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Harlots

SAMANTHA MORTON, LESLEY MANVILLE AND JESSICA BROWN FINDLAY STAR IN NEW SERIES FROM MONUMENTAL PICTURES FOR HULU AND ITV ENCORE

Harlots, a brand new eight-part series will air on ITV Encore in the UK and stream exclusively in the US on Hulu as part of the Hulu Originals slate. Acclaimed actresses Samantha Morton (Fantastic Beasts, Rillington Place, The Last Panthers, Minority Report, Cider with Rosie), Lesley Manville (Mum, River, Maleficent) and Jessica Brown Findlay (Victor Frankenstein, The Outcast, Downton Abbey) star in the series, which is produced by Monumental Pictures.

Set against the backdrop of 18th century Georgian London, *Harlots* is a powerful family drama offering a brand new take on the city's most valuable commercial activity - sex. Inspired by the stories of real women, the series follows Margaret Wells (Morton) and her daughters, as she struggles to reconcile her roles as mother and brothel owner. When her business comes under attack from Lydia Quigley (Manville), a rival madam with a ruthless streak, Margaret fights back, even if it means putting her family at risk. Brown Findlay will star as Charlotte, Margaret's eldest daughter and the city's most coveted courtesan who begins to grapple with her position in both society and her immediate family.

Written by acclaimed playwright and screenwriter, Moira Buffini (*Jane Eyre, Tamara Drewe*) and created by Moira Buffini and Alison Newman, *Harlots* is the first commission for Monumental Pictures, the independent company founded by Oscar nominated producers Alison Owen (*Suffragette, Tulip Fever*) and Debra Hayward (*Bridget Jones's Baby, Les Misérables*).

The series was filmed in London during 2016 and has been directed by Coky Giedroyc (What Remains, Penny Dreadful), China Moo-Young (Thirteen, Humans) and Jill Robertson (Brief Encounters, Vera, Grantchester). Alison Owen and Debra Hayward serve as executive producers alongside Alison Carpenter, Moira Buffini and Alison Newman, and Lawrence Till (Shameless) produced.

The deal was negotiated by ITV Studios Global Entertainment, who distribute the drama internationally.

Commenting on the commission of Harlots, Executive Producer Alison Owen said:

"In 1760s London there were brothels on every corner run by women who were both enterprising and tenacious. History has largely ignored them, but their stories are in turn outrageous, brutal, humorous and real."

Fellow Executive Producer Debra Hayward added:

"Moira and Alison's writing doesn't pull any punches when it comes to sex and violence, but it's the juxtaposition of these things and the domesticity of the 'houses' that makes *Harlots* so compelling."

Harlots was commissioned for ITV by Controller of Drama Victoria Fea, who said:

"Harlots is an exploration of family, power and brutal economics in a vibrant booming world full of colour and noise. We're delighted to be commissioning the series for ITV Encore. Moira and Alison's scripts are shocking, fascinating and compelling."

About Hulu

Hulu is a premium streaming TV destination that offers hundreds of thousands of hours of the best of television programming, original series and movies to subscribers with limited commercials for \$7.99 per month or with no commercials for \$11.99 per month. Since its launch in 2008, Hulu has been at the forefront of entertainment and technology and continues to redefine TV by connecting viewers with the stories they love.



Foreword by Moira Buffini and Alison Newman, co-creators of Harlots

Harlots was born of friendship and it has been a labour of love. Our desire was to write an epic story, where a large cast of women drove the action.

Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies was a Georgian bestseller, a yearly publication describing in very fine language, the services of London's prostitutes, from high-class courtesans to those who solicited in seedy bars and taverns. This gentleman's guide to whoring led us to a Georgian outlaw society, where some of these women had found a way to turn the economy of exploitation around and use it for their own benefit.

We knew instantly that we wanted to create a drama about these women, from their point of view. The more time we spent with the Georgians, the more we fell in love with them. We found them to be funny, bold and outrageous, full of wit and irreverence. It was easy to become seduced by them and their world. We took our idea to Alison Owen (and later Debra Hayward) who loved our take on a family drama involving mothers and daughters and two warring brothels.

We continued to read. We found out about the courtesans: the wonderful Sally Salisbury, Fanny Murray, Charlotte Hayes, Kitty Fisher, Lucy Cooper. We read about the bawds: Mother Needham, Mrs Goadby, Elizabeth Gould, Mother Douglas. We read about the law courts, coffee houses, theatres, the slave trade, drink and drugs, millinery, music and molly boys. We read inspiring primary source material: Boswell's London Journal, Nocturnal Revels (outrageous whorehouse gossip and anecdotes of the time), confessions and statements from the Old Bailey's archive. We even read the 'Apology' of Teresa Phillips, an enterprising woman who ran a sex shop on Bedford Street. We drew on the London Library's amazing resources and spent long hours in the rare books section of the British Library. So we amateurs began to build up a picture of Georgian London – and we were there with a purpose, right from the word go. We wanted to look closely at a profession that hasn't changed in hundreds of years.

We wanted to create a drama in which sex workers would recognise themselves; a drama in which we imagined what it was like to lead such a life, in a different time. It's always been the coal-face of gender politics and that's where we wanted to put our female gaze. Our characters have a contemporary edge. It's a costume drama with its teeth sunk firmly in the modern world.

We decided very early on not to use any historical characters. Our show is about a timeless economy and about Everywoman's instinct to survive. Our tone was important too. The Georgians were neither worthy nor miserable; we knew our drama would have humour. We were joined by Jane English, Cat Jones and Debbie O'Malley in the writers' room and in that occasionally raucous atmosphere, our harlots continued to develop an integrity all of their own.

They have been given breath and life by a truly exceptional cast.

An enviable production team was assembled, led by our first block director, Coky Giedroyc, who then passed the baton on to China Moo-Young and Jill Robertson. We took over a crumbling Georgian manor house near Watford. It gave us our production base and afforded us almost all of our interiors; the magistrates court, the coffee house, the gambling club – as well as all three of our brothels. We built Covent Garden's courtyards and alleys at the back, and Georgian Soho at the front. We spent many days shooting on location in London too.

