



# WOOSTER SAUCE

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## ‘Capital Tomfoolery’

### The Various Guises of *A Damsel in Distress*

by Richard Burnip

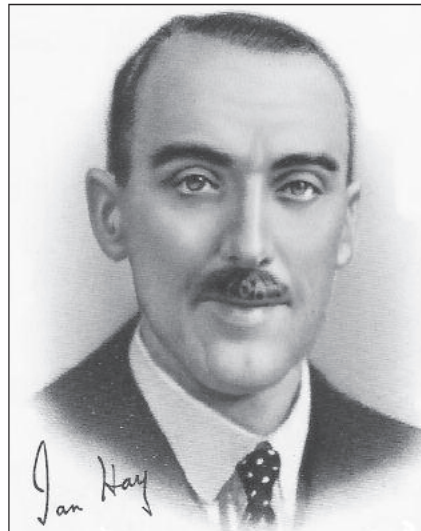
Adaptations of the Master’s work are legion, but *A Damsel in Distress* is unique because of the hand Wodehouse had in both the stage and screen versions. The novel was the fourth of his books to debut in the *Saturday Evening Post*, serialized in the summer of 1919 and published in book form that October. He received \$10,000 for the serial rights (“so now I can afford an occasional meat meal”) but later claimed to be distressed by excessive exclamation marks in the English edition, “of which I did not correct the proofs”.

*A Damsel* has long been recognised as a parallel universe to the Blandings saga, containing as it does a similar setting, a widowed earl, a domineering aunt, and the usual feckless relatives, assorted theatre people, imposters, and so on. There was an early silent film version, a five-reeler starring June Caprice, released around the same time. This dispensed with the English setting (Belfer Castle became the Marshcliffe Estate) and altered some of the characters accordingly (Lord Marshmoreton became millionaire John W Marsh), though the basic plot was retained. Nine years later, Wodehouse and Ian Hay wrote the stage version.

The summer of 1928 was a vintage season for Wodehouse: *Money for Nothing* was being serialized; he was “writing and rewriting the first 30,000 words of *Summer Lightning*”; the London production of *Show Boat* was at Drury Lane; and the play *Her Cardboard Lover*, which he had co-adapted, was also coming to town. *A Damsel* tried out in Blackpool before opening in London on Monday, August 13, at the New Theatre (now the Noel Coward Theatre) in St Martin’s Lane. The *Daily Mirror* was oddly hesitant in previewing the play, noting that it combined “the talents of Ian Hay and

P. G. Wodehouse, and on the face of it can’t help being funny. But you never know.”

The *Mirror* ought to have been more confident: the prolific Hay was an ideal writing partner. The *Dictionary of National Biography* records that his “wit, romanticism, decorous mind, and exceptional theatrical sense kept his plays popular”, and Wodehouse himself wrote, just before the play opened, “I don’t think we shall lose our money, as



Ian Hay (née John Hay Beith, 1876–1952)  
“An ideal writing partner” for PGW

Ian has done an awfully good job.” They worked by discussing characters and planning the play in the mornings, after which Hay would write the dialogue in the afternoons—similar to Wodehouse’s happy partnership with Guy Bolton. Hay and Wodehouse worked so well together that further collaborations were soon in the pipeline. The play was financed by Wodehouse, Hay, A A Milne, and the two producers, Tom Miller and Basil Foster, putting up £2,000 between them.

Rehearsals didn’t get off to a great start, according to Henry Kendall, who played Reggie Higgins and recalled the production in his spirited memoirs *I Remember Romano’s*. The first reading of the play took place in the bar of His Majesty’s Theatre, but Kendall and Reginald Gardiner (who played Percy) were returning from a holiday in the West Country, had car trouble on the way back, and arrived half an hour late, to be met with “black looks” from Foster and director Nicholas Hannen, who “had assembled quite a cast for us to keep waiting”.



The cast was indeed a fine one. Kendall regarded Reginald Gardiner, here in his pre-Hollywood days, as “the most talented person that I think I ever met”. He also remembered “three of the loveliest girls I have ever set eyes on, all then quite unknown . . . and all destined for stardom”. These were Ann Todd, Celia Glynn, and Jane Baxter, the latter being perfectly lovely casting as heroine Lady Maud. Baxter turned 19 during the run of the play and came to the world of Wodehouse fresh from two Aldwych farces. Helen Haye was ideal casting as the formidable Lady Caroline (we can still see her imperious presence, and get a sense of how she might have played the role, by watching her in the 1931 Hitchcock film *The Skin Game*). Clive Currie played the Earl of Marshmoreton and went on to rather corner the market in Hay/Wodehouse earls in the company’s next adaptations, playing Tuckleford in *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and Middlewick in *Leave It to Psmith*. Aubrey Mather, an excellent character actor who listed his recreations at the time as “foreign travel and care of his garden”, played the devious butler, Keggs.



Jane Baxter (1909 1996)

The hero of novel and play is George Bevan, a musical-comedy composer. The popular Basil Foster took the lead, as well as his first plunge into theatrical management. Reviewers frequently noted that he was one of the famous cricketing brothers of Worcestershire, the *Guardian* critic even going so far as to say, of *A Damsel*, “Mr. Basil Foster retains rather more of the M.C.C. manner and plays a quiet innings charmingly.” However, any suggestion that Foster was some charming amateur of the theatre would be misleading. Although famed for his earlier sporting activities, by 1928 he was 46 (but youthful with it: the play describes George as “a well-set-up young man of thirty”) and had been an actor for 22 years. He would subsequently play both Psmith and Lord Peter Wimsey on stage, pre-empting the late Ian Carmichael in playing both a Wodehouse hero and that aristocratic sleuth. After Foster’s death in 1957, theatre historian Macqueen Pope remembered him as “that graceful actor-sportsman”, which suggests he had the best of both worlds.



Henry Kendall (1897 1962)

There are several changes from novel to play. The main setting changes from Belper Castle to Totleigh Castle, Percy becoming Viscount Totleigh in consequence. The ‘Regal’ theatre becomes the ‘Regality’, perhaps because by August 1928 the genuine Regal Cinema at Marble Arch was nearing completion (coincidentally, it was here that the film of *A Damsel* would get its West end debut in 1938).

The Bond Street tea shop of the novel, ‘Ye Cozy Nooke’, becomes ‘Ye Dolly Varden’, conveniently situated for the registry office in Hanover Square (Wodehouse and Hay wanted three couples heading for matrimony in the final act). The melancholy gentlewoman serving at table becomes the play’s Miss Mould, providing what the *Times* called an “admirably absurd” cameo for a young Joan Hickson. Albert, the novel’s pageboy and would-be butcher, becomes the between-maid Albertina, Keggs’s niece, in the play. This gave a splendid opportunity for Australian-born Clarice Hardwicke, who charmingly listed her recreations as “dancing and sleeping” and received good notices for her comic role. Albertina gets both the last line in the play and the better of her uncle, a considerable achievement.

In the play, Reggie suggests that Percy’s assault on the policeman has “pushed Steve Donoghue and Tallulah Bankhead . . . right off the front page of ‘The News of the World’”. This was a nice little plug for Bankhead’s eagerly anticipated appearance in the Wodehouse-adapted *Her Cardboard Lover* (her obsessive fans would infuriate London’s regular theatre-goers), while the naming of the champion jockey seems appropriate for a play in which, according to a review in the *Guardian*, “It all happens in a queer world of abrupt slang in which the similes of the racecourse appear to be the chief currency of intelligibility.”

Henry Kendall remembered the play was “pooh-pooed by the critics as a lot of inconsequential nonsense, but it suited the taste of the 1928 public”.

By the time it closed on February 3, 1929, it had notched up a respectable 242 performances, and reviews had been very good: “All nonsense, but nonsense continually rippling into the laughter that rewards good fooling” (*Times*) and “Capital tomfoolery” (*Illustrated London News*) were typical. The play seems to have enjoyed a happy afterlife, including performances in March 1936 by the Royal Artillery Officers’ Dramatic Club and Band at Woolwich!

In the summer of 1937, Wodehouse worked on the script of the RKO musical version. He initially thought he would be polishing someone else’s script, but this proved unsatisfactory and he had to start over with another writer, certainly working under pressure: “We started shooting . . . ten days ago, and I still have about half of it to write!” Brian Taves has covered the film in detail in his excellent *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*,



and it's important to remember that Wodehouse was one of several (credited and uncredited) writers who worked on the script, neither the first nor the last; it may be significant that work on the script continued for five weeks after he finished. He emerged optimistic about the result, but this mood doesn't seem to have lasted long.

There are many changes for the film, most obviously that our hero becomes song-and-dance man Jerry Halliday, a role naturally tailored to Fred Astaire for his first solo venture without Ginger Rogers. The other big names were George Burns and Gracie Allen, playing Jerry's wisecracking press agents. Bringing them in from Paramount at \$10,000 a week made Wodehouse's own \$14,500 overall fee seem comparatively slight.

The film has neither stage door nor tea shoppe, and some characters disappear as a result. Others undergo curious changes: the earl's secretary Alice Faraday is not featured, but the earl's daughter is renamed Lady Alyce. Percy disappears, too, but his pursuit of the heroine and encounter with the law still feature in the film, these activities now undertaken by Keggs. In a slightly surreal progression, Keggs is played by the stage production's original Percy, Reginald Gardiner. We see a previously unsuspected side of Keggs in the film, best summed up by Guy Morgan in the *Express*, who called him the "operatic butler suffering from a suppressed aria". The snappy dialogue of Burns and Allen replaces, to some extent, the tone set in the earlier versions by chorus girl Billie Dore. Billie's absence has the knock-on effect of leaving Lord Marshmoreton still single at the film's conclusion, able, we presume, to return to the joys of his garden in more Emsworthian fashion. Montagu Love makes a wonderfully genial earl and has a suitably haughty Lady Caroline to play off in Constance Collier: "You will go and horse-whip him immediately!" "But I couldn't possibly! Why, I hardly know the fellow!" "You will horsewhip him directly you've had your breakfast!" "Oh, all right, I'll think it over." And for the film, there is no Albertina: as Albert, American child actor Harry Watson gives one of the most vigorous performances ever committed to celluloid.

Wodehouse's policemen usually run to type, and that type tends to be impressively large and possessed of a set of stock phrases. It is reassuring that *A Damsel's* P.C. C231 manages to utter "Hullo, what's all this?", "Ullo! Ullo! Ullo!" and "Come along with me!" or their near-equivalents in all three versions. From novel to play, in order to facilitate a joke, the police station to which he takes the enraged Percy changes from Vine Street to Great Marlborough Street; both were real stations in C Division. The violence meted out to C231 varies: "He gave the constable a punch just where the latter kept his lunch" suffices in the novel; the play has a full-blooded assault as Percy "punches the Policeman vigorously", is collared, wrenches himself free, "hurls

himself at the Policeman and butts him with his head"; the film is tame by comparison, reducing the assault to a tap with an umbrella and an accidental kick. This milder version may owe something to the Hollywood Production Code of the 1930s and the resultant need, among other things, to show respect for the law, but it also seems appropriate considering the stalwart appearance of Frank Moran as the policeman. An imposing ex-boxer, he was the perfect incarnation of 'Vigilant Authority'.

All versions have their share of choice expressions of greeting. In the novel, for example, Reggie says, "Goodbye, Bevan old thing, you're a ripper. . . . What ho! What ho! What ho! Toodle-oo, laddie, toodle-oo!"; the play includes "toodle-oo", "what-ho", "cheero" and "pip, pip" among its hails and farewells; and the whole thing reaches a kind of apotheosis in the movie's running gag involving "Right-Ho!" and the wonderful Gershwin song 'Stiff Upper Lip'. Regarding his glorious lyrics ("Pip-pip to Old Man Trouble and a toodle-oo, too!"), Ira Gershwin pointed out that "whether Englishmen actually greeted each other or not with 'old bean' or 'old fluff' or 'old tin of fruit' didn't matter frightfully—we had been conditioned by vaudevillians and comic weeklies to think they did."

