

Who killed David Kelly?

Nigel Jones reviews 'The Strange Death of David Kelly' by Norman Baker

By [Global Research](#)

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Reading this somberly factual book in tandem with Robert Harris's equally plausible political thriller, *The Ghost*, is an eerily surreal experience: similar worlds, peopled by similar characters, blur and blend, until it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins.

The anti-heroes of both books – although Harris lightly disguises his prime minister as 'Adam Lang' – is Tony Blair, and the cronies, lickspittles and murderous spooks who throng his corrupt court. The landscape of both works forming the backdrop to tragedy is the same: rural, wooded and bleak.

In Harris's novel, it is the stunted dwarf oak forests and beaches of Martha's Vineyard in midwinter where Lang's loyal aide, Mike McAra, is mysteriously washed up dead. In Norman Baker's equally vividly rendered reality it is the superficially homely Oxfordshire village of Southmoor in midsummer, in particular Harrowdown Hill, a lonely spot where, in July 2003, one of Britain's leading government scientists, Dr David Kelly, was found in similarly mysterious circumstances, equally dead. And the tragedy itself that informs both books is,

of course, Iraq.

The author of this stunning work of non-fiction, is not, like Harris, a glamorous TV journalist turned millionaire churning of superior thrillers but a spectacularly unglamorous Liberal Democrat MP. Troubled by the strange events surrounding Kelly's demise, Baker resigned his frontbench responsibilities to pursue a private investigation of the case.

He began, he tells us, believing that while 'brutality, immorality and deception were to be found in totalitarian regimes across the world' he had not appreciated how 'these qualities can easily be found in Western democracies too. We fool ourselves if we think "It can't happen here". It can, and it does.'

If Baker's meticulous account is to be believed, what happened on that gentle English hillside was murder most foul, carelessly dressed up to look like suicide. He begins with a minute description of Dr Kelly's last hours - insofar as they emerged from the incomplete investigation of Lord Hutton's travesty of an inquiry - the only inquest that poor Kelly is likely to get.

Although under extreme pressure as a result of the Blair government's outing of him as the source of Andrew Gilligan's radio report that the 'dodgy dossier' that took Britain to war in Iraq had been 'sexed up' to panic Parliament into authorising war, Kelly nevertheless kept his customarily level head.

He spent the morning of 17 July replying to supportive emails from friends. There were 'dark actors' at work, he wrote, but he would survive - and he went ahead with planning his next trip to Iraq, where he had become a familiar figure since 1991 - nosing out Saddam's efforts to conceal his biological weapons with a particularly effective, understated British persistence.

The tone and content of these messages, says Baker, were hardly consistent with a man bent on taking his own life.

His wife, Janice, took to her bed with a headache, and without bidding her farewell, Kelly left on one of his customary brisk, 20-minute strolls in the surrounding countryside. He was never seen alive again. The next morning, Kelly's corpse was found on Harrowdown Hill, a mile or so away from his home.

His ulnar artery - a matchstick-sized blood vessel in the wrist - was found cut, apparently by a knife he had owned since childhood (on which there were mysteriously no fingerprints). Twenty-nine Copraxamol painkiller tablets (used by his wife to combat pain from her arthritis) were missing from a blister pack by his body (although none were found in his stomach and he had a well-attested aversion to swallowing tablets).

There were many peculiarities about the death that went - and still go - unexplained: no suicide note; no arterial blood; the method of death so rare as to be almost unheard of.

Kelly was said by all his friends to be not the suicidal type; and he had told two of them that if his views on Iraq became inconvenient to the authorities 'he would be found dead in the woods'.

In addition, his dental records disappeared from his dentist's filing cabinet - and were then

mysteriously returned; and the police search for him, code-named 'Operation Mason', was officially started before his family had reported him missing. Curiouser and curiouser.

Baker fills in the political background to Kelly's death – the duplicities and deceptions advanced to justify the Iraq war; then ticks off the likely suspects for Kelly's death, starting with the nuttiest – no, it wasn't a ritualised pagan killing on a ley line; nor were the Russians guilty.

Reluctantly, he even acquits MI6 and the CIA of direct responsibility, while making it clear that both had the capability to carry out the killing and concluding that both probably were aware that it would happen and covered up the fact that it had.

Instead he fingers a rogue Iraqi hit team – either vengeful Saddam loyalists, still furious at Kelly's worming out their concealed WMD – or, more likely, followers of the exiled CIA- and MI6-backed 'dissidents' Ahmed Chalabi and Iyad Allawi, cousins both hoping to be installed in power in the wake of a successful Anglo-American invasion.

Kelly's honest questioning of the flimsy justifications for the war threatened to scupper their plans. Therefore, he had to be silenced.

And it is Baker's contention, informed by sources within the intelligence community, that British official operatives acted to transform a killing by Iraqi 'hired hands' into what looked superficially like a suicide. As the old KGB adage puts it: 'Anyone can commit a murder, but it takes an artist to commit a suicide.'

As Baker rightly comments, proponents of 'conspiracy theories' tend to be dismissed as nutters. His own courageous and well-publicised probing into Kelly's death has been dismissed with the usual 'we don't do that kind of thing, old boy'. But, as this disquieting book makes very clear – unfortunately, we do.

His concluding pages, in which he lists, with a cold anger, how those who launched and justified the Iraq war: the Blairs, the Campbells, the Hoons, the Huttons and the Generals and diplomats – have smoothly progressed, with their honours, their pensions and their directorships of dodgy arms companies intact, while Kelly's reward for his honesty was a grave in Longmoor Churchyard, make one shiver at the moral nadir of the Blair years.

Baker's anecdote about a copy of the Hutton report being auctioned by Cherie Blair to raise money for the Labour Party tells you all you need to know about our squalid rulers.

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