

WOOSTER SAUCE

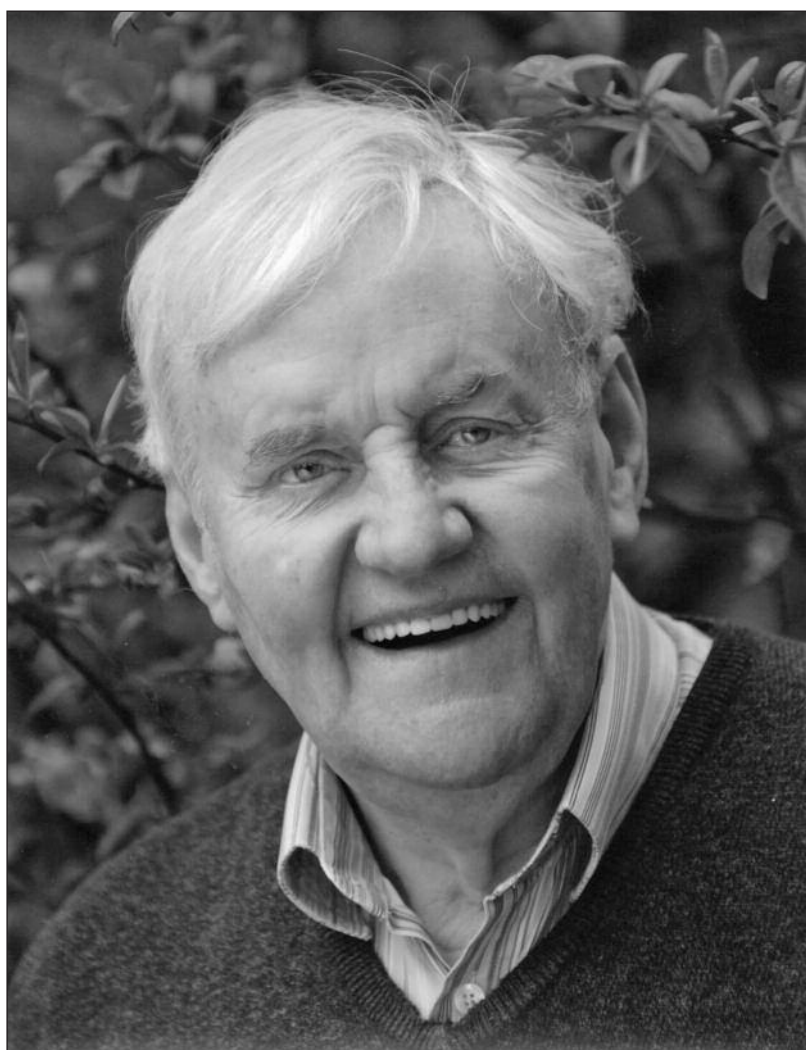
The Quarterly Journal of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

Number 65

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Richard Briers CBE

January 14, 1934–February 17, 2013



As this issue of *Wooster Sauce* was being prepared, word came of the death of the Society's President, the much-loved actor Richard Briers.

In addition to the comedy television roles for which he was justifiably famous – in particular, as Tom Good in *The Good Life* – Richard was a talented and entertaining presence on the stage and big screen. He was known for his work with Kenneth Branagh in several Shakespearean productions, played a wide range of parts in innumerable plays in the West End, and had 122 film and television credits to his name.

Society members know Richard best for his Wodehousean roles, which began with the film *The Girl on the Boat* in 1961. He later played Uncle Fred in the radio version of *Uncle Dynamite* and Bertie Wooster in several radio adaptations and audiotapes. In 1995, in inspired and appropriate casting, he starred as the Hon. Galahad Threepwood in the BBC TV movie *Heavy Weather*. He was President of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) from its beginning in 1997.

Richard Briers was awarded the OBE in 1989 and the CBE in 2003. He had been happily married since 1957 to the actress Ann Davies, with whom he had two daughters. We extend our deepest sympathy to his family. A fuller tribute will be paid to Richard in the June issue of *Wooster Sauce*.

Important Notice to Standing Order Payers

If you receive a Standing Order form with this issue, it means that, according to our records, you have not changed your Standing Order to the new subscription of £22.

If you have updated your Instruction to Pay online, please tell David Lindsay at dllindsay@gmail.com so we can update your record. Otherwise, please complete the Standing Order form and post it to David, at the address given, *right away!*

Thank you. (See also page 4.)

Plum in Guernsey

by Masha Lebedeva

When making plans for my holidays, I always try to follow in the footsteps of P. G. Wodehouse. Last year, having attended the wonderful Weekend With Wodehouse in Norfolk, I decided to continue east and visit Guernsey in the Channel Islands.

As David Jasen tells us in *P. G. Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master*, it was in 1889 that ‘Pev’, the oldest of the three Wodehouse brothers, was found to have a weak chest. Since sea air was the recommended remedy, his parents decided to send all three boys to Elizabeth College in Guernsey. “Why Armine and I had to go too I can’t imagine,” Wodehouse remarked to Jasen, “but my parents seemed to like these package deals.”

Jasen continues: “Elizabeth College, Guernsey, was a very small public school catering to no more than one hundred boys. The only place to board was at the headmaster’s residence, and it was there the Wodehouse brothers took up residence.”



Elizabeth College in St Peter Port, Guernsey, where the three older Wodehouse brothers attended school c.1890–92

Wodehouse recollected: “Guernsey in those days was a delightful place full of lovely bays; and as far as I can remember, our movements were never restricted and we were allowed to roam where we liked. My recollections are all of wandering about the island and the awful steamer trips back to England for the holidays. Paddle-wheel steamers, like on the Mississippi – very small and rolling with every wave. It was hell to go back for the holidays at the end of the winter term.” (Unfortunately, and perhaps surprisingly, Wodehouse does not appear to have left us any other memories of Guernsey than this.)

More than a hundred years later, I was blessed that I didn’t need to use a paddle-wheel steamer to reach Guernsey. An hour’s flight saw me landing on the island – and almost immediately taking the wrong bus. This took me on an unexpected but pleasant tour around the coastline, and for only one pound.

After arriving at St Peter Port, the capital of Guernsey, I began with a visit to the house-museum of another great author – Victor Hugo, who spent 15 years in self-imposed exile in Guernsey and wrote *Les Miserables* and *Toilers of the Sea* here.

Although it was the end of the day and I was tired out, I decided not to postpone my visit to Elizabeth College. The weather was glorious; however, the forecast was gloomy and I wanted to photograph the College in sunshine. Thus, I climbed up to the top of the steep hill where it stands – an imposing early 19th-century (1826) building looking down on the port. It was founded on the orders of Queen Elizabeth I in 1563, will celebrate its 450th anniversary this year, and has grown from 100 boys in Wodehouse’s time to 750 pupils today (boys and girls).

Having photographed the building on all sides, I came to the main gate, which bore a notice: “All Visitors Please Report to Reception.” I had written to the College beforehand, asking permission to see the interior, but hadn’t received a reply. Since the gates were now open, I passed through them and came to the main entrance. Here I found a similar notice and had just begun to search for the elusive Reception when a young man got out of a car in front of the building. Looking like Rupert Baxter – bespectacled and efficient – he asked me what I was doing there. I informed him I was a member of The P G Wodehouse Society and, as he probably knew, Wodehouse had been a pupil here. Baxter did know this, and I informed him that, as a Society member, I would be grateful to have a look at the College.

“Inside?” he asked. I assented. “When?”

“Whenever it is possible. I am free till Sunday.”

Baxter mused for a moment or so and said I could visit the College there and then. At this point, we were interrupted by the driver of a car that had come up, and Baxter told him I was a member of The P G Wodehouse Society. The newcomer shook my hand, introduced himself as George Hartley, the principal (headmaster) of the College, and promptly approved Baxter’s decision to allow me to look over the building.

With this, I took my leave of two obviously busy men and proceeded unaccompanied, making my way through the vestibule decorated with plaques commemorating events and former pupils (not Wodehouse), and into the main hall. Here I found waiters in white jackets setting out glasses along the tables, and after I had told them my visit had been approved by the principal, I began to take photographs. Unfortunately, some event was clearly about to take place, since there was a large screen in the middle of the hall, and my pictures had to be restricted to views of sections of the hall, the coats of

arms over the windows, and the glass cases containing sports trophies.

I then plucked up the courage to explore the wings of the building. The College was just about empty, and most of the doors were open. After nearly losing my way up and down the many staircases, I began to fear I would join the two College ghosts. One was a boy who had been locked in detention and then, forgotten during the holidays, had died of starvation; the other was a Nazi soldier during the German Occupation. Eventually I returned to the hall and went to look at the other wing, meeting on the way two ladies, one of whom revealed she had received my original letter asking to visit the College. Given the look in their eyes, I did not ask what had happened to it.

I thought my College visit would be the end of my Wodehousean experience in Guernsey, but the next day proved me wrong. I had written to Sausmarez Manor, the only Stately Home on Guernsey still in private hands, booking a place on their advertised Ghost Tour. The Sausmarez family have been in Guernsey since the 12th century, and in the 17th century one of them was Governor of New York and North Carolina, as well as Virginia and Massachusetts.

The present Manor is a beautiful 18th-century building, and I was lucky enough to meet the Seigneur himself, Peter De Sausmarez. He turned out to be a Wodehouse enthusiast, and we discussed the Wodehouses' time in Guernsey. He confirmed that the three boys would have been taught in the present College building but wondered about the boarding house where the boys lived since he did not know of one. As I did not have Jasen's book with me, I was unable to suggest anywhere, and I was delighted when, after I had returned home, Mr De Sausmarez sent me a copy of a letter he had written to the local newspaper, *The Guernsey Press and Star*, asking if anyone had any information.

I was very happy when a reply arrived almost immediately, from the well-known TV presenter and journalist Bruce Parker, an Old Boy who had published *A History of Elizabeth College* in 2011. He was extremely kind and provided me with a lot of information and scans of some interesting publications. I bought his book, which has a photo of the brothers and mentions Wodehouse twice. It is thanks to Mr Parker that some detective work was accomplished, allowing us to acquire more information about Plum's time on Guernsey.

For one thing, Mr Parker solved the question of "the headmaster's house" where the boys had lived. In a letter to me, he wrote: "My own guess was that they would have boarded in the College building 'The Headmaster's House' or in the Old College building which is where the Vice-Principal took in boarders."

He was also kind enough to investigate another question: when did Wodehouse and his brothers actually join and leave the College? Biographies say it was in 1889, but from the College ledger, Mr Parker discovered that the three boys did not arrive at the same time. Peveril and Pelham arrived in the Michaelmas term 1890 and were allotted the numbers 2617 and 2618, while Armine arrived in the Easter term 1891 and was numbered 2635. That is clear enough, but the ledger entries were later collated at intervals into printed registers, and it seems mistakes were sometimes made in the collation. Thus, Volume II of the register, published in 1931, states that Plum was at a private school in Dover 1890–92 and only attended Elizabeth College in 1890. In direct contradiction of this, a page from the November 1891 issue of the *Elizabethan* magazine lists all three brothers winning prizes. Wodehouse major (Peveril) got certificates in Form III for History and 'Extra' (whatever that was); Wodehouse minor (Armine) in the same Form was mentioned for Languages and Other Subjects; while Wodehouse minimus (Pelham) of the Lower School won the Class Prize for Arithmetic and Dictation. It should be noted that this did not prove the three brothers were there in November 1891 since prizes were normally awarded at the end of the summer term. The list of such awards would probably not be printed until a later (November) edition of the school magazine.

Thus, we can be pretty certain that Wodehouse arrived at Guernsey in September 1890 and was certainly there till July 1891, and we can also be fairly confident where the three brothers boarded. We know that Peveril stayed on at Elizabeth College and went on to join the Hong Kong Civil Service in 1897, and that Armine entered Dulwich College in January 1892. We also know that Plum went on to Malvern House, Kearsney, Dover. Since Malvern House closed over a century ago, there seems little hope of discovering exactly when Plum went there; perhaps he stayed in Guernsey until Christmas 1891, as Armine presumably did.

The idea of putting up a Blue Plaque to Plum had been proposed, but Peter de Sausmarez

PG Wodehouse, the Old Elizabethan



I WAS interested to see Peter de Sausmarez's letter regarding our illustrious old boy, PG Wodehouse, and his questions relating to his time at Elizabeth College.

The three Wodehouse brothers did indeed attend Elizabeth College at the end of the 19th century and are featured in Bruce Parker's excellent, recently published *History of Elizabeth College*.

Philip Peveril John Wodehouse (school number 2617) and Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (2618) joined Elizabeth College in September 1890 and younger brother Ernest Armine (2635) joined the following year.

