



WOOSTER SAUCE

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The Alarming Spread of Poetry

A Little Free Speech About Free Verse

by P G Wodehouse

Editor's note: Following Simon Brett's masterful performance of *A Crime in Rhyme* at the Society's meeting in July (see *Wooster Sauce*, September 2009), we sent our intrepid staff on a search for similar stuff among the works of one P G Wodehouse. Alas, nothing quite in the style of Simon's narration was found, but we did unearth the following essay, which appeared in *Vanity Fair* in June 1916 (under the name Pelham Grenville) and, in slightly different form, in the *Los Angeles Times* on August 31, 1930. Herewith we offer the *Vanity Fair* version as a rather jolly Christmas present to our readers. Enjoy – and have a Happy New Year!

Recently I had occasion to visit, on business the nature of which does not come within the scope of this article, my old friend Dodd of the firm Winchley, Dodd and Co. It was a perfect day, and as I was not pressed for time I thought it would be pleasant to stroll part of the way, smoking thoughtfully. Entering a tobacco-store, I addressed the youth behind the counter. He was a dreamy-eyed young man, and as I entered he was scribbling something on his shirt cuff with a stub of pencil. I could hear him muttering something about "light" and "bright."

"I want a mild cigar," I said.

He bustled about among his boxes, all eagerness and efficiency.

"A mild cigar? About what price? Ah! here you are. You'll find this nice. I hear each day somebody say this brand's the best by far. All other smokes are simply jokes compared with this cigar."

I thought little of the incident until I reached the office building where my friend works. A child of tender years was standing in the elevator, gazing heavenward in a rapt sort of way and chewing a fountain-pen. I addressed him.

"Take me to Winchley, Dodd and Co. They are on the second floor."

"Step right inside, and up we go. The elevator isn't slow. In fifteen seconds, sir, or so, you'll tap upon their door."

I obeyed the child's instructions, and, entering the office, accosted the office-boy. He had long hair and was dictating something to the stenographer. I caught the words "breath" and "death."

"Who is that you wish to see? Be candid and confide in me."

I said I wished to see Mr. Dodd.

"Mr. Dodd? Why, that's odd. There's his room, but he's not in it. He's gone out. Not a doubt! He'll be back in half a minute."

And then I perceived with that clarity which comes from actual personal observation how universal the once sporadic disease of poetry had become in our midst.



To the thinking man there are few things more disturbing than the realization that we are becoming a nation of minor poets. In the good old days poets were for the most part confined to garrets, which they left only for the purpose of being ejected from the offices of the magazines and papers to which they attempted to sell their wares. Nobody ever thought of reading a book of poems unless accompanied by a guarantee from the publisher that the author had been dead at least a hundred years. Poetry, like wine, certain brands of cheese, public buildings and Hans Wagner, was rightly considered to improve with age: and no

Are we all really poets at heart?

connoisseur would have dreamed of filling himself with raw, indigestible verse, warm from the maker's.

Today all this is changed. Editors are paying real money for poetry; publishers are making a profit on books of verse; and many a young man who, had he been born earlier, would have sustained life on a crust of bread, is now sending for the manager to find out how the restaurant dares try to sell a fellow champagne like this as genuine Pommery Brut. Naturally this is having a marked effect on the life of the community. Our children grow to adolescence with the feeling that they can become poets instead of working. Many an embryo bill clerk has been ruined by the heady knowledge that poems are paid for at the rate of a dollar a line. All over the country promising young plasterers and rising young motormen are throwing up steady jobs in order to devote themselves to the new profession. On a sunny afternoon down in Washington Square one's progress is positively impeded by the swarms of young poets brought out by the warm weather. It is a horrible sight to see those unfortunate youths, who ought to be sitting happily at desks writing "Dear Sir, Your favor of the tenth inst. Duly received and contents noted. In reply we beg to state . . ." wandering about with their fingers in their hair and their features distorted with the agony of composition, as they try to find rhymes to "cosmic" and "symbolism."

And, as if matters were not bad enough already, along comes Mr. Edgar Lee Masters and invents *vers libre*. It is too early yet to judge the full effects of this man's horrid discovery, but there is no doubt that he has taken the lid off and unleashed forces over which none can have any control. All those decent restrictions which used to check poets have vanished, and who shall say what will be the outcome?

Until Mr. Masters came on the scene there was just one thing which, like a salient fortress in the midst of an enemy's advancing forces, acted as a barrier to the youth of the country. When one's son came to one and said, "Father, I shall not be able to fulfill your dearest wish and start work in the fertilizer department. I have decided to become a poet," although one could no longer frighten him from his purpose by talking of garrets and starvation, there was still one weapon left. "What about the rhymes,



The cause of it all:
Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950)

Willie?" you replied, and the eager light died out of the boy's face as he perceived the catch in what he had taken for a good thing. You pressed your advantage. "Think of having to spend your life making one line rhyme with another! Think of the bleak future, when you have used up 'moon' and 'June,' 'love' and 'dove,' 'May' and 'gay'! Think of the moment when you have ended the last line but one of your poem with 'window' or 'warmth' and have to buckle to, trying to make the thing couple up in accordance with the rules! What then, Willie?"

Next day a new hand had signed on in the fertilizer department.

But now all that has changed. Not only are rhymes no longer necessary, but editors positively prefer them left out. If Longfellow had been writing today he would have had to revise "The Village Blacksmith" if he wanted to pull in that dollar a line. No editor would print stuff like:

*Under the spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands.
The smith a brawny man is he
With large and sinewy hands.*

If Longfellow were living in these hyphenated, free and versy days, he would find himself compelled to take his pen in hand and dictate as follows:

In life I was the village smith.
I worked all day
But
I retained the delicacy of my complexion
Because
I worked in the shade of the chestnut-tree
Instead of in the sun
Like Nicholas Blodgett, the expressman.
I was large and strong
Because
I went in for physical culture
And deep breathing
And all those stunts.
I had the biggest biceps in Spoon River.

After publishing a few like that he would have had to keep a dog to chase away the editors who cluttered up his door-step and pestered him for stuff. He would have had to wear a false mustache if he meant to walk anywhere near the magazine offices. And if he had seen Charles Hanson Towne coming he would have run like a rabbit.

Who can say where this thing will end? *Vers libre* is within the reach of all. A sleeping nation has wakened to the realization that there is money to be made out of chopping its prose into bits.

Ninety million people are discovering that they have been giving away all their lives what they might have sold for good money. Only the other day I myself was stricken with the disease. I happened to be writing to my landlord what is technically known as a “strong letter” about the state of the roof, dwelling on its imperfections and hinting at the probable danger of allowing it to continue in its present state. I had not got half-way through it when I perceived that I was letting good stuff go to waste. I tore up the letter and sent the following to a magazine:

Passer by
 Take a good look at the above tombstone.
 I died of acute rheumatism,
 Universally respected.
 (No flowers, by request.)
 Wasn't it rotten luck?
 Everybody loved me.
 But the landlord would not fix the roof.
 And the rain came in and made the house
 Damp.
 And that finished me.
 I tied myself in knots and
 Expired.
 Spoon River has forgotten me,
 Everyone in Spoon River has forgotten me
 Except
 Ed Judkins, the drug-store man.
 I owed him fifty cents.

A child can do it. And what is worse, nearly every child *is* doing it. Things have reached such a pitch that our little ones take to poetry as soon as they write a legible hand. Something must be done shortly if the nation is to be saved from this menace. But what? It is no good shooting Edgar Lee Masters, for the mischief has been done, and even making an example of him could not undo it. Probably the only hope lies in the fact that poets never buy other poets' stuff. When once we have all become poets, the sale of verse will cease or be limited to the few copies which individual poets will buy to give to their friends.

Final note: In 1915 Edgar Lee Masters published *Spoon River Anthology*. This consisted of 212 ‘free verse’ poems in the form of epitaphs presented by the dead of Spoon River. For some reason, it became a hit across the United States. However, the book was not well received in Petersburg and Lewistown, Illinois, since Masters had used the names of many of the people he knew there.



Letters to the Editor

From Charles Gould

Regarding Wodehousean/Wodehousian, Shakespearean/Shakesperian, and Spenserean/Spenserian: if the name ends with the vowel *e* I don't see any reason to change it to an *i*. H. W. Fowler, however, seems to like the *i* form in all cases: ‘Shakesperian’ etc. ‘Wordsworthian’, obviously, but then there's ‘Coleridgean’ . . . and then we have ‘Miltonic’, ‘Petrarchan’, and ‘Shavian’ (not that Shaw ever wrote a sonnet in his whole puff). Among great composers there are few contesters. ‘Wagnerian’, of course, is a word in our language; ‘Verdian’ really isn't. ‘Schubertian’ perhaps, but I can't think of another. Well, perhaps a grotesque ‘Mozartian’ on the lame lips of a music critic, but I think Wagner wins the prize uniquely here.

From Dr Dilip Joshi:

There is no doubt that Wodehouse was a master of puns as some examples quoted in the September *Wooster Sauce* show. But his epigrammatism (call it by any other name – esprit/wordplay/bon mot/quip) is far more witty and unique. I shall quote some examples, but they are from memory and not verbatim. Society members who are true Wodehouse devotees will know what I am talking about and will forgive the liberty.

I came out so fast that I almost met myself going in.

“Oh, do be quiet, Freddie.”

“Sorry, you know one gets carried away.”

“You will be, by the constabulary, if you do not desist.”

Bingo Little on telephone: “My name is Little.”

“Mine is mud” on the other end.

From Peter Gooday

The tie shown on page 18 of the September *Wooster Sauce* is undoubtedly a basic Old Alleynian tie, of which I sport two examples: the old one (faded, with full complement of the optional soup and fish) and a more modern one (which is a bit wider and cleaner). They should not be confused with an Alleyn Club tie, which is crested and also available as a bow but – theoretically, at least – to which only members of the Alleyn Club are entitled. However, I think I am right in saying that all school leavers are now automatically enrolled, no doubt to the considerable annoyance of those who paid substantial life membership fees in the past.

I expect that the College's brother foundation, Alleyn's School, in Townley Road, will have equivalents, but these should not be confused with the Old Alleynian sartorial appendages. I note, however, that there is something called the Alleyn's Association, which, I presume, is linked only initially with Alcoholics Anonymous and the Automobile Association. But if, in some cases, the difference is not obvious, just look closely at the subject's tie! My understanding is that the (U.S. Society's) Drones Club tie is based on the basic OA tie. Certainly its pattern dimensions are exactly the same (I checked) though, of course, the colour scheme is different.

More Letters to the Editor

From Iain Anderson

I very much enjoyed the June edition of *Wooster Sauce*. I was interested in the ‘Printer’s Error’ article, as it reminded me of a glaring error in one of my copies of *The Code of the Woosters*. In the Folio Society edition, when Bertie is in conversation with Madeline Bassett, he remembers something Jeeves had once called Gussie Fink-Nottle:

“A sensitive plant, what?”

“Exactly. You know your Shelley, Bertie.”

“Oh, am I?”

However, in the same story in *The Jeeves Omnibus*, printed by Century Hutchinson, Bertie asks, “Oh, do I?”, thereby rendering the Shelley remark rather pointless.

From Ian Alexander-Sinclair

We know that Plum occasionally applied the precepts of the Duke of Wellington, such as “Up, Guards and at them” and “When in doubt, retire and dig yourself in”. Might Lord Ickenham, when commenting in *Cocktail Time* on the inmates of the House of Commons in 1958, have had in mind the Duke’s succinct comment on the intake of 1833: “I never saw so many shocking bad hats in my life.”

From Larissa Saxby-Bridger

A friend of mine has embarked upon becoming a beekeeper, and to honour him for this, I sent him an Everyman edition of *Uneasy Money*, which is fitting as he lives in America, where some of the book is set. His venture prompted me to think of bees with their present plight. (Albert Einstein once said that if bees became extinct, the human race would survive no more than four years.) After reading *Uneasy Money*, I realised there is a sweet connection between bees and soul mates, for St Valentine is not only the patron saint of love, lovers, and marriage; he is also patron saint of bees and beekeepers. I wonder if Plum put the two together, sparking within him that seed of imagination for a story involving love and bees, linked by St Valentine? Given Plum’s unsurpassable knowledge and excellent witty use of Scripture and the classics in his works, I would like to think that it was the life of St Valentine that inspired him. What do fellow Wodehousians think?

