

WOOSTER SAUCE



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“What a Queer Thing Life Is”

Robert McCrum found many reasons to agree with Plum’s comment

A mystery cat followed by a mongrel pack, Wodehouse seems always to have known there would be a lot of us on his tail. “I would like my biographers to note” is a phrase that recurs in *Over Seventy*, his third volume of unreliable memoirs. Bertie Wooster says something similar in one of the stories.

Wodehouse’s intuition was right, of course. There was David Jasen. There was Frances Donaldson. Sloping along with these pack leaders were those lynx-eyed accomplices, Richard Osborne and Norman Murphy. Then came Joseph Connolly. Next, Benny Green and Barry Phelps.

And now me. (Or is it I?) *Wodehouse: A Life*, which has occupied every day of my own life for the last four years, is finally with the publishers. I have followed the King of Hearts’ advice to Alice: Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end: then stop. In other respects, being a Wodehouse biographer is not straightforward. The problems can be counted on the fingers of one hand, but each in its way is significant, even formidable.

First, Wodehouse was the supreme professional. Hardly a day of his long life passed when the author of stories about bachelor drones did not address himself to intense literary endeavour. For the biographer, his colossal output (letters, plays, stories, lyrics, drafts of novels, diaries, films) is an Everest of material that has to be scaled.

The work is one thing; the life, especially Wodehouse’s longevity, is something else altogether. When he died, on Valentine’s Day 1975, he had outlived almost all his family and contemporaries. Anyone who knew Plum in his prime (*ie* before the Second World War) must be now a stripling of seventy- or eighty-something. If there was more than a handful of living witnesses to Wodehouse the man (and I think I traced the most interesting), it’s not obvious that they would be terribly helpful. Wodehouse was shy, and fanatically private. Even with those close to him, he was never very forthcoming. His wife Ethel said on many occasions that he “lived on the moon”.

For all that, he was much loved. This is a third problem. His memory is rightly revered. Write about Wodehouse

and you tread on hallowed ground. He is a writer about whom people, from all walks of life, mind intensely, a writer who, without strong feelings himself, encourages the most vehement, even silly, reactions. I have found that for everyone who told me that writing Wodehouse’s life must be “fun”, there was an equal number who would ask, vaguely, “Wasn’t he a fascist?” or “a collaborator?” or, stupidest of all, “a Nazi?”

That the creator of Bertie, Jeeves and Lord Emsworth should find himself associated, however loosely, with Adolph Hitler is the most obdurate problem of writing about Wodehouse. Never mind the joy he gave to millions – the hundreds of lyrics, and scores of stories, it is those five Berlin broadcasts that steal the show.

Now that the book is done – there’s the grim rendezvous with one’s self-critical conscience. Is there enough about Mr Mulliner, the Oldest Member and golf? (Probably not.) Is there too much about Ethel? (Impossible to keep her out.) Isn’t Wodehouse, ultimately, a bit of a mystery? (Yes, but aren’t we all!) And then there are the fans, those kind people who wrote to me every day with snippets of information and advice.

To a degree unique in twentieth century English literature, Wodehouse and his work inspire a devotion that is just a white coat short of a clinically recognised condition. I am acutely aware that *Wodehouse: A Life* cannot satisfy such readers, though I hope they will discover agreeable compensations. Never mind the complexity of the biographical picture, there’s a treasure trove of fascinating bibliographical detail to deal with. How many fiancées did Bertie have? What was Psmith’s first name? Why is the American edition of *The Luck of the Bodkins* so different from the British? In some of these knotty matters, I gratefully acknowledge unwavering, generous, and reliable advice from the editor of this marvellous magazine. Now that my work is done – and before you go out and buy a copy from your nearest bookseller (you’ll know how that conversation should go) – I hand you back to Tony Ring and his cornucopia of Wodehouseana. . . .

Wodehouse: A Life will be published by Penguin Books in September, and reviewed in the next Wooster Sauce.

Dr Wodehouse and Mr Waugh

by Jan Kaufman

“For Wodehouse there has been no fall of Man: no ‘aboriginal calamity’ . . . the gardens of Blandings Castle are the original gardens from which we are all exiled.” These words, usually printed on the back of Penguin books, will probably be familiar, even if you haven’t read anything else by Evelyn Waugh.

When humorous literature of the 20th Century is discussed today, Wodehouse and Waugh are usually lumped together as if they were twins. In age they were 22 years apart, and in temperament they were opposites. Waugh was notorious for his prickly character, which got even more difficult with age. Waugh did have one very attractive trait, however, he had a great generosity when the work of other writers he admired was involved. He particularly appreciated Wodehouse and was always one of his most passionate and articulate supporters.

Wodehouse and Waugh have a lot of things in common: a classical education; a wide range of reading; an exceptional mastery of the English language; and a strong sense of humour; and both were consummate professionals in their attitude towards writing. Both authors have had multiple major biographies written about them, together with a number of other books on various aspects of their lives and works.

Both men were daily letter writers, and many of their letters have been published, in various forms. Both wrote highly selective autobiographies which ignored the difficult parts of their lives. Although he wasn’t particularly influenced by them, Wodehouse kept an eye on Waugh’s work and read his books. They wrote to each other several times in the 40s and 50s, but met briefly only once.

Waugh’s admiration for Wodehouse started in childhood. He described himself as having ‘grown up in the light of his genius. By the time that I went to school his stories were established classics and in the nursery I was familiar with my elder brother’s impersonations of Psmith.’ His father, Arthur Waugh, who was Chairman of the publishing firm, Chapman and Hall, wrote a letter to Wodehouse, published in *Performing Flea*, in which he told how he and his eldest son Alec had developed ‘a sort of freemason’s code of Psmithisms, which continually crops up in our letters’. Arthur Waugh went on ‘Indeed, I can truly say, in emulation of General Wolfe, that I would far rather have created Psmith than stormed Quebec.’ Alec Waugh was also a

novelist, and he and Wodehouse were friends who would meet at their clubs in New York, and enjoy talking about their respective school’s athletics. Alec recalls these meetings as very pleasant and easy, but not funny.

Three of Evelyn’s children also wrote books, the best known being his eldest son, the late Auberon, who was a novelist and journalist. He was also a very vocal Wodehouse admirer. Auberon said, when he saw his daughter chuckling over a Wodehouse novel, that she was the fourth generation of her family to do so. Now Auberon’s son, Alexander, is writing a book about his literary family, to be called *Fathers and Sons*.

One of the most interesting links between Wodehouse and Waugh is that they have one common biographer, the late Frances Donaldson, who was in the unique position of being a family friend of both men and knowing them intimately as family men. Wodehouse’s daughter Leonora was her girlhood friend and Frances Donaldson met her husband Jack through Leonora, as Jack had been a golfing partner of Wodehouse. The Donaldsons later became neighbours of Evelyn and Laura Waugh in Gloucestershire, and developed a family friendship.

When Frances Donaldson was preparing her biography of Wodehouse, she asked Evelyn Waugh to explain why Wodehouse was regarded as the ‘Master’. He replied with one of his most widely quoted phrases of appreciation of Wodehouse:

One has to regard a man as a Master, who can produce on average three uniquely brilliant and entirely original similes to every page.

Frances Donaldson continued:

It therefore greatly amused him to learn from the autobiographical books and also from letters he himself received later from Plummy, that the part of his work on which Wodehouse prided himself most and which to him was the only source of difficulty or anxiety was the working out of the plots.

Lady Donaldson also gives some details on Waugh as an enthusiastic collector of Wodehouse’s books:

Evelyn had a nearly complete edition of his works which was specially bound in leather. The books published up to the time of his marriage had been

Two US Musical Comedy Revivals

Tony Ring reports:

The US premier of the 1922 Kern-Wodehouse-Grossmith show *The Cabaret Girl* was presented in May 2004 by San Francisco's 42nd Street Moon theatre group at the Eureka Theatre. The show was the inspiration of Greg McKellan, its director, and was adapted from the British Library's libretto, with orchestrations based on the published vocal score.

Twenty-four members and guests of the Blandings Castle chapter of the US Wodehouse Society attended a matinée on May 9, and thoroughly enjoyed the interpretation. The audience was kept on its toes by the references to such familiar Wodehouse names as Lord Emsworth, Paradene and Woollam Chersey. Though in concert form, with minimal props and costume, the cast put over the typical musical comedy theme and launched into the varied songs with gusto.

One cast member, who had two parts, had trouble with her accent for one of them, seemingly touring the entire British Isles in less than ten minutes, but the main interest was in the songs, most of which had not been heard for decades. Some were already on record, others will be soon, as the company have recorded a CD combining some of the show's best songs with others from *Oh, Boy*; *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*; and *Miss 1917*.

The cast were an enthusiastic, jovial crowd who seemed to enjoy performing this lost musical.

Meanwhile, in New York, the Musicals Tonight! Company was staging a concert revival of the 1917 Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern show *Have a Heart* in the tiny 99-seat 14th Street YMHA Theatre. More than half the audience for the matinée performance on May 15 were Wodehouseans, who immediately recognised the expression 'light and sweetness' and an entire sub-plot about a girl pretending to be a ruined mother with a baby. (The following year this was used again, without the baby, in *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, and many decades later in the last Jeeves and Wooster short story, *Jeeves and the Greasy Bird*.)

The cast performed extremely well, the songs getting across very clearly. Some changes had been made to the libretto by the producer Mel Miller so that, for example, the hit song *Napoleon* was given to the second male lead rather than the lift-boy Henry, and was restricted to four verses and refrains (compared to the seven verses in *The Lyrics of P G Wodehouse*). Another change was the interpolation of *A Little Bungalow in Quogue*, from *The Riviera Girl*, at the start of Act II scene 2. This was given to Peggy's Aunt, and I understand that Evelyn Page, the seasoned actress who played the part, had used it in her audition. Good judgement from Thomas Mills, the Director, for it stopped the show.

Christopher Guilmet and Marni Raab led an extremely talented cast, and with luck the team will be able to reassemble many of the group for further revivals in the future.

Dr Wodehouse and Mr Waugh, continued

given to him and he had later bound many – I think not all – of the books which subsequently appeared to match the others. However, Jack owned a rarity, an early book named *Swoop*, of which Evelyn had not heard, and which had been given him by Wodehouse himself. This book was in a paperback edition and becoming slightly spoilt. Jack was glad both to be able to give Evelyn an unusual present and to find a leather binding which would preserve the Master's present to him. He gave it to Evelyn in 1948, the first Christmas after we met him.

As an author, Waugh was always conscious of Wodehouse's work. In a letter to his friend the writer Henry Yorke, who wrote under the name of Henry Green, he said about his first novel *Decline and Fall*: 'I have written 25,000 words of a novel in

ten days. It is rather like P G Wodehouse all about bright young people.'

Another Waugh biographer, Lady Selina Hastings, says *Scoop* is the most Wodehousean of all his novels.

Wodehouse liked Waugh's early novels and wrote to his old friend Bill Townend, saying

I am now reading Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags*, and am absolutely stunned by his brilliance. As a comic satiric writer he stands alone. That interview between Basil Seal and the Guards Colonel is simply marvellous. And what a masterpiece *Decline and Fall* was.

