



Janet Reuter

February 2020

**Dame Judi Dench is now 85 years old. I really can't believe it!**

**Judi Dench** is perhaps the best known of a group of ladies who have the titles of **Grand Dames** of the English acting world. I have seen her so many times in films and on TV but never in real life on the stage. Recently I had a chance to see the film **Tea with the Dames** when the great four ladies including Maggie Smith got together to talk about their lives as girls, starting out as actresses and a bit about their private lives off stage. It was so interesting and fascinating to hear them chatting about the past and to see the excerpts from their long and varied careers. Judi came across as probably the strongest and most famous.

Judith Olivia Dench was born on **December 9, 1934**, in North Yorkshire, England. From an early age, Judi received considerable exposure to the world of acting. Judi's father was the resident doctor for the **Theatre Royal in York**, and it wasn't uncommon for her to tag along during his visits there and mix with all the performers, musicians and dancers.

Even as a young girl, she showed a passion for performance herself. She loved to dress up and sing as her mother played the piano. Her first foray onto the stage came with the **York Mystery Plays**, where her mother Eleanora helped out with the wardrobes and even her father did some acting himself.

Judi attended an all-girls Quaker school, then followed with a brief stop at the York School of Art before changing course and heading off to London's **Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art**. The decision, she would later say, could be blamed on her brother, Jeffrey, another aspiring actor who also attended the school and pushed his sister to pursue stage work. "I'd never have thought of acting if it wasn't for Jeff," she said in the film *Tea with the Dames*.

Her acting talent and versatility were hard to ignore and she made her stage debut in **1957** with the **Old Vic Production Company** at the **Royal Court Theatre, London**, with an amazing performance as **Ophelia in Shakespeare's Hamlet**. She continued working with the Old Vic for another four years. In 1961, Judi joined the most prestigious **Royal Shakespeare Company**, the start of a 30-year run with that playhouse that would see the actress take on every leading female Shakespeare role. This must have been the hardest acting training but a basis to take on any other acting role that was offered to her.

Judi Dench wasn't just content with Shakespeare or drama. In **1959**, she made her television debut in the series **Hilda Lessways**. She stretched herself even more by taking on comedy work, including stage productions of **Oscar Wilde**. In **1968**, she had a starring role as **Sally Bowles** in the musical **Cabaret**. This was a great opportunity to show all her stage talent!

The 1960s brought Judi to the big screen, as well. Her performance as a young wife in **Four in the Morning** in **1965** earned her her first **British Academy of Film and Television Award**. Other strong performances in additional British movies followed. Coupled with her continued stage work, her reputation grew in stature in her native England but not in Hollywood.

## February 2020

### Dame Judi Dench (continued)

Gaining a foothold with American audiences was another matter. Dench's early play work had brought her to the States, and she later earned more of an international following as the star of the TV romantic comedy series **As Time Goes By**. However, it was her role as **M**, James Bond's boss in **Golden Eye** in **1995**, that established her as a legitimate Hollywood star. No James Bond film was complete without her and she played the character for another six Bond films, ending with the **2012** release, **Skyfall**.

In **1997**, she endeared herself to movie audiences in her first leading role as **Queen Victoria** in the film **Mrs. Brown**. But it was another royal performance, this time as **Queen Elisabeth I** in **Shakespeare in Love** in **1998**, that proved Oscar-worthy. Despite an on-screen time totaling just eight minutes, Dench's performance was so dazzling she walked away with the **Best Supporting Actress Award**. Who else could possibly do this!

Other memorable roles followed in films such as **Chocolate** in **2000**. Dench joined a cast of acclaimed British actors for the surprise **2011** hit **The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel**, and returned for its **2015** sequel, **The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel**. She also delivered a moving performance as the titular character of **Philomena** in **2013**, based on the book about an Irish mother's search for a son given up to adoption against her will. This was a very emotional role in a controversial film about a real life situation which happened to many young unmarried mothers in Southern Ireland.

In **2017** she earned a **Golden Globe** nomination for her performance as **Queen Victoria** in Stephen Frears **Victoria and Abdul**, a film about the unlikely friendship between the Queen and one of her Indian subjects. A true story!

Next film was with the director Kenneth Branagh where she appeared in an update of **Murder on the Orient Express** again in **2017**. Believe or not she headlined a star-studded film adaptation of the Broadway musical **Cats** in **2019** as **Old Deuteronomy** at the age of 85 but no sign of her batteries running down!

I am now beginning to feel dizzy from all these roles that she has played but I have not mentioned all of them. There are many more, sometimes two films a year plus stage work. Her filmography alone is overwhelming. Judi won some very high awards. In **1999**, she won unprecedented two **Lawrence Olivier Awards** for **Best Actress** and **Best Actress in a Musical**. These she said were her most prized awards. In the same year she won her **Oscar** and earned a **Tony Award** for her leading role in **Amy's View**.

Judi Dench's approach to her work is unusual. She famously doesn't read parts before accepting them, choosing instead to rely on the word of her friends and colleagues to help her make a decision. With her stage work, she often comes to rehearsals not having read the entire play. "Not reading pushes me to a kind of dangerous edge and there is something in me that needs that," she has explained. This I found very surprising in her open chats in **Tea with the Dames** but she is famously a risk taker.

