



Merry Memories

Once Robin of Sherwood's

Friar Tuck, Phil Rose will always be a merry man. By JOE NAZZARO

While working on a TV series based on the legendary exploits of Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men, it seems inevitable that one would receive viewer letters disputing historical accuracy. But what about complaints regarding inconsistent botany? According to Phil Rose, who for three seasons played Friar Tuck on the popular British series *Robin of Sherwood*, that's just what happened.

"One day, we ran out of time," Rose elaborates, "and they said, 'We'll have to go back to HTV [television studios] and film Marion

and Robin in front of a bush in the car park.' They put them in front of this bush to do the dialogue, thank you, that's fine, and about a year later, we got a letter from this 92-year-old Edinburgh professor of botany saying, 'Dear sir, I am a big fan of your program and I think it's very good, but in episode #15, when Robin is talking to Marion in front of that bush, did you not know that the bush was not indigenous to this country until 600 years later? Thank you very much.'"

Not all *Robin* bloopers are quite as obscure; sharp-eyed viewers had a number of opportuni-

ties to spot continuity gaffes and various historical anomalies. Back in London, over a long, laugh-filled dinner, Rose is happy to offer up a few of the show's best. "In the episode where we steal the sheriff's nephew, Much the miller's son is being put in prison, and in a later scene I'm teaching the boy to cook, Will Scarlet's teaching him to use a knife, Nasir is teaching him daggers and Much the miller's son is teaching him—how can Much be there when he's in prison? Nobody twigged it until it was actually out on the telly! If you watch the 'Sheriff of Nottingham' episode, there's a

Selected Photos: Courtesy ROS/NAB

scene where he's talking to Robin Hood [Jason Connery] and there's a white flash going through the trees. If you freeze-frame it, you'll see it's a white car!

"We were filming one day, and it was me, Ray Winstone, Peter Llewellyn-Williams, Clive Mantle, Michael Praed; we all smoked, and we had just finished doing this scene and afterward they checked the gate to make sure the film was all right. The gate was OK, and we were getting ready to move on to the next set-up when Ray said, 'You'll have to do that again, boys.' He had done the scene holding a cigarette and nobody noticed!"

Feature Friars

After more than 20 years of show business, Rose is accustomed to the more unusual aspects of life. While he was growing up in Manchester, England, acting took a sideline to less glamorous occupations such as selling encyclopedias, bricklaying and working at a center for artificial limbs and appliances. He finally applied to drama school, and after two years, went into weekly repertory work. "And I've been struggling ever since!" he jokes.

Rose's involvement with *Robin of Sherwood* came about as a result of *Memed My Hawk*, a film he had worked on in Yugoslavia with actor/director Peter Ustinov. "In January 1983, my agent rung me and said, 'You're going to meet with casting director Esta Charkham.' She later

this year and seven hours next year, and then they want to do a third year,' my bank balance went 'Whoopie!'"

Though *Robin of Sherwood* was filmed well over a decade ago, Rose can remember his first day as Friar Tuck as if it was yesterday. "We had all been to Pinewood for the reading, we had been for the costume fittings in London, and then we decided to get on the train to go to Newcastle together; there was Judi Trott, Clive, Peter, Ray, Michael and me.

"We got on the train, and went to the dining car—this is about 8:30 in the morning and we had each brought a bottle of champagne. The waiter said, 'If you're going to drink that, may I make a suggestion: why don't you have a bottle of Guinness with it?' So, we arrived at Newcastle, and fell out of the train, and they picked us up in a cab. They told us where we were staying, and 'at 6 tomorrow morning, you'll be picked up, and we'll do the first day's filming.'"

ing wagon, so if you've got something we haven't got, we want to see it! Otherwise, stop it,' and with that, we just stripped and got ready."

Missing Myths

Viewers took to *Robin of Sherwood's* exciting mix of fast-paced action and mythology, enhanced by the haunting music of the Irish band Clannad, and a second season was commissioned.

If there was a downside to that success, it may have been that *Robin* could be accused of falling back on formula. "The thing about *Robin* that amazed me was you got to know people *too* well," explains Rose. "There was no mystery anymore. Certain directors relied on that, where the Merry Men would just nip together. Every episode, I would say 'Little Flower' to Maid Marion, which I hated saying; you knew that Ray and Clive would have a bloody barmy; you knew that Much would



Robin of Sherwood found its early success with Michael Praed (center with sword) as the hero. Rose still doesn't understand why Praed ankled off to America to be "a little minnow in the ocean."