WatW on the Rise

Murray Hedgcock’s admirers will be glad to know that through the efforts of **Ken Lyon**, the sales standing of *Wodehouse at the Wicket* has now jumped from 980,889 to 980,888 (see *Wooster Sauce*, September issue, p.20). Ken worked this miracle by purchasing a copy in the Oxfam bookshop at Bedford. A few more purchases like this and Murray will soon be down (or up) to 980,000!

Society News

General News – and a New Website!

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 16, when we will be regaled by actor and PGW audiobook performer *par excellence* Jonathan Cecil – a talk not to be missed! (Note: There will be no abbreviated Wodehouse Walk prior to this meeting, though one will take place before the July meeting; see page 24.)

The Society was pleased to renew its sponsorship of the Berkshire Pig Breeders Club’s Champion of Champions for another five years; see page 9 for details.

Finally, be sure to check out our new-look website at www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk – you’ll be wowed!

Wodehouse Walks Return

Yes, the classic Wodehouse Walk is returning in 2010! After conducting numerous short walks during the Plum Pie exhibition (see p.8), Norman Murphy has decided to resume the original full-length (2½ hours) Wodehouse Walk. Three dates have been chosen on Saturdays in 2010 (see Future Events, p.24).

Changes on the Committee

At October’s AGM (see p.5), **Joe Selfe** stood down from the Society’s Committee and as our database manager. The Committee will miss her for her great good sense, attention to detail, and wicked sense of humour. Maintenance of the Society’s database is a crucial task, without which you would not now have *Wooster Sauce* in your hand. Fortunately, Joe’s forethought had produced a ‘shadow’ database manager who has nobly stepped up to the plate to run the membership records. Our hero is **Daryl Lloyd**; some of you will know him as a Gold Bat, others as one of the two geographers who, a few years ago developed a natty program designed to locate the real Blandings Castle (though purists may disagree with their identification of Apley Hall as the source). Welcome to Daryl, the Society’s new database manager.

This AGM was also **Alan Wood**’s last as the Society’s treasurer. Over the past five-odd years, Alan has done a superb job of transforming our accounts and reporting systems, saving – and making – useful amounts of money for the Society. Chairman Hilary Bruce has given her personal thanks to Alan for his unswerving commitment and kind, often repeated, explanations of things that to him must have been blindingly obvious. The Committee will not miss Alan, because happily he has been elected as a Committee member. And it is typical of him that, having signalled his plan to stand down, he manfully set about finding his successor. **Andrew Chapman** will be familiar to Gold Bats members and regulars at meetings. Andrew is an accountant presently occupied in trying to retire. He lives in Shropshire, where he has many local interests although of course the Society will soon change that. Naturally we are delighted that he has agreed to become our treasurer – with surprisingly little coercion – and we welcome such an amiable individual to the team.

A Good Evening – and an AGM to Boot

by Oliver Wise

The Society's 2009 Annual General Meeting at the Arts Club on 13 October kicked off late, in the happiest of circumstances. The officers' reports had all been compiled, and their authors were primed for delivery. Lured to attend by the fame of our illustrious guest speaker, Stephen Pound MP, far more than a quorum were present. In fact, a record attendance had been achieved; however, officers and members were too busy with the browsing and sluicing. Larissa Saxby-Bridger, one of the Society's keenest members, was celebrating her birthday by standing drinks all round – an act of great generosity, given the hordes packing into the Arts Club. Champagnes, Gins, Whisky Splashes, Lagers, and House Reds toasted Larissa and got stuck into the canapés.

After this Bacchanalian indulgence, the Chairman, Hilary Bruce, called us to order and the AGM proceeded. Alan Wood rounded off a distinguished term as Treasurer with accounts that gave universal satisfaction. We have a decent quantity of simoleons in the old oak chest. Joe Selfe retired from the Committee, having contributed much behind-the-scenes database work for the Society. Officers made their reports, and none drew tricky questions. And then it was time for our visiting speaker.

These are not cheerful times for MPs, what with them getting it in the neck for their expenses claims. Stephen Pelham Pound, the Hon. Member for Ealing North, was 579th in the list of MPs claiming incidental expenses, which would appear to be a happily long way down the field. Even so, he has suffered at the hands of the hypercritical. With us, Mr Pound was as jovial as could be, and at once referred to the expenses scandal with a bon mot about the free drinks provided for us all that evening.

The essence of Mr Pound's message was that Wodehouse was the tops, and he gave many fine examples. A convincing case for defeating the fascist menace was given by the Wodehouse treatment of Spode. ("What the voice of the People is saying is

'Look at that frightful ass Spode swanking about in footer bags! Did you ever in your puff see such a perfect perisher?")

A fellow sheltering from bombs in Srinagar would encounter senior Sikh soldiery and a copy of *The Code of the Woosters*. Someone who had no prior interest in golf, into which category Mr Pound confessed he fell, would be drawn to an understanding and appreciation of the Royal and Ancient game by *The Clicking of Cuthbert* and *The Heart of a Goof*. We were transported into the implausible world of Hash Todhunter in *Sam the Sudden*.

Mr Pound took us with a light touch to the political background of Plum's names: Pelham and Grenville both led 18th-century administrations. Fortunately, Pelham Grenville Wodehouse applied himself to a higher calling. Some of our other speakers may have spoken with greater learning about Wodehouse's works, but none can have relished the characters' names more: Zenobia ('Nobby') Hopwood, Pongo Twistleton, and Plug Basham being Mr Pound's particular favourites.

The Hon. Member packed his talk with infectious humour. In fact, your correspondent was laughing so much he could hardly take a note. It was a superb conclusion to a hugely enjoyable evening.



Our scintillating speaker, Stephen Pound, with Hilary Bruce

Dictionary Corner

Though this is an old item, we offer the following from the *Detroit Free Press Online*, October 28, 2007: **Enquiry:** If one may be either 'disengaged' or 'engaged', 'discredited' or 'credited', why is it that no one is ever referred to as being simply 'gruntled'?

Response: To be 'dismissed' isn't the opposite of being 'missed', and 'discussing' something isn't the opposite of 'cussing' it. 'Dis-', which we borrowed from the Latin, used to have a lot of meanings, including 'excessively'. 'Gruntle', in the English of 400 or 500 years ago, meant 'to grunt or grumble frequently'. The 'excessively' meaning of 'dis-' is the one that figures in 'disgruntled' – a disgruntled person was an over-the-top complainer. 'Gruntle' eventually fell out of use. 'Dis-', in the 'excessively' sense, all but vanished too. By 1938 the origins of both parts of 'disgruntle' were obscure enough that the British humorist P G Wodehouse could write: "He spoke with a certain what-is-it in his voice, and I could see that, if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being gruntled."

Plum Pie

The Life & Work of P G Wodehouse

Reports of an Exhibition at Heywood Hill

When the Plum Pie exhibition at Heywood Hill, the famous bookshop at 10 Curzon Street, was first mooted, probably nobody anticipated how successful it would be. From the evening of the opening ceremony on September 21 attended by, amongst others, Patrick Wodehouse, the Duke of Kent, and Richard Briers, to the final days, October 15 and 16, which saw the visit of three Very Important People, the whole thing was a huge success.

The exhibition, superbly put together by Edward Cazalet and Tony Ring, comprised panels illustrating Wodehouse's life; a case containing personal memorabilia, including his trilby hat, his typewriter, his pipes and tobacco jar, the legendary golf umbrella (the only golf trophy he ever won), and his walking stick, a gift from Guy Bolton; panels covering his theatrical successes and working methods, as well as a case with typescripts from *The Girl in Blue*; photographs of PGW throughout his life; and, scattered through the bookshelves, a series of superb



Henry Blofeld opened the exhibition, while Nicholas Soames was one of many glitterati in attendance at the opening. Hal Cazalet, in the background, sang PGW songs on the night.

Wodehouse one-liners. Given the size of the bookshop, the methods employed to fill it with Wodehouseana were nothing short of awe-inspiring. Special thanks go to the panels' designer, Volaire's James Redrup, who did a fantastic job of putting together photos and text in an eye-pleasing manner.

Favourable publicity (see page 23) – including a special report on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme that was turned into a slideshow on their website (see page 17) – resulted in a flood of Wodehouse fans coming from all over the country to view the exhibition. So great was the flood, in fact, that Heywood Hill's superb staff – Jeffrey, Venetia, Rachel, and Frances – needed guides on hand so that they could get on with their own jobs, as described by Peter Martin (see next page). Norman Murphy, who had agreed to conduct weekly Wodehouse Walks during the time of the exhibition, had his own problems to deal with, as he reports on page 8.

On September 29 a special viewing was held for Society members. Peter Thompson has written an account of this enjoyable evening that can be found on our website, where Jamie Jarrett also describes the opening ceremony presided over by Henry Blofeld and Norman provides an enjoyably expanded report of his Wodehouse Walks experiences; see www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk. In addition to all this, the exhibition attracted numerous new members to the Society, resulting in our biggest meeting ever (see the report on page 5). And to cap off the excitement, the final two days saw three unexpected visitors (and Wodehouse fans) from the United States: Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Stephen Breyer and Chief Justice John Roberts. Excellent judgement on their part!



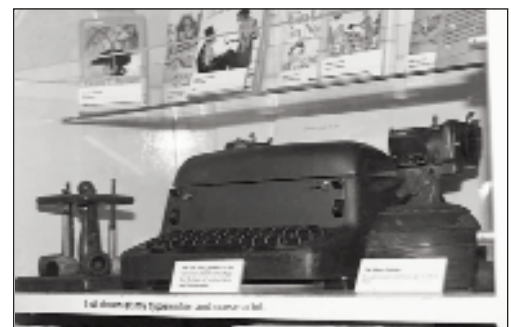
Curators Tony Ring and Edward Cazalet



Left: Camilla Cazalet and Patrick Wodehouse examine some of the panels.

Right: Plum's beloved Royal typewriter holds pride of place.

(All photos this page are by Ginni Beard)



A Slice of Plum Pie

by Peter Martin

During the time of the Plum Pie exhibition at Heywood Hill, the bookshop operated normally, and supplies of new books were received, sold, and delivered – the regular staff were very busy all the time. Therefore the curators of Plum Pie asked that a small volunteer corps of Wodehouse fans be available at the bookshop to meet, greet, chaperone, and generally help visitors to Plum Pie find their way round. This is a brief record of one such fan's experience on a Saturday morning in early October.

Visitors to the exhibition came in all shapes and sizes. Young and old, they all arrived seemingly full of enthusiasm to see what was on offer. Asked how they had heard of the show, most said that they had read of it on the BBC News website, some in the *Evening Standard*, and many by word of mouth from other fans. Nothing surprising in this, but it is interesting to realise how wide the BBC News catchment is. Many of those asked said they had the website as their computer home page. The BBC should be gratified!

First to arrive on my watch was a customer who came to collect previously ordered books – he had not heard of the show but walked round for a good half hour and said he loved it. Next were two visitors from Sweden who had come especially to see the exhibition and had spent much of Friday there as well; they asked if the show might be moved to Sweden, where, they said,



Above: Heywood Hill, a terrific bookshop and a London institution.

Below: Panels lining the shop focused on different aspects of Wodehouse's life and career.

(All photos by Ginni Beard)

Wodehouse competition questionnaire – first prize a set of the Everyman editions. One young man, obviously very knowledgeable, asked what US TV soap did Plum watch each day, which was referred to in the exhibit's last panel. This meeter and greeter was floored (the answer, it turns out, is *The Edge of Night*). The whole morning saw at least 20 visitors come especially for Plum Pie, but there were many regular Heywood Hill customers and, without exception, these looked at and enjoyed the show as well.

