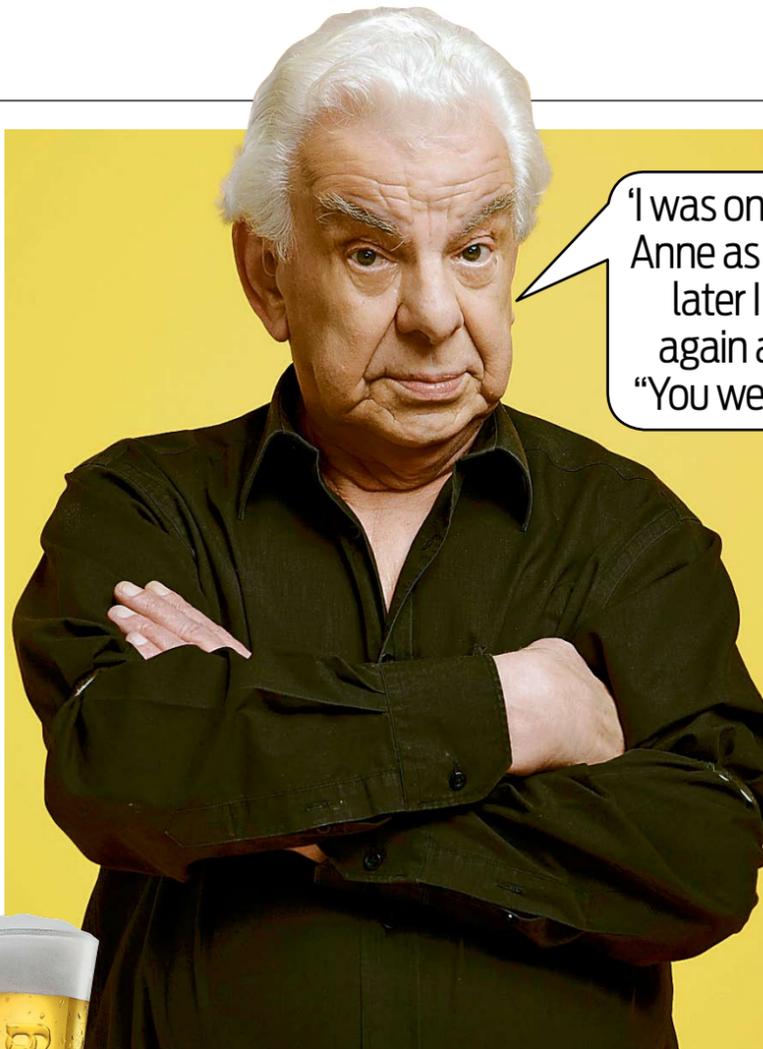


The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: writer and comedian Barry Cryer



'I was once introduced to Princess Anne as Barry Took. Three weeks later I was introduced to her again as Barry Cryer. She said, "You were Barry Took last time!"'

The prized possession you value above all others... 'The Black Book', an address book I've had for 20 years. My life is in it, if it was lost I'd be devastated.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not knowing my dad. He died when I was five, so I only have one or two memories of him, like us building an Airfix model plane, which I flew straight into the fire! His name was John and he died in his late 40s in 1940. My mother, Jean, never liked to speak about him.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Pork scratchings. They go so well with a pint that I'm prone to pig out!

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Good Companions by JB Priestley, about a group of dancers and singers on the road. Priestley is my literary idol and we were friends for the last ten years of his life.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd follow Tony Blair to see what he says when the mask is off.

Right: Winston Churchill. Above right: A cold pint of Carlsberg. Far right: St Charles's Church in Vienna



The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... People looking at their mobile phones when they should be talking to you.

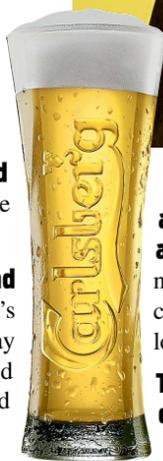
The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Live for the moment, that's all there is.

The film you can watch time and time again... Groundhog Day. It's about a man living the same day over and over again, which should get tedious, but never does. And Bill Murray is superb.

The person who has influenced you most... My wife Terry. We married in 1962 and she's very honest, whereas I can be devious. She's kept me on the straight and narrow.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Churchill. He was such a charismatic man. I'd love to tease out the lesser known details of his life.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Spiritualism. I believe there's something in it, but I think there are a lot of fraudsters making money out of people's sadness.



The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My hearing. I'm 79 now and I struggle to hear conversation when there's a lot of background noise.

The unending quest that drives you on... Survival – in both life and work. I've been in showbiz since 1956 and in this game you don't retire, the phone stops ringing. It hasn't stopped yet!

The poem that touches your soul... Willie Rushton's version of the limerick about the young man from Montrose – but you couldn't print it here!

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm Barry Took! I'm always mistaken for other people. I was introduced to Princess Anne at Comic Relief as Tooky. Three weeks later I saw her again and was introduced as Barry Cryer and she said, 'You were Barry Took last time!'

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Having a drink with David Frost in Danny La Rue's club in London in 1963. I was with Ronnie Corbett and David asked us to work on The Frost Report. I was catapulted to writing full-time for TV.

The song that means most to you... Unchained Melody by The Righteous Brothers. It reminds me of falling in love for the first time at Leeds University when I was 19. The girl broke my heart – she told me she was gay!

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... Terry and I would take the Orient Express to Venice. I'd have porridge, then fried eggs, bacon and fried bread on board. We'd wander around Venice, then pop to Sydney for a boozy lunch by the Opera House, I've never been to Australia. I'd have a BBQ-style lunch with a nice cold lager – Carlsberg, not that Australian Foster's rubbish! Later we'd hang out on a beach in Oz with our four kids and seven grandchildren, aged seven to 23. In the afternoon, without the family, we'd see the sights in Vienna and go on the Ferris wheel that was in The Third Man. I'd have drinks with friends at the Gilded Balloon comedy venue in Edinburgh. In the evening, we'd check into The Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan. We'd have Dom Pérignon champagne, followed by decent chardonnay and the special of the day for dinner. We'd watch

a Broadway show before heading back to our house in Middlesex where we've lived since 1967. These days I end every night out with a cup of builder's tea.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The birth of my first son, Tony, in 1963 when I was 28. I finally had responsibilities, although I'm not sure it made me grow up!

The saddest time that shook your world... My father dying. I remember a boy at my infant school saying, 'Your dad's dead' and I punched him.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To eat a prawn sandwich without some prawns falling out. I can never quite achieve it.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Think things are going to be awful, then whatever happens is usually an improvement and you cheer up.

The order of service at your funeral... It will be a humanist service, with people speaking about my life. I'll pop up on a screen saying, 'I know where you're all going later: the pub! But I'm off for a drink with Eric Morecambe and Tommy Cooper.' I want my ashes scattered in the garden of my local pub.

The way you want to be remembered... Family and friends have dominated my life, so to be remembered fondly by them is all that matters.

The Plug... Mrs Hudson's Diaries – the life of Sherlock Holmes's housekeeper as imagined by me and my son Bob – is out now, £12.99, therobsonpress.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: CAMERA PRESS, ALAMY, GETTY

PS...

The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, with Dames Judi Dench and Maggie Smith, is in cinemas Thursday. Ralph Fiennes is in romantic comedy Man And Superman at The National Theatre now. And don't miss The Brit Awards on Wednesday on ITV



NEXT WEEK

- Martin Clunes on playing Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in a gripping new drama
- Classic recipes to celebrate the WI's centenary
- Monty Don shows you how to mulch properly
- Britain's best TV listings