

WETHERBY

In honour of **SIMON RELPH** CBEWith special guests **VANESSA REDGRAVE** CBE, **SIR DAVID HARE** and **DUNCAN KENWORTHY** OBE

Winner of the Golden Bear at the 1985 Berlinale, the enigmatic and complex mystery film *Wetherby* (1985) marked David Hare's first foray into the big screen and consummated Simon Relph's reputation as a major force in the revival of British film production. **Vanessa Redgrave's** portrait of the haunted protagonist Jean Travers is viewed by many as one of her finest performances (the National Society of Film Critics awarded her Best Actress for the role).

RELEASE YEAR: 1985

RUNTIME: 102 mins

DIRECTOR/SCREENWRITER:

David Hare

PRODUCER: Simon Relph

At first *Wetherby* appears a standard police procedural about a shocking, but ultimately random, tragedy that follows a drunken, middle-class dinner party; but appearances can be deceptive. The idyllic, rustic home of English teacher Jean Travers becomes the focal point for an unusual investigation; initially echoing the style of Inspector Goole's enquiry (in Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*), policeman Mike Langdon (**Stuart Wilson**) queries the hidden motives of the respective dinner party guests. But Langdon is not immune from the forces that have conspired to strip the participants of their calm exteriors; he develops a compulsion to investigate an event he is forced to concede is not even a crime. Langdon's investigation gradually costs him his happiness, his self-belief and his job.

As nihilistic impulses swirl around her, and doubts are placed in her mind about the loyalty of her closest friends (outstandingly realised by **Judi Dench** and **Ian Holm**), Jean Travers is

emotionally affected by the casual, even defiant hopelessness of the sixth-form teenagers of her classroom, confronting a bleak, jobless future in Thatcherite Britain. The doomed choices facing her hormonal students force memories to resurface of her own youth and sexual awakening in a repressive 1950s northern suburb, where, as a wilful teenager, she fell in love with a dashing RAF recruit (the young Travers played brilliantly by Vanessa Redgrave's daughter **Joely Richardson** in her on-screen debut).

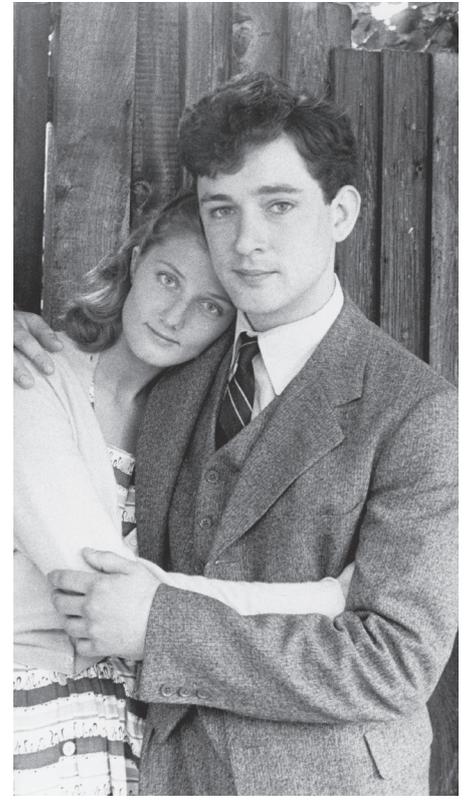
In a bravura portrayal Redgrave's mature Travers exudes serenity and stoicism at the intrusion of devastating horror; others are unaware she has a reservoir of personal pain from which to draw, giving her the inner strength to accept a violent incident beyond the experience of those around her. They in turn become baffled she is not distraught, and hint she is somehow culpable.

Reverberating throughout is the troubled figure of 25 year old PhD student John Morgan (**Tim McInnerny**), a Nietzsche-obsessed loner who subtly manipulates the other characters, often against their better judgement. His unexpected arrival at Travers' front door, carrying a brace of dead pheasants, underscores the pervading theme of mortality, and his impassioned speech about the authenticity of primal emotion betrays his unstable personality and unspoken

“...it turns out I was a sub-plot, the real story was happening elsewhere...”

challenge to middle-class sexual mores.

Disgusted with what he sees as the emotional void beneath the facade of a British market town Morgan contemplates shooting at it from his



bedsitter window. But he is described by others as “a central disfiguring blankness” himself. Morgan's acquaintance from university Karen Creasy (**Suzanna Hamilton**) then insinuates herself into Travers' home; dressed in diaphanous white she is like a malevolent invading spirit. Creasy's self-centred, grasping and increasingly empty personality distresses Travers as much as that of Morgan.

