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Coronation Street tour down under 1966; or, The day the TV people came

In the mid-1960s, the British television serial *Coronation Street* was at the height of its popularity in Australia, even eclipsing its viewer devotion in the United Kingdom.¹ Three years after its premiere on the London-based ITV network in 1960, episodes began airing on GTV-9 Melbourne, and on TCN-9 Sydney the following year. In Melbourne, the program screened in the primetime slot on Mondays and Thursdays at 9 pm, after the American soap *Peyton Place* (1964–69). In 1966, the Melbourne tabloid *Truth* was led to observe that it ‘is watched by more people per head of population in Melbourne than the millions who view it in England’.² Almost at once *Coronation Street* was embraced by Australians of British ancestry, who wrote to the cast expressing their feelings of homesickness for the ‘old country’. As an alternative to the mostly American offerings on Australian television at the time, the slice-of-life show was a piece of home.

Therefore, the announcement in early 1966 that popular stars from the show would be venturing down under as part of a goodwill promotional visit was eagerly received by fans. As publicised in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, Arthur Leslie (playing Jack Walker, the affable landlord of the Rovers Return Inn), Doris Speed (playing his wife, Annie) and Pat Phoenix (‘siren of the street’ Elsie Tanner) would be representing the show on a 17-day visit that would take in three of the major cities: Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. An accompanying photograph has Phoenix surrounded by her fellow cast

members with executive producer HV (Harry) Kershaw, looking with mock horror at her passport photograph for the upcoming tour.³ No-one at the time could have anticipated the level of interest or the turnout. Hundreds thronged to Melbourne's real-life Coronation streets to catch a glimpse of the stars. And when they flew out from Adelaide, on 2 April, tens of thousands of fans sent them off, inspiring scenes of adulation that were compared with The Beatles' historic 1964 visit to the city.

Two of the lengthiest accounts of the tour may be found in Pat Phoenix's first volume of her autobiography, *All My Burning Bridges*,⁴ and in HV Kershaw's memoir of the making of the show, *The Street Where I Live*.⁵ Granada archivist Daran Little also gives an account in *The Coronation Street Story: celebrating thirty five years of the street*, drawing heavily on Kershaw.⁶ With the passing years, however, the event has been largely forgotten to Australian history, and it is telling that by the mid-1970s *Coronation Street* had been taken off free-to-air in Australia, eclipsed by the popularity of locally produced shows and American soap operas.

The year 1966 also marked the tenth anniversary of television's introduction in Australia, and, as an early example of a media and cultural phenomenon, the tour is richly instructive, offering a particular frame in which to explore the power of the youthful medium of television in Australia, the impact of British and American television imports, the post-war migrant experience and the vagaries of taste. The purpose of this article is two-fold: first, to historically reconstruct the tour using a multiplicity of sources, notably newspapers, magazines, television guides and photographs held at State Library Victoria, as well as eyewitnesses to the event, and second, to unpack the factors that led to the show's becoming such a phenomenon before finally falling out of favour with Australian audiences.

As Kershaw chronicles, Granada Television, which has produced *Coronation Street* for ITV since it began, finally agreed to an invitation from the Australian commercial network to host a tour involving cast members of the show. The Manchester-based company had previously turned down invitations for fear it could be damaging to the program.⁷ At the time, the three major stations which screened the program and played host to the tour – TCN-9 and GTV-9, which were both owned by media magnate Frank Packer, and NWS-9, founded by young newspaperman Rupert Murdoch – enjoyed an affiliation. These stations (along with QTQ-9 in Brisbane) eventually coalesced into the different arms of the Nine Network. NWS-9's general manager Bill Davies, calling the tour 'the most successful thing we ever did', remembered, 'I went to London and travelled up to Manchester and saw the people who made the



Coronation Street stars Pat Phoenix, Mayor Matt Harris (with umbrella), Doris Speed and Arthur Leslie (shaking hands), on their visit to Coronation Street, Kingsville/West Footscray, 24 March 1966. Original negative, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Victoria, Australia. Copyright 1966 and image Museums Victoria

show; and I met the man who wrote it and directed it [*sic*], Harry Kershaw – a delightful bloke. We made a deal to have some of the cast come out to Adelaide.⁸ Granada's management decided which cast members would act as the show's ambassadors, taking into account their longevity and prominence in the serial.⁹ In addition to actors Leslie, Speed and Phoenix, who were written out of the storylines while they were away, the tour party included press officer Norman Frisby (who flew out ahead of the others to make preparations for the tour) and Kershaw.

