

# Gareth Hunt the Avenger dies at 65

**GARETH** Hunt, the former New Avengers actor, has died at the age of 65, it was announced yesterday.

He had fought a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer and died at his home in Surrey, leaving his third wife, Amanda, and three children.

His former co-star in the New Avengers, Joanna Lumley, said the actor was a 'dear friend'.

'Gareth was a very good actor, which was often overlooked,' she added. 'He started in the Royal Shakespeare Company and he was terrific.'

'He kept his illness quiet, only his family and a few close friends knew. I went out with him for his birthday in February and he was pretty frail but still hysterically funny.'

His agent Alexandra McLean-Williams said she was privileged to have worked with the actor, who also featured in a series of TV adverts for Nescafe.

'Hardly anybody knew he was ill,' she said. 'He continued to work up until New Year. He would have chemotherapy one day and be on the golf course the next. The way he dealt with it was absolutely remarkable.'

Hunt came to prominence for his role in the classic TV drama *Upstairs, Downstairs* in which he played footman Frederick Norton.

He was then chosen to appear in the action series, *The New Avengers*, alongside Miss Lumley and Patrick McNee. He played marksman and hero Mike Gambit.

He remained on the programme until its end in 1977, after two series.

In the early Eighties he appeared in TV productions such as *Minder* and the *Sunday Night Thriller*. In 1992 he landed a lead role in the sitcom *Side By Side* and in later years mainly worked on stage.



Screen partners: Joanna Lumley and the late Gareth Hunt



# Joanna tribute to Gareth



JOANNA Lumley paid tribute last night to her friend and New Avengers co-star Gareth Hunt, who has died.

Hunt, 65, who was the 1980 face of Nescafe coffee, lost his two-year battle against pancreatic cancer.

He passed away late on Tuesday night at his home in Redhill, Surrey, with his devoted third wife Amanda by his side.

Ms Lumley, his co-star in the 1970s hit TV action drama, spoke of a "dear friend". She said: "We started off as friends in The New Avengers and remained that way for more than 30 years. I loved him so much."

Hunt played Mike Gambit, the suave racing driver turned secret agent, alongside Patrick McNee as Steed and Ms Lumley as Purdey.

Speaking from Sheffield's Crucible Theatre where she

By Nick Fagge

opened in The Cherry Orchard last night, Ms Lumley said: "We shared so much laughter - we were constantly in hysterics making the Avengers."

"Gambit and Purdey were quite often sent out to do bits and pieces together so we would have scenes where we were driving or fighting people. We had enormous fun."

Despite his illness, Hunt had been determined to carry on as normal. His agent Alexandra McLean-Williams said: "Hardly anybody knew he was ill. He continued to work and until New Year you would never have realised anything was wrong. He would have chemo one day and be on the golf course the next."

Ms Lumley said: "I went out with him for his birthday in February. He was pretty frail but still hysterically funny."

Born Alan Leonard Hunt in south London in 1942, Hunt joined the Merchant Navy at 15, served for six years and had a variety of other jobs before he took to the stage, going on

to join the Royal Shakespeare Company. He was cast in TV shows including Doctor Who and Bless This House before his big break in 1974, a one-off appearance in period drama *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

The popularity of his character Trooper Norton ensured that he became a regular member of the cast throughout the fifth series in 1975.

The New Avengers followed in 1976 and turned him into a household name.

He worked consistently in TV and theatre over the next 30 years. His popularity led to Nescafe recruiting him to appear in their iconic 1980s TV adverts with Diane Keen.

In 2001 he appeared as a crime boss in *EastEnders* and was a suspect in the "Who shot Phil Mitchell?" storyline.

His most recent jobs in 2006 include episodes of BBC series *Doctors* and *New Tricks*.

He was a keen fund-raiser for the Variety Club, which helps sick and disadvantaged children, and had three sons - one from each marriage - Oliver, Gareth Jnr and Jason.





# Joanna trib



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Ms Lumley, known for her role in the 1970s hit 'The Avengers', spoke of her "dear friend". She said: "I was proud to be

credited off as friends in the New Avengers and remained a way for more than 30 years. I loved him so much."

