

27 Arlington Crescent

BY CHRIS LANG

6 part serial for ITV



When Stuart Hall emerged from a Preston courthouse following his admission of guilt to a string of child sex offences he looked as bewildered as he did terrified, as if he was not yet able to comprehend how his life had changed overnight, into a living hell. Already he knew his last few years on this earth would be characterised by shame, opprobrium and imprisonment. And not just his, what of his wife's and children's lives? What of his wider family, friends and colleagues? Everything they thought they knew, a person, a *life* they thought they knew, had turned out to be something else. Something beyond awful.

'27 Arlington Crescent' is the story of someone who did something so much worse – committed murder – but who escaped justice for nearly forty years.

Using a unique structure, revealing the identity of the murderer at the end of episode four, the series will look at how a such an historic investigation affects the lives of all those touched by it, from the first police knock on the door to the final tabloid report on the 'juggling' of the murderer in a high security prison cell 3 months after the conviction.

It will anatomise the experience of not just the guilty and their family but also the wrongly suspected and *their* families, as the unforgiving eye of the investigation unearths innocent men and women's deeply buried secrets from decades ago.

Despite not ultimately implicating them in the murder, these secrets will alter the dynamic of the families forever as life narratives are dismantled as surely as Stuart Hall's were. And it is the slow revelation of these secrets, the hunt for the killer (and as it will turn out the *rest* of the bodies) and the profound fallout for all, following the capture of the guilty and the exoneration of the innocent, that will form the narrative backbone of the series.

The story will be told in a multi-stranded format, with all of the stories running alongside one another from the beginning to the end. As the investigation gets underway, there will be regular use of flashback, to both take us back to the seventies, but also to deepen the mystery. This is flashback as the unreliable narrator it can only ever be, informed, as all memory is, by distance, perspective, and self deception.

The tone will be muscular, sometimes dark, but always with real heart, as the four suspects, all very ordinary people, struggle to protect their families and loved ones from the mistakes and frailties of their pasts, even as the fragile edifice that is the perception of who they really are, is slowly being dismantled.

THE VICTIM

JIMMY SULLIVAN

The victim, unearthed beneath the cellar of a demolished Victorian house, will be revealed by the end of Episode 1 as a 17 year old boy by the name of Jimmy Sullivan. Born in Toxteth in 1959 to a white mum and a Caribbean father, he ran away from home (his father was a violent alcoholic) in 1975. He ended up on the streets of the West End where he met various small time villains and other kids like him who taught him how to survive by begging and thieving. It was a desperate kind of life, hand to mouth, with no love or affection, at a time when there were far fewer safety nets for kids like him. At one low point he turned tricks with men he met in the dive bars and amusement arcades of Soho. His only stable period during this whole time was a 3 month stay at 27 Arlington Crescent, at that time, a hostel for homeless young men and women. Then inevitably one day he just fell through the cracks. The last sighting of him will turn out to be in late 1976 at a music venue in Soho, watching a new band called the Sex Pistols. His mum is still alive in 2014 (she is 72) and finding her boy's body brings some closure to a lifetime of pain. But now she wants to know who killed him.

THE SUSPECTS

ROBERT GRIEVES

Grievess (now 67) is the still very active Dean of a Sussex parish which straddles both the poverty of Hastings, and the more bucolic charms of rural Sussex. He has been married to Grace for thirty nine years and, we will learn, acted as chaplain to the hostel Jimmy stayed in, from 1972-1983. The investigation will reveal that in 1976, as a young man who had only recently taken holy orders, he had had an affair with a young girl (Jo Bridges) who was

staying in the hostel, and ended up getting her pregnant. Jo's actual boyfriend was Jimmy who had thought the kid was his and had been delighted. However Grieves, we will learn, had paid for Jo to have an abortion - he was married and a chaplain and the consequences of her having the child were potentially desperate for him. Then Jo had had a row with Jimmy and told him that Grieves was the father and one night Jimmy had gone looking for Grieves. So the question the police must ask Grieves, is did Jimmy find him, and if he did, what happened next?

