

# THE MONOCLED MUTINEER EPIISODE 1

Introduced by special guests Sarah Curtis, Graham Benson and Alan Bleasdale

In tribute to the outstanding contribution made to television by producer **Richard Broke**, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts is honoured to screen the first episode from one of his finest drama series, *The Monocled Mutineer*. The series received no fewer than nine BAFTA nominations, including Drama Series for Richard Broke and director Jim O'Brien and winning Original Television Music for composer George Fenton. Our special guests will introduce this screening and share their memories of Richard and his award-winning dramas.

RELEASE YEAR: 1986

RUNTIME: 75 mins

DIRECTOR: Jim O'Brien

PRODUCER: Richard Broke

SCREENWRITER: Alan Bleasdale

(adapted from the novel by John Fairley and William Allison)



**R**ichard Broke, who died aged 70, not only produced and script-edited some of the most significant and politically controversial television dramas of our time, he did so from a wheelchair, having been injured in a serious car crash in his 20s. He since became a fierce campaigner for better access in public places, particularly in the theatre, one of his great loves.

At the BBC and ITV, Broke worked with many of the best and best-known actors of the day. In 1981, he produced *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years*, a landmark, eight-part serial starring Robert Hardy, Siân Phillips, Nigel Havers, Tim Pigott-Smith, Peter

Barkworth and Eric Porter. As the first executive producer of Screen One for the BBC (he told *The Guardian* it was the best job in television), Broke was responsible for around 50 films in total, culminating in *Cold Comfort Farm* in 1995, directed by John Schlesinger. The film featured another star-studded cast: Eileen Atkins, Kate Beckinsale, Stephen Fry, Ian McKellen, Joanna Lumley, Miriam Margolyes, Freddie Jones and Rufus Sewell. The screenplay, from the Stella Gibbons novel, was written by Malcolm Bradbury.

With Schlesinger as director, Broke was executive producer of the award-winning *A Question of Attribution* (1991) for the BBC, from Alan Bennett's stage

play about Anthony Blunt (played by James Fox, with Prunella Scales as the Queen). Broke was also proud to have written the screenplay for James Mason's final film, *Dr Fischer of Geneva* (1985), from Graham Greene's novel, which also starred Alan Bates, Greta Scacchi and Barry Humphries.

In the mid-80s, Broke became best-known, or "synonymous with the word 'controversial'," according to *The Guardian*, for two productions that helped fuel the BBC's head-on conflict with the Thatcher government, in particular Conservative party chairman Norman Tebbit, and with the military.

The first was *The Monocled Mutineer* (1986), a series of plays written by Alan





Bleasdale and starring Paul McGann as Percy Toplis, a deserter in the first world war. The BBC advertised the series “foolishly”, according to the director general, Alasdair Milne, writing in his memoirs, “as being ‘a real life story’, which was certainly cutting corners. The press fell upon us for telling lies and it added to their fury that most of the papers saw the plays as ‘leftwing propaganda’. The fact that they were well-made dramas counted for nothing.”

The second was *Tumbledown* (1988), directed by Richard Eyre, with a screenplay by Charles Wood, which won the BAFTA for Single Drama. It starred a young Colin Firth as Robert Lawrence MC, a Scots Guards officer who was severely injured and partly paralysed during the Falklands war. His family was involved in the making of the film, much to the ire of the Ministry of Defence. The press contrasted the screening of these two productions, both questioning military policy, with the BBC’s shelving of a “pro-Thatcher” Falklands play by Ian Curteis.

“I never set out to make controversial drama and I would fall flat on my face if I did so,” Broke told an interviewer at the time. But according to friends he relished the controversy and loved it when *The Daily Mail* attacked one of his programmes.

He worked on a wide range of television programmes, including the cult drama series *Adam Adamant Lives!*.

Then, in 1970, came the car crash that was to leave him in a wheelchair as a paraplegic. He was driving up the A1 near Sandy in Bedfordshire, when he veered off the road, hit a bank and – this was in the days before compulsory seatbelts – suffered multiple trauma and broke his spine.

He was treated at Stoke Mandeville hospital, which he would revisit over the coming years, but he rarely allowed his disability to get in the way of his work. He campaigned fiercely for better wheelchair access in theatres, not least at the newly built National Theatre, which he regarded as disgracefully badly equipped in

its early days.

Broke also supported efforts to improve the portrayal of disabled people on television, citing *Ironside*, the American detective in a wheelchair played by Raymond Burr, as the most positive role model. “The Americans are years ahead of us on this,” he said in 1995. “A disabled character was at the centre of a popular entertainment without making a great issue of it.”

On his return to the BBC, Broke became a researcher on the Dennis Potter serial *Casanova* (1971) and was then steered into script editing, where he worked on *Thirty-Minute Theatre* and memorable series such as *The Glittering Prizes* (1976). There he began a fruitful partnership with Mark Shivas, building up the trust of the best writers, actors

and directors with whom he would work when he ran Screen One.

He left the BBC for two years to dramatise Martin Gilbert’s biography *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years* for Southern Television. “I’m still very proud of that,” he said. “It was a landmark for me.” Later, he produced other dramas for ITV, including 32 episodes of *Where the Heart Is*, the popular series about Yorkshire district nurses and their families.

Broke was a stalwart supporter of BAFTA, serving on its Council (1992–97) and its Television Committee (2003–09). He was also the first chair of its newly established Interactive Entertainment Awards (1998).

He is survived by his wife, Elaine (nee Carew), a makeup artist who worked on the Monty Python and Terry Gilliam films among others, whom he married in 1989, and by their two daughters, Anna and Bella.

*Torin Douglas, The Guardian, 18 April 2014*

We warmly welcome our special guests, film and television producers Sarah Curtis (*Mrs Brown*) and Graham Benson and screenwriter Alan Bleasdale (*The Monocled Mutineer*) to share their memories of Richard and the many BAFTA-winning dramas he brought to the screen.

## BAFTA HERITAGE SCREENINGS

BAFTA Heritage Screenings are a series of quarterly film screenings and on-stage interviews which celebrate British film and TV classics and the great film and TV professionals who made them.



WINSTON CHURCHILL: THE WILDERNESS YEARS (1981)

