



WOOSTER SAUCE

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

Number 49

March 2009

Right Ho, Sahib: Wodehouse and India

by Shashi Tharoor

Toast given at the Society's dinner on October 24, 2008

It gives me great pleasure . . . Oh no, I shouldn't have said that. I've forgotten the first of the Gussie Fink-Nottle Rules for Public Speaking, which we at the Wodehouse Society of St. Stephen's College had drawn up for our extempore speech contests. The first of those was: "Never begin a speech with the words 'It gives me great pleasure.'" We used to write topics on scraps of paper, drop them into a bin, draw them at random, and have to speak, all while following the Gussie Fink-Nottle Rules. Well, I had the misfortune of once drawing the topic "Sex". So I said, "It gives me great pleasure" and sat down again.

But I won't let you off so easily tonight. However, don't worry. I now belong to the Bertram Wooster School of public speaking. As Bertie said to his fiancées, I shall not keep you long.

It was at the Hay-on-Wye Festival a few years ago that I realised with horror how low the fortunes of P. G. Wodehouse had sunk in his native land. I was on stage for a panel discussion on the works of the Master when the moderator, a suave literary impresario, began the proceedings by asking innocently, "So how do you pronounce it – is it Woad-house or Wood-house?"

Woadhouse? You could have knocked me over with the proverbial feather. A luminary at the premier book event in the British Isles had no idea how to pronounce the name of the man I regarded as the finest English writer since Shakespeare. I spent the rest of the discussion looking

(to echo a description of Bertie Wooster's Uncle Tom) like a pterodactyl with a secret sorrow.

Like many of my compatriots, I had discovered Wodehouse young and pursued my delight across the 95 volumes of the Master's oeuvre, savouring book after book as if the pleasure would never end. When All India Radio announced in February 1975 that P. G. Wodehouse had died, a cloud of darkness settled over my day. The (belatedly) knighted Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, creator of Jeeves and of the Empress of Blandings, was in his 94th year, but his death still came as a shock. Three decades earlier, Wodehouse had reacted to the passing of his stepdaughter, Leonora, with the numbed words: "I thought she was immortal." I had always thought Wodehouse was immortal too.

For months before his death, I had procrastinated over a letter to Wodehouse. It was a fan letter written on the letterhead (complete with curly-tailed pig) of the Wodehouse Society of St Stephen's College, Delhi University. Ours was then the only Wodehouse Society in the world – I await contradiction, I hear none! – and I was its president, a distinction I prized. The Society ran mimicry and comic speech contests and organised the annual Lord Ickenham Memorial Practical Joke Week, the bane of all who took themselves too seriously. The Society's underground rag, *Spice*,

edited by a classmate who was to go on to become a counsellor to the Prime Minister of India, was the most popular newspaper on campus; even its misprints were deliberate and funny.



Dr Shashi Tharoor delivers the toast at the Society's biennial dinner in October.

(Photo by Ginni Beard)

I had wanted to tell the Master this and gladden his indulgent heart with the tribute being paid to him at this outpost of Wodehouseana thousands of miles away from any place he had ever written about. But I had never been satisfied by any of my drafts of the letter. It had to be just right. Of course, it never was, and now I would never be able to establish this small connection to the writer who had given me more joy than anything else in my life.

The loss was personal, but it was widely shared: P. G. Wodehouse was by far the most popular English-language writer in India. His erudite butlers, absent-minded earls and silly-ass aristocrats, out to pinch policemen's helmets or perform acts of petty larceny at the behest of tyrannical aunts, are beloved by most educated Indians. I cannot think of an Indian family I know that does not have at least one Wodehouse book, and most have several. In a country where most people's earning capacity has not kept up with publishing inflation and book-borrowing is part of the culture, libraries stock multiple copies of Wodehouse. At the British Council libraries in major cities, demand for Wodehouse reputedly outstrips that for any other author, so that each month's list of "new arrivals" includes reissues of old Wodehouse favourites. Wodehouse's death was page one news in every English-language newspaper in India; the articles and letters in the following days would have filled volumes.

Since his death, much has changed in India, but Wodehouse still commands the heights. His works are sold on railway station platforms and in airport bookstalls. In 1988 the state-run television network broadcast a 10-part Hindi adaptation of his *Leave It to Psmith*, with the castle of the Earl of Emsworth becoming the Rajasthani palace of an indolent Maharaja. (A disaster: Wodehousean purists were appalled by the changes, and English humour does not translate too well into Hindi.) Quiz contests, popular in urban India, continue to feature questions about Wodehouse's books ("What is Jeeves's first name?" "Which of Bertie Wooster's fiancées persisted in calling the stars 'God's daisy chain'?") But, alas, St Stephen's College tell me that the Wodehouse Society is now defunct, having fallen into disrepute when one of its Practical Joke Weeks went awry.

Many are astonished at Wodehouse's popularity in India, particularly when, elsewhere in the English-speaking world, he is no longer much read. I was delighted to meet the president of the US Wodehouse Society earlier this evening, but most Americans know Wodehouse from reruns of TV versions of his short stories on programmes with names like "Masterpiece Theatre", and these have a limited audience. The critic Michael Dirda noted in the *Washington Post* that Wodehouse "seems to have lost his general audience and become mainly a cult author savoured by connoisseurs for his prose artistry." So we are all members of a cult.

That is increasingly true in England and the rest of the Commonwealth, but not in India. While no English-language writer can truly be said to have a "mass" following in India, where only a small percentage of the population read English, Wodehouse has maintained a general rather than a "cult" audience; unlike others, he has never gone out of fashion. This bewilders those who think that nothing could be further removed from Indian life, with its poverty and political intensity, than the silly escapades of Wodehouse's decadent Edwardian Young Men in Spats.

India's fascination with Wodehouse is one of those endearing mysteries. Many believe that Wodehouse's popularity reflects a nostalgia for the British Empire in India. Writing in 1988, the journalist Richard West thought India's Wodehouse devotees were those who "hanker after the England of 50 years ago [i.e. the 1930s]. That was when the English treasured their own language, when schoolchildren learned Shakespeare, Wordsworth and even Rudyard Kipling. . . . It was Malcolm Muggeridge who remarked that the Indians are now the last Englishmen. That may be why they love the quintessentially English writer, P. G. Wodehouse."

Those lines are more fatuous than anything Wodehouse would have written. Wodehouse is loved by Indians who loathe Kipling and detest the Raj. Indeed, despite a brief stint in a Hong Kong bank, Wodehouse had no colonial connection himself, and the Raj is largely absent from his books. (There is only one notable exception I can recall: "Why is there unrest in India? Because its inhabitants eat only an occasional handful of rice. The day when Mahatma Gandhi sits down to a good juicy steak and follows it up with roly-poly pudding and a spot of Stilton, you will see the end of all this nonsense of Civil Disobedience." But Indians saw that comment was meant to elicit laughter, not agreement.)

If anything, Wodehouse is one British writer whom Indian nationalists could admire without fear of political incorrectness. My former mother-in-law, the daughter of a prominent Indian nationalist politician, remembers introducing Britain's last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, to the works of Wodehouse in 1947; it was typical that the symbol of the British Empire had not read the "quintessentially English" Wodehouse but that the Indian freedom-fighter had.

Indeed, it is the lack of politics in Wodehouse's writing, or of any other social or philosophic content, that made his world so free of the trappings of Englishness. Wodehouse does not require his readers to identify with his characters: they are stock figures, whose carefully-plotted exits and entrances one follows because they are amusing, not because one is actually meant to care about them. Whereas other English novelists burdened their readers with specifics of their characters' lives, Wodehouse's existed in a never-never land almost as unreal to his English readers as to his

Indian ones. Indian readers were able to enjoy Wodehouse free of the anxiety of allegiance; the world he created, from London's Drones Club to the village of Matcham Scratchings, was a world of the imagination, to which Indians required no visa.

But they did need a passport – the English language. English was undoubtedly Britain's most valuable and abiding legacy to India, and educated Indians rapidly learned and delighted in it, for itself and as a means to various ends. These ends were, first, political, for Indians turned the language of imperialists into the language of nationalism: Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India* was written in English. They were also pleasurable.

It was only natural that Indians would enjoy a writer who used language as Wodehouse did – playing with its classical precedents, mockingly subverting the very canons colonialism had taught Indians they were supposed to venerate. "He groaned slightly and winced, like Prometheus watching his vulture dropping in for lunch." Or: "The butler was looking nervous, like Macbeth interviewing Lady Macbeth after one of her visits to the spare room." And best of all, in a country ruled for the better part of two centuries by the dispensable siblings of the British nobility: "Unlike the male codfish which, suddenly finding itself the parent of three million five hundred thousand little codfish, cheerfully resolves to love them all, the British aristocracy is apt to look with a somewhat jaundiced eye on its younger sons."

That sentence captures much of the Wodehouse magic. Wodehouse's writing embodied erudition, literary allusion, jocular slang, and an uncanny sense of timing. "She [resembled] one of those engravings of the mistresses of Bourbon kings which make one feel that the monarchs who selected them must have been men of iron, impervious to fear, or else short-sighted."

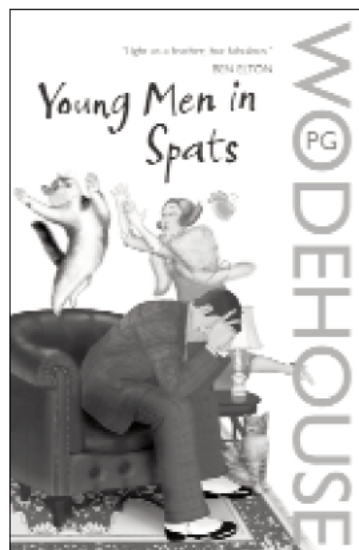
And with the Cazalets here, I should say that no dedication will ever match Wodehouse's classic for *The Heart of a Goof*: "To my daughter Leonora, without whose never-failing sympathy and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time."

Part of Wodehouse's appeal to Indians lies in the uniqueness of his style, which inveigled us into a sort of conspiracy of universalism: his humour was inclusive, for his generalizations were as absurd to those he was ostensibly writing about as to us. "Like so many substantial citizens of America, he had married young and kept on marrying, springing from blonde to blonde like the chamois of the Alps leaping from crag to crag." Aunts, who always loom large in Wodehouse's world, bellow to each other "like mastodons across the primeval swamp". Jeeves coughs softly, like "a very old sheep clearing its throat on a distant mountain-top". Evelyn Waugh worshipped Wodehouse's original similes: "a soul as grey as a stevedore's undervest"; "her face was shining like the seat of a bus driver's trousers"; "a slow, pleasant voice, like clotted cream made audible"; "she looked like a tomato struggling for self-expression". My own favourites include: "She had more curves than a scenic railway"; "I turned him down like a bedspread"; and the much-quoted "if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being grunted."

This good-humoured subversion of language appeals to a people who have acquired English but rebel against its heritage. Wodehouse's is a world we can share with the English on equal terms. So it gives me great pleasure, as Gussie Fink-Nottle might not have said, to propose a toast: "To Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, the Wodehouse Society UK, and Wodehouseans everywhere – may the sun always shine on Blandings, may young men always wear spats, and may Jeeves be asked to resolve the global financial crisis."

New Wodehouse Books in 2009

Good news for those members craving new Wodehouse editions for their collections! This year, Everyman has already published two more titles in their superb line of hardback books – *Galahad at Blandings* and *A Few Quick Ones* – and also will be issuing *Barmy in Wonderland* and *The Man with Two Left Feet*. Meanwhile, Arrow will be publishing another paperback, *Young Men in Spats* (pictured), on July 2. See <http://tinyurl.com/ch94ku> for more information on these and other titles published by Everyman and Arrow.



