

EXTRACT FROM  
***ESSEX'S OWN***  
BY DEE GORDON

IAN HOLM  
b.1931

As a result of Ian's father's job – Medical Superintendent at Barley Lane Mental Hospital in Goodmayes, Ilford – Ian had rather an unusual start to life. Not only born there, he spent a lot of time there as a child, although he was not in touch with any of the “dangerous” patients. The family home was close by, followed by a move to a larger house near a golf course and Ian had a succession of nannies.

The war years were spent uneventfully in Devon, although Ian was at a nearby boarding school for a time where he was not only bullied (his birth name, Ian Holm Cuthbert, didn't help) but was subject to the capital punishment prevalent in the school. The saddest war-time event for Ian was the death of his older brother Eric at age twenty-two, from cancer. After the war, Ian's parents moved to Worthing, and this time Ian was boarded – from 1946 to 1949 - at Chigwell Grammar.

It was at Worthing that he met provincial actor Henry Baynton. Ian had been interested in acting since seeing Charles Laughton in *Les Miserables* at the age of seven and Henry tutored Ian for his RADA audition. Having passed, somewhat to the surprise of his parents, he moved to relatives in Bromley, making the commute to college easier on a daily basis. His time there was interrupted by National Service and a nine month tour of the U.S. playing such parts as Peter Pan.

After RADA he was asked to join the RSC as the inevitable spear-carrier in *Othello*, with Anthony Quayle as the lead. He returned to Stratford in 1957 after a stint at Worthing Rep and

on BBC Radio and became one of their long-term contract artists in 1961. Sadly, his father died in 1955 not having seen him on stage.

The 60s also saw Ian on television (e.g. *The Wars of the Roses* directed by Peter Hall) and in film (e.g. *Oh! What a Lovely War* directed by Richard Attenborough). He won a BAFTA and a Tony during this decade for Best Supporting Actor roles, and was *Evening Standard* Actor of the Year in 1965 for *Henry V* and *The Homecoming*. Although films took up a lot of his time in the 70s following a 1968 debut as Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, he was still doing television, and theatre continued until 1976 when he had a series of panic attacks (interpreted by some as the onset of stage fright) when performing *The Iceman Cometh*. Since then, he has done little theatre, although he managed an acclaimed portrayal of *King Lear* at the National Theatre in 1997 resulting in another *Evening Standard* Best Actor Award. There has not been a decade since Ian started acting when he has not picked up awards, and these have increased as he has grown older (six in 1998 for instance).

Off-screen, there has also hardly been a decade when he has not entered into a serious, if not marital, relationship. His first wife, Lynne, was an RSC wardrobe mistress and they had two daughters during their ten years together, divorcing in 1965. He then lived with a much younger wardrobe assistant, Bee, after she fitted the diminutive actor with a club foot for *Richard III*. They had two children during their fourteen years together, but parted company in the late 70s before he moved in with photographer, Sophie. The birth of a son in 1980 was followed yet again by divorce a decade later. Ian married actress Penelope Wilton, but they split up after sixteen years, leaving him free to embark on yet another relationship – marrying artist Sophie de Stempel in Los Angeles – apparently on impulse - in December 2003.

Ian has received more recent acclaim for his role as Bilbo Baggins in the globally successful *Lord of the Rings* Trilogy, but he has also had to fight off prostate cancer since taking on the role. He has been honoured with a CBE (1989) and a knighthood (1998) for “services to drama”.

Now living in London, Ian is a serial grand-father. He can look back on a life and a career a world away from the sad place where he was born.