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Divine Providence in 2007!

From this issue onward, *Plum Lines* will print sneak previews of the next TWS convention, to be held October 11–14, 2007, in Providence, Rhode Island, and hosted by the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS). See page 10 for information about the convention hotel, the Providence Biltmore, and page 12 to learn about a spiffy contest in keeping with the convention theme. There will, of course, be an abundance of scintillating talks, entertaining skits and readings, toe-tapping music, and the browsing and sluicing for which we Plummies are renowned. A highlight of this convention will be a tour of Newport, Rhode Island, details of which are provided in the following letter from Jean Tillson (aka Pighooey), TWS president and 2007 convention coordinator. Most important, Jean's letter informs of us of everything we need to know about filling out the registration form (which will be included in every issue of *Plum Lines* between now and the convention). Be sure not to miss this especially divine convention experience!



The rather fabulous Providence Biltmore Hotel

Registering for the Divine Providence Convention

My dear fellow Wodehousians,

Many of you eagle-eyed chaps have no doubt noticed there is a convention registration form in this issue of *Plum Lines*. The NEWTS and I hope you will fill it out and send it at your earliest opportunity. While it is not, I hope, an overly complicated document, I thought I would just take a moment or two to show you 'round the form and try to explain some of the fruitier bits.

The Attendee Information Section

Get your valet to assist you with the details in this section. In fact, have your valet fill out this entire section on his or her own because you know full well your handwriting leaves more than a little something to be desired. If you have no valet, do the best you can to write legibly. Don't forget to mark the boxes asking if you are a TWS member. That will become important in the next section.

The Required Fees Section

Now have a good stiff drink of something really invigorating and turn your attention to the “Required Fees” section. If you have attended past conventions, you will note a difference in this part of the form. In brief, it ensures that every attendee will be a member of TWS.

At the 2005 convention, the TWS Board of Directors discussed our new tax status as a nonprofit social club, which exempts us from federal income tax but allows us to receive no more than a small percentage of oof from nonmembers. The only time we are ever in danger of collecting a substantial pile of money from nonmembers is during conventions. Thus, rather than worry ourselves into a decline by attempting to keep track of such a distasteful statistic (most of us being far too soulful to care about mere monetary matters), the Board decided that, in future, *every person attending a TWS convention must be a member of TWS* (which really isn’t such a revolutionary idea when you stop and think about it).

Anyway, that’s the “why.” The “how” is a tad more complicated due to our policy of letting one membership cover two people at the same address. Thus, I offer the following scenarios and instructions; find the scenario that fits your situation to be sure you fill out the form correctly.

Scenario 1: Members A and B live at the same address.

What to do: Member A and Member B both pay the member registration fee.

Scenario 2. Member A and Nonmember B do not live at the same address.

What to do: Member A pays the member registration fee, while Nonmember B pays the nonmember registration fee. Nonmember B will be enrolled in TWS and will receive a one-year subscription to *Plum Lines*.

Scenario 3. Nonmembers A and B live at the same address.

What to do: Nonmember A pays the nonmember registration fee, *automatically turning Nonmember B into Member B and enabling him or her to pay the member registration fee.*

Scenario 4. Nonmembers A and B do not live at the same address.

What to do: Nonmembers A and both pay the nonmember registration fee. Both receive one-year memberships to TWS and one-year subscriptions to *Plum Lines*.

Also, please note that the required fees are just that: *required* fees. Anyone who wants to participate in *any* of the optional events must still pay the required fees.

The Optional Fees Section

Now we come to the fun stuff, about which you might like a little more information in order to help you pick and choose (though of course I heartily recommend you choose them all!).

The **Thursday cricket experience** will be an opportunity for those who arrive in Providence by Thursday afternoon to meet in a small park within walking distance of the convention hotel and experience (or practice) some cricket batting and fielding. We may or may not have an actual match, depending on how many people show up. As we will not be having a tea interval this time (sorry), there is no charge for this event, but we’d still like to know how many people intend to participate, so please mark your registration form accordingly.

The convention will really kick off with the **Friday bus tour of Newport**. Convention attendees who sign up for this event will board a bus outside the hotel on Friday morning and be driven to the beautiful coastal town of Newport (approximately 45 minutes away), which was the playground of the extremely wealthy during the Gilded Age of the 1880s through the early 20th century. Here these captains of industry built fantastically elaborate mansions, which they considered summer “cottages.” We will visit two of them (and view the exteriors of several more). The first will be Lady Astor’s Beechwood, where the guides wear period costumes and remain in character throughout the tour. Convention attendees are encouraged to wear their own costumes and join in the spirit of the thing!

Upon leaving Beechwood, we will be driven to the Brick Market Place and let loose among the innumerable shops and restaurants to find our own lunch (the only thing not included in the cost of the tour). After lunch we will visit the grandest of all the Newport mansions, Cornelius Vanderbilt’s 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo, the Breakers.

We will return to Providence around 4:30 p.m., in plenty of time to get ready for the **Friday night dinner and clean, bright entertainment (CBE)**. Dinner will be a gourmet cold collation (but with a couple of hot soups, too) served buffet-style. The CBE is our version of Beefy Bingham’s memorable extravaganza that got Bingo Little into so much trouble—in other words, an amateur night. Watch future issues of *Plum Lines* for more information on how you can become a performer at this gala event!

The NEWTS are working diligently to ensure the **Saturday program and talks** will be up to TWS’s usual fine standard. Lunch is on your own (the hotel has a great restaurant), but morning and afternoon snacks will be provided.

The **Saturday night banquet** will be as elegant and exciting as ever, with lots of costume prizes (costumes are encouraged but not mandatory), the ever-popular raffle prize drawing, announcements of various contest results, and a great fuss made over the winners of the traditional Fiendish Quiz.

The **Sunday morning brunch** is another TWS convention tradition, whereat we comfort ourselves for the painful leave-takings we are soon to undergo by consuming a splendid breakfast feast. We also usually have some kind of entertainment; in keeping with our theme of "Divine Providence," this convention's brunch will feature a Great Sermon Handicap, the details of which you will learn in a future issue of *Plum Lines*.

And that gets us onto the back side of the registration form, most of which is self-explanatory. If you would cast your eyes down at the **Hotel Information** section for a moment, however, I would like to clarify the difference between a "standard room" and a "junior suite." The most important difference to note is that **the standard room has only one bed**. This is vital information if you are planning to share a room with someone! The junior suites are available with either one bed or two, with the bedroom and the lounge area separated by a partition, rather than being two distinct rooms with doors. (See picture with article on page 10.)

I hope this answers enough questions to enable you to immediately fill out and send in your TWS 2007 convention registration form, but, if not, there is contact information for me at the bottom of the form.

The NEWTS and I can't wait to see you all next October!

Yours ever,
Pighooney

The clean, bright entertainment was in full swing when I arrived, and somebody who looked as if he might be the local undertaker was reciting "Gunga Din." And the audience, though not actually chiyiking in the full technical sense of the term, had a grim look which I didn't like at all. . . . Well, it was a close thing. If ever my grandchildren cluster about my knee and want to know what I did in the Great War, I shall say, "Never mind about the Great War. Ask me about the time I sang 'Sonny Boy' at the Oddfellows' Hall at Bermondsey East."

"Jeeves and the Song of Songs" (1929)

A Few Quick Ones

The following items thanks to Peter Cannon:

In Richard Dawkins's best seller, *The God Delusion*, in a chapter on religion and childhood, this militant atheist argues for the value of the King James Bible as literature. Commending Bertie Wooster for his scripture knowledge, Dawkins says: "P G Wodehouse is, for my money, the greatest writer of light comedy in the language, and I bet fully my list of biblical phrases will be found as allusions within his pages."

In Julian Barnes's novel *Arthur & George*, Arthur Conan Doyle reflects at one point on the Authors v. Actors cricket match at Lords: "On that June day, he had opened the batting with Wodehouse, who got himself comically bowled out for a duck."

Joe R. Lansdale's *Lords of the Razor*, a horror anthology edited by Bill Sheehan and William Schafer (Subterranean Press), includes Chet Williamson's story "Jeaves and the Deteriorating Relations," whose narrator, "Bernard Worster," goes in for a bit of Grand Guignol at his Aunt Delia's country house, Binkley Court.

Wodehousian horror fans should also take note of William Browning Spencer's story collection *The Ocean and All Its Devices* (Subterranean Press), which includes a tale called "Your Faithful Servant" with the line: "My daughter will persist in calling you Jeeves, and I suggest you let her."

A Week With Wodehouse

Following up the UK Society's plans to celebrate its 10th anniversary with an event now titled A Week With Wodehouse (July 8–15, 2007), featuring visits to WodehouseansitesinLondon,Hampshire,Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire: Chairman Hilary Bruce chairman informs us that she has received expressions of interest in signing up for the 2007 event from all over the world in numbers that already exceed the limited number of seats available on the tour bus. Thus, if you have not yet written to Hilary to say you want to be part of the experience, you may, alas, not be able to get a seat. For those who have not yet expressed interest and think you want to join in the fun, you should write to Hilary to learn what chance there may be of obtaining a place on the tour.

Turnabout Is Fair Play: Identities Hidden and Detected in *Laughing Gas*

BY STU SHIFFMAN

In the Spring 2006 issue, Curtis Armstrong provided some enjoyable insight into Laughing Gas. Now Stu gives us another, equally enjoyable aspect. He originally presented a longer version of this paper at the January 28th meeting of the Anglers' Rest, our Seattle chapter. The second part will be published in the Spring 2007 issue of Plum Lines.

Topsy-turveydom is, I repeat, no laughing matter.

Israel Zangwill, *Without Prejudice* (1896)

Laughing Gas is a wonderful entry in Wodehouse's Hollywoodland, a place where nothing is as it seems. It's not just the usual Hollywood film magic or the eldritch powers of the fourth dimension. The minds or souls of Reggie Swithin, AKA the newly minted Earl of Havershot, and the child film star Joey Cooley have been exchanged through some strange rannygazoo while under the influence of nitrous oxide at the dentists' offices. Doctors I. J. Zizzbaum and B. K. Burwash have much for which to answer.

