

Happy Anniversaries!

It's always the same, wait ages for a decent anniversary and then three come at once. 2012 is set to be a bumper year for those who believe there is a special significance, and cause to celebrate, when a round number of years has elapsed since the beginning or end of something noteworthy, as this event-packed year sees the Queen, James Bond and Charles Dickens reaching important milestones.

Starting with her majesty, it's now 60 years since a young Elizabeth Windsor was summoned from a tree house in Kenya, where she was vacationing, back to blighty and the commencement of a reign that has seen her give her approval to 12 Prime Ministers, shake a million hands with her pristine gloved hand, and travel the world as ambassador supreme to her island realm.

This particular anniversary pulled me up short actually; is it really 60 years? I remember taking part in her silver jubilee in 1977, all of 35 years ago, a summer of street parties, endless sunshine and celebrations of the monarch's 25-year reign which were crowned with - believe it or not - a British winner of a Wimbledon singles title! Could that possibly happen again? Step forward Andy Murray and do your sovereign proud.

The Queen seems hardly to have changed since I was a boy. I thought of her as old then and I still do. The hair is grayer, but that's about it; she is still pulling off that delicate regal balancing act: of being in and out of the limelight at the same time, in touch and out of reach, all the while appearing immaculate, slightly apart from and above all that's going on around her, never too excited or too bored by her official duties.

And never giving too much away of course. After all this time we know she likes animals, but that's about it. Apparently well-informed she wisely keeps her opinions to herself and avoids taking sides or ever appearing partial - she was once asked which football she supported and her answer was just about perfect, saying everything, and nothing: 'I support all the teams'.

And Bond...is back. It's now 50 years since the Queen's most devoted and able civil servant slipped on a tuxedo, ordered a martini and began the stylish cavalcade of guns, girls and gadgets that is now preparing its 23rd offering to a still eager public - 'Skyfall' is due for release in October. Six actors have now played the role, diplomatically chosen one each from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and the Commonwealth (New Zealand) plus one more from England, the latest incumbent, Daniel Craig.

Why has Bond endured? Well, from a commercial standpoint the films come along just often enough to keep us interested but never quite sated, and the clever producers of one of cinema's longest-running franchises have managed to retain it's essential and perennially popular qualities while, at the same time, subtly updating the films as the first whiff of staleness reached their finely attuned nostrils. Bond has refreshed his values too; he no longer smokes and is a bit more considerate of women than he was.

The films are as popular now as they ever were, and the new one will doubtless make a bundle, but, for me, the titles, 'Skyfall?', are not a patch on the films that were adapted from the original novels - 'You Only Live Twice?', 'From Russia with Love?', And the music? Well, let's just say, the great John Barry is sadly missed.

And finally, completing the bonanza is Charles Dickens, Britain's premier novelist perhaps, the driven, prolific, passionate creator of nearly 1000 vividly rendered characters, born 200 years ago, who has achieved the astonishing feat of writing big fat books that take an age to read, and yet are still being read in our supposedly time-pressed age, books that seemed of their time in their time but have now proved themselves indisputably timeless.

Dickens has survived the curse of being a set-text at schools, unflattering Hollywood adaptations – one featuring the Muppets – and two centuries of fluctuating tastes in literature. No one writes like Dickens any more but it's testament to the power of his message and the style and wit with which he expressed it that we are still discussing his influence, and admiring his genius, at such a lengthy remove.

Three causes for celebration then and there is something comforting about all this anniversary business. With the world around us transforming itself at such a dizzying speed, we can reorientate ourselves by holding on to the few things that don't change.

Except of course they do, even Dickens' novels can't appear to us as they did to their original audience, but, to quote the man himself: *it is a succession of changes so gentle and easy that we can scarcely mark their progress.*

<http://www.dickens2012.org/>

<http://www.2012queensdiamondjubilee.com/the-diamond-jubilee/diamond-jubilee-events>

<http://www.beaulieu.co.uk/attractions/bond-in-motion>

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