



Research Among the Chickens

Mary Bohane of The Lyme Regis Society finds Ukridge's farm

In the first edition of *Love Among the Chickens*, most of the action of the novel took place in Lyme Regis, though in the 1921 rewrite, the seaside town was renamed Combe Regis. So to most members familiar with the book, the Lyme Regis Society may on the face of it be an unexpected source of some valuable research about the site of an early Wodehouse story. However, a letter by Norman Taylor was published in that Society's March 2003 newsletter, recommending *Love Among the Chickens* as a light-hearted, delightful book and asking whether anyone knew where the chicken farm was located, and whether PGW had actually visited the town. Mary Bohane, editor of the newsletter, added a postscript saying that she had found a brief mention on the Internet of a visit by P G Wodehouse to Lyme Regis in the company of Joan, Effie and Ernestine Bowes-Lyon, cousins of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the future Queen Mother.

Two of their members suggested that PGW's visit might have been to Fairfield House, which in the 1950s had been occupied by two Misses Munro, who were 'related to the late Queen Mother and had been her Ladies-in-Waiting'. These ladies used to drive down from Scotland in their Austin 7. *Kelly's Directory* of 1903 showed the owner of Fairfield House as Sir Campbell Munro, father of the two Misses Munro, but a link between the Munro and Bowes-Lyon families needed to be established. A plaque in the local church to the memory of Dame Henrietta Munro indicated that she was the daughter of John Drummond, and it appears almost certain that Sir Campbell and Lady Henrietta Munro were the uncle and aunt of Issobel Drummond, John's granddaughter. Sir Campbell appears to have inherited the house from his mother-in-law. Issobel and the Hon Ernest Bowes-Lyon, married in 1882, were the parents of Joan, Effie and Ernestine.

Mary Bohane is certain that the chicken farm was Fairfield House, which is described in the book as a 'topping old house with large grounds' with a golf club 'at the top of the hill not half a mile from the farm', and the narrator says that 'a walk of five minutes down the hill brought me to the sleepy little

town'. Ukridge 'led us in the direction of the farm, which lay across the valley, looking through woods to the sea. The place was visible from the station from which, indeed, standing at the top of a hill, the view was extensive.' She continues:

Geographically it all fits. From the site of the old station (closed in 1953) you can indeed see Fairfield House, and the walk from the station to the house is easily traceable. The house is exactly half a mile from the golf club, and it would have been a five-minute walk to the outskirts of Lyme in 1905. Now it is a retirement home for the elderly.

Norman Murphy added further information. He pointed out that the Hon Ernest had left Issobel a widow in 1891, and although she was from the Drummond's Bank family, she was not well off. Her sister Susan married Richard Corbett of Stableford, Shropshire, where the girls went for holidays, and where they first met PGW. He regards it as highly likely that the girls would have used the house of their great-aunt Henrietta during holidays. Perhaps PGW was invited along as a trustworthy young man to play tennis or golf, or go for walks with 13-, 15- and 16-year-old girls.

But whatever the minutiae of the situation, it seems clear that the critical link is Fairfield House, and it is much to the credit of the Lyme Regis Society that it has now been satisfactorily proved.

Filming Piccadilly Jim

At the end of November, filming began on the Isle of Man for the new full-length feature film of *Piccadilly Jim*. Starring Sam Rockwell, Brenda Blethyn, Tom Wilkinson, Hugh Bonneville and Frances O'Connor, the film has a script by Julian Fellowes and the director is John McKay.

It is hoped that the film will be released for distribution by Universal Pictures International this autumn. *Wooster Sauce* will provide more news when it is available.

Wodehouse – A Male Thing?

by Helen Murphy

I have always been puzzled by what I regard as a misconception, that Wodehouse is a writer who really only appeals to men, and that women certainly don't have the right sense of humour to appreciate him. "It's a male thing, Helen," I was informed from an early age. But I was certainly not discouraged from reading the books, mostly Jeeves and Bertie, during that early part of my life.

Then, at the age of ten, I went to boarding school, a convent. Convents provide just about the most feminist form of education there is. I should loosely define my terms at this stage. I am well aware that feminism has undergone many guises. For the purposes of this piece, I loosely interpret it to mean the willing support and encouragement of women in whichever sphere they choose to occupy themselves.

The nuns at my school were keen on Character and character building. We had the examples of many saints and martyrs available to us in the school library, and were constantly lectured on the need to be strong, independent women. There was another, special library, though, in the headmistress' office, where the best books were kept. Here were the treasures, the Sherlock Holmeses and the Wodehouses. *Young Men in Spats* was the first I borrowed from Sister Goddard so Wodehouse must have written for girls and women, mustn't he?

The more thought I gave to this, the more I realised that in fact Wodehouse is one of the most consistently feminist writers of the 20th century, as I hope to demonstrate. In this he runs second only to the early girls school stories of the same era. I think there are several reasons for this, mainly empathy, the work ethic and Platonism.

First, empathy. As a young man at the bank Wodehouse used to go to tea with the three growing Bowes-Lyon girls, Ernestine, Joan and Effie, the late Queen Mother's 'naughty cousins' as she called them. They told him what they had been up to – admiring beautiful guardsmen through opera glasses as they rode to parade, or planning to buy a really big hat when they grew up (this was in the era, remember, of hats like cartwheels), or debating whether it would be better to marry or be boiled in oil, or whether Plum should leave the Bank. Of course he should, and he did, and dedicated to them his first full length book, *The Pothunters*. Whether it was these three, or the young servants with whom he had so often been parked when on formal visits to

aunts, it is certain that he liked all his young girl characters, unlike the fiendish small boys. And I do know that I have come across no other school story, ostensibly for boys, with such an accurate female perspective. In the short story *Playing the Game* Charteris was ensnared by Scott's sister, whose hair isn't quite 'up' yet. Scott told a story about this against Molly, and Charteris doesn't laugh. It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of hair being 'up'. It was the passport to adulthood and dances and being eligible that ceased after the Great War, when everyone went bobbed or shingled. It was of acute importance. Later Molly sent Charteris her photo.

More empathy. In a couple of the early short stories, Wodehouse again shows a rare ability to identify with the feelings of his female protagonists, and in a way unexpected in a writer who so consistently shuns the physical aspects of intimacy. Long before he had devised the Ickenham method of accosting women, in *The Romance of an Ugly Policeman*, when PC Ted Plimmer decided to be arch, and accosted his unsuspecting inamorata, she was actually not just shocked but frightened. And, more empathy, when she has to be arrested.

There was the misery of the stricken animal in her gaze. He had seen women look like that in Whitechapel. The woman to whom, indirectly, he owed his broken nose had looked like that. As his hand had fallen on the collar of the man who was kicking her to death he had seen her eyes. They were Ellen's eyes, as she stood there now – tortured, crushed, yet uncomplaining.

And we recall the girlfriend Gladys, and the picture conjured up for us of her struggling through the London streets carrying a child almost as big as herself, leading another by the hand and yelling at another in the distance.

Now, the work ethic. Other than Dickens and Kipling, I can think of no writer who so reinforces the redemptive power of working for a living than Wodehouse. All his most powerful and popular female characters work – often very hard – unless they're in one of the Bertie and Jeeves books, where their energies are devoted to starting things or stirring things. They are all spirited and occasionally fall on hard times through putting their chemise on a dead cert that isn't, like Eve Halliday in *Leave It To Psmith* or Emerald Stoker in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*.

Wodehouse – A Male Thing? continued

They sculpt, or nurse, or are secretaries, or of course chorus girls – and remember Wodehouse could describe accurately how hard that was. *Jill the Reckless* and *The Adventures of Sally* bear me out.

Wodehouse's women are allowed other jobs too. The longest discussion on this is in *Doctor Sally*, who not only works hard herself but cannot ever love a man who doesn't. In *Ring for Jeeves* Jill Wyvern is the vet – the other 'worker' is Rory, only a shop walker. And I think we can all agree who is the brains of the operation out of Dolly and Soapy Molloy.

Even the generally unsympathetic female characters, apart from Madeline Basset, have strong interests outside the home. There are the Girton Girls, starting with Miss Beezley in *The Babe and the Dragon* and continuing through Florence Craye and Honoria Glossop. The early Girton girls had had to work hard for their education but were not allowed to join the university. In a house in Hitchin, kind dons would, in their spare time, give lectures to the young women, who were allowed to sit their Cambridge final exams but not awarded degrees until nearly the Second World War. No wonder their songs (the *Girton Song Book* had one in Latin and sixteen in English) were so fervent in praise of the early pioneers. But Wodehouse mocks their hearty, intellectual manner, and their bossiness, not the fact of their education.

The aunts are some of the strongest characters in all the books, of course, and Wodehouse was writing powerfully about these middle-aged women long before he moved on to his other favourites, often American: women of a certain age, almost all of whom, once again, work – often by writing. Not a writer for women? What better role model than Aunt Dahlia, not least for her power of invective, if not her magazine editing skills.

Finally, Platonism. Wodehouse had had a classical education. He knew that the Platonic philosophical ideal is one from which all other forms derive as flawed imitations. Therefore, when he was writing, especially after years of practice, he could hardly help creating ideal forms himself. His butlers are more butlerine (you even need to coin the adjective), his aunts more auntly, his uncles more avuncular, his young men about town more Dronelike and bespatted. It is this quality, of course, that lets people think they remember the works well after such a brief and limited reading. Therefore he could not help his female characters being strong, memorable female characters.

We also recall that Wodehouse had married a woman who gave him an ideal young girl who grew into a charming adult – Leonora. And we remember how he adored Ethel – marvellous in a crisis, party loving, but taking care of all the details of their lives so he could get on and work. Malcolm Muggeridge described her, memorably, as a mixture of Mistress Quickly, Lady Macbeth and Florence Nightingale. Practically an aunt.

This article is a slightly modified version of a paper given at the TWS Toronto convention in August last year, and of Helen's presentation at the Savage Club after the AGM in February 2004.

Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh

Michael Pye wrote about Waugh's work in The Scotsman on October 20, 2003

They're not exactly farces. They don't – for example – work at all like P G Wodehouse, who also wrote immaculately and who also dealt in the foibles, oddities and criminal records of the upper classes.

It's a distinction worth checking. Both men gloried in the surface work of language, the look and sheen of words; both had only a minimal interest in psychology, especially as a subject; both considered themselves craftsmen above anything else. Waugh, who had once thought of being a cabinet-maker, aspired to write Arts and Crafts novels, well turned, well polished – the proper job for such a 'lazy and ill-educated' man to earn his living; so language was at least as serious as wood and polish and chisel and awl. To express his horror at Stephen Spender's awful prose, he thought of artefacts:

To see him fumbling with our rich and delicate language is to experience all the horror of seeing a Sèvres vase in the hand of a chimpanzee.

