

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

*Volume 27 Number 2 Summer 2006*

## Richard Usborne 1910–2006

BY ELIN WOODGER MURPHY

The world of Wodehouse admirers lost its doyen when Richard Usborne died on March 21 at the age of 95. He was and always will be well-known to Plumies as the author of *Wodehouse at Work* (1961) and its revision, *Wodehouse at Work to the End* (1976); the editor of Wodehouse's final, incomplete book, *Sunset at Blandings* (1977); and the compiler of four collections: *Vintage Wodehouse* (1977), *Plum Sauce: A Wodehouse Companion* (1981), *Wodehouse Nuggets* (1983), and *After Hours with P. G. Wodehouse* (1991). For those of us fortunate enough to have known him, though, he will be remembered not just as the foremost Wodehouse scholar of our time but as a kind, gentle, erudite man who always seemed to have a smile on his lips and a sparkle in his eyes.

I was one of the lucky ones, having first met Mr. Usborne in 1998 during a visit to London. After I married Norman in 2001, we made periodic trips to visit Dick (as I came to call him) at the Charterhouse, where he had taken up residence following the 1986 death of his wife Monica. He had attended the Charterhouse School, so it was entirely appropriate that he should become a Brother at the historic former monastery in London—"the only real Carthusian in the place," he liked to say. He lived out the final 20 years of his life there, with sorties to visit family and friends and to attend functions. Though such excursions were rare in the final years of his life, Dick came to the party for the launch of Robert McCrum's *Wodehouse: A Life* and spent the evening surrounded by friends and admirers.

Richard Usborne was born in Punjab and educated at Summer Fields, Charterhouse, and Balliol College at Oxford. His multifaceted career encompassed work in advertising and on magazines, including a short stint as deputy editor of *The Strand Magazine*, in addition to wartime work for the Special Operations Executive and Political Warfare Executive. A regular contributor to *Punch*, he made his mark in the literary world with the 1953 publication of *Clubland Heroes*, a witty and affectionate examination of John Buchan, Sapper, and Dornford Yates, three best-selling writers of the 1920s and 1930s. The book was well-received and set off a new literary genre, though Norman tells me that none of the later books by others matched Dick's light touch.

P. G. Wodehouse was among the many who admired *Clubland Heroes*, and he chose Richard Usborne to write the book that his publishers were proposing to mark his 80th birthday in 1961. Rather than a biography, *Wodehouse at Work* is a scholarly and appreciative study of PGW's writings and characters—done, according to Norman, "from a literary point of view by a man with the same Classical background as Wodehouse and with the same remarkable grasp of English literature." As soon as it was published, Dick became the foremost authority on—and champion



*Richard Usborne*

of—Wodehouse (whom he did not meet until 10 years after its publication). Thus, it was no surprise when he was asked to edit *Sunset at Blandings* after PGW's death in 1975, and in addition to his subsequent compilations and revision of *Wodehouse at Work*, he produced a number of radio adaptations of Wodehouse novels. On top of all this, he was unfailingly generous in his support and encouragement of other Wodehousian scholars; Norman credits Dick with inspiring him to write *In Search of Blandings*.

*After Hours with P. G. Wodehouse* gives a strong clue to Dick's empathy with the world of Wodehouse. In Chapter 4, "Laughter in the Church," he describes his boyhood and the local curate, "a cheerful young red-head bachelor who . . . came to supper with us every Saturday. This was his bath-night, too, because his digs in the village had few amenities, and those were in the garden. The curate liked his whisky . . . or rather our whisky . . . or rather whisky. We got a bottle in, for him alone. He had a glass before supper after his bath, a glass with supper, and a glass after supper. He taught us that you could always get twenty-seven more drops out of a bottle you thought empty. He taught us that Lenten fasts and self-denials didn't apply between dusk on Saturday and dawn on Monday. . . . He had been a member of the Archery Club at John's, his college at Oxford. He said the advantage of that was that you could have girl guests and, to teach them how to shoot a bow and arrow, you had to stand behind them and put your arms round their shoulders. He was very fond of pretty girls."

Dick's own pretty girl was Monica MacArthur, an American whom he married in 1938; they had a son and a daughter. At his funeral on April 4 at the Charterhouse Chapel—attended by several members of both The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) and The Wodehouse Society—listeners were deeply touched and amused when some of Dick's more personal work was read aloud: poems that demonstrated not only his lighthearted way with words but his deep-seated love for his wife and family.

I like to think that during my too-few visits with Dick in the last years of his life, my American accent brought back some happy memories of his life with Monica. With each goodbye kiss, there was that familiar sparkle and lovely slow smile I had grown to love. I am not the only one who will miss Dick's charm, grace, and humor. Like all Plummies, though, I can take heart in the legacy he has left: a treasure-trove of books that pay loving tribute to a great writer, masterfully written by a man who was no slouch with the English language himself.

## P. G. Wodehouse and the Hollywood Cricket Club

BY JOHN HAYWARD

*A talk presented at the Hooray for Hollywood convention, August 2005. John also regaled the crowd with off-the-cuff remarks during which he had intended but failed to relate a rather spiffy poem. We expect him to remember his lines and perform the poem at our 2007 convention in Providence.*

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, known by many of his associates as Plum, was a first-class cricketer who played six times at Lord's. This is a distinction for a cricketer because of the high standards demanded of those playing at this famous London venue, which was opened by a Mr. Thomas Lord way back in 1787 as Dorset Fields.

One must consider that Wodehouseans may know a great deal about Wodehouse but perhaps just a modicum about cricket. So it is gracious to offer a few details about this honourable and gracious game, referenced as first being played by boys at Guildford, Surry, England, a jolly long time ago, possibly in the year 1550. However, it is most popularly claimed that the first cricket match was played in the 1700s at Hambledon, Hampshire (also in England), where it is said that the First Laws of the game were established. It is reasonable to assume that the home team was Hambledon C.C., though I have not the faintest idea who their opponents were.

Here is an explanation of the historic game of cricket, written, of course, anonymously.

There are two teams, one out in the field and one in. The team out in the field are trying to get out the team that are in. Each player on the team that is in, goes out and when he is out he comes in and the next man goes out and is in until he's out.

When they are all out, in the side that has been out in the field comes in and the side that has been in goes out and tries to get out those who are coming in. When all of the side that's in are out, there is always one player who, though he is not in, is still not out.

When both sides have been in and out, including the not outs, that's the end of the game.

As they say in cricket, "How's that?"

When PGW met well-known film actor C. Aubrey Smith, who founded the Hollywood Cricket Club in Los Angeles in the early 1930s, they knew not of the celebrity playing members and supporters who would later become associated with the Club. At this time the cricket teams competing in California included Los Angeles, Hollywood, Venice, Pasadena, Sons of St. George, Barbarians, Golden Gate, Marin County, Montecito and Santa Barbara (although later, these last two clubs merged to form Santa Barbara C.C.).

Listing the movie industry members joining C. Aubrey Smith as Hollywood players were Boris Karloff (born William Pratt in England in 1887), Nigel Bruce (Dr. Watson in the Sherlock Holmes movies), Errol Flynn (born in Tasmania in 1909, so he was a fair dinkum Aussie), who later became a swashbuckling movie star playing parts as a pirate and then had a big success as Robin Hood (the outlaw of Nottingham's Sherwood Forest), H. B. Warner, Basil Rathbone (on screen as Sherlock Holmes), Laurence (later Lord) Olivier, David Niven, and Clifford "Doc" Severn.

Drawing attention to the fact that P. G. Wodehouse served as the vice president of Hollywood Cricket Club in 1937 reveals that other movie celebrities who became vice presidents of the Club included the previously mentioned Boris Karloff, Nigel Bruce, and Errol Flynn, as well as Henry Stephenson, Leon Errol, Ronald Colman, Cary Grant, and George Arliss.

Also in those far-off days, members and supporters included the movie actresses Greer Garson, Ann Richards, Yvonne De Carlo, Joan Fontaine, Merle Oberon, Charlotte Greenwood, June Duprez, Mildred Steele, and Doris Lloyd. Similarly, movie actors included Arthur Treacher, Alan Mowbray, Herbert

Marshall, and (later) Ian Bannen. Additional movie industry celebrities who were members and enthusiastic supporters were Tommy Freebairn-Smith (president of the Hollywood Cricket Club for six years) and Tony Friedman (Captain 1954 and 1955).

Searching the available archives for Plum's name was unrewarding. Nowhere could be found the illustrious name of player PGW. Surely Sir Aubrey Smith, always eager to bring new players on to the team, would quickly acquire a talented cricketer as P. G. Wodehouse? Surprisingly, the answer is no. Although PGW's cricketing talents, especially his bowling, would have been of exceptional value to the team, they were never used. Though he had served as vice president of the Hollywood Cricket Club and may have written letters or articles for them, he never appeared on the field as a player. It is suggested that the writing and production skills of PGW were so much in demand that other activities could not compete or perhaps the timing was not conducive. Who knows?

It is fair to say that had Plum's cricketing prowess been used by the Hollywood Cricket Club, its history would have been filled with accounts of his high-quality performances, both with bat and ball, out on the field of play.

TWS member Murray Hedgcock, an experienced Australian journalist, former Fleet Street bureau chief, and sometime contributor to *Wisden Almanack* (known as the bible of cricket), says in his book *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, "P. G. Wodehouse and cricket—what an unbeatable combination for admirers of all things English."



## And the Winners Are . . .

It is with pleasure that we announce the names of those lucky folks who won DVDs of *Wodehouse Playhouse* in our raffle to benefit TWS's convention fund. They are:

William Watt Campbell (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)  
Luceil Carroll (New York, New York)  
Michael Eckman (Minneapolis, Minnesota)  
Lucian Endicott (Blairsville, Georgia)  
Paul Schnake (Colorado Springs, Colorado)

Congratulations to William, Luceil, Mike, Lucian, and Paul—and thanks to all who participated!

## Convention 2009: Call for Bids

In the Winter 2005 issue of *Plum Lines* (pages 10–11), we announced new procedures with regard to choosing the sites for future conventions. Henceforward, any chapter interested in acting as host must submit a formal bid according to criteria set out in the charter of The Wodehouse Society Convention Steering Committee (CSC). To obtain this document, download it from the Society's website ([www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org)) or write to Elin Woodger (see below).

The CSC will receive bids for the 2009 convention between now and the deadline of January 11, 2007. Bidding chapters will be notified by April 11, 2007, whether their application has been successful or not. Please send your bid (and any questions) to the CSC chair: Elin Woodger.

## Remembrance of Fish Past

BY C. W. DUEKER, M.D.

(Dr. Dueker—known to all and sundry as Chris—presented this illuminating paper at last year's Hooray for Hollywood convention.)

