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Wogan's Twelve

A Sharp Eye and a Witty Word to Mark the Passing Year

Terry Wogan

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Extract

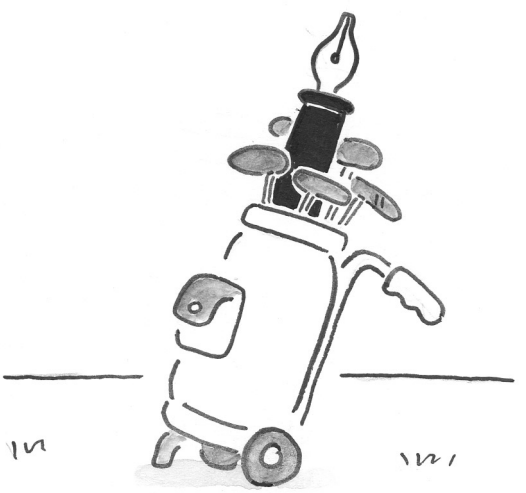
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Intro to Diary

This homely record of a year gone forever should really have started in July, but I lost my notes, and as anybody of my vintage will attest, it's hard to remember what happened yesterday, so trying to cast what remains of my mind back a whole month is asking for the moon.

So, friends, it's a shotgun start at August 2006. Here, let me take your hand as we dawdle into a world that was. Take your seats – fasten your seat belts – we have lift-off . . .



9 August 2006

'Marketing' is now at the very heart of the BBC, which accounts for the fruitless pursuit of the Phantom Viewer – the young male, sixteen to twenty-three, whose attention and spending power all advertising agencies crave. The sad fact that the young male in question would rather be in the pub, the disco, the rave, on Xbox, eBay, YouTube or chilling out with the young babe of his choice – anything rather than watch television – is driving marketing, and the sixth floor of Television Centre bananas. No use telling them that their 'core' audience – parents, young families, the middle-aged and the elderly – are sitting patiently there in front of the box, waiting to be entertained . . .

The news today that the BBC has appointed a Head of Diversity brings the blood rushing to the head. Another new Beeb buzzword, when we've only just got a handle on 'compliance'. And what happened to 'cut the crap'?

Years ago, BBC producers used to jest about a mythical figure, the 'PPO' – Programmes Preventions Officer. With Diversity, Compliance, Talent and at least two different controllers (Programmes and Commissioning) per network, nobody's laughing now . . .

Naturally, the listener could not be left out of it:

Tel,

I am very glad that my sister has made such a big impact at Radio 2, it's only been 3 months since she started there as a cleaner. If you bump into Di as she is mopping out the bogs

on the fourth floor say hello from me and tell her her family are so proud.

Love,

Una

PS Is Deadly's office still the 3rd trap on the left?

UNA VERSITY

10 August 2006

I suppose people have always been fascinated by their forebears, but programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* have whipped enthusiasm for delving into the upper branches of family trees into a fine old frenzy. I've just come across a magazine where, unbidden – at least by me – a genealogist has researched the proud family Wogan. I don't know where some people dig up their ancient information, but in the preamble to his painstaking digging, this fellow referred to my 'writing the lyrics of "The Floral Dance"', and to the TV chat show where I was 'walloped by Grace Jones'. Since the words of 'The Floral Dance' were written before I was born, and it was the late lamented Russell Harty who got the Grace Jones slap across the chops, you won't mind if I take genealogy with a grain of salt from now on.

