**Amateurs**

We are all amateurs.

Michael and his immediate team encountered many wonderful people during investigations. Government and administrative officials and members of the church all treated us with courtesy, intelligence, respect, and professional support, which usually extended into personally interested support and kindness. So did the journalists, who moved to publish, or were honest if they decided not to. None of us in the team were ‘professionals’ in what we were doing. I say “we”, “our”, and “us” to represent the core team, specifically intent on finding the Romanovs under Michael’s guidance, as distinct from everyone else, though in practice it felt like a bigger “we”, since most folk we met believed in what Michael was attempting, supported the cause, and contributed to its success.

None of the ‘professionals’ we encountered, such as Embassy and Church officials, made any distinction about whether we were ‘professional’ or ‘amateur’. It was not an issue. They were people doing useful things well, and so were we (most of the time).

The notion of ‘amateur’ never cropped up in action.

Such distinctions are used in the vicarious passivity of writing. Blogs and books about investigations to find the Romanovs often say things like “an amateur team”, “amateur sleuths” (Klier, photo section), “was it a *scientific* excavation?” “are they professionals?”, “what are their credentials?” In blogs and books the term “amateur” is usually used to insinuate incompetence or inappropriateness. It seems appropriate here in the written word, in the literature, to return some literal meaning to “amateur” and “professional”, which may help clear up some prevalent misunderstandings.

When you are talking with an official at an Embassy, a nun in a Church, or a journalist in an apartment, they care about things like what you know and what you have done, and could do next. They do not care about ‘amateur’ or ‘professional’. They know what the words mean, and that actions speak louder. These are people who are themselves professional.

No-one is professional in the search for the Romanovs. Avdonin was an amateur. Michael Buchanan-Smart was an amateur. Bloggers and authors are self-appointed amateurs. Sergei Plotnikov, the 46-year-old builder who, as the Guardian put it, “stumbled on a small hollow covered with nettles”, was an “amateur”. I am an amateur.

There are no “amateur or professional” criteria for hunting for Romanov remains, as it is rather niche. Current literal meanings for ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’, and decision criteria in contested areas like astronomy or boxing, are to do with expertise and knowledge, conduct, and whether the person makes a living by doing it. No-one is professional at finding missing Romanovs, or missing saints, or missing royalty. There is no such profession.

There was such a profession when Nicolai Sokolov was the Coroner of Court of Special Affairs, appointed in 1919 to investigate what happened to the Romanovs. Sokolov and his predecessor were professional, in that seeking the Romanov’s was their job. Sokolov was officially appointed to investigate, from among a selection of possible candidates, and the task had something to do with his paid job at which he had proven himself to be effective. In 1993, after the 1991 confirmations, the Office of the Russian Federation General Procurator again opened an investigation, though more to determine the cause of death of the nine, as a criminal case, than to find the missing two. The Public Prosecutor, and various similar roles, could be argued to have been professional posts associated with finding the Romanovs while they were missing, but without a directive to investigate there was no profession in seeking them. No-one since Sokolov has been officially appointed by an appropriate authority, and demonstrated competence at attempting to find the Romanovs. Since then, everyone who has attempted to unravel the mystery is just as amateur as everyone else[[1]](#footnote-1).

There are professionals in various relevant fields: professionals at finding missing persons, archaeological excavation, analysis of historic and political documents, at criminal profiling, geology, theology, etc. There is no profession which combines all aspects, and it is unlikely that one individual would be ‘professional’ in all aspects (though identifying the aspects and stakeholders could be a good start). If someone was a ‘professional’ in historical research, archaeology, and criminal profiling, then the Church and Governments could say, completely legitimately from their standpoints, “that person has no professional credentials in the political or religious aspects of what they are doing.” Those stakeholders could then add “...so they should be prevented from trying.” Realistically the only way to approach being ‘professional’ in finding the Romanovs is to be a team of relevant professional individuals.

We weren’t.

Overall, this is a book about my research in England with specific reference to the leading players and places. I also cover briefly my journey through Russia to Ekaterinburg, which played its own part in finding the two children. Then of how I ‘found’ or ‘was shown’ the burial site of the two missing children on Sunday June 27th 2004 and gave the information to the Russian ‘Authorities’. Somewhat frustrated and concerned with their perceptible lack of progress for numerous reasons including apparent delaying protocol, ‘ageing’ ailments by the older scientists, lack of funds, the Siberian winter etc., I undertook a second ‘expedition’ in June 2005. I relate about this and the first excavation. One day hopefully, the ‘Children’ can finally be handed over to the Russian Church – and then laid to rest with their family.

I never intended to write this book, but just keep notes and photographs of my journey and quest. However, due to self inflicted emotional and obsessive pressures, the only real release I could find was to write about the whole ‘affair’. Some aspects of my accounts may answer some of the many outstanding questions and in time, prove useful for historical records or possibly help to solve future ‘detective mysteries’.

There are many coincidences that link me to the scenario, the prime one being that the family were executed at about 02.30 hours on 17th July 1918 - I was born at about 02.30 hours on the 17th July 1944! There are others, some of which are mentioned in the text.

Was I just a mad Englishman with too much sun who spent thousands of pounds and travelled thousands of miles to a mosquito and tick infested hot swampy forest for a jolly! Or: Was my journey just a hopeful mission? Was it a crusade? Was this my destiny? After four years of research in England I had become obsessed with a passion and determination to succeed.

Perhaps most of all, my experience may further the belief of mankind that miracles do occur.

The question of whether diggers are “amateur” is almost always raised by people who are themselves “amateur”. The word ‘amateur’ is usually used in these contexts with a derogatory intent. It is intended to suggest that the person or persons involved are not very good at what they are trying to do, or will probably do it wrong. The distinction used between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ tends to miss other relevant terms such as ‘skilled’ and ‘specialist’, ‘competent’, and ‘incompetent’. ‘Amateur’ is often used to insult people, in a cowardly way.

If we were to separate those involved into ‘amateurs’ and ‘professionals’, the Tsar and family were ‘amateurs’. No qualifications, unelected, no probationary period, and Nicholas hardly seemed particularly able. They were professional only in the sense of making a livelihood from doing what they did. If there were an appointment process at the time to find a suitable Tsar, Nicholas Alexandrovich would have been in the bottom 50% of the royal family, and probably of the population of Russia. He would not have made it to interview.

At being an effective ruler in the way that previous Tsars had led, and the way in which he was expected to rule – and how he is judged retrospectively not just in this book but by almost everyone who has ever expressed an opinion about his suitability and effectiveness - Nicholas was decidedly amateur.

In terms of being appointed by an appropriate authority, Nicholas was appointed by God. As God’s anointed, he must have had qualities suited to God’s purpose. From that, God’s purpose seems to have been that He was a bit fed up with the whole Tsar thing, and figured it was time for a change – or at the very least, time for a fallow period and a bit of Russian suffering. As a professional at ending the imperial dynasty, Nicholas was divine.

