PRESS RELEASE

THE LAST KINGDOM

A CARNIVAL FILMS & BBC AMERICA co-production for BBC TWO

An adaptation of Bernard Cornwell’s best-selling series of books by BAFTA nominated and RTS award-winning writer Stephen Butchard

The Last Kingdom, a new historical 8x60 drama series launches on BBC Two and BBC America in October. Made by Carnival Films, the Golden Globe® and Emmy® award-winning producers of Downton Abbey, the show airs on BBC America on 10 October, 2015 and later the same month on BBC Two.

BAFTA nominated and RTS award-winning writer Stephen Butchard, (Good Cop, Five Daughters, House of Saddam), has adapted Bernard Cornwell’s best-selling franchise “The Saxon Stories” for the screen. Cornwell is also known for his much-loved “Sharpe” novels that became the long-running TV series of the same name starring Sean Bean.

The series cast is headed up by Alexander Dreymon (American Horror Story, Blood Ransom), playing Uhtred of Bebbanburg, with Emily Cox (Homeland) as Brida, Rutger Hauer (Blade Runner, Galavant) as Ravn, Matthew Macfadyen (The Enfield Haunting, Ripper Street) as Lord Uhtrtred, David Dawson (Peaky Blinders) as Alfred, Rune Temte (Eddie the Eagle) as Ubba, Ian Hart (Boardwalk Empire) as Beocca and Adrian Bower (Mount Pleasant) as Leofic.

Set in the year 872, when many of the separate kingdoms of what we now know as England have fallen to the invading Vikings, the great kingdom of Wessex has been left standing alone and defiant under the command of King Alfred the Great.

Against this turbulent backdrop lives our hero, Uhtred. Born the son of a Saxon nobleman, he is orphaned by the Vikings and then kidnapped and raised as one of their own. Forced to choose between the country of his birth and the people of his upbringing, his loyalties are ever tested. What is he - Saxon or Viking? On a quest to claim his birthright, Uhtred must tread a dangerous path between both sides if he is to play his part in the birth of a new nation and, ultimately, seek to recapture his ancestral lands.

The Last Kingdom, is a show full of heroic deeds and epic battles but with a thematic depth that embraces politics, religion, warfare, courage, love, loyalty and our universal search for identity. Combining real historical figures and events with fictional characters, it is the story of how a people combined their strength under one of the most iconic kings of history in order to reclaim their land for themselves and build a place they call home.
Gareth Neame, Nigel Marchant and Stephen Butchard serve as Executive Producers. Nick Murphy (Prey, Occupation) is the co-executive producer and has directed multiple episodes and Chrissy Skinns (Mr Selfridge, Marchlands) is the producer. The Commissioning Editor is Polly Hill for the BBC while Perry Simon, General Manager, Channels, and Richard De Croce, SVP Programming are overseeing the series for BBC AMERICA.

“Cornwell's Saxon novels combine historical figures and events with fiction in an utterly compelling way,” said Gareth Neame. “In the hands of Stephen Butchard we believe it makes original and engrossing television drama. In part the epic quest of our hero Uhtred, it is also a fascinating re-telling of the tale of King Alfred the Great and how he united the many separate kingdoms on this island into what would become England.”

Kim Shillinglaw, Controller of BBC Two added: "BBC Two has a great reputation for distinctive, surprising drama - The Last Kingdom is an epic piece from a highly regarded creative team."

PRESS CONTACT
Una@milkpublicity.com
CAST

Alexander Dreymon ................................................................. Uhtred
David Dawson ................................................................. Alfred
Emily Cox ........................................................................... Brida
Matthew Macfadyen ........................................................ Lord Uhtred
Ian Hart .............................................................................. Beocca
Tobias Santelmann .......................................................... Ragnar The Younger
Thomas W. Gabrielsson .................................................. Guthrum
Peter Gantzler ...................................................................... Earl Ragnar
Rutger Hauer ...................................................................... Ravn
Joseph Millson .................................................................. Aelfric
Tom Taylor .......................................................................... Young Uhtred
Alexandre Willaume ...................................................... Kjartan
Jocelyn MacNab ............................................................... Young Brida
Levente Törkölly ................................................................. Scallion
Ole Christoffer Ertvaag ................................................... Sven
Julia Bache-Wiig ................................................................... Thyra
Rune Temte ........................................................................ Ubba
Andrea Vagn Jensen ......................................................... Sigrid
Madeline Power ................................................................ Thyra (Girl)
Henning Valin .................................................................. Storri The Sorcerer
Balazs Medveczky ............................................................... Uhtred’s Brother
Alec Newman .................................................................. King Aethelred
Andrew Lukacs .................................................................. Young Sven
Simon Kunz .................................................................. Odda The Elder
Adrian Bower .................................................................. Leofric
Harry McEntire ................................................................. Aethelwold
Elizabeth Conboy .............................................................. Glenna (Uhtred’s Step-Mother)
Brian Vernel .................................................................. Odda The Younger
Eliza Butterworth .............................................................. Aelswith
Amy Wren ........................................................................... Mildrith
Lorcan Crantich .............................................................. Father Selbix
Victor McGuire ................................................................. Oswald
Charlie Murphy ................................................................. Queen Isuelt
Sean Gilder .......................................................................... Wulfhere
Nicholas Rowe ..................................................................... Father Asser
Alan David ......................................................................... Bishop Alewold
Paul Ritter ............................................................................. King Peredur
Jonas Malmström ............................................................. Skorpa
Eva Birthistle ........................................................................ Hild
Gerard Kearns ..................................................................... Halig
Executive Producers ...........Gareth Neame, Nigel Marchant, Stephen Butchard
Co-Executive Producers ...............Nick Murphy, David O’Donoghue
Producer .................................................. Chrissy Skinns
Lead Director (Ep 1 + 2) ........................................ Nick Murphy
Director (Ep 3 + 4) ........................................ Anthony Byrne
Director (Ep 5 + 6) ........................................ Ben Chanan
Director (Ep 7 + 7) ........................................ Peter Hoar
Writer .......................................................... Stephen Butchard
Production Designer ...................................... Martyn John
DOP ........................................................................ Chas Bain
Casting Directors .............................Kelly Valentine Hendry and Victor Jenkins
Costume Designer ..............................Ros Little
Hair and Make Up Designer ...................... Kate Benton
Stunt Coordinator ..............................Levente Leszák
Composer ...................................................... John Lunn
Editors .............................................Catherine Creed, Paul Knight and Kim Gaster
CHARACTER BACKGROUND

UHTRED
We first meet our hero Uhtred as a boy. Born of Saxon nobility but raised a Dane he grows up with a conflicted identity. A natural warrior, he is a leader of men, fearless, instinctive, and driven by a deep seated need to reclaim his homeland of Bebbanburg. Quick-witted, and impetuous he follows his gut, and abhors the prayer, fasting, and obedience so precious to King Alfred. Like a Dane he believes life should be lived passionately and fully. He has charm, energy, charisma and an underlying sense of justice – qualities which make him very attractive to women. His impetuosity and irreverence sometimes land him in trouble. Alfred has some success taming our maverick hero into using his head and valuing his Saxon roots…but Uhtred’s spirit is undimmed.

LORD UHTRED
Uhtred’s father, Lord Uhtred, is ruler of Bebbanburg, one of three kingdoms in Northumbria. A serious and rather distant man, whose commitments to Bebbanburg leave little time for his two sons. Lord Uhtred is a formidable fighter and leader of men, and his son Young Uhtred struggles to win his father’s affection and approval.

ALFRED
As the King whose ambition it was to unite the kingdoms of England, Alfred has gravitas, intelligence and integrity – but is not your typical swashbuckling hero. The flip side of Uhtred, Alfred is a thinker and a master strategist. A man of great wisdom, he is committed to the power of the written word and the spread of Christianity. Learned, pious, cautious, and often sickly, the responsibilities of leadership rest heavy on his shoulders. But, despite his vulnerabilities he is ruthless and determined and not oblivious to the charms of women, despite being married to his possessive wife Aelswith. Even Uhtred, who first sees Alfred as a humourless pedant, grows to admire the man who will become known as King Alfred the Great.

BEOCCA
Uhtred’s Saxon father’s priest Beocca goes on to become Alfred’s most trusted advisor. As such he alone has seen Uhtred grow from boy to man and knows his true birth-right. Pious and devout, but with a wry sense of humour, Beocca is also a clever and strategic thinker, whose opinion Alfred values. Ever hopeful of turning stubborn Uhtred from his pagan ways, Beocca maintains a strong paternal affection for his wayward charge.

BRIDA
Alongside Uhtred, Brida is captured as a child and raised by Danes. She becomes Uhtred’s best friend, soulmate, and future lover. Fearless, gutsy, outspoken, and a born fighter, Brida immediately feels at home in the boisterous world of the Danes. Unlike Uhtred she keeps her allegiance to the Danes and disapproves of Uhtred courting favour with Alfred. Uhtred’s commitment to the man who might win him back his homeland, threatens to drive a wedge between them.
EARL RAGNAR
A formidable and infamous Danish warlord, Earl Ragnar is fearless, charismatic, and a natural leader, but also a warm-hearted family man. Devoted to his son, Ragnar the Younger, he doesn’t hesitate to also take Uhtred under his wing, seeing spark and courage in the Saxon boy, and raising him as his own. Uhtred sees Ragnar as his true father.

RAGNAR THE YOUNGER
Uhtred’s Danish brother Ragnar the Younger is every inch his father’s son – handsome, brave, loyal and fair. Ragnar embodies the Viking way of life for Uhtred – freedom, passion, challenge, and adventure, a world away from the strictures of Alfred’s court. Ragnar will tempt Uhtred to rejoin the Danes and tests his allegiance to Alfred.

UBBA
The most senior ranking Dane Ubba is a mountain of a man, loud, brash, violent, playful and a little unhinged. A ferocious warrior, Uhtred is warned as a boy never to fight Ubba, but fate dictates he must. Ubba’s weakness is his superstition and reliance on his sorcerer Storri…it may just prove his undoing.

GUTHRUM
A Danish warlord and Ubba’s second-in-command Guthrum is a man of quiet intensity. Dour and relentlessly pessimistic, with a dry sense of humour, he is a cold-hearted killer, but his belligerence hides a conflicted soul. He develops a fascination with Christianity, with surprising repercussions.

ODDA THE ELDER
Odda the Elder is Alfred’s most trusted and senior Aelderman. A politically astute and fiercely loyal advisor, Odda shares Alfred’s suspicion of Uhtred. He is godfather to Uhtred’s future wife Mildrith, and must tolerate the embarrassment of his devious son.

ODDA THE YOUNGER
Odda the Younger lives in the shadow of his respected father but has few of his qualities. Slippery, dishonourable, and morally corrupt, he wants the quick and easy path to power and success. Odda has particular contempt for Uhtred, and is jealous of his marriage to Mildrith. His ambition threatens to be his downfall.

AETHELWOLD
Alfred’s oldest nephew, Aethelwold would have taken Alfred’s place as King if it weren’t for his age, and so holds a grudge against Alfred. A little younger than Uhtred, Aethelwold has led a sheltered life, and is an immature, petulant rebel, who wants to stake his claim on the throne.

QUEEN ISEULT
One of Cornish King Peredur’s two wives, Iseult is a ‘shadow queen’; a beautiful sorceress with magical powers. Iseult captivates Uhtred from the first moment they meet, and teases him with visions of his future. Mysterious, cool, and slightly aloof, Iseult is a world away from Mildrith, and Uhtred is powerless to resist her charms.
MILDRIETH
Uhtred’s wife, and Odda the Elder’s godchild, Mildrith is good-natured, trusting, and beautiful. A very devout Christian, she is generous and committed to the workers on her estate. Mildrith is ashamed of the debt to the church that she inherited from her deceased father. Her piety grows the longer she is with the untamed pagan Uhtred, driving a wedge between them.

LEOFRIC
A trusted Saxon, warrior Leofric is Odda the Elder’s military man. Weathered and worldly, Leofric is straight talking, uncomplicated, but far from stupid. Leofric initially dislikes Uhtred, who he renames ‘Arseling’ but a close bond is soon struck between crude curmudgeonly Leofric and fellow warrior Uhtred. Their friendship is put to the test in the course of the series, as is Leofric’s loyalty to his Saxon leaders.

RAVN
Earl Ragnar’s elderly father Ravn is a ‘skald’ – a Viking poet and wise man. With his considerable life experience he is philosophical about the struggles of the Danes, and is able to impart his wisdom on young Uhtred, who often acts as the eyes of blind Ravn.

AEELSWITH
Alfred’s wife Aelswith is fiercely loyal, and protective of her husband and king. Pious, haughty, and acerbic, she is an unpopular figure in Alfred’s court. Aelswith takes an immediate dislike to Uhtred, who she sees as a threat to her beloved husband.
EPISODE AND SERIES BILLINGS

SERIES ONE
Series one tells of the rise of our hero Uhtred, a Saxon boy, heir to the lands and fortress of Bebbanburg, Northumbria, whose future is turned upside-down when his father is defeated in the great battle of Eoferwic (York). That same day, Uhtred, is taken by the mighty Danish lord, Ragnar, and is brought up as his son.

Forced to choose between his Saxon heritage and his Danish upbringing, his loyalties are ever tested. Is he Saxon or Dane? Uhtred must tread a dangerous path between both sides if he is to fulfil his quest to recapture his ancestral lands.

Uhtred makes a precarious alliance with King Alfred of Wessex, using the King as his means of reclaiming Bebbanburg. Alfred, however, is using Uhtred and his knowledge of the enemy, to save the last free Kingdom of Wessex from Danish rule. Tension and mistrust simmer between the pious king and the pagan warrior and this hostility has repercussions on relations with the women in his life.

The alliance with Alfred is fragile, but ultimately Uhtred will fight at the King’s side in one decisive battle against the Danes. The battle for Wessex comes at a high price for Uhtred who loses Saxon and Danish friends alike. The dream of recapturing Bebbanburg remains.

EPISODE ONE
When our young hero Uhtred loses his Saxon father in battle, his lands and inheritance are taken by his scheming uncle Aelfric, who becomes a puppet-lord for the ruling Danes. The Saxon boy is brought up by Danish warlord Ragnar and grows into a warrior. But when his surrogate family is murdered by a group of renegade Danes, Uhtred finds himself alone; neither Saxon nor Dane.

EPISODE TWO
Finding himself blamed for the wedding massacre Uhtred pleads his innocence to the great Viking warlord Ubba, but is not believed. His only choice is to return to his roots and approach the soon-to-be Saxon King, Alfred.

EPISODE THREE
Uhtred wins the protection of Alfred, but his commitment to the new king threatens his relationship with Brida.

EPISODE FOUR
Uhtred’s relationship with Alfred hits a new low. Alfred invites Uhtred to peace talks only to use him as a pawn. Held hostage by the Danes, Uhtred renews contact with Ragnar, who saves his life. A great battle looms.

EPISODE FIVE
In rescuing Mildrith from suspected abduction, Uhtred is drawn into the great battle of Cynuit, where he heroically defeats a formidable enemy. But when Odda the Younger steals the glory, Uhtred is furious and faces Alfred’s penance.
EPISODE SIX
Uhtred leads a raiding party to Cornwall, on a mission for wealth and independence. The party become mercenaries for a Cornish King and Uhtred attracts the attention of a beautiful pagan queen, but he must eventually return to Wessex and face Alfred’s wrath.

EPISODE SEVEN
The Danish invasion of Wessex sees Uhtred driven to hiding in the marshlands with King Alfred. With Wessex lost and the life of Alfred’s child hanging in the balance, a bond is finally struck between the two men. They must work together if Wessex is to be reclaimed.

EPISODE EIGHT
Leaving the marshes, a united Alfred and Uhtred must get word to Saxon forces to assemble and fight a decisive battle for Wessex and England. Treachery, deception and heartache follow as Wessex is saved – but at what cost to Uhtred?
AN INTRODUCTION BY BERNARD CORNWELL

The Last Kingdom is the story of a nation’s making. It is a tale of endless war and at the end of it, in the early years of the 10th Century, a new nation is born; England. It is a story that is curiously ignored, almost as if we assume that England was always there, but the making of England is a tale of vast and savage struggle, and at times that struggle looked hopeless. When Alfred the Great was stranded in the Somerset marshes it seemed that Saxon Britain was doomed, and that Alfred’s Wessex would be the last Saxon kingdom. Instead Wessex expanded until, under Alfred’s grandson, the new nation emerged. England.

The hero of The Last Kingdom is part fictional and part real. There really was a man called Uhtred who was Lord of Bebbanburg, but we know almost nothing about him. I had never even heard of him until, at the age of 58, I met my real father for the first time. He was a Canadian named Oughtred, a name that had gone to Canada with emigrants in the 19th Century, and those emigrants had taken with them the family tree which traced the Oughtreds all the way back to the Saxons called Uhtred. I had ancestors who had taken part in the great struggle against the Vikings, in a war that had swept from Somerset and Surrey in the south to the frontiers of Scotland. I had always wanted to tell the story of that vast conflict, but now I had a name to hang the tale on; Uhtred of Bebbanburg. I had seen his signature on a charter, knew that he was the lord of a great fortress, Bebbanburg, which is now Bamburgh Castle, but beyond that he was hidden by history.

Now he comes to life in a television series. Much of the series, like much of the novels that tell Uhtred’s story, is fictional, yet the background is grimly real. The 9th and 10th centuries were desperate in Britain as adventurers and armies fought for land. The Saxons had taken the land from the British, who still fought back in forays from what is now Wales and Scotland, but in turn the Saxons are under siege from the Northmen. Life is brutal, short and hard. Almost all of what would become northern England is captured by Vikings, East Anglia falls to the invaders, the Midlands go next, and Alfred the Great is forced on the defensive in the last kingdom, Wessex. That there is an England at all, and that we and much of the world speak English, is thanks to what happened next.

Alfred was a clever, pious and chronically ill man. He depended for his kingdom’s survival on the church, on trade and on warriors. This is an heroic age. The church would be destroyed and trade ruined unless the warriors can defend the land. It is a story of savage men in mail coats armed with big shields, swords, battle-axes and given a brutal ability to kill in close-quarter combat. Anglo Saxon poetry is filled with admiration for such men. Uhtred is one of them, and his story, like the larger story of the nation he helped to make, is full of drama. There were also heroic women, like Æthelflæd, Alfred’s daughter, who led armies against the enemy and reclaimed great swathes of land from an implacable enemy.

It is a tale made for television, a true story that explains the origin of our land, our culture and our language, a story of heroism and horror, of romance and revenge. I have loved writing the books and now look forward with intense enjoyment to seeing the stories come alive on the screen.
AN INTERVIEW WITH GARETH NEAME
Executive Producer

This is an adaptation of Bernard Cornwell’s books – what was it about these novels that made you want to bring them to screen and what does Stephen bring to that process?

The story of how England came to exist is a defining part of history, and an interesting and exciting period of time. It’s also one that we don’t hear so much about which is a great opportunity in television. Bernard’s books are real page-turners, in which he perfectly weaves his own fascination with history and real events with characters, both real and imagined, to create a very rich and exciting world which I was confident would translate well to television. I loved the idea of having a fictional hero with his dual identity forged by circumstances, surrounded by figures from history to bring a new dimension to the story of King Alfred and his vision of a unified Kingdom.

Carnival Films has a pedigree for historical fiction. What appeals to you most about this period?
What I like about this particular period in history is that it’s an era that isn’t depicted much in film or television, but it is also one that is hugely important. History is such an important source of material for British drama, but so much of that is set during the nineteenth century or during the Tudor or Elizabethan period. That, twinned with Bernard’s incredibly storytelling, brings a fresh take to the genre, which I hope will be really engaging for viewers.

What do you hope this series offers an audience?
The Last Kingdom is a drama based on true history rather than fantasy. There are no dragons or magic in this show. It’s real and happened over a thousand years ago. It is for not only British viewers but anyone with a connection to the Anglo Saxon world. This is where it all came from, where it started. If King Alfred hadn’t had that dream we could be living in a very different country now. It’s not only interesting, but shows us where we came from, and focuses on the individual stories and parts played by people of the time.

What do you think makes BBC TWO the right UK channel for the show?
BBC TWO has become a very successful and important channel for smart and entertaining drama. There have been a number of really impressive shows on the channel within the last year or two and it’s great to be in and amongst this roll call. It allows us to push some of the story lines a little bit further. It’s a really good creative home and it has been a very rewarding collaboration with them.

In the USA there seems to be a huge appetite for British and historical drama, and this will be going out on BBC America. What do you think BBC America offers the show, and how do you think an American audience will respond?
As a marketing led channel we all felt BBC America would do a fantastic job establishing the show in the busy US marketplace and give it the best chance. BBC America is a platform where The Last Kingdom will get really strong promotion and marketing, and being an American audience who enjoy watching quality British drama. The team at BBC America has been
incredibly supportive throughout the process and brought with them a genuine enthusiasm for what we set out to achieve.

The drama has an epic scale to it, which almost seems contradictory given Nick Murphy’s close quarters documentary style of filming. How important was that sense of scale?

We used a rough and ready photographic filming style, which brings the viewer right in amongst the action, but nonetheless the production value is very high. The camera moves around and interacts on the ground yet we have these fantastic aerial shots. We have a lot of action we have emotion and romance, loss and destiny. It’s a fresh approach to filming as well as a bold and upmarket production style. It’s a really strong combination.

I’d love to ask about what you think Nick Murphy brings to the look and the feel of the show, and what makes him the right choice for lead director.

Nick had such a bold vision of how to execute the piece and how to take what he had read on the page to the screen. This style of handheld interactive photography is very much his vision and it works incredibly well, bringing the viewer in amongst the action. Nick also brings a huge amount of energy and enthusiasm to the way he works, and had a real collaborative relationship with Chas Brain (cinematographer). The chemistry between Nick, the crew and the cast makes the set a very exciting place to be and work, and really gets the best out of everyone.

You have gathered an incredibly eclectic and international cast. Why was it important to draw your cast from so many different countries?