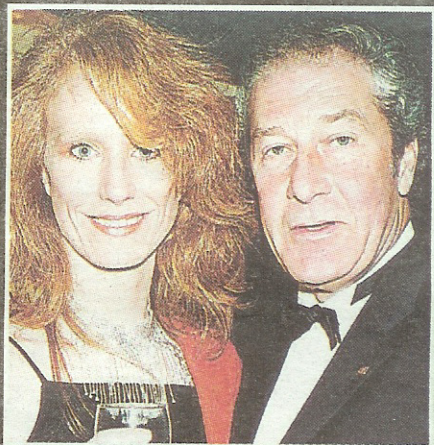
Hunt played Mike McNeely, the suave racing driver turned secret agent, alongside

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Lumley as Purdey.

Speaking

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MEMORIES: Gareth Hunt with co-star Joanna Lumley in *The New Avengers*, top. Above left, Hunt, ringed, with the *Upstairs, Downstairs* cast. Right, with his third wife Amanda in 2002



# Gareth Hunt

Actor who became a household name with his role as tough man Mike Gambit in *The New Avengers*

PAT JACKSON / REX FEATURES

Gareth Hunt's acting roots were firmly in the world of theatre but it was as Mike Gambit in the TV series *The New Avengers* that he achieved international fame.

After the controversial demise of the original *Avengers* in 1969, the suave secret agent John Steed (Patrick Macnee) returned to television screens seven years later assisted by the newcomers Purdey and Gambit. Purdey (Joanna Lumley) was classy, elegant and hard as nails, but it was Gambit, a former mercenary and martial arts expert, who provided the muscle which the ageing Steed lacked. Hunt, with his good looks and adventurous personality, was ideal casting.

"Gambit is like a dream really," he said. "He's what a lot of people would like to be. I'm just acting out other people's fantasies, like James Bond."

Although not a patch on the original series, *The New Avengers* ran for 26 episodes and topped the ratings. Hunt's face adorned women's magazines, and he had enormous fan mail. Even when the series finished, repeats and videos turned it into something of a cult.

He was Alan Leonard Hunt in Battersea, South London, in 1942 and had an interest in acting from an early age. His aunt was the actress Martita Hunt who played Miss Havisham in David Lean's 1946 film *Great Expectations*. Hunt served in the Merchant Navy for six years from the age of 15, before jumping ship in New Zealand and ending up in a military prison for three months.

On returning to Britain he had a variety of jobs, including road digger, a door-to-door salesman and a stagehand, before training at the Webber Douglas School of Dramatic Art. Hunt was fortunate in learning his stagecraft in the last days of repertory theatre in Britain. He did spells at Ipswich, Coventry and the Bristol Old Vic, appearing in a different play each week. In the early 1970s he joined the Royal



Hunt as tough guy Gambit with his *New Avengers* co-stars Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee

Shakespeare Company and later the National Theatre, where he was seen in a number of supporting roles.

His stage credits included *Twelfth Night*, *Oh! What a Lovely War*, *West Side Story*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and the lead role in Ira Levin's *Deathtrap*.

His first television exposure came in 1963 as Arak in *Dr Who*, followed by a run in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, where he had some memorable scenes as Frederick the footman.

Playing Mike Gambit from October 1976 to December 1977 was the highlight of Hunt's

career. *The New Avengers* was tongue-in-cheek adventure with bizarre villains and comic strip action. Memorable episodes included *The Last of the*

**I'm just acting out people's fantasies, like James Bond**

*Cybernauts...? Angels of Death and Gnaws*, in which Gambit grappled with monsters, a murderous health spa and a giant rat in the sewers.

There was an obvious natural rapport between Hunt and Lumley, and although the

series was beset by financial problems, it was very popular.

Despite the success of *The New Avengers*, Hunt was never able to maintain the high profile of Macnee and Lumley. He made several films, including *The World is Full of Married Men* (1979), *Bloodbath at the House of Death* (1984), *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1988) and Michael Winner's *Parting Shots* (1988).

On television he turned to comedy and starred in the sitcom *That Beryl Marston*, playing Gerry Bodley, and, later, in *Side by Side* as Vince Tully. He also played Thomas Warner in

*The Love School* and *Family at War*, *Hammer of Horror* and *Mindbenders*, also in the BBC's popular series of Charles Dickens' *Old Curiosity Shop* in 1985. His greatest television success came through a series of lucrative coffee commercials, in which he appeared more than ten years, occasionally in pantomime, including *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Aladdin*.