Laughing Gas seems to be all about identity, that which is individual and special to ourselves (whether you regard it as "soul" or the *ka* and *ba* of the ancient Egyptians), the self as regarded by others (as Reggie is in the shell of young Joey), and the identities behind the fiction in this novel that partakes of the roman à clef. The theme of "identity exchange" wasn't new with our favorite author. F. Anstey's novel *Vice Versa* (1882) is the most notable example. The plot concerns Paul Bultitude and his son Dick, who, thanks to a magic talisman, find their minds have swapped bodies. Mr. Bultitude has to endure a day at his son's boarding school, while Dick finds himself similarly out of his depth attempting to run his father's business. In the end they are both restored to their own bodies. The novel has been adapted to film several times, with the *Freaky Friday* films its significant cinematic descendant. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, edited by John Clute, also mentions Sir Walter Besant's *The Doubts of Dives* (1889), in which a rich man and a poor man swap bodies to the confusions of their girlfriends; and Ernest Bramah's "The Story of Lin Ho and the Treasure of Fang-Tso" (1928), which swaps a weakling and a ferocious Chinese bandit.

One favorite of mine is *Turnabout*, by Thorne Smith

(1931), a screwball novel about a jaded husband and wife who trade identities through the intercession of Mr. Ram, a small idol. This is one of those novels referred to by Reggie in *Laughing Gas*, where "In the stories there had always been a sinister scientist who has messed about with test-tubes, or an Egyptian sorcerer who had cast spells, and the thing had taken weeks, if not months. If quick service was desired, you had to have a magic ring or something. In either case, you didn't get results casually like this—out of a blue sky, as it were."

Reggie is a typical Wodehouse juvenile lead, where "juvenile" in the theatrical manner means young adult. He's another big, kindhearted, and somewhat hapless upper-class character, with a less than dazzling face. He likens his features to that of a gorilla. Poor fellow. One wonders if this is a reflection of Wodehouse's own self-image, with gorillas fresh in the public mind since *King Kong* (1933).

One recalls one of Mr. Mulliner's tales, about the well-received acting gorilla ("Monkey Business" from *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere*, 1935). That hairy simian escaped from his cage and snatched a baby from its perambulator, on the premises of Perfecto-Zizzbaum. The gorilla took the baby to the top of a building, and there he met Montrose Mulliner, who had just fled to the same top. When the ape raised the question how to refresh a snatched baby's nappy, the startled young man observed: "You speak very good English, for a gorilla." The ape's modest reply ("Oh, well, Balliol, you know. Dear old Balliol. One never quite forgets the lessons learned at Alma Mater, don't you think?") revealed Cyril Waddesley-Davenport, a struggling thespian with gorilla-nature an artificial skin deep.

Money and fame mean nothing to me, Lord Havershot

On the train from Chicago to Los Angeles, to save cousin Egremont ("Eggy") from what is characterized as a disastrous marriage, Reggie meets the famous film actress April June and immediately falls head over heels in love with her. Reggie, of course, is just the type of stage accessory that April June would like for her curriculum vitae, and makes a subtle play for the poor stupe. The beautiful movie star projects a frail flower of a persona to him, the seemingly wonderful, tender,

and caring April June, who is difficult to, ah, come to grips with. When he finally succeeds in doing so and is just about to propose to her, poor Reggie's tooth starts hurting so badly that he has to postpone all his plans, hurry home, and make an appointment with a dentist. Fortunately, while Reggie's soul is still inside Joey's body, he realizes the true nature of this woman, who is jealous of attention paid to anyone else. When they are alone at her place, she even kicks him with her foot, incensed that her young costar Joey Cooley (with Reggie inside) had butted in and stolen the limelight during an important press interview.

So, who among the superficially classy Hollywood actresses is a model for April June, the monthly maiden with the heart of pure brass?

There is only one candidate in my mind for the inspiration behind her name. That's Mae Marsh. Say it aloud to yourself: May March; April June.

Well . . . I think that it's significant.

Mae Marsh (1895–1968) worked with Mack Sennett and D. W. Griffith, two giants of the early silent era. Sam Goldwyn gave Mae the title "The Whim Girl," as Clara Bow was "The It Girl." Marsh's career went on a downhill slide in the later 1920s due to poor management and second-rate films, but she managed to score a personal triumph as the long-suffering heroine of the 1931 talkie tearjerker *Over the Hill* and minor appearances in John Ford films thereafter.

American poet Vachel Lindsay was moved to write a long, elaborate poem in the actress's honor after viewing her performance in the now notorious *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). In "Mae Marsh, Motion Picture Actress," he writes:

She is Madonna in an art
As wild and young as her sweet eyes:
A frail dew flower from this hot lamp
That is today's divine surprise.

Here's a fascinating bit from a Louella Parsons article (*New York Telegraph*, April 15, 1923):

Mae Marsh, who returns to the Griffith fold in "The White Rose" after an absence of six years, comes back in an unexpected fashion. The little sister of *The Birth of a Nation*, the pathetic little wife of *Intolerance*, and the sweet heroine of numberless Griffith dramas, plays an up-to-date "flapper."

"Instead of having the hero court me," said Mae, "I run after him, decking myself in the garb of the up-to-date flapper and pursuing him

relentlessly. I had to study the psychology of the flapper, because she is a *rara avis* to me. In the past I have played the ingenue variety—the girl who wears a white dress and blue sash and who peers shyly upon the world through a mass of tangled curls. In *The White Rose* my hair is bobbed and I forgo all my former earmarks of girlish sweetness. I become a brazen overdressed girl whose world is clothes."

Here is the matrix of Hollywood make-believe and press-agentry. Who is the real Mae Marsh, frail flower or heartless flapper? Her fame was past by the time Wodehouse was in Hollywood, but the images must have mixed together with those of Clara Bow and many another scheming starlet to make one April June, the gal with a chiffon exterior and a heart of brass.

The Kid

Lost in this gaudy crowd, but equally fixated on film and fame, were plenty of bound-for-glory parents (kids in tow) and a few born-old movie children like me.

Diana Serra Cary

Forward to *What Ever Happened to Baby Peggy?*

Who is Joey Cooley, the filmic Idol of American Motherhood? Who indeed but young Jackie Coogan (1914–74)! Unlike the fictional character of Joey Cooley, whose mother stayed behind in Chillicothe, Ohio (also the home, by the way, of Archie Goodwin, assistant to the master detective Nero Wolfe) when he lived with the Brinkmeyers, Jackie's case was different. John Leslie Coogan Jr. came from a show business family: His father Jack Coogan was a vaudeville headliner who entered the movie industry, and his mother Lillian (Dolliver) was a child star herself on the stage. Little Jackie was, in the manner of the theatrical cliché, born in a trunk.



Jackie Coogan, effortlessly emoting skepticism

Wodehouse describes the adorable curls on Joey's head, but that may be a conflation with those worn by newspaper comic-strip character Buster Brown, actress

Mary Pickford, and child star Shirley Temple. It was Jackie Coogan's pageboy haircut that was his trademark. At age 12, his boyhood ending, it was cut off during the filming of *Johnny Get Your Hair Cut*. The public had gone crazy for Jackie Coogan with his signature Dutch-boy haircut, big brown eyes, and appealing personality. He was literally an overnight success, thanks to guidance and exposure from Charlie Chaplin, who gave him his big chance in 1921 with *The Kid*. After Chaplin, Jackie proved he could hold his own. He was a terrific actor with the uncanny ability to cry copious tears on cue or raise the roof with his hilarious antics. It was not mere platitudes when the fan magazines proclaimed him "The Greatest Boy Actor in the World." Jackie had the gift of touching the emotions of his audiences and the practiced professionalism of a seasoned performer. He was the first child star to achieve such a magnitude of superstardom. As a child, he earned a fortune of \$4 million, for which the press dubbed him "The Millionaire Kid." He had his own production company and a Rolls Royce dealership. In 1924, charity showings of his films raised enormous funds for Near East Relief and the "starving Armenians." A poor little rich boy. However, there was always a line of competitors in a similar mode lined up, like Jackie Cooper, Dickie Moore, and Mickey Rooney.



Baby Peggy Montgomery, innocent as Eve

Diana Serra Cary, the former silent film child star Baby Peggy Montgomery, has thoroughly described the trials and tribulations of the youngsters enmeshed in Hollywood in a number of books, including *Jackie Coogan: The World's Boy King* (Scarecrow Press, 2003). This is the first study of Coogan's life to be published and reveals how he became a sensation overnight, was

idolized by his fans, and, sadly, was exploited by his parents. Cary recounts the shocking civil trial of Jackie Coogan vs. his income-embezzling parents, which resulted in the Coogan Law, legislation designed to protect minors working in the industry under long-term contracts. It set off a rash of lawsuits between children and their legal guardians that rocked the minds and the hearts of the country; however, it was too late to help all those performers who had come before, such as Baby Peggy.

The life of a child star, the cash cow of the family, was a hard life. It's been the same since long before Lotta Crabtree's mother put her in a pinafore at age six in 1853 and made her the "fairy star" performing in the California mining camps. According to legend, when the satchel with Lotta's earnings got too heavy, her mother would buy real estate in the cities where they toured. Unlike many, Lotta Crabtree (1847–1924) did okay in her subsequent adult career and real estate investments. Most did not. No wonder so many failed to make a life and career when they made the mistake of growing up. One-time child star Dickie Moore interviewed other child actors for his memoir *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star (but don't have sex or take the car)* (Harper & Row, 1984). One was Gene Reynolds, who noted: "We were not working with peers but with directors, teachers, executives, agents, parents. As children, we were always the slaves. All these people had this goddamn age and experience over us and a certain ruthlessness that children do not have."

George (Spanky) McFarland said: "Everybody's story more or less has the same grain running through it. The studios took advantage of the ignorance of the parents. The parents took advantage of the children. But I am glad that I had the experience, regardless of whether it was good or bad—even if there was no money. I am proud to say, 'Look what I did at one time,' even though I don't remember nine-tenths of it."

Coogan gained later fleeting fame in the 1960s on television as Sgt. Barnes in *McKeever & the Colonel* and as Uncle Fester in the *Addams Family* television series.

A Woden Bard

Ray Steen writes:

Recently, while rereading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the following leapt off the page and hit me squarely in the eyeball. Demetrius (II.i.192) in the forest outside the city says, "And here I am, and wode within this wood . . ."

The note interprets: "wode: mad (pronounced *wood*)."

You doubt it?

Just look around at the next TWS convention.