God’s purpose for Nicholas was evidently not to be a strong ruler. Nicholas upheld the sanctity of the Church and of the family. In what was probably a time of inevitable revolution, those were values and institutions which were under threat, and which the right person could save. As a divine purpose they may be considered honourable. There Nicholas did well. This accords with both the 1981 canonisation of the family as martyrs (killed for reasons of faith) and the 2000 canonisation as passion bearers, for piety and humility[[2]](#footnote-2). Tsar Nicholas II is an unconvincing figurehead for restoring the monarchy, but posthumously and with the support of his family, seems effective as a figure for maintaining religious values, particularly Orthodox, and for the institution of the family, with some interlink between those values. From the perspective of faith, he and the family have shown the endurance of divinity, relative to which even that vast revolution can seem temporal. Nicholas and the family are worthy Saints.

Throughout my life, primarily in the working environment, I have come across ‘talkers’, ‘thinkers’, ‘watchers’ and ‘doers’. Some people ‘talk’ a good job, some ‘think’ they do a good job, some ‘watch’ others do a good job and some people *actually do* a good job. I would like to think that I am a ‘doer’. (*as I believe Yurovsky was - and had to be given his situation at that time*.)

I am not a historian or a scientist, but consider myself a ‘Problem Solver’. Many of my years in computing were spent in the time critical ‘front line’ operations and this necessitated problem solving, to bring computers back online again. Thus, I learned how to pay attention to detail, how to think logically, how to dispense with irrelevant information and most of all, how to calculate informative guesses or judgements based on facts rather than make idealistic assumptions that suits the case in issue, then ‘persuade’ everything to fit around that ‘incorrect’ assumption. Additionally, when I write a show, attention to detail is paramount, and every point has to be carefully considered regarding continuity, staging, lighting effects, the places of up to 30+ actors actresses and children, who will move next and to where, what props are required and other aspects that many people take for granted. Also, when acting a character, you must learn to ‘be’ that person in order to give a creditable performance. All these things helped me to ‘home-in’ on the burial area.

In terms of finding Romanovs, there is no such thing as professional or amateur. As Jack Sparrow says, what counts is what a man can do, and what a man cannot do. Or, as Michael said, there are ‘talkers’, ‘thinkers’, ‘watchers’ and ‘doers’.

Most Saints are amateurs. What counts is what you do.

Michael Buchanan-Smart worked out where the second grave was. So how come nobody else did? Other than he’s an exceptional genius.

The truth of the site of the two, and its location, remained a mystery largely because of the mistranslation or misinterpretation of witness statements. How did these misunderstandings happen? When did they happen? How come everyone followed them for so long? Why did no-one understand them sooner? I would like to know, so I have gone through many books, and some other sources like blogs, to find out who thought or said what, and when. When did people first know about various statements, and obtain them? Did people tend to copy what others had said, and perpetuate errors that arose early on?

I would also like to know why people made mistakes, or whether they deliberately spread misinformation.

The public perception of what happened to the Romanovs is based on popular culture – books and newspaper articles, films and documentaries, and web pages. Public perception does not pay much attention to whether books are accurate. People are quite skeptical of newspaper journalism and tv news, and hardly anyone ever believes films are accurate. But documentaries are typically respected, and people generally assume that books are accurate – after all, they are written by clever people. That is a dangerous assumption. Readers can be a bit too credulous. Everyone tends to believe a book which has a bibliography, and an index, and references. Who ever checks that a book’s references are genuine? If readers do find something they think is inaccurate, they tend to google it, or check facts against other books on the same subject. If everything agrees then it must be true. No one ever wonders whether everyone has been copying one another for years, and there was something inaccurate right at the beginning, which has now become accepted as ‘fact’. That is how history gets changed. The Romanov case and the missing children may have been a victim of this. So it seemed worth checking who quoted who, and when.

Another danger of such assumptions is that authors can exploit it. Most do not, but some probably do. This is why I went into that rant earlier on about “Amateurs” and “Professionals”. When it comes to writing, people will happily call an archaeological excavation team “amateur”, but it never occurs to credulous readers and bloggers that most writers are just as “amateur”. One danger of this is that writers can exploit readers’ gullibility, and also start to think they deserve to be believed: “They’ll believe what I say. I am sure I am right - no real need to check it. Anyway, I saw it in Wikipedia, so it must be right. And so-and-so put it in his/her book, so no need to check it. Anyway, I am a Writer!”

These risks are particularly relevant for the missing Romanovs, where source materials are miles away, in secure archives. For many years you could get into serious trouble for even asking to see government documents on the Romanovs. Into the 1960s and 70s and well into the 80s, asking about government records could get you killed or imprisoned. Worse than “could have”. It probably would have, unless you could present an iron-curtain-clad reason to ask to see them. Alexander Avdonin and Geli Ryabov knew very well the dangers they faced. Their film-making reasons were brilliantly protective, but they still could not risk pushing their luck – particularly Avdonin with responsibilities to his family. The Bykov book had been banned. Even the existence of witness statements was secret. It is very likely that hardly anybody knew those statements existed. (It is quite possible that more statements exist than we know of now. Ten years from now someone might find a “Yurovsky and Sukhorukov and Rodzinsky’s July 1918 Statement” written just after the events, in great detail with maps and photos (Yurovsky was a photographer), explaining much more than we know today. It is unlikely, but not impossible.)

The unavailability of source documents makes it much more likely that quotes are unreliable, and that authors would copy each other. You cannot tell whether an author saw the originals, or someone else did, then told the author about them – maybe with an unreliable memory. If an author cannot get to the papers, they can quote someone else’s quote, and it would probably not even occur to a reader or editor that the author never saw the original text.

The original statements are in Russian. For books in other languages, like English, someone must translate. For non-Russian authors this makes it a bit irrelevant whether they used the original source – I have plenty of Russian books which I cannot read or quote from in English. This makes it more likely to just copy what other people have already published in English.

The secrecy of the documents could encourage authors to make up quotes, e.g. to appear exclusive. Authors outside Russia could invent statements to frustratedly try to get a reaction out of Russian authorities who would not share the originals.

Quotes could be made up for other reasons too. Secret documents are a great context to spread disinformation, and make things up for your own reasons; for any reasons. To keep secrets about where some of the Romanovs’ gold and jewels went; to keep the mystery alive; to stop anyone finding the bodies…

As a reader, do we have any way of checking?

You can try. Like Michael did with his investigation, you need to work out the issues and be rigorous. And go for it.

Here is what I found…

**DNA of Russian Whispers**

[text removed]

**Luggage opened at the airport**

“The flight was really comfortable. I’ll say this for Aeroflot: they’re on time. It was wonderful! They look after you brilliantly. When my case broke they even came and found me to apologise!”