Waugh went on to say

But P G Wodehouse wrote historical novels. Memory, with footlights. He set them in a constant summer, where villains aren't that bad, and anyway are inexorably bound by the plot to lose in Act Three: a world as narrow and brilliant as a stage, like musical comedy but with the tunes in the words. The closest he comes to a recognisable menace, aunts aside, is the shadow of the fascist beast and knicker entrepreneur Rodney (*sic*) Spode and his ludicrous Black Shorts.

“What if . . .”

asks Louise O'Connor

The ‘new’ Wodehouse novelette, *A Prince for Hire*, demonstrates features reminiscent of the curate’s egg. The plot is a bit of a shambles, but it has an interesting heroine, less passive than most Wodehouse heroines. It is something that strikes me about his heroines: they may be bright, intelligent and strong-minded, but they never seem to actually do very much, they just urge the men on to action. This contrasts with the heroines of Wodehouse’s near-contemporary, Agatha Christie. Her novels are also full of bright, intelligent, strong-willed young women, but they are much more likely to act for themselves. A Christie heroine who wanted a policeman’s hat pinched, for instance, is more likely to go and pinch it herself than to try to get a man to do it for her.

Reading *A Prince for Hire* inspired me to reread *Psmith, Journalist*, with its very similar plot. Another thought occurred to me: what if instead of writing comedy, Wodehouse had decided to follow the direction that *Psmith Journalist* is going and

write thrillers? He could have done a whole series featuring Psmith as the suave man of action, with Mike Jackson as his amiable sidekick. Lots of humour, of course, like there is in *Psmith Journalist*, but darker, fiercer plots than his later novels and more villainous villains. I don’t mean I would have preferred him to write like that, but I find it interesting to speculate what his books might have been like if he’d gone in that direction.

I feel the same way about Jane Austen. I wonder what her books might have been like if, in *Northanger Abbey*, it had turned out that General Tilney had really murdered his wife after all, and Catherine Morland had solved the mystery. It could have been the start of a really good series, with the general title of *The Morland Mysteries* or *Miss Morland Investigates*. Henry Tilney could be her amiable, obtuse sidekick (poor old Henry, he never guessed the identity of the real murderer). She could have been the first great mystery writer.

Or not.

And “What Next?”

asked Richard Usborne

While Richard Usborne was researching his momentous *Wodehouse at Work* (Herbert Jenkins, 1961), he conducted a lengthy correspondence with Wodehouse himself. In a *PS* to a letter of July 24, 1956, he wrote the following:

As you may know, the BBC did the ‘Gussie presenting the prizes’ bit as a half-hour broadcast the other day. As you may not know, they changed Fink-Nottle to Fink-Whittle and Angela Glossop became Cynthia Glossop and Tuppy became Tippy. These names also appeared in the *Radio Times*. I expect you got a spate of letters about it. I was most interested to learn from the producer the reason for his changing the names, *ie* to make them easier to listen to and easier to remember in pairs. I didn’t know this sort of thing happened in radio treatment of classics. What next? Has it ever happened to you before? Bertie Warner and his valet Jones?

Editor’s Note:

It has, of course, happened frequently since, as with the Oldest Member and Mulliner radio series of the last ten years or so.

Two PGW Manuscripts

Recently Offered for Sale

At a Christie’s sale on November 20 lot 229 was described as:

Autograph manuscript and typescript of the novel *Much Obligated, Jeeves*, occasionally dated in working notes (c May to August 1970), comprising a typescript with numerous autograph emendations for the complete text, 7 pages, 4to, wholly in autograph, and 170 pages, 4to, typescript, tipped into the pages of an album, brown morocco; and working notes for the novel, comprising 34 pages, 4to in a ‘Criterion Compositions notebook’, and 35 pages, autograph, and 15 pages, typescript, loose, in a roan-backed box.

The estimate was £ 12,000 – £ 18,000.

For sale from a dealer at the Boston Book Fair at the end of October was a pack of manuscript pages, both typed (with major hand-written alterations) and autograph, representing planning for *Do Butler Burgle Banks*, particularly what Wodehouse called ‘Act 2’. It is clear that the plot had originally been used to develop a play (probably with Guy Bolton), and that the idea was abandoned in favour of a novel.

The offer price was \$ 22,500.

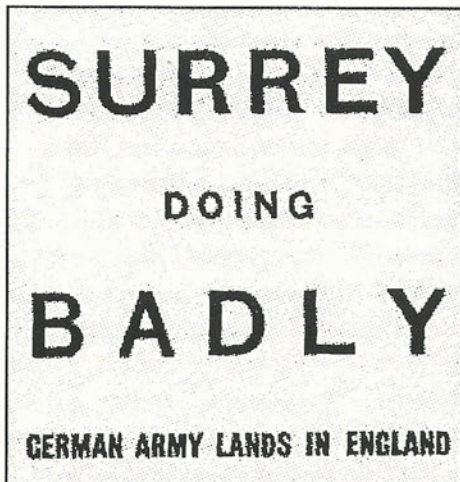
Plum Didn't Think Of It First This Time

says Murray Hedgcock

We have occasionally recorded how *Plum Thought of It First*, identifying bright ideas expounded by others, whose origins can be traced to the inventive scope of The Master.

But like all good journalists, Plum was always on the lookout for the angle that might be worked up.

Remember how in *The Swoop!*, published in 1909, Clarence Chugwater is alerted to England's peril when he sees a newspaper poster:



Just four years earlier, an author masquerading under the imaginative initials of MCC produced a booklet, *Cricket on the Brain* (priced rather oddly at eleven pence) with cartoons, spoof advertisements, imaginary news items, humorous profiles of players, and various fun.

One page offered a poster from *The Evening Exciter*:



Our Formal Dinner is on October 21st

We are very pleased to inform members that arrangements for this year's formal dinner are proceeding smoothly. It will be held on Thursday October 21, at the Inner Temple in London. In line with recent dinners, there will be a half-hour cabaret featuring Wodehouse words and music.

We are also delighted to announce that the bookseller Ottakar's has agreed to sponsor the dinner, which has enabled us to keep the ticket price as low as £65 per head. Application forms for tickets, which will initially be restricted to members only, will be distributed with June's *Wooster Sauce*,

and it is recommended that these be completed and submitted immediately, as in previous years some members who delayed have been disappointed.

Ottakar's was founded in 1987 by James Heneage and Philip Dunne. The first shop opened in Brighton in 1988, with Salisbury and Banbury following soon after. Through a process of organic growth and acquisitions Ottakar's grew to sufficient size to float on the stock exchange in 1998, since when expansion has been rapid, with the purchase of eight shops from the James Thin chain in 2002 and twenty-four from Hammicks in 2003. Ottakar's now operates over 120 branches in England, Scotland and Wales.

Emsworth Museum News

Emsworth Museum is celebrating the centenary of PGW's move to Emsworth, Hampshire, with a special exhibition from April 10th to 25th. The Museum, which also has a permanent PGW exhibit, is open from Easter to the end of October, on Saturdays and Bank Holidays (and Fridays in August) from 10.30 to 16.30, and on Sundays from 14.30 to 16.30.

Ottakar's believes that the secret of great bookselling lies in the recruitment of people who enjoy a real passion for books and who are able to articulate that passion to their customers. In recognition of its high standards and achievements, Ottakar's has been honoured several times at the British Book Awards (the book trade Oscars), most notably in 2003 when it won Bookselling Company of the Year.

The Military Man in Wodehouse: From Major Thomas L Smith, US Army, Retired,

As a retired soldier and Old Antarctic Explorer, I must say that I feel a certain affinity for the military men who show up in the works of Wodehouse. However, I often felt he just didn't use enough of us in his stories. But I was surprised to learn, after going through Dan Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse*, that there are at least 55 characters with military titles or a reference to military service in the entry.

For the most part, the military man in Wodehouse is a minor character, a member of the supporting cast – a walk-on. Many don't even have speaking parts and some don't even walk on at all, but are merely referred to in the story. Even so, there are *four* main characters in the world of Wodehouse who are military men and there is at least one story with a military theme: *The Swoop*. In keeping with my current profession as an econometrician, I've accumulated some statistics. There are: 1 Admiral, 5 Generals, 3 Major Generals, 18 Colonels, 1 Lieutenant-Colonel, 9 Majors, 7 Captains, 1 Second Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant Major, 2 Sergeants, 1 Corporal, and a handful of characters whose ranks are not mentioned.

Many have had distinguished military careers and eight of the characters have earned titles. In addition to Sir Agravaire, we find Admiral Sir George Biffen, General Sir Hector Bloodenough, General Sir Frederick Featherstone, Major General Sir Wilfred Boshier, Major General Sir Masterman Petherick-Soames, Major General Sir Edward Venables, and Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake. There are also two Princes, one Count and Lord Rowcester, although these men inherited their titles rather than by having earned them through military service. Nevertheless, they still served in the military or in military operations. One Prince commanded the German invasion force in *The Swoop*, the other, Prince John, led loyalist troops in a counter-revolution in *The Prince and Betty*. Lord Rowcester served in the Commandos in World War II. There are indications that one or two of the military men in Wodehouse left the service under questionable circumstances and quite a few are inept. We find among the soldiers handsome guards officers, daring adventurers, and men's men.

In most cases, when these soldiers appear in the world of Wodehouse, they are retired, no longer in active service, or engaged in non-military pursuits. Many of these characters are 'gentlemen': they are

squires, maintain country homes and have vicarages to bestow on promising rugby players. In *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, Major 'Barmy' Plank set out to build the best village football team around and offered a vicarage to Stinker Pinker in return for Stinker's services for the team. We also find among these military country gentlemen a Chief Magistrate and a Chief Constable. Off the battlefield, one of the most popular professions among these men is the great white hunter or explorer. There are three explorers: Captain Jack Fosdyke, Major Brabazon-Plank, and Major Barmy Plank. Colonel Sir Francis Pashley-Drake and Captain Cuthbert Brabazon-Biggar are both described as great white hunters. In the short story, *A Good Cigar is a Smoke*, Sir Francis entitled his memoirs, *My Life with Rod and Gun*.

As I mentioned earlier, at least four major characters had a background of military service. Archibald Moffam, of *Indiscretions of Archie*, had served as a second lieutenant and machine-gun platoon-leader during the Great War. However, when we met up with Archie in one of Wodehouse's stories (*Strange Experiences of an Artist's Model*), we find a handsome, dashing, artist's model.

The second major character with a military past is Jefferson, Comte d'Auguste, the major character of the novel *French Leave*. Jefferson held the rank of Captain in the Maquis, a Free French underground unit during World War II. This is one of the few references Wodehouse made to the Second World War in his stories. Other than that reference, we learn little about Jefferson's military exploits, and are told only that he is a writer.