After the obligatory press conferences in their native land and a luncheon with the Australian high commissioner to the United Kingdom, Sir Alick Downer, on 13 March 1966, the party of four were given a grand sending off from 10 Downing Street, London, by Labour prime minister Harold Wilson (reportedly a big fan of the program) and chancellor Jim Callaghan. Leslie, Speed and Phoenix 'had sherry with Mr and Mrs Wilson',¹⁰ and photographs of them with the prime minister and chancellor on the steps of 10 Downing Street were splashed all over the London newspapers. 'Cynical observers, on hearing of the *Street* invitation [from the governing Labour Party], pointed out

that a friendly liaison with Elsie Tanner and Jack and Annie Walker would hardly damage the party's popular vote';¹¹ Labour was facing a general election on 31 March. (They won easily.) Two years earlier the media-savvy Wilson had courted younger voters by being photographed with The Beatles. Leslie told reporters he was hoping to meet his cousin on the tour, who managed a bakery in Albury, Victoria [sic].¹² After another press conference and farewells, the party departed Heathrow on 17 March.

When the stars landed at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport on 19 March, however, they scarcely made any impact. If we are to believe Kershaw's account, only Frisby, from the Granada press office, was there to greet them. Kershaw's explanation – 'Our plane was some hours late and those fans who had gathered to greet us had drifted away'¹³ – is less interesting than his highlighting of regional differences in the reception of the British-made serial: 'We were in the least Anglophile of all Australian cities. Sydney was much nearer to the States, both geographically and culturally, than Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth and local taste ran more to American television than the products of the motherland'.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the party received a warm welcome from the New South Wales premier, Robert Askin, and the lord mayor of Sydney, John Armstrong. While in Sydney, they did some sightseeing, including a boat-trip around Sydney Harbour and (with the exception of Leslie) a visit to a striptease club.¹⁵ As a measure of interest in the show in Sydney, where it had a small but dedicated following, Leslie, Speed and Phoenix were guests on television chat shows, including Don Lane's *The tonight show*, and quiz shows, before flying off to Melbourne.

The reception when they arrived at Essendon Airport, on 23 March, was in marked contrast to the one at Sydney Airport. For Kershaw, it was like being 'dropped into another world': 'This was hard-core *Coronation Street* territory, still British in its tastes and yearning for any link with the Old Country. Hundreds of fans lined the airport balconies. The Press, too, were waiting for us'.¹⁶ Their arrival even made the front page of the *Herald*: 'Autograph hunters and fans – mainly women – mobbed these three stars of the TV show *Coronation Street* when they arrived in Melbourne today ... [Leslie, Speed and Phoenix] signed dozens of autographs and handed out photos to a screaming crowd'.¹⁷ 'And all the while', the Melbourne broadsheet added, 'the strains of the *Coronation Street* theme [by Eric Spear] poured out over the airport public address system'.¹⁸ The three were photographed sampling beer from the airport bar, and later in the day they were spotted arm in arm in Bourke Street, in central Melbourne, going to a city hotel bar.¹⁹ At a time when the *Herald* owned the rival HSV-7 station, *Truth* snarkily commented, 'How it



Coronation Street stars Pat Phoenix, Arthur Leslie, and Doris Speed chat to TV host Philip Brady on the bar set of GTV-9's *In Melbourne Tonight*, 24 March 1966. Photograph by Barrie Bell. Reproduced courtesy of Philip Brady

must have hurt the editorial conference to promote a TV serial presented by their opposition Ch. 9'.²⁰

