



# Plum Lines

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*    *Vol. 18 No. 3*    *Autumn 1999*

## LONDON'S DULWICH COLLEGE

By John Koenig Jr.

John, in addition to the signal honor of present membership in the Wodehouse Society, was formerly a Washington correspondent for the Associated Press. He now lives and writes in Athens, Georgia. In recent issues of *Plum Lines* he has described his visits to the Wodehouse residences in Le Touquet, France, and Remsenburg, Long Island. Here he describes his pilgrimage to the school where Wodehouse spent what were probably the happiest years of his life. To illustrate John's article, I'm happy to be able reproduce the charming drawings of Dulwich College made on the spot by our own **Pauline Blanc** during our memorable Wodehouse Pilgrimage ten years ago. Pauline was the Founding Mother of our San Francisco chapter. —OM

To get to Dulwich College from London's West End it is not necessary to nip out in the old two-seater, as Bertie Wooster would have done, with Jeeves at his side. Just hop on a south side local train from Victoria Station and you will be there in a jiffy ten minutes.

Why go to Dulwich? Well, for one thing this is the

unique spot on the earth's surface where a young P. G. Wodehouse attended school, played cricket and rugby, boxed, edited, and wrote for the school paper, sang at school entertainments, and on the basis of his associations here conceived the embryo ideas and characters that later appeared in his humorous writings.



The central building of Dulwich College. The college was founded by the Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn and is still properly referred to as "Alleyn's College of God's Gift." This building was erected in 1870 in what was then a semi-rural setting on the southern edge of London. Drawing by Pauline Blanc.



Elm Lawn, the house then known as “Treadgold’s” after its master, where Plum boarded during some of his Dulwich years in the 1890s. It is still one of the “houses,” and we privileged few on the 1989 Wodehouse Pilgrimage visited the house for tea on the lawn and walked, in awe, in the steps of the Master. Drawing by Pauline Blanc.

At Dulwich, waiting to be born through the medium of a typewriter, first appeared in the medulla oblongata of a young Wodehouse the essence— or at least their forebears in his imagination— of Bertram Wooster, Jeeves, Aunts Agatha and Dahlia, Mr. Mulliner, Psmith, and many other memorable characters.

It might be said that Dulwich, where Wodehouse received his formal education, is somewhat to blame for the release of these rather balmy creations into the literary world. Even the name of the school is Wodehousian; it is pronounced not Dullwicht, but Dullidge.

At first glance, Dulwich may seem to be a far cry from the gentleman’s clubland and cafe society in Piccadilly where a young couple, well prepared for cavorting, might hear the clarion call of Terpsichore as described in these Wodehousian words:

“A sound like the sudden descent of an iron girder on a sheet of tin, followed by a jangling of bells, a wailing of tortured cats, and the noise of a few steam-riveters at work, announced to their trained ears that the music had begun.”

Nor does there seem to be much similarity between Dulwich and the country mansion setting in Worcestershire where Bertie Wooster, finding himself caught in insuperable difficulties, decides after all the family and house guests are asleep to slide down the rainspout and catch the 3 a.m. milk train to London.

But the connection is there and it does not require the ratiocination of a Jeeves to comprehend the evolution of the writer Wodehouse, from a fast bowler on the cricket fields of Dulwich, to writing about the sport, then branching into short fiction, novels, and all the humorous stories, plays, and musical comedies that made him famous.

Dulwich, after a fashion, was the birthplace of all this, for it provided the young Plum with the classical education, the sporting experience, and the faculty to discern aspects of the human comedy and write about it all in a manner that made him, in the words of pundit Henry Steele Commager, “the greatest master of the English language since Shakespeare.”

After hopping off the train at the West Dulwich stop, it is the work of a moment (as Wodehouse would say) to ankle down tree-lined College Road to the gates of Dulwich College in this sylvan suburb.

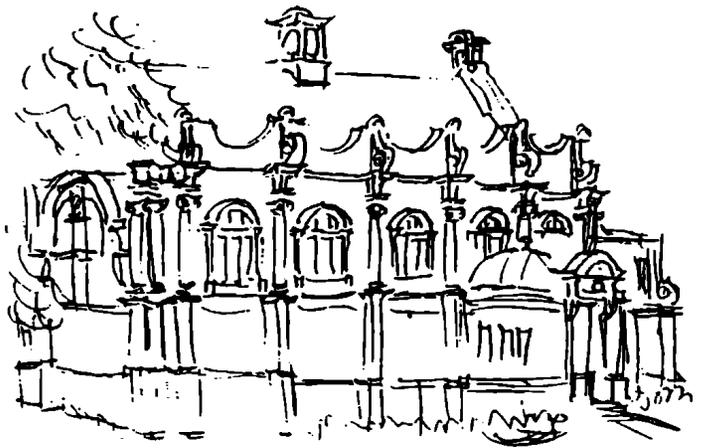
Inside the grand Victorian main building you may be met by Terry Walsh, secretary of the “Old Boys” club and a former deputy headmaster, who like the affable Mr. Mulliner of the Wodehouse stories, is apt to entertain you with droll anecdotes about Wodehouse’s relations with and memories of his beloved old school.

All hands are agreed that Wodehouse regarded his six years at Dulwich as among his happiest. In his early school stories the school is known as “Wryken,” while the community of West Dulwich is sometimes fondly commemorated as “Valley Fields.”

He last visited Dulwich (for a cricket match), and England in 1939. Much of his writing in the 1930s was done at his home at Le Touquet on the channel coast of France, and not long after World War II he moved to America.

Wodehouse was not a prophet without honor in his own native heath. In 1977 Dulwich College dedicated its new library as the P. G. Wodehouse library. At the library you will find a shrine to him, known as the Wodehouse Corner, a small glass-enclosed replica of Wodehouse’s own writing room in his house at Remsenburg, Long Island, where he spent happily his last 20 years.

Here is the Wodehouse desk with numerous mementos



The Old Library, Dulwich College. Something precious will be lost when this building disappears. Drawing by Pauline Blanc.

tos, his chair, his well-used old Royal typewriter, and a filing cabinet. On the wall above the desk is a portrait of the Master, and to the left are bookshelves filled with his works. All were contributed by his widow, Lady Wodehouse, when the library was dedicated. You may even be taken upstairs to that Holy of Holies, a locked vault whose shelves are filled with valuable Wodehouse books and manuscripts and less valuable works of other (and lesser) authors.

"I believe we have every edition of all P. G. Wodehouse books published both in Britain and America," said Dr. J. R. Piggott, Professor of English and head of the library and archives.

Seeing the school and campus makes for a pleasant excursion and as Plum Wodehouse would say keeps one out of the public-houses. It is also helpful in preparing one for a return to the everyday world outside, in which, as P. G. himself once said, one makes one's way treading on life's banana peels.

A final look at the cricket and rugby fields and the main group of buildings, and one makes the five-minute walk back to the West Dulwich station.

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*Dinner for  
Marilyn MacGregor  
Wednesday 12th May 1999  
The Riverside  
50 5th Morrison Street, Portland*

**M**arilyn Macgregor, our membership secretary, is getting a lot of ink these days (see above, and elsewhere in this issue). Marilyn travels somewhat more than considerably, and a trip last spring took her to Portland, Oregon, where she was fêted by the Wuckoos of the Palace, our Portland chapter, at a dinner I wish I could have attended. Among the goodies were hazelnut and frangelico crusted baked Brie with crostini, and maple-crusting Chinook salmon with fresh vegetables, and—oh, and there were *people* there, too. —OM

## PIG TALK

William Hardwick found this item in the English *Sunday Telegraph* of May 16, 1999.

**A**vet has discovered that pop music makes pigs feed better and feel relaxed and happy. Younger sows preparing to give birth are especially soothed by the strains of soft rock. John Carr, a veterinarian of East Yorks, has been encouraging stockmen to play the radio since he found that bands such as Status Quo, Queen, and U2 raised the spirits of pigs.

