

THE LONG CALL





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Ben Aldridge leads an illustrious cast in ITV's evocative and gripping four-part event drama, *The Long Call*

Ben Aldridge (*Our Girl*, *Fleabag*) stars in *The Long Call*, ITV's gripping four-part event drama adapted by Kelly Jones (*Des*, *Baptise*) from the best-selling novel of the same title from award-winning writer Ann Cleeves.

Directed by Lee Haven Jones (*Dr Who*, *Shetland*, *The Bay*) *The Long Call* follows Detective Inspector Matthew Venn (Ben Aldridge), who has returned to live in a small community in North Devon with his husband, Jonathan (Declan Bennett).

Matthew was brought up in the Barum Brethren before leaving to go to University. At 19 he knew he couldn't continue amongst the community, hiding his sexuality, and to his mother's shock and dismay, he declared publicly he no longer believed. Now he's back, in the place where it all began, not just to grieve for his father, but to lead a shocking murder investigation.

Matthew is forced to re-engage with the community he left, including the most painful and challenging relationship with his mother Dorothy, played by award-winning actress Juliet Stevenson (*Riviera*, *Truly Madly, Deeply*).

After the body of a man is found on the beach close to Matthew's home, the investigation casts a shadow of doubt over the whole community. In order to expose the killer, Matthew and his team have to get to the bottom of a case which brings with it old wounds and a deadly secret.

This powerful and thought-provoking series also stars Pearl Mackie who plays DS Jen Rafferty, a tough and fiercely determined woman who has recently relocated to Devon with her two teenage kids, Ella and Ben. As a diligent worker and a single parent, Jen muddles her way through domestic life whilst trying to put some distance between her own traumatic scars from her former life in London.

Pearl Mackie is notable for her work in television, theatre and film and is best known for her work in the long-running BBC series, *Doctor Who*, where she played the role of the Doctor's companion, Bill Potts, opposite Peter Capaldi. Pearl's work in theatre includes the award winning and critically acclaimed stage adaptation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. Her film credits include *Greed* starring Steve Coogan and Isla Fisher.

Ben, Juliet and Pearl are joined by Martin Shaw as the Brethren leader Dennis Stephenson and Anita Dobson who plays his wife, Grace Stephenson. Adding to the illustrious cast are Neil Morrissey as Christopher Reasley, Sarah Gordy as Lucy Craddle, Alan Williams as Maurice Craddle, Amit Shah as Ed Raveley, Aoife Hinds as Gaby Chadwell, Siobhán Cullen as Caroline Reasley and Dylan Edwards as DC Ross Pritchard.

Commented novelist Ann Cleeves:

“Ben was the actor who read the audio book even before the TV show was commissioned. I love his pared-back, restrained narration. He’s worked on the novel as well as the script, and so he understands the character in depth. No author could wish for more.”

Commented Ben Aldridge:

“I’m delighted to be playing Matthew Venn, a brilliantly unorthodox detective who audiences will see solving a gripping and intricate case, whilst simultaneously surmounting a deeper, more personal mystery within himself. It’s a poignant and complex journey of self-discovery and sexual and religious identity, which navigates the tension between pride and shame, and I feel privileged to be bringing it to ITV viewers in *The Long Call*.”

Angie Daniell (*Vigil, Alex Rider, Clique*) has produced the series which has been filmed on location in Bristol and the beautiful North Devon coast whilst Silverprint Pictures’ Creative Director Kate Bartlett (*Flesh and Blood, Shetland, Dark Heart*) is the Executive Producer alongside writer, Kelly Jones.

The Long Call is produced by ITV Studios label, Silverprint Pictures and co-produced with BritBox North America. *The Long Call* has been commissioned by ITV’s Head of Drama, Polly Hill. The drama is produced in association with ITV Studios, who are handling international distribution.



"I can't think of anyone who could play Matthew Venn better than Ben Aldridge. He brings an authenticity and commitment to the role. I always hoped that the actor chosen would come from Devon, where the books are set, and he does."

Ann Cleeves

FOREWORD BY WRITER & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KELLY JONES

A few years ago, I met a young woman who was raised in a fundamentalist Christian church in the same town where I grew up in the West Country. She told me the church was completely withdrawn from all aspects of modern life - no TV, no pop music, no trendy clothes, nothing 'worldly' - because their focus was always on the next life, the Second Coming. For her it had been a stifling and repressive life and she had run away, aged 18, in the middle of the night, with a bin bag full of clothes, and made her own way - totally alone.

Her story fascinated me - that a woman my age could have had this experience, in my ordinary Somerset town in the late nineties, when my only concern was trying to get into the (single, terrible) local club. That her church community existed in the same time and place as mine but in a sort of parallel universe that I knew nothing about. So when the chance came for me to tell the story of DI Matthew Venn, Ann Cleeves' wonderful new detective, whose life closely resembles that of the young woman I had met, I was instantly excited.

When we meet Matthew he has recently returned, with his new husband, to the small Devon town where he grew up, to spend time with his dying father. We quickly learn Matthew feels a strong sense of belonging to this beautiful place but there is painful unfinished business with his estranged mother - who has never acknowledged his sexuality - and the isolated Brethren church he ran away from 20 years ago.

On the day of Matthew's father's funeral there is a murder - of an unidentified man, new to the town - Simon Walden. The crime is seemingly unconnected to the funeral but we quickly learn Simon had been drawn to the church Matthew grew up in - and a tangle of dark secrets start to emerge that pulls Matthew back into the strange, compelling Brethren community.

An atheist myself, I have always been fascinated by - and a bit envious of - those who believe. In Britain we are now a largely atheist people. The loss of hellfire and judgement is surely a good thing but the fading of religion has meant the fading of other things too - community, shared rituals, often the sense of a bigger purpose or meaning. The Barum Brethren in *The Long Call* devote their lives to trying to hold onto things that we in our modern lives have lost - as Dorothy, Matthew's mum, puts it, their life is 'less about buying things and looking at screens; more about helping people'. The community they have built reminds us of what we in our atomised, consumer-driven modern lives have lost and could perhaps refind.

Lee Haven Jones has brought the Barum Brethren community to life so vividly and beautifully onscreen - with its communal meals around a long table, its rituals, its sense of togetherness. I think the audience will feel what Matthew feels - a fascination, almost an envy, for a way of living we have lost.

FOREWORD BY KELLY JONES CONTINUED

I know I felt it when writing - and on the shoot, watching the Brethren harvest their vegetables together, on a cloudless June day in a West Country field.

But there is darkness there too. Matthew has a deeply conflicted relationship with the Brethren - he's driven by unresolved shame about his sexuality, which he only begins to face during the course of the story. There is darkness too in Grace's story, the wife of the charismatic Brethren leader Dennis, as we start to discover the troubling coercive control she has suffered at his hands.

Other stories circle around Matthew and the Brethren. Lucy, who has Downs Syndrome and is hiding secrets about the murder victim, and her elderly dad Maurice, who is fiercely protective of her - and desperately worried about how she'll manage after his death. Caroline and Gaby, Simon's housemates, who have their own troubling private suspicions about how Simon might have died. Ed, Caroline's boyfriend, who left a corporate job in London after suffering burnout, and is now trying to find a better, more peaceful life in Devon. Jen, Matthew's DS, who arrived in Devon fleeing an abusive marriage and is struggling to make a new life here.

These stories, as they weave into the crime story, are all about community, belonging - and redemption. Most of all they are about people trying to find some sort of meaning and sense of belonging in their often shattered lives.

It is Matthew Venn who feels this pull, this need to belong, most acutely, but it comes at a cost. The 'long call' of the title is the sound of the gulls that he hears from his new home and remembers from his childhood - the call that always sounds like a cry of pain.

As with all Ann Cleeves' stories, this is a tale of place, of connection with landscape - about how we reconcile our essential aloneness with our need to belong. As a writer who spends her working days alone, having lived for years in big anonymous cities, I found the journey back to this small Devon town - only a few miles away from where I grew up - totally irresistible. I hope you do too.



CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Matthew Venn played by Ben Aldridge

Late 30's, returning to his childhood town, after a successful career in Bristol, with his husband Jonathan. Matthew was brought up in the Barum Brethren before leaving to go to University. At 19, he knew he couldn't continue amongst the community, hiding his sexuality, and to his mother's shock and dismay, he stood up in a meeting and declared he no longer believed. Matthew is now forced to reengage with the community he left, including the most painful and challenging relationship with his mother. Naturally reserved, Matthew is sharp and perceptive with an inner resolve. He is pushed to his limit and forced to ask fundamental questions about his identity and if he can ever truly belong.

