

# WOOSTER SAUCE



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

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## SOCIETY SPICE GIRLS —IDENTITIES REVEALED!



### WOOSTER SAUCE REPORTER FINDS GEM AT TILBURY HOUSE

*Wooster Sauce* staff reporters are as abundant in number as the skilled operatives working in the detective agency of J Sheringham Adair, but one found the time to hunt through some of the files of the Mammoth Publishing Company at Tilbury House. In the frail, yellowing, past issues of the *Daily Record*, he came across this gem, describing certain events of April 1, 1933.

Readers will be familiar with the wide-ranging interests of the ubiquitous Percy Pilbeam, the notorious editor of *Society Spice*. At the start of this theatrical season he caused something of a stir by launching on an unsuspecting public a new all-female singing and dancing troupe known only as the *Society Spice Girls*. He has continuously sought to preserve the secret of their identities, allowing each of them to be known to the public only by a *nom de danse* representing a particular spice.

We can now reveal to our readers the identities of the *Society Spice Girls*, all of whom are very well connected. 'Ginger' is none other than Roberta Wickham, daughter of Sir Cuthbert and Lady Wickham of Skeldings Hall, 'Chili' is Lady Florence Craye, from the Earl of Worplesdon's stable, 'Cayenne' is Honoria Glossop, daughter of nerve specialist Sir Roderick and Lady Glossop. 'Allspice' is Stephanie Byng, ward of Sir Watkyn Bassett, the retired magistrate, while 'Saffron' is his daughter Madeline.

Insiders have reported that occasional tensions have surfaced amongst members of the troupe as it dawned on them that each has been engaged to man-about-town Bertie Wooster. He apparently sits in the front row during most of their performances, and is liable to become quite emotional when they sing their closing number, which includes the line "If you wannabe my husband...".

Last Saturday night, (1st April, should you have forgotten) it is reported that he was in a more maudlin frame of mind than usual, possibly because during the afternoon his beloved Oxford had lost their tenth successive Boat Race to their Cambridge rivals.

Whatever the reason, Bertie apparently tried to climb on to the stage, but before he was able to make much progress he was shepherded out of harm's way by his valet, Jeeves. We understand that a sympathetic view of the incident is being taken by the authorities and no action is expected.



## The Influence of W S Gilbert (1836-1911) on P G Wodehouse

by David Mackie

David Mackie worked for the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company from 1975 to 1982, first as Repetiteur, and latterly as Chorus-Master/Associate Conductor, in which capacity he conducted over 500 performances of G&S operas. The company had no other repertoire. In this article he explains how he came to realise the significant links between W S Gilbert and P G Wodehouse.

While performing *Savoy Operas* eight times a week for 48 weeks of the year, I became fairly intimately acquainted not just with the music but with every crossed t and dotted i of W S Gilbert's libretti. At this time, unaccountably, I had not read any Wodehouse. Various people had said to me "Oh, you must read some Wodehouse; you'd love it" or similar, but no-one had ever suggested to me that there might be a link between Wodehouse and Gilbert or I might have made an effort to rectify this deficiency sooner. It was not, however, until the late 1980s that I finally acquired my first volume, which was *Mulliner Nights* (1933). Even as yet I was simply expecting to be entertained by an author of whose reputation I was, of course, already aware; I was indeed greatly entertained but what I also discovered (and am still discovering) was something of an added bonus.

The first story in *Mulliner Nights* is *The Smile that Wins*. I hadn't got too far with it (actually the third page) when I came upon the phrase 'their love ripened rapidly'. "Ah," I thought, "that sounds very Gilbertian." There is, in fact, much alliteration in Gilbert's writing (of which more anon) but I thought I detected a specific reference to *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888). In their second entry in Act 1 (*Here's a man of jollity*) the chorus sing 'If you vapour vapidly, River runneth rapidly'. Was it merely coincidence that PGW's 'love ripened rapidly' was so similar to WSG's 'River runneth rapidly'? Somehow I didn't think so.

At the beginning of the twentieth century few people (let alone another humorous writer) could have been unaware of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas – indeed the whole Savoy empire – and we know that Wodehouse did actually meet Gilbert. He gives an amusing account of how he ruined one of WSG's stories by laughing uproariously at the wrong place, and in a later preface to *Psmith in the City* gave a thumb-nail sketch of Rupert D'Oyly Carte (son of Richard, who founded the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company) who had been at Winchester with his cousin. Of course these facts don't in themselves infer any specific knowledge of Gilbert's works but the similarity of the line to the one in *Yeomen* made me think that Wodehouse must have known the opera fairly well.

This was interesting but I didn't think too much of it and read on. Then, just a few lines later, I came to the following: 'With the usual allowance for good conduct he should be with us again in July.' In Act II of *Patience* (1881) there is the following exchange:

Patience: But, Reginald, how long will this last?

Bunthorne: With occasional intervals for rest and refreshment, as long as I do.

Wodehouse's 'With the usual allowance for good conduct . . .' is clearly not a direct quote but the structure is remarkably similar and with a second such similarity within the space of a few lines my interest was now well and truly awakened. But was I trying to read too much into this? I kept going, and a few pages later came to:

'You aren't by any chance the feller –'

' . . . who loves your daughter Millicent with a fervour he cannot begin to express? Yes, Lord Brangbolton. I am.'

If I had had doubts about the first two apparent references to Gilbert I was in no doubt about this one for in Act I of *The Gondoliers* (1889) Casilda says to Luiz: 'I loved you with a frenzy that words are powerless to express.'

Again this is not a direct quote but of the three it is the closest to Gilbert's original and again, too, the structure of the Wodehouse line surely belies its origin. So, already – in the space of one short story – we have had apparent references to no less than three of the Savoy operas – *Patience*, *Yeomen* and *Gondoliers*.



This had to be more than coincidence, but there was more to come. Towards the end of the story comes the line: ‘... take Millicent and with her a father’s blessing’. This could be related to at least three lines from the Savoy Operas:

<i>The Sorcerer</i>	1877	Take him – he’s yours! May you and he be happy!
<i>HMS Pinafore</i>	1878	Here – take her, sir, and mind you treat her kindly.
<i>Ruddigore</i>	1887	– take her, you dog, and with her my blessin’!

Of these three the third is obviously the closest, although the listing of all three shows Gilbert’s own self-plagiarism. Wodehouse could have known the *Ruddigore* line without necessarily being aware of the others.

So far I had come across apparent references to four Savoy operas but there was yet one further small but characteristic point to be noted. Towards the end of the story Wodehouse introduces a character called Lord Knubble of Knopp – a suitably dotty piece of alliteration which again recalls Gilbert. In *Patience*, for instance, the three dragoon officers are Lieut the Duke of Dunstable (a later Wodehouse hijacking), Colonel Calverley and Major Murgatroyd. Five references and all in one short story of less than twenty pages. By now I was hooked – eager to finish *Mulliner Nights* and, indeed, to read all of PGW’s vast output to see what else I might find and try to classify it in some way. As Gilbert himself said in *Princess Ida* (1884): ‘There’s an unbounded field of speculation.’ Perhaps Howard Carter felt like this as he approached the opening of Tutankhamen’s tomb!

I finished *Mulliner Nights* and found to my increasing delight that there was at least one Gilbertian reference in all but one of the nine stories, some thirty references in all. I also found that there were numerous other references: to Shakespeare, Browning and even parlour songs, but the Gilbertian references seemed to predominate.

After *Mulliner Nights* I read *A Damsel in Distress*, which dates from 1919, taking us back even closer to Gilbert’s own lifetime. Again I was delighted to find many Gilbertian references as well as those to other literary figures. The Gilbert ones did seem to predominate but I can make no claim to being able to recognise any but the most obvious quotations from our other literary giants.

I have now read about a dozen of Wodehouse’s books and can already distinguish several categories of reference. First of all – and fewest in number – are direct quotations. Secondly – and greatest in number – are what appear to be half-remembered quotations which are still close enough to Gilbert’s originals to invite comparison. A third category might consist of odds and ends which are neither of the above, such as the alliterative element in Knubble of Knopp or the example from *The Story of Webster*: ‘You get your cat and you call him Thomas or George, as the case may be.’ In Act II of *Iolanthe* (1882) we find that the two Earls, Tolloller and Mountarat, actually have Christian names:

Tolloller: It’s a painful position, for I have a very strong regard for you, George.

Mountarat (much affected): My dear Thomas.

Coincidence? After the numerous references in the first story it would seem unlikely. Within less than thirty pages there have been hints of *Patience*, *Iolanthe*, *Ruddigore*, *The Yeomen of the Guard* and *The Gondoliers*. So many references in such a tiny proportion of Wodehouse’s output would seem to imply that he was well acquainted with the Gilbert and Sullivan operas and that they had – wittingly or unwittingly – played a recognisable part in the evolution of his own style, a conviction borne out by subsequent reading.

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## DO YOU HAVE ANY SPARE READING COPIES?

One of many problems faced by the Russian P G Wodehouse Society is that of obtaining copies of Plum’s books in English. Michel Kuzmenko, who has formed the Society, would appreciate receiving paperback reading copies which members could spare to form the basis of a lending library and help spread the awareness of Wodehouse’s writing amongst English-speaking Russians.

