



J-W 4 eva

Class war

He's played both student and teacher on TV, and now he's graduating into film. But how did Jack Whitehall become Britain's King of Comedy?

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Jack Whitehall, a white shirt in one hand and a stripy tie in the other, is standing in his pants trying to decide what to wear for our shoot. We're waiting for him to say something. But he doesn't. In fact, he hasn't said much at all since he arrived for our interview; just a few handshakes and hellos and a slightly feeble request for coffee: black, no sugar. That's his medicine.

Today, three weeks before his 27th birthday, Whitehall is out of sorts. He is the victim of an ailment so common that most people would consider it trivial. But when it gets to Jack, it can plunge him into a state of anguish, melancholy, even panic. Jack Whitehall does not have a cold. No – Jack Whitehall needs a poo.

It is a fine June day when we meet near his home in the swanky London district of Chelsea. Jeremy Clarkson, who owns a place nearby, has just been sacked from *Top Gear*. We've tried to warm Jack up with small talk, suggesting he might have made a fun replacement, had Chris Evans not stepped in. It's a bad start. Our conversation goes like this:

FHM: "You live near Clarkson, don't you?"

Jack: "Do I?"

FHM: "Don't you?"

Jack: "I don't know. I think I'd be the worst *Top Gear* presenter ever. I'm not that interested in cars and can't drive."

FHM: "Um... Are you alright?"

Jack leans in as if he's about to share a terrible secret. "I think I'm losing the plot, actually. I really need a poo. Sorry."

But there's no time. Our photographer is ready and we're already running late. Most celebrities would have shut the interview down and gone to relieve their burden regardless of our deadlines. Not Jack. He's a good egg: a well-mannered and gracious sort of egg. We crack on.

Jack is fresh out of the editing suite where he's been putting the finishing touches to his first movie, a cinema adaptation of the hit BBC Three sitcom *Bad Education*, which he co-wrote and stars in as a useless secondary school history teacher. "It's a school trip through the eyes of someone who loves *Indiana Jones*, *The Goonies* and *Die Hard*," he »

says. "I wanted explosions and helicopters and swords and Cornish terrorists. It's super-sized."

It's a typically silly film: obscene, funny and the culmination of a career to date that most comedians could only joke about. No other comics could say they've written a movie, starred in two major TV shows (*Fresh Meat* and *Bad Education*), captained a team on a panel show (Sky's *A League Of Their Own*), been crowned King of Comedy at the British Comedy Awards three years running, and drawn crowds of 21,000 a night for their stand-up arena tour.

Jack Whitehall is not a man you would think prone to self-doubt. Yet right now, as he paces up and down the room, he is freaking out. "I am wrought with anxiety over the release of this film," he tells us. "I mean, I'm proud of it and I genuinely think it's better than the TV show, but it's a big project and it's a bold project, and whenever you put your head above the parapet, people are always ready to shoot you down."

Then he laughs loudly, "I do not think the *Daily Mail* will like this film."

In 2013, that newspaper was left gasping for air in a puddle of its own indignation after Jack, James Corden, Jimmy Carr and others "guzzled wine and traded vile, obscene jokes about the Queen" on Channel 4's *The Big Fat Quiz Of The Year*. Cue complaints, investigations and paparazzi shots of Jack going out to buy milk.

"When the *Mail* picks a fight with you, everyone tells you not to react," he says. "But it's hard when they're getting so angry about something so stupid. My favourite part of that week was when a commenter wrote under a story on MailOnline, 'This is just the kind of behaviour that makes me ashamed to pay my licence fee.' Er, it's Channel 4, mate."

Jack's grown up since then. Now he's tackling the Big Issues: things like education and institutional bullying and terrorising swans.

"There is a scene in *The Bad Education Movie* where bullies make me teabag a swan," he reveals. "I'll never be allowed near a swan again after this film. Or the Queen. As if I hadn't upset her enough already, I have now done something terrible to one of her swans."

It is one of many moments in his movie that will surely have a certain type of cinema goer in hysterics. But for Jack, filming the scene was no laughing matter. "I had to approach a real swan before they swapped it for an animatronic one," he recalls. "But the director let me get very close - I was literally hovering above it - before he yelled cut. It was meant to be a well-trained swan but it was actually very angry. It was the most scared I've ever been on set. But I tried not to fuss because apparently he was quite a famous swan;

he'd had quite a lot of other work."

