

Are you an 'invisible addict?' Didn't think so

DICK LUMSDEN takes exception to suggestions that the older generations are drinking to excess behind closed doors

THE European economy is in meltdown, volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis are becoming ever more common, High Street shopping chains are dropping like flies and people are fighting each other all over the world.

You'd think, wouldn't you, that with all of the bad things happening today the safest place to be would be sitting indoors with your feet up watching Eastenders and nursing a glass of something cold in your hand?

Well you'd be wrong.

It seems that enjoying the simple pleasure of a quiet drink or three in the comfort of your own home is making you (and me) a menace to society. We are, apparently, creating an army of "invisible addicts" which, if left unchecked is going to drag the country down to hitherto unplumbed depths.

If the Royal College of Psychiatrists has its way, we'll all be strip searched every time we go to pick up a repeat prescription at our local surgery. Sniffer dogs will be all over us like a cheap suit, and woe betide any of us who have been doing a spot of DIY.

The smell of brush cleaner will be enough to mark you down as a front line foot soldier in the subversive army. As Lloyd Bridges hilariously remarked in *Airplane*, "Looks like I picked the wrong week to stop sniffing glue".

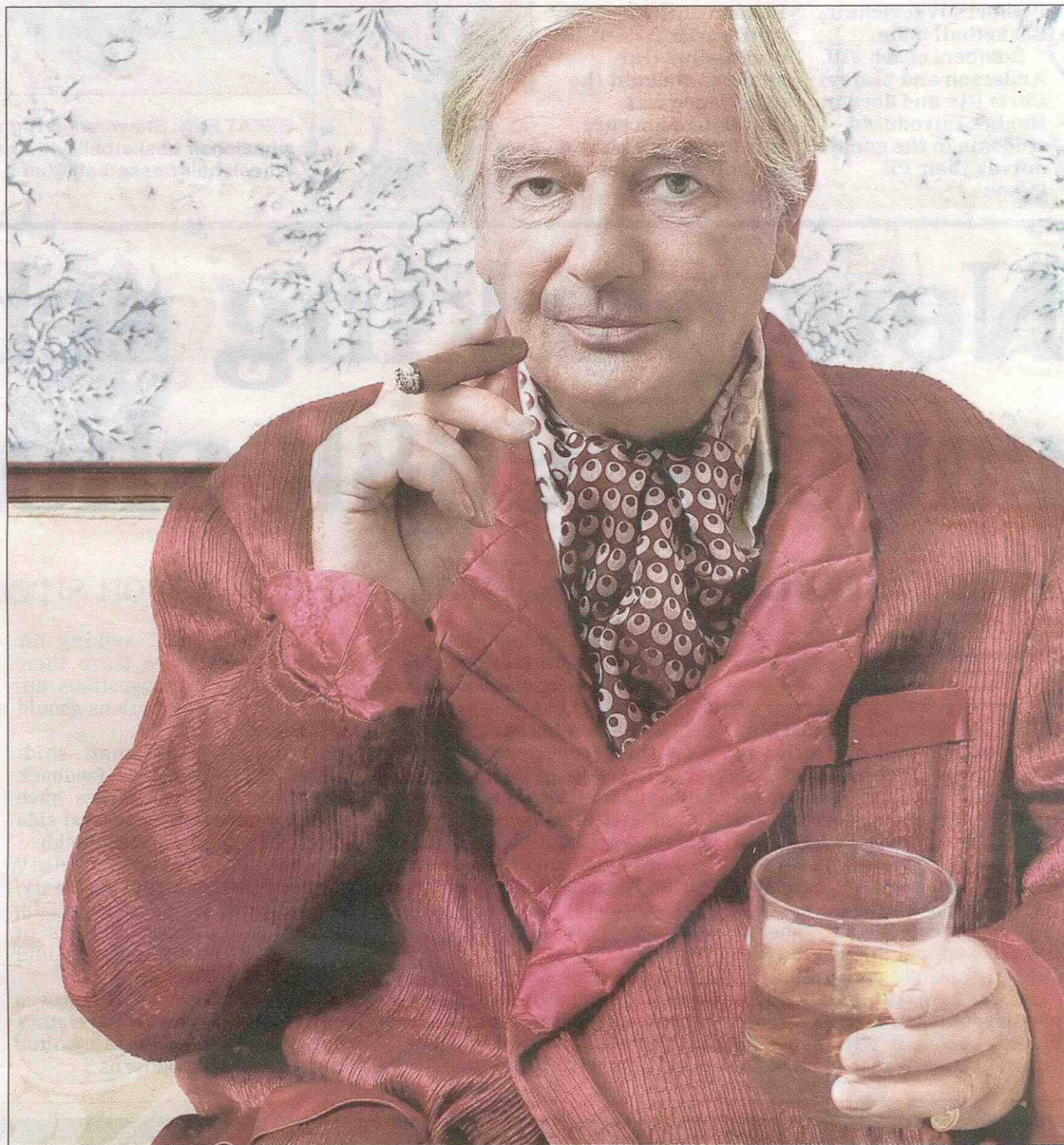
Believe it or not the RCP has actually created something called The Older People's Substance Misuse Working Group to collate all of the so called "evidence".

The crux of their campaign is that the "baby boomer" generation – anyone born between 1946 and 1964 – is careering towards retirement on the back of growing alcohol and drug misuse.

And that among those already retired are thousands and thousands of invisible addicts who are drinking more than 11 units of alcohol a week.

They want the Government to step in and order GPs to compulsorily screen everyone over 65 for "substance misuse", they want hugely expensive advertising campaigns to warn us of the dangers of drinking more than a glass of wine a day, and they want every doctor, nurse and social care worker in the country re-trained to spot the signs. It's staggering.

And it won't stop there. In supermarkets where you have to prove you are over 18 to buy



DING DONG: I hope you're not abusing any substances, sir

There are many reasons why older people drink at home. It costs far less than going to the pub, it's more relaxing, and you don't have to worry about driving home.

Some people will drink to take away the pain of loneliness or bereavement, others out of sheer boredom.

And if there are the odd occasions when you have a glass more than you should have and you end up snoring on the sofa, isn't that better than causing havoc in the streets, urinating in doorways and challenging everyone you meet to a fight

But what I don't accept is the sweeping generalisation that just because those of us that are a little bit older choose to enjoy our pinot grigio in front of the TV rather than in front of a busty barmaid, we are causing society a problem.

It is our choice, and instead of attacking us, the powers that be should be praising us for keeping the retail economy afloat and stocking our fridges with beer and wine.

There are 21 million people over the age of 50 in this country, and that number is rising all the time as our older pensioners live

alcohol to the levels recommended by the RCP, the supermarkets will lose millions of pounds in sales and the Government will lose millions in the tax they would have collected.

The psychiatrists may be on the warpath, but I for one will carry on doing my bit for the economy and I won't bow down to the killjoys who are over dramatizing the situation. Cheers!

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views