



# Plum Lines

A Quarterly Publication of The Wodehouse Society  
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## Notes from Plum

George Donelan, TWS, recalls a sleepless night 35 years ago: "Our oldest son Kevin had a bad cough one evening when he was just a tyke, and after ministering to his needs I couldn't get back to sleep. I sat up and finished *Leave It to Psmith*, after which, in the morning's early hours, I wrote to P.G.W. I received the following letter in response.

Remsenburg N Y

Oct 31. 1955

Dear Mr Donelan.

Thank you so much for your letter. It bucks me up enormously to hear that you have enjoyed my stuff so much, as I am just starting another book and the going, as always at first, is sticky. A letter like yours encourages me.

I always find that I can't get the thing set till each of the characters has played a scene. Then I begin to see daylight. So far with this new one seven of my nine characters will have performed by the time I have finished the chapter I am on. Unfortunately I shall then discover that they are all wrong and shall have to start the story over again. However, this has happened with all my books, so I am not worrying.

So glad you like *Leave It To Psmith*. I think it is my favorite of all the things I have written.

Best wishes  
Yours sincerely

P.G. Wodehouse

The novel must have been *Something Fishy*. David Jasen states, in *Portait of a Master*, that Plum had finished *French Leave* in March 1955, and started work on *Something Fishy* about the time he began *America, I Like You* in the summer of 1955. The novel appeared in America as *The Butler Did It*. It is touching to see that a single letter could so encourage him.

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*Notes from Plum* (continued)

"About 10 years later," George writes, "when son Kevin himself was hooked on Wodehouse, Plum honored me with another reply to a "thank you" note of mine."

P. G. WODEHOUSE  
REMBENBURG  
NEW YORK

July 16.1966

Dear Mr Donelan.

It was so nice to hear from you and to know that the Donelan family were as sound as ever on their Wodehouse. (I can't think what has gone wrong with the left margin of my typewriter.)

So glad Kevin liked the Stiff Lip. Tell him to give me an idea for another Jeeves book. The difficulty of course always is how to get a fellow with a large private income like Bertie into trouble.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

*P.G. Wodehouse*

### *"Honeysuckle Cottage" Comes to the Silver Screen*

Eliot Milstein, TWS, has some good news for us: After a lapse of 30 years, a new Wodehouse movie is about to be made. The latest movie was apparently "The Girl on the Boat" in 1961. Eliot reports that Curtis Armstrong, TWS, a friend of his, and John Doolittle have written and sold a screen adaptation of "Honeysuckle Cottage" and the movie will go into production in Hollywood in October. Its director is Christopher Guest, the male lead is Val Kilmer. Negotiations are underway with a British actress who would be an excellent female lead. I got this information in a last-minute phone conversation with

Eliot, who could not at the moment recall the name of the production company or the release date. This will be a movie for theaters, not television.

Problems of adaptation and the need to write for American, rather than British, production have required a good many changes in the story. Eliot assures me, however, that these have been kept to a minimum. "Curtis is a Wodehouse scholar," he says, who has followed PGW just as closely as possible. Curtis Armstrong is an actor as well as a writer and has appeared in a dozen or so films and on television, according to Eliot.

A  
TRUE AND FAITHFUL  
ACCOUNT OF THE  
AMAZING ADVENTURES  
OF THE

## WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

ON THEIR PILGRIMAGE  
JULY 1989

Norman Murphy's (TWS) story of the Pilgrimage, under the above title, is published at last, to the applause of an eager world. Step right up, folks, and get your copy before they're gone! A stern notice on the verso of the title page warns us that this is the ONE AND ONLY EDITION.

Jimmy Heineman, TWS, has done us all a favor by publishing this gem. It's a beautiful little book of 73 pages, hardbound in plum-colored cloth. The front cover and spine are lettered in gold, with four small golden pigs on the cover. 188 little black pigs parade across each endpaper, four more decorate the title page, one is on its verso, two appear on half-title pages, and two adorn each chapter heading - pigs all over the place!

Inside, Norman has provided a detailed and informal story of a marvelous Wodehouse week. Each chapter describes one day of the trip, from the Monday afternoon when we arrived at Dulwich College in London, to Friday morning when we left on our coach tour of Wodehouse country, until Sunday evening when we disbanded, with regret, back in London again.

The story tells not only what we did, but what it meant. Norman's account of our tour of Dulwich village, for example, is accompanied by copious quotes from Plum's *Over Seventy*, *Performing Flea*, *Sam the Sudden*, and *Big Money*, which are so clearly set in that very neighborhood, along those streets, in those houses and pubs.

Norman points out a number of coincidences. One occurred as "as we waited for the lift in Claridge's [the original of Barribault's Hotel]. A few feet away, the desk porter was taking a message over the telephone about theatre tickets. As he repeated the name, the writer pricked up his ears and inquiry a moment later confirmed that the caller was Lord Ashcombe of Sudeley Castle. Our visit had coincided

with a telephone call from the occupant of the real Blandings Castle to the real Barribault's Hotel!"

Charming sketches by Pauline Blanc head every chapter, and four photographs illustrate highlights: Peacehaven, the banquet, and the Greek temple and the Empress at Weston Park. The book concludes with several lists: participants, our hosts at Dulwich College, honoured guests at the banquet, and "those who helped us on our way." Norman silently passes over his very extensive preparations for the Pilgrimage: many letters, many phone calls, and a number of personal visits to the places we visited later. A less persistent man could not have opened up so many sites for us.

The book is carefully designed. Every chapter, for example, begins on a right hand page, and every pig on the endpapers is marching *toward* the contents of the book. The book is printed in two colors: black for reading, plum for decorations. The last page lists the type faces used (people who care about books care about such things).

For the Pilgrims the book will recall a happy week in Wodehouse's world, "where it is always high summer." For the rest of us it's a guide for future visits, and for all of us an excellent permanent record of an important event in the history of our Society.

You can order the book directly from IBD Ltd, 24 Hudson Street, Kinderhook NY 12106 or toll free in the U.S. at (800) 343-3531. The price is \$25. Postage is \$3 for the first book and 50¢ for each additional book. Residents of New York state should add 7% sales tax. Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

Jimmy writes: "[The price] is high, but I ain't making nuttin' on it due to the short [press] run, discounts to distributors, two-color printing, etc."

If you want a copy, order it now. Remember that this is the first and only edition.



She went out into the Park to look at rabbits. Never seen one before. Not running about, that is, with all its insides in it.

*If I Were You, 1931*

## Norman Murphy's American Pilgrimage

Col. Norman Murphy, TWS, leader of our dauntless band of Wodehouse Pilgrims in England last summer, is making his own pilgrimage to America in October.

In response to an earlier notice in Plum Lines, Norman received far more invitations to visit American Wodehousians than he could accept. His visit will be limited to the month of October only.

He writes: "I have noticed that States' Rights are still an issue. People in State A find difficulty in understanding why I should want to see State B or even State C. And everybody reckons their State needs at least a week to see properly. Very embarrassing but I am trying to stick to my timetable. My only fear is that people I cannot reach and/or make time to stay with will be offended...I am looking forward to the trip immensely." The anticipation is just as keen on our part.

Here is his itinerary at last report:

- 2 Oct Arrive New York
- 5 Oct To Chicago
- 8 Oct To San Francisco
- 11 Oct To Los Angeles
- 15 Oct To Houston
- 18 Oct To New Orleans, Natchez, Vicksburg
- 21 Oct To Middleburg, North Carolina
- 24 Oct To Washington DC
- 28 Oct To New York "to make life of librarians miserable for last time"

The two gatherings described to the right are, as far as I know, your only chances to meet Norman unless he has arranged to visit you.

I remarked in an earlier discussion of his trip that Col. Murphy, far from looking like a Colonel Blimp, bore some resemblance to the lean and intense Sherlock Holmes. Mindi Reid's (TWS) response was typical: "Does the Colonel really look like Sherlock Holmes? Golly!"

I append a picture so that the reader may judge for him, her, or itself. The photograph resembles a mug shot in a police station, but I happen to know that the background is Norman's garage door.

## Norman Murphy's San Francisco Banquet

Our San Francisco chapter is planning a gala banquet in honor of Norman Murphy in San Francisco on the evening of October 10. All chapter members are invited and members from outside our area will be most welcome..

Time: Wednesday, October 10, 1990  
6:30 pm No-host cocktails  
7:30 pm Banquet

Place: Lehr's Greenhouse in the Canterbury Hotel  
740 Sutter Street, San Francisco, California

Our 1987 convention was held at the Canterbury, so it will be *deja vu* all over again for the conventioners. We can promise you a most interesting slide talk by Norman on Wodehousian topics. Other features are still being worked out. There will probably be a choice of two or three entrees at the banquet.

