



# Peter Sallis

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**Peter John Sallis**, OBE<sup>[1]</sup> (1 February 1921 – 2 June 2017) was an English actor, known for his work on British television. He was the voice of [Wallace](#) in the [Academy Award](#)-honoured *Wallace and Gromit* films and played [Norman "Cleggy" Clegg](#) in *Last of the Summer Wine* from its 1973 inception until its final episode in 2010, making him the only actor to appear in all 295 episodes.

Although Sallis was born and brought up in London, his two best remembered roles required him to adopt the accent and mannerisms of a [Northerner](#). He also voiced Rat in *The Wind in the Willows*, appeared in *Danger Man* in the episode "Find and Destroy" (1961) as Gordon, appeared in the BBC *Doctor Who* serial "The Ice Warriors" (1967), playing renegade scientist Elric Penley, and appeared in an episode of *The Persuaders!* ("The Long Goodbye", 1971). Other appearances include *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961), and *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970). He retired from acting in 2010 and died in 2017, aged 96.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Early life

Peter John Sallis<sup>[3]</sup> was born on 1 February 1921 in [Twickenham](#), [Middlesex](#), the only child of bank manager Harry Sallis (1889–1964) and Dorothy Amea Frances (*née* Barnard; 1891–1975).<sup>[4][5]</sup> After attending Minchenden Grammar School in [Southgate](#), north London, Sallis went to work in a bank, working on shipping transactions. After the outbreak of the [Second World War](#) he joined the [RAF](#). He was unable to serve as aircrew because of a [serum albumin](#) disorder and was told he might black out at high altitudes. He became a wireless mechanic instead and went on to teach radio procedures at [RAF Cranwell](#).<sup>[6]</sup>

## Early career

### Theatre work

### Peter Sallis

OBE



Sallis in October 2008

<b>Born</b>	Peter John Sallis <div>1 February 1921</div> <div><a href="#">Twickenham</a>, <a href="#">Middlesex</a>, <a href="#">England</a></div>
<b>Died</b>	2 June 2017 <div>(aged 96)</div> <div><a href="#">Denville Hall</a>, <a href="#">London</a>, <a href="#">England</a></div>
<b>Resting place</b>	<a href="#">St John the Evangelist Churchyard</a>
<b>Occupation</b>	Actor
<b>Years active</b>	1946–2010
<b>Known for</b>	<i>Wallace and Gromit</i> , <i>Last of the Summer Wine</i>

Sallis began his career as an amateur actor during his four years with the RAF when one of his students offered him the lead in an amateur production of Noël Coward's *Hay Fever*.<sup>[1]</sup> After his success in the role, he resolved to become an actor after the war, winning a Korda scholarship and training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He made his first professional appearance on the London stage in September 1946 in a walk-on part in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Scheming Lieutenant* (1775).<sup>[6]</sup>

<b>Spouse</b>	<u>Elaine Usher</u> (m. 1957; div. 1965)
<b>Children</b>	<u>Crispian Sallis</u>

Sallis then spent three years in rep before appearing in his first speaking role on the London stage in 1949.<sup>[6]</sup> Other roles followed in the 1950s and 1960s including Orson Welles' 1955 production of *Moby Dick—Rehearsed*.<sup>[1]</sup> In his autobiography, *Fading into the Limelight*, Sallis recounts a later meeting with Welles where he received a mysterious telephone call summoning him to the deserted Gare d'Orsay in Paris where Welles announced he wanted him to dub Hungarian bit-players in his cinema adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* (1962). As Sallis wrote, "the episode was Kafka-esque, to coin a phrase". Later, he was in the first West End production of *Cabaret* in 1968 opposite Judi Dench.<sup>[7]</sup>

Sallis appeared in the Hal Prince-produced musical *She Loves Me* in 1963.<sup>[8]</sup> Though not a success it led to him making his Broadway debut the following year. Prince was producer of a musical based on the work of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes called *Baker Street*. Sallis was asked by Prince to take the role of Dr. Watson to Fritz Weaver's Sherlock Holmes. The show ran for six months on Broadway.<sup>[8]</sup> Just before *Baker Street* ended he was offered the role of Wally in John Osborne's *Inadmissible Evidence*, which had been played by Arthur Lowe in London with Nicol Williamson reprising the lead role. The production was troubled with Williamson hitting producer David Merrick with a bottle and walking out before being persuaded to continue. The show was a minor success and ran for six months in New York, opening at the Belasco Theater before transferring to the Shubert Theater.<sup>[8]</sup> Sallis reprised his role in the 1968 film adaptation.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Television and films

