

WOOSTER SAUCE



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

Number 2

June 1997

UP AND RUNNING!

The Committee of the Society is delighted to report that we are now up and running! Members will receive, with this second issue of *Wooster Sauce*, the first three newsletters in the *By The Way* series. The subject-matter of this series will be drawn from far and wide, and we hope that all members will find something of interest. The first three issues include a fairly comprehensive list of Wodehouse books in print, a guide to a London walk packed with Wodehousean interest and extracts from an article which appeared in *Colliers*, the American magazine, in 1920 and described in detail the daily exercises in which the Master set so much store. Suggestions for future topics (if our membership numbers grow sufficiently we hope to be able to produce up to six *By The Ways* a year) would be very welcome, as would our members volunteering to write or research the material! The more members who contribute to our Society publications, the more the Society will seem to belong to the membership.

We have lined up a most impressive array of patrons from all walks of life. They have one thing in common: a long-standing and deep-rooted appreciation of the works of P G Wodehouse, and although they are all busy people, we hope that from time to time we can persuade some to contribute to our pages, or appear at our Society events.

We know that we cannot really do justice to their positions and achievements in a few words, but believe that members will appreciate even the briefest of information about their Patrons. It is hoped that we will be able to prepare more substantial profiles in future issues, similar to that concerning our President, Richard Briers, OBE, which can be found on page 9.

Our Patrons, in alphabetical order, are:

Rt Hon Tony Blair, MP: Prime Minister
Henry Blofeld: *Test Match Special* commentator
Ian Carmichael: Actor who played Bertie Wooster on television in 1960s
Jonathan Cecil: Actor, and reader on Chivers' unabridged audio-cassettes
Nicolas Colicos: Actor, appeared in *Wodehouse on Broadway* and *By Jeeves*
Alan Coren: Writer and humorist
Stephen Fry: Writer and broadcaster; played Jeeves on television in 1990s

Benny Green: Jazz musician, writer and broadcaster

Sir Nicholas Henderson GCMG: Industrialist

Lady Hornby: PGW's step-grand-daughter

Sir Simon Hornby: ex-Chairman, W H Smith

Richard Ingrams: Writer and satirist, and Editor, *The Oldie*

Lord Lloyd-Webber: Composer

John Mortimer QC CBE: Novelist

Frank Muir CBE: Humorous writer and broadcaster

Rt Hon Lord Oaksey OBE: Writer and former jockey

Jan Piggott: Archivist, Dulwich College

Lord Quinton of Holywell: Former Chairman, British Library

Griff Rhys Jones: Actor and broadcaster

Rt Hon Sir Richard Scott: High Court Judge

Tom Sharpe: Novelist

Godfrey Smith: Author and columnist

Ian Sproat: Former Minister for the Arts

Lucy Tregear: Actress who appeared in *Summer Lightning* and *By Jeeves*

Auberon Waugh: Editor, *Literary Review*

John Wells: Writer, actor and humorist

Tony Whittome: Publisher, Hutchinsons

Patrick Wodehouse: PGW's nephew

FROM EDWARD CAZALET'S

Sir Edward Cazalet, P G Wodehouse's step-grandson has a substantial collection of correspondence between Plum and family, close friends, business contacts and fans. He has kindly agreed that Wooster Sauce should be allowed to put in its thumb and pull out the odd . . .

Letter dated April 9, 1972 from PGW to Thelma Cazalet-Keir, Peter Cazalet's sister:

"I was invited by the President the other day to go to the White House and go to church with him. I couldn't go, as the trip would have tired me too much, but it was a nice compliment."

Comment: Plum was 90 at the time; the President was Richard Nixon. The Daily Mail carried a story on 29 April, 1997 that Checkers, Nixon's beloved dog who died in 1964, had been buried in the Bide-a-Wee Pet Memorial Park on Long Island, which was supported so generously by Plum and Ethel.

Undated letter from PGW to Godfrey Smith:

"Jeeves' bracer does not contain dynamite as is generally supposed. It consists of lime juice, a lump of sugar and one teaspoonful of Buck-U-Uppo. This, it will be remembered, is the amount of Buck-U-Uppo given to Elephants in India to enable them to face tigers on tiger hunts with the necessary nonchalance."

Comment: This evidently refers to bracer Mark 2. Readers may recall from Jeeves Takes Charge, written in 1916 (ten years before we were introduced to Buck-U-Uppo) that Mark 1, injected into Bertie Wooster on the day on which Jeeves entered his employment, incorporated Worcester Sauce for colour, raw egg for nutrition and red pepper for bite.

Letter dated July 2, 1953 from PGW to a Mr Slater

"I have never revealed the fact before, but Market Blandings is Marlborough. I passed through it years ago on a motoring tour and was much impressed by it. It seemed to me just the town which ought to be miles away from Blandings Castle."

