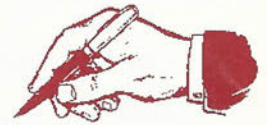


# WOOSTER SAUCE



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

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## Pigging Out at the Inner Temple

We please ALL the people, ALL the time! (Apart from those unlucky members who applied too late to obtain tickets.) At least, we seem to. The buzz and reaction from those attending our Fourth Biennial Birthday Dinner on October 21st certainly suggested so, and the reports on the centre pages bear that out. One is written by Godfrey Smith, a journalist of immense experience, who has attended all our dinners. The other is by David Herboldt, (our unsung hero of the database, without whom you would not be reading this journal), whose first attendance it was.

### SIR P G WODEHOUSE

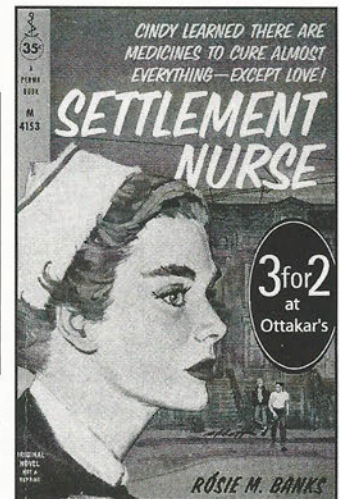


**THIS  
IS YOUR LIFE**

*The front of the big red book*

It was also the first to be sponsored by Ottakar's, one of our most professional chains of book stores, whose Chairman, Philip Dunne, astonished the guests on his table by marching to the lectern during the entertainment (a forty minute edition of *This Is Your Life: Sir Pelham Wodehouse*) to read that lovely extract from *Joy in the Morning* in which Bertie expresses the view that it's silly to try to buy a book when you go into a bookshop. "It merely bewilders and startles the inmates," he says at one point. Without Ottakar's involvement, you might still have been reading the journal, but you would not have been reading a report of a dinner.

*The rear page of the dinner menu, which reproduced the cover of one of four genuine slush novels by Rosie M Banks. Note the spoof offer!*



It may have become our tradition to create an entertainment based on Wodehouse's writings and his songs, and as the reports explain, this year proved to be no exception, but our thank you to the entertainers this year was unique. Thinking laterally of the urgent need to boost the numbers of Berkshire pigs in the country, about which members will hear more next year, we presented all our entertainers with a year's sponsorship of Patience, a young Berkshire sow living at Baylham House Rare Breeds Farm, near Ipswich.

**Sponsorship Certificate**



**Patience**

In memory of *The Empress of Blandings*, the most famous Berkshire pig in literary circles, The P G Wodehouse Society gave sponsorships of *Patience* to the following actors and musicians who recently entertained the Society during their 2004 Biennial Dinner.

<b>Hal Cazalet</b>	<b>Stephen Higgins</b>
<b>Lara Cazalet</b>	<b>Eliza Lumley</b>
<b>Stephen Fry</b>	<b>Anton Rodgers</b>

*The certificate can be found on Patience's pen*

## Nodders I Have Known:

### Wodehouse's Hollywood and Mine by Curtis Armstrong

The Mulliner stories are good examples of Wodehouse achieving perfection of form, that form being the short double-fiction, or frame story, as popularized by the late Geoffrey Chaucer, to whose *Canterbury Tales* Wodehouse owed some little debt. Mulliner is a taproom Munchausen and his fabulous embellishments allowed Wodehouse free reign with his literary structures. In no other series of stories did Wodehouse allow himself such dazzling messing about with surrealism. The golf stories were similar in structure and also gave Wodehouse outlets for literary loopiness, yet they remained firmly rooted within the milieu of the links and clubhouses. The Mulliner stories ranged far and wide and their *mis en scène* was unimprovable: what better setting than the Anglers' Rest – as fishermen are famous for being habitual liars themselves. But Mulliner's fish stories eclipsed them all. There was no class, gender, profession, or country, it seems, that could not be infested by one of Mr Mulliner's countless relations. A Mulliner could be a banker, a poet, a pastor, or a private detective; he could be independently wealthy or as poor as a church-mouse, it didn't matter. The presence of a Mulliner in a Wodehouse story often as not guaranteed the bizarre and unexpected.

The surrealism in the early Mulliner stories was particularly noticeable because of their setting in traditional Wodehouse country. It was only after fate sent him to Hollywood – and circumstances hastened his departure from it – that the Mulliners of Hollywood made their appearance. Suddenly, Mulliner had a backdrop for his tales that was as fantastic as the stories he was making up as he went along. Previously, it had been a Mulliner whose personality or circumstance brought a kind of heightened lunacy to normal surroundings. In the Hollywood stories, the Mulliners are the sane ones. In Mulliner's Hollywood then – as in mine now – the lunatics are running the asylum and we – the actors and writers – are on the inside looking out, waiting pathetically for someone to come along and shove a bit of lettuce into our hutch.

Immediately following his first visit to Hollywood, Wodehouse set about fulfilling a commitment to write a series of short stories for *The American Magazine*, whose editor had specified American characters in an American setting. There are many who would question whether Hollywood qualifies as an American setting, but Plum used this opportunity to get a little boot in. In Wodehouse's satiric



depiction of Hollywood, the romantic spotlight was, as always, on the assistants, the secretaries, the nodders, the fellow in the monkey-suit – the little people. (And in the case of Little Johnny Bingley, The Idol of American Motherhood, I mean little people in its most literal sense.) But the big shots – especially the stars and studio heads – were obvious targets. These were the people then considered to be America's Royalty.

Hollywood would prove to be a perfect 'stand-in' for Plum's native land. England had its earls, dukes, and second and third sons of dukes, and daughters of a hundred earls, valets, gentlemen's clubs, a rich vein to tap. America had nothing similar to point to with reverent pride other than Hollywood. Wealth, privilege, nepotism, inbreeding – Hollywood had it all, plus golf-courses and perfect weather. Despite its protestations to the contrary, America was no less a class society than England then, and no more so then than today, but within this class structure there were few cities which were built upon a single universally renowned industry which was itself as rigidly class conscious as Hollywood.

The lowest of these classes included the Nodder. The Nodder was not, as might be supposed, entirely a Wodehouse creation. Nodders, under various names, were essential cogs in the wheels of the movie business, without whose wordless affirmations titans like Louis B Mayer or the Warner Brothers would be paralyzed into inaction. Nodders sprang, not full-formed from the brow of Plum, but from earlier Giants of Industry from New York and Boston to Detroit and Cincinnati who felt naked without five or six Yes-Men on the company payroll.

***This article is based on a talk which Curtis Armstrong gave at the Toronto Convention of TWS in August 2003, and the second part will appear in the March 2005 edition. Curtis is a film and television actor with over 40 films or TV series to his credit.***

One of the most interesting evolutions from the dawn of the Hollywood system to the present day has involved the Nodder. At some point, possibly during the early talkies, the Nodders and the Yes-Men evolved into a marginally more advanced animal that became known as an associate producer, assistant director, or development executive, or really any studio or network drone who operates in any capacity under the ultimate decision-making level. Hence, as American society has grown increasingly complex and polarized, the Nodders have gone from being the ‘untouchables’ of the traditional Hollywood caste system to a caste system of their own, in which all Nodders are not created equal. Nodders today have many names and positions, but for the sake of simplicity, we will still just refer to them as Nodders, for they function in much the same way that Wodehouse’s Nodders did.

Screenwriters, or scenarists, also play an important role in these stories and were included because Wodehouse knew from experience that screenwriters were always good for a laugh. We tend to think of screenwriters as nearly mythic characters, commanding mind-boggling amounts of money, marrying beautiful actresses and owning second homes in Colorado. This was not always the case, certainly not in Wodehouse’s day. Screenwriters ranked slightly below nodders on the totem pole, as Mulliner explains in *The Nodder*:

It [the Nodder] is a position which you might say, roughly, lies socially somewhere between that of the man who works the wind machine and that of a writer of additional dialogue.

The Nodders and the screenwriters in Wodehouse’s Hollywood stories represent the bottom-feeders in the studio pond. To put it as delicately as possible, part of their job description involved dining off the excretion of their superiors. I’ve been a screenwriter and I know.

“It is not easy,” Mr Mulliner says, “to explain to the lay mind the extremely intricate ramifications of the personnel of a Hollywood motion picture organization. Putting it as briefly as possible, a Nodder is something like a Yes-Man, only lower in the social scale. A Yes-Man’s duty is to attend conferences and say ‘Yes’. A Nodder’s, as the name implies, is to nod. The chief executive throws out some statement of opinion, and looks about him expectantly. This is the cue for the

senior Yes-Man to say ‘Yes’. He is followed, in order of precedence by the second Yes-Man – or Vice-Yesser, as he is sometimes called – and the junior Yes-Man. Only when all the Yes-Men have yessed, do the Nodders begin to function. They nod.”

Essentially talent-free and just intelligent enough to know which side his bread was buttered on, the Nodder was usually a relative of someone slightly higher up in the industry food chain. This is a matter of perspective, as even those at the top of Hollywood’s evolutionary ladder at that time were themselves more like those fish that grow up in caves than anything human. They may have been blind, but they were capable of generating sufficient light to lure in dimmer organisms and devour them. (That much, at least, hasn’t changed.)

The flood of Nodders of both sexes in the Hollywood system had, of course, predictable results: Nodders tended to intermarry, producing new generations of Nodders, with progressively diminishing intellectual capabilities. As their parents and grandparents did before them did, these hapless hopefuls with production deals in their eyes head for the San Fernando Valley and points west in search of studio heads to be brutalized by. This modern class is known in the industry as ‘nodder fodder.’ I have had personally many nodder encounters in a career spanning over a quarter of a century, but one stands out particularly.

This occurred back in the mid-eighties, during the last great Nodder boom in Hollywood. Those were the days when Nodders were Nodders, when you couldn’t swing a cat within half a mile of Studio City without hitting one. This was an audition encounter, as opposed to a pitch encounter, but the experience was similar. I had auditioned for a guest appearance on a television series, *Moonlighting*, which would ultimately become a long-running job for me. Having passed the first test, I was brought in to read for the people who really mattered. On entering the room I was faced with a kind of Pythonesque parody of *The Last Supper*: A long table, with staff writers, co-executive producers, and story editors arrayed along either side of Christ, or in this case, series creator Glen Gordon Caron. On the completion of my audition, Caron looked down the table, first to his right then to his left and nodded silently. All present nodded back at him. Caron then delivered sentence: two and a half seasons without the option.

# Measuring Time: The Wodehouse Way

by N Rathnasree, Mark Hodson and Ian Michaud

The concept of Time is rather fluid in the world of Wodehouse. The extreme fluidity of this can be seen in the calculation of the age of Lord Emsworth, in various Blandings novels. Wodehouse may not have been all that preoccupied with speculations about Time. However, on occasions, when he glances towards it, he does so with spectacles of his own, unique kind.

The following is an extract from *The Small Bachelor* (later repeated, with some small variations, in *The Old Reliable*):

There are, as everybody knows, many ways of measuring time: and right through the ages learned men have argued heatedly in favour of their different systems. Hipparchus of Rhodes sneered every time anybody mentioned Marinus of Tyre to him: and the views of Ahmed Ibn Abadallah of Baghdad gave Purbach and Regiomontanus the laugh of their lives. Purbach in his bluff way said the man must be a perfect ass: and when Regiomontanus, whose motto was Live and let live, urged that Ahmed Ibn was just a young fellow trying to get along and ought not to be treated too harshly, Purbach said Was that so? And Regiomontanus said Yes, that was so, and Purbach said that Regiomontanus made him sick. It was their first quarrel.

Tycho Brahe measured time by means of altitudes, quadrants, azimuths, cross-staves, armillary spheres, and parallactic rules: and, as he often said to his wife when winding up the azimuth and putting the cat out for the night, nothing could be fairer than that. And then in 1863 along came Dollen with his *Die Zeitbestimmung vermittelt des tragbaren Durchgangsinstrument in Verticale des Polarsterns* (a best seller in its day, subsequently filmed under the title *Purple Sins*) and proved that Tycho, by mistaking an armillary sphere for a quadrant one night after a bump-supper at Copenhagen University, had got his calculations all wrong.

This extract raises one's curiosity for its odd mixing up of historical references to people connected with Astronomy.

Why did Wodehouse suddenly pounce on so many Astronomers and more surprisingly still, so many astronomical instruments? One does not have far to look for most of the references mentioned in the abstract above. Almost all the names occur together

in an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on the Measurement of Time.

Hipparchus and Marinus, amongst the first to use astronomical observations to determine Time, and who differed in their choice of reference Longitude; Ahmed Ibn Abadallah, the 11th century Arab astronomer, who observed the location of the Moon in the sky at the time of an eclipse, and inferred the time from these observations and the calculated astronomical tables; Purbach and his student Regiomontanus, who adopted the same method in the 15th century; and finally, Tycho Brahe, who used extensive instruments and a variety of position determinations of celestial objects and could determine the Time as a by-product of these observations.

All of them are mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia* article, and what is more, compressed inside a paragraph or two, without too many technical details of their observations. However, the *Encyclopaedia* article does use a number of technical terms at that point without explaining them. These terms must have tickled Wodehouse's sense of fun, particularly the words describing the instruments that had been used by Tycho. None of them happen to be other than actual astronomical instruments or standard observational quantities used by Brahe, and all these terms occur together in a compact paragraph in the *Encyclopaedia* article.

