

# WOOSTER SAUCE

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

Number 92

December 2019

## Dedication of the Wodehouse Memorial at Westminster Abbey

by Matthew Darroch-Thompson

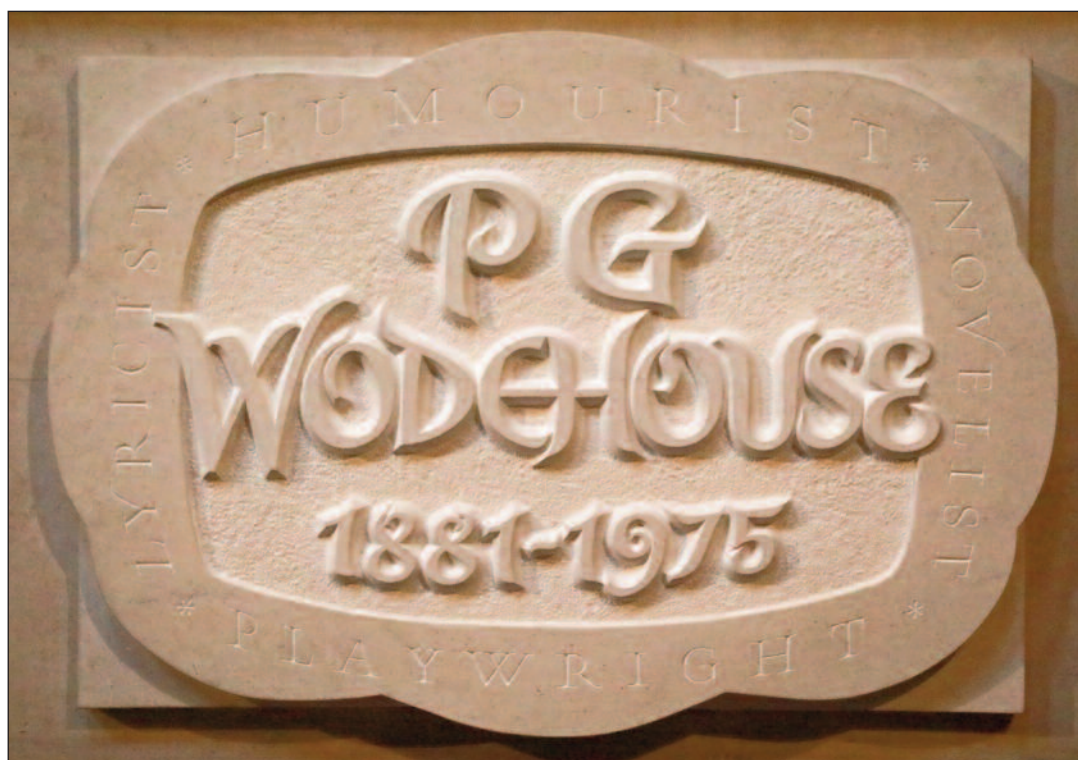
The church does not feature very heavily in the works of P G Wodehouse, although it does seem to lurk in the background, especially in the stories set in England. We know, of course, that Bertie Wooster won a prize for Scripture Knowledge, and there is the sublime Great Sermon Handicap. Occasionally, a squire needs to be persuaded to appoint a vicar to a living so that he can afford to be married. Vicars and curates appear now and again, as do bishops. One feels sure that the Earl of Emsworth attended church regularly, dozing in the family pew.

We know little of PGW's own religious views, as he guarded that sort of thing closely. While interviewing him, Malcolm Muggeridge deliberately

slipped in the question: "Do you believe there is an afterlife?" Quick as a flash, PGW replied: "We'll have to wait and see."

However, the church was part of his upbringing. The Wodehouse boys often spent their school holidays with three of their four clergymen uncles, and PGW quotes regularly from both the Bible and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, betraying a considerable knowledge of the ways and culture of the Church of England.

So, while his life's work already more than qualifies him for a memorial in Westminster Abbey, Wodehouse's own background makes it even more appropriate. It was therefore a proud moment for the



*The memorial stone in Westminster Abbey, designed by Stephen Raw and cut by Annet Stirling  
(Photo courtesy Andrew Dunsmore/Westminster Abbey)*

Society when, in September 2017, the Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, granted permission for a stone memorialising P G Wodehouse to be installed in the South Quire Aisle, near Poets' Corner.

Two years later, on 20 September 2019, more than 200 Wodehouse enthusiasts gathered in the Abbey for the stone's dedication. Some of us arrived early enough to attend Choral Evensong – as usual, a peaceful and uplifting experience. The dedication service followed in transept by the South Quire Aisle. The congregation included the Society's patron HRH The Duke of Kent and at least four ladies in hats, which shows just how important an event it was.



(Photo courtesy Andrew Dunsmore/Westminster Abbey)

We were welcomed by Dr Hall (pictured above). The Dean's support had been central to the creation of the memorial, whose installation took place at breakneck speed, in Church of England terms – only about 11 months from commissioning the design to the dedication. Dr Hall made the point that Wodehouse is now in the company of Chaucer, Trollope, and Noël Coward (PGW's memorial overlooks Coward's).

Stephen Raw, the memorial's designer, told me that one of his challenges had been that its position has very low illumination. This is why the stone is Purbeck, a light-coloured limestone from the quarry on the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset; it was selected by the cutter herself, Annet Stirling. It's not the first Abbey memorial Stephen and Annet have worked on together; they also created one for the founders of the Royal Ballet, near Plum's stone.

Stephen told me that receiving the commission had induced the sense of being a rabbit in the headlights, but he was encouraged by the happy instruction "We don't want it traditional". Nonetheless, his initial designs were not traditional enough. He had originally included a little coat of arms featuring the Empress of Blandings and a plum tree (see *By The Way*, page 3), but this had been rejected by the Abbey authorities. "We can't have jokes," the Dean told me, which did strike me as somewhat ironic, given who was being memorialised, but it's his Abbey, so that's that, and I'm sure he's right.

However, there were plenty of jokes in the service. After the Dean's welcome, we enjoyed readings of some of Wodehouse's funniest passages, as well as some music. Our President, Alexander Armstrong, gave us "Do trousers matter?" from *The Code of the Woosters*, and Lucy Tregear read from *The Mating Season*, describing Gussie Fink-Nottle being chased by Constable Dobbs ("I liked his ankle work"). Accompanied by Stephen Higgins (who played the piano throughout the evening), Hal and Lara Cazalet – PGW's great-grandchildren – sang 'Oh Gee! Oh Joy!', which Wodehouse had written with George Gershwin. Following this, Martin Jarvis read the wonderful moment from 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend' when Lord Emsworth's hated top hat is knocked off, to his considerable satisfaction, by a well-aimed rock cake.

Our President then delivered the Address, which you can read in the *By The Way* accompanying this issue; suffice to say that it was a model of its kind.

Then came the dedication. HRH The Duke of Kent lent a dignified royal seal of approval to the occasion and formally asked the Dean "to receive into the safe custody of the Dean and Chapter this memorial in honour and memory of P G Wodehouse", upon which the Dean pronounced these words:

To the greater glory of God, and in thankful memory of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, and of all that he achieved and contributed to the joy of life, I dedicate this memorial: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Following this, flowers were laid by our Chairman, Hilary Bruce, on behalf of the Society and by David Cazalet on behalf of the family (pictured below).



(Photo courtesy Andrew Dunsmore/Westminster Abbey)

With the formalities concluded, the actors stepped forward again with a succession of short quotations from PGW, and we had another song from Hal Cazalet: 'My Castle in the Air', by Wodehouse and Jerome Kern. I thought this was especially well chosen as it includes some lines that seem to me to sum up the world PGW created:

We'll have joy and laughter, mirth and song,  
 And we'll all be happy as the day is long  
 In the shelter of my castle, of my castle in the air.  
 No one ever worries there, for ev'rything goes right.  
 The sky's always blue and no lover's untrue,  
 And your life's one long delight.

Thus inspired, the Dean led us in prayer, in which he gave thanks for all those “whose art bringeth joy and consolation”. And so say all of us.

After the service, many of us strolled over to Church House for a glass or two of something convivial. It was quite a party – about 150 of us, from all over the world. I met Wodehouse devotees from India, the Netherlands, and the USA who had travelled especially for the event. We were also lucky that so many Wodehouse family members were able to attend, including Plum's great-nephew Nigel Wodehouse and, of course, his grandson, Sir Edward Cazalet, plus Edward's wife, Camilla, and children David, Hal, and Lara.

There were more songs, including ‘Anything Goes’ by Cole Porter, to which PGW had contributed lyrics for the London production. It was sung brilliantly by Alexander Armstrong, Lucy Tregear, and Hal and Lara Cazalet.

Our Chairman thanked the Dean and all those who had worked so hard, especially committee members at the centre of the planning, the Abbey staff, the professional performers who had freely given their time, and two generous but anonymous supporters who had helped to underwrite the event. Hilary also threw in a nugget that was new to me. When Baron Armstrong of Ilminster – better known, perhaps, as Sir Robert Armstrong – was Prime Minister Harold Wilson's Principal Private Secretary, he was responsible for drafting the letter that Wilson sent to PGW inviting him to accept a knighthood. What a happy duty, which greatly overshadows his other achievement of making it into the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* with his effective use of the magnificent phrase “economical with the truth”. Sadly, he could not be with us.

Following Hilary's speech, Hal Cazalet sang ‘The Land Where the Good Songs Go’, which Wodehouse wrote with Jerome Kern. Hal's father, Sir Edward Cazalet, then spoke movingly of his visits to Plum and Ethel and what their routine and relationship were like. It was a story of relentless work and a devoted marriage. There was, apparently, never any question of Wodehouse's retirement from professional writing, or even a holiday; when he took what he called a holiday, it was to write lyrics for a

musical instead of continuing with a book. We learned that he rather enjoyed being a literary recluse and that he died in harness, sitting in an armchair with his pencil still in his hand, writing the aptly named (and unfinished) *Sunset at Blandings*.

Edward told us that PGW's marriage to Ethel was “one of the happiest that I have known” because they understood each other so well. She attended to all practical matters while Plum simply wrote and wrote. Edward spoke of PGW's fitness regime – he could still touch his toes at 92 – and the daily notes Ethel left for him with his breakfast. They slept apart because PGW was in bed by 10:00 pm and up at 7:30; Ethel was often still up at 1:00 am and would sleep until noon. Hence the notes, which were often miniature love letters, and many of them are now in the British Library.

Edward concluded by saying that to understand Wodehouse properly, you must appreciate “his particular combination of genius, industry, kindness, and utter humility”. He then introduced his daughter, Lara, who sang, beautifully, one of PGW's best-known songs, ‘Bill’, written with Jerome Kern.

Then, by way of a finale, the great actor Neil Pearson performed an abridged version of Gussie Fink-Nottle's famous prize-giving speech at Market Snodsbury Grammar School, delivered after Gussie has inadvertently drunk far more

alcohol than he could reliably handle (*Right Ho, Jeeves*). It brought the house down, and once more we had cause to be grateful to a professional who had kindly given us his time and skill.

And so a memorable evening ended. We had been treated to the Church of England at its best, many magnificent performances, and an occasion that overall had much the same feel as a very happy wedding, one of those where both families thoroughly approve of the match, the wine flows, and the contentment grows. One wonders what the man himself would have made of it all. One relative told me that he would have been astonished, but delighted.

As for the memorial, it may have been a few years coming, but it will rest in the Abbey forever – and so it should.

*Turn the page for more photos. Members who wish to see all the readings and lyrics used in the service can download them via the link on the Society's website. For more on the memorial service and reception speeches, as well as a report on how the stone was created, see the special By The Way supplement.*



L-R: Martin Jarvis, Lara Cazalet, Alexander Armstrong, Lucy Tregear, Hal Cazalet  
 (Photo courtesy Andrew Dunsmore/Westminster Abbey)

# Pictures of an Historic Occasion



*The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster, and HRH The Duke of Kent dedicating the memorial*



*Around 200 attended the service of dedication in the Abbey, very close to the South Quire Aisle, where the memorial is located.*



*Martin Jarvis read, brilliantly, a passage from Wodehouse's sublime short story 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend'.*



*At the reception in Church House, Lucy Tregear, Alexander Armstrong, and Hal & Lara Cazalet wowed the masses.*



*Celia and Nigel Wodehouse (Plum's great-nephew) were among the family members in attendance.*



*The memorial following the laying of flowers on behalf of P G Wodehouse's family and the Society*



*Neil Pearson provided sterling entertainment with his reading of Gussie's prize-giving technique.*



*l-r: Lara & David Cazalet; Hal Cazalet singing 'My Castle in the Air'; happy and tired Tim Andrew & Hilary Bruce; Peter Nieuwenhuizen & Josepha Olsthoorn of the Dutch society*



## Photographs: Credits and Ordering Information

On this page, photos of the memorial and dedication service are courtesy of Andrew Dunsmore/Westminster Abbey. Pictures of the reception at Church House are courtesy of Katy Ward, Katy Photography.

# Society News

## *February Meeting*

Our next Society meeting is at 6:00 pm at the Savile Club on 10 February 2020. The entertainment will be a reprise of the talk premiered by Tim Andrew and Hilary Bruce in Cincinnati (see next item) on how the Society sought and won for Wodehouse the honour of a memorial in Westminster Abbey. Technology permitting, there will be some stills from the service, and there may also be a video of the brilliant celebration after the service of dedication.

## *Convention Talks*

As reported by Paul Kent on page 14, our American sibling society held its 20th convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, in mid-October. Some 140 members enjoyed an entertaining and instructive long weekend celebrating Wodehouse in as many ways as we could find. For the British contingent, it was gratifying to note that, of the 11 speakers giving papers at the event, no fewer than seven were members of our own Society, and three of those were actual Brits. It would be remiss of us not to mention that Paul's talk 'Wodehouse and the Stuffed Eelskin of Fate', based on his new book, received rave notices and a queue waiting to congratulate him. Very gratifying, and wholly deserved. (If you haven't ordered Paul's book yet, see the box on page 7.)

## *The State of the Editorship*

We've known for quite a while that Elin Murphy was planning to stand down as editor of *Wooster Sauce*, and we have been looking for the right person or persons to replace her. And now it looks as if we have found a good solution in the form of an editor

responsible for the content and a production editor responsible for design, layout, proofing, and everything else involved in getting *Wooster Sauce* to the point of distribution.

To that end, Elin has edited this issue, her last, together with Andrew Bishop. Assuming Andrew is happy to continue (and the runes are good), our March issue will be edited by him and laid out by the person we hope will be our production editor, with Elin in support on that role. With a following wind, Elin should have her summer free as the new team takes over the June issue.

We are delighted to have found these members with the skill and the will to take over as joint editors, and we really hope this will be a collaboration made in heaven. Obviously, we'll offer both of them all the support we can, and in the meantime, we thank them and wish them both the very best of luck.

## *Fancy a Game?*

Are you a cricketer looking for a team? If so, the Society may be able to help!

