



# WOOSTER SAUCE

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

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## A Message from Our President

Well, here it is – the 50th edition of *Wooster Sauce*; maybe not a landmark in the history of English literature, but certainly one that deserves notice. And for that reason, the issue you hold in your hands is a very special one, including as it does an interview with Martin Jarvis and contributions from Patrick Wodehouse, Jonathan Cecil, Stephen Fry, Robert McCrum, Nigel Rees – and Pelham Grenville Wodehouse himself. And all that is in addition to the usual splendid articles by Society members.

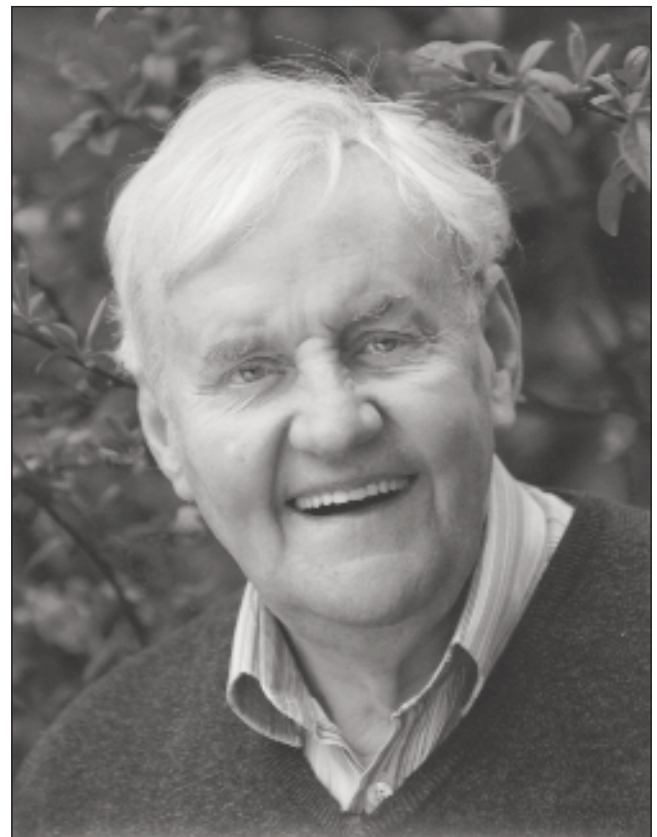
Now, there are well over a hundred literary societies in this country, and they all publish a journal of some sort, but *Wooster Sauce* is different. And it is because of that difference that, on behalf of all Society members, I thank Tony Ring, who edited it so well for so many years, and Elin Murphy, the current editor.

The vital difference in *Wooster Sauce* lies in its approach. Like other literary journals, it keeps us informed, whether about Wodehouse's life and works, Society events, or forthcoming Wodehouse plays, musicals, and publications. Like other journals, it also publishes scholarly articles, answers abstruse questions from members, and provides informed guidance on such matters as first editions and dust jackets.

But I wonder how many literary journals report the sort of members' discoveries we do – finding a pub named after the Empress of Blandings and learning that John Schuppe made three different grades of silver cow creamer are just two recent examples. However, I believe the most important aspect of *Wooster Sauce* is that it keeps us informed of what is going on across the 'world of Wodehouse' – and I use the phrase deliberately because *Wooster Sauce* has contributors and a readership that span the globe. Look at the last few issues: Shashi Tharoor came from New York to address us at Gray's Inn; the Gold Bats (captained by Wodehouse's godson) defeated a Hollywood Cricket Club team; Jean Tillson from Boston reported on the Berkshire pig championship; Jelle Otten from the Netherlands reported on the Old Home Week in Moscow; and Tamaki Morimura from Japan showed us how to climb the Octagon at Hunstanton.

Is it any wonder that *Wooster Sauce* has readers around the world, from Austria to Australia, from Michigan to Melbourne, from St Andrews to Saskatoon and from Zutphen to New Zealand?

I could, as president, take all the credit, but I won't. I am a firm believer in delegation, which means somebody else does the work while I just look forward to enjoying the next 50 editions – as much as I have enjoyed the last 50.



Richard Briners

## And a Word from the Editor . . .

As Richard Briers says overleaf, this 50th edition is something to celebrate. He notes that *Wooster Sauce* has a readership around the world, and by what I assure you is pure coincidence, this issue has a particularly international flavour. Just to give you a taste, we have reports of Wodehouse being read in the Himalayas (p.11) and among the Masai (p.19). We can enjoy an article written by Robert McCrum for a Japanese translation of Wodehouse (p.8), and we learn more from Brian Taves about Wodehouse in Hollywood (p.10) – the same place where Martin Jarvis found English and American actors to tape *Something Fresh* (p.12). On the other side of the American continent, we learn of a trip taken to Remsenburg by two of our members (p.23). There are reviews of a Wodehouse show in New York (p.27) and of a book on Wodehouse written by Baroness Reinhold von Bodenhausen and published in Sri Lanka (p.19). And as ‘Recent Press Comment’ (p.30) reminds us in every issue, Wodehouse is constantly mentioned in the media throughout the world.

On top of all this, our 50th edition features a wonderful mix of articles and titbits from well-known Wodehousians, Society members – and Our Hero himself. We are pleased to publish two Wodehouse articles that haven’t seen the light of day in years –

### Why I Wrote *Leave It to Psmith*

by P G Wodehouse

I am not one of those authors to whom mere material gain is everything; and it was not entirely the thought of the box of cigars which the proprietor of the *Saturday Evening Post* promised me for the serial rights nor the reflection that, if he brought it out as a book, my publisher would be practically bound to send me a card next Christmas that induced me to write *Leave It to Psmith*. I was urged to the task principally by the importunity of my daughter Leonora, who, if I may coin a phrase, is my best pal and severest critic. It was the fact that she kept after me like a bloodhound to write another Psmith story that at length induced me to set typewriter to paper.

Psmith – the p is silent, as in *pshrimp* – was the hero of a book for boys which I wrote in the year 1909 when I was young and slim and had quite a crop of hair. I had always intended someday to write of his after-school life, but never quite got down to it till my golden-haired child, who is the world’s worst pest, harried me day by day in every way to such an extent that I saw the thing had to be done.

So I did it. And very good it is.

Published in ‘Book Reviews and Literary Notes’, Oakland Tribune, August 24, 1924. Thanks go to Andrew Sholl for finding and sending this item.

the item highlighted below and the piece found on page 17 – as well as the rarely seen (and very charming) poem on page 28. And for the icing on the cake, we have a delightful personal anecdote from Plum’s nephew, Patrick Wodehouse (opposite page).

It is a privilege for me to act as editor, though deciding what to include or, far more difficult, what to exclude can often be a nightmare. I cannot emphasise too strongly that *Wooster Sauce* is the result of team effort, and I want to record my thanks to those who provide support and help in its production. On behalf of you, the readers, I want to thank Tony Ring, former editor and current advisor; my husband Norman, resident writer, editor, and proofreader; Gwendolin Goldbloom and Mike Snowdon, who provide editing and proofreading assistance; our printers, Baines Design and Print; the always-supportive Wodehouse Trustees; and Hilary Bruce, the Society’s Chairman, and her Committee, who make their views clear with a frankness tempered only by their benevolence.

But most of all, my thanks go to you, the members, who provide the material. Please keep it coming, and please be patient – there’s a backlog, but your contributions *will* make it into print eventually. Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy this very special issue!

Elin Murphy

### Our Patrons

For members’ information, herewith is a list of the Society’s current patrons. Our deepest gratitude goes to these Wodehousians for supporting the Society with their patronage.

HRH The Duke of Kent KG  
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Tony Whittome  
Patrick Wodehouse

# Jam Today!

*Patrick Wodehouse reflects on a sweet experience*

My dear uncle Plum and I had very similar childhood experiences. Each of us was abandoned by our parents at an early age and deposited with a strange family. He was only two and a half when he and his two brothers were dumped in Croydon, I was four years old when they dumped me. The difference was that the two events were 40 years apart.

Later, when each of us was at boarding school, we had to spend the holidays with various uncles and aunts, and there being no other children to play with, we both sought the company of the servants. In my case the uncle was Plum and the house 17 Norfolk Street.

I would creep downstairs, and they were always kind to this lonely little boy. I soon learned that there was a strict below-stairs protocol. Upstairs it was "Pavey" and "Cook"; downstairs it was Mr Pavey and Mrs Bostock, and there was a strict seating order in the servants' hall.

Mrs Bostock, the cook, was my favourite; I would watch her with wonder as she assembled the vast variety of dishes which made their appearance on the dining table. One day she asked what was my



favourite dessert. As my main eating experience was school dinners, I had only a limited knowledge of puddings; such things as apple strudel, Peach Melba, and strawberry cheesecake were not in my vocabulary. I replied: "Jam roly-poly."

Straightaway she set to, making the roly-poly while I looked on, fascinated. Finally the jam roll was wrapped up in a cloth, tied at each end with string, and dumped into a pot of boiling water, made ready by the kitchen maid.

I spent the rest of the morning with one of the housemaids whose job it was to walk the dogs in Hyde Park, and had quite forgotten the incident by lunchtime. Then at lunch the butler, Pavey, announced, "There is an extra sweet course today, sir. Jam roll, and Cook tells me Master Patrick made it."

This was a gross exaggeration, as my part in it was purely as a spectator; however, Plummie said he would try some and, of course, I had some also. It was a superb example of the art of jam-roll making, and I was delighted when Plummie said he would take another helping.

Three cheers for Mrs Bostock!

## P G Wodehouse and Roly-Poly Pudding

From *A Pelican at Blandings* (1969), Chapter 1

"... That stuff smells good, Beach. What is it?"

"Leg of lamb, m'lord, with boiled potatoes."

Lord Emsworth received the information with a gratified nod. Good plain English fare. How different, he was thinking, from the bad old era when his sister Constance had been the Führer of Blandings Castle. Under her regime dinner would have meant dressing and sitting down, probably with a lot of frightful guests, to a series of ghastly dishes with French names, and fuss beyond belief if one happened to swallow one's front shirt stud and substituted it for a brass paper-fastener.

"And," Beach added, for he was a man who liked to be scrupulously accurate, "spinach."

"Capital, capital. And to follow?"

"Roly-poly pudding, m'lord."

"Excellent. With plenty of jam, I hope?"

"Yes, m'lord. I instructed Mrs. Willoughby—"

"Who is Mrs. Willoughby?"

"The Cook, m'lord."

"I thought her name was Perkins."

"No, m'lord, Willoughby. I instructed her to be careful that there was no stint."

"Thank you, Beach. Are you fond of roly-poly pudding?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"With plenty of jam?"

"Yes, m'lord."

"It's quite essential, I always feel. Unless there is lots of jam, roly-poly pudding is not worth eating. . . ."



# Reading *The Small Bachelor* for BBC Audiobooks

by Jonathan Cecil

My boyhood self – an avid Wodehouse and wireless fan – would have been pleased to know that he would one day read the Master’s books on cassette and CD. At the time of writing this, I am on my 35th audiobook. Each has been a comic gem, with only one possible exception; pretty good going for any writer.

*The Adventures of Sally* was the exception. Despite some hilarious passages, it is uncharacteristically moralistic and even at times mawkish. Admittedly, as the reader I was prejudiced, as its wronged but feisty heroine is a young American girl and I am neither young, American, nor a girl, which made characterization difficult – especially when Sally was conversing with another YAG.

However, my last recorded book, *The Small Bachelor* (1927), is a cracker. In his introduction to the First Sphere edition (1971), Wodehouse himself said how easy and enjoyable it was to write, and it certainly makes for exuberantly happy reading. It is set against the idyllic background of 1920s Greenwich Village, where for once in a way the course of true love *does* run smooth. George – the small bachelor of the title – and his Molly fall in love almost at the outset and never once fall out in the usual musical comedy way. The only temporary obstacles to their marrying are Fate and Molly’s monstrous society-hostess stepmother, Mrs. Sigsbee H. Waddington. She is a snobbish, sarcastic bully who could have made even Bertie’s Aunt Agatha quail. It is a delight to see her get her comeuppance when, terrorised in the dark by a sinister voice, she finds it is only a parrot.

Mrs. Waddington’s crushed husband, Sigsbee H., takes refuge in the Wild West novels of Zane Grey and films like *That Li’l Gal from the Bar B Ranch*. Other characters in a splendidly eccentric line-up include Freddy Mullet, an ex-con turned valet; his light-fingered fiancée, Fanny Welch; Garroway, a would-be-poet policeman; Ferris, a misanthropic

English butler; and Lord Hunstanton, a monocled English aristocrat – imbecilic even by Wodehousian standards:

“Hullo-ull-ullo!” said Lord Hunstanton exuberantly. “Here I am, here I am, here I am!” – meaning, of course, that there he was.

An outstanding figure is J. Hamilton Beamish, best-selling author of Improving Booklets such as ‘The Marriage Sane’ and ‘Pure English’, and wearer of No-Jar Rubber Soles (‘They Save the Spine’).

It is interesting that self-help booklets were as popular then as now. Incidentally, have any *Wooster Sauce* readers noticed how depressed people can look when addicted to ‘How to Be Happy’ manuals?

Hamilton Beamish, at first sight overbearing and pedantic, reveals a kindly and surprisingly susceptible heart. In this amiable book, there are no real villains apart from the dreaded stepmother: “Unfortunately, at this moment the door opened: and like a sharp attack of poison gas, Mrs. Waddington floated into the room.” Appraising Mrs. W’s

formidable size, Wodehouse writes: “No theatre, however little its programme had managed to attract the public, could be said to be ‘sparsely filled’ if Mrs. Waddington had dropped in to look at the show.”

Despite all the pre-preparation that goes into recording an audiobook, there is always some hilarious passage that takes me by surprise, forcing the producer and myself to stop for a tea break. In *The Small Bachelor* there was this one:

The Reverend Gideon Voules looked at George with a dull and poached-egg-like eye. He did not seem to the latter to be a frightfully cheery sort of person: but, after all, when you’re married, you’re married, no matter how like a poached egg the presiding minister may look.



Almost every page of this delightful book contains similar verbal felicities.

Choosing voices for recordings can sometimes be tricky. In *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*, for instance, should film magnate Ikey Llewellyn, brought up in Wales till he was 20, have had a Welsh accent? *No* was my decision. He was written in streetwise New Yorkese, and any attempt to fuse the two accents could have ended up somewhere in Serbo-Croatian.

Mrs. Waddington, though American, has some affected English diphthongs: “It was most kay-eend of you to come” and “Good na’eeet”. I thought of Margaret Dumont, that sublime foil in the Marx Brothers films. She was the quintessential American hostess, but her accent veered towards English. Like

an unsympathetic Margaret Dumont was how I tried to play Mrs. Waddington.

*The Small Bachelor* began life as the Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern musical comedy *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* Although clearly much changed in the transition, the book has all the sunny effervescence of a 1920s musical, with charming love scenes. I apologise if I have preached to the converted, but for those who haven’t read it, I cannot recommend it too highly.

*The Small Bachelor* was issued in June by BBC Audiobooks, for whom Jonathan has just recorded *Money for Nothing*. See page 26 for a review of *The Heart of a Goof* and page 22 for more information on Jonathan’s BBC Audiobooks titles, including *Summer Moonshine*, *The Adventures of Sally*, and many more.

