

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

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## Divine Providence 2007

FROM October 11 to 14, the light shone yet again on our merry Plummy band as we stormed the shores (and taverns) of Providence, Rhode Island, and hordes of happy conventioners commandeered the Providence Biltmore. The halls and rafters of that venerable old hotel rang with the sound of giggles and guffaws. Costumed revelers, unlit cigarette holders, and even a lorgnette or two were spotted. If you need proof of the cheer of this gathering, gaze upon the omnipresent sparkling smiles in our full-color photo section on pages 13–16.

The NEWTS proved to be perfect hosts. The convention was exceedingly well-managed and well-mannered. One hundred and eighty mad Wodehouseans came and went, and there were no reports of fallen chandeliers, untipped bellpersons, or champagne-soaked carpets. On the contrary, Providence seemed uplifted by the influx of laughter and camaraderie.

In the following pages, you will find reports from the various events: the Newport tour, as the rapt busloads invaded many of the greatest mansions on American soil; the Clean, Bright Entertainment, as the sluicers sluiced, the singers sang, and the thespians thesped; the reception, banquet, and costume contest, colorful, spirited, and occasionally fishy; and the final brunch and sermon handicap, when our genuine Very Reverend Wendell Verrill ended the session with vim and vigor, with the only lacking ingredient for some being one of Jeeves's pick-me-ups.

For those many, those happy many, who were privileged to be at the convention, there will be cherished memories to recall fondly at future conventions. Which brings up the Very Important News: **A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie in Saint Paul, Minnesota, June 12–14, 2009**. Stay tuned to *Plum Lines* for additional details, but mark your calendar now, so that neither class reunions, favorite television programs, nor impending prison terms can keep you from Saint Paul that week.

And, of course, 2011 is just around the corner. Please see page 6 for information about having your chapter apply for the 2011 convention. Bids are due *no later* than September 12, 2008, to Jean Tillson.

Now, read on and discover the real story of what happened in Providence when TWS came to town . . .



*Elizabeth Peel, Deborah Bellew, Karen Ruef,  
and Hope Gaines get the party going.  
(Photo from Deborah Bellew)*

# The Newport Bus Tour

BY SUSAN COLLICOTT



*Beechwood Mansion (Photo by Barbara Combs)*

FRIDAY DAWNED clear and bright, and the Plumies were off on a bus trip to Newport. On the way, the fall colors were beautiful and the sun turned everything golden. The tour material handed out on the bus was a Newport/Wodehouse timeline (prepared by Max Pokrivchak and Norman Murphy) that had a fascinating list of events from Newport's founding (1639) to Wodehouse's death (1975). Highlights included Ethel and Leonora helping to unload bootlegged hooch after a fancy dinner party and the first Newport Jazz Festival in 1954.

Arriving in Newport, we picked up our tour guide and drove past sites such as the Comte de Rochambeau statue, St. Mary's Parish Church, Touro Synagogue (oldest in the USA), and the Seaman's Church Institute. We did a drive-by visit of Fort Adams and then stopped at Brenton State Park to stretch our legs. It was gorgeous with the sunshine glinting on the waves and a strong wind blowing us about.

On the way out along Ocean Drive we drove by Hammersmith Farm, where Jackie Bouvier and John



*Tony Ring and the Beechwood limo (Photo by Barbara Combs)*

F. Kennedy's wedding reception was held. Next stop was a tour of the Astor mansion, Beechwood, which is set up as a living museum. Actors play the parts of Astor family members and friends, and act as guides throughout the house, while tourists must pretend to be members of "The Four Hundred" who have come

to attend a party at Beechwood that night. Our guide on the first part of the tour was none other than "Cole Porter," who at one point paused to sing us his latest hit, "Night and Day." My favorite parts of the house were the music room and the housekeeper's room. The view was lovely, a solid, sunny green lawn stretching out to the waves, so pleasing on this brisk fall day.

When we were let loose in town for lunch, a few of us stopped by the soup and sandwich buffet at a nearby hotel and sat with a lovely view of the wharves. Others grabbed a lunch on the run and toured more of the city, including Trinity Church, where George Washington once worshipped.

Our next stop was the Vanderbilt mansion, The Breakers, where we had time first to wander around



*Monika Eckfield basks at The Breakers. (Photo by Tamaki Morimura)*

outside the house (as there was a bit of a line to enter!). We again found ourselves on a glorious lawn leading down to the shining ocean. The house guide gave us a lovely tour, and I can say that I've never seen so many different kinds of marble, in such quantities, in one house! The bathrooms did *not* seem comfortable at all, rather chilly and daunting, but the sitting rooms were very pretty and the music room ceiling was a delight. My favorite spots were the Loggia (with a fanciful ceiling painted to look like draped fabric) and the two-story butler's pantry.

Once we had battled our way through the gift shop (I made it out with only a bit of damage, a tea towel and some postcards) we strolled out down the long driveway and back onto the bus, and headed to the hotel to get ready for some Clean, Bright Entertainment.

# The Clean, Bright Entertainment

BY GARY HALL AND MAX POKRIVCHAK

FRIDAY NIGHT arrived, and the Clean, Bright Entertainment commenced. The Garden Room was overrun by the Wodehousean herd, and a variety of delectable fare gave us sustenance to last the evening. Hops and fruits of the vine flowed freely from the congenial fellows at the drinks tables.

After the huzzahs quieted to a moderate roar, TWS President Jean Tillson took the microphone, welcomed one and all, and turned the stage over to our Master of Ceremonies, Max Pokrivchak.

The Wodehouse Society is rich in talent, and much of it was on display this night. The audience welcomed one and all, and not a single tomato was vaulted stageward as the room rocked with laughter again and again.

Leading off the show, Monika Eckfield and Paul Abrinko sang "You Never Knew About Me." Expertly accompanied by Chris Morgan on classical guitar, the duo seemed quite sincere. Keep reading to see how soon Monika would sing another song of romance with yet another Romeo. Ah, how fickle are the women of the stage!

Ken Clevenger then presented the first sermon in the Brotherly Love Sermon Challenge. Ken claimed to have found this piece, which was signed by none other than the Reverend Francis Heppenstall. Though it wandered a bit into the lineage of the ancient Assyrians, it was warmly received by the flock, and no heads were seen nodding off (the acid test for any sermon).

