



Plum Lines

Beyond Anatole: Dining with Wodehouse

BY DAN COHEN

AFTER stuffing myself to the eyeballs at Thanksgiving and still facing several days of cold turkey and turkey hash, I began to brood upon the subject of food and eating as they appear in Plum's stories and novels.

Like me, most of Wodehouse's characters were hearty eaters. So a good place to start an examination of food in Wodehouse is with the intriguing little article in the September issue of *Wooster Sauce*, the journal of the UK Wodehouse Society, by James Clayton. The title asks the question, "Why Isn't Bertie Fat?" Bertie is consistently described as being slender, willowy or lissome. No hint of fat.

Can it be heredity? We know nothing of Bertie's parents, but Aunt Dahlia, while never described as fat, was clearly a robust woman with a hearty appetite for food and drink. Bertie's Uncle George was a classic Wodehouse fat uncle. He's the prominent London clubman whose tailors measure him just for the exercise. He

eats and drinks so much that about twice a year he has to go to one of the spas to get planed down.

Bertie himself is a big eater. He starts with tea in bed—no calories in that—but it is sometimes accompanied by toast. Then there is breakfast, usually eggs and bacon, with toast and marmalade. Then there is coffee. With cream? We don't know. There are some variations: he will take kippers, sausages, ham, or kidneys on toast and mushrooms.

Lunch is usually at the Drones. But it is invariably preceded by a cocktail or two. In *Right Ho, Jeeves*, he describes having two dry martinis before lunch. I don't know how many calories there are in a martini, but it's not a diet drink. Lunch is accompanied by wine and there may be a little something afterwards.

If it's a stressful day, there will be a little something else to restore the tissues. Bertie also takes afternoon tea. I don't mean just a cup of tea, but tea accompanied by buttered toast or muffins, cake, or tea sandwiches.

Which of these would best please the Wooster—or the Wodehouse—palate?

Dan Cohen provides some surprising answers in this article.

The French Chef Cookbook



Julia Child
co author of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*

Betty Crocker's COOKBOOK



GOLDEN

NEW AND REVISED EDITION

And then comes dinner! Probably around eight o'clock. Dinner would usually have been the main meal of the day. If it was prepared by Jeeves in the flat it would be fairly simple. But more often than not Bertie dines out. There would be dinner at the Drones, or at some good restaurant. But his most memorable dinners were at country houses—particularly Brinkley Manor, where the fabled Anatole presides over the kitchen.

Near the end of *The Code of the Woosters* Bertie and Aunt Dahlia plan a get-out-of-jail dinner for Bertie—cooked by Anatole. It consists of nineteen courses—all French and all fattening.

Dinners, whether cooked by Anatole or not, were preceded by cocktails, accompanied by wine, and finished off with port or some other after-dinner drink. And then there was the nightcap—usually a whisky and s.

There would have been more food and drink if he went to a night club, though the kipper and bottle of liquid rat poison labeled wine that was served at the Mottled Oyster isn't exactly appetizing.

I think we can all agree that there is a whole lot of eating going on here. So we return to the question, Why isn't Bertie fat?

James Clayton says, Perhaps he works it all off in exercise. But he quickly and properly dismisses that argument.

Some of Bertie's old schoolmates like Tuppy Glossop, Stilton Cheesewright, Beefy Bingham, even Bingo Little, have put on some pounds—and both Tuppy and Stilton are quite athletic. We must assume that unless Bertie has a tapeworm, or is suffering from some wasting disease, he's going to get fat someday. Then he, like his Uncle George, will be off to Harrogate.

OF ALL the meals described in the Wodehouse canon the club lunch is probably mentioned most frequently. Particularly lunch at the Drones or Senior Conservative Club. But what did the diner actually eat when he went to his club for lunch? Since I have been blackballed at every London club I ever applied to I don't know first hand. So I turned to the invaluable Norman Murphy to enlighten me.

During the 1920s and '30s—when most of the stories are set—the diner would look at the menu and then write out his order, sign it, and give it to the head waiter. Or the waiter might just come to the table and take down the order, the way most waiters do today.

Lunch would be fairly limited. There would be one or two sorts of soup and then a choice of lamb chop, pork chop, or roast beef. This would be followed by dessert or pudding as it was frequently called, some sort of sweet. There was also the cold table. This was an array of cold food set out on a long table at the side of the room. It was

not generally a serve-yourself buffet that is so familiar today. The diner would see what he liked and then order it from the waiter who would bring it to his table. The cold table plays a role in a couple of stories, and they give us an idea of what it contained. There was the game pie at the Drones that Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright hit with six consecutive bread rolls from across the room.

In *The Code of the Woosters* Sir Watkyn Bassett lures Uncle Tom to lunch at his club. At this club the cold table is in the center of the room where Uncle Tom cannot avoid looking at such dishes as cold lobster and sliced cucumbers, which he adores, but which someone with his delicate digestion should never touch. He can't control himself and devours pounds of the stuff. The result is a monumental attack of indigestion that makes it impossible for Uncle Tom to purchase the cow creamer of his dreams. Sir Watkin gets it instead, and this sets up a chain of circumstances which puts Bertie waist deep in the gumbo yet again.

The only place where a genuine serve-yourself buffet appears is at English country house breakfasts, where there is an elaborate array of eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, kippers, etc., presumably set out in heated dishes—a lot like Sunday brunch at the Best Western. In *Right Ho, Jeeves* there is the cold collation, a self-serve array of cold foods—cheese, boiled eggs, and the like, that is eaten at Brinkley Court one evening in order to give the servants time off to go to a dance.

Dinner at the club was more elaborate than lunch. It would usually offer a five-course meal, but with little choice. This would be made up of soup, fish, a bird (grouse, partridge, etc.), roast beef (or some other roast), and a pudding, plus biscuits and cheese.

According to Norman, it is a fact that nursery food is still very popular in certain senior clubs. Roly-poly with lots of jam, and rice pudding—also with lots of jam—still attract a lot of surprisingly famous gentlemen who can't get them at the Savoy or Claridge's.

Norman added this note: England lost an order of dress and a course from the menu with each major war. In the First World War, frock coats went out and so did the compulsory bird for dinner. In the Second World War, we lost morning dress as a customary clothing and the fish course tended to go. All meals in clubs would be served by waiters. Only since the last war would you have these help-yourself buffets.

Those who lunch at the club are serious about their eating. In *Something Fresh* we find the Earl of Emsworth entering the Senior Conservative Club for lunch. The Senior Conservative is a huge club, having thousands of members, and there would be several hundred in the dining room for lunch.

Nobody appeared to notice him....To attract attention in the dining-room of the Senior Conservative Club between the hours of one and two-thirty, you have to be a mutton-chop, not an earl.

A contrast between lunching at the Senior Conservative and lunching at the Drones is sharply drawn in *Leave it to Psmith*:

These clubs ranged from the Drones, frankly frivolous, to the Senior Conservative, solidly worthy. Almost immediately Psmith decided that for such a mood as was upon him at the moment, the latter might have been specially constructed.



Anybody familiar with the interior of the Senior Conservative Club would have applauded his choice. In the whole of London no better haven could have been found by one desirous of staying his interior with excellently cooked food while passing his soul under a leisurely examination. They fed well at the Drones too, no doubt; but there Youth held carnival, and the thoughtful man, examining his soul, was apt, at any moment, to have his meditations broken in upon by a chunk of bread, dexterously thrown by some bright spirit at an adjoining table. No horror of that description could possibly occur at the Senior Conservative. The Senior Conservative has six thousand one hundred and eleven members. Some of the six thousand one hundred and eleven are more respectable than the others, but they are all respectable....

Of course clubs were not the only place where one could dine out in London. Wodehouse mentions quite a number of restaurants as well, from real places like Claridge's, the Savoy, or Barribault's, to purely imaginary places like Mario's. But there is one restaurant that seems to have held a special place in his heart—Simpson's in the Strand. In *Something Fresh* he becomes lyrical:

A pleasant, soothing, hearty place. A restful Temple of Food. No strident orchestra forces the diner to bolt beef in ragtime. No long, central aisle distracts his attention with its stream of new arrivals. There he sits, alone

with his food, while white-robed priests wheeling their smoking trucks move to and fro, ever ready with fresh supplies.

All round the room, some at small tables, some at large tables, the worshipers sit, in their eyes that resolute concentrated look which is the particular property of the British luncher, ex-President Roosevelt's man-eating fish, and the American army-worm.

The American army-worm, incidentally, is a particularly voracious kind of caterpillar.

Near the end of *Psmith in the City*, probably Plum's most autobiographical novel in its descriptions of working in a bank, we hear of Simpson's again:

Psmith waited for Mike while he changed, and carried him off in a cab to Simpson's restaurant which, as he justly observed, offered two great advantages, namely, that you need not dress, and, secondly, that you paid your half-crown, and were then at liberty to eat till you were helpless, if you felt so disposed, without extra charge.

Simpson's is still there today, and is something of a place of pilgrimage for many Wodehouse fans visiting London. In the old downstairs dining room the carver still wheels around an enormous trolley with the finest beef in England on it.

It's not hard to imagine the youthful and then far from rich Plum treating himself to an enormous lunch at this famous restaurant. But did he? I asked Norman Murphy that question. He replied he could find no solid evidence that Wodehouse had ever eaten there. "On the other hand," writes Norman, "it did indeed serve meals before the First World War at half a crown a head no matter how much you ate—it was about the best value in London, and a hungry young schoolboy and journalist like Wodehouse would certainly have taken advantage of it."

PSMITH, by the way, is not the only well known fictional figure to have dined at Simpson's. Sherlock Holmes ate there in at least two of his adventures, and gave every evidence of being well acquainted with the place. I have often thought our little Wodehouse/Holmes crossover group, the Clients of Adrian Mulliner, would have a wonderful time at Simpson's.

So there were plenty of places to eat in London. But what about the countryside? What kind of food could you expect to get in a small town pub like the Anglers' Rest? The answer is, not much.

Back in the '20s and '30s about the only thing you were likely to get in a rural pub was bread, cheese, and pickled onions. Most of these pubs were pretty primitive affairs; they wouldn't have had cooking or refrigeration facilities.

The beer you ordered would be warm by American standards, and if you wanted Scotch you better not ask for it on the rocks, because the innkeeper probably would not know what you were talking about. That was true even in a lot of London pubs. Norman Murphy said that Wodehouse missed the Alleyn Arms at Dulwich when it was bombed because it was the place where he used to go for bread and cheese before watching Dulwich football matches.

Outside of the clubs, restaurants, and hotel dining rooms in metropolitan areas, there wasn't a lot of eating out in early 20th-century England. Most long-distance travel was done by train, and the travelers ate on the train or in the station. There were few cars, so little need for roadside dining. There had been more roadside dining in the days when the main form of long-distance transportation had four legs.

NOT ALL Wodehouse stories are set in England. But there is only one other place that provides a truly unique dining experience—Hollywood—and most particularly the commissary of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum studio.

You might think of Hollywood, California, as the land of fresh fruit and low calories. But Wodehouse certainly didn't see it that way. When a despondent Wilmot Mulliner goes into the commissary, he orders Hungarian goulash, salad, two kinds of pie, ice cream, cheese and coffee.