Nigel Williams has kindly agreed to act as a collection point, so please either send him paperback editions which are surplus to your requirements, or call in to leave them at his shop next time you are near Leicester Square:

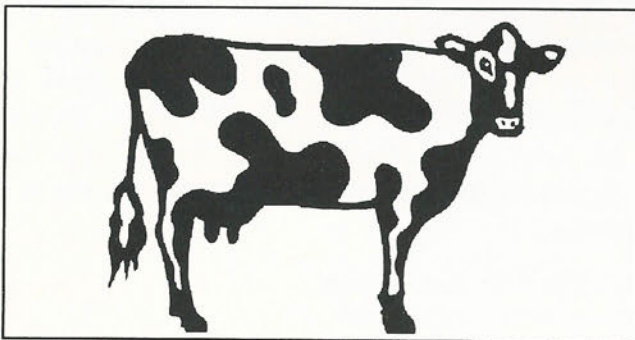


# RIGHT HO, HERRIOT

by Peter Cannon

At the funeral for Alf Wight, a.k.a. James Herriot, “Robert Hardy read a piece by one of Alf’s favourite authors, P G Wodehouse, from *The World of Jeeves*”. So Graham Lord tells us in *James Herriot: The Life of a Country Vet* (1997). Earlier, before Wight became a famous author himself, his biographer says he “dissected the books of writers he admired to try to see why they had been so successful – Conan Doyle, Dickens, Hemingway, Salinger, Wodehouse”.

It is clear that Wight learned his most important lesson from Wodehouse, that in an age where sex and violence are in vogue millions of readers everywhere are hungry for something more wholesome. In effect Wight achieved what Wodehouse did – out of personal experience he created a timeless, idealised world, set in his case in the Yorkshire dales from the late 1930s to about the early 1950s, and peopled it with comic and eccentric characters, namely veterinarians as well as farmers and pet owners who typically prove more difficult to deal with than their animals.

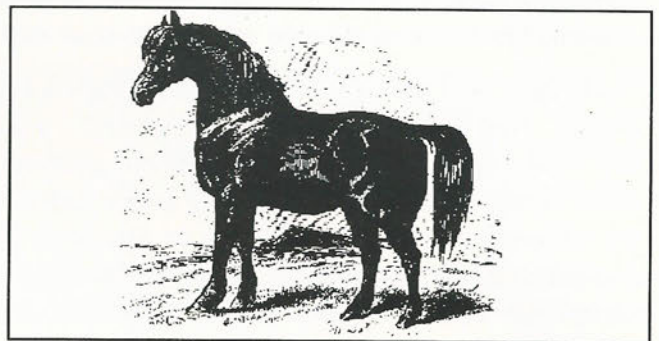


This mix of humour and nostalgia, supported by a genius for storytelling, made ‘James Herriot’ a best-selling author, in the United States starting with *All Creatures Great and Small* (1972), which combined the contents of his first two books published in the UK, *If Only They Could Talk* and *It Shouldn’t Happen to a Vet*. (On occasion an American editor can actually improve on British titles.)

It is perhaps no surprise, then, to discover as I did in reading *James Herriot: The Life of a Country Vet* that the person capable of writing such wonderful stories was a kind, modest man much like Wodehouse himself. As the son of a Glasgow

ship-builder whom he later liked to describe as a ‘musician’, Wight was not born to any advantages. Even after his books brought him wealth and fame, he continued to practice as a vet in the small Yorkshire town fictionalised as Darrowby. Devotees soon besieged his surgery, eager for his autograph. (No doubt this is what would have happened to Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson at 221B Baker Street had they really existed – a queue of admirers on the doorstep all but overwhelming their legitimate clients.)

Wight never turned away a fan. He briefly considered becoming a tax exile, but in the end stayed put and without a murmur paid his 83% to the Labour government then in power. Like Wodehouse in later years, he was to have his share of tax troubles. Fortunately, the authorities accused him only of petty offences, such as deducting the cost of a video as a business expense.

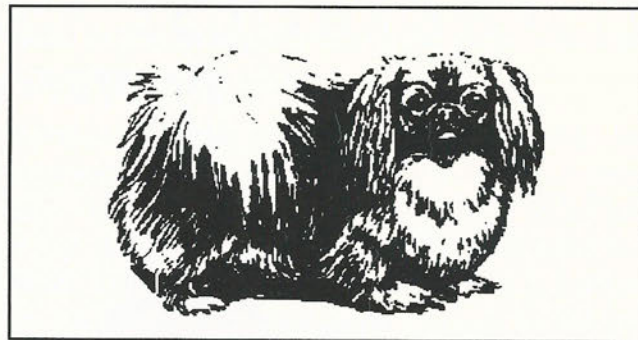


Like Wodehouse, too, Wight was keen on sport. Throughout his life he followed his native Sunderland football club as faithfully as Plum did the Dulwich cricket team. And when he needed the name for a character he found it on the playing field. According to his biographer, he was so impressed by the performance of a Scottish goalkeeper in an FA Cup match that he took this as a good omen and adopted the man’s name for his narrator. Unlike the original for Jeeves, the footballer Jim Herriot did not die in battle, indeed he lived for years thinking his having the same name as the vet on the telly was a coincidence until the two men met and Wight gave him the credit. The fictional Herriot of course, in his role of lovable bumbler telling tales on himself, takes his cue not from Jeeves but from Bertie Wooster.



Wight was as happily married as Wodehouse, though Mr Lord indicates that his wife Joan, the original for Helen, was the dominant partner of the two, determined and forceful where he was gentle and easygoing. His American editor used to kid Alf about his British titles, until he learned that Joan was the source for most of them. (At one point Wight proposed the punning title *III Creatures Great and Small*, which his American editor wisely rejected.) Joan, like Aunt Agatha, was evidently not someone to cross lightly.

In another Wodehousian parallel, the actor John Alderton played Herriot in the second of two feature-length films based on the books, *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet*. Those who relish Alderton's performances in *Wodehouse Playhouse* will nod knowingly at the praise he receives as "far and away the best of the three actors who portrayed Alf on screen". Alderton became friendly with Wight, who confided in him a couple of hilarious anecdotes that are alone worth the price of the biography.



Finally, one has to wonder whether Wodehouse himself was familiar with Herriot. Since both he and Ethel were great animal lovers, it is hard to imagine him not reading *All Creatures Great and Small* and recognising a writer after his own heart, besides taking especial delight in Tricky Woo, the pampered Peke.

*Peter Cannon is an American-born Wodehouse enthusiast living in England. He is a professional writer of fiction.*

## BERTIE AND THE EYEGGLASS: DID HE OR DIDN'T HE?

F John Pinhorn, a member from Canterbury, wrote concerning Jonathan Cecil's statement in the December issue of *Wooster Sauce* that when playing Bertie he considered an eyeglass as important a prop as Sherlock Holmes's pipe. John said:

As a close student of the Great Man's works for over 57 years, I beg to say that never does Bertie refer to himself as wearing one of these appendages. I will go so far as to assert that the only major character in the whole of PGW's output positively stated as wearing a monocle was the Hon Galahad Threepwood.

This was evidently a matter for the most rigorous examination, so opinions were obtained from a number of important and knowledgeable witnesses. Ian Carmichael, the TV Bertie of the 60s, did not remember exactly what drew him to use one, whether it was his own idea, that of the director Michael Mills, or whether it just felt right. Whichever it was, wrote Ian, he agrees with Jonathan Cecil that it was an essential prop.

But he doesn't agree with another assertion which Jonathan made, that "the essential thing is never to let it drop". Ian Carmichael added: "If he is correct, I'm afraid I committed the sin many, many times in moments of astonishment. At such times one's

eyebrows are invariably raised involuntarily which, of course, releases the monocle and allows it to fall. On one occasion into a glass of champagne which I was holding at the time."

Steven Pacey, the *By Jeeves* Bertie, confirmed that one reason he did not wear an eyeglass was that "with dance routines and two and a half hours on stage, the blessed thing would have driven me nuts", but more importantly "Alan Ayckbourn and I made a conscious effort to steer away from the archetypal image of Wooster and whilst still retaining a thirties feel, make him more accessible to a nineties audience; in short less of the upper-class buffoon and more the leading man."

Unfortunately, Hugh Laurie, the TV Bertie of the 90s, is away directing a film and Stephen Fry, who might also have been able to answer the question, is filming in America, so we have been unable to reach either of them for a view on Hugh's recent portrayal. We can put forward with considerable confidence, however, the claim that our President, Richard Briers, did not wear an eyeglass when playing Bertie in the radio production of *The Code of the Woosters*.

In summary, you pay your money, and you take your choice.



# WODEHOUSE AND ‘YE WHITE HART’

by Murray Hedgcock



## The White Hart, Barnes

(from a postcard  
c1909, courtesy  
The Barnes and  
Mortlake  
History Society)

Plum's young men – the Drones and the rest – lived, worked (admittedly not *many* soiled their hands with such distasteful doings) and played mostly around Mayfair. If they went further afield, it was probably to country houses; within London itself, these West End Johnnies were cautious. Occasionally they ventured to the East End, there was the odd trip to Wimbledon – and some of the most charming tales were set in Valley Fields, Wodehouse's tribute to his happy youthful years in the suburb that is actually Dulwich.

