

# True star lived to ripe old age

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By **PAUL WELSH**

I was sad to read that actor Barry Morse had died earlier this month, just short of his 90th birthday.

I had the pleasure of knowing Barry for the past ten years, and he became a regular at Elstree and Borehamwood Town Council's annual Elstree Film Evening.

Barry's death made headline news in the New York Times, because many Americans remember him as the policeman chasing David Janssen for years in the highly successful Sixties TV series *The Fugitive*.

In fact, the finale of that series got the highest TV viewing figures of all time in America and was not beaten until the "Who shot JR" storyline in *Dallas* many years later.

Barry told me: "At one time I was the most hated man in America, which was fun!

"People took it very seriously and often accused me of chasing an innocent man even when I was out shopping.

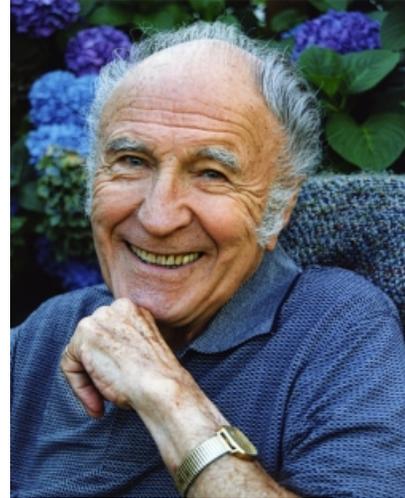
"It made my name but I never financially benefited from all the repeats, video releases etc, and the residual agreement was only for five years."

Barry was probably the first English actor to play an American in a major Hollywood TV series.

"I spent a lot of time acting in Canada from the Fifties," he said.

"Few people realised I grew up as a street urchin in the east end of London."

He eventually clocked up an amazing 3,000 TV, film and stage appearances in a career spanning seven decades. He was always the perfect gentleman and a real pleasure to know.



*Unforgettable: Barry Morse's work was far more important than celebrity*

Another English gentleman and a good friend of Barry's that I had the pleasure to meet on two or three occasions was the "horror" star Peter Cushing.

I cannot believe it is 35 years since I set off for Shepperton Studios to interview him for the first time.

He was working on a forgettable movie called *The Beast Must Die* but he still ensured he gave a good performance.

We chatted about him working with such diverse actors as Laurel and Hardy and Laurence Olivier, not to mention his classic Hammer horror films.

I noted during our conversation that Peter chain-smoked but wore a glove.

He explained: "When you have a close-up on the big screen the last thing audiences want to see are nicotine-stained fingers."

We next met just after he filmed *Star Wars* at Elstree in the mid-Seventies, and he said: "I am not a great fan of science fiction, but it is always flattering to be offered roles. I was dressed in what reminded me of an Edwardian chauffeur's uniform and it was only a few days' work."

Peter offered me his support during the campaign to save Elstree studios in the late Eighties, by which time he was in failing health.

He said: "I might be held together by super glue and sellotape but I will join you in front of any bulldozers any time."

Barry and Peter were of that passing generation of stars whose work was far more important than celebrity status.

It was great that the town council honoured Peter's memory with a commemorative film plaque 12 years ago and that their screen performances are preserved for future generations to enjoy.