We’ve got around seven nationalities in the show, which is a result of Bernard Cornwell’s storytelling and Stephen Butchard’s interpretation of that. Uhtred is the son of a Saxon nobleman, kidnapped at the age of ten and brought up by the Danes as one of their own. It’s very important to the storytelling that it’s instantly recognisable who are the Saxons and who are the Danes. We made the decision to cast the Danes using Scandinavian actors, as they naturally have the right look and lilt to their speech. Likewise with Uhtred and Brida – played by Alexander and Emily both of whom have European accents - the fact that they have that accent adds another aspect to show that they are in neither camp particularly, but have a connection to both.

There must have been a lot of pressure on the shoulders of the young Uhtred (played by Tom Taylor) – how did he adapt to the filming environment?

I remember when we were working on the first script and had sold the project to the BBC thinking that the success of the show rested on casting the right boy for young Uhtred. He’s in more than half of the first episode and the whole story is told through this child. He is the prism of the story and if we hadn’t found a young actor with the right level of talent or the right look it wouldn’t have worked. As soon as we saw Tom’s audition we thought he was perfect, and in fact after seeing him on screen think that he has achieved even better results than we ever hoped for. He has the right look, a real ability and confidence as an actor, and takes direction very instinctively. I really believe Tom could have a great acting career ahead of him.

What has Alexander Dreymon brought to the role of Uhtred?

Nick Murphy was very excited when he met Alexander and was convinced immediately that he was our leading man. The show lives or dies on the strength and qualities of the actors in leading roles and I felt that, although Alexander isn’t that well known yet, he has true leading man qualities. I love that he is German born which gives a European slant to his dialogue. It adds to
the understanding that Uhtred is a fish out of water wherever he is - he’s stuck in no man’s land - and that is really important for the storytelling.

**What can audiences expect from the show?**
Great storytelling, brilliant acting and production values, with a quest at the heart of it that people will really want to follow. It’s got action, politics, intrigue, betrayal, and romance and I hope it will be really exciting viewing.
AN INTERVIEW WITH NIGEL MARCHANT
Executive Producer

What was it about Bernard Cornwell’s novels that made you want to take them to screen? And how did Stephen fit into that process?
We looked at Bernard Cornwell’s books originally because they were historical novels and Bernard is brilliant at writing the historical side but they’re not classical novels, they’re written purely for entertainment. I think that is what drew in the BBC and BBC America as well. We weren’t confined by a literary adaptation and we could really have fun with these. Stephen Butchard brought the ability to hone in on the relationships he was able to bring out all of the emotion as well as the big set pieces of the stories.

Carnival Films is well known for period dramas. What was it about this period in time that made you want to make it?
The great thing about the time period of The Last Kingdom, as opposed to a show like Downton Abbey is that this travels back much further in time than we have references for and we felt we could have a lot of fun with it. Nobody really knows what people wore during that time, for example, and we were able to make assumptions on some aspects of the design. It also allowed us to have more poetic licence and freedom than certain periods in history where we are so much more informed.

How do you think the show will fit on BBC TWO?
BBC TWO as a channel offered a real sense of freedom where we could play on the politics, the history; that we could be much more open to the darker side of our story with the battles and the bloodiness. As a result it feels much more like a contemporary thriller that a historical drama. It gave us freedom to be able to push the visual boundaries as BBC TWO has a really informed and engaged audience and so we can play a little bit more.

It’s a popular time for medieval fiction with big dramas such as Game of Thrones and Vikings. Where does The Last Kingdom fit into this?
The Last Kingdom is based on real history and throughout the novels, Bernard has kept certain battles, historical figures and a lot of the Viking characters are real. He’s simply woven this fictitious character, Uhtred, through it. I hope that it will appeal to audiences who like the spectacle and scale of these shows with the big battles but it’s also got real history woven throughout. We don’t have the fantasy elements of Game of Thrones as this is more grounded in real life but at the same time it’s entertainment.

How did you develop the visual style of the show?
We wanted this show to look different to other period dramas. Obviously there is a huge amount of period drama in the marketplace with varying degrees of budget. So the challenge was how do we make our show stand out. Our director Nick Murphy had made a drama called Prey; a contemporary thriller that had been shown on ITV and he had created a unique style with that show. We shared a vision that we wanted The Last Kingdom to feel more contemporary than a period show and so Nick decided to use hand held cameras to film the drama. We wanted the audience to discover what was happening at the same time our characters did. The action is much more immediate as a result.
Was it a conscious decision to cast the net wide with such an international cast?
Very early on we decided to cast Scandinavian actors as our Danes. The biggest fear on any show is making sure that the audience knows who is who. We meet a huge amount of people very early on and we really wanted to establish the different tribes. These are our Saxons and these are the Danes, both through the way that they looked with the make-up, hair and costume, but also by the fact that they had accents. We then have two characters right in the middle of that, Uhtred and Brida, who are born Saxon but brought up as Danes, and again, they have a slightly different accent. So when they go into court and meet Alfred for the first time in the Saxon stronghold of Winchester they are seen as outsiders. They are never fully trusted, they don’t look or sound like the other Saxons. They’re in this in-between place that means that neither side trust them. It’s a theme that Bernard writes so well throughout the books that it’s clear Uhtred is his own man and he has to fight for his own cause.

Tell us a little about casting Rutger Hauer
A lot of our cast are new faces and we wanted to go down that route of discover our hero, our leading man, but we also wanted to pepper it with some familiar faces who would help us come into the story. Rutger Hauer came very early as an idea from our casting directors and he has brought such gravitas, fun and brilliance into the first series.

What is it about Alexander that you felt would work so well? And what does he bring to the show?
This is very much drama that hinges on a leading man, unlike the large ensemble we have on Downton Abbey, and so we really needed someone who can be a leading man. Nowadays you’ve got to have marketability and you have to see someone on the posters that the audience believes is the hero and warrior. Alexander had that immediately when he first auditioned with us and you could see him on that poster! He has worked incredibly hard; he has been in almost every scene. He has had to learn stunt work, sword fighting and improve his horse riding skills (although these were pretty good to start with) and it was exhausting for him. It’s a big part and a lot has been on his shoulders but he has risen to the occasion.

What can audiences expect from The Last Kingdom?
I think that The Last Kingdom gives us a sense of history, a sense of time, of seeing the birth of England, as we know it, as well as an element of entertainment. When I first came to the books I sped through them and read the first seven back-to-back. They were utterly entertaining and I think Stephen Butchard has brought out the real heart of the novels.
AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD CORNWELL
Author

How did your journey as a writer begin?
It all began with love. I was a television producer working out of Belfast at the time. A colleague and I were in a hotel in Edinburgh when the lift door opened and a beautiful blonde woman walked out. I said to Gavin (my colleague) that I was going to marry her - and boom - just like that it began. It turned out that she was American so there were a few obstacles to true love; She couldn’t come to Britain because of family concerns and although I could go to the US, the US wouldn’t give me a green card. So I told her ‘Don’t worry darling, I’ll start writing books.’ That was 36 years ago, 36 years on we’re still married and I’m still writing books. So it was desperation, total desperation. It was the only way to be with Judy, I needed a job that didn’t require the US government’s permission. That’s how it started.

Is this period of history a period that you’ve always been interested in?
I’ve always been interested in the Saxon era, it goes all the way back to my college days when, to my horror, I discovered if you were doing a degree in English you have to learn proper old English. I remember being quite daunted but I fell in love with Saxon poetry. I remember a row as to whether The Battle of Maldon was actually possible because you wouldn’t be able to shout from one river bank and be able to hear it on the other, so I went down to Maldon and tried shouting and yes you could hear. These poems, when they’re not being religious, they’re often quite violent. It was a very violent age so much of the literature celebrates these warriors and the warrior’s way of life, even the Battle of Maldon celebrates a defeat but in a sense it’s a battle of life. I had this keen interest for about twenty to thirty years before I ever wrote about it.

Whilst writing the books did you ever favor either the Saxons or the Vikings? And did this have an impact on how you wrote the book?
I’m sympathetic to both this is why Uhtred is equally torn. I’m English and we’re effectively telling the story of the making of England. I suppose I’m on the Saxon side of this story but I’m extremely sympathetic to the Danes. For me the joy of writing these books is that Uhtred is a Pagan. For Alfred, certainly, and to a lesser extent for his children, this is not just a battle to reclaim territory and to make a country, to make England; it’s also a religious crusade. This is a crusade on behalf of Christianity. I deliberately made Uhtred a Pagan in order to create some tension with Alfred. In a sense he rather admires Alfred but at the same time he can’t stand him. I think that would be my personal opinion towards him too. He is this extremely clever, extremely pious King. I have a natural distaste for all puritans - the fun prevention league!

How would you like Alfred to be perceived by the TV audience?
I suspect the creators of the series will have taken some cues from the book with regards to how to depict him. There’s actually this statue of Alfred in Winchester, where he looks like a second row forward: the statue is of this big, burly man wearing a chain mail coat, a helmet with a crown and carrying a sword. In actual fact Alfred was sick all his life, probably with Crohn’s disease, which would have been very debilitating. We know for instance that he collapsed at his own wedding. He was probably not a physically strong man, but mentally he was very strong. He’s one of the most intelligent monarchs that ever ruled in Britain. We know he was a scholar, we know he prized scholarship and one of his greatest priorities was education. He translated texts
into the English tongue and these books are all about religion or theology. So, you have this extremely pious, extremely intelligent, rather sick scholar. He nevertheless is doomed to spend his entire life fighting. In many ways what he brings to the problem of the Viking invasion is actually an intelligent solution. He knew that he needed these alpha-males, these thugs like Uhtred to fight for him and so he controls them through intelligence.

You call Uhtred a thug do you think that’s true?
I don’t think he’s a true thug; he’s a kind man but he doesn’t particularly want people to know that. Uhtred is born into an age where your success is measured on your skill with a sword. It’s an era of alpha-males where no single corner of England is safe; any town from North to South is at constant risk of a Viking raid. It is constant warfare and in the midst of that constant warfare Alfred recognises that you need men like Uhtred. He knows that his destiny is to be a warrior and to fight. In war societal restraints are lifted and you have freedom to do the things that society normally says you shouldn’t. So how do you react to that? Well everyone reacts in different ways and truthfully Uhtred does not react badly at all - he is actually a decent guy. Alfred’s was a very brutal reign indeed and it was impossible to survive unless you could match that brutality with some of your own.

Do you have a favorite character?
I’m terribly fond of Uhtred and characters like Father Beocca. Uhtred is rude about Christians and a lot of those people who always write to me ask why I’m so nasty about Christians but they don’t realise there are a lot of very nice Christians in the stories too.

Describe the character of Brida?
I tend to write rather strong women. One thing that always irritates me is when you’re sitting in a cinema and on the screen there is a couple running away from the villains - you’ve got a man and a women but it’s always the girl who trips over and at that point I want to scream at the screen; it’s such a cliché. My women don’t trip over: they can run and fight just as hard as any guy. Brida is incredibly strong but it is her anger that’s interesting about her. Along with Uhtred, she shares a great anger towards Christianity.

What did you read as a child growing up?
The Bible. I was brought up in a family belonging to a sect called ‘The Peculiar People’ and by God they were. I was adopted into them and they were fundamentalist evangelical Christians. I was once beaten for reading a book that wasn’t religious. There were seventy-six copies of the bible in the house. You are probably getting the feeling that I rather rebelled against this. The Peculiar People had a long list of things they disapproved of - cosmetics, wine, beer, cinema, theatre, blondes, high heels, Roman Catholics, smoking, alcohol, television. It became a wish list for me. In a way I am very grateful to the Peculiar People as they give me a list of things which I wasn’t allowed and this lead me to pursue them for the rest of my life - blondes, television, historical novels, alcohol. The Bible is actually a very good grounding for a writer – there’s some wonderful prose in the King James version, so no regrets.
AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN BUTCHARD
Writer and Executive Producer

How did you get involved with The Last Kingdom?
A development executive at Carnival told me that they were thinking about adapting the books. I hadn’t read them but he explained a bit about it. So I read the blurb and about half a page and I was hooked straight away. It is such a fantastic premise of a Saxon boy kidnapped and brought up by Danes, he’s torn between two worlds and two faiths and I immediately felt the drama!

What do you think it is about this story that will appeal to a modern audience?
I approach it from the point of view of the characters and the first of these is Uhtred who is torn between two worlds and I think that audiences will immediately identify with that. A boy who starts out in one life and ends up in another, and the conflicts that go on within that change, is also appealing. The historical aspect of the story is equally important and the fact that there are real characters involved, like King Alfred works for an audience too. When you put interesting characters against a backdrop of those times and the events that came with them, it all adds up to a really engaging watch.

How do you go about condensing the books for the screen?
This first series covers the first two books (The Last Kingdom and The Pale Horseman) and so for me, it’s looking at what is the overall arc of these books; where does the story start and end. Once you establish that you join up the dots in between. You always go to the characters first, because when an event happens it means nothing unless you are invested in the characters. So that’s the starting point and everything begins with the relationships. In the first instance it’s Uhtred’s relationship with his Saxon father, Lord Uhtred that establishes his character for the audience and then we move to his Danish father Ragnar and his brother and what they mean to him. Then there is Brida, Uhtred’s friendship with Leofric and his all-important relationship with Alfred that underpins the story. As a writer you are attaching people to your main character and establishing how they all impact on the main character. You know where you want to take them and you know each of the character’s agendas, and so it’s a case of finding the best way to pull that through. You also have to pick your events. You can’t have a battle in every episode or else they become meaningless and so, to coin a phrase, you choose your battles.

How do you imagine the characters when you’re writing?
You start off with one point of view and you cast to that brief. But it’s inevitable that the actors are going to bring something new to it and you do find yourself watching the rushes from day one and seeing how the actors are playing the role and so you can’t help but tailor the writing a little bit. Not necessarily personality but certain lines. For instance, Aethelwold starts off as a couple of scenes but then you just fall in love with the character as well as with Harry’s performance of the character and it makes you think I need more Aethelwold here! It’s the same with the other, smaller characters because you can grow them. If you see something really interesting on the screen you just want more of it and so you do start off creating a personality but that can’t help but shift a little bit with the input of directors and actors a little bit. If they were solely to do what is on the page then I don’t think that they would be doing their job properly.
Does working on these books, which already have such a big fan base, bring an element of pressure?
I didn’t feel any pressure because I tackled it in the same way I would any script. I was just looking at the characters and the relationships first and then putting on screen the best version of that you can. What really helped was that Bernard Cornwell was generous enough to just hand the texts over, he knows that the books will remain, the books stand, and he is interested to see what people do with his stories. So that was really generous of him not to be in any way prescriptive and to say ‘go and enjoy it’. That was freeing. I think, like the fans, you fall in love with the characters and so you want to tell the best story you can and stay as faithful to the books as possible.

What traits did Uhtred possess that you wanted to shine through?
From the very first moment you meet him there’s a real confidence and honesty to Uhtred. I wanted to keep them and then bring into that, when events and family situations change, the real conflict and the pain that he carries as well as his vulnerability. He’s a young guy in this series he’s a bit headstrong still. He hasn’t yet developed that maturity to keep his mouth shut and keep his sword in his scabbard. That’s an important part of Uhtred’s character, he brings that impetus to the drama that sometimes it’s pure immaturity that makes him do the wrong thing at the wrong time and that feeds into the story. That’s important because he comes from a place of honesty. It’s also been important to show his sensitivities and his worries. Uhtred is a warrior and very much a sword Dane but there is a real sensitivity to him.

You have injected a lot of humour into the script. Why was that important to you?
Humour was something we wanted to bring when we began to create this world. We very much wanted this to have a sense of time and place and I didn’t want people to be waking up in a village full of mud thinking ‘it’s another day in a village full of mud’ because that was their life and that was okay because they simply got on with it. There would have been disease and people walking around carrying swords and axes left right and centre and any one of them could be dead by the end of the day and so I wanted them all to have a vitality and a hunger for life and to enjoy the very simple things. Humour is very important for that. That applies to both tribes. You don’t want the Danes to be one-dimensional men with swords and beards. They are real people and you want them to be funny and have a sense of humour and joke. I think it’s always interesting when you see a documentary for example on some hidden tribe, and once it’s translated you realise that everyone’s cracking the same jokes. Things don’t change!

How did you build the dialogue?
This is ninth century England and no one really knows how inhabitants spoke but I knew there had to be a difference. We couldn’t give the characters contemporary English so it was about taking the language far enough from modern without alienating people and it had to feel real for the times.

Did you have to do any additional research or was it all taken from the book?
I did do some additional research as I think it’s always useful to do. These are real times and real people and I wanted to know who they were. I was very much interested in the details like why Alfred became Alfred the Great.
What major changes did you have to make?
I think the biggest decision I took was to make Uhtred a man by the end of episode one because in the first two books he is predominantly a boy, but that was going to cause problems for the series. The biggest decision initially was there were events in the book that happened when Uhtred was a boy, which I really wanted to keep and I had to work out how to adjust these events so that they could happen when he becomes a man. I did that when they go to East Anglia; in the book he goes as a boy, but I sent him there as a man to find Ubba, the Danish chieftain in episode two. Juggling details like that was definitely the biggest challenge.

What was your approach to the female characters?
I think the female characters are really important to the series. They bring a different tone to what is an alpha-male environment. It’s so important we have strong women within the group that were authentic to the times. I have no doubt that strong women existed and you just have to look at Alfred’s daughter who goes on to be a great Queen. Brida was taken as a slave like Uhtred and he says later in the series that he couldn’t have got through it all without her. I think you have to recognise that. Alfred’s wife, Aelswith puts up with an awful lot with Alfred but she keeps this man on the right path all the time. She is always there to berate him when necessary.

What is it about Bernard’s writing that you think lends itself to television?
I think that because the stories have longevity you wouldn’t have enough hours in a film to do them justice and to develop the many characters properly and so in that sense the books do lend themselves to television. The historical times that he writes are hugely appealing and he chooses his history carefully. He makes sure that there are interesting events going on within that period of time. Also there is always a wonderful hero at the centre of the action to draw the audience in and to grow other great characters around. That was the great thing for me, I could really grow Alfred and I could really grow Brida and Mildrith. They were there in the books but they were free enough for me to take them in new directions.
AN INTERVIEW WITH NICK MURPHY
Co-Executive Producer and Director

What is the backdrop you have created for The Last Kingdom?
We were aware that there wasn’t an existing world when we set out to make The Last Kingdom. There wasn’t anything standing and by that I mean that you can’t go and use old cathedrals because the story pre-dates anything that exists now. That became a daunting prospect but what it allowed us to do is reinvent everything. We built an accordion like barn structure that we could extend and make smaller. For example, we filmed a Viking party that constituted the largest version of the barn and it was full of people doing crazy things.

What was your brief in terms of creating the Viking and Saxon worlds?
There were key things to get right in terms of keeping clarity of character and culture, so we have a clear narrative of the two worlds. The entire story is based on the clash between these two tribes therefore they need to be very clearly delineated for the audience so you absolutely know who is who. It’s almost like an alien invasion, which I suppose it was in those days. The North Sea was a huge place and Denmark was another universe. So we must be very clear to the audience who is a Viking and who is a Saxon so they are not left thinking ‘Hang on? What? Who? Where are they?’ Similarly the spaces they occupy need to reflect and define their identity.

What can we expect to see in terms of point of difference to other dramas based in this era?
Most dramas that are set in this period base themselves on other dramas also set in this period. It’s become this weird cultural inheritance to drama. The truth is we don’t know how people behaved in those times so I have pushed for a visual style of approach that is about reality. My style is about using hand held cameras. I want the audience to discover things as the characters do and I’m very keen that the camera is the audience not the storyteller. I never want the camera to feel more in control of the story than the characters are and accordingly the audience will get drawn in by this sense that they’re never absolutely certain what is going to happen and that underpins everything. I think one of the reasons that Carnival and the BBC asked me to direct was because my intuition for it was not rooted in other dramas. It was about shining a new light on this period and genre with a fresh set of eyes.

What was your initial approach to the casting?
I was keen to cast Danish, Scandinavian and Nordic actors to play the Vikings and I was fully supported in this by the BBC and Carnival. It was really important to me that the audience is fully aware of the cultural differences between these two tribes. I was also keen to avoid anyone using ‘received pronunciation’ or any sort of sub-Shakespearian speech. What we get from our brilliant cast is the pure narrative and characters’ objectives. Add to that a world where people can get their heads chopped off at any moment, where violence and sex and death and love and loss are all absolutely front and centre and you have the makings of sensational drama. Where risk is real and mortality a serious concern, then you are immediately in a world where drama means a lot more than it would if it was covered in some sort of medieval veneer.

What did Tom Taylor bring to the part of young Uhtred?
We knew that the Young Uhtred would be a crucial piece of casting as he takes up so much of the first episode before Uhtred grows up. We were ready to cast hundreds of kids to try and find the
right one but ended up auditioning only one. Tom was the first guy that came in. He left the room and Chrissy Skinns (Producer) and I looked at each other and said ‘that’s it, that’s him’ and I’ve never known that to happen. So we didn’t have to look any further and he has been incredibly impressive. I have worked with a lot of really good actors young and old and his work ethic, his kindness, his insight, his intuition and his ability to not overthink is astonishing. You don’t often get child performances that, at the end of the take, cause the camera operators and the crew to all look at each other in amazement because he is that extraordinary. We have a group of really experienced actors and you have this little guy doing his second ever job alongside Rutger Hauer (playing Ravn, Young Uhtred’s Grandfather) who has made lots of films and is an actor of huge experience. Putting those two in the lens together is just pure joy. They have a delicate, gorgeous little scene where the blind man can see more than the eagle-eyed kid and their worlds open up despite the different cultural backgrounds. It’s a beautiful thing and Tom’s ability to handle that scene was really impressive.

Why do you think Uhtred is so drawn to the Viking world?
If The Last Kingdom is about the clashing of two alien worlds then Uhtred, our lead character, sits slap bang in the middle of them. He is born and raised a Saxon but is abducted and adopted by a Viking into a Danish family. So when he hits adulthood he is torn very much between the two worlds. His oscillation between these two worlds becomes the central theme of the entire drama. Uhtred seeks to regain what was once his in the Saxon world, forcing him to forego a lot of his Danish culture. He forms an ongoing relationship with the King, of Wessex who goes by the name of Alfred (later to be surnamed ‘The Great’). King Alfred sets up England for the first time and this is the backbone of the story. Uhtred is tugged emotionally, practically and physically between the worlds of the Danes and the Saxons.

