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## THE PRISONER DIRECTOR REMEMBERED

by Roger Langley



The last of the 'Prisoner' directors passed away in June. Pat Jackson was 95 and directed four episodes, their titles appearing in the boxes above. In 2007 he gave me a message for the 2008 convention (next page), saying he was too old to attend physically, but he would be there in spirit. At that time he still recalled great detail about his episodes, stating that he could even picture the scenes, shot for shot:

"Pat asked me to come over to Elstree to MGM and said, 'I've got a proposition that might interest you' and he showed me location stills of Portmeirion and a rough outline of the story which wasn't absolutely clear then and said, 'Would you be interested?' and I said 'Yes, Pat, very interested indeed.' Then he sent me the script and I tore open the envelope and started to read 'The Schizoid Man'. I was absolutely thrilled. I didn't know what the hell it was all about, but I thought it was a fascinating, absolutely wonderful idea, very interesting. So down to Elstree I went for the first day's shooting and there was Pat ready. We had to get about five and half to six minutes cut film every day. So you were doubling the cut film you would do in a feature, yet the quality didn't have to drop at all, it had to look as good as a feature, even though we had to get twice as much. And that was successfully done and then I did the other three for him. You took the script, read it, analysed it, worked out your shooting plan, how the artists moved and then you got on the floor and quickly blocked in the scene and everybody was happy and comfortable and off you went. I had no brief at all, you just analysed it as a conductor would a score. Oh, I'd love to be able to say yes, I saw the significance of this series, but I didn't at all. I took it as a drama and I was thankful that one could do it with conscience and do it with pride and it was a fascinating, fascinating project, ... a tremendous achievement! (Pat) devised it single-handedly, he wrote many of the episodes, he produced it and he acted in every one. Not that I knew what it was all about, and I don't think he did really. But what a concept!"

The director's other strong connection with the series came from having given Patrick McGoohan his first screen opportunity, a decade before *The Prisoner*:

"I saw him in 'Moby Dick', with Orson Welles. I was struck by him and I got in touch with his agent. He was a wonderful actor (and) the result was first-class. Patrick was perfect for the heroic role I had in mind. I was assigned to direct 'High Tide at Noon', a Woman's Own type of story about an island off the coast of Maine.

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Apart from a couple of bits (Pat had) barely done any film. Then, new to the screen, (he) was to play the lead. I arranged a test for him, he was extremely nervous, but he did it beautifully and got the contract. Eddie Carrick, one of our great art directors, and I went location hunting. I came back to Pinewood to discover that the film had been cancelled. Shortly after ... Phil Leacock ... told (me) that he was to make 'High Tide at Noon' in the studio: a sea picture about lobster fishermen. He did and many months later, the film having cost a fortune, it emptied the Rank circuit so fast that it had to be withdrawn."

Later, Jackson was once again working with McGoohan:

"(It was planned) to produce an anthology of short stories for television, 'Rendezvous'. I directed about half of the series and got Pat McGoohan in three or four of them. Patrick was required to play a Catholic priest in the story 'The Hanging of Alfred Wadham'. Such was his success that I gave him parts in two further episodes."

After that came the 'Danger Man' story 'The Hunting Party', which Jackson directed. Soon, the germ of an idea for the new 'Prisoner' series was forming, according to Jackson:

"A Home Office official, perhaps a little the worse for drink, had intimated that such places as the Village existed. Patrick was inspired and commissioned script writers, directors and ideas. He approached me and the scripts I was offered were worth doing. They were interesting, new and original."

'A. B. and C.' is put together very well and the episode maintains tension, building suspense until the final scene delivers its payoff. 'The Schizoid Man' and 'Hammer Into Anvil' also contain a good deal of action and innovative directing methods. Jackson had to 'hold the fort' while McGoohan went to Hollywood to shoot 'Ice Station Zebra' and the episode 'Do Not Forsake Me Oh My Darling' was made largely in his absence. Jackson also went to Portmeirion for the second 'Prisoner' shoot in 1967. His dedicated approach throughout his episodes was "Let's do the best we can". With a strong team in place, he was pleased how the series gained momentum, with each episode being a story in its own right. Jackson also continued to work on other ITC shows like 'The Saint' and 'Man in a Suitcase'.

*Pat Jackson obituaries and film lists can be seen online. Quotes used in this article: 'Six Into One: The Prisoner File' (1983) and the biography "Patrick McGoohan: Danger Man or Prisoner?" (2007; Tomahawk Press) by Roger Langley.*



Best wishes to everyone in Six of One. Have a good time at the convention in Portmeirion. I'm 92 now and don't get around as much as I did. I recall working on 'The Schizoid Man' and I think it was very well produced. Everything then had to have a shooting script, how the actors would move, which camera lens and so on, there was no time to fumble around. I brought Patrick McGoohan to the screen. I screen-tested him at Pinewood. I did some 'Danger Man' for him as well and I think this and 'The Prisoner' have stood the test of time very well. As for 'The Prisoner' at the time I think nobody really knew what it all meant!