Parking is available in the public Sutter-Stockton Garage. Validated parking will also be available about a block away.

To make reservations, send a check for \$21 per person (for banquet and tip) to:

Ella Driscoll

Checks must reach Ella by October 1 to meet the reservation deadline. Make checks payable to Ella Driscoll.

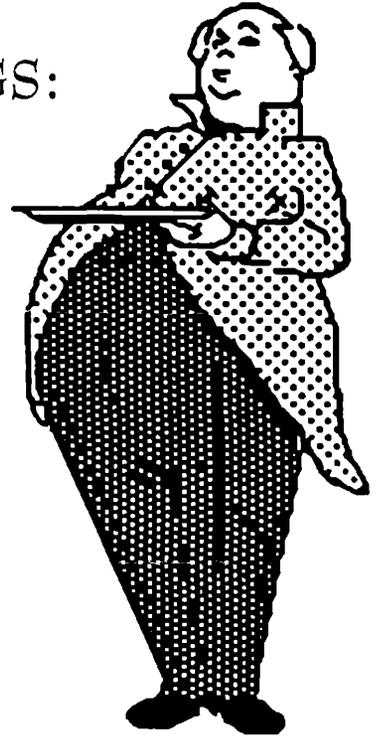


The TX/LA P. G. Wodehouse Society  
*presents*

IN SEARCH OF BLANDINGS:  
P. G. Wodehouse in  
Fiction and in Fact

by  
N. T. P. Murphy

Author of *In Search of Blandings*



*Lecture and Discussion*  
*October 17 at 7:30 P.M.*

*University of St. Thomas*  
*Houston, Texas*  
*Anderson Hall, 204*

*Reception following*

•  
*Donations cheerfully accepted*

This meeting and the one in San Francisco are your only chances to meet Norman Murphy. Y'all come, y' hear?

Toni Rudersdorf, organizer of this meeting, has reserved a block of rooms in a good Houston hotel for a flat rate of \$52 a night, whether the room is occupied by one or two people, or possibly more.

For further information, please call (713) 522-6220

## Wodehousian or Wodehousean?

Jimmy Heineman, TWS, asked this question in our Summer issue, and I'm glad to say that several members have come to his rescue.

John Hoppe's (TWS) response was first. He left a message on my answering machine pointing out that the majestic Oxford English Dictionary spells the word with an *i*, and includes no alternate spelling. Down with the phone, out of the kitchen, into the hallway to the bookshelves: the first edition had no entry spelled either way, but the recent supplement spells the word with *-ian* only, supported with quotes from *The Times Literary Supplement* (two quotes), *Scrutiny*, Malcolm Muggeridge, and the *Daily Telegraph*. Who are we to argue with such thunderers?

Bill Blood, TWS, was next: "It is probably inconsequential which spelling is used, so long as its significance is clear. My preference is *Wodehousean*, as the surname is not being robbed of its final letter. If *ian* is used, the final *e* is replaced with a vowel which has the same phonetic value: *ee* as in *EEK*. So what advantage is gained? Why change Plum's name to Wodehous?"

John Fletcher, TWS, is as scholarly here as he was in his work on Bertie Wooster's family tree: "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary backs *-ian* in such cases as Shakespearian and Gladstonian. (It allows "Shakespearean" only as a second choice.) The "Why?" seems to be that *-ean* works only for words of Greek origin like European, crustacean, empyrean, Herculean. "Wodehouse" is hardly Greek. Otherwise the suffix for "of or belonging to" comes from the French and in English is *-ian*. Personally I am a Wodeholic."

Back to the OED to see what it had to say about the suffixes themselves. Under the *-ian* entry I found that *-ian* is used "in many Eng[lish] words adapted or formed from L[atín], ...and in modern formations from proper names, the number of which is without limit, as *Addisonian*, *Arminian*...."

The OED has no entry for the suffix *-ean*.

The last three of John's examples are considered by the OED to have the suffix *-an*. The suffix of European appears to be *-an* also.

Bill Horn, TWS, writes that "Wodehousean is correct, because the existing *e* is serviceable for

euphony before adding the *an* and it need not be replaced by *i*. So also, Nietzschean. ("You would not enjoy Nietzsche, sir," says Jeeves, following Florence Craye's recommendation.) However, if Plum himself ever used *ian* or several of the distinguished academics in TWS argue for it, I would yield."

Bill included with his letter a photocopy of a page of a dictionary-type book, listing the suffix *-an* with several definitions and examples. Under the definition "Resembling or characteristic of" are listed the examples Proustian, Nietzschean, and Alaskan.

Finally, I heard from Christine Dorffi, TWS: "Mr. Heineman's poignant discomfiture alerted my editorial bloodlust, so I pored over my reference material to check on the correctness of Wodehousian versus Wodehousean.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* puts *-ean* strictly as a variant of *-ian*. Furthermore, *ia* derives from the Latin *-ius* and Greek *-ios*; it means "things derived from, relating to, or belonging to." But I'll be happy to elucidate further, for particularly obtuse members who've been dipping into the port.

*Words into Type* says only that "Words ending in silent *e* generally drop the *e* before a suffix beginning the word with a vowel." *Chicago Manual of Style*, *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*, and *Evans' Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* seem to have thought the matter beneath their respective notices.

I say Wodehousian wins the case."

That's the evidence to date. I think Wodehousian will be part of the *Plum Lines Style Manual* until I see better evidence to the contrary.



## Scrymgeour Revisited

Rhoda Robinson, TWS, handed me this little item recently from Leo Rosten's book, *People I Have Loved, Known, or Admired*:

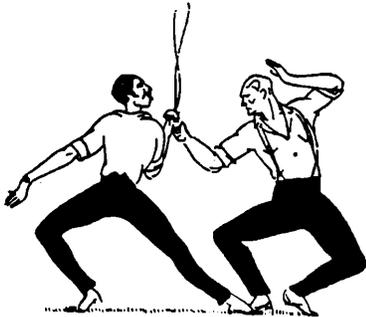
Churchill was, in truth, a poor politician. He thrived on the dramas of public life, but was bored by the requirements of party politics. In the 1922 elections he even lost his seat to a prohibitionist named Edwin Scrymgeour. (I know of no other distinction to grace that improbable name.)

Clearly, Rosten knew nothing of PGW'S two distinguished Scrymgeours (or was it the same man appearing twice, 20 years apart?). Nor did he know of our very own Scrymgeours, Richard and Bridget, TWS, known and admired wherever they go.

The name has a long and slightly raffish history, according to P.H. Reaney's *The Origin of English Surnames*\*. Fencing-schools and fencing-masters, Reaney says, were illegal in London as early as the 14th century. "The chief proof," he continues, "of the continued existence of the fencing-master throughout the Middle Ages is provided by surnames. From 1154 to 1533 numerous examples are found of men labelled by some form of [Old French] *escremisseor*, *eskermisor*, or *scremisseur* "fencing-master". Their name was not concealed, the surname was used openly and was so common that it has survived in at least 11 variant forms. We find it as *Scrimgeour* in Scotland and as *Scrimshaw* and *Skrimshire* in England, with other variants...."

*Jeeves*, by the way, is said to be a "pet-name" derived from *Geva* (Genevieve).

\* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967



## Royal Player?

Donald Daniel, TWS, found this letter to the editor in the English *Daily Telegraph* recently:

SIR - The news of Princess Margaret's former theatrical ambitions does not surprise me (report, Aug. 22).

Some years ago, as associate producer of the BBC TV series *The World of Wooster*, I was offered the option to produce a play entitled *Win With Wooster* by Guy Bolton and his friend "Plum" Wodehouse.

Billy Wallace, who was then a close friend of Princess Margaret, had long wanted to play the title role of Bertie Wooster in a stage production of the piece and, over lunch at his club, confided to me - whether it was wishful thinking or not I do not know - that if an amateur production in aid of charity could be arranged it was not unlikely that HRH might be persuaded to play one of Bertie's more drippy fiancées, Madeline Bassett.

PETER COTES  
Chipping Norton, Oxon

## PGW Seminar

Bill Blood, TWS, reports that his PGW Seminar at Delaware Valley College was so successful that he was asked to repeat it this fall. All in his group have said they will take the seminar again, and others have expressed interest.

Weeks after the seminar ended members were meeting with Bill for lunches and picnics. "This group enjoys Wodehouse," Bill says, "and has developed a strong sense of good-fellowship."