The charm of the bookshop is its wonderful display of books on tables, set out as if in a very bookish private house – all the newest novels, biographies, cookery books, new paperbacks, and so on. These, with the table of Wodehousiana and the shelf of Everyman editions, attracted the widest interest, and there was a constant flow of people leaving with the characteristic Heywood Hill bag filled with Wodehouse and other goodies. The regular Heywood Hill staff are wonderfully welcoming,



efficient, and patient; it is not like a multiple bookshop, more like a private house with books incidentally for sale!

If asked what seemed to give the greatest individual enjoyment to visitors, one would be bound to say the strap lines of Wodehouse one-liners dotted about all over the bookshop – people seem to love them, probably because they wished they could have said or written such witty things themselves. To add to the general fun, a filmmaker, armed with her camera, shot a small cameo of a very well-known society fashionista reading and commenting on her favourite strap lines and Wodehouse anecdotes.

A thoroughly amusing and worthwhile morning.



knowledgeable Wodehouse fans were to be found in legions. A young violinist, complete with violin, rucksack, briefcase, and whatnot, arrived to pay his respects, on his way to an evening concert in the City. A woman from Henley-on-Thames, up specially for the day, spent a good hour checking her answers to the

Heigh-ho! Heigh-Ho!

It's off to Heywood Hill

by Norman Murphy

Because of Plum Pie's popularity, the Society provided practical help to Heywood Hill in the form of volunteers to act as exhibition guides, answer Wodehousean queries, point them towards the Society membership forms, and generally keep them happy. I went in quite often in this role. I had always known that Heywood Hill had a pretty select clientele, but I never expected to be giving advice to an ex-Foreign Secretary and at least two millionaires, as well as being greeted familiarly by a man who had been a fellow subaltern in my regiment and was now a field marshal and member of the House of Lords.

My initial contribution to the exhibition was to conduct a mini-Wodehouse Walk on Wednesday afternoons – four Walks in all. Heywood Hill had told their customers to telephone to book a place. I had asked for a limit of 12 per Walk, but that was soon raised to 15. The first Walk went well enough and included the author/journalist Harry Mount doing a report for the *Evening Standard*, plus photographer. Two days later, 400,000 Londoners read a full-page report on the exhibition and my Walk and the information that it started on Wednesdays at 2.30. Unfortunately, it did *not* say that people should book a place beforehand. As Murray Hedgcock pointed out, nearly half a million people read the *Evening Standard* and, if just one per cent turned up for the Walk, I was in for an interesting afternoon.

Well, it wasn't that bad, but when Heywood Hill told me they still had more people trying to book places, I offered to do a Thursday Walk as well. The following Wednesday I was extremely apprehensive – and rightly so. By 2 p.m. the shop was heaving with people. They weren't just Londoners; they had come from all over England – “just for the Walk”. How could I say no? And so it went on. I think I had 24 or 25 that day – and the rain started as well, but they all enjoyed it.

The following week was the same, including one chap from Glasgow(!), and it was clear by the start of the fourth and last week that desperate measures were necessary. Heywood Hill were still getting telephone

calls, so I did five Walks. Before the Society meeting on Tuesday evening, I led four Society members and 10–11 others. On Wednesday I did a special in the morning for a chum of mine and his three friends which grew to a party of 14, including two couples who saw us leaving and tagged on. That afternoon I set off with a second party of 32! For readers who wonder how I kept track of them all, I began every Walk by selecting the tallest man present and appointing him as Rear Marker or sheepdog. It worked very well, and I only lost one person of the total 190 or so.

Thursday and Friday were reasonable – back to the middle 20s, though both Walks included people who had heard the Walks had officially finished but



The final group of Walkers on the last day of the exhibition, with Lottie, the dog who led the party with Norman and behaved perfectly throughout.

(Photo courtesy of Heywood Hill)

had telephoned anyway and the Heywood Hill people told them to come along and look pleadingly at me!

A busy and tiring month, but hugely enjoyable. I must conclude, however, by paying a tribute to the people at Heywood Hill: Jeffrey, Venetia, Rachel, and Frances. I had never realised how much hard work was involved in running a busy bookshop. I was incredibly impressed that every member of staff seemed to know what customers wanted. I heard at least three people ask for a book whose name and author they could not remember but it was about “a chap who went to China”, “some girl who saw angels”, or simply “a very good book about Canada”. And the Heywood Hill people knew it every time. Most impressive!

Another Champion Crowned at Newbury

by Elaine Ring

The sun shone as Chairman Hilary Bruce, accompanied by a small retinue of members, attended the court of the Royal County of Berkshire Show on Sunday, September 20, for the annual crowning of the Champion of Champions in the Berkshire Pig Class.

As hors d'oeuvres, we were treated to the competition for the show's inter-breed champion. Did we detect in Mr Guy Kiddy, a judge of great renown, a predilection for redheads? The 'reserve' award went to a beautiful Duroc of a deep chestnut colour, the youngest pig in the ring. As Champion, he nominated a fine ginger Tamworth, a veritable Bobbie Wickham of a pig.

Then to the main course, our Berkshires. The commentary from the ring was provided by Nick Hankin, who once again did the Society proud. During the 20 minutes that the pigs were strutting their stuff, he explained to the gathering crowd the warm relationship between the Society and the Berkshire breed, mentioned the word 'Wodehouse' at least 50 times and urged all who would listen to read the Blandings books and visit the Heywood Hill exhibition, and even, if they got the chance, to catch the play *Oh, Clarence* if it came to their local theatre. He told us why the Berkshire is often called 'The Lady's Pig'. Not only are they easy for ladies to control, but ladies have often been their owners. In the late 1880s, he added, Queen Victoria established a herd at Windsor where they remained until the 1950s. Princess Anne is said to remember them, and to hope that one day they may be seen there again.

Now it was the turn of Judge Kiddy. First he chose the runner-up: a young boar, Fair Oaks Peter Lad II, the son of last year's champion, owned by Chris Impey of Chepstow. Then the moment for which Hilary had been waiting: the opportunity to present the rosette to the

Supreme Champion. Having caught and pinned down the *victrix ludorum*, she swathed Dittisham Lady 36, owned by Sue Fildes of Dartmouth, in the magnificent Wodehouse Society sash. This splendid animal, whose father now seeks to sire more prize-winning progeny in France, was born in August 2008. At her birth Sue recognised her potential, saying that she was head and shoulders above the rest of the litter, later becoming the fastest-growing pig Sue has ever raised. What is more, she was due to maintain the family tradition by producing her first litter at the beginning of November 2009. Maybe next year Hilary will be paying homage to one of her children – and perhaps more members would care to come along and join in the fun.



Sue Fildes and Dittisham Lady 36, proud winners at the Newbury Show in September

(Photo by Tony Ring)

The Chairman Adds:

This year we completed our five-year commitment to sponsor the Berkshire Pig Breeders Club's Champion of Champions, so it was time to consider renewal. Negotiations had begun in the pig tent at the Newbury Show, when the BPBC said they would greatly welcome our continuing sponsorship, if the Society was so minded. At our October meeting, the Committee debated the matter for almost three seconds before voting unanimously to continue its support for another five years. The details are that the Society will sponsor the BPBC Champion of Champions competition at £150 a year for the next five years. We are also providing a one-off payment of £200 for a BPBC display board, on which the Society's name and logo will appear as sponsor; we have also agreed website links and various other cooperative ideas. Both parties gain a lot from the relationship – for example, the Society has unrivalled access to Berkshire pigs more or less on demand, while the Berkshire breeders have probably the most unusual and newsworthy sponsor of any breed society in the world.

– Hilary Bruce

The Ultimate in Clerical Appointments: Following up on his own item on our September issue, **Murray Hedgcock** found the following appointment in the October 22 *Telegraph*: "The Rev. Geoffrey Hollingsworth, vicar of Airmyn, Hook and Rawcliffe St.David (Diocese of Sheffield), to be priest-in-charge, Pocklington and Owsthorpe and Kilnwick Percy with Great Givendale and Millington, and priest-in-charge, Burnby St.Giles, and priest-in-charge, Londesborough All Saints, and priest-in-charge Nunburnholme and Warter and Huggate St.James, and priest-in-charge Shipton Thorpe and Hayton All Saints (Diocese of York)." Murray notes: "The thought occurs that this posting would allow the new incumbent to provide all entries for a Great Sermon Handicap on his own – unless he sneakily gave the same sermon to each of his flocks. I do hope the reverend gentleman has a bike . . ."

My First Wodehouse Experience

by Dr Dilip Joshi

“Jeeves,” I said, “may I speak frankly?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“What I have to say may wound you.”

“Not at all, sir.”

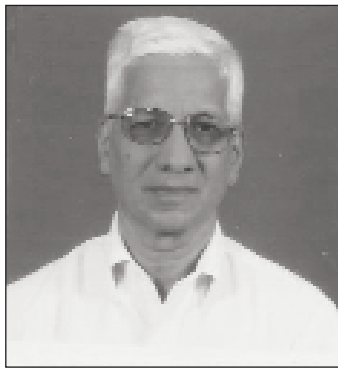
“Well, then—”

These or similar words plunge me headlong into the World of Wodehouse, and there is no turning back – not that I want to. It is a world of hilarious situations and characters. It is England of the Twenties and Thirties peopled by Bertie, Jeeves, Bingo Little, Pongo Twistleton, Lord Emsworth, Ukridge, and Mr Mulliner, where the most unspeakable offence is pulling back the last loop as Bertie crosses the Drones Club swimming bath in full evening attire, and where the annual cross-talk act between Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps and Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton is the most popular event in the calendar. (Talking of English names, I have always been intrigued by Bulstrode, Murgatroyd, and Featherstonehaugh and have nursed a secret desire to meet somebody with such a name. No luck so far!)

How did I get hooked? My father was a devout Wodehouse fan, collecting about 40-odd titles which held pride of place in his modest library; I have assiduously added to that collection. My generation was brought up on Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Harold Robbins, and Jeffrey Archer. But somewhere down the line I was weaned away (with the exception of Agatha Christie) and got hooked on Wodehouse.

My father introduced my sister to Wodehouse as well, and dinner table conversations centered around his humour. One of us would be reading one book or another and would share a hilarious passage with the others. Since all three of us had read them, dinner would be forgotten, to the chagrin of my mother, waiting to clear the table. Gussie’s speech at Market Snodsbury or Bertie and Sir Roderick Glossop roaming the countryside at night with a blackened faces would be repeated again and again. One-liners became part of our vocabulary. “He looks more like a gorilla than most gorillas do” is one example. All this made for great family bonding.

Alas, there is a tragic twist to this. During one such dinner table session, the oft-used expression ‘kicking the bucket’ made my father laugh so much that he had tears in his eyes. “Does one actually kick a bucket while dying?” he said. Within a week, he passed away, a fact so deeply etched on my mind that I can never forget the coincidence.



When I first went to England in 1984, I did not feel that I was going to the land of Shakespeare or Wordsworth or Johnson but to the land of Wodehouse. It was the land of Blandings Castle, Totleigh Towers, and Wrykyn School. Walking the streets of London was so surrealistic an experience that it gave me goose bumps. I

secretly hoped to bump into Bertie walking to the Drones Club, or Jeeves on his way to The Junior Ganymede, or Freddie Threepwood rushing to Aspinall’s on Bond Street. I looked in vain for Arundell Street, off Coventry Street where impecunious Wodehouse bachelors lived. Walking along Regent Street, Pall Mall, or Trafalgar Square gave me an eerie sense of déjà vu. One gets so familiar with London just by reading Wodehouse, I had a hard time suppressing the desire to walk into Paddington Station to catch a train to Market Blandings.