The third major character, providing the only other reference to World War II that I am aware of, is Bill, Lord Rowcester, Jeeves's employer in the Bertie-less book, *Ring for Jeeves* (or *The Return of Jeeves in America*). The fourth major character will be revealed in the second part of this article, in June.

One may ask why Wodehouse used military characters in his books, particularly, when his stories are rarely on military topics? We know that Wodehouse had no military experience himself, having been rejected for military service during the Great War for poor eyesight. So what was the attraction? Considering the subject matter of Wodehouse's world, the military man was a regular component of the English society Wodehouse wrote about. At a typical country-house weekend, you

Ex-Sergeant Beale to Colonel Pashley-Drake considers Plum's roll-call of Service Personnel

couldn't swing a dead cat without hitting an officer. The British Military, like the law and priesthood, was one of the careers suitable for the younger sons of the British Aristocracy. An upper-class younger son could go into the military and earn a title of his own and, through military service, the upper middle classes could also rise to the ranks of the nobility. We can be sure that Wodehouse had plenty of opportunities to become acquainted with military men, and there were more than a few illustrious soldiers in the family. Plum was even named after his godfather, an Army Colonel. His cousin, Captain P G Wodehouse (see *Editor's Tailpieces*, page 24), commanded England's first aircraft carrier and his son-in-law served as an officer in the British Army during World War II. A Major Wodehouse was instrumental in preventing a war between the United States and Great Britain at the end of the 19th century over oil rights in Venezuela.

But that still doesn't answer why Wodehouse would use so many military men in his stories. To answer that question, we must turn to Kristin Thompson. In her work *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes: or Le Mot Juste*, Thompson points out that 'Wodehouse's originality lies, paradoxically, in his systematic dependence on previous works and in his insistence on convention and cliché'. By using a military title or attributing a military background to a character, Wodehouse economizes in building the character and then can proceed with the story at hand. Readers, with their preconceived notions of soldiers and the military, will provide much of the character's background themselves. Introduce a Colonel into the story, and most of us imagine a nonsense, tough, gruff older fellow. A Colonel Norman Murphy, for example. When Plum needs a

competitor for a major character's love interest, all he needed to do was introduce a Guards officer. Someone knowledgeable about the British Military of the time then knew a lot about the competition. Guards officers came from the best families and Guards commissions were expensive and hard to come by. A Guards officer didn't expect to live off of his military pay; in fact the cost of uniforms and mess fees usually exceeded the pay of the officer. While younger sons were sent into the British Army to get them off the family payroll, the families of Guards officers were expected to supplement their earnings for most of the time the soldier served on active duty. Their families had to have the financial wherewithal to keep a Guards officer on the active rolls. Guards units were the elite soldiers and were 'the King's Own'. So by introducing a competitor who is a Guards officer, Wodehouse was giving our hero stiff competition indeed.

Part of Wodehouse's humor though, the paradox that Thompson mentions, is that he introduced the military character in a story and then proceeded to show how the old soldier wasn't the tough man's man we expected to find. Colonel Sir Pashley-Drake, great white hunter, magistrate, and country squire, lived in fear of his cook leaving him if she caught him smoking cigars. In the school stories, gruff old Ex-Sergeants were among the most sympathetic characters.

As is usually the case with Wodehouse, some of the characters, or at least their names, are tributes or references to real people. In the next issue of *Wooster Sauce*, I will introduce you to a contemporary of Plum's who gave his name to two of his military characters.

The Dutch Society Mourns the Death of its Founder, writes Jelle Otten

Kees van Rijswijk, a Dutch journalist, died on January 5th 2004 in Amstelveen, The Netherlands. He was 81 years old. He began his career as journalist at an Amsterdam newspaper shortly after the Second World War and soon got the chance to take care of the publicity of the Dutch Women's Annual Fair. From that time on Kees van Rijswijk was working in the world of public relations. He started his own press agency in Amsterdam in 1963.

In the first week of March 1972 he attended a convention in Finland with a dozen fellow-journalists. At a meeting in a room of Hotel Vaakuna, Helsinki, he saw some books by PG Wodehouse lying on a bedside table. Because Kees was a great lover of Plum's books, he came up with the idea of establishing a PG Wodehouse Society. In November, 1972 PG Wodehouse blessed this idea in a letter, but it was only in November 1981, on the occasion of the Centennial of Plum's date of birth, that The PG Wodehouse Society was officially founded in The Netherlands.

Kees van Rijswijk was an Honorary Member of the Society with the honorary title of Founding Father.

My First Wodehouse Experience

by Elliott Milstein

I was introduced to P G Wodehouse by my father at the tender age of 12. Having announced to him that I had read everything of interest there was to read (I had finished off the Tom Swift series, you understand) I complained bitterly that there was nothing left in life. He handed me his tattered old *Nothing But Wodehouse* and instructed me to begin at the end with *Leave It To Psmith*. Now if this was a fairy tale, I would tell you that from that moment on I never looked back, but I must be totally honest with you. I found it silly. I did not even get through the first chapter, and I returned it to him. He muttered something underneath his breath – I think it was “Youth! Youth!” – and sent me off with a Jules Verne, which kept me busy for some time.

Around the age of 15, I underwent another period of ennui, having polished off Verne, Wells, Poe and the like, and returned to him for advice. He slipped *Jeeves in the Offing* into my hand. I made it past the first chapter, but not much further than that. “This guy’s an idiot”, I said, handing the book back to him.

“But that’s the point”, he replied. “I don’t see much of a point in that”, said I, and spent the next two years wallowing in murder mysteries.

By the age of 17 I was far too cool to ask my father for advice, so being bored and once again out of ideas for something to read, I began prowling his library. In my mind, I can still see the Wodehouse shelf – it was the second shelf from the top, a series of Penguins about three feet long. I climbed up onto the counter and began to look at the titles. *Service With A Smile* caught my attention as a pleasant title, so I pulled it down. Now I get to say it: I never looked back!

Editor’s Note: The subject of Elliott’s paper at the TWS Toronto Convention was the thesis he had written on an aspect of PGW’s work many years earlier. The evolution of the thesis and its conclusions made fascinating listening, and edited extracts, following on from the above, will appear in the next few issues of Wooster Sauce.

Letters to the Editor

From Murray Hedgcock of Barnes:

I apologise for committing a grave libel on Wodehouse of the Dulwich 1st XV, by writing in the December issue of *Wooster Sauce*.

The Alleynian assessed him as ‘Still too much inclined to tackle high’

– prompting my comment:

As the high tackle is an offence, regarded as a bit brutal, it is surprising criticism of gentle Plum.

I have now been informed that ‘tackling high’ is not the same thing as ‘making a high tackle’. A Society member explains: ‘Tackling high is merely a fault – making a tackle around the chest and above the waist of the man with the ball, making it much

easier for him to break it, stay on his feet, and retain possession, than if you execute the textbook tackle round the hips, whence you naturally slide to the knees: the ball-carrier has no escape from this. So PGW was no thug – just a mediocre tackler.’

I see the laws provide that ‘a tackle around the neck or head is dangerous play’ – that is, a high tackle. Acknowledging that ignorance of the law is no excuse (I had never even seen the code till I came England at the ripe age of 22, having grown up a Good Aussie Rules enthusiast), I shall now write out 500 times:

PGW was just a mediocre tackler.

Or is that not how lines work?

From Charles E Gould, Jnr of Kennebunkport

Referring to Gus Caywood’s piece about Abe Baermann and Charles Neville Buck in December’s *Wooster Sauce*, you may care to know that Buck’s *The Call Of The Cumberlands* is advertised, alone, on the back panel of the first edition dust wrapper of *The Little Nugget*, the second PGW book published by A P Watt.

Incidentally, I have a Simon & Schuster’s Publisher’s Presentation Copy of *America, I Like You*, three-quarter morocco leather with marbled endpapers, inscribed by Wodehouse ‘To Charlie Buck’s Margaret’. I had owned this book for some time before I made the connection. I suppose Margaret was Buck’s wife, or maybe daughter.

Fives Bats: A Hundred-Year-Old Mystery

by Nicholas Aldridge

As I expect you know, Fives is a game, played by two or four players, using the gloved hand to hit a small hard ball about a court. This, I think, is universally true, although there are varieties of Fives, depending on which school it is played at. But in the essay *Mr Bultitude Looks Back*, Bernard Darwin wrote of his schooldays at Summerfield (now Summer Fields) in the late 1880s:

If I were now set down in the Lobby, with its floor of coloured tiles and its row of squash rackets (we called that game ‘Fives’) in a rack, and its pigeon-holes for slippers, I think I could walk straight into the pigeon-hole where my own slippers lived . . .

The Lobby at Summer Fields is quite changed now: no coloured tiles, no pigeon-holes, and no squash rackets – but what on earth did Darwin mean by calling squash ‘Fives’? Richard Osborne was so intrigued by that sentence that he wrote an article on it for the 1974 *Summer Fields Magazine*.

The school used to have Fives courts in its playground. Could one of them have been for a game played with rackets? Or bats? If so, with what sort of ball? The master i/c Fives was Bryan Buckley, and Osborne remembers asking him what Fives bats were.

Next term Mr Buckley brought back a pair of bats – like half-inch-thin ping-pong bats, but a bit

longer in the handle – which he had kept since his days at Eton.

P G Wodehouse mentions Fives bats at least twice. In *Uncle Dynamite* Uncle Fred remembers beating (ie, caning) Mugsy Bostock with a Fives bat for bullying. And in *The Passing of Ambrose*, the hero opines that what a certain poisonous small boy needs is six, or better ten, with a Fives bat [on the seat of the pants].

Osborne’s article came back to me when I was looking at another volume of the school magazine for a piece about *100 Years Ago*. In April 1903, we read:

Fives, or rather squash rackets as it should be called, has been played a good deal throughout the term. . . .

But what was the game they were playing? Did it use a ‘bat’, or the more familiar gloves, and if it really was Fives, when did it change from one to the other? I do hope some reader will solve the mystery for us. How can Fives be called squash?

Editor’s Note: Nicholas Aldridge is a master at Summer Fields School, an Oxfordshire Prep School.

Editor’s Second Note: Does any member know of a reference to fives bats in any other book where there is a picture of the implement concerned? This would go some way towards solving the problem.

Fair Exchanges

Favourite Nifties - 29

“He’ll probably be an ambassador some day.”

“Thus making a third world war inevitable.”

From *Frozen Assets* (1964)

A Plaque o’ All Your Houses

Patron Stephen Fry was in the news on January 8th. He has been appointed a member of the English Heritage’s Blue Plaque Panel, which judges which historical figures are commemorated with an inscribed tablet outside their former homes.

