

Dirk Bogarde

The SECRET he took to his GRAVE

He remains one of the UK's most intriguing movie stars, but behind the matinee idol good looks, Dirk Bogarde was a complicated, notoriously private man. Steve O'Brien remembers the actor who went from teenage heartthrob to arthouse icon

On 14 September 1986 ITV screened an hour-long interview with Dirk Bogarde that, for the first time ever, addressed the actor's rumoured homosexuality. 'When you turn to the back of each of your four autobiographies,' begins interviewer Russell Harty, 'the name that figures most prominently and is covered most frequently is that of Tony Forwood. Now he's your manager and he's your closest personal friend. Do you count yourself blessed in him?'

'Oh, very much so,' the actor replies cautiously, going on to say how they met when Bogarde, then at the beginning of his career, was just 18. 'We made a pact that I'd be represented by him and I've stayed with him ever since.'

Harty then goes further. 'But it's more than an agent and client relationship, isn't it, because you share this house with him?' Bogarde replies yes, with Harty going on to ask whose taste is reflected in its interiors, telling the actor it's ➤



**DID YOU
KNOW?**

One of Dirk Bogarde and Tony Forwood's homes, Beel House in Amersham, was later owned by Ozzy Osbourne of Black Sabbath fame.

a house 'of exquisite taste'. Bogarde is flattered, but can clearly tell Harty's after more.

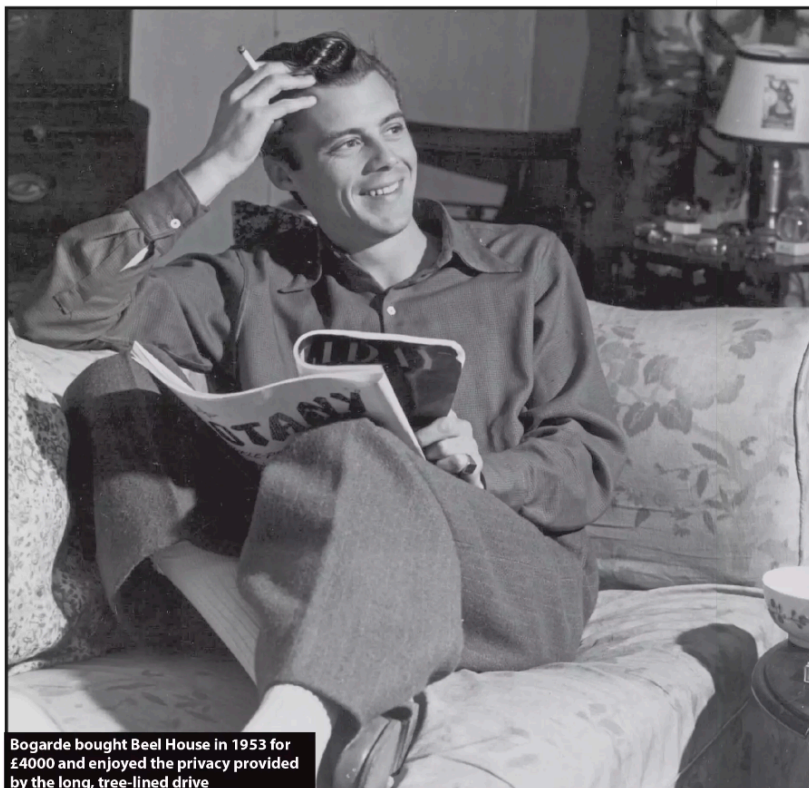
'When you and Forwood are here at home in the evening, let's say when we've gone, do you have post-mortems on how the day has gone?'

'If you're inferring we might sit down knitting and pulling rugs, forget it,' Bogarde snaps. 'That doesn't happen. There are no post-mortems.'

That interview was the nearest Bogarde had ever come to acknowledging – in public anyway – the relationship that spanned 40 years of his life. Through seven volumes of memoirs, Tony Forwood is referenced only as his manager and friend, and only ever by his surname. When they went on holiday, Bogarde would often invite his sister Elizabeth to camouflage the fact that they were a couple.

