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here is an old saying, that the only thing certain about life is its uncertainty, a sort of variation on the Greek philosopher's 'All I know is that I don't know'. Once the canal scenes for the Morse episode, *The*

*Wench is Dead* had been filmed in June 1998, with a little help from myself and my canal friends, I was convinced that I had seen the last of the *Inspector Morse* circus.

My view of media 'eats, shoots and leaves' was proved correct the following year when the BBC filmed *Songs of Praise* at Braunston Marina, during what proved to be the last Braunston Boat Show. The huge amount of work on our part was rewarded by a very nice thank you letter from the producer afterwards, pointing out, as perhaps a sort of sweetener for the £3,000 or more in infrastructure costs we had 'sponsored', that the programme would now be seen by 16 million viewers worldwide. And that was that. Not even a Christmas card from presenter Pam Rhodes, despite my getting her a ride on the historic steam narrowboat *President* for its five mile run in from Napton Junction, on completion of its 36 hour non-stop fly run from the Black Country Museum to the show. And then inviting her to cut the boat's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday cake.

### Chance encounter

But the *Morse* filming was to prove very different. From that first chance encounter with the producer Chris Burt in September 1997, I have never ceased to be involved. The high spot was in fact some years after in 2002, when I was invited by Sheila Hancock, as a select member of the *Inspector Morse Society*, to attend her late husband John Thaw's memorial service. This was held in St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square in the presence of Prince Charles and the great and the good of the acting world. But that is to jump the story on somewhat.

What really started that post-filming involvement was chance. Following it, I had the idea of stocking copies of the paperback edition of *The Wench is Dead* among the books and magazines in our marina shop. The book had been around since 1989, and in paperback since 1990. It had been well sold, so it was getting a bit old hat. But the forthcoming television episode would no doubt spark interest and it was the ideal summer cruising book to read. My £5.99 paperback edition had Pan Books' London address and it was simply enough to get the telephone number. I rang, and yes they still had fifty in stock. There would be a special price if we took twenty, and the deal was done.

**LEFT: Water now under the bridge:** Morse (John Thaw) and Lewis (Kevin Whately) on the case in Oxford. (ITV Rex Features)

**RIGHT: Media 'eats shoots and leaves':** Tim Coghlan interviewed by Pam Rhodes for the BBC's *Songs of Praise*, filmed during the 1999 Braunston Boat Show (Paul Bennett)

**BELOW: My £5.99 paperback edition of *The Wench is Dead*:** Well worn and well read, it gave the address of Pan Books to stock the marina shop with twenty copies and the excuse to visit *Morse* author Colin Dexter at his Oxford home to sign them. It was the beginning of the beginning.

Coincidental to this book purchase was my receiving the leaflet for the forthcoming autumnal concert series of the recently formed *Oxford Philomusica*, which styled itself 'Oxford's Professional Symphony Orchestra In Residence at The University of Oxford'. The music was just the sort of thing the good Inspector would have gone to listen to: Mozart, Haydn and Mendelssohn, and perhaps just a hint of something modern in Elgar. And its location was perfect, in Wren's early masterpiece the Sheldonian Theatre, with the White Horse Inn just cross the road to complete the perfect solitary evening to think and drink.

Amongst the concerts on offer was *The Music of Morse*. It was to be conducted by its theme composer Barrington Pheloung, who was also a conductor in his own right. The programme was rather like something out of an episode of *Morse*, that haunting theme tune, with the name 'Morse' played out in morse code, followed by pieces from the German classics, interspersed with pieces Pheloung had written for various episodes. This was a concert we had to go to.

### Meet the author

I then had the idea of using the visit to call on the *Inspector Morse* author, Colin Dexter at his house in Oxford, with the excuse of asking him to sign those twenty books. I rang him and learnt, perhaps unsurprisingly, that he and his wife were also going to that concert as celeb-guests. Yes, he would be pleased to see us in passing, and sign those books.