The film was not a success, though Hermes Pan won a well-deserved Oscar for his choreography. Wodehouse later called it "a Mess" and suggested it was responsible for "the dark circles beneath my eyes and my tendency to leap like a jumping bean at sudden noises", while leading lady Joan Fontaine later said, "It set my career back four years." Today it's possible to see the sense in C. A. Lejeune's perceptive *Observer* review of 1938: "Astaire [seems] less a dancer in search of a story than a young man in a story who just can't help dancing . . . one can't miss it without losing a step in the development of one of the few real artists of the screen." This perhaps helps explain why Astaire was such an ideal American version of a Wodehouse hero. Both men were artists and craftsmen with very similar methods: long, dedicated hours spent at their work, the resulting lightness and brilliance, seemingly effortless, concealing all the time and effort behind it. "Nothing is left to chance, and we can sit back, knowing that at no point shall we be let down" was one opinion of Astaire's films at the time, and of course much the same could be said of Wodehouse's books.

Years after the film, in his post-war exile, Wodehouse received unexpected news that the BBC wanted to do *A Damsel in Distress* "as a bedtime story or something", signalling the beginning of his rehabilitation with the Corporation (it was broadcast in April 1951, read by the much-loved Richard Hurndall). There seems to be something very appropriate in their choice of this particularly joyous novel for a Wodehouse 'comeback'. Since then, of course, he's never been away from the airwaves or television screens for long, and quite right, too.

## Society News

### *Joy in the Wicket*

Later this month will see the Gold Bats' annual traditional cricket matches, first against the Dulwich Dusters on Friday, June 17, and then against the Sherlock Holmes Society of London two days later. The Dulwich match starts, as always, at 4.30 p.m., with a break for the famous tea hosted by the Society. Please note that if you plan to come as a spectator, tickets to the tea are required. Applications were enclosed with the March issue of *Wooster Sauce*; if you missed yours but want to come, contact Elaine Ring

On the 19th, our match against the Sherlockians, which is played to 1895 rules, starts at 11 a.m. at the West Wycombe Cricket Club ground, just off the A40 (Oxford Road) in West Wycombe. Bring your own picnic lunch, enjoy the action on the pitch, and enjoy the beautiful scenery as well as (possibly) some interesting period costumes. At the end of the match, around 6.00 p.m., many head off to the nearby Swan Inn. This day is invariably a lot of fun – we hope to see you there!

### *An Enjoyable July Meeting*

On July 12, we will again gather, from 6 p.m. onwards, in the upstairs room of The George, at 213 Strand, to sluice, chatter, and otherwise thoroughly enjoy ourselves. We will have the great pleasure of hearing Murray Hedgcock tell us about the republication of *Wodehouse at the Wicket* (see *WS*, March 2011) and have the opportunity to purchase copies. To add to the fun, we will be honing our little grey cells on a Wodehouse quiz compiled and hosted by committee member Paul Kent (see page 8 for a profile of Paul). Form teams, compete on your own, or sit back and watch others wrack their brains – the choice is yours, but do come and join in!

### *Subscription Renewal Time*

For those members who do not pay by standing order, a reminder that it is time to renew your subscription is enclosed with this issue of *Wooster Sauce*. Renewal can be made by cheque, PayPal, or standing order, with the latter perhaps being the best option so that you don't have to suffer reminders again. Furthermore, as noted in the last issue of *Wooster Sauce*, members who renew via standing order will have a year's grace from the subscription increase that will probably be instituted next year. Thank you for renewing your membership!

## A Quiz – and a Prize – for Brainy Coves

In the December 2010 issue of *Wooster Sauce*, we published the questions that had been put to DAVID BUCKLE when he appeared on Mastermind last year. David subsequently wrote and offered to do a series of quizzes for the journal, starting with this one, which features a Blandings theme.

Coincidentally, AudioGO, which produces the BBC Wodehouse books on tape read by Society patron Jonathan Cecil, recently offered the Society a number of Wodehouse audiobooks, and we thought it would be a jolly idea to give some of these as prizes to the first three brainy coves to submit correct answers to David's quizzes in each issue.

**[Info on where to send answers deleted.]** The names of the three winners, plus the names of all those who submitted 10 correct answers, will be published in the September issue, along with the answers themselves. (Note: If you don't want your name published, please say so in your entry. This contest is not open to members of the Society's committee or its Remembrancer.)

Our thanks to AudioGO for making their splendid audiobooks available as prizes. To see their full range of Wodehouse audiobooks, visit <http://www.audiogo.co.uk>.

1. What is the name of Lord Emsworth's bespectacled onetime secretary who throws flowerpots at his employer's bedroom window in *Leave It to Psmith*?
2. In *Full Moon*, what product does Freddie Threepwood return to England for in an attempt to sell it to the English?
3. What is long-serving butler Beach's first name?
4. Which prominent 'nerve specialist' (also a scourge of Bertie Wooster) is impersonated by Frederick Twistleton, 5th Earl of Ickenham, in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*?
5. What is Monica Simmons's job in *Galahad at Blandings*?
6. In *Pigs Have Wings*, what weight-loss remedy does Sir Gregory Parsloe invest in, on Lady Constance's advice?
7. What object does Lord Emsworth unwittingly steal from American millionaire J Preston Peters in *Something Fresh*?
8. Where could you buy G Ovens's homebrewed beer?
9. Hugo Carmody takes a job as Lord Emsworth's secretary in *Summer Lightning* following the failure of which nightclub?
10. In *Heavy Weather*, what does Monty Bodkin have to do in order to marry Gertrude Butterwick?



# My First Wodehouse Experience

by Lucy Meredith

Five summers ago, when I was at the tender age of 12, my family and I hit upon the corker of an idea that the thing to do that school holiday was to purchase some chickens. They would be as pets to us, producing eggs by the dozen and providing a convenient, natural disposal system for all kinds of kitchen waste. As it has turned out, however, the pekin bantam chickens, in direct contempt of their biology, refuse to lay a single egg most of the time, apart from about a fortnight in the warmest months of the year, when each bird will lay only one bally egg as a token gesture for the rest of the annum. They also turn their ungrateful beaks up at any 'kitchen waste' short of fresh, piping hot porridge, topped with a swirl of good old strawberry jam.

A few days after we purchased our veritable flock of four hens, I ankled off to the town centre for the weekly family library visit. I was at the stage, which I am sure many of you will recognise, where one has left the children's section of the library far behind, yet doesn't quite know how to go about the daunting rows of shelves for grownups. On a casual perusal of the *W* section, a modest, unpretentious tome entitled *Love Among the Chickens* made itself known to me for the simple fact that the cover sleeve was possessed of a large and conspicuous likeness of one *gallus domesticus*. I grabbed the volume like a shot, practically starved of reading material because I simply had not known where to begin.

That night, I returned home to indulge in the very enjoyable activity of curling up in a good old, squashy armchair with a mug of cocoa and what turned out to be, as I'm sure you will heartily agree, a very improving book. From that moment on, Wodehouse became a new form of sustenance to me

and I could no more survive without him than could Augustus Finknottle in the absence of his beloved newts.

Some of my peers think my new style of language an object of high amusement, as I incorporate words such as *blighter*, *topping*, and *old horse* into the conversation over the pronging of a moody forkful of school dinner, but I take no offense. "Let them laugh!" say I, for these are the pals with whom I oft shared my last bar of milk chocolate when a mere stripling, and this chummy spirit is not something to be missed.

Although I first embarked upon my Wodehousean journey thanks to Ukridge and Garny, I have discovered that it is the tales from Blandings which will always draw me back inexorably. The wit and style of Wodehouse's language is to be luxuriated in, not simply read. Since those carefree days of yore, I have become far more skilled in the

navigation of various athenaeums, and we even went so far as to purchase a few more hens, due to the chronic refusal of our bantams to lay. Whilst the aforementioned pekin bantams are a small breed of chicken, bantam being similar in meaning to the word *pygmy* in the world of poultry, our next lot were ex-Battery hens. These new hens, although erring rather on the bald, are indeed very productive, so the bantams have officially been retired from egg-laying and are now simply pets. In addition to Aunt Elizabeth and her friends, I have prostrated myself at the feet of my parents for hours in the noble efforts of procuring a pig, but to no avail. *Consensu omnium* except me, no porcine will be forthcoming to our household and so I shall be forced to content myself with the Empress; no great hardship at all.



"Listen to me! When I said that we were going to keep fowls, I didn't mean in a small, piffing sort of way two cocks and a couple of hens and a golf-ball for a nest-egg. We are going to do it on a large scale. We are going to run a chicken farm!"

"A chicken farm," echoed Mrs. Ukridge with an affectionate and admiring glance at her husband.

"Ah," I said, feeling my responsibilities as chorus. "A chicken farm."

(From *Love Among the Chickens*, 1906)

## We Remember

### Nancy Kominsky Wodehouse 1915–2011

I was deeply saddened when I learned that Nancy Kominsky had passed away, age 95, on March 11, just six weeks after losing her husband, Patrick Wodehouse.

Born Emanuela Agneta Circelli in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Nancy became a well-known artist through her television programme *Paint Along with Nancy*, which was broadcast in the United Kingdom and the United States. She was the author of 12 books on painting and pastels, as well as an autobiography, *This Is How I Did It*, published in 2009 (and still available on Amazon).

Nancy had a wonderful joie de vivre as well as a spirit of adventure: at age 50, newly divorced, she left the States for Rome, where she opened a studio and began teaching painting. When offered her television series in the 1970s, she commuted between Rome and Bristol for the filming. One day a new student arrived in her class: the widowed Patrick Wodehouse. Romance blossomed, and the two were married in 1983, subsequently moving to Wimbledon, where Nancy continued her painting and they entertained friends and family.



Nancy and Patrick in 2005  
(Thanks to Michael Kominsky)

That was how I came to meet her. As a newly married immigrant in 2001, I was gratified when Nancy and Patrick were the first to invite Norman and me to dinner, their way of welcoming me to England. Their warm, gracious hospitality went a long way to making me feel at home, and they were both unfailingly kind. Nancy had an upbeat attitude that saw her through increasing health problems as

she aged, and she eventually had to give up her painting. She had overcome many hardships in her life, but her years with Patrick were undoubtedly her happiest. The last chapter of her autobiography describes their wedding and honeymoon, and then concludes:

Five years later, in 1988, English Heritage decided to put a commemorative blue plaque on the house where P G Wodehouse had lived in London. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother agreed to unveil it and Patrick and I were invited to the ceremony and luncheon afterwards.

As she performed the ceremony, the Queen Mother said that whenever she felt depressed she would go to bed with a Wodehouse, “and I always fell asleep with a smile on my face.”

“Ah,” I thought, “but I go to bed with a Wodehouse every night, and I always wake up with a smile on my face.”

That was Nancy – always smiling, never afraid to be a little racy. Along with many others, I will miss her very much.

– Elin Woodger Murphy

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### Florence Cunningham 1918–2011

Florence Cunningham, who died on February 24, age 92, was president of the The Wodehouse Society (US) from 1985 to 1987. She played a leading part in the installation of the plaque in the Little Church Around the Corner in New York to commemorate the marriage of PGW and Ethel in 1914.

I met Florence first when she came on the famous 1989 Pilgrimage, bringing her two sons, her daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren with her. I acted as Native Guide for the trip, and I remember vividly making polite conversation with her on the first evening, during which it became very clear that this trim, white-haired, blue-eyed elderly lady was not your usual grandmother. The phrase ‘sharp as a razor’ sums her up, an impression that strengthened as the pilgrimage went on.

Florence had a ‘presence’, a self-confidence, probably inherent but certainly developed by her years as a teacher and as the wife of a man in public life. This proved invaluable when the pilgrimage arrived at Cheney Court, where Wodehouse lived as a boy with his grandmother and four aunts (he drew it later as Deverill Hall in *The Mating Season*).

Cheney Court had become a language school, and they gave us a tremendous reception which included



nibbles and champagne. Further, the director of the school made a very formal speech of welcome, which none of us had anticipated. I had the inspiration of sidling over to Florence



*Florence and Norman converse on the grass in front of the temple at Weston Park, 1989*

and asked her to reply on our behalf. I recall I added something like: “Just pretend you’re the Queen Mother.”

She saw exactly what was needed and did it perfectly. Her shoulders went back, she stood up, sailed across the room – ‘sailed’ is the only word – and thanked the director and his staff courteously and graciously in about 50 words, then sat down.

