



Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society

Vol 10, No. 1

February 1989

WCY + 8



DE

P.G. Wodehouse

SOCIETY

Verklaart als lid te hebben ingeschreven

E. Ratcliffe te Felton (USA)

Amsterdam, de 31^e december 1988

W. J. M. de Vries

What is all that on page one?

Many of you already know that our Society has a counterpart in the Netherlands, the P.G. Wodehouse Society. The editors of our two newsletters have been exchanging publications and swiping each other's items for a long time. The current Dutch editor, Rob Kooy, is a member of our Society, and it occurred to me that it would be a sporting thing for me to join his Society. Hands across the sea, and so on.

Little did I imagine the consequences. I received a membership certificate I can only describe as magnificent. The less-than-life-size reproduction on the previous page is only a pale shadow of the original - it's printed on thick, creamy paper with my name, address, and the date engrossed, the pig and the hat are in dark blue, the two decorative devices below them are in gold, and the whole spectacular production is signed by the most majestic officers of the Society. I'm still vibrating.

The certificate declares that I have been enrolled as the 116th member of the Society. You realize what that means. It means that a group less than half the size of ours has produced a membership certificate the likes of which we haven't even dreamed of. The situation is rummy to a degree. Call the Junior Ganymede and have them page Jeeves.

The Dutch newsletter has much fruity material, lots of it in English, and the Dutch is easier to understand than you might think. You can get membership information by writing to:

The membership certificate was accompanied by the explanation given below.

Explanation of the escutcheons as shown on the P.G. Wodehouse Society Certificate of Membership

Emsworth

The blazon is displaying a blue sow. According to Geoffrey, in his book *Blandings the Best*, the Threepwood family crest may very well be a blue boar, a "boar statant azure." However, to honour the "Empress of Blandings," I thought a sow would be more appropriate. The blazon is flanked by two lions, one in white and one in black, showing the eternal contrast between good and evil as represented so often in the many and various guests to Blandings Castle. The blazon is covered by an earl's coronet, what else. On top there are two plumed helmets. The left helmet is crested with a pair of forearms rising from an earl's coronet, the arms having ostrich-feather-gloved hands. This symbolizes Emsworth being a kind soul, and also the manners of the 9th earl to handle with gentleness everything and everybody on his way. The right helmet-crest is a winding snake, representing the guileful fate, constantly attempting to draw his attention from his beloved sow. The device reads: *SUS REFUGIUM MEUM* (The swine is my resource.)

Wooster

The blazon shows a top hat and a smoking cigarette in a cigarette-holder, two essential attributes to the Bertie Wooster-type of a wealthy young man-about-town. Over the blazon we see a crown, flamboyantly plumed to illustrate Bertie's general attitude to life, provided there are no aunts around to drag him into danger or trouble. On top of all this there are a griffin and a unicorn, to symbolize Bertie's enormous credulity. For, as everybody knows, griffins and unicorns do not exist. The blazon is flanked by a barbarian carrying a bludgeon, and a lion. They respectively are representing Jeeves' often drastic way of solving Bertie's problems, and Bertie's courage to take things, time after time, as they come. The device reads: *JEEVES ADIVTOR ET FIDVCIA* (Jeeves is my help and my trust.)

Many girls of her age would have been carried away by the glamour of young Heacham's position and wealth; but she, divining with an intuition beyond her years that he was unsound on the subject of pigs, had drawn back while there was still time and refused to marry him.

"Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!"

Special scrawls

Florence Cunningham, our immediate past president, sent me an interesting proposal recently:

The other day when Phil Ayers and Amy were here, we were discussing the Wodehouse books we had, the used ones in particular, and he said he enjoyed the personal notes he found in them, such as, "Hi John - from Mary. May this cheer you up," and so forth. I agreed. I like to think of the people who have enjoyed the book before it reached my hands. Who were they? What did they think about? Were they young or old? What did they do? Were they well, ill, or going on a vacation, when they bought or were given this book?

Two books I bought recently have no names of former owners, no clues, and I feel cheated. They left me no messages, those former owners.

Anyway, Phil and I agreed it might make for an interesting column if your readers would send you some of the personal notes found in their used Wodehouse books. What do you think?

