

Salisbury Continues to Suffer while Theresa May Plays Novichok Game

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Global Research, April 03, 2018

Region: [Europe](#)

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Salisbury is still suffering from the crazy Skripal/nerve agent event that took place on Sunday 4th March. Four weeks on the picture is still grim despite local efforts to encourage people to come to the city. It is after all a shopping and tourist magnet.

On 23rd March Environment Minister [Michael Gove visited the city](#) and promised government support. He said,

"I know that local businesses have taken a bit of a hit understandably as a result of the events..."

A 'bit of a hit'?

Across the city, businesses have taken a 20% fall and are still far from back to normal. There has been a [a 90% drop in visitors](#) to the city, with a corresponding drop in trade, particularly for those shops near the Maltings where the unconscious Skripals were found, and it is not much better now. It could take weeks for things to return to anything like it should be.

The government is providing £1 million to help faltering business, although they haven't said when. And promises are often empty where this government is concerned. It may sound a lot but it isn't, and Salisbury will be lobbying for more. It really should be seen as compensation for the damage done by the government in pushing its anti-Russia agenda. In a more constructive fashion, Wiltshire County Council took the decision to [make all parking free](#) within the city, even though it would lose them a lot of revenue. Did that work?

On Easter Saturday I revisited Salisbury to see for myself. This was, after all, a holiday weekend, and Salisbury should be packed with people. Yes, car parks were full but...

Sainsbury's supermarket, between a big car park and the Maltings, was not exactly humming. Although the check-out tills were busy, there were no queues. Walking along the ends of the aisles, I saw only one or two people in each, searching the shelves. I spoke to a Sainsbury's floor manager, who told me that,

"Yes, free parking has made a difference, but...", and he looked around, "this is not as it would be, normally."

I later went to another supermarket, out on the edge of the city centre, and accessible by one of the busy through-roads. That was very active. I wondered whether it may have picked up some of the customers lost by other stores, but truly, no one is a winner here.

Whichever way you approach the Maltings, there are large official signs saying 'Shops Open'. But there is also a very visible police presence, both cars and officers, and areas cordoned-off with police tape.

Because it was a holiday weekend, work on the decontamination of various sites had been postponed and everywhere cleared of people in protective suits, which might have 'unsettled' Easter weekend visitors. But there were still too many police on display, some of which have been drafted in from other counties. And the shops along the area where the Skripals were found are still shut, even though the bench they sat on [has been removed](#). Why not remove the litter bin right beside it?

I returned to a shop I had been in before and spoke to the manager. Free parking had not made much difference to shops around the Maltings. People see the police, she explained, and walk another way into the city centre. Yes, some did come into the shop and say they were 'there to support Salisbury'. Then, she said, they walk out again. Well, sorry folks, but don't pat yourselves on the back for that. Next time, get your wallets out and buy something. *That's* how to support Salisbury.

All such small shops, so dependent on tourists, are wondering if they can survive much more because, despite cars coming in and parking for free, the coaches full of tourists are not coming. I found one coach park that, apart from two little local buses and a big coach from Kent, was empty. I was told that one coach tour company has simply cancelled *all* its Salisbury tours for this year.

And what of Guildhall Square that was so empty when I last saw it? It was filled with the Saturday market; huge stalls laid out with rails of clothes, tiers of fresh vegetables and all the other things you expect in an open-air market. Just not quite enough customers to fill the spaces between the stalls. Bustle it didn't, and the cafes and restaurants were still not full enough.

Salisbury may have to face [months of decontamination work](#), with all that involves. What is worse is that, each time the Novichok story goes a bit dead in the media, out pops something else to hit the headlines. And none of it, when you sit back and really look at it, makes sense.

Almost 3 weeks after the incident, Public Health England [issued further advice](#) on dealing with the clothes worn by perhaps 500 people which *may* have been 'infected', offering compensation for those clothes that should be dry-cleaned. Is this for real? Or has everything been infected by May?

At the end of March Prime Minister May was still claiming that up to 130 people '[may have been exposed to Novichok](#)'. A Salisbury Hospital doctor disagreed. In [a letter to The Times](#), regarding their article *Salisbury poisoning exposure leaves almost 40 needing treatment*, Stephen Davies, a consultant in emergency medicine, wrote that:

'No patients have experienced symptoms of nerve-agent poisoning in Salisbury

and there have only ever been three patients with significant poisoning'. And note, not nerve agent poisoning, just poisoning.

Three patients – Sergei Skripal, his daughter Yulia, and Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, who was reported to have been '[among the first](#) to help Col. Skripal and his daughter as they lay stricken... and was rushed to hospital after the incident.'

Now, hang on a minute. What was a plain clothes policeman doing on a Sunday afternoon to be so handily on the scene? And none of the first responders, the paramedics, were affected by this deadly nerve agent. In fact, when May met them she was told that they thought they were attending [a drug overdose](#), and goodness knows, paramedics have seen enough of those to know what they're looking at.

Bailey apparently took himself to hospital later to report some symptoms but was discharged. He was also one of the first police officers to go to Skripal's house the following morning, and was in hospital by the evening, with reports of the police believing he was 'contaminated' in Skripal's house.

He was [discharged](#) from hospital on March 22nd, unlike the Skripals, who are invisible and, despite pressure, [unvisited](#) by the Russian Ambassador.

"At least Bailey's gone home," I commented to one shop owner, a long-time Salisbury trader. "Oh no," she replied. "He can't go there, his house is cordoned off!"

"Well," I said, "perhaps he's in hiding elsewhere in Salisbury."

No again.

"We all know Nick. He'd be recognised, wherever he was."

"Then perhaps he's gone somewhere else. Perhaps he'll transfer to another police force," I suggested.

"I doubt he'll want to carry on policing, not after this," was the confident reply.

Indeed, Salisbury does know, and has great affection for its Nick Bailey. When I said he seemed to be quite a poster boy for the city, she agreed. And I cynically wondered if that was why he had been chosen for the role in May's Novichok drama.

Then on March 28th something else hit the headlines: Specialists have found that the [greatest concentration](#) of the nerve agent was on Skripal's front door, and that this must be how they were poisoned.

Now hang on another minute. Police and aliens in Hazmat suits have been going in and out of this house since whenever. One investigator was [photographed](#) in the garden with a checklist taped to the back of his/her suit. Are these *really* specialists in their work? And why react to the 'front door' news by rushing to cordon off the [children's play area](#) just down

the road? A 'precautionary' measure or scare tactics?



If the contamination by such a deadly 'nerve agent' on the front door was so high, and is now first in the long list of how the Skripals got poisoned, why did it take so long to have an effect? Drive into the city centre, park your car, walk to the Mill pub for a drink, walk back to the Zizzi restaurant to have a leisurely meal, walk from Zizzi's through Market Walk to the bench in the Maltings (a mere 100 yards or so) and all the while showing no signs of physical distress – all this, then boom, and you're unconscious?

Here's another question: why, when a few days earlier, investigators from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were [collecting their own samples](#) from 'contaminated sites', was the deadly front door only discovered *after* they had left?

One can only hope that OPCW gets brave and really sinks Theresa May's nerve agent ship. And if it does, Salisbury is due much, much more than £1 million.

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