But there is a unique record in Wodehouse for the tucked-away village suburb of Barnes. (West Enders can try to get there by turning over Hammersmith Bridge – when it's open.) It made its Wodehousean debut in 1924, and was recorded again as late as 1959, 20 years after Plum had last been in London.

The White Hart, a striking turn of the century pub, which is virtually unique in being identified by Wodehouse and still in existence, is prominent in Barnes life as the “local” for residents of the affluent thoroughfare in which it stands. This is The Terrace, once home to composer Gustav Holst (another with Dulwich links, having once taught at the James Almeyn Girls' School); today its most famous resident is Sir Tim Rice – although by coincidence Anneka Rice also lived there recently.

The present building succeeded an earlier pub of the same name, which dated back to the early years of the last century.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the character who blazed the trail to unlikely Barnes is that most unorthodox of Wodehouse creations, Ukridge – so unsociable in many of his habits that he is almost a forerunner of modern literature's anti-hero.

In the book bearing his surname, Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge decided to make his fortune in boxing management, and persuaded Wilberforce “Battling” Billson, a huge and muscular trimmer on the steamer *Hyacinth*, to come ashore and try his hand (or fist) in the ring. Ukridge explained the project to his friend James Corcoran: “We move to The White Hart at Barnes tomorrow to start training.” Corky commented: “The riverside retreat was somewhat off my beat” – and he did not get there until after Billson's disastrous first bout. (He went easy on his opponent, who had told a harrowing tale of being up all night, looking after his wife, “who burned her hand at the jam factory”, thus sparking all the Battler's innate kindly nature). A second bout is teed up – and Corcoran at last makes it to The White Hart, to find Ukridge's charge in an upper room, “earnestly pounding a large leather object suspended from a wooden platform”.



The next fight is inevitably another fiasco (Billson wasted his efforts by duffing up his opponent in a confrontation outside rather than in the ring), although the project finally paid off when a third fight won Ukridge temporary affluence.

Billson retired to run his own pub, at Shoreditch – but a Barnes pub as a training venture surfaced again in the 1959 book, *A Few Quick Ones*. This time Drones plutocrat Oofy Prosser was attracted by the idea of adding to his vast wealth by backing wrestling bouts between Porky Jupp and Plug Boshier. He drove to “the White Stag in Barnes” – which suggests PGW had The White Hart in mind, but a quarter-century after first using the name, he didn’t bother to check his original usage to get it precisely right.

Oofy decided that Barnes was too close to “the temptations of the big city” for anyone in training, so the gigantic wrestlers are spirited away to a country cottage – and we hear no more about The White Hart under either its actual or its assumed name.

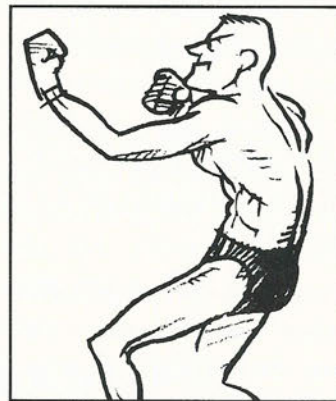
The puzzle is – why did PGW choose this particular pub? Hotels and pubs figure frequently, and largely, in his output, but most are either totally imaginary, or disguised under obviously assumed names. The White Hart is unique in being correctly named and placed (although it is now Ye White Hart, the Wodehouse version was correct in the early days of the century, before it was renamed).

Wodehouse knew the Dulwich area of Southeast London well enough, but otherwise, like his Drones, he was essentially a creature of central London, and the Southwest was not his habitat. One theory is that he visited Barnes to watch the Boat Race – The White Hart is a centre of spectator activity on such occasions, being on the Thames bank just up-river from Barnes Railway Bridge. There are plenty of Boat Race references in the oeuvre, mostly to do with pinching policemen’s helmets – but there is no indication anywhere that Wodehouse took any personal interest in the race. He did not attend either university, and there is no recorded indication that he ever went to Barnes.

The logical answer is that The White Hart in Edwardian England did provide training facilities for boxers and wrestlers, like the legendary Thomas a’Becket in the Old Kent Road more recently, and that this was well known to boxing enthusiast Wodehouse. (He boxed at Dulwich until poor eyesight made him give up, and his first

trip to New York in 1904, at the age of 23, was made largely in hope of seeing the great American ring names of the day).

Norman Murphy suggests Wodehouse was an inveterate walker who at the turn of the century often walked from his Chelsea lodgings to his job at the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank in Lombard Street, and may well have found his way to Barnes. He was known to walk from Chelsea to Putney, and Norman argues that it would be quite logical that at some stage he continued along the river-bank, to discover The White Hart.



There does not seem to be any local record of boxing at The White Hart, but Murphy points out that in the early years of the century, it was still ‘quasi-illegal’; in broad terms, a bout was only lawful if it were held on private premises to which the

public was not admitted. As a result, boxing was regarded in respectable circles with grave misgivings, “so there wasn’t much about it in the contemporary Press. Local residents did not like mention in their local papers about such dens of iniquity and common pugilism”.

Mrs Helen Osborn, archivist of brewers Young & Co., who have owned The White Hart for a century, admits she has no idea of any boxing – or Wodehouse – connection. “For many years there was a clubroom, used for masonic lodge meetings, and perhaps this was where an earlier licensee had run a boxing ring”, she suggests.

The only other pub in Wodehouse identified by name and still standing, according to Murphy, is The Coal Hole in The Strand – which is where Ukridge explained the Billson vision to his friend Corky. Other Wodehouse pubs are either imaginary, or long-gone – but today in 1998, The White Hart stands little changed at Barnes, a flag depicting a rampant deer flying proudly at its mast, to suggest an ideal stopping-off point for any PGW London pilgrimage.

*Murray Hedgcock is an Australian who has spent some decades in this country as a news and sports reporter. His book Wodehouse at the Wicket was published by Hutchinson in 1997.*



# SHERLOCKIAN PLUMS

by Marilyn MacGregor

*Marilyn MacGregor, Membership Secretary of the American-based 1,000-member The Wodehouse Society, is also a noted Sherlockian, and has been invited to present papers to a number of meetings of both Wodehouse and Sherlock Holmes societies. This article consists of two extracts from a paper given on a Sherlockian Caribbean Cruise in 1995, in which she contrasted the treatment by Doyle and Wodehouse of such topics as mental abilities, the relevance of fish and cranial capacity to intellect, dainty blondes, red hair, dogs, oysters, education, Woman, home comforts and French. We must, however, restrict ourselves to her introduction, and one major topic.*

P G Wodehouse greatly admired the writing of Dr John H Watson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. As a schoolboy at Dulwich, Plum made special trips to the railway station for *The Strand Magazine* to get the earliest possible look at the latest segment of a Doyle serial. As an adult and fellow-writer Wodehouse admired Doyle's technique and his ability to grip.

The Sherlock Holmes stories in particular influenced Plum to such a degree that he quoted and echoed Holmesian phrases not only in his early writing but throughout the seventy-three years during which he was a full-time, published writer. In the last year of his life, Wodehouse wrote an introduction to a Ballantine paperback edition of *The Sign of the Four* in which he said:

When I was starting out as a writer – this would be about the time Caxton invented the printing press – Conan Doyle was my hero. Others might revere Hardy and Meredith. I was a Doyle man, and I still am. Usually we tend to discard the idols of our youth as we grow older, but I have not had this experience with ACD. I thought him swell then, and I think him swell now.

As the fellow said, there's no police like Holmes.

Wodehouse went on to say that he and Doyle were great friends:

... our friendship interrupted only when I went to live in America. He was an enthusiastic cricketer... and he used to have cricket weeks at his place in the country, to which I was nearly always invited. And after a day's cricket and a big dinner he and I would discuss literature.

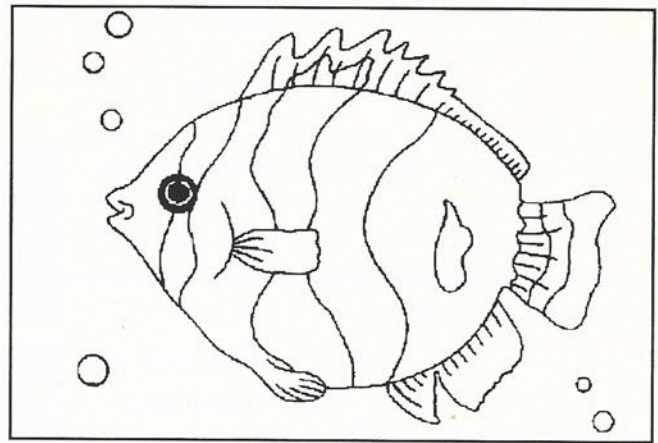
It has been said that eating fish is good for the brain. Holmes, who had at least one letter from a fish-monger, spoke of the 'remarkably good fishing' being one of the things leading to 'a pleasant month' at Donnithorpe. He used fishing as an excuse to begin to sleuth undetected near Shoscombe Old Place. Watson reported that they 'did actually use our fishing tackle in the mill-stream, with the result that we had a dish of trout for our supper'.