Fry was interviewed standing next to the plaque at 17, Dunraven Street, London, which was unveiled by the late Queen Mother for Wodehouse in 1988. Nominees for a plaque must now have been dead for 20 years.

The Smile That Wins

Favourite Nifties - 26

The first intimation Barmy had that the binge was going to be run on lines other than those he had anticipated was when a very stout Mother in a pink bonnet and a dress covered with bugles suddenly picked off a passing cyclist with a well-directed tomato, causing him to skid into a ditch. Upon which, all sixteen Mothers laughed like fiends in hell, and it was plain that they considered the proceedings had now been formally opened.

From *Tried in the Furnace*, in *Young Men in Spats* (1936)

Everyman Titles

The four titles being published in the autumn are:

Cocktail Time

Spring Fever

Piccadilly Jim

Uneasy Money

After the Infant Samuel: Tanagra Figurines

Richard Usborne's scholarship to the fore

Richard Usborne's book After Hours with P G Wodehouse (Hutchinson, 1991) contains essays on a wide range of subjects, and hidden amongst the scholarship are some gems. In December's issue of Wooster Sauce, Edward Cazalet wrote about The Infant Samuel and The Soul's Awakening. In this extract, Richard considers the Tanagra Figurine.

In *Quick Service*, in his courtship of Sally, Joss Weatherby compares her to an exquisite Tanagra figurine. Much of Wodehouse's humour is word-play with cliché and jargon: the clash of pulpit prose with racecourse slang, Shakespeare with music hall. Wodehouse knew that 'exquisite Tanagra figurine' was a cliché, but I bet that he, and Joss and Sally, thought that a Tanagra figurine was exquisite. I know better now. The passage in *Quick Service* made me realise that I had never to my knowledge seen a Tanagra figurine, nor did I know where Tanagra was – assuming that it was a place, not a sculptor.

So I went to the British Museum: up the main stairs and then sharp to the right. A trove of small terracotta figures was dug up by archaeologists in 1873 in a village, Tanagra, in Boeotia, north of Athens. The BM had three showcases for Boeotian terracottas, two of them being for items from the Tanagra dig. Dates 300-200BC. The figures are not much disfigured by age, and a number of them retain traces of the colours that were painted on them more than 2,000 years ago. Gods, demi-gods, heroes, goddesses, satyrs, animals, small groups. But none at all seemed to me to rate the word 'exquisite', which is part of the cliché. In fact, amateur work, I'd say: some of the figures could have been shaped by children puddling clay, as toys. They are between three and twelve inches in height. Not even attractive. In fact, if Joss Weatherby had seen the BM's Tanagra figurines, he wouldn't have compared his loved one to any of them. Had Sally seen them, she might have gone back to kicking Joss's shins for his intended compliment.

How, then, had the phrase 'exquisite Tanagra figurine' come into the language with sufficient mileage to make it a cliché. I went to the London Library and looked up Tanagra in the Subject Index. I was referred to a pamphlet – a print-off of an address given by Quentin Bell, 'formerly Professor of the History and Theory of Art in the University of



4-3 century BC Tanagra Figurine with Column
Picture: www.antiqueo.com

Sussex', in May 1976: his fifth Gwilym James Memorial Lecture at the University of Southampton. I recommend the pamphlet, titled *A Demotic Art*. It told me, learnedly and amusingly, just what I wanted to know about the 'coroplasts of Boeotia'. The term must come from the ancient Greek for 'a modeller of small figures', which I found in my Liddell & Scott lexicon.

These small terracotta figures have been found, as easy-to-make dolls and grave-offerings, all round the Mediterranean, and some in the Crimea. Christianity diminished the demand for them. It was not till the big find at Tanagra in 1873 that they

Another Letter to the Editor

From David Mackie of Raynes Park

In Wodehouse's article *A New Line* (*Wooster Sauce*, December 2003) he gave the leading character the unusual surname 'Centrebit'. James Centrebit is a burglar, and one definition of the word is 'one of the chief tools of a burglar', but he might have derived the name from W S Gilbert.

In the second act of *The Pirates of Penzance* the pirates set out to attack Tremorden Castle. The stage direction requires them to come down stage, Samuel being laden with burglarious tools and pistols. The chorus sings 'With cat-like tread, Upon our prey we steal . . .', in the middle of which Samuel has a solo:

Here's your crowbar and your centrebit,
Your life-preserver – you may want to hit;
Your silent matches, your dark lantern seize,
Take your file and your skeletonic keys.

A second example of Gilbert's influence in the article comes in the second line: 'We were boys together', which I am convinced was inspired by *Iolanthe*. In my article in *Wooster Sauce*, March 1998, page 5, I cited an example from *The Story of*

Webster ('You get your cat and you call him Thomas or George, as the case may be') and quoted dialogue from Act II of *Iolanthe* that suggested these names were derived from the two Earls in that opera:

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

Mountararat (*much affected*): My dear Thomas!

The dialogue then continues:

Tolloller: You are very dear to me, George. We were boys together – at least I was.

This is a very funny scene, and it is not surprising that such clever lines would eventually find their way into the work of a man who quotes Gilbert as often as Wodehouse does.

From French Leave, chapter 4

One of [the revellers] was brandishing a pair of trousers. They passed on their way and Terry [Trent], feeling like W S Gilbert's Lord Lardy, 'How strange are the customs of France?', resumed her progress towards the dunes.

Tanagra Figurines, continued

became fashionable possessions for collectors: Tanagra figurines suddenly became the rage. They were claimed to be 'the most charming works of Hellenistic civilisation'. Prices soared. 'Tanagra, once trash, had become Art, or acquired the status of High Art,' says Professor Bell. 'By 1877 the Greek government had to put guards round the Tanagra excavation site. Theft, fraud, forgery and clumsy restoration were rampant. Bodiless heads, eyebrows and lips touched up with new paint. There arose a factory for forgeries at Myrina, second only to Tanagra as a productive dig. The British Consul in the Piraeus warned travellers and collectors against the most barefaced local restorers – Xacousti, Lambros and Rousopolis were names to remember, he said.'

Then the market broke: partly because forgeries had swamped it, but largely because Greek art of the last centuries before Christ was no longer regarded as the all-time absolute of beauty. Professor Bell remembered that in his youth Boeotian coroplasts were being sold, cheap and in quantity, like Christmas Tree decorations, at a little Mediterranean coastal village called St Tropez, which was so far off the map then that he and his friends were able to swim naked in the sea there.

Professor Bell's pamphlet answered my question. The phrase 'exquisite Tanagra figurine' became current in the short period when fashion dictated that the figurines *were* exquisite, in the 1870s, 80s and 90s. The fashion and taste (and prices) turned away from the glory that was Greece, and the bottom fell out of the market for Boeotian coroplasts, whether made two years ago or two millennia.

Editor's Note:

Oscar Wilde also seems to have got it not quite right in *An Ideal Husband*, which was first performed in 1895, for in Act One, there is a description of Mabel Chiltern on the second page:

Mabel Chiltern is a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type. She has all the fragrance and freedom of a flower. There is ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair, and the little mouth, with its parted lips, is expectant, like the mouth of a child. She has the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence. To sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art. But she is really like a Tanagra statuette, and would be rather annoyed if she were told so.

What Price Wodehouse?

by Eric Coulton

Last autumn, I was about to consign to the bin a piece of junk mail, *Autograph Magazine* Issue 9, when glancing down the contents I noticed on Page 23:

P G Wodehouse

Katja Lindskog takes a sympathetic view of the career of this much-loved author.

Much loved? Yes. Sympathetic? Yes. Accurate? Well, that's another story! But what really attracted my attention was an advertisement at the end of the article offering two PGW autographs for sale. The first was merely *Best Wishes P G Wodehouse*, a neat and tidy piece priced at £75, while the second was a short note to an appreciative reader on a piece of notepaper headed *Memorandum from the Desk of P. G. Wodehouse*, available at £125. On it PG had written a short note:

Jan 27, 1958

Dear Mr Fouhy,

I am so glad you like my books. It was awfully nice of you to write and say so. Much appreciated.

Best wishes.

Yours sinclly

P. G. Wodehouse

The really interesting thing for me was – if PG is worth £125, how does he compare with others in the autograph rankings? Over 90% of the adverts are for film stars – mostly signed photographs – and

as they are as famed for their looks as PG is for his words I consider a signed photograph of one of the stars to be equivalent to a signed note from the Master.

Well, £125 could also buy you a double-signed photo of James Stewart and Marlene Dietrich, or Robert Mitchum in cowboy garb, or Pierce Brosnan as a sophisticated 007. I was pleased to note that most of the rich and famous were priced lower than PG – though there were exceptions. John Wayne was highly prized at £1,250 (£255 more than the Queen Mother!) but top of the bill was Adolf Hitler, weighing in at £2,750.

And who do we find down among the wines and spirits? Spock and Captain Kirk were each valued at £85, a nice signed photo of Laurence Olivier in three piece suit and bow tie was £75; and I was surprised to find that Ursula Andress, quintessential Bond girl in classic pose rising out of the sea, was worth a mere £60. It is with some embarrassment that I have to record that our very own Richard Briers came in at only £30, but don't worry, Richard, there are plenty of others holding you up! Why not just go for Ronnie Barker (£18), Frank Bruno (£15) or Fred Trueman at a mere £10.

So the gauntlet is thrown down. Is there an expert amongst our members who could write a definitive article on PG autographs and memorabilia? If this light-hearted review is the appetiser, bring on the main course!

What Price Australian Golf?

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of December 13, Richard Hinds regretted the lack of success of the current crop of Australian golfers, but proposed an innovative solution:

All we keep hearing this summer is that Australian golf needs a new Greg Norman ...

The solution? Let's get out the scissors, glue and stem cells and build ourselves an NBT from the ground up. We will turn down lucrative endorsements from modern equipment makers. Instead, our boy will be packing a Mashie-Niblick, a Spoon, a hickory-shafted putter – nothing you can't find in a P G Wodehouse story.

Plum and Vegetarianism

In a letter to Bill Townsend dated May 5, 1927, Wodehouse wrote:

I have stopped eating meat, not for hygienic reasons but because I saw a lamb being killed in a field! I vowed I wouldn't touch another bite and I haven't. It's making me quite slim. It's remarkable how little one misses meat. I find as long as I can get a drink at dinner I don't care what I eat.

Was it his recollection of this short-lived experiment which encouraged him to make Madeline Bassett a vegetarian in the later stories, thereby finding a credible way for Gussie to fall out of love with her?

A Wodehouse Salmagundi

Contributed by various Society members and others

In the December issue, Murray Hedgcock concluded his article on Page 1 by using the marvellous word 'Salmagundi'. The OED's earliest reference, from 1674, identifies it as coming from Italy and being 'a dish made of cold turkey and other ingredients', though by the mid-19th century it was being applied to a wider range of subject-matter.

