

= Bernard Lee =

John Bernard Lee ( 10 January 1908 ? 16 January 1981 ) , known as Bernard Lee , was an English actor , best known for his role as M in the first eleven Eon @-@ produced James Bond films . Lee 's film career spanned 1934 to 1979 , though he had appeared on stage from the age of six . He was trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London .

Lee appeared in over one hundred films , as well as on stage and television dramatisations . He was known for his roles as authority figures , often playing military characters or policemen , and highlights in his career include *The Third Man* , *The Blue Lamp* , *The Battle of the River Plate* , and *Whistle Down the Wind* .

He died of stomach cancer on 16 January 1981 , aged 73 .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early life = = =

Lee was born on 10 January 1908 , the son of Nellie ( née Smith ) and Edmund James Lee . He was born in either County Cork in what is now the Republic of Ireland , or Brentford , London . Lee 's father was also an actor and Bernard 's first appearance on stage in 1914 , at the age of six , was with his father in a sketch called " *The Double Event* " at the Oxford Music Hall in London . Lee attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art , working as a fruit porter to pay his fees . During the 1930s , after graduating from RADA , he initially worked in repertory theatre in Rusholme and Cardiff before beginning work on the West End stage in thrillers , such as *Blind Man 's Bluff* . Lee also played comedic roles , such as with Arthur Askey in *Ten Minute Alibi* .

Lee 's screen debut was in *The Double Event* in 1934 , followed by a role as Cartwright in Berthold Viertel 's *Rhodes of Africa* ( 1936 ) , a biopic of Cecil Rhodes , in which he starred alongside Walter Huston , Oskar Homolka , and Basil Sydney . Terence Pettigrew mentions a " witty scene " featuring Bernard Lee in the film in which he is " struggling to put on a tight collar prior to slipping into town for a few ales . " Although Lee was in wartime service in the army between 1940 and 1946 , he had managed to act in several films earlier which were released between 1939 and 1943 , including *Murder in Soho* , *The Frozen Limits* , *Let George Do It !* ( known in the US as *To Hell with Hitler* ) , *Spare a Copper* , *Once a Crook* , and *The New Lot* .

= = = Second World War to 1962 = = =

Lee 's wartime service was with the Royal Sussex Regiment , and while he was awaiting his demob he attended golfing ladies ' night , where he met a producer , and was subsequently offered a part in the play *Stage Door* .

After the war , Lee returned to the stage whilst also developing a successful film career . He appeared in Herbert Wilcox 's *The Courtneys of Curzon Street* ( 1947 ) , playing a colonel alongside Anna Neagle , Michael Wilding and Daphne Slater ; the film was a major success and became the best @-@ selling film at the British box office of 1947 . He developed a reputation for playing " solid , dependable characters such as policemen , serving officers or officials " in films such as *The Fallen Idol* ( 1948 ) , *The Third Man* ( 1949 ) , *The Blue Lamp* ( 1950 ) , *Last Holiday* ( 1950 ) , *Cage of Gold* ( 1950 ) , *Mr. Denning Drives North* ( 1952 ) , *The Yellow Balloon* ( 1953 ) , *Beat the Devil* ( 1953 ) , and *Father Brown* ( 1954 ) , and commanders , colonels , or brigadiers in films such as *Morning Departure* ( 1950 ) , *Calling Bulldog Drummond* ( 1951 ) , *Appointment with Venus* ( 1951 ) , and many more . In John Huston 's *Beat the Devil* , Terence Pettigrew considers Lee to have been instrumental to the climax of the film , remarking that it was " left to Bernard Lee to inject a badly needed touch of earthiness at the end . " In total , Lee appeared in over one hundred films during his career .

During the 1950s he had a long run on stage , appearing as Able Seaman Turner in *Seagulls Over*

Sorrento , a role he later reprised in the film of the same name with Gene Kelly ( released in the US as Crest of the Wave ) . In 1954 Lee starred opposite Gregory Peck in The Purple Plain , playing a Royal Air Force medical officer based in Burma during the late Second World War . In 1956 he portrayed Captain Patrick Dove in one of the most successful British films of that year , Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger 's war film The Battle of the River Plate , based upon the battle of the same name . He starred alongside John Gregson , Anthony Quayle and Peter Finch . George Lovell remarked that Captain Patrick Dove was played " ponderously by Bernard Lee , but he forms a much closer bond with the battleship 's commander , Captain Langsdorff ( Peter Finch ) . " The film was critically acclaimed , nominated for three BAFTA Awards in 1957 , for " Best British Film " , " Best British Screenplay " and " Best Film From Any Source " , and was the fourth most popular film in Britain in 1957 . Other films of this period include The Spanish Gardener ( 1956 ) , Dunkirk ( 1958 ) , Beyond This Place ( 1959 ) , Whistle Down the Wind ( 1961 ) , and The L @-@ Shaped Room ( 1962 ) .

