



Garrett in Cannes in 1980  
CAMPAIGN PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE AT HISTORY OF ADVERTISING TRUST

OBITUARY

# Jim Garrett obituary

Advertising guru behind After Eight and other campaigns who took on the thankless task of making Ted Heath more voter-friendly

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Wednesday January 11 2023, 12.01am GMT, The Times

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Long before the Conservative Party turned to Saatchi & Saatchi for the “Labour isn’t  
[← PREVIOUS ARTICLE](#) [NEXT ARTICLE >](#) Thatcher to win the 1979 general  
election, there was Jim Garrett.

Arguably Garrett’s brief as a political ad-man was a much harder sell — to persuade the nation to elect Ted Heath as prime minister, rather than the more voter-friendly Harold Wilson.

Heath had lost the 1966 general election by a majority of 98 and was perhaps lucky after such a landslide defeat not to have been challenged and replaced as party leader. However, he survived and, with the next election looming, in 1968 Garrett was asked by his friend Geoffrey Tucker, an ad man seconded to Conservative Central Office as director of publicity, to assemble a team of communications advisers to help get Heath elected.

In an age before spin doctors and image-makers dominated the political landscape, Garrett was a big beast in the advertising world, running Britain’s largest production company, with an enviable track record for producing memorable TV commercials, including campaigns for Benson & Hedges and After Eight.

When he arrived at Conservative Central Office, he swiftly realised that although the party was skilled in the use of such old-school campaigning tools as posters and rallies, there was no television strategy. “The ruling generation of the party — many of them pre-war, pre-television in outlook — had little experience in TV,” he found. “Yet they had an annual allocation of free airtime, the programmes were produced free of charge by the BBC and aired simultaneously on the BBC and ITV at peak time. It was a unique media gift that was totally undervalued other than by Harold Wilson.”

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Nobody was better qualified than Garrett to take on the task of using the medium of television to repackage the unpopular Rt Hon Edward Heath — whom the polling data suggested was perceived as remote, stiff and snobbish — and replace him with something resembling “the people’s Ted”, who was to be accessible, affable and familiar.

Garrett put together a team that included Dick Clement, the creator of popular TV sitcoms from *The Likely Lads* to *Porridge*; the film director Bryan Forbes, who would later move to Hollywood, where his credits included *The Stepford Wives*; Ronald Millar, the future speechwriter to Margaret Thatcher; and the fashion photographer Terence Donovan, whose images of Twiggy, Jean Shrimpton and Julie Christie helped to define the “swinging Sixties”.

Garrett and his team created a series of party political broadcasts that showed different facets of Heath — at work in his constituency as an ordinary MP; as a national leader on a tour of the industrial northeast; and as an international statesman meeting President Nixon and the senator Edward Kennedy. The team also commissioned a theme song, which was played at hustings and in the broadcasts, designed a logo and created a stage set for use at meetings around the country during the campaign.

Against the predictions of the opinion polls, the campaign achieved its objective and Heath won the 1970 general election, his one and only victory amid three defeats at

the hands of Wilson.

Yet as Garrett admitted, it was an uphill struggle. “Heath was not an easy man,” he recalled. “He was remote and suspicious of anything to do with communications. He thought he could communicate with the public via a letter in *The Times*.”

Garrett’s own politics were intrinsically Conservative. One of his earliest memories was leaning out of the window of the family car and shouting “Vote for my Daddy” at high street shoppers when his father stood for election as a Tory councillor. Yet he was also an active trade unionist who had been a shop steward in the film union ACTT, which was affiliated to the Labour Party, and later a member of its general council and a vice-president. Nor did Garrett tell Heath that as a young man he had voted for Attlee rather than Churchill in the 1950 and 1951 general elections.



Garrett was behind BT's adverts starring Maureen Lipman

Unlike later image-makers who were showered with knighthoods and peerages by Thatcher, Sir John Major and David Cameron, Garrett received no such recognition. All he had to show for playing kingmaker to the new prime minister was a letter Heath wrote him two days after polling day which read: "I am writing simply to thank you for all your help and wise advice throughout the campaign and indeed before it. As regards the broadcasts themselves, I have heard nothing but praise for all of them, and that is no mean achievement. There is no doubt that they played a major part in our success."