It just cried out to be used again, so here follows quotations and thoughts on a variety of topics.

Bexhill

In a letter to Bill Townend dated December 10, 1934, Wodehouse wrote:

About Bexhill. It is not a bad little spot in many ways. Excellent for housekeeping, and I don't think very expensive. Full of books – a good Boots library and a remarkably good bookshop.

Its defects are that, unless you like the sea on top of you all the time, you get too much of it. It cuts off one direction for walks entirely. Then you go along the front to the left and you are stopped by a railway siding etc, so that you are able to walk only inland (all uphill) and to the right, which isn't bad but a little dreary.

Molly Cazalet, Snorky's mother-in-law, now lives at Cooden Bay, about two miles from Bexhill, and loves it.

I certainly wouldn't take another old cottage. They are awful. I think the first thing to go for is modern conveniences.

The Bookshelf and the Soul

Robbie Millen wrote in *The Times* on September 26:

Your bookshelf is a window to your soul. For instance, spot too many P G Wodehouses sitting between someone's bookends and you can easily dismiss their owner as a man (for it is likely a chap) who is ill at ease with our age. He probably owns a novelty bow tie, knows his cricket stats, is chirpily irritating and self-consciously uses slightly archaic words like rum cove or chap.

Reader Timothy Kearley responded:

Who is this blighter? He certainly has the wrong end of the stick, what? I mean to say, I'm sure we can all see the basic flaw in his thesis: it's the assumption that a person can have 'too many P G Wodehouses'. It simply can't be done.

When you consider the high proportion of ladies in our Society, that we have a Lady Chairman and that the American Society will have had four successive Lady Presidents, we can dismiss Robbie Millen as a man (for it is likely a chap) who is ill at ease with facts.

Ostriches

Anne-Marie Chanet reports that in *London Review of Books* for July 24, 2003, she discovered a PGW reference in a review of *The Tower Menagerie: Being the Amazing True Story of the Royal Collection of Wild and Ferocious Beasts* by Daniel Hahn. Referring to a medieval belief that ostriches could digest iron, the author wrote:

Is this misapprehension now extinct? Not in the works of P G Wodehouse: 'He gazed at the girl like an ostrich goggling at a brass doorknob.' (*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, ch6)

A number of quotations can be found with the ostrich gobbling, rather than goggling, such as:

'Bingo gulped like an ostrich swallowing a brass doorknob.' (*All's Well with Bingo*, from *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*)

Norman Murphy has pointed out that researches three years ago among the South African ostrich farmers showed that ostriches do indeed eat keys, nails and other forms of metal to help their digestion, and in one old, deceased ostrich they found over a pound and a half of metal which had been ingested over the years.

The Pronunciation of 'Featherstonehaugh'

In a letter to Richard Osborne dated December 10, 1959 Bill Townend quoted from a letter from Arthur W Gosling, Akron, Ohio which had appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on December 5, 1959.

Once upon a time, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse invented a wonderful character named Stanley Featherstonehaugh Utridge. We met him, of course, in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

I have a very imaginative brother-in-law, so much like this sterling character that his nickname has been 'Featherstonehaugh' ever since.

We feel that you have let us down. In your story *Duel in the Dusk* by Gerald Kersh, Oct 10, you finally tell us that 'Featherstonehaugh' is pronounced 'Fanshaw'. Us country bumpkins really thought that our favorite *Post* would keep us better posted on things like that.

Over the Moon in Seattle

Tom Smith reviews a new play

It was just 1.30 on a Sunday afternoon as I walked across the Seattle Center, the site of the 1964 World's Fair, towards the Bagley Wright Theater on the western edge of the Center. As I approached the theater, nestled in a theater row of sorts, between the Intiman Theater and the new Opera House, I didn't expect to see much of a crowd. I was surprised to be met with a lobby packed like a New York subway car at rush hour.

I asked one of the theater employees if this was a typical Sunday crowd. "No," she gushed, "most of our plays only get 350 to 400 patrons, this one has had 600 plus, every show. It's had great word of mouth, and the actors are local legends in Seattle." She told me that the theater seats about 800. On the main floor, I saw only four empty seats, and two of them belonged to me, since a theater-goer's daughter, who will remain nameless, backed out of going.

What was this crowd waiting to see? It was the Seattle Repertory Theatre's production of Stephen Dietz's adaptation of the P G Wodehouse novel *The Small Bachelor*. Dietz's play, entitled *Over the Moon*, is hilarious and fast moving. Not only is it a wonderful adaptation of Wodehouse, it pays homage to that genre of theater, the farce. It reminded me of the work of Molnar, with the fast-paced footwork, the exits and entrances, and the quick rotation of scenery. The dialogue is fast-paced as well. In interviews with other reviewers, Dietz says after he finished writing the adaptation, he had a hard time figuring out where Wodehouse left off and his work began. In fact, it's rather easy to figure out – the double entendre was the work of Dietz.

Dietz also should get credit for another piece of magic. One of the toughest things to do in adapting Wodehouse to the stage is incorporating the best part of Wodehouse – the narrative description. Dietz skilfully accomplishes this by inserting the narrative into the characters' mouths. In an after-show question and answer session, the actors commented that the show had the feel of a musical comedy, appropriate since the play was based on a book which was based on a musical.

Dietz's skill as a playwright is complemented by a superb cast, great scenery and costumes, and great direction (although I wouldn't know what the director contributes to a play if he knocked me in the head with a sack of quarters). The sets evoked the 1920s Greenwich Village penthouse and set changes were imaginatively made as part of the play. I was impressed as Hamilton Beamish travelled from the Waddington's home to Madame Eulalie's parlour by standing centre stage as the sets moved about him.



Liz McCarthy as Molly, R Hamilton Wright as George, Roberto Guajardo as Mullet and Julie Briskman as Fanny

Photo: courtesy Seattle Repertory Theatre

This was an ensemble cast, and many of the supporting players had better parts than the lead. An actor with a name worthy of P G Wodehouse, R Hamilton Wright, played George Finch, the small bachelor. I initially thought he was much too old for the part of a young bachelor from Idaho, but Wright pulled off the impossible. He reminded me of Red Buttons, and he played the part of artist-manqué to perfection. The part itself was rather weak. Liz McCarthy played his love interest, Molly Waddington. Molly, father's little princess and the light of George's life, had one of the weaker but essential roles in the show. Liz played the pouting, whining girl perhaps too well. One wonders what George saw in her.

Ken Ruta played Sigsbee Waddington, Molly's doting father, a down-on-his-luck drugstore cowboy and kept man. Ruta played the part as a combination of a witless Will Rogers and Slim Pickens. Mr

Apley Hall, Again

With amazing revelations about Lord Emsworth

It has always been the policy of the Editorial Office here at Tilbury House to present both sides of any reasonable argument without fear or favour. The true source (or sources) of Blandings Castle, according to our Remembrancer, Norman Murphy, has been referred to from time to time, and in the last issue exposure was given to the contrasting views of two of our members, Ian Greatbach and Daryl Lloyd, as outlined in their dramatic exposition to the Royal Geographical Society. The Press duly reported their ideas, the *Guardian* scoffed at the idea of people having fun, and the moment passed.

Until the owners of Apley Hall, the location of choice for the Greatbach/Lloyd axis, put the property on the market. Who knows, they may even have thought that the publicity would enable a higher price to be obtained!

Enter the Press again. Or rather, two of its members. Nigel Lewis opened the debate for the *Daily Mail* on December 5. He is evidently a recent graduate from the Modern school of journalism, thoroughly checking all his facts before starting to put pen to paper. So he discovered what no Wodehouse researcher has ever realised before, that:

Blandings Castle is the setting for dozens of the Jeeves and Wooster yarns and is where Bertie Wooster's mad uncle Lord Emsworth lived with weekend visitors such as Freddie Threapwood [sic] and Rev Rupert Bingham plus his ten formidable sisters as well as brother Galahad.

In his favour, Lewis did mention that other houses in Shropshire, and Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, had claims to the Blandings title, a point for which Marcus Binney in *The Times* of December 12 could not find space. But readers may think that, this omission apart, his paragraph describing the Wodehouse connection is a little less controversial:

This is a house with a better claim than any other to be the inspiration of P G Wodehouse's Blandings Castle. From battlements like these Lady Constance barked orders to Lord Emsworth while Empress, his prize pig, dozed in her own residence in the park below.

Wouldn't it be interesting to know how some of the more fantastic notions emanating from journalists' pens evolve? Alas, this will probably remain as much a mystery as the true source of Blandings Castle.

Over the Moon in Seattle, continued

Waddington, wearing chaps and a Stetson with his dinner clothes, reads Zane Grey and longs to be out west where men are men and the cattle are scared. He takes to George immediately on discovering that George is from Idaho; however, Dad's approval of the engagement between George and Molly doesn't count. Molly's fate is in the hands of the rich, evil step-mother (Suzy Hunt). Described as Catherine of Russia, she is more familiar to Wodehouse readers as the aunt in step-mother's clothing. It is her mission to marry Molly off to someone of substance; in this case, Lord Pickering, a character who never appears on stage.

The cast is rounded out by the supporting members – Garroway (Jeff Steitzer), the beat cop who longs to be a poet; and Mullet (Roberto Guajardo), George Finch's loyal valet and man of all work, an ex-con who longs for nothing more than to marry his fiancée, Fanny (Julie Briskman), a skilled pickpocket. Garroway's is probably the weakest of the characters and performances, but necessary to the plot development. Two other members of the supporting

cast are Madame Eulalie (Kirsten Potter), the palm reader, and Hamilton Beamish. Bob Sorenson plays the part of Beamish. The suave, dignified, and intelligent writer of pamphlets on all subjects from poetry to self-improvement to using the word beautiful, reminded me of a likeable Frasier Crane. Sorenson's performance is one of the two strongest in the play.

My favourite character was Sigsbee's butler, Ferris (David Pichette). Ferris is no Jeeves. He leaves no doubt about who is of the highest station, as he looks down his nose at everyone. When asked about the talk among the domestic staff, he looks over his reading glasses and says disdainfully, "I don't mix with the domestic staff, they are mostly Swedes and Irish."

The play ran close to two hours in two acts, but I didn't notice the time go by. The audience loved the play and laughed at all the right places. It ended with . . . well, all I'll tell you is that it had to do with ukeleles.

Society News

A Plea from The Editor for Assistance on Wooster Sauce

The Committee is very conscious that *Wooster Sauce* is one of the principal public faces of the Society as far as our members are concerned. It is thus an important asset, and like many of our favourite foods, must not be allowed to go stale. A couple of years ago, the Editor suggested that it would not be in the Society's interest if he remained in post for more than a total of ten years. Until recently a few tentative soundings had been made which came to nothing, and the ten year period will be reached in less than three years from now.

