

CUSTARD, CULVERTS
AND CAKE

Academics on Life in
The Archers

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Academics on Life in
The Archers

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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CHAPTER SYNOPSES

SECTION ONE: GENTEEL COUNTRY HOBBIES?

Chapter One: ‘My Parsnips Are Bigger Than Your Parsnips: The Negative Aspects of Competing at Flower and Produce Shows’, Rachel Daniels and Annie Maddison Warren. It ought to be obvious how Bert Fry comes to this subject, having devoted a lifetime to the various feuds and intrigues of the ‘Flower and Produce’. He will be disgruntled to hear that this was the only paper which was passed unanimously by our listener peer review panel and academics and was awarded a prize at the conference of two parsnips for this clean sweep.

Chapter Two: “‘Big Telephoto Lens, Small Ticklist’: Birdwatching, Class and Gender in Ambridge’, Joanna Dobson, commenting on the gender dynamics of birdwatching, with a reply from Jennifer Aldridge who somehow manages to get in a mention of Phoebe being at Oxford.

Chapter Three: ‘The Ambridge Paradox: Cake Consumption and Metabolic Health in a Defined Rural Population’, Christine Michael. This chapter was awarded the prize — of a tin of shop-bought custard — for the most Ambridge paper of *Academic Archers 2017*. The often culinary-slighted Christine Barford has been given the right to reply concerning the campaign of intimate terrorism deployed by her closest friends regarding her bake-off credentials.

SECTION TWO: EDUCATING AMBRIDGE

Chapter Four: ‘Ambridge as Metaphor: Sharing the Mission and Values of a 21st-Century Library’, Madeleine Lefebvre, talking of the place and absence of a mobile library in Ambridge.

Chapter Five: ‘We Don’t Need No Education? The Absence of Primary Education in *The Archers*’, Dr Grant Bage and Jane Turner. Nic Grundy, mum-of-four and one of the silent characters at the time of writing, finds her voice in response, giving her view before rushing to meet the school bus.

Chapter Six: ‘Educating Freddie Pargetter: or, Will He Pass His Maths GCSE?’, Ruth Heilbronn and Rosalind Janssen, bringing a UCL Institute of Education analysis to ask whether Freddie Pargetter is an underachiever and if so is this attributable to his bereavement aged twelve. State-education advocate, Jill Archer, responds.

Chapter Seven: ‘Phoebe Goes to Oxford’, Felicity Macdonald-Smith, turning our focus from early years to elite higher education, and Jennifer Aldridge, whose pride in and hope for self-reflected glory from Phoebe led to fairly Olympic-standard boasting.

SECTION THREE: THE GEOGRAPHY OF AMBRIDGE

Chapters Eight and Nine: These two chapters concern complementary analyses of the Ambridge Flood.

First, ‘Get Me Out of Here! Assessing Ambridge’s Flood Resilience’, Angela Connelly sets up a review from the very disgruntled Stefan, who may or may not have more to say in the future.

Second, ‘After the Flood: How Can Ambridge Residents Develop Resilience to Future Flooding?’, Fiona Gleed, turning our attention from developing resilience to future flooding, offers an action plan for another casualty of the flood, Charlie Thomas.

Chapter Ten: ‘Locating Ambridge: Public Broadcasting, Region and Identity, an Everyday Story of Worcestershire Folk?’, Tom Nicholls considers the midlands location of Ambridge, to which loyal Ambridge resident Clarrie Grundy will add her thoughts.

SECTION FOUR: POWER RELATIONSHIPS

Chapters Eleven and Twelve: Both have a visual element as authors seek to present information about the relationships that underpin the village.

First, Louise Gillies and Helen M. Burrows, ‘A Case Study in the Use of Genograms to Assess Family Dysfunction and Social Class: To the Manor Born versus Shameless’. Their analysis somewhat vindicates the much maligned Horrobins and we hear from the most incorrigible of them, Clive Horrobin in response.

Second, ‘Kinship Networks in Ambridge’, Nicola Headlam warms to this theme and presents *The Headlam Hypothesis*, *The Archers* are dead, long live the network. Hazel Woolley responds.

Chapter Thirteen: Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, ‘God in Ambridge: *The Archers* as Rural Theology’ and a response from Alan Franks.

Chapter Fourteen: Jessica Meyer tries to locate the Ambridge war memorial and approaches *The Archers* as *lieu de*

memoire of the Great War in Britain. Jim Lloyd, whose interests are more classical than modern, replies.

SECTION FIVE: AMBRIDGE ONLINE

Chapter Fifteen: ‘An Everyday Story of Country Folk’ Online? The Marginalisation of the Internet and Social Media in *The Archers*’, Professor Lizzie Coles-Kemp and Professor Debi Ashenden argue that for the younger characters particularly this has been a gap.

Chapter Sixteen: ‘The Importance of Social Media in Modern Borsetshire Life: Domestic and Commercial’, Olivia Vandyk, presenting her social media marketing perspective to the villagers. Josh Archer, who appears to making a path for himself combining eBay with Grindr, replies.

Chapter Seventeen: ‘Being @borsetpolice: Autoethnographic Reflections on Archers Fan Fiction on Twitter’, Jerome Turner, proposing an (auto)ethnographic understanding of *Archers* fan fiction on Twitter, a pursuit that results in him being interviewed at Felpersham police station.

SECTION SIX: THE HELEN AND ROB STORY

Chapters Eighteen to Twenty-four: We turn our attention to the most serious storyline of recent times the controlling relationship between Helen Archer and Rob Titchener which culminated in the violent stabbing of April 2016 and the ensuing courtroom drama where Helen was acquitted.