## Plum Pie in Curzon Street

by Kirsty Anderson

So far 2009 hasn’t been much of a picnic. At Heywood Hill, the old-fashioned Mayfair bookshop, we want to cheer people up, and we think we’ve come up with a novel way of doing so – one which we hope members of the Society will particularly enjoy.

Nothing lifts the spirits like exposure to the Master, which is why we are delighted to announce that Heywood Hill will be hosting a small but very special exhibition about Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse KBE at our shop in Curzon Street this autumn. Thanks to the generosity of our co-curators Edward Cazalet and Tony Ring, we will be illustrating not only PGW’s working life but also his family life with material from private collections, some of which has rarely, if ever, been seen in public before. We hope the exhibition will provide a real insight into the great man’s world.

The exhibition will include an overview of Wodehouse’s work, both as a novelist and in the theatre. We hope to reveal his working methods, showing the evolution of a novel from notes to first manuscript drafts to publication, and we will display his work for Broadway, with programmes and sheet music. We will be playing music featuring his song lyrics from time to time, and we will also be decorating the shop with some of our favourites from among his seemingly inexhaustible supply of unique similes.

There will be small sections on, among other things, the origins of Jeeves, PGW’s doctorate at



Oxford, and his uncharacteristic irritation when printers failed to follow his clear instructions. There will also be a demonstration of the wide appreciation of his work across the globe, including copies of *Leave It to Psmith* in many different languages.

The exhibition is free and open to all, but naturally we are especially keen to meet Society members. We

would therefore be delighted to welcome you to a Private View of the exhibition at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 29 September, when the curators will be present to guide you round the exhibits. Since space is limited, please call Hilary Bruce on 020 7286 0211, or write to [chairman@pgwodehousesociety.org.uk](mailto:chairman@pgwodehousesociety.org.uk) to let her know if you plan to join us.

There will be a wide range of Wodehouse material on sale – not least, of course, Norman Murphy’s *A Wodehouse Handbook* and Tony Ring’s *The Wit and Wisdom of P. G. Wodehouse* and *Millennium Concordance* volumes, as well as many other old and new books to interest the collector. And we can promise one or two surprises, too. We hope you will be able to join us!

*Plum Pie* will run Monday–Saturday from 21 September to 16 October 2009 at G. Heywood Hill Ltd, 10 Curzon Street, London W1J 5HH.

# All a-Twitter

## *Stephen Fry reflects on Wodehouse and modernity*

Many years ago I turned down the opportunity to own shares in the Ask Jeeves internet search engine. They wanted me to appear in a series of television advertisements and offered stock options as some species of lure or bait. I decided, in a burst of righteous integrity quite alien to my character, that this would scarcely be consonant with the dignity of the great man. Ask Jeeves then turned itself into Ask and has since been transmogrified once more back to Ask Jeeves. Older, wiser, and far less honourable than I once was, I feel almost disappointed that the company has failed to renew their now suddenly tempting and wholly reasonable offer. No matter.

One of the peculiar – and I may say unlooked-for – consequences of playing a well-known character on screen is that people are apt to approach one with bewildering questions of the ‘What would Oscar Wilde make of reality television?’ variety. The other day someone wanted to know whether or not Jeeves, were he around today, would be on Twitter? What is Twitter? Some will know, others will confess themselves baffled, while many of you may have heard of it yet prefer to hear no more. For our purposes it is enough to know that it is an online ‘microblogging service’. There, that’s all cleared up then. In case this is still more perplexing to you than Florence Craye’s beloved *Types of Ethical Theory*, let me add that it is a conduit through which people communicate with each other in messages of no more than 140 characters in length. A ‘tweet’ can be sent online or by mobile phone as a text. Twitter has, at the time of going to press, achieved a certain notoriety as the current Next Big Thing on the internet.

So. Would Jeeves have anything to do with such a strange 21st-century entity? It is a vexed question and one perhaps not so susceptible to ready decision as might, at first blush, be apprehended. There is, you will recall, a Jeeves novel which features a television. No prizes for shouting “*Ring For Jeeves!*” in one voice. The Master himself, we know, loved soap operas and sport on television: “now that my pins have gone back on me I walk less and watch the Mets lose baseball games more,” he observed in a polite, kindly, and accurately typed reply to my breathless schoolboy fan letter back in 1972.

So let us not hide behind Wodehouse in the hope that he will screen us from the modern world. While his books might well do just that, the man himself, for all his apparent political naïveté, lived and worked in the 20th century and was fully aware of



(Photo by Johnny Boylan)

its technical and cultural advances. The first commercially available typewriter was introduced only 10 or so years before he was born. For the generation older than him, his use of the famous Royal model that served him so faithfully over the years would have been quite as baffling and irritating in its new-fangled modernity as the use of computers and word-processors was for some people just 10 or 15 years ago: “Oh, but it’s so mechanical. It comes between the brain and the hand,” etc etc. If that was ever true of computers, how much truer of typewriters!

So let us rid ourselves of the fancy notion that Wodehouse had any truck with sentimental nostalgia. He was a modern who for his literary milieu fixed on the age of his own youth and early manhood. Above all he was, so far as his craft was concerned, tough: a tough professional. There is no reason to suppose he wouldn’t have been completely on the button, online, and up to the minute were he around now.

But Jeeves? I can picture Jeeves doing all kinds of things, but the gravity, seriousness, depth, and greatness of the man could not, I fancy, ever be expressed by a word that resonates with the inconsequentiality of birdsong and tinkles with the trivial traffic in tittle-tattle.

“Indeed, sir,” murmured Jeeves. Coughed Jeeves. Said Jeeves. All those words of speech might be used. But surely the day could never dawn where this might be written . . .

“Good morning, sir,” twittered Jeeves, as he biffed in with the tea.

One shudders. I mean, one positively shudders . . .

Speech seemed to have been wiped from his lips, and I saw, as I had foreseen would happen, that his gaze was riveted on the upper slopes of my mouth. It was a cold, disapproving gaze, such as a fastidious luncher who was not fond of caterpillars might have directed at one which he had discovered in his portion of salad, and I knew that the clash of wills for which I had been bracing myself was about to raise its ugly head.

(From *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, 1954)



# Society News

## Future Meetings and Wodehouse Walks

This edition of *Wooster Sauce* will arrive just prior to our next meeting, on July 7 at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street, London. Our speaker for the evening, Simon Brett, promises a special treat for all attending members; see his profile below. In October our speaker will be Stephen Pound MP, who bears the delightful middle name of Pelham. Members are reminded that the always enjoyable AGM will also take place on that date.

Prior to both meetings, Norman Murphy will conduct an abbreviated Wodehouse Walk around Bertie Wooster's Mayfair. The start time is 5 p.m., the walk will last approximately one hour, and it is free. For details on where to meet and to book a place, call Norman on 020 8881 9979.

Be sure to visit the special Wodehouse Exhibition at Heywood Hill bookshop in Curzon Street (not very far from the Arts Club) prior to the October meeting – as well as the private viewing just for Society members on September 29. See page 5 for details.

## Help Wanted: Shadow Database Manager

Because of your Committee's ready appreciation of the way fate can sneak up behind you with a bit of lead piping, it appoints deputies, or 'shadows', to act as backstop on the critical functions within the Society. Usually the shadow is another Committee member, but that only works if more than one person has the right skills, and we have run aground in our search for a shadow Database Manager.

If you understand Access and basic Excel, and have them on your computer, why not volunteer to help? Our database is quite small – only 1,000-odd live records. Our Database Manager (who is, as far as we can tell, fit, healthy and not planning to leave the country) is compiling a full set of instructions and will provide consultancy if required. Then, with luck, you would not have a lot more to do.

## Profile of a Patron

### Simon Brett

Simon Brett was a very late developer, being well into his forties before he came to love the works of P G Wodehouse. Though this is undeniably a shameful admission, it did give him the huge bonus at that great age of being able to wolf down a large number of the oeuvre which he hadn't already read in his teens.

After Oxford, where he got a First in English and was President of the Oxford University Dramatic Society, Simon's first job was as Father Christmas in a department store – only 22 and master of his own grotto. The work being by its nature seasonal, it couldn't last, and he joined BBC Radio as a Light Entertainment producer on January 1, 1968. In that capacity, he started *Week Ending* with David Hatch, who produced all the Jeeves and Wooster series starring Michael Hordern and Richard Briers. Simon also worked as a producer on *Just a Minute*, *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*, *Lord Peter Wimsey*, *The Burkiss Way*, and *The News Huddlines*; wrote more than 100 scripts for the anthology series *Frank Muir Goes Into . . .*; and produced the pilot episode of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Shortly after that, Simon moved to London Weekend Television as a comedy producer and two years later, in 1979, became a full-time writer. He had

by then had three of his Charles Paris murder mysteries published, and he went on to write many more crime novels, notably the Mrs Pargeter and Fethering series.

His psychological thriller *A Shock to the System* was made into a feature film starring Michael Caine. He has edited Faber anthologies of Useful Verse, Parodies, and Diaries, and written a large number of humorous books, including the bestselling *How to Be a Little Sod* series. Simon Brett's total number of published works is now an almost embarrassing 80. The most recent, *Blotto, Twinks and the Ex-King's Daughter*, is a work of exceptionally gleeful silliness.

Simon also continued to write for radio, with such series as *Semicircles*, *Foul Play*, *Baldi*, *No Commitments*, and *After Henry*, starring Prunella Scales, which was also successful on television. His

stage plays *Murder in Play* and *Silhouette* are still regularly performed, and he has written five pantomimes.

Simon Brett has been chair of the Crime Writers' Association, The Society of Authors, and the Public Lending Right Advisory Committee. He is President of the Detection Club, and is now extremely grunted also to be a Patron of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK).



# Robert McCrum on Ukridge

*Plum's biographer shares the introduction he wrote for a collection of Ukridge stories published in Japan last year*

Stanley Featherstonehaugh (pronounced: Fanshawe) Ukridge is unique as the one Wodehouse character who seems to open a window directly onto the well-concealed life of Wodehouse, the artist as a young man. Not as intelligent as Psmith, nor as wool-gathering as Lord Emsworth, nor as effete as Bertie Wooster, and certainly not as conservative as Mr Mulliner, it's precisely because he is not one of these universal characters that we can detect in Ukridge's "big, broad, flexible outlook" the lineaments of eccentric reality. In the long life of his creator, he represents a nostalgic, but never sentimental, recollection of Wodehouse's early life as a struggling writer.

Ukridge is important in another way, too: he makes his loquacious debut as the hero of Wodehouse's first comic novel, *Love Among the Chickens*, published in 1906. Up to that point, the young Wodehouse was the highly regarded ex-public school author of popular school stories like *The Gold Bat* and *The Head of Kay's*. No one had any inkling of his ambition to write for an adult audience, or indeed of his genius as a comic writer. So *Love Among the Chickens* is a declaration of intent: Wodehouse's first full-length novel for a grown-up market, and also the first with an unequivocally comic hero. As such, Ukridge is the essential precursor of Rupert Psmith and Galahad Threepwood ('Uncle Gally'), and Frederick, Lord Ickenham ('Uncle Fred'), those irrepressible bounders who will stand centre stage in the great fictions of Wodehouse's mature years, novels like *Heavy Weather* and *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. But perhaps because he is grounded in reality, Ukridge's life as a comic protagonist will be limited. Here, too, we bump up against his creator's biography.

As I have described in *Wodehouse: A Life* (Penguin Books, 2004), Ukridge is definitely a composite character, drawn from Wodehouse's early struggles as an up-and-coming young novelist in Edwardian London. At that time, in his twenties, Wodehouse was the archetypal freelance writer, moonlighting on *The Globe*, living in digs in cheap, unfashionable parts of London, carefully noting his earnings and expenditure

in a meticulous ledger, and occasionally eating out in the kind of Soho restaurant frequented by Ukridge, when he happens to be in funds, in which four courses with coffee costs a shilling. 'Ukridge's Accident Syndicate', for example, is certainly based on direct experience of a metropolitan Edwardian personal insurance scheme, and Teddy Weeks, the sickeningly smooth and untrustworthy matinee idol, reflects all Wodehouse's youthful experience in the West End musical theatre.

From this glitzy but down-at-heel milieu, two real-life characters stand out. First, there is Wodehouse's faithful old school chum, the pathetic figure of Bill Townend, whose shadowy friend Carrington Craxton did indeed experience personal vicissitudes as a Devonshire chicken farmer; and second, there is his colleague from *The Globe*, Herbert Westbrook, an aspiring literary man and sparring-partner with whom Wodehouse had a long and turbulent relationship. It's clear that Ukridge is partly based on both these men, and that his ludicrous adventures owe much to Wodehouse's life in London before the outbreak

of the Great War. Similarly, the character of the narrator 'Corky' (in *Love Among the Chickens* he appears as Jeremy Garnet, but no matter) is obviously based on the young Wodehouse.

But the arguments about the sources of inspiration for Ukridge are really by the by. Real or imagined, he stands out as a wonderfully enjoyable creation, the first in a long line of comic heroes, as full of lies and bombast as Falstaff, a charming, fantastical rogue, who is forever snatching failure from the jaws of success, speaking in a vivid, egotistical Edwardian slang, and surviving more scrapes than Bugs Bunny. Near-ludicrous in his yellow mackintosh, addressing one and all as 'old horse', with his pince-nez spectacles precariously attached to his flapping pink ears by 'ginger-beer wire', and his detachable collar permanently unmoored from its stud, S. F. Ukridge is every bit as memorable as Wodehouse's more famous characters.

Sadly, he is not as well loved as Bertie or Lord Emsworth. To Evelyn Waugh, he was too 'contrived';



Robert McCrum  
(photo by Jerry Bauer)



to many other readers, he is too much of a crook. The fair-minded critic would have to agree that his conduct in the episode of 'the Dog College', or his wooing of Dora Mason and Mabel Price (in 'No Wedding Bells for Him') displays an amoral, possibly even immoral, dimension that must exclude him from the Wodehousian Elysium.

Interestingly, where Psmith, Lord Emsworth, Bertie, Jeeves, and Mr Mulliner are all memorialised on Wodehouse's massive tombstone in Remsenburg, Long Island, USA, Ukridge's name is absent. This might not have been his creator's choice. Wodehouse was always fond of him. As late as 1966 he published a valedictory Ukridge story, 'Ukridge Starts a Bank Account'. Before that, in 1921, he revised *Love Among the Chickens* in a new edition as a curtain-raiser to a volume of 10 Ukridge stories. Knowing his penchant for creating characters who would appeal to magazine editors on both sides of the Atlantic, Wodehouse was, we can guess, wanting to launch Ukridge as a character suitable for transatlantic magazine serialisation in London and New York. But then, shortly after this, a holy fool called Bertie Wooster caught the mood of the interwar reading public, and Wodehouse had his hands full attending to the needs

of a nincompoop even greater than Ukridge, and far more lovable.

Wodehouse was always utterly ruthless about pleasing his audience. He had learned from Broadway that there was no percentage in casting a big star in a minor role. Besides – and I think this would have been decisive with Wodehouse – to write more about Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge would have involved digging deeper into the bank of his own, sometimes troubled, personal and private experience as a young man. That was something he never liked to do if he could help it. For Wodehouse, prose was never about digging deep into life 'not giving a damn', but about floating happily on the surface, free and irresponsible, and unbothered by the darker questions of existence. Ukridge might be a wonderful character, but he was just a bit too close to home. So the stories you will read in this marvellous compilation are touched with the spirit of 'What Might Have Been'. I think that's oddly appropriate: Wodehouse at his finest is always something of an elegist for a lost world.

