

much-loved comic actress



**Hattie Jacques**

**Born 127 High St 1922**



## Chapter Twelve

### HATTIE JACQUES

Born Josephine Edwina Jacques on February 7<sup>th</sup> 1922 she went on to become a nationally recognised figure in the British cinema of the 1950s and 60s. Her father, Robin Jacques was in the army and stationed at Shorncliffe Camp at the time of her birth. The Register of Electors shows the Jacques family residing at a house called Channel View in Sunnyside Road. (The register shows the name spelled as JAQUES, without the C. Whether Hattie changed the spelling or whether it was an error on the part of those who printed the register I don't know).

Hattie, as she was known, made her entrance into the world in the pleasant seaside village of Sandgate, mid way between Folkestone to the east and Hythe to the west. Initially Hattie trained as a hairdresser but as with many people of her generation the war caused her life to take a different course. Mandatory work saw Hattie first undertaking nursing duties and then working in North London as a welder.

Even in her twenties she was of a generous size and maybe as defence she honed her sense of humour after finding she had a talent for making people laugh. She first became involved in show business through her brother who had a job as the lift operator at the premises of the Little Theatre located then on the top floor of 43 Kings Street in Covent Garden.

At end of the war the Little Theatre found itself in new premises under the railway arches below Charing Cross Station. Hattie made many appearances at the little Theatre, her songs and comedy routines in what was essentially an old fashioned Music Hall venue provided an ideal nursery for the later for the innuendo and double entendre that were the trade marks of the 'carry on' films

It was during her time at the Little theatre that Hattie along with Bill Owens, Ian Carmichael and Clive Dunn entertained, learned and honed their skills in the art of making people laugh. Hattie's experience in those years was a perfect, 'dress rehearsal' for when she made her on BBC radio in the late 40s. Her radio debut was as Sophie Tuckshop in Tommy Handley's classic comedy series ITMA.

In the early 1950s Hattie was playing the art of Agatha Danglebody in Educating Archie where she worked for the first time with Eric Sykes who was a scriptwriter for the series. From Educating Archie Hattie moved on in 1956 to join the cast of Hancock's Half Hour where she worked along series regulars Sid James, Bill Kerr and Kenneth Williams. Later in the same year she starred in The Tony Hancock Show.

Hattie first made a screen appearance in Oliver twist in 1948 where she played the part of a singer in a pub. It was a blink and you'll miss part but it was a start. Her next film parts in Dickens' stories was Scrooge, 1951 in which she played the part of Mrs. Fezziwig and got billing and The Pickwick Papers, 1954 in which she played the character Mrs. Nupkins and was listed in the credits.

She appeared in a Norman Wisdom comedy The Square Peg and then in 1958 came the first of the 'carry on' films. It was called Carry on Sergeant and Hattie played the role of Captain Clarke a doctor in the Royal Medical Corps.

This was the start of her long association with the series and she appeared in fourteen carry on films between 1958 and 1974. She also appeared in more than twenty other films in her career.

Apart from film Hattie Jacques appeared in the long running BBC TV comedy sit com Sykes in which she played the twin sister of Eric Sykes. A wonderful piece of

deliberate miscasting as Eric Sykes was tall and thin while Hattie was short and very generously proportioned! A perfect foil for each other's humour they continued to work together for thirty years.

Throughout her life Hattie gained a reputation as a friend who would readily offer support for those facing problems. She frequently opened her home to friends who were living solitary lives such as the very popular actor Kenneth Williams and the comedy actress Joan Sims. Christmas and New Year always found Hattie entertaining a house full of her fellow actors.

In great demand to make personal appearances at charity events Hattie felt a great responsibility to attend as many as possible even though it would often cause her to make sacrifices in her private life...

In December 1949 she married fellow actor John Le Mesurier in Kensington. He went on to become an established actor in films and on TV but was probably best known and gained a national identity as Sergeant Arthur Wilson in the long running BBC series Dad's Army. It was his second and her first marriage. There were two children born of the marriage, Kim and Robin. Hattie and her husband divorced in 1965.

For many years Hattie made her home in a large town house in Earls Court, south west London, and it was there that she raised her sons and spent the years of her marriage to John Le Mesurier.

Her successful career spanned almost forty years and made her name and style recognised throughout Britain. She appeared in more than thirty films and numerous TV and radio programmes.

Her son, Robin went on to become a composer of popular music and has also appeared on TV in that connection. John Le Mesurier made one more marriage and died in 1983.

