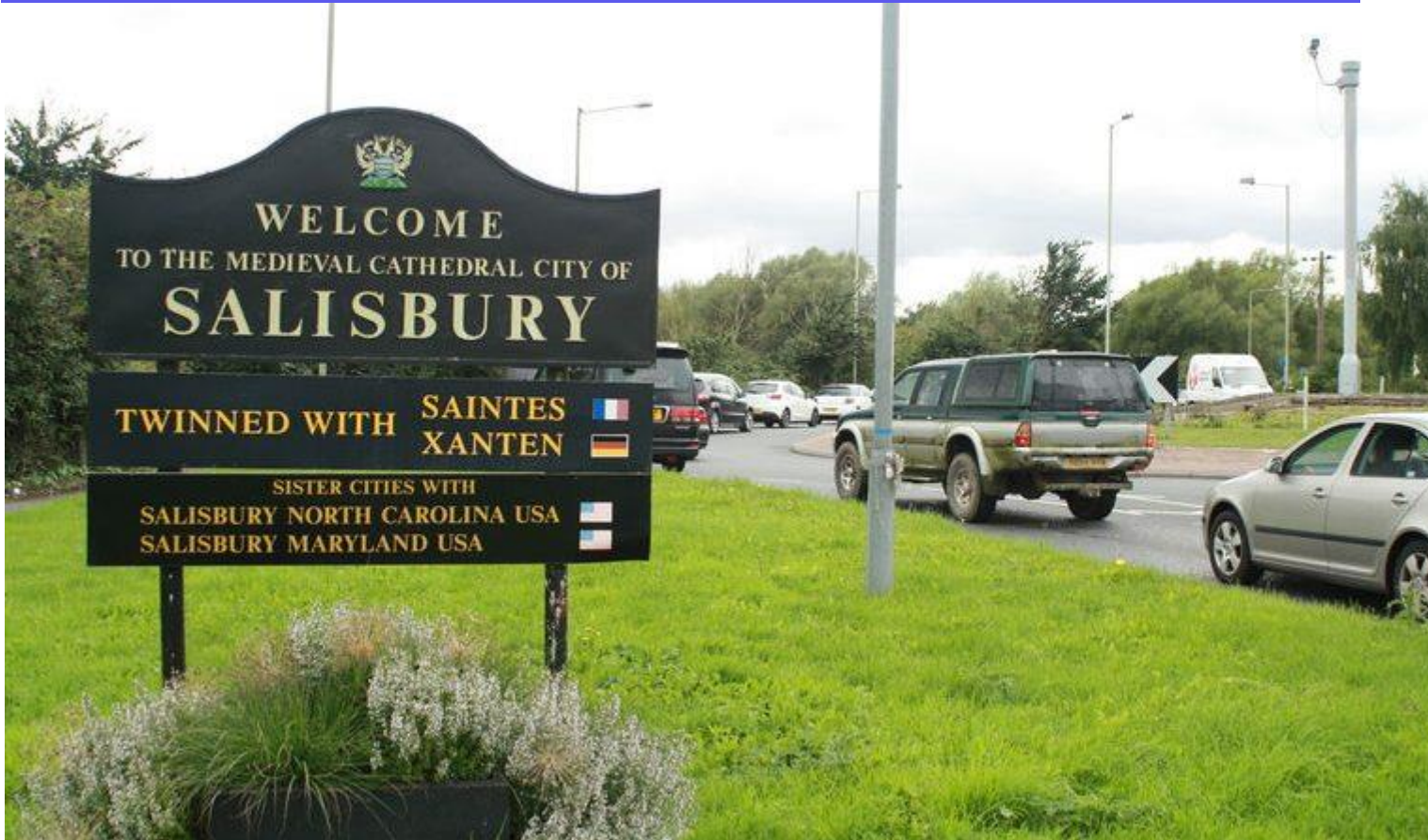


The Salisbury Poisoning One Year On: An Open Letter to the Metropolitan Police

March 3, 2019 [Rob Slane](#)



Dear Assistant Commissioner Basu,

It is now a year since the events in Salisbury that shocked the nation, and indeed the world. Since then, your organisation has conducted an investigation into the case, and has laid out a case about what happened in a series of statements, notably those made on 5th September (no longer available on your website), in which two suspects were formally accused, and another on [22nd November](#), following the screening of the Panorama documentary: *Salisbury Nerve Agent Attack — The Inside Story*.

