

One evening in 1966, viewers noticed something funny was happening to Doctor Who. "This old body of mine is wearing a bit thin," the Doctor, then played by William Hartnell, muttered, before collapsing onto the floor of the TARDIS. Soon Hartnell's face was bathed in a strange light. When the light went down again (an effect that worked reasonably well in black and white), it was clear the Doctor was quite literally a new man.

He was, to be precise, Patrick Troughton, an actor more than a decade younger than Hartnell. Troughton would have been a familiar face to audiences: he had, for example, been the first man to play Robin Hood on TV. But he clearly was not Hartnell and, though he was still supposed to be everyone's favourite time traveller, he made no attempt to look, sound or act anything like the actor who'd played the Doctor during the previous three years. Even his clothes had changed during the transformation! Hartnell wore a white wig and dressed like an extra from *The Forsyte Saga*. Troughton's appearance has been best described as resembling that of a 'cosmic hobo.' What was going on?

THE CHANGING MAN

The people behind Doctor Who had stumbled upon a perfect solution to a major short-term problem: how to continue producing the show without William Hartnell. The series had been popular since it had started in 1963, but the original premise of a 'frail old man lost in space and time' potentially had a limited shelf-life. Hartnell was younger than he seemed – he was only 55 when he started

playing the Doctor – but he couldn't go on forever.

Sure enough, three years later, and suffering from undiagnosed arteriosclerosis, it was proving hard for Hartnell to remember his lines. Add to this the fact that he was getting on badly with certain members of the crew, it was time for him to bid farewell. But could the show survive without him?

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

The genius of the 'regeneration' idea that Doctor Who's sci-fi premise enabled the series' creators to invent, meant the actor playing the Doctor could be replaced every few years with relative ease. A particular masterstroke was that each Doctor could be very different from the previous one while remaining fundamentally the same person, with the same history, memories and past experiences. His story could continue. It did not matter that the new Doctor would look, act and behave entirely differently. In fact, this was encouraged ➔



Tom Baker's Doctor wore a long scarf and had a penchant for Jelly Babies.



although a certain eccentric tendency has remained through all the Doctors.

Patrick Troughton was a success as The Doctor, but by 1969 and over 100 episodes, he was overworked and wanted to quit. This time, the change was incorporated into the storyline: The Doctor's appearance was 'altered' as part of the punishment for his interventionist ways, which also saw him exiled for a few years to Earth. The Doctor's appearance changed in another way too: the series was produced in colour.

The term 'regeneration' was first used to describe the process in 1974, when Jon Pertwee transformed into Tom Baker. By this point, the process was becoming

an established tradition. Occasionally, things wouldn't go smoothly. Following the metamorphosis of Peter Davison into Colin Baker in 1984, the lack of chemistry between the new Doctor and his assistant (Peri, played by Nicola Bryant) was immediately obvious. When Colin Baker was effectively fired from the series in 1986, he didn't want to take part in the scene requiring him to become Sylvester McCoy. The Seventh Doctor thus was filmed on his own, effectively regenerating into himself.

Doctor Who experienced a hiatus between 1989 and 2005 (except for the 1996 film), but since then the tradition of the Timelord regenerating into a new actor every four years or so has continued. It has undoubtedly massively increased the lifespan of the series. Now close to 60 years after the TARDIS first appeared on our screens, Doctor Who is the longest running science fiction series in the world.

Peter Davison's Doctor favoured an Edwardian cricketer's outfit (left). Colin Baker with Nicola Bryant as Peri (below).



WHAT? HOW? WHERE? WHY? & WHO?

THE EARLY REGENERATIONS:

1966 (THE TENTH PLANET): William Hartnell becomes Patrick Troughton. Other than the old Doctor's body "wearing a bit thin", we've no idea why. Hartnell's clothes change instantly, which doesn't happen with anyone else.

1969 (THE WAR GAMES): As the other Timelords impose a "change of appearance" on the Doctor to punish him, we last see Troughton spinning away helplessly into oblivion. By the time he wakes up on Earth in the next full-colour series in 1970, he's Jon Pertwee. He's lost some hair colour but gained some height.

1974 (PLANET OF THE SPIDERS): "Here we go again!" An unconscious Pertwee has been poisoned by radiation and simply changes into Tom Baker as he lies on the floor. Unexciting, but at least we get to see it this time. The term 'regeneration' is now used to describe the process.

1981 (LOGOPOLIS): A weird one. Tom Baker's Doctor's life (K9 and all) flashes before his eyes as he falls off a giant radio telescope. A bizarre ghostly figure called The Watcher merges into Baker who briefly changes into The Watcher before finally becoming the youthful Peter Davison.

1984 (THE CAVES OF ANDROZANI): Davison's Doctor has been poisoned. He manages to save his assistant Peri (Nicola Bryant) before collapsing onto the floor of the TARDIS. His life flashes before his eyes, in a nightmarish fashion. He wakes up as Colin Baker. "You were expecting someone else?" he asks, before staring directly at the camera.

1987 (TIME AND THE RANI): The TARDIS crash lands with the fantasy dinner party guests from hell, The Doctor, Bonnie Langford and Kate O'Mara, on board. Colin Baker refused to appear in this episode so the Doctor's face is concealed until he starts regenerating. Instead Sylvester McCoy is aided by some special effects and a blonde curly wig to create the illusion he is briefly Colin Baker!



Sophie Aldred played Ace, teenaged companion of the seventh doctor, Sylvester McCoy.