
FLAPJACKS *and* FEUDALISM

*Social Mobility and Class
in The Archers*



Edited by

CARA COURAGE • NICOLA HEADLAM

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EDITED BY
NICOLA HEADLAM
AND
CARA COURAGE



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For John Popham A Class Act

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With thanks to all of our contributors, our community of Academic Archers Research Fellows (aka our Facebook group and conference attendees, and you, dear reader), the team at Emerald, and to all the people of Ambridge who prove, year in, year out, to be such a fascinating and infuriating subject of study.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ACRE	Action with Communities in Rural England
Ambridge BC	Ambridge Before COVID-19
BL	Borchester Land
C of E	Church of England
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIOB	Chartered Institute of Builders
CPEC	Care Policy and Evaluation Centre
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EA	Environmental Agency
ENHR	European Network for Housing Research
FBI	Farm Business Income
GLA	Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority
ILO	International Labour Organisation

IoE	Institute of Education
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NRCN	National Rural Crime Network
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
NYE	New Year's Eve
OCG(s)	Organised Crime Groups
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act
PCC(s)	Police and Crime Commissioner(s)
PESGB	Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain
PFCC	Police, Fire and Rescue and Crime
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SME(s)	Small and Medium Enterprise(s)
UCL	University College London
UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of Children
WHO	The World Health Organisation

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Dr Cara Courage is a placemaking, arts, activism and museums academic and practitioner, and Head of Tate Exchange, Tate's platform dedicated to socially engaged art. Cara speaks internationally on topics covering the C21st museum, the civic and activist museum, socially engaged art in community and museum settings and arts and urban design, placemaking and planning and has published widely on these topics. Cara is author of *Arts in Place: The Arts, the Urban and Social Practice* (Routledge, 2017), and the co-editor of *Creative Placemaking and Beyond* (Routledge, 2018), and editor of *Routledge Handbook of Placemaking* (Routledge, 2021). More importantly, Cara is also co-founder/organiser, with Dr Nicola Headlam, of *Academic Archers*, and has co-edited three books on the programme, *The Archers in Fact and Fiction: Academic Analyses of Life in Rural Dorsetshire* (Peter Lang, 2016), *Custard, Culverts and Cake: Academics on life in The Archers* (Emerald, 2017), and *Gender, Sex and Gossip in Ambridge: Women in The Archers* (Emerald, 2019). Brought up in a farming family, *The Archers* was a constant refrain in her grandmother's kitchen, much to Cara's chagrin at the time. Many years of working from home with BBC Radio 4 on in the background brought about a process of *Archers*-osmosis that eventually wore Cara down to become a

fan, though her joy is found more in chastising those in Ambridge than celebrating them.

Dr Nicola Headlam is a founder of *Academic Archers* and an expert on economic development policy. Currently free-lancing, Nicola has worked in local and central government, as Head of the Northern Powerhouse and in parliament, as a regional and local specialist in the Parliament Library. She has conducted extensive international post-doctoral research and policy development work at the Universities of Oxford and Liverpool, always focussed on how to use evidence for policy development. Prior to that her doctoral thesis looked at the interface between the governance of economic development and infrastructure in Greater Manchester. Nicola has influenced policy at all levels and is a regular media commentator.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Claire Astbury, 25 years working in housing and 18 years listening to *The Archers* inspired Claire Astbury to present her first *Academic Archers* paper in 2018. She is especially interested in how housing needs are met in the village. Claire's housing background spans local government, housing association and lobbying organisations as well as board membership. Starting on the front line allocating affordable homes sparked a long-term interest in housing policy. Claire's current role is interim director of housing at Luton Council. She holds a postgraduate diploma in housing policy and practice from Sheffield Hallam University and is a Corporate member of the Chartered Institute of Housing. A keen contributor to the *DumTeeDum* podcast as 'Claire from Clapham', her *Archers* vintage is Ruari Donovan. Claire followed her 2018 *Academic Archers* paper with a presentation about online fan cultures to the 2020 conference as part of the fandom panel.

