



itv

STONEHOUSE



STONEHOUSE PRESS PACK CONTENTS

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MATTHEW MACFADYEN, KEELEY HAWES AND EMER HEATLEY STAR IN STONEHOUSE, WRITTEN BY ACCLAIMED WRITER JOHN PRESTON AND DIRECTED BY AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR JON S. BAIRD

The life and times of disgraced Labour minister John Stonehouse has been dramatised for ITV by acclaimed writer John Preston with BAFTA and Emmy award-winning actor Matthew Macfadyen (*Succession*, *Quiz*) in the leading role and co-starring Keeley Hawes (*Honour*, *It's A Sin*) as Stonehouse's wife Barbara.

The three-part drama, directed by BAFTA nominated Jon S. Baird (*Stan & Ollie*, *Vinyl*, *Filth*) with BritBox International as co-production partners, relates how Stonehouse, a high-flying member of Harold Wilson's Government, vanished from the beach of a large luxury hotel in Florida in November 1974, leaving a neatly folded pile of clothes as he swam into the sea, intent on faking his own death.

Commented Matthew Macfadyen: "What happened to John Stonehouse is the stuff of legend. I've always been intrigued by what motivated him to fake his own death, and leave behind the family he loved and doted upon and a promising political career. John Preston's script truly captures the man and his colourful life."

The MP for Walsall North left behind his loving wife Barbara and three young children as a shocked public and media presumed he had drowned or been eaten by sharks.

Charismatic, oozing with charm and brimming with confidence, Stonehouse had impressed Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Labour stalwarts from an early stage in his parliamentary career. From a working-class background, he'd graduated from the London School of Economics, was in the RAF during the War and seemed the ideal candidate for a life in politics.

As the drama unfolds, it becomes apparent his reputation as a devoted family man masked the truth, as he'd embarked on an extra marital affair with his secretary, Sheila Buckley, and acted as a spy for the Czech Secret Service in the 1960s.

His complex financial status and relationships eventually took their toll, with Stonehouse deliberately stealing the identity of a recently deceased constituent. Stonehouse applied for a passport in the dead man's name and began to weave an elaborate conspiracy, seeking a new life in Australia. But his plans soon turned sour as Stonehouse was arrested by Australian police who had been under the mistaken impression that he was the fugitive peer Lord Lucan.

Brought back to the UK by Scotland Yard detectives, Stonehouse found that he was crucial to keeping the Labour government in power with its wafer-thin majority.

The drama also stars Emer Heatley (*Showtrial*) as Stonehouse's mistress, Sheila Buckley, Kevin R. McNally (*The Crown, Unforgotten*) as Harold Wilson, Dorothy Atkinson (*All Creatures Great and Small, Mum*) as Betty Boothroyd and Igor Grabuzov (*Voskresenskiy, No Looking Back*) as Marek.

Commented writer John Preston: "I've always been fascinated by John Stonehouse. The story of how he faked his own death and tried to start a new life in Australia under an assumed name is one of the most bizarre true-life tales I've ever come across. I'm absolutely thrilled that it's being brought to the screen with such an outstanding cast."

Stonehouse has been commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama, Polly Hill.

Commented Polly Hill: "John Preston's brilliant scripts and the perfect casting of Matthew Macfadyen and Keeley Hawes promise to make this an unmissable drama. This incredible story and the excellent production team, led by the Director Jon S. Baird, will continue the unparalleled quality we have at delivering true drama on ITV."

Stonehouse is produced by Snowed-In Productions and Clearwood Films with Ruth Kenley-Letts (*Mrs Wilson, Too Close, You Don't Know Me*) and Ellie Wood (*The Dig, Decline and Fall*) as executive producers. The production reunites Ellie Wood and John Preston, after Wood produced the feature film, *The Dig*, adapted from Preston's eponymous novel.

The drama is directed by acclaimed film and TV director Jon S. Baird. Baird's credits include the award-winning *Filth*, starring James McAvoy, and *Stan & Ollie*, with Steve Coogan and John C. Reilly playing comedy legends Laurel and Hardy. Baird's most recent TV project is the upcoming *Tetris*, starring Taron Egerton for Apple TV.

Commented Director Jon S. Baird: "I'm always drawn to fascinating true stories and this one is extra special because it has both comedic and emotional potential. Matthew is perfect casting for this role. It's also been great to work with ITV for the first time and with two fabulous producers in Ruth and Ellie."

Ruth Kenley-Letts, CEO at Snowed-In Productions, said: "It's been thrilling to be a part of the team making this stranger than fiction story of a British MP who came back from the dead. It's also been very exciting to work for the first time with the talented director Jon S. Baird on this first-class script with a standout cast. I'm delighted to work again with Polly Hill and Kevin Lygo at ITV and partnering with Diederick Santer at BritBox International along with the team at Banijay, all of whom have given their unequivocal support to the project."

Ellie Wood at Clearwood Films said: "It's been wonderful to work on this drama about the astonishing rise and fall of John Stonehouse. John Preston's exceptionally witty and poignant scripts feel peculiarly relevant at a time where the behaviour of politicians is so often making headlines. I can't wait for the audience to see Matthew, Keeley and the brilliant cast bring this incredible story to ITV and BritBox International."