In a unique publicity stunt, on the overcast morning of 24 March, the trio made a series of brief visits via bus to five of Melbourne's Coronation streets, according to a carefully timed but, one suspects, overambitious schedule: West Brunswick (9.10 am), West Footscray (9.50 am), Sunshine (10.30 am), Brighton (11.15 am) and Mount Waverley (11.45 am).²¹ Accompanying the trio was Channel 9 personality Philip Brady, who looked after them in both Melbourne and Adelaide. 'Hundreds of fans crammed Coronation Street, West Brunswick ... to welcome their favourite television personalities', who attracted people 'from all over Brunswick and surrounding suburbs'.²² Leslie, Speed and Phoenix were driven up and down the street in a bus, while 'the fans – mainly women – ran excitedly alongside raving and cheering'.²³ People arrived by taxi, and police had to cordon off the street already packed with cars and people. The three actors shook hands with fans and handed out autographed photographs. Some of the street's residents had made banners and signs to welcome the visitors.

The party's next stop on the itinerary made the front page of the *Footscray Advertiser*: 'Footscray gave the television personalities of *Coronation Street* a right royal welcome when they visited Coronation Street, Kingsville'.²⁴

(Nestled between the inner western suburbs of West Footscray and Yarraville, Kingsville has often been considered part of Footscray; hand-addressed mail from the period attests to this.) As before, the cordoned-off street was besieged by hundreds of fans – up to 700, mostly women – coming from Footscray and the neighbouring suburbs (one elderly lady, who couldn't get enough, taxied in from Brunswick). Several residents had also prepared welcome banners and signs; for example, the local grocer's shop carried the sign 'Welcome to OUR Coronation Street', and Mrs Sylvia Spence at 115 Coronation Street had a banner which read, 'Welcome to Elsie, Jack and Annie'.²⁵ So-called New Australian 'Margareta', who lived at 41 Coronation Street at the time, half-remembered the 'day the TV people came' to her humble little street: 'A man in a bus drove past the houses to announce over the loudspeaker, "All the way from England: the cast and crew of *Coronation Street*. Come and say hello!"²⁶ The actors chatted and joked with the crowd, shook hands and handed out more photographs. There was considerable amusement in having the actors meet their namesakes, including a Mrs Annie Walker of 90 Coronation Street, and a Mr Jack Walker who also happened to reside in the street.

On a vacant corner block (at the junction of Webb and Coronation streets), once the site of a quarry hole and now a reserve, a stage was set up to welcome the stars. Brady called for three cheers as the actors made their way up to the stage to be met by the mayor of Footscray, Councillor Matt Harris, 'who had been active behind the scenes in preparing the welcome for the international visitors'.²⁷ Giving them a warm welcome on behalf of the street and the City of Footscray, the mayor said it was a pity that the 'menfolk' were at work and unable to greet the visitors²⁸ – just like the husband of 'Margareta', who worked as a mechanical engineer in the inner Melbourne suburb of Toorak. Cliff Borlase, who lived at number 53, was aged 17 at the time and also unable to attend the event because of an apprenticeship. But 50-odd years later he could still recall the impact of these visitors on the street: 'Everybody I knew in the street, it was just a big buzz, they were all talkin' all about it'.²⁹ Phoenix and Leslie both thanked the crowd, and Speed said, quothably, 'You have very warm hearts – but I think you have wet feet'.³⁰

The trio's next stop, in Sunshine, also drew large numbers of women and children.³¹ At one point during the scheduled stops to the namesake streets, divorcée Phoenix got flowers and a marriage proposal.³²

In what can only be described as a whirlwind itinerary, Leslie, Speed and Phoenix made more personal appearances in Melbourne, gave radio and television interviews and, it appears, were special guests at the 1966 Logie Awards, held for the first time at the Southern Cross Hotel.³³ (Melbourne's