Dorothy Venn played by Juliet Stevenson

Dorothy, 60s, a committed, devout member of the Barum Brethren and Matthew's estranged mother. Dorothy has recently lost her husband but even in a time of grief is unwelcoming of her only son's return and his presence at his father's funeral. She hasn't seen Matthew for over 20 years and made it clear to him all those years ago that without belief he could no longer be a part of the community. However, mother and son find themselves reforming some kind of relationship and Matthew discovers that she is proud of what he has achieved in his career. Ultimately, she has to battle with her own sense of morality and is forced to finally confront who her son really is – his beliefs and his sexuality.

Jonathan Venn played by Declan Bennett

Jonathan is Matthew's husband and manager at the Woodyard. He has a warm, friendly and kind nature - a people's person especially with those more vulnerable. He is sensitive to everyone's needs and puts people first, he understands how difficult it is for his husband to be back in Barnstaple and is quietly anxious and protective. He knows he has to let Matthew make his own choices but he's quick to question the Brethren's motives, making sure Matthew isn't lulled into a false sense of security and familiarity with them. Jonathan and Matthew have a loving and respectful marriage full of trust and support, but the case puts a strain on them as Matthew has to investigate those involved at the Woodyard. Jonathan stays by Matthew's side and shows him that he has a home wherever they both are.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Jen Rafferty played by Pearl Mackie

Jen is a detective and a single mum of two (Ella 16, Ben 14) from London. Jen is straight talking, tough and fiercely determined; we see her balancing the increasing pressures at home and now a murder case at work. Jen relocated with her kids to Devon, escaping an abusive partner who was physically violent. The dynamic at home with Ella and Ben is chaotic as they muddle their way through with Ella taking on ever more domestic responsibility to help support her mum. There is a special bond between mother and daughter with the deep scars from the life they had to leave behind. At work, Jen and a more junior detective, Ross, have a relatively spikey dynamic with the pair knowing how to push each other's buttons. Jen is diligent in examining the case and not afraid to ask hard questions; she's also intuitive, realising when she needs to tread sensitively with Matthew. We see Jen's sharp instincts, her ability to be firm and direct, sometimes a bit forcefully, but she also shows restraint and real professionalism when interviewing suspects.

Dennis Stephenson played by Martin Shaw

Dennis, 60s, is a Church Elder of the Barum Brethren. He began life as an evangelical preacher on street corners. Charming, charismatic and warm with a twinkle in his eye, his caring and open nature belies a darker side. Beneath the surface he is controlling and manipulative; he's desperate to retain complete control of the Brethren, and of his wife.

Grace Stephenson played by Anita Dobson

Grace, 60s, a member of the Barum Brethren and Dennis Stephenson's wife. At 19, Grace ran away to Devon, only to fall into the clutches of Dennis. We believe Grace to be fairly timid but strong of faith and particularly compassionate. She suffers from attacks of extreme anxiety which we start to realise are a result of being trapped in a controlling marriage. As the story progresses, we see Grace find her voice and stand up for those who are disempowered.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Christopher Reasley played by Neil Morrissey

Christopher Reasley is a businessman, chairman of the board of the Woodyard and father to Caroline Reasley. The relationship between Christopher and his daughter is extremely fractured, caused by the loss of Caroline's mother who died in a car crash which Caroline believes Christopher was responsible for. She can't forgive him or move on with him happily in her life. The harder he tries to build a better relationship, the more she pulls away and the less progress he makes. Out of desperation to protect his daughter, Christopher becomes embroiled in the investigation at the Woodyard and his old-fashioned mentality is exposed. Perhaps there's a chance for him to forge the relationship with his daughter he has always wished for, but only if the secrets of the past are finally laid bare.

Caroline Reasley played by Siobhán Cullen

Daughter of Christopher Reasley. Simon and Gaby are tenants in Caroline's house showing that she has a generous and kind side, wanting to help those in need of stability. Caroline harbors her own physical and mental wounds from the car crash she suffered as a child which caused the death of her mother. She believes her father to be responsible for the crash and has never been able to get past her doubts of his character and have a meaningful relationship with him. She feels smothered by his attempts to reach out and is deeply distrustful of the people in her life due to being so hurt in the past.

Gaby Chadwell played by Aoife Hinds

Gaby is friend and housemate to Caroline and Simon. She's also artist in residence at the Woodyard. Gaby moved to Devon leaving behind a fractured and difficult relationship with her mother. We discover that she found herself drawn to Simon and the two started a secret relationship. She finds it hard to admit, even to herself, the depth of feeling she developed for him. She doesn't get the chance to tell Simon that she's pregnant before he's murdered, and although she's overwhelmed with the idea of bringing a baby into the world she finds so difficult to navigate, there is the sense that this could be a new beginning for her.

Ed Raveley played by Amit Shah

Ed Raveley, an uprooted city boy, packed in his life as a corporate accountant a year ago to move to Devon and become a social worker. That's how he met his girlfriend Caroline Reasley, with whom he is enthralled. We see the loved-up pair early on in their relationship - things are moving quickly and he agrees to move in with her following Simon's death. He is kind and supportive - he encourages her to make amends with her dad, he wants a family and a place to call home.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Ross Pritchard played by Dylan Edwards

DC Ross Pritchard, late twenties, is the junior detective on Matthew's case. Ross dives into the investigation with glee – clearly, it's the most exciting thing to happen in the area for a while. He treads a fine line with Jen and the two often clash, but we see a softer and more home-bird side to Ross when we meet his wife and baby. His bravado hides the reality of a small-town guy who hasn't travelled far or seen much of the world, but it turns out he doesn't have the insular mentality to match.

INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE



INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE

How did you become involved in *The Long Call*?

"I had narrated the audiobook and heard afterwards that it was being commissioned by Silverprint Pictures as a TV series. I remember thinking at the time that, although Matthew and I were extremely different in personality and energy, there were many crossovers and experiential similarities. When they were originally casting, I was unavailable. Later, though, my commitments shifted and it became a possibility. I had a long Zoom call with Lee Haven Jones (Director) and Sam Jones (Casting Director) where I remember talking about said crossovers and registering their reactions as they realised how many coincidences between Matthew and I seemed to be mounting up. Perhaps those connections to the story helped, but of course, I still had to self tape an audition and then heard that they'd like me to do it."

The first of these crossovers is that both you and Matthew identify as gay. How liberating was it to play a character who shares your sexuality?

"Extremely. I've been wanting to play a character whose sexuality and emotional inner world is similar to my own and this felt like the right project to do so."

"A lot of what Matthew has experienced and continues to navigate in this piece is recent history for me. Acting is imaginative and creative and sometimes requires spending time in situations that you haven't necessarily experienced yourself or know about yet, that's what enables actors to play a range of parts beyond their own experience, that's the ideal anyhow. That said, I've been wanting to play a role that I knew from the inside out, a role that was close to me, that didn't involve total imagination but instead, drew on and expressed some of my own experiences."

INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE CONTINUED

Tell us about the experience of religion that you share with Matthew?

“The Long Call is partly about the collision between the modern world and a strict religious group, the fictionalised Barum Brethren. I was raised as an evangelical Christian, and before that, my parents and grandparents had themselves been devout members of the Brethren. Both my grandfathers were Elders in their respective churches. My parents moved away from that particular domination when they met, however the memories lived on in my wider family, as did some of the culture. I was able to use that knowledge and my own experience growing up in the evangelical movement in relation to Matthew. Parts of it were extremely similar; there were so many corresponding conversations and coincidences. I was able to ask my parents about many of the specifics regarding the Brethren. They were both brilliant sources of information. We spent hours talking, dissecting, reminiscing, telling stories. It’s quite a unique thing to be on the other side of religious devotion looking back at it.”

“In Matthew’s case, he had been ostracised by the Barum Brethren and his own mother, Dorothy, as they believe being gay is a sin and results in burning in the fires of hell. Matthew had to leave his family and everything he’d known behind as a young adult and is only returning now twenty years later.

“Though different, I have experienced my own version of that and so I understand how Matthew’s specific religious background can contribute to, compound and amplify the feelings of shame surrounding his sexuality and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles this creates in his struggle on the journey to a prideful existence.”