It’s 2004. We are settled at Michael’s sunny, cluttered table. Michael is beaming as we look through the photos he has just had processed, after returning from his first Ekaterinburg trip. He has told me by phone that he found the site, and now I’ve come down to his bungalow to see how he is and catch up properly. I look at him a bit puzzled. “Your case broke?”

“Yeh. While I was at the airport.”

“How do you mean they ‘found’ you?”

“Someone came up to me while I was in the airport.” I ask him who did, and he tells me it was one of the airport officials. A man with a cap on. I ask, “What did he say?”

“He said he was sorry, my case had broken – I think he said in baggage handling – and asked me to come with him to see.”

I am a bit surprised that he did not mention this sooner. Feeling like I am beginning to conduct an interrogation, I ask “Where did you go?”

“To a room where my case was. They showed me where it had broken, and said they were very sorry.” Perhaps I am missing something about the dynamics of Russian airports. For sure, someone is missing something. I ask him what the man looked like. “Quite big. Strong. A nice man. He had a friendly smile.”

“So...” I ask. “Did they call for you over the tannoy?”

“No,” he says. “He just came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder.”

“He tapped you on the shoulder? So he was behind you?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Ermm... I was just wondering how he knew it was you. What was broken about the bag?”

“It was a case.”

“Yes. How was it broken? Was it the lock?” I know the case he means. A big wheelie case that’s seen better days, with one of those logo names intended to remind you of a brand, like ‘Sampsonlite’ or ‘Pierre Cardini’ or ‘Carlton’.

“The zip had gone. Along the seam.”

“Where’s the case?”

“Oh, I threw it. There was no way to repair it. I took it to a menders in town, but they said it would cost more to repair than a new case. It was all plastic. You couldn’t sew it. I tried glueing it.”

“Right... Was the case locked?” He says it was. He always locks his case. Which is true - he has packets of little bronze padlocks. They’re the sorts of things that make it onto his work table, like escapees from the back of a drawer, hiding among drifts of opened letters and torn pieces of envelopes with notes written on them in bold biro, and as many exclamation marks as he speaks. The table is partly cleared now for a photo show. I consider asking if the lock was damaged, but there’s no point, so I ask what the room was like instead. “Smallish. Well, not that small.” And was there a table? “Yes. The case was on the table. There was a woman there, behind the case. They were both embarrassed. They’d taped the case up and put it in a plastic bag. Thick stuff, so it would hold together in the plane.”

“Sorry, was this before you flew or after?”

“Before. It was before I flew to Moscow.”

“So they stopped you in Ekaterinburg.”

“Yes.”

“So it was after you had checked in?”

“Yes.”

“After you had shown your passport.”

“Yes.” My father is becoming interested now. He has a cunning knack of spotting when I am onto something. He also takes my question sessions as a prime opportunity to light a cigarette. One of his maxims is ‘If you can sit, never stand; if you can lie, never sit.’ No point sitting there not looking at photos *and* not relaxing.

I ask if he lost anything from the case. He says yes he did, actually. His earth samples got lost.

“How exactly did the man come up to you?”

“He... I don’t know. I didn’t see him. He tapped me on the shoulder.”

“So how did he know it was you? Did he ask you your name?”

“Yes. No. I don’t remember.”

“I mean, did he say ‘Excuse me. Are you Mr Buchanan-Smart?’” Or did he just ask you to follow him? Did he call you ‘Mr Buchanan-Smart’, or ‘Sir’?

“Oh, he knew who I was.”

As Oscar Wilde said, in the voice of Aunt Augusta: ‘Ignorance is like a delicate flower. Touch it, and the bloom is gone.’ I tell him that it really was excellent service: checking the airport cameras so they could find him in the airport. Not many airlines would do that.

“Come to think of it,” he adds, “my shower pole went as well.”

“How do you mean?”

“The shower pole,” he says. “The shower pole I cut, and used as a borer. You know. The tube I did the soil samples with.”

“Did anything else go?” He says he doesn’t think so. His cross was still there, and the icons. No, everything else was fine.

“And you had already told the Embassy that you were going to dig?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t think that maybe someone went through your luggage?”

“What? No. They’d have taken my camera.”

I poke the photos on the table so that we can both see a corner of the photo with the soil samples laid out. A murky photo with a lot of blinding flash that glints off the shiny bits and stops you seeing clearly what it is you’re looking at... I shift my seat round a bit.

“Someone finds you in the airport, takes you to a room, your case had been split along the seam, and all your sampling materials are gone, and you don’t think someone went through your luggage?”

Looking back on it, it was me who should have been more perceptive. I should have paid more attention to how much the emotion got to him. The scale and passion of the intrigue, and of the country.

He thinks a bit and says “hmmm. I suppose it’s possible.” Like me, he’d never thought of it before.

I feel a Russia trip coming on. We both know we’re going to finish this.

A few days later, on the phone with him I confront something which had been playing on my mind. That same photo of soil spread on a table included, in one corner, an ivory coloured speck which my father said was a tooth. His shower pole intrusion of hallowed soil had withdrawn, among the mixed strata and ash layer, a lone tooth. In the photo it looked like a small white stone. Even in that photographic granularity, the thing obviously had no tooth root. Among the bayonets and rifle butts a lost tooth may have been knocked out, snapping at the gumline and leaving the root stuck in the jaw, and setting free only the bit visible above the gumline that we tend to think of as “a tooth”. But still, in the photo it was not as angular as I would expect a lost and found tooth to look. A bit too large and rounded for an incisor, but too small for a child’s molar or pre-molar which would anyway be unlikely to snap at the gumline. To me it did not look like a tooth. Not to mention the chances of extracting a tooth from a grave site using a pole that is only about 15mm wide – it is not impossible, but highly improbable. It seemed more like what you would call “a tooth!” if you were play acting as a child. Either he thinks a stone is a tooth, or I think he does. Either way, it’s no way to find missing children.

On the phone I mention that it is pretty amazing that he found a tooth, and ask him what he has put it in: a small box? “Hmm,” he says. “Now you mention it, I’ve not seen that either. I had it in a food bag. Hmmm. That’s vanished as well.”

Mr L. Carlin

*Customer Services Manager*

Shires of Bath

PO Box 7356

Nottingham

NG15 0YU

30th March 2004

Dear Mr Carlin

Customer Number: 0826110

Order Number: 20364702

**RE: Foresters Hat – Customer Service?**

Today I received my hat – NOT!

However, I did receive another return label – WOW!

I have already returned the two ‘damaged’ hats with the first two return labels. Is this for the hat I have not yet received but paid for nearly two months ago, or is someone just taking the P\*\*\*!?

I think the joke has gone far enough – don’t you?

**JUST SEND ME MY HAT!**

Many thanks for your extended and continued assistance.