Furthermore, in the autumn, a few months after reminding the Committee that arrangements needed to be made for *Sauce* to continue should he selfishly fall under a bus, the Editor did have a health scare which could have seriously interrupted his ability to produce some issues. So, after receiving a brusque refusal from Bertie's Aunt Dahlia, who, having sold *Milady's Boudoir*, says she "wants to spend more time with her family", we have decided to make a direct appeal to our members.

The role of the Editor, at present, consists of commissioning (a posh word for persuading people to write), collecting, editing and setting articles; drafting paragraphs, reports of events to come, etc; sending the material to the printer; and arranging its distribution to members.

He/she is also responsible for *By The Way, Kid Brady* and any occasional publications (we have produced two in seven years). More or less straightforward, you would think, but it does take time, and a new editor undertaking the whole job would need to be prepared to spend between 300

and 400 hours each year on the project. Unpaid (as are all our contributors).

There is no reason why the workload should not be spread amongst a group of two or three people with overlapping talents, under an appointed Editor, and one of the tentative soundings mentioned above may have borne fruit using this approach. The present Editor will be happy to continue in post as required while a new team settles in, and will naturally be available to advise if requested thereafter.

The present Editor was given his role because, when the Society was established, only his computer had enough capacity to take the desktop publishing software which is used. He had no experience either of the software or of producing journals, so the journal is proof that it can be learned quite quickly. But a broad familiarity with Wodehouse's work is an obvious advantage, as is a willingness to meet fellow-enthusiasts at the various events which take place.

In the shorter term, we would also like to contact members experienced in the use of Quark software, who might be able to assist should a problem arise in relation to the production of any one issue through ill-health or accident. Naturally, if a member was both interested in the Editor role and experienced in Quark, that would be a bonus.

Any member who is interested in finding out more about what is involved, either as a successor to the Editor, a member of an editorial team, or as an emergency resource (and it may well be that for practical reasons it has to be someone in the UK), should contact

Proposed Visit by David Jasen

We are delighted to announce that the speaker at the next Savage Club meeting, on July 6, will be David Jasen. As a slip of a lad in his 20s, David met PGW on many occasions and produced the first biography of P G Wodehouse in 1974. He also published a *Bibliography and Readers Guide to First Editions* in 1970 and the first guide to Wodehouse's theatrical career in 1979.

David has offered to host one or two lunches or dinners in London for small groups of members who would like to meet him. He expects to be in London from July 6th to 10th, so members who are interested should contact the Editor with names, addresses, telephone numbers and where possible e-mail addresses, ideally by the end of May, expressing their preference for lunch or dinner and noting which dates would not be convenient. Dates and venues can then be arranged, and confirmed with David and his wife Susan.

We would expect that the cost per head (including a contribution to their hosts' meals) would be in the region of £ 50 to £ 60.

Please note that members expecting to see Delboy or Inspector Frost will be disappointed. Not that David Jasen!

More Society News

Christine Hewitt Joins the Committee

Christine has agreed to assist former Chairman Norman Murphy on his Walks round Wodehouse's London. She is also acting as Membership Secretary for a year. She writes:

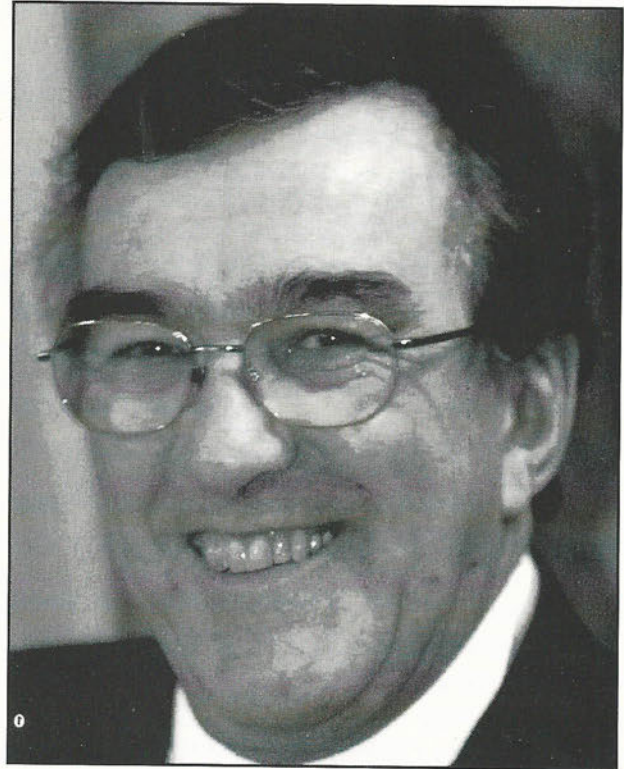
I joined the Society fairly recently, December 2001, so was surprised, delighted and bewildered to be asked to join the Committee.

I am secretary to one of the management team at the John Lewis department store in Oxford Street. In addition I serve on our branch and divisional councils. The Branch Council has committees doing some of its work and I have been on the steering committee, charities committee and an ad hoc committee.

My first PGW Society Committee meeting took place immediately before the October 2003 Savage Club meeting. The facilities were a little odd. Whilst the Savage Club is a cosy and congenial venue for a speaker and a spot of socialising it is not one of the capital's great conference venues. A diverse collection of chairs of various heights had to be assembled at the slightly too small table before business could commence. The Committee is highly intelligent, dedicated and resourceful. (I wonder again why I am there.) Throughout the agenda comments and suggestions from Society members were considered. Everything submitted is given attention so do take a moment to respond to requests in *Wooster Sauce* for thoughts and feedback. I look forward very much to future meetings.

And Here is Our Treasurer

Alan Wood was appointed as our Treasurer last year and we provided some information about him in the September issue. In that issue, there was no room for a photograph, but in response to members' demands we are delighted to provide one below.



Alan worked for many years for a firm of London accountants, latterly specialising in charity accounting and personal tax matters.

Report of the Annual General Meeting, by Peter Read

6.56 p.m: Calming the crowds, Hilary Bruce took centre stage for her first appearance as Chairman with the *Something Fishy* declaration there would be no Tontine. Describing a highly successful year, with many events organised by a hardworking Committee and other volunteers, she highlighted the work of David Herboldt who created our membership database. She paid tribute to the unique contribution of Norman Murphy, Chairman from 1977-2003, who led the Society to its present healthy position. Norman is now Society Remembrancer, (job description – 'Norman'), and he was elected Honorary Life Member by acclamation.

The Chairman thanked two indefatigable retiring officers: Nick Townend – treasurer; and Helen Murphy – Membership Secretary (sabbatical), replaced by Alan Wood and Christine Hewitt. A fierce election saw officers and committee returned unopposed.

Helen convinced us a paid up membership of 976 was an increase, the thousandth member expressing concern he might have to return his gift! Alan Wood presented a unique treasurer's report without mentioning a single figure, yet proved our finances were in excellent shape! Tony Ring's report, given in his absence, showed a thriving *Wooster Sauce*. The Chairman controversially proposed a constitutional amendment. However, the crisis passed and the post of Website Editor was created, John Fletcher triumphantly elected. Chris Reece's technical work on the website was also praised.

7.11 p.m: Meeting closed. Fifteen minutes and no Tontine. What a Chairman!

The 4th International Memorial Dinner

Amsterdam, November 23, 2003: reported by Etienne Corljé

The fourth biennial dinner was again held in the rustic ambience of the Groote en Industriële Club and attended by almost 50 persons. All names were listed on the programme which also contained the menu. At reception, in the cosy bar, each was given a badge with name and a picture. Drinks were served while we listened to Mariëken Blommesteijn who sang *Bill*, after which her daughter Bobbie sang *Anything Goes*. Both were ably accompanied by Andrea Vasi on piano.

At 20.00 sharp we went up to the dining-room where the bookcover on our badges directed us to one of six tables. Master of Ceremonies, Carel Blommesteijn, welcomed us all but especially Joop Doderer, the renowned Dutch actor, and Theo Olof, the world-famous violinist. Letters regretting they could not attend were read from Tony Ring and Kees van Rijswijk.

Peter Nieuwenhuizen spoke on PGW as a detective writer, and reported on forthcoming films and plays. Intra-dinner games were provided for as each table had to perform in a 'most original way' the dialogue supplied with the programme. The other tables had to judge these and allocate their points. A 'fishy' course for starters was followed by a speech from Etienne Corljé on the subject of cheating. He also awarded Josepha Olsthoorn with a certificate on the same. This was immediately followed by the first and second sketches.

It had reached 22:00 when, after the soup, the third and fourth sketches were performed, and the fifth materialised near 23:00. Hard on its heels Peter Nieuwenhuizen introduced the translation into Dutch of *The Harmonica Mystery* by our Leonard Beuger. Only 100 copies had been printed, and these were handed out to those present. The story is also known as *The Education of Detective Oakes* or *Death at the Excelsior*, and its Dutch title is *Het mondharmonica mysterie*. The very first one was autographed and given to the ONLY person dressed up as a detective, the newest Dutch member Nicole Stuckenberger in her disguise as 'Susan Simmons'.

Dessert was followed by the sixth sketch, a performance containing 'flapping angels' in a scene from *Ice in the Bedroom*. Coincidentally this was a mixed table with English, German and Dutch guests. We then returned to the bar for coffee with cigars and a talk by Geoff Hales on various PGW stories and contemporary writers.

At a quarter past midnight, with port being served, the winners were announced. Table 6 won the battle, and were rewarded with PGW-related books.

Bobbie performed more songs from *Anything Goes*, and the evening finished with a spirited rendering of *Sonny Boy*.

Kees van Rijswijk, who was unable to attend the dinner, died in January. See the obituary on page 7.

The Play's The Thing in Chicago

Daniel Love Glazer provided this review by Lawrence Bommer from the Chicago Reader of the City Lit Theater Company's production of The Play's the Thing.

The City Lit is in familiar territory with P G Wodehouse's adaptation of Ferenc Molnar's supple 1926 comedy. So it's not surprising that Terry McCabe's theatrically assured, combustibly comic staging is superior to Borealis Theatre's revival two months ago.

Smart casting and pacing make this delightful script hum. The sardonic story depicts an elaborate stratagem: playwright Sandor keeps from promising young composer Albert the knowledge of his actress-fiancée Ilona's dalliance with the self-inflated Almady, a married thespian who persists in pursuing his protégée. The play is both convincingly cynical, denying the idea that the truth sets anyone free, and idealistic: art does have the power to improve on

life. The one curious misconception is that artists require happiness for inspiration: experience shows how much more often they thrive on sorrow. Setting the perfect note of sophisticated optimism, Page Hearn's Sandor is worldly-wise and wickedly witty, his buoyancy tempered by the pessimism of Will Schutz as his dour collaborator, Mansky. Cameron Feagin convinces as the capricious actress, while Craig Bryant's hammy Almady earns his punishment.

