

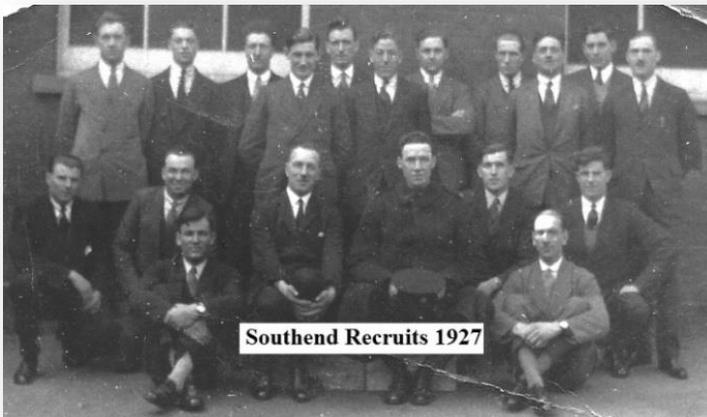


## **Per Terra Ad Astra** *from the beat to the stars*

**By Fred Feather**

The term “canteen culture” is now often derided, but in my experience it taught young officers valuable lessons in the background to their work. Vaguely mentioned in those long ago discussions of the former police force, the Southend on Sea County Borough Constabulary (1914-1969), there was the story of a man who began his career walking the beat in Southend on Sea and who became “A Film Star.”

This memory reappeared recently when the credits rolled after an afternoon film on television. It was “I was Monty’s Double” and the actor was David Davies. It confirmed the almost apocryphal story that Superintendent Ray Law’s uncle had left Southend police to become an actor!



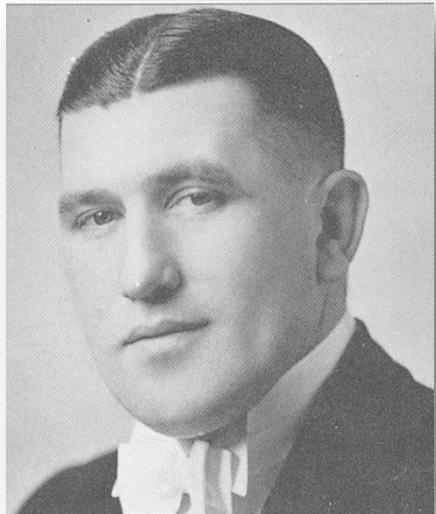
Constable 40 David Lewis Davies (3 April 1906 – June 1974) began his police career on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1927 and Ray Law has shown me a photograph of his uncle with a number of named recruits in the police station yard off Alexandra Street.

David Lewis Davies was born in the Welsh village of Brynmawr in 1906. Both he and his father were miners, but his parents and siblings came to Southend from South Wales in the depression and General Strike circa 1926. The family lived at Chalkwell Park Drive, Leigh on Sea.

David was 20 when he joined Southend Police. He later married Eve Simmons and they had a daughter Margaret. They divorced about 1937.

Both David and his father were singing welsh men and Ray said that David was a fine baritone and earned money apart from his police pay.

He was a very early owner of a car and used it for singing and entertainment on the side.



There was a story about him being disciplined for taking a prisoner to London in his own car and Ray thought that it sounded true. He had an 'entrepreneurial' spirit.

The following is an apocryphal story, again from Canteen Culture. It was one function of David as the duty "ambulance" driver at Southend to convey bodies to the Mortuary. As the ambulance was about to turn into Alexandra Street and was on the tram lines, the back doors came open.



The body shifted. The two policemen rushed back to find that a tram had stopped. The tram driver had got out because of the obstruction and fainted! David retired from Southend Police with a duodenal ulcer on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1937.

For a year he had a cleaners shop on the corner of Westbourne Grove opposite Chalkwell Park but his fine baritone voice and theatrical ways led him towards a higher income. He quickly became a distinguished stage and film actor. His early acting roles were on the stage, and in 1942 he appeared at the Stoll Theatre in London in the role of Sergeant Malone in the operetta *Rose-Marie*.

During the war he had married one of C.B.Cochrane's *Tiller Girls*, Muriel Miller; they had a son called Elwyn. He became a War Reserve policeman with the Metropolitan Police and also helped to entertain wartime troops with E.N.S.A. Whilst David was on his way to a concert in the Middle East for E.N.S.A. his boat was torpedoed.

In 1948 a memorable part he played was Gus Jordan in *Diamond Lil*, a play written and performed at the Prince of Wales Theatre in the West End by Mae West, who met his family. He then appeared in films, cast at 6' 4" as a "heavy", a police officer or in a military or authoritarian role He often appeared in British film and television programmes, and was in demand in films set in Wales, such as *Tiger Bay* (1959) and *Only Two Can Play* (1962). His mother Ester never approved of these roles, she would not go to see him in them and discouraged family members from doing so.

Ray Law recalled his own "Stag Night" in London on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1954 when he and a friend met his uncle and a friend who had just been cautioned by the Police for busking in Leicester Square.

In 1948 he appeared in the Dylan Thomas written film *The Three Weird Sisters* as a police officer. He continued his connection with Welsh cinema in 1949 when he took the role of Septimus in *The Last Days of Dolwyn* and as a burly stranger in the comedy *A Run for Your Money*. In 1950 he took on the role of Mr. Arrow, the first mate of the Hispaniola who comes to an unfortunate end at the hands of Robert Newton's Long John Silver in the Disney live action adaptation of *Treasure Island*. That year he also appeared in the British Drama *The Angel with the Trumpet* as a Nazi leader.



By 1951 he was a regular face in British television, appearing in *The Passing Show* and as Ben in *Midshipman Barney*. He continued appearing in popular films of the time, but normally in walk-on character parts, such as a police officer in *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951).

He received the more substantive role of Benson in the British crime thriller *Mystery Junction* (1951) and gained a credited role as a chauffeur in the 1952 mystery Drama *Mr. Denning Drives North*. He continued to work chiefly out of Britain for the majority of the 1950s, with roles in the fantasy-comedy *Miss Robin Hood* (1952), *The Story of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men* (1952) and appeared alongside Tod Slaughter in *Murder at Scotland Yard*.

David appeared sporadically in film and television during the mid-fifties, with un-credited roles in *Forbidden Cargo* (1954) and *The Long Arm* (1956), but finished the decade with regular appearances on British television. He also returned to movies with roles in *I Was Monty's Double* (1958), *Tiger Bay* (1959), *The 39 Steps* (1959) and *Ben-Hur* (1959). He had been considered for the part of the singing Welsh soldier in *Zulu* but was sick and the part went to Ivor Emmanuel.



**Ray Law with Honor Blackman and actor John Paul**

Between 1959 and 1960 he appeared as a regular character, Jim Blake, in the British television series *Probation Officer*. Ray recalls an evening in the 1950's when David turned up at Southend Police's Alexandra Street club along with fellow stars John Paul and Honor Blackman (Now Dame Honor). He also had guest roles in long running shows such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1960), *Richard the Lionheart* (1963) and *The Avengers* (1963). In 1964 he appeared in Roger Corman's *The Masque of the Red Death* and a year later he took the part of the captain of Galtesund in *The Heroes of Telemark*. After a brief stint as Lieutenant Commander Prince in the soap opera *Coronation Street* (1972) he made his final screen outing in the 1972 adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* playing the role of Utah Watkins. He died in June 1974.