



# Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

Vol. 22 No. 4

Winter 2001

## 2001: A Wodehouse Odyssey

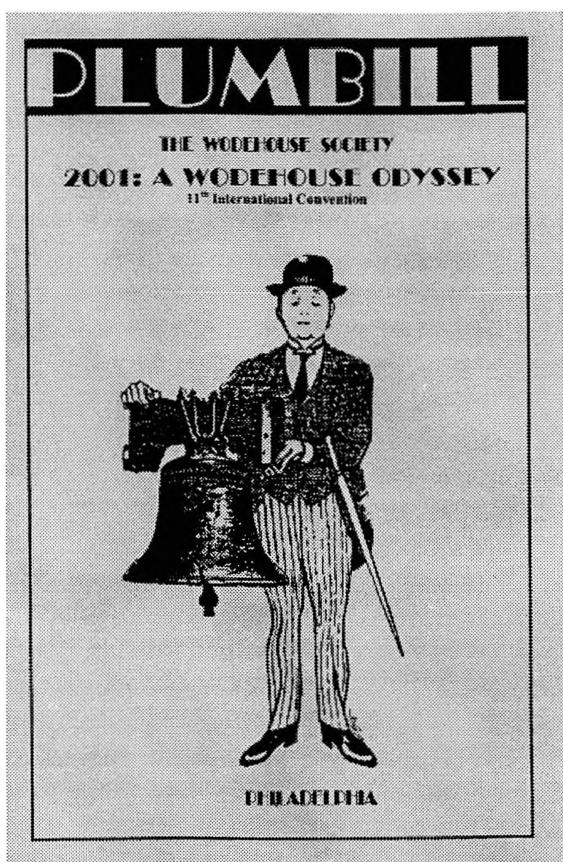
Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly (and Sisterly) Love, lived up to its name in spades on Thursday, October 11, when an abundance of Plummies descended on the Sheraton Society Hill Hotel for our 2001 convention.

A number of us had been drifting into the city earlier in the week, and by Thursday evening we formed a critical mass and tended to take over the lobby and adjoining bar. Our hosts, Chapter One, welcomed us at the registration table, where we scooped up our bag of souvenirs and convention materials and began the very pleasant process of meeting old and new friends.

The bar adjoining the lobby, usually known as The Wooden Nickel, had become the bar-parlour of The Anglers' Rest for that evening, and Miss Postlethwaite, our courteous and efficient barmaid, was able to provide a Lizard's Breath, a Dynamite Dew-Drop, a Dreamland Special, an Undertaker's Joy, a May Queen, a Hot Scotch and Lemon, and other beverages whose names have faded into a haze of pleasant memories.

In the midst of this conviviality a Sensational Event took place. I do not propose to tell you what it was. I refer you to the article on page 10 entitled "A Marriage of True Minds."

When the applause and toasts had died away we resumed our serious business of talking, laughing, and drinking in the Anglers' Rest and elsewhere until driven forth into the snow.



No, the background is not gray, it's Plum, and I would have printed it in color had not stern economic reality forbidden. The drawing is by Lou Glanzman, a well-known artist and Chapter One member.

Friday

Bricicisms, some merely social, others technical and cricket-related, rang out next morning in the group that whooshed off to the Merion Cricket Club for cricket playing, tea drinking, and a visit to a cricket library. Jean Tillson has written an article about the game with input from Shamim Mohamed and Alekh Bhurke, two of the few who actually knew how to play it. The article appears on page 13 of this issue. (Shamim and Alekh are from India, where they take Wodehouse and cricket with equal seriousness.)

Herb Moskovitz and Gretchen Worden led a walking tour of the historic part of the city this morning and showed us such humdrum things as the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were born. Then they dazzled us with the really important building, the Curtis Publishing Company headquarters. *The Saturday Evening Post*

was a Philadelphia institution for over a hundred years, as well as the magazine where, between 1915 and 1965, Wodehouse published 14 novels and 36 short stories. These included the first Jeeves stories and the first



The May Queens and Green Swizzlers at the Merion Cricket Club, Philadelphia. Photo by Jean Tillson.

Blandings Castle novel, *Something New*. I stood before the building and wished I had a hat to doff. The Curtis Publishing Company is long gone, but the building remains in use for other purposes.

That afternoon I was whisked off with a small group to the Free Library of Philadelphia to see a special exhibit of Wodehouse first editions and rare editions owned by John Graham and Frits Menschaar. We trailed John through the Rare Books section of the library as he pointed out editions some of us had never seen. The exhibit also included items from the library collections: original copies of *The Saturday Evening Post*, letters, dust jackets, sheet music, and as Dan Cohen put it, "various pigs and cow creamers of our acquaintance."

Some of us discussed Plum's other career that afternoon: Tony Ring led a consideration of "Wodehouse and the Musical Theatre," and Dan Cohen led a discussion of "Wodehouse and Audiotapes." Susan Cohen reports:

"The discussion groups worked very well. Small

groups, 20 to 25 people or so clustered around Dan and Tony in separate rooms. Dan led a discussion on Wodehouse audiotapes and played examples from various recording companies. I was in Tony's group, where we listened to recordings of Wodehouse songs, asked questions, and had quite a lively and wide-ranging discussion of the music as well as Wodehouse's life. Tony seemed quite pleased with it and we agreed that small-group discussions of aspects of Plum's career is a good idea for future conventions. An addition to, not a substitute for, the big all-day Saturday program."

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, whose members are Wodehousians as well as Sherlockians, held its biennial meeting, called The Senior Bloodstain, on Friday afternoon. Marilyn MacGregor, Anne Cotton, and John Baesch were among those who gave a dramatic reading of the Sherlockian pastiche, "The Adventure of the Misplaced Hound." The name of the meeting is taken from "The Smile that Wins," where, as I need hardly remind you, The Senior Bloodstain was the detectives' club in which Adrian Mulliner proposed to Lady Millicent Shipton-Bellinger and, more to the point, was accepted. (I note with a certain hauteur that the corresponding meeting at a Sherlockian convention is known as The Junior Bloodstain.)

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, some of us played Dronesian games: Knock the Constable's Hat Off, Pitch Cards into the Top Hat, Tiger Wodehouse Challenge Gowf Course, and the Fat Uncle Sweepstakes.

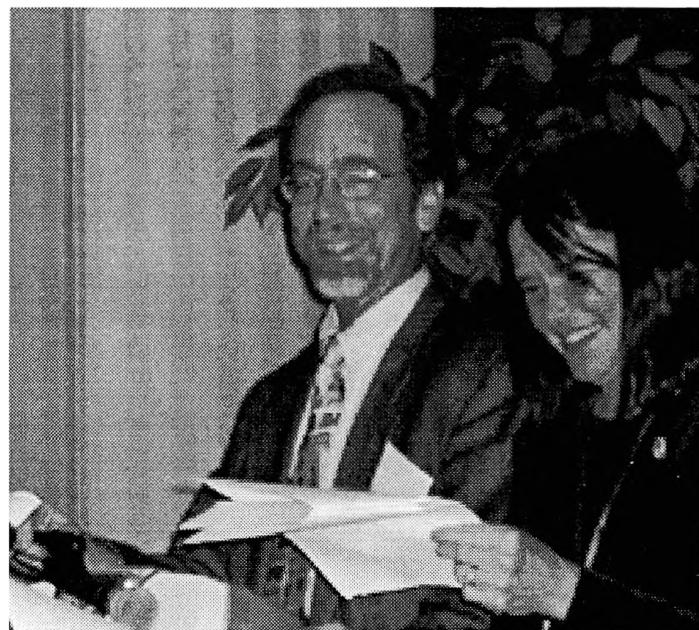
The evening was naturally devoted to conviviality. Our cocktail party was enlivened by Tony Ring's description of the morning's cricket game between the May Queens and the Green Swizzlers. The game was won, 69 to 39, by the May Queens. I was rather surprised that teams almost entirely composed of novices could run up such scores.

Casting your mind back to our 1999 Houston con-



John Graham pointing out a few treasures.

vention, you will remember that Norman Murphy announced his discovery that there really was a Fred Patzel of Nebraska, "hog-calling champion of the Western States." Following Norman's talk, Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall of Nebraska undertook to find and report on the present status of the Patzel family in Madison, Nebraska. Report they did, most thoroughly, in an ensuing *Plum Lines*, and at this evening's party they reported further. On July 4, 2001, they attended a Madison civic event and witnessed hog-calling, husband-calling, wife-calling, pig-kissing . . . well, you can see that they just aren't serious about hog-calling in Madison these days. We mourn for lost glory. Gary and Linda's report will appear in a future issue—without, unfortunately, the recorded hog-calls included in their presentation to us.



Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall reporting on the low state of hog-calling in Madison, Nebraska.

Balancing this sociological investigation was a display of the purely physical—an egg-and-spoon race that ranks with the best this race-hardened reporter has seen. To see these convivants (that wasn't *water* they were drinking!) carrying spoons-with-eggs in their mouths while racing the length of a largish room and back, arriving with spoon and sometimes with egg, filled me with a respect bordering on awe. As any veteran egg-and-spooner will tell you, the spoon itself can obscure much of the critical path ahead. Add to that the bulging egg, the whole structure in precarious balance amidst the bouncing and jouncing of the race, and most of the world may be a blur to the racers. Yet they brought home, not the bacon, not always the egg, but certainly the spoon. Such powers are given to few mortals. Gretchen Worden, Elizabeth Landman, Marcia Rodgers, Jill Singer, Amy



Poise, aplomb—and two outta three isn't bad!

Plofker, and Marilyn MacGregor were among the racers.

A gorilla made what can only be called a dramatic appearance at the cocktail party—just a standard gorilla with the usual flaming eyes, slashing teeth, ferocious roars, and menacing gestures, calculated to strike terror into weak female hearts and allow fearless males to display astonishing courage in the face of mortal danger—at least those males who knew that inside the gorilla costume was our own Dan Cohen. Dan's agent is presently negotiating with several Hollywood studios, demanding an extra fee for weddings that take place in the cage. Dan was impersonating his nom de Plum, Cyril Waddesley-Davenport.