She was so gracious that the director didn’t leave us; he came over and hung on her every word. When he eventually left, she turned to me, smiled, and asked: “How did I do?” To which there was only one reply: “Florence, the Queen Mother couldn’t have done it better.”

I saw her at Conventions later and she was always the same – witty, charming, a pleasure to talk to. She will be sadly missed.

– Norman Murphy

## **Two Wodehouse Limericks**

by Ewart Johns

Apart from his jolly Aunt Dahlia  
Whose laugh can be heard in Australia  
Bertie thinks that the rest  
Are C3 at best  
And that Aunts as a class are a failure.

Lord Emsworth, that dreamy old peer,  
Loved to dress in some ghastly old gear.  
Lady Constance, despairing,  
Said, “What you are wearing  
Looks especially foul from the rear.”



# Letters to the Editor

### *From Ken Clevenger*

In Murray Hedgcock’s latest note on C of E news (WS, March, p.7), notes I always treasure, I felt the editor should have pointed out parenthetically that Mapledurham (now known to be a real place as well as a Wodehouse name), in the Diocese of Oxford, is, or may be, pronounced ‘Mum’.

### *From Nick Townend*

I was interested to read Norman Murphy’s ‘The Origin of Steggles?’ (WS, March 2011), in which Norman stated that “it is most unlikely [Wodehouse] did not read [Eden] Philpott’s popular ‘Human Boy’ series [which featured a bad egg called Steggles].” I can confirm that Wodehouse had indeed read the book. The final paragraph of his article ‘School Stories’ (*Public School Magazine*, August 1901) reads as follows: “One could name scores of writers of today who are capable of writing good school-stories but who devote themselves to more mundane topics. Conan Doyle, for instance, Eden Philpotts (who wrote ‘The Human Boy,’ an excellent set of school-stories but not Public School stories), EF Benson, Inglis Allen, and many others.”

**Editor’s note:** Nick has kindly supplied an article he wrote several years ago on similarities between ‘The Human Boy’ and Wodehouse’s fiction, which will appear in a future issue of Wooster Sauce.

### *From Iain Anderson:*

Browsing through the motoring section of the *Daily Telegraph* (19 February), I came across the following: “Bentley Brooklands R Mulliner, LWB, 98/R Black Emerald (*sic*), Sand Hide, 31,000 miles, £24,999.” Most of this meant little or nothing to me. However, I wondered if it might give a hint as to Mr Mulliner’s first name; Robert, Roger, Rollo, Roland, Richard or possibly Rudyard? Alas, a swift search through the internet failed to show a connection with the Wodehouse raconteur, at which point I lost interest & decided to stick with our Volvo. Nevertheless, I feel sure that among the serried ranks of well-heeled members of the Society there will be several proud owners of Bentley Mulliners who can cast some light on the subject.

**The editor replies:** My better half informs me that the Mulliners who made their name by creating splendid bodywork for Bentleys and other expensive cars have little connection with PGW’s Mr Mulliner as far as we know. Thanks to Mr Hollingsworth of Hayes Bank, Stableford, where Wodehouse lived for seven happy years (1895-1902), we know that the Wodehouse’s next-door neighbour there was a gardener named Mr Mulliner – hence the source of the name. Still, Iain makes an interesting automotive connection!

### *From Paddy Briggs:*

I enjoyed Eddie Grabham’s notes on the *Ladies of the Grossmith Company* (*By The Way*, March 2011), but why oh why the use of the ghastly term ‘female actor’ to describe these actresses? Plum would never use two words when one would do (except by bloviating characters) and he would certainly never bow to the petty gods of political correctness in this way!

## Profile of a Committee Member

*Paul Kent*

**P**G Wodehouse was ultimately responsible for several important aspects of Paul Kent's life and career, their paths crossing on a number of significant occasions.

The first was when his English teacher was trying to coerce him into reading a work of fiction – for at the age of 13, Paul was very definitely not a fan of literature, preferring factual writing to stuff that was 'made up'. The book in question was *The Inimitable Jeeves* – and Paul now confesses that he hated it as much as all the others that had been forced on his attention.



But a seed had been sown, for soon afterwards, he came across a copy of the Penguin edition of *Psmith in the City* in the Blackpool branch of WH Smith's – and that 50 pence was perhaps the most

important he ever spent, for it simultaneously ignited his love of Wodehouse and fiction in general. Said copy (with its gloriously eye-catching Ionic cover) is still in his possession, inscribed with "Paul Kent, March 1974" inside the front cover.

Just in time, Paul switched one of his 'A' level choices from Maths to English, which led to an English degree at Oxford, which in turn gave way to research for his doctorate on a very different writer – the American novelist William Faulkner. Paul finally submitted the resulting thesis in April 2011, a mere 25 years late.

A career at the BBC followed, which included a stint as Radio 4's head of features and readings, during which time he worked on several Wodehouse projects, his favourite being the late Simon Cadell's brilliant renditions of the golf stories. The Wodehouse theme later reappeared when Paul was Programme Director at Oneworld Radio, which broadcast many of Jonathan Cecil's superb audiobook performances. Listener feedback signalled Wodehouse as the most consistently popular author to grace the network, which won two 'UK Station of the Year' Awards during its brief existence.

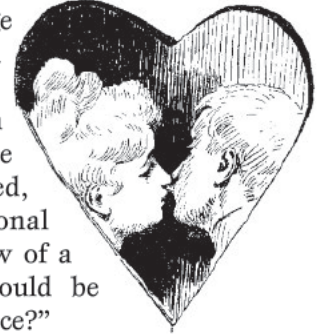
And now Paul is a writer himself: having published an unorthodox biography of the French essayist Michel de Montaigne entitled *What Do I Know?*, he is currently working on an overview of Voltaire, due to appear in spring 2012.

To Paul, reading Wodehouse into adulthood does not equate to escapism or nostalgia; the latter's doggedly eupeptic attitude to life is his most important bequest, representing a brave and principled stand against life's harshness from which we can all draw inspiration. In the battle against gloom, he is one of our doughtiest defenders.

Not bad for a fiction writer, Paul now admits.

## Some Advice for the Royal Couple

**T**he recent marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge made the request from LOUIS McCULLOCH quite timely. Louis asked, apparently for personal reasons: "Do you know of a PGW piece which could be used at a wedding service?"



Unfortunately, there is no single passage that really meets the requirement. In early works there is an occasional mawkish sentence or two that might fit the bill, and later in the canon the subject of marriage becomes more of a joke among Wodehouse's characters. Nonetheless, the subject does come up in his stories and novels, and so here is a rather jolly selection of quotes which, we hope, will help the royal couple in the early stages of married life.

*For the bride:*

Chumps always make the best husbands. When you marry, Sally, grab a chump. Tap his forehead first, and if it rings solid, don't hesitate. All the unhappy marriages come from the husband having brains. What good are brains to a man? They only unsettle him.

(From *The Adventures of Sally*)

"And here is a piece of advice you will find useful in your married life. Don't watch his eyes. Watch his knees. They will tell you when he is setting himself for a swing. And when he swings, roll with the punch."

(From *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)

*For the bridegroom:*

The whole wheeze in married life, Bingo had come to learn, was to give the opposite number as few opportunities of saying "Oh, how could you?" as possible.

(From 'Sonny Boy')

Love's silken bonds are not broken just because the female half of the sketch takes umbrage at the loony behaviour of the male partner and slips it across him in a series of impassioned speeches. However devoutly a girl may worship the man of her choice, there always comes a time when she feels an irresistible urge to haul off and let him have it in the neck.

(From *Joy in the Morning*)



“Marriage is a battlefield, not a bed of roses. . . . The only way of ensuring a happy married life is to get it thoroughly clear at the outset who is going to skipper the team. My own dear wife settled the point during the honeymoon, and ours has been an ideal union.”

(From *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)

I have made rather a close study of the married state, and I know what happens when one turtle dove gets the goods on the other turtle dove. Bingo Little has often told me that if Mrs Bingo had managed to get on him some of the

things that it seemed likely she was going to get, the moon would have been turned to blood and Civilisation shaken to its foundations. I have heard much the same thing from other husbands of my acquaintance, and of course similar upheavals occur when it is the little woman who is caught bending.

(From *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*)

So, what are *your* favourite PGW quotes on the subject of marriage? What of love, for that matter? Send your quotes to the editor, and we'll publish the best ones in future issues of *Wooster Sauce*.

## Wodehouse Under the Hammer

by Graham Johnson

In the March issue of *Wooster Sauce*, Tony Ring reported the untimely death of Nigel Williams, bookseller and occasional publisher of lesser-known Wodehousian morsels, and indicated that Nigel's stock in trade was shortly to be sold by Bloomsbury Auctions. I therefore toddled off to Maddox Street on 19 April, accompanied by my minder, Angela, who gamely agreed to provide wifely support tempered with prudent restraint. It proved to be a pleasant and instructive afternoon.

The shelves were stacked with a mouth-watering array of modern first editions and the like, of which 31 were Wodehouse, which had been available for viewing in the morning. As when entering an unfamiliar church, we sat towards the rear, the better to observe the scene and get the hang of what to do when, and to calm any potentially expensive nervous twitches. At 1 p.m. prompt, the priest-like chappie at the front, surrounded by acolytes, some gazing reverently into computer screens and some swinging mobile phones, waved his gavel in benediction, and we were off.

With 333 lots to shift, it was a fairly swift process, with flurries of bids coming from the floor, telephone, and internet. We had to sit through close on 300 inconsequential items such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (which fetched £400), *The Golliwog's Christmas* (£550), and William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (£950) before reaching *A Prefect's Uncle*, spotting throughout, which went for £480.

Which would you rather have on your shelves? *The Man with Two Left Feet*, “1st edition, original cloth, browned and soiled (McIlvaine A21a) 1917”, or *Love Among the Chickens*, 2nd edition 1921, plus eight more recent firsts together with about 50 other later editions, all with dust jackets? *Left Feet* went for £1,100, while the ready-made PGW library of 60 volumes fetched a relatively modest £850. Which would you rather read?



Nigel Williams's bookshop in Cecil Court sadly, no more

The school stories and scarcer early works fetched the highest prices, as one might expect. The great majority were sold within the auctioneer's range of estimates, with eight slightly under and ten over, sometimes comfortably so. Three lots languished unsold, having failed to meet their reserves. The 28 lots sold brought in £12,040 in all. I am pleased to report that I secured a nice, bright, illustrated first edition of *Psmith Journalist* for £420 – about half of what the

deceased had been indicating on the front endpaper, to which the auctioneer's courteous assistant gently reminded me should be added the 22% buyer's premium.

Some undoubted bargains were to be had. A lifetime's entertainment in the form of 35 omnibuses and similar collections fetched £170, and the *Comprehensive Bibliography* by the blessed McIlvaine, indispensable to any serious Wodehousian (surely an oxymoron, but you know what I mean), accompanied by about 50 omnibuses, books on PGW, etc., just £190.

Tony Ring, who was one of the surprisingly small number of Society members present, reckoned that the biggest bargain of all was sneakily not in the Wodehouse section of the sale: 190 individual issues of magazines, mainly *Strands*, and most containing Wodehouse stories, which went for £130. With his swift accountant's brain, he pointed out that this was less than £2 per *Strand* with Wodehouse in it compared with a market price of anything from £15 to £50 (if you and the seller know what's what).

My only regret was that we travelled by train and not pantechicon.

# Did Plum Play 100 Years Ago?

by Murray Hedgcock

Open Volume 1 of Norman Murphy's monumental and invaluable *A Wodehouse Handbook*, turn to page 92, and you read of Plum's cricket: "Wodehouse used to play for the Emsworth village team when he was available, and turned out for them for four successive weeks in 1911."

This is a reference to Plum's association with the charming little Hampshire seaside town of Emsworth, which began in 1903 when he stayed at Baldwin King-Hall's School, Emsworth House.

A year later he rented, and then bought, a house called Threepwood a couple of hundred yards from the school. After a few years, he returned to London, but Norman comments: "Threepwood seems to have become his weekend retreat until he sold it in 1914."

That sets the scene. Now to the nub.

