

# WOOSTER SAUCE



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## *Plum's Indian Summer is Still Hot*

*On July 20th, The Guardian devoted the front page and three inside pages of its Review section to an article How the Woosters Captured Delhi by Shashi Tharoor, Under Secretary-General for Communications at the United Nations. As its title suggests, the author was trying to explain the attraction of Wodehouse's prose to many Indians.*

Tharoor discovered Wodehouse young and felt a cloud of darkness settle when All-India Radio announced PGW's death in 1975.

For months before his death, I had procrastinated over a letter to Wodehouse. It was a collegian's fan letter, made special by being written on the letterhead of the Wodehouse Society of St Stephen's College, Delhi University. Ours was then the only Wodehouse Society in the world, and I was its president, a distinction I prized over all others in an active and eclectic extra-curricular life. The Wodehouse Society ran mimicry and comic speech contests and organised the annual Lord Ickenham Memorial Practical Joke Week, the bane of all at college who took themselves seriously. The society's underground rag, *Spice*, edited by a wildly original classmate who was to go on to become a counsellor to the prime minister of India, was by far the most popular newspaper on campus; even its misprints were deliberate, and deliberately funny.

It is an exaggeration to say that his was the only Wodehouse Society in the world at the time, for the Dutch Society have a letter from the Master himself acknowledging their existence. Nevertheless, the activities of St Stephens' College offer ideas for societies worldwide.

Tharoor went on to comment that:

Twenty-seven years since his death, much has changed in India, but Wodehouse still commands the heights. His works are sold on railway station platforms and airport bookstalls alongside the latest bestsellers. In 1988 the state-run television network Doordarshan broadcast a 10-part Hindi adaptation of *Leave It To Psmith* with [Blandings Castle] becoming the Rajasthani palace of an indolent Maharaja.

Tharoor's piece contains much sound commentary. Perhaps the most interesting single point he made is that:

Wodehouse is one British writer whom Indian nationalists could admire without fear of political incorrectness. My former mother-in-law, the daughter of a prominent Indian nationalist politician,

remembers introducing Britain's last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, to the works of Wodehouse in 1942; it was typical that the symbol of the British Empire had not read the 'quintessentially English' Wodehouse but that the Indian freedom-fighter had.

He followed this with several Wodehouse nifties and added:

This insidious but good-humoured subversion of the language, conducted with straight-faced aplomb, appeals most of all to a people who have acquired English as a language, but rebel against the heritage.

He introduced one controversial line by noting that some years ago another critic, Michael Dirda of the *Washington Post*, had written that Wodehouse:

... seems to have lost his general audience and become mainly a cult author for connoisseurs for his prose artistry.

Tharoor believes that this is increasingly true in England and the rest of the Commonwealth, but the evidence does not support the claim, at least since the supremely successful reissue by Penguin of more than 40 titles over the last three years or so. Just look at the launch of the Everyman series, the unabridged audiotapes from Chivers and Simon Callow's abridged Jeeves and Wooster recordings for Penguin if you need more proof; these publishers don't publish if the material doesn't sell.

One final, remarkable, point from Tharoor's essay:

In a country where most people's earning capacity has not kept up with inflation and book-borrowing is part of the culture, libraries stock multiple copies of each Wodehouse title. At the British Council libraries in major Indian cities, demand for Wodehouse titles reputedly outstrips that for any other author, so that each month's list of 'new arrivals' includes reissues of old Wodehouse favourites.

Our Society's membership includes Indian schoolboys, and we are pleased that they offer support to the main tenet of this very good article, which remains copyright Shashi Tharoor. Thanks are due to *The Guardian* for their consent to publish these extracts.



# Wodehousean Hangovers

Explored by Jonathan Bacchus

A rich and robust streak of bibulousness runs through much of Wodehouse's work. From beer to Bollinger, from exotically-named cocktails to fine wines, there can be few alcoholic beverages that do not get a mention somewhere in the opus. The teetotallers and moderate drinkers appear to be heavily outnumbered by characters who, faced with a row of bottles, would probably square their shoulders and go at it until their eyes bubbled.

Consequently, the canon is littered with instances of Eggs, Beans, Crumpets, Piefaces and others in a condition in which they would be unable to articulate the phrase 'British Constitution' to please a dying grandmother. The Wooster/Drones section of Geoffrey Jaggard's *Wodehouse World* concordance lists twenty-four different substitutes for 'intoxicated', from 'awash' to 'woozled' by way of 'fried to the tonsils', 'ossified' and 'stewed to the gills'. Whilst under the influence of the sauce, Wodehouse's toppers pinch policemen's helmets, throw eggs at electric fans, mistake standard lamps for burglars, burn down country cottages and compel acquaintances to wade in the Trafalgar Square fountains in search of newts.

Yet here's a funny thing. On the morning after their excesses, they are more likely to be found 'chanting like larks under the cold shower' and calling for eggs and bacon, as the twins Claude and Eustace are after an all-nighter round the West End, than groaning in bed. One of the many delights of Wodehouse-land is the speed and ease with which hangovers seem to vanish in it.

Bertie's, of course, and those of anyone else fortunate enough to employ Jeeves as his gentleman's personal gentleman, are swiftly dealt with by Jeeves's magic pick-me-ups, although the sufferer has to put up with the passing inconvenience of the top of the skull flying up to the ceiling and the eyes shooting out of their sockets and rebounding from the opposite wall like racquet balls. But there are other examples.

Perhaps the most celebrated binge in Wodehouse is Gussie Fink-Nottle's in *Right Ho, Jeeves*. The normally teetotal Gussie, you will recall, drinks sixteen medium-sized gulps of neat whisky followed by a jug of orange juice laced with two tumblersful of gin, and with 'the old familiar juice splashing up against the back of the front teeth', makes his scholastically innovative speech at the Market

Snodsbury Grammar School prizegiving. Nine hours or so later, is he writhing in the throes of the worst (perhaps the first) hangover of his life? Not at all. He is happily regaling Madeline Bassett with stories of Bertie Wooster's schooldays.

In *Pigs Have Wings*, George Cyril Wellbeloved pays a visit to Blandings Castle, drinks beer, whisky, gin and champagne there and becomes 'brilliantly illuminated'. Sure enough, the following morning he is found propped up against a tree, in the grip of 'one of those hangovers that mark epochs, the sort of hangover you tell your grandchildren about when they come clustering round your knee'. Yet only a couple of hours later he is in the Beetle and Wedge, pleading for a glass of beer with a spot of gin in it to improve the flavour.

A Mulliner drinks three cocktails, followed by 'hock, sherry, champagne, old brandy and port' at dinner (there is a delightful flamboyance and carelessness about the way in which Wodehouse characters mix their drinks) and then spends the small hours reading *Strychnine in the Soup* with his future mother-in-law. Another Mulliner drinks three cocktails and a pint or two of straight rye at Mike's Place; when he awakes next day his chief preoccupation is that a lady is apparently violating the proprieties by being seen in a gentleman's bedroom. Oofy Prosser, confined to his bed on the morning after a party at which Bronx cocktails, Martinis, Side-Cars, Lizard's Breaths and All Quiet on the Western Fronts are consumed, is nonetheless equal to a spot of conversation on the subject of where to buy strawberries in December. The demon drink may loom large in Wodehouse, but its after-effects are kept firmly in the background.

How pleasant it would be to gain admission to one of the better Wodehousean country houses (gravel soil, rolling parkland, browsing and sluicing well up to sample) and sit down to the sort of dinner at which the butler gets a stiff wrist from pouring all the drinks – without ever having to worry about anything so prosaic, and so un-Wodehousean, as a hangover.

*Sarah Cutts wrote from Australia:*

The Word of the Day on my local radio station one day in May was 'Good Egg'. It was described as having become popular after P G Wodehouse's *Something Fresh*, but having originated with Kipling.



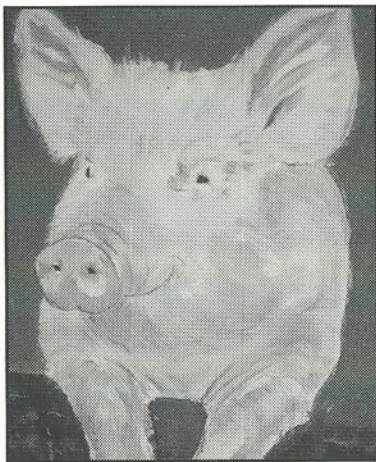
# But No Hangover in Amsterdam

Says Tony Ring

The oldest extant Wodehouse Society, which dates from the early 1970s, meets three times a year at Mulliner's Wijnlokaal in Amsterdam. On June 15 members celebrated the 80th birthday of its founding father, Kees van Rijswijk (below), whose name appears on the brass plaque outside the Society's home. And at the next meeting, they will be able to celebrate the completion of 21 years meeting at Mulliner's.



Three main items were on the agenda, the first of which was a Great Pig Contest. All members had been invited to bring a pig of some description, though with an eye to potential recriminations from The Dumb Chums League (see *Open House in Mulliner Nights*) a single rule was laid down: no real pigs would be admitted.



There were a total of sixteen entries, varying in style from a painting which had been completed that morning (and was auctioned later in the meeting for Society funds), a substantial pottery pig borrowed from a local butcher, a homemade felt stuffed pig, a

pig hat whose inspiration evidently came from *By Jeeves*, other pottery pigs and even an invisible pig in a collar which went round snuffling at those present.

There were even Olive, a one-year-old red setter ("Dogs are not pigs," said the stern judges, breaching the copyright of the thoughtful Pint of Bitter at the Anglers' Rest) and Pepijn, a small boy whose party turn was pig noises. After considerable exercise of vocal chords in the call of "*Pig-hoo-o-o-ey*" and of grey cells borrowed for the occasion from an adjacent detective, the prize was awarded to a pig which had not even entered: one already owned by the Society which enjoys permanent residence displayed on the wall at Mulliner's.

Olive hid her disappointment during the next event, an egg-and-spoon race along the canalside. Her job was to lick up all the raw egg which emerged from those dropped by clumsy competitors. After some close heats and semi-finals, the event was won by the newly-wed Peter Uges, watched by the adoring eyes of his Henriette.



Another Peter, Peter Nieuwenhuizen, who is a family man of some years' standing, introduced the third event. Peter is the Society researcher and undertakes an enormous amount of valuable research into the more obscure appearances of PGW in The Netherlands. He spoke of Plum's theatre and a fairly recent production of *Come On, Jeeves*, in Dutch, which had been staged by a school dramatic society.

The Dutch Wodehouseans' meeting place is as informal as the Savage Club, and its members enjoy the comparable benefits of a friendly barman and having to slide no more than two or three paces to the bar for a refreshing snort. Perhaps it is time for the two Societies to arrange an exchange visit.



# Why Isn't Bertie Fat?

*James Clayton asks the question*

But before examining that question, perhaps it is necessary to examine how we know he isn't. All his relatives appear to be fat. His uncles are so fat that from time to time they need to go to Harrogate for the cure. Indeed, fat uncles are commonplace among the relatives of members of the Drones. But Bertie is normally depicted – in drawings, on television, in film – as slim, dapper, and well dressed, if perhaps sometimes a little on the short side.