We were used to working with female producers, directors, writers and actors. It felt completely normal and natural. It was only when one of our male actors pointed out that in his entire career he'd never been on a set quite like it, that it occurred to us how unusual *Harlots* is.

We are very thankful to all of our colleagues and collaborators. They have ensured that our beloved harlots have made their way to the screen in a truly vivid and arresting way.





Character Biographies



Margaret Wells played by Samantha Morton

Shrewd, indomitable and humorous, Margaret is the centre of Harlots. She has risen up from the streets and is proud of the way she runs her family and her house, tough and loving in equal measure. She is hungry for success and thrilled when she achieves it – even when her ambition begins to threaten everything she cares for. Margaret is the product of generations of whoring. She runs a popular middle-class brothel in Covent Garden. She works hard to find new clients and to keep her position on Fortune's slippery wheel. Margaret retains a bruised humanity. She uses laughter as a weapon and a shield. She treats her employees fairly, by the standards of the day. Although she takes a massive cut of everything that they earn, she encourages them not to drink and to save their money. She is also deeply ambitious for her two daughters.



Lydia Quigley played by Lesley Manville

Lydia is Margaret's rival. The Lady Macbeth of brothel keepers. She runs a lavish seraglio in Soho, full of well-groomed girls with the kind of accomplishments normally reserved for high-class young ladies. Her brothel is not a happy place to work; she keeps her girls locked in. But her clients are from the highest echelons of society and walk the corridors of power.

Lydia has a decades old feud with Margaret, which reignites when our story starts. The harder Margaret tries to climb up, the more Lydia is determined to keep her down. Her loathing knows no bounds. Lydia's Achilles heel is her spoilt and dissolute son, Charles.



Charlotte Wells played by Jessica Brown-Findlay

Charlotte is Margaret's eldest daughter – fashionable and beautiful, a London celebrity and 'the meteor of the hour.' She is a fiery and rebellious spirit who cannot buckle down to obey her keepers – so her relationships are all short lived. Her success is increasingly precarious, as Charlotte has a dangerous self-destructive streak. She cannot bear the possessiveness of her current keeper Sir George Howard and across our series their relationship will implode with disastrous consequences.



Lucy Wells played by Eloise Smyth

Lucy is Margaret's youngest daughter – a teenager whose entrance into the family trade was decided at birth because of her gender. She's always imagined she'll follow in the footsteps of her thriving and successful older sister. But Lucy finds her new profession more of a struggle than she ever imagined. What other options are open to a girl bred to please, when she finds that she's utterly unsuited to the task?



Nancy Birch played by Kate Fleetwood

Nancy is Margaret's oldest friend. In their youth, they both worked in Lydia Quigley's house. She's loyal, darkly funny and moral. Nancy abhors the bullying ways of brothel keepers like Lydia Quigley. Nancy is a strong presence who rules the streets unbothered – for she's a dominatrix who specialises in using the rod with her clients. She rents rooms in her dingy house to women at the lower end of the market. And although Nancy isn't the maternal type she cares for these girls in her way, and has saved many a girl from the dangers of the streets.





William North played by Danny Sapani

William is Margaret's partner. He is her lover, the house 'bully' (doorman) and is also on hand to serve the occasional female client. North is strong, characterful and loyal. And in him, Margaret Wells has met her match. This is a relationship without jealousy and they are both grateful for it. Margaret and North are not married but they have a ten-year-old son, Jacob, who works in the house as a pageboy.



Charles Quigley played by Douggie McMeekin

Charles is Lydia's only child. He lives off his mother, spends what he can and sleeps with who he likes. Charles is a social-climbing hanger-on, provider of girls and drugs to those more dissipated than himself. If he wasn't such a laugh, he would be loathsome. He's a spoiled manchild, kept under his mother's thumb by her indulgence.



Sir George Howard played by Hugh Skinner

Sir George is a baronet. He's only recently married Lady Caroline Howard and is merrily spending the money she brought to the match, gambling, drinking and whoring. Though he isn't brutal or cruel, he has a vicious streak. He is obsessed with Charlotte and is prone to jealous rage. He wants to possess her entirely.



Thomas Haxby played by Edward Hogg

Thomas is the estate manager and loyal servant of the Howard family. Haxby sees himself as the true protector of the family's prosperity and dignity. Yet he has been installed in his London house by George Howard, and set the demeaning task of indulging and looking after a whore who fritters away the family money.



Daniel Marney played by Rory Fleck-Byrne

Daniel is a charmer. Both clever and canny, and at ease amongst harlots and courtiers. He begins our series as a lowly sedan chairman but Marney's decision to become a whore will take him on a trajectory to the highest reaches of society, and in ever closer proximity to the famous Charlotte Wells.





Harriet Lennox played by Pippa Bennett-Warner

Harriet is an American slave, living as a 'wife' to her owner Nathaniel; mother to two of his children. Her calm obedience hides a fiery nature and when circumstances leave her friendless on the streets, she determines to survive, how best she can. She resolutely sets about earning the money she needs to provide for her family



Kitty Carter played by Lottie Tolhurst

Kitty is the daughter of a respectable bookseller. Ruined as a teenager, she has been working in Margaret's brothel for years. Kitty is loyal and reliable – an educated girl – she knows the ways of a family business, and is brilliant with accounts. Far better in fact than Margaret, and this makes her an invaluable member of the Wells household, although she begins to feel that Margaret doesn't truly recognise her worth.



Fanny Lambert played by Bronwyn James

Fanny is a much loved member of Margaret's house, a pretty and guileless girl who – though she doubts herself – is always popular with the punters. Fanny is a child of the streets, she's spent time in workhouses, and been in far worse places than Margaret's, so she is grateful to be where she is. And Fanny is good at her job, which, though she doesn't know it, makes her an asset to the house.