*The Japanese version of this article originally appeared in Yuukuriji no shoubaidou (The Enterprises of Ukridge), published by Bungeishunjuusha, Tokyo, in December 2008.*

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## The Word Around the Clubs

### **New Books on Wodehouse**

Spring 2009 saw the arrival of three new books on Wodehouse. One, *P G Wodehouse: The Unknown Years*, is reviewed on page 19. The other two will be reviewed in our September issue: *Basham on Wodehouse* is a collection of essays by Society member Thomas Smith (aka Plug Basham) on PGW previously published in *Wooster Sauce* and *Plum Lines* as well as two previously unpublished essays. It is available on Amazon.com for US\$15.99. *The Inimitable P. G. Wodehouse: The Story of His Life and a Treasury of His Wit*, by Mark Hichens, contains a summary of Wodehouse's life and a selection of quotations. It is published by Book Guild Publishing, Brighton, retails for £12.99, and can be purchased through their website at [www.bookguild.co.uk](http://www.bookguild.co.uk); by phone from their distributor, Vine House,; or from Amazon.

### **The Return of Jeeves – to Ask**

It seems that Ask.com has seen the light and brought back Jeeves to be once again the symbol of its search engine – at least in the UK. The iconic 'butler' had been given the boot three years ago, yet apparently users of the site still associated it with Jeeves, despite attempts to rebrand it. Jeeves returns with a sleek new look, which can be seen at <http://uk.ask.com/>.

### **Wodehouse and the BBC**

This spring saw Plum effectively make appearances on BBC radio and television. In addition to the Radio 4 broadcast of *Something Fresh* in March and April (see pages 12 and 18), there was a reading of the recently

rediscovered story 'Providence and the Butler' on May 21. Short, touching, and brilliantly read by Martin Jarvis, the story provided an excellent example of Plum's early work and hinted at familiar characters and plotlines to come.

A week earlier, on May 11, Russell Davies's programme on BBC Radio 2 played the Kern-Wodehouse song 'You Never Knew About Me' from *Oh, Boy!* **James Hogg** writes: "The singer was Pat Healy, who seems to be as little known as the song. Both deserve better!"

Finally, on April 19 the television programme *Mastermind* (hosted by John Humphrys, known to be a big fan of Wodehouse) included as a specialist category 'The School Stories of P G Wodehouse'. The contestant was Shrirang Raddi, and alas, he came in fourth after the general-knowledge round. Later this year, *Wooster Sauce* will publish a transcript of his exchange with Mr Humphries and will also challenge readers with the questions put to Mr Raddi.

### **Wodehouse and Parliament**

UK members will be only too aware of the scandals caused by the *Daily Telegraph's* investigation into MPs' expenses. On May 15, Dr Donald Stevens of Bournemouth wrote in and quoted Lord Ickenham in *Cocktail Time*: "Have you ever been in the House of Commons and taken a good square look at the inmates? As weird a gaggle of freaks and sub-humans as was ever collected in one spot. I wouldn't mix with them for any money you could offer me." Dr Stevens added: "And that was in 1958. What would he say nowadays?"

# Hollywood Adapts Wodehouse, Part 2

by Brian Taves

*An abbreviated version of a paper delivered at the Divine Providence convention in October 2007.*

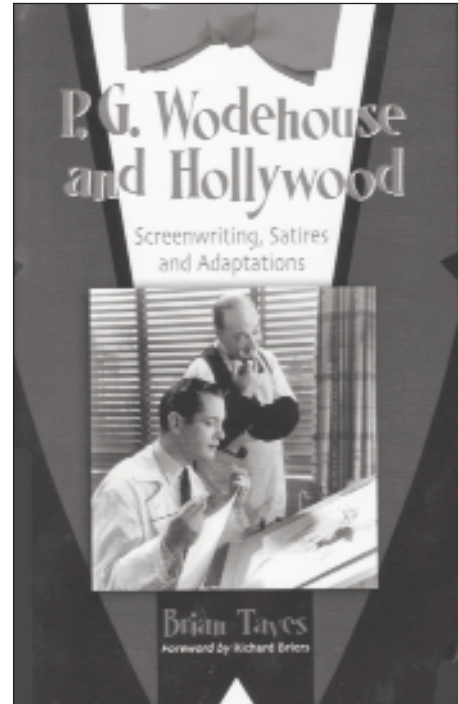
In September 1936, to Wodehouse's own surprise, he returned to Hollywood as a screenwriter, first for MGM, then for RKO. At the latter studio, he was asked to adapt *A Damsel in Distress*. The 1919 movie had been faithful to the novel, and Wodehouse had collaborated on a stage version with Ian Hay in 1928. The new film was based on both versions, plus additional material. However, *A Damsel in Distress* proved to be the first Fred Astaire picture to lose money. This was probably inevitable; after seven films with Ginger Rogers, audiences did not want to see Astaire paired with a newcomer, Joan Fontaine. Wodehouse was disappointed as well, since for once he had scripted his own book, as good a break as a writer gets in Hollywood.

In 1942 MGM remade *Her Cardboard Lover*, starring Robert Taylor, Norma Shearer, and George Sanders. With a significant alteration to the plot, the comedy collapses at the end. Thus, this version leaves the viewer with a sense of disappointment, giving the movie a much worse reputation than it deserves.

Television then became the ideal medium for bringing Wodehouse to the screen. The format of 30–60 minutes allowed an emphasis on dialogue and incident from the source. Two of his stage productions filmed in the 1930s were brought to the screen anew in the 1950s. In 1949 the first British Wodehouse television show was *By Candlelight*, and it appeared three times in the United States, twice in 1953 and again in 1955.

There were nearly as many new versions of *Anything Goes*. On Wodehouse's behalf, Guy Bolton had sold the rights to Paramount for the 1936 movie, while reserving television rights – a wise decision. An hour-long television presentation came out in 1950 with Martha Raye. In 1954 it was presented again on NBC for *The Colgate Comedy Hour*–*The Ethel Merman Show*. An aging Merman played opposite a miscast Frank Sinatra in the gangster role, in a program surviving in kinescope form. Finally, in 1956 came a new movie version of *Anything Goes*, 20 years after the original, with Bing Crosby again in the male lead. This was the least faithful to the play, although unlike the previous movie, Wodehouse was credited.

The year 1950 offered the first American Wodehouse television broadcast, a one-hour *Philco Television Playhouse* version of *Uncle Dynamite*. Almost inevitably the star was Arthur Treacher, in his fourth Wodehouse screen appearance.



*For information on how to obtain Brian's book, see the end of this article.*

Treacher's former partner in the 1930s Jeeves movies, David Niven, proved an ideal Uncle Fred in two television versions of 'Uncle Fred Flits By', in 1953 and again in 1955. The latter was produced by Niven and is one of the most successful transpositions of Wodehouse. It captured the zaniness of the source and used much of the Wodehouse dialogue; the show can be readily found on collector videos.

One of Wodehouse's plays, *Arthur*, adapted from a Molnar play in 1952 but never hitherto staged, premiered on television in 1960. Re-titled *Dear Arthur*, it is an unusual story of a father who plans the ultimate marriage of convenience for his daughter, to an explorer perpetually away from home – a nonexistent man whose history he invents. It is delightful, with many Wodehouse lines, including his adage that a husband has no use for brains – they just unsettle him.

Subsequently, British television productions of *The World of Wooster*, *Wodehouse Playhouse*, *Jeeves and Wooster*, and *Heavy Weather* have dominated Wodehouse adaptations on American television, with one exception. *The Old Reliable* was filmed in 1988 for the American Public Broadcasting miniseries *Tales from the Hollywood Hills*. This used the familiar Wodehouse device of the tell-all autobiography with prospective publishers and individuals jostling one another to steal it.

Outside of the United States, Wodehouse's work has been, and continues to be, adapted for the screen in a variety of countries, most notably his native England, but also in such countries as Sweden and Germany. The decline of Hollywood movie interest in Wodehouse after 1942 stemmed from several factors. First, attempts to use Wodehouse himself as a screenwriter at MGM and then RKO had failed. Second, none of the other sound films associated with his name made any notable commercial mark. Third, in a Hollywood retooled in the 1950s for more youthful audiences, his style of storytelling had less appeal, while television became the vehicle to reach both the mass and more specialized audiences.

Television's success in this regard may be judged by the way in which it has kept the Wodehouse name before new generations.

Finally, a shameless plug. Learning more about Wodehouse's screenwriting, his Hollywood stories, and the film and television adaptations from many countries, not just those from America that I've just discussed, is not as difficult as purloining Galahad Threepwood's autobiography. For the tell-all book was published in 2006, with a harvest of information not available elsewhere. Entitled *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*, it is available through the publisher, McFarland (<http://tinyurl.com/27sd6t>), or on Amazon.com.

## Wodehouse On Top of the World

On page 1 of this issue, Richard Briers comments on the fact that this journal is read around the world. We are proud of that but, in some respects, we are even prouder that the man we commemorate, P. G. Wodehouse, is read not just around the world but, as we now learn, on top of the world.

Some time ago, Fiona Haughey informed us that her son Toby, an Army officer, had made the acquaintance of the Master while serving in Basra in 2007 and had become an addict, as we all do. But how many of us, firstly, decide to join a few friends in attempting to climb the fifth highest mountain in the world (8,463 metres, or 27,765 feet), Makalu in the Himalayas, by the hitherto impassable South-East Ridge route; and, secondly, take Wodehouse along to while away the hours of cold and loneliness?

The team began their attempt from the head of the Upper Baron Valley in April 2008 and began the lengthy and exhausting task of carrying equipment up the mountain to establish further camps, five in all. Toby's blog of 23 April reads:

Phudorje was much surprised to see me this morning lounging in a chair at Base Camp and reading from one of the many P. G. Wodehouse novels that lurk in my arsenal. Yesterday we passed each other high on the fixed ropes near Camp 2; he was heading south toward Base Camp for a day's rest and I was heading north toward Camp 2 laden with rations and cursing fluently.

The team had got as far as 7,800 metres (25,590 feet) when, on 29 May, it became clear that two of the lead team of three had become too ill to proceed further and



Toby on Makalu - with a Wodehouse in his backpack, no doubt!

the attempt had to be abandoned. As Colin Scott, one of the three, wrote: "Naturally, emotions amongst the team have been at both extremes. There is a degree of relief that we are all down safely and can walk out together." Ed Viestur noted: "It's a round trip. Getting to the summit is optional, getting down is mandatory."

The conditions they experienced can be seen in this picture of Toby, which can give a better impression than any words can. As to the part Wodehouse played, here is a message Toby sent us afterwards:

The perusal of treasured manuscripts such as *Leave It to Psmith* and *Summer Lightning* built for me a bridge from the cold, ragged backdrop of base camp to the dreamy fertile haven of Blandings Castle. Transported by the rush of words that poured from the page, I would escape from my harsh surroundings and, whilst safely ensconced in acres of goose down, would walk alongside Wooster and Psmith in civilised society. Indeed, my sojourn into the world of Wodehouse extends beyond the mountainous valleys of Nepal with my initial discovery of these magnificent works taking place in a dusty corner of Iraq last year. Taking succour from his veritable feast of quintessentially English characters, the roar of armoured vehicles and the stifling Arab heat would recede and I would bask in glorious memories of home. A battered copy of a Wodehouse tome now accompanies me on all my adventures – it's de rigueur!

To read more about the expedition and Toby's blogs, visit the website at [www.makalu2008.org](http://www.makalu2008.org). Toby's blogs can be found amongst those for the South East Ridge Team.



# Producing *Something Fresh* for the BBC

*In discussion with Tony Ring, Martin Jarvis explains the motivation and processes behind the recent radio serial*

When at the beginning of 2008 Martin Jarvis and Rosalind Ayres (Jarvis & Ayres Productions) were invited to pitch to BBC Radio 4 for the opportunity to produce a *Classic Serial*, they had in mind the dramatisation of a Wodehouse novel. The BBC's response – that they were looking for serials based on pre-1918 books – intrigued but did not faze them, and after a brief consideration of alternatives, they identified *Something Fresh*, the first Blandings novel, as having the greatest potential. Martin explains:

“Though knowing most of the Blandings saga, I had never read that first Blandings story, and it struck me as particularly interesting. As with some of his later works, it promotes the idea of ‘the new woman’. Joan is almost Shavian in her feistiness and some of her dialogue. I think it is a remarkable novel, and of course Wodehouse himself thought it was a turning point in his career. But it was quite a challenge to turn it into a two-hour play.”

Fulfilling that challenge came after a successful presentation in competition with other producers offering different serials. “You have to include a précis of the plot as part of the pitch, but it is very hard to show someone who has not actually read it why a book is remarkable. In explaining why it would make great radio, it is very beneficial to be able to add comments about Wodehouse and his comic genius. Interestingly, when the commission was confirmed, the commissioner asked that the formal title be ‘*Something Fresh* by P G Wodehouse’, not merely the book title.” A testament to the pulling power of Plum.

Having received the go-ahead, the adaptation was undertaken by Martin himself. “On this occasion I used my late grandfather's name, Archie Scottney, as a pseudonym. It was he who introduced me to his



*Martin Jarvis, aka Archie Scottney*

bookcase when I was about nine, and therefore to the lifelong joys of Plum.”

Experience has taught Martin that an hour's drama represents about 11,000 words, so he had to extract what proved to be 22,895 words from the 75,000-word text. “I look at the novel, and try to shape the play so as not to lose anything ‘too golden’. I attempt to dramatise elements from the narrative as well as the dialogue, though I try to keep actual narration to a minimum. I would expect to write a long first draft, then trim material to bring it back down to the correct length.”

An important element in the planning is to identify a high spot for the end of the first episode. “This could be termed a romantic comedy thriller, so there needs to be some sort of a cliff-hanger. I decided that the best first-half ending would be the unexpected meeting in the dark of Joan Valentine and Ashe Marson, when Ashe realises for the first time that they are rivals. And it was also important for the structure of the two-part play as a whole to reach that point at that time. It does not come until about 60% of the way through the novel, but I wanted to get the action to Blandings as soon as I possibly could. I started with the building blocks: the meeting of Ashe and Joan; the separate reasons each had for being on the way to Blandings; the nature of the relationship between George Emerson and Aline Peters; and the discussion on the train about the niceties of downstairs life. This enabled me to arrive at Blandings, where the listener meets Beach, Baxter, and the household, and renews brief acquaintance with Freddie and Lord Emsworth. I felt that if I hadn't got as far as the first attempt to recover the scarab by the end of the first episode, the listener might well be asking, ‘When does something happen at Blandings?’”



*Scenes from the Green Room*  
*Members of the cast discuss a scene.*

*Kenneth Danzinger (Adams and Colonel Mant), left, and Alan Shearman (Jones, Ferris, and Porter) enjoy the laughter that is inevitable when reading Wodehouse.*



It is often said that Wodehouse is particularly difficult to dramatise because of the style and content of his narrative. “For a ‘classic serial’ it seems right and proper to use the narrative voice of Wodehouse to set the story in motion, to briefly recap at the start of episode two, and to intercede occasionally to progress the plot. Sometimes I feel that there is such an unbeatable piece of narration – maybe only a one-line comment – I don’t want to do without.”

