



# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's scientist Mary Archer's turn*

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** The great 19th-century scientist Michael Faraday. He created the dynamo and electric motor. I'd like to show him what happened thanks to his work.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** The same piece of advice my father Harold gave me when I was young: never let anything you don't understand pass you by. In other words, ask questions.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Tap dancing. I can't do it, but I have wild moments when I think it'd be fun to go on Strictly Come Dancing. This is not to be encouraged! Jeffrey's been asked many times.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** My bladder! I was diagnosed with high-risk bladder cancer in 2010, so I had it removed and reconstructed from my intestine. The new one works much better.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To be an expert in whatever I do.

**The poem that touches your soul...** BC:AD by UA Fanthorpe. She was my English teacher at Cheltenham Ladies' College and a poet. This poem is so subtle and not a word is wasted.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I wrote Jeffrey's early books. I used to read them and correct his punctuation, but I never changed a syllable.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Being accepted to read chemistry at Oxford University in 1962. It was transformative.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** To push anyone I see dropping litter headfirst into the nearest dustbin.

**The song that means most to you...** The Victorian religious ballad The Holy City from 1892. My father used to play it on the organ and taught me the words. It reminds me of him.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** When Cambridge University Hospital won Trust Of The Year in 2008. I was chairman at the time.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** The death of my father from lung cancer in 1971 when he was 60. I was 26 and he died before I could tell him I was pregnant with William.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To play the organ.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Be a force for good.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'd like a service at Great St Mary's church at Cambridge University beginning with Bach's Fugue in E flat. Jeffrey would read from John Donne's Meditations XVII – if he's up to it! There'd be a wake at our house in Cambridge.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a giver, not a taker.

**The Plug...** My book The Story Of The Old Vicarage, Grantchester can be ordered from [www.jeffreyarcher.com](http://www.jeffreyarcher.com), £10 plus p&p. All profits go to the Rupert Brooke Society. ■

*As told to Rob McGibbon*

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**The prized possession you value above all others...** A ruby necklace, earrings and bracelet my husband Jeffrey gave me for our ruby [40th] wedding anniversary in 2006. They're very special.

**The unqualified regret you wish you could amend...** Not getting to see my son William sing solo in a choral concert at his prep school when he was 11. I was working. He's never forgotten it!

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I would begin with a 3km jog near our home in Cambridge. I'm 68 now and a run sets me up for the day. Then I'd attend a seminar about converting sunlight into fuel at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. I'd join Jeffrey and the boys [sons James, 38, and William, 40, and his four-month-old baby Alexander] at our favourite restaurant, Lucio in Chelsea. I'd have sea bass followed by affogato – their homemade ice cream – which is wicked. I'd go to the RSC theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in the afternoon to see Much Ado About Nothing, then visit our home, called Writers' Block, in Majorca for a swim. I'd have dinner at Tempo in Mayfair, making sure I have some Pouilly Fumé wine and lemon tart, then I'd sing in the choir at a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Royal Albert Hall.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Playing with my Bengal cat Sunita (right) when I should be working.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu by Marcel Proust. It's full of so many truths about life.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day...** I'd visit pubs and stub out the cigarettes being smoked by young women. It's so tragic to see girls ruining their health.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Bad spelling or punctuation. I like to take out my editorial red pen to make corrections when I see errors.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** A Man For All Seasons from 1966. I particularly loved Susannah York as Thomas More's daughter Margaret. She was so beautiful.

**The person who has influenced you most...** Sir George Porter, who was director of the Royal Institution when I was researching chemistry there in the 70s. He kindled my interest in solar energy. He sadly died in 2002.



From top: Great St Mary's Church at Cambridge University, Proust's A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu, Beethoven, affogato, Susannah York in A Man For All Seasons, tap dancing and Michael Faraday

PS...

*Colin 'Merlin' Morgan opens the new Shakespeare's Globe season in The Tempest. Robert Downey Jr's back as the flawed superhero in Iron Man 3 – in cinemas from Friday. And Leona Lewis begins a UK tour at Glasgow's Clyde Auditorium on Friday*



**NEXT WEEK**

- Whatever happened to Rachel Stevens after Strictly?
- Bake Off winner John Whaite's hilarious Cordon Bleu school diary
- Jamie Oliver does sweet things with honey
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings