

Adele Paul (P.A.).

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Adele Paul was Pennant Roberts' P.A. during the second series of *Survivors*. In this interview she describes her work and the general flavour of the series.

How did Adele become a P.A.? "My boyfriend at the time was working in television while I was a secretary in a film company. I didn't know that you made television productions! As far as I was concerned there was a machine in the corner of the room which you switched on and a programme came out! Anyway, I thought that the idea sounded fun and I went to the BBC just as BBC 2 was starting up, although everyone had warned me that you were made to work in radio for a long time followed by hum-drum jobs in television before you could do television production. I started out on children's programmes and I did the production course after five or six months. It was exciting work, and I think that my sister who is a teacher still bears a grudge! If you're single it's a wonderful and glamorous life. It wouldn't suit me now as an old married person with children. For example, sometimes you might be filming at Acton Gasworks at two o'clock in the morning with snow up to your bum which wasn't much fun, but then we did have three months on Cyprus doing *The Regiment*."

How did Adele come to work with Pennant Roberts on *Survivors*? "The woman who allocated the teams, Betty Stewart, knew that I worked very well with Pennant. I did his first shows, *Softly Softly*, and I worked with him a lot on *Doomwatch* and *The Regiment*. I think that Betty automatically put me on Pennant's shows unless one of us was unavailable. *Doomwatch* was the most incredible series and got terrific ratings, the post bags were full every week! I worked right through the series and loved it. It looks dated now because it was topical and up to date, at the cutting edge in fact.

For drama series, every episode would last fifty minutes. It would take about six weeks of pre-production, rehearsals, taping and editing. Where possible people would work through on one series although sometimes you would do one programme here and another there. Each director would have his own team. He would have three people working with him, one of whom was the P.A.. There was always some confusion over the terminology, because the P.A. could either mean me as the continuity script girl cum secretary cum general dog's body, or it could be the floor manager. I was the P.A. who did the continuity, i.e., making sure that it all matched."

So what were the principal duties of a P.A.? "I was supposed to help make sure that the script that got written was the one that got recorded. So I would have to check as the episode was being made that continuity was maintained. You can have disastrous things go wrong sometimes. I worked on *Troubleshooters* and we were very pushed for time while recording the very last scene. One of the actors accidentally transposed the distance a man was trapped underground by the length of time, and it just made nonsense of the script. It would have cost thousands in sheer man-hours and heartbreak to go back and do it again, but that is what would have happened if no one had noticed the mistake. Fortunately I and an actor asleep in the gallery behind me had noticed the mistake. Visual continuity is also an important task.

"The second series of *Survivors* was made at Callow Hill in Herefordshire. During taping it was my job to call the shots, telling the cameramen which shot we were on so that they knew when to hold steady and when to go for the next shot on the camera script. Pennant used to write out the shots that he wanted on the transcript and I would type them in. Typing a camera-script is one of the most boring things you can do in this life, especially as we only had ancient manual typewriters for many years."

Adele's first episode on *Survivors* was Don Shaw's *Greater Love*. "Don has always been a fine writer. In fact I've been following his *Dangerfield* on BBC recently as I'm doing a degree in law. For a series the producer and principal directors normally get together to agree the casting of the principal actors. On a series like *Survivors* there would be thirteen episodes and three directors, two of whom would do four episodes and one five. They would confer and send their own floor manager type P.A.s out together to find locations, because the locations chosen would have to suit everybody. The first story of the second series to be made was Jack Ronder's *The Witch*, directed by Terry Williams, or 'wet-weather' Williams as we used to call him because whenever he set foot outside to shoot we'd have a monsoon!

"I had watched some of the first series when I knew that I'd be working on the second. When I arrived on location to begin work I had the distinct feeling that the producer Terry Dudley had done it yet again! He was very uncomfortable with working-class people, which is why Chris Tranchell was written out in *Don Shaw's Greater Love*. Chris had a great deal of life and vigour about him. He was so exciting on screen, he had intelligence and vitality and the series imploded after his departure."

The two-part story *Lights of London*, by Jack Ronder, saw a return to the first series's studio work with film inserts. The episodes saw the return of our heroes to a rat-infested London where 500 or so weary survivors lived on the brink. Does Adele have any recollections of this story? "Of course I do. I remember especially the wonderful Syd Tafler, who came from the same part of the East End of London as me. It was a real joy to work with someone like him. He was already a film star during World War H. I also remember that marvelous Scots actress Lennox Milne, Coral Atkins and Nadim Sawalha. What a wonderful man he is, and it is good to see him doing so well in *Dangerfield*. His daughter Julia is a wonderfully talented actress too and very beautiful.