How to follow such an act? With the biennial NEWTS skit, of course! "Bertie Meets His Maker," written by David Landman and directed by Elizabeth Landman, was a hot item. With David Nolan enacting Bertie, John Kareores as Jeeves, and a plot involving Bertie's lame defense before his Maker—a celestial Plum—the laughs abounded. Tim Andrew played the offstage Plum, a bit impatient to get the proceedings over in time for tea. With the "character" witnesses asserting that Bertie was an ass, chances for acquittal seemed remote. David Landman's Anatole almost burst a brisket: "I know on which side my butt is breaded!" Rounding out the able cast were Wendell Verrill as the Rev. Audrey Upjohn, Rosemary Roman as Aunt Dahlia, Randall Burkett as Baxter, Max Pokrivchak as Reggie Pepper, John Fahey as Constable Dobbs, Jean Wilson as Roberta Wickham, Elizabeth Landman as the treacly Madeline Bassett, and the delightful Anne Cotton as the human-sacrificing werewoman Aunt Agatha.

Chris Morgan took the stage again. What a fine classical guitarist he is! He threatened to do Wagner's

*The angelic NEWTS  
prepare to testify.  
(Photo by  
Barbara Combs)*



Ring cycle for us, but limited his hilarious selections to "Have Some Madeira, M'Dear"; "Loving You Has Made Me Bananas"; and his own composition, "The First Law of Thermodynamics," which quickly became an audience sing-along.

Stephen Persing, the next sermon entrant, was absent, but his stand-in was a ringer, for the crowd got their first earful of the Very Rev. Wendell Verrill. Perhaps it was the wine, perhaps it was the hour, but most likely it was the dulcet and dynamic tones of Rev. Verrill that made Stephen's sermon the ultimate winner of the Challenge.

Tamaki Morimura then offered a sweet and sincere rendition of "Bill," with Elizabeth Landman on the keys. Our response is, "More, Morimura!"

Susan Collicott's Anglers' Rest crew was next, breathing life into Plum's "Came the Dawn." The cast included Susan herself as Man in Bar and Hall Porter, and also starred Noel Merrill as Mr. Mulliner, Lucy Merrill as Jeremiah Briggs, Major Thomas L. Smith (Ret.) as Lancelot Mulliner, Caralyn Campbell as Fotheringay, Ken Clevenger as Isadore Zinzinheimer, Joan Clevenger as Angela, and Elin Woodger Murphy as Lord Biddlecombe.

Tony Ring and a cast of thousands (or fewer; my enumerating skills were impaired by the Green Swizzles) read from *The Wit and Wisdom of P. G. Wodehouse*. See page 27 for more info about ordering it for the holidays.

The Broadway Special presented four of Plum's tunes, accompanied by the indefatigable Mrs. Landman on piano. David Rabinowitz gave us "Napoleon" and "Greenwich Village," Evelyn Herzog charmed and seduced us with "Cleopatterer," and M. E. Rich did a fine version of "Saturday Night."

Wednesday Matinee (aka Freda Kirkham) took the stage. With David Nolan assisting, she sang a spunky "Russian Love," which nicely segued into the next act.

Masha Lebedeva was a fierce Vladimir Brusiloff, complete with a mass of shrubbery on her chin. Tim Andrew read from "The Clicking of Cuthbert" as Masha thoroughly convinced us that, aside from Wodehouse, Brusiloff is the only writer we should be reading.

Finally, spreading affection in all directions, Monika Eckfield performed again, this time with John Graham as her partner. Singing "Rolled into One," their humor and intermittent fidelity topped the evening nicely.

# Saturday Speakers

ACADEMIA and humor abounded during the Saturday program. In the morning, **Wendell Verrill** wowed us with his talk on “Wodehouse and God” (see page 8). **Margaret Slythe** then discussed PGW’s years at Dulwich College in “The Dulwich Factor.” **Sophie Ratcliffe** told us about her book of PGW letters due in 2009; see “The Envelope by the Toast Rack” on page 23. In “Hollywood Adapts Wodehouse,” **Brian Taves** described screen adaptations of Wodehouse stories; then **David Jasen** reminisced about his friendship with Wodehouse in “That Reminds Me.” The afternoon kicked off with the Dread Business Meeting and announcement of the 2009 convention (see page 21). Next, **Norman Murphy** presented his “Director’s Cut, or Now It Can Be Shown”—photos omitted from *A Wodehouse Handbook*. (See page 22 for a Great Revelation from Norman’s talk.) **Dan Cohen**’s talk, “Gorilla My Dreams,” concerned legendary and Wodehousian gorilla impersonators. **Anne Cotton** paired PGW characters with canine counterparts in “If Jeeves Were a Dog,” while **David Trumbull** spoke on “Robert C. Benchley: At the Crossroads of Humor.” **Charles Gould** ended the day with “The Discretions of Archie”—actually a disguised version of his legendary 1991 convention talk, “P. G. Wodehouse: The Last of the Great Russians.” See future issues of *Plum Lines* for many of the speakers’ talks.

## Saturday Evening Reception and Banquet

BY KEN CLEVENGER

THE GARDEN ROOM of the Providence Biltmore Hotel was a veritable garden of delight as the TWS revelers reveled at the acme of the 2007 convention.

I will skip lightly over the preliminary sluicing, not that said sluicing was unmemorable. However, the most memorable part of the preprandial session was the artful array of costumes: stylish flappers, both marcelled and bobbed, I am reliably informed, and gentlemen (here my information may be less reliable) dressed to the nines such that even Jeeves would approve. The costumes were judged and many prizes presented. I will summarize the prize-giving by



Speaker Margaret Slythe, a Plummy friend, and chardonnay (Photo by Toni Rudersdorf)

mentioning the curious case of The Can of Tuna and noting that a vision in pink, The Girl in Blue, and a green alligator-accessorized lady (The High Priestess of Rannygazoo) were some of the female winners. On the non-distaff side, a cow creamer and the classic sailor suit merited prizes. My favorite winning costumes were sported by Freda Kirkham and Maria Cimino as Rockmetteller Todd, Freda before five in the afternoon and Maria thereafter. Clearly the costume judges were sober and judicious and pleased to see the creative range of Wodehouse characters, types, and titles present. [See page 7 for full details!—Ed.]

