CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

When, in 1894, Tsar Alexander III died suddenly of kidney failure aged only forty-nine years, his son Nicholas Romanov succeeded him as Nicholas II. Inexperienced and ill-prepared for the task of governing the extensive Russian Empire, Nicholas complained to his brother-in-law: ‘I am not prepared to be a Tsar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling.’

Like his father before him Nicholas was determined to rule as an autocrat, that is, one who rules without accepting any limitations to his power. In an autocracy no consultation is necessary; the ruler’s will is law and parliaments, if they exist, are powerless. Nicholas would not willingly grant any concessions to those who wanted political reform and in this lay the seeds of destruction, both for Russia as a monarchy and for Nicholas as an individual. As Orlando Figes says of the reigns of Nicholas and his father: ‘It was their tragedy that just as Russia was entering the twentieth century, they were trying to return it to the seventeenth.’ (Figes 1997, p. 14)
### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Nicholas Romanov is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Nicholas marries Princess Alix (Alexandra) of Hesse–Darmstadt and becomes Tsar.</td>
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<td>1895–1904</td>
<td>The royal children are born: Olga (1895), Tatiana (1897), Marie (1899), Anastasia (1901) and Alexis (1904). Alexis suffers from the potentially deadly disease haemophilia, in which the blood fails to clot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>A year of riots and disturbances leads to the ‘October Manifesto’, a concession which helps to stop the unrest by promising a constitution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>First Russian Duma (parliament) meets but is dissolved after ten weeks because it questions the Tsar’s powers.</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>The First World War breaks out, temporarily uniting the country behind Nicholas.</td>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>Nicholas becomes army commander-in-chief, thus identifying himself with Russia’s military failures in the war: military defeats, lack of ammunition and poor medical facilities were now blamed on him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Rasputin, whose influence over Alexandra attracts criticism, is murdered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Nicholas II abdicates in the face of revolution. Russia becomes a republic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Nicholas, Alexandra and children are executed at Ekaterinburg.</td>
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*Figure 3.1* Nicholas and Alexandra *circa* 1890. A serious character and prone to nervous illnesses, Alexandra rarely smiled in photographs.
**Timeline exercise**

Study the timeline, then use the information to write questions for which the following are answers.

1. fifty years old  
2. 1904  
3. murdered  
4. the Russian monarchy ends  
5. twenty-six years old  
6. Anastasia  
7. ten weeks  
8. Ekaterinburg  
9. 1915  
10. seventeen years old

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**DOCUMENT STUDY: RUSSIA IN 1900**

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**DOCUMENT STUDY QUESTIONS**

Look carefully at the cartoon and answer the following questions, based upon your observations.

1. What comment is the cartoon making about the Tsar’s position in society?  
2. What is the cartoon suggesting about conditions in Russia?  
3. What is the Tsar holding? What is the significance of each of these items?  
4. There are two figures on the ‘surface’ of the ground (one on the left and one on the right). What are they doing? What group in society do you think these figures represent?  
5. Consider the title of the cartoon. What clue does it give about the type of people who are in the caverns in the middle of the picture?

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*Figure 3.2* Marie, Tatiana, Anastasia, Olga and Alexis. Their mother always insisted that the daughters dress identically.

*Figure 3.3* Underground Russia—a foreign artist’s view
DOCUMENT STUDY: THE CHARACTER OF NICHOLAS II

Source 3.1
At his desk, he wore a simple Russian peasant blouse, baggy breeches and soft leather boots ... Although Nicholas's English, French and German were excellent, he preferred to speak Russian.

R.K. Massie, Nicholas and Alexandra, 1972, p. 61.

Source 3.2
Nicholas was not only unstable, but treacherous. Flatterers called him a charmer ... because of his gentle way with courtiers. But the Tsar reserved his special caresses for just those officials he had decided to dismiss. Charmed beyond measure at a reception, the minister would go home and find a letter requesting his resignation.

Nicholas recoiled in hostility from anything gifted and significant. He felt at ease only among completely mediocre and brainless people.


Source 3.3
He was a devoted husband and father, loved the country and the wildlife, and was a good landlord. Of constitutional, social and economic problems he understood little.


Source 3.4
A quick intelligence, a cultivated mind, method and industry in his work, and an extraordinary charm that attracted all who came near him—the Emperor Nicholas had not inherited his father’s commanding personality nor the strong character and prompt decision which are so essential to an autocratic ruler ...

Sir G. Buchanan, British ambassador to Russia from 1910, in H. Seton-Watson, The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1964, p. 108.

DOCUMENT STUDY QUESTIONS
1 Assess the character of Nicholas II as revealed in the sources:
   (a) List the positive features mentioned.
   (b) List the negative features mentioned.
2 Why was his desire to ‘rule as an autocrat’ likely to end in failure?
3 Overall, did Nicholas possess the qualities to be a good ruler of a country on the brink of the twentieth century? Explain your answer.

THE 1905 REVOLUTION

Russian society at the beginning of the twentieth century was rapidly becoming ‘more educated, more urban and more complex’ (Figes 1997, p. 15). Literacy rates were rising, even in the countryside. Ironically, this newly literate generation was to provide many of the local activists who, when faced with the intransigence of an autocratic regime, became more revolutionary as discontent increased.

The new century had started badly for the autocracy. A poor harvest in 1902 intensified the poverty of the peasants. They seized land from the landowners and destroyed property. Disorder spread to the cities and by the middle of 1903 a wave of strikes in the oil industry, engineering works and the railways threatened to paralyse the economy. A war with Japan, begun in 1904 with the expectation that Russia would enjoy a quick and cheap victory over an ‘inferior’ rival, had brought unexpected difficulties. Mobilisation of peasants’ sons disrupted agriculture and food supplies. A general discontent with the conduct of the war and alarm at a series of defeats was added to the economic hardships.