*I dedicate this essay to the late Jan Wilson Kaufman, who provided me the opportunity for expression. Jan confused my interest in drowning with an interest in Browning and thought I could be trusted. Nonetheless, she often fervently hoped that she should not be blamed for my excesses.*

My parents introduced me to the world of P. G. Wodehouse when I was a high-school student. Adolescent boys have two interests. One cannot be discussed because, in the words of Bertie Wooster, it would be “a bit too fruity for mixed company.” The other is food. I drooled over the many references to urban and rural delights. The world was real to me. For many years I thought being B. Wooster would be quite fine if one could eliminate the cigarettes.

In 1977 I made my first trip to England. It was rather a shock. Definitely not a pleasant culinary experience. Things had rather deteriorated from the Wooster days. Subsequently, I have made several trips to the UK and am happy to report that with normal effort one can eat very well as far afield as Scotland and Wales. The question of defining English food remains challenging. Despite the setback of 1977, I have remained an enthusiast of the culinary arts. I count P. G. Wodehouse as one of my influences in company with my grandmothers and my mother.

My childhood dream of becoming a circus acrobat was not attainable. I compromised by going to medical school. Not surprisingly, I became interested in nutrition, which is the science of eating. Reading Wodehouse on food was no longer mere pleasure. I

sought truth. My interests in eating, nutrition, and Wodehouse drew me inexorably to the issue of fish in the Wooster and Jeeves saga.

Wodehouse wrote beautifully and provocatively on the art of eating. His discussion of the pompano in *A Damsel in Distress* (Chapter 26) combines food's importance with its sensuality. The Wodehouse writings on nutrition focused on fish. Where did Jeeves stand on fish?

Those who pronounce Wodehouse as it is spelled often call Jeeves a butler. Readers who are better informed, but who maintain a shred of sanity, often believe that Jeeves's intellect depended on fish. Those embroiled in the dispute of Wodehousean vs. Wodehousian have said that Jeeves did not rely on fish.

Could fish have helped Jeeves, and did it help him? Where does fish rank in the pantheon of foods? Economics is commonly called the dismal science. “Dismal science” also describes much of the nutrition literature. Investigations rarely rise to the level of true science. This must be well understood before one tries to make sense of conflicting claims.

A food can be described as healthful or as healthy. Healthful foods are those that promote the health of those consuming them. Healthy foods are those that are sound (uncontaminated, fit). Wodehouse neatly illustrated these categories in the following passages:

**Healthful:** “Medical research has established that the ideal diet is one in which animal and vegetable foods are balanced.” (*Stiff Upper Lip*, Jeeves, Chapter 7)

**Healthy [not]:** “. . . the sausages on Sunday,

which were made not from contented pigs but from pigs which had expired, regretted by all, of glanders, the botts and tuberculosis.” (*Jeeves in the Offing*, Chapter 13)

All too commonly, sloppy writers call foods healthy when they mean the food is healthful. If a tubercular pig were properly butchered, it could be quite healthful. A bush of brussels sprouts may be quite healthy, but one wouldn't want to eat them. Carelessness in word choice leads to more serious errors in judgment such as using tea bags or using *gourmet* as an adjective instead of as a noun.

Fish are usually quite healthful. They are a very good source of protein, and unlike some other meats, their fat content may actually be helpful.

Wodehouse did not invent the idea that fish consumption increased intelligence. This is a very old belief. As an example, the Celts may have originated the theory that “you are what you eat.” They believed that fish were very intelligent and that eating them would make the consumer intelligent. In truth, fish do not seem particularly intelligent, despite spending so much time in schools.

Possibly fish consumption may help the brain. There are a few reports that persons with the delayed onset of Alzheimer's had a history of eating more fish than those who demonstrated Alzheimer's at an earlier age. This certainly does not prove that eating fish prevents Alzheimer's. It is suggestive enough that true experiments are being conducted in which young animals are fed varying amounts of fish and their intelligence is monitored as they age.

Does eating fish increase intelligence? Some very unsubstantiated investigations suggest that fish improves infant mentality. Any fish influence on Jeeves's cleverness would probably have been due to childhood eating habits. Fish effects are long-term. A fish is definitely not a “Buck-U-Uppo.” At times, Bertie seemed to understand this; at others he did not (especially in *Joy in the Morning*). On a few occasions, Bertie attributed the value of fish to its phosphorus content. Fish is a good, not a great, source of phosphorus. The shrimp Jeeves sought on his holidays contain more phosphorus per ounce than do fish. Phosphorus deficiency is very rarely a problem in normal diets. Increasing phosphorus consumption has not been demonstrated to help the brain.

The omega-3 fatty acids of fish do affect cardiovascular health. Fish eaters in several population groups have a lower death rate from cardiovascular disease than those who shun fish. Interestingly, the fish

oils do not inhibit coronary atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). They act by preventing fatal rhythm disturbances (dysrhythmias) and by reducing coronary blood clots. A very recent report indicated that isolated fish oils might increase dysrhythmias in persons who have implanted cardiac defibrillators. The effect of actual fish consumption was not studied. Possibly the oils used in fish-oil pills act differently than the oils ingested when fish meat is eaten. Many plants contain omega-3 fatty acids, but these are not the same oils that are found in fish. Vegetable omega-3 oils have not been demonstrated to have the same cardiovascular effects as those from fish.

Is fish always healthful? Even healthy fish may be unhealthful. Fish may harbor natural contaminants which make them unsafe to eat. As an example, the risk of ciguatera (caused by dinoflagellates) makes the consumption of large fish unwise in many warm-water regions.

Fish may become unhealthful from chemical contamination. Currently there is widespread interest in the risk of mercury poisoning from eating fish. This topic vividly demonstrates the dismal science aspect of nutrition. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are advised that ingested mercury can pass from them to the unborn or suckling child. However, the effect of this mercury remains unknown. Infant intelligence testing failed to show a correlation between measured mercury and intelligence. In this investigation, another fish contaminant (polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs) showed a direct correlation with infant intelligence. Caution, not panic, remains advisable. Unfortunately, the same fish (dark flesh such as tuna) that helps the heart and which may help the brain are those prone to mercury contamination.

Finally, there are the poisonous fish that are perfectly healthy but of restricted healthfulness. The leading example is the puffer fish, whose flesh is a Japanese delicacy (as “fugu”). Eat this tasty fish only when it is prepared by a thoughtful professional.

We can conclude that fish would have been good for Jeeves, though not in the ways Bertie imagined. But was fish important to Jeeves?

I went to the standard texts to answer this simple question. Very quickly, the question became more complex. These books about the world of Wodehouse were not designed for serious research. Topics such as fish, diet, and nutrition are not specifically discussed. References to Jeeves and fish are incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. I was left with no choice. I had to study every Wooster and Jeeves book and story. The scientist's burden, as it were.

## Chart: Books

	BWA	JEC	JENC	JED
Thank You, Jeeves	TWICE		YES	
Right Ho, Jeeves	YES	YES		
The Code of the Woosters	YES		YES	
Joy in the Morning	BERTIE 4 UNC PERCY	TWICE	TWICE	
The Mating Season	BERTIE & CATSMEAT		YES	
Ring for Jeeves	AUTHOR 2 EARL R. 4	YES	YES	
Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit				
Jeeves in the Offing	TWICE		YES	
Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves	TWICE		YES	
Much Obligated, Jeeves	YES		YES	
Aunts Aren't Gentlemen				

The accompanying chart lists the Wooster novels and their piscatorial contents. In all but two novels, at least one assertion is made associating fish with the brain of Jeeves (BWA). In the unusual *Ring for Jeeves*, Bertie does not appear, but there are six assertions about Jeeves and fish.

Jeeves never initiated a discussion of the benefits of fish. Quite likely he did not feel it was his place to boast. However, he also never denied in the novels that fish strengthened his brain (JED). In eight novels Jeeves does not confirm the importance of fish (JENC). Interestingly, in *Joy in the Morning* and in *Ring for Jeeves*, Jeeves confirms some assertions and does not comment on others.

The instances where Jeeves does not comment must not be interpreted as denials of the value of fish. Wodehouse quoted Tennyson on the power of absence. When Jeeves is offstage, he cannot comment. He did not hear the assertion; he does not initiate claims. Only in *Much Obligated, Jeeves* and *Joy in the Morning* does Jeeves hear an assertion and fail to comment. These are the sole “no comments” of importance. They neither verify or deny the importance of fish.

Jeeves concurs that fish improves his intelligence in three novels (JEC). One reference book incorrectly

states that a confirmation occurred in *The Code of the Woosters* (Chapter 21). In *Right Ho, Jeeves* (Chapter 21), this exchange takes place: “Still eating plenty of fish?” [Wooster] “Yes, sir.” [Jeeves] *Joy in the Morning* is the strongest novel for fish. Bertie is sure that Jeeves’s angling and fish eating will be of value. At the conclusion of the book, Bertie sends Jeeves to the kitchen to brood and eat fish. Jeeves responds that there is “only a tin of anchovy paste, sir.” Bertie recognizes the weakness of anchovy paste (the tea bag of the fish world). The problems are solved without the assistance of Jeeves, who apologizes for his failure by noting, “It appears, sir, I regret to say, that there is no anchovy paste.” A reference book cites this episode as “indirect proof” of Jeeves’s reliance on fish. To the contrary, this episode provides strong support for the theory that Jeeves believed in fish.

The Wooster novels are well-organized. The stories challenge even the most conscientious investigator. How many stories are there? This most basic question does not have a satisfactory answer. The multiple titles are the first hurdle. Is “The Artistic Career of Corky” (*Carry On, Jeeves*) different from “Leave It to Jeeves” (*The Strand Magazine* and *My Man Jeeves*)? Don’t expect agreement from the reference books.

Wodehouse reworked many of his stories. Late

## Chart: Stories

	BWA	JEC	JENC	JED
The Aunt and the Sluggard	Bertie Asks			YES
Jeeves & the Impending Doom	Yes		Yes	
Dog Macintosh	Yes	Yes		
The Love that Purifies	Bertie Asks			Does Not Respond

stories may be revisions of earlier stories. *The Inimitable Jeeves* contains stories that are divided from their original magazine appearance. Each “new” story was given a new title. This led to the very unfortunate title “Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebellum” (part of “Jeeves in the Springtime”). The cerebellum controls balance, not thinking. Someone was not exerting his cerebrum in the editing. The split stories assumed their original form in the later *Jeeves Omnibus* (and *The World of Jeeves*).

Formerly unknown stories continue to be discovered. Rumors circulate about two stories that might well discuss Jeeves’s reliance on fish. These stories—“Bertie, Taken at High Tide” (commissioned by the Ullapool Fishery Council) and “Jeeves and the Christmas Sprat” (a Christmas-gift book from the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank)—may be in the trove of a reclusive collector. Perhaps they are held by The Estate because of their commercial origins.

