

Holding pattern

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Coincidence theories

With the jury's declaration of guilt in the trial of Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, we can now move forward to the vital next step, which is to spend the rest of his sorry lifespan (and maybe longer) listening to lunatics claiming he was totally innocent and it was all a false flag operation organised by the New World Order (or whatever).

One thing of note that we learned from this trial: using the same legal definition, Tsarnaev had weapons of mass destruction while Saddam Hussein didn't.

The first signs of the inevitable pro-conspiracy deconstruction of the bombing appeared almost before the smoke had cleared. As usual, this was a mixture of the odd, the anomalous and the inexplicable. There was also a truly unpleasant spin-off theory in which maimed civilians caught on video were dismissed as 'crisis actors' with pre-existing amputations.

The most interesting aspect from my point of view was the claim that – yet again – a drill or rehearsal for a terrorist attack was taking place at the time of the real-life attack. This hair-raising coincidence can be found all over the internet, but 'patient zero' appears to have been a piece (no dateline) on 'alternative news' site <humansarefree.com>,¹ which lists a number of such simultaneous drills and rehearsals coinciding with other terrorist attacks. Some of these are mildly interesting, most less so, and some are completely barking (if you were planning a bombing, how and why would you sneak

1 <<http://humansarefree.com/2013/04/the-boston-bombing-is-inside-job.html>>

references to it into an episode of 'Family Guy' aired prior to your attack?)

But when you boil the whole thing down and sort the myths from the facts (and doing so is far too tedious to relate here) there do indeed seem to have been several instances in which this phenomenon – rehearsals for emergency response to attacks, shortly before or during real attacks in the same place – has occurred.

The classic example was that of the anti-terrorism training exercise taking place in London on the day of the 2005 '7/7' bombings, which was imagining bombs going off at the precise stations where they did in fact go off, leading some participants in the exercise to be initially impressed that the drill extended to live BBC broadcasts of their 'fictional' disaster. (Although much has been made of this incident, it should be remembered that it was a 'paper drill', i.e. a crisis command simulation, rather than a response deployment exercise.)

So, are these phantom attacks significant?

Probably not. The average news consumer has no idea of exactly how much time and effort public safety bodies pour into constantly keeping their systems tweaked and running smoothly in case the unimaginable happens. Drills and rehearsals are almost the norm, rather than the exception. In the case of the Boston bombing, it would obviously make sense for local public safety organisers to run a 'terrorism' simulation during a large-scale public event almost beyond anyone's control – and the same thought obviously occurred to the bomber himself, with considerably less philanthropic motivations.

As for the unusualness of some coincidences, consider the exhumation of Richard III in Leicestershire and his reburial earlier this year. The team looking for Richard's body sank their first pit through a capital 'R' painted on the tarmac of the car park at the centre of their search – and found the skeleton immediately. An archaeological hole in one, compounded by the fact that Richard had died on that day's date (22 August) 527 years previously. The odds against all this must be

stupendous. Yet no-one has so-far suggested that Richard III's exhumation was a staged event planned by the New World Order for whatever nefarious purpose such things are normally done.

Shadows in the Sunshine State

Another decade, another Bush. This time, it's Jeb, who was governor of Florida when that state's dodgy balloting put George W. in the White House in 2000, leading many to cry 'foul!' As the *Financial Times* recently observed, the prospect of a Bush/Clinton race in next year's presidential will mean that two families have effectively run the USA for just under 40 years (including George Bush Snr's vice-presidency and Hillary Clinton's tenure at the State Department). But if Jeb runs, he may find some questions reappear concerning the connection between his adoptive state and the 9/11 catastrophe that was the forging of George W.'s presidency.

Looked at from a Floridian perspective, the attacks seem to have remarkable coherency. Five of the hijackers trained at the same Venice, Florida, flight school, Huffman Aviation.² Eleven of them opened bank accounts in Florida, with the same bank, and apparently using genuine Social Security numbers – obtained from where, we do not know – as a form of ID.³ Fifteen of the hijackers somehow obtained Floridian driving licences (the issuing of those licences being handled by Florida's DMV, overseen at cabinet level in then-Governor Bush's executive).⁴

The official investigation of 9/11 was led by two of Jeb's contemporary fellow Floridians, Representative Porter Goss (Rep.) and Senator Bob Graham (Dem.). Goss represented

² Huffman Aviation has now closed. There is another flight school called Huffman Aviation in Texas, home state of Jeb's brother George. The owner of that flight school assures me that this is a coincidence

³ <<http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/07/10/hijackers.accounts/>>

Curiously, the hijackers' bank of choice, Sun Trust, has on its board one David Hughes, a Floridian lawyer who worked on Bush Jnr's presidential campaign

⁴ <http://www.sptimes.com/News/092401/State/Florida_flight_school.shtml>

Florida's 13th District until redistricting in 1993 shifted him into position in the 14th District, where he stayed until 2004 when he quit to take up position as George W. Bush's nominated CIA director. This was very much a return to home turf, when you consider his early career.

In 1960, Goss was a Yale student, where he was in the same fraternity as William H.T. Bush (George H.W.'s brother and George W's uncle) and John Negroponte (later appointed an ambassador under both Bush administrations). From Yale, Goss was recruited into the CIA (no doubt the Bush family connection was purely coincidental), and took up office at the Agency's Miami station, where he played a still unclear role in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Senator Bob Graham, on the other hand, was the brother of former OSS man and later *Washington Post* editor the late Phil Graham, who helped the CIA by running propaganda as part of Operation Mockingbird and by covering up the Agency's failure at the Bay of Pigs, whose personal acquaintances included CIA Director Allen Dulles. (Phil Graham had also worked for the OSS in China, alongside E. Howard Hunt and Richard Helms.)

So, perhaps it was, shall we say, a sense of common heritage and interests that inspired Floridian Senator Bob Graham to appoint Porter Goss as a Lee County Board Commissioner in 1983, after which Goss's political career in Florida took off in earnest.

By a strange twist of fate, these two eminent and well-connected Floridians were in place at the top of Washington's intelligence oversight hierarchy when Atta and co. flew into the twin towers: Goss as Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee (since 1997) and Graham as Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (a role he had taken up just months before the attack, in July 2001). By an even stranger twist of fate, the two were actually involved with the director of Pakistan's intelligence service in a breakfast discussion of Osama bin Laden, at the very moment the

attacks took place.⁵

Graham and Goss went on to co-lead the 9/11 Commission and oversee its final report, the notorious 28 still secret pages of which have drawn so much suspicion and curiosity. It's been rumoured for over a decade that the withheld pages at least strongly suggest Saudi complicity in the attacks, although given the absolutely unignorable Floridian dimension to the attacks one might be forgiven for perhaps suspecting that there might be an element of misdirection going on.

If Jeb Bush ends up in the White House, the calls to declassify those 28 pages will certainly become louder. Then again, since Jeb is a founder signatory of the Project for the New American Century, we might have other things to worry about.

A paedogate puzzle

With the appointment of New Zealand Judge Lowell Goddard to run the on-again-off-again Child Sex Abuse Inquiry (an appointment made just days after Lord Brittan died, by complete coincidence), it would appear that the entire farrago can get under way at last and disappear from the news for a decade or so before concluding that 'mistakes were made' and 'lessons have been learned' and all the guilty parties are now dead anyway so let's all put it behind us. Justice Goddard, being from the other side of the planet, can reasonably be believed to have been beyond the reach of the tentacles of the British establishment and thus without any personal conflicts of interest (unlike her unfortunate predecessors).