Is it viable to use this adaptation as the basis for a stage play, including the narration? “I don’t think it could work as a totally traditional stage presentation,



Andrea Bowen played the put-upon Aline Peters

where you might almost be confined to a Blandings set, but it can work with a more modern approach – creating everything on an open stage where anything can happen with great pace, mobile props, and fantastic lighting, helping the audience to be almost part of the fun, bustle, and comedic drive of the novel. You can be in an office in London, or on a train, or below stairs, or in the

Blandings library or grounds. You could even have the Wodehouse narrator stepping in to fill minor roles such as Adams at the club, one of the valets, Colonel Mant, and so on. What fun! But don’t try to change Wodehouse unnecessarily to meet your dramatic vision.”

In preparing the adaptation, Martin used a scene from the American original *Something New*, i.e. Baxter’s pursuit of the shoe covered in red paint, which was originally omitted from the UK text because it had recently been published in the UK as part of the school story *Mike*. “Its use in the structure of the novel is important – it develops the characters of Baxter, Ashe, and Lord Emsworth – and it dramatises beautifully. Thank goodness it was pointed out and I was able to use it, as it becomes a very strong sequence in Episode Two.”

The recording was actually made in Los Angeles, where Martin undertakes about half his projects and where there is a community of fine British actors whom he can call on. “I thought Ioan Gruffudd, a highly successful young actor whom I had worked with and I knew was in America, would make a great Ashe, and then learned that Helen McCrory was with

her husband Damian Lewis, who was working out there. To play J Preston Peters, I wanted an excellent American actor, Hector Elizondo, who is very well known in America. Similarly, young Andrea Bowen, playing Aline, is a regular in the TV series *Desperate Housewives*. I found that I could secure a great cast – with mainly British actors – if I recorded in LA.”



Producer Ros Ayres

Were the cast familiar with Wodehouse? “Very much so. For example, Moira Quirk, a very talented young actress who took a leading role in an Ayckbourn play we have just recorded, is very familiar with the oeuvre, and said it was her ambition to be in something by Wodehouse. She was thrilled to be involved, even in the multiple role of ‘all the maids’! Most literate actors are well aware of Wodehouse, and understand how important it is, in increasing the comedy effect, to take themselves and the situation utterly seriously and never let on they know it’s meant to be comedic.”

The single most difficult piece of business was clearly Ioan Gruffudd’s depiction of two cats fighting in a back yard. How did he cope? “If an actor followed the detailed description provided by Wodehouse in the book, it would take about two and a half minutes. Too long in a drama. I gave Ioan a copy and asked him to try to create the effect required in a much shorter time. He was slightly nervous, but with Wodehouse rather than me as director he came up with a realistic imitation which recorded perfectly, and had not been rehearsed before the cast.”



Multi-talented Moira Quirk played the maids.

A happy project – a happy cast. Result – a broadcast filled with humour, character and an admirable faithfulness to Wodehouse. Let us hope that the BBC consider it worthy of commercial offering on CD in the not too distant future.

*Note: The photos on this page and at the bottom of page 12 were taken by Matthew Wolf, who played Freddie Threepwood. For a review of the radio broadcast of Something Fresh in April, see page 18.*

## Some Wodehousian Clerihews

The clerihew challenge to our readers in previous issues has resulted in a flood of contributions! We’ll keep printing them until we run out – which may not be until 2020. See also page 17.

Constance Keeble  
Terrified the feeble.  
Just one look  
Was all it took.

– Jonathan Radgick

Plum  
Invites us to come  
Into the world he created  
Where smiles and joy are unabated.

– James Linwood

Veronica Wedge:  
Over the edge.  
Her bosoms Veronical  
Are bigger than her brain. Ironical.

– Charles Gould

# The Quotability of P G Wodehouse

*A talk given at the Society meeting on 18 November 2008*

by Nigel Rees

Madam Chairperson, members of the Society, and anyone else who has got in.

It is, of course, a great pleasure for me to have become a Patron of your Society. Any organization that can embrace Boris Johnson and me in this position is clearly very broadminded, and it's obvious you can suffer fools gladly. I look forward to being supportive of your goals and ideals. I had hoped that the position would carry with it reciprocal rights to membership of the Drones Club, but this appears not to be the case.

Now, when you do the sort of things I do, you come into contact with some of the numerous societies devoted to the immortal memories of particular writers, great and (present company excepted) not so great. And when the invitation comes, as it tends to do, to say a few words – my usual practice is to pontificate on the quotability of the author in question and to reflect, if appropriate, on the author's use of quotations from other people.

I first did this for the Chesterton Society. Chesterton, of course, was a slightly older contemporary of PGW and the man immortalized by Wodehouse in the passage that goes: "The drowsy stillness of the summer afternoon was shattered by what sounded to his strained senses like G.K. Chesterton falling on a sheet of tin."

Then I was trotted out before the Jerome K. Jerome Society at their annual bunfight near Walsall, his somewhat unlikely birthplace. Odd that. For many years I had laboured under the impression that he must be an American with a name like Jerome Klapka Jerome, but there you are, life is a learning experience.

Then I talked to the Detection Club about how its founder, Dorothy L. Sayers, was not only quotable but made much use of quotations herself – but fractionally more accurately than G.K. Chesterton, who never verified his references.

And then, a couple of years ago, I became President of the Johnson Society of Lichfield and gave a discourse on the fact that, leaving Shakespeare aside – and the team of hacks who wrote the Bible – Dr Johnson is, without a shadow of a doubt, numerically the most quoted man of all time, both from his writings and from his conversation, as recorded by Boswell.

Now it's time for me to turn my attention to the Quotability of P G Wodehouse. But as you may know, I have been boring on about this for years in *Wooster*

*Sauce*, so this is not exactly a new venture. There is a ritual question asked of all your Patrons – and, indeed, anyone of any rank who wanders into the pages of *Wooster Sauce*: namely, what was your first Wodehouse experience? Well, I have to tell you that I can't remember. I am certain that the first book of his that I actually *purchased* was a paperback of *Summer Lightning* when I was on the Edinburgh Fringe in 1966 appearing with the Oxford revue before starting my first job at Granada TV. I can't believe that I hadn't read a Jeeves story before this, but I'm afraid I simply cannot remember.

The first encounter I can remember with the world of Wooster was with *The World of Wooster* in 1965 – the very successful BBC TV adaptations with Ian Carmichael as Bertie and Dennis Price as Jeeves. And Fabia Drake as Aunt Agatha. You can't get better casting than that – even if Ian and Dennis were perhaps a little on the elderly side for their roles. But there is no getting away from it – my view of Jeeves and Bertie is still dictated by those two performances.

In particular, whenever I quote a bit of Bertie, I tend to do it in the Carmichael voice.

But how do I remember what that voice was like? The BBC famously wiped all but two (I think), of the videotapes back in the 1970s – to some of us, a crime rather worse than letting two overpaid presenters misbehave on Radio 2, but that's another matter.

I have a copy of the record issued in 1966 of two songs that Sandy Wilson wrote for the TV series. The B-side is called 'Bertie's Lucky Day' and I think the A side was the signature tune of the series: "What would I do without you, Jeeves? / I'd get in the most frightful stew, Jeeves. / Those terrible traps that destiny weaves – and all that sort of rot . . . / What would I do without you?" And the record ends with Ian Carmichael saying: "Jeeves, I have said this before and I shall say it again, You stand alone!" "Thank you, sir."

We all have, I'm sure, our favourite PGW quotations – or nuggets, as they have come to be called following the pioneering work of Richard Usborne. Here are just three that I'm fond of.

Honorina . . . is one of those robust, dynamic girls with the muscles of a welter-weight and a laugh like a squadron of cavalry charging over a tin bridge.



Dennis Price and Ian Carmichael  
in *The World of Wooster*



“What ho!” I said.  
 “What ho!” said Motty.  
 “What ho! What ho!”  
 “What ho! What ho! What ho!”

After that it seemed rather difficult to go on with the conversation.

“Alf Todd,” said Ukridge, soaring to an impressive burst of imagery, “has about as much chance as a one-armed blind man in a dark room trying to shove a pound of melted butter into a wild cat’s left ear with a red-hot needle.”

I have to admit – sometimes – to preferring these delights in ‘nugget’ form even to whole pages of superlative Wodehousian prose. And certainly to the full-length books. It’s just that having your Wodehouse served up in tasty bite-sized chunks is like devouring a box of chocolates at one go. And probably about as good for you.

But I have to say that these Wodehousian nuggets are not hugely represented in the major dictionaries of quotations. The current *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* has 17 – but that’s a long way behind equally prolific writers like Chesterton and Mark Twain. And the American *Bartlett* only fields six, as does the new American *Yale Book of Quotations*.

Never mind. We know it is all immensely quotable, and if the editors of these dictionaries don’t consider that Wodehouse has really entered into the mainstream of popular quotation and allusion, so be it. We know what we like. And to quote *Jeeves in the Offing*: “As the old saw has it, One man’s caviar is another man’s major general.”

And so to the other side of the quotations coin. It will be obvious, to anyone who has read Norman Murphy’s *Wodehouse Handbook*, the extent to which PGW quoted other writers. There are hundreds and thousands of familiar and less familiar quotations and allusions throughout the canon. And oh, what delight there is to be had from the merry mischief Wodehouse makes with them. From *Right Ho, Jeeves*:

“But what can I say about the sunset?” asked Gussie.

“Well, Jeeves got off a good one the other day. I met him airing the dog in the park one evening, and he said, ‘Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, sir, and all the air a solemn stillness holds.’ You might use that.” (*Gray’s Elegy – well done!*)

From *Much Obligated, Jeeves*:

“The snail’s on the wing and the lark’s on the thorn, or rather the other way round, as I’ve

sometimes heard you say.” (*Browning, ‘Pippa Passes’ – deux points!*)

On the face of it, few writers have employed literary allusions to the same extent as Wodehouse in his novels and short stories. He was undoubtedly well-read, but he seems also to have used a shortcut to the mighty lines he quoted and played about with: he admitted that he used a well-thumbed copy of *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*.

“Hullo, fathead . . . what news on the Rialto?” – unusually, this is Aunt Dahlia plucking a line from *The Merchant of Venice* in *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*.

More usually, it is Bertie who is fumbling for the apt quotation and, more often than not, believing that Jeeves invented all the best lines. When Jeeves quotes “It is a far, far better thing”, Bertie comments: “As I said before, there is nobody who puts these things more neatly than he does.”

A quotation from Shakespeare is frequently accompanied by “As I have heard Jeeves put it” or “To quote one of Jeeves’s gags”. For example: “Leaving not a wrack behind, as I remember Jeeves saying once.” Although we all know that Jeeves is quite capable of reading Spinoza’s *Ethics* (indeed he gets a complete edition of the Annotated Works), such faith in his ability to coin a neat phrase is strange in a Wooster educated at Eton and

Oxford and winner of the Scripture Knowledge prize. But as Richard Osborne (again) pointed out in *Wodehouse at Work*, Bertie’s frame of reference is no more than one would expect of an educated man in the early 20th century. And the same goes for Wodehouse himself, of course.

There are lapses, though: “The next moment I was dropping like the gentle dew upon the place beneath. Or is it rain? Jeeves would know.”

Some quotations recur throughout the Jeeves canon. “With a wild surmise” probably crops up most often. And Bertie worries obsessively and understandably over “the cat i’ the adage” and the “fretful porpentine”, two Shakespearean allusions. What is more, Wodehouse larded the novels with more and more literary allusions as he grew older. *Jeeves in the Offing* (published in 1960) contains no less than 50 or so.

Norman Murphy and I may spend our lives agonizing over the more obscure quotations and allusions but, in the end, it doesn’t really matter. When you get *this* sort of thing, it’s just plain barmy and at the same time sublime:

The older I get, the more I agree with Shakespeare and those poet Johnnies about it always being darkest before the dawn and



William Shakespeare – just one of many poet Johnnies who provided PGW with a quotation or two

there's a silver lining and what you lose on the swings you make up on the roundabouts.

And then this passage alluding to Shakespeare's Cardinal Wolsey, used on more than one occasion – as in 'Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest':

I'm not absolutely certain of my facts, but I rather fancy it's Shakespeare – or, if not, it's some equally brainy bird – who says that it's always just when a fellow is feeling particularly braced with things in general that Fate sneaks up behind him with a bit of lead piping. And what I'm driving at is that the man is perfectly right.

Going back to the rich quotability of Wodehouse himself, I'm going to end by remarking on the fact that what we have doesn't seem to be enough for some people. I am referring to the apparently bogus Wodehouse quotations that do exist and which I am sometimes asked about, in my role as a pursuer of 'lost quotations'. I'm usually straight on to Tony Ring, the best shortcut to the answers that we have, but we now also have the Google Books search facility, though that has to be handled with care and doesn't help us with the duds.

A couple of case studies. When I was on a visit to India last February, I was at a hunting camp in tiger country when, round the campfire, I met an Indian with an impeccable English accent – he'd been to school at Stowe – who seemed to have bought into English culture wholesale. I told him that my wife and I had just been to the Taj Mahal, and he immediately trotted out a line from Wodehouse that he said was the view of Lord Isleworth in *Cocktail Time* – that the Taj Mahal was "a nifty little tomb – but draughty".

As soon as I got back, I was on to Tony Ring but found that (a) there is no such character as Lord Isleworth in Wodehouse, though there is, of course, a Lord Ickenham; and, of course, Ickenham and Isleworth are not a million miles from each other, as you go westwards out of London. And (b) no such exact quotation came from Lord Ickenham in *Cocktail Time* or any other in the Wodehousian oeuvre. Tony did point out, however, that PGW does mention the Taj Mahal from time to time. In *The Code of the Woosters* we have this:

I was beginning to wonder if I had been right in squelching so curtly Jeeves's efforts to get me off on a Round-The-World cruise. Whatever you may say against these excursions – the cramped conditions on

shipboard, the possibility of getting mixed up with a crowd of bores, the nuisance of having to go and look at the Taj Mahal . . .

I don't think that PGW ever went to India himself. In 1931 there were plans for him to stay with a Maharajah, but he confessed in a letter to a friend: "I get much more of a kick out of a place like Droitwich, which had no real merits, than out of something like the Taj Mahal."

It turned out that what my Indian acquaintance had proffered me was an embroidered quotation from 'The Clicking of Cuthbert'. Adeline describes herself as "fairly good looking" and Cuthbert replies: "Anybody who was content to call you fairly good-looking would describe the Taj Mahal as a pretty nifty tomb."

And that's it, no mention of the draught. But this is what I do, hacking my way through the thickets of misquotation and misattribution, a benign (I hope) pedant, ever in search of quotation truth.

A small footnote. I wondered if anybody had commented on the draughtiness of the Taj Mahal. Well, they had. I had never heard of a novel called *The Green Leaves of Summer* by Oriel Malet until a Google Books search turned it up. Having obtained a copy of the 1950 publication, I found this passage:

[Nanny] had actually visited the Taj Mahal by moonlight. Serena . . . was more impressed with the fact than Nanny herself. "A nasty, draughty sort of place, if you ask me," [Nanny] said disapprovingly. "And damp, too, I shouldn't wonder, with all that water about."

Well, sometimes these confusions occur in the best circles. When John Lloyd, the original producer of *Quote . . . Unquote* appeared on our 30th anniversary edition, he came up with this supposed quote from Wodehouse:

If it were not for quotations, conversation between gentlemen would consist of an endless succession of 'What hos'.

Now that might seem to have something to do with the 'What ho?' nugget I mentioned earlier, but can we find it in the complete works? No.

John Lloyd is now the man behind *QI* – I do hope he wasn't having us on. What ho!



