

= Press Gang =

Press Gang is a British children's television comedy @-@ drama consisting of 43 episodes across five series that were broadcast from 1989 to 1993 . It was produced by Richmond Film & Television for Central , and screened on the ITV network in its regular weekday afternoon children's strand , Children's ITV , typically in a 4 : 45 pm slot (days varied over the course of the run) .

Aimed at older children and teenagers , the programme was based on the activities of a children's newspaper , the Junior Gazette , produced by pupils from the local comprehensive school . In later series it was depicted as a commercial venture . The show interspersed comedic elements with the dramatic . As well as addressing interpersonal relationships (particularly in the Lynda @-@ Spike story arc) , the show tackled issues such as solvent abuse , child abuse and firearms control .

Written by ex @-@ teacher Steven Moffat , more than half the episodes were directed by Bob Spiers , a noted British comedy director who had previously worked on classics such as Fawlty Towers . Critical reception was very positive , particularly for the quality of the writing , and the series has attracted a cult following with a wide age range .

= = Storyline = =

Famous journalist Matt Kerr (Clive Wood) arrives from Fleet Street to edit the local newspaper . He sets up a junior version of the paper , The Junior Gazette , to be produced by pupils from the local comprehensive school before and after school hours .

Some of the team are " star pupils " , but others have reputations for delinquency . One such pupil , Spike Thompson (Dexter Fletcher) , is forced to work on the paper rather than being expelled from school . He is immediately attracted to editor Lynda Day (Julia Sawalha) , but they bicker , throwing one @-@ liners at each other . Their relationship develops and they have an on @-@ off relationship . They regularly discuss their feelings , especially in the concluding episodes of each series . In the final episode of the third series , " Holding On " , Spike unwittingly expresses his strong feelings to Lynda while being taped . Jealous of his American girlfriend , Zoe , Lynda puts the cassette on Zoe's personal stereo , ruining their relationship . The on @-@ screen chemistry between the two leads was reflected off @-@ screen as they became an item for several years .

Although the Lynda and Spike story arc runs throughout the series , most episodes feature self @-@ contained stories and sub @-@ plots . Amongst lighter stories , such as one about Colin accidentally attending a funeral dressed as a pink rabbit , the show tackled many serious issues . Jeff Evans , writing in the Guinness Television Encyclopedia , writes that the series adopts a " far more adult approach " than " previous efforts in the same vein " such as A Bunch of Fives . Some critics also compared it with Hill Street Blues , Lou Grant " and other thoughtful US dramas , thanks to its realism and its level @-@ headed treatment of touchy subjects . " The first series approached solvent abuse in " How To Make A Killing " , and the NSPCC assisted in the production of the " Something Terrible " episodes about child abuse . The team were held hostage by a gun enthusiast in series three's " The Last Word " , while the final episode approaches drug abuse . The issue @-@ led episodes served to develop the main characters , so that " Something Terrible " is more " about Colin's redemption [from selfish capitalist] , rather than Cindy's abuse . "

According to the British Film Institute , " Press Gang managed to be perhaps the funniest children's series ever made and at the same time the most painfully raw and emotionally honest . The tone could change effortlessly and sensitively from farce to tragedy in the space of an episode . " Although the series is sometimes referred to as a comedy , Moffat insists that it is a drama with jokes in it . The writer recalls " a long running argument with Geoff Hogg (film editor on Press Gang) about whether Press Gang was comedy . He insisted that it was and I said it wasn't ? it was just funny . " Some innuendo leads Moffat to claim that it " had the dirtiest jokes in history ; we got away with tons of stuff ... We nearly got away with a joke about anal sex , but they spotted it at the last minute . " In one episode Lynda says she's going to " butter him up " , and , when asked while on a date in a restaurant if he was staying at the hotel , Colin replies " I shouldn't think so : it's only the first date . "

