

The problem with History

'O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive' comes from Sir Walter Scott's poem, *Marmon: A Tale of Flodden Field*, in 1808 where he describes how one deliberate falsehood leads to creating a baffling complex web of more lies, in an attempt to cover up the consequences of the initial dishonesty.

So, in that context, do we have a problem with some of our history?

Can we trust what we read and hear about the past? Some of history is about dates, places, significant events and people who were part of important occasions of the past. Much of it tends to be presented as 'truth'. But how do we know how much of it is true ... and how much is just story-telling ... fiction?

Should we just accept what we are told ... by people we should be able to trust ... like historians, officials in authority?

Or can we check what we are being asked to understand ... to test its accuracy ... even to look for alternative motives from the people producing that history ... **as fact?**

Let's briefly examine two examples where, I contend, that history is content to foster wrong information (to deliberately deceive) – specifically the writings of William Shakespeare and secondly the Warren Commission report in 1964 into the death of President John F Kennedy.

First. The literary works attributed to **William Shakespeare** of Stratford-on-Avon are **brilliant masterpieces in the English language**. No argument about the quality.

They extend to 38 full plays, written across comedy, tragedy and the history of other lands, royal courts and legal procedures. In addition, there were 158 sonnets and other narrative poems – all apparently written between 1592 and 1616, presumably **with a feather quill and an inkwell** (no fast word-processing back then) ... and published in *The First Folio* in 1623.

But, **there is a problem**, indeed many problems, with the historical narrative. That work was apparently produced in **24 years** – even physically, that is a **mighty feat for any one person**, even a literary genius, using the writing technology of that time.

The evidence. First, William Shakespeare of Stratford was a grain trader on the river Avon and sometime actor in London. There is **no evidence** of his handwriting, except for 3 or 4 signatures on legal documents written by others. Yet, there is copious evidence in The British Library, in London, of the handwriting of other playwrights and poets of his era.

There is **no contemporaneous evidence** that **the grain trader** ever claimed to be a writer ... or that other playwrights thought that he was ... although someone using the pen-name, 'Shakspeare', was often attributed to the plays. **There is no evidence that the man from the Avon river ever travelled overseas or was part of the machinations of royal life.**

So, it would be much more likely that **several** skilled writers of that era, with **experience** of life in royal courts, who **had** travelled and lived overseas, were writing these plays and poems under the '*Shakespeare*' pseudonym (eg Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford).

Perhaps it was dangerous for high-status courtiers to be seen to confidently write 'often-mocking' plays for the wild general public, in the reigns of Elizabeth 1 and James 1 (both of their mothers had been beheaded).

Indeed, the likelihood is that the Shakespeare of Avon was both **illiterate** and **a convenient posthumous patsy** for a **commercial promotion** – David Garrick's famous Shakespeare Jubilee – a three-day event in Stratford-on-Avon in 1769 which **fabricated/established** the grain trader into **solitary bard status** as England's national poet. ([Check out the debate on-line.](#)) That commercial venture helped cement the continuing 'unchallengeable' narrative (taught in schools to this day) that attributed these brilliant works (performed worldwide) to a person who most probably didn't write any of them. But it would be almost 'heresy' to question such an entrenched narrative ... because the works are brilliant ... and the accepted narrative was not seriously challenged until the turn of the 19th century. **But it certainly has been since. What price accurate history?**

Second. The **Warren Commission** was established by President Lyndon B Johnson to establish in the public mind that former president, John F Kennedy (JFK), was assassinated by a lone gunman, Lee Oswald, on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.

In the investigation and validation process, documented evidence (written and video) was ignored, impounded, modified, destroyed and replaced – including the autopsy report. **That takes some power.** Witnesses were seriously intimidated into giving **only** the official line and well over 100 people with knowledge of the events met extremely suspicious deaths. The Commission report was published in 1964, just before the presidential election and then became part of the official history of the USA.

Ever since, the American public has been torn between its need to trust the ‘eminent’ people on the Commission, against … the widely held view that **the findings were clearly illogical, contradictory of publicly available evidence and of the testimonies of multiple witnesses.** Those included the many doctors who treated JFK at Parkland Hospital, Dallas, in the 30 minutes after the shooting – before the body and the limousine were taken to Washington for official ‘processing’.

This has led to decades of USA Congressional investigations (as recently as 2025) that have revealed the likelihood of a multi-layered ‘hitjob’ on JFK with **very complex layers of cover-up**, that could only have been achieved with the support and control of the **highest levels of government.**

The likelihood is that multiple shooters engaged JFK in a cross-fire and that the accused Lee Oswald was quite possibly not even one of them.

Nevertheless, **the conclusion of the Warren Report is still the official history of the JFK assassination.**

Gerald Ford, a Warren Commission member and later US president, admitted in the 1997 Assassination Records Review Board report that he **edited a key sentence** in the Warren Commission report, thereby **altering evidence to suit the required theory.** He is famous for explaining his decisions as *‘for the good of the country’*. However, that blatant disregard for due process is but one of dozens of other documented distorting examples, ‘gaslighting’ the public, that has likely assisted in creating the significant change in USA public attitudes – **dissatisfaction about the trustworthiness/probity of many public figures – and incorrect history.**

History is part of our cultural heritage – part of how we view the world in which we find ourselves. It is in our schooling systems, in libraries, in universities, within families and our communities. We absorb it from old photographs, commemorative buildings, documentaries, movies, social media, by listening to songs, by watching interpretative dances and plays ... There are so many ways.

Many resources enable us to verify our histories. Records of births, deaths, marriages, court appearances, business dealings, official ceremonies, people holding official community positions (eg kings, judges, prime ministers, religious leaders ...), documents, accounts, interviews – passed down through the generations in written form, in ceremony, even in rock art and hieroglyphics ... as well as carbon dating from archaeological digs.

Is it true that only the victors get to write history ... and to produce the official records?

To the extent that victors are usually in charge of the record keeping, memorials and history writing, then official history documents would probably be written/kept from **the victor** viewpoint (perhaps a perspective that suggests that the victors are 'the good people' and the vanquished would have been 'less worthy' of serious consideration at that time).

However, the vanquished and victims often **also** recorded their stories (informally, unofficially) and passed them down through the generations ... until such times as later ruling groups are prepared to listen to the victims' recollections of historic events.

If the re-writing of history is based on **verifiable evidence**, then it is surely better to have **true records of the past** ... rather than promulgating falsehoods, misinterpretations or misrepresentations.

And, in terms of understanding our past, all of that dodgy evidence should be kept (rather than destroyed), stored in libraries and museums, **to show the distortions of history** in the context of the agendas of their time (eg slavery museums, genocide museums). In that way, changing social attitudes and ideologies can be better understood. **It is about learning the lessons of historical agendas and how the past is remembered.**

In future essays, we might share examples of histories that may have been wrong (but not intentionally) and then can be amended as more confirmable information is discovered.

In the meantime, do your own research into the examples given here.