Even as late as 1989, a year after Forwood's death, Bogarde was still, if not outright denying a relationship, certainly skirting around it. 'Did you resent the rumours?' Sue Lawley asked on Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* about the talk that he and Forwood were partners. 'I resented it enormously for his family,' the actor replied, 'and for my own family, but what can you do?'

Within his own family and social circle, Bogarde and Forwood's relationship was no secret, yet the actor was obsessively tight-lipped about it in public. Part of that reticence came from the fact that, when the two began their affair,



Bogarde bought Beel House in 1953 for £4000 and enjoyed the privacy provided by the long, tree-lined drive

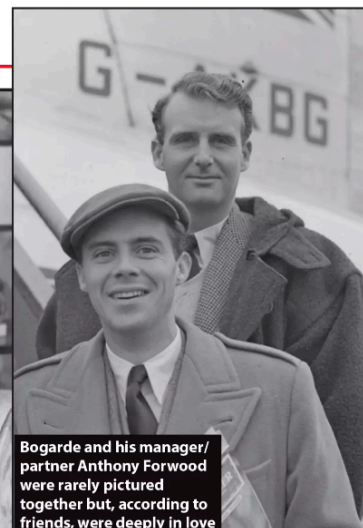
homosexuality was still illegal in the UK, but it was also that Bogarde came from a tradition of keeping one's private life exactly that – private. That's partially what makes that Russell Harty interview such electrifying television, especially from a modern perspective. 'I'm certainly in the shell,' Bogarde tells him at one point, 'and you haven't cracked it yet, honey.'

To anyone who had come to know Dirk Bogarde through his Fifties films, that waspish, slightly grand manner would have seemed in stark contrast to the boyish, twinkle-eyed charm he radiated in films such as *Doctor in the House* (1954), *Simba* (1955)

and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1958). As one of that decade's biggest stars and most lusted-after heartthrobs, his love life was of constant fascination for the starry-eyed film mags of the time. 'Dirk Bogarde – will he ever find true love?' posed the headline of one, going on to call him 'tall, dark and handsome, yet he's still a bachelor,' and linking him erroneously with actress Jean Simmons.

CHARM SCHOOL DROP OUT

Luckily for Bogarde, he was never, unlike certain gay actors from across the Atlantic, encouraged to fake a heterosexual relationship. Audiences never doubted his orientation, his boy-next-door image forged by a succession of cheery romantic comedies, all



Bogarde and his manager/partner Anthony Forwood were rarely pictured together but, according to friends, were deeply in love



Brigitte Bardot starred alongside Bogarde in *Doctor at Sea*, though one of the movie posters misspelt her name as Birgitte

leading man. Through those films, and under Forwood's guidance, Dirk's career went from strength to strength, but the movies he was most famous for, from feather-light comedies such as the *Doctor...* series to the epic *The Spanish Gardener* (1956) to romantic drama *The Wind Cannot Read* (1958) weren't the kind of fare that Bogarde felt was

worthy of his talents. As he said later in life, 'I always wanted to make a fuss in the movies.'

TURNING POINT

Bogarde finally extricated himself from Rank in 1961, buying out his contract for £10,000, and immediately set about torching the image his former employers had crafted for him. To say that *Victim* (1961) was a personal movie for Dirk Bogarde would be exaggerating, but clearly its story, of a married QC, Melville Farr, who leads a homosexual double life, resonated with the actor. He may not have been 'out' to the public, but the inequity of homosexuality being illegal (the film is specifically about the blackmailing of its lead character, after ➤

Doctor knows best

Dirk Bogarde once said he had made 'three or four films that will last longer than I will ever last'. Whether or not the *Doctor...* movies were in that list isn't known, but to the general public, it's the role of Dr Simon Sparrow that most people remember Bogarde for. He starred in four official *Doctor...* films, *Doctor in the House* (1954), *Doctor at Sea* (1955), *Doctor at Large* (1957) and *Doctor in Distress* (1963).

