



MARK JENKIN'S THE CINEMATIC DNA OF ENYS MEN

The Stone Tape

This selection is all about Nigel Kneale's script, which gave birth to the endlessly intriguing stone tape theory, along with the unmistakable work of Desmond Briscoe and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Both were huge influences on me while making *Enys Men*. Visually speaking, it is typical of a TV play and not something I tend to get excited by. But the dramatic denouement is brilliantly constructed and truly unnerving.

Mark Jenkin

As soon as the men arrive with crowbars and jemmies, hacking off wooden panelling to reveal a steep stone staircase, you know that Nigel Kneale must have a hand in this. For Kneale, dark forces were always unleashed by some form of digging or excavation. The ancient alien spacecraft lying dormant for millions of years, unearthed in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), is one instance of his Escher-like view of history and superstition, where one forgotten civilisation's futuristic invention can subtly haunt another whose science may be sophisticated but whose memory is short. So his teleplays, which have come to define a certain strain in British television infused with weirdness and creeping horror, are often about the abscess that forgetting can engender in the mind, and the horrors that swell to fill it.

Frequently cited by 'hauntological' musicians such as those associated with the Ghost Box label, *The Stone Tape* is a clear reference point for a film like Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012): both fill their screens with analogue sound equipment and Dymo-labelled oscilloscopes. It was transmitted on Christmas Day 1972, which places it slap within a period of paranoid techno-thrillers that includes Coppola's *The Conversation* and the BBC's *Doomwatch*.

Ryan Electric Products have just acquired an old Victorian mansion, Taskerlands, to use as a laboratory for secret, progressive projects. (The location was Horsley Towers, former residence of computer pioneer Ada Lovelace.) The team, led by Peter Brock (Michael Bryant), arrive in high spirits, with plenty of laddish boisterousness. Jill Greeley (Jane Asher), though, almost gets crushed between two trucks on her first day – an event that leaves her shaken and foreshadows a larger, looming tragedy. After a blazing pep talk by Brock exhorting his department to discover 'the big one' – a new recording medium to give the company a competitive edge over Japanese rivals – the team are shown a dungeon-like room whose uncanny atmosphere spooked the restorers. Much of the action takes place in this black hole, as the team act on Brock's hunch that the stones themselves have captured the sound of a traumatic historical event. Believing that ghosts are 'a mass of data waiting for the correct interpretation', he alternately cajoles and thrashes them onwards, while himself under pressure from a faceless superior.

A Kneale signature is the juxtaposition of individual trauma and chills within earshot of innocent pleasures. There's plenty of that here, as when the landlady at a local pub recalls some West Indian workers at the house mentioning 'guppies... no, duppies, in the stone'. Taskerlands stands for any large institution (Kneale scouted out the BBC's development labs at

Kingswood Warren in Surrey) or even, perhaps, a nation conflicted as to whether to wipe the tapes of its own past, or to recapture them. (Auntie's notorious tendency to erase its own output at the time affected Kneale's creations too.)

The relationship between Greeley (a computer genius with mediumistic capabilities) and Brock (a visionary driven by ego and economics) is handled with great subtlety, as Kneale supplies the vaguest inklings of a possible past affair. The hauntings – a Victorian maid tumbling to her death – are seen in vanishingly brief glimpses, almost a subliminal afterimage. What lingers in Peter Sasdy's direction is the close-up agony of Asher's face, petrified by the disorienting effects of screams, electronic noise and supernatural presences. Kneale's script (and Richard Henry's production design) maintains a relentlessly gloomy scenario: the room is claustrophobically dark and full of abrasive noises; the brittle, scientific white and cream of the computer rooms and living quarters are often complemented by a low-level atonal synthesiser theme. The soundtrack, created by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop's Glynis Jones and Desmond Briscoe, is a model of its kind, evoking a spectrum from the menacing hum of 1970s computer technology to savage white noise. Forty years on, *The Stone Tape's* disturbing power has not yet begun to decay.

Rob Young, *Sight & Sound*, June 2013

Nigel Kneale has returned to the ghost story on several occasions in his career, but *The Stone Tape* stands as perhaps his finest single work in the genre, and his most typical. Asked to come up with a Christmas play, rather than providing a traditional ghost story (which he successfully did later on with 1989's *The Woman in Black*), he produced something far more original and challenging.