It is unlikely that Wodehouse would have understood their underlying meaning or use – Altitude, referring to the angular extent of a celestial object from the horizon, towards the Zenith; Azimuth, referring to the angular location eastwards, away from the North direction; Cross-Staves – instruments for measuring angular extents in the sky; Armillary spheres – spherical instruments for measuring celestial co-ordinates of any object in the sky; Quadrants – large sized sundials using one quadrant of a circle for measuring solar shadows; and finally Parallactic Ruler – a ruler like instrument with an added attachment for measuring small angles in the sky.

None of these are likely to have struck any chords with Wodehouse – other than as interesting sounding nonsense words which, strung together, were so much fun! In fact the way he talks of Tycho winding up the Azimuth and putting the cat out for the night shows that Wodehouse thought of the

***Nandivada Rathnasree is a Director of the Nehru Planetarium, New Delhi. Ian Michaud is a Society member resident in Canada describing himself as a ‘freelance media consultant’. Mark Hodson works at the Rikswijk branch of the European Patent Office.***

word Azimuth as representing some kind of an instrument and not the observable quantity that it is.

So far, so good. Everything fits. An idle reading of an encyclopaedia article on the measurement of Time could have tickled Wodehouse into adding this elaborate paragraph in *The Small Bachelor*.

Everything? Where does Dollen come in? This is the only name not mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia* article. Not just that. A retrospective look at names that would shine in a compilation of all significant advances in Astronomical observations, or measurement of Time, does not produce any noticeable Dollen. Not of any kind. Where did Wodehouse come across Dollen and his 1863 publication of *Die Zeitbestimmung vermittelt des tragbaren Durchgangsinstrument in Verticale des Polarsterns* – an apparently nonsense German title?

Not so much of nonsense German, actually. Hacking at it, bit by bit, it seems to emerge roughly as – *The determination of Time by means of a portable (vertical?) Meridian Transit instrument*. This translation emerges only after some massaging of the original words used by Wodehouse, in order that they make sense. For instance, ‘vermittelt’ is the second person singular, present tense, of vermitteln, to mediate. One would never use this informal ‘du’ form in a scientific title. This could perhaps have been a mistake for ‘mittels’ (by means of).

The net result sounds plausible. The determination of Time by means of a portable (vertical?) Meridian Transit instrument. The last bit ‘des Polarsterns’, refers to the Pole star. Without going into too many technicalities – the words jumbled together do refer to possibilities of measuring Time, using portable instruments that can be aligned with the help of sighting the Pole Star and studying the meridian transits of known stars – a method that had also been used by Tycho Brahe, with the difference that his instruments were much larger and were fixed to the ground, not requiring repeated alignment with respect to the Pole star.

Which brings us up against the absence of any Dollen in simple Astronomy textbooks. Where did Wodehouse encounter him? A little deeper search does turn up a Dollen, as an assistant of William Struve, of the Pulkovo Observatory. Struve’s team did signal work in Geodetic surveys. Perhaps, this is the Dollen that we are looking for.

It turns out that this is, in fact, the Dollen we are looking for. A search through *Astronomy Abstracts* for the period between 1850-1900 turns up two publications by a Wilhelm Dollen dealing with Astronomy.

Not just that, the title of one of them happens to be *Die zeitbestimmung vermittelt des tragbaren durchgangsinstruments im verticale des polarsterns*.

In fact, the very title mentioned by Wodehouse!

Wodehouse might have come across this publication, perhaps, in the Library at Hunstanton Hall, while he was staying there. Having read this article, which intrigued him for some reason, he may have followed up with reading about the measurement of Time, from the *Encyclopaedia*, and put the two together.

Alternatively, he may have had spent time just idly reading through the *Encyclopaedia*, for fun – he has created such a character in *The Man with Two Left Feet*. He may have put together all the other stuff that appears in *The Small Bachelor* reference and have laid it aside. Later, he may have encountered this article by Dollen. The very vagueness of the title must have seemed like a good thing to draw some fun value out of. A later addition of this kind could explain the patchiness of the reference to Dollen, which occurs in the extract above, compared to the references to the rest of the gang that had been involved in the measurement of Time. However, someone with an interest in Astronomy and who knew German must have sounded Wodehouse off as to what Dollen’s article was about – as it turns out that it was not such an odd man out amongst the rest of the references – it did fit in the overall theme.

We will never know, of course, which explanation, if any, was the right one. Not that it matters so much. The operative factor is the amount of humour that Wodehouse could extract from dry compilations about different observers and Astronomical instruments involved in the measurement of Time.

### ***The Spring Everyman Titles***

The four titles to be published by Everyman in Spring 2005 are:

<i>Jill the Reckless</i>	<i>Money In The Bank</i>
<i>Mr Mulliner Speaking</i>	<i>Something Fresh</i>

This will bring the number of titles published to 40.

## Master of Folly ~ Part III

### Pieter Boogaart completes his review of Wodehousean follies

At first sight it looks as if Wodehouse couldn't have recognised a folly if it had been brought to him on a plate with watercress round it. There are so few, and the opportunities of describing rare and funny buildings must have been numerous. But we'll not be discouraged. We'll start with the most frequently mentioned folly: the summerhouse (variously spelled as summer house, summer-house and summerhouse, depending on the publisher and the date of publication, the last spelling being the latest). Summerhouse can have several meanings for Wodehouse. In *The Head of Kay's* it means little more than conservatory, while in *Uneasy Money*, *Summer Moonshine* and *The Small Bachelor* it means a second home in the country, also called summer home as in *French Leave* for instance.

But Wodehouse must have had a definite picture of a summerhouse in his head and thought it was in our minds as well, otherwise he would not write in *The Girl on the Boat* that there was 'a sort of summerhouse' on the ship. On the other hand in *Heavy Weather* the beer garden at The Emsworth Arms is 'dotted about . . . with summerhouses'. (*Service with a Smile* mentions the same garden, but refuses to use the same word to describe them). In *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets* (Ukridge and the Old Stepper) a portable summerhouse gets stolen. *Ice in the Bedroom* and *Something Fishy* mention the houses in Mulberry Grove, Valley Fields, London that have summerhouses, 'each with its birdbath' (and 'you don't get summerhouses and birdbaths for nothing'), but one gets the impression that, all things considered, they are little more than garden sheds. The same goes for The Larches on Wimbledon Common in *The Mating Season*. *The Small Bachelor* also has the remark that 'that small oblong thing that looks like a summerhouse is George Finch's outdoor sleeping porch', though this was on the roof of a New York apartment block.

But the most folly-like of the summerhouses in Wodehouse are the temple-like structures as in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* that are used to read poetry to loved ones. And that is at the same time the most romantic use that is made of them. In *Without the Option* (Carry on, Jeeves) and *The Love that Purifies* (Very Good, Jeeves) summerhouses are used as reading-places, but in *Thank You, Jeeves* Bertie Wooster sleeps in one, although 'it's not a thing I would advise any friend of mine to do'. They are good as a shelter from the rain, provided with a little

table for card-playing and reading (*A Gentleman of Leisure*), for cooling off (*Right Ho, Jeeves*), poetry reading to a little sister, and lovers' meetings and embraces (*Lord Emsworth and Others*, *Mulliner Nights* and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*).



*Fishing Temple, Hall Barn, Beaconsfield, Bucks*  
A possible model for the Damsel in Distress temple

In *A Damsel in Distress* there is 'a cracked stucco temple set up in the days of the Regency on the shores of a lily-covered pond'. It is called 'a special haunt' and is used for reading poetry to a page boy. Other temples only appear much later in Wodehouse's career. 'On a knoll overlooking the lake there stood a little sort of imitation Greek temple, erected by Lord Emsworth's grandfather in the days when landowners went in for little sort of imitation Greek temples in their grounds. In front of it was a marble bench . . . ' (*Service with a Smile*). And in *Company for Henry* we find a similar remark: '. . . and had added the marble temple without which no gentleman's ornamental water was thought complete'. I am sure that Wodehouse, this way and that dividing the swift mind, might have chosen the word 'temple' for lots of summerhouses, such as the one Aunt Dahlia had at Brinkley Court.

A special place of honour must be reserved for the Octagon, on an island in the lake at Woollam Chersey, Aunt Agatha's lair, jealously guarded by a short-tempered swan in *Jeeves and the Impending Doom*. So the story of the Octagon is on page 9.

Boathouses next (spelled without a hyphen in later years). Wodehouse was fond of lakes and their

paraphernalia. In *A Gentleman of Leisure* he even situates a boathouse in the centre of an island, which seems a bit silly. You need a boat to get to the island in the first place. That boat would probably have come from a boathouse and Wodehouse must have taken it for granted, the way many follies were taken for granted in the circles in which he moved: no special attention was paid to them. Anyway, this boathouse is described as consisting of only ‘a little creek, covered over with boards, and capable of sheltering an ordinary row-boat’.

*The Man Upstairs* has the short story *The Good Angel* in which a boathouse appears and there is one in *Money for Nothing*. In *Mr Mulliner Speaking – Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court*, Sir Francis Pashley-Drake uses the roof of a boathouse for (near-naked) sunbathing and gets shot in the leg with an airgun. *Hot Water* has the story of how the leader of the younger school of novelists is tied up and hidden in a boathouse for a night.

And that’s all about boathouses. No further descriptions. They were taken for granted. Of all sad words of tongue and pen the saddest are these: it might have been. We don’t know what Wodehouse’s boathouses look like. Maybe he meant temple-like things, as he did when referring to the summerhouse-cum-angry-swan as ‘a sort of boathouse’. I am on thin ice here. I am accusing a man who is universally admired for his felicitous choice of words of inaccuracy. It is not exactly like dancing on the remains with hobnailed boots, but still. Yet here I stand – I can do no other. Again, perhaps we should consider the possibility that he was rather vague on purpose, in order not to give away the locations that he had in mind.

All other follies-in-the-widest-sense-of-the-word occur with even less frequency than summerhouses and boathouses. Take bathhouses. *Bill the Conqueror* mentions two dressing-sheds by a lake, and *Hot Water* a bathhouse. *Laughing Gas* has a bathing-hut and, finally, you can find ‘trunks, towels and what not’ in the bathhouse at Blandings Castle, according to *A Pelican at Blandings*.

In this last book I found the only grotto mentioned by Wodehouse, and then it is not a real grotto, but the word occurs in a song in a Gaiety show (*The Girls of Gottenberg*): ‘If you don’t like what you have got-o, pick another from the grotto, that’s the motto of Otto of Roses’. And grottoes are such an important feature in eighteenth-century gardens.

The first paragraph of *Money for Nothing* mentions a Jubilee Watering Trough. Wee Nook, the little cottage in *Joy in the Morning*, later to go up in flames, has a rockery in the front garden, but I feel

that I am already scraping the barrel here. The gamekeeper’s cottage in the west wood at Blandings, used in *Leave it to Psmith* and later in *Heavy Weather* as well as in *Pigs have Wings*, doesn’t even sound like a folly and neither does Lord Wetherby’s shack-studio in *Uneasy Money*. For a second I thought that the word gazebo, as used by the likes of Pugsy Maloney, Spike Mullins and Mr Jarvis of New York meant a building, as it should have done, but they only meant to say something like geezer.

In *The Girl on the Boat* the ruins of an ancient castle are preserved on an estate for reasons of picturesqueness. They are apparently romantic enough for the heroine to draw a picture of them. This is also a well-known element in a number of eighteenth-century folly gardens.

Seeing Wodehouse steadily and seeing him whole, as it were, it must be said that there are remarkably few fun buildings in the books of this fun writer. But there is one description of a garden wall at Sanstead House in which Wodehouse virtually defines the word folly. It is in *The Little Nugget* and I am going to quote it almost in full.

To the left was the outhouse where the coal was stored, a squat barn-like building; to the right a wall that appeared to have been erected by the architect in an outburst of pure whimsicality. It just stood there. It served no purpose that I had ever been able to discover, except as a cats’ clubhouse. Tonight, however, I was thankful for this wall. It formed an important piece of cover. . . . Having built this wall to a point level with the end of the coal-shed, the architect had apparently wearied of the thing and given it up; for it ceased abruptly . . .

I am thankful for this wall as well. Having folly-researched all of the Master of Folly’s books, this bit of wall is the best folly description anywhere. And by the way: there is an enormous folly wall at Corsham Court, Wiltshire, which Wodehouse used to know very well. Thanks for bearing with me. I hope I have interested you strangely.

## The Smile That Wins

### Favourite Nifties - 29

“She’s a nice girl – Polly. American – yes,” said Ma Price, as one who is not afraid to look on the dark as well as on the bright side. “But I always say,” she went on, “that it takes all sorts to make a world, and I will say for Polly that I’ve never found her shooting and murdering like these Americans do all the time.”

From *If I Were You*, 1931

# The Early Period of P G Wodehouse

## Elliott Milstein describes his approach to his thesis

This is the fourth instalment of the story of how Elliott Milstein, former President of TWS, wrote a thesis on Wodehouse whilst at St Michael's College, Toronto. It is based on the talk he presented at the TWS convention last year.

