

Dawn Sturgess funeral held in UK as unanswered questions mount in novichok crisis

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The funeral of Dawn Sturgess, who was poisoned under unexplained circumstances at the end of June in Amesbury, England, was held Monday. Sturgess died on July 8, allegedly as a result of exposure to an ultra-deadly “novichok” nerve agent.

Despite receiving safety advice from Public Health England and initial reports that her coffin could not be carried by pallbearers, it was, and they did so without wearing protective clothing.

That any funeral took place at all was totally unexpected. Just a few weeks ago, the Sturgess family had been informed her body would not be returned for many months, presumably while an autopsy and further tests were carried out. This statement was made under conditions of government-backed media hysteria, claiming that her death was linked, in the words of Prime Minister Theresa May, to the Kremlin’s supposed “attempted murder” by means of novichok poisoning of former double agent, Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury on March 4.

Why the authorities finished this work so much sooner than expected has not been explained. Nor has any reference been made to information, even in the most general terms, garnered from their investigations.

Precise details about the illness of Sturgess and her partner Charlie Rowley, which hospitalised them both before Sturgess died, are still not clear. This did not stop the media from dutifully reporting how the pair were treated for “novichok poisoning.”

However, when the inquest into Sturgess’ death opened on July 19, Detective Chief Inspector Kathryn Barnes from the South-East England counter-terrorism unit suddenly revealed, “It was initially believed that on admission both patients had been exposed to contaminated controlled drugs. However, it was soon

established that both patients were exhibiting symptoms of organophosphate poisoning.” Organophosphates are chemical compounds used in many nerve agents but also in medications, insecticides and herbicides, all of which are potentially toxic.

While the UK’s Porton Down military laboratory—located just a few miles away from Salisbury and fully capable of manufacturing what is known as “novichok”—baldly asserted its presence in the couple, the inquest was told that more tests were needed until an actual cause of death could be given.

But no such verdict has been released to the public, with the inquest into her death adjourned until January 2019.

The Conservative government is desperate to contain and control a story, which, with the discharge of the now healthy Rowley from hospital, has reached such a pitch that not a single word from the authorities can be believed.

Upon leaving hospital, Rowley was whipped off to a police safe house, despite not being the target of any attack—even in the government’s own narrative he was simply an unfortunate “collateral” victim. Rowley was allowed a short phone conversation with his brother Matthew, while he was denied access to television and newspapers, apparently due to concerns that his mental health would be damaged by reports of events. He was also given a new mobile phone with a new number and understood that his calls were being recorded.

Since then Charlie Rowley has given an interview to ITV News, rendering even more bizarre the official version of events. The official story goes that Sturgess and Rowley picked up a discarded novichok “container”—connected with the March 4 poisoning of the Skripals—somewhere in the Queen Elizabeth Gardens park in Salisbury. At that time, either in the evening or the

following morning, they became contaminated and fell seriously ill.

Rowley now says that the mysterious “container” in question was a perfume bottle, contained in a branded, cellophane-wrapped box with a separate pump dispenser. He says he brought it home several days before giving it to Sturgess as a present. At that point, according to Rowley, he spilt some of the substance on his hands, but washed it off. Rowley remembered that the “perfume” did not smell as such but had an “odd ammonia-type smell.” Sturgess sprayed it on her wrists and fell ill within fifteen minutes.

Rowley is not sure where he found this item, though he is “100% sure it wasn’t in the park” and suggested a collection of bins behind some shops in Salisbury city center as a possibility.

One barely knows where to begin asking questions.

Given the trauma Rowley’s body has suffered, whatever the cause, some memory loss or confusion is plausible. Regardless of this, the fact that he cannot remember where he came across the supposed nerve agent container throws every one of the government’s claims and theories up in the air. That the police are now scouring Queen Elizabeth Gardens for the hiding place of an expensive-looking, packaged perfume bottle—which Rowley is sure he did not find there—is testimony to the desperate and farcical nature of the authorities’ cover-up.

From the standpoint of the “Russian agents” responsible for the poisoning of the Skripals’ narrative, the idea that their deadly chemical weapon was found in a bin is just as nonsensical as the idea that it might have been picked up in a public park. The alleged “hit” on the Skripals was carried out in March. So not only is a spare dose of nerve agent supposedly left behind by a team of highly trained assassins, it is then supposed to have remained unmoved in a nearby bin for over four months.

As former British ambassador Craig Murray pointed out, the fact that the box was cellophane-wrapped contradicts the government’s suggestions that Rowley and Sturgess were poisoned by a substance from the same batch allegedly used on the Skripals.

Accounts are beginning to appear in the tabloid press of wild stories of multiple novichok dead-drops and roving bands of Russia assassins. Journalism has descended to the level of Cold War spy fiction.

Of the item itself, very few specific details have emerged. Murray asks, “Is it not rather strange that [the police] have not published photos of it, to see if it jogs the memory of a member of the public who saw it somewhere

in the last four months, or saw somebody with it? The ‘perpetrators’ know what it looks like and already know the police have it, so that would not give away any dangerous information.”

Rowley claims that Sturgess “recognised the product” and even the brand. But he has only described it in vague, strangely technical terms as “a 3x3inch box at half an inch thick... with a plastic moulding which contained a glass bottle and plastic dispenser.”

Finally, there are unanswered questions around the circumstances of Rowley’s poisoning. He describes spilling the liquid, “my hands were covered in the stuff,” but says he was “fortunate enough to wash [his] hands.” As a result, he was able to go about his business for several hours before falling ill and then survived following hospital treatment.

This is supposed to be one of the deadliest substances on the planet!

When the story was that the container had been found outside in a park, a roll call of “experts” were called forward to say that the nerve agent was highly stable and resistant to degradation. But apparently, standard personal hygiene is all that was necessary to foil a highly sophisticated chemical weapon. Rowley even inhaled the substance, saying that it “didn’t smell of perfume.”

Aware that their unraveling narrative based on lies and distortions is viewed with skepticism by the British population, the government and police have kept their distance from Rowley’s interview and from recent press speculation, neither confirming nor denying various claims. Paul Mills, deputy chief constable of Wiltshire police, noted only in general terms, “We’re aware that Rowley has conducted an interview as is his right.”

While Rowley has at least been heard of since being taken to a secret location by the British state, nothing regarding how they came to be poisoned has been heard from the Skripals since also being spirited away by police and intelligence forces months ago. Sergei Skripal was discharged from hospital, after his daughter, fully 75 days ago on May 18. His daughter was discharged on April 9, 114 days ago.



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