"The first day, it poured and we all went into the van to change. My very first experience that day was when we were down to our underpants, and there was a knock at the door. One of the dressers came in, and said, 'Put your clothes back on, you're all going to have to stand outside, because Mr. Valentine [Anthony Valentine, who played Baron Simon de Belleme] is here, and he wants to get changed.' So like a bunch of idiots, we all got our clothes back on, and stood outside in the rain under this big umbrella. He goes in, the dresser closes the door and we stood there for about five minutes. Then, old Ray knocked on the door, opened it and said, 'We're coming in.'"

"We all piled in, and he said, 'Anthony, we understand you're a big star, but we are the Merry Men and this is Robin Hood. It's pissing down out there, and this is *our* chang-

look thick as pig shit; you knew Robin and Marion would have a kissing/cuddling scene, and Nasir would be moody all on his own; it got *quite* monotonous."

Another constant, says Rose, was that Michael Praed stayed the good-looking, clean lead. "He only got his face dirty on two occasions: fighting Robert Addie in the mud in 'Alan O'Dale,' and the previous episode, 'Seven Poor Knights From Acre.'"

"Shall I tell you a story about that mud fight?" laughs Rose, recalling what was arguably Praed's most unglamorous moment. "It was a long, hot summer, and that fight went on for ages. They must have been in the mud for six hours. The scene was sent that night to Reading for developing where it was eaten by the developing bath. They turned around to Robert and Michael and said, 'We're going to have to do it all over again!'"

Phil Rose began acting more than 20 years ago, and "I've been struggling ever since."

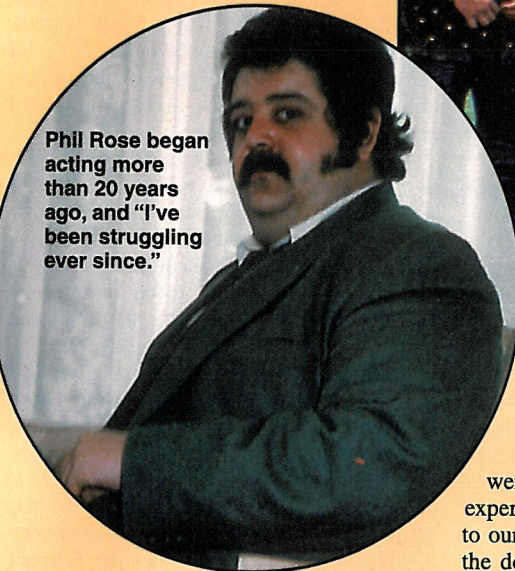


Photo: Jo Beth Taylor

became co-producer with Paul Knight. Esta had cast *Memed My Hawk* and she remembered me and wanted to see me about *Robin of Sherwood*.

"So, I went along, and Clive Mantle [Little John], whom I had known for a while, gave me a lift to Pinewood Studios where I met Kip Carpenter, the writer, Knight and Ian Sharp, who directed the first six. On the way home, Clive said, 'What do you think?' I said, 'Well, if we get it, we get it. I'm used to rejection, but it would be nice.' I thought it was another feature, and when my agent rung me and said, 'You've got it, and it's six hours

Photo: Showtime

Design & Layout: Yvonne Jang



Jason Connery assumed Robin's mantle in the series' second season—and Rose was the first Merry Man to glean the Hooded Man's new identity.

"They went back the next day and the water level had gone down even more, because of the heat. They were there for eight hours, it was the only thing they did that day, and the boys were caked with mud everywhere. They came out, and were packing the film away, when Michael turned to the director and said, 'Send a little note with that package that if these get eaten by the bath, I'm coming to see the gentleman that should have bloody developed them!'"

As it turned out, the second season of *Robin of Sherwood* was also Praed's last. The actor had decided to seek his fortune in America, leaving the series without its hero. "About episode five of the second year, they got all the Merry Men into the porta-cabin, as well as Michael, Paul and Esta. They said, 'Michael is leaving at the end of episode seven,' so we had about five weeks to go. 'He's doing *The Three Musketeers* on Broadway,' and to be honest, my first thought was 'silly boy,' because if they wanted him that much, they would wait if he said, 'No, I'm doing another year of *Robin of Sherwood*,' because he knew another 13 episodes were on the cards.