We arrived in good time at Colin's 1930s house and rang the doorbell at exactly 5.20 p.m. His wife Dorothy ushered us into a small sitting room, explaining that Colin was still eating and



would join us as soon as he finished. While waiting I noticed that a small Edwardian-style glass fronted bookcase contained his first dozen *Morse* books, and amongst a few other chosen books, the complete works of Thomas Hardy.

From the kitchen across the narrow hallway, I could hear Radio Four blaring out the early evening news on what sounded like an old radio. I remembered that Colin's growing deafness had taken him from classroom teaching in Grantham to joining the Oxford University Examinations Board in 1966, and from there to writing the *Inspector Morse* books.

At about 5.30, Colin and Dorothy joined us, with greetings and apologies. The business of signing the twenty books was quickly done. Colin commented that he had once been told by his literary agent that only Margaret Thatcher was faster than him when it came to bookshop signings. At Oxford's Blackwell's Bookshop one Christmas and with a new book, he had once signed more than a thousand in one



# Bringing the dead wench to life

**Part IV** Tim Coghlan completes his series on the filming of *Inspector Morse* at Braunston with a look at some real life crime mysteries on the canal as well as saying goodbye to *Morse* himself, the much-loved actor, John Thaw



day – I forget just how many – with the queue stretching out into the winter street. The thought went through my mind that on that occasion he had probably signed more books than many an aspiring novelist might sell in a lifetime.

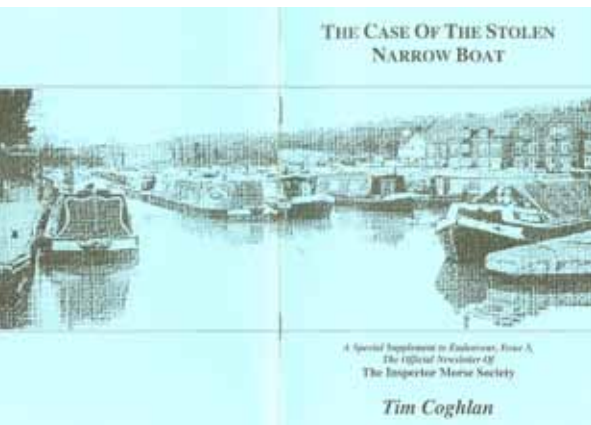
And still he modestly lived here, in the same house he had bought in 1966, in suburban Oxford. It contrasted sharply with that sun-kissed cove in Jamaica where Ian Fleming had lived at *Goldeneye*, and written his *James Bond* books following his morning swim. But Colin's reward was thoroughly enjoying the world of *Morse* at the heart of Oxford that he had created, a far cry from that Grantham classroom. The forthcoming concert was just one example of it, and the recent opening of the Braunston Boat Show was another.

## In the writers den

As one who has scribbled the odd bit in my time, I am always curious to visit writers' dens. Recently Sonia Rolt kindly let me visit canal author Tom Rolt's study which remains an untouched time warp. I told Colin that I had visited those of two of his favourite writers, Hardy and Kipling, and would very much like to see his in the brief time available. We went upstairs into the small room at the top of it, which might only just pass for a small child's bedroom.

There, hard against the wall in the left-hand corner, was Colin's small Edwardian-style leather flat-topped desk. There was a desk-chair and bookcases round the wall and that was that. Behind his back to his right when seated, was a window overlooking his and

other back gardens, but little more. In front was nothing but blank wall, and I was reminded of Mark Twain, who usually wrote in similar circumstances, stating in a letter to his publisher, 'I owe a great debt of inspiration to my wall.' Colin wrote his books in a well-formed schoolmaster



**The Case of the stolen Narrow Boat:** A true canal amateur-sleuth story, it was published as *A Special Supplement to Endeavour*, as the author's first publication for The Inspector Morse Society.

hand on lined school essay paper. There was not a typewriter or computer in sight. The only concession to modernity was a telephone extension.

