



# Rushcliffe School

**Everyone at Rushcliffe School will be given the chance to shine brightly**

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He is by far the most appealing of the tsars, especially the later ones. He was thoughtful, kind to everyone, and actually very skilled.

But he didn't have the consistency or the endurance to keep it up for his entire rule. That was a problem with the job: as we know from our own leaders, they're barking mad after 10 years in power – and that's not even supreme power. So after 15 or 20 years, these guys were exhausted. He had great potential, but because he swung back to reactionary policies, he lost a lot of support. He's a great tragic figure, a very lovable man, and one of my favourites.

### **What were the main crisis points in the Romanov years?**

A big crisis was the invasion of Russia by Charles XII of Sweden in 1708. If Peter the Great had lost Poltava the following year, Europe could now look very different. We could have a huge Sweden controlling the whole Baltic area. It now seems totally impossible – it seems obvious Russia was always going to be this giant bear -but, of course, everything's possible.

The French invasion of Russia in 1812 was a big crisis. The Russians could have lost everything, but they survived the fall of Moscow, which was amazing. Alexander I had found the strength in his character and was not going to make peace with Napoleon.

### **Considering the dynasty's decline, do you think it's right to see it as a victim of its own earlier success?**

The dynasty had been so successful that there was increasing resistance to fundamentally changing anything. That was a major factor in its failure.

It's very easy to say that the later tsars got everything wrong, but their jobs were actually much more complicated and harder to do than anyone thought, and they were very likely to be overthrown – or worse – if they got something wrong. The dilemmas of the final tsar, Nicholas II, were extremely difficult to sort out, for instance, and I'm not sure that anyone would have got them right.

### **What is your view of Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra?**

The thing about Nicholas and Alexandra -Nicky and Alix – is that they have become an industry in their own right. But if you look at the millions of books written about them, most are about what they wore, where they went on holiday, the children's illnesses, and all that sort of stuff. And all of that's very fascinating – a window into a shipwrecked world – but you have to look at the politics too. It's impossible not to think about them without knowing how it all ended, but we have to try.

Nicholas was moderately successful for his first 10 years and it is easy to forget that he ruled in total for 22 years – which is a long time – despite war, revolution and folly. But they were monumental failures. The question, of course, is why. In order to answer it, I wanted to look at them as politicians, not just as lovers and a happy couple with children – even though we feel great sympathy for them because of their assassination by Bolshevik forces in 1918.