

# WOOSTER SAUCE

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

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## ‘What Ho’ Causing Offence?

by Allen Hunter

Down here in sunny Queensland, Australia, I tried to obtain a personalized number plate that would, I thought, honour the worthwhile tradition of P G Wodehouse.

An old Army friend helps organize an annual Bentley meet. As I aspire to own one, I go along to enjoy the cars and to have tea and scones in the park-like grounds of an historic home. It’s all very nice; very civilized.

After the last such meet, I started thinking I should prepare for eventual Bentley ownership by at least acquiring a suitable number plate. And wouldn’t ‘What Ho’ be perfect (even if it is not on a Hispano-Suiza)? This would let other PG fans know that there is someone out there doing their little bit to keep the tradition alive.

I also knew that if one thinks of a number plate and doesn’t acquire it right away, someone else will beat you to it. So straight away I got onto the Government website and typed in ‘WHAT HO’ to see if it was available. You might imagine my excitement to discover that it was. So I paid the necessary fee and had the purchase confirmed.

Now all I had to do was work out how I was going to acquire the car. If I may digress briefly, I should point out that the Director of Purchasing in our humble financial empire had not given prior approval to said purchase, but I considered that merely an obstacle to overcome. After all, I reasoned, there are many ways to skin a cat, as we say down here. For instance, one fellow I know obtained a dog which he proceeded to name

‘Bentley’, figuring that this would be the only Bentley he would ever have. Solutions have a way of appearing unexpectedly, I often find.

Nevertheless, all weekend I basked warmly in the contented knowledge that even though I had not yet worked out how to get the car, at least I would have the number plate. Imagine going down to the shops for the papers and milk in the morning!

It was on Monday morning that I collided with the State bureaucracy, and my dream evaporated. I received an email from them, explaining that all applications for plates are assessed for



*Allen and his wife, Carmel, with a facsimile of the offending plate*

appropriateness. They went on to say (quoting verbatim):

*An unacceptable plate combination can include, but is not limited to, obscene or indecent combinations, plate combinations that promote unsafe or harmful behavior, or plate combinations that may be considered offensive to members of a religion, members of a distinct culture, citizens of a particular nation, people of a particular race and members of a particular minority.*

Then they said: “Your plate combination ‘WHAT HO’ has been assessed as unacceptable.” Furthermore, I was to be relieved of \$100 for attempting to obtain an “*inappropriate or offensive*” plate (their emphasis).

I was stunned. I sent off an email, asking them (politely, of course) why this plate was unacceptable. I explained the connection with PGW, with my (future) Bentley, and how it “would have given rise to much pleasure in the hearts of those many followers of the many exploits of . . . Bertie Wooster.” I suggested that maybe P G Wodehouse himself would have smiled.

But this, I am sad to say, was to no avail.

Their reply indicated that they accepted the plate was “not meant in an offensive or inappropriate manner”; nevertheless, WHAT HO

“is definitely not a combination that can or will be sold”. You will note that they did not explain what the problem with the plate was.

Further communication ensued. When I received a phone call from the Manager, I pointed out that not only was “what ho” found all through the writings of P G Wodehouse, but the phrase has an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as an interjection. It even appears in Shakespeare! Still no explanation. At least he agreed to consider waiving the penalty for my wickedness.

So I had to unearth for myself what the problem was. I asked a young acquaintance, and he just snickered, if that’s the word I’m looking for. It seems the problem might have been with the “HO” part. Apparently the word is some kind of rap slang for a lady of dubious virtue.

When I told my son about this, he wanted to know if Santa would be refused “HO HO HO” for the number plate on his sleigh? (Clever boy, my son; goes right to the heart of the matter in cases such as this.)

So, dear readers, you may well share my feelings in this, but the sad thing is that a much-loved, well-established part of our rich and glorious literary heritage should be usurped by some mindless, modern slang.

I wonder what P G would make of it?

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## Two for the Tup

### *Reports of the Society’s most recent meetings*

#### *November 19: The AGM*

The Savoy Tup, 2 Savoy Street, is a most unusual pub. Customers are invited to bring their own food to enjoy while sipping their choice of drink from the pub’s vast range. The word *tup* means a ram, a paving hammer, a pile driving monkey, or the striking face of a steam hammer. As a verb it refers to domestic activities of sheep. So take your pick!

This quaint watering hole is where we had our meeting on the 19th November last year – the first one at this new venue. It is smaller than what we are used to, but we made ourselves comfortable.

The AGM was disposed of with her customary skill by Chairman Hilary Bruce. Exhausted by having to raise our hands when required during the meeting, we were rewarded with a well-earned break. We gained some muscle tone by having to go downstairs to buy our drinks.

The evening’s entertainment was provided by Graeme Davidson, who was interviewed by Paul Kent about Graeme’s interest in – or rather passion for – the various artists who have illustrated PGW’s work, especially in magazines, notably the *Saturday Evening Post*. The artists Graeme spoke so eloquently

about in his beautiful Scottish accent (for which he apologised!) included Paul Cox, Andrzej Klimowski, Frederic Gruger, Ionicus, Ronald Searle, Frank Ford, and James Montgomery Flagg. (We confess that we had heard of only two: Ionicus and Ronald Searle.)

Graeme told us how, when he was at school, he began to take an interest in the various illustrators who had worked on Wodehouse material. His enthusiasm was clear to see, and he had brought with him some of the cherished artwork he had bought.



*Graeme shows off one of his many treasures.*



He marvelled at the different styles of the artists and how they all could convey the spirit of the text, regardless of mistakes such as a butler’s pantry being shown as a very grand place.

When he was able to get a word in, Paul asked if there was a golden age of illustration. Graeme thought there was, and it was in the 1920s–1940s when magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Vanity Fair* flourished.

Paul wondered if illustrations were spoiled by inaccuracies such as a pink Empress of Blandings or Bertie Wooster with a monocle. Graeme thought not, in that it did not affect the value of the artworks.

In the event of a fire, Paul asked, which one of the artworks would Graeme save? It looked like a toss-up between *Louder and Funnier* and the first one he ever bought, *Leave It to Psmith*. (NB: *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* by Sebastian Faulks is illustrated by Paul Cox in *Vanity Fair*.)

Altogether it was a most informative and enjoyable evening.

– Arthur and Elizabeth Findlay

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**February 11: An Enjoyable Relapse**

The Society’s first meeting of 2015 was held on 11 February at our now established haunt for such events, the upstairs room at the Savoy Tup, found at 2 Savoy Street, just off from the Strand towards the Thames. Word swirled round, as I arrived and ensconced myself amid the thronging masses and atop a bar stool adjacent to a fortifying brace of glasses of Merlot (recommended by my splendid breakthrough medical team), that a sick note for the night had been received from our Chairman, Hilary Bruce, advising that she was confined to bed with directions to stay there until better.

“Lawks!” I thought. “No show without Punch! No Hamlet without the Prince!”

I began resigning myself to the evening’s proceedings being scratched before they’d even started. I had not, however, accounted for the sterling and stonking capabilities of (a) Hilary *in absentia* and (b) Hilary’s fellow Committee members present that evening.

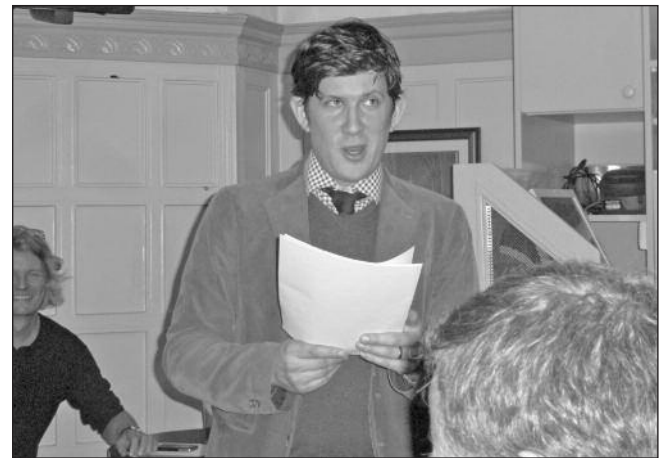
Whilst still resigning myself per the above and mentally extending to Hilary my best wishes for a full and speedy recuperation, blow me if Membership Secretary Christine Hewitt didn’t step up to the plate and rally the proceedings. She very ably stood in for Hilary and advised that she would be acting pro tem as the chairman for the evening.

Christine updated us on the Chairman’s absence,

explaining Hilary was recovering from an immune system malfunction. Sympathies and best wishes were extended. Christine then produced a spiel prepared by Hilary for the benefit of attendees at the meeting, and went through parish notices.

The notices included (a) confirmation that the entertainment at the next Society meeting would be a quiz, on 22 July; (b) a glimpse of Society Remembrancer Norman Murphy’s latest opus *The P.G. Wodehouse Miscellany* (see page 5 for more details); (c) details of various Society cricket match dates (see Society News, next page); and (d) an exhortation for a volunteer to take on the role of Society Treasurer.

As the date of the meeting fell in the week of St Valentine’s Day, the date of Plum’s passing, an appropriate toast was fondly and respectfully raised.



Paul Kent, essentially the Society Redcoat, then took the floor, delivered a brief commentary on relations between Wodehouse and fellow writer A A Milne, and segued into an introduction to a reading of a lightly abridged version of the Milne-inspired golf story ‘Rodney Has a Relapse’, performed that evening by actor Alex Harcourt-Smith, to whom Paul duly passed the floor. Alex (pictured above) proceeded to read, delight, and enchant. His reading gripped me more assuredly and effectively than any grip as might have been devised by the great Harry Vardon.

As a mark of appreciation of the enchantment and delight Alex had brought us, he was presented with a signed copy of Norman’s new *Wodehouse Miscellany*.

The formal part of the evening was then brought to a close, but the attendees continued with the customary browsing and sluicing and, as ever, comforting and entertaining chat about, and prompted by, the writings of Plum.

– Graeme W I Davidson

It was golf and the love of a good woman that saved Rodney Spelvin. The moment he had bought his bag of clubs and signed up Anastatia Bates as a partner for life’s medal round, he was a different man. He now wrote mystery thrillers, and with such success that he and Anastatia and their child Timothy were enabled to live like fighting cocks. It was impossible not to be thrilled by Rodney, and so skilful was the technique which he had developed that he was soon able to push out his couple of thousand words of wholesome blood-stained fiction each morning before breakfast, leaving the rest of the day for the normal fifty-four holes of golf.

(From ‘Rodney Has a Relapse’, 1949)

# Society News

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## ***Desperately Seeking Treasurer***

In the last *Wooster Sauce*, we called for a volunteer to take over as the Society's Treasurer. Jeremy Neville has been doing a diligent job for us since 2011, but in that time he acquired two children and increased job responsibilities that make it impossible for him to continue.

Thus, we are looking for a member willing to keep the Society's accounts in good fettle. Jeremy estimates the job takes an evening every week or so, although he does it in half-hour chunks. It involves the things a numerate person might expect: cash book, paying bills and expenses, bank reconciliation, and preparing the annual accounts. We use a computer-based accounting system, and the incumbent would have to be familiar with such things and actually own or have access to such a system, at least in the short term.

We'll be relying on the new Treasurer for the know-how to make some necessary changes, such as considering software that integrates our membership and accounting functions, and streamlining our subscription payments further. This is an officer position on the committee, and we hope that the Treasurer would be able to attend three or four afternoon committee meetings a year in London, as well as being in regular email contact with committee colleagues.

## ***Graeme Davidson, Editor***

It is with great pleasure that we announce the addition of Graeme Davidson to the *Wooster Sauce* editorial strength. Graeme will be assuming the position of Editor in Chief, while current editor Elin Murphy will continue to assist as Production Editor. Graeme will introduce himself in the next issue, though you can learn something about him now in the report on page 2. In the meantime, letters and new submissions should be sent to him at the address found on the bottom of page 24. Please welcome Graeme with your contributions, large and small!