The agitation of 1905 began with a strike in the Putilov steelworks in St Petersburg on 16 January, caused by the dismissal of some men belonging to the Assembly of Russian

DID YOU KNOW?
Alexander III, Nicholas’s father, enjoyed showing off his strength. His party trick was to crash through locked doors or bend silver roubles in his thumb.
Workers. The union had been founded, with police assistance and approval, by Father George Gapon, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Gapon has been described as a young and popular priest with a genuine interest in the welfare of his people in the working-class districts of St Petersburg where he worked, though some suspected him of being a police agent. Others saw him differently. A contemporary observer alleged he was actually a revolutionary socialist, whose purpose was to secure concessions on working conditions from the employers, under the respectable cloak of the priesthood (Bucklow & Russell 1987).

Whatever his motivation, Gapon decided to put himself at the head of the protest movement. He organised a protest march and petition that would be presented to the Tsar at the Winter Palace on Sunday 22 January. About 150 000 people marched from all parts of the city, many of them carrying religious icons and portraits of the Tsar.

The petition was written in respectful terms, addressing the Tsar as ‘Sire’ and ‘O Emperor’, and called for:

- a guarantee of civil liberties, for example, freedom of speech
- measures to alleviate poverty, including the introduction of an income tax
- better working conditions, such as an eight-hour day.

To many of the marchers, and to others of the poorer classes throughout Russia, Nicholas was a father figure who had their best interests at heart but was prevented from understanding their plight by a barrier of officialdom. If they could only meet the Tsar face to face, so the argument ran, he would realise the true situation and put in place measures to remedy it. However, Nicholas was not in the Winter Palace that weekend; he had gone to Tsarskoe Selo, another palace on the outskirts of the city.

![A worker’s lodging house in Moscow in 1911. Those workers who were too poor to hire beds slept on the floor underneath the beds.](image-url)
**DOCUMENT STUDY: THE BLOODY SUNDAY MARCH**

**Source 3.5**

Along the Nevsky Prospect ... came row upon row of orderly and solemn faced workers all dressed in their best clothes ... We had already reached the Alexander Gardens, on the other side of which lay the Winter Palace square, when we heard the sound of bugles, the signal for the cavalry to charge. The marchers came to a halt ... in front, on the right, was a detachment of police, but since they showed no sign of hostility, the procession began moving again. Just then, however, a detachment of cavalry rode out ... The first volley was fired in the air, but the second was aimed at the crowd ... Panic stricken, the crowd turned and began running in every direction ... It was quite clear that the authorities had made a terrible mistake; they had totally misunderstood the intentions of the crowd ... the workers went to the palace without any evil intent. They sincerely believed that when they got there they would kneel down and the Tsar would come out to meet them or at least appear on the balcony.


**Source 3.6**

Robert McCormick, the United States ambassador in St Petersburg, described it differently.

I have heard the assembled crowd accused of nothing worse than jeering at the troops, hustling the officers, and using language to them that will not bear repetition, although they came, it is said, armed with knives, pieces of piping, sticks, and some even with revolvers.

I do know that the commanding officer of the infantry ... twice warned them to disperse, adding that if they did not, he would be compelled to fire on them ... the officers, on foot, would go right in among the people and try to reason with them, seeming to do everything in their power to persuade the people to disperse peaceably.


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**Figure 3.5** St Petersburg, showing the routes of the Bloody Sunday marchers
DOCUMENT STUDY: CONTINUED

Figure 3.6 Troops open fire on the marchers approaching the Narva Gate on the southern outskirts of St Petersburg; Father Gapon (in centre) in a tall hat, holding an icon.

DOCUMENT STUDY TASK

Read the accounts by Kerensky and McCormick of the Bloody Sunday march. In what ways do these accounts differ? How do you account for these differences?

The official toll was ninety-two dead and several hundred wounded, though one English newspaper reported 2000 killed and 5000 wounded. Whatever the final figure, ‘Bloody Sunday’ had a profound effect on the attitude of the people towards the Tsar. Instead of their ‘Little Father’ he became ‘Nicholas the Bloody’. The traditional belief that the Tsar and the people were linked in a common bond, a view that Nicholas himself liked to foster, was shattered forever.

Father Gapon escaped into hiding, from where he issued a public letter denouncing the Tsar for the bloodshed in bitter terms. Just over a year later, in April 1906, his body was found hanging in an abandoned cottage in Finland.

REVIEW TASK

The mysterious death of Father Gapon leaves many questions: Was it suicide? Was he executed by revolutionaries suspicious of his past links with the police? Was he executed by the secret police because he knew too much? Present a case for each of these possibilities, then indicate which you favour.
THE AFTERMATH OF BLOODY SUNDAY

Following the events of Bloody Sunday the police arrested those leaders of the march they could find and sent them into internal exile. This only succeeded in spreading the news of the massacre across the country. On 17 February Grand Duke Sergei, Nicholas’s uncle and governor-general of Moscow, was killed by a bomb thrown by a socialist revolutionary.

Peasant revolts began in early February 1905 and intensified as the year progressed. In one district after another the landowners were forcibly removed and their land seized. In June a national Peasants’ Union was formed as the peasants took up the socialist revolutionary cry of ‘land for the peasants’.

By the end of January nearly half a million workers were on strike in the cities, and unions for all classes blossomed—doctors, lawyers and teachers formed organisations alongside waiters and engineers. In May the Union of Unions was formed, and at the end of June a congress of representatives from eighty-six city councils across Russia met in Moscow to demand civil liberties and the formation of a legislative assembly elected by universal suffrage. In factories, councils of elected delegates were formed to negotiate with the factory owners.