Emily Lacey played by Holli Dempsey

Emily is a popular, successful, but brittle girl whose ambition knows no bounds. She is the top earner of Margaret's house and has thrived there but sees it as a stepping stone to greater things. She thinks she is better than the other girls.



Betsey Fletcher played by Alexa Davies

Underneath the grime, Betsey looks like an angel but she's still tough as old boots. Betsey rents a room from Nancy Birch, works the streets to pay her way and is unlikely to rise any higher as she continues to drink away her profits.





Marie-Louise D'Aubigne played by Poppy Corby-Teuch

Marie-Lousie is good at pretending that she doesn't care. She is a disdainful French girl working for Lydia; but her hauteur hides her unhappiness. She is anxious to leave Lydia's employ and when the opportunity presents itself, she had no compunction about going.



Violet Cross played by Rosalind Eleazar

Violet is a street-girl and one of Nancy's tenants. She's bold and unashamed, street-smart and funny. And Violet is trouble. She'll take what she can get when she can get it, and that includes the pocket-watches and purses of clients and passers-by.



Florence Scanwell played by Dorothy Atkinson

Florence is a religious zealot whose life's mission is to rid the streets of harlots. But hers is not a message of redemption, it is a message of damnation. Florence's blindness means her daughter Amelia is a constant presence beside her mother, caring for her, preaching with her. They have very little and rely on charity and the church to survive.



Amelia Scanwell played by Jordon Stevens

Amelia is a young, poor, pious woman, repressed through religion, her upbringing and society. Amelia has little choice but to care for and support her blind mother, and take part in her religious campaigns. Yet Amelia finds herself drawn to the harlots she is meant to be damning.



Prince Rasselas played by Josef Altin

Prince Rasselas is a young molly boy who plies his trade on the streets of Covent Garden. He longs to be friend the street-girls, but Rasselas also earns coins selling information to the likes of Lydia Quigley. He'll do what he has to survive, and to keep those he loves safe.







Samantha Morton is Margaret Wells

Can you tell us what attracted you to Harlots?

"The initial appeal of working on the series was the thought of working with Debra Hayward and Alison Owen; they are real heroes of mine in the film industry."

"I left television at 19 to work mainly in independent cinema and with film makers, but when The Last Panthers came along (in 2015), I thought, 'It's Warp Films. I'm sure it's going to be produced with a film ethos.' And it was. I had an incredibly positive experience working on that series. The whole experience was one that I'll remember for the rest of my life. It was absolutely extraordinary and it didn't feel the way that television had been made in the past.

"So when this came through and I saw Debra and Alison were involved, I thought, 'Oh yes, it's film people making television again.' I have been a huge admirer of Debra and Alison and the thought of working alongside them was something I'd always hoped for in my future. Harlots felts timeless and very original. Yet also familiar, like Dickens only now with a twist.

"That was my initial excitement. I do watch some brilliant television and I think, 'Well maybe it's all merged a little bit. Maybe the attitude of film-makers and the integrity of some film-making, the honesty and bravery of that have merged in this, understandably, corporate world.

"As an actor I initially think, 'OK. Who is this woman? Who are they thinking about me playing? Can I play it? Am I right for it? Am I the right age. Is it feasible? Is it going to work? Can we achieve this?' They're all the questions you ask yourself initially as an actor.

"It's not really about the whole bigger picture. I have to make it very intimate to start with. Very, very personal. Because I have the responsibility of playing Margaret Wells. So that's what I have to try and do."

People may see the title 'Harlots' and think it will be a saucy romp. But that's not what it is, is it?

"When I'm shooting my scenes they're certainly not saucy. It is very easy and understandable that there will be that response. And you have to rise above it. Of course there is going to be sex in there. It's selling sex and you have to see that. Whether you see it from the whore's-eye view or not, you are going to see sex, you're going to see nudity. It is how that nudity is portrayed and how our show managed to do that differently. That's the question.

"Harlots is about women, the heartbreak, the cruel reality that is being a woman, the choices we are forced to make and why. Yet we still have grace, courage, hope and mostly, love. The world for women then was brutal. It still is."

Can you tell us about Margaret Wells?

"She is a survivor. She has found a language and behaviour for herself akin to her environment. She is what she is because of her surroundings.

"Margaret Wells has had it tough yet she's incredibly optimistic and joyful. She loves life and loves her children, she doesn't suffer fools and has fought hard to get where she's got. She's loyal but do not cross her."

Margaret introduced her eldest daughter Charlotte to the 'oldest profession' when Charlotte was just 12. But she has given younger daughter Lucy more time? Why?

"Margaret was looking for a keeper for Charlotte aged 12. It's not the same as with the other girls who sell themselves constantly. Lucy wasn't ready, Margaret was able to provide Lucy with more schooling as Charlotte rose through the ranks.

"It's a trade, let's not forget that. It's easy to look at prostitution as a 'last resort' or with shame but that's not how some working girls see it. If you know a trade why not pass it on to

loved ones?"









What's her relationship with rival brothel keeper Lydia Quigley, played by Lesley Manville?

"Lydia Quigley is my ex-evil boss. Margaret hates her and all she stands for. She doesn't want anything to do with her. However, the history they share means on some strange level there's also love, in the same way an abused child might still love the parent."

What was it like working with Lesley?

"There was an anticipation of working with somebody like her, almost in an exciting child-like way. She is iconic. Her body of work and how she maintains that dignity. She's just a legend to me. I've watched her and admired her work for such a long time. It was an honour and a privilege to work alongside her

An audience of today may be surprised to learn that one in five women in London made their living selling sex at this time. Did anything about the series shock or surprise you?

"It surprised me how modern it was. I live in an early Georgian house and it's a period that fascinates me. I find it incredibly modern. I think in some ways we've gone backwards in terms of our attitude.

"The world continues to be brutal and the world continues to be unjust and unfair for many. And it's how people get out of that and survive. And the amazing stories of survival. It's all down to where you put the camera, I suppose, or the pen when you're writing about these survivors.