Little Nuggets

James Hogg writes: While looking for something else, I happened on a webpage devoted to quotations from the letters and other writings of Isaiah Berlin. Naturally I was hooked and was especially pleased to find this:

To Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, 2 May 1955:
 My mother is calling. I must go down to dinner.
 I quail like some hero in P. G. Wodehouse
 before my mother's stern, all-perceiving and
 all-penetrating eye.

Holy Writings

A friend of the Cazalet family recently attended the funeral of the Mother Prioress of a convent in Wiltshire. While there, "we met another Mother Prioress of another enclosed convent who said that, apart from holy works, her nuns read ONLY works by PGW as his innocence and freedom from sin was almost Holy Writ itself". How right she was – Evelyn Waugh pointed out the same thing.

Society News

Of Cricket and Teas

June sees the start of the Gold Bats' cricket season; see page 24 for dates and times. For those who will be attending the Dulwich match on June 19, please note: this year *tickets for the tea are required for all spectators*. This has become necessary due to the numbers of gate crashers who have enjoyed the tea without paying for it. Application forms for tickets are enclosed with this issue; be sure to bring your ticket with you to the match.

A Special Evening with Henry Blofeld

Cricket commentator and Society Patron Henry Blofeld is planning a special celebration of his 70th birthday this year by performing a one-man show at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday, 30 May, at 7.45 p.m.

July Meeting and Wodehouse Walk

Our last two meetings having been such fun (see the reports on pages 8 and 9), members are eagerly looking forward to the next one, which will be at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street, London, on July 7. Our speaker will be the well-known author and new Society Patron, Simon Brett, who is planning something different and special for us: a talk entitled 'A Crime in Rhyme' – and it is indeed entirely in rhyme. This promises to be a special event – come and join us!

Prior to the meeting, Norman Murphy will again conduct an abbreviated Wodehouse Walk around Bertie Wooster's Mayfair. The start time is 5 p.m., and the walk is free.

Wodehouse Readings on the Radio

Members will be delighted to learn that BBC Radio 4 will be broadcasting readings of a Wodehouse novel and short story this spring. First up, on Radio 4 Classic Serial, is *Something Fresh*, adapted by Martin Jarvis and featuring a sterling cast that includes Helen McCrory, Jared Harris, Joanne Whalley, Jill Gascoine, and Martin himself as the Earl of Emsworth. This adaptation will have a scene from the original *Something New* that was excluded from the British equivalent book *Something Fresh*. The broadcast dates are:

Episode 1: Sunday, 29 March, 3 p.m. (repeated Saturday, 4 April, 9 p.m.)

Episode 2: Sunday, 5 April, 3 p.m. (repeated Saturday, 11 April, 9 p.m.)

In May we will have the pleasure of hearing the newly discovered PGW story 'Providence and the Butler' on Radio 4's *An Afternoon Reading*. The provisional date for this broadcast is Tuesday, 19 May, at 3.30 p.m. Check radio listings or our website (www.pgwoodehousesociety.org.uk) for the exact day and time. (See also page 14 for a related story.)

Special Offer on PGW Silent Movies

In 1924 a series of six half-hour silent movies were produced by Stoll Pictures, each featuring a Wodehouse golf story. In 1997, Talking Business Ltd reissued three titles (*Rodney Fails to Qualify*, *Chester Forgets Himself*, and *The Long Hole*) from the series, and offered them as a single videotape, running for 1 hour 40 minutes, using VHS technology. Members of the Society had a chance to buy copies at the time.

The owner of Talking Business has now offered the Society the entire remainder stock at no charge, and we are very pleased to pass on the offer to our members. Allowing for postage and packing, we are charging £3 for UK members and £5 for overseas members, though the latter should bear in mind that the tape was designed for use in the UK and may not work on other video players. The video is of considerable historic interest and would make an excellent gift for golfing friends and

acquaintances. We are therefore initially offering the chance to buy *up to five* copies per member. Payment can be made in one of three ways:

Profile of a Patron

Nigel Rees

Nigel Rees is a broadcaster and author, probably best known as the deviser and presenter of BBC Radio 4's *Quote . . . Unquote* programme, which has been on the air now for 33 years. Born near Liverpool, Nigel went to the Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby, and then took a degree in English at Oxford. He went straight into television with Granada in Manchester and made his first TV appearances on local programmes in 1967 before moving to London as a freelance. He reported for ITN's *News at Ten* and then became involved in a wide range of programmes for BBC Radio – news, current affairs, arts and entertainment – including two years as co-presenter of the breakfast-time *Today* programme on Radio 4 (1976–78).

Unusually, Nigel has combined his broadcast presentation work with appearances in comedy shows, notably BBC Radio's *Week Ending* (with David Jason and Bill Wallis), *The Betty Witherspoon Show* (with Ted Ray, Kenneth Williams, and Miriam Margolyes) and *The Burkiss Way* (with Chris Emmett and Fred Harris). Among other radio shows he has presented are: *Twenty-Four Hours* (BBC World Service 1972–79), *Kaleidoscope* (Radio 4,

1973–75), *Where Were You in '62?* (Radio 2, 1983–84; he also devised it), and *Stop Press* (Radio 4, 1984–86). He is the author of more than 50 books, mostly about well-known phrases and sayings but also on other aspects of popular linguistics. He has been the President of the Johnson Society of Lichfield (2006/7) and lives with his wife, Sue Bates, in London and Oxfordshire.

Nigel came within the orbit of the Society several years ago when tracking down Wodehouse quotations for his website (www.btwebworld.com/quote-unquote), and members will be familiar with his *Wooster Sauce* round-ups of PGW's own use of quotations and allusions, which he still finds a subject of endless fascination.

As he explained in his talk at the AGM (see page 8), Nigel can't remember his first encounter with Wodehouse on the page, but he certainly recalls seeing *The World of Wooster* in 1965 – the very successful BBC TV adaptations

with Ian Carmichael as Bertie and Dennis Price as Jeeves. He says his view of these characters is still dictated by those two performances. In particular, whenever he quotes a bit of Bertie, he tends to do it in the Carmichael voice . . . don't y'know.



*Nigel and friend at the AGM in November.
(Photo by Carolyn de la Plain)*

My Life with Wodehouse

by Lucienne Thomas

In late 2007, Mme Thomas, who lives in southern France, received a surprise gift from her friend Betsy Parker for her 86th birthday – membership of our august society. Here she tells her story of her longstanding, long-distance love affair with the works of Plum.

Like all great encounters, my first meeting with PG was due to fate disguised as mere chance. It was some 40 years ago at a little second-hand bookshop near my office. I had been a non-stop reader since childhood and at the fateful moment was intent on perfecting my English. Luckily a student, coming to the end of term, started to off-load book after book of English literature – mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries – at the bookshop. These classic novels are the sort I love the best, and I couldn't pick them up quickly enough.

And yes, you've guessed it: tucked away among the old classics were some worn-out books by PG and, well, it was love at first sight. Like a blissful affair, we've spent almost all of our evenings together, and there's never been a dull moment. And if, in time, passion changed to affection, we are still inseparable and will be so as long as I live.

How could we stand each other for such a long time? Let me tell you that it's been easy and very rewarding. Soon after our first meeting, I discovered that there were many more PG books in store for me than the half-dozen I'd got at the shop. The following years were spent going through them like an all-consuming flame (in similar mode to PG's only golf tournament success against a gaggle of people with a 20+ handicap). That was the second stage of our relationship.

For some years now, it has evolved into a peaceful, grateful and lasting delight – delight in the perfection of style, the wonder of unforgettable similes (how I loved the *Wooster Sauce* contribution on the topic of Wodehousian similes by Mr Hedgcock and Mr Haggerty) – delight in the linguistic tricks.

In Bed with PG

Even though I'm getting on in years, I re-read PG with the same gusto. His work remains my favourite reading before going to sleep, as it is so completely devoid of any stress or tension-rousing suspense.

Some nights ago I was in the middle of *Jeeves in the Offing* (not vintage Wodehouse, a little on the déjà vu side). I had come to the part (after the plot to save Aubrey Upjohn had failed miserably – as

foreseen by Jeeves) when Bertie says: "I don't know if you know the meaning of the word 'agley', Kipper, but that, to put it in a nutshell, is the way things have ganged." I suddenly heard myself laughing out loud, disturbing my three cats asleep on my bed.

On the subject of re-reading, I favour the short stories over the big novels. You can't read the same novel one year after another without it losing some of its appeal, but the Webster stories or the Brusiloff-Cuthbert idyll, 'The Coming of Gowf', 'All's Well With Bingo', and so many others – I can enjoy them all every time. It's not so much 'reading' them anymore, it's the reunion – a celebration where I take time to rejoice in every sentence and every word.

I couldn't resist this unique opportunity of talking about my great love, being sure to get sympathy and understanding from an audience far more competent than myself.

Lucienne's friend Betsy revealed her remarkable life story in a letter to Membership Secretary Christine Hewitt:

Lucienne was born in Vienna in 1921 into a Jewish family. In 1937 she discussed with her family that she thought things were turning seriously unpleasant and that they should leave. They disagreed. She left and went to France, where she ended up with the family of a pen pal. She already spoke excellent French (and English). The family kept her hidden for a time to perfect her French and then introduced her to their world as their cousin from the north of France. No-one except the family knew she was Jewish.

She and her husband were very active in the Resistance (Lucienne is an officer of the Légion d'honneur). In 1943 she was captured by the Gestapo, but they didn't know she was Jewish and so sent her to Ravensbrück – a camp for women "undesirables". Her family in the meantime had all been sent to Auschwitz. When she was released, she went to Sweden to recuperate with the other survivors and then returned to France, her husband, and a career as a sociologist and then as a teacher.

One day we were chatting about books and I asked her: "When the going gets really tough, what do you read to help you see your way through?" Her answer? "But of course, P G Wodehouse!"

Recently, while reorganising her new library, Lucienne put her PGW collection somewhere inaccessible; but the books were later re-installed – sharpish – by her bed. As others might say their prayers every night, she reads a Mulliner or has a few chuckles into the night with Bertie or Cuthbert.

My First Wodehouse Experience

by Helena Ruff

Trying to remember my life before Wodehouse is difficult, and it pains me to imagine how wretched and miserable those few years without him must have been. I remember, with great fondness, how I was introduced to him one rainy Sunday afternoon, when my mum, who was exasperated with having a bored five-year-old to look after, sat me down next to her and made me watch Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie as *Jeeves and Wooster*, saying, “Look, Helena – funny men!” Somehow, something made me tick. Was it Bertie Wooster’s golfing tweeds? Aunt Agatha’s sneer? Or maybe Spode’s knees in his black shorts? Who can say? But that moment was the start of a long and flourishing relationship that recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

I am still in love with the television series, and the stories’ appeal has grown and grown over the years. The lovable characters, the actors who play them, and the plots are all ingrained in me, and I could easily recite whole episodes if I tried. However, I am not going to call myself a true Wodehouse fan just because I have watched the television series innumerable times.

When I was about 12 or 13, I ventured into my first Jeeves novel: *The Mating Season*. Well, it definitely did not disappoint! The wonderful Jeeves and Bertie and the true horror of a “surging sea of aunts” on paper! I quickly read through the other Wodehouse novels we had in our house, and although I did occasionally read other things, Wodehouse became my main reading material. Dickens? Austen? You must be crazy! Get me Plum, and fast!