The first film in the series made Bogarde a star, and his box-office clout was soon so great that he was even allowed to rewrite some of his dialogue. Sparrow's line in *Doctor at Sea* about why doctors become doctors – 'I think it's because they feel that the most precious thing we have in the world is life – and that there's nothing more important than helping to give everyone their fair share of it' – is his, as is 'The NHS is all very well, but some people still prefer manners with their medicine.'



Bogarde played teenage delinquent Tom Riley in *The Blue Lamp*, which was the first film to use the word 'bastard' in its dialogue

DID YOU KNOW?

Dirk Bogarde became Sir Dirk Bogarde when was knighted by the Queen in 1992.

he has an affair with another man) clearly enraged the then 40-year-old actor. In fact, it was Bogarde who made the film's themes more explicit. The original script was less daring in referencing Farr's sexuality, but Dirk insisted on a scene near where the character admits to loving the other man. '[The original ending] was rubbish,' the actor recalled in the book, *An Autobiography of British Cinema*. 'Janet Green had written the script and very kindly allowed me to write that one little scene.'

Victim showed to the world that there was more to Bogarde than light comedy. He'd even allowed his dark brown hair to be greyed-up for the part, pushing his image even further away from his clean-cut Rank look.

The film led in turn to *The Servant* (1963), an intense psychodrama from exiled Hollywood director Joseph Losey. In it, Bogarde plays a sinister and manipulative manservant, who wheedles his way into the home of the younger, aristocratic Tony (James Fox), only for the power dynamic between the two men to shift as time goes on. It was a low-budget picture, shot in black and white, with a script by first-time screenwriter Harold Pinter, and was considered so outré that Losey was only able to fund it on Bogarde's name. It's not hard to spot the homosexual hints in

Bogarde suggested James Fox for *The Servant* after seeing him on TV and saying, 'This young man could spoil like peaches, he could be led to the abyss'



Jack Hawkins, James Mason and Stewart Grainger had all turned down the role of tortured barrister Melville Farr in *Victim*

Pinter's script. As *The Guardian* said in an article marking the film's 60th anniversary, 'Homosexuality is everywhere and nowhere in *The Servant*', and Bogarde's co-star believed its subtext would have resounded with the actor. 'The domination thing, dominating and being dominated,' Fox said in the documentary *The Private Dirk Bogarde* in 2001, 'he must have been attracted by that. He's got a beautiful young man who he can corrupt and

control. That presumably was a big turn-on for him.'

The Servant, which would go on to win a wealth of awards, including a BAFTA for Bogarde, propelled the actor into the centre of the new wave of British cinema. There were roles in John Schlesinger's achingly hip romantic drama *Darling* (1965) and Joseph Losey's vogueish spy comedy *Modesty Blaise* (1966), as well as another collaboration with Losey and Pinter in 1967 in the dark and challenging *Accident*.

COURTING CONTROVERSY

Perhaps the actor's most acclaimed – and controversial – role of his post-pin-up years came in 1971 with *Death in Venice*. In Luchino

Visconti's film, Bogarde plays a middle-aged composer nearing the end of his life, who becomes besotted with a young boy, played by 15-year-old Björn Andrésen. For Visconti it was a story of mortality. 'To put your eyes on beauty,' the director told one interviewer, 'is to put your eyes on death.'

Many reviews of the time zeroed in only on the implied homosexuality of its lead character. When asked about it by one interviewer, Bogarde stressed that, 'the love affair that happens is the love affair of beauty, of a man who has one year to live who goes to Venice to have the last summer of his life to enjoy beauty... He sees this child who is the essence of innocence, of crystalline purity of beauty and he simply falls in love. It's not physical, homosexual love at all.'

