

Synopsis

Newlyweds Gerald and Phryne Banstead walk slowly along the narrow main street of Holihaven, a small coastal town in East Anglia. Phryne is an attractive young woman in her early twenties, whilst her husband is some twenty years her senior, a fact which ably manifests itself in the way he clearly struggles with the burden of their suitcases. Excitedly, Phryne calls out that she has spotted their destination - the Bell Inn, the town's only hotel whose creaking sign can be seen at the end of the strangely deserted street. Curiously, it is not just the street that is deserted, for since their arrival in the town they have not as yet encountered a single inhabitant. Curiously, the only evidence of any real activity is the tolling of a church bell, which punctuates the virtual silence with its steady, sonorous beat.

Entering the reception area of the hotel, Gerald looks despondently at the drabness of their surroundings. He apologises to Phryne for bringing her to such a "dump", but his wife seems inordinately pleased at Gerald for having brought her to a place that he himself had never been to before. Gerald's disappointment is not to be assuaged however - his mood exacerbated by his growing irritation at the incessant pealing of the bell.

The couple are met by Mrs Pascoe, the proprietress of the hotel, whose haggard and withdrawn demeanour does little to dispel Gerald's unease. Being "out of season", she informs them that the only other guest at present is an elderly "regular" named Commander Shotcroft. She leads the couple upstairs, where Gerald is struck by the unnerving impression that the sound of the bell has been joined by another, and has also increased in volume. Mrs Pascoe vaguely dismisses the pealing as "practice", adding equivocally that "they have ways of their own in Holihaven". Leaving the couple to unpack in their room, she turns to go downstairs but is stopped short by the sudden appearance of her husband Don. Clearly very drunk, he stands unsteadily alongside the ornamental suit of Japanese Armour that adorns the opposite side of the corridor. Approaching him fearfully yet gently, she tells Don how he "can't do nothing here", and urges him to go downstairs.

Inside the bedroom, Phryne has thrown open the window to air the room, only to be repulsed by an almost overpowering putrid smell from outside. She looks out across the shore, from which the tide has completely receded leaving an expanse of desolate mudflats. Gerald speculates that the smell could be rotting seaweed, but his thoughts are distracted by the sudden realisation that the noise of the bells appear to be coming from different directions. Phryne seems unperturbed, however, adding that she rather likes the sound. Turning to him, she embraces her clearly agitated husband, and begins kissing him with an intensity that is unexpected and curiously alarming...

Later that evening, the frail white-haired figure of Commander Shotcroft descends the stairs to the hotel lounge, where Mrs Pascoe has just finished serving dinner to Gerald and Phryne. Exhausted by the day's journey, Phryne is sleeping soundly in one of the lounge chairs, but the others turn sharply at the sound of breaking glass. They look on in silence as the drunken and swaying figure of Don Pascoe, mumbling incoherently and oblivious of his audience, shuffles off behind the bar. Her face fraught with anxiety, Mrs Pascoe offers a brief apology to her guests for his behaviour and hurries away after her husband.

Shotcroft introduces himself to Gerald, and begins talking sympathetically about how Don Pascoe was once a "damn fine man". He alludes to some trouble that had led the Pascoes to start afresh in Holihaven, although Shotcroft adds with feeling that they "couldn't have chosen a worse place". Querying how long Gerald and Phryne have been married, the Commander suddenly - and agitatedly - berates the couple for arriving arrived "tonight of all nights" and urges Gerald to take himself and his wife away as quickly as possible. Bewildered by the Commander's intensity, Gerald explains that he has been led to believe that the bell-ringing is mere "practising". Visibly distressed at Gerald's naivety, Shotcroft explains that the villagers are "ringing to wake the dead": "No one can tell how long they have to go on ringing. It varies from year to year. But you'll be all right up to midnight. Probably for some time after. In the end, the dead awake. First one or two; then all of them. Tonight even the sea draws back. Out of the stinking mud, out of the ground, out of the sea, they come. And in the streets, the living embrace the dead. They celebrate and rejoice."

Initially confused and disbelieving, Gerald explains that he does not believe in the "resurrection of the body", but it is clear that the intensity of Shotcroft's conviction has disturbed him.

As Shotcroft takes his leave and departs upstairs, Gerald is approached by Mrs Pascoe, who awkwardly attempts to explain that he should not take the Commander seriously. She likewise makes some vague allusions to some past indiscretion, which had led to Shotcroft being cashiered and court-martialled. She goes on to tell Gerald that Don and herself currently keep him at the hotel "out of kindness". Her uneasy manner only fuels Gerald's suspicions, however, and despite her now distraught protestations that staying at the hotel will be the safest option for them both, Gerald is adamant that he should leave with Phryne as soon as possible.