Jeff Evans also comments that the series was filmed cinematically , dabbling in " dream sequences , flashbacks , fantasies and , on one occasion , a Moonlighting @-@ esque parody of the film It 's a Wonderful Life . " The show had a strong awareness of continuity , with some stories , incidents and minor characters referred to throughout the series . Actors who played short @-@ term characters in the first two series were invited back to reprise their roles in future episodes . David Jefford (Alex Crockett) was resurrected from 1989 's " Monday ? Tuesday " to appear in the final episode " There Are Crocodiles " , while the same actress (Aisling Flitton) who played a wrong number in " Love and the Junior Gazette " was invited to reprise her character for the third series episode " Chance is a Fine Thing . " " Attention to detail " such as this is , according to Paul Cornell , " one of the numerous ways that the series respects the intelligence of its viewers . "

After the team leaves school , the paper gains financial independence and runs commercially . Assistant editor Kenny (Lee Ross) leaves at the end of series three to be replaced by Julie (Lucy Benjamin) , who was the head of the graphics team in series one .

= = Production = =

= = = Inception = = =

Bill Moffat , a headmaster from Glasgow , had an idea for a children 's television programme called The Norbridge Files . He showed it to a producer who visited his school , Thorn Primary School in Johnstone , Renfrewshire , when it was used as the location for an episode of Harry Secombe 's Highway . Producer Sandra C. Hastie liked the idea and showed it to her future husband Bill Ward , co @-@ owner of her company Richmond Films and Television . When she requested a script , Moffat suggested that his 25 @-@ year @-@ old son Steven , an English teacher , should write it . Hastie said that it was " the best ever first script " that she had read .

All 43 episodes were written by Steven Moffat . During production of series two , he was having an unhappy personal life after the break @-@ up of his first marriage . His wife 's new lover was represented in the episode " The Big Finish ? " by the character Brian Magboy (Simon Schatzberger) , a name inspired by Brian : Maggie 's boy . Moffat brought in the character so that all sorts of unfortunate things would happen to him , such as having a typewriter dropped on his foot . This period in Moffat 's life would also be reflected in his sitcom Joking Apart .

Central Independent Television had confidence in the project , so rather than the show being shot at their studios in Nottingham as planned , they granted Richmond a £ 2 million budget . This enabled it to be shot on 16 mm film , rather than the regular , less expensive videotape , and on location , making it very expensive compared with most children 's television . These high production costs almost led to its cancellation at the end of the second series , by which time Central executive Lewis Rudd was unable to commission programmes by himself .

= = = Directors = = =

More than half of the episodes were directed by Bob Spiers , a noted British comedy director who had previously worked on Fawlty Towers amongst many other programmes . He would work again with Moffat on his sitcom Joking Apart and Murder Most Horrid , and with Sawalha on Absolutely Fabulous . According to Moffat , Spiers was the " principal director " taking an interest in the other episodes and setting the visual style of the show . Spiers particularly used tracking shots , sometimes requiring more dialogue to be written to accommodate the length of the shot . The other directors would come in and " do a Spiers " . All of the directors were encouraged to attend the others ' shoots so that the visual style would be consistent .

The first two episodes were directed by Colin Nutley . However , he was unhappy with the final edit and requested that his name be removed from the credits . Lorne Magory directed many episodes , notably the two @-@ part stories " How To Make A Killing " and " The Last Word . " One of the founders of Richmond Films and Television , Bill Ward , directed three episodes , and Bren Simson

directed some of series two . The show 's cinematographer James Devis took the directorial reigns for " Windfall " , the penultimate episode .

= = = Location = = =

Whilst the show was set in the fictional town of Norbridge , it was mostly filmed in Uxbridge , a suburb of London . Many of the scenes were shot at Haydon School in Pinner . The first series was filmed entirely on location , but after the demolition of the building used as the original newspaper office , interior shots were filmed in Pinewood Studios for the second series , and the exterior of the building was not seen beyond that series . Subsequent series were filmed at Lee International Studios at Shepperton (series three and four) and Twickenham Studios (series five) .

