

Peter Jefferies (Director).

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Peter Jefferies worked exclusively on series three, and directed a total of four episodes. Peter was largely responsible for the much grittier, scruffier and more realistic appearance of this final series.

How did Peter start out in television? "I had an interest in theatre from a very early age. I am the curious combination of being the son of a bank manager father and a ballet dancer mother, so there was always a creative side to my nature. In fact, as a child my mother trained me as a dancer and I won a scholarship to the Royal Ballet School when I was aged twelve but my father put his foot down demanding that I had a 'proper' education. I was therefore sent away as a boarder to a public school instead. Throughout all my young years I was always involved in dramatics. In those days there was something called The Junior Drama League which was the junior section of The British Drama League. In the summer months we used to go off to different colleges for courses and have a wonderful time. It never occurred to me until much later that I would actually make a career out of it and this was probably the influence of my father. In fact my first career was as an officer in the Merchant Navy, which lasted all of nine months, after which it was decided by mutual agreement that that was not for me! I then dabbled in all sorts of things for a while, being a teacher and working in a travel agency, but all the time keeping up this interest in amateur dramatics. My life changed literally overnight when I was twenty-one. I was in a pub, having been an Assistant Stage Manager (A.S.M.) for an amateur theatre group called Tavistock. I was drinking in this pub with my boss and he remarked that as I obviously enjoyed the theatre so much I ought to do it professionally. Up till that moment in time it had never occurred to me that I might do this sort of thing professionally. He was a camera-man at one of the newly created ITV companies, Rediffusion, and literally within four weeks I was working at Rediffusion as an Assistant floor Manager (A.F.M.) which was the lowest grade that one went in at. ITV in those days was so incredibly young the average age on the studio floor was only twenty-three. One could rise rapidly through the ranks. I soon moved my allegiances to another amateur dramatic group, The Questors Theatre in Ealing, one of the best in London. I started to direct there. This was in fact just down the road from Rediffusion, and many of the people I knew there worked in television during the day and in the evenings did some immensely creative work at this theatre. I owe this theatre a tremendous debt.

"By the time I was twenty-three I was offered a scholarship to direct in repertory theatre by ABC Television, which then became Thames and has now lost its broadcast license. This was called the ABC Theatre Directors' Trainee Scheme. They awarded six scholarships each year and I went to Birmingham Rep, which is where I first started to direct professionally. We did a lot of contemporary stuff which was really avant-garde. The university students used to come in their droves. The idea behind the scheme was that people went to the theatre and stayed there, but I had always wanted to get back into television. So after my year I wrote off to all the television companies saying that I was now ready to become a television director. I received only two positive responses, one from ATV and the other from the BBC. The BBC had offered me a place on their course for the following October. As we were only in February and the AIW offer was to start the following week, I went to ATV. I did my nine-months training there and then became a staff director. I stayed there for four years directing drama. There was a lot of drama around in commercial television in those days. By the time I was twenty-nine I felt ready to go freelance. From then on I spent most of the next ten years at the BBC. It was during this period that my agent approached me with a new project for the BBC, which was Survivors in 1977."

How would Peter describe a typical day's shooting in this third series of Survivors? "Most of the time a typical day was rather like organised chaos. By that time the series had moved away from Callow Hill. They were trying to keep the series alive and buoyant, and felt, quite rightly in my opinion, that they had played out Callow Hill and that it was time to go on the road. We were all based out at Television Centre and had offices in the then fairly new East-Tower block. A production team was made up of the director, the A.F.M., the production manager, the production assistant (P.A.) and others. The team was quite small really, of about six people. You were given the script by the producer, Terry Dudley, and basically you could go and shoot it wherever you wanted. We would send off our production manager to find a location to fit the story and they were given about a week to do so. Sometimes he would get it right very quickly, other times there would be panic by the end of the week as no location had been found. We then all had to bail out and go and find it. In those days the name of the BBC opened almost every door and people would welcome us onto their land, often without any thought of money. This has changed very much over the years. I'm sure that they had no idea that they were soon going to be hit by eighteen trucks of gear! We got fairly cheeky about it, and what we used to do (my responsibility!) was on the Monday morning, having sat down down to begin a new production, I used to get The Good Food Guide out on the desk and pick the locations

depending on where there were good restaurants! We did finish up with some extremely good weeks on location. I think we really got it right when we went to Robert Carrier's mansion house in Suffolk for Manhunt. After finding a location, we would send the next team down. This would be the designer and myself and others. One of the difficulties of doing O.B. at that time was that it literally meant taking a circus out on the road, because the machinery in those days was big, heavy and there was a lot of it. On the travel day when everybody would set off for the location, my production managers and I would often be the last to leave the office. As we travelled, for example, along the M4 we would pass a succession of huge BBC trucks which were all ours, which used to give me a tremendous thrill. When we arrived it all looked like a circus with twenty or more cars plus the trucks. In those days you needed an average of seventy or more people to get the show together. These days the same job could be done by three men and a Range Rover! The cameras in those days required a lot of light and usually a five-thousand-amp generator went with us which weighed about twenty or thirty tonnes, such that we had to be careful not to take it up any muddy lanes. The scanner, which was the mobile control room, was also immense. We also needed all the back-up facilities such as the make-up caravan and so on. I've been on location all over the world since that time, but I don't think I've ever been out on the road with as many people and vehicles as on Survivors!