For years, each evening after a day's work on the examination board, his early dinner, and listening to *The Archers* on the radio, Colin would climb that staircase and enter that room to sit at that desk to write one page of *Morse*, about 400 words, the same as canal crime writer Leo McNeir sets as his early morning task before compiling Celtic dictionaries for the rest of his day; both a modest achievement compared to the 5,000 words the Victorian novelist, Trollope wrote after a day at the post office.

Colin would then go out to one of the local pubs for a pint. Like the Inspector, he enjoys his beer and the pageant of life in a pub. And so to bed. Colin made the secret of writing best sellers sound so simple, 'If you set you set yourself the target of one page a day and a 200 page book, you can easily write one a year. That's just what I did.' I noted that the Pan edition was exactly 200 pages long.

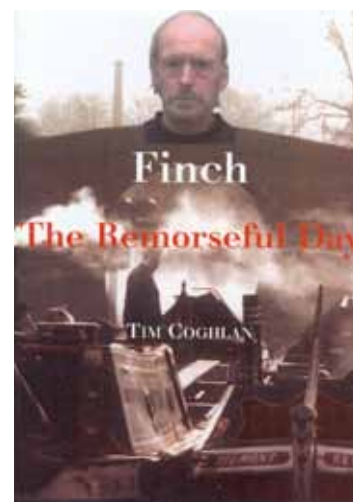


**Friend remembered:** Colin Dexter addressing The Inspector Morse Society on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2009 prior to unveiling the John Thaw Memorial Bench at St Paul's (Actors') Church, Covent Garden, London. With him are his wife, Dorothy and Antony Richards, Chairman. (Tim Coghlan)

## Clues in the books

I looked around for any clues to the inspiration for the *Morse* books, but there were none. I could see no books by other great thriller writers. The nearest was more Thomas Hardy, whose books normally include at least one awful tragic death. *Jude The Obscure* was actually set partly in Oxford, and ends with a good mass suicidal hanging. There was also a collection of early editions of Morse's favourite poet A.E. Housman, who killed off his Shropshire lads in droves, and boxed CDs of Wagner operas, where murder, love-deaths and incest abound. Other music comprised boxed symphonies of Mahler and Bruckner. 'You see,' said Colin, 'in the books Morse likes these composers, but the TV producer insisted we used Mozart and Schubert instead, as having a more popular appeal.' The Inspector perhaps not surprisingly shared so many of Colin's pleasures, including his passion for crosswords, which Colin actually sets for *The Times*.

It was time to go now. I asked Colin how he was getting to the concert. It



**Finch The Remorseful Day:** The author's second *endeavour* for The Inspector Morse Society. It ran to three editions and sold 3,500 copies and is today available off the Braunston village website.



**Hand it to me:**  
A scene from  
*The Wolvercote  
Tongue*. (ITV/Rex  
Features)

transpired he didn't drive a car and was planning to take the bus. 'It runs very close to the Sheldonian.' He however accepted my offer to give him and Dorothy a lift and drop them off as near as I could. I would then go and try to park, an Oxford torture akin to those found in Dante's Second Circle of Hell.

I just made that concert in time, dashing past the spot where Bloody Mary burnt the Oxford Martyrs, which that day reeked of take-away kebabs. The fine Sheldonian building was full of people who looked straight out of the concert scenes in *Morse*, the world of Oxford academia. Amongst them I spotted Colin and Dorothy in the best seats. We sat in uncomfortable seats at the back of the round, from where I had a good view of my first sighting of the youngish Australian *Morse* theme composer Barrington Pheloung, who in time I would see a lot more. The concert opened with that haunting *Morse* theme and seemed to pass very quickly and enjoyably.

