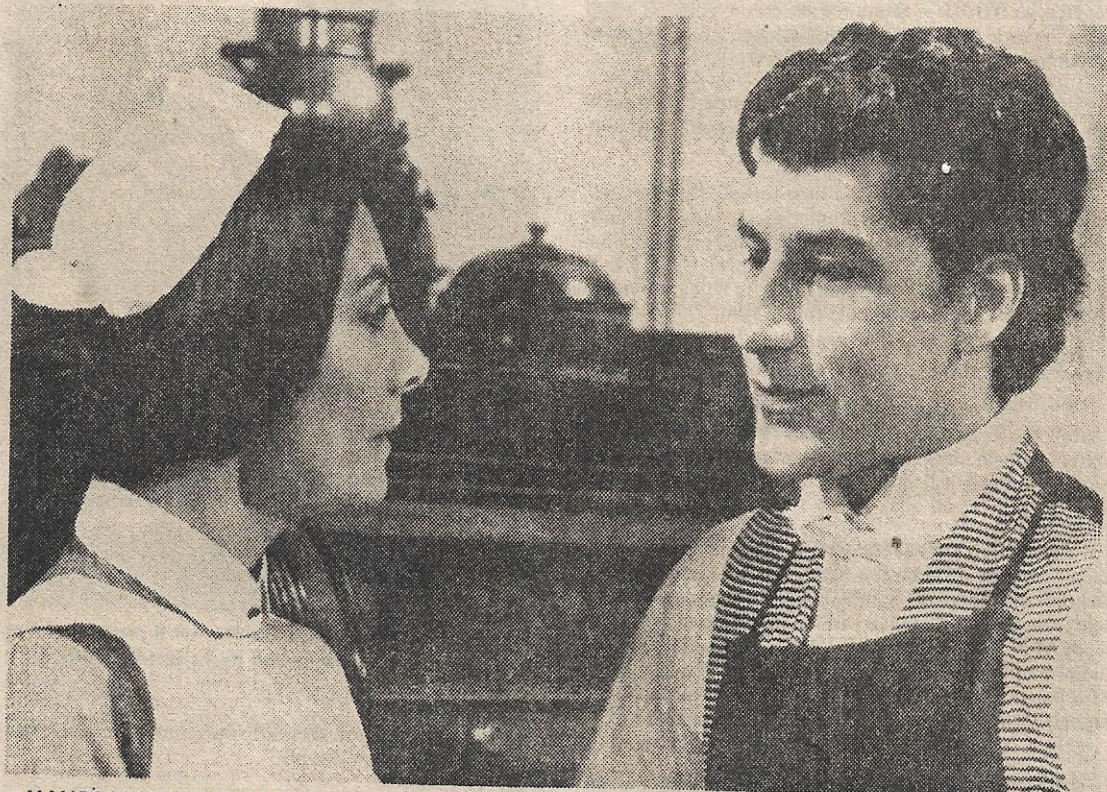


Footnote On Footman: Actor Blames Role For Sexy Status



HANDSOME ADDITION to the servant's quarters at 165 Eaton Place is Frederick (Gareth Hunt) who's apparently trying here to charm Rose (Jean Marsh).

NEW YORK — "It's Frederick they love, not Gareth Hunt," says the self-same Gareth Hunt, not at all unhap-

pily. The blue-eyed, black-haired, handsome English actor, who's become the heartthrob of the current "Upstairs, Downstairs" series on Masterpiece Theatre, refuses to believe that he, personally, has much to do with all the pulse-quickening occasioned by Frederick Norton, the new footman at 165 Eaton Place.

There's some logic in his disclaimer. As he's quick to point out, he may be a new face in the Bellamy menage, but he's not exactly a newcomer, having done a six-year stint with the Royal Shakespeare company before he went into service on the

PBS series.

"I have been working in the theatre all this time, and then suddenly 'Upstairs, Downstairs' comes along," he marvels. "I'm a well-known face overnight and no longer do I have any peace. The pace of London is killing these days as it is, but with being recognized and mobbed by strange girls and ladies in the street all the time . . . it's a bit much for a shy bloke like me."

The 32-year-old six footer moved in when Edward, the former footman, was elevated to chauffeur-valet. He was "hired" by James Bellamy (Simon Williams) because he'd been the young major's orderly during the war.

"Upstairs, Downstairs" producer John Hawkesworth took one look at Hunt's debut in a minor role in last year's series and promptly pro-

moted him to a fatter role in the current episodes, which were seen in Britain last season. That's when the ladies started mobbing the startled actor in the street.

Whereas they had considered the big-eared, cheeky Edward as a sort of amiable big brother, they flipped in their millions over Frederick. Hunt is waiting in petrified anticipation to see whether his new-found sex symbol role will catch on in America and the dozens of other countries which now see "Upstairs, Downstairs."

If Frederick Norton doesn't do it, Mike Gambit probably will. Gambit is the dashing, all-action sidekick to Steed (Patrick Macnee) in the new "Avengers" series now being filmed in England. Hunt won the prime part as a direct result of his impact in

"Upstairs, Downstairs."

The impact was so great that Hunt was mightily relieved late last year when he had to grow a beard for his part of Guildenstern in the National Theater production of "Hamlet" in London. Hiding behind the beard, he was able to move for a while around his London without being pounced upon by eager female "Upstairs, Downstairs" fans.

"I keep away from the city center as much as possible these days," says Hunt. "All I want is a garden and peace — not a lot of girls mobbing a gigolo."

The wavy-haired, personable Hunt was born in Battersea, London, of working-class stock. He learned his acting the hard way, with nearly a decade rising up through the minor rep companies.