"It's similar still today: Child brides, child abuse, the legal age of consent varies in the world with some countries as young as nine."

"It's sad the choices women have to make in this world. It's very similar to today all over the world. Nothing much has changed, women often have to pretend to be stupid to make a man feel superior."

Was it a different experience filming with a female-centric cast?

"It wasn't the same. We made it with so many women. This show is about women. I'm not used to that. I'm used to there being a bit more of a balance. But then the crew are predominantly male. So on the set you have a balance. You don't have many female sparks. So it balances out in other ways."



What decisions were made about how Margaret should look?

"The designer and I felt she would spend her money on her girls. She wouldn't spend her money on herself. She would have one 'going out' dress that she needed. And the rest is business.

"She wears very simple clothes. She's not poor but the money she makes goes back into the girls' health, food, lodgings, making sure they're comfortable and eating well. Margaret is not foolhardy.

"Hair and make-up took a couple of hours and it was tough doing continuous working days in a corset."

Harlots also had to create the world of 18th century Georgian London; what were the sets like?

"What the production designer managed to do in establishing this world was absolutely extraordinary. It's a team who are able, first of all, make somewhere like a home or whatever. But it's then in the detail of what you choose to dress in that set, what's its relevance and why is it there? Is it being used and is it accurate in time? That's a very hard task.

"The fact they managed to make all of those worlds as realistic as they were was extraordinary. I was blown away by the level of commitment.

"Margaret's first Covent Garden house was breathtakingly accurate. I felt proud to be on the set and I was in awe of the production design."

How do you reflect on the experience of filming Harlots?

"It was very tough and very extraordinary. But hopefully completely worth it if an audience responds with love. The creators Moira Buffini and Alison Newman did an amazing job of establishing this world and its believability."



Lesley Manville is Lydia Quigley

Can you tell us what your initial thoughts about Harlots were?

"Harlots is not how you would imagine it might be. Or how it could be in lesser hands. They only had the first two or three episodes for me to read. I was intrigued by the character enough to say I was interested. But I wanted to know what the trajectory of Lydia was going to be. So I met Moira Buffini, the writer, and Coky Giedroyc, the lead director and they talked me through it and it seemed fascinating.

"Then I started to read up on the period. There are some fantastic books about Georgian England, prostitution and what the impact of it was on that period. So much of London was built on the profits of prostitution. One in five women were prostitutes during that time. That was an amazing statistic. And it was happening at all levels of society.

"Lydia Quigley is operating at the highest end. She runs a brothel for royalty, aristocracy, Lords and so on. When you see how the girls in Lydia's house look, it's quite beautiful. They look like Gainsborough paintings. Very different from some of the other lives you see in the story. Margaret Wells's girls and the girls working literally on the streets. It's a very different scenario."

What did you like about the approach to the way this story is told?

"It's very hard to define what makes good writing. You only know it when you're reading it. I'd seen Moria's work before and I respected her as a writer. She seemed to create the world very effortlessly. She drew characters very well. They were all coming off the page when you read it. And she had plenty of strands of story going on. You could be criticised if you only saw that world from one point of view. But in Harlots you're seeing it from so many aspects. From the privileged down to the desperate. That's very good juxtapositioning.

"Having then met Coky for the first time, you just know when you're talking to a director if they are somebody you're going to want to work with or not. It was very clear that I would want to work with Coky. It was also refreshing to do a very female-led piece. Of course there are men in it, but it's a female-led drama. When I was invited to join I heard that Samantha Morton was involved and you thought, 'It's going to be good.'

Can you sum up what Harlots is about?

"It's a proper fully-fledged story about what it was like to be trying to survive as a prostitute in 1763 in Georgian England at every level of society. Along the way you get humour, bitterly sad stories, revenge, pain, women hating women, you get a bit of everything in it. But it's coming from an angle of truth and of trying to be honest to that time. And not be titillating in any way. That's definitely what we're not aiming to do."

Can you explain to us who Lydia is?

"Lydia is a very high class, top end madam who runs a bawdy house. She is powerful and ruthless. Lydia doesn't seem to care about very many people and she does terrible things.

"Lydia has a strange dual personality. Alongside all of the horrendous things she does, she is a great wit and entertainer. Very quick and also evil. It's been a delight to play her. In that it's quite theatrical. There's a theatricality about Lydia and hopefully I've hit the right level with it. Because some of it demanded a theatricality.

Lydia is a formidable force of nature. I have genuinely adored playing her. Although some scenes have been rather unpleasant to play. But the scenes I've loved remind me of being in a restoration play at the National Theatre"

Did women like this really did exist?

"Oh my God, yes. There's Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies from that time which I bought. It's an extraordinary Yellow Pages of the prostitutes working in Covent Garden. That in itself is a fascinating read. The way these women were being categorised and described can only mean the men having the liaisons with these women were relaying that information. You read it and you can almost feel yourself in the Covent Garden coffee house where the story was being told to the author. It is extraordinary reading."

Had the stories of these women been forgotten?

"Maybe as time has gone on, their stories are probably not ones you want to advertise particularly. And history does have a way of trying to eliminate negative stories. That's been the case in all echelons of society. The stuff you would like to be forgotten.





"You really can't ignore what an industry this was. It was huge. Streets like Greek Street in Soho were built so they could be brothel houses until the builders would find somebody to sell them on to and make huge profits. They were built and used in the meantime as brothels.

"Soho still has that reputation to a degree. Certainly in my lifetime that's more of a relic from how things were in the sixties. But when you think of that statistic - one in five women...that is a huge amount.

"Desperation would lead women to become prostitutes. But, oddly enough, there were also stories of well-to-do middle class ladies coming up from the suburbs for a day who were in desperately boring marriages. They would come up to London for the day and just prostitute themselves. Not so much for the money but just to have a bit of fun. Then they'd go home back to the suburbs or wherever they lived.