Skipping on to the browsing, the meal was truly memorable. Several toasts were offered and drunk, most notably the encomium in rhyme to Plum delivered by Anne Cotton. Eating ensued and more wine flowed. The meal was enjoyed by all the comfortably seated diners at tables with black pig centerpieces. And even if the sugar was not in throwable lumps, at least the bread rolls were prime for throwing. I did not actually see such a shocking breach of decorum, but I am sure the idea crossed more than one mind.

On TWS’s behalf, Len Lawson presented a gift to Doug Stow, who has created terrific keepsakes for many of our conventions. Former president Jean Tillson was also recognized for her contributions to TWS and received a Voco Clock. Hilary Bruce of the U.K. Society presented Jean with an embossed cricket ball, referring aptly to her “good eggness.” Norman Murphy was later observed teaching Jean the art of the slow googly.

The announcement of the Fiendish Quiz winners followed, and it was the dickens of a Wodehouse quiz. I do not know if all the winners in the Masters and Fans divisions had lists of the relatives of Mr. Mulliner pinned to their blouses, but the depth and detail of their knowledge was remarkable. The winner of the Brotherly Love Sermon Handicap challenge was the absent Stephen Persing, represented by Wendell Verrill, who also won a well-deserved prize for his superb delivery of the winning sermon.

The auction of two unique items followed. The City of Providence Proclamation and the State of Rhode Island Citation (which designated October 15, 2007, as P. G. Wodehouse Day) stimulated a significant degree of suspenseful bidding. Auctioneer John Kareores did such a superb job that prices skyrocketed, to the unconcealed delight of the NEWTS. This spectacularly successful auction was no doubt due to the generous spirits of TWS members—and their generous intake of spirits in the course of the evening. Even more successful was the rummage sale. Many Wodehousean items were donated and made for some fun, no-calorie

browsing throughout the convention. The final money-making scheme was a raffle for prizes such as Wodehouse books and tapes autographed by Richard Briers, Stephen Fry, and Martin Jarvis. A staggering sum was raised and, together with the auction and rummage sale, made for a highly successful fund-raising program for future conventions.

The awarding of the final prize was followed by an announcement that the bar was still open and an apparently spontaneous outbreak of egg-and-spoon racing. Dancing followed, but sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the two. Recall that the bar was still open. Of course, there were many elegant couples whose graceful swaying to the music was beautiful to see. And so the evening wound down, dancers and revelers, Plum-lovers all, in communal conversation, making plans to meet in St. Paul.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention Doug Stow's attractively printed keepsake booklet, containing a charming set of quotations compiled by Amy Plofker. The quotes featured the role of "Providence" in the world of Wodehouse and will be a joyful reminder of this delightful evening.



*Lord Emsworth's girl friend,  
Marilyn MacGregor  
(Photo by Marjanne Otten)*



*Flappers galore:  
Carol Cavalluzzi, Evelyn  
Herzog, Elaine Ring,  
and Elaine Coppola  
in fine style (Photo by  
Barbara Combs)*

## The Final Brunch and the Great Sermon Handicap

BY KAREN SHOTTING

**B**RUNCH began at a crispish 8:30 A.M. There was many a call for Jeeves's pick-me-up by those with a morning head as a result of continuing Saturday night's festivities after the Biltmore bunged us out of the Garden Room at midnight. However, a bit of strengthening tea or coffee and some eggs and b. allowed conviviality and jollity to spread throughout the room as the weekend's fun, plans for getting together at "A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie," and other topics of general interest were discussed by the congregation prior to hearing the long-anticipated Great Sermon Handicap.

The Very Rev. Father Wendell Verrill (Higham All Saints), Catholic priest, TWS member, NEWT, and all-round good egg, was to speak extemporaneously on a Scripture passage selected at random, and punters were invited to wager on the length of the sermon. Our devoted group had been able to get a line on W. Verrill's form at the previous day's Sermon on Brotherly Love competition, where he had done an extraordinarily fine trial gallop. The passage for W. Verrill's sermon was chosen at random by a young man whose voice had not broken by the second Sunday of Septuagesima, and I think we can take it as read that a man of Father Verrill's impeccable moral standards

would not allow any ranngazoo in the manner of selecting the topic.

"The Insult of the Ammonites" (2 Samuel 10:1) was the passage chosen, which may have caused Father Verrill to begin to entertain doubt about slavishly adhering to moral rectitude. However, the die was cast, and ushers circulated among the parishioners with church collection baskets accepting bids. A reliable steward was appointed to time the sermon, and we were assured that the official timer had been guaranteed as accurate by that ever-reliable authority on weights and measures, Radio Shack.

Those who desiderated (and betted on) brevity at the pulpit were soon disappointed as W. Verrill fairly took the bit between his teeth and, ignoring the topic completely, launched into a digression of "funny moments from my past." His story of the young priest (name withheld) who, in a magnificent deviation from the Scriptural text, informed his flock that "Jesus had been baptized by Job in the john" and the subsequent agony of the attending Cardinal who fled the church and stuffed a handkerchief in his mouth to stifle his hilarity endeared him to all of those betting on a longish sermon. His further tangents into his own personal history (the man is approaching 70) and the definition of the obscure religious device "prophylacteries," coupled with the unfortunate effect when this word is mispronounced as "prophylactics," cheered anyone who had wagered that the good father could last 10 minutes or more.

Only after these segues did he launch into a discussion of the text. It appears that the insult occurred when David sent ambassadors to express sympathy to Hanun upon the death of his father, the King of the Ammonites. Unfortunately, whereas David was expecting that this would be one of those conferences between statesmen conducted throughout in a spirit

of the utmost cordiality, what in fact happened was that Hanun's advisers, who could have taken Iago's correspondence course, convinced Hanun that David had sent them as spies, and Hanun proceeded to cut off half their beards and half their garments, thus exposing their nether regions—pretty humiliating and the sort of thing that invites retaliation.

Additional valuable minutes were gained as W. Verrill referred to the prior day's sermon and pointed out the extreme lack of Brotherly Love exhibited by the Ammonites. The flock then learned that the Lord did a lot more smiting of the wicked in the Old Testament than the New, and we heard of a cartoon in *The New Yorker* where two angels are surreptitiously discussing whether the Man on Top was in "an Old Testament or a New Testament mood" that day.

