

CORONATION STREET

60TH ANNIVERSARY PRESS PACK



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CORONATION STREET CELEBRATES 60 GLORIOUS YEARS

On December 9th 2020 Coronation Street will celebrate its 60th anniversary cementing its place in television history as the world's longest running drama serial.

The show, a story of the everyday lives of ordinary folk, living in a northern town called Weatherfield, was created by a young scriptwriter called Tony Warren.

It first screened live at 7pm on Friday 9th December 1960 and changed the face of British television forever. It has been captivating audiences and proving a ratings success ever since.

More than 10,000 episodes later the Guinness World Record holding programme has seen 57 births, 146 deaths and 131 weddings alongside affairs, murders, secrets and lies, and not forgetting that unique blend of pathos and northern humour that makes the show just as popular today as it was all those years ago.

To celebrate this incredible milestone ITV is screening special shows, publishing an anniversary book, launching new products, unveiling unique social media content and of course at the centre of it all will be a fantastic week of drama on the cobbles of Weatherfield.

The anniversary week will see three storylines reach spectacular conclusions whilst at the same time starting off new chains of events which will take the show into 2021 and beyond.

For months the nation has been gripped by the appalling abuse inflicted by Geoff Metcalfe upon his wife Yasmeen. With Yasmeen on remand charged with Geoff's attempted murder, the anniversary week will see the end of her trial. Will justice be done or is the nightmare only just beginning for Yasmeen and Alya?

Meanwhile Carla and Adam battle to keep the shameful secret of their illicit night together, knowing that if the truth comes out it will ruin their lives and those around them. Nothing stays quiet for long in soaps, and as the week progresses the web of lies and deceit they've created threatens to destroy them with shocking consequences.

At the centre of the anniversary drama is of course Coronation Street itself as the residents unite to save the cobbles from the dastardly dealings of Ray Crosby. Having bought up most of the property and businesses in the area, Ray is ready to flatten the lot to make way for his new development. As the bulldozers arrive on the cobbles the race is on to save Britain's most famous street.

The show will be screened on ITV as three one hour episodes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 7.30pm. During the anniversary week fans will also be treated to two new ITV documentaries; *Coronation Street 60 Unforgettable years* and *Queens of the Street*.

BritBox subscribers can also watch a selection of dramas and episodes celebrating Britain's favourite and longest-running soap. This includes *The Road to Coronation Street* (a drama documenting the journey of Coronation Street from conception to its first transmission in December 1960), *Against The Odds: The Pat Phoenix Story* (a drama following Pat Phoenix's ill-fated affair with fellow actor Tony Booth in the 1950s) and *Coronation Street: 60 Years in 60 Episodes* (60 handpicked episodes which showcase the very best Corrie moments).

With average viewing figures in the UK still topping 7 million per episode, Coronation Street is a worldwide phenomenon, having been sold to a whopping 135 countries and is as synonymous with the UK as cups of tea and Sunday roasts.

On how the show has survived for 60 years, John Whiston, Managing Director of Continuing Drama & Head of ITV in the North, says:

"Coronation Street is very special. It's about the humanity of seeing characters developed through the brains, intelligences and hearts of so many people. And seeing how they deal with situations you know you may have to deal with

yourself in life. It's a guide to humanity with a little bit of comfort blanket thrown in along with a little bit of sharp, northern wit."

"It is the mix. Realistic storylines which tackle strong subjects - and Corrie has always had them - with more soapy affairs and people getting in other people's faces. And then the humour, which the writers are so adept at. Coronation Street has always been characterised as strong women and feckless men. I've tried to keep that tradition."

The show's longest serving cast member William Roache MBE has been with the show since the first episode. Reflecting on the show's longevity he says:

"Coronation Street has got a big heart. It's a happy place to come to work. I look forward to going to work. That comes through on screen. There's no doubt about that. Part of Coronation Street's success is the love and the enjoyment for the show."

"There is no reason why Coronation Street cannot go on forever if it continues to adapt to what is happening. Coronation Street is a massive part of my life. I love it and I am eternally grateful to it. I love what I'm doing. I see the future of more of the same and more enjoyment."

Coronation Street's anniversary week starts on Monday December 7th at 7.30pm on ITV



Interview with John Whiston

Managing Director of Continuing Drama & Head of ITV in the North

Q: What are your earliest memories of Coronation Street?

"I have to confess my parents didn't let us watch ITV for a long time. We were allowed Blue Peter, but not Magpie. I was probably aged about 10, around 1968, when I first watched Coronation Street. It is surprising how often, before I worked in television, you would happen upon the big Coronation Street episode or the big moment. You wouldn't watch something for a while and then suddenly you would just be watching and that big moment would come on. Like Alan Bradley and the Blackpool tram."

