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## The obituary notice of MICHAEL BILLINGTON

**National | Published: Online.**

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MICHAEL BILLINGTONA bronzed and ruggedly handsome leading man who screen-tested a record five times for the role of James Bond, Michael Billington was one of Britain's best-loved film and television actors by the time of his death on 3 June, 2005. He is probably best known for his role as Colonel Paul Foster in the popular 1970s science fiction series UFO, but also starred in long-running historical drama The Onedin Line and mini-series Edward VII. Said to have been producer's first choice for suave super-spy James Bond, Mr Billington was screen-tested for the role five times but ultimately proved happy to settle for the small but memorable part of a smooth Soviet agent in The Spy Who Loved Me. His final television role came in 1986 with BBC drama The Collectors. Born in Blackburn, Lancashire, on 24 December, 1941, Michael Billington initially trained as an engineer. However, an interest in acting soon saw him swap his job at a neon sign company for the stage, taking small roles in musicals before going on to work for a year as Danny La Rue's straight man. Private drama and voice lessons ultimately led to the more serious roles he craved and, in 1966, the ambitious young actor took to the boards alongside Alec Guinness and Anthony Quayle in Incident at Vichy. Further roles soon surfaced at The Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as bit-parts on the television in footballing soap United and cult series The Prisoner. He won his first major TV role in 1970 as Colonel Paul Foster. One of the leads in Thunderbirds' Gerry Anderson's first foray into live action drama, UFO ran to only 26 episodes but today remains a cult classic and cemented Billington's reputation as a talented young actor. The Onedin Line, a classic long-running boating drama, followed in 1971, while roles in Hadleigh, War and Peace and the award-winning Edward VII saw Hollywood take notice. A brief period in the USA presented Mr Billington with a number of guest slots in popular shows, such as Hart to Hart and Magnum PI. He returned to England in 1986 to play Tom Gibbons in the BBC custom and excise drama The Collectors but the series bombed in the ratings and Mr

Billington later credited it with killing off his acting career in the UK. His latter years saw him turn to teaching at the Lee Strasbourg School in London, while his story Silver Dream Racer became a film starring David Essex. He died following a battle with cancer in Kent, England, on 3 June 2005. He was 63. By sad coincidence, his death came within a week of that of his UFO co-star Ed Bishop. Mr Billington spent much of his later life encouraging son Michael's footballing aspirations, as well as working on his autobiography and attending cult TV conventions. In 1986 he beat successful Bond applicant Timothy Dalton to the starring role in TV drama KGB: The Secret War.

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We were so sorry to hear of Michael passing, we love him and miss him. The family are in our prayers. It is 14 years since he passed and his kind heart and is one of the Lord's angels. RIP Mike.

Terri Zezza

25/07/2019

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