

Do beer drinkers of Ambridge hold the key to a long life?

Have you ever wondered how the older characters in *The Archers* stay healthy given their penchant for a pint or two of Shires? You're not the only one. The matter will be discussed at next week's Academic Archers conference.

Opened by actor Carole Boyd, Ambridge's own Lynda Snell, the conference at the University of Sheffield includes a talk called *Pint Of Shires, The Elixir Of Youth?*

Speaker Sara Long, a doctor specialising in geriatric medicine at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff, will discuss why not one of the characters in the long-running radio drama – some of whom are in their nineties – suffers from life-limiting conditions.

'It's probably down to how active they are and their healthy eating habits rather than the ale served at *The Bull*,' says Long. 'Food holds a central role in socialising in *The Archers*, so the older adults are not eating ready-meals on the sofa, but instead cooking for younger members of their family, or popping in on relatives and staying for a homecooked supper.'

Caring for elderly people in the community is something taken seriously in the programme, which is why Long believes we should be taking lessons from life in *Borsetshire*: 'As someone who works in geriatrics, it's hard not to feel that *The Archers* is showing us a vision of what things could be like if we put more focus on family, companionship and community.'

Other topics on the agenda include the fact that Adam and Ian don't have any gay friends, and a talk by Rob Drummond, senior lecturer in linguistics at Manchester Metropolitan University, who will examine the diverse accents of the Grundy men.

Anna Shepard



ELIXIR OF YOUTH? Benefits of beer will be discussed by *Archers* fans



Illustration: Dale Edwin Murray

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



A HELPING HAND

Belvoir Fruit Farms need pickers to help bring in the elderflower harvest, which starts in May. The drinks brand sets up weighing stations where it is based in Leicestershire and pays £2.50 per kilo. If you would like to join in, find information at belvoirfruitfarms.co.uk.

The gift of giving has really put a spring in my step

A friend celebrated her 80th birthday this week. It was both a marvel and a surprise for her. She honestly and truly never expected to live to this age. To mark it, she wanted only two things. First, to be driven to the sea for a stroll along the beach (she loved the feel of every sandy step and every gust of air from the ocean). Second, she wanted to begin giving away the good things she owned. She did not want them to 'end up in the dumpster'. She summoned me to her apartment and gave me several boxes containing all of her crystal (I think it is Baccarat) and two of her silver trays. 'You are the only person I know who still entertains at home, so I know you'll use these. And when you get tired of these things, or get as old as I am, please give them to someone else,' she added.

As I unpacked the boxes and lined up the items in my kitchen, my friend's gift inspired me in a way I hadn't anticipated. And now, my new spring cleaning ritual is to give my friends some of the beautiful things I've owned for decades. These will be my 'happy spring' gifts to them. Importantly, I have to finish this before spring becomes summer.

I started with the gift from my friend. There were enough glasses of different kinds to create two complete sets of six and eight. I will give the larger set to a couple who have just got married. Then, from my kitchen cabinets alone, I found eight barely used items – some are design classics! – that my friends have often admired. Each person will now get the pleasure of owning and using that object.

The kitchen is just the start. Now onto the decorative objects, clothes, jewellery, books, even

some of the art I own. Every object will be gifted to an owner who really wants it.

When I told my friend that I was following her example, and writing this article about how she inspired me this spring, she was delighted. 'I never thought anyone would write about me. This is the best birthday present you could have given me. To let me know that our friendship made you do something good, makes me feel good, especially on my birthday.'

So, here's wishing my dear, theatre loving, inspiring friend, Josephine Albano, a happy 80th birthday!

BUS RIDE WITH YOUR WINE FLIGHT, SIR?

A luxurious food fantasy was not what I was expecting when a friend invited me at the last minute to join him for dinner on Monday at a restaurant with a new chef. After we were seated, the sommelier came to tell us that the chef would be making a multi-course dinner just for us, including a flight of paired wines.

A bespoke dining experience at a beautiful chic restaurant evoked both glee and a moment of money anxiety, until the sommelier said the meal would be compliments of the chef. I was totally surprised – and thrilled. My friend smiled knowingly as he lifted his flute of just-poured 2007 Cristal in a toast.

I love an adventure, and a custom dining adventure ranks pretty high in my imagination. Beginning with a warm poached quail's egg with Osetra caviar, through dishes flavoured with truffle shavings accompanied by a 2013 Volnay 1er Cru, to the dessert – a whipped cream-topped rum baba accompanied by a 2005 Perrier Jouet Belle Epoque Rosé, each dish was deeply flavourful, deliciously satisfying and dazzling to look at. One dish, a pâté encrusted in a light flaky crust, was based on a recipe first recorded in 1392.

When we emerged, two and a half hours later, I noticed that a bus was coming and its stop was nearby. We could easily take it to our destinations, I suggested. My friend leveled his gaze at me and said: 'Take a bus, Alvin, after that meal in that restaurant?'