= = = Music and title sequences = = =

The theme music was composed by Peter Davis (who after the second series composed the rest of the series alone as principal composer) , John Mealing and John G. Perry . The opening titles show the main characters striking a pose , with the name of the respective actor in a typewriter style typeface . Steven Moffat and Julia Sawalha were not very impressed with the opening titles when discussing them for a DVD commentary in 2004 . They were re @-@ recorded for series three , in the same style , to address the actors ' ages and alterations to the set .

Many of the closing titles in the first two series were accompanied by dialogue from two characters . Episodes that ended on a particularly sombre tone , such as " Monday @-@ Tuesday " and " Yesterday 's News " , used only appropriately sombre music to accompany the end credits . After an emphatic climax , " At Last a Dragon " used an enhanced version of the main theme with more extravagant use of electric guitar . Moffat felt that the voiceovers worked well in the first series , but that they were not as good in the second . Hastie recalls that Moffat was " extremely angry " that Drop the Dead Donkey had adopted the style . They were dropped after the second series . The cast , according to Moffat , were " grumpy with having to turn up to a recording studio to record them . "

= = Characters = =

= = = Main characters = = =

Lynda Day (Julia Sawalha) is the editor of the Junior Gazette . She is strong and opinionated , and is feared by many of her team . Moffat has said that the character was partly based on the show 's " ball @-@ breaking " producer , Sandra C. Hastie . Although she appears very tough , she occasionally exposes her feelings . She quits the paper at the end of " Monday @-@ Tuesday " , and in " Day Dreams " laments " Why do I get everything in my whole stupid life wrong ? " Intimidated by socialising , she hiccups at the idea . She is so nervous at a cocktail party , in " At Last a Dragon " , that she attempts to leave on several occasions . The mixture of Lynda 's sensitive side and her self @-@ sufficient attitude is illustrated in the series ' final episode " There Are Crocodiles . " Reprimanding the ghost of Gary (Mark Sayers) , who died after taking a drug overdose , she says :

Look , I 'm sorry you 're dead OK ? I do care . But to be perfectly honest with you , I don 't care a lot . You had a choice , you took the drugs , you died . Are you seriously claiming no one warned you it was dangerous ? ... I mean , have you had a look at the world lately ? ... There 's plenty of stuff going on that kills you and you don 't get warned at all . So sticking your head in a crocodile you were told about is not calculated to get my sympathy .

James " Spike " Thomson (Dexter Fletcher) is an American delinquent , forced to work on the paper rather than being excluded from school . He is immediately attracted to Lynda , and he establishes himself as an important member of the reporting team having been responsible for

getting their first lead story . He usually has a range of one @-@ liners , though is often criticised , particularly by Lynda , for excessive joking . However , Spike often consciously uses humour to lighten the tone , such as in " Monday @-@ Tuesday " when he tries to cheer up Lynda after she feels responsible for David 's suicide .

The character was originally written as English , until producer Hastie felt that an American character would enhance the chance of overseas sales . This meant that English @-@ born Fletcher had to act in an American accent for all five years . Moffat says that he isn 't " sure [that] lumbering Dexter with that accent was a smart move . " The American accent had some fans surprised to learn that Fletcher is actually English .

Kenny Phillips (Lee Ross) is one of Lynda 's (few) long @-@ term friends and is her assistant editor in the first three series . Kenny is much calmer than Lynda , though is still dominated by her . Despite this , he is one of the few people able to stand up to Lynda , in his own quiet way . Although he identifies himself as " sweet " , he is unlucky in love : Jenny (Sadie Frost) , the girlfriend he meets in " How to Make a Killing " , dumps him because he is too understanding . His secret passion for writing music is revealed at the end of series two , which was influenced by Ross ' interests . Colin organizes and markets a concert for him , and the second series ends with Kenny performing " You Don 't Feel For Me " (written by Ross himself) . Lee Ross was only able to commit to the first six episodes of the 12 @-@ episode series three and four filming block because he was expecting a film role . Thus , by series four , Kenny has left for Australia .

