

OLIVER REED

A self-proclaimed hellraiser, Oliver Reed is perhaps as famous for his behaviour off-screen as he is for his performances on it. An overwhelmingly talented actor, heavy drinker, and outspoken public personality, Reed is a character that is hard to overlook.

Robert Oliver Reed was born in Wimbledon on 13 February 1938, and attended a number of schools, 14 of which he was expelled from, before settling down and becoming captain of athletics and the junior cross-country champion at Ewell Castle. Some time as a bouncer at a strip club and compulsory military service in the Royal Army Medical Corps served as a precursor to an illustrious acting career which started with television work, where Reed was notably cast as Richard I in a children's serial. The bulk of Reed's work, however, was in cinema. His most famous roles were in films like *Oliver!*, *Women in Love*, *The Jokers*, and *The Devils*, as well as Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*—his last film. In fact, Reed took some persuasion to start acting and ignored suggestions that he should join the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art founded by his great-grandfather, until he discovered that many of his drinking companions were making a decent living as film extras. Reed was catapulted to fame after some largely unnoticed leads in Hammer horror films, thanks to his role in the 1968 musical film *Oliver!*, in which Reed played the softly spoken menace, Bill Sikes. The film won six Oscars and Reed became an actor of international renown. By the end of the 1960s, Reed had become Britain's highest-paid actor with the world at his feet and a bottle in his hand.

Reed's next role earned him an accolade for being the first actor to appear fully nude in a mainstream film. The film adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* required Reed to partake in a naked wrestling scene, a role for which he claimed to have prepared by drinking a bottle of vodka and 'staggering' onto the set. Nudity became something of a motif throughout Reed's career, with a myriad of stories of drunken, naked antics characterizing his legacy. One famous instance of the man's misadventures in a state of undress took place in the early 1970s at a hotel in the Caribbean, where he was keen to show off a recently acquired tattoo. Reed proceeded to drop his trousers to reveal a cockerel's claw emblazoned on his penis. Unbeknownst to him, the onlooking crowd perceived Reed's new acquisition as an involvement in Voodoo magic, and he was forced to make a hurried escape over a nearby balcony. In 1974, the police were called to Reed's house in Surrey after neighbours reported sightings of crowds of naked men galloping across the countryside. It later transpired that Reed had invited 36 rugby players back

