

Self Sufficiency, Introduction to series two

By Kevin Marshall.

Directors:

Terence Williams

Lights of London I
Face of the Tiger
The Witch
Parasites
New World

Eric Hills

Birth of a Hope
A Friend in Need
The Chosen
Over the Hills

Pennant Roberts

Greater Love
Lights of London II
By Bread Alone
New Arrivals

WRITERS

Jack Ronder

Birth of a Hope
Lights of London I
Lights of London II
The Witch
Martin Worth
By Bread Alone
Over the Hills
New World

ROGER PARKS

The Chosen
New Arrivals

Don Shaw

Greater Love
Face of the Tiger

Roger Marshall

Parasites

Ian McCulloch

A Friend in Need

Series two sees a dramatic shift in emphasis away from the leit-motif of Abby's search for her son Peter, to a much more settled existence on a farm. This was an inevitable development which had in fact started half-way through the first series, as the production team needed a permanent base for their heavy equipment. But unlike the first series, when the community had settled at the great manorial house, there is no longer any hint of a search.

The second series was just as notorious for the significant 'interplay' between cast and crew on the one hand and the inhabitants of Callow Hill on the other. The experience was to change the lives of many, as relationships were struck up and romance as well as marijuana was in the air. Actors were just as likely to be found on a tractor, helping out on the farm, as they were to be doing their scenes. To be sure, the existing community on this strange yet enchanting Hereford-shire hilltop was anything but ordinary. With eccentric characters in abundance, conditions were ripe for a chemical reaction when the BBC circus arrived to take up residence. The BBC found a community that was actually living the life that was depicted in Survivors. By the end of the series however, relations had become so strained that the community was torn apart. It is an irony that the BBC helped to destroy the very thing it was trying to portray.

The series begins with the destruction, in Jack Ronder's Birth of a Hope, of the original settlement, which was based at Hampton Court near Leominster in Herefordshire, but in this episode was a different building as Hampton Court was no longer available. Bricks and mortar were not the only victims of the flames, as many members of the original community were consumed as well. The reasons behind this mass destruction of characters are not perfectly clear. No doubt the producer had hit upon a core of characters he wanted to continue with and weave the story round.

Self Sufficiency

The producer, Terry Dudley, felt that after the Plague mankind would be reduced to farming as in the middle-ages. In the 1970's self-sufficiency and environmental issues were very much in vogue, hence the popularity of Doomwatch and the comedy show The Good Life. To act as a mouthpiece for these concerns, Martin Worth and Roger Parkes joined the team of scriptwriters. Martin had become interested in these issues while writing for Doomwatch, while Roger had a background in agriculture.

Parting of the ways

Jack Ronder, one of the principal writers of the first series had by this time fallen out with Terry Dudley, caused by the constant tampering with his scripts and exacerbated by the changes in cast at the end of the first series (see interview with Anne Christie). Jack took his case to the Writers' Guild (and won) but by this time his days on the series were numbered. These problems were typified by The Lights of London. When the series was being commissioned, Jack Ronder was very swiftly encharged with the writing of this story. Given the harsh deadline that he was up against, the sequel, Exodus, was hastily put together. Terry Dudley was not happy about this and took it upon himself to re-write Exodus, particularly the second part, calling the story Lights of London II. But the writing styles of the two men were very different, giving the impression that parts land II had been written by different writers. Director Pennant Roberts saw the dangers with this and re-wrote the re-write, which actually occasioned a parting of the ways between the said director and the producer, the latter being astonished at the temerity of Pennant re-writing the producer's re-write! It is true to say that part II is more Dudley than Ronder. This was in fact the last episode that Jack Ronder ever wrote for Survivors. He was shabbily treated and afterwards spent quite some months unemployed.

There were also occasions where scenes involving Jack's daughter Tanya were cut and eventually the tensions became so great that Jack left the show, and Tanya herself was withdrawn at the end of the second series. There was a particular scene involving Tanya and a lamb which had to be slaughtered, which for no apparent reason had been cut. A tearful director telephoned Tanya's mother to inform her that this, one of the finest pieces of acting he had seen, had been removed from the final version. Terry Nation himself had also had problems with the producer and after the conclusion of the first series felt that he had nothing else to contribute.