But, what with skinheads, American tourists, and traffic, London had become very different. Poor Bertie would have lost his way in the maze of McDonalds, KFC, and Indian, Thai, and Lebanese restaurants. I therefore suppressed the desire to request a friend who was driving me to Oxford to turn off to one of the villages along the road. I did not want to shatter my mental image of a Wodehousean village of a small railway station, Jno. Robinson’s solitary station cab, The Goose and The Gander, a grocery shop that doubles as post office and tobacconist, and the High Street leading to the Castle. Today’s English village is likely to be lined by Boots, Thomas Cook, and American Express.

Similarly, when I went to Long Island in the USA, I wanted to visit Wodehouse’s last abode in Remsenburg. It would have been a pilgrimage for me. But my cousin, with whom I was staying, gave me a funny look when I expressed my desire to go there, so I said, forget it. But in July 1995 I again found myself in central London and wandered till my feet ached, looking for familiar names and places, renewing old associations.

The love affair goes on. I still pull out a Wodehouse at random and start reading it. It elevates, perks one up, and makes one forget day-to-day worries. The best thing is that I do not have to read from page 1; I open the book in the middle and still get lost in the wonderful World of Wodehouse. And it’s not all about the humour. Recently I read a tender passage between Pat Wyvern and John Carroll (*Money for Nothing*) which could give pulp writers like Rosie M. Banks a run for their money.

These days it is fashionable to say that the young generation is no good, a wasted lot. But when I see a youngster asking for a Wodehouse title in our local British Council Library, it reaffirms my faith in the next generation. As long as people read PGW, things cannot go badly with the world.

Are You a PGW Mastermind?

On April 17 this year, the TV quiz programme *Mastermind* included among its specialist topics ‘The School Stories of P G Wodehouse’. The contestant was Shrirang Raddi, who, in conversation with John Humphrys at the start of his general knowledge round, discussed Wodehouse’s popularity in India, saying: “I think Wodehouse has a special charm. He’s a wordsmith, and I think for many people of my generation and even for people in college today he is the person that you read when you want to figure out how to use the English language; he’s a master.” Following are the specialist questions Mr Raddi had to answer; he passed on one and answered one incorrectly; otherwise he got them all right. How well do *you* know the school stories? (See page 13 for the answers.)

1. In *Mike*, which of the Jackson brothers is described as “the sort of man who wouldn’t catch a ball if you handed it to him on a plate with water-cress round it”?
2. When O’Hara and Moriarty tarred and feathered the Mayor of Wrykyn’s statue, what did they use in place of feathers?
3. What kind of headwear is worn by the pupils of St Jude’s that the Wrykynians aimed to send spinning into space whenever possible?
4. Whom does Uncle John recommend instead for the vacant post in the firm of Van Nugget, Diomonde & Myness?
5. At St Austin’s school, Charteris is the editor of which unofficial magazine, which is far more in demand than the official school magazine?
6. By provoking him to write a letter of complaint to Mr Day, Dunstable finally manages to acquire which celebrity’s autograph for his housemaster?
7. The St Austin’s school doctor regards hot fomentations and what other treatment as a panacea for every kind of bodily ailment?
8. What does Rupert Smith add to his surname to mark him out from other Smiths because he doesn’t care for Smythe?
9. In *The Gold Bat*, whose study is the first to be ransacked by the secret society called ‘The League’?
10. What derisory mark does Bradshaw score on the Euripides paper? He later claims he deliberately got the answers wrong.
11. In a spectacular coup, the inconspicuous Shields defeated Day’s House in the inter-house cricket cup when the favourites are incapacitated after eating what?
12. What do the pupils of St Austin’s call the practice of staying in the house during school on a pretence of illness?
13. Which insignificant-looking little weed’s study do Mike and Psmith requisition on their arrival at Sedleigh?
14. What two words does Scott instruct Pillingshot to write in his notebook after Trent the prefect reacts unenthusiastically to being questioned about the missing sovereign?
15. When, in *The Tabby Terror*, Prater’s cat steals Trentham’s sausages, which member of his family does he send to try to buy the cat?

Wodehouse and Kenneth Grahame

After he had opened the *Plum Pie* exhibition at the Heywood Hill bookshop in September, Henry Blofeld disclosed to Tony Ring that some years ago he had come across a second edition (published 1898) of Kenneth Grahame’s *Pagan Papers*. Its particular interest is that it had Wodehouse’s signature in the front, with some handwritten annotations which proved that he had read and absorbed the text.

The first, on page 59, identifies a few lines as the text for an essay entitled ‘Notes’, which appeared in *Tales of St Austin’s*. The second, on page 147, was the basis for an essay, ‘Concerning Relations’, from *Public School Magazine* in March 1901. Each of these essays reproduces Grahame’s relevant lines at their starts.

Wodehouse’s third mark was a pencil line in the margin of page 169 alongside the following lines.

The fact is, the poets are the only people who score by the present arrangement; which it is therefore their interest to maintain. While we are doing all the work, these incorrigible skulkers lounge about and make ribald remarks; they write Greek tragedies on Fate, on the sublimity of Suffering, on the Petty Span, and so on; and act in a pretty offensive way. And we are weak enough to buy their books; offer them drinks, peerages and things; and say what superlative fellows they are! But when the long-looked-for combination comes, and we poor devils have risen and abolished fate, destiny, the Olympian Council, early baldness and the like, these poets will really have to go.

Does any reader recognise the theme in any of Wodehouse’s essays, articles, or journalism from contemporary (say, pre-1910) writings? Or did he just recognise a familiar view of poets and poetry, subjects on which he was himself to make teasing, unflattering comments in many future novels?

Chambers Loves Psmith!

by Murray Hedgcock

Back in the mists of time past (September 2005, actually), I reported for *Wooster Sauce* the distinctly erratic listing of Wodehouse characters as set out in *Everyman's Dictionary of Fictional Characters*. This was eccentric to the point of ignoring Blandings entirely, recording no aunts, no Psmith, and no Mike, while listing modest creations such as Sir Raymond Bastable, Constable Cyril McMurdo, even Sir Thomas Blunt. Who he? – indeed. The dictionary belonged to my wife's reference collection to help her tackle *The Times* and *Guardian* crosswords – a collection which I update every so often. Having bought her lately a chunky copy of *Chambers Dictionary of Literary Characters*, it seemed worth a Wodehousean browse.

"Over 6,500 characters from literature in English" proclaimed the dust jacket – (presumably they could not fit in the correct phase, "More than 6,500 etc."). Under the Index by Author, you find, "Wodehouse, P(elham) G(renville)", with a brief biographical note and a list of the books in which the chosen characters appear. Seven titles are cited, and six characters. The much smaller *Everyman*, by contrast, announced 20,000 fictitious characters and quoted from 11 Wodehouse books, listing 115 Plummy people. To identify them, you had to go through each title and check the quoted page numbers.

Chambers starts well, with special mention of Jeeves in an introductory essay as Alan Taylor, of the *Sunday Herald*, offers his thoughts on 'Literary Sidekicks'. He suggests:

Often, they provide a source of comedy by "innocently" pricking their boss's arrogance, pomposity or pretension with a well-timed intervention. Jeeves, however, Bertie Wooster's ever-faithful, ever-punctilious major-domo, would never be so presumptuous. Ostensibly, their relationship is that of master and servant, but it is much more complicated than that.

Jeeves may play the part of the traditional English butler (sic) to perfection, but that is just one of the many roles he is called upon to play. P.G. Wodehouse featured the odd couple in eight novels and 34 short stories, in all of which Jeeves comes to Bertie's rescue in one way or another, whether it involves concocting the perfect cure for a hangover, to helping extricate him from an unfortunate love match.

Throughout, the guiding principle is chivalric – one cannot be seen to let a chum down. This is a world in which small things matter, in which one ignores details at one's peril. The fate of civilisation hangs in the balance if one

does not toast a crumpet to perfection, or one uses an incorrect form of address.

It can all be summed up in the following incident, which occurs in the middle of one of Bingo Little's matrimonial crises. Jeeves is attending to his master, who is so disturbed by Bingo's dilemma that when Jeeves says, "The tie a little tighter, Sir; one aims at the perfect butterfly effect", Bertie so forgets himself as to cry out, "Oh, Jeeves, what do ties matter at a time like this?" Whereupon a shocked Jeeves replies: "There is no time, Sir, when ties do not matter."

I'm not sure where the niceties of crumpet toasting concern Wodehouse, other than perhaps in the school stories (*Fags – Duties Of . . .*) nor even the correct form of address, but you get the idea that Alan Taylor seeks to convey. So – which books and which characters does *Chambers* see as properly representative of the oeuvre? The list reads:

Blandings Castle – Emsworth, Lord.

Carry On, Jeeves – Dahlia, Aunt.

The Inimitable Jeeves – Jeeves; Wooster, Bertie.

Leave It to Psmith – Psmith.

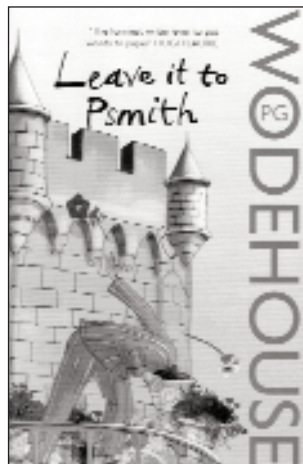
Psmith in the City – Psmith.

Psmith, Journalist – Psmith.

Right Ho, Jeeves – Fink-Nottle, Gussie (Augustus).

This is distinctly odd. No-one could argue with "*Blandings Castle* – Emsworth, Lord". But why is Bertie not listed in the first *Jeeves*? He was certainly among those present. And why the curious concentration on Psmith? – one of the most notable of all Plum's creations, agreed. Perhaps to atone for *Everyman's* omission? There is no explanatory note in *Chambers* to tell us on what basis the books and characters were selected, so these points must go unresolved.

The six characters named are a properly representative bunch, and you could not really quarrel with their selection ahead of others. But some of the pen-portraits are slightly puzzling. Skipping the reference to Lord Emsworth's great joys as being "his prize pig, Empress of Blandings, and his yew avenue" (was his yew alley quite so significant?), we move on to "Dahlia, Aunt". She is introduced as "Large, exuberant". Come, come: "Large?" Bertie has recorded her as being built like a scrum-half at the game of rugby football – and scrum-halves are known for their chunky nippiness, rather than their stature. The pen-portrait proceeds, "Always seeking finance for her magazine Milady's Boudoir, and losing money at



Chambers is leaving it almost entirely to Psmith!

baccarat . . .”, which we know happened once and is recorded at no other time.

The Jeeves summary is fairly apt, although a reference to his “brief holidays at Ascot or the seaside” leaves you puzzling over the Ascot break. But we take issue with the pronouncement: “. . . his most forcible protest being a grave, ‘Indeed, Sir?’”. Surely protest is voiced with the phrase, “Well, really, Sir” – or even an occasional firm refusal to do as required, i.e., spice up Gussie’s orange juice, or help tend the baby kidnapped with the aim of Fixing it for Freddie.

Bertie is recorded as being “rich” – not so in the early stories, but I suppose that situation is near enough overall. However, we do question the comment “Unsympathetic relatives have summoned psychiatric consultants to look into Bertie” – which seems to overstate the niggling attentions of the pestilential Sir Roderick Glossop, until that high-priced looney doctor reveals his better qualities and becomes Bertie’s bosom buddy.

The Psmith character sketch is not at all bad, ending with the summary of his initial adventures at Blandings: “Through all these social embarrassments, Psmith emerges with absolute aplomb and enjoyment.”

And Gussie F-N is properly profiled, with the record that his bizarre bracer for the event leads to “the most memorable prize day ever known at Market Snodsbury Grammar School” – and indeed one of the richest of all PGW’s sketches.

Editorial afterthought: It seems the *Chambers Dictionary of Literary Characters* is not alone in being fascinated by Psmith. An item in the *Evening Standard* of September 7 quotes **Stephen Fry**, who identified *Psmith in the City* as one of his favourite things: “Someone – was it a general? – said they would rather have created Psmith than climbed the Heights of Abraham and captured Quebec. Delight is a word that goes with Wodehouse more than with any other writer I know. What Hardy is to massive fatalistic doom, Wodehouse is to delight. Don’t get me wrong, I love a slice of doom from time to time, but there are days when only delight will do.”

