

The Woman Who Invented James Bond?

Saturday 10.30am Radio 4 FM



PUSSY GALORE,
KISSY Suzuki,
Plenty O'Toole.

The world of James Bond is filled with female characters possessing preposterous, cheeky or sexually suggestive names. But even Ian Fleming might have baulked at calling someone Phyllis Bottome.

But Bottome was a real woman. And without her influence there might have been no 007. Or indeed Ian Fleming.

Bottome died in 1963 at the age of 79 and, although she's little remembered now, she was a successful novelist in the early part of the 20th century whose bestselling books addressed the pressing political issues of her day. Her 1937 novel *The Mortal Storm*, for instance, was a clarion call warning the world about the appalling abuse of the Jews in Nazi Germany. It was turned into a Hollywood movie starring James Stewart.

She was also – excitingly – married to a spy. Ernan Forbes Dennis had been SIS station chief in Marseille and was then vice-consul in the Tyrol, a cover job for his continuing work for British Intelligence.

In the early 1920s the couple set up the Tennerhof, a skiing and language school in the small Austrian town of Kitzbühel that became a refuge for upper-class boys who'd gone off the rails. Soon after the school opened they received a young visitor who had left Eton in disgrace. Ian Fleming was young, troubled and headstrong.

In the Austrian Alps he found both freedom and discipline. When not cutting a swathe through the local womenfolk, he practised skiing, learnt



Did this woman invent James Bond?

Miles Jupp unearths the thrilling mystery of the woman who inspired Ian Fleming – and 007

PICK OF THE WEEK

BY JANE ANDERSON

Drama: James Bond: Thunderball
Saturday 2.30pm Radio 4



This is Bond: unreconstructed Bond. His sexism is so blatant that it becomes pure camp and Toby Stephens adds a wilful comic nuance to 007's every encounter.

This faithful dramatisation of Ian Fleming's 1961 novel begins with our hero visiting a Sussex health farm to rid his body of toxins. Within a matter of hours he is swapping herbal teas and massages for death-defying skirmishes with a ruthless killer from crime syndicate Spectre (Special Executive for Counter-Intelligence, Terrorism, Revenge and Extortion), run by one Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

Before we know it, Bond is off to the Bahamas to save the world from nuclear attack, while battling deadly marine animals, avoiding underwater grenade attacks, quaffing champagne, chain-smoking, gambling and, of course, having thoroughly satisfying sex with a woman he says reminds him of a child – not dialogue that would be written today!

The cracking cast includes Alfred Molina as Blofeld, Tom Conti, John Standing and Ian Ogilvy – long-time radio collaborators with husband-and-wife production team of Martin Jarvis (the voice of Fleming) and Rosalind Ayres. It's all delivered with tongue firmly in cheek. A right rollicking treat – just don't take any of it too seriously!



RAUNCH APPEAL
Toby Stephens ramps up 007's 60s sexism



INDEBTED
Ian Fleming at his villa in Jamaica

Chalmers is 36. He is sent abroad to spy for Britain by a secret service chief known only by one letter, "B". He is armed with a suicide pill. He also shares a number of characteristics with Bond, among them his height, hair colour, tastes in food and wine and expertise in Alpine sports.

It was 1953 when Fleming's James Bond officially arrived, emerging from the smoke and sweat of a casino at 3am in his first novel, *Casino Royale*. But the similarities between Chalmers and Bond are so great that the spy writer Nigel West describes the relationship between the two novelists as "thief and victim": "1946 is the moment when Phyllis Bottome writes a James Bond book. He's not called James Bond, he's called Mark Chalmers."

It's an extraordinary claim. Since the publication of Fleming's first novel, James Bond has become a multimillion-pound industry, spawning films, spin-off novels and merchandise.

Yet the similarities between the two books are certainly worth considering. As well as the physical similarities of Chalmers and Bond, they each undergo a kind of education in the course of their respective adventures. Both receive a

'Bottome's spy hero shares tastes with Fleming's Bond'

savage beating. Both, in the course of recuperating from their wounds, hallucinate wildly.

Fleming's biographer John Pearson agrees that Phyllis Bottome had an important influence on the troubled young Fleming, but he rejects any suggestion that she created his most famous character: "*The Lifeline* and *Casino Royale* are such different books."

However, writer and critic Simon Winder thinks that Bottome may have had more to do with Fleming's success than has ever been acknowledged before. "Phyllis Bottome seems to have been a substantial influence. [When it comes to the creation of Bond] she's definitely been missed out."

James Bond: Thunderball starring Toby Stephens as 007 is on Saturday on Radio 4. See Jane Anderson's preview, top right

French and German... with Bottome's encouragement, began to write. He produced his first short story, *Death on the Occasions*, for her and absorbed her criticism and encouragement.

"They loved him like a son," says Pam Hirsch, Bottome's biographer. "The spark was lit there, and her ability to be a bestseller, the page-turning quality, I think he learnt that from her."

In 1960 Fleming wrote to her: "My life with you both is one of my most cherished memories. And heaven knows where I should be today without Ernan."

For the rest of his life, Kitzbühel held a magical place in Fleming's imagination. In *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* Bond takes his new bride Tracy on honeymoon and witnesses her brutal murder. In the novel the young couple are heading for a then still obscure Austrian ski resort named... Kitzbühel.

AFTER KITZBÜHEL, BOTTOME and Fleming remained in touch. In the 1930s she roped him into her attempts to arrange a British lecture tour for the psychologist Albert Adler, whose teachings she followed. In 1947 the Forbes Dennises spent a few days at Fleming's Jamaican villa, Goldeneye. They exchanged copies of their books, and apparently took great pleasure in each other's successes.

But could Bottome have made more than just an impression on Fleming? Did she play more than just a supporting role in his early life? Could the white-haired lady novelist have actually invented James Bond?

It seems like a wild suggestion. But in 1946 Faber & Faber published a novel by Bottome called *The Lifeline*. It introduces the world to a British spy named Mark Chalmers.

ER WORD HIS BOND?
...an Connery... may have Phyllis Bottome to thank for 007

AMBRIDGE DIARY

The Archers this week...

After Rob shows up at the children's Nativity play, Pat expresses her anger at his nerve. But Helen is surprisingly empathetic, arguing that it must be hard for Rob at this time of year and that she did love him once. Someone else who had feelings for Rob is Jess, who gets a visit from Helen later in the week. As the pair talk about their experiences of recovering from being in Rob's clutches, both wonder whether they'll ever be able to move on.

Pip, meanwhile, announces that she'll be spending Christmas Day with Toby at Rickyard Cottage. Ruth tries to convince her that they could both join the rest of the family, and she'll ensure that Jill behaves. But can the festive spirit help to forge harmony between the Archers and the Fairbrothers? **DAVID BROWN**