12 August 2006

It's hard not to be moved at the new, exciting face of television news. Nothing to do with Natasha, Fiona, Sophie or even

George. It's the endless variations that have been added by a thinking newsroom. 'Let's not sit on our laurels,' cries the editor. So, the readers stand. Then they sit down, bringing it all to a nail-biting climax by standing up again. Then, blow me down if they don't sit again for the big finish. Creative broadcasting at its best, combining thought, flair and pace, with a frisson of the unexpected. What are they going to do next – sit or stand? It makes such a difference to the boring old news. As I sat in my customary trance before the microphone, I thought what a difference it would make if radio newsreaders would get up and move about a bit, like Tony Hancock's mother's gravy, but old habits die hard on the wireless. I asked a BBC2 newsreader if he favoured standing or sitting while intoning the bulletin. 'Lying down, actually,' he replied languidly, flicking an imaginary speck of dust from his irreproachable cuff. And yet, can television news ever compare with the great moments of radio news? Only this week, I heard a Radio 4 newsreader, having delivered a polished, flawless performance, pause, and then say: 'Ah! That was yesterday's bulletin, I'm afraid . . .'



Reading the news

15 August 2006

The latest indication of rampant insanity in high places is the idea put forward today that roads should be constructed only after first taking into consideration the lot of the butterfly. You'd want to be hard of heart not to love the delicate creature, but one of the more notable features of the butterfly is its ability to fly. So, if naughty old road-building is disturbing their habitat, unlike us leaden-footed, earth-bound mortals, they simply flap their little wings, and off they fly to another, less stressful environment.

I have my own suspicions that the people behind this tosh are the same ones who last year were asking motorists to count the dead insects on their windscreens, because the little birds were not getting enough to eat. So have a care before you start the engine of your petrol-guzzling, carbon-spouting monster! It will lead to more dead insects, starving birds and some very inconvenienced butterflies.

Naturally, Dame Fran Godfrey, newsreader, traffic reporter and right old softy who feeds pigeons in her window-box, fussed like Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm over the poor little butterflies.

Sweet little butterfly
Just watch it flutter by
Giving dear Frances much cheer.
But nasty road planners
Forgetting good manners
Are making its home disappear.

Lepidoptera on the wing
Make Fran's day start to zing.
With a handbook to cast out her woes.
Designers of carriageways
Now have to mend their ways.
Or with Godfrey they'll soon come to blows.

THE CROOKED MAN OF
OLD BANGOR TOWN

16 August 2006

How did we get on to the subject of 'bloaters' this morning? It's all coming back: June Brown, aka Dot Cotton on *EastEnders*, last night made bloater sandwiches for her husband Jim Brannan's little nieces, and I expressed the pardonable doubt that such a thing as bloater paste still existed. Surely it was a staple of the hungry rationing years after the last unpleasantness, lost in the mists of time, along with Snoek, Spam fritters and dripping? Anyway, says I, who should know better what a bloater is? I got my answer:

A bloater is a straw hat. Some of the bigger boys used to wear them at my school back in the 60s. Small boys didn't as their bloaters usually got stamped upon.

PETER PENNINGTON

A big thank you to Fran and yourself for explaining what a bloater is. Why then, did Harold Lloyd, Maurice Chevalier and Frankie Vaughan use to wear one on their heads? I

believe little Elty John also plonks one on his head now and again, perhaps you could ask him the reason!

Regards,

RALPHY

Has nobody got a sensible word to say?

Bloater is herring first developed at Yarmouth in 1835. Bloaters that are prepared whole are said to owe their special flavour to the activity of gut enzymes. The fish are dry-salted for about 12 hours, washed to remove surplus salt, threaded on metal speats, and stacked in the kiln to smoke.

MICHAEL SPENCER

Oh. Sorry I asked . . .

17 August 2006

I knew it. The first thing to greet me in the studio this morning? A case of bloater paste . . .

Somewhere during yesterday's bloater controversy I must have let slip that my second volume of autobiography, *Mustn't Grumble*, is being published in a month's time:

What Ho Me Old Man of Letters (that's a postman, isn't it?),

Did I hear you mention your new book yesterday? What's it called? 'Doesn't Mumble'? Never has a book been better titled, say I. Your voice is stentorian, yet mellow. Like Donald Sinden ringing a bell with his tongue, like a perfectly tuned

foghorn, dipped in treacle! But what I really want to know is, are you doing a book signing tour? A bit of the old publicity? And if you are, do you need a warm-up man? Picture it: you lounging in a hammock or whatever you do, as your adoring public queues to have you sign your book, then I charge on, in my signature role of Aramis from The Three Musketeers . . . *'All For One – And I'm The One!' Then I do a few songs, comic ditties, torch songs, you name it. I have a large repertoire, but you can't get the strings for it these days. So I won't bring it. Then I finish by doing a few death scenes from my old film noir thrillers: 'Watch out Guv', 'e's got an 'atchet!' Tell the audience, don't show them! Then if there's time, you can sign a few books, as long as you do it quietly! What do you think? Shall I get my tabard out of storage? I can be ready in the time it takes to order a cab.*

Cheery Pip,

CHUFFER DANDRIDGE

Dear Chuffer, our resident resting Shakespearian actor-manager, ever present with his racy tales of treading the boards to the roar of the greasepaint, permanently hard up in his timeless search for that elusive white fiver that Larry – or was it Johnny? – borrowed from him in the bar of Wyndham's all those years ago . . .

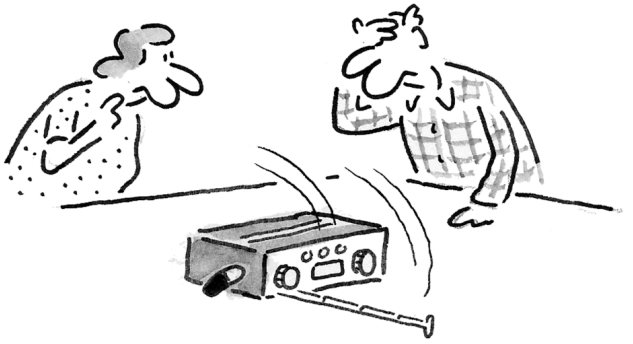
21 August 2006

A Monday morning like any other, and then, suddenly, I was no more. The music played, but the voice of Wogan was no

longer heard in the land. Somewhere in the electronic entrails a rubber band had snapped, and Studio 6C Western House, home of BBC Radio 2, was silenced. The music, on another computer, tinkled merrily away but, from me, blessed silence. Engineers and technicians dashed purposefully around . . . Well, they stood over the offending machinery, sucked their teeth and shook their heads – the usual procedure when anything goes wrong – but could offer no solution to the crisis. Apparently, the new equipment – German, and the finest licence-fee payers' money can buy – is brilliant when it's working, but when anything goes wrong . . . The music came to an end, and while we were deciding what to do, I played the next record. More sucking of teeth, shaking of heads, but no panic, this is the BBC, and anyway nobody has a clue. The newsreader was Alan Dedicoat, for it was he, Voice of the Balls, King Deadly, the Wealdstone Weather-boy, whom fate had deployed that morning to carry the can, to be the keeper of the flame of BBC Broadcasting. So, when the next record slowly faded, he spoke up from the news studio, filling the deathly hush with his ever-berating, if somewhat nasal, tones. Meanwhile, Barrowlands Boyd and myself had gathered up the vital material – emails, letters, coffee, remains of bacon butties – and made our way to another studio as the band played on. Switch on the lights, the computers, test the microphone, stick the headphones on, and bingo! We're on the road again!

I tell the world what happened, everything's all right, Daddy's home again, God's in His heaven, little imagining the unnamed dread that had struck at the heart of the loyal listener. You'd think people would be grateful for a pause in the endless twittering that is 'Wake Up To Wogan,' but no, cock-eyed optimists to a TOG, they assumed the worst. Knowing that

nothing but a monumental natural disaster could shut me up, and having noticed no volcanoes erupting nor meteorites striking the planet a glancing blow, they reasoned there could be only one other reason for a Wogan silence: the Grim Reaper had struck me in the mazzard.