"The production day was a fairly normal one. This meant that the actors, wardrobe and make-up people were the first to start because, especially for the girls, they would need an hour in make-up to get ready. We would probably start shooting at 9 am, so they would have to be in wardrobe and make-up by 8 am. Breakfast was at 7 am, which meant they had to be up at about 6 am. The feeling of directing on this show was very much like being a general with his army. There was a tremendous spirit, I think because we spent so much of the time up to our knees in mud. We were out in all weathers. I remember one that I did at the beginning of the year (Law of the Jungle) and it was absolutely freezing. We filmed a lot of it in railway carriages up in Brecon: The Severn River Valley Railway, to be precise. The whole episode was shot around this area. We tried not to move too much and we had a week in which to shoot the episode. Some days, if you were doing action sequences, you could only film about five minutes of cut-length in a day. Other days, when you were in doors and the weather didn't matter, you had basically dialogue scenes. I remember that for a long time I held the record when I shot cut-length of twenty six and a half minutes in one day. As each episode was only fifty two and a half minutes long I had virtually done half of it in a day. But it was always swings and roundabouts, because if you did that then you would have longer to spend on your action sequences and therefore you could hopefully make them more interesting than if you didn't have so much time.

"Another thing we had to bear in mind was the horses. Each of the lead characters had a horse and therefore the horses had to go with us and be fed and stabled. So we had yet more trucks to go around with us! The actors of course already knew how to ride. I remember that Lucy was a tremendous horsewoman. Denis was also a very competent horseman.

"Every day was different, and it was all organised to the extent that it was pre-planned. You had these three directors doing a series. You had two or three weeks to prepare each episode, one week to shoot it and then a week to edit it."

One criticism of the second series is that it looks far too idyllic. With the third season the episodes look far grittier and scruffier, which was more in keeping with the basic premise of the show. "I remember that Terry Dudley was very complementary about Law of the Jungle. Inevitably a director follows in the footsteps of others who have gone before him. When you look at previous work you try to see how you can add your own special mark. I felt to some extent that life for the survivors at Callow Hill had become too cosy. They were not any longer in survival territory and had become a bit too domesticated. Terry obviously felt this as well and wished to get a rougher edge back on the series and take it back to its basic concepts. In other words, to get the series to live up to its title. I was all for this and that's why when we did Law of the Jungle I was quite glad that it was bitterly cold. We were up there filming in the first week of January and there was snow on the ground. And of course we had those dogs! They came from a security firm in Liverpool and they were virtually wild and used as security guard dogs. I don't remember any accidents with them but people tended to treat them with respect! But even with these dogs I remember that we had to do a considerable number of takes and they have to be deprived of food for longer than they normally would so by the time we came to shoot they were pretty hungry! They were literally just chucked lumps of raw meat and they went for them."

One of the highlights of series three was Ian McCulloch's The Last Laugh, in which Greg is supposedly killed off after contracting a smallpox-like illness. Does Peter have any memories of this story? "This was a very good story. Once again we were pushing for the elements of realism and danger. This was made in Brecon. Although Ian and Denis weren't too fond of each other, they were both very professional. I have to say that I was equally fond of them both. The memory I have of the whole of the team is that there was very little tension among the cast and the crew. Everybody derived an immense enjoyment and fulfilment at getting these episodes made because we were at the cutting edge of technology at that time and we were always trying to push back the frontiers a little bit further. That was

what gave people such a sense of fulfilment working on the series; we definitely worked hard and we played hard. When you have to concentrate so hard for such a long time then you need to unwind at the end. I think that wherever we were the local pubs did a roaring trade!"

How does Peter feel viewing his episodes eighteen years on? "As a director I have to say that I found some episodes more plausible than others. It was difficult at times, due to the practical difficulties of doing the job, to convey that sense of realism."

Does Peter have a soft spot for any of his four episodes? "I recall various incidents in several episodes. I certainly recall turning up that January morning to do Law of the Jungle in that railway carriage in a siding. The design team had been up there building these shacks or dwellings for people and when I arrived everybody was there assembled. It was so cold that I remember walking up the railway lines to the location (you always knew where the location was because you just followed the cables from the control van!) and there was an engineer with two ends of the main transmission cable from the cameras to the control room. He was blowing on them because they had frozen solid! I remember that for the first few hours of that location we had to unfreeze everything before we could start! The water in the location caterer's caravan had frozen solid too. So first thing in the morning we couldn't even have a cup of hot tea! We were working in sub-zero temperatures. Yet again you never heard anyone complain about conditions."

How does Peter feel about the possibilities of a new series of Survivors for the 1990's? "I think that there is always room for good science-fiction themes. If I were Head of Drama at the BBC, I wouldn't want to be accused of not having any new ideas. I think that this is the present attitude of the BBC towards Survivors, and I don't think that there is any chance of Survivors in its existing form being re-moulded. I think that you would have to start with a clean sheet of paper and say; 'What were the values of the series?'. It was a struggle of man against the elements, which can be reproduced in a hundred different ways. As a general theme it is an area which has been ignored by the BBC for a long time. Unfortunately, the facts are that the more 'soapsy' the drama is with less thought required by the audience, then the more popular it is. I'm not saying that, for example, Coronation Street for what it is, is bad drama, in fact it is very good, but it is drama that caters for the lowest common denominator as opposed to the middle of the road. Survivors was BBC 1 fare, which was for that centre market. It is interesting to note that in those days we never had to be conscious of the viewing figures, but only of quality and of critical acclaim and of all the things of which we were proud of working for the BBC. Today there is nothing but pressure from the viewing figures. For the future I really do think that you must forget Survivors. It was successful in its own right at that time but these days things have changed and we can't keep going back to the past. To do Survivors again you'd have to take the basic concept of people living on the edge and near to extinction. You would have to write it from the start and my advice would be to forget the old Survivors and anything associated with it."