Seeking some confirmation of his growing suspicions, Gerald hurries upstairs and knocks at the Commander's door. Receiving no answer, he enters the room to find Shotcroft kneeling by the open window, his face distorted into a rictus by an expression of ecstatic agony. Gerald recoils at the sight, which for him is the first physical manifestation of the pervading fear and horror that had hitherto only been implied.

Returning quickly to his own room, he enters to find Phryne gazing out of their open window with wide-eyed fascination, claiming to find the deafening peals of the bells exciting. Gerald locks the door quickly and attempts to convince Phryne of his now absolute conviction that something disturbing and catastrophic is about to take place. Phryne pays little attention to this, feeling that Shotcroft's story says more about the Commander's irrational state of mind

Radio Times article for Late Night Horror (13th to 19th April 1968)

than anything inherently "evil" about the place. Her eyes gleaming, she invites Gerald over to the large four poster bed. Despite the urgency of the situation, Gerald is unable to ignore her invitation and moves to embrace her.

Suddenly, the noise of the bells stops, with the ensuing silence falling like a heavy curtain over the hotel. At first Gerald and Phryne sit motionless on the bed, but eventually they are able to discern the faint sound of a man's voice in the distance, calling out with the stridency of a street evangelist. As they continue to listen, the sound draws closer - close enough for the couple to pick out the disturbing refrain: "The Dead are awake!" More voices take up the cry until it becomes a chorus, sang out to the pounding of trampling footsteps on the cobbled streets. This rhythmic cadence plays out with the sonorous tread, offering a contrapuntal beat to a strange hymn-like chant:

"The living and the Dead dance together. Now's the time, the place, the weather..."

With Gerald clutching Phryne in a fiercely protective embrace, they listen in horror as the stamping, but unseen mob surge into the hotel, bringing with them an overpowering stench of corruption. In the midst of this chaotic maelstrom of sound - banging doors, the splintering of overturned furniture and the shattering of glass and china - Gerald and Phryne look on helplessly as the door handle of their room slowly turns. Abruptly the door bursts open, and a shambling, screaming, dancing hoard stream into the room. Surrounding the couple on the bed, Phryne is quickly swept up into this macabre dance, whilst Gerald finds himself held back by the milling throng. Suddenly struck from behind, he falls unconscious to the ground...

Some time later, Gerald regains consciousness to find Commander Shotcroft standing over him, illuminating the dark room with a lantern. Shotcroft explains how Phryne had been taken by the dancing group, and how she had been caught between two of the figures - each taking hold of one of her arms. Quick to calm the shaken man, Shotcroft explains that Phryne is now safe, obliquely referring to some intervention of his own: "I did what had to be done". Without further explanation, he adds that he hoped he was in time...

With the putrid smell still pervading the hotel, Gerald is consumed with nausea as they pick their way through the debris of the landing. Shotcroft looks on without sympathy, indicating that "...decay, that's all it is. The flesh that we desire so much. The soft flesh of humanity. Weak or strong, we share a common end, Mr Banstead. Stinking, rotten decay."

They make their way downstairs, where Phryne is sitting quietly amidst the devastation of the reception area in a tattered nightdress. Mrs. Pascoe looks on silently as Phryne stands and reassures Gerald that he is "not to worry". Deeply shaken but glad to see that she is alright, Gerald gently takes her arm and leads her back upstairs.

The couple leave the hotel the following morning. Silently, they make their way back through the quiet streets, pausing only to look at a group of labouring gravediggers at the local cemetery who are obviously digging fresh graves for the dead. Gerald glances at his wife and is appalled to see that she is gazing with obvious fascination at the toiling group, a desirous smile playing across her face...

Background and Production Details

First published in the third volume of Cynthia Asquith's

celebrated **The Ghost Book** collections in 1955, Robert Fordyce Aickman's **Ringling the Changes** remains not only one of his best known tales, but has since become one of the most frequently anthologised of modern ghost stories.