No question: the Rev. was a trier. His pauses for emphasis, his statements of incredulity, clearing of his throat, and the digressions, tangential references, and use of extraneous filler words such as "as I close" prior to his final peroration all added valuable minutes.

Finally the topic and the V. Rev. were exhausted, and the official timer announced that the time from the opening words to the final "Amen" was 11 minutes and 45 seconds. The winner was Mike Iwanaga, with exactly that time.

Jean Tillson then announced the close of the Divine Providence Convention, and we left for our various destinations—a happy group with fond memories looking forward to the next gathering.

*Thanks to Jean Tillson, the NEWTS, and all the others who made this convention a success! A complete list of acknowledgements and thanks will be printed in the Spring issue of Plum Lines.*

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

## Convention Loot!

FOR A PITTANCE or two, you can be the proud owner of convention loot! You can get a mug for \$10, a pin for \$5, a convention bag for \$15, or all three for \$25, postage paid, anywhere in North America. Those in distant lands (outside of the USA) should add another fiver (US) for shipping, on account of the poor old dollar not quite feeling itself these days. Send your order to the following address (with checks/money orders made out to The Wodehouse Society): Jean Tillson.

## Applying for 2011

WE KNOW that there are many of you out there eager and willing to be the host chapter for the 2011 convention! Full details about how the host chapter is chosen are available in TWS's Convention Steering Committee (CSC) Charter. If you are unable to get it from TWS's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter.html>) for some reason, please write to Elin Woodger for a copy (see below).

**All bids for the 2011 convention must be submitted to Jean Tillson by September 12, 2008.** You may contact Jean by e-mail at [pighooey@mindspring.com](mailto:pighooey@mindspring.com), or by snail mail at 246 Beaver St, Franklin MA 02038-3002.

The host chapter selection will be made well in advance of the 2009 St. Paul convention. The CSC Charter mandates: (1) Any chapter wishing to host a convention must submit their bid to the Committee by nine months before the next convention. Therefore, with the 2009 convention slated for June of that year, **all submissions for the 2011 convention must be received by September 12, 2008.** (2) The Committee will notify bidding chapters whether their bids have been successful at least six months before the next convention. Thus, chapters wanting to host the 2011 convention will be notified by December 12, 2008, whether their bid has been successful or not. (3) If the Committee receives no bids by the nine-month deadline, they will use those nine months to make their own convention plans—which may mean selecting a likely chapter and inviting them to play Persian Monarchs, with the honor of hosting the 2011 convention as the stakes.

Thus, it is to everybody's benefit not to wait until the last minute to submit a bid. Throughout 2008, *Plum Lines* will carry short announcements reminding all interested chapters of the September 2008 due date for 2011 convention bid submissions and where to send them. For full host chapter selection criteria, download the CSC Charter from our website, or write to Elin Woodger for a copy at 9 Winton Avenue, London N11 2AS, U.K.; [elinwm@btinternet.com](mailto:elinwm@btinternet.com).



*Who can resist a newt with their morning coffee?*

# Divine Providence Costume Prizes

THE JUDGES (Dottie Swanson, Rosemary Nolan, Kris Fowler) would like to commend the largest and strongest crop of costumes in recent history. Well played, all! Difficult though it was to narrow the field, we eventually settled on these winners, and offer our congratulations to go along with the sumptuous prizes.

1. Winner of the Egg-and-Spoon Race: Susan Collicott
2. Best Helpmeet: Tamaki Morimura
3. Best in Show at the Shropshire Agricultural Show: John Graham
4. Sweetness and Light (possibly Unbearable Sweetness and Light) Award: Monika Eckfield as Madeline Bassett
5. Best Book Titles:
  - The Girl in Blue: Deborah Bellew
  - Doctor Sally: Christine Hewitt
  - Something Fishy: Sophie Ratcliffe
  - A Gentleman of Leisure: William Franklin
6. Best Mother and Daughter Characters: Sally Herships and Sally Schubert as Honoria and Lady Glossop
- 7a. Best Flapper (Marcelled Variety): Anne Cotton
- 7b. Best Flapper (Bobbed Variety): Eileen Keck
8. The proper recipient of the coconut box with sea salt inside, the Old Salt: Chief Petty Officer John Hickman, RN
9. Most Elaborate Props: Joan Roberts as Loretta Peabody, author of *My Friends the Newts* and other well-known books
10. Debutante of the Year: Emily Kane (senior in high school)
11. Best Tailored: the spatted Paul Abrinko
12. High Priestess of Rannygazoo: Karen Shotting as Lottie Blossom
13. Multiple Aspects of the Same Character: Freda Kirkham and Maria Cimino as Rocky Tood A.M. (pajamas) and Rocky Todd P.M. (sweater over pajamas), respectively
14. Best Former Barmaid: Sharon Powell as Maudie Stubbs
15. Best "Divine Providence"-themed Costume: Marjanne Otten, wearing a dress printed with a sacred text (obscure though it may be)



*Maria Cimino and Freda Kirkham as the Rocky Todds (Photo by Barbara Combs)*



*Lady Glossop (Sally Schubert) (Photo by Marjanne Otten)*



*Several of the costume winners, including Paul Abrinko, Monika Eckfield, Karen Shotting, the udderly extroverted John Graham, and Tamaki Morimura (Photo from Tamaki Morimura)*



*Susan Collicott, in her guise as Prudence Baxter, shows off her blue ribbon from the Egg-and-Spoon race. (Photo by Shirley Lawson)*

# Wodehouse and God

BY WENDELL VERRILL

*A NEWT of many years' standing, Wendell is also a Roman Catholic priest, which gives him some authority on his subject. This was the opening talk at the Divine Providence convention.*

I HAVE completely forgotten that Pat and Mike joke with which I had hoped to convulse you so I guess I'll have to get right to it. I stand before you convicted of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. That would have been at a NEWTS meeting some time ago at the Lexington home of David and Elizabeth Landman, where the subject of a theme for this weekend was being discussed.

Bud Swanson looked at me, the only clergyman in the room, and said, "How about Divine Providence?"

Eureka! And it seemed only seconds later that someone said, "And Wendell can give a talk on Wodehouse and God."

