

BANISHED



An RSJ and See-Saw Films co-production for BBC Two

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Introduction

At its heart, Banished is a story of survival. Though it is set in the stark historical reality of the founding of the penal colony in Australia in 1788 after the arrival of the First Fleet, it is not the story of Australia and how it came to be. Rather, it is a tale of love, faith, justice and morality played out on an epic scale in a confined community where the stakes are literally life and death.

“If you’re a woman and you have nothing except your body,” says writer Jimmy McGovern, “how far do you go to survive? If you’re a man and a stronger man is stealing your food and you are starving to death and nobody lifts a finger to help you because it’s every man for himself, what do you?”

Several years ago McGovern developed a film about the plight of the first convicts in New South Wales. It was, says Sita Williams, McGovern’s long-time producing partner, a wonderful script but it was never made. Instead the film provided the framework for a series.

“Jimmy always wanted to go back to the thing that he loved doing most in his Brookside days, which is multi-character, multi-strand, continuing stories. He said, ‘I’ve got this story,’ we read it and we went ‘absolutely.’”

McGovern had already been working in Australia as a story editor on the acclaimed multi-award winning ABC drama Redfern Now. He expanded his original film with new characters and stories gleaned from history but given new life. Many of the characters in Banished, from Governor Phillip, the founder of the settlement that would become Sydney, to Major Robert Ross, his nemesis, are known figures from history - but their stories here are fictional.

There is, McGovern points out, an honourable tradition for this approach – “I go all the way back to the days of Wagon Train on NBC which told the stories of the travellers going from the East Coast of America over to the West Coast - all that stuff was factual but the stories they told were fiction. Or more recently you could look at Deadwood, which was a terrific series, and brought in Wild Bill Hickok and people like that. These series used real people, but the stories affecting those historically real people were often fictional.”

As relevant as what McGovern has chosen to include in his story is what he has opted to omit. The First Fleeters did have well-documented encounters with the aboriginal people, but none will appear in this series of Banished.

“The British haven’t met the aboriginal people in my drama. It is difficult to exaggerate how important is it to get the portrayal of indigenous Australians right. In recent years I have been fortunate enough to work with a group of aboriginal people as story editor on Redfern Now, a contemporary urban drama. The time frame in Banished is very short something just over two weeks, and there is not sufficient time to develop and do justice to indigenous characters. Hopefully if there’s another series there would be time to collaborate and get any representation right.”

As ever with McGovern's work, Banished is concerned with ordinary people who by a twist of fate find themselves in extraordinary situations - but they remain situations that anyone could identify with. Although Banished is set in the 18th century, it is in many ways a contemporary story.

"There's quite a formal language being used even by the convicts," says McGovern, "but apart from that, you could tell the story now. You take a group of people up to a log cabin up in the mountains and you ask, 'how do you survive?'"

Yet if the themes are universal and enduring, the setting is particular. The task of bringing Australia, 1788, to life fell to directors Daniel Percival and Jeffrey Walker and their crews. The first decision that was made was that the production would be split - all of the exteriors would be shot on location, in Sydney, Australia, and thereafter the production would return to Manchester to film the interiors.

Lead director Daniel Percival says, "We knew right from the beginning that we were going to shoot all the exteriors on location in Australia. There's nowhere else to film them. One of the extraordinary things about the environment around Sydney is the landscape is very much as it was. Not literally Sydney Cove where the Opera House is, but you only have to go a few miles north and you're in virgin forest again, with estuaries and inlets very similar to what the first fleet would have seen."

The decision was made to base the convicts' camp at Manly Dam, surrounded by dense bush and replete with native wildlife.

Daniel Percival says: "Jimmy had imagined a world where between the barrier of the ocean and the barrier of the forest there was this strip of Georgian England trying to carve out an existence and survive. It didn't take much to stand in these spots and feel that – and then try to capture it."

Nonetheless, if the Sydney location was hugely compelling, filming two halves of a major production on different sides of the world presented a major logistical problem.

Jeffrey Walker, who directed the second block, turned up to find himself filming the final scene of the whole series on his first day of filming.

"It was just the way that the locations worked out. But it showed me how it was going to be - shooting four episodes concurrently in two very, very different locations on the other side of the world was a huge challenge. What it came down to was if someone leaves a tent in Australia screen right, then we had to match that exactly when they came to the studio in Manchester. It dictated where we put our cameras in the studio, so that hopefully the audience are none the wiser."

It was a challenge that also affected Production Designer Claire Kenny. She had to oversee the construction of an entire convict camp in Manly Dam, and then replicate that same camp from the inside over in Manchester. Even to the point where bags of original Manly Eucalyptus leaves were shipped all the way back to England with her.

Yet as with McGovern's script, at every call the first requirement for Banished was how best to tell the story, rather than pitch-perfect historical accuracy.

“Our whole story really is a bit of a creation, we wanted to create a world that was a hybrid between the historic reality and somewhere that gave us a sense of dramatic interest and variety says Kenny. “There was a fair amount of artwork available, but what I found when I started to research the piece was the same prints were everywhere, and there was a very muted palette to them.”

And so she adjusted: in reality the entire camp would have consisted of tents made of white canvas. “But that would have made for a very bland look, offering a limited tonal contrast particularly when it came to our interiors back in the UK. So, we shipped out our own canvas, which was a more interesting rich tan colour, and we decided to embrace build methods that I saw in early Australian settlements. We ended up with some tents, and some solid structures.”

The camp was a major undertaking, built on public land and so requiring the assent as much as the goodwill of the local people. “There were some challenges for us,” says Kenny. “Because it’s a public area, there were picnic areas in the centre of Manly Dam, and so in actual fact when you see the Governor’s house, there’s a metal picnic pergola in the centre of it that we had to build around.”

But whatever compromises had to be made, time and again the primary requirement was that character was paramount. Everything else stemmed from there.

“We have the characters,” says Sita Williams, “and then the plot comes out of who they are, the situation in which they find themselves. What’s really special about Banished is at its heart there are love stories. People always think of Jimmy as doing tough political stories or tough moral dilemmas, but essentially the way these people keep going in the most brutal circumstances is by forming relationships with one another. That’s how they survive.”

International award-winning independent production companies RSJ Films (Accused, The Street) and See-Saw Films (Top Of The Lake, The King’s Speech, Shame) joined forces for the first time to co-produce Banished.

Banished is written and devised by Jimmy McGovern, and Shaun Duggan (Accused) has co-written episode five. Sita Williams produces for RSJ Films and also executive produces with Roxy Spencer and Jimmy McGovern. Emile Sherman, Iain Canning, and Jamie Laurenson are executive producers for See-Saw Films. Brett Popplewell co-produces for See-Saw Films alongside Simon Hailey RSJ Films co-producer. Lead director is Daniel Percival (Death Comes To Pemberley), who directs episodes one to three, and Australian director Jeffrey Walker (Jack Irish) directs episodes four to seven.