In the interval I noticed a man standing beside a display for the Inspector Morse Society, something I had never heard of. His label read 'Antony Richards, Chairman'. I introduced myself and told him of the recent filming at Braunston. He asked if the society could come and visit the locations next Spring, after the programme had gone out in February. This I happily agreed to, but turned down an invitation actually to join the society; my day job left me too little time to participate in its activities.



**Yard above the knee:** Morse takes a punt on the case.  
(ITV/Rex Features)



**The Morse Classic Car:** The red Jaguar car is still going and very much an icon collectors' piece. It was recently reported as being resold for £80,000 (ITV/Rex Features)

*The Wench is Dead* duly came out, and for my part I did not like it very much, thinking it a poor second to the rest of the series. I had videoed it and watched the canal scenes again, reminding myself how inaccurate they were, and this only convinced me of my conclusions. For years I never watched it again. Perhaps I had just been too close to it all. Some years later the *Casualty* star Zita Sattar, came to open our first Historic Narrowboat Rally; her great-great grandfather on her mother's side was the first captain of steam narrowboat, *President*. In conversation she told me she never watched herself in the programme, as all she saw were her mistakes. Her words seemed to strike a cord.

## Society visit

In the Spring, *The Inspector Morse Society* called as arranged at the marina one Sunday for a fleeting visit. I had helped much with the arrangements, including lunch at a local canalside pub and a boat trip. But as if to emphasise my lack of time to join their merry band, I was working in the marina shop and only broke off for an hour to show them round it. However I did strike a cord of affinity with members of the group, who seemed a quirky lot, from a young Cambridge academic writing the ultimate biography of the Russian 1820s poet Pushkin, who was killed in a duel with his wife's brother, to a Heathrow air traffic controller who was passionate about crossword puzzles, and actually went to competitions where





**A drink to think:** Morse and Lewis in an Oxford pub in a scene from *The Masonic Mysteries*. (ITV/Rex Features)

you completed them under examination conditions. I immediately felt a cryptic clue coming on, 'Catastrophic Russian poet (7)'.

With my credentials of failed stockbroker turned canal marina owner, who in his spare time scribbled seminal articles for *Canals & Rivers*, I thought I would slip seamlessly unseen into their midst. It was irresistible, and I signed up there and then. Where time permitted I joined their occasional weekends in and around Oxford – revisiting scenes from various episodes, liberally lubricated with Inspector Morse pub crawls, punting on the Isis, and concluding the days' festivities with black tie dinners in college halls, where Colin and producer Chris Burt were in attendance. It was all great fun.

And that might have been that, with only more of the same, except that in 2001 I found myself at the centre of a real-life detective drama, when I discovered that a boat we had on sale at the marina had been stolen in what was the most bizarre set of circumstances.

## Swaggering man

In January 2001, one Malcolm Sullivan of Coventry, whom the Bard might have described as a 'swaggering man', brought in his small 30-foot narrow boat *Rominon* to Braunston Marina and asked us to broker it for him. He told us he had bought the boat in January 1994, from a friend who had rescued it as an abandoned wreck on the canal – builder unknown – and had been doing it up ever since. It was an old style of build and all of this could have



**Canal scene from *Last Enemy*:** This was the only episode involving murder on the canals in modern times. (ITV/Rex Features)

been quite plausible. Indeed at that time British Waterways were instructing us to sell seized abandoned boats on their behalf, and people were doing them up.

We sold the boat in March for £8,000 to a run-down middle aged man, who reeked of drink, and told me he had fallen out with his partner. He also informed me his ancestors were working boatmen, and he wanted somewhere cheap to live, as well as returning to his roots. A few days after paying for the boat, but before collecting it, his partner came on her own to see me and explained their situation and that they had been reconciled, despite his beating her up when drunk, which was almost daily.