A writer quoting from the commissary bill of fare says, "I had just mentioned roast pork with boiled potatoes and cabbage and was about to go on to Mutton Stew Joan Clarkson" (Joan Crawford in the American edition).

This is all heavy stuff.

But in the Hollywood stories we come up against something that Wodehouse hated like taxes—dieting!

In *Laughing Gas*, the child star Joey Cooley (the idol of American motherhood) is on a diet that seems to consist largely of prunes. He is constantly hungry and constantly dreaming of the huge meals of fried chicken that his mother back in Chillicothe, Ohio, used to make. Joey is ready to chuck his entire Hollywood career just to get a good home-cooked meal. He is also addicted to candy, cakes, and pies. This novel is set in America so he doesn't mention roly-poly pudding—but he gets close. Joey's addiction to sweets is passed on to the Earl of Havershot, during a remarkable soul transfer that is somehow brought about by the laughing gas of the novel's title.

Undoubtedly the most moving of Wodehouse's dieting stories is the Hollywood tale, "The Juice of an Orange." (Though some might argue in favor of "Jeeves and the Old School Chum," where Bingo plans a picnic lunch that would have staggered Diamond Jim Brady.) In "The Juice of an Orange" Wilmot Mulliner is placed on a diet consisting solely of the juice of an orange taken three times a day. The diet is not for weight but for chronic indigestion. The

diet is also driving him crazy and when studio head Jacob Schnellenhamer begins eating a beef sandwich during a story conference, Wilmot nearly goes mad. The actress Hortensia Burwash (the Empress of Molten Passion), is on the same diet and is ready to attack Schnellenhamer with a sword.

I WOULD like to end with one final food and dieting story. Here we go back to England and to the Blandings Castle novel *Pigs Have Wings*. The famously fat master of Matchingam Hall, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe—also known as "Tubby"—has improbably become engaged to the glamorous and athletic Gloria Salt, and she has put him on a diet—which of course he hates. When she dumps him he does not take to drink, he takes to food, and plans a spectacular meal for himself. Here is Le Diner:

Smoked Salmon
Mushroom Soup
Filet of Sole
Hungarian Goulash
Mashed Potatoes
Buttered Beets
Buttered Beans
Asparagus with Mayonnaise
Ambrosia Chiffon Pie
Cheese
Fruit
Petits Fours

In case you don't know what Ambrosia Chiffon Pie is, a recipe is supplied:

Ambrosia Chiffon Pie is the stuff you make with whipped cream, white of egg, powdered sugar, seeded grapes, sponge cake, shredded cocoanut and orange gelatin.

This is not the sort of menu that would have been planned for Anatole—the only thing French about it are the petits fours, which probably came in a package.

The Ambrosia Chiffon Pie is particularly gruesome—it sounds like something from a Betty Crocker cookbook of the 1950s—in fact the whole menu has about it a 1950s Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval aura. *Pigs Have Wings* was published in 1952, and by then Plum had been living exclusively in America for some years. This seems to me to be a menu planned by an aging Englishman who had been brought up on public school food, and the plain but filling fare of Simpson's—and who while living in America had completely adopted, indeed embraced, the plain but filling fare of middle America circa 1950.

For Plum, it seems, the motto would be not French and Fancy but Plain and Plentiful.

A Funds Drive for the Wodehouse Wall

BY GUS CAYWOOD

PLUM'S favorite church, New York's Little Church Around the Corner, needs help. Wodehousians are encouraged to pitch in with contributions. See the end of this bulletin for logistical details.

In 1994 The Wodehouse Society sponsored the installation of a plaque on the North Wall of the Little Church Around the Corner, an Episcopal (Anglican) church known formally as the Church of the Transfiguration. The plaque reads:

P. G. WODEHOUSE, 1881-1975, AUTHOR
married Ethel Rowley in 1914 in this church:

"...the only church that anybody could possibly be married at. It's on Twenty-ninth Street, just around the corner from Fifth Avenue. It's got a fountain playing in front of it, and it's a little bit of Heaven dumped right down in the middle of New York."

In loving memory,

THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

The ringleaders of the Society's effort were Florence Cunningham, Frits Menschaar, and John Graham, supported by Toni Rudersdorf, the President at the time.

The quote on the plaque is from the memorable last chapter of *Uneasy Money*. The *Millennium Concordance* cites further references to the Little Church in *The Girl On the Boat* (ch. 1), *The Small Bachelor* (chs. 4, 9), *Barmy in Wonderland* (ch. 18), and *Company for Henry* (ch. 4), and the US equivalents. Also some magazine short stories. And don't forget the Wodehouse/Kern song "The Church 'Round the Corner," from the 1920 Broadway musical *Sally*:

Dear little, dear little church 'round the corner,
Where so many lives have begun.
Where folks without money
See nothing that's funny
In two living cheaper than one.
Of dull care, of course, I'm a scorner.
We're busted, but what do we care?
I'll be dressed all in white,
I'll be dying of fright,
At the church 'round the corner,
It's just 'round the corner,
The corner of Madison Square.

So, you see, Plum liked this church and would have given the shirt off his back to help it out. Can we do less?

Well, what I've been trying to say is that the North Wall and the Wodehouse plaque were about to come tumbling down—"imminent danger of collapsing"—and over the past two years the Church has had to rebuild the Wall at huge expense. The reconstruction is just about finished. The rebuilt Wall was dedicated at a mass on December 1 (the Right Reverend Mark S. Sisk, Bishop of New York, presiding). At last count, however, the Church's North Wall Appeal still had over \$200,000 to go to cover the \$600,000 cost.

It's late in the game, but we can be helpful here on Plum's behalf. I suggest you mail in your check with a cover letter saying you're making the contribution "as a member of The Wodehouse Society." Here are the Church's instructions:

"Those wishing to contribute can send a check to the order of the 'Church of the Transfiguration' with the notation 'North Wall Appeal' on the memo line. Checks should be mailed to North Wall Appeal, Church of the Transfiguration, 1 East 29th Street, New York, NY 10016. Those who want to give securities or who desire additional information may call the church office at (212) 684-6770. The church's e-mail address is transfig@ix.netcom.com."

Further background on the Church and the North Wall project, including references to PGW, can be found in the Church's website at

<http://www.littlechurch.org/nwall.html>

A fall 2002 update on the North Wall's status is at

<http://www.littlechurch.org/lych0101.html#nwallup>



An Evening to Remember

BY TONI RUDERSDORF

Every two years The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) puts on a grand dinner at one of the Inns of Court in London. On October 17, 2002, a record 15 Americans (including three from Alaska) were among the 120 attendees. Toni, of the Drone Rangers of Houston, gives us an eyewitness account of the event.

WHEN Anne Bianchi and I planned our holiday to England, we did it with the hope of attending the biennial dinner of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK). One places one's fate in the laps of the gods when applying for this event, since there are a limited number of places available, and inevitably some are disappointed. When Anne telephoned to let me know we would be part of the event, my heart soared like a lark, and I hurried out with wings on my feet and a song (much to the horror of the other shoppers) on my lips to find a dress for the occasion.

What is it about the British that makes a person feel so glad they exist? In my opinion it is the civility of the average man or woman one meets. How do they keep it up? They show you the way when you are bumbling about, they give you good advice as to what to avoid, and they laugh when you are trying to be funny. And they are *always* polite, which can't be easy since all Americans talk funny and too much. During our visit, Anne and I had good reason to rejoice in the British because we were in the midst of some of the best and brightest of them.

We arrived at the Lincoln's Inn Gatehouse just as the sun gasped its last and found our way to the Crypt below the Old Hall. Although the term "Crypt" may seem like something Buffy the Vampire Slayer would face with trepidation, we found it suited us just fine. A reception was beginning inside and at the door stood Norman and Elin Murphy. They greeted us and a moment later, by some Murphy magic, glasses of champagne materialized at our fingertips.

Having heard that Hal Cazalet (PGW's great-grandson) and friends would be warming up for the evening's musical entertainment, I slipped up the stairs and caught my first glimpse of the Old Hall. Very few could have seen this fine room in such a felicitous way as I did then. It was dressed for dinner, and gloved waiters slipped silently between tables, straightening this and tucking in that, while overall the voices of Hal and Eliza Lumley intertwined with the acoustics, adding resonance and harmonics. I looked around the room where barristers and students of the Inn have dined for more than 600 years (John Donne was a member), and where court was held on occasion (famously described in Dickens's *Bleak House*). Above me were the newly revealed timbers that had been covered with plaster in the 18th century, and it was as I stood gap-

ing at them that Hal came along and brought me back to the moment.

The reception was underway when I returned to the Crypt. I was glad to recognize, amid the dazzling fauna, several old friends: Sir Edward and Camilla Cazalet, John Fletcher, Sven Sahlin, Tony and Elaine Ring, Elliott and Elyse Milstein, and many more. Soon I was slurping champagne and becoming acquainted with some new people—new to me, that is. A woman of Helen-like loveliness turned out to be named Anne Perry. She writes novels and poetry, and her husband is (I think) a QC. There were several QCs abroad in the Crypt, each more fine looking than the next. Then Sir Edward Cazalet introduced me to H.R.H. the Duke of Kent; I wished I had read an etiquette book so I would know the proper way to say "Hi" to him, but as it was, I just said, "How d' do?" and we talked about *Leave It to Psmith*. A little later I met Lord Scott of Foscote (who, shortly after the festivities began, read a description of the Old Hall from *Bleak House*).

THE P G WODEHOUSE SOCIETY (UK)



CENTENARY DINNER LINCOLN'S INN 17th OCTOBER, 2002

*The evening's program, with an illustration by
T. M. R. Whitwell from Psmith in the City*

Our evening meal was declared ready to receive us, and we went as one to find our tables. We had been given the opportunity to request the company of friends, and therefore Anne and I were at a table with Helen Murphy. This evening's event had been dubbed the "Centenary Dinner" to commemorate the publication of Plum's first book, *The Pothunters*, in 1902.

I had not known that *The Pothunters* was published just nine days after Plum resigned from his position with the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. The assembled diners learned all about it when Sir Edward Cazalet spoke, telling us with humor and gratitude of this excellent bank's wisdom in not sending Plum to Hong Kong, or putting him in a junior VP position, or giving him a branch to oversee. Sir Edward cited that same clear-headed ability to judge who was and was not good bank material as being instrumental in the Bank's continued success over the 100 years since Plum set out to make the world laugh. He also noted their recent opening of yet another branch in which is there is a

small area dedicated to P. G. Wodehouse. Upon hearing these words, the entire room applauded and lifted glasses to toast the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank.

Tony Ring introduced Sir Tim Rice, who, with Lara Cazalet (Hal's sister), and Eliza Lumley performed "My God! What a Sex," subtitled "A light entertainment offering alternative visions of the delicately nurtured," with piano accompaniment by Stephen Higgins. As Sir Tim and Lara narrated selections giving Plum's view of women, Hal and Eliza illustrated with a fine assortment of PGW songs. After the rafters had stopped shaking from the applause, and just when Lara thought she might actually get her dessert, cries for "Bill" went round the room, and to our unbounded joy, she pulled up her socks and sang this most wonderful of Wodehouse songs.

