

They've peopled the fictional small-town of Royston Vasey with a host of disturbing, macabre and hilarious characters for their BBC 2 comedy. MARK BLACKLOCK quizzes writer Jeremy Dyson on what it means to be part of...

The League of Gentlemen

You opened the new series on a macabre note...
Because it's got the carnival in it, it's such a lovely thing to do we wanted to put that up front.

You would seem to be influenced by classic horror movies...

If you didn't know that, you'd have guessed it from that. In episode one, there's *Freaks* in there, several bits of *Freaks*. There's actually *The Monkey's Paw*, which is a story rather than a film. There's a more direct *Texas Chainsaw* reference to come, in episode three I think. They're all there for the fans.

You use some odd make-up, particularly on Tubbs and Edward. Did you want them to look like pigs?

It started when we were messing around with a roll of Sellotape, nothing more than that. It was accidental, sometimes a lot of the things are. It first appeared years ago, just after we'd started doing the *League* together, we did our own home movie on camcorder called *Highgate House of Horror*, which was like our version of *Tales from the Crypt* with three different stories in it. There was a character called Mr Baron who was based on Steve and Reece's upstairs neighbour who was always complaining. Steve played Mr Baron with some Sellotape sticking his nose up and it stuck, so to speak. Also, when Steve used to do Uncle Harvey on stage he'd blow his top lip out with his breath, but on TV we've made a prosthetic.

Have any of the show's catchphrases come back to haunt you?

Because they're under such heavy make-up so much of the time, they're spared a lot of that—at least for now. So nobody has been calling "This is a local shop!" at them as they walk down the street. In time, perhaps.

The series is filmed in a town called Hadfield in Derbyshire. Did you get any feedback from the locals about their feelings on the series?

Yeah, we did, because the community was divided down the middle between those who loved it and those who hated it. But we did a lot of schmoozing and made friends with people. And they get credit this time, which they didn't last time, so that should help if we have to go back.

What do you find genuinely sick?

Well, in terms of film, I've seen it all, because I grew up with it. I'm not as interested in it now. When I was 15, I was big fan of Lucio Fulci and Italian gore horror films but I found that I lost the taste for that when I turned 23. It's real life things that shock and disturb me now.

Have you ever encountered anywhere as frightening as Royston Vasey?

Personally, I have. I remember when I was about 14 going on holiday to a town on the East Coast of Yorkshire called Humnaby and that was almost as frightening as Royston Vasey. I wouldn't want to go back. Anywhere away from a main road.

Can a character be human and inhuman at the same time?

Oh, absolutely, they're the best ones. They've all got a good side to them.

Do you think that audiences like to be shocked?

Absolutely. The history of cinema tells us so, no doubt about it. There's a thrill to be had. Having said that, we don't set out to shock people, we set out to make them laugh. Incidentally, we end up with what we end up with. We're interested in what makes you laugh because you're uncomfortable.

How difficult were the transitions from stage to radio and then radio to TV?

Because we like films, even when we were doing the stage stuff, I think we always had a lot of

film influences. It's easier to do it on the telly than on the radio, I think, because we're used to picking into bits of films. On radio, you can do specific jokes. Chinnery started as a radio joke, really—because the joke was that he was doing bad things to animals, which we didn't think you'd be able to show on telly—and then we ended up doing it. The one that amazed me was the cow, when he pulls the cow inside out. I thought that was disgusting on the radio, we'll never do that on the television, and then our producer last year said, "Oh no, we'll do that."

The humour is particularly British. Were you surprised to get success abroad?

I think 'everywhere has small towns' is the simple answer to that.

You've written a screenplay...

Yes, I had to as part of my MA in scriptwriting, but it's safely tucked away in a drawer.

Who else makes you laugh?

Many people. I grew up living on the good stuff of the 1970s—Les Dawson, *Rising Damp* and *Porridge*, as well as *Monty Python*—all the good things really. Nowadays I love Chris Morris and *Brass Eye*, *The Day Today*. There's a lot of good stuff around.

