more investigative research with somebody who's really clever and clued-up. Amanda she's called, and she refuses to be classed as a therapist. She's more like a life coach.

'I wanted to change certain things about me that were bugging me,' he continues. 'The patterns I fall into, [responding to] the way the world impacts on me, being sensitive.'

For Gough, 'undoubtedly' that feeling is tied up with Catholic guilt. 'I ain't been to church since I was 20. So that's 30 years [ago], and I'm still reeling from the dose of Catholicism that was bestowed upon me by my mum from the age of four and being an altar boy. Weirdly, my dad was totally atheist,' he says, smiling.

THE DEBUT ALBUM

THE HOUR OF BEWILDERBEAST

2000

Following the 1999 single *Once Around the Block* (above), Gough released his first album, also including *P—sing in the Wind* (below). It went on to win the Mercury Prize.

All that, he explains, played a part in his mental and emotional crises. As did the drinking that became a daily habit, at work and at home. 'Not to make excuses, but touring and making records are the kind of jobs where you can drink and still do the job well. Or, you think you can. I definitely did some gigs in the early days where I'd had too much to drink. But I could still manage them. Then as time went on, and I had more songs to learn and play live, I found I couldn't keep that up.'

The cracks began to show, publicly and internally. On a handful of occasions, Gough acted out onstage, either wrong-footing his fans or getting into arguments with them.

'*About a Boy* brought in a new audience. I did have an issue with doing it,' he admits. 'At the gigs there would be couples in their 30s who loved the soundtrack. And I'd be doing 20-minute fuzz guitar solos. Not to p—s people off but to show that I wasn't just the guy who did this mainstream romcom. That caused a bit of turmoil for me around that period.'

Indeed, having previously enjoyed near-blanket adulation from the music press and media, Gough began to endure criticism. To some, he went from bedroom/DIY-artist hero to Badly Behaved Boy.

We're talking just after the suicide of Caroline Flack, so I ask: can he imagine if he'd received the kind of social-media scrutiny and hounding that contributed to that tragedy?

'Gosh!' he exclaims. 'Well, I've had moments throughout my career that have hinted at what that could be like, a backlash here or there. I did a gig in Northampton, got a bit of stick for it and was almost banned from the town. And after the odd gig in LA when the internet was just becoming what it is now, people would post stuff…' He tails off. 'That's the problem with these social-media platforms: I do one bad gig and it gets talked about for five years.'

It is hyper-accelerated by Twitter and its ilk. 'Without a doubt,' he nods. 'The likes of poor Caroline Flack, can you imagine you pick your phone up and half the stories that are trending are about you? Because that must have happened to her. Most people don't care but try telling yourself that when you're in the eye of the storm. Most good people would be supportive of Caroline, and it's just a tragedy that she couldn't see past that.'

For Gough, there was turmoil at home, too. In part catalysed by his depression and drinking, in 2011 Clare, his partner of 15 years and mother of Edie and Oscar, threw him out. It was Christmastime and the day after Edie's birthday.

Gough, though, isn't bitter. Far, far from it. 'Bless Clare – that period we were together was eight albums in 12 years, if you look at it like that. And touring, and two kids. And I used drinking to make that more a cope-able experience, more pleasant. Which is again an illusion.

'So I think, more than anything, that's what took its toll. Part of me feels like Clare ended things for my own good.'

Or, he wonders with a frown, did she? 'She'd probably just had enough of me, but there's an element of me that fantasises that she did it as a goodwill gesture, and the last thing she wanted to do was split up.

Marrying his wife Leanne in March 2018

'I don't know. I think she'd just had enough of seeing me the way I was. I wasn't very easy to be around,' he says.

'But I got lucky meeting Leanne – she's helped me enormously to get back on my feet.'

She and Gough ran into each other two months after his break-up, in a pool hall in central Manchester. At the time he was out every night with a couple of pals, drinking away his woes. The musician wasn't looking to meet anyone.

'And Leanne is younger than me, really attractive – I'd have said out of my league,' he says of the woman who's still in his phone contacts as 'Leanne Paper Roses', the name of the singing duo she was in at the time. There's a 16-year age gap, 'which sounds like a lot and it is a lot'.

But they clicked and had their first date on