There is one slight concern here, and that is that the ultimate head of New Zealand's judiciary is of course Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, so perhaps from an Establishment point of view Justice Goddard isn't quite the long shot she might seem. (There is also the fact that it has now been reported that a member of the Royal Family came to the

⁵ <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/04/politics/04INQU.html?todaysh headlines>>

attention of Her Majesty's Police in the 1980s as a suspected member of a paedophile ring.⁶ And, of course, the less said about Prince Andrew's current predicament the better.)

In this age of transparency, anyone can look up Justice Goddard's judicial 'pedigree' on the internet, in this case on the website of New Zealand's Ministry of Justice. Like many others, I did so out of curiosity and found that out of all Judge Goddard's many cases, one was unavailable to view.

The case is: *The Sensible Sentencing Group Trust v The Human Rights Review Tribunal* [2013] NZHC 2720 [High Court judgment]. Intrigued, I emailed the NZ Ministry of Justice and was told that Judge Goddard had put a non-publication order on the case. When I asked why, I was told:

'In this case, the unredacted version of this judgment included the names of the victims of sexual offending, as well as the name of the appellant (whose name is allegedly subject to a permanent suppression order made in 1995), and thus was unable to be published without breaching those orders and statutory provisions.'

Wait....what? 'Allegedly'?

When I asked why the case was being withheld due to an anonymity order that might not even exist, I was told: 'Rather than upholding the alleged name suppression order, the Tribunal granted interim suppression orders, presumably until the substantive matter could be determined.'

From all of which I understand that someone claimed to have a legal right to anonymity but there was no evidence in Ministry of Justice records to support that claim, and no evidence has surfaced in the two years since then, and rather than do the obvious (redact that person's name just in case and release the transcript of the case as normal) the entire case has been effectively classified a state secret by Justice Goddard herself, somewhat in contravention of the Common Law principle of open justice.

⁶ <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/royal-family-member-was-investigated-as-part-of-paedophile-ring-before-coverup-excopsays-10126864.html>>

The entire situation makes no sense whatsoever. Perhaps it's nothing but a one-off bureaucratic snarl-up. But this opaque episode makes me suspect there is something of real interest here.

Murdoch's news values then....

Murdoch saw an underreported story, in the form of the Cabinet Office's rejection of an FOIA request for documents relating to the so-called 'Iraqi Money Affair', comprising a file created by Harold Wilson himself in 1976. The affair involved Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's attempts to solicit campaign funds from Saddam Hussein's ruling Ba'ath party, made through a French-Australian publisher go-between who was secretly a KGB agent and who stole the huge sum of money (some \$3m by today's value) that Iraqi intelligence paid into a Hong Kong bank account. The KGB agent then approached Australia's premier newspaper magnate Keith (Rupert) Murdoch at around the time of Whitlam's dismissal, and leaked the explosive story of Whitlam's Iraqi benefactors, spicing it up further with allegations that Whitlam was going to leak information to Iraq about Arab discussions with Henry Kissinger. And of course, in February 1976 with Whitlam back in opposition, Mr Murdoch duly published it.

However, he displayed his unmistakable knack for improving on the truth by reporting that Whitlam had actually received the Iraqi money, a misstep that eventually cost him a six-figure sum in damages for defamation. Either Mr Murdoch behaved with a reckless disregard for the truth, or he was playing some bigger game of his own. As were the KGB, whose motivations for smearing Whitlam seem unfathomable (unless it was an attempt to discredit Mr Murdoch, for whatever reason).

In any event we won't find out what was going on for the foreseeable future because the Iraqi Affair papers have been withheld on the grounds that disclosure could seriously harm international relations. With the Soviet Union dissolved and Whitlam long dead, it's difficult to imagine which

international relations the Cabinet Office has in mind. There is absolutely no suggestion that Mr Murdoch's old friend David Cameron is in any way doing him some kind of personal favour by withholding the file.⁷

.....and now

Fast forward to the present day and we learn that US President Obama is facing investigation over his administration's ties to the omniscient internet behemoth Google Inc. This story was reported in early April by the normally on-the-ball IT site The Register ⁸ and may yet surface in the general news media; but when you look at what's actually going on it turns out that the entire 'scandal' traces back to a conspiracy theory being floated by.....one Keith (Rupert) Murdoch, who fell out with the search engine giant in 2009 and is now pursuing his grievances through his hydra-headed media mouthpieces, aiming at both the corporation and the Obama administration on the 'two birds with one stone' principle.

The details of the alleged scandal don't particularly matter, because they had already been comprehensively debunked long before the Register picked up the scent.⁹ Worse still, the fearless investigator who is going to expose the sinister Obama-Google cabal is Senate Judiciary Antitrust Subcommittee leader Republican Senator Mike Lee,¹⁰ a leading 'Tea Party' figure and the instigator of the last federal government shutdown, who is an old ally of Mr Murdoch's notorious Fox News channel.¹¹ The sheer blatancy of all this leads one to wonder: does Mr Murdoch not care about getting caught red-handed, or is he just losing his touch?

7 <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/ruPERT-murdochs-secret-dealings-with-kgb-agent-still-suppressed-20150315-143fr7.html>>

8 <http://www.theregister.co.uk/2015/04/03/senate_to_probe_obamagoogLe_lovein/>

9 <<http://mediamatters.org/blog/2015/03/30/ruPERT-murdochs-media-empire-pushes-baseless-co/203085>>

10 <<http://www.nationaljournal.com/tech/senate-to-investigate-white-house-role-in-google-s-antitrust-victory-20150330>>

11 <<http://mediamatters.org/print/blog/2013/10/23/sean-hannity-and-fox-news-tea-party-ties-once-a/196568>>

Sadly, with what passes for fact-checking in the mainstream media these days, Mr Murdoch's little scam will probably be pounced upon by US news media, who are always out for The Big Story but who don't look twice at the source.

But compared to the Operation Mockingbird's 'mighty wurlitzer' run by his old pals in the CIA, with his latest scheme Mr Murdoch is tootling through a plastic trumpet.

Must try harder, Keith.

Love of a cold climate

I am willing to bet that there is a possibility that virtually the entire scientific community is wrong in accepting that man-made climate change is occurring; but I'm only willing to bet that the possibility is very, very tiny indeed. The fossil fuel giants are however missing a trick in the debate that could swing things decisively in their favour.

Officially, the planet is still in an Ice Age, since there are still two not inconsiderable polar ice caps. It just so happens that the entire course of civilisation to date has unfolded in what's called an Interstadial – a slightly warmer interlude between two of the Ice Age's periods of glaciation. No-one is quite sure how long this interstadial will last, but since the previous one lasted around 11,000 years and this one has lasted about as long, it's a reasonable hypothesis that our current window of fair weather hasn't got long left to run (in geological terms, at least).

There doesn't seem to have been any serious scientific debate on the subject¹² but given that the consensus is that we are warming the planet with carbon emissions and that the current interstadial must have almost run its course, then it seems inescapable that our CO₂ emissions might actually be the saviour of civilisation rather than its nemesis.

Of course, I'm referring to the northern hemisphere here.

¹² There appears to have been precisely one concerted attempt to model the global warming/glaciation offset: see <<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/09/090903-arctic-warming-ice-age.html>>.