I think it's a great idea. Collectors of first editions curl up at the edges when they find the tiniest mark in a valuable book, but that's a different world. Ordinary mortals - at least this one - are often glad to find notes. They're like messages in bottles, washed ashore on a beach. I enjoy a used book more than a new one, because I'm sharing it with someone else. Send me some of the notes you find in used Wodehouse books, and I'll publish the best of them. Please include any pertinent information, such as the name of the book or story and the passage where the note was written.



If you were a millionaire, would you rather be stabbed in the back with a paperknife or found dead without a mark on you, staring with blank eyes at some appalling sight?

Archeology of The Play's the Thing

I've received a letter from Dolores Robinson about the early history of a PGW play. She writes:

Thanks to the reference librarians in the San Francisco Main Library I hereby report on the provenance (is that the right word - I hereby declare it is) of *The Play's the Thing*.

From the forward of *All the Plays of Molnar*, Deluxe Edition, Garden City Publishing Company, New York, 1929, 1937, pp. 728-777: Name of the play in Hungarian, *Jatek a Kastelyban*. First production in English by Charles Frohman at the Henry Miller Theater, New York, November 3, 1926. PG's adaptation is listed as being "from the Hungarian."

I enclose a photocopy of the review by Brooks Atkinson of the opening night performance. Atkinson refers all the way through to Molnar with no acknowledgement of Plum's contribution as adapter. Rather unsporting, I'd say.

As far as the plot is concerned, here is a quote from Molnar himself (from *All the Plays...*):

"My wife (Lily Darvas) and I were stopping at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna. She was then learning to speak German. All day long she had to recite classical German plays. Just for practice for hours on end. One afternoon an intimate friend called on me, and as we were chatting amiably, he suddenly jumped up. He had heard Lily's voice in her room, which adjoined mine, saying in fluent German, "I love you! I love you! I shall die of love for you!" No wonder he jumped. And I jumped. Both of us went to the door, and upon opening it, found Lily quietly sitting in a rocker reciting declarations of love to her tutor. Utterly harmless, yet how disturbing it sounded... That's how I got the idea."

Thank you, Dolores, for unearthing this most interesting material. I've seen the play and wondered if he got the idea from a real incident.

The review by Atkinson, *the* theater critic of the time, describes the play as having "no more substance than a sprinkling of stardust." He praises its "merriment" and "the virtuoso skill of Molnar's comedy...with sparkle of extraneous conversation" and "sudden twists of action and informalities amazing in their successful effect."

"Best Seller"

Something fresh

by Len Lawson

Penguin has recently republished Richard Usborne's *A Wodehouse Companion* and Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings*. I don't know the exact price but I think each book is in the 6 to 7 pound range. I am really pleased to see *A Wodehouse Companion* back in print. There must have been only one printing of this book when it originally came out because it disappeared in a hurry. This fine book is another example of the excellent work Richard Usborne has done for us. I recommend it highly.

Here are four offerings from Barnes & Noble, 126 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10011. Add \$3.95 to your total order for shipping and insurance. Add state tax if you live in MA, MN, NJ, NY, or PA.

1. B&N has been offering for some time eight Wodehouse titles published by Penguin. They are now offering the same titles published by B&N with new cover illustrations. With their order numbers they are:

1552785 Bachelors Anonymous
 1552793 Pearls, Girls and Monty Bidkin
 1552777 Young Men in Spats
 1552769 A Pelican at Blandings
 1552801 Ukridge
 1552819 Meet Mr. Mulliner
 1552751 Blandings Castle
 1552827 Psmith in the City

These books can be ordered separately for \$4.95 each, or the entire set can be ordered for \$32.00:

1563907 P.G. Wodehouse eight volume set

2. *Jeeves* by P.G. Wodehouse, an audio cassette, includes "Indian Summer of an Uncle" and "Jeeves Takes Charge" performed by Terry-Thomas and Roger Livesey. Order number 1533595, \$12.95. I have this cassette and enjoy it.

3. *The Most of P.G. Wodehouse*, 666 pages, paperback. Order number 1533751, \$11.95. This book includes 31 short stories from most of the sagas, and the complete novel *Quick Service*. The price has climbed steadily over the years but it still comes to less than two cents a page. If you want to introduce anyone to Wodehouse, this is a good book to choose.