At one point he abandoned acting and pursued a successful business venture, opening a CD-Rom company for actors.

Hunt returned to the screen in recent years, touring the UK to try in a variety of thriller and comedies. He was also in several productions in America, including *Your Wife in Florida* in New York in 1988, and *My Darling Clementine* in Toronto in 1991.

He made something of a comeback on TV in 2004, coming as a hitman in *Enders*, one of the success stories of the "who shot Phil Mitchell" storyline and in the stage production of *Night and Day* as John Doyle. He also appeared in BBC series *Doctors* and *Tricks*.

He continued making films and appeared in *Twelve Days of Christmas* (2004) and will feature in *The Riddle*, with Vincent D'Onofrio, Derek Jacobi and Vanessa Redgrave, expected to be released this year.

He had frequent bouts of ill health and in 1999 had to withdraw from a pantomime in Malvern after a heart attack and three years later he was on stage with a suspected cancer attack in Bournemouth.

Hunt was married three times, and is survived by his third wife, Amanda, and three sons.

**Gareth Hunt, actor, was born on February 7, 1942. He died of cancer on March 14, 2007, aged 65**



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PAT JACKSON / REX FEATURES



Gareth Hunt with his *New Avengers* co-stars Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee

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America, including *Run for  
Your Wife* in Florida and New  
York in 1988, and *Sleuth* in  
Toronto in 1991.

He made something of a  
comeback on TV in 2001 with  
a cameo as a hitman in *East-  
Enders*, one of the suspects in  
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storyline and in the same year  
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**Gareth Hunt, actor, was born  
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# Gareth Hunt, star of the Avengers, dies from cancer

By Lucretia Munro

GARETH Hunt, the former New Avengers actor, has died at the age of 65, it was announced yesterday.

He had fought a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer and died at his home in Surrey, leaving his third wife, Amanda, and three children.

His former co-star in the New Avengers, Joanna Lumley, said the actor was a 'dear friend'.

'Gareth was a very good actor, which was often overlooked,' she added. 'He started in the Royal Shakespeare Company and he was terrific.'

'He kept his illness quiet, only his family and a few close friends knew. I went out with him for his birthday in February and he was pretty frail but still hysterically funny.'

His agent Alexandra McLean-Williams said she was privileged to have worked with the actor, who also featured in a series of television adverts for Nescafe.

'Hardly anybody knew he was ill,' she said. 'He continued to work up until New Year. He

## 'He fought the disease bravely'

would have chemotherapy one day and be on the golf course the next. The way he dealt with it was absolutely remarkable.

'This will have to come as a huge shock to Gareth's colleagues and admirers as he fought this dreadful disease privately and bravely.'

'I am honoured and feel very privileged to have been his agent but more the close friendship I had with both him and his wonderful wife Amanda, the one person my heart goes out to.'

'He fought the disease with great courage and through his strength of character and his wonderful sense of humour he continued to work right up until the end of 2006.'

Six years ago Hunt collapsed on stage with a suspected heart attack during a performance in Alan Ayckbourne's play Absurd Person Singular.

He shocked audience members after slumping forward and crying out: 'Oh please, God.' He was immediately taken into hospital.



Screen partners: Joanna Lumley and Gareth Hunt

his role in the classic ITV drama *Upstairs, Downstairs*, in which he played footman Frederick Norton.

He was then chosen to appear in *The New Avengers*, alongside Miss Lumley and Patrick McNee, star of the original *Sixties* series.

Hunt played marksman and hero Mike Gambit. He remained on the programme until its end in 1977, after two series. In the early Eighties he appeared in TV

productions such as *Minder* and *Sunday Night Thriller*.

In 1992 he landed a lead role in the sitcom *Side By Side*, by which time he had become an even bigger household name after starring in a number of television adverts for Nescafe.

While suffering from pancreatic cancer, Hunt continued to work in plays, while his last appearance was in *EastEnders* in 2001.