How did the casting process work for pairing up the younger and older Uhtred?
We’d only seen one boy for Young Uhtred and we were so blown away we put a pencil in him and said ‘please don’t go anywhere’. Then we turned our attention to finding a matching older Uhtred. If we had ended up with a different Uhtred who didn’t fit Tom I think we would have had to keep looking for the Young Uhtred but luckily we didn’t have to. I wanted somebody who had a sense of other about them, that wasn’t too earthy-Saxon-British, but similarly wasn’t too alien. Alexander, apart from being an incredible looking guy with great screen presence, just had a naturalism on screen from the early castings. He sent a tape over to us, I was in a Budapest hotel watching it in the lobby and coincidentally Chrissy Skinns (Producer) was in her hotel room also watching it. She came down to the lobby and we both immediately asked each other “have you seen it? Oh my god!” and we both knew pretty much then that we had found him. He has been incredible. He’s physically phenomenal in terms of the action. He’s what I’ve said from the outset that I was looking for in our leading man.
What is it about Uhtred’s character that is going to cut through these two worlds?
Most heroes are pretty sensible. They always have the answers and they are flawless. One of the things I like about the Uhtred in the books and scripts is that he’s impulsive. He makes a lot of mistakes but his heart is so driven and in the right place. That’s a brave move by a writer and that’s what warms you to him from the beginning. He rushes in and he’s prepared to put a foot forward when everyone else takes a step back and actually that’s real heroism. Heroism isn’t getting everything right and knowing all the answers. It’s being ready to say ‘right, I’m stepping up’ and he does. In his story he’s constantly getting himself in trouble in that sense. His impetuosity and volatility is part of what leads him into all these scrapes as he is struggling to find his feet in life.

Why is Brida so integral to the story and what does Emily Cox bring to that role?
We all love the character of Brida. It’s a brilliantly written part that avoids any of the cliché that we’ve often seen with female characters in the past. Brida is mouthy, smart, ballsy, loyal and has a directness of approach that not many of the other characters possess. We’ve all fallen in love with Brida. She, like Uhtred, belongs in both worlds, Danish and Saxon. When Emily came in to see us, it was her ability to skate across the dialogue and it's meaning to produce this spark of a relationship with Uhtred that impressed us. We screen-tested them together so we knew they were both right for the roles and for each other.

What makes the battles in The Last Kingdom stand out from other similar battle scenes we have seen on television?
Both sides fought with shield walls and so I wanted to make sure that for the audience there was a clear visual difference in the methodology of fighting so they could follow a story within the battle. The Vikings arrive with this weaponry where they can form a shield wall the length of the battlefield to protect themselves. It was important to film that in such a way that it was very clear that whenever something happened on one side there was an immediate reaction or response from the other side, which added to the plot and narrative. It was important to set out a clear sense of competition between the two sides and then see what happened when they come together.

What are the key distinctions between the Saxons and the Vikings?
It was a conscious choice to create a contrast between the Saxons and the Vikings. There is an austerity and seriousness to the Saxons that stems from their emerging Christianity. The Saxons are dressed in ash colours. They are modest, pious and have simple silhouettes and garments whereas the Danish are flamboyant. They celebrate battle wins in a big way and they indulge. The idea was always that the audience get behind the Saxons and want them to win, but at the same time, wish they were Danish. The Vikings are the rock stars and when they arrive on English shores it’s clear that they’ve been places other than a muddy field in Wessex. They’ve been to Turkey and Russia and Iran. The Danish Vikings were an astonishing bunch and I really wanted that flamboyance, colour and eccentricity to shine from them. Therefore we added the augmentation in the form of extra jewellery and the facial tattoos, which is all part of creating a sense of the life they’ve led. They don’t feel guilt about anything they’ve done. You have the sense that the Danes get out there and live a life. I must add that they don’t rape and pillage the whole time either. Our Vikings are an incredibly erudite bunch. There are Danish writings about how to behave properly and not to spill your drink and not get drunk and all these sorts of things;
they’ve been greatly misrepresented in the past. But I did want them to be fun, I wanted there to be magic about them.

**Were you pleased to find so much humour within the script?**

It’s an incredibly humorous script, which I didn’t expect. It’s hilarious in places and that, I think, is down to Stephen Butchard who is a naturally funny guy who writes family particularly well. He creates human interactions and characteristics that are nothing to do with the period but it naturally pulls you through the story.

**What has filming in Hungary added to the series?**

It’s very hard to make the English landscape not look contemporary. There is enough land in Hungary that hasn’t been touched and so you get a great sense of other and scale. It feels English but it isn’t quite English and that is hugely important to building and creating the world of *The Last Kingdom*
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISSY SKINNS
Producer

How was it filming in Budapest and what has that location brought to the production?
Filming in Budapest has been amazing for this show. It’s an epic show both in terms of its subject matter, Vikings and Saxons fighting and re-creating ninth century Saxon England, and also in terms of production scale, to have scores of actors, extras, stunt men, all in costume makes for a really big show. Hungary has been key to us achieving that because we had space to construct huge sets. Hungarian crews are used to working on a lot of movies and big productions so we’ve been able to achieve things in design and scale that we couldn’t have done in the UK. The crews in Hungary are amazing; they’re very quick and very skilled technicians.

What were your first thoughts as a producer reading this script?
As a producer, when you read a script full of burning boats, heads being lopped off, big battle sequences, it’s two-fold. On the one hand you think it’s very exciting and I would love to create that but on the other, you wonder how we are going to achieve this in a way that it looks plausible. I must admit, when I read Uhtred was to set fire to the ships my first thought was ‘we don’t have any ships and we can’t set fire to ships we haven’t got’. In the end, we constructed a Viking ship which is full size and to scale to use in all the ship scenes.

How did the production designer, Martyn John, support this sense of scale?
I was very keen for Martyn John to design the show because I’ve worked with him before and he has great vision. He sees things on a big scale and he’s not scared of that. He’s a trained architect and has a great eye for detail. He did an amazing job at building sets that could be transformed into other sets; we had one particular space that was a Viking barn, a Saxon York barn and then a Briton barn set in Cornwall. He transformed the same set several times. I think one of the key roles of a producer is to try and help the designer put the money in the most cost-effective places.

Which have been the most key locations?
It was very useful that there are various back lots out in Hungary. We found one at Göböljárás that was fantastic; it’s an entire walled town with a gateway, various villages and streets. We transformed that by lowering the roofs to make it look more Saxon and Martyn [John] added some further features such as a courtyard and a palace. We’ve created our own set within the existing lot. Then there is a set at Fot Studio which has been an exterior fortress in various guises. Martyn [John] was very clever with that by cladding it with wood and making it our Bebbanburg fortress, which we then added to with CGI.

What has Ros Little (costume designer) brought to the production in terms of the creating contrasting looks for the Vikings and Saxons?
Ros Little is a very talented and creative costume designer and she really responded to Nick Murphy’s original idea. I wanted it to be very clear that the Saxons were pale, pious and clean cut whereas the Vikings were sexy with lots of decoration, wonderful fur, armour and were strong warriors. Ros [Little] has really helped to create these two distinctive looks. We wanted to bring some colour in to it and to make different people distinctive. People did dye things in that era and so we gave the Vikings these wonderful red and blue tones. Despite being as historically
accurate as we could be, interestingly no one really knows what these people looked like. There are no photos available of Vikings or Saxons, which gave us a level of freedom. We really want people to feel that they’re living in that world and Ros’ designs certainly contribute to that.

**Did you seek any historical advice?**
We worked with Ryan Lavelle from the University of Winchester (which is rather appropriate as Winchester is one of our key towns in the story). Ryan was great at checking all the scripts, costume and make-up. It was useful to have Ryan on hand for any queries the directors had, for example to be able to ask about small details such as the parchment they wrote on and how they would have written.

**Were you familiar with the novels before production began?**
I knew of Bernard Cornwell’s work because I was aware of the Sharpe novels. I have various friends and family who are completely hooked on The Last Kingdom and the series of Saxon novels and so I went into this project with huge respect for the original material. Steven Butchard [writer and executive producer] has re-created the essence of the books very cleverly by selecting particular threads of the story. He’s pulled out the really important characters and focused on who they are and what motivates them. The books are fantastic reads but obviously they are not scripts and Steven Butchard has really honed down the novels so that we focus on the key characters. Steven writes families really well and this comes through in the scripts as essentially this story is about different families breaking up and coming together. Each director has added to that to try and tell the story visually as well as verbally, and Steven has been really responsive to that. Our characters are in an important landscape. The point of the story is about saving England and the landscape symbolises the last bit of England that can be saved. So when we see our characters riding across (what is supposed to be) an English landscape it’s a really important part of the story to see that this is a land worth saving.

**How does the process of having four directors work and evolve?**
Nick Murphy was very much the lead director as he set up the style, cast the main characters and really created the world of The Last Kingdom. Then each subsequent director (Anthony Byrne, Ben Chanan and Peter Hoar) took up the mantle so they basically worked within the style of the show that Nick created whilst bringing their own talents to it also. Each episode is slightly different and so requires different skills. Each director has worked within the main idea of the show but they’ve added their own touches.

**A fantastic, international cast is a really refreshing element to this show. What does that bring?**
The read-through was a fantastic experience. I set the room out so that we had the Saxons on the one side and the Danes on the other so they were already facing each other in battle! It was really interesting to see such a wonderful group of English actors like Matthew Macfadyen, David Dawson, Ian Hart, Harry McEntire, Simon Kunz and Brian Vernel sat opposite Scandinavian actors like Rune Temte, Thomas Gabrielson, Tobias Santlemann and the wonderful Rutger Hauer. It was wonderful to get Rutger on board. We offered him the part of Ravn but I don’t think I really believed he signed up until he walked into the read-through room. He was so charming and brought a real cinematic pizzazz into the room.
The Last Kingdom

How did you discover Tom Taylor?
Kelly Hendy and Victor Jenkins (casting directors) found Tom Taylor really early on. He was just a natural and he looked fantastic with his blonde hair and blue eyes. He is absolutely gorgeous. At this point we hadn’t found our Uhtred and so we kept Tom on the back burner. When we found Alexander Dreymon to play Uhtred he was dark haired and so we had to make the decision to dye Tom’s beautiful blonde hair which I think Tom actually rather liked! He was so fantastic and you really could believe that when young Tom is grown up he could be Alexander. They had a similarity. He brought such humour and energy to the role and was very grown up about it.

Was finding the right Uhtred a challenge?
Finding Uhtred was a challenge, as obviously, it’s the key role. We saw lot of young men aged between 23 and 33 and a lot of them would have brought amazing things to the role. But we just couldn’t find that star quality we needed for Uhtred, until we met Alexander. We knew that he was our Uhtred.

What were the big challenges for you as a producer on the battle sequence days?
My biggest challenge with the battles was always the mud! Our first battle had probably three hundred people on set, lots of stunt men, horses, actors, supporting artists and we were knee-deep in mud. Trying to manoeuvre from A to B in those conditions became quite a challenge. But it looked fantastic for the battle.

What have been the standout moments for you during all these stunts?
There was a wonderful morning when we all had to get up extremely early to walk to the top of a hill. It was cold, dark and icy, as it had been snowing. The scene was Uhtred lighting a beacon to alert the whole of Wessex that they are called to battle. So we had this enormous wooden beacon built by our designer Martyn John. We were all on the top of the hill, it was dawn and we could see the sun coming up and all across the mountains as this beacon was lit and I recall thinking that this really was a special and beautiful moment, and maybe it’s not so bad getting up at that time when you can see a view as beautiful as this.
AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTYN JOHN
Production Designer

Where does the process of creating a Kingdom start?
Initially I did a lot of research; looking through historical books, scrolling through the internet, looking at museum documents, and then putting together images that relate to the script. It takes a vast amount of research from artifacts and representations of how people thought it was, based on historical records. It gives us a lot of scope and as designers of drama we can push the boundaries a bit or a lot depending on what the scene needs. Sometimes we can have fun with it too.

What was the thinking behind the Saxon designs?
When we first started I had a lot of meetings with Nick Murphy and he had a clear idea about the two worlds he wanted to create. The Saxon world was quite pious and restrained because it was for normal people who went about their everyday business in a respectable manner. Then we came up with a colour palette for their world that included the natural tones; taupe, beige, grey, brown, light blue in an earth palette.

What was the thinking behind the Viking designs?
In comparison to the Saxons, the Vikings were like rock stars, and when they come to town everybody knew them. When I got the job, I put a reference of Lenny Kravitz into my presentation, and the director said ‘yeah that’s it, totally.’ The Viking colours are still based on natural tones, but we added some more colours, such as blue, red, purple and acid yellow. That gave us little hints of magic, which we could put in. The jewellery was more extravagant, and I had a lot of references from Alexander McQueen’s work and Galliano’s work because they’re just out-there and we wanted to bring some modernity to our Viking world.

Where is the main Saxon world located?
Göböljárás in Hungary is our main site where Winchester (the King’s Palace) is situated and where our Saxon villages are located. The lot had been used previously so to re-imagine it I suggested we built the palace in the middle of the lot. We then used these amazing structures that could become the village around the palace. In our story the Vikings are invading, everyone has fled to Winchester for safety, so the palace is where the Saxon world feels safe.

What did you have to do to repurpose that set?
The set we inherited were all stone houses with some two or three stories high. These were too tall for our period because they couldn’t build that high during that era. So I took the roofs and the top floors off six or seven houses and then added covered verandas to bring the eye-line down and thatched them all thus creating a shantytown feel for Winchester, full of people, animals, madness and mud. It looked quite mental, and like nothing you’d ever imagine!

Were there any other types of Saxon buildings you had to create?
Bebbanburg Hall was part of a fortress we created, so one of the initial design questions was what does Bebbanburg look like. It is based on Bamburgh Castle in Northumbria, which is a stone castle. To mix and merge the two worlds I built a fortress that was based on stone but after the first ten feet was timber clad. Its interior was a way of mixing the two again with stonewalls,
huge timber columns and a roof. This became the style for Bebbanburg. From that we developed the Saxon style using raw materials and timber as much as we could, and putting the odd bit of stone in. Shutters were everywhere, as they didn’t have windows or glass, the Romans had glass but the Saxons didn’t so we put shutters and simple openings in.

**Could you describe the interior of the Palace of Winchester?**

At the Göböljárás location we had the exterior of the palace, but there wasn’t enough space to build the King’s hall, which is a big interior where all the council meetings happen. There’s a throne for the King and pieces of furniture and the original idea behind the palace interior is that it was an old ruined Roman palace. This was until the Saxons came in from their villages and took it over, renovating as best they could, making it fit for their King. Hence, when you see the room itself it’s got quite a Roman feel about it, with lots of lovely brick arches and columns, with the odd bit of Saxon heavy timber work where the walls are falling in.

**Describe Ragnar’s Hall interior?**

I based Ragnar’s barn on a huge Scandinavian Norse design I had found. We set that up in a beautiful landscape, but had to set fire to it, so I built two barns; one exterior and one interior. And of course the challenge with jobs like this is you need to re-use and re-adapt all the sets when you have completed particular scenes.

**Where do you get such authentic materials for props and the sets?**

The most amazing thing I discovered about Hungary is the creative talent pool that exists there. You can’t buy things, but you can make them. So if I imagine something and draw it, the team will find someone who will make it for me. It’s brilliant, because then we can have horn candelabras that you just can’t buy anywhere because they don’t actually exist. Hungary has great sculptors and fantastic leather workers who made everything for us. All of the weapons we made were casts of weapons so when actors are fighting they don’t hurt themselves. You then have to replicate them two, three or even one hundred and twenty times because we have so many extras.

**Could you tell us about the key weapons and what you have done to design them?**

Nick Murphy wanted a piece of amber (that belonged to his father) to be around Uhtred’s neck as a boy and at the opening of the film he’s looking through it and he sees the Vikings are coming. That becomes the establishing image for Bebbanburg and Uhtred. Nick thought it would be a great idea to put the amber in the hilt of the sword. I designed these swords and daggers based on historic references but then we put our own design spin on them.

**Can you tell us more about having to build a Viking long boat?**

The opening starts with Ragnar on the high seas sailing towards Britain in a Viking ship. We toyed with the idea of building a ship, but it’s very expensive, tricky and as soon as you’ve put a boat on water it triples the time you need to film with all the safety equipment etc - it’s a nightmare. We found a real Viking ship in Denmark that still sails and they were really happy to let us film on their boat. Another script came in where Uhtred sets fire to a fleet of Viking long boats. In order to achieve this we had to build fake boats, which sat on platforms just above the surface of the water on a lake. Because of the nature of the series, you wonder how we can use these again, as we couldn’t afford to build a fleet. I built one boat, split it into one and two-thirds and this way we could have two boats and then replicate it to four boats or twenty-four boats as you wish. We
also built cut outs to set on fire. We never set the actual boats on fire, just a platform behind them where all the special effects team control the flames. They replicate those again and again so you can turn it on and off like a cooker.

**How does it feel watching your designs get set on fire?**
I don’t mind, easy come easy go. It’s part of the magic. As soon as it’s built, it belongs to somebody else. If they want to set fire to it they can as long as they do it well and we had a terrific special effects team who are used to doing huge films, so it’s nothing they haven’t dealt with before.

**Was there anything you had to consider with the filming style?**
Yes, it’s quite interesting because the filming style is handheld so they can basically see three hundred and sixty degrees, above or below for everything. On a normal film set you have areas where the lights are kept or moved, however on this film set we create a total environment. I also had to create a natural lighting, the flames and the candles, which are part of the set in more ways than one. The camera can look everywhere so it was quite challenging, as you have to think about so much more, as you can’t just do three quarters of a room like normal and not bother with a ceiling. It was great actually because you’re creating a whole environment.

**There was quite an international cast; did this inspire your designs?**
When we went to the Viking museum just outside Copenhagen in Denmark, it was quite interesting because I bought a lot of stuff like candle holders, which were round bits of steel with a spike on the end so you could put them in tables. We made them bigger because it would have needed to give off more light, but interesting things like that and cutlery are very simple but even from that time they were very smart and elegant designs. I use reindeer fur, so just bringing animals from another continent over to Britain and things like that. They would have brought tents over with them from Mongolia because they travelled all over that part of the world. I’ve tried to broaden the aspect of design and try and use things as much as possible from other lands, which they may have visited. This increased the colour palette, the shape and the texture and it’s all about those kind of things when you get close up. You’ll see these details when you get close up and see the fur against someone’s face or lying in bed.
AN INTERVIEW WITH ROS LITTLE
Writer and Costume Designer

How did you differentiate between the Saxons and the Vikings costumes?
There wasn’t a lot of available reference material for this period but one can read about the archaeology of dress in books that provided some useful inspiration for costumes. There are also some Viking costumes in existence in a museum in Copenhagen, which were extremely interesting. In reality the clothing of this period would actually be very similar for both the Saxons and the Vikings so it was really important from the outset that we found a way to differentiate between the two groups. I began by talking through the designs with the director Nick Murphy and (producer) Chrissy Skinns, to determine how we would achieve this. I went to our first meeting with a colour palette with strong colours for the Vikings and more muted earthy tones for the Saxons. I wanted to bring in the colour of the sea to the Viking costumes and so turquoise blue was the predominant colour for them with the introduction of mustards and burnt orange as the show became more land based. The brief for the Saxons was that they would be austere in a grey colour palette but gradually we introduced a bit more colour to their costumes particularly when they are not with the Vikings. The fabrics, we decided, would clearly separate them from each other and I designed leather and furs for the Vikings while the Saxons had wool and leather for their armour.

Did the fact that there are no garments from that period in existence allow you artistic license to create whatever you wanted?
We were aiming for a realistic feel to the clothes so that the audience would believe that these people would have worn and lived in these clothes. My job was to marry existing knowledge about the simplicity of the shapes with the designs and I was very fortunate to find a contemporary tailor who was key to helping me create the shapes. We then continually developed these shapes to avoid the costumes becoming boring and uniform. Most of the costumes have been made from scratch with the exception of some pieces like the warrior chain mail suits that I’ve been able to hire in a synthetic lightweight, but convincing chain mail.

Was it challenging to work with fabrics such as leather and fur?
I’ve used leather before and I found two extremely talented leather-masters in Bulgaria and Hungary who worked with us. We also found a props leatherman who contributed to the armour and crowd scenes. There was also a group of Viking re-enacters in Hungary who had their own extremely convincing costumes and armour that we were able to make use of, so we certainly covered all the bases.

Describe Uhtred’s costume?
Nick (Murphy) had a clear idea what he wanted for Uhtred so I worked very close to his notes on Alexander’s costume. He wore a boar’s skin and fur with a leather harness that was made by our Hungarian leather-master and our metal-master and worked very closely with Nick to ensure the designs where exact and what he had imagined. It was an extremely successful collaboration and I’m delighted with the way Uhtred’s costumes turned out.
What was a typical day for you on set?
We had large crowd scenes of supporting artists who all needed to be dressed and those costumes don’t exist in modern day costume houses. So we set up a workroom in Hungary about two months prior to production starting and set to work making all the costumes for the extras. All the fabrics were ordered in from the UK. They all had to be dyed and washed which was a gargantuan task, which we began in early September. My team is quite large and my costume supervisor helped with all of the buying and ordering of materials. I also had a wonderful crowd supervisor who was on top of all the van loads of crowd costumes that would arrive almost daily from the workrooms. They would also be responsible for turning around the costumes and repurposing things. I had three standby supervisors for the lead cast on the set, which is quite small, but I hired people in on a daily basis when I needed them.

How did you dress the other female characters?
The female characters are all important markers for Uhtred’s character arc and he interacts with them differently. As a result their costumes are all distinctive and different. Brída, we agreed early on, would wear fur and trousers, because she is riding a lot. She also has a distinctive work belt that cinches in her waist giving her a hint of femininity but that she can hang her daggers off. It is her trademark in a way and when she is at the Saxon court in a dress she still wears her Viking work belt.
Alfred’s wife, Aelswith is a homely character that wears knitted capelets and clothing to give her something practical to wear but which is also interesting to look at. The character of Mildreth, who Alfred is keen to marry off to Uhtred, wears much prettier and colourful clothing than the other Saxon women. Later in the story we meet Iseult who wears dark, rich colours with beautiful jewellery because she is a Briton queen.