Mr Carr, an international pig expert whose practice cares for 100,000 sows and up to one million piglets, said: "The music we play is easy to listen to and makes the pigs feel more comfortable. We encourage stockmen to place a radio with their pigs, tuned into popular music channels. We have found that sows relax and go to sleep listening to pop music. They seem to love music and also the chat of the disc jockeys."

"Pigs," he says, "are omnivores and very similar to us. They're very sociable but also think as individuals so they're different from cattle and sheep. You've got to understand them and try to be their friend."

Mr Carr, 39, of Richmond, North Yorks, said he encouraged stockmen to talk to their pigs, despite the fact that younger people entering the profession found this strange.

"They ask 'What do you talk to your pigs about?' and I tell them all about my day. They might not be able to understand our words but they understand if I'm annoyed or happy.

"Humans and pigs have to live together; the more we can understand each other the better for everyone," he said.



Lord Emsworth spent some of his happiest hours talking to the Empress, and it is most gratifying to see that the world of medical science is finally catching up with the ninth earl. —OM

A small china figure...represented a warrior of pre-khaki days advancing with a spear upon some adversary who, judging from the contented expression on the warrior's face, was smaller than himself.

"A Shock for Mr. Brewster,"  
*Indiscretions of Archie*, 1921

# MILLENNIUM TOUR 2000



By Elin Woodger and Hilary Bruce

From the P G Wodehouse Society of the U.K. comes word of a grand Tour now in the planning stages and open to all Wodehousians who can join what promises to be a topping way to see in the Millennium. The dates are July 17 to 23, 2000, and the details are as follows.

Ten years ago, Norman Murphy led 25 Plummies, many of them from the U.S., on a six day tour based on his book, *In Search of Blandings*. This event was reported in the Winter 1989 issue of *Plum Lines*, and is still discussed in tones of nostalgic longing by those who were fortunate enough to be a part of a very special occasion. The P G Wodehouse Society hopes to (and undoubtedly will) recreate the itinerary and happy success of that original tour as an appropriate means of commemorating the 25th anniversary of Plum's death, in addition to celebrating the approaching Millennium (which, as any scholar would know, will actually begin in 2001).

As noted in the June 1999 issue of *Wooster Sauce*, "Members are invited to join this playful exploration of the locations immortalized by Wodehouse, among them Weston Park and Sudeley Castle, two of the houses that inspired Blandings; Bertie's London clubs; the Junior Ganymede, Jeeve's professional retreat; Aunt Dahlia's London and country homes; and Plum's own beloved Alma Mater, Dulwich College. Throughout, the tour leader will be that fount of Wodehousian knowledge, Norman Murphy."

The Millennium Tour will cover six days, from July 17 to July 23. Hilary Bruce of the UK society has provided the Hard Facts that follow:

The tour is in two parts, the first based in London, the second a coach tour. They can be booked separately.

## Dates and outline of activities:

London section: Arrive Monday, 17th July 2000. Activities start on Tuesday 18th, including a Savage Club evening, The Chairman's Wodehouse Walk, and a day exploring Dulwich. We will also be arranging certain other events, dinners, etc., at a modest extra cost.

The tour: Friday 21st July. Leave London by coach for three-day, two-night tour. Visits include Weston Park, Sudeley Castle, and Hanley Castle. Lunch, dinner, bed

& breakfast, and entrances are included. Incidentals, coffees, teas, drinks, and gratuities are not.

## Costs:

London section. There is no charge for the London section, though participants will be responsible for their own fares, meals, and participating in the entertainments referred to above. The society is negotiating favourable rates at a central London hotel at a cost of about £200 per person sharing, £300 single, for the four nights. It will be necessary to pay a deposit, when details are finalised.

The tour: Cost per person is £205 sharing twin accommodation, £235 single. Again, incidentals and gratuities not included.

Since the tour is only open to members of the UK Society, the charge for non-members, including spouses/partners of members, is as above plus £15, to include membership for the year 2000-2001.

The deposit for the tour will be 25% of the cost. Payable by the end of October 1999. Balance due by end April 2000.

## Booking forms and full details available as follows:

Included in September *Wooster Sauce*.

On UK society website late September.

By mail :

Hilary Bruce

The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)



My wife and I were privileged to be members of the 1989 Wodehouse Pilgrimage, a week never to be forgotten. Rob a bank or counterfeit the money, but GO!

—OM

# 1999 GONE TO TEXAS TWS CONVENTION

## **THURSDAY**

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For early arrivals the hotel has many fine amenities. The Warwick is located in Houston's Museum district within walking distance of Hermann Park, The Rose Garden & Hermann Park Zoo, Rice University, The Texas Medical Center, Montrose Boulevard where many excellent restaurants are located, University Villiage (shopping and dining), and, of course, museums. Museums: Fine Arts, Modern Art, Museum of Medical History, Children's Museum, Holocaust Museum, Natural History Museum.

**FRIDAY** beginning at 10:00 – Advance SIGNUP is encouraged

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**Cricket:** A la Wodehouse in the Rose Garden of Hermann park – all TWSrs may play or observe  
Catered food and beverages. Cash for beer and wine coolers.

**Golf:** The Sandy McHoots Golf Tournament at Hermann park golf links.  
Prizes include a golf umbrella. Note: you need to schedule in advance.

**Special:** Friday field-trip to NASA (really good for kids)  
Field trip - Civil War and Texas history buffs - The San Jacinto battleground, Bayou Bend, etc.

**Games:** From 10:00 'til 4:00 at the hotel. Gawlf, egg & spoon races, pot the top hat with a "hazel-nut"  
foozle ball, dance contest.

**Booksellers & Chapters tables** – individuals may bring books to sell. Continuous Wodehouse videos

**Party:** Cocktail party includes Good Gnus Challenge & Parrot music. Costumes are encouraged.  
**SKIT: Chicago Accident Syndicate** (35 minutes)

**Play:** Main Street Theater will stage a production of a Wodehouse play 8:30 p.m., Oct. 22, 1999.

## **SATURDAY TALKS (begin @9:30)**

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Tony Ring Limp Lavender Leather

Elin Woodger Lady Constance's Lover: Sex and Romance a la Wodehouse

Dan Cohen Wodehouse at the bar, a lecture-demonstration of drinking in Wodehouse stories

Norman Murphy Wodehouse Among the Animals

Break

Business Meeting

Mike Skupin Wodehouse Theater from his books

Darlene McNaughton Medicinal Marvels in Wodehouse

## **NEWTS SKIT (35-40 minutes)**

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## **SATURDAY EVENING:**

**Party:** 6:00 P.M. **Blandings Castle West skit** (35 minutes),  
Music & dance, costumes are encouraged.

**Music:** A sing-along using Wodehouse Parrot poems  
**Good Gnus Challenge** - Drone Rangers vs NEWTS vs the Swedes. All challenges  
accepted.

**Banquet:** From the top floor of the Warwick Park Plaza with its famous view

## **SUNDAY BRUNCH: 9:00**

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# "PLAY AWAY, MR WODEHOUSE, PLEASE"

By Raymond Jacobs

Peter Barnsley found this item in a book entitled *The Golfers—The Inside Story*, edited by Peter Dobereiner. The item was originally published in the *Glasgow Herald*, probably soon after Plum's death in 1975. I confess, with considerable embarrassment, that Peter sent me this article more than two years ago. It was among the Lost Treasures of *Plum Lines* that Elin referred to in her article in the last issue. I recently uncovered some of the treasures in a neglected stack of papers in my house, and they will appear, in mortifying numbers, soon.

Peter says he bought the Dobereiner book at a car-boot sale. [American translation: car trunk sale.] "The advantages to be found by frequenting such sales," writes Peter, "were demonstrated to me this morning when I set off for a car-boot sale in the Worcestershire countryside, where I found the English edition of *Bring on the Girls*. No dust wrapper, but you can't expect everything for twenty pence. I've been looking for it for years." —OM

There should be an air of rejoicing in the Elysian Fields Golf and Country Club. The first appearance of a new member as distinguished as P. G. Wodehouse will not readily be ignored even at an establishment that has already welcomed so many of the great men of the game across its threshold.

