



THE CIPRIANI FIVE...



*Clockwise from top
left, Paul Castle, Scot Young,
Boris Berezovsky, Johnny
Elichaoff and Robbie Curtis.
Opposite page, Michelle
Young with daughter Scarlet,
Barbados, 1994*

An oligarch, an entrepreneur, a rock manager and two property tycoons; all high rollers, all friends, all dead within four years under suspicious circumstances. Can this really be coincidence? The missing millions and the shady Russian connections suggest not. Keith Dovkants investigates one of the most compelling mysteries of our time



**...AND THEN
THERE WERE
NONE**

They were

known as the Cipriani Five, friends who often met at the restaurant (now known as C London) on Davies Street, dined lavishly and prospered on the deals they hatched. There was Boris Berezovsky, the exiled Russian oligarch; property men Paul Castle and Robbie Curtis; ex-rock manager Johnny Elichao; and Scot Young, entrepreneur and fixer. Between November 2010 and the end of 2014, they were all to meet violent deaths, leaving behind one of the most baffling mysteries of modern times. Scot Young was the last to go.

The 52-year-old property and telecoms tycoon plunged from a fifth-floor window in Marylebone onto spiked steel railings on 8 December 2014. His death has never been fully explained, nor has the riddle surrounding the approximately £400m he is believed to have hidden in a string of offshore tax havens. His death seems to be part of a puzzle that no one – including the police and a coroner – can crack. But there are clues. *Tatler* talked to Young's former wife, Michelle, who shared evidence from her own investigation. We interviewed the American private investigator she hired, whose spine-chilling theory is matched by facts. It all suggests the possibility of a horrific crime, a massive theft that may have ended in cold-blooded murder and might, at last, provide clues to the fate of the Cipriani Five.

Michelle Young is a slim – almost slight – figure in black trousers and matching silk shirt, sitting next to a pile of photographs that many would view as property porn; there are shots of a grand staircase, a soaring atrium, a library, vast dining rooms, long driveways and velvety lawns. These are the houses Michelle used to own. Woodperry House, a Palladian villa in Oxfordshire. Bakeham House, on the Wentworth Estate, in Surrey. Wootton Place, in the Cotswolds. These homes were part of the life she lived with Young as he built their

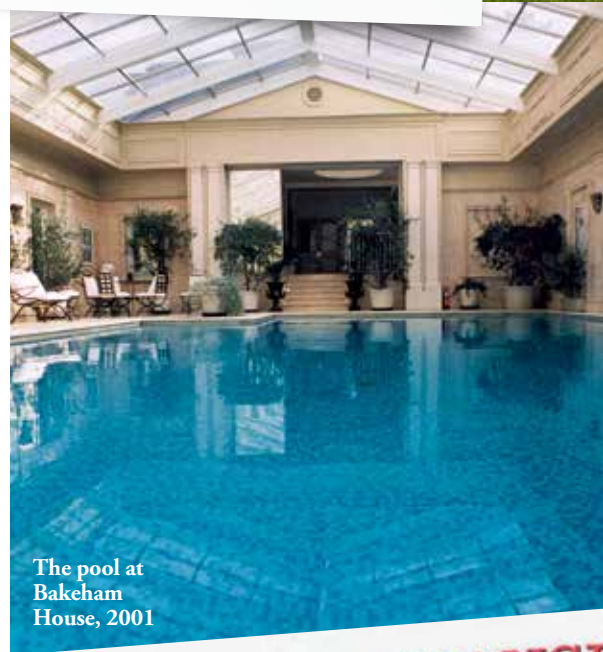
fortune. He was a charming, sharp and funny young man – son of a former Dundee United player – when they met in the late Eighties. Michelle was a fashion buyer, and when Scot started in property, it was with money provided by her and her father, an Essex businessman. They married in 1995 and had two daughters: Scarlet, now 25, and Sasha, 23. Scot seemed to dote on his family. The girls went to expensive schools; presents for Michelle included a Range Rover filled with clothes by Maria Grachvogel and, for her 40th birthday, a million pounds' worth of jewellery from Graff. Scot invested successfully in telecoms and chip-and-pin technology, and their wealth grew enormously. But he was always very secretive. With good cause, as Michelle was to discover. In 2005, they moved to an opulent beachfront property in Miami after a tense time in the marriage. Michelle began looking for a permanent home for the family.

