



■ WORK. AND PLAY: Johnnie Chuckles entertained thousands of children with jokes, magic tricks and Punch and Judy shows

Mr John Davis:

Better known as children's entertainer Johnnie Chuckles

CHILDREN'S entertainer Johnnie Chuckles has died after decades keeping smiles on families' faces.

The 72-year-old — real name John Davis — was born in Wheatley and lived all his life in Oxfordshire.

At the age of seven he went to the Vera Legge school, in Witney, to study tap dancing after missing many of his early school years through ill health.

Initially the reason behind the tap lessons was to help him with his health, but soon it became a passion for him.

In an article in the *Oxford Mail* in December 1979, Mr Davis recalled his love for tap: "As soon as I started, I got really enthusiastic. I

used to like to do the fast bits — just like a pianist wanting to do the bang and crash. I thought it was exciting."

Mr Davis carried on dancing, joining up with John Padbury to form a double act after leaving school at the age of 15.

He was then taken under the wing of Oxford Punch and Judy man Percy Best, who introduced him to the world of children's entertainment.

In 1969, Mr Davis gave up his job as a bookbinder at Oxford University Press and adopted the name he would be known by for the rest of his career — Johnnie Chuckles.

In the beginning things were hard

for Mr Davis, but following an offer from BBC Radio Oxford to host a regular children's programme his new career started to take off.

He was then asked by the Chipperfield Brothers to comper their new dolphin act at Coventry Zoo.

These performances would form the foundation of his career, as word of mouth became sufficient recommendation to bring him as much work as he could handle.

His career would see him playing to thousands of children, with jokes, magic tricks and Punch and Judy shows.

Mr Davis also turned his hand to cabaret, becoming as popular among adults as he was children.

In a 1972 *Radio Times* article he was described as a man who was "difficult to ignore".

It said: "He has a soft rural accent, which, combined with his childlike sense of humour and his innate sympathy of all things children-like, makes him a natural focus for their approval.

"But not only children approve of him. He entertains all sorts of audiences, from play-groups to undergraduates, working men's clubs and five-star hotels."

He leaves two daughters, Melina and Cheryl.

His funeral service was held on Wednesday at St Peter's Church, Wootton, near Abingdon.