



Made in Derby 2018 Profile

John Hurt

His experience of attending the theatre in Derby as a young boy, was a major inspiration behind John Hurt's decision to become an actor.

Born in Chesterfield and then living in both Shirebrook and Woodville, Sir John always spoke fondly of his native roots in Derbyshire, even though he went on to attend school in Kent from the age of eight.

His wife Anwen, recalls that Sir John told her some of his earliest memories revolved around an annual trip to the Derby Playhouse to see the pantomime.

She said: "John's mother loved the theatre and this was John's first experience of it.

"His father was a vicar, and I know that John felt that in some ways being a vicar and acting had a lot in common because of the need to stand in front of people and perform.

"After John died, I had a lovely letter from a woman who remembers that as a child he would create plays to act in and make grand entrances from behind a curtain, which the other children found hugely entertaining. For him, Christmas shopping in Derby and the pantomime were a big event and had a huge impact on his life."

Sir John went on to become one of the world's best-known actors and this led him to be asked to be the very first patron of the city's arts centre Quad in Derby Market Place.

He agreed because he “wanted to help inspire young people in the city to engage with film and broaden their horizons. Sir John believed in Quad’s vision of “making art and film accessible to all”.

Anwen said: “He always spoke fondly of Derbyshire - the people and the peaks. But unfortunately he was also so busy, he had little time to visit but when he did, he would make the most of it.

“I remember on one visit he was invited onto the pitch at Pride Park at half-time, with the then manager Nigel Clough. He was very proud and thrilled to be there.

“So he was especially proud to be asked to be patron of Quad. He loved its atmosphere and the people.”

Receiving an honorary degree in 2002 from the University of Derby was also high on his list of achievements and speaking afterwards he said the degree “was more important to him than any award from Tinseltown”.

He said: “The acting awards are all tinsel and often are based on commercial considerations but this is very different and is much more serious. This has been very moving and a profound moment in my life.”

Sir John appeared in more than 150 films, including 10 Rillington Place, 1984 and the Harry Potter movies, in which he played the part of wand-maker Mr Ollivander.

He was nominated for two Oscars – for the Elephant Man and Midnight Express – and won four Baftas.

Sir John enjoyed a big hit with sci-fi horror Alien in 1979 and his character’s final scene has been frequently named as one of the most memorable in cinematic history. He also found new fans when he starred as a “forgotten” incarnation of the Doctor, known as the War Doctor, in Doctor Who.

Other celebrated roles included his performance as Stephen Ward – a key figure in the Profumo affair – in Scandal and a reprisal of his role as Quentin Crisp for An Englishman In New York in 2009, 34 years after his original portrayal of the flamboyant figure in The Naked Civil Servant. Sir John’s distinctive voice was used MANY times as narrator, and accompanied a chilling Aids awareness advertising campaign in the 1980s.

Sir John went to art college before he studied at RADA (THE Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) and worked consistently in television, film and on stage and had his major breakthrough, appearing in A Man For All Seasons as Richard Rich.

He was knighted by the Queen for services to drama at an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle in 2015.

But it was the homespun awards that pleased Sir John the most and he was delighted to become the first recipient of the Hero of Cinema award at Derby Film Festival in 2014 and Quad's Cinema 1 was renamed the Sir John Hurt Cinema in 2017 in tribute to him.

As acting royalty, the death of Sir John in January 2017 led to tributes being paid to him from across the globe.