A Silver Screen Survey to Savor and Save: Brian Taves's *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*

BY NORMAN MURPHY

Let's start off right away by saying I would bet money that nobody will ever write a more comprehensive review of Wodehouse on screen than Brian Taves has done. There may be the odd short film or TV adaptation he has missed, but I doubt it very much. I only wish he had written it earlier because it has lots of information I could have made use of in my own literary efforts.

Brian is sensible enough to widen the scope of his book well beyond Hollywood. In fact, the book covers not only Wodehouse's work in Hollywood but the many versions of his stories on the screen and on television, from the early silents up to *Piccadilly Jim* in 2005.

Brian starts his book with a review of Wodehouse's early career and tells of the first Wodehouse stories to appear on the screen: *A Gentleman of Leisure* in 1915, followed shortly afterwards by *Rule Sixty-Three*. Other short films followed; as Brian says, these no longer exist, but he lists the 10 silent films that were made and makes the important point that Hollywood was content then to use the plots as Wodehouse wrote them. Only later did the studios insist on "improving" them.

I had no idea that "silent" Hollywood had given us *Uneasy Money* (1918), *A Damsel in Distress* (1919), *The Prince and Betty* (1919), *Piccadilly Jim* (1919), *Their Mutual Child* (1920), and *A Gentleman of Leisure* (again; 1923) as well as *Sally* (1925) and *The Small Bachelor* (1927). I have, however, been fortunate enough to have seen the British-made *Clicking of Cuthbert* series (1924).

Brian, quite properly, deals with Wodehouse's stage successes and Hollywood's subsequent attempts to put these on screen, though I suggest the silent screen versions of such shows as *Oh, Boy!* and *Sally* can never have had the appeal of the original stage shows. Nevertheless, Brian tells us about them and leads us into Wodehouse's two periods working in Hollywood, making it clear how he and the studios marched to a different drum. He tells of the projects given to Wodehouse and what happened to them, and he describes the films based on Wodehouse's stories that were made elsewhere. He covers the wartime period well and brings a practical point of view to the contract that Wodehouse signed with a German film company.

Possibly because I first saw Wodehouse on television, I found Brian's Chapter VII the most interesting. It deals with the TV adaptations of the 1960s and the various series

made by Ian Carmichael and Dennis Price as Bertie and Jeeves, by Anton Rodgers playing a superb Ukridge, and by Ralph Richardson as Lord Emsworth. It still boggles the imagination how the BBC could have destroyed all their tapes of these excellent series, but they did. Brian gives high praise to Hugh Laurie's Bertie Wooster, and I think he is right. Laurie is the only actor I have seen whose face could mirror Bertie's shock, horror, hopelessness in two seconds, followed by the three seconds of dawning optimism as Jeeves reassures him that all is not lost. Brian also makes the important point that both Laurie and Stephen Fry knew and admired Wodehouse's writing and tried to play the parts as they felt Wodehouse would have wanted.

I may have missed it in Brian's book, but I think he omitted one aspect, albeit a very minor one. There have been many excellent adaptations of Wodehouse's full-length novels, enjoyable versions that followed the script faithfully—especially when they were made at Sudeley Castle with Richard Briers as Gally—but there is always something missing. I don't know what it is and I certainly cannot fault the actors. Perhaps I have built up too definite a picture of the story in my own mind. Perhaps it is because the full-length novels are too complex; I don't know. Conversely, I firmly believe that Wodehouse short stories make perfect television. There is less time—or need—to develop the characters and they can be played "straight" and still get over every Wodehousean aspect. There is no background or scene-setting to be done; just saying the lines Wodehouse wrote and doing the actions he describes gives you the Wodehouse story. That is why I believe the John Alderton and Pauline Collins series of short half-hour versions of the Mulliner stories (1975 & 1976) are the "nearest to Wodehouse" versions I have seen on screen.

But that is a matter of personal opinion and I know many others take a different view. If Brian missed commenting on this, he certainly hasn't missed anything else, and his 50-page filmography completes a scholarly and definitive review of Wodehouse on the cinema and TV screen.

There is good stuff in Britain's barmaids, and the Motherland points at them with justifiable pride.
Quick Service (1940)

Books and Articles about P. G. Wodehouse

BY TONY RING

This is Part 1 of Tony's talk for the Hooray for Hollywood! convention in Los Angeles, August 2005, where it was presented for him by Kris Fowler. The rest of Tony's talk, along with a list of the books and articles he discusses, will be published in subsequent issues.

The publication by Viking on September 2, 2004, of the new authorized biography by Robert McCrum, simply entitled *Wodehouse: A Life*, seemed also to be a plea for someone to review the enormous amount of material which has been written over the years about the author and his work, much of which is of considerable interest and scholarly value, whilst becoming increasingly collectable and sought after. I should, however, caution against blind acceptance of the published word. Many obvious factual errors occur in the corpus of material available, whilst a regrettable amount of personal opinion is, in the modern journalistic style, presented as fact.

One has a certain sympathy with the early commentators, though, unaware that many of the personal anecdotes he wrote for public consumption were partly or entirely fictitious, as Wodehouse stressed to Guy Bolton in 1952, when they were planning *Bring on the Girls*: "I think we shall have to let the truth go to the wall if it interferes with entertainment. . . . I want to avoid shoving in stuff just because it happened. Even if we have to invent every line of the thing, we must have entertainment."

I do not propose to give comprehensive bibliographic details of all the books and articles I mention in this paper. You can find that in an article in the *British Book and Magazine Collector* for November 2004. Or, in most cases, in the principal reference source, *P G Wodehouse—A Comprehensive Bibliography*, compiled by Eileen McIlvaine and others in 1981, which is widely known just as *McIlvaine*. An *Addendum to McIlvaine* was published in time for the 2001 TWS convention by the International Wodehouse Association. This updated the bibliography as far as books about Wodehouse and his work are concerned but was highly selective about new articles. Both are long out of print. A copy of *McIlvaine* sold on eBay earlier in 2005 for almost \$500.

Not surprisingly, with so much material to choose from, I will be referring only to those written in English.

The first comprehensive biography was published shortly before Wodehouse's death in February 1975. Entitled *P. G. Wodehouse: Portrait of a Master*, it was written by David Jasen, who enjoyed extensive access to

Wodehouse and his wife in their Remsenburg home. It was first republished in 1981, one of many books which coincided with the centenary of Wodehouse's birth, having been updated with three additional pages and revised appendices, and then again in 2002.

Before then, Joseph Connolly, a North London book dealer, had produced *P G Wodehouse: An Illustrated Biography with Complete Bibliography and Collector's Guide*. Its biographical text is actually relatively sparse and contains little that was new, but its bibliographical list is one of several which are reasonably comprehensive. Connolly unashamedly tried to cash in on the McCrum publicity by reprinting again in 2004, and he was most put out when permission to use quotations from Wodehouse was refused pro tem.



Tony Ring, basking in the glow of the rare English sun

Two other biographies appeared in 1981, the centenary year, concentrating on different aspects of Wodehouse's life. *Wodehouse at War*, by Iain Sproat, had an unexceptional plain red dust jacket with a high propensity to fade, especially on the spine, and a copy with an unfaded spine is now relatively rare, although I gather from Iain that he has a small hoard of copies for sale in mint condition and at the original price. He had been the first person to gain access to contemporary government papers, including the report of the MI5 officer who had interviewed Wodehouse in Paris in 1945. This exonerated Wodehouse from any suggestion that the fact of the broadcasts had been other than very stupid, and this book made a major contribution towards debunking the most inaccurate of the assertions against him.

The late Benny Green, musician, broadcaster, cricket

enthusiast and raconteur, wrote *P G Wodehouse: A Literary Biography*, which, not surprisingly, added material about Wodehouse's career in the musical theatre in the 1910s and 1920s. Benny promoted Wodehouse's lyrics in his radio shows whenever he had a chance and expressed the view that there was a treasure trove of material to be mined by future researchers.

These were followed by an authorized biography by Frances Donaldson. A paperback edition two years later incorporated some minor factual corrections, but, frustratingly, a further printing in paperback, by Prion Books in 2001, reverted to the original text, so those inaccuracies returned. Donaldson had been a school friend of Leonora Wodehouse, so she had the advantage of knowing the family, but while her book had some good points, it also had severe weaknesses. First, she did not really understand Wodehouse's books or how he came to write them. She certainly did not appreciate the nuances of his different markets or the ways in which magazine versions of the stories might interact with the book publications. Secondly, she was already quite elderly when it was suggested that she write the biography. She reacted honestly by saying she could not travel to research new material, but would work with the mass of data readily available to her. Perhaps only with the publication of McCrum's biography, drawing on his research and travel over a five-year period, has the scale of the error of judgment of her appointment become clear.

In 1992 Barry Phelps's *P G Wodehouse: Man and Myth* was published, in many ways a more comprehensive biography than Donaldson's and offering some controversial opinions about its subject. It was immediately followed by *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*, written by Lee Davis and published only in the United States. Lee Davis's father had been Wodehouse's doctor in Remsenburg, and the young Lee Davis had himself acted as golf caddie to Wodehouse or Bolton on many occasions, so he had the advantage of personal familiarity with two of his subjects. The book's theme was the still under-researched area of their musical comedy and straight theatre activities, and I am not aware of any book dealing in greater detail with Guy Bolton.

The last book before McCrum's which can be even partially described as biography is the narrowest and most focused of all: *You Simply Hit Them with an Axe*, by Tony Ring, published by Porpoise Books in 1995. The checkerboard dust jacket in red, black, and white features terminology relevant to the tax problems Wodehouse encountered, which forms the basis of most of the text, although it also incorporates substantially all the many references Wodehouse made to tax and the tax authorities in his letters and his published work.

Musing on Golf and PGW

BY DAVID McDONOUGH

Ira Berkow, longtime sportswriter for the *New York Times*, has written a memoir with the somewhat precious title *Full Swing: Hits, Runs and Errors in a Writer's Life* (published by Ivan R. Dee, 2006), in which he shows the proper respect towards the Master. In Chapter 13 he writes: "I thought P. G. Wodehouse was as funny a writer as I've ever read. I've laughed out loud on airplanes reading the exploits of the inimitable butler [sic] Jeeves and his 'man' [sic] Bertie Wooster. . . . Wodehouse was also a sports fan, particularly a golf lover, and one afternoon in 1969 I traveled to Remsenburg, a town of Long Island, to interview Wodehouse."