They were all boarders and as such would have lived in the college building, this having been constructed in 1829 to serve as school, boarding house and principal's residence, although we believe the older two may have also resided for some time at Grosvenor House in Victoria Road. The principal at the time was the Rev. William Penney, who was in charge from 1888 to 1924.

Appointed at the remarkably young age of 27, Penney was instrumental in broadening the education provided by the college to include many of the extra-curricular and sporting activities we continue to offer today. Among a great variety of other achievements, he also supported the formation of the Old Elizabethan Association in 1891 and, in sport, was the first to try 'an experiment of a match with Victoria College, Jersey'.

As with PG Wodehouse's brilliant writings, of which I am a huge fan (particularly the recollections of Mr Mulliner), the Rev. Penney's legacy continues to be well appreciated today.

GEORGE HARTLEY,
Principal,
Elizabeth College.

Letter by George Hartley, headmaster of Elizabeth College, published in the Guernsey Press and Star following Masha's visit.

has since informed me that the college authorities decided against it because they didn't want uninvited visitors coming to the school. Peter also sent me another newspaper article, written by the college's head-master, George Hartley. In addition to talking about the Wodehouse brothers' time at the college, Mr Hartley pays tribute to their headmaster at the time,

Rev. William Penney: "As with PG Wodehouse's brilliant writings, of which I am a huge fan (particularly the recollections of Mr Mulliner), the Rev. Penney's legacy continues to be well appreciated today."

My heartfelt thanks go to Mr Hartley, Mr De Sausmarez, and Mr Parker for expanding our knowledge of P. G. Wodehouse's time on Guernsey.

Society News

Attention, Standing Order Payers

Very many thanks to the 300-odd members who have already sent us their new Standing Order mandates, or have updated their instructions online and told us that they have done so. Your membership record has been updated, and we shouldn't need to bother you further.

However, at least the same number again have not yet sent us their new bank instructions, or haven't told us they have done it online.

This is now urgent, because the £15 subscription rate expires on 31 May. The cost of membership for the year 2013–14 is £22, and if you wish to continue your membership of the Society – and of course we hope you do – you need to change the instructions to your bank in good time.

If the Society's records show you haven't yet updated your payment, you will find a replacement Standing Order form enclosed with this issue.

This threatens to be a mammoth task for some time to come, so thank you for making things easier for our volunteer committee members and, ultimately, cheaper for your Society.

Cricket: Third Time Lucky?

Once upon a time, the Gold Bats played cricket on green pitches under blue skies. For two years in a row, however, rain has been the rule, and as a result their contests against their major rivals, the Dulwich Dusters and the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, were cancelled. Mother Nature has a lot to answer for.

The question now is: will this year be different? Will we return to the halcyon days of warm, accommodating weather, the exciting crack of bat on ball, and abundant, delicious teas? Time will tell, and we are optimistic, so the dates have been set, and if all goes well, this year will see our two main matches played with, we hope, the Gold Bats triumphant.

So we look forward to two special days in June, each a bit earlier than usual. Where normally we have played the Dusters at Dulwich College on the third Friday of June, this year it will be on the second – June 14. The match will begin around 4.30 pm, and as in the halcyon days alluded to above, the Society will host the tea, which sees tables piled high with gastronomic goodies to please both eye and stomach. Spectators who desire to partake of the tea MUST have tickets; applications are enclosed with this issue of *Wooster Sauce*.

Sunday, June 23, sees our traditional match against the Sherlock Holmes Society. The arena is the cricket pitch at West Wycombe Cricket Club, just off the A40 (Oxford Road) in West Wycombe. We usually aim to start around 11 a.m., and there is a leisurely break, during which players and spectators may enjoy – and share, if they like – the picnic lunches they have brought. We generally finish around 6 p.m. and then head off to the Swan Inn. Some come in period costume, so if you feel like dressing up – do! Or just admire the costumes worn by the Sherlockians, which are always dazzling. It's all free, and Society members are encouraged to join in the fun.

Details of other matches in which members of the Gold Bats take part will be published in Future Events in the June issue of *Wooster Sauce*.

Upcoming Society Meetings

Our impresario, Paul Kent, has heaved himself off the casting couch (where he was having a little nap) to send us this latest telegraphic bulletin on future entertainments at The George. Headed 'Your Society Needs You!', it reads as follows:

July 9th Meeting is 'Open Mic Night' STOP Volunteers required to read out/perform their favourite short passage from Wodehouse, be it prose, poetry, journalism, or even a song STOP Response from members so far utterly lamentable, only one volunteer – shameful – many more urgently required STOP Contact Paul Kent at wodehousefeedback@live.co.uk to enrol – don't be shy! MESSAGE ENDS.

Some time later a telephone message was left, which we are printing verbatim:

Ahoy, Editor! In response to popular demand – well, one member, actually – the October 29th meeting will debate the thorny issue of 'Adapting Wodehouse for Radio and TV' in the company of a leading thesp who often does these things. This in the light of ... [here the line briefly broke up] ... Blandings. Further details in the next edition of 'Sauce'. Over and out.

So now, dear reader, you know as much as your Editor does.

A Most Successful Product

Robert Bruce reports on the Society's November Meeting

As a financial journalist, I have been to many an annual general meeting. Some were grisly, with furious shareholders yelling at the Chairman. Others were more sociable – brewery AGMs were legendary. But the best I ever went to was that of a whisky distillery held in Glasgow. They raced through the formal proceedings, pausing only to note the few minutes' time it had taken, before pointing to the waiters with trays of glasses at the back. "The product awaits you" was the final message from the chairman as his shareholders joined the stampede.

The AGM of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) is similar. Held in the traditional setting of the George Tavern (on November 13), it goes at a gallop. The formalities are cheered to the rafters. The financial surplus is noted. Uncertainties are said to lie ahead. The subscription rate is raised modestly for the first time in the Society's history. The Chairman and her committee are thanked effusively, and everyone makes for the bar at the back.

Then, like the distillery meeting in Glasgow, the product awaits. And on this occasion it was an equally refreshing and class act. We had our own chat show. Paul

Kent, committee member and entertainment impresario, interviewed Sophie Ratcliffe, editor of *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, the collected letters of the great man.

We started with her first encounter with Wodehouse, which turned out to be when she was hunting at the top of her parents' bookshelves for rude books. She found *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and, it being an orange Penguin paperback, she took down the next. This was *The Inimitable Jeeves*. And that was that – it was "amazing". Then it was onwards to Psmith and *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*. Later on, Sophie quoted Wodehouse in her finals paper at Cambridge.

Subsequently, as an English tutor at Oxford, she heard on the grapevine that someone was being sought to edit the collected letters. She wrote a proposal, and got the job. Colleagues were rather startled; some "diehard 17th-century historicists" were sniffy. She was terrified. "I didn't have a clue," she said, and fits of anxiety followed. She quoted from her diary from the time she started her research: "Resisted reading the letter. Went shopping for a new frock."

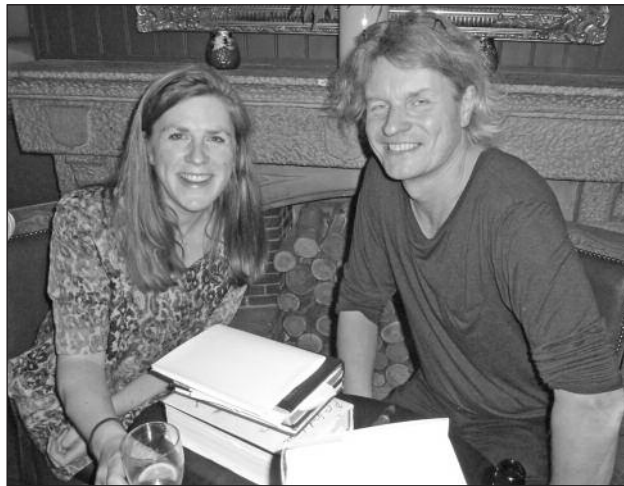
Robert McCrum had uncovered a lot of material while writing his biography of Plum. Sophie followed up and found more. In all, she said, she went through around 3,000 letters, of which 500 are in the book.

Through the letters, she said: "I wanted to tell the truest story of the life as I could, watching one life collide with history"; the wartime problems, "the catastrophe in the middle", "gives it a plot".

But two themes stood out for Sophie. "The consistent theme is kindness," she said. And she "got more of a sense of how hard he worked, the craft and the dedication".

Paul Kent asked Sophie what, having been so close to Plum through his letters, she would ask him if she could go back in time. "I would ask him about his first meeting with Ethel," she said. She admitted she would have liked to know more about Ethel – "she being a single parent, acting, travelling to and fro from England, what was it like being an Englishwoman in New York, I'd like to know the detail about that." She felt it had been a huge honour to read the love letters, "to be that close to them".

Sophie was cheered that the book had been received so well, and like all Plum's writing, "had brought such happiness". And then she was cheered to the rafters herself.



Sophie Ratcliffe and Paul Kent

More on the Everyman Editions

Thanks to DAVID LILLEY for sending along further information regarding Everyman's publication of Wodehouse books in hardback. Since our last list was published in the September 2012 *Wooster Sauce*, two more titles were released in 2012, and there appear to be four on offer in 2013. Most recent and future additions to the series are:

Mike and Psmith (published September 2012)

Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin (published September 2012)

French Leave (to be published in March 2013)

The White Feather (March 2013)

If I Were You (May 2013)

The Small Bachelor (May 2013)

David writes: "According to my calculations, Random House may be nearing the end of the line. The only PGW works remaining to be published after May 2013 are mostly scarce and limited in length."

Mastermind Quiz 8: The Blandings Short Stories

by David Buckle

With the BBC's Blandings series fresh in our minds, it somehow seems appropriate that this issue's quiz should concern the classic stories featuring Lord Emsworth and others. Answers can be found on page 19.

1. In 'Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey', why, initially, is the Empress of Blandings off her food?
2. In 'The Go Getter', what is the name of Rev. Rupert 'Beefy' Bingham's dog?
3. What radical staff change does Lady Constance propose in 'Sticky Wicket at Blandings'?
4. In 'The Crime Wave at Blandings', which efficient secretary does Lady Constance re-employ?
5. What is the full name of the girl that Lord Emsworth accidentally spies Freddie Threepwood kissing at the start of 'The Custody of the Pumpkin'?
6. What is Beefy Bingham's alias in 'Company for Gertrude'?
7. In 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend', what does Lord Emsworth refuse to do that Lady Constance has demanded of him?
8. In 'Birth of a Salesman', who or what chases Lord Emsworth up a tree?
9. Why does Beach seriously 'consider his position' in 'Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best'?
10. Who is the only person who seems to be able to render the call 'Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey' correctly?

Letters to the Editor

From John Graham

In his December 2012 column of The Bibliographic Corner, Nick Townend does Wodehouse book collectors a great service by detailing issue points associated with early editions of *Something Fresh*. But I think he may have missed one point of interest. He correctly describes the first edition, published by Methuen in 1915, as containing a four-page supplement headed 'Methuen's Popular Novels', with advertisements on pages 317 and 320 for Wodehouse's latest book, which they incorrectly title *Something New*. He and I both have copies with this error. But I have also seen copies of the first edition, which contains a slightly different four-page supplement, with advertisements on pages 317 and 319 for *Something Fresh*. Assuming Methuen corrected its error, this issue would have to be considered a "first edition, second issue". Methuen's own publishing records housed at the Lilly Library (at Indiana University) say there were 1,510 copies of the first edition. Unfortunately, there is no way to know how many copies were issued with each version of the advertising supplement. In my limited experience, the two issues are about equally rare and any sensible collector should be happy to own either one.

From Peter Thompson

It is of course almost impossible to do justice to P. G. Wodehouse on screen (large or small), since the narrative is essential to the books. But in this instance the TV production team managed to rewrite the plot, change the characters, and generally feed ammunition to those who describe the sublime characters created by PGW as "just silly asses".

Timothy Spall as Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, was the first to do an injustice to the character. Assuming that Lord Emsworth should realise that Wellbeloved the pigman was intending to go to the public house, I cannot imagine him leering, winking, and handing over coins to indulge this intention. Freddie looked like half of Jedward, and would never have driven off the road and crashed into a tree for absolutely no reason, except to show that the character was totally stupid. From a stature point of view, Mr Spall might have been better employed playing Beach. If I simply say that Jimmy being sent to prison for an attempted assault on Lady Constance Keeble and Freddie helping Jimmy to escape from clink and return the same night were just two of the changes by the 'writer', you will see (if you have not already suffered the screening of the first episode) what has been done to this wonderful piece of literature. Frankly, I was appalled.

From Alex Connelly

I thought *Blandings* was extremely good. They didn't take it too seriously, and I'm sure we can say that Wodehouse never took himself too seriously. The programme entertained me throughout and cast everyone exquisitely, matching each character perfectly to the actor playing him or her. Wodehouse set out to make people laugh, and that's what the TV show did – make me laugh – so I would have thought that's mission accomplished!