Answers to Mastermind questions:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Bob | 9. Mill |
| 2. Leaves | 10. Four |
| 3. Mortar-boards | 11. Bad rabbit |
| 4. Mortimer | 12. Slumbering in |
| 5. <i>The Glow Worm</i> | 13. Spiller |
| 6. Montagu Watson | 14. Suspicious silence |
| 7. Leeches | 15. His sister |
| 8. A ‘P’ | |

The Curious Case of the Missing Award

by Martin Stratford

I was reading the March 2009 edition of *Wooster Sauce* (second only to *Milady’s Boudoir* for its incisive insights into modern culture and society issues) when it occurred to me that there was one accolade that the Master had yet, so far as I am aware, to receive. The most casual perusal of the canon demonstrates that P G Wodehouse is a leading contender for a posthumous Diamond Dagger Award from the Crime Writers’ Association for his outstanding contribution to crime fiction.

Just a moment (I hear you cry) – surely PGW is renowned as one of the greatest humorous writers of all time? This is, of course, true, but a moment’s reflection on his plots will, I feel sure, make my case. For a start, consider the number of people who are constantly being knocked out by a cosh or by some other solid article that comes to hand (it’s all in the follow through). It is a miracle that the stories aren’t full of bodies with crushed skulls or, at least, severe brain injuries (the unkind reader might suggest that with some of the characters, this would be hard to determine). These assaults include attacks on the police with both dog and cosh, not to mention tripping policemen while they are raiding nightclubs and stealing their helmets on Boat Race Night. When a cosh or other blunt implement is not available, then drugs are employed to produce unconsciousness.

False identities abound, whether being given to the police and the courts to keep nefarious deeds hidden from relatives, or being used to gain access to one of the great stately homes of England. There is also smuggling (most memorably, perhaps, in Mickey Mice), kidnapping (both human and porcine), unlawful detention (often by those in a position of authority), and theft of all kinds – pearls, cow creamers, dogs, and everything in between. Firearms are abundant and seem to be kept in desk drawers as casually as pens and paper clips. An air rifle is used to chilling effect (even if you discount its use on a bespectacled secretary).

Burglary is carried out at the drop of a hat (or the scaling of a – later removed – ladder), and criminal damage (often involving a porcelain figure of the Infant Samuel at prayer) is commonplace. At the Drones Club you risk injury from a well-aimed bread roll or a sugar lump, and even outside the premises a catapulted Brazil nut could cause criminal damage to your headwear. As well as other common assaults, there are several instances of confidence tricks, card-sharpping, and false insurance claims.

You can add to this catalogue of infamy the impersonation of a vet and his anaesthetist (what would the RSPB have to say about pruning a parrot without the proper licence?). And as for suffocating a swan in a raincoat . . . Well, there are clearly enough dastardly criminal deeds in the Master’s work to keep Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and Miss Marple busy for years.

I think it is safe to say that my case is complete and all that remains is for an application to be made immediately to the CWA in order to rectify their oversight. I am sure that if the award is made, no matter how late in the day, PGW Society members will be, if not actually grunted, far from being disgruntled at the result.

The only question left is what to wear to the awards ceremony. Now, where did I put my white mess jacket?

What the Discerning Theatre-goer Is Going to See These Days

by Our Man in the Stalls*

I was singin' in the bathtub some days ago and I was giving of my best in a performance of a melange of show hits by Lorenz Hart. I had just finished a haunting rendition of 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' when the phone rang. It was the Editor of *Wooster Sauce* asking whether I would write a review of a show on at the National Theatre in London called, coincidentally enough, as I understood the Editor to say, *Stories by Hart*.

I cheerfully answered in the affirmative to the request to write the requested item, or, as we writers call it, the piece. Accordingly, I strolled over to the National on the appointed evening, being one of the two October evenings that the show was being performed in the UK, having been performed with very considerable success in 2008 in New York.

I settled down into my seat and a tall bod, looking a bit like an exclamation mark expressed in human form, padded on stage and started nattering away amiably. Minutes passed and the fellow was still nattering amiably. Rummy, I thought. No singing. If there is one thing I expect of a show called *Stories by Hart*, it's songs, specifically Larry Hart songs, and of these there had been decidedly none.

I thought I should make enquiries on the matter. Sitting next to me was Lt. Col. Norman T P Murphy, the Wodehouse Society's impossibly brainy Remembrancer. So, I tugged on Norman's sleeve and asked him what was what. Where are the songs? Where are the Hart lyrics? We journalists ask these probing questions.

Norman explained all to me, quickly – Norman does not really do slow. Turns out the show is not *Stories by Hart* but *Stories by Heart*. It's a one-man show by the American actor John Lithgow of two stories, P G Wodehouse's 'Uncle Fred Flits By' from *Young Men in Spats* and Ring Lardner's 'Haircut'. No songs. No Hart connection whatsoever. Turns out I had picked up wrong

end of the stick altogether. Actually the wrong stick. Totally different stick. Stick of a different water.

Stories by Heart came about through the American actor John Lithgow learning favourite stories which his father had told him in childhood and were later told back by him to his father, whom he helped to comfort through his final illness. Mr Lithgow opened the show with recollections of his early family life and of his father's later illness. He then moved into a wonderful reading of 'Uncle Fred Flits By', seamlessly segueing into a barnstormingly effective word-perfect 'by heart' performance of the story. He played some 10 or so roles, including a nut-proffering parrot, delivered with some very good physical comedy. Mr Lithgow's delivery of Uncle Fred's observations in the matter of the world of jellied eels was a particular delight.

The second act was given over to the Ring Lardner story, a far darker tale, and one involving Lithgow playing this time just one role, the barber-narrator, but in various moods and modes. If less barnstorming, and subtler, this called for just as much skill, if not more, than his performance of the Wodehouse farce.

If the stories of the first act were songs, they were songs delivered with the bravura verve of an Ethel Merman performing for the benefit of the Upper Circle, whereas the songs of the second act were delivered with far more intimacy, as if in a small nightclub.

The show may have no songs, but it well deserves to be a super boffo hit for John Lithgow. So, if you ever get the chance to see *Stories by Heart* – and I hope he is successfully encouraged to reprise it regularly, as the number of performances of it by him are criminally rare – do toddle along to see it, even if there is no singing in it. Not a single song, but tremendously good.

* Also known as Graeme W I Davidson



John Lithgow prepares to tell the classic Wodehouse story 'Uncle Fred Flits By'.

". . . I found to my horror that a young man of whom I knew nothing was arranging to marry my daughter. I sent for him immediately, and found him to be quite impossible. He jellies eels!"

"Does what?"

"He is an assistant at a jellied eel shop."

"But surely," said Lord Ickenham, "that speaks well for him. The capacity to jelly an eel seems to me to argue intelligence of a high order. It isn't everybody who can do it, by any means. I know if somebody came to me and said 'Jelly this eel!' I should be nonplussed. And so, or I am very much mistaken, would Ramsay MacDonald and Winston Churchill."

(From 'Uncle Fred Flits By', 1935)

Wooster Sources

Paul Kent reviews Murphy's Three Wodehouse Walks

Being flattened by a Rolls Royce isn't the only hazard awaiting you, the carefree boulevardier, in London's upscale district of Mayfair. You may also find yourself trampled by a dapper gentleman tooling along at quite a few mph pursued by a wheezing crocodile of Wodehouse enthusiasts.

As this unlikely Pied Piper gestures with hat or umbrella towards some heretofore anonymous building, two things strike you: (1) his passionate and authoritative knowledge of the area; and (2) that you have joined the procession haring along behind him, your previous engagements forgotten.

And there is a third point – let's call it (3): everyone, yourself included, is smiling. For you have stumbled (as I recently did), upon one of Norman Murphy's hugely entertaining tours of 'Bertie Wooster's West End', which this remarkable man, although the wrong side of 70, conducts free of charge as a service to Wodehouse devotees. And here, at last, is the book of his Wodehouse tours, permitting us to guide ourselves if Norman is not available.

Regular readers of this journal will already be familiar with Mr Murphy's matchless achievements as founding chairman of the Society and tireless investigator of all things Wodehousian. The encyclopaedic knowledge paraded in this book has been rigorously pursued fact by fact, anecdote by anecdote, through libraries, gentlemen's clubs, saloon bars, and even a jeweller's (for the inside track on silver cow creamers, since you ask). Add to this his easy intimacy with the minutiae of London's history, and you have a walking (or rather cantering) database of facts and stories from which these ambulatory tours have been constructed.

And now he is sharing this rich resource with us, the reading public. For a paltry ten quid (only eight until Christmas Eve), you get not one but THREE guided tours

in this conveniently practical paperback volume: in addition to Bertie's regular haunts in Mayfair (taking in Berkeley Mansions, the Drones Club, and Jeeves's bolthole at the Junior Ganymede) – a walk which, in its full-length form, extends to Trafalgar Square and Northumberland Avenue – there's a jaunt round Gally Threepwood and Stanley Featherstonehaugh Utridge's Edwardian London (from Piccadilly Circus to the Strand) and a trip through the leafy suburb of Dulwich (alias Valley Fields), where Wodehouse spent much of his youth.

As to the matching of fictional references with actual places, Wodehouse himself proved hugely helpful. In short, Mr Murphy has only managed to unearth four or five "invented" London addresses in all 90-odd books. The rest can be traced back to real or thinly disguised locations Wodehouse would have known during his years in the capital.

However, in *Bachelors Anonymous*, published two years before the author's death, there is mention of a fictitious 'Murphy Mews' situated in the back streets between Victoria and Chelsea. As Lieutenant Colonel Murphy was corresponding with the great man at the time, it is not too fanciful to imagine Wodehouse borrowing his surname for use as Sir Jaklyn Warner's address. I'm sure you will agree there could be no more fitting tribute to a writer who has done so much to enrich our appreciation of all matters Plum.

And now, having road-tested all three of these fascinating perambulations, I can happily report that there could be few

more pleasant, or indeed edifying, ways for Wodehouse devotees to spend their time in the metropolis. Three cheers for Norman Murphy!!

See the flyer enclosed with this issue for details on how to order Three Wodehouse Walks.



Bucks Club, source of the Drones, as seen on the Mayfair Walk.

Six Wodehousean Clerihews

When Bertie saw his aunts
Making a direct advance
He tried with all his might
To disappear from their sight.
– Allyn Hertzbach

Jeeves grieves
O'er some of Bertie's weaves.
For th'invisible red stripe in tweeds
Is all one needs.
– Charles Gould

Sebastian Beach
His loyalty you cannot impeach.
A reluctant pig pincher,
But *noblesse oblige* is the clincher.
– Peter Thompson

Aunt Georgina's fourteen dogs
Need the food that Freddie flogs.
The Reverend's 'Bottles' wins the fight,
And Freddie makes his sales alright.
– John Durston

Uncle George
On rich food would gorge
And then have to endure
The horrors of 'The Cure'.
– Geoff Millward

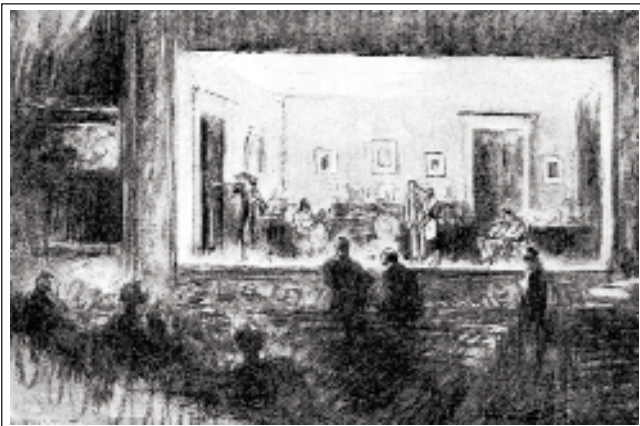
The Aunt who is Dahlia
Would certainly regale ya
With tales of the chase
If you gave her space.
– Jonathan Radgick

Sally and Blandings on Audiobook

by Tony Ring

An interesting topic for debate among Wodehouse fans is what status should be granted to his non-series novels – especially those published between 1915 and about 1926, ending, say, with *Sam the Sudden*. Several of these deal with theatrical subjects, either as a major plot element or in some of their characters, and they make some telling points about American theatrical conditions for those interested in Wodehouse's theatre.