For those who have not tried dining out with the UK Society, I recommend it. Anne and I will treasure the memory of our October evening at Lincoln's Inn and the friends we found there.

Life Imitates Wodehouse in Wooster Square

BY AMY PLOFKER

LITTLE was it known to the NEWTS, when we prepared our most recent convention skit starring Revolutionary War General Bertie Wooster, how close we were to the truth. Thus, when I spotted a notice in the New Haven, Connecticut paper about a Fourth of July ceremony honoring Revolutionary General Wooster, I was legitimately fearful of what I would see next. Mauve elephants, possibly. But a true NEWT should have the strength to face these things, and so I hied off to Wooster Square in New Haven to see what, if not imaginary, it was all about.

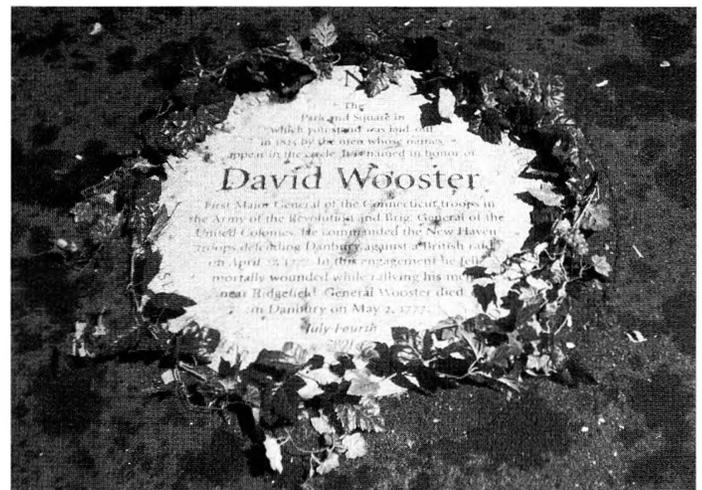
It transpired that this General (David, alas) Wooster was a stalwart bloke back in the mid-1700s, chummy with Washington and Roger Sherman and all that lot. A steely-eyed merchant and military man, he received his fatal wound in 1777 while defending food supplies from the British. (Somehow I can more easily see General Tuppy Glossop in this role—Woosters do not care so much about their stomachs except when the supplies are cooked by Anatole.) Still.

General Wooster died bravely for his newly-fledged country, and was honored by being the namesake for Wooster Square (now a pizza mecca) as well as Wooster, Ohio, a charming town of which you have heard in recent *Plum Lines*. Wooster College is also named after him, so it seems that General Wooster did better in Ohio than in his native state! Connecticut tried to even the score in 2001 by installing a Wooster plaque (see photo at right) smack in the middle of the square in New Haven, and importing a fife and drum corps for a brief, spirited ceremony which

was repeated this year.

Passing lightly over the fife and drum corps (which made a rousing sight with just one fife, one drum, and a lot of corps) and the speeches by local dignitaries, the part of the ceremony I enjoyed most was the two-gun salute. The two blokes with muskets looked absolutely equal in terms of rank and uniform and all that, but one bloke was giving the other bloke continuous orders on how and when to present arms, load, fire, and so on. It just went to show that in any pair of chaps, fate will make one the mere Nodder to the other's Hollywood magnate.

All Hail General Wooster! I confess that I still can't think of this historical worthy without picturing him in the skit and giggling, but I'm working on it.



The Old Reliable: Novel and Film

BY BRIAN TAVES

P. G. WODEHOUSE'S 1951 novel, *The Old Reliable*, was his only story set completely in Hollywood to be written after both his sojourns there as a screenwriter, in 1930–31 and 1936–37. There are echoes of earlier works, especially "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," with a retired but still intimidating silent star, Adela Shannon, now widowed several times and wealthy, who was known as "the Empress of Stormy Emotion." (Here, with Adela having her own private screening room, she has become, whether intentionally or not, a comedic version recalling Gloria Swanson's portrayal of Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*, released on screen the previous year.) In a manner similar to "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," two local policeman that Adela labels "Keystone Kops" imagine themselves as potential stars. Jacob (changed from Sigismund in "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom") Glutz is still head of the Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz, and is described as looking like a lobster. Although set in contemporary Hollywood, *The Old Reliable* still functions in a town ruled by ferocious studio executives, gossip columnists, and contract talent. Time has passed and the system Wodehouse knew was fast dissolving, and he acknowledges the contemporary decline of Hollywood.

The Old Reliable is constructed around three basic

devices typical of many Wodehouse stories: the attempt to steal a secret diary which could be used for blackmail; an underhanded butler; and the satisfactory conclusion of two love stories between contrasting couples. Adela has hired her sister, Wilhemina, the reliable of the title, to ghost her autobiography. "Bill" discovers that her old flame, Smedley Cork, the brother of the man who left Adela a wealthy widow, lives with his sister-in-law, who is obliged to support him according to the terms of the will. Smedley is hoping to make his fortune by finding the diary of the fiery Mexican star Carmen Flores, who died in a plane crash a year earlier and was the previous owner of the property where he and Adela now live. Smedley is unaware that the butler, Phipps, has the same goal, but only Adela recognizes Phipps as a "reformed" safecracker; she was on the jury that convicted him.

Bill has just been fired by the Superba-Llewellyn, as has another pulp writer turned scenarist, young Joe Davenport, who is in love with Adela's daughter, Kay. Although Kay has rejected Joe's proposals of marriage, Bill has a sympathy for Joe born of having been shipped with him to Hollywood in a crate of twelve. Through a stroke of luck, Smedley finds the diary—which is in Spanish—and already has an offer of \$50,000 for it from the Colossal-Exquisite, before he has even contacted Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz. Adela takes the diary, places it in her safe, from which Phipps takes it, blackmailed into taking up his former profession by Bill. Wodehouse was aware of the melodrama; as Joe thinks at one point in chapter 9, "He was conscious of an unpleasant sensation of having been plunged into the middle of a B picture of the more violent type and this was making him gulp a good deal."

Wodehouse includes excerpts from the exaggerated autobiography Bill must write for Adela, using Hollywood hyperbole in chapter 4.

"Who could have dreamed that in a few short years the name of Adela Shannon would have been known to the whole wide world from China to Peru? Who would have supposed that before I made my third picture, I would have become loved, worshipped, idolized by the prince in his palace, the peasant in his cot, the explorer in the jungle and the Eskimo in his frozen igloo? So true it is—so true—Ha!" said Bill. "So true it is that one touch of nature makes the whole world kin and that courage, patience and perseverance will always find a way. I will now describe my first meeting with Nick Schenk."



Phipps is described as the “Butler Supreme,” and Wodehouse goes on in chapter 5 to playfully connect him with the actor who had enacted his own best-known butler on the screen earlier in the Jeeves movies. “He out-Arthurs Treacher. He lends lustre to the whole establishment. That harsh, grating sound you hear from time to time is the envious gnashing of the teeth of all the other Beverly Hills employers who haven’t got him.” Phipps ultimately takes the Flores diary for himself, setting a new pattern of butlers who serve themselves as much as their employer. He has also won an offer to play butlers on celluloid; such are the reasons why, as noted in chapter 21, “It is a very impoverished butler in Beverly Hills who does not own his natty little roadster.”

The Old Reliable became the only one of Wodehouse’s Hollywood novels adapted for the screen when it was filmed for television in 1988 as a one-hour production for the American Public Broadcasting series *Tales from the Hollywood Hills*. *The Old Reliable* concentrated on the familiar Wodehouse device of the tell-all autobiography, of which there is only one copy, with prospective publishers and individuals named in the account jostling one another to steal it (situations best remembered from the Blandings Castle saga). In the adaptation, the fading “queen of stormy emotions” (Rosemary Harris) has Bill (Lynn Redgrave) ghost her life story to extort money from her five ex-husbands, all heads of different studios.

None of Wodehouse’s lines or scenes actually make it to the script; instead his outline is the basis for an otherwise largely original work by Robert Mundy. The adaptation condenses some preceding episodes into the on-

screen narrative of a single day, emphasizing the Hollywood elements of the novel throughout, particularly through adding the luncheon and the addition of Adela’s ex-husbands as studio moguls (who disparage writers). Wodehouse had been content, in this story, to leave the moguls off-stage, and the idea of the blackmail of the executives was minimized with a milder treatment of the diary and autobiography. Adela’s echoes of Norma Desmond are more pronounced, and making her the wife of a studio mogul adds to this resonance, evoking the actress who played Desmond, Gloria Swanson, and her 1920s relationship with Joseph P. Kennedy. Adela’s mediocrity as a performer is emphasized, as a tour guide says she slept her way to the middle, but she is now broke, hanging on only to a pearl necklace which tempts Phipps (Paxton Whitehead). The adaptation makes Joe reluctant to abandon his little book of starlet’s telephone numbers, instead of gladly leaving it behind for Kay (Lori Laughlin).

Bill switches sides over both profit and concern that her magnum opus may never see the light of day. As in the novel, she knows Phipps as a reformed safecracker, and sees to it that Adela’s daughter is united with her love, while she happily resolves her own long-standing romance with a fading “stage-door Johnny” (Joseph Maher). All of it is handled under Michael Blakemore’s direction with a lightness, frenetic pace, and appropriate dialogue and sense of character for a Wodehouse adaptation, producing a quietly amusing hour. With its setting shifted to 1937, *The Old Reliable* captures the sense of a Hollywood that never was, a place of tyrannical moguls, egotistical stars, and a few relatively sane people trying to survive amidst them.

Three items from intrepid correspondent **David McDonough**:

A revival of George S. Kaufman’s *The Butter and Egg Man* ran from October 2–20 at the Atlantic Theatre in New York City. This 1925 play became the basis for Plum’s backstage novel *Barney in Wonderland*, a.k.a. *Angel Cake* (1952).

A Broadway musical entitled *Never Gonna Dance*, based on the film *Swing Time*, will open in spring 2003. The film had music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Dorothy Fields. The stage show looks like it will incorporate other songs by Kern, as the list of lyricists includes Ira Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein, Johnny Mercer and Jimmy McHugh. No mention of Plum.

The film included the beautiful song “The Way You Look Tonight,” which popped up a few years ago in the film *Peter’s Friends*, played on the piano by Hugh Laurie and sung by Laurie and Imelda Staunton, as Stephen Fry and others listened.

Last year, the Modern Library published *The Fun of It*, stories from the “Talk of the Town” section of the *New Yorker*. In a piece from 1942 entitled “The Admiral’s Chair,” by Eugene Kinkead, we find the portrait of Rear Admiral Bradley Allen Fiske, USN, Ret., who lived at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in NYC and, at 88, was the hotel’s oldest resident.

When we found Admiral Fiske in Peacock Alley he was occupying his armchair, reading P. G. Wodehouse’s *My Man Jeeves*, and smoking a cork-tipped cigarette....Wodehouse, he explained, was a change from his customary literary fare, the works of Charles Dickens....As we left the Admiral, we asked him the inevitable question, “How long do you think the war will last?” “How the hell would I know?” said he, reasonably, returning to Jeeves.