Bad news from the east worsened the situation. The war against Japan had produced a series of embarrassing defeats. In February 1905 the Russian army was defeated by the Japanese at Mukden, and on 27 May the Russian fleet was destroyed in the Straits of Tsushima. With morale in the armed forces low, the sailors aboard the battleship Potemkin in the Black Sea mutinied in June.

By August the increasing discontent led Nicholas to promise that an assembly or Duma would be called. Nicholas would seek its opinion when he chose, but it would have no authority to make laws against his wishes.

The promise of a Duma on such limited terms failed to satisfy the opponents of the regime. Strikes and protest meetings intensified. On 21 October a railway strike was declared in Moscow and spread across the nation. On 26 October the first St Petersburg soviet was formed, with Leon Trotsky as one of its leaders.

Nicholas turned to Prime Minister Witte for advice and was told that the regime could only be saved by granting the people a constitution. This document, the October Manifesto, marked a watershed in the events of 1905, but ultimately it solved little and pleased very few.

The soviets, with their concerns for working conditions such as the eight-hour day, condemned the Manifesto as it did little to address the everyday needs of the working people. They found, however, that their alliance with the more liberal middle-class elements was crumbling as the latter seemed to be willing to settle for the political concessions offered. When, in November, the St Petersburg soviet called a general strike in support of the eight-hour day, it was forced to abandon the protest as there was little support from the middle classes.

Nicholas disliked the Manifesto. He had hoped to buy peace with concessions and felt betrayed when the strikes and protests continued. Nicholas returned to the methods of an autocrat.

In the countryside loyal troops moved through the villages with a campaign of hangings and floggings to subdue the rebellious peasants. On 16 December the St Petersburg soviet was closed down and 190 of its members arrested. A general strike in Moscow led to street fighting from 21 December until 2 January 1906, resulting in defeat for the strikers at the cost of over 1000 lives.

It had been a troubled year for Nicholas; however, the secret police were as powerful as ever, the army had remained loyal, the bureaucracy remained intact, and the soviets had been defeated. As Trotsky said, ‘Although with a few broken ribs, Tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough.’
**Document Study**

**Source 3.7**

*The October Manifesto*

We, Nicholas the Second ... declare to all our loyal subjects: The rioting and agitation in the capitals and in many localities of our Empire fills our heart with great and deep grief. The welfare of the Russian Emperor is bound up with the welfare of the people, and its sorrows are his sorrows. The turbulence which has broken out may confound the people and threaten the integrity and unity of our empire.

[The Tsar decided the following:]

1. To grant to the population the inviolable right of free citizenship, based on the principles of freedom of the person, conscience, speech, assembly, and union.
2. Without postponing the intended elections for the State Duma ... to include in the participation of the work of the Duma those classes of the population that have been until now entirely deprived of the right to vote ...
3. To establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall go into force without its confirmation by the State Duma ...

Tsar Nicholas.

**Source 3.8**

A comment by Leon Trotsky:

So a Constitution is granted. Freedom of assembly is granted; but the assemblies are surrounded by the military. Freedom of speech is granted, but censorship exists exactly as before. Freedom of knowledge is granted, but the universities are occupied by troops. Invulnerability of person is granted, but the prisons are overflowing with the incarcerated ... A constitution is given, but the autocracy remains. Everything is given and nothing is given.

**Document Study Questions**

1. Why, according to Source 3.7, was the Manifesto introduced?
2. What changes were granted by Nicholas? Summarise them in your own words.
3. What does the female figure symbolise in Figure 3.7?
4. Explain the message of the cartoon in Figure 3.7.
5. How does Source 3.8 contradict Figure 3.7?
6. In Trotsky’s view (Source 3.8), how genuine is the Tsar’s desire for reform?
7. Do the comments in Source 3.8 suggest that the revolutionary activity will increase or diminish after the issuing of the October Manifesto?

**Political Developments 1905–14**

The Tsar bitterly resented the concession of a Duma and tried to reassert his position by issuing a series of Fundamental Laws on 2 May 1906. These confirmed the Tsar’s right to appoint his own ministers, to legislate by decree and to have complete control over foreign affairs. Laws passed by the Duma required his approval to have legal force, and an Imperial Council, half of whose members were to be appointed by the Tsar, would share power with the Duma.

The elections for the first Duma produced a parliament that took a clear anti-government stance. The Duma met for ten weeks, from May until June 1906, after which it was dissolved by the Tsar.
A second Duma, meeting in February 1907, fared little better. It was dissolved within three months after it severely criticised the Tsar’s administration.

Before the third Duma met, the Tsar altered the electoral law to ensure that the representation of the peasants, small landowners, and urban dwellers was drastically reduced. The resulting Duma, a docile and conservative body, was allowed to serve its full term from 1907 until 1912. The fourth and final Duma (1912–17) followed a similar pattern.

While the Dumas met, the Tsar’s prime minister, Peter Stolypin (1906–11), carried out a policy to repress the revolutionary elements, and offer limited land concessions to the peasants in a two-pronged approach designed to consolidate the position of the Tsar by removing his opponents and winning the loyalty and gratitude of the peasants.

DID YOU KNOW?

Russian peasants sometimes had to live with rude names, for example, ‘Smelly’ or ‘Ugly’, which originally had been an insult, but became formalised as surnames. They could not change them without the Tsar’s formal consent.

Figure 3.8 Revolutionary parties

REVIEWS QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by the term ‘revolution’? Do the events of 1905 merit the description of a ‘revolution’? Why or why not?