"I found that extraordinary as well because that also says a lot about marriages. Marriages were not primarily made for love. They were made for convenience or status. People were not getting married because they had fallen in love and genuinely wanted to be together. So there were an awful lot of bored marriages around.

"There were girls coming down from the north and all over the place and being lured into false senses of security, it's really shocking that the age of consent was 12."

Does Lydia have a family?

Lydia has a grown-up son called Charles, played by Douggie McMeekin. Early on in the series she says to him, 'Why did I choose to keep you? I should have had a girl' Horrible, ghastly. Can you imagine these people having children and thinking, 'Oh well, I'll give that one away but keep this one.' Life was dispensable at this time. Death was part of everyone's life. It was a very different time to the one we're living in now. Although in some ways there are parallels."

Is the sex totally a job of work for the harlots?

"I suppose it is. But clearly somewhere along the line there are other attachments formed. It can only be inevitable. You see these very well-heeled gents, mostly older rather than younger, not in the bedroom but enjoying downstairs in the salon these young beautiful girls who are laid out on tables with fruit very strategically placed all over. It's not a debauched scene. It's quite a beautiful scene. And the girls present these tableaux images of goddesses. With these very dignified looking gentlemen sitting there drinking their claret, just looking at them.





"The girls do it brilliantly. And if they didn't they would be out. And then at certain times of the evening they very quietly take the gentlemen upstairs. Then the sex happens. But at Lydia's house it's not just about the sex act. It's about the whole evening. It's almost like what goes on in the salon downstairs with these little performances and the eating and drinking is like foreplay."

Are the men using the harlots? Or is it the other way around?

"It's a bit of both. They are all getting something out of it. The girls are getting a life. They're not on the street. I suppose they're all hoping as well, as is the case with Charlotte Wells, they become the permanent mistress of somebody. And then you don't have to sleep with lots of men. You sleep with one man and you are his mistress at his beck and call. And you are kept in jewels and given a nice house to live in with staff. That's what they're after."

What was it like working with Samantha Morton?

"Lydia Quigley and Margaret Wells have a history and a rivalry. Given the whole main thrust of the story is the conflict between Lydia and Margaret, we actually had very few scenes together. But it was a real delight working with her. She is an amazing actress.

"We were both a bit nervous of each other in an unspoken way. We revealed that later on, that we were quite nervous of each other. Because of the respect and all of that. I only mention that because I think it added a certain frisson to our scenes together when we played them. That less familiarity gave the scenes some real bite. Loading them with all of the historic bile between Lydia and Margaret."

Lydia aside, is there a bond between these women?

"There is definitely a bond between these women. That's something Lydia doesn't have. She's a different kind of brothel keeper. For her it's not about bonding with the women. I don't think she likes women very much. She's a man's woman. Which is why she seemingly enjoys dealing with the powerful men. That's what she wants: Power.

"She looks after her girls but purely for professional reasons. It's not because she wants to care for them, nurture them, have friendships with them and any kind of female bonding in any wholesome way. She's not that kind of person at all. She's is a maverick, autonomous, greedy and hungry for power."





What part does wit and humour play in the series?

"Lydia's humour is a particular breed. It's very much about sarcasm, back-stabbing and having a stab at whoever she can have a stab at. It's very cruel and with no warmth to her sense of humour. It's not about making anybody laugh. It's almost like she loves the delicious sound of what's rolling off her own tongue. It gives her some kind of innate pleasure. Everything is for her own gratification.

"You can't have a series that deals with such a serious subject matter without humour. We're showing something that was a reality for those women. And the reality is that, yes, you may be doing unpleasant and dark things and going to bad places, but when you have a group of women working together, especially in Margaret Wells's house, there's going to be love and humour and support and all of those things women generally gravitate towards."

How would you describe Lydia's look on screen?

"The higher up the social scale you were, you displayed that with your use of powder and wigs and so on. Lydia has the white-face make-up and the big powdered wigs. We had an extraordinary design team around us in the wardrobe, hair and make-up departments. Really exceptional.

"My make-up did take quite some time and it's not the most flattering either. It's quite a thick white make-up and I discovered lines I never knew I had. I was daily moaning, saying, 'Why can't all these other girls have all this on? I'm one of the older members of the cast and I'm being made to look 105 because I've got this thick white make-up on.' I defy anybody to have that on and not discover wrinkles they didn't know they had. It's not the most flattering of looks.

"There's something very ghost-like about the look of Lydia. Something soft. And the clothes I'm wearing are all very pale. So you can see her coming and you could be misled into thinking she might be quite a soft, gentle character. But not a bit of it. It's a very extreme look. Big white wigs, big white faces with red painted lips, stuck on beauty spots.

"I had a corset on, as everybody did. But the corsets then in that period were more about shoving up your bosom rather than pulling in your waist. And I wore a cage, called a pannier. You put it tight around your waist. It's a cage that sticks out at the sides and doesn't go all the way around. It's like you've got two little shelves on top of your waist either side. So I was a bit wide going through doors."

Was there a moment when you felt you had really captured who Lydia was?

"I did feel it quite quickly. You do find it as you go along and you find it by doing it. Obviously we talked, we workshopped the look so it wasn't just day one we were doing it for the first time. I had sessions with the make-up artist and the wig stylist and all of that. So we knew how she was going to look. And obviously I'd worked with Coky and Moira.

"Some of the early scenes we shot were her being quite deliciously spiteful. I do work quite fast. You don't have long. Television is fast. So you've got to have learned it and done your homework. You've got to be on top of it so you're not spending a long time debating, 'Where have I come from? What have I been doing? What am I thinking at this point?' You've got to know all of that. Be on top of it. So that once you get up on your feet you're just working out how to play it and therefore where physically you're going to be.

"I enjoyed Lydia when I had her quite contained. And then suddenly she would just turn, a bit snake-like, adder-like, and burst out of a chair. There is an iciness about this woman. But once you ignite her she becomes quite terrifying and threatening. I love all of that.