## ***Cricket 2015***

At the time of going to press, only one of our official Gold Bats games had been set in stone. We will play the Sherlock Holmes Society of London on Sunday, June 21, at the West Wycombe Cricket Club (just off the A40 [Oxford Road]). Play starts around 11.30 a.m. and ends sometime around 6 p.m.; there is a long lunch break – perfect for you to bring your own picnic! Given decent weather, this is a fun day out, and afterwards players and spectators congregate at a nearby pub.

Our other official match is against the Dulwich Dusters. In the past this has been on the third Friday of June, starting around 4.30 p.m. This means the likely date is June 19; if this, or any other date, is confirmed by the time *Wooster Sauce* is posted to members, then that

information will be included on the cricket tea applications enclosed with this issue. Otherwise, please check the website ([www.pgwoodehousesociety.org.uk](http://www.pgwoodehousesociety.org.uk)).

Finally, the Gold Bats charity match against the Patrick Kidd XI will take place at Audley End on Sunday, May 17, at Audley End (near Saffron Walden in Essex). Start time is around 1 p.m.

## ***July Meeting***

The Society's next meeting will take place on Wednesday, July 22, at the Savoy Tup. The Fiendish Quiz is back by popular demand, so sharpen your pencils and your minds and join us for a splendid evening! We start gathering around 6 p.m., with Parish Notices at 6.45, followed by the quiz, moderated by our fiendish impresario, Paul Kent.

## ***The Society and London-centricity***

Recently our Membership Secretary, Christine Hewitt, received a letter from a member who was resigning from the Society. Among his reasons was this comment: "It was fun while it lasted, but inevitably the Society is very much London based and, living as I do in rural mid-Wales, I feel rather remote from the centre of things."

This spurred your committee into a lengthy discussion about the Society's early days, when we tried as best we could to encourage the formation of local groups, sadly with only limited success. We talked about our efforts to get word of the Society to areas outside London – for example, encouraging attendance at local Wodehouse theatre productions and organising events such as the tour to Norfolk in 2012 and our recent 10-year sponsorship of the Berkshire Breed Champion of Champions at the Newbury Show.

Certainly many of our members are centred in and around London – close to 30%, according to recent calculations – and another 20% are elsewhere in Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world. But some 50% of members live in other parts of the U.K., and the committee is willing to do all it can to help with the establishment of local Wodehouse groups around the country, such as are found within the American society. Indeed, all new members receive a document from Christine inviting them to get in touch with a committee member if they would like to arrange an event in their area, which would be a realistic first step towards forming a local group.

What we can't do, for obvious reasons, is actually to organise groups and events without reciprocal assistance from members who live in those areas. Thus, if you want to do more with other Wodehouseans in your area and are willing to get involved with the organisation, let us know!

# Multum In Parvo

## *The P.G. Wodehouse Miscellany*

by Norman Murphy

There I was in November 2013, happily settling down to a job I knew would take months, i.e. sorting out a filing cabinet full of over 40 years' worth of Wodehouse notes, when the call came. I received an e-mail saying The History Press of Stroud, Gloucestershire, was looking for someone to write a book to be titled *The P.G. Wodehouse Miscellany*.

It seemed an interesting idea, so I sent them a copy of my *Wodehouse Handbook* to look at and asked if they were interested in something along those lines. They were and sent me a contract. The money was just about okay, but the shock was in their stipulation that the book must not exceed 25,000 words. I am not good on numbers, but that struck me as being very short. It was; it works out at sixty pages of A4!

I realized I had a problem. Sixty pages to cover Wodehouse's long life, his 98-plus books, his theatre and film career, TV adaptations, Wodehouse societies and websites – and somehow give a flavour of his humour? I decided to write twenty pages and then review the situation. I did so and the review made me feel rather like Napoleon at Moscow: things were not going as planned. What to do now?

Then I remembered I'd been here before. My first job in the Ministry of Defence back in 1967 was to write briefs for a four-star member of the Army Board. The briefs could be about anything – the choice of a new tank, introduction of a new radio, amalgamation of two regiments, or an argument with the Air Force on some topic or another. The point

was that the brief could never be longer than two sides of A4, no matter how complicated the subject. Background, aim, factors for and against, conclusions, and recommendation, all within two sides. Suffice to say, I soon learned the hard way to “write short” – very short.

I went through the twenty pages of my draft with this in mind. Adjectives? If in doubt, take them out. Adverbs? Who needs adverbs? “Executed properly”? “Done well” uses fewer letters. And so the long days wore on. And since it has been made clear to me that, in America, writing “Singing in the Rain” instead of “Singin’ in the Rain” is apparently as bad as burning the flag, I made sure Neil Midkiff cast his eye over it before it went off. And, of course, I was very lucky as Stephen Fry kindly made time to write a generous foreword to the book.

Looking back at it now, I'm proud of it. I believe it does encompass Wodehouse's life and 75 years of writing, and I did manage get in three sections of

‘Images’ – those passages we all love so much and which only Wodehouse could have written. These include the Scotsman with the grievance, the opening sentence of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, and my current favourite, which is from *Ring for Jeeves*:

It was a confusion of ideas between him and one of the lions he was hunting in Kenya that had caused A. B. Spottsworth to make the obituary column. He thought the lion was dead, and the lion thought it wasn't.

We'll see how it goes.

“It is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine.”

*The Custody of the Pumpkin*

THE  
*P.G. Wodehouse*  
MISCELLANY

N.T.P. MURPHY  
FOREWORD BY STEPHEN FRY

*The P.G. Wodehouse Miscellany is published by The History Press; list price £9.99. A review will be published in the June Wooster Sauce.*

Archie Moffam (pronounced Moom) sets a pattern for us. From Archie onwards, we can be pretty certain that if a young man's name ends in 'ie' or 'y' – Reggie, Monty, Archie, Eggy, Gussie, Freddie, Bertie, Reggie or Barmy – he is probably a member of the Drones Club (see Chapter 11), and the nice girl he eventually marries will have enough sense for both of them, take him in hand and make a man of him.

If he has a good, solid name – John, Joe, Mike or Bill (Wodehouse's favourite name) – then he is a young man with honourable intentions and able to provide a good home for the girl he marries, though some misunderstanding will always cause her to hate him before she at last realises his true worth.

Conversely, if a girl is named Bobbie (Wickham), Stiffy (Byng), Nobby (Hopwood) or Lottie (Blossom), then she is attractive but she is a human time bomb. She is charming, unscrupulous, quarrelsome and lovable, and her bright ideas cause chaos for all around her. If her name is Jane, Joan, Ann, Sally or Elizabeth, then she is a nice, sensible girl and probably the heroine of the story. If she is unfortunate enough to be named Gertrude, Florence, Madeline or Honoria, then she will try to mould her fiancé, make him stop smoking, force him to read improving books and probably want him to resign from the Drones Club.

(From *The P.G. Wodehouse Miscellany*, 2015)



# P. G. Wodehouse – A Friend in Need

by Agneta Westin

It was Hugh Laurie. My father had died, other gruesome things had happened, and going to bed was scary. Like Lord Emsworth I sought unconsciousness in vain ('Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best'). Hugh Laurie said somewhere that Wodehouse had saved his life, and I thought I would try him, too.

My father, Bo Westin, had left me the complete works, and I started reading in bed in order of publication in August 2010. Only in bed. No hurry. I wanted them to last. I had read most of them before, off and on since childhood. Wodehouse quotes were part of the family lingo. Rereading was also a leisurely way of sorting the books and weeding out doubles. Bed is no longer daunting, but it took a long time. The sun set at Blandings in May 2013.

Bo had discovered Wodehouse in the early Swedish translations, none very good. He realised that he was missing the essence of the books and had to read them in the original. In his teens in the late 1920s, Bo wallowed in things English – Wodehouse, jazz, and films. German was the first foreign language at school and French was preferred at home, but he became fluent in English – unlike his peers. Wodehouse helped him to a language and a large vocabulary, and it changed his life to such an extent that he later became an attaché at the Swedish embassy in Washington. Wodehouse is thus also partly responsible for making me bilingual and ending up as a translator at the Swedish Defence Staff.

As a translator of technical texts and reports, I have lived according to Yossarian's whim "death to all qualifiers" (Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*). Thankfully, Wodehouse does the opposite. Adjectives galore!

After my father died, I decided to join the Wodehouse societies. He was a member of the Swedish one, but I went for three: the Swedish one, the UK, and the US.

I was fortunate enough to attend the Biennial Dinner at Gray's Inn in 2012. Wonderful party, fantastic venue. I sat beside Tony Ring, and he put me on to Robert McCrum, Sophie Ratcliffe, and other biographical works that I had not read. Before the dinner I had only had a vague idea of Wodehouse's life from *Over Seventy* and his letters to Townend. I devoured them all – in the daytime. They are too big and heavy to read in bed.

I am slightly bemused by the general obsession with trivia. Nevertheless, it was great fun going walkabout round Bertie Wooster's (and Wodehouse's) old haunts in Mayfair with Norman Murphy the next morning. Of course, I got his book too and will take the other walks later, book in hand. In March 2014 I started on his two revised volumes of *A Wodehouse Handbook*.

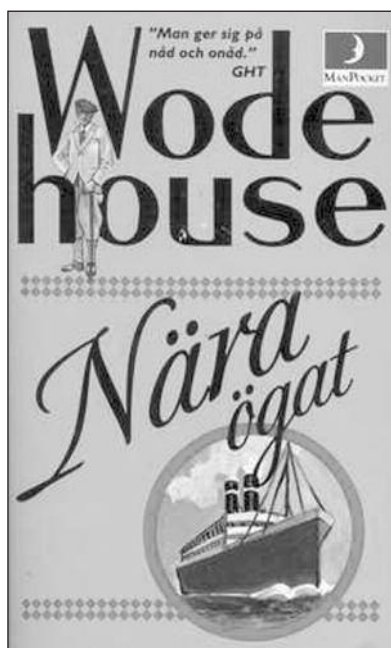
The early Herbert Jenkins books are wonderful for bed. Big print, lots of space between the lines and even a space before question marks. I used to buy cheap books at auctions in the early 1970s, lots of red Herbert Jenkins. Hence there were many doubles when I inherited my father's collection.

Unlike Stephen Fry, I cannot say that I have bathed in a bath of bliss, but Wodehouse provides distraction; he is amusing, soothing, and safe. He trusts the reader to fill in boring gaps, sparing you dull informative passages that other writers feel obliged to put in. You know there is a happy ending. His use of dramatic irony is Shakespearian. There is no reason to rush since you already know pretty well where the various characters are heading and what their just deserts will be. The villains are Runyonesque. It is always summer and the sun is always shining, unless he needs Psmith to offer a young lady an umbrella. I can feel the grass at Blandings under my bare feet.

I have been a Janeite since my teens – long before her books became romantic stories on television sadly lacking in what I enjoy in her books, "the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush". To my mind Jane Austen and P. G. Wodehouse are two of a kind, and I imagine them working – and giggling – in much the same way with intense concentration.

Wodehouse has been more successful on television. John Alderton and Pauline Collins were quite enjoyable in some Mulliner stories, but Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie reign supreme and are definitive as Jeeves and Bertie. I've been an avid fan of both ever since. Earlier television versions made me cringe. Ian Carmichael was just too old as Bertie. Wodehouse wrote to his daughter, Leonora, "Bertie is really the important part."

The Mulliner and Jeeves stories that have been televised are basically short stories with emphasis on plot. My own favourites are all novels



*The Luck of the Bodkins,*  
translated by Birgitta Hammar

where Wodehouse goes off on a tangent, reflecting with long trains of thought and astute observations of the human condition, usually drastic.

Two of my favourites are – I think – *Leave It to Psmith* and *Sam the Sudden*. I first read the Psmith book when I was about nine and can still see Baxter hurling flower pots in my mind's eye. Sam is a later favourite, perhaps because it does not belong to any series. I know pretty well what a semi in Valley Fields would be like – inside and out. One wonders how Americans – or Swedes – picture it.

