



ON THE SEA

A film by HELEN WALSH



The Yellow Affair





**The
Yellow
Affair**



Cast

**BARRY WARD, LORNE MACFADYEN, LIZ WHITE, HENRY LAWFULL
WITH CELYN JONES AND DANNY WEBB**

Written and Directed by
HELEN WALSH

Producers
DAVID MOORES DAVID A HUGHES

Executive Producers
MIKE GOODRIDGE CHRIS CLARK

Worldwide Sales **The Yellow Affair**
Steven Bestwick, Alexandra Cruz - contact@yellowaffair.com

Genre:
**Drama,
Romance**

Country:
UK

Language:
English

Running time:
**111
minutes**

Screen ratio:
**2:1 / 16:9
letterbox**

Sound:
**6 x mono
wav (5.1)**

Logline

Love, longing and desire in a beautiful, remote coastal community.



Synopsis

Jack has been married to Maggie for over half his life. He works as a Hand Raker on the mussel beds in North Wales alongside his younger brother, Dyfan, and Dyfan's three sons. Jack has always assumed that his own boy, Tom, will join the family business on leaving school but Tom's resistance to follow in his footsteps creates familial tension. Tensions are further inflamed by the arrival of an itinerant deckhand, Daniel, who makes known his feelings for Jack. In this remote, rural community where life revolves around Church and fishery, Jack is faced with an impossible dilemma. *On The Sea* is a beautiful, sensual and at times, tragic exploration of masculinity, place and desire.

Director's statement

All stories are rooted in place. Character is born of place, and Story is crafted from Character. I always start with a physical space – a city; a street; a scrap of wasteland. But *On The Sea* was an exception in that Jack arrived first, half-formed, loosely inspired by a man I knew who'd been cut adrift by his family and community after coming out, mid-life. The man moved to the city and in time he reconnected with his children, and in a more diverse and metropolitan environment he was able to live a more meaningful life. A writer's job is to put truth through its paces and render it ripe for fiction, and I wondered how it would be if, because of work or family ties, the man I knew had been unable to move on. What if he were forever confined to the prying eyes of a remote and insular community?

I spent a good three years trying to find Jack's community and his line of work. I looked at work which both valued and relied upon traditional tenets of masculinity -strength, endurance, emotional restraint. I wrote a tentative draft set first in a herring smokehouse on the Isle of Man, and then in the logging industry in Scotland. But each time, the story stagnated. I found it impossible to work in reverse and impose a fully formed character onto place. Then, just after lockdown, my producers took me to a fishing harbour in Anglesey. We met with the owner of a small scallop dredger, who took us out on his boat – and immediately the composition of Daniel and Bernie's lonely world began to take shape.

Being in Anglesey brought us to a mussel farm further along the coast. From the moment I saw the mussel men working silently, stoically, shoulder to shoulder, seemingly inured to the lacerating wind, the boiling, raging currents of the straits, the story came alive. It felt as though Jack had lived and worked here all his life, and he stepped seamlessly into the shoes of this emotionally reticent world. From that moment of enlightenment, I wrote the script in four weeks.

My work deals with marginalised identities, outliers in some way, who are spatially or emotionally cut adrift and here on this wind-battered island, it was easy to imagine a world disconnected from the mainland. The town faced the sea but operated with its back to it. In the smokehouses and scattered settlements of the Isle of Man for example, one could imagine Jack being able to hide away. But here, on the wide-open straits and on the streets of a small coastal town, he was *visible*.

I think anyone who has ever been othered or marginalised shares a common sociopolitical kinship. Édouard Louis, the auto-fictional novelist makes this point in the opening of his book, *Who Killed My Father*, that victims of homophobia, transphobia, racism and the extreme poor are all linked in their mutual social and political oppression within certain spatial-power structures. I grew up in a small northern town in a working-class household, and each summer we holidayed in nearby resorts which, aside from the occasional Indian or Chinese restaurant, were composed of an almost exclusively white demographic. Alongside his dark-skinned, Tamil Indian wife and his brown-skinned children, one of whom had a distinctive birthmark on his face, my blue-eyed, blonde-haired father learnt what it meant to be visible. We were stared at in pubs and seaside cafes - on a bus, a mother pulled her children close and told them not to touch us. We would routinely be turned away from B&Bs displaying 'vacancies' in the window. My father worked the summer seasons in these towns as a drummer, and he knew too well the reasons why. With a grudging acceptance of our fate, he would make us wait around the corner while he went on