The Reaction to *Blandings*

After months of eager anticipation, *Blandings* finally reached British television screens, with six episodes airing on Sunday evenings from January 13 to February 17; many overseas Wodehouseans were also able to view it via the Internet. Discussion of the series was very lively indeed, and opinion was often sharply divided, as can be seen from the two letters printed on page 6. Other Society members who wrote in included Jack Smith, who was unable to get through much of the first episode and signed his letter “Yours, frothing”; and Mark Taylor, who pronounced *Blandings* to be “quite good but not great” and had critical comments to make about the casting of both pig and humans.

Comments on Internet forums ranged from furious condemnation to sympathetic understanding of the changes made to Wodehouse’s stories. A few anonymous examples:

“If the idea of the BBC *Blandings* series is to attract a new Wodehouse audience while accepting the prospect of utterly alienating the old, then all I can say after shuddering through the first episode is – surely no hope whatsoever.”

“While I was disappointed by the strict departure from Wodehouse, one can enjoy the show on its own merits.”

“Hugely disappointing. I don’t recall the Master being so reliant on “toilet humour” Adapting *Blandings* was always going to be difficult, [but] proper casting would have been a good start.”

“I’ve watched all episodes without flinching. I’ll confess to even smiling occasionally. . . . I tend to watch the show from a Cyril George Wellbeloved mentality as opposed to a Jeeves or a Florence Craye mentality, and as far as I’m concerned, there are worse ways to spend a half-hour.”

“Yes, it’s not exactly what I would like best to see, but it’s not awful, in my humble op. I am mystified as to why they failed so utterly in using and showing off PGW dialogue. . . . I don’t know if it’s likely to attract any new readers.”

“The problem isn’t adapting for TV – it’s adapting for the modern general audience. . . . I think the problem lies in misguided attempts to do something ‘fresh and new’ with ‘old’ material. As if modern audiences are somehow thick in the head. I suspect what they are really trying to do is adapt for a general American audience.”

As Tony Ring wrote in the September issue of *Wooster Sauce*, the *Blandings* series (with which the Society had no involvement) was never intended to be an adaptation of Wodehouse; rather, the plots and characters were drawn from Wodehouse’s stories and revamped “in a contemporary take on Wodehouse’s humour”. Understandably, many dedicated Wodehouse fans were not happy with many of the changes that were made, and whether the series will attract new readers to Wodehouse, as the *Jeeves and Wooster* series did, remains to be seen.

And what of the Press reaction? Journalists were also divided in how they viewed *Blandings*. Those who were hardcore fans themselves were more likely to be critical of the series, though there was widespread acknowledgement that Wodehouse is almost impossible to portray faithfully on the screen and better appreciated on the page. Many reviews condemned the overacting, with Timothy Spall (as Lord Emsworth) generally coming out of it better than others. Some representative comments:

You can invest psychological complexity into Wodehouse’s characters, the clarity and depth comes from the writing, and so the cast were all at sea. . . . Never were you drawn into the world of *Blandings* and never did you get a sense of the precise and comic world which Wodehouse created.

(Ben Lawrence, *Daily Telegraph*)

Wodehouse is a dish best served broad, and this is door-slamming, trouser-dropping farce of the old school. It may be a bit too eager to please, its breathless flapper soundtrack a bit too keen to let us know at which point one is expected to TITTER and at which point it would be considered rather rude not to GUFFAW, OLD FRUIT, but in these days of eviscerated prostitutes (*Ripper Street*) and hubris in pants (*Splash!*) this sort of aerated escapist japery is just the ticket, by jove.

(Sarah Dempster, *The Guardian*)

What kills this effort stone dead is the giant flag everyone seems to be waving, marked “COMEDY!” . . . The tone is so frantic and the performances so heightened that you can’t decide whether the production team have no confidence in the material or no idea what they are doing.

(‘Couch Potato’, *Private Eye*)

[Wodehouse] was . . . a master of plots, but the BBC’s latest adaptation, *Blandings*, is so noisy and chaotic that you cannot discern what is going on. . . . The adapter, one Guy Andrews, should be taken out and shot – preferably by the Germans.

(Richard Ingrams, *The Oldie*)

Have Timothy Spall et al pulled it off, though? P. G. Wodehouse fans steeped in Plum’s master-ful tales of porcine rivalry, stolen manuscripts and the incident of Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe and the prawns are a tough crowd to please. The fact remains, however, that there can never be too much Wodehouse in our lives. And if even a single person is tempted into his glorious and inimitable world, then the BBC’s job is well done.

(Leader in *The Independent*)

This last statement probably sums up the situation best. We may gripe about the casting, and we may grumble about the changes in Wodehouse’s plots and the failure to use his original dialogue. But at least an effort to bring Wodehouse to television has been made, and if it inspires future efforts, then perhaps the right writers and cast can do justice to the Master’s immortal words, as many of us believe is possible.

Wodehouse Whiffs: *The Mortdecai Trilogy*

by Pieter Boogaart

While it can take quite a while to print many of the articles we receive for Wooster Sauce, this one sets a record. Pieter sent this to the Editor back in 2007, but said Ed., clearly lacking Baxter's efficiency, managed to let it fall into a crevice and only recently rescued it from purgatory. We print it now with ever so many apologies to Pieter for the delay and thanks for this fascinating find.

'Ah' I added, 'the good old soothing Oolong or Lapsang!'

'Eh?'

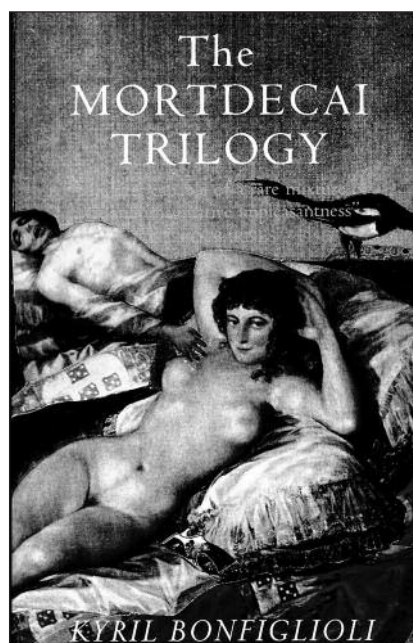
'Bring me my whangee, my yellowest shoes, and the old green Homburg', I quoted on. I am going to the Park to do pastoral dances.'

'Eh?'

'Oh, never mind, Jock. Bertram Wooster speaking, not I.'

It is entirely possible that I will try the patience of some readers of this magazine by writing about an author other than P. G. Wodehouse. My excuse is that he was a great admirer of the Master of Folly, and I have never come across a writer who so copiously and freely quoted from Wodehouse's works.

I am talking about Kyril Bonfiglioli (1928–85). Who he? You may well ask, as he is largely forgotten nowadays. Born of an English mother and an Italo-Slovene father, he studied at Balliol and became a



writer and an art dealer, just like the main character in his trilogy. He wrote in the 1970s and died on the isle of Jersey. To quote him about himself, he was abstemious in all things except drink, food, tobacco and talking' and was 'loved and respected by all who knew him slightly'.

The Mortdecai Trilogy was first published in 1991

by Black Spring Press, bringing together *Don't Point That Thing At Me* (1972), *After You with the Pistol* (1979), and *Something Nasty in the Woodshed* (1976).

Bonfiglioli wrote with a great sense of humour, but a perverted one. I hesitate to recommend him to Wodehouse readers, who are such civilised and gentle folk on the whole. For example, in one scene that is both gruesome and hilarious, somebody gets his ear nailed to a tree. I must warn you that the trilogy is full of this kind of stuff, but Bonfiglioli's style is witty, is a bit salacious, and has fast-paced suspense.

Apart from the wit, it is not what we would expect from Wodehouse or his fans. The main character in all three books, Charlie Mortdecai, is an immoral art dealer and adventurer. Bertie Wooster has faithful Jeeves; Mortdecai has faithful Jock, who is an uneducated and streetwise thug, always ready with tea in the morning and knuckle-dusters for other occasions.

Now, what about these Wodehouse connections I promised? Apart from the quotation above (taken from 'Jeeves Exerts the Cerebellum', by the way), a reader must be well versed in Wodehouse to spot the all the references. There are characters' names which faintly smack of Wodehouse, like the car mechanic Spinoza (Jeeves's favourite author) and H. Glossop, a young lady reporter. But mostly the PGW links consist of general expressions and quotations from other authors whom Wodehouse favours. Sometimes they are grouped together:

... so I simply left the room in a marked manner and stayed not upon the order of my going.

The lark was on the wing and flying strongly, while the snail was positively striding up its favourite thorn. Admittedly, there was one fly trampling about in the ointment of my content ...

Sleep, Nature's kindly nurse, ravelled up the sleeve of care until dinner-time, when I arose with my nerve-endings more or less adequately darned.

You know the kind of thing, of course. It looks as if Bonfiglioli suddenly gets bothered by Wodehouse Whiffs, as if this were a disease. And sometimes these expressions appear on their own:

'You interest me strangely,' I said.

Be that as it may, tell me now, without evasion and in your own words, omitting no detail however slight, what is for dinner tonight?

The Marquis de Sade could have taken his correspondence course profitably.

Or this one, from Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*:

This way and that, like Odysseus on so many occasions, I divided my swift mind.

Of course, Tennyson was talking about King Arthur, not Odysseus, whom he would have called Ulysses anyway. This is a simple mistake by Bonfiglioli, or does Tennyson use this saying more than once?

A great number of such expressions are used, and this article would become too long if I were to quote all of them. Besides, it's a lot more fun if I leave it to you to discover them yourself.

Let's go on to the quotations where the Wodehouse references are more obvious.

'Are you aware,' I asked bravely, 'that you are occupying space which I have other uses for? Or rather, for which I have other uses?'

'I like P. G. Wodehouse too, sir,' he rejoined, 'but I would hesitate to use any kind of flippancy in the situation you find yourself in. Or rather, in which you find yourself.'

I gaped at the man. Perhaps he was human after all.

I reckon that I can shift the Mortdecai carcass around fairly noiselessly but this man was quite uncanny; he was even better than old Wooster's manservant who, as is well known, used to shimmer for England.

'I pity the prawn which pits its feeble wits against you,' I quoted.

Seldom have I spent a happier and more innocent hour but, as the Master himself tells us, it is at times like these that Fate creeps out of a dark alley, fingering a stuffed eel-skin destined for the back of one's neck.

Again, there are more of these, but I can't give them all. In the following example, the reference to Wodehouse is camouflaged:

Back in my slum on the fourth floor in Upper Brook Street . . . Jock sidled in.

'Jock,' I said severely, 'I have repeatedly asked you not to sidle. I will not have this sidling. It smacks of the criminal classes. If you wish to better yourself you must learn to shimmer. What's the name of those naval-outfitter

chaps at the Piccadilly end of Bond Street?'

'Gieves?'

'That's it. There you are, you see,' I said, completely vindicated.

But Bonfiglioli usually quotes Wodehouse with insouciance and quite cheerily, even using words like 'to Wooster' and 'Woosterism', as seen here:

'Wheel on the life-giving fluids without delay.' . . . We Woostered away for a while, giggling silently at the thought of grim-jawed FBI men and beetle-browed CIA men frantically sending out 'Code Orange-five Trace Orders' on such ornaments of the Drones Club as Oofy Prosser and Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps. . . . While we idly bandied these Woosterisms . . . After another invigorating suck at the brandy-tit we parted with many a friendly message to Freddie Widgeon and Honoria Glossop. . . . 'Charlie, don't believe a word old Mulliner says.' I gasped but mumbled assent, grinning inaudibly.

This last quote shows lots of Wodehouse references on one page. This was a very serious attack of Wodehouse Whiffs.

I fully realise that, giving these Wodehouse connections one after another as I have, it looks a bit as if the only fun I had in reading this trilogy consisted of finding out how many references there were. On the contrary, this was merely a bonus. I enjoyed reading it tremendously for Bonfiglioli's wit and creative use of language, and for the contrast his naughtiness and pace provides with the relative tranquillity and languorous humour of Wodehouse. You should, perhaps, try Bonfiglioli, though he is not for the faint-hearted.

I would like to finish this article with another Bonfiglioli quotation, this one very reminiscent of the Master's endings. At the end of the trilogy's second part, Charlie Mortdecai and Jock Strapp have returned home after a series of adventures. As they relax, Charlie asks for a well-deserved drink.

'Jock, please add one of your extra-special jam-sandwiches to that order, if you will be so kind.'

'Right, Mr Charlie; that's one large rum, one jem semwidge.'

'And one canary.'

'Right, Mr Charlie.'

'Right, Jock,' I said.