Away from politics, his business thrived. He was the first British ad man to set up an office in New York and work poured in from the big Madison Avenue agencies, later depicted in the TV series *Mad Men*. Multinational clients included Gillette and Polaroid and he even managed to work for both Pepsi and Coca-Cola.

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#### ADVERTISEMENT

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From the 1960s through to the 1990s his ads were never off British TV screens. He employed directors such as John Schlesinger, who won an Oscar for *Midnight Cowboy*, and Nicolas Roeg, whose film work included *Don't Look Now* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Richard Loncraine, recruited from the BBC features department, was a mainstay before he went on to direct *Band Of Brothers* for Steven Spielberg and the Bafta-winning adaptation of *Richard III* starring Ian McKellen.

A show reel of Garrett's greatest hits included BA's Manhattan ad, the BT commercials starring Maureen Lipman and the first Halifax building society ad to use a crowd of people to form the "X", which went on to become a familiar trope.

The wonderful Clement-directed "you don't have to be big to be beautiful" campaign for Tom Thumb cigars starring Dudley Moore was another Garrett production, as was the first Aids awareness information campaign, directed by Roeg.

He is survived by his Czech wife, Margot (née Fleischner), who arrived in Britain in 1938 as a refugee at the age of ten. They were married for 68 years. He is also survived by their two sons, Stephen and David, both of whom work in the film industry.

James Leslie Michael Peter Garrett was born in Bristol in 1928. His father, Reginald, was a Cambridge-educated Catholic schoolmaster with a small private income from the family's interests in the wine trade. His mother, Eve, was the illegitimate daughter of an actress and a member of the landed gentry whose family fortune had been made in coal mining.

He grew up comfortably in a household with several maids and a nanny, paid for from a trust fund established for his mother. When the Second World War intervened, the family was evacuated to the Welsh market town of Builth Wells, where they rented a smallholding with cows, chickens, ducks and geese.

At Builth Wells County Grammar School and later Bristol Grammar, he was a decent schoolboy goalkeeper and cricketer but decided early on that he did not want to go to university. He thought it was “a slippery slope to becoming a schoolmaster,” and feared turning into his father.

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A history of rheumatic fever meant he failed his army medical and was spared National Service. With no idea what he wanted to do, he moved to London, where in 1949 he landed a job as a junior assistant director with the newly established British Transport Films, set up to promote the nationalised transport industries.

He spent six years there before joining Pearl & Dean, the cinema advertising producers. Three months later commercial television was launched in the UK and with the new opportunities that it opened up, he became a senior producer at TV Advertising (TVA), the biggest commercials production company in London.

Within three years he had taken over management of the company. He launched his own company in 1963 with a staff of eight, which included Richard Lester, who would go on to direct the Beatles' films *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*

He also employed Ken Russell to direct commercials and, working out of two rooms in a studio in Kensington, by 1966 Garrett was running the largest production company in the UK.

The 1970 general election was the only party political campaign he ran but in 1975 he was part of the team that produced pro-European broadcasts for the referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EEC.

By the 1990s other production companies had overtaken Garrett and he downsized. He eventually retired in 2003, closing the company that had borne his name for 40 years. When he did so Campaign, the ad industry's house magazine, paid fulsome tribute, conferring the honour which successive governments had failed to bestow, by calling him "Lord Jim".

**Jim Garrett, advertising man, was born on October 20, 1928. He died on January 2, 2023, aged 94**

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**Charles Day**



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Clearly a talented man who should have been recognised for his talents. RIP.

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Good advert for a good career.  
**Mark Gregory**

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**L Lawson**

10H AGO



Great career. R.I.P.

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Anyone who could get Heath elected had to be a magician.  
**JP Lee**

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10H AGO



I voted for Heath having watched his final election broadcast, it was compelling and, rightly or wrongly, convinced me.

**Colin Sawyer**

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8H AGO



**Martin Drew**  
What an interesting life which I have enjoyed reading about. Sympathy to his family.

6H AGO

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**Matthew Daley**

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