About his being well-dressed there is, of course, no question. Jeeves sees to that. Even when he wears something of which Jeeves disapproves, such as the white mess jacket, he attracts the admiration of acquaintances. And while there are plenty of references to his general appearance, details about his size and shape are few.

It may not be conclusive that a bearded Hyde Park orator describes him as tall and thin with a face like a motor mascot, because the occasion on which this description is offered demands an insult. But Bertie does not deny this, and elsewhere describes himself as slender and willowy, a description which Boko Fittleworth supports.

According to Bobbie Wickham and Jeeves, who should know, he has a face like a fish, and again, Bertie appears to accept this as a reasonable description. Fishes and motor mascots are not normally fat, so we can assume he is thin-faced, and no one anywhere makes disparaging remarks about his size – although Bertie occasionally comments on the fatness of others – so it would appear that he is precisely as depicted, slim.

So, *why* isn't he fat?

His daily routine consists largely of eating and drinking, and when one looks for them, there are a surprising number of references to his daily intake.

He gets up late after having been brought tea and, occasionally, bread and butter, in bed. His breakfast is usually eggs and bacon, with marmalade and toast, followed by coffee, presumably containing milk, but there is some variety in that occasionally he will have kippers or sausages, or kidneys on toast and mushrooms. Undoubtedly, he breakfasts well, wherever he is.

He then goes off to the Drones for lunch unless he has invited guests to the flat or is out of town, and while details are rarely given of his lunches, when

circumstances take him to the Senior Liberal Club he has six courses without any indication that he might be overdoing it.

The famous picnic lunch at the races would have consisted of the following: ham sandwiches, tongue sandwiches, potted meat sandwiches, game sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, lobster, cold chicken, sardines, cake – ‘and if we want a bite to eat after that, of course, we can go to the pub’. Would have, I say, only because the hamper has been left behind as part of Jeeves's manipulations.

There are many references to afternoon teas, at the flat, or in country houses, and these usually consist of something oozing with butter, such as toast, or muffins, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the tea is with milk.

Every night, wherever he is, he has dinner, sometimes alone, sometimes at Aunt Dahlia's table enjoying Anatole's cooking. And when he selects the dinner of his choice as a reward for accepting a term of imprisonment, the menu contains 19 items. It is likely that however many courses he has at any dinner, they may not be large, but they are always plentiful. So he eats a lot.

What about drinking? He describes himself as an abstemious cove, but it is now accepted as a truism that most people, when asked to indicate their idea of excessive drinking, say it is a little more than they drink themselves. Sometimes, such independent comments as we have on the extent of Bertie's drinking come from others whose ideas of excessive drinking could be considered to match that truism.

But among his relatives and associates, Aunt Dahlia, Gussie Fink-Nottle, and Stilton Cheesewright all think he drinks too much, and say so. Apart from those special occasions such as Boat Race night and bump suppers at which he admits to having drunk too much, the independent observer might conclude that at other times he also drinks rather a lot. Cocktails before a lunch taken with a half-bottle of wine or champagne and followed by brandy, cocktails before dinner, wine during dinner, a whisky and soda to help him sleep. In addition there are the occasional drinks he takes when he feels the need to restore the tissues.

So here we have a youngish man who eats and drinks in large quantities and yet remains slim. Perhaps he works it all off in exercise.



# The Man Who Defied The Chairman

## *Murray Hedgcock switched subjects for his Savage talk*

When Murray Hedgcock rose to his feet to tumultuous applause at the Savage Club on July 2nd, he knew that he was about to break new ground. Having been briefed to speak about *The Australian View of Wodehousean England*, he unilaterally decided on a change of topic, to *Plum's Prejudice against Australia*.

He offered the premise that there is distinct, obvious and quite unforgiveable prejudice against 'Godzone Country' (as Australians know it) throughout the Wodehouse saga.

His first line of attack was to point out that where PGW had a real opportunity to introduce Australia and the Australians, he failed to do so, selecting Argentina as the country of preference for Mike Jackson's father to make and lose his money. And also as the country to which Wyatt is sent to make good when he irreparably falls out with his step-father.

Moving on twenty years, he chided Plum for sending Claude and Eustace to South Africa, as the appropriate place for 'wild youths'. "Why not Australia," asked Murray. "Australia had been accepting the sweepings, leavings, offcuts and director's cuts from homeland for 134 years when PGW wrote that story: surely even so unworldly a character might have picked up the hint that here was the ideal dustbin for rejects from all classes of British life."

Murray commended Plum for making Australia a suitable prospective repository for one unwanted item: the Smoker's Ideal Comrade, an unloveable Christmas present to be recycled amongst friends and acquaintances.

But looking at the actual Australian characters in the œuvre, he was not able to point to many. The one who played the biggest part was Uncle Percy from Australia, the Old Stepper in the Ukridge story, who was a mere reflection of the Antipodean gift for scrounging, in his case acquiring illegally everything from roses to a sundial and a summer-house. Murray added that when he was growing up he was more familiar with the term 'to souvenir' than 'to scrounge', but the meaning was the same.

He also referred to Ellabelle Prebble, Dudley Finch's Australian fiancée, who comes with him for a visit to the UK. While welcoming her existence, Murray challenged the choice of name. Wodehouse passed it off thus:

"Nice girl?"

"Oh, of the best."

"What's her name?"

"Ellabelle."

"How perfectly foul."

"Oh, it's all right. I call her Stinker."

Murray then asked whether Plum would have met many Australians, and referred to the stage star Oscar Asche, who wrote books and lyrics for, and starred in the London production of, *Chu Chin Chow* in 1916. Asche came from Geelong, the same Victorian provincial city where Murray undertook his journalistic cadetship.

He also mentioned Gubby Allen, an Australian whom most Englishmen would have considered more English than the English. He was Sydney-born, but became very influential in many ways in English cricket — and was a friend of Plum. But even he, it seems, could not stir Godzone creative juices.

## *Why Isn't Bertie Fat? continued*

In younger days he was fairly active. At Oxford he rowed, but not with distinction, he rode a bicycle, and swam in the college fountain. He did, however, represent the university at racquets. Nowadays he rides, swims, shoots, plays golf and squash, tennis and darts, and throws bread rolls. But not a lot, and surely not enough to burn up all the energy from the daily intake of food and drink.

Sometimes, when staying at a country house, dinner is followed by a stroll in the grounds, hardly enough

exercise to counter the earlier excesses, certainly not when at Brinkley Court where, he acknowledges, Anatole's skills one summer added an inch to his waist. In town he will often go to the theatre after dinner, usually a musical comedy — not a particularly strenuous excursion — or to a night club, where the dancing is accompanied by more drinking.

No. He may be slender and willowy, but it cannot last. One day he will be as fat as Uncle George, and then who will go with him to Harrogate?



# Travels of a Biographer

## Robert McCrum gives his second progress report

A year in the life of a Wodehouse biographer can seem like a long sentence. The direct and immediate consequence of your subject's indefatigable appetite for work – stories, novels, plays, lyrics, filmscripts, letters, notes, and Dulwich match reports – is that hardly a day goes by without some new nugget of information presenting itself for scrutiny and analysis.

As in 2001, I have been sustained in my labours by the generous support and assistance of Tom Sharpe, Murray Hedgcock, Tony Ring, Norman Murphy, Jan Piggott and Edward Cazalet, together with help from friendly Wodehouseans, too numerous to mention, around the world. You know who you are.

In my last progress report I wrote that Wodehouse is 'elusive, often maddeningly so'. Elusive, certainly, and also nomadic. In addition to wading through a mass of literary material, I have also, in the quest for understanding, retraced his footsteps, from London to Hampshire, to New York, to France, to Hollywood, and finally to Germany. Richard Holmes, a contemporary biographer I greatly admire, says somewhere that it is not enough to look into your subject's life, you have to look *out* from it, too, to see the world as he (or she) would have observed it.

So I have visited his boyhood home in Stableford, Shropshire (and been generously entertained by the current owner Peter Hollingsworth); I have motored through a near-biblical downpour to Emsworth (an excellent guided tour of the local museum and its Wodehouse items from Tessa Daines and Roy Morgan); and then (highlight of the year) I have spent an enthralling week-end with Edward Cazalet in Le Touquet, followed by a visit to the citadel at Huy and a hilarious evening with the Drones Club of Belgium.

On top of this, courtesy of Cunard, I have crossed the Atlantic on the QE2 (at the height of his career PGW was an inveterate transatlantic, ocean-going commuter); paid my respects at the Wodehouse grave in Remsenburg; visited the Little Church around The Corner, just off Madison Avenue, where he married Ethel Newton in 1914 (you can still inspect the marriage licence); and spent a month in and around Hollywood, mining the infinite riches of the Academy's wonderful archive. In California, I also visited the Wodehouses' two principal Hollywood homes, 1005 Benedict Canyon Drive (opposite the Beverly Hills Hotel) and 1315 Angelo Drive (up in the hills).

But I did not go to Los Angeles just to cruise around Sunset Boulevard with a camera in a Hertz car. Amazingly, there are still one or two people alive today who actually remember Wodehouse during his Hollywood years. Mrs Frances Ershler (née Mayer) was a young temp secretary working in and around the film community. Early in 1937 as a young woman of twenty she found herself taken on as a secretary by Ethel Wodehouse, initially during her convalescence from some unspecified 'major surgery'.

Ershler quickly became devoted to 'Mr Wodehouse', driving him on his afternoon trips to the library. Fran (as she now is) has some vivid and precious memories of life in the house on Angelo Drive, and some absolutely priceless signed first editions. Her testimony confirms what the American archives suggest: that Wodehouse was rather more deeply involved in movie-making and the studio life than he liked to pretend to friends. No doubt Tinseltown's script-writing factory was undemanding. But then, by his prodigious standards of daily work, almost everyone was an amateur.

Los Angeles has been the furthest limit of my Wodehouse odyssey. Nearer to home, the rest of my travels have been quite as invaluable. I have made countless small, but fascinating, discoveries, each of which will deepen and (I hope) enrich my rendering of the Life. Yet throughout this research period, which is still in process, some aspects of his biography have proved hard to elucidate. None more so than his relationship with 'old Bill Townend', his Dulwich school friend.

Townend, as everyone knows, shared a dormitory with Wodehouse in Elm Lawn, knocked about Edwardian London with him during his apprentice years on *The Globe*, tried (and failed) to make a career as a commercial artist, (thanks to Wodehouse, he was commissioned to do the – rather wooden – illustrations to *The White Feather*) and kept up the faithful, lifelong correspondence that, in 1953, became the basis for that crucial autobiographical volume, *Performing Flea*.

Next to Guy Bolton, Townend was probably Wodehouse's closest friend, though it was a relationship conducted on paper and, for many years, at long distance. As Wodehouse's latest biographer, I became anxious to find out more about this shadowy figure, whose threadbare life of



literary struggle (intermittently rescued from abject poverty by Wodehouse's discreet subventions) stands in such stark contrast to the grand worldly successes of his old school friend. In particular, I wanted to do something that no previous book about Wodehouse had managed to do. I wanted to locate and publish a photograph of Bill Townend.