"What's the matter?"

"G. Hayward's the matter," said Eustace morosely. "The Lower Bingley starter."

"We never even considered him," said Claude. "Somehow or other, he got overlooked. It's always the way. Steggles overlooked him. We all overlooked him. But Eustace and I happened by the merest fluke to be riding through Lower Bingley this morning, and there was a wedding on at the church, and it suddenly struck us that it wouldn't be a bad move to get a line on G. Hayward's form, in case he might be a dark horse."

"And it was jolly lucky we did," said Eustace. "He delivered an address of twenty-six minutes by Claude's stop-watch. At a village wedding, mark you! What'll he do when he really extends himself!"

(from 'The Great Sermon Handicap, 1922)

Imaginary Wodehouse

For Wodehouse fans and art collectors – especially those who are both – there is a very special limited-edition print now available that you will want to snap up before there are none left.

A few years ago, the artist and printmaker Phil Shaw (see www.philshawonline.com/) began using Photoshop to create pictures of bookshelves that had an unusual twist to them. In some cases, the titles on the books that line his imaginary shelves are real, in others they exist only in fiction or in Phil’s mind. From those titles, and employing books that he acquires at charity shops and used-book stores, Phil creates striking prints based on a theme – for example, Shakespearean quotes or London’s Underground stations.

Last year, at an exhibition, Phil met Edward Cazalet, a long-time admirer of his work, who had a bone to pick: “Why,” he asked, “have you not done a picture of Wodehouse books?”

After an initial period of doubting he could do adequate justice to the Master, Phil had an inspiration: why not a bookcase whose shelves were lined with the works of such renowned writers from the PGW canon as Rosie M. Banks, Rex West, Leila J. Pinkney, and Alexander Worple? With a whoop and a holler, he set to work, and Edward enlisted Norman Murphy’s help to ensure that Phil had plenty of titles to choose from, and also to eliminate those titles in the canon that sound Wodehousean but are, in fact, quite real.

After that, it was a matter of choosing which titles Phil wanted to include on his shelves and how to represent them in book form. As with all his



Phil Shaw with his print at the London Art Fair

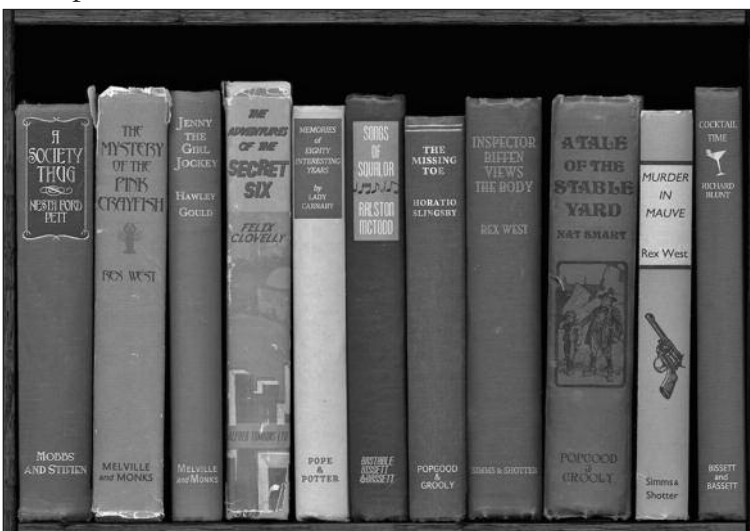
projects, he obtained likely-looking volumes from bookstores and charity shops, scanned in the spines, removed the original titles, and replaced them with the Wodehousean titles, using appropriate fonts.

For this print, Phil has incorporated 48 imaginary titles from the PGW canon, including such classics as *Strychnine in the Soup*, by Horatio Slingsby; *Cocktail Time*, by Richard Blunt; *Sewers of the Soul*, by Wilmot Royce; *On the Care of the Pig*, by Augustus Whiffle; and, of course, *Mervyn Keene*, *Clubman*, by Rosie M. Banks.

Some Wodehouse fans might comment on the absence of certain titles, such as Florence Craye’s *Spindrift*, and the inclusion of more

obscure titles, such as *My Life with Rod and Gun*, by Col. Francis Pashley-Drake. But when you consider that there are some 200 fictional titles in the Wodehouse canon, and quite a few more that are real but sound Wodehousean, then you can appreciate the considerable job Phil had on his hands when choosing just the right titles and books to suit his four bookshelves – and even forgive him for including one that doesn’t really exist in the canon, but might (*Wee Tots Annual*, edited by Richard Little). You can also admire his ingenuity in matching titles to books; they are so well suited and realistic that it seems hard to believe one cannot reach out and pluck a book from the shelf. And there’s a lot of fun to be had in figuring out in which PGW books the invented titles appear.

Phil’s ingenuity arises out of his admiration for the works of Wodehouse, something that was handed down to him by his father. During World War II, the senior Shaw carried around a battered copy of *Eggs, Beans, and Crumpets* – a book that went with him everywhere, even in prisoner-of-war camps (and out of them when he escaped). Phil has brought his love for the words of Wodehouse into his wonderful depiction of this small representation of PGW’s imaginary titles.



A close-up of one of the shelves

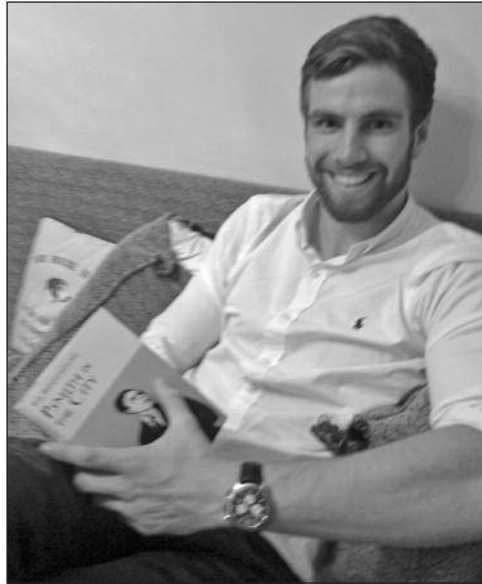
My First Wodehouse Experience

by Alex Connolly

I have had two first Wodehouse experiences. I first fell in love with the stories and characters of Wodehouse through the BBC's *Jeeves and Wooster* series. It was then that I fell in love with the books. Although heavily dyslexic, I decided I wanted to read a Wodehouse book, no matter how long it was going to take me!

I first came across the TV programme when I found an old videotape of the first series. I was ten at the time, and I remember thinking, *what on earth is this!* By the end of that first episode I was walking and talking like Bertie and was dressing up in my suit. This set off my love for the world of Wodehouse from the arcades of Piccadilly to the characters and all their eccentricities. I am not sure how happy my mother was that she had shown me the TV series, as I begged to be taken down to Bates the hat shop and the Burlington Arcade to see the shop where Bertie had nicked the cow creamer.

It was after falling for the world of Wodehouse that I began to fall for the words of Wodehouse. I



remember being in my local bookshop and finding an Everyman hardback copy of *Young Men in Spats*. At the time my reading level was very low and I was quite dyslexic, although I had my heart set on reading this wonderful book. After reading the first page, I hadn't the foggiest what was going on. It was after reading the first page for about the sixth or seventh time that it suddenly clicked that the eggs, beans and crumpets being mentioned were not that of breakfast but that of members of the Drones, and from there the reading began to flow. It had only taken two weeks to get past the first page!

What treasures I had unlocked! It has now been ten years since I first came across that *Jeeves and Wooster* series, and I can safely say I am a true Wodehousean, having been a member of the Society for almost five years and having read everything from Psmith, Mike, and the Blandings stories to the golfing tales with the Oldest Member and, of course, the *Jeeves and Wooster* series.

The Word Around the Clubs

An Unlikely Wodehouse Fan

The world of rock music has a few surprising Wodehouse fans in it, including Charlie Watts of the Rolling Stones and Lemmy of Motörhead; the latter has often been described as the "wild man of rock". Recently, Society member STEPHEN PAYNE sent an article about Lemmy that had been published in the *Sunday Telegraph Magazine* of 14 November 2004. It included the following paragraph:

He certainly seems a good egg, sitting here in Bertie's Bar at the Royal Garden Hotel, Kensington, his home from home in London when he's touring, as he does for seven months a year ("That's where I'm happiest, on the road, with bloody suitcase full of bad socks"). Bertie's Bar is appropriate, too, for Lemmy, an ardent bibliophile, is an admirer of P G Wodehouse, and of the Wooster books in particular: *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* was the last one he re-read.

Wodehouse: Always the Best Medicine

The *Times* magazine of January 26 contained a four-page spread on Tracey Thorn of the popular 80s–90s

pop band Everything But The Girl. Ms Thorn has just published a memoir, *Bedsit Disco Queen*, relating the story of her life as a pop star. The extract published in the *Times* concerned a time in 1992 when her husband and creative partner, Ben Watt, was taken seriously ill with an undiagnosed illness. He was opened up, and a lot of damage to his insides was found, arising from a rare inflammatory condition. Convinced that her husband had died, or was going to die, Ms Thorn did all she could to cope:

In the end, it simply became too exhausting to sustain that level of anxiety. It faded, or hardened, or settled somewhere inside me, and I got used to living with the possibility of disaster without being overwhelmed by it. As Ben lay unconscious in intensive care, I sat beside his bed, doing jigsaw puzzles and reading P G Wodehouse novels, gratefully losing myself for hours in the comforting world of stories where the worst disaster that could befall a young chap was the unexpected arrival for lunch of a fearsome aunt.

Ben survived, and their joint musical career blossomed.

The Human Boy and P. G. Wodehouse

Part One

by Nick Townend

In March 2011 there was a brief article in *Wooster Sauce* (p. 10) called ‘The Origin of Steggles?’ Of course, Steggles is the character who runs the book on the events in ‘The Great Sermon Handicap’ and ‘The Purity of the Turf’ and who schemes to influence the outcomes for his own advantage. In the article, Norman Murphy discussed two books written in the 1890s (*Martin Hewitt, Investigator* by Arthur Morrison (1894) and *The Human Boy* by Eden Phillpotts (1899)) in which each author used the name Steggles for a character who attempts to win bets by underhand methods. Norman suggested that both Morrison and Phillpotts used the name in response to the actions of an Inspector Steggles of the Metropolitan Police, who was active in the 1880s and 1890s. Norman favoured Phillpotts’s Steggles as the most likely source for Wodehouse, stating “it is most unlikely [Wodehouse] did not read Phillpotts’s popular ‘Human Boy’ series.”

The June 2011 *Wooster Sauce* (p. 7) contained a letter in response from me stating: “I can confirm that Wodehouse had indeed read [*The Human Boy*]. The final paragraph of his article ‘School Stories’ (*Public School Magazine*, August 1901) reads as follows: ‘One could name scores of writers of today who are capable of writing good school-stories but who devote themselves to more mundane topics. Conan Doyle, for instance, Eden Phillpotts (who wrote ‘The Human Boy,’ an excellent set of school-stories but not Public School stories), EF Benson, Inglis Allen, and many others.’”

We know from this mention of *The Human Boy* that Wodehouse had read the book and enjoyed it. In this article I will show that he made use of the book in his own school story fiction, in which there are, to my mind, numerous allusions to, echoes of, and general nods in the direction of characters, plots, or features which appear in *The Human Boy*.

I am not for one moment attempting to deny Wodehouse’s own creativity. But every author writes within a literary tradition, and is, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by other writers within the same genre. That is particularly true of the school story genre, where there is a limited number of items that can conceivably happen at a school, and Wodehouse himself often treated the genre very knowingly: consider the first words of Psmith to Mike “Are you the Bully, the Pride of the School or the Boy who is Led Astray and takes to Drink in Chapter Sixteen?” (*Mike*, chap. 32). Rather, what I am attempting to do is to show the effect of one of the early influences upon Wodehouse.

As is so often the case with matters Wodehousean, Richard Osborne led the way, and put it very well, when he wrote:

I have done some speculating, and I shall be going to some trouble to suggest origins, influences and affiliations for Wodehouse’s stories and characters – the writers whom writer Wodehouse must have read with admiration and fed on to some degree. Let’s be clear about this at the start. I am not saying that Wodehouse deliberately copied from anybody – at least, not in the sense of cribbing. . . . But Wodehouse’s writing does feed joyfully on his reading. . . . [There is a] sentence in *Bring on the Girls* (doubtless written by Bolton) about Wodehouse: ‘As Charles Lamb said of Godwin, he read more books not worth reading than any man in England.’ Wodehouse had been a devoted reader of trash since his schooldays. He teases it, evokes it, parodies it and plays it back in ragtime. And you will be missing much of the best in Wodehouse unless you, too, have drunk deep at the same sort of piffling Pierian springs as he has. (*Wodehouse at Work*, 1961, pp. 19–20)

Eden Phillpotts (1862–1960) was a popular Victorian and Edwardian novelist. His book *The Human Boy* was published in 1899, containing 11 short stories which had previously been published in *The Idler* magazine. All of the stories were set at one school and narrated in the first person, but there was a slight twist in that each story was narrated by a different boy (a device later used by Arthur Calder-Marshall in his 1935 school novel *Dead Centre*).