In the second part of her talk (in September's Wooster Sauce), Jan will concentrate on the public statements of Waugh's appreciation for Wodehouse.

The Master of Folly ~ A Review of the Dutch member Pieter Boogaart has had a lifelong interest

Most of my non-working life has been spent on reading, and on follies. Architectural follies, that is. My favourite author for pleasure-reading has always been P G Wodehouse. I think my collection of his books is complete and I have long wanted to write an article on the combination of the two hobbies. It seemed reasonable to assume that a writer with a sense of humour should have an eye for buildings with a sense of humour. Besides, Wodehouse must have had the opportunity to develop a feeling for follies, being as he was a regular visitor to houses and estates where you can expect to find follies, if anywhere. Places where every prospect pleases and only man is vile. Not that I had a memory of many follies in his books offhand, but one needs to be sure of these things when one thinks about writing an article on the subject.

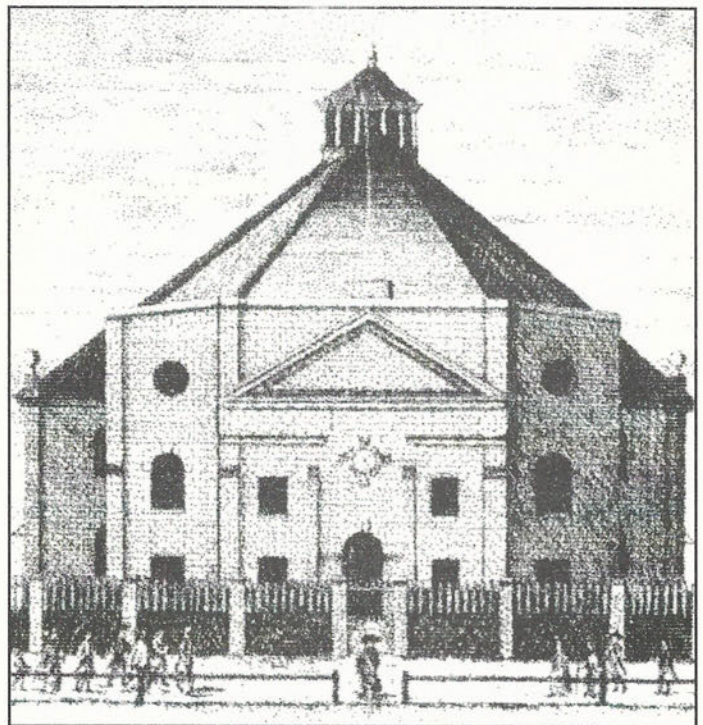
An illness afforded me a chance to read all ninety-two books in chronological order over a period of nine months and when I recently saw the author described as a 'master of folly' in *Wooster Sauce*, I understood that this was my cue. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. So here is what I found. And if, in the course of this series of articles, you see expressions that seem familiar to you, I assure you that that is entirely intentional. One can't read ninety-two books by the same writer without being influenced.

Well, I would be deceiving my customers if I said that it is easy to write on a subject like follies. There can be few areas of expertise that have so many borderline cases. What exactly constitutes a folly is often a matter for discussion even in a publication like the magazine *Follies*. These discussions are usually as enjoyable as they are fruitless: a feast of reason and a flow of soul. Unless prompt steps are taken through the proper channels, you will end up with more definitions than you could shake a stick at. For the purposes of this article the question of fine definition is down in the cellar with no takers. It is out, leaving not a wrack behind. Instead, we are going for the broadest definition possible, and will talk about boathouses, summerhouses, monuments, gazebos, grottoes, residences, temples, towers and the like, even if to some people the connection to real follies seems dubious. This article will appear in three instalments, the first about Wodehouse on architecture in general, the second on residences and real-life follies and the third on follies and garden structures in particular.

Let's start off with some cases that are more borderline than usual. The story *The Goal-keeper and the Plutocrat* (from the collection *The Man Upstairs*) features somebody who has a private football field. Sounds folly-like to me. And the Casino that is described in *The Prince and Betty*, in spite of its being a commercial undertaking, is like a folly and could have come straight out of Las Vegas and no questions asked. Apart from the words 'imposing' and 'gold-domed' we hear nothing of the exterior, but the interior is wild enough with eg Dutch, Japanese, Indian, Swiss and 'Esquimaux' rooms, and the whole must have been glorious.

But even earlier, in *The Swoop*, we get a picture of the young Wodehouse's taste in architecture when the Germans have bombed London. The inhabitants begin to return to the city.

They found that the German shells had had one excellent result, they had demolished nearly all the London statues. . . . Taking it for all in all, the German gunners had simply been beautifying London. The Albert Hall, struck by a merciful shell, had come down with a run, and was now a heap of picturesque ruins; Whitefield's Tabernacle was a charred mass; and the burning of the Royal Academy proved a great comfort to all.



The Whitefield's Tabernacle

Wodehouse Approach to Architecture

in the subject. This is the first part of a three-part study.

Whitefield's Tabernacle did look peculiar when it still existed, but I can't imagine that the grown-up Wodehouse disliked the Albert Hall and the Royal Academy.

On the whole, there are not many remarks on architecture in Wodehouse books. Some forty of them do not describe buildings at all. Maybe that is to do with him trying to hide localities. *Psmith Journalist* is in fact mostly about architecture, but not of the fun kind. Wodehouse must have shuddered thinking about a room with no windows in New York when he wrote this book, the most 'socialistic' of his works.

Psmith seems to entice Wodehouse into thinking about architecture. In *Leave it to Psmith* we read a number of remarks on the architecture of London.

When the great revolution against London's ugliness really starts and yelling hordes of artists and architects, maddened beyond endurance, finally take the law into their own hands and rage through the city burning and destroying, Wallingford Street, West Kensington, will not escape the torch.

... where London breaks out into an eczema of red brick ...

... for in London there was never anything worth looking at ...

on the one hand, and on the other we see a description of Market Blandings.

There was about the High Street of Market Blandings a suggestion of a slumbering cathedral close ...

For descriptions of Blandings Castle itself I refer to the book *In Search of Blandings* by Norman Murphy who has been spreading sweetness and light on the subject and whose future career will be watched with considerable interest.

In *Ukridge* an election meeting is held at 'that popular eyesore, the Associated Mechanics' Hall'. The second paragraph of *Money for Nothing* runs:

You will find Rudge-in-the-Vale, if you search carefully, in that pleasant section of rural England where the grey stone of Gloucestershire gives place to Worcestershire's old red brick.

Written by somebody with an eye for architecture, one would say, and mind he says 'old red brick', not Victorian red brick, which he hated.



Massey's Folly, Farringdon, Hampshire

From *The Mating Season*:

The village hall stood in the middle of the High Street, just abaft the duck-pond. Erected in the year 1881 by Sir Quentin Deverill, Bart, a man who didn't know much about architecture but knew what he liked, it was one of those mid-Victorian jobs in glazed red brick which always seem to bob up in these olde-worlde hamlets and do so much to encourage the drift to the towns.

Although this is in King's Deverill, Hants, it could have been written about one of my favourite follies, Massey's Folly in Farringdon, Hants, although if it was, Wodehouse could have made more of its building process. Another Victorian village hall is described as 'a red-brick monstrosity erected in the eighties', in *Cocktail Time*.

In *Pigs Have Wings* the house Sunnybrae is in Market Blandings, but it's not the chocolate box cottage that one might have expected. It is:

a red brick building which might have been transferred from the suburbs of London. Market Blandings itself was old and picturesque, but, as in other country towns, the speculative builder had had his way on the outskirts.

Architecture can be very disconcerting and the general feeling we get in Wodehouse is that he isn't very pleased with what he sees around him.

In the second part of this article, in the September issue, we will see some good portrayals of buildings and real-life follies.

The Military Man in Wodehouse: II

Tom Smith completes his review

The fourth major character who had military service? None other than Jeeves, the gentleman's gentleman. We learn of Jeeves's service in *Ring for Jeeves*. His new employer, Lord Rowcester, is in dire straits – as Captain Brabazon-Biggar proposes to have Rowcester arrested for absconding with the winnings of a horse race while in business as a Silver Ring bookmaker. Jeeves has just developed a plan to assault Captain Biggar and remove from his person the proof that the bet was made – the winning ticket. No ticket, no arrest. Rowcester is very impressed with Jeeves's plan and asks:

“Were you in the First World War, Jeeves?”

“I dabbled in it to a certain extent, m'Lord.”

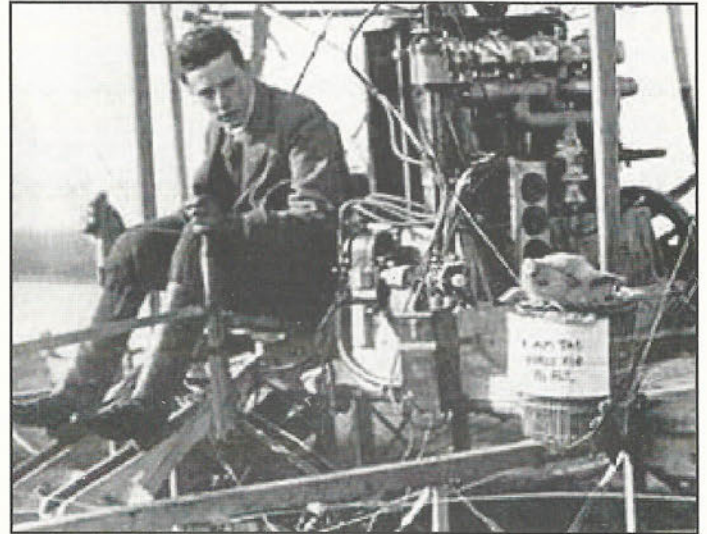
“I missed that one because I wasn't born, but I was in the Commandos in this last one. This is rather like waiting for zero hour, isn't it?”

“The sensation is not dissimilar, m'lord.”

From this exchange, we learn that Jeeves's dabbling probably had him serving somewhere near the front, but this is all we know. One can speculate about Jeeves's service, though. With his ability to move about unnoticed, he could easily have been a scout, a soldier whose duty is to go behind the lines, get information about the enemy, and return. However, Jeeves's talents probably suited him for other tasks. His abilities would be quickly noticed by some officer and he could have soon been assigned duties as batman to a junior officer or aide to a general officer.

In the list of military characters, we find two characters who pay homage to a real person, who was a contemporary of Plum's. Major Brabazon-Plank and Captain Cuthbert Brabazon-Biggar both refer to the historical person Lord Brabazon of Tara. Who was this Lord Brabazon?

Lord Brabazon was born John Theodore Cuthbert Moore-Brabazon in 1884, a member of an Anglo-Irish aristocratic family. With great wealth at his disposal, John Moore-Brabazon became England's aviation pioneer and racked up many firsts in English aviation history. Among these were the first sustained flight in England and the first circular mile flown in England. He was the founding member of the British Air Club, and may have been England's first licensed pilot, but there is some dispute over this. In addition to flying airplanes, he became an associate of Charles Rolls and designed and built airplanes.



