Unlight streams through the stained-glass windows of Ripon Cathedral, where a long service detailing the many plagues that befell the Egyptians is moving slowly to a conclusion. Smoke gently drifts into the air above the congregation to create the atmospheric motes-in-sunshine shot, flags lining the aisle are adjusted infinitesimally and an assistant director utters a prayer common to all film and TV sets.

"We've done enough fiddling, enough fiddling. Can we just get on with it?"

The prayer is answered not with "Amen", but "Action", prompting Victoria (Jenna Coleman) and Albert (Tom Hughes) to lead the congregation of crinoline-clad ladies and frock-coated gentlemen out of the dark, Gothic church into the bright North Yorkshire sunshine.

The first series of Victoria was an unqualified hit, with average audiances of 7.7 million. Now ITV's top-rated drama of 2016 has moved to the heart of the network's schedules with a new, eight-part second series plus a two-hour Christmas special. Given Prince Albert's role in popularising German traditions such as the Christmas tree, it doesn't require a crystal bauble to predict how the festive special might unfold.

If series one was about Victoria navigating her way through the political minefield of her first years as Queen, series two will deal with her deepening bond with Albert and the division of the Hanover household duties. Appropriate, then, that since the first series was filmed, Jenna Coleman and Tom Hughes have now reportedly become "an item" in real life.

Reluctant though she is to say too much about her co-star, Coleman, unlike the Victoria of legend, is regularly amused, letting out big, infectious chuckles especially when she's asked if she would ever give Hughes a "note" (thespian-speak for advice on, or criticism of, his performance).

"Oh no," she laughs, relaxing in her modest trailer at an Army barracks just outside Ripon. "I'm not sure how well that would go down! We talk about different versions of the scenes, but luckily we've got really good directors. It's more mapping out their romantic youthfulness against the political backdrop. We talk about it not being too happy, as that would get stale. They're a great love story - it's like Anthony and Cleopatra, Heathcliff and Cathy. It's passionate and volatile - they're such different beings."

Hughes, for his part, says with his gentle Scouse inflection: "It's always exciting to work with Jen because you never know what she's going to bring to the table. I love never quite knowing what's going to happen, and with Jen it's always alive and always exciting."

Coleman is equally impressed. "It's amazing working with Tom," she enthuses. "It's always been so easy since the first day, really. What's really interesting about Victoria and Albert is that they have incredibly different temperaments. Albert is on a wavelength of logic and science while Victoria is impulsive. On paper they shouldn't work, but there's something within them that's in synch and it's the same with me and Tom. Tom is wonderful."

Despite the high profile she gained as Clara Oswald in Doctor Who (2012–15), playing Victoria has changed everything for Jenna Coleman. "With Doctor Who you're a new cog in a well-oiled machine," she reflects. "All I was thinking was I don't want to break it - not that you really have that capability anyway. Actually, I think I did break the Tardis on the first day."

If the responsibility of leading a major drama for the first time weighed heavily on her, she didn't show it in series one of Victoria. Coleman gives the credit to writer and creator Daisy Goodwin for giving her such a clear brief.

"Daisy has always said that the film Mrs Brown with Judi Dench is the most faithful to everything that she knows about Victoria," says Coleman. "So in a way, it was like taking Mrs Brown and rewinding 50 years. Victoria's impulsive, romantic and passionate, but when she's made up her mind about something, she's equally unrelenting, frank and candid. Plus she's in this position of power with all this responsibility and yet she's still so young. She's got these elements within her that are constantly at war."

In this series, Victoria will also be contending with, as producer Paul F rift puts it, "a few more babies" - the Princess Royal, Victoria, is followed by Albert (the future Edward VII) and Alice - and she'll also have to deal with a new PM (au revoir Rufus Sewell's Lord Melbourne) in Sir Robert Peel (Nigel Lindsay), and political events of the mid-1840s such as the Irish potato famine and the repeal of the Corn Laws.

"A lot of what we're telling in this series is the expectation that as soon as Victoria was a mother, then Albert would take over and she would be in the nursery," explains Coleman. "But Victoria, being incredibly stubborn and forthright, kicked against that and in the first few years of their marriage that caused a lot of strife."

"Also, she continues. "She loved her children, but she resented giving up her independence. In her diaries she calls getting pregnant being 'caught', but her maternal instinct is strong and she writes endlessly about Victoria, her first baby, and about how funny and delightful she is. Yet later in life, she said to her children, 'You do know you ruined my first couple of years of marriage, don't you?'"

On the subject of love and marriage, there is
The royal couple

Jenna Coleman and Tom Hughes return as Victoria and Albert. But why is this love story one to watch?
NEW PARENTS
Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with their new baby in episode one of the new series

was a feeling in some quarters that – perhaps in trying to compete with BBC1's *Poldark* – the first series of *Victoria* rather oversimplified the story, but Coleman isn't convinced. "I think sex was a huge part of their relationship. They were a young couple, completely and utterly in love, who went on to have nine children. Albert to her was a hero, she adored him, and sex was a huge part of that."

For Hughes, best known before *Victoria* for his role as the rakish spy Joe Lambe in Cold War drama *The Game*, playing Albert has allowed him to break new ground. "This is the first time that I've done a second series of anything, so one never knows how that's going to feel," he explains. "I have a restless quality to me and I always want to move forward, so this is a new challenge."

And it's plain to see the attachment he feels for his character. "I've only played a real person once before and that was Chaz Jankel in the [2009] Ian Dury biopic *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll*," he recalls. "Someone apparently said to Chaz, 'Who do you want to play you?' and he said, 'Richard Gere.' And then I turned up! But with Albert I feel I can't let him down. The man I'm discovering is someone who by his quiet strength and forthrightness was challenging the status quo."

Coleman regards the appeal of playing the most powerful woman of the 19th century as Victoria's very normality. "If she wasn't Queen, she'd be the person next to you in a queue who'd give you their entire life story: her children, her marriage and this or that argument," she smiles. "And that's incredibly endearing. Against that, you know she has to find the iron discipline that she needs to survive."

**ENTER THE DAME**

**Diana Rigg** plays a royal adviser with a sharp tongue

There's a galaxy of starry cameos in series two, from Martin Compston (*Line of Duty*) as Dr Robert Traill, who tries to make England's political elite aware of the Irish famine, to *Call the Midwife*'s Emerald Fennell as computing pioneer Ada Lovelace, and Diana Rigg as the Duchess of Buccleuch (below).

The Duchess is nominally Mistress of the Robes, but in effect she's Victoria's etiquette enforcer. "She sits two paces behind Victoria and makes certain people curtsey," is Rigg's pithy summary. Like Rigg herself, the Duchess is no stranger to the one-liner. "She's got no long speeches," smiles Rigg, 79. "It's mostly punchy lines and that is heaven. Ah, brevity!"

"The Duchess is fun," laughs Rigg. "And I'm grateful to Daisy [Goodwin] as she's given her every prejudice that a grand Victorian dame would have. She approves of Victoria, but she doesn't always approve of the people she surrounds herself with. So the French won't do, the Germans certainly won't do, the Irish are feckless and oh, the Belgians, let's not go there. But she's also a counterbalance to a great deal of the sycophancy that goes on in court."

Can we call her the Duchess of Brexit, then? "Oh, don't do that," Rigg replies with a smile. "I don't want any letters."  

**BACK THEN...**

Jenna Coleman as Clara in Doctor Who (2013) and Tom Hughes as Joe Lambe in The Game (2014)