A literary scholar likes to be able to order stories by their dates of publication. This makes it easier to detect thematic progression. We know, for example, that the Drones Club was not in the earliest Wooster stories. The first fish reference was in “The Aunt and the Sluggard,” published in 1916 in *The Strand Magazine*. This story was in *My Man Jeeves* in England (1919) and *Carry On, Jeeves* in the United States (1927), but not in *The Inimitable Jeeves* (U.K., 1927) or *Jeeves* (U.S., 1923). Therefore American readers might not have recognized its primacy. The anthologies generally do not list story publication dates. More seriously, they print the stories out of order.

Because of the confusion rampant amongst the stories, I have chosen to restrict the accompanying table to only those stories that mention fish. In “The Aunt and the Sluggard,” Bertie questions Jeeves about fish as a booster of intelligence. Jeeves says that fish does not power his brain. They agree that Jeeves’s intelligence is a gift. In this early story, Bertie is still getting to know Jeeves, and the question is very reasonable. However, in

later days, Bertie will ignore Jeeves’s denial. This is the only time, in story or novel, that Jeeves flatly denies his underlying reliance on fish.

In “Jeeves and the Dog Macintosh,” Bertie advises Jeeves to eat sardines, and Jeeves agrees to do so. Later, after solving the problem, Jeeves says he did not eat the fish, since he dislikes sardines. In “The Love that Purifies,” Bertie asks Jeeves if any food would help him (fish is not specifically mentioned). Jeeves demurs as he has already solved the problem.

Throughout the stories and novels there are references to fish that may indirectly apply to the question of fish and intelligence. Jeeves shudders at Bertie’s request for sardines at tea (“Comrade Bingo”); Jeeves prefers a slice of ham to the breakfast kipper (*The Mating Season*, Chapter 8). The stories and novels refer several times to Jeeves’s fondness for shrimping. Shrimp are crustaceans, not fish, but they are included in the world of seafood. People shrimp to obtain food. There is no catch-and-release policy for shrimping. And we know from *Joy in the Morning* that Jeeves enjoys fishing and eats the fish he catches. The final Wooster story to mention fish (“Jeeves and the Greasy Bird” in *Plum Pie*, 1966) reveals Jeeves’s desire to catch a tarpon in Florida. The noble tarpon is a trophy fish; few would consider eating one.

What do we conclude from this investigation? Bertie believed in the power of fish, though he did not understand how it worked. In most cases, Jeeves did not comment on the value of fish. However, most of these “no comment” instances do not prove a lack of interest in fish. Jeeves often agreed that fish was important. He only once stated that fish did not strengthen his brain.

Life cannot always be lived as a musical comedy. Sometimes the pursuit of truth requires a vigorous splashing in the literature of life.

*Note: The author thanks Karen Shotting for the Pompano reference.*

# My First Encounter with P. G. Wodehouse

BY KEN LUDWIG

*Ken Ludwig is an award-winning playwright whose impressive credits are far too numerous to list here (though some are mentioned in this article); for more information on Ken, visit his website at [www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com). We are delighted to print his contribution to our My First Time series.*



*The illustrious, and obviously well-read, Ken Ludwig*

I am often asked (well, at least once) by prominent journalists (I think he was from the *Sheboygan Free Press*), “Who was your greatest influence on becoming a writer?” I always think about answering “Tolstoy” because it would sound so impressive; then I tell the truth. It was Wodehouse by a length.

I wrote a number of plays and musicals, including *Lend Me a Tenor*, *Crazy for You*, and *Moon over Buffalo*, quite consciously thinking about Wodehouse; and he has certainly influenced most of the things I’ve ever written.

My love for everything Wodehouse began when I was 14 years old. My mother and I were cleaning boxes out of my grandmother’s attic when she came upon a copy of *Cocktail Time* and turned to me and said, “You know, Kenny, you might enjoy this. Give it a try.” That night, under the covers, knowing that mothers never have very good recommendations, I started to read the book, festooned in a sort of vague grumpiness. (I was the one festooned in the grumpiness; the book was festooned in a sort of blue.)

I read the first paragraph . . . and I sat up. I read the second and third . . . and the little hairs on the back of my neck stood up and saluted. By the end of the first chapter, the scales had fallen from my eyes and it was for me the work of an instant to realize that this Wodehouse fellow was the man for me. I proceeded that summer to read every Wodehouse book I could get my hands on, and I’ve been reading him ever since.

It was the same summer, and in significant part because of Wodehouse, that I decided to become a writer. (Admittedly, Austen, Coward, and Shakespeare had something to do with it, too.) We lived in a smallish town in Southern Pennsylvania (“York” by name, the setting of one of my latest plays), and for the next several years I would make a yearly pilgrimage to the Colonial Bookstore (the one in the little shopping strip near the hospital) to buy the latest Wodehouse—and then devour it in one unstoppable gulp that night. Thus were acquired and digested *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*, *The Girl in Blue*, and many another late work of the master.

Professionally, as I say, I’ve *thought* about Wodehouse a good deal as I’ve written my plays over the years; but my actual encounters with anything resembling a professional Wodehousian have been few. The exception had to do with one of my earliest plays, *Sullivan & Gilbert*.

When I was casting *Sullivan & Gilbert* for a production at the National Arts Centre of Canada (and subsequently the St. Lawrence Centre and the Kennedy Center), in came a chap to read for the part of Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh. His name was Edward Duke, and he was already famous for his one-man show entitled *Jeeves Takes Charge*. Well, Wodehouse fanatic that I am, I had seen *Jeeves Takes Charge* twice, and when Edward came in and started stuttering and blustering as the Duke of Edinburgh, I almost fainted for joy. Needless to say, he was cast in the role—and went on to be more than smashing for the entire run of the play.

Edward and I became great friends during those months and shared many Wodehouse stories and moments. He liked to kid me about the opening night of my play *Lend Me a Tenor* in the West End, which had occurred about a year before we met. By coincidence, he had sat directly behind me that night—and he said that I reminded him of Bertie Wooster on one of those hideous mornings after a long night at the Drones Club, sluicing and throwing bread rolls at the other members. In short, he said, I was a wreck and could have done with one of Jeeves’s morning tissue restorers with the Worcester Sauce, the raw egg, and the red pepper.

I recently started a website ([www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com)), and of course I urge everyone who reads this to go there and spend hours and make it their life’s work to visit it daily. But aside from that, I think it shows how Wodehouse has influenced my work every step of the way. I think you can see it in the bright color palette of the sets and costumes, suggesting strongly that comedy is afoot; in the kinds of actors who like to be in my plays; and most of all, in the stories of the plays themselves, which are summarized there: Comedies, all. A bit lighthearted. A bit frivolous. Hopefully touching. And hopefully a bit Wodehouse.



# What Ho, Jeeves, We Need You

BY BARBARA SHELLY

*This article appeared in the Kansas City Star on March 3, 2006. It is reprinted here in abbreviated form by the kind permission of the author. The full article can be viewed online at [http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/columnists/barbara\\_shelly/14012123.htm](http://www.kansascity.com/mld/kansascity/news/columnists/barbara_shelly/14012123.htm).*

It took the dot.com world to fire Jeeves. The new owner of his search engine decided the butler wasn't holding his own against powerhouses like Google and Yahoo, and sent him packing.

So be it. I never really liked the idea of turning the dignified champion of the P. G. Wodehouse novels into a computerized information service. Jeeves is meant for bigger things than answering queries like, "What is the distance between Kansas City and Poplar Bluff, Mo.?"

What we need isn't a picture of a goofy-looking valet as the token for a search engine. We need the real Jeeves, brought to life to assume his role as troubleshooter, sage, and self-effacing hero. Things would be much different in this nation if Jeeves had been alive, well, and working in the White House the past 10 years.

Before I explain, some background: Jeeves is the best-known character of the late P. G. Wodehouse, a prolific English author. A discreet and classy valet, Jeeves lurks in the background of Wodehouse's hilarious novels. His job is to unravel the knots into which his employer, the affable airhead Bertram Wooster, gets himself tangled. Jeeves always achieves his task with aplomb.

Jeeves specializes in resolving embarrassing situations before they get out of hand. I feel certain the Monica Lewinsky scandal could have been headed off had Jeeves been stationed in the Clinton White House. And wouldn't *that* have been a good thing.

Some of the political analysis I've seen leads me to think that Dick Cheney was picked as vice president so he could play a Jeevesian role in the Bush White House—offer counsel from behind the curtain and keep the boss out of trouble.

If that's the case, it hasn't panned out. Jeeves is the ultimate behind-the-scenes operator. He would never have landed himself on the late-night comedy shows. The VP has had a bad time lately, and I'm sorry to pile on, but Dick Cheney is no Jeeves.

.....

This is an age in which nearly everyone, it seems,

wants to star in his or her own show. Memoirs are best-sellers, and some of them aren't even factual. Folks starve themselves in jungles, just to be on camera. Couples throw themselves over-the-top weddings, making sure every second is on videotape.

What we need are more people like Jeeves. Not to be butlers—people can open their own doors, for heaven's sake.

We need modest people who are so confident of their intelligence and character that they're content to remain in the background and make other folks look good.

Jeeves was wasted on a search engine, but he shouldn't be canned. He should be promoted, given a raise, and reassigned to the halls of power.



## Wodehouse and Chaucer— Birds of a Feather?

BY RAY STEEN

Richard West concludes his book *Chaucer 1340–1400* by speculating on what sort of man Geoffrey Chaucer was. Much like P. G. Wodehouse was his assessment. Both saw the funny side of things, and both were self-deprecating, Wodehouse famously so. Chaucer publicizes his fatness in *The House of Fame*, an early long poem, where the eagle complains how hard he is to carry. The Host in *The Canterbury Tales* holds up Chaucer's girth to the ridicule of the company. The Man of Law, when it's his turn to tell a tale, bemoans the fact that it is hard to think of one that Chaucer hasn't already told in his lousy poetry.

But here, don't take my word for it, read it for yourself:

I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn  
That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly  
On metres and on ryming craftily,  
Hath sied hem, in swich Englissh as he kan

That's it, in a nutshell.

# The Long, Strange Trip of Ivor Llewellyn

BY BRIAN TAVES

The progression of P. G. Wodehouse's portrayal of Hollywood, in a caustic manner from the mid-1930s with the "Mulliners of Hollywood" stories and *Laughing Gas*, to a more gentle, nostalgic view, is to be found in the saga of Ivor Llewellyn. Llewellyn, president of the Superba-Llewellyn Motion Picture Corporation, succeeded Jacob Schnellenhamer as Wodehouse's principal fictional creation of a studio executive. A man with three chins who hums extracts from the musical scores of old Superba-Llewellyn features, he is heartless and only has use for those from whom he needs favors.