The very first story is called ‘The Artfulness of Steggles’. The name of the title character alone is enough to alert any Wodehousean. The story features a schemer who, as mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article, is surely the literary ancestor of the Steggles who causes Bertie Wooster and his friends so much trouble in ‘The Great Sermon Handicap’ and ‘The Purity of the Turf’.

Phillpotts’s Steggles had previously been sacked from Harrow, supposedly because he “didn’t know enough and couldn’t get up higher in the school”, although in the words of one of the masters, “it wasn’t what he didn’t know had rendered it necessary for Steggles to leave Harrow, but what he did know.” Steggles’s career and characteristics may have been the inspiration for Wodehouse in his creation of Farnie, the title character of *A Prefect’s Uncle*. Wodehouse’s Farnie had previously been sacked from Harrow and Wellington, and withdrawn

from Clifton, before starting at Beckford, from which he is withdrawn after only one term.

According to Benny Green, the surname was borrowed from Henry B. Farnie, an author and adaptor of musical farces who died in 1889, but the character is “a genuine original, a prematurely finished cynic mildly amused by the childish protocol of the public school system” (*P. G. Wodehouse: A Literary Biography*, 1981, p. 17). One could quibble with Green’s opinion because Wodehouse’s Farnie surely owes something to Phillpotts’s Steggle, and Green’s description of Farnie could equally well apply to Beetle, M’Turk, and Stalky, the three main characters in Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky & Co.*, which, like *The Human Boy*, was also published in 1899 (and which Wodehouse had also read, as he discusses it in his article ‘School Stories’).

In addition to Steggle, another nominal echo from *The Human Boy* can be found in Wodehouse in Mr Merevale, one of the house masters at St Austin’s, who appears in both *The Pothunters* and *Tales of St Austin’s*; Phillpotts’s school, Dunston’s, is set in a location called Merivale.

In the second story in *The Human Boy*, there is a new mathematical master, Thompson. The boys call him an “unholy bounder”. “Yet with all his bounderishness, he was awfully clever, and meant well. But he didn’t know anything about chaps in a general way. . . . Thompson tried hard to be friendly to everybody, but only the kids liked him. He couldn’t understand, somehow, and insulted chaps in the most frightful way, not seeing any difference between fellows at the top of the school and mere kids at the bottom.”

Does this remind you of Mr Thompson, the sixth form classics master at St Austin’s?

Mr Thompson, though an excellent classic, had no knowledge of the inwardness of the Human Boy (*sic*). He expected every member of his form not only to be earnest – which very few members of a Sixth Form are – but also to communicate his innermost thoughts to him. His aim was to be their confidant, the wise friend to whom they were to bring their troubles and come for advice. He was, in fact, poor man, the good young master. Now, it is generally the case at school that troubles are things to be worried through alone, and any attempt at interference is usually resented. Mr Thompson had asked Jim to tea, and, while in the very act of passing him the muffins, had embarked on a sort of unofficial sermon, winding up by inviting confidences. Jim had naturally been first flippant, and then rude, and relations had been strained ever since.

(*The Pothunters*, chap. 10)

In his next school story, *A Prefect’s Uncle*, Wodehouse put a similar phrase in the mouth of a master: “‘I should imagine,’ said Mr Robertson, ‘from what small knowledge I possess of the Human Boy,

that matters will be made decidedly unpleasant for the criminal’” (chap. 10). (It is, alas, not clear to me whether these two references to “the Human Boy” are nods by Wodehouse in the direction of Phillpotts, or whether both Wodehouse and Phillpotts were picking up on a contemporary usage of the phrase.)

The third story in *The Human Boy*, “Freckles” and “Frenchy”, features an Australian boy, “Freckles”, who intends to be a bushranger. This involves breaking bounds and avoiding gamekeepers. “He never joined in games, but roamed away alone for miles and miles into the country on half-holidays, and trespassed with a cheek I never saw equalled. He could run like a hare – especially about half a mile or so, which, as he explained to me, is just about a distance to blow a keeper. Certainly, though often chased, he was never caught. . . . His great hope some day was to be a bushranger himself, and he practised in a quiet way every Saturday afternoon, making it a rule to go out of bounds always.”

Eventually, though, as in all school stories, the wages of sin are the sack: “The keepers finally caught him in the game preserves, sitting in his hole under the stream bank, frizzling the leg of a pheasant which he had shot out of a tree with his air-gun and buried seven days before.” Such exploits are reminiscent of the adventures of Barrett and Plunkett, breaking bounds in Sir Alfred Venner’s woods, in order to collect birds’ eggs and to smoke respectively, in *The Pothunters* (chaps 7 and 8).

At one point, Freckles’s bushranging get-up is described: “Down his leg was the barrel of an air-gun, strong enough to kill any small thing like a cat at twenty-five yards.” Do you remember that Wyatt in *Mike* (chap. 5) used to break out at night to shoot at cats with an air-pistol, in order to improve his aim for the shooting eight? In the story ‘An Unsavoury Interlude’ in *Stalky & Co.*, the boys used “saloon-pistols” which they also concealed down their trouser legs. Stalky shoots a cat with his, and places the cat in the roof of King’s house to produce a smell, so as to avenge an insult from King. In connection with this incident, Isabel Quigly says, “Cats, admittedly, were then considered rather as vermin are today: there were too many of them, wandering uncared for, and the average boy’s instinctive reaction, I have myself been assured by an elderly gentleman, was to reach for his catapult when he saw one out of doors” (*The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English Public School Story*, 1982, p. 124). This was very much the reaction of Stalky too: “Hi! There’s a bunny. No, it ain’t. It’s a cat, by Jove! You plug first.” When Richard Usborne (*Wodehouse at Work*, p. 58) was comparing the similarities of *Stalky & Co.* and Wodehouse’s own school stories, he forgot to mention this shooting at cats.

In the concluding part of this article, to be published in June, we will examine further similarities between *The Human Boy* and Wodehouse’s writings.

Sunset at Toszek

by Tim Richards

Note: This is an abbreviated version of an article that originally appeared in full in Plum Lines, Spring 2012.

“If this is Upper Silesia, what must Lower Silesia be like?”

Sitting on a train from the Polish city of Opole to the town of Toszek, I’m reminded of P G Wodehouse’s comment on the region where he was held prisoner from 1940 to 1941. The landscape is flat and undramatic, unlike the mountainous terrain further south.

I step out at Toszek, a 19th-century German construction of dark red brick, sinister in appearance even on this warm day. It has seen better times; it’s decorated with graffiti and appears to be completely shuttered, bar a small waiting room. Strange to think that Plum likely came through here in 1940.

For Polish Toszek was once German Tost, the prisoner-of-war camp into which Wodehouse was finally placed after capture in France.

As a freelance travel writer, one of my assignments is to visit Poland for the publisher Lonely Planet to update guidebooks. I’ve always wanted to make the pilgrimage to Plum’s temporary wartime home, and I’ve been assigned Silesia, so Fate has made it easy for me to take a trip to Toszek (pronounced TOSH-ek, by the way).

I find myself on a quiet country road with no town in sight. Google Maps has been a bit vague, but my iPhone soon sorts me out – a left turn into town.

After 20 minutes, the road deposits me at the Old Town. This is a collection of tightly intersecting streets once contained within a medieval wall, centred on the Rynek (market square). Here I find a town hall looking out over a pleasant civic square. But this is where my research runs out. Preparing for the trip, I had made attempts to contact tourism authorities in Silesia to ask about the asylum which became a prisoner-of-war camp in World War II. Emails went around in circles and I was told to “Talk to someone at the castle”.

This is my cue to use my favourite sentence in Polish, “Jak dojść do zamku?” (“How do I get to the castle?”). A lady points to the northwest, and soon I’m passing through a stone gateway into the keep of a former Gothic castle.

I say “former” because this structure has been through a lot. In the ninth century the town was founded by a duke whose life was saved by a dog called Toszek. In the 16th century the wooden castle burned to the ground, then the rebuilt stone edifice was again ravaged by fire in 1811.

Interesting, but not getting me any closer to PGW, so I knock on the door. A friendly office worker doesn’t seem aware of an old asylum but points me to the Ratusz (Town Hall).

Back to the town hall, into the ground floor, hoping to spot a tourist information bureau. No such luck. There’s a staircase, so I follow a couple up to the second floor. At the top there’s a cashier’s window at which locals might pay their council rates. I ask the middle-aged lady in residence and realise I’m not making much sense asking for the *stary* (old) *aszylum*. What I should be asking for is the *szpital psychiatryczny* (psychiatric hospital). Once I hit upon this, one of the women called forth by the cashier writes down an address: ulica Gliwicka 5, just around the corner. We all smile, and I’m back on the streets.

The first few buildings are too modern. Luckily, I have the relevant pages from my copy of Robert McCrum’s *Wodehouse: A Life*, so I peek at it. Sure enough, further on I find a massive, grimy structure with two jutting wings thrust to the edge of the pavement, and bars on its central windows. (See photo below.) It was from here that Wodehouse could “watch everyday life passing up and down the road outside”.



The building apparently has changed little in appearance over 70 years – still grim and intimidating. Opposite is a small, neglected park with a half a dozen wooden benches dotted around. As much as Plum made light of his situation in that “Boy’s Own” way of his, the gravity of his prison camp is starting to impress itself on me as I sit and stare at the hospital. Prisoners died within its walls that first bitter winter, after all.

As if sensing my mood, the weather has become colder. It was warm and humid when I arrived, but now there’s a chilly breeze blowing. It’s easy to

imagine how cold a Silesian winter can get once it spits on its hands and really gets down to it.

I look through the gates, where I see a plaque marking the use of the building as a prison by the feared Soviet NKVD secret police after the war. I consider asking if I can visit, but on reflection it seems that a foreigner trying to gain access to a mental institution in rural Poland might gain the attention of the hospital's keener talent scouts.

So I return to the bench, looking up at the windows and imagining Plum looking back at me – we are, after all, separated not by space but only by seven decades. If I could somehow pierce that veil of time and shout up to him, what would I say? “Don't

do the broadcasts!” comes to mind. If he'd listen, it would save everyone a lot of heartache.

But Time the Great Healer doesn't work that way, so I plod back into town to have lunch. Then it's back to the station, each footstep taking me further away from this point of intersection with the darkest days of Plum's life.

Tim made this trip to Toszek in 2011.

Cosy Moments

***Double Cross*, by Ben Macintyre (2012)**

(from Terry Taylor)

Terry writes that there are several references to the wartime Wodehouse in this book: “One of the German double agents who is pro-British knows Wodehouse well and there is even the suggestion that Ethel might be a useful spy for MI6 as the two of them know Hitler's interpreter. She is described as totally anti-German, though Wodehouse is said to be ‘entirely childlike and pacifist’.”

***Patrick Leigh Fermor: An Adventure*, by Artemis Cooper (2012)** (from Christopher Bellew)

Cooper's biography of Paddy Leigh Fermor quotes a friend recalling “everything was *ripping*, and there was more talk of P G Wodehouse than of Horace or Gibbon”. This love for Wodehouse took tangible form in 1991, as Cooper relates:

Paddy was working feverishly in his study at all hours of the day and night, and finally emerged clutching a sheaf of paper. ‘I *knew* P. G. Wodehouse would translate into Greek!’ He had just translated ‘The Great Sermon Handicap’ from *The Inimitable Jeeves*.”

Christopher Bellew adds: “For those who don't know Fermor, he is better known for walking from Holland to Constantinople as a young man and in World War II kidnapping General Kreipe in Crete and spiriting him away to Cairo. This latter adventure was made into a film, *Ill Met by Moonlight*. Ian Alexander-Sinclair and I attended his Memorial Service in December 2011 at St James's Church, Piccadilly.”

***From Russia with Love*, by Ian Fleming (1957)**

(from Tamaki Morimura)

On page 1 of Fleming's novel, Tamaki was delighted to discover Red Grant of MGB reading Wodehouse's *The Little Nugget*, thus showing very good taste.

***Ogden Nash: The Life and Work of America's Laureate of Light Verse*, by Douglas M. Parker (2007)**

(from Paul Tubb)

Paul writes that P. G. Wodehouse is mentioned four times in this book. Most simply confirm Nash's admir-

ation of Wodehouse, but on page 54 we learn that the feeling was mutual. After Nash published his first collection of verses, he received many letters of congratulation. Parker writes: “But the letter that probably meant the most to Nash was from P. G. Wodehouse, whom Nash had long admired. ‘I simply revel in your poems,’ he wrote, adding, ‘I think the book is simply terrific and cannot be too widely known.’”