Adelaide enthusiastically welcomes the cast of *Coronation Street*, c. 29 March 1966.
Reproduced courtesy Nine Network Australia

premier hotel opened in 1962 and was the venue for the Logies ceremony on a dozen occasions.) On 24 March, Phoenix introduced live the night's episode of *Coronation Street* before she, Leslie and Speed were interviewed by Brady over a mock-up of a bar on a special episode of *In Melbourne tonight*.³⁴ Brady, by that time a household name, had graduated from doing commercials and sketches on the top-rating variety show to compering it on Thursday nights.³⁵ During the interview, Leslie complained about cold Australian beer. The trio made a second appearance on the show, on 28 March, this time hosted by television superstar Graham Kennedy, where they performed a sketch written by Kershaw. Somehow they found time to also attend the Moonee Valley horse races, give out prizes at a trotting meeting, visit the Royal Children's Hospital, see native Australian animals at Healesville Sanctuary, and put in appearances at Myer and Chadstone Shopping Centre. Despite their popularity and demand by television and radio programmers, none of this could have prepared them for the reception in Adelaide.

Their arrival in that city, on the morning of 29 March, made the front page of the afternoon daily the *News*: 'More than 5,000 people crammed into the terminal building and lined the road three-deep to the airport gates'.³⁶ Making their way across the tarmac, the actors 'spoke to about 1,500 fans, five-deep lining the fence'. Awed by the sight, Leslie remarked, 'Cor blimey, look at all

those people' and took a picture with his camera for posterity. One airport official was led to mutter, 'And they talk about teenagers flocking to see THEIR idols',³⁷ no doubt alluding to the enormous crowds that had welcomed The Beatles to the city only two years earlier. According to Kershaw, rather dubiously, on the second day of their visit, 'the Press informed us that the reception given to the *Coronation Street* trio was bigger than the Beatles'.³⁸ The trio was then driven by police escort through turned-off traffic lights and streets lined with fans to attend a press conference at the Hotel Australia, North Adelaide. In the afternoon, they attended a civic reception in the town of Elizabeth, in the northern metropolitan fringe of Adelaide, and were welcomed by the town's mayor, Stewart Lynn Gilchrist, and an astounding 20,000 people.³⁹ From the balcony of John Martin's department store the actors were given a most enthusiastic welcome.⁴⁰

The next day also witnessed remarkable displays of crowd behaviour along a motorcade route to the town hall accompanied by *Adelaide tonight* comperes Lionel Williams and Ernie Sigley. Sigley rode with Phoenix in one car, Williams with Leslie and Speed in another. More than '1000 people surged across King William Street to the median strip to see the *Coronation Street* stars', and on the street 'between 5,000 and 6,000 packed the road and footpaths' as the trio called on the lord mayor, James Campbell Irwin.⁴¹ Fans cheered and shouted, calling them by their character names: 'Good on you, Elsie', 'Want a beer, Jack?' Kershaw also recorded how Adelaideans had broken the hitherto unbroken invisible barrier of the blue line on roadways to meet and greet their idols and 'throw gifts, messages and flowers into the open cars'.⁴² Phoenix, touchingly, paid a visit to a bed-ridden elderly lady who couldn't come out for the parade through the city.⁴³

That night, Leslie, Speed and Phoenix performed a couple of sketches on *Adelaide tonight*, hosted by the Footscray-born Sigley, who first achieved prominence on Adelaide television (nabbing an interview with The Beatles) before GTV-9 lured him back to Melbourne. The next day it was reported that Phoenix had lost her prized amethyst ring, which she had worn in every episode of *Coronation Street* since it began. 'She believes she could have lost it among the huge crowds which have thronged around her in Adelaide.'⁴⁴ (Had a fan scored a nice souvenir of the tour?) Later, the actors had to be treated by a doctor for the 'Royal Complaint', on account of too many back pats and handshakes!⁴⁵

When they left the city, on 2 April, Speed and Phoenix were moved to tears by the estimated 50,000-strong farewell crowds en route to the airport.⁴⁶ 'My impression of that visit', Phoenix later reflected, 'is people, people