Aickman (1913 - 1981) first came to note with the 1951 collection **We are for the Dark: Six Ghost Stories**, a volume which also contained three tales by Elizabeth Jane Howard, written in collaboration with Aickman (including the excellent and also much anthologised **Three Miles Up**). Ironically, by Aickman's own admission, the popular conception of the "ghost story" was never the most apt description of his idiosyncratic fiction, which he preferred to characterise simply as "strange tales". The disarming brevity of this label however, belies the extraordinary depth and quality of his work, which many critics have compared to the sinister fantasies of fellow British author Walter De La Mere. Both authors shared a predilection for oblique allusion and understatement, where the presence of the "supernatural" frequently manifests itself in ways that are unexpected and ambiguous. Neither author would supply explanations or "rationalisations" of the events that unfold in their tales, frequently leaving the reader to come to their own conclusions.

As Aickman himself contended in his introduction to the first volume of the long running **Fontana Book of Ghost Stories** series, many of the best tales in the genre feature no "actual ghost". He goes on to argue that "a better title for the genre might be found, but the absence of the ghost seldom dispels the alarm", and points towards the effectiveness of narratives which leave the reader uncertain as to whether ghost has been apprehended or not. In this sense, the "awakening dead" of **Ringling the Changes** are a classic example of how Aickman achieves his effects through obliqueness and suggestion, since at no point in the narrative are the shuffling and stamping "mob" delineated or presented in any visual or literal manner. In fact, for the most part their presence is felt through every sense bar sight. Furthermore, it is the after-effects of this encounter with the supernatural, again suggested rather than directly articulated, that becomes the ultimate focus of the story. In this sense, Aickman's tales would frequently highlight the 'inner landscape' of his characters, foregrounding their (often neurotic) fears, dreams and obsessions.

Aickman's tale had been considered for incorporation into the series at an early stage, although the ambiguous (and multi-layered) story title had clearly not found favour with then-current Head of Plays Gerald Savory. In a memo sent to Script Editor Richard Davis on 2nd June 1967, Savory was emphatic that **Ringling the Changes** was "no title for our horror viewers", and urged the production team to select titles which reflected "some aspect of horror". In response, Producer Harry Moore quickly pointed out that the story had only just been commissioned, and that an alternative title would probably suggest itself during production. By this stage, it was also evident that the play would be granted a degree of exterior filming, which in the event would amount to the most extensive location footage allocated to any of the six productions in the series.

The task of adapting Aickman's tale was handled by the talented Hugh Whitmore, a noted and prolific writer whom Moore had previously worked with (as Script Editor) on series such as **Londoners** and **Thirty Minute Theatre**. On the latter series, Whitmore contributed a memorable "two-hander" entitled **Application Form** (: bc: 18th November 1965), starring Denholm Elliott and Donal Donnelly, and directed by a young Piers Haggard at a time when the series was still being broadcast live from the Lime Grove studios. Whitmore's other contemporary credits included

two early entries for **The Wednesday Play** strand: **Dan, Dan, the Charity Man** (tx: 3rd February 1965, Dir: Don Taylor) and **MacReadys Gala** (tx: 2nd March 1966, Dir:Waris Hussein).

Although now best known for such award winning productions as his adaptation of Laurie Lee's **Cider with Rosie** (1975, Dir: Claude Whatham), Whitmore's penchant for the psychological "chiller" would also surface in a number of television productions over subsequent years. These included the original teleplays **The Regulator** (tx: 8th September 1965, Dir: James Ferman), for the BBC's short-lived **The Wednesday Thriller** anthology, and **Frankenstein Mark II** (tx: 13th October 1966, Dir: Peter Duguid) for the second season of Irene Shubik's **Out of the Unknown** series. Some years later, Whitmore would also contribute two excellent scripts to the BBC anthology series **Menace**, comprising **Killing Time** with George Cole and Annette Crosbie (tx: 10th November 1970, Dir: Anthea Browne-Wilkinson) and **Deliver us from Evil** (tx: 3rd May 1973, Dir: David Sullivan Proudfoot), starring the celebrated John Gielgud. In the late seventies he also wrote an inventive reworking of Edwardian author E. F. Benson's **Mrs Answorth** (HTV 1978, Dir: Alvin Rakoff), a classic tale of vampirism set against the backdrop of a secluded English village. Suitably updated, this all film production featured excellent performances from the likes of Glynis Johns, John Phillips and Derek Francis.

Whitmore's adaptation of **Ringing the Changes** adheres very closely to the spirit of the original story, in which the oblique narrative tone is complemented by some startling imagery. "I knew Aickman's work a little", Whitmore recalled. "I had also admired Jonathan Miller's wonderful film based on the M.R. James story **Whistle and I'll Come To You, My Lad** - the best ghost story ever filmed in my opinion - and I hoped I had achieved the same sort of weird poetic ambiguity".