ahead and secured us a room. Typically, the owners quickly warmed to my mum; those same surly faced guests who'd stared at us from across the breakfast room that first morning, would later commend my father on his well-mannered children. But not all prejudice is born of fear or lack of understanding; sometimes it comes from a place of hatred and is realised through violence. Jack would have grown up in one of these small, close-knit coastal towns and, under the shadow of Section 28, the right to remain 'invisible', was not simply a choice it was a means of survival. Anyone who questions the truth of that fact, operates from a place of privilege.

The lens of the film takes a third-limited perspective – we see the community, the back-breaking work of the mussel farmers and a burgeoning love affair with a nomadic seasonal worker through Jack's perspective. Jack's lens has been shaped by his own personal history - the simmering threat of exposure from his bullying brother; a brutal beating from a group of townies as a teenager, and the internalised shame of falling short of the values and precepts of a community that, conversely, he still values and reveres. So, when Jack finds his lover, Daniel, flirting with a male trawlerman in their hard-bitten local pub it breaks him - not out of any sense of betrayal, but because in that moment he understands that perhaps a different life might have existed for him all along.

The first half of the film is shot largely in close-ups, reflecting the claustrophobia and limitations of Jack's world. It is only when Daniel arrives and slowly starts to break down Jack's boundaries that we lean into those big wides. Later, as Jack is cut adrift from family and community, he becomes smaller and isolated within the frame, until his estranged wife Maggie redeems him. Throughout the film, Jack stands at a distance, afraid to get too close to anyone, lest he's found out. Yet there is a sense that even if an opportunity had arisen to leave his small town, he would have stayed regardless. Jack seems to draw satisfaction from upholding the traditions of the family business; he performs the hegemonic masculinity of a boys' club that can never quite accept him. All my work has in some way tried to reconcile the more harmful and dangerous expressions of masculinity with a more compassionate and hopeful approach. With *On The Sea*, I was interested in exploring how singular places give rise to distinct cultural or communal values, which in turn privilege certain kinds of masculinities; and how 'transgressors' like Jack navigate such worlds.

When I first started talking about a visual language for *On The Sea* with the cinematographer, Sam Goldie, we were speaking in completely different tongues. But we soon found common ground in the work of Chris Killip and the restrained grandeur he lends to his documentary depictions of working-class coastal communities. We also admired Nan Goldin's ability to capture those rare moments of unstaged human intimacy. By the time it came to shoot, we'd established an easy shorthand. I like to film within a 10-mile radius and work within the truths of the landscape. The landscape of *On The Sea* carried such a bereft, timeless beauty with the great hulk of Yr Wddfa (Snowdon) framing the horizon, creating a naturally contained space that was both comforting and oppressive. Sam and I settled on an intuitive handheld approach, that allowed the actors freedom within the frame and allowed them to respond to the shifting dynamics of each scene. It was an instinctive process, we kept our shot plan loose, with ideas that had excited us during recesses falling by the wayside, to capture the moment that was evolving in front of us.

But it's only really in the edit that a story pulls focus. And I discovered there were three stories all vying for attention – the story of a well-worn marriage; the story of a powerful attraction and the story of a family of men bound by tradition and masculine solidarity, and the tensions and power imbalances that exist within those familial dynamics. The edit affords you distance, clarity and perspective and my editor, Ricardo Saraiva and I very quickly concluded that Jack's journey would be the central, dominating force around which all other narratives rotate.

On The Sea is a love story, a story of a marriage, a portrait of an insular yet kind-hearted community afraid to embrace change. But it's also a tale of hope and courage, where love and compassion can endure even the harshest of trials.