2. What choices were available to Nicholas in facing the growing call for change in Russia? Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the options available to him at the end of 1905.

3. The events of 1905 have been called a ‘dress rehearsal’ for the revolution of 1917. What lessons might revolutionaries have drawn from the events of 1905?

4. To what political party did each of the following people belong: (a) Lenin (b) Miliukov (c) Martov (d) Rodzianko (e) Kerensky?

5. Which of the political parties wished to retain the Tsar as head of state?

6. Remembering that Russia was a mainly agricultural country, which party would seemingly have attracted the support of the peasants?

7. State two policy differences that explain why the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks disagreed with each other.
THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

When war was declared between Germany and Russia in August 1914 it seemed that the conflict would save the Romanov throne, not destroy it. Volunteers hastened to join the army. The Tsar blessed the troops as they left for the front. Political differences were put aside as Russians joined to fight the common enemy in defence of the homeland. Even urban discontent, which had been expressed in an increasing number of political and economic strikes in the first half of the year, vanished. No strikes of any kind were recorded for the month of August 1914.

At first it seemed a story of unstoppable success. In the south the Austrians were pushed back in Galicia, while in the north the Germans were defeated at Gumbinnen. Then came the German response. At Tannenberg in August 1914 the Germans inflicted a heavy defeat on the Russians. Masses of prisoners, stores and guns were taken and the Russian commander Samsonov shot himself. In September another heavy defeat at the Masurian Lakes confirmed the end of the advance against the Germans and the beginning of a three-year attempt to hold back the German advance into Russia’s western provinces. Though further successes were gained against Austria, the optimistic mood that had greeted the war changed to one of increasing disillusionment.

Russia had been inadequately prepared for a modern war. Sukhomlinov, the war minister, had severely underestimated the needs of the army. Factories could not produce enough ammunition and army commanders were forced to plan manoeuvres using maps as much as eighteen years out of date. By 1916 soldiers were fighting barefoot because of a shortage of boots, and only one in three had a rifle. Artillery commanders were rationed to three to five shells per gun per day. The wounded were often left unattended on station platforms for days and were transported in freight cars, lying on the bare boards, often without adequate clothes or food. By the end of the 1915 summer campaign, Russia had suffered 3.5 million casualties. Trotsky wrote: ‘Through the infantry divisions, as through a sieve, there passed ever new and less and less trained human masses.’

The economy soon began to feel the strains of war. The normal trade routes through the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea were virtually cut off. Exports fell by 86.7 per cent in the first full year of the war while budget expenditure rose from 3.5 billion roubles in 1914 to 15.3 billion roubles in 1916. The government tried to fill the gap by borrowing from the allies and by printing more money. The result was inflation, which saw the price of flour double and the price of meat triple between 1914 and 1916. Speculators flourished, with a third of all grain stocks being held by banks, anticipating price increases.

The war hit the rural area particularly hard. About fifteen million men were mobilised during the war, and most of them were from the countryside. The loss of fathers and sons, and even horses, to the war effort meant fewer people and animals to work the soil. Though the 1916 harvest was good, the army took most of the supplies and the peasants were reluctant to sell grain for devalued money that bought little. There was, in fact, little to buy.

With the manufacturing focused on the war effort, the production of agricultural implements dropped to 15 per cent of the pre-war level.
In the cities the situation was no better. Food was hard to come by as an increasingly overloaded rail network had trouble transporting grain from the farming areas of the south to the cities of the north. Wages remained low and as prices rose discontent showed itself in strike activity: there were 268 in January and February 1917, resulting in a total of 403 295 lost working days.

As long as the state’s main priority was feeding and equipping millions of conscripts there could be no improvement in the overall economic picture. Increasingly, thoughts turned towards ending the war. One soldier wrote, ‘Everyone, to the last man, was interested in nothing but peace … who should win and what kind of peace it would be, that was of small interest to the army. It wanted peace at any cost, for it was weary of war.’

If the war showed up Russia’s economic weaknesses, it also confirmed the view that the corruption and ignorance of key individuals were leading the country to ruin. The principal objects of gossip and rumour were Gregory Rasputin and the Tsarina Alexandra.

**REVIEW TASK**

1. Write a sentence about each of the following to show their place in the Russian war effort:
   - (a) Gumbinnen
   - (b) Tannenberg
   - (c) Samsonov
   - (d) Sukhomlinov

2. Suggest reasons for the increased level of industrial unrest in Petrograd over this period, as outlined below.
   - Strikes in Petrograd August 1914 0
   - Strikes in Petrograd January–February 1917 268

3. You are a peasant soldier writing to a friend in your home village. It is January 1917, and you have served in the army since the beginning of the war. Outline your experiences and your thoughts on the progress of the war.
Gregory Rasputin was born in Pokrovskoe, Siberia, in 1872. His drinking and sexual activities quickly gained him a local reputation (‘Rasputin’ is Russian for womaniser). As a young man he claimed to have had a deep religious experience, which led him to undertake several pilgrimages. He was brought to the attention of Nicholas and Alexandra in November 1905 as a staretz, a wandering holy man.

Rasputin’s physical appearance was in stark contrast to the courtiers and nobles who normally surrounded the royal couple. Dressed in a peasant’s smock, Rasputin had broad shoulders with a large head, and unkempt, matted brown hair, which hung down to his shoulders. He would use his long beard as a napkin, and his teeth were blackened stumps. His eyes held the attention: they were small, bright and piercing, and many described how they felt hypnotised by his gaze. Despite the label that his enemies later gave him, he was neither mad, nor a monk—he had a wife and three children in Pokrovskoe. It was his supposed powers as a healer that earned him the unquestioning support of Alexandra.