How would you describe the relationship between Matthew and his mother, Dorothy (Juliet Stevenson)?

“They are both stuck in a state of unexpressed turmoil – two people who cannot bring themselves to talk about the very issue that is destroying them; Matthew’s homosexuality. The Barum Brethren don’t express emotion, they are stoical. When these two characters are reunited in the story, they are worlds apart in ideology, beliefs and lifestyle. Matthew has spent twenty years living in the secular world, Dorothy is frozen in time, clinging to her religion. It is near impossible to reason with or change what someone faithfully believes to be true, to be fact, and Matthew knows that. Therefore, even though he perhaps longs for his mother’s acceptance, it feels a futile desire. Talking is an essential part of healing both for parents and queer children, but here, even with the little communicating they are able to withstand, they manage to hurt each other further.

INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE CONTINUED

“The scenes between Juliet Stevenson, who plays Dorothy, and I were very affecting for both of us, I think. I found myself very full of emotion when filming them. Sometimes you can’t help experiencing your own personal set of feelings around a scene; they may align perfectly with the character or contrast dramatically, both can be helpful. For Juliet, I think it was about the horror of rejecting your own child, and for me it was often just extremely close to home. In those moments, Matthew and I definitely crossed over, sometimes cathartic, sometimes uncomfortable. I felt very thankful, very lucky, to be working with Juliet. I’ve always found myself in awe when watching her performances, she’s incredible. She interrogates a scene forensically and treated both of these characters with such respect, empathy and sensitivity, it was inspiring.”

You grew up in Devon yourself – another of the connections to Matthew. How was it filming on home territory?

“It was nice to be filming somewhere that felt familiar and to know it so well. We used to go on day trips to North Devon when I was younger and I spent some summers surfing on the beaches there. Once I knew I was playing Matthew, my parents and I drove up there for the day, visiting the locations in the novel - Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, Crow Point. When we eventually filmed the opening scenes at Crow Point, my mum and dad came to set, it was a little full-circle moment.

“They’ve not been as involved in something I was working on before, I usually keep things pretty compartmentalised and I must say I felt proud to have them there. I’d spent lockdown living next to them in Devon and loved being back there. The older I get, the more I find myself wanting to spend time there.

“Ann’s settings, of course, are always so central to the story – whether it’s *Vera*, *Shetland* or this, and it’s always more than just the brochure version. In this case, yes, North Devon has the beaches, agriculture and stunning coastal views, but there’s also a darkness and edginess to the place. For me, the least interesting thing would be to just show a sun-drenched idyll when actually it’s a place of real contrasts.”

Is this your first role as a detective?

“There’s an element of the detective to Thomas Wayne, who I play in DC’s *Pennyworth*, he’s a CIA agent, so there are similarities, but a detective in a modern British drama is definitely a first. I could easily have felt a little daunted when acting with Martin Shaw as he’s famously played two beloved British TV detectives. I definitely had to park any feelings of intimidation, which Martin made all the more easy by being totally lovely and brilliant to work with. I loved acting with him. We’d get to a scene between Dennis and Matthew and I’d think ‘this will play itself.’

INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE CONTINUED

“He’s so good and there was something that happened when our characters encountered each other, I never had to think about the acting, everything would just come together.”

How was it leading such an illustrious cast?

“It could have been intimidating, but all the actors were open and warm and just such great company; Juliet, Anita, Martin, Neil, Pearl, Dylan etc. I think everyone cared for the story and we were just all so grateful to be back working after Covid. Anyway, I don’t think a single person leads something like this, I think it’s all an ensemble vibe. Lee set the tone, it was a very happy job.”

Describe the atmosphere on set?

“Surprisingly, it was a very funny set. In front of camera, the drama itself was pretty dark and intense—there’s a lot of pain in the piece—but on set, there was always laughter, a lot of levity. Maybe that’s essential on something like this, relief from all the seriousness. Also it was a cast of anecdote tellers, anecdotes a go go, which I love. Anita Dobson always made sure we were laughing between takes, she’s hilarious and our scenes were always so heavy.”

***The Long Call* is directed by Lee Haven Jones. Did it help that he’s also gay?**

“I loved working with Lee and would jump at the chance to do it again. He was an actor himself so he knows instinctively what’s going on and is a brilliant communicator. The fact that he’s also gay gave us a mutual shorthand and understanding of Matthew’s journey, of each other and of our own experiences. I felt very bonded with Lee even before filming began. We spent hours chatting about Matthew and this specific journey, which involved a lot of discussing our own experiences and talking about that stuff is a vulnerable thing to do. I knew we were coming from a place of mutual understanding which was great.”

How would you describe the relationship between Matthew and his husband Jonathan (played by Declan Bennett)?

“It’s a very loving and supportive relationship in which Matthew can be his true self, the only place where he can, in fact. Out in the rest of the world, he’s careful, contained and sometimes crippling self censoring, but with Jonathan, he can be himself, unguarded, unfiltered. He’s lighter, easier, less self conscious. The relationship isn’t free of difficulties, but they’re totally unified as a couple.”

INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALDRIDGE CONTINUED

“Often gay relationships on screen are depicted as tormented or focus on hyper sexuality, and there’s absolutely a place for that, but Jonathan and Matthew’s relationship is the certainty in this piece, which is rare in TV drama.”

“I know Declan, Lee and myself all felt a responsibility to portray these men and this relationship as authentically as possible, to see a version of what we know ourselves represented on screen and it’s exciting to be bringing that to a mainstream ITV audience.”

INTERVIEW WITH JULIET STEVENSON



INTERVIEW WITH JULIET STEVENSON

How did you become involved in *The Long Call*?

“My agent asked me to read the script with a view to playing Dorothy and, at first, I thought, “Oh, another murder mystery” but then, I immediately found myself getting pulled into the material, which is such a clever mix of thriller and psychological study. There were so many interesting, unconventional, unpredictable characters and they all have such complex relationships with one another. Also, I’m always drawn to playing quite extreme characters - and Dorothy is certainly one of those. She offered the chance to investigate a completely different way of living, being and thinking, which is often what I look for in a role. I put the script down after the last page and picked the phone up....I couldn’t wait to plunge in.”

Who is Dorothy?

“Dorothy is a woman who has given herself over entirely to the Barum Brethren. Perhaps, like many others who live a life of religious devotion, she needed structure in her life and the security of belonging to a small community who all share the same unquestioned, unnegotiated, unmediated values. She doesn’t doubt and she doesn’t challenge - and because the Barum Brethren is very isolated from the rest of the world she doesn’t need to.

“She accepts without question a life in which women are desexualised and subordinate to men, and believes entirely that come judgement day – or as they call it in the Brethren, ‘The Great Sweep’ - she and all members of the Brethren will be swept up to be at God’s right hand, while the rest of the world will burn in hell. The Brethren believe that high on the list of those who will be judged and punished are gay men - of which her son Matthew is one. Which is why 20 years before, when he came out to the community as a young gay man, he was forced to leave the Brethren and his own parents behind. Dorothy, then, has chosen her religion above her own child, which is about as remote from my understanding of motherhood as I could get. I could understand someone believing in a higher power, but I struggled with the idea of putting religion before your children.”

What were the biggest challenges of playing Dorothy?

“The scenes between her and Matthew – when he is expressing so much upset, pain and anger with Dorothy - were challenging for me. I guess I am a pretty tactile person and a demonstrative mother, but Dorothy has been cut off from her feelings, and the laws and restraints of her church have long messed with her instincts and her maternal impulses, so she can express very little openly.

INTERVIEW WITH JULIET STEVENSON CONTINUED

“When shooting these scenes it was sometimes hard not to cry, and I had to say, “Oh, sorry! Stop! Cut!” because I knew that tears would never be Dorothy’s way. I would have to take a quick break to realign myself inside her emotional and psychological framework, get back into her cage... Luckily, Lee is a wonderful director who started out as an actor, so he understood all this!

“Often in the script, she’s described as “being stuck” or “unable to speak”. My constant question was, “Does she understand her feelings but lack the vocabulary, or is she actually so cauterised emotionally that she doesn’t even know how she feels?””

How difficult was it to have to carry off Dorothy’s look on a daily basis during filming?