Judi Dench had played English Queens brilliantly and in 1970 she was invited to **Buckingham Palace** to receive the **Order of the British Empire** given to her by **Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**. Again in **1988** she was awarded **Dame Commander of the British Empire** and in **2005** the **Order of the Companions of Honour**.

**Judi Dench is a Grand Dame in every way and a lady who I so greatly respect and admire!**

## February 2020

Here is some information for the ladies who are going on the next trip to England in May.



**Brighton** on the south coast of England in Sussex is the overnight destination for the ladies. Each time when I go in or out of my house I pass a beautiful print of the quiet fishing village of **Brighthelmston** drawn in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This was given to me by my colleagues when I left my job in Brighton in 1987. This 16<sup>th</sup> century fishing village with 400 fishermen and sixty boats changed drastically in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and became known as Brighton and was the largest town in Sussex with a population of nearly 4,000 people. Today the population is around 300.000 with more than 11 million visitors each year and 9.5 million day trippers. Brighton is known as **London by-the-sea!** It is only a short distance from the Capital and is today a popular weekend meeting place for the Gay Community.

The decline in the fishing industry during the 18<sup>th</sup> century resulted in large numbers leaving the town in search of work. Those that remained found life very difficult and by 1740 over three quarters of Brighton's households were too poor to pay rates. However their fortunes changed dramatically.

In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century some doctors began to claim that diseases could be cured by bathing in sea-water. **King George III** was the first monarch to believe this advice and he regularly visited the coast for a swim. His son, the **Prince Regent** and future **George IV (1762-1830)**, first visited Brighton when 21. He spent a great deal of time in Brighton and eventually built the **Royal Pavilion**.

Rich people tended to imitate the behaviour of the royal family, and holidays by the sea became very fashionable. The number of people visiting these resorts increased further because of the claims made by famous doctors, such as **Richard Russell**, that drinking sea-water would cure asthma, cancer, consumption, deafness and rheumatism. Close to London it was perfect to take a cure there.

Brighton soon became the most popular seaside resort in Britain, with over 2,000 people a week visiting the town. The cost of transport meant that it was extremely rare for most people living in towns to visit the coast. For example, the cost of a coach ticket from London to Brighton was more than most people could earn for two weeks work. However, the large number of rich people visiting the town enabled the building of the finest examples of Regency architecture in Britain. The best architects were needed and the three mile sea front was a continuous row of four storey terraces in grand crescent style with elegant gardens which were considered as impressive as in **St. Petersburg, Russia**. The **Theatre Royal** was built in **1807**, impressive ballrooms and meeting places were built for the recreation of the rich Londoners who had their Winter residences there.

**Theodore Fontane** described it as the most beautiful town he had ever seen. **William Turner** painted it many times( top right painting) and grand visitors such as King Wilhelm IV, King Louis-Philippe and Fürst Metternich were greeted by Queen Victoria on the pier where boats sailed daily to and from Dieppe in France. This exclusivity ended somewhat in **1844** when the railway was built to join Brighton with London. This gave the middle classes the chance to visit the town for a day trip and in this year more than 700.000 visitors took the train to spend a day by the sea. More facilities were then built to amuse the less elite.

Everybody loved Brighton except one lady who was **Not Amused**. This was **Queen Victoria** who found the town too small and crowded. She preferred the peace and quiet of Buckingham Palace to The Royal Pavilion. What would she have said about Brighton today!!!!

## February 2020

### Here is more information for the ladies... (continued)



In the mid **1780s**, **George, Prince of Wales**, rented a small lodging house overlooking a fashionable promenade in Brighton so that he could spend undisturbed time with Maria Anne Fitzherbert a beautiful Catholic who he had secretly but illegally married. Brighton suited George who was a vain and extravagant man with a passion for fashion, the arts,

architecture and good living. He rebelled against his strict upbringing and threw himself into a life of drinking, womanizing and gambling in the company of his uncle the **Duke of Cumberland**.

This decadent lifestyle combined with his love of architecture and the fine and decorative arts. His residences in London and Windsor were like immaculate sets to show off his superb collections, resulting in his incurring heavy personal debts. In **1787**, after much pleading and many promises by the Prince of Wales, the **House of Commons** agreed to clear his debts and increase his income.

George hired architect **Henry Holland** to transform his Brighton house into a modest villa which became known as the **Marine Pavilion**. With his love of visual arts and fascination with the mythical orient, George set about lavishly furnishing and decorating his seaside home. He especially chose Chinese export furniture and objects, and hand-painted Chinese wallpapers.