This is the only fish meal I have found in the Sherlockian canon but Wodehouse's brainy characters are stuffed with it. Bertie told us that there were no limits to Jeeves's brain-power: 'He virtually lives on fish.' Bill Towcester in *Ring For Jeeves* commented that Jeeves sailed into 'the sole and sardines like nobody's business' and attributed Jeeves's giant intellect to 'the effects of phosphorus'. Later, Bill said buoyantly: 'Jeeves, your bulging brain, with its solid foundation of fish, has solved what but for you would have remained one of those historic mysteries you read about. If I had a hat on, I would raise it to you.'

Speaking of hats, Holmes inferred that Henry Baker was highly intellectual, judging from the size of his hat, saying that a man with so large a brain must have something in it. Parenthetically, one may wonder about that theory in connection with Holmes's own brain, since when he clapped the hat upon his head, it came 'right over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose'. Perhaps his not having an outsize head is why Holmes believed that 'the little empty attic' should not be overfilled because it was a mistake to think that 'that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent'.



Bertie Wooster evidently believed a little more in cranial capacity than Holmes did, since he said that Jeeves's brain had been 'enlarged by constant helpings of fish'. Bertie was convinced not only of the efficacy of eating fish but also of the connection of head size with brain quantity and, more especially, quality. He said of Jeeves: 'He wears a number fourteen hat, eats tons of fish, and moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. See, here he comes, looking as intelligent as dammit.' Later, he pointed to Jeeves's head sticking out at the back, 'indicating great brain power', and later still, it was Jeeves's head 'sticking out at the back and his eyes shining with intelligence and what not'. Boko Fittleworth pointed out: 'That's where the brain is. Packed away behind the ears.' Professor Moriarty, too, seemed to subscribe to the size theory, although he disagreed with Boko on the location of the thought processes. He remarked to Holmes: 'You have less frontal development than I should have expected'.



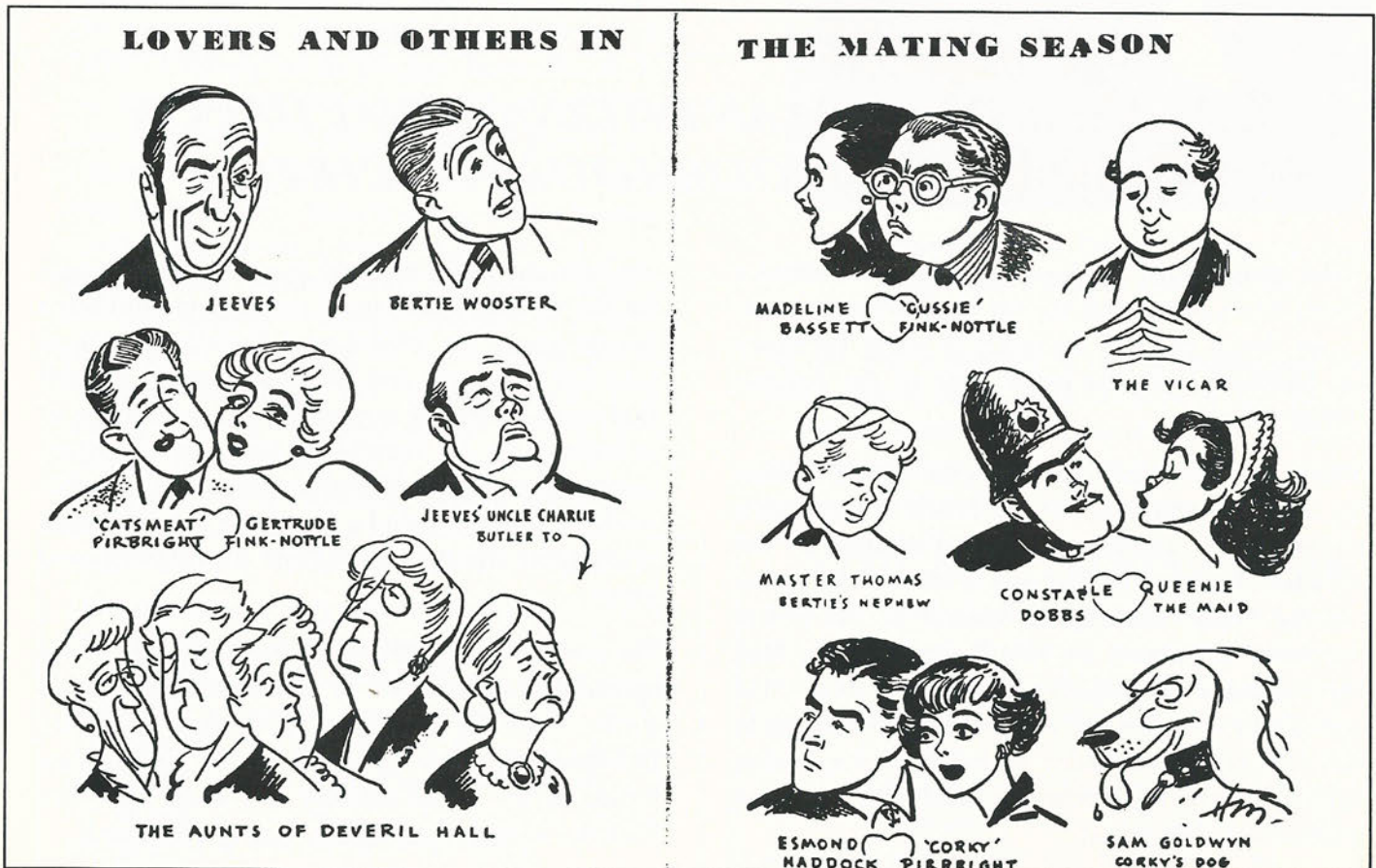
Marilyn added a final quotation to this section, her favourite on the topic, concerning Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe:

Fish, [Sir Gregory] had heard or read somewhere, was good for the brain. He took a forkful, hoping for the best, but nothing happened. His mind still whirled. Probably smoked salmon was not the right sort of fish.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Publishing Errors – 5

When Didier published *The Mating Season* in the United States in 1949, they provided an artist's impression of the main characters in the book. Unfortunately, Gertrude Winkworth, one of the main 'love interests', was given the name of Gertrude Fink-Nottle and Thos was described as Bertie's nephew!





## NEWS FROM THE BBC RADIO COLLECTION

by Jan Paterson, head of Audio Publishing, BBC Worldwide

BBC Radio Collection have published seven dramatised Wodehouse titles in all: three Jeeves and Wooster – *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*, *The Code of the Woosters* and *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* – and four others: *The Golf Omnibus*, *The Oldest Member*, *Uncle Dynamite* and *Galahad at Blandings*.

On 6th April we publish *Joy in the Morning* to add to our Jeeves and Wooster radio dramatisations and, at the same time, we will be reissuing the other three Jeeves titles with new artwork. The new covers have been designed by Mark Entwistle and are much more in keeping with the period and style. They have a comic touch which I hope will prove to be appealing.

One of the unique advantages of being in charge of audio publishing at BBC Worldwide is the access we have to the BBC Archive. After my first meeting with Tony Ring, I commissioned a search in the Archive on all of Wodehouse's work, as well as interviews with him and about him. The results have been fascinating: the first Wodehouse story to appear on BBC Radio was *The Heart of a Goof* in 1930 (only seven years after the BBC started broadcasting). It was scheduled in the Vaudeville slot, in the evening but is, alas, no longer available.

The Archive search also threw up other interesting facts: the Radio 4 series *With Great Pleasure*, in which well-known authors/performers select their favourite

works of fiction often featured PGW as a favourite writer. Names as diverse as Arthur Lowe, Kingsley Amis, PD James, Robert Robinson, Keith Waterhouse and Stephen Fry included Wodehouse in their selections.

PGW's stories on audio cassette are very steady sellers for us at the *BBC Radio Collection*, and I believe there are two main reasons for this: firstly, in the team of Michael Hordern and Richard Briers we have the quintessential Jeeves and Wooster. The relationship between Bertie's helpless bleatings and Jeeves' cool mastery of any situation is beautifully acted by the pair, and the supporting casts bring the other characters into play with exactly the carefree note that is needed.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the medium of audio is very well suited to the works of PG Wodehouse. It is a unique form of entertainment, in that it can be enjoyed anywhere, and whilst doing other things, and its appeal lies in its foundation on the centuries-old entertainment of verbal story-telling, including the reminiscences of the *Oldest Member*, for example, or of *Mr Mulliner at the Anglers' Rest*.

I am pleased and proud that our publications have received the recognition of the PG Wodehouse Society in our releases, and I look forward to continuing this relationship in our publishing programme over the next few years.

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## PROPOSAL TO FORM AN INTERNATIONAL LIAISON GROUP FOR WODEHOUSE SOCIETIES

Four members of the Society's committee spent a most enjoyable weekend (at their own expense – no sleaze in OUR Society!) in early February at Millfleet Hall, the home base of the Belgian Drones Club.