As a European I have entirely selfish motivations for thinking global warming could be a good thing. Which would you, the imagined reader in the northern hemisphere, rather look forward to – a warmer, wetter planet overall but with somewhat worse weather in the south and tropics? Or pretty much all of the planet's most advanced cultures and all their combined history being crushed into gravel beneath unstoppable valley-deep sheets of ice? Be honest, now. If push came to shove, we could get along fine without polar bears, couldn't we? And who'd miss the Netherlands anyway? Over to you, Big Oil.....

All the news that fits

Speaking at an event just before International Women's Day, Women and Equalities Minister Nicky Morgan MP declared that 'women fought and died for the vote'. Ms Morgan was talking out of her arse and doing it so blatantly that it's hard to believe it was accidental. The Suffragettes – she can only be referring to them – were undeniably treated appallingly, but none, zero, zilch, nought per cent of them died as a result. (Emily Davison was famously trampled to death by the King's horse while invading the track at the 1911 Derby but there is no evidence that this was not exactly what it looked like, an accident.)

Nevertheless, the government's minister for women told an untruth before a crowded all-female assembly, none of whom appears to have even raised an eyebrow and her claim ended up reported as though it were historical truth.¹³ It's an interesting example of how absolute whoppers can slip through the journalistic filter because they fit a narrative, and shows again the profession's notorious vulnerability to propaganda.

Murdoch and Iran-Contra

Those who wondered at the ease with which Keith (Rupert)

¹³ <<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/05/nicky-morgan-women-died-vote-use-it-international-womens-day>>

Murdoch settled himself into his current position as a US citizen and American media giant have had their darker suspicions confirmed by a recent revelation from the ever-excellent Consortium News. It turns out that Mr Murdoch was schmoozed into participating in a CIA 'perception management' operation in 1983, the object of which was to provide support for Ronald Reagan's obsession with 'protecting' Central America in general and Nicaragua in particular – 'America's backyard', in the parlance of the day.

Messrs Murdoch and Reagan first met on 18 January 1983, just five days after Reagan had been informed by lawyers that (since Congress would quite obviously never approve it) the project would need private funding. It's not clear how much money Mr Murdoch doled out to his patron's pet projects, but subsequent developments show clearly how Reagan's White House manipulated events to reward the president's new mouthpiece.¹⁴

Mr Murdoch snapped up 20th Century Fox and six US TV stations in 1984 (the same year that he apparently supplied cash to fund Brian Crozier on a supposed fact-finding mission in Europe). In 1985, Mr Murdoch became a naturalised US citizen in order to meet a regulatory requirement that TV stations had to be owned by Americans. He was plainly preparing to go big in America. The same year, the Reagan administration increased the number of TV stations that any single entity could own from seven to 12. In October 1986 Mr Murdoch formed the Fox Broadcasting Corporation and in 1987 Reagan abolished the USA's 'fairness doctrine', which demanded political balance from news reporting bodies.

The rest, as they say, is history, although one wonders if Mr Murdoch has a slyer sense of humour than we realised, since it was precisely the abolition of the 'fairness doctrine' that enabled the growth of the rabidly-conservative self-styled 'fair and balanced' Fox News.

Murdoch's covert *pas de deux* with the Gipper raises interesting questions about news coverage of some of the

¹⁴ <<https://consortiumnews.com/2014/12/31/murdoch-scaife-and-cia-propaganda/>>

CIA's dealings in Central America, which were the subject of a recent FOIA disclosure from the Agency.

The Agency's internal history of Gary Webb's infamous 1996 'Dark Alliance' story that exposed CIA complicity in the Contras' cocaine smuggling shenanigans was entitled 'Managing a Nightmare' – but appears to suggest that CIA did no management at all.¹⁵

The CIA's historian refers to the way in which 'a ground base of established relations with reporters and the Director of Central Intelligence's (DCI) Public Affairs Staff (PAS) helped prevent this story [i.e. Webb's] from becoming an unmitigated public disaster.' The rest of the document records how the CIA apparently did nothing but watch as other journalists tore into Webb's work.

Of course, this isn't true, and the document itself hints at what was really going on – almost as if the author couldn't quite resist crowing over the Agency's triumph while ostensibly disproving it. What the CIA actually did was deny everything, telling reporters that related allegations had been investigated in the 1980s and came to naught (which was technically true, but hardly disproof), while simultaneously 'nudging' those same reporters toward the weakest points of Webb's investigation. The effectiveness of this is recorded in the tantalising observation: 'One major news affiliate, after speaking to a CIA spokesman, decided not to run the story.'

Meanwhile, where the story wasn't kicked into the long grass, it was nibbled away in a sort of journalistic 'death by a thousand cuts', egged on by unattributed whispers from CIA spokesmen.

The cumulative effect of all this was that one month after his Dark Alliance story appeared, the entire affair had backfired on Webb, who – if he was guilty of anything – appears to have been guilty of no more than going along with his editor's excitement in overstating his case. For example, when looked at from this distance, it's clear that by stunts such as prominently reproducing the CIA's emblem on the page of Webb's report, the paper's fatal mistake was to play

15 <http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/DOC_0001372115.pdf>

up the very point at which Webb's story was sketchiest – that is, the actual personal connections between the Agency and the smugglers (though posterity has filled out enough of those details to vindicate him).

The CIA's chronicler observed piously:

'Public Affairs cannot dictate stories to journalists – and nor would we want to live in a society in which this was possible. What CIA media spokesmen can do, as this case demonstrates, is work productively with journalists who are already disposed to write a more balanced story.'

This is farce at its blackest: Webb's career was effectively destroyed by the onslaught of criticism, which was anything but 'balanced'. ('Fair and balanced' by Fox standards, perhaps). It's almost as if the CIA's historian had never even heard of the CIA's decades-long Operation Mockingbird propaganda-planting exercise (officially terminated in February 1976 by CIA Director George H.W. Bush). Who, exactly, was meant to be taken in by this baloney?

The linkage between Murdoch's news empire-building and the cover-up of the Contras/cocaine connection is, like Webb's 1996 exposé itself, not conclusive – but it's there.

Blunt in Hesse

One of the puzzles Peter 'Spycatcher' Wright said he never solved in the hundreds of hours during which he interrogated unmasked Soviet double-agent Sir Anthony Blunt was the precise nature of Blunt's mission to Germany at the end of the Second World War, which he undertook at the direction of King George VI.

Wright took a steer from the Palace and supposedly didn't question Blunt on the matter at all, concluding his recollection of the episode with a cryptic joke about the Palace having been in the scandal-burying business for centuries and MI5 being a comparative beginner.

Wright must have known at least part of the purpose of

Blunt's mission, because it was reported by the *Daily Telegraph* back in 1978. Blunt was sent to Schloss Friedrichshof, Hesse, in the very final days of the war in order to retrieve the minutes of the Duke of Windsor's 1936 meeting with Hitler, which were indeed found to be missing from the relevant documents after they were seized by Allied forces and returned to Britain. Now historian Professor Roland Perry has published an account that adds another dimension to our understanding of Blunt's escapade.¹⁶

In short, Professor Perry says that while in Germany Blunt also sequestered documents and letters dating from the early 1800s concerning the 15-year-old Princess Victoria's romance with a suitor hitherto unknown to history, Lord Elphinstone, then 12 years her senior. When she became Queen, Victoria was bent on marrying Elphinstone but she was manipulated into an arranged marriage with the impoverished Prince Albert by scheming relatives and courtiers. When Albert expired prematurely, Victoria appointed Elphinstone to an intimate position in her coterie and when he died in 1860 Victoria had a lavish memorial built to him.