The evening ended, as our evenings tended to end, with sluicing and talking and—well, to be absolutely frank, more sluicing and talking.



Gorilla and wife, Susan Cohen. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

## Saturday

This day was subtitled in our program "Voices Like Tawny Port Made Audible." It was the day of talking about Wodehouse—in my view, an exceptional set of talks. The speakers and their topics are mentioned only briefly here, but we expect to print their talks in future issues of *Plum Lines*.

President Elin Woodger welcomed us to the proceedings and introduced John Graham, most fittingly a local member, whose talk was most fittingly titled "Published in Philadelphia." Between 1915 and 1941 Wodehouse published 14 novels and 35 short stories in *The Saturday Evening Post*, under its long-time editor George Horace Lorimer. In all cases (except for one short story) these represented first publications anywhere in the world.

Wodehouse, like most writers in the early part of the 20th century, had enormous respect for the *Post*, which paid its authors handsomely and promptly. By the 1930s, Plum was earning as much as \$50,000 per novel, the equivalent of \$500,000 at today's prices. In 1965, he published one final short story, "The Battle of Squashy Hollow," in the *Post*, 50 years to the month of his first story, and just four years before the magazine handed in its dinner pail.

Erik Quick, mover and shaker in the Washington, DC, Capital! Capital! chapter, talked about "Wodehouse at the (Legal) Bar." His talk was an examination of the life and political beliefs of Watson Washburn, Wodehouse's lawyer, to determine possible motivations for Wodehouse's tax and legal battles that he carried all the way to the Supreme Court.

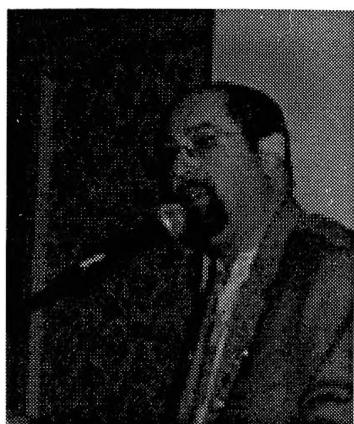
Elliott Milstein, from Michigan, discussed "Stanley Featherstone Ukridge: Hidden Values and Frozen Assets." He addressed a difficult question: Why do we enjoy the Ukridge stories? Ukridge himself has not one redeeming quality. As an acquaintance (he couldn't be *my* friend!) he



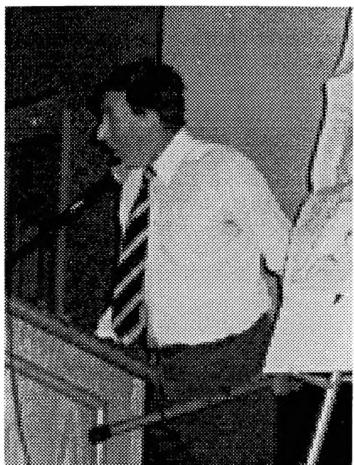
John Graham on Plum and the *Post*. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.



Eric Quick on Plum at the bar.

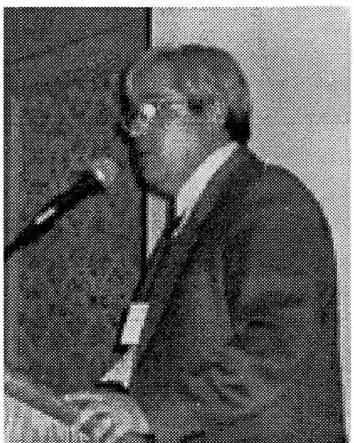


Elliott Milstein on Ukridge.



Norman Murphy and Bramley-on-Sea. The cane was a pointer.

noticeably in back. Test yourself—the quiz appears on page 23, and the answers on page 24.



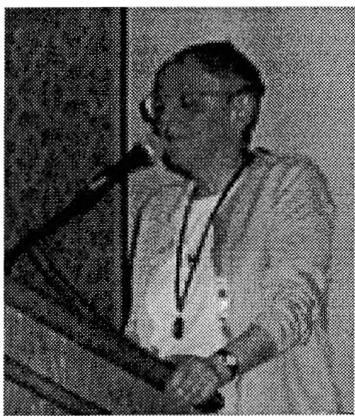
David McDonough, quiz fiend.

is simply a man to be avoided. Yet we read and reread the stories.

Elin introduced the next speaker as "one for whom I have long entertained feelings warmer and deeper than those of ordinary friendship." He was, of course, Norman Murphy, who described the tortuous paths by which he arrived at the answer to the question, "Where is the original of Bramley-on-Sea?" Norman has been known to speak quite rapidly when in full cry. Voice from the audience: "Norman, can you speak more slowly?" A look. One word: "No." Laughter. You will find the text of Norman's talk on page 16.

David and Andrea McDonough tortured, not the paths, but brave volunteers with "The Great P. G. Wodehouse Quiz: Weeding Out the Weakest Drone." First place Ian Michaud, second Elliott Milstein, and third Kris Fowler. The heads of all three bulged

After lunch our brief business meeting culminated in the election of officers: Susan Cohen was acclaimed as our new president and Jan Kaufman was conscripted as vice president. There followed the traditional Great Transfer of Power, wherein outgoing president Elin bestowed on Susan the various accoutrements of the presidency. First to be transferred was the new badge



President Susan Cohen

recognition of international cooperation among Plummies and which is always in the president's safekeeping. Finally, Susan was presented with the Tome, a large, heavy, and ancient record of TWS doings from time out of mind. It should be noted that the badge of office hangs from a decorative ribbon around the president's neck, while the Tome, mercifully, rests on a sturdy table. Other changes in TWS personnel are announced elsewhere in this issue.

John Fletcher, our next speaker, answered a question that may have occurred to many of us: what does a publisher do? After all, the author writes the book and the printer prints it. What's left to do? A great many things, as we learned from John's talk: "Writing Cheques at Intervals: The Life of a Wodehouse Publisher." John knows—he has published all of Tony Ring's *Millennium Wodehouse Concordance* books and a number of others by and about Wodehouse. The title of John's talk is taken from a paragraph in "The Artistic Career of



John Fletcher, publisher.  
Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

Corky": "I used to think that publishers had to be devilish intelligent fellows, loaded down with grey matter; but I've got their number now. All a publisher has to do is write cheques at intervals, while a lot of deserving and industrious chappies rally round and do the real work. I know, because I've been one myself."

Gretchen Worden, a Chapter One member, kept us laughing all the way with her off-the-cuff talk: "Cow Creamers: A Trivial Obsession." I would not have believed that anyone but Wodehouse could extract such humor from the subject. She showed us slides of a cow creamer

of office, prepared by Norman Murphy and consisting of a £5 coin issued to commemorate the Queen Mother's 100th birthday in 2000; the inscription "The Wodehouse Society" has been etched on one side of the coin. Second was our Wembley Exhibition silver tea bell, which Norman had previously presented to the Society in

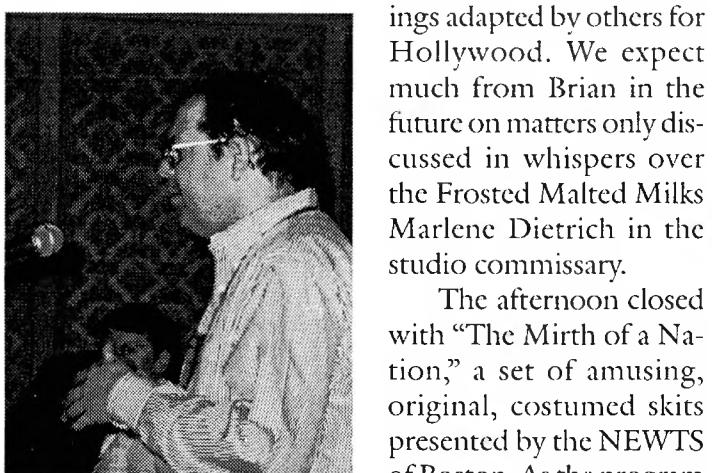


Gretchen Worden and cow creamers. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

shaped like a flying saucer with aliens peering out, a cow creamer from Asia marked "York and Lancaster" with human heads bearing red and white topknots, a cow creamer that was unmistakably a bull creamer, and so on and on, all accompanied by hilarious remarks—Gretchen was having as much fun as her audience. After her talk I asked her, as I did the other speakers, if I could

have the notes of her talk for publication in *Plum Lines*, and discovered to my surprise that she had no notes at all. I begged her to try to reconstruct her talk from memory and she promised to try. Later I discovered that the talks had not been recorded. If you were not there I can only offer sympathy. Question from the audience: "How many cow creamers do you have?" "Two hundred eighty." "How many do you use?" "Oh, I never use them."

Brian Taves, of the Library of Congress, discussed Plum's writings for and about Hollywood, and his writings adapted by others for Hollywood. We expect much from Brian in the future on matters only discussed in whispers over the Frosted Malted Milks Marlene Dietrich in the studio commissary.



Brian Taves on Hollywood.  
Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

The afternoon closed with "The Mirth of a Nation," a set of amusing, original, costumed skits presented by the NEWTS of Boston. As the program stated, "A highlight of every Wodehouse Convention is a dramatic turn by the NEWTS (The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society). This year they have taken as their text the founding of our nation, as seen through distinctly Wodehousian eyes. The noise you hear is our founding fathers rolling over and secretly giggling."

The *entr' acte* continuity of the six skits was provided by a spoken exchange of letters between John Rupert Baxter Adams (Jean Tillson) and Abigail Agatha Spencer Gregson Adams (Anne Cotton).

In the first skit, "Bizarre and Stripes Forever," Gen-



John Fahey and Elizabeth Landman as George Washington and Betsy Ross. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

eral George Bertie Wooster Washington (John Fahey) visited Betsy Madeline Bassett Ross (Elizabeth Landman) and asked her to piece together a flag for some nation or other—I forget which.

William Ukrige Penn (Norman Murphy) struck a bargain with American Indians in the second skit. The Indians were played by David McDonough and, most aptly, Shamim Mohamed and Alekh Bhurke from India.