John Preston, former Arts Editor for the Sunday Telegraph and London Evening Standard, is author of a number of acclaimed books. *A Very English Scandal*, the story of the political scandal involving Jeremy Thorpe, was adapted into the BAFTA award-winning TV drama, starring Hugh Grant and Ben Whishaw. Preston's novel, *The Dig*, was adapted into a major feature film in 2021 for Netflix, receiving multiple BAFTA nominations. His latest work, *Fall: The Mystery of Robert Maxwell*, won the 2021 Costa Biography Award and is being adapted for television.

Executive Producers are Jon S. Baird, Neil Blair, Ruth Kenley-Letts, Matthew Macfadyen, John Preston and Ellie Wood, Polly Hill for ITV and Diederick Santer for BritBox International.

BritBox International, the streaming service offering the best collection of unmissable British entertainment, will be the exclusive home to the series in the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway.

Banijay will be responsible for the international distribution of the drama.

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN



INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN

Did you know about this real life story?

“I was born the month before John Stonehouse faked his own death in November 1974. So I didn’t know much about the story before this project came along. Just a vague memory of something I had read. And I conflated it with the 1970s TV series The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin. Although that was based on a novel by David Nobbs and before that his short play written before Stonehouse vanished.

“John Preston’s scripts for ‘Stonehouse’ were brilliant. So there was no agonising over whether to take the role. It was such a blast to read. I found it very funny, odd, moving and English. It’s gripping, hilarious and sad. A similar feel to the TV drama Quiz I did in that it’s bizarre.

“John is very good at writing perfectly crafted scenes which swing along and are very nice to play. There is also a rather poignant theme running all the way through this involving a boyhood memory that John Stonehouse carries with him when things are going wrong.”

What sort of MP was John Stonehouse?

“The younger John Stonehouse was a bit of a rising star. A bright, self-possessed man. Good looking, charismatic and very personable with people. By all accounts he was a very good MP and at talking to people from different social backgrounds.

“He was a shining light in the Labour Party and became Minister for Aviation and later Postmaster General. Stonehouse was destined for higher things had Labour won the 1970 general election. There was a suggestion that Harold Wilson could have made him Foreign Secretary.

“He also did a spot of moonlighting for the Czech Secret Service and went to Africa and did some important work there. But eventually the wheels started coming off.”

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN CONTINUED

John Stonehouse's wife Barbara is played by your wife Keeley Hawes. How was it being reunited together on screen again?

"We first acted together in Spooks. Then I played a guest role as Gil Hollis in Ashes To Ashes before we played husband and wife in a film called Death At A Funeral. So this was our fourth screen outing together.

"We didn't really have any qualms about working together again, playing husband and wife. You hope it will be all right because you're going to work and coming home together. But, of course, it was totally lovely. As natural as breathing. I think something happens anyway when you're on set. Keeley is a brilliant actress so I'm lost in the scene and working with her. The bonus is that we get to hang out and spend time together.

"In the story as we tell it in this drama, there was real love and affection between John and Barbara and she was very ambitious for John. Barbara was a bright woman and they were a very good team. Keeley and I had great fun with that. Even when John is talking absolute nonsense or trying to dig himself out of a hole, she is always there in the background watching quietly. All seeing and all knowing.

"There's a line where Barbara says to him, 'The trouble with you, John, is that you always want to be somebody you're not.' You cannot know what his motivations were. But there are parallels with current politicians. A disconnect between them doing their jobs and their idea of themselves. You can spot it more easily now because we have 24-hour media and people are being interviewed all of the time.

"John Stonehouse was also ambitious and not without personal and professional vanity. Barbara also tolerated his roving eye. But, of course, this is a drama. It's the script we're shooting and it's always odd talking about real people. In our story, that's how we play it out."

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN CONTINUED

How did he become a spy for the Czech Republic?

“In the story it happened when he was in Czechoslovakia. But I don’t think he was pouring forth an awful lot of critical material. He did it for a while and he was paid. I enjoyed the idea, that we portray in this drama, that he relished the glamour of it. In his mind’s eye he was Edward Fox, Roger Moore - one of those guys in an overcoat with the collar turned up. A case of, ‘Well, if I’m going to be a spy, I might as well enjoy it.’ I imagine he created his own James Bond soundtrack in his head.”

When did John Stonehouse meet Sheila Buckley?

“In the drama he interviews her for the job of his parliamentary secretary and they fall for each other. She was much younger than him. He was a handsome man working in the House of Commons with power and influence. It’s quite intoxicating all of that stuff. It appears that was part of the attraction for her. I think when Barbara meets Sheila for the first time, she very quickly realises what is going on. Or at least has strong suspicions.”

Why did he fake his own death?

“I think it just became too much. It all unravelled. I played it as if he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He gets into terrible trouble with money with various different bank accounts and in one scene he dials The Samaritans. Although as his wife later points out once he reappears, if he was having a nervous breakdown he planned it all very well in advance.

“There is an extraordinary scene where he says goodbye to his wife and children and leaves for a business trip to Miami. With them not knowing this was meant to be a final farewell. That was a hard scene to play. Because once you start thinking about it, it’s unimaginable. Very difficult to do. I found it quite moving.

“In our story he obtains a passport to take on the identity of one of his constituents who has died. One of two different identities he took on. With the idea of starting a new life with Sheila in Australia, leaving his old identity of John Stonehouse behind.

“He was only discovered in Australia because somebody thought he was Lord Lucan, a British peer who had also gone missing. Otherwise, he might have got away with it. Who knows?”

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN CONTINUED

Where did you film the scene where he leaves his clothes on a beach and is presumed drowned?

