

VERA



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VERA

SERIES 11 & 12 - PRESS PACK CONTENTS

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VERA RETURNS TO ITV WITH SIX NEW FEATURE LENGTH EPISODES IN 2023

Award winning actress, Brenda Blethyn dons her iconic mac and hat to play the unorthodox but brilliantly perceptive Detective Chief Inspector Vera Stanhope, in six new feature length episodes set against the backdrop of the North East.

DCI Vera Stanhope (Brenda Blethyn) returns, leading her diligent team of detectives as they investigate some complex and murderous crimes. Kenny Doughty also returns as Detective Sergeant Aiden Healy, a strong and reliable partner to DCI Stanhope. Completing Vera's team is Jon Morrison who plays DC Kenny Lockhart, Riley Jones who plays DC Mark Edwards and Ibinabo Jack as DC Jacqueline Williams. Paul Kaye returns to three of the new episodes as Pathologist Dr. Malcolm Donahue whilst Sarah Kameela Impey joins the production from the episode entitled *For the Grace of God* as Pathologist Dr. Paula Bennett.

The six self-contained crime stories (two episode from series eleven and four episodes from series twelve) have once again been inspired by the best-selling novels and characters created by acclaimed crime writer Ann Cleeves, who received the Diamond Dagger Award at the Crime Writer's Association in 2017 for a lifetime achievement for sustained excellence.

September 2020 saw the publication of *The Darkest Evening*, the latest Vera novel by Ann Cleeves which has since been adapted by Colette Kane and is one of the new feature length episodes in this series to be broadcast on ITV.

In 2021 Brenda Blethyn received the Rose d'Or Lifetime Achievement for her starring role as Vera, ITV's longest-running female detective, and her many other defining roles throughout her career. Brenda is also the recipient of several accolades including a Golden Globe, a BAFTA and a Cannes Film Festival Award for Best Actress.

Produced by Will Nicolson and Debbie Shewell on behalf of Silverprint Pictures for ITV, these six feature length episodes have been directed by Rob Evans, Chris Foggin, Will Sinclair, Claire Winyard, Khurram M.Sultan and Paul Gay. Regular series writers Paul Logue, Sally Abbott and Colette Kane also return to the production alongside writers Michael Bhim and Lucia Haynes.

Two episodes of Vera entitled *Witness* and *Recovery* were broadcast on the main channel in August and September of 2021 and successfully drew an average audience of 7 million viewers.



CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES - SERIES REGULARS

DCI Vera Stanhope played by Brenda Blethyn

Heading up a team at Northumberland and City Police, Vera is obsessive about her work and dogged in her desire to uncover the truth at the heart of each case she leads. Unconventional and unglamorous maybe, but Vera has a wry sense of humour and faces the world with caustic wit, guile and courage.

For Vera, work is her life and her team is her family. Having been brought up by a neglectful father, she's constantly trying to find a sense of self-worth, feeling she has to prove herself in everything she does - although she would never admit this to her colleagues. Vera demands fierce loyalty and respect from her team, which she returns with the smallest glimmer of affection. Vera really cares for her team and for the victims of the crimes she investigates.

DS Aiden Healy played by Kenny Doughty

Detective Sergeant Aiden Healy has proved himself a strong and reliable partner to DCI Stanhope, who relishes his insight, commitment and diligence. Aiden, in turn, feels protective of his boss, knowing her obsessive nature and commitment to the job can sometimes be at the cost of her own wellbeing. Aiden has settled into family life and has a renewed focus on the demands of the job, as well as his dedication to ensuring that the perpetrators of crimes are sought out and held responsible.

DC Kenny Lockhart played by Jon Morrison

Kenny is a very loyal and trusted member of the team. Though Kenny works at his own pace, Vera knows that he brings with him years of experience and instinct, and she can rely on him when it counts. Plain-spoken if occasionally tactless, Kenny possesses a keen memory for cases long past and is often surprisingly savvy with contemporary technology and social media.

DC Jacqueline 'Jac' Williams played by Ibinabo Jack

Jac is a valued member of DCI Vera Stanhope's team. With her dry wit and no-nonsense attitude, she often uses her sharp abilities of detection and unique perspective to bring new evidence to the case at hand. Jac first joined Vera's team from the fraud squad after her former boss was found guilty of corruption. Jac looks up to Vera and greatly admires her commitment to the truth. Jac is tough, courageous and determined.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES - SERIES REGULARS

DC Mark Edwards played by Riley Jones

Since joining Vera's team from uniform, Mark has become a skilled and reliable detective. As one of the younger members of the squad, Mark is less outspoken and more introspective, preferring to channel his energy into meticulous analysis and research. His enthusiasm, keen eye for detail and self-drive means that Vera now counts on the invaluable information he uncovers to push an investigation forward.