Over 70 of Wodehouse's books have been translated into Swedish, with varying results. The best are by Birgitta Hammar. She was in luck when Monty Bodkin wanted to know how to spell 'sciatica'

(*The Luck of the Bodkins*); the Swedish word is *ischias*. Otherwise it has, of course, been impossible to render Wodehouse's way of writing accents, with words like 'sengwidges' and 'a slicer cake', so at least one dimension of his comedy is lost. Wodehouse expects you to know common Shakespeare quotes and to fill in the rest: "his voice sounded to Mr. Molloy like a knell" (from *Macbeth*: that summons thee to heaven or to hell). How do you convey that in Swedish? And what about translating this from *Sam the Sudden*:

"Fez, pliz."  
 "Valley Fields," said Kay.  
 "Q," said the conductor.

# Plum and the Book Collector

by C. Gwen Williams and Roger Bowen

The *Book and Magazine Collector* magazine was a must for serious bibliophiles and dealers alike. This handy, pocket-sized publication was produced for 26 years until its untimely demise in December 2010. Each month it gave pen pictures of leading writers and focused on their books or one aspect of their body of work as well as giving a guide to current values for good copies of the same. Naturally, dealers used it for advertising their wares to a receptive public. Occasionally it carried dire warnings not to part with money before receiving the goods from certain individuals, often with the rider that this person has no connection with the placer of the advert (usually a person with a similar surname).

P G Wodehouse's novels and magazine serials are well served by this magazine, notably in the May 1996, May 1998, and July 2002 editions, in each of which he was given top billing

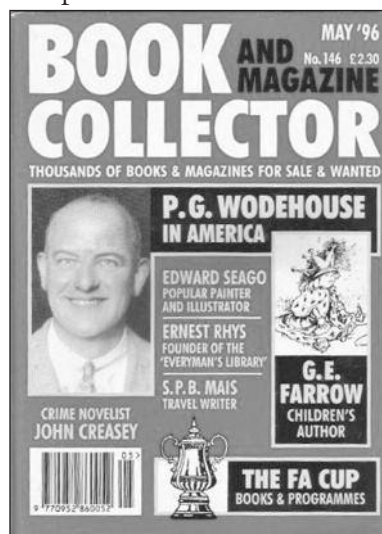
on the cover. Plum shared the limelight with the then Poet Laureate Ted Hughes; the prolific, but rather strange, adventure writer William Le Queux; and, in her centenary year, Orlando the Cat creator Kathleen Hale.

In the May 1996 issue, Crispin Jackson's article 'Wodehouse in America' highlighted Plum's great love for the United States and for the people of the country he first visited in 1904. The States' influence on his writing was considerable, not least because major film studios were happy to exploit his skills. By 1936 he was commanding a fine salary of no less than \$2500 a week from MGM.

In May 1998, Tony Ring, former editor of *Wooster Sauce*, told us about the serialisation of Plum's works. He highlighted the author's prolific output whereby 300 short stories appeared in an amazing 500 magazines, both in the UK and across the Pond, and 54 novels accounted for a further 400 publications.

In July 2002 Tony took the Blandings stories as his subject, referring to the Shropshire stately home as "an almost self-contained fictional world". Mr Ring highlighted, quite rightly, the lamentable error in representing the noble animal Empress of Blandings as anything but a Black Berkshire, both in jacket illustrations and in successive television series.

These editions of *Book and Magazine Collector* are well worth seeking out as they are widely available on the internet, notably for very modest prices on eBay.



# My (First) Wodehouse Experience

by Susan Richardson

Wodehouse? Who's he? Never heard of him. Jeeves and Wooster, yes – Ian Carmichael and Dennis Price, hilarious! Fast forward a few years to Fry and Laurie, even more hilarious – but P G *who*? Yes, I am saddened to have to admit it, but I grew up with no knowledge at all of the wit and wonder of Wodehouse, only the actors who made his Jeeves and Wooster household names.

Then one day I picked up one of my father's Jeeves and Wooster books – I have no idea which one and it really doesn't matter, because I discovered to my surprise that somebody called P G Wodehouse wrote a whole series of them. I read all the ones my father had in the house, and went in search of more. I hunted through the second-hand book stores and charity shops and to my utter delight I found that the wonderful Mr Wodehouse had written a whole lot of other stories about a whole lot of other people!

My main literary life from that time has consisted of a never-ending search for a 'new to me' PGW. The thrill of glimpsing an orange Penguin binding in the distance – the swoop and then the joy of finding I hadn't read this one or the anguished realisation that I had. What fun!

I left the north of England and have lived on the Isle of Man for almost forty years now, and for many of those years PGW was sent back and forth across the Irish Sea between my father and me. If I found a new Wodehouse, I would read it and post it for him to enjoy. I made sure I picked it up again when I visited, however, so that I could read it over (and over) again!

I was pleased beyond measure when I discovered that other people loved Wodehouse as well, and I

recognise the 'feeling of relief and comradeship' spoken of by Gerald Palmer (June 2014 *Wooster Sauce*) when he discovered The P G Wodehouse Society. It is a source of great disappointment to me that in all my Wodehouse reading years, my father is the only other person I have known who has shared my passion for P G. My mother, who was an avid

reader all her life, mystified me by saying *she could take him or leave him!* Is that possible? No, it isn't, and I think she was just being diplomatic; very sad for a woman of such otherwise impeccable taste. My husband is not the slightest bit interested; I tried in vain to get my three sons to read at least the golf stories (they all play golf). But I have given up, and I still have not met someone in the flesh as it were, to whom I can talk casually – no, not casually – to whom I can talk animatedly about the World of Wooster.

I cannot understand it, and have come to the conclusion that

I move in the wrong circles. A visitor to my home did once say "Ah *you* like P G Wodehouse do you?" I sprang round, my face lit up – I had found someone at last! Alas, it was but mockery, based on the sight of my bookshelves groaning with PGW paperbacks and my Everyman Library Collection.

It would still be pleasant to come across other living Wodehouse-loving comrades, but in the meantime I comfort myself with the knowledge that you are all out there. We are all from different walks of life and stations (I am a retired secretary myself), and whether we meet or not, P G Wodehouse is a great leveller. Do you know, I think I could chat to just about anyone from anywhere about his books – if only I could find someone!



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## Little Nuggets

### A Wodehouse Cameo

From member and sometime *Wooster Sauce* contributor TIM RICHARDS comes word of his new e-book, *Mind the Gap*. Tim writes: "Although he doesn't appear in the main story, PGW has a cameo appearance in the epilogue, set in 1941 Berlin. I think I've depicted him respectfully." *Mind the Gap* is published by HarperCollins and available through online retailers.

### Robert Was So Right

The December 2012 issue of *Wooster Sauce* included a letter from Robert Bruce, who reported having seen Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* for the first time. As he reviewed the scenario, Robert realised that he was "watching an opera written in 1786 but seeing a Blandings plot come alive before my eyes". Apparently *The Times* agrees with him. On January 30, 2015, the reviewer of a performance of *Marriage* at The Grand, Leeds, commented that "the overall tone of this opera is more P G Wodehouse than high classical solemnity". (Thanks to CHRISTOPHER BELLEW.)



# Why Does Connie Hold Such Power Over Clarence?

*Asks a puzzled Murray Hedgcock*

Increasingly, as I have pored over the Blandings saga, year in, year out, a question takes shape to which I have found no satisfactory answer: Why, exactly, did Lady Constance hold such sway over her brother, Clarence, the 9th Earl of Emsworth? Why did she intimidate him to the extent that she apparently did, day in, day out, story in, story out?

Certainly Connie was a forceful character, causing unease to many more than the head of the family. Even the resilient Galahad, while proclaiming the maxim “When Connie starts throwing her weight about, sit on her head immediately”, found it politic to bow to her role as gatekeeper of Blandings. As he admitted of Connie’s right of veto to his godson John Halliday, hopeful of an invitation to the Castle (*A Pelican at Blandings*, 1969): “Any attempt on my part to ring in a friend would rouse the tigress that sleeps within her. You would be lucky if you lasted five minutes.”

The definitive statement of the Connie-Clarence relationship is set out in the same book: “From childhood onwards, she had always dominated him, as she would have dominated Napoleon, Attila the Hun and an all-in wrestling champion.” This clearly suggests that Constance was so uniquely strong, single-minded, and indeed ruthless that she would have dominated not only Lord E., regardless of their childhood history, but indeed anyone.

But this is the very last Blandings book, written in 1969, over half a century after the first. I believe PGW was gilding the lily, over-egging the pudding, seeking to state afresh the relationship, and make the most of a continuing thread running through much – but certainly not all – of the Emsworth saga. Frankly, Plum went over the top in the effort to convince.

I repeat: I cannot understand how a small sister could establish such a hold over a big brother that it would endure into adult life. And she *was* a small sister. It is in *Summer Lightning*, published in 1929, that we get the most helpful pointers to their respective and significant ages. We learn that “Clarence was a long, lean, stringy man of about sixty”; Connie was “a handsome woman of middle age”. Musing on the maxim of Dr Joad (“It all depends what you mean by . . . middle age”), I submit that Lady Constance would be 45 or so. We are told in *Leave It to Psmith* (1923) that she was “a strikingly handsome woman in the middle forties”.

So the age gap was around 15 years – and this is where I question the idea that Clarence had been dominated endlessly by his sister, and indeed ask why she should have dominated him at all?

In fact, we are not even offered this scenario in the early Blandings novels. In *Leave It to Psmith* and in *Summer Lightning* (1929), Connie is bossy but by no means instils fear into a craven brother. It is not until *Heavy Weather* (1933) that there is any real suggestion of petticoat government, and then it is clearly limited. We learn “There had been times when the sudden advent of his sister when he was drooping his long body over the rail of the Empress’s sanctum would have caused him agitation and discomfort” – she tending to upbraid him for not attending to estate correspondence. But he had no secretary at this moment, no correspondence brought to his attention, and therefore no need to mount a defence.

We are told in the same book of Lady Constance: “In her dealings with the head of the family, she was always inclined to infuse into her manner a suggestion of a rather short-tempered nurse with a rather fat-headed child.” But please note: it is in *Heavy Weather* that Clarence finally brushes aside the protestations of sisters Constance and Julia, and writes the cheque to guarantee a happy start to married life for Ronnie Fish and his delightful chorus-girl fiancée, Sue Brown.

*Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* (1935) adds a little to the indictment. In ‘Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend’, Connie bullies Clarence about wearing his top hat and making a speech at the August Bank Holiday jollities in the castle grounds, calling on him to realise his position “as master of Blandings Castle”. This brought “a bitter, mirthless laugh from the poor peon thus ludicrously described”. But here again, in the finish Clarence finds the courage to face down Connie, this time inspired by the trust placed in him by Gladys from Drury Lane.

It is not until *Lord Emsworth and Others* (as late as 1937) that we are presented with the first full picture of Lord Emsworth’s subservience to the dragon lady who is his sister. Here, there is a pointer to her role as decision-maker in the short story ‘The Crime Wave at Blandings’, when she learns that Clarence has promised the post of Blandings land agent to his niece Jane’s most unsuitable fiancé, George Abercrombie.

Connie explains:

“I shall tell her you have changed your mind.”

“But I haven’t.”

“Yes, you have.”

And so, Lord Emsworth discovered, as he met her eye, he had.

This is the episode in which for the first time we see Clarence terrified of the consequences if Connie learns of one of his misdeeds – his potting of Rupert Baxter with grandson George’s airgun. “It was weak of him, he knew, to curl up into an apologetic ball when assailed by a mere sister. Most men reserved such craven conduct for their wives, but it had always been so, right back to those boyhood days which he remembered so well.”

“Those boyhood days?” Surely the baby or toddler Constance could not exercise that strange power over a big brother of sixteen or eighteen – an age by which he must have left boyhood days distinctly behind him. The young Connie would have been under the eagle eye of a governess, and then packed off to finishing school – in neither case in a position to establish control over big brother Clarence.

What the sister-brother relationship was between Lord Emsworth’s schooldays and marriage is quite unclear. But if we suggest Clarence married in his late 20s, then Connie would have been in only her early teens, and surely not equipped to browbeat and badger an adult brother, strengthened by the support of his fiancée and then wife?

So – would he have been dominated by Connie during his married life? Surely not – anything required in that regard would no doubt have been provided by his Countess. And if Lady Constance lived at Blandings in days when there was a resident chatelaine, she would hardly have been in a position to bully her brother as he faced life alongside a wife.