Violet Carson, aka Ena Sharples from *Coronation Street*, is surrounded by fans at Customs Hall, Fremantle Passenger Terminal, March 1968. State Library of Western Australia, image no. 346059PD. Reproduced courtesy State Library of Western Australia

everywhere'.⁴⁷ In fact, the turnout surpassed that for the queen mother a few days earlier, where an 'estimated 10,000 farewelled the Royal visitor'.⁴⁸ In Adelaide, Bill Davies recalled how, on account of the tour, the 'program's ratings went through the roof. It was an extraordinary experience for lots of people'.⁴⁹ Placing the *Corrie* phenomenon into context, the *Truth* was in fine irreverent form: 'By now the word will have reached Buckingham Palace: Never send the Queen Mother to tour a country at the same time as selected stars from *Coronation St.*'⁵⁰ The stars flew out to Sydney and left Australia on 5 April, stopping over in San Francisco before returning to England. Kershaw wrote from Granada thanking Brady on behalf of the party for looking after them 'so completely and self-effacingly' in Melbourne, and for his gift of a stuffed toy kangaroo.⁵¹

As a postscript to the tour, one of the most popular stars on the show – Violet Carson, who portrayed the cantankerous and puritanical Ena Sharples – paid a brief visit to Australia in March 1968. Because of her fear of flying, Carson travelled by ship and was welcomed by thousands of fans on the docks of Fremantle and Melbourne. In Melbourne, she visited *Coronation* streets and presented accolades at the 1968 Logie Awards.

Then she was chauffeured across regional Victoria to Adelaide, and she was welcomed by more crowds from towns along the way. Hundreds turned out to meet her in the South Australian town of Tintinara, and there were more crowds at Murray Bridge, over 100 kilometres away.⁵² ‘Thousands of people crowded the suburban route from Glen Osmond, in the foothills, to the Hotel Australia in the city, where about 3,000 people had gathered to shout, “Hello”, “Good on you, Ena”, “Good luck to you, Violet.”’⁵³ Police had to clear the path. And as publicity manager Rob Carless reminisced, ‘It was wall to wall people from Stirling [in the Adelaide Hills, around 16 kilometres from the Adelaide city centre] all the way down. People were throwing flowers out into the roadway and ahead of us. The road was covered in flowers. It was extraordinary’.⁵⁴

The 69-year-old thespian, according to Carless, was ‘beside herself’ at the star treatment in Adelaide.⁵⁵ Speaking at a press conference in the city, she said, ‘I felt warm, yet goose-pimplly all over’. Like her fellow cast members less than two years earlier, she got a ‘rousing welcome’ in Elizabeth from ‘thousands of British, now Australian, citizens’.⁵⁶ Like them, she appeared to a large crowd on the balcony of the John Martin building and sampled the brew at a local pub.

If all the attention bestowed on these older, unassuming British television actors seems hard to fathom today (before acting in *Coronation Street*, Leslie, Speed and Phoenix were veterans of the English stage), what’s clear is that the characters they portrayed struck a chord with Australian viewers. Phoenix believed the popularity of the show was due to its portrayal of ‘real people with real guts’.⁵⁷ Carson similarly credited the show’s everyday reality: ‘It’s real ... it’s real enough to fascinate people, and it’s more or less documentary’.⁵⁸ As such, journalists and fans would routinely refer to the actors by their character names, and the actors would happily perpetuate the fiction. As Jack, Arthur Leslie complained to a Melbourne journalist about having his television wife, Annie, in tow: ‘Like all husbands, I get sick of her nagging ... I put up with just so much and then I have to put my foot down’.⁵⁹ And when Carson received her Adelaide fans it was as ‘battle-axe’ Ena Sharples, complete with signature hairnet. On being regularly accosted as the character, Carson said it at first ‘irritated me a little but it doesn’t now, I don’t mind’.⁶⁰ But, while Carson was moved by her reception in Australia, by 1978 she’d half-gripe that it was Ena and not Carson herself who was famous: ‘She rules my life. I’ve begged them [the producers] to bury the old girl and let me go, but they won’t hear of it’.⁶¹