Centennial Reflections on a Career

Neil Midkiff and Ed Ratcliffe report on reactions in the press to one hundred years of Wodehouse books

SEPTEMBER 2002 marked the centenary of an important month in Wodehouse's life. Plum wrote in his notebook of literary earnings these momentous entries for September 1902:

Chucked Bank Sept 9, 1902

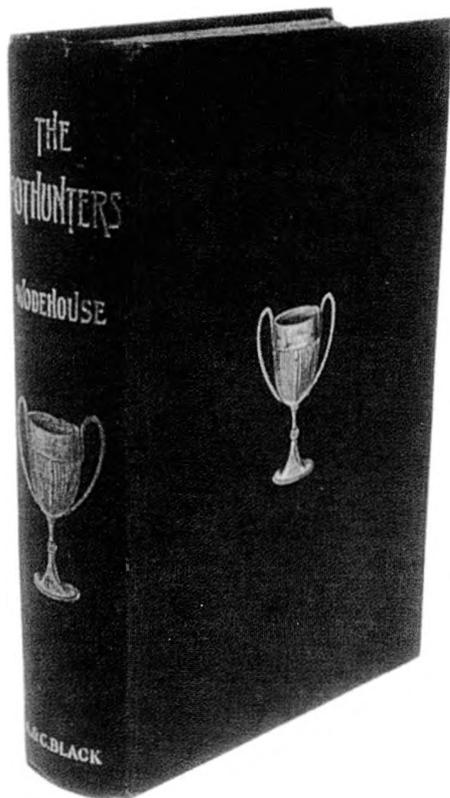
This month starts my journalistic career - P.G.W.

On September 19th "The Pothunters" was published.

Floreat!!

Total for September = £16-4/- . Record so far!

Though he had begun to earn some money two years earlier from his part-time writings while employed at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, his decision to become a professional author marks a milestone well worth celebrating. In addition to the festivities organized by the UK Wodehouse Society (see page 6), the anniversary, coupled with further releases in the uniform series of books published by the Everyman Library and the Overlook Press, sparked a gratifying response from the wider literary world.



Richard Lambert, writing in *The Times* of 5 September, challenged the "conventional wisdom...that his early school stories were nothing special." Evelyn Waugh had written that "it is impossible to discern in them any promise of what was to come. Then in Chapter XXXI of *Mike...Psmith* appears and the light is kindled which has burnt with growing brilliance for half a century." Lambert disagrees: "The reality is that the muse's wings are fluttering away almost from page one of the first school story, which appeared in book form exactly 100 years ago...Right from the start, the gifts of a natural storyteller are obvious."

Lambert cites "the style, the unexpected images, the perfect similes, the throwaway lines that make Wodehouse what he is" in examples from pre-Psmith school stories, as well as the familiar themes of powerful aunts, formidable and brainy young women, butlers, and slyly angled quotes from Shakespeare and the Bible.

He admits that "none of the early school stories approaches the genius of Wodehouse's finest work, *The Code of the Woosters*, published in 1938. But it is plain that Waugh was talking through his hat. They are full of early promise, or what you might call Joy in the Morning."

Robert McNeil's article in *The Scotsman* of 2 August provided an overview of the "hundred years since his honey-laden words first saw publication in book form." "Ostensibly about the conflict between love of cricket and duty to learn," the school stories "conveyed the code of honour that was later used with such comic effect." Characterizing Wodehouse's body of work as "formulaic" is not a put-down; McNeil explains how the musical-comedy-without-the-music structure lets "prehistoric aunts, knowing butlers, clueless constables, dithering vicars and cads who are arguably mad, only slightly bad and never dangerous to know, flit across the stage."

McNeil analyzes Wodehouse's postwar exile from England as only partly due to the "misjudgment" about his radio broadcasts from Germany; he brings up the question of Plum's attitudes about social class:

It did not help that his characters were drawn from the upper classes, against some of whom feelings were running high following allegations of treachery.

But most of Wodehouse's fictional toffs are irredeemably foolish and, since this isn't real life, many are rendered amiable. I'm as left-wing as the next man and I don't have a problem with it. Wodehouse once wrote from America to a friend: "What a weird country

England is, with its class distinctions and that ingrained snobbery....”

George Orwell, who defended Wodehouse against his wartime detractors, nevertheless quibbled on this point, noting: “On the contrary, a harmless old-fashioned snobbishness is perceptible all through his work... Wodehouse’s real sin has been to present the English upper classes as much nicer people than they are.”

A good thing too.

McNeil also picks up on a couple of references with local significance for his newspaper’s readers; he quotes “It is never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine.”

A terrible thing to say. Terribly funny too and with a ring of truth about it. Then again, in a letter from America to Compton Mackenzie, he wrote: “I never have any urge to revisit England, but I do sometimes pine for Scotland... Edinburgh and Paris are the only two cities.”

McNeil concludes that “One hundred years after his first, he’s still the best natural pick-me-up since a stiff snifter.”

J. Peder Zane, of the Raleigh (NC) *News & Observer* (July 21, 2002), is enthusiastic about the Overlook books as well as the words they contain:

The language crackles and the hilarity rises in these works that offer the safe, gentle, predictable pleasures of the best situation comedies...Wodehouse’s characters never fail to meet expectations.

The serious troubles of life never threaten these hale and hearty fellows, yet they view their little problems—which often center on finding a stiff drink or the right golf club—with the utmost seriousness. The reader knows nothing is at stake—every saga ends happily ever after. But to the characters, it is all. It matters to them because, well, it matters to them.

Call it the Wodehouse paradox. In creating a literary refuge for readers, a warm world free from life’s strifes, he reminds us of how much we define our world by choosing to care, or not, about this and that. In Wodehouse there is no there there, and there it is.

Philip Hensher, in *The Spectator* of 14 December 2002, writes a lovely essay titled “The Music of the Language” appreciating the longevity of Wodehouse’s world and style. “His world is dated, but then it was always dated; it is basically Edwardian, and went on, barely changed, into the 1960s and 1970s. But his appeal is not the period charm of a *Diary of a Nobody* or a Saki; it is much more alive than that.”

[His] sensitivity to idiom and to the music of grammar are exactly what is so wonderful about him. He is, apart from everything else, a grammarian of genius.

Oh, come on, you’re saying! A grammarian? But exactly that. What entrances him, and what he uses for his most unforgettable effects, is exactly that, grammar, and the unique, ambiguous potential of English grammar. Plenty of writers can pun. But take one of Wodehouse’s jokes, and this is something rather more subtle.

‘Oh, Bertie, you know your Shelley.’
‘Am I?’

This is not exactly a pun, but a joke about grammar, about the way that the genitive can, with the help of hopeless ignorance, transform a complete sentence in English. I want to insist on this distinction between Wodehouse’s august play with grammar and the ordinary humorist’s punning, because Wodehouse, for me, attains a greatness exactly through his linguistic freedom, the sense that unlike most writers in a language he is the master of it and not its servant....

Like Shakespeare, or many of the greatest writers, Wodehouse is violently cavalier with English grammar. The dictionary will tell you that ‘window’ is a noun, ‘small’ is an adjective, ‘Fred’ is a proper noun. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra sees herself ‘window’d in great Rome’; Hardy has a figure which ‘small into the distance’; a character in Wodehouse can ‘out-Fred the nimblest Astaire’. Try to do that in German. The greatest writers in English aren’t those who have mastered the dictionary; they are those, like Wodehouse, with a profound feeling for the music of the language.

Hensher appreciates also Plum’s mastery of “linguistic register”—the control over the tone of the language, always appropriate to each character, but allowing a freedom to “drop into any context something completely alien, and draw a kind of delirious poetry from it.” Beyond the obvious examples of Jeeves’s orotundity contrasting with Bertie’s slanginess, he cites the frequent use of unconventionally-phrased telegrams, capped by Madeline Bassett’s “Surely twisting knife wound?”

In short, Wodehouse strikes me as one of the greats, and if some of his novels, such as *The Code of the Woosters*, can more plausibly be described as masterpieces than others, I haven’t come across a single one which doesn’t contain stretches of pure delight.

Hensher suggests investing in the Everyman editions: “...your grandchildren will thank you for it. This is a writer who is going to last.”

A Tale of Two Countries

BY ELIN WOODGER MURPHY

As most of us remember, Elin Woodger of America married Norman Murphy of England just before our October, 2002, convention. Their surprise announcement of the marriage at the convention created a sensation. At that time Elin was President of The Wodehouse Society and Norman was Chairman of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)—facts that, among others, caused *The Times* of London to announce the marriage in a story, with pictures, that occupied half the second page of the newspaper. Elin's comments on her first year in England, presented in a recent talk at Norman's London club, are given below.

HOW SWEET it is to have something in common with P. G. Wodehouse. He had the pleasure of living in and loving two countries, England and the United States, and now that pleasure is mine as well. His experience enabled him to write with equal authority and humor about both countries and their citizens, mine to appreciate all the more what he wrote, especially now that I have been living in England for over a year. And what an experience it has been! There has been more to adjust to than I ever could have anticipated. Take the weather, for instance. While marrying Norman brought a lot of sunshine into my life, it also brought quite a lot of rain. Literally. I should have known better, of course. Yet my feelings in the beginning were not unlike those of Mr. Rufus Bennett in *The Girl on the Boat*. As he looks out the window of that lovely house, Windles, at a sensational fragment of England, we are told that he

was looking at the fifth heavy shower that had fallen since breakfast. It was the third afternoon of his tenancy. The first day it had rained all the time. The second day it had rained from eight till twelve-fifteen, from twelve-thirty till four, and from five till eleven. And on this, the third day, there had been no intermission longer than ten minutes.... Mr. Bennett, who had lived his life in a country of warmth and sunshine, the thing affected in much the same way as the early days of the Flood must have affected Noah. A first startled resentment had given place to a despair too militant to be called resignation.

Oh, yes, I know exactly how Mr. Bennett felt! After my first month here, I was feeling that if Norman said one more time, "Sunshine at seven, rain at eleven," I'd crack him over the head with something solid. Poor Mr. Bennett discovered the truth of this expression when, on the morning of his fourth day at Windles, after waking and checking the time,

he suddenly became aware of something bright and yellow resting beside the watch, and paused, transfixed, like Robinson Crusoe staring at the footprint in the sand. If he had not been in England, he would have said that it was a patch of sunshine.

Mr. Bennett is nevertheless emboldened enough to go for a swim. But along the way he is chased by a bulldog and finds himself climbing onto the walls of the ancient ruins, where he sits, terrified, unable to move. Insects begin to crawl all over him.

And then, first dropping like the gentle dew upon the place beneath, then swishing down in a steady flood, it began to rain again.

It was at this point that Mr. Bennett's manly spirit broke....

I can also sympathize with my fellow American Mrs. Steptoe in *Quick Service*. An hour or so before a garden party she is about to give in order to launch herself into English society, she begins to express her doubts to the butler, Chibnall:

"There's a cloud over those trees there."

"Yes, madam."

"Oh, gosh," cried Mrs. Steptoe emotionally. "And in another minute, I suppose, one might as well be standing under Niagara Falls. I'd like to find the man who invented this English climate and tell him what I think of him."