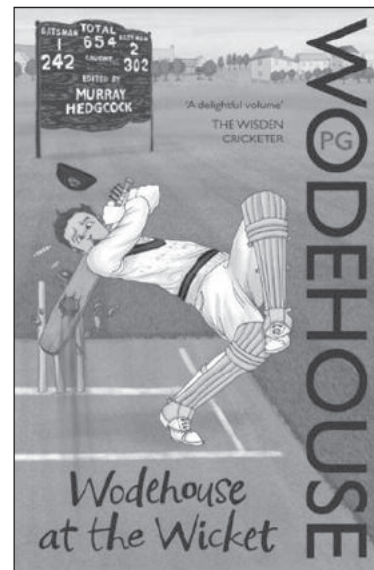
On Wednesday, July 27, of this year, Emsworth Cricket Club will welcome an MCC team as the highlight of a cricket week marking the club's 200th anniversary. It plays on Emsworth Recreation Ground, which was established in 1909.

Which brings us to the question: did the club stage a centenary match in 1911? And is it possible that this was one of those games in which Plum played?

Answers on a postcard, please.

# Speaking of Cricket

On June 2, the eagerly awaited revised edition of *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, edited with commentary by journalist and Society patron Murray Hedgcock, was published by Arrow. Those familiar with the original edition already know what a treasure this book is, and for new readers there will be much joy in poring through Wodehouse's cricket writings. The book can be purchased through the Random House website (<http://www.rbooks.co.uk/>) or through Amazon. Buy your copy today!



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## The Word Around the Clubs

We were delighted to receive a page from the House of Lords *Hansard* of 21 March, sent by LORD SELBORNE. In a debate responding to a question about what the Government is doing to help British pig farmers, the following exchange took place:

**Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville:** . . . I congratulate my noble friend on the usual high standard of his answers. Does his bloodline make him a kinsman of the late Earl of Emsworth?

**Lord Henley:** My Lords, that is a difficult one. I am very familiar with the works of PG Wodehouse. Whether I am related to Lord Emsworth is another matter.

It is reassuring to see our legislators are so well read!

CHARLES GOULD sent two clippings that fell out of a book he was reading a few months ago. Both are letters to the editor published in *The Times*, October 1981. The first, from Mr N C à Brassard, asks:

Sir, I have heard Bertie Wooster's surname pronounced Worcester and to rhyme with

rooster. As a mark of respect in the centenary of P. G. Woodhouse's [sic] birth, I feel that it would be apposite to know the pronunciation that was intended. Do any readers of *The Times* remember hearing Wodehouse say Wooster?

To which Mr Michael Hyam replied:

Sir, In one of the last interviews which P. G. Wodehouse gave, he rebuked his interviewer for pronouncing Bertie Wooster's surname as though it rhymed with rooster, when it should be pronounced Worcester. Bertie, himself, has never been known to correct anyone's mispronunciation of his name; perhaps even Spode got it right.

All of which inspired Charles to write the following:

There once was a fellow named Wooster  
Whose name shouldn't be rhymed with  
'rooster'.

The author's name Wodehouse  
Does not rhyme with 'roadhouse'  
Though published by Simon and Schuster.



## Follow Wodehouse to Emsworth

It's not too late to register for 'Follow Wodehouse to Emsworth', the special weekend of events and activities being organised by the Brookfield Hotel in Emsworth. It will take place October 28–30 and include talks, walks, a black-tie dinner, and more; full details of what is in store can be found in the March issue of *Wooster Sauce*, page 4. As an added bonus, the Emsworth Museum will be focusing on 'Emsworth in 1911' as its main exhibition, showing the town as it was during Wodehouse's stay there.

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### *My First Wodehouse Experience*

by Richard Heller

As a ten-year-old schoolboy, the worst thing that could happen to me was getting detention and missing cricket practice. (The misery was mine: for my teammates it was a relief. I was always the last to be picked, allotted as makeweight to the team which had acquired the star all-rounder.) I cannot now remember the crime that condemned me to a disconsolate afternoon in the empty classroom and denied me the hope of earning promotion to Third Game B. Suddenly, my gaoler burst in. He had forgotten to set me an imposition. He grabbed a book from the shelves and told me to read it – my first Wodehouse.

*Uncle Fred in the Springtime* is not the Master's finest, but it changed my life. I read it all through cricket practice. I went on reading it when the cricketers returned. For once I had no interest in their match reports. I finished it that day and got another imposition for undone homework.

I loved the plotting, full of recurring themes in the Master's work. Sundered hearts which have to be reunited; a dastardly conspiracy against the Empress of Blandings; and multiple impostures, including the especially brilliant passage when the Earl of Ickenham, impersonating Sir Roderick Glossop, convinces the Efficient Baxter that the real Glossop is one of his patients. I loved the characters (although there are more satisfying Wodehouse villains than the Duke of Dunstable), and although I did not then recognize all the Master's casual quotations and eclectic references, I was hypnotized by the language. "The ninth Earl of Emsworth . . . always tended to resemble the Aged Parent in an old-fashioned

melodrama when informed that the villain intended to foreclose the mortgage." I had no idea what that meant but it made me laugh out loud.

*Uncle Fred in the Springtime* was my passage to Blandings, and later to the Drones Club and Brinkley Court and the Angler's Rest, the schools and all the rest of the Master's world. That summer I read every

other book of his that I could get hold of. A bag full of Wodehouses kept me quiet on a 15-hour pre-jet flight to New York and on the stopover in Gander.

I have never stopped reading or rereading him since. My personal favourite remains *Psmith Journalist* (as a journalist I have my own fantasy of acquiring *Cosy Moments* and making it the magazine that won't be muzzled). My favourite single passage is Gussie Fink-Nottle's sozzled speech at Market Snodsbury Grammar School.

All of my own books have homages to the Master, and I would like to take it even further. If the Master's Estate would allow it, I have the ambition to write a Bertie Wooster mystery. Yes, Bertie would be the detective, having learned from Jeeves to study the psychology of the individual. I have decided who the (wildly improbable) killer would be but cannot think of a plausible motive. The Master sometimes had this kind of problem, and I need a spasm to overcome it.

*Richard Heller is an author, journalist, and two-time finalist on Mastermind. He has written two cricket-themed novels, A Tale of Ten Wickets and The Network, and a manual on public speaking, High Impact Speeches, which might have saved Gussie Fink-Nottle.*



*Richard preparing for his epic innings of 3 not out in 11 overs.  
(Photo by Andy Popperwell)*

# A Toast to P G Wodehouse and The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

by Elliott Milstein

*Past president of The Wodehouse Society (US), Elliott delivered this toast at the UK Society's dinner at Gray's Inn on 28 October 2010.*

When addressing a group of Wodehouseans in a formal setting like this, it is pretty much *de rigueur* to begin by making some reference to the prize-giving scene from *Right Ho, Jeeves*. And though I am at the moment easily as well-sozzled as Gussie Fink-Nottle was on that notable occasion, I will demur.

You see, as I prepared this little talk I was more reminded of Woody Allen at the 2002 Academy Awards when he was asked to introduce an homage of his beloved New York City. He said that he told the organizers of the Oscars, "Gosh you can do much better than me. You could ask Martin Scorsese or Mike Nichols or Spike Lee or Sidney Lumet and I kept naming names and I said Look I've given you 15 names of guys who are more talented than I am and smarter and classier and they said, Yes but they were not available."

And so it was with me when I opened an email from Tony Ring last month requesting my participation tonight after the original speaker had dropped out. They hemmed, he said, and hawed and searched their vast databases – which I took to be the polite British way of saying "scraped the bottom of the barrel" – and found me. I must admit I was a tad miffed at being an also-ran, but after being informed that speakers at these wonderful dinners are not asked to pay the price of admission, I jumped at the opportunity. It's the American in me.

Of course it's a little hard on all of *you*. Here you are, on this night of nights, the UK P G Wodehouse Society Formal Dinner, and rather than being treated to the wit and wisdom of some home-grown luminary like, say, Stephen Fry speaking in the dulcet tones of the Queen's own, you are subjected to the monotonous nasal whine of an obscure Midwesterner. And if that's not asking for bread and being handed a stone, I don't know what is.

And yet, it is rather *à propos* when you reflect that Wodehouse himself lived more years among us

Yanks than he ever did on this scepter'd isle, ultimately becoming an American citizen. Consider, too, that one of his autobiographical works was entitled *America, I Like You*. And he had reason to like us. America was, after all, the making of his career when, having visited us in 1904, he says his "income rose like a rocketing pheasant".

Also, while for most people the term 'The World of Wodehouse' conjures up Blandings Castle,

Brinkley Manor, and Berkeley Square,

many of Wodehouse's stories and novels take place in New York,

Long Island, and the bizarre

world of Hollywood, or, as

he liked to call it,

"Dottyville-on-the-Pacific".

It is true that he rarely

wrote about or graced the

great fly-over, as we in the

Midwest are so enchantingly

referred to by our coast-hugging

brethren. But what of that? We

don't hold that against him.

Across the plains and

mountains of our great land,

chapters of the American

Wodehouse Society have broken out like an eczema.

That being said, I must admit that Wodehouse is not as much in the forefront of the American consciousness as he is here. For instance, while many American news outlets recently mentioned that our latest Supreme Court is historic in that it has three women for the first time, it is the British media that pointed out that it has three Wodehouseans. (Although that may not be an historic event; for all we know, Louis Brandeis and Oliver Wendell Holmes frequently discussed their favorite Mulliner stories while Hugo Black pelted them with bread rolls.)

The problem is that Wodehouse aficionados are somewhat thinner on the ground in America than here. Not that we don't have many – the US Wodehouse Society now numbers over a thousand members – but we have so much more ground to cover. In America one often has to travel vast distances to find a fellow Wodehousean. I, for one, live in a Wodehouse wilderness, so, instead of enjoying frequent meetings and events like the ones this Society boasts, I have to endure my friends and neighbors constantly asking me, "What exactly is the attraction of this Wodehouse guy, anyway?"



*Elliott (right) shares a post dinner laugh with a fellow Wodehousean at Gray's Inn in October.*

*(Photo by Ginni Beard)*



On such occasions I could, of course, simply say that he is funny, but if they don't get that on their own, what's the use? And, of course, it is so much more than that. I could point out, for instance, how vivid and memorable his characters are, like Bertie and Jeeves, who are now so famous that when referred to in general discourse no explanation of them or their creator is required; or how the Wodehouse World is so brilliantly drawn it has become part of the Anglo-American literary landscape; or how the plots of his best novels have more twists and turns than a one-armed contortionist with hives.

But for me, the great joy of reading Wodehouse is the language, the craftsmanship of the writing itself. We laugh, we enjoy the goofy characters, we immerse ourselves in the world, but what gets *me* is just how darn good the writing is.

Of course there are the nifties, those amazing little one-liners, as recently celebrated by Heywood Hill, like "Jeeves lugged my purple socks out of the drawer as if he were a vegetarian fishing a caterpillar out of his salad"; or "The Duke shot back in his chair, and his moustache, foaming upwards as if a gale had struck it, broke like a wave on the stern and rockbound coast of the Dunstable nose"; or, my father's favorite, "if ever he had seen a fermenting aunt, this fermenting aunt was that fermenting aunt."

But I find the true genius of his writing emerges in more extensive passages. I could give any of a thousand examples, but one that always sticks in my mind is the flowerpot scene in *Leave It to Psmith*, all of which is just brilliant, but especially the moment when Lord Emsworth is awakened by Baxter's hurling flowerpots through the window. Several flowerpots have already come flying into his room, but he is only aroused finally by one that hits him as he lies in bed. The scene continues:

He looked at the flower-pot. It had no message for him. He had not put it there. He never took flower-pots to bed. Once, as a child, he had taken a dead pet rabbit, but never a flower-pot. The whole affair was completely inscrutable; and his lordship, unable to solve the mystery, was on the point of taking the statesman-like course of going to sleep again, when something large and solid whizzed through the open window and crashed against the wall, where it broke, but not into such small fragments that he could not perceive that in its prime it, too, had been a flower-pot.

That last sentence is certainly one of the finest ever penned in the English language and all the more brilliant in its set-up with a series of short, simple declarative statements. And, of course, it is screamingly funny.