Over the years I have delved into almost all of his most famous novels, and I now really enjoy reading the lesser-known works; one of my most recent acquisitions is *Young Men in Spats*. However, I do not just keep the many joys of Plum to myself, and I have even been called a ‘Wodehouse evangelist’ by my dad (I assume that it is a good thing) as I like to lend the books and audio tapes in my Wodehouse collection to those whom I trust strongly enough with them.

When I discovered that there was a society devoted entirely to the great man himself, I was thrilled. “Top hole!” I cried, and as quickly as Jeeves can save Bertie from a disastrous engagement, I signed up and became a member. Now that I have joined, I have found it fantastic to hear about people who are (almost) as big fans of Wodehouse as I am and it’s great to hear all the latest news. I have even broken a habit of a lifetime and have begun to support a sporting team: the Gold Bats!

Editor’s note: Helena may not be our Youngest Member, but she comes close – she’ll be 16 in May!



Wodehouse and the Postal Service

The recent launch by the Royal Mail of the SmartStamp project whereby users can print their own stamps from a home computer generated correspondence in *The Times*. On December 11, Mr Iain Gilmour pointed out that it seemed to be advocating a return to the P G Wodehouse method of throwing letters from the window into the street, trusting someone to find them and place them in a mailbox.

By December 27, the *Daily Telegraph* had conducted an experiment to test whether the populace would actually do so. It found that, of 20 postcards and letters dropped in the streets of towns and cities from St Ives to Glasgow, 14 were actually delivered.

(Thanks to Carolyn de la Plain and others for sending in clippings on this news item.)

Plum Thought of It First

On 27 February 2008, the *London Evening Standard* Londoner’s Diary had a report titled ‘Topshop Tina Poaches Mrs Arsenal’s Chef’: “Tina Green has swiped Sally Fiszman’s chef. Tina, wife of Topshop mogul Sir Philip Green, until very recently was said to be great friends with Sally Fiszman, wife of diamond dealer Danny Fiszman – non-executive director (and principal shareholder) at Arsenal Football Club. . . . Part of the Fiszmans’ five-star equipage was a top-class chef. . . . But it seems Lady Green has now stolen his cordon bleu services for her own ends. Fiszman, currently based in Switzerland, is apparently furious, and the two ladies are said to be no longer on speaking terms.” Do we hear Wodehousean echoes somewhere?

(Thanks to Murray Hedgcock, who sent this last year.)

The Society Meets – and Meets Again

Quote . . . Unquote at the AGM

by Elin Murphy

Society meetings are a guaranteed crowd-pleaser, even when business intrudes, and the night of November 18 was no exception. The Arts Club has proved to be a congenial venue, and the room filled up quickly with the usual suspects as well as some new faces – always a welcome sight. But the AGM could not be avoided, so Chairman Hilary Bruce called us to order and got down to it.



Members enjoy even the Committee members' reports in the Arts Club's convivial surroundings. (Photo by Carolyn de la Plain)

The Chairman's report covered June 2007–May 2008, and the happy news is that the Society remains solvent, with subscriptions of around 1,000 members who continue to enjoy such benefits as *Wooster Sauce*, *By The Way*, our website, cricket matches (we actually win sometimes), and splendid events such as 2007's A Week With Wodehouse. That Week saw our last gathering at the Savage Club and our first at the Arts Club, so there was a certain symmetry.

During the year, Arrow Books published its new line of Wodehouse paperbacks – celebrated with a picnic in Russell Square – and the Society continued its sponsorship of Berkshire pigs. New patrons included Lara Cazalet, Dr Shashi Tharoor, Simon Brett, and Nigel Rees (our speaker of the evening). We also acquired a new website editor, Jamie Jarrett (who will be unveiling major changes this year). Our treasurer, Alan Wood, was standing for re-election, though “he has been making noises for a while about standing down”. This will happen only after a successor has been lined up, and that appears to be in the offing. The Chairman concluded with a tribute to

the Society's “unsung heroes” – “the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate for their benevolent cooperation; Chris Reece for website support; Bob Miller, our cricket manager; and John Wilson, who checks our accounts and, thank Heaven, usually approves them.”

The Chairman was followed by Membership Secretary Christine Hewitt, Treasurer Alan Wood, and *Wooster Sauce* Editor Elin Murphy, all of whom reported that the Society is thriving in their respective areas. Christine's report was of particular interest for stories of Wodehouseans who had joined us during the year, many of whom have delightful tales to tell of their love of Wodehouse.

Following the election of officers and committee members and then a short break, the Chairman introduced our speaker, writer and radio presenter Nigel Rees (of *Quote . . . Unquote* fame); for more on Nigel, see his Patron Profile on page 5.

Nigel began by acknowledging the signal honour of becoming a Patron of our Society: “Any organization that can embrace Boris Johnson and me in this position is clearly very broadminded, and it's obvious you can suffer fools gladly.” He then spoke of societies commemorating such authors as G. K. Chesterton, Jerome K. Jerome, Dorothy Sayers, and Dr Johnson before focussing on Wodehouse. He told us how he first became aware of Wodehouse through the *World of Wooster* TV series in 1965, which resulted in Ian Carmichael and Dennis Price shaping his impressions of Bertie and Jeeves from then on. After reminiscing about Carmichael (of

whom he does an amazing impression), Nigel moved on – inevitably – to Wodehouse quotations. The room rang with laughter as he shared some of his favourites and described his searches for “quotation truth” – searching for the reality of quotations and where they came from.

This cursory account does no justice to his wit and sagacity, and long after he had concluded, Nigel was surrounded by admirers keen to hear more. They and those members who were not present for the fun on the evening will just have to wait to read the text of his talk in a future issue of *Wooster Sauce*.



Nigel Rees in quotable mode (photo by Carolyn de la Plain)

Plum in the Suburbs

A tale of crime, gambling . . . and blancmange

by Mike Snowdon

You can tell I've never been in the Army – I committed the cardinal mistake of volunteering for something. As a new member of the Society and in foolhardy mode, I contacted *Wooster Sauce* editor Elin Murphy to say I would be happy to help with the magazine. The next thing I knew, there I was at the Arts Club in Mayfair on February 17, tasked with doing this write-up of events.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Ominously, the first three people Elin introduced me to said: "Oh, we've heard all about you . . ."

My first impression of events?

A room full of kindred spirits, of course; secondly, the long journeys some people make for the event; and most importantly, eminently sociable coves at every turn – with conversation ranging from horse riding to a little bit about work and a bit more about Aussie Rules Football, cricket, and football with Murray Hedgcock and my fellow 'volunteer', Peter Thompson, who was writing up the evening's proceedings for the website.



Sluicing in style at the Arts Club

Murray was quick to dispel any thoughts that Plum portrayed the suburbs as the location where little happens: "There are brawls, assaults, householders coshed or administered mickey finns, burglaries, dogs chasing innocent and guilty alike, citizenry locked in rooms or cellars, guns flourished, breakings and enterings, frenzied pursuits, character assassination, crooks pretending to be curates and detectives, illegal gambling, people pushed into ponds, characters deprived of their trousers – an astonishing variety of mayhem."

The suburbs are not an environment in which we find Bertie Wooster too often; Murray could find only four stories in which Bertie is "sighted in suburbia". Outside the Bertie and Jeeves stories, though, "Plum set a surprising number of books in the suburbs". Plum himself lived for the most part in the heart of the city: St James's, Mayfair, the Dorchester, and Chelsea. (As an interesting aside, Murray said that it has only just been discovered in the 1911 census that there is evidence that Plum lived at 99-101 Ebury Street.)

With Plum at the typewriter, the quiet calm of suburban life can never continue for long – especially if Uncle Fred is in town. Pongo thinks his uncle couldn't get into trouble in the suburbs, but in 'Uncle Fred Flits By', our eponymous hero descends on one unfortunate household (placed in the literary setting of Mitching Hill, but thought to be Croydon), announcing himself to the maid as "the man who has come to clip the parrot's claws" – with his nephew as the anaesthetist.

In 'No Wedding Bells For Him', Ukridge describes with incredulity the culinary life for a family in Clapham: "Do you realise that a family like that has cold beef, baked potatoes, pickles, salad, blanc-mange and some sort of cheese every Sunday after Divine Service?"

To conclude, for Plum's characters the suburbs were "a wilderness where a city man could disappear". Later I too disappeared . . . not to a country pile, a stately mansion, or a Mayfair apartment, but back to the suburbs, safe in the knowledge that Uncle Fred was unlikely to descend on me – equipped with parrot claw clippers or not.



Murray (right) was assisted in his talk by Robert Bruce, Chairman's Consort and Accompanying Person. Winston Churchill was mute.

The star attraction was Society patron and stalwart Murray, who provided unique insight into Plum's own life in the London suburbs and how he used the environment as a setting for many of his stories. Murray told the assembled throng: "Plum knew something of Wimbledon; he had been to Kingston; he used a Barnes setting in a couple of his books; and above all, he had lived at, and remembered fondly all his life, Dulwich."

John Clifford Mortimer, 1923–2009

Edward Cazalet remembers:

After John Mortimer died, the media and press were bursting with eulogies, and I will not try to repeat the tributes which demonstrate the quite extraordinary breadth and diversity of his talents and achievements. However, I was lucky enough to touch directly upon two of the multitudinous facets of John's life: Wodehouse and the law.

When in 1998 we held the inaugural dinner of The P G Wodehouse Society, John was the obvious person to be the lead speaker. Having accepted our invitation, he then telephoned me nearer the time to tell me that, with the best will in the world, he would not be able to wear the prescribed dinner jacket. I had the temerity to answer by saying, "When Jeeves hears of this he will leap back like a startled Mustang." The problem was that John was going to have to drive back all the way from a day in Court in Leeds to the dinner in London that evening and would simply not have the time to change. Notwithstanding this, he appeared in full dinner regalia. In his speech, he told us of how, just before he had left home for Leeds that morning, a Jeevesian voice had whispered in his ear: "Sir, you should take your dinner jacket. I can only suggest, Sir, that you make full use of the Disabled Toilets in the Milton Keynes Service Area" – and, continued John, "that is exactly what I did."

In that same speech, John considered the task of writing humorous prose. He said, "Anyone on a wet Tuesday afternoon can write a tragedy; it is easy to write about troubled adolescence in distant Australia, or broken marriages in Islington. To write great comedy is difficult as I found when working with Dicky Briers. . . . The great gift of Plum was to depict ordinary people and get them into extraordinary situations. Here was a writer who was highly educated, who could write a joke in the style of Euripides or Shakespeare, and you get from him an insight into the whole of our cultures."

That quotation indicates the many similarities John and Plum adopted in their approaches to the written word. Both knew their Shakespeare from 'soup to nuts', and a discussion or Mastermind competition between them about Shakespeare would have been

fascinating. Both were supporters of the underdog, often pricking gently the bubble of authority and bringing the culprit down to earth with, at the least, a modest bump. To appreciate this you have only to compare the pugnacious Hilda Rumpole ("She who

must be obeyed") with any of Plum's many aunts. Hilda would have made a splendid aunt. Also, each created fictional characters who are likely to stand the test of time by achieving immortality, with Rumpole and Bertie already having been spoken of in this category in more than one of John's obituaries.

John was appointed a CBE in 1986, and he was knighted in 1998. Much of his continuing happiness was inspired by his sweet, intelligent, and dependable Penny and the immense pleasure he derived from the successful careers of his children.