“I’m absolutely on board with the idea that there is no place for vanity in roles and, as a rule, I’d rather look *right* than look *good*. But I’ve got to say - playing Dorothy stretched those principles to the limit! I’d be staring at my tired face in the mirror in the make-up truck at 6am before filming and thinking, “Oh, surely, a bit of subtle mascara ?!” But it was, “Nope. Absolutely not!” And I’d have been cross with myself if I had been allowed to go down that road, because it would have looked wrong.

“The clothes, too, were pretty challenging - because, while the men in the Brethren are allowed to go around in jeans and T-shirts and perfectly ordinary clothes, the women are wearing a sort of medieval garb: long, bunchy skirts, sandals and socks, little headscarves and long hair right down their backs. It’s as if these grown women have been infantilised, they look outgrown little girls. They are also completely desexualised in ways that, of course, the men are not.

“It seemed very contradictory to me that the Brethren call themselves a community without hierarchy because they don’t have priests, for example. And yet the men make all the decisions. They have all the power and all the resources, while the women clean, cook and raise the children in a completely gender-conventional way. The men also insist on and expect complete obedience from their women, which is the opposite of equality isn’t it?”

You seem very well informed on the Brethren. Did you do a lot of research?

“I did as much research as I could in Covid conditions – i.e. without being able to actually visit living Brethren communities, which would have been the most illuminating thing. So I read everything and watched everything that I could.

INTERVIEW WITH JULIET STEVENSON CONTINUED

“I saw copious YouTube videos, many featuring people who’d left similar sects or religious communities, and who needed to talk about their lives there and how they coped with the modern world afterwards, never having been on a tube or a bus, or ordered a cup of coffee in a café, or watched a television programme. I also talked with people who had personal experience of living inside a community like that, and how they felt from the outside about their lives within, the pressure on them to conform, and also about the positive aspects of it – the lack of materialism, the disregard for wealth, the aspiration to equality, the pleasures of communal living, etc. It is not hard to see how attractive these qualities might appear to people in need of belonging, and of surrendering choice to rules, and escaping the personal by living collectively. It wasn’t my job as an actor to judge any of this, but simply to use the knowledge to discover who Dorothy was, and what was happening within her when her silences held her speechless in their grip.”

How was it coming back to work after lockdown?

“*The Long Call* was pretty much the first job for all of us after over a year in lockdown, and I had got to the point where I was very worried my industry would never recover.

“So, there was a real sense of excitement to be back on set, working on this terrific drama, in the company of such a lovely group of actors, with Ben Aldridge at the centre of it and the rest of us, unbelievably happy to be on the journey with him. There was a real atmosphere of low-key celebration to be back at work, and a sense that we were lucky to be there. There was gratitude for the return of so many things that we had previously taken for granted and then lost during lockdown. I know that working on *The Long Call* gave those things back to me in spades, and I hope I can hang on to that gratitude indefinitely.”

What do you have coming up next?

“I’ve been working on a new ten-part Netflix drama series – with a working title of *Tinkertown*. It’s based on the movie, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, which was directed by Nicholas Roeg and starred David Bowie as an alien man on earth to save his own planet from drought and dehydration. I play Mary Lou, the woman that Bowie’s character fell in love with in the original movie, but 40 years on. It’s a fantastic script and a thrilling project to be part of...very exciting indeed.”

INTERVIEW WITH PEARL MACKIE



INTERVIEW WITH PEARL MACKIE

Who is DS Jen Rafferty?

“Jen is a really interesting woman. She has so much drive, gumption and strength of character. She’s escaped a brutal marriage and come to North Devon with her two teenage children to make a fresh start. Essentially, she wants to give them a better life and show them that they deserve to exist without the constant threat of violence in the home. She’s an urban Londoner and, so, quite a fish out of water in rural Devon. But she’s also an adaptable person and a very intuitive detective. She lives for two things, her children and her work.”

In what way does her past influence the kind of detective she’s become?

“In *many* ways. After all, she’s been up close and personal, in her marriage, to someone who was very manipulative and charming but also horribly abusive. So, she’s got a real sense of people who are one thing on the surface, but are hiding something dark underneath. It makes her a better detective, because it has sharpened all her instincts. Sometimes it can make her a little headstrong and rather hard on people she thinks are even *potentially* abusive. But maybe that’s not such a bad thing. Don’t we need some police people to be like Jen? Her view is, “I know how it feels to be in a place of violence, and I know that’s not ok. And I don’t want that to happen to anyone else.”

What were the biggest challenges of playing Jen?

“I felt the responsibility of playing a survivor of domestic violence and of making it realistic. I wanted to show the ways in which Jen had dealt with it on a practical level but also how much she had buried very deeply and hadn’t dealt with at all. It’s work in progress for Jen that could take many years. The challenge was to show all those layers and not to produce a generalised or cliched picture of someone who has survived domestic violence. There is no such thing as a typical survivor, every person and every relationship is different. So, I did a lot of work on Jen’s back story to get a handle on how someone who appears to be so strong could have become a victim.

“The other big challenge was playing the mother of teenage children. My son in the drama was even taller than me! I’ve got several friends with babies and a goddaughter of 13 but that’s very different from being a mum on a day-to-day basis. I have zero experience of that.

“It was very important for me to get the dynamic right, especially between Jen and her daughter Ella (played by Melissandre St Hilaire). It’s a really close relationship and potentially more sisterly than anything because Jen was so young when she had her.

INTERVIEW WITH PEARL MACKIE CONTINUED

“Ella takes on a bit too much responsibility and has probably had to grow up a bit faster than she wanted to. Sometimes, it’s almost as if the roles are reversed between them.

“Both the actors who played my kids were super professional and we had a lovely time, both on and off set because Lee, our director, allowed us to meet up and get to know each other a bit before we even started filming. So, by the time the cameras rolled we were extremely comfortable with each other and it made it so much easier to get the dynamic of this young mother and her teenage children absolutely right.”

Describe the relationship between DS Jen Rafferty and DI Matthew Venn?

“When they first meet, they don’t seem to have very much in common at all. Matthew is very contained and serious - someone who struggles to talk about his feelings and experiences - while Jen is quite forthright and outspoken. So, initially, they clash a bit and rub each other up the wrong way. You wonder how they’re going to work together harmoniously. But what they realise through working together is that they have a lot more in common than they thought – including the way they use their past experiences and their intuition and skill to solve the murder. In time, they really start to enjoy both their similarities *and* their differences.

“You start to see the balance that they strike and how they complement each other. It’s lovely to see. They both learn from each other and it makes them better people and better detectives.”

And how was it playing opposite Ben Aldridge?

“A joy. I didn’t know Ben personally before, but I loved his work – including the fact that he was self-deprecating enough to play ‘The Arsehole Guy’ in *Fleabag*. “I thought, “Here’s someone who takes the work seriously, but not himself.” And I was definitely right.

“A lot of *The Long Call*, on screen, is quite dark and sad and that did lead at times to some gallows humour – especially with Ben because we found each other quite funny. We filmed the police station scenes for two weeks solid with Ben in every one of them and me in 95 percent. There were some very intense interview sequences and briefing scenes where both of us had to handle a lot of dialogue. Sometimes we did four or five of these scenes back-to-back and occasionally, out of sheer overload, we’d get giggly about the most ridiculous things. At one point one of us changed the word ‘chalet’ to ‘cottage’ and Lee, the director, picked us up on it. Then, for some reason, the next time we tried to do it we just couldn’t hold it together. Fortunately, the entire crew was laughing too. Sometimes you just have to be allowed to get it off your chest.”

INTERVIEW WITH PEARL MACKIE CONTINUED

Both Ben and you are members of the LGBTQ+ community. Did it help that you had this in common?

“It did and when we weren’t filming, we were able to have some lovely discussions and to share our experiences - Ben about his journey to being a proud gay man and me about coming out as bisexual. It brought us even closer together and we both felt really ‘seen’ by each other and by the drama and by the team making it, including Lee Haven Jones who is also gay. It felt very comfortable and harmonious to be so accepted within this ‘family’ that you make on set when you’re filming over a long period of time. And I think it really benefitted the work too.

“As members of the LGBTQ+ community, we were also both absolutely delighted to be part of a mainstream drama that was focusing on a gay man at the centre of a detective thriller. In this case, too, Matthew has a husband, and that relationship is portrayed in a beautiful and loving way. It feels as though it’s 100 percent time for us finally to be telling these ground-breaking stories.”

Were you similarly delighted that the role of Jen called for a mixed-heritage actress?

