

Anna Pitt (Agnes).

"Where's Amber my horse - have you interviewed him?!"

The character of the Norwegian balloonist's daughter Agnes was introduced in the final episode of the second series, *New World*, when she was played by Sally Osborn. Throughout the third and final series Agnes was played by Plymouth-born Anna Pitt, who appeared in five episodes. Her character played a vital link between Greg, who was busy joining together settled communities up and down the country, and the original group which had been the focus of the *Whitecross* settlement. It is in many ways a great shame that her character wasn't allowed to develop into a fourth series, when she surely would have played a pivotal role. Agnes started out as a dreamy-eyed youngster who guided Greg back to her people in Norway where his skills were invaluable, but by *Long Live the King* she has been transformed into a defender of all that Greg stood for, and more than willing and able to carry on his work. She, even more than Jenny, would have made a fitting 'queen' to Greg, the new 'king' of an emerging nation.

How did Anna start out in her career as an actress? "I was hell-bent on becoming an actress and although my parents wanted me to go to university, and I was indeed offered a place at Manchester University, when I left school I joined the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. I don't know what it's like now, but in the 60's and 70's it was one of the places to train. I was there for a year and I realised very quickly that I wanted to be a student more than anything else. At the Old Vic we were taught very early on that we would have to be working actors. I wrote to Manchester asking if my place was still open and they replied that it was. So after a year in Bristol I went to Manchester, where I read a degree in Drama. This was in the days of Hugh Hunt when Manchester was certainly in its heyday. There was a great deal of theatrical activity going on and a company started up called Theatre 69, which is now known as the Royal Exchange Theatre Company. It actually started up in 1968 and they thought they were being terribly futuristic by calling themselves Theatre 69! They had people like Tom Courtney and Vanessa Redgrave coming up to do shows and they also used the students for extras and small bit parts. Actually, that is how I got my Equity card before I'd even left university."

Does Anna remember her very first appearance on television? "Interestingly enough I was launched into television in a very big way, but not quite as an actress. Even before I had graduated I think I must have broken all university records by getting an extremely glamorous job whilst still doing my finals. That was as the first female In Vision television announcer that the BBC had had since the days of Judith Chalmers and I always feel very miffed that Angela Rippon has always taken the credit for doing this but in actual fact it was me! This was in 1970. An agent sent me for an audition to be the news reader and link presenter for BBC Northwest. To my total astonishment, at the ripe old age of twenty two, I was given the job! I would say it was a baptism of fire and a half! It was in the days before auto-cue. When I think about it, it sounds as if I'm talking about the nineteenth century! Presenters had self-op consoles so you were operating your own desk as well as appearing, and that was quite terrifying.

"The presentation work was television exposure in the extreme, but I wouldn't consider it as acting. My first acting television part was on Coronation Street where I think I was an extra and I had to say something like 'Can I have a gin and tonic please!' In those days there was a lot going on in Manchester. This would have been in about 1971. I remember meeting Pat Phoenix (Elsie Tanner) when walking on set and the first thing she said to me was 'Whose sister are you?' which has been the bane of my life because everybody thinks that they've seen me do something before. I've got that sort of face I suppose. People always seem to recognise me but they can never remember where. Many people often think that I'm related to Ingrid Pitt."

Does Anna recall how she got the part of Agnes in *Survivors*? "Yes, indeed I do. I went up to Scotland to do a play called *Bloodletting* for BBC Scotland and met Ian McCulloch. Ian told me about his last two years in *Survivors* and he was intrigued by the fact that I spoke Swedish. He suggested that I write to Terry Dudley because there was a part going for a Norwegian girl for the third series. So when I got back to London that is exactly what I did. I went to see him and he virtually gave me the part on the spot, which I was astonished at! Sally Osborn had played Agnes in the final episode of the second series, but I think she was doing something for one of the independent companies and was unavailable because of that."

Had Anna seen any of the first or second series episodes? "No, I hadn't. The only thing I remembered about it were the opening credits. In those days I didn't sit in and watch a lot of television. I was very lucky because I was doing a lot of rep and of course in those days we didn't have video-recorders."

Did Terry Dudley give Anna an inkling of the way in which he wanted the character of Agnes to develop? "Absolutely not, nobody gave me any idea at all! I think he would have told me the story-line of

what had happened up till then and that the stories were going to develop in such a way that Agnes was going to become one of the central characters."

Was Anna happy when she received the first scripts to read? "I remember my heart sinking when I got the scripts. Even now my strongest recollection is 'This part does not make sense!' I didn't know who she was or what she was doing! Even the name itself, Agnes, is not typically Norwegian, something like Grun or Britt or whatever would have been better. It seemed as though with every episode each writer had a favourite few characters on who he would concentrate and around whom the others had to be wrapped. This is why, when we got to episode 11 and Agnes became this extraordinary femmefatale figure it did not quite make sense."

Did Anna find a happy atmosphere on the set? "No, it was not a happy set. The nicest person I met on *Survivors* was a horse called Amber! I've got a photo of Amber and that's my happiest memory of the series! There were all sorts of peculiar things going on. The others had been working together for a couple of years and suddenly a new character turned up who wasn't in every single episode but seemed to connect up with Greg."

The above comments refer to episode 11 of the third series, a Martin Worth story called *Long Live the King*, which was directed by Tristan de Vere Cole. In this story we see Agnes, who had been faithful to Greg and all he stood for right up to the end, dressed up in fatigues and very much running the show. But up until this episode there had been no inkling that Agnes had such strength of purpose. How did Anna view this dramatic transformation of Agnes' character? "I remember that the bitchiest people on set were the make-up people saying things like 'Why have you suddenly got boobs and curls of hair floating from under your cap?'. The director, Tristan de Vere Cole, was very insistent that Agnes become a sort of gauleiter figure. I was confused as this character didn't seem to make progress properly. If, for example, Agnes was besotted with Greg why did she keep leaving him?"