Slight shortfalls: Brian Pastor as young Albert wastes time being gawky when he should register the character's heartbreak, and Thomas M Shea's servant would be much funnier if his accent weren't so infuriatingly indeterminate.

Recently Spotted Literary References

Billy Sunday and Jimmy Mundy

by Eric Coulton

I have always accepted the view of our ex-Chairman that Wodehouse wrote about what he knew, and when I read the World War II narrative *In Peril on the Sea*, I was struck by the similarity both in name and actions between the real-life evangelist Billy Sunday and Wodehouse's character Jimmy Mundy from the 1916 story *The Aunt and the Sluggard*. It made me wonder whether, during his sojourn in New York, PG had heard, or heard of, Billy Sunday and devised a look-alike/sound-alike name for his character.

Jimmy Mundy did not have a huge part in the story, but was a vital catalyst for Jeeves's solution. Some of the quotations bear a strange similarity to details of Billy Sunday which I have pulled off the internet.

Wodehouse wrote:

... Jimmy Mundy, the reformer bloke. Jimmy had just come to New York on a hit-the-trail campaign.

He has come to save New York from itself; to force it – in his picturesque phrase – to hit the trail

This seems to equate to a report about Billy Sunday:

[They] grasped the evangelist's hand to signify their conversion. Such action was called 'hitting the sawdust trail' because the tabernacle floors were covered in sawdust.

Again from Wodehouse:

He leapt about in a frenzy of inspiration till I feared he would do himself an injury. And when he stood on one leg and pointed right where I was sitting ...

And about Sunday:

Sunday was noted for his acrobatic feats on the platform as he preached.

There seems no doubt that Wodehouse took a real name and wove a variation of it into his narrative.

The Kaiser's Last Stand

A careless error exposed

When Donald Daniel drew attention to a mention of Wodehouse's writing in a review of Alan Judd's novel *The Kaiser's Last Kiss* (Harper Collins, ISBN 0-00-712446-5), it was the work of a moment for the journal's enthusiastic staff to obtain a copy and start investigations.

A fictional work, based on the Kaiser's life in Holland early in World War II, the author imagines the impact on the household of a visit from the SS chief Himmler to the Kaiser's residence. First he had the Kaiser ask the local SS officer:

"Do you know Wodehouse? An English author. Very funny. I shall read you something of his one day."

He then fulfilled this promise on the night when Himmler was staying.

"So, I shall now read you some good examples of the humour of the English. The author, who is very well known in England, is called Wodehouse."

"Indeed," said [Himmler] smiling again, "he is well known in Germany too. We have him in Berlin. He was captured trying to escape in northern France when his car broke down. He needed his humour then, I think."

The Kaiser then read an extract from a novel, and tried to draw relevant conclusions from the text. We are told that he even repeated the reading, translating it into German.

A neat scene, but it is a shame that Alan Judd and his editor fell into the same trap as had Vikram Seth in *A Suitable Boy*, that of failing to check that the quoted book had actually been written by the time it was supposed to have been read. Seth had a character read *Galahad at Blandings* (a 1965 book) in the 1950s; in *Kaiser's Last Stand* (set in 1940 or 1941, unspecified) the chosen book is *Full Moon* from 1947.

Come and Play for The Gold Bats ~ or Just Watch

On Friday June 18, The Gold Bats have their annual cricket match against the Dulwich Dusters, played on the College grounds and starting at 4pm.

would love to hear from you if you would like to play.

If you prefer to just watch, tea will be laid on for spectators who order it on the enclosed form.

Our second match will be played at West Wycombe against The Sherlock Holmes Society of London on Saturday June 26, starting at 11am. Again please call Bob Miller to book your place in the team.

This event is enhanced by players and spectators in period (1895-ish) costume enjoying their own picnics in unhurried peace. Come and join us.

The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

Chap with a Good Story to Tell

I cannot claim credit for my title. It was used by Herbert Warren Wind for his profile of Wodehouse which appeared in *The New Yorker* on May 15, 1971, and which formed the basis for his subsequent book *The World of P G Wodehouse*.

The title hints at the fact that Wodehouse was well known for his repeated use of the same material. When Bob Hope died last year, he was said to have over seven million different jokes stored in filing cabinets in his home. With Wodehouse, it's more a case of seven million versions of the same joke, or plot line. But part of the enjoyment with Wodehouse is the familiarity and seeing how he recycles material.

In this *Corner*, I want to consider Wodehouse's use of one of his best known stories: in the words of Richard Osborne (*A Wodehouse Companion*, 1981, p3):

... that story of his about being sacked by the Bank for defacing a new ledger. I heard him, at the age of ninety, trying to get it past Robert Robinson's defences in a TV interview. The ledger-defacement/angry-Head-Clerk/banishment-in-disgrace-of-young-Wodehouse made a good story, and Wodehouse worked it up and sold it in print, more than once. Wodehouse knew it by heart, and thought that Robert Robinson might not.

In fact, Wodehouse was never sacked by the bank, but left it of his own volition, as the following well-known entry in his Account Book makes clear:

On September 9th [1902], having to choose between *The Globe* and the Bank, I chucked the latter and started out on my wild lone as a freelance.

It is possible that Wodehouse first made use of the ledger story as early as February 1903, in an article entitled *The Light Side of Banking* in the *John Bull Yearbook* (McIlvaine, D99.1). Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate a copy of this article, and would be delighted to hear from any readers who have a copy in their possession.

The first definite appearance in print of the story was in chapter one of Wodehouse's autobiographical *Over Seventy* (A79b), published on October 11, 1957. This can be considered the *locus classicus* of the story, ending with Wodehouse being sacked:

They got me under the lights and grilled me, and I had to come clean. It was immediately after this

that I found myself at liberty to embark on the life literary.

However, an earlier version, dated April 7, 1955, exists in manuscript form under the title *Something Clever* at the start of the New York Alleyn Club Dinner Book. The book was presented to the club by Wodehouse, bound in the Alleynian rugby colours of blue and black stripes, and now resides in the Archives at Dulwich College. The piece starts:

Our noble secretary has been after me for years to write something clever as a dedication for this book.

It has the feel of a first draft, being much less polished than the version in *Over Seventy*. For example, compare the following final two sentences with those quoted above:

I was grilled and the truth came out. It was almost immediately after this that I left the bank and embarked on the life literary.



After *Over Seventy*, Wodehouse placed the story in *Family Weekly* (*Sunday News*) on September 27, 1964 (DA9.1), where it appeared in the paper's regular series entitled *My Most Inspiring Moment*:

I think I may say that my most inspiring moment occurred on the afternoon in 1901 when I laid

The Latest News on The Complete Lyrics

Barry Day's book has now been published in America

Barry Day's book, *The Complete Lyrics of P G Wodehouse*, has finally been published in the United States, by Scarecrow Press, ISBN number 0-8108-4994-1.

The book will be available in the UK at approximately the beginning of April, and will retail at a price of £52.95.

Nick Townend's Bibliographic Corner, continued

down the pen after completing what I knew was my masterpiece.

Again, Wodehouse presented the episode as leading to his sacking, but with a silver lining:

I had the satisfaction of knowing that I was about the hottest writer that ever took pen in hand and that all I had to do to win to fame and wealth was to write something a quarter as good as that Opening of the New Ledger thing. I never have yet, but I am only 84, so there is still hope.

This version was reprinted a year later under the Sherlockian title of *The Case of the Lacerated Ledger* in the book *My Most Inspiring Moment: Encounters with Destiny Relived by Thirty-Eight Best-Selling Authors . . . From a Series in Family Weekly Magazine*, edited by Robert Fitzgibbon and Ernest V Heyn (pp 235-40, E45).

The next appearance was in Wodehouse's old school magazine: under the title *My Start* it graced pages 20 to 22 of *The Alleynian*, Summer 1969, No 618. This appearance is not listed in *McIlvaine*.

Next came Wodehouse's encounter with Robert Robinson. As well as featuring in the BBC2's *The Book Programme*, it also appeared on page 496 of *The Listener* on October 17, 1974 under the title *Of Aunts and Drones: PG Wodehouse Talks to Robert Robinson* (D103.1). Here, Wodehouse let Robinson in on an open secret:

The story always ends, when I tell it, that I got sacked and became a writer; but as a matter of fact nothing happened. I was forgiven.

Another chance to hear Wodehouse telling the story came later in 1974 when Argo issued the LP

Speaking Personally (ZDA 1966) (SC1). The LP comprised readings by Wodehouse from *Over Seventy* and other sources.

The story appeared again in 1975 in Gerald Clarke's interview with Wodehouse in *Paris Review*, No 64 (later republished in book form in 1981 in *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews 5th Series* (H52)). Again, Wodehouse was honest with his interviewer: "But I didn't get the sack for it."

The story finally and fittingly appeared in the magazine of the bank itself: under the title *My Banking Career* it featured on pages 13 to 16 of *The Hong Kong Bank Group Magazine* for Summer 1975 (D93.1). Once again, Wodehouse felt honesty was the best policy for the denouement:

The story ought to end with my being fired and cast into outer darkness where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, but actually all that happened was that I became the recipient of a number of home truths, among which the accusation that I had about as much intelligence as a jellyfish figured largely. But as I knew this already, the sting was not deep.

So, the final tally for the story was one manuscript dedication, one autobiography, three magazine articles, two interviews and one LP; not bad going, even by Wodehouse's standards. And I'm prepared to bet that there were other appearances still unknown to me. Indeed, if readers know of further appearances of the story, I'd be pleased to hear from them.

My thanks to Jan Piggott, Keeper of Archives at Dulwich College, for copies of Something Clever and My Start.

Recent Press Comment

Waitrose Food Illustrated Magazine, September

Sybil Kapoor admitted that the prospect of weekend visitors filled her with panic ‘despite the appeal of the P G Wodehouse image of a home brimming over with jolly guests and plenty of delicious food’.

Evening News (Edinburgh), October 16 (from Murray Hedgcock [MH])

Terry Pratchett acknowledged the influence of PGW on the Discworld saga: ‘While being very careful not to suggest any comparison, everything that P G Wodehouse wrote more or less existed in the same world. It was the world of Wooster that you made your way into, rather than the specific stories. And I think Discworld works on that basis.’

Daily Mail, October 28

On Evelyn Waugh’s birth centenary, John Mortimer described him as ‘a satirist sharper than *Private Eye*, a comic novelist who could make you laugh aloud as often as P G Wodehouse, whom he greatly admired’.