***The Deadly Dance*, by M. C. Beaton (PB, 2012)**

(from Beth Carroll)

Page 169 of this book reveals a delightful PGW reference – with no direct reference to Wodehouse himself: “Elaine had a voice like one of Bertie Wooster's aunts, which could be heard across a six-acre field, two spinneys, and a paddock. That voice now sounded across the restaurant.”

***St Pancras Station*, by Simon Bradley (2007)**

(from Tim Andrew)

In this book about the history of the London landmark, the author makes some cutting remarks about Victorian sensibilities regarding architecture. He includes the comment: “Even P. G. Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster got the drift, remarking somewhere that if he knew one thing about the Victorians, it was that they weren't to be trusted around a pile of bricks and a trowel.” (He got this slightly wrong: Bertie never made this observation. Rather, it is from chapter 2 of *Summer Moonshine*, with regard to the hideous-looking Walsingford Hall.)

***Our Queen*, by Robert Hardman (2011)**

(from Barry Chapman)

In this book, a female footman at Buckingham Palace states that her job resembles that of a butler, citing Jeeves. The author also notes that valeting is among the duties of “the modern Jeeves”. A couple of pages later, he describes the work of the Royal Chef and comments: “Along with the job comes automatic membership of a club straight out of P. G. Wodehouse. The Chefs des Chefs is restricted exclusively to the personal chefs of the world's heads of state.” With discretion being “the club's primary rule”, it is easy to compare this club with the Junior Ganymede!

Plum Afloat

by Robin Dodd

In my days as a partner of a West End firm of Estate Agents in the 1980s, my office was on the ground floor of 20 Berkeley Street, on the corner of Hay Hill. Some 60 years before, P. G. Wodehouse had occupied a somewhat more elevated position, a third-floor flat at 18 Berkeley Street, on the same side as you walk down from Berkeley Square to the Ritz. My home was, and still is, but a horse ride from Plum's Emsworth.

When I retired, I spent some very pleasurable years working part-time on the Expedition Staff and as a pianist aboard small, luxury "classic" cruise ships. In May 1999, I filled in as the pianist aboard the Swan Hellenic's *Minerva* on a tour of classical Greece, working on the same team as the late Lord Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury, who was one of the lecturers. I recall a most convivial afternoon tea with him as we passed Ithaca, during which we discussed the proposition that Bertie's Aunts were alive and well on cruise ships.

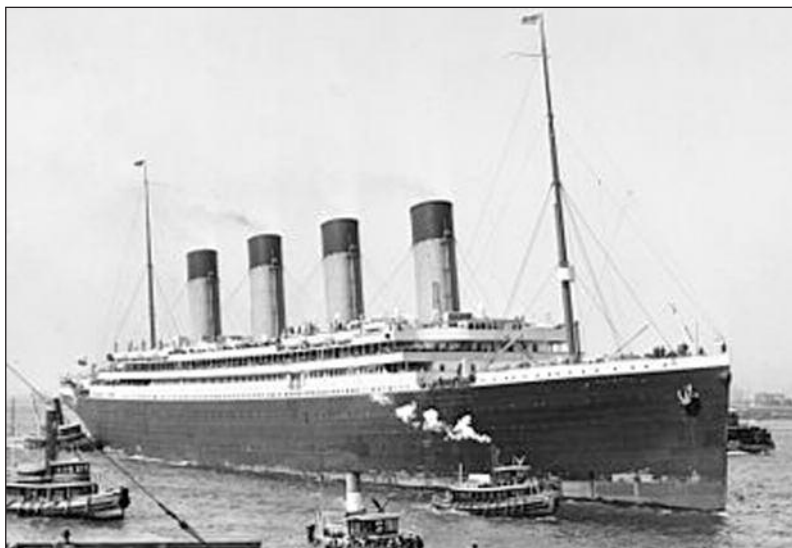
It was Robert Runcie who inspired me to explore the connection between Wodehouse and ocean travel, particularly in view of my erstwhile "Wodehousian London" address. My enthusiasm led me into a search for the true identity of the legendary White Star liner R.M.S. *Atlantic*, which features so largely in *The Girl on the Boat* (1922) and *The Luck of the Bodkins* (1935).

In the 1920s, the Western Atlantic was dominated by two British lines, White Star and Cunard, and Wodehouse took passage aboard the prestige liners of both. The names of White Star liners ended in 'ic' (*Titanic*, *Olympic*, *Homeric*, *Majestic*), whereas Cunard's ended in 'ia' (*Lusitania*, *Mauretania*, *Aquitania*). R.M.S. *Atlantic* is named in seven books; the first is *Uneasy Money* (1916) and the last is *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* (1972). The 'ic' ending drew me to concentrate on White Star, particularly as Wodehouse identifies R.M.S. *Atlantic* as a White Star liner in his books, prior to the White Star-Cunard amalgamation in 1933.

So why did Wodehouse choose the name *Atlantic*? There are a number of possibilities, but in my opinion the best bet for the actual name was White Star's ill-fated *Atlantic*, which went down, New York-bound, in 1873, taking 585 souls with her, off Prospect Cape, Halifax. White Star did not feel like using the name again, so Wodehouse might have felt he would not upset anyone if he used it.

Now let us turn to the model for Wodehouse's R.M.S. *Atlantic* in real life, which, in my view, is the R.M.S. *Olympic*. Wodehouse crossed twice on the

Olympic, in 1913 and 1914, and it is mentioned three times in his works, beginning with *Something Fresh* in 1915. At 45,000 tons, maximum speed 21 knots, she was sister to the *Titanic*, and by 1913, following the previous year's famous disaster, she had been extensively refitted with watertight bulkheads extending from bottom to top throughout the ship, as well as double sides. Most significant of all for our purposes, the lifeboats were doubled, one nesting on top of the other the entire length of the boat deck, giving her a very distinctive and unique profile, in my view applicable to no other liner in service on the Western Atlantic.



The *Olympic* was nicknamed 'Old Reliable', and service was still the watchword in 1934, when Wodehouse completed *The Luck of the Bodkins*. This was the year before the *Olympic* made her last voyage to a breakers' yard at Jarrow, where the exquisite wooden panelled walls and windows from her First Class lounge and staircase were removed. They were purchased at auction and reconstructed in the dining room of the White Swan Hotel, Alnwick, in Northumberland, where they can be enjoyed to this day – perhaps even more so as R.M.S. *Atlantic*!

The curators of the Historic Photographs and Ship Plans Section of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, have kindly taken a brief look at their collection, and report no evidence to hand of another White Star liner with double-nesting lifeboats the entire length of the boat deck serving on the Western Atlantic in 1922. They confirm that the post-*Titanic* Board of Trade Regulations of 1913 called for a required number of lifeboats, their arrangement dictated by the layout of the boat deck. There were no fixed rules about double-nesting lifeboats the entire length; the boats could be placed aft, as on another ill-fated sister, the hospital ship *Britannic*,

which was almost exactly similar to the *Olympic*. Alternatively, the required lifeboats could fill in any gaps on the boat deck to form a single, uninterrupted row, as on the *Mauretania*. Individual liners displayed a lifeboat profile, an easily identifiable “calling card”, none more so than the *Olympic*.

The plans of the *Olympic* were published in *The Shipbuilders Magazine* of 1911 and provide the strongest clue to the connection between the R.M.S. *Atlantic* and the *Olympic*. In *The Girl on the Boat*, Sam Marlowe’s progress to his cabin aboard the *Atlantic* coincides exactly with the Saloon Deck D of the *Olympic*. Destined to keep his tryst with Billie, in which he would propose marriage and read Tennyson, “Sam raced up the companion-way as far as it went; then, going out on deck, climbed a flight of steps and found himself in the only part of the ship which was ever even comparatively private. . . . He threaded his way through a maze of boats, ropes, and curious-shaped steel structures which the architect of the ship seemed to have tacked on at the last moment, in a spirit of sheer exuberance.”

The *Olympic*’s double-nesting lifeboats, one above the other, also utilised “curious-shaped structures”. These were the Welin Quadrant Double Acting Davits, with double the pre-*Titanic* number of steel cables and pulleys – complicated structures into which the heads of both Sam Marlowe and the obnoxious Bream Mortimer would take painful purlers. Many of the *Olympic*’s distinguished clientele suffered similar agonies, and complained accordingly. True, the architect did have to tack on these davits at the last moment, to comply with the Board of Trade’s requirements of 1913, but whether he did so in a spirit of exuberance is debatable, given the circumstances.

Then there is Sam’s walk aft: “Above him towered one of the funnels, before him a long, slender mast. He hurried on, and presently came upon Billie sitting on a garden seat, backed by the white roof of the smoke-room; beside this was a small deck which seemed to have lost its way and strayed up here all by itself. It was the deck on which one could occasionally see the patients playing an odd game with long sticks and bits of wood – not shuffleboard but something lower in the mental scale.”

Looking at the *Olympic*’s plans, it all begins to fit like a jigsaw, with the First-Class smoking room and the rear companion-way. Then the plans yield the best clue of all. Wodehouse writes: “A sailor crossed the deck, a dim figure in the shadows, went over to a sort of raised summerhouse with a brass thingummy in it, fooled about for a moment, and went away again. Sailors earn their money easily.”

The “brass thingummy” was the top of the brass casing that housed the vertical reciprocal engine, which plunged down to the bowels of the ship, and there were “tank rooms” each side on the deck. This was all housed within a raised structure that indeed

was deliberately designed to resemble a summerhouse, even so far as fronting a little promenade deck on the port side. This formed a convenient buffer zone between First and Second Class, but it was exclusively reserved for engineers. Plum and his fellow passengers might well have been prompted to remark on the way sailors earned their money!

Close examination of the plans in First Class clearly identifies Monty Bodkin’s stateroom C 25 and Ivor Llewellyn’s C 31 on Shelter Deck C of the *Olympic*, forward of the Grand Entrance, both having windows on the starboard side, and the domain of steward Albert Peasemarch in *The Luck of the Bodkins*. Clearly standing out opposite the lift, the last one in the row, is Gertrude Butterwick’s stateroom B 36 on Bridge Deck, with a window on the port side.

It is all a confusing trail of swapped “sheds”, to use the vernacular of Albert Peasemarch, whose “glory hole” is situated on the port side of Upper Deck E, along with the cabins of “The Dooser” (second steward), “Jimmy the One” (chief steward), and “Old Scupperguts” (head waiter), using White Star terminology.

In *The Girl on the Boat*, Sam Marlowe proceeded down the main companionway “through a rich smell of india-rubber and mixed pickles” as far as the dining saloon, then turned down the narrow passage leading to his stateroom – and it’s all there on the plans. Experienced mariners will confirm that every ship has her distinctive smell; for example, whiffs on the *Ile de France* and the *Normandie* were delightfully Gallic. It is known that the White Star line did use a peculiar concoction of cleaning fluid made to their special order for use by the likes of Albert Peasemarch, which drew passenger comment on the *Olympic*, obviously not lost on Plum, but whether this inspired him to mention the ship in *Something Fresh* is open to debate.

Two large models of the *Olympic*, or R.M.S. *Atlantic* if you prefer, are known to exist. One, 18½ feet long, was exhibited at White City in 1910 and thereafter from 1932 at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool. A smaller model, 6 feet long, was constructed by the famous model makers Bassett-Lowke of Northampton, with the port side cut away to reveal the interior. In 1937, this model was presented by the Olympic Steamship Company to the Science Museum, South Kensington, where it may still be seen.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if The P G Wodehouse Society could find the larger model, to be a centrepiece at the next Society dinner, with two girls posing as red-headed scorchers Wilhelmina (Billie) Bennett and Lottie Blossom with her pet alligator. One can but wonder whether they derive from personal experience on one or another of the author’s 43 Atlantic crossings. As the poet Gray wrote, and Wodehouse was happy to agree, “Youth on the prow and Pleasure at the Helm”!

Wodehouse on the Boards

By the time this issue of *Wooster Sauce* reaches our U.K. members, the Common Ground Theatre Company in Lincoln will have begun its short run of *Carry On, Jeeves*, being performed March 14–16 at the Lincoln Drill Hall. There may yet be a chance to go see it; if there is, tickets (a mere £10) can be ordered at www.lincolndrillhall.com, or by calling 01522 873894.

