



Feb 14, 2018 14:49 GMT

Criminologist explores dark side of The Archers

It is the longest running soap on British radio, billed as ‘an everyday story of country folk’ when it launched in 1951. Now an academic from Northumbria University is exploring the darker side of the BBC Radio 4 show The Archers by examining the role of criminals and crime within the long-running series.

[Charlotte Bilby](#), a Reader in Criminology at Northumbria and long-time fan of The Archers, has investigated how offenders are portrayed within the show, and whether it perpetuates or subverts criminal storylines and characters.

She has now been invited to present her findings at the annual Academic Archers conference, taking place this weekend at the British Library, in London. Now in its third year, the event will see 26 academics and professionals from all over the world take an academic perspective on life in The Archers.

Topics range from rural housing and policy, the importance of silent characters in radio, and accent and identity, with a special focus this year on women in Ambridge – the fictional village in which The Archers is set.

The idea for Charlotte's paper, entitled *Fear, fecklessness and flapjacks: imagining Ambridge's offenders*, came about while she was carrying out research for the Ministry of Justice.

She said: "When (Archers' character) Ed Grundy was sentenced to a community penalty I'd been working on a national evaluation of offending behaviour programmes. I became very interested with which programme he was taking part in, whether it matched his risk of reoffending level, and if he'd breach his order. I've never listened to crime on The Archers in the same way since.

"As a fan of the show it is a huge honour to be asked to speak at this year's conference, and to get to share my thoughts about whether a huge crime wave is sweeping Ambridge at the moment. It feels like there is, but when you dig a little deeper, the crime rate is still very low; something that might come as a bit of a surprise to my fellow listeners."

The Academic Archers symposium is organised on a voluntary basis by long-time fans of the programme, Dr Cara Courage, and Dr Nicola Headlam, of the University of Oxford.

Cara said: "Academic Archers is for anyone that loves The Archers, wants to get to know more on its storylines and quite simply, wants to talk about Ambridge and its residents all day. We've another day of varied, and some quite leftfield, takes on life in Ambridge and we can't wait to welcome our delegates."

Academic Archers takes place this Saturday 17 February at the British Library, in Euston, London and will be streamed live on Twitter - follow

@academicarchers. For more information please visit <http://academicarchers.net/>.

Charlotte Bilby is a Reader in Criminology at Northumbria, with research interests in arts and creativity in criminal justice systems, images of offenders, as well as evidence based criminal justice policy making.

She has carried out research for the Home Office and Ministry of Justice and the Northern Ireland Office looking at the impact of psychological interventions on reducing re-offending.

Most recently she has been considering why prisoners might take part in positive creative activities while incarcerated; the influences this has on prisoners' identity and behaviour, and how the wider public might view and understand art work created 'inside'.

[Criminology](#) is one of a number of courses offered within Northumbria's Department of Social Sciences – for more information visit <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/postgraduate-study/masters-subject-pages/social-sciences/>

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