Initially, I thought it would be enough simply to appeal for help through the literary columns of the English and American press. Accordingly, I wrote about my researches, making pointed reference to Townend, both in the *Spectator* and its transatlantic cousin, the *American Spectator*.

This fishing expedition landed quite a catch — several nice letters of encouragement, a number of photocopied PGW items, and a letter from a gentleman in Paris which began *in medias res*, 'Rather surprised that your researches have not uncovered the fact that Bill Townend was PGW's lover, during his late and post-school years . . .'. That set me back a bit. Surely not! I carefully re-read the Townend letter file from 1906 to his death in 1962, enquired what my correspondent might mean and soon established that this was a highly eccentric interpretation of some exceedingly questionable paternal memoirs. Besides, none of it brought me any closer to a photograph.

Next, standard journalistic techniques applied by my friend and colleague Martin Bright, the Home Affairs Editor of *The Observer*, located the surviving daughter of Townend's elder brother Harry.

Baroness Charlotte de Serdici was charm itself. She gave me morning coffee in her exquisite Eaton Square apartment, spoke movingly of her 'Uncle Bill', but could, alas, only come up with an Edwardian group portrait from a Townend wedding. All the Townend boys were there: tall, good-looking, self-confident. Only Bill, the black sheep of the family, was absent.

The Baroness, however, did put me in touch with 'the head of the family', her cousin Gavin, a professor in Durham. He, in turn, kindly passed on



addresses for two more Townend cousins. I wrote to both, one in New Zealand, the other in Shropshire. Their replies, by chance, arrived on the same day. Neither had anything definite to offer; but both were eager to help. Suddenly a photograph seemed a possibility.

Helen Townend, whom I have never met, and to whom I owe the resolution of this conundrum, soon became as exercised by the quest for her 'Uncle Bill' as I have been. Letters flew to and fro. There were phone calls to Canada. Memories were searched; attics

ransacked. Finally, a phone message. Cousin Harriet had found something. A glass plate photograph of her grandfather Barney Townend and his teenage cousin, Bill (left in the reproduction). When the copy arrived I felt, to lift one of PGW's favourite borrowings, like stout Cortez on that peak in Darien.

I have to confess that pursuing, and then waiting for, this photograph of Bill Townend has occupied much of the past year. Now that I've got it, I've run out of excuses. I really can no longer postpone the business of actually writing the book. Besides, the BBC are showing alarming signs of wanting to make a documentary programme about my work. The early chapters are now in progress; I'm optimistic I have found the right tone for the narrative; and I'm hoping to have a first draft completed by this time next year, on schedule for publication with Penguin Books in Autumn 2004.

I can't wait to read it.

*If you have any last minute information for Robert McCrum, please send it to him*

## I SAY!

### Favourite Exchanges - 23

"What's to be done, Jeeves?"

"We must think, sir."

"You think. I haven't the machinery."

From *Without The Option* in *Carry On, Jeeves*, (1925)



# My First Wodehouse Experience

By Nicholas Aldridge

Of my sixty-plus years, thirty-five have been spent, man and boy, at Summer Fields, a prep school in Oxford, which has two major connections with PGW: first, it was the *alma mater* from 1918 to 1923 of Richard Usborne, leading authority on the great man; and second, Geoffrey Bolton taught there.

“Who?” I hear you cry. “Do you mean Guy Bolton?”

But no, I mean Geoffrey, or ‘GB’, as he was to generations of Summerfieldians. Being thrown together with the Head Master’s son in the Great War led to his taking a job at SF when the conflict ceased.

‘It was at Woolwich, I think, or some other ghastly spot,’ he wrote in his memoirs, ‘that I first met Geoffrey Alington. It did not take us long to discover that we had practically everything in common: a love of Oxford, the Classics, cricket, Gilbert & Sullivan; a knowledge by heart of much of the works of Wodehouse (the Wodehouse, that is, of Mike and Psmith; the other masterpieces were still in the womb of time), A A Milne, Kipling, Hornung, Anthony Hope; and a hearty dislike of our CO.’

Sadly, Alington was killed in 1916, but by then GB was on intimate terms with his family, and so in 1919 he took up a teaching post at the school of which he was one day to become Head Master. For forty years he shared the loves listed above with generations of schoolboys. In 1923, he was given charge of Cubicles, a large dormitory divided by partitions in a similar fashion to the Long Chamber at Eton. He read to the boys nearly every evening.

‘Having a statistical mind, I tried a rough calculation of how many words I had read to Cubicles when I left them after sixteen years, and arrived at the impressive total of twenty million. Those were the days of Wodehouse at his summit, the vintage years of *Right Ho, Jeeves*, of *Summer Lightning*, of *Leave it to Psmith* and *Money for Nothing*, and the shouts of laughter that rang round Cubicles still linger gratefully on the ear. [GB was writing this shortly after his retirement in 1960.] Once, on the first night of term, I read a brand-new Jeeves story from the *Strand* (*Jeeves and the Old School Chum*): anyone coming in would have thought it was the last night of term; for we laughed ourselves nearly silly.

‘The earlier Wodehouse stories were not neglected. *Mike and Psmith* had been the joy of my own boyhood; there were *Love Among the Chickens*, *Something Fresh*, *The Little Nugget*, *The Girl on the Boat* and many another. Those were truly happy days, and I am always thrilled when boys who are now parents recall the Wodehouse evenings as something that meant a lot to them.’

Interestingly, Richard Usborne just missed the GB-Cubicles era; so his devotion to the Master must have sprung from another source.

In 1939, upon becoming Assistant Headmaster, GB moved to Cottage, a senior boys’ boarding house, where I slept from 1951 to 1954. On ‘party’ evenings, usually Sundays, we would be invited down to his sitting-room, given sweets and either read to or played Gilbert & Sullivan on his wind-up gramophone. The literary diet was not purely Wodehouse; one term we were read *Vice Versa* in instalments. I have vivid visual memories of the scene: the dressing-gowned boys, at ease on the sofa or sprawled on the carpet; GB’s desk, with documents and framed photographs; and especially the bookcase – the brown and yellow spines of his *Wisdens* (a complete set, I believe) and the predominantly orange-backed Wodehouses with the black Herbert Jenkins colophon.

Fifty years later, and with GB long dead, Wodehouse again holds pride of place in that room. For Cottage is still a senior boys’ boarding house, now run by Andrew and Jane Bishop. Andy is Deputy Headmaster and a Wodehouse Society member, and his collection of PGW first editions is on proud display. I’m sure that, remembering the hundreds of boys, including the present writer, whom he introduced to the delights of Lord Emsworth, Jeeves and Ukridge, the ghost of GB sometimes tiptoes in to refresh his memory with a familiar page or two and to laugh himself nearly silly.

## The Smile That Wins

### Favourite Nifties - 20

They train bank clerks to stifle emotion, so that they will be able to refuse overdrafts when they become managers.

From *Ukridge’s Accident Syndicate*  
in *Ukridge* (1924)



# *The Joys of Married Life!*

*A progress report by Plum after just two months*

As mentioned on page 20 of the June issue, Emsworth Museum has recently been given a batch of letters written by Plum to Lily, his housekeeper at Emsworth. The Museum has agreed that brief extracts from the correspondence may be reproduced in *Wooster Sauce*, and we acknowledge their permission with thanks.

This extract from a letter dated December 2, 1914, was written in recognisable style while Wodehouse was living in Bellport, Long Island:

I expect you have heard that I am married and have been wondering why I did not write and tell you about it. The fact is that things have been in such a rush that every time I have tried to settle down I have had to start in and do something else. We have only just been able to get a maid, and for the first six weeks my wife did all the cooking and I washed the dishes and did the housework. It has increased the admiration I have always had for you! How on earth you managed to look after me and your own home and the two children I can't understand. I don't wonder you used to get up at four in the morning or whatever it was. My only wonder is that you were ever able to go to bed at all. . . . I also realise more than ever what a lot

you used to do for me with the animals. We have two cats, a dog and a puppy here, and however many of them we turn out of the dining-room at mealtimes, there always seems to be one left, shouting for food. I gather them up in armfuls and hurl them into the kitchen.

Later in the same letter he refers to the agent handling matters at *Threepwood*, his Emsworth home in Record Road. The agent's name was 'Mant', and Colonel Horace Mant was a brother-in-law of the Ninth Earl of Emsworth in the first Blandings novel *Something Fresh*, which appeared the following year.

To celebrate the Millennium, the Museum produced a coloured poster of the parish of Warblington with Emsworth, featuring a map and more than twenty sketches of prominent features, including several known to Plum. These include *Threepwood* and Emsworth Harbour with its historic oyster beds, featured in *A Damsel in Distress*. The posters, a little above A2 in size, make an excellent addition to a collection and are available for £6.50 post-free in the UK and Europe or £7.50 post-free elsewhere,

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## *Wodehouse As An Aid To Coping With Serious Illness*

On June 24, there was a most unusual talk at Voice Box, a room within the Royal Festival Hall. Robert McCrum and Katherine Shonfield discussed humour and laughter as an aid for coping with serious illness.

The evening had been arranged by Rosetta Life, a charity set up in 1996 to enable the terminally ill to document their experiences in life in art forms appropriate to their needs, with the support of artists in various media who would help the participant develop their life story in the appropriate medium. The charity has now established online digital arts centres in four hospices, with six more preparing to go on-line. Any member interested in knowing more about the work of Rosetta Life or wishing to offer assistance in any way should visit [www.rosettalife.org](http://www.rosettalife.org)

Katherine, who has cancer, gave a moving speech in which she challenged the view that comedy was mere escapism. She identified Wodehouse as an author who made everything animate ('the fat-headed sun', 'he grabbed at a passing chair') and gave it a soul. One of the uses to which she put his work in her own mind was as an antidote to the bureaucracies you have to cope with when ill, and provided an amusing example of how this worked in practice. Robert McCrum supplemented her arguments by pointing out that, despite his protestations, Plum's childhood really had not gone like a dream and that he had been pretty lonely and his pre-Dulwich days chaotic. He had successfully sought to bring routine to his life, and the principal objective of his work was to cheer people up, to remind everyone what it was to be a human being.

We hope to be able to present extracts from Katherine's talk in the next issue of *Wooster Sauce*.



## Pottery Cow Creamers

*Michael Bird looks at the more common manifestation*

Assay marks make it easy to ascertain the date of manufacture and the silversmith responsible for making a particular silver cow creamer, but with pottery creamers there is no such assistance. Of the nearly 70 pottery cows which we currently own, only two have a mark to help with the identification. With the rest it has been a matter of detective work, learning a little about antique pottery and trusting the dealer! The modelling of the cow, the range of the colours and the way they are used are all pointers to the age and the likely area of manufacture. Unlike the silver cows, earthenware creamers normally stand on flat bases and the design of this base can be a further clue, but with most of our cows, we knew when we handed over the cheque that the age of the model and the area where it was made were only probable. It is impossible to be certain and even the experts sometimes disagree.