Over in the States, February and early March saw the production of two Wodehouse-based plays by Margaret Raether: *Jeeves Takes a Bow*, put on by First Folio Theatre in Oak Brook, Illinois; and *Jeeves in Bloom*, staged by the Taproot Theatre in Seattle, Washington. Both plays received excellent reviews from both the Press and from Wodehouseans. Plot descriptions show that Raether takes quite a few liberties with the original Wodehouse stories on which her plays are based, but she



Kevin McKillip as Binky Bickersteth, Jim McCance as Jeeves, and Christian Gray as Bertie in *Jeeves Takes a Bow*.

nonetheless delivers a lot of entertainment.

The Taproot production also featured a panel discussion on the night of February 19, featuring Wodehouse experts and Society members IAN MICHAUD and THOMAS L. R. SMITH. In his review published in the Spring 2013 issue of *Plum Lines*, Tom declared that *Jeeves in Bloom* “was the goods” and that Taproot had “put on a wonderful little production of a well-crafted adaptation”. Ian also offered kudos to the cast and to the director, Karen Lund, “for skilfully

bringing to life the characters we all know”. Bravo to Taproot – as well as to First Folio and (especially) Margaret Raether!

And what lies ahead? Well, nothing in the UK that we know of, but, if you’re in or headed to New York City in April, be sure to catch *Leave It to Jane* at the Lion Theatre, 410 West 42nd Street. Musicals Tonight! is producing this Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern classic on April 16–28, with tickets only \$29 (app. £19). They can be purchased by calling Telecharge at (001) 212-239-6200 or (001) 800-432-7259; or going to their website: www.telecharge.com/homepage.aspx.



The publicity poster for *Jeeves in Bloom*

The Reverse Bertie

by Robert Bruce

Everyone knows the enthusiasm with which members of the Drones Club will, in certain stages of intoxication and good humour, attempt to remove a policeman’s helmet from its rightful wearer. And most people who have taken an interest in the subject are familiar with the instructions on how to do it with ease, élan and, above all, speed. After all, Bertie Wooster provided a tutorial for Stiffy Byng in *The Code of the Woosters*: “It is essential, when pinching policemen’s helmets,” he said, “to give a forward shove before applying the upwards lift. Otherwise, the subject’s chin catches in the strap.” Failure to observe this rule meant that Bertie finished up in the dock in front of a fearsome Sir Watkyn Bassett the following morning.

But what we haven’t had, until last summer, is details of what you might call ‘The Reverse Bertie’ – how to put helmets, or similar, securely on in the first place.

The details became apparent in the unlikely location of Lambeth Palace, official residence of the

Archbishop of Canterbury. In a glass case at the far end of an exhibition entitled ‘Monarchy and the Book of Common Prayer’ we found the then Archbishop Fisher’s Order of Service for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. And written neatly in the margin, and carrying the experience of a fortnight of daily rehearsals, were his own notes for what he describes as ‘The Putting On of the Crown’. They are intricate and thorough – the equal, perhaps, of Bertie’s.

“We devised this way”, his notes start. “1) I put the crown on getting the front edge where it should be, a piece above the eyebrows. 2) I press down the back firmly. 3) I give a slight pressure at front. If Queen indicates it, another pressure here.” And as the notes to the exhibit put it: “These careful preparations paid off.”

So there you are. We doubt if the Queen would have put up with Bertie’s ‘forward shove’, but should you ever need to execute a reverse Bertie, you now have the inside track from the highest authority.

Butlers and Valets on Stephen Fry's *QI* by Gus Caywood

On a visit to the UK this past December, I was introduced to the nighttime BBC quiz show *QI*. This show, on which contestants rack up points more for the brightness of their repartee than for the actual correctness of their answers, has been hosted for 10 years by the genial and erudite Stephen Fry.

By happenstance, the first episode I saw included a brief segment on 'butlers and valets'. Stephen, as moderator, was immediately called upon to correct a contestant's misconception that Jeeves is a butler. But he was also ready with Bertie's comment that Jeeves can "buddle with the best of them" when pressed into service (see *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, chap. 1).

During the back and forth, there flashed onscreen a still photo of Laurie and Fry as Jeeves and Wooster from the early 1990s. One of the contestants ventured the remark that Stephen had been quite young at the time to play Jeeves. Stephen defended his casting by offering the following as Wodehouse's description of Jeeves's first appearance, in *Carry On, Jeeves*: "A darkish, youngish chap stood in the doorway."

Was Stephen bluffing? The actual quote, from the story 'Jeeves Takes Charge' in that book, is: "A kind of darkish sort of respectful Johnnie stood without." No mention of "youngish". (This, of course, was Jeeves's first meeting with Bertie in chronological terms, but was not his first appearance in print. The latter had come in 'Extricating Young Gussie', originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* a year before 'Jeeves Takes Charge'.)

The word 'youngish' does turn up in a 1953 description of Jeeves, however. Wodehouse said Jeeves was "tall and dark and impressive. He might have been one of the better-class ambassadors or the youngish High Priest of some refined and dignified religion" (*Ring for Jeeves*, chap. 4). The Wodehouse-Bolton play *Come On, Jeeves*, upon which *Ring for Jeeves* had been based, was more succinct: "Jeeves is a man in his middle forties of impressive dignity." (*Come On, Jeeves*, Act 1)

The "youngish" contention gets some further, though equivocal, support from the 'Jeeves' entry in the *Wodehouse in Woostershire* volume of Tony Ring's *Millennium Concordance*: "In age, he was young enough to actively cultivate understandings with waitresses themselves of an age to attract Bingo Little, yet he was mature enough to realise that an understanding with a middle-aged cook would have little future."

I tuned in for two or three more *QI* episodes during my UK stay in the hope of seeing more Wodehousean material. The shows were entertaining, but apparently the Wodehouse references are well spaced out because I didn't spot any more.

Answers to Mastermind Quiz

(Page 6)

1. George Cyril Wellbeloved, Lord Emsworth's pigman, is in jail for being drunk and disorderly.
2. Bottles
3. That Beach should be removed from his post
4. Rupert Baxter
5. Niagara (Aggie) Donaldson
6. Mr Popjoy
7. Make a speech
8. A Pekingese named Eisenhower
9. Lord Emsworth has grown a beard.
10. James Belford

The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

A Gentleman of Leisure

The novel *A Gentleman of Leisure* has a couple of points of interest from a bibliographic point of view. It was one of only two Wodehouse titles published by Alston Rivers (the other being *The Swoop*), and it was the only Wodehouse title to be published by three different publishers in the UK before World War II.

A Gentleman of Leisure was first published in November 1910, by Alston Rivers, in royal blue cloth with gold lettering. The title and author's name appear on both the front cover and the spine, and the spine also shows the publisher's name at the foot. According to *McIlvaine* (A13b), the dustwrapper was dark red, with black lettering, with a price of 7/6 shown on the spine.

The dedication to Herbert Westbrook is the original version of the better-known dedication in *The Heart of a Goof* to Leonora Wodehouse. The original reads: "To Herbert Westbrook, without whose never-failing advice, help and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time." In the dedication to Leonora, the words "advice, help" are replaced by "sympathy".

McIlvaine records that Barry Phelps, the noted book-dealer, mentions a second issue from Alston Rivers in red cloth (A13b2) in one of his sale catalogues. However, *McIlvaine* omits details of another Alston Rivers issue. This is bound in mid-blue cloth. The front board is plain, apart from three black lines forming concentric rectangles around the edge of the boards. The spine is lettered in black, with the title in lower case and the author's name in capitals. The publisher's name is not present on the spine; the foot of the spine merely has six small black squares by way of decoration. There are a further six small black squares at the top of the spine. The text block is identical to that of the first edition, including the advertisements at the rear of the book. The red issue mentioned by *McIlvaine* is, apart from in the colour of its boards, identical to the blue issue. The blue and red issues seem to be much scarcer than the first edition, judging by the frequency with which copies appear for sale.

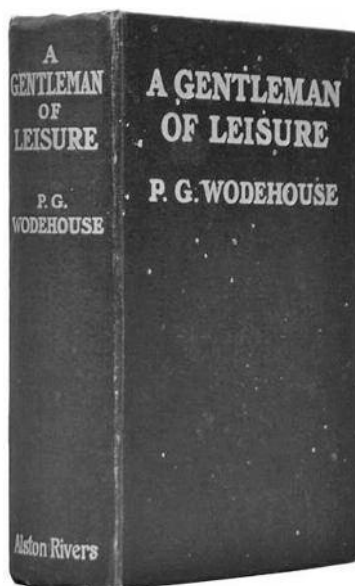
There were no further editions issued by Alston Rivers. In 1911 George Newnes started issuing

reprints of the title. *McIlvaine* records five such reprints, in 1911, 1912, 1920, 1929, and 1931 (A13b12 to A13b16). It seems that at least the last four of these reprints were paperback issues. The 1920 reprint is stated by *McIlvaine* to be abridged, and, judging by the number of pages in them, it is possible that the other paperbacks were also abridged. None of the Newnes editions contained the dedication to Westbrook, not even the 1911 edition published the year after the first edition, which perhaps throws an interesting sidelight on Wodehouse's often tempestuous relationship with Westbrook.

After Herbert Jenkins became Wodehouse's regular publisher, the title was also reprinted by Jenkins, in 1921 (A13b3). Again, the dedication to Westbrook did not appear, being replaced with one "To Douglas Fairbanks who many years ago played 'Jimmy' in the dramatized version of this novel". *McIlvaine* contains an error in its rendering of the final part of the dedication, recording it as "this dramatized version of the novel", which would only make sense if it accompanied the script of the play. *McIlvaine* also contains an error on

the date of publication, giving it as "[February 1911, reissued March 1921]"; as the stage version featuring Fairbanks premiered in August 1911 (J5), "[February 1911]" must be a misprint for February 1921, or else the dedication ("many years ago") becomes nonsensical. The first Jenkins edition has blue boards, the date on the title page is MCMXXI, and there are six Wodehouse titles listed on the verso of the half-title page, beginning with *Piccadilly Jim* and ending with *Indiscretions of Archie*.

The title continued to be reprinted by Jenkins with some frequency over the next 20 years. *McIlvaine* records a 15th printing (A13b8) in a dustwrapper with an orange background, which she dates to "[ca. 1939]". Given that the 14th printing (A13b7) was issued in a dustwrapper (with a white background) on which *Quick Service* (October 1940) is the most recent title advertised, the 15th printing must have appeared after the 1939 date attributed to it by *McIlvaine*.

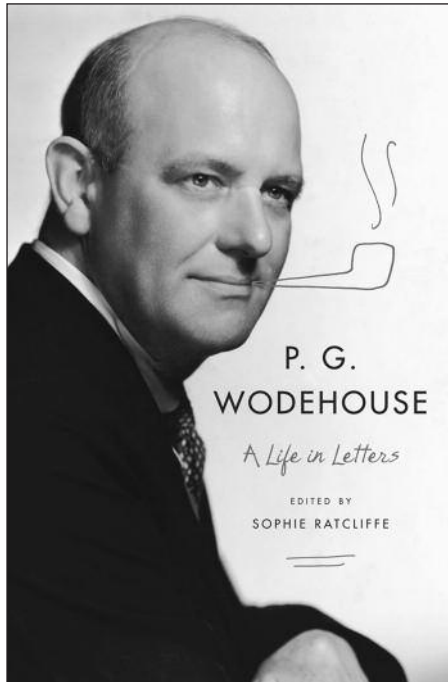


Alston Rivers first edition



Newnes paperback (1929)

Good News from the Colonies



Three cheers for W. W. Norton & Company, which has recently published *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*, edited by Sophie Ratcliffe, in the United States and Canada. It is, of course, the same book that was published by Random House in the U.K. in late 2011, though with a spiffing new cover and edited for an American audience. The book has been widely reviewed by American journals and newspapers since its publication, with the majority quite favourable. Christopher Buckley wrote in *The Daily Beast*:

Ratcliffe . . . has given us a monumental, exemplary book, excellent in every regard and indispensable to a three-dimensional understanding of one of English literature's great figures. Many of the letters are published here for the first time. It is a worthy companion to Robert McCrum's splendid 2004 biography.

Allan Massie, writing for *The Wall Street Journal*, had this to say:

P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters covers his long life. There must be many more uncollected or lost letters since he often wrote more than a dozen letters in a day. But the editor, Sophie Ratcliffe, has done a marvelous job. Her linking passages are sympathetic and intelligent, her footnotes well-judged. The book is a joy, and every admirer of Wodehouse will want to have it.

The new book lists for US\$35 and can be purchased at all major bookstores as well as through online sites such as Amazon.

Poet's Corner A Solitary Triumph

Oh, the progress of Woman has really been vast
Since Civilization began.
She's usurped all the qualities which in the past
Were reckoned peculiar to Man.
She can score with a bat, use a rod or a cue;
Her tennis and golf are sublime.
Her aim with a gun is uncommonly true,
But Man beats her hollow at crime.