"~These difficulties were compounded by individual actors who starred in a single episode. They were the stars. I seem to have spent most of my time on that series being frightened of everybody and avoiding people because I just couldn't make sense of what was going on."

Given these obvious problems with the series and in particular the character of Agnes, how would Anna have preferred her character to have developed? "The question really ought to be how I would have preferred Anna Pitt to have developed! We are talking about me twenty years ago, when I didn't have the insight or the courage to be able to go up to the producer and talk with him about my character. I didn't do things like that in those days. Had I been able to then perhaps I could have sorted it all out. Now I would certainly do that."

"Actually, *Survivors* was one of the reasons I began thinking of doing something else. I felt that if this is what I had been waiting for then it's not actually very much fun to do. This was not the way I wanted to lead my life. I was about twenty six at the time, and it's sad that I couldn't get my act together. I think that women and people in general have come a lot further forward in the last twenty years in being able to say what they want. People were so suspicious of each other, asking you who your character was and how many episodes you had and how many lines you'd got. They were constantly vying with each other and it wasn't very nice."

The first episode in which Anna appeared was Ian McCulloch's *A Little Learning*, directed by George SpentonFoster. Does Anna have any memories of that episode? "Most of all I remember Sylvia Coleridge who made me laugh all the time. She was so funny and a lovely old actress. I also got to speak a little Norwegian. This was when I asked Sylvia Coleridge's character, Mrs Butterworth, who had just been quite rude to me, whether or not she was going to let me in. I probably spoke with a Swedish accent but I very much doubt whether anybody would have realised."

Anna's second episode was Martin Worth's *Law of the Jungle*, directed by Peter Jefferies. "I remember that it was absolutely freezing when we did that episode! We had to be issued with thermal underwear, and the wardrobe master gave me the tattiest, the oldest, most shrunken and washed out ones which I didn't want to put on! We spent most of the time huddled in an old disused train around a gas fire because it was very cold. This was my first episode and I was still trying to work out what Agnes was doing there and why she wasn't with Greg and what her purpose was. In the end I thought I would just memorise the lines and say them."

"Apart from the dogs I also remember Cheryl Hall having to bring in to the train a couple of skinned rabbits. Peter Jefferies, the director, went off and killed a pig to get the sound of a pig dying. This was my first emotional reaction as a person to this series. I had become a very strict vegetarian in 1975 so suddenly to have to do a scene with two skinned rabbits and knowing that they'd gone off to kill a pig in order to get the sound effect of a dying pig, and watching these dogs being handled in a way that I wasn't too happy about, made me feel a bit uncomfortable."

"John Abineri had a strange experience with his crossbow in this episode, but I had an even stranger experience. There is a scene where Brod shoots a mug off my head. The crossbow expert was supposed to be an ace shot. Peter Jefferies' initial thought was we should do it for real, actually putting a mug on my head and having it shot off! They rehearsed by using a wig-block with my head-scarf on with the mug on top. When the shot was fired the arrow went straight into the temple of the dummy! Initially everybody gasped and then fell about laughing! They thought how hysterical it was and how good it would be for the series if one of the actresses got killed! Naturally, the actual scene was shot with the wig-block and careful editing."

One of the undoubted highlights of the third series was Ian McCulloch's *The Last Laugh*, directed by Peter Jefferies. By the end of this episode Greg is assumed to be dying of a smallpox-like disease. Anna has some tense scenes to play when Agnes is back with the community, and is threatened by Mason and his thugs, who try to force her to translate Greg's notebook, which had been put together in Norwegian by Agnes and her father. Does Anna have any memories of this episode?" I remember being roughed up very well! I remember that the actor who had to pull me around didn't exactly act it but did it for real! I also recall that in this episode there was a scene where Ian and Peter Jefferies got very annoyed with me because I couldn't remember a set of lines. Once again this reverts back to what I've already said. The lines I had to say were disjointed and didn't flow and I therefore couldn't remember them!"

The penultimate episode of *Survivors*, and Anna's last, was Martin Worth's *Long Live the King*, directed by Tristan de Vere Cole. In this episode Agnes undergoes a tremendous transformation from a mere companion of Greg to a femme fatale, dressed in fatigues and looking all set to overcome the world! Given the obvious confusion and lack of coherency in Agnes' character, how did Anna feel about these changes? "I had decided that I would just go with the flow. There was no common sense to this particular character. When everybody saw me dressed up in fatigues for this episode I think they were pretty much gobsmacked. The make-up girls in particular. The director had given very specific instructions to the effect that I was to look as sexy as possible with make-up and tendrils of curls coming from under my cap. The make-up girls were dabbing my face and saying 'What the hell are you doing with your character?', and I had to answer 'Ask the director, he's the one who's asked for it!'. In a way I was pleased because as far as I was concerned, as a hard-nosed actress I had to treat it as a one off part. The episode did begin; I suppose, to make some sense regarding Agnes, about what she had been doing, what she had been trying to do and her admission that she loved Greg but it came far too late. Some of those admissions should have come a few episodes earlier so that you would have seen a gradual progression to what we see in *Long Live the King*. Series three of *Survivors* was very disjointed and Agnes' part was one of the most disjointed of all. In this episode she suddenly becomes a different person without there ever having been any natural progression."

Would Anna consider reprising her role if there were ever a new series? "Of course I would, without going into too much detail, it would be quite warming to see such a change 'out of the blue'. I think that the concept of *Survivors* is more pertinent today than it was twenty years ago. I don't think we really understood it in the 1970's, but it would be more understandable today."