Maggie Bartlett has been a General Practitioner since 1989, working in a variety of rural and urban settings in Derbyshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Dundee, Scotland. Alongside this, she is a clinical academic involved in teaching and research in medical education. Maggie worked at Keele University until 2017 where she was the academic lead for

GP-based student teaching in Shropshire and a rural campus for undergraduate medical students in Ludlow. She moved to Dundee in 2017 as Professor of Education in General Practice and in 2019 became the Head of the Undergraduate Division of the School of Medicine. Maggie's research is in undergraduate medical education, focusing on students' learning in general practice, teaching and learning clinical reasoning, ways of measuring the quality of teaching in community settings and setting up new programmes of learning which are designed to improve recruitment to general practice especially in rural areas. Maggie has listened to *The Archers* consistently since she went to university in 1980; she can truly say it is a very important part of her life and that the characters are very dear to her. She attended the *Academic Archers* conference for the first time in 2020 and was proud to present her work there.

Charlotte Bilby had a 20-year career in higher education as a criminologist. Her research interests were in arts and creativity in prisons and probation, fictional images of offenders, and evidence-based criminal justice policy making. While working in universities, Charlotte carried out research for the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance. Charlotte tried, on numerous occasions, to bring *The Archers* into her teaching: Ed's probation, Helen's time on remand and Freddie's sentence all allowed students to roll their eyes and question what relevance it had to 'real life.' Since leaving academia, Charlotte has worked in criminal justice organisations in the public and third sectors on topics including knife crime, rural policing, sexual exploitation, and trafficking. Charlotte's career helped her question many of *The Archers'* crime-related storylines and discussed these at length with colleagues. She once tweet-heckled the two presenters of a paper on *The Archers* at the British Society of

Criminology annual conference. Not her finest professional moment. It was this experience that instigated Charlotte's papers at the 2018 and 2019 *Academic Archers* conferences, where she unexpectedly found herself defending Dorsetshire Constabulary's rural policing plan.

Helen M Burrows, is a Registered Social Worker and experienced Senior Lecturer in social work who worked in the East Midlands both as an independent practice educator and as an Outreach domestic abuse support worker until retirement in 2018. Her professional practice background is in Child Protection and working with adults with complex needs. Helen's research interests include social work education, gender and sexuality in social care, digital engagement, and more recently the role of popular and social media in informal and public education. This has led her to look at fandom, and how fan forums can support learning in a variety of disciplines. Helen has been listening to *The Archers* since around 1964, is the same age as Shula, and shares her birthday with Tracy Horrobin. A long-term member of the *Archers Anarchists* ('The Archers is real, there is no cast'), Helen has been involved with *Academic Archers* since the first conference in 2016. Since then she has presented papers at four of the five conferences to date: on using *The Archers* in social work education, mapping family dysfunction, Morris Dancing, and transformative fandom. Her chapter in this book brings her social work education paper up to date.

Lalage Cambell, now retired, was a Principal Lecturer, Reader and Head of the Department of Applied Psychology at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Lalage's research was based in health psychology initially, then recovery from centrally acting drugs, but latterly its focus was on student experience and wellbeing. Under the name Lalage Sanders, she is the

author of over 40 peer-reviewed research papers and two textbooks: *Ambulatory Anaesthesia and Sedation* (1991, Blackwell) and *Discovering Research Methods in Psychology: A student's guide* (2010, Blackwell Wiley, a BPS Publication). Born in 1951, giving her an affinity with *The Archers*, Lalage has been nursing an addiction to events in Ambridge since 1971 when she discovered it almost by accident. She had experienced a very deprived childhood as her mother would switch off the radio (the Light Programme) the moment she heard the first dum-dee-dum. The first episode Lalage heard included a scandalous scene between Nelson Gabriel and Lillian Bellamy and she has been rivetted ever since, apart from a brief sulk after they killed Nigel Pargetter. Lalage has had only a 50% success rate with her offspring as sadly only two of the four are *Archers* fans despite rigorous and sustained indoctrination throughout their childhood.

Rob Drummond is a Reader in Linguistics at Manchester Metropolitan University. Rob researches, teaches and writes about anything to do with spoken language (especially accents), and its relationship to identity. He is particularly interested in the role of language in the 'performance' of our individual identities in any given context, and the perception of that performance by others. Rob is currently working on a big research project with his colleague, Dr Erin Carrie, called *Manchester Voices*. The project aims to explore the accents, dialects and identities of people living in Greater Manchester. Part of this involves driving around the ten boroughs of the region in their 'Accent Van', inviting people aboard to talk about the way they speak. Rob and Erin also work together on the *Accentism Project*, uncovering and examining language-based prejudice in everyday life. Rob only learned about *Academic Archers* at the time of the 2017 conference, by which time it was too late to be involved. An avid listener

since Ruth nearly ran off with Sam, he made sure he was involved in 2018 and 2019. Rob had to miss 2020 due to work commitments, much to the dismay of his conference companion, his 20-year-old daughter Maya.