“We filmed that in Malaga, doubling for Miami. The water was very cold. Some of us in wet suits with camera equipment. Some of us without, including me. With wig and sideburns. It was extremely chilly. Fortunately, I am a good swimmer. As was John Stonehouse.

“We had atrocious weather in Spain. Awful storms. The sky went yellow on the last day of filming with all of the sand and dust from the Sahara Desert. We shot there for six days in total and in all but one of those days no-one could get in the water because it was too dangerous. The waves were huge. Then we had one day of weak sun and so we went for it. And I think it works on screen.”

How did he think he would ever get away with it?

“It’s that chutzpah. A sort of vanity, which I found fascinating. ‘I’ll just do it - it’ll work.’ It was much easier to disappear then when none of today’s modern communications existed. Britain and Australia were literally worlds apart.

“The only disguise he managed was changing his parting from one side to the other. That was all he did. His teeth were always a bit of a horror show. So I had some fabulous fake teeth for Stonehouse. It’s a lovely prop to have because it makes you feel different. It’s quite a subtle thing that also changes the way you speak.”

Do you think John Stonehouse ever registered the cost to others of what he did?

“My feeling is that he did come to realise the human cost of what he did. But you simply play moments of that and you allow the audience to make their own minds up. Even so, it must have been such an enormous thing to address and contemplate that he might have buried it in his mind.

“When he came back to Britain he was quite brazen about it all. He hung on as an MP before being imprisoned. He did not want to give that job up. The Labour prime minister Harold Wilson had a very slim majority in the House of Commons so he needed Stonehouse to toe the line.

“There is a sadness in this story. John and Barbara had a life together with children which he chose to leave behind. After his release from prison he stayed with Sheila Buckley and had a child with her.”

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN CONTINUED

What was it like working with Kevin R McNally as Harold Wilson and Emer Heatley as Sheila Buckley?

“I had done an episode of Spooks with Kevin 20 years ago. It was really good fun to work with him again. Those scenes were a hoot. Just lovely. Most of the time we were trying not to laugh. While Emer is a total delight. She’s still very early on in her acting career but she was such a brilliant, natural actress and lovely to be with.”

What did director Jon S. Baird bring to ‘Stonehouse’?

“Jon brought huge rigor and enthusiasm with an instinctive intelligence about how to tell a story. I loved working with Jon. Keeley and I had a really good time. He has a great skill, which very good directors have, of galvanising the whole crew. Which is so important. Jon was brilliant.”

John Stonehouse talks about what politics does to some of the people involved in it. Has that changed?

“I think that resonates with events today. I’m sure it’s true of many politicians. There’s no escape, no hiding place. It exposes all of your faults mercilessly.”

If John Stonehouse were alive today, what would you ask him?

“I’d ask him, ‘Why?’ But I sort of know the answer. It’s an irrational thing. And I don’t think he would be able to answer that question. The heart wants what it wants and you’re not able to rationalise things. You just do them.”

You have enjoyed a huge recent success in America. Why did you want to then play John Stonehouse?

“I had filmed the last season of Succession, which was a long one because Covid extended it all. Then Stonehouse came along and I could not turn it down. To go from Succession to Stonehouse is just the best as an actor. Because it’s different. You’re flexing different muscles.

“It was exhausting because it was filming every day with a lot of different make up changes. Our make-up designer Julie Kendrick and the team worked really hard. With different wigs and a time period from the 1960s to the 1980s. So, it was very hard work but I really enjoyed it. I’m very glad it came my way.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEELEY HAWES



INTERVIEW WITH KEELEY HAWES

Q: Did you know about the disappearance of John Stonehouse?

“No, I hadn’t heard about John Stonehouse. It’s quite a story. Matthew was sent the script when he was approached about playing John Stonehouse and he suggested I should also read it. So I did. I said, ‘It’s fantastic and the part of Barbara is really good too.’ But that was the first I knew of this story. It’s the kind of thing where you think, ‘Why hasn’t this been done before?’ Because it’s so brilliant dramatically, unusual and true. Which is quite often where the best stories come from.

“John Preston’s scripts tell a tragic story but it’s also both funny and moving. It is a heightened version of the truth. We are dealing with a real person and other people who are still alive. Everybody wanted to be very respectful to the memory of John Stonehouse. There is always all of that to consider, but you are making a TV show - a three-part drama not a documentary.”

Q: Can you tell us about Barbara Stonehouse?

“In our story we meet Barbara when she has been married to John for a number of years and they have three children. She was an intelligent woman who was very ambitious for her husband. It was a very male dominated world back then.

“As the wife of an MP she was used to a certain amount of press and being in the public eye. This was nothing compared to what happened after John went missing and then when he was subsequently found in Australia. It was a huge story.

“Barbara was incredibly bright, confident and savvy. Barbara did an amazing job of navigating her way through it all and then quietly divorcing him and leaving him to it, while keeping that ‘politician’s wife face’ on things. Keeping up that front.

“The whole thing must have been horrendous, humiliating and deeply upsetting for her and the family. All of their dirty linen being aired in the newspapers. I think she was very strong and brave under the circumstances.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEELEY HAWES CONTINUED

Q: How would you describe John Stonehouse?

“By all accounts he was an incredibly charismatic man and attractive to women. He was much liked and his family adored him. It was just a case of somebody who dug himself into a deeper and deeper hole and couldn’t see a way out. I don’t think he was a bad person. He just found himself out of his depth.”