Banished was commissioned by Ben Stephenson, Controller of BBC Drama Commissioning, and is executive produced for the BBC by Polly Hill, Head of BBC Independent Commissioning. Tim Christlieb, Director of Television, leads the co-commission for BBC Worldwide Australia and New Zealand. It is the first local commission for BBC First launched by Foxtel in Australia in 2014. In New Zealand, it will be shown on UKTV. BBC Worldwide is the distributor of Banished.

Cast

Anne Meredith	ORLA BRADY
Reverend Johnson	EWEN BREMNER
Elizabeth Quinn	MYANNA BURING
Corporal MacDonald	RYAN CORR
Captain Collins	DAVID DAWSON
Letters Molloy	NED DENNEHY
Housekeeper Deborah	BROOKE HARMAN
Sergeant Timmins	CAL MacANINCH
Marston	RORY McCANN
Jefferson	TIM McCUNN
Major Ross	JOSEPH MILLSON
Spragg	NICK MOSS
Private Buckley	ADAM NAGAITIS
Mary Johnson	GENEVIEVE O'REILLY
Private Mulrooney	JORDAN PATRICK SMITH
James Freeman	RUSSELL TOVEY
Tommy Barrett	JULIAN RHIND TUTT
Kitty McVitie	JOANNA VANDERHAM
Stubbins	DAVID WALMSLEY
Governor Phillip	DAVID WENHAM

Production credits

Series written and devised by Episode Five co-writer	JIMMY McGOVERN SHAUN DUGGAN
Directed by	DANIEL PERCIVAL (Ep 1- 3) JEFFREY WALKER (Ep 4- 7)
Produced by	SITA WILLIAMS
Script Executive	ROXY SPENCER
Head of Production See-Saw Films	SIMONE NICHOLSON
Co-producer for See-Saw Films	BRETT POPPLEWELL
Co-Producer for RSJ Films	SIMON HAILEY
Costume Designer	WENDY CORK
Hair & Make-Up Designer	ZELJKA STANIN
Editors	DAVID THRASHER (Ep1 & 2) JAMES BARHAM (Ep 3) ORAL OTTEY (Ep 4 -7)
Directors of Photography	STEVEN LAWES (Ep 1 - 3) MARTIN McGARTH (Ep 4 - 7)
Music by	DAVID HIRSCHFELDER
Production Designer	CLAIRE KENNY
Executive Producers for RSJ Films	ROXY SPENCER SITA WILLIAMS JIMMY MCGOVERN
Executive Producers for See-Saw Films	EMILE SHERMAN IAIN CANNING JAMIE LAURENSEN
Executive Producer for BBC	POLLY HILL

Cast Interviews

MyAnna Buring

Elizabeth Quinn/Barrett

What was it about the character of Elizabeth that attracted you to the role?

It was her heart really. When I first read the script I felt very strongly that not only did she have a great heart but also that she was the heartbeat for three other characters in this story: Freeman, Tommy Barrett and Private Buckley. It's simply the kind of part that comes along and you can't say no to it.

How did you come to be cast?

I've always been a huge fan of Jimmy's and when I got the chance to read for Banished - I was so excited. I remember preparing for my audition, being blown away by the material and his characters. They felt so very real and we only follow them over a period of about two weeks, yet everyone's journey and struggles are so huge - the stakes are so extremely high for all of them from the start. I kept thinking how lucky I was to even get to read for Elizabeth, never in a million years did I think I would get the chance to play her!

What is Elizabeth's situation as the series begins?

Elizabeth is a Cockney. A city girl who finds herself in this incredibly beautiful but also perilous environment: awe inspiring and terrifying. In our story she met and fell in love with Tommy Barrett on the journey to Australia from England... and so despite going through terrible hardship: being a prisoner on the other side of the world, far from home, starving, and scared, she is nevertheless driven and buoyed by the fact that she is completely and utterly in love.

How would you characterise the relationship between Freeman, Tommy and Elizabeth?

Jimmy writes very well rounded, believable characters and has a profound understanding of the fact that life is not simply an arrangement of straight forward choices, actions and consequences, it is filled with shades of grey, shades of right and wrong, and constantly shifting points of view ... you don't only love one person, you can have very different loves for lots of different people. Here are three people who have gravitated towards each other. Freeman and Tommy have this strong friendship that started when they were on the transportation ships. Tommy is as in love with Elizabeth as she is with him. Yet Freeman is also in love with Elizabeth. It's a situation where your best mate is seeing the woman that you're in love with, and she loves you - but as a friend. Because Tommy exists Elizabeth will never be able to look at Freeman in any other light. If he didn't exist perhaps, maybe she wouldn't rule it out, but that is not the situation they find themselves in.

The law said Elizabeth was a criminal. How do you see her?

I don't think Elizabeth is a bad person, and she is only a dangerous criminal in the eyes of the law of late 18th century Britain - where a legal system reigned that was incredibly merciless. Doing the research for this, it was quite heartbreaking to see the offences that people were banished for, or indeed that people were taken to the gallows for. For a lot of the convicts that came over from Britain the question they'd been asked on the gallows was, 'Do you want to die now or do you want to be taken on a ship for nine months to a part of the world that you've never heard of called Australia and work to start a new colony there?' To all intents and purposes Australia could have been Mars - they had no idea. So there must've been a huge array of conflicting feelings for them when they got there. Elizabeth's crime was that she punched a woman who turned out to be a Duchess - had it been a lady or gentleman from the working class Elizabeth may not have been convicted at all... most certainly not sent to the gallows or banished. Jimmy never divulged in the script what precisely Elizabeth punched the Duchess for, but I personally feel that whatever it was - the lady deserved it...

What did you know of this history beforehand and what's been most striking from what you've learned?

I knew more about aboriginal history than that of the first British immigrants... I did know that the first British people who came over to colonise Australia were convicts and soldiers, but I didn't know much more than that. What struck me the most was the resilience and the desire to live that these people had. They showed extraordinary bravery and strength. You read accounts of what people went through - the journey by sea alone was so arduous. Nine months on a ship - give or take - and before that months, and months waiting to leave, moored and imprisoned in rat infested hulls where food and water were extremely scarce. And then arriving to this beautiful but foreign and strange place with creatures and snakes and spiders that could kill you. With little means to find and produce food, make clothes, build homes, protect themselves... Their resilience was astonishing.

What do you think it was like being a woman in the first penal colony?

It must have been horrific. At best your body could be a bartering tool, at worst you could be a victim of rape or sexual assault. The idea that you had any right to do as you wished with your body was laughable. Yet they were intrinsically a Christian community where the idea of the perfect woman, The Virgin Mary, was both a virgin and a mother - an impossible ideal to live up to. Freud would have had a field day. In Banished I do feel that Elizabeth, and many of the other women have a great sense of their own self worth, and portray great strength in fighting for it - you would have to be strong in those conditions, however, like everyone they are all subjected to demeaning behaviour. You needed a man to protect you - if he had "ownership" of you then you were - to some extent - off limits to others...it wasn't only the threat of surviving in a new and difficult environment these women dealt with, it was surviving day to day with the threat that your body could be used and abused against your will, at any time. I remember reading accounts of cases that were brought in front of the Governor and a lot of them were accusations of rape. That must have been awful,

nothing to really protect you or protect your rights. Sadly still the case for many today.