BIBLIOPHILE BOOKS' SPECIAL OFFERS

Bibliophile Books is a mail order distributor of publishers' 'remainders'. They have recently acquired some of the unsold stock from the distribution arm of the late Jimmy Heineman, including the American editions of the following Wodehouse items which might be of interest:

Wodehouse Nuggets, selected by Richard Usborne. £6.

Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern, by Lee Davis. £6

Lord Emsworth's Annotated Whiffle: The Care of the Pig, by James Hogg. £5

What's In Wodehouse? by Charles Gould. (Published in the UK as *The P G Wodehouse Quiz Book*) £6.

The Great Sermon Handicap. Six volumes with the story translated into 58 languages plus English and Phonetic English. £45 for the set of six.

Bibliophile can be reached on 0171 515 9555 or by fax on 0171 538 4115. A postage charge is added to all bills.

PG WODEHOUSE ARCHIVES

Letter dated July 29, 1939 from PGW to Guy Bolton

*PGW was asking Guy Bolton for help with a dramatisation of *The Code of the Woosters*, with which he was having difficulty. The first draft of the play has not survived, unless it is in the Bolton archives, but notes for the revised outline referred to do exist. They demonstrate again the meticulous approach taken even to speculative assignments which came over so strongly in *Performing Flea*:*

“So glad you liked *The Code of the Woosters*. But, as regards the thing as a play, there’s a snag, – viz, that as handled by me it seems to lose all its punch. George Abbott read the book and wrote me a rave about it, but didn’t like the play. ‘It seems to need the old G. Bolton touch.’

Since writing the play, I have had a lot of ideas for improving it, – notably cutting out Aunt Dahlia and starting at Totleigh, the whole of act one being played in the drawing room. This has the advantage of giving one fifteen more pages to play about with, and I think that’s what it needs, as at present the story has to be so rushed. I have it all worked out for Stiffy to take on all the Aunt Dahlia stuff, and I think it’s a big improvement. (After the scene in act two where Bertie pretends to be engaged to Stiffy and Sir Watkyn consents to her marriage to the curate, Stiffy is grateful to Bertie and pinches the teapot at end of act two to do him a good turn).

It seems to me that in the play too many people are trying to steal too many things, and there is too much of Gussie. In my revised scenario everything is greatly simplified. I didn’t bother to write the new version, thinking I would wait till Waller decided definitely. And then he suddenly sprang all this ‘big musical’ stuff on me.

I absolutely agree with you that the thing ought to be a straight play. My feeling, when Jack suggested music, was ‘Oh, let him rave’. I knew Jack Buchanan would never agree to play a part without a love interest, and there seemed to be no other possible star.

What I suggest if you feel the thing has a chance, is that you take over from this point and we split fifty-fifty.”

What the Papers Said: The Daily Mail (2)

On 26 March, 1926, the following was reported in the **People and their Doings** column:

The latest arrival to Droitwich is Mr P G Wodehouse, who really ought to be snapshotted in the brine baths by an enterprising photographer. For our leading humorist has a remarkable habit of reclining for an hour at a time on his back in the shallow end with hands clasped round his knees while, swaying gently from side to side, he thinks out the plot and dialogue of his next story.

THE SMILE THAT WINS

Favourite nifties – 1

As a child of eight Mr Trout had once kissed a girl of six under the mistletoe at a Christmas Party, but there his sex life had come to an abrupt halt.

(Bachelors Anonymous)

Favourite nifties – 2

They train curates to judge bonny babies. At the theological colleges. Start them off with ventriloquists’ dummies, I shouldn’t wonder.

(Uncle Dynamite)

SCHOOLWORK AT DULWICH

Jan Figgott, Archivist at Dulwich College, has contributed two essays to Wodehouse Goes To School, the 1997 volume in the Millennium Wodehouse Concordance. In these extracts, he considers one aspect of the academic life of the College.

To understand Wodehouse's schooldays, it is necessary to know a little about the Dulwich College of his day, and the rapid history of the College since it was incorporated into a public school in 1857. It had been, since 1619, a charity foundation to educate and house twelve poor scholars and to house twelve poor old age pensioners, founded by the most famous Tudor and Stuart actor and theatre-manager, Edward Alleyn. The first Master from 1858-83 was Canon Carver, who aimed at 'breadth and variety' of studies. The College since then has profited from the tension inside it between the highly academic urban day school and the public school elements. A H Gilkes, the famous Master who so greatly impressed Wodehouse, thus wrote in his diary that Dulwich was 'in the main a day school, and at the same time desires to be, in the fullest sense of the word, a public school'. Gilkes goes on to explain the qualities his boys should possess: virtue, loyalty, hard work, discipline, and tradition, 'co-operating earnestly in every way for the general good, and the renown of the school', becoming 'in every way that good product of English life, a body of good public school boys.' Gilkes, says Gibbon in *Gilkes at Dulwich* 'gave Dulwich a soul'.

