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# The **Oldie**

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March 2023 | £4.95 £4.13 to subscribers | [www.theoldie.co.uk](http://www.theoldie.co.uk) | Issue 423



## Carry On Laughing

**Jim Dale on 70 years in showbiz**

**Reasons to be cheerful - Lady Glenconner**

**Reasons to be gloomy - Jeremy Paxman**

**Best British actors ever - Robert Bathurst**



Jim Dale, 87, was in his first *Carry On* film 60 years ago. After acting for 70 years, he's still performing, he tells *York Membery*

# Carry on working



**Lucky Jim:** Dr Jimmy Nookey (Jim Dale) and Maud Boggins (Barbara Windsor) in *Carry On Again Doctor* (1969)

The son of a Northamptonshire iron-foundry moulder, Dale caught the showbiz bug after seeing actor Lupino Lane in the musical *Me and My Girl* in London as a child after the war.

'I thought this would be a wonderful way to go through life, making people laugh,' says Dale from his home in New York state.

He started doing dancing lessons after school, 'learning ballet, tap dance and ballroom dancing'. Seventy years ago, at 17, he toured in variety as a comedian and dancer with other up-and-coming stand-ups, including Barry Took.

'I played every major and minor theatre in the British Isles from the Finsbury Park Empire to Tonypandy in Wales,' he recalls.

After National Service – 'Which set back my career by two years' – he got a gig as a warm-up man, telling jokes, singing songs and playing guitar on the BBC's rock'n'roll TV show *Six-Five Special*.

George Martin, later the Beatles' producer, happened to be watching. He contacted Dale and asked him, 'Do you want to be my first pop singer?'

He went on to score hits with songs such as *Be My Girl*, which got to number 2 in the charts in 1957, and found himself a pop heart-throb.

'I'd go on stage and there would be all these screaming girls in the audience, and I'd think, "Where were you a year ago, when I was working as a stand-up comic?"' he laughs.

**W**ho can forget the scene in *Carry On Again Doctor* (1969), when Jim Dale's saucily named character Dr Nookey crashes through a window on a hospital trolley after taking a bone-shaking descent down a flight of stairs?

It was the actor, comedian and singer's finest *Carry On* moment. But he actually made his *Carry On* debut six

years earlier, in *Carry On Cabby* (1963).

To mark the 60th anniversary of his *Carry On* debut, Dale, 87, the last surviving big-name *Carry On* star, has taken a trip down memory lane with *The Oldie* – in his first British print interview for more than a decade – to discuss his extraordinary career. It takes in hit records, Broadway shows and a string of Harry Potter audiobooks, as well as the *Carry On* films.

Dale then returned to his comedy roots, landing a small role in *Raising the Wind* (1961), opposite Kenneth Williams.

'He screamed out his lines and I took the mickey, screaming back mine,' remembers Dale. 'I thought he was furious, but he later persuaded the *Carry On* team to hire me because he thought I'd be a good fit.'

After playing an expectant father in *Carry On Cabby*, Dale became a *Carry On* regular. From *Carry on Spying* (1964) onwards, he had bigger roles. Each film was shot in around eight weeks.

'I was delighted just to be a part of the *Carry On* team and it was a joy to work with such funny people,' Dale says. 'They were also very giving. They didn't try to hog the spotlight. You knew that at some point during a *Carry On* film the camera would be on you alone.'

After a day's shooting at Pinewood, he would make his exit 'as fast as I could' and head back to London to see his wife, Patricia, and four children before they went to bed.

'The only person I really became friendly with was Kenneth [Williams], who came round to my house occasionally,' he says.

Much as he enjoyed making the films, the pay was no great shakes, admits Dale.

'As Kenneth once said to the producer, "You can treat us like royalty and pay us nothing and we don't mind, or can you treat us like shit and pay us a lot of money and we don't mind, but you can't pay us no money and treat us like shit!"'