Chapter Eighteen: The conference keynote from Professor Jennifer Brown, ‘Understanding the Antecedents of the

Domestic Violence Perpetrator Using *The Archers* Coercive Controlling Behaviour Storyline as a Case Study’, which sets the criminological and social context for the storyline.

Chapter Nineteen: ‘Bag of the Devil: The Disablement of Rob Titchener’, Katherine Runswick-Cole and Rebecca Wood, arguing that by stigmatising Rob the storyline could have been clearer in educating about stoma, but that this opportunity was lost. *Bag of the devil...* both won the award of Best Title at *Academic Archers 2017* — and was awarded the prize of a bottle of cider — and the attention of Rob Titchener, who has written his retort to the chapter.

Chapter Twenty: Amber Medland, ‘Culinary Coercion: Nurturing Traditional Gender Roles in Ambridge’, on all things food, identity and domestic labour in the village, and which is reviewed by the domestic goddess herself, Jennifer Aldridge.

Chapter Twenty-one: ‘The Case of Helen and Rob: An Evaluation of the New Coercive Control Offence and Its Portrayal in *The Archers*’, Elizabeth R. A. Champion, taking the legal line on coercive control.

Chapter Twenty-two: Anna-Marie O’Connor takes a forensic science approach to the crime scene as in *Forensic* ‘Blood Pattern Analysis in Blossom Hill Cottage’. Reviewed by the first officer on the scene, PC Harrison Burns.

Chapter Twenty-three: ‘Soundtrack to a Stabbing: What Rob’s Choice of Music over Dinner Tells Us about Why He Ended Up Spilling the Custard’, Emily Baker and Freya Jarman, on what Rob’s choice of music over dinner tells us about why he ended up spilling the custard, reviewed by Alan Franks. Winner of a bottle of bubbly at conference for

audience participation (a group *dum tee dum* for the Dum Tee Dum podcast opener).

Chapter Twenty-four: Caroline M. Taylor tells us of ‘Helen's Diet Behind Bars: Nutrition for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women in Prison’.

INTRODUCTION

THE ARCHERS ANALYSED: ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES ON LIFE IN BORSETSHIRE

This book builds upon our slightly grand attempts to develop a ‘new academic community’ (Courage, Headlam, & Matthews, 2016) quite deliberately connecting subject-specific knowledge from a cohort of academics, researchers, and professionals present at the 2nd *The Archers* in Fact and Fiction: Academic Analyses of Life in Rural Borsetshire conference, with the wealth of material available through 18,000 episodes of the world’s longest running soap opera (or docudrama as Archers Anarchists and Dum Tee Dum podcast fans would have it).

We announced our intention for Academic Archers to be ‘a fine-detailed, open, cross disciplinary space’ in our first book (*ibid.*) and have described elsewhere our maturation from ‘idle tweets’ through to now combining social media curation, events management, media and PR (see Academic Archers website and press work) as well as holding down day-jobs. This volume is the latest output of our experimental *modus vivendi*. In everything we do we have invested significant hope in the cognitive surplus afforded by the wisdom of the crowd or the hive mind of the wider *Archers* firmament. By our calculations on the day, the collective listening time of the audience at the second Academic Archers conference

amounted to half a million minutes. There are many hubs of *Archers* lore and obscure trivia lurking in the message boards.

This introductory chapter seeks to flesh out some of the elements of our thinking in developing Academic Archers since our founding in 2015. As previously, each academic chapter contribution is ‘peer reviewed’ in the voice of an *Archers* character/real person of Ambridge (depending on your disposition). Uniquely within this volume the Helen and Rob storyline represents almost a book within the book – the conference and this book coming at a time when we are in the wake of this substantive storyline. We sincerely hope that the varied contributions of these wonderful (all-female researched and written) chapters in this section can go some way to offer catharsis for those still deeply affected by what was a very traumatic, brave and controversial storyline for the programme.

BUILDING ACADEMIC ARCHERS

From an ethos perspective Academic Archers has been influenced by the political decentring of knowledge production — that being to form and take knowledge outside of the academic academy and its predominantly white, male, and elder constituency — specifically from within feminist scholarship, critical disability studies (Runswick-Cole, 2017) as well as cultural studies and sociology (Thomas, 2017). We intuitively feel that a focus on the processes and practices of relational and meaningful social research should continue to be wholeheartedly embraced by the higher education academy. However, there is a risk that rather than a carnival and celebration of different bodies of knowledge, the ‘impact agenda’ that universities have to place front and centre of

research to secure State funding, can mean such social research becomes co-opted and as calculable as other reforms to research practice as incorporated into the neo-liberal university. Academic Archers is a means to, through *The Archers* lens, develop and present a cross section of scholars and listeners and to explore more subtle ways of being together differently. This is a move to make knowledge production and dissemination horizontal rather than vertical and a mode of investigation that is ‘a rite of communion between thinking and acting human beings, the researcher and the researched’ (Fals Borda, 1997, p. 108).

When convening the conference, for this *modus operandi* to have any meaning at all, non-specialists needed to have positions of power and authority within the paper selection processes. Further, we needed to ensure the quality of contributions and from a wide spectrum, within and without the academy. We began the second cycle for the Academic Archers year with a conventional call for papers but backed up by a novel and slightly terrifying blended peer reviewing process whereby eighteen Academic Archers Research Fellows subjected all submitted paper abstracts to their scrutiny. These peer reviewers were found through an open call within our social media community and offered free conference places and training and support in exchange for their efforts. The reviewers cohort had a range of backgrounds and were not selected because of prior familiarity with academic peer reviewing processes. We developed a peer review protocol, based on the work conducted by the British Medical Journal (BMJ) on peer review of articles by patients (BMJ, in Headlam, Academic Archers website) and waited to see what happened. We are very keen to further interrogate the role of ‘non-academics’ within circuits of knowledge production, and will discuss some of the state of the conversation on these matters in this chapter. The outcome of this process

was a day and a half of a programme with the same thematic areas as we present in this volume, and a delegation of 120 at the second conference superbly co-organised with Professor Carenza Lewis at the University of Lincoln, her superlative PA, Julie Barclay, and her brilliant staff team. We had the broadening of the audience in our minds as we set out into brave new worlds of online streaming all content, and of building on the social media links we had made on Facebook and Twitter.