So would her husband, who that evening, after the party is indeed rained off, strongly expresses his desire to return home to California: "What's the sense in sticking around in a climate like this?" he asks. "If you like being rained on, come to Hollywood and stand under the shower-bath."

WELL, I married my reason for sticking around, and now that I've been here a year, I can only say that my admiration for the British just grows daily. No wonder it's a great country; if the Brits can survive the weather, they can survive anything.

But life in England has required other adjustments besides getting used to the weather. There is the driving, for instance, and I don't just mean the madness of driving on the left-hand side of the road. In my opinion, Wodehouse was quite right to give up driving, as it seems to this American that the British spend most of their time driving around in circles. The abundance of roundabouts

(or rotaries, as we call them) is mind-boggling. It is my firm belief that North London alone has more roundabouts than all the cities in the United States put together.

The list goes on. Television is different, customs are different, shops are different. There are foods and items easily obtainable in the States that can't be found here (and vice versa. I am told that America would be an even better place if it had marmite, kippers, and toast racks). And if it's not the food, then it's eating habits that become the subject of debate, as Lord Emsworth noted in *Galahad at Blandings*. After returning from a visit to the States, he reports his "extraordinary" experiences there to Galahad:

"Those tea bags."

"I beg your pardon?"

"They serve your tea in little bags."

"So they do. I remember."

"And when you ask for a boiled egg, they bring it to you mashed up in a glass."

"You don't like it that way?"

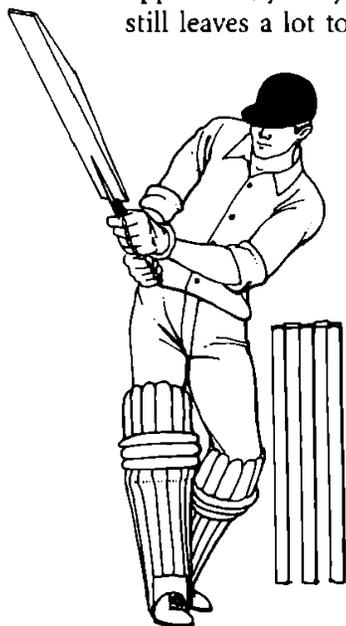
"No, I don't."

"Then the smart thing to do is not ask for a boiled egg."

"True," said Lord Emsworth, who had not thought of that.

I must admit that the first time I mashed up a boiled egg in front of Norman, he looked at me with an expression of shock and horror, as if he couldn't quite believe what he had married. But now he only looks away politely, pretending he hasn't seen. I might also add that since my arrival in England, he has become a convert to teabags. Today teabags, tomorrow boiled eggs is the way I look at it.

SPORTS is another thing. I have now attended two full-length cricket matches between the Society and other opponents, yet my comprehension of the game still leaves a lot to be desired, even after long



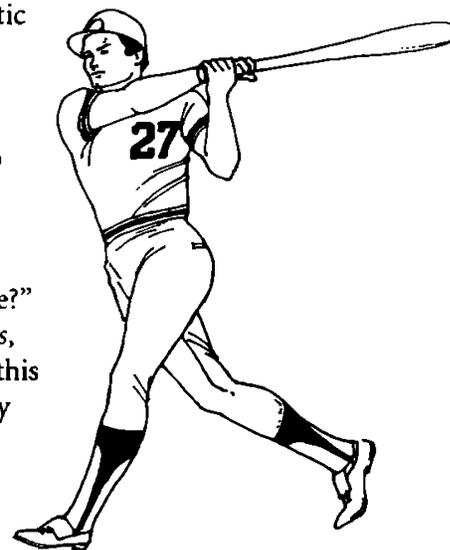
and patient explanations have been tendered to me.

In this regard I fully identify with the devoted baseball fan

Mr. Crocker in *Piccadilly Jim*, whose efforts to understand the butler Bayliss's

description of a cricket match leave him breathing heavily through his nose and asking "to have it once again slowly."

The trans-Atlantic Wodehouse had no such problems, being one of those rare individuals who understood both cricket and baseball equally well. In "How's That, Umpire?" from *Nothing Serious*, he provides us with this description of Conky Biddle, who has accompanied his uncle to Lord's:



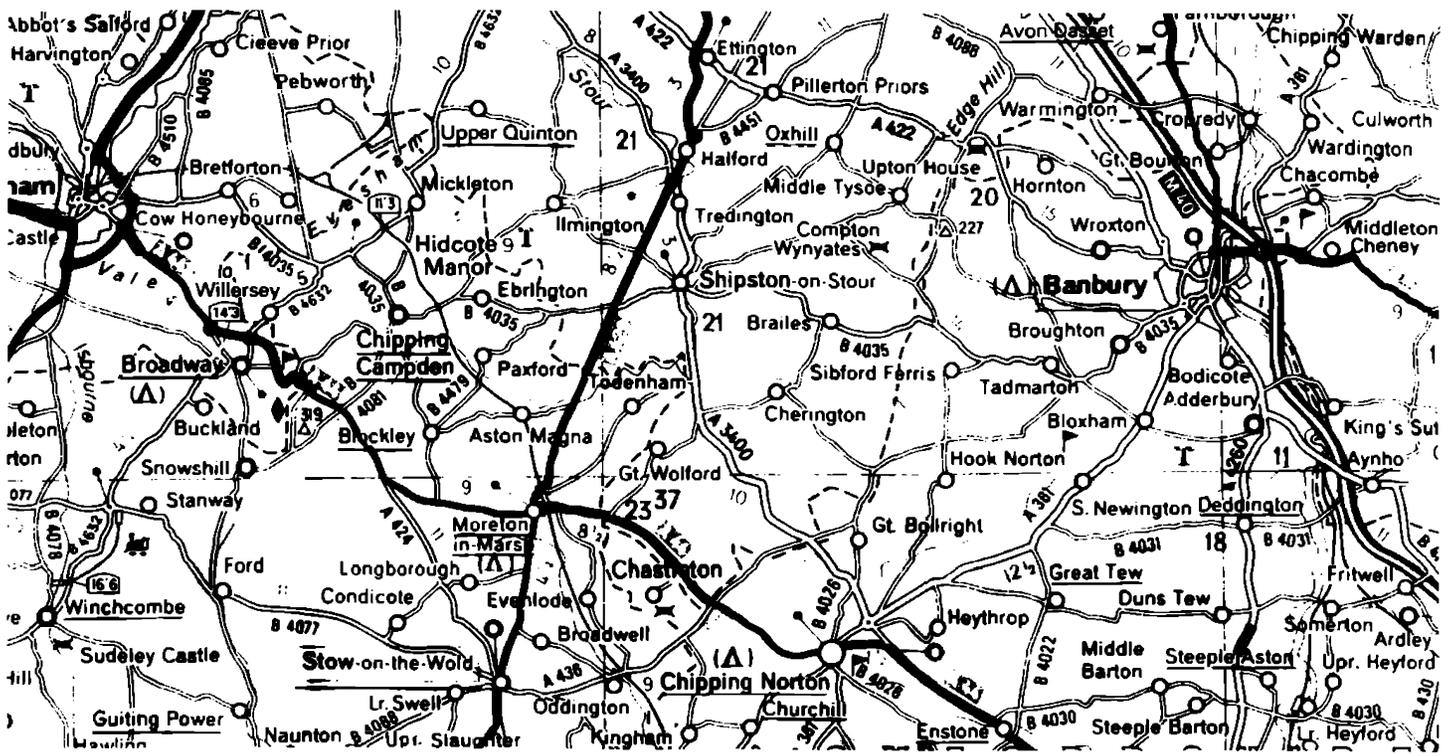
He was still in a sort of trance when they took their seats in the pavilion, but here it was less noticeable, for everybody else was in a sort of trance. The somnambulists out in the field tottered to and fro, and the spectators lay back and let their eyes go glassy. For perhaps an hour nothing happened except that Hodger of Middlesex, waking like Abou ben Adhem from a deep dream of peace, flicked his bat at a rising ball and edged it into the hands of a sleeper dozing in what is technically known as the gully.

Here, though, is where cricket and baseball are similar, for I have been to baseball games just as dormant in nature as this.

THEN there is the language gap, quite an edifying experience, I must say. Issues of vocabulary and spelling have been the subject of many a debate in the Murphy household. He calls it a full-stop, I call it a period. He calls it pudding, I call it dessert. He spells it licence, I spell it license. And on it goes. I didn't know I couldn't speak English until I came to England. Fortunately, I'm learning.

Place names have also provided some enjoyable moments. There are wonderfully named towns in both countries, and Wodehouse certainly appreciated this. In *Indiscretions of Archie*, Archie Moom comments on the weirdness of Snake Bite, Michigan: "What rummy names you have in America.... Still, there's a village in England called Nether Wallop, so who am I to cast the first stone?"

I am informed that Wodehouse used the ubiquitous village of Loose Chippings at least three times. For the benefit of Americans in the audience, this is a joke. In England, when a road has been resurfaced, they put up signs saying "Loose Chippings." But of course Wodehouse's use of this name is small stuff compared with what he gave us in "The Truth About George," in which George Mulliner is chased by an angry mob "East as far as Little Wigmarsh-in-the-



Perhaps no "Loose Chippings" — but we find three "Chipping"s within a thirty-mile stretch east and north of Sudeley Castle (one of the models for Blandings). Note also "Moreton-in-Marsh" and the inimitable "Cow Honeybourne."

Dell and as far west as Higgelford-cum-Wortlebury beneath-the-Hill." This journey takes him past the Dog and Duck at Pondlebury Parva, "splashing through the brook Wipple at the point where it joins the River Wopple," and finally, "just as the setting sun was gilding the spire of the ivy-covered church of St. Barnabas the Resilient,... a damp and bedraggled figure might have been observed crawling painfully along the High Street of East Wobsley...."

If American readers think Wodehouse was making all this up, they have only to look at a map to see how close to the truth he was. Indeed, my wonder and admiration for British nomenclature only increases whenever I take a drive into the English countryside. For instance, driving back to London from Great Dunmow (this is true, by the

way) you pass in turn through Philpot End, then High Roding, Aythorpe Roding, Leaden Roding, Margaret Roding, and Beauchamp Roding, then a left turn to Pigstye Green and you finally reach my favorite of all: Shellow Bowells.

Yes, England has been an educational experience for me, and I now concur with the inestimable Dan Garrison, who once said, "England is a collection of odd traditions inhabited by natives." Similarly, in his book *The British Character*, the American philosopher George Santayana wrote: "England is the paradise of individuality, eccentricity, heresy, anomalies, hobbies and humors." For the past year I have discovered the many ways in which this is true, and now that I'm an inhabitant myself, I can look forward to many more years of discovery. And I'm very glad I came.

Transatlantic membership update

Now that Elin has settled into her English home and established a working relationship between her dollar and sterling bank accounts, she will resume her former position as the payment coordinator for USA members of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK).