There were two principal reasons for the Drones to invite not only us, but the Board of the Dutch PGW Society and the outgoing President of the Swedish Society. The first was to attend a reception on the Friday evening in honour of the newly appointed Patron of the Drones Club, HM Ambassador to Belgium, David H Colvin. He graciously accepted the unusual honour and made an amusing speech, after which there was much singing, dancing, browsing and sluicing and multi-lingual backchat.

On Saturday morning there was a working session for the 'Boards' to discuss a proposal to establish a liaison group for Wodehouse Societies. With at least five in Europe and four elsewhere, it was felt that there should be scope for the exchange of information on individual societies' activities, cooperation to avoid duplication and possible waste of resources, and a forum for the discussion of projects which may require an international input.

The concept was approved in principle, and it was agreed that a short form of words would be drawn up to form the *Treaty of Millfleet*. The four European Societies involved in the discussions would be the initial signatories, but all the other Societies would be invited to sign up afterwards.



## JOYFUL CLUB EVENING AT THE SAVAGE

*Jonathan Cecil and Anna Sharkey do us proud*



*Anna Sharkey and Jonathan Cecil*

The compact premises of the Savage Club in London came resoundingly to life on February 17, when more than 50 members and prospective members of the Society gathered to remember PGW's death some 23 years previously. Patron Jonathan Cecil and his wife, the singer Anna Sharkey, provided nearly an hour of Wodehousean entertainment right out of the top drawer.

Anna sang three songs with Plum's excellent lyrics: *The Land Where The Good Songs Go* from *Miss 1917*, *A Bungalow in Quogue* from *The Riviera Girl* and from *The Beauty Prize*, *You Can't Make Love By Wireless* (in which Jonathan joined her in a duet). This selection had deliberately steered away from his best-known songs, so that members could enjoy material which was possibly new to them. Sheran Hornby, Plum's step-grand-daughter, felt very nostalgic hearing *Quogue*, in reality a small town very close to Remsenburg, for she clearly remembers her grandmother, Ethel, singing it on Sheran's regular trips to Long Island. Anna's treatments, ably supported by her accompanist Denys Rawson, were most enjoyable.

### *Events Outside London*

The Committee is very conscious that all the club's events have so far been held in the south-east, generally London. As membership grows it should be possible to organise meetings elsewhere. But we need help with their organisation! If you are interested in working with the committee to put something on for members elsewhere,

Jonathan read two PGW items, an abridged version of the Freddie Widgeon story *Goodbye To All Cats*, and the lesser-known essay, *Thrillers from Louder and Funnier*. Between them Anna and Jonathan provided a memorable evening for the Society.

It was most pleasing to see that so many members, some having travelled a hundred miles or more, were able to attend. At the gathering were our Patrons Iain Sproat, Jan Piggott and Sheran Hornby, journalists Max Davidson, Glen Owen and Robert Bruce, the new President of the Swedish Society, Sven Sahlin, and his wife Britta. Correspondents and contributors to *Wooster Sauce* introduced themselves, and John Wilson was promoting the Society Golf Day in April.



*Regular contributor Murray Hedgcock and Committee member Oliver Wise*

We also met a number of new members who had only recently discovered the joys of the Society, including Anne Higgins, the daughter of Plum's younger brother, Richard Wodehouse. A superb evening, and thanks to all who came.

### *Visit to Anything Goes*

A small group of members attended the amateur production of *Anything Goes* in Marlow in November, which was enjoyable and well-staged. The programme did not mention any author other than Cole Porter, and few people realise that even today's standard production contains two songs to which Wodehouse contributed a significant part of the lyrics, the title song and *You're The Top*.



# The Thing Became A Habit: The Lyric and P.G. Wodehouse

by Charles E Gould, Jnr

Alan Ayckbourn and Andrew Lloyd Webber in *By Jeeves* created a marvellous show which some Wodehouse people have defied and defiled on the ground that “It’s Not Wodehouse”; but this is no test: Nobody ever said it was. (I can’t resist recalling, since these days I can’t resist recalling anything I can remember these days, the comparable critical commentary Alexander Pope has had to put up with: “Pope’s Iliad is not Homer, and Pope’s Odyssey is not even Pope.” Even Homer nodded, though what Horace actually says in that Ode is that he slept, albeit *quandoquidem*, and his identity problem is compounded by the critical school which holds that those epic achievements were not even set down by Homer, but by somebody else of the same name.) But some of Mr. Ayckbourn’s lyrics are truly the legacy of The Master, and I for one wouldn’t contest the will.

As Bertie Wooster sets out for Totleigh Towers with Jeeves in the two-seater, he embarks upon a charming song of the open road:

I’ve invariably found  
That feet kept on the ground  
Allow the grass to grow.

This is a nice start, not only for the song but for the journey, and it’s funny in quite a Wodehousean and Bertiesque way, for the mangled cliché is one of the trademarks of this pair of verbally lunatic geniuses. Of course the point about not letting the grass grow under your feet is not that you don’t want the grass to grow, as this verse would have it. The lines make perfect sense, but Ayckbourn and Bertie have focused them beautifully backwards. The lyric progresses in a fashion also appropriate to both Wodehouse and Wooster:

Wodehouse, having smashed up Ian Hay’s Darracq the first time he took it for a spin, c. 1920, never drove again; and Wooster, like Wodehouse, didn’t know the difference between a sprocket and a differential gear (see *Jeeves and the Old School Chum et passim*). Here’s Alan Ayckbourn’s Bertie, now ready to roll:

Check your mirrors front and rear –  
Slip smoothly into gear,  
Then hit the road and go.  
Hear the pistons’ steady beat,  
The cam-shaft ’neath your feet.

This is immaculate Woosterian gibberish. We know what a redundantly-called “rear-view” mirror is; but what must a “rear” rear-view mirror be? As we tootle along in the old Widgeon 7 two-seater, we may hear the “pistons’ steady beat,” but if the cam-shaft (regularly part of the motor) actually is “beneath our feet”, the good old Arab steed has sprung a leak of some magnitude. To the literal mind, the lyric is not even funny: it’s just wrong. But – or, perhaps, therefore – it is a lyric which, if not of surpassing beauty, surpasses truth.

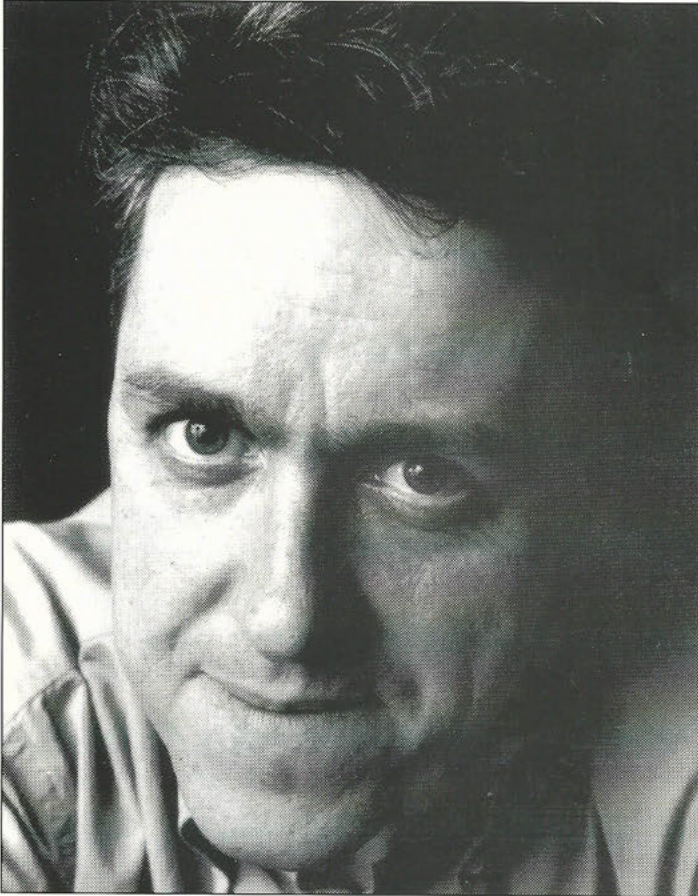
Then comes the Refrain:

My philosophy’s to travel hopefully  
And making each day that I survive  
An opportunity to share the company  
That welcomes me when I arrive.

Here again, cooked to perfection, is a Bertie Wooster verbal squab, soft and thick and inane, with a lovely slipping internal rhyme. As Bertie himself somewhere says about Shakespeare, it sounds good but it doesn’t mean a thing. Wodehouse affords Bertie this marvellous sort of double-talk in the stories and novels, and Mr. Ayckbourn’s verse marvellously echoes that, even in a song. It won’t parse, either: “and making” naturally, grammatically, should be either “making” or “to make,” and neither would interfere with Sir Andrew’s smashing metres. Why not? It’s just Bertie Wooster all over.