Keith Flett has been an *Archers* listener since around 1960 – his parents listened – but his conscious memories of Ambridge really stretch back to the mid-1960s. Keith is a research historian, organising the socialist history seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, and also works as a national trade union officer for Prospect in the telecoms sector. This combination of working-class history and day-to-day union work has given Keith a particular take on *The Archers* and he has edited the *Ambridge Socialist*, a weekly bulletin, now published online for more than ten years. The *Ambridge Socialist* reports, usually in a fairly light-hearted way, on the class struggle in Dorsetshire. That means we back the Grundys and criticise the Archers. The combination of an academic background and an active pursuit of the class struggle means that Keith keeps in touch with a range of *Archers* related groups, including of course the *Academic Archers* and the rather differently focused *Archers Anarchists*. Keith is 63 and lives with his partner Megan (also an *Archers* fan) in central Cardiff and Tottenham. He also runs the Beard Liberation Front which occasionally passes comment on events in Ambridge too.

Paula Fomby is Research Associate Professor at the Survey Research Centre and Population Studies Centre at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. She earned her PhD in Sociology with an emphasis in Social Demography at University of Wisconsin in 2001. As a family demographer, Paula studies the social, economic, and interpersonal factors that lead to family formation and dissolution and investigates

the influence of family composition change on children's wellbeing across the early life course. She learned to love *The Archers* in a Sussex country kitchen in 1992, but only became a regular listener via the podcast in 2009. Paula's perfect weekend includes serving as a judge in a baking tent at the Flower and Produce Show, trespassing across Brookfield to climb to the top of Lakey Hill, and indulging in a pint of Shires at The Bull, especially if Jazzer McCreary is buying. An earlier version of the chapter in this volume was presented at the 2018 *Academic Archers* conference in London. Many thanks to Cara Courage and Nicola Headlam for bringing this unlikely and phenomenal community together.

Ruth Heilbronn lectures and researches at the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education (IoE), specialising in teacher education, linguistics and philosophy of education. She taught in London schools for many years and has held Local Education Authority advisory posts before joining the IoE where she led the Modern Foreign Languages Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Ruth has published texts in the areas of the epistemology of practice, mentoring, practical judgement and ethical teacher education. John Dewey has figured largely in her work, as an editor of several collections and organiser of conferences. Ruth is an executive member of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB). Contributing to the *Academic Archers* with her co-writer and presenter Rosalind Janssen has afforded a very welcome extension to her academic community of fellow researchers.

Rosalind Janssen is Honorary Lecturer in Education at UCL's Institute of Education. This is where she first met her co-author Ruth Heilbronn and discovered their mutual love of *The Archers*. Rosalind has been an avid listener since the 1960s. An Egyptologist by profession, she was previously a Curator at UCL's Petrie Museum, and then a Lecturer in

Egyptology at UCL's Institute of Archaeology. Rosalind currently teaches Egyptology classes at the University of Oxford and at London's City Lit. She even has a course – *The Archers of Antiquity* – revolving around daily life going on at Deir el-Medina, a unique New Kingdom village. Rosalind and Ruth have previously presented papers at the *Academic Archers* conferences at the University of Lincoln and the British Library. Rosalind's MSc in Gerontology explains what prompted them to focus on care provision in Ambridge in 2041 for their latest contribution at the Academic Archers 2020 conference at University of Reading. What they could not have foreseen was that, just three weeks later, COVID-19 and lockdown would bring the topic of death in care homes, care in the community, and the contribution of the nation's carers, to the centre of the stage. They accordingly updated their presentation for the *Academic Archers Saturday Omnibus*.

Nicola Maxfield, after completing a history degree, found her academic career forestalled at the first hurdle when instead of going to study for a Masters, she had a baby. Nicola now has two adult sons and has worked as a teacher in Further Education for over 15 years and specialises in subjects relating to health and social care, including psychology, but most recently has been teaching Nineteenth Century History at an Further Education college in North Hampshire. The long postponed Masters will hopefully start at the end of 2020. Listening to *The Archers* since university, Nicola has eavesdropped on Ambridge since Mark Hebden died.