Since the birth of their son and heir, Alexis, in 1904, Alexandra had worried constantly about his health. His haemophilia meant that he was often ill and in great pain. Their regular doctors could do little to prevent the pain and swelling that accompanied each knock or bruise. Only Rasputin seemed to be able to help the boy. Whatever the source of his power, Alexandra’s belief in ‘Our Friend’—her name for Rasputin—could not be shaken.

As Rasputin’s influence at court grew, so did the stories about his disreputable conduct. The Okhrana, the Tsar’s secret police, watched his home and listed his drunken exploits, his party-going and his womanising. Lewd posters appeared depicting Rasputin and the empress in sexual poses.

There was little point bringing these scandals to the attention of the Tsar because Nicholas could always be swayed by Alexandra’s robust defence of ‘Our Friend’. In her mind any enemy of Rasputin was an enemy of the autocracy. Rasputin boasted openly of his influence over the royal couple, whom he referred to in their presence as ‘Mama’ and ‘Papa’: ‘I can get anything and everything from her. As for him, he’s a simple soul.’ (Bucklow & Russell 1987, p. 115)

Rasputin also began to meddle in political and military matters. When Nicholas appointed himself commander-in-chief of the army in 1915 he spent much of his time in his military headquarters at Mogilev, over 600 kilometres from Petrograd. Control of the capital was left in the hands of Alexandra, which, to a great extent, meant the control of Rasputin.

He promoted his friends and admirers to positions of power, regardless of ability. Able ministers were dismissed if they spoke out against this growing corruption. Daily audiences were held where Rasputin would dispense favours, often by sending the petitioner to the relevant

DID YOU KNOW?
The Khlysty were a religious sect who believed that you had to sin before you could be saved before God. At their meetings they danced naked to achieve a state of frenzy, then engaged in whipping themselves and group sex.
The decline and fall of the Romanov dynasty

To ignore the note was to invite dismissal. In this way Russia went through five interior ministers and three foreign ministers in the space of ten months.

The Tsarina’s regular telegrams to Nicholas carried military advice from Rasputin to advance here or retreat there. Though Nicholas was not under Rasputin’s influence to the same extent as his wife, the advice was sometimes heeded to the astonishment and anger of the generals.

As the fortunes of war turned against Russia, rumours abounded of German spies and sympathisers at the very top in Russia. Alexandra, the former German princess, was openly despised as the ‘German woman’, and it was known that Rasputin had opposed the declaration of war against Germany in 1914. By the autumn of 1916, with a Cabinet dominated by Rasputin’s nominees, criticism was constant.

In December 1916 Rasputin was murdered by Prince Felix Yusupov and Grand Duke Dimitry, young members of the extended royal family. After he had been poisoned, shot and clubbed to death, Rasputin’s body was wrapped in canvas and dropped through a hole in the ice in the River Neva.

The death of Rasputin could not undo the effect of his years of influence. Open corruption in political appointments, rumours of German sympathisers at court, and the inability of Nicholas to overrule the influence of the ‘German woman’ and the ‘mad monk’ made it clear to many, including the nobility and the wider royal family, that a change was needed at the top. The desirability of the change was accepted; only the nature and the timing of the change were in doubt.

**REVIEW TASK**

Produce the front page of a newspaper announcing Rasputin’s death. You should choose an appropriate headline and write the main story. Your story could contain reactions to the news from among the following: a spokesman for the Okhrana, a palace spokesman representing the Tsarina, and the ‘people in the street’.

**THE OVERTHROW OF THE TSAR**

There was already talk of removing Nicholas II at the beginning of 1917. This came not from revolutionary groups but from members of the Duma and several of the grand dukes of the imperial family. Their hope was to put the Tsarevitch Alexis on the throne, with the experienced and popular Grand Duke Nicholas as regent and effective leader. One grand duke wrote:

*... the government is taking every possible measure to create as many dissatisfied people as possible and is succeeding completely at it. We are assisting at an unprecedented spectacle of revolution from above, rather than below. (Radzinsky, 1992, p. 172)*
Nicholas ignored the growing demands for change, remaining true to his coronation vow to uphold autocracy. Alexandra supported him: ‘Now let them [the Russian people] feel your fist … They must learn to fear you.’ Her view of the revolutionary threat was simple: ‘There is no revolution in Russia, nor could there be. God would not allow it.’ (Radzinsky 1992, p. 171)

THE MARCH REVOLUTION

On 7 March the Tsar left Petrograd for his military headquarters. The next day riots and demonstrations broke out over the shortage of bread in Petrograd. Striking workers from the factories swelled the numbers, and by the end of the day about 90,000 workers were on strike. Though there was violence, there was no shooting by the police. The following day the demonstrators stopped the trams and disabled the vehicles. In parts of the city the police fired on the crowds but, in an ominous sign for the authorities, patrols of mounted Cossack troops refused to fire on the people. Nicholas, with a poor understanding of what was happening in the capital, ordered the military commander in Petrograd to end the disorder. From Alexandra he received assurances that all the trouble came from a collection of idlers, wounded soldiers and high school girls; from Michael Rodzianko, the president of the Duma, he received warnings that there was anarchy in the capital and it was ‘essential immediately to order persons having the confidence of the country to form a new government’ (Moynahan 1992, p. 63). Nicholas ignored the latter telegram, complaining that ‘that fat Rodzianco has written me some kind of rubbish’ (Moynahan 1992, p. 63).