One of my favorite professors at Bowdoin, prize-winning poet Louis Osborne Coxe, corduroy-coated in his office once defined for me The Poet for all time: “How do I know what I mean till I see what I say?” he said. Sir Philip Sidney said, “The





## Profile of a Patron

Griff Rhys Jones is a talented actor who has his own production company, Talkback. He started reading Wodehouse at school, along with his friend Douglas Adams, and soon appreciated Psmith, Ukridge and the Jeeves and Wooster stories. In the theatre he has starred in a variety of productions including *Twelfth Night*, *Wind in the Willows*, *Charley's Aunt*, *The Alchemist*, *An Absolute Turkey*, *Thark*, *Plunder* and most recently a highly acclaimed revival of *The Front Page*.

Best-known perhaps for his television series *Alas Smith and Jones*, he also appeared in *Porterhouse Blue* and *Demob*, and hosts *The Bookworm*, a programme aimed principally at adolescent readers. Recent films have included *Wilt*, *As You Like It* and *Up and Under*, and of course he played Ukridge in a BBC radio adaptation of the stories in 1992/93.

### I SAY!

#### Favourite Exchanges - 5

"It's so hard to put things properly in a letter."

"Then put them improperly," said Mr Carmody.

*Money For Nothing*, 1928

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### *The Thing Became a Habit*

(Continued)

poet never lieth, for he nothing affirmeth." The lyrics we've been examining paradoxically prove both of those attitudes. In a wacky way, Ayckbourn's lack of grammar and sense generates meaning just as Gilbert's and Wodehouse's insistence upon them generates meaning. At their best, they're the best. Shakespeare: take a bow.

*Charles E. Gould, Jr., an amateur Organist, has been a member of the Department of English at Kent School, Kent, Connecticut, for 25 years. The foregoing piece is the second and final extract of an article which appeared as Apollo and the Liar in Book Source Monthly, P.O. Box 567, Cazenovia, NY 03035-0567. Vol. 13, No. 1, April 1997.*

## NEWS OF THE 1999 US SOCIETY CONVENTION

Preliminary information has been received from TWS, the American-based Wodehouse Society whose highly successful 1997 convention in Chicago was reviewed in the December *Wooster Sauce*.

The 1999 convention will be held at the Wyndham-Warwick Hotel, Houston, Texas, from 22 to 24 October. It is proposed for the first time that the registration fee, expected to be \$175, will include the Saturday night banquet, two cocktail parties, a breakfast and a brunch.

The convention hotel, which is in the Museum district of the city and is one of the oldest hotels in Houston, will offer rooms at the provisional price of \$105 + tax per night.





## PLUM and ROSIE – A Match Made in Heaven

The second part of Helen Murphy's Chicago talk



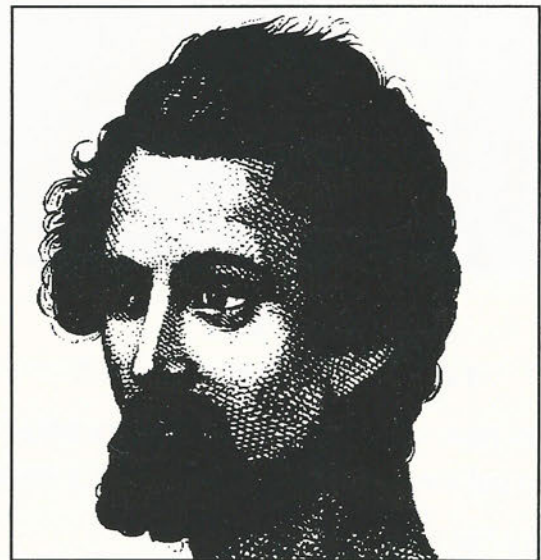
PGW loved popular literature, however trashy, just as he enjoyed soap operas in later life. He also milked it for some of his best one-liners. For example, a common figure at the time of his early writing, was the pathetic dog, specifically the tragic terrier. A very popular book (mine is the 13th edition of 1910, the year Edward VII died) was *Where's Master*, by 'The King's Dog'. This narrates in the first canine the King's illness and last days, and ends with the little dog accompanying Missus (Queen Alexandra) and the King's Horse, Kildare, in the funeral cortège, even though he is only a little, common dog. It is really touching in a frightfully sentimental way. All this pathos is, of course, much easier to achieve if you are a small terrier. Leave to the larger breeds the dragging back from cliff edges, the rescuing from roaring torrents – the touching terrier lick to the moribund hand is far more fitting than the dribbly, alsatian slobber.

Well, of course, PGW adored dogs. But what did he do with this cliché? Well, in *The Magic Plus Fours* Wallace Chesney became so good at golf, and so critical, that he lost all his playing partners and his fiancée. He confides in the Oldest Member, ending: "Nobody loves me." His voice rose in a note of anguish and at the sound his terrier, which had been sleeping on the rug, crept forward and licked his hand. "The dog loves you," said the Oldest Member, gently, for he had been touched. "Yes, but I don't love the dog," said Wallace Chesney. '

Just because he used a cliché or phrase for comic effect does not mean he despised the author. Leaving aside the classics, like Shakespeare, I have the impression that the use of phrases like "Here, if I mistake not, Watson, is our client now" is in the nature of a tribute.

PGW would probably have endorsed Dr Johnson's view that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money". He himself always worked hard, but as he wrote when considering the awful task ahead of Evangeline in the Mulliner story *Best Seller*, "It is not the being paid money in advance that jars the sensitive artist – it is the having to work." Thus, it was perfectly okay for Rocky

Rockmetteller to write just enough to keep himself in blissful idleness by spending a few hours every month producing claptrap like *Be!* which ran to four verses and a picture of a socialist-looking muscleman. Wodehouse personally would only have congratulated him. And Mr McKinnon said reprovingly in *The Haunted Cottage*: "No author who pulls down a steady twenty thousand pounds a year writes tripe." PGW may have made fun of certain types of writer, but he respected those who made a living from it.



The Illustration for 'Be'.

However there was a certain kind of literature that, in the voice of the narrator, he chose to disparage for comic effect. Such included the works of Leila J Pinckney, Rosie M Banks and others. Where did these authoresses come from, and who were their originals?

There had been a huge expansion in the market for popular fiction towards the end of the 19th century. *The Education Act* of 1870 made provision for universal schooling and created the thirst for fiction, the Empire expanded into territories with vast forests for wood pulp to satisfy it, and I have a personal theory that the growth of the railways and the railway bookstall had something to do with it. However it happened, the masses wanted cheap fiction, and they wanted it purple.



With the occasional exception such as Mary Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein*, almost all the female novelists had hitherto been fairly respectable, including Mrs Oliphant, Mrs Gaskell and lots of Brontes. Of the later writers, some were respectable, like L T Meade, and some were not. A fair way of telling what sort of book it was, apart from checking who was the publisher, was to look at the advertisements at the back. If they were for Wright's Coal Tar Soap, or for a work by a Mrs Waterhouse called *With the Simple Hearted - little homilies to women in country places*, you could be pretty sure you were all right.

Even novelists like Mrs Charlesworth, whose work was breathtakingly exciting, got away with it because they were writing 'Temperance' novels, in which at least one character was guaranteed to die horribly with the DTs. Incidentally, like "Elementary, my dear Watson", the expression "Dead! – and

never called me mother!" was never in the original novel of East Lynne – it came in the stage version.

Mrs Braddon, whose most famous work was *Lady Audley's Secret*, also wrote *Cut by the County*, a fate Uncle Fred cheerfully expected any day, and *The Fatal Three*. Do you remember the PGW girl who looked "like a vicar's daughter who plays hockey and ticks off the villagers when they want to marry their deceased wives' sisters"? That was a hot topic in the 19th century, and the plot of *The Fatal Three* hung on it.

The book most likely to have been banned in Boston was *The Woman Who Did*, by Grant Allen, which created a tremendous stir in 1895. It gave PGW the chance to make a joke, again in *Best Seller*, about the fashion for "scarlet tales of Men Who Did and Women Who Shouldn't Have Done But Who Took A Pop At It".

## SOMETHING ODD

*In the December 1997 issue of Wooster Sauce, John Fletcher asked for clarification of an apparent discrepancy in the timetable of events in the first Blandings novel, Something Fresh.*

*Two members took up the challenge.*

David Hudson of Milton Keynes calls on P G Wodehouse's friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for assistance:

The answer, I believe, lies in *The Poison Belt* by Arthur Conan Doyle, published in *The Strand* from March to July 1913. This is an account of how the earth's population was immobilised for a period of 28 hours before coming to life again. This may explain the discrepancy in time.

Phil Ayres of Washington State, USA, relies instead on the inconsistent editorial skills of publishers:

The Bishop of Godalming, to break up the boredom at Blandings, coerced the local curate to hold a special reception at the church for the local populace, nobs and yeomen, to meet the prospective bride and groom. Thus the members of the family, including Lord Emsworth, under duress, had to go to church. Other members of the family went to socialize, break up the boredom, or just get free food and drink. This occurred on Thursday.

The printer noted that it seemed to be a Thursday when all the family was in church and, used to printing 'not' for 'now', amended the manuscript on his own initiative so that it read Sunday.