Pathologist Dr. Malcolm Donahue played by Paul Kaye

Dr. Malcolm Donahue is thorough and observant. His dour demeanour might be mistaken for misanthropy, but in truth his grim scientific approach comes from a deeply rooted commitment to justice. He worked with Vera several years ago and their professional relationship has always been challenging. Pedantic and officious to the point of rudeness, Malcolm often treads heavily on Vera's toes. Though he appears to be critical of Vera's impatience and sometimes bullish approach, he retains an underlying admiration for the DCI's capacity for empathy and compassion.

Pathologist Dr. Paula Bennett played by Sarah Kameela Impey

Paula's acerbic sense of fun intertwines with her brilliant forensic brain and detail driven approach. She's sometimes mistaken for indulging in dark humour but actually it's enthusiasm for the science of the investigation. She still feels the death of her father which gives her empathy when working a crime scene but she never lets her emotions get in the way of gathering the facts. Especially when there's an unusual death with some intriguing science to investigate. Vera isn't quite sure what to make of Paula at first as she's a bit of a whirlwind. Paula is brilliant at what she does but occasionally needs reminding that not everyone's brain works at the same rate that her's does.

S11 EP3 SYNOPSIS | VITAL SIGNS



Written by Paul Logue and directed by Rob Evans

The charred remains of local GP, Doctor Lucy Yo, are found in the back of a burned out car that's been abandoned in a deserted quarry. Her husband states that she was called out to a patient on the evening in question but we soon discover from her colleagues at the surgery that there is no record of any patient. So who lured Doctor Yo out that night and who would want her dead?

As Vera probes further into Doctor Yo's life she uncovers a web of intrigue, betrayal and deadly secrets. An elaborate affair, accusations of malpractice and an investigation into prescription fraud are just the tip of the iceberg with this case. As Vera seeks out the truth amongst the bed of lies the real Doctor Lucy Yo is revealed.

S11 EP 4 SYNOPSIS | THE WAY THE WIND BLOWS



**Written by Michael Bhim and directed by
Chris Foggin**

When the body of Lisa Millworth is found washed up on the shore of the River Tyne, DCI Vera Stanhope (Brenda Blethyn) questions who would want a beloved mother, loyal friend and popular manager at a green energy company dead. With few clues to launch her inquiry, Vera soon learns that Lisa has been in the middle of a storm both professionally and personally.

As Vera and the team piece together Lisa's final movements, Vera must delve deep into her checkered past as well as deal with more recent and potentially deadly problems that Lisa has been up against. Unresolved wounds, grievances, betrayal, misplaced loyalty and corporate cover ups all bubble to the surface which means Vera has to work harder than ever to zero in on the killer.

S12 EP 1 SYNOPSIS | AGAINST THE TIDE



Written by Lucia Haynes and directed by Will Sinclair

DCI Vera Stanhope (Brenda Blethyn) is called to a remote lighthouse where a body has been discovered lashed to a sailboat.

Immediately setting about her investigation, Vera soon discovers that the body is local council enforcement officer and experienced amateur sailor Frank Channing. A family man, with strong friendships, who was well respected at work, surely this really was just an accident? However, it's not long before Vera discovers evidence suggesting foul play. Vera and her team piece together Frank's final days and soon discover that his life wasn't all plain sailing.

S12 EP 2 SYNOPSIS | FOR THE GRACE OF GOD



**Written by Sally Abbott and directed by
Claire Winyard**

Lance Corporal Conn Burns was a dedicated, diligent and decorated soldier with a loving young family but all of that fell apart when he left the army. Adapting to civilian life was not easy and after a series of bad life choices, Conn found himself desolate, down and out on the streets of Newcastle.

Attempting to get his life back on track, Conn had recently been making moves that would see him repay old debts, rebuild relationships and get him off the streets but a dark secret from his past, and betrayal in the present, left his future looking uncertain, and deadly.



S12 EP 3 SYNOPSIS | BLUE

Written by Paul Logue and directed by Khurrum M. Sultan

Joel Kingston is a copper's copper from a respected and notable police family but when he is found dead, floating in a park lake, DCI Vera Stanhope (Brenda Blethyn) finds herself investigating both sides of the thin blue line in order to find his killer.

A complex family dynamic, tensions at work, and brushes with the underworld, paint a dark and complex picture. Joel was there to serve and protect but did his stubborn commitment to justice at any price lead to his death? Or, was he killed to stop him revealing a secret that would destroy someone's life? Vera steps on toes and ruffles a few police feathers as she searches for answers as to why PC Joel Kingston is no longer on the beat.

