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# Was he pushed?

Scot Young, who plunged to his death last week, left school at 16 and built a £400m fortune. But his business dealings were more complex than anyone imagined

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Scot Young, his London home address and Michelle, his former wife

who had fought him in the courts for a share of his fortune, challenged him with the allegation that he was linked to the Adams family.

She believes her husband had links more than 20 years ago to this notorious north London crime syndicate, which for many years appeared to be able to operate unimpeded by the police.

It is suspected of drug trafficking, extortion and high-tech crime and is reportedly linked to 25 murders worldwide.

Its patriarch, Terry Adams, was given a seven-year prison sentence for money laundering in 2007. His brother, Michael, was arrested in a police operation against organised crime earlier this year. No charges ensued.

The scene could have come straight from the dark imagination of PD James. An elegant London square, just after 5pm on a dark, winter's afternoon. A man's body, hurtling silently from the top-floor window of a Georgian house to become impaled on the railings below: a death of unimaginable horror.

"Divine justice" was the cool assessment of a woman later passing by, who added that "now his wife will get the money he owed her". But will she?

Scot Young, an allegedly bankrupt tycoon, was a man with many rich friends and a murky past. Rumours began swirling even before the angle grinder that cut away the railing with his body attached had finished its work. Young, 52, had a price on his head, the whisperers said. He was murdered. He committed suicide. He owed money to the Russian mafia.

The Sunday Times can reveal, however, that Young's business dealings — details of which he went to prison to protect rather than disclose to a divorce court — were even more complex than anyone had previously imagined.

Shortly before his death, his ex-wife Michelle Young, who had fought him in the courts for a share of his fortune, challenged him with the allegation that he was linked to the Adams family.

The story of Young's life and death turns out to be as intriguing and mysterious as any thriller. He was once worth at least £400m, but how much of the money he lavished on palatial houses and private jets was actually his own?

## How death has come to those in Young's wealthy circle



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Scot's speciality was "moving money around discreetly", according to Michelle. His business contacts and corporate network stretched around the world, from Russia to the Caribbean.

Were his associates rattled by the forensic accountants his ex-wife had hired to dig into the source of his wealth, as their divorce became increasingly bitter? To the extent that they threatened him, or put such pressure on him he felt suicide was the only way out? Or had he owed money to foreign criminal gangs?

Michelle, 50, always claimed that Young was worth "billions" and that he had gone to great lengths to hide his assets when she fought for her share. The courts finally awarded £20m last year. She described the amount as "a disgrace" — and never saw a penny of the money anyway.

Young claimed he had gone broke after the collapse of a huge property deal in Moscow, but when he died he was renting an £8,000-a-month flat, and an acquaintance who moved in the same social circles said "he never seemed to be short of money". A judge in the divorce action noted that despite claiming to be penniless, Young seemed to have "wads of cash". The judge also concluded Young had not lost any money in the Moscow deal.

Even Young's love life has a mysterious twist. His 17-year relationship with Michelle fell apart after his financial meltdown. She was followed by a string of glamorous girlfriends. "He has a type," a friend said. "Tall, hard-faced blondes."

Five years ago, he met Noelle Reno, 30, an American socialite who has become one of the stars of the reality TV show *Ladies of London*. They recently got engaged. "I am distraught by the sudden loss of my best friend," she said.

At the spot where Young died last week, a young woman left a tribute that read: "My Darling Scottie, no words. I have loved you since we met 11 years ago. You have broken my heart. Xxx LP. Rest in Peace".

So: secret upon secret. Will the truth about Young's supposed billions die with him? He is known to have suffered from depression, but showed no sign he was about to take his life, although a source close to Reno claimed last night that he fell to his death moments after the couple had a row when she tried to order him out of their shared apartment.

James Creed, an old friend, said he had spoken to Young on the afternoon he died. "He was quiet... he seemed distracted, but he didn't say anything unusual."

David Ingram, a senior partner at accountants Grant Thornton, and Young's joint trustee in bankruptcy, said they last spoke about two weeks ago: "He seemed fine. He had ups and downs, but he was not particularly down when I spoke to him."

Ingram said he hoped Young's death would turn out to be a tragic accident. He is still trying to establish whether Young left a will. If he did, it might just prove a key to solving the puzzle.

THERE was no indication of the lifestyle to come as Young was growing up. The son of a Dundee United footballer — in the days when footballers' wages were in tens rather than millions of pounds — he was raised in a tenement block and left school at 16. He moved into property development during the boom of the mid-1980s.