The play focuses on the relationship between three scientists: Jill, a talented computer programmer attuned to psychic phenomena; her arrogant, egotistical and ruthless, if frequently charming, boss (and lover) Peter; and Collinson, the foreman on the project and confidante to both of them. Their differing personal experiences of the mansion's haunted room provide the framework for the drama and are drawn along traditional gender lines. Kneale's script explores male and female perspectives, contrasting rational problem solving and the application of the scientific method with intuitive and emotional responses and solutions aligned with a compassionate feeling for people and their circumstances. Peter and Jill stand at the opposite poles of this dialectic, and as their inability to communicate their differences increases, so their personal relationship disintegrates. Collinson comes somewhere between the two, as the main identification figure for the audience. Iain Cuthbertson gives a powerful yet restrained performance in the role, which was expanded considerably during filming as his character replaced the one played by Michael Bates, who became unavailable when the shooting of some scenes had to be rescheduled.

The special effects are often startling, despite their crudeness. The use of sound by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, however, is highly sophisticated, with atonal electronic sounds used to merge music with the noises made by the scientific machinery.

Although reminiscent of Kneale's own earlier *Quatermass and the Pit* in the way that science unleashes supernatural forces from the past, *The Stone*

Tape can also be seen as a dark meditation on Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with Peter as a Scrooge figure, basically uncaring of those around him, who eventually learns the error of his ways through supernatural intervention, but only when it's too late.

Sergio Angelini, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Journey to Avebury

This short is such an obvious choice I almost didn't include it. But ever since I stumbled across *The Garden* late one night on Channel 4, Jarman has been in the DNA of everything I do, so he had to be in this season somewhere. Simple, striking and melancholic: the fact that the aesthetic of the film was a mistake makes it even more precious.

Mark Jenkin

JOURNEY TO AVEBURY

Director/Photography/Editor: Derek Jarman
UK 1972
10 mins

THE STONE TAPE

Directed by: Peter Sasdy
©/Production Company: BBC
Producer: Innes Lloyd
Script Editor: Louis Marks
Written by: Nigel Kneale
Lighting: Robert Wright
Visual Effects Designer: Peter Day
Graphics: Bernard Lodge
Videotape Editor: Geoff Higgs
Designer: Richard Henry
Costumes: Odette Barrow
Make-up: Maureen Winslade
Sound: Tony Miller
Special Sound Effects: Desmond Briscoe, Glynis Jones, BBC Radiophonic Workshop

Cast

Michael Bryant (*Peter Brock*)
Jane Asher (*Jill Greeley*)
Iain Cuthbertson (*Collinson*)
Michael Bates (*Eddie*)
Reginald Marsh (*William Crawshaw*)
Tom Chadbon (*Hargrave*)
John Forgeham (*Maudsley*)
Philip Trewinnard (*Stewart*)
James Cosmo (*Dow*)
Neil Wilson (*sergeant*)
Christopher Banks (*vicar*)
Michael Graham Cox (*Alan*)
Hilda Fenemore (*bar helper*)
Peggy Marshall (*bar lady*)

BBC2 tx 25.12.1972
UK 1972©
89 mins

MARK JENKIN'S THE CINEMATIC DNA OF ENYS MEN

Walkabout + Oss Oss Wee Oss

Sun 1 Jan 13:10; Mon 9 Jan 20:30

The Stone Tape + Journey to Avebury

Mon 2 Jan 15:40

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles

Wed 4 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:15

Symptoms + Stigma

Fri 6 Jan 18:10; Sun 15 Jan 15:30

Lost Highway + Jaunt

Fri 6 Jan 20:15; Sun 22 Jan 18:10

Haunters of the Deep

+ The Living and the Dead Episode 2

Sun 8 Jan 13:20; Sat 14 Jan 20:40

Long Weekend + Between the Tides

Tue 10 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 20:30

Penda's Fen + A Warning to the Curious

Wed 11 Jan 17:50

Two Years at Sea + A Portrait of Ga

Sat 14 Jan 18:00 (+ intro and Q&A with Mark Jenkin and Ben Rivers);

Tue 24 Jan 20:45

Daguerréotypes + World of Glory

Sun 15 Jan 12:00 (+ intro by Mark Jenkin); Thu 26 Jan 20:50

Bait

Sun 15 Jan 18:00; Mon 30 Jan 20:50

Requiem for a Village + The Signalman

Fri 27 Jan 18:20; Tue 31 Jan 20:40

Berberian Sound Studio + Wind

Sun 29 Jan 15:30 (+ intro by Mark Jenkin and Peter Strickland);

Tue 31 Jan 18:10

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