To go back to the beginning – we first meet Clarence in *Something Fresh* (1915). He was “as completely happy as only a fluffy-minded old man with excellent health and a large income can be. Lord Emsworth never worried. Nature had equipped him with a mind so admirably constructed for withstanding the disagreeablenesses of life that, if an unpleasant thought entered it, it passed out again a moment later. . . .

“His was a life, undeniably an extremely happy one. He was possibly as nearly contented as a human being can be.”

There is no sign in that character sketch of a shrinking, browbeaten brother. At this stage, his hostess is another sister, Lady Ann Warblington. She does not dominate her brother, or indeed anyone: “When Lady Ann Warblington was not writing letters in her bedroom – which was seldom, for she had an apparently inexhaustible correspondence – she was nursing sick headaches in it.”

Where is Lady Constance at this stage in Clarence’s life? Again, there is no indication. But it is clear enough that the 9th Earl is a happy-go-lucky character, with no obvious concerns about sisterly rule.

So why, and how, should the cheerful Lord Emsworth of those days, neither oppressed nor depressed, have become the shrinking, put-upon,

craven character we are presented with in the later novels?

One theory stems from a passing reference in ‘Jeeves Takes Charge’ (from *Carry On, Jeeves*, 1925), when Florence Craye spells out to Bertie the appalling impact if Uncle Willoughby’s *Reminiscences of a Long Life* ever gets into print. She tells him it includes a “dreadful story” about Lord Emsworth.

“Lord Emsworth? Not the one we know? Not the one at Blandings?” A most respectable old Johnnie, don’t you know. Doesn’t do a thing nowadays but dig in the garden with a spud.

“The very same. That is what makes the book so unspeakable. It is full of stories about people one knows who are the essence of propriety today, but who seem to have behaved, when they were in London in the ‘eighties, in a manner that would not have been tolerated in the fo’c’sle of a whaler.”

We never learn what Lord Emsworth did in the Eighties that was so shocking: did Messrs Riggs and Ballinger actually publish *Uncle Willoughby*? (I have failed to locate a copy on eBay or AddAll Books). Certainly it is censored from the Wodehouse oeuvre: Bertie never refers to it again, and there is no suggestion that he ever actually read it (although presumably he wished to do so, as he had enjoyed Lady Carnaby’s *Memories of Eighty Interesting Years* – a pallid predecessor).

Is it possible that the book was never published, but Lady Constance, either by acquiring access to the manuscript, or else by chance or research from other sources, somehow learned of her brother’s misdeed? She stored away the recollection, and in later years when it was generally forgotten, or unknown to new generations, she would flourish to her quivering brother the threat of revelation to those around him.

But there is a snag to this proposition, and that is in the personality of the Clarence now revealed to us – a free spirit of the 1880s, a man whose behaviour could be recorded in “a dreadful story”.

Could this same Clarence, whose lusty behaviour once led to his being thrown out of a London music-hall, and which would have been too riotous for the fo’c’sle of a whaler, possibly be the man to be scared of a young sister? He surely would simply have followed Gally’s advice, and sat on her head.

So I offer a second possibility: Clarence *appeared* to be intimidated by Connie *because it suited him to be intimidated!* His apparent apprehension about “what would Connie say?”, his concern when she bore down on him remorselessly, his shrinking response when she reproved him – all were simulated.

Clarence, 9th Earl of Emsworth, was putting on an act, suggesting to the world that he was scared stiff – when, behind the quivering façade, he was unworried, coolly in control. And Lady Constance could stalk off, satisfied that she had put Clarence in his place yet again, and shown him who was boss.

It meant, quite simply, that he could abrogate all responsibility for life at Blandings, called on to make

no decisions which would involve consideration or action, and the prospect of offending anyone, which in search of a quiet life in his Autumn days, he preferred to avoid. He had simply opted out of the realities, the duties, the risks of everyday life, and could live almost a hermit's existence, ignoring the social whirl around him, the family comings and goings, the parade of impostors, the vast staff keeping the castle running (except of course to lean on his faithful ally Beach).

He could sit in the library, his feet slippers, in old, battered, comfortable clothes, reach for a pig book and relax at any time of day or night, secure in the knowledge that the castle would be run effectively by his efficient sister – and, in those spells when he was lumbered with the chap, by the Efficient Baxter.

This was the one area where Clarence's policy went wrong, and he was saddled with Baxter, an incubus to make life endlessly miserable.

Connie he could bear: Connie he could handle primarily by keeping out of her way, and then by giving in to her demands and orders – the line of least resistance. But Baxter was different – always underfoot, always wanting him to decide things, to DO things.

Did Clarence ever wish he had jumped on Connie when young, and made it clear who was master of the family seat, so that she would not have grasped the power to invite those pain-in-the-neck young artistes as guests – and to install Baxter as a factotum? If this is the case, the fact remains that he never did so jump, and so was fated to be overridden always by this Boadicea of the county set.

But in the finish, there may be no logical explanation to offer of the Connie-Clarence relationship, set in deep, dark waters, and a matter of strange, innate powers held by the female sex, which those of us not blessed/burdened with sisters, can never fathom.



## Letters to the Editor

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

#### From Karen Shotting

I was delighted to see my favourite 'feuilleton', *For Love or Honour*, in the December 2014 *By The Way*. I am quite proud of the fact that I was the first person to have read it in over 100 years, and I remember the frisson I felt when I saw the reference to Bill Townend that made me go back and study this curious item a bit more closely than I had previously. I was also the first person in 100 years (I think, unless Norman beat me to it) to read the feuilleton out loud to a fellow Wodehouse admirer.

May I make a suggestion to your readers? Find a willing audience and do the same – with all of the appropriate melodramatic inflections. It's loads of fun, and my audience was laughing out loud.

#### From Alan Hall

Having read the Recent Press Comment in the latest edition of *Wooster Sauce* (December 2014), I rushed to my local library to borrow a copy of *Heartburn* by Nora Ephron. Marcus Berkmann had suggested that it was "a brilliantly sustained piece of comic writing, as good as anything you'll find outside Wodehouse".

I needn't have bothered. I didn't find it brilliant or comic but a sustained piece of dreaded feminist writing interspersed with a few dull recipes. It was one of the most boring books I have read, brazenly describing a monotony of sexual experiences with constant blatant use of the 'f' word.

In all fairness I did get one good laugh – but many cringes. Wodehouse can give a laugh a page and no cringes, so I fail to see the comparison. I haven't read any of Marcus Berkmann's books, but if this is his idea of comic writing, I probably won't bother. Plum, I think, would not have recommended it as required reading.

#### From Christopher Bellew

Bertie and Jeeves were described by Evelyn Waugh as living in a timeless world and, in the sense that they don't age, he is right. However, Wodehouse's plots are absolutely up-to-date. In *Much Oblived*, Jeeves, published in 1971, Roderick Spode has become the seventh Earl of Sidcup. He is dumped by Madeline Bassett when he says that he is going to renounce his peerage so that he can stand for a seat in the House of Commons. Such a thing only became possible when the Peerage Act was passed in 1963, allowing Tony Benn to renounce his hereditary viscountcy and become the Member of Parliament for Bristol South East (again). In the event, as you will remember, members of the electorate that attended the debate in the Market Snodsbury Town Hall gave the Conservative candidate such robust treatment that Spode decided that he preferred the safer haven of the red benches in the House of Lords.

#### From Francis Wheen

I have just noticed an eruption of international PGW enthusiasm on Facebook, prompted by someone suggesting that there aren't many Wodehouse fans in the southern states of India – an assertion instantly disproved, as you'll see if you go to the 'Fans of P G Wodehouse' Facebook page. (*Editor's note: This Facebook page has around 10,000 members worldwide.*)

#### From Roger Bowen

In Wodehouse's short novel *The Swoop* (1909), one marvellous sentence stands out, as true today as it was 105 years ago: "Editors were collecting the views of celebrities, preferably of those whose opinion on the subject was absolutely valueless." Nothing changes!



# Recollections from Two Long Lives

by Tony Ring

On 7 May 1962, Wodehouse made what was probably his only appearance on the successful television show *This Is Your Life*, hosted by Eamonn Andrews. The victim was Ellaline Terriss, Lady Hicks, who, with her husband (Sir) Seymour Hicks, had had a big influence on Wodehouse's earliest days in the musical theatre. (For a summary of their careers, see *By The Way* no. 33, March 2008.) He was a successful director-manager-actor; she was one of the most popular of the Gaiety Girls, as pretty as any and more talented than most.

Wodehouse had been invited to spend time with them on holiday in Devon, and had stayed at their home in Merstham, Surrey, over Christmas 1906. Their house was often filled with guests, and Wodehouse had already developed a way of overcoming his shyness by finding a secluded spot in which to write – in this case, at the bottom of the garden. As a result, they nicknamed him 'The Hermit', and the name still stuck even 50–60 years later.

Wodehouse was invited to England to be a surprise guest on the TV show, but had to decline, as Ethel had just had an operation on her foot. He did, however, make a filmed appearance, introduced by Andrews with these words:

World famous names gathered at your table, actors, writers, politicians, business tycoons, but there was still room for those still trying to make their way. People like the struggling young author whom you used to call 'The Hermit' because he retired to sit among the trees at the bottom of your garden as he wrote his first book. You haven't met him for more than forty years but he still remembers your

kindness and encouragement and he's filmed this greeting to you from his home on Long Island – 'The Hermit' himself, world famous author P G Wodehouse.

As far as I know, there is no recording of the TV programme extant, so we shall never be aware of just what Plum said. The Red Book of her life given to Ellaline, along with the linking script, is in a small museum run by her great-granddaughter Lucia Stuart, at Deal in Kent, which I visited in May 2014. The museum, which is a tribute to both Seymour Hicks and Ellaline Terriss, also includes some original Wodehouse letters, one written on 20 May 1962, soon after the programme had been transmitted.

The second item of Wodehousean interest comes later, in 1971. Ellaline had been born on 13 April 1871, and she invited Plum to her planned 100th birthday celebration. He would not have been able to attend, but the celebration had to be deferred after she had a fall at home, fractured a hip, and had to be taken to West Middlesex Hospital. On 11 April, he and Ethel sent her a telegram to commiserate:

LADY HICKS WEST MIDDLESEX  
HOSPITAL = DEAREST ELLA ALL OUR  
LOVE THINKING OF YOU SO MUCH DO  
HOPE YOU ARE FEELING BETTER BLESS  
YOU = ETHEL AND PLUMMY WODEHOUSE

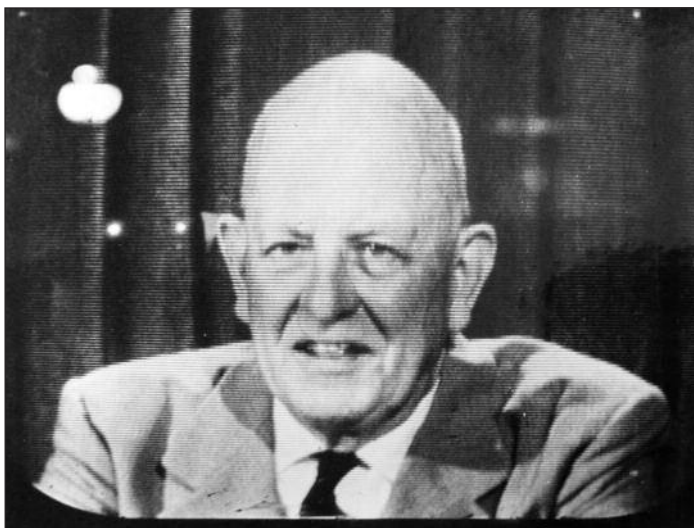
He followed this up with a letter on 16 April, repeating similar sentiments, and telling her that the doctor did not allow him to travel over for the celebration as there was something the matter with his heart.

... I suppose it has been coming on for a long time, but it is only lately that I have been conscious of anything wrong. I suppose one has to expect these things!

I think of you so much. Last night I was reading *A Little Bit of String* [Ellaline's autobiography about her stage career] again. What happy times those were. I shall never forget that visit to you in Devonshire.

