

The secrets and surprises behind

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

THEY call it television's most successful confidence trick. It also happens to be one of TV's most enduring and best-watched series. It is, of course, "This Is Your Life" which returns to the screens tonight. But why has it lasted so long? What has it got that makes it so popular? Why will twenty million people tune in to hear Eamonn Andrews say those four little words yet again?

FOR fifteen of the past twenty years "This Is Your Life" has been part of Eamonn Andrews's life.

But his could have ended on the programme. That was two years ago when he was trussed up in a sack ready to spring out and surprise magician David Nixon.

Nixon spent twenty minutes discussing an act with his associate All Bongo and Eamonn, complete with his big red book, had to sweat it out.

By the time he finally staggered out of the sack, Eamonn was suffering from exhaustion and lack of oxygen.

"This Is Your Life" was first launched by the BBC in 1955 — with Eamonn as the first unsuspecting victim.

It ran for nine years and a total of 255 programmes.

Then ITV revived it six years ago and every year since has seen a six month run.

Since then, each series has consistently been in

by **KEN IRWIN**

the top ratings. On its past record, it will almost certainly jump to No. 1 in the viewer charts by next week.

"Its success is in the element of surprise," says producer Jack Crawshaw. "If you take away the element of surprise, we've got nothing."

Drama

The secrecy and cloak-and-dagger methods carried out by the production team in planning the show would do credit to D16.

They even have code names for their various



victims to add to the drama.

Lulu was on file as "Kilt," Rolf Harris was "Tweed," Eamonn himself was code-named "Selfridges."

The producers insist on such strict secrecy, and if ever the person singled out for the treat-

ment finds out in advance the show is immediately cancelled.

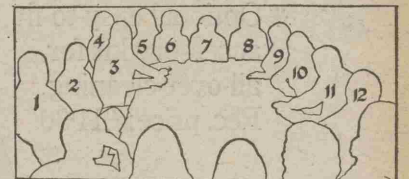
But just how genuine and realistic is it? How often do the stars appearing on the show know they are being tricked?

Despite tremendous precautions, there have been times when the

subject must have guessed what was happening.

Arthur Askey did. Arthur is one of the exclusive five — the others are Ted Ray, Petula Clark, Mait Busby and Eamonn himself — who has appeared on the programme twice.

Arthur admitted: "The second time, I guessed what was happening. But I put on a little act and pretended to be surprised."



THIS is the production team responsible for putting "This Is Your Life" on the screen.

No. 1, Jack Andrews, Light Entertainment executive producer; 2, Maggie Minchin, production assistant; 3, Royston Mayoh, director; 4, Sue Tindale, secretary; 5, Juliet Scroggs, secretary; 6, Debby Black, programme organiser; 7, Roy Bottooley, programme consultant and writer; 8, John Sandilands, scriptwriter; 9, Tom Brennan, programme consultant and writer; 10, Jack Crawshaw, producer; 11, Eamonn Andrews; 12, Kay Bird, programme associate. In the foreground — five research workers, who must remain anonymous to protect their cover.

Costly

For a half hour show, it's quite costly. Apart from flying long-lost relatives and others from all parts of the world, Thames TV lay on a big party for the chosen guests, their family and friends immediately after every show.

All the guests receive their expenses. Overseas visitors are put up in a London hotel for a week or so.

But the only fee paid — apart from Eamonn's — is £50 to the "star" no matter how big a name he or she may be. There is a production

team of seventeen people involved behind the scenes — including five researchers and three scriptwriters.

But, although they all throw up names suitable for the programme, it is Eamonn who has the last say.

The programme is often criticised for pandering too much to show business people.

Producer Crawshaw

and his team are aware of this.

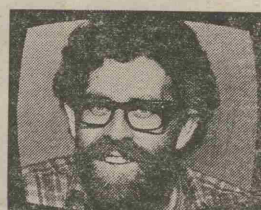
"My ambition," he says, "is to put the spotlight on someone who has achieved nothing at all. A completely unknown character off the streets — but with a real human interest story to tell."



JOHNNY SPEIGHT



CLIVE DUNN



ROLF HARRIS

SCRIPTWRITER Johnny Speight got the fright of his life . . . thanks to "This Is Your Life."

Johnny, creator of the Garnett family, thought his wife, Connie, was having an affair.

It happened when the phone rang at their home. He picked up the receiver and heard a man speaking to Mrs. Speight on the extension.

"If Johnny is going away tomorrow, is it all right if I come round?"

Puzzled, Johnny put down the phone and later asked his wife who had called.

She blushed and told him it was "a friend".

Strict

The next day he told his actor pal James Booth: "I think Connie is having an affair with a bloke while I'm away."

But, a few hours later, his fears vanished . . . as Eamonn Andrews pushed the "Life" book into his hands.

Connie's caller had been one of the pro-

Johnny got the shock of his life

gramme's researchers, doing a little undercover digging.

But that wasn't Johnny's only problem on the programme.

"I was so drunk," he says, "I couldn't stop talking."

Now he's a strict teetotaler.

Another man who was "sloshed" when he appeared on the show was actor Clive Dunn — Corporal Jones of "Dad's Army."

He was filming on Barnes Common, South London, when Eamonn

popped up from behind a bush and announced: "Clive Dunn, This Is Your Life."

Clive was taken to a TV studio and locked away in a room on his own.

He got bored and someone took him a bottle of white wine.

But he was kept waiting so long, that he drank the lot . . . before finally staggering out in front of the cameras.

When Eamonn brought on Clive's two daughters, he looked at them solemnly, and said:

"They're lovely—but who are they?"

He chuckles at the thought now, but says: "Of course I recognised the children. But only just — I was seeing double."

Crazy situations often arise as the show takes shape.

When Rolf Harris was the "victim" they wanted his mother and father to fly from Perth, Australia.

But Mr. Harris Sr. had never been on a plane in his life and he told the producers he had no intention of flying.

Tears

Rolf's wife, Alwen, finally managed to persuade him.

"I told him Rolf would be terribly hurt if his father and mother couldn't be here on this special occasion," she said.

So they came—and when Rolf saw his parents in the studio he burst into tears.

His father was in tears. So was his mother. "Everyone was in tears," says Alwen.