Monday 12 March was the turning point in the revolution. On the previous day, approximately 400 troops had mutinied for about an hour. By 10 a.m. on Monday, over 10,000 soldiers had mutinied. Nicholas had given orders to suspend the Duma, but its members continued to meet. This in itself was
an act of rebellion. Some ministry buildings and government offices had been occupied by revolutionaries. The headquarters of the secret police, police stations and the law courts had been set on fire. No one gave orders or directed events. In the words of one observer, the revolution went of itself. The Duma members formed a provisional committee to try to control the developing situation. Yet even as they were taking this step, a rival source of authority had arisen in the form of the workers’ soviet.

Finally, grasping the seriousness of the situation, Nicholas prepared to return home, but he received word that the rail lines into Petrograd were in the hands of the revolutionaries and had to turn aside to Pskov. There he heard that his generals had deserted him and he received messengers from the newly formed provisional government urging him to abdicate.

At first he intended to abdicate in favour of his son, Alexis, but after talking to his personal physician, Dr Federov, who reminded him of the seriousness of Alexei’s illness and the likelihood that Nicholas and Alexandra would be separated from him by exile, he decided to include Alexei in the abdication document, which was signed on Thursday 15 March. The throne passed to Nicholas’s brother, Michael, but he was persuaded that the public would not accept him as Tsar, and also abdicated. Russia was now a republic and the Romanov dynasty had ended.

Right to the end, Alexandra retained unrealistic hopes. On the day of abdication she telegraphed to Nicholas: ‘I feel that God will do something … When people find out they have not let you go, the troops will be outraged and will rise up against them all.’ (Radzinsky 1992, p. 184)

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What issue began the revolution on 8 March?
2. What was Alexandra’s attitude to the threat of revolution?
3. What day is described as the ‘turning point’ in the March revolution? Why is this so?
4. Trotsky said: ‘There is no doubt that the fate of every revolution is decided by a break in the disposition [loyalty] of the army.’ What did he mean by this? Do the events of 8–15 March support this view?

**REVIEW TASK**

A hypothetical exercise: how might the history of Russia have been different if Alexei had not suffered from haemophilia?

**THE MYSTERY OF ANASTASIA**

Nicholas had hoped that while the political turmoil of the revolution played itself out in Russia, he and his family would be allowed to retire to Livadia, their palace on the Black Sea coast. This was not to be. The new government could not let Nicholas stay at liberty. On the one hand, revolutionaries might try to kill him; on the other, supporters might try to restore him to the throne. Efforts to find the family a refuge abroad brought no results. The most obvious solution was to send them to Britain, where Nicholas’s cousin George was king. However, British public opinion was against giving refuge to a man with such a bad reputation as a harsh ruler.

After some time spent confined to the palace at Tsarskoe Selo outside St Petersburg, the family were taken in August 1917 to the small town of Tobolsk, to the east of the Ural mountains, where they were kept under house arrest. Later they were moved to Ekaterinburg, a town where the local soviet was loyal to the Bolshevik revolutionary cause. They were detained in the Ipatiev House, the home of a local merchant. From May until July they remained under guard, an afternoon’s walk in the garden being the only break from the confinement in their rooms. How was Nicholas now? A guard recalled:

*The Tsar was no longer young, his beard was getting grey [he had his 50th birthday at Ekaterinburg] … His eyes were kind and he had altogether a kind expression. I got the impression that he was a kind, simple, frank and talkative person. (Massie 1972)*

Beyond their prison, Russia was in the grip of a civil war. Supporters of the revolutionary Bolshevik government (Reds) were opposed by a collection of anti-Bolshevik forces (Whites). As the fighting spread
Ekaterinburg, held by Red forces, came under threat from the approaching Whites. The decision was taken to kill the entire Romanov family to prevent their being rescued by the Whites and the possibility of Nicholas being restored to the throne.

Around midnight on 17 July 1918 the family were awoken in their upstairs rooms and told to get dressed and be ready to leave. When they made their way downstairs they were shown into a small room, and chairs were brought for the Tsarina and Alexis. Yurovsky, their head jailer, then stepped into the room at the head of the squad of armed guards. He announced that, as their relatives in Europe continued to attack Soviet Russia, they would now be shot.

All seven members of the family were shot, along with the family physician Dr Botkin, the valet Trupp, the cook Kharitonov and the Empress’s maid Demidova. The bodies were placed in a truck and transported to the abandoned Four Brothers mine, where they were doused in sulphuric acid, burned, then tossed down the mine shaft. This was the end of the Romanovs—or was it? Later investigations by Whites at the mine discovered hundreds of articles such as the Tsar’s belt buckle, Dr Botkin’s false teeth, several items of jewellery, three small icons like the ones that the Grand Duchesses had worn around their necks and a severed finger, presumed to be Alexandra’s.

But what about the bodies? Critics of the accepted version of the story pointed out that the number of charred bones found down the shaft could not account for the remains of eleven bodies. Doubts arose as to whether this really was the last resting place of Nicholas Romanov. But if he wasn’t down the mine shaft, where was he?

For almost 70 years the mystery remained. The Soviet Union, under a communist government, kept its state files secret and showed no interest in the ‘Romanov mystery’. With the collapse of communism came a new openness and the opportunity to unravel the puzzle.
The bodies had been thrown down the mine shaft but they had not been left there. Yurovsky was appalled to find upon his return to Ekaterinburg that the ‘secret’ burial place was being talked about all over town (Radzinsky 1992, p. 408). The guards on the burial party had been unable to hold their tongues. The Bolsheviks did not want the grave of the last Tsar to become a shrine for future generations of monarchists, and so it was necessary to move the bodies to a new hiding place. Yurovsky led another group of soldiers back to the mine.

