

# Ian William Richardson

(1934-2007)

*A Scottish actor known best for playing the Machiavellian political Francis Urquhart in the “House of Cards” for the BBC.*



***Ian William Richardson*** was born in Edinburgh and educated at Tynecastle High School in the city and trained at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. After a period at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre at what is now The Old Rep he subsequently appeared with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), of which he was a foundation member, from 1960-1975.

He acted in Peter Brook’s production of the *Marat/Sade* for the RSC and on

Broadway in 1965. He would play the part of Jean-Paul Marat again in the 1967 film version. Later he played Professor Henry Higgins in the 1976 revival of *My Fair Lady* and received a Tony nomination. He also appeared on Broadway in 1981 in the original production of Edward Albee’s play *Lolita*, an adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov’s book, but this is not regarded as being a success.

He played one musical role on film – the Priest in *Man of La Mancha* the 1972 screen version of the Broadway musical. In 1987 he played a variation on this role when he portrayed the Bishop of Motopo in the non-musical telefilm *Monsignor Quixote*, based on Graham Greene’s modernised take on the Quixote story. He was made a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 1989.

He made many film appearances, including *Brazil* (1985), *Dark City* (1998), as Polonius in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (1990), Martin Landau’s butler in the Halle Berry film *B.A.P.S.* (1997). and Cruella de Vil’s solicitor, Mr Torte in the live action movie *102 Dalmatians* (2000). Richardson also gave memorable TV performances: as Bill Haydon (‘Tailor’)

in the BBC adaptation of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, Sir Godber Evans in *Channel 4's adaptation of Porterhouse Blue* and Major Nuehiem in the award-winning *Private Schulz*.



**As double agent Bill Haydon in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.**

He also starred in *Murder Rooms: The Dark Beginnings of Sherlock Holmes*, playing Dr Joseph Bell, the mentor of Arthur Conan Doyle.

He had earlier played Sherlock Holmes in two 1980's TV versions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Sign of Four*. In 2003 he played the recurring role of the villainous Canon Black in the short-lived BBC fantasy series *Strange* and as "Lord Groan" in the BBC production *Gormenghast* (2000)

Richardson won the BAFTA Best Television Actor Award for *House of*

*Cards* and was nominated for the two sequels, *To Play the King* and *The Final Cut*, as well as for the 1992 film *An Ungentlemanly Act*.



**In *To Play the King***

He is quoted as saying that he was grateful for the part as "It put me on the map". His famous one-liner - "You may very well think that; I couldn't possibly comment - passed into common parlance at Westminster. In the early 2000s Richardson joined Sir Derek Jacobi, Sir Donald Sinden and Dame Diana Rigg in an international tour of *The Hollow Crown*.



**Cast of *The Hollow Crown*: Alan Howard, Donald Sinden, Vanessa Redgrave, Ian Richardson**

He also appeared in *The Creeper* by Pauline Macaulay at the Playhouse Theatre in London and on tour.



**As the Chancellor in *Bleak House***

He played the curiously detached Chancellor in the highly successful TV drama series *Bleak House*. In June 2006 he was made an Honorary Doctor of the University of Stirling. In December 2006 Richardson starred in Sky One's two-part adaptation of the Terry Pratchett novel *Hogfather*. He voiced the main character in the novel, *Death, the Grim Reaper* who steps in to take over the role of the Father-Christmas-like Hogfather.

He died suddenly on the morning of 9 February, 2007, aged 72. He had not been ill and in fact had been due to start filming an episode of *Midsomer Murders* the week after his death. He is survived by his wife, Maroussia, née Frank, also an actor, and two sons, one of whom, Miles, is an actor with the Royal Shakespearean Company.

Dame Helen Mirren, winner of the 2007 Best Actress BAFTA Award for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth II in the film *The Queen*, dedicated her award to Richardson, saying that Richardson had been very supportive of her when she started out acting and that without this support she may not have been so successful. Paul Seed, who directed *House of Cards*, called Richardson “the most sophisticated craftsman comic actor in this country. I cast him because of his comic talent and he was absolutely brilliant..” Michael Dobbs, co-author of *House of Cards* and its sequels described him as “a superb actor” who was “very careful not to let fame get in the way of his personal integrity.”



Ian Richardson as Francis Urquhart in *House of Cards* (1993)

*Prepared by John Horsefield, Cowra  
USA*