Colin Mathews (Paul Reynolds) is the Thatcherite in charge of the paper 's finances and advertising . He often wears loud shirts , and his various schemes have included marketing defective half @-@ ping @-@ pong balls (as ' pings ') , exam revision kits and soda that leaves facial stains . Rosie Marcel and Claire Hearnden appear throughout the second series as Sophie and Laura , Colin 's mischievous young helpers .

Julie Craig (Lucy Benjamin) is the head of the graphics team in series one . Moffat was impressed with Benjamin 's performance , and expanded her character for the second series . However she had committed herself to roles in the LWT sitcom Close to Home and Jupiter Moon , so the character was replaced by Sam . The character returns in the opening episode of series four as researcher on the Saturday morning show Crazy Stuff . She arranges for Lynda and Spike to be reunited on live television , but the subsequent complaints about the violence (face slapping) results in Julie 's firing . After giving Lynda some home truths , Julie replaces Kenny as the assistant editor for the final two series . She is a flirt , and , according to Lynda , was the " official pin @-@ up at the last prison riot . "

Sarah Jackson (Kelda Holmes) is the paper 's lead writer . Although she is intelligent she gets stressed , such as during her interview for editorship of the Junior Gazette . Her final episode , " Friendly Fire " , shows the development of her friendship with Lynda , and how the latter saw her as a challenge when she first arrived to Norbridge High . Together they had established the underground school magazine : Damn Magazine . Her first attempt to leave the newspaper to attend a writing course at the local college is thwarted by Lynda , but she eventually leaves in series five to attend university (mirroring the reason for Holmes ' departure) .

Frazer " Frazz " Davis (Mmoloki Chrystie) is one of Spike 's co @-@ delinquents forced into working on the paper , his initial main task writing the horoscopes . Frazz is initially portrayed as " intellectually challenged " , such as not understanding the synonymous relationship between " the astrology column " and the horoscopes . Later episodes , however , show him to be devious , such as in " The Last Word : Part 2 " when he stuns the gunman using a large array of flashguns .

= = = Other recurring characters = = =

Sam Black (Gabrielle Anwar) replaced Julie as the head of the graphics team in the second series . Sam is very fashion conscious and a flirt , and is surprised when an actor rejects her advances in favour of Sarah . Anwar had auditioned for the role of Lynda . (Many actors who unsuccessfully auditioned for main characters were invited back later for guest roles .) Moffat had expanded the role of Julie after the first series , but Lucy Benjamin was unavailable for series two . Sam , therefore

, was basically the character of Julie under a different name , especially in her earlier episodes .

Charlie Creed @-@ Miles , who played Danny McColl , the paper 's photographer , became disenchanted with his minor role and left after the first series .

Toni " Tiddler " Tildesley (Joanna Dukes) is the junior member of the team , responsible for the junior section , Junior Junior Gazette .

Billy Homer (Andy Crowe) was also a recurring character . A tetraplegic , he is very competent with computer networks , sometimes hacking into the school 's database . His storylines are some of the first representations of the Internet in British television . Moffat felt that he was unable to sustain the character , and he appears only sporadically after the first series .

The main adults are deputy headmaster Bill Sullivan (Nick Stringer) , maverick editor Matt Kerr (Clive Wood) and experienced Gazette reporter Chrissie Stewart (Angela Bruce) .

= = Reaction = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

Critical reaction was good , the show being particularly praised for the high quality and sophistication of the writing . The first episode was highly rated by The Daily Telegraph , The Guardian and the Times Educational Supplement . In his emphatic review , Paul Cornell writes that :

Press Gang has proved to be a series that can transport you back to how you felt as a teenager , sharper than the world but with as much angst as acute wit ... Never again can a show get away with talking down to children or writing sloppily for them . Press Gang , possibly the best show in the world .