## Obituaries

## Gareth Hunt

Actor adept at playing heroes and villains who found TV fame in *The New Avengers*

**G**areth Hunt, who has died of pancreatic cancer aged 64, was an actor whose smooth and steely presence made him an ideal Frederick the Footman in the last series of television's *Upstairs, Downstairs* in 1975, and Mike Gambit, Joanna Lumley's crime-fighting partner in *The New Avengers* in 1976, but whose gifts were not used as regularly as he and his admirers might have wished. In later years, he became well known as the advertising face of Nescafé, with a shake of his hand revealing coffee beans.

Tall and saturnine, and with an ominous stony look in his eyes, Hunt would have fitted more easily into the great days of the British film industry in the years spanning the second world war,

when heavyweight personalities and stiff upper lips were more in fashion.

Alternating between television, undistinguished movies and respectable stage work that included the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, he was never lucky enough to play a character that both suited him and took a firm grip on the public. His stage work, including pantomime, often took him to the regions and abroad, as with *Run for Your Wife* to Florida and New York. Films also required extensive travel: in 1997, he was in Ukraine filming *Marco Polo* with Jack Palance.

Having that slightly sinister glassy gaze, Hunt could play heroes or dastardly villains with equal facility. Some of his enterprises were bizarre, including a 1984 comic horror film, *Blood Bath* at the House of Death, starring Vincent Price, Kenny Everett and Pamela Stephenson, and a Swedish film called *The Forgotten Wells* (1990), in which a television crew were held hostage in the sewers by two armed thugs, all of whom then came across a psychopathic half-man half-beast who had lived underground since he was a child.

Hunt was equally at home playing those on the right side of the law,

especially smooth-talking, tough police officers. In 1997 alone, he played two such characters – Inspector Masefield in *Fierce Creatures*, the unsatisfactory follow-up to *A Fish Called Wanda*, and Inspector Bass in *Parting Shots*, made by Michael Winner and described in the *Observer* as among the worst British films ever made. In 1989, long after *Frederick the Footman*, Hunt played a coachman in a Barbara Cartland story adapted for television, *The Lady and the Highwayman*, an illustration of the fact that parts that could accommodate him were now in short supply.

Hunt was born in Battersea, south London, the nephew of the actor Marita Hunt. At 15 he joined the Merchant Navy, and served for six years before jumping ship in New Zealand and spending three months in a military prison. On returning to Britain, he took a number of dead-end jobs to raise money, including road digger, door-to-door salesman and stagehand, while he nursed his theatrical ambitions. He also worked in an ITV studio before taking a BBC design course, ending up eventually at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art.

His next step was repertory at Ips-

wich, Bristol, Coventry, Watford and the Royal Court in London. He was in the 1975 National Theatre production of *Hamlet*, when the company was still operating from the Old Vic, and in the 1978 RSC production of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Aldwych, where he also appeared in Philip Magdalany's *Section Nine*.

But it was television that established Hunt with the public. In 1974, he was in six episodes of *Planet of the Spiders* in the *Doctor Who* series; the following year he was in the episode *The Guardian of Piri in the Space: 1999* series, and in *The Hanged Man* series episode *The Bridgemaker*. That was the year he became *Frederick the Footman*, which made him famous enough to be considered for film roles.

The 1979 film adaptation of Jackie Collins' *The World is Full of Married Men* saw Hunt playing Jay Grossman, one of the many Hollywood weasels abusing women, and that same year he also played in *Licensed to Love and Kill*, a James Bond spoof, and *The House on Garibaldi Street*, a serious film about an attempt by the Israeli secret service to catch a Nazi war criminal.

The 1980s were not kind to Hunt

artistically. In 1981 he played in the BBC TV adaptation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the *Minder* series. But his other television work, *A Hazard of Hearts* and *The Lady and the Highwayman*, won no great critical praise, and his film work in *Funny Money*, *Bloodbath at the House of Death*, *It Couldn't Happen Here* and *A Chorus of Disapproval*, was not mainstream.

None the less, Hunt carried on working throughout the 1990s, including presenting a series of excerpts from *Upstairs, Downstairs* on its 25th anniversary in 1996. That same year he started a company producing showreel videos for aspiring performers, but its success could be measured by the fact that he himself soon returned to acting. He was a regular in the ITV soap opera *Night and Day*.