"I remember that terrible day when the London Underground told us that we wouldn't be allowed to go back and do anything which we hadn't finished. I think we had to do an 18-hour day to complete the day's work and we broke all the union laws. I wouldn't have done it for anyone else but Pennant, I would have told them to get stuffed to be quite honest, because I don't think that it's right or fair to expect people to work such long hours. Some people did go home; one of the sound men said: 'this is ridiculous!'. I don't blame them as it was a disgrace. These two episodes were good as they relied on three very good actors who had been brought in, Syd, Lennox and Coral. Sparks flew between them on the screen and there was great chemistry there. I have nothing against Ian or Denis, but found their characters not very interesting to watch. Also, the scripts by Jack Ronder were good. Jack Ronder was a wonderful man and one could not help but like him. Jack was heart-broken at his scripts being tampered with by Terry Dudley. Unfortunately, Terry didn't know when to leave things alone. Although he was an incredibly intelligent and witty man, he never realised that he could not cast, and he should not have insisted on doing the casting."

Another episode directed by Pennant was Roger Parkes' *New Arrivals*, which sees the arrival of the remnants of another community which had been ravaged by flu. Prominent among the new actors were Heather Wright as Melanie and Stephen Tate as Alan. "Stephen was away from home and Heather turned up looking very 'dolly' and blonde, in a Morgan car. Stephen, at the sight of this cool, upper-class blonde driving this Morgan just fell on his face."

Most of the crew and cast were lodged at The King's Head Hotel in Monmouth. What was the atmosphere like? "The couple who ran the hotel were wonderful. When a whole unit goes to stay in a hotel, very often you're treated well because people are away from home and there isn't much to do at the end of the day, if you're tired and lonely, other than drink, which is good for the bar takings! We all had such a wonderful time at the hotel. I wouldn't however say that there was more drinking done on this location than on any other. The owner's wife used to cook us baby eels, an incredible delicacy. There was also a country market in the square outside the hotel."

Ian McCulloch has expressed the view that *Survivors* would have been better had it been an action-adventure series, rather than trying to discuss issues. This was partly why he left at the end of series two (but see interview with Ian for a full account). "I think he was right. The series bored everybody to sobs! People switched off in droves. They definitely needed a bit more action! It is true however that Ian did start to play up, and even started to count his lines."

The second series of *Survivors* was rounded off with a party to which many of the cast and crew were invited. Does Adele have any recollections of this? "We could all take someone to the party. It was somewhere very remote and I didn't drive a car. But Coral had a car and I found to my disgust that they were penny pinching so much on the series that she and the guest stars hadn't even been invited! As I was entitled to take someone I invited Coral. I seem to recall that it was rather a good do."

Would Adele describe *Survivors* as a happy series? "No, I think it was a very sad series. The theme was miserable, the location was absolutely filthy and there were other tensions. People were not very happy at all. One of the sad things about *Survivors* is that people made choices to their own detriment. On filming with some series, for example *The Onedin Line*, you would see people falling in love and being very happy. On *Survivors*, however, people made mistakes. People did things which afterwards they felt sorry for."

Does Adele recall any moments which were particularly funny or which stick out in the mind? "I remember a funny incident when we were shooting at the top of a hill. Obviously, when you're taping you can't have the noise of traffic, and Pennant's wife Betsan had to slog all the way up this hill on foot. Julie Peasgood's fiance Peter McEnery roared up the hill in his sports-car, so we had to shoot it all again. Pennant was very cross, not because of the taping but because his wife had had to walk up the hill! Julie had a wonderful dress, the sort of dress that at the time you could only get in very fancy little boutiques in Chelsea. I can remember telling her how much I liked it and she told me that it was a present but when she 'discovered' it at home she initially thought that her fiance had had another girl in the house while she had been away! I also remember Coral's expensive boots, which had to be replaced by the BBC as they got oil all over them while she was walking along the underground tracks."

Why does Adele think that Survivors has never ever had a repeat showing on the BBC? "Because it's a complete downer! We're living in hard times at the moment, and I don't think that people who are unemployed or worrying about mortgage payments would want to watch something like that, except for one of my fellow students, Andrew, who was really hooked on it! Of course, he was seven years old when it went out!"