Was there any reference to Alfred’s clothing?
The crown I had made for him echoes an image I found in etchings and old paintings so we collectively agreed that particular design was the most suitable for him. Alfred was another key character that Nick had a particularly strong idea of how he should look. He had contemporary ideas of what Alfred might wear, for example a duck egg linen shirt that you see him wearing a lot, which I covered with a simple over-gown in a light fabric with a furry lining that he wears quite a lot. We wanted him to be a serious and quiet character.
AN INTERVIEW WITH KATE BENTON
Hair and Make-Up Designer

Can you tell us how you began to create the overall look for this series?
I think the overall design of the show, which Nick Murphy was very keen on, was to have two very distinct tribal identities so that an audience could easily distinguish between who was a Saxon and who was a Dane. Very quickly we established that the Vikings were sexier, more flamboyant, had tattoos, beards, big flowing locks with braids, whereas the Saxons would be quite pious, contained, their hair would be tight and neat. Nick was keen that the Saxon women’s hairstyles were to be braided underneath their chin, which would be neat and practical.

Is this based on research?
It’s not really based on research, as ultimately who really knows what they looked like. There are things that we did research and use, for example the warrior Vikings would shave their teeth into points, mark and rub red berries into them so when they went into battle they had these fierce red teeth. They would also rub black paint over their eyes. So the look was very mask-like and this was something we were able to use for some of our characters.

How did you come to design the Viking warrior Ubba’s look?
Rune Temte who plays Ubba, was keen that his character was depicted as a fighter and a warrior and therefore we discussed the practical side the design in detail. Ubba is a man who would simply want his hair to be out of the way so the braiding is very much a Viking trait and the colours we used matched his costume. He had a very simple braid in his hair to keep it out of his eyes whilst he’s killing people!

Uhtred has a scar on his face, why does he have this?
Uhtred’s scar is one that has to tell the story of his capture as a young boy when he gets this awful clump on the face from Earl Ragnar. We had a scar made for Young Uhtred, which then followed through to older Uhtred. We wanted to make him look like he has lived a life and we wanted to be able to add scars as we went along so we put little ones in various places as he goes along as well as a couple on his body.

What was the look you wanted to give Brida?
Brida is a tomboy and a tough girl who has been through the same awful experiences as Uhtred. Emily wanted something very low-maintenance, with absolutely no make-up whatsoever. As she becomes more Viking we change her hair to make it more of a Viking style.

The polar opposite of Brida is the Shadow Queen Iseult, whose look grows stronger as the series progresses. Why is that?
We wanted a very striking look for the Shadow Queen and as Charlie has very beautiful long hair it was easy for us to increase the length of that hair and try to do a make-up design that looked majestic and inspiring. So when Uhtred sees her he is absolutely wowed by this different looking creature, and I hope we’ve achieved that.
What kind of materials would people have been using in these times as make-up or face paint?
I think that the Vikings, although everyone thinks of them as incredibly dirty, were actually probably cleaner than the Saxons. They had combs, they had ear picks and all sorts of things and they bathed. I think the make-up that they used would have been more about going into battle and frightening your enemy rather than for beautification.

What would a big battle sequence day mean for your team?
We would take a box of scars in case the director suddenly said he wanted a big slash on a character. We would also take a big box of dirt and blood; we have all the different types you can imagine like dried blood, old blood, washable blood, mouth blood, eye blood, all of those things! I remember shooting one particular big battle day with Nick when the actors were all really going for it. There were horses everywhere, with lots of Saxons and Danes and it was a complete mud bath! The mud was really sticky as it had rained two days before; I remember going to put a wound on an actor and losing my boot in the mud and having to be pulled out because I was stuck.

Is it a continuity nightmare?
We have the script supervisor there to make sure that things stay consistent, but really it’s a case of working out the sequence of it all. On the battle scenes in particular they tend to shoot in sequence so you’re not having to go back and forth but sometimes it’s simply a case that you have to clean off and re-do. We are always armed with a lot of wet wipes, towels and water just in case!

Was there any existing reference to King Alfred that you used?
There is reference to King Alfred but one of the main things that the director was keen on was that we’re not tied to history. We’re not tied to a certain look, or somebody’s version of what that would have been. One of the things that we did know about Alfred was that he probably suffered greatly from Crohn’s disease and his awful stomach pains were as a result of this physical illness. So he would have been possibly slightly paler, underweight with sores on his face; all sorts of things that we would try and use with his character.

Martyn John used images of Lenny Kravitz for inspiration for the production design, have you used any similar inspiration?
Our mood board for the Viking characters was a very contemporary selection. The shaved sides of hair and the beards, if you walk through Soho today you will see a lot of guys looking like that! I love that mix of old and new and making it work, as that’s exactly what we wanted. The tattoos also wouldn’t be out of place in a bar in Soho!

Did you get much information from the scripts about the characters and how they look or did that come from your own research?
For me, it’s a mixture of reading the script, of talking to people, doing my own research, talking to costume and much more. It’s such a collaborative process to get a look together. It can be quite a stressful day when you test the actors as the ideas you have in your head, until you see the actor in person you aren’t sure if it’s going to work or look good, if it’s going to work with costume, is the director going to like it, is the actor going to like it; it’s such a collaborative and time pressured process which happens not that much in advance of filming so you really have to be prepared to adapt.
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHAS BAIN
Director of Photography

Give an overview about your role on set and how you work with directors.
Nick Murphy rang me after we worked together on Prey because he wanted to adopt a similar style of photography for The Last Kingdom. The style is very raw allowing more time with the actors because the set-up time is much quicker. Nick (Murphy) likes to shoot all over the set allowing for 360 degree lighting, which isn’t always pretty, and he likes for everything to be done in as few shots as possible. The shooting style evolved from initially feeling and looking very raw to ever so slightly more polished. The idea is that the audience is discovering the story at the same time the actor is discovering. It makes it a very tense situation for the viewer but it is exciting to watch.

Can you describe that physical process of filming like this?
Our filming technique became quite comic to the bystander, especially when we’re trying to shoot developing shots in one take since everything is done in one go. We had to consider things like when we’d track an actor from outside into a building, we needed to balance the light as well as find space for us to manoeuvre. I travel into the space and actors and crew alike need to move as I pull the camera around. It became a sort of ballet. We had some hilarious moments where I would turn the camera to find the entire crew facing me. It was a lot of fun but it meant we had to rehearse and rehearse to perfect these developing shots but I think we’ve done quite a good job of it actually.

Describe those particular shots where you feel like you’re right there in the moment
Every shot was designed to make the viewing experience feel as real as possible. If a character is entering a new space for the first time we don’t want a wide shot from the back whilst they’re walking in. We want to be with the actor on his shoulder. So, to achieve this we might start with a close up of his face and pivot round so that the viewer is going into the room with him. He doesn’t know what he’s going into and neither do we. Again, once we’re in the room if the dialogue or mood develops we adapt our style with it. We were always trying to achieve that ‘golden slate’; one sweeping take which we’d then turn around and pick off the close-ups we need. This was particularly true for episodes one to four as the scenes were handheld but more sedentary as there is more dialogue and less action. We always discover as the actor discovers.

Was this shooting style something that is quite new for a lot of the actors?
This approach to shooting was new to a lot of the cast but they loved it because it meant we spent very little time setting up (after all we used very little lighting) so they had more rehearsal time. We’d build the shot together from the beginning and let things develop. We’d always shoot the rehearsal and sometimes it would be a disaster but we’d pick out the good bits and develop the shot from that, or sometimes, we’d capture what we needed there and then.

Surely the set must have needed to be designed in such a way to make this shooting and lighting style possible?
Martyn John (Production Designer) had to be on-board with the look and style of the photography from the beginning and he very cleverly incorporated it into his incredible sets. We needed a lot of top light, lots of ambient level because we were going to shoot 360 degrees. So
for example, this meant incorporating lots of windows for natural light sources. This style threw everything I’d learnt photographically completely out of the window. It became a case of make it up as you go along and make it as nice as you can whilst keeping in mind the style we’re trying to achieve. The style is about the story and the actors, not the lighting. Throughout the series, different directors brought new ideas and so the look and style continued to morph but still always maintaining the basic principles that we initially wanted to achieve.

What were the challenges in creating this very naturalistic photography?
Because of the naturalistic style all the night scenes needed to be lit by firelight. We needed to be able to set-up these scenes very quickly as there was so much dialogue for us to get through. We gained time by shooting everything hand-held; we had decided at the very beginning that there would be no tracks, dollies or cranes. The filming was very much ‘on the hoof’ and that allowed us to really hoover all of the dialogue up, but not wastefully, it meant we had the time to do it well. We had to use a lot of daylight and where possible I’d use negative film to put in shape rather than using light so that I could get shape and contrast on the face. We had gas torches on the set but I didn’t always put them all on because in those times they probably wouldn’t have done that. I didn’t want rows and rows of burning torches, instead I purposefully made it sporadic which looks a bit weird but actually felt more real. I broke the rules a little with lighting, putting them specifically where doors were and specifically turned them off - I made a statement about that. The night work was lit by fire and to light these big areas, to shoot in forests for example, I would use a balloon over the top that would bring out ambient levels and then use fire to light people’s faces. I designed these LED lights specifically for the series that have software in them so that I could record a lighting effect into these LEDs. I knew all the lighting had to be fire so I computer generated three different levels of firelight; a bright burning yellow fire, a dull orangey fire, and an ember type fire, with different levels of flicker on the back of each of these lights so that I could adjust them. This meant we didn’t need to strike actual fires with all the hazards and time that would bring on a set; we just brought these LED panels in order to put firelight on the side of the face.

In terms of fire, one of the scenes you shot involved a stuntman performing a full body burn. What does a day like that entail?
The stunt actor had to complete that stunt in one go. Obviously we rehearsed it in detail beforehand as the actor is completely blind and his face is totally covered. The stuntmen had the entire scene carefully choreographed: It was a fire ballet. I got as close as I could with the camera, I wanted to be close and wide but it wasn’t achievable. He was so hot I couldn’t get anywhere near him and had to drop back onto a slightly longer lens. I was fully suited up for that shoot – I looked like a formula one driver with my mad goggles and all-in-one suit! The stunt actor was alight for about forty-five seconds. This particular stunt performer only got set alight once and then the second stunt actor was used for the second take. That was quite a night, setting fire to a human being as well as a barn. I’ve never seen anyone in my career within the film industry be that much on fire. It was really quite impressive to see and it looks equally as good on film. It was a horrendous pressure to get that shot right. I didn’t realise how bright he was going to be. I had set my exposure on some fire before the stunt but when he came out he was the colour of the sun! I had to make a quick adjustment on an incredibly hot camera in order to get the exposure right on him. That’s not the sort of take you want to do twice.
What were the challenges of shooting the battle sequences?

Nick was very good at setting out the remit so we all knew how the battle was designed and how we wanted to shoot it. This is very important when you’ve got two hundred extras, horses, everyone to be put in costume, hair and make-up and fighting, and within this, we need to tell the story of how our hero’s going to either win or lose. Once the battle commenced we’re very much with the character, I used a slightly wider lens and basically I was actually in the battle. I would have one hand on the camera in front of me and then asked all the other actors, extras and stuntmen to treat me as if I was in the fight. So, I was fending people off as they were pushing me, whilst trying to maintain our actor in the frame. Sometimes I got clobbered and other times I didn’t but it was enough to really give the effect that I was right in there. The most difficult thing we experienced when shooting a fight was early on when we were shooting in winter and the rain was torrential and we had two hundred people tramping around in the mud. Your shoes end up encased in mud and trying to operate the camera whilst being stuck in the mud is a nightmare. That was the hardest battle to do because of the conditions, the subsequent battles after that became significantly easier as the seasons changed. So we actually used a forty-five degree shutter in the next battles. We never shot at high speed because we didn’t want to glorify anything, but using the shutter gave a bit more brutality and a bit of realism to the actual shot. We broke our rules a little by doing that but that was the only trick we used.

Tell us about the shoot on a Viking ship?

That day was the highlight of the entire shoot for me. The ship is owned by a museum in Denmark and is called The Sea Stallion; it is an exact replica of a Viking long ship. When we first went out to sea in it all the volunteers were dressed up as Vikings and were rowing away with the oars and I suddenly felt we were back in that time. There is a main sail going through the boat which when pulled up made a huge wind sound and then we were on the way. It was really emotional. We sailed up a fiord on the North Sea and came round the headland. It was so nerve racking and I had two grips holding me while I was falling all over the place, trying not to throw up. But to be on that boat, imagining that time is a day I will never forget. Even the actors couldn’t believe it. Alexandre Willaume (playing Kjartan) played our ship’s captain and they couldn’t get him off that ship, he loved it so much stayed on it all day. That day was absolute highlight of the whole show for me.
What first attracted you to *The Last Kingdom*?
I’ve been in the stunt business over twenty years. The first time I read the script for *The Last Kingdom* I knew this was a dream job for a stuntman. There are a lot of elements within this story that require a lot of stunt work.

What was it like to work with an actor as young as Tom Taylor?
It can be difficult to work with kids but Tom is a really tough guy and it’s been a fantastic experience to work with him. Tom is not an experienced rider and had never ridden before (other than two or three lessons from me) but in the end he was so confident we were able to do a very complex horse riding stunt with him very easily. In one scene, his Father, Earl Ragnar, throws him from a horse and he was able to perform it just like a stunt guy!

How much preparation did Alexander Dreymon and Emily Cox need for their stunts?
It’s hard work for an actor because on top of acting they have to ride, they have to fight and they have to master difficult sword fighting and choreography with period weapons. Myself, along with my stunt team, gave riding lessons, fight lessons and basic stunt training to the actors and we were able to work with both Alexander Dreymon and Emily Cox in particular for a week before shooting began. Alexander Dreymon is a born warrior and a trained martial artist and Emily is a very talented rider so it was really easy to work with them.

Can you tell us more about the battle scenes? What does a day like that involve for you?
I love history and dreamt of becoming a historian when I was younger. I am interested in authentic fighting techniques that were used in the Middle Ages and I did my own research before we filmed the battle scene. This helped us put together authentic battle choreography for the scene. We used period weapons like spears, short swords and swords, and of course the Viking shields and axes. The shield wall and all the fighting methods that you are going to see are absolutely authentic. All in all we did everything we could to make the battle atmosphere as genuine, as brutal and as harsh as we could.

What were the fighting systems that were used in those times?
The Vikings worked together in battle as very professional commandos. The shield wall was a precise fortress built from shields; they protected their entire bodies with this technique and it was far more advanced than the battle technology of the Saxons. The Viking shield wall was four rows deep, it was a fortress; it was like waves that run towards the rocks and ebb back. The Saxons were not able to destroy the Viking fortress of shields. The Saxons had similar ideas with their shields, but it was far simpler than their opponents and to begin with they didn’t stand a chance. We had to re-create this image with the fighting techniques. The battle scene was very interesting to put together, I had almost sixty stunt guys and warrior extras, so together there were more than one hundred people performing on set.
What choreography advice do you give the actors before a battle?
Good choreography is when you cannot see that it’s choreography: when you really believe that it’s happening in that very moment in front of your eyes. I ask my guys to imagine themselves in that battle.

What sort of brief did Nick Murphy give you in terms of what he wanted from the battles?
Nick told me that he wanted to see straight and brutal fights; no martial arts or anything like that, just straight, effective warrior and weapon techniques. I watched a lot of YouTube videos as research before we started filming. We have a great European military tradition and there are a lot of people and historians who have worked out the fight elements that were used. I researched the Viking shield wall technique, the spear and the long and short sword techniques as well.

What has been the most exciting part of the project for you so far?
The most important and exciting part of my job was managing a full body burn stunt. When Earl Ragnar’s home is set on fire he continues to fight throughout. This is a very dangerous stunt and it’s a treat for a stuntman not to simply die when you are on fire, but to get to fight as well! I decided to do that stunt myself. Sometimes you have to step-up and show your colleagues that you are still able to do the stunts, not just coordinate them! It was great fun. It is days like that which are the reason we do stunt work. When you are on fire and covered with flames and you cannot see. I was really proud because I managed to do the entire step-by-step choreography just as we had planned. You have no air inside the suit, it’s hot and you have thirty seconds to get it done. We had to film the sequence twice so I shared the stunt with one of my colleagues. It’s a really great experience for a stunt guy and you only get a few opportunities to perform something like that in your lifetime. So I wanted to gift that second take to him.

What effect has Nick’s close-up style of filming had on your stunt preparations?
Nick’s style is really interesting. When we did our training with the stunt team we discussed having the cameras inside the battles scenes. Nick’s camera team always want to be in the middle of things. We had to practice for when the actors need to fight around the camera crew. We have to watch everyone carefully to protect them. Even if the actors are using rubber swords it still hurts!

What training did you do in terms of getting the cast used to handling the weapons?
I don’t wish to destroy the illusion but, for safety reasons, most of the actors used rubber weapons that are much lighter than the heavier metal versions. We cannot use sharp weapons because when you’re acting as well as performing a stunt there must not be a source of danger. However on occasion the actors do have real weapons. The character Ubba (played by Rune Temte) has to destroy a table and chair with his axe and so in that case we have to use a real weapon. Rune was able to feel the power of the axe and he told me later on that when he used the axe he felt like a Viking.

Do you find it satisfying to see all the battles coming together?
Nick was quite straight with what he wanted to see in the battle so actually I had a step-by-step storyboard plan of what we needed to do. I was given freedom to put my ideas into the sequence. I love the creative process of painting a picture with your ideas, I love the creative part of my job.
How long does the training process take before you can start filming?
We had a one-week stunt training camp just before we started the principle photography on the battle scene.

Are all the warrior extras stunt trained already?
Fortunately the Hungarian stunt people are well-trained stunt guys and have worked all over the world. The Hungarian film business is fairly big. We film a lot of A-grade movies here in Hungary and so there are a lot of stunt guys who are world-class.

What sort of techniques have you used for these stunts?
We use a lot of stunt rigging within this production. There is a scene where a man is tied to a horse’s tail and being dragged along the ground; back in the Dark Ages, this was a common form of torture. To perform this stunt we used a small stunt wire that we concealed underneath the horse’s tail. I have eight horses of my own so their wellbeing and comfort is always a priority. The stunt guy holds onto the hidden stunt wire giving the image that he is tied on to the horse’s tail. We also used complex stunt rigging to perform the crucified Priest scene. The actor was in a full body flying harness operated by a special wire rigging system, as were the women being thrown into the air at the Viking banquet.

Did you have to modify any weapons for safety?
As a stunt coordinator I have the responsibility to find the balance between performing stunts safely whilst maintaining a spectacular visual and I hope we were able to find this balance. For safety reasons I asked the team to make rubber replicas for every weapon. I had to make changes when I felt that a stunt was too dangerous or if we needed to change something, but that wasn’t very often. I think it’s all about teamwork. The pre-production process is quite long so we had time to talk through each weapon and each scene to make sure that we could find a solution that worked within the creative process.

What is it that people are going to enjoy about this series?
This is a fantastic and beautiful story of a man struggling to find his identity whilst all around him a nation is struggling to hold onto theirs. It promises to be a spectacular story about that rarely dramatized period in history.

Who are you favourites, the Vikings or the Saxons?
My favourite is Uhtred because he is both!
AN INTERVIEW WITH ADRIAN BOWER
Playing Leofric

What role does Leofric play within the story and how does he appear to the audience?
Leofric is a senior bodyguard/warrior in Alfred’s court but he is also attached to Odda the Elder’s household and is by all accounts his right hand man as much as he is Alfred’s. By virtue of his senior position within the court he is privy to everything that is going on within the Palace. We first meet him when Uhtred arrives at Alfred’s Palace in Winchester and it’s fair to say that his first encounter with Uhtred is antagonistic. Being a die-hard Saxon, when Leofric comes across this pagan upstart youth he wants to bring him down a peg or two.

How are Uhtred and Leofric thrown together?
Alfred asks Leofric to take Uhtred onto the training fields to see how tactically the Vikings fight. He wants Leofric to learn about their battle strategies and really understand how they form the infamous Viking shield wall. They end up having a few scuffles and scrapes but through that a bond starts to grow between these two warriors. Their respect for each other grows from their love of fighting really and that begins to form around the same time that Uhtred goes through a personal crisis. As Leofric consoles Uhtred he shares some of his own deep losses and this slowly strengthens the growing bond between them.

Describe Leofric’s relationship with Aethelwold?
It’s an interesting relationship that Leofric has with Aethelwold and Uhtred. He is almost like an adopted elder brother to Uhtred and he finds Aethelwold like an irritating younger brother that he sees himself reflected in by way of Aethelwold’s boozing and whoring. Aethelwold wants to be a warrior but hasn’t had the chance to learn yet and Leofric hasn’t been bothered to teach him.

What is Leofric’s relationship with Odda the Elder and Younger?
He is very much Odda the Elder’s man and his personal bodyguard. He respects Odda the Elder and thinks he is a good man though not necessarily a great warrior and he says that later on. He doesn’t have time for the younger Odda and believes he has his eye on the prize and will do anything to get it including destroying Uhtred. He is a bad apple but as the only son of Odda it is likely that Leofric will end up working for him and that is the way it is.

What does Leofric think of the Vikings?
He firmly believes they are the enemy but he learns more about their way of life the more time he spends with Uhtred. Given the chance I’m sure Leofric would rather be on their side because they seem to have a lot more fun and the Saxon way of life is rather harsh. However, I think ultimately Leofric regards the Vikings as savages that need to be destroyed.

What was it like to film those epic battle sequences?
The Battle scenes have been fun to do and the shieldwall training in particular was epic. They are always great fun because we get the weaponry out and we’re on horses with all the battle armour on and I get to wield an axe and a sword. Alexander and myself had to learn a couple of fight sequences during the shieldwall training, which was amazing. However what I really learnt that day was how freezing it gets in Budapest at that time of year.
Describe the fight training sequences you have gone through with the fight coordinator?
We had lots of sessions with Levente, the Stunt Coordinator and we had to learn how to wield a sword and ride a horse at the same time. What bloke doesn’t want to do that?

