



GARY OLDMAN

The Firm Director's Cut

With his wife (Manville, then married to Oldman), child, comfortable home and job as an estate agent, Clive 'Bexy' Bissel (Oldman) would seem a respectable citizen; his abiding passion, however, is football hooliganism... Clarke's TV drama, inspired by the rivalry between the 'firms' of violent hooligans of the 70s and 80s, centres on one of Oldman's most forceful yet subtly persuasive performances.

bfi.org.uk

The Firm was to be Alan Clarke's final film, though no-one involved in this very vigorous BBC production could have known as much during the shoot in the spring of 1988. Indeed, the film has enjoyed as healthy an afterlife as anything Clarke ever made. His onetime collaborator David Hare rates it 'one of the few authentic television masterpieces.' Phil Davis, who plays Yeti, is of the view that it 'sums up the 1980s.' Producer David M. Thompson wryly notes its achievement in having built 'a certain hooligan cult following.'

The script – about a vicious turf war between self-styled 'supporters' of rival football teams who ruck with one another in the vicinity of their local stadiums – was by actor Al Hunter, who drew upon first-hand research. But according to cameraman John Ward, Clarke – a staunch fan of Everton FC – turned down Hunter's offer of an introduction to the real firms who had inspired the drama: 'Alan said, "No, I'm a football fan, they're the guys who are ruining the game."' Clarke and Hunter were to have deeper disagreements. 'Things were changed as drafts went on that were not always to Al's liking,' Phil Davis remembers. 'But that was the thing about Alan, he shaped everything to his own wishes.'

Leaving football aside, then, it seems fair to assume that the director of *Scum*, *Contact* et al was drawn to *The Firm* because of what it had to say about the masculine propensity to violence and how this can be massaged if one keeps very intensely homosocial company. 'Funny old guy, Alan', Gary Oldman recalls, 'because he abhorred violence, was appalled by it. And yet he could display it so well because he had a great understanding of where it was coming from.'

The Firm is about prospering estate agent Clive 'Bexy' Bissell (Oldman), a man who – as David Leland put it – loves his wife, loves his family, and loves to slash the faces of people he hates with a Stanley knife. No stereotypical knuckle-dragging yob, then. But through Bexy – and Davis's Yeti, with his Ray-Bans, ponytail, white mac, and convertible GTI – Clarke was clearly gesturing to a particular 1980s 'type': the 'yuppie', a well-paid professional with no care for anything but his or her self-gratification.

Is *The Firm* an authentic account of 80s-era hooliganism in the UK? It certainly references various socio-economic factors that had changed football by that time – the mixed fortunes of the game's traditional working-class constituencies, the rising violence in and around the grounds, and the growing subcultural obsession with what was the right clobber to wear to the match. But one could argue that Clarke threw into this mix a special despair he was feeling about the state of the nation. 'Alan certainly got very tired of

England in the 80s,’ remembers Jane Harris, Clarke’s ex-partner and mother of his two children. ‘It was becoming a mean little country and he didn’t like that.’

In Gary Oldman, Clarke at least found a lead actor with brilliance and authenticity to spare. ‘I was never a member of a crew,’ Oldman says of his south London upbringing, ‘but I was born within the sound of Millwall supporters.’ By 1988 Oldman had played Sid Vicious and Joe Orton and worked with Nic Roeg; and he was aware that Clarke, discoverer of Ray Winstone and Tim Roth, preferred not to cast known faces. But once the two men had met and hit it off, Oldman’s name was first on the team-sheet.

A whole cottage industry’s worth of books and films about British hooliganism have come out since *The Firm*, and most have seemed to want to rub their real-life subjects the right way with tasty accounts of hard-man behaviour. *The Firm* does none of that. And if its towering bleakness is maybe not the happiest memorial to Alan Clarke, the undeniable brilliance of the direction certainly is.