Major Moore-Brabazon proving his theory

He entered the House of Lords in 1910 and made a reputation for himself as a proponent of aviation and technology. He was rewarded for his work in aviation by being appointed Minister of Transport and Minister of Aircraft Production during World War II, and was made the first Minister of Civilian Aviation shortly afterwards. He was tasked with making Britain more competitive in the world of civilian aviation and modernising British Aviation.

Apparently, his work here was questionable at best. His term as minister was dogged by accusations of bribery, graft, and ineptitude. While he allowed others to run amok in his department, he concentrated on the development of the world's largest aircraft, the Bristol 167 Brabazon. Though a prototype aircraft did make it off the ground, the plane never went into production, the project was plagued by cost overruns and Brabazon quietly left public life. Brabazon took up other interests in his retirement: he began driving racing cars and took up golf. At the age of 70, he made the bobsled run at St. Moritz. He died in London in 1964.

To me, though, his most notable achievement was an event that Plum must surely have read and chuckled about. In 1909, the year before he ascended to his title, Moore-Brabazon set out to prove a long-held personal belief. He tied a waste paper basket to the wing strut of his airplane and using this as a 'cargo hold', he placed a small pig in the basket. Moore-Brabazon and pig then made history with the first live cargo flight, proving his pet theory that pigs could fly.

Which Bank Did Butlers Burgle?

asks Murray Hedgcock

In an age when ‘High Street bank’ means one of three or four huge chains, or a gaggle of restructured building societies, the 1968 Wodehouse novel *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* takes us back to another world – and a very real one.

This novel records how the hero, Mike Bond, succeeded his Uncle Hugo as owner and manager of Bond’s Bank in the Worcestershire market town of Wellingford, it being ‘one of those substantial country banks which are handed down . . . through the ages, growing more prosperous with each transference’. The theory was fine, but as Sir Hugo spent the bank’s money like water to boost his reputation as a jolly good chap, Mike inherited problems rather than profits – which is where the story really starts.

Plum as usual drew upon real life. Such banks formed a significant segment of local financing for about a century from the mid-1700s, as spelled out in a two-volume history by Margaret Dawes and C N Ward-Perkins, published by the Chartered Institute of Banking (now the Institute of Financial Services).

Country Banks of England and Wales; Private Provincial Banks and Bankers 1688-1953, explains how so much banking was conducted by small firms, owned by one or two partners, often local businessmen with money to invest. From a dozen such banks in 1750, the total jumped in little over half a century to nearly 600: most country towns had one or two, many more being based in the growing industrial centres. But lack of reserves meant economic downturn, national or local, could hit them hard: 80 stopped trading during the crash of 1825 alone.

In 1826, legislation encouraged the formation of joint stock banks, armed with directors, professional management and shareholders, and the ‘country banks’, as they were known, were steadily absorbed. The last such bank was Gunner & Co in Bishop’s Waltham, Hampshire, which was taken over by Barclay’s in 1953.

Sadly, Bond’s Bank – and indeed Wellingford – were not qualified to rate a mention in the Dawes and Ward-Perkins history.

Theatre in Trust and Jo’s Trust Stage Oh, Clarence!

From 19th to 24th April, these two charities put on an amateur performance of *Oh, Clarence!* at the Britten Theatre in London. The Society managed to assemble a party of twenty, from among whom John Fletcher offered to prepare a review.

Have you ever said “If only we could pop down to Blandings?” If so, John Chapman wrote this farce for you.

There you meet Clarence the 9th Earl, Lady Constance Keeble, Beach, Freddie Threepwood, Gertrude, Dame Daphne Winkworth, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe and the Rev. Rupert Bingham.

But each time you go to Blandings there are new people. Sir Gregory had a horsey daughter Jennifer, who fits in well, and Austen, a parlourmaid. I doubt if Blandings ever had a parlourmaid, any more than a parlour. Has she wandered in from an Agatha Christie thriller?

Sir Gregory, pretending to be ill, had brought with him Dr Simmons, an impostor (naturally). Connie is suspicious and calls in a real Doctor, Sir Eustace Chalfont. The dialogue between the two Doctors was marvellous, and throughout the pace and professionalism of the acting was terrific.

To judge by the skill with which Rupert Bingham broke coffee cups and side tables and then threw parts of them in the air for other members of the cast to catch, they could not have skimped on rehearsal time.

Beach seemed more angular than I had imagined him, but fully authentic on the subject of his Feet. Freddie was as vacuous a chinless wonder as anyone could wish for.

This play collected plot lines from (I quote Tony Ring’s notes in the programme) *Something Fresh*, *Summer Lightning*, *Galahad at Blandings*, *Company for Gertrude*, and *The Crime Wave at Blandings*, and thoroughly tangled them up. There are seven scenes, six in ‘The Drawing Room’ with a suitably palatial set, and one in Lord E’s bedroom, to remind you that this was a farce.

A great performance of a great play. I must pop down to Blandings more often.

The Problems of Selling Backlist Titles

Jon Howells of Ottakar's explains his company's approach

Ottakar's has gone from strength to strength in the last few years, with acquisitions such as Hammicks and James Thin, as well as brand new stores in towns across the UK, bringing us close to 130 branches. And while a large slice of the record profits that we reported earlier this year come from sales of popular new titles such as Louis de Berniere's *Birds Without Wings* (his first since *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*), and modern icon Jordan's autobiography, much of it comes from the extensive range of backlist titles you will find in any branch of Ottakar's. And, of course, no-fiction section could claim to have any authority without a decent selection of titles by the inestimable PG Wodehouse.

Of course, Ottakar's makes no claim to have cornered the market in the adventures of Jeeves and Wooster, Psmith *et al*, and it is fair to say that the modern success of Wodehouse titles in print depends on more than just having the books available on the shelves of your local bookshop. It is some years since Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie hung up their hats as the most recent actors to portray Bertie Wooster and his unflappable valet on screen. But other things can influence new readers, or remind fair-weather fans of the sparkling wit than can be found between the covers of any of Wodehouse's books.

The Big Read was a massively successful campaign, run by the BBC and supported by Ottakar's and the rest of the book trade, to find the nation's favourite novels. Amazingly, there was not a single Wodehouse title within the top 100, but this was most likely down to the fact that, with such an extensive range of titles to choose from, fans effectively split their vote. But Wodehouse's absence got people talking, and that in itself sparked sales –

as do the many fans of Plum that work in Ottakar's across the UK. We actively encourage our staff to promote books they love, and you will see, hopefully, in every branch, examples of staff writing their own reviews for favoured titles – including Wodehouse. This may seem an old-fashioned approach – there are no bells and whistles about a keen reader writing about why a certain book is a fantastic read on a small review card – but our experience shows that customers like, and trust, our staff's recommendations.

As Ottakar's gets bigger and bigger, and we move further into the 21st century, new ways of promoting old titles become increasingly important. Sales of books on tape have been increasing for years, and many of the best sellers are classics by authors such as Wodehouse. And now those same books are being released on CD, and seeing similar increases in sales. Wodehouse titles will see another rise in profile this autumn with the release of Robert McCrum's major new biography. With the extra profile given to Wodehouse at the time of publication, we should see sales rise again for the available backlist.

Ottakar's has always prided itself in the quality, enthusiasm and voracious reading habits of our staff, and they have always been the best tools for selling books, new or old. Get a bookseller behind a title and you can almost guarantee sales. There is nothing a reader enjoys more than a personal recommendation on a title – and what more sure-fire a recommendation can one give than to a classic by PG Wodehouse?

Ottakar's are sponsoring the Society's formal dinner in October (see page 11). Jon Howells is their Press and Communications Manager.

Society Announcements

Mystery Subscribers

We have been unable to trace two subscriptions paid by post direct to our bank, for which we have been given no payer's name.

If you think you are one of the mystery members, please could you contact the treasurer, Alan Wood ,

Golf Challenge at Exeter

The Second Cow Creamer Golf Challenge will be held at the Exeter Golf and Country Club on Thursday August 12th, from 9.30am. The cost will be £20 for the green fee plus £9 per person, to include afternoon tea. The competition is a mixed doubles, and those interested, with or without a partner, should contact

for details. Entries close on the August 5th.

My First Wodehouse Experience

by Jo Wyld

Regrettably, I can't exactly recall the first time I set eyes on the prose of this society's eponymous hero. Which may, you might with some justification be thinking to yourselves – not rudely, not unkindly, but firmly nonetheless – defeat the object of this entire article. To be rendered futile so early in this, my first journalistic endeavour, is not a little discouraging, but please bear with me in the generous spirit I've come to hope, nay expect, of you.

Haziness of memory pertaining to a formative experience can be attributed to many things. These can range from, on the one hand, a lack of realisation at that time that the moment one is experiencing is of a nature that can only be described as transcendental to, on the other hand, a state of intoxication known as being 'pickled to the gills'. I am in the fortunate position of being able to inform you that it is the former of these two extremes from which I suffered when getting my first sniff of the heady, and later addictive, world of Wodehouse.

As an adolescent I developed a passion for words, but this was by and large and widely without independent direction, and was instead channelled into schoolwork. Wodehouse's novels stood out even then as being amongst the few volumes in my possession *not* blemished by colour-coded 'themes' and other sacreligious markings that stain and blot so many school books. Was it significant, I muse now, that I was educated at a (state) school where linguistic frippery, far from being the stuff of everyday camaraderie (as depicted in countless accounts of boarding school life, for instance), was confined to the margins? Was it that those few of us who craved the luxury of extravagant language, forced to meet furtively in locker rooms to exchange a few juicy metaphors before end of break-time, were yet to appreciate that, years before us, an author had championed our cause with greater success and style than could ever have been hoped for?

Perhaps, perhaps. But I do remember reading *Full Moon* while staying with my aunt (who is, incidentally, the antithesis of the stentorian Wodehousean model) and, though this wasn't the first book of his I'd read, relishing Wodehouse's masterly ability to marry the rigidity of his plots and absolute organisation of his language to a sense of freedom and joy that seems entirely effortless. I never cease to marvel at this sense of reconciliation,



and it is reconciliation that from then on, for me, was central to Wodehouse's genius. It is part of every plot: loved ones separated by a squabble, reunited by the most circuitous route imaginable. It is central to Wodehouse's world-view – he takes the apparent conflicts between town and country, the States and England, young and old – and seems able to appreciate both, to enjoy the dualities, and not to feel an obvious pull in either direction. Wodehouse takes such rivalries and renders them redundant. He parodies and celebrates everything with an almost metaphysical fairness.

The world of romance is perhaps the best example of this, with its pitfalls and idiosyncrasies lampooned without mercy, yet its joys and rewards praised without stinting. But it was the language that drew me most. Had he been less able, Wodehouse's play on words, already indulgent, might seem insufferably smug. Yet what must have been utterly contrived, and totally thought-out, is written, seemingly, without any effort at all. For an author, the ultimate reconciliation.

Philosophical Thought

What is life but a series of sharp corners, round each of which fate lies in wait for us with a stuffed eel-skin?

From *Uneasy Money*, 1917

How to Blackmail a Thesis Adviser

by Elliott Milstein

St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1975.