The secret of the crack in the Liberty Bell was revealed in the next skit by John Fahey as General Washington, David Landman as Reginald Jeeves, aide-de-camp, with Max Pokrivchak and Shamim Mohamed as Claude and Eustace.

"A Pelican at Valley Forge" revealed to us "the sufferings of that dreadful winter . . . reproduced for your enjoyment." Captain Freddie Widgeon (Max Pokrivchak), Captain Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps (Shamim Mohamed), and Colonel Galahad Threepwood (David Landman) were this principals in this tear-jerker, aided by three groaning soldiers and a messenger. We learn for the first time that Washington wanted to cross the Delaware, not in that overloaded skiff you see in the famous painting, but by "swinging across the river on rings." Cooler heads, I understand, prevailed.

"Yes, Mr. Schnellenhamer!" revealed how the Declaration of Independence was really composed. Jacob

Schnellenhamer (Elin Woodger), Prudence (Amy Plofker), a secretary, and Thomas Wilmot Mulliner Jefferson (Max Pokrivchak) headed the cast, aided by three yes-men and abetted by two nodders.

Then the nation's new flag was presented in a burst of glory, looking just a little different than we expected: thanks to Betsy Madeline Bassett Ross, instead of a circle of 13 stars there was a daisy chain of 13 daisies with a wee pixie Minute Man sitting under each one.

In the Grand Finale the entire cast belted out a tribute to Philadelphia to the tune of "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

It was an ambitious production, presented to enthusiastic applause, with enough spectacle and melodrama to supply our needs well into next spring. Several actors had parts in two or even three skits in rapid succession, and I imagined the backstage air thick with flying clothes during lightning costume changes.

**A**fter an interval for regrouping and bringing up reinforcements from the rear, we met for the cocktail hour. Many of us delighted all of us with costumes of all kinds—at each convention more and more people seem to appear in costume for the banquet, a welcome trend. I was particularly pleased with Andrea McDonough as the Emperor of Abyssinia, who scattered largess to the multitude and pointedly asked my opinion of human sacrifice. There were ladies elegantly gowned in mostly Twenties evening clothes, there was Alekh Bhurke looking extraordinary in his usual(!) gray top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, and spats, and there was Neil Midkiff cleverly disguised as himself, a gentleman resplendent in white tie and tails.

The sluicing concluded, we proceeded to the browsing, which was quite good but included no breadstuffs of any description whatever. This, I heard, was on the direct orders of President Susan Cohen. Thus, no bread-throwing, no roll-tossing: we merely ate dinner. Opinion is divided on this matter, and roll-throwing is fun, but recalling the red wine splashed on white clothing and crusty rolls barely missing soft, squashy eyes—vivid memories from past conventions—I side with Susan.

At each diner's place was a beautifully printed little booklet, designed and produced on a hand-operated press by Doug and Margaret Stow. And grouped around the centerpiece of each table were eight little black marzipan pigs, one for each diner, provided by Hope Gaines.

Best costume awards were presented during our dessert. Anne Cotton, as Aunt Dahlia with a lorgnette, won first prize for costume among women, and Dennis Miller, as a verrry Scotch Sandy McHoots, first prize among men. Norman and Elin were chosen the best couple with their Mephistopheles costumes, Ian Michaud was the funniest character, Tom Smith as a member of The Wrecking Crew



The NEWTs unveil the nation's new flag in the magnificent Grand finale. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.



Anne Cotton as Aunt Dahlia and—who the devil is that? It must be Elin Woodger! Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

was the best sports character, Andrea McDonough presented the best interpretation of a character as the Emperor of Abyssinia, and Kris Fowler was the most obscure character as Miss Myra Jennings, whose heavy suitcase led Freddie Widgeon into so much trouble in "Fate."

The banquet ended with what the program accurately described as "An Absence of Long Speeches." Happily, there were nifty short ones.

President Susan Cohen read a brief letter of greetings and good wishes from the Queen Mother, who has been a Wodehouse fan for many decades. We are proud to count her an honorary member of our Society.

David McDonough presented his "Toast to P. G. Wodehouse":

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Soon our revels are ended. Two days from now, we will all be at home with wet towels wrapped around our foreheads, drinking pick-me-ups and wondering why we overindulged. And bemoaning the fact that it will be another two years until we all meet again.



Could this be Aileen Peavey? No, it's Jill Singer. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

## 2001: A **Wodehouse Odyssey**

*A keepsake commemorating Plum's relationship with the Saturday Evening Post*



October 12-14, 2001  
Sheraton Society Hill Hotel  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Title page of the Convention keepsake designed and printed by Doug and Margaret Stow.

Sad thought, indeed. Let us all pause to ponder that thought . . . All right, that's enough. For there is a silver lining to this cloud. I should like to draw your attention to the fact that two days from now, Monday, October 15, is the 120th birthday of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse.

Several months ago, I had the honor of presenting a paper to the Society entitled "Where was Plum in 19 One?" Where he was that year is well documented. But where would he be in 2001? I think I know.

I believe it is best expressed by the words of Jacqueline Powell, who was personal secretary to Ethel Wodehouse in the 1930s:

*He was not exactly shy, but he was a loner. And he loved people to be enjoying themselves in his house. If we were dancing to the gramophone, or chatting, or eating, or having a little drink, he would suddenly put his head through the door which led to his study, and he'd look round with his sweet smile and his very short-sighted glasses, and say "Is everybody happy?" And we'd say, "Yes, thank you very much. Why don't you come and join us?" And he'd say, "No, thank you very much, but I think I'll go back to my work."*

And if you look quickly, I think you will see in the back of the room tonight, a large, amiable man who has shoved his head round the door and then is gone too soon.

And if you listen closely, you can hear the faint staccato of typewriter keys.

And so we, too, say, "Thank you, Plum. Why don't you come join us? And Happy Birthday."

To P. G. Wodehouse.

We raised our glasses in salute.

A message from the Oldest Member, Frank Axe, on the founding of our Society, was read by John Baesch when Frank was unable to be on hand. (Editor's note: pay no attention to my "Oldest Member" tag—it's just the editor's title. Frank Axe is the really and truly Oldest Member, now and forever.) His message will appear in a future issue.

Susan paid tribute to several members who have made outstanding contributions, among them Elin Woodger. Elin left a few days later to join Norman in London, but has no intention at all of cutting ties with the Wodehouse Society.

The evening ended with dancing (Norman and Elin among the first couples) and singing around the piano, where Neil Midkiff seemed to be able to play every song from every musical in any period. Word from Jan Kaufman: "I have photos to prove that Norman Murphy, John Fletcher, and Margaret Slythe all tap-danced for some brief shining moments rather late in the evening." One piece of damning evidence is the photo in the column just to the right.

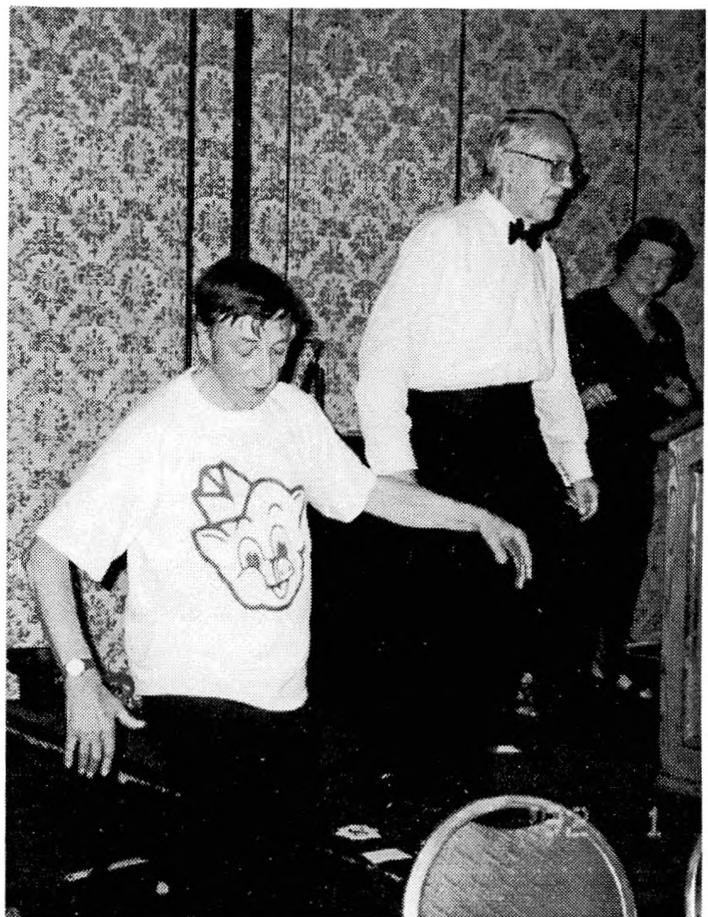


Singing around the piano with Neil Midkiff at the keyboard, a tradition at Wodehouse conventions.  
Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

## Sunday

Our convention ended as all our conventions end, with Sunday morning brunch, a sad and happy affair.

The chatter of breakfasters faded as, up on the podium, our Blandings Castle group began a dramatic reading of "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend." Marilyn



Norman, John, and Margaret, caught in the act.  
Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

MacGregor was Gladys, in a dress custom-tailored for the part (from a drawing in a 1928 *Strand* illustrating the first publication of the story), Bill Franklin, with tam, was a growling McAllister, Jan Kaufman an imperious Lady Constance Keeble, Chris Dueker a ponderous Beach, Neil Midkiff (who adapted the story for reading) a mellifluous narrator, and I was Lord Emsworth.

Elin Woodger reports that as we "approached the story's climax, the audience seemed to hold its collective breath for the line they all knew was coming. When it arrived—'...Gladys, seeking further protection, slipped at this moment a small, hot hand into his.'—the entire room let out a sigh of recognition and appreciation. This really happened. The smiles that lit up the room were magical."

Then the reading was over, succeeded by the round of good-byes, and the looking forward to the next gathering, as we all slid down the Wodehouse waterpipe into the Real World. Parting is all we know of heaven and all we need of hell—I just made that up.

