



WOOSTER SAUCE

The Quarterly Journal of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

Number 51

September 2009

Just Another Day in London

by Hilary Bruce

Saturday, May 30th, and the day dawned bright and Searly. Somewhat earlier, in fact, than the hour at which we chairmen really flourish, but we were due in Mayfair, to put out the welcome mat for an Empress.

It all started at a meeting about Plum Pie, Heywood Hill's forthcoming Wodehouse exhibition, when publicity ideas were solicited. "I could get you a pig," said a voice, brightening proceedings perceptibly. Too late, I realised the voice had been mine and shortly afterwards, the response came by telephone: "Could you *really* get a pig?"

Luckily, I could. That sort of request is meat and drink to our friends at the Berkshire Pig Breeders Club, whose championship the Society sponsors under our Back the Berkshire initiative. Just two phone calls secured a pig-in-principle; two more established that setting a live pig loose in Mayfair was unlikely to attract Constable Oates's censure; so just the Walking Licence remained. Yes, truly, a Walking Licence. Which presented no difficulty, once Christine Coe, our pig expert, discovered that the Animal Licensing official was a huge Wodehouse fan. What are the chances, eh?

At 7.30 a.m. Curzon Street does not usually bustle, but outside Heywood Hill it was positively congested: two photographers; booksellers in mufti; assorted hangers-on, including self and consort, as well as David Cazalet, Wodehouse's great-grandson; and a farm trailer on a yellow line. Chris Coe – members will recall her witty explanation of the finer points of pig breeding and showing at a Society meeting a while ago – had risen substantially earlier even than the Chairman to chauffeur Gloria the Berkshire sow from Warwickshire to London, but showed no sign of it as she tempted our model, now dubbed the Empress of Mayfair, from the comfort of her trailer. A nice bit of apple did the trick.

The thing about kerbs is that they don't exist to any great extent in Warwickshire fields. Gloria was rightly suspicious and refused point-blank to step up



Stephen Fry does not look as though Constable Potter is about to serve a summons on him for moving pigs without a permit.

(Photo by Chairman's Consort)

onto the pavement. And so she made her stately way down the middle of the road towards the zebra crossing on the corner. At every step there were smells so captivating that she seemed not to notice the traffic. Most drivers affected little interest, although we noted exceptions – the cabbie who loudly advised "I'm not having *her* in the back of my cab" and the striking number of garbage trucks on the streets at that early hour, every one of which hove to alongside Gloria as, to a man, the operatives photographed the scene on their mobiles.

A note on navigation might be useful. Perhaps you've wondered how pigs are steered? There are no reins, there is no lead; the accoutrements of the pig handler are a pig board – a sort of giant portable blinker tactically deployed by the handler; a light cane for gentle tapping; and, in extremis, pig nuts. (For the avoidance of doubt, these are a food item enjoyed by pigs.)

Gloria lingered long at the zebra crossing – its aroma seemed to surpass even that of the white line – and during this interlude the scene was further enhanced by the arrival of a tall, lissom chap, one Stephen Fry. Devoted Heywood Hill customer though he is, were they testing his loyalty too far by getting him to turn up at eight o'clock on Saturday morning to play second fiddle to a pig? He certainly seemed perfectly content, and of course his arrival did wonders for our box office – the binmen drove round the block for another go with their phones, and now tourists were arriving, their sightseeing off to a splendid start with one of the most improbable sights Mayfair had ever offered. Perhaps they thought this sort of thing happens the whole time.



Gloria poses for photographer Tommo as Stephen and Chairman Hilary look on (Photo by Chairman's Consort)

Meanwhile, Gloria and Stephen were outside the shop and getting on like a couple of sailors on shore leave, posing on the steps and by the railings, strolling down the street – and by now it wasn't just the tourists and binmen whose interest was piqued. Three separate police cars drove past; you could see the precise moment they spotted a loose pig in the road and took the foot off the accelerator. And you could see the precise moment they decided it wasn't worth the paperwork and put the foot back on the gas. The Chairman was having conniption fits about being arrested in the

Society's name, but we were perfectly legal – we had our Walking Licence and, unbelievably, that's all you need to set several hundredweight of live pig loose in Piccadilly.

Our delightful photographer Tommo seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly – the assignment doubtless made a pleasant change from the chore of snapping international fashion models for glossy magazines – and he and Gloria quickly established a rapport as she learned to 'make love to the camera', a trick all the best models have.

We had been warned that with luck we might retain Gloria's interest for half an hour – though it might be as little as half a minute – and she would clearly signal the end of proceedings. But a long hour after we'd begun, Gloria was still posing winsomely while the human model and the hangers-on had drooped perceptibly. And so, at half-past nine, we closed down the cabaret. Gloria retired to her trailer and thence to Warwickshire where, apparently, she put on considerable dog with the other pigs in her field. Our forbearing human model left, Twittering about the proceedings, our friends at Heywood Hill tidied up the street and opened for business, and the Chairman's Consort took the Chairman off for a rather tactless bacon roll. Peace reigned once more in the refined surroundings of Curzon Street . . .



Gloria, Stephen, and Hilary relax with David Cazalet outside Heywood Hill (Photo by Chairman's Consort)

Between Empress of Blandings and these two human beings who ministered to her comfort there was a sharp contrast in physique. Lord Emsworth was tall and thin and scraggy, Pirbright tall and thin and scraggier. The Empress, on the other hand, could have passed in a dim light for a captive balloon, fully inflated and about to make its trial trip. The modern craze for slimming had found no votary in her. She liked her meals large and regular, and had never done a reducing exercise in her life. Watching her now as she tucked into a hash of bran, acorns, potatoes, linseed, and swill, the ninth Earl of Emsworth felt his heart leap up in much the same way as that of the poet Wordsworth used to do when he beheld a rainbow in the sky.

"What a picture, Pirbright!" he said reverently.
"Ur, m'lord."

(From *Heavy Weather*, 1933)