To those who have a superficial interest in the case, the explanations you have presented for what happened on 4th March 2018 may appear credible, especially since the British media has largely repeated them verbatim, even when they have been self-evidently flawed and contradictory. Indeed the press has steadfastly refused (or been refused) to ask some very obvious and much needed questions about them. But to those who have spent time looking at the incident, the explanations you have set out contain glaring omissions, factual errors (see [here](#) for more detail), and at least one scientific impossibility (more on this below). What I wish to do in this letter, is to set out some of the most important, and which I believe you owe it to the public to explain.

Why have we heard nothing from Sergei Skripal?

The most glaring problem with your case is the disappearance of Mr Skripal himself — and yes “disappearance” is the right word. It is now 12 months from the original incident, and about 11 months since it was announced that he had recovered. During that time there have been zero public appearances and — curiously and curiously — not even one public statement put out in his name. Additionally, it is known with certainty that he has not been in contact with his mother back in Russia

— not on her birthday, not at New Year and not at Christmas — which has caused her great distress. This is not just odd; it is highly disturbing, especially given that Mr Skripal was said to be in the habit of contacting his mother every week prior to 4th March.

If I were to ask how you can account for this, I would anticipate an answer that includes the claim that any such statements, appearances, and contact are deemed dangerous to his security. Certain reports in the media have indeed stated or implied this. However, it will not wash, for two reasons:

Firstly, are we seriously expected to believe that the UK Intelligence Agencies are incapable of protecting Mr Skripal's whereabouts and his safety, whether in a statement, a pre-recorded video, or in a call to his mother? The idea is self-evidently ludicrous.

Secondly, these apparent “security concerns” were somehow overcome with Yulia Skripal. Not only was a statement released in her name upon departure from Salisbury District Hospital, followed by a Reuters video of her reading out a pre-prepared statement, but she was also allowed reasonably regular contact with her family, including her cousin and grandmother — up to 24th July last year (that is, up to the point that she told her cousin that she “now understood everything”). If Yulia's security can be protected, there is no reason that Sergei's security can not also be guaranteed.

It is also worth noting that neither Sergei nor Yulia have once endorsed your explanation of the incident. Sergei has been silent, and as for Yulia, far from endorsing your version, in none of her statements or phone calls has she ever pointed the finger of blame at the Russian state for an assassination attempt on her and her father. In fact, she has repeatedly expressed a desire to go back to live in Russia — a very strange desire given what you claim happened to her, wouldn't you agree?

To all intents and purposes, both Sergei and Yulia Skripal have now disappeared without trace — he since 4th March 2018, and she since 24th July 2018. In the absence of any plausible reason for this, it is reasonable to consider them both as being held against their will, without consular access, without legal representation, and without the ability to contact their next of kin. Needless to say these are very serious issues, and if confirmed would put the United Kingdom in breach of a number of international legal obligations. Yet there are of course very obvious steps that could be taken to assure the public that this is not the case.

And so I simply ask you this: what credible reason can you give as to why nothing has been heard from Mr Skripal since 4th March? Why has he been unable to contact his mother? And what credible reason can you give as to why Yulia appears to have been denied contact with her family since 24th July?

Why won't you show where the suspects were going?

Your organisation has repeatedly stated that the CCTV footage of the two suspects at the Shell Garage on the Wilton Road shows them “in the vicinity of” and “on their way to” Mr Skripal's house (or “the Skripal's house” as statements bizarrely keep referring to it. Who, may I ask, is “The Skripal”?). This is misleading on two counts.

Firstly, the footage actually shows them some 500 yards or so from 47 Christie Miller Road, which cannot be conceivably described as “in the vicinity” in terms of proving that they actually went to the house. This evidence would not convince a discerning jury.

Secondly, it does not show them “on the way” to Mr Skripal's house either. It is possible that they did go there, but the CCTV footage does not show this, since it gives no indication that they were preparing to cross the Wilton Road, which they would have had to do to get to Christie Miller Road (either via the passage to Montgomery Gardens or via Canadian Avenue).

However, there is more than this. The camera that was used to take footage of the two men covers the area where they walked past the garage, but does not cover those two routes to 47 Christie Miller Road mentioned above. What you failed to inform the public, however, is that there is another CCTV camera on the Shell garage, just past this one, that *does* cover these routes. As the following picture

shows, it is located on the right-hand side of the front of the building (circled), facing the Wilton Road, *almost exactly opposite the path to Montgomery Gardens* (note: the camera that was used to take the footage that was aired is on the corner of the left-hand side of the building, just out of shot):



Had the two men crossed the Wilton Road to go through the passage to Montgomery Gardens, or even via Canadian Avenue, this camera would have recorded it. Had this camera recorded them going through either route, although it still wouldn't have been conclusive proof that they went to number 47 Christie Miller Road, much less what they may have done had they gone there, it certainly would have been far more credible than the footage you did release. Yet you have chosen not to show it. Can you tell us why, and also whether the footage taken by this camera on the right of the building backs up your claims that they were “on their way” to Christie Miller Road?

Wot no CCTV?

The issue of CCTV is not just confined to what was and wasn't shown of the two men on the Wilton Road, however. It remains a curious fact that aside from this and the other footage of them on the bridge at Fisherton Street — which by the way were released nearly nine months after the event — you have not released one bit of proper footage of the Skripals or other related events that day.

This is extraordinary, for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, such footage most certainly does exist. For example, there exists “really clear footage” of Sergei and Yulia Skripal feeding ducks with some local boys on the afternoon of 4th March, next to the Avon Playground. The time of this footage was around 13:45 which — it should be noted — is approximately 20-30 minutes *after* the Skripals were said to have come into contact with a nerve agent on the door handle of their home (more on this below).

Secondly, in the early days of the investigation, a number of places in the city centre were mooted as possible locations for the poisoning (namely Zizzis, The Mill pub, and the bench itself). However, despite the fact that “really clear” CCTV footage of these areas undoubtedly exists, and despite the fact that the public were being asked to come forward with information, you showed not even a second of footage of the pair in that area. The public were therefore being asked to come forward with information about two people who were on CCTV and could be clearly identified by it, but without

so much as a few seconds of this CCTV being shown so that they could see what they looked like, what they were wearing, and where they were going.

All this simply adds to the nagging suspicion that this CCTV shows things that would cast huge doubt on the explanations you have given. However, it is even worse than this. In the first few days after the incident, CCTV footage was released of a couple walking through the Market Walk at 15:47, and it was stated by more than one news outlet that the pair were the Skripals. Of course it wasn't them, and yet — given some witness statements that followed — these people were undoubtedly somehow involved in the events that followed. Yet, important as they were, they were quickly forgotten about in the days after that grainy CCTV footage of them was released, and were subsequently never mentioned by the media or the police thereafter. Why is this, since witness testimony leads to the belief that they were something to do with what happened?

What we have, then, is what you have described as a “fast moving” and “complex investigation”, in which you repeatedly appealed to the public for information, and yet refused to show the public anything of the CCTV footage that exists, which may well have helped to jog memories and so aid you in your investigations. Furthermore, since the explanation you have given for what happened (poisoning at the door handle) implies that nothing of note happened in The Maltings (other than the collapse at the bench), reasons of “national security” simply cannot apply. Therefore, what reason can you give for not showing CCTV from The Maltings to the public when you were appealing for information?

The Skripals, the suspects, the ducks and the bin

I mentioned above the CCTV footage taken of the Skripals at 13:45 on 4th March at the Avon Playground, which is in The Maltings. This is one of the most interesting incidents in the whole case, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, as already stated, the footage shows Mr Skripal and his daughter feeding ducks, with Mr Skripal actually handing bread to three local boys, one of whom apparently ate a piece, but none of whom became contaminated. This clearly suggests that Mr Skripal was *not contaminated* with nerve agent at that time.

