



BY THE WAY

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Not a Lot of People Know This!

To accompany the 50th issue of *Wooster Sauce*, Tony Ring has looked back over his researches and prepared a mélange of twenty snippets about Wodehouse, his work, friends and connections which do not seem to have been mentioned, certainly not prominently, in the numerous biographies and books of criticism.

Wodehouse and Maurice Chevalier

In 1917, the Wodehouse-Kern song *The Picture I Want to See* was featured in Act 1 of *Hallo, America!*, a revue put on at the Palace Theatre, London. Initially, it was sung as a duet by Elsie Janis and Owen Nares, but when he left the cast, his place was taken by Maurice Chevalier.

Wodehouse and the Radio

The broadcast of Wodehouse's work on BBC Radio has never been the subject of a serious study, but is one which would repay attention. For example, on February 2, 1927, 'An entertainment arranged and to be announced by Mr P G Wodehouse will be broadcast from the London station tonight at 9.30.' The programme actually lasted from 9.15pm to 11.00, but no information seems to be available as to its contents.

Wodehouse after Hollywood

Following the interview which Wodehouse gave on leaving Hollywood in 1931, in which he complained about being paid \$104,000 but not being asked to do any work, he was invited by Sam H Harris to appear for one performance in *Once in a Lifetime*, in the role of a playwright disillusioned with the films. He declined the invitation by telegram, saying that he had a feeling that 'sudden work after all this might prove fatal'.

Wodehouse as Scenario Writer

In a poll organised by 'London Film Productions' in 1935 concerning the suitability of certain authors for employment as scenario-writers, the first three spots were filled by Wells, Priestley (both well ahead) and Buchan. But despite knowledge of his experiences in Hollywood, the public included Wodehouse along with Coward, Maugham, Kipling, Shaw and Walpole in the next most popular band.

Talking Books for the Blind

According to reports in the *New York Times* dated March 19, 1935, and November 27, 1938, *Thank*

You, Jeeves was one of the first books read into a recording machine, from which gramophone records were created and distributed to blind persons all over the USA. In less than five years, there were 300 volumes, lent free of charge by 28 regional libraries in the USA to the sightless, 20,000 of whom had been provided with a special 'talking machine', built by blind workmen on a WPA project. *Thank You, Jeeves*, read by an experienced radio announcer, consisted of sixteen records of a little over half an hour each.

The London *Times* also reported on equivalent developments in the UK in January 1936, and in a discussion of the techniques of reading books and poetry out loud commented that:

No man of normal intelligence and normal self-control can read aloud from Mr Wodehouse or from the earlier work of Mr Milne without laughing himself; and to laugh is the reader's last offence.

Wodehouse at Dartmouth College

In March 1937, Dartmouth College offered a stipend of \$25 for the best student original work or adaptation. It was won by Dave and Steve Bradley of Madison, Wisconsin, for their version of Wodehouse's 'Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner'.

Wodehouse at Princeton University

In a Seniors' Poll at Princeton University in June 1937, Wodehouse took over from Dickens as the favourite fiction writer. He retained his position in the following year's poll, keeping Ernest Hemingway in the runner-up spot.

Wodehouse in the Open Air

Also in 1937, it was reported that New York Public Library's third season of having an Open Air Reading Room in Bryant Park, which closed towards the end of October, had been the most successful yet, with 72,000 readers, up 10% on the previous year. Wodehouse was the library's most popular author.

Wodehouse and Cary Grant

It looks as though the year 1937 represented the peak of Wodehouse's career. On November 21, the US Radio Station WJSV broadcast the Wodehouse comedy *The Medicine Girl* in their 'Silver Theater' slot, starring Constance Bennett and Cary Grant.

Wodehouse and Pronunciation

The Times reported on July 13, 1938, that the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English had decided to obtain guidance as to the correct pronunciation of unusual surnames from those who possessed them. It pointed out that many surnames

. . . would not disgrace the ingenuity of Mr P G Wodehouse, who, it will be remembered, not only gave one of his characters the name of ffinch-farrowmere but also blessed him with an ear so sensitive that he could detect the proletarian pronunciation which so crudely capitalized the small 'f's'.

Wodehouse and Learning English

The Times also reported – on July 22, 1939 – that 250 foreign students attending the annual Holiday Course in English at the University of London had been advised by Professor Sir Dennison Ross to tackle the paper's crossword puzzles and to read the books of P G Wodehouse. These sources were described as the best avenue to the 'neglected background' to English, which included familiarity with proverbs, catchphrases, contemporary slang, history, folklore and daily life.

Wodehouse and American Television

In a Parliamentary debate on November 26, 1953, concerning plans to permit the introduction of commercial television, Earl Jowitt, Leader of the Labour Party in the House of Lords, cited an article in which Wodehouse described television in the USA and Canada as 'the foulest, ghastliest, loathsomest nightmare ever inflicted by science on a suffering human race'.

Wodehouse and Vanessa Redgrave

In September 1957, Vanessa Redgrave played Mrs Spottsworth in *Come On, Jeeves* at the Cambridge Arts Theatre – her second professional appearance.

Wodehouse and Nancy Mitford

In September 1961, Nancy Mitford said that although she preferred reading fact to fiction, she liked anything that made her laugh, like Waugh and Wodehouse.

Wodehouse and the Goodspeed Opera House

When the Goodspeed Opera House reopened on June 19, 1963, after 40 years of disuse, the first production was the Wodehouse-Bolton-Kern musical comedy *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*

Wodehouse at the Rockefeller Center

When the Rockefeller Center New York Hilton hotel opened for business in 1963, it had a floor with fifteen suites, all named in honour of writers. Wodehouse was included, along with Ogden Nash and Henry James, though more in recognition of his work on Broadway than for his novels.

Wodehouse, Jeeves and Butlers

In 1971, Wodehouse responded to a letter in the *Washington Post* bewailing the continued insistence of that paper that Jeeves should be described as a butler by pointing out that butlers and gentlemen's gentlemen can be distinguished quite simply as 'butlers are always stout and the Jeeveses slim and slender'.

Wodehouse on Sale

One of the surprise stars of a sale at Sotheby's on July 17, 1973, was a typescript of *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*, with extensive autograph revisions, together with drafts and notes for a dramatized version, which made £1,050, far more than expected. First editions of the first books by T S Eliot, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and George Moore went for £280, £650, £220 and £160, respectively, while a hand-written working notebook (which included several versions of Beckett's *Endgame*, a fragment of his *Waiting for Godot* and part of his translation of *Molloy*) was bought in at £6,500, around one-third of its estimate.

In 1969, Phillips, Son and Neale had auctioned a John Schuppe silver cow-creamer jug of 1756 for a new record price for a cow-creamer – £950.

Wodehouse and Lynda La Plante

TV scriptwriter Lynda La Plante had a short career as an actress before turning to writing, and under her stage name of Lynda Marchal appeared in a musical version of *The Luck of the Bodkins* at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, in April 1978.

Wodehouse and Asquith

One of the unrealised ambitions of the one-time Prime Minister Lord Oxford and Asquith was to write a first leader in the *Times Literary Supplement* on P G Wodehouse.