

What is funny Week 7: Peter Cook in the E.L. Wisty mode **I never had the Latin**

This sketch was originally performed by Peter Cook as the character E.L. Wisty, whom he first developed at Radley College, modelled after the school butler. Wisty was a famous nuisance, who badgered members of the public on park benches on a range of topics of little importance – nudism, tadpoles etc. Wisty was essentially the character Cook developed with Dudley Moore in the ‘Pete and Dud’ dialogues.



Yes, I could have been a judge but I never had the Latin, never had the Latin for the judging. I just never had sufficient of it to get through the rigorous judging exams. They're noted for their rigour. People came staggering out saying 'My God, what a rigorous exam'—and so I became a miner instead. A coal miner. I managed to get through the mining exams—they're not very rigorous. They only ask one question. They say 'Who are you?', and I got 75% for that.

Of course, it's quite interesting work, getting hold of lumps of coal all day. It's quite interesting, because the coal was made in a very unusual way. You see God blew all the trees down. He didn't say 'Let's have some coal,' as he could have done—he had all the right contacts. No, he got this great wind going you see, and blew down all the trees, then over a period of three million years he changed it into coal gradually, over a period of three million years so it wasn't noticeable to the average passer-by. It was all part of the scheme, but people at the time did not see it that way. People under the trees did not say 'Hurrah, coal in three million years.' No, they said 'Oh dear, oh dear, trees falling on us—that's the last thing we want.' And of course their wish was granted.

I am very interested in the universe. I am specialising in the universe and all that surrounds it. I am studying Nesbitt's book—*The*

Universe and All That Surrounds It, an Introduction. He tackles the subject boldly, goes through from the beginning of time right through to the present day, which according to Nesbitt is October 31, 1940. And he says the earth is spinning into the sun and we will all be burnt to death. But he ends the book on a note of hope. He says ‘I hope this will not happen.’ But there’s not a lot of interest in this down the mine.

The trouble with it is the people. I am not saying you get a load of riff-raff down the mine. I am not saying that. I am just saying we had a load of riff-raff down my mine—very boring conversationalists, extremely boring. All they talk about is what goes on in the mine — extremely boring. If you were searching for a word to describe the conversation, boring would spring to your lips. If ever you want to hear things like ‘Hello, I’ve found a bit of coal.’ ‘Have you really?’ ‘Yes, no doubt about it, this black substance is coal all right.’ ‘Jolly good, the very thing we’re looking for.’ It’s not enough to keep the mind alive, is it?

Whoops. Did you notice I suddenly went ‘Whoops’? It’s an impediment I got from being down the mine. Because one day I was walking along in the dark when I came across the body of a dead pit pony. ‘Whoops.’ And that’s another reason why I couldn’t be a judge, because I might have been up there all regal, sentencing away. ‘I sentence you to whoops.’ And, you see, the trouble is, under English law that would have to stand. So all in all I’d rather have been a judge than a miner.

And what is more, being a miner, as soon as you are too old and tired and sick and stupid to do the job properly, you have to go. Well, the very opposite applies with the judges. So all in all I’d rather have been a judge than a miner. Because I’ve always been after the trappings of great luxury, you see. I really, really have. But all I’ve got hold of are the trappings of great poverty. I’ve got hold of the wrong load of trappings, and a rotten load of trappings they are too, ones I could have very well done without.