Later, he quotes Plum as telling him, "I think it is rather a good thing to be a poor golfer [because] you get comic ideas." And still later comes this paragraph:

"How I loved the game," Wodehouse told me. "I have sometimes wondered if we of the riffraff don't get more pleasure out of it than the topnotchers. For an untouchable like myself, two perfect drives in a round would wipe out all memory of sliced approach shots and fozzled putts, whereas if Jack Nicklaus does a 64 he goes home and thinks morosely that if he had not just missed that eagle on the seventh, he would have had a 63."

There's more about Plum, but the above paragraph is the most interesting. When I read it, it rang a bell. I went back to the preface of *The Golf Omnibus* (1973), and sure enough, there is that same paragraph, word for word, except that Plum changed "we of the riffraff" to "we of the canaille."

So the question is: Did Wodehouse say to himself, after talking with Berkow, "By George, that's good stuff I gave that youngster, and for free. I must start writing things down." Or was this tried and true stuff that he trotted out on many occasions, to give the audience what they want?

PGWnetter **Jim Wickham** mused about a visit to Burgundy in which he "was amazed to see a small bar in the middle of the town of Beaune with the truly Woosterian name of 'Teuf Teuf.'" **Hetty Litjens**, aka Aunt Agatha, noted in reply that the phrase *teuf teuf* is French in origin and derives from the name children gave to cars. She wondered whether it was Wodehouse who introduced it in England. It wasn't. **Norman Murphy** reports it is one of the many "smart slang" variations of saying goodbye that were common in the early 20th century.

About the Providence Biltmore

For the 2007 convention, TWSers will be returning to swanky surroundings, and nothing could be swankier than the Providence Biltmore Hotel, with its stunning art deco décor. Built in 1922, it was, according to the hotel's literature, "designed to recreate the high standards of living enjoyed at the Vanderbilt Biltmore Estate in North Carolina." As the photos on page 1 and below show, the hotel features style, elegance, and comfort in abundance.

Why will the Biltmore be so ideal for our purposes? Well, for one thing, it is centrally located in downtown Providence and easy to get to by car (valet parking is available), train (the station is nearby), and public transportation. For another, Providence itself is a walking city, and therefore convention goers will find it easy to get to shopping, historical sites, and visitor information. The Biltmore is, in fact, adjacent to the Rhode Island Convention Center and Providence Place Mall. Hotel amenities include McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant (with more than 30 varieties of fresh seafood), an Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spa, an in-house Starbucks, and Golden Gate Studios Florists in the lobby, where there is also a gift shop with "a wide variety of Providence specialties and gift ideas." For more information on the Providence Biltmore, including its history and a photo gallery, visit the website at <http://www.providencebiltmore.com/>.

Room rates for convention attendees are \$179 for a standard room (one bed), \$199 for a junior suite (one or two beds). See page 3 and the enclosed registration form for important information regarding rooms and how to book them.



*Prepare to wallow in luxury at the
Biltmore Hotel in Providence*

... no poet has yet treated of the most poignant bereavement of all—that of a man halfway through a detective story who finds himself at bedtime without the book.
"Strychnine in the Soup" (1933)

Swedish Society Happenings

Jeff Peterson, of Capital! Capital!, received this e-mail from Sven Sahlin, president of the Swedish PG Wodehouse Society (Det Svenska Wodehousesällskapet).

Recently we had an extended meeting of the Inner Circle (we have three layers—the Board, the Inner Circle, and the Total Membership) in Jarfalla where our only female board member, Anna, lives. So, a nice salmon lunch and a longish discussion. Topics: our yearbook (takes lots and lots of work), our pamphlets (take lots of work), our web (should take much more work), our membership (who has paid and not), etc. We are some 200 members, out of which more than a third live in the Greater Stockholm area. What to do with the Gothenburg and the Malmoe members? These are deep waters . . .

Normally we have two biggish gatherings. The Spring one is the Annual Meeting, spiced with some uncomplicated entertainments—quizzes, songs, etc.—and the Fall one is our Annual Dinner. The AM gets some 25 participants and the AD gets some 40. Quite fun and not too much work. And members tend to quietly agree to the overall program. We should like some more readings and that will come, I'm sure. Did you ever see the 1985 television programs on Wodehouse made by Ulf Schenkmanis for the Swedish Television? Very good!

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

It's been a busy time here in the jolly old U.K., and the most exciting news I have to report—from a personal point of view, I mean—is the publication of Norman's ultimate book on Wodehouse. His article on page 13 and the enclosed flyer will tell you a little something about this magnum opus, but they don't even hint at how much sweat has been expended over the last few months to prepare it for publication (much less the 25 years that went into its writing). You see, Norman is printing the book privately, and this has required particular skills and knowledge that neither of us has in great abundance. So what does one do? Call in the Friends Who Can! And since Norman was leaving the technical side of things to me, that meant Stateside friends like Neil Midkiff, who patiently explained all of the printer's requirements and made helpful suggestions; Gary Hall, who used his specialized software to set up all the text and the photo sections for the two volumes and then made the dozens upon dozens of corrections we transmitted to him long-distance; and Jean Tillson, who formatted all the photos

and designed the book covers as well as Norman's publisher logo. Without these wonderful people, who knows how much longer it might have taken for *A Wodehouse Handbook* to see the light of day?

Take a good look at that dandy logo. Can you guess what the centerpiece of it is? The answer is discreetly contained in Volume 1, Chapter 30, on nicknames. If that isn't enough to get you to buy the book, though, perhaps the information that it is (a) full of fascinating information about Wodehouse, his books, and the world he wrote about that you never knew before and (b) hugely enjoyable to read will tempt you into shelling out the oof. All right, so I'm biased—that's a wife's prerogative. Nonetheless, as an informed and dedicated Wodehousean, I am completely unbiased in my belief that this book is the goods and well worth the 25-year wait for it.

Yet life in England has not all been bound up in preparing Norman's book for the printer. There have been other distractions as well, including a delightful September day spent at the Royal Berkshire Show in Newbury, where Norman and I joined several other members of the UK Society to witness a large field of black pigs competing to be crowned Berkshire Champion of Champions. I should point out that our attendance did not merely reflect the normal Wodehousean interest in Black Berkshires. Oh, no, there was a higher purpose, for the UK Society has been conducting a Back the Berkshire campaign and thus was the sponsor for this particular competition.

Details of this delightful day can be found in a report written by Christine Hewitt posted on the society's website (www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse). Suffice to say that the competition was won by an impressively large (and somewhat old) boar who, as soon as the silver cup had been awarded to his owner, retreated as far away as possible to savor his victory in private. In doing so, he eluded the efforts of Society Chairman Hilary Bruce to drape a colorful sash (noting the Society's sponsorship) across his expansive back, though she finally managed to corner him, complete her task, and pose with him for pictures. As the same thing had happened to her last year, Norman suggested that next year she ought to learn how to lasso the pig and then wrestle it to the ground. For some reason, Hilary didn't seem to think much of this idea.

The Back the Berkshire campaign continued when members of the UK Society convened for its biennial formal dinner, this year held on October 5 at Gray's Inn. On the menu that night? Berkshire pork, of course! The Society believes in the Emsworth Paradox—i.e., that only

by eating Berkshire pigs can we save them from extinction. Consequently, the highlight of our meal was the main course, Loin of Berkshire Pork. And was it ever yummy! Naturally, none of us thought of ourselves as eating the Empress; rather, we were preserving her and her kind, which only added to the warm glow in our stomachs.

The evening itself was as splendid as always, and for this particular American it was made even more enjoyable by the presence of several other Americans who had flown over for the occasion: Susan Brokaw and Dirk Wonnell, Chris and Joyce Dueker, Bill Franklin, Amy Plofker, and Jean Tillson (who proudly wore her TWS presidential medallion). The Loyal Toast was proposed by Sir Edward Cazalet, known to us all as PGW's grandson, and the toast to Wodehouse and the P G Wodehouse Society (UK) was proposed by Sir John Mortimer (he of *Rumpole of the Bailey* fame), who gave a delightful speech. The post-dinner entertainment, always a highlight of these occasions, was provided by Edward Fox, Gabrielle Drake, Lucy Tregear, Andrew Rees, Lara Cazalet, David Cazalet, Stephen Higgins, and HRH The Duke of Kent. This immensely impressive cast—joined by two gents representing the evening's sponsors, PricewaterhouseCoopers—performed a review, in words and music, of the importance of aunts in Wodehouse's work. Entitled "A Surging Sea of Aunts," the entertainment had been put together by Tony Ring, who seems to surpass himself with each successive dinner. The performances were met with thunderous applause, and we all considered ourselves properly dazzled.

When the festivities had officially concluded, Jean wasted no time in asking Margaret Slythe to introduce her to John Mortimer, whom she engaged in sprightly conversation. The photo below should give some small indication of the evening's overall merriment. What a shame to have to wait two years for the next one!



Urged on by Margaret Slythe, above, Jean Tillson tries to persuade John Mortimer to come to America and stand for president.

(Photo courtesy of Ginni Beard)

Divine Providence 2007: The Brotherly Love Sermon Challenge

BY MAX POKRIVCHAK

The nub on which the plot of Plum's masterpiece "The Great Sermon Handicap" turns is undoubtedly the Reverend Francis Heppenstall's own masterpiece—his sermon on Brotherly Love. However, what with one thing and another, the sermon itself does not appear in the story, and so we never get to hear it.

It is time for this editorial oversight to be corrected. Aspiring sermonizers are invited to submit their own treatise on Brotherly Love (not longer than three double-spaced pages or 10 minutes' reading time), and the three most noteworthy entries will be read at The Wodehouse Society's 2007 Divine Providence Convention, either by the author or, if the author prefers, by a Vicar to be appointed by the Upper Bingley Ecumenical Council.

Your sermon will be judged, as all sermons are judged, by the following criteria:

- √ Does it satisfactorily answer any and all outstanding questions about life, the universe, and everything?
- √ More importantly, will it keep a church full of drowsy parishioners with morning heads awake on a warm summer day?

Please note the Upper Bingley Ecumenical Council welcomes sermons from all religious traditions, even those with only one member. All entries should be submitted to:

Upper Bingley Ecumenical Council
c/o Max Pokrivchak

Entries must be received by October 1, 2007.