"Michael, like many actors, thought the only place to succeed was in America. I totally disagree; I think you can succeed anywhere if they want you, and it's quite obvious with hindsight that he didn't succeed because they didn't think he was good enough on Broadway, so there's my argument answered. I would rather be a small fish in a little pond in Great Britain than a little minnow in the ocean if they didn't like me in America."

Secret Spirits

Finding the right swashbuckling young actor to play the new Robin Hood was a diffi-

cult task. After testing several people, including Paul (the Eighth Doctor Who) McGann, the producers finally cast Sean Connery's son Jason. "They got Jason down to the set, and into costume, and we did a bit of dialogue with him from previous scenes. They would stick episode three in our hands and Jason would read Michael's dialogue, which was quite strange, because Michael was there. Right up to the last day of filming, they wouldn't tell us who they had picked."

The identity of the new Robin was kept a total secret—except from Rose, who happened to be hiding behind the right tree at the right time, a story he can finally recount with impunity. "On the last day, before we finished filming, they had this person locked in a porta-cabin at the base camp, dressed as the Hooded Man, and they taped paper over all the windows. It was the final scene needed to complete the series, where we were all shooting the arrows into the lake, and they had a stuntman come out from behind with the hood up and fire the arrow. So that was it, end of episode. Michael is now dead, and we head back in the van to the base camp until the next time they call us.

"It was only a quarter of a mile up to the base, and the van was a bit full, so I said, 'You all go up and I'll walk.' I got about halfway up this track through the forest, and I see the land rover coming back. In the front is the driver and the director, and in the back are Esta, Paul and Jason Connery with his hooded man gear on. I stood behind this tree as they drove past me, and then followed them down to the bottom of the track and I sat behind this bush a few feet away watching them. Jason comes out with his hood up, fires his arrow and puts his hood down, and I'm away like a rat up a drainpipe. I get back to

the porta-cabin and everybody says, 'You missed it, they put us in here and locked the door so we couldn't see who it was and he's gone!' They had actually locked the actors up! I lied and said, 'They must have gone the other way, because nobody passed me!'"

As Rose recalls, Connery's arrival in Sherwood Forest was a potentially major event, illustrated with a story about a close encounter with the British press. "After we finished filming, we all got changed and went to the last-night party," the actor explains. "Everybody was talking about who the new Robin was, and asking Esta and Paul and they were saying, 'We can't tell you.' About six weeks later, I was in London, in a pub near Fleet Street, talking to Paul Nicholas, the head of freelance publicity for *Robin*. I said, 'I know who the new Robin is,' and he asked me who it was and I said, 'I'm not going to tell you.' He said, 'Hang on a minute,' and came back with this lady journalist who said, 'I work for the *Daily Mail*, and I believe you know who the new Robin of Sherwood is.' I said yes, and she said, 'Are you going to tell me?'" I said no, and she went over to the phone and came back two minutes later and said, 'I'm authorized to pay you £1,000 if you tell me who it is.'

"I said no, and she went back to the phone, came back and said, 'I'm authorized to pay you £3,000.' When we got to £5,000, I said, 'Darling, if it was five million, I wouldn't tell you who it was. I am an actor, and you're not, and if I told you and it breaks, and the other actor isn't ready for it to happen, what do you think I'm going to be treated like when I go back to the new series—if I get back,' because what goes around, comes around. I didn't tell her, and for months, I kept that secret to myself.

"Jason started on May 1, and I said, 'Nice to meet you,' and that was it. We had 27 weeks' work on 13 episodes, and in the middle we had a fortnight off, so all the Merry Men went to Spain to meet Sean Connery, and I went to Blackpool to buy a hotel. Of course, the fourth series never happened, and to be honest, a part of my life went west."

After the demise of *Robin*, there was talk of bringing the series to a conclusion, possibly with Praed back in the title role, but those plans still remain in limbo. "For eight years, they tried to get the £15 million together to do the *Robin of Sherwood* feature that Kip Carpenter had written, and they wanted Rutger Hauer to play the baddie—or Terrence Stamp but in the end, it never reached fruition; the Americans didn't want it because of the glut of Robin Hoods."

While *Robin of Sherwood* may have joined other genre adventures in television limbo, Phil Rose still hopes he'll be able to take Friar Tuck's cassock out of mothballs one day. "There were some times when you might think it was a little boring, but then you think of the money, and maybe this wasn't so bad. There were times when you thought, 'This will last forever!' and other times when you thought, 'If this lasts forever, I wouldn't want to be in it forever!' We thought it would never end, but it did." ★