One of the first potters known to have produced cow jugs in imitation of the silver ones made by John Schuppe was Thomas Whieldon of Staffordshire, working around 1760. The Whieldon type of cow creamer is characterised by the use of translucent lead glazes, coloured with a range of metallic oxides to give yellow, green, grey or blue (at that time no-one knew lead was poisonous). No attempt was made to imitate the markings of a cow: the glaze was either allowed to run freely over the surface of the earthenware into stripy vertical patterns or was sponged to give a dappled effect. The bases of the Whieldon jugs were often coloured bright green to imitate grass.

From about 1790 the range of available colours increased to include blue, yellow, green, orange and purple. Known by the generic title of Prattware after Felix Pratt who operated a family pottery at Fenton, the colours were either stippled or splashed on to the model before the glaze was added and then fired at high temperature. A number of Prattware cows still exist, many manufactured in Sunderland and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, dating from about 1790 to 1820.

Sunderland also gave its name to a type of lustre decoration, using colours made with silver, gold and platinum to give a certain radiance, and cow milk jugs were made in this style from about 1820. The Cambrian Pottery at Swansea made cow creamers decorated in various shades of pink lustre. Transfer printing came in around this time and we have a



*Thomas Whieldon, c 1765*

pair of cows in white decorated with transfer-printed rustic scenes – the only cows we own with a distinguishing mark on the base. They were made by the Glamorgan pottery of Baker, Bevans & Irwin which operated from 1814 to 1838.

Completely different in appearance are the Jackfield cows. Black, and highly glazed, these Victorian cows are made, not from pottery but from terracotta. They were originally made at Jackfield, Shropshire, near the famous Iron Bridge built by Telford. The company specialised in tiles, but apart from the cows they also made jugs, teapots and other domestic items, all with the distinctive shiny black, or occasionally brown, finish. The factory today is a tile museum, part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum complex. Later the design was copied by many of the Staffordshire companies operating at the time, but they are known collectively as Jackfield creamers.

As the cows had a flat base on which to stand, it gradually became common to put further detail to the model. Calves were added lying beneath or at the side of the cow. In other models there is a milkmaid with a pail sitting on a stool to do the milking. On one of our models the bent arms of the milkmaid have 'stretched' so that if she stood up and put her hands to her sides, her fingers would touch the ground! Occasionally the cow is hobbled as it is milked. The cows and humans are quite out-of-scale to each other, which adds to the fun.



## Pottery Cow Creamers *continued*

Victorian earthenware cows made during the second half of the 19th century are generally larger, less sharply modelled and more crudely decorated than their Georgian predecessors, partly because of the introduction of mass production and partly because they were aimed at less affluent buyers. Many were made with milkmaids or cow herds standing proudly at the head of their charges. To fill these cows the milk is poured through the attendant's hat! Sometimes, the cow stands amid some pseudo-vegetation or borage, and occasionally the milk has to be poured down a tree trunk. With the increasing size and complexity of the model, its original use for pouring out milk and cream became impractical and it became simply an ornament. Many, in fact, were made with the traditional Staffordshire flat back to stand on the chimney piece. Others were made in pairs – like the Staffordshire Dogs. If these were made from the start to be together they are a true pair: if they have been put together later they are known as a marriage.

Because of the difficulty of adequate cleaning, cow creamers started to fall out of favour when the cholera epidemic of the 1850s underlined the need for better hygiene in food. They also came under suspicion in the frequent outbreaks of typhus, although this was later attributed to infected well water. There are still cow creamers made today – how about a brown cow with *Present from Jersey?* – but they do not have the attraction or the individuality of the earlier models.

The size and modelling of the cows varies considerably. Tall or short, plump or thin, some with prominent breastbones, tails curving to the right or left, horns that stick up or curl round in a loop, udders which look as though they could give milk or a mere suggestion of a bump, all standing on round, oval, shaped or rectangular bases . . . the variety is endless. The lids too vary in shape and size. On our earliest Whieldon type cow there is a small bird on the lid; on others there are knobs or rings, but most are plain except for the colouring. The different coloured glazes are sponged or applied as a variety of stripes, blobs or patches – colourful but quite unrealistic. The expressions on their faces vary from the slightly belligerent, through the rather vacant to the whimsical and the frankly funny. They make us smile as we pass by.

In our collection we have a number of early cows and some later ones, but because they are so easily broken, few have survived intact and many horns, tails and lids are tributes to the art of the restorer.



*A Selection from Our Pottery Collection*

To the serious collector it is the earlier cows which are the attraction. Although they are often rather crude in their colouring and the modelling is naïve, they are all individuals and they deserve their place in the history of British pottery.

If this article has interested you in cow creamers, we suggest that you visit the Museum at Stoke-on-Trent to see the Keiller Collection. There are 400 on display at any one time – all different. Plum would have been amused!

*Dr Michael Bird has been enjoying P G Wodehouse for well over 50 years. He is a retired lecturer and he finds enormous pleasure in dissipating his children's inheritance by buying cow creamers and first editions of PGW. He says it is more fun than the traditional way of squandering an inheritance on slow horses and fast women. His wife, Betty, enjoys the cow creamers but has yet to be persuaded to read the books.*

### *The Great Sermon Handicap*

Sophie Glazer spotted this news report:

In June, Rev Chris Sterry delivering a sermon lasting 28 hours in a bid to get his name into the *Guinness Book of Records* for the longest unscripted speech.

His topic was *The Book of Genesis*, and when he passed the existing record, the Anglican vicar was lecturing to 100 parishioners about the tale of Daniel in the lion's den.

He was not permitted to repeat himself, talk nonsense, or pause for more than 10 seconds. He could take a 15-minute break every eight hours but was allowed no other rest.



# *An American in Dulwich*

*by Elin Woodger Murphy*

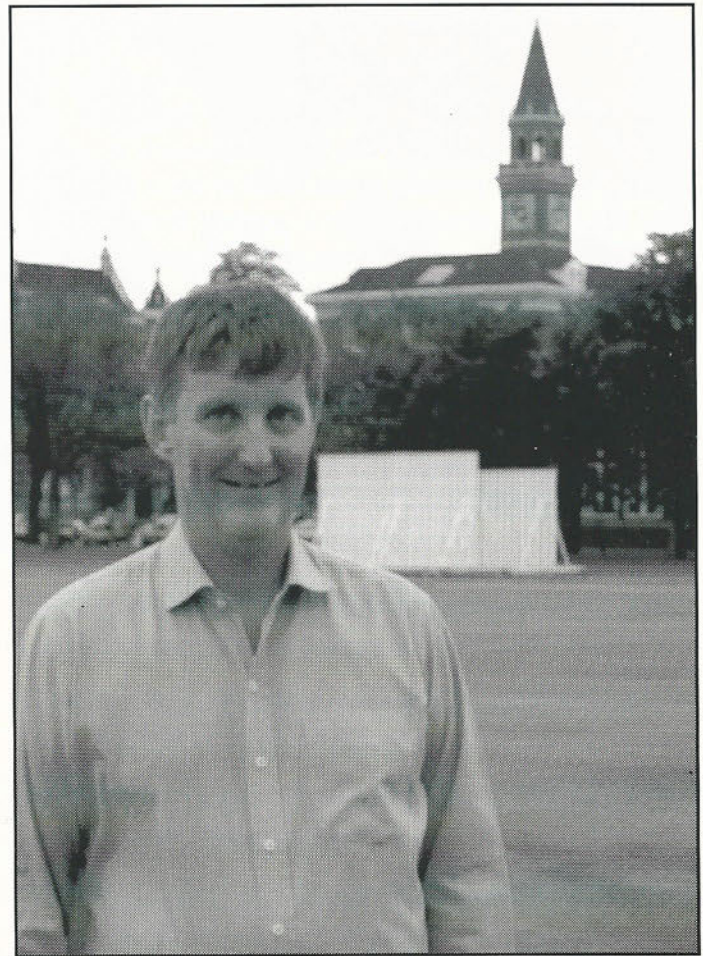
So I was hanging around the Dulwich cricket pavilion, minding my own business, when the Editor sidled up to me. Suddenly I found myself agreeing to report the match between the Gold Bats and the Dusters for *Wooster Sauce*, despite knowing next to nothing about cricket. “Discuss it from an American viewpoint,” urged Tony. Right.

Depositing myself on a bench next to Margaret Slythe, I admired my dazzlingly green, impressive surroundings. Margaret pointed out a clump of trees nearby. Plum had written about it in his school stories and joined a campus protest when officials had tried to cut it down. Dulwich College, she went on, was founded in 1616 by Edward Alleyn, whose birthday it was this day (June 21). Several fascinating snippets about Alleyn followed, but I was supposed to be reporting the game, so I focused on that. Until, that is, Margaret shared the fact that the pavilion had been built in 1932 for £32,000 – exactly the cost of building the current school in the 19th century. One likes to know these things.

I was a bit puzzled by the activities on the pitch. Cricket, you know, is very different from baseball, which is more like rounders (a game, I noticed, regarded by cricketers with contempt). I began to express my puzzlement aloud, eliciting snickers around me. Overs? Wickets? Huh? Margaret and a kind chap named Ola Winfridsson assisted me. “Why are they running when the batter hit the ball behind him?” I was told the ball can be hit in any direction, a full 360°. “Why aren’t the batters running after that fantastic hit?” The ball went outside the white boundary rope, an automatic four runs – six if it first lands outside the boundary. “Aaacckk! How can he catch that hard ball without breaking his hand?” No answer for this one.

By teatime, the Gold Bats had scored 101 runs – pretty darn good, I thought – and I was learning a lot. Meanwhile, Elaine Ring and Hilary Bruce, with Tony’s assistance, had laid out a magnificent tea. Tables groaned under the weight of sandwiches, savouries, puddings, coffee, tea and, of course, bowls of strawberries. One player described the scene as ‘tea heaven’.

The second half began, with the Dusters batting as the clouds rolled in. The two umpires were Michael Rush and Norman Murphy. I beamed proudly on my husband-baby as he made all sorts of gestures that apparently had some relevance to the



*Graham Able, Master of Dulwich College, played in the match for the first time.*

scorekeepers – except, I’m sure, the one where he waved hello to me. I now understood enough of the game to be able to tell the Gold Bats were in serious trouble. Our bowling seemed fine – two of the opposition were even bowled out – but their batting seemed finer. Duster runs were piling up at a fast and furious pace. Dulwich Master Graham Able suffered a bad bounce, and he went out on an LBW, whatever that is. As he came in, he said, “Tell the groundskeeper to be in my study in the morning.” Shades of Aubrey Upjohn!

Before all the Dusters had batted, the game was over, 104-101. With superb timing, the first drops of rain began as the players strolled off the field. Led by Bob Miller, our boys had fought valiantly, but such contributions as Dave Bloxham’s 25 runs and Oliver Wise’s 21 were not quite enough to save the day. Oh, well, there’s always next year – we’ll get ‘em then!



# Gold Bats Outwit the Sherlockians

*Father and Son Chris and George Reece explain how*

**Junior:** On Sunday July 14th, the P G Wodehouse Society (UK) cricket team (The Gold Bats) took on the Sherlock Holmes Society of London in a timed one-day game. My father and I were both making our debuts for the Wodehouse Society. We batted first, with my Dad (Chris Reece) and Mr Wilcox opening. Mr Wilcox made 14 runs before being dismissed and Dad made a very respectable 39.