Q: What does your job involve?

"As Managing Director of Continuing Drama I have overall responsibility for Coronation Street and Emmerdale from both an editorial and financial perspective. I have been with Corrie for 15 years or so and with ITV for about 24 years."

"I go to the creative conferences when they used to happen in real life and now online. I'm part of the team that decides who lives, who dies, who leaves in a taxi. Ultimately I've got fantastic producers and executive producers. So those bits of my life are very pleasurable. The parts where you sit around a table with 25 writers and work out what is going to happen next Christmas or whenever."

Q: How many people work on Coronation Street?

"Between 400 and 450 people work on Coronation Street including a regular cast of about 70. It has grown in recent years as we have increased the number of episodes screened every week. We produce three hours of television a week which is the equivalent of one or two feature films. And the same with Emmerdale."

Q: You said at the 50th anniversary that Coronation Street creator Tony Warren had uncovered the DNA of a nation. His legacy lives on?

"Tony Warren was so insightful about the show long after other people would have stopped being so. He watched it right through to his dying day and he would always have fantastically insightful things to say about it. All of the producers would have a monthly or bi-monthly lunch with Tony when he would give them his opinion. And they always came back from that enriched and with a depth of knowledge about what the show was. We will always be indebted to him for that."

Q: It is easy to forget how groundbreaking Coronation Street was when it first came to the screen in 1960?

"There were plays like *Look Back In Anger*. But for Granada Television at the time there were a lot of misgivings. Would anyone understand the accents? Would anyone want to watch a programme about the daily doings of a small street in Salford?"

"We made that film *The Road To Coronation Street* and a lot of the story was in there. It was all genuine. Including the people talking about it in the canteen that made it the success it was. That's when the founder of Granada, Sidney Bernstein, started to take notice and think, 'Actually, hang on a minute, we've got something here.' It was genuinely different for Granada to do and I think they were probably quite surprised at just what an instant success it was. I don't think they thought it would be."

Q: How has Coronation Street managed to survive on TV for 60 years?

"It's a huge achievement. It is the mix. Realistic storylines which tackle strong subjects. The best storylines are the ones where you are sitting around at the conference and when somebody pitches it, your first reaction is, 'No way can we do that.'"

"And then the discussion carries on and the writers start to think about how characters would react in those situations. Then suddenly you realise it's actually the best story you've got."

"So there are those big stories that people think, 'Is that going to happen in my life? Is this something that could give me some guidance if it were to?' When we did the Bethany grooming story we really were surprised at the chord it struck with people. I read an email from somebody saying, 'I was watching the programme with my 12-year-old daughter and she turned to me and said, mummy, I think that's happening to me.'

"It was just the most chilling thing. But that was one of those stories when you had thought to yourself, 'Can we really do that?' Along with, 'Can we really do male rape? Can we really do Aidan's suicide? Can we really do the Geoff and Yasmeen story?'

"It's a mix of having big stories like that - and Corrie has always had them - with more soapy affairs and people getting in other people's faces. And then the humour, which the writers are so adept at. Coronation Street has always been characterised as strong women and feckless men. I've tried to keep that tradition of having our men as feckless as possible and certainly our women are very strong."

Q: How does the long history of Coronation Street help inform the decisions and stories of today?

"The history is one part of the mix. We have writers who go back a long way and have a lot invested in certain characters. They know all of the history of the show. We also have great researchers who keep us right.

"That's the great thing about having 25 writers. You will always find two or three who are totally invested in a particular character and know everything about that character. That's when it gets difficult if you're deciding you need to kill somebody. You will then always have two or three writers who will passionately argue why it can't be that person.

"It's fun that when we did our 10,000th episode we went to Blackpool because Blackpool is the sort of place Corrie goes on its traditional charabanc. It's fun to play with all of that history. An episode where people are joking about Deirdre's glasses. It's fun for people who have invested that amount of their lives in watching Coronation Street.

"But it's much more than that. When Hayley Cropper died there was a national outpouring of grief. People wrote in to say, 'Hayley has been married to Roy for longer than I have been married to my husband. And that's why I am so devastated by it.' People build up these long term relationships with characters.

"If we go wrong at all then people do jump on it. And where they jump on most is where we take a character into something the audience don't think that character would do. Quite rightly. They are absolutely willing to think a character will do extreme things in extreme circumstances. But there are some fundamental things a character just would not do. Sometimes we have arguments about that around the table. Would Roy Cropper do this? Or not? And those are the most passionate arguments. The audience will go with us on pretty much anything apart from radically changing a character midstream."

Q: It has been said that Coronation Street's brand of humour and comedy set it aside from other soaps. Do you agree?