Nigel with Larissa Saxby-Bridger after his talk at the Society's meeting in November.  
(Photo by Carolyn de la Plain)

# On the Stealing of Fine French Chefs

by P G Wodehouse

*Editor's note: In 1961, there was great hoo-ha when the White House apparently attempted to lure chef Bui Van Han away from his post with the French ambassador to London to work in Washington. Van Han claimed he had been offered "lots more money" to take the White House job; the French Embassy was initially shocked, and then expressed relief when the chef turned down the job. Wrote Newsweek magazine at the time, "it all sounded like something out of P.G. Wodehouse" – resulting in this article, which appeared in their issue of March 6, 1961.*

Those who have read their Wodehouse – and those who have not deserve little consideration and can be ignored – will recall that Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia stole Mrs. Bingo Little's French chef Anatole and that later Sir Watkyn Bassett and Mrs. L.G. Trotter nearly stole him from her. In other words, if there is one thing that is rife, if that's the word I want, it is the stealing of French chefs.

One sometimes asks oneself what the world is coming to.

And now it has happened again. The charge has been officially denied, but all the evidence seems to point to the fact that President and Mrs. Kennedy did make a good old college try at luring away from the employment of Jean Chauvel, French ambassador to Great Britain, his supreme chef, Bui Van Han, widely known in London dining circles as God's gift to the gastric juices. At least, if writing to Van Han and asking him if he would "consider an offer to join the White House kitchen" wasn't luring, it is difficult to see what it was.

Van Han remains staunch and not a smell of his *pointes d'asperges à la Mistinguett* will the Kennedy menus get, but the attempt was unquestionably made and it makes one realize once again what a jumpy life these swells with French chefs must lead, never a peaceful moment. Chauvel's whole outlook on life must long ago have become soured. He can't give a

dinner party without regarding each of his lip-smacking guests with the liveliest suspicion.

Harold Macmillan, let's say, looks up from his *timbales de ris de veau Toulousienne* and says (speaking thickly for his mouth is full): "Some eats [*quelque chose à manger*]." Chauvel starts as if the Prime Minister had stabbed him with a fish fork. He instantly suspects that Macmillan is going to try to get his chef away from him. He does not like the look in his eye. Nasty, nasty covetous glitter it has, he thinks, and he resolves to watch him closely and to be very short with him if he catches him hanging about the embassy.

And the same thing applies to all the other guests. I have never dined with Chauvel myself, but I am sure that if I did, I would instantly become a suspect. He would notice at once the way I was squaring my elbows and digging in and getting mine. And nothing would convince him that I had not sinister designs on Van Han. How happy we of the *canaille* should be that our skillet wielders are not of a virtuosity that leads to their getting pinched.

My own Gracie dishes up an excellent leg of lamb with potatoes and two veg but nobody has tried to steal her from me. The Wodehouse home may be humble but at least we don't get masked men slinking to the back door and trying to lure Gracie away with offers to switch her to the White House. No letter from

Letitia Baldrige [First Lady Jackie Kennedy's social secretary] has come our way. Nor any "informal queries" from Pierre Salinger [the White House press secretary].

In a word, we are sitting pretty. How different from the home life of Ambassador Jean Chauvel. The way things are going these days, if I had a French chef I would put him in a stout box and sit on the lid. And no doubt this is what Chauvel will be doing from now on.



## More Wodehousian Clerihews

Reginald Jeeves  
Always kept up his sleeves  
Schemes to rescue his master,  
Whose ingenuity invariably led to disaster.  
– Lennart Andersson

Bobbie Wickham, a flaming redhead  
"She's not for you, sir" as Jeeves said.  
Poor Bertie is much put upon,  
Up to his ankles in the bouillon.  
– Peter Thompson

Bertram Wooster  
Is in need of a booster.  
Which he will gulp down  
If an aunt is in town.  
– Geoff Millward

One key to the wisdom of Jeeves  
Was his diet, I believe.  
When he needed a brand-new scheme  
He turned to trout, sole, or bream.  
– Allyn Hertzbach

Wellbeloved, George Cyril, of that clan  
Is not a man  
To trust.  
Unless you must.  
– Norman Murphy

Roderick Spode  
When about to explode  
Could be calmed easily  
Just by saying 'Eulalie'.  
– Paul H. Tubb



# Something Fresh on BBC Radio 4

A review by **Eddie Graham**

There is little doubt that the novels of P. G. Wodehouse often work very well on radio. Proving the point, in April BBC Radio 4 offered a dramatised version of Plum's 1915 novel *Something Fresh* in two one-hour episodes.

The novel first introduced the world of Blandings, where Lord Emsworth wanders through his own special world of absent-minded dottiness. On this occasion, he inadvertently pockets a valuable scarab owned by the American millionaire J. Preston Peters, who had invited him to view his precious collection. Peters thinks he's stolen it, while Lord E. assumes it was given to him for the Blandings museum. Meanwhile, Ashe Marson is getting tired of turning out his exceedingly popular Gridley Quayle detective yarns. When he meets Joan Valentine, she suggests he tries something fresh. He becomes J. Preston Peters's secretary and is promised a reward of one thousand pounds if he can recover the scarab. Needless to say, Joan, who by chance is friendly with Peters's daughter Aline, also gets wind of the reward on offer and decides she will go for it.

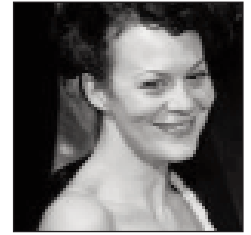
The ensuing romantic comedy has all the hallmarks of Plum's inventive mind, and this radio adaptation captured the many complications, coincidences, and myriad characters of the fast-paced story. A radio play can never include all the wonderful Wodehouse descriptions. However, in recognising the importance of Plum's inimitable style and his witty use of English as he describes the unfolding scene to the reader, this version had the foresight to include Plum himself in the cast list (Ian Ogilvy) to ensure that the delightful prose outside the conversations was not altogether lost.



*Ioan Gruffudd, who played Ashe Marson*

Perfectly cast as Lord Emsworth, Martin Jarvis was also responsible for the direction, and his affection for Plum's unique

style was evident throughout. A first-class cast clearly shared Jarvis's enthusiasm, for they made Plum's glorious characters come to life in splendid fashion. The burden of the story is carried by Ioan Gruffudd as Ashe and Helen McCrory as Joan, the rivals who travel to Market Blandings by train, both intent on recovering Preston Peters's beloved scarab. Needless to say, the hint of true romance is never far away. Among the more amusing sequences, Gruffudd and McCrory extracted every ounce of humour as Joan Valentine gave Ashe the lowdown on below-stairs etiquette in an attempt to scare him off and make him return to London.



*Helen McCrory, aka Joan Valentine*



*Jared Harris (l.) and Hector Elizondo played the Efficient Baxter and the scarab-crazy J. Preston Peters. (Photo by Matthew Wolf)*

As the inevitable heavy-weight up against the Earl of Emsworth, Hector Elizondo as J. Preston Peters had all the gusto and determination of the typical Wodehousian self-made American. Andrea Bowen's Aline Peters fended off Hong Kong policeman George's advances as she kept faith with her engagement to the Hon. Freddie Threepwood who, like the Earl himself, was destined to figure in future Wodehouse epics. As the portly butler Beach, Morgan Sheppard captured the faithful servant to a 'T', while the Earl's secretary, Baxter, was given just the right edge by Jared Harris.

Mention must also be made of the dastardly R. Jones, always ready to take advantage if it means financial gain for himself. Alan Shearman, who also played a couple of other minor characters, gave Jones the correct air of seediness as he schemed to squeeze yet more cash out of the Hon Freddie. As always with Wodehouse, what may have seemed an amusing embellishment turns out to be an important element in the intricate plot, and this was realised to perfection in this production.

The full glory of Plum's first Blandings novel was brought to radio audiences in sparkling form; let us wish for more from the same team.

From his fourteenth year onward Ashe had been in love many times. His sensations in the case of Joan were neither the terrific upheaval which had caused him in his fifteenth year to collect twenty-eight photographs of the principal girl of the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, pantomime, nor the milder flame which had caused him, when at Oxford, to give up smoking for a week and try to learn by heart the Sonnets from the Portuguese. His love was something that lay between these two poles.

(From *Something Fresh*, 1915)

# Insight into a Distant World

A book review by Murray Hedgcock

From various sources, Wodehouse buffs have been able to build a reasonable picture of the life led by Plum and Ethel during much of World War II, from lazy days at Le Touquet to the divide of internment and then surreal months in Berlin and Paris. But the months from June 1941 to November 1942, when Plum (and periodically, Ethel) basked in the warmth of friendship with the Baroness Anga von Bodenhausen-Degener on her estate on the fringe of Germany's Harz Mountains, have been no more than sketched.



Now the Baroness's daughter, Reinhild von Bodenhausen, has fleshed out the bones of that record with a delightful and highly readable memoir of the time when she, as a child of 10, enjoyed the presence of her dear "Uncle Plummie". He was offered hospitality by the good graces of the Baroness's cousin, Baron Raven von Barnekow, who had become a close friend in Hollywood.

The impact gentle PGW made is underlined by the account of the nervous delegation of villagers, who warned his hostess that the "Tommy" should be locked up: "He could roam around the house and murder you

and the child." The Baroness reassured them that all were quite safe.

With the shrewdness of a child's eye, Reinhild notes how PGW "did not live in the real world as the rest of the grown-ups saw it" but "continued to live with his characters in 'Joy in the Morning', and 'Money in the Bank', which he was writing at that time". And as others have suggested, he was no bundle of laughs. "Uncle Plummie was rarely amusing or entertaining. . . . He was quite a serious man, and took us children seriously; this made us feel very important and grown-up."

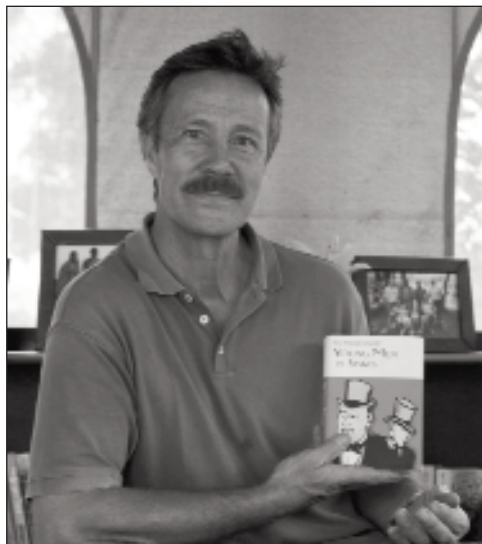
In a thoughtful introduction, Edward Cazalet expresses gratitude for the hospitality shown the couple, and explains the thinking which led to that sad error of judgment – the innately harmless but ultimately harmful broadcasts over German wartime radio.

This charming study provides fascinating insight into the privileged life of pre-war German aristocracy, its struggle to survive in the face of the bureaucracy and instinctive suspicion held by Nazism, and the price paid by its many members opposed to Hitler.

*P G Wodehouse: The Unknown Years*, is published by Stamford Lake, Sri Lanka. It can be purchased through [www.lakehousebookshop.com](http://www.lakehousebookshop.com) for the equivalent of US\$15 (at the time of writing), plus shipping charges.

## Wodehouse in the Maasai Mara

A camp with just 12 tents for visitors, owned jointly by two Kenyans (including a Maasai warrior) and situated in the middle of the Maasai Mara, would not be top of many people's list as the most likely place to find a Wodehouse book. But the Rekeru camp is an extraordinary place for a number of reasons, one of which was that its minuscule library included a copy of *Young Men in Spats*. Not, we may reassure any cynical readers, one taken along by a Society member, either.



Tony Ring spotted the book shortly after arrival, and just after hearing an adjacent hippopotamus roar. He immediately invited Jonathan Scott (of BBC's *Big Cat Week*) to pose with the book for *Wooster Sauce* (pictured left). Jackson Looseyia (one of the owners, pictured above) was rather glad it was not the volume containing 'Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court', with the poem 'Good Gnu', as each autumn tens of thousands of wildebeests (gnus) cross the river about 100 yards downstream from the camp. He said he would not have wanted to give future guests any ideas.



# Gertrude Jekyll and the Gardens at Blandings

by Alan Dean

When P. G. Wodehouse wrote *Leave It to Psmith* (published in 1923), he probably was not a keen practical gardener. He wanted to describe the gardens at Blandings in some detail, and it is apparent that he found inspiration in a book by Gertrude Jekyll: *Some English Gardens*, published in 1904.

At the beginning of the first chapter of *Leave It to Psmith*, Wodehouse writes:

A writer, describing Blandings Castle in a magazine article, had once said: “Tiny mosses have grown in the cavities of the stones, until, viewed near at hand, the place seems shaggy with vegetation.”

The writer must have been Miss Gertrude Jekyll, whose chapter on Berkeley Castle includes: “Tiny mosses have grown in their cavities; . . . Here grasses and many kinds of wild plants have found a home, until, viewed from near at hand, the mighty walls and their sustaining buttresses are seen to be shaggy with vegetation” (p.32).

A few paragraphs later, Wodehouse writes that “the castle, which is one of the oldest inhabited houses in England, stands upon a knoll of rising ground at the southern end of the celebrated Vale of Blandings”. Miss Jekyll describes Berkeley Castle in a similar way: “This venerable pile, one of the oldest continuously-inhabited houses in England, stands upon a knoll of rising ground at the southern end of the tract of rich alluvial land known as the Vale of Berkeley” (p.31).

In chapter 6, section 4, a detailed description of the gardens at Blandings is given by Lord Emsworth himself, eager to entertain Ralston McTodd, the powerful young singer of Saskatoon, during lunch at the Senior Conservative Club:

“In large gardens where ample space permits . . . nothing is more desirable than that there should be some places, or one at least, of quiet greenery alone,

without any flowers whatever. . . . In no other way can the brilliancy of flowers be so keenly enjoyed as by . . . pacing for a time in some cool, green alley, and then passing on to the flowery places. It is partly, no doubt, the unconscious working out of some optical law, the explanation of which in everyday language is that the eye . . . being, as it were, saturated with the green colour, is the more attuned to receive the others, especially the reds.”

This paragraph is identical to the first paragraph of Miss Jekyll’s chapter on Rockingham (p.45) except that Lord Emsworth omits from her second line the words “and even in those of narrow limits”, which clearly do not apply to Blandings. No doubt for the same reason, he omits Miss Jekyll’s next two paragraphs, which deal exclusively with small gardens. Otherwise the two passages are identical. Wodehouse continues, “It was probably some such consideration that influenced the designers of the many old gardens of England in devoting so much attention to the cult of the yew tree.” Miss Jekyll prefers: “. . . the many old gardens of England, where yew, the grand walling tree, was so freely used.”

Lord Emsworth then gives his well-known views on the antipathy to moss of professional gardeners in general and Angus McAllister in particular. He continues: “Nature intended a yew alley to be carpeted with a mossy growth.” Miss Jekyll writes, describing the “straight alley of ancient yews” at Rockingham: “Almost better it might have been if the path were green and grassy too – Nature herself seems to have thought so, for she greens the gravel with mossy growths. Perhaps this mossiness afflicts the gardener’s heart” (p.46). Both Lord Emsworth and Miss Jekyll affirm, in identical words, that “The mossy path is in true relation for colour to the trees and grassy edges”.