"Blast and damn their eyes!" I thought to myself while smiling sweetly. "This is going to be the shortest talk on record since every indication is that Plum was at best an agnostic." But research it I did, and here we are. Your eyes are already glazing over, a sight with which I am all too familiar in my professional capacity. I'll try not to keep you too long.

We know the deleterious effect of aunts on Wodehouse as exemplified by this line from *Heavy Weather*: "When you get to know [the] family better, you will realize that there are dozens of aunts you've not heard of yet, far-flung aunts scattered all over England, and each the leading blister of her particular county." Clearly written from painful experience.

And where there are aunts, there are usually uncles. According to Norman Murphy and others, three of Wodehouse's four clergyman uncles did spend time in general proximity to the budding author. Thus, he would have had an inside track on the gossip and intramural sniping that are as characteristic of a clergyman's life as untangling the squabbles between the altos and the sopranos in the parish choir.

Norman says it was here that Plum would have picked up references to the Romish practice of having too many orphreys on one's chasuble. It may be a Romish practice, but I never knew what an orphrey was until I came across the word in Wodehouse. There are a lot of these strange words in liturgical life, and many are attributed to us Romans. Until a few years ago, I firmly believed that things like narthexes and ambos, for example, were



*The Exceedingly Reverend Wendell Verrill commands another podium. (Photo by Shirley Lawson)*

found exclusively in Anglican churches. Then a new parochial vicar (assistant priest) was assigned to me, and one of his first initiatives was to post a memo that "The Book of Gospels will be held high in procession and placed on the ambo." Not one soul in the parish up to and including the pastor knew what the ambo was. It gave rise to a certain amount of creative kidding as we gathered for Mass—centered on speculation, some of it quite personal, as to what the ambo might be. ("Yeah, well, put *this* on your ambo" threatened to become a battle cry in our sacristy.) The ambo is, in fact, the pulpit from which the gospel is proclaimed.

Wodehouse probably wouldn't have picked up a lot of Scripture at his dinner table chats with the uncles, but he would have heard it every Sunday, perhaps several times every Sunday.

I love that description in *Young Men in Spats* where a Bean is describing a country house visit and tells us that "not only were we scooped in and shanghai'd to church twice on the Sunday, regardless of age or sex, but on the Monday morning at eight o'clock—eight, mark you—there were family prayers in the dining room." The Bean, an Egg, and a Crumpet were discussing Freddie Widgeon's latest lost love who, the Bean says, "plays the organ in the local church and may often be seen taking soup to the deserving villagers with many a gracious word."

Knowing Freddie well, the little group couldn't understand how such a good woman could be attracted, but a Crumpet piped up and said, "She liked his quiet, saintly manner and considered that he had a soul."

Speaking of souls, how about this quote from Bertie in *Joy in the Morning*?

The whole business of jacking up the soul is one that varies according to what Jeeves calls the psychology of the individual, some being all for it, others not. You take me, for instance. I don't say I've got much of a soul, but such as it is, I'm perfectly satisfied with the little chap. I don't



want people fooling around with it. “Leave it alone,” I say. “Don’t touch it. I like it the way it is.”

Norman, Tony Ring, and others are right on target when they point out the literary rhythm and beauty of the so-called Authorized Version of the King James Bible. That and the Book of Common Prayer were loaded with rhythmic beauty which a good ear like Plum’s would pick up in a heartbeat.

And pick those rhythms up he did. There is a website maintained by a Benedictine monk who modestly omits his name but which Elin Woodger tells me is Father Rob Bovendeard from France. The site, *Biblia Wodehousiana* [<http://wodehouse-bible.com>], codifies all the references to Scripture in 92 of Plum’s books. (For some reason he omits *The Purloined Paperweight* of 1967, which gives me the vapors because that is where the character J. Wendell Stickney resides. My claim to fame is that he is named after me because I had written to Mr. Wodehouse in 1966 and he wrote back. Of course, I lost his letter.)

Anyway, this website is enormous; the index alone runs to 27 pages. A brief review finds that of the 39 books in the Old Testament King James version, Wodehouse has reference to 30. Twenty-two of the 27 books in the New Testament are referenced (and frankly the missing books are pretty short; most of them only a page or so long). (It is a pity that the King James version omits the Book of Tobit. I think Plum would have had a field day with stories about the demon in the bedroom and the grateful dead.)

In many of his books, Wodehouse will have 30 or 40 allusions to Scripture. *Cocktail Time* takes the prize with 52 biblical references. There are 655 pages of quotes and references in the *Biblia Wodehousiana*. Granted, every time the words *ewe lamb* appeared, a reference to the prophet Samuel popped up, but still, it’s pretty impressive.

Just running down a few of the 655 pages reminds us of the incredible memory of this man who, admittedly, heard or read many of them from childhood through college. But did he hear them as theology or literature? Or both? That brings us, finally, to the question: “Wodehouse and God? How about it?”

Harking back to our theme, Divine Providence, we read the following lines in *Big Money*. The subject is Godfrey Edward Winstanley Brent, Lord Biskerton, informally known to his friends as “the Biscuit.” The narrator offers this description:

From his earliest years the Biscuit had nourished an unwavering conviction that Providence was

saving up something particularly juicy in the way of rewards for him and that it was only a question of time before it came across and delivered the goods. He based this belief on the fact that he had always tried to be a reasonably bonhomous sort of bird and was one who, like Abou Ben Adhem, loved his fellow men. Abou had clicked, and Lord Biskerton expected to click. But not in his most sanguine moments, not even after a Bump Supper at Oxford or the celebration of somebody’s birthday at the Drones, had he ever expected to click on this colossal scale. It just showed that, when Providence knew it had got hold of a good man, the sky was the limit.

Another quick quote from “The Aunt and the Sluggard”: “Providence looks after the chumps of this world and, personally, I’m all for it.”

So here we have a man well versed in scripture and theology, seeming to acknowledge a higher power, perhaps reflecting his training at Dulwich College and beyond. (I note for the record that it was late in life before I realized that, like so many other linguistic oddities on the other side, Dulwich—pronounced Dullich—is not a college but a high school where, by the way, the second floor is the first floor. Otherwise, it sounds a lot like my seminary.)