Hattie died of a heart attack on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1980, she was only 56 years of age. She was cremated and her remains were interred at the Putney Vale Cemetery, London. There is a memorial to her in St. Paul's Cathedral, London

Researched & prepared  
by Jean P. Hallysmith  
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Mother superior: Hattie Jacques with her husband John Le Mesurier and their sons John and Robin at the seaside

JOHN LE MESURIER

## Carry on charming

Roger Lewis enjoys a loving biography of a sensuous and vivacious actress

### Hattie: the Authorised Biography of Hattie Jacques

by Andy Merriman  
232pp, Aurum Press, £16.99  
£14.99 (plus £1.25 p&g) 0870 428 4112

Forget Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson whittering at each other through the carriage window on Carnforth railway station. The greatest clinch in the history of British cinema is between Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams in *Carry On Doctor* (1967). "No, no, matron. I was once a weak man," implores the weedy Williams, recoiling in fastidious horror from Jacques's elephantine yearning. "Once a week's enough for any man," she responds, straining to get across the starting line. Williams is wrestled upside down and Jacques's long-suppressed desires break forth. Our national embarrassment and frustration about sex is on painful display.

Though she allowed herself to be cast as the battle-axe, Jacques was a sensual and vivacious actress. For, as Andy Merriman says in this first-rate biography, she had "an aura of kindness around her" – and it is this quality that finally registers with the audience, despite her girth. She had pathos. Off-screen, too, she was warm and nurturing. She liked to surround herself with company, and her big house in Earl's Court was crammed with out-of-work actors, window-dressers, homosexuals wanted by the police, and the alcoholic and incapable Joan Sims. To feed this lot on Christmas Day meant three turkeys on the go in three ovens.

It was as if she feared being alone – for then elements of self-loathing closed in. "I hate being the size I am

with all my heart and soul," she once confessed. She had to wear long, billowy dresses and, until she complained, scriptwriters expected her to endure jokes about her weight. "Look at her plate piled up there," said Tony Hancock in his radio show. "You can't see her. Just her arms coming round the sides."

Jacques was born in Kent in 1922. Her father, an RAF officer, was killed on a solo mission over Grantham when she was 18 months old. She was raised above an uncle's pawnshop in Chelsea and dressed up in the unredeemed shawls, velvet cloaks and mandarin slippers. She went to Godolphin and Latimer School and, as her puppy fat never melted, she was teased about her size. Nevertheless, Jacques was a light-footed dancer and good at acrobatics. During the war, she was a nurse for the Red Cross and then became a welder, making bridges and tanks. But again – the mockery: "Blimey, good job Adolf hasn't got a bomb that size!"

Her salvation was to join the Players' Theatre, a music hall situated under the arches of Charing Cross. Jacques sang Marie Lloyd songs and ended her act by leaping into the air and doing the splits. She was quickly popular. "We want Hattie!" roared the crowd. This led to offers of radio spots and bit parts in films. She was the grass-skirted Tahitian girlfriend of Brian Rix. Norman Wisdom she found "difficult and self-centred". Peter Sellers was "tempestuous to say the least". Harry Worth was a martyr to piles. Only once did she venture into Kenneth Williams's flat and he made it clear that his lavatory was off limits.

In matters of the heart, life was not plain sailing. Jacques braved the Blitz for trysts with an American soldier who promised her the earth. She later said

he'd been killed in action in the Ardennes. Merriman has discovered that Major Charles Kearney already had a wife and children when he was asking Jacques to marry him – and he lived on in Massachusetts until 1984.

Her next love was John Le Mesurier. They became man and wife in 1949. Le Mesurier's legendary calculated vagueness had to do with his reliance on "extra strong cigarettes", i.e. marijuana, and as it took him 10 years to get around to organising a honeymoon, even Jacques grew impatient with his sloth. She acquired a lover called John Schofield, a cockney used-car dealer whom Barbara Windsor appraised as "a gorgeous piece of crumpet". He moved into the master bedroom and Le Mesurier uncomplainingly retreated to the attic. When Jacques was filming in Rome, Schofield came out to stay and ran off with an Italian heiress. He remains untraced to this day.

Her confidence knocked, Jacques raided the fridge and her weight ballooned to nearly 20 stone. A chain smoker, she suffered from breathing difficulties, arthritis, high blood pressure and swollen, ulcerated legs. She couldn't get insurance for films and so took to the road in a stage version of *Sykes*, the contrived, long-running sitcom about a brother and sister and their scrapes. It was a sad ending – playing to half-empty theatres in Torquay and Cardiff.

What an altogether good book this is – excellently researched and infused with a love of its subject. It should be the model for any future studies of (say) Terry Thomas, Hugh Griffith, Dennis Price, Irene Handl, Margaret Rutherford, and the rest of the immortals.