4. I saved the best B&N offering till last: *In Search of Blandings* by N.T.P. Murphy. Order number 1561463, \$5.95. This is the hard bound issue being remaindered, so don't pass it up. It deserves a far

better fate than being remaindered so quickly. If you are going to England for the tour then you must have this book. If you are not going to England for the tour then shame on you and you definitely must have this book to find out all you'll be missing. If you are just starting to read Wodehouse and aren't sure if this book is for you, then buy it, put it on the shelf, read PGW for awhile and then read this book. I recommend this book. [So do I. It's one of the best ever written about Our Hero. OM]

Bill Horn informs me that he saw *The Old Reliable* on his Minneapolis PBS station in December. It was part of the Great Performances series and was also called Tales from the Hollywood Hills in the program guide. We have several PBS stations in our area, but none of them broadcast that show. Check your local listings. These things often come around again.

It seems like only yesterday that Robert Stow was our youngest member. Now here he is, growing by leaps and bounds, raiding his dad's library with an enthusiasm that could only be sustained by the young. He has discovered an item you will all want to add to your collection. In the December 1988 issue of *Donald Duck Adventures* (#10) there is a story entitled "The Ersatz Earl." In this story Daisy has an Uncle Bertie. She announces him as Sir Bertrand Wister III, Earl of Enthouse. Unfortunately, that is as Wodehousian as it gets. Let's hear it for Robert!

I didn't stir up much interest in my quest for Wodehouse anthologies. I did hear from a couple of you though and I have one more textbook to add to the list: *Adventures in Reading*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936. (Mine is actually the second edition from 1944.) This one contains "Farewell to Legs" and informs us, among other things, that a stone is an English unit of weight equal to 14 pounds. I would still like to hear about anthologies with PGW contributions, especially textbooks.

The least thing upsets him on the links. He misses short putts because of the uproar of the butterflies in the adjoining meadows.

"Ordeal by Golf"

Convention phase two in Kalamazoo

Jim Thorne, chairman of the Kalamazoo planning committee, tells me that the convention will begin Friday, October 6, and end Sunday, October 8, 1989. Jim telephoned me today with the news that the committee has secured the campus of Kalamazoo College as our convention site. It's a beautiful place, Jim says, and just the one he hoped to get. He asked me to thank the people who sent their preferences about the convention date. He and his committee are energetically rounding up speakers and laying plans to thrill and delight all who attend. Few details have been settled yet, but Jim expects to have quite a bit to tell us in the May *Plum Lines*. If you would like to contribute to the program, the committee will be glad to consider your ideas. Jim's address appears in the list accompanying this *Plum Lines*.

Ethel Plummer unmasked!

Fergus Horsburgh raised a question in the August 1988 *Plum Lines* about the identity of an illustrator of Plum's articles in the 1915 *Vanity Fair*. Her name was given as Ethel Plummer, and Fergus wondered, quite reasonably, if this was Ethel Wodehouse, using a *nom de illustrator*.

Len Lawson has provided what seems a final answer for the question. He requested help from San Francisco area librarians and was rewarded with photocopies of biographical and other data from eight publications such as *Women Artists in America*, *American Art Annual*, *Who's Who in American Art*, and the *New York Times*. They attest repeatedly that Ethel McClellan Plummer was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 30, 1888, studied with Henri and More, illustrated for *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *Life*, *Shadowland*, *New York Tribune*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and "other leading women's magazines," painted portrait sketches, was vice president of the Society of Illustrators, married twice (to a Jacobson and a Humphreys), and died in New York City on October 31, 1936. The existence of an illustrator named Ethel Plummer who worked for *Vanity Fair* at some time in the first third of this century is thus established beyond question.

If Ethel Wodehouse illustrated her husband's *Vanity Fair* articles under the name Ethel Plummer, I think there are just two possibilities: (1) she did it before the real Ethel Plummer worked for *Vanity Fair* and there was a remarkable coincidence of names, or (2) she did it during or after the other woman's work and deliberately hid behind the other woman's name, most unlikely for several reasons.

"Didn't Frankenstein get married?"

