

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's Sky's Royal Commentator Alastair Bruce, who chatted to the Queen about her coronation in a recent documentary

The prized possession you value above all others... My grandfather's cocked hat, which he gave to me for Christmas when I was eight. He [Vice Admiral Sir Peveril William-Powlett] was governor of South Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from 1954 to 1959. He died in 1985.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Crowns And Coronations, A History Of Regalia by William Jones. I was given a copy aged 12 and it set me on fire.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Trying to get to one further petrol station when my car is on empty. It is silly.

The philosophy that underpins your life... If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again. It was said by Robert the Bruce, who was my ancestor.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother Vernon, 90. She is full of love and forgiveness. She taught me to talk to people in shop queues. She is also practical and totally unshockable.

Right: Robert the Bruce. Above right: Bollinger. Far right: on TV with the Queen last month

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... House numbers that are not clearly visible. You can waste so much time finding where someone lives.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd go wherever I want at a State occasion. I'm usually barred by media managers.

The film you can watch time and time again... Clockwise always makes me laugh. One of John Cleese's lines sums up my life: 'I can stand the despair. It's the hope.' Hope can be agonising. It took 22 years to make my conversation with the Queen happen [for BBC1 documentary The Coronation, which aired in January]. The hope it might happen was painful.

The poem that touches your soul... If by Rudyard Kipling. I wish I could live up to the line about filling the unforgiving minute, but I'm lazy.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... My mother says, 'Remember, people can be very disappointing.' Once you accept this, life becomes easier.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... Three diaries I kept during my senior years at school.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... St Dunstan. He was a fascinating English saint and wrote the first coronation ceremony.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Ringing my father, Henry, to tell him I'd been made head boy of Milton Abbey School in Dorset. It's every boy's dream to make his father proud. My father died in 2011.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Space travel has intrigued me since I watched Neil Armstrong's moon landing in 1969.

The unending quest that drives you on... To educate people about the origins of symbols and traditions we take for granted here in the UK, like crowns, which appear everywhere.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd break laws in order to give disadvantaged people new opportunities.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Fighting in the Falklands changed me. Fellow soldiers dying gave me the hunger to live life more – for me and for them.

The song that means most to you... Zadok The Priest, composed by Handel for George II's coronation in 1727. It so eloquently conveys emotion.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I love buildings in which man has worshipped and inaugurated leaders. I learn more alone, so I'll spend the day on my own. I'd hear the call to prayer in Hagia Sophia mosque in Istanbul, then go to Lala Mustafa Pasha mosque in Famagusta, Cyprus. Later, I'd walk down the Via Dolorosa, in Jerusalem's Old City. I'd visit the Dome of the Rock, then watch the sunset over Aztec temples in Mexico. I'd end up at home in Winchester with a glass of Bollinger and The X Factor.

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The biggest regret you wish you could amend... That I wasn't a better infantryman. I was a reasonable lieutenant in the Scots Guards but I wasn't a natural in the field. My soldiers deserved better!

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... People make assumptions about me from my accent. It's described as posh but I don't live in a castle and soldiers ensured my values are grounded.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To commentate on a key constitutional event and make the story accessible to everyone.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my orderly, Guardsman Jim Reynolds, was killed by mortar fire in the Falklands. He was 19 and giving first aid to a comrade. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

The order of service at your funeral... It would be at Winchester Cathedral, where I have worshipped all my life, but others can choose the details.

The way you want to be remembered... He endeavoured and encouraged.

The Plug... Please support the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which cares for cemeteries and memorials in 154 countries and helps educate new generations about the cost of war. Visit cwgc.org. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Glenn Close plays an eccentric mother in the comedy Father Figures, in cinemas on Friday. Seal's UK tour kicks off in Edinburgh today. And Ben Batt opens in The York Realist at London's Donmar Warehouse on Tuesday



NEXT WEEK

● James Martin serves up amazing recipes from his American adventure ● Which houseplants are the height of fashion? Monty Don reveals the latest trends ● PLUS Britain's best TV guide