It was a wonderful weekend, a great gathering of kindred spirits, someone said our best convention ever. We are all grateful to the Chapter One crew who put it together and made it seem effortless. Many people contributed, but special thanks must go to:

Convention coördinators

Lou Glanzman

Art

Susan Cohen, David McDonough

Program

Herb Moskovitz

Tour, printed program and guide, photography

Karen Byrne, Edward Whittaker

Banquet

Gretchen Worden

Tour and library exhibit

Bennett Blum, John Graham

Library exhibit

Andrea McDonough

Registration

Dave Ruef and Barbara Van Hook

Games

Norma Frank

Contracts, cricket, overall help

Vivian Carlson

Computer

Hal Lynch

Official greeter

Debbie Bellew, Fran LaRosa, Bob Nissenbaum,

Carolyn Pokrivchak

Overall help

Many of these people worked in several other capacities than those listed here.

Above all we are grateful to our beloved  
**Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse**,  
whose life and work we meet to celebrate.

-OM

with contributions from David Landman, Elin Woodger,  
Norman Murphy, Neil Midkiff, Jan Kaufman, Carolyn  
Pokrivchak, Jean Tillson, and probably others . . . .



20th August 2001

*Dear Mr. Cohen*

Thank you for your letter which I have laid before Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.

Queen Elizabeth much appreciated your message of greetings and was most interested to hear that the Wodehouse Society will be gathering in Philadelphia on 12th October. The Queen Mother sends her best wishes to all members of the Society and hopes that you will have a most enjoyable and successful celebration.

*[Handwritten signature]*

Private Secretary to  
Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Mrs. Susan Cohen,  
President Elect  
The Wodehouse Society

# A Marriage of True Minds

By David Landman

In a convention which, like a Rossini overture, featured a succession of brilliant crescendos, the first of these was clearly the most sensational. It occurred on Thursday evening as a glittering company of gallant gentlemen and fair ladies, having shaken off the dust of travel, was assembled in the Anglers' Rest pub of the Society Hill Sheraton. They were called to order by the redoubted Colonel Norman Murphy. In ringing tones clarified by deep feeling, he began:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have an important announcement to make and I also need the support of The Wodehouse Society Committee. Elin," he asked out-going TWS President Elin Woodger, "would you please bring your troops up here."

The "troops" assembled, he continued.

"Ladies and gentleman, as some of you know, I am Chairman of the P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK), and we place tremendous importance on the liaison and cooperation of The Wodehouse Society. Two years ago at Houston, I showed you a picture of the pig which Wodehouse used to create the Empress, and since then David Landman went off to become the scourge of the New England libraries and found the press cuttings Wodehouse used to write 'Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!' Meanwhile, two thousand miles to the west, Gary and Linda Hall went off and found Fred Patzel's family. That's coöperation and liaison over seven thousand miles.

"I'm delighted to say that our President, Elin Woodger, also feels that liaison and cooperation between our two societies is important.

[Pause.]

"Indeed, so important does she consider it that last Saturday she made the final sacrifice in this great cause.

[Long puzzled pause.]

"I am delighted and happy to tell you that last Satur-



Chairman-in-law, President, and fish slice. Photo by Robert Bruce.

day the President of The Wodehouse Society married the Chairman of The P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK)!

[Long, puzzled, incredulous pause.]

"Elin and I are wife and husband!

[Uproar in all directions.]

"I have one more word to say. To misquote Bertie Wooster, as we all do so often, please do not look upon this as losing a president. Try to regard it rather as gaining a chairman-in-law."

Toasts were raised, backs slapped, hands shaken, and soft cheeks bussed while the room echoed with the sweet voice of joy. Elin and Norman raised aloft the fish slice presented by Susan and Dan Cohen.

We are sure all Plummies join the staff of *Plum Lines* in the following wish for Elin and Norman:

MAY ALL YOUR DAYS BE BLANDINGS CASTLE DAYS!

# Villanelle

By David Landman

On the Marriage of Col. Norman Murphy of London and Ms. Elin Woodger of Long Island

Oh, let this day with joy resound,  
Ring out glad bells from shore to shore;  
The Thames has wed Long Island Sound.

From cricket pitch to pitcher's mound,  
Long Island Parkway to M4,  
Oh, let this day with joy resound.

The Euro's wooing of the pound  
Compared to this?—a crashing bore;  
The Thames has wed Long Island Sound.

At embassies the cry goes round,  
“Cupid's the best ambassador,  
Oh, let this day with joy resound!”

On Heaven's links with glory crowned  
Sweet Plum tees up a blessing—Fore!  
The Thames has wed Long Island Sound.

By secret channels underground  
Bright waters into waters pour.  
Oh, let this day with joy resound,  
The Thames has wed Long Island Sound.

# Timely Responses

The announcement of the Murphy-Woodger wedding brought major responses in *The Times* of London, than which there is surely none whicher. The entire top half of page 2 of the October 27 issue was devoted to the event. The writer, Emma Hartley, was well acquainted with the Wodehouse world and the result is less an arm's-length account than the description of a family affair. "It is a romantic tale of which even a confirmed bachelor such as Bertie Wooster would approve," her account begins. It ends with this comment by Richard Briers, president of the British P.G. Wodehouse Society: "That's absolutely tickety-poo. . . . I wish them a joyous union—hands across the sea in no uncertain terms." The story features a large photograph (below) of Norman and Elin embracing while Norman holds a clearly visible copy of *The Adventures of Sally*.

Accompanying the wedding story is an account of the many engagements of Bertie Wooster.

On Sunday, November 4, *The Times* followed up with another photograph and article, this one of the newly-weds-at-home variety.

—OM



Well, the book is by Wodehouse, but who are those people?

# Tinkerty-tonk

By Elin Woodger

As you know, Aunt Dahlia eventually separated herself from *Milady's Boudoir*, and it is now time for this Auntie to separate herself from *Plum Lines*. London has many attractions — a certain Colonel heads my personal list — but it has this remarkable disadvantage: When one editor lives in England and the other lives 8 hours away in California, working together becomes rather difficult, to put it mildly. Thus it is with great regret that I must announce my resignation from the *Plum Lines* editorial board. However, with our ever-faithful Oldest Member at the helm and the assistance of David Landman and Neil Midkiff, I leave knowing our jolly old journal is in the best possible hands. But do not assume this means you've heard the last of me! Thanks to the benefits of modern technology, I am always on call and look forward to continuing to help the OM in any way I can — because, after all, Norman and I will always be devoted to The Wodehouse Society and to the spreading of sweetness and light on all continents.

—OM

That distant gurgling sound is just my effort to swallow the lump in my throat. Elin has been an invaluable co-editor for more than five years, editing, writing, collecting material, and saving the publication from brink-of-the-precipice blunders more often than I like to remember. *Plum Lines* was an Elin-and-Ed production for years until David Landman joined us in 2000. Elin has moved to London, but I'm sure we will continue to need her editorial advice and counsel. David and I wish Elin and Norman every happiness.

# Aloft Again

Tom Thomas has found another, and quite obscure, Wodehouse reference to flying, in addition to those in the article "Wodehouse and 'Flying'" in the last issue of *Plum Lines*. In *Hot Water* (1932), two English-speaking imposters engage in small talk in an attempt not to be drawn into conversation in French. Wodehouse devotes nearly 20 lines of dialogue to establishing that "so many people fly nowadays" and that flying is "so much quicker." Chapter 10, Section 1.

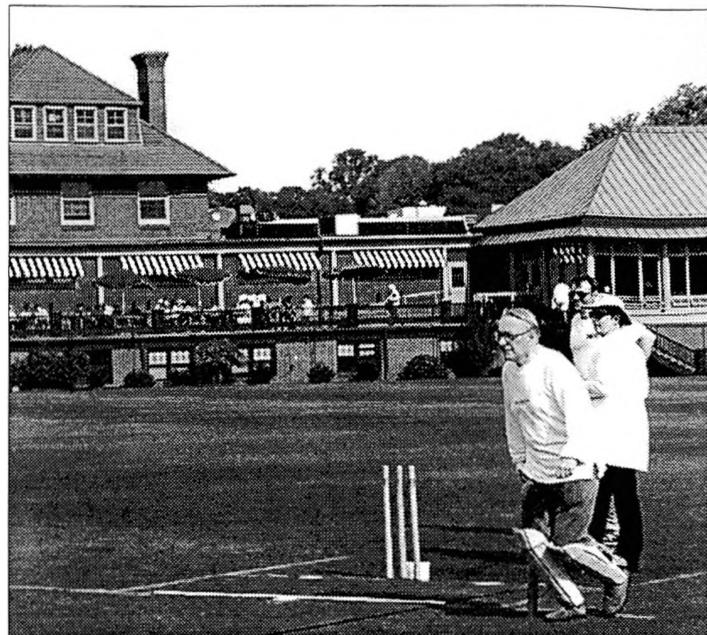
# The May Queens v. The Green Swizzles, 2001

By Pighooley

While the press coverage of the recent TWSCC match at the Merion Cricket Club in Philadelphia was, of course, highly gratifying, we should like to remind the AP journalist who wrote that Wodehouse Society members "play cricket badly" of the fundamental truth that all things in life are relative. Had this journalist witnessed the level of our play in Houston just two years ago or (we blush to recall) what can only be described as our "antics" in Chicago in 1997, we think he would agree with us that the match we played on 12 October of this year was, in comparison at least, nothing short of brilliant.

Certainly we all *felt* brilliant and that, after all, is the point. For The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club is simply another manifestation of the principal urge which prompts each of us to attend TWS conventions in the first place: the overwhelming desire to physically enter Plum's world, if only for one magical weekend every two years. The fact is, most of us did not row for our college nor get our rugger blue nor win a house boxing championship nor any of those other wonderful things which Wodehouse heroes do. Let us come right out, then, and admit the thing: we are not, as a group, good at sports. But what we *are* good at is pretending. As individuals we are good at pretending to be certain characters from Plum's world whom we most admire or resemble, but where we really shine is at pretending *en masse*. And so it was in Philadelphia; dozens of Plummies decked out in various degrees of proper cricketing attire made their way to the Merion Cricket Club on a glorious green and gold autumn morning prepared to assist each other with word and gesture to believe that they were, in reality, players of the great game. Perhaps it was the fact that we were (for the first time) playing on a regulation ground at an honest-to-goodness cricket club, or that this was our third TWS Convention Cricket Match and several people actually knew what they were doing, but the illusion was a complete success from start to finish.

