SOAPS

20 best ever Coronation Street characters

Landladies, matriarchs, eccentrics, survivors

Paul Simper
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No one said it was going to be easy. For six decades Coronation Street has given us some of the most memorable characters on television.

The Sixties alone delivered such stalwarts as Jack and Annie Walker, Ena Sharples, Elsie Tanner, Hilda Ogden, Betty Turpin, Minnie Caldwell, Rita Littlewood (later Fairclough, then Tanner) and of course Ken Barlow.

You could make a Top 20 out of just the barmaids, landlords and landladies to have graced and served at The Rovers. And then there's the bad boys and villains.

Our roll call stretches all the way back to the show's beginnings. Yet the most recent has only been a series regular since 2015. Who are they? Take a look...

Hilda Ogden (Jean Alexander)

Hilda and all her greatest loves (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

The street's greatest gossip, nothing got past Hilda. Her cleaning duties at The Rovers might not have been done with great gusto but it was down to her efforts, not layabout husband Stan's, that they kept a roof over their heads at no.13.

Her trademark curlers and headscarf saw her through 23 years at the pub and it was a special moment when she was tasked with performing its 1988 re-opening ceremony after the fire.

Her loyalty to Stan, despite all the grief she gave him, was unquestionable. The scene where she opened Stan's personal effects after the funeral and found his spectacles is one of Corrie's greatest ever.

Raquel Wolstenhulme (Sarah Lancashire)

Sarah Lancashire's award winning portrayal of Raquel (Credit: ITV/REX /Shutterstock)

In the hands of almost any other show, and possibly actor, aspiring model-turned-barmaid Raquel might have met a very different fate. Her naivety could be played for laughs but Corrie's writers and Sarah Lancashire also recognised her as decent and trusting and worthy of much more.

She was badly treated by love-rat Des Barnes and was self-aware enough to realise she was settling with husband Curly Watts who she eventually left to once again pursue her modelling career.

Her Eliza Doolittle-style French lessons with ‘Professor Higgins’ Ken Barlow gave us: "Je M'Appelle, Raquel", a catchphrase that even merited its own t-shirt merchandise.

Deirdre Barlow (Anne Kirkbride)

Another emotional court appearance for Deirdre (Credit: ITV/Rex /Shutterstock)

Hers was the affair that brought Britain to a stand-still in the Eighties. When Deirdre eventually chose to stick with husband Ken, not wideboy Mike Baldwin, it made the national news.

The greatness of Deirdre, and of Anne Kirkbride who played her, was that she could always surprise you. She bared her fangs when Ken took up with secretary Wendy Crozier and delivered home truths to daughter Tracy that made her blink.

When she was duped by 'pilot' Jon Lindsay the nation responded with posters to 'Free The Weatherfield One'. And she could always be relied upon for a stuffed marrow.

Hayley Cropper (Julie Hesmondhalgh)

The brave and beloved Hayley Cropper (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

That the onscreen death of Hayley Cropper in January 2014 felt so painful and real is testament to what a wonderful character she was.

Born Harold Patterson she completed her transition during her early days in Corrie supported by love of her life Roy. Never a pushover, Hayley stood up for what she believed to be right till the very end when she took her own life after treatment for her pancreatic cancer failed her.

She leaves behind so many poignant and indelible memories, perhaps none better than her quietly holding hands with Roy paddling in the sea at Blackpool.

Blanche Hunt (Maggie Jones)

Blanche judged them all on Coronation Street (Credit: ITV/REX /Shutterstock)

Never was a woman so openly disappointed by and unstintingly critical of her family's shortcomings as Blanche.

Poor daughter Deirdre was one of the least deserving of her tirades – "Why can’t you be a proper daughter?" Granddaughter Tracy and son-in-law Ken, on the other hand, quite often had it coming. Her surgeon's scalpel dissections of the great and the good made her unmissable company.

She memorably hijacked Peter Barlow's AA meeting and even had it in for Postman Pat – "nowt but propaganda." When Ken once revealed though that he was extremely fond of her Blanche's shocked, tender reaction was terribly moving.

Roy Cropper (David Neilson)

Roy Cropper, loyal, steadfast. Not a fan of chicanery or poker (Credit: ITV)

Roy is the honest to goodness saviour of Weatherfield. Best known in partnership with his late wife Hayley he has also been the helping hand that showed Becky and Carla, and indeed new love Cathy, their best selves.

Roy is another who it's hard to imagine flourishing quite so gloriously in any other soap. Initially judged as an oddball loner and mocked by the likes of Tracy Barlow, Roy's obsessive and thorough nature has quietly paid dividends bedding him into the whole community's lives.

That's why his recent sleep walking episodes troubled by the death of mother Sylvia have been so distressing.

Rita Tanner (Barbara Knox)

Rita has seen it all at The Kabin (Credit: ITV)

Working with the likes of Mavis Wilton, Norris Cole and now Brian Packham would be enough to test anyone’s patience yet Rita knows how to handle them all.