"I do think that is true. There is a particular type of Corrie humour. The kind of incisive humour that comes from the characters and from the hearts of the writers. I'm always in awe of the way the writers manage to find the humour, sometimes in quite bleak circumstances. That's where the show works best. When it is bouncing between something very bleak. That's where I think Corrie is at its finest."

Q: How do you attract a new younger audience without alienating older fans?

"I read all of the duty logs about the calls and emails we get and, interestingly, older viewers are very willing to go along with things if they feel it is done in the right mood with the right heart. They are much more mobile of thought than some people might think. Partly because they have lived, they have seen everything and it takes quite a lot to shock an older person."

"It's actually the younger people who are much more easily shocked than older people these days. So I don't think we have a problem doing quite extreme subjects while still appealing to our older audience."

Q: Social media now provides a real time reaction to storylines. Do you read it?

"I try not to let it make a difference. The soap gods mean they will eventually get their man. But that happens slowly. It wouldn't be drama if what everybody on social media wanted to happen just happened. Then we wouldn't have any drama. People in real life don't always behave as you want them to. They behave how their character dictates they should."

"The Geoff and Yasmeen story is a case in point. For a long part of that story, perhaps maybe even until Geoff locked Yasmeen in the box, people were hating it. Really hating it. Hating Geoff, rightly, but also hating the story. How can we watch this man being cruel to this woman for so long? And then they suddenly got it and realised where we were going."

"We had plenty of time to change the story. We could have said, 'Social media hates this story. We can go away from it.' But we stuck to our guns. You have to do that with social media. You just have to say, 'You will eventually get your satisfaction.'"

"All of our sensitive and potentially controversial storylines are extensively researched in advance. We talk to all of the charities involved in stories and fully research. But in the end it does have to be drama."

"I do feel for everyone who may be going through a similar sort of thing. I remember, again with the Hayley Cropper story, quite early on when she first got pancreatic cancer there was a letter from someone saying, 'My wife has got pancreatic cancer. Hayley has just been told that it is terminal. My wife's only joy in life was watching Coronation Street and now you have taken that away from her in the last months of her life.'"

"It was a sobering letter and it does make you think. But what I did think was, well, on the crew there are lots of people who have suffered from losing people due to cancer. Lots of people have personal things invested in the stories we cover. The writers, the actors and the crew. Life is full of that sort of trauma. All we can do, all we can promise to people, is to do it as honestly and as unblinkingly as we can. With a cast as brilliant as the cast we have got you can feel a degree of certainty they will get it right."

Q: What is the story process from original idea to screen?

"We have monthly story conferences which look at the next block we are about to storyline. They involve all of the writers, the story team and the producers who sit around a table and discuss what next for this set of characters or that set of characters. Four times a year we have a long term conference and sit round for two days and work out what was happening from probably about six months hence to about a year ahead. The writers will pitch stories for their favourite characters. So we will have three or four competing stories for, say, the Nazirs or the Platts. Before virtual meetings the art of the pitch was everything. The writers are very funny people so they will pitch very funny stories in very funny ways and it can be a very enjoyable experience.

"The producer's job, and to some extent my job, is to take, say, the three or four stories that have come up at conference, discuss them and say, 'Which one do we like best? Could we hook into this, use that?' And so on. So from those stories comes an outline of where the show will be going over the next year or so.

"Part of my job and part of the producer's job is to look at it strategically and say, 'What is going to be our big story next autumn? What is going to be our Christmas story?' And also look at it from an ITV schedule point of view. What is going to be big in Britain's Got Talent week? And so on. So we plan out the year.

"Then we layer that on to a monthly conference where we look at what is going to happen in the next month. The story office will put that on a big board with lots of Post-It notes and they will look for an A-story, a B-story, a C-story and sometimes D and E. And the A-story will be the tagging story that week. The big main story and the one you end the episode on. That will then dip down the next week and another main story will come out. We will work out a month in that way. It's a very colourful board because every family has a different Post-It note colour. We also look at it and think in terms of large things or a big stunt and think, 'Can we achieve that in terms of production?'

"Once we've done that it is written up as a storyline document. That will then divide into episodes and then the writers will write the stories with all of the beats in them. Individual writers will be given those episodes with those stories. And then it's up to the writer to pour in the magic. They have to hit all of those beats. Not steal beats from the next episodes, which are what writers are always very tempted to do. They will think, 'Oh, I can have that really juicy conversation in my episode.' They have to restrain themselves from doing that. Think about what has gone before and how the characters would react in those situations. And then they have to think a little bit laterally and say, 'Where should I set this argument between people?'