Hunt had a history of heart attacks, the last in July 2002, while he was appearing in *Absurd Person Singular* at the Pier Theatre, Bournemouth. Married three times, he is survived by his wife Amanda and three sons.

**Dennis Barker**

*Alan Leonard 'Gareth' Hunt, actor, born February 7 1943; died March 14 2007*





Hunt in 1976 on the set of *The New Avengers* with Joanna Lumley (Purdey) and Patrick McNeely (John Steed) Photograph: PA

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# Obituaries

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## GARETH HUNT

Gambit, the smooth action-man hero of 'The New Avengers'

Gareth Hunt found fame worldwide as the action man Mike Gambit in *The New Avengers*. With the revival of the quintessential 1960s British spy series a decade after the original, a lithe male sidekick was needed for Patrick Macnee's bowler-hatted, broly-twirling Steed, who was by then in his mid-fifties. Gambit, a former major in the Parachute Regiment and the SAS, performed that function while Joanna Lumley as Purdey performed high-kicks in skirts.

It was the high point of Hunt's career. "When I stopped playing Gambit," he said, "everybody saw me as Mr Smoothie, which is an image that is a million miles away from me. Then I did the Nescafé ads, so for 10 years I was known as the coffee man."

Hunt's own early life was every bit as varied. Born in Battersea, south London, in 1948, he left school at the age of 15 and served in the Merchant Navy for six years. On returning to Britain, he took a string of jobs, before enrolling for a BBC design course, then deciding to try acting as a career. He trained at the Webber Douglas Academy and gained experience in repertory theatre around Britain, before performing at the Royal Court Theatre and with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre.

After bit-parts in the sitcoms *For the Love of Ada* (1972) and *Bless This House* (1974), and the *Doctor Who* story "Planet of the Spiders" (1974), Hunt landed his first regular television role as the footman Frederick in the popular ITV Ed-

Fennell, producers of *The Avengers*, were approached by a French company with the idea of reviving the sophisticated and stylish espionage series that had been one of the 1960s' great telefantasy productions.

The original star, Patrick Macnee, returned, playing the gentleman undercover agent John Steed, with Joanna Lumley filling the action-girl role previously taken successively by Honor Blackman, Diana Rigg and Linda Thorson. But Macnee was getting too old to be involved in much physical action, so Hunt was drafted in to play Gambit.

"Originally, I didn't see my character the way I was asked to play him," he said:

I'm totally different to Patrick. He went to Eton, while I was born on the wrong side of the Thames, so I thought Gambit should be less smooth. Besides which, it's very difficult diving through windows and fighting people in a three-piece suit. Still, it was wonderful to get one's suits made at Savile Row.

With both French and Canadian backing, *The New Avengers* enjoyed location filming in Britain and those countries over two series and 26 episodes (1976-77). But the programme never attained the success of the original and its greatest legacy was probably the much-copied page-boy haircut donned by Joanna Lumley as Purdey.

Although the programme had given Hunt international recognition, he subsequently found screen roles hard to come by and took parts in second-rate films such as *The World is Full of Married Men* (as a well-dressed south London wide-boy, 1979) and the horror



Hunt, right, as Mike Gambit, with Joanna Lumley (Purdey) and Patrick Macnee (John Steed) in 'The New Avengers', 1976

pany executive steering the road to divorce from his wife, Georgie, a Brighton curiosity-shop owner (played by Julia McKenzie). Only their friends Harvey and Phil (Peter John and Jonathon Morris), a gay couple who ran a health-food store, kept them from coming to blows, but the nail was finally hammered into the coffin by Gerry's affair with "the sex goddess of East Sussex", Beryl Marston, who was never seen on screen.

Gilly Bell (Louisa Rix), with his DIY projects and home improvements such as a Grecian acropolis built in his Kingston-upon-Thames garden.

Another fallow period followed for Hunt, until soap opera beckoned. He briefly played the mobster Richie Stringer in *EastEnders* (2001), which put him at the centre of a "Who shot Phil Mitchell?" whodunit, but Phil's former lover, Lisa Shaw, was eventually revealed

east London, Doyle tried to settle down in the area where he grew up.