Llewellyn first appears in a Wodehouse book of 1935, *The Luck of the Bodkins*, which began a series with Hollywood characters but set outside the city. *The Luck of the Bodkins* is a shipboard romance whose plot may have been suggested by the work Wodehouse was doing on the play that became *Anything Goes*. His word is notoriously unreliable, as Clara Bow-type star Lottie Blossom notes in Chapter 15: "Why, if Ikey had an only child and he promised her a doll on her birthday, the first thing she would do, if she was a sensible kid, would be to go to her lawyer and have a contract drawn up and signed, with penalty clauses." He is unpredictable and temperamental, and tends to avoid flattering those he seeks to employ, instead seeking to create an inferiority complex. Like Schnellenhamer, Ivor Llewellyn's cultural awareness is minimal. Hearing that Tennyson is a famous poet, Llewellyn hires the first English author of that name he meets, unaware that the Tennyson of note has been dead for decades.

Llewellyn has been ordered by his wife, Grayce, to smuggle a pearl necklace through customs on his return from France. Such instructions are not to be taken lightly, for Grayce was one of leading panther-women of the silent screen, famous for the role of Mimi, the female Apache in *When Paris Sleeps*. Mabel Spence, Llewellyn's sister-in-law, proposes putting Reggie Tennyson on the payroll as an advisor for English sequences, mistakenly believing Bodkin to be an undercover customs agent who could be bribed in this fashion.

Until this moment the emotion which any reference to that fox-hunting in July thing always caused him had held him dumb. It was a sore subject with him. One of the features of his super-film, *Glorious Devon*, it had been the occasion of much indignation in the English Press and of such a choking and spluttering

and outraged what-whatting among purple-faced Masters of Hounds in the Shires as had threatened to produce an epidemic of apoplexy. This Mr. Llewellyn could have borne with fortitude. But it had also resulted in the complete failure of the picture throughout the island kingdom, and that had cut him to the quick.

To Llewellyn's continual vexation, much of his family is on the payroll, even his wife's cousin Egbert's sister Genevieve, a reader at \$350 a week.

Llewellyn would return years later. In *Cocktail Time* (1958) and *Biffen's Millions* (1964, titled *Frozen Assets* in the U.K.), Llewellyn is an offstage character, referred to but never actually appearing. In *Cocktail Time* Llewellyn hears that the new book of that title would excite filmgoers if he can get it past the censors, and bids against Medulla-Oblongata-Glutz for the film rights. In *Biffen's Millions*, Edmund Biffen Christopher hopes Llewellyn will give him a job in "pix," while Lord Tilbury must feign illness to provide an excuse for a missed luncheon with the powerful mogul, one of his principal advertisers.

Llewellyn was a principal character in two of Wodehouse's very last books, *The Plot That Thickened* (1973, titled *Pearls, Girls, and Monty Bodkin* in the U.K.) and *Bachelors Anonymous* (1974). Both novels pick up where *The Luck of the Bodkins* had left off nearly 40 years earlier, and the tone toward Hollywood is much softer, perhaps also a result of the success of *The World of Wooster* and *The World of Wodehouse* on television. By comparison with the other studio bosses of Wodehouse's imagining, Ivor Llewellyn is now a benevolent dictator, much changed from the character etched in *The Luck of the Bodkins*.

Most obviously, Llewellyn has changed religion. In *The Luck of the Bodkins* Llewellyn was, like most other studio heads, apparently Jewish, and was regularly called "Ikey" by intimates, a diminutive form of Isaac usually given to children. By the 1970s Wodehouse has transformed Llewellyn into a gentile, a native of Wales. He left home after falling in love with a schoolteacher who wanted him to learn English literature. He recalled how he "came to America and got a job with Joe Fishbein, who was the big noise in pictures at that time, and one day discovered where he had buried the body, and of course after that I never looked back. I was

like a son to him. So that sequence ended happily. . . .”

At the studio Llewellyn remains such a forbidding figure that he reminds Monty Bodkin “of one of those unpleasant creatures in the Book of Revelations.” Despite having worked at the studio for a year, Bodkin remarks that “whenever we meet my bones still turn to water and Dow-Jones registers another sharp drop in my morale. I shuffle my feet. I twiddle my fingers. My pores open and I break into a cold sweat, if you will pardon the expression.” However, Llewellyn becomes a sympathetic figure; he is dominated at home, deprived of his own spending money because of a joint bank account, and placed on a strict diet. Grayce, who is divorcing Llewellyn by the end of the novel, continues to harken back to her Oscar-winning role in *Passion in Paris*, a picture in which, during the course of its shooting, “she used up three directors, two assistant directors, and a script girl. They were never themselves again.”

Oft-married, all his wives ultimately cast him off like a soiled glove. His only excuse for the repetition is: “That’s Hollywood. You sort of drift into it. There’s nothing much to do after office hours, so you go out and get married.”

Wodehouse begins *The Plot That Thickened* in Hollywood:

As always when the weather was not unusual the Californian sun shone brightly down on the Superba-Llewellyn motion-picture studio at Llewellyn City. Silence had gripped the great building except for the footsteps of some supervisor hurrying back to resume his supervising or the occasional howl from the writer’s ghetto as some author with a headache sought in vain to make sense of the story which had been handed to him for treatment.

Monty Bodkin has completed a year as a production advisor at Llewellyn City, fulfilling the edict of his prospective father-in-law that he prove he can hold down a job. However, beginning with the second chapter, Bodkin returns to England to claim his bride but is told that since he secured the job by blackmailing Llewellyn, his year’s work is voided and he must begin again. Monty’s former secretary obtains him another job with Llewellyn, who is visiting England to write his memoirs; Llewellyn is happy to hire his former employee in order to borrow from him the funds that his joint bank account, shared with his wife, has rendered inaccessible. The remainder of the narrative revolves around standard Wodehouse themes: uniting the right couple, a stolen necklace, and some amusing criminals.

In *Bachelors Anonymous* Llewellyn, newly divorced from Grayce, leaves Los Angeles for a sojourn with the London production office. Despite his determination to avoid another marriage, he quickly meets temperamental stage star Vera Dalrymple. Because of Vera, Llewellyn sees her new play, *Cousin Angela*, three times, although her demands for changes in the script cause it to close in a week. The frustrated playwright is advised by Llewellyn that, “With a little fixing, it might make a good picture. I don’t say great, I don’t even say colossal, I just say good. It flopped, yes, but the practiced eye like mine can see possibilities in the worst stage flop.”

Llewellyn is simultaneously generous and an egotist—a “modern Santa Claus” who knows the pleasure his company will add to any meal. His lawyer, Ephraim Trout, is a member of a local group called Bachelors Anonymous, which uses the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous to persuade their members of the perilous fate that may result from so little as taking a woman to dinner. By this point Llewellyn’s character has been considerably diluted, and he has little distinction as a movie mogul; he is simply another comic figure for whom wedding bells are the ultimate peril. The commentary on the motion picture industry in *Bachelors Anonymous* is considerably diminished even from *The Plot That Thickened*, and the narrative seems rather perfunctory, failing to live up to the comic potential of its premise.

As demonstrated by the arc of Llewellyn’s character, the bitterness Wodehouse felt from his own Hollywood memories was dimming with the passage of time. Moreover, he could look with increasing satisfaction at the quantity and quality of adaptations of his work in the new medium of the small screen, television providing lively yet faithful adaptations. Wodehouse must have been comforted; despite earlier disillusionment, at the end he saw the best on the screen. Although with *The Plot That Thickened* and *Bachelors Anonymous*, the author’s last years were laced with reminders of his own Hollywood sojourn so many years before, he now wrote gently of the filmmakers that once he had mocked.

The thing above all others that the holy moment called for was privacy, and privacy in the presence of Ivor Llewellyn was out of the question. There was only one of Mr. Llewellyn, but he somehow created the illusion of being a large and fashionable audience with opera-glasses.

*The Luck of the Bodkins* (1935)

# Collecting The Autograph Edition

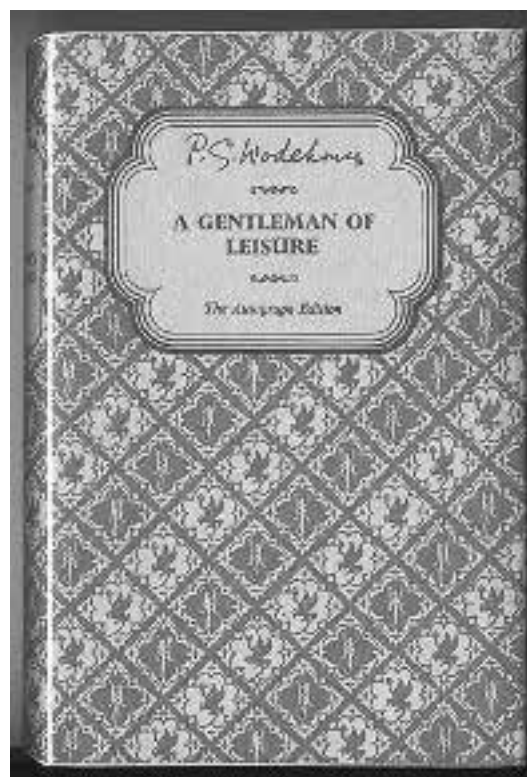
BY JOHN GRAHAM

*“I would like to buy a handsome (and as complete as possible) set of P. G. Wodehouse books. Is there a publishing house that offers this?”*

This innocent and perfectly reasonable inquiry was posted recently to our TWS website. Corresponding secretary Amy Plofker had to inform the (no doubt disappointed) visitor that, putting aside the issue of paperbacks, no complete set of hardback Wodehouse books in a uniform edition has ever been produced. Tony Ring concurred but pointed out that the U.K. publisher Everyman (along with their U.S. counterpart Overlook Press) has now come closer than anyone else to producing such a set, with 46 titles (and counting) available as of this spring. This eclipses the previous record of 41 titles held by The Autograph Edition of Herbert Jenkins, which debuted exactly 50 years ago. In honor of this golden anniversary, I want to devote this collecting column to a short history and compendium of little-known facts concerning The Autograph Edition.

In May 1956 Plum's longtime British publisher Herbert Jenkins republished eight of his older titles in a new uniform format, which they described in many subsequent ads as “printed from new type, attractively bound and with coloured foil spines.” What the ads failed to mention was that each volume was bound in green cloth with a replica “P. G. Wodehouse” signature blind-stamped diagonally across the lower right-hand corner of the front cover. The eight titles selected for publication were *The Inimitable Jeeves*; *Thank You, Jeeves*; *The Clicking of Cuthbert*; *The Girl on the Boat*; *Lord Emsworth and Others*; *Hot Water*; *Summer Moonshine*; and *A Damsel in Distress*.

