

Written by Megan E R King @megaerki

# FROM BRAMWELL TO STEWART

MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS OF

*Jemma Redgrave*

AN ICONIC FIGUREHEAD FOR THE STRONG  
WOMAN AND THE SAPPHIC COMMUNITY



At twenty-three years old, Jemma Redgrave made her first appearance on British television in an episode of ‘*Tales of the Unexpected*’ in 1988. Prior to this, however, she had already made her debut on the stage.

It seemed inevitable that Jemma would pursue this particular career path having been born into the famous Redgrave family; now onto its fourth generation of actors. The Redgraves dominated the stage and the screen, particularly Jemma’s Grandfather, Sir Michael Redgrave CBE (and if you haven’t seen ‘*The Browning Version*’ for which Michael won **Best Actor**, I’d certainly recommend it). Her father, Corin Redgrave was also an actor and her mother, Deidre Hamilton-Hill, a fashion model.

It would seem that acting forms a crucial part of the Redgrave’s DNA and Jemma proves no exception. She joined LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Drama Arts) at eighteen and today, she still remains closely tied to the academy; who list Jemma as one of their trustees.

Jemma has now been active in the industry for almost thirty-four years. *I repeat – thirty-four years.* That’s thirty-four years of Jemma Redgrave on our screens and in our theatres.

But during that time, not only has Jemma become a popular face on our televisions; well liked amongst the general public - she has also gained an incredibly loyal fan following. (*You too, huh? Everyone’s welcome here.*) And I mean, a fan following that goes above and beyond: “Oh, that’s Jemma Redgrave, right? Yeah, I like her. She’s good in this.” Think more, tweeting 100+ times a day about our constant love and adoration of Jemma.

# SO MUCH MORE THAN A PRETTY FACE



*Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart*

I attribute this loyal and almost cult like following, largely, to the roles Jemma has chosen to take on (*and the fact that she’s super scrummy – obviously. But let’s not be shallow. After all, Jemma is so much more than just a pretty face.*)

One of Jemma's earlier roles saw her playing Doctor Eleanor Bramwell, a 19<sup>th</sup> century female **Doctor who** (*Hah. See what I did there? We'll talk about that later...*) challenges the patriarchal hierarchy in medicine. As a woman, Eleanor is often dismissed as inferior. Though, this doesn't stop her.



*Jemma Redgrave as Dr Eleanor Bramwell*

She establishes a free of charge hospital in the slums of London to treat the poorest of society, (History Check: The NHS didn't exist in the Victorian era. It was established in 1948. Prior to this, it was mainly the wealthy who were able to access medical treatment. Free of Charge Hospitals were set up by individuals like Bramwell and relied mostly upon charitable donations to function, though the conditions were usually pretty shocking). The popular series, titled '*Bramwell*', ran for three years and spanned four series; running from 1995 – 1998.

Since then, Jemma has taken on many roles representing powerful women.

# strong, successful, and independent

A PATTERN BEGINS TO EMERGE...



*Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart in Doctor Who*

Her role as Kate Lethbridge-Stewart in ‘Doctor Who’ began back in 2012. The show’s worldwide fanbase helped to expand Jemma’s pool of fans and she became a far more familiar face on British television from then on.

Forgetting for a moment, die hard fans like you and I, Jemma’s portrayal of Kate has become much loved by Doctor Who fans around the globe.

Just a brief browse on the *Official Doctor Who Facebook* page and you'll find comments like, "I love Kate..." and "I was so excited to see her (...) again", after her reprisal of the role in 2021. Jemma certainly had big boots to fill when she joined the show as the daughter of Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, who made his first appearance in 'Doctor Who' in 1968. He was present physically within the show up until 1983 and after that, was still mentioned regularly up until the character's death in 2011. But Jemma's portrayal of the Brigadier's daughter has become as much loved as the Brigadier was himself.