The role of Gustav von Aschenbach earned Bogarde another BAFTA nomination and gave him the courage and confidence to be even bolder in his film choices. He was chilling as a sadistic SS officer in *Liliana Cavani's* *The Night Porter* (1974) and stole the show as a vengeful lawyer in *Alain Resnais's* 1977 drama *Provvidence*.

MAN OF MYSTERY

As he entered his seventh decade, Bogarde's career took a back seat after Forwood was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Dirk himself suffered a stroke in 1987, with Forwood dying of liver cancer just a year later. The actor made his final film appearance in 1990 in the French drama *Daddy Nostalgie*.

Bogarde's final years were mostly bed-ridden (he was struck down by a more serious stroke in 1996) before he died from a heart attack on 8 May 1999, aged 78. In his life, he'd penned seven volumes of autobiography, six novels and a book of collected journalism, but what was truly amazing – as obituarists would find out

– was how much of his life was still cloaked in mystery.

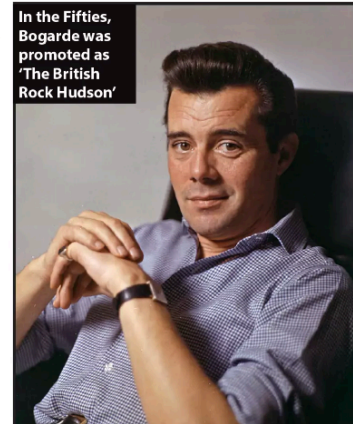
In 1986, Russell Harty asked Bogarde about this. 'In a way,' the host began, 'it's a very carefully edited picture of yourself isn't it... You allow people to know what it is you want them to know about you. There is no totality of the picture.'

'There is a complete totality, as far as I'm concerned,' Dirk fires back. 'It's all there if you want to read, but if you're not very bright, you won't get it. You have to read between the lines.'

Twenty-six years on from his death, there's no equivalent of Dirk Bogarde today, not just someone who has a sense of mystery and unknowingness about them, but someone who's navigated the journey from matinee idol heartthrob to arthouse darling. Because the thing Bogarde dreamt of was not stardom or awards or to be desired by millions, it was the freedom to live life the way he wanted and to make the kind of movies he loved.

'Being me is being allowed to be the person I always was,' the actor once recalled. 'And the person I always was actually comes back to the fundamentals of my first book [*A Postillion Struck by Lightning*], of that child in the meadow doing whatever he bloody well wanted to do.' And that was Dirk Bogarde, an artist who, certainly in the second half of his life, got to do whatever he bloody well wanted to do.

In the Fifties, Bogarde was promoted as 'The British Rock Hudson'



Behind closed doors

Like Bogarde, Tony Forwood was also an actor, but his career never flourished like his partner's and so he spent more of his time managing Dirk's work rather than his own. His first screen credit came in 1950, when he starred in Ralph Thomas's *Traveller's Joy* and over the years he popped up in such features as *The Black Widow* (1951), *The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men* (1952), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* (1956). His son Gareth, from his early marriage to the actress Glynis Johns, also became an actor, appearing in such films as *Gandhi* (1982) and *King Ralph* (1991).



Forwood's marriage to Glynis Johns lasted six years, she went on to marry another three times and died last year at the grand age of 100

I know the face...

DORIS HARE



Born: 1 March, 1905, Bargoed, Monmouthshire

Died: 30 May, 2000, Denville Hall, London

Screen debut: *Night Mail* (1935) (uncredited)

Screen credits: 78

Best known for: Born into a theatrical family, Doris was appearing in music hall revues from the age of six. In 1930 she took over from Gracie Fields in *The Show's the Thing*, and two years later appeared in *Words and Music*, alongside John Mills. During the Second World War she compered *Shipmates Ashore* earning her an OBE in 1946 for services to the Merchant Navy. She played Alice Pickens *Coronation Street* (1961–69) and in 1969 she took over the part she became best known for, playing Stan's mum in *On the Buses*. Aged 87 she appeared in a tribute to Evelyn Laye at the London Palladium and her final film role was *Mrs Hawkins* in 1994's *Second Best*.