In **1808** a new stable complex was completed with an impressive lead and glass-domed roof, providing stabling for 62 horses. In **1811** George was sworn in as **Prince Regent** because his father, **George III**, had been deemed incapable of acting as monarch. At that time the Marine Pavilion was a modest building in size, not suitable for the large social events and entertaining that George loved to host. In **1815**, George commissioned **John Nash** to begin the transformation from modest villa into the magnificent oriental palace, **The Royal Pavilion**. George was determined that the palace should be the ultimate in comfort and convenience. Particular attention was paid by his architect and designers to lighting, heating and sanitation, as well as to the provision of the most modern equipment of the day for the **Great Kitchen**. On his death in **1830**, George's younger brother, **William IV** inherited the palace and then it was passed on to **Queen Victoria**. However, this royal residence did not represent the Victorian style and so Queen Victoria sold it to the Brighton Council in **1850** for **£50,000**.

She did however, strip it of all the finest treasures which she had transported to **Buckingham Palace**. **Queen Elizabeth II** returned all these objects in the 1960's and the palace was restored and opened for the over 350.00 visitors who come to see it each year.

**The Royal Pavilion** is my favourite building and the **Museum and Art Gallery** is next. Opened in **1873** Brighton Museum occupies land that was formerly used as part of George IV's stable complex, the building was one of the first purpose built museums in England. It is full of examples of Art Nouveau, Art Deco and a fashion gallery showing trendy Punk and Rocker fashion for which Brighton is so famous. There were great battles in the 60's between Mods and Rockers!

The next on the list is the **Volks Electric Railway**. Magnus Volk, a 19<sup>th</sup> century inventor and engineer from Brighton designed and built it and it was opened in **1883**. The son of a clockmaker, he set up the first telephone line in the city in **1879** and pioneered the early use of electricity, which he brought to illuminate the Royal Pavilion. It runs regularly from the Brighton Pier to the Brighton Marina.

**The Lanes** are also worth a visit. This is all that is left of the old fishing village and is a complex of small antique and jewellery shops. **The North Lanes** are the trendy area where you can find everything from retro fashion to the latest trends in food. However, a traditional meal of fish and chips on the **Brighton Pier** is a must with all the Pier entertainment thrown in!

**The Brighton Festival** takes place in May and at the weekend there should be many street performers and musicians. There will be no shortage of entertainment. And if you want something quieter there is always the **Theatre Royal** or just a stroll on the promenade.

February 2020

## News about and for the English ladies

There is some new and interesting historical screen viewing for those of you who have Netflix



Many of you have been eagerly waiting for the 3<sup>rd</sup> series of **The Crown**. This series shows the political rivalries and romance of Queen Elizabeth II's reign and the events that shaped the second half of the twentieth century. In the first two series Queen Elizabeth II was a twenty-five-year-old newlywed faced with the daunting prospect of leading the world's most famous monarchy while forging a relationship with legendary Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill. Now history has moved on. The British Empire is in decline, the political world is in disarray, a new era is dawning. Peter Morgan's masterfully researched scripts reveal the Queen's private journey behind the public façade with daring frankness. Again viewers are welcomed into the coveted world of power and privilege and behind

locked doors in Westminster and Buckingham Palace where the leaders of the old empire await. The first episode starts with a horrible disaster in 1966 in the Welsh town of Aberfan which killed 144 people and 117 children who were in school at the time of the coal waste avalanche. The Queen took a week to decide to visit the town to offer sympathy to its people, she must confront her reasons for postponing the trip. I remember this vividly as this village was not far from my home town. Olivia Coleman is the new face of the Queen. We knew her from her role as Queen Anne in *The Favourite*. This is only available on Netflix at the moment.

### **Another Netflix production is the new film *The Two Popes*.**

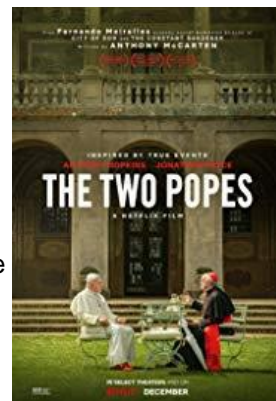
An intimate story of one of the most dramatic transitions of power in the last 2000 years.

Frustrated with the direction of the church, Cardinal Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce), as Pope Francis used to be called, requests permission from Pope Benedict (Anthony Hopkins) to retire in 2012.

Instead, facing scandal and self-doubt, the introspective Pope Benedict summons his harshest critic and future successor to Rome to reveal a secret that would shake the foundations of the Catholic Church.

Behind Vatican walls, a struggle commences between both tradition and progress, guilt and forgiveness, as these two very different men confront their pasts in order to find common ground and forge a future for a billion followers around the world.

Inspired by true events this film interests me as Anthony Hopkins comes from my home town in Wales and I knew Jonathan Pryce as a young actor in *The Everyman Theatre* in Liverpool.



### **Little Women a new film of the wonderful classic book written by May Alcott in 1868**



The story tells of four sisters with four differing personalities and desires grow up together with a loving, charitable mother who holds them together away from the horrors of the Civil War that has taken away their father. The sisters live a relatively enclosed life in their home and try to break free from their domestic duties to embrace youthful desires such as artistic pursuits. The story takes us over a decade of these sisters lives as their lifestyles change, their needs adapt and the incoming adulthood is about to change their naive bright youth.

### **Birthdays in February:**

Hana Stadnik

**Happy Birthday Hana !!**