David McDonough recently alerted PGWnetters to the obituary of humorous author Ralph Schoenstein, who died on August 24 at the age of 73. Schoenstein's 18 books included the best-selling *I Hate Preppies Handbook*, but it was his magazine work that might be of most interest to Plummers. As his obituary noted: "Through his friendship with author P. G. Wodehouse, Schoenstein became the American correspondent for *Punch*, and he was a founding writer for *New York* magazine."

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In Memoriam: Bill Claghorn

BY ANNE COTTON

Our good friend and founding NEWT, Bill Claghorn, died of a heart attack at his home in Princeton, Massachusetts, on August 15, 2006. His wife of 50 years, Jo, passed away November 16. They are survived by a son and three daughters.

Bill had a lifelong career in the field of computers, from early mainframes to system applications and small-business solutions, working into his 70s. In addition to being actively involved in his community, he had a passion for P. G. Wodehouse. He was a founding member of the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS) in early 1992 and was a loyal member over the years. (There was, in fact, one meeting at which he and the hostess were the only attendees.) He and Jo hosted several Nottles, particularly the early spring gatherings when all good NEWTS come out to play after a long winter's hibernation. Bill built an extensive collection of Wodehouse memorabilia, and his other collecting mania was pots—primarily Dundee marmalade pots of all sizes, which filled his study alongside his Wodehouse books. Not surprisingly, his nom de Plum was The Pothunter, and his family assures me that Bill shared his love of Wodehouse with all his children.

Rather than a formal service, on September 1 there was a gathering of family and friends (including the NEWTS, of course) at the Claghorns' home, a celebration of life and old friendships, in accordance with Bill's wishes. Bill was a gentleman, and gentle man, in every sense. He will be missed by all who knew him.

There are few pleasures keener than the pleasure of telling somebody something he didn't know before.
The Pothunters (1902)

Convention 2009 Bids

Areminder: All chapters who may be interested in hosting the 2009 convention must submit their bids to Elin Woodger, chairperson of The Wodehouse Society Convention Steering Committee (TWS CSC), by *January 11, 2007*, at the latest. Bidding chapters will be notified by April 11, 2007, whether their application has been successful or not. The criteria for bids are set out in the TWS CSC charter, which can be obtained from the Society's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter>) or by writing to Elin.

A Wodehouse Handbook: Twenty-five Years' Hard Labour

BY NORMAN MURPHY

Well, actually, it has been 26 years because it all stems from the things I had to leave out of *In Search of Blandings* back in 1981. That had taken me over seven years, but the reaction made me realise there was much more to be done. People were delighted to find there were factual origins for Aunt Dahlia, for "Peacehaven" in "Valley Fields," for Blandings Castle, for Mike Jackson and his brothers, but I'd left many questions unanswered. Where was Bertie's flat? Was there a Junior Ganymede club? Was the Empress of Blandings based on a cow? Was there really a London club whose members kept their clothes on while swinging down the swimming pool by the ropes and rings?

Many people wrote to me asking: where did a particular quotation come from? What did Wodehouse mean when he wrote this or that? And I have never forgotten the remark Rob Kooy made on the 1989 Pilgrimage. He said that unless one was a native-born English speaker, one missed half of Wodehouse's jokes. And because of the numerous questions I had been asked, I realised many native-born English speakers missed them as well. I clearly had another book to write.

I had learned much about Gally's Pink 'Uns and Pelicans, but now I had to dig into the social history of England from 1890 to 1939, from a Wodehousean point of view. That meant reading biographies, obituaries, memoirs, magazine advertisements, and popular songs of the day; wading through dictionary after dictionary of quotations (I have nine now—all startlingly different); and spending days in the British Library, counting the hundreds of songs by lyricists yearning to go back, back, back to somewhere.

But I've been very fortunate. I've met a man forced to drop in the "Drones" swimming pool by his so-called friends, I discovered what Green Swizzles are, and I've found Geisenheimer's as well as the Junior Ganymede. With the help of friends in America, I know where "Pig-hooo-ey" came from, and, out of the blue, a distant Wodehouse relation has given me the source of Buck-U-Uppo. Not to mention such pieces of luck as finding the Cabinet Minister Bertie and Jeeves rescued and lunching with a man who knew the real Jeeves. But it all took 26 years.

The result is *A Wodehouse Handbook: The World and Words of P. G. Wodehouse*, which I am publishing in two volumes—far larger than I had originally envisioned. In



The original Gibson Girl, Camille Clifford, was one of the many showgirls who married into the aristocracy, as Sue Brown did later.

Volume 1, I have tried to show that there were indeed cricketing curates, bullying baronets, and impoverished landowners, just as Wodehouse told us—and even Royalty were subjected to practical jokes in country houses.

Although I agree with Bernard Shaw that England and America are separated by the same language, I had not appreciated how deeply Wodehouse had delved into the literature of both, from their poetry and popular songs to their newspaper advertisements. In Volume 2, therefore, I try to explain the hundreds upon hundreds of quotations and deliberate misquotations Wodehouse used, as well as the mysterious references to people, places, and events that everybody recognized *when he wrote of them*. Such references are often incomprehensible today and many of the once universally known quotes and catchphrases mean little to the modern reader. So blame the March of Time for the size of Volume 2, not me!

Editor's note: Norman is publishing *A Wodehouse Handbook* privately. Details for ordering a copy of this two-volume set are contained in the flyer enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines*.

Collecting Wodehouse

BY JOHN GRAHAM

Welcome to the anniversary edition of the collecting column. As Wodehouse book dealer Charles Gould notes elsewhere in this issue of *Plum Lines*, 2006 marks both 125 years since Plum was born and 25 years since Charles issued his first catalogue. To commemorate both occasions, this column offers a collector's guide to five Wodehouse titles that are also celebrating important anniversaries this year. They are *Love Among the Chickens*, published 100 years ago in England; *Big Money* and *If I Were You*, first issued 75 years ago in both England and America; *America, I Like You*, published 50 years ago here; and *French Leave*, published 50 years ago in England.

Plum's first adult novel, *Love Among the Chickens*, was issued midyear 1906 by Newnes, Ltd (founded by Sir George Newnes, the publishing force behind *The Strand Magazine*). Eileen McIlvaine notes there is some disagreement about the exact month of publication, but most reference sources seem to have settled on June. There is little argument that this is an extremely rare book: Joseph Connolly describes it as one of the five rarest titles, and Barry Phelps once ranked it second only to *The Globe By the Way Book* in scarcity. In nearly 20 years of collecting, I've seen fewer than 10 copies offered for sale; and whether listed in dollars or pounds, the asking price is always at least four figures. I know of two copies inscribed by Wodehouse that were priced at \$10,000 apiece; a near-fine unsigned copy is currently being offered by an Australian dealer for \$15,000. Earlier this fall, an unsigned, slightly tattered copy sold on eBay for only \$1,600. (Someone got a very good deal!) McIlvaine mentions just one reissue in the same format as the first edition, with the date August 1906 shown on its copyright page. She fails to record another printing in the same format with a stated copyright date of November 1906. The fact that this third printing calls itself the second and makes no mention of the August reissue only adds to the confusion. In my experience, neither reprint is any easier to find than the first edition, although when copies do appear, their price is only about one-fourth that of a true first.

Seventy-five years ago, Plum published *Big Money* (on January 30 in America and March 20 in England) and *If I Were You* (on September 3 here and 17 days later over there). The American editions of both books were printed at the Country Life Press in Garden City, Long Island, for Plum's longtime American publisher Doubleday, Doran and priced at \$2 apiece. There was a second printing of each book that removed the first-edition statement from

the copyright page. As Charles Gould has often noted in his catalogues, the second printing of *Big Money* reverses the order of the illustrated end papers found on the first edition. In 1932 Chicago-based reprint house A. L. Burt reprinted both books with dust jackets that had the same cover art as the firsts. McIlvaine records no other printings in hardcover. I would judge first editions of both titles to be about equally rare today. An early November search on Abebooks, the Internet's largest used-book site, turned up 20 copies of each book (without jackets) ranging in price from \$25 to \$225. The presence of an intact dust jacket would raise prices considerably, to between \$500 and \$1,000. If you opt to wait for a copy in dust jacket, be aware that the red and orange inks used on the jackets of these books have a tendency to fade with exposure to sunlight. Unfaded spines are rare, desirable, and expensive.

English editions of *Big Money* and *If I Were You* (both published by Herbert Jenkins) are an interesting study in contrast for book collectors. Since the two titles are exactly the same age, you might expect them to be about equally rare today. In my experience, however, *Big Money* is somewhat rarer than *If I Were You* among copies without a dust jacket and much rarer among copies in jacket. The reason for this, I suspect, has a lot to do with the artists who drew the dust jackets for the two books. The artwork for *If I Were You* was done by W. Heath Robinson (1872–1944), a well-known British cartoonist and book illustrator whose work is still highly prized today. By contrast, the dust jacket of *Big Money* simply credits one Batchelor of K. B. Studio. Who Batchelor is, I don't know and Wikipedia doesn't know; nor, I bet, do you. In early November I found three copies of the first edition of *If I Were You* in dust jacket for sale on Abebooks, priced from \$1,800 and up. I cannot recall ever seeing a first edition of *Big Money* in dust jacket advertised for sale anywhere. Fortunately, you don't have to spend a lot of money to own reasonable copies of either jacket: Jenkins reprinted both books many times and kept the same jackets as on the first editions, changing only their spine price and advertisements on the inside flaps.

Fifty years ago, Herbert Jenkins published *French Leave*, a "nonseries" novel that would not be released in America until 1959. According to my dictionary, the term *French leave* means a sudden departure without permission or notice. It is what the Marquis de Maufringneuse (or "Old Nick") took when peril loomed and, ironically, what Wodehouse failed to take in spring 1940 as the German army advanced on Le Touquet. Plum based some of the storyline for *French Leave* on an old play by Guy Bolton called *Three Blind Mice*. When Herbert Jenkins published the book in January 1956, it had a dust

jacket illustration by Sax, an artist with a comic touch who also drew memorable covers for *Pigs Have Wings* and *Ring for Jeeves* (and most likely for *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*). First editions of *French Leave* are not hard to find today, although fine copies in dust jackets have become fairly expensive (say \$250). As far as I know, the book is unique in one respect: It is the only Wodehouse title to be reissued by a book club. At some point in 1957, the Popular Book Club of London chose *French Leave* as their current selection and issued it in a new format with 10 illustrations by Sax, said to be “specially drawn for this edition.” They offered the book to their members for just 4 shillings, less than half the price of 10/6 charged by Herbert Jenkins. This economy was achieved in part by using lower-quality paper, which unfortunately has not aged well. Still, given the new illustrations and new illustrated dust jacket, I think this is a desirable book to own. And as copies are often priced in the \$25 range, it even makes an attractive alternative to the first edition.