Oceans of love from  
The Hermit

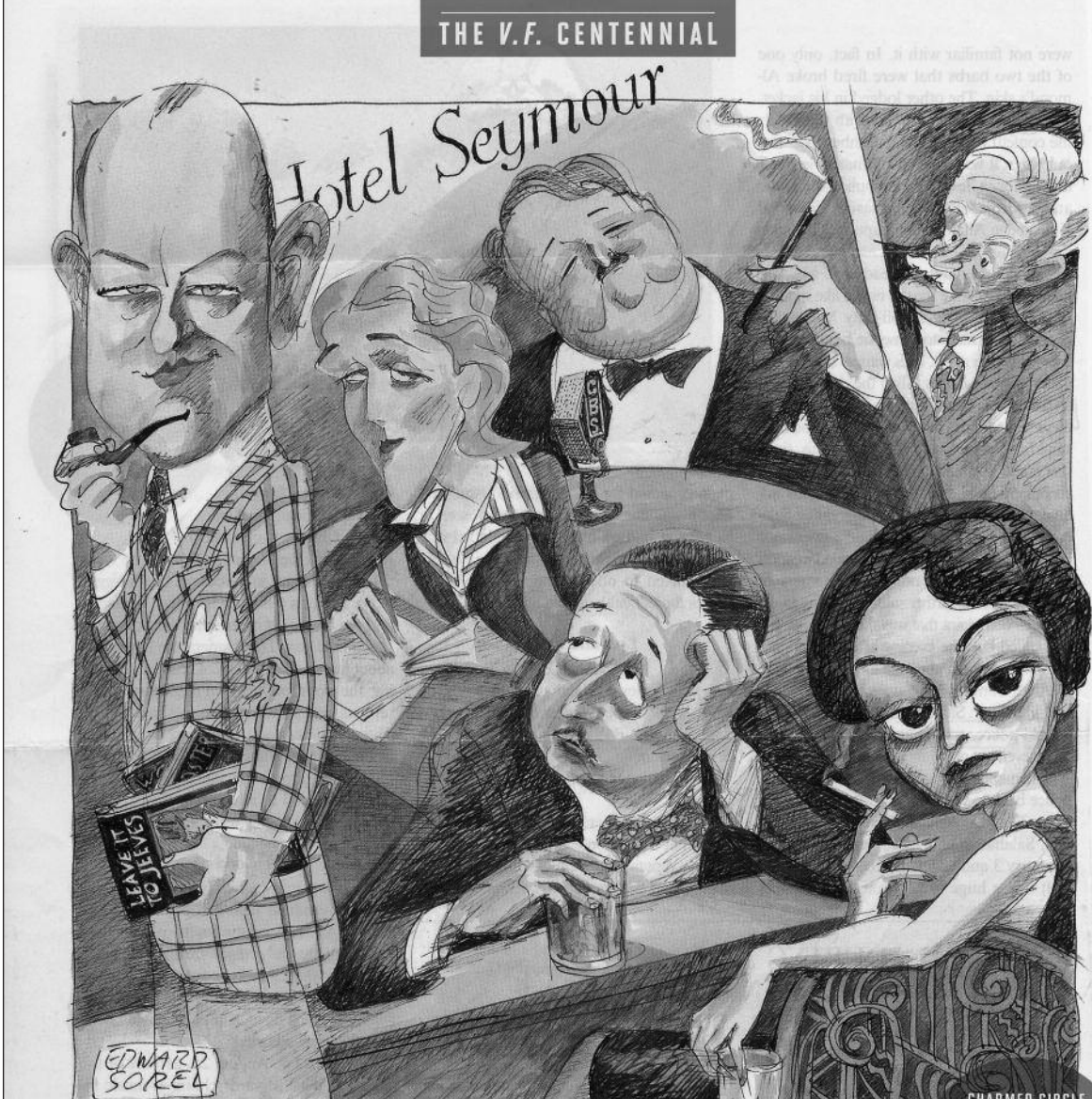
It is not clear whether Ellaline Terriss recovered sufficiently to enjoy her Centenary celebrations. She was in a nursing home when she died on 16 June 1971.



Wodehouse as he appeared on the televised tribute to Ellaline Terriss

## A Special Vanity Fair Celebration

THE V.F. CENTENNIAL



From left: P. G. Wodehouse, Clare Boothe Brokaw (Luce), Alexander Woollcott (on CBS radio in the 30s), Robert Benchley (foreground), and Dorothy Parker.

**CHARMED CIRCLE**  
*V.F.* editor Frank Crowninshield (top right) hosts marquee-name staffers at the Coffee House (a dining club he founded in Manhattan's Hotel Seymour).

# VANITY FAIR'S JAZZ AGE COCKTAIL

To wind up the magazine's centennial, *V.F.* is publishing a unique treasury from its Jazz Age incarnation. In this adaptation, P. G. Wodehouse, Dorothy Parker, A. A. Milne, and Walter Lippmann, among others, sparkle as if new

Heartfelt thanks go to SHARON MITCHELL for sending some pages from the November 2014 edition of *Vanity Fair* (USA). As part of the magazine's centennial celebrations, they have published an anthology entitled *Bohemians, Bootleggers, Flappers, and Swells: The Best of Early Vanity Fair* (Penguin Press). The book consists of 72 articles published in *Vanity Fair* between 1914 and 1936, written by many of the literary greats of that time – including, of course, P. G. Wodehouse. The theme is “how to live well in a fast-changing age”, and the Wodehouse contribution, originally published in the magazine in May 1914, is entitled ‘The Physical Culture Peril’. An excerpt was included in the November 2014 article.

The illustration above, showing Wodehouse on the far left, was especially created for the magazine by the 85-year-old artist Edward Sorel.



# The Rodney Spelvin Theory

by Noel Bushnell

I want to speak to you today about Rodney Spelvin – an obscure Wodehouse character but one I believe may have opened the door just a chink on Plum’s notoriously private life.

Rodney appears in four golf stories narrated by the Oldest Member – three in a 1927 collection, *The Heart of a Goof* (*Divots* in the US), and one in *Nothing Serious*, published in 1950. Rodney is a villain – a sappy writer of the kind PG often derided. Read A A Milne.

But it’s on just one of the four stories that I wish to focus: ‘Jane Gets Off the Fairway’ in *The Heart of a Goof*. Without going into detail, it’s about how Jane, a crack golfer, forsakes her husband, William, an equally crack golfer, for the dastardly Rodney, endangering in the process their infant son, Braid Vardon (named after two champion golfers of the time).

Rodney does not play golf. But he’s a handsome devil and a smooth talker – a ladies’ man, in fact, a term that becomes important in this tale – and he introduces Jane to the world of capital-A Art (which I might add includes the smart set’s use of cocaine). All does not come good until Braid gets the wrong grip on a golf club one day and Jane realises she’s been foolish and rushes back into William’s arms, telling Rodney where he can go.

Not, you might say, the funniest of PG’s golf stories, and it isn’t. In fact, it’s quite tear-jerky because it’s about infidelity – although, of course, this being Wodehouse, there’s nothing explicit. It is one of the very few instances in the many broken romances that litter the Wodehouse canon in which serious infidelity is even hinted at.

Usually, Wodehouse treats jealousy, the frequent switching of couples, and other sexual foibles with exaggerated innocence and the comicality we all know and love so well. But the Jane-Rodney imbroglio is not innocent and not comic. Rodney is a cad, Jane is taken in by him, William is hurt, and little Braid sleeps in a cupboard in his mother’s studio, unexposed to golf – that is, he is not being taught the right way to live; he gets the wrong grip on the club of life. This is serious stuff. This is not about the bright young things of the jazz age running about being silly.

‘Jane Gets Off the Fairway’ has bothered me for some time because the story is to my mind so out of step with Wodehouse stories generally, despite the same distinctive characterisation and language of the narrative. Even the title carries a moral implication rarely seen in Wodehouse. Why, I asked myself. It might be, of course, that PG pinched the plot from somewhere else and embroidered it in his usual style, as he frequently did – in which case, of course, my

theory is without substance. There’s no way of knowing, and none of the many Wodehouse analyses I have at my disposal even mentions Rodney Spelvin – except in one respect, which I shall address as a footnote.

The theory is this.

PG’s wife, Ethel, had been twice widowed when she met and married Plum in 1914. She was 29 and a mother. The nature of their marriage, which lasted until Plum died in 1975, was loving and devoted, according to all accounts. Yet it is also well known that when they settled down to married life they did so in separate bedrooms. When they travelled, they frequently stayed in separate hotel suites on different floors. Plum’s view of marriage, stated in his letters, was that it established a stable and happy environment in which he could get on with his writing. Theirs was a kind of *ménage à trois* – Ethel, Plum, and his typewriter.

Plum was not known for his amorous adventures, despite what you might read in *Bring On the Girls*, the highly fictitious account with Guy Bolton of their Broadway show business days. It’s clear from PG’s work, from the first story to the last, that he considered certain usual intimacies of marriage not for him. All his married characters have separate bedrooms, such that the Hays Office would have had no trouble in persuading them to keep one foot on the ground when in the proximity of a bed and the opposite sex. He valued marriage for its companionship, not sex.

But Ethel, it seems, was different. She was extravagant and always looking to be entertained. Plum’s latest biographer, Robert McCrum, says that in sexual matters, Wodehouse recognised early on that he was not Ethel’s equal. As well as being twice widowed, she was “on the stage” when she met Plum. McCrum calls her a showgirl, and you don’t have to be terribly prurient to figure this as code: she was familiar with male company and wanted male attention. It seems that, wherever the Wodehouses went, Ethel always had some extracurricular male companions, and this was the case all her life.

Sometime in 1921, when the Wodehouses were in London, an American named Bobby Denby appeared on the scene – an ex-Army captain and a *ladies’ man*. Note that term – McCrum’s, not mine. But of all Ethel’s male friends, it seems only Bobby made it into the actual household, where he stuck fast for some years (at least nobody else gains a mention). And even when he departed, Plum engaged him to be his agent in the US – until such time as he messed up important business and eventually faded out of the picture sometime in the 1930s (although he did turn up again briefly after the war).



The tale of Rodney Spelvin and the infelicitous Jane comes from the Bobby Denby era – 1924. The other two stories in *The Heart of a Goof* about Rodney mainly stick to golf and Wodehouse’s stock situations about sundered hearts, although one of the stories, building on the ‘Jane Gets Off the Fairway’ plot, does start down the infidelity path – mistakenly, as it turns out. The 1950 *Nothing Serious* story, ‘Rodney Has a Relapse’, is a vehicle for throwing well-aimed barbs at A A Milne, no doubt in revenge for Milne’s denunciation of Wodehouse for his disastrous wartime broadcasts from Germany. Serious, as opposed to comic, infidelity appears once and once only, and the ladies’ man, Rodney Spelvin, is the cause.

It’s my theory that with ladies’ man Bobby Denby, Ethel overstepped the mark, wherever that was located in Plum’s mind.

It should be noted that PG formed a strong bond with Ethel’s daughter, Leonora, who was 17 in 1921 when Bobby turned up and would have been already fairly sophisticated, given her history – a child of a difficult parent, with no father and long separations from her mother, on different sides of the Atlantic. But she was a child in Plum’s eyes. He called her Snookums or Snookie in letters all her life. She could easily have been seen by Plum as not being taught by

her mother to grip the club correctly. Plum, therefore – never one to confront anything directly – admonished Ethel in the only way he knew how.

McCrum notes: “If Denby had a relationship with Ethel, it was discreet and one to which Wodehouse, working hard at his typewriter, turned a blind eye.” Even Frances Donaldson, the family friend, implies in her biography that Plum preferred to let Ethel have her companions as long as her activities didn’t disturb his work.

Hard to disagree, given that their marriage endured – happily, apart from perhaps that one incident – for more than 60 years. On the other hand, you could say “turning a blind eye” represents an abdication of responsibility – a character trait Wodehouse often displayed and one for which he was to pay dearly. But that’s another story.

The footnote to this Ethel-Bobby thesis concerns the name Spelvin. In the story that introduces Rodney Spelvin, Rodney says he is a cousin of George Spelvin the actor. This is an in-joke. George Spelvin is the traditional name adopted by actors on the American stage when they do not want to be identified, or when they are playing more than one part in a play. Norman Murphy says George Spelvin is estimated to have appeared in 10,000 plays over the past century.