In this process, as in all things we self-consciously blur the boundaries between subject and object, expert and non-expert, and fact and fiction in a way that some people struggle to 'get'. This is part of the pleasure for us, we firmly believe in the interface between popular culture and serious academic research, in the political and epistemological possibilities opened up by probing the interplay between the real and the imagined communities and further, in closing the feedback loops between 'who knows?' 'who listens?' and 'who gets to say?' The answers ought not to be simple or settled if one takes seriously the privileging of alternate forms of knowledge and experience.

ACCIDENTAL 'ACA-FANS' AND THE 'FANDOM' IN CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Having felt our way towards a form of practice which felt right as regards how we engaged with the wider *Archers* community it made sense to check our own lived experience. We approach *Archers* scholarship in this vein and have continued to explore our activities within a wider frame of a co-produced ethics of Action Research, but also one which is alive to the aesthetics and affect in simultaneously being in and building a community of this nature and our enthusiastic

participation in the online worlds of the fandom we, these mediated selves, suggest as an ethics of encounter.

In case this sounds overly intellectualised or grand for what may also be seen as ‘p*ssing about on Twitter rather than doing any real work’ it is striking how far technology has accelerated the possibilities for activities of this nature threading around the everyday. As relative social media digital natives, we were comfortable in moving between these performed selves of online and offline worlds, but it is immediately obvious that the colossal wealth of user-generated content, on Twitter, Facebook, in fan podcasts, blogs, and fanfiction was actively creating ‘boundary objects’ for investigation. A boundary object is any object that is part of multiple social worlds and facilitates communication between them; it has a different identity in each social world that it inhabits. As a result a boundary object must be simultaneously concrete and abstract, simultaneously fluid and well defined (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393).

The broadcast ‘canon’ itself is a boundary object for the wider listening community. The listeners then in their acts of interpretation merge ‘common identities’ across all the many *Archers* online communities (see Thomas, 2009, 2014, 2016; Turner, this volume) for example the policing of behaviour and swift acculturation to different online fan groups. One thing that we were absolutely clear about from the beginning was that we were not lurking anonymously round the edges of the online communities with our notebooks. Waves of fan studies and scholars of popular culture have engaged with subcultures, fan bases and fandoms with more and less respect. We have always seen Academic Archers as an example of aca-fandom. We understand this to mean referring both to the study of popular culture with academics in the position of fans themselves and to the study of the associated fan subcultures. In this, we are hopefully navigating

some of the edges of proper fandom studies featuring academics translating fan culture into academic currency. This way of working, we feel may run the risk of extractive relationships. It is most striking when reading the literature on fans that there is an ‘othering’ or ‘weirding’ by the author of the fans going on — the fans are treated as something separate to the ‘norm’ and in this process, shamed. Certainly long-established fan groups such as Trekkies or Buffy fans are scathing about the roles of anthropologists who focus on fan-fiction, geek cults and conventions. Whilst an academic study of fandom can work to variously celebrate, validate or rehabilitate fan practices:

‘... a pervasive sense of shame permeates both fan spaces and academic approaches to the subject. There is shame about being a fan at all shame over the extremity of some fans, shame over certain fan practices over having those practices revealed to the rest of the world...there is also shame about studying something as “frivolous” as fandom - or worse yet, taking frivolous pleasure ourselves “sitting too close” instead of remaining suitably detached observers’ (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, p. 213).

The key here is that in ‘sitting too close’ to our radios we expose ourselves to ridicule (see [Courage, 2017](#)). In [Courage, Headlam, and Matthews \(2016\)](#), we wrote about our different relationships with the programme. I have been reminded of the steps required for ‘becoming’ from the classic article by Becker (1953). Becker argues that there are distinct phases in the acculturation of any supposedly pleasurable behaviour — with getting high as the example he uses in the article — and it is worth reflecting that until two years ago I had never had a

conversation with anyone outside my immediate family about *The Archers*.

FAN STUDIES

The first wave of fan studies followed De Certeau's (1984) definition of powerful producers and disempowered consumers, as befitted a mass and broadcast-only mediascape. Second and third wave fan studies continued to focus on class and subversion (subcultures). Theorists are now more interested in the roles of fans in identity work and in the social and cultural performance of identity and in the distribution of power/knowledge prioritizing the emotional aspects of 'fanning'. This later work on the emotional affect is most productive in terms of our engagement with both *The Archers* and *The Archers* fandom.

The point, of course, is to seek to work in a way that disturbs some of the false oppositions and binaries that have governed scholarly life by being different together to some purpose, and it is in this territory that [Cristofari and Guilton \(2016\)](#) have developed their theories of the ways in which both subject positions, of academic and of fan, may be nearer to continuums than divisions.

In seeking differentiated points of entry between distance/proximity, professional/amateur, rational/emotional, orthodox/unorthodox, analytic/appropriative and fundamentally between the individual/community, Academic Archers hopes to unsettle some of the power dynamics that govern the mobilisation of knowledge. It may be that calibrating these continuums differently may serve to radicalise the production of useful and useable knowledge.