Never mind that we played with a red rubber ball from a children's cricket kit in order to spare each other's occipital bones and the pavilion's windows. Never mind that some of us batted with a blue plastic bat from the same kit in order that we might actually hit the red rubber ball (it didn't fly very far, but that just saved a lot of tiresome running about after boundaries). Never mind that some chap called "Extras" was the top scorer for both sides. None of us were expecting to be chosen to play for



John Fletcher prepares to run under the watchful eyes of Tony Ring, umpire, Bill Franklin, bowler, and the spectators on the pavilion deck. Photo by Jean Tillson.

our county; we just wanted to experience the game Plum loved so much and wrote about so well. With that as our goal, and with our natural talent for play-acting as our guide, how could any of us lose?

Well, in a less-spiritual sense, of course, someone had to lose and this year it was the Green Swizzles. We turn to Gussie (Captain, May Queens) for a description of the opening action. "The day started terribly for the May Queens as we lost both tosses—one was for who gets first draw at team selection—and the Green Swizzles put us in to bat. This was rather surprising since the out-field was a little slippery early on. Pongo probably expected the early movement to help his bowlers but the tables were turned as the May Queen openers, especially Neil Midkiff who played a decidedly Boycottian innings before getting out to Jean Tillson in the 5th over, saw the shine off the rubber ball. Soon the runs started to flow and big partnerships developed as Pongo "Butterfingers" Twistleton was kind enough to oblige with a few dozen dropped sitters. I'd have recommended catching practice for him at 6 o'clock for the next two years had he not made up for it with a brilliant caught and bowled later in the innings."

Pongo (Captain, Green Swizzles) has grave doubts

about the veracity of some of the foregoing. To wit, he states, "I should like to correct a few misstatements on Gussie's part, no doubt owing to his seeing not just double but hexadecuple. He claims I dropped several dozen catches; the truth is this reflects more the quality of the champagne consumed by the TWSCC Committee on the previous evening than my fielding. I dropped just two. One because the sun got in my eyes, the other because I happened to be engaged in some deep reflection at the time. To make up for his critical remarks, he praises my c. and b.—alas, I must admit that on my follow-through I felt something on my hand, which closed reflexively. Looking down I was surprised to see the ball there, and general jubilation on the part of the Green Swizzles. I concluded that I must have brought off a catch."

The match was a 20-over limited game and the umpires were Tony Ring (bowler's end) and Norman Murphy (square leg . . . er, gully umpire). This same Murphy, by the way, had a word of instruction and encouragement for each and every player be they timidly attempting to bat or merely tying their shoe laces. He was, therefore, in due course awarded the TWSCC's most prestigious honor, The Bertie Wooster Preux Chevalier Award for Sportsmanship, and received for his gallantry a week's supply of false moustaches. Everyone played magnificently (by TWSCC standards), but special mention must be made of the spirited batting of John Fletcher. "At one point I was guilty of making him run for a quick bye," explains Gussie. "Seeing me half way down the pitch he hesitated not, made a run for the danger end and took a dive with his bat outstretched, suffering a cut on his forehead in the process." Pongo's admiration is no less than Gussie's. "Not only did he shed blood for his side, but he managed to get his bat into the crease, sneaking another run which for a mere mortal was simply not there."

Pighooley would like to assure the more sensitive



Pongo, wickets keeper, is ready for anything batsman Gussie lets past him. Photo by Jean Tillson.

among our readers that Mr. Fletcher did not suffer any lasting damage as a result of his fall and was, in fact, so completely recovered by the time the banquet rolled around that he honored her with several dances.

The TWSCC would like to thank Hope Gaines and the rest of the Chapter One cricket committee for their Herculean and eventually successful efforts to convince the fine folks at the Merion Cricket Club that we are essentially harmless and make up in enthusiasm what we lack in skill. To Tony Ring we are also forever grateful as his announcements of "right hand over!" (or "round" as the case may be) and his attempts to help the batsmen take guard lent an impressive air of authenticity to the proceedings even if most of us don't have the foggiest idea what he's on about. This year we were also graced with two official scorers in the persons of Hilary Bruce and Elaine Ring who did their utmost to look serious and murmur wonderfully genuine-sounding terms to each other as they kept the tally of runs, wides, and wickets taken. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation for the generous gift presented to us by Tony Ring on behalf of Murray Hedgcock (professional cricket reporter and author of *Wodehouse at the Wicket*) who endowed the TWSCC library with a copy of *MCC Scores of Matches, 1905*. This slim red volume, as everyone knows, contains a report of an Actors v. Authors match in which P. G. Wodehouse played (with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, E. W. Hornung, and C. Aubrey Smith, among others). We are chuffed beyond expression to own such a treasure and can only say it is our dearest wish that comrade Hedgcock will be able to join the TWSCC in person for its match at the next Wodehouse Society convention, wherever it may be held.



A word of explanation: In the darker world where we spend our time between Wodehouse Conventions, Pighooley is known as Jean Tillson, Pongo as Shamim Mohamed, and Gussie as Alekh Bhurke. The three make up The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club Committee.

"The last time I played in a village cricket match [said Psmith] I was caught at point by a man in braces. It would have been madness to risk another such shock to my system."

Mike, 1909

# The *Concordance* is Finished!

Tony Ring has spent a large chunk of his last nine years editing the eight volumes of a monumental Wodehouse concordance, and John Fletcher has spent a corresponding slab of his time publishing the books. (Geoffrey Jaggard, whose name appears as co-editor, published the original and very much smaller version of the concordance in the 1960s.) The usefulness of this concordance in guiding the reader through the trackless jungle of the nearly one hundred Wodehouse books can hardly be overstated. What follows is an excerpt from a letter I received from BookSystems, the British distributor, in September.

I am writing to let you know that *Volume 8: Wodehouse with New Friends* is being published this month. The previous volumes covered works that dealt with characters who appeared in more than one story. This, the final volume, covers books and stories in which no active characters appeared more than once (subject to a few exceptions, where their appearance was not expected!).

Like previous volumes, *Wodehouse with New Friends* is lavishly illustrated with specially commissioned drawings by Bernard Canavan and re-

productions from original appearances in magazines such as *Colliers* and the *Strand*.

This final volume includes four appendices and two "Series Notes" that serve to complete the *Concordance*. This vast survey of Wodehouse's work has taken eight years to publish. The eight volumes list all his characters, his places, and his references to everyone from Moses to de Gaulle.

It's worth mentioning that this concordance is even more comprehensive than Dan Garrison's excellent *Who's Who in Wodehouse*. That invaluable book lists "characters who actually enter Wodehouse's stage and speak lines," as well as a few in domestic service who do not speak, "two moustaches, a bath sponge, a pig, assorted dogs and cats, and a beverage." This concordance seems to include every person, place, and thing mentioned, no matter how briefly, in the canon. All eight volumes are currently available.

## Detroit Gears Up for 2003 Convention

By Elliott Milstein

**C**ALLING ALL DETROITERS: Contact Elliott Milstein if interested in joining the new Detroit chapter of The Wodehouse Society, which will be called (Gawd help us) "The Pickering Motor Company," the only reference to Detroit in the canon. We plan to have regular meetings and lots of fun, but keep in mind that the first task is taking on this crazy business of a 2003 convention. No tentative plans, no tentative date; everything's up for grabs. We're even thinking of holding it in August to allow those tied to school schedules to attend (for once!!). Also checking out alternative venues to keep costs down, so don't expect the kind of gala extravaganzas we've been blessed with up till now. A few lectures, a couple pints of ale, a cot in a dormitory should just about see us through. Actually, we haven't a clue — the curse has just now come upon us. So if you live in

Southeastern Michigan and want some input, give a call. If you live elsewhere and just live for these biennial events, hold your breath . . . more to come!

# Wodehouse at the Seaside: Where is Bramley-on-Sea?

By Norman Murphy

A talk delivered at the Philadelphia convention of The Wodehouse Society, October, 2001.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As many of you know, my particular interest in Wodehouse is to try and find the factual basis of his stories. I have been lucky enough to find most of his major locations—Peacehaven down there in Valley Fields, Bertie Wooster's flat in Berkeley Street, the sources of Blandings—and today I want to take you on a search for Bramley-on-Sea.

Now, I should remind you that England is a small country and that nowhere is more than fifty miles from the sea. This meant that when Bank Holidays/Public Holidays were instituted by Act of Parliament in 1871, everybody was able to use the railways to spend some time at the seaside.

Small fishing villages mushroomed into large resorts all the way round the British coast from Scotland downwards. Four generations of Britons spent their summer holidays shivering on cold beaches, dashing into our freezing waters and pretending to enjoy it, and this continued till the 1960s when the European holiday became popular with its guarantee of sunshine and exotic foreign food.

So, in *Hot Water* (1932), we read that Waterloo Station in London was full of "large crowds of moist adults, accompanied for the most part by children with buckets and spades. For it was the beginning of what the papers call the Holiday Rush. London and its young, like Xenophon's Ten Thousand, were making for the sea."

Packy Franklin, the cheerful American hero, is very taken with all this hustle and bustle. He finds himself returning stray children to their parents, being generally caught up in the whole mad rush and confusion and enjoying it. His fiancee, Lady Beatrice Bracken, does not.

"What a mob!" she said disgustedly.

"I like it," said Packy. "All this is helping me to understand the spirit which has made England what it is. I can see now what they mean when they talk of the bulldog breed. There was one fellow came navigating by here just now with an infant in each hand and attached to each infant, mark you, a Scalyham on a string. The last I saw of them, the port-side child had got tangled up with the starboard Scalyham and the port-side

Scalyham with the starboard child, and, take it for all in all, it was beginning to look like a big day for Dad. In my opinion, good clean fun, gratifyingly free of all this modern suggestiveness."