S12 EP 4 SYNOPSIS | THE DARKEST EVENING



Written by Colette Kane and directed by Paul Gay

On the night of a massive storm, trying to get home, DCI Vera Stanhope (Brenda Blethyn) comes across an abandoned car with a baby inside.

With no mobile signal and blocked roads at every turn, Vera is forced to seek refuge somewhere she'd rather not be, Brockburn House, the Stanhope's ancestral pile. Vera doesn't exactly receive a warm welcome from her estranged family as there's a function in full swing and her turning up with a baby isn't a great look.

Things start to look even worse and take a far sinister turn when a body is found on the track leading to Brockburn House.

BRENDA BLETHYN IS DCI VERA STANHOPE



Q: What can Vera fans look forward to in 2023?

“There’s been a little wait but Vera fans can look forward to six new feature length episodes, instead of the usual four. To be followed by a seventh film - The Rising Tide - later in the year, which we only finished filming just before Christmas. That’s based on the latest Ann Cleeves’ Vera novel of the same name which was published in September. We began making that in November and wrapped in December.

“The six new films also include an adaptation of Ann’s previous book, The Darkest Evening, which marks the 50th episode of Vera. I feel rather proud of having reached the landmark of 50 episodes, now having filmed 51 in total. I think it’s wonderful. A great achievement for everyone involved. Ten of those 51 films are based on the books by Ann Cleeves. She has created such well defined characters, allowing the other story writers to bring them to life on screen as well.

“Who would have thought when we made that Vera pilot 13 years ago that we would be talking about having made 51 films? I know the character better than anyone so when we have new writers coming in I just look at the scripts for tiny anomalies. I also throw little comical bits in there as well.”

Q: You filmed in 10 of the 12 months of the last year. What challenges did you face?

“We encountered extremes of weather. We shot one episode during that intense summer heatwave. It was 37C when we were filming on a golf course and I had all of Vera’s clobber on. I thought I was done for. It was so hot I had to unbutton Vera’s mac. I kept asking, ‘Could I take the mac off?’ I could if I really wanted to. But I tell myself I’m not going to be any cooler if I take it off.

“Then we go to the other extreme doing The Darkest Evening when I’m frozen through to the marrow. The heated waistcoat came out for that one. But then I can’t button up Vera’s mac. So I had to take the waistcoat off. Vera’s costume is designed to make me look broader. So everything underneath finishes at the hip. While people might think there is some insulation inside Vera’s hat during winter filming to keep me warm. But, unfortunately, there isn’t.”

Q: Can you tell us about the first new film ‘Vital Signs’?

“That was one of two films filmed in the summer of 2021. It features a story about a local GP Dr Lucy Yo whose remains are found in a burned out car in a quarry. It’s quite a puzzle for Vera and the team. All of the endings come as a surprise and that one certainly was.

“There’s a scene in that where DC Kenny Lockhart, played by Jon Morrison, brings in a cake he has baked. My own lemon drizzle cake won the prize for best cake when we wrapped the final episode of 2022 on the last day of filming before Christmas. We did another fundraiser for Macmillan Cancer Support and a lot of us made cakes and brought them in. I had made a lemon drizzle cake before some time ago and everyone liked it so much that they kept asking for more cakes!”

Q: The second film ‘The Way The Wind Blows’ illustrates one of Vera’s practical skills?

“There’s a brief scene where we see Vera changing a tyre on her Land Rover in the middle of nowhere. It was a very heavy tyre but I lifted it up and chucked it in the back. Vera would have learned how to do all of that from her dad. That’s her dad’s motor. It was her who got it going when he died. She got it out of the shed.

“The Land Rover was adapted to an automatic for me to drive. And I’ve got a little extra step to get in and out. Getting out is easy. I just come out like going down a chute. But it’s quite high up to get in. So they added a little step for me.”

Q: One regular character moves on to pastures new in these films?

“We say goodbye to the wonderful Paul Kaye as pathologist Dr Malcolm Donahue in the third new film ‘Against The Tide’. Paul is one of the most positive people I know. No matter what the circumstances he’ll find something positive to say. There was total respect between Vera and Malcolm along with some very dry humour from him.

“The relationship between Vera and Malcolm has been interesting to play. But his replacement is good news. A pathologist called Dr Paula Bennett played by Sarah Kameela Impey. When they first meet Vera isn’t quite sure what to make of her and thinks she’s a bit too clever for her own good. But she is clever in a good sense.