'We were meant to be starting a new life,' she says. 'I was looking at \$20m houses and making plans. Then I was in my bedroom one day when I got a call from someone I didn't know.' It was a London lawyer, who told her that Scot was in the Priory following a suicide attempt and had lost all his money.

It was late March in 2006. 'Scot had been talking about buying a multimillion-dollar yacht and an executive jet,' Michelle declares. 'How could he have lost all his money?' How indeed. Next, she discovered that he was leading a double life, living with



Scarlet, Sasha, Michelle and Scot Young on holiday in France, c. 2000



The pool at Bakeham House, 2001





ABOVE, WOODPERRY HOUSE IN OXFORDSHIRE, FORMERLY OWNED BY THE YOUNGS. BELOW, SASHA YOUNG IN THE GROUNDS OF BAKEHAM HOUSE, 2001



another woman at a house in Belgravia. 'Can you imagine?' she asks. 'I loved him. I had always stuck to my marriage vows. But he was deceiving me.' Worse was to come. Young claimed he was broke, and Michelle and her daughters were soon back in London. Maintenance payments stopped, and Michelle and the girls found themselves with no home and no money.

As she goes over this intensely painful part of her life, she speaks softly, never getting angry or emotional. Her daughter Sasha has joined us, and they exchange glances as the cruellest moments in the story unfold. There are many of them. As Michelle, now 53, tried to work out what was happening, she learned that her husband had orchestrated his own financial collapse – and, later, bankruptcy – to cheat her out of her share of the family wealth. She knew he was not

broke and set out to prove it. She pursued him through the courts in what became one of the new century's most sensational divorce cases.

She was eventually awarded £26.6m by the High Court but never saw any of it. Young stuck so tenaciously to the story that his money had disappeared that, in 2013, a High Court judge sent him to prison for six months for refusing to provide details of his finances. He served three months and, following his release, binged on drink and drugs, behaving more and more erratically. Then, on a December night in 2014, he turned up at the Montagu Square flat he had shared with a girlfriend – Noelle Reno, an American-born model and presenter. She was a star of the reality-TV show *Ladies of London*, in its first series, and, on Scot Young's arm, a familiar face at London parties. They dined often at the Ivy and Cipriani. Despite his claim to be penniless, Young was spending around £60,000 a week, Michelle's investigators found. He had an expensive cocaine habit, rent was £4,000 a week on one flat and he was having a lot of fun at Boujis, his favourite club. Michelle's QC, Edward Fitzgerald, remarked: 'He is attending party after party, posing with a glass of champagne in his hand and a girlfriend – some supermodel or other – on his arm.'

Noelle Reno said they had intended to marry but had split up, and on the night of his death, she said, he arrived 'unexpectedly and unannounced'. In July 2015, she told the inquest that on that night Young had been 'the most sober since he got out of prison' – but 'more desperate than I had ever seen him'. They argued and, she said, he threatened to call ▷

RED RUSSIAN TYCOON LOST £2bn

MAUN WOOLLER
ATT WILKINSON

H property tycoon
aged 60ft to his
railings lost his
billion fortune in a
property scheme.

ing, 62, fell four sto-
his £3million London
and was impaled on
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ng made his fortune as a
"fixer" for mega-rich Rus-
let all



Ex-wife... Michelle Horrific... railings
He referred to her boyfriend's legal
and financial plight several times
during the series.
"She said yesterday: 'I am dis-
traught by the sudden loss of my
best friend.'
The businessman had luxury
homes around the world and trav-
elled them on a private jet."

RIGHT, THE BUILDING FROM WHICH SCOT YOUNG FELL TO HIS DEATH IN 2014



Noelle Reno and
Scot Young, 2014



called his younger daughter, Sasha. She told *Tatler* that Young had said he would ring her the next day. She timed the call at about 10 minutes before he died. Young's daughters are convinced their father was murdered. Moments before he plunged from the window, Reno received a text from his phone: 'Now I have hit rock bottom as you will see. Loved you like no other. Love you always and forever! xxx.' Yet there was no proof that Young had sent the text. And in exchanges with his daughters, Young said his feelings for Noelle had cooled considerably. Dr Radcliffe, citing the 'conflicting evidence', was not entirely sure that Young had killed himself. There was no proof of foul play, she noted, and recorded a narrative conclusion, effectively leaving Young's death unexplained. But perhaps not a complete mystery, as *Tatler* has learned from one of the key players in this enigmatic affair.