"Coky was great at giving us a freedom. We could do anything and go wherever we wanted. We'd show it to the director of photography and then they'd work out how to shoot it to accommodate you. Which is the right way round of doing it."





Jessica Brown Findlay is Charlotte Wells

Can you tell us why you wanted to be involved in Harlots?

"You are naturally very cautious when something seems too good to be true. So I had to double check when Harlots came along because it is really is so good. It's very unusual that a piece of work is made to this calibre, with the writers and women involved. It doesn't usually happen.

"I got very excited at how flawed and frustrating Charlotte Wells was as a character. She was allowed to be all those human things. Lovably annoying, makes really bad decisions sometimes and is too stubborn for her own good. But she makes her way in the world with all those things and you love her even more because of them.

"I wanted to make sure those things weren't going to disappear. I spoke to the writer Moira Buffini and Coky Giedroyc, who directed the first three episodes, and I came out skipping because their strength and determination for it to be bold was just so clear.

"The fact I was able to be involved is just magic. Harlots is brave, bold and beautiful. I wanted to be a part of an incredible

Can you explain what Harlots about?

"This world revolves around sex. That's what these women do. It's the service they provide. But Harlots is not titillating. There was no question of going, 'I know how we'll get people to watch it. Let's sex it up.'

"Harlots is an honest conversation about life for these women at this time. It's about love, family, desperation, social behaviour, economics and all of those things. Told from their point of view. In a way, to put the word 'sex' on to one act is bizarre. Actually what's happening in their worlds is so much more complex than this little three letter word. They are women who are surviving. It's incredible to see them struggle and thrive within that."

Have these women's stories been told before?

"I don't think we have seen these women's stories before within this context. Maybe we've seen hints of these stories but from one person's perspective. Harlots features the stories of many women and they all have many experiences.

"You can be on top of your game and really in control of your life. Of what happens to you, with you, at you and who with. Then a week or two down the line your whole world can be completely different. And you can be out of control, out of status, out of your comfort zone and having to do the same things and yet within a completely different context.

one tale about one person or a couple of people. Everyone's experiences constantly vary. Which feels very like real life to

Is it important this project involves a mainly female production team?

characters are fully fleshed out real people as well. So it wasn't just turning the tables and having the guys as 2D characters. The female involvement from production and direction was so exciting. It made for a very different feeling being at work. It was important just in terms of empowerment and the subject matter we were dealing with. There was an openness in which we could have discussions and talk. So much of that is also to do with the cast and the way we were allowed to form the security of those family-like bonds."





Can you explain to us who Charlotte Wells is?

"Charlotte Wells is the eldest of the Wells' children. Her mother Margaret runs a brothel, and she has a younger sister called Lucy who is very different to Charlotte. When we meet Charlotte she is basically a live-in courtesan, rather than a harlot, to wealthy Sir George Howard. Charlotte is exclusively his. Yet she won't sign her contract to him which would give her some security and protection.

"Some men of a certain class with money would have a wife to have children with and a mistress to play with. And the two would be separate. If you signed a contract to exclusively belong to someone, if anything happened to the man you would be protected by law. You would get money if they died, have property and be safe. So it's very much within Charlotte's interest to sign this contract.

But being an absolute legend and stubborn cow, she doesn't sign it.

"That's her brilliance and the thing that drives her mother insane. It's interesting because she looks like she belongs to some world now that is different to where she was born. Charlotte is dripping with diamonds and very much wears her wealth. She doesn't wear one necklace, she wears four.

"But at the same time when she goes home and visits Lucy and her mother and the girls in the house, she doesn't fit in there any more either. She's in a quite delicate, vulnerable place. Yet if anybody said that to her she'd be devastated and very angry and prove you wrong.

"Charlotte Wells is headstrong to say the least, stubborn to a fault, wonderfully infuriating. Sometimes she knows what best to do. And then out of that stubbornness decides to do the complete opposite. She doesn't conform."

Where do we first meet Charlotte?

"When we meet Charlotte she's living in Sir George's house as his live-in mistress. It's very open. Everyone knows they're together in that sense and that he won the prize of Charlotte Wells. She's a celebrity in her own right. She goes to coffee shops, sits in windows and knows that part of her allure, her commodity and the reason she is so desired is because she has this fame. She has built this profile. And therefore Sir George values her even more.

"She's quite bold with him. When we first meet her she is very much in control of the way she is with him and what she does a lot of the time day to day. She's flying high at the beginning."







Every year 'Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies' published reviews of their services. How does Charlotte rate?

"I didn't know about the Harris's List. That there were literally reviews every year in a book form that everyone would have and read. They tell you exactly what you want to know. It's brutal. But Charlotte does really well. She's described as fascinating, exciting, alluring and mysterious. The most desired courtesan in London. But don't believe everything you read. Some of the reviews are scathing, damning. Like calling a certain woman, 'If you want someone sweaty and fat then with her full name and address - is your girl.' All types of women were in this list - ridiculous and terrifying all at the same time."

Was filming the sex scenes challenging?

"I got away quite lightly. It's always a closed set for the sex scenes. So that helps. And I found it was quite amusing if you put a whoopee cushion underneath someone. It breaks the ice. Sex scenes are massively awkward. But you can make them funny.

"Working with the directors and producers we did, I felt we could actually have really informed discussions. Not just about what physically you saw but about what circumstances we were going to depict and why they were being depicted. They were always to drive the scene forward, to see that dynamic between two people.

"Because of that I felt, for the first time ever, confident and happy and able to talk openly and be as free as possible with the people you're working with and the context in which things were happening. Our directors were amazing.

"There are many manners and forms in which sex is displayed in Harlots. It is part of the story and can't be shied away from. As long as you're open and feel safe and are protected with who you are working with and everyone else around you, then you can get over the awkwardness."

Did you imagine what Charlotte might be if she lived today?

"Charlotte could do anything. She is fiercely emotionally intelligent. She knows how to make other people happy very quickly and make them feel good about themselves. But she is very afraid of what it will take or what might change if she makes herself happy.