What is the most important goal for the convicts?

The most important thing for the convicts is to survive. It goes back to basics and that's what's so interesting when you're in this world and exploring these stories. The basic emotions come out - love, anger, jealousy - but then they have basic needs and they are first and foremost food; you would kill for food. That's why this series has universal appeal beyond the specific story its telling - the common denominator is the fact that this is a story about human beings, being tested to their very limits both physically and emotionally. Certainly for me Banished is probably the most challenging part I've ever played.

Julian Rhind-Tutt

Tommy Barrett

What attracted you to the role?

It was a very interesting opportunity to play a convict. Tommy is more of a manly man than any role I've had the chance to play recently. I've been playing aristocratic people, politicians, advisors, people like that. But Sita [Williams], our producer who I worked with 15 years ago kindly remembered that there are other areas that we might like to explore, and so she thought it would be interesting for me to have a look at Tommy Barrett.

What sort of a man is Tommy Barrett?

Tommy is a man with a chequered background; but fundamentally a man of honour with a steely sense of pride and a simple but clear ethical framework within which he lives. We all developed back stories for our characters and shared them with each other. For my part Tommy was a skilled gambler and once worked on the boats in the Thames Estuary. I've imagined that he probably did something heart-warming and noble like take the blame for his unreliable brother who was cheating at cards. Back then you could be sent over to the colonies for a crime as small as stealing a wallet or indeed cheating at cards. He's not unacquainted with the dangerous side of life, but he has strongly held, unshakeable values.

Would you describe him as a leader?

Yes, he's gravitated to be one of the leaders. He's a man who by dint of his personality, character and a certain charisma finds himself in a position of influence in this benighted community. He's a profoundly honourable man but in this environment any sense of honour or morality is constantly eroded by the threat of starvation, murder or hanging. An interesting comparison emerges in the writing between the internal code of honour within the convict community and the governor struggling to impose honour and law from above. At one point the governor says, "You will have found the law in England to be old and rusty, but here it is shiny and new and I will do my best to keep it this way." There has to be a place for order, but how it is implemented and upheld is an issue fraught with dilemmas.

What's at the crux of Tommy and Elizabeth's relationship?

They've fallen deeply in love in very difficult and dangerous circumstances. They are intelligent people and recognise each other's strength of character, resolve and loyalty. Their relationship is based on this mutual respect and a romantic adoration which makes their partnership potentially unbreakable. Elizabeth knows Tommy's a man of honour and he will try and protect her come what may.

And what is at the heart of his friendship with James Freeman?

I think this is really the strongest form of friendship - founded when two people who are already suited to be friends go through an extraordinary experience together. In

Tommy's and James's case they've been on this horrific journey on a ship for eight months. They have survived against the odds and made it all the way to Australia. This experience has forged their friendship in a way that is hard to comprehend from the comfortable standpoint of a modern, comparatively trauma-free life. It welds them together. In their world there's an awareness that the stakes are very high not least because the very real risk of starvation is with them constantly. Thoughts about what you're going to do if you die tomorrow means that Tommy and James end up having very frank exchanges about what happens if one of them isn't there in the morning.

What, broadly, is Banished about?

Banished is, as we would expect a brilliant Jimmy McGovern story about, honour, love, betrayal, and complex ethical and moral dilemmas; but it's been transposed to an historical setting, albeit loosely based on real events. It's going to be really interesting to see how these themes play out. Instead of the contemporary context that he normally writes in there are certain constrictions that are in place here. The characters are trapped in a tiny community; they are close to starvation; they are living under military rule and surviving as best they can; it's classic and exciting Jimmy McGovern but in an even more compressed and tense situation with even higher stakes.

What did you learn about the history that was most startling?

I read that they sent these 700-odd people and 300 soldiers out to Australia with only six scythes. And with that they were expected to start their own agricultural community. There is, of course, a valid historical opinion that the authorities didn't really care that much about what happened to them. But what struck me most often as I stood on the set - surrounded by only a small collection of tawdry canvas tents and the most basic amenities to survive - was how swiftly and miraculously today's modern metropolis of Sydney has evolved - in roughly four of my lifetimes. That is extraordinary.

How did you find filming in Australia?

Disappointing. The people are rude, the weather's terrible [laughs]. In fact it's been an absolutely wonderful experience. I went there with my family and we all agreed there would be absolutely no reason to go home if we didn't need to make a living.

Did you pick up any new skills for the CV working in a convict camp?

Yes, to a full driving licence and scuba diving I'll be adding 'axe work' – I had excellent training from some real Australian men, and I can now split kindling wood with some degree of efficiency. I can also say I have worked with leeches. It's the moment where they actually suck the blood and engorge themselves that you have to get over psychologically, but I tried it in good heart as part of our many adventures there.

Russell Tovey

James Freeman

Why did you want to be part of Banished?

When a Jimmy McGovern script comes your way, you automatically feel like you want to be a part of it – for every actor, if you hear that name, it's got so much weight behind it that you are automatically drawn to it. The scripts were wonderful; it's just such a beautiful, unique piece and for Jimmy McGovern to do a period costume drama feels new and fresh.

It's a period piece about a specific moment in history. What gives it broad, universal appeal?

I think it's an untapped chapter in history that's not really been covered. Brits love the fact that everybody in Australia is related to a criminal of some sort. Yet over in Australia it seems like it's only recently that they're really proud of their historical, European convict roots. Just the fact that people were transported from London for over six months on a horrible boat and exiled to completely the other side of the world, with creatures like deadly snakes and spiders to contend with, and a climate that is the antithesis to British weather...is fascinating history.

Tell us about James Freeman.

James Freeman is a cheeky chappie. He's a pickpocket and he was caught in London. But instead of being hanged, which seems quite a strong sentence for pick pocketing, he was given the option to come to Australia on a ship to a penal colony there, do his sentence and maybe start a new life. He is 26, he's got a big heart and he's a very genuine, nice guy – I think he's just been down on his luck. He's managed to forge a very strong friendship with Tommy Barrett, played by Julian Rhind-Tutt, on the way over. They both love the same woman and have a deep connection with her - Elizabeth Quinn, played by MyAnna Buring. But the best man won her, Tommy. They put these potentially conflicting feelings aside and become a strong team. The power of their love and deep bonds of friendship mean they all hang out together and look out for each other in this dangerous new environment.

What's the moral scheme in this world?