## 11. Hattie Jacques

1922 – 1980

At 125 Sandgate High Street



Hattie Jacques was born Josephine Edwina Jaques in Sandgate, Kent, in 1922, the daughter of Robin and Mary Jaques. Her father was an RAF pilot and footballer was killed in an aeroplane crash 18 months after her birth.

Educated at the Godolphin and Latymer School, she served as a nurse in the VAD during the Second World War, and worked as a welder in a factory in North London

At the age of 20, she made her theatrical début at the Players' Theatre in London. Almost immediately, she became a regular performer with the company, appearing in music hall revues and playing *The Fairy Queen* in their Victorian-style pantomimes

After achieving success in radio, television and film, she returned to the Players' regularly as a performer, writer and director. It was during her time at the Players' that she acquired the nickname

"Hattie" – appearing in a minstrel show called *Coal Black Mammies for Dixie*. Thereafter the name stuck.

Hattie Jacques was married to actor John Le Mesurier from 1949 to 1965 when they divorced. Jacques had been having an affair with John Schofield, a younger man.

Schofield ran off with an Italian heiress. Jacques, who had had a weight problem since her teens [began eating "comfort food" and her weight ballooned to nearly 127 kg (20st).

Jacques was a near chain smoker. In her later years she was plagued by health problems. She died of a heart attack on 6 October 1980, at the age of 58 and was cremated at Putney Vale Crematorium, where her ashes were also scattered.



WHAT'S ON AT THE CINEMA? CHECK OUR WEBSITE

Hattie Jacques

# Village unveils plaque in honour of Hattie Jacques



Linda Rene-Martin and members of the Sandgate Society unveil the plaque to Hattie Jacques

Picture: Gary Browne PD187865

SHE may have only lived in Sandgate for 18 months, but that has not stopped comedy actress Hattie Jacques being added to the village's hall of fame.

A blue plaque has been placed on 125 Sandgate High Street by the Sandgate Society, where the star of the Carry On films was born in 1922.

The unveiling on Friday was followed by a tea party at Chichester Memorial Hall where clips of Miss Jacques' films were shown.

Society secretary Marjorie Findlay-Stone said: "We are putting up blue plaques in the village because a number of well-known people lived here.

"Hattie Jacques is such an iconic figure we decided to mark the unveiling with a tea party afterwards.

"Although she was born at 125, she lived at 116 Sandgate High Street for 18 months immediately after her birth until her father, who was in the RAF, was posted to Lincolnshire.

"She was actually born Jacqueline Edwina Jacques but when she



went on the stage, decided to change her name to Hattie and added a 'c' to the surname.

"The rest, as they say, is history."

The society has also installed three plaques relating to HG Wells at Spade House, Arnold House and Beach Cottage and two at Sandgate Castle commemorating stays by Henry VIII.

Yet to be placed are ones marking connections with author BM Croker and Dame Sheila Sherlock, who pioneered research into liver disease.

Mrs Findlay-Stone added: "There are a lot of people connected with Sandgate so eventually we want to put together a blue plaque trail and make something of the village's history."



Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams in Carry on Camping 1972

# Hattie Jacques

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Josephine Edwina Jaques** (7 February 1922 – 6 October 1980) was a well-known English comedy actress, known by the stage name **Hattie Jacques**.

Having started her career in the 1940s, Jacques first became famous through her appearances with Tony Hancock in *The Tony Hancock Show* and *Hancock's Half Hour*. From 1958 to 1974 she appeared in fourteen *Carry On* films, often playing the Matron. Hattie Jacques had a long professional partnership with Eric Sykes, with whom she co-starred in *Sykes and A...*, *Sykes and a Big, Big Show* and *Sykes*.

Jacques was married to John Le Mesurier, an actor who would later achieve stardom for playing Sergeant Arthur Wilson in *Dad's Army*, from 1949 until their divorce in 1965. Hattie Jacques died of a heart attack in 1980, aged 58.

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## Early life

Hattie Jacques was born Josephine Edwina Jaques in Sandgate, Kent in 1922.<sup>[1]</sup> Educated at the Godolphin and Latymer School, she served as a nurse in the Red Cross during the Second World War, as well as working as a welder in a factory in North London.

At the age of 20, she made her theatrical début at the Players' Theatre in London. Almost immediately, she became a firm favourite of the company, appearing in music

	<b>Hattie Jacques</b>
<b>Birth name</b>	Josephine Edwina Jaques
<b>Born</b>	7 February 1922 <div>Sandgate, Kent, England</div>
<b>Died</b>	6 October 1980 (aged 58) <div>Kensington, London, England</div>
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	John Le Mesurier (1949-65)
<b>Children</b>	Kim and Robin



hall revues and playing the Fairy Queen in their Victorian-style pantomimes.