During his screen career, Hunt also stepped into period costume for the television films *A Hazard of Heart* (1987) and *The Lady and the Highwayman* (1989), and in the cinema was seen in *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1988) and as a police inspector in both *Fierce Creatures* (1997) and *Parting Shots* (1998). He also played a crooked businessman



# GARETH HUNT

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After bit-parts in the sitcoms *For the Love of Ada* (1972) and *Bless This House* (1974), and the *Doctor Who* story "Planet of the Spiders" (1974), Hunt landed his first regular television role as the footman Frederick in the popular ITV Edwardian costume-drama serial *Upstairs Downstairs* (1974-75), which followed the lives of the upper-class Bellamy family and their "below stairs" servants.

He was then catapulted from the rank of supporting player to one of the stars when Brian Clemens and Albert

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A short-lived starring role came in the sitcom *That Beryl Marston...!* (1981), made by Southern Television shortly before it lost its ITV franchise. Hunt acted Gerry Bodley, a well-heeled com-



Hunt, right, as Mike Gambit, with Joanna Lumley (Purdey) and Patrick Macnee (John Steed) in 'The New Avengers', 1976 PA

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It was more than 10 years before Hunt landed another regular screen role, again in a sitcom. In *Side by Side* (1992-93), he played the happily married Vince Tulley, who ran a successful plumbing business but proved a thorn in the side of his newly widowed snooty neighbour

Gilly Bell (Louisa Rix), with his DIY projects and home improvements such as a Grecian acropolis built in his Kingston-upon-Thames garden.

Another fallow period followed for Hunt, until soap opera beckoned. He briefly played the mobster Richie Stringer in *EastEnders* (2001), which put him at the centre of a "Who shot Phil Mitchell?" whodunit, but Phil's former lover, Lisa Shaw, was eventually revealed to be responsible for the near-fatal shooting of Albert Square's hard man.

Hunt then took a regular role as the four-times-married former merchant navy seaman Charlie Doyle in ITV's *Night & Day* (2001-02). As landlord of the Nautilus pub in Greenwich, south-

east London, Doyle tried to settle down in the area where he grew up.

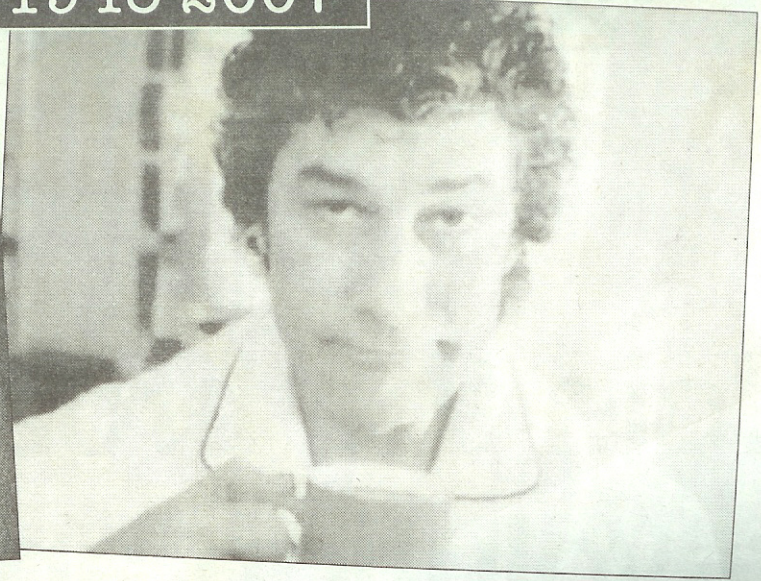
During his screen career, Hunt also stepped into period costume for the television films *A Hazard of Hearts* (1987) and *The Lady and the Highwayman* (1989), and in the cinema was seen in *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1988) and as a police inspector in both *Fierce Creatures* (1997) and *Parting Shots* (1998). He also played a crooked businessman in an episode of *Minder* (1982).