My thesis at St Michael's, Toronto, was called *The Growth of Sweetness and Light (A study of the novels of P G Wodehouse)* and I described the main task to be 'to divide the books of P G Wodehouse into three distinct periods', which, being the creative and imaginative writer I was in those days, I called 'Early', 'Middle' and 'Late'.

When one thinks of Wodehouse's earliest publications, one naturally turns to the world of the public school and his well-loved stories of St Austin's, Wrykyn, Beckford, Eckleton and all the other fictional representations of his beloved Dulwich College, but, in reality, most of his effort was spent combing the pulps and imitating whatever style he thought would sell, churning out bilge under a multitude of pseudonyms, generating cash and honing his craft. I think we can best mark Wodehouse's turning point with the 1909 boy's school story, *Mike*, and the creation of the sublime character of Ronald Rupert Eustace Psmith.

There is a reason Psmith is the only character to make the transition from boy's school to the adult world. He is unlike any other public school figure, much more grown up and sophisticated, as we can see from the interchange between him and the headmaster at the end of *Mike*, chapter 58, when the headmaster asked Psmith why he confessed to a crime he did not commit:

"Strictly between ourselves, sir . . ."

Privately, the headmaster found Psmith's man-to-man attitude somewhat disconcerting.

"Well, Smith."

"I should not like it go any further, sir. This is strictly between ourselves."

"I think you are sometimes apt to forget, Smith, the proper relations existing between boy and . . . Well, never mind about that for the present . . ."

"Not a bad sort", said Psmith meditatively to himself, as he walked downstairs. "By no means a bad sort. I must drop in from time to time and cultivate him."

*A Gentleman of Leisure* is another important Early Period book, often overlooked, again because the

quality of writing is not up to the later works, but it is critical because it is the first book set in what will become known as the Wodehouse World, as Jasen says:

It was the first humorous story to be set in a stately home in Shropshire, feature an amiable but dim peer, the first in a long line of Drones, a tycoon, a formidable aunt, a pretty but foolish girl and a butler.

Further, it introduces the underworld motif, which Wodehouse will use for the rest of his career. Later, too, the pretty but foolish girl becomes the girl of spirit or *The Modern Girl*.

We are still in the Early Period here, a Period characterized mostly by experiment and change, as Wodehouse works to find his *métier*. His first truly fine book of this period is, I think, *Something Fresh*, the first of the Blandings Castle stories. Everything that was begun but not quite mature in *A Gentleman of Leisure* here succeeds.

Of all Wodehouse novels, *Something Fresh* gives us the broadest vision, offering detailed accounts of every aspect of British society, from earls and dukes, to younger sons, members of the church, the middle class, the servants and the dark underbelly of London. We even have the visiting American millionaire. This panoramic view distracts, at times, from important aspects of the story, but it was a bold attempt and, on the whole, it succeeds.

Wodehouse's finest work of the Early Period, in my opinion, is *Piccadilly Jim*. Here, for the first time, the characters, the writing, the humour and the story are fully integrated. Nothing in the book detracts from the final effect. In Jimmy Crocker we have the perfect Wodehouse hero and in Ann Chester the perfect heroine.

But the most enduring creation of the Early Period is, beyond a doubt, Bertie Wooster and his man, Jeeves. Of the myriad of Wodehouse characters, these two are the best-loved and mostly widely known. Of all the sagas, Wooster/Jeeves has the greatest number of books – fourteen in all. And the voice of Bertie Wooster will become a critical feature in the transition from Middle to Late Period.

For Elliott's discussion of the Wodehouse of the Middle Period, readers will have to await the March 2005 issue of *Wooster Sauce*.



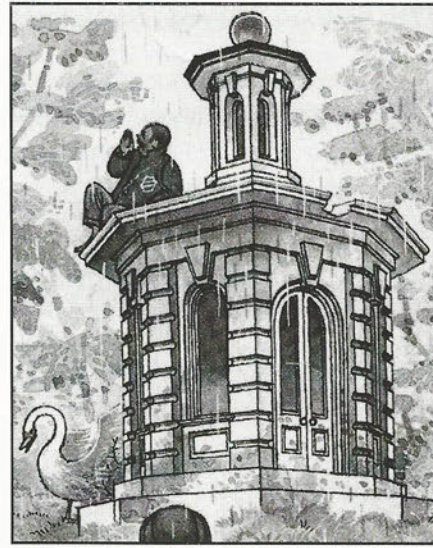
# A Final Word on Pieter Boogaart's Follies

## All May Not Be Quite As It Seems At The Octagon

Pieter Boogaart referred (page 6) to the Octagon featured in *Jeeves and the Impending Doom* (Very Good, *Jeeves*), see picture right. Bertie explains that:

This building was run up somewhere in the last century, I have been told, to enable the grandfather of the late owner to have some quiet place out of earshot of the house where he could practise the fiddle.

Pieter adds: 'In *Much Obligated, Jeeves* this folly is referred to as 'a sort of summerhouse'; in *The Code of the Woosters* as 'a shack'; and again in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* as 'a sort of boat-house' – all very irreverent appellations if it looks anything like the picture on the Ionicus cover of the Penguin *Very Good, Jeeves* where it appears as a fine folly indeed. But we know exactly what it looks like. Norman Murphy has identified the Octagon as the one in the lake at Hunstanton House in Norfolk; there is a picture of it in the book *In Search of Blandings*. Until very recently, it was in a derelict state, which was a great pity, because it is one of our oldest existing follies.



The Penguin Octagon

Mrs Sophia Buckingham has written to the Editor with a report from *The Kings Lynn News* that in June this year the Octagon at Hunstanton was removed from English Heritage's list of buildings at risk, on which it had been placed last year following a roof collapse. This has now been repaired.

Mr Michael Meakin, who runs the Le Strange Estate which includes Hunstanton Hall Park, was quoted as saying that "The Octagon was built in about 1640 for Sir Hamon L'Estrange. The story is that he used to play the viols, a type of violin, and he made so much noise in the house his wife suggested that he build himself a little house in the park, which became the Octagon." The report added that the Octagon is set on an island in an octagonal pool, and is attributed to architect William Edge.

The Octagon at Hunstanton Hall Park  
For another view, see *In Search of Blandings*



### Letter from Allan H Ronald, former Dulwich Master

I have just read Robert McCrum's life of PGW and Stephen Fry's review of it in *Wooster Sauce*, and would like the chance to comment on the Plautus problem.

While teaching at Dulwich I did some research concerning the syllabus followed by Wodehouse and Chandler in their time at Dulwich.

Records of texts studied by each class are to be found in *The Alleynian* as are the Class Lists. According to these records PGW, while in the Classical Remove, read Plautus' *Rudens* in the Michaelmas Term, 1896,

and part of the same author's *Menaechmi* in the Michaelmas Term, 1897.

*Menaechmi*, of course, is the play on which Shakespeare based *The Comedy of Errors* but *Rudens*, or *The Rope*, is less well known. It is described in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* as 'a romantic comedy', set near the country house of an Athenian gentleman (Blandings, Brinkley Court?). The happy ending depends on the accidental discovery of a box of gold rather than a cow-creamer, but the idea is there.

# Four Society Experts Review Aspects of

## Fact to Fiction: From Cheney Court to Deverill Hall, by Norman Murphy

## Fiction to Fact: The Broadcasts by Iain Sproat

There are still people who do not appreciate the historical accuracy of Wodehouse's descriptions and how often he used real places and real characters in his stories. Robert McCrum gives due importance to this aspect, and when a real character or location is significant, he tells us. His journalist's skill enables him to summarise Victorian country houses and Edwardian London brilliantly and, at page 128, one sentence brings to life the musical comedy world of New York.

Wodehouse relied heavily on factual originals at the beginning of his career for obvious reasons. He dramatised the world he knew and, as a young man, it was a world of school, his time in the bank and on the *Globe*. McCrum notes these usages and such Wodehouse tricks as naming his own prep school (Malvern House) and using his memory of his stays with his grandmother and four aunts at Cheney Court to create the five elderly ladies of Deverill Hall in *The Mating Season*.

As the book makes clear, the daily routine and ambitions of a boy at Dulwich in the 1890s are accurately recalled in the school stories, and I agree with his comment that the stories on Hollywood 'amount to a more closely observed satirical assault on an institution than anything he had written since *Psmith in the City*'.

(Though I would argue *Psmith Journalist* would be a more accurate comparison.)

McCrums correctly stresses the autobiographical importance of *Not George Washington*, tells us how Max Enke (a fellow internee) was used to create Lord Uffenham and reminds us that Wodehouse's last home, Remsenburg in Long Island appears as 'Bensonburg' in *French Leave*.

Best of all, so far as I am concerned, is the inclusion of a photograph of the legendary 'Bill', Bill Townend, Wodehouse's confidant and friend for over sixty years.

Robert McCrum has written an outstanding biography of Wodehouse. This is particularly true of the account of Wodehouse's ferociously criticised behaviour during the Second World War, following his broadcasts on German radio, to America.

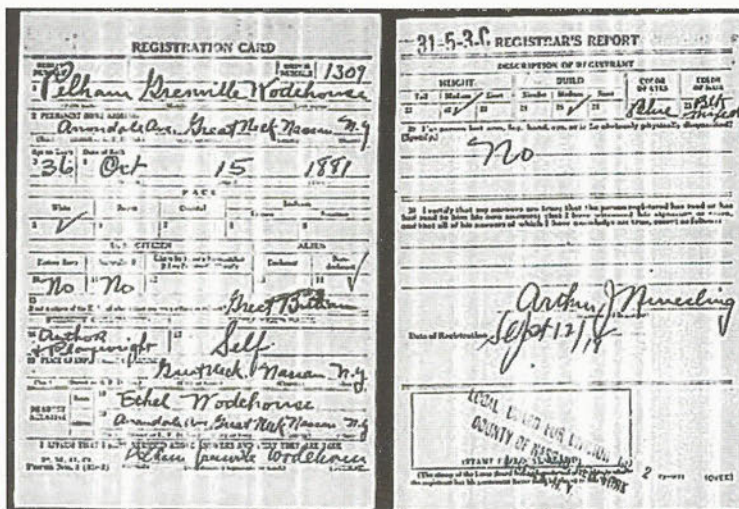
The charges laid against Wodehouse may be summarised thus: that, living in France in 1940, he made no attempt to escape from the advancing German Army; that, subsequently, he and his wife willingly entertained Nazis at their house in Le Touquet and, later in the war, in hotels in Germany and France; that during his internment in a civilian prisoner of war camp, in 1940 and 1941, he was given privileges for collaborating; that he was released from the camp in return for agreeing to broadcast Nazi propaganda to Britain on the radio; and that, for the remainder of the war, he lived a life of luxury in Berlin and Paris, paid for by the Nazis.

Every one of these charges, McCrum has investigated rigorously. Every one of them was false.

McCrums's judgement on what Wodehouse did do – as opposed to what wartime hysteria, rumour and malice wrongly accused him of doing – is that Wodehouse had been 'well-intentioned' but 'foolish'.

His good intentions were to broadcast to America – which was not then at war – in

gratitude to the hundreds of Americans who had written him kind letters in his captivity; and also to demonstrate to the outside world how manfully British civilian prisoners conducted themselves. But although Wodehouse was, in McCrum's words, 'an instinctive patriot', he was also politically innocent, and allowed himself to be tricked into one, and only one, very foolish action: he did not realise at first that the simple act, alone, of broadcasting on German radio – however innocuous his words – was playing into Nazi hands. As soon as he was made aware of this, he stopped.



Wodehouse's American Enlistment Registration, referred to in McCrum on page 106, discovered by Murray Hedcock

# Robert McCrum's Wodehouse: a Life

*The Treatment of Hollywood*  
by Eddie Grabham

I walked with Plum as I read Robert McCrum's Hollywood episodes.

P G Wodehouse was undoubtedly ambivalent about his life and work in California. As he tussled with the studio system, his frustrations were patently evident, yet he secretly enjoyed life on the West Coast as he continued writing his stories while esconced at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer on a satisfyingly fat salary. Robert McCrum brings it all to life in splendid fashion, adding colour to what we already knew. He gives us a remarkable insight into the life and mind of a seemingly mild man who could unwittingly turn a gentle zephyr into a raging storm.

Though relatively few scripts resulted from his spells in Hollywood, he ruffled the odd feather and undoubtedly made his mark. Most Hollywood histories credit C Aubrey Smith alone with founding the Hollywood Cricket Club; we must therefore be grateful to Robert for confirming Plum as a co-founder.

However, certain confusions remain, for though the author has clearly researched Plum very thoroughly, he appears to have fallen into the 'Goldwyn trap'. Though Goldwyn gave his name to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1924, he never produced a film for the newly-formed consortium, and worked with neither Louis B Mayer nor Irving Thalberg, though he held the latter in very high regard.

Rather, Goldwyn set up his own studio and, with his reliance on works of literary merit, it was not surprising that he should have approached Wodehouse. How confusing therefore that Plum ultimately signed for MGM. Ironically, McCrum recalls that he lampooned the famous 1924 merger in one of his Hollywood stories, underlining his perceptive view of Wodehouse in tinseltown.

Nonetheless, this remains a comprehensive and incisive account of Plum in Hollywood with adroit 'wipe dissolves' to the rest of a fascinating and enjoyable biography.

*P G Wodehouse, the Wordsmith*  
by Nigel Rees

It is irritating for a reviewer to complain about what is not in a book if it was never intended to contain it in the first place.