Another emotive and emotional feature of the fan clans surrounding *The Archers* is that many fans seem to have quite

deep-seated antipathies towards some (or all) of the characters in the show (Courage, 2017). This is quite brilliantly explained using the example of queering *Star Trek*. Trekkies get so exercised about the lack of gay characters on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise that they vent against the show itself, creating hostility between fans and the show's creators (or 'showrunner fans' as some fan communities have it.) The intensity and depth of engagement from fans are a very temperamental resource indeed. *The Archers* fandom has sat at an angle to the show's creators as long as they have had the means to express this. As we wrote in the first book (Courage, Headlam, & Matthews, 2016), there has been a curious but intense elision between *The Archers* and social media.

In order to examine how the interactions between the show and the fan communities has been changing it is worth exploring the controversy surrounding the unilateral closing of *The Archers* message board site, Mustardland. This story has a number of unique features — explained by Thomas (in Courage, Headlam, & Matthews, 2016) — but the dimension of the power of the BBC in framing and shaping how *The Archers* is received has appeared to change drastically in the very recent past.

Early engagement with social media shows the patrician attitudes of 'Auntie Beeb' in coming to terms with the power of message boards in shaping the ways in which the programme is received. Auntie Beeb, is in this case more or less personified by then-*Archers* editor, Vanessa Whitburn, whose twenty-two-year tenure had begun in pre-social media days. Speaking to *Feedback* on Radio 4 about her retirement in 2013, she described a vexatious relationship with fans, and that she had been subject to 'cyber-bullying' online. It is clear that the relationship between formal channels and the wider fandom were on precarious ground around this time as the BBC closed Mustardland. Reported here in The Telegraph:

*In two weeks' time, the site (bbc.co.uk/dna/mbarchers), or "Mustard Land" as it is known to fans because of its yellow background, will be no more. The official reason is dwindling numbers: the BBC claims that, out of five million listeners who tune in to The Archers, just 1,000 regularly post on the forum, so it can no longer justify the cost. Listeners, however, claim otherwise. They say the BBC is trying to censor them, in particular their candid comments... "How to get rid of the pesky, wrong sort of listener!" ranted one angry fan on the site, who felt that message board users were seen by the BBC as "too critical, too old and too much trouble". (Sarah Rainey, *The Telegraph*, 13 February 2013)*

It is fair to say that — as Facebook group mediators and as @AcademicArchers on Twitter — the 'candid' and 'proper criticism' can shade over into quite personal invective at times. The robustness of this criticism may have come as a shock to Vanessa Whitburn. There is a very particular role for the BBC in this space. Fandoms in the US are linked with the market imperatives of their creators and can function as a form of marketing and PR, albeit highly reflexively. The justification of 'only' 1000 active posters on Mustardland within the click and attention economy could have been seen as a vital resource for the BBC at this time.

The ensuing five years has seen huge shifts in this relationship, and a flowering of smaller, more fleet of foot forms of commentary, on social media, and through *The Ambridge Observer* and *Dum Tee Dum* podcast for example. The new regime of Editor Huw Kennair-Jones appears to be much more enthusiastic about engaging with the fandom on social media. Kennair-Jones crowd-sourced questions for an outing

on Broadcasting House on Radio 4 and we will enthusiastically watch how this relationship develops.

ACTS OF CREATION AND INTERPRETATION: ALL WE HAVE IS AN ABILITY TO STRUCTURE INFORMATION

Something that has tickled us from the beginning has been the ingenuity of many of the parody accounts on Twitter, the cartoons and gifs and memes and tropes which circulate in mega-quick time in direct response to the broadcast of *The Archers*. This instant response, coupled with often a snort of laughter or a smile of recognition, is the main way in which the community of *Archers* listeners develops. More recently the show itself has been more active in participating in the fun and a relevant, funny post can get widely retweeted by the official BBC *The Archers* Twitter account before the end of an episode even. Rather than viewing academic practice as some lofty thing, we approach academic endeavour as just an example of us being able to bring the thing that we can do to this party. Not adept as cartoonists, we can offer solely our subject knowledge and the learnt ability to structure knowledge in the way that renders it visible to other scholars and the wider *Archers* culture.

Table 1 from [Cristofari and Guitton \(2016\)](#) shows how far these various categories are linked through the currencies of ‘involvement’ and ‘structure of knowledge’. This is salient as it places our endeavours as Academic Archers firmly within the acts of creation and interpretation that we admire so much in the wider fandom. This table connects specific skills, fan spaces, practices and modes of participation.

It is our hope that in participating and helping to curate *Archers* content that Academic Archers moves from an extractive or consumptive mode and toward a productive

Table 1. Currencies of ‘Involvement’ and ‘Structure of Knowledge’ of Fandom (Cristofari & Guitton, 2016).

Skill	Fan Space	Fan Practices	Participation
Technical	Public spaces	Info gathering	Consumptive
Analytic	Semi-public (fans only)	Forums, discussion, blogging	Productive
Interpretive	Private, fans only	Creation of fan works	Productive

and engaged academic community. We hope that you enjoy the book, and that we can continue the conversation online on Facebook ([Academic Archers](#)), on Twitter ([@AcademicArchers](#)) and via our website (www.academicarchers.net).

Dr Nicola Headlam
 Dr Cara Courage
Editors

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SECTION ONE



GENTEEL COUNTRY
HOBBIES?