## Radio

In 1947 she was spotted at the Players by Ted Kavanagh and was invited to join the cast of the radio comedy series *It's That Man Again* ("ITMA"), playing the greedy schoolgirl Sophie Tuckshop.

By the early 1950s, she was appearing in radio shows like *Educating Archie* as Agatha Danglebody. It was on this show that she first met Eric Sykes, who was providing scripts for the series.

In 1956, she was asked to join the radio series *Hancock's Half Hour*, joining regulars Tony Hancock, Sid James, Bill Kerr and Kenneth Williams. The same year she starred in *The Tony Hancock Show* on television.

## Carry On films

She was also appearing in films by this time, including a couple of Norman Wisdom comedies - *The Square Peg* and *Follow a Star*. However, it wasn't until 1958, when she joined the Carry On team in *Carry On Sergeant* that her film career really took off.

She appeared in fourteen films in the long-running series and became famous as the no-nonsense Matron in five of the films - *Carry On Nurse*, *Carry On Doctor*, *Carry On Camping*, *Carry On Again Doctor* and *Carry On Matron*.

She was known by the team as a warm, kind and endearing lady and was close friends with many of her co-stars, including Kenneth Williams and Joan Sims.

## Eric Sykes

In 1960 she joined Eric Sykes on his long-running BBC comedy series *Sykes*, in which they played a brother and sister who got into all sorts of comic scrapes. The joke was that they were meant to be twins, but were physically very unlike, Jacques being short and plump, while Sykes was thin and gangly. The show ran from 1960 to 1965 and was revived from 1972 to 1979.

## Personal Life

Hattie Jacques was married to the actor John Le Mesurier from 1949 to 1965.<sup>[2]</sup> They had two sons. At the time of their divorce, the media were given the impression that the fault was on Le Mesurier's side. It was later revealed that Jacques had been having an affair with a younger man and had left her husband for him. Le Mesurier had gone

along with the charade so as not to damage her career.

Hattie Jacques died of a heart attack on 6 October 1980, at the age of 58.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Radio performances

- *ITMA* (1948 - 1949), Sophie Tuckshop
- *Educating Archie* (1951 - 1952)
- *Hancock's Half Hour* (1956 - 1959), Griselda Pugh

## Television

- *Hancock's Half Hour* (1956 - 1960), Griselda Pugh
- *Sykes* (TV series, 1960 - 1965, 1971 - 1979), Hattie

## Selected films

- *Carry On Sergeant* (1958), Captain Clark
- *The Square Peg* (1958), Gretchen
- *Carry on Nurse* (1959), Matron
- *The Navy Lark* (1959), Fortune Teller
- *The Night We Dropped a Clanger* (1959), Ada
- *Carry On Teacher* (1959), Grace Short
- *Make Mine Mink* (1960), Nanette Parry
- *Carry On Constable* (1960), Sergeant Laura Moon
- *School for Scoundrels* (1960), First Instructress
- *In the Doghouse* (1961), Gudgeon
- *Carry On Regardless* (1961), Sister
- *Carry On Cabby* (1963), Peggy
- *Carry On Doctor* (1967), Matron
- *Carry On Again Doctor* (1969), Matron
- *The Magic Christian* (1969), Ginger Horton
- *Carry On Camping* (1969), Miss Haggerd
- *Carry On Loving* (1970), Sophie Bliss
- *Carry On Matron* (1971), Matron
- *Carry On Abroad* (1972), Floella
- *Carry On Dick* (1974), Martha Hoggett

## References

1. ^ GRO Register of Births: MAR 1922 2a 2065 ELHAM - Josephine E. Jaques, mmn=Thorn
2. ^ GRO Register of Marriages: DEC 1949 5c 2328 KENSINGTON - John E. Le M. Halliley = Josephine E. Jacques
3. ^ GRO Register of Deaths: DEC 1980 13 1473 KENSINGTON - Josephine Edwina Le Mesurier, DoB = 7 Feb 1922

## External links

- Hattie Jacques (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0415150/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- Hattie Jacques Memorial (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=6241002>) at Find A Grave
- BFI Screen Online (<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/482409/>): biography

Retrieved from "[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hattie\\_Jacques](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hattie_Jacques)"

Categories: 1922 births | 1980 deaths | Deaths by myocardial infarction | English film actors | English radio actors | English stage actors | English television actors | People from Sandgate

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