Q: You and Matthew first acted together in Spooks, then in Ashes To Ashes and played husband and wife in Death At A Funeral. What was it like reuniting on screen?

“Working with Matthew was delightful. We’d talked about doing something together again. This was perfect. Because it’s based on true events - we’re very much playing other people - this is so far removed from our lives. So this felt right. It was so interesting, the writing was brilliant and the parts were so wonderful that it just seemed to tick all of the boxes.

“We both loved working with the director Jon S. Baird. I’ve also worked with Ruth Kenley-Letts of Snowed-In Productions a number of times now and so I knew we would be in safe hands there.

“Matthew was obviously on set every day and I just went in and out. It was always going to be slightly odd. I think probably stranger for the people around us on set, knowing that we are married and how that might work and how that dynamic might play out. But actually, for us, it was just really normal. And having worked together before, we knew that it would be OK. “We also both look different in Stonehouse. I wear various wigs for different time periods. While Matthew has contact lenses, lots of facial hair, different wigs and false teeth. Everything about him that I’m used to seeing had been changed.

“Matthew and I had already had make up calls and tests before filming so we had an idea of what it would be like. Then we would have the daily reveal of him as John Stonehouse and every time it would be slightly different because of the process of ageing across the time periods.

“Barbara’s costumes are on another level. Just brilliant. Our costume designer is so clever. I just loved Barbara’s look. She was a stylish woman. Really well put together. And the 1970s was such a great period in terms of fashion. We had a lot of original pieces because the fabrics from that time period survive anything.

INTERVIEW WITH KEELEY HAWES CONTINUED

“So it was easy. Matthew is also a really good actor! We would drive in together and then his teeth would go in, we’d do the scenes and then have lunch. It was a lovely experience. And that was down to the director Jon and the crew and the other cast. It was a very happy job, people enjoyed it.”

Q: What are your thoughts about why John Stonehouse staged his own death?

“It’s very hard to get your head around what he did. You couldn’t even attempt it now. Today we have a digital footprint and trail. Although it’s possible, it’s very difficult to just disappear now. Especially someone with such a high profile.

“John Stonehouse found himself in all sorts of trouble. Politically, financially and emotionally. He’d been having an affair with his secretary Sheila Buckley for a long time and had money troubles. So he was under a huge amount of pressure. To do what he did is not something someone in their right mind would try to get away with. It was quite a saga.

“There’s a scene where he is saying goodbye to Barbara and their children. Him knowing that if his plan worked this would be the last time he would ever see them. While they, of course, have no idea about it. The whole thing is heartbreaking and really moving.

“He used other people’s identities to vanish and start a new life. That’s quite extraordinary. But it was a different world back then with no mobile phones or internet. Making a landline call abroad was a big thing. Even later in the 1980s. We had some relatives in Australia and you would make a call at Christmas. The delay on the line would be horrendous. You would have to speak and then wait for them to say something. It was a different world of waiting weeks for a letter to arrive from the other side of the globe.

“The fact he thought he would get away with it is astonishing in itself. That Sheila Buckley was also going to disappear to be with him. Was no-one going to question that? It was as if they hadn’t really given it much thought beyond the initial few weeks. And then the fall out when he was discovered in Australia was horrendous. For five weeks his wife and children thought he was dead. And then he suddenly turns up again. It’s just unimaginable. The way he went about it is mind boggling.

“Mental health wasn’t really talked about in those days. I think he did have a breakdown. That was a huge part of why he did what he did. Someone losing control of their life and having a breakdown. Which is far from funny.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEELEY HAWES CONTINUED

Q: Can you tell us about the scene where Labour's assistant chief whip Betty Boothroyd (Dorothy Atkinson) visits Barbara after her husband is found alive?

"Barbara already knows Betty wants her to go to Australia to see her husband and why. But, of course, she has to go. I did a play when I was 12 with Dorothy Atkinson and we hadn't seen each other since then. Until that day when she came in as Betty Boothroyd for that scene together. It was brilliant."

Q: Barbara finds herself living with both John and Sheila in Australia?

"In our story John asked Barbara to come out to Australia. And then they lived together with Sheila."

"We filmed the Australian scenes in Malaga which also doubled for Miami. There was a mini heatwave with sunshine and glorious blue skies in England when we left and then when we got to Malaga it rained every day with storms and the palm trees blowing around. But somehow it worked out OK."

Q: Once back in Britain, Barbara initially took her husband back. Why?

"I think she took him back for the sake of the family, the children and for appearances. But Barbara probably knew that once the dust had settled that would be that for their relationship. She wasn't going to be humiliated anymore."

Q: What was it like working with Emer Heatley as Sheila Buckley?

"Poor Emer, coming in with Matthew and I being actual husband and wife and then playing that character of Sheila. We laughed all the way through. We adored Emer. And this is one of her first jobs. She gave a brilliant performance. So professional. I really enjoyed working with her."

Q: What did director Jon S. Baird bring to this drama?

"Jon brought so much enthusiasm and energy to the project. It was really exciting working with him."

"The atmosphere on set comes from the director and from number one on the call sheet, which was Matthew. Between them they created an atmosphere where people were happy to be at work every day. It was such a lovely project to be part of."

INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY



INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY

You were not born when John Stonehouse vanished in 1974. Did you know about this story?

“I was with my dad when I got an email from my agent about this role and it said, ‘Amazingly, this is a true story.’ So, I told my dad and he said it was a massive news story at the time. But that was the first I had ever heard of it. I couldn’t believe it had really happened. There was a real difference between the actors who came in and didn’t know about this story and others who said they remembered it so vividly.

