



MARK JENKIN'S THE CINEMATIC DNA OF ENYS MEN

Requiem for a Village

It may be nearly half a century old, but this melancholic portrait of loss seems more relevant than ever. I was intrigued by this film when I heard about the dead rising from their graves sequence, but the film is so much more than this undoubtedly brilliant sequence. At times surreal and abstract, while in other moments pure documentary, this is a quietly angry piece of filmmaking.

Mark Jenkin

As David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* is a search for the past contained perhaps in the present, and what it shows of life in a Suffolk village a generation ago is so breathtakingly beautiful that audiences can be forgiven for regarding the film as primarily an idealisation of an age that has gone. There is of course an element of this in it, but to sum up the film in such a way is really to blind yourself to everything original about it. The point is that the film is not a statement. Statements are best made in other ways than this. It is something altogether more fluid and impressionistic – an attempt, as I see it, to show the co-existence of all things in time.

The idea for a film about a village had been on Gladwell's mind since at least 1958. People remember him talking about it when he first came to London in the Free Cinema days. It is important, I think, to know that what started him off on this was not nostalgia for anything familiar to himself. It was, on the contrary, the sight of the new towns spreading across the country and in their progress replacing, burying – what? At the outset he had no precise notion of what was disappearing underneath, and thought he would have to project his village in conventionally narrative terms of 'characters' who made up its life. His earliest attempt to write a script was along these lines – a strictly literary effort. After writing several versions in this way, he decided he lacked the literary talent and, off and on through the years, tried to find a writer who could put his concept into words. Fortunately nothing came of this search, probably because his own visual ideas (which included a Stanley Spencer-inspired resurrection from the start) were so strong and really always getting stronger. It was not until he had read the books of George Ewart Evans, followed by one or two other studies of agricultural life, that he saw the real documentary approach to the subject.

Requiem for a Village begins where Gladwell's idea itself began, on a new housing estate – the ordinary, the everyday, sounds of the radio, motorbikes, fragments of conversation. You gather things have changed. Things do change. The images are changing all the time. It is the ice-cream bell that gives the first intimation of how it really is. Its resonance reaches out to layers of earth, rich layers exposed by tractors simultaneously destroying and uncovering the past; and also to music, abundant music by David Fanshawe, evocative of a once immovable faith. 'God will give you to me again. With joy and gladness for ever. Peace perfect peace.' Most of the words that are sung were taken from tombstones.

The old man tending the graves soliloquises about the people he knew now lying underneath. His words drop inconsequentially out of the present. It is images, not words, that make all the connections, although sometimes the

odd phrase juts out later as if, after all, there had been a link somewhere, like the feeling of *déjà vu*. The images, and their juxtapositions, proclaim the earth, the rape of the earth, the continuity of matter. Slow motion photography (which Gladwell would have liked to use more extensively had the cost not been prohibitive) is capturing the quality of perpetuity that attaches to anything acutely observed. The idea of resurrection is the same thing in reverse. What the mind's eye has seen, quite simply becomes visible.

So the past starts to rise up, brushing the gravel from its eyes – the recent past, only a layer below the present, still vivid in people's memories and still fragmentarily surviving. Scenes in the blacksmith's and wheelwright's shops, for instance, are showing the real thing in authentic locations.

In the luminous stillness of a late afternoon the old man is going home. He approaches the cemetery gate with his bicycle – an inescapable moment, his last on earth. You can sense it by its extraordinary and yet ordinary beauty. The motorbikes are speeding silently towards it. The old man steps out in front of them, is dead, and almost instantly rises again. They all get out of their graves, his wife and all the others, children and adults dressed in their Sunday best, and are clasped in the arms of their dear ones. Gladwell has the kind of simplicity from which humour is never entirely absent.

Tractors are still ploughing up the earth. The motorbikes are coming home to the housing estate, but what a different world it is from the one we started at. What disturbances there are beneath. 'Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth/Mirth of those long since under earth/Nourishing the corn.' The similarities of theme with T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which I have repeatedly pushed aside until now, cannot finally be ignored. 'To be conscious,' wrote Eliot, 'is not to be in time.' This was Gladwell's intuitive starting point, and it says much for his ability to stick to the evidence of his senses that his film is illuminated rather than destroyed by the comparison.

Elizabeth Sussex, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1975/76

The Signalman

Maybe the best known of the *Ghost Stories for Christmas* and the one I revisit the most due to my fascination with time-slips and premonitions. Presented as a riddle cloaked in ambiguity and the formal manners of the time, once the smoke finally clears, and like all good stories, it's quite a simple narrative and ultimately all about [Lawrence Gordon] Clark creating an unsettling atmosphere.

Mark Jenkin

A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS: THE SIGNALMAN

Director: Lawrence Gordon Clark
Production Company: BBC
Producer: Rosemary Hill
Production Assistant: Vee Openshaw-Taylor
Television Version: Andrew Davies
Based on a story by: Charles Dickens
Camera: David Whitson
Editor: Peter Evans
Designer: Don Taylor
Costumes: Christine Rawlins
Make-up: Toni Chapman
Music: Stephen Deutsch
Sound Recording: Colin March
Dubbing Mixer: Brian Watkins
Cast:
Denholm Elliott (*the signalman*)
Bernard Lloyd (*the traveller*)
Reginald Jessup (*the engine driver*)
Carina Wyeth (*the bride*)

BBC1 tx 22.12.1976

UK 1976

38 mins

REQUIEM FOR A VILLAGE

Director: David Gladwell
Production Company: British Film Institute Production Board
Producer: Michael Raeburn
Assistant Producer: Bob Settle
Assistant Director: Neil Thomson
Written by: David Gladwell
Photography: Bruce Parsons
Additional Photography: Walter Lassally
Photography Assistant: Gordon Steinfeld
Editor: David Gladwell
Art Director: Philip O'Reilly
Music Composed and Conducted by: David Fanshawe
Music Recorded by: Gerald Beckwith
Sound: Michael Pharey, Doug Turner
Cast:
Vic Smith (*old man*)
The Witnessham villagers, the Metfield villagers

UK 1975©

68 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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