In view of this, it is interesting to note how Whitmore's script frequently highlights the tale's desolate East Anglia shoreline setting, a small echo of the inspired photography that had also characterised Miller's **Omnibus** presentation (tx: 7th May 1968). By extension, it is also notable how Whitmore also utilises several of Aickman's own evocative metaphorical descriptions in the script. These include the memorable depiction of the sleeping Phyrnne as "looking strangely ethereal, like a dead girl in a painting by Millais", and the startling simile which compares the deafening sound of the pealing bells to "plunging, roaring lions".

Given Whitmore's expressed affiliation with the style and tone of Aickman's story, he recalls being bitterly disappointed at Savory's prescription to change the title in order to grab the nations "horror viewers": "I thought **The Bells of Hell** was a cheap, vulgar and dumbing-down title for what I still think of as a strange and subtle story. I much preferred **Ringing the Changes**. I forget who thought of the new title, it may have been the Story Editor Richard Davis. It certainly seemed silly to muck about with the title of a thirty minute story that would be screened very late, as the size of audience must have been minuscule. I didn't approve at all, and I remember arguments - which of course I eventually lost!"

Although, in the main, faithful to the sequence of events in the original narrative, a notable omission in the adaptation is the couple's evening excursion along Holihaven's deserted beach (with Phyrnne in search of the receding tide) which was presumably dropped for reasons of timing or budgetary restraints. Another early scene set in a railway compartment, as Phyrnne and Gerald make their way to Holihaven via an isolated branch line, is also absent. Since much of the dialogue in this early scene helps to define the relationship between Gerald and Phyrnne, however, Whitmore seamlessly grafts elements of this dialogue to the couple's initial entry to the hotel. These small changes aside, the enigmatic characterisation of the play is entirely in keeping with the tone of the original story, in which the broken and emotionally destitute figures of the Pascoes and Commander Shotcroft are adumbrated by Aickman with only the barest of personal histories.

By extension, the sense of terse ambiguity that pervades Aickman's tale is fully retained in Whitmore's dramatisation. Stylistically, the story is in many ways the perfect embodiment of Aickman's uncompromising approach, in which both events and dialogue are frequently presented with an air of unspecified significance, bereft of even the most cursory "explanation". A striking example of this is the play's sensitive handling of the tale's denouement, the enigmatic nature of which is preserved in Whitmore's script. Introducing Aickman's story in his seminal 1962 collection **Best Tales of Terror**, the literary critic and author Edmund Crispin noted how readers of the tale might be "affected less by the obscene rout of the dead than by its disturbing, unexpected aftermath in modifying the character of the wife". The exact nature of this transformation is left unclear, and this ambiguity is conveyed very effectively by the play's closing sequence. Filmed entirely without dialogue (the only sound being that of the early morning wind blowing through Holihaven), this sequence showed Phyrnne and Gerald stopping to look at a group of men digging fresh graves in a cemetery (whom Whitmore, following Aickman, describes in his script as being as "thick as flies on a wound, and as black"). The camera then focuses on Gerald's growing awareness of the strange attraction the scene has for Phyrnne, with the final shot being an extreme close up of her "smile of desire".

With Whitmore's first draft in hand, the project was offered by Moore to Naomi Capon, an experienced director whose credits stretched back to the early fifties, including a two part serialisation of Robert Louis Stevenson's melodrama **The Black Arrow** (tx: 20th and 27th May 1951, W: John Blatchley). Other notable contributions had also included the premiere production in the BBC's **The Sunday Night Play** strand, an original drama entitled **A Walk in the Desert** (tx: 25th September 1960, W: John Whiting) and Peter van Greenaway's **The House** (tx: 4th August 1965), the eerie opening instalment of the BBC-1 anthology **The Wednesday Thriller**. Her more recent work had also included three productions for the **Out of the Unknown** series: **Sucker Bait** (tx: 15th November 1965, adapted from the Isaac Asimov novella of the same name by Meade Roberts); **The World in Silence** (tx: 17th November 1966, adapted by Robert Gould from a short story by John Rankine) and another Asimov

dramatisation entitled **The Prophet** (tx: 31st December 1966, adapted from the short story **Reason** by Robert Muller).

Although having recently turned down Hugh Leonard's script for **Party Games** (which was eventually taken up by director Paddy Russell, and broadcast as **The Corpse Can't Play**), Capon was very impressed with Whitmore's adaptation, feeling that it offered "the most exciting possibilities". Pre-production duly began in July, with Capon, Whitmore and Script Editor Richard Davis scrutinising the proposed script to earmark any necessary changes. Only minor alterations were deemed necessary, although for reasons of economy it was thought feasible to collapse the hotel's reception and lounge area into one composite set. The small number of changes were in place by the end of August, by which time the production scripts had been typed up and ideas for casting were under consideration.