Archie Duffie, TWS, of Kingston, Ontario, donated his Penguin paperback Wodehouse books to the group. "All are in excellent condition, and circulation has begun. His generosity is genuinely appreciated."

Doug Stow, TWS, sent a sample bookmark to the group from his letterpress print shop. When the group showed its interest by asking for prices, Doug sent 60 bookmarks free. "Again," says Bill, "his generosity is deeply appreciated."

## *The Prize-Giving at Market Snodsbury Grammar School*

Well, not *exactly* Market Snodsbury, but the next best thing: Hanley Castle Grammar School. Norman Murphy, TWS, identified it firmly as the original of Market Snodsbury Grammar School in his *In Search of Blandings*. Hanley Castle is a tiny village near the River Severn - the Wodehouse Pilgrims visited the place last summer and found it delightful: we "could not fling a brick in any direction without hitting an apple-cheeked villager." Norman was invited to return this May and (gasp!) give out the prizes at the end of term.

I can think of no greater proof of the courage of this gallant British officer than the simple fact that he did so. (Do they give the Victoria Cross for this sort of thing? We should inquire.) Like Colonel Carteret, Norman will surely be known in the future as Cold-Steel Murphy. The fearful ordeal is best described in his own words:

I wish to emphasize with all the force at my disposal that I was sober, properly dressed, and my trousers did not split up the back. A pity, but there it was. I have to report to members that no child came up to claim the prize for Religious Knowledge. One boy did get a prize for excellence in half a dozen subjects including Religious Knowledge and was slightly surprised to get a conspiratorial grin from the prize-giver.

Before I forget, I should pass on the following advice to other prize-givers either in future or in absentia. When giving away prizes, the following procedure should be adhered to:

a. Adopt a fixed smirk or grin (either may be used).

- b. Ensure the teacher giving you the prizes puts them in your left hand.
  - c. Do not try and think of anything clever/witty/sage/memorable to say to each prize-winner. "Well done" for odd numbers and "Congratulations" to even numbers is perfectly adequate.
  - d. Despite heat of the evening and natural nervousness/anxiety etc, do not wipe one's hand ostentatiously on a handkerchief. A subtle rubbing of the palm on the opposite sleeve will suffice for the sweatiest palm. This ensures the next firm, manly handshake in ten seconds will not be too damp.
  - e. For male prize-givers only. When confronted with a female prize-winner of considerable personal attraction, the utmost self-control is required. The face should not light up, nor should any expression of admiration whatever be allowed to mar the fixed smirk or grin.
- Only by obeying these simple rules can the amenities be observed and the status of the Royal United Guild of Prize Givers be maintained.

It was great fun and Charlotte and I thoroughly enjoyed it. On the way home next day, we called in on Rowena Mackenzie and told her all about it.

## Address Given at the Annual Prize-Giving Hanley Castle Grammar School May 24, 1990

Col. N.T.P. Murphy, TWS

Chairman of Governors, Headmaster, ladies and gentlemen - of all ages.

I should start by telling you how I came to be here tonight. For some years I have spent my spare time tracing the background of the novels of PG Wodehouse. Some of you probably saw the recent series on television. It was a good series in many ways, but it is impossible to put over on television the essence of Wodehouse's genius - his superb use of language.

For example - if you want to look reproachful on television, all you can do is, well, look reproachful. Wodehouse puts it far better: "He gave me the long, slow, sad look of someone who has been bitten in the leg by an old friend." When Aunt Agatha is speechless with rage on television, all she can do is stand there. Wodehouse puts it far more graphically: "She stood there, heaving gently like a Welsh rarebit at the height of its fever." You see what I mean.

Lord Emsworth is muddle-headed. How do you show that on television? Wodehouse tells us in one sentence: "Lord Emsworth had one of those minds that could cope with only one thought at a time - if that." And, of course,

there is the splendid opening sentence of one of his books: "Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept the look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French."

As I said, I have been looking into the background of Wodehouse's novels for years and I can tell you that an astonishing proportion of the 97 books he wrote is based on fact. He knew people just as bizarre as the characters he described; Bertie Wooster and Jeeves have their origins in acquaintances of his and nearly every location and setting of his novels can be traced.

The London stories are set in his own house or those of his friends. The real Drones Club is still to be found a few hundred yards off Piccadilly, and Blandings Castle is - exactly as he said it was - a mixture of places he remembered.

If you want to see the terraces, the lake, the rose gardens of Blandings, the cottage in the wood suitable for hiding stolen diamond necklaces or prize pigs - go to Weston Park in Shropshire, just a few miles from where Wodehouse once lived. You'll find the castle itself with its flag-tower, ruined wing and yew-walks across the valley from here - at Sudeley, close to Cheltenham where the Wodehouse family moved after Shropshire.

One book, *Right Ho, Jeeves*, is set in Brinkley Court, the home of Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia. In that book, Wodehouse wrote his funniest-ever scene - the prize-giving at Market Snodsbury Grammar School. If you haven't read *Right Ho, Jeeves*, I envy you. You have a treat in store.

So, if the places in Wodehouse's novels are real, where is Brinkley Court and this mysterious Grammar School? Let me give you some clues. Brinkley Court is described as a red-brick Tudor mansion in Worcestershire. It is near the River Severn; it lies close to the road to Pershore. And, very near it, is a small village with an ancient Grammar School. And when I tell you that Wodehouse's uncle was vicar here in Hanley Castle in the 1890s, that we know that Wodehouse came here for his holidays, that he was often the guest of the Lechmeres across the road at Severn End, and that his uncle was a Governor of this school, you have the answer. This is Market Snodsbury Grammar School.

Since I was the man who discovered this was the setting of the famous prize-giving in *Right Ho, Jeeves*, your headmaster felt it only appropriate I should present the prizes tonight. And I suppose it serves me right!

But I am in good company. There are thousands of Wodehouse enthusiasts all over the world. He is read in Japan, Sweden and India; one of his keenest fans is the Queen Mother [TWS]. Two years ago, she unveiled a plaque on his London house. In her speech, she said she always read Wodehouse last thing at night because it meant that, no matter how bad a day she had had, she went to sleep with a smile on her face.

Now, it is the task of anyone presenting prizes to try and think of some magic words to inspire the younger members of the audience. The theory is that his words will be so memorable that every boy and girl will immediately go off and become Lord Chief Justice, chairman of ICI or Prime Minister and, when they appear on Desert Island Discs, they will say, "Oh yes. The formative influence of my early life was the inspiring speech I heard etc etc etc...."

Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. Such ideals and inspiration as you've got, you have received from your parents and teachers already. However, I do have a word of advice for you. It won't alter your lives but it might help in some way. It is this.

All the way through our lives, we are usually worried about something. O levels or A levels, boy friends or girl friends; getting to university, not getting to university; getting a job, not getting a job. It seems to go on forever. These worries are natural enough but you can alleviate them slightly.

My advice is simply this - and I'm sure you've heard it before. Try and get yourself a hobby, an interest.

Football, cricket, tennis, squash - games are all very well - but they don't last. Something that exercises your mind does.

It doesn't matter what it is. Photography, Chinese pottery, the American Civil War, postage stamps, collecting beer mats, little known brasses in mediaeval churches. It can be as heavy or as light as you like - I can recommend reading Wodehouse for a start - but the point is this. It should be something that will take your mind off your normal concerns; something you can switch off with; something you can enjoy and develop on your own, in your own time, when you like and how you like. This country is reckoned to be one of the most contented nations in the world because more people in this country have hobbies than anywhere else.

Look at Master Mind. Income Tax inspectors specializing in Chinese history, housewives who know all there is to know about sea birds in the south Pacific.

You don't have to go in for Master Mind. All you need is an interest, something you can enjoy and relax with, something you can read about last thing at night so that - like the Queen Mother - you too can go to sleep with a smile on your face.

## A Few Quick Ones

Bill Horn, TWS, has discovered, in a current New York City entertainment guide, that "There will be a new production of the Gershwin musical comedy OH KAY, brought to Broadway by David Merrick, the name behind the famous musical 42ND STREET. This will feature an all black cast, and it takes it's (sic) story by the well known and very amusing P.G. Wodehouse book. Instead of the setting being Long Island, the setting will be Harlem, during its jazzy heyday of the Roaring Twenties!"

"Oh Kay" was a smasher when it opened on Broadway in 1926, with a book by Bolton and Wodehouse, music and lyrics by the Gershwins, and the enchanting Gertrude Lawrence as the star. "Someone to Watch Over Me" was just one of its songs. What a show it must have been!

Amanda DeWees is one of several members who have written to ask what became of Plum's poem "Too Much Hamlet," which I've delayed for several issues. (It's in this issue at last.)