“I completely loved John Preston’s script. It jumped off the page and the tone was very clear. It’s such a lot of fun but he’s also made it incredibly moving. The character of Sheila Buckley was a gift. A nice mix of innocence and manipulation, becoming more strident as the story develops. She also has quite a pronounced speech impediment. I really enjoy working with accents and finding a character’s authentic voice – so that element was particularly exciting for me to work on. I also loved the period. The fashion and music of that time. So I wanted to be a part of it right from the start.”

Q: Who is Sheila Buckley?

“We meet Sheila Buckley when she goes for an interview as MP John Stonehouse’s parliamentary secretary. She was aged around 22 at the time and about 21 years younger than Stonehouse, who was married with children. In the drama there is an instant frisson between them and they begin to have an affair. He was a bit of a dish and would appear as a charismatic figure to Sheila who at this time wasn’t that worldly or knowing. She was probably completely bowled over by him initially.

“Early on Sheila is rather naive and appears quite innocent. I think Stonehouse enjoys her adoration of him. But those dynamics change as the story goes on. She had married very young and was later divorced.

“This was also an era of huge social and technological change. Stonehouse was involved in things like Concorde and the arrival of modern telephones in the home and so on. Because it’s a true story and such a specific time period I read a few books when I was preparing for the role. One of them was ‘White Heat’ about the 1960s and Harold Wilson’s government.

INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY CONTINUED

“It was just such an exciting and youthful time. People really thought the world was changing after the Second World War and then rationing. It must have felt like everything was moving into the future. Stonehouse was at the forefront of some of that.

“The writer John Preston wanted to play with how much power Sheila had. At the beginning she uses her innocent side to her advantage. There are a few scenes where she can see that Stonehouse is not playing ball. So, she reverts to a very flirty, almost child-like tone. Which completely pulls him back into line.

“It was fun to play with that rather than just portraying her as an ingénue for the whole thing. But you can see that she is motivated mainly just by wanting to be with John Stonehouse. She must have really been in love with him. I think John Stonehouse could not say ‘no’ to people. He had to please whoever he was in front of at the time. So, he told both Barbara and Sheila that he loved them.

“Sheila is very much a child of the 1960s. She’s got knee-length black leather boots and a mini dress. I wore quite a big wig to play Sheila but there was an extra bit of wig to add for the sixties’ scenes. Lots of hair.

“The costume, hair and make-up team basically did 95 per cent of our jobs for us. Once I had the wig and amazing clothes on. I had so many clothes. It was fantastic. Then when you walk in on these amazing sets it did feel easy to put yourself back in that time. Everyone did such a great job.”

In this drama, when does Sheila first meet Stonehouse’s wife Barbara (Keeley Hawes)?

“We have a scene at the BBC TV studios on the night of the 1970 General Election when Sheila and Barbara meet. The way I decided to play it was that Sheila knows she is going to meet Barbara for the first time. Sheila wears her best dress and looks absolutely fantastic because she wants to stake her claim. Having that in my head when we filmed the scene was really helpful.

“At that point Sheila and John have their own professional relationship that Barbara walks in on. So Barbara is on the back foot. It was fun working with Keeley and seeing how we could play the balance of power. But there was an element of sacrifice for Sheila because during the affair she could never have a full relationship with him. It was probably quite frustrating a lot of the time to have to meet in secret.”

INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY CONTINUED

Why did John Stonehouse fake his own death?

“On a base level, John Stonehouse got into a very large financial mess and couldn’t see a way out of it. He strikes me as someone who could convince himself of anything. And in the way that John Preston has written this, really enjoys the double lives he leads. Whether it’s the affair with Sheila or his link to spying. He enjoys putting on different hats.

“Maybe that excitement and sheer madness of it all was appealing for him. If it happened today, we would probably think there was a deeper, underlying mental health problem. I can’t think he was fully in his right mind to do something like that.”

What happened after John Stonehouse disappeared?

“There is news footage of Sheila being interviewed after John Stonehouse vanished and then was discovered and arrested. I watched that as a warm up to get her voice. It’s incredible because you obviously know now that she is lying about not knowing anything about it. She’s around my age at this time and I can’t imagine doing something like that. Being so determined to stand by him while knowing you could be arrested and charged yourself. She kept it a secret from Barbara and his children.

“He would have been discovered far earlier today with social media, mobile phone cameras, CCTV, better communications and so on. I think he was incredibly naive. He even made phone calls to Sheila and sent letters to her in London from Australia where they were going to start a new life together. It’s difficult to see how he thought that could ever work.

“From what I read, after John Stonehouse was sentenced Sheila visited him in prison whenever she could and was completely devoted. Then when he was released, she was there waiting in a car to collect him. Hilariously, I can’t drive. But I did least get to sit in an original Mini car, and that was enough for me. Those Minis were tiny. Like a little metal box so close to the ground.

“John and Sheila later married and had a son together. She definitely proved her love for him when all of his power and money had gone. If I could speak to Sheila, I would ask her if she ever regretted anything. And if there was ever a point where she wished she had removed herself from the situation. I suspect the answer would be no.”

INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY CONTINUED

What was it like working with Matthew Macfadyen as John Stonehouse and Keeley Hawes as Barbara?