Notably, the surviving documentation indicates that sixties icon Marianne Faithfull was initially earmarked for the role of Phyrnne, indicating that casting had been delayed at one point whilst waiting for Faithfull to accept the role. Ultimately, however, the part was taken by a young Michele Dotrice, whose recent television credits had included Rudolph Cartier's celebrated **Out of the Unknown** production of Mordecai Roshwald's **Level 7** (tx: BBC-2, 27th October 1966, W: J.B. Priestley), and the linked anthology series **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle** (tx: BBC-2 15th January tp 23rd April 1967), for which Harry Moore cast her as semi-regular Vicky Crabbe. Ironically, Michele's father - actor Roy Dotrice - had entered the same studio only a week earlier to play the lead in **The Kiss of Blood**, the second episode of **Late Night Horror** to be recorded.

The role of Gerald Banstead was given to Ronald Hines, a fine character actor whose penchant for comedy as well as straight drama roles had been frequently demonstrated over the years. His talents in the former field, for example, had been well exemplified by appearances in the Jack Hylton production **Tell It to the Marines** (Associated Rediffusion, 1959 to 60) and the first series of Richard Waring's sitcom **The Marriage Lines** (BBC-1 1963). In a more overtly dramatic vein, Hines had been equally well known as regular Derek Prentice in the initial years of John Elliott's oil company drama **Mogul** (BBC-1, 1965 - retitled to **The Troubleshooters** the following year). He had also recently featured as the beleaguered Guy Birkett in an inspired adaptation of Frederick Pohl's advertising satire **The Tunnel Under the World for Out of the Unknown** (tx: 1st December 1966, W: David Campton, Dir: Alan Cooke).

The excellent cast assembled for the play also boasted Pauline Letts as Mrs. Pascoe, whose notable earlier credits included the David Mercer trilogy **Where the Difference Begins (Where the Difference Begins**, tx: 15th December 1961; **A Climate of Fear**, tx: 22nd June 1962 and **The Birth of a Private Man**, tx: 8th March 1963, produced by Don Taylor for the BBC). Veteran Keith Pyott - recently seen in episodes of both **Doctor Who** (the early William Hartnell serial **The Aztecs** (tx: 23rd May to 13th June 1964, W: John Lucarotti, Dir: John Crockett)) and the ABC science fiction anthology **Out of this World (The Dark Star**, tx: 1st September 1962, W: Denis Butler, adapted from Frank Crisp's novel **Ape of London**, Dir: Peter Hammond) was also on hand as the world-weary Commander Shotcroft. Also appearing as Don Pascoe was Jerold Wells, who had appeared on numerous BBC programmes in supporting roles as far back as the fifties, his most notable role being that of Magwitch in the 1959 version of **Great Expectations**.

With the casting finalised, location filming for the play took place at the town of Wivenhoe, on the banks of the River Colne, which Capon had identified as the nearest Essex estuary boasting a large expanse of mud and saltings at low tide. A suitable pub and high street (to double as Holihaven's "Bell Inn") was also found to be available. Although the running time of the five telecine sequences was fairly short, Capon envisaged that her crew would require at least two days of filming, given that the sequences called for a mixture of evening, night and morning shots. Having calculated the local tide levels, she considered that there would be a suitable period of "low water" to complete the evening sequences before the light receded completely.

Accordingly the film crew, along with Ronald Hines and Michele Dotrice, travelled across to Wivenhoe on 19th September, where the evening and night shots were completed on 35mm colour film. These included the opening sequence where Gerald and Phyrnne walk slowly up Holihaven's main street in search of the Bell Inn (over which the title and author credits were superimposed); Phyrnne's point-of-view shot of the mudflats as seen from their hotel window; a second similar shot of the shoreline expanse in the gathering dusk and a single shot of a church tower silhouetted against the night sky. Phyrnne's point of view shot was, in fact, absent from Whitmore's first draft and had been added by Capon in order to consolidate the overall effectiveness of the scene.

The fifth and longest sequence, involving Gerald and Phyrnne's morning departure from the Inn (and their subsequent passing of the town's graveyard) was filmed on the morning of the 20th. Six accompanying extras, including several who would later double as the macabre "dancers", also joined Hines and Dotrice that morning to make up the required number of gravediggers.