Current members should do nothing until receiving renewal notices in April; new members will find dollar payment instructions at the UK Society website:

<http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse/>

John Kimberley, 4th Earl of Kimberley, died last year after a long and checkered career as a British Army officer in World War II, a champion bobsledder and tiddlywinks player, a steeplechase jockey, a shark fisherman of note, a real estate operator in Jamaica, a gambler who lost immense properties, and most notably for us a breeder of prize pigs, the author of a racy volume of memoirs, and a cousin of P. G. Wodehouse.

No Newts is Not Good Newts

BY DAVID RUEF

Way back in June Chapter One visited its sponsored newt at the Philadelphia Zoo and descended into what I can only call a maelstrom of newt-madness: a newt-naming frenzy, a newtrivia quiz, and the creation of a newt pennant. One result was the following literary effluvium. —OM

Father's Day...a cherished holiday in which we pay homage to our progenitors. And, in the Gussified eyes of Philadelphia's Chapter One, what better time to bestow our feelings of admiration on our slimy adopted newt at the local zoo? Imagine the heart-warming sight of a band of Gussied-up Chappies and Chapettes marching through the Philadelphia Zoo behind the fluttering, newt-festooned banners created by Lou Glanzman, the debonair artist-in-residence who designed our Conference posters.

Thanks to member Beanie Blum's considerable political wiles, the Zoo treated us to our own pied-à-terre: a well-equipped classroom, in order to do that voodoo we do so well under the guise of official meetings. Following a Newtritious repast, we paid a visit to Shanghai Lilly, the curvaceous Mandarin newt for whom our \$65 donation has been employed to ensure she is well-fed, and to her spritely colleagues in the water tank of the Amphibian House.

Withered and spent by our emotional encounter, we repaired to our war room to debate the merits of alternate noms de newt befitting our adoptee. Such options as Mynewt, Newtron, and Figgie (Newton) were abandoned in favor of the keep-it-simple approach: Gussie. Readings of our favorite newt- and other animal-related passages from the Master were followed by the brain-wracking Know Your Newts Quiz. Replenish your gray matter with a tin of kippers and test your newtile knowledge below. Answers are on page 23.

Know Your Newts Quiz

- 1) Newts can reach up to 14 inches in length.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 2) What part of the newt is a dorsum?
- 3) What are newt bodies covered with?
- 4) Warty newts are native primarily to:
 - a) North America
 - b) Europe
 - c) Asia
- 5) Newts give live birth.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 6) What is the eft stage in the life of a newt?
- 7) Where are fire-bellied newts found?
 - a) China and Japan
 - b) Mexico
 - c) Coastal plains of North and South Carolina
- 8) Ribbed newts are so named because:
 - a) They provide extra sexual pleasure for their mates.
 - b) They get joked about a lot by slugs.
 - c) Their ribs literally pop through their skin.
- 9) Single females can lay up to:
 - a) 100 eggs
 - b) 1,000 eggs
 - c) 10,000 eggs
- 10) What do crocodile newts do during monsoon season?
- 11) Why should a newt in captivity not be given light during the winter?
- 12) Which of the following forms of bloodworms do newts prefer to eat?
 - a) Live
 - b) Frozen
- 13) Newts need to eat:
 - a) Every 4 hours
 - b) Every day
 - c) Once every few days
- 14) What is a Newtsicle?
- 15) What do you call a keeper of reptiles and amphibians?
 - a) A psychoanalyst's delight
 - b) A herpetoculturist
 - c) Augustus Fink-Nottle



Bertie and the Poet Shelley

BY DENNIS CHITTY

No longer now

He slays the lamb that looks him in the face.

THESE words occur in lines 211–212 of Canto VIII of *Queen Mab**; and fearing he had been too cryptic, Shelley added some 5,500 words of explanation. In proposing a return to an original “frugivorous” lifestyle, he refers to the allegories of Adam and Eve and Prometheus, quotes several lines from Milton, Horace, and Pliny, and ends up with 27 lines in Greek from an essay by Plutarch: “But you call snakes, panthers, and lions ‘wild beasts’ though you have murderous habits of your own that are every bit as bad as theirs...” (trans. by Rogers, p. 399). Suitably revised, this note might have made a good Ph.D. thesis.

The gist of the argument is that, in making an unnatural change from a vegetable to a cooked-meat diet, which involves the slaughter of innocent animals, man has lost his immunity to diseases and become vicious. A return to a vegetarian diet would do much to lessen the travails of the world.

This note, or some second-hand version of it, found a ready disciple in Madeline Bassett in *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*. As Jeeves explains, “I understand that Miss Bassett has recently been reading the life of the poet Shelley, sir, and has become converted to his view that the consumption of flesh foods is unspiritual. The poet Shelley held strong opinions on this subject.” As a result, “I regret to inform you, sir, that Miss Bassett has insisted on Mr Fink-Nottle adopting a vegetarian diet. His mood is understandably disgruntled and rebellious.”

“But this is frightful, Jeeves!...Is there nothing we can do?” wailed Bertie, knowing that, because of an earlier misunderstanding (in *Right Ho, Jeeves*), Madeline would expect to marry him if Gussie threw her over. Persuading Madeline of the doubtful benefits of vegetarianism seemed unlikely to change her mind; for “The poet Shelley regarded the matter from the humanitarian standpoint rather than that of bodily health. He held that we should show reverence for other life forms, and it is his views that Miss Bassett has absorbed.”

Luckily, the cook, Emerald Stoker, had a heart that “melted in sympathy with his [Gussie’s] distress,” and she told Jeeves to “apprise Mr Fink-Nottle that if he were

agreeable to visiting the kitchen at some late hour...she would be happy to supply him with cold steak and kidney pie.” All would have been well had not Stiffy Byng seen “the cook shovelling...pie into [Gussie] like a stevedore loading a grain ship.” With the threat of telling Madeline, Stiffy was now able to force Bertie to carry out one of her hair-brained schemes. For Bertie knew that if Madeline found Gussie “eating the flesh of animals slain in anger...[she] would have nothing more to do with him.” This was the fear that haunted Bertie.

The story ends with Gussie eloping with the cook and with Bertie being saved from marrying Madeline thanks to Roderick Spode (a.k.a. Lord Sidcup), who addressed her with the burning words “What you’re going to do is marry me, and I don’t want any argument.”

The phrase “the flesh of animals slain in anger and pie” occurs in *The Code of the Woosters*, and is, I presume, an allusion to the same views; but I have been unable to discover the meaning of “pie” or to trace a source for the actual words; so they are probably original Wodehouse.

Bertie had two other brushes with Percy Bysshe Shelley. The first passed without incident, as neither he nor, I suspect, most of his readers spotted the allusion in which Jeeves suggested that “sensitive plant” rather than “poop”

was a kinder expression for Gussie (in *Right Ho, Jeeves*). Although Bertie preferred “poop,” he later on used the kinder alternative in the following dialogue with Madeline (in *The Code of the Woosters*):

“A sensitive plant, what?”

“Exactly. You know your Shelley, Bertie.”

“Oh, am I?”

In supposing that Bertie had read a 311-line poem about the loveliness and ultimate decay of an Italian flower, Madeline cannot have known that Bertie’s literary tastes were confined to “goosefleshers” such as *The Trail of Blood*.

* Rogers, Neville (ed.), 1972, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, vol. I*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.



Why the Knighthood was Delayed

This account was compiled from news stories written by Jane Wardell of Associated Press, Alan Hamilton of *The Times* of London, Kevin Myers of *The Sunday Telegraph*, and Paul Reynolds of BBC News Online. We are pleased to see that the late Fergus Horsburgh, a member of The Wodehouse Society, was effective in promoting Plum's knighthood. —OM

OFFICIAL files show that the decades of delay before P. G. Wodehouse was knighted were not just due to his wartime broadcasts on German radio. His enduring creation, Bertie Wooster, bears part of the blame.

The long internal wrangle in the British government over the question of his knighthood is shown in hitherto secret papers released by the government in August, 2002. They show that Wodehouse was first recommended for a Companion of Honour in 1967.

Of course the British ambassador to the US, Sir Patrick Dean, tried to stop Wodehouse from being knighted. Of course he declared that the greatest literary stylist of the 20th century had done nothing for British interests in the US. Of course he raised the old chestnut of Wodehouse's wartime broadcasts for the Germans. And of course, he wittered—though more witlessly than usual in such communications—that Bertie Wooster gave currency to “aspects of the British character we are doing our best to eradicate.”

No doubt Shakespeare would on those grounds have been refused a knighthood for his views on kingship in Richard III, Scotland is still not talking to him because of Macbeth, and the Danes still haven't forgiven him over Hamlet. And as for the Italians...

But if Sir Patrick Dean achieved nothing else with his observations, he has at least provided proof of a human version of Newton's third law of motion: that for every comic genius a nation produces, it must also produce doltishness of equal and opposite measure. So that for every literary shaft of comic brilliance, there must also within the national system be a bowl of cerebral suet.

Even by 1971, resentment remained. When then Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home suggested that “we are inclined to bury the wartime hatchet,” the then British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Cromer, replied: “I certainly could not bring myself to support such a recommendation.”

The Foreign Office also put the argument that since Wodehouse had taken US citizenship, he could be honoured only for some service to British interests. In the words of one official: “The fact that Mr Wodehouse writes in English can scarcely be held to constitute services to this country.”

In the same year, Sir Alec Douglas-Hume, who was then Foreign Secretary, cabled Lord Cromer, saying that

the Government was “minded to bury the wartime hatchet.” But Cromer stamped on the suggestion as firmly as his predecessor, cabling back that the writer's wartime activity “is not forgotten in this country.”

Meanwhile, civil servants in London were looking into the Wodehouse case. Stuart Milner-Barry, of the Civil Service Department, wrote to the head of protocol at the Foreign Office. “Rather the same sort of difficulties arise over him as do in the case of Charlie Chaplin and Noel Coward. My own view on this one, too, would be that it was time to bury any remaining hatchets unless the evidence against Wodehouse is more incontrovertible than I believe it to be.”

Milner-Barry concluded: “But I do not know whether there is any precedent for giving an honorary award to a natural-born Englishman who has abandoned his British citizenship.”

The Foreign Office was cool. “British honours are not conferred on foreign nationals as a tribute to their distinction in a particular field,” a senior official replied. “The doctrine is that such persons should look to their own head of state for recognition of their achievements.”

It was only after Scottish businessman Fergus Horsburgh wrote to the Queen in January 1972 from his home in Canada urging an honour for Charlie Chaplin that a knighthood became likely.

Horsburgh's plea followed others by “highly reputable, indeed distinguished sources” the previous year, the documents said.

In his letter, Horsburgh also made a case for the novelist P. G. Wodehouse. Horsburgh wrote, “I respectfully suggest that the time has come to let bygones be bygones and award Charles Chaplin a knighthood. Not only would this give pleasure to Charlie, but it would delight millions in and out of the English-speaking world.

“Also as good a case could be made for Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. No doubt these men have erred, but they are both old now. Why not forgive and forget?”

Eventually in 1974, it was decided that Wodehouse, who had never renounced his British citizenship, should be knighted. The Foreign Office was still sceptical but did not formally object.

