

In plain SIGHT

TIMOTHY SPALL and ANNE REID on the complex case at the centre of a new true-crime drama

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

NEW MONDAY & TUESDAY, 9PM, BBC1
DRAMA (BOX SET, BBC iPLAYER)

One of the most chilling and complex criminal cases in recent history is explored in BBC's true-life drama *The Sixth Commandment*.

The four-part recounts how charismatic churchwarden Ben Field (Anna Hardwicke) murdered his 60-year-old lover, inspirational teacher Peter Farquhar (Timothy Spall), in October 2015, and also targeted retired head teacher Ann Moore-Martin (Anne Reid).

Field seduced, manipulated and gaslighted both victims in a bid to get their inheritance. The show also follows the police investigation and the high-profile trial that led to Field being found guilty of Peter's murder and sentenced to life in prison in 2019. 'I'm honoured to be playing Peter,' says Timothy. 'I hope I do him justice, which is the very least he deserves.'

Here, Timothy, 66, and Anne, 88, give us their take on the drama, which was made with the full support of the victims' families...

Why do you think viewers will be drawn to this story?

ANNE I think the audience will find the whole story fascinating. What's terrifying is that terrible evil is hiding in plain sight. Ben Field could be anybody, he feels like a normal, loving guy, which makes you question your own life. I don't know whether I would have been taken in by someone like him - it's difficult to judge relationships.

TIMOTHY Throughout history, it's usually the murderers, not the victims, who become famous, but this is about the victims as well as the perpetrator. We're paying homage to the people who lived and talking about the frailty of the human heart. This drama is a tribute to them and to the bravery within the family in finding justice for them.

What sort of people were Peter Farquhar and Ann Moore-Martin?

TIMOTHY Peter was a Cambridge graduate and a brilliant teacher. He was highly respected, much loved, and had a huge influence on young people's lives and

careers. He was also a devout Christian and found it difficult to reconcile his repressed sexuality with his faith. Although he had many friends, he was quite lonely and felt deeply isolated within himself. When we first meet him in the drama, he's just retired from Stowe School and is about to take up

a position as a guest lecturer at the University of Buckingham.

ANNE Ann was a successful model when she was young, and then became a teacher and headmistress. She was a lively, intelligent woman who had retired and lived a couple of doors away from Peter. That's how Ben Field came to meet her and identify her as a potential victim.

How do you think Ann and Peter were duped into fake relationships by Ben Field?

ANNE Ann was very religious and Field feigned a religious belief to gain her confidence and become friends. He began by helping her with things around the house and, before long, she offered him a room because he said he had nowhere to live. He wins her confidence and draws her in and then he tells her that he's fallen in love with her, which is quite beguiling when you're 83.



Support: Dame Sheila Hancock stars as Peter's neighbour Liz



Manipulative: The drama shows how Ann trusted Field



**'BEN FIELD
COULD BE
ANYBODY, HE
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A NORMAL,
LOVING GUY'**

Anne Reid

Cruelly duped: Peter
(played by Timothy Spall) and
Ann (Anne Reid). Background:
Eanna Hardwicke as Field



Suspicions:
Annabel Scholey plays
Ann's niece Anne-Marie

TIMOTHY You're talking about deeply intelligent people who are hoodwinked by their own dreams being answered – the softest part of their souls are being touched by somebody so seemingly genuine, who offers them a love and intimacy that they've never felt.

When Peter starts to get very ill and begins hallucinating, he makes the assumption that he's just getting old – he doesn't see anything nefarious at all.

What were the main challenges of taking on your respective roles?

TIMOTHY It's a massive responsibility when you're playing a real human being as you're telling a story about someone who's loved and remembered and was alive not that long ago. You really want to get it right. It was so important to me that Peter's

family were behind this production. As the story develops, we follow the criminal process, the bringing to justice in a case that was originally shut down and deemed to be accidental death.

ANNE I felt a great sense of responsibility portraying Ann; this good, kind, trusting woman who was so cruelly deceived and whose relatives are still alive.

How did you find acting in scenes opposite Eanna Hardwicke, who portrays Ben Field?

ANNE Eanna's a joy to work with. In real life, he has a lovely Irish accent; I got such a shock when I heard him talking as himself and not as Ben Field!

TIMOTHY When I first read the script, I wondered, 'Who on Earth are they going to get to play this part?' From an acting point of view, it's a great role, but it's very subtle and needs a brilliant actor. Eanna's fantastic. He makes the character so convincing and believable.

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'THERE WERE SO MANY ELEMENTS TO IT'

Writer **SARAH PHELPS** on the challenges of retelling an extraordinary true-crime story...



'I remember following the case as it was happening, and I could feel it coming to life in my head as a story before I even started going through the research material', says Sarah, who wrote *A Very British Scandal* and has adapted a number of Agatha Christie classics for BBC1 including *The Pale Horse* (2020).

'There were so many elements to it. I started out thinking that this was a really twisted, sad story that had a fairy-tale quality to it. It's about an English village into which walks somebody who is entirely predatory but who was so good at camouflage that nobody saw the wolf's clothing.'

'I've spent a lot of my career writing about murder, and I think the victim is always the most important element. One thing I didn't want to do was to glamourise the killer. I wanted to understand and honour the victims, to give them life and dignity. 'I wouldn't have been able to write this without the help, support and insights of Peter and Ann's families. I'm so appreciative of the trust they placed in me to tell the stories of their loved ones.'