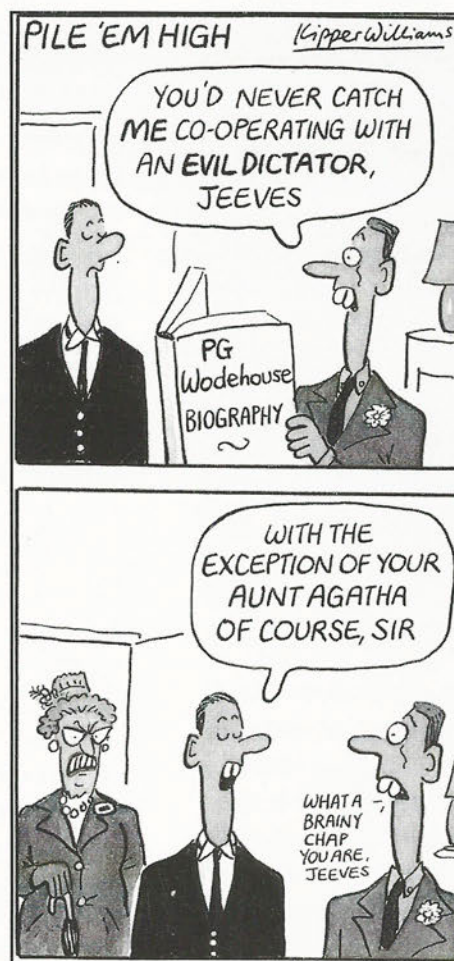
*Wodehouse: A Life* is not a critical biography, in the literary sense. It does not attempt to link the life to the art in anything but the most general way. Of course, McCrum quotes several plums, refers to the celebrated pieces that have been written by Evelyn Waugh and others on PGW's prose style, and very properly writes a little about PGW's 'unique voice'.

But he does not go very deeply into this side of things.

Actually, I would like him to have gone further down this road rather than give us quite so much detail on PGW's – let's face it, rather boring – quotidian existence. There seems to be a mention on every page of him doing his 'daily dozen'. Now I'm not sure actually whether I would want to read a critical biography of PGW (why let in daylight on magic?) but I would certainly have preferred it to the raking over of the Great Scandal once again and in such detail.

Frankly, I just do not agree that the bloody Berlin broadcasts were the 'defining moment of Wodehouse's life' (page 292). Apart from the crashing cliché involved, the statement just does not

add up. They might have been the 'defining moment' of PGW's character but they have absolutely nothing to do with why we so revere him. McCrum has really written a book that could be entitled *The Genius Is a Chump*. But I would rather have read a book that celebrates and explains that genius – and of which his use of words would, of course, be a major part. For books and genius, there is no need to seek a 'defining moment'.



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# Wodehouse and Philo- (Theo)-sophy

By David Rathbone

On page 15 of *Wooster Sauce* No 27, we have read of Plum's 'Flirtation with Spiritualism', something McCrum also touches upon on page 161 of his mighty tome. On April 12, 1925, Plum and Leonora attended a *séance* with one H Dennis Bradley, a medium recommended by Conan Doyle. In that sitting, a voice which identified itself as 'Ernest Wodehouse' said 'something about being with Mr Wodehouse when he was in Harrogate about a year ago'. Plum speculated that it might be a cousin who had died in WW I. (Plum's father, Henry Ernest, did not die until 1929, and his theosophical brother, Ernest Armine, until 1936). Plum *had* been in Harrogate in 1924, and although he said that he didn't know what the voice meant, he famously wrote to Bill Townend in December 1925: 'I've got the Bradley book. I want to talk to you about Spiritualism. I think it's the goods.' Old Bill got back to him in October 1967 to confirm this hunch of Plum's – and he would have known, having been dead himself for some five years at that point (*Yours, Plum* p243).

So what was Plum was doing at the Grand Hotel in Harrogate in October 1924? Taking the spa waters described on page 2 of *Wooster Sauce* No 21, no doubt, and generally 'trying to teach his liver to take a joke' (*Ukridge and the Old Stepper, Strand*, June 1928) while their new London residence at 23 Gilbert Street was being renovated. He wrote to Bill Townend from there on September 23 that 'Harrogate is a terrific place for work'. While there, Plum mapped out *Sam the Sudden* and wrote several short stories, including *Honeysuckle Cottage*, which he called in a letter to Bill on October 1 'the funniest idea I've ever had'. Of course, the sceptic might suspect that Mr Bradley himself could easily have read that story in the *Strand* for January 1925, and might have known that Plum had been in Harrogate the year before, and put two and two together, so to speak.

However, said sceptic might have had a bit more trouble explaining how in 1924 Plum was in New York on July 23, then in Harrogate on September 23, then in New York on September 24-29, then back in Harrogate on October 1 (see *Author! Author!* pp31-45 and *Performing Flea* pp24-30).

"Now there's a chap I envy. He's knocked about all over the world . . . America one day, Australia the next, Africa the day after."

"Quick mover," said Kay. (*Sam the Sudden*, ch2)

But a bit too quick, if you see what I mean. Is the solution on the very first page of *Bill the Conqueror*, the book which came out in London on November 24?

One of the things that makes the lot of the reader of a story such as this so enjoyable is the fact that, in addition to being uplifted, entertained and instructed, he possesses all the advantages of a disembodied spirit. He can go anywhere and see everything.

But to try to pin down whether or not Plum took spiritualism all that seriously would be to somehow miss the point, and to fall prey to the error of trying to find the 'message' in Wodehouse which he himself denied was there. As with religion in general, and as with fiction itself, the interesting thing is the power of the willing (or in some cases not so willing) suspension of disbelief.

The comic possibilities of matters spectral had occurred to Plum as early as 1903, when he wrote the series *Mr. Punch's Spectral Analyses* from 'the ghost's point of view' for *Punch*. I have raised here the highly speculative possibility that Plum took spiritualism as something more than a laughing matter not in order seriously to entertain it, but rather to point out *à la* Reginald and his secret pleasures, what it is that I'm *not* doing.

For we can read all sorts of things into a body of texts as extensive (and extensively interconnected) as Plum's works, and it *is* fun to let yourself get carried away with this sort of game. Wodehouse, the wise old owl, winks at the perceptive reader on all sorts of levels. The enthusiast can easily thereby draw perilously close to that fine but decisive line that separates the *aficionado* from the obsessive! But as peril approaches, there stands Plum, with wisdom at the ready to pass down from ancient sources. Not in the guise of quotes with which to bludgeon you or monologues with which to bore you, but in the guise of a sort of informal moral – or better, an *ethic* – subtle but clear to those who would pay heed.

The Wodehouse ethic is a shy creature which rarely draws attention to itself and prefers to remain implicit. It does pop its head through explicitly now and then when a maxim slips into the text as quietly as Jeeves himself. Sometimes it's in a dialogue, sometimes it's in the narrator's voice, and sometimes it's in no voice at all (and hence at least implicitly in Wodehouse's own). For example:

# My First Wodehouse Experience

By Geoff Hales

When I was a stripling of fourteen summers, all of twenty years ago now, my gran told me off to accompany her to a jumble sale. I wasn't much of a lad for jumble sales, but hers was a commanding personality (an eye like grandma's, to threaten and command) so I trickled along, as per instructions.

It was, frankly, a bit of a washout. But after I had blown most of my available funds on some back numbers of *Rover* and *Adventure* and an illicit bag of crisps, I chanced upon a fat orange hardback across whose cocoa-stained cover a stout boy in buttons was being pursued by an elegant-looking person in a tailcoat. My taste at the time being for broad comedy, I invested my remaining 3d. I was through the first two chapters of *The Inimitable Jeeves* before they'd even had the raffle.

After that I went through the oeuvre with a good deal of elan. (I was consuming Biggles at a similar rate). A year or so later I had graduated to *Laughing Gas* and it was during my study of that seminal work that I sustained a shock rather like that suffered by Reginald Lord Havershot when struck amidships by little Joey Cooley's motorcycle.

I was in the school production of *Julius Caesar* and, having rehearsed my six lines – I played mostly cameo roles at that time, and had no idea of the glittering career behind the greasepaint that I now enjoy – I had retired to a remote corner of the school to read. Well, I was reading *LG* as noted when I was taken in the rear, as it were, by the sudden advent of the deputy head.

A word about this DH. He shared with my gran the ability to have you jumping through hoops and looking lively about it. I later identified him with the Rev Aubrey Upjohn. An enquiry into my reading habits was hardly likely to produce the sunny smiles that we like to see in Deputy Heads. But he chuckled like bathwater going down the plughole and told me that when he was 15 he had been thrown out of Assembly for reading the selfsame *LG* behind his hymn book. I reeled. He had got right in amongst me. I thought of him more kindly after that, though I don't think he noticed.

*Geoff Hales is an actor and member who has presented a number of Wodehouse weekends at colleges in different parts of the country.*

## Wodehouse and Philo- (Theo-)sophy, continued

'The secret of all successful prose is the knowledge of what to omit.' (*The Return of Battling Billson*, in *Ukridge*)

'Even with glasses, we can never see ourselves as others see us.' (*Crime and the Eyesight*, in *Punch* February 25, 1903)

'A quiet conscience is more important than a loud suit.' (*The Spring Suit*, in *The Strand*, July 1919)

'Though you may have goose, it is never pure goose.' (*Bingo and the Peke Crisis*, in *The Strand*, June 1937)

'Humour, if one looks at it, is principally a matter of retrospect.' (*The Prince & Betty*, 'Mervo Changes its Constitution')

But by and large, the Wodehouse ethic prefers to remain implicit in the stories, in a manner closer to the more conventional sense of a story's 'moral'. To express an ethic without moralising is a difficult task, and one at which Wodehouse always excelled. In the ways in which characters' strengths and weaknesses unfold, ideals emerge, implicitly, subtly, and variable no doubt in different contexts for

different readers, but ideals nevertheless. This ethic is absorbed unconsciously for the most part, and there is even a sense in which self-consciousness destroys its effects.

But there is also a sense in which 'those who make the nation's songs' work a deeper and more admirable job than 'those who make the nation's laws' (*Bill the Conqueror* p32); the level, as Plum puts it, of the 'subconscious mind', which works after the helpful habit of subconscious minds ... all the time on its own account (*BTC* p168). A level not unlike the fourth dimension, I hazard!

And as for explaining how Plum seems to have been in two places at once in October 1924, I maintain we can do no better than to quote Wittgenstein (who is on record as having said that *Honeysuckle Cottage* was one of the funniest things he had ever read) – 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'.

*David Rathbone is one of our Australian members. He has been lecturing at the University of Melbourne and will continue his assessment of the topic in the next issue.*

# Godfrey Smith Announces a Success

There was a distinct buzz of revelry in the air when the Wodehouse Society met for its 2004 dinner in the gracious Hall of the Inner Temple on 21st October. The cheerful faces of many of the Master's most loyal followers were to be seen at the champagne reception that launched the celebrations. There was Edward Cazalet, greeting us benignly, and our learned Remembrancer, Norman Murphy. There was John Mortimer, affable in his wheelchair with Penny steering him expertly to his seat. There was Murray Hedgcock, taking snaps with Antipodean bonhomie, and standing tall, lean and thoroughly enjoying himself, was our royal Wodehousean, the Duke of Kent.



John Mortimer, Eliza Lumley, Sidney Kentridge and Robert McCrum

We had come to pay homage to Plum in the slap-up style which is our trademark, and sat down to a scrumptious banquet, washed down with a benediction of wines. We were then reminded by Edward Cazalet of a particular reason to rejoice this year. We had seen the publication – to universal acclaim – of Robert McCrum's magisterial *Life of the Master*, and Edward presented Robert, as a small token of our thanks, with the cigarette box Plum had kept in his study.

Robert, replying, told us what extraordinary generosity had been shown to him in tackling his great *oeuvre* by Patrick Wodehouse and all the Cazalet family. There had been the unfailing support of the Drones Club of Belgium, who make our own Society look painfully repressed. What most shone through all his research had been Plum's sheer wisdom and *joie de vivre*. By the time he'd finished the book he said his admiration had turned to awe: he had proved 'a very special kind of English genius'.

Our President, Richard Briers, recalled how he had played Bertie Wooster to Michael Hordern's Jeeves 150 years ago (or so he alleged), and then told a surreal story about a musical cat which was hilarious but defies print. And now it was time for the entertainment to which we looked forward as the *digestif* without which none of these dinners is complete.

Tony Ring, indefatigable editor of *Wooster Sauce*, rose to tell us about the centenary of Plum's first visit to the United States, which we were just about to celebrate, when he was peremptorily interrupted by



Stephen Fry (seen here with Philip Dunne) with the ringing words: "Tonight, Sir Pelham Wodehouse, This Is Your Life". The famed theme tune sounded through the speakers as Stephen crossed to where Anton Rodgers, balding, seemingly bemused but admirably benign, was waiting to impersonate the Master. Launching effortlessly into his role, he told us how he had gone to America principally because he was then an enthusiastic boxer and had a boyish reverence for their pugilists. New York had come up to its advance billing. "Being there was like being in heaven without going to all the expense of dying."