The Adventures of Sally is one such, and Jonathan Cecil brings it to life in his 2009 unabridged recording for BBC Audiobooks with his customary skill and panache. This time most of the cast are American, with just two major and one minor British characters. There are some fairly unlikeable individuals – reflecting Wodehouse's own theatrical experience – and Jonathan's representation of one actress in particular made me sit up and take special notice. (Maybe this should be taken as a warning, as I was driving at the time!)



"I'm through!" announced Mabel Hobson. It appeared that Sally's presence had in some mysterious fashion fulfilled the function of the last straw. "This is the by-Goddest show I was ever in!"

(From *Colliers*, October 29, 1921)

Even Mr Faucitt's description of the blond beauty and self-important actress Mabel Hobson's theatrical skills in chapter 5, explicit though it was, does not fully prepare the listener for the skilful rendition of her first pieces of dialogue in the following chapter (CD 3, track 12), bringing out with the utmost clarity her distasteful temperament and perceived power. All I can add is that she rose several places in my list of top 10 unspeakable Wodehouse characters.

I found another impressive representation in the second of this issue's reviews – the abridged *Pigs Have Wings*, presented for CSA Word by Martin Jarvis. The last of the Blandings books in which the Empress is actively seeking the Fat Pigs Medal at the Shropshire show, it includes a cameo role for George Cyril Wellbeloved. George Cyril was employed by the despicable baronet and JP Sir Gregory Parsloe, who swore him to abstention from alcohol in the run-up to the show. He used his initiative to obtain more than sufficient from Beach and Gally to cover his personal Plimsoll line, and his subsequent interview with Sir Gregory gave Martin Jarvis an opportunity to present the conversation of a carefree drunkard which he grabbed with both hands, but without overdoing the grip.

Two cameos brightening even further the traditionally superb renditions from two fine readers. Wodehouse is exceptionally well served, once again.

The Adventures of Sally, BBC Audiobooks

ISBN 978-1-4056-8318-0 (7 hrs, 53 min)

Website: www.audiobookcollection.com

or contact The Audiobook Collection, FREEPOST (BA1686/1), Bath BA1 3QZ (Tel: 01225 443400)

Pigs Have Wings, CSA Word, ISBN 978-1906147396

(5 hrs); see www.csaword.co.uk.

There seemed to me a strong resemblance in the newcomer's manner to that of those Assyrians who, so we learn from sources close to them, came down like a wolf on the fold with their cohorts all gleaming with purple and gold. He could have walked straight into their camp, and they would have laid down the red carpet for him, recognizing him instantly as one of the boys.

But where the Assyrians had had the bulge on him was that they weren't going to find in the fold a motherly young woman with strong wrists and a basin in her hands. This basin appeared to be constructed of some thickish form of china, and as Spode grabbed Gussie and started to go into the old shaking routine it descended on the back of his head with what some call a dull and others call a sickening thud. It broke into several fragments, but by that time its mission had been accomplished. His powers of resistance sapped, no doubt, by his recent encounter with the Rev. H. P. Pinker, Spode fell to earth he knew not where and lay there looking peaceful. . . .

(From *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*, 1963)

Three More Clerihews

The world of Wodehouse, Pelham G
Enchants us, and will always be
A treasure trove of well-turned phrase,
Of earls, aunts, pigs and summer days.

- James Linwood

When Augustus Fink-Nottle
For once hit the bottle,
He made a fool
Of himself at Market Snodsbury Grammar
School

- Lennart Andersson

Bobby Wickham's red hair is a sign
Of a temperament far from benign.
Her boyfriends find themselves in the soup,
Including Kipper Herring, poor goop.

- Norman Murphy

Little Nuggets

More on Plum Pie

In addition to the publicity for Plum Pie mentioned on page 23, the *Guardian* put a slideshow of pictures from the exhibition on its website; it can still be viewed at <http://bit.ly/3PKUxA>. The BBC also has a slideshow (with sounds from the opening night of the exhibition), and this can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/6AICq>.

One of Those Odd Coincidences

The captain of the St John's Oxford team in *University Challenge* on September 14 was George Wodehuysen. He sat next to a fellow-student named Townsend, only one letter away from the name of PGW's great school friend.

A Sure Cure

In *The Mail* of November 6th, Quentin Letts reviewed the play *Mrs Klein* and included this very insightful comment: "A girlfriend of mine once dabbled with going to a shrink, but I managed to steer her on to the novels of P.G. Wodehouse instead. She soon cheered up and it saved us a great deal of money."

Quotable Pub

In autumn 2008 **Tony and Elaine Ring** were in Chichester and went into the pub The Spotted Cow, where the walls had various quotes from famous authors. To their delight, among these quotes was this classic from *My Man Jeeves* (1919): "I was so darned sorry for poor old Corky that I hadn't the heart to touch my breakfast. I told Jeeves to drink it himself."

Worth Visiting

Quite a while back, we received word from **Paul Norman** that his website, Books Monthly, featured a review of the Arrow series of Wodehouse books in its October 2008 issue. Should you wish to read what was written about the series, go to <http://bit.ly/25k6KX>.

Wodehouse on the Boards

There is no news of any Wodehouse productions in the UK in the upcoming months – if you hear of anything, please let the Editor know. In the meantime, if you live in or are planning a trip to New Zealand or the United States, the following may be of interest.

From November 21, 2009, to February 13, 2010, the Court Theatre in Christchurch, New Zealand, is presenting *Anything Goes*. The original book for this classic musical, which debuted in 1934 and ran for 420 performances on Broadway, was by PGW and Guy Bolton, with revisions by Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse. This production features a new book by Timothy Crouse and John Weidman. Music and lyrics, of course, are by Cole Porter. For more information, visit the Court Theatre's website at <http://www.courttheatre.org.nz>.

Stateside, the City Lit Theatre in Chicago is celebrating its 30th Anniversary Season, which will conclude with a bang when *Oh, Boy!* is performed from May 21 to June 27, 2010. This is the landmark 1917 musical with book by Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, lyrics by Wodehouse, and music by Jerome Kern – the first and most popular of their collaborations. *Oh, Boy!* was one of the earliest musicals to incorporate songs into the action, "thereby helping pave the way for the modern American musical," according to City Lit's website. Its plot is quintessential Wodehouse, involving a young man who has to hide his bride from the aunt who controls his money – and also conceal from his bride the woman who has unexpectedly appeared in his bedroom. The show's songs include the wonderful 'Till the Clouds Roll By'. For tickets and more information, contact City Lit's box office at (001) 773-293-3682, or visit their website at <http://www.citylit.org>. (Note: If you plan to attend and are willing to write a review for *Wooster Sauce*, please let the Editor know!)

By Jeeves in Edinburgh

An Interview with Director Sian Morris

The Just Good Friends Theatre Co. of Carmarthen was one of two theatre groups to take productions of *By Jeeves* to the Edinburgh Festival this year. Sian Morris, its director, made some useful comments in conversation with Tony Ring.

As reported in *Wooster Sauce* for September 2006, Just Good Friends had previously presented the production on its home territory. All but two of their original cast were recruited for the reprise and, said Sian, "They all upped their game, and continued to develop their roles in Edinburgh." She added that Gareth Kirby, who played Bertie Wooster, is an avid Wodehouse reader.

One thing was new to them – the venue for the six performances in Edinburgh was Old St Paul's Church Hall, with no raised stage; instead, the audience was situated close to the actors on two sides of the acting space, while the small group of musicians hugged a third side. The company had not played in such conditions before, so three performances at Welsh villages were arranged as a try-out, in the time-honoured manner of Wodehouse's own Broadway musicals!

Although none of the venues were large – audience capacity varied between 75 and 100 – all the shows were sold out, meaning that there was a total audience of something over 700. Imaginative marketing had seen two young men on stilts attracting considerable attention as they advertised the show round the streets of Edinburgh.

On stage, the audience reaction was very positive, and the Fringe website gave the show five 5-star reviews. The company involved the audience as best they could, mingling with the audience and shaking their hands during 'The Hello Song'. The whole experience wholly justified the Company's decision to restage the show and demonstrated the fun which both company and audience can have from *By Jeeves*.

The Bibliographic Corner by Nick Townend

Another Century for *Mike*, Part 2

Part 1 of this article marked the centenary of Wodehouse's *Mike*, which was first published on 15 September 1909, and reviewed the first 10 years of its publishing history to 1919. Now that your columnist has got his eye in, this Corner will cover the next 90 years at a brisker pace.

Mike was reprinted in 1924 (McIlvaine, A12a5), in non-pictorial boards which had a design of black squares and gold bars incorporating the A & C Black logo on the front cover and featuring black lettering. It also incorporated four new illustrations by J H Hartley. It was reprinted the following year (A12a6) with pictorial boards showing the same T M R Whitwell illustration as that on the first edition of 1909, but now in light blue, black, and white on light blue, rather than olive green, cloth, and, again, black lettering. The jacket incorporated one of the Hartley plates, the frontispiece, rather than the illustration on the front boards, above a quotation from Alec Waugh's *Myself When Young*: "The only great cricket story of recent times is a school story, PG Wodehouse's *Mike*." Further reprints followed in 1928 (A12a7), 1932, and 1936 (both omitted by McIlvaine), still with the Whitwell pictorial cover and the four Hartley plates, but while the 1928 and 1936 editions were bound in light blue cloth, the 1932 printing was bound in dark blue.

The existence of the 1936 edition is something of a surprise, as in 1935 A & C Black published the second part of the book (the last 30 out of 59 chapters) with the title *Enter Psmith* (A12c). It had blue-green cloth with bright red lettering and was printed by Billing & Sons, Ltd. The dust jacket had a full-colour illustration based on one of the J H Hartley illustrations in *Mike*, and the rear panel carried advertisements starting with *Psmith in the City* and ending with *The House of a Thousand Candles*. There were two reprints in 1935 and one in 1940 (noted by McIlvaine in A12c, but not catalogued separately), and there was a further edition with reset text in 1950 (A12c2).

Enter Psmith was also published in America by Macmillan in 1935, in two distinct editions, the differences being explained by the American expert Charles Gould as follows. The first (A12d2) was printed in England by Billing & Sons from the plates of

the recently published British A & C Black edition. The verso of its half-title bears the Macmillan logo. The later edition (A12d) was printed at the Polygraphic Company of America in New York. Both copies had orange cloth with the title and the names of the author and publisher in black. The dust jacket was an illustration in black on grey by Anderson, covering the panels from back to front, with yellow lettering. Further editions were published in 1936 by Wodehouse's normal American reprint publisher, A L Burt, in orange (A12d3) and blue (A12d4) covers, this book being very slightly taller.

In England after the war, *Mike* was split into two volumes, *Mike at Wrykyn* (A12e) and *Mike and Psmith* (A12c3), corresponding to the original *Captain* serials *Jackson Junior* and *The Lost Lambs*, respectively. Both titles were published in hardback by Herbert Jenkins in 1953 and printed by Wyman and Sons with jacket illustrations by W Spence. *Mike and Psmith* was republished in 1966 (A12c4) in a revised dust jacket which modernised the appearance of the boys illustrated. Following Herbert Jenkins's change of name to Barrie and Jenkins, a further edition was published with plain (non-pictorial) dust jackets in 1976 (*Mike at Wrykyn*; omitted by McIlvaine) and 1979 (*Mike and Psmith*; A12c5).

The two post-war titles were also published in paperback by each of two publishers. Armada, an imprint of May Fair Books, published them in 1968 (printed by Love and Malcomson Ltd) and Penguin in 1990. Armada's

editions (A12e2 and A12c6) look cheap, particularly when one notes that the name 'Wrykyn' is misspelt 'Wrykin' on the cover and spine, though not on the copyright page or in the text of the book. The Penguin editions (omitted by McIlvaine) have cover illustrations by Tony McSweeney.