Very Bestest Wishes

Yours sincerely

Michael Buchanan-Smart

cc The Managing Director; Shires of Bath

**2004**

On 17th June Michael visited the Saints Peter and Paul Cathedral. He stayed in St Petersburg until Saturday 19th. He transferred to Moscow, then took a sleeper train to Ekaterinburg, arriving late on 23rd June. In the morning of the 24th he went to the British Consul in Ekaterinburg to describe his intentions to find the children. He visited a Romanov museum, took a Romanov tour, went to the site of the nine. On Friday the 25th he visited the Cathedral on the Blood, and again the next day, which included seeking divine guidance for his mission. On Sunday 27th he knew roughly where the children were buried.

**THE JOURNEY TO EKATERINBURG**

Although not a major part of the mission, I had decided to stop briefly at St. Petersburg and Moscow to visit some of the ‘Romanov’ places of interest.

**ST. PETERSBURG**

I came here for three days to visit again the final resting place of ‘The Family’ in the St. Peter’s and Paul’s Fortress Cathedral. On my first visit, they were still in coffins, now they have their own ‘chapel’ within the Cathedral. The weather was not conducive for walking the six hours I did – drenched – drenched – DROWNED! Also, in my opinion, St. Petersburg has gone down hill regarding crime and prostitution. Not all areas or hotels as there are still some very beautiful parts – Peterhof where the gold and gravity fed fountains are a sight to behold; also, the Hermitage Museum and a few other places. The city has a new lady Governor who is trying to tackle the ‘problems’. I decided to stay in the Hotel much of the time and further research with the books I had brought.

**MOSCOW**

The transfer from the airport to the hotel was ‘MANIC’! A young yet confident driver drove at *high* speeds and lane jumped often on rain soaked roads – we arrived in one piece but NEVER again! I immediately had a full bottle of red wine much to the amusement of other ‘travellers’.

A superb yet rather large hotel overlooking The Kremlin, the beautiful St. Basil’s Cathedral and the Moscow River – and VERY reasonable! Food excellent but red wine rather expensive. The ‘Two Legends’ restaurant is part of the Hotel complex and this is set like a racing track with sports cars included! Also, quaint old English setting with red telephone box and garden with watering can and wheelbarrow. You can hire a taxi for two hours, anywhere you like for about £16 – good value. My driver Siergie took me to an large bookshop where in a small ‘guarded room’ of old Russian books, they found for me a 1926 Bykov book I had been looking for – all in Russian but purchased it for several hundreds of pounds! VERY rare as Stalin had ordered the original reports on the execution to be destroyed because it was the first book to state that the bodies had been moved from the ‘burning place’, and ‘buried’ in a swampy forest. I also visited the birthplace (next to the Hotel!) of the first Romanov Tzar Michael. The centre of Moscow is beautiful with lovely parks and fountains by Red Square, and the superb ‘GUM’ fashion and souvenir shopping complex. With HUGE cameras and police everywhere, but not too conspicuous to spoil your enjoyment, I could wander anywhere day and night without any problems. They seem to have created a ‘Safe’ inner zone. (an example to other world city centres)

In 1926, the Head of Communist / Urals Siberia, Bykov, wrote a book stating for the first time, that the bodies had been moved and were buried in a ‘swamp’. Stalin ordered the destruction of the 10,000 books published but a few survived – *I managed to buy one in an old shop in Moscow – at a price!*

**TRANS SIBERIAN RAILWAY**

The corridor had flowers and there was a very clean ‘washroom’ at the end; also, a smoking ‘cell’! Two Stewardesses on shift were available at all times and cleaned the carriage twice a day! The two day journey through the Ural Mountains to Western Siberia was a lovely experience; small villages and towns we stopped at had Russian ‘food and wares’ for sale and along the railway line and in some forests – millions of Lupins.

**EKATERINBURG**

The station was not perhaps the best in the world with a few ‘shifty’ characters about, but a taxi met me and it was an interesting drive through the town to the hotel. Ekaterinburg is an old ‘industrial’ City primarily known for its’ armaments manufacture. The American spy plane U2 was shot down from here and it was out-of-bounds’ to all foreigners during the Soviet era. A few ‘stray’ dogs about in some streets – kept clear of them. The city is being ‘brought up-to-date’ and has a good ‘flea’ market in the centre, a new shopping mall and a theatre where I went to see a ballet one evening. Overall, the hotel was comfortable, the staff were most helpful though only a few spoke a little English, room and facilities more than adequate and as for the food – just SUPERB! Not only the choice, but the taste and presentation. The only ‘drawback’ perhaps was that there was no Russian music! At dinner, the ‘musicians’ (different most nights) played in my opinion, too loud! (especially one Saxophone player – nearly drove me mad!) There was a pleasant park behind the hotel; it was a nice place to walk and unwind.

In Ekaterinburg, amidst the older Soviet proletariat, I found modern-day Russians who in many ways, are changing fast. Not perhaps so much in their materialistic things, although they are striving to come into the 21st century with buildings and technology, but they no longer want to be part of old Russia – they appear to want a true European Russia. There are of course a few exceptions, but in the main, their ideology is to forget and progress. The Romanovs were history; the Communist era was history; it appeared as if their total past was to be ignored and forgotten – except of course, their glorious battles in wars.

**RUSSIA OVERALL**

Russia is a vast country – but I love it. The people were always helpful though sometimes communication was difficult due to MY inability to speak much Russian and only a few Russians speak good English. I met many wonderful people including a Russian Pop-star who supported Sir Paul Macartney in a ‘Beatles Concert’ in St. Petersburg – watched some of it on TV. Also, in Moscow, about 50 American ‘Soul’ singers and we partied late into the night singing. In the Siberian forest, I met an old ‘Mushroom Picker’ who tried to sell me some but we had vodka instead! Regarding safety, in Moscow centre, (*did not try the suburbs*) I felt completely at ease, and there’s no problems if you are in groups / tours etc., in other towns / cities, but as a 60 year old by myself with only 25 words of Russian, I did not walk alone much in the evenings, but neither would I in parts of some English cities or towns for that matter.

**Art and soldiers**

While we were disposing of trowels and brushes and other bits of excavation a young boy, about 5, with his grandmother or great grandmother, ran by a vast war memorial statue, busily shooting at pretty much everything, with a toy gun. We were getting rid of our evidence, the tools of our crime, by dumping them in public bins in public spaces. Little trowels and other things we had barely used, wrapped in multiple plastic bags, occasionally clattering to worry us. They could have been valuable to people, but we figured that not many folk we were likely to meet would have much practical use for poky little trowels, whether or not they might want them as objects. Plus the stuff felt like it had a curse. We had just cut through a cable, got unreasonably angry at others, and nearly had a fight with some giant very tough folk who were just minding their business. We were not proud of our recent achievements, or lack of them, but the party was still on, and here we were on another task in the saga: throwing away a bunch of dig tools, like an albatross tied uncomfortably noose-like round our necks, and banging heavy at our chests, because we wanted to throw away the dig.