Wodehouse told David Jasen that Dulwich

... was what you would call a middle-class school. We were the sons of reasonably solvent but certainly not wealthy parents, and all had to earn our living later on. Compared with Eton, Dulwich would be something like an American State University compared with Harvard or Princeton. Bertie Wooster's parents would never have sent him to Dulwich, but Ukridge could very well have been there.

Wodehouse said how lucky he was to be on the 'Classical' as opposed to the 'Modern' (Languages), 'Science' or 'Engineering' Sides, as 'it was the best form of education I could have had as a writer'.

Wodehouse's final entry on the College Register charted his academic progress:

489 Wodehouse, Pelham Grenville

May 1894

Sixth Sept 1898 left July 1900

Form and Place at Yearly Examinations.

	<i>Form</i>	<i>Overall</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Math</i>
1894	Up III B	6th	15th	Set IA 2nd
1895	Classical L V	16th	25th	Set IIIc 8th
1896	Classical U V	6th	21st	Set III 24th
1897	Classical Rem	12th	21st	Set III 18th
1898	Classical Rem	4th	23rd	Set III 15th
1899	Classical VI	23rd	not placed	not placed
1900	Classical VI	17th		

Entered Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Oct 1900.

Study figures in Wodehouse's school stories as a threat to sport, but is an important theme, particularly in the Upper School, the arena of most of the stories, when the 'remove' from the Upper Fifth took place. This 'remove' could be delayed if work was unsatisfactory, forcing a boy to repeat the year before promotion into the Upper School. The first of the two years in the Upper School was spent, then as now, in the form named the Remove. It is possible from the stories to deduce the school rhythms of study and preparation, and many specific classical texts are referred to.

The outdoor bias of *The Captain*, and that of the average boy, is presumably to be flattered by the stories; there is of course contrary evidence that Wodehouse himself took his study seriously. There is a constant dialogue in the novels, and an interesting tension, between the claims of the class-room and the athletic fields, the gymnasium or courts. There is the danger of falling into the extremes of being a 'slacker' in one's work, and on the other hand being a 'swot'. Mike Jackson's father removes the brilliant cricketer from his beloved school for being a 'slacker'; Mike's report says that "an abnormal proficiency at games has apparently destroyed all desire in him to realise the more serious issues of life" (*Mike*, ch30).

Wodehouse's irritation at this academic snootiness is hinted at by the parody of the schoolmaster's style. In the essay entitled *Work in Tales of St Austin's*, we read that:

The ambition of every human new-boy is surely to become like J. Essop of the first eleven, who can hit a ball over two ponds, a wood, and seven villages, rather than to resemble that pale young student Mill-Stuart, who, though he can speak Sanscrit like a native of Sanscritia, couldn't score a single off a slow long-hop.

This is very witty at the expense of dead languages, but the academic element in Wodehouse's mentality is of course present in the name-joke – about John Stuart Mill's education and the consequent breakdown which it gave the young Mill from too much crammed knowledge – as it is of course in the many examples of verbal play and interwoven literary allusion. Wodehouse goes on to justify the supremacy of the physical over the academic in another passage by claiming that the athlete as a product of nature is a more perfect type of animal, while the scholar is the outcome of artificiality. Mike's elder brother Bob is a typical normal athletic animal, who finishes oiling his bat before facing, in *Mike ch 7*:

... the stress of wrestling with the speech of an apparently delirious Athenian general, whose remarks seemed to contain nothing even remotely resembling sense and coherence.

It is, of course the Classics that the self-respecting prefect heroes study; this is of course the traditional stance of the Headmaster in *The White Feather* in spite of his awareness of "the spirit of the age" and of "the fact that things were not as they used to be". This is obviously based on the opinions of Arthur Herman Gilkes, the Master of Dulwich College, expressed in chapter 24:

The headmaster was silent. To him the word 'education' meant Classics. There was a Modern side at Wrykyn, and an Engineering side, and also a Science side; but in his heart he recognised but one Education – the Classics.

To Wodehouse all phraseologies – such as the lunatic poetry of the names of Anatole's culinary masterpieces – all idioms and lexical curiosities are endlessly fascinating; no modern writer, except perhaps James Joyce, has such an alert ear. He tellingly uses the terminology of Classical rhetoric for the absurdity of an incongruous parallel: of two schoolboy witnesses in *The Gold Bat ch 13* he writes that

The two told their story in alternate sentences like the Strophe and Antistrophe of a Greek chorus. ('Steichomuthics', your Greek scholar calls it, I fancy. Ha, yes! Just so.)

The Classical Sixth Form at Dulwich from 1890 to 1902 included the future luminous philosopher of the Bloomsbury Group, G.E. Moore, and two future Heads of Oxford and Cambridge houses, the famous scholars Sir John Sheppard, Provost of Trinity College, Cambridge from 1933-55, and Alic Smith, Warden of New College, Oxford from 1944-58 and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. In 1900, the year of Wodehouse's leaving the College, nine scholarships at Oxford and Cambridge were won. The boys worked in fact extremely hard, as from *The Manoeuvres of Charteris* in *Tales of St Austin's*:

The Sixth did four compositions a week, two Greek and two Latin, and except for those did not bother themselves very much about overnight preparation. They relied on their ability to translate both authors [Livy and Virgil] at sight, and without previous acquaintance.