“Yes, although the role doesn’t focus on Jen’s race, it does feel important that when people – especially young people - look at a TV screen they are all able to see themselves represented and to see their own identity reflected back at them. It’s just saying to them, ‘You exist, I see you and you are important’. It’s exactly the kind of validation that young people - especially in marginalised communities – really need. When I was growing up, I rarely saw anyone on the screen who looked like me or reflected my life or had a real three-dimensional story to tell. So, to be a black woman who’s a lead detective in the police force now on a mainstream TV drama feels absolutely brilliant.”

Was playing a detective fun?

“So much fun. When I was growing up, I used to love shows like *The Bill* and when we were about 10, me and my cousin – who is really more like a sister – used to play cops and robbers and practice the arrest speech. It’s embarrassing to say it, but we actually used to read each other our rights! I was pretty excited when I thought I was going to be able to do it for real in *The Long Call*. I was like, “I’ve got this!” But then I discovered they’d changed the wording quite a lot since then. Absolutely gutted.”

INTERVIEW WITH PEARL MACKIE CONTINUED

Was filming of all the interior scenes in Bristol a trip down memory lane?

“Yes, because I’d been at university there before going onto drama school at Bristol Old Vic. It was quite surreal walking around the places where I’d spent five very vivid and sometimes challenging years of my life. I was offered a flat to stay in during filming which was quite near to The Old Vic and my old stomping ground, but I thought it would be better for my mindset to be somewhere totally different. In a way, although there was so much I’d loved about Bristol, I didn’t want to return to those days where there was so much grappling with who I was and what I wanted to be and how I was going to get there. Had I known back then how the career would have gone, including being cast as Bill Potts, Dr Who’s companion when Peter Capaldi was in the role, and a real game changer for me, I’d have been much more at peace with myself. There was an element of returning now to Bristol to film *The Long Call* where, without wanting to sound arrogant, I did feel really proud of myself for how far I’d come. I’d really have liked that girl back then to see me now.”

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SHAW



INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SHAW

How did you become involved in *The Long Call*?

“My agent has always had an extremely high regard for the Director Lee Haven Jones and the Executive Producer Kate Bartlett and had been talking to me about really wanting to put me together with them. When *The Long Call* came up he called me, almost apologetically because Dennis Stephenson was, essentially, a supporting role, which is not something I have done before. I would be starring in a play in the West End at the same time and so it was going to take a lot of juggling in terms of my time too. But after I read the script and had communication with Lee and Kate it became a no-brainer. I really, really wanted to play this role. And, as it turned out, it was one of the happiest experiences I’ve had.”

And what made it so happy?

“Many things. I’ve been doing this job for well over 50 years and my experience has always been that the overall atmosphere on the production comes down from the people at the top. And if those people are focused on excellence and well-being as Kate and Lee were, it just infiltrates the entire project. Another truth for me is that when women are in charge the experience and the end product are just, well, better.

“And here, aside from Kate, we had Angie Daniell, the Producer, Kelly Jones the script writer, Ann Cleeves the original author. It was like a surge of wonderful female energy.

“Aside from that, there was the joy of working with Ben Aldridge who led the company so well, and with the entire cast, including Juliet Stevenson who I’d last worked with 30 years ago and who I was able to pick up with as though it had been yesterday. And, of course, there was the role too. Dennis was exactly the kind of interesting character that I love to play.”

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SHAW CONTINUED

Who is Dennis?

“Dennis is the leader of a religious cult known in our story as the Barum Brethren. It’s a fictitious cult although, in reality, there are various sects of the Brethren that exist today in the UK and further afield. They live by teachings of the Bible in a very absolute kind of way. They run along the principle of removing themselves from modern society and avoiding what they consider to be the worst things of that society - from mobile phones to televisions.

“Basically, I believe that Dennis is a good man although he is utterly fixated with the world view of the Brethren and with the continuation of the sect. I think he started with the best intentions, but as often happens with leaders of religious cults his ego now dominates and threatens to destroy everything.

“I don’t see him, though, in terms of black and white. He’s a complex character and the challenge was to portray those complexities and to get people wondering what Dennis is all about.

“There’s nothing more boring for an audience than knowing everything about a character in the first ten minutes, so my aim was to have them constantly shifting their view. One minute you think you have him sussed, the next, you’re not so sure.”

How would you describe the relationship between Dennis and his wife, Grace (Anita Dobson)?

“Dennis is very controlling. But then it’s the nature of extreme religions to be male- dominated, and Dennis and Grace exist in a world where male dominance has a sense of righteousness attached to it that makes it seem the correct way of things. It’s accepted as something that God intended because, of course, God is a man and Jesus was a man. So, anything that we do as men has got a religious, righteous force behind it. There are certainly religions out there that are even more oppressive and cruel than this one but, at the same time, the Brethren *is* about women having a subservient role which they accept and go along happily with. In the case of Dennis and Grace, though, the control has become so great that the pressure is building to unbearable levels. You can’t help predicting that bad things could happen as a result.”

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SHAW CONTINUED

What was it like working with Anita Dobson who plays Grace?

“It was wonderful. On screen we had some extremely difficult scenes together because of the dark nature of that relationship and you could easily have carried the atmosphere of those scenes around with you. But the great thing about Anita is that she also has this extraordinary sense of mischief so that, having given a splendid, nuanced and often very disturbing performance on screen, she could then snap out of immediately when the cameras stopped rolling. We had a lot of laughs off camera and a really funny time together.”

Did you do any research into the Brethren?

“Yes, I did, although It’s quite difficult to research the Brethren because, by its very nature, it’s a closed society. I did watch a documentary about the Plymouth Brethren that Lee recommended with the caveat that, because it had been made by the Brethren themselves it wasn’t likely to show the darker side. It was helpful though and Kelly’s script supplied the rest.”

You have a mystical side yourself as a long-time devotee of Charan Singh and the Sant Mat religion. Did that help when playing Dennis?

“Not really. The two of us and our beliefs are very different. While both Dennis and I do both believe in a higher power, the path I follow is all about discriminating between the good and the bad that we can do as human beings. At his core, Dennis has religious devotion but he lacks the discrimination to put it into practice in a way that doesn’t hurt people. That would be the reverse, hopefully, of what I aim to be.”

What was the biggest challenge of the role?

“The most challenging day was when I had to be up to my waist in a very cold sea in North Devon for a scene in which Dennis is baptising somebody into the Barum Brethren. It was blowing a gale, with torrential rain for the most part, with the occasional ten minutes of sunshine. What represents 30 seconds on screen took maybe four hours of filming, by which time I was literally shaking all over with cold. Maybe it’s to do with ego or a complete unwillingness to accept my limitations but every time Lee said to me, ‘Do you think you’ve got one more take in you?’ I’d be like, ‘Yeah, come on. Let’s go!’. It was uncomfortable but also enjoyable and exhilarating. In those situations, I just see myself as a bit invincible. Nothing can hold me back.”

INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN SHAW CONTINUED

How was it filming *The Long Call* through the pandemic?

“Filming under strict Covid restrictions was a whole new experience for all of us. We all had to do PCR tests - the ones that get sent to the laboratory - two days before being on set and every day we had to fill out a questionnaire before we could get a pass to get on location. Then, when you arrived, there would be someone in a mask to take your temperature with one of those thermometers they aim at your head. It was pretty full on.

“I have deep respect for all the crew because they had to wear masks all day, come rain or shine and I don’t think I could have done that. It was strange occasionally to see one of them outside without a mask on. You’d think, ‘Oh, that’s what you look like!’”

Did you enjoy filming in North Devon?

“Yes, very much although we were in Bristol for a large part of the time because it was where all the interior scenes were filmed. The last three weeks though were in North Devon which viewers will be able to see is a truly stunning part of our country.”

You famously played George Gently in the British cop show, *Inspector George Gently*. How does *The Long Call* compare?

“Very favourably and, for me, it moves the genre on. On the one hand, *The Long Call* is a police procedural but it also has so many other levels and is a rich character driven piece too. It poses questions about modern society and consumerism, it tackles the theme of female emancipation, it looks at relationships and the rejection of someone who has been bold enough and brave enough to announce their sexuality within a society in which it’s simply not allowed. So, there is a lot of emotion and complex social issues being explored here as well as the detective format. It was one of the things about the experience that excited me most.”

INTERVIEW WITH ANITA DOBSON



INTERVIEW WITH ANITA DOBSON

How did you become involved in *The Long Call*?