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CHAPTER ONE

MY PARSNIPS ARE BIGGER THAN YOUR PARSNIPS: THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF COMPETING AT FLOWER AND PRODUCE SHOWS

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ABSTRACT

The Ambridge Flower and Produce Show is the source of frequent scandals. For example, the misunderstanding that resulted in Chutneygate in 2016 caused feelings to run high. However, there is also evidence of deliberate cheating. Toye (2009) records three confirmed instances between 1975 and 2008, two planned and one opportunist, along with a number of unproved allegations. According to Michaels and Miethe (1989, p. 883), 'cheating is a general class of deviance that occurs in a variety

of contexts’, whilst DeAndrea, Carpenter, Shulman, and Levine (2009) believe that it is now commonplace throughout society. Houser, Vetter, and Winter (2012, p. 1654) argue that ‘the perception of being treated unfairly by another person significantly increases an individual’s propensity to cheat’. Taken at face value, Flower and Produce Shows are charming, community-based events showcasing personal endeavour for little in the way of reward. However, both the Ambridge experience and the literature suggest that the competitive nature of the event aligned with the potential for perceived unfair treatment by the judges may mean that the likelihood of cheating is high. Given this, how representative is the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show of a real-life Flower and Produce Show? This chapter examines the emotions and behaviours that these shows engender by reviewing scholarly thinking on competition, competitive behaviour and cheating, and then comparing critical incidents at the fictional Ambridge show with evidence derived from interviews with the committee and contestants of the annual Flower and Produce Show in a small market town in Wiltshire.

Keywords: Flower and Produce Shows; competition; competitive behaviour; cheating

FLOWER AND PRODUCE SHOWS: FACT VERSUS FICTION

Over the years, the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show has been the source of misunderstandings, impropriety and scandal. For example, there was uproar in 2016 over

Chutneygate when Jill Archer's chutney was confused with Carol Tregorran's and she was wrongly awarded Best in Show. [Toye \(2009\)](#) records a number of unproved allegations of impropriety and three confirmed instances of deliberate cheating between 1975 and 2008. The idea of using the Flower and Produce Show as a dramatic device is intriguing. On the face of it, it is a charming, community-based event, showcasing personal achievement for little reward. Yet, the drive to succeed causes characters in *The Archers* to break the bounds of acceptable behaviour. Can this fiction possibly be representative of a real-life Flower and Produce Show? To answer this question, this chapter reviews scholarly thinking on competition and competitive behaviour, then identifies critical incidents at the fictional Ambridge show before seeking similar examples at an annual Flower and Produce Show held in a small market town in Wiltshire.

WHY DO PEOPLE COMPETE?

The academic literature was reviewed to find out why people compete and why competition encourages both positive and negative behaviour, potentially tipping over into cheating. [Gilpatric \(2011\)](#) argues that competition is often valued for its own sake, positively motivating a desirable activity. Earlier work by [Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, and Elliot \(1997\)](#) categorised this positive motivation as an inner drive to succeed, which affects behaviour, actions, thoughts and beliefs. Some people have higher standards than the societal norms and a stronger implicit need to achieve their goals ([Garcia, Tor, & Schiff, 2013](#)). Inevitably, their inner drive and associated achievement goals affect the way they perform a given task, not only demonstrating competence but also driven to improve their performance ([Harackiewicz et al.,](#)

1997). Competition is clearly valued for its own sake, encouraging personal endeavour in order to succeed.

The sense of personal achievement is often more important to the driven competitor than any rewards on offer and, whilst they enjoy victory, they also view defeat positively, determining how to improve themselves through a process known as social comparison (Garcia et al., 2013). This theory states that individuals are motivated to improve their performance by the need to minimise any discrepancies between their achievement and that of others (Garcia et al., 2013). In a competition, individuals are ranked relative to the other competitors and being awarded first, second or third is a clear acknowledgement of one person's higher capability and, therefore, higher status in relation to others (Schurr & Ritov, 2016).

As already discussed, the behaviour that results from competition is not always positive. Competing often leads 'good people to act in bad ways' (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009, p. 10). It can cause undesirable, even prohibited, behaviour (Kosiewicz, 2011). More specifically, it sharpens the incentive to cheat (Gilpatric, 2011). Cheating is defined as 'an attempt to gain unfair advantage by violating the shared interpretation of the basic rules (the ethos) of the parties engaged without being caught and held responsible for it' (Loland, 2002, p. 96). However, deciding what is and what is not a violation of the rules is not as simple as it may seem. As Kosiewicz (2011, p. 40) notes, competition should not be viewed as 'a strict adherence to the rules ... but the optimal use of their content in order to achieve success'. In other words, it is considered acceptable to have the wit and ability to stretch the rules, often to their furthest point, in order to achieve success. If they are stretched beyond their perceived limits, then they are considered to be broken and breaking the rules is viewed as cheating, unless it is considered to be

‘unintentional or unknowing’ (Green, 2003, p. 140). Chutneygate is, therefore, a case of mishap rather than cheating as, in Jill Archer’s own words, ‘I didn’t do it on purpose; I wasn’t trying to cheat.’

Michaels and Miethe (1989, p. 883) see cheating as ‘a general class of deviance that occurs in a variety of contexts’, whilst DeAndrea, Carpenter, Shulman, and Levine (2009) describe it as being commonplace throughout society. Early thinking linked cheating to the lure of financial rewards (Pike, 1980) but, more recently, Houser, Vetter, and Winter (2012, p. 1654) have argued that ‘the perception of being treated unfairly by another person’ is sufficient to significantly increase the ‘propensity to cheat’, whilst John, Loewenstein, and Rick (2014, p. 101) have found ‘mounting evidence that psychological factors also matter and that dishonesty is not simply the result of economic cost/benefit analysis’. Interestingly, work by Schurr and Ritov (2016) suggests that a competition winner is more likely to be dishonest than a competition loser due to their need to maintain a positive self-concept. In this case, the act of cheating must not violate their perception of themselves as fundamentally honest and this may lead to them failing to notice the unethical implications of what they are doing, a condition known as ethical blindness (Schurr & Ritov, 2016).