In retrospect, the 1966 promotional visit by actors all the way from Mother England was like a homecoming for Australian fans of British descent,

tormented by what historian Geoffrey Blainey memorably termed the ‘tyranny of distance’.⁶² In its homeland, the program quickly established itself as a staple of primetime viewing, cutting through regional and class differences for its portrayal of an urban, working-class street in northern England.⁶³ It also cut through ethnic and cultural differences in the most unlikely of places, including Thailand and Singapore. But, as Kershaw noted, ‘the warmest response to the programme came from [countries in] the Commonwealth’,⁶⁴ not least Australia. And for those with roots in Britain,

there was a strong nostalgia for the clustered terraced streets of the North-West of England. Many an Australian child had been told by parent or grandparent of fish and chips, local pubs, trips to Blackpool, cotton mills and cold, rainy days ... With all this going for it, it was not surprising that *Coronation Street* took hold of the hearts of the English-speaking Commonwealth. Nor was it unexpected when requests began to arrive at Granada’s Manchester headquarters for the *Street* to ‘tour’ these distant yet familiar lands.⁶⁵

Everywhere they went, the party encountered ‘the same friendliness and nostalgic desire for news of the people and places back home’.⁶⁶ Looking back, Kershaw saw ‘elements of cruelty’ in the tour, in so far as ‘the hunger for home was barely repressible in many first- and second-generation Australians’,⁶⁷ including those with British relatives and those who had migrated to Australia from Britain. In short, the nostalgia for the ‘old country’ was palpable and painful.

For ‘ten-pound Pom’ Joan Pickett, who travelled to Australia on the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme, the show carried an authenticity that enabled her ‘to enjoy and share Manchester life with her Australian friends’, while the local *In Melbourne tonight* helped her to become grounded in Australian values and culture.⁶⁸ Less well known is how it also spoke to non-British migrants and was an important part of their assimilation into British-Australian culture. For Austrian-born ‘Margareta’, watching and *listening* to the program was a formative influence in learning how to speak English in the new country, when the familiar complaint was ‘Speak English, you bloody New Australians!’ On recalling how these immigrants were drawn to the Lancashire accents on the show, she said, ‘We tried to talk like the characters on *Coronation Street* and thought that this was the way we *should* talk. But later we found out that the way the Queen spoke English was the “proper” English. We wanted to speak more Queen’s English’.⁶⁹ She further recalled how ‘the men’ would mimic the show’s dialect: “See you at the *poob*.” But we didn’t want to be the *poob* people anymore’.⁷⁰ To wit: immigrants were imbibing

the program's British values and class distinctions. How ironic, then, that NWS-9 boss Bill Davies had not been keen on taking the program in Adelaide – it had its station premiere in April 1965 – and thought Australian viewers would need subtitles to understand the accents!⁷¹

The regional differences in the reception of the show are worth considering. Regular columnist for the Packer-owned *Australian Women's Weekly* Nan Musgrove reported in January 1964 that TCN-9 had screened the show to an exclusive Sydney audience from the city's Coronation streets, avenues and parades.⁷² Musgrove was sure it would find an audience in Sydney but was later forced to admit:

In Australia, it has been very popular in every state except New South Wales. Sydney viewers, the most choosy in the Commonwealth, are not mad about it ... Here *Coronation Street* has a small but hard core of regular fans, a core that never changes ... But Victorians and South Australians simply dote on it.⁷³

She thought a scheduling change might improve its prospects in Sydney but was at a loss to explain its lack of appeal there. For Kershaw, the explanation lay in Sydneysiders' preference for American over British cultural products. But one also suspects that this was a reflection of Packer's 'determination to put an American stamp on his new channel [TCN-9]', and his outright rejection of the British model.⁷⁴