If you recall, we were worried about the future of our Gold Bats when we couldn't field enough players for either of our 2019 matches. That situation changed very much for the better at our October meeting, when a new friend of the Society – who comes ready-equipped with the makings of a team – volunteered to attempt a resurrection of the Gold Bats. As you might imagine, we absolutely seized his offer with both hands, and as soon as the year has turned, we'll be on the case for the coming season. Meanwhile, hang on to that linseed oil for a while yet . . .

## *The Great Clergy Handicap Continues*

Murray Hedgcock continues to peruse the *Daily Telegraph's* Appointments in the Clergy column, and on the 6th August he spotted the following. As ever, we're grateful to Murray for keeping us updated!

The Rev. Deborah Margaret Coyne, assistant curate, Tadcaster (Diocese of York) to be priest-in-charge, Alne, and Brafferton with Pilmoor, Myton on Swale and Thormanby Coyne, and to be licensed as associate curate to the other Easingwold Deanery benefices: Coxwold and Husthwaite, Crayke with Brandsby and Yearsley, Easingwold with Raskelf, Strensall, Forest of Galtres, and Skelton with Shipton and Newton on Ouse (same diocese).

The Rev. Hilary Moore, Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM) assistant curate, St. Augustine, Chesterfield, St. Mark, Brampton, and the Order of the Black Sheep (Diocese of Derby), to be SSM assistant curate, known as associate priest, St. Augustine, Chesterfield, St. Mark, Brampton, St.

Thomas, Brampton, St. John, Walton and St. Mary and All Saints, Chesterfield, and associate pioneer minister to the Order of the Black Sheep (same diocese).

The Rev. Catherine Jane Toase, assistant curate, Easingwold with Raskelf and the Easingwold deanery benefices (Diocese of York), to be SSM assistant curate, Skelton with Shipton, and Newton on Ouse, and to be licensed in the same capacity to the other Easingwold Deanery benefices: Alne, Brafferton with Pilmoor, Myton on Swale and Thormanby, Coxwold and Husthwaite, Crayke with Brandsby and Yearsley, Easingwold with Raskelf, Forest of Galtres, and Strensall (same diocese).

*Murray adds:* Interesting that all of these names are of women: Plum would have found that puzzling. Incidentally, one other cleric bears the enticing name of The Rev. Emma Dinwiddy-Smith. Again – a product of PGW's fertile imagination, surely . . .

# A Spirited AGM

by Peter Read

Following the usual preliminary sluicing, the 2019 AGM, reporting on matters for the previous year, had an unusual start as we joined in singing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Thomas Hartman (pictured right) on his 13th, in the convivial spirit of the Savile Club. Then our Chairman, Hilary Bruce, exuding the same spirit, called us to some semblance of order for the evening’s business. She noted that it was our 22nd year of existence, so we have truly passed the age of maturity, celebrating a membership of a thousand members.



(Photo by Jo Jacobius)

Two years at the Savile Club have been an unqualified success, and we continue to welcome non-members who come and try us out (feel free to encourage your friends). Hilary highlighted the fiercely fought team quiz, with many scratch sides competing for the honour of victory. We learned that the website is thriving and up to date with bags of information. The key link with members remains the superb *Wooster Sauce*, edited by Elin Woodger Murphy for more than 12 years. Sadly, she is now retiring, but a new production team is being formed (see page 5).

Hilary reminded us that the October 2018 dinner at Gray’s Inn was a triumph, including as it did the participation of our new President, Alexander Armstrong, and his brilliant and very funny toast to PGW. The dinner had ended with a jaw-dropper as Hilary announced the approval of a memorial to Plum in Westminster Abbey. The Committee spent much time thereafter in planning what proved to be an amazing event, which took place in September this year, as reported on page 1.

Hilary offered thanks to the Wodehouse Estate and to the many members who make the Society a

huge success, including: Chris Reece, webmaster; Louis McCulloch, book examiner; Ian Nilo-Walton, treasurer; Christine Hewitt, secretary and membership secretary; membership managers Sue and Bryan Williams; website editor Christopher Bellew; the almost irreplaceable Elin Murphy; Paul Kent, entertainments impresario; Tony Ring, cabaret organiser; Tim Andrew, dinner organiser and 50 per cent of the Westminster Abbey team; committee members Jo Jacobius, Oliver Wise, and Edward Cazalet; and Lesley Tapson, who stood down from the committee at this meeting. All officers and committee members, apart from Lesley, were re-elected.

The Treasurer completed the briefest of reports, which can be summarised as the Society being in a healthy state. Just before declaring the meeting closed after 15 minutes, Hilary revealed that she would stand down at the next AGM after 16 years as Chairman (cries of shame!).

This was followed by a presentation of framed photographs of the Westminster Abbey memorial to Hilary and to Tim Andrew, the primary organisers of the arrangements for its installation, in grateful thanks for their remarkable work in ensuring a memorable occasion.

After a brief refreshment break, Hilary introduced Paul Kent, who gave us a tour of Wodehouse’s comic imagination by way of introducing his new book on the same theme, on sale at the meeting. He began by explaining the book was about what Plum wrote and how he wrote it, not about his life. Paul likened the process to an Irish stew: stage one, Plum got some wonderful ingredients together; stage two, he boiled them up in his imagination; stage three, a fabulously tasty nourishing dish came out the other end.



In October the Savile Club was packed with Wodehouseans for the Society’s AGM. (Photo by Robert Bruce)



Hilary Bruce, Paul Kent, and Tim Andrew;  
Hilary and Tim hold their framed photos of the memorial.  
(Photo by Jo Jacobius)

Paul wrote his book, the first of three volumes, for two reasons. One, obviously, was his love of Wodehouse's works; the second was his disgruntlement over humour being the Cinderella of writing, with Wodehouse regarded as a great humorous writer but not generally a great writer (shock, horror!). To illustrate Paul's thesis, his talk was littered with well-thought-out quotations delivered in character. He noted that Plum had no axe to grind with tragedy and plundered Shakespeare freely; an excerpt from *The Code of the Woosters* provided a brilliant example of comedy's power to convert Macbeth from a serial murderer to 'the cat chap'. Paul saw this as the tragic sublime meeting the comic ridiculous, an exemplar of why, in his view, comedy is better than tragedy – because it makes us laugh! He went on to extract the comedy from Plum's mining of *Hamlet* and the Russian classics.

Paul then read a substantial extract from *A Damsel in Distress* featuring Keggs the Butler, illustrating Wodehouse's uncanny ear for sound, dialogue, rhythm, rhyme, and actions. The reading induced fits of laughter in the Savile Club as Paul matched dialogue, accent, and intonation to these attributes, no doubt using his professional skills as a drama director. From this he glided effortlessly into Monty Bodkin's strangled Franglais at the start of *The Luck of the Bodkins* and Anatole's skewed English in *The Code of the Woosters*, cleverly analysing the three sources of the latter's cock-eyed vocabulary. He finished by observing that "Plum has sifted and weighed every word of Anatole's complaint before signing them off. He has taken care, incredible care, for we are not simply laughing at a silly Frenchman who can't speak English, we are with Anatole all the way because his expression is not a parody but an idiolect, and a damn brilliant one at that."

It certainly whetted my own appetite, and I am now the proud owner of a signed copy of *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse – Volume 1: 'This is jolly old Fame'*.

## Letters to the Editor



### From Sushmita Sen Gupta

'Humourist'?! The most important word on the memorial stone has been misspelled! The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us clearly and unambiguously that the word is spelt 'humorist'. We also have 'humorous'. The word 'humourist' does not exist; it is not even mentioned as the American spelling. Do any other dictionaries approve this spelling? If they do not, then to have a word misspelt on the memorial stone of one of the greatest practitioners of the English language is unforgivable. And it is going to stay that way for all time to come. Quite frankly, I'm appalled.

*The Editor replies: Many dictionaries still use the spelling 'humourist', but not current editions of the Oxford English Dictionary and Chambers; these two authorities specify 'humorist', although 'humourist' does appear in older editions of both dictionaries. It should be noted that the word would have been spelled 'humourist' in Wodehouse's time, and it was for that and other reasons that Westminster Abbey officials settled on that spelling.*

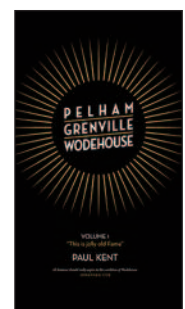
### From Mark Taylor

Murray Hedgcock's review of *'His Captain's hand on his shoulder smote'* (September 2019) mentions *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. The only mention of cricket in that book is at the end of Tom's school career, when he captains the school against the MCC and loses, partly because of his putting the other team in first, allowing comic songs to be sung during the interval, and playing Arthur because he thought it would do him good to be in the team. Anyone remember a St Austin's short story called 'The Tom Brown Question' or something like that, in which Hughes was apparently forced to rewrite the second half by a committee?

Before I came across Psmith – my favourite character – a friend who'd read *Mike and Psmith* compared him to Greyfriars Remove Lord Mauleverer. Edwy Searles Brooks, in his St Frank's stories for the Nelson Lee Library, plagiarised Psmith as William Napoleon Browne and Bertie as Archie Glenthorne with his Jeeves-like valet Phipps.

### A Perfect Christmas Gift

Members who have not yet ordered Paul Kent's magnificent work on Wodehouse's literary legacy, *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (Volume 1)* will be delighted to learn that they can do so simply by going to [www.canofworms.net/shop](http://www.canofworms.net/shop). This book was reviewed in our September 2019 issue, and it is a corker, to be sure. Order it now as a Christmas gift for the devoted Wodehouse fan in your life – or even for yourself!



# Profile of a Patron

## Ben Elton

At our Society's meeting in February this year, our Chairman announced that a new name was to be added to our eminent list of Patrons: the wonderful Ben Elton. As this issue of *Wooster Sauce* goes to press, Ben is approaching the conclusion of his three-month tour of the UK with his new stand-up comedy show, marking his return to the genre after a break of 15 years. Some of us will recall his rapid rise to public prominence in the early 1980s, when (with his reputation as "Motormouth") he was highly influential in establishing the new wave of alternative comedy that swept away the likes of Benny Hill and Bernard Manning. However, over the last 40 years he has gained renown and, indeed, many prestigious awards, not just as a stand-up comedian but also as a novelist, playwright, television writer, screenwriter, and lyricist. He is also a director of theatre, television, and film, as well as a very occasional actor.



Ben is married to an Australian and now divides his time between Britain and Australia. It was in Australia that he began his career as a best-selling novelist, which began with the million-selling Australian-set novel *Stark* (1989). His 16th title, *Identity Crisis*, was published earlier this year. *Popcorn* (1996) earned him the Gold Dagger Award from the Crime Writers Association, and his stage adaptation of the book won an Olivier Award in the West End. A second Olivier came his way for the musical production of *We Will Rock You* (2002), for which Ben provided the book, with music by Queen. Other successful musicals on which he has

collaborated include *The Beautiful Game* (2000) and *Love Never Dies* (2010), both with music from Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber; the former won the Critics Circle Best Musical Award.

Many will remember that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the name of Ben Elton was on our television screens almost every week, either as a stand-up comic performing on shows like *Saturday Live* and *The Man from Auntie*, or as a triple BAFTA-winning writer of top comedy shows – notably *The Young Ones*; three series of *Blackadder* (with Richard Curtis); and, more recently, *Upstart Crow* (starring the husband of Society patron Victoria Coren Mitchell). Those who would seek a full list of all Ben's accomplishments (and other awards) during his long career can find a wealth of further information on Wikipedia, of course.

Born in Catford, in the southeast of London in 1959, Ben was educated at state school and graduated from Manchester University in 1980 with a degree in drama. The same institution awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2004, and three years later he collected the Special Golden Rose d'Or at the International Television Festival for his lifetime contribution to the television arts.

Ben has been a Wodehouse fan for many years; in a 2004 interview, he described Wodehouse as "the novelist I've loved more than any other". Reviewers of his own novels have occasionally referred to a certain Wodehousean flavour in his writing – the ultimate accolade. It is a great pleasure to have him as a patron of our Society!

---

## Cosy Moments

*So, Anyway . . .*, by John Cleese (2014)  
(from Barry Chapman)

A passage in chapter 2 of Cleese's autobiography reveals that his father, when out East, ended up sharing a house with one of PGW's brothers. Reginald Cleese found this Wodehouse to be "charming, wonderfully companionable and considerate, but, oddly, seemingly without any sense of humour." The elder Cleese also thought his companion was very naïve (the reason is rather too indelicate to reveal here), leaving John Cleese to ponder:

If his brother was as naïve as this, is it possible that PG himself lacked a certain degree of worldliness, of the everyday experience of the average man-about-town, of actual, ordinary *savoir faire*? And if so, is it

possible that this very ingenuousness is connected with the rather simplified psychology of PG's characters, which forces me to regard him as a very good comic writer rather than a great one?

But as Barry rightly points out: "P. G. Wodehouse was a still greater comic writer than even John Cleese!"

*The Guinness Book of Curious Words*, by Leslie Dunkling (1994) (from Roger Bowen)

Roger spotted this passage:

In *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens plays with capitals: "IF" said John Willett . . . uttering the monosyllable in capitals.

P G Wodehouse, in 'A Slice of Life', has a similar joke: "Sir Jasper Finch-Farowmere?" said Wilfred. "ffinch-ffarowmere" corrected the visitor, his sensitive ear detecting the capital letters.



# P. G. Wodehouse and ‘The Message’

## Part 2

by Brian Wagstaff

This is the second instalment of my two-part article arguing that, contrary to what many critics say, there is a serious kernel, something akin to a ‘message’, in P. G. Wodehouse’s work.

In Part 1 I argued that the central tenet of all Plum’s work is that we should dare to be true to ourselves, resisting the temptation to pretend to be more highfalutin’ than we are, and that disguise and intentional deception, which shy away from truth to self, are serious flaws and usually lead to disaster. I showed how his short story ‘Bill the Bloodhound’, on the surface a farcical tale of an incompetent private detective who wins the heart of the minor actress he loves, reveals at a deeper level a more intricate meditation on disguise and pretence on the stage and in real life.

A still clearer comparison of theatrical conventions and social behaviour occurs in ‘Extricating Young Gussie’,<sup>1</sup> the first of the stories involving Jeeves.

Bertie’s Aunt Agatha has demanded that he go to New York to prevent his cousin Gussie Mannering-Phipps from marrying a vaudeville performer with whom he has fallen in love. Not surprisingly, Bertie fails in this task; in fact, Gussie himself gets a contract to appear as a vaudeville artist. Gussie’s mother, Bertie’s Aunt Julia (in Bertie’s words, “the most dignified person I know”), responds by coming to New York herself. She herself had been on the vaudeville stage before marrying into an upper-class British family, and she is, according to Bertie, “like a stage duchess”. Bertie takes her first to see Gussie’s girlfriend singing and then to watch Gussie himself. Aunt Julia’s reaction is not quite what Bertie expected: she finds herself yearning for the life of greasepaint she abandoned. Her reminiscences about her life in England after leaving vaudeville explicitly compare British society life to a career on the stage:

“They made a lady of me. I never worked so hard in my life as I did to become a real lady. They kept telling me I had to put it across, no matter what it cost. . . . The study was something terrible. I had to watch myself every minute for years, and I never knew when I might fluff my lines or fall down on some bit of business. But I did it . . . though all the time I was just aching to be back where I belonged [the vaudeville stage].”