They lit the mine shaft with torches. Voganov the sailor climbed down into the mine shaft and stood below in the darkness in the icy water, which was up to his chest. A rope was lowered. He tied the bodies to it and sent them up. (Radzinsky 1992, p. 408)

Once again the bodies were placed in the back of a truck, which set off into the forest. It got stuck in the mud and it was decided that the bodies should be buried.

At about seven in the morning [of July 19] a pit two and a half arshins [1.8 m] deep and three and a half arshins [2.4 m] square was ready. The bodies were put in the hole and the faces and all the bodies generally doused with sulfuric acid, both so they couldn’t be recognized and to prevent any stink from them rotting [it was not a deep hole]. We scattered it with dirt and lime, put boards on top, and rode over it several times — no trace of the hole remained. The secret was kept — the Whites did not find this burial site. (Radzinsky 1992, p. 410)

In 1979, three geologists and a writer did. They dug up three skulls, made casts and put them back.

Fearful of the reaction from the authorities, they did not talk about it. Only ten years later did they tell their story to the press. In 1991 the grave was opened again and the bones of nine corpses removed. Modern techniques of forensic science established one of the skulls as that of the Tsar. The grave of Nicholas Romanov had been found. Yet there remained a further mystery. Of the eleven people shot, only nine skeletons were found in the grave. The remains of Alexis and one of the younger females were missing.

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**CASE STUDY**

**DID ANASTASIA SURVIVE?**

In 1920 a young girl was pulled from a canal in Berlin. It was presumed that she had attempted suicide and for several months she was kept in a clinic while attempts were made to find her identity. She refused to tell the doctors who she was at first, but gradually it emerged that this young woman claimed to be Anastasia. After she left the clinic and began a life that would take her from Europe to the USA, she became best known as Anna Anderson. For years her claim intrigued historians and surviving members of the Russian nobility. She fought several court cases to establish her identity but they were inconclusive. During her lifetime many people who claimed to know the Romanov family, including surviving relatives, met Anna Anderson in a bid to establish the truth. Some, such as Pierre Gilliard, who had been tutor to the Grand Duchesses, declared her to be a fraud; others, such as the son and daughter of Dr Botkin, the Romanov family doctor, declared her to be genuine. In 1984 she died in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA.

If this was Anastasia, how did she survive? Her story was that she had been badly wounded in the Ipatiev House. She had lapsed into unconsciousness and when she next...
Source 3.9

The room in the Ipatiev house where Nicholas and all his family were reported to have been killed. (Refer to Figure 3.19)
opened her eyes she saw stars above her. Seeing that she was still alive, a guard, Alexander Tschakowsky, took pity on her and helped her to escape in the confusion and darkness that surrounded the disposal of the bodies. Eventually she made her way as a refugee to Romania, where she had Tschakowsky’s child and married him. Tschakowsky was shot and killed on the streets of Bucharest in 1919 (Radzinsky 1992, p. 389). His young widow left the child with her late husband’s family and made her way to Berlin, in the hope that she would be able to get help from members of her mother’s family. However, when approaching the Netherlands Palace in Berlin she had been overcome with doubts. Would she be admitted to the palace? Would any of the royal family be in residence? Would anybody recognise her after all the ordeals she had been through? Filled with despondency, she turned aside to the Landwehr Canal.

Several aspects of the Anastasia story throw up questions for the historian. Consider the following.

What happened in the ‘murder room’ in the Ipatiev house?

**Source 3.11**

An account by Kabanov, one of the executioners:

> When all of us participating in the execution walked up to the opened door of the room, there turned out to be three rows of us firing revolvers, and the second and third rows were firing over the shoulders of the ones in front. There were so many arms with revolvers pointed toward those being executed, and they were so close to each other, that whoever was standing in front got a burn on the inside of his wrist from the shots of his neighbour behind.

> They gave up the entire space of the tiny room of execution to the eleven unfortunates, who raced around in that cell while the twelve sharpshooters, sorting out their victims, fired continuously from the mouth of the double doors.


**Source Questions**

1. Do Sources 3.9 and 3.10 make it easier or harder to believe that all the members of the family and their servants were murdered in that room? Explain your answer.

2. How does Source 3.10 conflict with Source 3.11? Which do you think is the more accurate source? Why? How might this difference be explained?

**Source 3.12**

Various accounts of the execution:

> So the Tsar was down, felled by the first shots ... But the girls were still alive. It was bizarre how the bullets bounced off them. Bullets flew around the room.
Key Features of Modern History

The bodies were then carried out to the Edvard Radzinsky, all the gun smoke. in a hurry. The light barely shone through bodies over, checking pulses. They were town, Quickly, hastily, they turned the while the July night still hung over the possible. This truck had to be on its way They had to get them out as quietly as the shooting stopped:

Radzinsky describes what happened when

Kabanov:
I ... shouted to stop the firing and finish off those still alive with bayonets. One of the comrades began plunging the bayonet ... into her [Demidova’s] chest. The bayonet was like a dagger, but it was dull and would not penetrate.

Yurovsky:
When they tried to stab one of the girls with a bayonet, the point would not go through her corset.


SOURCE QUESTIONS

3 How does Source 3.13 help to explain the events recorded in Source 3.12?
4 Why might all the women have altered their clothes?

Edvard Radzinsky, The Last Tsar, p. 389.

THEORIES AND PROOFS?

Attempts to prove or disprove the identity of Anna Anderson (later Anna Anderson Manahan after her marriage to an American history professor) gave rise to a constant stream of books and at least one feature film. Tom Mangold and Anthony Summers produced an intriguing piece of investigative journalism in 1976 called ‘The File on the Tsar’ providing ‘evidence’ that the female members of the Tsar’s family had left Ekaterinburg by night in a sealed train, and during the course of their journey at least one unsuccessful escape attempt had been made by a daughter they identified as Anastasia. Despite the believable evidence they provided, the opening of the mass grave in 1991 shows this to be a work of unintentional fiction.