= = = Bond and beyond = = =

In 1962 Lee was cast in the role that The Illustrated Who 's Who of the Cinema thought would probably be his best remembered , playing the character of M , the head of the Secret Intelligence Service ( MI6 ) ? and the superior of James Bond ? in the first Eon Productions film , Dr. No . A number of Bond scholars have noted that Lee 's interpretation of the character was in line with the original literary representation ; Cork and Stutz observed that Lee was " very close to Fleming 's version of the character " , whilst Rubin commented on the serious , efficient , no @-@ nonsense authority figure . Smith and Lavington , meanwhile , remarked that Lee was " the very incarnation of Fleming 's crusty admiral . " One American newspaper , The Spokesman @-@ Review , described Lee as " a real roast @-@ beef @-@ and @-@ Yorkshire @-@ pudding type of British actor . " Murray Pomerance refers to Lee as a " paternal actor " in embodying this role . Terence Pettigrew , in his study British film character actors : great names and memorable moments agreed , noting that Lee was a " gruff , reliable , no @-@ nonsense role character actor " , with " kindly eyes , droll manner and expressly Anglo @-@ Saxon level @-@ headedness " . In 1967 Lee appeared in O.K. Connery , a spoof of the James Bond film series which starred Connery 's brother Neil Connery , Lois Maxwell ( Miss Moneybags ) , and several former actors of the series . During this period he also appeared in several ITC television productions such as The Baron , Man in a Suitcase , and Danger Man . In 1972 he portrayed Tarmut the sculptor in Terence Fisher 's Hammer Horror picture Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell , alongside Peter Cushing , Shane Briant , and David Prowse ; it was not released until 1974 .

On 30 January 1972 Lee 's first wife , Gladys Merredew , died in a fire at their seventeenth @-@ century home in Oare , Kent which also left Lee hospitalised . According to actor Jack Warner , " Bernard and Gladys had a lovely seventeenth @-@ century cottage in the Kent village of Oare , and it was there she died tragically in a fire early in 1972 . Bernard and Gladys were trapped in their bedroom when the fire started on the ground floor . Bernard escaped through a window and ran to get a ladder in an attempt to rescue Gladys , but unhappily was unsuccessful . It was an awful end to a long and happy marriage . " In February 1972 Lee was mugged and robbed by two youths . After the mugging and fire , Lee turned to drink , was unable to find work for two years , and ran into debt . By chance Lee met Richard Burton in a pub , who , upon hearing of Lee 's problems , gave him a cheque for \$ 6 @,@ 000 to clear his debts , together with a note saying that everyone has a spot of trouble once in a while . Burton 's gift assisted Lee in overcoming his depression . In 1975 both Lee and Lois Maxwell accepted roles in their usual Bond characters in the poorly received French James Bond spoof , From Hong Kong with Love .

Three years after the fire , Lee married television director 's assistant Ursula McHale . Lee 's first marriage produced a daughter , Ann , who also followed her father onto the stage , and did so with his blessing , Lee saying " She 's doing what she wants to do and enjoying every moment of it . " Ann later married Alan Miller , a stage actor and later a stage manager at the BBC : their son is the British actor Jonny Lee Miller . Lee 's hobbies included golf , fishing , reading , music and sailing .

## = = Death = =

In November 1980 Lee was admitted to the Royal Free Hospital in London , suffering from stomach cancer . He died there on 16 January 1981 , just six days after his 73rd birthday ; his wife Ursula was present at his death . After his death , Ursula joined Exit ( now Dignity in Dying ) after witnessing Lee 's suffering .

Lee died after filming had started on For Your Eyes Only , but before he could film his scenes as M. Out of respect for Lee , no replacement was found , and the script was re @-@ written so that the character was said to be on leave . A year after Lee 's death , Terence Pettigrew summarised his acting work as a " Gruff , reliable , no @-@ nonsense role character actor , whose many credits include policemen , servicemen , father figures , and spy chiefs . Mostly shows the honest , hard @-@ working face of officialdom , with only very occasional lapses . "

## = = Filmography and other works = =

From 1962 to 1979 Lee featured in eleven James Bond films as the character M , Bond 's superior .