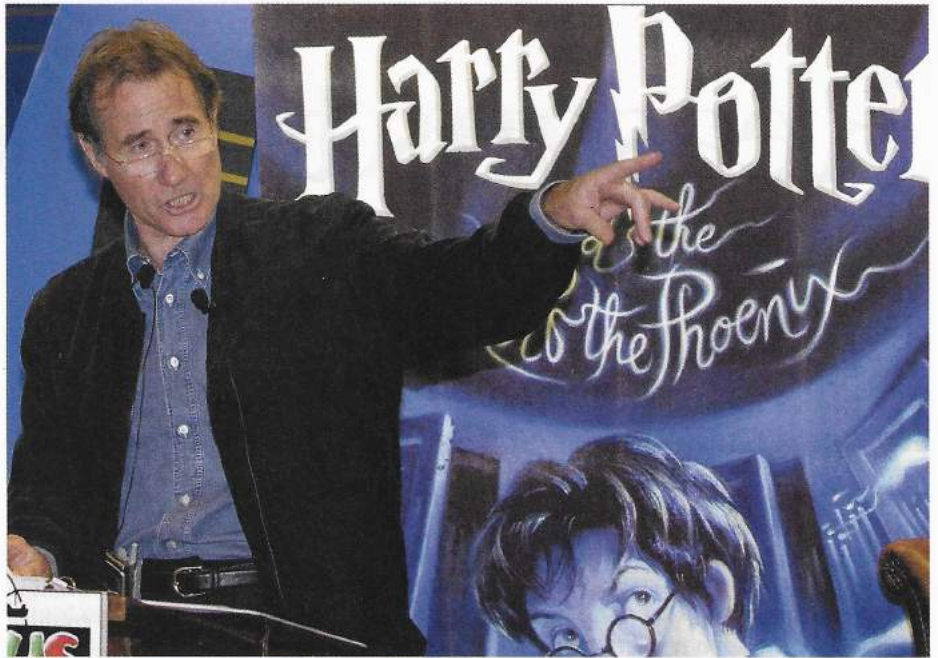
Moreover, Dale was sometimes left battered and bruised after doing stunts. 'I injured my arm going down that trolley [in *Carry On Again Doctor*],' he recalls. 'My elbow kept bumping onto the metal surface and it created some sort of elbow dysfunction – I had to have an operation that evening.'

While doing the *Carry On* films, Dale also co-wrote the theme song *Georgy Girl* for the 1966 film of the same name. It was a top-three hit on both sides of the Atlantic for the Seekers, selling 11 million worldwide.

After making eight *Carry On* films (though he later appeared in a ninth, the 1992 revival *Carry On Columbus*), he turned down the chance to appear in *Carry On Up the Jungle* (1970) after Laurence Olivier had invited him to join the National Theatre Company, then based at London's Old Vic.

'You just do not turn down an invitation from the world's greatest actor,' says Dale.

While at the National Theatre, he



**Harry Potter's mouthpiece: Dale voiced all seven audiobooks**

**Left: in *Pete's Dragon* (1977)**



starred in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Scapino*, which both transferred to New York.

'When we took *Scapino* to America we really blew it off the stage,' he says.

The following year, he appeared in another National production in the States and, while there, landed a role in the Disney movie *Pete's Dragon* (1977).

Back in Britain, he found work hard to come by. 'There were no plays being offered to me and I had four children in private school and needed to make some money.'

'So when I got a job offer in America, I went back, and one job followed another until, by the mid-seventies, I was pretty much living there,' says Dale.

His transatlantic work commitments put an unbearable strain on his family life. 'Marriages can't exist like that – marriages are togetherness, not only you and your wife, but you and your

children,' he observes. 'That's what broke up my marriage.'

In 1980, he won a Tony for his starring role in *Barnum*, which made him 'the toast of Broadway', according to the *New York Times*.

He's since narrated all seven of the Potter audiobooks for the American market – doing 134 voices for *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in 2003 and 146 voices for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in 2007 – earning himself two Grammy awards.

So how do you go about creating so many voices? 'As a stand-up comic in British music hall, I'd travelled all over Britain – so probably unconsciously picked up all these accents and just dug them out of my memory,' says Dale, who has since found love again with art-gallery-owner Julie Schafner, whom he married in 1981. His *Potter* audiobooks have now exceeded one billion hours' worth of listening.

In 2014, he put on a one-man show, *Just Jim Dale*, which he took to Broadway and London's West End. The entertainer is still tap dancing and performing his one-man show in America.

He puts his longevity and good health down to 'laughing a dozen times a day' and has no plans to retire.

'I intend to hang around as long as I can,' he says. 'Just let me get the gag line out before I kick the bucket on stage – I don't want to go halfway through a joke! 🍷'