The brass name-plate will have been attached to his locker door, stocks of his favourite pipe tobacco laid in, and the barman will be wiping the cocktail glasses with a livelier wipe. Outside, similar preparations will be well in hand.

The professional and his assistant will be waiting respectfully at the entrance to the shop. The caddy master will be casting a thoughtful and piercing eye over the ranks of angelic faces as he weighs up a suitable candidate. The starter in his box by the first tee will have pencilled in a favourable time.

Undoubtedly the weather, like yesterday and tomorrow, will be perfect - the sort of morning when, as Wodehouse began one of his inimitable stories, "all Nature shouted 'Fore.'" The Oldest Member will surely be in attendance on the clubhouse veranda, but the Wrecking Crew, the undoing of many an enjoyable round, will have been warned off.

This imaginary scenario has its roots in the truth of the game - "That varied never-ending pageant that men call golf" - as Wodehouse saw it. He wrote of it, as he did in his major novels, as a world which, as someone perceptively observed "stopped on Boat Race night of the year of the Relief of Mafeking". [Considerably later than *that*, surely!]

More accurately, it never really existed at all, except in

the author's unique and fertile imagination. As with Bertie Wooster's Jeeves, Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps, and Looney Coote, so with golf. For Gussie Fink-Nottle, after his orange juice had been liberally spiked with gin, the world was a beautiful place - and so with few exceptions, it was, too, for golfers.

All the same, Wodehouse's golf stories contain instantly recognizable situations, emotions, and characters. The severe critic might say that the plots are repetitious, for invariably they have to do with some tangled affair of the heart. But one does not read them for an insight into life's deeper meaning, rather for the dazzling virtuosity of the verbal style.

Yet frequently the two come together, as in "It is one of the chief merits of golf that non-success at the game induces a certain amount of decent humility. I attribute the insane arrogance of the later Roman emperors entirely to the fact that, having never played golf, they never knew that strange chastening humility which is engendered by a topped chip shot."

Or again - "If Cleopatra had been ousted in the first round of the Ladies' Singles we should have heard a lot less of her proud imperiousness." Come to that, Wodehouse also laid down - "There are higher, nobler things than love. A woman is only a woman, but a hefty drive is a slosh".



Like most of us Wodehouse took to golf rather more than it took to him. In his preface to *The Golf Omnibus* he confessed: "I won my first and only trophy, a striped umbrella, in a hotel tournament in Aiken, South Carolina, where, hitting them squarely on the meat for once, I went through a field of some of the fattest retired business men in America like a devouring flame."

Wodehouse was a master of the telling phrase and the apt metaphor. In golf, as in his "lay" stories, he has made countless felicitous contributions to the grammar of the game. He described the man who "missed short putts because of the uproar of the butterflies in the adjoining meadows" and another "who never spared himself in his efforts to do it (the ball) a violent injury".



Relief, as Wodehouse describes it, can be compared with a golfer who “sees his ball heading for dense rough, only to hit a rock and rebound on to the fairway”. One hero satisfactorily concludes a romance by folding the adored one in his arms “using the interlocking grip”, and a heroine, a heretic converted to golf, is only dissuaded by earnest pleading from christening her first-born Abe Mitchell Rib-Faced Mashie Banks.

If it is true that the world is divided into those who cannot stand Wodehouse style - which is their bad luck - and those whose devotion is like that perfect peace, the peace that passeth all understanding, it will by now be obvious on which side of the line I stand. I was educated in the finer lunacies of the game by reading Wodehouse.

The astonishing thing is that Wodehouse wrote all his golf stories between fifty and sixty years ago. His terminology gives that fact away. Yet they are timeless and the essence of them is as strong today as it was then. When his daughter died suddenly he was moved to say: “I thought she was immortal.” His writing will certainly always remain so.

And now if that apostle on the right will kindly stand back a little - “Play away, Mr Wodehouse, please.”

## RECYCLING

Plum is well known for squeezing the last drop of juice out of his material, and nothing shows that propensity better than his use of the last Mulliner story, “From a Detective’s Notebook,” telling how Adrian Mulliner deduced that Sherlock Holmes led a double life as the master criminal Professor Moriarty.

The story first appeared in *Punch* in 1959, then in the American magazine *Escapade* in 1960, then in *The World of Mr. Mulliner*, published in London in 1972 and in New York in 1974.

But the story appeared again in 1975, only slightly altered, as part of Plum’s introduction to a Ballantine edition of *The Sign of the Four*. The introduction must have been one of the last things Plum wrote—its copyright date is 1975, and he died on February 14 of that year. Plum, now a tired and very old man, saved a good deal of labor by recycling a story about Sherlock Holmes.



The kernel of this item was picked up by Wayne Swift from the Hounds of the Internet. Factual details were nailed down most competently by Len Lawson. —OM

## THE BLIND PIG



Speaking of pigs, here’s one drawn by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with his eyes closed. Marilyn MacGregor found this oddity in an article by Julie McKuras in *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections*. The drawing appeared originally in the *Strand* magazine of 1899, illustrating a curious article entitled “Pigs of Celebrities.” The article’s author, Gertrude Bacon, wrote about the fascination of collecting objects “whose chief value would appear to lie in their strange character and utter uselessness.” She felt that “a man of genius and strong personality would imprint his every work with his own greatness. Accordingly, Bacon asked a number of “leading representatives of science, art, literature, society, etc.” to draw a pig with their eyes closed. About this signed sketch by Conan Doyle, she wrote:

Turning to the “pig literary,” he must be wanting in imagination indeed who fails to trace in Dr. Conan Doyle’s spirited little sketch the resemblance to the immortal and lamented Sherlock Holmes. That pig is evidently “on the scent” of some baffling mystery. Note the quick and penetrating snout, the alert ears, thrown back in the act of listening, the nervous, sensitive tail, and the expectant, eager attitude. The spirit of the great detective breathes in every line and animates the whole.

It’s a lean, lank pig, devoid of the essential oleaginous. What Lord Emsworth would say about such a representation boggles the mind. —OM

# REVELRY BY NIGHT

By Murray Hedgcock and John Fletcher

Our sister society, the P G Wodehouse Society (UK), held a most celebratory dinner in London on October 15, 1998, in honor of the birthday of Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. Ninety happy people were privileged to attend. What follows is an account of that dinner by two of those happy people who are also, as you are about to see, gifted writers. “Why,” I can hear you asking me, “have I not read of this delightful evening much earlier?” You have not because this co-editor’s life has been chaotic for the last couple of years and much good material has been mishandled. This entertaining account rose to the surface just now, and is headed straight for the next *Plum Lines* that leaves the harbor. Mea has been exceptionally culpa. (It’s some of that Garter regiment Latin—see below.) —OM

The Inner Temple is not some Holy of Holies but one of several large buildings inside that complex of squares, gardens, and chambers devoted to legal affairs between Fleet Street and the Thames. Not far away must have been the office of Lord Tilbury (see the second sentence of *Heavy Weather*). A quarter of a mile to the north-west was Psmith’s “quite snug little flat in Clement’s Inn” where he accommodated Mike Jackson for the duration of *Psmith in the City* (see chapter 7). And on the night of 15th October, 1998 the Inner Temple rang to the laughter and happiness of those who loved those characters and honoured Wodehouse their begetter.

Jurists from the centuries looked down from their portraits in the hallowed Parliament Chamber of the Inner Temple as society celebrated The Master’s birthday—and it surely was not too fanciful to imagine an approving twinkle in the eye of stern judges and their ilk as the revelry developed. Even the Right Honourable William Pitt, Prime Minister of a deprived (i.e. pre- Wodehouse) world, looked a more kindly and human character as the Wodehousians, assembled from home and across the seas, acclaimed their hero.

The invitations said “7 for 7.30” for a privileged 90 (what weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth there must have been among those tardy applicants who could be there in no better than spirit). The eager were there well before 7, approving of the gin and tonic (well, champagne, it seemed mostly), although Mr Mulliner might have been saddened to note little demand for port and lemon, small bitter, pint of stout, or even whisky sour.....

Among those present were His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent; three Wodehouses: Patrick, PGs only surviving nephew, Charles, and his wife Joyce. Charles’s grandfather was PG’s Uncle Fred, but (he said with some regret) he was not at all like the Uncle Fred that PG created. From the USA we were delighted to greet Dan and Tina Garrison, Phil Ayers, and Marilyn MacGregor.

Seated in the panelled dining chamber, we were prop-

erly set on our way with grace given by the Chairman, Lieutenant-Colonel Norman T P Murphy, heard with some satisfaction by those knowing Latin, with some bafflement by those not knowing it—and with smug approval by those who had been quick enough to open their special programmes and read: “Grace has been specially written for the use of the Society by Paul W. de Voil, MA (Oxon), FTH., solicitor—complete with English translation”. Our chairman seemed to speak slightly more slowly than usual, to allow those whose Latin had rusted to keep up. His Latin accent was curious, but that he explained later as being in the speech of the 2nd Division of Legionnaires, the Garter regiment, in northern Gaul in the late second century.

When Sir Edward Cazalet came to propose the toast of HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother he gave us her letter of reluctant refusal: her “ipsissima verba” (this was less authentic 2nd century Latin than 20th century legalese Latin, in the spirit of the place (*genius loci?*) and in deference to the lawyers present).

Our President, Richard Briers OBE, introduced Sir John Mortimer QC, commenting; “I seem to be the only paid-up luvvie present” (which perhaps indicated this was no gathering of the EC4 branch of New Labour?) He apologised for the absence of the Hon. Galahad Threepwood, who in a warm message beginning “Dear Eggs, Beans & Crumpets” explained that he had deputed “Tricky Dicky” Briers to read some of his recollections, “and I hope he doesn’t make a hash of it”. He didn’t.

“I first met Parsloe at Romano’s while he was walking round the supper table with a soup tureen on his head and a stick of celery in his hand, saying he was a sentry outside Buckingham Palace. And the name Parsloe goes by now! Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe Bart! It reminds me of a story about Jack Bellamy-Johnstone. He fell in love with a girl called Esmeralda Parkinson-Willoughby and had the whole thing tattooed on his chest with a heart round it. The wounds had barely started to heal

when they had a row and within three months he was engaged to May Todd.

At least even Parsloe didn't try to follow up poor Buffy Struggles' footsteps and become teetotal. Old Buffy came to me one day and asked where he could buy tea. "What d'you want tea for?" I asked. "To drink", he said. "You don't drink tea", I reminded him, "you drink whisk-and-soda." "No more alcohol for me", said Buffy. "Look what it does to the common earthworm." "But you're not a common earthworm", I said, putting my finger on the flaw in his argument. "I will be if I go on drinking whisk-and-soda", he said. I begged him not to do anything rash, but he would insist. He ordered in ten pounds of the muck and was dead within the year. Dead as a doornail. Drinking tea had dulled his reactions and he was run over by a hansom cab while crossing Piccadilly.

We laughed—loud and long. There is something so special about PGW that, even if you know a passage practically by heart, as many of the buffs do, then you still can delight, to the point of wallowing, in the words, the timing, the pictures conjured up as you hear it yet again—especially if they come in the tones of so splendid an interpreter.

Then Sir John Mortimer proposed the toast of the Society. He said there was no microphone and he would apply the Rumpole Audibility Test. Rumpole took a young barrister into court for a case one day and said aside to his junior "You must know that the judge in this case is boring, foolish, incompetent, vindictive, petty, and hopeless." The young barrister was startled to hear the Judge in question boom back across the court "The acoustics in this building are excellent and I heard every word of that." At which Rumpole turned to the young barrister and simply said "See what I mean?"

The deafening laughter established that he had no need of a microphone.

Sir John Mortimer then invited us into his own world of Wodehouse fantasy, explaining how as he lay in bed that morning his man, Cazalet (the name received with much approval) had explained he was to attend the dinner of the Wodehouse Society—"Mr Little attended last year, when his rendition of 'Sonny Boy' was not appreciated".

"Cazalet", in best Jeeves fashion, told his master that he had laid out a black tie.

"Why", Mortimer said, hope beginning to dawn, "is Aunt Agatha dead?"

He explained in an aside to his listeners how he had "fallen among booksellers". He had been launching a new book in Leeds and raced back. Booksellers' idea of wearing black was "black track-suit trousers and trainers".

No, sir, his man replied, but for a formal occasion such as this dinner a black tie would be of the essence. But I

can't, I protested. Where shall I change? How would he dress, he protested to Cazalet, as he made his way from Leeds to London?

"I can only suggest, sir, that you make full use of the Disabled Toilet in the Milton Keynes Service Area."

"Which is what I did", Sir John said (bringing what might be described as gales of laughter). "I hope I was at any rate better prepared than the Judge who came to court after a long case to deliver judgement, and announced that he had spent three months assessing the evidence, he had weighed it all carefully, summed it up, made important and critical decisions on various matters, and resolved all the points at issue in the case; but unfortunately he had left all the papers concerned in his cottage in the country. 'Well', said the Clerk of the Court, 'fax it up, my lord.' 'Yes', agreed the Judge. 'It does rather.'"

You can rehearse too much (Sir John continued). He remembered the timid actor playing King Duncan in *Macbeth*. His first line in the play is "What bloody man is this?" which he refused at first to say. "How can I say this? How can I start by swearing?" he argued. But his Director persuaded him that it wasn't swearing; more a physical description of the man in front of him and suggested he try different ways of saying it. So the actor said "What bloody man is this?" in as many different ways as he could think of. But he still believed it was swearing, and when the first night came, he walked straight on to the stage and said "Who is this bugger?"

Sir John Mortimer looked at the task of writing humour, arguing: "Anyone on a wet Tuesday afternoon can write a tragedy; it's easy to write about troubled adolescence in distant Australia, or broken marriages in Islington. To write great comedy is difficult.

"As I found working with Dicky Briers, you have to take comedy terribly seriously. The great gift of Plum was to depict ordinary people, and get them into extraordinary situations. Here was a writer who was highly educated, who could write a joke in the style of Euripides or Shakespeare, and you get from him an insight into the whole of our cultures".

And Sir John paid tribute to the nobility of character of a man who was ferociously attacked by William Connor (Cassandra in the *Daily Mirror*), and called a traitor—and who in time became great friends with his accuser, "a most wonderful tribute to PGW the man".

Then it was time for cabaret—and offered for our delectation was the incomparable pairing of Hal and Lara Cazalet, with Lucy Tregear most welcome as a substitute for Maria Friedman, and Madeleine Mattar as the brilliant accompaniste. They sang five numbers; it was a shock as Hal and Lara offered, "Till the Clouds Roll By", when the Parliament Room clock chimed 10—we had been there

2 1/2 hours, and it seemed like ten minutes.

Lucy livened the night with a fullblooded version of “Cleo-patter-er” which had the more nervous gentlemen draw back in their chairs as she shimmered and slithered among the tables while the braver kissed her passing hand—a performance of splendid verve and brig. Like Hal and Lara, she was as superb an actress as a singer.

Lara must have sung “Bill” dozens, hundreds of times—but she sang for us with a delicious mix of warmth and humour that reminded you just why this is the best known of all Plum’s lyrics.

And finally, Hal gave us “Sonny Boy”—and how! Every drop of pathos was distilled into his rendition, and handkerchiefs should have been handed out to control the racked emotions—punctuated by bursts of laughter as he reached varying pitches of intensity.

Never did the costermongers of Bottleton East thunder their applause as did the Wodehouse Society and its guests, and Hal gave us the encore we demanded, bringing more plaster from the ceiling, tears to the eyes, and laughter to the throats.

## A FEW QUICK ONES (I)

David Landman found an interesting coincidence. Psmith, as we know, sprang full-blown from the brow of Plum in 1909—with a silent “P” to begin his name. Just seven years earlier the popular English author Edith Nesbit created an animal character which called itself a Psammead:

“Do you mean to tell me seriously,” it asked a child, “that you don’t know a Psammead when you see one?”

“A Sammyadd? That’s Greek to me,” was the response.