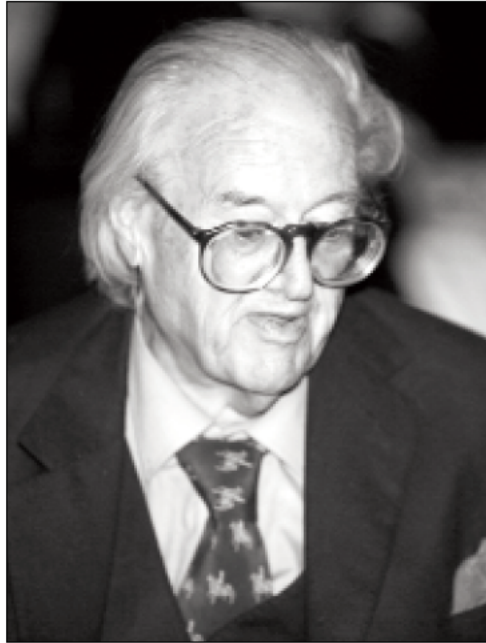
Only last October, John came to the Society dinner at Gray's Inn. When, at the end of the

dinner, a toast was given to John, the 150 present rose spontaneously and gave him a standing ovation which went on and on and on. There must be many of us who would relish further opportunities to do exactly the same again and again.

Tim Andrew adds:

John Mortimer wasn't just a wonderful supporter of The P G Wodehouse Society – attending and speaking at our dinners and seemingly taking every possible opportunity to say how much he enjoyed PGW's writing – he was also a terrific supporter of causes, and not necessarily large, public ones.

The school of which I was head had a strong drama tradition but poor facilities. Despairing of ever getting local authority funding, we embarked on what seemed a terrifyingly ambitious appeal to raise £200,000 to build a performance studio. To give our appeal weight, we needed 'names' as patrons. One of the first to whom I wrote to ask to be a patron was John Mortimer. I wrote simply because I loved his writing, shared his love of Wodehouse (so he must be a good bloke!), had heard him speak at our first dinner, and knew of his passion for the arts in education. His short reply came almost by return; it could be summarised as: "Of course." Our morale soared: we built our studio.



*John at the Society's dinner in 2006
(Photo by Ginni Beard)*

We Remember . . .

John Hayward

by Murray Hedgcock

John Hayward was a late entrant to the world of Wodehouse, but he arrived with such enthusiasm via the 2005 Hollywood Convention that he made an immediate impact, and the pity is that he was able to enjoy so short a time as a Wodehouse buff. John died at Minden, Nevada, on December 3, age 86.

John's entrée came through his long association with the Hollywood Cricket Club, of which he was a past president – and of which Plum was a founder member. Of great help when I researched *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, he became increasingly interested in Plum's life and writings.

Put in touch with then-TWS President Jean Tillson, John was delighted to accept her invitation to address the Convention, and he entertained with a breezy address that brought in PGW and a host of other subjects – all delivered in a mix of accents derived from his years on the stage and as a broadcaster.

Born in Cliftonville, Kent, in 1921, John served in the RAF, migrated to Los Angeles in the 1970s, and threw himself into American life while never losing his love for his homeland, which he visited regularly.

John McGlinn

by Hal Cazalet

I was saddened to learn of the death in February of John McGlinn and to read the flood of tributes to him as the world of the 'lost' musical mourned one of its greatest ambassadors. He was only 55.

I first met John in 2001 when we embarked on a project to record the complete works of Jerome Kern and Victor Herbert – a project, he told me, that might take up to 15 years! We started with Kern's *Love O' Mike* and then went on to record Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*. He discovered original orchestrations, reinstated lost songs, and was one of the principal proponents of making authentic studio cast recordings of the classic musicals. He had extraordinary insight into this material and would always set the scene by telling us how the song came to be written.

John considered the music of Kern, Gershwin, and Herbert every bit as good as the great classical composers. He thought a song by Kern just as intricate as a song by Schubert and he could bring out all the subtle textures and colours in it. Sadly, the project was pulled and I still don't know why.

John's work formed a crucial link between the Broadway of the past and the Broadway of today. I can only hope that there are others as determined as he to keep the torch burning.

The Best of Wodehouse in the Press

From *The Week*, December 13

(from Alexander Dainty)

In the column 'Best Books', Susan Hill chose *The Mating Season*.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, January 17

(from Jo Jacobius)

Its review of 100 best books included *The Code of the Woosters* at number 15.

From *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 18

(from Jo Jacobius)

Included in its article about wisdom to be passed on to the next generation:

Required Reading: P G Wodehouse

From *The Guardian*, January 10

Included Beach in a list of its 10 'Best Butlers'.

From *The Guardian*, January 19

The paper published an extensive section about '1,000

novels everyone must read'. Robert McCrum described the nature of Wodehouse's work and mentioned six titles which were included in the list (*Something Fresh*; *Piccadilly Jim*; *Thank You, Jeeves*; *Heavy Weather*; *The Code of the Woosters*; and *Joy in the Morning*).

From *The Guardian*, January 24

Named Claude and Eustace Wooster third on a list of its ten 'Best Identical Twins'.

From *The Week*, February 7 (from Alexander Dainty)

In the column 'Best Books', Melvyn Bragg picked any PGW book featuring Psmith and described *Mike* as "the best schoolboy book I ever read".

From *Abe.books.com* website, February 19

(from Andrew Parker and Mario Farrugia)

A recent poll of 555 Abebook UK customers on funniest books listed *Right Ho, Jeeves* as No 1 and *The Code of the Woosters* at No 8.

Our views on each other, Spode's and mine, were definite. His was that what England needed if it was to become a land fit for heroes to live in was fewer and better Woosters, while I had always felt that there was nothing wrong with England that a ton of bricks from a height on Spode's head wouldn't cure.
(From *Much Obligated Jeeves*, 1971)

Plum in Norfolk

by Ian Alexander-Sinclair

with added comments by Tamaki Morimura

After the 2008 dinner at Gray's Inn, Tamaki Morimura, who translates Wodehouse novels into Japanese, came to stay with my wife and me, determined to leave no stone of Plum's Norfolk unturned. On Friday, our first visit was to the Wodehouse memorial window in Norwich Cathedral, commemorating Edmund Wodehouse (nephew of the first baron and a Norfolk M.P. for 37 years), his wife Lucy, and nine of their descendants.

Saturday's programme required an early start as we wanted to look at Fakenham racecourse, called 'Lakenham' races in 'Jeeves and the Old School Chum'. Afterwards, we took the road to Wells so that Tamaki could experience how Bertie had felt: "I don't know any part of England where you feel so off the map as on the by-roads of Norfolk. Occasionally we would meet a cow or two, but otherwise we had the world pretty much to ourselves." Today one is more likely to meet a tractor towing a huge trailer of sugar beet, but otherwise it remains much the same. The road goes through Brancaster, one of four villages in this corner of Norfolk that provided Plum with suitable titles. Lord Brancaster appears briefly in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, feeding seed cake steeped in the '84 port to his parrot, with potentially disastrous results; Lords Hunstanton, Heacham, and Snettisham make up the quartet.

Arriving in Hunstanton, a minor navigational error serendipitously took us into Wodehouse Road before we arrived at the le Strange estate office to meet Michael le Strange Meakin, the estate's owner, Lord High Admiral of the Wash, and a delightful man. He presented Tamaki with copies of several pages of the estate visitors' book, which contains the signatures of Plum, Ethel, and Leonora, recording their visits to the Hall from 1924 and onwards. In *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Norman Murphy has calculated that Plum spent nearly 12 months in all at Hunstanton

and believes "its significance in his writing cannot be overestimated".

Plum first stayed in 1924 as a guest of Charles le Strange, "a weird bird". The Hall itself, no longer part of the estate, is a mixture of Tudor, Jacobean, and Victorian architecture. "It is," he wrote, "a joint belonging to a friend of mine . . . one of those enormous houses, about two thirds of which are derelict. . . . thousands of acres, park, gardens, moat etc., and priceless heirlooms, but precious little ready money." On this bright autumn morning, the Hall, now in good repair, looked spectacular.

Hunstanton Hall was the setting for *Money for Nothing*, although Plum shifts it across the country to the picturesque village of Rudge-in-the-Vale. Plum similarly moved the Octagon, our next port of call, to Hertfordshire, in 'Jeeves and the Impending Doom'. It is a curious building, exactly as described in the story: "Its walls had grooves at regular intervals which were just right for the hands and feet." With an initial leap, Tamaki was ascending it as rapidly as any Cabinet Minister with an angry swan in hot pursuit before she came to a halt, clinging like a limpet until we could take her photograph.

Kindly allow me to correct Ian's remark. It was not I but Mr Meakin who climbed up the wall first. These historical facts have to be accurate. I said, "I wonder how Bertie could climb up here." Then Mr. Meakin said, "Oh, it's easy. I used to climb up here as a kid." And then he showed me how. –TM

We visited the gardens behind the Hall, to look at the dilapidated pigsty in which a Large Black pig, the inspiration for the Empress of Blandings, had lived in the 1920s. Further on lie the graves of Charles le Strange and his brother Bernard, to whom Plum dedicated *Carry On, Jeeves*. We wandered down to the moat, where Plum used to sit in a punt working at his typewriter. In 1970



Egged on by Ian (far left) and Michael Meakin, Tamaki practises how to evade an angry swan via the nearest Octagon.

(Photo taken by Patricia on Tamaki's camera)

he wrote of *The Small Bachelor*, “I wrote most of it in a punt on a lake at a country house in Norfolk . . . all Nature, as you might say, pitching in to make my task more pleasant.”

Ian’s wife Patricia used to live in Brancaster and therefore knew Mr. Meakin personally and was well acquainted with his family. She is somebody who is not afraid to ask questions, which proved very helpful. –TM

Sadly, it was time to thank Michael Meakin and leave Hunstanton Hall, “a gorgeous place” as Plum once put it, to return to Norwich.

That afternoon, we were able to visit Kimberley Hall, the Wodehouse family seat. The house is not open to the public, so we were very fortunate. Mr and Mrs Ronald Buxton, a charming couple who had bought the Hall from the fourth Earl of Kimberley in 1958, showed us around the exterior and the grounds. Mr Buxton had been at Eton with the fourth earl, whom he referred to as “Johnny Kimberley”, who had married six times, and whose memoirs were called, no doubt appropriately, *The Whim of the Wheel*.

Kimberley Hall, built in 1712 for Sir John Wodehouse, the fourth baronet, was designed by William Talman but later enlarged with four corner towers for Sir Armine, fifth baronet, Plum’s great-great-grandfather. As we walked around, accompanied by guinea fowl and peacocks, it looked extremely handsome in the afternoon sun, with a fine view over the lake landscaped by Capability Brown.

Mr Buxton, a former MP, was, I’m thrilled to report, exactly my idea of Lord Emsworth. He was impeccably dressed in a well-worn houndstooth check jacket and matching corduroy trousers of similar age, and he is now happily living in the former head gardener’s cottage with the kind Mrs. Buxton. Oh, how I love Mr. Buxton. –TM

It is not known if Plum ever visited Kimberley. He may have done so in 1924, when he is thought to have become godfather to the fourth earl, but this is uncertain. Mr Buxton doubted it. If Plum ever did come, we were sure he would have approved.