“My agent let me know that there was a project coming up that might work out for me. I got the script and started reading it and thought that if I *was* offered the role of Grace it would be quite unusual casting. Then, as I read on, I came to see the logic more and more and by the end of that script, I was like, ‘sign me up, immediately!’. It felt like a long time before the role was officially offered to me, although, funnily enough, when I turned up for my costume fitting, the designer, who I’d worked with before, pointed to the rail and said, ‘There’s all your costumes’. She knew my size already and she’d known all along that I’d be playing Grace.”

Who is Grace and in what way would it have been unusual casting?

“Well, I’ve played some very feisty characters in my time, whereas Grace is a sad, wretched woman whose life has dribbled away from her. She is so beaten down and repressed and, possibly, chronically abused – not physically, but mentally - by her husband, Dennis, that she doesn’t really know how she even feels about anything and she doesn’t know how to form proper relationships because she’s never had the opportunity to do so.

“It was fascinating to me because, if I hadn’t been an actress, I’d have wanted to be a therapist and I love getting inside people’s heads. With Grace, all those endless years of being without a proper voice, without being able to express yourself either verbally or physically - I mean, those clothes, for a start! - it does something to a person.

“Grace and I are very different kinds of women, with very different lives and yet I felt a deep empathy for her, in fact, I fell completely and utterly in love with her and I found I could access her very quickly. I think there are a lot of women out there who will identify with her too. After all, as a woman, you don’t have to be part of a repressive, evangelical community to feel trapped, unhappy, stuck in limbo and unable to express yourself. I found myself protecting Grace very strongly and, if I could, I’d have grabbed hold of her and said, ‘It’s alright. We’ll find a way through it.’”

INTERVIEW WITH ANITA DOBSON CONTINUED

How much did the costumes help you to find Grace?

“A lot. And I have to be honest and say that I actually relished those costumes, even the socks and sandals! And I LOVED my long grey wig. Together they gave me the ability to immerse myself completely in the character. It was joyful, but also quite scary to look so different and I even sent my husband, Brian (May) a picture on the first day, telling him to delete it immediately! He said, ‘Oh, no, I quite like it. She’s sweet.’ And I said, ‘Yes, but it’s definitely not how you’re used to seeing me’.”

How easy was it to leave Grace behind at the end of filming?

“In some ways, it was very easy and very necessary because if you carried her around with you and remained in her head after filming a scene it would be quite depressing. So, I felt duty bound, not just personally, but for everyone around me to find the bright side of myself the moment Lee, our director, said ‘cut’. When you do that, it makes it easier to come back and dive into the gloomy morass of feelings necessary for playing Grace. There are a lot of sad and tragic elements to the story but, off screen, we honestly had a lot of fun.

“In other ways, though, Grace did stay with me and she taught me a lot: most important, never judge someone purely on what you see. Sometimes you have to look beyond the façade and the barriers that they’ve put up to protect themselves. You have to say to yourself, ‘wait a minute and don’t jump to conclusions about someone.’

“She also rubbed off on me in unconscious ways. Shortly after filming, Brian and I were having Sunday lunch with a close friend and I had adopted Grace so wholly that I was kind of enjoying the no make up look. So, I just pulled my hair back, didn’t bother with the jewellery or the lipstick and mascara. And Brian was like, “What’s all that about?” I suppose I just felt I didn’t have to bother or make any big effort. And that was really Grace talking.”

INTERVIEW WITH ANITA DOBSON CONTINUED

How was it working with Martin Shaw?

“Ah Martin, I told him he wasn’t the first Dennis I’d encountered! (remember Dirty Den on *EastEnders*). But, seriously, he was lovely and extremely easy to get on with and most important, of all, as an actor I felt extremely safe with him. Martin is playing someone who believes that he is being loving in his own way, but Grace can’t even look him in the eye. She is completely controlled by him. The scenes between us were tough but, because we tended to think alike, and we trusted each other we were able and willing to just run with it and to find the truth in those scenes. It was actually rather wonderful.”

Did you do much research into the Brethren?

“Well, the Barum Brethren, is a fictitious cult, made up by Ann Cleeves for the novel, but it amazed me to learn that there are, in fact, lots of real-life similar Brethren communities existing all over the place. I hadn’t known anything about them, but I started to dig around a bit and to talk to various people about the Brethren. Strangely, I discovered people who I thought I knew really well had connections to it – either they had personal experience or their parents or grandparents or aunts or uncles had been in the Brethren. It was almost like lifting the corner of a carpet and peaking underneath. Then giving a little shriek and dropping it again.

“It was enlightening, fascinating and a real privilege to be able to disappear into a world that was so alien to my own existence. Honestly, you can’t imagine that people - and especially the women - are living these kind of lives that are so disconnected from the modern world. I resisted the temptation, though, of doing too much research because I wanted to come to *The Long Call* as fresh as possible and to find my own Grace.”

How was it filming in North Devon?

“We filmed all the interior scenes in Bristol and moved to North Devon for the last three weeks for the exterior scenes and it was quite an eye-opener because I’d never been there before. The landscapes are just stunning - and quite different, according to the weather. On my first day of filming in Devon I was doing a scene with lovely Iona Anderson who plays Rosa, and we were sitting on a little outcrop of rocks looking out to sea. It was a rainy day and the landscape was so dark and rugged with the sea rolling in and pounding against the rocks. So dramatic. Other times the sun shone, and the landscape was transformed. I thanked my lucky stars every day that I was not only in such a beautiful place but filming in it and still doing the job I love. What an absolute privilege.”

INTERVIEW WITH ANITA DOBSON CONTINUED

And what was the biggest challenge of the role?

“Making sure my wig stayed on, which was more difficult than it sounds! But, seriously, it’s the same challenge I have, whatever the role, which is to be as good as I can be, to deliver exactly what the director, the writers and the producers want and to do it as quickly as possible. It helped so much that we had such amazing people in charge, from the producers to Lee our incredible director who knew exactly how to get the very best performance out of everybody and to make it such a happy occasion at the same time. I’ve had a lot of lovely jobs and worked with some wonderful people, but this one is right up there. There are a few that will be forever embedded in the memory and this is definitely one of them and to get it now at this stage in my career was a double whammy.”



INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEE HAVEN JONES

How did you become involved in *The Long Call*?

"I've worked with the team at Silverprint Pictures on other Ann Cleeves adapted dramas - directing episodes of both *Vera* and *Shetland*. In fact, thanks to Ann I've paid my mortgage for the last several years, for which I thanked her personally when she came on set for *The Long Call*! Joking aside, when I was asked if I'd direct *this* drama it seemed like the perfect project: it has all the qualities that Ann's original work always offers - the procedural mystery has you on the edge of your seat, the setting, in this case, North Devon is vividly part of the story and the lead character, DI Matthew Venn is incredibly compelling to watch. Importantly, for me, too, beneath what is on one level a good solid detective story there are so many layers of emotion being experienced by all the characters.

"At the virtual cast read through I spoke about the drama's appeal to me and why I wanted to direct it. Really, it came down to two main things: the first was that the main character, happens to be a gay detective, which I think is a first for British television. And as a gay man myself I was delighted to be sent something that was catapulting the gay experience into the public imagination.

"The second was that *The Long Call* is full of people trying to find their voice and their place in the world – from Matthew attempting to communicate and reconnect with a mother who rejected him for being gay 20 years before, to almost every other character in the story. They're all struggling to express their feelings, all unsure of where exactly they belong. I knew I wanted to direct this drama as soon as I had read Kelly Jones's script because it encapsulates all of this beautifully."

How did you want the gay element of the story to be portrayed?

"I didn't want to direct a 'gay drama' as such and this was never going to be *It's A Sin*. Although I'm an admirer of that drama, I wanted something here that would project a positive spin on a gay relationship and wasn't about HIV or promiscuity or emotional breakdown (often the fare of gay dramas). So at the heart of *The Long Call* you have Matthew and his husband, Jonathan who have a supportive, loving, wholesome gay relationship. They have their ups and down on their journey but, basically, they are a normal, married couple who just happen to be gay and that felt exciting to me."

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEE HAVEN JONES CONTINUED

Were you also attracted by the contrasting worlds that the characters inhabit?