By January 1957 The Autograph Edition had expanded to 11 volumes (with the inclusion of *Meet Mr. Mulliner*, *The Heart of a Goof*, and *The Luck of the Bodkins*), as listed on the back inside flap of the dust jacket for *Something Fishy*. This was the first of many times the new series would be advertised on the dust jacket of a new Wodehouse first edition. The bottom of the ad reads: “The intention is to add to this list from time to time until eventually all the works by P. G. Wodehouse are available in the series.” Over the next few years, Herbert Jenkins started to make good on its ambitious promise. Three new titles were added during 1957 and another four in 1958. Between 1959 and 1965, two to four new titles joined the series each year.



Finally, in 1966, the addition of *The Coming of Bill*, *Piccadilly Jim* and *Mulliner Nights* brought the series to 41 volumes. No more titles were ever added to the series.

Although the series ended abruptly in 1966, it is clear that for a time in the late 1960s more titles were contemplated and, indeed, even advertised. For example, on the back inside flap of the dust jacket for *The World of Jeeves* (published in July 1967), 43 titles are listed as being in the series: *Pigs Have Wings* and *The Adventures of Sally* are the two unexpected ones. Open the book and there, opposite the title page, is an even greater surprise: eight new titles are said to be “in the course of preparation.” By October 1967 the promises get even more fantastic: According to the book list in *Company for Henry*, 16 titles are now said to be in preparation. By 1970, however, the promised list (in *The Girl in Blue*) has shrunk to just four: *Pigs Have Wings*, *Mike at Wrykyn*, *The Adventures of Sally*, and *French Leave*. And finally, to add insult to injury, in October 1971 the dust jacket for *Much Obligated, Jeeves* (which is the last ever to mention The Autograph Edition) lists not 41 but only 39 titles in the series: *The Inimitable Jeeves* and *Ring for Jeeves* have been unceremoniously dropped or forgotten.

The 41 titles in The Autograph Edition span Plum's most productive years from *Piccadilly Jim* (1918) to *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (1954) and include all but nine titles Herbert Jenkins had previously published.

The nine missing books are: *The Adventures of Sally*, *Money in the Bank*, *Joy in the Morning*, *Full Moon*, *Spring Fever*, *Uncle Dynamite*, *The Mating Season*, *The Old Reliable*, and *Pigs Have Wings*. There is just one title in the series Herbert Jenkins had never published before—*Louder and Funnier*—and as a result, to this day it remains the most elusive and expensive title to acquire. Also missing from the series are the nine books first published by Methuen; these are *The Little Nugget*, *The Man Upstairs*, *Something Fresh*, *Uneasy Money*, *The Man with Two Left Feet*, *Bill the Conqueror*, *Sam the Sudden*, *The Small Bachelor*, and *Doctor Sally*. Failure to include these does not seem to be entirely a matter of copyrights, as Herbert Jenkins had already republished *Doctor Sally* in 1952 and would begin reprinting the other eight titles in 1969.

The Autograph Edition can definitely be recommended as a collectible series. I have known book dealers to ask as much as \$3,200 for a complete set. It is far cheaper and much more fun in my opinion to try to put together a set on your own. Individual titles in dust jacket often sell for as little as \$10 on eBay. Herbert Jenkins reissued most of the 41 titles numerous times; first issues and later printings are hard to distinguish from each other, but McIlvaine (section K) can help. Frankly, since none can be said to be a true first edition, first issues and reprints often sell for similar prices. The books are wrapped in light-brown dust jackets decorated with a flowered wallpaper motif of uniform design in a single color (usually blue, red, green, orange, purple or yellow) that changes from volume to volume. The first 11 titles in the series (those published in 1956) have all-white page edges; first issues of the other 30 titles have top page edges that are blue-green. Wodehouse's blind-stamped signature is curiously missing from some later printings.

What did Wodehouse himself think about The Autograph Edition? We will never know for sure, but according to Herbert Warren Wind in *The World of P. G. Wodehouse* (Praeger, 1971, p. 59), "nothing [Herbert Jenkins] has done for him ever pleased him more." Wind also tells us there are 45 titles in the series, so perhaps he cannot be fully trusted. But then, of course, there is that famous photograph which is the frontispiece for Joseph Connolly's Wodehouse biography: a smiling Plum at home in Remsenberg, with part of The Autograph Edition clearly visible in the background.

"I'm going to forgive him the day after tomorrow," she said. "Not earlier, because we must have discipline."

*The Mating Season* (1949)



## P. G. Wodehouse in Wartime Germany

In the last issue of *Plum Lines*, readers learned of a unique tour. Inspired by Robert McCrum's *Wodehouse: A Life*, it has been arranged by TWS member Patrick Hinchy and will be operated by Travel Editions of London, a reputable and accredited tour operator. The tour centers on the 11-month period in the early part of World War II when P. G. Wodehouse was captured and interned by the Germans, as well as his two-year stay in Nazi Germany when he made his controversial broadcasts from Berlin. Based on Mr. McCrum's research, the tour will begin on August 20 in Krakow, Poland. Highlights in Poland will be visits to the mental hospital at Tost where Wodehouse was interned and to the country house in Lobris where he spent the summer of 1943. Then it will be on to Germany, where the highlights will be visits to Dresden and to the Harz Mountains and Degenershausen, the estate where Wodehouse spent his happiest times during an otherwise traumatic period. On August 24 tour members will arrive in Berlin and have dinner in the Hotel Bristol, where Plum and Ethel stayed after leaving the Adlon. Tour members will then depart from Berlin on the 25th.

This is a rare and exciting opportunity to trace Wodehouse's steps during a particularly significant time of his life. The tour will cost £550 (approximately \$1,000 at the current exchange rate) plus airfare. All bookings must be made with Travel Editions; details of the tour can be found on their website at: <http://www.traveleditions.co.uk>; enter "Wodehouse" in "Search for a Tour by Keyword." For those without Internet access, additional information can be obtained by writing to Travel Editions at 69-85 Tabernacle Street, London EC2A 4BD; telephone: +44-20-7251-0045 (in the U.K.: 020 7251 0045). Email: [tours@traveleditions.co.uk](mailto:tours@traveleditions.co.uk).

*A final note from the editors: If you plan to go on this tour, please let us know—we would welcome a report of it for a future issue of Plum Lines.*

# Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Damon Runyon

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

One morning along about four bells, I am standing in front of Mindy's restaurant on Broadway with a guy by the name of Regret, who has this name because it seems he wins a very large bet the year the Whitney filly, Regret, grabs the Kentucky Derby, and can never forget it, which is maybe because it is the only very large bet he ever wins in his life.

“The Bloodhounds of Broadway”

There is perhaps only one humorist of the 20th century with a voice as distinctive as that of P. G. Wodehouse. It is a voice that instantly evokes a time, a place, and a particular and unique set of characters. That voice belongs to Damon Runyon, a New York newspaperman whose comic, sentimental stories of a Broadway fantasyland of tough-but-tender gangsters, gamblers and chorus girls struck a chord with the Depression-era public. If Runyon is not a top-ranked favorite today, he remains read, and quite readable. His real life was equally as romantic as his fiction, although, as is so often the case, not always as much fun.

Alfred Damon Runyan (the name became Runyon much later, through a printer's error) first saw the light of day in Manhattan, as benefits one who made so much of his reputation there. However, this was Manhattan, Kansas, where he was born on October 4, 1880 (one year before another October baby, named Wodehouse, for those of you who are keeping score). His father was a descendant of French Huguenots who came to America before the Revolution; his mother could trace her family back to 17th-century Massachusetts.

Alfred Lee Runyan, Damon's father, was also a newspaperman, but one of uncertain temper. He had known his share of adventure, serving out west under General Custer (and having had the good sense to quit Custer's service some eight years before Little Big Horn), but he never quite settled back down in Kansas. He ran several newspapers in several towns from 1880 to 1887, but seems to have always quarreled with his business partners. Finally, in 1887, he moved his son, three daughters, and consumptive wife to Pueblo, Colorado, where, no longer able to find financing for his editorial ideas, he took a downwardly mobile job as a printer. Within a year, his wife died and his three daughters were sent to live with relatives. Young Damon was alone with his father and—increasingly, as Alfred Lee spent more and more time in the local

saloons—alone. Like Wodehouse, Damon was never really raised by his parents, and like Wodehouse, he appears to have spent very little time regretting it.

Very unlike Wodehouse, however, the younger Runyan ran wild. He rarely attended school, hung out with a gang, and by age 15 was a cub reporter on the Pueblo Chieftain. Pueblo was a wide-open town in the 1890s, still living up to the Western reputation for gunplay, rustling, and robbery. Young Damon Runyon—it was around this time that his name change occurred—soaked it all in. He also began his lifelong fascination with outlaw types—an affection that would transition into his relationships with the gangsters of New York City and would ultimately make him rich and famous—and began to drink heavily as well.

In 1898, lying about his age, Runyon enlisted to serve in the Spanish-American War. Eventually he was sent to the Philippines and was later mustered out in San Francisco. After blowing all his pay, he rode the rails back to Colorado, where he worked on various newspapers, ending up at the *Denver Post* in 1905. He was fired in 1906 and later that year got on staff at another Denver paper, the *Rocky Mountain News*. This time his work struck a chord, and he teamed with a cartoonist to provide a satirical look at local politics. He also cut his teeth on sports and began to write short stories for national magazines. These stories were based on his experiences covering strikebreakers in Colorado, hobbing across America, and in the army. They brought in a little money and a small national reputation.

But Runyon was in trouble. His drinking was out of control, and his sweetheart, Ellen Egan, wouldn't marry him in those circumstances. Runyon resolved to reform but felt he could never quit in the familiar setting of Denver. In fall 1910 he moved east, probably the first man in history to go to New York to stay out of trouble. Yet it worked. He was taken on as a sportswriter for the *New York American* and successfully gave up drinking, and he and Ellen were married in 1911. They had two children, but the marriage was not happy. Runyon was an absent husband and father, and the couple eventually divorced.

Had he never written any more fiction, Runyon would have occupied a minor place in American literary annals as a widely regarded writer of baseball, boxing, and racing prose, and as a Broadway columnist. His approach was to write about the people of the games: the players, the fans, the gamblers. His eye for description



*Damon Runyon pounds the keys.*

and his ear for dialect stood him in good stead. So did his wide circle of acquaintances. He had known the lawman-turned-sportswriter Bat Masterson in Denver. Now he met the likes of Al Capone (a next-door neighbor in his Miami winter home); Pancho Villa (in Mexico, Villa introduced him to his, Runyon's, second wife); and all the colorful denizens of Broadway. It was inevitable that he would turn toward these characters and romanticize them in his stories.