In America in October 1968, Meredith Press, owned by Scott Meredith, Wodehouse's one-time American editor, published *Mike at Wrykyn* in hard covers, with a grey dust jacket with a line drawing (A12e3). Confusingly, the copyright page gives a copyright date of 1953 (the Herbert Jenkins UK publication date), but no US publishing date. However, the front flap of the dustwrapper has "10-68" printed in the bottom right-hand corner. The book contains a



The 1936 dust jacket of *Mike*

preface by Wodehouse in which he attempts to explain cricket to an American audience: “Take a line through baseball, which incidentally I consider a far superior game”! (Incidentally, a 1933 Italian translation (F264) had contained a three-page introduction entitled ‘Il Cricket’, complete with a diagram showing the various fielding positions, such as ‘portiere’ (wicketkeeper) and ‘cover point’ (cover point)!).

Meredith Press followed up the next year with *Mike and Psmith* in a similar format (A12c7). Even more confusingly, the copyright page gives a copyright date of 1909 (the A & C Black first publication date), but no US publishing date. Once again, the evidence (2-69) is on the dust-jacket flap. There was also another preface by Wodehouse: “I must apologize, as I did in the preface to *Mike at Wrykyn*, for all the cricket in this book.” Several collectors believe that *Mike and Psmith* is Wodehouse’s most difficult post-war US title to find in good condition complete with dust jacket, as most copies were either remaindered or sold to libraries and hence have library stamps on them.

There also seems to have been a special library edition of each of the two titles, bound in green cloth, with the dust-jacket illustrations reproduced on the front cover. All of the copies your columnist has seen contain a sticker reading “New Method Book Bindery Inc. Bound to stay bound. Jacksonville, Illinois”.

Passing References

From *Adventures in Group Theory: Rubik’s Cube, Merlin’s Machine, and Other Mathematical Toys*, 2nd ed., by David Joyner (2008)

Kris Fowler found this unexpected Wodehouse sighting in a book received at the mathematics library where she works: “The Rubik’s Cube, a mechanical toy that has a reasonably efficient solution using pure mathematics (and no ‘strategy’), is a case in point. It’s difficult to know where to begin to explain this connection: as Wodehouse’s character Bertie Wooster, said, ‘I don’t know if you have the same experience, but the snag I come up against when I’m telling a story is the dashed difficult problem of where to begin it’.”

From *The Freedoms of Suburbia*, by Paul Barker (2009)

Murray Hedgcock notes that the author of this new book provides an intriguing thought of Plummy interest. In a chapter studying attitudes to suburban life, especially as expressed in books, Barker writes:

The hero of P. G. Wodehouse’s novel *Big Money* (1931) has to take to suburbia temporarily, in pursuit of riches and romance. He sees the suburbs as less a threat than a big adventure:

With his usual masterful dash in the last fifty yards, Berry Conway had beaten the 8.45 express into Valley Fields station by the split-second

margin which was his habit. Alien though he felt the suburbs were to him, he possessed in a notable degree that gift which marks off suburbanites from other men – the uncanny ability to catch a train, and never to catch it by more than three and a quarter seconds.

Wodehouse was, by this date, comfortably settled in the United States, with a profitable line in writing stories for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and libretti for Broadway musicals. But he knew all about ‘Valley Fields’, which is clearly based on the South London suburb of Dulwich, where he went to school. He also, I’m sure, knew where most of his British readers lived: in suburbia.

Murray adds: “I supposed on the basis of demographics, i.e. that most Britons live in the suburbs, that theory is accurate.”

From *Cold Cream*, by Ferdinand Mount (2008)

Ian Alexander-Sinclair writes that Mount’s excellent memoir is permeated with Wodehouse allusions, of which we provide a mere three:

When he was interviewed by Mrs Thatcher with a view to becoming the head of her policy unit at Number 10, “she wrongly remembered me more as the Efficient Baxter than as Idle Jack” (p.287).

On his first day at Number 10: “There was a cough at the door. A friendly unobtrusive cough. A Jeeves cough. It was John Vereker” (p.297).

When he reached Chequers through the surprisingly rural byways of Bucks: “In a moment you were transported from the world of Bertie Wooster to a bad spy thriller where an unnameable power lies at the end of the long avenue” (p.321).

From *Killer Blond, a Jaine Austen Mystery*, by Laura Levine (2004)

Karen Shotting says that she found the following in this book about a contemporary, not-very-successful writer living in Los Angeles (whose mother is an Anglophile and bad speller):

There was something about [my client’s daughter] that reminded me of the young Jaine Austen. Maybe it was the book she was reading. *Stiff Upper Lip* by the British humorist P. G. Wodehouse. When I was a teenager, I was crazy about his books. In fact I still am. But it’s not every day you see a teenager reading Wodehouse.

Later in the story, Jaine attends the same character’s birthday party and gives her a P. G. Wodehouse book as a present. Karen writes: “Even though she did not quite get the title right, I think this author’s heart is in the right place.”

A Wodehouse Crossword

by Mark Smith

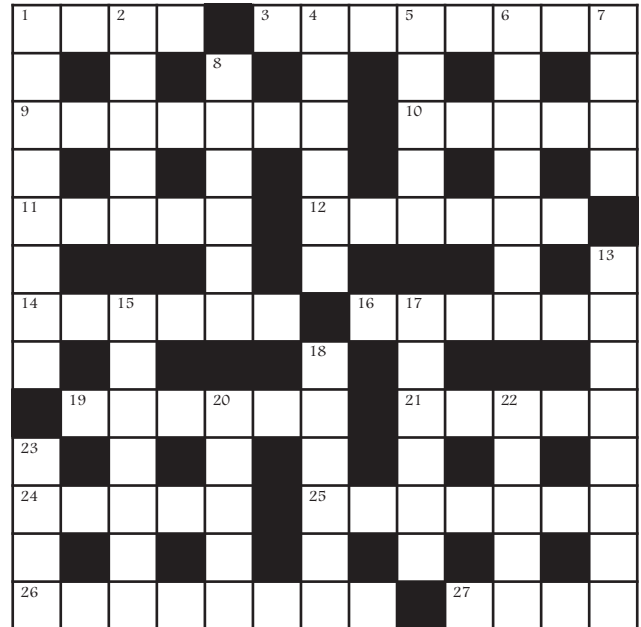
Following on the success of June Arnold's acrostics, Mark has offered a series of crossword puzzles designed with Wodehouse lovers in mind. His puzzles will alternate with June's acrostics in future issues. Answers to this puzzle will be revealed in the March 2010 issue. You may find it a wee bit difficult – no Aunt Dahlia tantrums allowed!

Across

- 1 Reasonable penalty (4)
- 3/23/12 After a month, we object, informer not let to be disturbed, being a friend of Bertie (8,4,6)
- 9 Small animal misses the point, 500 removed with crowbar (7)
- 10 Secures hair (5)
- 11 Chump is more heavily clad, we hear (5)
- 12 See 3
- 14 Uneven Swedish jazz trio is the most unusual (6)
- 16 Poems by South African in Black Sea port (6)
- 19 Quiet worker, a character once seen In the City (6)
- 21 He sat about, providing something proverbially more desirable than speed (5)
- 24 Old British industrial giant taken over in Spanish (5)
- 25 A rich zoo naturally will provide first pairs for state (7)
- 26 Family member, sailor at first, has a Congolese destination (8)
- 27 Went crazy for 3's favourite (4)

Down

- 1 T P Frisby's niece after a satisfactory meal – only happens once a month (4,4)
- 2 Wine very concealed? Impossible! (5)
- 4 One French academic stuck inside and fallen apart (6)
- 5 In natural light, son withdraws, becoming obscure (5)
- 6 Sources of mirth let sick degenerate (7)
- 7 Of uneven quality, therefore repeated (2-2)



- 8 Talks monotonously, in gentlemen's club (6)
- 13 To join in, accept a theatrical role (4,4)
- 15 Record to make money, lacking a spot (7)
- 17 One will get stuck between children's author and a well-known aunt (6)
- 18 A hundred sporting contests produce rule breakers (6)
- 20 European flower-girl with hot head (5)
- 22 Leader of mixed-up dopes (5)
- 23 See 3 Across

The Word Around the Clubs

Of Wodehouse and Milne

Adrian Reading informs us that Vintage Books have re-published A. A. Milne's *The Red House Mystery*; it bears an endorsement by P. G. Wodehouse on the front cover. Readers will recall that, though Wodehouse had little time for Milne personally, he admired his writing. In a letter to Denis Mackail (7 February 1952), PGW wrote of Milne: "... he is one of the very few readable writers. I can always re-read him indefinitely."

Words, Words, Words

On August 13 both the *Sun* and the *Telegraph* had items on a new book, *Jolly Wicked Actually: The 100 Words That Make Us English*, by Tony Thorne. One of these words is 'cuppa', said to be "first used for tea by P G Wodehouse, the playwright". On September 30 the *Los Angeles Times* reviewed *Drunk: the Definitive Drinkers*

Dictionary, which has 2,964 synonyms for the word. The review noted that "P G Wodehouse popularised 'Blotto', which Edmund Wilson, in his 1927 *Lexicon on Prohibition*, considered 'the drunkest of drunk'."

Too Clever by Half

Murray Hedgcock: reports that in the October 26 issue of the *Sunday Telegraph* 'Seven' supplement, Nigel Farndale wrote of how Mensa members are reluctant to shout their involvement in the organisation. Farndale believes that being among the top two percent of the population IQ "does seem to be a mixed blessing, especially in this country where intelligence is regarded as an affliction. . . . Which other country would instinctively side with Wooster, he of the low frontal lobe wattage, over his Spinoza-reading valet Jeeves, he of the bulging forehead and appetite for fish?"

A Christmas Sonnet (Sonnet XXIII) by Charles Gould

Amidst December's chill, or rain, or freeze
 We sought the Angler's Rest, where holly shone
 By firelight, and two brave Christmas trees
 Stood bright in corners whence the light had gone.
 And there, hot Scotch and lemon at his side,
 Sat Mr Mulliner. His tales of yore
 We'd heard, and now no longer could abide:
 If you've heard one, you've heard them all before.
 We ordered bitter, Bass, a gin-and-it,
 And slunk into a corner next the tree;
 But Mr Mulliner cared not a whit
 And 'gan a tale about a nephew he
 Had told a hundred time. Aye, there's the rub!
 We grabbed our rods and reeled him from the pub.

© Charles Gould

Wodehouse Whimsy 4



The fourth drawing from Cornwall's *Siân Jones* depicts our favourite team of Bertie and Jeeves.

You ask, have I asked her to marry me? I, who am not worthy to polish the blade of her niblick? I, who have not even a thirty handicap, ask a girl to marry me who was in the semi-final of last year's Ladies' Open! No, no. I may be a *vers libre* poet, but I have some sense of what is fitting.

(From 'The Purification of Rodney Spelvin' in *The Heart of a Goof*, 1926)

A Christmas Competition

In September's *Wooster Sauce*, Tony Ring described some of the challenges Jonathan Cecil faced with pronouncing certain words ('undeliable' and 'shoppe') while recording Wodehouse audiobooks. This led us to wonder: Which Wodehouse word or expression, other than personal or place names, is the most difficult for UK English speakers to pronounce? Tony himself has already started the ball rolling with his own entry: 'Ouled Nail'. What word or expression trips up *your* tongue? Send your entries to the editor!

Poet's Corner

Thoughts on a Recent Wooing

I used to think I'd like to be
 A person of position.
 A scion, say, of Royalty.
 Or some such high condition.
 But now I hold the mortal whose
 Ambition takes this shape errs.
 I'll tell you why I've changed my views –
 I read the morning papers.

