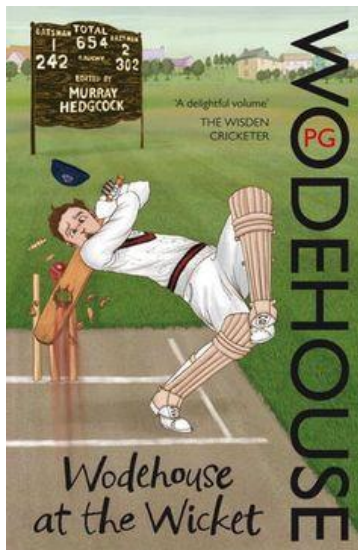


# Jeeves played for Moseley Cricket Club at the Reddings.



Percy Jeeves was an all-round county cricketer for Warwickshire. In a letter on display in Edgbaston's new Museum, P G Wodehouse, in response to a letter asking him if he really did name the character of Jeeves after the Warwickshire player, replied on October 16, 1967, that, "Jeeves's bowling must have impressed me, for I remembered him when I was in New York starting the Jeeves and Bertie Saga. It was just the name I wanted...I remember admiring his action very much." Wodehouse had seen Percy Jeeves play against Gloucestershire in the Cheltenham Festival of 1913 at the College ground.<sup>i</sup>

Percy Jeeves's talent was spotted very early on when, as a schoolboy, he played in a match at Howden, Yorkshire. Jeeves lifted a ball for six into the adjoining churchyard, after which several minutes were spent finding it.

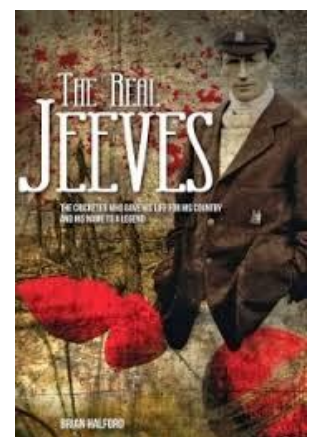
During the interval, an elderly spectator walked out to the boy on the pitch and handed him two coppers, remarking, "Here lad, tak' this; it's all ah've got. Ah've watch'd creckit here for nigh on thirty year and yort' fust ah've seen knock yan ower theer."<sup>ii</sup> He was not the only one to spot his talent. In 1910 Rowland Vincent Ryder, secretary of Warwickshire County Cricket Club, visited the Dales on holiday and by serendipity saw Percy Jeeves playing at Hawes, and immediately spotted his potential. Jeeves, in an earlier trial in 1910 for his own county Yorkshire, had been unsuccessful and in an interview with 'Old Ebor' in the Yorkshire Evening Post in 1916, he admitted that it had been a major disappointment.<sup>iii</sup>

A player had to complete two years residency before being eligible to play in the county championship. Brian Halford's recently published book, 'The Real Jeeves' has revealed that Percy Jeeves spent 1911 settling into Birmingham and working around Warwickshire's Edgbaston ground, assisting the long-serving groundsman John Bates.<sup>iv</sup> Although Jeeves did not get much match cricket in that year, he was a spectator to the extraordinary success of Warwickshire winning the county championship, under the leadership of Frank Foster. It was the first time a county team outside the Big Six, of Surrey, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Middlesex, Nottinghamshire and Kent, had won it.<sup>v</sup> Out of the cricket season he played mid-week football for the Stirchley Co-operative and continued to do through to 1914.<sup>vi</sup>



The suave figure of Percy Jeeves xvi

In 1912, Percy Jeeves was allocated to Moseley Cricket Club as their professional player in the Birmingham League. On 4<sup>th</sup> May, he was scheduled to make his first appearance for Moseley against the 'brewers', the Mitchells and Butlers team, at Edgabaston, but the game was called off due to rain. His next chance came a week later on the 11<sup>th</sup>, when Moseley played Walsall at their recently opened Gorway Ground. The game attracted a large crowd, numbering over two thousand on the unreserved area alone. Many had come to see Foster who the previous year had dismantled Walsall. The crowd, however, were disappointed as Foster was feeling 'slightly unwell' and did not bowl. Jeeves stepped up to the mark and took the stumps of Walsall's top four batsmen and finished with 15-1-45-6.