If society life in England involves pretence and performance, the United States offers opportunity for

those who have talent, unconstrained by complicated social rules: it allows people to be true to their natural selves. British male characters in Wodehouse’s work frequently marry American women, who rescue them from the stranglehold of the British class system. Typically, the American characters are more practical, forthright, and natural in their behaviour. Here is Sally Nicholas, the American heroine of *The Adventures of Sally*, speaking to Ginger Kemp, the (British) main male character, exhorting him to make something of himself rather than be dictated to by his well-connected but recently impoverished family:

“I’m going to speak words of wisdom. Ginger, why don’t you brace up?”

“Brace up?”

“Yes, stiffen your backbone and stick out your chin, and square your elbows, and really amount to something. Why do you simply flop about and do nothing and leave everything to what you call ‘the family’? Why do you have to be helped all the time? Why don’t you help yourself? Why do you have to have jobs found for you? Why don’t you rush out and get one? Why do you have to worry about what ‘the family’ thinks of you? Why don’t you make yourself independent of them? . . . You’ll never get anywhere by letting yourself be picked up by the family like . . . like a floppy Newfoundland puppy and dumped down in any old place that happens to suit them. A job’s a thing you’ve got to choose for yourself and get for yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

Later in the same chapter, and at frequent intervals through the rest of the novel, Sally utters her exhortation to Ginger, “Death to the Family”, which seems shocking even now and can hardly have been less so in 1922. Of course, this is Sally speaking, rather than Wodehouse himself, but she is the novel’s heroine, and it seems likely that we are being invited to take seriously the idea that British society has become sclerotic, held back by rigid notions of class and social connection that are stifling natural talent.

Perhaps the story showing most obvious contempt for the class system in countries with aristocracies is ‘Crowned Heads’,<sup>3</sup> in which Katie Bennett, who runs a secondhand bookshop in New York, lives with her grandfather, who has delusions that he is the King of England. When Ted Brady, a wealthy, handsome, and athletic young man falls in love with her, she is delighted. Unfortunately, her

<sup>2</sup> *The Adventures of Sally*, 1922, Chapter 3

<sup>3</sup> In *The Man with Two Left Feet*, 1917

<sup>1</sup> In *The Man with Two Left Feet*, 1917

grandfather forbids the marriage because Ted is “a commoner”, and she won’t go against his wishes in case this kills him. Eventually she asks Ted to stop seeing her, since meeting can only cause pain. Months pass. Then Ted reappears, asking to see Katie’s grandfather. He has been voted King of Coney Island in the Mardi Gras festival. Now that Ted is a king, Katie’s grandfather is happy to allow the marriage. As Ted explains to Katie afterwards:

“I don’t see there’s so much call for me to feel mean. I’m not so far short of being a regular king. Coney’s just as big as some of those kingdoms you read about on the other side; and from what you see in the papers about the goings-on there, it looks to me that, having a whole week on the throne like I’m going to have, amounts to a pretty steady job as kings go.”

The association of monarchy with the delusions of an old man could hardly be more negative.

At first glance, most of Wodehouse’s novels and stories appear to portray British upper-class society affectionately, but a closer look shows a much more complex picture. True, it is hard to dislike Bertie Wooster, ineffectual and “mentally negligible”, in Jeeves’s words, though he is. Similarly, Bertie’s Aunt Dahlia is likeable, as are Lord Emsworth and Gally Threepwood in the Blandings Castle stories. But Bertie is redeemed by the fact that he admires American society and has quite enlightened attitudes by the standards of Wodehouse characters. And Gally, whose family blighted his romantic prospects by forbidding him to marry Dolly Henderson, the chorus girl who was the love of his life, serves as a sort of male fairy godmother, preventing the same thing happening to younger characters in the stories.

Most of the sympathetic characters in the stories and novels are kicking against a rigid society that oppresses them in some way. Many of the other

regular characters who represent the landed gentry are much less attractive. Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe in the Blandings Castle stories is pompous; the Duke of Dunstable is rude and insensitive. Most sinister of all, in the Jeeves stories, is Roderick Spode, who leads a party suggestive of fascism, much in the manner of a dictator, and who, once he becomes Lord Sidcup, transfers his allegiances to the Conservative cause.

Wodehouse hardly ever addresses us directly, and is never preachy, so there is no *direct* ‘message’, but he leaves all the clues we need to draw negative inferences about British society as opposed to a meritocratic system.<sup>4</sup> In the Jeeves stories, Bertie uses the word ‘feudal’ and its derivatives frequently, and although *he* uses the word favourably, it is not likely that we are expected to interpret it that way.

Wodehouse’s stories and novels consistently indicate that truth to self; natural, unaffected behaviour, uncontaminated by pretence, disguise, or trickery; and a society that allows such truth and naturalness are the elements that make for success in life. He is far too subtle a writer to state this outright, and unlike some 20th and 21st century writers, he never bares his soul, but this is the implied message throughout his work.

The body of Plum’s work is so great that it is, of course, impossible for me to prove this with anything like a representative sample of his fiction. Therefore, the only course of action is for you to reread the Wodehouse oeuvre and decide for yourself if what I have said is true. What a delight you have in store for you!

---

<sup>4</sup> I don’t wish to imply that Wodehouse’s *only* political target is the British right wing. In his story ‘Comrade Bingo’, in *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923), he pokes fun very effectively at the Communists, but the British establishment is a more frequent source of merriment.

---

## Two Books for the Christmas Stocking

### *Funny Ha Ha*

Perfectly timed for the Christmas market, the comedian Paul Merton has gathered together a collection of some of his favourite comic writing by his favourite comic writers. *Funny Ha Ha: 80 of the Funniest Stories Ever Written* has been reviewed favourably in *The Times*, earning praise for its “winning randomness”. The somewhat eclectic, wide-ranging anthology contains essays, comedy sketches, excerpts from novels, radio scripts, and whimsical magazine pieces. Society members will not be surprised to learn that there are three works by Plum.

Merton explains in his introduction that there are very few who, like Wodehouse, “delight in creating charming scenarios where nobody dies and the hero always emerges triumphant”. He goes on to assert: “Wodehouse is one of a handful of authors that I simply couldn’t get enough of, so I have chosen three of his works for this compendium. A Jeeves and Wooster story was unavoidable, and ‘Mulliner’s Buck-U-Uppo’ has been a favourite of mine since I read it forty years ago. But I didn’t want to simply pick stories that would be familiar to the well-read. . . . ‘A Day with the

Swattesmore’ is hopefully an obscure delight that only the most devoted fans would have been previously aware of.” Published by Head of Zeus, the book retails for £25.

### *Berkmann’s Cricketing Miscellany*

Thanks to TERRY TAYLOR for sending an extract from *Berkmann’s Cricketing Miscellany*, published in July by journalist Marcus Berkmann. This collection of random facts, trivia, and cricketing stories, presented in month-by-month order from January through December, includes, not surprisingly, something on Wodehouse. Berkmann describes PGW’s love for cricket as a player, a writer, and a fan, and mentions the fact that the author named Jeeves after Percy Jeeves (who also has an entry in the book). He also describes how, while still working as a bank clerk, Wodehouse left a Test match at the Oval to return to the office, only to miss a great comeback and narrow win for England. “Wodehouse later wrote that, on seeing the following day’s papers, he decided that if banking made him miss things like that, he would be better off trying to be a writer.” Published by Little, Brown, the book retails for £14.99.

# PGW's First Published Words Revisited

Back in March we printed an article by Don Taylor in which he stated: "Until recently, we believed that Mr Wodehouse's first published words appeared in *The Alleynian* in 1899." This prompted a letter from John Hodgson, published in June, in which he disputed this assertion, pointing out that Robert McCrum and Barry Phelps, in their respective biographies, had ascribed Wodehouse's first printed words to an October 1894 article in *The Alleynian* entitled 'Junior Cup Matches'. Your Editor suggested that some intrepid member might ferret out the issue in question to determine whether the piece was really written by our hero.

Well, two members took up the challenge, one being John himself, who wrote to the archivist at Dulwich College. The reply he received reads: "I have tracked down the relevant issue of *The Alleynian*, and it appears that there has been a slight misunderstanding. The section headed 'Junior Cup Matches' on pp.239–40 consists of scorecards for Upper III matches, in which Wodehouse competed in two games, and has no prose article attached."

Meanwhile, Nick Townend also did a little research and reported as follows: "Having now intrepidly perused

the relevant issue of *The Alleynian*, I can report that the item was not written by Wodehouse, as it contains simply the scorecards of four cricket matches, in two of which Wodehouse played. In the first match, batting at no. 11 for Upper III B vs Upper III A, Wodehouse was bowled for a duck in each innings; he bowled out Upper III A's opening batsman for 2 in the second innings; Upper III B scored 39 and 49 vs Upper III A's 53 and 32, so won by 3 runs in a close finish (Upper III A's last two batsmen were both out for ducks, with their top scorer (10 not out) starved of the strike at the death). In the second match, Wodehouse was promoted to no. 10 for Upper III B vs Combined Lower III, and did slightly better – although he was again bowled for 0 in the second innings, his 0 in the first innings was 0 not out. Upper III A scored 61 and 68. Wodehouse took no wickets when Combined Lower III batted, and they scored 49 and 89 for 5, thereby winning by 5 wickets."

We shall let John have the final word: "When I was a small boy my grandfather warned me that I should not believe everything I read in the newspapers. To that I now add that I should not believe everything I read in biographies, even if the fact in question appears in two different biographies."

---

## Profile of a Committee Member

### *Ian Nilo-Walton*

PG Wodehouse insinuated himself, Jeeves-like, into Ian Nilo-Walton's life. He remembers there was a brief exposure to a couple of quotations as part of a comprehension exam at school. Many years later, Ian's bookshelves contained a good, well-thumbed, selection of the Master's works, but memories of where and when he acquired them are lost in the mists of time. What is not lost is that he has always been able to turn to the books for entertainment and, at times, solace.

After university, Ian joined the UK chemical firm ICI, working for it and its successors for 40 years before he decided enough was enough, and retired. He spent a fair amount of this time commissioning large chemical plants, which can be a stressful activity. Indeed, the works doctor once solemnly certified the entire start-up team as alcoholics so they could obtain a drink in the otherwise dry Indian state of Tamil Nadu. (Some of the certificates were proudly displayed on office walls for years after.) Possibly a healthier alternative was a soothing dose of PGW in the evenings, to calm the nerves and restore sanity (the Wodehouse world *is* sane compared with a plant start-up!).



Ian had been vaguely aware of the Society for a while, and with retirement came rather more time for frivolities, so it seemed to him like a good wheeze to join. Shortly after that came the plea for a new Treasurer, to relieve the previous incumbent from the triple burden of treasury duties, work, and fatherhood. By this time, rather sadly, Ian was missing his daily fix of Excel, and this seemed the ideal opportunity to fill the gap. Happily, his application succeeded, and he reports that the subsequent Committee meetings have been some of the most entertaining of his career.

Being the Society's Treasurer is not, of course, a full-time occupation. Some of Ian's other diversions include bookbinding, scuba diving, and making useful objects out of old junk. And so the long day wears on . . .

With Ian in the photo is his lovely wife, Pamela. Since they married, Ian has noticed that various long-treasured items have disappeared from his wardrobe. He doesn't know where they have gone, as the couple have no under-gardener or lift attendant as potential recipients. However, when one hears something like "Ian, gaudily striped shirts from Marks and Spencer are not worn at dinner", one tends to recognise a *modus operandi*!

# The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University

by Anita Avery

*The following is an edited version of the talk Anita gave at the 20th biennial convention of The Wodehouse Society (US), in Cincinnati, Ohio (October 2019).*

In collaboration with Vanderbilt University Library Special Collections and University Archive, The Wodehouse Society (TWS) is pleased to announce The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University.

The goal of this project is twofold: to preserve a comprehensive collection showcasing the history, diversity and depth of works by and about Wodehouse; and to provide a place for scholars and lovers of the author to peruse and research the evolution of his craft, spanning many genres and decades. To our knowledge, there is in the United States no publicly accessible Wodehouse collection of the breadth and depth envisioned for this endeavour.

The catalyst for this project arose at the 2015 convention in Seattle, where, in a conversation with Ken Clevenger and Bob Rains (then President), this ageing member speculated that if the planned donation of her PGW collection to a university library seemed a good idea, imagine what might be possible if more TWS members were to pool the best of their collections to form a Wodehouse archive or collection in the United States. Ken agreed to help craft a suitable proposal, and Bob encouraged us to explore the possibilities. Over the next year, the mission statement and well-defined scope envisaged for the collection took shape.

Late in 2017, the idea was accepted by Vanderbilt University Library. The official name would be: The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University. The initial donations would be from my personal collection. Arthur Robinson, college reference librarian, Wodehouse scholar, and TWS member – the perfect chap for the job – agreed to help curate and vet the books and other items being offered. While

collecting everything wouldn't be feasible, Vanderbilt generously approved the proposed parameters of the collection, notably the various formats and items that would be accepted and the quality standards for the holdings.

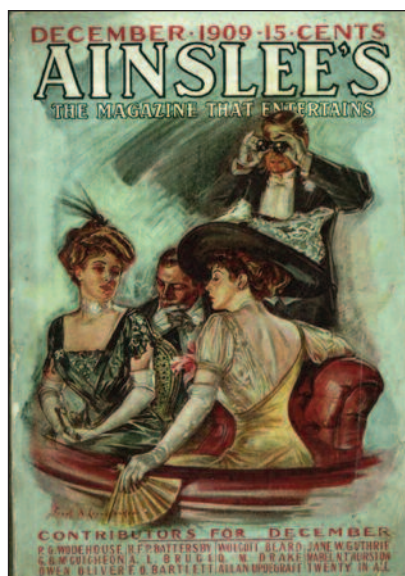
The primary goal is to acquire UK and US first editions of works by or about Wodehouse, with dust wrappers when possible. Because acquiring first editions of rare/early titles with dust wrappers would be difficult, firsts without wrappers or 'closest to first' editions could be accepted, with hopes of a future upgrade. Taking these variables into account, and reflecting a realistic approach to collecting items spanning more than a century, guidelines were developed regarding the collection's date range, condition, and dust wrapper requirements. In general, the more recent a publication, the higher the requirements for condition and wrappers.

Shortly after curation of the initially offered collection began, Arthur decided to donate major portions of his own outstanding collection. This was terrific news! Drawing from the best of both collections would strengthen the quality of the first collection holdings at Vanderbilt. Over the next year, hundreds of books were sorted, compared, and vetted. Numerous lists were made of the various categories and formats of Wodehouse works.