Sallis' first extended television role was as Samuel Pepys in the BBC serial of the same name in 1958.<sup>[6]</sup> He appeared in *Danger Man* in the episode "Find and Destroy" (1961) as Gordon.<sup>[10]</sup> He appeared in the BBC *Doctor Who* story "The Ice Warriors" (1967), playing renegade scientist Elric Penley,<sup>[11]</sup> and in 1983 was due to play the role of Striker in another *Doctor Who* serial, "Enlightenment", but had to withdraw.<sup>[12]</sup>

He was cast in the BBC comedy series *The Culture Vultures* (1970), which saw him play stuffy Professor George Hobbs to Leslie Phillips's laid-back rogue Dr Michael Cunningham.<sup>[13]</sup> During the production, Phillips was rushed to hospital with an internal haemorrhage and as a result, only five episodes were completed.<sup>[14]</sup>

Sallis acted alongside Roger Moore and Tony Curtis in an episode of *The Persuaders!* ("The Long Goodbye", 1971).<sup>[15]</sup> He appeared in many British films of the 1960s and 1970s including *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960),<sup>[16]</sup> *Doctor in Love* (1960), *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961),<sup>[16]</sup> *The V.I.P.s* (1963),<sup>[16]</sup> *Charlie Bubbles* (1967),<sup>[16]</sup> *Scream and Scream Again* (1969), *Taste the Blood of Dracula*, *Wuthering Heights* (1970),<sup>[16]</sup> *The Incredible Sarah* (1976)<sup>[16]</sup> and *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* (1978).<sup>[17]</sup> Additionally in 1968, he was cast as the well-intentioned Coker in a BBC Radio production of John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*.<sup>[18]</sup>

He played a priest in the TV film *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973), and the following year he played Mr Bonteen in the BBC period drama *The Pallisers*.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Later career

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Sallis was cast in a pilot for *Comedy Playhouse* which became the first episode of *Last of the Summer Wine* (retrospectively titled "*Of Funerals and Fish*", 1973), as the unobtrusive lover of a quiet life, Norman Clegg.<sup>[1]</sup> The pilot was successful and the BBC commissioned a series. Sallis had already worked on stage with *Michael Bates*, who played the unofficial ringleader Blamire in the first two series. Sallis played the role of Clegg from 1973 to 2010, and was the only cast member to appear in every episode. He also appeared, in 1988, as Clegg's father in *First of the Summer Wine*,<sup>[9]</sup> a prequel to *Last of the Summer Wine* set in 1939.

He appeared in the children's series *The Ghosts of Motley Hall* (1976–78), in which he played Arnold Gudgin, an estate agent who did not want to see the hall fall into the wrong hands,<sup>[9]</sup> and he played Rodney Gloss in the BBC series *Murder Most English* (1977).<sup>[19]</sup> In the same period, he starred alongside *Northern* comic actor *David Roper* in the ITV sitcom *Leave it to Charlie* as Charlie's pessimistic boss.<sup>[20]</sup> The programme ran for four series, ending in 1980. Sallis also played the part of the ghost-hunter Milton Guest in the children's paranormal drama series *The Clifton House Mystery* (1978).<sup>[21]</sup>

Sallis was the narrator on *Rocky Hollow* (1983), a show produced by *Bumper Films*, who later produced *Fireman Sam*, and alternated with *Ian Carmichael* as the voice of Rat in the British television series *The Wind in the Willows* (1984–89), based on the book by *Kenneth Grahame* and produced by *Cosgrove Hall Films*. Alongside him were *Michael Hordern* as Badger, *David Jason* as Toad and *Richard Pearson* as Mole. The series was animated in stop motion, prefiguring his work with *Aardman Animations*. Also in 1983 he played the lead character Jim Bloggs, alongside *Brenda Bruce* as Hilda, in a BBC Radio 4 adaptation of Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows*.<sup>[22][23]</sup> Sallis appeared in the last episode of *Rumpole of the Bailey* (1992)<sup>[24]</sup> and he later starred alongside *Brenda Blethyn*, *Kevin Whately* and *Anna Massey* in the one-off ITV1 drama *Belonging* (2004).<sup>[25]</sup>