She saw some sights as a nightclub singer in her youth but it was the betrayal by cheating husband Len Fairclough and her near-death experience with Alan Bradley and a Blackpool tram that really tested her mettle.

Like Roy, she has been enriched by youngsters like Jenny Bradley and Gemma Winter that she's helped. A brain tumour in 2017 proved more challenging than her last marriage to flaky Dennis Tanner. Blessedly she has seen off both.

Vera Duckworth (Liz Dawn)

Vera took pride in her time at The Rovers (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

As with the Ogdens there were those who looked down on Vera Duckworth and her workshy husband Jack.

Loud and terribly indiscreet, Vera could be relied on to put her foot in it at every opportunity. There was real pride though when she and Jack became licensees of The Rovers in the Nineties.

Vera's great weakness was their waste of space son Terry who promised little and delivered less. The scales finally fell from Vera's eyes when Terry sold his own son Tommy for £10,000 to his maternal grandparents. When she quietly passed away in her favourite armchair in 2008 Corrie lost one of its finest.

Jack Duckworth (Bill Tarmey)

Jack loved beer, pigeons and Vera (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

50 years of marriage to Vera show that for all the shirking, boozing and gambling (and that foolish affair with Bet Lynch) Jack was a keeper.

Never fooled by their awful son Terry it was nonetheless noble the way he tried to protect Vera from their offspring's shortcomings. His relationship with the son they wished they'd had, Tyrone Dobbs, was lovely as was the way he doted on those pigeons of his.

His various secret acts of kindness to various residents when he discovered he had non-Hodgkin lymphoma showed his big heart and his tender 'last dance' with Vera's ghost before he passed was a fitting end.

Becky McDonald (Katherine Kelly)

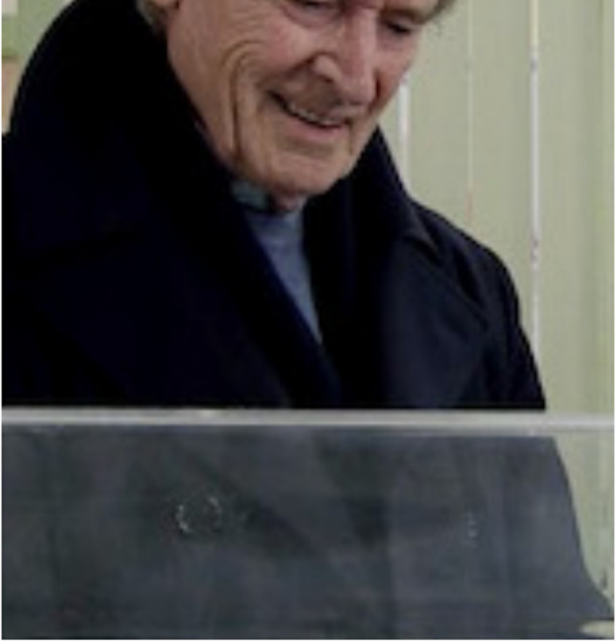
Becky is one of the modern greats (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

When she first appeared Becky McDonald nee Granger could not have got things more wrong. She went joy-riding in Roy and Hayley's vintage Morris Minor and was blamed for Roy's Rolls almost burning to the ground.

When Hayley discovered the faulty deep fat fryer was the actual cause it was the start of a beautiful friendship between the three that remained true to their very last massive hug. And it cemented Becky as one of the greats.

In her trademark leopard-print bomber jacket, she was never perfect. She stole, fought, cheated and got spectacularly drunk but as played by Katherine Kelly her fierce massive heart shone through.

Ken Barlow (William Roache)



Ken can smile more these days about his life on the Street (Credit: ITV)

One of the most remarkable aspects of Ken Barlow as a Corrie character is that he has spent almost his whole life wanting to leave behind the cobbles that have been his home.

Never capitalising on his university education Ken blamed everyone from wife Deirdre to offspring Peter, Tracy and Daniel for his own shortcomings. He is pompous, condescending and exasperating. Yet what has made us grow to love him is the fact that he is so flawed and that particularly in recent years he has finally begun to recognise his mistakes. Even if he still might make them all over again.

Bet Gilroy (Julie Goodyear)

Bet in all her glory (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

The gold standard for Corrie barmaids. Bet Gilroy nee Lynch then rose above that station when she became Nelson & Ridley's first single manageress to run The Rovers in 1985.

For years she was blighted by a procession of unworthy men but did find someone who genuinely cared for her when she married theatrical agent Alec Gilroy. Typical Bet, their marriage also meant she could hang onto her beloved pub when money troubles hit. The closest she came to breaking was when fire gutted The Rovers in 1986. That more than any man gave her a sense of worth.

David Platt (Jack P Shepherd)

David Platt has had a lot to ponder over the years (Credit: ITV)

There have been times in the life of David Platt when his character's reputation as a devil child reduced him to one killer stare.