'Cribs' are referred to: one unfortunate victim of a 'rag' by a fellow member of his boarding-house is discovered by his visiting uncle, a Bishop, to have on his shelf – as well as some yellow-covered novels – *Bohn's English Translations of the Classics*. Wodehouse is most amusing about schoolboy cribs in *Treatment of Cribs by an Expert* in *Public School Magazine* for January 1902.

In addition to translating from the Classics, the 'compositions' mentioned were renderings into Latin and Greek from English. In *Ruthless Reginald* Rigby of the Sixth wrestles with some obstinate set of Iambics or Elegiacs with his lexicon. This type of exercise, however, obviously trained the skills of future writers of English, or at least, one of the best.

DID YOU KNOW?

Publishing Errors – 2

The first edition of *Jeeves in the Offing*, published by Herbert Jenkins in 1960, showed on its half-title page *A Few Quick Ones*, the name of the preceding book. It was corrected in the second printing, but the error reappeared in a Barrie & Jenkins reprint in 1979!

I SAY!

Favourite Exchanges – 2

"He travelled back to Paris with her and left her there."

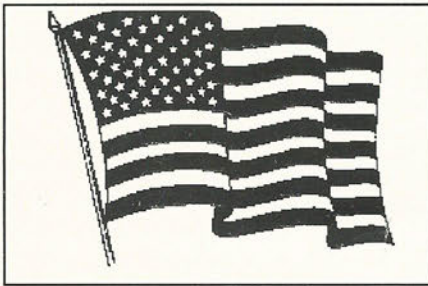
"How fickle men are!" sighed Millicent.

(*Summer Lightning*)

CONFESSIONS OF AN AMERICAN WODEHOUSIAN

by Peter Cannon

I don't remember when I first became aware of P. G. Wodehouse. In the late 1960s, at my New England prep school, for instance, he wouldn't have come up in English class – nor was he an author any friend of mine was reading for fun. Tolkien was all the rage for the young of that era, and I was no exception, having early on developed a special fondness for Edgar Allan Poe and others in the horror-fantasy genre. (One Agatha Christie mystery had been enough to convince me I'd never be a fan of detective fiction, apart from Sherlock Holmes; while one Isaac Asimov novel similarly cured me of any urge towards science fiction.) At my university I majored in English, with a concentration in American literature. A year of graduate school with more of the same left even less time for casual reading, though by this stage in my education I may well have picked up the idea that Wodehouse wrote comic novels about a 'butler'. And what butler could compete for lively interest with a hobbit?



Not until New York, where I moved to pursue a career in book publishing, did I read my first Wodehouse – an old Penguin paperback of *The Inimitable Jeeves*, which I borrowed from my mother's house in Massachusetts. It was one of the books that had recently joined the family library courtesy of my new step-father, a genial man blessed with a good sense of humour, as well as a strong build and bald dome. (That he proved devoted to his step-children would come as no surprise.) Well, within the first few pages I knew I was in the presence of a genius. As a duo Jeeves and Bertie Wooster ranked up there with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and Laurel and Hardy. (Tolkien's Frodo Baggins and his servant Sam, I now saw, didn't qualify.) It was nearly the work of a moment to read the remaining Jeeves titles, most of which were available in new Penguin editions with charming cover art by Ionicus. I've always been sceptical of the claim that a book could cheer you up, but I can recall once when I was feeling low if not actually ill that reading a chapter or two of *The Code of the Woosters* actually lifted my spirits. Wodehouse was the best medicine!

The wonderful centennial exhibition at the Morgan Library made me curious to learn more about Wodehouse the man. I began to read and collect biographical and critical studies. My Wodehouse shelf grew to include as many secondary as primary works, the latter largely consisting of Penguin paperbacks, review copies given me by a friend who wrote the book column for the rough American equivalent of *Milady's Boudoir* (not the sort of magazine likely to tout Wodehouse to its readers). As a rule I prefer cheap reprints to fine volumes, though I hardly complained when one birthday I received a first edition of *Bertie Wooster Sees It Through*.

Terrence Rafferty's *New Yorker* appreciation, 'Satisfaction', sparked a search for the latest U.S. edition of *The World of Jeeves*, which I wasn't able to find for many months since it was between printings. More happily during this period I ran across the Wodehouse books published by James Heineman. These inspired me to write to Mr Heineman, who phoned almost instantly in response to my letter and gladly explained who was who and what was what in the larger Wodehousian world. He even volunteered to show me his collection sometime. While I could have easily walked to his address across Central Park, I alas never took him up on his friendly offer.