**Senior:** I met many new people that day and put faces to several familiar names. In particular, I enjoyed introducing myself to Bill Kent as we made our first acquaintance at the wicket.

**Junior:** Mr Kent was run out, without facing a ball and so was elected as our eleventh batsman, both teams being a player short. He lasted four balls in his second knock, unfortunately scoring another duck.

**Senior:** As the heat rose, the Gold Bats wilted and only a fine stand between Bob Miller, our skipper, and Tim Stevens brought us to the respectability of three figures.

**Junior:** The final total was 103. High scorers were:

- Chris Reece 39
- Tim Stevens 22 not out
- Mr Wilcox 14
- Mr Miller 13

The Sherlockians came out to bat with high hopes, which were soon dashed as they slumped to 26 for 7.

**Senior:** 13-year-old George from Wellington bowled well against the adults but it was his duel with the Sherlockians' Lawrence Owen, from Wellington, also 13, which drew the greatest attention.

**Junior:** A good lower order partnership between Messrs Utechin and Older saw them in with a chance.

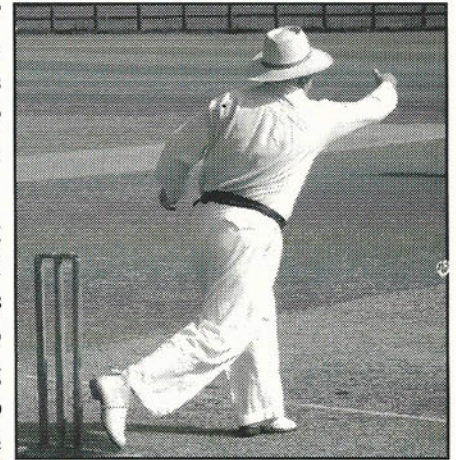
**Senior:** Assisting the opposition was a capricious decision by Bob Miller to bring George's Dad on to bowl innumerable underarm wides.

He was our second 'lob bowler'; one of the spectators disarmingly pointing out that our first lob bowler (above) was Bruce; Kent the wicket-keeper.

**Junior:** Soon enough though, the run rate was beyond reach so the tail-enders were left hanging on for a draw. However, the Wodehouse Society captain, Bob Miller, got the last wicket in the penultimate over to seal the victory by 25 runs.

**Senior:** The winners overall though, in a dead heat, were the weather and the picnics. George and I retired content to the west country, to take a cold shower, swear off food for a while and explain to George's mother why we had forgotten the sunblock. Motorists are still mistaking us for traffic lights set at Stop but even after that souvenir has faded we will remember a wonderful day.

*Patron Henry Blofeld mentioned the match the previous day on Test Match Special, during the Nat West Trophy Final between England and India*



## Gunns and Roses

*Bob Miller has exchanged his traditional cricket bat for the pen*

It was with great delight that by reading Michael Greener's contribution to June's (*Wooster Sauce*) I was able to add to my limited literary knowledge. For instance, I wasn't aware that Ben Gunn was the sole inhabitant of Treasure Island. When I knew him, he was Head of Special Branch at Scotland Yard, and is currently (and hopefully not marooned) in Cambridge as Chief Constable.

Whilst penning this, my first contribution to *Wooster Sauce*, from the village of Titchmarsh in

Northamptonshire, I have been sitting in bed, listening to *Desert Island Discs*. This week's guest is Alan Titchmarsh, who shares the same name as my spiritual home. When asked by Sue Lawley which book he wished to take with him to his desert island, the gardening guru announced that he is a great fan of P G Wodehouse, whom he considers to be the finest comic writer of his time, and in particular of his Blandings Castle novels. Sue responded "Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!"

Game, set and match to Plum.



# Before The Booker ~ 1934

## *The Editor attended the BBC4 recording*

It is difficult to know how to begin reporting on *Before the Booker – 1934*, a TV programme for BBC4, which John Fletcher and I saw being recorded in June. The concept is sound (1934 was one of four years to which attention was being given in separate programmes), and the format practical. Four books from the year were selected for discussion by a panel, each member of which, under the Chairmanship of Clive Anderson, set out the case for one as winner of the hypothetical prize. The discussion of their merits was in three stages, after each of which one contender was eliminated.

Unfortunately, the panel only included three members who wanted to take the programme seriously. Jenny Eclair seemed to treat the event with regrettable disdain and contempt. When asked to state the case for *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie she said she was only doing so because she had been told to; when invited to eliminate a book, in the first round she said “I couldn’t care less”; in the second round she threw down *Thank You, Jeeves* with the comment “Good riddance. Load of \*\*\*\*.”, and finally, when she had what amounted to a casting vote between Robert Graves’s *I, Claudius* and *Tender is the Night* by F Scott Fitzgerald, she played ‘Eeny, meeny, miny, mo’ to make her choice. I am afraid her contribution reflected her name: all puff and no substance. Her participation destroyed the balance of the programme, to Clive Anderson’s evident irritation, and if a further series is to be made next year, the producers should ensure that all members of the panel will be positive rather than negative.

The most impressive speaker was Professor Patricia Duncker of East Anglia University, and it can only have been her advocacy that enabled *Tender is the Night* to win. The panel accepted there were many flaws in the book, both in the construction (Fitzgerald himself decided later that the first two thirds of the book were in the wrong order, and that it should have been a chronological story rather than one with a flashback) and the language (it being agreed there were short brilliant passages interspersed with longer very ordinary ones). James Walton, the able proponent of *Thank You, Jeeves*, preferred *Tender* to *I, Claudius* in the final analysis because the author was deliberately seeking to write a great novel, and had been more ambitious in his outlook. This seems perverse: ambition is all very well . . . if you succeed. If you cannot achieve what

you set out to do, surely you have failed. Like Ukridge’s big, broad, flexible outlook on most occasions – or like the England football team. Clive Anderson commented afterwards that he found *Tender is the Night* the most difficult to read of any of the sixteen books that had been discussed in the four programmes, and he would evidently have loved to cast a Chairman’s vote for *I, Claudius* (which was, incidentally, the preferred choice of the audience between the last two contenders).

*Thank You, Jeeves* never stood a chance, as two members of the panel, both professionally involved with humour, said they found nothing funny in it! Whilst one can understand anybody not liking Wodehouse, it is more difficult to understand the breadth of such a comment. Patrick Neate based his view on the prevalence of ‘upper-class twits’ and said he resented the social environment of the setting. That was, of course, not directly relevant to considering the merits of the book as a whole, including its language. He spoke up ably for *I, Claudius*, but in the case of both he and Jenny Eclair one wondered whether there was professional jealousy over the apparent ease and consistency with which Wodehouse wrote funny books.

(The comments above relate to the actual recording of the programme. Cuts will undoubtedly be made before it is broadcast on the digital channel BBC4 on Wednesday 16th October at 9pm. As a result, some of the more disparaging comments made may not appear to be relevant.)

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## *Science Catches Up with Wodehouse - Again!*

Murray Hedgcock refers to an item in *The Observer*: The Sunday paper’s Science Editor, Robin McKie, reported that the annual meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists was told by a Canadian scientist that humankind evolved by ‘hopping into the fish’ at mealtimes, thus leaping ahead of competing species. He had the grace to conclude his article:

Of course, the idea that we owe our big brains to a fishy diet is not entirely new. Fans of P G Wodehouse know that the towering intellect of his gentleman’s gentleman hero, Jeeves, was entirely due, as Bertie Wooster claimed, to the fact that the great man ‘virtually lives on fish’.



# The Montcalm Dinner was a Legend

*James Wood revelled amongst Anatole's dishes*

Think of a warm May evening in Central London. Imagine the restrained elegance of the Montcalm Hotel, in particular its handsomely appointed downstairs dining-suite, where the furnishings and décor exude an air of timeless refinement as well suited to the Wodehouse era as to the present.

Fortified with pre-prandial champagne and canapés, more than twenty guests assembled around the exquisitely laid oval table – a cosmopolitan gathering including Americans (specimens from both East and West coasts), Scandinavians and visitors from a wide spectrum of English regions including Lancaster in the north and Cornwall in the west, though sadly none from London.

Silence descended as our member, the Reverend Richard Smail of Brasenose College prayed the grace he had specially composed (see inlay). And as we sat to peruse the gourmet menu, its origins became immediately evident as we identified a series of Anatole's own dishes, prepared with the assistance of *Éscoffier*. In due course the various dishes appeared, perfectly prepared, artistically presented and skilfully served in an atmosphere of delightful conviviality.

It would be an act of cruelty to enumerate and describe in detail to absent members the culinary delights they have missed, not to mention the excellent wines, but to give just a flavour, a taste of the glorious fare, one might mention the Ris de Veau à la Toulousaine, duly incorporating the requisite fresh cockscombs, while none of those present is likely to forget the meticulously decorated individual

Bombes Nero, each having the appearance of a delicate item of Sèvres porcelain crowned with flame, which were brought ceremoniously into a suitably dimmed dining-room towards the conclusion of the evening.

## *Rev Smail's Grace*

For pommes d'amour and foie gras  
For sweetbreads Toulousaine  
For wines (both red and white ones)  
And especially for Champagne

For service from the Montcalm's  
Team of Jeeveses and of Beaches  
For the very strict injunction  
That there shall be no speeches

For converse and for fellowship  
Around this well-filled board  
And for Pelham Grenville Wodehouse  
We give you thanks, good Lord.

All good things must, sadly, come to an end. These proceedings did so with an expression of admiration of the skills of the Chef, Stephen Whitney, his staff, and our host for the evening, Jonathan Orr-Ewing, for staging such a successful event.

It is to be hoped that the occasion may be repeated and, indeed, that it may become a regular event in the calendar, as it is a rare opportunity to return to the gastronomic times of Uncle Tom, Aunt Dahlia and her guests.

## *Even Bertold Brecht Read Plum!*

Swiss member Thomas Schlachter recently came across the book *Brecht in Context*, by John Willett (Methuen, 1984, revised 1998) and was surprised to discover references to PGW in the second chapter, *Anglo-American Forays*.

While in exile in Finland and the USA during the war, Brecht wrote a work in dialogue form entitled *Refugee Conversations, Dialogue between Exiles*. It included an epigraph:

He knew that he was still alive  
More he could not say

Underneath was the name 'Woodhouse', and its source is the incident in *Something Fresh* when Baxter had been struggling with Ashe Marson in the hall of Blandings Castle at the dead of night, and, lying on the ground, had mistaken a cold tongue in aspic for a dead body. The words were those of Wodehouse; the setting as verse and the perception of their relevance to the life of anti-Nazi exiles were Brecht's own.

While researching the book, Willett confirmed the source when he was also told, by Brecht's friend Elisabeth Hauptmann, how much Wodehouse Brecht had read whilst in exile.



# A Sauce of Misquotation

## Nigel Rees considers Love Among the Chickens

The Penguin re-issue of *Love Among the Chickens* (originally published in 1906 and 1921) prompts me to provide a little light annotation.