## POETS' CORNER

### An Olympia nightmare

As through the show at eve we went,  
     The motorist and I,  
 His eyes were bright: he waved his hands:  
 He pointed gaily at the stands  
     Which we were passing by.  
 And oh the technical remarks  
 On clutches, switches, plugs and sparks!  
  
 I am a plain, rough, rugged man,  
     And frankly do not know  
 The subtle difference between  
 The various parts of the machine,  
     And what makes motors go.  
 But oh the expert's deep remarks  
 On carburettors, cranks and sparks!  
  
 My interest was all assumed,  
     My "Really's!" insincere.  
 Of Greek and other classic lore  
 I have an enviable store,  
     But – I'm no engineer.  
 And oh the deluge of remarks  
 On tonneaux, second speeds and sparks.  
  
 At last, long last, he said Farewell;  
     (He had to meet his wife).  
 My head ached, and I wished that I  
 Could simply creep away and die:  
     I did not value life.  
 And oh my pungent, crisp remarks  
 On clutches, switches, plugs and sparks!

*This poem first appeared in The World on November 27, 1906*



## LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

*From the former Minister for Sport, Iain Sproat:*

In the December 1997 issue of *Wooster Sauce*, in a review of the audio-cassette, *Psmith in the City*, read by Jonathan Cecil, the reviewer refers to “the unhappy time spent by Wodehouse in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank at the start of his professional career”. I do not think it is accurate to call it “unhappy” – except, possibly, for Wodehouse’s employers. In David Jasen’s biography, Wodehouse is quoted as saying: “. . . Right through my two years in the Bank I never had the slightest inkling what banking was. I simply could not understand what was going on. Except for that, life in the Bank – after a month or two – was quite pleasant. My fellow colleagues were all public school men – from Bedford, Merchant Taylors’, Dulwich and other schools where parents could not afford a university career – and the atmosphere was on the informal side. We ran a football and cricket team, of both of which I was a member, and there was a general idea of not taking banking very seriously. I suppose the other fellows had more of a grip of things than I did, but there was none of that grim atmosphere that prevails in the usual London bank . . .”

Furthermore, in a statement to the Cussen Inquiry in 1944, about Wodehouse’s finances, in the context of his behaviour in Germany during the Second World War, Ethel says that “My husband also has a small account at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank – for sentimental reasons” (see my book *Wodehouse at War*). Keeping an account in the Bank for sentimental reasons seems to argue against the notion that Wodehouse was unhappy at the Bank.

*Editor’s comment: The reviewer of the cassette accepts your views. His intention in using the word ‘unhappy’ was to indicate that Wodehouse was unhappy that he had to be at the bank at all, instead of at University or writing, rather than that the actual hours spent there were positively hateful.*

*From Robin Simpson of Barnes:*

Murray Hedgcock in his excellent article *Was Bertie a Cricketer?* suggests that although a sportsman of some note at Oxford, his experiences there do not seem to have inspired continuing love for any particular outdoor pastime as he moved lazily into his mid-twenties.

I must disagree. Bingo Little was clearly a formidable and enthusiastic lawn tennis player (see *Jeeves and the Impending Doom*). Bingo, a man of steel when away from Mrs Bingo, would have required a partner of similar calibre, and it was Bertie who partnered him as they pushed forth to do their bit in the first doubles at Woollam Chersey. More to the point, it was Bertie who, forgetting the young thug Thomas, no mean feat in itself, put it across the local curate with a good deal of vim until buckets of rain stopped play.

In his own moving words, “What with my fast serve zipping sweetly over the net and the man of God utterly unable to cope with my slow bending return down the centre-line, I had for some time been living, as it were, in another world.” What a pity he never played the ‘real’ game.

*Murray Hedgcock of Barnes opens the batting in his second innings:*

Stone the crows, Cobber – Australian belief in the long-term decline of English cricket can only be confirmed by Nick Townend’s astute recollection (*Wooster Sauce*, December) that PGW as far back as 1903 should have a character in *Tales of St Austin’s* refer to ‘that new leg-before rule’. To think that The Master himself, public school product, soon to take the hallowed turf at Lord’s, later to join Surrey, and ultimately to help found the Hollywood Cricket Club, should refer even in his properly brought-up youth to the greatest game having dull ‘rules’ rather than noble ‘Laws’. No wonder your lot don’t win the Ashes too often . . .

*Michael J Greener of Barry, South Glamorgan, drew attention to a letter which appeared in The Times from someone at The College of Wooster, Ohio:*

One pictures a glorious educational establishment wherein all the students are named Wooster and instructed by a fair number of Jeeves’s.

*Editor’s comment: Perhaps this is where the real Bertie Wooster went off to at the start of Ring For Jeeves, and from which he was so ignominiously expelled for having a woman in his room at night.*

*Peter Wightman of Bolton thought that members may be interested in a printers’ error which afflicted our Patron Richard Ingrams’ column in the Observer on November 9th, and a readers’ reply:*

Richard Ingrams had been referring to his period at Oxford, studying philosophy and attending lectures by Isaiah Berlin. Berlin apparently deplored the approach to teaching the subject which meant that “Plato was studied as if he were a contemporary of Bertram (sic) Russell . . .”

Mike Bloxsome, of Malpas, South Wales, replied as if from Jeeves:

My employer, Mr Bertram Wooster, is indisputably the most engaging of gentlemen; but is lacking somewhat in the intellectual distinction that would be necessary for confusing him with the philosopher, Bertrand Russell – even, I fear, to the extent of a single forename – as was the case last week.



## OBITUARIES

It is with great sadness that we have to record the deaths of two of our Patrons, and of two others intimately connected with P G Wodehouse during the course of their careers.

### JOHN WELLS

*Edward Cazalet has penned this appreciation of John Wells (1936-1998)*

In his masterly history of the House of Lords, published only three months before he died on 11 January 1998, John Wells drew time and again upon the Wodehouseian nobility to develop a point.

He clearly demonstrated his love and extensive knowledge of Plum's writing – for instance by recording how impressed Bertie had been when the House of Commons “drew the line somewhere” in not permitting Roderick Spode to stand as a prospective Member after he had succeeded to his title as the Seventh Earl of Sidcup, or in noting a bemused Lord Emsworth watching Rouge Croix and Bluemantle at the State opening of Parliament.

John had a remarkably versatile and distinguished career – as schoolmaster, linguist, translator of French and German plays and operatic scores, playwright, actor, author and of course co-founder editor of *Private Eye* and writer with Richard Ingrams of those two long-running inimitable political satires, *Mrs Wilson's Diary* and the *Dear Bill* letters. He also read a number of Wodehouse stories on audio-cassette, most recently the Chivers unabridged recording of *Summer Lightning*.

He would spend hours browsing through my collection of Plum's material. He would always find some undiscovered joke or reference and would pass it on with those twinkling eyes and that bubbling sense of fun.

John and Plum had a natural affinity. Both were masters in their use of the English language and both were deeply kind and gentle people. Slice almost any Wodehouseian character where you will and far from finding a hell-hound you invariably find a nice guy.

So not only do we mourn John's death but we salute a true Wodehouseian addict, a Patron of our Society and a man of high distinction.

### FRANK MUIR, CBE

*Norman Murphy pays this tribute to Frank Muir (1920-1998)*

I suppose most people nowadays remember Frank Muir for his television appearances in *Call My Bluff* but I, and many of my coevals, remember him best as the co-author with Denis Norden of the radio series *Take It From Here*. Along with *The Goon Show*, it set a new standard in literate humour and was a landmark in broadcasting.

I met him only once, at the unveiling by Her Majesty the Queen Mother of the Wodehouse blue plaque in Dunraven Street. He was as charming and witty as I had imagined. After lunch, he acted as master of ceremonies so entertainingly that the Queen Mother stayed an hour longer than she had intended.

A great admirer of Wodehouse, he had, like Plum, a talent to amuse.

### IONICUS (J C ARMITAGE)

There can be no Wodehouse reader who does not know the work of Ionicus, for he designed the covers for more than 60 paperback editions of the Master's work. His understated drawings of British stereotypes won widespread, though by no means universal, acclaim from Wodehouse readers.

Ionicus was born in 1913 and lived in Hoylake, near Liverpool, and apart from designing covers for books (and the monthly cover for *The Dalesman* for 17 years) was a regular *Punch* cartoonist and watercolour artist.

### J C GIBBS

The name of J C Gibbs (1902-1998) is much less likely to be familiar to members. He was a noted rugby player with the Harlequins, but in our world he was important as the sales director of the printer, Purnell & Sons of Somerset, who obtained the orders for printing Wodehouse's novels.



## RECENT PRESS AND BOOK REFERENCES

The Sunday Telegraph, December 14, 1997

In the *Mandrake* column, Mark Inglefield reported:

The Prime Minister claimed he had 'engaged' with Gerry Adams when they met at Downing Street last week. It is difficult to imagine how the grizzled Sinn Fein leader and the nice Mr Blair bonded. I wonder, however, if they touched on the subject of spats and newt-fancying. For the two men, I learn, share an obsession with the work of P G Wodehouse. Adams cited the writer as an influence on his book *Before the Dawn*, while Mr Blair is a patron of the P G Wodehouse Society. Top hole.