Together Morgan and Creasy personify the new principles of nihilism, casual greed and selfishness that have arrived uninvited in Travers' life.

Confronting the ghosts stirred up by renewed tragedy, Travers comes to terms with her repressed memories and with the intrusions a morally bankrupt society is making into the cultured life she defiantly chose for herself as a young woman.



That *Wetherby* subtly addresses genuine destructive social and psychological currents at play in mid-1980s Britain was to be appallingly verified by the Hungerford massacre (1987), then later by major City scandals.

SIMON RELPH CBE (1940 – 2016)

“...it is no exaggeration to say that Simon was in the vanguard of the revival of British cinema after its nadir in the 1970s...” (Stephen Woolley).

Without Simon Relph the rebirth of an indigenous British film industry during the 1980s and 1990s, in a marketplace dominated by American imports, would arguably not have happened; if it had, it would have lacked the dedication to quality and the nurturing of new talent Simon placed at the heart of his principled approach.

Simon’s professional influence was immense; a much-loved, larger-than-life presence around Soho’s film company headquarters, Simon was also an inspirational and generous confidante to up and coming young British filmmakers. His five year reign as head of the government investment body British Screen (1985 – 1990) is rightly celebrated as a period of risk-taking innovation that successfully resuscitated the British film industry. As his colleague Colin Vaines recalls in the *Times*:

“...at British Screen we simply couldn’t support everyone, and it was torture to Simon to have to say no to a project... he really stood out as someone special, because he was a classic independent producer himself, and knew what the applicants for funds were going through...”

Simon came from a family deeply immersed in theatrical and cinematic traditions. Simon’s mother Doris was a set-designer and his father Michael was a film producer making politically committed and creative features; an important example being *Victim* (1961), credited with having advanced the liberalisation of homosexuality laws. Michael Relph’s idealism left a lasting impression on his son Simon.

Commenting on this in the *Times* his daughter Bella says:

“...a big motivation for Simon in films was to be making a political statement and to have an impact on people’s views... as a producer who followed the same creative path as his father’s generation at Ealing studios, Simon was troubled by the change in the relationship between money and art that occurred over the course of his career...”

Simon’s first job was as a runner and third assistant director on *Carry On Cruising* (1962), and it was as an assistant director during the 1960s he developed the calm professionalism and affable

reliability that prompted increasingly bigger names to seek him out, Bryan Forbes (*Séance on a Wet Afternoon* [1964]), Ralph Thomas (*Deadlier than the Male* [1967]), Charles Jarrott (*Anne of a Thousand Days* [1969]) John Schlesinger (*Sunday Bloody Sunday* [1971]) and John Boorman (*Zardoz* [1974]).

It was Simon’s ability to work with some of the most perfectionist auteurs, notably with Polanski on *Macbeth* (1971), made in the aftermath of the Manson murders, that convinced directors they could not afford to ignore Simon’s dedication, sensitivity and sleeves-rolled up approach to getting things done.

But it was collaboration with Warren Beatty on his epic *Reds* (1981) that launched Simon into his main career as a film producer.

With numerous credits to his name (*Enchanted April* [1991], *Damage* [1992], *Land Girls* [1998], *Hideous Kinky* [1998]) it was provocative films like *Ploughman’s Lunch* (1983) and *Wetherby* (1985) that reflected the political critique Simon believed film should be there to make. He is fondly remembered for having risked government ire by backing Stephen Woolley’s anti-establishment *Scandal* (1989) whilst at British Screen.

Simon’s landmark *Relph Report* (2002), described by the Film Council’s then chair, Sir Alan Parker, as “the best industry report I’ve ever read”, has caused academic opinion to re-evaluate Simon, recognising him now as one of the leading shapers of British film policy over the last 30 years (see for example Spicer’s essay in McKenna and Meir’s book *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* [2014]).

Simon’s proud legacy is to have helped create a sustainable home-grown film industry and to have carried the flame for politically committed and culturally relevant film production in Britain.

BAFTA HERITAGE SCREENINGS

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



Left: Simon Relph and Warren Beatty on location in Helsinki with *Reds*

Right: In production on *Sunday Bloody Sunday*