“Very much so. As a director you try to find the idea that lies at the heart of the drama so you can hang your vision on it. For me, it was the stark contrast between the characters and the environments in which they live. North Devon itself is a place of contrasts – you have the extremely flat landscape around Barnstaple, where, in our story, members of the Barum Brethren live in a community that’s turned its back on the modern world, and then you have the incredible craggy coastline around Ilfracombe, which is where most of the worldly characters live. One world is dark, the other suffused with light. But it’s when you rub two contrasting things together that sparks begin to fly. It’s when the drama gets really interesting.”

North Devon is a character in *The Long Call*. How did you want it to look on screen and how did you achieve it?

“On any project I start by asking myself two questions: where is the piece set? And how has this place been represented in art? Then, I become a kind of art historian, throwing a mood board together of various representations of that landscape ancient and modern.

“This time, I looked at the work of J.M.W Turner and to some of his contemporaries like Thomas Girtton and Albert Goodwin. I also looked at the work of David Bomberg – a post-impressionist landscape painter. I took inspiration, too, from the vintage travel posters of Harry Riley and from John Hinde who produced a famous series of postcard photographs for Butlins holiday camps in the late sixties. Then I looked at the contemporary photographs of Simon Roberts and Martin Parr. What linked them all was the amazing use of light and colour and I wanted to replicate that in *The Long Call*.”

Was that desire for bold colour a reaction to the look of the Scandi Noir thriller?

“For the last decade or so Scandi Noir has invented and dominated a whole genre of cop shows. I’m a fan of them, of course. But, for *The Long Call*, I wanted to move away a bit and to articulate a new vision for the thriller genre that has a different kind of form and composition from Scandi Noir. And the first place to start, of course, was with colour.”

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEE HAVEN JONES CONTINUED

How was it working with such a prestigious cast?

“As a director you dare to dream you can fill every part with your first choice and on *The Long Call*, we got our wish list - from icons like Juliet Stevenson, who I idolised as a young man, nuanced and brilliantly experienced actors like Martin Shaw, Neil Morrissey and Anita Dobson, to young actresses like Pearl Mackie who earned her stripes on *Dr Who* and Iona Anderson, who came fresh from drama school to play Rosa, and stunned us with her performance.

“At the very centre of it all is our protagonist, DI Matthew Venn. Strangely, I still have a note on my phone from October 2020, before we’d started casting. It has two words on it – *Ben Aldridge*. At first, he wasn’t available, then two months later he suddenly was. No actor was more perfect for that role. Dare to dream, right?”

The cast admire you, too, and call you The Actor’s Director. Does it help that you’ve also been a successful actor?

“They took the mickey mercilessly when I kept jokingly referring to my ‘Hamlet Reviews’. But, seriously, I do think it puts actors’ minds at ease if you’ve been there yourself. You’ve done it. You’ve suffered. And there’s nothing I’d ask them to do that I wouldn’t expect from myself.

“So, hopefully, they felt I had sensitivity and understanding and that the whole process felt very collaborative.”

Did you sympathise with Juliet and Anita over the Barum Brethren costume and make up issue?

“I did! Before filming her scenes, Juliet would circle her make-up free face and say, ‘You see this, Lee? This is for you!’ After the initial costume fitting, too, I was sent photos of the two of them in full dowdy garb, including these incredible grey wigs topped off by a headscarf. I turned to our producer Angie Daniell and said, ‘Oh God. What have we done? Have we made the right decision?’ But, actually, the whole USP of the piece is that these women inhabit a world that’s completely strange to modern sensibility and I think that people will respond to that otherness and be fascinated by it. Hats off to them both though. You couldn’t play these roles with even a shred of vanity.”

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEE HAVEN JONES CONTINUED

Did you do a lot of research into similar religious communities?

"I did, although it's difficult to research the Brethren because it's a closed community. But I looked at various religious cults – including the Amish and Orthodox Jewish communities - and how they are visually represented as well as reading some incredible written accounts of people who have left The Plymouth Brethren – although, of course, our drama focuses on the fictitious Barum Brethren.

"Research material was a bit thin on the ground, but then we're not making a documentary which frees you up to invent to a certain extent. The great thing about creative people – actors, writers, directors – it's that they're rather marvellous at inventing."

Was it enjoyable to have so many talented women involved in the making of *The Long Call*?

"Yes, and it's not often that you can say that the Executive Producer, Screenwriter, Producer, Author and First Assistant Director are all women. For me, personally, it was a joy because I love working with women. They seem to create a very different and very collaborative vibe.

"I find nothing more off-putting than a film set when it's full of men. There again, I'm gay. I'm an actor. I'm not your typical alpha male director."

What was the highlight of the experience?

"There were so many, but I think the penultimate week when we filmed all of the scenes at Matthew and Jonathan's house on location in Appledore in Devon were the most satisfying and delightful seven days we could have imagined. There was such a sense of liberation, freedom and respect for each other and for the story we were telling. There was so much openness and honesty and we had a lot of fun. It's a week I'll remember forever."



INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KATE BARTLETT

Silverprint Pictures have adapted other Ann Cleeves novels, *Vera*, *Shetland* and now *The Long Call*. What makes this author's work so special?

"Ann is a great storyteller whose books are bursting with atmosphere and with characters who you feel compelled to spend time with. Her sense of place, across all the books, is astonishing as she writes about places she knows intimately. She lives in Northumberland, where *Vera* is set, met her husband in Shetland and subsequently lived there for a while, and she grew up in North Devon, which is the backdrop for *The Long Call*.

"Her protagonists, too, whether it's the eponymous Vera, or Jimmy Perez in *Shetland* or DI Matthew Venn in *The Long Call*, are all extraordinary in their own way – flawed, brilliant, intriguing. When optioning books for adaptation, one of the deciding factors has to be a magnetic lead character who will transfer brilliantly to screen. When we read *The Long Call*, Matthew just leapt off the page again and again.

"We're extremely fortunate that Ann has always trusted us to get on with adapting her work and understands that sometimes the demands of storytelling on screen differ to those of novel writing. There is no, 'You can't do this, and you can't change that.' So, it's a really lovely working relationship."

In what ways does this feel different to previous Ann Cleeves adaptations?

"The book itself felt like an evolution of Ann's work but we were also extremely keen that this series felt very different in flavour to both *Vera* and *Shetland* and gave the audience something distinct. We wanted to make a four part 'event drama' that was underpinned by a murder mystery, but which was, actually, more about the emotional and psychological journey that both Matthew and so many of the other characters are on.

"There are many big themes beyond the thriller element too. *The Long Call* is about belonging, community, family, religion, and finding a place that you can call home. It's about dealing with the pain and rejection of your past and finding redemption in the present."

Is this the first time that a British thriller has featured a lead detective who happens to be gay?

"Well, I certainly can't think of others and yet why shouldn't the protagonist be gay? Still, what we wanted to avoid saying was 'Matthew Venn; GAY detective.' It's more about presenting a character who has come back to Devon - the place where he was rejected for his sexuality by his mother and by the religious community he grew up in and how he deals with the fallout from that rejection."

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KATE BARTLETT CONTINUED

“So being gay is important to his experience, but it’s not the absolute defining thing about him. He is married to Jonathan and I love the fact that we are showing a happily functioning couple in a very normal relationship that happens to be gay.

“Ben Aldridge who plays Matthew is gay and Lee Haven Jones, the director, is also gay and that was a conscious decision for this show. Both of them were our absolute first choice for many reasons, including the fact that they were able to bring so much honesty, understanding, knowledge and emotion to everything that we did. But what mattered most, I think, to them and to us, was to take the opportunity to represent a gay relationship in a primetime TV drama which was stable, grounded and loving but didn’t deny some of the difficulties that Matthew and Jonathan had had to overcome.”

Ben Aldridge had other connections to the role too.

“Yes, not only did he also grow up in Devon, his parents had been members of the Plymouth Brethren when he was a child, although they left when he was still young. I must stress that our story is not about the Plymouth Brethren – it’s about the fictitious Barum Brethren. But let’s just say that his insights into the closed world of the Brethren - and those of his parents who I know he talked to a lot – were invaluable. In so many ways Ben was the perfect Matthew.”

What makes the Brethren such a good subject for drama?

“The fact that that the viewer almost certainly won’t have seen it before makes it pretty alluring. Closed societies are always fascinating subjects and so little is known about the Brethren. What we were mindful of, though, was not saying, “They are bad, and that’s the end of it.” It’s much more nuanced than that because, actually, this is also a world where there is a strong sense of community and support and belonging. For a lot of people, their religion is huge and in those communities it’s your life. So, as with the representation of any community, we wanted to show the good as well as the more difficult aspects and to do it with balance and respect.”