They're in a world where for convicts, unless you're married, you don't get a woman. All the women belong to the soldiers. These are sex-starved men that are working for little food, in boiling hot sunshine, with no pleasures. So their existence is fraught; there's a lot of aggression, there's a lot of pent up frustration. It's a sad time, but what's wonderful about it as well is that they feel like they're the first fleet, the first settlers: there is opportunity here to start again, to reinvent yourself.

How much of this history did you know beforehand?

Not a lot, but doing this has made me fascinated with the period. You walk around Sydney itself, as I did when we filmed out there, and you see where Governor Phillip

had his courthouse, where Reverend Johnson gave his first sermon; now there are little plaques just next to H&M and Subway! It's intoxicatingly fascinating that Sydney actually happened, and in the space of 250 years, all of that city has been created – yet it was begun by the people that we're playing. That's an incredible achievement that these "felons" that would have been hanged in Britain. Seen as rats at home these people flourished in extreme conditions on the other side of the planet. Hopefully this show will open up that period in history, because we're not taught it in the UK, and I think it's going to encourage a lot of discussions.

To what extent is the landscape, the bush, a character or a presence in Banished?

Huge – the bush is what contains these people; it is the prison wall. It is the unknown. It is No Man's Land. So at any point anyone could run, and people do run and try to escape. But predominately, if they don't die, they come back because it's too scary out there. If you run out of water... it's game over. If you run away in the UK, you at least understand the environment, but in the bush you'd hear noises and see things that you would have no conception of. It's like you don't know if you're going to turn a corner and there's going to be a dinosaur. It's that sort of place for these people, so the bush is a humongous threat. Ironically, it's the safety of the prison camp, of the convict settlement, that keeps these people sane.

What skills have you acquired through pretending to be in hard labour?

I've wielded an axe, and I've hacked a log in half. I mean, come on, that's big time! I'm definitely going to use that in Old Street, East London. I've picked up something called a Moreton Bay bug, which looks like a Trilobite. You know those fossils? Well, they actually exist, alive, now, and they're gross. One of the crew was bitten by a mouse spider, and we thought it was a funnel web, which is one of the deadliest spiders. I actually saw a dead funnel web. So my nature skills, particularly in relation to avoiding certain death, have improved a lot!

What was it like filming in Australia?

It was lovely. It's a predominantly British cast, though there are four or five Australians who have been wonderful, with flawless English accents. What's fascinating is that an 'Australian' accent wouldn't have existed at this time, so the modern Australian accent comes from an amalgamation of all of the British Isles' accents stuck together. In Australia we filmed at Manly Dam, which was beautiful, totally picturesque. Just being there gives it a certain concentration because you don't go home at night to your 'normal' life. We were there as a gang to work. It's been a very strong bonding process and now we're a close cast.

Joanna Vanderham

Kitty McVitie

Can you describe Kitty for us?

In my imaginings, Kitty has worked as a housemaid for at least six years. She started work when she was really young, perhaps at 12 years old and her life has been very limited and sheltered: she's never had a relationship with a man and comes from a close family. I've imagined that she is the oldest of all of her siblings and her dream has been to one day leave service and be married and have a family of her own. This is her sustaining hope and desire in life. But the likelihood of this happening becomes an ever fading fantasy when she is convicted for allegedly stealing from her employer Lord Campbell of Weymouth, and is wrenched from the world she knows and carted off to faraway Australia. This is when we met Kitty and this trauma has understandably made her pretty fragile. On the ship over Kitty in her innocence has found a soldier, Private MacDonald [Ryan Corr], who she believes will cherish and look after her. She thinks she loves him. But as events unfold her love for him is challenged and Kitty becomes less than enamoured about the man MacDonald becomes.

The story is set in a very specific historical moment. What makes it universal?

The story is so universal because the characters are so real. You meet them and it's impossible not to want to spend time with them and find out what happens to them. The scene is set in eighteenth century Australia, but the people and their stories resonate in the modern day because we care so deeply about them and what happens to them.

What did you make of Jimmy McGovern's script?

His writing is phenomenal. At the end of a scene, he will just say put: "Kitty's face," or "Ross's look." He won't say, "with concern," or "with angst." He trusts that the actor knows what the scene is about and where the story is going and how to express it and having this freedom as an actor from such an inspirational writer is a real gift.

What was it like filming in Australia?

It has been great fun. I think the fact that we've all been on location together was important, so we spent a lot more time together outside the set. It really helped when you would then come on to set and be about to do a scene. There was one example with Ryan when we were doing a scene together and we were under a lot of time pressure. We were on the beach and the tide was coming in and the camera was practically being washed away, Dan [Percival, Director] needed to go and be with the camera department yet Ryan and I were able to just say to each other, "This is what we want to do with this scene, right?" We'd got to know each other so well, the scenes could just work.

Orla Brady

Anne Meredith

When you read the scripts for Banished what was your response?

It felt novelistic. With each character I came across, I wanted to come back to their story. I had no favourites and was intrigued to follow each story again.

Who is Anne Meredith?

She is described in the script as mysterious, enigmatic. When you play a part you would never describe yourself in those terms because your motives are clear to you. But I accept that Anne is a character who is apart from the others. She is not Christian in spite of Christianity being a given in the colony at that time. Anne has a different way seeing. Her beliefs are akin to what we would now call Pantheist, or Animist in the sense of everything having a soul. Anne believes that she speaks to the dead and that she is a conduit that can bring messages from the dead and even the unborn. Standing outside the moral code of her time, she is not a character which the others find easy to understand, hence there is suspicion and fear of her, especially from the vicar.

Anne has a close relationship with Mrs Johnson. Is she manipulating her?

When there is a person who is without power, status or wealth and they form a relationship with somebody who can possibly do them favours, it will always be viewed cynically by some. I think there is a very real bond between these women. I think Anne genuinely notices a sadness within Mrs Johnson, and her intuition is to encourage Mrs Johnson to speak of her loss, to change her perspective on it. It's the only relationship between two women in the show and I think a very real connection. Jimmy McGovern writes these great female characters. He seems to be inside the mind and heart of a woman and know what's going on in there.

Everyone in the colony is there to work, what is Anne's job?

Anne and Kitty are washerwomen and cooks, so we do women's work in a tough environment. Washing, of course, was terribly, terribly harsh because you barely had warm water. Cooking just meant rustling up endless pancakes. I could make you one now if you wanted, in a minute. It's basically maize meal with weevils in there to provide protein!

What was the highlight of your time in Australia?

There are so many...like paddle-boarding in the harbour before work. But I have to go with a volleyball game on the beach. It was Establishment versus Convicts. So soldiers, housekeeper, Governor, made up one volleyball team and all the convicts the other. Obviously the convicts won – we're tougher!

Rory McCann

Marston

Who is Marston?

