"Suddenly the last day arrives and it really hits you - oh God, this is it."

Matt Smith vividly recalls Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill's last day on set.

"We were filming in a hospital in Cardiff and were all a bit giddy," he says. "It was a bit like being on holiday. You're having a lovely time, thinking it will never end - or at least you've another week before you have to go home or back to school. Then suddenly the last day has arrived and it really hits you - oh God, this is it."

So when the last scenes were shot on that final day, were speeches made, presents exchanged, bouquets presented and tears shed? Smith seems bewildered by the notion.

"We're not really like that," he replies, deadpan. "It was moving to see them go, of course it was, but it's par for the course in the show. In fact, it's almost the nature of the show."

He has a point: in Doctor Who there are few constants. Whether companions leave under their own volition or, rarely, die in the line of duty (1980s companion Adric, for example, though if rumours are to be believed, at least one of the Ponds will perish), one thing is certain: they all leave in the end. Some may pop back - notably all of David Tennant's Doctor's companions from Billie Piper's Rose to Catherine Tate's Donna appeared in his final episode - but these are eye-catching exceptions. Once the Doctor moves on, he moves on, and finds another companion, in this case played by Jenna-Louise Coleman.

So what of Smith, Gillan and Darvill? Do they have a future together? "I'm very, very fond of Arthur and Karen and there's no way we'll lose touch," Smith says firmly.

"We've been texting and we'll always see each other when we can. Being on this show together was a bit like university. It's been three years and we've spent practically every day of those three years together. Being in Cardiff means you're removed from the rest of your life and friends in London so inevitably you develop strong bonds in what is an intense time. I can't imagine us ever losing touch. We're simply too close for that."

If Smith feels bereft at not seeing his chums every day at work, he doesn't show it. "I honestly don't have time," he says. "We've hit the ground running with Jenna and it's been non-stop. I've got ten more weeks filming before the end of the season and with the 50th anniversary coming up, it's not as if I don't have a lot to think about."

But has Gillan and Darvill's departure given?
something else to think about - his own time on the show, his tenure as the Time Lord?

With Gillan off to make a movie (Oculus) in America and Darvill returning to the stage in London's West End (where he and Smith first met, on the play Swimming with Sharks), does Smith nurse a pang of envy as they embark on new projects?

"There are absolutely things I'd like to do. I'd love to go to the States and do a film, but for the moment, I've more than enough to keep me busy, and it's work I love. I don't think there's any point in concerning yourself with what you might be doing if you weren't doing this. This is an amazing, extraordinary job and it would be madness - total madness - to be wishing it away when it's such a gift."

His friends' departure has made Smith evaluate the past three years. When I ask about the first RT photoshoot he did with Gillan back in 2010, in which she dressed as a kissogram police officer, and how he's changed since, he chuckles.

"If nothing else, I'm older and I'm definitely looking older," he says. "I started when I was 26 and I'm going to be 30 next month - and I still can't quite believe it - 30!"

"I'm definitely looking older. I'm going to be 30 next month and still can't quite believe it - 30!"

That they evolved together in the peculiar fishbowl conditions that fame brings has also cemented their friendship. "A job like this changes your life in a number of ways," Smith says. "I'm lucky enough to still have the same friends I did before and I have a strong family unit, so having great
AMY'S MEMORABLE MOMENTS IN TIME AND SPACE

2 SNOGGING THE TIME LORD
Before her wedding to Rory, Amy pinged back the Doctor's braces, banking on a night of passion. "She's a normal girl with normal impulses," said Karen Gillan, "but he basically sees her as little Amelia aged seven. So when she kisses him, he's like, 'Ooh, this is all wrong.'" (Flesh and Stone)

1 THE LITTLE GIRL WHO WAITED
Karen Gillan's favourite episode is her first one: "It has a particular magic, a spellbinding quality." Little Amelia (played by Gillan's cousin, Caitlin Blackwood) was the 11th Doctor's first pal. She fed him fish fingers and custard, but he left her waiting 12 years for a return. (The Eleventh Hour)

3 HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO
Centurion Rory dutifully guarded Amy for two millennia while she was inside the Pandorica. "It was brilliant," said Arthur Darvill. "I never thought I'd get the chance to be a Roman soldier. It was a bit like wearing a one-man band - the uniform made so much noise!" (The Big Bang)

4 VAN GOGH PROPOSES MARRIAGE
In a tearjerking episode by Richard Curtis, the troubled artist proposed to Amy: "We will have children by the dozen." After his suicide, Amy told the Doctor: "If we'd got married, our kids would have had very red hair... The ultimate ginge. Brighter than sunflowers." (Vincent and the Doctor)

5 GROWING OLD FAST
Trapped in another time stream, Amy waited 36 years to be rescued. "I volunteered to play older Amy. They were going to cast another woman," said Gillan. "I spent hours in make-up." In a heartbreaking scene, the older Amy gave up her life for her younger self. (The Girl Who Waited)

6 THE MYSTERY OF AMY'S BABY
Poor Amy - first her baby was kidnapped by evil Kovarian (Frances Barber, right), then she returned all grown up as River Song. "I couldn't believe it when I read the script," said Gillan. "It was the best. I get to be Alex Kingston's mum!" (A Good Man Goes to War) Compiled by Patrick Mulkern

"It's like being in a band. Actually, I'm one half of Wham!"