Runyon's first Broadway story, "Romance in the Roaring Forties," appeared in *Cosmopolitan* in July 1929. It was an instant hit. He published three more stories that year. "Madame La Gimp" appeared in *Cosmopolitan* in October, alongside a Wodehouse story, "Jeeves and the Dog McIntosh." The November *Cosmopolitan* showcased Runyon's "Dark Dolores," Wodehouse's "Jeeves and the Love That Purifies," and a Ring Lardner story. No doubt readers needed some laughs that autumn, as the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began.

Runyon's stories were an instant hit with the public. Between 1929 and 1945, he published more than 60 tales of Broadway, mostly in *Cosmopolitan* and *Collier's*, with some in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The first collection of his works, *Guys and Dolls*, was published in 1931 and was a smash. In all, 12 volumes of Runyon stories would be released, three posthumously.

Hollywood saw the possibilities immediately. "Madame La Gimp" became director Frank Capra's first big sound hit under the title *Lady for a Day*, gathering Oscar nominations for Best Picture and Best Director. In all, over 30 films have been made from Runyon

material, as well as a radio and later TV series, *Damon Runyon Theatre*. His works have starred such diverse performers as Bette Davis, Bob Hope, Henry Fonda, Jackie Gleason, Marlon Brando, Martin & Lewis, and Madonna. The 1932 story "Little Miss Marker" was the first big hit for a six-year-old Shirley Temple and has since been remade three times.

Runyon's death in 1946 from throat cancer might have signaled the end of his place in the public consciousness. But he had one more claim to fame. In 1950 Frank Loesser, (the same Frank Loesser who later planned to produce the never-finished Wodehouse/Bolton Jeeves musical), wrote the music and lyrics for his biggest Broadway hit, *Guys and Dolls*. Based on the Runyon story "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," the show ran for 1,200 performances in New York. It was made into a rather peculiar 1955 film starring Frank Sinatra and Marlon Brando (probably the only movie ever made in which it can be said that Dean Martin should have played a Marlon Brando role) and remains a staple of community theater and high schools. It is reasonable to say that more people probably know Runyon's name from that show than from his actual stories.

The stories are well worth revisiting. Runyon's conceit of always writing in the present tense ("So I say to him, 'What do you say?") survives the test of time and never grows wearisome. The idea of outlaws with hearts of gold and chorus girls with attitude has always worked in the right hands—in fact, Plum worked this field with considerable success himself. Remember Bat Jarvis?

One of the differences, though, is that Wodehouse never prided himself on his real-life association with the gangster types. Runyon reveled in it—much to the distaste of at least one of his biographers. Jimmy Breslin, in *Damon Runyon: A Life* (1991), makes clear that Runyon had a predilection for the unsavory types and profited by it. Those in the know could spot the real-life characters flattered by being a part of Runyon's fictional Broadway. His character "Dave the Dude" was Frank Costello, head of Murder, Inc. "Armand 'The Brain' Rosenthal" was gambler Arnold Rothstein, the man who fixed the 1919 World Series. "Missouri Martin" was Texas Guinan, the Broadway speakeasy owner, and "Waldo Winchester" was fellow Broadway columnist Walter Winchell.

Gangsters like Al Capone and Owney Madden, killers like Charley McManus, the crooked gamblers and sports promoters—Runyon knew them all. And he reveled in it. His newspaper columns were full of references to Famous Mugs I Have Known. Who killed Dutch Schultz? Mad Dog Coll? Read Runyon to find

out. The inside dope on the Lindbergh kidnapping? Runyon will tell you. Small wonder that his literary output seemed incidental to him.

Although their pasts must have inevitably have crossed, working as often as they did for the same magazines, Wodehouse's only published opinion of Runyon came in 1945, a year before Runyon's death. Writing to his friend Bill Townend, Wodehouse says, "I see in the Express that poor Damon Runyon has had an operation which has left him unable to speak. It sounds pretty serious. Do you like his stuff? I have just been reading a book of his stories and some of them were fine, but he never seems to wait till he gets a good plot but just goes ahead and bungs down anything."

A curious remark, because Runyon, like Wodehouse, prided himself on his plots, with their O. Henry-like endings. In "Sense of Humor," the gangster who plans to kill another gangster and take off with his wife accidentally kills the wife instead. In "Butch Minds the Baby," a safecracker brings his baby along on a heist, and the baby ends up providing an alibi. As in Wodehouse, the plots are comically contrived, and the characters carry the plot. And true love always carries the day.

Then, too, like Wodehouse, Runyon took what he knew and embellished it, creating a world that never really existed but was mistaken for real by many readers. Runyon's stories have not maintained their place in the literary world as well as Wodehouse's, even though at his peak he probably outstripped Wodehouse in popularity, but his is another Never-Never Land well worth visiting.

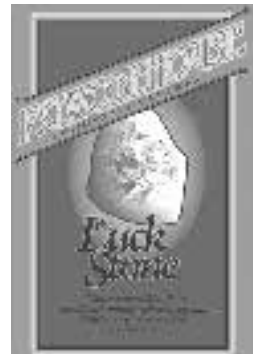
Note: Much of Runyon's work remains in print, and almost all of it is available in used-book stores and online. One item worth searching out is the audio tape "Guys and Dolls on Broadway: Stories of Damon Runyon," read by the incomparable Broadway actor Jerry Orbach.

There are three standard biographies of Runyon: the aforementioned Breslin book, *A Gentleman of Broadway* by Edwin P. Hoyt (1964), and *The World of Damon Runyon* by Tom Clark (1978). An excellent biographical sketch by Michael D. McClanahan appears on the *Rocky Mountain News* website: [denver.rockymountainnews.com/denverpressclub/archive/people.html](http://denver.rockymountainnews.com/denverpressclub/archive/people.html).

He wrote stories about mysterious Chinamen and girls with hair the colour of ripe wheat and the corpses of baronets in panelled libraries.

*Money in the Bank* (1946)

## The Luck Stone: A New Edition



For U.S.-based Wodehouse readers who don't have *The Luck Stone* in their collection—and missed the limited edition Tony Ring brought out in 1997—take heart: Portland publisher Obody & Marley has come out with a dandy reprint that reproduces the story just as it appeared in *Chums* (September 1908–January 1909) and includes all the original illustrations. Cowritten by PGW and Bill Townend under the pseudonym of Basil Windham, *The Luck Stone* is a sensational school adventure story in which the hero is harried by sinister foreigners. Obody & Marley's new edition comes with endnotes that explain aspects of the story that may puzzle modern-day readers—for example: "Rem acu tetigit: Latin, literally 'You have touched the thing with a needle.' You have expressed it precisely; you've hit the nail on the head."

*The Luck Stone* is available in paperback for \$19.95 (plus, we assume, shipping). To learn more or to order the book, visit Powell's Books at <http://www.powells.com/biblio/17-1419623214-0>; or write to Obody & Marley LLC, PO Box 66464, Portland, OR 97290.

One caveat: TWS members who reside outside the United States should bear in mind that in many countries, including Europe, all Wodehouse books are in copyright until 2045. The importation of this book into a country where it is protected by copyright may be strictly against local law.

## Piccadilly Jim: Mystery Solved

For those who were wondering what has happened to *Piccadilly Jim*, the movie of the Wodehouse novel of the same name with screenplay by Julian Fellowes, wonder no more. Pulled from theatrical release, it has gone straight to DVD, so if you want to see it, then simply rent or purchase it. To refresh your memory on the changes Fellowes made from the PGW original, see the reviews by Philip Shreffler and Brian Taves in the summer and autumn 2005 issues of *Plum Lines*, respectively.



# A Plum Celebration at the East Coast Binge

BY JEFF PETERSON

*The East Coast Binge is a traditional gathering of East Coast Plummies held in the years between the biennial national TWS conventions. This year the Binge was hosted by Capital! Capital! on April 28–30 in—funnily enough—our nation’s capital.*

When Capital! Capital!, the Washington, D.C., chapter of The Wodehouse Society, began planning for the East Coast Binge, the chapter wanted to focus on underlooked, if there is such a word, aspects of P. G. Wodehouse’s work and career. Everyone knows Plum as the unchallenged master of English humorous prose. Less appreciated, however, or at least less widely known (for reasons completely incomprehensible to Capital! Capital!), are Plum’s poetry and musical lyrics. Thus was born the Binge theme of: Plum the Poet, Plum the Musical Lyricist, and Plum the Playwright (or at least Plum the Adapter of other People’s Plays for Broadway). Everything followed from there.

Out-of-towners arrived Friday, April 28, and met Capital! Capital! townies for a kickoff evening at the Hamilton Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown D.C. The hotel first opened as the Hamilton Hotel in 1921 and, after several added concessions to modernity and convenience, still retains a classic charm, all of which suited attendees just fine, thank you. Behind the bar, a white-jacketed ministering angel (where have I heard that descriptive before?) attended to everyone’s wish for delicacies brewed, distilled, or fermented.

The main Binge events, of course, were on Saturday. Some 52 Plummies attended a matinee performance by the Washington Stage Guild (a sort of farm club or stepping-stone organization to the more upscale Arena State further uptown) of *The Play’s the Thing*, adapted from Molnar by Wodehouse for a Broadway production in 1926. Plum’s hand in this drawing-room farce is everywhere present: two young lovers separated by misunderstandings, a Spode-like lecher, a Baxter-like secretary, two playwrights who conspire to reunite the lovers, and a Jeeves-like butler. Fun and laughs were aplenty. The only problem was that the well-read Plummies in the audience probably knew the characters better than the actors. There were lively discussions after the play as to which actor fit in, or not, to everyone’s personal image of the more-or-less stock Wodehouse characters.

There were no such disagreements, however, about the Saturday evening dinner, held in the ballroom of the elegant and historic Army and Navy Club on



*Bingers Unite! Freda Kirkham leads (from left to right) Ken Clevenger, Ed Powell, and Jeff Peterson in song.*

Farragut Square, in downtown D.C., only a few blocks from the hotel. The evening’s program began with an acknowledgment of the out-of-town guests. From furthest away was a contingent from Seattle’s Angler’s Rest. Also present was a Canadian representative as well as guests from New England’s NEWTS and New York City’s Broadway Special.

The Master of Revels for the evening was Ken (“The Beak”) Clevenger, the author of two recent *Plum Lines* articles. Ken, much to everyone’s envy, told the story of how he purchased a first edition of a compilation of Plum’s poetry, *The Parrot and Other Poems*, published in 1988 by Hutchinson. Ken bought the book for £2.99 off a remainder table at the London Book Warehouse about six years ago. (There were undercurrents, at least at one dinner table, of large men who were considering mugging Ken after the dinner and taking the book by force.) Ken favored attendees with a couple of Plum’s poems: “A Useless Example,” the story of a cannibal chef, and “The Outcast: A Tale of a Ladies’ Cricket Match,” simply to revel in Wodehousean constructions (“Out where the grizzly grizzlies / Out where the possums poss.”) The eponymously named Parrot poem of 1903 was a form of political commentary in light comic verse (and a nod to Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Raven”) about rising food prices in London at the time (“When the Parrot broke the silence / With ‘Your food will cost you more!’”).

