



LAST TSAR: Nicholas II

'Bones belong to missing Romanovs'

TESTS carried out on bones found in the Ural Mountains suggest one of the great royal mysteries of the 20th century can be laid to rest.

The human remains belong to Russian Crown Prince Alexei and his elder sister Grand Duchess Maria, say forensic experts.

The pair were thought to have been shot along with their father, Tsar Nicholas II, and the rest of the family, by Bolshevik guards in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution. But the fact that the

From **Will Stewart** in Moscow

remains of two of the royal children were not found in the same grave as family members and their servants led to speculation that they might have escaped the same fate.

Now Russian scientists say DNA tests indicate that the bones found last year are those of Maria and Alexei, who was heir to the Romanov throne before his

father's abdication. "Tests conducted in Ekaterinburg and Moscow allowed DNA to be extracted from the bones, which proved positive," said scientist Nikolai Nevolin, head of Ekaterinburg forensic bureau.

Other tests are believed to be underway in Britain which will match DNA to members of the British Royal Family, notably Prince Philip, great-nephew of Alexandra, the controversial tsarina of Imperial Russia.

By **David Pilditch** and **Tony Bonnici**

A DISTRAUGHT teenage girl last night gave a chilling insight into the bizarre death cult blamed for the copycat suicides of seven young people from the same town.

Student Anne-Marie Eagle, who knew all the victims in the tragic chain, admitted she, too, had thought about taking her own life, adding: "It has become a cool thing to do."

She spoke out as MPs and campaigners condemned social networking websites for "romanticising" suicide.

Senior police chiefs yesterday confirmed that they were investigating internet links to the tragedies which have rocked Bridgend, in South Wales.

The probe follows the deaths of six young men and a teenage girl there over the past 12 months. The dead, who hanged themselves, were each linked in some way.

Since their deaths friends have set up special memorial web pages where they post messages and tributes and can obtain a "virtual brick" in a remembrance wall.

Village

The first to die was Dale Crole, 18, whose body was found hanging in a disused warehouse at a local funfair in January 2007.

Next month his schoolfriend David Dilling, 19, was found hanged near his village home.

Two days before David's funeral another school chum, Thomas Davies, 20, hanged himself in a tree. Thomas's friend Zachary Barnes, 17, was found hanged from a washing line at a block of flats last August. Liam Clarke, 20, was found hanging in a local park shortly after Christmas. Gareth Morgan, 27, a friend of Liam's, was found hanged in his bedroom on January 5.

Last Thursday the latest victim Natasha Randall, 17, was found hanged at her home.

Within 24 hours, two of her girl friends, 15, also tried to take their own lives. One, Leah Phillips, was saved by her family hanging from the stairs at home.

The tragedies have raised new concerns over the influence of the internet on young people. There were growing fears that

Suicide is 'cool' says friend of death cult gang



'IT'S NOW A TREND': Ann-Marie, left, was a friend of Natasha Randall, above, who died. Leah Phillips, below, was saved by family



youngsters have come to regard "virtual immortality" as the ultimate in cool and are killing themselves because it will enhance their prestige among their peer group. It comes as Anne-Marie, 17, told how she almost became the latest victim.

She admitted the "dread of suicide is lessened" by having close friends who did it. Like many of the victims she has posted a personal profile on the Bebo social networking site. She has pictures of the dead and tributes on her web page saying, "Luv u all". She

said: "It has become a trend, it has become a cool thing to do in our area. I've thought about doing it myself. With all the deaths I have got very upset and depressed. A lot my age have had thoughts and worries like me. But I couldn't hurt my family."

Dangers that lurk on friends' websites

CAMPAIGNERS warned last night of the dangers of social networking sites influencing suicides.

The tragedies in Bridgend highlight fears that youngsters logging on to sites such as Bebo, MySpace and Facebook have been "romanticising" suicide for impressionable users.

Anne Parry, of the suicide prevention charity Papyrus,

By **David Pilditch**

said: "We've been running a campaign for the last three years to try to draw attention to the dangers of the internet. Social network sites can be particularly dangerous.

"Of course, they can give a lot of support to young people but they can also do quite the opposite and feed into suicidal

feelings. What happens is people who are vulnerable can become influenced by another suicide."

She added: "We know that young people can be impressionable and can be persuaded to do things and say things, because they do not know the consequences of it."

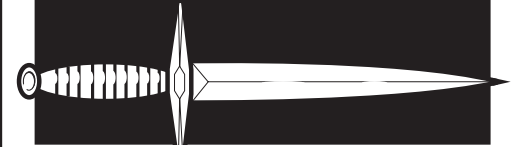
In a study earlier this month, the charity found a growing number of young people were

committing suicide after reading about it on the internet.

It revealed that there have been at least 27 internet-related suicides by young people in the UK in the past six years. The youngest to die was just 13.

The charity is challenging the Government to change the law to make it illegal to run a website which encourages or helps people kill themselves.

HICKEY



AS THE Government launched its strategy yesterday to encourage people to eat more healthily and cut down on obesity, it seems Schools Secretary Ed Balls got his wires seriously crossed.

In the document launching the initiative, he is quoted as saying: "Every parent wants their child to be fit and *unhealthy* - what we want to do is help them make informed decisions about their own children's lives."

Notes Hickey's man eating five portions of fruit and veg a day: "Presumably Balls meant healthy not unhealthy but it was rather an unfortunate typographical error in the circumstances!"



HAVING long been the butt of jokes over her boyish appearance, colleagues have noticed that Housing Minister Yvette Cooper - who is Ed Balls's wife - has taken steps to look more feminine. She is rumoured to have been upset to hear that her nickname among some MPs, as Hickey revealed, was "Mr Balls" due to her short hairstyle.

Fellow politicians point out that she has undergone something of a makeover and is now sporting a longer, less severe-looking barnet. "Yvette has finally allowed her hair to grow a bit and certainly looks more feminine," says one colleague. "It seems she took the "Mr Balls" gags to heart."

SNEAKING into Prime Minister's Questions yesterday half way through the session, Margaret Beckett was a fool to think that her belated Commons arrival would go unnoticed - due to her lurid outfit. "It was garish," shudders Hickey's girl calling out the fashion police. "Margaret wore a bright green, shiny, Seventies suit, complete with ironed-in crease down the trouser leg. She looked like a cross between The Grinch and Robin Hood."

HE MAY have turned 70 but Jack Nicholson is still the rebel. He slowly brought out a cigarette and a plastic lighter and very deliberately lit up during a press conference in The French Salon at London's Claridge's Hotel yesterday, where he was publicising his new movie *The Bucket List*, in which he plays a cancer victim.

When asked why he had defied the ban that prohibits smoking in public places, Jack replied defiantly: "Nobody told me I couldn't light up."



ECHOING the sentiments of Poet Laureate Sir John Betjeman, who once wrote: "Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough, it isn't fit for humans now", residents of neighbouring Windsor are campaigning to lose what they perceive as their downmarket Slough postcode. The royal borough is demanding a WM postcode for Windsor and Maidenhead rather than the current SL.

Campaign organiser Anu Caudell says: "I don't think it comes down to snobbishness but from a need for the area to be recognised in its own right."

"I can't deny there are connotations that arise from an association with Slough, as it's not perceived as being a desirable place to live."

But Slough council leader Richard Stokes insists: "This is an issue without any real substance as our services and amenities are among the best in the area."

E-mail me at: hickey@express.co.uk