Lord Emsworth then describes his yew alley in sentences almost identical to



The yew alleys at Sudeley (Blandings) Castle  
(Photo by Andrea Jacobsen)



those used by Miss Jekyll in her chapter on the famous topiary gardens at Levens (p.86). He begins with the opening sentence of her third paragraph: “No doubt many of the yews have taken forms other than those that were originally designed.” Then he goes to the middle of her third paragraph and uses her words exactly, omitting only a few phrases:

“Some are like turned chessmen; some might be taken for adaptations of human figures, for one can trace here and there a hat-covered head or a spreading petticoat. Some rise in solid blocks with rounded roof and stemless mushroom finial. These have for the most part arched recesses, forming arbours.”

Lord Emsworth (chap. 1, sec. 1) and Miss Jekyll (‘Summer Flowers’, p.35) have very similar views on flowers, both affirming that the end of June is “the high tide time of summer flowers”. Wodehouse (chap. 6, sec. 4) and Jekyll (‘Hollyhocks at Blyborough’, p.7)

agree completely that head gardeners and florists are quite wrong about hollyhocks, favouring “forms that one cannot but think have for their aim an ideal that is a false and unworthy one”. Wodehouse uses this and several other of Miss Jekyll’s phrases with very little change when describing the hollyhocks preferred by Lord Emsworth, but he does amplify with graphic effect, as when he adds to Miss Jekyll’s “the flower must be very tight and very round” the words “like the uniform of a major-general”.

Gertrude Jekyll and her book *Some English Gardens* clearly played an important part in the creation of one of the finest gardens in English literature.

*This is an abbreviated version of an article that first appeared in Notes and Queries, March 2008. Gertrude Jekyll’s Some English Gardens (London, Longmans & Co., 1904) was republished as Classic English Gardens (New York, Studio Editions, 1995).*



## Letters to the Editor

### Reactions, Questions, and Thoughts from Our Readers

#### From John Hillary

With all respect to Norman Murphy, and his review of the radio play ‘How to Be an Internee with No Previous Experience’, one must remember it is ultimately a work of fiction. One also remembers PGW was the victim of a poisonous Celt who has been followed by many more, the most recent of which is a certain Damian McBride. I cannot believe that a person of Wodehouse’s character and breeding would in any circumstances burst into tears.

#### From Harry Grove

Recent events inspired me to buy and read and laugh aloud at *Money for Nothing* – vintage Plum that I had not read before. With vintage Plum you can quote almost every sentence, but I thought the following apposite for today: “A youth and middle-age spent on the London Stock Exchange had left Lester Carmody singularly broad-minded. He had to a remarkable degree that spacious charity which allows a man to look indulgently on any financial projects, however fishy, provided he can see a bit in it for himself.”

#### From Dr Dilip Joshi

Seeing Dr. Shashi Tharoor on the front page (*Wooster Sauce*, March 2009) would make any Indian reader proud, and I am no exception. Of course, reading the speech can never be the same as listening to it in person, but Dr. Tharoor made a good job of it. There were, however, some inadvertent omissions in his remarks on Wodehouse and India.

Armine, second of the four Wodehouse brothers (Plum was the third), went out to India after leaving

Oxford and, while there, joined the Theosophists. In 1911 he was appointed President of the Theosophical College at Benares, and there he was known to have tutored Krishnamoorthy, a great Indian philosopher and thinker. He presumably held the post till the onset of the First World War, when he returned to England to join the Scots Guards. For some period he also taught at the Deccan College, Poona. Plum’s younger brother Dick also had a brief spell in India before going on to China. (I am deeply indebted to Christine Hewitt and Norman Murphy, who unearthed this little-known information for me.)

My own town Poona (spelt as Poonah) and Bangalore are mentioned a couple of times in Wodehouse’s stories, and we know Bertie’s Wooster’s sister was to stay with him when she and her daughters came back from India. Captain Biggar, the big-game hunter, had two close friends back in the East – Major Tubby Frobisher and Subahdar. The latter, I would like to believe, is a misnomer for Subhedar, an Indian surname as well as a rank in the Indian army. This is, by no means, to disparage or belittle Dr. Tharoor’s effort but merely a desire to add nuggets to the trove.

#### From Murray Hedgcock

I have long felt that we know too little about the Efficient Baxter, despite the significant part he plays in Wodehouse. For starters: did he go to a minor public school? Or was he a grammar school product? I’m sure Wodehouseans more familiar with the English education system than I am, can read between the lines – or the lines themselves – and proffer informed assessments.

# Wodehouse on the Boards

by Tony Ring

By the time this edition of *Wooster Sauce* reaches our members, one production of a Wodehouse play will have come and gone, while another will have enjoyed its first month or so in repertory.

Following its nationwide tour last year, *Come On, Jeeves* was selected by the Quay Theatre, Sudbury, Suffolk, to be one of their 2009 productions. Director Richard Fawcett saw the touring show in Chelmsford last March and very much enjoyed it, though he says he wasn't greatly influenced by it in preparations for his own production, which were already well in hand.

The Quay Theatre can draw on a fairly deep pool of performers, encouraging new blood by open and fair auditions and looking to the young persons' drama staged at the Quay as a potential part of that new blood. A fair number of their potential actors have had – or will go on to have – professional experience, but most are amateurs. The cast for *Come On, Jeeves* did all have considerable performing experience.

Richard added that the cast hugely enjoyed rehearsals – a comment which one always seems to receive in relation to Wodehousean theatre – and anticipated that they would hugely enjoy the production, which opened on 28 April.

Meanwhile, rehearsals were also starting for the production by the Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, of Giles Havergal's adaptation of *Summer Lightning*, being staged alongside Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in its three-play repertory season. There will be a total of 56 performances between early June and early November; the theatre has a capacity of some 380 seats.

Director Ian Forrest first spotted the potential of *Summer Lightning* in 2004, when reading a review of the Northampton production. As he is always looking

for comedies and scripts with a light entertainment factor, he obtained a copy of the play, liked it, and thought it had a great feel. So he kept it on a shelf for some years waiting for the right opportunity to do it. This year, he said, it fitted in with the rest of the programme.

Ian explained that the site contains two theatres; there is also a smaller Studio theatre which features more modern, challenging, controversial works. He added that the theatres operate all year round and stage

more than 600 performances annually, including visiting work as well as home-grown productions. Experience has shown that in the summer, though, many of the visitors will be looking to relax after a day's fell-walking, with evening entertainment which does not unduly tax their brains!

The Theatre by the Lake has a company of 15 actors who will each play in three of the six productions being shown in repertory over the summer, three in each theatre. It is a fully professional company, and many of the actors have played at Keswick in the past. Indeed, because this is the tenth anniversary of the theatre in its present form, Ian actively invited some past

members of the company to play a return season. He pointed out that casting for a rep season causes different problems to casting for a specific play, as the actors in the company have to be flexible enough to take what might be three very different roles.

We offer the cast, director, and other personnel involved our best wishes, and hope that they enjoy the production as much as their audiences will. The box office telephone number is 017687 74411, and it is open between 9.30 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. every day; or tickets may be booked online at [www.theatrebythelake.co.uk](http://www.theatrebythelake.co.uk). A review of the production will be published in the September issue of *Wooster Sauce*.



*Summer Lightning* plays at Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, this summer.

# Our Wodehouse Adventure

by Anne Soutry

Last November, Richard Heard and I decided to pop over to New York for a bit of a pre-Christmas pick-me-up. We were staying in a hotel overlooking Central Park, and it rather epitomised the description ‘faded glory’ – probably dating back to better days as seen by P G Wodehouse!

To break up the shopping tedium (Richard’s words, not mine), we thought that a trip to see where PGW lived on Long Island would be just the ticket. Having looked at the train times, lazy Richard organised a private car to ferry us to and from the town of Remsenburg on Long Island. This is how we met Jesse Gullatt, our ‘peak-capped’ chauffeur of African.-Caribbean parentage, who reminded us very much of the character in the movie *Driving Miss Daisy*. Once we had explained our intentions to drive the two-and-a-half hours to Remsenburg, Long Island, to seek a bungalow and a grave, this wonderful man could not have been more helpful and really entered into the spirit of the adventure. Jesse had never heard of Wodehouse, but by the time we hit Long Island, our chauffeur was fully appraised of the delights of Plum’s works – although he did remain pretty confused on the attributes of the Empress of Blandings. We may have gone a notch too far on our rambling accounts of PG’s various story lines!

Our directions (kindly supplied by Elin Murphy) took us to the quaintly named Basket Neck Lane, which has the delightful Remsenburg Community Church on the corner. Further down the lane we found the Wodehouses’ old bungalow and, having stared at it for a bit, decided that it barely qualified as a proper



Jesse and Richard by PGW’s gravestone

residence for the great man. PG used to swim most mornings in the local creek (Fish Creek), and we had a very enjoyable walk through autumn leaves down to the inlet. It had been very cold for several days, and on this bright, sunny afternoon there was a veneer of ice across the surface of the water, giving a rather mystical and magical backdrop to where the Bard of Remsenburg had his dip before doing his ‘daily dozen’. On returning to the bungalow, Richard was slightly horrified when I crept into the garden and collected some leaves. However, it is rather nice to now view them on the bookshelf in London and remember our visit!



Remsenburg Community Church, where Sir Pelham and Lady Wodehouse are buried

Jesse then drove us to the post office where PG used to walk every day. It was rather a cute building, and we wondered whether the present-day customers had any idea of the existence of the great man and the significance of this post office in his daily routine.

We then went to find PG’s grave in the cemetery at the end of Basket Neck Lane, and good fortune took us quickly to his graveside. (Yes – there is an error on his gravestone – but you’ll have to go and find it yourselves!). Jesse insisted on having his photograph taken next to PG, and then we thought we would test him further by asking him to drive us to the Bide-A-Wee Pet Cemetery where many of the Wodehouse pets were buried.

At this point I was about to be consumed by an inappropriate fit of giggles, so we decided to make our way back to the Big Apple. We left an exhausted Jesse to tell his friends about these mad English people he had met, and had they heard the one about the eggs, beans, and crumpets . . . ?



The bungalow on Basket Neck Lane



# The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

## 50 Issues of New Wodehouse Books

Earlier this year, *Wooster Sauce* Editor Elin Murphy informed me that June's journal would be the 50th issue, and much would be made of that fact. I therefore felt duty bound to look back over the new books by, about, or featuring Wodehouse which have been reviewed in the first 49 issues. The very first issue of *Wooster Sauce* (WS1, March 1997) set the tone for what was to follow, with John Fletcher's magnificent summary of Margaret Drabble's *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*: "Those who love PGW have already found the best possible companion to English literature, but if they should want to know more about the writers he refers to, this handy volume will do nicely."

Taking a thematic rather than chronological approach, however, the books reviewed in *Wooster Sauce* can be grouped into five broad categories, as below.

### **Books by Wodehouse**

Three series of uniform editions have been commissioned over the period. WS8 (Dec. 1998) reported the impending launch of Penguin's new reprints, with David Hitch's covers. Penguin's Kate Jones revealed: "The design of the covers was inspired by original jackets of hardback editions, particularly the American *The Ice In The Bedroom*." WS14 (June 2000) covered the launch of the Everyman edition ("an ambitious new uniform hardback edition which plugs what Ukridge would surely call 'a gap in the market, laddie'"), and WS41 (March 2007) announced that Arrow Books were to publish 43 titles in paperback when Penguin's licence expired in 2008.

For aficionados, of greater interest was the book publication of material previously only available in more or less obscure magazines. 1997 was an *annus mirabilis*, with *The Luck Stone* and *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere* being published in advance of the *Concordance* school stories volume (see Reference section). Tim Andrew reviewed the former in WS2 (June 1997): "The action moves at a cracking pace and the writing is calculated to grip the reader." Ruth Dudley Edwards described the latter in WS4 (Dec. 1997) as "a beautifully produced, first edition of a collection of splendidly obscure stories (complete with original illustrations). . . . Enthusiasts as daft as us will revel in all twenty-five of these school stories."

Even more obscure was the origin of *A Prince for Hire*, reviewed by Malachy Cornwell-Kelly in WS26 (June 2003) as "a good story, well told as you would expect, and perfectly adapted no doubt to the tastes of the readers of *The Illustrated Love Magazine*, in which the text first appeared in 1931".

A more minor item was Elliott Erwit's *DogDogs*, containing one of Wodehouse's last essays, 'About My Friends'; it was reviewed in WS8 (Dec. 1998) as "a cheap way, at £6.95, to obtain an elusive Wodehouse essay".

### **Biography**

Two full biographies were published in the period, together

with three books examining specific aspects of Wodehouse's life. The first to appear was Roderick Easdale's *The Novel Life of P G Wodehouse*, which Tony Ring in WS30 (June 2004) said was "meticulous in separating the facts from the fiction which many of [the existing biographical] publications contain".

The main event, however, was Robert McCrum's *Wodehouse: A Life*, reviewed in WS31 (Sep. 2004) by Stephen Fry: "No lover of Wodehouse will want to be without this masterly appraisal of the good life of a good man." Further reviews on specific aspects appeared in WS32 (Dec. 2004), by Norman Murphy (on fact to fiction), Iain Sproat (the wartime broadcasts), Eddie Grabham (Hollywood), and Nigel Rees (the wordsmith).

WS32 (Dec. 2004) provided details of Linda Newell's *Emsworth's Plum*, a booklet dealing with Wodehouse's connections with Emsworth. WS39 (Sep. 2006) contained Eddie Grabham's review of Brian Taves's *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood* – "a rewarding critical appraisal of the various ways in which Wodehouse influenced and contributed to screens both big and small".

In WS47 (Sep. 2008) your columnist reviewed Jan Piggott's *Dulwich College: A History 1616–2008* ("Quite simply, Jan has written the definitive history of Dulwich College . . . an outstanding book"), which contained new information on Wodehouse and his association with Dulwich never previously published. And in this 50th issue (p.19), Murray Hedgcock reviews a new book, *P G Wodehouse: The Unknown Years*, by Baroness Reinhild von Bodenhausen. Also just published is *The Inimitable P. G. Wodehouse*, by Mark Hichens (see p.9), yet to be reviewed.

### **Bibliography**

Sadly, there have only been two publications in this area! WS20 (Dec. 2001) included your columnist's review of the *Addendum to McIlvaine* ("fills a long-felt want. Every home should have one").

WS35 (Sep. 2005) contained an anonymous review of *P.G. Wodehouse's Colonial Editions*, compiled by John Loder with Bill Matthews, and published in Australia: "The booklet's sub-title is *Some First British Editions in their Colonial Issue Formats & Other Editions of Australian Interest*, which provides a pretty good summary of its contents. . . . It is so much more informative than any other bibliography regarding the colonial editions that it is an essential tool for any collector with the relevant interest."

### **Reference**

Three definitive works appeared in the period, from Messrs Ring and Jaggard, Day, and Murphy.

During the early years of *Wooster Sauce* there was the annual addition to Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard's *The Wodehouse Millennium Concordance* to which to look forward. WS5 (March 1998) contained your columnist's review of the fourth volume, *Wodehouse Goes to School* –

“the best yet. 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.” WS9 (March 1999) saw Godfrey Smith of *The Sunday Times* review *Wodehouse at Blandings Castle*, “this magisterial new fifth volume of the mighty eight-part *Wodehouse Concordance*”. WS12 (Dec. 1999) noted the appearance of volume 6, *Wodehouse in Woostershire*. Volume 7, *Wodehouse with Old Friends*, was reviewed by William Dennison in WS17 (March 2001) – “combines good fun with good scholarship”; and finally, WS19 (Sep. 2001) noted the appearance of the eighth and final volume, “the longest book of all”, *Wodehouse with New Friends*.