Guests heard poems in the Wodehousean style and poems written by Capital! Capital!’s members in Plum’s honor. A sonnet by Joan Roberts, entitled “Raison d’Etre” and dedicated to the Empress of Blandings, won the loudest and most sustained applause:

The Empress's eyes aren't looking at the sun.  
 They seek an object lower to the ground.  
 A spacious trough to feed just one  
 Where morsels rich and ripe are found.  
 Her ears, lopped down, screen out the wash  
 Of birdsong, motors, or praise from men.  
 But hear unmarred the cheerful slosh  
 Of swill pails carried to her pen.  
 Her jaw works with deliberate speed  
 To gorge each cell that plumps her frame.  
 She snuffles, roots, and chews her feed  
 In bliss unmoved by thoughts of fame.  
 And yet she knows by instinct in her,  
 It's better to dine than be the dinner.

Music came to the evening through the talents of Freda ("Popgood and Grooly") Kirkham. Freda, never a shrinking violet, sang "Cleopatterer," a song from the Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern show *Leave It to Jane* (1917). The show itself was based on a play by George Ade, *The College Widow*, about a popular co-ed. Just why she was so popular one can only speculate, but the opening verse gives a good idea of why Cleopatterer was:

In the days of old beside the Nile a famous  
 queen there dwelt;  
 Her clothes were few, but full of style; her  
 figure slim and svelte;  
 On every man that wandered by she  
 pulled the Theda Bara eye;  
 And ev'ry one observed with awe that her  
 work was swift, but never raw.

Freda was supported in her songs by male dancers Ken Clevenger, Jeff Peterson, and Ed Powell, who were recruited (dragooned or Shanghai'ed might be more apt words) for the occasion. Freda also sang two Wodehousean-inspired songs: "Oh, By Jingo" and "With My Little Ukulele in My Hand," the latter with rather naughty lyrics by George Formby. Although the Wodehouse canon is silent on the subject, there can be little doubt that Bertie Wooster sang these songs, like "Sonny Boy," while in a hot bath on crisp and sunny London spring mornings.

Bringing the Binge to a higher intellectual level, Anne ("The Dog-Girl") Stone, *Capital! Capital!*'s resident puzzler, announced the results of her 2006 "Year of the Dog" Wodehouse Canine Quiz. Anne had sent out this quiz, with 22 multiple-choice questions, to all those who signed up for the Binge. (Look for it in a future issue of *Plum Lines*. —Ed.) Anne awarded prizes to four respondents who answered all 22 questions

correctly. The prizes included the canine-related wines Black Dog, a Virginia product, and Rabid Red, from Napa Valley. There were also lesser prizes for those who demonstrated less advanced knowledge of this Wodehouse oeuvre, but everybody, winners and not-so-winners, had fun anyway.

The dinner and after-dinner program ended with an ovation to Joan Roberts, who had organized and coordinated the whole Binge weekend, including designing, producing, and mailing the weekend programs to attendees. Shana Singerman won kudos for her table decorations, including centerpiece adornments with Wodehouse quotes related to epicurean dining.

But the weekend was not quite over yet. Cognac and hyperbole continued well into Saturday evening at the Hamilton after the celebrants were rousted out of the Army and Navy Club. And some out-of-towners met for brunch the following morning at Old Ebbitt's Grill, probably eating under a stuffed yak's head felled by Teddy Roosevelt himself. Even the normally treacherous Washington spring weather cooperated, allowing for warm and sunny walks to the play, the dinner, and nearby monuments and museums.

As NEWT Anne Cotton noted in her report to PGW-Net afterward, it was all absolutely splendid!

## A Prize Limerick

*Speaking of Joan Roberts, in Capital! Capital!'s poetry competition last year (see Plum Lines, Winter 2005, page 13), she won the Rex West Prize for the following delightful limerick.*

There once was a chap named Fink-Nottle.  
 As dull as cold milk in a bottle!  
 But a great crested newt  
 That was really a beaut  
 Would cause him to rave at full throttle.



Cora McGuffey Spotsworth still looked like one of those women who lure men's souls to the shoals of sin, but there was no question that, as far as knowing what to do with a good number four iron when you put it into her hands was concerned, she would make a good wife.

"Feet of Clay," *Nothing Serious* (1950)

# The Wodehouse Room

We have received an email from the Spencer Hotel in Chautauqua, New York, with an offer that is clearly an attempt to get some business—but what an attempt! Ms Cyndi D’Avignon writes: “The Spencer Hotel, located on the scenic grounds of the prestigious Chautauqua Institution, is a bibliophile’s dream. Each of the 26 elegantly appointed rooms is a tribute to a world-renowned author, creating a literary fantasy . . . During the first of the nine-week summer period, June 24–July 1, 2006, we will be celebrating the famous author, Wodehouse. All week we will have discussions and readings. On Sunday, June 25, we will be have a dinner party in [the] Wodehouse Society’s honor. Please feel free to dress in costume. . . . Please visit our web site at [www.thespencer.com](http://www.thespencer.com) and take a visual tour. Click on the specific room and view the details of your famous author.”

We visited the website and clicked on the details for the P. G. Wodehouse Room (#108), which appears to contain a large cardboard cutout of a valet. The room’s description reads: *Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse (1881–1975) was an English humorist who wrote novels, short stories, plays, lyrics, and essays, all with the same light touch of gentle satire. He is best known as the creator of the unflinchingly affable Bertie Wooster and his invincible valet Jeeves, but Wodehouse also produced multi-volume stories on Blandings Castle, Mr. Mulliner’s extended family, Mike and Psmith, the Oldest Member, Uncle Fred, and the Drones Club. All this is in addition to his many stand-alone novels, short stories, and plays. Jeeves, the valet, ever-present, awaits your arrival to the P. G. Wodehouse room.*

Though the Wodehouse Room costs less than Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and The Brownings, it is (appropriately) on a par with E. F. Benson, Shakespeare, and Percy Shelley (they know their Shelley). Nonetheless, all the rooms are on the expensive side, and during the summer there is a weekly (rather than nightly) charge. For further details visit the Spencer’s website at <http://www.thespencer.com/>, or call 1-800-398-1306/1-716-357-3785; email [stay@thespencer.com](mailto:stay@thespencer.com).

## *A Spanner is Bunged*

There was a young person named Stiffy.  
Whose manners and morals were iffy!  
Though her bark was a curse  
Her bite was far worse,  
And her dog was incredibly niffy!

– Freda Kirkham

## Yet More Capital! Capital! Limericks!



## *Mother Says*

Shortcutting words came to be  
A habit caught from P.G.  
Our children were small,  
But harked to the call,  
“Come in, now, d’s on the t.”

– Dorry Clevenger



## In Memoriam

### Jacqueline Powell, Barrie Pitt

We recently learned that Jacqueline Powell, who had been P. G. Wodehouse’s secretary in France, passed away on February 11 at the age of 92. In addition, Barrie Pitt, a historian who had been interned at Tost with Wodehouse, died on April 15, age 87. According to Norman Murphy, it is to Mr. Pitt that we owe the invaluable information that the Berlin broadcasts were originally given by Wodehouse to his fellow internees, who found them hugely funny and very anti-German.

### Leon Bishop

Tina Woelke writes: The Chicago Accident Syndicate Chapter was saddened by the recent loss of one of their valued members, Leon Bishop. Besides being an all-round splendid fellow, knowledgeable Plummie, and creator of splendid desserts, Leon was an accomplished commercial artist and painter. His widow, Ann Bishop, has helped to organize a retrospective of Leon’s paintings, to take place at the Lubeznik Center for the Arts in Michigan City, Indiana, from July 8, 2006, through August 27, 2006. The CAS is planning a group trip to the exhibit, and we thought to alert the rest of the membership to this opportunity to refresh eyes and soul through a gaze at Leon’s artistry. More information is available at [www.lubeznikcenter.org](http://www.lubeznikcenter.org).

# Chapters Corner

CONDUCTED BY SUSAN COHEN

It's fun being with other fans, and it's fun reading about what other fans are doing. So please use this column to tell the world—the Wodehouse world, that is—about your chapter's activities, zany and otherwise. Chapter representatives, please send all info to me, Rosie M. Banks, otherwise known as Susan Cohen (see Chapter One below). Anyone reading this who is not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member can get in touch with the contact person listed.

## Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)  
Contact: Susan Collicott



Phone:

Email:

At the time of writing, with our scholarly April meeting under our belts now (and a rousing cheer of thanks to Stu Shiffman for his paper), Anglers' Rest was planning a reading on May 21 at the Elephant & Castle, in the darts/billiards room underneath the restaurant. We hoped to have guests from "Somewhere in Time" again. Rumor had it that local Patrick O'Brian folks would crash the party—cutlass at the ready, Bertie! A few of our Anglers attended the East Coast Binge and planned to report back on that fun-filled occasion at the May meeting. We also discussed summer events and outings—bring your datebook to future meetings! We have food, drink, darts, Plum, billiards, and lots of friendly, wonderful chaps and chapettes.

## Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)  
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe

Phone:

Email:



## The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker

Email:

The Broadway Special met on March 24 in the Card Room at The Players Club in Manhattan's Gramercy Park for a roaring discussion of *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. Conversation ranged across a myriad of topics: the connection of Celtic *magna mater* goddesses like Brigantia with Plum's Aunts (and Plum's telling David Jasen once that "mothers are not funny; aunts are"); the definitive resolution of the issue of the Elgin Marbles (however it was that we resolved the problem and whatever we may have perceived that problem to be); and the consensus that this novel is quintessential Wodehouse, yet because there are so many characters, none of whom is central, there is no unified "voice" in the work, leaving the reader feeling somewhat distant. The meeting concluded with members reading from Chapter 12 of *Uncle Fred*, after which some of us made our way to downtown public houses for further browsing and sluicing. The chapter convened again May 6 for luncheon before taking in a performance of *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* and will gather again at The Players on June 9, when we'll discuss "The Truth About George," "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo," and "Portrait of a Disciplinarian," which can all be found in *Meet Mr. Mulliner*.



*The entrance to The Players Club*

## Buck-U-Uppo Bottling Company

(Seaside, Oregon, and vicinity)  
Contact: Sandy Rea

Phone:

Email:



## Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson



Phone:

Email:

The big news from Capital! Capital! (and kudos galore to them for all their hard work) was their hosting of the East Coast spring binge, April 28–30, in the city where Senator Opal worked. A write-up of this between-conventions special event in all its glory can be found on pages 17–18.