"The magic the writers bring is the ability to cleverly weave much deeper things into, ostensibly, much shallower conversations. In the way we all do. A classic example was written by Simon Crowther. A conversation between Kylie and David Platt. They had both been out to the shops and bought a cucumber. So they had this big row. But, of course, the entire thing wasn't about the cucumbers, it was about the state of their relationship.

"Once the writers bring their magic to it, the script editors come in and they do two or three drafts of that script, maybe changing things because we can't get hold of that set or a particular actor for that time. Or the director wants to do it in a different way. Then that becomes the shooting script and that's what we go and film.

"In terms of the actual genesis of the ideas, the writers are very different. Some of the storylines come up from the story office. Some come from the producers. Some of them come from the writers. But a lot of the writers have been in the story office. That's where they cut their teeth. So they have a story brain. They are magpies. They are out there collecting phrases and stories. Listening to the world."

Q: Is there a route into Coronation Street for voices of all kinds?

"I have always taken the view that the more diverse the team, the better the stories. We try to have writers who have lived a bit. In the past people have been social workers or teachers in another life and have turned to writing. Writers should come from different backgrounds. Comedy writers and theatre writers. Also diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and orientation and geographically diverse. There are lots of different groupings among the writers.

"What that makes for is people coming at things with a more inquisitive and broader approach that improves the writing. The best stories are the ones where people just tear them apart to begin with. Somebody will pitch something and you think 'This is ruthless.' But by tearing the story apart people then start to put it back together again. Sometimes it comes out remarkably similar to how it was pitched in the first place and sometimes it is entirely different. It is a collaborative process. Coronation Street is a writer-led show. That's the way Tony Warren wanted it and that's why it works so well."

Q: Do you think some people underestimate the skill and talent required to produce a show like Coronation Street?

"There is so much snobbery about soaps. Our writers produce top class scripts week after week after week. They love the genre. It's the most immediate way of getting your thoughts, and some of your spirit, on screen. At its best, soap is the highest form of drama.

"A soap actress once said to me, 'It's not that hard, is it? It's just two people shouting at each other in the street.' Well, on one level it is. But on another level it is much more than that. Including a blueprint for going through life. I think the pandemic has shown that more than anything."

Q: Do commercial pressures impact on the show?

"It is interesting the extent to which ITV advertisers are on board for the radicalism of the show, in a way. I'm not sure you would get that in America. There are times in America where advertisers would shy away from some of the trickier subjects Coronation Street deals with.

"Advertisers are quite commercially savvy. And certainly sponsors are too. They like to know when we're doing these tricky subjects. But I have never once had a sponsor or an advertiser say, 'Hang on a minute, should you really be doing that?' That is to their credit. They want to be associated with something that does get to people."

Q: Bill Roache has played Ken Barlow since the very first episode on December 9 1960. That is quite an achievement.

"Bill Roache is the longest serving soap actor in the world. What an amazing career. And he is now looking younger than ever. There must be a portrait in an attic or something. It's quite an achievement to have been on screen for 60 years. Bill is a real marathon runner. It is incredible.

"You can throw anything at him. For example, the storyline set in the posh retirement community. And he is very funny because he plays it so real. You can also suffer with him as Ken deeply agonises about Peter's drinking. He is an everyman in the sense he can span it all. When he stands on the Street and looks up at it, that's when the history does really hit home.

"One of the things that is lovely about the show is if you take a character like Daniel - it's a cycle. He is reliving Ken's early life in a way. It's an aspiration of doing better through education and so on. But in the end it is the pull of family and the pull of the Street. I like the parallels between Daniel and Ken. They really do resonate."

Q: What issues did you have to overcome when filming resumed after the pandemic lockdown?

"They divide into off screen and on screen. Off screen was about security and safety for everybody. Early on we took the decision that no-one should be closer to each other than two metres - cast or crew or anyone else. That dictated a whole lot of stuff like how many people we could have on set, the complexity of shots and so on.

"It also meant people had to think about how they could appear to be closer than two metres but actually not be. There was a whole new language that the directors, the camera people, lighting and the actors had to learn. The actors had to learn a little dance they do between each other, 'I'll come forward, you come back...'

"When I watch episodes now I don't really notice any social distancing. But there actually is. I know that because everyone is wearing buzzers and they buzz if anyone is closer than two metres to them.

"It's easier inside because you can use a bit of furniture, somebody can be making a cup of tea in the background and so on. It's slightly more noticeable outside where people walk down the street and one person is walking in the gutter and the other person is walking on the pavement. Or somebody is rushing along and the other person is rushing to keep up, which is another way of doing it.

"Those are the superficial things. I think more germanely it's about how to keep the interest going in the stories. How to tell those stories when a little bit of soap is about the thrill of blowing cars up, doing something unexpected or spectacular.