What is not clear, however, is why the Palace so desperately wanted this historical romance hushed up. According to Professor Perry, before handing the relevant paperwork over to disappear in the archives at Windsor Castle, Blunt microfilmed it and passed it to the Soviet Union. But what happened to it there remains unknown, as does why on earth the USSR would have any interest in the girlhood crushes of a long-dead monarch.

The Royal Family has survived far bigger and far messier scandals than disclosure of a future Queen's youthful infatuations (for example, the spectacular public meltdown of the marriage between George IV and Caroline of Brunswick at around the same time as Victoria's dalliance) and so it's difficult to resist the feeling that there's still more to come about this mysterious episode.

¹⁶ <<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/queen-victorias-dirty-little-secret-revealed-in-roland-perrys-new-book-the-queen-her-lover-and-the-most-notorious-spy-in-history/story-fni0cx12-1227108612289>>

The pre-statutory intelligence services

Another recent CIA declassification is more of interest to history buffs than to watchers of contemporary parapolitics, but still casts an interesting light on the present. A newly-released CIA analysis explores the British penetration and sabotage of the 1775 American mission to Paris, during which revolutionary figures canvassed support from the French establishment. Pre-revolutionary France was still Britain's greatest rival in international affairs and the Americans were working on the principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.

The CIA's analysis records how thoroughly and professionally the British skewered the rather naïve American delegates, and posthumously damns Benjamin Franklin himself as a bumbling liability from a security point of view. The entire thing is well worth reading, if only for the light it sheds on a poorly-understood area of pre-'Special Relationship' Anglo-American history.¹⁷

Tucked away in the text, however, is an intriguing statement by the CIA's historian that there was no centralised British intelligence organisation at the time and that such operations were carried out by King George III himself, acting through his then Prime Minister. (Presumably this means that the King expressed his thoughts and wishes on operations and the Prime Minister was tasked with putting them into effect.)

And the situation appears to have continued until the succession of Queen Victoria in 1837, at which point funding for the Secret Service was transferred out of the Royal household budget.¹⁸

So it would appear that the roots of the pre-statutory security and intelligence bodies can be found in a web of intrigue centred upon the throne, a situation essentially unaltered since the days of Elizabeth I and Francis

17 <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB493/docs/intell_ebb_007.PDF>

18 <http://www.andywrightman.com/docs/civil_list_crown_1901.pdf>

Walsingham. This explains the continual presence of the present Queen in the background of many narratives concerning MI5 and MI6. It's more than simply the ultimate loyalty of the two services to the head of state rather than to her government, it's a matter of living history.

Paedogate predicted

As the national scandal of child-molesters in high places continues to simmer away, various names from bygone days are coming to light in a sort of horrid parody of the retro fashion for all things 1980s. The one that caught my attention most recently was that of Mrs Thatcher's Deputy PM (1979-88) Willie Whitelaw, who is alleged to have quashed a 1980 investigation into child abuse involving 350 separate charges that were then in the process of being pursued against 'politicians, prominent lawyers and film stars'.¹⁹

The claims come from one Jeff Edwards, who wrote a story for the *Evening Standard* about the investigation at the time it was happening and was then called in by the Met and threatened with prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. For some reason, Mr Edwards gave his interrogators the name of his police source, who was duly punished to the extent of being docked six months' wages. Neither man was prosecuted, which is not so odd when you consider that each of them would have appeared in court where they would have inevitably spilled the beans under absolute privilege, meaning that the media could report their testimony with no fear of legal action whatsoever, thus destroying the entire alleged cover-up.

So why didn't we hear about this at the time?

As it turns out, there was a voice on the fringe blowing the whistle for all he was worth.....and that source was none other than noted batshit loon Lyndon LaRouche.

In the 13 December 1983 edition of his publication

¹⁹ <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2863814/Willie-Whitelaw-ordered-police-scrap-inquiry-VIP-child-sex-abuse-ring-Police-launch-probe-sensational-new-cover-claims.html>>

Executive Intelligence Review (EIR: available online in PDF format), LaRouche writer Scott Thompson listed Whitelaw among members of a massive high-level child abuse ring involving Foreign Office officials, Palace figures and a Paedophile Information Exchange member working out of the Home Office. None of which sounds quite so far-fetched now, does it?

Of course, this being a LaRouche mouthpiece, the waters were muddied by linking the entire mess to the proprietor's fantasy version of the international narcotics trade (CEO: HM Queen Elizabeth II).

But reading between the lines, it appears that the article's ultimate source was nothing less than the famous dossier handed to the Home Secretary by Geoffrey Dickens MP on 24 November that year – a few weeks before EIR's article appeared – and which subsequently disappeared.

The timing is interesting too: as well as being Thatcher's deputy PM, Whitelaw was her Home Secretary from her 1979 election until the General Election of 9 June 1983. Two days later, he became Thatcher's first hereditary peer as Viscount Whitelaw (and Lord President of the Privy Council) and was kicked upstairs to the House of Lords, with Leon Brittan taking over at the Home Office.

So, yet again, we have an episode in which the 'cranks' seem to have been on the right scent at the time, with solid leads, and no-one took the blindest bit of notice because it appeared to be as loony as the Queen-is-a-drugs-kingpin nonsense.

Well, we're not laughing now.

The abuses of 'conspiracy'

From time to time, self-professed rationalists deign to examine the phenomenon of conspiracy theories, usually denouncing them as products of uneducated minds. The latest example of this to have floated under my nose appeared in the *Scientific American* in December, in which Michael Shermer performed

the usual incantations against irrationality and delusion, noting smugly that people educated to degree level are less likely to believe conspiracy theories than are high schoolers.¹⁰

While there's nothing terribly wrong with all that (most conspiracy theories are, let's face it, undeserving even of the word 'rubbish', let alone 'theory'), the framing of Dr Shermer's piece is itself problematic if you take a moment to reflect upon it. Put bluntly: what has science got to do with conspiracy theories in the first place?

For a start, if you wield Occam's well-known Razor at purported conspiracies, they always disappear because Occam carves simplicity out of complexity. Occam's Razor is undoubtedly of use in discriminating between competing hypothesis in a laboratory context – but it would be a foolhardy individual indeed who attempted to account for his or her personal relationships and interactions in terms of simplicity.

For a second: people are not in fact the elusive 'rational actors' that social theoreticians insist upon. The 'rational actor' fallacy has had deep and corrosive social effects, not least in the area of economics where it leads to such absurdities as the Department for Work and Pensions employing drastic 'stick and carrot' techniques against Social Security claimants, who can supposedly be manipulated into employment like trains being switched from track to track, and then wondering in all innocence why these techniques just result in widespread chaos and misery for society's most vulnerable.

Science has no place in determining the probability of conspiracy theories whatsoever and it is a staggering product of popular infatuation with science that makes the idea seem feasible without question in the first place.

Of course, science can be useful in a supportive role (weighing up various items of evidence, for example), but the correct place to assess a conspiracy theory is in a courtroom, where human testimony and behaviour – in all its maddening complexity and irrationality – can be judged against non-scientific standards called laws. Failing that opportunity, verification falls to historians (who again, may use science to

assess evidence, which may or may not be conclusive) whose recognition of a conspiracy paradoxically ensures that it won't be referred to as a conspiracy at all.