We were reminded of his connection with the family seat by the Wodehouse coat of arms in the Hall’s central pediment. At either side are figures of ‘Wodehouses’, or wodewoses, wild men of the woods, and the motto is ‘Agincourt’, at which Sir John



Kimberley Hall in Norfolk (photo by Tamaki)

Wodehouse had fought. Like Lord Emsworth, Lord Ickenham, and Bertie Wooster, Plum was proud of his ancestor’s part in that great battle. Having thanked the Buxtons for the privilege of a private visit, we left, satisfied that we had done full justice to Plum’s Norfolk.

But we were not quite finished. On Monday morning, before Tamaki had to return to London, there was just time to visit Inspector Paul Rush at Norwich police station where Tamaki was able to fulfil another ambition – to wear a British policeman’s helmet. When Paul then put it on, Tamaki had to be restrained from trying to knock it off. After all, it was not Boat Race Night.

I sincerely thank Inspector Paul Rush for enabling me to fulfil my long-time ambition and kindly escorting me to an underground ‘gaoler’s cell’!

Finally, I’d like to express my deepest gratitude to Ian and his wife Patricia for providing this humble but fortunate translator with some of the happiest hours in her life. I should add that Ian’s great-grandfather was Captain Alexander, who fought in the battle of Shimonoseki in 1864 and was badly wounded in the foot. What a preux chevalier Ian was! Don’t you feel awed to think about the working of Wodehousean Providence, which takes care of the chumps of this world? Personally, I’m all for it. Thank you so much, Ian.

Love, Tamaki

Spotted Online

The used-books website AbeBooks.com (or AbeBooks.co.uk) has begun a series called ‘Legends of Literature’, and earlier this year the second instalment in their series was on P. G. Wodehouse. The page includes a short biography of Plum as well as an interview with **Kris Fowler** and **Ian Michaud**, president and membership secretary, respectively, of The Wodehouse Society. It may be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/ark2kd>.

Larissa Saxby-Bridger has alerted us to a website, www.greenmetropolis.com, that sells second-hand books. A green initiative designed to recycle books, it allows people to buy and sell books on the website. Larissa discovered numerous Wodehouse books on the site, all at a bargain price of £3.75 each, including a donation to the Woodland Trust. Larissa writes: “Just type in ‘Wodehouse’ and like magic the books appear!”

The Story of 'Providence and the Butler'

by John Dawson

PG Wodehouse died on Valentine's Day 1975, but his legacy is alive and well among an avid corps of Wodehouse fans and scholars.

I joined the club in 1974 when I chanced upon a copy of *Laughing Gas*. I had never heard of Wodehouse – blame an American education – but I was hooked from the very first page. Even today, I find it impossible to read Wodehouse without smiling, and every Wodehousean has a story about bursting into laughter at something they had just read, causing inquisitive smiles from those around them.

Two years ago, inspired by Norman Murphy's *A Wodehouse Handbook*, I began a project to study and annotate Wodehouse's early writing. This has proved a major task, due to the multitude of contemporary references, slang, and quotations, many of which are not familiar to today's readers. Still, Wodehouse's skill enables the reader to understand exactly what he means, even though they may not understand the word or quotation he is using. In the process, one gains not only a new respect for Wodehouse the writer, but also for the work carried out by such commentators as Richard Osborne, Geoffrey Jaggard, Norman Murphy, and others.

In researching *The Globe By The Way Book* (1908) (which I regard as the most under-appreciated book in the canon), I visited the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* website, featuring a scanned archive of historic newspapers. Lo and behold, I came across a Wodehouse short story published in the *Washington Herald Literary Magazine* of February 1910, entitled 'Providence and the Butler'. I've collected Wodehouse for years but had never heard of

it. It wasn't mentioned in McIlvaine or any of the Wodehouse biographies.

I withheld the cork-popping, because it was common for Wodehouse to sell a story to both American and English magazines, and often these were re-titled for their respective markets. I sent an inquiry to the knowledgeable Charles Stone-Tolcher (Pillingshot) of the Yahoo Blandings discussion group, who hadn't heard of the story either. He consulted Tony Ring of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK), and the word came back – 'Providence and the Butler' was a completely new discovery!

But true to Murphy's Law, a fly in the Unguentine then arose: the Library of Congress had scanned only the first page of the story. So the Wodehouse community went to work, and through the generous assistance of Vikas Sonak (Old Sureshot) and Lynn Vesley-Gross (The Dog Emily), a complete copy was obtained and transcribed.

The story is epochal because it contains the first appearance of some of Wodehouse's best-known characterization and plotting. There's the gruff 12th Earl of Drexdale and his historic family castle; Keeling, the faithful family servitor; and – offstage – the wayward son Lionel, who wants to marry an American showgirl. Familiar elements to Wodehouseans, but this was the first time the author had put them together.

The Blandings series comprised over a dozen books and several short stories from 1915 up to Wodehouse's last, unfinished book in 1975. They are deservedly revered, but he worked his way up to them. 'Providence and the Butler' shows that in 1910, Blandings was but a gleam in his literary eye – the



On December 28, 2008, the Sunday Times Magazine printed PGW's early short story 'Providence and the Butler' – only the second time this story had ever been published. It was discovered by John Dawson (below).



equivalent of a Wodehousean Dead Sea Scroll. Its importance in Wodehouse's literary development cannot be underestimated.

At that time, Wodehouse was writing what magazine editors wanted: sentimental stories with a happy ending; see, for example, *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories* (1914). Readers of 'Providence and the Butler' who are expecting the mature laugh-out-loud Wodehouse style – the inane dialogue, superb language, and remarkable prose – will be disappointed. This story is but a stepping-stone, an apprentice piece, in his development as the classic humorist he would become.

Tony Ring brought the story to the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate, who, understandably, were concerned about widespread publication. Once something is published on the Internet, no one has any control of it, and chasing down miscreants who publish copyrighted material is ineffectual. Technically, anyone in Britain who downloads an unlicensed literary work is in violation of the law, and the entire body of Wodehouse's work is protected there until 2046.

Enter the Estate's literary agents, who sold the story to the *Sunday Times*, which published it on December 28. It is just so fitting to see it published in a London newspaper, where Wodehouse began over a century ago. I'm thrilled to have played a part in bringing this story to light.

Up in heaven, The Master is probably sitting with Bertie on the terrace, while Jeeves is materializing with a spot of the needful (light on the splash). "I say, Plum, rather a good show, what?"

John Dawson is a writer and banking consultant in Kansas City, Missouri. He is trying to publish his first book of humorous short stories, depicting life in small-town America. You will always find a Wodehouse on his bedside table. He is also writing a book, tentatively titled P. G. Wodehouse, The Early Years 1900–1910, A Literary History. He welcomes inquiries, particularly from Wodehouseans who might be able to help him gather PGW's articles, poems, and stories during that period. He can be reached at or at the Angler's Rest.



Letters to the Editor

Reactions, Questions, and Thoughts from Our Readers

From Christine Draycott

Towards the very end of *Arthur Ransome and the World of Swallows and Amazons*, Roger Wardale tells us that the Ransomes' last boat, bought just before he became very ill and had to give up sailing, was named *Lottie Blossom*. Is it known whether this name was chosen because the Ransomes were fans of Plum, or of the Monty Bodkin books?

Norman Murphy replies: Yes, Ransome's boat was named after Wodehouse's character. PGW knew of it and was very pleased by the compliment.

From David Carlton Smith

Bengt Malmberg's article 'The Political P. G. Wodehouse' prompted the following simple thought. If an author portrays the aristocracy and middle class as simple-minded fools or grasping industrialists dependent on or regularly outwitted by members of the lower orders or working class, then that author might surely be considered to have the outlook of a socialist. To consider P. G. Wodehouse as a socialist comes as a surprise, not least to me.

From Larissa Saxby-Bridger

In *Do Butlers Burgle Banks*, Bond's Bank is in deep financial trouble and the auditors are coming. The bank is short of about 200,000 pounds due to embezzlement and the late Sir Hugo Bond using depositors' monies for his own end. Several of the characters in the story suggest robbing the bank, so the auditors will not know how much was missing in the

first place! Naturally this is not a solution for ailing banks, but it is terribly funny and poignant reading this during the current credit crunch and banking crisis. What would Mr Wodehouse say of today's crisis, given his fondness for monetary themes and the ethical and moral dilemmas encountered in his stories?

From Jonathan Bacchus

The recent Osbert Lancaster exhibition at the Wallace Collection in London included Lancaster's original jacket designs for *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin* and *Much Obligated, Jeeves*. Lancaster is quoted as saying, "All right-minded people will split their sides over the works of Mr P. G. Wodehouse."

From Nicholas Aldridge

The English language contains many jewels, and among these is its little treasury of eccentric Proper Adjectives. The normal procedure is to chop a bit off the proper noun (but not always!) and then stick on one of a set of standard endings; so *England* provides *English*, and *Uppingham* gives us *Uppinghamian*. The really irregular ones alter all, or most of, the noun, as *Salopian* from *Shrewsbury* and *Alleysonian* from *Dulwich*. Because *Charterhouse* becomes *Carthusian*, I have long felt that the Wodehouse adjective should be *Wodehusian*. I wonder if any other readers agree.

The editor replies: There has long been a debate going about whether the spelling should be *Wodehousean* or *Wodehusian*, but *Wodehusian* is a new one to me. Any thoughts from other readers?

Hollywood Adapts Wodehouse, Part 1

by Brian Taves

This is an abbreviated version of a paper delivered at the Divine Providence convention in October 2007. For the full version, see Plum Lines, Summer 2008.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Southern California, I stumbled across an old memo in the files of Warner Bros. for the 1938 Errol Flynn movie *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, suggesting that P. G. Wodehouse might be an ideal writer for the script. Absurd as this might seem, it gave me a notion: to investigate the relationship of Wodehouse to film, since my field was the history of cinema and television.

Cast your mind back to 1914. A 32-year-old writer, selling stories to the magazines, has just married a widow with a nine-year-old daughter, and the Famous Players film company offers \$2,000 for the screen rights to his book of short stories, *The Man Upstairs*. The sale is botched by a hopelessly incompetent agent; however, that year the first Wodehouse movie goes into production, *A Gentleman of Leisure*, made for Paramount. The movie, which survives, is surprisingly faithful to the source, considering the limitations of running time and reliance on intertitles for exposition and dialogue.

Several short Wodehouse films followed, and within a few years his novels began to become feature-length movies. In 1918 audiences saw *Uneasy Money*, followed by *A Damsel in Distress* and *The Prince and Betty*; and 1920 saw *Their Mutual Child*, while *A Gentleman of Leisure* was remade in 1923. His prices also improved: Essanay bought *Uneasy Money* in 1918 for \$1,500, and in 1927 Universal bought *The Small Bachelor* for \$15,000.

From 1916 to 1928, Wodehouse was heavily involved in musical comedies, and some of these appeared on the silent screen: *Oh, Boy!* (1919); *Oh, Lady, Lady* (1920); *Sally* (1925); and *Oh, Kay* (1928). The star of two of these, Colleen Moore, explained how you make a musical comedy into a silent film: “It seems strange now . . . but we did it all the time, supplying the theatres with a cued score for the orchestra or organ, or, in some smaller theatres, piano, incorporating into the film the story and all the dance numbers, omitting only the singing. Since musical comedy stories in those days were invariably thin, we fattened them out with gag sequences.”

Wodehouse also adapted comedies by continental playwrights, and his version of Jacques Deval’s *Dans sa candeur naïve* saw several incarnations. *The Cardboard Lover* of 1928 switched the gender base, with Marion Davies and Jetta Goudal dueling for Nils Asther. Davies

gives a riotous performance, justifying her reputation as a skilled comedienne.