Marston is a convict and a blacksmith by trade. I don't know what his crime was but I am pretty sure it was violent, what with his temper! He's a woman hater and a very angry guy. You could call him a bad guy but as with everyone else he's just looking out for himself. It's a game of survival and he's given a job that you can't shirk. When you are dealing with molten metal you have got to go full force; there is only one speed and that's full speed ahead and he's probably seen guys that haven't really worked in physical labour before and aren't working as hard as him. He resents that - he is burning up all these calories and so he feels that he is justified in stealing other people's food. He also knows his worth. Marston knows the establishment have made a mistake making him the only blacksmith in this community. It makes him indispensable. It's a get out of jail free card for him.

How did you prepare to play an 18th Century blacksmith?

I have got friends who are blacksmiths up in the North of Scotland, so I took a few master classes off them and I learnt. I really loved that, learning a new skill. I will never look at a piece of wrought iron the same way now, without trying to imagine how they made it in a forge. In fact I can now make semi-decent knife blades and candlesticks myself. I left school to be a lumberjack but with hindsight I can see me being a blacksmith.

What was the forge like on the Banished set?

It was a working forge. The producers could have pretended, put a little gas fire underneath and everything but it was all absolutely real - they brought on a blacksmith there to look at it and he was very impressed. The design team even found some original bellows and an anvil from the 1700s - there was a right good chance that anvil was used by a convict blacksmith.

How did you find working in Australia?

Too bloody hot! And sharks in the water. But it helped being there. I live out in the country in Scotland and I know that if I close my eyes and just listen, I know every bird and I can recognise every sound. On that film set in Australia it felt so alien - there were all these mad screeching noises. I didn't take much imagination to feel like you were in another world. Then I read a couple of history books and it just makes you realise what they went through.

Ned Dennehy

Letters Molloy

Who is Letters Malloy and how does he fit in to the story?

Letters Malloy is a convict. He happens to be the one who's quite educated. He can read, so he reads and writes other people's letters for them. He's really quite saintly, very unassuming, no ego; his main concern is helping other people. I call him a saint and a scholar - and also a little bit of a liar. Let's just say that when somebody gets a letter that says, "I'm leaving you for another man," Letters reads it out as, "I will always be true to you my darling." But his main concern is other people's welfare, so he's trying to make harsh reality into something a little bit more palatable and that's what gets him into trouble along the line.

What struck you most about the life the convicts had to endure?

Food and sex, those are the two fundamental human requirements and there was a shortage of both. It's that simple.

Did you learn any skills in the making of the series?

I had calligraphy classes. I used to be an architect and I have a bit of an artistic background, so it was wonderful to add a little bit of calligraphy to my CV, pen and ink, even if I don't think we're likely to see it on camera!

How did you find your time out in Australia?

We were in a place called Manly, on the northern beaches and it's all about the outdoors there. You get to the set not far away and it's amazing because you've got all these kookaburras and all these birds wandering around. Some of the birds make just the weirdest noises. You could be in an emotional scene pouring your heart out and the next thing you just hear a sound like Kenneth Williams saying, 'Oh Matron!' I kid you not, some of the birds in Australia sound like Kenneth Williams! You can't take that seriously, so several times in the middle of emotional scenes we'd have to stop and start again. Me, I was worried about sharks, because I do a lot of swimming and I love the sea. There was a bit of a language barrier: Australians say, "Well, a bloke was taken there last week mate." "What do you mean, 'taken'? Taken where?" "Taken mate. Eaten. Taken means eaten by a shark". All in all it was quite a relief for me to get back home to swimming in the Irish Sea. It's cold but at least you're unlikely to be taken.

Nick Moss*Spragg***Describe Spragg**

My invented back story is that his crime back home was some sort of active rebellion against authority, because he seems to be that way inclined. He always seeks social justice and has a strong moral compass, which is ironic because he's now found himself in a world of criminality. It means that when it comes to living in the camp his story is all to do with the politics of the camp. He is a believer in the common good, and he instigates a kind of protest against the amount of food that the convicts are receiving. Of course, the truth is that this isn't a place for principles - it's a place of opportunism, foraging, survival and making do.

What did you make of the scripts?

I was blown away by them. I'm a big Jimmy McGovern fan; I've done about four or five things for him over the years including *Accused*, *The Street* and *Hillsborough* all of which were contemporary dramas. To see Jimmy's take on events in the eighteenth century and create a new fictional world there was really exciting.

What would you say the series is about, thematically?

It's about the formation of a society and we see that all the challenges the characters face would be the same today like have we all got enough to eat and is there social justice? Jimmy looks at big themes: how power is implemented, how the group is controlled, how a new society can be encouraged to grow and what it is to be human.

What most struck you in your research about this period of history?

The severity of life back then, how brutal it was. I was reading about the history before these guys left. There was no industry, not many skilled jobs; so there was a massive underclass fighting tooth and nail for survival without any state aid or help. When you think of that you realise how easy it would have been to become a convict. Anyone could have ended up in Australia for stealing a loaf of bread.

David Walmsley

William Stubbins

Describe Stubbins

William Stubbins is one of the convicts. We never find out why he has been sent to prison but as was the case for many on the First Fleet, a seven year jail term could be handed out for petty theft. He made a mistake which completely turned his life upside down and sent him to the far side of the world.

What is his story in Banished?

Stubbins like most ordinary working people then is illiterate, but he's been given a letter from his wife back home. He's been unable to read it on the passage from England to Australia. So he gets one of his fellow convicts, Letters Molloy, played by Ned Dennehy, to read it for him. Stubbins is told that the letter says his wife will always wait for him and her love will never die. Letters Molloy hasn't got the heart to say what the letter really says. So William Stubbins is under a wonderful illusion that his wife is waiting for him back home. This gives him hope while he's a prisoner in this alien world. We wonder whether he will ever find out the truth of the letter. In the meantime he takes up as the camp's blacksmith. It takes years off his sentence which, of course, he's doubly happy about.

How are your blacksmith's skills?

We had a few sessions with Alex, our on-site blacksmith, which were brilliant. We were working with authentic 18th century bellows and a fully functional old style forge. We learnt about how to use the forge, how to use a hammer effectively, how to strike the anvil, how to hit the metal, how to shape metal and how to judge the heat necessary for the job we were doing. We learned how to make miner's candlesticks, which were basically coiled pieces of metal with a spike on the end, which miners would hammer into the walls of the mine to keep their candles in. I managed to make a knife (of sorts) but unfortunately I wasn't able to bring it back to the UK. Customs, you see!

Most of your character's story takes place with Letters Molloy. How does that relationship play out?

It's a friendship that you might not expect. This older Irish geezer and this younger lad. Their friendship begins through Stubbins' letter, but unfortunately the letter holds a secret. We know Letters Molloy withholds information from Stubbins with the best intentions, but they do hit a rocky patch. I think their friendship is really touching. The bulk of my scenes were with Ned and he was brilliant to act alongside.

David Wenham

Governor Arthur Phillip

Why did you want to play Governor Phillip?

This is a terrific project to be involved in. I'm Australian and from this side of the world where Arthur Phillip is held in very high esteem, an amazing man who had a huge impact on this country and its future.