Jack still seems a little on edge. We aren't sure if it's the painful memories of past wars with the press or his loosening bowels, but he is now literally walking around us in circles with growing speed before leaning rakishly against the mantelpiece on the far wall.

He's never been afraid of making himself the butt of the joke, especially when it comes to his perceived poshness. Isn't he tired of constantly talking about polo and private school?

"I guess I do get a bit bored of it," he admits, "but it's entirely my own doing."

The truth is, Jack's not *that* posh. He hasn't got a title or a double-barrelled surname or a mouth that doesn't close properly due to generations of inbreeding. His mother was an



"I had to teabag a swan. It's the most scared I've ever been"



RIGHT: SHIRT: £20, TIE: £15, HAT: £10, SHOES: £120, HAT: £20, STARBUCKS LABEL: £10, HOODIE: £15, ASOS.COM, GLASSES: £5, ASOS.COM, JUMPER: £15, BENSHERMAN.COM

actress and his father was a theatre agent made good. So good, in fact, that Jack attended the Harroddian School and Marlborough College, two of the most prestigious academic institutions in the country.

"I'm upper-middle class really, I think," he ponders. "But I've decided that the only way to deal with it is to embrace it and mock it. I play a character on stage [but] I think at some point in the future, I'd like to find more honesty in my

stand-up, start tearing layers away and searching deeper." Mostly, though, he just seems to enjoy laughing at himself: which he does, regularly and charmingly, throughout our interview.

Is part of his success down to British people's need to define each other by the schools they went to or whether or not they think 'forehead' should rhyme with 'horrid'?

"We are totally obsessed with class in this country," Jack says. "In America there is more »

THE RISE AND RISE OF JACK WHITEHALL

7 July 1988
Jack Whitehall is born
"It was the poshest birth ever - everyone, except me, was wearing a dinner jacket."

Summer 2004
Performs his first gig in a Marlborough pub
"It was to a few posh students and farmers. The landlord handed me a Darth Vader costume to wear in case it went tits up. It didn't."

June 2008
Hosts E4's *Big Brother's Big Mouth*
"I used to get, 'Oh, you're so like Russell Brand.' I'd read these stories of him having raucous orgies, and I was still living at my mum's, thinking, 'When do I get these perks?'"

December 2010
Performs at the Royal Variety Performance
"Meeting Paul Chuckle at his table was my highlight. I was so starstruck, I could barely speak."

September 2011
Makes his acting debut on Channel 4's *Fresh Meat*
"I was in Manchester as a student and it is quite bizarre filming in a bar when the last time you were there was for a foam party where Dr Karl from *Neighbours* was DJing."



June 2012
Becomes regular panellist on Sky 1 sports quiz show *A League Of Their Own*
"Jamie Redknapp sent me to his tailor to get a suit recently. Jamie likes it cut very tight in the crotch so you can see his religion. I call it 'Redknapping.'"



to have had the “poshest birth that ever happened”.

Jack was born on 7 July 1988 in the Portland private hospital in central London, surrounded by men in black tie. “My dad got drunk, my godfather turned up in a dinner jacket because he had been out, and then the gynaecologist also turned up in a dinner jacket because he was on the way to a gynaecological dinner convention,” he tells us. “It was all very *Downton Abbey*.”

Jack’s first brush with stardom didn’t quite work out as his mother had hoped. He was 12 when a casting agent for the first *Harry Potter* film came to the Harroddian School to hold open auditions for the title role. “I remember going to the audition and being told beforehand by my mum that I was Harry Potter so I would definitely get the part,” he remembers. “She dressed me up in round spectacles and a blazer and would’ve scarred my forehead if she could, but I completely cocked it up.”

Looking back, he says, that agent did the world a favour in casting Daniel Radcliffe

instead. “I’d have been a horrible Harry,” he says. “It’s too much pressure to carry that film; I’d have ruined it for everybody.”

At the age of 16, Jack went to Marlborough College (future queen of England Kate Middleton went there, too) where he performed his first gig to “a couple of posh students and some local farmers” in a pub. “Just before I went on stage,” he says, “the compere

of an obsession with race whereas over here, our race is class, which is the issue that people feel interested in and defined by. The depictions of posh people in this country seem like cartoons. Look at *Made In Chelsea*: it’s ridiculous. But the same can be said for the working classes on TV; *Benefits Street* felt so opportunistic and damaging to people’s perceptions.”