Whilst the boat was subsequently on sale with its sale board stating 'Builder unknown,' a moorer at the marina called in saying she knew who the builder might be, as she had previously owned a very similar boat with the same unusual Volvo single cylinder engine. I rang the boat builder, who said the boat could well be the unfortunately named *Steelaway* which had been stolen on New Years Eve 1993 and then simply disappeared. A bit of checking, including the owl that had been painted on the side, which was still just visible, the unusual galley arrangement the



**John Thaw in earlier times:** As a detective with Dennis Waterman in a 1978 scene from the big screen film, *Sweeney 2*. They were celebrating in a south London pub following the conviction of particularly nasty villain. (John Curtis/Rex Features)

first owner had specified, and the forced removal of the engine number plate, were enough to prove this was the boat.

When I rang our friend Sullivan on his mobile to express my concern, he said he would come in and sort things out, but I never was able to contact him again. He now simply never answered his pay-as-you-go mobile. Our marina builder who lived in Coventry, visited the address Sullivan had given us, and found out from neighbours that the property had stood empty for years. At this stage, I had no choice but to buy the boat in from our drunken seller at the price he had paid less our commission. I also informed the local police, in which I made the first of three written statements as the drama unfolded.

## Detective work

Now stuck with the boat, I continued to pick away at trying to find the true owner. With the boat's true name and help from British Waterways, we finally managed to discover its third and last registered owner. But unfortunately they had since moved and the letter I wrote via BW, was returned 'gone away'. All efforts to find where they had moved to failed. Then by chance the second





**LEFT: Men United:** The Morse, Lewis and Chief Superintendent Strange team examine a corpse dumped in a skip and then found on a waste tip in *The Remorseful Day* in what transpired to be their last case. (ITV/Rex Features)

owner of the boat called at the marina and spotted the boat, and he was able to lead us to the first and third owners; he knew roughly where the latter had moved to and Directory Enquiries did the rest. The third owners came in and identified the boat as *Steelaway*, the boat that had been stolen from them. The husband stood on the counter, and congratulated me on tracing him, adding, 'I never thought I would ever step on this boat again.'

Following the burglary, the couple had been paid by their insurers, and produced the documentation for me to copy. The insurers themselves proved a problem, as they no longer existed as such. They had been bought out by another company and the business had moved, all of which I had to find out. But finally I got

to them and they traced their file. In a magnanimous move, they agreed to sell the boat to us for one pound, allowing us finally to recover our monies when we sold it on.

By chance, at that time we started to use the boat delivery services of someone from the Coventry area. He recognised the boat as the one he had seen at a somewhat disreputable boatyard, where it sat on the hard for years under canvas. Following the theft it had obviously been lifted out and hidden, until Sullivan got round to modifying it out of recognition.

Through the information I had been given, I now had pretty well the full story of just what had happened to that boat. I made a final written police statement of some five thousand words. Having read it, the officer dealing with the case complimented me by saying I could have made a good detective. He also said the police would only have given the same degree of determination as I had done if it were a major crime, like a murder or armed robbery or a big drugs bust. They could not spare the resources for something like this.

At best Sullivan, who was already well known to the police as a 'fence', would have spent nine months in jail. He had now disappeared but sooner or later he would turn up again, and this incident would be added to the list of charges.

I showed my final police statement to *The Inspector Morse Society* chairman Antony Richards and asked if he would like to use this true-life amateur detective story, which could easily be worked up for the *Inspector Morse Society Journal*. He suggested instead that the society should publish it as a stand-alone booklet, and this was done; and so my first effort at crime-writing for the publication by the society was achieved, as *The Case of the Stolen Narrowboat*. Pleasingly, the Northamptonshire IWA branch picked up on it and asked to publish it in serialised form in their newsletter, which was rather appropriately named *Endeavour*, Morse's unused first name. This request I was honoured to grant.

## More sleuthing

My second effort at canal crime writing for the society was some eighteen months later, when housebound for the best part of a week, recovering from a hernia operation, and with nothing better to do. Earlier in the year I had attended Oxford Crown Court to



**LEFT & ABOVE: The case collapses:** Scenes from Inspector Morse's own *Remorseful Day*. (ITV/Rex Features)

witness the sentencing of the notorious canal thief Finch, who had been re-arrested for the eighteenth time a few months before, and was being remanded in custody.