"Did he?" said Eggy. "I don't know. I never met him. Harrow man, I expect."

Laughing Gas

The Wodehouse Pilgrimage



Nineteen people have sent deposits for the trip, and we may receive two or three more deposits in the very near future. All these people are located in the western U.S., England, and the Netherlands. No one from Canada, no one from the eastern or central U.S. We're going to miss you!

Our plans and schedule remain as described in the supplement to the November 1988 *Plum Lines*. Our estimate of the basic land cost is now somewhat below \$500.

President Bill Blood sends the following Pickwickian paragraphs:

"The House I have taken," said Mr. Pickwick, in outlining his retirement plans upon dissolving the Pickwick Club, "is in Dulwich; it has a large garden, and is located in one of the most pleasant spots near London." Dickens notes that Mr. Pickwick "...may still be frequently seen, contemplating the pictures in the Dulwich Gallery or enjoying a walk about the neighborhood on a fine day."

In conjunction with our Dulwich College pilgrimage next July, our members are encouraged to locate the Sam'l Pickwick residence. To qualify for the winning award, a certified copy of the original deed of ownership, notarized and attested to by proper authorities, must be submitted with the claim of discovery.

Announcing the great Barribault's contest

Rob Kooy is our member in the Netherlands and editor of *Nothing Serious*, the newsletter of the Dutch P.G. Wodehouse Society. He has sent us a plea for help:

We do have a problem here. Or, rather, it's not us having the problem, but one of our members has. The problem is: Where does the name "Barribault" come from? Maybe you'll remember I already spent a couple of words on the subject in various issues of *Nothing Serious*.

Let me freshen up your memory: Norman Murphy, in his book *In Search of Blandings*, has revealed the backgrounds of a great many names of persons and places Wodehouse used in his books. But the book remains silent about the origin of the name Barribault's. And Mr. de Vrey, a long-time and constant member of our Society, has dedicated himself to a quest for the origins of Barribault's without any success so far.

This is what we do know: The extremely sumptuous Claridge's Hotel (address: Brook Street, Mayfair, London W1) has played a role in many a Wodehouse story. Under its own name until World War II (see, for example, the beginning of the Wodehouse short story "The Awful Gladness of the Mater"). But from the book *Full Moon* on, it is named Barribault's, while there is substantial evidence that the very same hotel still is meant here (see *Full Moon*, the last part of Chapter II). We also do know that Wodehouse very often used place-names for his characters, and vice-versa. So Wodehouse, during his stay in Berlin, or even more probably, afterwards when he stayed in Paris, might have met somebody (or something) named rather similar to "Barribault," and Wodehouse used this name - perhaps slightly altered - to rename the old Claridge's. Who might this person (or: what might this "something") have been? And why at all would Wodehouse have felt the necessity to change the hotel's name?

As said before, all Mr. de Vrey's attempts, so far, to unearth the truth have been in vain, and even Norman Murphy is ignorant of the answers. Now the problem to our faithful member has caused serious insomnia, and he's spending many a wakeful night

wrestling with the problem.

So, time has come to place these questions in the spotlight in front of the international gang of Plummers, having so many eminent Wodehouse-scholars amongst them. I think *Plum Lines* is the most appropriate platform to pose these questions. Please help me to restore Mr. de Vrey's most needed (and deserved) night's rest.

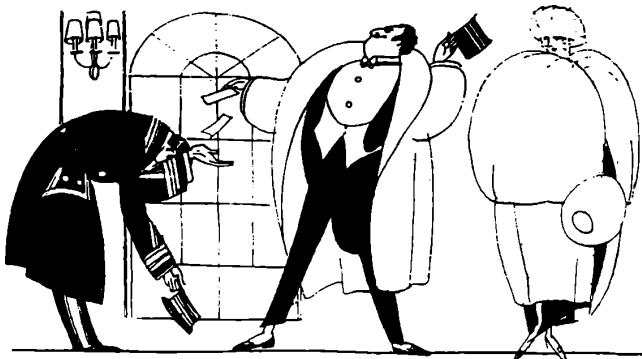
You could even make the Barribault question a topic of a contest. And, in the best Wodehouse tradition, the winner of the contest (that is: he/she who gives the most plausible explanation, or even better, he/she who proves best that his/her explanation is the correct one) could be entitled to a cigar or a coconut, at choice.