I joined The Wodehouse Society and attended the New York convention, my first opportunity to mingle with fellow aficionados. One was Colonel Norman Murphy, who was kind enough to sign my copy of *In Search of Blandings*. Four years later my wife Nan and I went to Boston, where we happened to sit at the same dinner table Saturday as Tony and Elaine Ring. Tony and I discovered that we both played real tennis, a sport Wodehouse must have been familiar with but doesn't, as far as Tony knows, mention in his writings. The following spring good fortune and Nan's job brought us to London. In the past year we've participated in a number of local outings, including to see the musical *By Jeeves* and several screen adaptations of Wodehouse at the British Film Institute.

I confess that I've also become a member of the British Fantasy Society, but if I ever have to make a life-or-death choice between the two, believe me, now that my literary tastes have matured, you can count on P. Cannon to cast his lot with Wooster and Co.

WAS PLUM IN THE GROOVE?

asks Murray Hedgcock

Popular music plays its due part in the Wodehouse stories, with Bertie's interest in hits of the day often noted. His own piano talents were modest, but we acknowledge his flair with the banjolele (although sadly, Jeeves did not).

Plum of course wrote the lyrics for many Broadway successes – but what of a more basic popular music? Was he at all interested in jazz, which was beginning to make an impact around the time that the young Wodehouse first visited the United States?

The first true jazz recordings were made in 1917 by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, two years later the ODJB hit London, and by the Twenties, jazz was well established here, if heavily toned down for the West End nightclub audiences of which Bertie and the other Drones so often formed an appreciative part.

But no genuine jazz bands or tunes crop up in the Wodehouse writings – except for a significant reference in *The Luck Stone*, 'Basil Windham's' schoolboy thriller just published by Galahad Books. The amiable German master Herr Steingruber is invited to play his cello at a school concert, with the nervous inquiry: "Er, I suppose you don't know any cakewalks, do you Sir? *Smoky Mokes*, or *Bill Simmons*, or something like that?"



Half a century rolled away when I read that, because *Smoky Mokes* was one side of the first jazz record I bought, back in 1947 – a 78 costing half a crown, on Australian Regal Zonophone.

True, Graeme Bell and his Dixieland Jazz Band spelled it "*Smokey*", but the melody came to mind immediately, and the beat:

"Dum dee-dum, dum-dee-dum, dum de dum-dee-dee-dum, dee-dum dee-dum dum dee dum-dum dum deeeeeee".

The *Oxford Companion to Popular Music* says the cakewalk was a forerunner of ragtime. "It became a national craze in America in the 1880s, arrived in Europe soon after – and was very popular in the North of England".

Smoky Mokes itself turns up on page 494 of Brian Rust's discography, "Jazz Records", under Vess L Osman. "Sylvester Louis Osman was one of the greatest American banjoists of all times. He made hundreds of records between 1897 and 1916, many of interest as contemporary accounts of ragtime music", writes Rust.

Osman's first major session, with piano accompaniment, was for Columbia in New York around 1899-1900; this included *Smoky Mokes*, composed by Abe Holzmänn. He also recorded it in London in 1900 and 1903, and yet again in New York in 1906 or 1907.

Plum made his first visit to the States in 1904, when he may well have heard the tune, or possibly that first record – and the London recordings could have hit the Wodehouse ear, too.

Did the digital dexterity of Vess L Osman stay with PGW and form the inspiration for Bertie's somewhat abortive enthusiasm for the banjolele?

It is a pleasing thought. But as for *Bill Simmons* – after ploughing fruitlessly through all 794 pages of *Jazz Records*, I fear this buff can do no better than inquire plaintively: "Who he?"

RECENT PRESS COMMENT

A selection from the many and varied references to Wodehouse and his work which have appeared recently in the Press

Radio Times, 15-21 February

In a feature article introducing a programme *A Woman called Smith*, the stars of which were real women whose only thing in common was their surname, they 'rounded up some other Smiths who made their mark'. These included: Hammersmith, the Smiths (eighties pop group), Mandy Smith, Mel Smith, Citizen Smith, W H Smith, the Granny Smith, Delia Smith and of course Ronald Eustace Psmith.

Sunday Times, 9 March

In an article lamenting the passing of the great BBC1 sitcom *The Last of the Summer Wine*, James Gilbert, the former head of comedy, who first commissioned the programme in 1972, was quoted as saying that the secret of its appeal lay in its innocence.

Like P G Wodehouse, it is set in the land of eternal summer. If I was ever in two minds about how to direct a scene, I would think how they would react if they were children. . . .

Sunday Times editorial, 16 March

The Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* is too kind. Its list of Europe's 100 finest achievements and inventions made Britain top dog. . . It is touching to see so many of our secondary artefacts and fashions (Barbour jackets, Church's shoes, the miniskirt) lumped together with Shakespeare, organised sport and parliamentary democracy as contributors to Euro-civilisation. Any litany of our achievements needs to be fair and balanced, and not designed simply to soften us up for the single currency. They were right about one thing, however. P G Wodehouse is a national treasure, even if he did die an American citizen. It is nice to know our Italian friends have learnt to love him, too.