A week later, on the 18th May, Moseley played Dudley at Edgbaston, where Jeeves took 6-47 and struck an unbeaten 106. This included twenty fours, five of them in one over.

Next, in his cricketing success story, came 6-37 against West Bromwich Dartmouth at the Four Acres. After bowling Dartmouth out for 117, Jeeves received applause from the field but not as great as when Moseley was bowled out for 104 and the Dartmouth bowler George Baddeley was carried shoulder high off the field.<sup>vii</sup>



Percy Jeeves xvii

Although Jeeves was not qualified to play for Warwickshire until the summer of 1913, he was allowed, by courtesy, to play against the Australians at the end of May<sup>viii</sup> and the South Africans in July. In between these matches he continued to play for Moseley. The first match against Handsworth Wood was curtailed due to rain and Jeeves didn't get on the field. In his next match playing Kidderminster at Edgbaston, Percy Jeeves, batting at number three between his team mates Frank and George Stephens, scored 61 and then took 4-64 to set up a 89 run victory. A week later at Smethwick, Moseley made 126 and Jeeves came close to a hat-trick.<sup>ix</sup>

Straight after the South African game Jeeves returned to club duty for Moseley's home game with Birmingham League leaders, Walsall. Moseley had just returned to their Reddings home, having sorted out a new lease but the game didn't go their way. Walsall made 192 (Jeeves 18-1-51-1) but Moseley, after reaching 12 without loss, collapsed to 20 all out.<sup>x</sup>

By the end of his first season in the Birmingham League, Percy Jeeves was placed third in the competitions bowling averages with 44 wickets at 10.48 runs each and fourteenth in the batting list with an average of 25.20.<sup>xi</sup>

On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, war was declared and on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> August 1914 Percy Jeeves left the field at Edgbaston to a huge ovation from Warwickshire supporters. He had played for the county for only two seasons but, during this time, his exuberant cricketing style gave immense pleasure to the spectators.<sup>xii</sup>



Private 611 Percy Jeeves xviii

Two weeks later, Jeeves signed up to join the Birmingham 'City' Battalions and became Private 611 Jeeves of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Birmingham Pals (15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, C Company).<sup>xiii</sup>

On 21<sup>st</sup> November 1915 Percy and his battalion set sail for the Western Front. He endured and survived the privations of trench warfare around the Arras salient and the Bray front before moving to the Somme in 1916. On the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> July the 15<sup>th</sup> Warwickshires were sent to High Wood to support the battalions that had been decimated in an earlier attack. Percy Jeeves vanished that night.<sup>xiv</sup> His body was never found and he is just one name amongst 72,000 or more commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial. Percy Jeeves was just 28 years old.

Percy's fellow cricketer at Edgbaston, Lance-Corporal Hyde, heard about the death of his friend some time later reading a newspaper he'd found in the trenches at Arras and exclaimed "Poor Percy. What a favourite he was, and how everyone says when one refers to the deceased, 'what a loss to cricket'."<sup>xv</sup>

**This article has been researched and written by Edwina Rees for the Moseley History Society at:**  
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## Endnotes

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- i Coventry Telegraph 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013
- ii The Birmingham Daily Post 7.8.1916
- iii Yorkshire Evening Post 11<sup>th</sup> July 1919
- iv Halford Brian, 2013. *The Real Jeeves*. Pitch Publishing. Durrington. p 49
- v See iv, p 50
- vi Birmingham Daily Post 29<sup>th</sup> January 1914
- vii See iv, pp 53-56
- viii See iv, pp 57-60
- ix See iv, pp 61-62
- x See iv, p 65
- xi See iv, p 67
- xii See iv, p 137
- xiii Coventry Telegraph 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013. Birmingham Daily Post 11.9.14
- xiv See iv, pp 145-173
- xv Sports Argus 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1917
- xvi, xvii Halford Brian, 2013. *The Real Jeeves*. Pitch Publishing. Durrington
- xviii Coventry Telegraph 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013