What does Leofric wear?
My costume is pretty heavy though as soon as I put it on I instantly felt more warrior-like. I recall when I had my first fitting Ros, our costume designer, brought down this chain mail suit and I thought “great let’s get this on” and straight away you stand differently. You feel more invincible though whilst it might stop an axe blow it wouldn’t prevent an arrow or a sword from getting through.

Was it a surprise to see how much humour was intertwined with often dark and tense scenes?
The humour within the script is wonderful against so much of the text that is dark and deals with huge issues. Those moments of lightness feel true and right when they come. We have to believe that people joked and had a laugh at the same things that we laugh at today. It isn’t there all the time but when it does arise, Alexander and myself have fun without overplaying it because ultimately we are most likely in moments of danger and jeopardy.
AN INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER DREYMON
Playing Uhtred

When do we first meet Uhtred in the story?
We first meet Uhtred as a boy played by the wonderful Tom Taylor. He is born a Saxon, the second son of Lord Uhtred. When the Danes invade they kill both his brother and his father making him the rightful heir to his father’s beloved Bebbanburg Castle. However, he is kidnapped by the Danes and then brought up and adopted by them, becoming a Pagan in the process.

How does the story unfold?
When the Danes invade England, he is on the beach with his father and he’s the one that spots the ships coming in to land. As the rightful heir to Bebbanburg his father gives him the amber representing his lands and says to him “you’re going to be the heir” and shortly after that his father is killed. He attacks the Danish Lord that killed his father and Earl Ragnar sees the courage in him and takes him as a slave. Little by little he becomes part of the family.

What does the Danish environment offer Uhtred?
I think the Danish environment is a lot more fun for him to grow up in. Had he grown up in the Christian system he would have learnt how to read and write though the environment would have been a lot more pious.

What does Uhtred like about the Danes?
They have a great sense of humour, love of life and love of food. They live to fight and they’re not afraid of anything. They don’t believe in the Christian beliefs of punishment for sinning, either self inflicted or otherwise.

Everyone sees Uhtred as a leader, is that what he becomes?
Uhtred has the potential to be a leader and grows into this role but isn’t one at the beginning of the story. Once he’s an adult he’s completely lost. He lost his birth family as a boy and then loses his adopted family as a young adult. When he goes to the allies of his Danish father he is rejected and considered a Saxon and when he’s with the Saxons he’s seen as a Dane and so it’s difficult to find his identity within these two worlds.

What is he fighting for?
The last kingdom left in England not under Danish rule is Wessex. It’s the last kingdom standing. All the other kingdoms at that time have fallen to the Danes. Alfred is the only leader who has that grand idea of uniting all the other kingdoms to stand and fight the Danes together.

Why is Bebbanburg so important to Uhtred?
Bebbanburg is Uhtred’s birthright in Northumbria. In the books it has the reputation of being impenetrable. The walls have never been breached, the fortress has never been conquered and it’s that notion of having a place that you know is your home and belongs to you.
These two worlds are very different – the Danish and the Saxon. What does Uhtred get from each of these worlds?

It’s an interesting question because I was brought up in quite a few different cultures. I don’t really feel an allegiance to any of the countries I have lived in, even though I feel part of them and part of them is in me. I think you just take what tickles your interest in every culture and you make your own mix. Uhtred kept his sense of freedom, of not bowing down to conventions when he doesn’t absolutely have to and it gives him that edge. He knows how to deal with the Saxon order and admires the fact that the Saxons are more educated than the Danes, but at the same time he brings the freedom and the craziness of the Danes. I think that’s what makes him so interesting in the story.

What is his relationship with Brida?

Brida is his first love interest and whilst they grow up as brother and sister they become closer as adults. They are never destined to marry and that is made clear at the beginning but they have a special bond. They meet when Uhtred’s father is killed. She’s a Saxon girl who gets adopted by Earl Ragnar just like Uhtred, so they share the same background. She loves the Danish life, just as Uhtred does, but her allegiance to the Danes never wavers unlike his.

And why does he decide to switch sides?

Uhtred knows that his only way back to Bebbanburg is to ally with the Saxons because the Danes that remain in power still consider him a Saxon. So as much as it bothers him to do so, he doesn’t have a choice if he wants to regain control of what rightfully belongs to him.

What is his relationship with Leofric?

I think the fact that Uhtred loses both his fathers early on in life means he is always searching for a father figure. I think even Alfred is a bit of a father figure to him because he’s the thinker and he’s got a vision that Uhtred admires. The same applies to Leofric, a great warrior that Uhtred admires, just like he admires the Viking warrior, Ubba.

What is Uhtred’s relationship with Beocca?

There is a very loving relationship. Beocca is the closest person left alive from his original family circle and in some way represents a father figure for Uhtred. Beocca is Christian and Uhtred is now a Pagan so there’s always an ongoing battle between them but it’s often playful banter and Uhtred takes great pleasure in teasing Beocca but it comes from a place of love.

Nick Murphy had a particular style of directing, what did this mean to you as an actor.

Nick is an insightful director who knows instinctively what actors need. He also isn’t afraid to take risks on the floor and that is really exciting for an actor. Working with him was so refreshing because he was collaborative and completely trusted us to take different directions if they felt instinctive. He also wanted to direct us in a contemporary and modern way by letting us work with the dialogue and let the camera find us on the floor. If something didn’t work he would make the adjustments necessary to ensure it did work. He didn’t want us to know where the camera was half the time so that when the camera found each actor it was like it was a fly on the wall documentary. Every time we filmed a big scene he would secure his golden shot and once he had it in the can he would throw open the gates of the playground and allow us to try out new things. It was incredibly liberating.
Describe the fight sequences and how much training went into making those scenes as realistic as possible?
We worked with a brilliant stunt team lead by Levente, who is one of the most patient stunt directors I have ever met. He practices natural horsemanship so is very close to his animals. I think he applies that same patience he has with his horses to the people he works with, certainly to the actors he works with. He is a very good teacher so it was quite easy to absorb everything that he was throwing at me and I think I’m very fortunate to have one to one horse-riding lessons with him. Having said that, I think most of the stunts you see in the battles are kind of learnt on the job as we were going along. The battle scenes were so much fun to film and required quite a lot of waiting around but it was worth it.

Can you describe the Viking shield wall?
Uhtred teaches the Saxons about the Viking shieldwall which is illustrated in that first battle sequence when Uhtred’s birth father is killed. So as a Dane he learns how to build a shield wall and that’s one of the reasons why Alfred is interested in keeping Uhtred close. His knowledge of how the Danes work in battle is invaluable.

Can you think of a scene that stands out particularly to you?
I have so many it’s hard to pinpoint one but all of the scenes I did on horseback were utterly exhilarating. Every actor strives to be in the moment and when you’re on a horse you constantly have to communicate with it and assert your authority. In particular the scenes that involved galloping over the big open plains were so freeing.

Did Uhtred’s costume and make-up design help you become your character?
Uhtred has many scars and wears leather and furs rather than chain mail, which was a blessing as it was difficult to get in and out of. My costume was actually quite comfortable to wear and a bit like wearing a motorcycle jacket. The fur also makes you feel more like you’re a real part of nature and carrying that weight of the leather and sword changes your whole body language and it definitely makes you feel tough.
AN INTERVIEW WITH AMY WREN
Playing Mildrith

Who is Mildrith?
Mildrith is a very religious Saxon who is brought up on a farmstead. Unfortunately her father dies owing a lot of debt. As a result Mildrith is forced to marry and unbeknownst to her groom, he inherits her debts. She is being made to marry against her will which goes against everything she believes in. However, as time goes on, she begins to fall in love with him.

What are her strengths?
Mildrith isn’t strong to begin with but she becomes so as her story progresses. She goes through some hard times, but remains strong and true to her beliefs. That’s what is fantastic about this show – the characters are all multi-dimensional and even the strongest of them show their vulnerabilities at times. It means you grow to feel something for each of them.

What does Mildrith love about Uhtred?
Obviously because of the circumstances of their marriage you would imagine she could never feel anything for him but Mildrith is religious and very loyal and Uhtred reveals his soft side towards her at the beginning. Their love for each other grows very early on and she sees a completely different side to him.

How does their relationship progress?
Their relationship is complex from the beginning and despite falling in love with each other, their different backgrounds eventually come into play and drives wedges between them. There is another interference in the form of Odda The Younger who is in love with Mildrith and loathes Uhtred. This sets off a sequence of events that changes the course of Mildrith’s life forever.

Does the Danish lifestyle that Uhtred has introduced her to make him more attractive to Mildrith?
We’re forced together and she is completely loyal to her Saxon traditions and religion. Her faith almost defines her, but when she sees he is a kind person she becomes less set in her ways. I did learn that some Saxon women were attracted to the Vikings because they washed once a week when Saxons washed very rarely and so were much cleaner. How much truth is in that I don’t know.

When you go on sets does it help you imagine what life was like back then?
When I saw the sets for the first time it was quite daunting because I simply hadn’t seen anything like them before. The detail was extraordinary and the scale was vast. Additionally when you have the costume on you are completely transported back in time.

Why does Mildrith wear this particular clothing?
Mildrith’s costume is grey like most Saxon clothing, but she’s from out of town so she would make her own clothing. She’s quite girly too, so she’s trying to show a bit of shape but back then I don’t think they were that bothered about the style of their garments.
AN INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN VERNEL
Playing Odda The Younger

Who Is Odda The Younger?
Odda The Younger is the son of Odda The Elder, a noble man in Alfred’s court who has relatively high status within the group of characters we meet.

He doesn’t come across as the nicest of men, can you describe his character?
He isn’t so nice towards Uhtred and he is really ambitious which controls the majority of his actions. He is slightly jealous of Uhtred for a variety of reasons including Uhtred’s relationship with Mildreth but mainly because Uhtred is a heathen who has come into the court and seems to be calling the shots. He is definitely not a ‘laugh a minute’ type of guy. His anger lies in his frustrations and the fact that he is dismissed publicly and regularly in front of his peer group. There is so much cerebral tension in his head that when he loses his temper it is quite volatile and unexpected. He can be frustrated and immature when things don’t go his way. He often focuses on the wrong things when there are other more pressing issues at play.

What are his feelings for Mildreth?
Odda is in love with Mildreth but Alfred arranges a marriage between Uhtred and Mildreth, which really upsets Odda. He attempts to bribe Uhtred not to marry Mildreth and then tries to get him out of the picture in other ways. All the way through the series Mildreth is at the forefront of Odda’s mind and motivation. He completely believes that if he can get Uhtred out of the way that he could have a chance with Mildreth.

Is he manipulative?
Odda will use anything at his disposal to try and get what he wants. His needs are quite simple though he wants power and status, and he likes it when people think he has a voice. He loves being listened to.

What is his relationship with his father?
His relationship with his father is good and they are always at each other’s side. Theirs is a strong relationship that can at times be testy because of the antics the younger gets up to but they defend each other and it’s clear they love each other.

What was it about the script and this part in particular that encouraged you to take the part?
Odda’s journey is an intriguing and complex one and he’s a character with so many layers for an actor to work with. It’s not useful or helpful for me to view that character as inherently bad or evil. He must have some justification for his actions. I think a lot of his behaviour early on towards Uhtred is justified. Here is this heathen guy who has come into their court and is changing their lives and course of action with his views. Uhtred is a big threat to them all...or so Odda thinks.

What does he make of the Vikings?
He is quite scared of them (they’re all about 8ft tall) and regards them all as heathens who aren’t to be trusted, least of all Uhtred.
What sort of world does Odda inhabit in the Saxon community?
Odda’s world, the Saxon world, is made up of a very strict regime that is relatively straightforward. God and loyalty come first and it’s about status and family and not a lot of fun compared to the Danish camps.

What did Nick ask you to bring out in the character?
I’d worked with Nick Murphy before and I know how he likes to work and what direction he likes to point an actor in. He tries to get that sense of realism for an actor and ensure we know the essence of the character, that these are people with real issues and problems like all of us.

Does Odda get stuck into a lot of the action scenes?
I take part in two battles though you don’t see me fighting in one of them - I just walk through the aftermath and mist. I think it is quite unnerving when you look back at the stakes, which essentially were life or death every single day. The battle scenes take huge amounts of coordination and organisation but they really do get you into character immediately and get the blood boiling and adrenaline pumping. Odda fights but he isn’t a warrior like Leofric or Uhtred. He does do a lot of riding however and I’d never been on a horse before filming this show. It was quite nerve-wracking doing that but now I can do a bit of cantering, trotting, turning. Ironically I prefer the dialogue sequences when I’m actually riding the horse rather than standing still. In one particular scene Adrian and I had to canter 50 yards, hit a mark, speak to each other and then move off and we did that in two takes whereas it took me about 150 takes to do ‘some standing still on a horse’ scenes weirdly.

What is Odda’s relationship with Leofric?
Leofric is Odda’s family guard and he works closely with Odda The Elder. He is very loyal to Odda and his father but later on when Leofric becomes close to Uhtred that tests his relationship with Odda. I see him as an upright man who generally does the right thing compared to some of the things that Odda does. There are some very charged scenes for Odda but he begins to unravel and is beginning to compromise the Saxon court to the Danes later on in the series.

What do you think it is this show that will appeal to the audience?
First and foremost I think it is about the relationships between these people and what drives each of the characters that I think audiences will find most appealing. It just happens to be set in this time, against this amazing backdrop of historical fact. It is not just a time period. There is so much more humour than I thought there would be which is really important because noone wants to watch just darkness and death. The elements of humour really lift the show and it is true to say that in hard times comes humour.
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHARLIE MURPHY
Playing Queen Isuelt

Who is Queen Isuelt?
Queen Isuelt is a shadow queen who appears later in the series and captures the eye of Uhtred. She is a bit of an outcast I suppose, which is quite similar to Uhtred and so they click. She is married to King Peredur of Briton and Uhtred is asked to join forces with Peredur in order to attack a neighbouring village, and that is when their paths cross. Iseult really falls for Uhtred and considers herself his soulmate but he is also her ticket out of the world that he found her in. She is in the middle of nowhere, married to a much older man and it is definitely not for love. Peredur has married her because of her powers of premonitions and because he is superstitious. So when she meets Uhtred it’s an absolute liberation for her and even though she seems like a knowing creature she is in fact quite innocent.

She is a powerful woman and a queen. How does she use that power?
She has had to survive and to an extent uses her power as currency in that struggle to exist and survive. She is an outcast because of her powers amongst the Christian community and is constantly on her guard.

What is her background in paganism?
She claims to have visions and premonitions and is steeped in superstition. She was born in dark times and during a dark month hence the tag of shadow queen.

Why do you think this particular time in history will appeal to an audience?
This is a particularly interesting time in history because you don’t really hear about how England was born. It must have been an extremely chaotic and dangerous time to live in. It’s been brilliant delving into that world and learning about what that time must have been like to live in.

Did you know how to ride a horse before or did you have training?
As a child I had horse-riding lessons every weekend but that was a very long time ago and I didn’t wear huge dresses. Levente gave me a few lessons and I managed not to kill myself or fall off.

Had you read the books before beginning production?
I read the first two books, which is what this series is based on, and it is a beautiful adaptation. Then I started reading the third book but I had to stop because it began to get too confusing but I fully plan to finish them all.

How would you describe this drama?
It is about love, loss, a coming of age, the thirst for power, the thirst for land and establishing yourself in a splintered society whilst trying to anchor oneself to something, which are all universal themes at any stage of history.
AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID DAWSON
Playing Alfred

What did you know about Alfred the Great?
I am a real lover of history and I didn’t know a lot, but I love research. What thrilled me about this story was you see the famous statue in Winchester of Alfred the Great so you picture this heroic warrior king. Then you realise in our story he is far more thoughtful, frail, sickly, quiet, pensive, and calculating - that was what really drew me to the part. In a world full of brave warrior men, this thin little pale man may not have had the clout physically, but he is the cleverest man in any room. From research you realise what he really did for England at that time. He was a visionary; he wanted to educate his kingdom and his men. He also liked negotiating with his enemies to gain control over them. He’d rather negotiate and have peace than kill if possible.

What appealed to you about the role?
I think what attracted me to the part was how complex he is. He is a bit of an anti-hero and full of flaws. Although he’s clever and has this vision for his kingdom, he also has extreme faults, lusts, sadness and self-loathing. For me that’s what I love about the image of him and Uhtred, because they are complete opposites of each other. In one you have this brave, handsome warrior and then you have this thin, frail, but incredibly clever man who both want what the other has. It is a bit of a love story, because the conflict between them shows they need each other to both survive in this brutal world. What I love about his relationship with Uhtred is that he hates him at the beginning of the story, but needs him completely at the same time. He realises that he has value because he has so much knowledge of his enemy. Rather than fight them, Alfred wants to know them, how they fight and what they’re afraid of to know how to win Wessex more easily.

Does basing the series on historical events bring something different to the drama?
What I love about this drama is that it’s a part of history that we don’t know a lot about. But you realise England, as we know it now, would have never existed without this one man in this little country, striving to save it.

Have there been any surprises whilst playing this role?
I feel very privileged to be playing this part and it’s a real treat to play somebody so complex and conflicted who also becomes the King of England. We all pictured King Alfred as a big burly warrior king, but what I love about this story is that he’s the complete opposite of that. I hope the audience will embrace the surprise of seeing a character they thought they knew as the man they meet in our story.

What makes Alfred “Great”?
At the start of our story he is a prince and fourth in line to the throne, so you would never think he would take the crown, and especially not be any good at ruling. However he does have this unique vision that his brothers never had of a united kingdom under, one God, one King and that’s something nobody before him had. It makes him very special. We meet him in a library and he seems like a very quiet bookworm, and yet he has this incredible vision for the future of England. At the start of the story we don’t think he’s capable of achieving greatness and I don’t
think even he does. But he grows in confidence and becomes quite a visionary king. He is also ruthless and dangerous and that’s partly why I’m very fond of him.

**What is Alfred’s relationship with Leofric?**
Leofric is one of his most trusted advisors as far as battles go, and he’s quite unique because Alfred has brought him into his council. Usually you’re just surrounded by noblemen and wealthy men, who are paid lots to advise a King, but he has brought a commoner into his court to win Wessex back.

**What is Alfred’s relationship with Beocca?**
I love the character of Beocca, especially if you read the books, because there is a really sweet relationship there that is almost paternal. He has known both Uhtred and Alfred since they were young men and he has been Alfred’s closest advisor.

**How does religion factor into his world?**
What makes Alfred quite terrifying is his complete devotion, obsession with religion, God and his complete belief that God will be on his side. But mixed in with that there is the conflict of his more human desires. Beocca is almost his conscience; constantly bringing him back to faith and helping him through.

**Tell us a bit about Aethelwold and their relationship?**
I love Aethelwold; he’s the pain in arse. He’s Alfred’s brother’s son and when he dies the normal rule is that Aethelwold would then take the crown. But my brother trusts me far more and so I controversially inherit the crown. So then I always have this dangerous little man in my court. But I think Alfred is very clever in the way he handles him because he says to Uhtred “I could kill him quite easily and then that worry would be gone”. But I’d rather keep him alive and so people know him for the fool he is.

**What is Alfred’s relationship with Aelswith?**
I love the fact that there are some strong women in this story. Historically, marriage was a marriage of convenience, to bring two kingdoms together. Although I’m not sure they enjoyed being in bed with each other a lot, they had enormous respect for one and other. So there is a love there. She is always there and is looking after his best interests. She is possibly more dominant than Alfred wants her to be, but I think it’s great to have a powerful woman behind the King.

**What differences do the Vikings present?**
The Danes to Alfred are like aliens; godless men who have no faith in the One above. They’re therefore soulless men who aren’t to be trusted because they don’t live their lives by the same rules as him. This makes them incredibly dangerous people and Uhtred isn’t to be trusted, but one to be controlled if possible.

**What is it like filming these epic battle scenes?**
I’ve never worked on something as epic as this and I think it’s stunning. In scenes when you’re on huge battlefields surrounded by warriors, you do realize it must have been incredibly dangerous. To survive this period of time must have required a lot of strength physically and mentally.
So I got to learn how to ride a horse, which I had never done before filming. I wasn’t very good at the beginning! I rode a horse called McFlurry, and his name didn’t suit him because he was massive and he knew I was an amateur on his back – bit of a diva I think. I got the hang of it in the end. I didn’t have long to learn how ride, about two days before filming, and you progressed as you went along. McFlurry kept stopping to eat grass, so I kept trying to lift him up. However I didn’t know that if you lift a horse up by the reins, it means reverse. So when we were filming scenes I would be looking at the monitor and suddenly my horse would be moving backwards. I carried on anyway. Once you get the handle of your horse, you do really enjoy it.

**What was it like filming Alfred’s Coronation?**
The coronation was filmed early on and was quite terrifying. When I arrived on set, there were about one hundred and fifty extras all lining this very long route to the hall. I was really nervous about it, but it was good because Alfred must have been too. It’s interesting because now you have pictures of modern monarchs and the rituals they go through and how they are completely different to the way we’ve shot this. In my coronation, I am bare-chested and they have these oils, which show how different things were. It’s an alien world watching, and not one an audience would be familiar with.

**Are you surprised about the language they used back then?**
There is a lot of humour within the show and I remember we spent a lot of time purely doing Saxon court scenes. During this, one of the scenes is when the Saxons meet the Danes, Ubba and Guthrum. It was really refreshing having this completely different energy in the room. These foreigners invading our turf, one of them a psychopath and the other a sociopath.

**What costumes have you worn?**
When I first went into the wardrobe truck I could see all the ‘rock n roll’ costumes for the Vikings, with big furs and the horned helmets. Then I looked at Alfred’s shelf which was literally one very dull tunic. Although I’m not wearing the most exciting clothes, they say an awful lot about the man wearing them. It’s not something that resembles extreme importance; it’s about a life devoted to God and to Wessex.
AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZA BUTTERWORTH

Playing Aelswith

Describe Aelswith and how we first meet her?
We first meet Aelswith in the second episode when she is having breakfast with her husband, Alfred. She is from Mercia, which funnily enough is only about fifteen miles from where I come from in Lincolnshire. King Alfred is from Wessex and they married very young to unite the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex.

