

# St Luke's, St Luke, and the Doctor

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SERIES TEN OF **DOCTOR WHO** PLACES THE DOCTOR as a tutor at St Luke's University, Bristol. He's in an enviable position. He seems to be able to teach anything and anyone he wants. He doesn't seem to be complaining about teaching loads or the Research Excellence Framework. His lectures are blisteringly interdisciplinary, and probably to some onlookers have no discipline (in any sense) at all. It's just accepted that he's been a fixture for fifty, seventy or perhaps even more years. Perhaps he's been there for as long as St Luke's has existed.

As seen in *The Pilot*, from Bill's point of view, the Doctor's history is entwined with the university. In *Knock Knock* he's regarded as a living legend in the most literal sense by Bill's flat-mates. In the university's vault is a 'quantum fold chamber', wherein is imprisoned Missy, whom we learn in *Extremis* the Doctor has promised to guard for no less than a thousand years.

Steven Moffat likes to suggest that the Doctor lives apart from companions and viewers for centuries. Matt Smith's Doctor had two hundred years of adventuring between leaving the Ponds at the end of *The God Complex*, and visiting their younger selves at Lake Silencio in *The Impossible Astronaut*. He lived on Trenzalore for nine hundred years during *The Time of the Doctor*.

One might speculate that the Doctor has been living on the site of St Luke's for centuries, with the university growing around him. However, the Doctor has repeated this series that he is two thousand years old. One might easily quibble with such an argument. Steven Moffat has said in several interviews that the Doctor doesn't know how old he is.

Another source of inference is that the Doctor shares attributes with St Luke himself. Luke is the patron of doctors and surgeons. The Doctor is a patron saint of healers too. Steven Moffat has promoted the idea that the Doctor is the foundational healer and wise man of the universe. 'We get that word (doctor) from you, you know,' River Song tells him in *A Good Man Goes to War*. The *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* reports the tradition that Luke painted an icon of the Virgin Mary, justifying Luke becoming the patron saint of artists too. Moffat's Doctor has been a painter of icons. The eleventh Doctor painted a portrait of Clara in *The Bells of Saint John*, when in religious retreat. The painting of Clara seen in *Heaven Sent* was also meant to have been painted by the Doctor. Wikipedia claims Luke as the patron saint of students, too, which complements the twelfth Doctor's preferred alias, 'Doctor Disco', based on the first person singular of the Latin verb *discere*, to learn.

The name St Luke's University suggests a 'new' university, a former college of higher education which has only in recent years begun awarding degrees on its own account. Perhaps St Luke's has sprung up only in the last couple of centuries to harbour the Doctor and his prisoner. Whenever it was founded, I imagine St Luke's grew up in medieval fashion, with scholars and students gathering around the Doctor as they did in a settlement associated with the church or court, only afterwards seeking formal recognition from civil authorities. It's a pity, but typical of the rich loam of associations from which **Doctor Who** grows, that we don't get to see more of St Luke's and how it relates to the Doctor, but that might infringe the prerogatives of **Class** where aliens-in-classroom drama is concerned. So instead it's left to the viewers to fill in the gaps – but for many that's what **Doctor Who** has always been about.