As the investigation peels back layers it will turn out that actually Jo didn't have the abortion but had the child, which Grieves discovered some thirty years ago. Since that time he has lived a completely separate life as a father and financial support to the child, Bronwen (37) and a sometime partner of Jo, siphoning money from his parish to do so. Which is of course profoundly shocking for Grace and their children (he is about to officiate at one of their daughters' wedding) and makes them question everything they thought they knew about him. In the end, Grace will ask him to leave. This is a woman who has played second fiddle all her life, finally saying enough. All of the problems of the last 37 years are revealed - this is a family that have lived a lie of happiness, partly by the force of Robert's personality, and they are incredibly angry that in his desire to re-invent himself he was actually a bad father and an emotionally distant husband.

The final twist is when Jo has to contemplate that Grieves might have murdered Jimmy in self defence. And so (perhaps to protect Bronwen) she reveals that Bronwen was actually born a year after the abortion and four years before she re-established contact with Grieves. Bronwen's real father was a one night stand and Grieves has been financially and emotionally supporting someone else's child all this time. Already in frail health, Grieves will suffer a near fatal heart attack before the story is over.

FRANK PHILIP CROSS

Now known as Philip Cross (62) he is the CEO of a successful chain of sports wear stores. He has always traded on being a self made man who started out selling cheap clothes from the back of a van down East Lane market, but the truth is more complicated. Born to dirt poor parents in the east end of London, in the late sixties he managed to get himself 'apprenticed' to a south London crime family. 'Frank' quickly earned a reputation as a vicious and ruthless enforcer for the firm's rackets (protection, usury, fraud) capable of shocking levels of violence. When evidence emerges during the investigation that in the summer of 76 Sullivan might have borrowed money from the firm that he was unable to pay back, Cross finds the finger of suspicion pointing in his direction. Now a business tsar to the coalition government he has rewritten his history to include no mention of his violent criminal beginnings.

The discovery of Sullivan's body threatens to un-do his reputation, the share price of his company, his promise of being elevated to the Lords and his relationship with his wife and daughter Bella, who is a human rights lawyer currently fighting a high profile case against the deportation of an asylum seeker. Cross, a seemingly decent man now, insists his sometimes violent past does not make him a murderer. But as figures from his criminal past re-emerge, threatening everything he once held dear, is there a chance that Philip might fall back on old methods to protect his reputation?

LIZZIE WILTON

Lizzie Wilton (57) a cashier in a building society, and her Jamaican born husband Ray (62), a tube driver, are heavily involved in the local youth centre. Ray as a football coach and Lizzie teaching literacy skills to disadvantaged (mainly black) kids. Lizzie has a particularly close relationship with one of their most troubled kids, Curtis, who she is helping to eschew gang life and make a bid for normality and stability.

But in 1976, Lizzie (or Beth as she called herself then) was a runaway and living on the streets, in a relationship with a man called Kevin Erskine, who we will learn was a member of the British Movement. The investigation will uncover that Beth ('Laws' as she was then) was also a prominent member of the NF and wrote many articles in their pamphlets inciting racial hatred and advocating violence against Jews, blacks and Asians. Erskine and Laws were together for three years before he was arrested for robbing and murdering an Asian man in Mile End. But evidence will emerge to suggest Laws knew Sullivan and had had several fall outs with him in the hostel, and that she and Erskine may have lured him to his death to rob him of money they believed he had (fifty pounds they knew he had borrowed from Cross - money he had borrowed to prove to Jo he could raise their child).