With the location filming completed, attention then turned to an unscripted film sequence that Capon had discussed at an early stage with both Whitmore, Designer Richard Wilmot and Lighting Supervisor Robert Wright. This concerned the basic visual treatment of the climactic entrance of the dancers as they stream into Gerald and Phyrnne's bedroom. Whitmore had strongly felt that no "real" people should be visible in this sequence, which echoed Aickman's own oblique description of the dancers as a shouting and shambling throng, their limbs whirling in a "stuffy darkness". Both Capon and Whitmore considered that the only feasible way of achieving the right atmosphere was to use back-projection - in this instance projecting a specially shot black and white sequence of whirling dancers over the walls and ceiling of the studio set (it was noted in the documentation that black and white film would be quicker to process and edit.). At the same time, it was envisaged that the moving shadows of the real studio-based dancers should fall over the couple on their bed, giving the



Radio Times picture for **The Bells of Hell**

impression that they were caught up and surrounded by the dancing group.

As a result of these discussions, a further day of filming at the BBC's Ealing Film studios was granted in order to achieve this effect. This took place on 22nd September, just a day after the location shooting had completed, with the six extras employed for the graveyard sequence re-utilised as the dancers. The allocation of the Ealing film shoot must certainly have come as some relief to Capon, as the only practical alternative she had discussed with Whitmore was the option of superimposing "white figures" over the studio action, a technique which she felt would be "less visually effective and less terrifying". During the actual studio recording, a smoke machine and four wind machines were used to augment the effectiveness of the 35mm back-projection as the dancing throng burst into the bedroom.

In order to increase the effectiveness of the mass singing heard by Gerald and Phyrnne, a four-hour session of "voice treatment" took place on the 22nd September at the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop at Maida Vale. Capon was very familiar with the Workshop's capabilities through her recent work on **Out of the Unknown** and she was keen for the team to both write, record and "treat" the song, which she felt should come across as a "weird and partly distorted chant". She also requested that this treatment should incorporate the sounds of the "tramping, shuffling and dancing" feet of the dancers on various surfaces (representing the stone and cobbles of the exterior street and the wood stairs and floorboards of the hotel bedroom). Several of the extras employed for the Ealing filming were re-utilised for the voice recording, alongside Pauline Letts (Mrs Pascoe) and Jerold Wells (Don Pascoe).

With the initial outside rehearsals and location filming completed, **The Bells of Hell** moved into studio TC6 at Television Centre on Wednesday 27th September. Camera rehearsals were carried out throughout both morning and afternoon, with the play recorded later that evening between 8.15 and 9.30. Commensurate with the initial planning for the play, the production had been structured to accommodate a number of recording pauses, mainly to allow the actors to move between the reception/lounge area and the "upstairs" sets. In total, only four pauses and two actual recording breaks were employed for the play, well within Moore's stipulation of a maximum of three breaks for each separate production.

In a deviation from the other five plays in the series, no incidental music was utilised for **The Bells of Hell**. This stemmed from Capon's very clear ideas regarding the use of music and sound effects in the production, with her belief that "all the 'noise' should emanate from the bells and the rhythm that they establish". Because this entailed a virtually continuous soundtrack well into the main body of the play (with the steady tolling of a single bell gradually building up to a crescendo of pealing), Capon considered that it would be wiser to dub this sound during the editing stage of the play, which took place over a two day period immediately after the recording was completed, on Thursday 28th and Friday 29th September. The morning of the first day was given over to a general "technical review" of the previous evening's recording, with the editing of the production taking place between 11.45am and 7.30pm. The following day was devoted exclusively to the extensive dubbing required for the production, conducted over a ten hour period and utilising two dubbing machines.

A few weeks after the initial broadcast, an appreciative review of the production appeared in **The Sunday Telegraph**, which outlined how the play had "come closer than anything recently to fulfilling the proper requirements of a ghost story". Reference was also made to the "disquieting atmosphere" that pervaded the story, which built up to "a genuinely macabre climax as the dead awoke to go dancing and chanting through the streets". Noting the evocative use of the same East Anglian coastal setting favoured by M.R. James, it was considered that **The Bells of Hell** had also successfully accommodated some of the "same Freudian interpretation which Jonathan Miller had

imposed upon his notorious *Whistle and I'll Come to You*". The final image was singled out in particular, with the critic applauding the play's willingness to end on "a note of erotic equivocation [...] as Miss Dotrice, eyeing some vaguely familiar gravediggers, licked little pink tongue around little pink lips."