It is said that Plum’s editor Peter Schwed at his new

American publisher, Simon & Schuster, did not have a very high regard for *French Leave*; instead, Schwed convinced Wodehouse to write *America, I Like You*, which Simon & Schuster published in May 1956. (This book was revised and retitled *Over Seventy* when it was released in England in October 1957.) One of Plum’s few works of “nonfiction,” *America, I Like You* is a collection of 15 humorous essays illustrated throughout by Marc Simont. According to the publisher’s own records, just 7,500 copies were printed. It is definitely one of the rarer titles from this period and especially difficult to find in truly fine condition since the all-white dust jacket soils and yellows easily. In early November I could find just 12 copies, mostly in jacket, listed for sale on the Internet, ranging in price from \$45 to \$300. There is a copy (unfortunately not for sale) in the Harry Ransome Humanities Library at the University of Texas with an inscription by Wodehouse that reads: “This one comes right from the heart! I’m very proud of being an American at last.” Plum had become an American citizen on December 16, 1955!

Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Ring Lardner

BY DAVID MCDONOUGH

Ring Lardner enjoys probably the highest literary reputation of any 20th-century American humorist. This can be probably be attributed to the fact that he spent a good deal of his career as a short story writer. It is his short fiction, in stories such as “Champion,” “Haircut,” and “The Love Nest,” on which his literary reputation is based, but he was also a master of the short humorous essay and satire. In fact, in 1960 literary critic Dwight MacDonald edited a volume called *Parodies: An Anthology from Chaucer to Beerbohm—And After*. In there with Shakespeare, Swift, Keats, and Lewis Carroll is Ring Lardner with his *Three Nonsense Plays*. In all, Lardner wrote over 4,500 articles and newspapers columns, according to the website www.tridget.com/lardnermania.

Ringgold Wilmer Lardner was born in 1885 in Niles, Michigan, to a wealthy family. His early interests—sports and writing—mirror both Plum and another contemporary, Damon Runyon (“Rivals of P. G. Wodehouse: Damon Runyon,” *Plum Lines*, Summer 2006). It took him a while to find his true calling. He flunked out of engineering school in 1902; worked as a bookkeeper, bill collector, and meter reader; and wrote and participated in local theater. In 1905 he got a job reporting sports for the *South Bend* (Indiana) *Times*, eventually graduating to Chicago papers from 1907 on, with time out as sports editor of the *Sporting News* in St.

Louis and the *Boston American*. He wrote about boxing, golf, horse racing, and his first love, baseball.

In 1906 Lardner met a girl named Ellis Abbott, of Goshen, Indiana. Her family, a prosperous group, was none too sure about her involvement with a roving newspaperman who was barely making a living. Ellis wasn’t sure, either, but Lardner persevered, and they were married in 1911.

Lardner had begun to achieve at least a local reputation as a sportswriter; he loved hanging with the Chicago ballplayers back in the days when such a relationship was possible. He even collaborated with a local pitcher, Doc White, on some song lyrics. He was regarded by the players as an acerbic, tough, but honest and sympathetic reporter. He was also highly regarded by his fellow sportswriters. In 1962, long after his death, the Baseball Writers’ Association established an annual award for baseball writing. Ring Lardner was the first recipient.

In 1913 Lardner undertook to write a daily column for the *Chicago Tribune*. “In the Wake of the News” was a potpourri of sports news, humorous poetry, and other tidbits. Chicago readers, at least, began to realize that Ring had more to offer than most sportswriters.

It was in 1914 that Lardner began the set of stories that first made his reputation. The stories, published over the next couple of years in the *Saturday Evening Post*, were

fictional letters from a young Chicago pitcher, Jack Keefe, to a pal back home. The pitcher is fresh, naïve, selfish, egotistical, hopelessly ignorant, and constantly in trouble with management, other players, and girls.



Ring Lardner, looking much like one of his characters

The stories were an instant hit, and in 1916 they were published to acclaim and brisk sales in a collection called *You Know Me Al*. Lardner became a staple of the American magazines. In addition to the *Post*, he appeared regularly in *Cosmopolitan* and *Liberty*. It was around this time that Ring published two of his most famous stories, “Alibi Ike” in 1915 and “Champion” in 1916. “Alibi Ike” is the hilarious story of a ballplayer that just can’t stop making up excuses for everything that happens to him, good or bad. “Champion” is a much more somber story, the melodramatic tale of a no-good rat who becomes a boxing champ. Both stories have been widely anthologized, and “Champion” became a popular movie in 1950, shooting Kirk Douglas to stardom. (Strangely enough, few of Lardner’s works have been adapted for the screen, especially when compared to Runyon and Wodehouse.)

His 1917 short story collection, *Gullible’s Travels*, introduced his most famous type of character, the “Wise Boob”—that is, a middle-American individual who isn’t as smart as he (or she) thinks he (or she) is. The characters frequently have a streak of cruelty about them, as does their depiction, but Lardner, some critics’ opinions to the contrary, had a great affection for them. He used these types again in collections such as *The Big Town* in 1921.

In 1919 Lardner resigned from the *Chicago Tribune*. One of his last assignments was to cover the 1919 World

Series between the Cincinnati Reds and the Chicago White Sox, managed by an old friend, Kid Gleason. The Reds won the Series, but even before the games began, rumors of a fix had spread. Later the truth came out: eight of the Chicago players had conspired with gamblers to throw the series. Many critics have argued the Black Sox scandal hit Lardner hard and contributed to his growing misanthropy. Certainly in the 1988 film *Eight Men Out*, based on the book by Eliot Asinof, Lardner is portrayed as a deeply cynical individual. (By the way, the film’s director, John Sayles, kept one of the plum parts for himself. He played Lardner.)

Lardner moved his family to Greenwich, Connecticut, and began to write a syndicated column as well as more stories and books. He made several attempts at writing plays. Never the most robust of individuals, and an alcoholic to boot, he fretted constantly about leaving his family insolvent and always hoped that Broadway might be his salvation. Only one of the plays—*June Moon*, written with George S. Kaufman in 1929—was a success.

The move to Connecticut inspired one of Lardner’s most popular books, *The Young Immigrants* [sic], which contains his most famous line. Allegedly narrated by little Ring Jr., it’s the story of the family’s trip from Illinois to the East.

Are you lost daddy I arsked [sic] tenderly.
Shut up he explained.

(Three of Lardner’s sons would become writers. Ring Lardner Jr., who was blacklisted in the 1950s, won an Oscar for cowriting the film *M*A*S*H*. David Lardner was a war correspondent; he was killed during World War II. John Lardner was a newspaperman who died in 1960, age 47. A fourth son, James, was killed in the Spanish Civil War. Ring Lardner’s brother, Rex, was a journalist as well.)

Lardner came to more critical attention with his 1924 collection *How to Write Short Stories*. The critics praised his use of the vernacular, his unerring ear for capturing the way people really speak. His writing had also become progressively darker. In the story “Haircut” (1925), he uses the voice of an uncomprehending small-town barber to expose the unpleasant side of village hijinks that end in tragedy. “A Day with Conrad Green” (1925) tells the story of a nasty Broadway producer who gets what’s coming to him. The critics hailed Lardner as the most authentic American voice since Mark Twain.

The move east also threw Lardner into contact with many of the most prominent writers of the times. The family soon moved to Great Neck, Long Island, and

hung out with the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Damon Runyon, as well as show-biz types such as George M. Cohan and Groucho Marx and business tycoons named Chrysler, Astor, and Guggenheim. Although Lardner is frequently associated with the Algonquin Round Table, he was rarely there. He knew them all, of course, but he was essentially a solitary man and didn't relish the brittle banter of the crowd. In his diaries, Edmund Wilson writes: "I was struck by the enormous reverence the Algonquinites felt for Ring Lardner. He never mingled with them. He lived at Great Neck, Long Island, and came only into town for business. . . . He was somehow aloof and inscrutable."

Wilson was not the only one who felt this way. Corey Ford, the comic writer whose memoir *The Time of Laughter* is an invaluable resource for information about humorists of the Twenties and Thirties, wrote of Lardner: "He was the most completely silent man I have ever met, solemn and unsmiling and yet curiously appealing. His face was gaunt, with high cheekbones and shadowy hollows—someone compared his vaulted features to a cathedral—and reminded me in an odd way of Buster Keaton."

Ford quotes Lardner's friend John Wheeler as saying that Lardner "could be the most droll and convivial of companions. To be accepted by him was to enter a magic circle of camaraderie."

Unfortunately, few were privileged to see that side of Lardner, which may explain why he and Plum Wodehouse never seemed to have had much of a relationship. Certainly they knew each other, and their work appeared in the same magazines throughout the Teens and Twenties, although the *Saturday Evening Post* seemed to have an odd, perhaps shrewd, habit of alternating their work: one week a Wodehouse, the next a Lardner. Good for circulation, one imagines. But what joy to have opened, say, the October 1929 *Cosmopolitan* and read, for the first time, Wodehouse's "Jeeves and the Love that Purifies" and Lardner's "That Old Sweetheart of Mine."

Both Wodehouse and Lardner lived at various times in Great Neck; the Great Neck website (www.westegg.com/greatneck/Kensington) claims them cheek by jowl ("men once nationally renowned . . . such as . . . Guy Bolton, P. G. Wodehouse, Ring Lardner . . ."). Robert McCrum empathetically states that when Plum moved there in 1918, "His circle included W. C. Fields, the actors Ed Wynn and Gene Buck, the humorist Ring Lardner . . ." But in 1918 Lardner was living in Chicago. In the summer of 1920, when the Lardners moved to Great Neck, the Wodehouses were living in Europe.

