

Valiant

For

Truth

A response to

How the English Establishment Framed

STEPHEN WARD

By

Caroline Kennedy & Phillip Knightley

When it mattered few of those we might see as dramatis personae in a tragedy remained close friends with truth. If self-preservation was weighed against truth it usually won. This was the case not only for individuals but also for government and for those that served and mingled with government. By contrast, Stephen Ward, the tragic hero, remained true to his friends and to life itself. And for that devotion to truth and life he killed himself and cheated an *Establishment* that sought to project upon him its lies, deceptions, duplicity and incompetence. The injustice done to him remains. This book reminds and bestirs us.

With all his foolish faults, which included talking too much, the inability to manage his finances, trust in others and naïve faith in justice, this man who enhanced the lives of so many was the one whose destruction some of his friends would directly, indirectly, deliberately, unintentionally and, too late, regretfully, help government, the legal system, *The Establishment*, to bring about.

This is not simply a story about an excitingly racy half-hidden episode from a disappearing past. There are layers of meaning that, as they are revealed, demonstrate that truth, honesty and justice, though difficult to nail down, always matter. They certainly matter to the authors who deserve John Bunyan's appellation, *Valiant For Truth*.

The title includes that impressive word *Establishment*, multiplied by the word *English*. It recalls books by authors such as Anthony Sampson who tried to discover where powerful people placed their fulcrum, how long was their lever, whose hands were allowed on it and how much force they exerted. Last

year (2014) Owen Jones published yet another book on *The Establishment* subtitled, *And how they get away with it*.

The notion of a powerful group, sometimes cohesive and clearly defined but often disparate and murky, cannot be thrown into the dustbin of history. Such groups have long-life chameleon-like qualities though, as Kennedy and Knightley show, their control over events is not always effortlessly certain. They work hard at getting away with it but while there remain authors combining high-level research skills, relevant experience and strong human values being part of *The Establishment* is no guarantee of immunity.

This book shines a light into the dark corners of *The Establishment* of the early 1960s and, yes, the private networks of school, university, club and regiment do play a part in the tragedy, as do the secret world of spies, the appetite of the press for the salacious, the power to pressure witnesses and the ruthless urges to survive of politicians; but the authors also convey a strong sense of Stephen Ward maintaining a standard of humanity higher than those in whom he mistakenly placed his trust. His was not the only tragedy. For some of those that distanced themselves from him at his lowest point their later lives were, as a consequence, far from content. But he stands out as a noble figure, undeserving of his fate.

Ward was a cultured man, combining eagerness for experience with an empathetic nature. Royalty and aristocracy were keen to cultivate this osteopath who not only banished their pain but, as an artist, also immortalised them. He certainly charmed but did not prise his way into such society: he was invited and welcomed. To Stephen I believe there really was no distinction between an insider and an outsider world. He felt 'in' wherever he was; until the time when so many of those that had been glad to be his friends crossed to the other side of the road to watch him being scapegoated and attacked.

The legal charge that he lived on immoral earnings, that he pimped, was only ever credible in the minds of two kinds of *establishment* figures. The first group we might call the *The Cynical Fixers* who decided that Ward must be sacrificed for their sake. His name was besmirched to save reputations and a false accusation was key to this. Those that had sought his company now shunned it. The security services that had played upon his patriotism when they wished him to work for them allowed him to be characterised as a Walter Mitty fantasist.

John Profumo, Macmillan's Secretary of State for War, having 'misled' (lied to) the House of Commons about his relationship with Christine Keeler, was to be allowed a dignified departure from public life. A conviction against Stephen Ward, a contrived calumny, was necessary for the construction of an official narrative to serve *The Establishment*. Like so many fairy tales, this featured Stephen as a vile, wicked creature, source of all that was evil: the man who introduced a Keeler 'of easy virtue' to Profumo, a respected minister of the Crown: the man whose friendship with a Soviet spy endangered national security: the man with no morals. Once that narrative had been embedded in

the public consciousness *The Establishment* intended to continue with business as before.

Profumo did gain his quiet dignified departure but Ward's suicide, despite strenuous and continuing (to this day) official efforts to suppress and distort evidence, ensured that business would not continue as before and the new narrative was not embedded, though official guilt has never been admitted. This book provides us with the evidence and the will to call again for an admission of official guilt.

The second group I think of as *The Bemused*. For me Lord Denning, the Master of the Rolls, belongs here. He remains noted throughout the world for the high quality of his legal judgments and his belief that justice should be a theme of law and yet, when required to look into and report on 'The Profumo Affair', his values and expertise were overwhelmed and he was out of his social and sexual depth. The Denning Report sold in huge numbers and was no doubt intended to play a large part in establishing the official narrative but Denning made a simplistic judgment, *Establishment Good: Ward Evil*.