I don't know exactly when the idea of doing my thesis on Wodehouse first put down roots in my febrile brain, but I know that I had already submitted my proposal and was searching for an advisor when news of Wodehouse's death reached me. I was in my room in McCorkell House when a friend of mine came into my room the Sunday night after Valentine's Day and said "Sorry to hear about PG Wodehouse." Over the next few days I gathered together a few friends of a Wodehousean bent and we had a wake, or memorial service, in my room.

By this time, I had already pestered several professors to be the advisor for my thesis, all of whom had turned me down like a bedspread. Some were very nice about it – "Well, I'm not really qualified in that area." – others, less so – "A thesis on P G Wodehouse? Are you nuts?"

One professor I had tried to rope in, Professor Joaquin Kuhn, approached me the following Monday. "You still looking for an advisor?" "Yes," I replied. "Do you know J M Cameron?" Well, of course, I *knew* him. J M Cameron was St Michael's only University Professor, a special designation that allowed him to give a course on any subject of his choosing in any department. He was equally qualified in the areas of English, History and Philosophy (he had held the Philosophy Chair at the University of Leeds) and taught in all three disciplines.

"Well," said Joaquin, "you might want to approach him. At Mass yesterday, during the call for petitions, he asked that we pray for the soul of P G Wodehouse."

It was the work of a moment for me to spring through the quad, into Carr Hall, up to the second floor and pound on the good man's door. "Come in," he replied. I did, and in a few well-chosen words I put the idea to him and asked if he would be my advisor. I will never forget the look on his face. There was no question at all that this man did NOT want to do this. But behind the blank stare, the wheels were turning. I could almost hear the internal monologue. "How do I say 'No'?" Less than 24 hours ago I petitioned God for P G Wodehouse and now this young man is at my door. This must be some kind of test. If I say 'No', God will think I wasn't sincere in my prayer." I had him. And he said "Yes".

Actually, when I had finished the grand opus and he and I were going over the high and low points of our

collaboration, he confided to me that he really did not want to do it (he said nothing about the internal spiritual struggle – that had been purely my interpretation of his inscrutable silence). But he was kind enough to say that he was glad he *did* consent because it brought back his youth. I knew what he was talking about. I remembered clearly one day, he was reading over a passage I had written that week, he came across the line 'Wodehouse still knew how to crack them through the covers'.

"Do you know what that means? 'Crack them through the covers'."

"I assume it's a cricket term."

"Yes, of course," he said, "but do you know what it *means*?"

"Well, I guess I assumed it meant you hit the ball so hard the cover comes off."

"Nooooo. Not at all. The covers are positions played on the cricket field. The batsman stands like this [demonstrating], and if he gets a really good shot, he cracks the ball so it goes between the two covers and he gets extra runs."

In that stuffy office, I could see before my very eyes, the years peel away from old Professor J M Cameron, and little Jimmy Cameron was up there on the pitch, bat in hand, cracking them through the covers.

This is the second extract from Elliott's talk at the TWS Convention in Toronto, 2003. Further extracts will appear in the next few issues.

Letter to the Editor

From Sir Edward Cazalet

With reference to the recent *By The Way, 'Books Dedicated to Plum'*, members may care to know that one of Plum's most treasured possessions was a book given by Evelyn Waugh, an American edition of one of his War Trilogy entitled *The End of the Battle*. The book is inscribed in EW's handwriting as follows:

For P. G. Wodehouse D. LIT
The Head of my Profession
From
Evelyn Waugh
Christmas 1961

A nice Christmas present!

Helen Murphy, 1965~2004

Wodehouseans across the world will miss Helen Murphy, who died in April, aged 38.

The daughter of Norman Murphy and his late wife Charlotte, Helen was brought up with Wodehouse, so it was natural that, when the Society was formed in 1997, Helen would play an important role. She was our first Treasurer and our first and only Membership Secretary until, at the end of 2003, she asked for a sabbatical.



Helen knew the name of every single member of our Society, because she processed every single application form, answering hundreds of arcane queries with wit and erudition. Equally, and for the same reason, every member of our Society felt they knew Helen.

Widely read and with a fine intellect, Helen graduated in English Language & Literature from Edinburgh. For nearly 15 years she held civilian management posts within the Metropolitan Police; for much of that time she was also a volunteer Victim Support Counsellor. Latterly, she took a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education; with her keen intelligence and love of literature, she would have made a memorable teacher, the sort that pupils remember years after they have forgotten the others.

We will remember Helen with gratitude – for the crisply argued, entertaining papers she gave at US Conventions and, as recently as February, at the Savage Club, beautifully delivered with cut-glass clarity; for her ability to draw her vast literary scholarship into any conversation or situation; for her great kindness and helpfulness.

Helen had been in poor health for a long time, so when she contracted pneumonia, she simply wasn't able to overcome it. Our hearts go out to her father Norman, brother Tim and the rest of her family.

And, as she remembered all our names, so we will remember hers, with great affection.

Anne Bianchi

We must also record the death of Anne Bianchi on Friday 26th March after a long battle with cancer. She attended every American Society Convention and came to events of ours such as the Millennium Tour and the 2002 biennial dinner. We shall miss her Texan drawl and her bright smile.

Our sympathy goes to the Drone Rangers and condolences to her family.

This Year's Dinner is at the Inner Temple

This year's Society dinner will be held in the Inner Temple Hall on the evening of Thursday 21 October.

The Temple area is steeped in a history that goes back to the 12th century, and the Inner Temple Hall is one of the finest dining venues in London. You can take a virtual look by visiting the web site: www.innertemple.org.uk

Once again, we can promise you a wonderful evening consisting of a champagne reception and an excellent meal with wine provided followed by entertainment. Previous dinners have set a terrifyingly high standard for those who organise

them, but you can be assured that everything is being done to ensure that this year's eclipses them all.

Generous sponsorship by Ottakars, the booksellers, has enabled us to keep the cost of the evening down to £65 per head. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis and strictly limited to one per member; your nearest and dearest will not be able to accompany you unless themselves a member in their own right.

Please fill in the form enclosed with this edition of *Wooster Sauce* and sent it to Tim Andrew with a cheque for £65 as soon as possible.

PGW's Hungarian Translators

1 Tamas Revbiro

Tamas Revbiro has been translating Wodehouse, and other authors, for rather a long time. He writes:

P G Wodehouse has accompanied my life since I was ten. Initially, I was a fan; later I became a translator of his books, but I never ceased to be amazed by his wit. He has been playing a prominent role in my life, actually more than any other author on earth – or outside of it, for that matter.

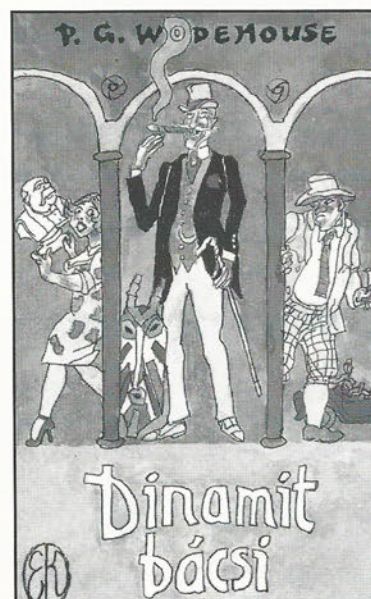
It all began in the summer of 1957, when I borrowed a book from a young girl who lived a block away. I still have those two small volumes; I never gave them back to her. It seemed imperative that I keep that novel for the future which is now my past and present. The book was the second Hungarian edition of *Leave it to Psmith*.

The first edition was published before World War II, translated by Guthi Erzsébet, a remarkable woman. (Her son, Devecseri Gábor became a poet and a translator of ancient Greek and Latin literature and, coincidentally, her grandson was my schoolmate in elementary school.) Later I managed to obtain a copy of the first edition of her translation.

In one of his books, *Over Seventy*, Wodehouse (Plum to his friends) wrote that he was banned in Hungary. He even read that passage on his LP record, *Speaking Personally*. Well, I am not sure if his works were actually banned, but one thing is certain, that they were not published again until 1957. It is not very surprising – Psmith, for instance, keeps calling people ‘comrade’, and frequently makes fun of socialism, the official state religion of Hungary between 1948 and 1989.

The 1956 October revolution of Hungary, although crushed by Russian tanks, still brought about some major changes in the life of the country. For example, among many other authors popular between the two world wars, Plum could be published again. Before 1945, about a dozen of his books had been translated into Hungarian, half of them Jeeves stories, and now *Leave it to Psmith* was on the shelves again, in a very cheap paperback edition. Illustrations were drawn by Kaján Tibor, a great Hungarian cartoonist who about 20 years later became my friend and advisor in the period when I tried myself as a cartoonist.

At the tender age of ten to twelve, I went sort of crazy about Psmith. His eloquence, his unique choice of words and his whimsical associations served as a model for me. I started to imitate him, to



One of Tamas Revbiro's translations: *Uncle Dynamite*

speak like he would. Instead of saying straight yes or no, I gave elaborate and complicated answers to the simplest of questions. I must have been a very unusual kid, making people wonder about my sanity. I never pinched anyone's umbrella and did not throw flower-pots, mind you, but my verbal expression was as close to Psmith's as I could get.

At about the same age I started to learn English, and it felt like learning back something that I used to know. Then I studied it in high school and at the university, and now I make my living by translating books. The first complete book that I translated on contract was *Birds, Beasts and Relatives* by Gerald Durrell, and the second was *Sam the Sudden* by P G Wodehouse. I translated it at the age of 25 or 26, and it was published a few years later.

In the mid-Seventies, I went to the Szechenyi Library in Budapest, an institution that theoretically holds every book ever published in Hungary, and made a complete catalogue of the then twenty existing Hungarian PGW editions.

In total, I have to date translated twelve books of Wodehouse, and that is a record in my history. (The next in line is James Redfield with a mere six.) I have just completed the translation of *The Adventures of Sally*, but it has not yet been published. I have also written the article on Wodehouse in the 18-volume *Hungarian Encyclopaedia of World Literature*, a job that I am proud to have been commissioned with.

PGW's Hungarian Translators

2 Poór Bálint, Father Valentine OSB

Poór Bálint, Father Valentine OSB, is a Benedictine monk in his early forties, living in a very old abbey in Hungary. He writes:

How did I come to love Plum? It happened in the attic of my grandma's house, where I came across a copy of *Leave it to Psmith* – in Hungarian. I was 13 then and I fell in love with him right there, and my admiration for him has not died over the decades. Now I am 41, a Catholic priest, monk and a teacher in the grammar school next to our abbey.



Poór Bálint's first translation:
Heavy Weather

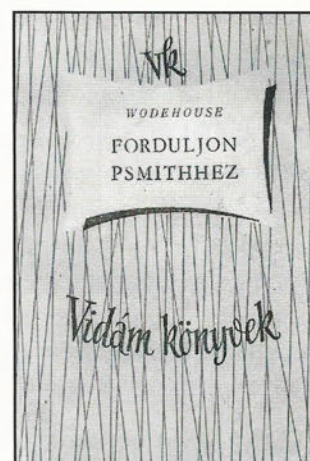
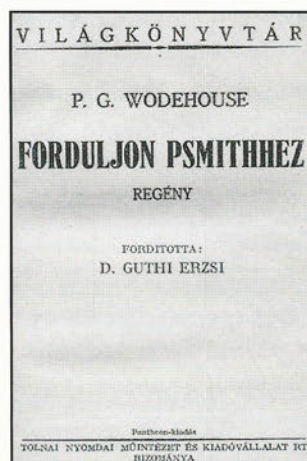
In my spare time I read Plum's novels. Some eight years ago it occurred to me to try to translate a chapter of *Heavy Weather*. It took me a whole week and I could not stop. But it took me a more than a year to finish the book, since I could do it only in my leisure time.