With BBC-1 making the transition to colour broadcasting in November 1969, *The Bells of Hell* was granted a repeat showing on Friday 5th December (heralding a staggered repeat run of the whole series, which finally finished in March 1970). Sadly, the subsequent wiping of the 2" Quad master tape, the play became little more than an obscure memory, analogous to the relative inaccessibility of Aickman's own fiction in later years (until the posthumous *Collected Strange Stories* became available in 1999).

A further BBC adaptation was forthcoming in October 2000 however, this time as an effectively-realised radio play written by Jeremy Dyson and Mark Gatiss (of *The League of Gentlemen* fame). Capturing perfectly the sombre and claustrophobic mood of the story, the play featured the voices of notables such as George Baker (as Gerald Banstead) and Barbara Shelley (still well known to genre devotees for her roles in several Hammer Film productions) as Mrs Pascoe. A professed admirer of Aickman's fiction, Jeremy Dyson later wrote and directed a twelve minute short film based on Aickman's story *The Cicerones* (GB 2002), which also featured Mark Gatiss in a central role. The film was screened alongside the 70's cult-favourite *The Wicker Man* (GB 1973, Dir: Robin Hardy), at the Greenwich Film Festival in London, on 12th November 2002.

Transmission Details

The Bells of Hell was first broadcast on BBC-2 Friday 17th May 1968, between 11:16:05pm and 11:38:05pm. The recorded viewing figures for this transmission were 1.0m, a respectable gain on those recorded for the preceding three plays (indicating that a more regular audience for the series may have just begun picking up). Ironically, despite the documented positive critical reception, the recorded Audience Reaction Index was only 52 (the second lowest score for the initial run of the series).

It is worth noting that the duration given by the BBC's "Programmes as Broadcast" documentation is 22'00", which is a significantly short length even for a programme of this nature. Furthermore, Harry Moore's *Directors Guide* for the series (dated 5th July 1967) is quite emphatic about the need for each play to approximate 24'30" minutes in length (30 seconds from the allotted time of 25 minutes). The duration for the repeat showing is the same length, however, so this episode must have ended up coming in 'short'.

The repeat broadcast took place on BBC-1 Friday 5th December 1969, between 11:04:53pm and 11:26:53pm, the first programme from this series to be repeated and the last broadcast programme for the evening (bar the customary Weather review before Close-down). Viewing figures for this repeat are not known.

A small colour photograph of Hines and Dotrice in the hotel bedroom set was featured in the promotional article for the launch of the series (edition dated 13-19 April 1968). No photograph accompanied the billing for the week of transmission (edition dated 11-17 May 1968), though the billing featured the following teaser:

"Three months after their marriage, Gerald and Phrynn Banstead decide to stay at the Bell Inn, an ostensibly picturesque pub in East Anglia. As they arrive the whole place seems strangely deserted - the only sound they can hear is the desolate tolling of a church bell. Mr and Mrs Pascoe who run the Inn, and their only other guest, Commander Shotcroft, all seem desperately afraid of something vague and indefinable."

This promotional text was an incomplete extract from the BBC press information release, which continues the summary as follows:

"Later, when the young couple are in bed, all the bells of the village, which have been ringing loudly suddenly stop. A single cry rings out along the streets, a cry which is to involve the Bansteads in a hideous night of unbelievable horror."

For the repeat broadcast on Friday 5th December 1969 Radio Times ran a half-page article to tie-in with the beginning of the re-runs on BBC-1. This time, however, the emphasis was on the acting career of Michele Dotrice, with little reference to *The Bells of Hell* per se and no photographs bar a portrait shot of Dotrice at her Warwickshire home. Under the heading "*The Bells of Hell go Ting-a-ling-a-ling for you, but not for Michele*", the only reference to the play was Dotrice's amused recollections of having taken part in the production:

*"When reminded of **The Bells of Hell** recently, Michele went off into peals of slightly nervous laughter. She covered her face with her hands. 'I couldn't watch it,' she said in tones of muffled hysteria. She seemed to find the recollection of the film funny rather than frightening; she is not the sort of actress to be tremendously solemn about horror. 'Some actors get very serious about it,' she said giggling. When they start wearing the makeup around the house, that's the time to worry."*

The billing for the repeat broadcast contained only production crew & cast details.