“So it is to everyone,” said the creature sharply. “Well, in plain English, then, a Sand-fairy. Don’t you know a Sand-fairy when you see one?”

“Both Edith and PGW were coining comic capital by Englishing a Greek letter,” David points out.

Reuters, in a dispatch from what I’ve always considered the non-butlerine city of Columbus, Ohio, points out that butlers are back in increasing numbers, and there are at least two American schools to train them. The school in Columbus claims three clients for every graduate, offering salaries from \$30,000 to \$85,000 “and up.” California alone is providing some of those clients with its 22,000 “quiet” non-Hollywood millionaires.

## REVELRY CONTINUED

By Phil Ayers

Phil is a past president of our society and, as you about to see, a very active member at present. He, Marilyn MacGregor, our membership secretary, and Dan Garrison, our current president, with his wife Tina, attended the London dinner described in the previous article. Then Phil and Marilyn, with Tony and Elaine Ring, flew to Holland where, a couple of days later, the Dutch society held a birthday dinner on a scale similar to that in London. Phil sent me this report in November 1998, I misplaced it, found it just now, and bunged it most promptly into *Plum Lines*. Please consider that the *mea culpa* of the previous article applies here too. —OM

The day after the London dinner Marilyn and I were fortunate to be able to visit Tony and Elaine Ring in their home near London. I could have camped out in Tony’s Wodehouse sanctuary for a week. Have you wondered what happened to the Heineman portrait of the Empress after the recent auction? I can tell you that Tony and Elaine have hung it over a fireplace in a most perfect spot. I believe Jimmy Heineman would be proud to see it so well displayed.

The Rings and Marilyn and I flew to Holland and rode the train to the banquet near Maasden. I am in awe of the smoothness, efficiency, and quiet of the European trains. They make our Amtrak seem as if it hasn’t improved in the last century.

I met several of the international set in the hotel lobby before setting out to the banquet: Belgians, Swedish, English, Dutch, Americans, all sharing a delight in the Wodehouse world. The U.N. could take lessons from us.

Again, as in London, the browsing and sluicing were top notch. I cannot overpraise the warmth and hospitality of our Dutch hosts. Those at my table kept me informed of what was happening when it happened in Dutch.

Again there was Wodehouse music. Again the hit was “Sonny Boy.” I hope our Antarctica members sing “Sonny Boy” so that it can be said to have been sung by Wodehousians on every continent.

Once again the evening ended far too quickly and it was hard to say goodbye. I wish again to express my deep appreciation to both the English and Dutch hosts for all they did in presenting two such excellent evenings. I can only urge all American Plummies to take advantage of other banquets of this kind wherever and whenever they are held.

One final thought. At neither banquet was one roll, or even a portion of a roll, thrown, and yet everyone had a most wonderful time.

# ODE AND EPODE: TO JEEVES

By Dean Miller

## Ode

OH MUSE!

Who guards the sacred place  
Where Drones and Aunts do hover  
I bow the head before thy face  
And thy poitrine, moreover  
And spread glad flowers abroad in sheaves  
To honor still  
the skill  
of Jeeves.

OH FISH!

That swims in murky brook  
Which hook or net discover  
Served up, as in the Book of Cook  
To glut the piscine lover  
We sing, since Wooster yet believes  
This food  
that feeds  
the brain of Jeeves.

OH KAY!

The song sung in thy place  
Though Great White Way is over  
But royalties flow on apace  
And leave the bard in clover  
Let other say to whom he cleaves  
While yet  
we praise  
the ways of Jeeves.

OH JEEVES!

Thy power is still on tap  
While Wooster, sayeth the gossip  
Avoids again the fatal step  
With Bassett, yea, or Glossop  
Owed all to him who plotting weaves  
In deathless fame  
the name  
of Jeeves.

OH PLUM!

Thy pen has found its marks  
And buoyed us up like helium  
Providing aye the genial sparks  
On printed page revealing 'em  
Let Lazarus hold forth, or Dives  
Providing each  
shall preach  
of Jeeves.

## Epode

Pity on him whom Fate bereaves  
Pity on her whom Life deceives  
Pity on all whom Reason leaves  
Who have not heard  
the word  
of Jeeves.



Here's another poem that was entered in the Great Poetry Handicap at the Chicago convention of 1997, proving again that, though there is a good deal of bread thrown about, the literary achievements reach an exceptionally high level of brilliance. —OM



# WONDROUS "WHAT HO!"

By Nicola Shulman

William Hardwick and Alex Hemming found this appreciation of the Master's work in the English *Sunday Telegraph* of May 23, 1999.

Whereas it is a common critical error to confuse an author with his characters, P. G. Wodehouse may be the only writer whose characters get confused with his readers. Hence, if I say I am thrilled by the novels of Dick Francis, no one will think I am a bookmaker. But if I say I cried, as I did, tears of laughter over the passage (in "Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit") where Bertie unfolds his plan to puncture Tuppy Glossop's hot water bottle with a darning needle tied to a long stick, I invite the assumption that I myself am someone whose idea of a party turn is to place a bag of flour where it will fall on the head of the heir to a dukedom.

The lifelong admirer of Wodehouse, such as I am, knows well the contumelious sneer against which there is no appeal.

You can be affirmative or defensive, it makes no difference. If affirmative, you may say you like Wodehouse because he is incapable of putting a word in the wrong place, or for the effortlessly repeated miracle of his comic similes. If defensive, you might allude to the fact that here is an *imaginary* world, inhabited by impossible people and sustained by an invented, unique language.

If you wanted to provide an example, an obvious one might be the use of "What-ho!" as a form of greeting. Did anybody really say "What-ho!"? Has anybody ever heard it spoken? Has anybody even *read* it outside of P. G. Wodehouse? One scours contemporary literature in vain for this salutation.

Not once, for example, does anybody say "What-ho!" in *Women in Love* (1920) or in *Kangaroo* (1923), although these were published within months of *My Man Jeeves* (1919) and *The Inimitable Jeeves* (1923). And one fares no better among the novelists of the *bon ton*, whose characters may well be depicted in houses groaning with house-guests and all kinds of butlers. Yet who in Elizabeth Bowen says "What-ho!"? Does anyone say it in *Crome Yellow*? Does Mrs Dalloway say it? Not even to herself.



"What ho" appears at least 28 times in Shakespeare's plays, but not at all in his poems. I have not searched other authors. —OM

# A DISCOVERY

By David Landman

David, a retired college professor with an active imagination and enough time on his hands to indulge it, is a member of the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society. He created and, with his wife, Elizabeth, performed the following for a recent NEWTS meeting. Auntie liked it so well that she immediately snaffled it for *Plum Lines*, of course. —AD

Among the items which failed to evoke interest at the recent Sotheby's auction [of Wodehouse material] was a nondescript carton of miscellanea. On a whim, I bought the lot for a song after the auction, and to my surprise found, beneath a farrago of bibelots including pipe-stems the Master had bitten through in the agonies of composition, ribbon-bound locks of hair from various pet pooches, and a petrified sally lunn, a curious volume bound in black leather. This proved to be the official log kept by Rev. Aubrey Upjohn, M.A., headmaster of St. Asaph's School in Bramley-on-Sea, which Plumies will recognize as that attended by the boy Bertie Wooster. Inserted in the volume were twelve pages written in shorthand. It was short work for me to decipher this document, which proved to be a transcript of the scripture knowledge contest held the very year that B. W. Wooster won first prize. The proceedings were secretly recorded by a Miss Belinda Trapp, school matron and sometime court stenographer for the Bramley-on-Sea judiciary. I believe it will be of interest to the Wodehouse Society to discover at last how Bertie won that prize. What follows is the relevant passage from the Trapp files.

*Rev. Upjohn:* As we near the end of our competition, I am disappointed that once again none of our contestants has achieved a perfect score, and am not sanguine that any shall, as I see our final contestant is Bertram Wooster. Wooster, step forward.

*BWW:* Sir, yes sir.

*Rev. Upjohn:* After last night's fortuitous encounter over a tin of biscuits in my study, young Wooster, I should think you would blush to pretend to knowledge of the Scripture which enjoin us to probity and self-control. Nor do I feel that your appearance here today bespeaks a proper sense of contrition.

