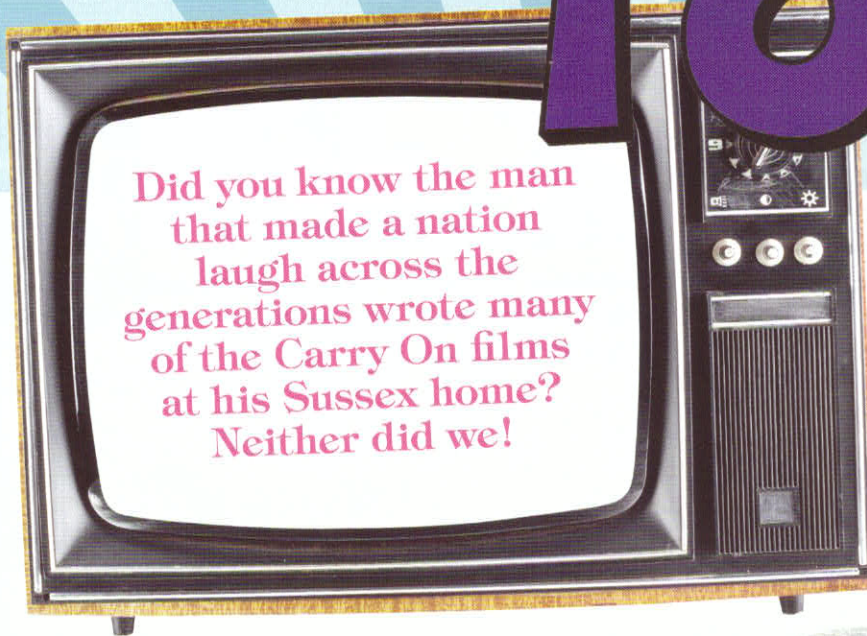


CARRY ON TOLLY



It cost him several drinks, but provided plenty of material. From time to time cast members from the films would come and visit.

Somewhere along the line, we've all laughed at a Carry On and the canon contains classics of British cinema in *Carry On Cleo*, *Carry On Doctor* and *Carry On Up The Khyber* – all of which were penned by Talbot Rothwell. The films reached a creative peak at the end of the 1960s. Since then, the films have reached new generations of viewers thanks to constant repeats on television.

Kenneth Williams need only mutter the words "Oooh Matron" and it's easy to recall Hattie Jacques, a picture of lusty desire, looking adoringly across the hospital ward towards her beau that will never be.

Talbot Rothwell, once a resident of Fulking and Worthing, scripted that scene and countless others across twenty consecutive Carry On films.

Talbot was born on 12th November 1916 in Bromley and spent his early working life as a town clerk in Brighton and then as a Police Officer before becoming an RAF pilot.

During WWII he was shot down over Norway, sometime after 1942 and kept prisoner at the infamous Stalag Luft III, close to the current German – Polish border. Stalag Luft III was the location of *The Great Escape* and it was here he first met Carry On stalwart Peter Butterworth. Along with others, they began to entertain the allied prisoners. Tolly as he liked to be called, recounted on Peter Butterworth's *This Is Your Life* in 1975, "I think we had one production about every 7-10 days and each ran for 4-5 days... let's face it we had a captive audience." The noise from the entertainment helped mask the sounds underground in tunnels Tom, Dick and Harry. Ironically Peter Butterworth later auditioned for *The Great Escape* but was rejected because he didn't look heroic or athletic enough.

Post-war, Talbot became a full time

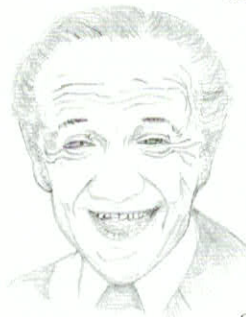
scriptwriter, penning lines for the Crazy Gang, Arthur Askey, Terry Thomas and Ted Ray. In 1963 the door was left ajar at the Rank Organisation after Norman Hurdis, the writer of the first six Carry On films departed for America.

Talbot's first effort was *Carry on Cabby* and he would write screenplays for a further nineteen films until his retirement. His style differed from Hurdis, being bawdy seaside humour

Let's face it we had a captive audience

with double entendres and puns. Talbot called it music hall humour in the style of Max Miller. But there was an undercurrent of morality to it. There was no swearing, and nobody succeeded in getting anybody else into bed. Often the men were portrayed as idiots and the women enjoyed being on top.

Talbot wrote many of the films at his Fulking home, nestled at the foot of the South Downs beneath Devil's Dyke. Legend has it he would visit the local pub and buy anyone a pint for telling an original joke that made him laugh.



In 2007 Talbot's, "infamy, infamy, they've all got it in for me" performed by Kenneth Williams was voted the greatest one-liner in cinematic history for a movie poll. It beat off some serious competition including, "he's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty boy" and "don't call me Shirley," as well as "Bond, James Bond."

But thereby hangs another tale. The infamy line was actually written by Frank Muir and Dennis Norden for their radio show *Take It From Here*. Talbot borrowed it with their permission. As a wide-eyed ten year old, watching *Carry on Cleo* on TV, the infamy line washed over me. But then my young eyes were fully focused on the very alluring, endlessly captivating, Amanda Barrie!

Talbot Rothwell retired after *Carry On Dick* in 1974. He moved over the South Downs to Worthing, living quietly on the coast with gradually deteriorating health. After his retirement, the quality of the later Carry On films went downhill. Society became more permissive, as did the films, losing their *raison d'être*.

The final reel on a career that filled a nation with laughter came to an end in February 1981. Talbot's work lives on in the films. *Carry on Laughing?* Just turn on the TV, there may be one on now. ■