Times, 23 April

Reported that in the *Folio Society* Readers' Poll of their top fifty books, a compilation called *The Plums of P G Wodehouse* came in 40th. Has any reader heard of this, or does anyone know what it contains?

Times, 11 May

In an article entitled *Name Games*, Roland White dicussed the British obsession with nicknames.

The 1920s and 1930s were the golden age of the British nickname. Look at Bertie Wooster: he is virtually the only person of his social circle with a proper name apart from Gussie Fink-Nottle and when you are called Fink-Nottle you need all the proper names you can lay your hands on. But what about Bingo Little, Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps, Oofy Prosser, Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright? Wodehouse obviously had his finger on the social pulse.

Express, 3 May

The featured restaurant in *The Literary Lunch* series was Planet Hollywood, which Norman Murphy has identified as being on the site of Mario's. The rationale for the article was a scene in the book *Bill the Conqueror*. As the article begins:

Everyone wants Felicia to marry Roderick, the heir to the Mammoth Publishing Company, set fair to inherit millions. But she has already fallen for Bill West. Her Uncle Sinclair decides to promote Roderick's prospects over dinner.

"Think how jolly it will be to revel in some gay café. I want a place I can throw bread at people. I'm afraid I shall have to begin dinner by talking what you might call shop. I ought to be finished by about the fish course. Let's go to one of those Nightclubs Which Are Living Hells, that *Society Spice* writes about."

Thrilled to bits, Felicia suggests Mario's in the West End . . .



Profile of the President

Richard Briers was born in 1934. He and his wife, Ann Davies, have two daughters, Kate and Lucy. In 1959 he was a contemporary at RADA with Peter O'Toole and Albert Finney, since when he has been one of the country's most popular and versatile actors. Apart from appearing in some 20 West End plays spanning Ayckbourn, Cooney, Coward, Ibsen, Shakespeare and Shaw, he has starred in extremely popular television sitcoms such as *Ever Decreasing Circles* and *The Good Life*. His association with P G Wodehouse roles dates back to the film *The Girl on the Boat* in 1961, since when he has played Uncle Fred in the radio version of *Uncle Dynamite* and Bertie Wooster in a number of radio adaptations and BBC audio-cassettes. He starred as Galahad Threepwood in the excellent *Heavy Weather* film made for the BBC which was shown on Christmas Eve 1995. He was made an OBE in 1989.

RECENT PRESS COMMENT, continued

Evening Standard, 18 March

A long article by Mark Jones on the editorial page considered further the inclusion of Wodehouse in the list of Europe's 100 greatest achievements of the century. He pointed out that,

by shoving in Wodehouse and sturdy shoes, they have consigned us, as we are so often consigned, to an Edwardian never-never land far removed from the serious and sober reality of Britain today.

After then considering a list of modern authors who might better balance the inclusion of Shakespeare, he suggests:

Any writer, in fact, who has never put a doddery earl or a pair of spats in one of their novels and goes on to say that another good reason for not having Wodehouse on the list is that he is neither very European nor entirely English, having spent so long in America.

He then offers as his most serious objection to Wodehouse's inclusion on a list of cultural achievements the fact that he:

. . . was a philistine. Not a stupid philistine, nor a badly read one. . . But his real heroes and buddies were golf pros, schoolboy cricketers and Broadway lyricists. The good guys in his novels are rowers, boxers, drinkers, clubmen, plucky little women and dim old aristocrats. The bad guys are bluestockings, modern poets, female modernists and intellectual young men who wear side-whiskers and read Russian novels.

Jones asks whether we as a nation should petition *Corriere della Sera* to find another writer to represent Britain, but concludes that this would be wrong:

Reality is all very well, but it has its limitations. We've got to have a spot of fantasy, and as far as fantasy goes, P G Wodehouse is erotica for many of us. How much more gratifying to have someone on the list who will allow us to pretend for eternity that we are an affable and essentially harmless race, where the only threat to the social order is that policemen get their helmets stolen on Boat Race night.

THE LEAST LIKELY PRODUCTION OF THE YEAR?

What would you think of a stage production of
Laughing Gas?

Performed as a musical?

By a group of children in New England who are
all home-schooled?

This is what Elin Woodger, of the American-
based Wodehouse Society, had to say:

A group of children who are all home-schooled
formed a theatre group a few years ago. They call
themselves the "*Puddlejump Players*" and they are
directed by a woman named Sheila Leavitt, who
happens to be a fan of P G Wodehouse. Recently they
presented a production of *Laughing Gas*, which I
naturally had to go and see.