### Chapter III

Ukridge had lighted a cigar, and I understood why Mrs Ukridge preferred to travel in another compartment, for

*In his hand he bore the brand  
Which none but he might smoke.*

Two heavyweight problem solvers came to my aid on this one. Elizabeth Knowles, editor of the current *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* and T A Dyer, a former 'Brain of Britain', both conclusively suggest that this is a deliberate echo/misquotation of:

And in his hand he shakes the brand  
Which none but he can wield

'He' being Astur in Macaulay's *Horatius* from *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842).

### Chapter III

... what were we? Ships that pass in the night.

Longfellow, *The Theologian's Tale: Elizabeth*, Pt 4, from *Tales of a Wayside Inn* Pt 3 (1874):

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other  
in passing;  
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the  
darkness;  
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one  
another,  
Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and  
silence.'

### Chapter VI

The coops were finished. They were not masterpieces ... but they were coops within the meaning of the act.

This phrase comes from Section 2 of the 1853 *Betting Act* (which banned off-course betting on racehorses) – originally, 'a place within the meaning of the act.' PGW also alludes to it in *Thank You, Jeeves* (1934):

Folding the girl in my arms, I got home on her right eyebrow. It wasn't one of my best, I will admit, but it was a kiss within the meaning of the act.

### Chapter VI

He was not one of those men who want but little here below.

From Oliver Goldsmith, *A Ballad* (St 8) in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Chap. 8 (1766):

Man wants but little here below,  
Nor wants that little long.

### Chapter IX

I did not love as others do:  
None ever did that I've heard tell of.  
My passion was a by-word through  
The town she was, of course, the belle of.

This is a direct quotation of C S Calverley's *Gemini and Virgo*, from *Verses and Translations* (1862).

### Chapter IX

I shall never forget those furtive visits . . . the  
smell of the flowers in the garden beyond; the  
distant drone of the sea.

God makes sech nights, all white and still,  
Fur'z you to look and listen.

J R Lowell, *The Courtin'* from *The Biglow Papers*, Second Series (1862-66).

### Chapter XII

To a man the tradesmen of Combe Regis seemed  
as deficient in Simple Faith as they were in  
Norman Blood.

Tennyson, *Lady Clara Vere de Vere* (1833):

Howe'er it be, it seems to me,  
'Tis only noble to be good.  
Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood.

I need hardly add that this is a verse quite often quoted or alluded to by PGW.

But, no, I don't think we really need an *Annotated PG Wodehouse* in book form. Pursuing these hints and allusions keeps us out of mischief.

### Editor's Note:

Nigel Rees masterminds the *Quote . . . Unquote* website which provides information about the radio programme of that name (which returned for a new series on September 9), and lists many of the unsolved queries submitted to it.



## Profile of a Patron

*This issue may see the demise of our regular feature. So we conclude with a contribution from Tom Sharpe (right), sent from his Spanish retreat.*

Tom Sharpe wrote nine three-act plays attacking Apartheid when he was living in South Africa in the 1950s. They were, as one might expect, immensely pretentious, ineffectual diatribes, but they did provide him with a free passage back to England at the South African government's expense (and an insight into five prisons) when he was deported in 1961.

Back in Cambridge where, at Pembroke, he'd been an undergraduate distinguished only by his inability to get anything better than a Third in Social Anthropology after three years, the outstanding lack of intelligence so mean an achievement required served him well in his subsequent writing, beginning with *Riotous Assembly* and continuing through twelve other farces.

In short, he discovered in 1969, while he was teaching history at the Cambridge College of Arts and Technology, that he was a savage clown. In an attempt to improve his style the eminent historian, Dr Piers Brendon, lent him *Performing Flea*, the Master's letters to Bill Townend, and Sharpe, who had never read any Wodehouse (further proof of his ignorance) was hooked on the great writer's novels.

To imitate Wodehouse's delightful and brilliant works was out of the question. In particular, one mistake he has never made has been to use similes: the Master did for similes what Shakespeare did for poetry and playwriting. No one in the world can compete with genius.

To mark his gratitude Sharpe went to all the houses from which Wodehouse had written to Bill Townend, photographed them all and sent them to Remsenburg. He visited Low Wood, Hunstanton Hall, Domaine de la Freyere, Rogate Lodge and the Impney Hotel outside Droitwich, but never disclosed that he was a minor novelist himself.

Even when in 1973 Sharpe visited the Wodehouses on Long Island and spent the afternoon with them he kept the dark secret of his own publications to himself. In the presence of a truly great gentle man and gentleman, to do otherwise would have been immodest. It was only under pressure from his then exigent publisher that he was finally persuaded to send over his *Porterhouse Blue*, and was favoured with an exceedingly kind comment.



### ***The Pothunters Centenary*** **Exhibition at Dulwich College**

**October 15 to December 14, 2002**

The exhibition, organised by Jan Piggott, Patron of the Society and Keeper of Archives at Dulwich College, and Nick Townend, Committee member, will focus on Wodehouse's time at Dulwich and the school stories he wrote after leaving.

The exhibition will show articles Wodehouse wrote for *The Alleynian*, photographs of contemporary school life, letters and manuscripts, and a cricket scorebook of June 1900 when he took nine wickets for the Classicists against the Modern Linguists. The printed concert programme for Wodehouse's solo singing about *Hybrius the Cretan* (featuring his first recorded use of the word 'drones') and the sheet music of the song will be on view; as will Wodehouse's account book, showing the amounts earned for the first articles and stories he wrote. There will be articles and school stories from magazines, and serials, first editions and inscribed copies of the school stories from the Dulwich/Barry Phelps collections and those of the organisers. There will also be a section on the illustrators of Wodehouse's school stories.

The exhibition will be held in the PG Wodehouse Library and will be open on weekdays from 9.00am to 5.30pm (closed for half term between 19 October and 3 November inclusive). If necessary, for further details contact

A special Society viewing will be held on November 21 – see the enclosed flyer for details.



## *We Remember You Well:*

### *Comments from two participants*

From Tony Whittome

*Sauce's* special supplement about Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's unveiling of the plaque to Plum at 17 Dunraven Street marvellously captures the joy of the occasion, but not all readers may know what a cup-and-lip affair it was. For months beforehand the house had been a building site, and as the clock ticked towards unveiling day, the organizers became increasingly worried whether it would ever be cleared in time. It was – but the day before, the cleaners didn't turn up, and so that night organizers of varying degree of grandeur set to with dustpans and industrial hoovers. If the Queen Mother knew of this, she never let on – but it just added to the spice of a remarkable day.

From Patrick Wodehouse:

At the luncheon which followed the Plaque unveiling at Dunraven Street, the Queen Mother ended her speech by saying "Whenever I am feeling tired or low, I go to bed with a Wodehouse, and I always fall asleep with a smile on my face." My wife Nancy was heard to whisper to her neighbour "But I always go to bed with a Wodehouse, and I always fall asleep with a smile on my face!"

## *Breadthrowing Is Alive And Well - in Prague*

Marilyn MacGregor found this warning on a menu at the Kavarna Imperial Cafe earlier this year. Apart from wondering, naturally, when the Drones Club had introduced the practice to Prague, or whether the owners had read some of the many Czech translations of Wodehouse, she did like the concept of 'sorbet' people!

**SPECIAL OFFER**

**Saturnin's bowl 1943 CZK**

bowl of yesterday's doughnuts that you can throw at other customers  
/served only for sorbet people, more than 21 years age  
payment in advance required/

**DANGER! WARNING FOR GOOD CUSTOMERS!**

The bowl is visibly stationed on our bar.  
If you don't see it there, leave quickly coffee-room,  
if you stay longer it's only at one's own risk!

### *Appeal on behalf of the BBC*

Robert McCrum's forthcoming biography is to be the basis of a BBC2 documentary for Christmas broadcast. The producers wonder if anyone has a film or video recording of Ralph Richardson's 1966 portrayal of Lord Emsworth in the BBC TV series.

If anyone has, or has relevant information, would they please contact the Editor at the address at the foot of page 24.

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## *It's That Time Of Year*

### *Two more Wodehouse cricket stories*

From Murray Hedgcock, a recollection from his *Wodehouse at the Wicket* (Hutchinson, 1997):

P G Wodehouse wrote of his visits to The Oval, home of his favourite Surrey, to watch big cricket – and 2002 marks the centenary of his brief attendance at one of the most famous of all Tests, 'Jessop's Match'. The young bank clerk took his lunch-hour at The Oval on Wednesday, August 13, 1902, the last day of the Fifth Test against Australia. England had been given most of the day to make 263 for victory. In a rain-hit session, the 21-year-old Plum saw three wickets fall for ten runs before having to rush back to Lombard Street. He thus missed the immortal innings by the great Gloucestershire amateur, Gilbert Jessop, who reached a century in 75 minutes before the final pair Hirst and Rhodes, both from Yorkshire, made the last 15 which were needed for victory.

Both Oliver Wise and Robert Bruce noted that the Gold Bats match against The Sherlock Holmes Society of London in June 2001 was mentioned in *Wisden Cricket Almanack, 2002*, the cricketers' annual bible, which reported it in the following terms:

Lob bowling was compulsory for one bowler on either side in a match at West Wycombe CC on June 10 between The Sherlock Holmes Society of London and The P G Wodehouse Society (UK). The Sherlockians' challenge called for 1895 Laws to apply – on the grounds that Sherlock Holmes once declared: "It is always 1895". Five-ball overs and eight-inch wickets were duly restored.



# The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

## The School Stories

September 18, 2002 marked the centenary of the publication of the school story *The Pothunters*, Wodehouse's first book. It therefore seems appropriate to devote this *Corner* to Wodehouse's school stories, particularly given the forthcoming Centenary Exhibition at Dulwich (see page 17). *The Pothunters* was discussed in the *Corner* in June 2000, and magazine appearances of some of the school stories were covered in September 2000. This *Corner* will therefore deal with the book appearances of the other school stories.

*McIlvaine* omits to record that the first edition of *A Prefect's Uncle* was reissued with an eight page advertising supplement entitled *Beautiful Books for Boys and Girls*, in which the latest title advertised was *The Head of Kay's*; this suggests a reissue date between October 1905 (the publication date of *The Head of Kay's*) and October 1907 (the publication date of Wodehouse's next school story, *The White Feather*).

The collation details of the preliminary pages of the first edition of *Tales of St Austin's* in *McIlvaine* (A3a) are incomplete, as the numbering given runs from i to iv, and then from viii to xii. Of the omitted pages, v contained the dedication ('*ad matrem*?), vi was blank and vii contained the preface. Page iv, which *McIlvaine* states was the preface, was in fact blank.

For *The White Feather*, first published in 1907, *McIlvaine* records the first edition (A8a) and a reissue (A8a2), which is the same as the first edition except for the addition of an eight page advertising supplement. The latest Wodehouse title listed in the supplement is *Mike* from 1909. But *McIlvaine* dates the reissue as '1907?', which must surely be a misprint for '1909'.

There are two other reissues of the first edition of *The White Feather*, unrecorded by *McIlvaine*, with eight page advertising supplements different from that in A8a2: one, presumably earlier than A8a2, lists *The White Feather* as the latest Wodehouse title; the other does not list any Wodehouse titles. *McIlvaine* records a reissue of 1913 (A8a3), but does not record a further reissue in 1914, which comes in two states: one, like the first edition, has gold lettering on the spine; the other does not.

