

ITV commissions real life drama, Stonehouse, starring Matthew Macfadyen and Keeley Hawes

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[Drama](#), [ITVX](#)

[Pictured: Matthew Macfadyen as John Stonehouse]

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ITV commissions real life drama, Stonehouse, starring Matthew Macfadyen as John Stonehouse and Keeley Hawes as his wife Barbara, written by acclaimed writer John Preston, directed by award winning director Jon S. Baird and produced by Snowed-In Productions and Clearwood Films - with BritBox International as co-production partners

The life and times of disgraced Labour minister John Stonehouse is to be dramatised for ITV by acclaimed writer John Preston with BAFTA award-winning and Emmy-nominated Matthew Macfadyen (Succession, Quiz) in the leading role

and co-starring Keeley Hawes (Honour, It's A Sin) as Stonehouse's wife Barbara.

The three-part drama, directed by BAFTA-nominated Jon S. Baird (Stan & Ollie, Vinyl, Filth) with BritBox International as co-production partners, relates how Stonehouse, a high-flying member of Harold Wilson's Government, vanished from the beach of a large luxury hotel in Florida in November 1974, leaving a neatly folded pile of clothes as he swam into the sea, intent on faking his own death.

Commented Matthew Macfadyen:

"What happened to John Stonehouse is the stuff of legend. I've always been intrigued by what motivated him to fake his own death, and leave behind the family he loved and doted upon and a promising political career. John Preston's script truly captures the man and his colourful life and I'm looking forward to taking on his character."

The MP for Walsall North left behind his loving wife Barbara and three young children as a shocked public and media presumed he had drowned or been eaten by sharks.

Charismatic, oozing with charm and brimming with confidence, Stonehouse had impressed Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Labour stalwarts from an early stage in his parliamentary career. From a working-class background, he'd graduated from the London School of Economics, was in the RAF during the War and seemed the ideal candidate for a life in politics.

As the drama unfolds, it becomes apparent his reputation as a devoted family man masked the truth, as he'd embarked on an extra marital affair with his secretary, Sheila Buckley, and acted as a spy for the Czech Secret Service in the 1960s.

His complex financial status and relationships eventually took their toll, with Stonehouse deliberately stealing the identity of a recently deceased constituent. Stonehouse applied for a passport in the dead man's name and began to weave an elaborate conspiracy, seeking a new life in Australia. But his plans soon turned sour as Stonehouse was arrested by Australian police who had been under the mistaken impression that he was the fugitive peer Lord Lucan.

Brought back to the UK by Scotland Yard detectives, Stonehouse found that he was crucial to keeping the Labour government in power with its wafer-thin majority.

The drama will also star Emer Heatley (Showtrial) as Stonehouse's mistress Sheila Buckley, Kevin R McNally (The Crown, Unforgotten) as Harold Wilson, Dorothy Atkinson (All Creatures Great and Small, Mum) as Betty Boothroyd and Igor Grabuzov (Voskresenskiy, No Looking Back).

Commented writer John Preston:

"I've always been fascinated by John Stonehouse. The story of how he faked his own death and tried to start a new life in Australia under an assumed name is one of the most bizarre true-life tales I've ever come across. I'm absolutely thrilled that it's being brought to the screen with such an outstanding cast."

Stonehouse has been commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama, Polly Hill, who will oversee the production from the channel's perspective.

Commented Polly Hill:

"John Preston's brilliant scripts and the perfect casting of Matthew Macfadyen and Keeley Hawes promise to make this an unmissable drama. This incredible true story and the excellent production team, led by the director Jon S. Baird, will continue the unparalleled quality we have at delivering true drama on ITV."

Stonehouse will be produced by Snowed-In Productions and Clearwood Films with Ruth Kenley-Letts (Mrs Wilson, Too Close, You Don't Know Me) and Ellie Wood (The Dig, Decline and Fall) executive producing. The production reunites Ellie Wood and John Preston, after Wood produced the feature film, The Dig, adapted from Preston's eponymous novel.

The drama will be directed by acclaimed film and TV director Jon S. Baird. Baird's credits include the award-winning Filth, starring James McAvoy, and Stan & Ollie, with Steve Coogan and John C. Reilly playing comedy legends Laurel and Hardy. Baird's most recent TV project is the upcoming Tetris, starring Taron Egerton.

Commented Director Jon S. Baird:

"I'm always drawn to fascinating true stories and this one is extra special because it has both comedic and emotional potential. Matthew is perfect casting for this role. It's also great to be working with ITV for the first time and with two fabulous producers in Ruth and Ellie."

Ruth Kenley-Letts, CEO at Snowed-In Productions, said:

“It’s thrilling to be a part of the team making this stranger than fiction story of a British MP who came back from the dead. It’s also very exciting to be working for the first time with the talented director Jon S. Baird on this first-class script with a standout cast. I’m delighted to be working again with Polly Hill and Kevin Lygo at ITV and partnering with Diederick Santer at BritBox International along with the team at Banijay, all of whom have given their unequivocal support to the project.”

Ellie Wood at Clearwood Films said:

“It’s wonderful to be working on this drama about the astonishing rise and fall of John Stonehouse. John Preston’s exceptionally witty and poignant scripts feel peculiarly relevant at a time where the behaviour of politicians is so often making headlines. I can’t wait for Matthew, Keeley and the brilliant cast to bring this incredible story to ITV and BritBox International.”

John Preston, former Arts Editor for the Sunday Telegraph and London Evening Standard, is author of a number of acclaimed books. A Very English Scandal, the story of the political scandal involving Jeremy Thorpe, was adapted into the BAFTA award-winning TV drama, starring Hugh Grant and Ben Whishaw. Preston’s novel, The Dig, was adapted into a major feature film in 2021 for Netflix, receiving multiple BAFTA nominations. His latest work, Fall: The Mystery of Robert Maxwell, won the 2021 Costa Biography Award and is being adapted for television.

Stonehouse will be directed by Jon S. Baird. Executive Producers are Jon S. Baird, Neil Blair, Ruth Kenley-Letts, Matthew Macfadyen, John Preston and Ellie Wood, Polly Hill for ITV and Diederick Santer for BritBox International.

BritBox International, the streaming service offering the best collection of unmissable British entertainment, will be the exclusive home to the series in the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway.

Banijay will be responsible for the international distribution of the drama.

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