"But there was a thought about, 'Is the world changing? Does the world want to be a little kinder than it was? Is the community of Coronation Street all the more important in a world where we have all found we are not always immune or as clever as we thought we were?' So I think there has been a little shift in the tone of the show towards a slightly more supportive community. Also looking at what is important in family.

"The biggest issue for us has been trying to adhere to the ever changing rules nationally and between the nations for things like face masks, some businesses being open and others not. How big a household can you have? How many people can you interact with?

"With masks, for example, the watchword has been to respect masks but enjoy the drama. We did shoot an intense scene where two people had masks on and, frankly, after 25 seconds it became farcical. It became comedic and not in a good way. So we had to take some dramatic license. The view we took is that people are seen wearing masks in the same way as they appear in real life. But people will take their masks down in order to have a conversation. And I think the audience has gone along with that and feels that is fine."

Q: How have the original plans for the 60th anniversary changed due to the pandemic?

"Two or three years ago we started talking about what the 60th anniversary was going to have in it. It's difficult when you have done what we did for the 50th and that live episode. We had plans in place for something that was going to be big and then the pandemic happened.

"So what we have done is concentrate on the stories we have running at the moment and peak them during the week. We will have a good whodunit and a great chapter in a particular story. And we will have a community story where our community has to rally together to save the street. That has been done before. I've seen Ken sitting down on the cobbles in past episodes. But this is a more Manctopia-type threat to the street which feels more modern. Rising to the challenge of that.

"But there will be a stunt for the 60th anniversary and a little bit of the spectacular still there. We are going to do 'close contact cohort' for the first time. Which basically requires two or three of the actors to be tested every two or three days and for them to isolate only with themselves. And the stunt crews to do the same. So they can be within two metres of each other for this particular stunt.

"It's a balance of two safeties. The stunt people have to be there to make sure our actors are safe. And that is really important. As is people not spreading the virus. So it's a combination of using this testing regime and a bit of isolation to allow us to film this stunt in that way. It is new territory for us."

Q: A street created by Tony Warren has been a thread through so many viewers' lives. A place we can escape to. In some cases for 60 years. What are your thoughts about that?

"Coronation Street is very special. It's about the humanity of seeing characters developed through the brains, intelligences and hearts of so many people. And seeing how they deal with situations you know you may have to deal with yourself in life. It's a guide to humanity with a little bit of comfort blanket thrown in along with a little bit of sharp, northern wit. People drift away from Coronation Street and they drift back. The great thing is it is always there for them."

Q: What are your hopes for the next 60 years of Coronation Street?

"I hope Coronation Street continues to be modern. That after I have stopped somebody doesn't come in and say, 'What we like is about Coronation Street is it's nostalgic, harking back to an old era.' I used to have big discussions with David Liddiment, former director of programmes at ITV, about what would Coronation Street really be like if it was in Salford today? Would The Kabin have a metal grill and should we knock down the medical centre and put a block of flats there?

"For me that is all cosmetic. It is more about the characters. Do the characters feel modern? Is Gemma the sort of person you come across in the street in Manchester? If those characters are modern and not a parody of themselves I don't think it matters what buildings they live in.

"It is an honour to do the job I do and be a part of Corrie. If the writers are the keepers of the show's 'holy flame' then maybe I'm the person with the match. But I'm only allowed to light it from time to time. It's a very privileged position to be in.

"So long as we are true to how things are out there in the real world then I don't think there is much doubt that Coronation Street will be around for another 60 years."



INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM ROACHE OBE

Q: How has Coronation Street survived on TV for 60 years?

"The reasons for Coronation Street's success? First of all there is a quality threshold. It has to be well produced, directed and acted. You then look at what it is. It's just about a group of people. Some shows are about police, courtrooms or hospitals. We aren't any of those but we're all of them. So we can have anything we want. We are about people.

"Coronation Street is about a small sovereign community which people can identify with and there is no reason why that shouldn't go on for ever and ever. So long as we retain the truth and the humour of the North West.

"Tony Warren created Coronation Street in 1960 and his legacy absolutely lives on. He had an insight into what was to come. Although I don't think he realised himself that he was on the crest of the wave of the realism sweeping through the acting profession.

"People often quote Marlon Brando and James Dean in the cinema and John Osborne with Look Back In Anger in the theatre. We were the kitchen sink drama on television. Very much a cutting edge drama serial. There were no 'soaps' as such in those days.

"Today we can draw on all of the Street's long history for present day storylines and characters. There are not many shows that can do that. Call on itself from 60 years ago. It's a wonderful thing to have."

Q: A street created by Tony Warren has been a thread through so many viewers' lives. A place we can escape to. In some cases for 60 years. What are your thoughts about that?