Amanda adds: "Look for my first novel, *Skin Deep*, in August [of 1990]. Aegina Press, \$7. Sparkling, witty autograph messages free of charge. Ideal for gift-giving." Nothing remarkable about this except that Amanda is, as accurately as I can guess from her letter, 22 years old. Plum published his first novel just a little younger, shortly before his 21st birthday. May it sell a million copies, Amanda.

Jim Thorne, TWS, visited Guildford, Surrey, Plum's birthplace, in June and discovered that the authorities have been tampering with the evidence. "One Vale Place, Epsom Road, of 1881," he writes, "is known to the postal authorities as 59 Epsom Road. It is a 3-flat with a historic marker over the door."

There's nothing we can do about postal authorities who take the bit in their teeth, I suppose. We must just remember that from now on Plum was born at 59 Epsom Road, Guildford. Until we hear further from the postal service.

Jim adds happily that "P.G. Wodehouse books are snapped up fast. The booksellers say they can't keep a Wodehouse book in stock, especially since the recent TV series."

In the Spring issue I identified Jimmy Heineman as our honorary President. Bill Blood, TWS, reminds me that that lofty distinction belongs to Richard Osborne. My apologies to Richard.

Donald Daniel, TWS, asked, in passing, in the Summer issue if there had been any Italian translations of PGW. Pauline Blanc, TWS, notes that the "Centenary" book issued by the Pierpont Morgan Library in 1981 lists several dozen translations from 1928 to 1977.

A number of people have asked me why I don't append TWS to the names of members in this newsletter. I've tried it several times in drafts of *Plum Lines* and dropped it every time. It seems unnecessary. But I've done it as an experiment in this issue, as you can perhaps too plainly see. I've tried to keep the TWSing to a minimum by using the initials just once in each article for each member. I'm not fond of chopping up a perfectly good sentence with a couple of commas and three initials, but it may be useful. I'd like to hear your comments.

Using TWS in other ways, after the name in the address of a letter, for example, seems to me a thoroughly nifty idea.

The Queen Mother's ninetieth birthday - a very special event - isn't covered in this issue because of an unbreakable deadline and jealousy in high places. Next time!



The Oldest Member

Information and New Memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues Payments and Address Changes  
Tom Wainwright

Editorial Contributions  
Ed Ratcliffe, OM

Every writer really wants to have letters printed in the newspaper. Unable to make the grade, he drops down a rung of the ladder and writes novels instead. P.G. Wodehouse, no source given

## *A Chance Meeting*

A tribute to P.G. Wodehouse by Robert Burns,  
provided by George M. Donelan, TWS

"Sae unco eerie 'tis to see  
Two laddies like thysel' and me  
In randy Poesie Nancie's be  
On sic a day.  
Forsooth, ma hame's nearby but ye  
Live fa' awa.

Tis nae frae Ayr ye are, for sure,  
I ken't as ye step't in the door  
And in a squeal aboon the roar  
O' Poesie's din  
Ye charged the Boniface to pour  
A splash o' Gin!

Scotch uisquebagh ye didn' crave  
Like lawlan' lad or hielan' knave  
But, Sassanach, ye needs maun have  
A drap or two,  
About which Lon'on gentry rave,  
Ca'd "Crystal Dew."

My welcom friend, ye be nae Scot,  
Nor Scot alane is what ye're not.  
The duddies strange that ye ha' brought  
From de'il knows where  
Could na' this present day be bought  
Nor fashioned here!

Ye be the ghaist o' one to be.  
A chap o' wit and jollity  
Wha'll pen a muckle litany  
O' tales of fun.  
Thy fruity name o' Plum shall be  
A household one.

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, you  
Ha' stumbled into Poesie's zoo  
A century before ye're due  
To gladden hearts.  
I, Robbie Burns, embrace the view  
Tis best o' Arts.

One hundred years and mair shall fly  
Before the unsuspecting eye  
Th' uproarious insanity  
That ye, them, feed.  
A crowlin migraine wings Bye Bye  
When you they read.

The dingbats in the beuks ye write;  
Young Bertie's everlasting plight;  
Jeeve's ingine to gar a' aright;  
Your whole daft clan,  
This Bardie and the warl, delight  
Down to a man.

I maun lea'e, ma Jeannie ca's me.  
Drapin' in at Poesie Nancie's  
Given pleasure to this Bardie.  
Adieu, dear Plum,  
And may thy Muse on thee look kindly  
For years to come.

. . . . .

George writes: "My oldest living brother Matt, now in his late 70s, introduced me to Wodehouse when I was a stripling of 8 or 9 years and my enthusiasm for his stuff has never waned. Brother Matt can also take credit for introducing me to the works of Robbie Burns, for Matt became a most appreciative expert on the Immortal Bard during a three year tour of duty spent in Scotland.

Notwithstanding the late Mr. Evelyn Waugh's rather uncharitable assesment of P.G. Wodehouse's personality, I believe that Robbie and Plum are kindred spirits. In that belief I wrote the enclosed bit of verse. It is in Robbie's own style.

## Lord Emsworth's Gutenberg Bible

Richard Usborne, TWS

Some fiend has borrowed, and not returned, my copy; but if you go back to your *Something New* (*anglice Something Fresh*), Plum's first Blandings novel, you will be reminded that Lord Emsworth had then (the novel was published in 1915) a museum in the castle. Plum describes the museum as "an amateur junk-shop." But in amongst a collection of worthless trivia, such as a collection of birds' eggs he had made as a boy - he would have been Lord Bosham until his father, the eighth earl, died - there was a Gutenberg Bible. Neither the museum nor the Gutenberg Bible is mentioned in subsequent Blandings books.

The Latin Bible printed by Johann Gutenberg in Mainz c. 1455 is claimed to be the first Bible, perhaps the first book, printed with movable type, and Gutenberg has been described as "the strongest claimant to the honor of the invention of printing." Today there are only about fifty known copies of the great Bible in the world, and some of these are seriously imperfect. I believe that the Morgan Library in New York has two perfect copies. Princeton has one. Eton College in Windsor has one, the gift of a certain John Fuller, who died in 1831. Fuller's claim to fame (other than for having given this Bible to his old school) is to have been the last Member of Parliament (for West Sussex) to be imprisoned by the House of Commons for having defied the Speaker.

Robert Birley, when Headmaster of Eton, lived within a biscuit-toss of the College Library. He has written that when at midnight he decided that some problem was insoluble, "let us say what to do about the kitchen in some boys' House, or how to arrange the mathematical divisions in Remove," he would go to the Library and rest his mind by studying the treasures there. He selected, annotated, and, in 1970 published as a pamphlet, *One Hundred Books of the Eton College Collections*. His Number 17 was the Gutenberg Bible, and he slipped a sentence into his half page of annotation, "To the recorded copies of the Gutenberg Bible should be added one in the library of Blandings Castle in Shropshire." He sent a copy of the pamphlet "To Mr. Wodehouse from the author, a devoted admirer of his works, with special reference to No. 17." He wrote in his covering letter to Plum, "I am very hopeful that some German professor will write to me

asking what he should do to inspect the book. I shall, of course, suggest to him that he catches the 11.28 or the 2.33 train from Paddington Station for Market Blandings, having secured a room at the Emsworth Arms hotel and making use of the services of Mr. Jno Robinson and his station taxicab."

Birley had been a Wodehouse addict when he came to Eton as a junior master, long before he returned there as Headmaster. He has written, I forget where, that at some meeting chaired by the august Provost of Eton, Dr. Montague Rhodes James (the author of those ghost stories and much else more weighty) had mentioned the name of an English country house, and young Birley had referred to it as one of the houses that Queen Elizabeth I had visited in her "snipe-like" progress from mansion to mansion in her realm. "Monty" James had looked up and said "I see you are a Wodehouse man" ...recognizing the adjective from a discourse of Psmith's in *Leave It to Psmith* (1923, 1924). The two sages, old and young, had become friends on the spot. I possess somewhere (and will give it to Jimmy Heineman's collection when I can find it) a chart, in Birley's own hand, of the interrelationships of all the Mulliners...cousins, nephews etc etc of the original Mr M, a fine bit of scholarly geneology. But enough of this boasting...

In the early 1970s my office, in Golden Square, Soho, was very close to the underground establishment of Quaritch, one of the great, old-established, antiquarian booksellers. I went there one lunch-time and asked a learned young assistant (he later told me that when he was at his public school, one of his form-masters set them passages of Wodehouse to render into Latin) about Gutenberg Bibles. The young man's first cautious question to me was "Are you buying or selling?" He was very well informed about them, and said he thought probably every known copy had at one time or another passed through the hands of Quaritch. And he gave me a leaflet, printed in colour, about a Gutenberg, "probably the last copy in private hands (the Shuckburgh family)", being offered for sale by the late H.P. Kraus for Swiss francs...I think eleven million, anyway the then equivalent of £1,000,000 sterling.