**Anthony Hayward**

*Alan Leonard Hunt (Gareth Hunt), actor: born London 7 February 1943; three times married (three sons); died Redhill, Surrey 13 March 2007.*



# GARETH HUNT 1943-2007



Avenging heroes . . . Gareth with Joanna and Patrick MacNee, and in Nescafe advert, right

# JO: I WILL LOVE HIM FOREVER

Lumley's tribute to Avenger

ACTRESS Joanna Lumley last

By THOMAS WHITAKER







Avenging heroes . . . Gareth with Joanna and

# JO: I WILL LOVE HIM FOREVER

## Lumley's tribute to Avenger

**ACTRESS** Joanna Lumley last night paid tribute to her *New Avengers* co-star Gareth Hunt who died of pancreatic cancer yesterday at 64.

Hunt — who had battled the disease for the past two years — is best remembered for his role in the '70s ITV hit and the Nescafe coffee ads.

In the show — watched by 13.5 million viewers at its peak — Gareth played tough but charming agent Mike Gambit, alongside Joanna and Patrick MacNee.

Ab Fab star Joanna, 60, said: "We started off as friends in *The New Avengers* and remained that way for more than 30 years. I will always love him. We shared so much laughter — we were constantly in hysterics making the *Avengers*."

"Gambit and Purdey were quite often sent out to do bits and pieces together so we'd have scenes where we were driving or fighting people, and we had such enormous fun."

Speaking from Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, Joanna said: "Gareth was also a very good actor, which was often overlooked. He started life in the Royal Shakespeare Company and he was just terrific."

He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer two years ago

By **THOMAS WHITAKER**  
Showbiz Reporter

but carried on working. Joanna said: "He kept his illness quiet, only his family and close friends knew."

"I went out with him for his birthday in February and he was pretty frail but still hysterically funny. I always looked forward to seeing him. He was loved by everyone who knew him."

Gareth, who died at his home in Redhill, Surrey, leaves a wife Amanda and three sons.

He won even more fans for his role in the Nescafe ads and TV period drama *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

### Bravery

His agent Alexandra McLean-Williams said: "Hardly anybody knew he was ill. He continued to work and up until New Year you would never have realised anything was wrong."

"He would have chemo one day and be on the golf course the next. The way he dealt with it was absolutely remarkable." She added: "This will have come as a huge shock to Gareth's colleagues and admirers as he fought this dreadful disease privately and bravely."

"I'm honoured and feel privileged to have been his agent but more the close friendship I had with both him and his wonderful wife Amanda."



Gareth . . . in 2006

t.whitaker@the-sun.co.uk



# The New Avenger Gareth Hunt dies of cancer at 65

By Ian Herbert

The actress Joanna Lumley led tributes yesterday to the actor Gareth Hunt, her co-star in the 1970s fantasy adventure series *The New Avengers*, who has died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 65.

Ms Lumley, who played Purdey opposite Hunt's secret agent, Mike Gambit, in the sequel to *The Avengers*, recalled the hysterics she and Hunt shared in far-fetched scenes where they were "driving or fighting people" together.

Hunt, whose character was drafted in because producers feared 53-year-old Patrick Macnee, the ubiquitous Steed, might not handle the stuntwork, made it one of his defining roles in a long and varied television career. Playing a former mercenary and kung fu expert, his verbal sparring with Purdey became legendary.

Hunt will also be remembered by many as being the man with the handful of coffee beans in the 1980s Nescafé ad.

Hunt, who grew up in Battersea, south London, joined the Merchant Navy when he was 15 to satisfy an am-

the bewilderment of an audience which assumed his agony was part of the drama and continued clapping. His co-star, Robert Beck, the former *Emmerdale* actor, eventually dashed from the wings shouting: "Is there a doctor in the house? I'm serious." The curtain came down and nurses rushed to his aid.

Lumley said: "We started off as friends in *The New Avengers* and remained that way for more than 30 years. I loved him so much. Gareth was also a very good actor, which was often overlooked. He started life in the RSC and he was just terrific. He kept his illness quiet; only his family and a few close friends

knew. I went out with him for his birthday in February and he was pretty frail, but still hysterically funny. I always looked forward to seeing him. He was loved by everyone who knew him."

Hunt's agent, Alexandra McLean-Williams, said: "Hardly anybody knew he was ill. He continued to work and up until new year. You would never have realised anything was wrong. This will have come as a huge shock to Gareth's colleagues and admirers as he fought this dreadful disease privately and bravely."