Surprisingly, the silent era was the most prolific in cinematic Wodehouse adaptations; not until the coming of television would he again prove so popular a source.

In 1929 Ethel Wodehouse negotiated a contract for her husband at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Almost simultaneously, the first Wodehouse sound film was released, a remake of *Sally*. Wodehouse’s reputation in the theatre was probably of more significance to MGM than his stories and novels. Wodehouse was assigned to *Rosalie*, a stage musical to which he had contributed, but the studio decided to shelve the project. At the end of 1930, MGM bought the rights to *Candle-Light*, Wodehouse’s own 1929 adaptation of the Siegfried Geyer play, but his script was not produced. Soon after Wodehouse was released from MGM, production began on another version (1932) of *Her Cardboard Lover*. Re-

titled *The Passionate Plumber*, Buster Keaton played the ‘cardboard lover’, Gilbert Roland was the cad, and Jimmy Durante provided further comic relief.

Universal bought the rights to *Candle-Light*, filming it as *By Candlelight* (1933). Liberty Pictures bought the rights to Wodehouse’s 1910 short story ‘The Watch Dog’ in 1934 and wholly transformed it into *Dizzy Dames* the next year.

In 1936 Paramount released *Anything Goes*, adding new songs to those by Cole Porter, with Bing Crosby and Ethel Merman repeating her Broadway role.

The year before, 20th Century-Fox had bought the rights to *Thank You, Jeeves* for \$15,000, along with a one-year option on the other stories and the right to make additional films centred

around Jeeves. The contract could be extended for 20 years, but the movie series lasted barely two. *Thank You, Jeeves!* (1936) cast Arthur Treacher, known for such roles, as the valet and David Niven as Bertie. However, it dispensed entirely with the novel, involving our heroes with espionage. The follow-up, *Step Lively, Jeeves!* (1937), again starred Treacher but this time alone and as added as the absent Bertie Wooster. Both films were recently issued on DVD.

In August 1934 MGM bought the rights to *Piccadilly Jim*, but after two years of scripting by at least nine writers, only the novel’s back story was used. A superior cast – including Robert Montgomery, Frank Morgan, and Eric Blore – resulted in an amusing comedy with the Wodehouse flavour.



Brian has detected a great deal about Wodehouse in Hollywood.

Profile of a Committee Member

Tim Andrew

Tim Andrew, an educational consultant, was previously a secondary school head teacher. For 20 years he was head of three schools ranging, socially, from a seriously disadvantaged urban community to the relative affluence of the London commuter belt. In 2004–5 he was national president of the Secondary Heads Association (since renamed ASCL) and became very involved in international education matters.

Tim retired from his UK headship in July 2007 and now divides his time between the UK and China. In the UK, he works with school leaders and governing bodies on such matters as the recruitment of senior staff. He spends about 20 weeks each year in Beijing, working as Academic Principal in a Chinese state school, developing a programme for Chinese students who wish to study at UK or US universities.

Tim first became aware of Wodehouse at school, when he was drawn to the block of Herbert Jenkins editions donated to the modern fiction section of the library by his French teacher, whose lessons were full of Wodehouse-isms. (“Ah, Dobson, old horse . . .”) He’s still not sure whether he loved the French lessons because of the banter or whether the lessons prepared

him to love Wodehouse’s books. His interest grew with the Carmichael/Price *World of Wooster* series on the BBC, although now that he knows the books better, he confesses to not much liking most adaptations of Wodehouse on any kind of screen: the silly-ass nature of the characters is too emphasised and the plot sticks out too obviously when it should be the invisible skeleton on which hangs the wonderful prose, of which much is lost. (He says there are honourable exceptions that come close to the original, like the Fry/Laurie *Jeeves and Wooster* series.)

Tim also wishes that people would stop pretending that Wodehouse was a dreamy saint – Lord Emsworth with a sublime writing talent, as it were. A man who can describe Lord E. as

“peace, perfect peace with loved ones far away” did not have a head stuffed with nothing but charitable thoughts and is arguably a better writer for it.

Tim is responsible for the administration and organisation of the secular – i.e., non-entertainment – parts of the Society’s biennial dinners, a task he describes as terrific fun, similar to trying to herd cats of a particularly independent turn of mind.



(Photo by Ginni Beard)

A Question of Dahlias



In September 2008, Gwen Millan wrote: “A thought occurred to me when admiring the dahlias at the recent, wonderful venue for the RHS flower show in the Inner Temple Gardens. Is there, or wouldn’t it be really good to rejoice in, a Mrs Travers dahlia? A strong colour, of course. Loudish.” A sound idea indeed, but the P. G. Wodehouse Society of the Netherlands beat us to it back in 1991 when they formally named seven new dahlias that had been shown at the Royal Horticultural Show at Harrogate. Developed by Cor Geerlings, the dahlias were called: P. G. Wodehouse, Aunt Dahlia, Milady’s Boudoir, Jeeves, Bertie Wooster, Uncle Fred, and Sir Philip Sidney. According to Jelle Otten, the P. G. Wodehouse dahlia, at least, is still with us, though the black-and-white photo here does not begin to do justice to its rich yellow-orange colours; see <http://tinyurl.com/cm5hfl> for the real thing.

A Book of Interest

Nicholas Aldridge tells us of his recently published book about the Summer Fields master, *G.B.: Master, Monster or Myth?*: “Geoffrey Bolton (1893–1964) was the person who introduced me (and literally hundreds of others) to PGW. This biography makes no deep literary comments on the Master, but if you scan the excellent index, you will find that he appears 14 times, and mention is made of Psmith, Mike, Jeeves, Bertie, Lord Emsworth, Ukridge, the Drones Club, Herbert Jenkins, and Dick Osborne. Several Wodehouse titles also find a place.”

The book sells for £12.99 and is available at book suppliers or direct from the publisher: www.ahstockwell.co.uk. Nicholas has kindly presented a review copy to the Society. If a member would like to review this book for a future issue of *Wooster Sauce*, please let the Editor know.

Wodehouse on the Boards

So far, the only Wodehouse productions we know of are taking place in the United States, so for our American members (or those planning a visit to the colonies), here is what's happening:

In April, *Anything Goes*, with book by Bolton and Wodehouse, music and lyrics by Cole Porter, will be staged at Tallahassee (Florida) Community College, Turner Auditorium (444 Appleyard Drive). The dates are April 2–4 and 9–11 at 8 p.m. For tickets and information, call 850-644-6500.

On April 6 in New York City, The Acting Company's John McDonald Salon Series will feature a

reading of *The Play's the Thing*. The performance will be followed by a reception. Location: Baruch Performing Arts Center, East 25th St. (between Lexington & 3rd Aves.), New York. Call 212-258-3111 or visit www.theactingcompany.org/salon/ for more information.

And if you happen to be in or going to Michigan, a production of *By Jeeves* will be staged at the Meadow Brook Theatre of Oakland University, 207 Wilson Hall, Rochester Hills, Michigan, from April 22 to May 27. For tickets or more information, visit www.ticketmaster.com, or call 248-377-3300.

The Clerihew Challenge Continues

Egad, Jeeves, the *Wooster Sauce* Editor certainly didn't know how much she didn't know about clerihews until the Society's membership started writing in and telling her! After the results of our original Clerihew Challenge were published in the December issue, we received a flood of new contributions. And with them also came a bit of educating, supplied in particular by Geoff Millward, who wrote: "As I understand it, the first line of a classic clerihew usually only consists of the name of the subject. If not, then the name should appear at the end of the line, even though this does present a problem as some names are difficult to rhyme."

This led your Editor to do some belated research on clerihews, and in addition to the biographical aspect that Geoff refers to, these four-line verses generally follow a certain pattern: (1) the lines rhyme *aabb*; (2) the length of the lines and the meter are irregular, with the third and fourth lines often longer than the first two; (3) the clerihew is whimsical and pokes fun at its subject. But none of this means that poets cannot take liberties with the 'rules' (as established by the clerihew's creator, Edmund Clerihew Bentley) – the clerihew's lack of rigid form is part of its fun.

That said, here are a few clerihews from member poets, with more to be published in future issues (and more welcome if you feel the irresistible urge to respond).

Uncle Fred
Would rise from his bed
And spend morning 'til night
Spreading sweetness and light
Geoff Millward

My favourite is the languid Psmith
(The 'P' is silent, yeth it ith!)
Poor Baxter gives it one last shot
Waking Lord Emsworth with a flower pot.
Peter Thompson

Augustus Fink-Nottle
Who eschews the bottle
Claims there's no substitute
For a great-crested newt
Geoff Millward

It is hard to impress the Empress
For the Empress is hard to impress.
You can droop on her sty, like Clarence and sigh
Like a sock that is hung out to dry.
Peter Thompson

Galahad Threepwood
Always would sleep good
Although he should have been knighted
For services to Lovers Reunited.
*Paul H. Tubb**

Miss Madeline Bassett
Had many a heart-warming asset
For Providence had not chosen
From among those frozen
Lennart Andersson

The Oldest Member
From January to December
Golf tales he relates
but never participates.
*Paul H. Tubb**

The profile of Miss Glossop, Honoria
Inspires euphoria.
But her boyfriends get itchy
When she makes them read Nietzsche.
Norman Murphy

* Note: It turns out that when it comes to poets, Paul Tubb is the Real Thing: look for his collection of poetry, *Please Do Not Encourage This Nonsense By Purchasing This Book: Poems by Paul H. Tubb* (published by Trafford), which Paul describes as "funny rhyming poems that will delight children of all ages".

The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

Piccadilly Jim

Piccadilly Jim was one of Wodehouse's first big successes as a novelist. In a letter to Bill Townend in April 1927, he recalled, "I didn't sell any novel more than two thousand until *Piccadilly Jim*" (McIlvaine, N56.19). As this was Wodehouse's first novel published by Herbert Jenkins, this sentence was recast for subsequent publication in 1953 in *Performing Flea* as "I didn't sell over two thousand till I went to Jenkins with *Piccadilly Jim*" (p35).

Piccadilly Jim was first published in the UK in May 1918 (A20b) at a price of 6s. McIlvaine describes the book as bound in mustard yellow cloth, with black lettering. In fact, the front board had a double-ruled black frame around it, with the wording PICCADILLY | JIM | By | P.G.WODEHOUSE at the top. The title was in larger lettering than the author's name. The spine also showed the title and author's name at the top, with the publisher's name at the bottom. A photograph of the book is available via <http://tinyurl.com/aftau4>.

The title page was undated. In her description of the layout of the title page, McIlvaine makes a small error, stating that two parts of the publisher's address (York Street, St James's) are on separate lines; in fact, they are on the same line.

The dust wrapper is not described in either McIlvaine or any of the other standard bibliographies



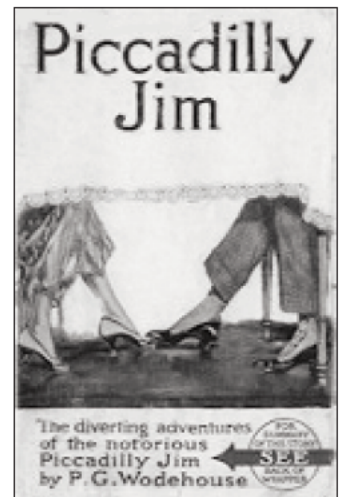
such as Connolly or Jasen, and there was no copy in the James H Heineman collection. Given the success of the book, it is surprising the wrapper is so scarce. According to Dick Neal (of Dick Neal Fine Books), the first edition had a print run of 5,000, and the second printing of 1919 had a print run of 2,000. (The second printing is not mentioned

by McIlvaine, who moves from the first edition to the popular edition of 1920 (A20b2)). Barry Phelps (in his 1982 catalogue for the sale of the Louis Hughes collection) noted that the first edition was "a rather cheaply and badly made book . . . which has made it very difficult to find in . . . nice condition".