In contrast, Melburnians and Adelaideans were much more British/anglophile in culture and taste. Significantly, the satellite town of Elizabeth, where Leslie, Speed and Phoenix encountered some of the largest crowds on the Adelaide leg of the tour, was by 1960 well known as a 'Pommy Ghetto', and by 1966 'British migrants made up over 65 per cent of the population' at the northern end of the town.⁷⁵ None other than Ena Sharples had given her seal of approval to the town's planning and development.⁷⁶ Kershaw submitted that Adelaideans at the time were more British than the British, in that they were 'maintaining standards and moral values which, at home, were in decay. And, as *Coronation Street* had itself avoided the mainstream of permissiveness, the people of Adelaide were, in a strange way, closer to the heart of the programme than was its home audience'.⁷⁷ For a great many 'transplanted Brits', then, the show fulfilled an important cultural need. But Australia would soon tune out from the goings-on of the street.

Tony Robinson has argued that The Beatles' tour of Australia offered a preview of the differences between fame, 'earned slowly and carried permanently', and the more fleeting notion of modern celebrity, arising from the ability of broadcast technology to 'influence taste, cultivate sentiment and

shape culture'.⁷⁸ The *Coronation Street* tour perhaps illustrates this notion of celebrity more clearly; by the dawn of the next decade, the trio from England would have never attracted the sorts of crowds they had drawn only a few years earlier. And while it is easy to dismiss the mass hysteria as a modern media-induced phenomenon, this sort of phenomenon was not new and in fact pre-dates television in Australia. In 1954, fictional cowboy Hopalong Cassidy (as played on the big screen by William Boyd) drew enormous crowds on his 16-day tour of Australian cities, including Darwin, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide; as Derham Groves documents, he visited hospitalised children and helped raise money for children with disabilities.⁷⁹ The hero worship was symptomatic of a 'Western craze' that spread from America to Australia. But, as with the British visitors down under, Boyd/Hoppy struck a chord with children as well as adults, as witnessed by those who could still vividly recall details of the tour many years later. As such, we need to look deeper for explanations of *Coronation Street's* rise and fall.

In the mid-1960s, television programming in Australia was undergoing a cultural, political and industrial shift, which had far-reaching consequences for the continued popularity of *Coronation Street*. As television scholar Tom O'Regan has observed, programs imported from the United Kingdom and particularly the United States have long been the mainstay of Australian television culture, leading to a situation where Australia pays more for imported product than larger television markets.⁸⁰ Without clear rules for content regulation to encourage the production of local drama and documentary, producers in the early 1960s were unable to compete with imported product and were often forced to work overseas.⁸¹ Imports were an important and arguably necessary phase for the start-up costs of early television stations in Australia, as was the commissioning of cheaply produced variety and quiz shows made by Australians for Australians.⁸² The upshot was that little local drama was being produced. When Kershaw, who started out as script editor on *Coronation Street* before becoming producer, then executive producer, accompanied his countrymen on their visit to Melbourne's Coronation streets, he thought

West Footscray, the civic-welcome suburb, was a melting pot of not only differing nationalities but of conflicting emotions. The district was a transit camp, and immigrants who had failed to make good lived cheek by jowl with the hopeful new arrivals, Briton next to Pole, Italian to Yugoslav, some using the area as a springboard to a new life, others as a gloomy staging post on the way back home. Truly a serial writer's paradise. And [because of the underdeveloped state of the Australian television industry] no one to write it.⁸³

From 1965 to 1968, *Coronation Street* placed in the national top ten in the McNair Anderson ratings.⁸⁴ After that, it dropped out of the top ten altogether, increasingly edged out by newer content. The decline in the program's fortunes coincided with stricter rules for content regulation, or 'quotas', by the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, beginning with quotas for general Australian content and advertising in 1960 and, later, a specific quota for drama in 1967, which contributed to the development of a national market for Australian content.⁸⁵

In producing soap operas with a distinctively Australian flavour, the Australian Broadcasting Commission had notable success with *Bellbird* (1967–77) and *Certain women* (1973–76), created by the late screenwriter Tony Morphett. Ten Network (formerly called 0/10) commissioned a more risqué version of *Coronation Street* and in *Number 96* (1972–77) got unprecedented sex and nudity (including homosexuality) onto Australian television, made possible by the relaxing of censorship laws in the early 1970s. After a string of highly successful police dramas, Crawford Productions riposted with their first 'adult' soap opera, *The box* (1974–77). Reg Grundy almost cornered the soapie market with *Class of '74* and *Class of '75*, *The young doctors* (1976–83) and *The restless years* (1977–81).

