

Obituary



Durrington

Trevor Bannister

Actor known for his role as Mr Lucas in Are You Being Served?



Trevor Bannister, third left, and the cast of *Are You Being Served?* Photograph: BBC Pictures Archives

The actor Trevor Bannister, who has died of a heart attack aged 76, was best known to television viewers from his role in *Are You Being Served?* as Mr Lucas, the menswear assistant at the Grace Brothers department store. The character was conceived by the sitcom's creators, David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, as one of the linchpins in the ensemble cast, creating a link between the menswear and ladieswear departments through his constant chasing of the stereotypical dollybird Miss Brahms (Wendy Richard).

Bannister was also adept at portraying Mr Lucas as a rebel who frequently questioned the store's management policies – such as requiring staff to smile more – and made fun of the pecking order, in which he stood at the bottom. He served as a mouthpiece for Lloyd, who had himself sold menswear at Simpson Piccadilly, in central London, but

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kept his views to himself – although Lloyd was eventually fired for selling soft drinks from a fitting room during a heatwave.

Mr Lucas began as the junior menswear member of staff when *Are You Being Served?* was launched as a 1972 episode in the BBC's *Comedy Playhouse* slot, before it was turned into a series the following year. In 1979, he was promoted to assistant when the camp Mr Humphries (John Inman) became senior in the department. Bannister did not appear in the final three series, pulling out in 1980 after the BBC refused to change the programme's recording day to allow him to continue in a long-running stage tour. He starred in the show's 1977 film spinoff, but was not approached to reprise the role of Mr Lucas in the 1990s television sequel, *Grace and Favour*. By then, he had firmly put *Are You Being Served?* behind him, saying: "I've done an awful lot of things since then and I did an awful lot of things before then. That was just eight years of bits and pieces in my life. I don't hang my hat on that."

Bannister was born in Durrington, Wiltshire. His father was a tobacconist and newsagent. He attended the private Modern school, in Salisbury, leaving at the age of 15 to join a repertory theatre company in Folkestone. He trained at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts and, after two years' national service in the army, gained further repertory experience in Torquay, Bath, Bedford, Worthing, Wolverhampton, York and Birmingham.

He made his London West End debut as Arthur Crabtree in *Billy Liar* (Cambridge theatre, 1960) and later acted on stage in the farce *Move Over Mrs Markham* (Vaudeville theatre, 1969), *Funny Money* (Playhouse, 1995) and a revival of *The Odd Couple* (Theatre Royal Haymarket, 1996).

After making his film debut in *Reach for the Sky* (1956), Bannister's screen appearances were almost exclusively on television. He starred as Peter Barry in the children's sci-fi series *Object Z* (1965) and *Object Z Returns* (1966), before his breakthrough role as the titular spiv in *The War of Darkie Pilbeam* (1968), the popular trilogy about a 1940s black marketeer, written by the *Coronation Street* creator Tony Warren.

He was then cast as the refuse collector *Heavy Breathing* in all three series of the Granada sitcom *The Dustbinmen* (1969-70), written by Jack Rosenthal, whose gutter language tested the patience of the moral crusader Mary Whitehouse.

After *Are You Being Served?*, Bannister played the ladykiller and burglar-alarm dealer Peter Pitt, who joins a group run by Brian Wilde's retired army major and Neighbourhood Watch founder, in the sitcom *Wyatt's Watchdogs* (1988). He also took three roles in *Coronation Street*, appearing first as Harry Lester (1967), then as Ritchie Levitt (1972) and finally as Mike Baldwin's solicitor (2006).

From 2001, he enjoyed making guest appearances in *Last of the Summer Wine* as the golfclub captain Toby, becoming a regular for the final two series (2009-10). Throughout his career, Bannister was a regular pantomime dame on stage, taking 34 roles in 35 years, and always supplying his own wigs, moulded to his head.

In 1959, Bannister married the actor Kathleen Cravos, from whom he was later divorced. He is survived by their three sons, Simon, Timothy and Jeremy, and by his second wife, Pam Carson, whom he married in 1982. Two of his sons followed him into show business: Simon as a theatre stage manager and Jeremy as a producer of commercials and pop videos.

- Trevor Gordon Bannister, actor, born 14 August 1934; died 14 April 2011

(*The Guardian* – Monday 18 April, 2011)

Trevor Bannister

Trevor Bannister, the actor who died on Thursday aged 74, was best known for playing Mr Lucas in the 1970s BBC television sitcom Are You Being Served?



He also featured in many other television series, such as *Silent Witness*, *Keeping Up Appearances*, *Coronation Street* and *Last of the Summer Wine*.

In *Are You Being Served?* Bannister was cast as Mr Lucas, the young menswear salesman in his twenties who, unlike his camp colleague Mr Humphries (John Inman), had eyes only for the buxom Miss Brahms, the siren of ladies' underwear, played by Wendy Richard.