The strings to her bow are both varied and quaint;
There are maids who can work with the pen,
There are maids who can handle the palette and
paint
With a skill that's not given to men.
There are ladies who preach, lady doctors there are,
MPs will be ladies in time,
And ladies, I hear, practise now at the Bar –
But Man holds the record for crime.

So it's hey for the jemmy, and ho for the drill,
And hurrah for the skeleton keys.
Oh, to burgle a house or to rifle a till!
I am more than her equal at these.
She may beat me at home, she may beat me afield;
In her way I admit she is prime.
But one palm at least I compel her to yield;
I can give her a lesson in crime.

From *Daily Chronicle*, 12 January 1903
(Following a report that the ratio of criminal women is considerably lower than that of males)

A Wodehouse Sonnet by Simon Alcock

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the tabletops with kippered herrings,
Gilding butter-pale toasts with cold-smoked
sheen,
And put peckish prudence to the buckling
winds.
That tray, that with metallic brass doth frame
The lovely fish where every eye doth dwell,
Will play the tyrant to these very same
In vaunting wares it's disinclined to sell.
I heard the sloosh of coffee in a cup
Split from tail to head the vagrant diner:
Cured appetite's distillation left a
Liquid prisoner pent in walls of china.
Yet though cajoled by some fancied relief,
Breakfast is fleeting; your suffering, brief.

Recent Press Comment

The Hindu, October 20 (from Raja Srinivasan)

An article compared fictional villages in two books of stories – Market Blandings in PGW's *Imperial Blandings* and Malgudi in R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* – commenting that each has a certain something that has endeared them to generations

Elle Decor, November

(from Barbara Jacobitti)

The New York Metropolitan Museum director Thomas P. Campbell named as one of 12 things he can't live without: "*The Complete Jeeves*, by P G Wodehouse. Timeless and upbeat. The perfect escape."

The Daily Telegraph, November 3

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

An article about exorbitant luggage charges on no-frills airlines suggested it would be cheaper to take the butler to carry the second bag, with a headline: "How to beat baggage charges: bring Jeeves."

The Daily Telegraph, November 10 (from Lucy Tregear)

Lucy drew attention to the comment in an article about musical flops by Sarah Crompton that "Andrew Lloyd Webber has never been tempted to revisit *Jeeves*, a collaboration with Alan Ayckbourn, based on the novels of P. G. Wodehouse, which vanished unmourned after 38 performances." (Crompton apparently was unaware of *By Jeeves*.)

The Observer, November 11

(from Murray Hedgcock & Terry Taylor)

Frank Keating recalled that on the 1981–82 cricket tour of India, "Just about everyone would have a book on the go", adding that Bob Willis contentedly waded through *Brideshead Revisited* before chortling quietly at a Wodehouse omnibus.

The Daily Telegraph, November 15

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

A letter commenting on the disappearance of the tie from the dress of many TV performers quoted the Bertie-Jeeves exchange: "What do ties matter, Jeeves, at a time like this?" "There is no time, sir, at which ties do not matter."

Times Literary Supplement, November 23

(from Barry Chapman)

In a review of *Counting One's Blessings*, a collection of the late Queen Mother's letters edited by William Shawcross, Richard Davenport-Hines noted how the Q.M. loved Wodehouse's novels to the point of frequently using their idioms in her own speech. Among other things, "when asked by her arch-confidant D'Arcy Osborne how he should address her after her royal marriage, [she] suggested 'What ho, duchess!'"

The Wall Street Journal, November 24

(from David Landman & Beth Carroll)

The reviewer of *Counting One's Blessings: The Collected Letters of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother* noted that when her husband was forced to assume the throne, "her Gibraltar-like qualities helped make him the steady

monarch that Britain urgently needed", and added: "Given that P G Wodehouse was her favourite author and that her husband's name was Bertie, it is tempting to describe her role as Jeevesian."

In Other News . . .

There was much going on at the time this issue was being prepared. See page 7 for both personal and public views of the BBC1 series *Blandings* and page 21 for news and reviews of the just-published American edition of *P. G. Wodehouse: A Life in Letters*. A tribute to Richard Briers, including a summary of the press coverage of his death, will be published in our June issue.

Bibliophile, December

The mail-order book remainders journal used three PGW quotations to introduce various categories of book offers, such as, for 'Crime Fiction': "As a sleuth you are poor. You couldn't detect a bass-drum in a telephone-booth."

The Times, December 6

(from Iain Anderson)

Damien Whitworth's article about the great British butler,

now sporting a BlackBerry instead of a silver tray, reminded readers that "P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves was technically a valet rather than a butler, although, according to his employer Bertie Wooster, 'If the call comes, he can buttle with the best of them.'"

The Independent, December 12 (from Graham D. Palmer)

An amusing letter to the editor, done as a dialogue between Jeeves and Bertie, made it clear that Jeeves is a gentleman's personal gentleman, and not a butler, as he had been described in a recent crossword puzzle clue.

The Times, December 22

In his column 'The Pedant', considering the meaning of the expression 'eke out', Oliver Kamm wrote that there was no more pleasurable way of grasping nice distinctions about language than reading Wodehouse, and used quotations from 'The Tabby Terror', an early short story, and *Uneasy Money* to illustrate his points.

BBC Radio 4, From Our Own Correspondent, January 5
(from Alexander Dainty)

Hugh Schofield (BBC Correspondent in Paris) presented a 10-minute piece on Wodehouse and the French.

The Guardian, January 7

Robert McCrum commented on the on-off friendship of Wodehouse and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who shared the services of the American literary agent Paul Reynolds and lived close to each other at Great Neck.

Daily Telegraph, January 12

In advance of the first episode of *Blandings*, the Review section had an article by author and Society patron Tom Sharpe describing his affection for the works of Wodehouse and the probable location of Blandings Castle as posited by Norman Murphy.

Evening Standard, January 14 (from Nirav Shah)

The Londoners Diary reported that Rowan Atkinson, starring in *Quartermaine's Terms* by the late Simon Gray, had been asked by 'Give a Book', a charity founded by Gray's widow to nominate a title for its latest 'Book of the Month', and had chosen *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*.

I would recommend *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* by P G Wodehouse. I first read it at school when I was

seventeen and it opened a window onto the Wodehousean world, in which I have wallowed ever since. I know that Wodehouse is absurd, escapist nonsense but as a result, I find it extremely attractive as literature and genuinely funny. I mentioned the book in an interview I once did, 25 years after I left school and rather sweetly one of my old teachers sent me the actual volume from the school library that I had read, and which I have still.

The charity's website is at www.giveabook.org.uk.

The Week, January 19 (from Edward Cazalet)

Actor Simon Williams, who is appearing in *Chariots of Fire*, included an Arrow collection of ten Wodehouse books in his list of favourite books. "I had to choose this because when all the bad news of the world comes at me, P. G. Wodehouse reminds me of all that I love about the madness and wonderfulness of being in this country. The Wodehouse world is just so full of joy."

Buffalo News, January 26 (from Laura Loehr)

A cartoon by Harry Bliss shows a man watching (American) football on TV while his wife hands him a bowl of popcorn. He thanks her with: "Right-Ho, Jeeves!"

New York Times, January 31 (from Barbara Jacobitti)

In an interview published in the Sunday Book Review, journalist and humour writer Dave Barry named Robert Benchley and P. G. Wodehouse as his favourite authors.

From The Daily Telegraph, February 14

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

In a column referring to a decision by the BBC to downplay the role of Harold Wilson's pipe in a five-hour tribute to him to be shown on BBC Parliament, Alan Massie discussed well-known pipe smokers, and wrote:

Raymond Chandler was rarely photographed without a briar in mouth or hand. Even so, he wasn't quite as dedicated as that other distinguished old boy from Dulwich College, P G Wodehouse, still photographed, pipe in mouth and tapping away into his typewriter well into his eighties.

From The Times, February 16

Magnus Linklater wrote about the problems of downsizing when moving house – and the difficult decisions to be made in order to reduce his 3,500 books to 400. He asked:

But why, then, hang on to my sets of Wodehouse, Waugh, Kipling or Conrad? They are every bit as dusty, and will I ever read *Kim* again? I decided it was partly the pleasure of acquisition – a set built up, like a stamp collection, over many years, retains loyalty in ways that single volumes may not. But also because, like a favourite relation who pops in now and again, your spirit lifts when they cross the threshold. I can see certainly myself pulling down *The Luck of the Bodkins* on a long winter's evening...

Quizzes, Puzzles, and PGW

Lately there has been an abundance of mentions of Wodehouse in crossword puzzles, quiz columns, and quiz programmes; here are just a few. Thanks to all who sent items, including June Arnold, Barry Chapman, Carolyn de la Plain, Nirav Shah, Mark Taylor, and Susan Walker.

BBC2 quiz programme Eggheads, November 12

One General Knowledge question asked whether the Empress of Blandings was a horse, pig, or cat. None of the challengers had read the books, but one guessed the right answer because she had heard of 'Pigling Bland'.

The Times, November 29

Times 2 crossword clue to 13 down was quite easy: 'P G -, writer (9)'.

Times Literary Supplement, November 30

Crossword 952 by Tantalus included two PGW-related clues: 'There are two in Wodehouse's *Jeeves in the Offing*, and one in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* (4)'; and "'Hers was an alert, vigorous mind, bright and strong like a steel trap," said Wodehouse of this Lady Caroline (4)'. (The answers, respectively, are 'effs' and 'Byng'.)

The Times, December 22

Question 6 of the Christmas Quiz, Round Two, read: 'P G Wodehouse had Mr Mulliner to narrate some of his taller stories. Which Indian novelist, born in 1906, used a similar character called *The Talkative Man*?' (The answer was R. K. Narayan.)

Independent on Sunday, January 6

Presented a quiz on Wodehouse and his work across two full pages – a total of 60 questions.

The Mail on Sunday, January 6

A Prize Crossword clue was: 'Rupert . . . , a P G Wodehouse character (6)'. The answer was 'Psmith', although, ignoring letters from other clues, it could have been 'Baxter'.

Brain of Britain, BBC Radio 4, January 7

Society member (and Mastermind quizmaster) David Buckle was a contestant on this quiz programme and got through to the semi-finals. His questions included one that asked what the initials 'PG' stand for in Wodehouse's name. David slightly mispronounced the name but got the point.

The Times, January 12

In his daily 'Literary Quiz', Philip Howard asked: "If all the girls Freddie Widgeon has loved and lost were placed end to end, they would reach – how far?" (Halfway down Piccadilly.)

The Guardian, January 13

Weekend Crossword clue 16 down: 'Bertie Wooster's Gentleman's Gentleman (6)'.

The Daily Telegraph, January 19

The weekend GK Crossword clue, 25 across: 'Former term for a sum of £ 100,000, the nickname of author P. G. Wodehouse or the surname of the professor in Cluedo. (4)'

The Daily Telegraph, January 26

The weekend General Knowledge Crossword, clue 2 across: 'Comedy drama series starring Timothy Spall and Jennifer Saunders based on stories by P G Wodehouse. (9)'

Future Events for Your Diary

April 13, 2013 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Explore Wodehouse's London with Norman Murphy! The walk is free and lasts about 2½ hours (10–12.30).

April 16–28, 2013 *Leave It to Jane* in New York City

The classic Bolton & Wodehouse & Kern musical will be staged by Musicals Tonight! at the Lion Theatre. See their website at www.musicalstonight.org/previews.html. Information on ordering tickets and other details are on page 18.

June 14, 2013 Gold Bats vs. The Dulwich Dusters

The definite date of our annual match against the Dulwich College masters; see page 4.

June 23, 2013 Gold Bats vs. Sherlock Holmes Society

This date is now confirmed; see page 4 for details.

July 9, 2013 Society Meeting

Another fine time is in store as we launch Open Mic Night – but only if we have enough people taking part! The fun starts from 6 p.m. at The George, – be

sure to join us. Better yet, become part of the entertainment!

July 13, 2013 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Another chance to join Norman on a walk around Wodehouse's London. See April 13 for details.

September 14, 2012 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

See April 13.

October 18–20, 2013 TWS Convention in Chicago

The Wodehouse Society's 17th biennial convention will be held at the Union League Club in Chicago, Illinois.

October 29, 2013 Society Meeting and AGM

Another rollicking good time at The George, complete with an AGM – who could ask for anything more? See page 4 for more about this meeting.

In Lord Emsworth's eye, as he gazed at his brother, there was the reverential look of a disciple at the feet of his master. He had always known, he told himself, that as a practical adviser in matters having to do with the seamier side of life the other was unsurpassed. It was the result, he supposed, of the environment in which he had spent his formative years. Membership of the old Pelican Club might not elevate a man socially, but there was no doubt about its educative properties. If it dulled the moral sense, it undoubtedly sharpened the intellect.

(from *Heavy Weather*, 1933)

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