Packy Franklyn took the optimistic view. In *The Girl on the Boat* Sam Marlowe mourns his rejection by Billie Bennet by spending a week at Bingley-on-Sea.

All watering places on the south coast of England are blots on the landscape, but though I am aware that by saying it I shall offend the civic pride of some of the others, none are so peculiarly foul as Bingley-on-Sea. The asphalt on the esplanade is several degrees more depressing than the asphalt in other esplanades. The Swiss waiters at the Hotel Magnificent, where Sam was stopping, are in a class of bungling incompetence by themselves, the envy and despair of all the other Swiss waiters at all the other Hotels Magnificent along the coast.

For dreariness of aspect Bingley-on-Sea stands alone. The very waves that break on its shingle seem to creep up reluctantly, as if it revolted them to have to come to such a place.

In his early books, Wodehouse did not disguise his locations. *Love Among the Chickens* is set in Lyme Regis on the south coast because Wodehouse had holidayed there with the three little Bowes-Lyon girls. And I learned just a couple of years ago that his friend Bill Townend and Westbrook, the original for Ukridge, were there as well. By the way, the house in the novel has now gone. I did manage to find where it had been, and there are still some very old apple trees left from the orchard mentioned in the book, from which you can still look down on the harbour as Wodehouse told us.

In *Not George Washington* the hero, based on Wodehouse himself, meets the heroine on the island of Guernsey, and we read of Cobo Bay, St Peter's Port, Fermain Bay, St Martin's, and other real locations because Wodehouse holidayed there the previous year, and his notes show that he met a mother and daughter there, just as the hero did.

But both these books were very early in Wodehouse's career—1906 and 1907 respectively. From then on he began to change the names of his settings. So Emsworth, the village where he lived on the Hampshire/Sussex border, appears only once under its own name, when Mike Jackson tells us it was the location of his prep school before he came to Wrykyn.

In *The Little Nugget*, Wodehouse called Emsworth "Sanstead," and the local big house "Sanstead House"—its real name is Stansted House.

In "Something to Worry About," it appears as Millbourne. In *A Damsel in Distress* it is called Belpher.

Another factor to be remembered is that Wodehouse spent much of his life by the seaside, or at least very near the sea. His house at Emsworth, Threepwood, which now has a blue plaque on it, is about six hundred yards from the water. His first married home in America, at Bellport, Long Island, was about the same distance from the sea and he used it under the name Brookport in *The Little Warrior*. Used it again in *The Adventures of Sally* and made it the setting for *Uneasy Money*.

He spent the final years of his life at Remsenburg, Long Island, once again in a house about three or four hundred yards from the water, and promptly used it as Bensonburg in *French Leave*.

These identifications were easy. Now we come to the tricky ones. For example, the resort of Marvis Bay is placed in Cornwall, Devonshire, or Long Island, depending on what setting Wodehouse wanted.

I've come to the reluctant but firm conclusion that Marvis Bay is a completely fictional place until its last appearance in the Oldest Member's golf stories, which we now know were set in the Soundview Golf Club at Great Neck, Long Island. In the short story "Ordeal by Golf," the English version is set in dear old Marvis Bay. In the American version, the course is called the Manhooset Golf and Country Club. If you look at a map you will see that Great Neck is a peninsula and the stretch of water to the right of it is called, not Manhooset, but Manhasset Bay. As Wodehouse told us in "Life with Freddie," the Soundview Golf course has gone now. It is completely built over except for the famous lake where so many golfers suffered. If you go to Great Neck, drive along Pond Park Road to Pond Park: you'll find the lake still there, the last relic of the best loved golf course in the world. Except, of course, for St. Andrews, at whose revered name I would doff my bowler hat if I were wearing it.

Now, back to the UK. And I'll do the easy ones first. Brighton, where Mrs. Bingo Little and Mrs. Purkiss went to school and where Bertie Wooster used to go for a breath of fresh air is, well, Brighton, actually, fifty miles

due south of London.

Twenty miles to the west is Bognor Regis. It is mentioned at least six times by Wodehouse but only in passing. A Mulliner cousin is bishop there. Mrs. Bingo Little's mother lives there and both Jeeves and Seppings, Aunt Dahlia's butler, take their holidays there. And in *Uncle Dynamite* and *The Ice in the Bedroom* we are told that Bognor is "bracing." And that word strikes a chord with English readers, if not American ones.

Bingley-on-Sea we know is *not* bracing—and, yes, I will deal with this bracing business in a moment. In *The Girl on the Boat*, Sam Marlowe leaves Bingley-on-Sea, returns to London, and tells his father where he's been. His father replies:

"Bingley-on-Sea! Good heavens! Why Bingley-on-Sea? Why not Margate while you were about it?"

Sam replies: "Margate is too bracing. I did not wish to be braced. Bingley suited my mood. It was grey and dark and rained all the time, and the sea slunk about in the distance like some baffled beast . . . ."

In "Portrait of a Disciplinarian," Bingley-on-Sea is the home of Nanny Wilks, who terrorises Frederick Mulliner and Jane Oliphant. In "Jeeves and The Kid Clementina," it has a Hotel Splendide where Bertie stays, and it also possesses St. Monica's, the school presided over by Miss Mapleton.

And I cannot resist adding here what I think is a perfect example of Wodehouse's descriptive powers. It is accurate, it describes a type of person we all immediately recognise—but I have never seen it put into words so well—and it is funny. It is Wodehouse's description of Miss Mapleton as seen through Bertie's eyes:

The breath-taking exhibit before me was in person a bit on the short side. I mean to say, she didn't tower above one, or anything like that. But to compensate for this lack of inches, she possessed to a remarkable degree that sort of quiet air of being unwilling to stand any rannygazoo which females who run schools always have. I have noticed the same thing when *in statu pupillari*, in my old headmaster, one glance from whose eye had invariably been sufficient to make me confess all. Sergeant-majors are like that too. Also traffic-cops and some post office girls. It's something in the way they purse up their lips and look through you.

In short, through years of disciplining the young—ticking off Isabel and speaking with quiet severity to Gertrude and that sort of thing—Miss Mapleton had acquired in the process of time rather the air of a female lion-tamer; and it was this air which had caused me after the first swift

look to shut my eyes and utter a short prayer. But now, though she still resembled a lion-tamer, her bearing had most surprisingly become that of a chummy lion-tamer—a tamer who, after tucking the lions in for the night, relaxes in the society of the boys.

Bingley-on-Sea is the setting for the first chapter of *Doctor Sally*—you call it “The Medicine Girl”—and in “Ukridge and the Home from Home” we learn that Ukridge’s Aunt Julia spent three weeks there when her housemaid got mumps.

Now, the point I want to make is that Bingley-on-Sea first appeared in *Three Men and a Maid* in 1922 and is last mentioned in “Ukridge and the Home from Home” in 1937.

We never hear of Bingley-on-Sea again. Instead we read of Bramley-on-Sea, and its first appearance is in the short story “Bramley Is So Bracing” in September 1939. Why did Wodehouse change the name? And what is the point of this “bracing” business? Wodehouse tells us that Margate, Bognor, and Bramley are all “bracing,” and since the allusion is an English one, I’d better explain.

In 1909, the townspeople of the small town of Skegness, halfway up the east coast of England, decided they wanted their share of the holiday trade and decided to advertise. I know I shall offend somebody here, but frankly, that part of the coast has very little to draw the crowds. What it does have is a strong east wind blowing off the cold North Sea—and that meant ozone. And people believe ozone is good for you, bucks you up, gets the blood cells racing round. So the Skegness people commissioned a poster from a chap called John Hassall.

Hassall did a poster of a fat, jolly, bearded fisherman skipping over the sands and the caption reads: “Skegness Is So Bracing.” It is simple, it is colourful, it became the

most popular poster in the UK. It entered into the subconscious of the entire nation—and I think it’s still there. And that is why Wodehouse used the phrase so often and why there is that splendid section in “Bramley Is So Bracing” when Freddie Widgeon wants to join his beloved at Bramley-on-Sea. He learns that:

Bingo Little and Mrs. Bingo had taken a shack at Bramley in order that the Bingo baby should get its whack of ozone. Bramley, as I dare say you have seen mentioned on the posters, is so bracing, and if you are a parent you have to think of these things. Brace the baby and you are that much ahead of the game.

To cadge an invitation was with Freddie the work of a moment, and a few days later he arrived with suitcase and two-seater, deposited the former, garaged the latter, kissed the baby and settled in.

But why did Wodehouse change Bingley-on-Sea to Bramley-on-Sea? What did Bramley-on-Sea have that Bingley-on-Sea hadn’t?

Yes. I’m sure you’re ahead of me. *Bramley-on-Sea* has the Rev. Aubrey Upjohn who makes his first appearance in “Bramley Is So Bracing.” From that 1939 story, we grow to know him and love him—well, maybe not love him, but you know what I mean.

But he doesn’t enter our lives till Wodehouse’s 61st book. This surprised me too, I must admit. He is good background material for Bertie to think about . . . exactly what Wodehouse wanted. Why did he appear so late? Did something happen in 1939 to put him in Wodehouse’s mind?

Well, yes, something did.

Those of you who have read *In Search of Blandings*



will remember that I was thrilled to discover that Wodehouse had gone to a prep school called Malvern House at Dover, which is at the eastern end of the south coast. And the headmaster wasn't called Aubrey Upjohn; he was called Harvey Hammond. When Wodehouse changed names, he nearly always kept the same number of syllables and the same metre, the same rhythm. Hammond died in 1911, but the building stayed there till 1963. So what put Malvern House back in Wodehouse's mind in 1939? The answer lies in a letter I read some months ago from Bill Townend, who was then living at Folkestone, also on the south coast. Wodehouse was living across the Channel in France and, once or twice a year, he'd pop over, spend the day with his old friend, and get the late ferry back. Townend records that in 1939, Wodehouse came over, hired a car, and he and Townend went to look at Wodehouse's old school at Dover. And Townend implies it was the first time Wodehouse had gone back. That's what triggered the memory of Malvern House and gave us Aubrey Upjohn.

