

The week in TV: Banished; Storyville: India's Daughter; Surviving Sandy Hook; Pompidou; Arthur & George

Jimmy McGovern's new period drama recreated the fatal shore of Australia in 1788, while two shocking documentaries showed the present day faring little better when it comes to humanity's capacity for cruelty

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Sunday 8 March 2015 07.00 GMT

Banished (BBC2) | iPlayer

Storyville: India's Daughter (BBC4) | iPlayer

Surviving Sandy Hook (BBC2) | iPlayer

Pompidou (BBC2) | iPlayer

Arthur & George (ITV) | ITV Player

Banished, a thrillingly pot-boiling tale of the first convicts to land in New South Wales in 1788 and their dastardly redcoat overseers, could almost have been written by anyone. Elizabeth Jane Howard, Ken Follett, Mrs Tiggy-Winkle, the Akond of Swat. Such is the dramatic power of that fatal shore that it would be hard to string together a narrative that fell anything short of adequate, or at a push mediocre.

The one name we didn't expect to see on the credits, however, was that of Jimmy McGovern, and that was close to a stroke of genius. So Jimmy gets (presumably) to shake from his shoes the beloved grit of his north-west and saunter barefoot on a few deserted beaches, and we get a sharply clever reminder that, even in the grimmest Manc and Liverpudlian estates, life today is, relatively, a bloody cakewalk.

It's McGovern's first period drama (I don't think *Hillsborough* counts), and there are bound to be flaws. There appear to be slightly too many Michelle Pfeiffer lookalikes with perfect teeth. And I don't normally mind anachronisms except in woeful *Downton*, but would someone in 1788 *really* have known the baby polar bear joke (second episode)? But, for all that, McGovern lifts this to an altogether higher quality of drama, with credible rather than cartoon villainy, and Julian Rhind-Tutt, after such sterling years of radio service, proves again what a thoroughly class package he really is. And there's MyAnna Buring, all flashing eyes and dirty feet, and a surprisingly nuanced (for McGovern) take on class war. It's like *Sharpe* for evening adults with a bottle of dusty red, and looks set to give the by-all-accounts-insipid new *Poldark* a hefty run for its money.

India's Daughter, a film from the *Storyville* strand brought forward by the BBC from International Women's Day (on Sunday) "given the intense level of interest" in it after preview clips sparked outrage in Britain and India, was the most shocking piece of revelatory filming on TV this year. India has now banned its broadcast, with urban development minister M Venkaiah Naidu declaring: "This is an international conspiracy to defame India. We will see how the film can be stopped abroad too." The splendid news for the ludicrous man is that the genie doesn't go back into that bottle any more.

Many of us will presumably have read of film-maker Leslee Udwin's interview with bus driver Mukesh Singh, now on death row, convicted alongside others of the unconscionable 2012 gang-rape and gang-murder (they stuck an iron rod inside her, were drunkenly confused when they found her intestines hanging out, so wrapped them in a paper bag and threw them off the bus) of 23-year-old medical student Jyoti Singh (no relation). In Mukesh's cruelly unrepentant words: "A girl is far more responsible for rape than a boy" and "She should just be silent [during the rape]. Then they'd have just dropped her off after doing her."

Harsher still were the insights it brought into what even educated Indian males think. The two defence lawyers, for instance: "If you put your diamond on the street, certainly the dogs will pick it out." Jyoti had been returning from a film at 8pm. Or: "If my daughter or sister engaged in premarital activities, or brought any other disgrace on herself... in front of my entire family, I would put petrol on her and set her alight."

The subsequent anger, both then and now, has wisely focused not only on Jyoti but on the legions of other female victims - not only of rape, or murder, or honour killings, but of getting (from birth) less milk than their brothers, of the constant sense of male entitlement, brought into queasy focus as a changing economy empowers clever women and atrophies stupid men. It might be a clunking comparison, but who might have believed that, almost 250 years after female convicts were being forced into the tents of slaving soldiers on the eucalypt coasts of Oz, there's still a need for placards on Delhi's streets proclaiming "It's a dress, not a yes". And there is an argument for this having had the wrong title. It might have been called *India's Sons*.

Only marginally less compelling, though in any other week it would have been head and shoulders shocking, was **Surviving Sandy Hook**, the tale of three families coming to grips with Adam Lanza's fatal shooting of 20 children and six teachers at an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut - coincidentally, just two days before Jyoti's rape.

A social worker who independently lost her own son years before had "comforted" grieving mother Scarlett Lewis with the words: "I'm here to tell you that you will never get better. You will never feel any better than you are feeling right now." The feisty Scarlett, rather than instantly felling her with a rabbit-punch to the back of the neck, instead chose to embrace free will and choice and go on, with her surviving son JT, to make her son Jesse's death count for something, anything.

Normally I recoil from such heartsweet tales, and that tiresome ability of Americans to sturdily confuse sentimentality with emotion, but this was rather moving, honest and telling. I only had to walk from the room during the foul, bewitching sophistry of the gun lobby, never more articulate than when basking in its myopia.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate how awful was the thing entitled **Pompidou**. I might be a little biased, because this pompous-bloke-fallen-on-hard-times sitcom featured three of my very least favourite things - slapstick, deference and the inexplicably beloved Beeb pet Matt Lucas. Even on an objective reading, however, this misguided and ill-disguised attempt to flog to the BBC Worldwide and children's market a sub-Bean, definitely sub-Hulot, half-hour lash-up of silly voices, snobbery and painfully telegraphed misunderstandings made me yearn for the comparatively Shavian sophistications of that exaggerated, whistling, carefree saunter Norman Wisdom would adopt six seconds before falling into a manhole. Insulting to children, insulting even to French people, who seem to like this kind of stuff, and you could find more intellectual creativity in 10 minutes of *Bananas in Pyjamas*.

Arthur & George was fine. Martin Clunes's Scottish accent was fine. It was all fine. Rich-tea biscuit fine. Warner Leisure Hotels fine. But was this Sherlock-lite really necessary, and have I sold it well enough yet?

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