Describe Aelswith’s relationship with Alfred.
Alfred and Aelswith have quite a tempestuous relationship however it still remains a love story. She deals with a lot of his bad behaviour silently but they are both deeply religious and that ties them together. She is also deeply loyal to him and will do anything to defend him. However, she can sometimes come across to others around them as being quite fierce and cross. All she wants to do is protect Alfred’s throne but it comes across as harsh. There are a lot of things bubbling under the surface of their relationship that they deal with on a daily basis.

It feels like there is a real contradiction between her deeply held religion and a couple of decisions that she makes which feel brutal.
I was a bit surprised at how harsh she can be and how she reconciles that with her religious beliefs. Being that devout, and being a woman in that era, I think there is a lot that she has to do to battle through things and that often appears as quite tough. In actuality her mentality is very strong and she has to fight to be heard in what must have been a very male dominant environment.

What does Aelswith make of Uhtred?
Aelswith really dislikes Uhtred because she believes that he has abandoned his Saxon duties, his loyalties to the community and has a pagan heart.

What does she make of Aethelwold?
Aelswith thinks Aethelwold is just a boy who wants power with no sense of responsibility whatsoever. Being the pious and devout woman that she is, the fact that a character like Aethelwold, who has no religion at all, is able to get anywhere near the throne of her kingdom is alien to her.

There is a moment in the story where Christian religion meets the pagan world and it surrounds her sick child. Can you tell me about that story line?
Aelswith and Alfred’s child, Edward, becomes very sick whilst they are staying in the marshland. The sorceress offers to help cure the child but advises that if she succeeds in saving little Edward, the consequence is that another baby in the kingdom will die. Aelswith is incredibly perturbed by it, in terms of the guilt and the fact it appears to be magic and it goes against everything she believes in. However, Alfred just wants the baby to survive no matter what. Edward is his son, his heir, and he will do anything to save him. The consequence of their decision ends up being quite bad.
Alfred is obviously the leader, but Aelswith is seemingly playing a power game?
Aelswith is playing a power game. She is trying to keep everything in check and holding everyone to account to her religion. This is especially to ensure that Alfred isn’t led down the wrong path by Uhtred or his warriors or the noblemen as she sees in them a brutality which she doesn’t like in her husband.

What does Aelswith make of the Danes?
Aelswith thinks the Danes are brutes. They think with their guts and are vulgar to her. She likes to think that the Saxon people are thinkers; they’re more logical and measured. You can see this in the Saxon costumes, they wear a lot of grey whereas the Danes are covered in bold blues, reds and purples. This really sums up the way the two camps approach life.

You have a pretty interesting hair-style can you tell us about it?
I think that the women liked their hair to be practical and out of the way. That combined with the fact that Aelswith is described in Bernard Cornwell’s novels as being quite a plain, unattractive woman, so they’ve tried to do everything they can to make me look pretty gross!

You mentioned the books – were you familiar with them before you started this project?
I actually wasn’t aware of the books before I began this project. Quite a few of my family members had read the entire series – about eight novels worth, as well as the Sharpe series. When I found out about The Last Kingdom I tried to read as many of them as possible and they are so exciting! They’re all written from the point of view of Uhtred, the main character, and I found them fascinating.

Will this show appeal to a female audience?
It was definitely a boys club on set but I loved it and had so much fun with the boys. I think for a female audience watching this its very interesting to see these powerful women behind these men. Within the series it’s not all about war and battles, there are themes of love, family and female power. The main female characters in this series have such complex journeys.

What have you learnt about that time? Can you imagine being a woman back then?
Being a woman at that time must have been incredibly difficult. Especially if you were a woman within village life; just to get your opinions across and to be validated would have been hard. I think the character of Aelswith has a lot of power over Alfred’s decisions. You don’t often hear her advise him but you know that he is heavily influenced by her and respects her authority.
AN INTERVIEW WITH EMILY COX

Playing Brida

Who is Brida?
Brida is a really strong and unapologetic woman. She really fights for what she wants, she is honest and she stands up for herself. She really says what she thinks and doesn’t believe that women are worth less than men. As long as they can fight, they’re equal. And Brida can fight! She has a fantastic sense of humour, even when put in situations which are really difficult. Brida is a woman whose experienced a lot of trauma in her life but she manages to survive, fight for herself and achieve happiness.

She sounds like a very modern woman?
I like to think of Brida as the first feminist. She says exactly what she thinks; she isn’t scared of others’ opinion of her and I think would have made a good politician! She is a thinker, strategist and analyst. I was interested in finding the dark moments that she could find a brighter side of and the contradiction between her being a strategic thinker but also having a bad temper and being impulsive. I found that fascinating about her that she has both of these elements; she has a restrained, analytical energy. I really like Brida. I hope that the audience will like her too as she is someone who really speaks her mind.

What is Brida’s relationship with Uhtred?
Both Brida and Uhtred were abducted by the Danes at a very early age and from that moment on, since Brida was nine years old, they spend every day together. I imagine them to have shared everything. For Brida, Uhtred is both a brother and a lover. I think the fact they are not blood relations makes this more acceptable, especially in Viking times. Brida absolutely loves Uhtred and she understands how he thinks and similarly he understands how she functions and he respects her.

Brida won’t remember her Saxon life, but what is it she loves about the Viking life?
I believe that what Brida loves about the Viking society is that it’s wild. People take what they want without asking. Regardless of her gender, she really counts as something within the Dane camp. When she isn’t taken seriously by the Saxons later in the story it becomes a pretty big problem. She knows that equality would never change with the Saxons and therefore they could never provide her with somewhere that feels like home. The Danes represent family to her, they are home and they are her everything.

Each woman seems to represent a particular time in Uhtred’s life. What does Brida bring to Uhtred? What does she teach him?
I think they have a lot of fun together and they’re wild together. They tease each other and laugh about other people. They’re honest with each other and, if I’m being honest, I think she’s the best woman for him!
How does Brida feel then when she realises he wants to stay with the Saxons?
She feels angry and lost about it but really it’s a case of her leaving him. He would have been open to her staying with him and the Saxons. I think in the first few episodes we really see how much Uhtred means to Brida. She compromises a lot for him by going with him to the Saxons, although it’s something she absolutely despises doing. But she stands with him and looks at the way they live and tries to find ways in which she could make a life there. All she discovers is what she already feared, that Saxon women are not treated with much respect.

Tell us about her relationship with Young Ragnar?
Young Ragnar is actually a better match for Brida as they both want to live similar sorts of lives. He wants to be a Viking, to be wild, to be free and she loves him for that. Death was a very normal part of Viking society and I don’t think that Brida is afraid of dying.

What is Brida’s relationship with Guthrum?
Guthrum is the equivalent of a king to the Danes. Brida hates all the pomp and ceremony that comes with Alfred and the Saxons and loves that it’s not like that with Guthrum. He doesn’t dictate like a Saxon king, the structure is flatter with a lot less hierarchy.

How have you found playing a female character that gets involved in all the stunts?
The stunts have been so much fun to perform. I’ve been able to gallop into cities wielding my axe and I’ve killed people whilst riding my horse. On one occasion Ragnar rides into a city before me and knocks over a guy and I’m riding behind to finish him off. However the professional stunt guys, who are amazing, of course do the really complicated stunts. There was one stunt in particular that I watched that was particularly incredible which was a full body burn. It’s one of the most dangerous stunts to perform and as soon as it was time to shoot that scene, and the stunt man came on set, the whole atmosphere changed. We were all watching and you could really sense the intensity.

Have you done all your own stunts?
Alexander and I arrived on set a few weeks early and we were trained by Levente (stunt coordinator) along with Palma who is my stunt double and actually owns my horse. My horse is usually used for children and so it’s really calm, which helped as it just did what I told it to do. It’s been lovely being so close to nature and on horseback. I hadn’t really ever ridden a horse before and I never really understood why people liked it so much, but now I do, as it’s such an exhilarating feeling. I’ve had a few fighting scenes which have been fun, one where I get punched in the face! I also had to lie in the mud for three hours in the heavy rain. It’s the most glamorous job in the world.

Did you have weapon training?
I have an axe so I learnt how to throw it properly, which was pretty cool. When throwing an axe it is really important that you let it go at a certain point and that you keep your hand loose. I also learnt how to fall safely, which I thought I was pretty good at, but Alexander kept saying I fell like a ballet dancer. I used to do a lot of dancing so maybe that’s why but after a while it worked quite well
Describe your costume and make-up. What discussions were there about your look?
I am the only actress who wears trousers. It was important that the costume was functional as she is not the kind of woman who thinks a lot about how she looks. It’s more about being a good fighter and surviving. Basically it was important that the look was practical but also real. I have a short fur coat, which could be added, to with other sections that could be tied on or taken off depending on how hot or cold it was. When I discovered that it took twenty minutes to take my trousers off I stopped drinking so much water.

How did you enjoy Nick Murphy’s unique style of filming?
I think that Nick’s directing style is fantastic and it’s exactly what I believe in. Nick manages to provide an environment where things can happen without being planned, and I love that in acting. For example when you start laughing or crying in a scene but you haven’t planned it. The style was wild and free and the cameraman told me at one point that even if we haven’t discussed it before, if I felt like picking something up from the ground for example, I should just do it and he’ll follow me.

Do you think that this style will make the audience feel closer to this world?
I definitely think that it’s a good way of getting people closer to your character because it felt like these are real human beings, not people pretending to be warriors. They’re people like you and me who have hopes and wishes and do the things they do to become free or happy or loved.

What are the key themes within the show?
The Last Kingdom centres on this very modern premise of people not really knowing where they belong. It’s easy for me to relate to as my mum is Irish, my dad is English, I was born in Austria and now I live in Berlin. I think Brida really wants to survive and she hopes, well believes even, that the Vikings will always win. In fact, she just has to stay with the Vikings because any alternative to her would just mean death.

Can you describe the scenes aboard the Viking ship and the challenges you faced?
We went to Denmark and got to sail on a real Viking ship. The ship belongs to a museum and has been re-constructed exactly as it would have been in the Viking era with one big main sail. There are a team of volunteers who, alongside their normal jobs, sailed this ship over five weeks from Denmark to Ireland. They told me that you can’t go under the deck and so, regardless of the conditions, you had to sleep on the deck in the open sea. Realising then, I couldn’t believe that this team of people had travelled on this ship from Denmark to Ireland but then it’s even more incredible to think that these are journeys that the Vikings would have made all the time. That was an amazing and really emotional feeling to have that insight into how people lived in those times.
AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRY McENTIRE
Playing Aethelwold

Where do we meet Aethelwold and how does he come into the story?
Aethelwold is the son of Aethelred who is the King of Wessex. When Aethelred is killed in battle, Aethelwold is passed over for the crown. Instead of the crown going to him it goes to Aethelred’s brother Alfred, and so the source of his frustration stems from that.

He really is knotted up with his bitterness. Can you describe him as a person?
Aethelwold believes he has been groomed for a starring role his entire life. He thought he was going to be King. He has been groomed to be King and he wanted to lead people into battle and be in command. To have that taken away from him is a complete sideswipe which he didn’t see coming. I think Aethelwold is an opportunist more than anything and as such there are various elements within each culture that he can manipulate to his own end. Similarly with the Saxons Aethelwold knows that you can easily say you have been told to do something by God and he would be believed. He is however a sceptic when it comes to organised religion. I think he would love to be a Dane. They seem to self-govern and make their own rules.

What does he think of Alfred?
When Alfred takes over Wessex, the dominant thing is a huge sense of injustice. That this was absolutely Aethelwold’s crown. This was his crown, this was his kingdom, this was his domain and this was what he was born to...or so he thought. You know they are cut from very different clothes and I think he looks at Alfred’s piety and reverence and essentially regards him as a bit of a wet blanket.

What does he make of Uhtred?
The relationship with Uhtred is a really exciting one. Initially Uhtred is a slightly exotic and interesting outsider. Anyone that takes Aethelwold outside of the constriction of Alfred’s Wessex is a terrific thing to Aethelwold. Later in the series when he goes rogue with Uhtred and Leofric there is almost a kind of hero-worshpping going on with Uhtred and Leofric. These are two guys that are having the life that Aethelwold wants. The Danes do appear to have all the fun. They have a perverse glamour about them that the Saxons lack.

What was a standout scene for you?
We had a scene in which Aethelwold and Uhtred are both forced to crawl through the streets of Winchester to make penance for their various wrongdoings. Aethelwold for whoring and drinking and Uhtred for drawing a sword in the presence of Alfred. It is a terrific scene and one that kick-starts Uhtred and Aethelwold’s friendship. It is an opportunity for Aethelwold to be a showman, to gain the attention of the crowd and to play to an audience. He loves that and he loves holding court. Uhtred and I were being pelted with red cabbage and apples and various other rotten things whilst crawling through the mud. Just before we were about to do a take, Alexander said that we were not muddy enough and grabbed handfuls of this very wet mud and starts to rub it on my costume and face. But what we thought was mud turned out to be animal dung of some kind. Let’s just say that stench will stay with me for a very long time.
AN INTERVIEW WITH IAN HART

Playing Beocca

Who is Beocca?
Originally Beocca was the priest of Lord Uhtred, father of (younger) Uhtred and he’s basically a nobleman from Bebbanburg in Northumbria. He was their family priest and tutor to young Uhtred. The Church in those days was a very different institution and had a lot of power. Alfred was one of the only noblemen to be blessed by the Pope. You were anointed King by God and the Pope, as God’s chief representative on earth. It was all God’s work. Therefore the role of a priest within that society was far different to what it is now. Beocca’s connection with Alfred was as spiritual advisor.

Alfred is quite a tortured soul, especially when it comes to his infidelities. How does Beocca reconcile that side of Alfred with his faith?
Matrimony, for Beocca, is a religious endeavour and playing away from home was not acceptable to priests. Alfred is meant to be holier, stronger and wiser than other men. When you separate your relationship with God like that, it weakens your power but Beocca would still have to find a way to forgive him. He tries to guide him away from it and offer penance.

What’s the relationship like between Beocca and Uhtred?
At the beginning of the story Lord Uhtred’s firstborn son is called Uhtred and often the second son is never going to be the heir. Beocca was left to look after him and teach him God’s work and how to read and write and so they developed this kind of father and son relationship by proxy. Even when Uhtred does become the heir, then is abducted by the Danes, that bond between them never diminishes. Beocca still views him as the Saxon boy he baptised and he doesn’t let go of that image. Many of the things that Uhtred does goes against the teachings of the Church and Beocca is constantly trying to keep him on the right path – albeit unsuccessfully.

What was it about the scripts that particularly drew you to play Beocca?
I had worked with Stephen Butchard before and think he is a great writer and that is initially what drew me to the part. Oddly enough you always take a job based on one script because you never usually get to see subsequent episodes. I had also worked with Nick Murphy previously and his enthusiasm for the project was also a draw. He wanted to liberate the text, make it free and normalise it. He didn’t want to make a conventional costume drama. He wanted to try and find a way of reinventing the format that turned the drama on its head. Especially the way he wanted to shoot it and the way he wanted to make it move visually.

Did you expect the scripts to be as funny as they are?
I think that’s down to Stephen Butchard and his quest to make the narrative have normalcy. People still laughed in those days and made jokes. It’s one of our gifts as human beings. Humour is part and parcel of everyday life. To cut it out of history would be very strange.

What was it Alfred, Uhtred and Beocca were fighting for?
In a sense it was a notional thing because at that time, there was no England. There was Mercia, Wessex, Briton and Northumbria made up of different tribes and so the notion Alfred had was to unify all these tribes into one Kingdom called England. This was Alfred’s great journey. At the
time of this story, the Vikings have basically invaded all the land and taken kingdom after kingdom until there’s only one left. If the last kingdom of Wessex falls then there would be no land left not under Danish rule.

**Why does Beocca believe Uhtred can help Alfred save Wessex?**

Beocca is a constant go-between from Alfred to Uhtred because he believes what they see in each other is limited. Beocca feels he has a greater understanding of Uhtred and sees him as a man of honour and morals whereas Alfred and his noblemen don’t see any of that. They view him as a heathen Viking who won’t respect the conventions of their Christian Church. He won’t give himself up and subjugate himself. Uhtred is working to his rules while Alfred and the noblemen want a company man. Beocca has to convince Alfred that Uhtred can be trusted and is the right warrior to help him achieve his goals.

**What does Beocca make of the Vikings? Because they do have faith, it’s just not the same one.**

The Vikings are a committed people that seem to have a lot of fun whereas Beocca and Alfred’s worlds are tied inextricably to the church and politics. They’ve had God in their lives from the day they were born. Beocca tries to see the value in what they represent and asks if they can be converted. He realises that to do that would be much easier than having to kill everybody. If they could just convert to Christianity all the bloodshed and war could be avoided. They became an Earl or a landowner by taking land that didn’t belong to them and that is what the Vikings did to the Saxons. However Beocca knows that with that land grab comes the end of Christianity which is why Alfred fought so hard against them.

**If priests could marry and live like other men why don’t they go into battle?**

I get to bless people before they go into battle but not to fight and I think that was to ensure that when soldiers died I could help them get back to God and heaven. That role was a very serious role. People would not go to battle without the presence of a priest. If a battle hadn’t been sanctioned by God and blessed by a priest then they felt that if they died in the battlefield they would not transcend to heaven. So the priests went everywhere but into battle. Much later in history there was an order of priests that went on the Crusades and were anointed as Holy Warriors. They were killers who acted in the name of God.
AN INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN
Playing Lord Uhtred

What sort of a man is Lord Uhtred?
Lord Uhtred is a very hard man and not in the least bit sophisticated. He is however a leader, a father and a toughened warrior. Like a lot of lives lived in that time his was short, brutish and hard.

Was it important to you to convey the emotional side to your character despite those brutish times?
The emotion is always bubbling away beneath the narrative. Especially informing scenes with his son who eventually becomes Uhtred the Younger. He doesn’t show his son a lot of love, which as the story unfolds you see really shapes the younger Uhtred. They’re not robots or totally unfeeling but emotionally the lid is firmly screwed on.

What was the relationship like between Lord Uhtred and the young Uhtred?
The young Uhtred is rather insolent with his father that makes for a great dynamic. My character, Lord Uhtred, is pretty tough on his kid. He realises how hard life is so he’s tough on young Uhtred in order to make him strong.

What sort of world is it that Lord Uhtred inhabits?
I would imagine that his is a really hard life to live. There were very few comforts and they must have been a very hard and resilient people. I wouldn’t have lasted a second!

Were you prepared for the scenes with the hawk?
Unfortunately I missed the falconry class at drama school! The hawk was a bit testy and flighty. During one take I had to get off a horse, the hawk then had to land on my hand, I had to meet my wife, join my brother Aelfric and then walk up some stairs; all of this with the hawk plus a lot of dialogue! So you could say the hawk made things extra challenging at times.

How hard was it adapting to the costume and stunts?
You just have to get used to it all in a short space of time but that adds to the fun of it. If I’m asked what I did at work today I can say ‘well, I jumped off a horse, made friends with a hawk and waved my sword at somebody!’ That’s the great thing about being an actor, no two days are the same and you have to just jump into these worlds and hope for the best. You get to learn how to horse-ride and practice sword fighting. It’s great fun.

What has been your experience been of the filming process?
I’ve been really impressed and wish that I had longer with him on the show. We had a huge battle sequence, which on paper was always going to be an incredibly complicated sequence of events between the Vikings and the Saxons. Nick had planned it all out beautifully and with military precision so for us actors we just turned up and he had planned it all out into mini sequences. It made what we had to do very simple and clear and you have to let that be the director’s job. Nick’s style is extremely freeing and he likes the filming to be hand held. There’s not a great amount of lighting time on Nick’s sets and he tends to try and get it all in one big
magic take. It feels very exciting to do that as an actor and oddly you don’t feel like there is a terrible pressure to get it right. I love that about working with Nick.

**What sort of training did you receive for the stunts?**
We had pretty rigorous training on horseback riding. I’ve shot a fair few battles over the last twenty years or so but this was incredibly exciting and on such an epic scale.

**Was there ever a point when you felt completely immersed and a bit terrified?**
The way we’re shooting this with Nick’s cinematography you are right in the middle of the moment. You really don’t have to use your imagination very much. At one point we had about one hundred extras, a lot of them brilliant stunt men so we were completely immersed in that world.

**Was this a time period that you knew anything about?**
This is not a period in History that I knew much about at all. I was slightly upset because the Vikings look a lot cooler than the Saxons. So much so that the other Saxon actors and I feel a bit hard done by. They’ve got cool hair with shaved sides and long sections with cool tattoos and a kind of Nordic chic and we’re just boring Saxons.

**What do you and your fellow Saxons have to wear?**
I model some moleskin breaches, some very high boots, leather tunic, an under tunic and a cloth outer tunic. In battle I wear chain mail. Luckily it’s baby chain mail, which means it’s fake and very lightweight. I have a hat that I wear which is slightly different from everyone else’s so I think that must have been to denote me as King, but other than the hat we all wear pretty much the same.

**Does the story feel realistic?**
With any period piece it’s very easy to slip into caricature. I think what’s wonderful about Nick Murphy’s style of direction is that he’s very keen to avoid anything like that. It feels very fresh and not at all like we are re-hashing another medieval blood and guts thriller.

**What have you learnt about the Middle Ages that you didn’t know before?**
I think probably all of it! But again that’s the lovely thing about being an actor you get to just dip your toe in. For me it really is just dipping my toe in as I’m only here for a short time, but it’s lovely to immerse oneself in a previously unfamiliar world.

**What was your initial reaction to the script?**
I think this script is brilliantly written and doesn’t fall into that stereotypical Saxons and Vikings theme. I thought it was really fresh, interesting and exciting packed with all manner of politics.

**What was the advice to the cast on language and accents?**
We were advised to be very free and naturalistic with the accent and not come with any preconceived ideas of how they would have spoken in our heads.

**What has been the highlight for you?**
The battle was quite something. It was a wonderful set piece. We were in this beautiful bit of the country just outside Budapest and the whole thing was just great fun.
AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER GANTZLER

Playing Earl Ragnar

Who is Earl Ragnar?
He’s a Viking, a King and a family man. He loves life but he can be cruel. He knows what he wants and if anyone gets in his way he simply removes them. If you think like that then you can have anything you want; and if what you want isn’t in your own country you go abroad, take it and bring it home. Which means that for Earl Ragnar, everything is possible.