## Top Hole!

### *Gerald Dickens and P. G. Wodehouse On Stage*

Yes, that’s right – Dickens. As in Charles. Only this is Gerald, the great-great-grandson of Charles and a talented writer and performer in his own right.

Gerald Dickens specialises in one-man shows of the works of his great-great-grandfather, but that did not stop him from approaching the Wodehouse Estate with a view towards adapting some of PGW’s golf stories for the stage. With their approval, he created a one-man show entitled *Top Hole!*, based on four stories: ‘The Coming of Gowf’, ‘Ordeal by Golf’, ‘The Salvation of George Mackintosh’, and ‘The Letter of the Law’. The first performance was in April last year, appropriately enough at the Oxford Golf Club.

Last November Mr Dickens performed the show again, this time at Oak Quarry Golf Club in Riverside, California (USA). Society member KAREN SHOTTING attended this performance and subsequently expressed her approval:



*Gerald Dickens in costume for the November 2014 performance of Top Hole!  
(Photo by Karen Shotting)*

He is very faithful to the text, and his portrayal of Alexander Patterson’s ritualistic preparations before each swing (a hilarious description of which can be found in ‘Ordeal by Golf’), as well as the First Grave Digger’s (Joseph Poskitt) hammer throwing (see ‘The Letter of the Law’), were absolutely masterful. He was dressed in Plus Fours and had minimal props: three books (one being Wadsworth Hemmingway’s essential tool, a rule book); four stools; and a few antique wood-shafted golf clubs – including, of course, a niblick, because if one was to kill George Mackintosh, it was unquestionably a niblick shot.

Gerald Dickens maintains a blog in which he records his experiences of writing and performing around the world. In two entries, he has written how he came to create and produce *Top Hole!*, providing some fascinating insights into the challenges of adapting another author’s work. The blogs can be viewed at [geralddickens.wordpress.com/2014/03/](http://geralddickens.wordpress.com/2014/03/).

Here’s hoping there will be more performances of this work, as it certainly sounds like a hole in one to us!

# You, Too, Can Own a Wodehouse Trunk!

In a letter to the Society, Pauline Collings wrote: “We recently became owners of a trunk that had been in the attic of a house in Pretoria Road, High Wycombe. It was found in 2006 but the owners were only able to get it out when they had a loft conversion done. . . . The house was built in the late 1920s, so it could have been there a long time!”



So far, so ordinary. But this particular leather-bound trunk – with a wicker framework and some rail stickers on it (all within the UK, including Victoria and Isle of Wight) – has the name ‘Wodehouse’ imprinted on the lid (see image below). Pauline and her husband were naturally very curious as to its origins: could there possibly be a connection to P. G. Wodehouse?

Always game for a challenge, the Society’s Remembrancer, Norman Murphy, did a bit of detective work. He knew that Wodehouse’s mother, Eleanor, had died in 1941 in a nursing home at Ashendon, Boyn Hill Avenue, Maidenhead. He therefore contacted Nigel Wodehouse, PGW’s great-nephew, who told him that from 1936 to 1939, Eleanor had lived in Farnham Royal – a mere six miles from Maidenhead, which is itself only ten miles from High Wycombe. Nigel also



## Mastermind Quiz 14: Homes and Other Places

by David Buckle

1. Who is the owner of Totleigh Towers, a country house visited on more than one occasion by Bertie Wooster?
2. What is the country seat of Lord Emsworth’s rival, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe?
3. What is name of the substantial Wimbledon home of Ukridge’s Aunt Julia?
4. Tilbury House is the headquarters of which publishing concern?
5. Which Wodehouse fictional building is said to be modelled on Severn End at Hanley Castle in Worcestershire?
6. Sedleigh, Eckleton, and Beckford are all what sort of establishment?
7. To which hotel does Bertie decamp after Rocky Todd’s aunt takes over his New York flat?
8. Where would Mr Mulliner regale his fellow drinkers with tales of his family’s exploits?
9. Along which London thoroughfare would you find the Drones Club?
10. What is the name of the country seat of Lester Carmody, uncle of Hugo Carmody?

*(Answers on page 19)*

informed Norman that, since it was wartime at the time of Eleanor’s death, nobody in the family had collected her belongings. One can therefore assume that nursing home staff divvied them up – and this is probably how the trunk ended up in High Wycombe.

Norman’s conclusion: “There are many other Wodehouses in the world apart from PGW’s family, but the name is unusual enough for me to say that, first, we can never be certain that the trunk was Eleanor’s, and one should not claim that it was. But, second, on the balance of probabilities and the locations involved, I would bet up to £5 – no more – that it was.”

# The Words of Wodehouse

by June Arnold

Solve the clues in the top grid, then transfer the letters from there to the bottom grid, which will give you an extract from a novel. Reading down Column A in the top grid will give you the Christian name of an author. Answers are on page 19.

Clues:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													
6													
7													
8													
9													

- Reverend \_\_\_\_\_, editor of *Tiny Tots* in *Heavy Weather* (7) / \_\_\_\_\_ of *Heaven*, Welsh hymn (5)
- Llewellyn \_\_\_\_\_, a safe cracker in *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* (5) / Following secretly (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Anonymous*, PGW novel (9) / Golf support (3)
- Canadian province (7) / To eat grass (5)
- Surname of title character in *Doctor Sally* (5) / Removing hair from the face (7)
- Showed gratitude (7) / Long dispute between families (4)
- Old container for writing implements (8) / A rubbish ship? (4)
- Change slightly (6) / Cloth used to wrap a dead body (6)
- Scientist credited for the law of gravity (6) / Mailed (6)

1M	4A	5B	1B		7J	8D	7H	2I	6A	8I		5H	2C	9M		
3H	9I	9C	5A		8K	6I		3A	4B	8A	3C	7C				
1I	2A	7F	8B	9J		9E	2B	6J	4E		3D	1K	1J			
4D	5J	9B	2L	1E	6D	5M		8M	4J	4M	7D	8E		6C	9A	6G
2H	7B		6K	5L	4C	3F	5C	2D	6E	2K	7L	4I				
2M	4K	4L	3L		1C	5K	7M	6F		4G						
8J	5I	5D	7E	2J	3E	2E	7G	1L	1G	3M		4F	5E	3B	9K	3I
8C	8L	5G	8F		8H	9H	3G	9D	3K	9L	6L		7A	2G	1A	
1D	7K	9F	1F	6B												



# My Own Wodehousian Experience

by Chris Roerig

The publication of the Sebastian Faulks novel *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* brings back memories of an experience which culminated in the writing of my own Jeeves & Wooster story, and although it was read by agents of the Estate of P. G. Wodehouse, I was advised that the Estate was not prepared to endorse the use of the Wodehouse characters in this way. I have shown the thing to a few friends and family members (some of these being dyed-in-the-wool Wodehouse enthusiasts), and they have without exception been highly complimentary.

My tale starts in the summer of 2001. Like many people, if I go to bed with a lot on my mind I often find it difficult to sleep. If I'm awake in the small hours with some idea rattling around inside my head, I find the best solution is to get up and write down what I'm thinking about.

And so it was at an obscenely early hour on this particular summer day that I sat at my desk and, rather than the few sentences I would normally produce, wrote out in longhand the title and the first 1,200 words of what would become a novel. The oddest thing was that I then practically forgot about it. When I at last picked up the notes again, I was surprised (and a touch concerned) to find that the title I had written was 'Well, Really, Jeeves', and that the story featured Bertram Wooster and Reginald Jeeves, perhaps the best-known characters of P. G. Wodehouse.

I tried putting the book to one side to concentrate on other, more prosaic demands of life, but it was as if some kind of gateway had opened. Plot scenarios, character details, and even specific words and phrases popped into my head (often at the strangest times), leading to the accumulation of an array of notes which I eventually decided to turn into something.

Initially, I viewed this as an interesting diversion. To be honest, I didn't know if I was *capable* of writing the number of words a novel would require, let alone producing anything remotely readable. I roughed out the framework of a few chapters and began to get the plot ideas into some kind of order, and although at this stage there were more gaps than plot, I was eventually able to fill them in to yield what seemed to be a workable outline from start to finish.

And then it was simply a matter of sitting down at the computer and getting on with it. It wasn't always plain sailing, and when I couldn't make much progress it was of inestimable help to have the day job to attend to, so that I could justifiably put things aside. But in compensation there were times when the stuff just seemed to flow out. Don't ask me where it came from – I couldn't begin to tell you – but I do recall one day looking back at what I had produced and reading some 3,000 words of what I thought was pretty reasonable prose.

Knowing that the use of copyrighted material needed permission, I decided to contact a literary agency, hoping they would approach the Wodehouse Estate for me. I thus embarked upon the path trodden by countless others before me by printing off the first three chapters, preparing a synopsis, and writing a single-page explanatory letter. And you can probably guess the result – yes, the rejection letters arrived right on cue!

So there was nothing else for it. Perhaps a direct approach to the agency representing the Estate of P. G. Wodehouse would prove more fruitful – and, as it turned out, they could not have been more helpful. I was asked to send in the novel in its entirety, and the euphoric feeling that someone was actually taking my tale seriously and wanted to read what I had written still remains with me. When the response came, it did not contain the feedback I had been hoping for, but at least I knew where I stood regarding the Estate's policy about Wodehouse's characters.

I can understand the Estate choosing an author of the calibre of Sebastian Faulks to take Bertie Wooster to the next stage, as it were, but given the manner in which my novel came about, I occasionally feel somewhat at a loss, like so many unpublished authors who believe that their work might give pleasure to others.

I printed a copy of my book on A5 paper and bound it with a soft cover to be fairly close to a paperback, and while there is a clear sense of achievement in holding it in my hand, the desire to share it will probably always remain. One reason for writing this account was that seeing *these* words in print will at least help to relieve *that* situation, and if further inspiration arrives I can always write another one!

It was the being without advisers that made the situation so bleak. On these occasions when Fate, having biffed you in the eye, proceeds to kick you in the pants, you want to gather the boys about you and thresh things out, and there weren't any boys to gather. Jeeves was in London, Catsmeat in Basingstoke. It made me feel like a Prime Minister who starts to call an important Cabinet meeting and finds that the Home Secretary and the Lord President of the Council have nipped over to Paris and the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the rest of the gang are at the dog races.

(From *The Mating Season*, 1949)

# The Mortdecai Connection

In the March 2013 edition of *Wooster Sauce*, we printed an article by PIETER BOOGAART about *The Mortdecai Trilogy*, by Kyril Bonfiglioli. This trilogy of books – featuring an immoral art dealer, Charlie Mortdecai, and his faithful manservant-thug, Jock Strapp – has often been compared with the works of Wodehouse, chiefly due to Bonfiglioli’s pairing of master and servant as well as his use of classical quotations throughout the books. Pieter noted that while Bonfiglioli is “not for the faint-hearted”, he admired the author’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”.

So it is with great interest that we have observed, in recent months, reprints of Bonfiglioli’s books as well as a new movie starring Johnny Depp as Mortdecai and Paul Bettany as Jock (pictured; Depp on right). And many articles were quick to make the Wodehouse connections. In a review of various critics’ best books of 2014 that appeared in *The Times* of December 13, Robbie Millen chose a reprint of Bonfiglioli’s Mortdecai novel *Don’t Point That Thing at Me*, noting: “If Wodehouse had a filthy, criminal mind his novels would have been like Bonfiglioli’s Charlie Mortdecai capers. The eponymous hero is a louche, hard-drinking aristo art dealer who dabbles in crime – the plots are silly but the politically incorrect gags, in-jokes and wordplay ricochet off the page.”



Tim Martin’s article about Bonfiglioli’s books in the January 17 *Saturday Telegraph* (thanks to DAVID ANDERTON for sending it along) had a similar conclusion: “The tone is undiluted Wooster but the attention to specifics is pure Bond.”