It appears that the dust wrapper on the first edition (and potentially the second printing, if my inference from Dick Neal's information is correct) was totally different from that used for the popular edition

onwards. The front cover shows a tablecloth-covered dining table, with a woman sitting by it on a chair and a man in evening dress standing behind her, resting his hand on the back of the chair.

The dust wrapper then changed from the popular edition of 1920 onwards, and it is this wrapper with which most people are probably most familiar. The view on the front cover has moved to below the tablecloth-covered dining table and shows a man in spats playing footsie with a woman in heels. This remained as the standard Jenkins wrapper to the



end of the 25th printing (A20b14), by which point 266,000 copies of the title had been printed. So, of these, 259,000 copies were issued with the 'standard' wrapper, as against only 7,000 with the original wrapper on the first and second printings. The 26th printing (A20b15) in c1950 was issued with a Frank Ford dust wrapper but in a print run of only 5,000. There then seem to have been no further reprints until the Autograph Edition of 1966 (A20b16).

It was unusual for Jenkins to change Wodehouse's dust-wrapper illustrations from first editions to later editions. The only other Jenkins title for which I

am aware of this having happened is *The Coming of Bill*, which was first published in July 1920 (A23b; see *Wooster Sauce*, December 2006, p29, for full details) and was the next but one title (after *A Damsel in Distress* in October 1919 (A24b; see *Wooster Sauce*, March 2003, p19, for full details)) to



be published by Jenkins. It seems that, after that, Jenkins settled down and stuck with the first-edition wrappers for all of those of Wodehouse's subsequent titles which they published.

My thanks to John Graham, Rod Collins, and Dick Neal for their help in preparing this article.



Bertie Wooster and Bingo Little,
as imagined by Siân Jones

Wodehouse Whimsy 1

Inspired by last year's article on the Japanese manga of the Bertie and Jeeves stories, Siân Jones of Cornwall tried her hand at depicting some Wodehouse characters herself. Siân writes: "The manga's artwork looked fabulous. I'm nowhere near as professional, but I had some drawings that I did for fun and I thought I'd send them to you. The manga did make me curious to know how other Society members pictured their favourite characters. Maybe other artists would like to submit their own visions?"

Well, Siân may not consider herself professional, but her drawings are top hole, and we'll be running them over the next few issues. For starters, here is her vision of Bertie with the lovesick Bingo. Would anybody like to rise to her challenge?

Wodehouse on Radio 4

A Review by Norman Murphy

On the afternoons of December 15 and 16, BBC Radio 4 broadcast two plays on Wodehouse. The first dealt with his time in Hollywood, the second with his interrogation in Paris by Major Cussen of MI5 over the Berlin broadcasts.

'Wodehouse in Hollywood' was written by Tony Staveacre, who knows his Wodehouse, and this was reflected in the script. Tim McInnerny did an excellent Wodehouse voice and Fennella Woolgar was good as Ethel, but my American better half was not too impressed by the American accent of some of the other actors. They were there to keep the play from being a dialogue between Wodehouse and Ethel. As friend/adviser/chauffeur/pianist as required, these actors explained some of Hollywood's weirder aspects and were thus able to comment on Wodehouse's habit of walking everywhere ("nobody walks out here") and the way a film script could be written and re-written by a dozen people. The authority of film mogul Irving Thalberg was dealt with before he appeared, and much was made of the jobs Wodehouse was given and which were later scrapped (*Rosalie*) before his contract was up. The play concluded with his famous interview in which he regretted how little he had been asked to do in his time there.

There were one or two scenes I thought inappropriate, especially when Ethel confided aspects of their married life to a comparative stranger, but I imagine this was the writer trying to introduce a new aspect into an otherwise well-known period of Wodehouse's life. It was a pity time did not allow for a mention of Wodehouse's return to Hollywood just a few years later, nor of his visit to Hearst's incredible palace of San Simeon, but one can't have everything. Overall, a good try and, if you did not already know about Wodehouse in Hollywood, a good introduction.

The second play, 'How to Be an Internee with No Previous Experience', was a very different matter. Written by Colin Shindler, it dealt with Wodehouse's interrogation in Paris over the Berlin broadcasts. Tim

McInnerny again played Wodehouse very well indeed, Alex Jennings was good as Malcolm Muggeridge (though he did not attempt Muggeridge's distinctive voice), and Anton Lesser played the MI5 officer Major EJP Cussen to perfection.

Sombre and serious from the outset, it had clips from the broadcasts plus another from Connor's notorious broadcast on the BBC. The play begins with Muggeridge, who also worked for MI5, discussing Wodehouse with Cussen and then going off to meet Wodehouse. They get on well together, become friends, and Muggeridge makes clear the serious position Wodehouse is in. Muggeridge has become convinced of Wodehouse's innocence of any traitorous intent but realises that is not enough.

The play then comes to its crux – Cussen's interviews with Wodehouse. Didn't Wodehouse realise how his talks could be misinterpreted? Didn't he realise that saying he didn't mind his time in prison camp would offend people who had fought? Didn't he realise how the news that the Wodehouses had stayed in the Hotel Adlon, and were now in the Hotel Bristol, made the worst possible impression on people back in Britain? At one point Wodehouse bursts into tears, and it is a tribute to Colin Shindler that this seems completely appropriate. After the interviews, we hear Muggeridge telling Wodehouse that Cussen feels that, though the broadcasts aided the enemy, Wodehouse was clearly innocent of any intention of doing so. But, innocent or not, he advises Wodehouse to stay out of England.

The play ends with a scene many years later, when Wodehouse and Muggeridge are talking to Connor, with whom Wodehouse has now become friends. Muggeridge says: "So it's sweetness and light all round then", but Wodehouse points out that he still feels he can't return to England. And, though Muggeridge then reads out the last paragraph of Evelyn Waugh's glowing tribute for his 80th birthday, Wodehouse's sad remark is the comment we remember. This thought-provoking, well-researched play was superbly written and equally well performed.

Passing References

From *A Beautiful Blue Death* by Charles Finch (2007)
(sent by Fred Schroeder)

In reading this book, Fred was “surprised to find two brothers, Claude and Eustace. They belong to a London Club similar to the Drones (the detective is welcomed by a shoe being propelled out the window). Claude and Eustace go beyond mischief – they are the murderers!”

From *A Town Like Paris* by Bryce Corbett (2007)
(sent by Benjy Berglas)

Page 39 has this quote: “Gavin was dashingly good-looking in a kind of James Bond, terribly proper English fashion. He was debonair in a way that seemed almost to belong to a bygone, more elegant era, as if he had been plucked straight from a PG Wodehouse novel and plonked down in modern-day Paris.”

From *World of Knowledge* by Henry Root (1983)
(sent by Norman Murphy)

The entry on Wodehouse in this book describes him as “The greatest writer in the language since Shakespeare. By his very nature he added a whole new dimension to the concept of innocence.” Root quotes praise from Geoffrey Wheatcroft and Benny Green for backup.

From *A Field Guide to the British* by Sarah Lyall (2008) (Sent by Charles Gould)

Lyall refers to Wodehouse a couple of times and on page 75 mentions Gussie Fink-Nottle as one of the people in British fiction who get drunk. On page 158 she notes that Boris Johnson (now mayor of London) was “an elegant spinner of memorable, Wodehousian phrases”.

From *Adrian Mole: The Wilderness Years* by Sue Townsend (1993) (sent by Marco Farrugia)

From the entry for Monday, December 9: “He (Peter Savage) dresses like Bertie Wooster and talks like Bob Hoskins of Roger Rabbit fame.” (Note that whereas the author felt obliged to qualify Bob Hoskins with a reference to a film, she felt that Bertie Wooster’s fame is so widespread as to not require any elucidation!)

The entry for Wednesday, December 11 notes that “they were in a celebratory mood because they had just won a contract worth 500,000 on the strength of a slogan for an advertising campaign for condoms.” And the slogan? Nothing less than the title of Bertie Wooster’s famous, and only, published article ‘What the Well-Dressed Man Is Wearing’!

From *Schott’s Almanac* (2009) (sent by Hilary Bruce)

On pages 282–283, there is a guide to forms of address, and wherever a name is required, Bertie Wooster is used. Thus, our Bertie is listed as a Baronet (Sir Bertie Wooster Bt [or Bart]), Knight of an Order (Sir Bertie Wooster *and order*), and Knight Bachelor (Sir Bertie Wooster) – all of which would require a salutation of “Dear Sir Bertie”; as a Minister ([The Rt. Hon.] Bertie

Poet’s Corner

The Bachelor’s Song

Since my twentieth birthday I had tried
With no success to win a bride;
My heart had been returned with thanks
By cruel ladies in endless ranks.
But, instead of the balm that the jilted lacks,
The state came down on me with a tax,
And I saw my savings disappear
At the rate of twelve pounds every year.
It came a bit expensive for
I wasn’t a wealthy bachelor.

Fearing my purse wouldn’t stand the drain,
At the age of thirty I tried again;
Bought new clothes of the latest style,
Practised a fascinating smile;
But – why, I cannot understand –
Nobody wanted my heart and hand.
And the State, in its brutal, callous way,
Doubled the tax it made me pay.
Pounds to the number of twenty-four
I paid for being a bachelor.

My fiftieth birthday found me still
A single Jack in search of a Jill;
Hairless, hopeless, dull and stout,
Troubled, too, with a twinge of gout;
And for all my exertions I could not
Find anyone willing to share my lot.
But did the State feel sorry for me?
No; it multiplied my fine by three.
Seventy pounds and a couple more
I paid for being a bachelor.

I write these lines with a borrowed quill
On the back of an unpaid tailor’s bill.
As clever readers will doubtless guess,
The local workhouse is my address.
It seems the only refuge for
A cruelly-harried bachelor.

News Chronicle, 20 February 1904

(On hearing that in one of the Argentine states bachelors have to pay a fine of £1 per month up to 30, £2 a month up to 35, and £6 a month after they reach 50.)

Wooster Esq. [PC] MP – “Dear Minister”; and as an MP (Bertie Wooster Esq. MP), MP Privy Councillor (The Rt Hon. Bertie Wooster PC MP), and Privy Councillor (The Rt Hon. Bertie Wooster PC) – all “Dear Mr Wooster”. (Norman Murphy, a stickler for correct form, asks a pertinent question: Shouldn’t it be Sir *Bertram*?)

Recent Press Comment

From *Spectator*, 180th anniversary issue

(from Alan Carter)

Included an April 1991 article by Ian Hislop commenting on the *Jeeves and Wooster* television series.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, September 23

Mark Forster suggested in a letter that the title of the short story 'Indian Summer of an Uncle' (1930) would have been derived from John Galsworthy's *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* (1918), which also deals with the amorous activities of an elderly uncle.

From *BBC News Online Magazine*, October 11

Listed 50 favourite words of correspondents, including 'zareba', from 'The Clicking of Cuthbert', as nominated by Peter Skinner of Morpeth.

From *The Sunday Telegraph*, October 19

Frank McCourt wrote in the column 'My Perfect Sunday': "I love to read, particularly the books of P G Wodehouse, so I would dedicate some time to that."

From *The News (Portsmouth)*, October 22

(from Frances Sweeney)

Carried an interview with Tony Ring, relating to the Havant Literature festival in September.