The 'bible' of many Wodehouse collectors is Elaine McIlvaine's *P. G. Wodehouse: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Checklist* (also known as *McIlvaine*) and the later 2001 Addendum. The bibliography is divided into various sections, each devoted to a specific type of works: novels, omnibus volumes, books about Wodehouse, periodicals, dramatic works, music, etc. The *McIlvaine* numbers assigned therein have become the internationally accepted standard for identifying specific editions and issues of works by or related to Wodehouse. Organising the collection along those lines provided



Among the many gems in the collection is this PGW story in the December 1909 edition of Ainslee's.



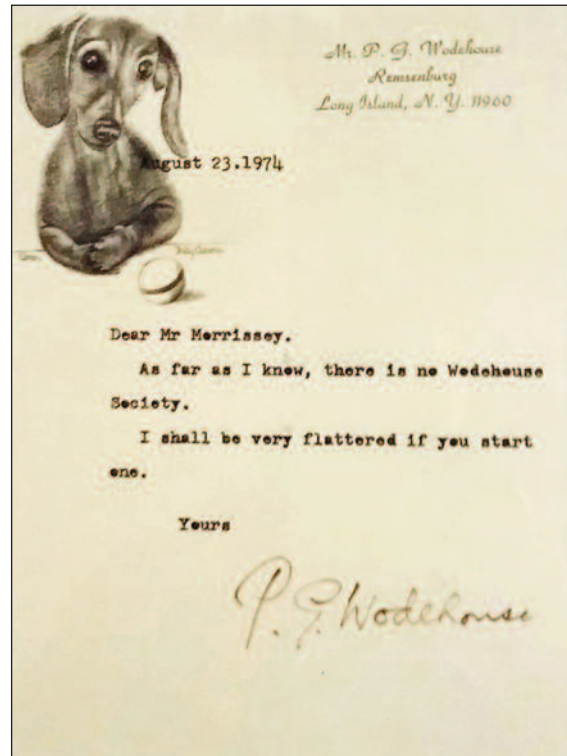
consistency across the board, shared terminology, and codification of the items that were sought. For purposes of collecting items in categories not contained in *McIlvaine*, three sections were added to the collection's framework: (1) Television; (2) Ephemera and Collectibles; (3) Journals and Newsletters. Working within the *McIlvaine* structure also provided the template for keeping track of what had been donated to the collection and what was still needed.

As is usual, donated items will be catalogued in the Vanderbilt system. However, to make it easier for TWS members and other donors to know what is still needed, The Wodehouse Society is hosting an online database devoted to the collection. Ananth Kaitharam set up the first of several spreadsheets, which was a great help while this utter novice got up to speed on Excel. TWS's webmaster, Noel Merrill, then added the crowning touch by converting the various spreadsheets into a beautifully organised webpage. Visitors to the website can easily browse the collection, see what is there, and consider donating one or more items from their collections.

The database URL is [www.wodehouse.org/PGWCVU](http://www.wodehouse.org/PGWCVU). Visitors are greeted by 'What Ho!' on the home page, which describes the collection and how to use the database. Clicking on the gold navigation bar on the left of the page displays the links to the 19 sections in the database. Each has an explanatory preface followed by a database for that category. Most section databases list all known items in that category desired for the collection. When items are donated, details of condition, wrappers, and special

notes are entered on the database. For sections having hundreds of items, such as periodicals and sheet music, items will be listed on the database when they are donated.

Thus far, Vanderbilt has received over 270 items. Another 200 await shipment, and nearly 100 back issues of *Plum Lines* have been donated. One of the collection highlights is a 1974 letter, long in the care of TWS's NEWTS chapter:

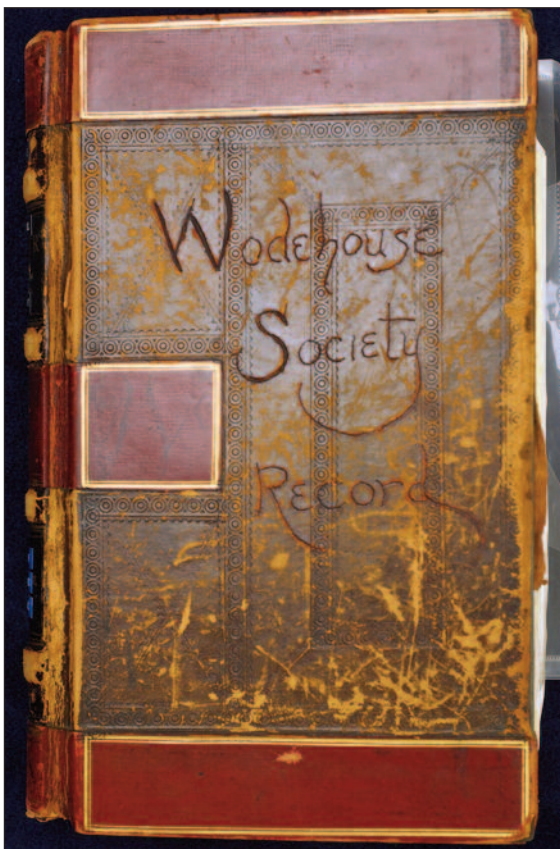


This letter and TWS's early records book, known in that society as *The Tome*, were presented to Vanderbilt University Librarian Valerie Hotchkiss, who, with two other staff members, was in attendance at the recent convention in Cincinnati.

Donations of books and other items are US tax-deductible. Should an upgrade copy of a title be acquired, the original can be returned to the donor. To the Wodehouse scholars and authors among us, autographed copies of your Wodehouse-related publications would be most welcome additions to the collection.

The groundwork has been laid, the initial donations are in place, and the stage is set. Just as The Wodehouse Society started small and grew into a body of notable purpose and accomplishment, we have the potential to build, in partnership with Vanderbilt University, what promises to be the most comprehensive, publicly accessible Wodehouse collection in the United States, beginning a legacy of preserving and spreading the sweetness and light of Plum's long and illustrious career.

We hope you will visit the online database of The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University and come back often to check on the progress being made.



*The Wodehouse Society's Tome is now housed at Vanderbilt University along with other treasures in the new collection.*

# Confessions from the Queen City of the Midwest

by Paul Kent

*Editor's note: Pigs Have Wings, the 20th international convention of The Wodehouse Society, was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, on October 17–20. Herewith Paul's view as a first-timer.*

## Friday

Well, the venue got 10 out of 10 for a start. Possibly 11. Trundling my carry-on suitcase over the threshold of the Hilton Netherland Plaza in downtown Cincinnati, this restored 1931 art deco masterpiece certainly put the OH in Ohio. The public areas, where the majority of convention events were to be held, were designed to shock and awe. And didn't they! I made a mental note to head to the Palm Court Bar as quickly as possible to drink in the opulence.

This boded well, I thought – a feeling reinforced as I gazed from the window of my 28th-floor room across the winding Ohio River and quite some way into the bourbon country of northern Kentucky. But there was work to be done flogging my Wodehouse book – an ideal Christmas gift, by the way – and I headed down to Registration to meet the most welcoming gang of welcomers possible. Bill Scrivener, Susan Pace, Christine Wands, and their team were seated in a sea of convention tote bags, calmly dishing out the lanyards and IDs that do so much to break the ice at these events. The etiquette that accompanies them is fascinating: as the ID dangles from your neck, some make a great show of yanking it up to eye level before scanning the name and exploding with delight; others affect a subtle downward glance on approach before quietly addressing you by name as if you're a long-lost friend. Either is, of course, wholly acceptable, and being fellow Wodehouseans – with the added sweetness and light *that* brings – makes the welcome doubly warming.

And the icing on the cake? Of all the people who introduced themselves, not one loved my English accent – a relief I celebrated with my first Old-Fashioned of the weekend. At which point it struck me I hadn't bid for the 1908 edition of *By the Way* that I'd spotted in the silent auction. Already way past my budget, I was forced to drown my sorrows with a second cocktail, thereby securing the friendship of the bartender – a fascinating

gentleman who'd been having his ear bent there since 1983. As a bonus, I noticed his ID read 'Bill'. Did Bill (Scrivener) plan this?

Side-stepping the scheduled river cruise in favour of Cincinnati's two world-class art museums, I made it back to the hotel in time for the opening buffet reception, where I met my fellow transatlantic travellers (our Chairman plus Consort, Tim & Kate Andrew, and Elin Murphy). We mixed and mingled with the best of them, the only newbie in the party (me) managing to put faces to all those American (and Dutch and Japanese) Society names hitherto known to him only in legend, song, and *Plum Lines*. Great trenchermen (and women) all, they hoovered up the canapés with frightening efficiency, as if they were a swarm of locusts who hadn't enjoyed a square meal in some time. Which meant it was soon time to savour some more of Bill's unique wrist action (Bill the barman, that is).

## Saturday

Day 2 dawned amid considerable unease, for this was the day of the Riveting Talks – and I was on the stump at 10 am. Early breakfast was taken in an on-site 1950s diner, complete with Chuck Berry soundtrack and sassy waitress (Bill *did* plan this with me in mind, I decided). Getting outside eggs-over-easy with a side of corned beef hash – and eye-popping amounts of coffee – I was ready to deliver 'Wodehouse and the Stuffed Eelskin of Fate' to an expectant crowd of around 120 conventioners. It seemed to go down well, prompting a welcome further rash of book-signing.

The other riveting talks were, I am pleased to report, genuinely riveting, embracing: a comparative



*Just part of the crowd enjoying the Riveting Talks at the convention.*

*(Photo by Barbara Saari Combs)*

study of fashions in Wodehouse and Downton Abbey; the delights of Spinoza; the desirability of the Wedding Glide in Wodehouse; a rendition of ‘Sonny Boy’ worthy of ‘What Ho, Twing!’; Plum’s use of theatrical jargon; and Plum’s borrowings from the New York Society library. There was also the wonderful news of the founding of the P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee (see page 12); and a brilliantly circular tale from Peter Nieuwenhuizen, President of the P. G. Wodehouse Society in the Netherlands, involving two Dutch schoolboys, a monastery, the Empress of Blandings, and Gally’s ‘Story of the Prawns’ (don’t ask). I didn’t miss a word of them, nor of the original skit performed by the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS).

But the jewel in the crown, which received a long and deserved standing ovation, was Hilary and Tim’s illustrated account of the laying and dedication of the Wodehouse memorial stone that had taken place just over four weeks before in Westminster Abbey. Admirably diplomatic, the speakers managed to convey the life-sapping, glacial pace of their battles with bureaucracy without once taking the shine off that wonderful occasion or its (literally) monumental significance.

Following the talks, I exhumed the M&S dinner suit from the suitcase, inspected it for moths, and prepared myself for the convention’s climax – the ‘Banquet Gala with all the Fixings’. The standard of fancy dress was truly astonishing. Many took their cue from the art deco surroundings, but a glance to the left revealed Admiral ‘Fruity’ Biffen in full naval regalia, and to the right not one but two parrots (pictured), in honour of Plum’s hugely popular topical poetry of the 1900s. Humanity was staggered



*The British were there: Kate & Tim Andrew, Paul Kent, Hilary Bruce  
(Both photos this page by Barbara Saari Combs)*

amidst the browsing, the sluicing, the prizes, and the awards, including bestowal of the Norman Murphy Award on Neil Midkiff. This glorious evening was topped off by the utterly incandescent Maria Jette, who sang a selection of Wodehouse and non-Wodehouse lyrics, impeccably accompanied by Dan Chouinard on piano and vocal. One last chat with both Bills rounded off a memorable evening.

### *Sunday*

The programme of events promised ‘Tearful Farewells’ – and it got them. After a morning brunch and another excellent Wodehouse-inspired skit – this one performed by our hosts, the Flying Pigs – it was time to trouser the many business cards and scraps of paper with email addresses I’d collected and hare off in the direction of the airport bus. A sincere thank-you to one and all for a great, great time – this will definitely not be the newbie’s last American convention.

## *Jeeves as Role Model*

In October a vacancy posted on Jobs in Childcare attracted the attention of a number of newspapers in the UK and around the world and was reported with some relish. The advert, placed by a wealthy Russian family, was for an experienced, bilingual (French and English) butler possessing a knowledge of Russian. It indicated that the family were fans of Granada TV’s *Jeeves and Wooster*, and stipulated that the candidate should “pay attention to the main character of the series (Jeeves) to see what is expected from the butler”.

Notwithstanding the common error over Jeeves’s job title, the main responsibility was to manage the

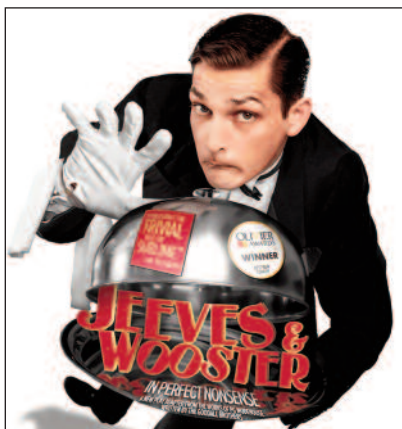
household, and the job description included several apposite, Jeevesian requirements. The candidate should, for example, be “practical, neat, proactive, productive”, displaying a familiarity with restaurants in London and the south of France, and having a good knowledge of (among other things) food and geography. The ability to be a diplomat was also a must, as the candidate was expected to be able to “solve any issue at school, at a shop, at a salon for the benefit of the family”. Almost as an afterthought, “able to get along with children” appeared near the end of the advert.

Experienced Bilingual Butler for France, Italy, UK & Russia- Ref:4602

# Wodehouse on the Boards

## *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense*

David and Robert Goodale's award-winning adaptation is receiving another revival, and this time it is going on a spring and summer tour of the country (England, that is), taking in venues that include not only mainstream provincial theatres



but also a number of village halls. It is a joint production by Chipping Norton Theatre and The Barn Theatre and, some might say, an ambitious project. Aficionados of *Perfect Nonsense* might be interested in catching one of the rural bookings, in order to see how the production team manages to overcome some of the difficulties inherent in staging the show in smaller spaces.

The tour opens on 5 February at The Theatre, Chipping Norton (until 15 February) and the production then visits 35 other locations (including 23 one-nighters), embracing Winchester to Lancaster, Ilfracombe to Lowestoft. A full list of tour dates and information on booking tickets may be found at [jeevesandwooster.co.uk](http://jeevesandwooster.co.uk).

## *Jeeves at Sea*

The Ilion Little Theatre in Ilion, New York, features in its 2019–20 season a production based on familiar PGW characters and plot lines, but written by Margaret Raether in 2015. The play has been staged several times over the last few years, but has yet to be seen in the UK. It runs from 17 to 26 April 2020. For further information, go to [www.ilionlittletheatre.org](http://www.ilionlittletheatre.org).

---

## *Cosy Moments*

### *Cats*, by Delia Pemberton (2006)

(from Gwen Bowen)

In this book featuring items from the British Museum's collections, a chapter headed 'Critics and Censors' used a quote from PGW's 'The Story of Webster' (1933) to demonstrate the essential snootiness of cats, as well as their ability to disconcert humans:

Webster was very large and very black and very composed. He conveyed the impression of being a cat of deep reserves. Descendant of a long line of ecclesiastical ancestors who had conducted their decorous courtships beneath the shadow of cathedrals and on the back walls of bishops' palaces, he had that exquisite poise which one sees in high dignitaries of the church. His eyes were clear and steady, and seemed to pierce to the very roots of the young man's soul, filling him with a sense of guilt.