Overall, three key themes within the literature explain why people compete: the inner drive to succeed, achievement goals and social comparison. It is acceptable to stretch the rules in order to succeed, but cheating is unacceptable. Competitive behaviour, however, may change from positive to negative as a result of seeking a reward (not necessarily financial), of responding to unfair treatment or trying to maintain a positive self-perception. The literature examines the effect of competition on behaviour in a number of contexts, such as sport, school and the workplace. There has

been no examination to date of Flower and Produce Shows. Therefore, in order to determine whether the same factors are at play, examples of unethical behaviour at the fictional Ambridge Flower and Produce Show were identified and categorised before evidence of similar incidents was sought at a real-life Flower and Produce Show.

THE FICTION: THE AMBRIDGE FLOWER AND PRODUCE SHOW

The Ambridge Flower and Produce Show is one of the most recurring themes of *The Archers*, held most years in mid-September (Dillon, 2011). There have been a series of incidents, categorised here according to an increasingly negative continuum ranging from ‘strategic planning’, ‘mishap’, ‘questionable judging’ and ‘disqualification’ to ‘cheating’. Cheating is further classified as being ‘suspected’, ‘inadvertent’, ‘opportunistic’ or ‘pre-meditated’.

Possibly the most benign form of competitive behaviour relating to the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show is strategic planning, whereby potential contestants prepare their campaign 12 months or more in advance to increase their chances of winning. Pru Forrest campaigned strategically in 1995 to become overall winner, neglecting to feed her husband, Tom, in the process. Poor Tom became the subject of village gossip, even suffering snide jaunts at the pub. Chutneygate, the chutney mix-up discussed above, is an example of a mishap, simply an unlucky accident. Questionable judging was apparent in 1994 when young Will Grundy won the best onion category, which was judged by Henri Touvier, the French mayor of twinned village, Meyruelle. Tom Forrest claimed that this ‘butcher’ did not know what he was talking about. Examples of disqualification include Clarrie Grundy’s

greengages in 1986 and Lynda Snell's photographs in 2008, whilst in 2010, Jim Lloyd's onions were disqualified following illicit use of twine, despite the fact that Bert Fry (the winner) may well have done the same thing.

Turning to cheating, there are two examples of suspected cheating. In 1977, Laura Archer suspected that Doris Archer's prize-winning jar of lemon curd was one that she herself had given her. In 1982, Walter Gabriel accused Pru Forrest of using Women's Institute products in the homemade jam category. Any concrete evidence of these suspicions would, of course, have turned both into instances of pre-meditated cheating. There are two examples of inadvertent cheating, possibly due to poor understanding of the rules, and both providing further examples of disqualification. In 1978, organising committee member and winner of the overall prize, Jean Harvey, was disqualified for using a professional gardener. In 2012, Jack 'Jizzer' McCreary's surprise entry in the men-only bread-making class was disqualified after it transpired that he had used a bread maker.

Opportunistic cheating may have occurred in 2007 when Ambridge Village Hall was evacuated during the Show due to a burst water pipe. Bert Fry was convinced that Derek Fletcher had taken advantage of the situation to swap the labels on the runner beans. Firmly believing that Bert's beans were the best, Phil Archer swapped them back to ensure that the best man won. Another clear example of pre-meditated cheating was Sabina Thwaite, who entered one of Jill Archer's fruitcakes as her own in 2008. The admirable Jill decided to let her win. Interestingly, these two incidents, the most probable examples of cheating and deserving of disqualification, if not worse, were actually covered up by those bastions of rectitude, Phil and Jill Archer, perhaps employing ethical blindness to maintain their self-esteem.

Overall, the evidence from the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show confirms a competitive spirit spilling into an array of negative behaviour, although it is the lack of adherence to the rules that causes the most issues. However, as noted above, this is not considered to be cheating. Given these conclusions, the next stage of the research was to determine whether this fiction is representative of fact.

THE FACT: A FLOWER AND PRODUCE SHOW IN WILTSHIRE

To identify incidents at a real Flower and Produce Show, in-depth interviews were held with six long-term participants, with one interviewee answering on behalf of two children, who were also veteran competitors. As this was an exploratory investigation, intent on obtaining qualitative data in order to understand attitudes and behaviour, there was deemed to be no requirement to obtain a statistically representative sample.

The interviews began by asking competitors why they compete at these shows, seeking evidence of the three key themes identified in the literature: the inner drive to succeed, achievement goals and relative ranking. All of the competitors demonstrated their inner drive to succeed:

I want to do the best I can — that's more fun. And for my own benefit. It's satisfying to know that I've done something good.

One interviewee explained how the inner drive manifested itself in relation to vegetable growing:

I improved my soil, I planted slightly differently ... we moved house and the first thing

I did was to dig up half the garden ... You end up planting things in just the right way and then you can get a bit more competitive for the show.

This also shows that achievement goals are being set in order to improve ranking year on year, so confirming the second key theme.

Evidence was also obtained of contestants seeking recognition for their time and effort. One noted that:

In the gardening world, I've already achieved a lot ... I'm not too bothered about entering now because I've had the first, second and third, the commendation, so that drive for me isn't there anymore. When I didn't get anything, I had the drive then.

On the face of it, this contradicts Schurr and Ritov's (2016) assertion that a competition winner is more likely to be competitive. However, it was evident that this contestant had not lost their inner drive to succeed and was still setting achievement goals despite their winning run:

I have grown a broccoli that's famous. I have grown a pumpkin that was famous — it was four stone! (Sigh) I've not grown an onion that's famous. I want to set a challenge. I want to grow an onion that's on the radio!

Contradicting the spirit of this statement, size is not as highly valued in vegetable categories as consistency and presentation, although one of the judges revealed that large vegetables are always appreciated:

... a cabbage so big it couldn't even go on the bench! We had to bring up a chair for it! A cabbage that had its own chair!

It was clear that, for some, the inner drive to succeed and the resulting achievement goals are about self-improvement as much as winning. Inevitably, this affects the amount of effort that they put into their entries:

Improving every year, the show has helped me to do that.