"What is wonderful is when you hear people talking about Coronation Street. So many people sat at their grandma's knee to watch it when they were young. The parents were busy so would say, 'Go and sit with your gran and watch Coronation Street.' A lot of people have started that way.

"And then later on they've grown up, had children of their own and had grandchildren. We now have people who have grandchildren who were once a young child sitting with their gran themselves when Coronation Street first started. Not many shows can claim that. So it has that family connection which is truly wonderful and quite unique."

Q: What was it like returning to filming this autumn after lockdown?

"It was pretty much the longest period of time I had physically been away from Coronation Street in 60 years. It was like going back to school after the holidays. And I was going back to a totally different set up.

"But I had already gone in to do an interview with Joanna Lumley for part of her latest TV project. Of course her first break was playing Ken's girlfriend Elaine Perkins in 1973. I've met her since she left Coronation Street at an awards ceremony and at Windsor Castle when it reopened after the fire. Various celebrities were invited to mingle with the royal family and I was one of those and so was she.

"So I had seen the studio in its new marked out protocols state and it wasn't such a big shock. I quite like it. It's very peaceful at work and everything is done very well. There is a great feeling of camaraderie among the actors. It's just strange that you can't be nearer to each other in a scene than two metres. But so far that hasn't been a problem."

Q: Having been a part of your life for 60 years now, was lockdown a difficult time, not being able to work and mix with other members of the cast?

"I know lockdown has been very hard for a lot of people. I was very fortunate. My two children Will and Verity live in a flat in London and they have been up with me the whole time. We all get on very well. Every evening at 9:30 we'd have our cinema evening where we watch a half hour comedy like The Vicar of Dibley or something. And then we watch a good classic film. The house is big enough for us to have our own areas and we have a nice big garden. Being able to sit out in the lovely weather to begin with. So I know how very fortunate I have been while fully appreciating it hasn't been the same for many people."

Q: Lockdown highlighted the value of local communities like Weatherfield. Of people supporting and looking after their neighbours. What are your thoughts about that?

"In many ways there is a lot of good going to come out of this period. People who were very busy, rushing around with busy lives, have had time to reflect. To maybe think about their life and see areas that maybe they could change. Hopefully, it will have made people care more about other people. They will be more caring and considerate.

"Ken has lived on the same street his entire life when he could have moved away. People sometimes don't appreciate what they have close to home. You hear the story of the person who is searching for the meaning of life and they travel all over the world. And eventually they realise that all of the answers were back home in their own backyard.

"In other words, the journey in life is an inward journey. That's how you find out everything as and when it is right for you. Appreciating the here and now and where you are is all part of that."

Q: You hold the Guinness World Record for the longest serving actor in a continuing TV drama. How does that make you feel?

"I'm on the wonderful ship Coronation Street. It has taken me there. Coronation Street is the longest running ongoing drama in the world and I am just part of that. So I am very fortunate to have been with this wonderful show that I absolutely love and enjoy. And a show that has been so successful.

"Coronation Street has got a big heart. It's a happy place to come to work. I look forward to going to work. I enjoy doing the scenes. That comes through on screen. There's no doubt about that. Part of Coronation Street's success is the love and the enjoyment for the show."

Q: It has been said that you have lived the life of another person as well as your own. Do you see it like that?

"Most people don't get to live another life like that. I am not Ken. But I like him and I am his caretaker and I care for him. I am an actor. But Ken is more than just a part that I play. He is another being, like a close friend that I inhabit and work with. Very few people have ever done that.

"I'm very fortunate that Ken wasn't some horrible vicious serial killer or someone you wouldn't be too happy to play. He has been a guy who is trying to keep peace with his dysfunctional family. That I love and like. So I am very much in tune with what he is and what he does even though we are different types of people."

Q: Can you tell us a little about Ken's storyline in the 60th anniversary episodes?

"I'm involved in a really interesting story that is very much Ken. In trying to save a part of Coronation Street which I really enjoy and like. And then I'm going to have big problems with my dysfunctional family. Peter is going to fall off the wagon again. It's all really good stuff. Powerful and always well written, of course. It's a strong storyline which I have really enjoyed filming.

"Ken has always protested for what is right. He took part in the CND marches and anti-Vietnam War protests in the sixties. He always takes a stand for peace, love and a caring community. I am very much in tune with that. The one thing I want more than anything is world peace. Imagine if we had world peace? If countries didn't have to spend money on armaments, that would solve pretty much every other problem we have. And that is a thing that is possible. If a lot of people seriously thought about world peace and being peaceful themselves, it can happen. And that's how it will happen. Not through governments. Through people."

Q: Do you think some people underestimate the skill and talent required to produce a show like Coronation Street?