## Wodehouse Quiz 33 *The Drones*

by David Buckle

1. In which street in Mayfair, W1, would you find the Drones Club?
2. Which Drones member is the main character in each of the following *Young Men in Spats* stories? 'Fate' / 'Trouble Down at Tudsleigh' / 'Goodbye to All Cats' / 'Noblesse Oblige'
3. Which Drones member once hit the game pie with six consecutive bread rolls from a seat at the far window and, in 'Stylish Stouts', gave Bingo Little information on the Drones Club's Fat Uncles Sweep?
4. The Drones Club Annual Golf Tournament is likely to be held on one of two courses. Name them both.
5. In which Jeeves novel does G. D'Arcy 'Stilton' Cheesewright draw Bertie Wooster in the Darts Club Sweepstake, only to later sell his ticket to Percy Gorringer?
6. In the Drones smoking concert in 'Tried in the Furnace', who forms the other half of the slapstick double act that features Pongo Twistleton?
7. In 'The Editor Regrets', members of the Drones Club try to sell articles to Bingo Little, who is then editor of which children's magazine?
8. What position on the Drones Club staff is held by Bates?
9. In 'The Amazing Hat Mystery', which two Drones Club members buy new top hats they believe to have been made by Bodmin, a renowned hat maker, in order to impress two girls they have fallen in love with?
10. In 'The Reverent Wooing of Archibald', with whom does Mr Mulliner's nephew Archibald fall in love, having seen her from a Drones Club window?

(Answers on page 23)

### *Diary of a Bookseller*, by Shaun Blythell (2017)

(from Mike Swaddling)

Blythell's entry under November 7th reads: "A significant number of customers recently have been asking for Terry Pratchett novels. His sad decline with Alzheimer's may have something to do with it. Pratchett, like John Buchan, P G Wodehouse, E F Benson and many others, is an author whose books I can never find enough of. They sell quickly and usually in large numbers. In one day last year we sold our entire Wodehouse Penguin section of over twenty books, all bought by three customers."



# Wodehouse and the Girl Friends

by Norman Murphy

*This was the last talk the Norman gave at a convention of The Wodehouse Society (US); it was written and presented in 2013. For my final issue as Editor of Wooster Sauce, I wanted to include something by Norman, and this is it. I hope members enjoy it as much as I do. –Elin Woodger Murphy*

You will have noticed that I say Wodehouse and the Girl Friends, not Wodehouse and the Girlfriends, because there are two categories. There were girls he was friends with – girl friends – and there were girls with whom he wanted to be more than friends – girlfriends.

Let's remember how boys like Wodehouse were brought up. We have all heard of Victorian values, which reached their apogee around the time Wodehouse was born. Sex was something you simply didn't talk about. Remember also that Wodehouse saw very little of his parents during his childhood. He never developed a normal relationship with his mother, he had no sisters, and his happiest times were at Dulwich, which reinforced the male-female separation.

Until he left Dulwich, Wodehouse's knowledge of girls was limited to the daughters of the aunts and uncles with whom he spent his school holidays. Our knowledge of his social life only becomes clearer in May 1902 when, while still working at the Bank, he began writing a commonplace book that he called 'Phrases, Notes Etc' (and I shall refer to as 'Phrases & Notes'). The two notebooks are full of one-line jokes, ideas for stories, and notes of conversations he had heard. These range from the remarks of an Italian prince at a smart dinner party to noting how a little Cockney girl talks to her sister.

We all know 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend', but how many of us have read the five Joan Romney stories, which came out in magazines from 1905 to 1909 and are narrated by a 17-year-old girl? That is quite an achievement by a young man with no sisters of his own.

Wodehouse never wrote those from his imagination, and it needs little effort to trace them back to Joan, Effie, and Teenie Bowes-Lyon, the three daughters of Mrs Bowes-Lyon of Ovington Square, Kensington, London. Mrs Bowes-Lyon was the sister of Mrs Corbett of Stableford Hall, Shropshire, the big house in the valley behind The Old House, Stableford, where the Wodehouses lived until 1902. That is where Wodehouse first met them around 1899, when Joan was 11, Effie 10, and Teenie 8 years old. And the first story of the 17-year-old Joan Romney came out in 1905 when Joan Bowes-Lyon was indeed 17.

Wodehouse entered the Bank in London in 1900 and saw the Bowes-Lyon girls constantly over the next few years, joining them for Sunday lunch or tea in the nursery and recording dozens of their frank and artless remarks. In one note, Effie, aged 13, solemnly advises him: "Marry a plain girl, because they are always the nicest. In her experience, pretty girls are never nice." Another note reads: "Effie says she would marry a rich man, however much of a beast he was, simply to get a horse." The youngest, Teenie, reveals her ambition when she says: "I've got £25 in the Bank. When I come of age, I'm going to buy a Hat."

Wodehouse also noted how the girls were growing up when he reported that the eldest girl, Joan, "has bought a pair of opera glasses so she can watch out for the Guards officer coming out from his house across the square every morning." I believe he came to regard them as the sisters he never had, and that is why his first book, *The Pothunters* (1902), is dedicated to them.

The Bowes-Lyonses were probably the girls Wodehouse knew best, but he also noted conversations with his cousins, the Thompson girls, and with the Deane sisters. The Thompson cousins were the sisters of Malcolm Thompson, who was at Winchester College and told Wodehouse of the tall, languid schoolboy Rupert D'Oyly Carte, on whom PGW based Rupert Psmith.

Wodehouse also learned how sisters keep younger brothers in their place when Malcolm Thompson came home from school wearing his first stick-up collar. Boys then wore the turned-down Eton collar until they were 16 or so and were then allowed to wear the adult stick-up collar. It was the male equivalent of girls putting their hair up at 17 – a cherished sign of becoming an adult. When Malcolm came home proudly wearing his 3- or 3½-inch high collar, elder sister Gertrude was ready for him. She said simply: "Hallo, little man – can you see over the top of those?"

Flaxie Frizzle, a friend of the Thompsons, gave Wodehouse some sound advice: "If you have an ideal girl in your mind's eye, never describe or mention her to any girl you may be friends with, as the latter will never be the same to you after it: – the ideal always comes between you and her."

Then there were the beautiful daughters of Wodehouse's

uncle, Major Hugh Deane. And here I can show you a picture – the Three Deane Sisters (above). Aren't they something?



*Portrait of the Three Deane Sisters, c.1908, by George Percy Jacomb-Hood*

Wodehouse got on well with the three girls – Violet, Dorothy, and Marjory – and noted their views on men and marriage. He records Violet saying: “I can’t think why men want to marry. Here is Bob, perfectly comfortable, no ties of any sort, able to go anywhere & then he wants to burden himself with ME, and with a house and servants – or no servants, which is worse.” But she thinks: “Men ought to marry before they get too used to living by themselves & and [sic] always wanting their armchair in a certain place & the electric light turned on at a certain time.”

Another lady, Miss Passiter, told Wodehouse bluntly that men in the Colonial Indian Civil Service “are so lonely that they come home with the unconcealed intention of marrying whoever will have them”.

For that period, these are surprisingly frank remarks for young ladies to make. They are blunt, straightforward comments that reflect a harsh reality. In those days, for young women of Wodehouse’s social class, marriage was as much a matter of financial security as it was of love or affection.

Wodehouse, then a freelance journalist scraping a living, was also a member of a highly respected family. His aunts in London therefore made sure he fulfilled his social obligations – which meant paying formal calls on them and their friends in top hat, frock coat, and spats. And, although he found the calls boring, they widened his social circle.

In the early 1900s, young ladies of the upper class did *not* go out to work, so a ‘young lady’ who did something other than look for a husband was unusual. Wodehouse was therefore impressed when he met Miss Sholto Douglas, a relation of the Marquess of Queensberry, no less, who was “giving up Society to become a singer”, and a Miss Congreve, who worked in a tea shop because she enjoyed seeing how other people lived.

And, of course, he also had his aunt Emmeline, the youngest of his many Deane aunts, a professional artist living in London, and whom he knew well enough to call by her family nickname ‘Nym’ (self-portrait, right). He liked her and recorded conversations with her and with her friend and companion, another artist, Emily Childers (1866–1922).



Wodehouse also noted a conversation with a lady I think he also respected: Jessie Pope (1868–1941). Who she? She was a well-known poet and writer, once nominated as our ‘foremost woman humorist’, who provided verses for *Punch* for many years.

Now I must mention Wodehouse’s youngest girl friend. November 1904 saw the publication of his book *William Tell Told Again*, dedicated: “To Bid-

dy O’Sullivan’. It took some time to find her, but I can tell you now that Biddy, born 1900, was the only daughter of Denis O’Sullivan, a successful Irish-American actor who came to London and sang in musical comedy.

Wodehouse got on well with Biddy. She was 3½ when their conversation turned to ice cream: “I like ice cream. It is as cold as the sky. I wonder what the sky feeds on. And the moon.” Wodehouse suggested they don’t feed on anything and noted her reply: ““Oh, some moons do’ says Biddy as one speaking with authority.”

Another comment of Biddy’s is a clear reflection of her having an older brother, Curtis, and that she had learned to look out for herself. Wodehouse reported that Biddy was eating a bun at a party and a kind old gentleman came up to her and said: “Well, Biddy, what are you doing?” She replied simply: “Go away. It’s mine.”

The many comments Wodehouse noted from young Biddy, the Bowes-Lyon girls, and his Aunt Nym indicate to me that he realised that, if he wanted to write about girls, he had to learn how they thought and spoke. And I think this stayed with him for much of his life.

When Maureen O’Sullivan, the Jane to Johnny Weissmuller’s Tarzan, first came to Hollywood, Ethel Wodehouse took her under her wing, and Maureen later wrote how much she enjoyed going for long, long walks with Wodehouse, talking about everything under the sun. She was delighted when he dedicated *Hot Water* to her.



And now for the Wodehouse girlfriends, the ladies for whom he felt emotions deeper and warmer than that of ordinary friendship.

I have to begin with that most difficult of subjects: Wodehouse’s sex life. Robert McCrum writes: “Wodehouse seems to have been recognized as a man for whom sex was simply not important. . . . There are two possible explanations for this, both speculative. The first lies in nature, the second in nurture. Even as a mature man, Wodehouse was emotionally backward.” McCrum reckoned this derived partly from his lonely childhood and partly from his natural character. McCrum then stressed that the climate of the 1890s discouraged this aspect of life, anyway. Personally, I think this last point is the important one.

I must add that I do *not* think Wodehouse’s low libido was caused by the attack of mumps when he was 19. My father and brother, both doctors, told me that mumps at that age can *sometimes* make you sterile. Only very, very rarely does it make you impotent.

The first lady to whom we know Wodehouse was attracted was Ella King-Hall, sister of Baldwin King-Hall of Emsworth House school; Wodehouse first met her in late 1903. She was an accomplished musician, some 16 years older, and he held her in high regard. They collaborated on a short-lived musical sketch, *The Bandit’s Daughter*, in 1907. It was probably just a matter of mutual respect, as Ella married Herbert Westbrook,



Ella King-Hall

the original of Ukridge, in 1912. However, Wodehouse did make her his agent in the UK until she retired in 1935.

The next lady we know Wodehouse was attracted to was the actress Alice Dovey (1884–1969), who played the second lead in *The Pink Lady*, a New York hit of 1911. We know Wodehouse met her again when *The Pink Lady* came to London in 1912, but his letters make it clear she did not want the acquaintanceship to ripen. Her daughter later confirmed that he asked her to marry him and was rejected, but Wodehouse clearly remembered Alice fondly. Years later, in *Summer Moonshine*, Sir Buckstone Abbott is shown to be delighted that he had married Alice Bulpitt of *The Pink Lady* company 30 years before.



Alice Dovey went on to marry the playwright John Hazzard, but – and this did surprise me – Wodehouse was still sending her copies of his books in 1955. She is still to be seen in his last address book, the one on his desk when he died. McCrum reckons Alice Dovey could be the girl on whom Wodehouse based Peggy Norton, the heroine of that unusual short story ‘In Alcalá’, and I think he is right because it was written the year Wodehouse met Alice.

Six months after Alice rejected Wodehouse, he wrote a letter, dated 22 November 1912, saying that Daisy Wood was back in London and he was going to



ask her to dinner. When I looked her up, I couldn’t believe my luck. If it is the right Daisy Wood, she was a well-known musical hall artiste, the youngest sister of Marie Lloyd, the Queen of the Music Halls.

Daisy was very different from her sister. She was petite and dainty, had charm and an excellent voice, and was a delightful dancer.

She toured America in 1909, and maybe that is where Wodehouse met her. We hear no more about her in

Wodehouse’s life – but I would point out that she fits *exactly* the description we are given of Dolly Henderson, the girl Gally Threepwood loved and lost.

Then there is the mysterious Mrs Lillian Armstrong, a widow with whose daughter, Bubbles, Wodehouse corresponded till the end of his life. Apparently he met her around 1909, but all I have been able to find out is that Bubbles said that her mother had also turned down Wodehouse’s proposal to marry her.

McCrum writes that, around 1912–1914, Wodehouse found that bachelor life was beginning to pall. He met Ethel – and that was it. Their living arrangements may seem strange to us today – separate bedrooms, sometimes even separate suites in hotels – but they were happy with it, and Wodehouse’s loving notes to Ethel over the years show how contented he was and how lucky he thought he was to have married her.

I conclude with a mystery – well, not a mystery so much as a surprising anecdote which, from memory, originated from Guy Bolton. McCrum mentions it, as does Lee Davis in his excellent *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*, although Davis stresses that it could be apocryphal. Well, I am proud to say that I can settle the matter.

During Wodehouse’s Princess Theatre period, the company tried out shows on tour before opening in New York. During one of those tours, Wodehouse allegedly had an affair with a chorus girl. When they returned to New York, so the story goes, Ethel Wodehouse was there to meet them; she took one look at Wodehouse and said: “Plum, you’ve been having an affair.”

And Wodehouse, according to Bolton, made the worst possible reply: “Who told you?”

Some 59 years later, in 1976, I spent an evening with Guy and Virginia Bolton at their London flat, and within two minutes of Guy opening the door, it was clear that he could charm the birds off the trees. Lee Davis summed him up perfectly: “To the end of his life, Guy would be a peerless raconteur, holding forth with glee and glibness and only passing references to reality. What mattered least was accuracy, what mattered most was a good story.”

At a rare break in Guy’s anecdotes, I asked him about the story of Wodehouse’s affair with a girl on tour. He told me the anecdote again, stressing Wodehouse’s naiveté in saying, “Who told you?”

I still didn’t really believe him, so I said something like: “Extraordinary! That’s so unlike Wodehouse.”

Upon which Virginia Bolton interrupted. “Oh, yes,” she said. “It happened all right. Ethel often told me it was the only time Plum had been unfaithful to her.”