Lizzie will protest that she was a drug addict and an alcoholic in her early 20s and under the thrall of Erskine's relentless violence toward her, effectively that he forced her to say the awful things she did back then. But her husband and Curtis find it hard to accept this. And even when she is exonerated of the murder, her racist past looks as if it has now destroyed her marriage, her place in her community, and her relationship with not just Curtis, but all the kids that she has tried to help, and who had become her family. In the end, racked with guilt, Lizzie, decides it would be better for everyone if she just disappeared, and so she does. Curtis, who has been on a downward spiral since he learnt of her past, finally pulls himself together and goes to look for her. He eventually finds her, living on the same streets she lived on nearly forty years ago, and ultimately, is able to remind her of what she taught him, that we are all more than the sum of our past.

ERIC SLATER

When we first meet Eric, 74, he is the wheelchair bound carer of his much loved wife Claire who has early stages of dementia. We will learn Eric worked as an accountant for HMRC for most of his professional life and did the books for the hostel from 72 – 84, when it closed down. Now long in retirement, as we join him, this chirpy grand dad is organising a fortieth wedding anniversary party, and trying to resist one of his son's proposal that he and Claire move in to sheltered housing. So Eric seems a gentle, kind soul, but what no-one ever knew, and what the investigation will slowly unravel, is that as a young man, Eric had developed a pathologically violent hatred of homosexuals (perhaps precipitated by a childhood incident in a cinema with a 'dirty old man') and expressed this hatred in the sixties and seventies, in extreme violence against 'queers'

In episode four a key witness gives the police a reason to search Slater's house and astonishingly, they discover a body in the garden (the reason Eric had always been so

resistant to moving out). Eric is arrested, and finally confesses to the murder of both the young man and finally, of Jimmy Sullivan (Jimmy's reputation for turning tricks his sole motive).

Over the course of the remaining episodes, as Eric is remanded in a high security prison, it will be slowly revealed that there were four further murders he was responsible for, most of them, young gay men who simply one day disappeared. Slater, using up the last bit of control he has, spools out the information bit by bit, which allows the police to find the missing bodies and tell the victims' loved ones where their sons, brothers and fathers are buried. He later admits himself he would certainly have gone on to kill more if a car accident in 1978 had not left him physically disabled (he has been in a wheel chair since then) and robbed him of his mobility.

His two sons are of course completely bereft, the only comfort they are able to find, that an often difficult relationship between the two of them is partially repaired, as they the tragedy brings them closer. As for Eric's wife Claire, we get the sense, through elliptical comments she makes during the investigation, that she always had her doubts about her husband, but we will never quite know if this is the dementia talking, or the real person.

THE INVESTIGATORS

D.C.I. CASS STUART

Cass Stuart is 45 and a chess grandmaster who also allegedly once did the Times cryptic in under four minutes. In her time she has undone some of the most unpleasant criminals in the UK and was heading for an assistant commissioners role before common sense prevailed and she turned it down to go back to the coalface. Divorced, she has a filthy laugh, a huge heart, and is indisputably the smartest detective in the Met. Lives with her dad, a 73 year old widower, who has refused to grow old gracefully and spends his days chasing GILFS on online dating sites. He is a complete joy in her life but the investigation will prompt her to ask questions about his relationship with her late mother, that she will wish she hadn't.

D..S. SUNNY KHAN

Sunny is forty nine and an old hand who any time he wants but who just still loves the gig. There is no-one better placed to cope with the strain the investigation puts on the whole team as it gets darker and darker. A single father of two girls, Sunny juggles work and home life seemingly effortlessly.

What Stuart and Escott slowly uncover will change the relationships between the suspects and their loved ones forever, and for Slater will end in five life sentences for a crime 37 years old. The story touches on multiple themes - how well we know those closest to us, can justice be served so very very cold, is a seventy year old any more or less deserving of our compassion or our ire than someone younger? And ultimately, do bad things ever *really* go

unpunished, or, if the law does not catch up with you, does justice find some expression in the person you become or the life you end up living?

Welcome to '27 Arlington Crescent', a returnable format series, investigating cold case crimes and exploring the rippling, heart rending, and primarily domestic, repercussions of introducing the past to the present.