A terrific idea! This is going to rank right up there with The Great Ethel Plummer Mystery as one of the fundamental problems of western civilization. Any member of either Society may enter the contest. Entries will be judged as stated in the preceding paragraph. Judges will be the Oldest Member and a couple of other Society members if I can drag them into the job, but no contestants. I'll print the winning entry, at least, in *Plum Lines*. (If you effuse beyond reason I'll have to edit your entry.) I'll print the names of all contestants so that other scholars may, if they wish, request the results of their investigations. Prizes are as follows:

First prize: A cigar or a coconut, at choice, donated at crushing expense by the Oldest Member.

Second, third, and fourth prizes: We shall follow your future career with considerable interest.

If Norman Murphy doesn't have the answer to this question it's a really tough one, so don't hesitate to send along whatever evidence, possibilities, or ideas you may have, no matter how slight they seem. If we put several entries together we may crack the problem.



A few quick ones

Ed Sherman, one of our stalwart San Francisco members, finds references to PGW in the most unlikely places. He found this in *Forbes* magazine, that fortress of the money-minded:

"If you recall your P.G. Wodehouse, Wooster is the frivolous English gentleman whose butler, Jeeves, is forever devising complicated schemes to get him out of trouble. Jeeves handles Wooster's purple socks, for example, "as if he were a vegetarian fishing a caterpillar out of the salad."

Forbes quotes this item from a more likely source, *Esquire*, where we can imagine Bertie writing about men's fashions as he did for *Milady's Boudoir*.

Please, dear editors of *Forbes* and *Esquire*: Jeeves is a gentleman's personal gentleman, between whom and a butler there is a great gulf fixed.

Bill Blood and Pauline Blanc inform me that *Victoria* magazine, "an excellent magazine, worthy of your perusal," will carry a feature article about Plum in its May 1989 issue. Bill sternly commands us, "Watch for it on your local news-stands!"

I'm way overdue in thanking Richard Osborne for his nifty book, *Wodehouse Nuggets*. It consists, as you know, of Richard's favorite quotes, and I've been shamelessly swiping them for *Plum Lines* since my first issue a year ago. When the issue is late (always), when I can't remember a suitable quote to go with an item (usually), when I can't take time to browse through the books because I'll get hooked (invariably), it's a great comfort to know that *something* is ready to go. I just reach across the table for *Nuggets* and pick out a zinger. May I say across the havoc of a cluttered editorial table, a great book.

You may have noticed that lots of items in this and recent issues of *Plum Lines* have been written, not by me or people outside our Society, but by our members themselves. Examples are the investigation by Dolores Robinson and the proposal by Florence Cunningham - I didn't rewrite their letters, I printed them just as they were written. Members are in effect writing directly to each other. I like that. It reminds us that The Wodehouse Society is more than just a newsletter, written by one person. We're a *group* of people - literate, articulate people - with a good sense of humor, a great deal in common, and a lot of interesting things to say to each other.

I've just finished the first year of the best job I've ever had - editing *Plum Lines*. It's fun, and they haven't fired me yet.

OM

The Oldest Member



Financial report for 1988

Katy Kilgore, Treasurer

Beginning balance, December 31, 1987		\$2157.60
Income		
Dues	\$1946.50	
Interest	<u>137.91</u>	
Total income		2084.41
Expenses		
Stationery	\$134.64	
Postage	435.01	
Printing and copying	881.52	
Telephone	18.90	
Bank charges	17.00	
Miscellaneous	<u>10.69</u>	
Total expenses		1497.76
Ending balance, December 31, 1988		2744.25

Call for dues

It's dues time, folks! Statements for 1989 annual dues are sent with this mailing. If you find no statement, it means that you are paid up for 1989 or you have joined the magic circle of Honorary Members, and you can take a deep breath and relax. Membership in our little group of serious thinkers is a great bargain at \$10 a year for individuals or couples. (Dues have never been raised in our eight years of existence.) And what do you get for your ten smackeroos? The fellowship of kindred minds, essays by the leading thinkers of our day, and answers to Life's Great Questions, such as the identity of Ethel Plummer. The opportunity to contribute to this scholarly journal. The chance to get together with other admirers of PGW in local groups and at our conventions. And fun.