This really was a remarkable production in a lot of
ways. In terms of theatrical quality – well, it definitely
wouldn't have won any prizes. In particular the songs
were nothing short of atrocious, just pastiches of
popular melodies with rather awful lyrics laced in.
The cast was sometimes enjoyable, sometimes painful
to endure, as children's casts can be. However, what
the kids lacked in talent, they more than made up for
in enthusiasm and both the sets and the costumes
were extremely clever and at times quite brilliant.
What really amazed me was the level of sophistication.
The script that Sheila wrote was remarkably true to the
original and retained not only a bit of innuendo, but
also lots of references to heavy drinking, which I
would have thought many of the parents would have
found inappropriate. However, Sheila informs me that
the parents were completely supportive of the entire
production.

Come on, you school-teachers! Let's have
some English schools producing Wodehouse
plays and musicals, whether they are the more
readily available items, or new adaptations.

POETS' CORNER

All Over

Farewell to the hurry and bustle,
The speeches, the hecklings, and all,
The bracing delights of a tussle,
The posters on every wall:
Farewell to the rows, which were splendid,
Good-bye to the eggs which we cast,
The General Election is ended
At last.

There isn't a person who knows if
We gave in our votes for C.-B.,
Or plumped for that warrior, Joseph,
Who cries for a tax upon tea:
But Free Trader or Tarriff Reformer,
We all had our share of the fun:
And the contests, or peaceful or warmer,
Are done.

No more with a groan or a whistle
We hint that a speaker has erred.
Or use a dead cat as a missile
To prove that his views are absurd.
We don't seize a 'shop-'un' and shy it
As a prelude to joining the fray:
Eggs are merely a light form of diet
To-day.

But years will roll by; and their rolling
Will bring us our pleasures anew.
The stir and the fight and the polling,
Opponents a fellow can boo.
May nothing occur to delay it,
No shifty political trick
Postpone that glad moment. Oh, may it
Come quick!

*This poem first appeared in the February
1906 issue of **The Books of To-day and
the Books of To-morrow**, a monthly
journal in which PGW had over seventy
pieces in about four years. It commemorated
the General Election in January 1906 in
which the party leaders were Sir Henry
Campbell-Bannerman (C-B), who became
the Liberal Prime Minister, and Arthur
James Balfour, of the Conservative party.
The 'Joseph' referred to is Sir (Joseph)
Austen Chamberlain, Chancellor of the
Exchequer in the outgoing government.*

BOOK REVIEW by *Tim Andrew*

THE LUCK STONE by *P G Wodehouse* (Galahad Books, £ 40)

There is good news for Wodehouse fans. Galahad Books have been given permission to republish *The Luck Stone* for the first time since its original appearance as a serial in *Chums* in September 1908. The story was written by P G Wodehouse, under the pseudonym of 'Basil Windham', with some help – quantity indeterminate, but described by Tony Ring in his interesting and informative introduction as 'worth ten pounds' – from his friend William Townend.

Like everything in *Chums*, it was aimed at school-boys, but those of you more accustomed to *Tales of St Austin's* and the other stories which appeared in places like *The Public School Magazine* and *The Captain* will find this very different. Richard Usborne has said that *Chums* wanted a blood-and-thunder school story and the plot of *The Luck Stone*, although set against the familiar Wodehouse backdrop of public school life, certainly has all the elements needed: the Maharajah's stone, his heir at Cambridge and a century maker in the Varsity cricket match, air gun pellets flying thick and fast, a mysterious stranger from India, a suspicious new school master, a boxing match in which right triumphs over might, heroic football, even one of the earliest literary car chases. (If you've read *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins and Conan Doyle's *Sign of Four*, you may be forgiven if some of the above is causing you to experience a certain sense of *déjà entendu* at this point, but then PGW never was one to pass up the chance of reworking good ideas or plots to squeeze the maximum life out of them, was he?)

The St Austin's stories and their ilk were written for the boys of Wodehouse's own schooldays, who were relatively sophisticated, well-educated and upper class. *Chums* was targeted at boys among the fairly recently emerged mass readership created by the moves to provide compulsory elementary education free, for all, towards the end of the 19th century. (It was not until 1891, ten years after PGW's birth, that parents in England were given the right to demand free education for their children; in 1893 the school leaving age was raised to 11!). Wodehouse was, as always, acutely conscious of the audience for which he was writing; his own voracious reading habit was sufficient research.

Although Wodehouse was yet to find the 'voice' and develop the characters which were to give the fullest scope to his comic genius and make him one of the 20th century's household names, *The Luck Stone* was no speculative apprentice piece. It had been commissioned by *Chums*, which, by selecting PGW as author, was choosing a young man in his late twenties who had already been a professional free-lance writer for some six years, with nine books, not including the *Globe By The Way Book*, published under his own name. *The Luck Stone* appeared at about the same time as Psmith was introduced to the world.

There is no doubt it will have touched the spot and rung the bell. The action moves at a cracking pace and the writing is calculated to grip the reader. The mass of today's 'cool' youth revels in the excitement of fast-moving designer fashions and music and is targeted by magazines the content of which would make the knotted and combined locks of Wodehouse – when he had any – and his generation stand on end like quills upon the fretful porpoentine. Modern youth would no doubt find the setting of *The Luck Stone* and its implicit values dated and quaint, but to red-blooded boys of the time it must have come as a direct hit, straight between the eyes.