*BWW:* Sir, yes sir.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Nevertheless, it behooves me to proceed,

as no doubt your answers will occasion some little levity in the audience, and as The Good Book says, "The righteous...shall laugh at him." Psalms 52:6. Are you ready, Wooster?

*BWW:* Sir, yes sir.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Speak up. I am a little hard of hearing.

*BWW:* Sir, yes sir.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Then, Wooster, here is the first question. To purify whose lips did a seraph apply a burning coal?

*BWW:* Ah...Ah...I say, ah—

*Rev. Upjohn:* Isiah! Correct. You surprise me, young Wooster, but we budget for the occasional fluke. I pass then to the second question, which I hardly expect you'll...never mind. Wooster, according to Hebrew law, what will afflict the thigh of a married woman taken in uncleanness?

*BWW:* What rot!

*Rev. Upjohn:* Egad! Correct again. "The Lord doth make thy thigh to rot." Numbers 5:21. Quickly, what gift did Judah send to the Lord of Egypt by way of his sons?

*BWW:* Gift? Judah? This is a fine bit of box fruit...

*Rev. Upjohn:* Fruit! Zounds, correct again! "Take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present." Genesis 43:11. This is most suspicious. Wooster, let me see your cuffs. Hmm, soiled as usual, but no crib notes. Well, here's a question you won't be able to answer so glibly: In Moses' song, what does he taunt Jeshurun with being?

*BWW:* I say, this is a bit thick.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Speak up, speak up, I can't hear. What did you say?

*BWW:* A bit thick.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Amazing! "thou are grown thick." Deuteronomy 32:15. I'm flabbergasted. Well, then, answer this if you can. What did the angel order Gideon to spill out?

*BWW:* Oh, oh, now I'm in the soup.

*Rev. Upjohn:* Soup! I distinctly heard you say soup. Ha! There you are wrong, Wooster. Your true colors show at least. The Holy Book specifically says broth, "pour out the broth," Judges 6:20, and the difference between soup and broth is as night and day. (Judges beckon.) Yes? (Private conference.) Hmm. It seems, Wooster, the judges are of the opinion that you have translated freely from the ancient Hebrew yourself. I have grave doubts that this is so, but I must bow to the judges, who unanimously accept soup. Very well, then. What do the Bulls of Bas-han symbolize?

*BWW:* Ummm. Bit of a sticky wicket.

*Rev. Upjohn:* The wicked! Indeed, that is again correct. My dear Wooster, I humbly own that I may have misjudged your worth. Answer one more question correctly, and you shall have achieved an unprecedented perfect score. I wish you every success, and I will make this question as easy as possible so that your triumph may be complete. Listen carefully. By the rivers of what nation did the Hebrews weep and hang up their harps? I trust that, given your demonstrated mastery of Scripture, Bertram—I may call you Bertram, mayn't I?—this question will not overly tax you considerable prowess. Think hard, Bertram, my golden lad, think hard and answer with deliberation. Think, Bertram, think.

*BWW:* How can I think while you babble on?

*Rev. Upjohn:* Babylon! Babylon! He's done it! Ladies and gentlemen, for the first time in the annals of this hallowed institution, a scholar has achieved a perfect score. Bertram Wilberforce Wooster, you make an old man glad through thy works, and it now becomes my pride and privilege to award you First Prize in Scripture Knowledge. Boys, let this excellent young man be a model for you all, for as the scriptures say, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example." 1 Timothy 4:12.

Jeeves's Uncle Charlie [Silversmith, the butler at Deverill Hall], was something special. He looked like one of those steel engravings of nineteenth-century statesmen. He had a large, bald head and pale, protruding gooseberry eyes, and those eyes, resting on mine, heightened the Dark Tower feeling considerably. The thought crossed my mind that if something like this had popped out at Childe Roland, he would have clapped spurs to his charger and been off like a jack-rabbit.

*The Mating Season, 1949*

## BEACH, MEET RAMBO

By Thomas K. Grose

**Chris Wolski** found a remarkable article (excerpted here) in the magazine *U.S. News & World Report* for June 21, 1999. It's all very well to say that the new butlers can handle a gun and fly a helicopter, but can they nobble an angry swan? —OM

**C**lassic English butlers, as immortalized in film and fiction, have impeccable taste and are non-judgmental, imperturbable, and, above all, discreet. Now a few are being taught to take a bullet, too.

Hoping to cater to the growing number of freshly minted (and presumably paranoid) American millionaires, Britain's largest butler school is offering a new, yearlong course in "super" butlering. Graduates will be schooled not only in the exquisite nuances of personal valeting and household administration but in such skills as firing handguns, landing deadly drop kicks, and shielding their bosses from danger. Rambo, say hello to Jeeves.

Up to now, at least four millionaires—including three Americans—have expressed interest in enrolling their butlers in the course. But Ivor Spencer, who runs the International School for Butler Administrators/Personal Assistants in London, is betting that demand for his butlers-cum-bodyguards will be more than sufficient. After all, Alan Greenspan, ever the gentleman, hasn't raised interest rates yet, and the U.S. economy continues to rock. (Spencer reckons that 60 percent of his butlers end up in the States, double the number of 10 years ago.)

Super butlers won't come cheap, so the course fees will have to be borne by their rich employers. Tuition will vary, as each student's training will be tailored to the employer's needs. But it will run into the tens of thousands of dollars. The cost of the required 60 hours of helicopter-flying lessons alone is \$19,200.

Super butlers will be tutored by former military special-services officers in evasive driving techniques and the firing of handguns. They'll also earn a black belt in karate. Super butlers will do more than just keep their masters alive, however. Spencer will oversee 26 weeks of intensive training that will go far beyond the usual butler duties of ironing shirts and newspapers (just the front, back, and business pages, please), running baths, and laying out clothes. With the help of experts, he'll teach his fledgling super butlers how to shop for antiques and jewelry, yachts, Bentleys, fine wines, and cigars. And, of course, they'll be well versed in computers and the Internet. "Super butlers will have to keep up with technology," Spencer assures.

# SPOTTED ON THE INTERNET

By Elin Woodger

In the last issue of *Plum Lines*, we took a look at the sort of exchanges that occurred on PGW-Net. For this issue, we swing the eyeball around to alt.fan.wodehouse. This is yet another forum where like-minded Plummiacs can exchange ideas, information, and whatnot by means of that wonderful modern invention called the computer.

What, you ask, is the difference between alt.fan.wodehouse and PGW-Net? It's simple, really—one is a newsgroup and the other is a mailing list. With a mailing list (PGW-Net), you essentially have a “subscription,” so any messages that are posted to the list come to you automatically. With a newsgroup (alt.fan.wodehouse), messages are posted on an electronic sort of bulletin board, which means that you have to go to the group to read them. Other than that, there is very little difference to be had between these two modes of Internet communication. Those who participate in both groups generally find alt.fan.wodehouse (afw) to be a bit more active than PGW-Net, and there are, on occasion, role-playing and other games played among afw participants—including, in the past, the ever-popular Great Pumpkin Handicap.

As on PGW-Net, many (but not all) afw participants take aliases known as noms de plum, and post messages that might provide a nifty little tidbit to chew on, share information about convention or chapter doings, or ask questions that can spark anything from monologues to heated debates. Most exchanges, however, are simple, informative, and frequently entertaining. For instance, when Baffled American wrote, “I was reading a Mulliner story in which one of the myriad Mulliner nephews says about a fellow he dislikes, ‘He’s a bit of a Gawd-help-up, isn’t he?’ Can someone define for me ‘Gawd-help-us?’”—the following exchange was sparked:

Nomless: According to “English English” by Norman W. Schur, the U.S. equivalent is “pain in the ass.”

Beach: Oh dear me no! No no no no no! No! Loath though I am to disagreeing with Mr. Schur, a Gawd-help-us is most definitely NOT a pain in the (er...) posterior. For example, I believe the Earl of Emsworth has been described by some of his nearest and dearest and (we must assume) dearest as looking like a “Gawd-help-us.” “Pain in the (ahem) nether regions” will obviously not do as a synonym in this instance; it merely means that his raiment has more in common with a tramp than a belted Earl.