The school stories were re-set and re-issued by A&C Black in the 1920s and 1930s. Unsurprisingly, not all of the reprints of these editions are recorded in *McIlvaine*. In addition to those listed in *McIlvaine*, there were reprints of *A Prefect's Uncle* in 1930,

*Tales of St Austin's* in 1926, *The Head of Kay's* in 1922 (for reasons explained in *Wooster Sauce* in September 1998), and *The White Feather* in 1930. *McIlvaine* does list *The Gold Bat* reprint of 1933 (A4a6), but omits a variant issue of 1933 which was bound in orange cloth, rather than the red cloth normally used for these editions. *McIlvaine* also lists the red 1928 reprint of *The Head of Kay's*, but omits a variant orange issue from the same year.

*Mike* was reprinted by A & C Black in 1925. This edition is recorded in *McIlvaine* (A12a6), but not described in any detail. In fact, it has the same pictorial cover as the first edition (an illustration by TMR Whitwell from the original serialisation in *The Captain*) and four new plates by JH Hartley, so it is more similar to the following 1928 edition (A12a7), which also had pictorial boards, than to the preceding 1924 edition (A12a5), which had non-pictorial boards with a design of black squares and gold bars incorporating the A&C Black logo on the front cover.

*Mike* continued to be reprinted into the 1930s, with editions in 1932 and 1936, neither of which are recorded in *McIlvaine*. Both had the Whitwell pictorial cover and the four Hartley plates. The 1932 reprint was bound in dark blue cloth, whereas the 1936 reprint was bound in pale blue cloth, lettered and decorated in dark blue and white.

Later, *Mike* was split into two volumes, *Mike at Wrykyn* and *Mike and Psmith*, both published in hardback by Herbert Jenkins in 1953 (A12e and A12c3). They were then republished as Armada paperbacks in 1968 (A12e2 and A12c6), although *McIlvaine* refers to them as Amanda paperbacks. They were again republished, by Barrie & Jenkins, in hardback with plain, non-pictorial dustwrappers: *Mike at Wrykyn* in 1976 (not in *McIlvaine*), and *Mike and Psmith* in 1979 (A12c5 – although *McIlvaine* incorrectly states that the publisher was Herbert Jenkins).

These post-war editions had slight, modernising changes from the original text: cricketers Fry, Hayward and Knox (a Dulwich contemporary of Wodehouse's) became Sheppard, May and Trueman; 'diabolo' became 'yo-yo'; 'bunking' became 'cutting'; and 'jingling, clinking sovereigns' became 'crisp, crackling quids'.

Finally, the two titles were republished in paperback by Penguin in 1990 (not in *McIlvaine*).



## Summer Lightning ~ in the Autumn

*Felicity Peries writes about her forthcoming production*

Before directing a play, I like to steep myself in its atmosphere by researching the author, the era, the very underbelly of its creation.

So one year it was *The Venetian Twins* and *The Servant of Two Masters* by Goldoni. During a holiday in Venice I was able to visit the Casa Goldoni where the first Arlecchino costume is housed and spent hours of happy research into the Commedia dell'arte which preceded him. Last year it was *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer – I cooked to Mozart for months, read all I could about his glittering and ultimately tragic life.

Last autumn I heard of an adaptation of Wodehouse's *Summer Lightning* by Giles Havergal. In searching for a perusal script my son Dr James Peries, a man of the theatre in London, told me I would find Giles himself at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. The theatre referred me to a Glasgow agency, and then back to London. At last I received my perusal script and it was love at first sight – the deal was done and *Summer Lightning* placed firmly on the 2002 agenda.

There remained the problem of how best to research the subject. Not being a Wodehousean scholar, I

knew that to do justice to the subject I had to follow my usual practice and immerse myself in the Wodehouse world. All doors appeared shut. After a sojourn in Australia (where on my travels I found a few pertinent paperbacks) I returned to the dilemma.

At the end of October I opened *The Times* and found all my prayers answered. The golden key to the whole world of Wodehouse enthusiasts lay before me encapsulated in a superb photograph and a report that Colonel Norman Murphy, chairman of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) had married Miss Elin Woodger, President of the American equivalent. A marriage made in the bright blue yonder! I was staggered: there was a Society. There was a whole network.

Oh, Bliss! Oh, Joy! There was a phone number.

*Summer Lightning will be produced by the Clevedon Players from 10th to 12th October. The Society is arranging a meeting before the Saturday evening performance (see page 24). For tickets, which cost £5, contact Felicity Peries*

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## Another Enthusiastic Meeting in Bolton

*Mark Reid reports*

It was the byways rather than the highways which occupied the recent Society meeting in Bolton. Wodehouse the lyric writer. Plum the obscure. But the reason for such obscurity is, well, shall we say, obscure.

With the revival of poetry as the new black, and poets like Roger McGough and Matthew Sweeney using the lyric to tell anecdote and raise a smile, the poetry of PG would seem a perfect compliment. The story of the lad who meets his end researching a piece on 'how it feels to eat arsenic at meals', the reminiscence of the fozzled catch at the cricket match, inimitable takes on the evergreen subject of the not-so-evergreen English weather. I mean, I know the guy uses rhyme and rhythm, but should we let that count against him?

The chortles and generous applause told me "No", and the poetry is an area I, for one, will continue to explore and enjoy. Along with his work on the early

musical. For, just as *Ulysses* is rated as the best book of the twentieth century while being the least read, and everyone admits that Aristophanes is a hoot, so Wodehouse is regarded as one of the fathers of the modern musical. And yet the revivals in musicals in the West End and on Broadway don't seem to have reached back quite that far. Leaving a gap in the market which we filled with Nick Townend talking us through *Sitting Pretty* and the relationship with Guy Bolton and Jerome Kern, with a hefty selection of tunes from the show. Great stuff.

The meeting seemed to be a success, and closed with plenty of ideas to keep future meetings full of the joys of Wodehouse.

*The next meeting in Bolton will be held on November 2nd. See page 24 for details, and if you live in the area, why not join in and help establish the first regional group within the Society.*



# Reviews of New Books and Audiotapes

## *Penguin Audiotape: The Code of the Woosters*

*The Code of the Woosters* is one of the seminal titles of any Wodehouse collection. This abridged reading by Simon Callow makes an excellent refresher, including as it does some classic Wodehouse lines (Bertie being full up with education, Jeeves being far from grunted, etc).

It is, of course, the book which introduced Sir Roderick Spode and, as an on-stage character, Sir Watkyn Bassett. The former, in particular, has such a distinctive physical *persona* that one worries as to whether the reader will convey this adequately to the listener. But once again Simon Callow passes the test with flying colours, and his revelation to Sir Watkyn Bassett that Bertie had stolen his umbrella is extremely convincing.

Simon Callow continues to show that he is a highly skilled reader, ideal for the Penguin abridgements of Jeeves and Wooster books. This is the ninth in the series; we look forward avidly to the remaining four.

*The Code of the Woosters* Penguin Audio  
ISBN 01418036730 Published September 26

## *Chivers Audiotape: A Few Quick Ones*

On this side of the Atlantic, Jonathan Cecil must be the senior interpreter of Wodehouse on audiotape, as his latest, *A Few Quick Ones*, is his twentieth unabridged reading for Chivers. It is also a comparative rarity: a post-war collection of short stories. Virtually the whole range are there: Drones Club stories about both Freddie Widgeon and Bingo Little, Jeeves and Bertie, Oldest Member golf stories, Mr Mulliner and Ukridge. For a reader who has recorded as much as Jonathan, trying to recall how he represented the characters in the past must have been a considerable task.

The recording is well up to standard. Oofy Prosser, featuring in more than one story, is given a suitably 'untrustworthy' voice, enabling the listener to discern at once that, if this were a pantomime, Oofy would be the character at whom we would be expected to boo.

My one unproven concern is to wonder whether the voice selected for the Oldest Member, which sounds difficult to maintain, would survive a recording of *The Clicking of Cuthbert* or *The Heart of a Goof*, neither of which have been tackled yet by Chivers. Having listened to Jonathan Cecil through twenty volumes, however, one can be confident that when he tackles that challenge he will be able to overcome it.

The formatting as six tapes is a little odd. The reading barely reaches on to the first side of the last one, and the eye suggests that it could have been a five-tape series. But not a lot hangs on this, apart from an odd pound or so difference in the price; it is just irritating.

*A Few Quick Ones* Chivers Audio Book Collection  
ISBN 0 7540 0848 7

Tel (UK): 01225 335336; (USA) 1-800-621-0182;  
[www.chivers.co.uk](http://www.chivers.co.uk)

## *Penguin Classics: Summer Lightning*

The pig on the cover of the new Penguin Classics edition of *Summer Lightning* is very beautiful, but it is a Gloucester Old Spot, not a Berkshire. This inexplicable error from a usually reliable publisher seems, fortunately, to be an aberration.

As with all the new Penguin Classics, the text is accompanied by an original introduction, this time by Nick Hornby, who contemplates the reception Wodehouse would receive from critics inured to works like *Trainspotting* or *American Psycho*, if he were to publish his books for the first time today. He suggests that whereas most comic writers nevertheless include duller scenes when contemplating reality, Wodehouse's classic works had no joke-free zones.

Up to this point I agree with Hornby, but disagree with the way he then develops his argument. By comparing two American TV sit-coms, he argues that one can be perceived as 'better' than the other because jokes are sacrificed for deeper character development, while the second, wholly joke-filled, is a 'show about nothing'.

Contrary to Hornby's view, the point about Wodehouse is surely that he combines character development with an intensity of jokes and humorous writing that is unsurpassed – in his world the jokes develop through the character like the classic British sitcom (where, as a result, the second series is almost always better), unlike many inane American sit-coms which are no more than a series of one-liners. Where Wodehouse scores in his Blandings novels is from the repetitious use of character, plot and setting, so the situation and the jokes feed off each other.

Nick Hornby's essay provides food for thought, and debate of the trivial is one of the peripheral joys of Wodehouse. If you don't have a copy of this title in your collection, it is a good alternative to the Everyman edition or a second-hand copy.

*Summer Lightning* Penguin Classics  
ISBN 0-14-118195-8 £ 7.99

## Other New Publications

### Ebury Press

*Plum Sauce*, a companion to Wodehouse compiled from Richard Osborne's superb earlier works. To be reviewed.  
ISBN 0-091-88512-4 Available November. £ 14.99

### Acorn Video

At long last the BBC TV series *Wodehouse Playhouse* is to be released, as three double videos, early next year.

Each double video will contain an entire series. The approx running times are 210, 175, and 230 mins. The catalogue numbers are AV0260, AV0261 and AV0262.

An exclusive special offer to members will be announced with the December issue of *Wooster Sauce*, and the videos will be reviewed in the December or March issues, depending on when copies are received.



## Recent Press Comment

*New York Times*, April 6 (from Jan Kaufman)

A profile of Boris Johnson credited him with ‘a quaint Bertie Woosterish diction’.

*The Times*, May 9 (from Dr B Palmer)

Magnus Linklater said that until recently, whenever John Prescott raised the subject of regional assemblies in England, he was regarded in Cabinet like the hound in *The Code of the Woosters* ‘who will persist in laying a dead rat on the drawing-room carpet, though repeatedly apprised by word and gesture that the market for same is sluggish or non-existent’.