American private investigator L Burke Files is an acknowledged expert at investigating apparently insoluble riddles, especially those that involve husbands cheating wives out of their fair share

further research, and his conclusions were presented in a report to the High Court in a case brought by Michelle to make Young pay up. Contrary to his claim in 2006 that he was broke, Files said, Young had assets of at least £382,241,496. How did he know?

In 2008, Young gave his daughters a laptop each. The machines were second-hand, in line with his claim that he had no money. But Michelle had the computers examined by an expert, who found the hard drives had been wiped but that it was possible to recover information that had been stored. This included spreadsheets, submitted in evidence by Files, that showed details of Young's wealth after he claimed he had lost everything. Files also revealed evidence indicating that Scot Young had sought information about how to fake mental illness.

'In my view he was a man of great mental fortitude,' Files says. 'One morning after court, I went to the pub across the road and he walked up to me. He said, "When this is all over, can we talk?" I said, "Probably not. But I want to tell you one thing – you were the smartest man in that courtroom."'

SCOT YOUNG'S DEATH LOOKED LIKE AN OPEN AND SHUT CASE OF SUICIDE. THE CORONER WAS NOT SO SURE

◁ the police, though it was not made clear why. She left, then rang him on her cell phone.

'I said, "Do we really have to go to the police, do we really have to do it this way?" He said, "I'm going to jump out of the window. Stay on the phone and you will hear me."' Instead, she rang the police, who soon afterwards found Young's body hanging from the railings; one of the steel spikes had pierced his chest. Upstairs, the fifth-floor bedroom window was open. On the sill there was a can of Diet Coke, a packet of cigarettes and a lighter. The police concluded there were no suspicious circumstances, and it did indeed look like an open and shut case of suicide. But was it?

The coroner, Dr Shirley Radcliffe, was not so certain. Yes, Young had taken an overdose in 2006, leading to his first spell at the Priory, yet the medical staff who treated him concluded that he had made only a 'moderate attempt' to end his life. He had been sectioned in 2012 and received frequent treatment for mental-health problems, but shortly before his death he had been released from hospital because he was considered 'low risk'. And Young told Scarlet, his elder daughter, in a voicemail left shortly before he died, that he was looking forward to seeing her. He also

of family wealth. He specialises in tracking down hidden assets, and when Michelle Young was desperate to find out what had happened to the money and property her husband had owned – she thinks it may have totalled more than £1bn – she turned to Files for help. He runs his own outfit in Tempe, Arizona, and handles intriguing cases personally: 'Sometimes,' he says, 'you just have to get out from behind that desk and onto the streets.' He customarily charges \$200 an hour plus expenses but took Michelle's case on the understanding she would pay him when she could afford to. This was an arrangement that other professionals were also happy to make because they shared her belief that a vast fortune was out there, waiting to be found. The lure of Scot's missing millions turned into a treasure hunt, with rich investors putting up millions of pounds to fund Michelle's legal and investigative fees on the basis of an agreement that when the assets were found, they would get a share. It hasn't happened yet.

'The assets were there,' says Files. He arrived in London on 31 July 2013 and spent 10 days inspecting documents, interviewing Michelle and trying to get professionals who had dealt with Young to talk. His office conducted

Files found that Young had shifted his assets offshore, using tax havens and multiple layers of ownership to obscure his own interest. To do it, he had used people he thought he could trust. 'I've seen this happen before,' Files says. 'People are running different assets for one person who controls them indirectly. Now what if those people get together and say, "Hey – we can have it all if we squeeze out the legitimate owner."'

Does 'squeeze out' – in this case – mean murder? Files has his views.

'So – what happened? He accidentally fell out of a window? Come on... Or it was suicide? I'm not buying that. Suicide doesn't fit the psyche. Mentally, this guy was tough. He went to prison rather than reveal where his money was. There are few motives for murder. A crime of passion? That doesn't apply here. To get power? No. To get money? Yes. I believe there were a few insiders here who got control of the money. He trusted them, but they realised that with him out of the way they suddenly had a great deal of money. Maybe they felt threatened by him. Did he have the ability to put them in jail? Or was it an economic crime, as simple as that?'

So who are the conspirators who helped Scot Young hide his money and then, according to that analysis, had him killed in order to keep it? Files chuckles. 'Look at the Russian connection,' he says. 'It's fascinating.'