So, yes, I believe it *did* happen – and I admire McCrum for finding the name of the girl involved: Fleur Marsden. But, do you know what? If that affair was more than a few comforting hugs and the odd kiss, I would be very, very surprised.

So this was Peggy. She was little, and trim of figure. That was how he had always imagined her. Her dress was simpler than the other’s. The face beneath the picture-hat was small and well-shaped, the nose delicately tip-tilted, the chin determined, the mouth a little wide and suggesting good-humour.

(From ‘In Alcalá’, 1909)

# Cradle of Writers and Our School Stories

Reviewed by Nick Townend

As mentioned in September's *Wooster Sauce*, Dulwich College has published two titles of interest to Wodehouseans. Both volumes are handsomely produced, profusely illustrated, and attractively bound in blue and black, the College's colours.

Patrick Humphries, an Old Alleynian (OA), is the author of *Cradle of Writers: Mason, Wodehouse, Chandler, Wheatley, Forester*. This tips the scales at 223 pages; the chapter on Wodehouse occupies 52 pages. Wheatley and Forester each get 42 pages, Chandler 32, and Mason a perfunctory 12.

The focus on the five authors is interesting, and allows one to compare and contrast their experiences at Dulwich and routes to their ultimate profession. Only Wodehouse knew as a schoolboy that he wanted to become a writer. One may therefore doubt whether describing Dulwich as a "cradle of writers" is justifiable. To his credit, Humphries addresses this in his introduction: "Neither Forester nor Wheatley enjoyed their time at the College [September 1915 to July 1916 aged 16, and January to December 1909 aged 12, respectively], so it would be inappropriate to suggest that they saw Dulwich College as having played a formative role in their later careers."

As early as page 12, Humphries establishes his Wodehousean bona fides, mentioning that one of the trades to which one of the original "12 poor scholars" of the college was apprenticed in 1619 was "Buckram Stiffener, the latter sounding strangely like one of P. G. Wodehouse's more dubious American characters". The author is not afraid to tell a story against himself, quoting Wodehouse's 1969 comment on *The Alleynian* (the school magazine) being "ruined . . . with all this art photography and bad poetry" before revealing that he himself had contributed an eight-line poem, 'After Yevtushenko', to the Winter 1969 issue.

Humphries' chapter on Wodehouse is a competent and enjoyable general overview, but, as is to be expected in a volume like this, it is heavily reliant on some of the major authorities, with very little that is new, and it contains several minor errors. Your reviewer knows too little about the other authors to make an informed judgement on their chapters, but he certainly enjoyed them.

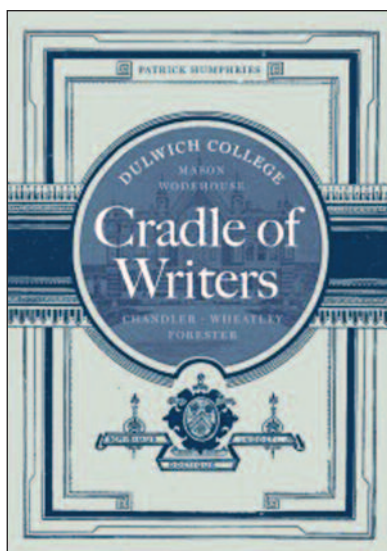
In terms of sources, the bibliography lists only the biographies by McCrum and Connolly (albeit

misspelt as Connelly), Jaggard's *Wooster's World*, Murphy's *In Search of Blandings*, Osborne's *Wodehouse at Work to the End*, and Piggott's *Wodehouse's School Days*, with the Society's website being mentioned in the acknowledgements.

What is new (at least to your reviewer) and very interesting is the information that Ben Schott, in researching *Jeeves and the King of Clubs*, came upon a book – *Contemporary English* (1927) – in which its author, W. E. Collinson, who was at Dulwich from 1901 to 1907, asserts that the language in Wodehouse's books "was almost a photographic representation of that in vogue" at Dulwich. Collinson cites twenty direct Dulwich references in nine Wodehouse books published between 1902 and 1927.

The minor errors include the following. Humphries has Wodehouse entering Dulwich "following in the footsteps of his brothers Peveril and Armine"; Peveril did not attend Dulwich. He misspells Wrykyn as Wrykin, but gets it right later. He states that Psmith "made his debut in a short story ('Jackson Junior', 1907)"; in fact, 'Jackson Junior' was a six-part serial and did not feature Psmith, who first appeared in 'The Lost Lambs', serialised in *The Captain* in 1908. He asserts that Wodehouse's school stories were "inspired by Charles Hamilton's yarns in the *Gem* and *Magnet*", despite Humphries himself telling us that the magazines "launched in 1907 and 1908" and that Wodehouse's first school novel, *The Pothunters*, was published in 1902. Wodehouse's imagining of a Gilkes dampener ("So you made a century against Tonbridge, did you, my boy? Well, always remember that you will soon be dead, and in any case, the bowling was probably rotten!", *Performing Flea*, p103), is misquoted and presented as an actual statement from Gilkes to Wodehouse ("Fine innings, Wodehouse, but remember we all die in the end!").

Humphries interprets *McIlvaine* as meaning that the October 1894 *Alleynian* item 'Junior Cup Matches' (D72.1) was by the 12-year-old Wodehouse, whereas *McIlvaine* includes it simply because it mentions Wodehouse. He incorrectly states that Wodehouse's 'Cricket Prospects' and 'Mafeking Day' in *The Alleynian* were poems (they were prose), and asserts that Wodehouse contributed a short story to *The Alleynian* in 1953 ('To the Editor, Sir...' was, in fact, an essay). He claims that Emsworth House School was in Shropshire (it was in Hampshire) and that "prior to the Great War, Wodehouse was already occupying a pre-eminent place in American



theatrical history”, despite making it clear that his first musical in the US opened in 1916. He routinely describes Jeeves as Bertie’s butler, and he adds a spurious ‘Young’ to the title of Bertie’s famous piece for *Milady’s Boudoir*, calling it ‘What The Well-Dressed Young Man Is Wearing’. Finally, he states that A. A. Milne “would become one of Wodehouse’s most vituperative critics at the end of the next war”; Milne’s letter about the Berlin broadcasts appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on 3 July 1941.

There are several typos dotted through the book, and three very odd square-bracketed insertions, which read as if they are editorial comments on a proof version, most notably: “if you wanted to know anything about films, you asked my colleague David Taylor, ‘Twas ever thus . . . ? [Not sure whether this is a quotation or a nickname].” There are also numerous sentences that are either missing a word or are subordinate clauses masquerading as sentences, such as: “While mastery of the banjolele is a real concern; and the angle of an Alpine Hat is a very serious matter.” This is one of twelve such sentences beginning “While”.

The second book, *Our School Stories: Tales Inspired by Dulwich College and PG Wodehouse*, contains eleven short stories, of which nine are by OAs, one is by a current Alleynian, and one is by the current Master of the College. All are worth reading.

The first story, by Society patron Simon Brett, is the one most clearly inspired by Wodehouse: it includes characters called Glossop, Florence, Travers, Craye, Bodkin, Wedge, Clarence, Gertrude, and Potter-Pirbright; one of the schoolboys refers (like Psmith) to a master as “Comrade Glossop”; another exclaims (like Jellicoe) “You are a chap!”; the plot is ingenious and complex, featuring the



Both titles can be ordered through the Dulwich College shop ([shop.dulwich.org.uk/](http://shop.dulwich.org.uk/)), in the 400th Gift Range, priced £20 each.

aristocracy, bookmakers, and young love; and Wodehouse and his notebooks also feature.

The second story, Justin Carroll’s ‘Hemlock Jones and the Missing Mascot’, also features Wodehouse as a character, who mentions his Aunt Agatha and is much impressed by the Watson character’s use of the phrase “eggs and b.”

Mike’s visit to Dulwich in *Psmith in the City* is echoed in the story by Joseph Spence (the current Master), in which an OA revisits Dulwich: “Where I did stop for a little longer was at the Clump, a sparse collection of trees at the heart of the school’s playing fields. I sat down on a memorial bench and watched the first sallies of an exhibition match. This brought back memories of the last of my few games for the first XV.” One of the memories was of a Gilkes-like dampener: “The Master . . . had enquired the following morning why my arm was in a sling and, hearing of my exploits on the field, had uttered the far from comforting words that those who lived by the sword, died by the sword.”

Several stories have no obvious Wodehouse echoes, but features of the College appear in several of them, e.g. the Centre Block, the Great Hall, the Lower Hall, the South Block, the gravel, the North Block, and Blue House (for Blew House).

In one story, the schoolboy narrator comments: “I had no desire to attend university and had already obtained a junior position at the Bank of England. . . . the City excited me”. Wodehouse would no doubt have strongly disagreed, but he would surely have been delighted (as should we all) that his beloved alma mater is still paying him such respect through books such as these.

## Stanton Court: A ‘Wodehouse Haunt’?

As numerous members wrote to point out, the September 25th issue of *Country Life* included an item on the sale of a wisteria-clad house in Wiltshire called Stanton Court. Here, it was asserted, “author P. G. Wodehouse, chronicler of the exploits of Bertie Wooster, spent summers”. As Stanton Court does not make any appearances in the Wodehouse biographies, nor in Norman Murphy’s meticulous researches into where Wodehouse was at any given time in his life, the claim that it was once his haunt initially seemed doubtful, but there’s a kernel of truth in it. It seems the basis of the claim is a history of the house entitled *The Chronicles of a Courtier* (2006), by Fiona Gilroy Baskett (Stanton Court’s owner for 23 years until putting it on

the market). On page 47 it is revealed that Wodehouse “was known to have occupied the study which forms the west-facing ground floor room of the West Wing, and he was a great friend of the family. Indeed his step-daughter Leonora Cazalet . . . was godmother to Helen Cannan.” Helen – who is now in her late 90s – was the daughter of Captain Astley Cannan, who bought Stanton Court in 1927 and sold it in 1931. Wodehouse’s whereabouts during these years are well known through his letters, and there is no known mention of Stanton Court. Nevertheless, it is clear that he *was* a family friend, and it is entirely possible that he visited the house at some time. When that was is still to be discovered, though, so stay tuned!

# The World of Sport as Recorded by PGW

A book review by Murray Hedgcock

To term P. G. Wodehouse “above average at games” seems rather restrained praise, given his track record at Dulwich College. He was the star fast bowler of the First Eleven; a prominent member of the rugby First Fifteen; and, until poor eyesight ended his involvement, a promising boxer. But the phrase proved irresistible for Richard T. Kelly as a title for his collection *Above Average at Games: The Very Best of P. G. Wodehouse on Sport*.

Kelly’s introduction quotes Frances Donaldson in her 1982 biography of Wodehouse: “No boy who is good at games ever has a bad time at school. . . . It was important to Plum’s later career that he was above average at games.” This certainly gave him a career qualification, as he was to write about several games over many years, revealing in every one an understanding of the techniques, tactics, and spirit required. Kelly demonstrates this with a series of PGW’s short stories, chapters, or extracts dating from 1900 to 1973 – three-quarters of a century of sublime reflections on the appeal of games. He introduces many with a summation of Wodehouse’s settings, influences, and activities at the time of writing, providing helpful background to the topic and its treatment.

We pause to study the foreword by Henry Blofeld. But, oh dear, Henry goes off-beam with a reference to “Psmith bowling his off-breaks”. A check with *Mike and Psmith* will reveal Psmith recalling, “I found I was degenerating, little by little, into a slow left-hand bowler with a swerve.” Left-hand (or arm) bowlers do not deliver off-breaks (they may bowl the chinaman, which similarly turns back from the off – but that is a different creature altogether).

The selection begins appropriately with Plum’s first paid published writing: ‘Some Aspects of Games-Captaincy’, an article that won him half a guinea in a *Public School Magazine* competition in February 1900. The style is unmistakable – but, to be frank, it does not read terribly well a century later.

More pleasing is a study, ‘Now, Talking About Cricket’, which appeared in the same publication a year later. Kelly explains that Wodehouse, now 20, had joined the world of upper-crust adult cricket with Sir James Barrie’s motley collection playing under the title *The Allahakbarries*. But we must correct the compiler in his assertion that Barrie’s oddballs played at Lord’s. Never – we MCC members draw the line in demanding some standard of play, even if socially Barrie’s team would qualify comfortably. Some of the *Allahakbarries*, including PGW, did appear in Lord’s fixtures involving teams of Authors, Actors, and Publishers, but their natural habitat was village and country-house grounds.

The bulk of the book’s content will be familiar to the serious Wodehouse collector, but Kelly adds a little-known gem under the headline ‘New York Baseball – Reportage for Vanity Fair’. This is explained: “Wodehouse’s interest in baseball begins (aged twenty-two) with his April 1904 visit to New York – an excursion for which he had long and devoutly wished. The intention [of the article] is to explain baseball as to a sceptical UK readership while at the same time, of course, having some sport with it.” Hence, the opening line sets the scene – and tone: “Next to divorce, baseball is New York’s favourite pastime.” And Wodehouse in time was to declare it his, as indicated by a 1975 interview in which he admitted without shame: “My game now is baseball. Oh, I’m crazy about it. I’d much rather watch a baseball game than a cricket match.” No wonder he remained in America and did not again show his face in cricket-loving England.

The selection continues with more rugby – reflecting the age, this is termed ‘football’ – plus boxing; athletics; “Prospects for Wambledon” [sic]; and, of course, golf. Many Wodehouse enthusiasts regard the *Oldest Member’s* tales as among PGW’s finest, and a comprehensive selection in this volume reminds us why.

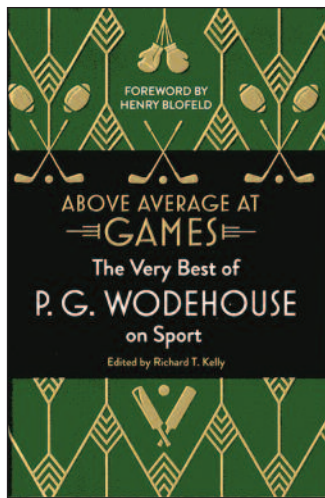
The cricket segment includes one of my favourites – even if it might be termed anti-cricket. “How’s That, Umpire?” tells of Conky Biddle, required to feign interest in the Summer Game to stay in favour with his cricket-enthused uncle, only to discover that cricket can lead to romance.

There have been two books assembling Wodehouse on sport: *The Golf Omnibus*, published first in 1973 and listing many tales of the links; and *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, surely too well known to need any explanation. [Although I’ll remind readers that it is edited by one Murray Hedgcock and easily obtainable for purchase. – Ed.] The collector may possess both – but that is no reason to ignore *Above Average at Games*, which should be added to the library without demur (and must make a spot-on Christmas present).

This is a truly delightful book, charmingly produced, with a richly eye-catching cover and pleasingly old-fashioned endpapers. It is a reminder that it is much more than the words within that hold the fascination of the printed volume, always a pleasure to handle and study. In the age of audiobooks and the Kindle reader, the printed book truly holds its appeal.

As to the PGW revealed here: *Above Average at Games*? Perhaps – but uniquely Alpha-Plus at writing about them.

