

Ian FLEMING

FROM LONDON WITH LUST

*Ian Fleming was an exceptional, mysterious and wild gentleman. From his literary prowess to his playboy lifestyle, **Hugh Francis Anderson** delves into the world of Bond's creator.*



Ian Fleming is a name synonymous with one thing, and one thing alone: James Bond. Although his fame has spread across the globe like wildfire, Fleming's extraordinary life holds many secrets not only to the modern gentleman, but to modern popular culture too. A journalist, banker, author and Naval Intelligence Officer, Fleming was about as British as British can be. Living during a period of English supremacy, his life was utterly glazed with the luxurious, and his demeanour was one of lavishly suave, overstated Britishness.

Fleming lived his life, and experienced the world, in the most fundamentally brilliant way. A man who seemingly fell into every career he undertook, the James Bond novels became a culmination of his life, a snippet into the intricacies of his genius, with a protagonist whose own values were much the same as Fleming's. An infamous womaniser, a quintessential British gentleman, and a character of unbridled wit, Fleming was a man of chivalric nobility.

"Ian's grandfather, Robert, was one of the pioneers of popular capitalism," says Andrew Lycett in his biography, *Ian Fleming*, and the subsequent wealth that poured down gave the Fleming's an aristocratic lifestyle; weekends at their country estate, a townhouse in Mayfair, and unparalleled connections in both business and pleasure. The result: a privileged young man who simply epitomised the debonair, cavalier and debaucherous

lifestyle of the roaring 20s. Fleming's education at Eton formulated not only a grounding in the elite, but an ability to push the boundaries, which led to altercations with school masters over his irreverent womanising, amongst other things.

This spell, whereby Fleming merely strolled through the education system with poor academic pedigree, led to his removal from Eton, and his commencement of hard-line officer training at Sandhurst. Hardline, that is, until he caught gonorrhoea from a prostitute in a London nightclub and was expelled from the military academy too. This renegade adolescence ended at a finishing school in Austria, run predominantly by former British spy Ernan Forbes Dennis and his novelist wife Phyllis Bottome, where Fleming's imaginative espionage-themed mind began to sprout, along with a lust for a sadistic love life. Taken from Fleming's own hand-written letters to a young woman while in Austria, he said: "If I were to say I love you, you would only argue and then I would have to whip you and you would cry and I don't want that." Could this not well be the formula for the frivolities of James Bond himself?

After a short spell at universities in both Munich and Geneva, Fleming returned home to begin his journalistic career. His relatively short-lived time at Reuters News Agency propelled him into the world of international politics, and the communist behemoth of Russia, before succumbing to family pressure and venturing into stockbroking. And then, in the spring of 1939, Fleming was recruited into the tumultuous world



SEAN CONNERY, SHIRLEY EATON & IAN FLEMING

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IAN FLEMING WITH WIFE ANN



of naval intelligence, as the assistant to Rear Admiral John Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence and, for the first time in his life, excelled at his role. His code name was 17F, and he became pivotal to the underground network of British espionage, rising quickly to the rank of Lieutenant Commander, a position he held until the end of the war. Espionage, Russia, supreme wealth; Hello Mr Bond.

Fleming's professional life was again controlled by the continual pursuit of women and the joys of high society, whereby his numerous affairs gave rise to a lothario notoriety within the gentrified circles of war-time London. From one-night stands on long train journeys, to the frequent bedding of the wives of high-powered aristocrats, Fleming partook in it all. Lady Mary Clive, one of Fleming's conquests, once said: "No one I have ever known had sex so much on the brain as Ian," and it was true. In the traditional masculine, egocentric vitality of early 20th-century upper-class men, Fleming was the proprietor of male supremacy, comparing women to dogs and men as the "only real human beings". Derogatory and sexist? Yes, but what more could you expect from such a character? His apartment in Ebury Street, Victoria became *the* hotspot for outrageous parties, where he established Le Cercle gastronomique et des jeux de hasard, a group of close friends who pursued late-night gambling, heavy drinking and, undeniably, women too.

This bachelor lifestyle went hand-in-hand with his affiliation to sartorial flare. A suave gentleman, Fleming opted for classic style from tailors Benson, Perry & Whitley. He favoured blue two-piece suits worn with bowties for all London forays, and lightweight suits and golfing attire for relaxation. His hub was London, and London fulfilled his high-life aspirations. Continuously smoking handmade cigarettes from Grosvenor Street's Morland & Co, buying copious amounts of alcohol from Berry Brothers & Rudd in St James' and spending afternoons reading at his private members' club, Boodles; Fleming lived the life of luxury.

In 1952 he finally married his long-term lover, Ann Charteris, after her divorce from Esmond Harmsworth, 2nd Viscount Rothermere. And it was Charteris who many have cited as being the inspiration for the Bond novels. Fleming recalled on a 1963 broad-

cast of Desert Island Discs: "I was just on the edge of getting married and I was frenzied at the prospect of this great step in my life after having been a bachelor for so long and I really wanted to take my mind off the agony, and so I decided to sit down and write a book."

During their relationship, their wild nights of lovemaking often turned violent, with both notorious for their sadomasochistic tendencies. Torment, cruelty and sex are what underpinned the very nature of their relationship, and what apparently underpinned Mr Bond, too. In a 1964 *Playboy* interview, Fleming was asked if Bond is Fleming and Fleming Bond. His answer: "No, Bond is a highly romanticised version of anybody, but certainly not I." Although the evidence suggests otherwise, it's possible that in Fleming's answer was the unperturbed truth; that he, in fact, thought himself a romanticised version of the modern

British gentleman, founded on the very nature of dominance. Neurotic? Yes, but neurosis in writers is no new subject, and one that has been argued for years. What lay in the makeup of Fleming was, above all else, a clinical superiority. "Ian was entirely egocentric," commented Ann, "he stood for working out a way of life that was not boring and he went anywhere that led him."

And so we come to Jamaica, the land of James Bond. After falling in love with the island after a U boat conference during

the war, he vowed to build a house there, and he did so in true gentlemanly style. Falling back into journalism after the war, working for *The Sunday Times*, Fleming bartered a two-month holiday each year, where he would go to his Jamaica estate, aptly named Goldeneye, and write. It was here, in 1952, that Fleming penned his first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, in a razor quick two months. Over the next 14 years, Fleming would write every Bond novel at Goldeneye and go on to write *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car* for his only child, Caspar, too.

A man who lived the life of ultimate luxury, whose varied and exciting careers made the world his oyster, and who ostentatiously chased all his pleasures, paid the ultimate price with a heart attack at the age of 56. Ian Fleming is quite rightly a cultural icon, a social commander, a literary genius and a quintessential British gentleman. He, like his character, will always remain a mystery, but a mystery that has surely changed the world.

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