The series settled down to issue-led stories of how to grow crops, produce methane and make soap. This inevitably gave it a sedentary, almost 'soapish' feel. Compared with the first series it had lost some of its edge. The series was not however without merit. Jack Ronder's opener, Birth of a Hope, is an elegant introduction to the new set-up on the farm. It is in this episode that we are introduced to the character of Pet, played by Lorna Lewis whose father, we are told, before the plague had been the owner of the Continental Cafe in Worcester. Birth of a Hope was not however the first second series episode to be made, that honour goes to The Witch, another Jack Ronder offering. Don Shaw's Greater Love is one of the best scripts of the series, and tells of the death of the popular Paul. Chris Tranchell was one of the best and most colourful actors on Survivors, and it is perhaps indicative of the way in which the series was getting lost that he asked to be written out. An interesting character study is given in Don Shaw's Face of the Tiger, in which Alistair McFadden, who had killed a child before the Plague turns up at Whitecross. Magnificently played by John Line, his kitchen speech produced a gasp, tears and applause from the cast (see the excellent review by Tanya Ronder). Martin Worth's Over the Hills broaches the topic of the need for a baby boom, as those babies who had survived the plague would have starved to death. When Charles attempts to instigate the boom, he is snubbed by the womenfolk. Why, after all they had won through contraception, should they be forced to retreat to the Middle-Ages?

Rivalry

Behind the cameras, the ongoing rivalry between Ian McCulloch and Denis Lill was creating problems for the producer. While in many ways it was dramatically convenient that the two main male characters disliked each other intensely, it wasn't so convenient when the actors themselves didn't get on. In the first series Ian McCulloch had been the star of the show along with Carolyn Seymour, but Denis became very popular with both the producer and the public when he became a regular. Ian resented this 'intrusion' and felt that something had been taken away from him. At the same time Ian was unhappy about the quality of the scripts. He was much more interested in Survivors as an action-adventure series, and felt that discussing methods of producing methane, for example, was quite boring. This was typified by the Martin Worth story, By Bread alone, which in fact obtained the highest viewing figures of all three seasons. Although in the background we witness discussions on how to produce methane gas from cow dung, the real point of the episode was a character study of a priest who had lost his faith. Ian McCulloch most certainly did not enjoy that kind of story. He himself wrote an excellent episode, A Friend in Need. Full of action, adventure and twists, it is very much in the Terry Nation School of writing. In the end however he had had enough and decided to leave the series.

The departure of Greg in a balloon in Martin Worth's New World is a watershed as great as the departure of Abby at the end of the first series. In some ways, Survivors was never fully to recover.

New characters introduced in series two included Charles Vaughan, played by Denis Lill, who had appeared in the first series episode Corn Dolly. Denis was equally popular with other actors, directors, writers and the public and soon became a powerful force. Charles' wife, Pet, was played by Lorna Lewis, who was enjoying her first major TV role. She seemed to fit into her role as the new community's matriarch with great ease. The medical student/doctor Ruth was now played by the stunningly attractive Celia Gregory. This she did with great aplomb, to the extent that she became joint female lead with Lucy Fleming. Celia also happened to find love while shooting the series, which is one of two reasons why she didn't return for the third, the other being that she was unhappy with the quality of many of the scripts and therefore wanted to move on to other projects. Two other major new characters were Hubert the shepherd/tramp, played with great feeling and humour by John Abineri, and Jack the carpenter/handyman, played by Gordon Salkilld, who, like Lorna Lewis, was also enjoying his first major TV role.

In balance, an Emmerdale-type season to Survivors was probably inevitable and not perhaps a bad thing. It was, of course, enormously advantageous for the OB unit to have a fixed base to work from. The German cameras used on Survivors were small by 1970's standards, but heavy and bulky by the standards of today. Martin Worth believes that the series could probably have continued

in this vein for any number of seasons. This assertion may well be true, but it would undoubtedly have degenerated into a soap, a kind of parallel-universe Emmerdale Farm. Yet the fact remains that the problems of survival and what it would do to the survivors were often ducked by the writers. Although there were some elegant performances from guest actors (e.g. John Line, Kevin McNally, Patrick Troughton, Nadim Sawalha, Coral Atkins etc), it would have been more interesting had the established cast been used more fully rather than using 'outsiders' to spark off a crisis.