It's a lot of work. And as it's gone on, it's snow-balled really. I've put more and more effort into it.

Similarly, there was clear evidence that the third theme, relative ranking, also drives competitive behaviour. People like to be ranked higher than other people, but particularly if they know the other people:

I think about specific people that I am competing against. These are all my friends from Church.

A theme strongly evident in the interviews was the need for external validation, which relates to the notion of a positive self-concept, as identified by Schurr and Ritov (2016). To some, it felt almost pointless producing vegetables, cakes and crafts without them being judged and rated:

If there wasn't a show, then I wouldn't be showing them and I wouldn't have other people looking at them so it wouldn't really matter.

People want to be appreciated for what they've done, for what they've grown and for what they've cooked.

It became evident that the need for external validation is about more than being ranked to show relative position. Validation goes deeper, recognising or affirming an individual's

perception of their own value, almost confirming their very existence:

*It's a self-defining thing — here I am, this is me,
I can do this.*

It is both poignant and telling that a couple of contestants related this to parental validation. One regretted that his father's abilities and, therefore, his worth had never been recognised:

*My dad was a good grower of veg but he didn't
have anyone recognise that.*

For another, it was the lack of parental recognition that drove the need to obtain an objective, external validation of personal worth:

*There is something in the confirmation of
ability ... mum always said I was a disaster in the
kitchen.*

Overall, the interviews confirmed a high level of competitive behaviour, influenced by the inner drive to succeed, achievement goals and relative ranking, as well as the need for external validation. However, above all of these, the key reason for competing was feeling part of the community and showing support for communal events. There was a strong desire to ensure the future of the show and to preserve the related skills. Some of the interviewees reflected on the increasing importance of such events in today's society, where it can feel that the old forms and traditions of community are disintegrating.

RULES ... AND UNWRITTEN RULES

A key theme to emerge from the interviews that was not so apparent in the literature was the existence of unwritten rules,

described here as ‘the etiquette’. There was a clearly perceived difference between the rules that appear in the competition information and the unwritten etiquette. These are the codes that entrants are expected to observe but that can only be learned by observing successful entries. This etiquette is handed down from the bigger Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) shows but is not included in the written rules for this smaller, local show. The committee members explained that they tried to avoid too many prescriptive rules, fearing that it might deter people from participating. However, one of the judges admitted that this causes issues:

Sometimes people come back to us and complain, usually because the rules are ambiguous. We should be clear.

Despite this, the judges employ the RHS principles when rating the entries:

There are ways of presenting your produce. It comes down from the RHS Shows. For example, standing your shallot on a cardboard cylinder.

Lack of knowledge about the etiquette often leads to failure the first time a category is entered:

There is nothing on the sheet that says your shortbread must be traditional and presented in a traditional way. I thought I had got it wrong ... I put the shortbread in a pretty tin but everybody else's was the classic round of shortbread on a plate. And mine just looked wrong. They weren't what the judges were expecting. And I didn't get anything.

It is only through trial and error that competitors learn what is really expected of them:

I wasn't confident (the first time). I became confident when I knew what the judges looked for and I knew I had good items to display.

It took a bit of practice and looking at others to work out what they were after. They're not looking at one thing.

I did Google what judges look for. If you know what they want you to do, then you can please them.

One of the judges argued that working out the elements of a winning entry is part of the challenge, making it clear that the etiquette plays a major part in both success and failure. Given this, the interviewees were next asked how they felt about both failing and succeeding in order to identify whether this led to any negative attitudes and, potentially, resulted in negative behaviour, as demonstrated at the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show.

TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION ...

Failing to be placed in the Show was an evident knock to personal pride but on a relatively small scale:

I just felt a bit embarrassed. At that point, I thought that I did badly because what I took in was quite small compared to the others.

I used ferns ... arranged them in a basket and, by the time we got back, they had completely wilted.

(My husband) was nudging me, saying how embarrassing is that — pretend it's not yours!

However, it was evident that the experience of failing did not deter people from entering future shows but rather encouraged them to learn about the etiquette and to improve their performance. Everyone enjoyed success but, interestingly, only if the category was properly competed. Being the only person to enter and, therefore, winning by default does not fulfil the need for relative ranking or give sufficient external validation:

My first win, only two people entered. I didn't want to tell people that only two people entered. I beat one other person — it's a bit of a hollow victory ... but I still got the certificate!

Turning to the categories of incidents and evidence of competitive behaviour, there were examples of strategic planning that included setting aside the best produce throughout the year and working out how to amass sufficient points to become the overall winner:

You make the preserves throughout the year, squirrel a jar away and you don't have to think, just get it out. I have a deliberate strategy. I eye up the marmalade, thinking is that good enough, is it going to beat X, Y and Z?

[My son] had seconds for his bughouse, photograph of a garden creature, and drawing of a treasure map and no place for his decorated biscuit — yet he won overall because he had entered every class!

Turning to the more negative categories of incident, a mishap occurred in one of the children's categories when

a vegetable queen (it was Jubilee year) was mysteriously damaged. Her crown had been removed and set to one side before the judging took place. This could have been a simple mishap but cheating was suspected and, if confirmed, would have been an example of opportunistic cheating. In certain circumstances, mishaps can be turned to advantage with some creative thinking:

When my friend's jam didn't set, he put a label on it saying 'French Set Preserve' to make it seem like it was meant to be like that! And he got placed!

This might be considered to be questionable judging but, interestingly, all of the issues with the judges came from the children's categories. One judge explained that they try to give a prize to all of the children who enter in order to encourage them to compete again. Inevitably, this is seen as unfair by those parents whose children have put in more effort and, as a result, produced better work. One example concerned an edible necklace made of sweets. It was awarded only second place, condemned as 'not healthy' (a point that was not specified in the rules). The irony is that it was the only entry that was totally edible and, therefore, fully met the written rules.