Kraus, of New York, had thought this, after his purchase of another, the Houghton copy, in 1970, must be the last that would ever surface. He wrote in *A Rare Book Saga* (Putnam's, New York c. 1978):

In December of that year a bomb exploded nearly shattering my hope that no other copy would be discovered. I learned from Dr. Bühler of the Morgan Library that at venerable Eton College in England an exhibition catalogue had been published which recorded a "newly discovered Gutenberg Bible at Blandings Castle." I wrote to Patrick Strong, Keeper of the College Library, asking for a description of the Bible and the location of Blandings Castle. I could not find it on any map and even the British Information Service could not help. On January 8th, 1971, I received from Patrick Strong the following answer. "I'm afraid the Blandings Castle Gutenberg is a ghost: it was brought into *Something Fresh*, one of the early novels of P.G. Wodehouse. Sir Robert Birley could not resist putting it into *One Hundred Books* (in the Eton College Library). *The Times Literary Supplement* alluded to it in "Commentary" after we reopened in 1969, whereupon Mr. Goff of the Library of Congress asked similarly for details."

So the canon of known copies hasn't had an addition that would startle us all...

So was the end of the Blandings Castle Ghost. I had one less worry - one less possible competitor. At that time I had no idea that in 1978 two more copies of the Bible were going to be offered for sale in New York.

Jimmy Heineman adds a footnote. "I knew Kurt von Bühler well, and I feel sure that he was pulling Kraus' leg, and the latter quite innocently let it be yanked, eager as he was to hold the market."

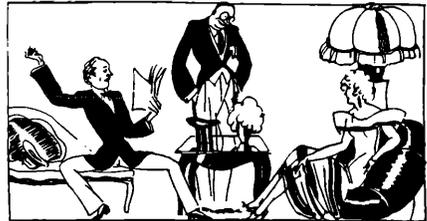
Jim Earl, TWS, coincidentally sent me an item about Robert Birley from the London *Sunday Telegraph* recently. Excerpts follow.

Eton's 550th anniversary sees the publication of *History and Idealism*, the collected essays, address and letters of that outstanding Head Master, Sir Robert Birley.

Perhaps the most imaginative of all history beaks, Birley was also a respected bibliophile, the midwife of post-war German education and a dedicated enemy of apartheid when a visiting professor at Witwatersrand University.

But he had his lighter moments and cherished the works of P.G. Wodehouse, all but three of which adorned his shelves.

He was a serious student of Wodehouse's similes, as when the Master wrote: "The head waiter began to drift up like a bank of fog." Or when describing "a swan moving moodily up and down a lake like a man looking for a lost collar stud."



## *Video Information Wanted*

Paul Randall, TWS, asks if anyone has a list of videotapes of Wodehouse movies, plays, or performances of any kind. I don't know of any such list, but Len Lawson, TWS, has offered to make up a list from information supplied by members. He will attempt to keep it up to date and will make it available to all of us. If it's short I'll print in *Plum Lines*.

## Something New

Len Lawson, TWS

In late July, Barnes and Noble offered the following books by and about Wodehouse:

- 1603919 *Who's Who in Wodehouse* by Daniel Garrison \$13.95  
 1332485 *The World of Mr Mulliner* by PGW 6.95  
 1625193 *Wodehouse Nuggets* selected by Richard Usborne 7.95  
 1606893 *Four Plays* by PGW paper 1.95  
 1625277 *The Great Sermon Handicap* by PGW paper 3.95  
 1625235 *A Toad at Harrow* by Charles E. Gould, jr. paper 3.98  
 1625219 *Three Talks and a Few Words at a Festive Occasion in 1982* by Richard Usborne, William Douglas-Home & Angus McIntyre. These talks were given at the National Theatre in London for the Centenary Celebration. paper 3.98

Write to Barnes and Noble, 126 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10011 or call toll free (in the U.S.A) to 1-800-242-6657. Add \$4 for shipping, and add sales tax in CA, CT, MA, MN, NJ, NY & PA.

Edward R. Hamilton, Falls Village CT 06031, has offered the following over the last couple of months:

- 450995 *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* by PGW \$7.95  
 855952 *Meet Mr Mulliner* by PGW 6.95  
 24726X *The World of Mr. Mulliner* by PGW 6.95  
 748374 *Wodehouse Nuggets* selected by Richard Usborne 7.95  
 613037 *The Infernal Grove* by Malcolm Muggeridge paper 2.95

The Muggeridge book is part two of his three volume autobiography *Chronicles of Wasted Time*. He devotes ten pages to the time he spent with PGW in Paris at the end of WW II. I personally consider this a very important essay on PGW and his Berlin broadcasts because Muggeridge was actually there during the time of the investigation.

With the exception of *Who's Who in Wodehouse* and probably *The World of Mr Mulliner*, all the books listed above are remainders and are subject to stock on hand. Barnes and Noble also offered the 1985 facsimile edition of *The Globe By the Way Book* but it sold out immediately. I recommend that you get on the mailing lists of these two companies so you can take advantage of these offerings as soon as they come out. By the time the information appears here it may be too late.

My wife can walk into a bookstore, walk past ten aisles of bookshelves, turn left, walk six feet, climb up a ladder and reach back behind the top row of books to pull out a book that has gotten wedged behind the rest. The book will then fall open to the section by or about PGW.

Her latest find is *The London Ritz Book of English Breakfasts* by Helen Simpson, copyright 1988, published by Arbor House,

William Morrow & Co., New York, \$10.95. The book contains a little exchange between Bertie and Jeeves about fish for breakfast from *The Mating Season*. It also includes an illustration of Jeeves rallying round the young master at breakfast.

David Jasen's (TWS) *A Bibliography and Reader's Guide to the First Editions of P.G. Wodehouse* is still available in limited quantity at Greenhill Books, Park House, 1 Russell Gardens, London NW11 9NN. The price is £25 plus postage. The publisher recommends using a credit card. I can never adequately describe this excellent reference. With each story Mr. Jasen has listed the people, places, and things in the story. There are indexes to characters, places, and things, a list of anthologies, and an alphabetical list of titles. I recommend this book highly.

[I want to add my unstinting praise. This is much more than a book for collectors of first editions. It is an invaluable reader's guide through the trackless jungle of Plum's work. If you want a list of all the characters in any story, with their relationships; if you want to know which book includes the short story "Strychnine in the Soup"; if you want to know which story contains the reference to Blair Eggleston's novel *Offal*, this is the book for you.

Dan Garrison's (TWS) *Who's Who in Wodehouse* provides an alternate guide: an alphabetical listing of every person or thing who can possibly be considered a character (including a bath sponge and two moustaches), with a description of the character, his relationships to other characters in every story in which he appears, and references to all those stories. Many of the descriptions are

amusing quotes from PGW himself. The book also includes alphabetical and chronological lists of titles, and other lists.

These two books are simply essential if you need guides to the vast Wodehouse output. I use them frequently, and several times a day when I'm preparing *Plum Lines* ...OM]

Jimmy Heineman, TWS, has just published Norman Murphy's (TWS) *A True and Faithful Account of the Amazing Adventures of The Wodehouse Society on Their Pilgrimage July 1989*. OM has included a review, with ordering information, elsewhere in this issue.

Jimmy is also working on six other books he expects to have out before the end of the year:

*Yours, Plum*, a collection of letters written by PGW and edited by Frances Donaldson, will cost about \$25. [Last-minute word from Pauline Blanc is that the book has just been published in England by Century Hutchinson.]

*After Hours*, a series of talks and articles by Richard Osborne, TWS, will also be about \$25.

*Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern* by Lee Davis will be \$25.

*The Great Sermon Handicap*, vol 2, will contain translations of the story into Western European Germanic languages for \$22.95.

*The Great Sermon Handicap*, vol 3, will contain translations into Scandinavian languages for a more modest \$19.95.

These will all be available from IBD (address above). Jimmy expects the Wodehouse bibliography to be available around the end of November from Omnigraphics at about \$135.

Bertie Books, TWS, offers a catalog devoted exclusively to ephemera. Write to Bertie Books, P.O. Box 8874, Lowell MA 01853 for a copy.