"I'm sure they do because it is a fantastic team. And a very big team. Everybody on that team cares. That's an energy that comes through on screen. It's wonderful to have this team feeling. People loving, respecting and enjoying being in Coronation Street."

Q: Looking back to the early days of Coronation Street, Ken lived with his Uncle Albert, played by veteran actor Jack Howarth, who you knew before the show started.

"Jack went to school with Gracie Fields and I went to school with Jack's son John. Jack used to come to the school and always had a cane with an ivory top. I remember speaking to him then and I knew his son John quite well. It's quite extraordinary to think back to all of those links."

Q: Is it correct you went to the original Coronation Street audition not wanting the role of Ken Barlow?

"Yes. I went to the 1960 Granada Television audition for Ken Barlow not wanting the job. I had just filmed the lead in a television play. The play of the week on the Wednesday night was always a highlight and I had the lead in it. Now this was a big career break. And I filmed it at Granada. But unbeknown to me, while I was doing that Tony Warren took the casting people down to the studios, pointed to me and said, 'He's the one I want for Ken Barlow.'"

"I just thought Coronation Street was a new little local show. I had my flat in London and I was waiting for this TV play to come out. When Granada said they wanted me, I said, 'No, I've got this play coming out. I don't want to do it.' But my agent persuaded me to do the pilot because I wasn't doing anything else."

"Then my agent said, 'They want you Bill.' I replied, 'I've told you, I've got my flat in London and I'm waiting for this play...' He said, 'Coronation Street is only going to run for 11 weeks. So look at it this way. In one of those weeks you will go out on the Monday and the Friday in Coronation Street and on the Wednesday you will have the lead in the play. What a great shop window.' And I thought, 'Yeah. I like that.' So I said, 'Yes, I'll do it.'

"And then, of course, the minute Coronation Street hit the screen...wow. It took off. Because it was this new realism sweeping through the theatre and on to TV. I remember the director walking in and saying, 'What's going on? What have we got here?'

"We were instant celebrities. Instant top of the ratings and have been there ever since. It was an amazing time. You were recognised in the street from the start. It was instantaneous with everybody."

Q: Did being recognised in public take much getting used to?

"It didn't for me, too much. I'm a middle class person. My father was a doctor. I went to public school. I was an Army officer. Not many people know that. I served in the Gulf for two solid years. I was an officer, a captain, keeping the security. I had all of that experience before I joined Coronation Street at the age of 28. So I knew about life and had that experience by then.

"It was wonderful to have that recognition of the show. It took a bit of getting used to. I can understand when a pop singer maybe has a hit record and is suddenly feted. You don't have time to adjust to all of that. At first it is very heady stuff, people recognise you, restaurants will give you tables and you get certain preferential treatment. And you begin to feel pretty good.

"But then you get to another point where you realise you are no different to anybody else. It just so happens that your job exposes you to the public a lot. But you are no better and no worse than anybody else. You have time to adjust to that. And now I virtually forget about it. It surprises me sometimes when I go out but I just forget it and carry on.

"What I do love is the fact we're giving enjoyment. When I see a person coming towards me and their eyes light up with joy because we're like part of their family. That is what I love. Coronation Street has given so much happiness to so many people. When you see that in someone's face, that is a tremendous reward."

Q: Is there a place in the world where you were really surprised to be recognised?

"I remember being on a train in France and the conductor said, 'Ahhh, Monsieur Barlowwww...' You find that wherever you go. You will always be recognised by the British holidaymaker or maybe the locals."

Q: In the early days was there ever any risk of Ken being written out of the show?

"The trouble with Ken was, he was an educated university graduate from a little back street. So why is he still there? He would have moved on. He would have gone up in the world? There had to be that element of failure. It was mainly in his relationships. Of course he always wanted to write 'the book' and that never happened. So you had to have all that. It was a tricky one to overcome.

"The worrying time was when Ken's first wife Valerie, played by Anne Reid, was killed off in 1971 when Anne wanted to leave. I wondered then whether they were going to keep me on or not. I didn't know. But that was very early on. Very early days.

"Ken's mum and dad died along with his first two wives and his younger brother David died in a car crash. Ken was a bit of a one man Greek tragedy."

Q: Was there a time when you thought about leaving?

"In my forties I had a long think about it and really looked at the whole thing. But I just loved it so much. As someone quite rightly said, 'During the year you'll get some scenes that are as good as anywhere in any film or play.' And that's true because the writing is so good. You get wonderful job satisfaction and you get some security from it too. I thought about leaving but not really seriously and I never put it into action in any way whatsoever."

Q: You experienced a huge personal and professional loss when actress Anne Kirkbride, who played Ken's wife Deirdre, died in 2015. What are your memories of Anne?