In an interview in *Metro* on 23 January (thanks to NIRAV SHAH for the clipping), Paul Bettany observed that the pairing of clever servant and stupid master had a long comic tradition – in Roman comedy, in Shakespeare, in Clouseau – and concluded it was like “Jeeves and Wooster on acid”. Alas, reviews of the movie have been universally poor – but then, what can you expect when you try to combine happy innocence with a harsh real world?

## Poet’s Corner

### A Sound Cure

*(Certain doctors maintain that the best way to prevent indigestion is to whistle without a pause for a quarter of an hour after dinner.)*

In days gone by, when meals were o’er,  
To guard ourselves from ill,  
The black, unpleasant draught we’d pour,  
Or bolt the azure pill.  
But now we’ve found, it seems to me,  
A trick that’s better far,  
We are a happy family,  
We are, we are, we are!

A whistled tune, MDs have found,  
All tonics will eclipse.  
So volumes of the richest sound  
Stream from our pursed-up lips.  
Each chooses his own melody,  
There’s not the slightest jar.  
We are a happy family,  
We are, we are, we are!

My father renders “Nancy Lee”,  
My mother “Dolly Grey.”  
My sister, in a different key,  
Works hard at “Sail Away!”  
My brother tries “Abide with me,”  
(Six faults to every bar).  
We are a happy family,  
We are, we are, we are!

And as the cheery notes arise,  
And soar towards the roof,  
For indigestion quails and flies,  
Dyspepsia holds aloof.  
Our health, as far as I can see,  
Continues up to par.  
We are a happy family,  
We are, we are, we are!

From *Daily Chronicle*, 28 March 1903

## Answers to The Words of Wodehouse

(Page 17)

- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Sellick / Bread | 6. thanked / feud  |
| 2. Evans / tailing | 7. inkstand / junk |
| 3. Bachelors / tee | 8. adjust / shroud |
| 4. Alberta / graze | 9. Newton / posted |
| 5. Smith / shaving |                    |

*Quote:* Dame Judith had rows of black beads over her evening dress and an unblinking gaze like a rattlesnake that’s just spotted its lunch.

*Name:* Sebastian

## Answers to Mastermind Quiz

(Page 16)

1. Sir Watkyn Bassett
2. Matchingam Hall
3. Heath House (later ‘The Cedars’)
4. The Mammoth Publishing Company  
(prop. Lord Tilbury)
5. Brinkley Court
6. Schools
7. St Aurea
8. The Anglers’ Rest
9. Dover Street
10. Rudge Hall

# The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

## Omnibus Volumes: Part One

McIlvaine lists 36 omnibus volumes in section B of her bibliography. She admits that “omnibus volumes” is a catch-all term which includes “collections of Wodehouse short stories, plays etc. which have previously been published in book form [and] anthologies of short stories with Wodehouse cited as the editor”. Given the “previously published” nature of the material, I suspect omnibuses tend to be disregarded by most Wodehouse collectors. Closer investigation, however, reveals several volumes worthy of inspection by completists keen to read every word published by the Master, as they include introductions by Wodehouse which have usually not been published elsewhere. Of the 36 volumes listed, 15 were published prior to Wodehouse’s death; of these 15, 10 contain introductions or prefaces by Wodehouse.

In 1931 Herbert Jenkins published Wodehouse’s first omnibus volume, *Jeeves Omnibus* (B1a). Wodehouse himself drew attention to this fact in the opening paragraph of his four-page introduction: “This trackless desert of print which we see before us, winding on and on into the purple distance, represents my first Omnibus Book: and I must confess that, as I contemplate it, I cannot overcome a slight feeling of chestiness, just the faint beginning of that offensive conceit against which we authors have to guard so carefully.” At 847 pages, it is certainly a substantial volume, and contains all the short stories narrated by Bertie which were previously published in *The Inimitable Jeeves*; *Carry On, Jeeves*; and *Very Good, Jeeves*. Wodehouse’s introduction also discusses the “lucrative offers” he has received for Jeeves’ services from various sources, but claims: “Jeeves knows his place, and it is between the covers of a book.”

What McIlvaine describes as the second edition of *Jeeves Omnibus* was published by Herbert Jenkins in 1967 under the title *The World of Jeeves* (B1b). For this, Wodehouse added a couple of paragraphs to his original introduction and says: “I must confess that a blush mantles my cheek as I read that bit about [not] selling one’s soul for gold. When the B.B.C. wanted to do [Jeeves] on Television (*sic*), I did not draw myself to my full height and issue a cold *nolle prosequi*; I just asked them how much gold they had in mind.” *The World of Jeeves* includes three more stories than *Jeeves Omnibus*. These are ‘Bertie Changes His Mind’ (from *Carry On, Jeeves*, and narrated by Jeeves); ‘Jeeves

Makes an Omelette’ (from *A Few Quick Ones*, 1959); and ‘Jeeves and the Greasy Bird’ (from *Plum Pie*, 1966).

The first anthology edited by Wodehouse was *A Century of Humour* (B4), published in 1934 by Hutchinson, to which Wodehouse contributed a three page preface, in which he was typically self-deprecating. “Nobody, I think, can deny that the swiftness with which I have become a force in English letters is rather remarkable. It is a bare thirty-four years since I started earning my living as a writer, yet already I am the author of an Omnibus Book, and now the world is ringing with the news that Messrs. Hutchinson have asked me to edit their *Century of Humour* – a job which entitles me to wear pince-nez and talk about Trends and Cycles and the Spirit of Comedy and What Is The Difference Between Humour and Wit. My only trouble is that I have so little to say on these matters.”

The second omnibus from Herbert Jenkins, Wodehouse’s regular publisher, was *Mulliner Omnibus* (B5) in 1935. Although published in the same format as *Jeeves Omnibus*, there was no introduction by Wodehouse. It contained all the Mulliner stories published to date, from *Mr Mulliner Speaking*, *Meet Mr Mulliner*, *Mulliner Nights*, and *Blandings Castle*.

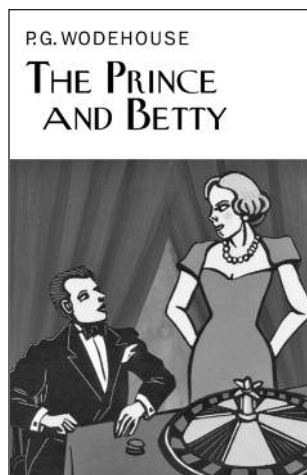
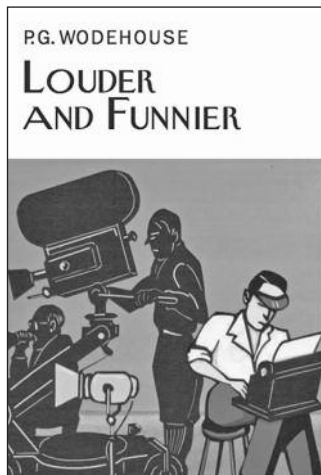
Once again Jenkins published what McIlvaine calls a second edition, under the title *The World of Mr Mulliner* (B5b), in 1972. This did contain a three-page preface by Wodehouse, in which he dispensed similar advice to that which he had provided with his first omnibus: “As regards the medium dose for an adult, I would recommend, as I did in my Preface to *The World of Jeeves*, not more than one or perhaps three stories a day, taken at breakfast or before retiring. Don’t try to read the whole book straight through just so as to be able to say you’ve done it. Nervous people and invalids will of course be guided by their doctor’s advice.” The second edition included a further ten Mulliner stories which had been published since the first edition had appeared. For two of these ten, this represented the first publication in book form: ‘From A Detective’s Notebook’ had only appeared in *Punch* (20 May 1959, D124.195) and ‘Another Christmas Carol’, which appears to be Wodehouse’s very last short story, had only appeared in *Playboy* (December 1970, D51.20).





# The Last of Everyman

For many years now, Everyman’s Library has been publishing hardback reissues of Wodehouse titles, all in modern, beautifully designed covers. Their ambition has been to publish a complete series of all of Wodehouse’s books, and with the three being published this year, they will see that ambition fulfilled at last. These three are:



*Louder and Funnier* (to be released by Everyman on or around March 26), *The Prince and Betty* and *Sunset at Blandings* (both scheduled for release on or around August 11). In the US, Overlook will publish the titles on August 11.

It seems hard to believe they have reached the end of the line, but Wodehouseans everywhere will be eternally grateful to Everyman for keeping Wodehouse in print with their high-quality books.

## The Word in Season *by Dan Kaszeta*

### *Snooter(ed)*

This column has somehow evaded getting chucked out of this otherwise august publication. In the last two issues, the editor has been kind enough to let me explore inebriation (‘scrooched’) and golf (‘foozled’), categories that in my own experience do overlap somewhat, and who is to say that I won’t mine those bountiful seams of Wodehousean words again in the future. Today, however, I turn my efforts to resurrecting ‘snooter(ed)’ into our daily parlance. It seems to me that a lot of snootering is going on these days, and nobody is calling it by its proper name.

‘Snooter(ed)’ could convincingly be used in the inebriation context, and few outside our circles would know any better if I wrote as much: “Bingo was snooter(ed) after spending the day at the Emsworth Arms.” It appears that PG based the verb ‘snooter’ on a now-obscure verb ‘snoot’. My *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (funding, shelf space, and, indeed, a whiff of spousal snootering preclude a household copy of the full edition) gives us this definition:

*Snoot: verb, intrans.: Snub; treat with disdain. Colloquial early 20th Century.*

While we have no clear dictionary definition of ‘snooter’, PG appears to combine ‘snoot’ and ‘neuter’. In effect, to snooter is to look down one’s nose at someone and cut that person down to size in the same act.

Wodehouse appears to have used ‘snooter(ed)’ on several occasions, often (but not exclusively) in the voice of Bertie Wooster. Five examples I found are here, and there are many more I could cite:

“He isn’t what you might call one of my greatest admirers, but everybody says he’s a square sort of cove and he’ll see you aren’t snooter(ed).”  
*Indiscretions of Archie* (1921)

My Aunt Agatha had gone to France and wouldn’t be on hand to snooter me for at least another six weeks.  
‘Aunt Agatha Speaks Her Mind’ (1922)

It’s a rummy thing, but I’d been so snooter(ed) by the old boy . . .  
‘Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch’ (1922)

As far, replied Mr. Finch, frigidly, as a bloke can be said to be all right whose hair has turned white into the roots and who has been starved and chucked out of windows into bushes with six-inch thorns and chivvied and snooter(ed) and shot in the fleshy part of the leg . . .  
*Mr. Mulliner Speaking* (1929)

[I]t’s perfectly amazing how the opposite sex seems to go out of its way to snooter me.  
*The Code of the Woosters* (1938)

It seems to me that snootering is something that could easily be done by an aunt or a club doorman or a maitre d’hotel. In fact, one could argue that when Bertie Wooster was browbeaten into going to the Brompton Road to sneer at a cow creamer, he was snooter(ed) into snootering.

Modern political discourse seems to be replete with snootering. After all, wasn’t the true essence of ‘Plebgate’ an allegation of brazen snootering? We have a perfectly good verb here, and we need to add it to our literary armament.

One thing that remains unclear is whether or not one can snooter a newt. Only Augustus Fink-Nottle can tell us that.

# Recent Press Comment

## **Palatinate (Student Newspaper of Durham University), November 8**

Louisa Cursons reported on the Oook! Productions presentation of *Come On, Jeeves* in very favourable terms.

## **Metro, November 10** (from Edward Cazalet)

Ben Elton named a Wodehouse Omnibus as one of the three books he would take with him on a desert island.

## **Metro, November 12**

Drummond Money-Coutts, a magician in his late 20s, recalled a journalist once said about his name: “Even Wodehouse wouldn’t go near it.”

## **Newsmine.com**

### **(‘The Voice of Interior Alaska’), November 17**

Greg Hill’s *At the Library* column stated that a growing body of evidence suggested online reading might be less satisfying, and quoted Stephen King as saying, “If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time, or tools, to write.” Hill suggested that new writers need decent literary mentors, naming Quintilianus as one of the first, and quoted Douglas Adams as saying, “I aspire to write like P G Wodehouse . . . what he writes is pure word music. . . . He is the greatest musician of the English language.” Hill concluded his article by mentioning that Fairbanks North Star Borough Libraries in Alaska have 66 Wodehouse books on their shelves!