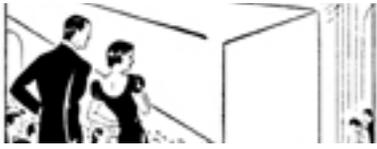
In 1928 the Lardners moved to East Hampton, Long Island. The clean air out there was better for Lardner's health, and his close friend, sportswriter Grantland Rice,

lived next door. They spent their summers there to the end of Lardner's short life. Wodehouse had rented a house in East Hampton as early as 1923, and he and Ethel showed up there a few other summers, but there is no indication that they hung out with Ring and Ellis. In fact, in the entire Wodehouse canon, there is only one reference to Lardner. Like Corey Ford, Plum was struck by Lardner's resemblance to the Great Stone Face. In *Performing Flea*, Plum talks of the newspaperman John Lardner: "John Lardner is the son of Ring Lardner, one of the most formidable blokes I ever met. He was at least eight feet high, with a grim, poker face like Buster Keaton's. When you spoke to him, he never uttered but just stood staring coldly over your head. . . . John Lardner is quite different, very genial and pleasant. I had lunch with him the other day and was dying to ask him if his father had ever spoken to him, but hadn't the nerve."

Could this have been the case of two men, shy in different ways, never finding the words to communicate with each other? Neither Plum nor Lardner was regarded as a talkative man, and Lardner's alcoholism couldn't have helped. It's a shame, because the two men had so much in common. Both loved sports, in fact; they have been frequently anthologized together in baseball, boxing, and golf collections. Both loved and worked in theater. And of course both were masters of the art of writing. However, a meeting of minds was not to be. And in the collections of humor that Plum edited, there is no mention of Ring Lardner.

Lardner's health continued to deteriorate through the Twenties and early Thirties, although he continued to work. He published his last work in 1933 and died in September that year, age 48.

Although at the time of his death, Lardner's work was no longer in vogue, he began a revival in the years after World War II. A posthumous collection, *The Portable Ring Lardner*, was published by Viking in 1946, bringing him back to the limelight. His work continues to flourish. Most anthologies of American short stories, especially for high schools, contain at least one Lardner story, and collections of his stories continue to be published; an annotated round-up of his baseball stories came out in 1994. Jonathan Yardley, the *Washington Post* writer whose name is familiar to Wodehouse fans, wrote *Ring*, the standard biography, in 1977. Elizabeth Evans chimed in with *Ring Lardner* in 1979. Critical studies were published by Twayne in 1963 and the University of Minnesota Press in 1965. Ring Lardner Jr. wrote *My Family Remembered* in 1976, and in 2004 Ring Jr.'s daughter wrote her memoir *Shut Up, He Explained: Memoirs of a Blacklisted Kid*. The Ring Lardner website at www.tridget.com/lardnermania is a valuable resource.



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. Representatives of chapters, 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:

The Anglers' Rest meets every other month (aside from holiday madness months when all bets are off) at various locales in the Puget Sound area. Much discussion of any topic in any way associated with Wodehouse takes place—and then everything else, too. We attend local arts events and try new restaurants, pubs, and teahouses. We read passages from favorite Wodehouse books out loud; trade interesting Wodehouse-related items; and lend books, tapes, CDs, and DVDs to one another with abandon. Join us for a relaxing or invigorating time with folks of like mind and attitude.

The Anglers' Rest met on Saturday, October 28, at the Elephant & Castle in downtown Seattle. Friends from Somewhere In Time Unlimited joined us, as did some of the original members of our group from long ago. New people showed up, too. The meeting started with a toast to the Master and was then followed by lots of good talk, good food, and good drinks. The drinks were all legal, as we had with us an official Department of Prohibition prescription for liquor from 1925! A copy of the McCrum biography of Wodehouse was given away as a door prize. Stu won the PGW trivia quiz prize, but Wes was not far behind. Discussion of other writers ensued: O'Brian, Thirkell, Shakespeare, etc. A grand time was had by all. With fond farewells we scattered to get home before the storm hit.

We will have a read-aloud of one of the Spode stories at our next meeting; date yet to be decided. Everyone

who shows up will get a part (if they want one). So brush up your reading-out-loud skills and join us. Props will be available to assist you.

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:

Because our usual meeting room at The Players Club was unavailable to us, the Broadway Special met on September 8, 2006, at the Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. This artists' club with a long and venerable history and stunningly beautiful clubhouse welcomed the Special warmly. Our discussion of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, attended by a good 25 chapter members, some in nautical attire, was a focused and serious one (or as serious as Wodehouse allows one to be).

On Saturday, October 21, a group of the more intrepid Broadway Specials gathered at the Washington Square Hotel, formerly the Hotel Earle, where PGW lived in New York during extended visits in 1901 and 1911. Our delightful mission was a Wodehouse walk in Greenwich Village led by New York historian, inveterate walker, and chapter member David Rabinowitz. We strolled through Washington Square, identifying along the way the building that we thought filled the bill as the locale of *The Small Bachelor*, though the Purple Chicken is long gone! Wending our devious way through the Village's charming streets, we looked in at the Minetta Tavern and Chumley's saloon (a former speakeasy), paused before the house where Washington Irving is said to have written "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and generally enjoyed a sparkling day with sparkling conversation along the way. Following the walk, a larger number of chapter members joined The Strollers at Gene's at 73 West 11th Street for a convivial luncheon. Our next meeting was to be held at

The Players on December 1, with the Wodehouse work to be discussed yet to be chosen at the time of printing.

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:

On Sunday, October 22, 31 members of Capital! gathered at a local restaurant for dinner and friendship and to hear a presentation by Ann Stone on “Wodehouse and Children.” Ann compared and contrasted Plum’s treatment of his stepdaughter Leonora with the treatment given to children and teenagers in Wodehouse’s writings. The presentation was joyously received by listeners. [Look for this talk in a future issue of *Plum Lines*. –Ed.] On Saturday evening, December 2, the CapCap loonies attended *She Loves Me* at the Arena Stage. This is a charming musical comedy set in the 1930s. The musical was not, alas, written by P. G. Wodehouse—in fact, no Wodehouse dramatic collaborations are scheduled for the Washington, D.C., area this 2006–07 theater season. But the show contains enough of the familiar Wodehousian heroes, heroines, comen, and blackguards to make for a fun evening.

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:

For a variety of reasons we couldn’t get our private room at the Dark Horse Pub in September, but we made up for it by an extra-large turnout at our November meeting. Once again ensconced in the Victorian Pickwick Room at the Dark Horse, the Chaps catapulted pigs—actually tiny plastic piglets—into a basket, using a flimsy airgun to get them there. The airgun broke before anyone but Dan Cohen could succeed at this game, which won him a special prize, an unspeakably disgusting toy worthy of Boko Fittleworth at his worst, called Poo-Pooing Pig. I will spare you further details. After that, it was pitch and toss, which wound up in a playoff between Hope Gaines and Bob Nissenbaum. Bob won. The prizes, delightful Drones Club matchbooks bearing a letter in miniature by PGW himself, were awarded to both winner and runner-up and to the winners of the team competition as well. Many thanks to David and Karen Ruef for this weird experience.

Herb Moskovitz told us about a new pastiche, *Messres Dickens, Doyle & Wodehouse Pvt. Ltd.*, by Neelum Saran Gour, published in India. The book has Jeeves as Sherlock Holmes’s butler, and Holmes’s clients are all Dickensian characters. Herb read a couple of pages of the book aloud, and everyone, including Herb, felt that this was a book only a collector could love. The final event of this activity-packed meeting was Dan Cohen’s presentation, “Gorilla My Dreams,” a history of that vitally significant group: gorilla impersonators. The Chaps will meet again on January 21, 2007.

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 in January 2007; 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.

The Drone Rangers had a quiet summer, returning to our regular schedule in September when we dined at a new restaurant in the River Oaks section of Houston. We enjoyed ourselves far too much, which is the ancient and honorable way of our members. Saturdays have meant movie night at Toni's, where the Drone Rangers have been watching Hugh Laurie in *House*, thanks to Toni's complete collection of the DVDs of the show, with an occasional foray into watching Laurie in *Black Adder*. On a recent Saturday we did something different and watched Ioan Gruffudd, instead, in the Hornblower series. Food at this get-together was provided by Bertie Ramos (pizza) and Susan Pierce (cheesecake). On this meager fare, eked out with champagne and fruit, we summoned the blood sufficient to help Hornblower stomp his adversaries, wrapping up the evening with glad cries and toasts to our seamanship. We planned to discuss *Psmith in the City* at our October 27th book meeting.

The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw



Phone:

Email:

In July the Flying Pigs enjoyed the first of what we hope will be an annual outdoor summer BBQ. It was held at the home of Dirk Wonnell and Susan Brokaw, with Dirk holding forth as the grill master from whom Anatole could learn a new culinary trick or two.

Susan Pace provided an excellent green salad aux herbes, and new members Donna and Moe Anderson brought along pints of Cincinnati's own very yummy Graeter's ice cream. We enjoyed dinner al fresco on what was one of the few comfortable summer evenings here in the Midwest: low humidity, clear skies, a billion or so lightning bugs, and the serenade of tree peepers and crickets. It was a very enjoyable evening of browsing, sluicing, and conversation centered on our beloved Plum.

Our autumn meeting was at Todd and Kelly Bell's fabulous home in downtown Cincinnati. Kelly laid out a delicious spread of homemade scones, butter cookies, crustless sandwiches (three kinds), and tea. We listened to Wodehouse songs on CD as well as the dulcet tones of our hostess Kelly, an operatic soprano. A delightful evening among Wodehouse lovers. Our next meeting will be in January 2007. We hope to continue to add to our membership and invite any and all interested Wodehousians in the tri-state area (Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky) to join us; you will be most welcome.

We are sorry to have to report that our O.M. Bob Elliott died in October at the age of 90. Bob, a lifelong devotee of Wodehouse, will be sorely missed by the members of our chapter and his many friends in the rest of TWS.

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 find 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 had a perfectly lovely fall gathering in Sturbridge, Massachusetts, with lunch at its most famous inn, the Publick House, in a private room for feasting and merriment. We did discuss a few small items in connection with next year's TWS convention in Providence, Rhode Island (plans are coming along nicely, as I trust you will see elsewhere in this issue), but, other than burbling a bit over my having completed 10 years as the NEWTS' not always fearless leader, we mostly ate and reveled. We do have one major announcement: Our Christmas gathering, originally scheduled for December 9, has had to be rescheduled to January 6 (at the Swansons', as usual). Anyone interested in details but not on our mailing list, please let me know.