How would you characterise Phillip?

I'd describe Phillip as a modern man. I think he was way ahead of his time in lots of ways. His thinking was very egalitarian. He wanted to start a society here that was based on a form of equality. His thinking about the indigenous population was also way ahead of its time - and in fact way ahead of a lot of people's thinking even now. He was somebody with great vision, with great foresight, and he was somebody who was also a compassionate man. I see him as a visionary.

What is his story as told in Banished?

Banished is a sweeping ensemble piece and at the core of the cast are the emotional threads between Tommy, James and Elizabeth. I think that Phillip's role in this particular series is as the man who has to cope with the moral dilemmas of the piece. He has to decide in this new, frontier land whether the rules of England actually do work or whether it's better for him to change some of those rules to start a society with laws that are a little bit more flexible. For the greater good and the bigger picture he sometimes has to make some pretty heavy sacrifices and big decisions. They're never simply questions of moral absolutes – it's never black and white - and the matters they are dealing with are not little things: they are people's lives.

What did you know of Governor Phillip and this period of history beforehand?

In this part of the world everybody is taught about this period of history when we go to school. However, the way that it's taught to us is – well, back in my day anyhow - sort of by rote learning. It was never taught in a captivating or interesting way. So my recollection of it was not terribly good. However, after having read the script and then embarking on rather a lot of reading myself - I think I'm up to fifth book on Phillip at the moment and now realise it's an incredible part of our history, much more visceral and exciting and brutal and dramatic than I could ever have imagined.

The thing that struck me more than anything, particularly with Phillip, was that they seemed to have been able to squeeze lifetimes into their short years back then. By the time he'd reached Australia he had already been around the world a number of times. He'd worked in South America, he'd been a spy in France for up to a year; he worked on a whaling boat when he was nine in Scandinavia... extraordinary stuff. I only can but admire what he did.

What is his relationship with Major Ross?

I suppose in a way Ross is Phillip's nemesis. He was a real-life character here, who quite possibly could have got the soldiers to rebel against Phillip's governorship. Phillip was certainly very well aware of that, and so in order to keep Ross and the soldiers on side he had to walk a very fine line and make some very tricky calls.

What have you made of Jimmy McGovern's scripts?

There's one particular sequence that's very difficult to talk about without actually giving it away but it was something that I've never actually come across before. There are maybe 14 or 15 characters in this ensemble and in that one particular sequence Jimmy McGovern seamlessly brings together all the storylines and all the characters without you being aware of him actually doing it. It's only retrospectively that you think, 'Oh my God, he's actually got that character doing that at that time, and that character doing *that*, completely seamlessly.' It's a remarkable achievement.

What else about Jimmy's writing?

He has the ability to be able to create characters very colourfully, very clearly and succinctly, without fluff, without stuff that's extraneous - he goes straight for the meat of the characters. And especially with a story like this, which is so inherently dramatic, for him to be able to effortlessly draw those characters is brilliant.

How was it to film much of this story in Sydney, where it actually took place?

Well for me it's wonderful because I live here. I haven't filmed in Sydney I don't think for about five years, so it's a great joy for me to be able to wrap at night and be able to go home to my family. But living here has also given me lots to think about with regard to this story we're telling. I went to the Mitchell Library here and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which has some wonderful paintings of Sydney Cove 20 years after settlement. It's remarkable, just geographically how similar Manly Cove, where we have built and filmed the camp, looks to Sydney Cove back then - art department, locations, and production design have done a remarkable job. But most of all you look at those paintings that were painted only 20 years after our story and already you see the development that occurred thanks to convict labour, and a lot of them were unskilled. What they achieved within that time period was phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal.

Brooke Harman

Housekeeper Deborah

Introduce us to your character

I play Deborah, the Governor's housekeeper. She's his confidante and they spend a lot of time together. He really values her opinion and I think he displays a great deal of humility and consideration towards her. That's what she really finds attractive in him. They have a really mature understanding of each other.

Is it too simplistic to describe it as they are in love?

Well, perhaps there's some mutual attraction. I think when someone's taking care of you and is just there for you... it creates a special bond. Not necessarily in a romantic way but in the sense of enjoying a mutual respect and trust. I suppose this might develop into something more but who's to say? You never really know about these sorts of friendships - it could go either way. They both have partners elsewhere. She has a husband at sea and in those days people had long periods away from their spouses; it was just part of life, both expected and accepted. That said I think that there are truly special feelings between Deborah and the Governor.

Why is she there?

I think that because her husband is at sea Australia seemed to be an adventure and it gives her an occupation. She's an intelligent woman who wants to experience the fullness of life although whether she could know how brutal and unforgiving the daily grind would be in the new colony is anyone's guess. I think she's brave and takes it as it comes.

As an Australian what does this story mean to you?

Banished is an unimaginable story of survival against the odds. How modern Australia came to be is fascinating to me and our show takes you into the lives of those who came on the First Fleet. I just look at where we're at now as a nation and while accepting there have been big mistakes and terrible wrongs along the way, I'm just in awe that we've come as far as we have given the shocking conditions of those early settlers.

Ewen Bremner*Reverend Stephen Johnson***Who is Reverend Johnson?**

Reverend Johnson is based on the minister who accompanied the First Fleet to Australia in the 1780s. He was part of the first settlement of the penal colony. Reverend Johnson was sourced from a variety of candidates in Britain to leave his life behind and enter this uncharted, unknown world. His task was to take care of God's flock and establish a spiritual base for this group of soldiers and convicts. In a lot of ways it was a thankless task. Spiritual wellbeing was a little further down the totem pole of what the soldiers and convicts needed in their lives, such as food, for example!

How does his story progress?

The Reverend's main predicament in Jimmy's story is to establish a church in this new world. Somehow he has to enlist the support of starving convicts and disgruntled soldiers to help him, literally, build it. He also has to establish, within this fledgling society, a spiritual domain, a territory that he can protect. His mission clashes with all the other needs that are fighting for dominance. For example Major Ross's wants military authority and protection his men whereas the Governor's agenda is to establish a safe and civilized community. All three of them are fighting to protect their spheres of influence.

How important is the historical context in understanding his position?

In that day and age, in the 1700s, the church was so much more powerful and a central force in people's lives. This is hard to imagine today. As the minister of this first church and the only spiritual authority in this new world, the Reverend Johnson has quite a position of influence over people's consciences. The majority of the community appreciate the guidance – he's a kind of connection with God and somebody that can provide meaning and hope in their lives. They appreciate this solace in such times of traumatic adversity.

Have you had to commit large tranches of the Bible to memory for the role?

I did have to get on top of the biblical meaning of certain passages and prayers and really enjoyed them. Jimmy's chosen specific prayers that resonate profoundly in particular scenes. I think they reflect his world, his own background and upbringing, and his own quest for meaning.

You've worked with Jimmy McGovern before. What is it about his writing that stands out?