Tony Ring and Barry Day in their book *In His Own Words* observe that there wasn’t a lot of sex or religious moralizing in Wodehouse’s school stories. Apparently there was a lot of both in other people’s writings, but his early stories reflect a personal code quite short on sex or moralizing, indicative of a young man’s developing personal code of conduct which—and this is my observation—surely was helped along by the many sermons, hymns, and life stories provided by the Church of England. Like today’s young people, I’m sure the young ones of those days were just as interested in shucking off the old and forging the brave new code for the new century without realizing how much of a debt they owed to Cranmer, Gutenberg, and good old King James.

In 2005, the Benedictine Abbot of Worth Abbey in West Sussex led a retreat titled “God, P. G. Wodehouse and Winnie the Pooh.” The Abbot, Stephen Ortiger, responded to a brief inquiry from me with some equally brief ideas about the theology of P. G. Wodehouse. Basically, he sees references to Divine Providence in Wodehouse, buttressed by the Wodehousean descriptions of a world sinless and not taking itself too seriously in the light of eternity. (He throws in the

Latin *sub specie aeternitatis* just to let us know he's not kidding). He sees good triumphing over evil in every book and story just like the Bible. He also sees Bertie's references to Jeeves as a "higher power" as a reflection of the Christian theology of grace. He identifies Jeeves as the Good Shepherd, evinced by Bertie's comment on seeking Jeeves' counsel from "Jeeves Makes an Omelette": "My attitude on these occasions is always that of a lost sheep getting together with its shepherd."

So we have P. G. Wodehouse, who knows his way around the Church of England, Sacred Scripture, and the lively night life of London. Wodehouse seems to have left behind the faith of the first two and the practice of the last. He wrote often about people drinking, drinking heavily, drinking reluctantly, or relievedly, or regretfully, but busily knocking back every kind of drink imaginable including, according to Norman, the Dog's Nose, which is beer with a drop of gin in it.

In *America, I Like You*, aka *Over Seventy*, Wodehouse has a chapter on his theater experiences and follows with a satirical comment on what he's been missing since he first arrived in New York. In response to a fictional interviewer, he says, "I miss those Sacred Concerts."

The interviewer asks, "Those—what was that once again?"

"Sacred Concerts." Plum replies. "On Sundays. When I first came to New York they were the only form of Sunday entertainment the authorities would allow. They took place at the Palace or the Winter Garden, and began with some devotional exercises by Professor Wilkinson's Almost Human Seals, followed by the Hoopla Troupe, Acrobats Extraordinary, and Vokes and Dooley, the Somewhat Different Cross Talk Comics."

Further on, he explains that "If you did your stuff in a green wig, purple dress clothes and a scarlet top hat, you were a vaudeville act. Stick to mufti, and you became a sacred concert."

So here we have a man living in a world saturated by sex, booze, chorus girls, and baggy-pants comics, and yet his characters and plots are the cleanest stuff we will ever read! Here we have a man steeped in all sorts of Christian practice and theology but who seems to not have been much interested as an adult. What's up?

Ring and Day have hit on something in their book *In His Own Words*. Halfway through his stint at the bank in 1901, Wodehouse contracted mumps and went off to his parents' house in Shropshire to suffer through them (the mumps, not his parents). He says he wrote 19 short stories in three weeks, "all of which, I regret to say, editors were compelled to decline owing to lack of space. The editors regretted it too. They said so." He claimed that he just wasn't yet a very good writer. He

says, "Worse bilge than mine may have been submitted to the editors of London in 1901 and 1902, but I should think it very unlikely."

Ring and Day then make this trenchant little observation:

Three weeks' intensive practice may or may not have helped his style but it may well have affected his future content. Mumps is one of the most undermining illnesses that can plague an adult male and it almost certainly left Wodehouse sterile and possibly impotent. Several of his biographers have speculated that this fact alone may account for the asexuality of his subsequent characters and storylines.

Robert McCrum observes that this issue remains "opaque." Are we surprised? I would have thought it unlikely that mumps would feature in any Wodehouse story, but he was a man who wasted nothing. Thus we have the story "Helping Freddie," which pivots on a whole family with mumps being unable to welcome home a fat, disagreeable child Reggie Pepper has mistakenly kidnapped.

In effect, Wodehouse may well have been, to all intents and purposes, a eunuch! And if there is anything I know something about, it is the care and feeding of eunuchs, being that I am, at least theoretically, one of those eunuchs of which Jesus speaks in the gospel of Matthew.

At this point in the preparation of this paper, I reached for my Bible, which is the New American version, and found that the word *eunuch* is not used. The King James version uses the word, as does, for example, the Jerusalem Bible, a popular translation in the Roman church. But the most popular Catholic translation in the United States omits the word altogether. It substitutes the term *incapable of marriage*, which, in itself, is pretty high-handed. So, the hell with the New American translation.

Here's the Jerusalem Bible version—Jesus is speaking: "There are eunuchs born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can." (Mt. 19:12)

You'll notice there is no mention of mumps or any other illness creating the condition, but, if that is the case with Wodehouse, then I would say he overcame that obstacle quite handily. "Incapable of marriage" indeed! From 1914 to his death in 1975, he had an idyllic union with Ethel, a marriage which observers

of the time would have pronounced doomed from the start. A reclusive writer and a twice-married chorus girl; a bookworm and a bon vivant; a careful husbander of royalties married to a spendthrift and lover of casinos. Not likely to succeed at all! Throw in the fact that they had separate bedrooms practically from the start and one wonders how this curious ménage could survive for 66 years!

But I wander from my topic . . . which is eunuchs. I have been surrounded by them all my life. If it's one thing I know, it is eunuchry—that is to say, the eunuchdom of unmarried males. My clergy buddies and I fall into that last category mentioned by Jesus: eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the kingdom of heaven.

Now here's the rub: Yes, it is true we walked into this emasculating state with free will and our eyes open. You wanted to be a priest, you gave up sex. That was the deal. What a deal! We heard that our sacrifice would make us nobler men and altruistic servants of the Lord, and we lapped it up like Mother's milk.

This was our legacy—our history. We might well be able to sum it up with the words of Pope Gregory the Great in the sixth century. Gregory is supposed to have written: "Sexual pleasure can never be without sin." Somewhere in the 20th century, this little gem was pointed out to theologians, and the opinion came forth that it was a forgery.

Well, let's try *this* response from Gregory in answer to a question about priests who are already married when they are ordained. Gregory says, "They should love their wives as if they were sisters, and beware of them as if they were enemies." And this is from the one they call "the Great," mind you!