In addition to the competition from local production houses, *Coronation Street* was up against the next generation of imported American soaps. *Days of our lives* was first broadcast in Australia in March 1968, *The young and the restless* in April 1974. Further to Australian viewers' insatiable appetite for all things American, changes in culture and taste saw a move away from the 'kitchen sink' social realism of *Coronation Street* to an escapism synonymous with Hollywood. As Kate Bowles characterises the difference, the American daytimers 'showcase a certain kind of tragic glamour which can be regarded as a house style' with an emphasis on wealth and power, while their British counterparts are 'naturalistic dramas, notorious for their lack of glamour', with a 'highly self-conscious attention to detail, particularly in terms of the producers' perception of class authenticity'.⁸⁶ Or, as one Sydney journalist put it in 1966, *Coronation Street* is a 'kind of fish and chips version of *Peyton Place*'.⁸⁷ (When *Coronation Street* was finally shown in America, in 1972, the response was lukewarm.)

Brady thinks the inferior quality of kinescope recordings of the show may also have contributed to its decline in Australia, especially when compared with more polished American product.⁸⁸ Still, Australia continued to purchase British product in the 1970s (especially the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which, because of its longstanding association with the British

Broadcasting Corporation, enjoyed competitive price structures for content). Coupled with stiff competition from local and American dramas, including soap operas, *Coronation Street* underwent regular changes in its schedule in the 1970s, with Channel 9 discontinuing the show in 1976. Transmissions resumed in 1979 (in colour), but the show left free-to-air for good in 1983.⁸⁹

This Americanisation of public taste was no doubt symptomatic of a larger shift from British culture as a dominant influence to American culture. In her memoir, *Foreign Correspondence*, Sydney-born writer and expat Geraldine Brooks wrote of this shift as something new and exciting, when, after President John F Kennedy's 1960 electoral win, the nation's gaze was turning towards the United States, and Australians were finally throwing off the shackles of their British heritage:

Slowly, American syndicated columnists began to leaven the British drone in our newspapers. In 1966 we shed the ridiculous complexity of the twelve-pence-a-shilling, twenty-shillings-a-pound currency we'd inherited from Britain and adopted American-style dollars and cents ... On television American programs started to edge out the British-made ones ... On Tuesday nights, when my sister wanted to watch the British spy spoof *The Avengers*, I lobbied desperately for the new American science-fiction series *Star Trek*.⁹⁰

What happened to the *Corrie* stars in the years following the two tours of Australia? Arthur Leslie died unexpectedly in 1970 and had to be hastily written out of the show. Three thousand fans turned out for his funeral procession in Lytham, Lancashire, England.⁹¹ Doris Speed left the show in 1983 and passed away in 1994. Pat Phoenix and Violet Carson continued playing their roles, on and off, almost to the ends of their lives. As a rising star of the early Australian television industry, Philip Brady was not himself star struck by the visiting trio from Britain. But after bearing witness to the fan reactions in both Melbourne and Adelaide, the long-time talkback radio presenter of 3AW's late-night programs *Nightline* and *Remember when* reflects on the significance of the tour more than 50 years on:

I can understand why Hitler hypnotised the masses in the 1930s, when the *Coronation Street* trio were in Australia. Particularly in Adelaide, it was mass hysteria. The fans, mainly middle-aged viewers, were very vocal in their adoration of their favourite stars, calling them by their character names rather than their real names. It was certainly a case of hero worship and I guess we all need our heroes.⁹²