Christine Narramore started her study of soil at a young age making mud pies, mainly in her aunt's garden. This was followed by enforced gardening at Girl Guides which has led Christine to believe gardening is hard work, which is why when working for Cambridge University she seemed to be the only non-gardener in the department. Christine has a BSc in

Chemistry from Birmingham, an MSc in Soil Science (Soil Chemistry, Fertility and Management) from Aberdeen University, and a DPhil in Physical Chemistry from Oxford, on *The Calcite/Water Interface*. She taught for a semester at the University of Illinois at Chicago in the Earth Sciences Department and has worked for environmental consultancies. However, Christine is now an armchair Soil Scientist, who mainly bores her children. She has a strong respect for farmers, farming also being hard work. As a result, Christine is now taking the much easier route of being a part time civil servant, whilst being a regular attendee at *Academic Archers* since the inaugural meeting in London, and more recently attending the *Academic Archers Saturday Omnibus* talks.

Amy Sanders is a PhD researcher at Cardiff University, researching the relationship between the third sector and government with a focus on Welsh equalities organisations. Born to an *Archers*-addicted mother, Amy's childhood was enriched with Ambridge-life, listening to village affairs from before she could speak. This has given her 45 years visiting her much-loved Ambridge community. Prior to her PhD, Amy spent over 16 years working on projects that brought the third sector and public sector together. She was a director of a Welsh workers' cooperative which promoted equality and rights. As Projects Coordinator, Amy delivered social change projects using creative, participatory methods for Welsh Government, local and public authorities. Her projects ranged from participation and empowerment work particularly with groups labelled as 'harder to reach', to equality, rights and tackling disadvantage, anti-poverty and community development. Amy has also been an Anti-Poverty Officer and a Community Development Officer. She has educated adults and children in Wales and internationally (Poland, USA, Palestine, Indonesia, Portugal.) Amy has a Diploma in Social

Work, a Masters in Social Science, majoring in Community Development, and a first class Honours Degree in Social Philosophy. Active in community performing arts, she models herself on Lynda Snell <sniff>.

Olivia Vandyk was born in Wales to a military family and had a nomadic childhood. Educated in Oxford, she graduated with BA Hons in Classical Studies from King's College, London in 1999. Since then, she has amassed over two decades of experience spanning a variety of industries ranging from business and PR consultancy for FTSE 100 companies, including 16 years working at the highest national levels in both consumer magazines and online. Olivia founded Gingham Cloud, a communications agency in 2015. Her specialisms include creative advisory, copywriting and social media marketing for SMEs. From a research perspective, Olivia's interests particularly lie in the importance of both honesty and tone in how a business communicates. She is also fascinated by the connections that can be made through communities, both on and offline – personal, professional and commercial. Olivia has been an avid *Archers* listener since 2006 when she first started working from home and kept BBC Radio 4 on after the *Today* programme for company. She now makes her home in a Hertfordshire village (which has many similarities to Ambridge), with her husband and four children.

Timothy Vercellotti is a Professor of political science at Western New England University in Springfield, MA, and director of the university's London summer program. He teaches courses on political behaviour, media and politics, and public opinion polling. Tim's current research projects focus on the role that social class plays in mediating the effects of political discussions in the UK, and how trust shaped the choices that voters made when seeking information prior to the Brexit referendum. He holds a PhD in political science

from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Tim became curious about radio drama while taking his students on tours of BBC Broadcasting House during summers in London, and he began listening to *The Archers* in 2014. The patterns of political behaviour that he observed on the program led to his first *Academic Archers* paper, on voting in Ambridge, in 2018. Tim's chapter is based on a second paper that he gave at the *Academic Archers* conference in 2020. He is grateful to have found a welcoming and enthusiastic interdisciplinary community in which to deepen his understanding of and appreciation for *The Archers*.

PREFACE – THE HAVE’S AND HAVE NOT’S: WEALTH AND VALUE IN AMBRIDGE

Cara Courage and Nicola Headlam

This, the fourth book from Academic Archers, *Flapjacks and Feudalism: Class Politics in The Archers*, turns its attention to matters of kinship and wealth in BBC Radio 4’s *The Archers*, with sections attending to housing, intergenerational wealth, skills and access to employment and how all of these, and more, shape the life of those in Ambridge. Who has what, or not, who knows who, where people live and work, and who they work with, and the parenting they have, determine how our beloved Ambridgians fare in life. And this is what keeps us tuning in.