“Matthew and Keeley are such fantastic actors. I’ve watched them both in so many of my favourite films and TV shows. It was wonderful to actually see how they work and how much fun they have with it all. In the scenes between Sheila and Stonehouse, Matthew was always there and ready to go, looking for ways to find fun in the scenes. Then the addition of Keeley as Barbara later in the shoot brought such a fun energy, as they have such an established dynamic as a couple – and there’s a shorthand already. It was a real pleasure to work with them both, and I feel very lucky to have done so.”

And the director Jon S. Baird?

“Jon was absolutely incredible. It was clear from the start that he knew exactly what he wanted in terms of tone. He works so quickly which is great. It keeps everything so fresh. But he also let us all make our own decisions about the characters, and was happy to let us play with our own ideas. Jon was excited about the script which was very infectious. He brought us all along with a sense of excitement and fun.”

Where did you film?

“They built John Stonehouse’s House of Commons’ office on a set. It was amazing and really felt as if you were in parliament with all of the wood panelling and so on. Sheila’s flat in Pimlico was also full of period detail with a brown and orange colour palette and a drinks trolley. That was fab. I was like, ‘Great. You can just leave me here. I’m going to live in this flat.’

“We filmed the Australian scenes in Spain. Unfortunately, it was during some of the worst weather the Costa del Sol has ever had. So, Australia might look a little bit stormy.”

How do you reflect back on playing Sheila Buckley?

“It was a dream role. Every element of it was exactly the type of thing I love to work on. The script was fantastic. All of the team were lovely and so encouraging. Really aware that I was stepping in to play opposite Matthew and Keeley, who are so established. The director Jon S. Baird was always helping to put me at ease and not to feel intimidated.

INTERVIEW WITH EMER HEATLEY CONTINUED

“I actually find this story incredibly moving. When we were filming certain scenes, I found myself feeling sad for the real people involved. The writer has done such a good job of combining the absolutely bonkers elements, with the story of a man who slowly lost himself.

“I don’t think John Stonehouse ever really knew who he was or where he fitted in. I always find that interesting in dramas. Where you’re watching someone come to terms with themselves. The way Matthew plays it is so brilliant. Because he makes you cry with laughter at times and then plays moving and poignant scenes. I have very fond memories of working on Stonehouse.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY



INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY

Do you remember the news of John Stonehouse's disappearance in November 1974?

"I was aged 18 when John Stonehouse vanished and I remember the headlines. When this project came up I was amazed at how much detail I recalled. It was a huge story at the time. You wondered later how he ever thought he was going to get away with it. I had forgotten that it happened at almost exactly the same time as the disappearance of Lord Lucan. It was very weird.

"One thing that attracted me to John Preston's script was that alongside it being a very serious look at the story it also has a wonderful dark humour. It would be very easy to write John Stonehouse off as a narcissistic fool. I think people will find this drama very enjoyable if they take it in the spirit in which it was made. As well as an informative experience.

"I usually get scripts through and I'll take a bit of time to read and assimilate them. I sat down with these scripts and the next thing I knew it was dark and I had read all three scripts in one go. It's like a compulsive thriller novel. Absolutely brilliant. Wonderfully put together."

How did you approach playing Labour prime minister Harold Wilson?

"I remember Harold Wilson very well. He was prime minister from the time I was about eight years old, off and on, until I was about 20. I had also played him briefly before in a couple of scenes in the Tom Hardy film Legend.

"I jumped at that opportunity, as I jumped at this one, because when I was at school, I used to amuse my classmates by impersonating Harold Wilson. I felt that ability to imitate him was useful because I wanted to be as much like him as possible. Just as a tribute to my generation who remember him so well. Wilson was such an easily recognisable person both visually and orally. So I wanted to get that right.

"I watched a lot of him and re-read some stuff about him. If you're playing Disraeli then you have an excuse to try to go for the historical spirit because nobody alive has met him. But with Harold Wilson I didn't feel I could get away with it being a little bit like him. I felt I had to do as much as I could to inhabit him completely.

"Of course you've then got to give a performance and respond to the script and the other actors. I just made sure I was very well prepared and I could turn him on at any moment.

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY CONTINUED

“He came to power after 13 years of what he described as ‘Tory misrule’. He was trying to bring Britain kicking and screaming into the modern world and taking power out of the hands of those old patrician, empire Tories who were in control.

“Harold Wilson was the youngest prime minister of that century when he first went through the doors of No 10 in 1964. Although he always had the air of a middle aged man. It was a time of great social and technological change. He made a famous speech about the ‘white heat’ of technological change and scientific revolution.

“Society changed completely from the late 1950s to the late 1960s and Harold Wilson was at the head of that in terms of the government of the day. He worked very hard to stay relevant. Famously pushing for The Beatles to get their MBEs. He wanted to appeal to a younger audience.

“But I had forgotten how he went from having a pretty safe majority to hanging on to power. And it ended up all hinging upon John Stonehouse. So, Stonehouse was intrinsically tied to the safety of the government at the time.”

What sort of government did Harold Wilson lead in the 1960s?

“We have a scene where Harold Wilson gives a speech in the House of Commons. He says there are no people he went to school with in his government or anyone he met at a London club land dinner or on a grouse moor. That speech completed resonated with events of today. He ends up saying that people are in his government for one reason and one reason alone: That they are the best for the job.

“We filmed that speech on a remarkable set at a college where they built a three quarters size version of the House of Commons. It was fabulous and felt good to be there. It did a lot of the acting for you.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY CONTINUED

What was his initial view of, then, backbench MP John Stonehouse?