I now translate one book a year on average. So far I have done four (*Heavy Weather*, *A Damsel in Distress*, *Cocktail Time* and *Money in the Bank*). I am on friendly terms with my publishing company, Geopen Konyvkiado, and they expect me to do my translation every year. Usually they publish the books just before Christmas in runs of 5,000-8,000 copies and they sell quite well.

Editor's additional comments:

Both Tamas Revbiro and Father Valentine write that the book which stimulated their interest was the Hungarian translation of *Leave it to Psmith*, or *Forduljon Psmithhez*.

Remarkably, five different publishers have produced editions of this book, each using the translation of D. Guthi Erzsébet, the woman mentioned by Tamas Revbiro in his article. The first, in hard covers, appeared in 1929, and the title page is illustrated below. The second was the 1957 version, a paperback printed in two volumes, which Tamas borrowed from his young neighbour. These were identical on the outside front cover, and one is shown below. Other publishers followed suit with paperback editions in 1972, 1980 and 1991.



The first two editions of the Hungarian translation of *Leave It To Psmith*

Approximately forty different titles have been translated into Hungarian, although not all the Jeeves and Wooster novels can be counted among their number. Perhaps the lesser use of his familiar techniques of allusion and misquotation in some of Wodehouse's other novels have permitted the beleaguered translators a simpler task!

Tamas Revbiro's publisher is Europa Konyvkiado. Apart from this firm, and Geopen Konyvkiado, two other publishers have been active recently: Cicero and Haxel Kiado. And there have been at least three other translators in the last five years: Agnes Vitez, Zoltan Molnar and Marta Levai.

There seems to be no reason why the present regular supply of new Hungarian translations should peter out in the foreseeable future.

15th Anniversary of the Drones Club

Kris Smets, its President, writes about its evolution

On 13 October 1989, The Drones Club of Belgium was founded by four friends: *Walter Rens*, the musician; *Walter Van Braeckel*, a teacher in Dutch and English; *Marc Boogaerts* and *Kris Smets*, both young professionals in the university town Leuven. 'The club has no goal, but is a goal in itself' is the first paragraph of the clubs' statutes.

The first years were relaxed with occasional visits to our Dutch friends in Mulliners Wijnlokaal in Amsterdam. 1995 saw a break-through. Walter Rens inherited a country house, rebuilt it, and finally it was baptized *Millfleet Hall*. The next step was to create *The Drones coat of arms* symbolizing the four club values : *savoir vivre, comradeship, sense of humour and generosity*.

David Colvin, H M. Ambassador to Belgium became our patron and was succeeded after three years by *Mohammed Zamir*, Ambassador of Bangladesh to Belgium.

The Board of The Belgian Drones Club follows a strategy which they describe as 'Applied Wodehouse'. The life and work of P G Wodehouse is never far away, humour is always present, but the discourse is often widened to English literature in general. Step by step the club grows, gains new members and targets an important number of its operations upon unveiling commemorative plates :

2000: *Huy, the Citadel*, in remembrance of PGW's internment in the citadel of Huy;

2001: *Thiepval*, in remembrance of Hector Hugh Munro, alias Saki, killed in 1916 during the Battle of the Somme;

2002: *London HSBC Headquarters*, to remember PGW's short banking career.

Other activities, like the *The Great Balloon Hunt*, *The Drones Darts Tournament* and *A Day at the Races* have also been a great success during the period 1995-2000. Several guest speakers like Norman Murphy, Guido Latré and Tony Ring, have been invited to the club to demonstrate their knowledge of the Master and his work. The Drones also like to picnic in style, and many places in Belgium, France and England are the scene of a pastoral Drones picnic with champagne and strawberries.

With a fixed monthly club evening, three big activities and occasional trips, the club has its yearly program, mostly focused upon a specific theme. In 2003-2004 we are looking for *Ten Gentlemen*, people who correspond with the Drones Concept of 'Gentlemanship'. According to the Drones 'gentlemanship' is a question of *upbringing, moral code and character traits*. The cases of The Red Baron, Sir Philip Sidney, Wodehouse himself and three of his characters are being investigated. Are they or are they not gentlemen?

On Saturday 13 November 2004 the Drones Club celebrates its 15th anniversary. 'The Ultimate Gentleman' will be announced during this evening. All the highlights of The Drones history will also be on the agenda. It will take place at *The Castle of Schoonhoven*, an enormous 17th century chateau with a moat and 100 rooms. All members of other Wodehouse Societies are welcome. If you would like further information please send an e-mail to drones.club@pandora.be.

American Humorists

In the March 2004 issue, the Editor posed the question to American readers of *Editors' Tailpieces* as to whom Plum was referring to when he claimed there were only three American humorists in the 1930s.

Tom Smith suggested James Thurber and Thorne Smith, though he confessed to not finding the latter funny at all. David McDonough suggested Frank Sullivan (then at the *New York World*), and Robert Benchley from *Vanity Fair*.

Nobody could find three to suggest! And there was no enthusiastic support for a single name today.

Wodehouse: A Life – Offer

To celebrate the publication on September 2nd of Robert McCrum's new biography of Wodehouse (see page 1), described in the *Financial Times*, no less, as 'a tome more eagerly sought than Sir Watkyn Bassett's cow-creamer at Totleigh Towers', the publishers are offering Society members a 20% discount on the purchase price.

We are told that it is too early to circulate a flyer, which will be enclosed with September's *Wooster Sauce*. But if you are keen to take advantage of this offer before the end of September, keep an eye on our website, www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse, which will carry full details as soon as possible.

A Source of Misquotation

by Nigel Rees

Although I have been absent from these pages for a year, I have not been idle. In fact, if anything, my sleuthing around PGW's use of quotation and allusion has increased. All will become clear in September when my book with the title *A Word In Your Shell-Like* is published by Collins. It is a study of '6,000 curious and everyday phrases' and you can rest assured that PGW features largely for his use of, and inspired playing around with, such things.

Take my title phrase, used when asking to have a 'quiet word' with someone ('let me have a word *in your shell-like* (ear)'). This makes gentle fun of a poetic simile. Keats in 'To –' (1817) writes:

Had I a man's fair form, then might my sighs
Be echoed swiftly through that ivory shell
Thine ear'

and in *Bianca's Dream* (1827), Thomas Hood has: 'Her small and shell-like ear'. *The Complete Naff Guide* (1983) may have been right to include 'a word in your shell-like ear' among 'naff things schoolmasters say' but it was just the thing to catch PGW's attention. In *The Gourmet's Love-Song*, one of the first poems he ever contributed to *Punch* (24 December 1902), he wrote

So, Effie, turn that shell-like ear,
Nor to my sighing close it.

I'm not sure, however, whether he ever used it again.

Another phrase from my book is 'it seemed like a good idea at the time' – that limp excuse for something that has gone awry. Again, it is not hard to see what drew PGW to it. The late filmographer Leslie Halliwell suggested that this originated in a 1931 film called *The Last Flight*. In this story of a group of American airmen who remain in Europe after the First World War, one of them is gored to death when he leaps into the arena during a bullfight. Journalists outside the hospital ask his friend why the man should have done such a thing. The friend (played by Richard Barthelmess) replies: "Because it seemed like a good idea at the time."

Surely it is not a coincidence that in Chapter 11 of PGW's *Heavy Weather*, published less than two years later in 1933, we find:

The best, indeed, that you could really say of the great gesture . . . was that, like so many rash acts, it had seemed like a good idea at the time.

My pursuit of another of PGW's tropes gave me another phrase for my book. In *Ring for Jeeves*, Chapter 9 (1953), Rory refers to Monica (to whom he is married) as 'my old partner of joys and sorrows'. What was this, I asked myself? Well, Scott in *The Talisman*, Chap. 6 (1825) has:

The Almighty, who gave the dog to be companion
of our pleasures and our toils . . .'

and in Motteux's 1703 translation of *Don Quixote*, Sancho Panza refers to his horse Dapple as

my faithful companion, my friend, and fellow-sharer in my toils and miseries.

But there is little doubt that PGW was alluding to a passage from Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Chapter 42 (1849-50). In a letter to David, Mrs Micawber refers somewhat archly to herself, first as 'the bosom of affection – I allude to his wife' and then to 'the partner of his joys and sorrows – I again allude to his wife.'

Quite rightly, PGW doesn't clutter up his text with references and attributions. But sometimes one is curious whether he is quoting or alluding to or echoing those who had gone before him, or not. In *Performing Flea* (1953), he has a letter dated 4 November 1923 on planning a new novel:

I have now reached a point where deep thought is required. I am not sure I haven't got too much plot, and may have to jettison the best idea in the story. *I suppose the secret of writing is to go through your stuff till you come on something you think is particularly good, and then cut it out.*

This is strikingly similar to the advice that Dr Johnson adduced from his college tutor:

Read over your compositions, and where ever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.

We may never know whether PGW was consciously quoting this, but heigh ho, great minds think alike, what?

Editor's Note:

Nigel Rees masterminds the Quote . . . Unquote website which provides information about his radio programme of that name, and lists many of the unsolved queries submitted to it.

Emsworth Museum Commemorates the Centenary of PGW's Residence in the Town

Emsworth Museum celebrated the centenary of P G Wodehouse taking up residence in the town in 1904 with a special exhibition of Wodehouse memorabilia and exhibits representing Emsworth as it would have been in the period from 1904 to 1914. Tony Ring was invited to open the exhibition, which was to last for almost a month from April 10th and augmented the permanent Wodehouse material on display at the Museum.

Member Tessa Daines, who is the museum's curator, had undertaken considerable research in order to present the display. One subject was Emsworth House School, where Wodehouse stayed with Herbert Westbrook before taking the lease of Threepwood, in Record Road. Several photos accompanied a written description of the house, which proved to be the model for the school Sanstead House in *The Little Nugget*. Wodehouse's correspondence with his housekeeper, Lily, was displayed along with her wedding photograph. There was a display of contemporary photos taken along the route he would have walked from his house to the station, and information about contemporary local events.

It was while at Emsworth in 1905 that Wodehouse started to learn the banjo, only to have it 'borrowed' and pawned by Westbrook. This incident was utilised later in the story *Ukridge's Accident Syndicate* and must surely have been in the back of Wodehouse's mind when he started to write *Thank You, Jeeves* in the 1930s. A banjo was included in the exhibition, with contemporary sheet-music.

The present owners of the house Threepwood, which sports a commemorative plaque, are Tim and Maggie Hart. Both were present, and it is encouraging to know that since discovering that it had once been home to an illustrious resident Tim has become a firm Wodehouse enthusiast.

The Museum is open until 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. It is situated at 10b North Street, there is a small adjacent car park, and a stairlift available to reach the main exhibits.