As usual he had pleaded guilty at his trial to those charges of breaking into boats that had been put to him that he had actually committed. It was not his practice to wipe the slate clean by asking for other crimes to be taken into consideration. Now he was to be sent down and I wanted to see him face to face for the first time, as he had lived a phantom existence sleeping rough or on empty boats and stealing food, drink and clothing. Many nights the police had tried to catch him, sometimes with help from ourselves, when they believed he was in our area.

The sentencing in my opinion was little short of a Gilbert & Sullivan farce. Finch pleaded his own case in a letter to the judge. He was full of remorse for the wicked life he had led, due to his alcohol problem which had resulted in marital breakdown and his becoming homeless and penniless. In jail since his arrest, he had been on an alcohol rehabilitation course, which the official reports showed was going very well. Now aged sixty and in poor health he wanted to make a fresh start. It was all swallowed hook, line and sinker, and he was only imprisoned for just under a year, taking into account the breach of bail conditions on his previous release from prison.



**Morse in the mortuary:** Lewis comes to say his farewell, with the famous words, “Good Bye, Sir”. (ITV/Rex Features)

On the Friday in November that he came out, he was driven to Northampton, arriving there at twelve o'clock, with the twenty pounds in his pocket given to him by the prison service to tide him over. He never attended his two o'clock appointment with the probation service, nor did he go that night to the hostel accommodation that had been arranged for him. Instead he did a runner, and within days three boats had been reported broken into, and the police had issued a warrant for his re-arrest for breaching his conditions of bail. So much for Finch's remorse. I wrote at the end, 'Finch had done bird, and this bird had flown!'

With a little help from my friends here and there, I had pieced together a great deal of Finch's life, which gave me enough to make what I thought was a good and thought-provoking study on the modern day issue of crime and punishment. The booklet, called *Finch, The Remorseful Day* was published through *The Inspector Morse Society*. It was something of a runaway success and went to three editions, with about 3,500 copies sold in all. For the first time in my life I even found myself having to sign copies of something I had written.



**Last chance saloon:** Morse gets an armful following his heart attack. (ITV/Rex Features)



**John Thaw's memorial service at St Martin-in-the-Fields:** His widow, Sheila Hancock kindly invited six members of *The Inspector Morse Society*, which included the author. Sheila Hancock with daughters (L/R) Joanna, Abigail and Melanie. (Tim Rooke/Rex Features)



One local police officer who had been involved in the hunts for Finch then took his signed copy to the jail where Finch was being held after his subsequent arrest. The prime intention of the visit was to discuss various unresolved canal boat burglaries. But at the same time the officer also asked Finch to autograph his copy, a request that was unsurprisingly refused. Finch has now been through three arrests and served three jail terms since I wrote that booklet. He is about to be released again, in good time for the 2009 summer season. (*Finch, The Remorseful Day* is now out of print but still available on the Braunston village website.)

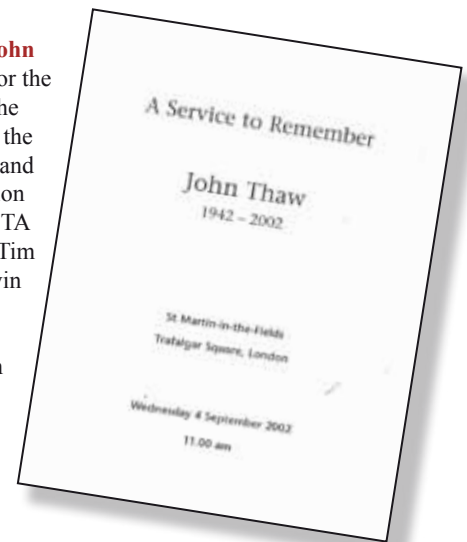


**Press launch of *The Clare Carol* at Braunston Marina, prior to its first performance at the Church of the Holy Cross in Daventry:** L/R Tim Coghlan, Ian McDonough – Braunston Marina moorer and violinist in the LSO - Heather Pheloung who played the glockenspiel, and her husband, *Morse* composer, Barrington Pheloung. (*Daventry Express*)



**The conductor's vocal score for *The Clare Carol*:** Signed and dedicated by *Morse* composer Barrington Pheloung to Tim Coghlan.