The Eye, November 8-14

Stephen Fry reiterated that ‘The Fry milieu, such as it is, is one of eccentric Englishness, lavish use of language and of old-fashioned speech. In short, the three Ws – Waugh, Wodehouse and Wilde, the loves of my life.’

Sunday Times, November 9

Novelist Allan Massie wrote that for relaxation he read in bed something he knew well such as Scott, Trollope, Waugh, Wodehouse, Powell, Chandler or Simenon.

Guardian, November 9 (from Peter Viggers)

Disclosed in an interview that the English character Gerry Adams most identifies with is Jeeves.

Sunday Express (Bombay), November 16 (from MH)

In a review of the UN’s Shashi Tharoor’s new book, Sagarika Ghose wrote ‘Shashi Tharoor is Nehru’s legatee. Like the subject of his book, he too is a western-educated lover of the genius of his own country; his writings strain to throw off colonial perceptions and strike out towards the future, where the Indian is not only someone steeped in the Bhagavad Gita but also in Proust (and sometimes P G Wodehouse).’

Indian Express (Bombay), November 17 (from MH)

In a tribute to the humorous writer Purushottam Lakshman Deshpande, the noted author Vishwas Patil was quoted as saying ‘He is Marathi’s P G Wodehouse’.

The Guardian, November 19 (from MH)

In an article applauding the Harry Potter-led reading boom amongst children, Rachel Billington mentioned how important it was to note a child’s sometimes surprising preferences. ‘My eldest son, for a long time an obdurate non-reader, surprised us one holiday by reading the entire collection of P G Wodehouse, followed by the science-fiction of Asimov. In a neat reversal of the mother-son role I ended up reading both authors for the first time and thoroughly enjoying them.’

Sunday Times, November 23

A *Profile* of Philip Pullman reminded the reader that he discovered the joys of adult fiction from a PGW book received from a relative at the age of 12.

Guardian, November 27 (from Peter Wightman)

David McKie wrote an article on book dedications, starting with four from PGW.

Minneapolis Star-Tribune, November 30 (from MH)

Recommended *Plum Sauce: A P G Wodehouse Companion* (published by Overlook in the style of their Collectors’ Editions) as a festive treat.

The Smithsonian, December (from Daniel Love Glazer and Jan Wilson Kaufman)

Anthony Day’s article about Patrick O’Brian referred to John Bayley’s suggestion that O’Brian ‘is a kind of humorous writer, perhaps a distant connection of P G Wodehouse, even of Wodehouse’s schoolmate Raymond Chandler, who I read with the same enjoyment, ...’

McKenzie, December (Newsletter of *Families Need Fathers*, from Edward Cazalet)

Included in a column of quotations about the break-up of relationships a PGW item: ‘Judges, as a class, display, in the matter of arranging alimony, that reckless generosity that is only found in men who are giving away somebody else’s cash.’

Sunday Telegraph, December 7

A page-long feature on Lisbet Rausing, the Swedish philanthropist, mentioned her liking for PGW – ‘I adore him. I’ve read every word he’s written. He’s a fantastically skilled wordsmith.’

The List, January 10 (from Alexander Dainty)

Lynne Truss included *The Code of the Woosters* in her list of six favourite comic novels.

Sunday Times, January 18

Godfrey Smith followed up the article in December’s *Wooster Sauce* about an alternative world rugby XV.

New York Times, January 26 (from Gus Caywood and Jan Kaufman)

The paper’s Bridge column opened: ‘One should not confuse the improbable with the impossible. That dictum, sometimes credited to a P G Wodehouse character, frequently applies in a bridge context.’

Times of India, February 1 (from Timothy Kearley)

Ben MacIntyre wrote that ‘Indian English has retained constructions of Wodehousean elegance long lost to English English’ and that PGW continues to be a best-seller in India because (according to Philip Hensher) ‘his sensitivity to idiom and to the music of grammar makes his work peculiarly compatible with the Indian ear for English’. ...

Daily Telegraph, February 9 (from Carolyn de la Plain)

The answers to several clues in the *Quick Crossword* were ‘Pea’, ‘Gee’, ‘Wooded’, ‘Douse’, ‘Jeeves’ and ‘Agatha’.

Poets' Corner

The Perplexed Poet

Oh, hark while I expound the tale of Peter Gorringe,
The only man who ever found a word to rhyme with
orange.

Now, Peter was a poet, and the finest of his times.
It really did a fellow good to listen to his rhymes,
While for purity of feeling and correctly-fashioned
metre,
There was not another writer who was in the hunt
with Peter.

One day, as at the looking-glass his raven locks he
curled,
Said he, "I'm quite the very finest poet in the world.
All rivals up to present date with ease I have
defeated."

(For Peter, I regret to say, was apt to be conceited.)

A rival, who had heard him, rose and answered
"That may be,
Perhaps you are in certain ways superior to me.
But for all your mighty genius, as you call it, Mr
Gorringe
I'll wager that you cannot find a word to rhyme with
'orange'."

"A rhyme to orange?" Peter cried. "Why, bless you,
yes, a score.

I'd have let you have them sooner if you'd
mentioned it before."

His rival laughed. "A score, you say? I'll bet an even
penny

That, however much you search for them, you won't
discover any."

So Peter sought for hours and days and weeks and
months and years,

Regardless of his rivals and their rude remarks and
sneers,

Until at last, "It's hard," thought he, "this problem
to unravel,

A change of air perhaps might help. So – happy
thought – I'll travel."

He went to Russia and Ostend, to China and Peru,
To Spain, Thibet, and Margate Sands, to Penge and
Timbuctoo,

And thus addressed the passer-by, whene'er by
chance he met one,

"I want a rhyme to orange. Can you tell me where
to get one?"

The passer-by would raise his hat, and slowly
scratch his head,

And finally request him to ask someone else instead.

He went through every continent: he sailed through
every ocean,
But everyone he asked declared they hadn't got a
notion.

The question after several years remained
unanswered still.

When Peter, in despair at last, brought up before a
hill.

"What good," he thought, "is in this search? What
benefit? What profit?

I'll clamber to yon mountain top, and die by jumping
off it."

He clambered to the summit, and was just about to
drop,

When someone from behind a rock ran out and
shouted "Stop!"

A uniformed official, and he said to Peter Gorringe,
"You aren't allowed to kill yourself by jumping off
Mount Blorengé."

"Mount WHAT?" cried Peter, "Oh, hurrah! Oh,
rapture, joy, relief!

Farewell to woe! Farewell to tears! Farewell to pain
and grief!

To England once again I'll speed. The startling facts
I'll mention.

I ought to get rewarded with a peerage and a
pension."

He did. A grateful country made him instantly a
peer,

With a house in Belgrave Square and fifty thousand
pounds a year.

And now he's changed his name from simple Mr
Peter Gorringe

To Peter, Poet Laureate, Viscount Rhymer of Mount
Blorengé.

From *Pearson's Christmas Extra*, November 1903

Truth is Stranger than Fiction

*Murray Hedgcock saw this notice, which
would have warmed the cockles of Plum's heart*

The Rev. Christopher Davidson, Rector of Banham,
New Buckingham, Old Buckingham, Eccles,
Quidenham, Wilby (the Quidenham Group, Norwich)
has become also priest-in-charge Blo' Norton,
Garboldisham, Kenninghall and Riddleworth with
Gasthorpe and Knettishall (The Guiltcross Group, in
the same diocese).

FUTURE EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

April 10, 2004 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Join the first of this year's walks round Wodehouse's London conducted by Norman Murphy. Contact him to arrange your booking and the meeting-place and time.

April 28-May 16, 2004 – *The Cabaret Girl* on stage

The 42nd Moon St Theatre in San Francisco is staging the American premiere of this Wodehouse-Kern-Grossmith musical comedy dating back to 1922.

May 4-16, 2004 – *Have a Heart* on stage

Concert performance of *Have a Heart* in New York.

June 12, 2004 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Another opportunity to see Wodehouse's London.

June 18, 2004 – Cricket at Dulwich (see page 19)

You can be sure the Dulwich Dusters will want their revenge and put out a strong team for the sixth annual match at the extremely pleasant Dulwich College ground. Contact

if you are interested in playing; otherwise put the date in your diary to come and watch.

June 26, 2004 – Cricket against Sherlock Holmes

The Gold Bats v The Sherlock Holmes Society of London at West Wycombe, Bucks. Contact Bob Miller if you want to play. Note that this is a Saturday, *not a Sunday*.

July 6, 2004 – The Savage Club

The summer meeting of members in London, at which our guest speaker will be David Jasen (see page 16). The Savage Club is within the premises of the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, close to Charing Cross and Embankment stations, and members meet from 6pm.

September 2004

Scheduled publication date of the new biography of PGW, by Robert McCrum.

September 11, 2004 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Another opportunity to see Wodehouse's London.

October 21, 2004 – Society Formal Dinner

The biennial black tie dinner to be held at the Inner Temple. See page 5 for more details. *Application forms will be circulated with our June issue.*

November 9, 2004 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the autumn meeting.

EDITOR'S TAILPIECES

Alexander Dainty has drawn attention to the good fortune of the great crested newts in Wiltshire. The local authority has now spent over £100,000 in providing specially lit and ventilated newt tunnels to ensure they don't get stuck, suffocated or scared when crossing the new A350 by-pass at Semington near Trowbridge.

Alan Wood came across the entry 'Captain P G Wodehouse, DSO retd' in a Navy List entry for January 1946. He had been with *HMS Wildfire*, Sheerness, since July 2, 1943. Norman Murphy adds that he was Philip George (the elder son of our PGW's uncle, the Rev Philip, and thus a first cousin), and won the DSO in the first world war.

Two Indian dramatists were recently awarded prizes in the BBC World Service International Playwriting Competition, 2003. The Regional Award was won by Mumbai playwright Ramu Ramanathan with *Collaborators*, which 'dwells on the upper class of Mumbai, ie, the class which speaks English unashamedly'. In an earlier work, he adapted PGW's *The Small Bachelor* for All India Radio.

Paul Rush reported that Brenda Blethyn appeared on a TV chat show (*The Frank Skinner Show*) in late November. After plugging her then current TV drama *Between the Sheets*, she mentioned that filming had just started on the Isle of Man for *Piccadilly Jim*, in which she is one of the stars. She spoke in glowing terms about both the production and the screen play by Julian Fellowes, and also about Wodehouse's writing generally. Paul added that it must be a sign of the times that the next guest was an American male porn star!

Ouch! In a letter to Bill Townend dated September 14, 1931, Wodehouse wrote:

The editor of the *American* has put me right out of my stride by asking me to write my last three stories about American characters. My difficulty is that Americans aren't funny. If they were, there would be more than about three American humorous writers.

The Editor would be interested in the views of American (and Canadian) members ONLY as to who the three were *in 1931*, and might be *in 2004*.