While working on my Wodehouse thesis at the University of Toronto, one day, in the library, I was

confronted by a professor with the accusation that it was a waste of academic effort to study a writer whose entire literary output had no redeeming feature other than it was merely funny. It was the word 'merely' that made the iron enter into my soul, so it was the work of a moment to hop up to the third floor, take *Plum Pie* from the shelf, photocopy the final chapter – an essay entitled 'A Note on Humor' – and hand it to him, pointing to this paragraph:

I think we should all be sorry for humorists and try to be kind to them, for they are so vulnerable. You can blot the sunshine from their lives in an instant by telling them you don't see what's funny in *that*, and if there is something funny in it, you can take all the heart out of them by calling them facetious or describing them as "mere humorists". A humorist who is called mere not only winces. He frets. He mopes. He refuses to eat his cereal. He goes about with his hands in his pockets and his lower lip jutting out, kicking stones and telling himself that the lot of a humorist is something that ought not to happen to a dog, and probably winds up by going in for "sick" humor, like Lenny Bruce, and the trouble about being like Lenny Bruce is that the cops are always arresting you, which must cut into your time rather annoyingly.

I took it as a personal victory that, the next day in class, he read a section of the essay out loud, which would have been a highly edifying experience for my fellow students had he not broken out laughing so frequently as to be incomprehensible. While he would still not admit that Wodehouse was deserving of serious study, after that performance, he had to acknowledge not just Wodehouse's incredible talent but also the value of humor.

And humor is more valuable now than ever. We live in a world where quotidian calamities assault us on all sides: the international situation is as dire as any we have ever faced; starvation and oppression run rampant from Africa to Asia; the underpinning of the entire world economy is on the shakiest of grounds; and government officials, from Washington to Whitehall, seem to be comprised entirely of either Baxters and Spodes or the less IQ-endowed members of the Drones Club. What better way to stiffen the sinews against the day than to pick up a Wodehouse, open it at random, and read something like "she resembled a Ziegfeld Follies girl who had been left out in the rain and swollen a bit"?

So, therefore, I invite you all to lift your glasses to toast one who has brought so much joy to so many, a humorist no one dare call 'mere', the Master of the English Language and the finest writer of either side of the Atlantic, the late Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, and to The P G Wodehouse Society, which triumphantly carries on the noble cause of spreading sweetness and light.

# Did Bertie Ever Meet Hercule Poirot?

by Stephen Griffiths

In Issue 54 of *Wooster Sauce* (June 2010), Mark Smith gave a very erudite summation of the likely homage paid by Agatha Christie to Plum by inserting a Wodehousian character into one of her novels. He ended his piece by wondering whether he had dreamt of listening to an audiobook featuring Bertie having a run-in with Poirot.

Before getting to the nub of the affair, I thought it would be helpful to give a couple of tenuous links between Bertie and Hercule. First, there is plenty of evidence to show that PGW and Christie were mutual fans of each other. Indeed, Christie dedicated her 1969 Hercule Poirot novel *Hallowe'en Party* to Plum with the following words: *To P. G. Wodehouse—whose books and stories have brightened my life for many years. Also, to show my pleasure in his having been kind enough to tell me he enjoyed my books.* While there is absolutely no evidence that Bertie ever appeared in a book written by Christie, one can speculate how much the Bertie character might have influenced Christie as she crafted her plots.

The second tenuous link comes in the form of a book by C Northcote Parkinson entitled *Jeeves: A Gentleman's Personal Gentleman* (1979). Parkinson was a naval historian who wrote over 60 books, including two biographies on fictional characters – Jeeves and Horatio Hornblower. The Jeeves book is the story of Jeeves, pre- and post-Bertie Wooster. We get to see Jeeves as a youth, his stint at Blandings Castle learning from Beach, the final fate of Bertie Wooster (marriage *and* a title), and Jeeves's final fate as well. Jeeves also gets to hobnob with fictional



detectives in the course of his adventures, such as Hercule Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey, and Father Brown. I have not read this book but can imagine the possibility of a sentence with both Bertie and Poirot together. Incidentally, this book also appeared as an audiocassette narrated by Gerald Harper. This may well have been the audiobook that Mark Smith dreamt about.

However, to find where Bertie actually does meet Poirot, one has to go to a very obscure and rather dark corner of literature, that of the world of the *Tales of the Shadowmen*. Before you ask, I had never heard of them either. This is a series of books published by Black Coat Press. Each volume contains a series of short stories by authors of science fiction, horror, ghosts stories and the like in which they take fictional characters from mainstream fiction stories and place them in a fictitious world of a more sombre ambience.

Volume 4 of the series is entitled *Tales of the Shadowmen: Lords of Terror* (2008). One of the short stories in it is by a French author called Xavier Mauméjean. His story is called 'A Wooster Xmas' and has as its leading characters – you guessed it – Bertie Wooster and Hercule Poirot. I suspect I shall never acquire enough enthusiasm to want to read it since it no doubt takes liberties with two beloved fictional heroes. However, Mark Smith asked the question, and now you have the answer. I must end, though, with the thought that, having as we all do such a love for PGW's works and characters, treating Bertie in this way leaves a rather sad and undesirable taste in the mouth.

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## Cosy Moments

What could be cosier than the moment when you unexpectedly run across a reference to Wodehouse in a book by another author? Hence the change of the title of this column from 'Passing References' to 'Cosy Moments'. If you stumble across a reference to PGW in a book, send it along via post or email; my addresses are on page 24. –Ed

**Payment Systems and Other Financial Transactions (4th ed.), by Ronald J. Mann (2008)**  
(Posted by Tim Kearley on PGWnet)

One of Tim Kearley's students pointed out this highly unusual Wodehouse reference. Tim writes: "One would not expect this highly regarded law school casebook to elucidate the [U.S.] Uniform Commercial Code by means of PGW, yet most of Problem Set 5 at

122-123 involves a client referred to the would-be student problem-solver by Bertie Wooster, the scenario of which is set in Roderick Spode's women's clothing store. Sub-parts of the problem draw in Gussie Fink-Nottle (supposedly an employee of Spode's, which does rather stretch credulity), Stiffy Byng, posing as Madeline Bassett (which imposture might well occur in Wodehouse), Stinker Pinker, and Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright. All abuse Spode's blank checks, forging his name and falsely endorsing them to each other on such a grand scale as to make one feel rather sorry for the fellow when it's all over."

To see the section of the book with the specific problems, go to <http://bit.ly/glrDXE> and scroll down to Problem Set 5.



**Pigs Can Fly, by Barry Cryer (2003)**

(From Alan Carter)

At one point in this book, Cryer describes his pride at having spoken to the Sherlock Holmes Society at the House of Commons and also refers to talks he has given to the William McGonagall Society and the Jerome K. Jerome Society. He then writes:

The only thing I lack to get a full house is to speak to the P. G. Wodehouse Society. Mind you, a jovial man at the Sherlock Holmes Society once asked me if I had spoken to the Wodehouses and I said, "No I haven't." "Don't," he said. "Humourless, humourless." The idea of a society devoted to one of the great humorists of our time having no sense of humour themselves is beyond belief.

Says Alan: "Can you put this man right?" Well, apparently we tried before to get Mr Cryer as a speaker, but he withdrew from the engagement. Our committee is not one to pass up a challenge, though, and we shall certainly try again. Stay tuned.

**The Napoleon of Notting Hill, by G K Chesterton**

(Reprint, 2008) (From Alan Carter)

The preface to the Capuchin Classic reprint of Chesterton's book was written by Anthony Lejeune, who notes that Chesterton "Looked at everything in a way that no one else quite did or does. Like P G Wodehouse, he may seem easy to imitate or parody – until you try."

**Five Days in London, May 1940, by John Lukacs**

(Folio Society, 2011) (From Barry Chapman)

This book, originally published in 2001, includes an extract from Evelyn Waugh's wartime diary in which he writes: "We went to church, read P. G. Wodehouse (who has been lost along with Channel ports), watched old men in panama hats play bowls, and forgot the war." A footnote explains what happened to PGW during the war, noting that there was "little or nothing objectionable" in the Berlin broadcasts, but that he never returned to England.

**England, Their England, by A G Macdonell (1933)**

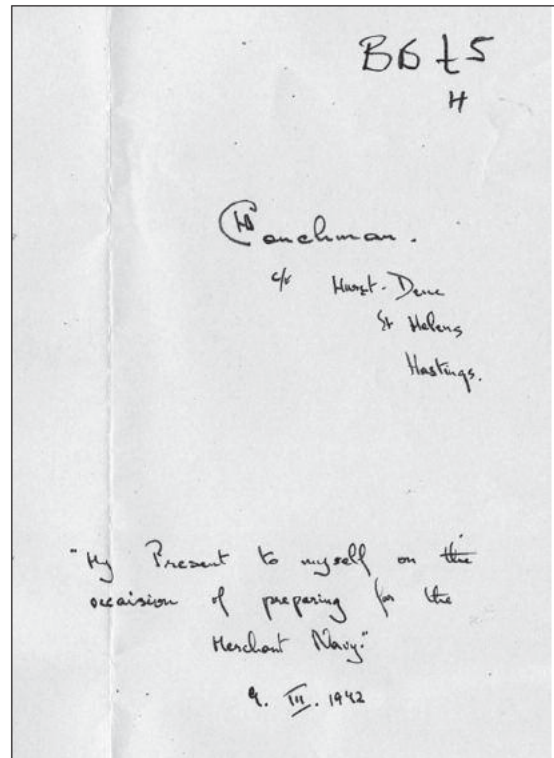
(from Elaine Ring)

On a recent plane trip, Elaine was rather surprised to see the following in chapter 10. The quotation, whose relevance speaks for itself, is a comment on a theatrical performance.

In short, *The Perpetuation of Eternity* was, as one of the penny dailies said next morning, the most arresting piece of thought provoking symbolism that had been produced since Ernst Toller's *Hoppla* had been staged on the previous Sunday, or since Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* on the last Sunday but two. *The Times* gave it three quarters of a column, but Mr Brown, to Donald's amazement, called it 'a turgid Dripp from the village Pümpernikkel', and inquired 'If this is Upper Silesia, what can Lower be like?'

The question is: did PGW get the line from Macdonell, or did Macdonell pinch it from PGW?

**Week-End Wondering**



In response to Ken Francis's article 'At War with Wodehouse' (WS, March 2011), DAVID BUTLER sent along a photocopy of this inscription found in a copy of *Week End Wodehouse* that he acquired several years ago. David writes: "One wonders who the young merchant seaman was and whether he got home safely. The inscription and the address are self evident, and the name Couchman also appears but in a different hand." If any members have a guess as to the identity of the inscriber, let the Editor know.

**Little Nuggets**

SIDNEY KENTRIDGE sent this question spotted in the *Times Literary Supplement* Christmas Quiz last December: "Who took a twenty-seven at the eighteenth hole at Bingley-on-Sea?" The answer can be found below.

GWENDOLIN GOLDBLOOM sent word of a TV programme she viewed on BBC4 in December. In *Mad and Bad: 60 Years of Science on TV*, the young Patrick Moore was likened to P G Wodehouse in space, apparently because, according to Gwendolin, "his approach in those days was rather youthful, jolly, and too utterly spiffing".

JUNE ARNOLD is a member of the Historic Houses Association, and recently the group went to a meeting at Strawberry Hill, built by Horace Walpole. There, June tells us, William Waldgrave gave a talk about his family connections with the Walpoles. "He started by comparing Horace Walpole to a character from P G Wodehouse. (He didn't actually say why, but Horace Walpole was a very rich and eccentric gentleman of leisure.)"

Answer: Sir Hugo Drake in *Doctor Sally*.

# Further Details Will Be Provided

by Tony Ring

## 2 – Later Development of the Stories in My Man Jeeves

One of the Special Situations mentioned in the notes to the Society's recent publication *A Simplified Chronology of P G Wodehouse Fiction* concerned several of the stories which appeared in *My Man Jeeves*. The purpose of this note is to provide more explanation as to how these stories developed than would have been possible in the space available in the *Chronology*.

Most readers will be aware that of the eight stories in that book, four related the adventures of Reggie Pepper and the other four represented almost the first appearances of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster. Five of the stories were wholly or partially rewritten for inclusion in the later Jeeves and Wooster collection *Carry On, Jeeves* (from which you will realise immediately that this included one of the Reggie Peppers), while two of the other Reggie Peppers were rewritten for other characters at a later date.