Hunt leaves his wife, Amanda, and three sons.

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Gareth Hunt in 1976 with his co-stars in *The New Avengers*, Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee UPPA

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### Tracing the Avengers

Patrick Macnee  
STEED



Patrick Macnee created the role of the urbane Steed in the original *Avengers* series. As well as *The New Avengers*, he starred as the



Hunt, who shares the role of the character was drafted in because producers feared 53-year-old Patrick Macnee, the ubiquitous Steed, might not handle the stuntwork, made it one of his defining roles in a long and varied television career. Playing a former mercenary and kung fu expert, his verbal sparring with Purdey became legendary.

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Hunt, who grew up in Battersea, south London, joined the Merchant Navy when he was 15 to satisfy an ambition to travel. It didn't suit him: he ended up in a military prison for three months after jumping ship in New Zealand. He also worked as a road digger and a door-to-door salesman, but acting was in Hunt's blood - he was the nephew of the Hollywood actress Martia Hunt - and he won a place at London's Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. He went on to join the Royal Shakespeare Company.

He had appeared in television shows including *Doctor Who* and *Bless This House*, when he got his big break in 1975 playing the footman Frederick Norton in *Upstairs, Downstairs*. It was that role which won him his part in *The New Avengers* in 1976, which ran for just a year. Later roles included the crime boss Ritchie Stringer, who was a suspect in the "who shot Phil Mitchell?" *EastEnders* storyline in 2001.

Though diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2004, he worked to the end of his life. He acted in the BBC series *Doctors* and *New Tricks*, and in the movie *The Riddle* with Vanessa Redgrave and Vinnie Jones last year.

In 2002 Hunt collapsed on stage at the Bourne-

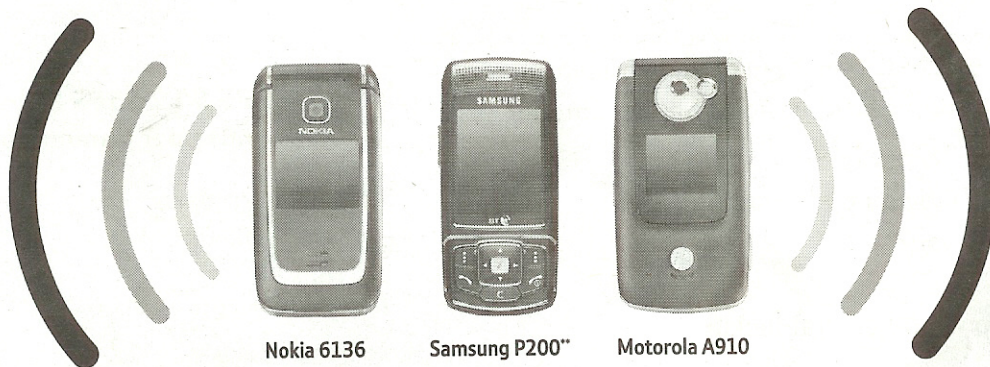
kept his illness quiet; only his family and a few close friends

Amanda, and three sons.

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Gareth Hunt in 1976 with his co-stars in *The New Avengers*, Joanna Lumley and Patrick Macnee UPPA

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## Tracing the Avengers

Patrick Macnee  
STEED



Patrick Macnee created the role of the urbane Steed in the original *Avengers*

series. As well as *The New Avengers*, he starred as the boss man in *The Return of The Man from U.N.C.L.E* in 1983 and Hungerford in the 1990s series *Superforce*. But he has profited most from his role as Steed, which earned him part in *The Pretenders'* video "Don't Get Me Wrong", and Oasis' "Don't Look Back in Anger". Live quietly with third wife, Baba, and his dogs in southern California.

Joanna Lumley  
PURDEY



*The New Avengers* was the series that made Lumley a star. Her trademark page

boy bob launched a thousand imitations. Among many television roles, her performance as the Bollinger-swigging fashion editor Patsy Stone alongside Jennifer Saunders and Julia Sawalha in *Absolutely Fabulous* ran as one of the most memorable. Lumley went on to star in another French Saunders collaboration, the 2006 sitcom *Jam and Jerusalem*.

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