Helen Walsh, August 2025

REVIEW QUOTES

Screen

Listed in Screen Daily 20 films to watch from the 2025 summer festivals

“On The Sea combines astute observational writing with powerful performances and evocative cinematography to create a low-key yet vivid portrait of a man coming to terms with himself”

“Walsh’s nuanced screenplay takes care to follow the natural contours of this relationship and its setting”

“A heightened natural soundscape emphasises the dichotomy between windswept isolation and claustrophobic intimacy”

“Sex scenes are frank, sensitive and shot through with genuine feeling; buoyed by Felix Rösch’s lilting score”

“Walsh takes care to remain true to her characters and their motivations”



Variety

“A Stirring, Windblown Romance”

“finely drawn, weather-heavy sophomore feature from British novelist-turned-filmmaker Helen Walsh”

“assured, even-keeled storytelling.”

“it traces the expected, anguished coming-out arc with rare honesty and frank, bristly sensual abandon – both actors committing with equal parts vulnerable yearning and terse emotional avoidance”

““On the Sea” finds poignancy in complication and compromise rather than easy, empowering short cuts to a happy ending”



Eye for Film

“Like a slow-burning fuse Helen Walsh’s second feature finds its strength in the subtlety of the writing and the power of the understated performances, in particular the central duo of Barry Ward and Lorne MacFadyen.”

“the film has an atmospheric sense of place”

“the film finds a note of hope and optimism and demonstrates how a good deal of compassion and understanding can emerge from the confrontation of someone’s worst fears.”

The Herald

“Helen Walsh’s *On The Sea* is a masterclass in powerful storytelling”

“Helen Walsh returns to the big screen with an affecting story of secrets, forbidden love and lives both lived and half-lived”

“a film which is otherwise balanced, poignant and - when it needs to be - suitably earthy and graphic”

“stellar performances from Ward and MacFadyen, actors who share some of that same intensity and gravity that make Barry Keoghan such a draw”

“powerful and absorbing film”

Cinema Perspective

“Helen Walsh’s compelling sophomore feature”

“Barry Ward has impressed of late in memorable supporting roles...it’s great to see him at the forefront of this atmospheric character study”

CAST

Barry Ward (Jack)

Ward's early screen appearances included roles in *Plotlands* (1997) and *Sunburn* (1999), but his major film breakthrough came in 2014 when he starred in Ken Loach's historical drama *Jimmy's Hall*. This performance cemented his reputation as a compelling screen presence and opened the door to a range of substantial roles.

He has since built a diverse filmography, including standout performances in *Blood Cells* (2014), *Maze* (2017), *Extra Ordinary* (2019), and *Dating Amber* (2020), the latter of which earned him an IFTA Award for Best Supporting Actor. Ward is equally known for his television work, with notable roles in series such as *Rebellion*, *Taken Down*, *Britannia*, *Save Me*, *White Lines*, *The Capture*, and *Bad Sisters*. In 2023, he starred in the Irish crime thriller *Clean Sweep*.

Lorne MacFadyen (Daniel)

Lorne is currently filming a new series regular role in the third season of the hit BBC series *SAS: Rogue Heroes*. He will next be seen in the feature *On The Sea* from writer/director Helen Walsh, which was chosen as part of Cannes Film Festival GREAT 8 showcase and premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

His recent credits include a series regular in the hit third season of BBC comedy *Starstruck*, the feature *War of Words* opposite Maxine Peake, *Six Four* and *Malpractice* on ITV, and the second season of *The Lazarus Project* for Sky.

Previously, Lorne starred in Danny Boyle's limited series *Pistols* for FX, the feature *Operation Mincemeat* opposite Colin Firth, and the hit BBC drama *VIGIL*. Other credits include David Mackenzie's *Outlaw King* playing Chris Pine's brother, and he played series leads in many high-profile British screen dramas including *Tina and Bobby*, *The Level* and *Grantchester*.

Liz White (Maggie)

Liz White is a versatile actress with a strong career across film, television, and theatre. She gained widespread recognition for her breakthrough role as Annie Cartwright in the BBC's *Life on Mars* (2006-2007). This performance earned her a Golden Nymph for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series at the Monte-Carlo TV Festival in 2007.

Her impressive film credits include Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake* (2004), *Wild Bill* (2011), *The Woman in Black* (2012), and the critically acclaimed *Pride* (2014).