So, is Bingley-on-Sea/ Bramley-on-Sea really Dover? No, I'm sure it isn't. Bingley- and Bramley-on-Sea are clearly seaside holiday resorts, not a working port as Dover is. We know Bingley- or Bramley-on-Sea has large hotels, an esplanade, boys' schools, and a golf course. And its real name will probably begin with a B sound very like Bingley-on-Sea/Bramley-on-Sea and will certainly have the same number of syllables. Wodehouse's disguised names always did. If we start at the left-hand end of England's south coast and move eastwards we have Brixham, Babbacombe, Budleigh Salterton, Beer, Bridport, Burton Bradstock, Bournemouth, Bognor Regis, Brighton, Bexhill-on-Sea, and Broadstairs.

Well, one sticks out as an obvious candidate. Bingley-on-Sea/Bramley-on-Sea—and Bexhill-on-Sea.

What else do we have? The first mention of Bingley-on-Sea is in 1922 in *The Girl on the Boat* or *Three Men and a Maid*. Wodehouse wrote it in 1921 and what happened at Bexhill-on-Sea in 1921? Wodehouse's mother and father left Cheltenham over in the west and moved into Ewart Lodge, Jameson Road, Bexhill-on-Sea. That's what happened.

We know Wodehouse and his brother Armine visited them there and the house is still there.

And I still believe in my heart of hearts that Nanny Wilks, who reduced Frederick Mulliner to a tenth-rate power in seconds, is based on Wodehouse's mother, a very, very strong-minded lady who kept the men in her family well under control.

There are still large hotels at Bexhill. And the association with boy's prep schools? Bexhill had at least nine prep schools for boys, and guess who went to a prep school at

Bexhill-on-Sea and remembers being carried on Wodehouse's shoulders down to the beach? Patrick Wodehouse, his nephew, that's who.

And some time in 1926 or 1927, Wodehouse seems to have spent a couple of months down at Bexhill-on-Sea rehearsing a play. I have no details, just a note to Bill Townend years later that some actress had died. She was "the last of the old Bexhill crowd."

And in 1935 Bexhill acquired another resident at Barnhorn Road, Little Common, Bexhill. He moved there on Wodehouse's advice that the place was fairly cheap to live in, that there were some good bookshops, and that he'd like the place. It was Wodehouse's oldest friend Bill Townend.

Well, I can't *prove* that Bramley-on-Sea is *not* anywhere else. All I can say is that there is nowhere else on the south coast that fits. There is certainly nowhere else on the south coast with that sort of name; there is nowhere else that counted among its residents his parents, his nephew, and his oldest friend.

It took me about six years to check that it couldn't be anywhere else. I'm only sorry it has taken me twenty-five minutes to set out the argument. Bramley-on-Sea is real enough, as Wodehouse's locations always are, and Bexhill has the honour of being the original. Sorry I took so long. Thank you.

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## Changing of the Guard at TWS

**A**t the Philadelphia Convention in October, Marilyn MacGregor was recognized for her eleven years of dedicated service as Secretary of The Wodehouse Society. Most of our members have corresponded with her as their first contact with TWS. Now she is passing the symbolic pen to Amy Plofker. Inquiries about the Society should be directed to Amy at the addresses on the back page of this issue.

Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall have also volunteered to take on a significant volunteer role as Membership Managers. They will receive new and renewal membership dues payments and maintain the database of addresses and other contact information. Their contact information is on the back page of this issue, and on the address/data insert and on the membership roster update enclosed with this issue.

Neil Midkiff will be assisting Ed Ratcliffe and David Landman in editing and publishing *Plum Lines*.

# Six Years in the Making!

By Neil Midkiff

## SIX YEARS IN THE MAKING!

No, this is not the publicity tagline from an Ivor Llewellyn super-film. It's how long we have been waiting for the realization of a recording of songs with lyrics by P. G. Wodehouse. By "we" I mean those of us who were lucky enough to hear Wodehouse's great-grandson Hal Cazalet sing at the 1995 Boston Convention of The Wodehouse Society. Tony Ring first suggested the recording project in Boston, and followed through by corresponding with several of us who had expressed interest. A breakfast at the West Egg Cafe in Chicago at the 1997 Convention refreshed our enthusiasm and brought Hal's sister Lara into the discussions. Hal and I spent a hilarious afternoon singing and playing through some of the songs when his operatic career brought him to California the next year, but after that, most of us retreated to the sidelines, letting Hal and Tony push the project to completion.

And now the CD of "The Land Where the Good Songs Go: The Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse" is finished, and it's great to report that it is more than worth the wait.

Hal enlisted his operatic colleague, the American soprano Sylvia McNair, who had already proved her love for Kern and Wodehouse in her recording "Sure Thing: The Jerome Kern Songbook" on the Philips label. Pianist/conductor/arranger Steven Blier was an ideal choice for the instrumental accompaniments; his New York Festival of Song is an important force in presenting and recording vocal music from the concert and theatre repertoires. Mark Stewart and Greg Utzig join in from time to time with deft backup work on guitar, banjo, ukulele, and cello. An equally deft (if non-musical) accompaniment is Tony Ring's well-researched essay on Plum's career as lyricist, part of the colorful CD booklet which also includes the full text of the lyrics, though Hal, Sylvia, and guest artist Lara all present the words so clearly that the listener doesn't need to read along.

"Oh, Gee! Oh, Joy!" starts off the disc with a snappy, jazzy trifle from *Rosalie*, a big 1928 Ziegfeld production, with two of everything: music by George Gershwin and Sigmund Romberg, lyrics by Ira Gershwin and PGW, and book by Guy Bolton and William A. McGuire. Most of the Wodehouse lyrics were for Romberg marches and ballads in the usual operetta style, but Ira and Plum collaborated on a few numbers with George's music. This



Cover of the CD booklet

one lets a young couple announce their love in ways that would sound clichéd ("birds are singing . . . bells are ringing") were it not for the slangy locutions ("Because why? Because I am in love") that perfectly blend with Gershwin's syncopation. Since the 1937 MGM film threw out the Broadway score in favor of new songs by Cole Porter, it's a treat to have this taste of the nearly-forgotten original as a reminder of a collaboration that contributed to a lifelong friendship between Plum and Ira.

The second selection takes us back to the late ragtime era, and Stewart on banjo joins Blier's piano to recreate the gently insistent rhythms of the time for "Tell Me All Your Troubles, Cutie" from *Miss 1917*. Jerome Kern dug deep into the American vernacular, and Wodehouse responded with a plain-spoken lyric, without a single self-consciously clever or highbrow phrase, and yet with a simple charm that wins the listener's smile. Cazalet and McNair respond in kind; Hal even manages to sound more midwestern-American than Sylvia, a native of Ohio, does!

Next we're treated to a transatlantic rarity, the first of two selections from the 1935 London version of *Anything Goes*. Bolton and Wodehouse had written the first version of the book, revised by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse for the 1934 New York production. Cole Porter, of course, wrote both music and lyrics for it, and his songs are famous for their lists of topical allusions. He asked Wodehouse to revise "You're the Top" and the title song for British audiences; most of the Porter lyrics remain intact, but, for instance, "Now gifted humans like Vincent Youmans" is replaced with "Some gifted fellow like young

Novello." In essence, though, the spirit remains Porter's, and I'd rather have had more purely Wodehouse lyrics on this disc.

The next one is exactly the sort of thing I mean. No one but Plum could have given so much charm to a girl's justification for keeping a bunch of male admirers on a string. "Rolled Into One," from *Oh, Boy!* (1917), is set to a lightly elegant Jerome Kern two-step, as the singer explains why Freddie, Joe, Ted, Dick, Ned, Sam, and Eddie all have their uses, but she's "pining till there comes in my direction one combining every masculine perfection" who will be all these fellows "rolled in one."

"Sir Galahad," from the college musical *Leave It to Jane* (also with Bolton and Kern, 1917), deflates the usual romanticized view of Arthurian times with comically informal diction. We're told of the days "when knights were bold and acted kind of scrappy: / When guys would take a lot of pains / and fight all day to please the Janes / And if their dame was tickled, they was happy."

"The Land Where the Good Songs Go" (from *Miss 1917*) is a wistful poem, sentimentally imagining "a haven of peace and rest" where songs retire after the public loses interest in them. Kern's music for the verse is unstable both in harmony and in rhythm as Plum deplores the treatment of "dear old songs forgotten too soon: they had their day and then we threw them away." The chorus is painted in idyllic, restful tones, evenly gliding through the paradise that the old songs enjoy. Cazalet and Blier perform it with great beauty and simplicity, convincing us that this deserves to be known as one of the great songs of the century.

"If I Ever Lost You" makes its romantic point via comic contrasts. This duet, from the Ivor Novello musical *The Golden Moth* (London, 1921), presents a couple who try to illustrate how much they need each other. She uses the conventional terms of love songs: "Think how a couple of lovers would swoon if they walked out one night and found no moon." The way to his heart, though, is presented in terms of his stomach: "Think how a sausage's hopes would be dashed if one day it awoke and missed its mashed." The accompaniments are neatly sweetened with guitar and cello, giving the high-flown melodies just the right mock seriousness.

Sylvia McNair gets her chance at an elegant, simple song with "Go, Little Boat" from *Miss 1917*. The verse is a gentle barcarolle, accompanied by solo guitar; Kern changes to a placid four-four meter for the chorus, and Blier's piano provides the quiet ripples of the "silver water" under the "boat, serenely gliding" in the sustained notes of the melody.

"You Can't Make Love By Wireless" from *The Beauty Prize* (with Kern, London, 1923) tells the story of a marine radiotelegraph operator who woos but loses his girl-

friend via Marconigram. Wodehouse proves his ability to keep up a list of rhyming puns or make a quick turn of meaning in the middle of a phrase: "She lived in Darjeeling / Avenue, West Ealing." But for all the cleverness, even with a spirited performance and a nifty arrangement with a bit of Morse code from the cello, it falls short of the best of Plum's work.