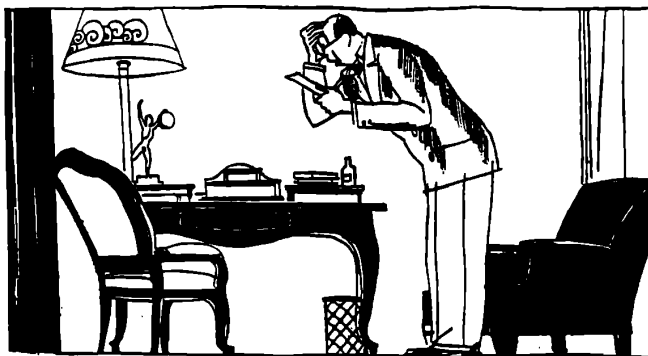
Members who, through some unimaginable lapse of judgment, fail to send their dues by May 1, 1989, will be regretfully expunged from our rolls. Of course, if you pay up later we will very happily admit you to the fold once more. We'd hate to lose you.

Writers through the ages have made a good many derogatory remarks about money and one gets the impression that it is a thing best steered clear of, but every now and then one finds people who like the stuff and one of these was Jane. It seemed to her to fill a long-felt want.

The Girl in Blue

Those who pay up promptly have the privilege of assisting Angelica Briscoe at the School Treat. Laggards must accompany the annual outing of the Village Mothers of Maiden Eggesford.

If you are a Canadian or an overseas member, please be sure to specify U.S. dollars on your check or money order, and please be sure that your check specifies a U.S. bank or the U.S. branch of a foreign bank at which your check may be cleared. If you fail to do these things, it will cost your Society money simply to cash your check or money order.



"I don't know if you have ever done the fine, dignified thing, Corky, refusing to accept money because it was tainted and there wasn't enough of it," said Ukridge.

"Success Story"

The Wodehouse Man

by Tom Sharpe

Reprinted from *Punch*, April 16, 1986

One of the greatest pleasures I know is to meet an astonishing person. Such an experience came my way last year when I met Colonel Norman Murphy, the author of *In Search of Blandings*, at Hunstanton Hall in Norfolk. We had arranged to "rendez-vous" there (my phrase, almost certainly, because in my Marine days Colonels always rendez-voused) to look for the Octagon which plays such an important part in "Jeeves and The Impending Doom." He was to find it and I was to photograph it. Of course at the time I didn't really believe him; I knew Wodehouse had lived at the Hall on and off during the late Twenties and early Thirties but I'd always toed the accepted line that P.G.W. was the creator of an idyllic world, not its meticulous recorder.

Colonel Murphy KNEW the Octagon was at Hunstanton and obviously regarded me as a heretic.

"We'll find it over there," he said with daunting authority as I tried to lead him in the direction of the moat, "over there" being in the opposite direction. I have an idea he even told me how far it was from the house.

Sure enough, behind a gate, across a bridge over a muddy pond and surrounded by shoulder high stinging nettles, was the Octagon just as Plum, through Bertram Wooster, had described it. It wasn't what I had expected. In my mind's eye it should have been on an island in the middle of a large ornamental lake instead of on a small island in a pond but there was no doubting its existence.

I came away from it with a sneaking suspicion (why do suspicions always "sneak"? They should be more forthright) that I was in the presence of some ghastly guru who walked - loped would be better - at 25 miles an hour, never stopped talking and KNEW with fearful infallibility everything there was to be known about dear Plum and was about to destroy his idyllic world in a welter of disappointing facts. It was almost as though I had agreed to meet a galloping serpent in the Garden of Eden and was being given a very exacting lecture on the constituents of apples and what Eve was wearing.

For another hour we shot into courtyards, and out of them, invaded what looked like private gardens while the Colonel questioned anyone foolish enough to ask what we were doing. In the end, on the far side of a moat, we came across some broken down outhouses. Among them was an abandoned chicken run which backed onto a brick shed with a square iron door about two feet high.