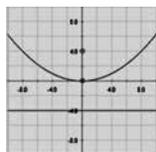
The Northwodes
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
Contact: Kristine Fowler



Phone:
Email:

Noteworthy Northwodes accomplishments this quarter included donating \$330 to the Hennepin County Library for acquisition of more Wodehouse books; we figure they can, with their library discount, stock the shelves of at least three of their branches with the 10-volume Basic Wodehouse Library we have suggested (and the books can, of course, be lent to all the others). HCL is the third library system we've targeted in our annual effort to spread the good word. We finished that campaign just in time to gather for the traditional Birthday Toast to the Master on October 15, followed by a fine dinner and convivial conversation at a venerable St. Paul establishment. Next up is a holiday gathering, details to be settled when we feel particularly efficient.

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 Plummers 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 website: www.lahacal.org/wodehouse.

The Pickering Motor Company
(Detroit and vicinity)
Contact: Elliott Milstein



Phone:
Email:

The Portland Wodehouse Society
(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)
Contact: Ray Steen
E-mail:

The Portland Wodehouse Society (née Wuckoos of the Palace), which plans to meet on the first Sunday of the even months, was launched on Sunday, October 1, at Annie Bloom's Books. Not having previously seen the room which Annie Bloom's has very generously made

available to us, we were all impressed with it. A more delightful meeting place would be hard to imagine. The challenge to come up with a name for our little group was enthusiastically accepted by Jeremy Thompson and Tom Smith. Jeremy urges the Jr. Ganymedes, an inspired idea! But it is not a cert because Tom wants the PGW (Portland Greater Wodehouse) Society, which has the advantage of being properly pretentious. Which name will be chosen? The finest minds are baffled. Maybe the issue can be resolved at our next meeting on Sunday, December 3.

The Size 14 Hat Club

(Halifax, Nova Scotia)

Contact: Jill Robinson

Email:

The Soup & Fish Club

(Northern Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard

Phone:

Email:



As head, and sole member, of the Soup & Fish Club, I got the wild idea some time ago to sponsor Best Antique in the annual local car show to promote Wodehouse. [See *Plum Lines*, Winter 2005, p.18.] It costs me a hundred Washingtons for the privilege of picking a winner and handing over a trophy. The trophy is engraved with “The Soup & Fish Club,” and various printed materials hark the moniker. My criterion is anything up to 1939 that could have been driven by any Wodehouse character on either side of the Atlantic. Giving out the trophy always creates a lot of interest in Wodehouse and TWS.

I am proud to announce that this year’s trophy winner is Jim Gray with his 1931 Model A Ford named Ruby. She is a stock restoration, correct in every visible detail, including the color “Rubellite Red.” I understand she drives beautifully and made a journey of 550 miles to Dearborn, Michigan, to win a MARC of Excellence award in the Touring Class in the Model A Restorers Club National Meet. Like Wodehouse, Ruby is standing the test of time.

Aunts Scare Gentlemen?

Tom Thomas notes that the *New York Times* crossword puzzle for September 30, 2006, provides the clue “Aunts ___ Gentlemen (P. G. Wodehouse’s last complete novel)” to a five-letter answer. Any guesses?

The Reminiscences of Galahad Gould

BY CHARLES E. GOULD, JR.

Part 1 of 2

October 15, 2006, was the 125th birthday of P. G. Wodehouse. By not exactly a coincidence, that date marked my 25th annual catalogue of Wodehouse material for sale: “First Editions, Later Editions, Anthologies, Autographs, Sheet Music and Full Scores, Ephemera, Translations, Biography, Bibliography, Criticism and Commentary, Theatre Posters and Programmes, Phonograph Records, Poor Copies, and Paperbacks. Perhaps North America’s largest selection of Wodehouse material.” This boast has recently been temporarily eclipsed by Clouds Hill Books, and the quality of my general inventory in recent years has been surpassed by Peter L. Stern and Quill & Brush and, possibly, other upstarts; but my immodest claim that I have been “North America’s Wodehouse Specialist since 1981” hardly needs disputing. Like Groucho Marx, I wouldn’t want to belong to a club that would have me as a member.

Mr. John Graham’s suggestion and Editor Daniel Cohen’s response to it—that I should write something for *Plum Lines* about my 25 years as a Wodehouse dealer—were flattering indeed, though my first response was dismay. Wodehouse once remarked that he would have some wonderful memories if only he could remember them; and, on the other hand, I have some very clear memories of things I would much prefer to forget. In “The Village Schoolmaster,” the poet Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) records the amazement of the villagers that “one small head could carry all he knew.” For 36 years a schoolmaster myself, I am amazed that a regulation-size head these days contains so very little of what mine did once. But Wodehouse well knew (*Bring On the Girls, Performing Flea*), as Roger Angell has recently written, that “stories about our own lives are a form of fiction,” and in that blue but bloodless vein I now continue.

In 1980 my late wife Carolyn (who died 20 years ago September) and I swapped places with an English couple at Culford School, near Bury St. Edmunds, where for three months I enjoyed the distinction (among a few onerous duties) of being an American teaching Dickens’s *Bleak House* to a group of A-Level English candidates. Technically, my “teaching” was what they called “revision”: they had already studied the novel for a year. But they hadn’t noticed that it was a work of art, and I acquired some measure of not altogether favorable renown by



Charles E. Gould, Jr., the definition of dapper

presenting it as such—pointing out, for example, that in Chapter I Dickens moves from phrases and fragments about the fog to complex sentences in which the fog becomes a metaphor for Chancery and then turns into the theme of the novel. They thought I was just a crazy Yank when I showed them that in the paragraph about the death of Jo, the crossing sweeper, Dickens's prose turns into perfect iambic pentameter—the “unconscious verse” that R.B.D. French and I used to correspond about: he saw it in Dickens, sought it in Wodehouse, and was delighted to see my examples from *Moby Dick*.

Robert Butler Davies French (the Butler as in William Butler Yeats) had written that very fine if slender (now rare if slender) book about PGW. He had taught English at Trinity College, Dublin, for 40 years or so, and as Senior Tutor was ready to retire when our correspondence began in 1975. He lived with his sister, Nell, in what he described as a “rambling shack” in Newtown Verney, just outside of Dublin, which Carolyn and I were eager to visit when RBD called us at our hotel in Curzon Street to say that he and Nell were both “down with the ‘flu.” He died not long after—looking, in the photograph Nell sent, rather like Robert Morley in morning clothes.

In the meantime, RBD had put me in touch with one Barry Phelps (“he sounds like a gent”) who, as the absolute first Wodehouse Specialist Dealer, was then operating out of his large house in Irene Road, Fulham. From Phelps I bought some of the gems in my collection. From my duplicates Phelps bought a gem or two for his collection (now at Dulwich College), and many more for resale; and I became a dealer. As early as 1976 rumors were flying, Psmith-like, around London about a rich American who was buying almost every Wodehouse book in sight. I learned his name, at last, from John Saumarez Smith at G. Heywood Hill's shop on Curzon Street: James H. Heineman of New York, whose London Agent or Buyer, I later learned, was the immortal late Richard Usborne. But at the moment, I was in England and James H. Heineman

was in Geneva, and it was going to be another year or so before I met Usborne. (One of my earliest epistolary exchanges with Dick Usborne concerned his statement in *Wodehouse at Work to the End* that “Pongo has rooms in Albany.” Dick had very flatteringly asked me to make some editorial notes on the book even as it was being prepared for the Penguin edition, and among two dozen pretty obvious errors I queried the absence of the article in that statement. “It certainly is a choice,” he replied. “But . . . I learnt at my mother's knee . . . that it is a rule of snobbery to call it ‘Albany,’ not ‘The Albany’—that row of houses stretching from Burlington Gardens to Piccadilly.” It's tough, as I have remarked elsewhere, growing up on the wrong side of the Atlantic.)

In the summer of 1980 I shipped back to America (the Culford Post Office required several days to process them) about three dozen boxes of PGW books, many of which came from G. Heywood Hill's, including vastly expensive (because heavy) bound volumes of *Punch*. In September I typed a list and sent it to Barry Phelps, whom by then I had met, and Jimmy Heineman, whom I had then not met. (When we met Phelps, he said to Carolyn, in the taxi on the way to Fulham, “Gould seems quite reasonable and normal; why is he so very strange on the telephone?” “Strange man,” Carolyn replied. When she and I first met Jimmy Heineman at the door of his Park Avenue flat, he and I were each wearing a blue chalk-striped suit and a red bow tie. Carolyn didn't say, “What's all this, then?” until later.) They bought almost everything and asked for more; and I became a *dealer*. Soon after, with the Morgan Library Wodehouse Centenary Celebration and the McIlvaine Bibliography in mind, Jimmy was constantly in touch with me, farming out for sale his (by then) huge collection of duplicates, mistakes, reprints, and junk, and buying whatever I could find that he didn't have . . . and, in those days if not still, there was an amazing amount of that. I became a *big dealer*, a moonlighting schoolmaster with Heineman's blaze behind me. And in 1981 I produced what I was proud to call a Catalogue.

It was typed and xeroxed, bibliographically maieutic with the occasional *hapax legomenon* thrown in to keep everybody honest, and not easy on the eye of the reader. For 10 years or more, I justified the margins by counting spaces on one of my two IBM Selectric Typewriters. (If this seems to you tedium, cane a chair. Or cane a boy . . . as I declined to do as a visiting teacher in England. Or lose 40 pages at a twitch of your lap on a laptop, as I did of my catalogue trying to join the club eight or nine years ago. “Tee-Hee,” quoth She in Technology. “These things happen.”) Ha, ha.

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First Editions Available

Harriett Karlin is selling four first editions of P. G. Wodehouse books: *The Butler Did It*, *French Leave*, *Joy in the Morning*, and *How Right You Are, Jeeves*. She already sold a larger collection that belonged to her wonderful librarian husband, who passed away five years ago. If you have interest, contact Harriett.

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Chapters Corner: Susan Cohen (same address as Dan)
All other submissions: Gary Hall

Note the address change for Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall. They are still in their mountain cradle in Estes Park, Colorado, but with a different street address for your Plum Lines contributions!

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