P. G. Wodehouse was knighted on January 1, 1975, six weeks before his death.

Wodehouse Playhouse Returns

The long wait is finally over! Acorn Media is releasing tapes and DVDs of the legendary *Wodehouse Playhouse* series. The first series of seven episodes is available now. There will be a second series later this year, and the third probably early in 2004. These BBC adaptations of mostly Mulliner stories were made in the 1970s and star Pauline Collins and John Alderton of *Upstairs, Downstairs* fame.

Each of the first six episodes has a brief introduction by Plum himself. Most of these episodes were shown in the US on PBS when they first came out, but this is the first time they have been available on videotape or DVD. Virtually everyone who has seen *Wodehouse Playhouse* regards the series as absolutely the best and most faithful adaptation of Wodehouse works anywhere, ever. TWS and the UK Wodehouse Society have actively campaigned for years to have the series released, and every Wodehouse fan will want to have their own VHS or DVD to watch over and over again.

The first series can be obtained directly from Acorn Media 1-888-870-8047. The list price is \$49.95 for three VHS tapes or \$39.95 for two DVDs. They are also being sold through other catalog companies that feature British videos, and through many on-line retailers, in some cases at substantial discounts, so you may want to shop around.

—Rosie M. Banks (Susan Cohen)

The Invisible Library on the Web

Tom Kreitzberg reported to PGWnet:

In case you haven't heard, there is an invisible library on the Web, "a collection of books that only appear in other books. Within the library's catalog you will find imaginary books, pseudobiblia, artificions, fabled tomes, libris phantastica, and all manner of books unwritten, unread, unpublished, and unfound."

The URL is <http://www.invisiblelibrary.com>

The Master is well represented, with something like 38 imaginary books, including 7 romances by Rosie M. Banks and 4 mysteries by Rex West. And Professor Pepperidge Farmer's *Hypnotism As A Device To Uncover The Unconscious Drives And Mechanism In An Effort To Analyse The Functions Involved Which Gives Rise To Emotional Conflicts In The Waking State* (published as *Sleepy Time*).

Tony Ring notes: The Invisible Library is a great idea, but needs editing. *Types of Ethical Theory* invisible? Not the copy in two volumes on the shelf above my head, with the various quotations marked by bookmarks or stickers.

Ian Michaud references the Blandings group on Yahoo (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/blandings/>) whose "Rosie M. Banks Library" lists over 230 fictitious books, plays, and films within the Wodehouse canon.

Lennox Lewis and Battling Billson

BY JOEL J. BRATTIN

In an article about heavyweight boxing champion Lennox Lewis in the 1 July 2002 issue of *The New Yorker*, David Remnick quotes from Wodehouse to describe the progress of Lewis's bout with Mike Tyson on 8 June 2002. Remnick notes that Tyson began aggressively, but that toward the end of the first round, the tide began to turn.

Tyson's blows seemed to arouse Lewis: first his concern, then his interest, and, finally, his own keenness. The transformation in Lewis was reminiscent of Wilberforce (Battling) Billson, in P. G. Wodehouse's *He Rather Enjoyed It*:

"A moment before the audience had been solidly anti-Billson. Now they were unanimously pro. For

these blows, while they appeared to have affected him not at all physically, seemed to have awakened Mr. Billson's better feelings as if somebody had turned on a tap. They had aroused in Mr. Billson's soul that zest for combat which had been so sadly to seek in round one. For an instant after the receipt of that buffet on the ear the Battler stood motionless on his flat feet, apparently in deep thought. Then, with the air of one who has suddenly remembered an important appointment, he plunged forward."

Most readers will better recognize *He Rather Enjoyed It* under its British title *Ukridge*. I find this the most inexplicable of all the American book title changes. —GW

A Few Quick Ones

The Woosterfest proposed for last September (see the Summer 2002 issue of *Plum Lines*) regrettably had to be cancelled; our ranks apparently contain more Emsworths than Baxters, and all the hotel rooms in Wooster, Ohio were filled before our plans could be made. **Susan Cohen** writes: "I think we would have had a great time. Many thanks to Lady Bassett of the NEWTS for all her help. But all is not lost. Maybe, someday in the future the binge will happen and we will worship Bertie as he deserves in the place that bears his name. We now have a member who lives in Wooster so, hey, Ohio Plummies! Why not organize a chapter of TWS that meets in that splendidly named town. In that case I'm sure we could have a Wooster binge."

Paul Sadler found this eminently Emsworthy item:

E. F. Benson (Lucia and Mapp, Dodo, *et al.*) mentions in his recollections of the Victorian era, *As We Were* (Longmans, Green, & Co., 1930), that Lord Hartington, the second husband of the Duchess of Devonshire, even after "in the course of nature he inherited colossal wealth and a quantity of noble possessions," was reported to have remarked, again to quote Benson, that "the happiest moment of his life... was when his pig took a first prize at some agricultural show." One can well presume that Benson, the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, was aware of this fact, for he was well-known as a scholar and eminent researcher.

Daniel Love Glazer reports:

I saw City Lit's production of *Cocktail Time* with my wife and two non-Wodehousian friends, and we all found it utterly delightful. Page Hearn's adaptation is excellent. Don Bender reprises his Uncle Fred from last year's *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* and one can't imagine an Uncle Fred spreading more sweetness and light. Jan Blixt earns the Eddie Murphy Versatility Prize for delightfully playing all four female characters. Scott Kennedy is appropriately stuffy as Sir Raymond Bastable and properly deferential and confused as the butler Peasemarch. Thomas Shea's daft Saxby is superb. And the swan is terrific!

City Lit is in Chicago and can be reached at (773) 293-3682 or www.citylit.org; the production was scheduled to close January 26, but it is always worth keeping in touch with their performance schedule.

Sophie Glazer reports on an Associated Press story last June from England that will remind us of "The Great Sermon Handicap" — although in this case the book involved is not an oddsmaker's book but the *Guinness Book of Records*. The Rev. Chris Sterry, vicar of Whalley in Lancashire, preached a sermon of 28 hours and 45 min-

utes, taking the Old Testament as his subject beginning with Genesis. He had gotten as far as Daniel in the lion's den when he passed the existing record of 27 1/2 hours for an unscripted speech. Apparently the congregation attended in shifts, not able to match his stamina.

Joel Brattin writes: "In an article in the 17 September 2001 issue of *The New Yorker* about Luigi Miraglio, an advocate for spoken Latin, Rebecca Mead notes that one of his housemates in Italy is 'a linguist... who speaks English with the accent of Bertie Wooster.' It is a testament to P. G. Wodehouse's skill that readers can speak confidently of Bertie's accent simply by reading the words on the page."

From Roger Ebert's column in the May 5, 2002 on-line edition of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, by way of **David Landman**:

Q. You didn't acquit yourself very well in your article on *Amadeus*. You are presumably a film critic and quite evidently not a literary critic. Anyone who thinks Thomas Mann is not a great writer, worse still, that P. G. Wodehouse is, doesn't know much about literature.

—Frank Schulze, Department of Art, Lake Forest College

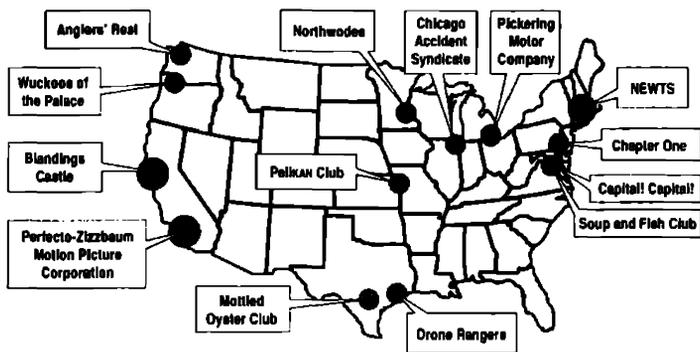
A. The kind of person who thinks Mann a great writer and Wodehouse not a great writer is precisely the kind of person who would believe that professional credentials are necessary to make such judgments.

Susan Cohen writes to thank **Frank Axe** for his donation of a batch of historical material from TWS's earliest days, including membership lists, copies of *Plum Lines*, copies of letters from Plum to Bill Blood, articles, information on the Morgan Library exhibit, and so forth. This will supplement the documentation already in the TWS Tome. (See Frank's article "How I Started the Wodehouse Society" in the Spring 2002 *Plum Lines*.)

Enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines* is a registration form for TWS's "main event" — our biennial **convention**, to be held in Toronto, Ontario in August 2003. The fearless pioneers of The Pickering Motor Car Company (our Detroit chapter) are eager to receive your reservations for this essential gathering. We've already introduced a delay into the works in getting this issue to you. Please do as we say, and not as we do—mail your registration soon!



The Oldest Member Society Spice Glow Worm



Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY NEIL MIDKIFF

AS ALWAYS, we appreciate hearing regularly from each of the chapters. Send your news, reports, updates, and plans

Our chapters are listed in alphabetical order below. The lack of a news report may not indicate an inactive chapter, but perhaps may serve to spur chapters to appoint a special correspondent to keep *Plum Lines* readers informed of their activities.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott

Blandings Castle Chapter

(greater San Francisco Bay Area)

Newsletter: The Argus Intelligencer and Wheat Growers Gazette

Contact: Jan Kaufman, president

"The principle I always go on in writing a novel is to think of the characters in terms of actors in a play," Wodehouse told Bill Townend. The Blandings Players of the San Francisco Bay Area have also been thinking in theatrical terms, as we're planning our offering for the August Toronto convention, and beyond that for Hollywood in 2005. For Toronto, we're now planning to do one of the Hollywood Mulliner stories which might then serve as the background for a movie we hope to make for TWS in Tinseltown.

We're all anticipating getting copies of the *Wodehouse Playhouse* TV series which have just become available for

the first time. When we were discussing the high quality of these Mulliner stories at a recent Blandings meeting, Len Lawson observed that we all have Jeeves and Bertie prototypes in our minds, but there are so many Mulliners that we don't have any preconceived ideas about them. Carl Wells says that movie versions overwhelm his memory of fictional characters. He told of an aunt who had greatly enjoyed a book when she was young and was very tickled to find the same edition many years later and was astounded to find there were no illustrations, as her imagination had supplied such a strong visual image of the characters.

We recently saw a video of "Fish and Prawns," the most ambitious production of the Blandings Players, which was made for our 1993 San Francisco convention. This production definitively solved the story of the prawns, which made Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe so nervous in *Summer Lightning*. This was produced by David Smeltzer, who works professionally in video.

Len and Shirley Lawson will host the Blandings meeting on April 6 at their Livermore home.

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C. and vicinity)

Contact: Erik R. Quick, president

Chapter One

(greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan and Daniel Cohen

A group of survivors of the scorching summer of '02 met at The Dark Horse Restaurant in Philadelphia in September to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of Wodehouse's first book, *The Pothunters*. And why the Pot is stuck in with the hunters is something I don't understand. I mean why not Pot (space) Hunters? Oh, well, who am I to quarrel with genius?

The meeting began with reminiscences about our June trip to the Philadelphia Zoo, organized by Dave and Karen Ruef. Beautiful newt banners, created by Lou Glanzman, our resident artist, were carried aloft as we made our way to the Reptile House. Thanks to a recent makeover the newt tank, funded by members of TWS, has been enlarged. It is now quite lush and absolutely crawling with charming amiable newts who were very glad to see us. We had our picture taken together and then it was time for lunch, the newts dining on aquatic plants and larvae, while we humans set out a spread in a room in the administrative

building. (See page 15 of this issue for details.)