Hill followed up with another article on Wodehouse’s abilities on 23 November, dealing mainly with back-formations of words and similes.

## **The Times, November 29**

In a review of *The Yellow Peril: Dr Fu Manchu and the Rise of Chinaphobia* by Christopher Frayling, Roger Boyes recalled Plum’s satire *The Swoop*, which imagined the Germans landing in Essex, the Russians occupying Yarmouth, the ‘Mad Mullah’ taking Portsmouth, and the Swiss navy seizing the bathing huts of Lyme Regis. Then the Chinese swooped upon “that picturesque little Welsh watering place Lllgxtplll, and despite desperate resistance on the part of an excursion of Evanses and Joneses from Cardiff, seized a secure foothold”.

## **Bibliophile, December**

The remaindered books sales magazine returned to PGW with a vengeance, using eight short quotations to introduce different classifications of books on offer: Crime; Crime Fiction; Erotica; Fiction; Humour; New Age and Occult (“As for Gussie Fink-Nottle, many an experienced undertaker would have been deceived by his appearance and started embalming on sight”); Psychology and Sociology; and Pets (“It was a nasty look. It made me feel as if I were something the dog had brought in and intended to bury later on, when he had time.”)

## **The Times, December 2**

In his Diary column, Patrick Kidd noted that Ladbrokes were offering 16-1 against George Osborne wearing an

orange tie when presenting his autumn statement. He recalled the running of the Clothes Stakes at the Drones Club in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, when the winner emerged from a locked telephone box wearing the costume of a Zulu warrior.

## **The Spectator, December 6** (from Christopher Bellew)

Stig Abell, managing editor of the *Sun*, wrote that, while making a statement to the press, he was interrupted by a dog named Stuart: “Only the night before I had been reading a Jeeves and Wooster story in which Jeeves had lured a dog called Macintosh by sprinkling his trousers with aniseed. Even the marvellous superbity (*sic*) of Jeeves, however, may have faltered at the sight of Stuart . . . romping around with muzzled snout.”

## **The Times (Saturday Review), December 6**

The ‘Classic Read’ reviewed the new Wodehouse anthology *Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit and Other Stories*, published by Hutchinson.

## **‘T Magazine’ in the New York Times, December 7** (from Timothy Kearley)

The author of an article describing ‘The Knowledge’, the training course for London black cab drivers, wrote:

It is tempting to interpret the Knowledge as a uniquely British institution: an expression of the national passion for order and competence, and a democratisation of what P G Wodehouse winkingly called the feudal spirit, putting an army of hyper-efficient Jeeveses on the road, ready to be flagged down by any passing Bertie Wooster.

## **The Times, December 10**

The review of the opening night of *Anything Goes* at Sheffield received a four-star rating from Dominic Maxwell (“A daft, deft dose of pure pleasure”) to go with five-star reviews in a number of other papers. Notably, the *Times* included the show in its ‘Must See’ column on several later occasions.

## **Open Book, BBC Radio 4, December 18**

(from Terry Taylor)

The section of the programme ‘The Book I’d Never Lend’ featured Ben Elton, whose choice was an old battered copy of *The Code of the Woosters*, written by “the greatest talent in English comic letters of all time”.

## **The Guardian, December 22**

Robert McCrum’s 66th choice of *The 100 Best Novels* (a series which started back in 2013 and appears weekly) was Wodehouse’s *Joy in the Morning*.

## **The Reunion, Radio 4, December 25**

(from Christopher Bellew)

The Christmas Day programme was about Wallace and Gromit – whose relationship, it was suggested, is similar to that of Bertie Wooster and Jeeves.

## Plummy Theatre News

There were many reports throughout the period concerning the performances on the UK tour of *Perfect Nonsense* (which continues until June); the three-venue tour of the same show in South Africa (Johannesburg, Capetown, and Durban), where it again received rave reviews; and *Anything Goes* (which started a National Tour in January following a seven-week stint at Sheffield). Many of these were previews or reviews in papers local to the relevant theatre.

**Daily Telegraph, January 3** (from Alan Hall)

The journalist Fraser Nelson's comment that Joe Cocker's cover of 'With a Little Help from My Friends' "was the only time a singer had improved a Beatles song" incited a fellow journalist to respond that Nelson had "really put a C among the Ps, as Wodehouse might have said".

**The Independent on Sunday, January 4** (from Peter Read)

A long article by D J Taylor concerned the nature of the practical joke, which may often be undertaken to draw attention to a concern for which no other remedy is available. He referred to Wodehouse's use of such a remedy for his essentially decent schoolboys against tyranny from self-important schoolmasters (e.g. by painting a dog red or breaking out of school at night) and noted that when the boys had become young men, such solutions were beyond them – Psmith could not 'rag' his bank manager boss Mr Bickersdyke, who held Psmith's career destiny in his hands.

**The Irish Times, January 6** (from Paul Kerrigan)

As part of a series of interviews on what 'life lessons' notable persons have learned during each year of their lives, author and columnist Paul Howard wrote that one of his 44 was: "If P G Wodehouse and Damon Runyon were the only authors I ever read, I would consider myself well-read."

**Daily Telegraph, January 7**

The clue for 8 down in the 'Telegraph Toughie' crossword was: "Feed the desire of Empress of Blandings, maybe (8)." The answer was PIGSWILL.

**London Review of Books, January 8** (from Patrick Kidd)

In his Diary, Alan Bennett wrote: "Forget P.G. Wodehouse, for a working-class boy aunties can be no mean things."

**The Week, January 9** (from Roger Bowen)

A review by Susan Hill of Margery Allingham's classic *Tiger in the Smoke* referred to Albert Campion as "usually a Bertie Wooster of a detective, but in this novel he is steely and determined".

**The Times, January 19**

In an article concerning the departure from TV screens of 'ageing female faces', Libby Purves asked whether it was because they reminded men of Aunt Agatha? Her concluding point was that even the lowliest onscreen face must be approved by middle-aged executives with commercial anxieties, and suggested that offered two equal talents, maybe they think of Aunt Agatha and go for a Jeeves – even if he's actually a bit of a Bertie.

**The Times, January 22** (from Leila Deakin)

Professor Stuart Russell of the University of California, Berkeley, has suggested that artificially intelligent robots should be the robots to humanity's Bertie Wooster, warning that humans risked a showdown with 'sociopathic' machines unless they were taught to be subservient. He added that Jeeves "did not need to be told what his master wanted. Their relationship, therefore, should be used as a blueprint for humanity's interactions with artificially intelligent beings."

**The Guardian, January 24** (from Robert Bruce)

Commenting on a leading publisher's recommendation that, to avoid causing offence, writers should not feature pigs, or even references to pork-based food, in their works, Harry Oulton went to his daughter's school and regretfully "removed all traces of literature about pigs from the shelves" – including Wodehouse's stories featuring Empress of Blandings.

**The Spectator, January 24**

Andrew Watts wrote of Boris Johnson: "If he is a character from Wodehouse – and with every stutter and 'piffle' he self-consciously reinforces this image – then anyone criticising him for his lack of attention to detail is forced into the role of Aunt Agatha ticking off Bertie Wooster."

**Daily Telegraph, January 29** (from David Anderston)

An obituary of the actress Mercy Haystead mentioned her marriage to Tony Samuel, chairman of Wodehouse's publisher Herbert Jenkins. The obit noted that "the couple would take a suite at the Algonquin Hotel in New York while Samuel was visiting PG Wodehouse at his home on Long Island".

**The Guardian, January 30 and February 2**

(from Terry Taylor)

Giles Fraser's suggestion in an article on the possible Disestablishment of the Church of England – that "establishment weakens the church and turns clerics into fawning Jeeves-like courtiers who prefer dressing up to speaking out" – drew the wrath of one Siobhan McGovern from Edinburgh. Her letter in reply of 2 February wondered whether Fraser had ever read Wodehouse, bearing in mind that Jeeves is neither fawning nor obsequious, rules Bertie with an iron hand, and is never afraid to speak out.

**The Guardian, February 7** (from Terry Taylor)

Commenting sorrowfully on Simpson's-in-the-Strand being up for sale, Ian Jack noted: "Wodehouse wrote that a Briton could easily stupefy himself with food at Simpson's, and quite cheaply too."

**Bay Area Reporter, February 12**

Included a review of *Jeeves and the Wedding Bells* in which the reporter expressed his pleasant surprise that Sebastian Faulks "has the Wodehouse lingo and sly sense of humor down pat".

**Only Connect, BBC2, February 16** (from June Arnold)

In the third round of this popular game show, the 'Connecting Wall' included the following words: *Glossop*, *Wooster*, *Byng*, *Worcester*, and *Spode*. The team correctly linked the four names from the Bertie & Jeeves stories, though 'Spode' could just have easily been fit into the 'Porcelain' connections that included 'Worcester'.

**The Spectator, February 17** (from Christopher Bellew)

Bruce Anderson wrote that George Macdonald Fraser's three McAuslan books "put him up there with Wodehouse".

Something of the gallant fire which was animating him seemed to pass out of Sir Aylmer Bostock. He blinked, like some knight of King Arthur's court, who, galloping to perform a deed of derring-do, has had the misfortune to collide with a tree. Though keeping up a brave front, he, like his wife, had always quelled before Hermione. Native chiefs, accustomed to leap like fawns at a waggle of his moustache, would have marvelled at this weakness in one who had always seemed to them impervious to human emotions, but it existed.

(From *Uncle Dynamite*, 1948)



# Future Events for Your Diary

## *Perfect Nonsense*

This hilarious play, adapted from *The Code of the Woosters* by David and Robert Goodale, is continuing to tour England. Remaining dates are: March 17–21: Marlow Theatre, Canterbury; March 24–28: Grand Opera House, Belfast; March 30–April 4: Malvern Theatre; April 7–11: Milton Keynes Theatre; April 20–25: Theatre Royal, Nottingham; April 28–May 2: New Victoria Theatre, Woking; May 5–9: Hall for Cornwall, Truro; May 11–16: Kings Theatre, Edinburgh; May 18–21: Salisbury Playhouse; June 1–7: Leeds Grand Theatre. For more information and tickets, see <http://bit.ly/1vA2qZi>.

## **March 29, 2015 Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk**

Richard Burnip is leading a Wodehouse-themed walk for London Walks. The usual fee is £9, but Society members get a discounted price of £7. No need to book a place; just be at exit 2 (Park Lane east side) of Marble Arch Underground station at 2.30 p.m., and identify yourself as a Society member.

## **May 17, 2015 Gold Bats vs. Patrick Kidd XI**

The annual charity match, this year to benefit Macmillan Cancer Care and the Helen Rollason Cancer Charity, will be held at Audley End House, near Saffron Walden; start time is 1 p.m. For directions, see <http://bit.ly/1vjLciv>.

## **June 19, 2015 (?) Gold Bats vs. The Dulwich Dusters**

At time of going to press, the date for our annual match against the Masters of Dulwich College had not been set (see page 4). Please check the Society's

website for confirmation of the date. Whenever it is, the start time will be around 4.30, and there will be a break for the Society's always popular tea.

## **June 21, 2015 Gold Bats vs. Sherlock Holmes Society**

This traditional match in bucolic surroundings is always fun; be sure to bring a picnic lunch! We will be convening at the West Wycombe cricket club in the morning and starting play at 11.30.

## **July 22, 2015 Society Meeting at the Savoy Tup**

Our next gathering will feature a Fiendish Quiz, presided over by Paul Kent. Enjoy the lively debates engendered by some of his more controversial questions! We gather at the Savoy Tup from 6 p.m.

## **October 29–November 1, 2015 TWS Convention (USA)**

The Wodehouse Society is holding its 18th biennial convention, 'Psmith in Pseattle', in, er, Seattle, Washington.

## **November 18, 2015 Society AGM at the Savoy Tup**

In addition to the AGM, we are promised a special guest speaker, whose identity will be revealed in a future *Wooster Sauce* as well as on our website. We kick off around 6 p.m. at the Savoy Tup, with Parish Notices and the AGM commencing at around 6.45, followed by our speaker. It promises to be another fun evening.

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