Jimmy McGovern's work is always full of empathy to a degree that no other writer I've read achieves. He's incapable of writing characters that are unlovable. Even in this story when people do appalling, unacceptable deeds - you still feel empathy for them. I think that's a seam that runs through all of his work. There is, in my opinion, a

biblical seed at the root of all his work and, to me, it's summarised in that commandment, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.' You are always presented with somebody you want to feel badly about or great about, but within twenty minutes you've completely changed your mind about them. I believe his philosophy is that none of us are free from sin, but we're all capable of love and doing the right thing but sometimes the wrong way.

Genevieve O'Reilly

Mrs Mary Johnson

Who is Mary Johnson?

Mary is the wife of Reverend Johnson. Her husband was given this post, he accepted it and she has come with him. I don't think she resents that at all - I think she and her husband have a very strong respect for each other. She loves him dearly. Also they have suffered some deep losses in their lives, so this post offers them the opportunity to leave some of that sorrow behind and to devote themselves to what is essentially missionary activity. They've come with Bibles and educational tools in the hope of offering the convicts some pathways for a better future in this new world.

How is her faith challenged as the story unfolds?

Her faith is challenged through communication, through a connection in particular with Anne Meredith. What Anne sees in Mary is sadness. What Anne offers Mary is someone who listens. It is through talking with Anne about her loss that Mary allows herself to think outside the confines of the church dogma that she has been immersed in. This eases her pain.

What attracted you to the role?

The scripts. I have been a fan of Jimmy McGovern and his writing for a long time, since *The Lakes*, *The Street* and *Accused*. He writes real people and from selfish point of view he writes women beautifully.

How did you find filming in Sydney?

It was glorious. I used to live in Sydney. I went to drama school in Sydney and cut my teeth as an actor in Sydney, so essentially I see myself as an Australian actor. I am Irish but we moved to Australia when I was young; so I think that makes me an Irish Australian. But really I'm an Australian actor. I worked for a number of years in Sydney at different theatres, different studios and locations but I'd never shot in the northern beaches where we shot *Banished*. I used to live in the suburb of Manly and we were filming at Manly Dam, just around the corner from my old flat. That was pretty special.

What have you learned about the history that you didn't know before?

What I've learned is that, in all probability, this would never have been a successful mission if it hadn't been for Governor Phillip and his vision. He was so rigorous in the preparation of the ships that were to make up *The First Fleet* - he stalled their departure a number of times until as many as possible of his recommendations were met. Many more people died during voyages of subsequent fleets. But hardly anyone did under his stewardship and on top of this feat he was an exceptional leader. History remembers Phillip as a hero on sea and on land. He was an extraordinary human being.

David Dawson

Captain David Collins

Describe your character

I play Captain David Collins, a young officer who has been sent to Australia as The First Fleet's Judge Advocate. He is responsible for the colony's entire legal establishment. He has to sit in court and together with Governor Phillip decide on the best action to take on each matter and the level of punishment appropriate. He and Phillip also have the power to increase or shorten a convict's stay.

How does Collins deal with the convicts?

He applies to the convicts the mantra he has for his own men - that they should be punished or rewarded in equal measure according to their behaviour. And so in Australia, he and Mrs Johnson begin a literacy class for those they decide worthy of bettering themselves. As far as punishment goes, whether it be flogging or worse, Collins (unlike Major Ross) believes that a convict guilty of a crime should receive only the necessary punishment that the law requires and no more.

How does he change as the story progresses?

He arrives in Australia thinking that the convicts under their control are simply criminals, bad people that England wishes to rid from its shores. The amazing thing through the series is that Collins begins to struggle with this belief and realises things are not so black and white and he starts to deal with the convicts as human beings.

What drew you to the role?

I took this job because I became fascinated with this man's story. How do you cope with having to leave your wife and children and all that you know in England, being sent on an eight month voyage to the ends of the earth knowing it will be years until you see your family again? And then to arrive in unbearable heat and be told to keep control some 1,000 criminals indefinitely and with limited food. It is a unique story to tell, one of survival both physically, and of the human spirit. Each character does what they think best to survive, and Jimmy writes each character warts and all.

What did you learn about soldiers of this time?

On arriving in Australia all the actors had a week with a military advisor, Mark Koens, which was brilliant. We were taken through drills outside in the baking hot sun. Usefully Mark made both Joseph Millson [Major Ross] and I learn the hard way as privates before we became officers. The uniforms they wore are heavy - you realised how tough it would be in such scorching heat. Another challenge I relished was that as an officer you have a duty to show no emotion to your men, to show no doubt in a decision. I loved exploring the Captain Collins on duty in the camp as opposed to the personal man relaxed in his tent or in the Governor Phillip's company.

Joseph Millson

Major Ross

Who is Major Ross?

He is a very experienced major in the British marines at the time, who's clearly fought here, there and everywhere. Jimmy McGovern gave me the best advice about his character, which is that 90% of the people around him disgust him and the other 10% are his interiors. He's able to do his job and maintain tight discipline because to him these convicts are not human beings, they're rats. It's like he's in his gentlemen's club – he's totally relaxed. He's so confident in his superiority, he's got nothing to prove to anyone in the colony.

What does Ross make of Governor Phillip?

Phillip is a very liberal governor and of course that's everything Ross doesn't appreciate. It's not a political thing. He's only worried because he thinks Phillip's liberalism is dangerous. In Ross's opinion Governor Phillip's is not strict enough about the food, the rations and meting out punishment. Major Ross's worry is that such an approach will lead to his soldiers getting hurt, hungry or dead. But interestingly, by the end, these men respect each other. It's just the most beautifully written piece.

What makes Ross more than just a pantomime villain?

He takes pride in his job, he's exceptionally good at it and his sense of duty is absolute. Major Ross is an honourable man and a decent, upright person, and is totally committed to his profession. He loves his men. Every day, he just wants to keep his promise to his men, and get them home safely. Get in, get the pay-cheque and get home. Ross is like a well oiled machine, he's a perfectionist. If he takes a shave, it is the most perfect shave somebody could ever take. I'm the only one who has clean fingernails in this entire cast, and I think that says a lot!

How did you find maintaining that level of grooming in a thick costume in Australia?

It's hot. But I got used to it. But it's tricky at certain times like when you've been on walking on sandy beaches in period boots. I had to carry a 12 stone man for a lot of takes and even after a hundred yards of carrying him, in the heat, was no fun. But that said these experiences are all helpful for understanding how they actually would have lived.

What is Banished about as a whole?

It's like extreme Georgian Big Brother with unbelievably good dialogue.

Cal MacAninch

Sergeant Timmins

Who is Timmins?

Timmins is a professional marine in the Royal Navy. He's been "a soldier of the sea" a long time and the fact he's survived so long shows he's extraordinarily resourceful and resilient. I'd thought of many back stories for him but the one I really liked, and that that Jimmy really liked too was that Timmins sailed with Captain Cook. There were some ten marines with Cook when he was butchered in Hawaii and only three of them got back to the ship, so I had the idea that Timmins was one of those survivors. Subsequently he has this guilt about losing his commanding officer, so that would set up nicely the idea of how he feels about Major Ross. Timmins is compelled to support Ross even though he doesn't like some of the things his commanding officer does.