As we do at all our meetings, articles were passed around and announcements made, to bring everyone up to date on Wodehouse. Then we toasted *The Pothunters*. Notes by John Graham, our resident expert on book collecting were read. Very interesting notes they were, too, giving the evolution of *The Pothunters* and the details surrounding its publication in book form in September 1902. Susan Cohen gave a presentation on the book itself, plot, characters, the public school code, etc. This was followed by a lively discussion of the shool stories.

Our next meeting was December 1st. A combination of Hanukkah, illness, and trips to warmer climes made this meeting small but cozy and, still stuffed from Thanksgiving, we just rambled along, talking about whatever we pleased. We discussed great butlers we had known, at least on the screen, and in books. Female butlers are on the increase. We brooded darkly over this. Is it a sign that civilization as we know it is coming to an end? Pigs cropped up next. Where do you go to adopt a pig? How much lard goes into a good pie crust? Ceramic pig collecting, anyone? One thing led to another and soon we were talking about statues of the Infant Samuel at Prayer. Did you know that Mole from *The Wind in the Willows* has one in his home? More of this and it was time for the topic of the day which was food.

We led off with The British Society's Centenary Dinner in London and followed up with Daniel Cohen's talk, "Beyond Anatole: Dining with Wodehouse." All in all a very satisfying meeting, one which whetted our appetite for the next one which will be Sunday, Feb. 2nd, 1:00 p.m. at The Dark Horse Restaurant, Philadelphia. New members are welcome. Let Susan know if you'd like to join us.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

The Chicago Accident Syndicate convened in Evanston on June 29 for an afternoon of browsing and sluicing followed by croquet in the yew alley on the grounds of Ukridge Castle. (See photo at right.) It was a double match, with so much energy expended on appeals of the rules, disputes about vernacular language to be permitted within the Court, and spousal recriminations that a play-off was postponed *sine die*.



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(for enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Newsletter: *Dronestar*, edited by Toni & Bill Rudersdorf

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

The Drone Rangers meet every month; one month we dine out together, the next we read one of Wodehouse's books and have two papers: one over the book, the other over "something about or related to PGW."

Most recently was our games night where we played Gawlf at the links built for the last convention by D-R Brad Frank. We also watched *Wodehouse Playhouse* videos and played various board games. We naturally ate and guzzled the good food and drink brought by our fellow D-Rangers. A happy time was had by all.

Next we read *Something Fresh* and had a scavenger hunt all over the Barnes and Noble bookshop where our meetings are held. Our most recent DroneStar described the hunt and winners. DroneStar is the news letter of the Houston chapter and available for \$15 "cheap" to any who wish to join our chapter.

In December we took a field trip to see "Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit" performed by Stage West, a little theater group in Fort Worth, December 28th.

We are planning our "Remember Plum Party" for February 15th. This party is the Drone Rangers' annual binge and we invite any TWS members in or passing through the area to join us.]

The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and elsewhere in New England)
Contact: Anne Cotton, president

The NEWTS have been busy of late. Last summer, we had a whiz-bang session of croquet *chez* Randall and Nancy Burkett. The day was a feast for our tummies as well as the minds. In the second game of the day, one of our enterprising NEWTS (Amy Plofker) even beat the host, who has his own private mallet which he keeps in a special case (so you know he takes his croquet seriously).

The next Nottle was on Sunday, October 20, at Lady Bassett's in South Hadley, Mass. We read "The Smile That Wins," heard some background comments sent overseas from The Man Who Knows Everything, and then saw the *Wodehouse Playhouse* version of this magnificent tale.

Our Christmas party, at Bud and Dotty Swanson's clubhouse in Westford, was the usual smashing success. We held a gift exchange, in which an astonishing number of gifts turned out to be cow creamers; ate and drank ourselves into a state of bliss, and read "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," a party tale if ever there was one.

We tend to hibernate between Christmas and early spring, as New England winters of late have been enough to discourage travel by any means other than dog sled. But future plans include greeting spring on March 30 with Bill and Jo Claghorn in Princeton, Mass.; a May 10 Nottle in Medford with John and Lisa Fahey; another midsummer celebration at the home of David Nolan and Rosemary Roman on June 21; and a post-convention gathering on August 24 with David and Elizabeth Landman in Lexington. Details may be obtained from Anne Cotton; invitations will be mailed to NEWTS before each meeting.

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler

The Northwodes sent a small, select group to another production of *Anything Goes* way back in June. Sandy Duncan starred as Reno Sweeney, and we were surprised how much we approved of her in this part. The production

as a whole was tip-top and formed a nice counterpoint to the good amateur performance we'd previously seen.

Sticking with the performing arts for the time being, we gathered on Aug. 18 for a "Jeeves & Wooster" video fest, including the blackface episode not broadcast in the US. A caravan of four cars made this our first road trip out of Minneapolis-St. Paul, to Karen Johnson's home in Rochester; the entertainment, the company, and the hospitality (the homemade popovers, in particular, being worthy of a Drones Club tea) made for a splendid day.

In October we sought relief from election rhetoric in Wodehouse's more attractive political universe: we read aloud the tales of Bingo's short but eventful communist career. Then our holiday dinner was a highlight of the year, as we have come to expect; several new attendees attended, and all enjoyed the feast of traditional dishes from our host Terry D'Souza's native India (who knew that homemade samosas go so well with ketchup?). Lest one think we focus a bit too much on the refreshments, let it be known that we are only following policy, as the Northwodes' one and only bylaw is that browsing and sluicing must take place at any chapter gathering. Next meeting will probably be in March (with food and drink, natch—the program to be decided later); contact Kris Fowler for details.

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles, California, and vicinity)
Contact: Melissa D. Aaron

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation celebrated its second anniversary at its regular June meeting in 2002. We read "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," from whence we derive our name, and followed up with a smashing tea at the Huntington Museum and Gardens Tea Room in Pasadena.

In November, some of us (well, two of us) attended the Liberty Tea at the Lanterman House to celebrate Armistice Day. December's meeting was our second annual Holiday Tea, featuring the gracious hostessing of Mrs. Tinker-Moulke (and Pom) and many yummys brought by the members.

We continue to have our meetings at 12:30 on the second Sunday of every month, but our meeting place has changed. Vroman's Museum Branch bookstore has closed and we will be meeting in future at Vroman's main branch, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. Our future selections are:

February: "Honeysuckle Cottage" and "Came the Dawn": two Mulliner stories

March: *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*

April: "Uncle Fred Flits By" and "Jeeves and the Song of Songs"

May: *Full Moon*

June: "Bingo and the Peke Crisis" and "Sonny Boy,"

from *Eggs, Beans and Crumpets*

Our spiffy website can still be found at www.lahacal.org/wodehouse. Wodehousians interested in our meetings and special events should proceed to our website (see above) and get on to our mailing list. We have a calendar which sends reminders about meetings, books and events. Related items of interest can be found on the Lively Arts History Association website (www.lahacal.org) and the Art Deco Society website (www.adsla.org)

Finally, it is looking as though PZMPCo will be represented at the Convention this year. I need say no more, except that my aunts had better lock up their pearl necklaces.

The Mottled Oyster Club

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: James P. Robinson III

Currently, meetings are held very irregularly, but I would like to hear from anyone interested in PGW in the neighborhood.

The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

As before, our motor car specialists are working hard to make the August 2003 TWS Convention in Toronto a memorable experience. Help their planning! Register early!

The Soup & Fish Club

(northern Virginia area)

Contact: Meredith Mengel

The Soup & Fish Club is now being spearheaded by a younger, more energetic, I will go further, a poetic soul named Meredith Mengel. I have as yet heard her speak of the stars as being God's daisy chain, but I suspect she has it

in her. I'll be watching her progress with gratitude and enthusiasm.

The Soup & Fish Club will be meeting at the end of Feb. at a Barnes & Noble in Fairfax, VA. In case Meredith has a bit too much of a poet's soul to get the details out, area members can contact me :

—Deborah Dillard, former chief cook and bottle washer of the Soup & Fish

The Wuckoos of the Palace

(greater Portland, Oregon area)

Former president: Dennis McDougall

There's been a bit of a shake-up out PDX way. After a year of complete non-activity, I have decided to step aside as President of the Wuckoos. Not being the most organized bunch on the planet, we've not gotten round to choosing a new leader yet, or doing anything else besides smuggling up with our Wodehouse.

I've passed my materials on to the lovely Ish, who is pondering our next move, if there's to be one. The last time Ish announced a meeting of our chapter, only she and I showed up. We'll keep you posted.

"Ish" is apparently a nickname for someone named Alicia, but until we get her contact information, Dennis has agreed to receive inquiries from interested Portland-area residents.

Answers to the *Know Your Newts* quiz

(see page 14)

1. a. True; newts can reach up to 14 inches in length.
2. A newt's dorsum is its back.
3. Newt bodies are covered with poison glands.
4. c. Warty newts are native to Asia.
5. True and false: Two species give birth; others lay eggs.
6. An eft is a newt in its juvenile, land, or second stage. In the third stage it returns to water to breed and remains aquatic thereafter.
7. a. Firebellied newts are found in China and Japan.
8. c. The ribs of ribbed newts pop through their skin.
9. b. A female (single or married) can lay up to 1,000 eggs.
10. Crocodile newts breed in monsoon season.
11. A newt hibernates during the winter.
12. a. Newts prefer live bloodworms.
13. c. Newts eat once every few days.
14. A Newtsicle is a frozen newt!
15. b. A keeper of reptiles and such is a herpetoculturist.

Congratulations!

The following announcement appeared in *The Times* and *The Telegraph* of London on January 9, 2003:

Mr. H. P. Cazalet and Miss P. M. Magraw
The engagement is announced between Hal, second son of Sir Edward and the Hon. Lady Cazalet, of Plumpton, Sussex, and Polly, youngest daughter of Mrs. Veronica Pearce, widow of Garth Magraw, of Shipbourne, Kent.

Hal, an opera singer, is the great-grandson of P. G. Wodehouse. Polly is a film-maker. In a later report, Hal told the *Daily Telegraph*:

"My real interest is Wodehouse's lyrics, but I've always loved Bertie Wooster's antics as well. Having said that, I'm delighted to go against the Wooster grain and get married of my own accord. Polly and I met across a tennis court in Regent's Park a while back.

"I think we took to each other straight away, but we didn't see each other again for another six months, when we met in a pub on Westbourne Grove, and it went on from there."

We wish Hal and Polly every happiness.

Footnote to our cover story: A martini has approximately 150-250 calories. —GW

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Apologies!

A combination of work, family, and travel-related responsibilities have interfered with our schedules this fall and winter, and have made this issue of *Plum Lines* unprecedentedly late.

We'll do our best to make future issues prompt and filled with the best in Wodehouse- and TWS-related news and commentary. You can help by keeping your contributions of articles, illustrations, and citations flowing along to the addresses below.

—GW
—OM

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Dues are \$20 per year, payable to The Wodehouse Society.

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