

## TELEVISION

# Jodie has time of her life

**B**BC One's *Who Do You Think You Are?* is opening up the world of history to a whole new audience – with a little help from some celebrities.

Returning to our screens for a 17th series, the hit show sees Doctor Who and Broadchurch star Jodie Whittaker live up to her Time Lord credentials by heading back in time to unravel her family's ancestry.

"I was really nervous ... this will sound narcissistic, but I was really nervous it was going to be properly beige," chuckles Jodie Whittaker, 38, of her historical journey.

"But it was the opposite. For me, it felt like I have a very strong identity with my mum, my dad and my brother as a family unit, but outside of that, at pretty much my grandparents, it stops there."

Helping celebrities to untangle their obscure – and in many cases long-lost – family trees, the series promises to uncover unexpected facts, alongside a few home truths.

"For a lot of people, if you go back three or four hundred years, you know, the stories have dissipated, but for us, our immediate family history has got slightly twisted or tweaked or completely

BY DANIELLE DE WOLFE

changed. The knowledge of my family history is really limited," says Whittaker.

Airing this autumn, the four-part series will see Whittaker discover more about her heritage, alongside Gavin & Stacey star Ruth Jones, comedian David Walliams and actress and activist Liz Carr. As with

past series of the show, the celebrities often make some life-changing – and life-affirming – discoveries.

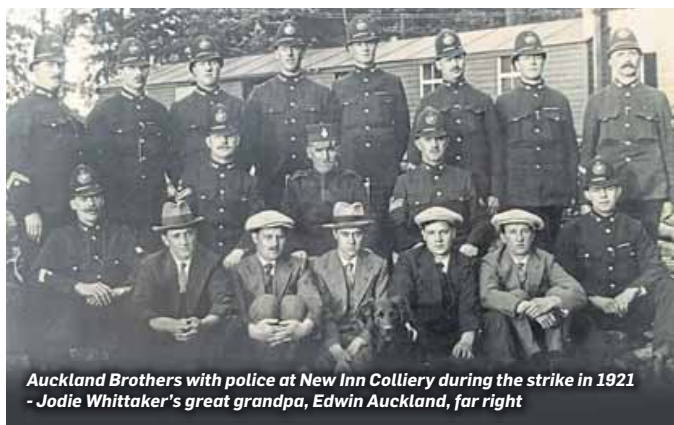
"I wasn't nervous about finding out anything that wasn't necessarily comfortable," confesses the Doctor Who star.

"You should know these things and these stories shouldn't be watered down, and they should be passed on, but they should be passed on with the correct information."

"My family, we tend to lose bits, not quite hear bits, so now at least we've got the actual story."

It was a journey that challenged Whittaker to decipher fact from fiction, including key events surrounding her great-uncle's sacrifice during the First World War.

"The story is open to interpretation, which is interesting as well, because some of it's definitive fact but some of it's how you emotionally respond," she says.



Auckland Brothers with police at New Inn Colliery during the strike in 1921 - Jodie Whittaker's great grandpa, Edwin Auckland, far right



Who Do You Think You Are? Jodie Whittaker

"It's so amazing – it's so emotional as well. And also, as someone who works in narrative, I can't believe it's real and I can't believe I was saying 'it's my dad's uncle!'"

However, uncovering hidden details surrounding the life of her great uncle Walter proved both a challenge and something of a revelation for Whittaker.

"I actually would make an excellent detective," she declares, "the jigsaw pieces start to click into place."

The journey also saw the actress explore some decidedly murky corners of the past, tracing back her Yorkshire roots and uncovering some unexpected revelations relating to her great-great-grandfather.

Working his way up from a child labourer in a Yorkshire coal mine to becoming a mine owner himself, the tale darkens when Whittaker discovers that he kept the family mines open during the biggest UK mining strikes of the 1920s.

"I felt very emotionally connected to the mining," recounts Whittaker. "It's not like I'm grafter in that sense – I've never worked in the dark for however many hours a day, but just to know that's in your history..."

"That's where I got my work ethic for my GCSEs from, right there," she chuckles.

Filming the show also acted as a point of reflection for the Doctor Who star.

Tackling the subject of class, the actress openly admits "I don't even understand what class I am".

Whittaker's episode delves into the very nature of the link between class and her identity, raising questions about the north of England, alongside emotional links she had never really explored.

"I think class is a really fascinating thing in this period of time, because it means so many different things," she says.

"I think the thing I feel is that... I'm an actor and I've transitioned (to) maybe middle class – my dad was brought up above that pub and my mum were brought up in that village – and I've always felt a very emotional connection to Yorkshire."

"I'd have been surprised had it been something other than that, if someone would have said 'actually, I think you're a descendant of a queen!'"

It's a journey Whittaker will hold on to and never forget, given the amount of documentation she has amassed over filming. "There's things that I was given, marriage certificates, death certificates, things like that, you get copies of that and I think it's about preservation."

"My grandma Rita, who the whole story follows, she was a massive hoarder and I've absolutely, sentimentally taken that on – like I'll keep everything if I think, maybe in like 20 years, this will be really interesting."

However, in many ways, the process of unveiling her family's story was the element that most caught Whittaker off-guard. "The team that make it happen – the production company and the on-the-road team – are absolutely brilliant because I am nosy. I'm a control freak," she confesses.

"I have found handing over control really hard. But ... I've had a lot of rewards for it."

**WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?**

**AIRS ON BBC ONE AT 9PM ON MONDAY**