And so Plum's story unfolded. There was his meeting over there with an English widow, Ethel Newton, whom he married six weeks later. "I'm in love with a wonderful guy" she was to write half a century later. "We've been married 53 years and it don't seem a day too long." There was the launch of his new career in musical comedy – the Irish stew, as he called it, of the drama. There was his collaboration with Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton, there was Hollywood and there was Long Island. "Life," Plum summed up, "is about simplicity . . . all that matters is three meals a day, light and warmth. And a wife, some paper, pencils, typewriter and tobacco."

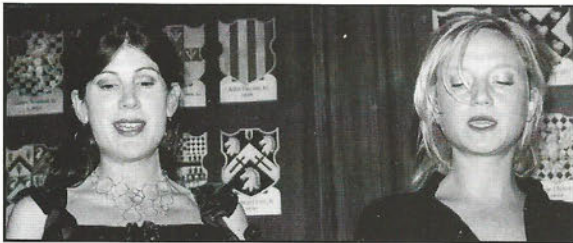
The Duke of Kent and Philip Dunne (from the sponsor, Ottakar's), sportingly joined in the fun by taking cameo roles in the sketch. Eliza Lumley, Hal and Lara Cazalet, and Stephen Higgins provided the heart-tugging songs, and Lara rounded off the evening by singing – in response to tumultuous demand – Plum's finest lyric of all – *Bill*. Clear, sweet and true, it crystallised as it always does all Plum stood for. We went out into the night better – and happier – men and women.

Photographs on these pages by courtesy of Ginni Beard

# As does David Herboldt, in another voice

A discrete cough awoke me. I raised one eyelid to see that Jeeves had materialised at my bedside.

“What’s the matter Jeeves? You know it’s barely noon and I had a late night last night at that bash at the Inner Temple for that author chappie, Wodehouse. And do stop it.” “Stop what, sir?” “Shimmering around the edges.” “I believe this may help, sir,” he said, passing me his foul-tasting but extremely effective hang-over cure. Once my eyes had returned to their sockets and I could speak again I asked why he’d woken me so early. “There’s a gentleman downstairs to see you sir – a Mr Tony Ring. I believe it is connection with the event you mentioned. Apparently you’re writing an article for him about the dinner.”



*Eliza and Lara in perfect harmony*

The light dawned. I vaguely remembered in a foolish moment agreeing to write something of my view as a first timer at the celebrations. But what to write? I turned to Jeeves as usual to seek guidance and inspiration.



*Our President, Richard Briers*

“Well first, sir, it was a dinner, so what did you think of the food?”

Trust Jeeves to hit the n firmly on its h. It was excellent. Parma ham, sole, pheasant, crème brûlée – not all on the same plate you understand. Even Anatole (my Aunt’s French chef) would have been

proud. And the wine flowed like water – well, better, actually. You daren’t glance away for a moment without some jolly old waiter refilling the glass. Hence the state of my head this morning. However I’m telling the middle before the start.

The evening opened with a champagne reception which was a great opportunity to chat to old chums and meet some new ones. A whole room full of Wodehouse enthusiasts. I must admit to a slight sense of foreboding in the location – far too many portraits of be-wigged members of the legal profession, every one of whom looked as though he knew about my escapade with the policeman’s helmet last Boat Race night.



*Anton Rodgers playing the part of Plum*

And the entertainment. Of course there were the usual toasts, and speeches by Hilary Bruce and Sir Edward Cazalet, Robert McCrum (did I tell you he’s written this spiffing book about Wodehouse?) and the lovely Richard Briers, but then there was a cabaret. It was based on that programme Jeeves told me about that he’d seen on the television I’d given him, called *This is Your Life*. The witty Steven Fry was the compère, and that wonderful actor Anton Rodgers played the role of PGW. But I was astounded – one of the people taking part looked familiar, and I suddenly realised it was HRH The Duke of Kent. No really! The jolly old D of K playing with the best of them. I tell you, if ever he finds himself short of the readies, he could easily take to the stage as an alternative career!

And the music. The lovely Lara Cazalet and her brother Hal, together with the talented Eliza Lumley sang a range of the Master’s songs, most of which were making their first appearance at one of these dinners.

A wonderful evening – but what on earth could I actually write about it for this Tony Ring fellow?

# The Impact of Censorship on Plum's Plays

by Tony Ring

The question of censorship was very important to playwrights in England (see *Poet's Corner*, page 27) for until 1968, any play performed on the public stage had to be cleared by the Lord Chamberlain's department. Even after approval had been received, any changes made to the script had also to be notified and cleared. Fortunately, the British Library has retained most of the copies of plays and libretti submitted for clearance, and has in addition a substantial, though incomplete, collection of the correspondence files maintained for each play.

Although there were widely-held arguments in favour of censorship, the Lord Chamberlain's office was excessively picky, and today its approach would be viewed with contempt. It employed a number of readers whose job it was to report on each submitted play, commenting on whether any aspects whatsoever might be considered liable to corrupt the morals of those attending a performance, and the words 'corrupt' and 'morals' seem each to have been given the widest possible interpretation.

In commenting on *The Inside Stand*, the 1935 play adapted from Wodehouse's own *Hot Water*, the department's reader took a dig at contemporary American slang:

It is all harmless. 'Cheese' is an occasional exclamation, but as 'Gee' is always passed we need hardly trouble about it.

The reader for *Don't Listen Ladies*, a post-war Wodehouse adaptation, wrote:

I think 'God's trousers' is a delightful oath, but I think it might offend some of even a Sacha Guitry audience. Regretfully, I think it should be altered.

He added an aside:

Sartorially incorrect, too, according to conventional ideas.

I will be returning to the role of the censor, and his impact on *Good Morning, Bill*, in the third and final article of this review. In the rest of this article I return to a chronological format.

Wodehouse's first major success as a playwright was his adaptation of Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*. Plum explained to Malcolm Muggeridge in 1948 how he had come to adapt it from the Hungarian:

Gilbert Miller asked me to do the adaptation in 1926 when I was in the process of putting on *Oh, Kay!* I saw it would be an easy job, so I took the

one and half per cent which he offered without bothering about it. I could easily have got two or even two and a half if I had stuck out, and the darned thing ran a year in New York and two years on the road. My consolation is that I wrote the adaptation in three days, so I suppose I've been well paid for my time.

This was followed by *Her Cardboard Lover*, which was the first major stage appearance of Leslie Howard, who, to the annoyance of Jeanne Eagels, made himself its star. Originally, the play had been adapted by Valerie Wyngate from a Jacques Deval play, but the try-out was unsatisfactory. Gilbert Miller approached Plum to rewrite the show, the management replaced Laurette Taylor by Jeanne Eagels in the starring role, and the show went on. Leslie Howard had been given some of the best lines in the play, and eclipsed Eagels, who during the next few weeks resorted to all sorts of professional tricks to try to steal the limelight. She was brought up before Equity on a number of charges, and after a quarrel with her offstage lover, drank herself into oblivion. Leslie Howard reprised the role in London, where the female star was Tallulah Bankhead, and Miss Bankhead took her own company on a New England tour with the production in 1941.

Back in England in 1929 and 1930 Plum teamed up with Ian Hay and between them they converted two of his novels and one of Hay's short stories into plays. They were interested in a suggestion that a theatre company be established to perform Wodehouse plays, rather in the way that in England today Scarborough is always used to try out new Alan Ayckbourns, and Hull Truck Theatre launches new works by John Godber. But the plan was dropped before the infant concept reached adolescence, probably because Plum went west to seek his fortune in Hollywood and the supply of material dried up. It may, incidentally, interest those of you who enjoy Miss Marple films to know that Joan Hickson's first three West End appearances were in these three plays, successively *A Damsel in Distress*; *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*; and *Leave It To Psmith*. All were substantial hits.

Gilbert Miller was instrumental in getting Plum involved in another rewrite, this time of *By Candlelight*, which had been staged most successfully in London but in a form which Miller did not think was right for New York. He asked Plum to rework it, which he did, the name was



# Problems for A Gentleman of Leisure

*Tony Ring explains the link between the play and the film*

In the first part of my series of articles on Wodehouse's plays (*Wooster Sauce*, September 2004), I referred to *A Gentleman of Leisure*, adapted by John Stapleton from Wodehouse's 1910 book of the same name (or *The Intrusion of Jimmy* in the USA). In 1914, this became the first feature film with a Wodehouse source.

It was directed by George Melford with a scenario by William C DeMille, supervised by Cecil B DeMille and produced by Jesse L Lasky Feature Play Co for Paramount release in January 1915. The star, Wallace Eddinger, was making his first film.

The film, which was of course silent, ran for 75 minutes, and bearing in mind its time-consuming reliance on inter-titles for explanations and dialogue, it was surprisingly faithful to the original story-line. The plot of the film included most of Wodehouse's major incidents and characters, including the shipboard meeting, the criminal break-in, outsmarting the real crook, and the theft and exchange of diamonds.

The collaboration with Stapleton proved unusually acrimonious, for moving pictures were so new a part of the entertainment scene that it was uncertain whether the legal rights to their ownership were covered by standard theatrical contracts.

Stapleton had received two-thirds of the proceeds of the theatrical dramatisation, but when the question of film rights arose, the question was whether they were derived from the book or the play, and it

became a test case with the Authors' League. For more information, see *Wooster Sauce*, December 2002, where letters from Wodehouse to Lily, his housekeeper at Emsworth, are quoted.

A second film, still silent, was made in 1923, starring Jack Holt. Merely by translating the inter-titles, silent movies could be sold to non-English speaking countries as the illustration below, of a poster advertising the Swedish version, clearly demonstrates.



## *Wodehouse's Straight Plays, continued*

changed to merely *Candlelight*, and Leslie Howard was given the male lead opposite Gertrude Lawrence, who was making her straight theatrical debut. It was reasonably successful, the critics' principle adverse comments being directed at the relative thin-ness of Siegfried Geyer's story, for they enjoyed the cast performances. The UK would not see Plum's adaptation until 1989.

Wodehouse could not continue at that pace, and his move to Hollywood in 1930 created a natural break. But there was still time for him to team up with Guy Bolton to write the play *If I Were You*, from which Plum's novel of the same name was later derived. Although, interestingly and unlike most of his plays, it was published as a play in book form, it may never have reached the stage. I should add that four years

later, in 1934, he and Bolton revised it, especially the latter part of Act II and Act III, and it hit the stage of The Duke of York's Theatre in London as *Who's Who*. After 19 performances it left it again.

From then on, with one exception, Wodehouse's straight plays, from whatever origin, and with whomever written, almost always failed. In 1934 *The Inside Stand* was put on in the West End. As already mentioned, this was an adaptation of his novel *Hot Water*, with Freddie Widgeon imported into the cast, but it only lasted 50 performances.

*This is the second in a series of three articles about Wodehouse's Straight Plays, based on a talk given in Toronto in 2002. The third part, in March 2005, will consider Wodehouse's post-war output, and finally look at Good Morning, Bill.*

# The Luck of the Bodkins on Stage

*The Luck of the Bodkins* is one of Wodehouse's longer novels, featuring the Drone Monty Bodkin, whose full name is given variously as Montague and Montrose. When he submitted the serial to the *Saturday Evening Post*, Wodehouse received a nasty shock, as it was rejected by the editor. As he wrote to Bill Townend on February 4, 1935, 'Hell's foundations quivering briskly just now'.

He decided it was 25,000 words too long and rewrote it, but the payment received from *Red Book* for the revised version was only \$25,000, compared to the \$40,000 he would have received from the *SEP*. The American book (Little, Brown and Company) follows the *Red Book* text; the British (Herbert Jenkins, 1935) has the original, longer (and in the Editor's view better) version.

They wrote the script, and it was planned for production at the Thorndyke Theatre, Leatherhead, to be directed by Gillian Lynne (now a well-known choreographer), but it never materialised. John then discussed the play with Hazel Vincent-Wallace at the Thorndyke, and she suggested using themed music to compensate for the difficulty of incorporating Wodehouse's narrative on stage, so John wrote the score for it.

In 1978, John found that although The Theatre Royal, Windsor, had just celebrated its 40th anniversary with a lavish production, the need for a follow-up play had been rather overlooked. John agreed to stage *Bodkins* at short notice and was able to get a strong cast. Leigh Lawson, then married to Hayley Mills, was, he told me, a perfect Monty.



*The Cast of The Luck of the Bodkins playing the last scene at Windsor Theatre in 1978*

All of which is no more than background to saying that, unrecorded in all the works I have seen about Wodehouse, a dramatic adaptation by John Gould and David Wood appeared on the professional stage at Windsor in 1978, and a shortened version of the play, directed by David Proudlock and performed by Theatre Vivant (the dramatic society of Mill Hill School), could be seen at this year's Edinburgh Festival.

The Editor recently visited John Gould at his home in Brighton. He and co-author David Wood had been fellow-students at Oxford and on leaving went into the West End with a Revue *Four Degrees Over*. Some time later, they were doing a Cabaret show for the Turco-British Association in Istanbul when John had the idea of adapting *The Luck of the Bodkins*.

Perhaps the name on the cast list which seems most surprising today is Lynda Marchal, who played Lottie, and is now better known as the novelist and TV screenwriter Lynda La Plante.

The show ran to good houses for three weeks, with encouraging notices in the *Slough Observer* and the *Windsor, Slough and Eton Express* which promised a strong future for the show.