In the 20th century it dawned on many priests and nuns that we were, in essence, cheap labor, and the great jewel of the clerical state—celibacy—was not necessarily an essential part of the mission. The 1960s and '70s saw thousands of defections, and from the '80s on, the central halls of most seminaries could have been converted into bowling alleys with no questions asked. Vocations dropped off to a tenth of what they were 40 years before. Listen to the hierarchy, and the life of a eunuch is some kind of pinnacle. Listen to a few eunuchs, and you might find a different story.

The only thing good about being a eunuch was the channeling of all that energy into other, altruistic goals. We were taught to sublimate our base urges—they didn't dare use the word *sex*—and channel them into other creative and altruistic goals. I would say Wodehouse certainly did this admirably. Could it be that his enforced eunuch state caused him, like Job, to be resigned to his fate? Are we the beneficiaries of a

sublimated baser nature channeled into a world before the Fall, a world into which sin has never entered? A world of perfect English summer afternoons, birds and bees doing their stuff and peace reigning throughout?

Joseph Bottum, in the review *First Things*, contrasts Nietzsche's God is Dead point of view with Jeeves's "You would not like Nietzsche, sir. He is fundamentally unsound." Bottum's point is that the entire work of Wodehouse, with its idyllic settings and innocent characters, is a refutation of the bleak belief that there is no God. Hence, Sir Pelham must have believed in God!

My seminary rector, a man from whom Aubrey Upjohn could have picked up several good pointers on discipline, used to say in regard to some knotty point of Scripture interpretation: "We don't know. We'd like to know but we don't." And that was that.

I toyed with the idea that Plum's agnosticism came from his unhappiness with his enforced eunuch state, but I chucked the thought as unworthy. It seems unlikely that anyone with as sanguine a disposition as Plum would hold a grudge for any length of time. So he probably accepted whatever fate was visited upon him and ran with it. Okay! So he wasn't mad at God. But was that because he didn't believe in God?

Wodehouse's life was designed to avoid conflict, confrontation, or discomfort. He could see both sides of anything, and this caused him trouble more than once. He lived in his own world and reluctantly came down for meals and meetings, looking forward to the moment when the "Wodehouse glide" would allow him to slip back into his study and lose himself in Blandings Castle or whatever site in which he was placing his characters.

I want to find something that will testify to Plum's belief in God, but I am forced to acknowledge that what we probably have here is a man whose worldview was so mild and good-natured, so removed from the things of this world, that if he did believe in an afterlife, he probably wouldn't have objected if someone had challenged him on it. Wodehouse had some interest in spiritualism, but toward the end of his life, the operative quote was, "I'm an agnostic. My attitude has always been, we'll have to wait and see."

But take heart, dear fellow theists. There's another reference from *Over Seventy* or *America, I Like You*, which I quote via McCrum's book:

If any young writer with a gift for being funny has got the idea that there is something undignified and anti-social about making people laugh, let him read this from the Talmud, a book which was written in an age just as grim as this one,

“. . . And Elijah said to Berokah, ‘These two will also share the world to come.’ Berokah then asked them, ‘What is your occupation?’ They replied, ‘We are merry-makers. When we see a person who is downhearted, we cheer him up.’ These two were among the very select few who would inherit the kingdom of Heaven.”

Yes, probably just a handy quote to defend a light touch, but I’m intrigued as to why a man in his 70s would be poring over the Talmud. Looking for plots? Or inspiration?

Perhaps our boy was simply cagey on most things. In the last lines of *America, I Like You*, Plum gives us this bit of fictional dialogue referring to his recent acquisition of citizenship. The interviewer asks him: “What are your views on referendum and the initiative?”

Wodehouse answers, “Yes.”

“And housing conditions?”

“I am in favor of them.”

“Will you vote Democrat or Republican?”

“Probably.”

LET ME wind down with a quote from Richard Osborne’s *After Hours with P. G. Wodehouse*. Osborne, in turn, is quoting Owen Dudley Edwards: “When Wodehouse died, I asked a Carmelite friend of mine to remember him at Mass. He replied, ‘Well, I will, since you ask me. But in the case of someone who brought such joy to so many people in the course of his life, do you think it is necessary?’”

St. Paul in Corinthians reflects on the three greatest virtues with these words: “There remain these three, faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.” P. G. Wodehouse was a man whose whole life reflected hope and love. In spite of his stated agnosticism—or perhaps as a result of it—I believe he was a person of faith as well.

About Ben Adhem came up in a quote about Divine Providence, and I didn’t know who he was. In the computer age, the answer is usually a keystroke away. I discovered he was an eighth-century sheik, the subject of a poem from the mid-1800s. I would like to think it describes our Plum equally as well. The poem reads:

About Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
 Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
 And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
 Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
 An angel writing in a book of gold.  
 Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
 And to the Presence in the room he said,

“What writest thou?” The Vision raised its head,  
 And with a look made of all sweet accord  
 Answered, “The names of those who love the Lord.”

“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”  
 Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
 But cheerily still; and said, “I pray thee, then,  
 Write me as one who loves his fellow men.”

The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
 It came again with a great wakening light,  
 And showed the names whom love of God had  
 blessed,  
 And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest!

Most of us have questions about what goes on beyond the clouds, or wherever we go at the last trump. No matter what our belief or lack of it, we all have the obligation to live our lives in a loving, considerate manner, using our talents for the greater good. I believe that it is Plum’s inherent goodness, his love of his fellow men, which comes through his writings and makes us better, more noble people for reading them. It’s not just the laughs we seek, it’s the goodness contained in the pages. Is goodness Godliness? Well, we’ll just have to wait and see.