Secondly, it shows Yulia carrying a red bag, which may seem inconsequential, but for the fact that the female caught on CCTV in the Market Walk (who wasn't Yulia) was also carrying a distinctive red bag. Not to put too finer point on it, given Mr Skripal's tradecraft, duck-feed plus distinctive red bag has a definite “signalling to someone” quality about it.

Thirdly, and most remarkably of all, given the nature of your claims, at the same time as they were feeding ducks, the two suspects — Petrov and Boshirov — were in close proximity. And when I say close proximity, I mean far closer than the distance from the Shell Garage to 47 Christie Miller Road, which you describe as being “in the vicinity”. How so?

According to the image you released of the two men at 13:08, they were standing at the entrance to Summerlock Approach, which happens to be the road that leads to the Sainsbury's car park, which happens to be the car park where Mr Skripal parked his car approximately 32 minutes later. They were then seen on CCTV obtained by the media walking past Dauwalders (coin and stamp shop) on Fisherton Street at 13:48. Crucially, they were *coming from* the direction of the town.

What this means is that after being photographed at Summerlock Approach, instead of walking directly to the train station, as your timeline suggested, they went back into town, either by doubling back down Fisherton Street, or by walking in a loop through Summerlock Approach, across the car park, *and through the Maltings*, before heading back to Fisherton Street via Malthouse Lane.

Dauwalders, where they were seen at 13:48, is less than 200 yards from the Avon Playground, where the Skripals were filmed at 13:45. And so we have the intriguing prospect of the two alleged assassins passing *less than 200 yards* from the pair they are alleged to have tried to assassinate, *within 3 minutes of one another*. Furthermore, given that the two suspects were coming from the direction of town when they passed the shop, it is entirely possible (although by no means certain) that they had actually come from the area of the Maltings, and therefore that they had, just moments before, been in even closer proximity of the Skripals.

The fact that the two suspects were closer to the Skripals at between 13:45-13:48 than they were at 11:58 outside the Shell garage, is of course extremely interesting. But what is particularly troubling about this episode is what your organisation has done with this information.

Firstly, you have left it out of your timeline, never once mentioning that the Skripals had taken a detour to feed the ducks — and it is indeed a detour if you are walking from Sainsbury's car park to Zizzis or The Mill — and never once mentioning that the two suspects were in that area at the same time (which is really odd, given that you are trying to make a case against them).

But secondly, although this incident was ignored in your timeline, as if it were trivial, it was obviously highly significant. The reason we can be sure of this is that on the day following the incident (5th March), a large number of military personnel were extremely focused on the bin next to the Avon Playground as these videos — [here](#) and [here](#) — make clear. Why that bin, which is a significant distance from the bench (50 yards or so), and why was it such an object of intense focus?

To leave this location out of your timeline, and to fail to inform the public of the close proximity of the suspects to the Skripals at the time of the duck feed, is frankly bizarre. What credible explanation is there for this?

The absolute impossibility of your door handle explanation

I mentioned at the start that alongside the factual errors, glaring omissions, and inconsistencies in your case, there is also an impossibility. That is the explanation that the assassination attempt was carried out using a nerve agent sprayed on the door handle of 47 Christie Miller Road.

Leaving aside the absurdity of what has been described as an “oily substance” being sprayed by an atomiser (how does that work?); leaving aside the ridiculousness of people actually spraying it without wearing proper protective clothing; leaving aside the silliness of supposing that the deed was done in broad daylight whilst Mr Skripal and his daughter were in the house; leaving aside the difficulties involved in having both victims touching the door handle on their way out of the house; and leaving aside the frankly preposterous notion that having apparently done their deed, instead of leaving Salisbury immediately, the two men then walked across town, and rather than dumping the open bottle of “Novichok” they had apparently used, they allegedly dumped a bottle they *hadn't* used (remember, Charlie Rowley's box was, according to him, cellophane wrapped) — leaving all those irrational propositions aside, as I say there is an absolute impossibility in what you are asking us to accept.