### *The four Jeeves and Wooster stories which appeared in both My Man Jeeves and Carry On, Jeeves*

#### 'Leave It to Jeeves'

This was retitled 'The Artistic Career of Corky' in *Carry On, Jeeves*. Its introductory pages were completely rewritten, but from then onwards the original text was fairly faithfully retained. Apart from the very last sentence, the only change seems to have been the omission of a line which was so good that Waterstone's made a publicity bookmark of it around 1997, without realising that its source book had not been in print for about 60 years!

The original text read:

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.*

But the second sentence (*italics added*) was omitted in *Carry On, Jeeves*. Presumably it was thought desirable to reduce the stress on an image of Bertie as a dissolute man-about-town, but it remains a lovely line.

#### 'Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest'

The original text remained largely untouched, the exception being the addition of a little more detail to the narrative in the early pages, the omission of a sentence or two later on, and the updating of the specific names of the hats which were in fashion.



#### 'Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg'

Again the original text was largely retained, with just a handful of descriptive phrases or sentences omitted.

#### 'The Aunt and the Sluggard'

The story was augmented by the addition of rather more descriptive material for the *Carry On, Jeeves* version than had been the case for the previous two stories.

### *The Reggie Pepper story rewritten as a Jeeves and Wooster story for Carry On, Jeeves*

'Helping Freddie' was the original title of the 1911 story which became 'Fixing It for Freddie' in the 1925 collection *Carry On, Jeeves*. Freddie Meadowes, rather than Freddie Bullivant, was the lovelorn friend whom Reggie Pepper wanted to help, and

the love interest was completed by Angela West rather than Elizabeth Vickers. The revised version, in which Jeeves, of course, coordinated the dénouement rather than Reggie's friend Jimmy Pinkerton, was very much longer, and the quality of the writing shows clearly how quickly Wodehouse's style had evolved during the previous decade.

### *The Reggie Pepper story whose plot was used for a Jeeves and Wooster Story in A Few Quick Ones*

If you read 'Doing Clarence a Bit of Good' from *My Man Jeeves*, you may realise that the plot is very similar to one which has been used a number of times by Wodehouse over the years. In particular, it was rewritten as the Jeeves and Wooster story 'Jeeves Makes an Omelette' and found its way into *Lilliput* in the UK and *Ellery Queen* in the US (under yet another title, 'Jeeves and the Stolen Venus') before being included in book form in *A Few Quick Ones* (1959). It was also used as the basis of chapters 25 and 26 of *The Indiscretions of Archie*, with yet another cast, with the title 'The Wigmore Venus'.

### *The Reggie Pepper story whose plot was used for a stage play in 1913 and rewritten as a Mulliner story for Plum Pie in 1966*

'Rallying Round Old George' was the title of the story as it appeared in *Strand Magazine* and in *My Man Jeeves*, but its American magazine title was 'Brother Alfred', and this was adopted as the title of the 1913 play starring Lawrence Grossmith, which was presented at the Savoy Theatre. The final version of the story, narrated by Mr Mulliner for the book collection *Plum Pie* and the January 1967 *Playboy* magazine, was 'George and Alfred'.



## Being a Member of Two Societies

by Paul Tubb

I have a real dilemma  
And solving it is my aim.  
I haven't a clue what to do  
About the annual game  
Of cricket that is always played  
Between the societies  
Of Sherlock Holmes and Wodehouse,  
I need suggestions, please.  
As a proud Wodehouse member  
I've always, traditionally,  
Sent positive thoughts to the Golden Bats  
Hoping they'll achieve victory.  
I'm still a Wodehouse member  
And hope to be till I die,  
But as a huge Sherlock Holmes fan,  
I thought it's about time I  
Joined the London society of  
The world's greatest sleuth.  
And now my loyalties are split,  
It's a pain, to tell you the truth.  
Who do I wish victory to now?  
And send vibes that are positive?  
To the worlds funniest humorist  
Or its greatest detective.  
Well, maybe I should stop worrying  
But it's difficult to ignore.  
Maybe the solution is simply that  
I should wish for a draw.

## Clerihew Corner

In gentlemanly chats  
Jeeves has grey views on spats;  
Soft collars, cleanish or dirty  
Makes this gent's gent decidedly shirty.  
*Fred Schroeder*

To touch his toes is for butler Beach  
A physical feat well out of reach.  
But in the best tradition of farce, Lo!  
He became uncle-in-law to Gregory Parsloe  
*Norman Murphy*

Lady Constance Keeble  
Could never be seen as feeble  
One brother considers her harsh  
"A right royal pain in the arsh."  
*Jenny and Susan Inglis*

Aunt Dahlia  
Reckoned Bertie a failure:  
Too vapid a dreamer  
To pinch a mere cow-creamer.  
*Jonathan Bacchus*

Constable Oates  
Observes and takes notes  
Of events that unfold  
In Totleigh-in-the-Wold.  
*Geoff Millward*

When Gussie Fink-Nottle  
Finally hit the bottle,  
The pupils at Market Snod  
Sbury decided that he was a god.  
*Richard Heller*

## Who Was Homer's Grandfather?

by Martin Stratford

Before you get confused, the eponymous (if that's the word I want) subject of this modest little piece is not the Greek chappie the translation of whose work caused the poet Keats to wax so lyrical. However, I must confess that when the idea occurred to me, I did stand and stare with wild surmise like s C's gang upon a p in D. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that my hair stood on end like q upon a f p.

No, the Homer to whom I refer has a rather jaundiced appearance, a mere four digits on each hand and lives in Springfield, USA – Mr Homer J Simpson.



If aficionados of *The Simpsons* were asked to describe some of the characteristics of their leading man, what might they say? A self-centred anti-hero who is always borrowing things from his good-natured, friendly neighbour and never returns them. A man constantly on the lookout for get-rich-quick schemes, such schemes generally failing due either to the machinations of Fate or the sheer incompetence and ineptitude of their originator.

Who does that remind you of?

Sorry, Jeeves. Of whom does that remind you?

It seems to me that there is a prima facie (if that's the phrase I'm searching for) case to be made that lurking somewhere in the murky branches of the Simpson family tree is a figure in a yellow mackintosh, his pince-nez held precariously in place by ginger-beer wire, asking if you could lend him a tenner until next Friday, old horse.

I can't recall whether the Simpson family have ever gone into the country to raise chickens. If not, that is surely an episode crying out to be written. I am certain that the mathematically irrefutable logic that in order to save money you incubate the eggs at half the recommended temperature and the chicks simply take twice as long to hatch would appeal as much to Homer J as it did to Stanley F. And as for leaving toxic tennis shoes in there to contaminate the eggs . . .

Whether you agree with my analysis or feel that I should simply lie down in a quiet corner with a damp flannel on my forehead and seek an urgent appointment with Sir Roderick, my underlying point is irrefutable. The comic genius of the Greatest Humorous Writer of All Time is just as fresh and relevant today as it was when the Master first picked up his pen or sat down in front of his typewriter.

# The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

## Wodehouse's *Royal* Engagements

Given recent royal wedding fever, it seemed topical to consider in this Corner the six occasions when Wodehouse was engaged by *The Royal Magazine*.

As mentioned in a previous Corner dealing with the *Windsor* magazine, during the course of his long career Wodehouse contributed a huge number of serials, short stories, articles, and poetry to a wide range of magazines. Much of this material, particularly from the early years of his career, has never been republished and so is not widely known. However, for the devoted Wodehousean this material is of interest. Some of it is now very rare, having been published in ephemeral magazines, but much of it, if published in more mainstream magazines, is relatively easily accessible, particularly via the internet.

*The Royal* is probably one of the lesser, and therefore lesser-known, magazines to which Wodehouse contributed. It is certainly not so well known as magazines such as the *Strand* and *Pearson's*, nor does its list of contributors contain as many well-known names as appeared in the *Windsor* (see *Wooster Sauce*, December 2010, p18). Glancing through the index pages for volumes IX and XII of *The Royal* (to both of which Wodehouse contributed), the list of authors reveals only a couple of familiar names in William Le Queux and Baroness Orczy. However, the list of artists contains three who illustrated other Wodehouse stories, namely Gordon Browne ('The Man Upstairs' in the *Strand*, 'A Corner in Lines' in *Pearson's*), Harold Copping ('Playing the Game' in *Pearson's*), and R Noel Pocock (*The Pothunters* in *The Public School Magazine*), providing an opportunity to see other examples of their work.

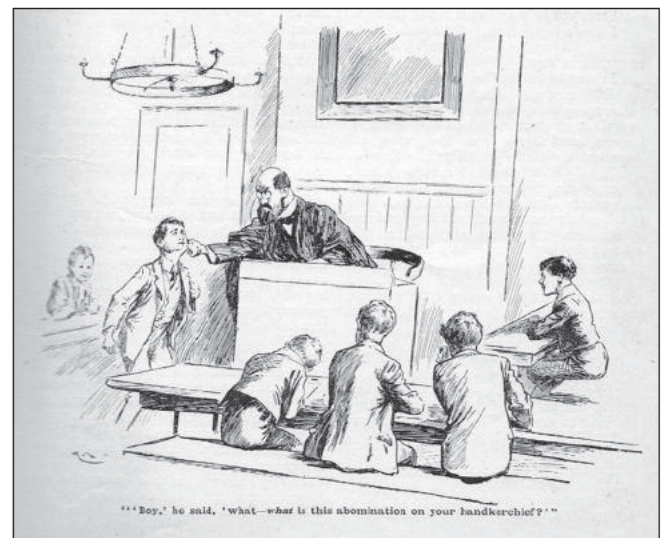
Wodehouse contributed six items to *The Royal* between April 1903 and November 1905. The first and last items were poems. The other four items were all short school stories, set at Wrykyn, which were not published in book form until they were collected in Tony Ring's *Tales of Wrykyn and Elsewhere* (Maidenhead, 1997).



Wodehouse's first piece in *The Royal* was 'The Rhyme of the Sitter-Out' (April 1903, *McIlvaine* D126.1), a six-stanza poem occupying half a page. *McIlvaine* correctly notes that it is "unsigned", and the minor nature of it is confirmed by the fact that neither the poem nor Wodehouse are accorded an entry in the index for the six-month bound volume. According to Wodehouse's Account Book, he was paid 10/6 for this story. The poem was eventually published in book form in the collection *The Parrot and Other Poems* (London, 1988).

The second piece, 'Jackson's Extra' (D126.2), was published more than a year later, in June 1904, earning Wodehouse five guineas. The story marks the first appearance of Mike Jackson (albeit he is not identified by his first name in the story): "Now Jackson, apart from his cricket, did not shine in school. He was one of those cheerful idiots without one atom of prudence in his whole composition." It is also possibly the earliest use by Wodehouse of imposture as a plot device; it certainly pre-dates any of the examples cited by Elliott Milstein in his recent article on the subject (*Wooster Sauce*, September and December 2010).

Wodehouse's next two contributions both appeared later in 1904. The August 1904 issue saw the publication of 'Homeopathic Treatment' (D126.3), and the November 1904 issue contained 'The Reformation of Study Sixteen' (D126.4). For each of these Wodehouse was paid five guineas. The former story centres on a boy who takes to wearing scent on his handkerchief in order to irritate his form master (see illustration). The latter story





describes how the head of a house makes two slackers buck up and play rugby for the house second fifteen.

The final school story was ‘The Deserter’ (D126.5), which appeared in August 1905 and for which Wodehouse was paid the higher amount of six guineas. Once again the story focused on Mike Jackson and his “confirmed recklessness and love of adventure, which qualities, though they have made us Englishmen what we are, are somewhat unpopular among the authorities at a public school.” The plot revolves around the annual cricket match between the villages of Bray Lench, captained by Neville-Smith, and Chalfont St. Peter’s, with Mike Jackson appearing for the former. The annual rugby game between the same villages would later form the basis of the plot for ‘The Fifteenth Man’ (D143.3) published in the *Windsor* in December 1906.

It was only three months later that Wodehouse’s final piece in *The Royal*, another poem, was published: ‘The Ballad of the Beard’ (D126.6), appearing in November 1905. For this 13-stanza poem, Wodehouse was paid two guineas. The ballad concerns the attempts of one Alonzo Grey to grow a beard “to satisfy his lady-love”. One passage presages Jeeves’s disdain when Bertie grows a moustache in the first chapter of *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*: “His valet looked contemptuous, / But Alonzo did not flinch. / Within a week the crop had grown / To more than half-an-inch.” The poem was republished in *Wooster Sauce* in March 2006.