Rex Bunnett reviewed Barry Day’s 489-page *The Complete Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse* in WS30 (June 2004): “a compulsive read . . . it is obvious that [Wodehouse’s] great love was lyric writing.”

WS41 (March 2007) carried reviews of Norman Murphy’s *A Wodehouse Handbook: The World and Words of P.G. Wodehouse*. The banner headline summed it up perfectly: “The Handbook to End All Handbooks.” Volume 1 (*The World*) was reviewed by Murray Hedgcock, quoting Lord Bittlesham to Rosie M. Banks: “You go from strength to strength. This – this is your bravest and best.” Volume 2 (*The Words*) was reviewed by David Landman: “. . . every bit as entertaining, lively and light-hearted [and] as compellingly readable as Volume 1.”

In WS25 (March 2003) David Herboldt reviewed Richard Usborne’s *Plum Sauce*, which was essentially a reprint of parts of Usborne’s earlier writings: “For those lucky enough to be exploring [Wodehouse’s] work for the first time, it is an excellent compilation.”

For completeness, mention should be made of your columnist’s review of Rowland Ryder’s *Cricket Calling* in WS3 (Sep. 1997). The main chapter of interest is ‘The Unplayable Jeeves’.

### Anthology

This section contains four anthologies, two of which (by Murray Hedgcock, and by Barry Day and Tony Ring) could have been included in the Biography section.

Henry Blofeld reviewed Murray Hedgcock’s *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, a collection of Wodehouse’s cricketing writings with an introduction detailing his connection with the game, in WS4 (Dec. 1997): “Murray Hedgcock has done . . . a great service. By bringing so many of his cricket offerings together, we are able to appreciate the better his skill as a writer about the game.”

Lindsey Davis reviewed *What Ho! The Best of P.G. Wodehouse*, the anthology compiled using the results of voting by Wodehouse societies worldwide, in WS13 (March 2000): “It combines the beauties of imagination, construction and language with the usefulness of a tonic.”

*In His Own Words*, a collection of Wodehouse’s thoughts on many aspects of his life and the world at large, compiled by Barry Day and Tony Ring, was reviewed by Chris Makey in WS21 (March 2002) as “an informative and entertaining view of [Wodehouse’s] life”.

Finally, Cyril Patrick Hershon reviewed Tony Ring’s *The Wit and Wisdom of P.G. Wodehouse* in WS45 (March 2008): “Dip where you will, Tony’s little book is full of felicities.”

It can be seen that the last 12 years have witnessed the publication of a wide range of material. What of the next 12 years? We already know (WS41, March 2007) that Sophie Ratcliffe is editing an authoritative new volume of Wodehouse’s letters for publication by Hutchinson in 2009, and that John Dawson (WS49, March 2009) is writing a book tentatively titled *P. G. Wodehouse, The Early Years 1900–1910, A Literary History*. Beyond that, the crystal ball becomes cloudy. However, based on previous experience, it seems likely that we can look forward to a regular flow of books.

## We Remember: Sir Nicholas Henderson

by Edward Cazalet

The Society notes with sadness the death of a former Patron, Sir Nicholas Henderson, who died on the 16th March last at the age of 89 years. Known as ‘Nico’ and renowned for his brilliant insight into events on the international front, he was a long-time diplomatic figure on the world stage, becoming particularly well-known during the Falklands War in 1982. After duty in a variety of the top ambassadorial posts and as Britain’s Ambassador to Washington (1979–82), he had the unenviable task of explaining the British side of the argument with Argentina to both the U.S. Government and the American people, and of obtaining U.S. support. So successful was he that the U.S. Defence Secretary, Caspar Weinberger, even offered the use of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier.

Sir Nicholas was a good friend of Ronald Reagan and had a vast circle of national and international acquaintances. A strong devotee of Wodehouse, he took real pleasure in exploring and browsing through the Cazalet Wodehouse Archive, and he attended many dinners and Society events, including the unveiling of the blue plaque at 17 Dunraven Street in June 1988. On this latter occasion, he made a brilliant speech, concluding by saying that in difficult diplomatic situations, he generally aspired to be a mixture of Bertie and Jeeves.

The Society wishes to extend its condolences to Sir Nicholas’s family.



Nico Henderson (far left) chats with Edward Cazalet and Patrick Wodehouse at Dunraven Street, June 1988.

# Two Audiobook Reviews

by Tony Ring

The recording and publication of audio-recordings of Wodehouse books continues apace both legitimately, in the UK, and with uncertain copyright implications in the United States and elsewhere. Members are reminded that, in Europe at least, all Wodehouse's writing will remain in copyright until 2045, and contracts must be entered into for audio-recordings to be sold here. The status of many of the supposed bargain downloads offered on the internet is extremely dubious, at least as far as Europe is concerned.

Fortunately, both series of authorised recordings – the abridged and unabridged readings – are sufficiently commercially successful for the publishers to produce new titles on a regular basis, read by actors who are not only experienced, but have a genuine and long-standing love for Wodehouse's work.

Both Jonathan Cecil and Martin Jarvis, the two readers, feature elsewhere in this edition of *Wooster Sauce* with articles of their own as a practical demonstration of their commitment to Wodehouse.

CSA Telltapes, the relative newcomers, have concentrated on abridged novels, several of which are in the Blandings series. *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* took seven-and-a-half hours when it was recorded, unabridged, by Jonathan Cecil some years ago; the CSA abridgement read by Martin Jarvis lasts about five hours. That is a modest abridgement by historic standards, and it ensures that there is plenty of room for all the subplots and much of Wodehouse's entertaining narrative as well.

The full richness and complexity of the plot is retained in this recording. Jarvis handles the complexities with his usual accuracy, and the listener is able to follow the plot's development and understand who is speaking at any one time without any problems. One can certainly believe in his Duke of Dunstable and Uncle Fred, who are amongst the characters given most of the dialogue. He also provides appropriate younger voices for the Pongos and Polly Potts of the story.

Jonathan Cecil's unabridged *The Heart of a Goof* – the collection of nine golf stories – follows on from his *The Clicking of Cuthbert* recorded in 2007. Strangely, the playing time for *The Heart of a Goof* is shown as a full hour longer, although based on book length alone one would expect about 40 minutes. If Jonathan was speaking more slowly on this recording, it is certainly not evident. His Oldest Member is a convincing voice, and he has the authority to distinguish between characters throughout the book.

Reading short stories is very different from reading novels, for virtually the entire cast of characters can change from one to another, and it is inevitable that there will be some similarity in the voices used for them. But then, listening to a volume of short stories can be very different from listening to a novel. A single story will happily absorb the odd 40 minutes of spare time, whereas a decision to listen to an eight-hour novel all the way through can take some planning. If you know

the book, it can be pleasant background listening instead of music; it can while away a long car journey; it can be almost subliminally absorbed through headphones while sunbathing on a lazy holiday. Or for the more unfortunate amongst us, it can help to pass the time whilst confined to a bed in a sick bay at home or in hospital. But the stories in *The Heart of a Goof* are definitely designed to dip

into one at a time when less time is available, and like the book itself, the recording is recommended with that policy in mind.

*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, CSA Telltapes

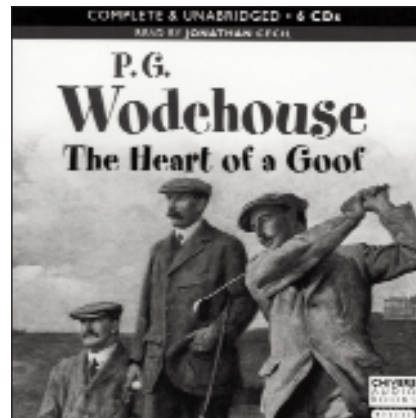
ISBN 9781906147303; see <http://www.csaword.co.uk>.

Note: CSA has just produced *The Inimitable Jeeves* (an unabridged version, issued in April) and *Pigs Have Wings* (June). Right Ho, Jeeves will be issued in July and *Service with a Smile* in November.

*The Heart of a Goof*, BBC Audiobooks

ISBN 9781405624725; see <http://www.bbcshop.com>.

See page 22 for further information on BBC Audiobooks.



There is nothing that so braces a young man in love as a statement on the part of the girl of his dreams, after events have occurred which have made him think her ardour has begun to cool, that he is the only man for her, and that though she may have attended dances in the company of Zulu warriors, the latter are to be looked on as the mere playthings of an idle hour.

(From *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, 1939)



## Cabaret Girl

A review by Gus Caywood

In March the Musicals Tonight! series presented, in a staged reading at the McGinn/Cazale Theatre, the New York premiere of *Cabaret Girl*.

*The Cabaret Girl* (as it is properly called) marked Plum's successful 1922 London reunion with Jerome Kern. They had worked together in London for a brief stint in 1906 and then, famously, in the New York Princess Theatre musicals in the late teens. The Princess Theatre musicals, anchored by Plum's great friend Guy Bolton as librettist, had revolutionized the American musical. Bolton wasn't on hand in London for *The Cabaret Girl*; instead, Plum wrote the book and lyrics with the help of George Grossmith, another frequent collaborator.

Librettos were never Plum's strong suit, and *The Cabaret Girl* lacks some of the flow and espièglerie of such Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern classics as *Have a Heart* and *Oh, Boy!* The Musicals Tonight! production, hampered by a warmish theatre and a running time of almost three hours, dragged a bit.

Nevertheless, the show had points to commend it to Wodehouseans. The dialogue and comic numbers were often entertaining. There were references to familiar Wodehouse motifs such as get-rich-quick chicken-farm egg-production schemes. There was a sketch in which two comic characters discussed the sport of fly-hunting, drawn from a piece Plum had written for *Vanity Fair* in 1916 (later recycled as 'A Day with the Swattessmore' in Plum's 1932 book *Louder and Funnier*, and again as a 1957 article for *Rex Magazine*).

Kern's score sparkled frequently and illustrated his own talent for recycling. A notable example was the beautiful 'The Pergola Patrol', which Kern and Wodehouse later revised for use in New York as the opening number in *Sitting Pretty*. ("Oh, is this not a model spot?" became "Oh, is this not a lovely spot?" in the latter show.)

The spirited and talented cast handled the material well. Standouts included the personnel of the song-publishing firm Grippe and Gravvins: Mark Woodard and Jackson Ross Best, Jr. as the comic pair Mr. Grippe and Mr. Gravvins, and Patricia Noonan as their super-competent secretary Effie, who managed to keep the firm afloat.

## The Origin of 'Printer's Error'

In February, Penelope Forrest wrote to say that she had come across the following in chapter 7, part 3 of *Service with a Smile* (1961): "The hatchet that looked like a dissipated saw would not have seemed to her [Lady Constance] barely adequate." This was clearly a misprint for "would now have seemed", and it reminded Penelope of PGW's 'Printer's Error' in *Plum Pie*, where he bemoaned that his "Ruth, ripening into womanhood, / Was now a girl who knocked men flat . . ." had become "was not a girl".

Penelope wondered whether Wodehouse had a specific Ruth in mind, and so she spent "a delightful afternoon" hunting through the canon. The only Ruths she could find were 'Ruth in Exile' (*The Man Upstairs*) and Ruth Bannister in *The Coming of Bill*, and neither story gave any clue. So, she asks, what provoked the poem?

Norman Murphy reckons that since 'Printer's Error' first appeared on November 1, 1954, in the *Punch Almanack* for 1955, the source might be in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (October 1954), *Performing Flea* (October 1953), or *Bring On the Girls* (October 1953). Or maybe it was in the 23 pieces he had done for *Punch* from May 1953 to October 1954?

Tony Ring points out that Penelope must have read a Herbert Jenkins edition of *Service with a Smile* since the American first edition has the correct "would now have seemed". But, he adds, *Pigs Have Wings* (chapter 1, section 2) of October 1952 (only two years before) has: "'Income tax!' cried Lord Emsworth, staring like a war horse at the sound of the bugle" –which should clearly be "starting like". And, just a few pages on, at section 4, Penny Donaldson says she has keep off deadbeats with a stick "since I ripened into womanhood".

Is Tony right, or does somebody out there have a better solution? Let us know – the world is waiting.

### Wodehouse Whimsy 2



Here's another drawing by the talented Siân Jones, this time envisioning Mike and Psmith.

# Poet's Corner

## Joe

Don't call him much of a dog, sir? Don't like his looks much? No?  
Well, he ain't a perfeshional beauty. He's all against pride and show.  
But though in his veins there doesn't run a drop of thoroughbred blood,  
He won us our annual match one year *versus* Chickenham-infra-Mud.

We men of Pigbury-super-Splosh were a sporting sort of crowd,  
And our skill at cricket was a thing of which we all were especial proud.  
Bowlers? My word, I believe you, sir! And we batted above a bit:  
We'd run up a total of thirty sometimes. Yes, and not think much of it!

Well Joe (that's Joe) would sit and look on from the start to the end of a match.  
I've seen that dog, sir, howl with rage when a feller missed a catch.  
And when young Giles ran Higgins out when we wanted one to tie,  
He waited for Giles inside the tent, and took a bit out of his thigh.

Well, this match what I'm going to tell you about. The enemy won the toss,  
And in less than an hour two of their cracks had knocked up five without loss.  
But old Farmer Brown was our umpire. 'E knew what he stood there for!  
They was both of them l-b-w before they could make any more.



The wickets began to fall quite fast, for Farmer Brown was in form,  
Till their hitter went in, and things began once more to get precious warm.  
But lunch-time came, with the score at twelve, and brought us a moment's rest;  
For you know what luncheon is, sir – a trap and a snare for the best.

We took that hitter, and did him proud. We filled up his mug with beer:  
And we didn't begrudge him his drop of gin, for all that it's rather dear.  
And by the time that play was resumed he was fast asleep on a seat,  
And we went and we wrote "Retired Hurt" to his name on the scoring-sheet.

Well, the game wore on, and they came and went, and each of them did his share,  
Till the last man came, and he hit a ball a long way up in the air:  
Johnson and Pratt they ran for the catch, and missed it clean, but lor!  
That didn't matter to Farmer Brown. He gave him out leg-before.

Twenty-one was their total score and we thought we could manage that;  
But cricket's a game where it's precious hard to see just where you're at.  
They'd brought an umpire with them, sir, a nasty, swindling lout,  
And right from the start this chap began giving all our best men out!

Higgins, and Giles, and Johnson, too, they melted way like snow.  
I thought we'd have had to have sent for the vet, I did, to attend to Joe.  
Your 'eart would have bled, sir; yes, sir, *bled* if you'd bin a-standing by,  
An' 'ad seen the fury and anguish, mixed, in that pore dumb creature's eye.

The last man in was a nervous chap, and he wore a feeble grin,  
When we sent him out to do his best. We wanted seven to win.  
Well, he shut his eyes, and he took a swipe, and we thought the skies 'ud fall,  
For blowed if that 'ere young nervous chap didn't go and hit the ball!

It rose in the air, and we shouted "Run!" and a fieldsman started in chase:  
But as he was running we thought we saw a curious look on his face;  
And then he stopped, and we wondered why, for the feller looked quite scared.  
And there was old Joe on top of the ball with his teeth all white and bared!