Still, he admits he can’t feel too hard done by. After all, this comes from a man who claims

offered me a Darth Vader costume to put on in case it didn’t go well.” He was relieved when he didn’t need the costume; not after the scars left by the last time he was forced into fancy dress.

“I was 11 on a school trip to Hampton Court where you can dress up in Tudor outfits,” he recalls mournfully. “It was meant to be fun and they had a male and a female outfit. But it was an all-boys school. And someone had to wear the Anne Boleyn outfit.”

No prizes for guessing who was pushed to the front of the queue. “I’ve got this photo somewhere of me and Patrick Ward, who got to be the man, and I look so sad in it – my eyes are completely blank, dressed in this corset and flowing dress. I was Patrick Ward’s pretty little Tudor queen. I never forgave him for it.” Has he seen him since? “No,” Jack replies. “I cut him off. The bastard.”

Jack turned to comedy as a defence mechanism, he says – always the fool in class with a talent for making boys laugh. “I was quite odd at school, actually,” he says. “I mean, I wasn’t a weird loner; I wasn’t torturing animals on my own.

But while everyone else was playing sports or smoking weed, I was writing sketches, putting on plays and drawing cartoons.”

With comedy still a sideline, Jack needed a profession. So, after his A-levels, he enrolled at Chelsea School of Art. “I basically doodled caricatures the whole time so when they came to assess me after three months, they dismissed it,” he says. “Then they came to this guy called Kybor who had plastered a load of homosexual pornography on a wall and then hung dildos from the roof. You looked through another dildo like a telescope to see the porn and they thought that was amazing. That was the point that I thought maybe art school wasn’t for me.”

So, after a stint studying history of art at the University of Manchester, Jack turned to the life of a freelance comedian. Cue awards, TV shows, sell-out tours and the kind of fame that has given him the chance to rub shoulders with some of the most important funnymen in comedy.

There was one chance encounter that will remain in his heart until its final beat. “I was at the Royal Variety Show when I saw him,” remembers Jack, his eyes lighting up. “Paul Chuckle. I was so starstruck. I don’t think he knew who I was but I asked him about the

Chuckle Brothers and about Barry and got him to sign a photo. It’s my most prized possession, framed above my toilet next to my 20m swimming certificate.”

We tracked Paul down to an internet cafe in Greece, where he was on holiday. “Of course I knew who he was,” he says. “I meant to go over and say hello myself but was busy talking to the Dowager Lady Westbury CBE. But I didn’t know he was nervous; I thought he’d got early Parkinson’s or the like. He was a gent and I’ve followed

his career ever since. In fact, I’ve got a photo of when we met that night framed on my wall next to a photo of me and Barry receiving our Bafta.”

Jack is beginning to fidget and pace more than ever. There’s only so much coffee and questions a man’s descending colon can take. We have one last enquiry: what’s the one thing you can tell us about yourself that nobody else knows? “Listen, I’ve got the perfect answer, you’ll love this,” he says, through gritted teeth, “but I’ve got to pop to the loo first.” He scurries off along the corridor. He does not come back. **FHM**

The *Bad Education Movie* is in cinemas from 21 August

“I’m bored of talking about poshness all the time. But it’s my own doing”

August 2012 *Bad Education* airs on BBC Three

“I write it with my best mate, Freddy Syborn. We were at school together and hated each other at first. But he was on my wavelength.”

November 2013 Stars in BBC comedy chat show *Backchat* with dad Michael

“I’m so bored of talking about my dad so it won’t happen again. I don’t want to give him any more publicity.”



December 2013 Embarks on a nationwide stand-up tour to audiences of 21,000

“The brand of comedy I do requires confidence to sell it, but right up until the moment I step on stage there is no confidence – I’m shitting it.”

December 2014 Wins third consecutive King of Comedy title at the British Comedy Awards

“It was a huge honour to me to have won, especially for the third time in a row. My father, not so much. He said he voted for Lee Mack.”

August 2015 *The Bad Education Movie* hits cinemas

“It starts with a crazy sequence where I get spiked with magic mushrooms. I steal a waxwork model of Anne Frank and am chased through the streets of Amsterdam.”