Think of the repeat broadcast during COVID-19 lockdown of the 1999 Ambridge New Year’s Eve, at the Millennium Ball at Lower Loxley. A black-tie event, the Borsetshire county set drank and danced the night away. With both Archer and Aldridge clans in attendance, we are privy to an extra-marital liaison, with the Brian Aldridge and Siobhan affair reaching its acute phase. This scene was interspersed by a far earthier party held at village pub, The Bull, with more ribald and rowdy fun for Eddie Grundy and his crew, the assembled proletariats led in a conga line to welcome the new millennium. Interposing the two parties, we have the hard boundary between ‘the have’s

and have not's' which is blurred in the normal run of Ambridge events where the propinquity of village life throws the classes together in their day-to-day settings of the shop and village hall.

There is a vexed question hanging over our village: is social mobility possible in Ambridge? This book covers the myriad of ways on which all forms of capital are unequally shared in the village and introduces the snakes and ladders associated with social mobility and class in Ambridge. 'The Fall of the House of Aldridge' could first appear as downward social mobility. Having lost their synecdochal Home Farm the Aldridges are currently squeezed (with only the one best tagine, the ignominy ...) into Willow Cottage, far more humble housing than they have been used at Home Farm. Through this storyline, we see that one of the more 'prominent' county families is suffering a reversal of fortune based on historic nefarious business practices of the formerly 'squireish' Brian – but, the family have still maintained a level of social status in the village (if not with the county set) based on their class identity and historical status as landowners. It is at 'the opposite end of the village' that the life chances of characters in the village of Ambridge are more defined – and fixed – by status at birth. The Grundys are perpetually disadvantaged and we see in their life's travails that intergenerational forms of capital – very much the lack of for the Grundys – are the clearest markers for class position in the village of Ambridge and that life chances and social mobility are circumscribed by accidents of birth.

Whereas the Aldridges have the economic capital that the Grundys lack, what both clans have in common though are cultural and social capital, albeit differing. In his defining text *Distinction* (1979) Bourdieu differentiates between: economic capital (wealth and income); cultural capital (the ability to appreciate and engage with cultural goods, and credentials institutionalised through educational success); and social capital (contacts and connections which allow people to draw on

their social networks.) Bourdieu's point is that although these three capitals may overlap, they are also subtly different, and that it is possible to draw fine-grained distinctions between people with different stocks of each of the three capitals, to provide a much more complex model of social class than is currently used. This multi-faceted model plays out through the machinations of the Aldridges and Grundys, metaphorically, from the Millennium Ball to the conga line.

The subtle complexities of class and social mobility in Ambridge was something that Charlotte Connor (aka, Susan Carter) foregrounded in her highly sympathetic reading of her character (Connor, 2019). Connor asked us to imagine the cauldron of resentment stirred in the young Susan Horrobin as she saw, through the window of her council house, the indulged Archers girls growing up in privilege. This fostered resilience in Susan as well as a heightened sense of the place of the villagers relative to one another. This sensitivity to the boundaries and codes of social hierarchy are core to the golden age of English sit com whereby the fine gradations of lower middle to upper middle class aesthetics and sensibilities have fuelled classics from Basil Fawlty's manic snobbishness in *Fawlty Towers* (BBC a), to the absurdities of Hyacinth Bucket in *Keeping Up Appearances* (BBC b), and the dialectic between Tom and Barbara Good and Margot and Jerry Leadbetter in *The Good Life* (BBC c).

Susan's sister, Tracey Horrobin, is refreshing in that she is untrammelled by the inverted snobbery that so torments Susan in her routine interactions. By storming the bastions of privilege – the reception desk of Grey Gables and the captaincy of the cricket team – Tracey acts as a robust decongestant to social anxiety and social climbing. Listeners were delighted as she 'levelled with' Helen Archer for advice about the intricacies of dating as a single mother, to Helen's obvious discomfort. Helen has the privacy mores of the petit bourgeoisie and was toe-curlingly mortified to talk frankly

about blended family dynamics. It was clear in this scene that Helen is 'good' single mother, with the attendant anxieties and angst, and that this gender and class distinction marks her out from 'bad' single mother Tracey, despite the fact that the mechanics of their situations are identical.