"Deirdre was the love of Ken's life. Anne Kirkbride was such a lovely person. She was full of bright ideas and energy. Her laugh was never far away. She was a naturally brilliant actress with great comedy timing as well. I was just so fortunate to work with her for so long and so closely. I really loved her. I was very grateful for Anne."

Q: Ken's mother-in-law Blanche, played by the late Maggie Jones, is another of the all time great characters. Was it hard to keep a straight face at some of her acerbic lines?

"I will never forget the Alcoholics Anonymous scene with Ken's son Peter and the rest of the Barlow family in attendance. We were all so worried about that, because Alcoholics Anonymous is such a wonderful organisation. And there was Blanche saying all of these awful things about them. We thought it was going to be a disaster, but it turned out to be one of the classic iconic comedy moments in Coronation Street's history.

"That side of Blanche only came out as she got older. Having previously been a character as a younger woman, she became one of those wonderful older people who just say what they think. They are like little hand grenades going off all the time. But they don't care. Maggie's timing was brilliant. Absolutely wonderful."

Q: It is often said the comedy and humour of Coronation Street help set it apart from other shows. Do you agree?

"I do agree with that. It's a northern humour. In times of so much poverty and so on, it was their humour that kept them going. Other shows try to do something funny. That's missing the point. It's not doing something funny. It's seeing the humour. The writers are very good at that, but you've got to be careful.

"It's understanding that Lancashire humour that the writers write so beautifully and the actors know how to play. You get certain characters like the Duckworths and others over the years...it's just wonderful. It's a generic thing within the Street. You can't impose it. It's just there."

Q: You have played some great comedy moments yourself. Do you enjoy that side of Ken?

"Ken has had quite a few memorable comedy moments over the years. Falling through the loft and various other things. I love the comedy. Sometimes they make Ken a bit intellectually pompous or whatever but they don't need to do that. He's a caring man who has experienced a lot in his life. So he's got some wisdom now. I think that can be used. I really like that. He cares about his family even though they really are dysfunctional. But that's wonderful and long may that continue."

Q: How would you sum up the Barlow family?

"Each one of them has got something dysfunctional about them. All Ken wants is for them to be a loving happy family. Mind you, in the early days Ken contributed to that quite a lot as well.

"Casting took a photograph of me when they were casting Daniel. He's supposed to be a younger version of Ken, going to university and all that. He's almost like a clone of Ken. But he is different in other ways."

Q: Some people say Ken has always been a man with an eye for the ladies. Do you agree?

"I don't think he is so much of a ladies man. It's the fact he desperately wanted a loving relationship like he had with his first wife Val. And that's what he was trying to do. But they never worked out. So he went from relationship to relationship.

"I thought the relationship between Ken and Martha Fraser, played by Stephanie Beacham, was very clever. Because Ken had the dreams about living in London with the intelligentsia and all of that and suddenly this woman arrives on a canal barge and offers him this life. She loves him and wants him to go with her. Ken thinks, 'Yes, this is it.' But at the last moment he realises he wouldn't fit in. It isn't who he is. So it was a great revelation for Ken."

Q: You have always said retirement is not an option. Is it your aim to celebrate your own 100th birthday in the Rovers Return?

"Absolutely. I'm looking forward to that. I'm some eight years older than Ken so I will get there first."

Q: The Coronation Street set has changed over the years and yet remains the same?

"Yes, the Coronation Street set has changed physically over the years. And then when we moved from the old Granada Television site in Quay Street, Manchester to the new Street in Trafford it was twice as wide. It looked like a boulevard when we first arrived there. And the houses were actually real size.

"But you get used to that very quickly because it's the heart of the Street along with the actors, the writing and everything else. I'm a great one for living in the here and now anyway. Be resigned to the past, you live in the here and now and be optimistic about the future. And the here and now is just as strong and believable and true as it ever was."

Q: Is it difficult to keep the balance of attracting new younger viewers while retaining the older ones?

"You do get some people who say, 'I don't like the Street anymore. There's too much of this and too much of that.' Which is rather sad. But actually that is a compliment, because if the Street was not a living organism and adapting to life going forward we wouldn't be at the top of our game.

"There is a balance the producers and writers have to find. It's a very tricky one, but it reflects life for everybody. And life is always changing. The only thing you can be sure of in life is change. And the Street has to change with the times."

Q: Do you think Coronation Street can go on for another 60 years?

"There is no reason why Coronation Street cannot go on forever if it continues to adapt to what is happening. Coronation Street is a massive part of my life. I love it and I am eternally grateful to it. I love what I'm doing. I see the future of more of the same and more enjoyment."