Written by David Croft and John Lloyd, *Are You Being Served?* was set in the fictional department store, Grace Brothers, and ran from 1972 until 1985. The show was originally planned as a vehicle for Bannister, following his success as "Heavy Breathing" in Jack Rosenthal's ITV sitcom *The Dustbinmen* (1969), with Bryan Pringle and Brian Wilde.

As the luckless Mr Lucas, Bannister's character was a young rebellious employee in an long-established store, and one of the principal roles. But as storylines evolved and other characters came to the fore, Bannister found himself surrounded by a large ensemble and cast in a less prominent part.

He remained with the show until 1980, leaving when it was at the height of its popularity. The crunch came when he was offered a long tour with a play called *Middle Age Spread*.

Bannister asked the BBC to change the recording day of *Are You Being Served?* from Friday to Sunday so that he could appear in both. The BBC refused. "The reason I left was simple," he maintained. "*Are You Being Served?* was only seven weeks' work a year."

Alongside his television appearances, Bannister also had a long-running stage career, mainly in farces and pantomimes, making some 35 appearances as the dame. Indeed, on the strength of his success in *Are You Being Served?* he was invited to perform in theatres all over the world.

Trevor Bannister was born on August 14 1936 at the village of Durrington, Wiltshire, the youngest of three children. Educated at Durrington primary school and the Modern School in Salisbury, he completed two years' National Service before enrolling at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.

He got his start in showbusiness from Arthur Brough, the actor, who hired him for a repertory company in Folkestone when Bannister was only 15. He and Brough were reunited in *Are You Being Served?*, in which Brough played the irascible senior salesman Mr Grainger.

In 1960 Bannister made his West End stage debut in *Billy Liar*, with Albert Finney, and he appeared on television in 1968 as a wartime spiv in *The War Of Darkie Pilbeam*. Following his role as "Heavy Breathing" in *The Dustbinmen*, he was in a West End run of *Move Over Mrs Markham* before being invited to play Mr Lucas in a pilot episode of *Are You Being Served?* for the Comedy Playhouse slot.

Reruns of *Are You Being Served?* have been shown in some 40 countries. In 1995, 15 years after leaving the series, Bannister was astonished to be recognised by an American fan in Saks Fifth Avenue store in New York.

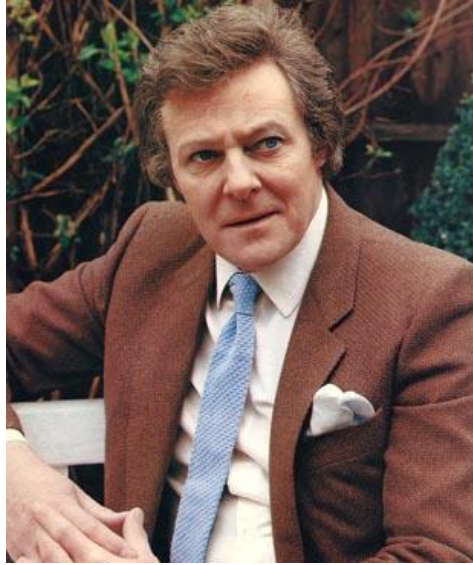
After leaving the series Bannister played Peter Pitt in the 1988 BBC sitcom *Wyatt's Watchdogs*, and had minor roles in *Keeping Up Appearances*, *The Saint* and *The Avengers*. Over the years he played three different characters in *Coronation Street*. From 2001 he was the golf captain in *Last Of The Summer Wine*, in 2009 becoming a regular character in the series.

In 2006 he played Sir John Tremayne in the 70th anniversary production of the Noel Gay musical *Me And My Girl* which toured theatres all over Britain. "He is a genuine delight," reported Tim Walker in *The Sunday Telegraph*. "In turn funny, touching, intensely human, he effortlessly dominates the stage."

Trevor Bannister suffered a fatal heart attack at his allotment in Thames Ditton, Surrey. His second wife, Pam, and three sons survive him.

(The Telegraph – 15 April, 2011)

Actor Trevor Bannister dies age 76



Trevor Bannister from the 1984 programme of The Mating Game with Barbara Windsor.

Durrington-born television and theatre actor Trevor Bannister has died at the age of 76.

Mr Bannister is most well-known for playing Mr Lucas in *Are You Being Served?* but also featured in numerous other well-known British TV shows like *Silent Witness*, *Keeping Up Appearances*, *Coronation Street* and *Last of the Summer Wine*.

He also had a long-running career in theatre, mainly in pantomimes and farces.

He grew up in Bulford Road, Durrington and went to Durrington Primary School and Modern School in Salisbury, which no longer exists, before doing two years' National Service and then going to London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.

Mr Bannister was the youngest of three children, his sister Sybil still lives in Durrington and his brother John lives in Salisbury.

He suffered a heart attack and died at his allotment in Thames Ditton yesterday. He is survived by his wife Pam and three sons Simon, Timothy and Jeremy.

(Salisbury Journal – Friday, 15 April, 2011)