Bill Horn, TWS, who will be lynched on the spot if he appears at another convention without his wife Nancy, tells of another textbook with reference to PGW. *Writer's Guide and Index to English* by Porter G. Perrin, published by Scott, Foresman and Co., 1942, contains a paragraph from *Big Money* that describes just how well Lord Biskerton clicked.

## *Blame It on Bludleigh* Mindi Reid, TWS

I TRY to tell my Greenpeace friends;  
They will not comprehend it;  
My theory is quite sound, I'm sure -  
I hasten to defend it;

I know it can't all JUST be chance  
So here's my diagnosis:  
Our environmental crises are  
All due to BLUDLEIGHOSIS.

Each person stricken by the bug  
becomes a choice enviro-thug;  
is overwhelmed by urges to  
depopulate the global zoo ---  
can't BEAR to think of something missed  
on the Endangered Species List.

Wodehousians! Be vigilant!  
Beware the dire prognosis!  
Let not our Noble Ranks be thinned  
By THAT SCOURGE - Bludleighosis!

## Social Notes from Paris

Serge Lafont, TWS, our man in Paris, writes:

On the 19th of May 1990, in Paris, France, Rebecca Rogers, daughter of Thomas and Jacqueline, TWS, from State College, Pa, and Olivier Debarre, nondescript, from Paris, France, joined in a merger, or plied their troth, whatever the exact words are.

Serge Lafont, TWS, as the groom's bestman, had the sacred duty to read him large extracts of *Bachelors Anonymous* prior to the ceremony, which nonetheless took place. The party then made way to the chateau de Pondron, where many colored fluids were consumed far into the night. Ladies were charming, gentlemen well behaved, and witticisms at their wittiest.

The good news is that at the end of the day, the young couple saw the light, and although it was too late to undo the undoable, they decided to renounce their aimless lives devoted to soulless pleasures; they swore to join The Wodehouse Society in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment, and are moving to Iowa to repent and live in expiation of their past lives.

. . . . .

We welcome Rebecca and Olivier into The Wodehouse Society with more than usual pleasure and hope that all their life together will be as happy as this beginning. Under Rebecca's tender and loving care, Olivier is sure to become more and more descript.

....OM

## Convention '91

President Phil Ayers says "Things are moving along toward a good convention. I can tell you now for publication that Peter Schwed, Plum's American publisher, is going to speak and bring mementos. There is enough interest so that on the Friday before, Oct. 11, we will take a trip to Remsenburg [Plum's last home, on Long Island].

I am pleased at how many people have responded to the general call. Many people volunteering to help and many to speak. I think we will have a veritable plethora of good speakers and shows to watch. I am very excited already."

We expect to have some English members, almost certainly including some prominent Wodehousians. However, no one seems to be set in concrete, if that's what I mean.

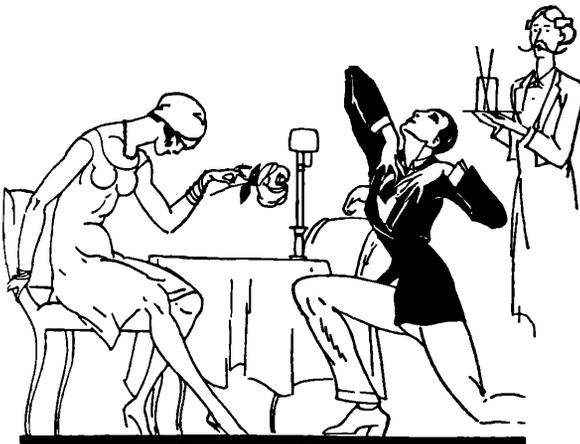
I think there's a good deal of backstage activity right now. I expect to have a lot to tell you in the next *Plum Lines*.

Begin now to save your pennies or pence and come to:

**Sheraton-Russell Hotel, New York City**

**October 12 and 13, Saturday and Sunday, 1991**

Come earlier for the Remsenburg trip on Friday, October 11.



(2) If you would like to make a presentation of any kind - a talk, a display, or whatever - please inform Phil at the above address.

Florence Cunningham, TWS, provides solid evidence that Plum himself would approve the choice of New York as the convention site. From *The New York Times*, with no source given, comes this quote from the Master: "To say that New York came up to its advance billing would be the baldest of understatements. Being there was like being in heaven, without going to all the bother and expense of dying."

"We just happened to be sitting in a cemetery, and I asked her how she would like to see my name on her tombstone."

*If I Were You, 1931*

## *History, Please!*

Charles Bishop, TWS

At a recent TWS convocation I was taken to task (rather severely, I thought) by a Wodehousian (see C. Dorffi, this issue) whose initials I will not sully in print, but whose name is Jan Wilson Kaufman. The reason for this task-taking was that I had asked for and received contributions from members, with the promise that I would publish them - but I have not done so. Contributors were asked to describe how and when they had become acquainted with the works of PGW, and were to include a favorite quote. For my failure to publish, we must look to the poet Burns and his notes on plans that "Gang aft agley." Well, my plans have been ganging agley, but do so no longer.

I have contributions from these people: Pauline Blanc, Florence Cunningham, Robert Hall, Jr., Jan Kaufman, Lise E. Kartak, Rob Kooy, Robert G. Plunkett, Rhoda Robinson, Susanna Smart, Doug Stow, and Beth Wainwright. There is also one from a person unknown that begins: "My mother is Cornish and a voracious reader." Please drop a note to claim authorship. And the rest of you should put pen (or typewriter or word processor) to hand, jot down your remembrances for posterity and post them promptly.



## *Barribault Report*

Serge Lafont, TWS, brings us up to date on what might be called certain theoretical investigations:

I got two letters from Thomas Rogers, TWS, and Rob Kooy, TWS, on the subject. The funny thing is that they come out with similar explanations: Tom Rogers suggests that P.G., meeting Jean-Louis Barrault, poked him in the rib, which created Barribault. Our distinguished colleague from the Netherlands has very convincing arguments to explain that Plum might have invented the name out of Barrymore and Barrault. If this is the case, alas, we shall never have any substantial proof.

Rob Kooy also suggests that the name might have originated from a "Bar Ribault." I checked in the electronic phonebook: there are 24 Ribault living in Paris today, although no bar or cafe of the name; but what of the year 1945?

The road to truth is well guarded...

One last thing: there is no town, city, village, hamlet, or even lieu-dit called Barribault, or something close, in France.

.....

Rob Kooy, who started this whole thing, has the following theory:

Firstly, PGW knew John Barrymore, the actor. Not only has Barrymore played a star role in several Wodehouse plays and films, it is known that both Wodehouse and Barrymore have crossed the Atlantic on the same boat at several occasions. And secondly: While living in Paris, Wodehouse might have met, or known, - or at least heard of - another actor: Jean-Louis Barrault, who, at the time, became internationally famous for his pantomime in Marcel Carnes' film "Les Enfants du Paradis." The combination Barrymore/Barrault might have inspired PGW for Barribault, though there's a second B remaining unsolved. This is all merely a theory and nothing but a theory, there's no proof whatever.

.....

I wonder if the collection of Wodehouse letters, due to be published by Jimmy Heineman, TWS, later this year, might have some clues.

...OM

## *A Perfect Resort for the Drones Club*

### P.G. Wodehouse's LeTouquet

Gavin Bryars, TWS, found this very interesting article in the English *The Independent* and sent it to Pauline Blanc, TWS, who sent it on to me.

The librarian was baffled. "*Woodhose...Non, je ne sas pais....*" I showed her the name written on my pad. "*Ah! Vodehowse. Certainment, il y a des livres humoristiques.*"

The town library in Le Touquet is not very large, but Le Touquet itself is no big place: a neat, well-kept resort a short drive from what the tourist board refers to as the Côte d'Opale. Outside the holiday season the population is no more than five or six thousand. There were two books on the shelves: *Ca va, Jeeves* and *Bonjour, Jeeves*. Far from looking like *livres humoristiques*, the book jackets suggested literature of a vaguely sinister bent. *Bonjour, Jeeves* (the French translation of the classic, *The Code of the Woosters*) showed Jeeves *le butler* manipulating two marionette Hooray Henry types complete with top hats and monocles.

I asked the librarian if she knew the house in LeTouquet where PG Wodehouse lived. "He lived in LeTouquet?" She was sceptical. She puffed out her cheeks, widened her eyes and shook her head. "*Non.*" She had an idea: perhaps the town's Société Académique would know, it knew everything on matters like this. But after making a telephone call she said that the lady who ran the society did not know: "And they're just moving offices, all their records are packed into boxes."