*Above Average at Games: The Very Best of P. G. Wodehouse on Sport*, edited by Richard T. Kelly, retails for £25.



## Poet's Corner

### The Thin Blue Line

*“The meanness of the Government in refusing to raise the pay of the police of the district is resulting in a decline in the physique of many members of the force, who are becoming visibly thinner and thinner daily. One of them is already scraggy.”* – Times of Burmah)

Whereas in meditative wise  
Through London's streets I wander,  
And o'er each sight that greets my eyes  
Dispassionately ponder,  
My petty worries cease to vex,  
I conquer melancholy,  
On seeing good Policeman X,  
So rubicund and jolly.

He 'straddles right across the way'  
(A phrase not mine, but Bunyan's)  
His whole demeanour seems to say,  
“I feed on steak and onions;  
On steak and cheese and bottled beer,  
That's why my flesh is firm.” Ah!  
They do not get that sort of cheer,  
Those constables of Burmah.

Their clothes don't fit them like a skin,  
But hang all loose and baggy;  
They really are extremely thin,  
And one of them is scraggy;  
Why is it that they fade away,  
And fail to fill their raiment?  
The parsimonious powers, they say,  
Won't give them proper payment.

Eye them, ye powers, and tremble. Zounds!  
They're naught but skin and bones.  
Oh, why should you be gaining pounds  
While they are losing stones?  
The sense of such a scheme is small:  
Who fancies it correct errs.  
Repent in time, and make them all  
Inspectors – not thin spectres.

From *Daily Chronicle*, 8 April, 1904

### Answers to Wodehouse Quiz (Page 16)

1. Dover Street; it is thought to be no. 16 Dover Street.
2. Freddie Widgeon
3. Claude Cattermole 'Catsmeat' Potter-Pirbright
4. Marvis Bay or Bramley-on-Sea
5. *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*
6. Cyril 'Barmy' Fotheringay-Phipps
7. *Wee Tots*
8. Hall porter
9. Percy Wimbolt and Nelson Cork
10. Aurelia Cammarleigh

## The Wooster Source

by Graeme Davidson

*This is the real Tabasco,  
It's the word from Bertie Wooster,  
A man who has had more fiancées than platinum  
discs have been won by Beyoncé  
And who proposes at the drop of a hat,  
perhaps an Alpine one at that.  
His creator is now commemorated in the country's  
most celebrated abbey,  
Which rightly also nods to Scotland's own great Rabbie.*



I made the acquaintance of Pauline Stoker. . . . She got right in amongst me. Her beauty maddened me like wine.

.....

“Well, that's how I felt this afternoon on being introduced to Miss Pauline Stoker. Press the trousers with special care tonight, Jeeves. I am dining with her.”

In New York, I have always found, one gets off the mark quickly in matters of the heart. This, I believe, is due to something in the air. Two weeks later I proposed to Pauline.

*Thank You, Jeeves* (1934)

I should imagine that if there's one thing that makes a fellow forget that he's in holy orders, it's a crisp punch on the beezee. A moment before, Stinker had been all concern about the disapproval of his superiors in the cloth, but now, as I read his mind, he was saying to himself “To hell with my superiors in the cloth,” or however a curate would put it, “Let them eat cake.”

*Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves* (1963)

The effect the apparition had on me was to make me start violently, and we all know what happens when you start violently while holding a full cup of tea. The contents of mine flew through the air and came to rest on the trousers of Aubrey Upjohn, MA, moistening them to no little extent. Indeed, it would scarcely be distorting the facts to say that he was now not so much wearing trousers as wearing tea.

.....

“Frightfully sorry,” I said.

“Too late to be sorry now. A new pair of trousers ruined. It is doubtful if anything can remove the stain of tea from white flannel. Still, one must hope for the best.”

Whether I was right or wrong at this point in patting him on the shoulder and saying “That's the spirit!” I find it difficult to decide. Wrong, probably, for it did not seem to soothe. He gave me another of those looks and strode off, smelling strongly of tea.

*Jeeves in the Offing* (1960)

He nestled into the chair again, and placed his feet on the desk. It was becoming increasingly apparent to him that the head of the firm of Duff and Trotter had one of those jobs which may be grouped for purposes of convenience under the general heading of velvet. Nearly a quarter of an hour had passed since the big chief had left him, and absolutely nothing had come up in the way of delicate problems calling for instant decision. He had always had a suspicion that these tycoons earned their money easily.

(From *Quick Service*, 1940)

# The Bibliographic Corner *by Nick Townend*

## “With a New Preface by the Author”: Part Seven

Continuing our review of the series of new prefaces contributed by Wodehouse to 14 reprints of his books issued by Herbert Jenkins/Barrie & Jenkins between 1969 and 1975, the final three new prefaces were issued in 1975. As it is unclear in what order they were issued, I am dealing with them in the order of the publication date of the UK first edition.

On that basis, the first 1975 title is *A Damsel in Distress* (McIlvaine, A24b12). The dust wrapper, with a blue panel on the front cover, follows what had been established by the seventh title in the series, *The Little Nugget*, as the standard format through to the end of the series (see Part Four of this series of articles for details). McIlvaine notes the presence of the new preface but describes neither the dust wrapper nor the book, which had black boards with gold lettering on the spine. When Hutchinson reprinted the title in 1982 (A24b13), the preface was included. McIlvaine provides no details other than date and price for this edition. The dust wrapper had a purple background, with black and white lettering and an illustration on the front cover, and the book had black boards with gold lettering on the spine.

Wodehouse’s preface begins by stating “*A Damsel in Distress* has rather an interesting case history. Almost everything happened to it that can happen to a book, short of being done on ice.” It was serialised in the *Saturday Evening Post* before being published in book form. “Ian Hay then made a play of it, and instead of submitting it to the managers he and I formed a company and put it on ourselves, with two partners. . . . The play was a great success, as Ian’s things nearly always were, and we followed it up, having now become wealthy, with a series of others including Ian’s smash hit, *The Middle Watch*.” For full details of Wodehouse’s financing of plays (mentioned only by Barry Phelps among Wodehouse’s biographers), see pages 54–55 of *Author! Author!*; one of the other partners was A. A. Milne. Wodehouse’s preface goes on

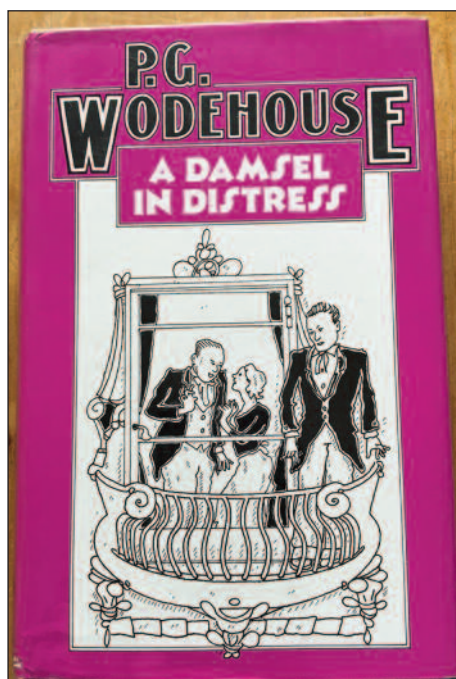
to say that the title was also made into a film. “The result was a Mess which for some reason is still shown occasionally on American Television and causes sets to be switched off from the rockbound coasts of Maine to the Everglades of Florida.” In the lead role, Fred Astaire had “nobody to dance with, so that he had nine solo numbers. To a jaundiced eye it seemed that there was not a moment when he was not on the scene by himself, singing and dancing his heart out, with nobody to lend him a helping hand.”

The second 1975 title is *Thank You, Jeeves* (A51a6). The “new preface” in this instance turns out to be a lightly edited extract from ‘My Methods, Such As They Are’ (*Over Seventy*, pp 186–87) dealing with dictating to a stenographer and Wodehouse’s experiences in using “one of those machines where you talk into a mouthpiece and have your observations recorded on wax”. In *Over Seventy* Wodehouse states that he used the machine for *Right Ho, Jeeves*, whereas in the preface he transfers the

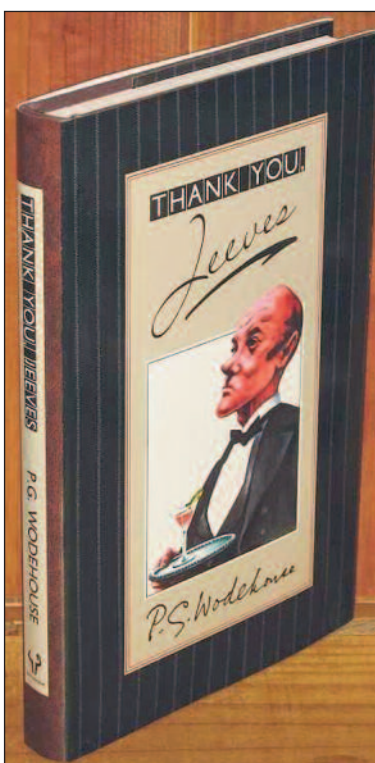
anecdote to *Thank You, Jeeves*.

McIlvaine notes the new preface but does not describe either the dust wrapper, which followed the standard pattern, with a green panel, or the book, which had black boards and gold lettering on the spine. The preface probably reappeared in the Coronet paperback reprint of 1977 (A51a10), as it certainly reappeared in the 1982 Coronet reprint (not in McIlvaine) of the 1977 edition, and it also appeared in Hutchinson’s New Autograph Edition of 1986 (A51a7/Kd4) and in the Vintage paperback reprint of 1990 (McIlvaine Addendum AAau51).

The final 1975 title to consider is *The Luck of the Bodkins* (A54a9). McIlvaine notes the new preface, but does not describe either the dust wrapper, which followed the standard pattern, with a



The 1982 Hutchinson edition of *A Damsel in Distress*



*Thank You, Jeeves*, 1986 Hutchinson New Autograph Edition



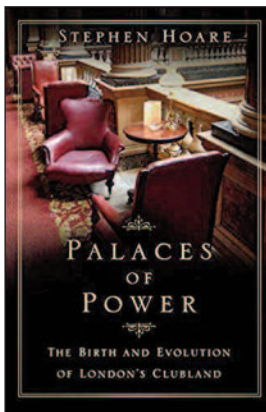
purple panel, or the book, which had black boards with gilt lettering on the spine. As far as I am aware, the preface has not subsequently appeared in any further editions, a distinction which it shares with only *The Little Nugget* in the series of 14 prefaces.

Wodehouse's preface mentions that the serial was initially "refused by the *Saturday Evening Post*. I sold twenty-one serials to the *Post* over the years without a rejection, but at this one George Horace Lorimer jibbed. . . . it was YARDS AND YARDS TOO LONG. . . . It is the only time I have been tempted to over-write. My great problem today is to make a thing long enough."

Wodehouse then ends the preface, and indeed the whole series of prefaces, with an elegiac paragraph.

## The Word Around the Clubs

### Clubland



There have been many books written about the clubs of Mayfair and St James's and the latest one was published in August by The History Press. *Palaces of Power: The Birth and Evolution of London's Clubland*, by Stephen Hoare, charts the evolution of these clubs, exploring the social and cultural history of the capital's most prestigious

district. A chapter entitled 'The Rise of the Dandy' includes the suggestion that the dandies' "foppish horseplay offers a foretaste of P.G. Wodehouse's fictitious Drone's [sic] Club. Bertie Wooster's feckless associates . . . might easily pass for trainee Regency rakes." In a later chapter ('The Jazz Age: St James's in the 1920s and '30s'), the author notes Wodehouse's nod to Buck's but promotes two other contenders for the accolade of being the nearest model for the Drones, namely the Bachelors' and the Bath Club, both based in Piccadilly. The book looks eminently readable, with each chapter divided into a series of shorter sections, thus making it easy to dip in and find stand-alone anecdotes – some of which might bring to mind a certain Galahad Threepwood.

### PGW and Condé Nast

Published on the 1st October was Susan Ronald's biography *Condé Nast: The Man and His Empire* (St Martin's Press). Nast was the American publisher and business magnate whose publications included *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. Of the former, PGW wrote: "I used to write about half of it each month under a

"And now George Horace Lorimer is dead, and the *Saturday Evening Post* [*sic - not italicised*] is dead, and all the magazines of my youth are dead, and I am 93 and I wouldn't place a substantial bet on my lasting much longer. Well, you can't say I've idled my time away. I may have loafed up to the age of five, which was when I began writing [see *Over Seventy*, ch2, p28], but after that I have stuck to the typewriter pretty closely, and the one thing I have learned is not to over-write."

number of names – P. G. Wodehouse, Pelham Grenville, J. Plum, C. P. West, P. Brooke-Haven and so on. . . . I also became the VF dramatic critic." It is likely that Wodehouse receives at least a mention in this new biography. If any of our members reads it, perhaps they can let us know if and how PGW appears in it.

### Like Wodehouse – But Then Again . . .

Thanks to ROBERT BRUCE for sending an item from the *Dictionary of National Biography*. This snippet from the life of Douglas Adams shows how two brilliant writers can be very similar in one way, very different in another.

Like P. G. Wodehouse, whom he hugely admired, Adams had an acute ear for rhythm and was a perfectionist whose idea of editing was to prune down the text until it delivered the goods with maximum economy. Though he did not doubt his talent, he was prone to bouts of anguished listlessness and depression, and his lifelong inability to meet deadlines was a torment for him and his colleagues.

Wodehouse, on the other hand, was a very contented man who met deadlines with aplomb – or should we say aplum?

### Early PGW

Members may be interested in viewing a short newsreel clip of P. G. Wodehouse from the early 1920s; Ethel also appears. (Spoiler alert: the narrator could have used a lesson on how to pronounce 'Wodehouse' correctly!) To view the clip, go to [bit.ly/2pBGyAC](http://bit.ly/2pBGyAC); PGW appears around the 5:19 mark.



"I'd be glad," said Dolly, with womanly dignity, "if you wouldn't call my husband chunks of boloney."  
 "What else is there to call him?" asked Chimp. "Slice him where you like, that's what he still is."

(From *Money in the Bank*, 1942)

## Recent Press Comment

### **Zoe Ball Breakfast Show, Radio 2, August 16**

(from Lesley Tapson)

Newest Society patron Ben Elton sang the praises of one P. G. Wodehouse.

### **Daily Telegraph, August 20**

(from Carolyn de la Plain and David Salter)

Anne-Elisabeth Moutet, in explaining why “The humourless French will never ‘get’ your prime minister”, noted that she is frequently asked about Boris Johnson’s dress sense: “You need more than a sound bite to develop the Lord Emsworth theory of dressing down, so I explain that the English find dapper men more suspicious than someone whose shirt tails seem to escape from their trousers of their own volition. It goes down like *un ballon en plomb*.”