The interesting aspect of all this (for me, at any rate) is the constant preoccupation with and concern about conspiracy theories coming from people in positions of some authority. It's tempting to suggest that such debunkers are 'useful idiots' for the elite – presumably unconsciously so (to suggest otherwise could itself be construed as a conspiracy theory of sorts). But the sad truth is that picking apart popular suspicions and rumours is just an easy way to bolster one's own credibility.

Stephen Jay Gould famously outlined the idea of Non-Overlapping Magisteria to allow for distinction between the spheres of relevance belonging to science and to religion. It's a messy, chaotic and above all human world out there and people do not always act in good faith, openly, or rationally. Perhaps it's about time that Gould's idea was invoked to stop scientists from pontificating irrelevantly about conspiracies, too.

Paxman and Kitchener

The centenary of the Great War gave Jeremy Paxman a chance to revisit some of the rumours and intrigues that circulated after the 1916 death of Lord Kitchener, who (along with many others) died when HMS Hampshire sank after hitting a German mine near Scapa Flow in the Orkeney.²⁰

These rumours last impinged upon public awareness with the 1959 publication of Donald McCormick's *The Mysterious Death of Lord Kitchener*, a copy of which I have – and I can tell you that it is a fascinating but very unconvincing read.

McCormick's name will be familiar to aficionados of Jack the Ripper theories, as one of the more notorious hoaxers associated with the case. Indeed, were it not for his work on

²⁰ <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f3760af0-6545-11e4-91b1-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3PNcm54NO>>f

the Ripper it is doubtful he would be remembered at all. McCormick is an interesting character (he worked for naval intelligence and the *Sunday Times*, wrote a biography of Sir Maurice Oldfield and was close to Ian Fleming and Rupert Allason) but Mr Paxman dismisses him as 'a cheap journalist' without evincing any further interest.

He then rehearses some of these old rumours about Kitchener (none of which are interesting enough to recount here) and details the results of a Freedom of Information Request that he filed to gain access to some still-withheld documents relating to Kitchener's demise. Surprise, surprise, these documents are almost completely irrelevant and certainly don't indicate any kind of conspiracy or cover-up.

Mr Paxman declares that this demonstrates the implausibility of conspiracy theories – but had his interest in the classified papers found anything of note it would, of course, have been a personal scoop, so it was something of a win-win situation for him.

Amusingly his piece for the *Financial Times* on the Kitchener 'mystery' was given the moaning headline: 'The British war secretary's demise at sea in June 1916 has spawned endless conspiracy theories. A century on, can the speculation be laid to rest?'

I wonder how many of Mr Paxman's readers had ever heard of these 'endless conspiracy theories' before Mr Paxman disinterred them in order to display them in the *Financial Times* so readers could see him triumphantly knock them down again.

Heathrow plots

It is often said of torture that (quite apart from being illegal and morally repugnant) it produces little of value because the victim ends up telling the torturers 'what they want to hear'. It appears that this rule of thumb applies to the processing of that information itself. In the CIA's case it extracted a 'confession' concerning a plot to attack Heathrow airport. Their

victim, once given a respite, then retracted that confession in depressingly predictable fashion. This didn't stop the Agency from telling President George W Bush 'what he wanted to hear', who in turn told the public 'what they wanted to hear' by referring to the alleged Heathrow plot in a speech in 2006.

Behind the sad irony of this sordid episode lies a considerable mystery, for it appears that there were in fact three 'Heathrow Plots' in circulation.

In early 2003, Tony Blair's government famously surrounded Heathrow with tanks and troops, citing 'quality intelligence' of an imminent attack. With the Iraq invasion looming in the background and widespread disbelief in the WMD fairy-story, many accused Mr Blair of cooking up a false alarm with regard to Heathrow too. But it seems very unlikely that Mr Blair was behind it: the impetus for the alert appears to have come from MI5 issuing a warning to the Met's Assistant Commissioner David Veness, who was backed up by his boss Sir John Stevens. They played their hands close to their chests, but a Scotland Yard statement was put out referring to 'the current strengthening of security' as being 'precautionary and [...] related to action being taken in other countries.'²¹

Popular assumption at present appears to be that this 'action in other countries' was the 'waterboarding' of Khalid Sheik Mohammed (KSM), during which he told CIA personnel that an attack on Heathrow was in the offing. But this can't be correct. The Heathrow alert happened on 11 February 2003, and KSM was officially captured nearly a month later, on 1 March 2003. In fact the US Senate's 'Torture Report' (page 76) identifies another al-Qaeda operative, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, as telling Pakistani interrogators about a Heathrow plot in October 2002.

Bin al-Shibh was transferred into CIA custody in February 2003 (the exact date is redacted for some reason, but from the size of the redaction it can be said with confidence that the date was a single figure). On 11 February, bin al-Shibh's torturers cabled CIA headquarters asking for a list of

21 <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/feb/12/terrorism.world>>

questions that al-Shibh would definitely be able to answer, in order to assess any new information they gained from him.

Same day, the tanks rolled up at Heathrow.

This, then, would appear to be the 'quality intelligence' to which the UK was referring – obtained by CIA torture and percolated up to the government from MI5 via the Metropolitan Police Service.

Bin al-Shibh's torture confessions were then apparently used to solicit information from other CIA victims, a recipe almost guaranteed to produce confirmations.

Bin al-Shibh's 'Heathrow plot' was then superseded by a second 'Heathrow plot' after the torture of KSM, and even though the two plots were quite probably one and the same, KSM's version of a 'Heathrow plot' lingered in a sort of information afterlife and cast a long shadow over subsequent developments.²²

The third 'Heathrow plot' was foiled in August 2006, when 24 arrests were made across Britain in one of the largest ever such counterterrorism operations. This was a purely British triumph – Mr Blair knew about it for months prior to the arrests and informed Mr Bush by telephone on Sunday 6 August 2006, with the arrests taking place just three days later.²³ However, on 6 September 2006, Mr Bush gave a speech in which he referred to the 'recently foiled plot in London' and followed it up by asserting a few minutes later that CIA torture had 'helped stop a plot to hijack passenger planes and fly them into Heathrow or the Canary Wharf in London.'²⁴ The impression given was clearly that the two plots were one and the same. Mr Bush also referred to a 'Heathrow plot' in a radio address given on 8 March 2008.²⁵

²² There is something of a minor mystery relating to the torture of KSM. An apparently erroneous report in October 2002 stated that he had either been killed or captured in Pakistan. And although he was officially captured in March 2003, the Senate committee saw CIA e-mails referring to 'Heathrow plot insights from KSM' dated February 2003 (see page 193).

²³ <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/aug/11/politics.usa>>

²⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/06/washington/06bush_transcript.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>

²⁵ Senate *Report*, p. 203.

So, the first two Heathrow plots were apparently the same vague scheme being described by two different torture victims, the latter's 'confession' probably extracted by his torturers' use of information gained from the former. The third (which has not yet been definitely linked to any external group) took place several years later, was unrelated to the 'confessions' of 2002-3 and completely different in nature but was allowed to stand as though it represented the near-fulfilment of the original.

Messrs Bush and Blair could have corrected this misleading perception at any stage, but chose to remain quiet. Perhaps this fell under the category of 'things they *don't* want to hear'.

D-notice doubts

One of the more extraordinary claims made by Michael Shrimpton during his trial in November (see below) was that he had the authority to issue D-notices on behalf of the government. Given the minor outbreak of bizarre stories about D-notices appearing in relation to the ongoing child abuse inquiry, I am beginning to wonder if he wasn't telling the truth on that point.