## Two More Nuggets

Congratulations to Gold Bats captain BOB MILLER, who was admitted to the Freedom of the City of London on February 21 in a short ceremony at Guildhall attended by members of his family and other invited guests. Afterwards, he hosted a lunch at the Turf Club. Bob writes: “It was an opportunity to spread the word about Wodehouse and [Siegfried] Sassoon and the effect and inspiration both have had on my life.”

FROM SHARON MITCHELL we have learned of an American television show called *Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*, in which host Guy Fieri visits eating places across the United States that have been recommended to him by people who have dined at them. Over the past year he visited two places in Minnesota that featured dishes made with Berkshire pork; the pigs were raised in Minnesota. At both, Fieri praised the pork he ate, in one instance calling the dish a “winner, winner Berkshire dinner”. We can’t help but approve of such taste in pork!

# Rannygazoo

Reviewed by Paul Kent

It’s a great word, isn’t it? Not quite onomatopoeic – but nevertheless suggestive of the throaty rasp of the kazoo, which always brings a smile to this writer’s lips. As indeed it does to Ken Clevenger, who has chosen it as the title for his “collection of sense and nonsense about P. G. Wodehouse”. Its goal? “To try to bring to the reading public a taste of, and greater knowledge of, and consequently a desire to read Mr. Wodehouse’s writings themselves.” And who could possibly argue with that?

Wodehouse is credited with being the first person to commit the word *rannygazoo* to print, in 1924’s *Bill the Conqueror*: “I’ll hang around for a while just in case friend Pilbeam starts any rannygazoo.”

Rannygazoo had itself been hanging around, particularly among newspapermen in Washington, D.C., since the latter part of the 19th century, when it became fashionable slang. It was then spelled *rannikaboo* or *reinikaboo*, and an anonymous writer in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of 9 January 1898 tried to account for its enduring popularity: “A reinikaboo is . . . a statement of news out of all proportion and almost out of relation to the facts, and yet having a certain origin and shadowy foundation. . . . In the classification of the Washington newspaper men there are fakes, reinikaboos, and real news.” In *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Norman Murphy states his belief that Wodehouse misheard the word and turned it, intentionally or unintentionally, into *rannygazoo*. As dedicated Wodehousians, we should perhaps try to reintroduce it as a modern-day colloquialism; there’s certainly no shortage of rannygazoo in the 21st century, journalistic or otherwise.

Ken Clevenger, however, has not delved into the word’s origins so much as given us many pleasurable and diverting examples: from a disquisition (and quiz) on Wodehouse’s book dedictees to Wodehouse’s admiration for Dorothy L. Sayers; from drinks in the Mulliner stories to pondering whether Wodehouse was a gastronome; from innuendo to Wodehouse’s knowledge of saints – it is all very diverting.

Most of the essays in this book were previously published, in edited form, in *Plum Lines*; Ken’s piece on Sayers appeared in *Wooster Sauce* last year. He leads off the volume, though, with a previously unpublished essay on editors, getting in a few pronounced barbs in the process. For the main body of his essays, Ken does not so much analyze Wodehouse’s works as catalogue them, finding themes and traits that are present in many of the stories; he has a particular affection for the Mulliner tales. He also has a fondness for wordplay and inserts as many puns as he possibly can. There may not be much depth, but there is certainly a lot of enjoyable rannygazoo.

Rannygazoo, by Ken Clevenger, is available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) for US\$7.99, plus shipping.

# By Jeeves

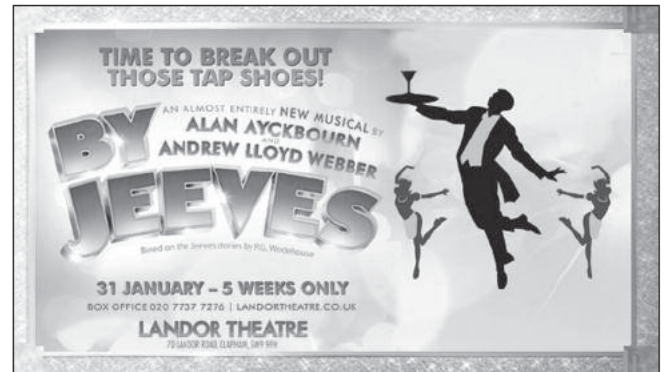
A Review by Lesley Tapson

Rumour has it that the licensee of the Landor Pub has never ascended the stairs to visit the Landor Theatre. Assuming the source of that information to be accurate (viz. the horse's mouth), he missed a gem of a performance of *By Jeeves*, by an aspiring playwright and equally aspiring composer who, mark my words, will become household names. Messrs Ayckbourn and Lloyd Webber (Sir and Lord to thee and me) have put together a delightful concoction featuring many favourite Wodehouse characters.

The tiny theatre (pop. 60 max) in Clapham was lovingly transformed into a Village Hall, complete with welcoming committee of Honoria Glossop and the Rev Harold 'Stinker' Pinker et al. providing cucumber sandwiches and jam rolls. The plot involves B Wooster Esq (played in this production by the amiable Kevin Trainor) appearing as the lead in 'Banjo Boy', only to find that, as a mercy to music lovers, the banjo has disappeared. To fill in the hiatus while waiting for the replacement banjo to be delivered, Bertie recounts his adventures involving Gussie Fink-Nottle

Andrew Pepper could make a fortune doing Fink-Nottle tribute nights – all six in our party thought he was spot-on. Honoria Glossop was played by a fantastically Amazonian Charlotte Mill with a belting voice, and she could swing a dashed efficient shoe, notably when taking what might be thought a relatively minor role as a tap-dancing fir tree (you needed to be there!).

Madeline Bassett was portrayed by Helen George, a woman you could believe does feel that the stars are God's daisy chain, while Owain Rhys Davies did handsprings as only Bingo Little could. The Rev Stinker Pinker (Brendan Cull – a hoofing vicar/fir tree (see above) and an impressive one at that), Stiffy



Byng (Jenni Maitland), Cyrus Budge (David Menkin), and Sir Watkyn Basset (a wonderfully bluff Tim Hudson) all provided for a dizzying story of the usual shenanigans in which our Bertram becomes involved.

The production pays homage to *Les Miserables*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and Gilbert and Sullivan (again, you needed to be there to appreciate it). The music is charming and, on occasion, touching. The delightful ballad 'That Was Nearly Us', as sung by Honoria to Bertie while he drives her through the countryside, takes on an air of menace when seen through Bertram's eyes as Honoria's thoughts veer towards the romantic, just when he thought he was safe.

Finally, there is, of course, Jeeves himself. Paul M. Meston played him with a certain *schadenfreude* and displayed a virtuosity in playing the saucepans with a wooden spoon in the gloriously mad finale (remember this is set in a village hall!). In all, it was a delightful evening of entertainment.

*The Landor Theatre production of By Jeeves played from February 1 to March 12. If this review seems familiar, that's because it was originally published in a slightly different form on the Society's website.*

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## Gloom and Doom – Must Be Wodehouse

In yet another *Spectator* competition, readers were challenged to "submit a book-jacket blurb for a well-known work of fiction that is designed to be as off-putting as possible". The results were published on December 4, 2010, and one of the winners, George Simmers, was nothing short of brilliant:

A feeble minded young man lives a life of useless pleasure in London, until he is inveigled into crime by a bullying relative. Admirers of the grimmer works of George Gissing will appreciate this author's remorseless chronicling of his anti hero's increasing desperation as he struggles to escape the consequences of his actions. Daringly, Wodehouse makes the

simpleton himself the narrator of the story, so that for 200 pages we are trapped within the confines of his limited sensibility as he struggles to make sense of his plight, his only intellectual resource a collection of tags vaguely remembered from a wasted education. Cunningly, the book's subtext implies a quasi Marxist analysis of class relations, as the hopelessness of the book's anti hero is contrasted with the resourcefulness of those doomed to spend their existences in the servants' hall.

If you don't recognise the plot, then shame on you – it's *The Code of the Woosters*, of course. (Thanks to KAREN SHOTTING for sending this item.)





# Poet's Corner

## The Traitor



Did I go to the wedding? *No*, sir!  
 Did I give 'em a pres -? Well, there,  
 Sit down and I'll tell you the story,  
 If you've got a few minutes to spare.  
 It'll be a relief to tell it,  
 For I give you my word I *biles*!  
 Yes, *biles*, sir, with indignation  
 At the thought of young Henry  
 Giles.

We men of Pigbury-super-Slosh,  
 As you may have heard before,  
 We's a sporting, cricketing set of  
 chaps  
 As you ever met; and lor',  
 There wasn't many villages round  
 Could teach us what was what:  
 Batting, and bowling, and fielding,  
 We was always pretty hot.

Bowling! Bah! Excuse me, sir.  
 Our bowling, perhaps, was weak:  
 We'd only one man who could  
 send them

Down like a good 'un, so to speak.  
 Higgs could bowl lobs, and  
 Johnson, too,  
 And get 'em in straight 'tween  
 whiles;  
 But the only feller who made 'em  
 buzz  
 Was this 'ere young 'Enery Giles.

Regular nailer he was, sir:  
 Banged 'em down fit to burst;  
 Often he'd hit a man on the head,  
 And we'd think he was dead at first.  
 Many a feller's come out to bat  
 With a kind of cheery grin,  
 And gone back 'retired hurt' for  
 a duck  
 When 'Enery hit his shin.

Well, the chaps from  
 Chickenham-infra-Mud  
 Had come to our field to play,  
 And when we took lunch it  
 seemed to us  
 Our prospects was pretty gay.  
 For we'd gone in first, and we'd  
 hit about  
 Till out total was thirty-four,  
 And naturally we was happy then,  
 Cos, you see, that's a winning score.

And, besides, young Giles was in  
 form, we knew,  
 For only two evenings back  
 We'd seen him bowling away at  
 the nets  
 Like a regular first-class crack.  
 Why, the ball he took Gubbins'  
 wind with,  
 And the one that blacked  
 Simpson's eye  
 Were regular out-and-outers.  
 They'd have settled a C B Fry.

And what's more, the wicket was  
 crumbling,  
 For while we'd been having lunch  
 Some cows had wandered across it  
 And given the turf a scrunch:  
 And when we saw the holes  
 they'd made,  
 With joy we were fit to jump;  
 "Put 'Enery this end," we said,  
 "And then let's see 'em bump."

And all went for a time, sir,  
 For their captain was out for one:  
 He got one fair in the stummick, sir,  
 And his day's work was done.  
 This sort of encouraged 'Enery.  
 He hit the next man on the knee,  
 And the next after him on the side  
 Of the head. So that was one for  
 three.

Then two of their fellows made a stand,  
 And, what with byes and such,  
 And some hits off Higgs and Johnson,  
 Who couldn't bowl up to much,  
 They'd brought their total to  
 seventeen,  
 Just 'alf of our final score,  
 When Giles got one of 'em in the ribs,  
 And he didn't want no more.

Well, the others all had a bit of luck,  
 So they all of them made a few,  
 And about two hours after play  
 had begun  
 They was eight for twenty-two.  
 The next man took a hasty swipe,  
 And made one of them lucky snicks  
 What went for four; and then he  
 was out;  
 Making nine for twenty-six.

Well, we all of us thought we'd  
 done it, then;  
 For they wanted nine to win,  
 And to judge from his looks, it  
 didn't see,  
 They's be made by the last man in.  
 A short, stout, elderly chap he was.  
 And I thought, "I'll eat my hat  
 If good old 'Enery Giles can't up  
 And settle a thing like that!"

Ah, this is the part of the story, sir,  
 Where I always regular *biles*  
 When I think of the awful conduct  
 Of that ere young Enery Giles.  
 Did he bowl fast and get him out.  
*No!*  
 He bowled a slow. And what's more,  
 The elderly buffer he made a swipe,  
 And he lifted the ball for four.

I says to him, "'Enery! 'Enery!"  
 With tears in my eyes I spoke.  
 "For 'Eaven's sake don't be foolish,  
 Don't show mercy to the bloke."  
 But he laughed a laugh which  
 turned me cold,  
 And he answered wildly, "Jim,  
 That's my Mary Susan's father,  
 That's what's the matter with him."