In 1985 it was brought up for West End consideration, at which time John was able to organise the recording of the musical themes for the guidance of any future production. He told me that the music was written for two pianos, trumpet, sax/clarinet, trombone, double bass and drum, but that at Windsor they made do with one piano, trumpet and trombone.

# And Revived at the Edinburgh Festival

So when he heard that Theatre Vivant, from Mill Hill School, were to revive *The Luck of the Bodkins* at this year's Edinburgh Festival, the Editor lost no time in finding a volunteer, Iain Skene, to review it on the Society's behalf. He reports:

"We've been packing them in all week!" A cursory glance at the growing queue on the sun-drenched pavement outside was enough to assure me that the show's Director, David Proudlock, was a man of his word. "And we were the *Scottish Daily Mail* pick of the day!" he continued.

Having been forced on a number of occasions through lack of an alternative to actually read the *SDM*, I decided to reserve judgment, but I need not have worried; once the house lights dimmed what followed was an hour and a quarter of escapism and jollity, punctuated at regular intervals by the laughter of a regally entertained audience.

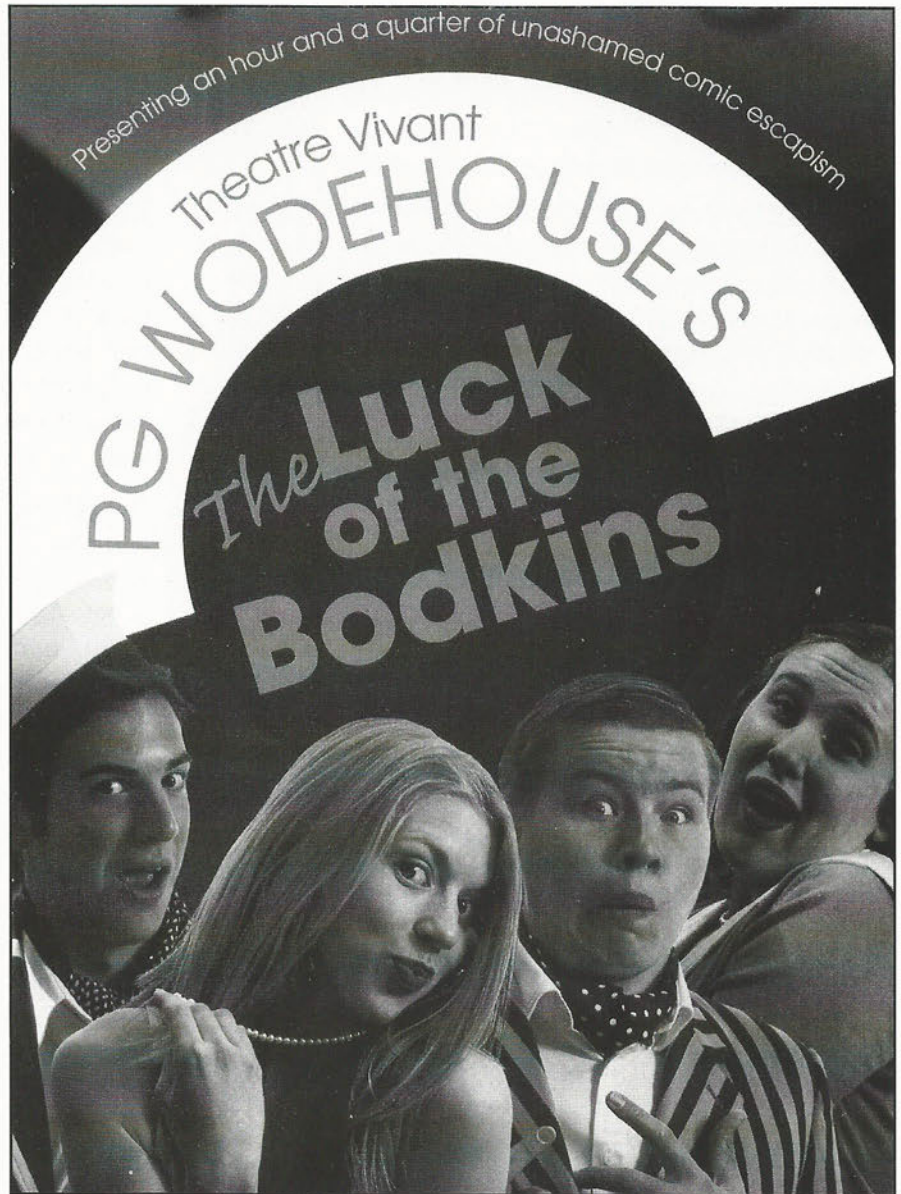
Thanks to the efforts of the musicians and cast the atmosphere of the Jazz age on an ocean-going liner was successfully produced and maintained throughout, and never once during the frenetic comings and goings on the stage did the performance lose the feel of the book.

Given the restricted space provided for them, in which it would have been difficult to successfully swing a kitten, let alone a ship's cat, they all performed admirably, and even managed to fit in a dance or two: I particularly enjoyed the Busby Berkley/Esther Williams formation swimming pool sequence, which was convincingly and hilariously carried out completely without the aid of the requisite H<sub>2</sub>O.

The production was not without its problems, however; some small hitches in the continuity of the script in particular slightly distracted the listener: did Lottie Blossom steal the Mickey Mouse toy, or was she given it by Peasemarch as in the original book? Unfortunately, both versions of this incident were presented at different times in the script. Truly 'inexplicable'!

None of this, however, detracts from the excellent performances given by all involved. Reggie

Tennyson, as played by Alex Barnes was excellent as a good-natured but indolent man-on-the-make. Laura Whitehead was convincing as the glitzy movie star Lottie Blossom, and Sean Froggatt was suitably



irascible as the put-upon studio boss Ikey Llewellyn. Such was the enthusiasm for their roles that you could sense that behind their characters the young cast were enjoying the unfolding story just as much as their audience.

All too soon it was over, and I was back to reality in 2004 Edinburgh. As I blinked in the sunshine, I looked back over my shoulder at the historic old Pleasance Theatre building. A beautiful day, a beautiful setting, an enjoyable play based on a book by a much-loved comic genius – what could be better?

Maybe those hacks at the *Scottish Daily Mail* know something after all ...

# Even More on The Luck of the Bodkins

*An exchange of letters between PGW and Arthur Ransome*

## Arthur Ransome's Eulogy

In the book *Signalling from Mars: The Letters of Arthur Ransome*, Seattle member Susan Collicott came across a letter which Ransome wrote to P G Wodehouse in 1953.

Dear P G Wodehouse

Ian Hay gave me your address last year and said he thought you might be amused to know that my wife and I have given our boat the name of our favourite female character in fiction, and that *LOTTIE BLOSSOM* appears in Lloyd's Yacht Register as a five tonner.

There are, of course, some ignorant persons who, knowing all the rest of your books, do not know the best of all and ask "Who was Lottie Blossom?" We refer them to the book, a copy of which is always aboard (another remaining at home in the long shelf of orange Wodehouses, orange but for a few regretted exceptions) and tell them merely that she is a red-headed American film star who, to please her publicity agent, travels around with a small alligator in a wicker basket and, when the Customs come aboard to go through her luggage, asks them to begin with the wicker basket, after which they go no further. This usually raised a laugh, but on one occasion it did not. I was registering the name of the boat at the Customs Office, and the Customs Officer who was taking down the particulars for the Registrar asked the usual question. I, unthinking, replied with the usual story. It did not seem to amuse him at all. "A very unpleasant young woman!" he remarked when I had done.

## Green Swizzles

The Green Swizzle is a drink which made an appearance in the 1924 short story *The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy*, from *Carry On, Jeeves*. There has been a recent debate on the internet as to its constituent elements, bearing in mind Bertie's comment that it had at least seven.

Disappointingly, they do not seem all to have been alcohol. The Green Swizzle was certainly available in Trinidad, and so may be assumed to contain local rum, together with green crème de menthe, lime juice and sugar. Add a dash of a famous local product, angostura bitters, and we are up to five. It looks as though ice and a sprig of mint may be the relatively neutral final ingredients. Drink up!

## Wodehouse's Reply

Wodehouse's response is held in the Special Collections Department of the Brotherton Library at Leeds University. Student member Kirsty Bennett obtained a copy, and with the Library's permission, we quote from his reply:

Dear Arthur Ransome

I am very flattered about the name of the boat. How pleased Lottie would be if she knew! (I am very bucked that you think *The Luck of the Bodkins* my best book, because it is my favourite. The Penguin people are doing another five next year [1954], and I'm going to insist on Bodkins being one of them.) [It was.]

Did you happen to see my last one, *Ring for Jeeves*? I had a weird experience with that. It started as a play by Guy Bolton and myself and I turned it into a novel. This was offered to *Ladies Home Journal* as a serial, and they liked it very much and kept it for about six months, trying to cut it down to 30,000 words. Eventually they gave it up and returned the script, whereupon without any difficulty I made a 30,000 word version and sent it to them. I thought now it was sure to click, but no, they refused it. End of Act One.

Act Two. Quite six months later out of a blue sky they asked to see it again. My agent explained to them that it had now appeared serially over here and as a serial and in book form in England, but they said Never mind, send it along. So he did and they took two days re-reading it and bought it for \$6,500, which was colossal considering what a battered proposition it was by then. But it makes one a bit uneasy, editors not knowing their minds better than that.

As a matter of fact, practically all American editors are cuckoo these days.

## Kid Brady Stories

Members of the Society who have renewed their membership at least once should find a *Kid Brady* story enclosed with this distribution. Number 7 has been printed for the first time this year. New members can look forward to next year, when, in appreciation of their renewing their membership, they will receive the first of the elusive stories from the American *Pearson's* magazine of 1905 to 1907.

# Wodehouse and the Poets

## Dennis Chitty challenges your memory

In the last edition of *Wooster Sauce*, we published extracts from Dennis Chitty's talk at the Toronto convention, entitled *The Maestro's Amazing Memory*. He outlined four major sources for Wodehouse's quotations: the classics, the Bible, Shakespeare and the poets. In this second extract, Dennis looks at the poets by means of a short competition and invites you to identify their source. There is no prize – the answers have already appeared in *Plum Lines*, the journal of the American Society, and they can be found here on page 24.

1 In *Pigs Have Wings*, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe enjoyed looking back on the sumptuous food now denied him by his fiancée Gloria Salt, and we are led to admire him for taking his fate so well. The dyspeptic J Preston Peters had similar memories of calorie-laden recipes in *Something Fresh*.

... this is the truth the poet sings,  
That a sorrow's crown of sorrows is  
remembering happier things.

2 In *Big Money*, when Lord Biskerton took the bus, he was bowed down with weight of woe. Fortunately, the poet spoke figuratively, 'for grief has no tonnage'. Otherwise 'the Number three omnibus ... could never have made its trip'.

The heart bowed down with weight of woe  
To weakest hope will cling.

3 In *Heavy Weather*, Lord Tilbury was sat upon in the mud by Cyril Wellbeloved and brought before Lord Emsworth. 'There was a scuffling of feet, and the prisoner at the bar entered, trailing like clouds of glory Stokes, first footman, attached to

his right arm, and Thomas, second footman, clinging like a limpet to his left.'

The soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting  
And cometh from afar;  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:

4 In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, when Bertie arrived on his bicycle at Kingham Manor his 'ear detected the sibilant shuffling of the feet of butlers, footmen, chauffeurs, parlour maids, housemaids, tweenies, and ... no doubt cooks, who were treading the measure. I suppose,' thought Bertie, 'you couldn't sum it up much better than by saying that there was a sound of revelry by night.'

There was a sound of revelry by night,  
And Belgium's capital had gather'd then  
Her beauty and her chivalry, and bright  
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men.

5 In *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, Bertie, given the wrong directions, climbed a ladder into the bedroom of Frances Craye. He realised that 'someone had blundered'.

Forward the Light Brigade!  
Was here a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Some one had blunder'd:  
Their's not to make reply  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die;  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

## Talking of poetry

As a special Christmas extra, we print below a short topical verse written by Wodehouse in his notebooks, a mass of uncoordinated jottings which he put down in the very early 1900s. As far as is known this has not been seen in print before.

### Christmas Carol

When days are dark and murky  
I sing in metre jerky  
The pleasure sound  
That may be found  
In eating too much turkey.

## Questions Answered

*The Times* has published a book entitled *Questions Answered* (ISBN 0-00-719135-9) which is a compilation from the newspaper's popular daily column. On page 130, this question is posed:

It is well known that Bertie Wooster was frequently engaged to be married, and always managed to escape matrimony, with Jeeves's help. But was he ever genuinely in love with any woman, rather than just briefly infatuated or proposing for lack of anything else to do?

The six published responses take up one and a half pages.

# A Summary of the Society's Accounts

*We are pleased to report that once again there was a surplus*

When this issue of *Wooster Sauce* went to press, the AGM was still to take place. To the right there is a summary Income and Expenditure account in a format similar to that used last year, which we hope is informative to members. The audited accounts, which will be presented for approval at the AGM, may be inspected at the meeting, or a copy obtained from our Treasurer

Our membership numbered 1,016 at the year end, 218 of whom come from a total of 29 overseas countries. We welcome on average 14 new members each month. Members with UK bank accounts are encouraged to renew their subscriptions by standing order, which reduces costs and time spent on administration. Should you still pay by cheque but be prepared to switch to standing order, please contact the Treasurer for a form. As an incentive, our policy has always been that, should our annual fee ever need to be increased, standing order members will receive a year's grace before the change affects them.