Source 3.15

When they laid one of the daughters on the stretcher, she cried out and covered her face with her arm. The others [the daughters] also turned out to be alive. We couldn't shoot anymore—with the open doors the shots could have been heard on the street ... Ermakov took my bayonet from me and started stabbing everyone dead who had turned out to be alive.

Edvard Radzinsky, The Last Tsar, p. 389.

SOURCE QUESTIONS

5 Source 3.14 suggests that all were killed in the room, whereas Source 3.15 suggests that this was not so. Is one of these statements untrue? Could they both be correct?
6 From the evidence you have read, do you think it likely that any of the Tsar’s family survived the events of July 1918? As a historian, what other evidence would you like to see to enable you to make a clearer decision in this matter?

A further complicating factor has been the attitude of the Russian authorities over the identity of the two missing Romanovs from the mass grave. Whilst there can be no dispute over the absence of Alexei because of his gender, the Russian authorities insist that the missing body is that of Marie, not Anastasia. Forensic pathologists in the West have dismissed such a positive identification as being impossible, given the close age of the sisters and the condition of the remains. Could the Russians be so insistent in their identification because they wish to kill off any ‘Anastasia’ speculation?

In the early 1990s Richard Schweitzer, a lawyer married to a descendant of the Dr Botkin who had died with the Tsar, commissioned a British forensic team under Dr Peter Gill to carry out DNA tests on a piece of preserved intestine from Anna Anderson which had been kept in an American hospital following an earlier operation. It was not possible to test the skeleton or other organs because Anna Anderson had been cremated. This was to form the centrepiece of a television documentary to finally prove the identity of this mysterious woman. The documentary, which appeared in 1994, showed various tests which had been carried out to establish Anna Anderson’s true identity. These included examination of her handwriting, compared to Anastasia’s surviving schoolbooks, speech patterns, compared to accents from eastern Europe and, most convincingly, ear patterns. Ears, like fingerprints, are distinctive and personal. Though they grow as we age, they retain the same basic proportions and can therefore be used as a means of identification. Measurements taken from Anna Anderson in life were compared to a photograph of Anastasia’s ear and the two were found to be virtually identical. It would seem that Anna Anderson and

Source 3.14
Radzinsky describes what happened when the shooting stopped:

They had to get them out as quietly as possible. This truck had to be on its way while the July night still hung over the town, Quickly, hastily, they turned the bodies over, checking pulses. They were in a hurry. The light barely shone through all the gun smoke.

Edvard Radzinsky, The Last Tsar, p. 389.

The bodies were then carried out to the truck. Strekotin, one of the guards, recalled:

Source 3.13
At the mine shaft, an account by Yurovsky:
The commandant ordered the bodies undressed and a fire built so that everything could be burned... When they began undressing one of the girls, they saw a corset torn in places by bullets—and through the opening they saw diamonds ... A. F. [Alexandra] turned out to be wearing an entire pearl belt made from several necklaces sewn into linen.

Edvard Radzinsky, The Last Tsar, p. 389.
Anastasia were the same person.

However, the findings from the DNA sample were to upset this conclusion. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is passed down through the generations from women to their children; no mtDNA is inherited from the father. Thus, mtDNA patterns can link people to their mothers and grandmothers and even to ancestors and descendents who are separated by many generations. Using DNA obtained from the Duke of Edinburgh, a grand-nephew of Empress Alexandra, for comparison, it was found that Anna Anderson could not have been related to Alexandra and therefore could not have been Anastasia. Furthermore, a link was made, through the mtDNA, between Anna Anderson and the family of Franziska Schanzkowska, a Polish wartime factory munitions worker who had long been suggested, by Anna Anderson’s opponents, as the real identity of this mystery woman.

As Dr Gill presented his DNA findings, Richard Schweitzer continued to believe in the authenticity of Anna Anderson based on ‘rational human experience’. How could a Polish wartime factory worker know so much about the intimacies of court life? How could she convince people who had known Anastasia personally that she was genuine? What about the physical features, including an apparent bayonet scar behind her ear, which she bore? Are ear profiles definitive or not? For most people, DNA is the clinching evidence and the case is closed. It is, however, interesting to note that in December 2007 the British government announced the collapse of an IRA terrorism case and the review of a number of others because the DNA testing technique used was found to be flawed. This was not the same technique used in the Anna Anderson case, but does it cast a shadow over the infallibility of any scientific procedure? The lingering supporters of Anna Anderson would like to think so.

In August 2007 it was announced that the two missing bodies from the Romanov mass grave had been found by a team of Russian amateur historians searching in the forests around Ekaterinburg (now Yekaterinburg). Russian archaeologists asserted they had discovered the remains of a 10–13-year-old boy and an 18–23-year-old woman—presumed to be Prince Alexei and Grand Duchess Marie. The remains had been doused with acid and burned, and were found not far from the mass grave of their relatives. Sergei Pogorelov, deputy director of the Sverdlovsk region’s archaeological institute, claimed that there was little doubt that the remains were those of the Romanov children. As well as bone fragments, his team found pieces of Japanese ceramic bottles—used to carry sulphuric acid poured on the Romanovs’ corpses. They also recovered seven teeth, three bullets of various calibres, and a fragment of a dress.

In May 2008, a US genetic science laboratory confirmed the royal identities of the bones. The governor of the Sverdlovsk region declared, ‘Now we have found the whole family.’ Many would now be satisfied that the Anastasia mystery has been answered beyond a reasonable doubt. Do you agree?

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