In recent years though David has become so much more than Martin Platt and Gail Rodwell's damaged offspring. Mostly it has been the women in his life – a series of rough diamonds - that have humanised him.

First Tina McIntyre, whose baby Gail forced her to abort, then Kylie Turner, who died in his arms. Finally Shona, the mother of Kylie's killer. It was, though, his rape by Josh Tucker which showed us a David we had never seen before.

Elsie Tanner (Pat Phoenix)

Pat Phoenix as the magnificent Elsie (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

Weatherfield's first sex symbol, Elsie Tanner was feisty, proud and unrepentant, much like Pat Phoenix, not giving a stuff who judged her.

She had memorable battles with Annie Walker and Ena Sharples. Later she turned on herself declaring to Mike Baldwin that she looked like "a clapped out old tart." Married men were Elsie's weakness and she racked up three marriages before leaving the cobbles behind to run a wine bar in Portugal in 1984 with old flame Bill Gregory.

It was only fitting that their marriage should end

Hollywood Babylon style in a red sports car at the bottom of a cliff like the star she was.

Carla Connor (Alison King)

Don't mess with Carla Connor (Credit: ITV)

Not all modern day Corrie greats have a foot in the past but Carla and her love-life has more than a touch of Elsie Tanner about them.

Husband no.1, Paul, died in a car crash. Husband no.2, Tony, killed Liam, the love of Carla's life, and held her hostage. Fiance Frank Foster raped her. Husband no.3, Peter Barlow, betrayed her on their wedding night.

Alcohol and gambling addictions have battered her. Yet she has risen again, with the help of dead cousin Aidan's kidney, and is back centre stage delivering sassy put downs, sometimes relying too much on the Malbec but best of all caring for Roy.

Steve McDonald (Simon Gregson)

Grown-up Steve has been full of surprises (Credit: ITV)

In his youth Steve was just a good-looking tearaway. The passing years - and particularly marriage to three great forces of Corrie womankind, Karen Phillips (Suranne Jones), Becky Granger (Katherine Kelly) and Tracy Barlow (Kate Ford) - changed that.

Steve developed the acutest of funny bones and as a character kept on growing. We've seen him cope valiantly with depression and the loss of baby Ruairi with Michelle Connor. And his recent scenes with daughter Amy showed a maturity (once he'd stopped trying to throttle Tyler) that we'd rarely seen before of him as a dad.

Peter Barlow (Chris Gascoyne)

Chris Gascoyne nails it as Peter Barlow (Credit: ITV)

It is very rare for a soap character to be played by so many different actors – seven in this case – before finally getting it so right that he or she could be considered one of the greats. Hats off then to Chris Gascoyne for all that he has done to make the bitter troubled son of Ken and Valerie Barlow such a riveting character.

Once Corrie's writers discovered what a powerhouse they had they didn't waste any time putting him through the absolute ringer. His self-destructive behaviour, fuelled by alcoholism, has also threatened to destroy everyone around him. Of course we want him to get back with Carla but Lord knows how that would end this time.

Bethany Platt (Lucy Fallon)

Lucy Fallon as modern day Corrie heroine Bethany (Credit: ITV)

The youngest name on our list it's a miracle that either Bethany Platt or Lucy Fallon, who has so memorably played her since 2015, are still here.

In her early Corrie days Bethany was in the car that Richard Hillman drove into the canal. She also took one of David's ecstasy pills by mistake. Lucy, on the other hand, got the part after first choice Katie Redford was discovered to be too old.

She has excelled ever since doing extraordinary award-winning work with Bethany's grooming storyline. In fact she's so good that our only worry is that she will be tempted away from Weatherfield too soon.

Ena Sharples (Violet Carson)

Ena, always happy to point the finger (Credit: ITV/REX/Shutterstock)

Has there ever been a more fearsome Corrie character than Ena Sharples? Old Testament in her morals and attitude Ena held no truck with strumpets like Elsie Tanner and would have had plenty to say about the likes of Carla Connor and Peter Barlow.

She sat in the snug with her two besties Minnie Caldwell and Martha Longhurst setting the world to rights over a few milk stouts – "and make sure there's no lipstick on the glasses."

Violet Carson wasn't afraid to voice her own love/hate relationship with the character. She is so iconic though that no one has ever dared attempt to replace her.

Pat Phelan (Connor McIntyre)

It's no longer a secret: best Corrie villain ever (Credit: ITV)

Corrie villains have come in all shapes and sizes, some more lethal than others. Until the arrival of dodgy building contractor Pat Phelan in 2013, they tended to have at least a touch of the theatrical, none more so than 'Norman Bates with a briefcase' Richard Hillman.

Phelan introduced Coronation Street's residents to a whole new level of fear. First with his cruel manipulation and rape of Anna Windass, later with his agonising incarceration of Andy Carver and toying with Michael Rodwell. His rantings were biblical but played with such conviction and invention by Connor McIntyre that he will never be forgotten.