For those of us who love reading Wodehouse in the late 1990s, the republication of *The Luck Stone* is a bonus in two ways. Firstly, we can settle in our favourite armchair in front of the fire, cheerfully park our disbelief on the mantelpiece and enjoy it on its own terms, for it is certainly excellent fun and contains its share of Wodehouse *bons mots*. Secondly, and more seriously, we can also appreciate it as an unusual piece of work which is entitled to its own position as an example of Wodehouse's output. It is quite unlike his better-known school stories, which occupy their own niche, and is a further demonstration, if one were needed, of the professional range of this master craftsman.

Galahad Books are to be congratulated on taking the initiative to republish *The Luck Stone* and the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate thanked for permitting it. This is a strictly limited edition (250 numbered and 26 specially bound lettered copies) and the intention is that there will be no more. It is beautifully produced and well worth the – relatively – high price. Get it while you can!

Tim Andrew
May 1997

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AUDIO-CASSETTE REVIEW

Summer Lightning read by John Wells
(Chivers Unabridged Audio)

Chivers have now produced about twenty unabridged Wodehouse volumes on audiotape, concentrating on the Jeeves/Wooster and the Blandings series, of which this is the sixth, but the first to be read by John Wells (one of our patrons).

As is the norm with unabridged recordings, it is presented in character so that it becomes fairly easy to appreciate who is speaking after listening for a few minutes, but it does, of course, represent a considerable test for the reader. John Wells gives Millicent a slight lisp, for example, to help distinguish her from Sue Brown. I find that readings such as this make ideal listening on long solo car journeys, for this tape lasts 7 hours 22 minutes, and being a familiar story to most of us, the occasional need to concentrate on the road does not spoil it unduly. Chivers should be encouraged to extend their Wodehouse offerings.

News of Recent and Forthcoming Publications

Wodehouse at the Wicket, edited by Murray Hedgcock (Hutchinson, July,)

Hutchinson are publishing an anthology of the best of PGW's cricket writing, including unrepublished poems from his early days in journalism. Murray Hedgcock, who has written extensive introductory notes, is an experienced Australian journalist and member of our Society; a Wodehousean of many years standing, who is an expert on his subjects.

Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere (Porpoise Books, August, £ 25)

Porpoise Books are again making available to the Wodehouse Collector some of his more elusive stories. This collection, which is timed to coincide with this year's volume of the *Millennium Concordance*, consists of 25 school stories which appeared in magazines some 80 or 90 years ago but never appeared in contemporary book collections. Two were included in *Plum Stones* in 1995, and others appeared in *The Greyfriars Holiday Annual* in the 1920s or in *The British Girls Annual* for 1918, but none have been readily available. The print run is restricted to 500 copies so early purchase is recommended.

The Wodehouse Millennium Concordance, Volume 3: Wodehouse Goes to School, by Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard, with introductory essays by Jan Piggott (Porpoise Books, August, £ 20)

Although numbered 3 in the series, the 1997 volume is actually the fourth to be published, owing to an error on last year's dust jacket! The halfway point in the Concordance, which when complete will cover all PGW's fiction in UK and US book editions and most of its appearances in magazines, will be reached with this volume, which has been enhanced by two extensive essays from Jan Piggott, Archivist at Dulwich College. An article based on an extract from one of the essays can be found on page 4.

News of Forthcoming Wodehouse Events

Oh Kay!

Each Summer, the Barbican Centre in London stages a series of new productions in the *Discover the Lost Musicals* series. This year, one of the chosen works is the Wodehouse/Bolton/George and Ira Gershwin musical *Oh, Kay!*, which will be performed on August 17, 24 and 31, and September 7, at 4.15pm. Tickets are only £12 and if still available can be obtained from the Box Office on 0171 638 8891.

The Wodehouse Society Convention in Chicago

The American-based The Wodehouse Society, to which the UK Society is affiliated and to which many of our members belong, will be holding its biennial convention in Chicago from 3 to 5 October, 1997.

The event consists of talks, sketches, a quiz, a bread-roll throwing banquet, Drones-style competitions, optional sight-seeing tours of Chicago, a great deal of bonhomie and as you would expect, a complete absence of stuffed shirt syndrome. Details of the convention, and of how to become a member of that Society, can be obtained from Dan Garrison 1228 Simpson St Evanston Illinois 60201 USA (Tel 001 847 475 2235)

Press Launch of your Society

The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) plans to hold a small reception for selected members of the Press at the Savage Club on 10 July. The purpose of this is to increase awareness of our activities so that we can increase our membership base and geographical spread. This in turn should put us in a position to organise events for members.

The Editor would welcome suggestions for articles to be featured in future issues of *Wooster Sauce*. He will be happy to open a correspondence column, if members can be persuaded to correspond.