Flapjacks and Feudalism: Class Politics in The Archers is presented in five sections, across 17 chapters, and we begin with *It's who you know, and what you know about them*, continuing the focused topic of this preface. In *The Class politics of Ambridge*, Keith Flett applies an x-ray vision the village from a life devoted to teasing out the mobilisation of the class war in *The Archers*. Nicola Headlam, in *One in, One out: Networks in Ambridge*, explores the effects of the death of Joe Grundy and the birth of Rosie Archer on the kinship networks of the village.

The second section, *The Fall of The House of Aldridge, the Rise of the Oppressed Grundys?*, begins with a study of the melancholia at the heart of the Emma and Ed storyline, from Lalage Cambell in *'If you have security, Ed, that is everything': Deconstructing 'security' as a buffer against life's challenges*. The disturbing storyline of modern slavery is then given due focus and political context by Nicola Headlam in *Feeding the Horses: shining a light on exploitation hidden in plain sight in Ambridge*. The following two chapters put Brian under the spotlight: *Borsetshire businessman or feckless farmer?*, by Christine Narramore, who lays the blame for the fall squarely at the door of Brian Aldridge; and then *What to do when you're no longer Borsetshire's Businessperson of the Year, or how to handle a scandal*, by Olivia Vandyk who counters that with some decent reputation management and public relations the family could have recovered their reputation far more quickly.

Examining an ever-popular topic for *Archers* listeners, the third section is all about *Family Function and Dysfunction*. Helen M Burrows opens with a presentation of the use of *The*

Archers in social work teaching, in *Contemporary social problems in a rural setting: using The Archers in social work education*. Cara Courage then, in *Academic Archers assembly: putting the parents on trial*, presents the sometimes acerbic, sometimes touching deliberations from the *Academic Archers* cohort on sets of Ambridge parents. The accents of Ambridgians is an ever-popular topic, and next, *Academic Archers* house linguist Rob Drummond looks at the demarcations of language and dialect by an in-depth linguistic family case study of the male Grundys, in *Accent and identity in Abridge: the link between how we speak and who we are*. We then turn to crime in and what impact being one of Ambridge's have's or have not's may have on one, firstly in 'We Should have called him Damien': *A discussion of the impact of Henry Archer's early years on potential crimes of the future*, from Nicola Maxfield, who discusses the impact of Henry's early years on potential crimes of the future. Then, the Archers Exceptionalism deployed in the face of transgressions in *Fear, fecklessness and flapjacks: imagining Ambridge's offenders* from Charlotte Bilby.

The fourth section, *Housing and the Ambridge Fairy*, talks of the import of where one lives, and with whom, on life experience in the village. Turning first to that bountiful imp, Claire Astbury presents *Rich relatives or Ambridge fairy? Patronage and expectation in Ambridge housing pathways*, taking a deep dive into the housing history of Emma Grundy set in the context of the rural housing crisis. Paula Fomby looks at how the blended households of Ambridge function to protect young single people who are priced out of the village in *Staying in the spare room: social connectedness and household co-residence in The Archers*. Ruth Heilbronn and Rosalind Janssen, in *Can't afford The Laurels?: Care provision in Ambridge in 2045*, offer us a vision of the future of three Ambridge residents and how their current financial status plays out for them in their later years.

The fifth and final section, *It Takes a Village... The Structure of Ambridge Civil Society* begins with *Parents, siblings, and the pursuit of power: Predicting the future leaders of Ambridge*, from Timothy Vercellotti, positing on who might be the movers and shakers in Ambridge hence. Intergenerational differences and changing social etiquette are discussed in *'From the moment those two joined the committee it's been grunge bands, sumo wrestlers and soufflé competitions': What Ambridge's civil society says about UK politics in 2019*, from Amy Sanders. Our final chapter benefits from interview research from those silent in Ambridge, examining their discombobulated psycho-emotional experience of living in the village, in *A divided village: a narrative study using a theoretical lens of speculative ontology*, from Maggie Bartlett.