In the BBC Panorama programme, *Salisbury Nerve Agent Attack — The Inside Story*, which was clearly made with official approval (the ex-head of MI6 and the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Dean Haydon, both appearing and helping in the reconstruction of what is supposed to have happened), it was claimed throughout the programme that the substance used was not only incredibly toxic, but that it could kill even with the tiniest of amounts. One of the men who worked on the original Foliant Project to create these substances, Vil Mirzayanov, was asked how much was needed to kill a person. He replied:

“To kill a person, you need only 1mg. To be sure, 2mg.”

Now this obviously gives rise to a problem, which is why didn't it kill Mr Skripal and his daughter, since they were both allegedly contaminated with far more than 2mg of the stuff? The answer given on the programme was supplied by Mr Mirzayanov, who said:

"Maybe the dose was not high enough. Salisbury was rainy and muggy. Novichok breaks down in damp conditions, reducing its toxicity. It's the Achilles Heel of Novichok."

Although this might sound plausible, it runs up against the buffers of [the statement released on 4th May by the OPCW](#), who said this about the samples they collected at sites in Salisbury, including the door handle:

"The samples collected by the OPCW Technical Assistance Visit team concluded that the chemical substance found was of high purity, persistent and resistant to weather conditions."

These statements, taken together, mean that your explanation is an absolute impossibility. If 2mg of "Novichok" is enough to *certainly* kill a person, as Mr Mirzayanov stated (corroborated by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Haydon who said there was enough in the bottle to kill thousands), then Mr Skripal and his daughter should be dead. If the reason they aren't dead is because "Novichok" breaks down in damp conditions, then it is impossible for the OPCW to have found a substance that hadn't broken down, which was of "high purity", and which is resistant to weather conditions.

There is simply no way you can square these things. If it didn't kill the Skripals because it had broken down in damp conditions, then the OPCW can't have found a high purity substance that is persistent and resistant to weather conditions. But since the OPCW claim that this is exactly what they found, then it can't have broken down in damp conditions and lost its toxicity, can it? One or the other, but not both.

Unless you can prove that a substance can lose its toxicity in just over an hour due to dampness (from the time it was allegedly sprayed to the time it was allegedly touched), only to regain its toxicity and be found to be resistant to weather conditions two weeks later, no rational person can possibly be expected to believe this explanation. It is obvious nonsense, utterly impossible, and discredits your entire account of what happened on 4th March.

In Conclusion

Along with other members of the public, I would love to be able to believe that your investigation has been based on all the evidence available, and that its conclusions (so far) are credible. Sadly, however, this is not possible, as the above issues (and plenty of others) demonstrate.

It was quite obvious from the outset, when the Government came to a conclusion before any evidence had been properly assessed, that any subsequent investigation had already been politicised. There was therefore little hope that the investigation would be impartial, and that if evidence was found to contradict the Government's assessment, that it would be presented.

However, there was always a glimmer of hope that your organisation would refuse to bow to this politicisation, and instead conduct a truly independent investigation. Amongst other things, this would have involved:

- Mr Skripal and Yulia being allowed to give their account of what happened that day to the media, and the media allowed to freely ask questions
- A thorough account of the two suspects' movements, rather than two highly selective bits of footage that imply where they went, but which leave out the footage that shows where they did actually go
- The release of CCTV footage showing what happened in The Maltings in order to appeal for witnesses to come forward
- Important information, such as the duck feed and the close proximity of the suspects to the Skripals at that time, being given out to the public, and included in the timeline
- An explanation of the poisoning that is actually scientifically credible

But since these elements have not been a part of your investigation, the public can have no confidence in your explanation and assessment of what happened on 4th March 2018, and has every right to suspect that they are part of what essentially appears to be a politically-driven cover up. That really is a great shame, not only in terms of understanding what really happened in the Salisbury and Amesbury incidents, but also in terms of the denting of trust in your organisation, and the authorities in general, in the long-term. I would like to hope that this potential denting in confidence in your organisation's integrity in handling this case, which surely cannot give you cause for celebration, would lead you to take the initiative in now providing a more credible account of what took place.