Richard T. Kelly, extract from booklet essay from the Blu-ray/DVD collection *Dissent & Disruption: Alan Clarke at the BBC 1969-1989* (BFI, 2016)

SCREEN TWO: THE FIRM (DIRECTOR'S CUT)

Director: Alan Clarke
©/Production Company: BBC
Producer: David M. Thompson
Production Associate: Jacinta Peel
Production Manager: Corin Campbell Hill
Location Manager: Anthony Smith
1st Assistant Director: Corin Campbell Hill
Production Assistant: Charlotte Blair
Assistant Floor Managers: Simon Mather, Adam Richards, Jane Cossey, John Spencer
Casting Adviser: Simone Reynolds
Script Editor: Richard Langridge
Screenplay: Al Hunter
Directors of Photography: John Ward, Ben Philpott
Lighting Gaffer: Steve Williams
Visual Effects Designer: Steve Lucas
Graphic Designer: Sid Sutton
Editor: John Strickland
Designers: Chris Robilliard, Rachel Heady
Props Buyer: Bob Tunnicliffe
Costume Designers: Maggie Chapelhow, Helena Ash
Make-up Designers: Jan Nethercott, Wendy Freeman
Film Recordist: Roger Long
Dubbing Mixer: Ron Edmonds
Dubbing Editors: Colin Goudie, Jane Merkin
Stunt Arranger: Terry Forrestal
Armourer: Ken Bond

Cast

Gary Oldman (*Clive ‘Bexy’ Bissell*)
Lesley Manville (*Sue*)
Philip Davis (*Yeti*)
Andrew Wilde (*Oboe*)
Charles Lawson (*Trigg*)
William Vanderpuye (*Aitch*)
Jay Simpson (*Dominic*)
Patrick Murray (*Nunk*)
Robbie Gee (*Snowy*)
Terry Sue Patt (*Yusef*)
Nick Dunning (*Simon*)
Nicholas Hewetson (*Beef*)
Steve McFadden (*Billy*)
Steve Sweeney (*J.T.*)
Hepburn Graham (*Stu*)
Dan Hildebrand (*Sully*)
Kevin Allen (*Lomax*)
Roderick Smith (*Cliffie*)
Martin Barrass (*Alan*)
Stephen Petcher (*Mark*)
Herbert Norville (*Joe*)
William Hayes (*Phil*)
Dave Atkins (*Bill*)
Kim Durham (*hospital PC*)
Stefan Escreet (*travel agent*)
Robert Hamilton (*Pullen*)
Phillip Joseph (*sociologist*)
Debbie Killingback (*Gill*)
Mark Monero (*Wesley*)
Cassie Stuart (*Siobhan*)
Mandy Vickerman (*strippergram*)
Jo Warne (*Ethel*)
James Woolley (*housebuyer*)
Albert Bentall (*Sammy*)

BBC2 tx 26.2.1989
UK 1988©
68 mins

GARY OLDMAN

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

Tue 18 Oct 18:05; Sun 6 Nov 18:20

Bram Stoker’s Dracula

Wed 19 Oct 20:25 (+ intro by Christopher Frayling); Sat 29 Oct 20:30;

Wed 23 Nov 18:00

Prick Up Your Ears

Fri 21 Oct 20:30; Sun 13 Nov 18:20; Fri 25 Nov 20:40

JFK – Director’s Cut

Sun 23 Oct 16:00; Sat 19 Nov 16:30

True Romance

Mon 24 Oct 20:40; Tue 22 Nov 20:30; Tue 29 Nov 18:00

The Firm – Director’s Cut

Wed 2 Nov 21:00; Thu 10 Nov 18:15

The Contender

Fri 4 Nov 18:00; Mon 14 Nov 18:00

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy

Sat 5 Nov 20:20; Thu 24 Nov 17:55

Mank

Tue 8 Nov 20:15; Sat 26 Nov 17:20; Tue 29 Nov 20:20

Darkest Hour

Sat 12 Nov 12:20; Sat 19 Nov 20:30; Mon 21 Nov 14:30

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