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Section 1

IT'S WHO YOU KNOW,
AND WHAT YOU KNOW
ABOUT THEM

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THE GRUNDYS AND THEIR OPPRESSORS

Keith Flett

ABSTRACT

The Grundys are the alternative world of Ambridge. Invariably down on their luck, often portrayed as lazy if not feckless and usually incompetent. This chapter speaks up for the downtrodden of Dorsetshire and in particular the Grundys. It looks at the development of the Grundy family in The Archers over almost 50 years now. It relates key elements in their lives, looking not just at the class struggle in the village but also the importance of gender in this. It draws on key players in the Grundy story from the 1970s including the late radio DJ John Peel who was for a time an enthusiast for The Archers and who played Eddie Grundy's records on his BBC Radio One show. It also looks at the views of key Archers figures such as Vanessa Whitburn and Keri Davies and how they have approached the Grundys. It uses the work of Marx and Engels to try to explain how it is that the Grundys moved from being small farmers to landless labourers. What the chapter doesn't do is to map

out a strategy for the liberation of the Grundys from their oppression. It does however look forward to a world turned upside down when at 19.02 hours on a weekday evening on BBC Radio 4 we hear a programme called not The Archers, but The Grundys.

Appearing on the Dumteedum podcast on 29 May 2020 ([Dumteedum, 2020](#)), *The Archers* chief scriptwriter, Keri Davies, noted that the first voice we had heard on *The Archers* when it resumed after a COVID-19 break was that of David Archer because after all it is *The Archers*, about the dynasty of the same name. Indeed, it is which is why the *Ambridge Socialist* backs the alternative proletarian dynasty of the Grundys. After 70 years, their time has come. The phrase ‘Grundys and their Oppressors’ is attributed to former Labour leader Neil Kinnock in Headlam, *Custard, Culverts and Cake* ([Headlam, 2017](#), Chapter 12) and reflects a wider truth about *The Archers* also articulated by Keri Davies. It may be that readers of *The Daily Telegraph* think that *The Archers* should centrally be about the Archer family who are rightfully the ruling clique. Others may have rather different ideas about what *The Archers* is and should be about.

While the Archer family has been with us since 1951, the Grundys certainly have not. They were introduced to the programme by William Smethurst who was producer from 1974 to 1986. Ratings were falling, and there was concern that what was the flagship programme from BBC Midlands in Birmingham would be ditched unless it was livened up somewhat. Even so, that gives us 40-plus years history of the Grundys in Ambridge, and it’s fair to say that a good deal of that has become hidden from history, at least until now that is. If the official view was, and to an extent remains, that *The Archers* is centrally about the Archer family, which after all

does have a role in most areas of village life, then what exactly is the purpose and role of the Grundys?

The Grundys were not the first plebeian characters in *The Archers*, and there have tended to be two types. The first is the enforcer of the rules and practices of the Ambridge ruling class. This role requires someone with a detailed understanding of the ways of the countryside but also someone who is always prepared to touch the forelock to their 'betters.' Tom Forrest was perhaps the best known character in this mould and his modern-day successor as gamekeeper is Will Grundy. Tom and Will are what the *Ambridge Socialist* would call 'class collaborators', acting against the real interests of their class. On the other side of the equation, we have exponents of rural tradition, folklore, song and so on. Probably, the best known was Walter Gabriel, with his catchphrase 'me old pal, me old beauty.' Played by Chris Gittins there seems to be some doubt as to whether he was ever actually a professional actor, but his role was to provide rural colour. There were others including Ned Larkin and Jethro Larkin, and in the present day Ambridge's poet laureate Bert Fry who in recent times, the poems aside, has been a more complex figure, in part as an agricultural worker whose experience frequently gets the better of David Archer. The role of characters like Walter Gabriel was to provide light relief, colour and basically, laughs. What a strange and often incomprehensible lot these peasant types were.

The Grundys' arrival in Ambridge was not so far removed from all that but this was after all the late 1970s and not the 1950s. There is social progress even in Ambridge. These were times of social conflict from the Winter of Discontent to the rise of Mrs Thatcher. Over time, the Grundys developed as the alternative Archers and characters who a newer, younger audience could identify with. Eddie Grundy (Trevor Harrison) was a country singer sometimes duetting with Jolene (now)

Archer. Harrison actually made records that warranted the occasional play on John Peel's BBC Radio One show. Peel and his producer John Walters formed an Eddie Grundy fan club in the early 1980s, and Peel made occasional Ambridge appearances. Peel aired Eddie's *Clarrie's Song* on his programme in December 1982. Peel wrote in *the Guardian* in 1994 ([Peel Wiki](#), n.d.) about his relationship both with the Archers and the Grundys:

Actually, I have featured in The Archers on two distinct occasions. On the first I was heard on the radio 'on the radio,' as it were. Eddie Grundy and the hapless Clarrie [Grundy] were listening to Radio 1 in the kitchen at Grange Farm when I played one of Eddie's records. On the second, my work was spread over several episodes and I even got to sing Yellow Submarine in a van with Eddie and that nice Mrs Antrobus. I've never got into television soap operas at all. I used to be into The Archers at one time until it became too kind of issue-driven. I just felt uncomfortable with that... I don't want that in The Archers. I used to like it back in the days when they did, "Well, looks like it's going to be dark soon"... I used to like that because I could cope with the pace of it.

(Peel Wiki, n.d.)

While presenting from Glastonbury Festival for the BBC in 2003, Peel interviewed several Ambridge residents including Ed Grundy (Barry Farrimond). The Grundys at this time represented part of *The Archers* changing with the times and surviving. Phil Archer may have played the organ at St Stephens, but he wasn't the person to launch a pop music career.

Characters in *The Archers* go on for many decades quite often, but writers and producers change as does the emphasis in storylines and listeners' expectations. If the Grundys, and Eddie in particular, first appeared as a move away from the rather staid mainstays of *The Archers* in the 1960s, by the 1990s the emphasis was changing to the Grundys as tenant farmers at Grange Farm. Small farmers in a world of giant firms and a worldwide agribusiness were and are in a tough place, and the Grundys were no different. They were however styled now as not particularly good farmers, inefficient, lacking diligence and so on. This was in comparison with the apparently excellent farming of the Archers and the Aldridges (see Chapter 5). It was a class divide in Ambridge and one that has been maintained to the present day. The view of *Archers* Ambridge is that the Grundys tend to be feckless even if on occasion they might be lovable rogues.

The Grundys were evicted from Grange Farm by the owners, Borchester Land, and the BBC broadcast the news on 26 April 2000. They had been unable to pay the rent. The then editor Vanessa Whitburn said at the time that,

It's only realistic for a drama set in the countryside to reflect what's going on there properly. Even six months ago it was obvious that farming was going through its worst crisis since the 1930s. And the most vulnerable, apart from hill farmers, are small-scale tenant farmers like the Grundys. This is what can happen to people like them.

(BBC Radio 4, 2000)

The comment 'people like them' reflects the view one suspects of some in the BBC about the Grundys and their like. It also reflected the rise of Borchester Land as the aggressive

agri-capitalist presence in the area that continues to this day. If the Archers dynasty has effective political control of Ambridge, Borchester Land is running the economy.

Keri Davies, effectively the historian of Ambridge, has written a good summary of the chequered history of Borchester Land. Formed in 1997 as New Labour came to power, it brought the Berrow Estate from Simon Pemberton. The leading figures initially were Brian Aldridge and Matt Crawford. By 2020, Aldridge had been purged, and Crawford was believed to be in South America. As ever there has been no room for sentiment in business in Ambridge. It was Crawford who booted the Grundys out of Grange Farm. He had no interest in or sympathy with such rural plebeians. Instead, wealthy ex-army type Oliver Sterling and his partner, the late Caroline Bone, bought the farm. Initially, Oliver had a herd of beef cattle and then switched to a dairy production including the appearance of a local cheese – a favourite *Archers* food-stuff – called *Sterling Gold*. There was however a twist, perhaps a surprising one. If Borchester Land represented the unacceptable face of modern capitalism sweeping people aside in favour of profit at all costs, Sterling was much more of a patrician, a sort of ‘we’re all in it together’ type, grasping that the better off had some social and moral obligations to the less well off. When Sterling acquired Grey Gables with partner Caroline, he decided to outsource the running of Grange Farm to Ed Grundy.

The Grundy family however were split up after their eviction from Grange Farm, with Eddie, Clarrie and Joe Grundy living in a cramped council flat, Meadowrise. It was this enforced change that made Joe to decide to kill off his ferrets. The class divide in Ambridge had rarely been sharper. In due course, the Grundys were able to afford to rent Keeper’s Cottage which they did until they were flooded out in the Great Flood of Ambridge in 2015. During this period,