Personally I was a bit baffled about the morning’s task, or entertainment, or whatever it was; and Rich was too. Nobody rationalised it at the time (well, I certainly didn’t), though I did wonder why we were being so supposedly careful to dispose of incriminating evidence when at least half the hotel knew we’d done the dig anyway. And cut the cable. In case of a police visit it may be a good idea not to have the tools of the crime lurking muddily in our hotel rooms, but I doubt the guys with warrants and uniforms would worry too much about trowels, given that our rooms still merrily contained a bunch of soil samples, notebooks with location maps and our hand-written details of the excavation, a chunk of human bone, and four cameras full of film showing us doing it. It was dad proclaiming to fate “No more dig”.

If you are ever in the position of dumping stuff surreptitiously in a Russian city, there will be a war memorial nearby. There are a lot of them, and most of them are so big that you’re usually in sight of one, judged in its cultural shadow. At a distance you see a statue of a soldier, on a vast scale that corrupts your habitual space perception, and you sort of feel that it is nearer to you than you are to it. They are immense. Imagine the biggest statue in squares in London or New York – the horse head at Marble Arch, for example. Russian statues are way bigger. There are plenty at least as big as that plunging, beautifully patinaed horse head. And Ekaterinburg is not the capital. The lions of Trafalgar Square in London would not get noticed in Ekaterinburg. Few statues in Ekaterinburg are that small. Nelson’s column in Trafalgar Square, London, is the pinnacle of sculptural height in the England capital. It is nearly 52 meters tall. In Victory Park in Moscow, one of about seven large parks, there is a victory column. It is 141.8 meters tall. It is entirely made of metal. Steel. Not stone. Russian public sculpture has evolved from the stone age. You stand by it, peering dazzled at its vanishing point in the blue, wondering whether you can actually see the top, and wondering how it stands – whether the bottom 20 meters or so has to be solid metal to support its own weight, and what the architectural structural mathematical equations might be to work out the hollowness profile and the triangular lattice, or whatever internal strength structure it has; wondering if it has more metal in it than all the London public statues put together and melted in a big pot. Yes, it makes you wonder. Ok, so it’s steel, not bronze, but that is to give it the strength for narrow elegance. Like Russian ballerinas. Bronze extravagance would need bulk that would have made it a chunky western R&B girl. There is some bronze in the Victory column. A 25 tonne bronze sculpture of Nike (the godess of Victory, not the shoe). A pretty big sculpture, but since it’s mounted 122 meters up the column it’s difficult to see in much detail unless you have a helicopter.

The reason the column in Victory park is not a nice round 150m, or the originally planned 250m, is because the war it represents lasted 1418 days. The rationale was 10cm for every day. You may say “How convenient. I bet they couldn’t afford more steel. What a great excuse not to make it taller.”

It is taller. Taller than any other column you are likely to see. And the war - that one Russian war among the many - did last 1418 days. So that’s why. It is also why the row of terraced water They need precise details like that to identify one war from another.

Or that fouth plinth in Traf Square, where every now and then some not-quite-household-name artist gets handsomely commissioned to produce, from what’s left of the budget, a statue designed to challenge public perceptions, rather than make people happy, but usually results in something like a big pregnant woman, as if none of us ever got pregnant, or were born, or thought about doing what makes pregnancies, and might just about shock a few snuggle-toothed and head-scarfed spinsters. The press then exaggerate its shock value – rather than shocking lack of value – and give it column inches Nelson which would be proud of.

The statues are usually loaded with pathos. They do not aim to glorify war overtly – rather to show its pain, and in the case of the statue at the square where we sat with bags of trowels, to look over you, and perhaps make you realise you are not the only person caught up in silly things.

**The Miracle**

I have worked out what the miracle is. Bear with me.

We found a bone, and a lot of people got very animated about it. We took it out of Russia, and back in again. Fetch, boy! Fetch! Want the bone?!

If you go to the road to Koptyaki, where the site is, it won’t be the same as it was when we went there. There will be a monument of some kind. There probably is already. And a bit of a way up the track, about 30 paces, there is probably a dip where we dug a hole and filled it in again. If you go there, have a look at it.

Like the difference between the phenomenally huge Seven sisters buildings in Moscow, and that modest scrape in the ground that was the Four Brothers mine... on the site of the two Romanov children there is a bit of a monument. A cross, at least. Or should I say “there is a cross For the two Romanov children”. What nobody mentioned at any point when I have spoken with people about the mission, about the find, the bone, the various escapades and how the Russian people might feel about it, and the Church and government and the other Romanovs and all that... what nobody ever said, ever, was: “so whose bone is it then?”

It never occurred to anyone.

Not Romanov, therefore irrelevant.

Never mind that it was probably a human bone, presumably from a human. Probably a dead one.

There are marked graves in the forest, and lots of patches which could be unmarked graves. There is a general view that the woods contain a lot of secrets, a lot of bones. I tend to believe it.

When I was about 16, and going through some kind of typical existential crisis or awakening, of the kind that pretty clever kids get when they are also dumb enough to not manage to be jolly - wearing black and writing poetry and occasionally hanging with artists who ‘painted the sounds of poems’, and sitting on bridges over rivers in the middle of the night and worrying the occasional policemen, and talking with owls, and all that stuff – when all that was a part of my youthful life, one day I bought a bunch of flowers and placed it by the side of a road. Nowhere in particular. Or, to be more precise, I placed the flowers specifically nowhere in particular, by a road. I figured that all those folk who had died through history were as worthy of recognition as the ones who’d been run over last month. Going right back to when hairy guys with clubs got gored by mammoths or kicked in by a sabre-toothed tiger, or died of some kind of disease, or hunger, historically there was probably not much land where someone hadn’t died. But no-one seemed to care about them. I wasn’t particularly emotional about them as people or lost souls. Just kind of peeved at the inequity of it all. So I figured I’d do something to redress the balance. I’m them in another life. We’re all them. And they’re us. I didn’t have shedloads of cash to do that sort of folly on a regular basis. But it seemed important. Try it yourself. Go on.

One of the many interesting aspects about the whole affair is that it shows how little anyone cares about ‘ordinary people’. In the Romanov case this is particularly pertinent, since Nicholas II had a Nicholasishly vague attempt at becoming an ordinary person. He didn’t like being ‘special’ – or at any rate, he didn’t like its responsibility and demands. He tried to avoid what being the Tsar entailed. If he had left the job altogether, and gone off to lead a less billboard family life, he probably would have preferred a big house to a little one but, to his credit, he didn’t live in the huge palace at Tsarkoe Selo. He was happier with the littler of the two palaces. Personally I rather like him, despite his indecisivelessly gormless idiocy. He was by nature a kind man.