“We meet Paula in the fourth film ‘For The Grace Of God’. That’s a really good story that deals with ex-Army personnel and homelessness when a former soldier ends up down and out on the streets of Newcastle. While the fifth new film ‘Blue’ is about a murdered copper found floating in a lake in a park.”

Q: Vera’s family background is further explored in ‘The Darkest Evening’ based on the Ann Cleeves’ novel first published in September 2020?

“We have set the TV adaptation of The Darkest Evening in a violent storm and we learn yet more about Vera and her family. A body is found on the outskirts of land owned by some of her distant relatives. At the start of that story, with no signal on her phone, Vera finds herself having to find refuge from the storm to get help having found a baby in an abandoned car. And the only place she can go for help is into the Stanhope’s ancestral pile - Brockburn House - where Vera used to go as a child with her dad. That brings back all kinds of memories for her.

“It was so cold during filming for The Darkest Evening. I spent a couple of weeks drenched from head to foot. I just hoped I would have shrunk but I didn’t. Some of the rain was artificial and then we had real rain when we didn’t want it. We also had wind machines and all the rest of it. We had to use pins to keep Vera’s hat on. Every ploy was used. I think a tube of glue would have come out if all else failed. The whole series would come to an end if I lost that hat!”

Q: What is it like working with Kenny Doughty, who plays DS Aiden Healy?

“Kenny is my mate, my buddy. I never thought I’d get over David Leon (DS Joe Ashworth) going in series four. That broke my heart. But Kenny is also a really good actor and a joy to work with. He’s great company on set along with the rest of the cast, the crew and the directors.”

Q: Vera is said to have one of the best crews in the business?

“The Vera crew are great. Very loyal. When you consider we started filming Vera 13 years ago now, it’s mostly the same crew today. And a lot of local people as well. The loyalty to Vera is phenomenal. Our supporting artists are also very good. They are pretty regular and also loyal. It’s all part of the real teamwork that brings Vera to the screen.

“Everyone needs a huge amount of stamina to get through long days of filming with often a lot of travel to and from set. They can be 16-hour days by the time you also add on costume, make up and so on.

“Then when I get home I’ve got to go through the script for the next day. I might find a little anomaly or something that is not quite right. So then I have to sort that and get it approved and they have to issue re-writes to everybody else. You can never just sit back and think, ‘Right, I’ll learn that now and that’s done.’ It all takes time to do that.”

Q: As the leading lady do you feel a huge responsibility?

“I suppose anybody who is playing a major part in a series has some responsibility to set an example, if you like. There’s lots of young people who come in to work on the show and they only know Vera from off the telly. So they are all petrified when they come in. I make a point of being daft or making a joke to put them at ease. And if they intimate they want some advice I will give it. But they are such talented young people, I usually learn from them. It’s great.”

Q: When not investigating murders are there lighter moments on set?

“We try to liven things up during filming. Jon Morrison, who plays DC Kenny Lockhart, has a great voice. He can blow the windows out, it’s so powerful. I can’t sing but I am always singing. Everything to me is a cue for a song. Anything to chivvy the day along. To keep spirits up. Things like show tunes and ‘Rawhide’. I also tried to teach Kenny Doughty to tap dance but failed miserably. I can’t do it very well myself but I know time steps and so on. There’s a job to do so it’s not all fun and games, although that does help us through the day.”

Q: Fans like to gather to watch filming. But you can’t get as close to them as you once did?

“It’s all changed since the pandemic because now you just have to be careful, sadly avoiding close contact with people who come along to watch filming. You are constantly using sanitiser. So as not to jeopardise filming.

“But it’s lovely to see them at things like the ‘Viva Vera’ event we had at the Whitley Bay Playhouse in September 2022 with Ann Cleeves and Jon Morrison (DC Kenny Lockhart) to mark the publication of *The Rising Tide*. The enthusiasm of Vera fans is gorgeous.

“When I walked on stage as Vera a few years back at one of the ‘Sunday For Sammy’ concerts in Newcastle, in aid of young performers and creatives in the North East, the stadium roof almost came off. That’s the enthusiasm for the character. It was like scoring a goal at the World Cup.”

Q: They also love watching Vera on screen?

“The viewing figures we get for Vera are absolutely wonderful. It’s fantastic that people are still so devoted to the show and want to watch it. Ann Cleeves doesn’t really age Vera in her books. Unlike the TV series. You could say I’ve grown into the role.

“I followed the story recently of how Ann lost her laptop in the snow on Shetland with half of the new 11th Vera novel on it. Luckily, Ann is a sensible woman and had already emailed it to herself to back it up. Even so, it was a good job the laptop was eventually found otherwise Vera might have had to go to Shetland to find it!

