

## **Jack Hedley : “What I liked best about drama school were the girls.”**

*The series “Who Pays the Ferryman?” which was filmed in Crete, was a great success. And not least due to the brilliant acting of Jack Hedley (Alan Haldane). Jack Hedley was in Amsterdam by invitation from Privé where we discovered that hidden beneath his cool demeanour of the successful businessman lies a passionate interest for beautiful women.*

Together we wander around a foggy Amsterdam, Jack Hedley - lead actor in “Who Pays the Ferryman?”- and I. On the Leidseplein he stops and looks around in the same disparaging manner as he regards the Cretan countryside in the series.

He is a man who has seen it all and will not be easily impressed by anything, especially not our half demolished, chilly capital city.

In his tailored, pinstriped suit he resembles a successful businessman, and that is what he really is: a businessman who exploits and cleverly invests his acting talents. He combined the invitation to visit our country with a number of appointments with business relations and he is more inclined to talk about his promotional work for a well-known Japanese car brand than his work as an actor.

That may not sound very nice, but when you have been associating with this self-assured man for a few days you soon notice that, besides being intelligent he is also sympathetic, although he hides this beneath his cool exterior. And that is not all he hides: he is also greatly interested in women. He will be on the jury of the Miss England competition in London soon.

Jack says: “What I liked best about drama school were the girls. There were many and on the whole very attractive. I liked having them around. I was 26 and up till then had lived in the men’s world of the navy.”

A bit later on he speaks full of admiration about Sophia Loren. “To know her is to love her. I played opposite her in a film once and for the part I had to spend two weeks in bed with her. Every morning when Sophia appeared on the set she would wink at me and say “ Are you coming to bed with me Jack? But the most sensual woman I have ever seen in the whole of my life was someone I met in a London club. Incredibly sexy. She turned out to be Christine Keeler.”

The look on his face indicates that he feels much sympathy for Lord Profumo, who lost his seat in parliament due to this call girl.

What does Jack Hedley think of co-star Betty Arvaniti ( Annika) after working with her for three months in Crete? His reaction is non-committal. Assures us that she is very photogenic, suggesting that she doesn’t quite come up to scratch .... no, he is not very impressed with Greek women.

Jack Hedley is 48 years old and has been married for 15 years. He has two children, boys, 3 and 6 years old. “Initially I did not want children, in my opinion the world is no place for them, but they arrived just the same. When my wife fell pregnant it did not please me and even now I find being a father and bringing

them up difficult. Take education for instance, it is totally different from what we had. What I learnt at school seems like nonsense now. We live in a hard world and everything is constantly changing. No, I do not want my children to become actors. Showbiz children are frightful. My children once watched an episode of *The Ferryman* and instantly became hysterical because they thought I had gone off with another woman. In another film they saw me being hanged and were very upset. They are better off not seeing my films, I don't like to watch myself either. I stopped doing that ten years ago.

I haven't seen myself in *Ferryman* at all. Deliberately. I feel embarrassed when I see myself act and keep on thinking, "This could have been better or that's no good." In the rushes I can see that I lost a lot of weight in Greece. I look thinner in each episode.

That is because I do not like Greek food which was a good thing really because I tend to become overweight quite quickly.

How did I meet my wife? She was an assistant producer. Shortly after we met she left for Bermuda and stayed away for a year. When she returned she rang me up and I invited her out for dinner. While we were seated at the table I suddenly heard someone say: "Let's get married." I looked around and then realised I had said it myself. We have a good marriage but I am not the romantic type who comes home with roses. No one does that these days do they? They do in Holland? That does surprise me. I never write to my wife when I am away filming on location and that happens often, sometimes for months on end. I ring her up sometimes. What should we say to each other? We have been married for so long." My wife is a go-getter. She is a racing car driver and won an English championship two years ago."

A group of students from Leiden, who have been observing us for some time, suddenly come rushing over to our table by the window in "*American*". While he is signing the inevitable autographs, Jack appraises them coolly one by one and asks after their study results. More admiring students gather outside. Wherever he goes Jack is instantly recognised and admired by girls and women who do not hesitate to address him.

In his businesslike manner Jack continues the conversation. "*The Ferryman*" was in actual fact one huge advertising campaign for Greece lasting for eight hours. That cost me money. I was supposed to make a commercial for Olympic Airways, but that was cancelled because tourism from England had already doubled.

Jack has travelled far and wide during his life, first as a marine and later as an actor. He tells his life story in a nutshell:

"I was born in London, my father was a doctor. I grew up during the war, went to the Naval Academy and became an officer in a warzone. I fought in India and Korea and I am familiar with the whole Middle East. I also fought on Sumatra. Like us you Dutch couldn't hold onto the colonies either," he adds compassionately. "I fought side by side with the Dutch on Sumatra.

I helped to ship refugees from Palestine to England but because I kept getting terribly seasick I changed over to the marines. At the age of 18 I was in command of 48 men. I was hit twice in my leg in Korea. The first was just a flesh wound; the bullet flew out on the other side. The second time was much more

serious. I was shot in my knee. Normally you can't take another step but I made a 20 meter run to the cover of shrubbery to get out of the line of gunfire. Incredible. I still get ten pounds war compensation every week.

After a long while I finally met a nice woman in Singapore. She was an army officer and I thought she wonderful. We were getting to know each other when the train was attacked from the air causing so much confusion that I never saw her again. The first thing I did after my return to England was getting a degree in history. That was the start of my passion for reading. My one and only hobby since then is reading, the more the better.

I wanted to go back to Japan where I had been for two years before- I felt like a character from Madame Butterfly, wanting to return to a place- but things turned out differently. I was passing by a drama school and decided to take up acting. During the next six years I never spoke in my own tone of voice. I played drunks, mostly Australians, with a distorted voice. It was not until I played the part of Tim Frazer (a detective series by Francis Durbridge) that I was allowed to go back to my own sound."

Jack does not hide the fact that he is one of the few British actors that earn a solid living. For years he drove around in Jaguars and Rolls-Royces until the exorbitant garage bills started to annoy him.

Now he drives around for nothing. In a Japanese car. Jack: "I have been successful as an actor because I am one of the few who are never out of work and earn more than £25.000 a year. But above all I am in business and my friends are business people.

I will do everything in my power to prevent my sons from becoming actors. The pay is far too low.

**Translated from Dutch to English by Anna Pereboom  
for the Michael J Bird Tribute Website**

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