*Maggie Hart, Tessa Daines, Tony Ring and Tim Hart
at the opening of the Special Exhibition*

Photo: John Saunders

Summer Lightning at Northampton

A new production of Giles Havergal's adaptation of *Summer Lightning* at the Royal Theatre, Northampton, ran from May 21 to June 12.

Giles Havergal's script is very clever. It is unfortunate that in cutting a 230 page book to the 60 or 70 pages of dialogue permitted in a two-and-a-half hour play an important character has to be omitted, but Havergal's excision of the Secretary, Baxter, is seamless. His exclusion provides Havergal with the space to permit use of a very substantial part of Wodehouse's humorous narrative, normally the part of a book which cannot be transferred to the stage. He does this very effectively by having most of the characters speak their own descriptive narrative, while the rest of the cast on stage freeze.

The experience of the cast was very mixed. Amy Brown, who played Sue Brown, was making her professional debut, and performed particularly well. Several others who stood out were James Woolley as Beach; William Mannering (a frantic Ronnie Fish); Giles Taylor (Hugo Carmody); and Tom Edden (the slimiest Pilbeam yet seen). Beards worn by Tim Hardy, as Gally, and Richard Kane (Lord Emsworth) were highly inappropriate, and Marty Cruickshank's Constance Keeble insufficiently austere. Miranda Colchester as Millicent Threepwood (like Amy Brown making her professional debut) was very good in an underwritten part.

When One and One and One Make Fives . . .

In *Wooster Sauce for March* (Fives Bats: A Hundred-year-old Mystery), Nicholas Aldridge speculated on the relationship of today's game of Fives to the version known in Lord Ickenham's youth, when he used a Fives bat to punish Mugsy Bostock for bullying (as recalled in *Uncle Dynamite*).

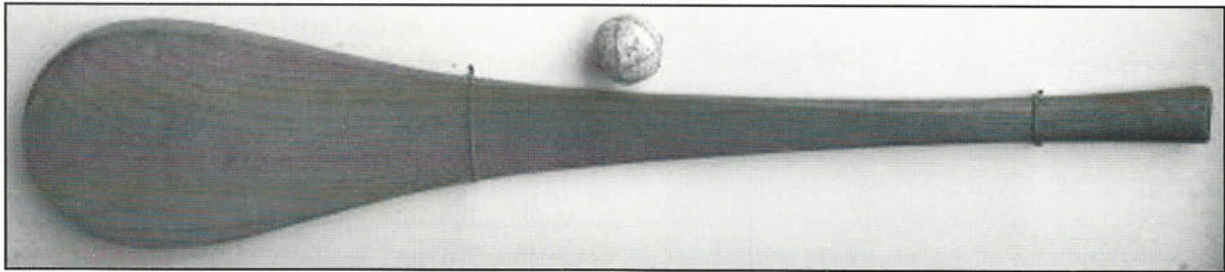
Murray Hedgcock took up the challenge.

"Bat, Fives – oh yes, I think we've a got a bat in the archives", said the helpful librarian at Shrewsbury School. And so they had.

The picture she provided should help resolve that mystery about the arcane world of Fives – today played in a semi-enclosed space, the ball struck with a gloved hand. Three prime versions are played: Eton Fives the most popular, named, like Rugby Fives and Winchester Fives, from schools where they flourished, and they are all offshoots of real tennis, along with rackets, squash rackets, and lawn tennis.

The bat version crops up in classic fiction – as in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, where Tom recalls gardening duties 'grubbing in the tough dirt with the stump of a Fives bat'.

As to the punishment handed out by Plum's Old Boys, there is an echo in reminiscences of Aldenham in the Twenties by A W Rooke: 'Corporal punishment was still in vogue, and the standard weapon was the Potty Bat (Fives Bat)'. The Headmaster of New Zealand's prestigious Wanganui Collegiate School late in the 19th Century was



*Length of the bat is 52 cms, the head is 10 cms wide and the ball about 3 cms across.
(Special thanks to Caroline Auger of Shrewsbury).*

There are about 4,000 adult Fives players in Britain, with a similar number in schools. Eton Fives clubs flourish in Switzerland and Northern Nigeria. The Rugby game has links to clubs in South Africa and the United States.

So – whence the bat? It is a variant that died out probably between the wars.

The terms 'Fives' and 'handball' seemed interchangeable in early days, the essayist Hazlitt in 1819 referring to the great John Cavanagh 'playing Hand/Fives'. A newspaper advertisement back in 1742 illustrated the games played in a single court:

To all Gentlemen that like the exercise of Tennis, Fives or Billiards. There is a complete Tennis-Court, with a Tambour and everything that makes it as good a Tennis-Court as any in England, at 1s a Set single or 6d a Set double; with Fives-playing in the Tennis-Court and Billiards at the same place. It's near the Bull and Gate Inn, Holborn, next door to Adlam's Coffee-House, opposite Little Turnstile. It's kept by Thomas Higginson, who keeps a Fives Court at the bottom of St Martin's Street. It's for Fives-playing only either with Racquets, Boards or at Hand-Fives at 2d, 3d or 4d a Game.

Walter Empson, who meted out punishment 'with a Fives bat for maximum sound and moral effect'.

And as recently as September 28, 2003, *The Colombo Sunday Leader* carried a light-hearted politics column by one Henry Harbottle, calling the nation's President to take disciplinary action against her politician brother, in 'a time of Government chaos . . . You might just get him to bend over and give him six of the best with a Fives bat right on his blue pantaloons.'

But – I have found no answer to that final query by Nicholas Aldridge: *How can Fives be called squash?*

The Smile That Wins Favourite Nifties - 27

From far away in the distance came the faint strains of the town band, as it picked its way through the *Star of Eve* song from *Tannhäuser* – somewhat impeded by the second trombone, who had got his music sheets mixed up and was playing *The Wedding of the Painted Doll*.

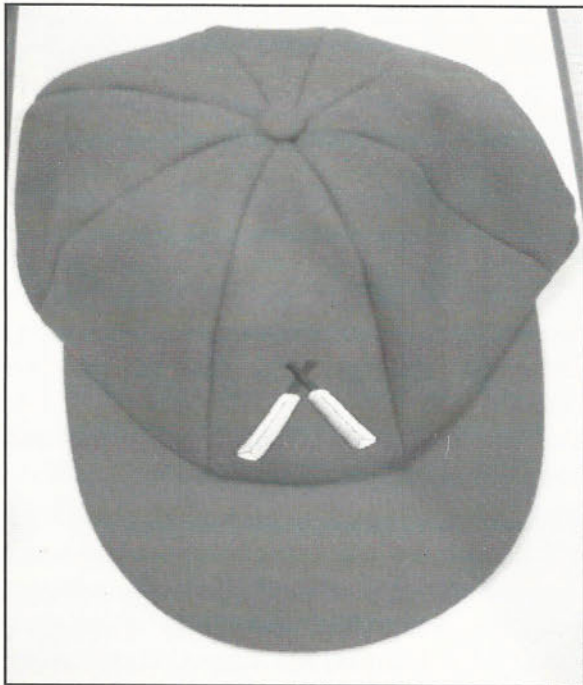
From *Best Seller*, in *Mulliner Nights* (1933)

Tales from the Long Room

by Paul Rush

Friday 26th March saw the first dinner of The Gold Bats, the cricket team of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK). Fittingly the venue was the Cricket Club of London in Blandford Street, and, equally fittingly, we were joined by cricketing members of the Sherlock Holmes Society. Ironically, the team of such a literary society does not have a name although this may of course change before the teams' annual encounter on 26th June. However, back to the dinner.

An excellent 3-course meal consisting of soup, steak and kidney pudding with a fruit salad to follow was enjoyed by all. Cricketing tales of matches past were re-lived and old battles of bat and ball re-fought. Future exploits of great derring-do were promised.



The Headgear of The Gold Bats

The Society's cricket cap, two crossed gold bats on a plum background, received its first public airing and was much admired. Murray Hedgcock, whose presence will be sadly missed at this season's encounters, gave a witty address touching on the cricketing pedigree of both Wodehouse and Doyle. Bowling from the other end, as it were, Peter Horricks replied for the Sherlockians, thanking Bob Miller for organising the event, sentiments echoed by all present.

As satisfied diners walked into the night in search of last trains and buses, it was universally agreed that this function should become a permanent feature of our cricketing calendar.

'Down Among the Wines and Spirits'

explained by Neil Midkiff and Norman Murphy

'What did Wodehouse mean when he described someone as feeling this way,' asked American member Neil Midkiff, 'as in *Sonny Boy* from *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*. I always took this as a comic circumlocution for being depressed, or feeling low, ie in the cellar, where the wines were stored. But recently I came across what might be an alternative explanation. In *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, by David Robinson (McGraw Hill, 1985), he explains that Chaplin's mother Hannah was a talented but troubled music-hall singer. Her career was brief and not triumphant, her performances all being in small provincial music halls. They were advertised on the programmes at the bottom of the bill 'among the wines and spirits', as they said in a day when music halls were still often also drinking places, and the artists' names were followed on the printed programme by the tariff of refreshments.

'Her cited performances began in 1886, and her career was pretty much over by the time Charlie was born in 1889, which means this expression was current when Wodehouse was a boy. By this explanation, the meaning would be one of relative insignificance, a mere filler on the program compared to the headliners.'

Norman Murphy agreed, adding that music halls evolved around 1869, when London pub owners started building a special music room at the back of their pubs for their customers to hear songs sung. These became bigger and bigger, and eventually the 'music hall' had become far more important than the pub. They were, in fact, the first variety theatres.

Up to 1914, some of these music halls would have up to 30 different performers. The bills (posters) advertising that week's show were long, thin, oblong affairs, and the performers were shown in order of importance. Hence, 'top of the bill' for the stars and 'down among the wine and spirits' for the least well-known. If you were down at the bottom, your name was so small it could hardly be read, and it was immediately above the advertisement for the brewery that provided the liquor.

I SAY!

Favourite Exchanges - 25

"Mike and I are going to be married."

"But you told me you didn't like him."

"Just a slip of the tongue."

From *Do Butlers Burgle Banks*, 1968

The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

Chap with a Good Story to Tell

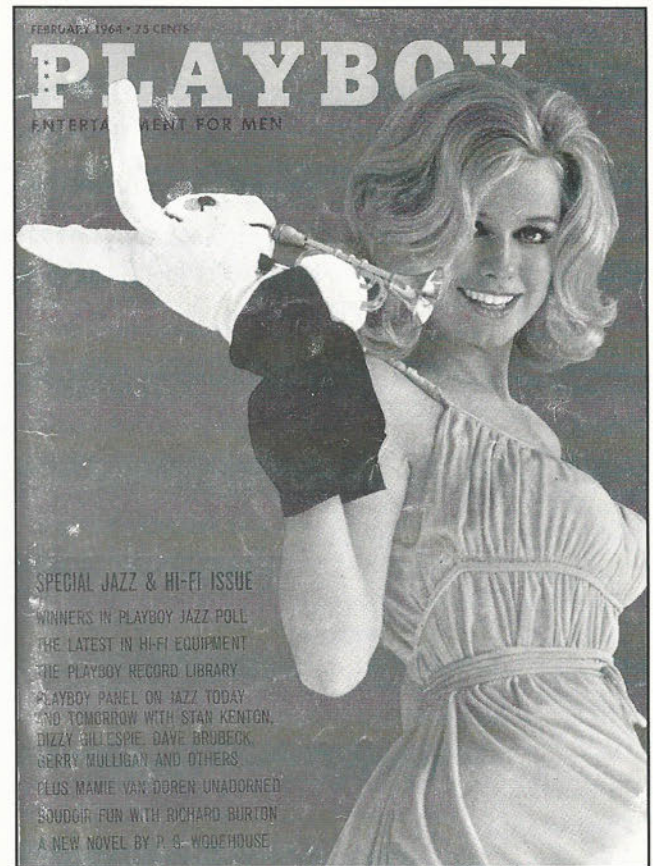
If you're expecting this column to deal with Wodehouse's volume of theatrical reminiscences, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed: this month's subject is actually Wodehouse's twenty appearances in *Playboy* magazine.