Indeed it is. The Russian link adds an even more sinister dimension to this dark affair. Witness Young's relationship with Boris Berezovsky. The Russian was one of the most conspicuous post-Soviet oligarchs, a one-time billionaire who profited immensely from the scramble for riches in Russia in the Nineties. Berezovsky fell out with his former protégé, Vladimir Putin, and was given asylum in Britain, where he pursued his business career with, among others, Scot Young. Berezovsky bought the Youngs' house on the Wentworth Estate, and he and Young became close friends.

Through Berezovsky, Young met a number of figures in the Russian business community and became known as a man who could fix things for them in pursuit of their interests. He also invested in a scheme to develop a huge site in Moscow. The deal, called Project Moscow, failed to become a reality, and Young blamed it for destroying his fortune, although Michelle stresses this could not have been the case. 'Look at the documents,' she says, citing a schedule from Coutts bank and evidence from Young's solicitor showing that, shortly before the deal, his wealth had amounted to at least £800m. 'The idea he lost all that is nonsense – it was a sham,' she adds.

But the Russian links were very real. Ever since the deaths of the other members of the Cipriani Five, there had been reports of Russian criminals pressuring Castle and Curtis. According to anonymous friends, Russian 'enforcers' burst into Castle's offices and threatened him shortly before he dived in front of a Tube train at Bond Street.

Berezovsky was 67 when he was found hanging in a bathroom at Titness Park, in Berkshire, in March 2013. Again, it looked like suicide, but a pathologist retained by Berezovsky's daughter, Elizaveta, pointed to marks on the body that suggested he had been murdered. This expert, Bernd Brinkmann, said the ligature had left a circular pattern on the neck, rather than a V-shape, which is usual in a hanging. A paramedic who saw the body also noted that Berezovsky's face was purple. This was strange – hanging victims are usually very pale. Berezovsky had long been on a Russian hit list. Scotland Yard confirmed that



LEFT, SCOT YOUNG ON HOLIDAY IN BALI, 2014. RIGHT, SCARLET & MICHELLE YOUNG, LONDON, 2009



it had foiled at least one serious attempt on his life. A coroner subsequently recorded an open verdict, noting it was 'impossible to say' whether Berezovsky had been unlawfully killed or had taken his own life. Young's friend Robbie Curtis, who made millions from rented property, was also believed to have had dealings with the Russian mob. He jumped under a train, as did his friend Castle. Then, in November 2014, another member of the set, Johnny Elichao, leapt from the roof of the Whiteleys shopping centre in Bayswater. Elichao, the former husband of TV presenter Trinny Woodall, had massive debts, it emerged, and had been talked down from the same roof a few weeks earlier.

While such a concentration of violent deaths in a small circle of associates raises suspicion, those of Curtis, Castle and Elichao have been recorded as suicides. Officially, Scot Young's demise, like Berezovsky's, is still open to question. But Valery Morozov, a Russian businessman now living in exile in Britain, sees things differently.

Morozov, who claimed asylum after exposing corruption in Russia, has said he believes that the Russian mafia were involved in hiding Young's money, and he suspects that gangsters had a role in his death. Russian elements – state-sponsored killers or mafia hitmen, often working together – have been blamed for other unexplained deaths, including those of Alexander Litvinenko, a defector from the Russian security services, and the whistleblower Alexander Perepilichny, who is suspected of having been poisoned after he fled to Britain.

'Of course Scot didn't kill himself,' says Michelle. 'For one thing, he wouldn't go near a high window. He was afraid of heights – it was a phobia.' She maintains Young was murdered because he started telling the

people he had used to hide his money that he wanted it back. Shortly before he died, Young phoned her. She recorded the call, in which he offered her a deal – £20m to drop her investigation. 'He just wanted it to stop. He'd had enough. He was missing the money, the houses, everything,' she believes he wanted to end the deception and get his old life back, but she refused his offer. He raised it to £30m. Again she refused – there was no guarantee she would ever get the money. Three weeks later, Scot Young was dead.

Michelle believes the people who helped Young hide his money from her sanctioned his murder rather than return it. Now she feels she is finally close to a breakthrough. She has sent key elements of her dossier to Scotland Yard and has a new legal team helping to establish that Young's bankruptcy and the disappearance of his assets were fraudulent.

In the smart but compact flat she now rents, Michelle carefully stacks the photographs of the grand houses she once owned. They may be gone, but she will not let go. She concedes that her unrelenting search for answers may place her in danger, but she vows never to give up: 'There is not one part of me that is scared,' she says. 'These people don't frighten me.' Rather, she says, 'they' should be afraid. Then she adds, with a surprisingly bright smile, 'because it's not over yet'. □