Her role in the show sees her portray a divorced mother and scientist who leads UNIT (Unified Intelligence Taskforce); a secret organisation with the sole purpose of investigating and protecting Earth from alien incursions. (*A big job, right? Not sure I could do it...*)



Jemma Redgrave as Kate Stewart, 2021

"KATE STEWART. DIVORCEE, MOTHER OF TWO

## *Keen Gardener*

OUTSTANDING BRIDGE PLAYER

*Also, chief scientific officer, Unified Intelligence Taskforce - who currently have you surrounded."*

Kate Stewart - 'Death in Heaven', *Doctor Who*

Kate Stewart is a breath of fresh air; a strong and independent woman who is able to hold her own. She has a successful career and runs one of the world's most important organisations - *(She's also an outstanding bridge player!)*

## **Kate Stewart is the kind of icon we need.**

And those kinds of roles didn't stop there. Not for Jemma. In 2016 she took on the role of a successful lesbian surgeon, Bernie Wolfe, in *'Holby City'*.



*Jemma Redgrave as Bernie Wolfe*

Her relationship with fellow Doctor, Serena Campbell, has been one of the most successful portrayals of a lesbian relationship on prime-time television. Though, fans were, rightly, gutted when the show's writers did the dirty on the two women and denied them a happy ending.

Seemingly, realising their mistake, in 2021, three years later, Jemma reprised her role as Bernie Wolfe (*clearly, 'Holby City' wanted to cash in on the popularity of Bernie Wolfe*) and made subtle references to her new life in Spain with Serena. (*Finally, a happy ending – though we were still denied the chance to see it on screen. And let's not even mention their fondness for blowing Bernie up...*)

This particular role saw Jemma's fanbase explode with new members. She was now established as an unofficial queen with a large sapphic following. (*And let's be honest, this is great. Lesbians lack representation on main stream TV – and Jemma has done wonders for tackling this in a sensitive and beautiful way.*)



*Jemma Redgrave's return to Holby City, 2021*

And speaking of fans, though I like to proclaim myself as her number one, that title really only belongs to one individual.



*Sandra Pascoe* runs the number one (and only), unofficial fan website dedicated to Jemma which is the best source for news and content. The website also has a large presence on twitter (@jemmaredgrave\_) and tweets regular updates about all things



*Jemma Redgrave at a Doctor Who Con 2016*

Jemma.

This is all done voluntarily by Sandra, who has previously had the pleasure of meeting Jemma. Sandra, who has run the fan site since 2018, tells me “It takes a lot of work – a lot of hours in the evenings and weekends are devoted to screen captures and the audio and video facilities (*all done around Sandra’s day job*). I enjoy it but I wouldn’t spend all this time on it if I didn’t respect and like Jemma herself.”

When Sandra first became involved in the fan site (*originally run by another fan*) she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her work with the site and her devotion to Jemma really helped her get through her diagnosis and treatment.



When she first met Jemma in the flesh, it was not long after her treatment had finished. Sandra said, “Jemma was a delight. (...) and gave some great post-treatment advice.”

Sometime after, she had the fortune of meeting Jemma again at a Doctor Who convention in LA. As soon as she saw Sandra “...without missing a beat (Jemma said) ‘**Good to see you again – how are you coping with the fatigue now?**’ It just blew me away.”

Sandra has been a fan since Jemma’s appearance in ‘*Cold Blood*’ in 2005 but she says, it wasn’t until 2012, when Jemma joined the cast of ‘*Doctor Who*’ that she “became a fully fledged fan.”

This is where I, too, first came across Jemma; having been a fan of ‘Doctor Who’ since the reboot in 2005. I have followed Jemma’s work ever since and I hope one day, like Sandra, I’ll have a chance to meet her too. And should this ever happen, I’ll



try my damn hardest not to ask for her hand in marriage.

It would be great to hear your own stories of Jemma. Have you ever met her? When did you first become a fan? What does she mean to you? Please feel free to share a comment below.