Time Out said that " this is quality entertainment : the kids are sharp , the scripts are clever and the jokes are good . " The BBC 's William Gallagher called it " pretty flawless " , with The Guardian retrospectively commending the series . Others , such as Popmatters , have also commented upon how " the show is renowned ... for doing something kid television at the time didn 't do (and , arguably , still doesn 't) : it refused to treat its audience like children . " Comedian Richard Herring recalls watching the show as a recent graduate , commenting that it " was subtle , sophisticated and much too good for kids . " According to Moffat , " Press Gang had gone over very , very well in the industry and I was being touted and romanced all the time . " Press Gang 's complicated plots and structure would become a hallmark of Moffat 's work , such as Joking Apart and Coupling .

The series received a Royal Television Society award and a BAFTA in 1991 for " Best Children 's Programme (Entertainment / Drama) " . It was also nominated for two Writers ' Guild of Great Britain awards , one Prix Jeunesse and the 1992 BAFTA for " Best Children 's Programme (Fiction) " . Julia Sawalha won the Royal Television Society Television Award for " Best Actor ? Female " in 1993 .

= = = Repeat showings = = =

The show gained an even wider adult audience in an early evening slot when repeated on Sundays on Channel 4 in 1991 . This crossover is reflected in the BBC 's review for one of the DVDs when they say that " Press Gang is one of the best series ever made for kids . Or adults . "

Nickelodeon showed nearly all of the episodes in a weekday slot in 1997 . The final three episodes of the third series , however , were not repeated on the children 's channel because of their content : " The Last Word " double episode with the gun siege , and " Holding On " with the repetition of the phrase " divorce the bitch " . On the first transmission of the latter on 11 June 1991 , continuity announcer Tommy Boyd warned viewers that it contained stronger than usual language . In 2007 , itv.com made the first series , with the exception of " Page One " , available to be viewed on its website free of charge .

2 episodes were broadcast on the CITV Channel on 5 & 6 January 2013 , as part of a weekend of

archive programmes to celebrate CITV 's 30th anniversary .

= = = Fan following = = =

Press Gang has attracted a cult following . A fanzine , Breakfast at Czars , was produced in the 1990s . Edited by Stephen O 'Brien , it contained a range of interviews with the cast and crew (notably with producer Hastie) , theatre reviews and fanfiction . The first edition was included as a PDF file on the series two DVD , while the next three were on the series five disc . An e @-@ mail discussion list has been operational since February 1997 . Scholar Miles Booy observes that as Steven Moffat was himself a fan of Doctor Who , he was able to ingrate the elements that TV fans appreciated , such as :

series finales with big cliff @-@ hangers , rigorous continuity and a slew of running jokes and references which paid those who watched and rewatched the text to pull out its minutia . At the end of the second series , it is remarked that the news team have been following the Spike / Lynda romance ' since page one ' , and only the fans remembered ? or discovered on reviewing ? that " Page One " was the title of the first episode .

Booy points out that Chris Carter and Joss Whedon would be acclaimed for these elements in the 1990s (in the shows The X @-@ Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer) , but " Moffat got there first , and ... in a children 's TV slot . His was the first show to arrive with a Britain 's fan 's sensibility to formal possibilities . "

Two conventions were held in the mid @-@ 1990s in Liverpool . The events , in aid of the NSPCC , were each titled " Both Sides of the Paper " and were attended by Steven Moffat , Sandra Hastie , Dexter Fletcher , Paul Reynolds , Kelda Holmes and Nick Stringer . There were screenings of extended rough cuts of " A Quarter to Midnight " and " There Are Crocodiles " , along with auctions of wardrobe and props . When Virgin Publishing prevented Paul Cornell from writing an episode guide , the Press Gang Programme Guide , edited by Jim Sangster , was published by Leomac Publishing in 1995 . Sangster , O 'Brien and Adrian Petford collaborated with Network DVD on the extra features for the DVD releases .

