

Before they were famous

Dan Stevens

'I'll never know my *real parents*'

The Downton Abbey hunk on his heartbreaking childhood

He's the actor whose cut-glass vowels and upper-class demeanour have helped make period drama Downton Abbey such a hit. But Dan Stevens – back as dashing Matthew Crawley in the show's Christmas Day special – certainly wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. In fact, his eventful early years were marked more by mystery and misery than wealth and privilege.

Born in Croydon, Dan, 29, has no memories of his birth mum. He and his younger brother were adopted by a working-class couple when he was just a toddler. To this day he's never got in touch with his



Dan's been with wife Susie since 2006 – sorry, girls!



Suits you, sir – looking dapper as Downton hottie Matthew

TURN FOR MORE ➔

Before they were famous

Dan Stevens

↳ birth parents to ask why they gave him up. He says: 'I don't know much about my biological background. I've never tried to find my real parents.'

The subject seems to be a no-go area for Dan, who's shied away from the fame *Downton*'s brought him. He is, however, happy to speak about his adoptive parents – teachers from the Brecon Beacons who worked hard to give him and his brother a better start in life. 'I'm very grateful to my mum and dad for adopting me. They're incredible people,' he says.

Despite their efforts, though, Dan admits he was a rebel during his childhood. 'I behaved terribly at primary school. I was always in trouble, always causing trouble. Anything I could do to rebel, I would,' he reveals. 'I remember the first ever play I did – I was cast last in the class because I was the wild kid.'

His behaviour only worsened as he reached adolescence. At the age of 13, he won a scholarship to the fee-paying Tonbridge School, over 200 miles away in Kent. 'I was never very happy at school,' he admits. 'My parents thought it was an amazing opportunity for me, but I felt quite isolated. There were a lot of rich children there

and that did something to me. I didn't get on with the other kids. I spent most of my time running away, causing problems.'

'I was 6ft tall and my voice had completely broken. I was this gangly, spotty, unattractive kid. I didn't want to fit in with anyone. I was pushing against everything.'

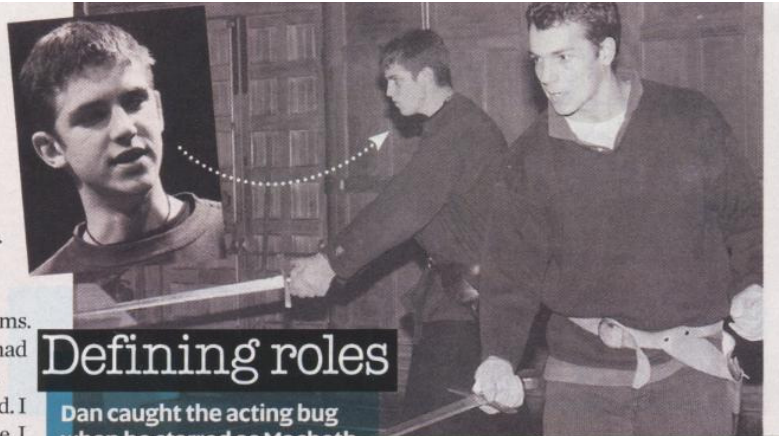
Dan became the epitome of a rebel without a cause. He says: 'I'd rebel against anything I could. I was getting suspended from school, going on demonstrations – I was a pretty difficult teenager.'

'I DIDN'T GET ON WITH KIDS AT SCHOOL'

It was only a passion for acting that stopped Dan going off the rails completely. In his first term, he beat some of the most senior boys in the school to the role of Macbeth. 'From the word go, I've always been the idiot who wanted to get on stage and perform,' he

says. 'I was up against 18-year-olds, but for some reason I got the part. It made me incredibly unpopular with my peers, but it was the English and drama teachers who stepped in to save me when the others wanted me kicked out of the school.'

In fact, it was an English teacher at Tonbridge who persuaded Dan that he was bright enough to study at the University Of Cambridge – he read English at Emmanuel College. He joined the university's



Defining roles

Dan caught the acting bug when he starred as Macbeth in a school play. Having honed his craft, he's now wowing us in *Downton Abbey* (far right).

prestigious Footlights dramatic club, where he befriended actress Rebecca Hall. While on stage, he caught the attention of her dad, director Peter Hall, and joined his theatre company. Soon he was impressing audiences with roles in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*.

A year after leaving university, Dan had his big break in *The Romans In Britain* at Sheffield's The Crucible Theatre. The role demanded that he strip on stage, and it's little coincidence that his performance caught the eye of his now wife, actress Susie Harriet. The couple, who met in 2006, now have a two-year-old daughter Willow.

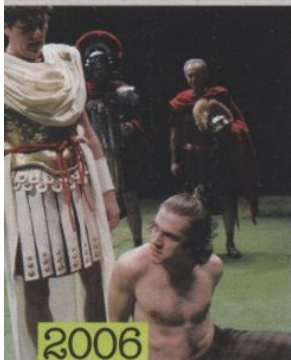
Parts in TV shows *Sense And Sensibility*, *The Turn Of The Screw* and *The Line Of Beauty* followed. But it was only when he landed the role of Matthew

Crawley in 2010 that he became a household name. Looking back, he says his awkward experience at public school was worth it.

'In many ways, I realise that going to Tonbridge and to Cambridge have set me up for life,' he says. 'I came out of the wash, I suppose, appearing to be much more upper class than I really am. But when people accuse me of being really posh, I think: "Hang on a minute. No, I'm not!"'

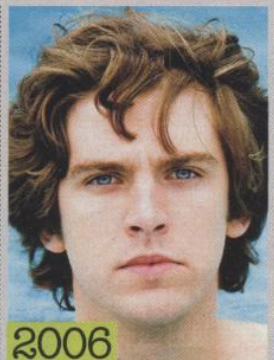


Humble beginnings to Abbey ending



2006

He showed off his torso in *The Romans In Britain*. No wonder wife Susie took notice. Hail, sexy!



2006

Dan landed his first lead role in a TV show in the critically-acclaimed BBC series *The Line Of Beauty*.



2008

A heartthrob is born: Dan made his period drama debut in the BBC series *Sense And Sensibility*.



2009

Treading the boards in the West End in the play *Arcadia*, he proved he can even work with animals. Poor rabbit...



2011

He got his teeth into playing the love interest of a female vampire in the film *Vamps*.