Well, they ran and ran, and the fieldsman yelled, but that didn't disturb old Joe.  
He sat on the ball as much as to say, "Am I downhearted? No!"  
And, just as they'd finished the seventh run, he rose and  
he winked at us,  
And he trotted away with a sort of blush, like he  
didn't want no fuss.

Oh, he ain't a Serciety beauty with a lovely silky  
coat:  
One of his ears is torn a bit. There's a scar or two  
on his throat:  
No, he ain't the sort of dog, maybe, as 'ud win a  
prize at a show,  
But for tact and sense there isn't one as is in the race with Joe.



P G Wodehouse

(From *Pearson's*, May 1907)

## Two Book Reviews

*The Roar of The Butterflies*

Reviewed by **Peter Read**

**Y**ou may well ask what a review of a novel whose hero is a bald, black, redundant lathe operator with questionable dress sense and a middle-aged paunch, who sets himself up as a Private Investigator and who hails from Luton, is doing in these august pages. The clue is in the title, drawn from 'The Clicking of Cuthbert': "He missed short putts because of the uproar of the butterflies in the adjoining meadows."

Although Luton is hardly a Wodehousian setting, Reginald Hill observes in his introduction: "Luton has been generally ignored by literature. It has an airport but, so far as I can ascertain, no hero. Every town needs a hero. So I've given it one."

This is, of course, a story about golf – to be precise a murder story, although, in the hands of the master who conjured up Dalziel and Pascoe, it is not your conventional detective conundrum. The corpse never actually arrives in the book; the humour is gentle but unrelenting, and to my mind reflects Plum on every page: "You know the great Wodehouse of course?" "Woodhouse? Played for the Posh and Grimsby then went into the fight game?" hazarded Joe."

Read it, laugh, and know that the Wodehouse style (with a bit of sex mixed in) lives on. As Hill writes: "A game can't be altogether bad that provided P G Wodehouse with material for some of the funniest stories he wrote, can it?"

*The Roar of the Butterflies*, by Reginald Hill, is published by HarperCollins and is available in paperback for £7.99 at retail stores and Amazon.com.

*G.B.: Master, Monster or Myth?*

Reviewed by **Harry Grove**

**R**eaders, like Plum, who look back on their schooldays with affection will enjoy this book. It is the story of Geoffrey Bolton (1893–1964), who was a

master at the prep school Summer Fields for most of his working life. The author, Nicholas Aldridge, gives an affectionate portrait of an archetype Mr. Chips and of an era that has now surely gone.

G.B.'s two great passions were the Classics (Latin and Greek) and cricket. He was not a great scholar, but he was a fine teacher; equally, he was not a great cricketer, but his love for the game got him in at No.11 even when he was not picking the team. The first of many admirable photographs in the book shows a boy sitting with his hand in the lap of an adjacent master. Both look relaxed. The boy was an outstanding cricketer, which was all that mattered. G.B. had his favourites, but that is the extent of the case against him. Though the book's title suggests that G.B. may have been a monster, there is no support for this in the text.

His taste in literature was impeccable, as shown in the following extract from his autobiography:

Having a statistical mind of a rather silly sort; I tried to calculate how many words I had read to Cubicles [his house] over the years, and I arrived at the impressive total of twenty million. Those were the days of Wodehouse at his best, the vintage years of *Right Ho*, *Jeeves*, of *Summer Lightning*, of *Leave It to Psmith* and of *Money for Nothing*, and the shouts of laughter that rang round Cubicles still linger gratefully on the ear. Once, on the first night of term, I read a brand new Jeeves story from *The Strand* ('Jeeves and the Old School Chum'); anyone coming in would have thought it was the last night of term, for we laughed ourselves nearly silly.

Bolton died in 1964, and the author rightly supposes that, in heaven, he would have been glad to be out of the Sixties. He would have detested helmets, coloured pyjamas, and sledging. His was a life to be envied.

*G.B.: Master, Monster or Myth?* sells for £12.99 and is available at book suppliers or direct from the publisher: [www.ahstockwell.co.uk](http://www.ahstockwell.co.uk); tel.: 01271 862557.



# Recent Press Comment

## From *The Times*, February 21

Philip Howard's 'Literary Quiz' asked readers to say what 'the Broken Compass, the Sewing Machine, the Comet, the Atomic, the Cement Mixer and the Gremlin Boogie' were. (They are the six types of hangover identified by Wodehouse.)

## From *University Challenge*, BBC2, February 23

In this year's Final, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, correctly identified P G Wodehouse as the author who wrote about the Empress of Blandings in a set of bonus questions on 'The Pig in Literature'.

## From *The Statesman*, Kolkata, India, February 26

Carried an enthusiastic summary of PGW's attractions by contributor Aritra Gupta.

## From *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 27 (from Barry Chapman)

A review of Jan Piggott's history of Dulwich College included a list of 'distinguished old boys' which included (of course) P G Wodehouse.

## From *The Independent*, February 28

Discussing the prospects for the Ireland v England rugby match, reporter Sean Diffley recalled Wodehouse's poem about the day the English winger Cyril Lowe, normally so deprived of the ball that he never had a chance to score, actually received a pass.

## From *Time Magazine*, March 6 (from Sushmita Sen Gupta)

In an article entitled 'A Brief History of Hangover Cures', Claire Suddath noted for 1916: "For his first day on the job, P G Wodehouse's fictional valet, Jeeves, whips up a curative of Worcestershire sauce, raw egg and pepper, and is hired on the spot."

## From the *Sacramento Bee*, March 9

This paper was the first to note that an American magazine with the name *Strand* was publishing both a previously unpublished Mark Twain story and a previously unpublished story by Wodehouse in its Spring issue. (It is slightly inaccurate, as the PGW story referred to is 'Providence and the Butler', actually unrepublished between 1910 and 2008.)

## From *Playbill News*, March 16

Noted that John Lithgow was reprising his one-man show in New York in April and May, during which he recites 'Uncle Fred Flits By'.

## From *The Times*, March 17

One of a number of papers to publish an obituary of Society Patron Sir Nicholas Henderson (see p.25).

## From *The Daily Telegraph*, March 18

A reader suggested in a letter that Wodehouse had a perfect answer to those who replied to the question "How are you?" with the reply "I'm good", which had been the subject of recent correspondence: "I was inquiring about your health," his character would say, "not your morality."

## From *The Independent*, March 19

An article about the history of stage Irishmen and phoney Irish accents pointed out that

The very excellent English creation Jeeves and Wooster gets its spot on in an episode where two of the characters, Gussie and Wooster, have to play Irishmen in a village play. Gussie asks, "Why do I have to end every sentence with 'Begorrah'?" Wooster answers, "My dear Gussie, that is how people think Irish people talk."

(It should be noted that this line is from the TV series; the exchange never takes place in the published story.)

## From *BBC Breakfast Programme*, March 25 (from Tony Whittome)

Reported that for a discussion on a survey for the National Year of Reading, Terry Wogan had selected *The Inimitable Jeeves* as his 'feel-good' book and provided a very favourable quotation: "I'm never without P G Wodehouse by my bedside table. I read him and reread him, even when I'm reading something else. His brilliant plotting, his wit, his wonderful use of language, lift my spirits, and always bring a smile. Along with Flann O'Brien Wodehouse is the author who can still make me laugh out loud, no matter how many times I turn to him."

## From *Financial Times*, March 28/29 (from A. Kinnear)

In an article on inequality, John

Lloyd described the London Chamber of Commerce as "Sounding like a Jeeves gone demented" in its advice to businesses to "consider asking their staff not to dress in a suit and tie".

## From *The Times*, March 31

An article about cryptic crosswords reminded readers that it had irked Wodehouse to learn that the Provost of Eton would time his lightly boiled breakfast egg by

### PGW and the *Telegraph*

Jo Jacobius writes: "Is The P G Wodehouse Society taking over the *Telegraph*? I think we should be told." Indeed, it sometimes seems that PGW's name appears more often in the *Telegraph* than in other newspapers. Following up an April 26 *Sunday Telegraph* article on British honesty, in which was mentioned Wodehouse's claimed habit of dropping stamped letters in the street for honest folks to post, reporters conducted an experiment. Fifty stamped and coded letters were dropped in four U.K. cities. More than half ended up being posted, with Londoners proving most honest: 10 out of 20 letters were posted, versus 6 out of 10 in Glasgow and York and only 4 out of 10 in Cardiff. These results were published in the *Sunday Telegraph* of May 3, and that same day MP Stephen Pound (who will be the speaker at our meeting in October; see page 7) commented on the project on BBC Radio 4. Sophie Ratcliffe, editor of the forthcoming book of Wodehouse letters, noted that Wodehouse never did toss letters out of his window; "he borrowed the story from a friend" (Fred Thompson). Jo wonders if the Society should offer corporate membership to the *Telegraph*!

the time it took him to solve the *Times* crossword.

**From *The Beverley Bee* (Minnesota), March 31**

Reported that its local library had embraced the internet so that its customers could download audiobooks. One of the leading downloaded titles in February was *Carry On, Jeeves*.

**From *The Guardian*, April 2**

Previewed Alan Ayckbourn's appearance on the Radio 4 programme *With Great Pleasure* by noting his choice of Pinter, Milne, Belloc, Waugh, and Wodehouse for his favourite readings.

**From *The Book Examiner*, April 2**

Included 'Anything' by Wodehouse in their list of the 10 funniest books of all time. Series by Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams were also treated as single entries, but otherwise single volumes (e.g., from Kingsley Amis and Jerome K Jerome) were selected.

**From *The Sunday Times of Sri Lanka*, April 5**

(from Edward Cazalet)  
Reviewed the new book *P G Wodehouse – The Unknown Years* by Baroness Reinhild von Bodenhausen (see p.19).

**From *Seven Magazine*, *Sunday Telegraph*, April 19**

An article on William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon estate in California included PGW's famous account of finding himself further from the middle of the table each night until he got to the end, "when I thought it was time to leave".

**From *The Daily Telegraph*, April 21**

(from Carolyn de la Plain)  
In an article on the decline in letter-writing as a result of the internet, Christopher Howse argued that romantic correspondence has no place in the digital era, and suggested that the worst kind of love letters come from the Madeline Bassett school of sentimentality. "Well, I mean to say, when a girl suddenly asks you out of a blue sky if you don't sometimes feel that the stars are God's daisy-chain, you begin to think," as Bertie Wooster said.

**From *Halesowen News*, April 25**

Reported that among the favourite pieces of writing read out by pupils at the Earls High School as part of the global Big Read event were examples by Bob Dylan, Douglas Adams, T S Eliot, J K Rowling, and P G Wodehouse.

**From *The Trinidad and Tobago Express*, April 25**

Much of an article about great writers who liked cricket, written by Tony Deyal (who admits to quoting Wodehouse to his media colleagues), was devoted to Wodehouse, with significant mentions also for Pinter, Beckett, Stoppard, and Rattigan. He even reproduced a stanza from PGW's cricket poem 'Missed'.

**From *The Times*, April 28**

A feature on the proposal for a £1,000 allowance from the government when old bangers are scrapped included a charming story about Anjana Ahuja and her Austin Vanden Plas 1300, which she had named 'Spode', after the Wodehouse character. He broke down eight times in 18 months, but she couldn't bring

herself to dispose of him. The article ended: "And what of Spode? It was love at first sight for Spode's new owner. Which was just as well, since the door handle fell off as he drove it away."

**From [John Lewis] *Gazette*, May 1**

(from Christine Hewitt)  
In its 'Statattack #11' (eye-catching statistics linking numbers with facts), 31 was stated to be the "Number of short stories that P G Wodehouse wrote about golf".

**From *Daily Telegraph*, May 1** (from John Hodgson)

An account of the French Open included the thought that "Many a PG Wodehouse character used to fozzle in the presence of a pretty girl". In the theatre review section, the plays of Ben Travers were compared Wodehouse's "sublime comic novels".

**From *Sunday Times*, May 3**

In the *Bookwise* quiz about the identity of characters named James, one clue was: "Lord Emsworth despaired when his prize pig refused all food. But this vicar's son, during an American tour, had learnt the complicated musical Pig Hooey call, which persuades pigs to eat. He won her owner's gratitude – and a bride." (The answer was James Belford.)

**From *Detroit Free Press*, May 7**

Carried a very positive review of the new production of *By Jeeves* at Meadow Brook Theatre, concluding with the comment: "This production proves that *By Jeeves* is more than a musical theater footnote. It's economical to stage and apparently as much fun to perform as it is to watch."

**From *The Times*, May 9**

One question in Philip Howard's 'Literary Quiz' was headed 'Old Florentians' and asked, "What do Bertie Wooster, Stilton Cheesewright and Boko Fittleworth have in common?" The answer was that they were the "known ex-fiancés of Florence Craye".

**From *Sunday Times*, May 10**

In the 'Bookwise' quiz about the identity of husbands or their associates, one clue was: "In America, suddenly a rich heiress, this girl was advised by the actress Gladys Winch, wife of the actor-manager Filmore: 'Chumps always make the best husbands. When you marry, grab a chump. Tap his forehead first, and if it rings solid, don't hesitate. All the unhappy marriages come from husbands having brains.'" (The answer was Sally Nicholas, in *The Adventures of Sally*, by Wodehouse.)

**From *Times Online*, May 15**

Patrick Kidd's blog mentioned his connection with the Society, the upcoming Gold Bats game against the Dulwich Masters, and a website that provides random Wodehouse quotes – "sheer silly brilliance".

**From *Daily Telegraph*, May 19**

An article on an MP's purchase of a trouser press quoted Bertie and Jeeves on whether trousers matter ("The mood will pass, sir") and offered a very obscure PGW reference when it quoted Lady Wetherby (*Uneasy Money*): "Every man who has had his trousers pressed is a social gangster."

# Future Events for Your Diary

## June 5 – November 6, 2009 *Summer Lightning*

Theatre by the Lake in Keswick, Cumbria, is putting on a production of *Summer Lightning*, adapted by Giles Harvergal.. See page 22 for a related article.

## July 5, 2009 **Cricket at Charterhouse School**

Members of the Gold Bats will play the Intellectuals at Charterhouse School; start time is 2 p.m.

## July 7, 2009 **Society Meeting**

We will meet from 6 p.m. at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street; Simon Brett will be our speaker. Norman Murphy will conduct an abbreviated Wodehouse Walk prior to the meeting; see page 7 for details.

## July 22, 2008 **Cricket in Kent**

Members of the Gold Bats will play together with the Siegfried Sassoon Society at Matfield, Kent, starting at 2 p.m. There is a golf outing on the 21st; contact Bob Miller for details.

## August 2, 2009 **Cricket in Hertfordshire**

Members of the Gold Bats will play the Stage Cricket Club. Contact Bob Miller for details.

## August 9, 2008 **Gold Bats v Kirby Strollers**

This now-annual charity match will take place in the grounds of Audley End House, near Saffron Walden; start time is 1 p.m. For directions to Audley End, see <http://tinyurl.com/2ewtht>.

## September 29, 2009 **Members' Private Viewing at Heywood Hill Exhibition**

Society members are invited to a special viewing of an exhibition at Heywood Hill Bookshop, Curzon Street, London. See page 5 for details.

## October 13, 2009 **Society Meeting and AGM**

Our annual AGM will take place at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street, from 6 p.m.; the speaker will be Stephen Pound MP. Norman Murphy will conduct another abbreviated Wodehouse Walk; see page 7 for details.

## February 16, July 6, and November 16, 2010 **Society Meetings**

Tentative dates for our 2010 gatherings at the Arts Club, London.

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