Big Finish Productions , which produces audio plays based on sci @-@ fi properties , particularly Doctor Who , was named after the title of the final episode of the second series . Moffat himself is an ardent Doctor Who fan , and became the programme 's lead writer and executive producer in 2009 .

Moffat has integrated many references to secondary characters and locations in Press Gang in his later work . His 1997 sitcom Chalk refers to a neighbouring school as Norbridge High , run by Mr Sullivan , and to the characters Dr Clipstone (" UneXpected ") , Malcolm Bullivant (" Something Terrible ") and David Jefford (" Monday @-@ Tuesday " / " There are Crocodiles ") , a pupil who Mr Slatt (David Bamber) reprimands for masturbating . The name " Talwinning " appears as the name of streets in " A Quarter to Midnight " and Joking Apart , and as the surname of the protagonist in " Dying Live " , an episode of Murder Most Horrid written by Moffat , as well as the name of a librarian in his Doctor Who prose short story , " Continuity Errors " , which was published in the 1996 Virgin Books anthology Decalog 3 : Consequences . The name " Inspector Hibbert " , from " The Last Word " , is given to the character played by Nick Stringer in " Elvis , Jesus and Jack " , Moffat 's final Murder Most Horrid contribution . Most recently , in the first episode of Moffat 's Jekyll , Mr Hyde (James Nesbitt) whistled the same tune as Lynda in " Going Back to Jasper Street " .

= = = Proposed television movie = = =

A television film called " Deadline " was planned . It was set a few years after the series and aimed at a more adult audience . At one stage in 1992 , series 4 was intended to be the last , and the movie was proposed as a follow @-@ up . However , making of the film fell through when a fifth series was commissioned instead . The idea of the follow @-@ up film was reconsidered several times during the 1990s , but every time fell through for various reasons .

In June 2007 , The Stage reported that Moffat and Sawalha are interested in reviving Press Gang .

He said : " I would revive that like a shot . I would love to do a reunion episode ? a grown @-@ up version . I know Julia Sawalha is interested ? every time I see her she asks me when we are going to do it . Maybe it will happen ? I would like it to . " The Guardian advocated the show 's revival , arguing that " a revamped Press Gang with Moffat at the helm could turn the show from a cult into a national institution - a petri dish for young acting and writing talent to thrive . It 's part of our TV heritage and definitely worthy of resuscitation . "

At the Edinburgh International Television Festival in August 2008 , Moffat told how he got drunk after the wrap party for Jekyll and pitched the idea of a Press Gang reunion special to the Head of Drama at the BBC , John Yorke . Despite Yorke 's approval , the writer said that he was too busy with his work on Doctor Who to pursue the idea .

= = Merchandise = =

Several products have been released , specifically four novelisations , a video and the complete collection on DVD .

Four novelisations were written by Bill Moffat and published by Hippo Books / Scholastic in 1989 and 1990 based on the first two series . First Edition was based on the first three episodes , with Public Exposure covering " Interface " and " How to Make a Killing . " The third book , Checkmate , covered " Breakfast at Czar 's " , " Picking Up the Pieces " and " Going Back to Jasper Street " , and reveals that Julie left the graphics department to go to art college . The fourth and final book , The Date , is a novelisation of " Money , Love and Birdseed " , " Love and the Junior Gazette " and " At Last a Dragon . " Each book featured an eight @-@ page photographic insert .

VCI Home Video , with Central Video , released one volume on VHS in 1990 featuring the first four episodes : " Page One " , " Photo Finish " , " One Easy Lesson " and " Deadline . " The complete series of Press Gang is available on DVD (Region 2 , UK) from Network DVD and in Australia (Region 4) from Force Entertainment . Four episodes of the second series DVD features an audio commentary by Julia Sawalha and Steven Moffat , in which the actress claims to remember very little about the show . Shooting scripts and extracts from Jim Sangster 's programme guide (published by Leomac Publishing) are included in PDF format from series two onwards . The second series DVD set also contains the only existing copy , in offline edit form , of an unaired documentary filmed during production of series two .