Survivors, like Doomwatch before it, had an underlying scientific premise. But just how realistic was the science in this second series? Terry Dudley's thinking was that man would of necessity revert to the technologies of the Middle-Ages. He wished, by way of an agrarian setting, to concentrate on the problems of life in a small, unprepared community.

As director Pennant Roberts explains in his interview, man would indeed revert to primitive techniques, but with the knowledge that has been gained up to the present day. Although individuals may not be experts in a particular field, the knowledge would be available to them. Twenty years ago, food preservation technology was sufficiently advanced to be able to preserve food for many years, even taking into account leakages. The dire food shortage we see in Survivors was therefore not wholly realistic. Indeed, there would have been enough to go round for perhaps three generations! This makes the assumption that access could be gained to the wealth of food. But some food items, e.g. bread and exotic fruits, would have been in short supply and it would have been interesting and more realistic to derive story-lines out of calculating which foodstuffs would perish and what would not. Of the three series, the first was closer to the mark. The series slipped into a comfortable setting of pseud-science down on the farm.

The following is a copy of Terence Dudley's briefing notes, which would have been distributed to the directors and scriptwriters for their guidance. There are also some notes by the scriptwriter Jack Ronder, who himself had been a chemist.

SURVIVORS II

Employment at the base Settlement.

All the characters contribute to large scale activity for the common good, i.e., ploughing, sowing, reaping and the intermittent hoeing. These obligations on one side, individuals "cultivate their own gardens."

There are some specialists in that they possess special skills. Where these skills have priority the possessor will be excused communal activity. Where a chore is "unskilled" it is performed in a roster system.

Specialists include:

Charles Architect, general farming.

Greg Civil engineer.

Russell Management. This, being largely a matter of manipulation, is not taken very seriously except that it makes him a useful committee man.

Jack

Carpenter. He is a practical, adaptable man who enjoys working with his hands and has turned himself into the blacksmith.

Hubert only A shepherd. Although not "skilled" in the sense of the above, he is the settler capable of neutering and lambing.

Ruth Among the women, represents the only skilled person, but she is not exclusively the "doctor" or "vet". She does her share elsewhere.

From time to time four **OF** more characters are sent on a "salt" detail to the brine pits of the Cheshire plain. They would be away for a week to ten days and return with enough salt to last the community a month. A lot is used as a preservative - meat and fish. As yet, there is no pattern of education for the kids. They are expected to perform chores within their capabilities and will be entertained and instructed when there is time and inclination.

Sights, however, are set at a long term target; that of achieving a hydraulic "power-house" that will lighten the burden of labour and release members of the community for work that is not simply to supply the urgent fundamental necessities of life.

A pattern has now formed of the "base" community to which Greg takes the survivors of the fire.

Ten adults and five children including Charles Brecon and Pet comprise the settlement before being joined by Greg, Jenny, John, Lizzie, Paul Pitman and Arthur Russell. The settlers in excess of the "regulars" constitute a "pool" from which to draw necessary characters and in which to lose others.

Charles, Pet and Ruth with possibly another character (for whom there is room) live in what is Robin David's house.

Greg, Jenny, John and Lizzie occupy the "Do it yourself House" in the woods belonging to Anthony David.

Arthur, Paul and other "single" characters occupy the White House belonging to Anthony David

There is no communal feeding except in special circumstances; Le. celebrations and convened meetings.

The other houses are for "one off" characters (guests) or supporting settlers.

Other accommodation; outhouses, farms etc. are for communal use.

The tree house (apparently constructed as an isolation ward and memorial to Paul by Jack) can be used when it is not specifically required for a newly arrived "sick" character.

~: Having in mind the time of year at which we'll be recording we must avoid night exteriors and plan at least 70% of scenes as interiors. This isn't a question of comfort so much as appreciation of the "light" situation and the length of an unabused working day.

General Notes

Jenny has her baby in episode 1.