While a student in 1983, animator *Nick Park* wrote to Sallis asking him if he would voice his character Wallace, an eccentric inventor. Sallis agreed to do so for a donation of £50 to his favourite charity.<sup>[26]</sup> The work was eventually released in 1989 and *Aardman Animations'* *Wallace and Gromit: A Grand Day Out* went on to great success winning a *BAFTA* award.<sup>[26]</sup> Sallis reprised his role in the *Oscar*- and *BAFTA* Award-winning films *The Wrong Trousers* in 1993 and *A Close Shave* in 1995.<sup>[1]</sup>

Though the characters were temporarily retired in 1996, Sallis returned to voice Wallace in several short films and in the *Oscar*-winning 2005 motion picture *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, for which he won an *Annie Award* for Best Voice Acting in an Animated Feature Production.<sup>[1]</sup> In 2008, Sallis voiced a new *Wallace and Gromit* adventure, *A Matter of Loaf and Death*.<sup>[1]</sup> After the *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, Sallis's eyesight began to fail as a result of *macular degeneration* and he used a talking portable typewriter with a specially illuminated scanner to continue working.<sup>[1]</sup> His last role as Wallace was in 2010's *Wallace and Gromit's World of Invention*.<sup>[1]</sup> Sallis then retired due to ill health, with *Ben Whitehead* taking over the role.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Autobiography

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In 2006, Sallis published a well-received autobiography entitled (with his typical self-deprecation) *Fading into the Limelight*.<sup>[27]</sup> Roger Lewis in *The Mail on Sunday* commented that "though Sallis is seemingly submissive, he has a sly wit and sharp intelligence that make this book a total delight".<sup>[28]</sup> Despite his nearly 37 years in *Last of the Summer Wine*, this is far from the main focus of the book, in which Sallis also recounts the early era of his relationship with *Wallace and Gromit* creator *Nick Park* when it took six years for *A Grand Day Out* to be completed. He says that his work as Wallace has "raised his standing a few notches in the public eye".<sup>[29]</sup>

## Personal life

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Sallis married actress *Elaine Usher* at *St. John's Wood Church* in London on 9 February 1957.<sup>[30][4][31]</sup> However, it was a turbulent relationship, with Usher leaving him 16 times before they divorced in 1965 on grounds of desertion and adultery.<sup>[6]</sup> They were eventually reconciled and continued to live together until 1999; and Sallis remained close to Usher until her death in 2014.<sup>[1][32][33]</sup> They had one son, *Crispian Sallis* (born 1959), who went on to become an Oscar-nominated *film set designer*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Sallis suffered from *macular degeneration*,<sup>[1]</sup> and in 2005 recorded an appeal on *BBC Radio 4* on behalf of the *Macular Society* of which he was a patron.<sup>[34]</sup> He also recorded on behalf of the society a television appeal, which was broadcast on *BBC One* on 8 March 2009. Following his diagnosis of the disease, Aardman produced a short animated film for the society.<sup>[35]</sup>

Sallis was awarded the *OBE* in the *2007 Birthday Honours* for services to Drama.<sup>[1]</sup> On 17 May 2009, he appeared on the BBC Radio 4 programme *Desert Island Discs*, selecting *Sibelius' Symphony No. 5* in *E-flat major* as his favourite.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Death

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Sallis died at the Denville Hall nursing home in Northwood, London, on 2 June 2017 at the age of 96.<sup>[37]</sup> He was buried next to fellow Last of the Summer Wine actor Bill Owen in the churchyard of St John's Parish Church, Upperthong, near the town of Holmfirth in Yorkshire, the home of *Last of the Summer Wine*.<sup>[38]</sup>

## Filmography

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### Television

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1958	<i>The Diary of Samuel Pepys</i> <sup>[6]</sup>	Samuel Pepys	
1961	<i>Danger Man</i>	John Gordon in Episode titled Find and Destroy	
1964	<i>The Avengers</i>	Steeds colleague and friend Hal Anderson in Episode titled The Wringer	
1967	<i>Doctor Who: The Ice Warriors</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Penley	
1970	<i>Catweazle</i>	Stuffy Gladstone	
1970	<i>The Culture Vultures</i>	Professor George Hobbes	
1971	<i>The Persuaders!</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	David Piper	
1973–2010	<i>Last of the Summer Wine</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	<u>Norman Clegg</u>	(final television appearance)
1973	<i>Frankenstein: The True Story</i>	Priest	
1974	<i>The Pallisers</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Mr. Bonteen	
1974	<i>Who Killed Lamb?</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Lloyd	
1974	<i>The Capone Investment</i>	Wheatfield	
1976–1978	<i>The Ghosts of Motley Hall</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Mr Gudgin	
1978	<i>The Clifton House Mystery</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Milton Guest	
1978	<i>She Loves Me</i>	Ladislav Sipos	TV Movie
1978–1980	<i>Leave It To Charlie</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Arthur Simister	
1984–1990	<i>The Wind in the Willows</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Rat	Voice
1987	<i>The New Statesman</i>	Sidney Bliss	
1988–1989	<i>First of the Summer Wine</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Mr David Clegg	
1989	<i>A Grand Day Out</i>	Wallace	Voice
1993	<i>The Wrong Trousers</i>		
1995	<i>A Close Shave</i>		
2008	<i>A Matter of Loaf and Death</i>		
2009	<i>Kingdom</i> <sup>[9]</sup>	Cyril	