“Harold Wilson was pleased that John Stonehouse was a new, young MP from a working class background who appeared happily married. He thought he could be one of the faces of the modern Labour party Wilson wanted to create. Stonehouse rose rapidly through the ranks. But what Wilson had not accounted for was Stonehouse’s narcissism. Stonehouse lived in a bit of a world of his own. Wilson learned that the way to contain and control Stonehouse was by flattery. Because that always works for a narcissist. And it did indeed work for a while.

“Very early on they got wind that he might be a spy as well. But Stonehouse managed to persuade them that he wasn’t. It was Margaret Thatcher who decided, just as she came to power, that they wouldn’t bring any charges against Stonehouse for being a spy.

“Harold Wilson was very pragmatic. He asked John Stonehouse to be the face of the Labour Party in the BBC TV studio on election night in 1970. There was a thought he might become Foreign Secretary if Labour won. And one day maybe even Wilson’s successor. But I don’t think Wilson thought much about Stonehouse until things went awry.

“It was his business affairs that largely became his undoing. Stonehouse was a terrible businessman so he was facing money worries and bankruptcy. Eventually he became a millstone around Wilson’s neck. But at the same time Stonehouse formed part of Wilson’s very slim government majority.

“After Stonehouse disappeared - because they didn’t find a body and he was only presumed dead - they couldn’t hold a by-election to replace him as an MP. So, he was an absentee MP who had possibly been eaten by sharks. Of course he was living in Australia having taken the identity of another person.

“The writer John Preston has done a very good job in showing the frustrations that Wilson had with this ludicrous situation that he suddenly had to face right in the heart of his prime ministership and his government.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY CONTINUED

What job did Betty Boothroyd (Dorothy Atkinson) do for Harold Wilson?

“Before she later became Speaker of the House of Commons, Betty Boothroyd was Harold Wilson’s assistant chief whip. She was his right hand woman, as it were. An incredibly strong, capable, able woman. In the script he relies upon her heavily to try to deal with the problem of John Stonehouse as it unfolds.

“Harold Wilson and Betty Boothroyd were very similar in their backgrounds. They were both working class people. Betty had a rather posh accent early on. But then when she became Speaker she reverted to her northern roots.

“One must remember that politicians can be incredibly manipulative about image. I think this is why Stonehouse was such a thorn in their sides. Because he was so narcissistic, he was remarkably ignorant about image and what he could get away with.”

Members of the House of Commons expressed their condolences to the Stonehouse family when he was presumed dead in 1974. What happened next?

“No-one, including Harold Wilson, knew for sure what had happened to John Stonehouse. All that was known was that his clothes had been found on a Florida beach and he was presumed to have drowned. They were expecting a call from the Miami police to say his body had been washed up.

“But what was extraordinary was that this went on for weeks with no answer as to what had happened. In respect of Harold Wilson and the Labour government it was a case of, ‘What do we do? There is no precedent for this?’ They weren’t allowed to take him off the register of MPs.

“Then when he was arrested in Australia just over a month after he was presumed to have died, the police there had assumed at first that he was Lord Lucan. When there is a newsflash on TV about Stonehouse being found and arrested, Harold Wilson can’t believe any of this is happening. It is very blackly funny. So absurd.

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY CONTINUED

“We have a scene where John Stonehouse returns to Britain and they try to assimilate him back into the Labour Party. They gave me a line where Harold Wilson says to him, ‘So John, no more silly buggers, eh?’ That’s a real indication of the wonderful humour of the piece that has been really well mined. Our director was very keen that we tread that line very carefully.”

How did Stonehouse ever think he would get away with his plan?

“Taking on someone else’s identity after they had died would be very difficult to do today with electronic passports and so on. But back then Stonehouse realised he could adopt a complete other personality and live as another person. And he managed to do it for a while.

“The sheer nerve of thinking he was going to do this is very well dealt with in this drama. We’ve had to make it as clear as possible that all of this genuinely happened. As hard as it is to believe, it’s actually what occurred.

“There was one other person who was in on the secret of what had happened to John Stonehouse. And that was his mistress Sheila Buckley (Emer Heatley). He believed he was going to share his life with her. His wife and children then had to deal with the fact that he had made them believe he was dead. It’s the act of a very callous human being. That’s the dark side of him.”

After his return, John Stonehouse claimed the House of Commons was riddled with corruption, hypocrisy and deceit. Did Harold Wilson also become disenchanted with politics?

“Wilson partially felt he and Stonehouse were alike in terms of being very disheartened by the people around him towards the end of his time as prime minister. He thought they were dishonest. Just the sheer bloody nastiness of them, as he said.

“It’s a story relevant to today. There must be lots of people at the House of Commons who are thinking about getting out because of the erosion of dignity and honesty. It’s not to say we don’t understand the difficulties. But we’re at a very low ebb politically. Why would anyone want to get involved in that world? There is a sense that you can’t ever say what you mean and do what you say.

“I think Harold Wilson was partially broken by his involvement with politics. He went in there as many socialists do with very high ideals about what he could achieve for the nation. And then realised it was just a question of retaining power. Unfortunately, that’s what happens so very often.”

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN R. MCNALLY CONTINUED

Was Harold Wilson's resignation as prime minister in 1976 expected?

"It was a huge shock. There was no warning. It would be hard to do that today with 24-hour TV news and so on. I think it's pretty well accepted now that Harold Wilson was aware of his early onset Alzheimer's. He was a very sharp, intellectual man. Because of that he began to notice he wasn't quite on top of things.