## The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

### Income and Expenditure

Year ended 31 May, 2004

Subscriptions	£ 13,125
Sales of publications, <i>et al</i>	258
Income tax provision not needed	76
Donations and sundry	117
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Total income	£ 13,576
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Printing costs	£ 5,243
Postage, copying and stationery	3,622
Insurance	262
Foreign exchange charges	335
Room hire and events	271
Sundry	258
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Total expenditure	£ 9,991
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SURPLUS FOR YEAR	£ 3,585
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## Piccadilly Jim on Unabridged Audio

### The Editor reviews Jonathan Cecil's latest

Jonathan Cecil's twenty-fourth unabridged recording for Chivers is *Piccadilly Jim*, recorded in what now seems to be a vain hope that its release might have coincided with the new film of that title. On eight cassettes or eight CDs, the recording lasts about eight hours and must mean that Jonathan alone has now recorded over a whole week, 168 hours, of pure Wodehouse!

An acknowledged master of the genre, he had some knotty problems to contend with in this book. First, it is a transatlantic novel, with a plethora of accents, both British and American, to maintain. Secondly, as a non-series book (if you don't count Ogden Ford), Jonathan is not able to default to a tried and trusted voice as he can for say some of Bertie's friends. Thirdly, one of the characters he portrays is an American pretending to be an English butler who is keen on baseball, not the easiest impression to convey. Yet Jonathan manages it all with his usual skill, even where he has such philosophical observations to relate as "Ann ought to marry," said Mrs Pett. "She gets her own way too much now."

It was encouraging to find that Jonathan used an edition with the correct text when describing early on the cricket match between Surrey and Kent which Peter Pett was sent to watch at Lord's by his wife. Yes, Lord's. Not the Oval, which had been requisitioned for the use of troops during WWI, but where Surrey might have been expected to play. Some misguided editor of Herbert Jenkins reprints changed the text nevertheless, but the recent Penguin edition with Hitch covers has reverted to the original.

There is little new that one can report about Jonathan Cecil's readings of Wodehouse. Like Martin Jarvis's of William Brown, they should be regarded as a national treasure, highly recommended especially to those who suffer from poor eyesight, are convalescing or wish to listen to wholesome fun on a long car journey.

*Piccadilly Jim*. The Audiobook Collection  
8 Cassettes £ 16.99; 8 CDs £ 21.99.  
For details of how to order see page 25.

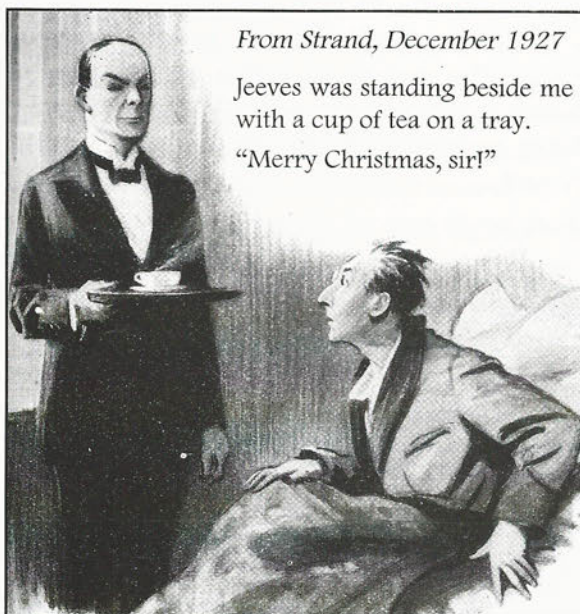
# The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

## Bertie Wooster and the Festive S

As the time of goodwill to all men approaches, it seems appropriate to consider the four Jeeves and Wooster short stories with a Christmas setting.

Perhaps the best known is *Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit*. The story appeared in book form in *Very Good, Jeeves* (McIlvaine, A42b), which was first published in the UK in the summer of 1930. However, as its title indicates, it was obviously pitched as a Christmas story, and had first appeared in magazine form at a much more seasonal time: in the UK in *The Strand* for December 1927 (D133.138); and in the US in *Liberty* on December 24, 1927 (D36.33).

The story began with Bertie receiving a letter from Bobbie Wickham's mother: "She has written inviting me to Skeldings for the festive s." Bertie's shortening of 'season' caused printers numerous problems over the years: it was correct when it first appeared in *The Strand*, but it then variously appeared as 'the festives', 'the festivities' or even 'Christmas' in different editions, until finally being corrected in a 1999 Penguin paperback (AAan42P; for full details, see *The Book and Magazine Collector*, February 2000, p9, and Tony Ring, *Wodehouse in Woostershire*, p166). This is the only one of the four stories which actually showed us Bertie on Christmas Day itself.



From *Strand*, December 1927

Jeeves was standing beside me with a cup of tea on a tray.

"Merry Christmas, sir!"

*The Ordeal of Young Tuppy*, also from *Very Good, Jeeves*, was the occasion of Tuppy Glossop's taking the field on behalf of Upper Bleaching in their annual rugby match against Hockley-cum-Meston. Once again, the Christmas scene was set early on:

Every year, starting about the middle of November, there is a good deal of anxiety and apprehension among owners of the better-class of country-house throughout England as to who will get Bertram Wooster's patronage for the Christmas holidays. It may be one or it may be another. As my Aunt Dahlia says, you never know where the blow will fall.

The story, under the title *Tuppy Changes His Mind*, had first appeared simultaneously in the April 1930 issues of *The Strand* (D133.160) in the UK and *Cosmopolitan* (D17.47) in the US.

*Jeeves and the Greasy Bird* looked forward to a Christmas scheduled at Brinkley Court, before which Bertie managed to thwart Aunt Dahlia's plans for him to play Santa Claus at the children's party. (Bertie: "You seriously expect me to put on white whiskers and a padded stomach and go about saying 'Ho, ho, ho' to a bunch of kids as tough as those residing near your rural seat?" Aunt Dahlia: "Pay no attention, by the way, to stories you may have heard of them setting fire to the curate's beard last year. It was purely accidental.") Instead, that dubious honour was earmarked for Sir Roderick Glossop.

The story first appeared in the US in *Playboy* in December 1965 (D51.14), before publication in book form in the UK in *Plum Pie* (A89a) in September 1966. A magazine appearance in the UK followed in *Argosy* in January 1967 (D74.3), before the eventual US publication of *Plum Pie* (A89b) in December 1967. In both the magazine versions, Santa Claus was to be played by Roderick Spode.

The earliest Christmastime story was *The Metropolitan Touch*, where Bertie was in Twing for Bingo Little's new and original revue, *What Ho Twing!!* In this story, the narrative covered several weeks, so the Christmas theme was less developed, but the climax occurred at the Village School Christmas Entertainment on December 23.

The story first appeared in September 1922, simultaneously in both *The Strand* (D133.91) and *Cosmopolitan* (D17.22), before appearing in book form in *The Inimitable Jeeves* (A30a) in May 1923.

*Editor's Note: This is Nick's twentieth Bibliographic Corner. Congratulations to him on that milestone: to paraphrase the title of a Wodehouse essay marking fifty years in The Saturday Evening Post, five years is practically half a decade.*

## A Prize Competition

We are inviting entries for a Christmas Anagram competition with prizes of Everyman books.

It was suggested by French member Rob Bovendeaard, who recently came across some interesting examples.

'Pelham Grenville Wodehouse' can become 'He plied novels; we laugh more'

'The Author Pelham Grenville Wodehouse' results in 'I wrote novel. Result promised Laugh. Ha! He-He!'

Not wishing to be unduly restrictive, please submit anagrams for Wodehousean character names, places, book titles or similar of *at least* 15 letters. The most recent set of four Everyman books for the best; five individual books for the runners-up.

Entries should be submitted to The Editor at the address at the foot of page 28 by January 31, 2005.

## More Letters From Members

*From Peter Martin:*

In the autobiography of Low, the artist (*Low's Autobiography*, Michael Joseph, 1956) I found the following reference to Wodehouse:

As I had expected, the humorists were personally not funny, but looked rather as though they were studying for the undertaking business. W W Jacobs was a sad worried-looking man not at all unlike a Wapping Old Stairs bargee. Pett Ridge was gloomy. Even P G Wodehouse, a cheerful big chap easy to get on with, was not funny in the sense of jokey, apart from his peculiar wish that I should draw him after he had just had drops for his eye treatment, so that he could have impressively large and luminous pupils like Edgar Allan Poe.

*From Simon Gordon Clark:*

A small speculation on the master's sources in film: a 1936 Mickey Mouse short called *Mickey's Rival* depicts Mickey and Minnie going out for a picnic and the occasion being very nearly ruined by the intervention of a smart Alec acquaintance called Mortimer. He plays practical jokes on Mickey and generally tries to humiliate him. At first Minnie is dazzled but in the end Mickey triumphs as Mortimer is driven away by a bull.

This unappealing mouse has so many common characteristics with the dreadful 'Legs' Mortimer in the short story *Farewell to Legs* that the fact that they have the same name cannot be a coincidence.

*Editor's Comment:* There is always a snag. *Farewell to Legs* first appeared in *This Week* on July 14, 1935. Perhaps the Disney team drew inspiration from Wodehouse instead.

## Two Interesting Publications

We bring news of two recent publications of interest to members.

### *Book and Magazine Collector*

The November 2004 issue of this monthly magazine has a twenty-page Wodehouse section, featuring an interview of Robert McCrum conducted by Tony Ring, followed by Tony's article *A Collector's Guide to Books about Wodehouse* and B&MC's guide to PGW first edition prices. The whole section has colour illustrations of over 30 books and magazines.

### *Emsworth's Plum*

by Linda Newell, published by Havant Borough Council 36pp £ 2.50

This is an unexpected booklet, and Havant Borough Council must be congratulated on its initiative in having published it. The first 24 pages summarise Wodehouse's life and professional career, with some natural concentration on the Emsworth years. On the whole it is both accurate and concise, evident errors being few and far-between, although pig-lovers will curl their tails in embarrassment when they read about the Duchess of Blandings.

Two pages list names and places local to Emsworth which were used by Plum in his books, and although a total of eight were identified from *Something Fresh* in 1915 and several date back to earlier publications, the author includes some from as late as 1947. Many errors and inconsistencies in book titles appear in these two pages, though there are only two whose real title is not immediately obvious. The book closes with a charming ten page description of Emsworth in 1904, and there are half a dozen postcard-style photographs which blend in very well.

The booklet can be obtained from Emsworth Museum, 10b North Street, Emsworth, Hants PO10 7DD at £2.50 per copy (plus 50 pence per copy postage in the UK).

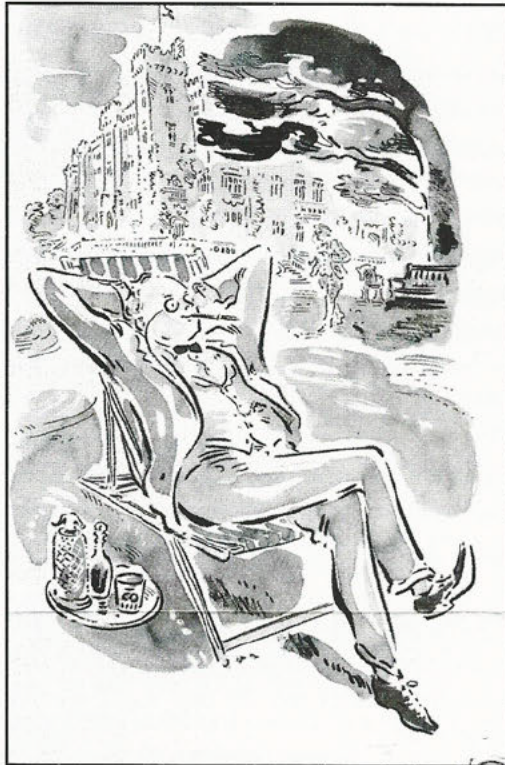
### *Answers to Dennis Chitty's Quiz on the Poets (see page 21)*

- 1 Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*. (Lord Alfred, not Ambrose).
- 2 Alfred Bunn, *The Bohemian Girl*
- 3 Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*.
- 4 Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.
- 5 Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.



## The Folio Blandings

The Folio Society recently applied their unique treatment to six of the Blandings novels, which they offer in a boxed set bound in cloth, each with a full colour design by the irrepressible Paul Cox, who also profusely illustrated the books. The titles included were *Summer Lightning*, *Heavy Weather*, *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, *Full Moon*, *Pigs Have Wings* and *Service with a Smile*.



One of our contemporary ubiquitous broadcasters, Alan Titchmarsh, has provided an introduction, which appears at the front of *Summer Lightning*. Titchmarsh has long declared his appreciation of Wodehouse, and with the odd novel behind him, he is no stranger to writing. As he says at the start of his comments:

It is difficult for a writer to read P G Wodehouse. Difficult, because it is so easy. Scan a single page of the old 'deftly crafted' and you are left with a feeling of total inadequacy ...

He adds that for him the Blandings novels are 'the top of the tree' and confesses that he is trying to reproduce the serenity of Blandings in the garden of the Georgian farmhouse to which he has recently moved, a laudable ambition.

