

That Was “The News Huddlines”

A giant of UK entertainment has passed on: Roy Hudd died Sunday. If you are not a UK denizen you have likely never heard of him, but although he was never an A List celebrity, he was every bit as big a star as many of those who become household names only to be forgotten a few years later.

Roy was best known as a comedian, but he was a lot more than that. He was a character actor, writer, author, historian, presenter, charity activist, and also a father by his first wife, Ann. His lengthy *IMDb* entry [begins with 1960](#), but before that he worked on the stage and in radio. Indeed, it is radio for which he made his biggest mark, in particular with *The News Huddlines* which ran from 1975 to 2001. This was an up-to-the-minute revue that took a swipe at stories in the news and often the people behind them. I actually attended a recording of *The News Huddlines*, a special edition which included a walk-on by David Frost. I still have the ticket and a couple of pages of the script that I picked up on the way out.



Roy Hudd was born at Croydon on May 16, 1936. In his autobiography, a book whose title cannot be given here, he wrote fondly of attending Saturday morning pictures at the Croydon Hippodrome. This was closed in November 1956 and was later demolished. Although he spent many happy hours at the cinema, his boyhood was anything but a bundle of laughs. He grew up during the Second World War, and in 1943, his mother committed suicide, leaving him to be raised by his maternal grandmother, Alice Barham.

Roy did his National Service in the RAF, something he says he enjoyed. His first professional engagement was not as a comedian but a musician, in March 1957. Playing a banjo without a plectrum, which left the fingers on his right hand “blood-soaked sausages”, the group was paid £7 10s for a

four hour performance at the *Newmarket Jazz Club*. They received just over £1 each. From there he went on to become a Butlin's Redcoat.

In 1959, he began his own radio programme with the BBC, then a monopoly. *Workers' Playtime* had actually started in 1941 and ended in 1964; it was produced by a man named Bill Gates!

During the 1960s, Roy made a string of TV appearances including his own shows, but for me one of his most endearing performances was as the morgue attendant in the 1968 horror classic *The Blood Beast Terror*, (pictured above). It was only a cameo performance, but the injection of humour was so typical of Roy.

In the 1970s, he appeared in a series of advertisements for Quick Brew tea, which didn't win him an Oscar but did pay for a house in Henley-on-Thames.

Roy married his first wife, dance teacher Ann Lambert in May 1961, with whom he sired his only child. He named his son Max after Max Miller, the infamous Cheekie Chappie, whose humour was at times far more risqué than Roy's. Max followed in his father's footsteps after a fashion, although not as a performer.

After nearly a decade of marriage, Ann petitioned for divorce, but in February 1971, it was reported the couple had reconciled, something that was said to have delighted the judge at the London Divorce Court. Six years later, the two teamed up in a rather unorthodox fashion when he played the front half of a centaur and she the back half in a production of *Jason And The Golden Fleece*. However, the marriage did not last.

Roy met his second wife in 1980 while rehearsing for pantomime in Nottingham. She was a dancer, and Roy was unsurprisingly playing Simple Simon. Deborah Flitcroft was 22 years his junior, but they were eventually married, and she stayed with him until the end of his life.

In 1989, he underwent emergency surgery for torn retinas in both his eyes, something that would almost certainly have blinded him.

Roy won many awards during his long career including the OBE for services to entertainment in the 2004 New Year Honours List. He was working up until the very end, off and on screen. His last on screen appearance will be in a short film *All The Things You Are* which is due for release next year.

Roy Hudd, born Croydon, May 16, 1936; died, March 15, 2020.