

BY THE WAY



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IONICUS Covers for Wodehouse Paperbacks

The topic for this *By The Way* was inspired by two members, Stephen Payne and Graeme Davidson. Stephen was anxious to confirm precisely how many Wodehouse books had been illustrated by Ionicus, as he understood there were more than the 56 Penguins he had at that point acquired. Graeme had been in correspondence with Ionicus in the late 1980s, with a view to purchasing the original artwork for one of the covers.

The artist Ionicus (J C Armitage), who died in February 1998, still retains a narrow lead as the person who has designed more covers for Wodehouse books than any other, although this position will be surrendered during 2009 to Andrzej Klimowski, illustrator of the Collectors series of jacketed hardbacks published by Everyman (or Overlook in the USA). Ionicus provided the illustrations for a total of 58 Penguins, as listed below, plus the wrap-around cover for the Chatto & Windus first edition of Wodehouse's last book, *Sunset at Blandings* (part of which was also used for the cover of the Coronet paperback).

1969	Piccadilly Jim	1974	The Little Nugget
1969	Spring Fever	1974	Sam the Sudden
1970	Psmith in the City	1974	Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin
1970	Psmith, Journalist	1975	Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves
1971	The Mating Season	1975	Leave It to Psmith
1971	Very Good, Jeeves	1975	Indiscretions of Archie
1971	Laughing Gas	1975	Bachelors Anonymous
1971	Blandings Castle	1975	Doctor Sally
1971	Summer Lightning	1975	Full Moon
1971	The Code of the Woosters	1976	Meet Mr Mulliner
1971	Eggs, Beans and Crumpets	1977	Aunts Aren't Gentlemen
1971	Right Ho, Jeeves	1978	The Man Upstairs
1971	Service with a Smile	1978	Money in the Bank
1971	Pigs Have Wings	1978	The Man With Two Left Feet
1971	Carry On, Jeeves	1978	Uneasy Money
1971	The Inimitable Jeeves	1978	Hot Water
1971	Mulliner Nights	1979	Something Fresh
1971	Young Men in Spats	1979	Do Butlers Burgle Banks?
1972	Jeeves in the Offing	1979	Vintage Wodehouse
1972	Uncle Fred in the Springtime	1980	A Pelican at Blandings
1972	Summer Moonshine	1980	Company For Henry
1972	The Heart of a Goof	1981	Much Obligated, Jeeves
1972	Quick Service	1981	Wodehouse on Wodehouse
1973	Ukridge	1983	Tales of St Austin's
1973	Galahad at Blandings	1986	The Adventures of Sally
1973	The Luck of the Bodkins	1986	Cocktail Time
1973	Big Money	1987	The Small Bachelor
1973	Lord Emsworth and Others	1987	The Girl in Blue
1973	Heavy Weather	1987	A Damsel in Distress

The illustration for *Right Ho, Jeeves* was used on the 1981 Penguin omnibus *Life with Jeeves*, and that for *Summer Lightning* on the equivalent omnibus *Life at Blandings*.

Readers will note the two intruders in the list provided: *Wodehouse on Wodehouse*, the omnibus collection of his three pseudo-autobiographies, *Bring on the Girls*, *Over Seventy* and *Performing Flea*; and *Vintage Wodehouse*, edited by Richard Usborne, which was an anthology of Wodehouse material from a number of different books.

In June 1987 Ionicus wrote to Graeme Davidson that:

‘Up to date I have done fifty-seven of these covers but I have no idea if Penguin wish to do any more.’

It is quite likely that he was excluding one of these two as not quite ‘pukka’. In his own collection of the books, he had numbered *Vintage Wodehouse* as 48 and *Wodehouse on Wodehouse* as 58, so we cannot conclude with certainty that the title he was excluding would have been the logical *Vintage Wodehouse*.

Ionicus wrote in another letter to Davidson, this time in 1990:

‘Although Penguin continue to reprint the Wodehouse titles, for which I drew the covers, they have no plans to print further titles in spite of promptings from me.’

As with most artists, Ionicus took great care with his work, making trials before launching into the final version. A good example can be seen in the illustrations of the cover for *Very Good, Jeeves*. The left-hand illustration below clearly shows from a distance the nesting swan on the island in the lake. In the version selected by Penguin for the book, the swan is still clearly in evidence while Bertie and Jeeves are approaching – artistic licence must be permitted! – but the picture suggests it has just emerged from behind the Octagon.



The original of the picture above is actually twice the size of the one on the right, which was the final version from which Penguin created the book covers.

Ionicus’s non-Wodehouse work appeared in many other places. He was a regular contributor to *Punch*, and worked for many other publishers, such as Chatto & Windus (for about 40 years), Hodder & Stoughton, Macmillan, the OUP and, of course, Penguin. He supplied many covers to the *Yorkshire Dalesman* in the 1960s and 1970s, and found a particular inspiration in golf as a subject. It is understood that several of his golfing watercolours are on display at his old club, The Royal Liverpool at Hoylake.