2010	<u><i>Wallace and Gromit's World of Invention</i></u> <sup>[1]</sup>	Wallace	Voice
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## Filmography

- *Stranger from Venus* (1954) – Soldier (uncredited)
- *Child's Play* (1954) – Bill – grocery merchant
- *Anastasia* (1956) – Grischa (uncredited)
- *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1958) – Secretary at Picture Gallery
- *The Scapegoat*<sup>[9]</sup> (1959) – Customs Official
- *Doctor in Love*<sup>[9]</sup> (1960) – Love-Struck Patient (uncredited)
- *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*<sup>[9]</sup> (1960) – Man in Suit (uncredited)
- *No Love for Johnnie*<sup>[9]</sup> (1961) – M.P.
- *The Curse of the Werewolf*<sup>[9]</sup> (1961) – Don Enrique
- *I Thank a Fool* (1962) – Sleazy Doctor
- *The V.I.P.s*<sup>[9]</sup> (1963) – Doctor
- *The Mouse on the Moon*<sup>[9]</sup> (1963) – Russian Delegate
- *The Third Secret*<sup>[9]</sup> (1964) – Lawrence Jacks
- *Clash by Night* (1964) – Victor Lush
- *Rapture*<sup>[9]</sup> (1965) – Armand
- *Charlie Bubbles*<sup>[9]</sup> (1967) – Solicitor
- *Inadmissible Evidence*<sup>[9]</sup> (1968) – Hudson
- *The Reckoning*<sup>[9]</sup> (1970) – Keresley (uncredited)
- *Scream and Scream Again*<sup>[9]</sup> (1970) – Schweitz
- *Taste the Blood of Dracula*<sup>[9]</sup> (1970) – Samuel Paxton
- *My Lover, My Son*<sup>[9]</sup> (1970) – Sir Sidney Brent
- *Wuthering Heights*<sup>[9]</sup> (1970) – Mr. Shielders
- *The Night Digger*<sup>[9]</sup> (1971) – Reverend Rupert Palafox
- *The Incredible Sarah*<sup>[9]</sup> (1976) – Thierry
- *Full Circle*<sup>[9]</sup> (1977) – Jeffrey Branscombe
- *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?*<sup>[9]</sup> (1978) – St. Claire
- *Witness for the Prosecution*<sup>[9]</sup> (1982) – Carter
- *A Dangerous Kind of Love*<sup>[9]</sup> (1986) – Mr. Walker
- *A Grand Day Out*<sup>[9]</sup> (1989) – Wallace (voice)
- *The Wrong Trousers*<sup>[9]</sup> (1993) – Wallace (voice)
- *A Close Shave*<sup>[9]</sup> (1995) – Wallace (voice)
- *Hotel*<sup>[39]</sup> (2001, uncredited)
- *The Incredible Adventures of Wallace and Gromit*<sup>[40]</sup> (2001) – Wallace (voice)
- *Wallace and Gromit's Cracking Contraptions*<sup>[41]</sup> (2002) – Wallace (voice)
- *Belonging*<sup>[9]</sup> (2004) – Nathan
- *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*<sup>[9]</sup> (2005) – Wallace / Hutch (voice)

- *Colour Me Kubrick*<sup>[42]</sup> (2005) – The Second Patient (cameo)
- *A Matter of Loaf and Death*<sup>[9]</sup> (2008) – Wallace (voice)

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## External links

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- [Peter Sallis](http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b9f3e777b) (<http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b9f3e777b>) at the [British Film Institute](#)
- [Peter Sallis](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0758608/) (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0758608/>) at [IMDb](#)
- "Desert Island Discs" (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00kc1lz>). *Desert Island Discs*. 17 May 2009. [BBC](#). [Radio 4](#). {{cite episode}}: Unknown parameter |serieslink= ignored (|series-link= suggested) ([help](#))

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