TOGs assume worst

For days afterwards, strangers stopped me in streets, bars and shops to tell me that they thought I'd gone to my eternal reward. They looked at me strangely, sympathetically, as you would at someone who had barely eluded the jaws of death. I tried to assure them that it was merely a technical hiccup, and nothing to do with me, but I got the distinct impression that they thought I was covering something up. Or maybe it was just disappointment; you know, when someone who's boring you stiff leaves the room, and, even as you're breathing a sigh of relief, they come back in again. Of the many letters that the incident provoked, these will give you a flavour of public reaction to the day they shut his gob:

There I was trying to gently introduce myself to Monday morning when my husband came rushing into my sanctum

and announced that the flooring man was here (one hour earlier than expected) and 'Something very serious has happened to Terry Wogan and they're just playing music!' Well . . . what to do? . . . I thought my world had ended . . . how would I go on without Wogan? . . . he's always been there?! . . . I had a cup of tea and lived the next half-hour in a daze . . . imagining what this would mean to the nation . . . Then the floor man was drilling and hammering and I was feeling as if my world had collapsed and I suddenly realised that the voice on the radio that was burbling on for the last five minutes was . . . yes . . . it was, that Irish Togmaster . . . he was there, he was alive and well!!! So . . . why couldn't someone have told me that it was his equipment that was sick not him? . . . I'm going to take a long time to get over this! I might be suing for emotional trauma . . . do you still do those T-shirts, badges, or mugs . . . that would sort it!!

TINKABELL

At eight forty-eight precisely
On Monday the twenty-first
A silence fell on the BBC
The machines had done their worst
A call went out to Deadlycoat
Who to the rescue came
And bravely stepped into the breach
To claim his moment of fame
So hail to good old Deadly
The saviour of the show
Now we don't need you any more
So go on, off you go!

WILTING

I don't mean that Terry, in fact, you had me worried, I thought something had happened to you, it was such a relief to hear your voice once more . . . don't you ever do that to us again.

BAZ

It's extraordinary, I'd never assume that silence spelt fatality. If I get a pain in my chest, I put it down to indigestion. I suspect that I have a very low-level survival instinct, and I'm sure pessimists live longer than optimists like me. When the terrible disaster of 9/11 happened in New York, I thought of how I would have reacted if I had been in one of the Twin Towers on that awful day and seen a plane crash into the other one. A pessimist, a survivalist, would have been out of the door, down the stairs and into the street before the second plane struck. I'm sure that I would have hung around on the foolish, optimistic, non-self-preservation basis that it couldn't happen again, and not to me . . . I'm always calm in a crisis, and one day it *will* be the death of me . . .

22 August 2006

It's the kind of bureaucratic, politically correct nonsense that seems to come up every second day now, and drives my otherwise kindly listeners into hissy fits: Ofcom – and I can't be bothered to translate that – has just upheld a complaint from a viewer that Boomerang, a children's TV channel, had shown a cartoon of *Tom and Jerry*, depicting Tom (the cat) smoking a roll-up cigarette.

From a bursting postbag:

Dearest Terry,

I would like to say that I find the complaints re: Tom and Jerry *to be completely ridiculous. I personally grew up on the said cartoon and consider myself perfectly normal.*

I believe that the fact that I wear baggy stockings, pink slippers, and have a strong desire to kick my no good lazy husband (who happens to be called Thomas) is totally unrelated.

AMANDA HUGANKIS

If only they'd done it when I was a lad but alas it's too late now. I refer, of course, to the timely censoring of that most influential of programmes Tom and Jerry.

For too long they have been allowed to peddle their vile trade and what is the upshot?

I'll tell you what it is, pal! 60 tabs a day and 10 cigars as well, that's what it is!

I watched these two as mere striplings, through my youth and indeed into my adulthood and I find that I can't get anything done at all as I need all my time to smoke.

And to think that it's all down to Tom and Jerry. *I knew it was somebody's fault and now the truth is out I intend to sue. Somebody will pay.*

But now if you'll forgive me I must go and suspend a grand piano from a block and tackle as I want to drop it onto my next-door neighbour because last night he chopped my head off with a rather large axe.

I think perhaps he watched Tom and Jerry *too.*

PC GONEMAD
TRUMPTON POLICE STATION