How did you show the stark contrast between the Brethren and what they term ‘The Worldly’ folk outside?

“Lee, our director, shared our ambition to present those two worlds in very different ways visually. Aside from the obvious costumes and look of the Brethren women - the long hair, the modest clothing, the socks and sandals, the headscarves – the world they inhabit was very pulled back, sparse, minimalistic, partly because they reject so many of life’s modern conveniences. The Worldly, on the other hand, live in a colourful and much more chaotic kind of environment with 21st century life around them. The visuals and colour palette in *The Long Call* very clearly show that.”

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KATE BARTLETT CONTINUED

Was it important that every character in the story had an arc?

“Yes, absolutely. We wanted a proper emotional journey for ALL the characters. So, we spent a lot of time asking what their back stories were and how that would impact their forward stories, especially when you have a cast of this calibre coming on board. All of them definitely have their own arc within the story and that was one of the things that was so tremendous about Kelly Jones’s scripts.”

You must have been delighted to land this particular cast?

“I was thrilled. It’s a phenomenal cast. Aside from having Ben Aldridge in the lead role, it was beyond our expectations that actors like Juliet Stevenson, Martin Shaw, Anita Dobson and Neil Morrissey would come and do what are essentially guest roles or that the cast would include Pearl Mackie, Alan Williams and Sarah Gordy. Sometimes you make a show and it just comes together on the casting and I feel that this is one of those shows where we could not have asked for a more perfect cast.”

Sarah Gordy plays Lucy – who has Downs Syndrome. How important is it to represent characters with disability in modern drama?

“It is incredibly important that we reflect the whole of society on screen. Why should anyone be excluded? In this case, Lucy comes straight from the pages of Ann’s book, she is very much a character in *The Long Call*, and we were thrilled when Sarah Gordy came on board to play her because she is absolutely brilliant. For me, some of the best scenes in the drama are between Lucy and her father (played by Alan Williams) where you can see that, basically, here is a father, like any other, who is worried about his daughter and her future. At the read through, there was a final scene between them where he says, ‘When I’m gone, who’ll look after you?’ And her reply is “Me. Dad. *Me*. It was intensely moving and even more so in the finished drama. It’s all about parents and children again – a theme that runs right through the drama.”

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER KATE BARTLETT CONTINUED

Could DI Matthew Venn come back for another four-part 'event drama'?

“Yes, I’d love to make more as Matthew Venn is such a compelling and relatable character with so much more to explore. Not only will he lead us into captivating new crime stories but his personal journey is so intriguing and sympathetic. The complicated relationship between him and his mother will continue and the struggle between them over his sexuality has so much further to go. Additionally, his story reflects so many other rich universal themes and emotions that we cannot wait to take Matthew further on his journey.”



SYNOPSIS | EPISODE ONE

A body is found on a beach in North Devon. A man with the tattoo of an albatross around his neck; he's been stabbed to death. DI Matthew Venn and his team, DS Jen Rafferty and DC Ross Pritchard, search for a way into a case that has no witnesses, no forensics and no motive. Matthew is also dealing with the recent death of his father and the complications of being thrust back into a community he was forced to leave. As he tries to make a new home with his husband, his mother, a strict member of the Christian Brethren community, refuses to put the past behind them after years of estrangement. It's a painful new beginning for Matthew; his husband, Jonathan, is keen to support him but Matthew is determined not to allow the past to distract him from the investigation.

The Detectives must establish how a man with very few connections to the area ended up brutally killed. Putting the pieces of the victim's life together exposes unlikely coincidences and shines a spotlight on a group unwittingly bound together by secrets that have long been buried. Will Matthew and his team be able to convince certain people to talk?

Matthew is also pulled further back into the Brethren community, at first, by the surprising warmth of Church Elder Dennis Stephenson and his timid wife Grace, and then by a shocking and unexpected turn in the case. Matthew finds himself thrust back into the religious community that rejected him, whilst attempting to confront an unresolved past that he, in truth, has never been able to let go of.



CHARCTER & CAST CREDITS | EPISODE ONE

DI Matthew Venn.....	BEN ALDRIDGE
Dorothy Venn.....	JULIET STEVENSON
DS Jen Rafferty.....	PEARL MACKIE
Jonathan Venn.....	DECLAN BENNETT
Dennis Stephenson.....	MARTIN SHAW
Grace Stephenson.....	ANITA DOBSON
Christopher Reasley.....	NEIL MORRISSEY
Caroline Reasley.....	SIOBHÁN CULLEN
Gaby Chadwell.....	AOIFE HINDS
Ed Raveley.....	AMIT SHAH
DC Ross Pritchard.....	DYLAN EDWARDS
Maurice Craddle.....	ALAN WILLIAMS
Lucy Craddle.....	SARAH GORDY
Rosa Shapland.....	IONA ANDERSON
Ruth Shapland.....	NIA GWYNNE
Simon Walden.....	LUKE IRELAND

CHARCTER & CAST CREDITS | EPISODE ONE CONTINUED

Alfie.....	JOHN-PAUL MCLEOD
WPC Becky.....	SUSANNAH EDGLEY
Will Strensham.....	KEVIN JOHNSON
Bryony Chorley.....	JENNY PLATT
Rich Chorley.....	CHARLIE ANSON
PC Callum.....	NIGEL ALLEN
Ella Rafferty.....	MELISSANDRE ST.HILAIRE
Ben Rafferty.....	CAMERON HOWITT
Willy.....	WILLY HUDSON
Dr Marrion Barclay.....	ALICE BARCLAY
Melanie.....	LIZZIE STABLES
Roxanne.....	ANNETTE CHOWN



PRODUCTION CREDITS | EPISODE ONE

Executive Producers.....KATE BARTLETT
.....KELLY JONES
Writer.....KELLY JONES
Director.....LEE HAVEN JONES
Producer.....ANGIE DANIELL
Director of Photography.....BJORN BRATBERG
Line Producer.....REBECCA CALLAS
Script Supervisor.....LOWRI REES-OWEN
Casting Director.....SAM JONES
Costume Designer.....REBECCA DUNCAN
Make-up & Hair Designer.....MARCUS WHITNEY
Editor.....DAVID FISHER
Composer.....SAMUEL SIM
Production Designer.....STEPHEN CAMPBELL
Art Director.....JOANNA PEARCE
Props Master.....MASS HARRIS
First Assistant Director.....ROSALIND HOWES
Production Co-ordinator.....INGRID LITMAN

AUTHOR ANN CLEEVES AND LEAD ACTOR BEN ALDRIDGE



AUTHOR ANN CLEEVES

Ann Cleeves is the author of over thirty critically acclaimed novels and is translated into as many languages. She is the creator of popular detectives Vera Stanhope and Jimmy Perez who can be found on television in ITV's *Vera* and BBC One's *Shetland*. The TV series and the books they are based on have become international sensations, capturing the minds of millions worldwide.

The Heron's Cry is the second book in her bestselling *Two Rivers* series featuring Detective Inspector Matthew Venn.

Ann moved to North Devon when she was 11 years old. Before then the family lived in a tiny village, and as the headmaster's daughter she always felt like the outsider at school. But in Barnstaple, Ann found a real home. She made life-long friends and fell in love with the beautiful North Devon coast, which still has a very special place in her heart. She dropped out of university and quite by chance, was taken on as assistant cook in the Fair Isle bird observatory in Shetland. She met her ornithologist husband there. Soon after, the couple moved to Hilbre, a tidal island nature reserve and Ann took up writing to occupy her time. Thus began Ann Cleeves' career in crime fiction.

It took a long time to achieve commercial success, however, and Ann had a number of day jobs, which fed into the novels. She worked as a probation officer, a playgroup leader, a youth worker and even sold flights for British Airways! Eventually, she found her perfect role as reader development officer in a public library, and continued working there until 2006, when *Raven Black* won the CWA Gold Dagger.

In 2017 Ann was awarded the highest accolade in crime writing, the CWA Diamond Dagger. The award recognises authors whose crime writing careers have been marked by sustained excellence, and who have made a significant contribution to the genre. She is a member of 'Murder Squad', working with other British northern writers to promote crime fiction.

Ann is also a passionate champion for libraries and was a National Libraries Day Ambassador in 2016. Her new 'Reading Coaches' project, providing support for health and wellbeing in communities, launched in the North East this summer.

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