### **The News, Portsmouth, August 23**

(from Stephen Payne)

Published an old postcard depicting a street in Emsworth believed to be Record Road. In the photo, a woman in a long black dress is standing by a gate with two dogs. The writer speculated: “I wonder if this lady is standing outside Threepwood, where Wodehouse resided sometime before the onset of the First World War? Perhaps she is his housekeeper, or even his wife?” [NB. *Wodehouse lived in Threepwood for ten years, from 1904 to 1914. He married Ethel in September 1914.*]

### **The Week, August 23** (from Roger Bowen)

In ‘The List’, the historian Diarmaid MacCulloch named his six favourite books, including *The Jeeves Omnibus*: “Wodehouse’s wit is unrivalled. His novels are hilarious, but the collected short stories are a tray of delicious canapés.”

### **The Times, August 23** (from Christopher Bellew)

Writing about the comic character Asterix, Oliver Kamm reflected that Asterix and Obelisk “have their own place in Anglophone literature. They are in the great comic tradition of Jeeves and Wooster, an inseparable pair of characters comprising an outstanding intellect and a ‘mentally negligible’ companion (although Bertie is the young master, rather than a friend, and is, despite his limitations, a narrator of genius).”

### **The Oldie, September 2019** (from Christopher Bellew)

Writing about ‘Snooty toffs versus heroic servants’, Simon Williams began by noting: “The storylines of country-house intrigue are terrific: P G Wodehouse with bells on.”

### **Spectator USA, September 2** (from Jo Jacobius)

Stephen Schmalhofer advised students aiming for a career in investing or technology to read more fiction, noting that novels offer character studies with invaluable examples for the workplace. A case in point: “P.G. Wodehouse created the perfect employee in the infinitely resourceful Jeeves. His employer Bertie Wooster offers a recommendation surpassing anything on LinkedIn: ‘I’ve always said, and I always shall say, that for sheer brains, Jeeves, you stand alone. All the other great thinkers of the age are simply in the crowd, watching you go by.’ Jeeves had more than raw brainpower; he could silently anticipate Bertie’s essential need and offer a creative corrective for any misunderstanding and escape every predicament.”

### **Lincoln County News, September 6** (from Tony Ring)

An article on the renovation of a bed-and-breakfast in Newcastle, Maine, called The Topsy Butler noted that there are four rooms, “each named for a famous butler or literary icon. On the first floor is the Wodehouse Room, named after the English author P.G. Wodehouse, who created the fictional character Reginald Jeeves.”

### **Hindustan Times, September 7**

Seema Goswami, in writing about authors who make her laugh out loud, reflected on her “old childhood favourite, P.G. Wodehouse. My mind flashed back to all the many summer holidays spent devouring the entire Castle of Blandings oeuvre, giggling over the antics of the Earl of Emsworth and his prize-winning pig, . . . and the whole host of characters who populate his whimsical plots.”

### **The Herald, September 14**

In an interview about books, playwright David Greig revealed: “PG Wodehouse makes me laugh until I cry. . . . His writing is, to me, like smoking very good grass. It just makes the world funny.”

### **The Times, September 19** (from Andrew Bishop)

In *The Times Diary*, Patrick Kidd noted that *Test Match Special* commentator Dan Norcross, who had attended Dulwich College, had something else in common with PGW: “Like the author, Norcross left a career in the City because it was getting in the way of watching cricket.”

### **The Telegraph, India, September 22** (from Jo Jacobius)

Amit Roy interviewed Jeffrey Archer, who spoke mostly about cricket but added: “I am always teased that the other author the Indians love is PG Wodehouse. And you wouldn’t think we could be more different.”

### **The Times, September 24** (from Hilary Bruce)

In *The Times Diary*, Patrick Kidd wrote of Edward Cazalet’s speech following the memorial dedication at Westminster Abbey. Edward had spoken of Plum’s work ethic and related that PG had said to him: “When I die, if they say I’m a rotten writer, just tell them I really did try.” Edward also commented on how happy PG was living in New York – “like being in heaven without going to all the bother and expense of dying.”

### **Evening Standard, September 26** (from Jo Jacobius)

In an article entitled ‘Britons don’t have to be stubbornly monolingual’, Arjun Neil Alim wrote: “Britons’ discomfort with languages is well recognised. PG Wodehouse notoriously wrote of: ‘The shifty hangedog look which announces that an Englishman is about to speak French.’”

### **New York Times, September 27**

In the ‘By the Book’ section, the actor John Lithgow declared: “I would say anything by P.G. Wodehouse is a secret pleasure. He’s the only writer who reliably makes me laugh out loud. But there’s no guilt involved: he was a fabulous writer.”

### **Daily Telegraph, September 28** (from Carolyn de la Plain)

Two separate items discussed the magazine publisher Nicholas Coleridge, who has just written a new memoir, *The Glossy Years*. In ‘The Godfather of Glossies’ (*Telegraph Magazine*), Celia Walden described Coleridge’s “jovial Bertie Wooster inflections”. And, continuing the Bertie comparison, Roger Lewis’s review of the memoir pointed out: “If he won a place

at Cambridge, it was because, like Bertie Wooster, Coleridge had a knack of doing well at scripture, a subject requiring little by way of academic rigour, and where one could mug up on parables."

**The Times, September 28** (from Andrew Bishop)

A letter to the editor regarding MPs' vitriolic exchanges in the House of Commons deplored "the lack of wit and elegance in the combat" and suggested they should look at clever words uttered by their parliamentary predecessors. The writer, Joe Haines, concluded: "In the meantime, if they wish to insult Boris Johnson, may I propose a line from PG Wodehouse: 'Why don't you get a haircut? You look like a chrysanthemum.' At least it might raise a laugh."

**National Review, September 28**

Jay Nordlinger, writing about the decline of comedy on American college campuses due to the 'woke culture' cited a particularly appropriate passage from PGW's *Over Seventy*: "Humorists have been scared out of the business by the touchiness now prevailing in every section of the community. Wherever you look, on every shoulder there is a chip, in every eye a cold glitter warning you, if you know what's good for you, not to start anything."

**Town & Country, Autumn 2019** (from Roger Baxter)

An article noted that dahlias "were considered garish and, as they have no scent, all splash and no substance. Indeed, PG Wodehouse christened one of his most divine but ridiculous recurring characters – she of the 'reddish-purple expression' – Aunt Dahlia."

**The Times, October 1** (from Keith Alsop)

In the third leader, the writer commented on the history of cookbooks and cookery and remarked that "Such genius was later immortalised in Anatole, the great chef in the Jeeves stories of P G Wodehouse, who could soothe the most jaded of palates with his *Sylphides à la crème écrevisses*."

**The Winchester Sun, Nevada, October 12**

An article on happenings at the Clark County Library revealed, first of all, that the coming Tuesday would be PGW's birthday. The next day an event called Book Lunch was scheduled to discuss *Joy in the Morning*, a book of which the author once said: "The supreme Jeeves novel of all time."

**LAPL Blog, October 13**

To mark PGW's upcoming birthday, the Los Angeles Public Library published a mini-biography on their blog. Among other things, librarian Keith Chaffee wrote that Wodehouse's "writing is marked by a lively wit, a gift for unexpected similes, and the skill to find infinite variations on characters and situations that might seem to be limited in scope".

**Washington Post, October 16** (from Jo Jacobius)

Cara Rosenbloom examined the science behind folk remedies and the benefits of common foods – and, of course, had a look at fish: "In his 1930 short-story collection *Very Good, Jeeves*, British author and humorist P.G. Wodehouse wrote: 'They say fish are good for the brain. Have a go at the sardines and come back and report.' Wodehouse was onto something!" Rosenbloom went on to provide scientific proof that fish does indeed boost the grey matter – but of course!

**Hindustan Times, October 19**

Karan Thapar wrote about 'The subtle humour in parapsydokians', a literary device in which the second half of a sentence or phrase provides a clever surprise or dig. He used as an example PGW's classic

description: "She looks as though she's been poured into her clothes and forgot to say 'when'." (Note: Thapar is paraphrasing. The exact quote is: "She looked as if she had been poured into her clothes and had forgotten to say 'when'.")

**Catholic Herald, October 24**

Writing about why he wears a cassock, Fr Michael Rennie cited the well-known passage in *The Code of the Woosters* when Bertie asks Jeeves, "Do trousers matter?" Fr Rennie goes on to say: "When I'm tempted to wander out of the rectory in anything less than my best – to take a night off, as it were – I fall back on a hard and fast commitment to exercise the priesthood rain or shine. Jeeves is right. The mood passes."

**Daily O, October 28** (from Andrew Bishop)

An article in this online opinion platform discussed questions and concerns about facing the age of artificial intelligence. The piece by Indrajit Bardhan takes the form of a fictional dialogue between Bertie Wooster and Jeeves, who is an android. To see how the philosophical discussion develops, go to [tinyurl.com/y647j3sz](http://tinyurl.com/y647j3sz).

**Big Issue, October 28** (from Roger Bowen)

Karl Shaw listed the 'Top 5 antidotes to our miserable times'; number 5 was *Right Ho, Jeeves*: "If you need cheering up, anything by PG Wodehouse, but one of the best-ever paeans to optimism in the English Language is in *Right Ho, Jeeves* when Gussie Fink-Nottle puts straight 'the fellow with a face rather like a walnut' who said the world was in a terrible state. 'Don't talk rot,' advises Gussie. "It is a beautiful world. The sky is blue, the birds are singing."

**Golf Digest, October 29** (from Andrew Bishop)

A reader's request for recommendations of books on golf received three specific suggestions, followed by the advice that "the most entertaining writing on golf can be found in P.G. Wodehouse's *The Golf Omnibus*."

**Mail Online, November 2** (from Jo Jacobius)

An article on comedian Paul Merton – who has just published a book of 80 comic short stories (see page 10) – includes his list of the top five funniest short stories, one of which is 'Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo': "Wodehouse was the master of comic writing, so it's impossible to consider a book without him, and this one made me laugh out loud. It's a world as pleasurable as a hot bath."

**Mail Online, November 5** (from Andrew Bishop)

Featured an interview, taken from the *Radio Times*, with the actor Jeff Goldblum in which he talked about marriage and children. He noted that when his two sons (ages 4 and 12) were old enough, he intended to read them PGW's books.

**The Sunday Times, November 6** (from Keith Alsop)

Valentine Low commented on an article in *Country Life* concerning "the achievements a modern gentleman should have notched up before they die", saying at the outset: "Jeeves, it can be said with some certainty, would not be impressed. Of all the foolishness exhibited by Bertie Wooster over the years, he never dyed his hair an outrageous colour, sheared a sheep or read *War and Peace*. Or, for that matter, constructed a Lego Batmobile."

**Daily Mail, November 7** (from Babioli Lillington)

In '100 Novels That Really WILL Change Your Life', a panel of 10 people each chose 10 books they claimed "shaped our world". Historian Dominic Sandbrook's list included *The Code of the Woosters*.

# Future Events for Your Diary

Are you aware of an upcoming or future event, such as a play or a radio programme, not listed here? Please let the Editor know!

## December 8, 2019 Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk

Richard Burnip will lead a Wodehouse-themed walk for London Walks (note: this is not a Society-sponsored event). The usual fee is £10, but our members get a discounted price of £8. No need to book a place; just be at exit 2 (Park Lane east side) of Marble Arch Underground station at 2.30 p.m., and identify yourself as a Society member.

## January 1 & 8, 2020 *Jeeves Live!* on BBC Radio 4

Earlier this year Martin Jarvis performed two PGW short stories before live audiences at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond, Surrey. Directed by Rosalind Ayres, the recorded stories are set to be broadcast at 11:30 am on Radio 4: 'Indian Summer of an Uncle' on Wednesday, January 1; and 'The Great Sermon Handicap' on Wednesday, January 8.

## January 4, 2020 Wodehouse Special on Radio 4 Extra

When we say 'Special', we mean really, really special! Months in the making, this three-hour program on Wodehouse both digs deep into the BBC's archives and features new material, including interviews with those involved with the recent memorial in Westminster Abbey. It will be broadcast at 9 am and then again at 7 pm the same day, with future repeats possible, so keep an eye on the Radio 4 Extra schedule.

## January 12, 2020 Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk

Take a walk with Richard and enjoy much about and by Wodehouse along the way! See December 8, above, for details on when and where.

## February 1–May 31, 2020

### Jeeves and Wooster in *Perfect Nonsense*

This extensive UK tour of the Olivier-award-winning comedy play drawn from the work of P. G. Wodehouse will be playing over 100 performances in venues large and small. It is produced by Chipping Norton Theatre and The Barn Theatre, Cirencester. For more information, see page 16.

### February 10, 2020 Society meeting at the Savile Club

For our listening pleasure, this evening will see Hilary Bruce and Tim Andrew give a reprise of the talk they presented at The Wodehouse Society's convention in October, concerning how the Wodehouse Memorial at Westminster Abbey came to be. This is a presentation not to be missed! As ever we start from 6 pm at the Savile, 69 Brook Street, London W1K 4ER. Gents, no tie is necessary, but please be sure to wear a jacket. For all: no jeans or trainers.

### April 12, 2020 Richard Burnip's Wodehouse Walk

Take a walk with Richard and enjoy much about and by Wodehouse along the way! See December 8, above, for details on when and where.

### April 17–26, 2020 *Jeeves at Sea* in Iliion, NY

This play by Margaret Raether will be performed at the Iliion Little Theatre; see page 16.

### October 8, 2020 Dinner at Gray's Inn

Advance notice that the Society's biennial Formal Dinner has been scheduled for this date, as usual at Gray's Inn. Mark your calendars now! Further details will, of course, be published in future issues of *Wooster Sauce*.

---

## CONTENTS

- |    |   |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|
| 1  | Dedication of the Wodehouse Memorial at Westminster Abbey | 14 | Confessions from the Queen City of the Midwest                           |
| 4  | Pictures of an Historic Occasion                          | 15 | Jeeves as Role Model   |
| 5  | Society News  | 16 | Wodehouse on the Boards  |
| 5  | The Great Clergy Handicap Continues                       | 16 | Cosy Moments   |
| 6  | A Spirited AGM  | 16 | Wodehouse Quiz 33: The Drones  |
| 7  | Letters to the Editor                                     | 17 | Wodehouse and the Girl Friends   |
| 7  | A Perfect Christmas Gift                                  | 18 | P. G. Wodehouse in the Bertrand Russell Archives                         |
| 8  | Profile of a Patron: Ben Elton                            | 20 | <i>Cradle of Writers and Our School Stories</i> (reviews)                |
| 8  | Cosy Moments  | 21 | Stanton Court: A 'Wodehouse Haunt'?                                      |
| 9  | P. G. Wodehouse and 'The Message': Part 2                 | 22 | The World of Sport as Recorded by PGW (review)                           |
| 10 | Two Books for the Christmas Stocking                      | 23 | Poet's Corner: <i>The Thin Blue Line</i>                                 |
| 11 | PGW's First Published Words Revisited                     | 23 | The Wooster Source   |
| 11 | Profile of a Committee Member: Ian Nilo-Walton            | 24 | The Bibliographic Corner: "With a New Preface by the Author": Part Seven |
| 12 | The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University   | 25 | The Word Around the Clubs  |
|    |   | 26 | Recent Press Comment   |

Quotations from P G Wodehouse are reprinted by permission of the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate and/or Hutchinson