"What I enjoyed about playing Harold Wilson is that they have looked at the arc of his deteriorating cognitive abilities. He had a journey himself that they allowed me to take. Wilson was a fascinating man and this was a lovely opportunity to play him in such a fascinating story."

What was it like working with Matthew Macfadyen (John Stonehouse) and director Jon S Baird?

"It is a magnificent performance from Matthew Macfadyen as Stonehouse. He really is one of our greatest screen actors at the moment. He is stunning in this role.

"Jon brought cinematic value to it, being a movie director. The great thing for me is that he really understood tone. Some directors don't get that. With every scene shot the same. Which is very tiring for the crew and the actors. But Jon had a really interesting idea on every scene. He knew what he wanted, he knew when he'd got it. Then he moved on realising the pressures of time in television. He had a real feel for the material. I am absolutely certain that 'Stonehouse' will be very well received because it's so well put together.

"It was a special role to play Harold Wilson. In recent years it has become important to me not just to do anything that comes my way. I'm lucky to be able to include this among one of many great passion projects that I'm doing. I'm too old to do things I don't care about. So you can be guaranteed if you see me in something, it's because I've got a passion for it and you might have real pleasure in watching it."



SYNOPSIS | EPISODE ONE

Miami, 1974. John Stonehouse's (Matthew Macfadyen) head bobs above the water. Looking back at the beach, he sees his clothes folded up. This is the point of no return.

In the late sixties, John Stonehouse's political career is booming. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Harold Wilson (Kevin R. McNally), he bags ministerial roles in Aviation and then as Postmaster General. He's happily married to Barbara Stonehouse (Keeley Hawes), with three children.

During these successes though, Stonehouse is also forging secret relationships - first with Czech spymaster Alexander Marek (Igor Grabuzov) and then with his new secretary Sheila Buckley (Emer Heatley). Marek makes him an offer and Stonehouse is more than happy to trade information for money. His romance with Sheila is more organic, but also requires some more plate-spinning.

On top of this, the drama sees him spending his new found wealth lavishly. Against Barbara's wishes, they move into a grand new house and Stonehouse buys an impractical sports car.

The 1970 election proves to be a turning point as Stonehouse, when Labour loses power, goes from flag-waver to scapegoat. He's left out in the cold by Wilson, Marek and the media. Rumours of fraud are circulating too, as his suspect investments are scrutinised. He's becoming desperate.

Inspired by *The Day of the Jackal*, he hatches a secret plan to escape his dire circumstances that involves a dead constituent and forged passports. A ministerial trip to Miami is the perfect opportunity - but can he bear to leave his family, and the real John Stonehouse, behind?



CAST CREDITS | EPISODE ONE

In order of appearance

John Stonehouse.....Matthew Macfadyen
Speaker at The House of Commons.....Simon Greenall
Harold Wilson.....Kevin R. McNally
Betty Boothroyd..... Dorothy Atkinson
Civil Servant.....Celia Robertson
Barbara Stonehouse..... Keeley Hawes
Young Matthew StonehouseDainton Anderson
Jane Stonehouse Orla Hill
Julia Stonehouse.....Aoife Checkland
Czech Government Official.....Brian Caspe
Irena Bala.....Ieva Andrejevaite
Alexander Marek.....Igor Grabuzov
Bank Manager.....Robin Laing
BAC Spokesman.....Jonathan Rhodes
Sheila Buckley..... Emer Heatley
Charles Elwell.....Timothy Walker
Harry EvansWill Adamsdale



CAST CREDITS | EPISODE ONE

In order of appearance

Margaret Thatcher.....Devon Black
Cliff Michelmore.....Albert Welling
BBC Studio Manager.....Joshua Diffley
Chief Whip.....Bryan Lawrence
Assistant Bank Manager.....Tommy Letts
Patient.....Richard Rycroft
Nurse.....Sam Yetunde
Mrs Carey.....Catherine Skinner
Mourner.....Linda Armstrong
Desk Clerk.....Sam Lockwood
Matthew Stonehouse.....Archie Barnes
Airline Official.....Tracey Vanessa Brown

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Executive Producers..... Jon S. Baird
.....Neil Blair
.....Ruth Kenley-Letts
.....Matthew Macfadyen
.....John Preston
.....Ellie Wood
Executive Producer for BritBox.....Diederick Santer
Executive Producer for ITV.....Polly Hill
Writer..... John Preston
Director Jon S. Baird
Producers.....Ellie Wood
.....Ruth Kenley-Letts
Line Producer.....Caroline Bean
Director of Photography.....Mark Wolf
Casting Director.....Jill Trelvellick
Script Supervisor.....Georgia Redman
Assistant Script EditorTom Williams



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Hair & Make-up Designer.....Julie Kendrick
Costume Designer.....Guy Speranza
Production Manager.....Joseph Sharpe
Production Designer.....Darryl Hammer
Editor.....Steven Worsley
Composer.....Rolfe Kent
Prop Master.....Jim Mate
Location Manager.....Matt Venables
Post Production Manager.....Lauren Tyack
First Assistant Director.....Liam Shaw
Second Assistant Director.....Matthew Whatton
Third Assistant Director.....Fraser Malcolm
Sound RecordistGrant Bridgeman
VFX SupervisorKeith Devlin
Key GripLuke Stone
GafferRob White
Covid CoordinatorAbigail Pitman