E. Gospodinoff: A “belted Earl”? Is that what he is af-

ter Connie, Julia and Dora become exasperated?

Neil Midkiff: I'm not a Brit, so perhaps I ought not to shove my oar in here. But reading between the lines, it seems that the phrase is used not so much to describe a specific attribute of the person referred to as to indicate the reaction of the speaker to that attribute. (Not quite as bad as *Types of Ethical Theory*, that last sentence, but I probably need to take another crack at what I mean here.) What I mean to say is, if A describes B as a “Gawd-help-us,” it may be that B is as silly as Madeline Bassett, as nerdy as Gussie Fink-Nottle, or perhaps possessed of some other idiosyncratic attribute which makes it difficult for A to maintain his equanimity and preserve the unruffled spirit required by social etiquette. The term, then, seems to be a reasonably literal abbreviation of the thought that “Divine assistance will be necessary for us to cope with interacting with this person.” At least that's the way it looks from here. Does this theory sound at all convincing to those on the other side of the pond?

Reggie B.: What Ho confused ones!! Coming from the side of the wet stuff which this topics is being discussed from, I would like to add my tuppence worth by saying a ‘gawd help us’ is sometimes used to refer to one that is beyond hope, bereft of improvement and generally down at the old plus fours!!!

Mortimer Rackstraw, the Great Boloni: Sounds like one possible translation might be “clueless.”

Recently someone asked one of the many questions that arise periodically in these forums—to wit, what goes into one of Jeeves' classic morning pick-me-ups? A new twist to the responses was provided with the following exchange:

Reggie Byng: What Ho! I am reminded of the first episode of the first series of the wonderfully portrayed TV adaption with Stephen Fry & Hugh Laurie. After a particularly late evening, Wooster answers the door to meet Jeeves for the first time who, upon acknowledging the state of his potential employer rallies round with a “Preparation” of his own. The ingredients on the table were as follows:

- Eggs
- Worcestershire sauce (I think)
- Courvousier Cognac
- Safe oil
- Olive oil
- Black Pepper

Looking at this list, I wouldn't be surprised if people popped their clogs after a snootful of this mixture!! What are your thoughts, fellow Bertram followers!!!

Mortimer Rackstraw, the Great Boloni: What is “safe oil”? For taking that tell-tale squeak out of the library

strongbox when purloining a discreditable manuscript or questionable pearl necklace? Does one squeak after a night of nicking helmets and stalking newts in fountain basins? I was given to groans and whimpers myself. My personal experience, which fortunately is well behind me now, is that the thingumbob what does the job in the above recipe is the cognac, the proverbial hair of the dog that bit you. The balance of the formula seems to be there more to punish the victim-of-his-own-folly than actually do assuage his symptoms. Notice I am subscribing to the theory that nice girls don't get hangovers, just a maidenly glow.

Such, then, exemplifies the intellectual content of afw discussions! Check your web browser for the best way to access newsgroups like alt.fan.wodehouse. In future issue of *Plum Lines*, we hope to present plum pickings from both afw and PGW-Net.

## LAUGH, I NEARLY DIED

By Bertie Brooks

The following article was forwarded to us from Pfather Richard "Catsmeat" Libby (see additional item in "A few quick ones"). Catsmeat spotted this one in the *Padre Island Moon*, a biweekly newspaper published on "The Only Island in Texas With More Pilots Than the Costa Rican Air Force." The author, Bertie Brooks, is a resident of Reading, Berkshire, England, who writes "an occasional column" for the *Moon*. The editors agree with Catsmeat that this particular column has a certain point of interest for Plummiess...  
—AD

The old lady's anecdote had clearly reached its climax. "Laugh," she cackled. "I nearly died."

The years rolled back. I, too, have dwelt in Arcady. I suppose everyone has at least one such memory in their treasure chest to be taken out and dusted off when black depression threatens. This is one of those magic moments of pure side-splitting hysteria. Let me share it.

It was 1963, dank November and past midnight. Poor Jack Kennedy was scarcely cold in his grave and fog was swirling about the street lamps like smoke. It was deadly quiet.

Had a mouse belched in Buckingham Palace you would have heard the echo a mile away in Trafalgar Square. But I was not in London. I was with two university friends in the centre of Cambridge, at the junction of Hobson Street, Petty Cury, and St. Andrew's Street, returning home after a late evening.

Suddenly the silence was shattered by the sound of running feet and a young man appeared out of the mists clutching a policeman's helmet under his arm like a rugby ball. He glanced about him with a hunted air and shot down Hobson Street.

Without a word spoken, we all sat on the low wall behind us. It was clear fate had arranged an exclusive cabaret for us and we had no intention of missing it. Nor were we disappointed. Scarcely had the youth's footfall faded, when the sound of pursuing feet, this time a heavier tread, intruded.

Moments later, the mists parted and a large, red-faced constable, sans helmet, appeared.

"Which way did he go, lads?" he said. It was to any dispassionate observer a last, despairing throw of the dice. Silently, we all pointed down the same road. And as the sounds of pursuit died into the distance, we started to laugh.

For we had, of course, all pointed in the same (and wrong) direction. We roared, we whooped, we wept. And just as the hysteria was beginning to fade, I fell off the wall backwards into a rose bush. That set us off again. Laugh, I nearly died.

## BLANDINGS RESCUED?

Francine Swift, eagle-eyed as always, spotted the following in a column written by W.F. Deedes.  
—AD

According to the *Shropshire Star*, Blandings Castle, once the seat of P. G. Wodehouse's Earl of Emsworth, is to be rescued from decay and converted into something more manageable. I always believed that the exact location of Blandings Castle was a secret Wodehouse carried to his grave.

But no, according to the *Star*: Blandings was drawn from Apley Hall, a 25-bedroom mansion near Bridgnorth, which has been lying unoccupied and crumbling since it ceased to be an English school 12 years ago. The house was built in 1811 by Thomas Whitmore and sold to William Foster in 1867 for a very large sum. Now it belongs to a property company which talks of spending £3.5 million on restoration and conversion.



It pains me to say that the *Star* is mistaken, but Norman Murphy's *In Search of Blandings* (Salem House, Topsfield, Massachusetts, 1986) presents massive evidence in favor of Weston Park as the original.  
—OM

# LORD OF THE RING FOR JEEVES

By Tom Kreitzberg

With apologies to P. G. Wodehouse, J. R. R. Tolkien, and everyone who reads this.

I sat up in my bed of leaves as Sam approached with my tea. Neither the bed nor the tea were up to Bag End standards, but when one is being chased through Orc country by the Black Riders, a Baggins accepts such hardships with a stiff upper.

"Sam," I said, determined to set him straight on his master's wishes, "I've been giving this whole Ring quest some thought."

"Indeed, sir!" He seemed a bit restless this morning, which I put down to his inability, under the circs., to present me with a morning paper.

"Yes. And I think, on the whole, I was too rash to agree to the bally plan."

"Indeed, sir?"

"It's all very well for Elves, Men, and Wizards to go running about the land, fighting Orcs and Balrogs and nameless dark things from the depths of the Earth. But really, it's not the sort of thing for us Bagginses. And the point—the goal, so to speak—of this adventure, is for me to throw my favorite Ring, my greatest treasure, into a blasted furnace."

"Yes, sir."

"Now I know, Sam, that you have never approved of my Ring."

He cleared his throat. "Well, sir, a tasteful broach—"

I cut him off firmly. "Now is not the time to talk of tasteful broaches."

"No, sir."

"When that time comes, I shall join you in conversation of tasteful broaches with a good spirit and a whole heart."

"Yes, sir."

"But anon, Sam, anon."

"Yes, sir."

"I was speaking," I reminded him, "of this Ring quest we're on. Or rather, that we're off. We return to the Shire this morning."

"Indeed, sir?"

"There are times, Sam, when you say, 'Indeed, sir?' and seem to mean something more by it. Now is one of those times. Do you have any objections to my plan?"