And then - but I can't go on, sir.  
 You'll guess the rest without:  
 Another couple of balls, sir,  
 Put the issue out of doubt.  
 And after the match was over,  
 I wandered inside the tent,  
 And there was that traitor 'Enery,  
 A-getting of pa's consent.

Did I go to the wedding? *No*, sir!  
 Did I give 'em a present? *No*.  
 Did I linger about the churchyard  
 With a bag of rice to throw?  
 It wouldn't be rice I'd have  
 thrown, sir  
 Not me, but 'arf a brick;  
 For the thought of young 'Enery's  
 baseness -  
 Well, there, sir, it makes me sick.

From *Pearson's*, September 1907

# Recent Press Comment

From *The Independent*, February 11

In an interview with Boyd Tomkin, the novelist Paul Torday was asked to describe the room where he usually writes, and he said it had all his favourite books: “Proust, almost all Trollope, the complete works of P G Wodehouse.”

From *The Daily Mail*, February 11

Sir Patrick Moore wrote:

For a cheerful read on my desert island I feel I could not improve on Wodehouse’s *Thank You, Jeeves*. There has never been a writer to rival Plum; pay close attention, as Bertie Wooster would say, and there is a laugh in every line. Actually any of the books will suffice, or for that matter any of the stories centred on Blandings Castle.

From *The Sunday Times*, February 13

Alan Titchmarsh reiterated in the *Witter* column that P G Wodehouse (along with Jane Austen and Nancy Mitford) was one of the writers he most admires.

From *The Daily Telegraph*, February 12

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

The general knowledge crossword, set by Kate Mepham, asked the name of the “creator of the characters Lord Emsworth and the Empress of Blandings”.

From *The Times*, February 18

Philip Howard’s ‘Wordwatch’ puzzle enquired whether ‘Cuppy’ meant (a) a bad lie, (b) a cup of tea, or (c) cheeky. In the answer (it is a bad lie – a golf term), Howard referred to *The Clicking of Cuthbert* as “the best golfing stories ever written”.

From *The Times*, February 25

Simon Barnes wrote about French rugby union coach Marc Lièvremont’s statement that “We don’t like black people and it’s better to say so than be hypocritical”. He pointed out that the English response to “Nazism and to all forms of mass hatred” is best expressed by PGW in *The Code of the Woosters*, and quoted Bertie’s well-known diatribe aimed at Roderick Spode. The article was reprinted in *The Australian* on February 26.

From *TLS*, February 25 (from Sir Sydney Kentridge)

A review of Sebastian Faulks’s *Faulks on Fiction* records the author’s citing of a passage from *The Mating Season*, “probably my favourite scene in the whole canon of English literature”. But Jeeves is actually the focus of Faulks’s chapter, in which “his sheer enjoyment enables him to discuss most freely how language and story come together to create a minutely absorbing world.”

From *The Times*, February 26

Philip Howard’s ‘Literary Quiz’ asked, “Whose exes include Honoria Glossop, Charlotte Corday Rownbotham [sic] and Mabel the Waitress?”

From *British Heritage*, March (from Sharon Mitchell)

Included a note that Apley Hall, identified [incorrectly!] as the inspiration for Blandings Castle, was on sale for £1.75 million.

From *The Times*, March 2

In the ‘Lives Remembered’ column, Society Chairman Hilary Bruce wrote of the late, great cricketer Trevor Bailey and of PGW once reporting that Bailey “awoke from an apparent coma to strike a boundary”. Hilary noted that Bailey never held it against PGW and even

## From *Bibliophile*, March 2011

This monthly book mail-order journal includes quotations appropriate to each category of its book offers. In this issue it included six Wodehouse quotations:

<p><b>Crime and Thrillers</b></p> <p>It’s the old problem, of course — the one which makes life so tough for murderers — what to do with the body.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The Code of the Woosters</i></p>	<p><b>Sport</b></p> <p>In boxing the right cross-counter is distinctly one of those things it is more blessed to give than to receive.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The Pothunters</i></p>
<p><b>Food and Drink</b></p> <p>“Have you ever seen Spode eat asparagus?” “No” “Revolting. It alters one whole conception of Man as Nature’s last word.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The Code of the Woosters</i></p>	<p><b>Religion and Philosophy</b></p> <p>Like so many vicars, he had a poor opinion of curates.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Meet Mr Mulliner</i></p>
<p><b>Nature</b></p> <p>. . . somewhere in the woods beyond the river a nightingale had begun to sing with all the full-throated zest of a bird conscious of having received a rave notice from the poet Keats and only a couple of nights ago a star spot on the programme of the BBC.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ring for Jeeves</i></p>	<p><b>Words</b></p> <p>“What Ho!” I said. “What Ho!” said Motty. “What Ho! What Ho!” “What Ho! What Ho! What Ho!” After that it seemed rather difficult to go on with the conversation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>The Code of the Woosters</i></p>



relished watching the Gold Bats in their annual fixture with the Dulwich Dusters.

**From *The Times*, March 2** (from Hilary Bruce)

A description of the new book *Machiavelli's Lawn* notes that its gardening tips include "choosing the correct houseplant [to] ward off the ignominy of marriage, as described by P. G. Wodehouse".

**From *The Daily Telegraph*, March 9**

(from Carolyn de la Plain)

The third leader used the quotation "I forget how it arose, but I remember Jeeves once saying that sleep knits up the ravelled sleeve of care" to introduce comments about some new American research on the value of dreamless sleep (which apparently "does wonders for the hippocampus, the learning region of the brain of which taxi drivers are so proud").

**From *The Independent*, March 23** (from Mark Taylor)

In a list of recommended books for children, literary editor Katy Guest included *Carry On, Jeeves* – "a grown-up book but not that grown-up".

**From *The Spectator*, March 26** (from Edward Cazalet)

Wodehouse merited three mentions: (1) Charles Moore wrote in 'The Spectator's Notes' that "The idea of John Gross as the literary Jeeves to [Martin] Amis's Bertie Wooster was very pleasing"; (2) Allan Massie led off a column on light verse by quoting the first lines of the classic 'Good Gnus'; (3) Charles Spencer wrote of his battle with depression: "The smallest task becomes a huge labour and all I want to do is read P. G. Wodehouse, drink cups of tea and sleep."

**From *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30**

Kaushik Basu, the Chief Economic Adviser for India, has published two new books, and in an interview he recommended reading Rousseau's *Confessions*; Katherine Tait's *My Father*, Bertrand Russell; Kafka's *The Trial*; and any P G Wodehouse.

**From *The Evening Standard*, March 31**

A review of Nicola Shulman's book *Graven with Diamonds* about Sir Thomas Wyatt says that the author describes Wyatt's "attempts to placate the termagant Anne Boleyn almost as P G Wodehouse might: 'Henry's letters swim with mollification and – in response to some lost rebuff – the sort of shaken dignity one sees in a senior dog retreating from an unexpected cat.'"

**From *The Financial Times*, April 2**

Lord Bragg wrote that Kingsley Amis had once met a man who had just read his first P G Wodehouse. "I thought, 'What a lucky beggar,'" said Amis. "Just think of the fun he's going to have reading all those other books for the first time."

**From *The Daily Telegraph*, April 2**

Ceri Radford's book *A Surrey State of Affairs* was inspired by her 53-year-old mother, who immediately recognised herself in the main character. In her description of the

book, Ceri added that her mother didn't take it too personally.

... Constance may be a trifle intrusive, but she is no Aunt Agatha. P G Wodehouse – who did in fact possess real-life aunts of his own – was a brave man to create fictional relatives of such staggeringly brilliant malevolence. His anti-hero Bertie Wooster describes 'My Aunt Agatha, the one who chews broken bottles and kills rats with her teeth' and nonchalantly maintains that 'It is no use telling me that there are bad aunts and good aunts. At the core, they are all alike. Sooner or later, out pops the cloven hoof.'

**From *The Daily Telegraph*, April 4** (from Mark Taylor)

Published an obituary of Nancy Kominsky, whose second husband had been Patrick Wodehouse (see p.6).

**From *The Guardian*, April 6**

Frank Keating wrote an article entitled 'From Jeeves to Herriot: all creatures great and sporty', noting that other writers as well as Wodehouse had "borrowed from real sporting characters to add resonance to works of fiction".

**From *Waitrose Weekend*, April 14**

(from Larissa Saxby-Bridger and Jo Jacobius)

In a column entitled 'My Best Books', gardening journalist and author Anna Pavord included *Life at Blandings* with the comment "Gardens are about escape and at Blandings – with its mossy walks, shrubberies and 'flarze' – lies the most perfect deliverance. I don't want to be Einstein or Scott of the Antarctic. I want to be Lord Emsworth."

**From *Sunday Telegraph*, April 17** (from Jo Jacobius)

A letter from a reader addressing another reader's objection to 'golf' being pronounced 'gof' referenced PGW's dedication in *The Clicking of Cuthbert*: "To the immortal memory of John Henrie and Pat Rogie who at Edinburgh in the year 1593 A.D. were imprisoned for 'playing of the gowff on the links of Leith every Sabbath the time of the Sermons . . .'"

**From *The Independent*, May 16**

In his article 'Readers Digest: How to Recreate the Great Literary Dishes', Christopher Hirst referred to Anatole's skills but also quoted Wodehouse's warning about the perils of picnics from *Very Good, Jeeves*:

I met a fellow the other day who told me he unpacked his basket and found the champagne had burst and together with the salad dressing had soaked into the ham, which in turn had got mixed up with the gorgonzola cheese forming a kind of paste. . . . He ate the mixture but he said he could taste it even now.

**More to the Fore:** In a letter printed in the *Financial Times* of January 15, John H. V. Gilbert of Vancouver, Canada, commented on an editorial that reminded him of a passage in Robert McCrum's biography regarding PGW's anonymous publication of his poem 'The Parrot' and its refrain "Your food will cost you more". Gilbert noted that the poem was "a huge success" and that on the heels of its publication, the Liberals came to power. "And the future of Wodehouse as brilliant comic writer was a certainty."

(Thanks to SANDY KINNEAR)

# Future Events for Your Diary

**June 17, 2011 Gold Bats vs. The Dulwich Dusters**

**June 19, 2011 Gold Bats vs. Sherlock Holmes Society**

Our two annual matches take place two days apart. For details, see Society News on page 4.

**June 30, 2011 Lecture on Strand Magazine**

Richard Burnip is giving a lunchtime lecture at the National Army Museum on *Strand* magazine in the Great War; PGW is mentioned.

**July 2, 2011 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk**

The start time for Norman's walk is 10 a.m.; the walk is free.

**July 3, 2011 Cricket in Thorpe Bay**

The Gold Bats will play in the Trevor Bailey Memorial Game at Alleyn Court School, Thorpe Bay.

**July 12, 2011 Society Meeting**

This meeting will again be held in the upstairs room at The George from 6 p.m. This will be a particularly entertaining evening – for the reason why, see page 4.

**July 20, 2011 Cricket in Kent**

Members of the Gold Bats will play together with the Siegfried Sassoon Society against the Matfield Cricket Club in Kent, starting at 2 p.m.

**August 7, 2011 Gold Bats vs. Kirby Strollers**

This annual charity match will take place in the grounds of Audley End House, near Saffron Walden; starting at 1 p.m. For more about Audley End, including a map, see <http://bit.ly/bVgjH1>.

**August 25–September 25, 2011 *Jeeves in the Morning***  
Stage West Theatre in Houston, Texas, is producing this Wodehouse adaptation written by Mark Richards. For further information, see their website at <http://www.stagewest.org/>. (Note the change of date from what was in the March issue.)

**September 3, 2011 Murphy's Wodehouse Walk**

Norman Murphy will lead another walk around Wodehouse's London. See July 2 for details.

**October 13–16, 2011 The Wodehouse Society Convention, Dearborn, Michigan**

The US Society's 16th biennial binge will be held at Dearborn, Michigan.

**October 28–30, 2011 Follow Wodehouse to Emsworth**

The Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth, has put together a wonderful program of events to commemorate PGW's 130th birthday. See the article on page 11.

**November 1, 2011 Society Meeting and AGM**

The location and speaker for this meeting will be announced in the September issue.

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