**A Service to Remember John Thaw:** The service sheet for the gathering of the great and the good of the acting world in the presence of Prince Charles and Cherie Blair. At the reception following, held at the BAFTA headquarters in Piccadilly, Tim Coghlan met 'Lewis' – Kevin Whately, who told him that his favourite episode was *Deceived by Flight*. Written by Anthony Minghella, it is about a cricket team that is smuggling cocaine into Britain from Hong Kong.



## Weedon Weed

About a year later, I was gifted with another great true canal-crime story, which frustratingly I never had time to write, coming as it did in the summer of one of those now lost and lamented boom years of narrow boat sales. I had it all in my head, ready to go, even the title, *Weedon Weed: or Saving Pusher Ryan*, but even at 1,500 words a day, I still needed five clear days to write it, which was like asking for the moon.

In brief, about a year before the Money Laundering Act came in, a pair of casually well-dressed young gentleman, driving an impressively smart new Range Rover Discovery, called at the marina on an afternoon when I was away. One called Ryan, wanted to buy a narrow boat, and spotted a somewhat elderly and tired forty-footer, which he offered to buy for cash and without survey, for which he offered £12,500, against the asking price of £14,950.

Given his lifestyle, it seemed a surprisingly poor quality choice. The boat had been on sale for a while and the seller was only too pleased to grab the offer. It was sold and paid for there and then. Ryan explained that he was a quality second-hand car dealer and used therefore to dealing in large sums of cash. From his zipped jacket pocket, he took out a wedge of 'folding money' and counted out the £12,500.

The following day a 'friend' moved the boat to a mooring close to the steps at Weedon Aqueduct on the Grand Union Canal, where inconspicuous amongst the other rundown boats moored there, it was used as a drugs warehouse. Ryan it later transpired was a major drugs dealer, with other interests in illegal cigarette importation, and was the subject of a police undercover drugs bust, in which we were sworn to secrecy in supplying all the information we knew about the gentleman.

I was able to follow developments in part from the inside, and after some time I was able to get a deal more about Ryan's sophisticated operation. One was that he bought and ran a Daventry high street hairdressing business, through which to launder some of his cash. Whereas the average Daventry hairdresser declared annual taxable profits of between fifteen and twenty thousand pounds, Ryan was declaring £120,000, and was only too happy to pay the tax, keeping the rest as laundered money. He must have been Gordon Brown's only tax-paying friend.

Another was that six months after being sent down, Ryan was moved to an open prison as a low risk category criminal. Surprisingly for someone dealing drugs on a massive scale, he had no convictions for acts of violence. His victims were all unseen, and one of his own drug-addict pushers died in jail of cold turkey. So much for the punishment fitting the crime. From there he made his appeal against his nine-year sentence, and was allowed to drive himself unescorted in the BMW in the wife's name to his appeal hearing in Leicester Crown Court. Sadly, I never wrote that story; perhaps in retirement or maybe if the recession gets worse.



## Remembering John

In early 2002 John Thaw died of throat cancer. He was a heavy smoker and only sixty. His funeral was private, but later in the year, on 4<sup>th</sup> September an invitation-only memorial service was held at St Martin-in-the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London. The Inspector Morse Society were sent six tickets by his widow, the actress, Sheila Hancock. I felt honoured when the Chairman Antony Richards offered me one for my endeavours on the Society's behalf.

