

Let's remember them

No. 1, David Baddiel

David Baddiel, the well-known novelist and literary critic who coined the phrase “I’m a bloke” (famously plagiarized by ‘Emily’ Howard as “I am a lady”), has, his friends say, died, from working himself too hard. He enjoyed a glittering undergraduate career. He read English at Cambridge (he was a King's man), not only taking a double-first but getting the highest marks ever awarded in the English tripos. After coming down, and doing research for a Ph.D. at UCL, he published three novels, the last of which Erica Wagner, the *Times* literary editor, described as “rewarding”. Despite the setback, he was rumoured, when he died, to be working on a fourth. He was a frequent contributor to quality newspaper book columns and high-brow television chat shows, where he could always be relied on to discover hitherto undetected flaws in the classic and to champion, as long as it was sufficiently recent, the obviously worthless. Fifty years ago he would probably have sounded like Julian Barnes but, the market for Julian Barneses having collapsed, he created for himself a niche as a Jewish bloke. This proved not just commercially but—as anyone familiar with his criticism will know—rhetorically astute, affording him access to a greater range of tropes (a favourite word of his) than any other critic of his generation. It meant he could come onto the reader as a bloke when he was being a literary critic and a literary critic when he was being a bloke. He was probably best known for being a mate of Frank Skinner's and enjoying a wank.