## Capital F.O.R.M.

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton



Phone:

Email:

## Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan Cohen

Phone:

Fax:

Email:



It can be revealed at last that our March 26 meeting was really a surprise 70th birthday party for Dan Cohen in his alter ego of Cyril Waddesley-Davenport. There was a delicious chocolate-and-vanilla birthday cake featuring the image of Cyril in his ape costume, done in yummy icing. There was a splendid read-aloud of “Monkey Business,” with Cyril in ape mask and Balliol tie. As for the rest of the cast and their costumes, even Chimp Twist would have been impressed. Herb Moskovitz made an excellent narrator. David and

Karen Ruef were splendid as Montrose Mulliner and the fair Rosalie Beamish. And, oh, how spiffy David looked, how art deco was our Karen! Will Jordan was an elegant and arrogant Captain Fosdyke, his head topped with a monogrammed Lester Lanin hat. Roz Kushner, our director and bringer of the cake, deserved an Oscar for all she did to make the day a success. Props included a pseudo-cage, a banana, and a cardboard baby that looked like it came out of a drugstore window circa 1945. No monkeying around, this was a terrific event. Our next meeting was May 21, our last before we break for the summer. The Ruefs were planning a mystery quiz, and Chaps are asked to bring masks, hats, guns, or whatever they associate with criminals. That shouldn't be hard. There are lots of criminals in Wodehouse.

## The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



Phone:

Email:

Our chapter holds bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members of the Syndicate meet in each other's homes to enjoy a potluck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes we meet in an Irish pub where there's good browsing and sluicing. We enjoy theater outings followed by dinner at a restaurant, and every time City Lit does a Wodehouse production, we are in the audience. We go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there, while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. We play miniature golf together and have one grand croquet game every year.

## The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor



Phone:

Senior Bloodstains are held at Wodehouse Society conventions. Junior Bloodstains are held every January, part of the big annual Sherlock Holmes celebration in New York. The meetings are always great fun. One does not have to be a Client to attend; anyone interested in both Holmes and Wodehouse is welcome. Our next gathering will be next January; till then, we hibernate.

### The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Phone:

Email:



We meet every month, alternating the meetings so that one month we dine out together and the next month we hold a book meeting. At the book meetings, which take place at Barnes & Noble on Westheimer at Voss, we have two reports. One is about the book of the evening, the other is about “something Wodehouse.” We browse and sluice at dinner meetings and share views. This past February we enjoyed our annual “Remember Plum Party” with sandwiches, pizza, cake, a large chocolate pig, and champagne. We followed this up by going to the Cadillac Bar to hear the Brave Combo. A fine musical time was had by all. In February and March we attended the classic films festival at the Museum of Fine Arts, then went on to enjoy a sweet time at The Chocolate Factory. We went to see a Moss Hart play, *Light Up the Sky*, on March 11, adjourning afterward to The Chocolate Bar. The following Friday we met at Toni & Bill’s house for videos and pizza. The next evening we went out to dinner at Dinner Only. Dinner en masse is the ancient and noble custom of the Drone Rangers.

A book meeting was planned for April 28, with Toni and Kathy Smith presenting papers on the subject of the day: Ukridge. Toni’s reading aloud of the memorial to Richard Osborne, published in the *Telegraph* upon his death, was also on the agenda. Several Drone Rangers planned to be in New York on May 6 to see *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* with the New York chapter. Back in Texas, and bustling and busy as ever, our schedule included a dinner meeting during the May 19–20 weekend, while for the Memorial Day weekend, plans were in the works for those in town to get together informally to read or watch something Wodehouse. Then it would almost be time for our annual garage sale to raise funds for our various doings.

### The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw



Phone:

Email:

This lively new chapter was planning an April meeting and at least some participation in the

5K walk affiliated with the Flying Pig Marathon in Cincinnati the first weekend in May. Claiming they weren’t in shape to actually run the full marathon, for the t-shirts and the group photo-op they’d attempt the 5K. Maybe if the marathon prize was a silver medal, they’d run it after all and win!

### The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: James P. Robinson III



Phone:

Email:

The San Antonio chapter of TWS continues to meet monthly on the second Thursday of each month (except when we don’t). We have a split personality: March, May, July, September, and November finds the Jellied Eels assembling at a local eatery-slash-watering hole, which we work mightily to tie in with PGW or his works in sometimes very obscure ways; while in April and every other month thereafter we gather as the Mottled Oyster at Barnes and Noble. We have lots of lighthearted fun together and would love to add to our roster.

### The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society

(NEWTS – Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: Anne Cotton, president



Phone:

Email:

The NEWTS’ March Nettle focused primarily on greeting the spring, with our usual sluicing and browsing (and the potluck menu was particularly outstanding). We did find time to do a reading of our now-about-final version of David Landman’s excellent skit, which you will have a chance to see at the TWS convention in Providence next year; and we did a bit of organizational planning for that grand occasion (but, being NEWTS, we didn’t stay serious for long).

### The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler



Phone:

Email:

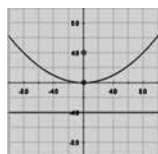
The Northwodes met on March 26 to discuss our ongoing public library Wodehouse donation project and to feast on our host's homemade samosas and chutney. We also regaled each other with passages nominated as "Funniest Single Page," although some leeway had to be granted for length. Entries ranged from the sozzled scene in "Strychnine in the Soup" to a speech from *Psmith in the City*. Not surprisingly, the laughter mark was high on all entries, and no conclusion could be reached. Some drama arose through the attempt to give away *My Lucky Star*, a book sent to the Northwodes by a PR company claiming that author Joe Keenan's style is like Wodehouse's. Since none of the attendees could find a page they were willing to read aloud in mixed company, the consensus was that the book failed the Wodehouse comparison test in many key respects and there were no takers. We offer *My Lucky Star* gratis to the first person who asks for it. The next Northwodes gathering is tentatively slated for June; contact Kris Fowler for details.

### The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

Contact: Peter M. Nixon

Email:



The Pale Parabolites . . . those who are seeking the Pale Parabola of Joy . . . whatever that may be. The Pale Parabolites' motto is *nil admirari*. Like the Empress of Blandings the Pale Parabolites take things as they come and marvel at nothing.

### The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

Email:



### The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Melissa D. Aaron

Phone:

Email:



We meet the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado, Pasadena. The readings change every month and can be found by checking our calendar or subscribing to our mailing list; we promise that it's very low traffic. NB to Plumies in Southern California, whether domiciled or just passing through—come up and see us. We also

occasionally attend events of interest, such as the Avalon Ball on Catalina Island, an Art Deco dance in the fabulous Casino, and the Lanterman House Tea, a ragtime era event. We go to ukulele festivals, silent movies, etc. Subscribers to our email list can be kept abreast of such local amusements. Information about our mailing list, and important links can be found at our web site, [www.lahacal.org/wodehouse](http://www.lahacal.org/wodehouse).

### The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein



Phone:

Email:

The Pickering Motor Company is alive and well and always looking for new members. One new member showed up at the last meeting but, due to miscommunication, at the wrong venue. Apologies ensued and a new meeting was planned for May 19. All Wodehousians (or Wodehouseans) in the Detroit area are encouraged to communicate with CEO Elliott Milstein and plan to join. The last meeting, taking place at our favorite Irish restaurant, had a most lively discussion, though on subjects rather non-Wodehousean (or non-Wodehousian). This time, we hope to keep more on topic—said topic being *Something New* (or *Something Fresh*, depending on which edition you have). Items on the agenda will be: Why does this book have two names? Is this truly the first Blandings Castle story, or is it just a run-up to *Leave It to Psmith*? Pigs or Flowers? Why does Michael like the early books more than the later ones? Should Dicron be made President of Pickering? St

### The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson

Email:



### The Soup & Fish Club

(Northern Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard

Phone:

Email:



The noble aim of The Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation.

The chapter's head and sole member, Deborah Dillard, aka Mary Kent, visits school librarians to talk them into letting her give presentations on the master's great works to their students, and occasionally tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse. Since the summer reading season looms, Deborah—or Mary if you prefer—will go into her practiced Plum Pitch in an attempt to get a handful of Wodehouse's book on the Beach Reads list of the local library system's quarterly publication.

## Topping Dogs



In the *New York Times* of April 2, prominent political columnist David Brooks wrote: “The relationship between staffer and boss is marred by the Jeeves Principle, which holds that in most large organizations the really intelligent people end up as subordinates while the blandly charismatic, effortlessly slender, excessively well-groomed ones end up as top dogs.” It is rather reassuring to see that Wodehouse has now entered our political dialogue.

## Volunteer Officers & Plum Lines Staff

President of The Wodehouse Society:  
Jean Tillson

Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries,  
contact information changes):  
Amy Plofker

<http://www.wodehouse.org/inquiry/>

Treasurer (dues payments):  
Kris Fowler

Website Development & Maintenance:  
Shamim Mohamed, AKA Pongo  
Website address: [www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org)

Editor Emeritus: Ed Ratcliffe  
Editor in Chief:  
Dan Cohen

Executive Editor:  
Elin Woodger

Layout and Article Contributions  
(preferably Word documents):  
Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

Final Proofreading & Technical Assistance, Printer/  
Mailer Liaison, Rosters, Dues Sheets: Neil Midkiff

## Where to submit articles:

*My First Time* and *Rivals of Wodehouse*: Dan Cohen  
*Chapters Corner*: Susan Cohen (same address as Dan)  
All other submissions: Gary Hall

## Contents

- 1 Richard Usborne 1910–2006
- 2 P. G. Wodehouse and the Hollywood Cricket Club
- 3 Raffle Winners
- 4 Convention 2009: Call for Bids
- 4 Remembrance of Fish Past
- 8 My First Encounter with P. G. Wodehouse
- 9 What Ho, Jeeves, We Need You
- 9 Wodehouse and Chaucer—Birds of a Feather?
- 10 The Long, Strange Trip of Ivor Llewellyn
- 12 Collecting the Autograph Edition
- 13 P. G. Wodehouse in Wartime Germany
- 14 Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Damon Runyon
- 16 The Luck Stone: A New Edition
- 16 *Piccadilly Jim*: Mystery Solved
- 17 A Plum Celebration at the East Coast Binge
- 18 A Prize Limerick
- 19 The Wodehouse Room
- 19 In Memoriam: Jacqueline Powell, Barrie Pitt and Leon Bishop
- 19 Yet More Capital! Capital! Limericks!
- 20 Chapters Corner
- 24 Topping Dogs

All quotations from P. G. Wodehouse are reprinted by permission of the Copyright Owner, the Trustees of the Wodehouse Estate.