It was a truly remarkable occasion for the journey's end of a working-class boy from Manchester who had been abandoned by his mother and brought up with his one brother by his lorry driver father, who drove the lad down to his RADA audition. In the ground floor nave of the famous Georgian church were the great and the good of the acting world in the presence of Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, and Cherie Blair representing the Prime Minister.

The others from John Thaw's life were upstairs in the surrounding balcony, including ourselves. I found myself sitting between his chauffeur and his village publican. Like the Inspector he enjoyed his pint at the local. There were tributes from actors Sir Tom Courtenay, Richard Briers, Lord Attenborough and of course *Lewis* – Kevin Whateley – half joking and then moved to tears by his quip, 'Goodbye, Sir' from the last episode of *Morse* in which the dying Inspector solves his last case. We left to the sound of composer Barrington Pheloung, conducting his 'Inspector Morse' theme.

We were invited on to a reception at the BAFTA premises in Piccadilly, where I met composer Barrington Pheloung and put to him an idea I had of making a Christmas carol with him of a setting of the early nineteenth century Northamptonshire poet John Clare's *December*. All rights would be given to the Macmillan Nurses and it would be dedicated to the memory of John Thaw. This we agreed to do in time for that Christmas.

I also met and chatted to Kevin Whateley, who now lives near the canal in Milton Keynes and has done a bit of boating. I commented that I had now met everyone in the series except the great man himself, rather like the Inspector meeting those 'about the person', but never actually talking to his murder victim. Colin Dexter invited me to join him and Dorothy on their table for lunch, and I found myself sitting next to Lady Attenborough, with her husband on the other side. I had the thought that this was all a far cry from my day job of running a canal marina, and that chance encounter with the producer at Braunston Marina in the September of 1997.



**The Bench is not Dead!** Colin Dexter unveils the John Thaw Memorial Bench presented by The Inspector Morse Society at St Paul's (Actors') Church, Covent Garden, with Antony Richards, Chairman, looking on. (Tim Coghlan)



**Braunston Marina revisited:** ...by *The Inspector Morse Society* in September 2008. Members came from as far afield as Holland and Canada. (Paul Bennett)

## Lewis – Morse 2

In the years that followed, I continued my interest in the Inspector Morse Society. The repeats of the 32 episodes kept the series alive, and now we have the excellent 'Morse 2', the *Lewis* series which involves not only Kevin Whateley but also producer Chris Burt and composer Barrington Pheloung.

Last September, we had another 'Oxford weekend', the Oxford day being held in conjunction with the 'Lords Taverners', brought along by Barrington, who is a keen cricketer and Taverner member. In the evening there was a black-tie reception in the grounds of Keble College, followed by a concert of the Morse music which he conducted in the large Victorian chapel, followed by a splendid dinner in the hall.

The next day, the Inspector Morse Society were due to come to Braunston for a revisit to the scenes from *The Wench is Dead*, followed by lunch at a canalside pub. This time I was going to take the day off and show them round. In anticipation of this visit, I had to borrow a video of the episode, one of the very few I did not have my own copy of, as I had not liked it. Re-watching it for the first time in nine years, it was all very different and I thoroughly enjoyed it and went on to watch it again.

As I came out of hall from that dinner, I bumped into producer Chris Burt and reminded him of the filming at Braunston in June 1998. 'That *Wench is Dead* was a very good episode', he said, and this time without hesitation, I warmly agreed with him.



**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** Special thanks to James Feltham, Archives Manager of ITV and John Curtis of Rex Features for their very generous help in assembling the *Morse* photographs. My morning spent with John going through the Rex Features archives was a pleasure to behold. Also thanks to Antony Richards, founder and Chairman of The Inspector Morse Society, which has given enormous fun and pleasure to myself and many others. To him this four-part series in *Canals & Rivers* is dedicated with gratitude. Finally with regards to the canal criminal stories I have recorded here, they are factually true. Only some of the names have been changed to protect the guilty.