Paul Pitman sacrifices his life for the community in episode 2.

At The Opening' Of The Series.

There is no shortage of sheep. Rams proliferate and are sometimes a danger when fighting over ewes.

Light is provided by 'floats': a wick in mutton fat.

Soap has all but run out and Ruth will insist that they make it even though it is a lengthy process. Clothes are washed by the primitive method of beating.

Clothes are ironed by the use of an antique flat iron with a hinged rear wall. Hot ashes are put into the iron rather as in warming pans.

At the beginning of the series the community has one and a half gallons of petrol which is kept against an emergency. Sorties are made on horseback.

Water is pumped by the windmill into the tank of Robin David's (Charles') house and is "on tap" here to the rest of the community.

The plumbing is awaiting sophistication as the community develops

Ruth will instigate a still to make methol alcohol from wood for antiseptic use only. A "still" for any other purpose is presently frowned upon as indulgent. Making wine (fruit) is already one of Charles Brecon's skills.

There are no matches. Fire is produced by a tinderbox and wood and charcoal and peat are used as fuel. There are two 12 bore shotguns and three .22 sporting rifles, one of which is short of a firing pin.

Ammunition for firearms is reduced to 21 twelve bore (S.G.) cartridges, 8.22 target cartridges and a packet of fifty .303 cartridges for which there is no rifle.

Notes by Jack Ronder

Scriptwriter Jack Ronder, himself a scientist, wrote the following notes as a guide to solving some of the more pressing problems of self-sufficiency.

How to make SOAP

Take about 2 lbs. of animal fat (mutton, beef or pig) in a pot, bring it to the boil and skim off the surface impurities. Let it solidify. Ladle off the solid and throw away the rest. Repeat this process with the solid two or three times until it is fairly pure. Put it in a clean bucket: it will be rather a small lump at the foot of the bucket.

Take 2 or 3 heaped barrow-loads of wood-ash. Put about 2 inches of the ash in a clean bucket and fill the bucket with water. Bring to the boil, allow to cool. Decant off the clear water, throw away the sludge. Boil the watery portion in the cleaned-out bucket until it is no more than a teacupful. Transfer this into a galvanised baby-bath. Repeat this process with the rest of the wood-ash, 2 inches at a time. Combine all the boiled-down teacupfuls in the bath, and boil this down till you have about two-thirds of a bucketful. Add this concentrate to the pure fat. Boil for a day, topping up with water to keep it from going dry. Allow to settle.

You will now have made a nauseating liquid soap floating on top of a nauseating mixture of alkaline glycerine. Scoop off as much as you can of the top layer into a clean bucket. Add 2 lbs. of salt, boil for a day, topping up as before. Allow to settle. Scoop off the top layer, which will now be semi-solid.

This top layer will be soap of a kind. You might be lucky enough to have made about one pound of it.

Using a big heating range that takes 4 buckets at a time, it will take an adult working 9-10 hours a day, about 6 days to make this amount of soap. It needs an adult because the solution tends to spit and spurt when concentrated, and could boil dry and burn if not watched all the time. The smell of burning, saponifying fat is appalling.

Perhaps, having made your soap, you would perfume it with rose-water.

Jack Ronder

How to Make Surgical Spirit

13/11/75.

Take some kind of water-boiler (like an old wash-day copper). Prepare the fire underneath in the usual manner. Fill the boiler itself (the part that normally holds the water) with wood shavings. Screw on a lid that has a flue-pipe of its own.

Connect this flue-pipe (the one from the wood shavings) to other lengths of flue-pipe that will lead the volatile matter from the wood in a downwards direction. About 20 feet of pipe should be long enough to let this volatile matter cool and liquefy before dripping out of the pipe. Arrange collecting dishes under the end of the pipe.

Light the fire underneath the boiler. The first distillate will be mostly methyl alcohol. Then will come acetone; then phenol; then creosote mixture.

Methyl alcohol is Surgical Spirit. It is used for cleansing skin. If drunk, it makes you mad then blind; or vice versa. Phenol is Carbolic, a good antiseptic. Creosote is used for preserving wood and has crude and powerful antiseptic properties.

JackRonder