Archive Details

The only surviving material from the production is a tape of sound effects/voice treatments retained in the Radiophonic Workshop holdings. Its catalogue listing is as follows:

"The Bells of Hell - Ringing the Changes
Series: Late Night Horror
RWS: Clive Webster
Department: TP05 TV Drama Films"

The listing indicates that the project was booked-in during July 1967. Clive Webster, the supervisor of this session, was one of numerous "assistants" who had undertaken work at the Maida Vale studios for short periods throughout the sixties. Webster's earlier credits had included effects work

for the *Out of the Unknown* episode *The Eye* (tx: 24th November 1966, W: Stanley Miller, adapted from a story by Henry Kuttner, Dir: Peter Sasdy), the opening instalment for John Hawkesworth's *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* series entitled *Lot 249* (tx: 15th January 1967, W: John Hawkesworth, Dir: Richard Martin), and director Christopher Barry's first colour production for the BBC, the *Thirty Minute Theatre* production *A Walk in the Dark* (tx: 29th May 1968) on which Webster worked alongside Workshop Head Desmond Briscoe.

Cast

Phrynn Banstead	Michele Dotrice
Gerald Banstead	Ronald Hines
Mrs Pascoe	Pauline Letts
Commander Shotcroft	Keith Pyott
Don Pascoe	Jerold Wells
Dancers	George Extant
.....	Robin Sherringham
.....	Aubrey Wolfson
.....	Roy Simpson
.....	Bob Anthony
.....	Jack Birkett
Gravedigger/Ealing Dancer	Lindsay Kemp
Gravedigger/Ealing Dancer	Jeremy King
Gravedigger/Ealing Dancer	Larry Dupres
Ealing Dancer/voice recording	Lucie Swayne
Ealing Dancer/voice recording	Joan Wolfson
Ealing Dancer/voice recording	Gavin Campbell
Gravedigger	Terry Nelson
Gravedigger	James Appleby
Gravedigger	Pat Gorman
Voice recording	Pauline Letts
Voice recording	Jerold Wells

Crew

Author	Robert Aickman
Adaptor	Hugh Whitmore
Director	Naomi Capon
Producer	Harry Moore
Story Editor	Richard Davis
Designer	Richard Wilmot
Film Cameraman	Brian Langley
Production Assistant	Terry Coles
Assistant Floor Manager	Jenny MacArthur
Assistant	Lesley Bruce
Technical Manager 1	Robert Wright
Technical Manager 2	Malcolm Martin
Sound Supervisor	Derek Miller-Timmins
Grams Operator	Brian Duffet
Vision Mixer	Bob Horman

Floor Assistant	Graham Hobson
Camera Crew	Crew 11
Make-Up Supervisor	Toni Chapman
Costume Supervisor	Juanita Waterson
Title Music	Radiophonic Workshop
Graphics	Charles McGhie

Production Information

Project Number	2157/4775
Recording Number	VTC/GHT/41090
Camera Rehearsals	27th September 1967
Camera Recording	27th September 1967
Duration	22'00"
Studio	TC6, Television Centre
Recording Format	625 colour VT
.....	with colour 35mm inserts
Archive Format	non-extant

Film Sequences Used

- o Specially Shot: 266' of colour sound 35mm (unspecified content)
- o Specially Shot: 16' of colour sound 35mm ("*Opening Titles*")

Music Listed as Used

- o 00'23" of the *Opening Signature Tune*, created by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop.

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BBC-2: FRIDAY

MAY 17

THE BELLS OF HELL

Three months after their marriage Phrynn and Gerald Banstead decide to stay at "The Bell", a picturesque pub in East Anglia. This is the setting for "The Bells of Hell", the "Late Night Horror" story on Friday, May 17, which is adapted by Hugh Whitmore from a story by Robert Aickman.

At first the place seems strangely deserted - the only sound they can hear is the desolate tolling of a church bell. Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe, who run "The Bell", and Commander Shotcroft, the only other guest, seem desperately frightened of something vague and indefinable.

Later, when the young couple are in bed, all the bells of the village, which have been ringing loudly suddenly stop. A single cry rings out along the streets, a cry which is to involve the Bansteads in a hideous night of unbelievable horror.

Michele Dotrice and Ronald Hines play the Bansteads.
Directed by Naomi Capon. Producer: Harry Moore. Story Editor: Richard Davis.

THE REVENUE MEN (May 17): Uncustomed goods are being distributed through working men's clubs in the North. Smith finds a man who is a supplier in the clubs but it's only when Ross gets some information at the docks that the pieces begin to fit into place. Roddy McMillan is the guest artist in this week's episode which is called "Combined Operation". MONOCHROME.

ANGLERS CORNER (May 17): Bernard Venables introduces a programme about float fishing for perch on the River Kennet, in Berkshire, in June.

Friday