Unfortunately for *The Establishment* the Denning Report did not wash. Its sloppiness and antediluvian perceptions of social mores harmed the attempt to embed an official narrative. There were many factors involved, including Harold Macmillan's health, but the Conservative government was now on the skids and destined to, narrowly, lose the next general election. Attempts to shore up *The Establishment* of the day merely confirmed perceptions of its irrelevant fuddy-duddiness.

The prosecuting counsel at Ward's trial we might allow as someone who was cynically doing his job, though hardly a noble one. The judge was, although probably playing by the rules, so clearly intent upon a conviction that he might actually have been appearing for the prosecution. Was he *Cynic* or *Bemused*? He was certainly biased and nasty.

Harold Macmillan would probably have preferred to be classified among *The Bemused*. But otherworldly bemusement was just one of the parts that the great political actor manager could play without rehearsal or script. He was never so innocent. Weaving tangled webs comes with the job, though we might yearn for politicians that can do better than become entangled in their own webs of deceit. The continuing disgrace is that, despite lively interest in the story, justice has yet to be done. More than fifty years ago various people were allotted parts to play. Some of them were expected to go on playing them without respite. They were sentenced to stay in the story and we have done insufficient to release them.

Even today the names of Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice Davies raise eyebrows and provoke knowing smiles as part of Ward's story. *The Establishment* decided the roles they should have. They were a source of uncomplicated fun for the rich, privileged and powerful but they also served as lightning rods when people in power and those that sustained that power felt the need to divert blame. The word *prostitute* was probably the most sticky

label that could be applied to these young friends of Stephen but, despite its total inappropriateness, it was the insult of first resort used by politicians, police and lawyers seeking to simultaneously discredit them and yet make use of their evidence under oath in order to 'get' Ward: to 'get' him for the innocent and unplanned part he played in bringing to the surface *establishment* lies, hypocrisy and fear of being found out.

I feel nostalgia for the days of unflappable Supermac created by the cartoonist Vicki. Today Harold Macmillan might, for a while, have been called a 'Teflon Prime Minister'. During the period on which this book concentrates his Teflon was, however, wearing off. Possibly he and his closest friends were encountering social pressures and changes for which they were ill prepared. It is, though, wrong to assume that sex was invented in the 1960s (that was Philip Larkin's sense of humour). Instead, perhaps, deference was diminishing. Stephen Ward, linking people of widely different backgrounds, was hardly the first to have crossed and mingled social (class) boundaries. His misfortune was to have done this at a time when too many political, governmental and social (*establishment*) arteries were clogged and in no fit state to cope with crises.

Possibly the Cuban Missile Crisis was the greatest but we ought to remember that for Britain it came not long after Burgess, Maclean and, later, Philby were revealed as Soviet spies who fled to the USSR and the humiliating Suez fiasco when Macmillan's predecessor Anthony Eden tried and failed to rattle a rusty sabre. Harold Macmillan won the 1959 General Election with the slogan 'You've Never Had It So Good' (he was lucky that he called the election after a long hot summer and an April budget that put money into people's pockets) but his restoration of national self-confidence and his talk of Britain playing a weak, *but wise*, Greece to the powerful, *though immature*, Rome of the USA was beginning to look shaky at the point when John Profumo first set eyes on Christine Keeler and when Yvgeny Ivanov arrived in London to play the part of likeable, glamorous Soviet spy in this drama.

The idea of Christine in bed with Profumo in Ward's flat, wheedling state secrets, letting him out by the back door as Ivanov arrived at the front to jump into a warm bed to hear those secrets was never credible, though cynical attempts were made to make it appear so. It was another part of the official narrative.

US Secretary of State Dean Acheson's remark near the end of 1962 that

Great Britain has lost an empire but not yet found a role

discomforted the *English Establishment*. It raised the question of what it was for. It certainly wished to self-perpetuate which, perhaps, led to a defensive cast of mind. We are not simply dealing with crusty old men in crusty old clubs drinking crusty old tawny while selecting a fine cigar before deciding the fate of The Empire. It is an attractive caricature not without some validity but, as the book shows, we are also dealing with police officers, journalists and members of the security services who probably never set foot in such clubs.

They were not merely foot soldiers for *The Establishment*. They were a part of it: their values meshed. When it was decided that Stephen Ward must be the tallest lightning rod they allowed few moral constraints or respect for truth to hold them back.

Back then I saw events through media prisms. The official narrative looked laughable but, like many, I simply filed it away. If you did the same or if this story is new to you I recommend this impressive book. It not only lifts up stones of secrecy but it inspires us to challenge injustice, then and now.

Thanks to the authors for this up-dated book and for their ferociously forensic drive to lift so many stones.

Published by CreateSpace, 2013

ISBN 978-1490939896