Evidence of suspected cheating also came from the children's categories. For example, the high standard of a winning Lego model of a kingfisher gave rise to the suspicion of significant parental input. Indeed, the level of assistance that may or may not have been received from parents was one of the biggest causes of suspicion in the children's categories, raising questions about how far 'helicopter parents' will go to ensure the success of their offspring.

The charge of inadvertent cheating resulting from failure to observe the etiquette was demonstrated by the use of cake

mix and a possibly unorthodox approach to the growing of onions:

It doesn't say you can't use a packet (but) you're not going to win, that's for sure.

When it comes to growing onions, I have suspected. There is a guy that regularly enters and the three onions he enters are so massive that they haven't been grown from seed and they haven't been grown from a normal set ... this is bigger ... I would imagine that he's planting an already grown onion ... they don't look right ... but he's clearly done that in his garden, he hasn't gone to a shop.

Despite the suspicion, the onion-growing example was not condemned:

I don't think it's cheating ... I just think that the set he uses is a fully grown onion ... It's in the spirit of growing big so I guess I kind of like it ... I wish I'd done it

This demonstrates that there is a clearly perceived distinction between the acceptable manipulation of the rules, which is part of the competition, and actual cheating:

People will always stretch the rules. But that's not cheating.

However, the dividing line is different for each individual:

Everybody's got a different point at which they think playing the system becomes cheating.

The literature noted that the self-perception of being fundamentally honest must not be violated, often resulting in ethical blindness, a failure to notice the unethical implications

of the act being undertaken. Similarly, stretching the rules is clearly considered to be acceptable where an ethical justification can be brought into play. For example, faced with low entries in the scone category and the desire to provide a good show for local people, a mother and daughter rushed home to bake more scones. They entered half each and one took first prize and the other third:

*If I'd gone out and bought them from a shop,
THAT would have been cheating!*

Not surprisingly, the interviewees were loath to identify examples of either opportunistic or pre-meditated cheating, particularly relating to their own actions. However, a tale from the longest runner bean category provided the most compelling example:

*Someone brought two in, which they'd cut and laid
on the plate as if it was a single bean, just placed
together. It didn't win. It seems so unbelievably daft.
I'd call that cheating.*

Interestingly, and unlike the fiction, it became apparent that no one had ever been disqualified, even when blatantly not adhering to the rules, as in the runner bean incident. In true British spirit, '*it's just mentioned quietly.*' Whilst entries are often disqualified at county shows, the local judges were motivated by their aim of not discouraging participation. Subconsciously, they might also recognise the potential unfairness of the etiquette to the uninitiated.

CONCLUSION

This study was inspired by the frequent scandal that occurs at the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show, asking whether it

is representative of real life. The interviews revealed that the depiction is not simply a convenient plot device but an accurate account of the significant competitive behaviour generated by a Flower and Produce Show, despite its inconsequential rewards. It is evident that competition is valued for its own sake as people demonstrate their inner drive to succeed and the need to meet their achievement goals, as identified in the literature. Relative ranking is critical, providing validation, but enhanced if competing against friends and diminished if there is a lack of competition. Overall, it is the external validation of achievement that competitors seek, the reinforcement of a positive self-concept.

Examples of strategic planning and mishap, along with suspected, inadvertent and, possibly, opportunistic cheating are found in both fiction and fact, with suspicions of cheating being particularly rife in relation to the real-life children's categories, something not yet seen in *The Archers*. For obvious reasons, examples of pre-meditated cheating are difficult to identify in real life and are, therefore, more evident in the fictional depiction. However, the commitment to these competitions and the competitive behaviour that they generate is such that the motivation to cheat in reality cannot be discounted, as evidenced by the tale of the longest runner bean.

The local show confirms the theory that competition is not about a strict adherence to the rules but rather using them to their optimum. The importance of etiquette and the unwritten rules was clearly identified, with individuals each employing their own moral code to determine the breaking point of these rules. In the face of potential rule breaking, the need to maintain a positive self-perception is critical, although there may be a failure to notice the unethical implications, so-called ethical blindness. Related to this, unintentional or unknowing rule breaking is not considered to be cheating.

The only clear area of disparity between fiction and fact was the number of disqualifications at the Ambridge Flower and Produce Show. Whilst the Ambridge judges are stern, the real judges at this local show are comfortable with tacitly ignoring even the most blatant cheating to ensure a happy event that encourages everyone to take part. This leads to the most critical finding of this chapter and the most important and universal driver for anyone entering a Flower and Produce Show. This is its importance as a community event, eliciting not only the desire to contribute, but also to preserve and maintain it for others in the future. Therefore, the clear link between the fiction of Ambridge and the fact of real-life is this sense of community and tradition, something that has always been at the heart of *The Archers*.

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PEER REVIEW, BY BERT FRY, BROOKFIELD
BUNGALOW, AMBRIDGE, BORSETSHIRE

BERT'S ODE TO THE FLOWER AND PRODUCE SHOW

*I think these clever ladies
Have hit the nail right on the head,
As there's a lot of suspect behaviour
In the chutney, jam and bread.*

*There is nothing more unsettling
Than a judge who doesn't know
The difference of a packet mix
From one made of proper dough.*

*I've seen some awful things occur
So someone can win First,
But there's something about a runner bean
That just brings out the worst ...*

*Now I can appreciate the etiquette –
All the rules not actually stated –*

*My Freda had a lot of those
And none could be abated!
My Freda loved the Ambridge Show
Her joy did never fizzle;
The only thing she ever feared
Was Jill Archer's lemon drizzle!*

*There's one last thing on which I must
Insist till my last night,
There was NOTHING wrong with that there twine –
Jim just hadn't tied it right!*