The librarian introduced a small elderly lady. "This lady has lived in Le Touquet 70 years," announced the librarian. "Did you know P.G. Wodehouse?" I asked. "Who?" replied the old lady. "In the old days we used to see the Prince of Wales. *Ah, le Prince de Galles*, he came all the time, every summer. You could see him alone in the street, going to the bar for a drink. He wasn't very good-looking, I thought."

"It was all the English here in those days," she continued dreamily. "There was the casino then; we had a casino long before Deauville. There were hotels *de grand luxe*: the Hermitage, the Grand. What days, what people."

The librarian came hotfoot from the telephone with more information: "His house is near the Manoir,

on the Avenue de Golf - in the forest. Just 10 minutes' drive from here. *Parfait.*"

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse ("Plum" to his friends) first came to Le Touquet in 1934; he and his wife, Ethel, found the place very much to their liking. In the year he arrived, Plum was 53 and at the height of his career.

Le Touquet had much to recommend it. A short drive from Boulogne and Calais: Plum could be in London in a few hours. Le Touquet was also reasonably well placed for getting a liner from Cherbourg to the States.

For Ethel, who, unlike Plum, was keen on the high life, Le Touquet offered the pleasures of the casino and the prospect of a rich social life. (Although by the time the Wodehouses came, Le Touquet was losing out to the increasingly fashionable resorts on the Côte d'Azur.)

For Plum, whose only abiding interest in life seems to have been writing, Le Touquet was the perfect place to write in the sort of isolation that would have been impossible in Britain or America.

But there were other, financial reasons why the Wodehouses preferred not to reside in Britain or the US. Shortly before his arrival in Le Touquet, Plum had been presented with huge demands for income tax from both the British and American governments. Never a practical man, Wodehouse was one of the world's highest-paid writers yet seems not to have bothered to get advice on tax matters.

The various claims were eventually resolved but the Wodehouses clearly felt safer living beyond the reach of the Revenue men. Another factor in Le Touquet's favor was that unlike Britain, France had no quarantine restrictions to prevent the free movement of the Wodehouses' much-loved dogs.

When the Wodehouses arrived, in the early Thirties, Le Touquet was largely an English colony. As a resort it was little more than 30 years old. At the turn of the century it had been "a small village of a few wooden shanties without water, gas, electric light, post office, police or bank."

Le Touquet is one place where the upper-class twits of the Drones Club would still have felt comfortable in the Thirties. Society magazine photographs of Le Touquet in 1927 show the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Westminster with the drag hunt

leaving the Westminster Hotel. Also pictured living it up are various lords, ladies, government ministers and members of parliament.

Initially, the Wodehouses rented a house called Low Wood, a handsome detached villa in the forest, an area developed as a sort of French Weybridge: avenue after avenue of stockbroker-style detached properties, from Hansel and Gretel cottages up to Second Empire-style mansions.

Low Wood backs onto the golf course, a short walk from what is now Le Manoir Hotel. Wodehouse seems not to have played golf during his residence in Le Touquet. The property suited Plum and Ethel so much that in June 1935 they bought it. "Sensational news. Yesterday we bought Low Wood!!! I must say I am delighted. I have grown very fond of the house, and with the alterations we are going to make it will be fine. We came to the conclusion that we wanted to live in Le Touquet and that Low Wood was the best best on account of the position."

Low Wood calls itself "Low Wood Manor" these days. The house sign is prominently located at the end of a short drive about 200 yards before the entrance to the golf course.

It is a large house, though in most respects fairly modest for someone as wealthy as Wodehouse in the Thirties. A place like Low Wood can now be had for around £300,000.

History is turning in circles: much of the property-buying in the Le Touquet area is once again being done by the British. A British company is involved in re-opening the casino. More luxury hotels are under construction, part of a revival that the city council hopes will put Le Touquet on a par with Cannes and other up-market French resorts.

Today the Wodehouses' old home is owned by a French couple who must be bemused by the trickle of Wodehouse Pilgrims who venture up their drive.

There is no monument to Wodehouse in Le Touquet. In the place where he seems to have spent his happiest years, there is not even a plaque.

## *Notes on the Empress*

Margaret and Jim Earl, TWS

The show in which Lord Emsworth's large black Berkshire sow, Empress of Blandings, distinguished herself for so many years, called variously by the Master "The Shrewsbury Show" or "The Shropshire Agricultural Show," is correctly known as "The Shropshire and West Midlands Agricultural Society's Show."

It is held yearly in mid-May on the Society's own show ground by the side of the River Severn in Shrewsbury. This year's show was the one hundred and second.

There has not been a "Fat Pigs' Class" for many years now. Talking to an expert at this year's Show, we were told that owing to outbreaks of swine fever, there are stringent regulations in force regarding the movement of pigs\*, and in general there are very few selective shows left.

However, we ascertained that there were indeed some pigs of the rare breeds at the Show, and on tracking them down we were delighted to find a fine black Berkshire sow occupying pride of place, together with six piglets. She was flanked by a Gloucester Old Spot and a Tamworth, also proudly displaying their progeny. It appears that all these pigs are now categorized as "Rare Breeds."

The Empress (it must have been she) was in great form. The sluicing and browsing was accompanied by loud joyful snorts, especially when Margaret tickled the Empress's back with an umbrella.

As if to demonstrate her fitness, the Empress overturned with her snout a large metal feeding trough that must have weighed about a hundredweight. She then settled down for a feast.

We took several photographs and left quickly, so as not to disturb her serenity.

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Lord Emsworth would certainly applaud Jim and Margaret's restraint in dealing with the noble animal.

A Rare Breeds Fact Sheet sent by Jim states that the Berkshire is a "relatively small pig." What a feat, then, is represented by those three silver medals!

## *My First Wodehouse* Elliöt Milstein, TWS

I read my first Wodehouse book shortly after Wodehouse published his ninety-third. The Master was celebrating his ninetieth birthday with a new Jeeves novel, *Jeeves and the Tie That Binds*. Even if I did not now have the very book in my collection, even if I had never seen it again after the moment it was held up for us all to behold, I would remember that cover now quite clearly. The book was a Chanukah gift from my cousin, Jon, to my father. I remember my father's eyes lighting up perceptibly at the sight of it and joyfully displaying it to the rest of the family as if it were a new-born child or a coveted prize. "A new Wodehouse," in great astonishment (even though more often than not Chanukah brought him a new Wodehouse): "and a Jeeves no less!" I was a little irked that my own present to him (now long forgotten by both of us) came such a distant second and decided finally to investigate this Wodehouse phenomenon.

It's not as if I had never been given the opportunity. There were no locks on our books, no volumes closed to my brother and myself. Like C.S. Lewis's father, mine too believed there was no evil in books and all his library was open to us at every age. I tasted the delights of Ian Fleming at age 10, and the ecstasy of John O'Hara at 13. The Wodehouses, too, were up there in plain sight and within easy reach; a full shelf of them - paperbacks mostly (I apologize for him to Plum, though I think the Master would have understood such frugality). But somehow they did not call to me. The pictures on the covers were kind of interesting, but the first few paragraphs of any one of them failed to grip my twelve year old mind.

Wodehouse was not passed over, however, for purely venal reasons. The naughty bits aside, my favorite books were, by and large, those that are meant to appeal to a pre-teen boy: Tom Swift, Danny Dunn, Henry Read, and a little later, Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and so on. Wodehouse would not have been totally out of place. There were, in fact, a number of examples of diversity, such as *Man and Superman* and a Clifton Fadiman anthology called *Reading I've Liked*. These anomalies were the result of a direct intervention by my father rather than any random exploitation on my part or recommendations from my contemporaries. But then the old man had a serious problem with me. Every six months or so I would, often with tears in my eyes, inform him that I had read all there was to read and now I was to be bored for the rest of my life. I do not remember how he responded to this regular plaintive wail - perhaps the Shaw was a result of one such occasion - but I do remember quite clearly a time, when I was thirteen, he handed me a large, very heavy orange volume, opened it up near the end (so that one part of the book was about



four ounces and the other side five pounds) and said "TryPsmith." Well, the name of the thing was cute, *Leave It to Psmith*, and I was desperate so I decided to give it a try. The book was, of course, the Ogden Nash anthology (also now in my collection) and it was very cumbersome and the introduction to the book struck me as ludicrous and the introduction to Psmith was worse and who was this stupid Nash anyway. I read the first chapter and handed it back to my poor Dad announcing that it was just too silly. He said it was a little early yet. I didn't know what he meant then.