As I complacently reflect
 I've very seldom seen a
 Dense, interested crowd collect
 When I'm with Angelina.
 And, if it does, it is not we
 Who entertain the gapers:
 Some accident they've thronged to see –
 (Next day, it's in the papers.)

But when a royal couple woo,
 It can't be done in private:
 For thousands rally round to view
 If they can but contrive it.
 With cameras behind the trees
 Reporters cut their capers.
 He gives her hand a tender squeeze –
 Next day it's in the papers.

Oh, wretched is the monarch's lot:
 How he must long to end it!
 And mine, although it's humble, 's got
 Some points to recommend it.
 And so I hold that he who tries
 These royal folk to ape errs,
 Unless some plan he can devise
 To dodge the lynx-eyed papers.

From *Books of Today and Books of Tomorrow*,
 March 1906.

Recent Press Comment

From *Mid-Devon Advertiser/Post*, August 21

Carried a report that a memorial to the author B F Robinson (with Wodehouse the creator of the playlets featured in the recent book *Bobbles and Plum*) had been installed in his home village of Ipplepen.

From *Just A Minute (Radio 4)*, August 24

(from Melvyn Haggerty)

Paul Merton completed a 37-second stint speaking on the subject of 'Texting' with the following comment on language:

Look at the books of P G Wodehouse and a whole area has been completely put in front of you – country houses, funny butlers and dim aristocrats – it's just like the House of Commons.

From *Daily Telegraph*, September 1

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

In an article concerning the desecration of flowers and vegetables in advance of an agricultural show at Torquay, reference was made to the trials and tribulations of Lord Emsworth in 'The Custody of the Pumpkin'.

From *Daily Telegraph*, September 1

In a review of *Strange Days Indeed: The Golden Age of Paranoia* by Francis Wheen, critic Anthony Holden highlighted Wheen's reference to Edward Heath as Wodehouse's Empress of Blandings to Alec Douglas-Home's Lord Emsworth.

From *Scottish Daily Express*, September 4

(from Melvyn Haggerty)

Ken Bruce's choice of his six favourite books included *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*.

From *Weekend Guardian*, September 5

(from Paddy Briggs and Mike Swaddling)

In 'Book Corner', Lucy Mangan's series on 'building a brilliant children's library' continued with *The Code of the Woosters*. Mangan described PGW's prose as "joyful, fluting music in paperback form" and quoted Bertie Wooster on Gussie Fink-Nottle: "Many an experienced undertaker would have been deceived by his appearance and started embalming him on sight."

From *Times Literary Supplement*, September 9

(from Barbara Jacobitti and Robert Bruce)

In an article about the golden jubilee of an album by musician Miles Davis, Stephen Brown wrote: "Writing about *Kind of Blue* is like writing about P G Wodehouse: If you get it you don't need an explanation, and if you don't, no amount of explaining is going to help."

From *Daily Telegraph*, September 13

The Culture section had an article explaining that Wodehouse derived the name for his 1909 invasion-scare novel *The Swoop*, from "the most popular and sensational novel of the invasion genre, James Blyth's *The Swoop of the Vulture*" and points out that this book is actually mentioned in Wodehouse's own.

From *Sunday Times*, September 13

In writing about Terry Wogan's retirement at 70 from Radio 2's *Breakfast Show*, Paul Donovan wrote in tribute: "A lot of presenters talk a lot, but don't say much, and I include myself in that on a bad day. Wogan? Never. His command of language is total, with great poetry in it. He reminds me of P G Wodehouse, who I've been reading since I was a teenager because my dad recommended him."

From *Western Morning News*, September 15

(from Colin Bradley)

Carried an extensive review of *Bobbles and Plum*, the book of four playlets that Wodehouse wrote with B F Robinson (see *Wooster Sauce*, September 2009, p.25).

From *Enfield Independent*, September 17

Reported that Nick de Spon proposed to walk 10 kilometres from Barnet to Southgate to raise money for the local Chickenshed Theatre. Throughout his walk, he would be reading a Wodehouse novel out loud, and he hoped to raise some £400. "I have to wear glasses to read and I can't see to walk with the glasses on, so it is going to be interesting," he said, with classic eccentric Wodehouse characterisation.

From *The Times*, September 19

A question in the 'Literary Quiz' asked to the author of the description "Small, shrivelled chap. Looks like a haddock with lung trouble".

From *The Times of India*, September 19

Reported a controversy that had erupted during 'silly season' about a remark made by our Patron Shashi Tharoor, in replying to a correspondent on Twitter. Some of his fellow members of Congress took exception at a light-hearted comment, which apparently required the Indian Prime Minister "to point out to his humourless colleagues" that the comment was a joke. It seems the vast majority of responses to his comment supported his broadly balanced approach to the serious and the flippant.

From *The Sunday Telegraph*, September 20

Included the 'Penguin Tea Towel' of *Carry on Jeeves* with its original orange-and-white Penguin stripes in its feature on 'The Top Five Tea Towels'!

From *Daily Telegraph*, September 22

Charles Moore's review of William Shawcross's official biography *Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother*, mentioned that PGW's novels were her favourite books. "Only a person of her upper-class background and temperament could have praised them, as she did, because they were 'so realistic'."

From *The Times*, September 23

The 'People' column reported Sir Edward Cazalet's recollection of advice given to him by Wodehouse: "If you want to find out if an author is any good, read their fourth book. One way or another, the first three are biographical. Most writers can produce three books, but it's the fourth one . . ."

From *Daily Mail's Weekend Magazine*, September 26
(from Iain Sproat)

An item about a new book, *Jolly Wicked Actually: The 100 Words That Make Us English* by Tony Thorne notes that one of those words is 'Sorry': "The British are famous for saying sorry when people walk into them, ignoring PG Wodehouse's maxim: 'It's a good rule in life never to apologise.'"

From *Parade* (a syndicated US Sunday-paper supplement), September 27 (from Leonard Goldstein and David McDonough) Author Nick Hornby wrote

about his favourite funny reads: "The best comic prose stylist – maybe the best prose stylist – in the English language, P G Wodehouse, had no ambition other than to make us laugh with books like *Summer Lightning*. There aren't many writers who are content to do that. We should be thankful he lived such a long and productive life, because without him, the body of pure comic writing would be literally half the size it is."

From *Western Morning News*, October 7

An article about this year's Berkshire Pig Breeders Club Champion of Champions competition at Newbury featured a prominent picture of the winner, Dittisham Lady 36, sporting the tricoloured sash displaying the Society's sponsorship of the championship. (See also page 12.)

From *The Mail on Sunday*, October 11

An article by Dylan Jones, editor of *GQ*, on male dressing style tips, expressed the controversial view: "There is never any excuse to wear coloured socks. In our office it is a sackable offence. Remember what Wodehouse wrote: 'Jeeves lugged my purple socks out of the drawer as if he were a vegetarian fishing a caterpillar out of his salad.'"

From *The Times Online*, October 15

Celebrated PGW's birthday by reproducing his first review in *The Times* (for the 1906 musical comedy *The Beauty of Bath*, to which he contributed some lyrics) and a later advertisement for the February 1921 edition of *Pan*, in which the first instalment of his novel *The Girl on the Boat* appeared (under the American title *Three Men and a Maid*); the

advertisement included Wodehouse's own comment "I think this the funniest story I have written".

From *The Independent*, October 19

The reviewer of *The Armstrong & Miller Show* on BBC1 referred to laughing out loud at a sketch "which replays Wodehouse without the innocence, with the Bertie Wooster character exasperatedly asking his butler to murder a kitchen-maid that he's impregnated. The joke is that the Jeeves type still inhabits a world in which both the pregnancy and the solution are as unthinkable as DayGlo spats."

Plum Pie in the Press

Plum Pie, the exhibition at Heywood Hill, benefitted from much favourable publicity. In the *Daily Telegraph* of September 7, Charles Spencer provided a substantial preview of the then-forthcoming exhibition. After it opened, Quentin Letts mentioned it in his column in the September 19 *Daily Mail*, noting that PGW's cocktail shaker, on display at the exhibition, was "big enough for two martinis" and that Ethel "was always officer i/c cocktail shaker". (Thanks to Stephen Payne and John Hodgson for this item.)

On the evening of September 16, Henry Blofeld opened the exhibition with an amusing talk that included a list of his All-Wodehouse Cricket XI. On September 22 Patrick Kidd, in his *Times Online* blog, posted Henry's list and also gave the exhibition a boost; the blog can still be read at <http://bit.ly/aMjeM>. That same day, Charles Moore had a lengthy review of Plum Pie that appeared on the Editorials page of the *Daily Telegraph*; he included substantial descriptions of several of the exhibits.

Meanwhile, having obtained the appropriate experience, Harry Mount wrote a full-page illustrated article about the Wodehouse Walks conducted for so long by Norman Murphy, which appeared in the *Evening Standard* on September 24. Harry's piece generated a lot of additional interest for Plum Pie – as well as for Norman's Walks, as he relates on page 8.

From *The Times*, October 21

Reviewed the theatre performance *John Lithgow: Stories by Heart* at the Lyttelton Theatre on October 19 (see also p. 14).

From *The Times*, October 22

The 'Court Circular' mentioned the visit of the Dutch P G Wodehouse Society Board to Clarence House to meet their Patroness, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, on the previous day.

From *Evening Standard* and *The Times*, October 22

Both had items referring to the competition being run by Heywood Hill to choose the best of 10 lines recorded by such fans as Stephen Fry, Alexander Armstrong, the Duchess of Devonshire, and Daphne Guinness, and available to view via the shop's website.

From *Evening Standard*, October 22

Nick Goodway wrote about the banking background of PGW's *Psmith in the City* and noted that HSBC's current chief executive, Mike Geoghegan, is quitting London for the Far East. "Wodehouse would probably be most heartened to find Geoghegan agreeing with his decision to quit the bank: 'We are a bank that runs on very simple principles. We run on the philosophy that, in fact, banking is very boring.'"

From *The Times*, October 26 (from John Hodgson and Gwendolin Goldbloom) Carried a favourable review by Andrew Riley of Reinhild von Bodenhausen's *P. G. Wodehouse: The Unknown Years*. Riley wrote: "This book may not offer any earth-shattering revelations about Wodehouse but it stands as a touching footnote to the episode that defined the rest of his life."

Future Events for Your Diary

February 16, 2010 Society Meeting

We meet from 6 p.m. at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street. Our speaker will be the wonderful Jonathan Cecil.

March 27, 2010 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Norman Murphy is resuming his Wodehouse Walks! (See p.3.) Start time is 10 a.m.

May 21 – June 27, 2010 *Oh, Boy!* in Chicago

The City Lit Theatre in Chicago is staging the Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern musical *Oh, Boy!*; see page 17. Are you planning to attend? Please volunteer to write a review for *Wooster Sauce!*

May 22, 2010 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Norman will lead another walk around Wodehouse's London. Start time is 10 a.m. (See March 27 for more.)

June 18, 2010 Gold Bats vs. The Dulwich Dusters

Our annual match at Dulwich College, with tea. Details will be in the March issue.

June 27, 2010 Gold Bats vs. Sherlock Holmes Society

We will face the Sherlockians at West Wycombe.

July 6, 2010 Society Meeting

We will meet from 6 p.m. at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street; speaker TBA. Norman Murphy will conduct an abbreviated Wodehouse Walk prior to the meeting.

August 8, 2010 Gold Bats v Kirby Strollers

This annual charity match will take place in the grounds of Audley End House, near Saffron Walden; start time is 1 p.m.

September 11, 2010 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk

Norman will lead another walk around Wodehouse's London. Start time is 10 a.m. (See March 27 for more.)

October 28, 2010 Dinner at Gray's Inn

The Society's biennial formal dinner will again be held at Gray's Inn, London.

November 16, 2010 Society Meeting

We will meet from 6 p.m. at the Arts Club, 40 Dover Street; speaker TBA.

Myrtle Prosser was a woman of considerable but extremely severe beauty. She did not resemble her father, who looked like a cassowary, but suggested rather 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 shortsighted.

(From *Ice in the Bedroom*, 1961)

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