When we were there in 2005, the answer was obvious. Michael’s research told us the children were up the track, and there were two dips up the track, suggesting graves. There’s not much other reason for folk to dig pretty big holes which end up as sunken dips filled with forget-me-nots and nettles. The two pits were absolutely blatant in 2005. It is an utter miracle that nobody ever thought to try digging there (assuming they really didn’t). What were the searchers thinking? If you have done a bit of research about what an old grave looks like, and you wander up the track, the dips were there in the road, plain to see.

We found the location of the grave of the two children. We knew why they were there, and we dug. We found a grave. But probably not the grave of Alexei Romanov and Marie or Anastasia Romanova. But it was a grave. So it was the grave of someone else, or another group of people.

What does this mean? It means that all the lovely folk out there, who don’t care about some other souls 30 paces away, must believe that those others are protected and cared for by God. Because to believe that the Tsar and his family are any more special than other people who also lived and died, you must believe that the Tsar and Co. were special. What is it (apart from wearing about 8 kilos of jewellery where you’re killed) that makes that particular family any more special than any other family anywhere in the world ever? Because Nicholas was the Tsar. It is not down to Alexei being a nice kid, and Anastasia being interesting. There are thousands of kids like that. Kids are great. Does anyone who is a fan of the Romanovs really believe that either of those nice Romanov children were nicer or more fun or more beautiful or interesting than any of the kids they know today? I doubt it. I also doubt that many people have thought about it. The reason folk care about those Romanov children is because they were part of the imperial family. So what is so special about that Tsar side of things? Bloodline? Intellect? Diplomacy? Nice embroidery skills? No. There is no specific, tangible reason. It is a belief that you cannot pin down. It is belief in royalty. It is the potency of the divine right of kings. People generally believe that those folk 30 paces away are irrelevant because they were not ruler of an empire. Those other buried people were not rulers by grace of God.

That scrape 30 paces away is to the Tsar’s family’s memorial what the Four Brothers are to the Seven Sisters. It is a quiet little monument to everyone else. To people.

That is the miracle.

But perhaps most of all, my experience may further the belief of mankind that miracles do occur… and there is just ‘One God’. Although I am not devoutly religious, I do believe and attend ‘Family Service’ often at my local Church. Throughout my search, many things cannot easily be explained. Were they just coincidences… or part of an overall miracle? After my ‘crusade’ I know that the Lord does indeed work in mysterious ways for without Him, the evidence of the children *may* never have been found. Amen.

If you go to see the monument, walk a little further and see the other pit. It is you. It is all of us.

**PIGLETS MEADOW**

As we drove along, although now full of expectancy and anticipation, a feeling of intrepidation came over me as I looked into the deep and darkening forest on either side of the narrow roadway. Soon however, it began to open up and avoiding some large and dangerous ‘potholes’ we arrived at our destination.

There was no sign on the road for such an important place, just an old rusty ‘swing’ metal barrier to an open rough piece of ground by a railway line. Apparently it is used for storing materials for railway maintenance. To the right was a large ‘swampy pond’ with the forest around and beyond. We parked by the ‘entrance’ to the forest. Here there is a large wooden arch inscribed in Russian with ‘Romanov Memorial’. The remains of an old road sloped gently down and after about 100 paces, the forest opened up into a relatively dry, yet ‘swamp-like’ pasture. Here, in the middle, is the ‘Romanov Monument’ to the nine bodies found. With reverence, I approached the Cross and after saying a few words, lit a candle that only stayed alight for a few moments due to the gentle breeze.

Unlike the simplicity, yet splendour, of the Monastery, this area was almost like a wilderness; it has remained an un-kept meadow. The monument itself, although quite magnificent with it’s imposing Cross and nine ‘Railway Sleepers’ to represent the nine bodies found, did not do real justice to the historical or religious importance of this place. Nevertheless, in the scope of the meadow, it was an imposing ‘Celebration’ of the Imperial Family.

I understood from Oleg that Alexander Avdonin and his friends had paid for this as the Church and ‘Authorities’ did not totally recognise this place due to DNA only proving 99.6% proof – the Church wanted 100% proof as for so long, they had told everyone all the Imperial Family had been burn to ashes and dust at Ganina Yama mine in accordance with Investigator Sokolov’s conclusions.

As I walked and looked around the vicinity, I was overcome with a daunting realization of what an almost impossible task I had set myself to find the Children. Everything was different to 86 years ago. Birch trees last only about 30 to 50 years, and Firs about 90 years maximum. There was nothing around, except for perhaps one Fir and a few old tree stumps that had been here to witness the burial – and a lot of mosquitoes! Where, in this swampy terrain, sometimes quite rugged in places, did I hope to discover the burial site. It was logical, and some authors have specified this, that the fire would probably be on slightly higher ground rather than in the wet areas. The ground slopes down to the ‘pond’ on one side of the Monument and as the fire was supposed to be near, I went to the other side and although there were some ‘holes and dips’, there were a few ‘banks’ or raised areas. It was on one of these, a more obvious choice, that I lit another candle, this time to the Children. After a brief moment, this too blew out in the breeze.

I then had another ‘walkabout’ to get the ‘feel’ of the area, (to ‘*become*’ Yurovsky) and the chatted to Oleg for a while, to glean as much information as I could. He was beginning to realise that I had a great deal of ‘expertise’ on the subject.

On the way back to the Hotel in the evening, Oleg asked about the second day of the tour to the ‘Asian / European’ border. I said that as we had spent so much time today on what I had really come for, and I had much to think about, then we could forget this it but I would see him again before I returned to England.

I spent the evening with a bottle of red wine, had a most pleasant meal, and thought a lot about what I had seen and learnt today.

On Saturday, I had a more restful day unpacking and sorting my notes and ‘equipment’, but in the afternoon, I also visited again the Cathedral on the Blood which had such a subsequent impact on my mission – as told in Chapter 1! (*Also, it was on my return to the hotel that I learned Alexander Avdonin had called me!*)

**The press**

Note that this book/text is a work in progress.

This section might be called out-takes. It is a collection of extractions from press and similar sources, with some critique notes.

**In early August 2007,  Dr. Sergey Nikitin informed Capt. Peter Sarandinaki,  Director of the SEARCH Foundation, that members of an Ekaterinburg based military historical club called "Mountain Shield", may have found the missing remains of the Romanov children, the Tsarevich Alexis and his sister, Grand Duchess Maria in the Southern part of the Pig's Meadow.**

**The initial Russian Press Release stated the following:**

**1.http://www.searchfoundationinc.org/tp.gifIn June 2007, at the initiative of A.E. Grigoriev, Deputy Director of the Regional Center for the Preservation of Monuments in the Sverdlovsk Region, V.V. Shitov, a historian and local lore expert and N.B. Neujmin, a member of the military historical club “Mountain Shield”, understanding what an impact this event would have on world history, a decision was made to undertake new searches along the Old Koptyaki Road with the goal of discovering a supposed second area where the remains of members of the Romanov Imperial family were concealed.**

<http://www.searchfoundationinc.org/Final-SEARCH.html>

If you look at records dated from August 2007, everyone tells of how they had been working on investigating the Koptyaki road since June, or sooner. My team included. If you go back to June 2007 there is no published evidence of anyone doing any such thing. My team included. That is fine because while you are working away on finding treasure you don’t tell people what you are doing. It is only normal that there are no contemporary records from June 2007 about anyone else making progress on the find. I have photos of my father in July 2007 with Alekseyev, and at the 17th July anniversary procession. This is probably reasonable proof that he told Alekseyev of the site in July, since the photos with Alekseyev are at the site. But it does not prove that on 17th July he gave officials further explanations about the site’s location and handed over the bone fragments. It could be coincidence that tents arrived at the site almost two weeks later, and the grave was found on July 29th. It could be coincidence that all this occurred very quickly when, for the first time, the Koptyaki road was officially investigated.