"If she was alive now I think she would have to be doing a very busy job that allowed her to not stop and think too much about herself. Or she'd be in the back pages of Tatler and things like that. You'd see her face at parties."

Does Harlots have any relevance to today?

"There are incredible parallels between Harlots and today. The fact that running a house where women are safe and have a place and clients come to them is still illegal. That is shocking.

"These women don't just sleep with these men. They do all kinds of services. And any service which is considered to be of the sex trade is still so under-protected and not respected. That shouldn't be the case. Your rights should be protected regardless of whether or not someone else might like or approve of what you're doing.

"Maybe it can be part of a conversation or add to a conversation which is already being had but seems to be quite often stopped in its tracks by people who are afraid of it or don't know what it is. That's why I think open discussion and honesty around subjects like sex is the only way forward so that we make this oldest profession in the world safer. We live in a world where sex is everywhere. But it's insane how little we have moved on in terms of women's rights in this area."

Q: How would you describe the wit and humour in Harlots?

"It's hilarious. It's allowed to be that. Giving these women the full range of being human. Something terrible can happen or ridiculous or sad. And later on someone will say something and despite your best interest sometimes you just find yourself laughing. Or saying something ridiculous. And there it is. There's your human side just shining through. The keep going-ness of you is there. That was so clear in the writing and wasn't quashed out of the piece. That's amazing. I love that it's also allowed to have a sense of humour.

"When you see what we get up to, you would have to have a very good sense of humour. And these women would sit around afterwards and say, 'Well that just happened.' It also reminded me of female friendship. What I sit around and talk about with my girlfriends. So I liked that."

Can you tell us about Charlotte's look on screen?

"Because of the fact she is this notorious courtesan, she is quite punk. Today Charlotte Wells would live in east London and she'd be getting her hair dyed a different colour every other weekend. But for Charlotte I wore this great big white powdered wig with a pink streak to it.

"It's like this armour she has. How she's able to go out. People have a perception of who she is, what she is like and people want certain things from her. And so to go and do them she can put on these pieces of armour, these wigs, these big dresses, the distracting jewels and go and play that part. She's able to do that. She's been trained in it since she was 12. It's what she knows.

"But behind closed doors when she's got all of that off - in that world with George, for instance - that's when she's at her most fierce. Because all the armour comes off and she's very vulnerable. And when she's made to feel vulnerable, like a dog backed into a corner, she'll bite eventually. Because she's trapped and she knows that. And she doesn't want to be.

"So knowing that vulnerability in the script, hair and make-up designer Jacquetta Levon, costume designer Edward Gibbon and I worked very hard to make sure she shone in all the colours of the rainbow when she was outside. Because it gives her the ability to do anything that's asked of her. Then you see that contrast.

"The make-up, hair and costume for Charlotte is not the quickest process in the world. Everywhere you go you're apologising because your hips are five feet wide. You wear panniers. Which is French for basket. And they are like little baskets on either side of your hips but wrapped round your waist and over the top of your corset to accentuate the size of your hips. It makes your waist look minute, only because you're five foot wide. It's an incredible exaggeration of the female form. It was like the bigger the better.

"Charlotte also has a beauty spot on her face. Hilariously they were used at that time to cover sores. A beauty spot was originally placed on my face where I had a spot. And, of course, months later the spot is long gone and we're trying to remember where the beauty spot should go."

How do you reflect on the experience of filming Harlots?

"I loved it so much. It was the most fun. Joyous. It was a completely different feeling being on that set to any set I'd been on before. And it had been quite a long time since I'd been filming. It was wonderful to work with so many people who were like-minded in their openness and being brave and daring. I can't quite get over how much I adored it."





Eloise Smyth is Lucy Wells

Can you tell us what story Harlots tells?

"It's about what these women went through. It's not about men getting their kicks. It's about women selling sex as a job. And that's really interesting. I don't think it's a story that's really been told yet.

"The Georgian era is so exciting. It was very debauched and almost quite rock 'n roll. Big parties and massive wigs. Great fun. London was the fashion capital of the world at that time.

"It was also brilliant there were so many women on one project. I thought it was going to be a great piece for women. It wasn't sexy. It's about sex but it's not sexy. It's a really honest portrayal of women's lives during that time.

"The trials and tribulations of normal life within that being your job. Getting pregnant and not wanting to keep the child. Or wanting to keep the child but not being able to because of your line of work. The risk of having a baby and that stopping your way of making money. It was a really tough time for women. They had to be super strong.

"Also so much of it can be applied to now. Things have massively changed but also things haven't. This divide between the rich and poor is still massive in the world.

"London's prosperity was funded by the sex trade. It was huge. And it gave a lot of women who otherwise wouldn't be making any money a means of income. It created livelihoods for women.

"The language in the scripts is quite beautiful. Very reflective of the time. The Georgians were so big, bold and colourful. And the language feels like that as well."

Can you describe Lucy Wells to us?

"Lucy has grown up in a brothel but has been kept away from selling sex as a trade, in the sense of her doing it. She has seen it all with her sister Charlotte and the women she has grown up with in this brothel. So she is very familiar with the world but her mother Margaret has kept her away from it and given her time.

"Her mother had her tutored and educated. She's learned to play the harpsichord. Margaret has massive high hopes for her daughters. She wants them contracted to a Lord or someone like that. It seems harsh when you think of a mother trying to do a deal for her daughters or sell off her daughters' virginity. But that was the best option for someone who has grown up in a brothel with a bawd for a mother. Rather than having to sleep with a different man every day and night.

L ENCORE "So Lucy has been kept away from all of it but she has this eagerness to be involved. All the women she looks up to around her, that's what they do for a living. She has a glamourised view of it, and on some levels, is itching to be part of it.

"But when she actually does approach it, she is massively out of her depth. It doesn't really agree with her, the whole idea of having to put on a performance for men. Pretending to be into it. She is really bad at that. Because she is incredibly honest. She can't mince her words or lie. So it's daunting for her when she enters into that world.