One of the best, of course, is "Bill." It's the best-known of the Wodehouse lyrics since it was incorporated, slightly revised by Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, into *Show Boat*. Lara Cazalet sings the original 1918 version from *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* here, with a great deal of sweetness and light. She makes us believe in her love for a suitor who "is quite the opposite of all the men in storybooks: in grace and looks I know that Apollo would beat him all hollow."

Wodehouse always sought new ways to approach a romantic duet, and "You Never Knew About Me" from *Oh, Boy!* (1917) lets the lovers speculate on what they've missed because they hadn't known each other since childhood. She confesses "I was often kissed 'neath the mistletoe by small boys excited with tea. If I'd known that you existed I'd have scratched them and resisted." He promises "I'd have let you feed my rabbit till the thing became a habit."

*The Cabaret Girl* (London, 1922) provided an obvious opportunity for a "new dance sensation" number, and "Shimmy With Me" lets Kern and Wodehouse show us how the new dance is done: "Just try to feel as if you'd swallowed an eel; you'll find that helps a good deal!" Blier's piano arpeggios slide as sinously through Kern's harmonies as McNair's voice does through the melodies, giving us an audio lesson in the way the dance should look.

"Non-Stop Dancing" (*The Beauty Prize*) is basically a tall tale in lyric form, exaggerating the effects of a family's addiction to the craze: "All day long the pianola plays: Grandma's worn out fourteen pairs of stays." If Mr. Mulliner had been a lyricist, this might have been one of his stories!

After these up-tempo numbers, we are treated to a trip to "My Castle in the Air" from *Miss Springtime* (1917). Kern provides a lulling, wistful tune as the singer tells us of an imaginary retreat: "Its walls and its bars are the dust of the stars, and its gate the gate of dreams." Hal's luscious baritone (here with his native English accent) makes for a performance of heart-rending sweetness.

Before the disc closes with Wodehouse's London version of "Anything Goes," we get what may be the best example of Plum's versatility with romantic indirection. The last of the Bolton-Kern-Wodehouse musicals, *Sitting Pretty* (1924), shows all three collaborators near the peak of their form. No one but Wodehouse could use the Long

Island commuter railroad as the subject of a love song! But in "The Enchanted Train" even its faults are endearing: "It stops to ponder now and then—the air inside needs oxygen." The lovers put up with it, of course, because it reunites them at the end of the day: "And how I'll cheer it each night when I hear it bringing you back to me!"

We can cheer all the producers of this marvelous album for bringing these songs back to us.



Order your copy of this CD from Harbinger Records, 25 Charles Street, #1C, New York NY 10019. (No telephone or fax number is listed.) The special price, for Wodehouse Society members only, is \$14.00 including postage, handling, and tax.

—OM

## By Jeeves on Broadway

*By Jeeves*, the Alan Ayckbourn-Andrew Lloyd Webber musical based on the Jeeves stories, has finally opened on Broadway after five years' gestation in lesser venues. The six reviews sent to me by David McDonough are decidedly mixed, though they agree that the play is a fragile and very modest affair. The action takes place in the church hall of an English village where Bertie is scheduled to give a banjo recital. Jeeves steals the banjo, forcing Bertie to improvise an entertainment full of confused identities and such props as a cardboard box which serves as his motorcar and a large yellow ball hoisted on a rope which becomes the moon. This isn't Wodehouse at all—it's another and a sillier world altogether. It's a pity the names couldn't have been changed to protect the innocent.

As the unnamed reviewer in *The New York Times* points out: "The Jeeves stories are piffle of great sophistication: in their recounting of ill-advised infatuations and foolish wagers, it isn't the plot or even the characters that make you laugh so much, but the narrative tone. That adult tone is precisely what is missing from *By Jeeves* [by Ayckbourn and Lloyd Webber], neither of whom is known for pea-brained schoolboy humor. But what they have come up with is slapstick farce reliant on routine stumblebum business with rare forays into original jokery (and only one episode of inspired lunacy) unenlivened by a score of 13 formula songs."

But Clive Barnes, of *The New York Post*, found "very real charms" in the production, with "wit and felicity" in the lyrics of Ayckbourn, who also stages the play "with a deeply careful casualness that neatly suggests but never copies the frantic air of painfully amateur theatricals."

Michael Kuchwara, of the Associated Press, warns us that "theatergoers with a low tolerance for whimsy may wish to avoid these goings-on," and *Newsday* found the production "overplayed and dreary nonsense."

*The New Yorker* is most dismissive: "Nothing calling attention to itself."

The play opened at the Helen Hayes Theater on October 28 and will continue until the word gets around.

Note added at press time: Soon after I ended the story on that prescient sour note, I received an email from John Graham via Elin Woodger saying that *By Jeeves* is now scheduled to close its Broadway run on December 28. "I, for one, found the show to be excellent," writes John. "If you can make it to NYC before the end of the year, try to see the show."

—OM

## Tovarich Fink-Nottle

By Catherine Merridale

Bob Creamer found this cross-cultural item in an account of a recent visit to Russia by a young Englishwoman. It appeared in *The London Review of Books* of April 5, 2001. The writer was one of three young women involved in a slight accident while driving through the Russian countryside. The police came to investigate, and the writer went on ahead to a dacha. ("Soviet custom had it that foreigners and policemen do not mix, and the tradition hasn't gone away.") Sometime later:

Elena and Oksana turned up in the small hours with two policemen, who had come along to make sure that the car was roadworthy, but one of them also had a question for me. It was not about my passport. Oksana had been reading a second-hand edition of PG. Wodehouse in English. . . . Oksana and the cop, poring over it at the station, had found only one word they could not translate. Now they wanted my help. We didn't have a dictionary, and I'd never needed the word in Russian, so I resorted to signs. When these didn't work, I found an old paper napkin and drew my best newt. "See?"

Oksana was delighted. "We *do* have them in Russia!"

# The Great P. G. Wodehouse Quiz: Weeding Out the Weakest Drone

David and Andrea McDonough, clearly a couple of fiends incarnate, offered this quiz at the convention to anyone brave enough to undertake it.

1. What is the correct response to this statement: "You know your Shelley, Bertie."
2. Which famous author still owes money to Prices's Hygienic Toilet Saloon?
3. What two Wodehouse characters were portrayed by David Niven?
4. What do these people have in common:
  - a. David Hemming, Ian Carmichael, Steven Pacy, John Scherer
  - b. Michael Aldridge, Dennis Price, Richard Kline, Martin Jarvis
5. Who edited:
  - a. *Tiny Tots?*
  - b. *Society Spice?*
  - c. *Milady's Boudoir?*
6. How do you play "Is Mr. Smith at Home"?
7. Who impersonated Lady Godiva, and why?
8. Who rubbed the nose of a member of his club's committee in an unsatisfactory omelette?
9. How many sisters does Lord Emsworth have? Bonus points for naming them.
10. How many times has Bertie Wooster been engaged?

Answers are on page 24.

# Translantic Dues Payments

One of the side effects of the recent International Wodehouse Association (that is, the Woodger-Murphy nuptials) is that Elin has moved to London, and so is no longer advantageously located for the task of American collector of dues for the P. G. Wodehouse Society (UK). I've volunteered to take on that role.

In other words, if you're in the USA and wish to join or renew your membership in the UK Society, you may do so in dollars through me, just as many of you have done via Elin in the past.

New memberships received between December and March are \$32 (in lieu of £20) and are valid through May 31 somewhat over a year later. At other times the annual subscription is \$24 (in lieu of £15) to the following May 31. (Members joining in April and May are credited to May 31 of the following year.)

Make your US dollar check payable to Neil Midkiff and mail it to me at 1056 Lorne Way, Sunnyvale CA 94087-5038. New members should enclose a membership application, available from the UK Society web site at <http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse/> or by written request to me. Renewal payments need only include any changes or updates of address or contact data.

—Neil Midkiff

## *Uncle Fred in the Springtime at City Lit*

Ian Michaud informs us that City Lit of Chicago began its run of *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* on November 8. Any fan within whooping distance of Chicago will want to catch this one before it closes on January 5. Phone number for City Lit is (773) 293-3682 and fax is (773) 293-3684.

I shouldn't wonder if right from the start Mrs. Bingo hasn't had a sneaking regret that Bingo isn't one of those strong, curt, Empire-building kind of Englishmen she puts into her books, with sad, unfathomable eyes, lean, sensitive hands, and riding boots.

"Jeeves and the Old School Chum," 1930

# Quiz Answers

Don't peek!—unless you have tried the questions on page 23.

1. "Oh, am I?" (Exchange between Madeline Bassett and Bertie Wooster in *The Code of the Woosters*.)
2. William Makepeace Thackery, *If I were You*.
3. Bertie Wooster in the film *Thank You Jeeves* and Uncle Fred in the Four Star Playhouse TV production of *Uncle Fred Flits By*.
4. a. They all played Bertie Wooster.  
b. They all played Jeeves.
5. a. Rev. Aubrey Sellick. Acting editor Monty Bodkin.  
b. Percy Pilbeam, later Jerry Shosmith.  
c. Dahlia Travers.
6. According to Pongo Twistleton, you put your head in a sack and the younger generation jab at you with sticks. "Tried in the Furnace" from *Young Men in Spats*.
7. Prudence Carroway in "Trouble Down at Tudsleigh." Because, she claimed, Freddie Widgeon advised her to.
8. The 4th Duke of Dunstable—not the current one, his grandfather.
9. Ten sisters: Constance, Julia, Florence, Diana, Ann, Charlotte, Georgina, Hermione, Dora, Jane)
10. Seventeen times. Lady Florence Craye (4 times), Bobbie Wickham (2 times), Madeline Bassett (4 times), Pauline Stoker (2 times), Honoria Glossop (2 times), Vanessa Cook, Stiffy Byng, Trixie Waterbury. This doesn't count three times at Brinkley to unknowns.

"The great thing is to get the young blighter Pongo safely married and settled down, thus avoiding the risk of his coming in one day and laying on the mat something with a platinum head and an Oxford accent which he picked up on the pier at Blackpool."

*Uncle Dynamite*, 1948

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