Somehow I got on with life, reading a little of this and that now and again, then suddenly getting stuck again; then I'd somehow get unstuck and read something else and so on. Then some years later when I once again declared that the literary world had exhausted its store for me, my father, feeling, evidently, that perhaps the wait was over, the time had come, reached up and pulled down *Jeeves in the Offing*. I have since explained to him the extreme folly of starting a sixteen year on Wodehouse with this particular gem. As a veteran of some two or three score

converts to the faith (I used to work in a bookstore) I know now that one must initiate the outsider with a broad stroke. He will not be ready for some time for the type of gentle brushwork that characterizes *Jeeves in the Offing*. I am certain my father was appreciative of the advice.

After making my way through the first third or so of the novel I approached my ever-suffering father, and passed judgement: this Bertie Wooster was an idiot. And this Jeeves fellow who was supposed to be so great a character (my father had given me a little introduction this time so I knew kind of what to expect from Jeeves) didn't seem to appear in this thing at all. I gave up, handed it back and staggered on. I can only imagine what my father's thoughts were. I'd like to think he hadn't given up all hope. But I will never know, because, as I say, I saw my father light up at the picture of Jeeves and that birthday cake and I knew I had to find out what it was all about. I took matters into my own hands.

Sometime that January or February I went to the Wodehouse shelf and picked pretty much at random. I knew I didn't want anything with Jeeves in it (*Jeeves in the Offing* put me off Jeeves for quite some time) and ended up with *Service with a Smile*. I liked the title; it had a pleasant quality about it.

I never looked back. I found my spiritual home in Blandings; Uncle Fred was my uncle; and I spent the next several weeks bellowing (rather obnoxiously) "Hoy, Stinker!" at baffled friends.

My father was very pleased to hear the news. This Wodehouse was all right, I proclaimed, handing the volume to him to put away; anything else with Uncle Fred, or at Blandings? Seizing the moment he next chose *Heavy Weather* which completed the conversion and sealed it. Then, eschewing the *Right Ho*, Jeeves proffered by the pater, I chose my own *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. After that I kind of lose track. I know that by June I was recommending a Hollywood story to a girl of theatric ambition whom I was trying to make (I never did but we are today very good friends and she still reads Wodehouse), and some Golf stories to a jock friend of mine. By the following Channukah it was me being quite surprised with the new Wodehouse. And, look, Dad, it's the sequel to *The Luck of the Bodkins*! It's amazing how he picks up on things, every time you turn around he's picking up another thread. My gosh, though, it's been forty years since we last saw Monty Bodkin, hasn't it, and Oh Look! this one picks up a year to the day after the other one leaves off. Does he marry Gertrude Butterwick? I do hope we meet Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright. .... You get the idea.

When I went on to University I ended up at St Michael's College at the University of Toronto where I

discovered an enormous Wodehouse collection in the library. Titles I had never even heard of before: *The Gold Bat*, *The White Feather*, the *Prince and Betty*, and, oh my sainted aunt, could it be? More Psmiths! Even Dad didn't know about these!

Later I discovered the source of this treasure trove was one of the old librarians, Father Scollard, and I contrived to meet and speak with the ancient scholar. He had been a big Wodehouse fan as a small boy and had collected them since about 1915, but only sporadically after 1936. Naturally he donated his collection to the library when he entered the priesthood, and he continued to buy them - sporadically - for the library after that. Though still a Wodehousian in advanced age he liked the boy's school stories best and he felt there never was a better book written than *Mike*. I remember him saying once, "Long after Dickens is no longer being taught at the University, Wodehouse will be read and studied." Father Scollard told me of the thrill of being a schoolboy when a new Wodehouse came out. They played cricket in those days in Toronto and he was very keen on cricket. I thought of my Dad (who was not, by the way, at all keen on cricket) following each novel's birth more or less since 1947. I am thankful that, if only for a few short years, I was able to share the excitement of that new Wodehouse shining in the bookstore window or peeking out from under the wrapping paper as you rip. If my children learn to enjoy the Master's voice, I will feel the deep and gentle glow that I know now my father felt when I finally passed judgement on *Service With a Smile*. But I am a little saddened that they will never share that sixty year chain that Father Scollard, my father and I have. On the other hand, they still have in front of them that exquisite moment when Wodehouse speaks to you for the first time.



## The Great Archbishop Handicap

Norman Murphy, TWS, found evidence once again that life imitates art in the events leading up to the selection of the new Archbishop of Canterbury. The columnist W.F. Deedes of the *Daily Telegraph* told the story on July 30.

"News that Dr. George Carey had been chosen as Archbishop of Canterbury against odds of 25-1 struck a faint chord in my mind. I turned up an early P.G. Wodehouse, *The Inimitable Jeeves*, which includes one of the best of all the Bertie Wooster adventures, "The Great Sermon Handicap."

As those familiar with the tale will recall, the plot centres on the Rev Francis Heppenstall, whose sermon on Brotherly Love is good for 50 minutes. But there are unforeseen complications. On re-reading the tale, my eye was caught by one particular passage in which Wooster asks: "What can you get on G. Hayward?" Eustace replies: "Only four-to one now. I think there's been a leak, and Steggles has heard something. The odds shortened last night in a significant manner."

In the betting on Dr Carey, much the same thing seems to have happened even more dramatically. His odds descended suddenly to 2-1. There appears to have been another Steggles and a leak. "We are investigating," the bookmakers said. I know that truth is often stranger than fiction, but to find a P.G. Wodehouse farce matched by the experience of a future Archbishop of Canterbury is a reminder that we do indeed live in extraordinary times."

.....

Norman reminds us that Deedes is Lord Deedes in real life, the "chap who was in Abyssinia with Evelyn Waugh and who appears as William Boots in Waugh's novels."

Norman concludes with the really significant question in this whole matter: "Has Lord Deedes ascertained whether the new Archbishop is as sound on pigs as his predecessor?"

She gave a sort of despairing gesture, like a vicar's daughter who has discovered Erastianism in the village.

*Laughing Gas, 1936*

## What Ho, Wodehouse!

Pauline Blanc, TWS, found a set of beautiful photographs of well dressed people in luxurious country house settings in a recent issue of England's *Country Living* magazine. The pictures appeared under the title above, and sprinkled among the pictures are Wodehouse quotes.

The first photograph quite properly features a pig. The second presents a young woman and a middle-aged man standing side by side in front of a brick wall: the familiar firing-squad arrangement of amateur photographers. The young woman proudly holds a silver trophy cup, both people are smiling into the camera, both are wearing clothes that remove about 65 years from the calendar, and just in front of them, broadside to the photographer, a large pink sow is riding at anchor. We are in Wodehouse's world.

In the third picture a young woman lounging on this side of the shrubbery is keenly aware of a young man creeping around from the other side with lovelight in his eyes.

Finally there is a young couple, standing in front of several tons of statuary, equipped with skipping rope and Indian clubs. His arm is about her shoulders, and they are both quite pleased to have it there.

All these people are clearly upper class, well financed, and very well dressed indeed. Quite, quite, Wodehousian.

Do I hear you asking what this is all about? Ah, it's good news: you too can be a picture of casual 1920s elegance by buying the clothes listed in the captions, at the stockists listed on the last page. It's great fun - but don't inhale.



## *New Members*

Gulping a bit from time to time, like a fish that has been landed out of a pond on a bent pin and isn't at all sure it is equal to the pressure of events.

*The Code of the Woosters, 1938*

## *Too Much Hamlet*

P.G. Wodehouse

In 1905, when London was seemingly bristling with gloomy Danes, the young P.G. Wodehouse, desperate for some less elevated fare, penned the following:

I went to book a ticket for to see a modern play;  
The man behind the counter said there's no such thing today,  
Every actor who has any self-respect is being starred,  
In the brightly-written masterpiece of England's Only Bard.  
    It's "Hamlet" here and "Hamlet" there,  
    And "Hamlet" on next week.  
    An actor not in "Hamlet" is regarded as a freak.

I went into a music-hall, but soon came out of it  
On seeing some comedians in a painful "Hamlet" skit  
And a gentleman who gave some imitations, all alone,  
Of other people's "Hamlet", plus a "Hamlet" of his own.  
    It's "Hamlet" this and "Hamlet" that,  
    And "Hamlet" day by day,  
    Shakespeare and Bacon must regret they ever wrote the play.

I don't deny that "Hamlet" has its merits as a play:  
In many ways it's finer than the drama of today.  
But with all respect to Bacon (and his colleague) I protest  
That I think the British Public is entitled to a rest.  
    It's "Hamlet" here, and "Hamlet" there,  
    And "Hamlet - Record Run."  
    It seems to me the masterpiece is being overdone.

Jim Earl, TWS, found this poem and its introduction in a flyer from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon. The poem first appeared, I believe, in the monthly periodical *Books for To-Day and Books for To-Morrow*.