In late November, the *Guardian* trumpeted a story alleging that Hilton Tims – the former news editor of my local newspaper, the *Surrey Comet* – had been gagged by a D-notice when he tried to report on the notorious Elm Guest House in the 1980s.

That's not what his contemporaries recall.

Guardian journalist Laura Marcus, 63, was employed at the *Surrey Comet* from 1979 until 1984 and does not recall the incident. She said: 'It's 50/50 in my mind whether it happened at all.'

Fellow ex-*Comet* reporter Tim Harrison joined the *Comet* in 1976, becoming deputy chief reporter by 1980 and chief reporter by 1983. Mr Harrison recalled:

'Nothing was said at the time – I'd definitely have

remembered something like that. Had a formal D-notice been issued, it would have been big news in the Comet newsroom. No way could that have been kept quiet.'

Mr Tims, now 82, had told the *Guardian*:

'I put someone on to it, the chief reporter I think, to make inquiries. It was the following day that we had a D-notice slapped on us; the reporter came over and told me. It was the only time in my career.'

The chief reporter in question was the aforementioned Tim Harrison and he said that he was 'surprised and puzzled' by Mr Tims' statements. He explained: 'It would have been the editor's task to deal with very unusual issues such as D-notices, not the news editor's.' He cast further doubt on Mr Tims' recollection by saying: 'Hilton was news editor from 1984, not 1980 as has been reported.'

D-notices have been mentioned before in connection with allegations of high-level child abuse. At the time of the Iraq war, Australian media published erroneous stories alleging that a D-notice was being used to protect powerful Britons caught in the online child porn investigation called Operation Ore (this links to the alleged Dunblane cover-up, rumours of which are still rumbling away in some corners of the Internet).

D-notice committee secretary Andrew Vallance told me by e-mail:

'Although the allegations that "D Notices" have been used to shield people allegedly involved in child abuse are widely repeated on the internet, there is absolutely no substance in them.'

This is surely common knowledge among experienced journalists, so why on earth did the *Guardian* run such an inherently implausible tale without apparently attempting to verify it?

No doubt it is merely a coincidence that Hilton Tims' daughter Anna is a *Guardian* writer of long standing.

Doppelgangers

The murky history of the deployment of lookalikes for political purposes has always fascinated me, and is an area that I explored a little in 'LBJ: Doubles and Disinformation' in *Lobster* 67. The first week of December saw a startling chance pair of photographs taken by the same snapper, showing two 'Barack Obamas' travelling in the same Australian motorcade. The resemblance is pretty good, certainly good enough to throw off a casual observer.²⁶

But who organises such presidential doubles? Since it's a VIP security matter, we might assume it's the Secret Service. But no details have ever emerged of such a program. The CIA, on the other hand, has a known history of using doppelgangers and in September it was revealed that the Agency had considered hoaxing a 'sex tape' to discredit Saddam Hussein, in which a lookalike was to be filmed having sex with a young man.²⁷ This is almost a carbon copy of the abortive plan that the Agency hatched in order to discredit Indonesian president Sukarno in the 1960s.²⁸ In the case of Hussein, the idea was apparently dropped because it wouldn't have been shocking enough to its envisioned audience. They then thought of hacking into Iraqi TV with a recording in which a Saddam double (another one?) would announce his resignation.

Before the Iraq invasion Hussein was routinely accused of deploying lookalikes to throw off would-be assassins.²⁹ One of these 'clones' was even said to have met Austrian politician Jorg Haider for a photo opportunity when Saddam

26 Have a look for yourself at <<http://tinyurl.com/l9e5puu>>. For what it's worth, I think the one on the left is the double. It's not so much about the man's facial features (although they're debatable) as his almost measured look directly into the camera lens and the slightly 'posed' feel about it. It just looks more like a conscious performance than the casual off-guard feel of the other snap.

27 <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/spy-talk/2010/05/cia_group_had_wacky_ideas_to_d.html>

28 <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/news/secretcy/2001/07/072401.html>>

29 <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cia-man-on-tape-is-saddam/>>

himself was otherwise engaged.³⁰ But after the invasion, none of these alleged lookalikes was announced as captured (although the US did test Hussein's DNA when they caught him, suggesting that there was some uncertainty on the issue).

More intriguingly still, the Agency also got as far as filming a hoax video depicting Osama bin Laden drinking alcohol and reminiscing about pederastic exploits in a campfire session with cronies. An ex-CIA man claimed that the actors were simply drawn from 'dark-skinned' Agency personnel. Is that really credible? For the video to have any value, it would obviously be necessary for the key actor to pass as bin Laden – and that automatically suggests the use of a double. The alternative is that the CIA produced a complete and utter botch job, which I suppose is not outside the realms of the possible and might explain why it was never used.

On the other hand, this little revelation does potentially revive the question of the authenticity of the bin Laden '9/11 confession' video released by the US after the Afghan invasion, in which a remarkably indiscreet Osama appeared to have put on a lot of weight.....and a new nose.³¹

Expressing an interest

Much concern has been voiced in response to Express Newspapers owner and sometime porn baron Richard Desmond considering a £300k donation to UKIP. For those who have been watching, the suggestion that the poundshop Murdoch is partial to the party will not have been a surprise.

The *Express* has carried a regular column by the party's leader – 'Farage on Friday' – for quite some time. In October, it was announced that one of UKIP's three peers, Lord Stevens, would become deputy chairman of Mr Desmond's holding company, Northern and Shell.³²

30 <<http://news1.iwon.com/odd/article/id/272230%7Coddlyenough%7C10-06-2002::12:01%7Creuters.html>>

31 <<http://www.wtfrly.com/wp-content/911truth/fakebinladen2.jpg>>

32 <<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/23/ukip-peer-lord-stevens-deputy-chair-northern-shell>>

We then had an *Express* 'exclusive' in which the Freedom Association – whose membership consists entirely of far-right Tories (such as the loveable Christopher Chope) and UKIP figures – attacked the BBC for 'plotting a Labour victory' in order to protect its licence fee arrangements.³³ Naturally, this piece was long on rhetoric and short on details of how the Corporation (which towers above Mr Desmond's own Channel 5) was going to execute its nefarious scheme.

And shortly before Mr Desmond reached for his chequebook, we saw the triple-crown spectacle of the *Express* quoting a UKIP MEP's outraged comments in order to plug a forthcoming documentary on one of UKIP's talking points - 'benefits tourism' – which was to be screened on Channel 5.³⁴

Could Mr Desmond's affiliations have been any more obvious?

The cumulative feel of these incidents is that Mr Desmond and UKIP are attempting to form a 'breakaway Establishment', the cosy relationships of which will supplant to some extent the traditional alliance between a large swathe of the print media and the Conservative party.

Fortunately, the *Express* is an irrelevant comic but nevertheless this intriguing situation is one to watch (unlike Channel 5), and will become more so if UKIP has any success in the general election of May 2015.

The paranoids' paranoid

I'm not sure how the jury in the trial of barrister Michael Shrimpton reached their majority guilty verdict, announced at the end of November. In order to convict him of making a hoax bomb threat, it would seem that they must have decided that he knew his information was false when he relayed it; yet, to judge by the coverage of the trial, Shrimpton remained totally sincere in his belief throughout.