"Well, sir, apart from the dangers of the return journey, I would expect the other members of the Fellowship to greet your decision with some dismay."

"This was the very difficulty I had confronted, Sam, but I have also devised a solution. I shall put on the Ring and slip away unnoticed. In the ensuing search, you and I will meet at a pre-arranged spot and continue back to our home." I smiled upon him benevolently. "I know that you have come to see yourself as the source of all our plans, Sam, but this time I've done all the work for us. It's a wonderful plan, is it not?"

"Well, sir—"

"Well me no wells, Sam. Hobbit to hobbit, is there a flaw in the gem I've laid before you?"

"To begin with, sir, we are currently surrounded by nine battalions of Orcs, each led by a Nazgul capable of seeing through your invisibility. Their one purpose is to obtain the Ring."

My heart gave a flutter. "I see."

"Furthermore, sir, it seems that Boromir has overreacted to the pressures of the quest, and destroyed all our supplies. We would need to forage for every bite of food between here and the Shire."

This was a bit much to spring on a chap who hadn't finished his morning tea. "Ah, well, put like that..."

"Yes, sir."

"About these Orcs?"

"They should be attacking presently, sir."

"And Boromir?"

"I regret that he has been slain in an ambush, sir."

I pondered. "Deep waters, Sam."

"Indeed, sir."

"I don't see much of a glimmer on the horizon."

"I was nonplussed myself when I first became aware of the situation, sir."

I eyed the hobbit closely. "You don't mean to say, Sam, that you are now fully plussed vis-a-vis the situation?"

"One might put it that way, sir."

"But this is wonderful! What is the formula?"

"It occurred to me, sir, that one way to fight fire is with fire."

"A puzzling adage, Sam."

"Yes, sir. Applied in this case, it suggests that, faced with an army, it is sometimes best to respond with an army."

"Have we an army, Sam?" I had learned not to underestimate Sam, but surely he could not have packed an army without my noticing.

"In a manner of speaking, sir. I took the liberty of employing the magical mirror given you by Galadriel, to summon the Ents."

"The Ents, you say?"

"Yes, sir. Once roused, I have little fear that they will prove to be more than a match for the Orcs."

"And are they roused?"

"Evidently, sir. If I am not mistaken, the noise in the distance is the sound of a large number of profoundly unhappy Orcs."

I cocked an ear. The honest fellow was right. At his cheeriest, an Orc sounds like a hobbit who's had to give up his bedroom while his aunt visits, then finds she's filled in his morning crossword. The Orcs whose voices floated toward us on the dawn air sounded, if anything, even more resentful.

I sat back with a sigh. "Well, Sam, it seems you've saved the day. If only we had some provisions to celebrate."

"That thought had occurred to me as well, sir. I apprised the Ents of our condition when I contacted them. We may expect them to provide a splendid lunch, and enough supplies to see us safely back to Rivendell."

"You are a marvel, Sam."

"I endeavor to give satisfaction, sir."

Never let it be said that a Baggins doesn't know how to reward service above and beyond. I don't say I did it without pain, but I did it. "Oh, and Sam?"

"Yes, sir?"

"About that Ring?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You may go ahead and toss it into Mount Doom."

"Thank you, sir. I destroyed it yesterday evening after you retired. Would you care for more tea, sir?"

## A FEW QUICK ONES (2)

Congratulations are due to **Pfather Richard "Catsmeat" Libby** (who tells us that the "P" in "Pfather" is silent, as in philosophy and pfirepfly). Pfather Catsmeat was ordained in June of this year and was recently assigned to shepherd the flock of the Saint Pius X Catholic Church in Corpus Christi, Texas. In his introduction to his new congregation, Catsmeat set the right tone by noting: "I have to admit that writing about myself for the parish bulletin presents me with a struggle in the area of humility. My favorite author, the late British humorist P. G. Wodehouse, once described a character in one of his books as 'looking like a man unveiling a statue of himself.' That's how I feel as I write this column, but I will forge ahead, trying to keep my humility intact." Catsmeat also

notes in a separate letter that "there is a family in my parish whose name is Woodhouse! After I teach them the correct spelling of their noble name, I will see to it that they know about the volumes of hilarity awaiting the eager reader." We have no doubt that the souls of Saint Pius are in good hands!

**Ron Louie** e-mails: The wonderful piece by Hugh Laurie rang a bell. Have you seen the Penguin Books UK Website!? Terrific page on the Master, complete with banner headlines, and a note from the Hon. PM Blair, so you must visit when you can: <http://www.penguin.co.uk/wodehouse/pager.html>.

Here's a couple of paragraphs from the Prime Minister's note:

Someone once wrote that the world was divisible into the people who like PG Wodehouse's stuff and those who didn't. New Labour is, of course, more inclusive than that. But I know what they mean.

To remember reading my first Wodehouse story is the work of a moment. A Jeeves short story, as it happens, and no doubt a Penguin paperback. Even at this distance, what stabs at the memory is simply how funny it was. How well-written, and how inventive, too. But just how funny: almost every sentence, pretty well every page, and over many, many years for PG Wodehouse, close on every book. I re-read Wodehouse whenever the work pressure gets too hard.

News about the online "digital butler," Ask Jeeves, continues to be forwarded to Plum Lines. **Rinehart S. Potts** has sent along an article that was published in the April 19 issue of Forbes. Among information already known, the article reports that "BellSouth has just rolled out its version of Ask Jeeves to help navigate its network of regional portals, which will tell you what's going on in your city—say, where you can get tickets to a Braves game." This is just one of numerous corporations that has adopted Ask Jeeves for its web-surfing employees. The article concludes: "Why corporations? The software won't say, but one imagines one knows the answer: Because that's where the money is."

Finally, those who arrive in Houston early for our October convention can enjoy a special treat at the No Tsu Oh Coffeehouse at 314 Main Street on the evening of Thursday, October 21. **Terry Kitchen**—singer, songwriter, longtime TWS member, and NEWT extraordinaire—will be performing sets of original folk songs along with Leora Salo, from 9:00 p.m. to midnight. If you have the chance to catch Terry in action that night, you won't be disappointed!

The Oldest Member and Aunt Dahlia

# GENTLEMAN'S PERSONAL ROBOT

This has turned out to be a distinctly butlerine issue, hasn't it? Here's a final pop at the subject. The article appeared in the English *Daily Telegraph* of 30 July 1999, and was sent in by **Francine Swift**. The author's name was not provided with the article.

—AD and OM

One reason for the popularity of Jeeves, Bertie Wooster's faithful servant, is that he is out of reach. Among servants, real or imaginary, Jeeves is nirvana. That is why some of the best brains in America's engineering, despairing of the human race, have been trying to assemble a robot that could perform one of Jeeves's menial duties. Jeeves shimmering in with the early morning tea...such simple duties are said to be within its range. A small company in Pittsburgh has spent 10 years working on a machine to shimmer in and out with trays, and even to serve the drinks.

Given the profound reluctance of the English race to be anyone's servant these days, the Pittsburgh robot is probably the best we shall get by way of service. The butlers go to Hollywood and the cooks are head-hunted by television producers. But let no one be taken in by the

deceptive headline—"Robot Jeeves..." Bringing early tea and, a little later, breakfast eggs and crisp bacon to the Wooster bedside were the lightest of his services. It was when Wooster or one of his pals ran into difficulties that Jeeves shone. We reflect on the occasions that Wooster veered towards entanglement with females judged by Jeeves to be unsuitable partners. That was when the sheer ingenuity of the man shone forth. Consider the episode in which Bertie Wooster's threatened match with a Miss Glossop ended abruptly after his prospective father-in-law—a brain specialist—lunched in the Wooster flat that, for complicated reasons, had become infested with cats. Study the part Jeeves played in that little drama. Left to the tender mercies of the Pittsburgh robot, or any other robot, Bertie Wooster would in all probability have got

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## VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes  
Tom Wainwright

Contributions to *Plum Lines*  
Ed Ratcliffe, OM                      Elin Woodger, AD

Dues are \$20 per year.

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