On television, White has delivered standout performances in series such as *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2011), *Call the Midwife* (2012, 2016-2017, 2022), *Line of Duty* (2014), *Ackley Bridge* (2017-2019), *Unforgotten* (2021), and *The Long Shadow* (2023).

She just finished starring in *Dear England* at the National Theatre as Pippa Grange, and has a significant theatre career with roles in productions such as *Dixon and Daughters* (National Theatre), *Shadowlands* (Chichester Festival Theatre), and *Electra* (Old Vic).



Henry Lawfull (Tom)

Henry has just finished filming indie-feature *Tidepools* as part of the leading cast and recently wrapped on star-studded feature film *The Scurry* alongside Rhys Ifans, Ella Purnell and Paapa Essiedu, and directed by Craig Roberts. He also joins the film *On The Sea* alongside Barry Ward, directed by Helen Walsh.

He has just been seen in Daniel Kaluuya's new feature *The Kitchen*, which was chosen as the closing film at the London Film Festival 2023 and the 8-part series *The Count Of Monte Cristo* as series regular Gaston. Henry also previously starred as the lead in the Christmas movie *A Boy Called Christmas* opposite acting greats including Dame Maggie Smith, Jim Broadbent & Toby Jones.

Celyn Jones (Dyfan)

Celyn Jones is a critically acclaimed and multi award winning actor, screenwriter and director from Wales.

As an actor, he recently appeared in hilarious Brit comedy *Swede Caroline* and the critically acclaimed Janis Pugh debut *Chuck Chuck Baby*. Other acting credits include Wim Wenders' *Submergence* opposite Alicia Vikander and playing Winston Churchill in Agusti Villaronga's *Born A King*. He was awarded the BAFTA Cymru Award for Best Actor, after giving a 'sensational and transformative performance' of a real-life serial killer in *Manhunt*.

Jones wrote the breakout and much loved *Set Fire To The Stars*, in which he starred as Dylan Thomas opposite Elijah Wood. Further writing credits include the BAFTA & BIFA nominated noir-thriller, *The Vanishing*.

He made his directorial debut *The Almond And The Seahorse*. The drama, starring Rebel Wilson, had its world premiere at Zurich Film Festival and won Celyn the Jury Prize at Dinard Film Festival. Celyn has very recently wrapped on his latest feature film as a director *Madfabulous* about the infamous 5th Marquis of Anglesey and stars Callum Scott Howells and Rupert Everett.

Danny Webb (Bernie)

Danny will next be seen on HBO's hotly anticipated *A Knight of The Seven Kingdoms*. He recently starred in *The Regime* opposite Kate Winslet and as Governor Al Smith with Ralph Fiennes in *Straight Line Crazy* at the Shed Theatre in New York and The Bridge Theatre in London.

Alongside his acclaimed performance in *King Lear* opposite Ian McKellan in London's West End, Danny's other stage credits include *Welcome Home*, *Captain Fox!* for the Donmar and *The Seagull*, directed by Matthew Dunster for Regent's Park Open Air.

Film credits include *The Dig* for Netflix, Alan Rickman's *A Little Chaos* for Lionsgate/BBC and *Residue* directed by Alex Garcia for Matador Pictures. TV credits include *The Gold*, *The City & The City* and *SS-GB*, all for BBC One, *Liar* and *The Halcyon*, both for ITV, *Humans* for Channel 4 and seasons one and two of *Pennyworth* as John Ripper.



CREW

Helen Walsh (Writer-Director)

Helen Walsh's debut novel *Brass* won the Betty Trask Award and was the most widely reviewed book of 2004. Natasha Walters, writing in *Vogue*, called it, 'One of the most striking coming of age stories I have ever read.' Her second novel *Once Upon A Time In England* won the Somerset Maugham Prize and *The Lemon Grove*, her most recent, was a critically acclaimed best-seller that she is currently adapting for TV.

Helen wrote and directed her debut feature, *The Violators* in 2016 and was awarded BAFTA's Breakthrough New Director. Her recent Channel 4 show, *The Gathering* (2024), which she created and wrote was the recipient of three RTS Awards. *On The Sea*, her sophomore feature, recently premiered at Edinburgh International Film Festival.