So how did it come about that officials and other key players prioritised the Koptyaki road and excavated in summer 2007?

I invite you to dig deep and wide to find their reasoning: to find their explanation – or anyone’s - of why they prioritised the Koptyaki road, or why it happened when it did. I had the assistance of a Russian speaker with a degree in computer science and internet technology from Moscow State University.

There are very few mentions of why the Koptyaki road was prioritised, as though it is a secret, or something which no-one would or should be interested in. The focus in public statements is more about the official nature of the find, emphasising that the amateurs were brought in by official request, and also what a lot of hard work it was to achieve. They are much less clear on where the inspiration and urgency came from. The focus of journalistic coverage is a combination of the significance of the find, with the usual voracity for juicy details about the brutality of the executions, and a homely everyman element about the grave being found by plucky amateurs.

The English press, for example, focussed a lot on their being found by a 46-year-old Russian builder. In the UK a lot of builders and similar manual laborers buy newspapers, and it fits the bulk of british newspapers’ comfort zones, and/or newspaper-readers’ comfort zones, that east Europeans are mostly plumbers and builders.

*From interview in Izvestia newspaper, 24Aug07 [Journalist credited: Boris Klin]:*

“ In the late 1990s, I met a local historian Vitaly Shitov – Grigoryev (who the article describes as “deputy director of the State Research and Production Centre for the Protection and Use of historical and cultural monuments, Sverdlovsk region”) told ‘Izvestia’. - He once told me about a document that is stored in the regional archives of the CPSU - about it, he said, almost no one remembers.  In 1934, the organizer of the execution Yurovsky addressed the old Bolsheviks and reported a very important detail: two of the shot - a boy and a woman - were burned and buried separately. I have reviewed this document. In Porosenkovom ravine, which it refers to, for many have been excavated, but there were still a pristine location.” That last part is a shoddy online translation, meaning something like “after many failed excavation attempts elsewhere, the ravine still had not been explored at all.” Something like that.

Let us examine the facts in this piece of journalism. Ignore my interpretation of the end of it if you like: it is not needed for a critique of the text.

Is the “document” referred to, Yurovsky’s 1934 statement, really one that “almost no one remembers”? Yurovsky’s 1934 statement was published in 1995 in ‘The Fall of the Romanovs’ by Steinberg & Khrustalëv, a book which had strong sales and is even today in many town libraries in the UK. It was also published in Alekseyev’s ‘The Last Act of a Tragedy’ which came out in English translation in 1996, after the Russian language edition. It was also extracted in Petrov, Lysenkho, & Egorov’s 1998 ‘The Escape of Alexei’. In the late 1990s the Yurovsky 1934 statement was there if you wanted to find it. So maybe it is true that almost no one remembers it, if they are a general member of the public. But if your business is State Research and Production for the Protection and Use of historical and cultural monuments in the Sverdlovsk region, or being a local historian, or has anything to do with what happened to the Romanovs, one might expect at least a passing interest in the existence and content of one of the two main statements by the man known to have managed the Romanovs’ execution.

The 1934 statement does make clear that “a boy and a woman - were burned and buried separately”. That detail is also clearly stated in Yurovsky’s 1920 statement, which was published in full in Radzinsky’s seminal and very popular 1992 book. It has been re-published, or at least heavily cited, in at least one entirely new book every year since. The separate burial was well known regardless of the 1934 statement. It was obvious anyway, since the 1991 excavation did not include them: evidently they were separate.

It is interesting that Grigoryev and Shitov apparently knew all this information since the late 1990s. The journalist might have asked Grigoryev why they did not tell anyone or do anything about it at any point between “the late 1990s” and 2006. I would have done. And do so now: if you knew, why did you not instigate an excavation?

Another point of fact: the Yurovsky 1934 statement does not mention the hill or ravine at all. There are a few possibilities. Shoddy reporting. Getting hold of books in the region in the late 1990s was not as easy as we take for granted. Grigoryev and Shitov have little idea of the content of the 1934 statement. They know that the 1934 statement holds a clue to the location, but they do not know what it is. Too little interest was paid to core texts. Grigoryev was lying in the interview. They did know about the ravine location. They knew since the late 1990s, kept it secret, and are not familiar enough with the Yurovsky statement to know that that information is not in it.

*From New York Times, 25Nov2007, “Amateurs Unravel Russia’s Last Royal Mystery”:*

“...Then Mr. Shitov and his colleagues decided to scrutinize a statement by the chief killer, Yakov Yurovsky, in the archives. Yurovsky related how he had set aside two corpses, believing that if they were burned and buried separately they would confuse royalists who later might be seeking 11 bodies, not nine.

But how separately? The amateur investigators focused on a Russian phrase that Yurovsky used to describe the sequence of events in the second burial. The phrase — “tut zhe” — can mean “nearby,” “right here” or “right now.” It had often been interpreted as indicating that the second grave was next to the first.

But now a different thought arose. From the context, the experts wondered whether Yurovsky meant that the grave was in the area, but not very close to the first. They also presumed that to burn the bodies he needed to find a place away from the wet ground near the road.

Working weekends this summer, they began searching away from the first grave and road, and first found the remnants of the bonfire that was apparently used to burn the two bodies.”

So, in conclusion about the reasons for looking on the Koptyaki road, there and then, the reasons given amount to no more than a couple of unspecific references to Yurovsky’s 1934 statement. It is clear that they knew that the 1934 Yurovsky has the answer, or at least a clue. There is also suggestion that in 2006 Shytov/Shitov had understood it, whereas others had not. This may well be true, particularly if Avdonin had explained it to him. What you will not find is any explanation about what that 1934 information actually is. No-one officially involved has so much as mentioned what the detail is. No one seems to know, or be able to solve it. Or else they are keeping it secret.

If they do not know, then clearly they were either told where to dig, or they struck lucky. Suddenly prioritising the Koptyaki road suggests very strongly that they were told. There seems to be no rationale imaginable for suddenly prioritising the Koptyaki road on a whim.