What was your reaction to the scripts?

Jimmy McGovern's name was attached and reading the script was the start of a great adventure. The breadth of the characters and the depth of the story are so compelling. It's dark and it's sexy and it's violent and everything I wanted it to be.

What did it mean to be a marine at the time?

They were and still are the Royal Navy's elite infantry fighting force. The idea of them having to protect the colonists must have driven them insane - they'd have been more used to combat and conflict, being mere guards must have felt a bit beneath them. But equally they were all volunteers; so on some level they must have been looking for adventure and the new opportunities life in Australia might eventually bring.

Did you have to learn to fire a musket?

They're called firelocks, please! I did do a day's firelock training before filming and then it turns out I don't fire one – I get a sword instead! What's fascinating is that so many terms that have come in to common parlance stem from the military. Several like 'hang fire' and 'sideburns,' come from musketry. For 'sideburns,' they grew the hair on the faces because when they were standing in close rank to fire the firelock they would burn each other's faces - so they grew sideburns.

What would be the main goal for a marine like Timmins?

Survival I think is key. They're all just trying to survive as well as they possibly can, because they don't know what is going to happen next. Back then some of the marines were promised land if they stayed for a year, so I quite like the idea Timmins retiring to become a farmer when his duty is served.

Ryan Corr

Private MacDonald

Who is MacDonald?

He's a soldier from a working class background who's been in the military since he was a young lad. He would've been the star in his family as he's reached a position in society that's deemed quite high - he's done really well for himself. But as well as being a soldier he's also a human being, and when the story begins he's fallen in love with a female convict called Kitty on the ship over. This chance happenings sets up a conflict between MacDonald and his superior officer Major Ross. Jimmy (McGovern) told me it's not beyond the realm of possibility that there were these kind of power struggles of the heart and head - when a superior officer might challenge the subordinate for their lover, or use his rank to try and move in on her.

How did you become involved?

Although I'm Australian I knew Jimmy's work very well: he'd worked on Redfern Now, which is a monumental series he been involved with down in Australia; it really changed the way Australian drama is viewed and made. I knew he was a God over in the UK, so if ever Jimmy's name is attached to anything you really want to do it. Plus the colonisation of Australia is a story that hasn't been tapped in to. It bridges both the UK world and the Australian world and finds that our early colonial history is something we have in common. As such it's a great basis for drama.

What's it been like for an Aussie playing an Englishman in a drama about the foundation of Australia?

My main goal is that I convince British viewers that I'm from south east England. We had a dialect coach, Danielle Roffe, for the first two months during pre-production so we could be right on the money, and be detailed and specific about where our accents and dialects were from. I think it plays so much into this series - it's very much about a class system and where characters sit on the hierarchical ladder in that Georgian world. Accents are a vital part of that - it's really important that we know where they're from and what that says about the character.

What training did you have to play an 18th-century soldier?

We had a number of weeks with a specialist military adviser Mark Koens. Any question you had, this guy was on to it! Just as you want the accent to be perfect you also want the physicality of the soldiers to be second nature. Simple things like how to salute and who to salute to, the different levels of saluting and so on. So much of the military back then was about display and regimentation. So for weeks we'd go out and start our days with three hours of military training - literally drilling. And then, of course, there were the costumes – so many layers! We had neckerchiefs, boots over socks over more boots; waistcoats on top of your shirt... It meant we were always working in major heat, but I suppose that helped placed us in the reality of the world - they would've been bloody hot!

Jordan Patrick Smith

Private Mulrooney

Who are you playing?

Private Mulrooney is the puppy dog of the group. He's the youngest, and it's his first time away from home. The other soldiers are experienced in battle but he isn't. He's been given the opportunity to be Major Ross's batman; so he's kind of the Major's go-to guy. I think Mulrooney idolises Major Ross and wants to follow in his footsteps. But at the moment he's more like his squire: he shaves him and helps Major Ross with all his domestic tasks. Although Mulrooney is very innocent and naive about camp life, he's learning all the time.

How did your training in marine boot camp help?

It did make you feel like part of a unit, especially when you put the jacket on. Being together for those weeks and it all being so regimented did make us feel different to the convicts. Because we trained so hard in the manner of real marines we did develop a comradeship and felt like a unit. Although the cocked hat was a pain in the back because unless you stood up straight it kept falling off. And you weren't allowed to take the red coat off, ever. Just like the real marines back then.

You're from Scotland but you live in Australia. What did you know of this history?

My first ever school project was actually on Australia, but when it came to the history side of things I knew very little, just when the convicts first arrived and that there were hardships. I didn't realise how tough it was. Banished has made me appreciate what they must have gone through and how hard surviving day to day must have been. When I arrived in Australia – my family moved there when I was young - there was just everything on your doorstep waiting for you. When these guys rocked up it was just bush.

Australia is renowned for its deadly wildlife. What was the safety brief like on set?

The briefing was the scariest thing I've ever heard of in Australia. I've lived here for 13 years and it terrified me. They told us nine of the ten deadliest animals in the world live...right here!

Adam Nagaitis

Private Buckley

Who is Buckley?

He's an outsider and has a lot of issues. This means he stays away from everybody else and he's isolated and this leads to some interesting behaviour. I think Buckley's just come out to find something in life. He's travelled for nine months at sea and he thinks maybe he'll be a hero, maybe he'll be like Captain Cook, do something remarkable in his life. But being with a small group of people, the same people every day, in this isolated environment with the ocean on one side and the bush on the other, means your reputation follows you around and your actions have consequences.

What is his attitude to the female convicts?

In the world that Jimmy's created the soldiers essentially have sexual rights to all the female convicts who aren't married, and they pleasure themselves with them. Both the soldiers and the convict men share the unmarried female convicts. But Buckley doesn't have anyone and he's not allowed to share - you never find out why though. It seems there's been a selection and allocation process when the fleet first arrived but for some reason he missed out. As Buckley's driving force is a need for companionship, he's is desperately lonely and needs a friend and someone to love like everybody else.

How important was costume and deportment to getting in to character?

Wearing a Royal Navy marine's uniform had a huge effect on me. I learnt how soldiers held themselves and why. Certain postures were adopted because the firelocks - later known as a musket or rifle - were loaded at all times. This meant the soldiers never relaxed because they were always responsible for a loaded weapon. These men had to have real strength in their shoulders and backs just to hold their muskets straight. When saluting they had to avoid knocking their hats off - so wore them at an angle. Believe me marching around Australia in heavy woollen uniforms with weapons feels really restricting, but back then the soldiers were starving, dehydrated, exhausted...it gives you a glimpse, just a glimpse, of what it must have been like for those First Fleet soldiers!