³³ <<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/544460/exclusive-bbc-accused-plotting-labour-election-victory>>

³⁴ <<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/544816/Roma-Gypsy-Migrant-Boasts-Free-Money-Benefits-System-Mansion>>

For those who missed the circus, Shrimpton had called in a warning at the time of the London Olympics, telling Defence Secretary Philip Hammond (and Shrimpton's local Conservative Association) that a stolen Russian nuclear weapon was being smuggled up the Thames by al-Qaeda, with the aim of detonating it in time to take out the Queen (along with most of London, of course).

His conviction (sentencing adjourned till early 2015, pending psychiatric reports) must have come as a surprise to his fellow Obama 'birther' Lord Monckton, who wrote a piece when Shrimpton was committed for trial, declaring that the prosecution was politically motivated, that Shrimpton would be found innocent and that David Cameron would end up with egg on his face.³⁵

A member of Mrs Thatcher's Policy Unit in the 1980s, Lord Monckton is now described as a semi-detached UKIP-favouring peer, having previously worked for and stood as an electoral candidate for Nigel Farage's motley outfit before some kind of falling-out occurred. However, as one of the hereditary peers cast out by the House of Lords Act (1999) he is no longer a member of the upper chamber, which has roundly slapped him down for his claims on this matter in the past but hasn't been able to prevent him from using a garishly-coloured rip-off of the Lords' portcullis device as his own personal emblem.

Delving further down this particular rabbit-hole, one finds that Lord Monckton has his own odd beliefs, being a climate change disbeliever, holding that gay men can clock up 20,000 partners in a lifetime (which wouldn't leave time for much else), advocating the quarantine of HIV+ people and declaring that he would abolish 90 per cent of public services in order to move power away from 'atheistic, humanist' government.

Shrimpton's beliefs – as Lord Monckton acknowledges – are extraordinary, but unless he is outright delusional he must have had some basis for holding them.

Shrimpton claims that the masterminds behind the

³⁵ <<http://www.wnd.com/2014/04/memo-to-cameron-leave-michael-shrimpton-alone/>>

alleged Olympics plot were really a German intelligence agency called the Deutsches Verteidigungs Dienst (DVD), which appears to have been behind just about every instance of skulduggery in modern history. But the DVD is so secret that there isn't any actual evidence of its existence.

The DVD did not originate in Shrimpton's mind. As far as I can tell, it originated in the mind of self-styled former Thatcher advisor, the late Christopher Story, who also (along with one time Joint Intelligence Committee chairman Percy Cradock) believed that the fall of Communism was a hoax perpetrated by the KGB in order to lull the West into a false sense of security.³⁶ Story was encouraged in this belief by the KGB defector, Anatoly Golitsyn,³⁷ who sold the idea of a KGB 'monster plot' to CIA counter-intelligence chief James Angleton in the early 1960s,³⁸ who in turn passed it on to a section of MI5 and IRD personnel, notably the late Brian Crozier.

World Net Daily <WND.com> is not the most reliable of sources, but it does seem to have tracked down another of Shrimpton's inspirations, Lt. Col. Dr. Harry Beckhough, MBE (ret'd) who has also published material about the elusive DVD.³⁹ So it would appear that Shrimpton is an affiliate of an informal, international, right-wing subculture of paranoia, and made the mistake of testing his ideas against reality by warning officials about the Olympic 'plot'.⁴⁰

Some idea of the scale of all this can be glimpsed from Shrimpton's defence statement in the bomb hoax case, which was published on the internet earlier this year.⁴¹ Perhaps the

36 On Cradock's views on this see the excellent Adam Curtis at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/posts/BUGGER>>.

37 Wikipedia isn't always accurate but the entry on Golitsyn <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoliy_Golitsyn> is a reasonable summary of what is known about the man. The CIA's current view of Angleton is at <<http://tinyurl.com/d75kskb>>.

38 See <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB493/docs/intell_ebb_025.PDF>

39 <<http://www.wnd.com/2014/04/obamas-origins-resurface-at-intel-experts-trial/>>

40 There is a collection of Shrimpton's articles at <<http://www.veteranstoday.com/tag/michael-shrimpton/>>.

41 <<http://gl-w.com/2014/03/14/michael-shrimptons-official-defence-statement-in-full/>>

crowning glory in this remarkable, if exhausting, document is Shrimpton's belief that Madeleine McCann was kidnapped to order for a high-level paedophile Eurocrat (whom he names) and that this is being covered up by just about every intelligence agency on earth.

Curiously, for someone who claims to see high-level paedophilia everywhere, Shrimpton lost an appeal against a child porn conviction at around the same time he was prosecuted for the bomb hoax. He claimed that the child porn (which was found when his house was searched after his arrest for the bomb hoax) was planted by British intelligence in order to discredit him. Given that exactly that scenario had formed the plot of an episode of ITV drama *Judge John Deed*, broadcast in 2004, one has to wonder exactly why the spooks would see any need to bother to discredit him at all.

Set in stone

Did you observe two minutes' silence at 11 am on 11 November? If so, you were hoodwinked by one of the most successful lies in British history.

Like many others erected around the same time, my local war memorial (Kingston Upon Thames) gives the dates of the Great War as '1914-1919'. This is not some stonemason's equivalent of a typographical error. The Kingston memorial's sculptor Richard Goulden – himself a war veteran – carved out that conspicuously discordant date in the year 1920, before the myth of the war's 1918 end had become firmly established in the history books.

The famous 11/11/11 armistice of 1918 was succeeded by three 'prolongations' while French and British troops occupied the (German) Rhineland and these prolongations lasted until after the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919, the fifth anniversary of the assassination that sparked the conflict. So the war officially ended in June 1919 – but even that's not the whole truth.

After the Russian revolution in 1917, Britain, France and

America intervened in the ensuing Russian civil war, hoping (in Winston Churchill's words) to 'strangle Bolshevism in its cradle'. The British Navy were the last Allied participants and they withdrew from the Baltic in December 1919, after a series of mutinies by war-weary seamen. And there's more. In strictly legal terms, Britain's participation in the war stretched on into 1924, when the very last peace treaty was signed with modern Turkey.

It's impossible to know what Richard Goulden had in mind as he painstakingly chiselled that glaring '1919' into the stone of his Kingston memorial – but he certainly wasn't thinking of the November 1918 armistice.

So when did the Great War really end? Who knows? It silently unravels somewhere in the early 20th Century like a wisp of smoke on the breeze.

And the fairy story of '11 November 1918' is not the only myth about the war. Many readers will have heard arguments advanced this year that the war was about protecting democracy or protecting freedom or something like that. If you're like me, you will have been profoundly disquieted by this idea. At the start of the war, Britain was not what we would now recognise as a functioning democracy. Voting was restricted to 60 per cent of the male population only: those voters were all property owners over the age of 21, and some of them had more than one vote. Not only that, but the British monarchy still exercised considerable 'behind the scenes' control over the nation's politics – the First World War itself had been declared by King George V's Privy Council.

The myth of the 'fight for democracy' seems to have sprung from US President Woodrow Wilson's propaganda advisor Edward Bernays, who helped Wilson craft an oft-quoted slogan about 'making the world safe for democracy' to encourage the USA's voters into supporting a war they had hoped to avoid.

So the lie of the war being fought in the name of democracy was being told during the war itself.

History is being rewritten under our noses – and this time, there are no living witnesses left to protest against it.

The man who wasn't there

Has Ed Miliband survived a plot to overthrow him, or have we witnessed a bizarre scheme unfold that was actually designed to fail and leave him looking stronger?

