

TV Review: Vera Series 5 Episode 2: 'Old Wounds'

A weak conclusion spoils the latest episode of Vera, says [Rhys Thompson](#)

Thursday 16 April 2015

★★☆☆☆



Brenda Blethyn as Vera. Image: ITV

When I read the Radio Times description for this episode I became genuinely excited to watch, it promised a compelling drama and, for the first seventy five minutes it delivered. Unfortunately it all fell apart in the closing quarter. But before we get onto that, what went right?

The episode presented the audience with a departure from the usual *Vera* format; a skeleton is discovered in a forest, prompting Vera and her team to explore a community still fractured by the Miners' Strike thirty years ago. It was great to see the programme utilising the history of the North East as part of a storyline; one or two episodes have lacked any tangible connection to the region and could have been set in Bristol for all the difference it made. By linking the storyline to the Strike, scriptwriter Martha Hillier was able to explore the social and cultural consequences of the 1980s upon modern Northumberland, especially with the relationship between the police and the people, which created a richly dramatic background.

The cast were uniformly excellent. George Costigan was especially noteworthy as the bereaved father who had to wait thirty years with the pain of not knowing where his daughter was. There was also a quirky new addition to the main cast, Lisa Hammond as online genius Helen; despite her character seeming to be a direct steal from the sublime Clarissa in *Silent Witness*, it's good to see a believable team developing on the programme.

Unfortunately, nearly all of this good work went to waste in the concluding twenty minutes. This paragraph does contain "spoilers", so if you don't want to know what happens (and I wouldn't blame you because it's nonsense) please skip to the next paragraph. As mentioned last week, a key part of any murder mystery programme is trying to guess who did it. Sadly, you would have to be watching *Poldark* on BBC1 to not guess "who-dunnit". Anyone who has ever seen any form of murder mystery programme knows that as soon as a character is introduced as an old chum of the programme's star they simply have to be the killer (especially if they're an old police officer). It's happened in *Taggart*, *Waking the Dead*, *Marple* and *Poirot*, to name just a few. Not only was it entirely predictable, it caused the whole

case to collapse into total nonsense. The victim was supposedly killed because she'd been taking photos of the (undercover) police officer. Fine, I can go along with that, except that meant the killer was an idiot (or poorly written) because the camera and the film with the supposedly incriminating photos were left for Vera and her team to discover thirty years later. He killed her for the photos then left them all behind. How does that make sense? A convoluted trail then followed, which was only resolved by one character remembering the killer's wife had cancer; just like Vera's old friend. As with the last episode, a single snippet of conversation solved the case. I don't want to call it lazy writing, but it's certainly poor plotting.

It feels incredibly harsh to only give this episode two stars. It's clear that a lot of work has gone into it. The production values are very high, the acting and directing are at the impeccable standard we've come to expect, but once again the script spoils the episode. My dissatisfaction doesn't lie with who the murderer was, nor how predictable it was. I just feel disappointed that such a brilliant opportunity was once again spoiled by a nonsensical plotline. ITV really need to work harder at the scripting stage if *Vera* is to continue being the ratings success it deserves to be.



2 comments

Suzan

19 Feb '18 at 3:34 am

Oh thank goodness I found your review. Just now binging on "Vera," my husband and I were so disappointed by the camera and pictures plot hole! It was so obvious we thought we missed some vital part of the plot.

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Jimmy

1 Mar '18 at 7:19 am

Great to see both of these comment. And for me, the camera is just the beginning. How does the murderer chase her into the woods with no witnesses? How far was that? How did he have time to dig a grave, wherein the camera was laid? Why did he use the same alias with the mother of the murdered girl, and his 'informant'? Why did carnival worker Manttan, who knew MP Tennant was formerly a scab, wait 30 years (or however long it was since his election) to blackmail him? Any why did the information about Tennant being a scab have to become public? He was not charged with any crime (unless scabbing is one with no statute of limitations), they knew who committed both murders, and there was probably no need to bring in any information about him. When Vera found out that Manttan had a history of violence against women (or did he? - that came from the murderer of the girl), and could possibly have been freed from prison to kill her, she threw her usual caution to the wind and sent a crew to bring him in. Which led to his murder, shortly before Vera found out there had been no opportunity for Manttan to have committed the 30-year-old murder. Bad police work leading to a needless death. So many holes, so unusual for Vera.

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