David Moores (Producer)

With a background in artiste management working with musicians as diverse as All Saints, Mara Carlyle, Richard Ashcroft and DJ Shadow, David first collaborated with Red Union Films on their rock movie *Powder*.

He joined Red Union on a full-time basis in 2012, co-producing *The Return of The Yuletide Kid* and Helen Walsh's acclaimed debut *The Violators*, for which he received a BIFA nomination for Producer of the Year. He recently produced Walsh's *On The Sea*, which premiered in competition at EIFF.

David A. Hughes (Producer)

Before his stint as an independent producer at Red Union Films, David was involved in several notable bands, including OMD, Dalek I and Thomas Lang. He then moved into movies, composing for over 30 features and many more TV soundtracks including *Leon The Pig Farmer*, *Lock Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*, *Funland* (BBC series) and Sky Television's successful adaptations of Terry Pratchett's *The Hogfather* and *The Colour of Magic*.

At Red Union, David has produced *Awaydays*, *Powder*, *The Return of The Yuletide Kid*, *The Violators* (for which he received a BIFA nomination) and *On The Sea*.

Sam Goldie (Director of Photography)

Sam is a London based cinematographer who works within long form both in films and tv series such *Karen Pirie*, *The Inheritance*, *Comrade Detective*.

Having worked with Helen Walsh on her award winning TV series *The Gathering* for Channel 4, Sam and Helen then went on to collaborate again with '*On The Sea*'.

Ricardo Saraiva (Editor)

Ricardo is a London based film editor, originally from São Paulo/Brazil. Recent work includes *A Poet*, winner of the 2025 Cannes Un Certain Regard Jury Prize, *Mariner of The Mountains*, by Karim Aïnouz, screened at the 2021 Cannes Official Selection – Special Screening and *Amparo*, presented at Cannes Semaine de la Critique 2021 and winner of the Rising Star Award.

Other feature film credits include selections at Berlinale (*My Favourite Cake* and *Matria*), Locarno (*Crickets*, *It's Your Turn*) and TIFF (*Anatolian Leopard*, recipient of the FIPRESCI Award, and *TOLL*).

Ricardo is Berlinale Talents alumnus and works internationally.

Felix Rösch (Composer)

Berlin-based composer Felix Rösch blends his love for melancholic, electronic ambiances with intimate, classical instrumentations. His music is featured in several Spotify editorial playlists, amassing 5+ million streams globally. It was synchronized to films and advertisements and got radio play from New York's WQXR, to UK's Scala radio.

He studied classical piano at the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf, sound engineering at the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf, and composition at the Film University Babelsberg.

Over the past ten years, his orchestral compositions have frequently been performed and recorded by world-renowned orchestras like the WDR Symphony Orchestra & Choir, the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and the German Film Orchestra Babelsberg. His music can be heard in countless theater plays, audiobooks, and film scores.

Alex Johnson (Casting Director)

Currently working on the feature, *Percy Pig The Movie*. Movies set for release: *Close To Nature*, Nick Moorcroft's *Mother's Pride*, *The State of Us*, *The Chelsea Cowboy* with Alex Pettyfer and Poppy Delevingne, animated feature *Suzu and The Seventh Isle* and *Santa Clause*.

Recent feature credits include: Colin Trevorrow's *Deep Cover, On The Sea* for Red Union Films, *The Strangers* trilogy, *Animal Within* with Anthony Boyle and Gaia Weiss, *Arthur's Whiskey* starring Diane Keaton, *Kindling*, with Geoff Bell and Mia McKenna-Bruce, *Last Sentinel* starring Kate Bosworth, Golda Meir "The Iron Lady of Israel" biopic *Golda* starring Helen Mirren, *Consecration*, *Fisherman's Friends 2*.

Other credits include; *Supervized*, *The Corrupted*, *Fisherman's Friends*, *Swimming With Me*, *Patrick*, *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, *Dad's Army*, *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie*, *The Carer*, *Mr Nice* and *The Sea*.

TV credits include; *Beecham House*, a 6 part drama for ITV directed by Gurinda Chadha, *Fearless* starring Helen McCrory.