As mentioned in this column in September 2003, in the first half of Wodehouse's career most of his novels and stories were originally published in various magazines before appearing in book form. In the second half of his career, after the Second World War, the magazine market in general declined. The demise of *The Strand* in 1949 prompted Wodehouse to ask 'How on earth does a young writer of light fiction get going these days? Where can he sell his stories?' (*Performing Flea*, 13 December, 1949).

One new magazine which did publish light fiction was *Playboy*, which first appeared in 1954. Wodehouse's own debut in *Playboy* came shortly afterwards, in April 1955, with the Ukridge short story *A Tithe for Charity* (McIlvaine D51.1). This appeared in book form in 1959 in the UK edition of *A Few Quick Ones* (A82b), but was omitted from the US edition.

After this, other stories and articles followed fairly regularly, such that by mid-1963 Wodehouse had eight appearances to his name. By this time, however, he was somewhat equivocal about his appearances in the magazine. He wrote to Guy Bolton to report the sale of the US first serial rights to *Biffen's Millions* (*Frozen Assets* to UK readers): 'Fine in a way, but when you consider that at any moment *Playboy* is likely to be scooped in by the police as an indecent publication, one wonders if one ought to be a contributor' (14 August 1963, quoted in the James Heineman auction catalogue, lot 118). According to Barry Phelps (*PG Wodehouse: Man and Myth*, p111), Wodehouse expressed similar comments in a letter of 26 January 1964; however, as far as I am aware, this letter has not yet been published.

Wodehouse was not alone in taking the *Playboy* dollar. Other prominent authors appearing in the same issues as Wodehouse included Ray Bradbury, Len Deighton, Ian Fleming, Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, John Le Carré and Vladimir Nabokov. And there were interviews with Michael Caine, Fidel Castro, Robert Graves, Bertrand Russell and Frank Sinatra.



Playboy, February 1964, which included the first instalment of *Biffen's Millions*

Wodehouse returned to the subject of *Playboy* in another letter. 'It makes an awful difference having no magazines to write for. Of course, I do have things published in *Playboy*. They've published all my latest stories, the last dozen or so, but they take such a time using them. I never like the way they look in *Playboy* at all. I hate a fussed-up magazine like that; half the page devoted to a naked girl, a bit to your story.' This letter is quoted by Joseph Connolly (*PG Wodehouse: An Illustrated Biography*, p121), but he does not give the date of the letter, so this might be the 26 January 1964 letter cited by Phelps.

As an example of the length of time it took *Playboy* to use a story, *Biffen's Millions* was serialised in February and March 1964 (D51.10-11), some six months after Wodehouse had written to Bolton about the sale. It eventually appeared in book form on July 14, 1964, in the USA (A87a) and exactly a month later in the UK (A87b).

In the next issue, I will look at Wodehouse's other contributions to *Playboy*.

The Novel Life of P G Wodehouse

by Roderick Easdale

Review by Tony Ring

Roderick Easdale was one of the original members of our Society, and he has written an intelligent, personal, enthusiast's view of Wodehouse's fiction. His new researches into Wodehouse's life have been relatively few, but his thoughts on the motivation behind some of the books are of considerable interest. Even so, while he relies principally on existing publications for his biographical material, he has been meticulous in separating the facts from the fiction which many of those publications contain, and it is pleasing that he specifies *Information Sheet 10* on the Society website as a source for part of his analysis of the wartime hiatus.

Easdale is very confident in expressing his ideas about some well-worn aspects of Wodehouse's work, and it is refreshing that he does not slavishly follow opinions expressed in previous writings. He writes intelligently, putting his own slant on oft-discussed topics:

There is a strain of opinion that holds that because Wodehouse wrote of the upper classes he must be on their side. By which logic, detective story-writers writing about murderers are on the side of the killers.

He expresses the view that much of Wodehouse's writing is to some degree anarchistic, especially where Jeeves is concerned. He contrasts Jeeves's moral code with Bertie's code of honour, and points out that Jeeves can thereby solve problems which Bertie is not able to.

Anarchism has its own variants, one of which states that any action by an individual is permitted so long as that individual's conscience can live with it. . . . Jeeves's own moral code is much looser [than Bertie's], and so he is able to countenance a much wider scope of action. . . . The rules that govern the actions of the characters in Wodehouse's world are not those of a law-enforcing and legislating body, but of the individuals themselves.

Overall, the shortish paperback is well-constructed, and represents a useful introduction to the man and his considerable output. Members who read *The Novel Life of P G Wodehouse* may not agree with all of Easdale's opinions: that is to be expected of a personal analysis of this nature. But that is part of the fun of Wodehouse; if everyone agreed about all his characters, his work would immediately seem somewhat duller!

Publisher: Cyhoeddwy'r y Superscript Ltd 196pp
ISBN 0 9542913 60 £ 10.00

Meet Mr Mulliner

BBC Radio Series on CD

Review by Katy Griffiths

Let me confess that I am a newcomer to Mr Mulliner, whilst I have adored 'Jeeves & Wooster' since first stumbling across them in a musty bookshop in an Indian monsoon and the BBC audiotapes have made even the British motorway network enjoyable. I was doubtful whether anything else could come close. Fortunately, *Meet Mr Mulliner* does not disappoint.

Mr Mulliner's tall tales of his assorted relatives include familiar Wodehouse themes: love-struck young men, assertive aunts, pale curates and country house parties. Richard Griffiths, in the title role, narrates his stories to his fellow drinkers at the Angler's Rest with a consummate sense of comic timing.

The small troupe of actors double up on parts, playing both the pub habitués and the characters within Mr Mulliner's anecdotes. Matilda Ziegler is superb in her roles as all six heroines, from the feyest of ingénues in *Honeysuckle Cottage* to the heartless parasol-wielding avenger in *Open House*. Peter Acre, also in *Open House*, also gives a glorious performance as the menacing Orlando Weatherspoon, Perpetual Vice President of Our Dumb Chums League.

A lovely touch is the 30s music (complete with authentic-sounding gramophone hiss) which punctuates the stories. On the other hand, one area of the production that baffles me is the sound effects: has the BBC recently had a cost-cutting exercise, or are they replicating 1930's methods? Squeaky balls for instance, seem to represent excited dogs (possibly to ensure that no dumb animals were injured in the making of the plays).

My only other gripe is the unconvincing regional accents: Martin Heider's Scottish brogue in *Honeysuckle Cottage* is straight out of the Radio 4 comedy *Hamish and Dougal*; Yorkshire and American accents fare little better. However, these are but minor quibbles.

As is to be expected, there are gems scattered throughout the stories, for example: 'he didn't want her to find that her beloved [bird] was inextricably mixed up with the gastric juices of a cat which the girl did not even know by sight', in *Open House*; the Sherlock Holmes parody of the mystery of the missing soap in *The Smile that Wins*; and the uplifting episode of *Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo* in its entirety (where a timorous curate becomes emboldened thanks to elephant tonic).

This new release from the BBC Radio Collection allows for repeated listening and has won its place in the glove compartment. Roll on the next Mulliner compilation . . .

The Audiobook Collection Freephone 0800 136919
ISBN: 0-563-52396-4 £ 15.99

The Complete Lyrics of P G Wodehouse

reviewed by Rex Bunnett

The Complete Lyrics of P G Wodehouse - edited by Barry Day. Published by Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2004 ISBN 0-8108-4994-1

The title does not really give due credit to this important reference work. For, in addition to the promised complete lyrics, we get an informative narrative about many of the songs and shows with quotes and other glorious pieces of extra information. This helps make the book a compulsive read. The introduction, in particular, is a well researched and perceptive piece that entices one to explore the lyrical side of P G Wodehouse.

The first known lyric is dated 1904 when Wodehouse was already a working journalist and novelist. Over the next few years he had a number of songs interpolated into shows and, in particular, had a strong relationship with actor/manager Sir Seymour Hicks. It was during this period that he first met Jerome Kern with whom he later had such an important collaboration. His first complete show was the revue *Nuts and Wine* which ran for eleven weeks in 1914 and covered subjects close to his heart such as journalism, taxes, politics, immigration and the different cultures of the United States and Great Britain, both of which he knew at firsthand. It is a pity that his future limited revue writing was for the extravaganza type that had no political or contemporary bite.

***Honeymoon Inn* (from *Have a Heart*, 1917)**

Life's always May there,
For sweethearts who stray there,
Away from the bustle and din.
All days are gay there
And no days are gray there.
When you're at the Honeymoon Inn.

It still amazes many that it was the very English Wodehouse who was to set the American musical on the course of becoming the Broadway art-form with a set of musicals that have become known as the Princess Shows. One of the interesting facts one discovers from the book is the relationship he had with fellow collaborator of these shows, Guy Bolton, who remained his closest friend and collaborator until his death. Their work with Jerome Kern and the kindling of the Broadway musical is nicely documented and Mr Day has done well in endeavouring to sort out fact from folk lore.

The book also talks of Wodehouse's method of work for, unlike the ground-breaking lyricist W S Gilbert, he preferred to write his lyrics to tunes already composed. That is why Gilbert's lyrics can be read as poetry and Wodehouse's cry out for the music that they were written for to ensure thorough enjoyment. Hopefully, this book will encourage further songs to be recorded and we can then hear what inspired his intricate rhythms and thoughts.

It is a handsome book that is illustrated with photographs and original art work. One tiny quibble is that the show details have been brought forward from previous books including the authorised biography by Donaldson and the theatrical tome by Jasen which tend to have quite a few incorrect performance details.

***Shimmy With Me* (from *The Cabaret Girl*, 1922)**

If you find you're getting the hump
If you are feeling blue,
If your nerves are all on the jump,
I'll tell you what to do;
Just get up and shimmy a while,
That's the thing for you.

In all Wodehouse wrote the libretto and/or lyrics for almost forty shows between 1904 and 1934. After an unsuccessful Hollywood 'sabbatical', musical theatre took a back seat. However, while his books and articles made him a rich man it is obvious that his great love was lyric writing. He even considered his novels to be musical comedies without the music. It is a pity he did not find lyrical success after this golden period – but he still tried, for he wrote to Bolton in 1945: 'I am concentrating now on writing lyrics of the type that will fit in anywhere, but I find it awfully hard to get anything done without a book and a composer to inspire me.' There were attempts to come back to the stage and these are documented in this fascinating book.