But there is one reference in the introduction that raises an eyebrow. Titchmarsh lists a number of Gally Threepwood's friends, describing them as blessed with the kind of nicknames for which Wodehouse has become famous: Plug Basham,

## Audio-Recordings on CD

In these pages, we have referred on many occasions to audio-tape recordings of Wodehouse's works, either dramatisations from the BBC, unabridged recordings from Chivers or abridged readings of the Jeeves and Wooster series from Penguin.

A number of members have inquired about the availability of recordings on CD, so we are delighted to list those presently available. All can be ordered from The Audiobook Collection, Freeport Bath BA1 3QZ; [www.audiobookcollection.com](http://www.audiobookcollection.com); Freephone 0800 136919; or BBC Audiobooks; 01225 878000. Prices exclude shipping.

### Unabridged readings

0754054063	<i>Blandings Castle</i>	£ 21.99
0754055493	<i>Cocktail Time</i>	20.99
0754055841	<i>A Damsel in Distress</i>	20.99
0754055558	<i>Hot Water</i>	20.99
0754054500	<i>Young Men in Spats</i>	20.99
075405375X	<i>Lord Emsworth and Others</i>	21.99
0754087557	<i>Service with a Smile</i>	20.99
0754054608	<i>Uncle Dynamite</i>	21.99
075409605X	<i>A Few Quick Ones</i>	20.99
0754094871	<i>Eggs, Beans and Crumpets</i>	20.99
1405670630	<i>Piccadilly Jim</i>	21.99

### Abridged readings

0141803924	<i>Jeeves in the Offing</i>	£ 9.99
0141803916	<i>Thank You, Jeeves</i>	9.99

### Dramatisations

0563523964	<i>Meet Mr Mulliner</i>	£ 15.99
0563524804	<i>More Mr Mulliner</i>	12.99
0563494395	<i>Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit</i>	9.99

Stumpy Whiting, Puffy Bengier and Stinker Pyke. The memory was stretched to recall the reference to Stumpy Whiting, but see chapter 7 of *Heavy Weather*. No, it was more subtle than that. He evidently realised that no piece of writing about Blandings was complete without reference to an impostor, and he provided one. Stinker Pyke. An acquaintance of Gally, yes, but never a friend.

*Folio Society editions are usually only available for purchase by Folio Society members, but members of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) may purchase the set for £ 108 (plus shipping), a 10% discount on the normal price, with no additional member commitments.*

**Best of Blandings The Folio Society £108**

## Recent Press Comment

**Boston Globe, August 16 (from David Landman)**

Described what David considered a Wodehousean type of incident, when a rabbit was set alight in a bonfire lit at Devizes Cricket Club, ran into the club hut, and set it ablaze, destroying costly equipment.

**Daily Telegraph, September 6 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

In an interview with Cassandra Jardine, Patron Tom Sharpe admitted that when he met Wodehouse, they spent all afternoon chatting, but Tom never mentioned that he, too, wrote comic novels. When his publishers sent one to PGW, who described it as ‘the most original novel he had read for years’, Sharpe replied: ‘I suppose he read it.’

**Good Housekeeping, September 8 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

A questioner asked for recommendations of books to tickle the funny bone. Ellen Heltzel suggested John Mortimer and PGW as authors of ‘memorable characters whose foibles we can identify as our own’, and mentioned Rumpole and Jeeves in particular.

**Daily Mail, September 9**

Keith Waterhouse has always regarded reading as one of the great freedoms, bringing with it the bounteous gift of serendipity. “Discovering an author – a Richmal Crompton, a Conan Doyle, a P G Wodehouse – is like stumbling into an Aladdin’s cave.”

**BBC World Service, September 17**

Ran a programme on the attraction of Wodehouse to Indians, and interviewed a number of our Indian members.

**The Times, September 18**

**Spectator, September 18**

In the *Times* review of Boris Johnson’s novel *Seventy-Two Virgins*, James Naughtie described the author as a ‘Wodehousean by instinct and practice’, who ‘does explicit homage to the master by giving his MP a dodgy lingerie enterprise called Eulalie’. In the *Spectator*, Douglas Hurd agreed that Wodehouse was the inspiration for the book and points out that the fictional US President and the MP are both Woosterish.

**Spectator, September 18**

Steven Glover wrote an article loosely related to the biography entitled *The work of P G Wodehouse is immortal, but he was guilty of a moral lapse*.

**Guardian, September 18**

A letter from J A P Dutton challenged a suggestion in an earlier letter which suggested Wodehouse wrote only for money. An accompanying cartoon had one person asking the same question, and the answer was “Dunno. Ask Jeeves.”

**Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 21**

Reviewed a new production of *By Jeeves* at the Beck Center of the Arts.

**Daily Telegraph, September 24 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

Had a photograph of Lara Cazalet, and a comment on her new role as Helen Baxendale’s best friend in a TV film *The Only Boy for Me*, due out in the New Year.

**Hindustan Times, September 23 (from Nick Townend)**

In *How Wodehouse Found Jeeves*, Avirook Sen wrote about Percy Jeeves and Warwickshire Cricket Club.

**The Tribune, Chandigarh, October 2 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

In a feature article *Hooked to Books*, one interviewee named Shalini said ‘I think I have been reading P G Wodehouse forever . . . at least for the past 20 years. He never fails to prop up my drooping spirits. I think I can continue reading him for the rest of my life.’

**Daily Telegraph, October 8 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

In a letter, David Gunn corrected Andrew Marr’s understanding of who Hengist was. Adding that he and Horsa were chieftains in an early Saxon settlement around 449 AD, he said

The two were immortalised by PGW, who bastardised a music hall song of the 1930s about horses by writing ‘As Hengist said to Horsa, “Horsa, keep your tail up.”’

**Süddeutsche Zeitung, October 13 (from Manfred Porsch)**

An article by Timothy Garton Ash compares Tony Blair’s government’s approach to George W Bush to that of Jeeves’s personality: immaculately loyal in public but whispering criticism of the “Is this really well-advised” nature in private.

**Daily Telegraph, October 13**

Bill Deedes wrote an article saying today’s youth is no worse than in his day. ‘One of P G Wodehouse’s stories has a tale about nicking a policeman’s helmet, so you might suppose such conduct is fiction. On the night of my 21st birthday in London, I can remember half a dozen of us playing rigger in Jermyn Street. Luckily, the police were elsewhere, for we were in helmet-nicking mood.’

**The American Thinker, October 15**

Published a long birthday tribute to Wodehouse in the form of pastiche sketches by John B Dwyer.

**‘Quote . . . Unquote’ Radio 4, October 18**

Nigel Rees and Philip Hensher had an exchange about Aunts in Wodehouse.

**The Guardian, October 21 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

**‘Megastar’ Website, October 21 (from Murray Hedgcock)**

Both referred to the Wodehouse nifty about the difference between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine, although in *The Guardian*, Simon Hoggard transmogrified it to Liverpudlian (with reference to the troubles of Boris Johnson). The quotation has been the subject of many entries in this column over the years, and I have decided to give it a year’s sabbatical!

## *Oh Clarence!* at the Britten Theatre Dominic Cazenove writes

I have just come across your review of *Oh Clarence!*, the production Theatre in Trust produced earlier this year at the Britten Theatre.

As a member of the cast (Freddie), I was astonished to learn that several representatives of the P G Wodehouse Society came to see our play (and by your account seemed to enjoy it). Nobody told me at the time that such high profile and important bums were going to be on the seats, and I would loved to have talked to some of you after the show about your thoughts and views of our production.

As you may already know, although Theatre in Trust is essentially an amateur company, however that particular production was lucky enough to have four full time professional actors (myself included) and of the remaining eight, four of them have been professional actors in the past – but as far as I was concerned, you would never have known they had left the game! This factor combined with some wonderful wheeler-dealing by the production crew who managed to get us a fantastic set and great theatre, to give us a pretty polished show; if we had all been professionals, and had had the time and inclination – I would not have been surprised to see the show continued.

So this is really just a thank you for coming to see us and also to tell you that the video of the show is currently being sold (all proceeds to Jo's Trust), and I'm sure that if you were to contact Simon Berry (the director), he may be able to help you out if any of your members were interested.

*Editor's Comment:*

*By the time this edition went to print we had been unable to obtain details re ordering the video. However, we expect to be able to do so and will put the information on our website as soon as possible.*

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## **Relaxing in Beaconsfield**

According to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on September 18, Francis Wheen wrote in the September *Tatler* that at Michael Foot's 90th birthday party, the Prime Minister said the misery of the 1982 Beaconsfield by-election (his first attempt to become an MP, which was unsuccessful) was cheered by discussing Wodehouse with Mr Foot over a pub lunch. He elaborated:

"Wodehouse is my campaign reading. Whenever you are in an election – which is always a difficult experience – there's something wonderfully relaxing about him."

# Poets' Corner

## **The Abolition of the Censor (A Peep into the Future)**

As I was passing through the Park  
In 1912 AD  
I heard a sudden rifle-shot,  
Which rather startled me.  
I said "Policeman, what was that?"  
He answered, courteously:

"It's that there persecuted cove,  
The Listener of Plays.  
Those dramatists they wait for him  
With guns where'er he strays.  
We winks at it: for Genius, Sir  
Will have its little ways.

"Another shot? I rayther think  
That's Mr Barker. He  
And Mr Shaw comes every day  
Each to his special tree.  
And tries to pick the Censor off  
As he goes home to tea.

"My chum, old Billy Jones, what's on  
The Cambridge Circus beat,  
Tells me they're playing the same old game  
All along Oxford Street.  
And Mr Garnett's shooting is,  
He says, especial neat.

"And Mr Redford? Well 'e don't  
Seem very much upset.  
He don't appear to think that there's  
Much call for him to fret:  
For as he very justly says,  
'E ain't abolished yet."

From *Books of Today and Books of Tomorrow*,  
November, 1907

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## **I SAY!**

### **Favourite Exchanges - 32**

"I think the heat must have made him irritable. In his normal state he would not strike a lamb. I've known him do it."

"Do what?"

"Not strike lambs."

From *Piccadilly Jim* (1917)

## FUTURE EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

### February 15, 2005 – The Savage Club

The winter meeting, at which Christopher Owen will perform an extract from his one-man show in the *persona* of Lord Emsworth.

### April 9, 2005 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Join the first of this year's walks round Wodehouse's London conducted by Norman Murphy. Contact him to arrange your booking and the meeting-place and time.

### April 26 to May 8, 2005 – *The Beauty Prize*

Advance notice of a production of the 1923 musical by Musicals Tonight in New York.

### June 17, 2005 – Dulwich College

Advance notice of The Gold Bats v Dulwich Dusters cricket match at Dulwich College with a famous Gold Bats tea provided.

### June or July 2005 – Sherlock Holmes cricket match

It has not been possible to set the date or venue yet. Please check the website or March's *Wooster Sauce*.

### July 9, 2005 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Another opportunity to see Wodehouse's London.

### July 12, 2005 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the summer meeting.

### August 11-14, 2005 – TWS Convention, Hollywood

The date of the next convention of the American Wodehouse Society, which will be held on the UCLA campus in Hollywood.

### September 17, 2005 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Another opportunity to see Wodehouse's London.

### October 11, 2005 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the autumn meeting, which is expected to include the AGM.

### December 2005 – Dulwich College

The planned event at Dulwich College in March 2005 has been postponed until December. It is hoped to display an exhibition for a week or more, stage some performances about Wodehouse's life and works, and hold a dinner, probably on the 10th.

*The Savage Club is within the premises of the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, close to Charing Cross and Embankment stations, and members meet from 6pm.*

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## EDITOR'S TAILPIECES

Simon Gordon Clark has answered Geoffrey Harris's question concerning Winchester Fives (*Wooster Sauce*, September) by confirming that it is played with gloves and not a bat.

Kit Evans pointed out that the ancient language of the troubadours is Occitan, not Occitam (*WS* September, p22), and queried the inclusion of Stephen Leacock in the item on eminent American humorists (p21), as he was an English-born Canadian!

Alan Hall suggests another of Plum's Brand Names: 'J Miller's Special Brainy Booby-Trap Apparatus', from *Punch*, September 1906. He also mentions 'Plasmon Biscuits' from *Punch* in July 1904 but wonders whether they were a genuine brand. Now, if we are moving into his journalism, there will be a wealth of new names to find!

Robert Bruce visited the Farmers' Market off Marylebone High Street, where 'there are a huge number of varieties of apples, including the good old Worcester Pearmain'. In October he spotted a crate labelled 'Wooster Pearmain'.

At the UNESCO General Conference in 1985, held in Sofia before the fall of communism, the Bulgarian Delegation sought the support of the British delegation for a resolution in favour of the establishment of a 'Museum of Humour' in Bulgaria. The reason they gave for seeking UK support was that P G Wodehouse was their most popular humorous writer.

A four-page agreement, between PGW and NBC and dated 1951, was offered for sale recently. It was for a one-hour TV broadcast of the musical *The Three Musketeers* to which Wodehouse had contributed. It was to be sponsored by Proctor and Gamble, but there were specific product exclusions:

Alcoholic beverages other than beer and wine, laxatives, deodorants, feminine hygiene products, patent medicines, ladies' undergarments.

Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight, boasts two examples of Tanagra figurines (see *WS*, March). My wife commented on them, and the excited room guide, Mr Don Webber, told her that she was the first person ever to show an interest in them!