His big break was meeting Michelle Orwell, the daughter of a successful businessman, in 1988. He was 26. She said she found Young "charismatic and assertive — he told me within two days of meeting me that he wanted us to marry and have children".

Her father Terence ran a successful business dealing in high-end electrical goods. They lived on a 10-acre Essex farm where Michelle bred miniature horses. Her parents took to Young at once. Terence gave him money to invest in his business and helped with contacts.

They could not afford a home of their own, so a few months later he moved in. "My family are warm and embracing. They knew I was in love and they liked Scot, so we all got on well," Michelle said. Young was the only child of only-child parents, so "being surrounded by a big family was something that he had never had, and it was a new experience for him".

Three years later the couple moved into their first home, a Tudor-style house with a swimming pool in Theydon Bois, and the following year, 1992, Scarlett, now 22, was born. Her sister Sasha came two years after that. The next year, the Youngs married at Chelsea register office.

Michelle said they were happy then, though they were both "fiery and stubborn". Young had, however, already made some unsavoury friends. Patrick Adams, a senior member of the Adams family, was an associate. Police sources have told *The Sunday Times* that two of Young's associates laundered money for the crime syndicate. During that time, Young was arrested on suspicion of drugs trafficking, but he was not convicted.

Whatever the source of his money, it was now pouring in. And if Michelle showed little interest in how her husband made his money, who could blame her? His burgeoning wealth provided his wife and daughters with a lifestyle most people could only dream of: a "palatial" spread in Oxfordshire, the best private schools, holidays on luxury yachts, private jets.

Many of Young's dealings were legitimate. He made a stellar investment in a company developing chip-and-pin technology. He also made shrewd investments in property. Court papers contain dizzying details of millions of pounds in loans, mortgages and profits, followed by — if Young was to be believed — equally huge and devastating losses.

Curious coincidences show up. Three businessmen in his social circle have died in falls. Another died in a helicopter crash. Young sold his Surrey mansion to the Russian billionaire Boris Berezovsky, who died in strange circumstances last year.

Like Young, he is supposed to have lost a large amount of money in the ill-fated "Project Moscow" property development. He was found hanged with a cashmere scarf in the bathroom of a house owned by his former wife in Berkshire. His daughter said she feared he had been killed because of his opposition to Vladimir Putin. The coroner returned an open verdict.

Much of Young's lavish lifestyle was real, but some of it was faked. Michelle told the court Young had given her a £1m diamond set from Graff for her 40th birthday and that her wedding ring was also worth £1m. The diamond set turned out to be worth £150,000. He said he had bought it from Giraffe.

FOR a number of years they were happy: Michelle said she was an old-fashioned wife. Despite their wealth, "I ran his bath and cooked his supper." In 2005, they moved to America where Young had bought a beach house in Miami. Less than six months later, his empire went into meltdown. Michelle discovered he had been unfaithful and filed for divorce in June 2007. Their divorce — bitterly slugged out over 65 hearings, six years and millions of pounds' worth of legal fees — subjected Young's business dealings to public scrutiny. Divorcing couples are legally obliged to disclose assets. Young's "Form E" was "so uninformative as to be nearly useless", the judge said. Michelle believed he was worth at least £400m and wanted half. Perhaps his pride was dented and he determined not to let her have her way. Or perhaps he really did not have the money — or owed it to people who would come after him if they thought he did.

Despite winning a ruling last year that she should be paid £20m, Michelle wanted more, and was still zealously trying to track down her husband's funds. She had written to HM Revenue & Customs in July 2013, accusing him of "criminality".

L Burke Files, president of the investigative firm Financial Examinations & Evaluations, based in Arizona, who examined Young's records for the divorce case said he was convinced he was concealing funds. He said: "His behaviour was not that of a millionaire who was broke." He said it had been suggested to him that Young acted as a front on behalf of other associates, but he had not seen evidence for this.

In recent weeks, Michelle had challenged him over his links to the Adams family and the fact he had been subject to a police investigation. She even threatened a private criminal prosecution and accused him of money laundering. He offered her £30m to mark an end to the hostilities.

The walls were closing in on Young. He owed millions, his ex-wife was hiring investigators to rake over his financial history, and the murky secrets of his past were threatening to emerge. There were claims Russian mafia figures to whom he owed money had dangled him out of a window at the Dorchester hotel two years ago.

It had been an extraordinary but secretive life, which was marked last Monday with the most dramatic and sad end. The trigger for his death almost certainly lies buried deep in his once great fortune. But which part? And did he kill himself last week, or was he pushed? In his death, as in his life, there are more questions than answers.