Bear in mind that I include in this book photographs of Buchanan-Smart and Avdonin and Zaitsev standing by a nettlebed depression marked as a grave in 2004, letters from Zaitsev to Buchanan-Smart 2005 confirming Avdonin’s intention to progress excavation there. And a photo of Alekseyev with Buchanan-Smart at the site.

Of course the photos with Buchanan-Smart could be any old bit of any old wood somewhere. The presence of Avdonin and Alekseyev should suggest that both these established authorities at least recognised that the photo location might have something to do with the Romanovs. Avdonin is a busy man, with some illness and mobility issues, and he was so in 2004. He is not in the habit of going into woods for random gravesite photo opportunities. If you believe he is, I suggest you try to contact him and meet with him, and see for yourself the kind of serious man he is.

If you are thinking “but those photos could have been taken later, in 2007 or so, after someone else had located the site.” Buchanan-Smart’s skin cancer of his head shows when the photo was taken. The dark patch advanced noticeably from 2004 to 2005. You can tell pretty much when photos of him were taken by the patch on his forehead. In 2005 he had a skin graft from his forehead to the back of his bald pate, which left noticeable scars. Avdonin aged too, like everyone. George Zaitsev died in September 2005. And there are witnesses in Russia of Avdonin and Buchanan-Smart’s 2004 meetings.

Also the trees tell the truth. The trees in the background of the photos will be identifiable if you go there yourself.

The Yurovsky 1934, which is the only one referred to by officials, is the least clear statement in its evidence. It is also the one which Buchanan-Smart discussed with Avdonin in 2004, it being the only one of the three statements which Buchanan-Smart had in a printed book (rather than his own translations) in his hotel room when he met Avdonin. Why the officials refer only to the 1934 (though do not seem to understand it), I cannot tell. My firm belief is that Avdonin explained it to them, but they still do not have Avdonin’s understanding of the texts and the 1918 events, so they do not really understand what Avdonin told them. Avdonin does not suffer fools gladly, and is reluctant to give audiences. They could have asked Avdonin again, for clarification, and maybe did, and he may have told them, or may not. Avdonin’s health is that of an old man who held secret the knowledge of the site for so long, and has continued to hold a lot of demanding responsibility about the Romanovs, often with little support. He somewhat frustratedly knows that he is much cleverer than most other folk who try to understand any of it, let alone make their own deductions.

Before we move on, I just want to share my favourite bit of British journalism about the find. It is from The Guardian, which is supposedly the UK’s paper for slightly left wing educated people: schoolteachers and that sort of thing. In the UK if someone achieves something by reading and research, the whole story would have an us-and-them feel, which would conflict with the notion of English pride in the monarchy and our royal family’s love of the people. Cleverness in England sets up a feeling of separation and conflict, and the word “boffin” would be used, which means “non-threatening intelligentsia who you could beat up in a pub”. The article below is a genius bit of comedy.

*Extract from 25Aug07 article in the UK’s The Guardian newspaper, ‘Bones found by Russian builder finally solve riddle of the missing Romanovs’ [Journalist credited: “Luke Harding in Moscow”, Saturday 25 August 2007]:*

“ ... But two of the Romanovs were never found. The bodies of the tsar's heir, Prince Alexei, and his sister Princess Maria were missing. Archive evidence suggested the pair had been buried away from the others. But repeated digs at the leafy spot on the outskirts of Yekaterinburg in southern Russia, where the remains of the rest of the family were found, failed to reveal a resting place.

That was until last month when Sergei Plotnikov, a 46-year-old builder, stumbled on a small hollow covered with nettles. Mr Plotnikov was part of a team from an amateur history group who spent free summer weekends looking for the lost Romanovs. Mr Plotnikov said he was searching in the clearing surrounded by silver birch trees when his prodder hit something hard.

"There was a crunching sound," he said yesterday. "This means you've hit coal or bone. My friend Leonid and I started to dig. We found several bone fragments. The first was a piece of pelvis. We then discovered a fragment of skull. It had clearly come from a child. We shouted over to the archaeologists. They began an expert search. My heart leaped with joy. I knew immediately that this was the kind of thing that happens only once in a lifetime. I also felt satisfied. I knew the Romanov children would finally be united with the rest of their family. ..."

I love that. “...stumbled on a small hollow covered with nettles”! That’s how we find things in the UK. We bumble about like cavemen. Even Homer Simpson would have put more talent into it than that. The whole thing sounds like a hairy neanderthal. British journalists are often required to help prevent any British worries that could shake the UK system, like wondering whether east Europeans might be cleverer and braver than us. Mr Plotnikov does not use a ‘sampling rod’ or ‘boring rod’ or anything so technical. He is a real man: he uses a ‘prodder’. I love the “..."There was a crunching sound," he said yesterday” as if he has only recently learnt words like “crunching sound” to be able to express what he did and what he felt about it. Yesterday he achieved coherent speech! “Ug Ug. Me hear crunchy sound. Must be bone!”.

“We shouted over to the archaeologists...”...because archaeologists are different from us real earthy laborer types. “Me ‘builder’. Leonid my friend. They over there: ‘archaeologists’. Me shout to them Ug Ug Bone! Me leap about with prodder, waving arms. Bone!”

We Brits like our comedy.



*Avdonin at the 2007 excavation, despairingly wondering why it took that bunch of quasi-soldiers so long to find the place after he’d given them a map of where to look. There were eight of them! Look for the ground dips, with nettles, and probe there. How hard can it be ?! There were only two nettled dips in that stretch of road. It’s not like the site was hidden. These guys in their soldier costumes are supposed to know about digging, and finding burial sites. You pay Americans, you get Americans. Pay peanuts, and you get monkeys. Give an infinite number of monkeys an infinite amount of time… and a map… …and tell them where to look. I’m too old for this game. And people wonder why I seem impatient!*



*Avdonin cheerful: for once some people managed to do something. Wahey!*

Mountain Shield’s website says they started in June, whereas the [Press Conference](file:///C:\M\Words\Russia%20downloads%20and%20materials,%20references,%20etc\August%2024,%202007%20press%20conference_googletrans.htm) said July:

**Oleg Gubkin:**   
“It is the continuation of work that began back in 1990, and held in place of the second burial. Such search and archaeological work was carried out from July 2007.”

1. It is possible that some have made a living from seeking the Romanovs, or purporting to seek them. E.g where individuals or organisations have obtained sponsorship and donations on (or at least in the approximate area of) such grounds. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "In the last Orthodox monarch of Russia and in the members of his Family we see people who sincerely sought to live by the commandments of the Gospel. In the suffering endured in captivity by the Imperial Family with humbleness, patience and meekness, in their martyrs' death during the night of 4 (17) July 1918, the evil-defeating light of the faith of Christ was revealed." - Bishops Council; August 13 - 16, 2000, Moscow [↑](#footnote-ref-2)