Did you feel a personal connection with the character of Earl Ragnar?
It’s been incredible to think that, as a Dane myself, only one thousand years ago I would have been a Viking in Denmark. I tried to get a feeling of what it would have been like. I tried to become immersed in the time by putting my own principles aside and before I knew it I thought ‘this could have been me! I am a modern Viking’ and that’s pretty interesting on a personal level. I find it incredible that a little country like Denmark travelled to America before Columbus. It’s amazing that such a small country had such power. They’ve found out that they actually made the trip to America in long boats! They went to the Middle East and England and travelled the Seas.

When do we first meet the character of Earl Ragnar?
The first time the audience meets Earl Ragnar is the day he arrives on the shores of England. His intention is simple; to take over as much land as possible, to grow old with his Father, to feed his family and to live comfortably. England had fertile land, waters full of fish and meat in the forests. It’s for that reason he wants to build a new Kingdom in England and he sends his eldest son (Ragnar the Younger played by Tobias Santelmann) to Ireland to do the same, simply to expand. Earl Ragnar is a King in Denmark and now he wants to be a King in England.

What’s that relationship like between Earl Ragnar and his father Ravn?
We meet Earl Ragnar’s Father (Ravn played by Rutger Hauer) very early on and he’s obviously a very powerful man. We don’t hear that much about their relationship but I imagine, being brought up by that man, the little Earl Ragnar had a lot to live up to. I imagine that his upbringing would have been pretty tough. Earl Ragnar wants to show he is as strong a man like his father was. But despite that I do feel that there was a strong and healthy father son relationship.

How does the relationship develop between Earl Ragnar and young Uhtred?
Earl Ragnar orphaned this little Saxon boy, Uhtred, and immediately recognises something special in him. Uhtred doesn’t give up, he is a little warrior and Earl Ragnar recognises himself in the boy, he recognises the attitude of a Dane. Slowly, over time, Earl Ragnar begins to see Uhtred as his own son. It must have been difficult for a boy that has been orphaned from his own father to suddenly be living in Viking land with this mighty guy. But they grow a relationship which goes far beyond that of master and slave and that’s really nice to watch unfold. I don’t think that it’s interesting if you only show the Vikings as barbarian beasts because they had exactly the same feelings as we have. Their morals and resolutions were pretty different to ours, but the love between father and son, and also father and daughter is unchanged. My character, Earl Ragnar, and myself both have young daughters and it’s exactly the same feelings. If somebody treated
my daughter badly I would make sure they knew that it wasn’t a very good idea and that’s what Earl Ragnar does.

What does Earl Ragnar think of the Saxons?
The Saxons and Vikings are portrayed as opposites; the Vikings being lively and full of energy, while the Saxons seem a bit boring. Maybe that’s what young Uhtred falls for, that lust of living that the Vikings have. The Viking’s had Valhalla and other figural Gods whom they believed in. At one point in the story Earl Ragnar gives Uhtred a little Thor’s hammer to wear around his neck to bring him strength. I don’t think that the Viking’s religion taught them that they would be punished for what they did in life, at least it doesn’t seem that way to me. It’s very much like what the Vikings want to do they are allowed to do. They don’t question whether or not they should rob a village or take slaves; they just see it as their right. If they are the strongest then they will win. You see Earl Ragnar doing some pretty tough things. Everything was so much tougher back then. They didn’t ask questions and that’s scary. There were no apologies or remorse. Things were very clear-cut and they didn’t see their actions as wrong. They didn’t believe in

What was it like working with the great Rutger Hauer?
It’s been wonderful working with Rutger Hauer. I met him on the first day in costume and I admit I was a bit star-struck. But then, as it is with actors, we just blended in and got on with our jobs and so ultimately it’s not any different acting with him compared to anyone else. Actors are sort of the same breed and - of course he knows that I know who he is – but in the end we’re all there to play our parts. Rutger plays my father and so it’s been helpful that I can use the fact that I admire him and his career to inform my performance of the father son relationship so that’s very giving.

How have you found working alongside Alexander Dreymon (playing older Uhtred)?
I think Alexander Dreymon is a great choice as the older Uhtred. We filmed a scene together where Earl Ragnar is offering advice on Uhtred’s relationship. That was actually very hard. It was tough to perform, as there was no Viking stuff at all, it was just father to son emotion. I could feel that it got very personal for both of us, which was nice, but I suddenly felt worried that I had lost Earl Ragnar. I was thinking ‘how could Earl Ragnar be this nice?’ but he can. It’s nice to present the Vikings in that way, more than just stabbing people and fighting, but having conversations that you could have with your own son today.

What are the sets like?
The production values on The Last Kingdom are fabulous. When I first saw Earl Ragnar’s house I wanted to live in it myself! There are two floors; the animals live on the ground floor and there’s a fireplace with meat drying above it, there are goats and cows and on the top floor you have the bedrooms. The whole thing makes total sense. It’s a bit smelly, but still, I could definitely live there. Every detail is wonderfully made, I wish that we’d been able to go around and film each little bit because it was really, really, really perfect. Too bad they burnt it down.

What is your costume like?
I am dressed in boar fur and armour made of thick leather. I also wear a sword on my back and carry a dagger and an axe just to be prepared! It’s really heavy and doesn’t make all the horse riding any easier! You feel pretty safe and warm when you’re in this outfit.
Who decided on this knotted beard design?
The costume team gave me a really long beard and, to keep it out of the way when we weren’t filming, I tied this knot because I didn’t want it to hang down. The director saw it, liked it and we decided to keep it. So now it’s Viking fashion! I have been home in Denmark, and the kids have been telling me how much they love the beard! I always planned to get rid of it once we’re finished filming, but as it’s proved to be so popular I might re-think it!

What have been the challenges of filming the battles?
I’ve done quite a lot of stunt training over the years, but as my character is the General of his army I didn’t have to do much fighting this time! I did a bit in the beginning and then just told the others what to do from then on. The battlefield itself was pretty tough, as it had been raining day and night for weeks. We walked around in mud up to our knees and you could hardly wade through it. The Vikings developed this particular way of fighting, a system of making a vast wall with their shields to protect themselves. My character was in charge of commanding this system in the battle; it wasn’t about just being wild it was all very precise and planned. It was great fun to make.
AN INTERVIEW WITH RUNE TEMTE
Playing Ubba

Who is Ubba?
Ubba is a Danish warlord and he runs the show when it comes to invading Saxon lands. He’ll take all his ships there, together with his good mate, Guthrum. Ragnar is Ubba’s right-hand man. He has a very dry sense of humour and is full of life. He teases people all the time, but at the same time he’s quite straight to the point; either you die, or you live. There can be humour in that though, especially when we go and kill some priests, which is a great win for us Vikings.

Were you surprised with the amount of humour in the script the first time you read it?
Yes, I was pleased to see lots of humour embedded in the script. Although we don’t know how much is based on the truth because we don’t know what really happened accurately, one thing is for sure; they had a sense of humour. Ubba mocks Alfred for writing things down because he thinks when people read it they’re going to be bored to death. The Vikings didn’t understand why Alfred needed to write things down, so these lines there are based on the truth.

What is Ubba’s relationship with Guthrum?
Guthrum is another warlord for another chief warrior. We have similar responsibilities, but Guthrum is still my opposite. Ubba is always on the front foot and is more overtly emotional. But he is also a psychopath and you never know what he’ll do next. It’s been fun playing that character in scenes with great English actors. Guthrum is a more settled and considered man and always takes a moment to think first.

How has working with a variety of nationalities in the cast brought something different to the set?
It’s great because it’s changed the atmosphere so much. It adds a weight to the story and makes the whole setting stand out and feel real. I’m really pleased they use actors from all different nationalities. We found when reading the script altogether, that there were seven different nationalities.

What was it like to work with Rutger Hauer?
It was a dream come true for me. He was extremely caring and generous with his time. Rutger’s a superstar and I was so pleased he was as friendly as he was. He was always teasing us to keep the mood buoyant. His character was fantastic and I cannot believe he’s seventy-one and looking as great as he does. Working with someone like him gives you a lot of energy.

What was it like to film?
Those big scenes take a lot of preparation due to the sheer numbers of people involved in the scene. The extras were from another country and didn’t understand English. The actors were there all set up and then they ran a horse through this room. It’s so much fun when we began filming but there was meticulous planning that went into the scene. The stunt team were incredible and looked after us all. I am sure it will look really impressive and unforgettable. When you see the director and crew really enjoying the scene too it really builds your confidence and adds to the overall performance. Hopefully the audience will feel involved.

Nick Murphy
wanted three-dimensional characters and when I saw Ubba in the script it’s clear that he can kill, he can horse ride and he can use an axe.

Is this series different to the filming style you’ve done in the past?
In a way, because in most films you have the two shot, one shot, close-up etc., and in this drama each take lasts about seven minutes. Within these takes you were free and it’s then the actors’ responsibility to remember their lines. It’s challenging, but I like the freedom of Nick’s style of filming. Of course acting is very precise work, because the camera will always find you.

How much training was required for your stunts and swordplay?
I’ve been fortunate enough to have two great friends in Norway who are part of a Viking reenactment society and I’ve been working with them since November 2014. It takes thorough preparation and a lot of time.

Were you involved in any shield walls or battle sequences?
As chief of staff of the Vikings, Ubba overlooked everything. This meant he was on a horse at the back, riding over the battlefield, slaying everything in his way. I remember there was a big battle scene with a lot of people and we were filming the whole day. I was at the back on a huge horse called Flossy, which I needed a ladder to mount. It was fantastic being up on this horse, as we looked very intimidating with me in my helmet and armour. We watched people being slaughtered and the Viking shieldwall moving forward. Flossy was so good as she stood still and Guthrum’s horse next to us was the complete opposite, so he had to hold on to stop falling off. I looked over and it was so funny that I let out this huge Ubba laugh unintentionally. Nick Murphy called cut and I thought I’d screwed up the whole scene but Nick kept it in. He thought it was great and showed the madness of Ubba. It was hilarious!

In that moment could you imagine what life was like back then?
In my mind, life was so different. Could you imagine going to bed with an axe next to your bed because you were always in danger of being ambushed? Our research team believed back then you had to have an axe, you have to hunt your food and this was how you survived. Vikings would fight all the time, and for us it is such a different life style. Some people believe that the Vikings were a selfless and a strong community. For example when they were on the boats sailing towards England, they came in fifty or sixty boats. If they got caught in a storm, the boat would sink if they didn’t loose weight. There was no problem having five or ten men jumping over board to save the rest as an act of selflessness. They were very close to nature, and gods such as Thor and Odin. Although they didn’t have a religion per se, they would follow these gods closely.

What do you think Uhtred finds with the Vikings that he doesn’t have with the Saxons?
Theirs is a much more fulfilling life, full of humour and a sense of being in control. The Vikings learnt skills like how to make weapons, take care of themselves and find food. I think Uhtred is fascinated by how their life involves travelling and adventure. This appealed to Uhtred as you could show your emotions, even though during wars you needed a closed heart. Uhtred is outgoing and can be angry, but also caring – the Vikings had strong emotions.
How did Ubba’s look develop and did you make any contribution to it?

Both make-up and costume delivered an incredibly impressive body of work. The make-up designer wanted the Vikings to have tattoos, which led to lots of discussions about how many tattoos the Vikings actually had. The Vikings in Russia had a lot of tattoos and would use symbols from the rune alphabet (the earliest alphabet.) They always had images such as dragons or snakes that were linked to fighting and power. So the make-up team designed this pattern on my face of a snake and dragon combined. They used it because of Ubba’s skills as a warrior and he is a feared man, like men are afraid of snakes and dragons. The tattoo adds to the idea that you shouldn’t ever fight him, and it shouldn’t look slick but rough. I wanted to add a piece of ribbon to a plait as my hair, so it keeps my long hair out of my face when fighting. Ubba was also cast without a beard, however my beard is real though I didn’t think I’d get to keep it. It took a while to grow so I’m glad I got to keep it. Ubba wears armour with metal squares on the body. I had a blue tunic and leather trousers, and I think the vibrant colours were a fantastic addition. The leather and metal is worn as protection during battles and I have an axe and a short sword as my weapons and of course a shield.
AN INTERVIEW WITH RUTGER HAUER
Playing Ravn

What character do you play in The Last Kingdom?
I play a man called Ravn and I’m an ex-Viking warrior and former Viking King. When they asked me to play this I didn’t know much about the period, but of course it’s every boy’s dream to be a Viking so I had to do it. I would imagine that Vikings never turned my age, so Ravn must have been doing something right otherwise why would they have kept him around? I see him as the spiritual leader of his tribe.

What was it about the script that attracted you to the role?
The script for The Last Kingdom is really tight and I quite fancied playing a Viking. I thought it would be great fun but then I realised my part is for an elderly, blind Viking which makes it a bit more of a challenge! My approach to the role has been to try to show some heart through the character. Everyone’s characters are warriors and I think it’s important that we express some warmth; they were people after all. It’s always been clear that The Last Kingdom was never going to be a soap opera. Nick Murphy (director) had very firm ideas for my character. He expected me to approach it one way and I gave him something else. The big sport in this game is to give directors something new that exceeds their expectation. That’s the charm.

Why does your family adopt young Uhtred and Brida?
Uhtred lost his father in the same battle that the Vikings found him so I think it was just unconventional thinking and they liked him. They try and give him back to his family, but there’s not a whole lot of family left so they just take him in. He just so happens to learn very quickly and becomes an adopted Dane. It goes beyond passports and boundaries I think; he’s an orphan and so they take care of him. Later on Uhtred becomes one of the leaders. I’ve not read Bernard Cornwell’s stories before, and so I’ve ordered all of the books from the Internet because I’m desperate to hear how he gets on in the end.

What was it like to act with young Tom Taylor?
Tom was lovely to act with; the two of us have really got something going on there! He is an amazing, instinctive actor and you can’t really buy that level of talent. I had planned to take him out for a surprise trip on my motorbike, just to try and take his mind away from the set, but the team decided it probably wasn’t the most sensible idea and so I had to give up on my plan. It’s hard work for kids to work these schedules, not that Tom seemed in any way phased by it.

What other mischief did you like to get up to on set with Tom?
I’ll always find a way of making mischief on set with anyone between the ages of five and ninety-nine. There’s sometimes a moment when you feel that things are getting too normal and then the energy dies. Especially with kids, they have to know that you’re going to do something, even if you don’t do anything for a while, they know it’s coming, that you’re going to try and play games with them. Tom was totally up for that but was also very professional. It’s the same with my colleagues, when I’m doing a scene with somebody and I feel the atmosphere getting a little too serious, I will do something naughty.
How real does Ravn’s world feel to you?
I love that we can say to the audience ‘you think it’s tough now?’ Back then they didn’t have phones, they didn’t have anything, they had to graft, clean, they had to find something to eat and if they wanted warmth, well you better go and find yourself some wood! And not only that, there was another tribe who would also want your wood! You’re going to be kept very busy with that. Things that are really simple now were incredibly difficult in comparison. I don’t think a lot of dramas show how life was in those times and I think we are bravely and believably attempting to. I really do think we are doing it in a convincing way. Nick Murphy (director) is all about making scenes believable and my performance is coming from the same place too; I want Nick to believe it, I want the audience to believe it. I want the story to move.

What is Nick’s style of filming like?
Nick’s cameras are always moving! As an actor, the advances in camera technology give you both more stress and more freedom in equal measure. It’s all very well reading through your script in your trailer but sometimes you just need to be on the set so you can feel it and smell it. I like to find a few quiet moments on set to soak up the atmosphere. It was pretty hard to find a quiet moment on that huge set though! They can photograph us in the most amazing ways, but as actors, we need to make sure that we are playing our parts convincingly otherwise none of it matters. No matter what the scene is about you have to really fight your way into the atmosphere. I guess that’s when the craft comes in because a scene without atmosphere doesn’t exist.

How important is it for you to portray an emotional side of your character?
It’s my job to find the person within the character. I may not immediately get it, but eventually I’ll find them. Imagination is key in this industry; we don’t know history. We know paintings and stories and google and okay that’s part of history, but to me it’s almost just as much fiction as the future is. Okay maybe fiction of the future is a little different but ultimately what makes anything believable is finding that thread of human nature; human nature has never changed nor is it ever going to.

What costume does your character wear?
Everything was so well thought out. The tattoos are a visual stunt to illustrate the Vikings’ characters. They gave me all this amazing long hair. The teams did such a great job. They went out of their way with the make-up and costumes to make them feel as close to the real thing as possible. You cannot wear those costumes and make-up without getting into character! As soon as it’s all on it made the acting easier.

Have you enjoyed working with such a multi-national cast?
Yes, I think it adds a really nice element to the project. There are tonnes of actors around the world who can come in and play these roles so it’s nice to extend the casting for a British production to include that larger selection. We have Danes, British, Swedes, Germans, Hungarians and obviously a Dutch guy. I like the combination of accents; we don’t really know how they spoke or what they sounded like in those times anyway, so we might as well have some variation in there. It’s movie making after all.
What sort of accent training have you had to have?
They weren’t pushing that too much but we tried to shave off too much American, and the Danes
have had to try and shave off their Danish tongue and the same with the Germans. But overall
they didn’t come down on us too hard with the pronunciation. Peter Gantzler and I had the same
problem actually, before we’d even got half way through saying ‘Uhtred of Bebbanburg’ we were
struggling. I found myself repeating that name in bed and in the shower just to get used to it. But
that’s all part of our craft.

How much can you see through the cloudy eye the make-up department have given you?
It’s a funny thing because in real life this is my better eye. I don’t know why they decided to do
this eye. At least I can see where I’m going with my other eye, but I can’t write a text message or
read my script. Everyone else had to do that for me.

Does that make it hard when you’re acting and trying to make a connection with other actors?
Nick Murphy doesn’t really want me to play blind. I praise him for it and I completely agree
because it can all so easily become a bit shtick and I would rather create someone who you can
follow and believe in. The blindness has a function in the story but we also kind of swept it under
the carpet. They say that I can ‘see enough’ and so you never know how much he can see or
what it all really means. But that’s my character.

Humour is important in this show and this really comes through adding to the feel of these
being real people
Humour is often the first thing to get lost and I don’t think that’s right or fair. In reality when
drama hits people’s lives we cling to humour because it becomes a lifesaver. It’s not that I’m not
serious but I don’t think you should ever lose your sense of humour. I hate it when that happens,
you feel it when everybody is playing tragedy and you wonder where the lifeblood has gone.
That’s just my sense of reality, you can be playing a serious drama but that doesn’t mean you
shouldn’t have a laugh.
Can you describe the character of Guthrum and how significant he is to the story?
At the beginning of the story Guthrum is one of the Viking lieutenants but as the show progresses he becomes more powerful. He is an interesting character to play because he is a little bit different from the other Vikings. He seems to question things more and appears to be curious about Christianity. He wants to understand the Saxons and their beliefs.

Describe the relationship between Guthrum and Ubba?
They are like chalk and cheese but in some ways they also complement one another. When Ubba is really upset Guthrum is calm and vice versa but they are still very different people. Guthrum likes Uhtred in some ways because he is brave and courageous but he sees him now as the enemy on Alfred’s side.

They are quite a double act and there is a lot of humour between them. Was that fun to play?
What we were making is quite serious business about how England becomes England. It is about a boy who becomes a man and lives between two religions, two cultures and two societies. He is torn between his heritage and birthright and the people who abducted him and then became his family. That is serious subject matter but through it all shines humour which is important throughout all periods in time. Humour would have been as much a part of life then as it is now and we had great fun playing those parts. They are normal people made of flesh and blood and the humour will hopefully make them more appealing to the audience. They can be very cruel people but this is a bloody time in history.

Were you familiar with the books before you took the role?
When I was offered the part I told my son (22) who was ecstatic, as he’d read all the books. For him it was like playing the lead in Lord of the Rings or something. I loved the story and it has universal themes of identity, belonging and family that we can all relate to as well as stories of warring cultures that resonate today.

Why does Christianity hold a fascination for Guthrum?
As the season progresses he becomes more and more interested in the notion of Christianity and wants to understand it. He is a clever man who is both excited and curious about it. Guthrum hits some storms and Alfred tells him that they are God’s storms and Guthrum doesn’t understand the omen within. Guthrum is also fascinated by Alfred’s need to write everything down and document events as they happen. He feels at a disadvantage because although he can fight, he cannot read and he wants to learn. He sees Christianity, knowledge and reading as powerful tools.

In terms of the shooting style it is not unique to have hand-held cameras, but what did this allow you as an actor to work with?
Nick’s style of filming gives the actor a sense of freedom; it is almost like a dance in some ways because you have the cameraman who is moving with you and among you and I really liked to work like that. It is like the cameraman and camera becomes your friend in some way and is amongst the dirt of the battlefield with you - it makes it a little bit more alive.
AN INTERVIEW WITH TOBIAS SANTELMANN
Playing Ragnar The Younger

Who is Ragnar The Younger?
Ragnar The Younger grew up with Uhtred because his father, Earl Ragnar, kidnapped Uhtred at an early age. Ragnar and Uhtred are like brothers and they have a special relationship where they stick together no matter what. Even though we choose different paths.

Are you fighting for The Last Kingdom?
Ragnar isn’t necessarily fighting for the kingdom, but he fights with Guthrum most of the time. Ragnar is fighting hundreds of Saxons to help achieve his long-term goal, avenging the death of his father. That’s what I think I am fighting for, but also not letting the country become one, ruled by the Saxons – that’d be very bad.

Does Ragnar’s father’s death drive him to fight more?
Ragnar doesn’t know that his sister is alive. To avenge his father I think is understandable for that reason. Also, the fact that the murderers are still breathing and have got away with it infuriates him. He knows seeking vengeance will be dangerous and he can’t talk to anyone about it apart from Uhtred who can potentially help him. They need to do this together. Ragnar is waiting for the opportunity to get close enough to strike – with or without Uhtred.

What is Ragnar’s relationship with Brida?
I’ve been close with Brida and she can’t connect with the Saxons, so she feels more comfortable with the Danes and me. We have a good relationship and after a while, obviously they connected. Back then I don’t think it mattered that she was with Uhtred before as long as she’s with Ragnar now.