In an attempt to introduce some levity into the proceedings, I remarked that we were now standing in the presence of The Empress of Blandings' famous pigstye. It was a flippant remark - at least I thought so at the time; no prizewinning pig could possibly have squeezed through that small iron doorway. But the Colonel seized on it with all the enthusiasm of a fanatic. I can't remember what he said but I do remember wandering away with Mrs. Murphy and muttering something disparaging about weaners.

Supplement to Plum Lines, Vol. 10, No. 1, February 1989

Behind us the Colonel was scrambling in and out of more stinging nettles and, having proved the obvious, that only the infant Empress could have lived in the sty, had turned his attention to some crumbling brick walls. I won't go on. You will find how astonishing Colonel Murphy and his methods are in *In Search of Blandings* to be published by Martin Secker & Warburg later this year [1986].

Instead let me turn to the man Murphy himself. He is of course an eccentric, one of that special breed whom all men of good sense treat, as the Muslims do village idiots, with the highest regard and as such to be protected. Armed with a seemingly infallible memory, the capacity to walk most people off their feet and to provide information with an unstopability that makes the Ancient Mariner look like an amateur, he is one of Britains's great obsessives. For 40 years he has made a study of London and acquired a mass of information that is, I suspect, more encyclopaedic than that of anyone else in the world. Streets are his speciality. From his office in the Ministry of Defence he strode forth during his lunch hours and made the remarkable discovery that every source of information he needed was within a mile. I should add here that a Murphy mile is two and a half times longer than that of any normal biped. In nine minutes he could cover the one and a half miles to the British Museum Library; in less he could hit Somerset House and the same time took him to St Catherine's House where wills are kept. Only Kelly's Directories defeated him, being out at Hampton Wick. He went there at weekends.

So year after year and lunchtime after lunchtime the strange, thin figure of this obsessive, ex-schoolmaster-cum-lawyer-cum-IBM-employee-now-soldier stalked the streets of London seeking what interesting facts it could devour until one day, one weird and wonderful day in 1972, it entered a bookshop and picked *A Pink 'Un and a Pelican* by A. Binstead off the shelves and a new and astonishing P.G.W. expert was turned loose on the world.

Presumably the idyllic world of Blandings and Brinkley Court had entered our desk Colonel's imagination as a schoolboy, but now it seized him.

The streets of London he knew so well were peopled with the ghosts of Galahad, Lord Uffeham, Uncle Fred, Bertie Wooster, Jeeves, Aunt Dahlia and a host of others. Fiction had turned to fact. At least in Colonel Murphy's mind.

From that sublime revelation his forced marches to Somerset House and the British Library took on a new meaning. Where before he had concentrated his attention on the hidden life of old London, he now delved into birth certificates and wills and Kelly's Street Directories. There he unearthed facts about Wodehouse aunts and uncles and numerous relatives and at the same time applied his infallible memory to characters and places in Plum's novels and linked real people and real places to their fictitious counterparts.

He visited every house Wodehouse had lived in, and during his weekends and holidays followed clues to Kent, Sussex, Shropshire and anywhere else in the country that might have provided The Master with inspiration.

I have no idea how many quiet householders have suddenly learnt they were living in part of the idyll and this by a man in a bowler hat and carrying an umbrella. So for nine years this astonishing man unearthed the material, the prima materia, from

which P.G.W. distilled his magical stories. When he had finished and the book was written he sent it to five publishers and wrote to a further ten. In each case it was rejected. The Colonel was not to be defeated.

Rightly determined to prove their judgment wrong, he had the book printed and published himself and sold it so successfully that it has become a collector's item and the publishing world has woken up to the fact that it once rejected the most important work on Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse since Richard Usborne's *Wodehouse At Work To The End*. Certainly the two biographies add little to our knowledge. *In Search of Blandings* tells us much more and, while scholars may dispute his findings, I am convinced.

But then I was there when this astonishing man saw the first glimmer of light that led him to reveal the splendid origins of the Empress of Blandings.

. . .

Note: Colonel Murphy's London book, *One Man's London*, is scheduled to be published June 1, 1989, by Century Hutchinson Ltd., Brookmount House, 62-65 Chandos Place, London W2CN 4NW, United Kingdom.

-- OM