Independent, October 7, 1997

Donald MacIntyre introduced an article *On The Task Facing Hague* with the following paragraph:

Perhaps only P G Wodehouse could do justice to the apprehension with which William Hague and Ffion Jenkins must be awaiting Margaret Thatcher's visit to the Conservative conference this week. She will descend on Blackpool like a disapproving great aunt, performing an irksome but necessary duty and requiring a great fuss to be made of her in the process. Will she dare to mention the young people's sleeping arrangements which have so horrified her?

Times, January 31, 1998

Philip Delves Broughton investigated the Lady Apsley School for Butlers being run at the Bathurst Estate. He found that Lady Apsley had hired Michael Shaw, a former under-butler at Buckingham Palace, to run the course, and it is refreshing to find that he at least knew his basic Wodehouse:

Shaw says: Jeeves was not a butler, he was a gentleman's gentleman, doing everything from cooking to ironing to soothing the Wooster brow, whether furrowed by alcohol or cloven-hoofed aunts. Beach, the head of Lord Emsworth's household, however, was a butler, more administrative, less of a brick than Jeeves.

(*The Times* had also run a piece on November 21 concerning the Ivor Spencer International School for Butler Administration, based in Dulwich, which has trained 125 butlers since opening.)

Daily Mail, January 19, 1998

A number of papers followed the saga of the Tamworth Two, Butch and Sundance, and made reference to the Empress. Perhaps the best was the following by Keith Waterhouse:

The glorious saga of the Tamworth Two is proof enough that inside everyone of us is a ninth Earl of Emsworth trying to get out. Lord Emsworth's prize porker the Empress of Blandings herself could not, when famously under the dastardly machinations of Sir Gregory Parsloe, Bart, have generated more concern than those two ginger boars on their dash for freedom.

A good deal of this weekend's newsprint went on analysis of why we took Butch and Sundance to our hearts. One sombre theory is that we were salving our consciences – we let thousands of pigs go to their doom without a second's thought, but just get a pair of them on the run and we adopt them as mascots. Another is that once animals are given names, or nicknames, they become personalities, characters, and no one wants to send a character to the slaughterhouse. There may be something in this. Certainly if I am ever reincarnated as a veal calf I shall make arrangements to have myself christened Daisy immediately.

But the only theory that really holds water for me is that despite all efforts to flatten us, to regulate us, to stamp out our individuality, the British, like Lord Emsworth himself, remain irremediably dotty.

### Recent Books with interesting Wodehouse References

*Golf Dreams* by John Updike

*Broadway Babies Say Goodnight* by Mark Steyn

*History of the House of Lords* by John Wells

*The Flying Sorcerers* ed. by Peter Haining



## BOOK REVIEW

### *Nick Townend reviews Wodehouse Goes To School*

by Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard, with introductory essays by Jan Piggott.

(Porpoise Books, 1997. £20)

This fourth volume of the Millennium Wodehouse Concordance deals primarily with Wodehouse's school stories, and it is the best yet. The concordance, reference system and other sections are all as excellent as in previous volumes. However, what differentiates this volume are the essays by Jan Piggott, the Dulwich College archivist, who is uniquely qualified to write about Wodehouse's school stories.

The first essay deals with every aspect of Wodehouse's school career capable of reconstruction from surviving sources: classical texts studied, form position, cricket, rugby and so on. The second essay examines how Wodehouse used his school experiences as the basis for his school stories. Here, Piggott is doing what Norman Murphy has done so admirably for other areas of the Wodehouse oeuvre.

However, inevitably, given the time elapsed since the stories were written, Piggott does not detect every influence upon Wodehouse. He refers to the phrase 'a man of the vilest antecedents' as a 'schoolboy-snobish term', apparently unaware that it is a quotation from a Sherlock Holmes story *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. Wodehouse was still using 'foul antecedents' in *Trouble Down at Tudsleigh* (*Young Men in Spats*, 1936), a variation found in the Holmes story *The Greek Interpreter*.

Piggott also seems unaware of the origin of the name Jack Point, Wodehouse's pseudonym for his *Under The Flail* column in *The Public School Magazine*, suggesting that it means 'presumably plain and honest'. In fact, it is the name of the strolling jester in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeomen of the Guard*. The character's first words, which one could interpret as summarising Wodehouse's own opinions, are:

"There is humour in all things, and the truest philosophy is that which teaches us to find it and to make the most of it."

Some minor errors intrude in the essay. On page xxxviii the reference to TPH ch 5 should be to APU ch 5. On page xlvii TPU ch 1 should be APU ch I. I would also query Piggott's explanation on page li of 'cock-house team' as meaning 'the teams for house matches'. In all other school stories of the period, and in the view of Richard Osborne (letter to the author, September 1985), the cock house team is the team only of the house which won the competition last time.

These are merely quibbles though. The volume is a delight which no Wodehouse fan should be without.

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#### Press References in Brief

On November 8, 1997, *The Times*, writing about Terry Pratchett, said that the 21 novels in his Discworld series represented the most breathtaking display of sustained comic invention since P G Wodehouse.

The November 1997 issue of *Ye Oldie* suggested that a membership to our Society would be a good Christmas gift idea, which brought about ten joiners.

The *Spectator* for December 20, 1997, reviewed *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere*.

The *Times* for December 16, 1997 praised Murray Hedgcock's *Wodehouse at the Wicket* as one of the best sports books of 1997.

The *Sunday Times* of November 30, 1997 welcomed Dulwich College's initiative in providing 24 weeks of intensive weekend lessons in its classrooms and laboratories for children in the state educational system.

*Audio Times* for January 1998 featured a front-page interview with Jonathan Cecil, particularly about his unabridged Wodehouse novel readings.

*The Job*, the journal of the Metropolitan Police, carried an article on December 12, 1997 about Helen Murphy's involvement on the Society's committee.

The *Church Times* of January 9, 1998 included an excellent article entitled *The Great Sermon Handicap* written by Helen Murphy.

*Quarterly Record*, the journal of HM Inspectors of Taxes, published in January 1998 the first of four articles on PGW's tax problems based on Tony Ring's book *You Simply Hit Them With An Axe*.

The *Evening Standard* for November 24, 1997 in reviewing *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight*, picked out the perceptive comment: "Had PGW died in 1918 he would have been remembered not as a British novelist but as the first great lyricist of the American musical."



## FUTURE EVENTS – FOR YOUR DIARY

### MARCH 28

*Wodehouse Walk* conducted by Norman Murphy. Be at Green Park Underground Station at 2 pm.

### APRIL 21

*Golf Day*. There are still vacancies for members to join in the first Society golf day at Tandridge Golf Club, Surrey. Applications to, or information from,

*AGM*: the AGM will be held at the Golf club at 1.45 pm. The main items on the agenda will be the Chairman's report, and the re-election of the officers and one committee member.

### APRIL 24-25

#### *Dulwich College Literary Festival*

Jan Piggott lectures on Wodehouse's School Stories from 3.30 to 4.30 pm on April 24.

Jonathan Cecil and Anna Sharkey perform songs and stories from 8 to 9 pm on April 25.

Tickets £2. Booking forms and details of the whole festival from, College, SE2.

### MAY 15-16

#### *Visit from the Dutch Society*

Members of the Dutch P G Wodehouse Society will be in London and possibly Dulwich, but their programme is not finalised. Members who would like to meet the visitors should write to the Editor for details, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

### JUNE 15

#### *Auction of the Heineman Collection at Sotheby's, New York*

The late Jimmy Heineman put together probably the most comprehensive collection of Wodehouse material ever known. This is to be auctioned at Sotheby's New York on June 15. Sotheby's expects to exhibit a number of lots in London in May, when the catalogue will be available. Members who would like to be kept in touch with developments should notify the Editor, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

### JULY 14

#### *Savage Club*

Informal social evening for members to meet each other. No formal entertainment planned.

### AUGUST 1

#### *Visit from the Belgian Drones*

A delegation from the Belgian Drones Club will be visiting London and taking a Norman Murphy Wodehouse walk. Members who would like to meet the visitors either on the walk or over lunch should write to the Editor for details, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

### OCTOBER 15

#### *Formal Society Dinner*

The Society will be holding a formal dinner at the Inner Temple. Details of how to obtain tickets, which are expected to be about £30, will be given in the June edition of *Wooster Sauce*. Patron John Mortimer has agreed to speak. The dress code will be black tie.

## EDITOR'S TAILPIECES

Do you believe in coincidences? My daughter is presently living in Teruel, a small town of 30,000 inhabitants some 4 hours coach ride east of Madrid, and over 2 hours from the nearest city. She is spending a year abroad as part of her languages degree course, and is teaching English conversation in a secondary school. Her head of department, a Spaniard in his early 30s, started a PhD soon after he graduated. The subject:

*A Comparison of the Approach Adopted by Different Spanish Translators to the Idiomatic Language of P G Wodehouse!*

Amongst the new members who have joined since the last issue of this journal is The Youngest Member, 8 year old Stephanie Garlick of Winnersh, Berks, to whom we extend a hearty welcome.

The Society would like to organise an Internet Website. But we need help from a member who would like to set it up and run it for us.