

## **Jumping The Queue BBC 1989**

Based on the novel by Mary Wesley, her first published at the age of 71 in 1983, the BBC drama serial deals with the desperation, guilt and attempted suicide by drowning of a middle-aged widow, Matilda, only to be left alone at the end, having ordered her affairs and found a new home for her pet goose, with all of the skeletons in her cupboard and herself intact.

I designed and directed the opening title sequence for the BBC drama serial in 1989. I filmed body shots of the lead actress Sheila Hancock, to match exactly shots of sea waves, surf and rocks which I had shot previously on location. These images were layered in digital post production with close ups of the pet goose, who plays a role in the heroine's life story, together with the credit titles, whose ripple effects were created directly under the camera using a tank of water.

Michael Graham-Smith

### Reviews:

I saw this well-focused British television film as a one-parter TV play in 1990 and always remembered its emotional depth and intimacy. It's essentially a chamber piece, a one-woman story, and a story inexorably headed towards tragedy. It is headlined by Sheila Hancock, the actress who chronicled her life with partner and 'television detective' John Thaw in a touching autobiographical/ biographical volume. The performances are strong and memorable, most of all for the maintenance of sympathetic identification with the lead character. It's a story of one woman's decision in the face of few other options. A fine piece of television theatre, this film has been unavailable since its screening and is seldom repeated. It would be fantastic if this ever became available in any shape or form.

***Jumping the Queue*** Television drama directed by Claude Whatham.  
Starring Sheila Hancock, David Threlfall and Don Henderson.  
Filmed in Looe.

### **Story Plot**

The heroine of the novel is Matilda, a widow in her fifties, who lives alone in an isolated cottage in [Cornwall](#), England. Her four children all live abroad

and rarely visit her, and troubled by her husband's death she has decided to end it all – commit suicide.

Matilda's plan is to go to the beach, swim out and drown herself. However, a gang of youngsters spoil her plan when they show up with the intention of having a party on "her" beach, and Matilda moves on to throw herself out from a bridge, only to find that the bridge has been occupied by a young man who has had the same idea as she. Matilda recognises the man, Hugh, as someone who is on the run from the police for having murdered his mother, and she invites him to stay with her in her cottage.

In the following days Matilda tells Hugh the story of her life, bit by bit. It is a story about a life filled with lies, adultery, incest and murder. Hugh is constantly worried that she may betray him and call the police, and Matilda partly hopes that he will just disappear and partly hopes he will stay. When he finally does go, Matilda is left alone with her skeletons.

## **Important characters**

- Matilda Poliport: A middle aged widow who lives alone in an isolated cottage in Cornwall.
- Tom Poliport: Matilda's late husband.
- Hugh Warner: 35, has murdered his mother and is on the run from the police.
- John/Piers: A bachelor and a civil servant based in London. An old friend of the Poliports.
- Mr Jones: Matilda's neighbour who is in love with Matilda.
- Louise, Mark, Anabel and Claud: Matilda's absent children.
- Gus: Matilda's beloved pet gander.

## **TV adaptation**

The novel was adapted into a TV play in 1989, directed by Claude Whatham. It is headlined by [Sheila Hancock](#) as the grieving and determined widow, Matilda, and [David Threlfall](#) plays the young man, Hugh.