From *Telegraph Review*, October 18

In an article on what made Ian Fleming's James Bond novels so unique, Sinclair McKay said: "I think the only other person to have invented a world in our time is PG Wodehouse."

From *Glasgow Herald*, November 1

(from Melvyn Haggerty)

Rosemary Goring used her column to praise the Everyman Wodehouse series in general and the 59th and 60th titles (*Doctor Sally* and *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*) in particular. Max Hastings undertook a similar exercise in the *Sunday Times* on December 21.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, November 21

The polling company YouGov conducted a survey of 2,067 people who were asked to name their favourite books (multiple nominations permitted). *Carry on, Jeeves* received votes from 15.4% of respondents, giving it eighth place. *The Secret Life of Adrian Mole* was the surprise winner.

From *Columbus Dispatch*, December 8

In an interview with Joe Keenan, the American book and TV screenwriter, about his nomination for the Thurber Prize for American Humor, he was asked about his liking for Wodehouse. He quoted as his favourite line the one in which a surprised and upset character is described as "resembling a United States senator who has just received a telegram reading 'All is discovered. Fly at once'".

From *The Daily Telegraph*, December 12

(from Edward Cazalet)

Critic Charles Spencer gave a favourable review to a production of *Twelfth Night*, noting that the characters

"often bring the idyllic innocent world of P G Wodehouse to mind".

From *The Times*, December 13

Critic Chris Campling previewed with approval the two Wodehouse-related plays to be broadcast on December 15 and 16 (*Wodehouse in Hollywood* and *How to be an Internee with No Previous Experience*).

From *Telegraph Weekend*, December 13

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

A letter to comedian Graham Norton, who was acting as agony aunt, complained of the writer's idleness since losing his job. "I spend most of the day sitting in the car listening to Radio 4 and reading PG Wodehouse." Norton's encouraging response noted: "The worst-case scenario is that you get to read Wodehouse in your kitchen instead of the car."

From *Dallas Observer*, December 18

Reviewed a Stage West production of the Mark Richards adaptation *The Code of the Woosters* and praised the production, its two complaints being its length (at about two-and-a-half hours) and the design of the set.

From *Orange County Register*, December 20

Timothy Mangan wrote enthusiastically about the Overlook imprint of the Everyman series, available in the USA, though his description of Bertie as "a kind of British Homer Simpson" and Lord Emsworth as "a kind of single-minded Mr Magoo" might raise the odd eyebrow.

From *The Guardian*, December 23 (from Robert Bruce)

In her review of the television programme *Crooked House*, Nancy Banks-Smith wrote of one character that he was "A man, as Wodehouse said, to whom even the bloodsucking leeches of the Inland Revenue would raise their hats".

From *Outlook*, December 29

(from Sushmita Sen Gupta)

As part of the cover story, 'How to Be Happy in These Gloomy Times', columnist V. Gangadhar suggested a list of possible activities, including: "Sink into a sofa with a P.G. Wodehouse classic, *Jeeves* or the *Blandings Castle* series. You will love people who care so much for a pig, who are so full of the milk of human kindness."

From *The Guardian*, December 30

Harry Phibbs included in his ideal scenario for Boxing Day "... lolling about in an armchair playing *Scrabble* or reading *Diary of a Nobody* or a P G Wodehouse or watching an old black-and-white film ..."

From *The Times*, December 31

Its 'Daily Universal Register Page' selected for its 'Last Word' on the last day of the year the Wodehouse quote from *My Man Jeeves*: "What a queer thing Life is! So unlike anything else, don't you know, if you see what I mean."

From *The Sunday Times*, January 4

Its 'Bookwise' quiz asked the reader to identify characters named Madeline or Madeleine. One such was described thus: "The daughter of a magistrate, she was pretty, in a droopy, blonde, saucer-eyed way, and had fanciful notions about the stars. Gussie Fink-Nottle, a teetotalter and lifelong student of newts, suddenly developed a passion for her."

From *Yorkshire Post*, January 9

Gervase Phinn commented on how he invented realistic place names, referred to the fascinating compendium *The Penguin Dictionary of Place Names*, and noted that 'Old Sodbury' in Gloucestershire ". . . sounds like a wrinkled retainer in a P G Wodehouse novel".

From *Time* magazine, January 10

In 'A Brief History of: Hangover Cures', it was noted that in 1916, "For his first day on the job, P.G. Wodehouse's famous fictional valet, Jeeves, whips up a curative of Worcestershire sauce, raw egg and pepper, and is hired on the spot".

From *Radio 3*, January 11 (from Bob Miller)

On Radio 3's Sunday lunchtime programme, actress Kate O'Mara said that when she feels down, she reads Wodehouse.

From *The Sunday Times*, January 11

In its special section 'Books for Schools', Martin Jarvis referred to his favourite books from his parents' bookcase, including *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *The Boys' Book of Conjuring*, and *The Inimitable Jeeves*.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, January 11

A leader commented on Gordon Brown's need for a butler and suggested "he should appoint someone of the calibre of Jeeves. His advice might be more worthwhile than that of the entire Cabinet."

From *New York Times*, January 17 (from Charles Gould)

In an appraisal of the late John Mortimer, Charles McGrath said the Rumpole stories "combine the whodunit satisfaction of Arthur Conan Doyle, say, with some of the comic fizz of P. G. Wodehouse".

From *The Guardian*, January 18

Robert McCrum opened his 'Appreciation of John Mortimer' by referring to their last meeting, at the Society's dinner in October. [Sir John's love of Wodehouse was mentioned in a number of the numerous formal obituaries and tributes to him which appeared at this time.]

From *The Telegraph (India)*, January 18

A recent book by local author Neel Mukherjee was discussed by him and other guests at a British Council evening meeting. Bemoaning that his book was 'bleak' or 'sad', someone asked whether there was anything

happy in the book. The author replied, "I've failed in my ambition to be P G Wodehouse. If you want Wodehouse, there is plenty here," he added, pointing to the Council's library. The reporter, Malini Banerjee, noted that Wodehouse could be bleak, too, and quoted the poem 'Streets' from *The Small Bachelor*.

From *Spectator*, January 19

Alex Massie introduced a new column which he would be writing in the form of a blog. He suggested that alongside the prospects of England's regaining the Ashes this summer, "There'll probably also be posts attempting to persuade you that P G Wodehouse can supply the answers to most of life's conundrums".

From *The Daily Telegraph*, January 23 (from Jo Jacobius)

A letter to the editor commented on President Obama wearing a formal white tie with a dinner jacket: "Time, I think, to send for Jeeves. I'm horrified, but when Aunt Agatha sees it, he'll be in real trouble."

From *New York Post*, January 24 (from John Baesch)

Noted that the '21' Club, one of the last restaurants in New York to retain traditional dress standards, had relaxed its rules and made wearing ties optional for its diners.

From *Publishers' Weekly (USA)*, Spring

Reported that Martin Jarvis's audio adaptations for CSA Word would shortly be available in the USA, and reminded its readers that in 2008, *The Guardian* picked *Summer Lightning* as one of the '40 best audiobooks ever'.

From *Welsh Guards Regimental Magazine*, 2008

(from John Stone)

Carried a three-page illustrated article written by John Stone about the time from 1954 when he and Edward Cazalet were both in the regiment on National Service, with appropriate mentions of connections with Wodehouse.

From *The Guardian*, February 3

An article about poets and writers who had great affection for cricket concentrated on Siegfried Sassoon but also mentioned Wodehouse, Doyle, Beckett, Barrie, Milne and A P Herbert, not forgetting Tim Rice and Harold Pinter in more recent times.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, February 4

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

Reporting on a confrontation between London mayor Boris Johnson and MP Keith Vaz, Andrew Gimson wrote that Mr Johnson's performance combined "the finest qualities of Bertie Wooster and James Bond".

From *Buffalo News*, February 17

A report of the second meeting of a new chapter of the American Wodehouse Society near Buffalo, New York, included mention of Norman and Elin Murphy. One of the chapter's founders is Elin's sister.

On paper, Blair Eggleston was bold, cold, and ruthless. Like so many of our younger novelists, his whole tone was that of a disillusioned, sardonic philanderer who had drunk the wine-cup of illicit love to its dregs but was always ready to fill up again and have another. There were passages in some of his books, notably *Worm i' the Root* and *Offal*, which simply made you shiver, so stark was their cynicism, so brutal the force with which they tore away the veils and revealed Woman as she is.

(From *Hot Water*, 1932)

Future Events for Your Diary

March 29, April 5, and May 19, 2009

Wodehouse Radio Readings

Thanks to Martin Jarvis, we will get to hear two Wodehouse stories on BBC Radio 4. See p.4 for details.

May 30, 2009 'An Evening with Henry Blofeld'

Society patron Henry Blofeld presents a special one-man show at the Royal Albert Hall. See p.4 for details.

June 12–14, 2009 TWS Biennial Convention

The Wodehouse Society's next convention will be held in Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA.

June 13, 2009 The Noddors vs. the Brigands

Members are welcome to play or watch real tennis at Hatfield House.

June 19, 2009 Gold Bats vs. Dulwich Dusters

Our annual match at Dulwich College; start time is 4.30 p.m., with tea served around 5.30. Tea tickets are mandatory! See p.4 for details.

June 28, 2009 Gold Bats vs. Sherlock Holmes Society

We will play the Sherlock Holmes Society of London at the West Wycombe ground (near the old Hellfire Club), starting at 11 a.m. Come and watch – and bring a picnic lunch.

July 5, 2009 Cricket at Charterhouse School

Members of the Gold Bats will play the Intellectuals at Charterhouse School; start time is 2 p.m.

July 7, 2009 Society Meeting

We will again meet at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street, from 6 p.m.; Simon Brett is the speaker; see p.4.

July 22, 2008 Cricket in Kent

Members of the Gold Bats and the Siegfried Sassoon Society will play on a joint team at Matfield, Kent, starting at 2 p.m. There is a golf outing on the 21st.

August 9, 2008 Gold Bats v Kirby Strollers

This charity match will take place in the grounds of Audley End House, near Saffron Walden; start time is 1 p.m. For directions to Audley End, see <http://tinyurl.com/2ewtht>.

October 13, 2009 Society Meeting

Venue: the Arts Club, from 6 p.m.; speaker to be announced.

CONTENTS

1	Right Ho, Sahib: Wodehouse and India	13	Spotted Online
3	New Wodehouse Books in 2009	14	The Story of 'Providence and the Butler'
3	Little Nuggets	15	Letters to the Editor
4	Society News / Membership Renewal Notice	16	Hollywood Adapts Wodehouse, Part 1
4	Wodehouse Readings on the Radio	17	Profile of a Committee Member: Tim Andrew
5	Special Offer on PGW Silent Movies	17	A Question of Dahlias
5	Profile of a Patron: Nigel Rees	17	A Book of Interest
6	My Life with Wodehouse	18	Wodehouse on the Boards
7	My First Wodehouse Experience	18	The Clerihew Challenge Continues
7	Wodehouse and the Postal Service	19	The Bibliographic Corner:
7	Plum Thought of It First	20	Wodehouse Whimsy 1
8	The Society Meets – and Meets Again	20	Wodehouse on Radio 4
10	John Clifford Mortimer, 1923–2009	21	Passing References
11	We Remember . . .	21	Poet's Corner: <i>The Bachelor's Song</i>
11	The Best of Wodehouse in the Press	22	Recent Press Comment
12	Plum in Norfolk	24	Future Events for Your Diary