*Observer Review*, May 12 (from Hilary Bruce)

Robert McCrum reviewed *The Salmon of Doubt*, a collection of essays by Douglas Adams, including one on *Sunset at Blandings*.

*The Times*, May 22

The third leader, on the widening of the eligibility for the Booker Prize to American writers, used a spoof opening to *Transgendered Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*, using PGW’s ‘tropes and feel for the English milieu, within the densely-plotted context of the Great American Novel’s sweeping handling of psychological dislocation’.

*Observer*, May 26 (from Hilary Bruce)

The Browser noted that FPDSavills is trying to increase the chance of selling Apsley Hall, Shropshire for an estimated £1.5mn, by claiming it as the model for Blandings Castle. Two problems: its promotional literature refers to P G Wodehouse, and Alan Hall drew attention to an item in *Money Week* (June 7) which dated the Hall to 1811, rather later than the Tudor Blandings!

*Take-Off* (BA’s In-Flight magazine), May (from Bill Franklin)

William Davis lists his five heroes as Mozart, Louis and Neil Armstrong, Frank Sinatra and PGW.

*The Times*, June 4

Reported that Michael Frayn’s *Spies* had won the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse prize, which included a pig presented by a local organic farmer.

*Entertainment Weekly*, June 7 (from John Baesch)

Recommended the ‘bubblingly witty and dryly loony’ British humour of PGW as evidenced by the North American Overlook imprint of the Everyman series of hardcover reprints. The books were also promoted by *Newsweek* on July 6.

*The Week*, June 22 (from Hilary Bruce)

Lord Deedes included *Blandings Castle* as one of his seven favourite books.

*Sunday Times*, June 23 and 30

Godfrey Smith ran a competition for new lyrics to *You’re the Top*.

*Sunday Times*, June 23

Reviewed as ‘outstanding’ the video *The Very Best of Jeeves and Wooster*, commenting that ‘Some of this stuff is funnier than Del Boy falling through a wine bar sideways’.

*Guardian*, July 20 and July 27 (from Peter Whiteman and others)

The July 20 issue featured the article by Shashi Tharoor reviewed on page 1 of this issue. (The Editor has six copies available for members who contact him by phone, post or e-mail ([tring@sauce34.freemove.co.uk](mailto:tring@sauce34.freemove.co.uk))) The July 27 issue had two letters commenting on aspects of the article.

*The Times*, July 20

Philip Howard suggested that a person wearing suede shoes with a dark suit contrary to Jeeves’s advice should be prepared for disapproving looks from old buffers.

*Sunday Times*, July 21

James Naughtie included *Summer Lightning* as one of seven books on his bedside table.

*Yorkshire Post*, July 30 (from J Moor)

Reported that an East Yorkshire businessman and his firm had had to pay £7,000 after being convicted of destroying Great-crested Newts and their habitat near Filey.

*Book and Magazine Collector*, July

Featured a 6,000 word article entitled *The Blandings Books of P G Wodehouse*, by Tony Ring. Another article, about Anthony Buckeridge, reported that he also started his working career in a bank and, like PGW thirty years before, had no idea what it was all about.

*The Times*, August 2

Philip Howard referred to PGW’s letter to *The Times* (of August 17, 1934) on the subject of crosswords in an article on our national addiction to them.

*The Scotsman*, August 2 (from David Ross Stewart)

Robert McNeil wrote an extensive appreciation of PGW to celebrate the centenary of publication of *The Pothunters*. ‘One hundred years after his first book, he’s still the best natural pick-me-up since a stiff snifter,’ he concluded.

*The Times*, August 7

Nick Thomas held up PGW’s choice of tobacco as his intellectual stimulant as a reasonable role-model for Prince William to follow.

*Initiative*, (Magazine of the New Opportunities Fund), August (from Margaret Slythe)

Reported on cancer patient Katherine Shonfield’s talk at Voicebox (see page 9) and her devotion to PGW, whose view of the world was always optimistic.



## *The Media and Plum's Knighthood*

The release of further Government files on August 15 caused a certain frisson of excitement in the media, as the reasons for the late award of Plum's knighthood were disclosed. Initially they concentrated on the war broadcasts, Robert McCrum being interviewed for *Front Row* (Radio 4) and Norman Murphy appearing on *Newsnight* (BBC2 TV), both on August 15, but the star performance was Stephen Fry's superb, precise and accurate summary on Radio 4's *Today* programme (August 16).

The newspapers started by following a broadly predictable pattern, with some tabloids reacting in the usual knee-jerk manner. Though the broadsheets in general reported more accurately, the *Daily Telegraph* was guilty of repeating the myth that Plum received money from Germany until the Liberation, overlooking the fact that any cash transfers from Germany to France (in this case, of his royalties from neutral Sweden) had to flow through the German Central Bank. *The Times* ran two articles, by Alan Hamilton and Philip Howard, which were well-balanced and commented critically on the efforts by the Foreign Office, notably by successive Ambassadors to the U S A, Sir Patrick Deane and Lord Cromer, to resist honours. Sir Patrick had said:

It would give currency to a Bertie Wooster image of the British character which we are doing our best to eradicate.

Harold Wilson had to overcome the opposition of his Foreign Secretary James Callaghan before siding with Lord Citrine and securing the knighthood in 1975.

Further articles followed, developing the theme of Foreign Office ineptitude. Tom Utley in the *Daily Telegraph* (August 17) put his finger on the nub:

The Establishment had another reason for denying Wodehouse an honour. It was a reason so preposterous, so fantastically silly, that it would take the comic genius of the Master himself to do full justice to its absurdity.

Utley pointed out, correctly, that Sir Patrick's opinion was extraordinarily insulting to Americans – that they might believe life in Britain was as described in Wodehouse's fantasy world, that never had existed and never would.

Kevin Myers, writing from Ireland for the *Sunday Telegraph* (August 18) suggested that Sir Patrick:

... provided proof of a human version of Newton's third law of physics: that for every comic genius a nation produces, it must also produce doltishness of equal and opposite measure. So that for every literary shaft of comic brilliance, there must also be a bowl of cerebral suet ... the price that has to be paid for England to have created Wodehouse and his imperishable wonders.

## **Poets' Corner**

### *Tabloid Love Letters*

Beneficent bardman of Balham,  
Accept this poor tribute from me:  
May good fortune and wealth  
And the best of sound health  
Pursue you wherever you be.  
Of clever inventors full many  
We've had since creation began  
But I very much question if any  
Have done such a service to man.

In the days that are distant, departed,  
(How very laborious it seems!)  
A lover who wrote  
An affectionate note  
Was expected to till several reams.  
It used to astonish and grieve her  
If he showed a desire to scamp,  
And many a man got brain fever  
And others got writer's cramp.

Then you came with your cunning contrivance,  
And gave us a merciful rest;  
No need to spend days  
In pursuit of a phrase  
Or a sentiment better expressed;  
You freed us at last from our fathers,  
You smoothed our fast-furrowing brow;  
A series of capital letters  
Is all she expects from us now.

With ease void of every exertion  
We dash off a passionate screed;  
The whole may be writ  
In a line and a bit,  
Though it's rather perplexing to read.  
If alien eye should peruse it,  
No meaning it's likely to teach;  
And it baffles the counsel who'd use it  
To back up an 'action for breach'.

This poem first appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* on 7 March, 1904

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Patron Richard Ingrams also commented on the Foreign Office attitude in the *Observer* (August 18), reminding readers that Wodehouse had some unlikely fans, including Kaiser Wilhelm II:

Exiled to Doorn in Holland after the First World War, the Kaiser used to while away the evenings by reading Wodehouse aloud to his family and guests.

Overall, the serious newspapers handled the reports more sympathetically towards Plum than has always been the case. Long may the trend continue.



## FUTURE EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

October 10 to 12, 2002 – Prince's Theatre, Clevedon, Somerset

Production of *Summer Lightning*, adapted from the book by Giles Havergal. A meeting will be held in Clevedon beforehand at 4pm on the 12th: details from

To book for the theatre, see page 20.

October 15, 2002 – Great Missenden Library

Illustrated talk on the life and career of PGW by Tony Ring, at 7.45pm. There will be a window exhibition on Wodehouse from October 8 to 20.

October 15 to December 14, 2002 – Dulwich

Exhibition on Wodehouse's school days and the school stories: see page 17.

October 17, 2002 – Society's Formal Dinner at Lincoln's Inn

The Society's biennial formal dinner at Lincoln's Inn. Enquiries regarding the possibility of late places should be directed to Tim Andrew

November 2, 2002 – Meeting at Bolton

To be held at The Little Theatre, from 2pm to 5pm. The programme will include the screening of a 1989 *Bookmark* TV programme on Wodehouse and

a discussion of a dramatisation of a Wodehouse story in comparison with the original text. Members may wish to meet for lunch beforehand from noon at Harvey's Cafe Bar. Local members will receive a letter with full details

November 12, 2002 – The Savage Club

Elin Woodger-Murphy will speak on *An American View of British Weather, as portrayed in Wodehouse*. The Savage Club is in the premises of The National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, close to Charing Cross Station, and members gather from around 6pm.

November 21, 2002 – Dulwich

Special Society day at the Dulwich College Exhibition: see page 17 and the enclosed flyer.

May 10 to 17, 2003 – The Little Theatre, Bolton

The theatre plans to stage a production of *Good Morning, Bill*. More details in a future *Wooster Sauce*.

August 8 to 10, 2003 – TWS Convention, Toronto

The next convention of The (American) Wodehouse Society will be held in Toronto. More details in the next issue of *Wooster Sauce*.

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## EDITOR'S TAILPIECES

On July 15, Radio 4 presented a programme *India Calling*, in which the presenters investigated the trend towards companies establishing call centres in India. They discussed training methods for the staff who had to be 'anglicised' to enable them to converse sensibly with their customers. One lady who was interviewed was asked if one of their subjects was the weather. She answered that they did learn about the weather "and of course we read about it in Wodehouse and other common literature".

Stephen Fullom noted that astrologist Patrick Moore bemoaned the demise of the monocle, a leading UK optician having ceased to stock them through lack of demand, and recommended the formation of a Monocle Wearers' Society. Many Drones and others would no doubt have been members, but not Bertie.

Sailesh Krishnamurthy drew attention to a report in *The New Yorker* of a world heavyweight boxing

match between Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis in which the reporter, David Remnick, quoted a paragraph from *Ukridge* about Battling Billson.

David McDonough reported that the play *The Butter and Egg Man*, by George S Kaufman, which became the second half of Plum's novel *Barmy in Wonderland*, is expected to be revived on Broadway in October.

Thomas Schlachter found this exchange in the book *Orson Welles* by Peter Bogdanovitch (1992, HarperCollins):

PB: Were you friendly with W C Fields?

OW: One of his pen-names was an in-joke just for me: Mahatma Kane Jeeves. The Jeeves part of it came from me telling him that he ought to read P G Wodehouse, because he's so funny. That kind of bothered Fields – that someone else was funny. Generosity was not his salient virtue.