"Margaret was definitely tougher on Charlotte, who was working from the age of 12, which scarily was the age of consent during those times. Her mother has waited as long as possible to keep Lucy intact as a virgin. She's spent all of Lucy's childhood preparing her for this moment. So Lucy feels a huge amount of pressure from her mother to find the right man and make some money for her mother. That's an enormous amount of pressure for a girl of 15. Scary."

How does Lucy view her older sister Charlotte?

"Lucy looks up to her elder sister Charlotte. She is incredibly in awe of Charlotte who is also the one person she can confide in about being nervous about all of this stuff."



Did anything in Harlots shock or surprise you?

"I was quite surprised when I found out that a Lord would have a mistress as well as his wife. A mistress he would house and have in an apartment. And the mistress would have access to the Lord and Lady's money and the Lady would know about this.

"That really shocked me. That you would know your husband has a mistress living down the road spending maybe money you have inherited from your father but then has gone into your husband's name. How blatant this debauched behaviour was. It was only when the Victorians came about that we became very prudish. The Georgians were really letting it all hang out, if you will. That surprised me.

"Then there's men treating women as property. Charlotte being asked to sign a contract to become the sole property of one man. But the contract was also there for a woman's safety. Because it meant she would be paid a certain amount however often. And then after the man died she would have a pension. That's why Margaret wants her daughter Lucy to find a keeper and get a contract sorted."

Are the men using the harlots or is it the other way around?

"I don't think the men see the harlots as important enough to use. The women were so savvy and clever about being seen as these inoffensive, powerless little harlots. When, in fact, they were charming the men and getting a lot of money out of them.

"It's almost like seeing the men as job opportunities and a chance to make money. The women were incredibly clever about doing that. It sounds like a bad thing to do but there weren't many other options at that time. The women were very intelligent about using the men to their advantage. Back then it was survival of the fittest.

"Someone like Margaret Wells would have been one of the most intelligent women in London at that time. She's an incredibly savvy businesswoman. Having to think and constantly have a game plan. And that's what she's done with her daughters. As soon as you have a child born into that world you need to be going, 'Right, how can I get them the best life possible?' She's been planning their lives from the minute they were born."

What was it like working with a female-centric cast?

"It was absolutely hilarious and so much fun. It's very rare that many women in any line of work get to work together and be around each other every day. It was amazing. It was so funny. All these women together felt so powerful."









Harlots – Episode Synopses

Episode One:

London 1763, the capital of the world, the most cosmopolitan place on Earth. One in five women in London is making her living selling sex. In some areas brothels, run by indomitable Madams, are to be found on almost every street. Margaret Wells' brothel is in a down-trodden area of the capital, but she's making her move upwards, aiming to move her family and her girls and take a new house in the vibrant new area of Soho. Margaret is determined to take her piece of the wealth of this great city. She is hungry for success – even when her ambition begins to threaten everything she cares for.

But Lydia Quigley - owner of one of the most fashionable, successful, and unhappy brothels in Soho - has other ideas. When Margaret's brothel is raided, Margaret realises her ambition has roused an enemy, and stirred up an old feud. As they risk losing everything, how much will Margaret and her daughters have to sacrifice to keep the brothel, and the Wells family afloat?





Character Credits

Margaret Wells SAMANTHA MORTON

Lydia Quigley LESLEY MANVILLE

Charlotte Wells JESSICA BROWN FINDLAY

Lucy Wells ELOISE SMYTH

William North DANNY SAPANI

Charles Quigley DOUGGIE MCMEEKIN

Sir George Howard HUGH SKINNER

Kitty Carter LOTTIE TOLHURST
Fanny Lambert BRONWYN JAMES

Emily Lacey HOLLI DEMPSEY

Nancy Birch KATE FLEETWOOD

Betsey Fletcher ALEXA DAVIES

Violet Cross ROSALIND ELEAZAR

Thomas Haxby EDWARD HOGG

Daniel Marney RORY FLECK-BYRNE

Florence Scanwell DOROTHY ATKINSON

Amelia Scanwell JORDON STEVENS

Jacob Wells North JORDAN NASH

Prince Rasselas JOSEF ALTIN

Nathaniel Lennox CON O'NEILL

Lord Repton TIM MCINNERNY

Lady Repton FENELLA WOOLGAR

Harriet Lennox PIPPA BENNETT-WARNER

Benjamin Lennox TIMOTHY INNES

Mary Cooper AMY DAWSON

Marie Louise D'Aubigne POPPY CORBY-TEUCH

Anne Pettier ELLIE HEYDON







Production Credits

Executive Producer DEBRA HAYWARD

Executive Producer ALISON OWEN

Executive Producer ALISON CARPENTER

Executive Producer/Co-creator and writer MOIRA BUFFINI

Executive Producer/Co-creator ALISON NEWMAN

Producer (episodes 1 – 4) LAWRENCE TILL

Writer (episodes 3 and 7) CAT JONES

Writer (episode 4) DEBBIE O'MALLEY

Writer (episode 5) JANE ENGLISH

Director (episodes 1, 2 and 3) COKY GIEDROYC

Director (episodes 4, 5 and 6) CHINA MOO-YOUNG

Director (episodes 7 and 8)

JILL ROBERTSON

Director of Photography (episodes 1, 2 and 3) HUBERT TACZANOWSKI

Director of Photography (episodes 4, 5 and 6) SIMON ARCHER

Director of Photography (episodes 7 and 8) OLLIE DOWNEY

Production Designer TOM BOWYER

Costume Designer EDWARD K. GIBBON

Make-Up and Hair Designer JACQUETTA LEVON

Casting Director NINA GOLD

Editor (episodes 1, 2 and 3) GARETH C. SCALES

Editor (episodes 4, 5 and 6) DOMINIC STREVENS

Editor (episodes 7 and 8) ISOBEL STEPHENSON

Composer RAEL JONES

Production Sound Mixer STEVEN PHILLIPS