On 16 October *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones ran a conspicuously anomalous column that was more or less an Alan Johnson hagiography, which stuck in my mind precisely because it was so odd. Quoting friends and colleagues – but not Mr Johnson himself – the piece appeared to explore, in quite some detail, the question of his possible ambitions to become party leader before delivering as its kiss-off the remark that those wanting to topple Miliband would 'have to look elsewhere'.

I wondered what had prompted this apparent disavowal of Johnsonian ambition; and then the alleged 'Miliband plot' exploded across the media. Surprise, surprise, the King Over The Water of the 'plotters' was identified as.....Alan Johnson. We all accept that cock-up is at least as likely as conspiracy, but surely Mr Jones's column could not have escaped the attentions of the alleged twenty or so-strong anti-Miliband cabal?

And then, as quickly as it had flared up, it was over, as Mr Johnson appeared on television on the Sunday of the weekend the plot was 'exposed' to rule himself out of the running. And that, it appears, was the end of that.

Recent Labour leaders have profited from their victories over their famously frangible party: see Kinnock expelling Militant and Blair ditching Clause IV. Is it possible that someone thought a similar trick was worth trying to overcome Ed's image problem?

Since the supposed 'conspirators' had disappeared like morning dew, I went straight to Mr Johnson and (on 10 November) asked him whether he had been approached by the Miliband plotters or had any prior knowledge of such a scheme. I chased the inquiry up on 17 November with his

assistant Tracy Windle, who said she would look into it. The same day, I put an inquiry in to the *Guardian's* press office, asking whether Mr Jones's eerily prescient piece had been 'prompted' in any way, and explicitly invited them to poo-poo my little hypothesis. I also emailed Owen Jones's literary agent.

None of them got back to me, so make of that what you will.

Negative proof

The case of the alleged 'Barbara Castle paedophile dossier' rumbles on, with news that police are to examine the late Mrs Castle's personal documents, held by the Bodleian Library. They also appear to be looking for the dossier compiled by the late Geoffrey Dickens MP, although how and when it 'emerged' that this dossier was also in Mrs Castle's possession is unclear – as is precisely how anyone found out this 'fact', years after she had died without ever apparently mentioning it to anyone.

In all, this futile interlude teaches us that the government, major media and police are not necessarily immune from 'conspiracy thinking'. After all, the complete absence of supporting evidence in any given case is often cited as being proof of a cover-up according to conspiracy theorists, isn't it?

I'm not sure how and when this type of thinking went mainstream, but George W Bush's demand that Saddam Hussein had to prove that he had no WMDs may be the tipping point. This is the logical fallacy referred to as 'the appeal to ignorance': i.e. 'There is no evidence that X is false, therefore X is true.'

It resurfaced again recently when Iraq's Prime Minister – in the middle of appealing for international aid – alleged that ISIS was planning to attack New York and Paris. Suspicions that this might be a ploy to garner military intervention were bolstered by his proclamation: 'I cannot prove 100 per cent that an existential threat is not there.'

To its credit, Obama's White House responded that it had no evidence that any kind of threat existed – and did nothing.

Quite a different kettle of fish, however, is the Home Office 'missing child abuse files' review conducted by Peter Wanless, who announced his findings shortly before the Castle yarn hit the headlines. Mr Wanless stated in his report that he had found no evidence that files were removed or deliberately destroyed. But hold that scorn: immediately after publication Mr Wanless was to be heard on BBC Radio 4 and 5 making it quite clear that he was not ruling out a cover-up at all.

Rather ironically, David Cameron used the Wanless review's conclusions to remark that 'people seeking conspiracy theories will have to look elsewhere', which goes to show what a double-edged sword negative proof can be, in the wrong hands.

Neighbours

A couple of curious coincidences in the ongoing child abuse inquiry shitstorm leap out of the papers. The first is the gobsmacking fact that the *Mail on Sunday* was apparently warned off investigating embattled Inquiry chair Fiona Woolf by an individual named James Saville (sic). The second is that Lord Brittan and Fiona Woolf – the social link between the two being under scrutiny – were near neighbours on London's Alderney Street, with Lord Brittan living at number 79 and Ms Woolf just twelve doors down. But that's not the coincidence. The coincidence is that at number 36 lived the late GCHQ employee Gareth Williams, whose mysterious demise in 2010, padlocked in his own holdall, has already raced ahead of that of the late Stephen Milligan MP as a byword for skulduggerous death.⁴² Complete coincidence on both counts, of course.

42 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Milligan>

Satanic Sussex

Norman Baker MP has resigned from the Home Office, unleashing the long-restrained mirth of Her Majesty's Press, with remarks about Roswell, grassy knolls, etc. etc. What they all missed however was the ironic fact that the redoubtable Mr Baker – author of *The Strange Death of David Kelly* – stars in a murky conspiracy theory dating back to his days on Lewes District Council.

Fittingly, it all started with a mysterious death: on 17 April 1996 a local Green Party activist by the name of Nic Gargani was found dead at the foot of the nearby cliffs. Police investigators soon uncovered a bizarre scenario at his home, with occult paraphernalia everywhere, pages from the Bible stuck to the walls and notes detailing alleged persecution at the hands of evil forces – specifically that Gargani believed himself to be 'targeted' by a powerful black magician and was in fear of his life.

Probing further, police and friends found links to a series of – apparently satanic – church desecrations and animal killings, all of which were synchronised with phases of the moon, which led them to a disturbed young man, a friend of Nic's who had a secret shrine to Satan in a backyard coal bunker, who was subsequently convicted of threatening behaviour against a 13-year-old whom he forced to kneel and pray. In time-honoured fashion, journalists attending his trial spoke shudderingly of the 'evil' they sensed from the young man (whose identity is still protected by a court order).

An inquest returned an Open Verdict on Nic Gargani, leaving his friends with many unanswered questions, not least of which was the identity of an unknown man referred to in one of Nic's notes as 'some black magician' who had apparently threatened him.

Another mystery is the fact that the notes apparently left by Nic in his flat and elsewhere were not in his handwriting.

On 4 July that year, Katrina Taylor – a 19-year-old mother who had herself played a murder victim on BBC television's 'Crimewatch UK' – was found stabbed to death in a graveyard in nearby Brighton. This time, the forces of

darkness were all-too-earthbound and an investigation uncovered the roots of an organised crime outfit stretching throughout the region. Four people stood trial for the murder and two were convicted; but they subsequently won appeals, leaving Katrina Taylor's murder officially unsolved.

What happened next is still a bit of a mystery itself but the general upshot is that at the time of writing there are several websites promoting a frankly incomprehensible theory in which the two mysterious deaths are linked to corruption within Sussex Police Force, a local businessman who is alleged to be a criminal mastermind with his fingers in child pornography and drugs rings, bribery and cover-ups on the local council, mysterious gunmen uttering threats against witnesses and all sorts of other stuff.

Amid all the confusion, there is near-unanimity on two points: Nic Gargani was investigating Norman Baker and Mr Baker was a key player in the entire affair, if not the actual 'Mr Big' himself.

Since I was unable to make sense of it, I emailed Mr Baker asking for his response to the accusations. Mr Baker replied within minutes: 'This stuff has been doing the rounds for years. I have no idea what they are talking about and nor does anyone else, as far as I can tell. If you find out, perhaps you can let me know.'

I also asked why Mr Baker hadn't sought to protect his reputation by initiating defamation proceedings against the site owners. Oddly enough, he didn't answer that.