One of the last shows he worked on was *Anything Goes* in 1934. He is still credited for the original book with the present successful revival but, as Mr Day points out, the book was greatly altered when the show opened; and not by him. He did, however, anglicise two numbers for the London showing and it is interesting to see the changes he made. But this is the kind of book it is – lots of facts and interesting points that help bring the lyrics to life and give an insight into the man himself.

Recent Press Comment

The Saga Magazine, February 14

In an article discussing what is artistic genius, Paul Johnson wrote of PGW: ‘talent, talent, talent at all times, but some would say that the *oeuvre* as a whole betokens a kind of stylistic genius ...’

The Times, February 15

Amanda Craig wrote that she preferred ‘to think of dear P G Wodehouse, who ate, drank, smoked and lived into his 90s surrounded by love and laughter, than listen to miserable gits and live in total blandness’.

The Times, February 18

Valerie Grove noted that PGW pinpointed the humanoid tendency in a domestic pet, quoted his description of the cat Webster and noted the Calvinistic tendencies that Wodehouse found in the Aberdeen terrier Angus.

My Way News, February 23

Reported the death in China of a 1,980 lb pig which died from lack of exercise.

Financial Times (website), February 24

Charles Pretzlik and Jane Croft wrote about John Varley, chief executive designate of Barclays, and said that the impression he gave was of a fancy-dress banker who had strolled off the pages of *Psmith in the City*.

The Times, March 4

The correct definition of ‘Agrapha’ in the *Word Watching* quiz was given as ‘The collective name for sayings attributed to Jesus, but not recorded in the canonical gospels’. Philip Howard added that it can be used for any apocryphal quotations, such as ‘Elementary, my dear Watson’ which appeared in *Psmith*, *Journalist* rather than a Holmes book.

Sunday Times, March 7 (*Style*)

In *Spring Fever*, 140 pages of ‘the sexiest fashions’, one of the necessary accessories to be seen with was stated to be *The Jeeves books by P G Wodehouse*.

Daily Telegraph, March 8 (from Murray Hedgcock)

An article about Muriel Spark and her friend Penelope Jardine pointed out their mutual dislike of jokes and their mutual abhorrence of Wodehouse.

The Times, March 13 (from John Hayzelden)

Philip Howard referred to one enquiry to his *Modern Times* column (about whether a person should try to beat his client in a golf match) as ‘a *Clicking of Cuthbert* scenario’.

BBC News (website), March 23

Reported the first piglet derby to be held in Moscow since 1898 (though see September 2003 *Sauce* for a

comparative UK event.) On April 8, *The Times* provided a photograph of four pigs ‘enthraling a crowd in Sydney during a race at the city’s annual Royal Easter Show, celebrating Australia’s agricultural industry’.

Daily Mirror, March 30

Announced that Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie are to play Holmes and Watson in a TV adaptation of a Sherlock Holmes book.

Book and Magazine Collector, March

In an interview, John Connolly said that *Joy in the Morning*, which he described as ‘pretty well flawless’, is his favourite Jeeves book, and *Mulliner Nights* is his favourite of the rest.

Daily Mail, March 31 and April 1

The answer to the quiz question *Who Said ‘He was the greatest musician of the English language’ About Whom* was that Douglas Adams said it about PGW.

Guardian, April 11

In an interview with Ingmar Bergman, whose films are renowned for their pessimism, the writer commented that ‘To paraphrase PGW, it has never been difficult to distinguish between a Swede with an existential crisis and a ray of sunshine’.

Daily Telegraph, April 12 (from Norman Murphy)

William Deedes had received a cutting from the *Wellington News* with pictures of Apley Castle. The reader had read the article (which linked the house to Blandings) to his 95-year-old aunt. She remarked that Minna Jeeves, daughter of a Mr Jeeves, butler at Apley at the time, had been a school friend.

The Times, April 16

Reported that at a memorial service for Dinsdale Lansden, Sir Tom Courtenay read from *The Heart of a Goof*.

The New Yorker, April 19 and 26

A long (11 page) article by Anthony Lane, entitled *Beyond a Joke*, has been mentioned very favourably by a number of its readers, whilst others regard it as no more than a self-indulgent reminiscence from someone still prepared to promote an erroneous analysis of the wartime broadcasts. Two letters commenting on the article appeared in the May 10 issue.

Daily Telegraph, April 20

An editorial mentioning Bob Dylan’s appearance in a lingerie advertisement and approving Anthony Lane’s article in the *New Yorker*, remembered the *Eulalie Soeurs* passage in *The Code of the Woosters*.

Recent Press Comment, continued

Cincinnati Post, April 24 (from Murray Hedgcock)

In an article on natural solutions for hair care, used the well-known PGW quip that the only cure for grey hair was invented by a Frenchmen and called the guillotine.

Daily Mail, April 25

Clare Hall wrote an article entitled *Luxury and Banking the P G Wodehouse way*, referring to the increased use of domestic help.

The Times, May 1

In breaking the welcome news that the *Punch* archive of letters is to be housed at the British Library, Giles Whittell pointed out that *Punch* published Wodehouse before Wodehouse published Jeeves, and also turned down Dickens.

Chicago Sun Times, May 5 (from Murray Hedgcock)

Writing a controversial article about the UN and Iraq, John O'Sullivan used Wodehouse's 'meanwhile, unnoticed in the background, fate was quietly slipping lead into the boxing glove'.

Guardian, May 5

In reporting the death of the 11th Duke of Devonshire, stated that he had a 'bluff, self-deprecating and humorous exterior seemingly modelled on a character straight out of the world of P G Wodehouse'.

Bill Sylvester's Books

Member Bill Sylvester wants to dispose of a number of duplicate books by and about Wodehouse. The PGW editions are reprints or paperbacks, priced between £1 and £5; the others include biographies by Donaldson, Green, etc between £2 and £12; and there are some hardback Hutchinson omnibuses for from £5 to £20. For details contact Bill,

Forthcoming Audiobooks

Fans of the unabridged audiobook will be pleased to learn of two new recordings which Jonathan Cecil has just made for BBC Audio Books (formerly Chivers).

They are *Piccadilly Jim* and *Ukridge*, and confirmation is awaited that they will be published later this year.

For details of the 34 readings already available, contact The Audiobook Collection, Freephone 0800 136919, or visit www.audiobookcollection.com

Poets' Corner Vale!

Gone! Is it possible? Thus do the years
Steal from us all we could wish to retain.
All that is pleasant in life disappears,
Only the sorrows and worries remain.
What though a church on the spot where it stood,
Methodist church, be erected instead?
What though the object's undoubtedly good?
Weep, for the Royal Aquarium's dead.

Many's the time I have pored o'er its sights,
Sights of which I at least could not tire;
Watched on a dozen consecutive nights
Blondin the Great as he strolled on the wire.
Here was variety Time could not stale;
Oft and again have I eagerly run,
Now to set eyes on the Labrador Whale,
Now on the lady they shot from a gun.

Here I marked Slavin's and Sullivan's skill,
Notable experts in 'counter' and 'fib',
Watched with a relish their world-famous 'mill',
Cheered when the *caestus* came home on a rib.
Here, too, I learned that to some kangaroos
Skill has been given to spar with the hoof.
Here of an evening I'd quake in my shoes,
Watching Miss Luker dive down from the roof.

Hobson his seal, Pongo's Simian face,
Zaeo (the bane of a shocked LCC),
Sandow, the feminine bicycle race –
These were the sights that ecstasised me.
Here I saw Roberts, the king of the cue,
Gazed on him daily, nor found it a bore,
Envied an eye so unerringly true.
Ah, that such visions shall charm me no more!

Still, when the logs are heaped cheerily high,
And in the chimney is howling the blast,
And when the beaker stands handily by,
I shall revisit the scenes of the past,
Muse o'er a pipe of the days that are dead,
Dream that once more I am able to scan
Closely the bird with the duplicate head,
Live once again with the Petrified Man.

This poem first appeared in *Punch*, January 21, 1903, following the announcement that a church was to be erected on the site of the Royal Aquarium.

FUTURE EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

July 6, 2004 – The Savage Club

The summer meeting of members in London, at which our guest speaker will be David Jasen. 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.

August 12, 2004 – Golf Match

The second Cow-Creamer Challenge at Exeter Golf and Country Club.

September 2, 2004 – New Biography

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

September 11, 2004 – Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Join the last 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.

October 21, 2004 – Society Formal Dinner

The biennial black tie dinner to be held at the Inner Temple. *Application forms are enclosed with this issue.*

November 9, 2004 – The Savage Club

At the autumn meeting, the 2004 AGM will be held and Robert McCrum will speak about his newly-published PGW biography.

February 15, 2005 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the winter meeting.

July 12, 2005 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the summer meeting.

August 11-14, 2005 – TWS Convention, Hollywood

Advance notification of date of the next convention of the American Wodehouse Society, which will be held on the UCLA campus in Hollywood.

October 11, 2005 – The Savage Club

Advance notice of the date of the autumn meeting.

EDITOR'S TAILPIECES

the Society's website, has been chosen as the *Cool Site* in the Wodehouse section of the *Open Directory*. There are some 31 Wodehousean sites listed in the Directory (which is used as a basis for search engines such as Google and calls itself 'the definitive catalog of the web'). Father Rob Bovendeaard, a regular entrant in the website's weekly quiz, has recently taken over as editor of the Wodehouse category in the *Open Directory* and has bestowed this honour on our website. We are hoping that the award will result in an increase in visitors to the website, although at a current average of about 2,500 visits per month, we are not doing badly already. To find the Wodehouse area in the Open Directory go to <http://dmoz.org/Arts/Literature/Authors/Humor/Wodehouse, P. G./>.

Alexander Dainty has discovered that 'Bohea', the brand of tea referred to by Bertie Wooster in *Joy in the Morning* chapter 5, is regarded as an inferior brand of black tea by the Editors of the *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*.

Louise O'Connor has drawn attention to a soap named 'Bertie' (in honour of Bertie Wooster) which she found in a mail order catalogue for Lush

(www.lush.com). It is made of liquorice, detoxifying fennel and revitalising pine, and the blurb points out that Bertie was usually in need of a bit of revitalising and detoxifying in the morning! But they don't supply a Jeeves to run the bath as well.

Louise has also asked why someone as brainy as Jeeves should have worked as a gentleman's personal gentleman, rather than being head of an Oxbridge College or something similar. Readers' suggestions are invited (in a maximum of 100 words) as to which other occupations might have benefited from his attentions. *

Harshawardhan Nimkhedhkar has found an entry in a dictionary which should interest Wodehouse readers: *materteral*. It is apparently defined as 'Pertaining to, or in the manner of, an aunt'. It is further described as 'the feminine equivalent of avuncular', and may be used 'to make direct reference to an aunt or her auntly activities, or to invoke characteristics commonly associated with aunts: usually kindly solicitude, although fans of PG Wodehouse's fictional character Bertie Wooster will be aware that materteral interventions can also be entirely unwelcome. An equally rare alternative with the same meaning is materterine.'