“Ann also told me how she had seen some Vera hats for sale in a designer store at Heathrow Airport. I did laugh. But why not? Absolutely. Anyone with any sense should buy one. Although they are probably more expensive than down the market.”

Q: ‘The Rising Tide’, to be screened later in the year, is mostly set on Holy Island in Northumberland. What was it like filming there again?

“I have to pinch myself every time we drive across that causeway to Holy Island. It is so lovely. But having filmed scenes for Vera on Holy Island over the years, working on *The Rising Tide* was the first time I’ve actually been into the village there and the little harbour and jetty itself. Because I’m always up to my eyeballs in work at the location on the island we use for the exterior of Vera’s house. I also went out on a boat from Holy Island this time. It was great but absolutely freezing cold on the boat. Among the locations we filmed at was The Ship pub which is The Seahorse in the story. The people there were very hospitable.

“I do love the North East. Everyone is so friendly. I will certainly continue to visit the area once Vera has finally hung up her hat. I’d recommend anyone to go. It’s just lovely. There is such a variety of locations in the area. From places like Corbridge in the Tyne Valley to the Northumberland coastline and many other varied locations. I also like working in the vibrant city of Newcastle which was the main venue for Sally Abbot’s “For The Grace of God”. The episode also highlights the problem of homelessness.

Q: What is the future for Vera?

“Every time we finish a series I say I’m not going to be doing any more. But then I change my mind. Usually it means six months away from home in Kent for me and in 2022 it was the best part of 10 months.

“My dog Jack can’t be with me in the North East for all of that time. He’s all right after I’ve been away for a little while. But if I happen to manage to come home for a few days in between filming Vera episodes he goes mad and then my husband has a merry time of it when I go away again with the dog wondering where I am.

“So when we finish filming, as we just have, I always say, ‘I really don’t think I can do this anymore.’ But then I have a rest and get my appetite back again and change my mind. I suddenly might get a bright idea about what to do with Vera and suggest who might be cast in it.

“The emotional feeling also comes in - thinking of all of the other people who are still there who do want to do more. And Ann Cleeves is currently writing her 11th Vera novel. So that hasn’t been dealt with on screen yet and you feel like you’d be letting her down. All of that goes on. Never say never. Things happen, circumstances change. Enthusiasm and opinions change. So watch this space.”



AUTHOR ANN CLEEVES

Ann Cleeves is the author of over thirty critically acclaimed novels and is translated into as many languages. She is the creator of popular detectives Vera Stanhope and Jimmy Perez who can be found on television in ITV's *Vera* and BBC One's *Shetland*. The TV series and the books they are based on have become international sensations, capturing the minds of millions worldwide.

The Heron's Cry, published in September 2021, is the second book in her bestselling *Two Rivers* series featuring Detective Inspector Matthew Venn.

Ann moved to North Devon when she was 11 years old. Before then the family lived in a tiny village, and as the headmaster's daughter she always felt like the outsider at school. But in Barnstaple, Ann found a real home. She made life-long friends and fell in love with the beautiful North Devon coast, which still has a very special place in her heart. She dropped out of university and quite by chance, was taken on as assistant cook in the Fair Isle bird observatory in Shetland. She met her ornithologist husband there. Soon after, the couple moved to Hilbre, a tidal island nature reserve and Ann took up writing to occupy her time. Thus began Ann Cleeves' career in crime fiction.

It took a long time to achieve commercial success, however, and Ann had a number of day jobs, which fed into the novels. She worked as a probation officer, a playgroup leader, a youth worker and even sold flights for British Airways! Eventually, she found her perfect role as reader development officer in a public library, and continued working there until 2006, when *Raven Black* won the CWA Gold Dagger.

AUTHOR ANN CLEEVES CONTINUED

In 2017 Ann was awarded the highest accolade in crime writing, the CWA Diamond Dagger. The award recognises authors whose crime writing careers have been marked by sustained excellence, and who have made a significant contribution to the genre. She is a member of 'Murder Squad', working with other British northern writers to promote crime fiction.

Ann is also a passionate champion for libraries and was a National Libraries Day Ambassador in 2016. Her new 'Reading Coaches' project, providing support for health and wellbeing in communities, launched in the North East during 2021.

ABOUT SILVERPRINT PICTURES



The Long Call

Silverprint Pictures is the label behind multi-award winning international hit dramas *Vera*, *Mr Selfridge*, *Shetland*, *Dark Heart*, *Flesh and Blood* and *The Long Call*. Producing high quality scripted content for the UK and international markets, Silverprint Pictures creates distinctive and ambitious dramas for all channels.



Flesh and Blood



Mr. Selfridge



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