What is Ragnar’s costume like?
The Vikings are very hairy, hence the long beard. Ragnar also has a large tattoo on his forehead, because when his grandfather was alive, his face was covered in tattoos. The tattoo that Ragnar has is the exact same one his grandfather had on his forehead. We decided to keep these designs to show Ragnar took things from his grandfather and father, whom he looked up to. I am mini version of my father and I was brought up in the same way as my father so we have the same beliefs. To this day, I don’t think Ragnar The Younger has done anything that his father hasn’t done before. Peter Gantzler who plays my father, has been the main inspiration I’ve had to my own character because we need similar grounded qualities. Ravn is blind, but has visions that other people don’t see. We don’t have a lot of scenes together, which shows they weren’t very close. I was definitely closer to my father than my grandfather. On the other hand Uhtred was always a lot closer to him that I was.
AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM TAYLOR (13)
Playing Young Uhtred

Who is young Uhtred?
Young Uhtred is a boy torn between being a Saxon and a Dane. He was born a Saxon but is adopted by this great Viking Ragnar and he doesn’t know what nation he belongs in. The way the character of Uhtred was explained to me, and this is how I tried to show it, was that he’s got so many different emotions and so many different worlds, that at times he just can’t handle it anymore and explodes with rage. He’s just a normal kid but he’s got so many problems to sort out. There are a lot of different sides to him; he’s emotional, he’s brave and you see the occasional tear. It’s realistic. Imagine if you were in that position, you can’t say that he’s a scaredy-cat for crying. I think Uhtred feels a lot freer when he’s with the Vikings because he gets to do all this fighting, he feels restricted being a Saxon and with the Vikings he can show off his eagerness. When he was a Saxon boy, the priest Beocca was always trying to teach him to read and write and he didn’t like that.

How did you feel when you were offered the role of Uhtred?
Well it’s a funny story because I’d only ever been doing acting workshops on the weeke...s. Then suddenly I got offered my first acting job, and then this huge thing came along soon after! The Last Kingdom is huge for me because it’s almost all based around this boy. It’s fantastic and such an opportunity for me as I’d only been acting for six months.

What sort of advice has Nick Murphy given you?
Nick told me to stay relaxed and not to overthink what I was doing; I should just really try to feel like I’m there. He said to imagine myself being back in those times and behave like it’s normal. If you see someone walking around with a dagger it’s no different to someone walking around with a mobile nowadays. A lot of what Nick said for me to do was to purely act, don’t pretend it’s this or that, just know it is. That really helped and a lot of it was improvised. Nick said that the simple things are more effective than the massive things in the story. You get bothered by some things but not by others. It was a crazy place to be in that era. Nick doesn’t like it if you race through the script, break for a bit and then start shooting, because you’ll forget it and you won’t be as alive as you were. So he will rehearse and then shoot straight away, no breaks, and I think it’s really fascinating the way he does that. He’s also invents really good stunt moves.

What things have you learnt from your time on The Last Kingdom?
That’s a big question! I’ve learnt a lot of things. Mainly I’ve learnt what I want to do when I’m older. After doing all this amazing work I have decided that I want to be a director or an actor when I’m grown-up. If anyone came here and looked around at all of the stuff that they do it would amaze them. It’s more than anyone would expect. It’s fantastic.

What was it like working with Rutger Hauer?
Rutger Hauer is great. You can just walk up to him and have a really fun conversation. When you see him in films he is menacing and fierce and then when you finally meet him he just messes around with you. He is really good with all the kids. It’s great and I think he’s awesome. He’s a really nice person and he looks amazing in his costume, really amazing! In the script he teases Uhtred a lot and then on set he teases me a lot. It’s really fun being here with Rutger.
Were there any moments that you felt you could see what it would have been like to live in that time?
One thing that surprised me is that I thought the Vikings wore horns on their helmets and they didn’t. A lot of the things people tell you are fictional and when you actually look around at the actors and their amazing costumes and you realise that it isn’t like what you you’ve been told; it’s more realistic. One thing that did shock me is how they treated other people. There were no restrictions back then; you could do anything you wanted to anyone in the most gruesome way. But if you did do anything to harm or upset a King, like young Sven did, the punishments were outrageous. I think it’s really gory but awesome.

What was it like filming the huge battle scene?
When we’re doing a scene and you’ve got all your gear on and the camera is rolling, it really feels as though every thing is real. You just ignore everything else and think ‘this is amazing’. The way it’s all brought to life is great, they don’t really choreograph it so it feels quite natural but they direct you in a certain way that makes sure it will look great. There were a lot of people on set that day; I think there was something like one hundred and forty people there. That many people look so amazing all in one place and the shield wall was so cool. You really do believe that you are there living it. At points like that one I did feel very into the character. Sometimes you actually feel what the character feels and that’s amazing.
CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Adrian Bower
Playing Leofric

Adrian Bower plays the mighty Leofric in *The Last Kingdom*. Adrian is best known for the role of Brian Steadman in *Teachers*. Other television work includes *Mount Pleasant, A Touch of Cloth, Gimme Gimme Gimme, Talk to Me, The Quatermass Experiment* (broadcast live on Channel 4), *Dirty Filthy Love*, *Monroe*, *Rev* and *Lennon Naked*. Adrian has extensive theatre credits including *The Herd, Elling, The Hotel in Amsterdam, In Celebration, Mr Heracles*, and *Brassed Off.*

Alec Newman
Playing King Aethelred

Alec Newman plays King Aethelred in *Last Kingdom*. He trained at LAMDA and has appeared on stage and screen on both sides of the Atlantic. He played Paul Atreides in both Sci Fi Channel series of *Dune* in the US. Appearances in *Angel, Dracula* and the lead in the WB pilot of *Dark Shadows* followed. Recent TV appearances include recurring roles in *24* and the DirecTV series *Rogue*. On film he has received critical acclaim for performances in *The Principles of Lust, Greyhawk* and *A Lonely Place to Die*. *Greyhawk* was nominated for the Michael Powell Award at the 2014 EIFF. Numerous stage appearances include the Donmar Warehouse *King Lear* and *The Motherf**ker with the Hat* at the National Theatre.

Alexander Dreymon
Playing Uhtred


Alexandre Willaume
Playing Kjartan

Alexandre Willaume plays Kjartan in *The Last Kingdom*. Alexandre trained at The Danish School of Theatre and has since enjoyed a varied career both on stage and screen. Alexandre’s most recent film credits include *Where Have All The Good Men Gone, Over the Edge* and *Deliver us from Evil* as well as numerous Danish television roles, most famously, a lead role in *Rita* (Season 2 & 3) and an episode lead in *Those Who Kills*. He has also provided voice over work on cartoons such as *Batman, Megamind and The Lorax.*
Amy Wren
Playing Mildreth

Amy is well known for playing Bethany in series 2 and 3 of Silk for BBC. Previously she has starred in Skins: Fire opposite Kaya Scodelario, plus lead roles in Silent Witness and Casualty. Film credits include the award winning Wuthering Heights directed by Andrea Arnold and short film SLR which was shortlisted for an Oscar and produced by Brian Singer. Most recently Amy filmed uwantme2killhim? directed by Andrew Douglas.

Brian Vernel
Playing Odda the Younger

Brian plays Odda the Younger, son of Odda in The Last Kingdom. Brian’s previous Television credits include The Casual Vacancy (BBC1/HBO), Grantchester (ITV), Prey (ITV1) and The Field of Blood (BBC). Theatre credits include Takin’ Over The Asylum (Royal Lyceum/Citizen’s Theatre) for which Brian won the Citizen’s Theatre Award for Best Actor, The Static (ThickSkin), Four Parts Broken (National Theatre of Scotland/Traverse Theatre/Oran Mor) and Blackout (ThickSkin). Film credits include Winter Song (Ran Entertainment), Offender (Revolver Media Productions) and Let Us Prey (Makar Productions). Brian graduated from The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2014.

Charlie Murphy
Playing Queen Isuelt

Charlie Murphy was most recently seen on screen in leading roles in BBC dramas Happy Valley and The Village, both BBC1. Other recent appearances include BBC dramas Quirke and Ripper Street. She appeared in the recurring role of Siobhan in all four seasons of RTE’s multi award winning TV drama Love Hate written by Stuart Carolan and produced by Octagon Films and for which she won Best Actress at The Irish Film and Television Awards (IFTAs) 2013. She has just been awarded the 2015 IFTA for Best Actress, Drama, for her work on all five seasons of Love Hate. She was also nominated in this year’s IFTA’s for Best Supporting Actress, Drama for her role in two seasons of the BBC Drama The Village.

David Dawson
Playing Alfred

David Dawson plays Alfred in The Last Kingdom. David is best known for his role in the hugely popular Ripper Street (BBC) and for his recent performances in Banished and Peaky Blinders. David has also starred in The Hollow Crown, Luther and the BAFTA winning The Road to Coronation Street. Dawson was nominated for Best Newcomer at the Olivier Awards (2008) for his performance of Smike in The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby and for Best Supporting Actor at the Whatsonstage Theatregoers Choice Awards (2010) for his performance as Gethin Price in Comedians at the Lyric Hammersmith. David trained at RADA.
Eliza Butterworth
Playing Aelswith

Eliza is a recent graduate of RADA and plays Aelswith, the wife of Alfred. Her credits whilst at RADA include Margaret of Anjou in the Sam Wanamaker Festival, Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing, Mrs Gascoigne in D. H. Lawrence’s The Daughter-In-Law, the title role in The Witch Of Edmonton and Kate Hardcastle in She Stoops To Conquer. Upon leaving RADA, Eliza appeared as Holly in ITV’s police drama DCI Banks and Lucy in the BBC period drama WPC 56.

Emily Cox
Playing Brida

Emily Cox began her acting career training at the prestigious Max Reinhardt Seminar at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Shortly after, she landed her first lead role playing Gretchen in the telefilm Dutschke which brought her a lot of recognition. Since then, she has won several awards for her work, such as Best Actress at the International Film Festival of the Vienna Film Academy in 2007, the TV Media Award for Best Newcomer in Austria in 2010 and the VdA Newcomer Award in 2011.

Emily previously starred opposite William Moseley in Ernst Gossner’s The Silent Mountain which eOne Entertainment released last spring and re-released earlier this year under the name 1915: The Battle for the Alps. She also starred in Marie Kreutzer’s award winning drama The Fatherless (Die Vaterlosen). Some of Emily’s other film credits include the upcoming film Jesus Cries, Praia do Futuro (Golden Bear Award nominated), Unser Lied and the independent thriller Rammbock (The Dead and the Living) which Bloody Disgusting released in the U.S. in 2011.

Harry McEntire
Playing Aethelwold

Harry McEntire plays Aethelwold in The Last Kingdom. Harry has performed in Billy Liar (The Royal Exchange), Debris (Southwark Playhouse), A Mad World Masters, Titus Andronicus (RSC), Blink (Soho Theatre), Winterlong (Royal Exchange Theatre), Macbeth, A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky, Treasure Island, Punk Rock and Spring Awakening. He also played a lead role in the feature, Unconditional. Harry’s television credits include Father Brown, Episodes, Some Girls, Prisoners Wives, Doctors, Eric and Ernie, Doctors, Clay and Torquil.

Henning Valin
Playing Storri the Sorcerer

Henning Valin graduated from The National School of Acting at Odense Theatre in 1999 and has enjoyed a varied career ever since. Henning is best known for his roles in The Truth About Men, Skytten and White Night. Henning’s most recent credits include Krummerne - alt på spil and Where Have All the Good Men Gone. Henning had a lead in The Bridge for Danish National Television and is currently filming the new Drama-series Follow The Money for DR1. Henning is an accomplished singer and musician.
Ian Hart
Playing Beocca

Ian Hart plays the character of Beocca, a Saxon priest, in The Last Kingdom. Ian began acting whilst studying in Liverpool when he was cast in the play The Government Inspector and has continued to work in British theatre and television ever since. He first gained recognition for portraying John Lennon in the British film Backbeat (1994). Ian also played Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the film Finding Neverland (2004) having already played Doyle’s creation Dr Watson in BBC1’s The Hound of the Baskervilles (2002) and reprising the role in 2004 with Sherlock Holmes and The Case of The Silk Stocking. Ian famously played Professor Quirrell in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (2001) and has also appeared in Boardwalk Empire, The Bridge, Agents of Shield, Elizabeth: The Virgin Queen and The Man Who Crossed Hitler. For his role in No Surrender, Ian won Best Supporting Actor (Venice Film Festival) as well as The Most Promising Newcomer (London Evening Standard Film Award). He also won Best Actor at the Tribeca Film Festival Award for Blind Flight and Best Actor at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival for Aberdeen.

Jason Flemyng
Playing King Edmund

Jason Flemyng plays King Edmund in The Last Kingdom. Jason trained at the National Youth Theatre as well as the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts before being accepted into the Royal Shakespeare Company. Jason is best known for his film work which has included roles in films such as Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels and Snatch as well as Hollywood productions such as Rob Roy, From Hell, The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button. Jason has also appeared in prominent roles in both theatre and television. Jason won Best Actor award at the Geneva Film Festival for his role in Alive and Kicking.

Joseph Millson
Playing Aelfric

Joseph Millson plays Aelfric in The Last Kingdom. Joseph was most recently seen starring as Major Ross in the hugely popular seven part series Banished written by Jimmy McGovern for BBC2. He has recently guest starred in 24-Live Another Day for Fox and Penny Dreadful for Showtime. He has been a series regular in many shows over the years including The Sarah Jane Adventures, Holby City, Campus, Eastenders, Talk To Me and Peak Practice as well as guest starring in many more including Ashes To Ashes, Survivors, Law And Order UK, Midsomer Murders, New Tricks, Macbeth and Enid. His film work includes Casino Royale, I Give It A Year, Telstar and starring in the popular zombie film The Dead 2.

He most recently played the title role in Macbeth at Shakespeare’s Globe theatre to rave reviews. This has subsequently been filmed and released in cinemas worldwide. Joseph is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company having played many leading roles for them including an acclaimed Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing. He has played many other leading roles at the National Theatre, The Royal Court, The Old Vic, Donmar Warehouse, as well as many West End shows including Love Never Dies for which he won the Whatsonstage.com award for best actor in a musical. Joseph has performed in countless dramas for BBC Radio and was recently nominated for Best Actor at the BBC Radio Drama Awards.
Matthew Macfadyen
Playing Lord Uhtred

Matthew Macfadyen is one of the UK’s most respected television, film and stage actors and brings his wealth of experience to the role of Lord Uhtred in *The Last Kingdom*. Matthew has had acclaimed success both on stage and screen with award winning performances such as Sean Foley’s *Jeeves & Wooster* and the role of Detective Inspector Edmund Reid in series three of *Ripper Street*. Matthew is well known for his portrayal of Tom Quinn in the BBC television drama *Spooks*, which won BAFTA & Royal Television Society awards. Matthew starred in the critically acclaimed and award winning series, *Any Human Heart*, a four-part television drama for Channel 4 based on the novel by William Boyd, who also adapted the screenplay. He also featured in the role of ‘Prior Phillip’ in an epic series for Channel 4 *The Pillars of the Earth* based on Ken Follett’s bestselling novel alongside Eddie Redmayne, Hayley Atwell and Rufus Sewell. Matthew was awarded a BAFTA Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in BBC1’s second series of *Criminal Justice*. He also starred in the award-winning (including BAFTA, Emmy and Golden Globe) BBC adaptation *Little Dorrit* with newcomer Claire Foy, earning himself a nomination for Best Actor at the 2008 Royal Television Society Awards. Matthew’s role in Channel 4’s one-off drama *Secret Life* received outstanding reviews and also earned him a BAFTA nomination and a Royal Television Society Award for Best Actor. His other television credits include *Enid* (BBC), *Agatha Christie’s Marple: A Pocketful of Rye* (ITV), *The Project* (BBC), *The Way We Live Now* (BBC), *Perfect Strangers* (Talkback TV), *Bloodline* (BBC), *Warriors* (BBC) (for which he was nominated at the 1999 Royal Television Society Awards) and *Wuthering Heights* (LWT).

Peter Gantzler
Playing Earl Ragnar

Peter Gantzler trained at The Danish National School of Theatre and is known for a range of movies and prominent roles within Denmark: most famously *Italian for Beginners* (by the Oscar nominated director Lone Scherfig) and for the role of Mike in *Taxi* (a popular Danish TV mini-series). Other leading roles include *The Boss of it All* by director Lars Von Trier and *Just Like Home* (directed by Lone Scherfig). In 2014 Peter had a large role in the Norwegian movie *Beatles* and an ensemble movie *Long History Short* by the director May El-Toukhy. In 2014 he also played a large role in the television series *Gentlemen And Gangsters* in Sweden for SV1 as well as a large role in the Danish National Drama television series *Bankerot* in the fall 2014. Over the years Peter has also appeared regularly on the stage in roles including the Father in the Henrik Ibsen’s drama *The Father* (2012) and Claudius in *Hamlet* (2007). Currently, Gantzler is touring around in Denmark with the hit comedy *The Green Elevator* opposite some of Denmark’s finest comedy actors. Peter’s directing and writing debut came in 2011 with his own film *Boy*. 
Rune Temte

Playing Ubba

Since training at The Drama Studio, London, Rune has played a variety of roles and worked with acclaimed directors such as Oscar nominated Nils Gaup, Harald Zwart (Norway), Leif Stinnerbom (Sweden), Oleg Kulikov (Russia), Jurek Zon (Poland), Marcelino Martin Valiente (France) and Norway’s Franzica Aarflot and Bjørn Sæter. Rune’s portrayal of Puck at The Vestanå Theatre in Sweden and Karl in Rogaland Theatre’s Karl and Anna (based on Leonhard Frank’s novel) earned him critical and audience acclamation. Latest work includes roles in major TV series Tatort (Germany) and Netflix hit series Lilyhammer. In The Accident he plays the lead Jonas and in the upcoming Eddie The Eagle feature film he plays Bjørn, the Norwegian Ski Jumping Coach, opposite Hugh Jackman and Christopher Walken. Rune runs his own production company and has produced more than twenty major theatre productions, three short films and one feature length film. Rune played professional football for Strømsgodset Football club prior to acting.

Rutger Hauer

Playing Ravn

Rutger Hauer has worked with filmmakers including Ridley Scott, Christopher Nolan, Phil Noyce, Lina Wertmüller, Ermanno Olmi, Robert Rodriguez, Dutch director Paul Verhoeven and has appeared in George Clooney’s Confessions of a Dangerous Mind. Rutger played a crucial role for Season six of True Blood for HBO and recently returned for the upcoming season. In the last few years he has been involved in a number of international productions including True Blood, Flight of the Storks, Drawing Home, The Letters, Michelangelo – le passioni dominant, Real Playing Time, Il Futuro and Agent Rangid rettet die Welt. His other recent films include Portable Life, Black Butterflies the Sundance Film Festival hit Hobo With a Shotgun, The Rite (also starring Sir Anthony Hopkins) for Warner Brothers, as well as with his latest production Il Villaggio di Cartone (The Cardboard Village). In the summer of 2011 Rutger starred in Dracula 3D with acclaimed international director Dario Argento. In the last decade, Hauer has been involved in major Hollywood productions, such as Warner Bros. Batman Begins (directed by Christopher Nolan, with Christian Bale, Gary Oldman, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman and Liam Neeson), the TV mini-series The Poseidon Adventure and Sin City the all-star cast film directed by Robert Rodriguez together with Frank Miller, who wrote and illustrated the graphic novel series on which the movie was based. In 2007, Rutger authored his long-awaited autobiography entitled All Those Moments: Stories of Heroes, Villains, Replicants and Blade Runners with all proceeds going to charity initiatives.
Thomas W. Gabrielsson
Playing Guthrum

The Danish-Swedish actor Thomas W. Gabrielsson completed his acting training at the Teatro Potlach in Rome. He has since appeared in several theatre productions and has toured extensively both at home in Sweden and abroad. Thomas' breakthrough role was as the ex-KGB agent Sergei in Niels Arden Oplev's acknowledged and Emmy–Award winning TV-series The Eagle. In the later TV-series The Protectors (2008-10) - which was also recognized with an Emmy Award for best Drama Series - Thomas played Leon Hartvig in one of the leading roles. His many Swedish and Danish television credits also include the series Wallander (2006), Nynne (2006), The Killing III (2011) and the Swedish drama-comedy series The Coaches (2012). In addition to a number of short films, Thomas has shown his richly faceted talent in feature films such as Jannik Johansen's Stealing Rembrandt (2003), Oskar & Josefine (2005), Arn: The Knight Templar (2007) and most recently in Nikolaj Arcel’s Oscar nominated period drama A Royal Affair (2012), in which he played Schack Carl Rantzau. For this performance Thomas was nominated for the Danish Critic Association Award “Bodil” in the category Best Supporting Actor (2013). Most recently Thomas has appeared in the Swedish drama Echoes from the Dead (aka Skumtimmern).

Tobias Santelmann
Playing Ragnar the Younger

Tobias Santelmann is a Norwegian/Scandinavian actor, born in Germany and trained at The Norwegian National Theatre School. Alongside The Last Kingdom, Tobias is currently starring in Norway’s Acquitted, The Heavy Water War and playing a supporting role in the Warner Bros series Point Break. Other credits include Eyewitness, Rhesus and Leave me Alone (nominated at the International EMMY Awards in 2013). MGM and Paramount Pictures’ feature film Hercules: The Thracian Wars was Tobias' first English language role. Tobias has been nominated for Best male actor in a supporting Role and Best Newcomer at the Norwegian Film Awards. Tobias was first introduced to an international audience through his role in Kon-Tiki which was Oscar- and Golden Globe nominated film 2013 in the category Best Foreign Film. Tobias lives in Oslo and speaks Norwegian, German and English. He is a member of the band 'The Young Suffering Ensemble'.

Tom Taylor
Playing Young Uhtred

Tom Taylor plays the character of Young Uhtred. Aged just thirteen, this is Tom’s second acting role after an appearance in Casualty for the BBC. Tom has undertaken extensive horse riding and stunt training for the role of Young Uhtred and performed all of his own stunts. Tom is a talented drummer, footballer and an accomplished skier. He is currently filming the Mike Bartlett series Dr Foster for the BBC.