*Appropriately, the Very Reverend Wendell Verrill pontificates at the Great Sermon Handicap on Sunday morning at the Divine Providence convention.  
 (Photo by Deborah Bellew)*



Our glorious leader, outgoing President Jean Tillson, who made this convention (and L.A.) successful (TM)



Wodehouse Day Proclamation winner Paul Abrinko consorts with fellow costume winner Monika Eckfield (as Madeline Bassett). (TM)



Katherine and Bruce Minevitz (TR)



Sherry and Michael Smith (TR)



Nancy Gold sports her gold. (TR)



Drone-tied Dan Cohen (BC)



Archivist Brian Taves looks sleuthy. (BT)



Dapper TWS Prez Kris Fowler (BT)



Norman explains to Hilary Bruce that American call motor mascots "hood ornaments." (IM)



Hot-hatted Anatole (David Landman) (TR)



Happy NEWTS Bob Norberg and Ellen Donovan (TR)



Betty and Tom Hooker (TR)



Amy Plofker and Philip Shreffler (BC)



Bertie & Jeeves behind the wheel of Bertie's roadster (BC)



Alekh Burke and mystery fingers (TR)



Ken Clevenger sermonizes. (TR)



Forever young at heart: Herb Woodger and Barbara Korntheuer (EM)



*Elizabeth Peel delivers a solemn candle to the jolly convention. (TR)*



*David Mackenzie & Karen Ruef (TR)*



*Frances Marcinkiewicz and John Hickman, RN (TR)*



*Past TWS President Susan Cohen (TR)*



*The Astor mansion ballroom (TM)*



*Versatile (and funny) guitarist Chris Morgan (PT)*



*MC Max Pokrivchak mans the microphone. (PT)*



*Tina Kane and daughter Emily Kane (TR)*



*Toni Rudersdorf and David Trumbull (TR)*



*Chapeau Belle: Mary Dizazzo Trumbull (TR)*



*Marjanne Otten and Masha Lebedeva (MO)*



*A luminous Plummy reads the convention keepsake. (TR)*



*Christine Hewitt glows with delight as the convention hits high gear. (TR)*



*Tim Andrew and Masha Lebedeva's alter ego, Vladimir Brusiloff (AW)*



*"Frankly, my dear, I'm having a grand time," says Anne Cotton. (SL)*



*John Graham in full bloom (EM)*



*Fiendish Quiz winner Lynn Vesley-Goss (EM)*



*Eileen Forster Keck stole the show. (TR)*



*Elaine Ring brightens the room. (TR)*



*Susan Garrett holding court (TR)*



*Pongo poses between snaps. (BC)*



*Susan Brokaw, Dirk Wonnell, and Tim Andrew (TR)*



*Elizabeth Landman accompanied by boa, and by husband David (TR)*



*Elliott Milstein (TR)*



*The Iwanagas in a merry mood (TR)*



*Doug Stow and Dottie Swanson (TM)*

*Photo Key:  
AW: Alan Wood  
BC: Barbara Combs  
DB: Deborah Bellew  
EM: Elin Woodger Murphy  
IM: Ian Michaud  
MO: Marjanne Otten  
PT: Pongo (Shamim Mohamed)  
SL: Shirley Lawson  
TM: Tamaki Morimura  
TR: Toni Rudersdorf*



*Jelle and Marjanne Otten raise a glass or two. (TM)*



Two of the Best Book Title winners: Deb Bellew as *The Girl in Blue* and Sophie Ratcliffe, carrying a can of tuna, as *Something Fishy* (DB)



Dashing Dan and Tantalizing Tina Garrison make their entrance. (SL)



The NEWTS bookies prepare to rake in the oof. (DB)



Elyse Milstein enjoys the food and fun. (TR)



Bill Scrivener toasts the photographer. (BC)



Ed Powell of Capital! Capital! (BC)



Tim Kearley, Barbara Combs, Wade Hinkle, and Mary Hinkle (BC)



Margaret Stow's perpetual cheer on display (TR)



John Fahey and Len Lawson (SL)



Colonel Murphy demonstrates the British salute to Tamaki Morimura. (TM)



Kid Brady (Tim Kearley) at the R.I. Capitol Building (BC)



Elin Woodger and Charles Gould share a moment and a sip. (BC)



# Chapters Corner

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 Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page). 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:  
E-mail:



THE ANGLERS' REST met on November 17 for a feast beyond compare, thanks to one of our new members, Mike Courtier. Mike hosted us at Lombardi's Italian restaurant, a local favorite. Browsing and sluicing until the wee hours, the Anglers had a rollicking good time. Other new folks were Michael and Eloise Sheldon, and returning was Karen Anderson. Mike C. had compiled food references from Wodehouse, and we read these aloud to the amusement of all. While not claiming to be extremely clever, we were reminded of the passage from "The Man with Two Left Feet": "They dined at a crowded and exhilarating Italian restaurant on a street off Seventh Avenue, where red wine was included in the bill, and excitable people, probably extremely clever, sat round at small tables and talked all together at the top of their voices." Barbara Combs had a multimedia presentation of the Divine Providence convention. The Anglers will gather again in January 2008.

## Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)  
Contact: Caralyn Campbell  
Phone:  
E-mail:



WHAT HO, ya'll! The newly formed Birmingham Banjolele Band is up and running! In August we enjoyed a presentation by Ken and Joan Clevenger detailing their Week With Wodehouse trip. We eagerly pored over their pictures, books, and many other items they shared with us from the trip. In October, five of us traveled to Providence for the Divine Providence convention. For three of us—Noel and Lucy Merrill, and myself, Caralyn Campbell—it was our first

convention, and I think it's safe to say that we were all sufficiently dazzled with the whole experience! On October 27 we met at Miss Rosemarie's Special Teas, an authentic English tea shop just south of Birmingham, to report on the convention for those in the group who didn't make it to Providence. With the holidays coming up, the Banjolele Band decided to reconvene in February after everyone has had a chance to recover!

## Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)  
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe  
Phone:  
E-mail:



## The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker  
Phone:  
E-mail:



OUR USUAL headquarters at The Players not being available, the Broadway Special met on September 28 in the library at the Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue, principally to conduct last-minute rehearsals for the Clean, Bright Entertainment at Divine Providence. However, since there were also members of the Salmagundi in attendance, Mary Ellen Rich and David Jasen provided lucid and informative introductions to the music of Kern and the lyrics of Plum, especially for the club members' benefit. Following this, the culling through pages of lyrics and sheet music to decide on final performance selections, in addition to sometimes-halting, sometimes-fluid crooning and (Cleo)pattering, amused the Broadway Special while likely confounding the Salmagundis. It was all *nil gravitatis*, as we in the Special like to say. We don't know what they say at the Salmagundi Club.

## Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)  
Contact: Jeff Peterson  
Phone:  
E-mail:



Jeff Peterson and Sven Sahlin

ON OCTOBER 7 Capital! Capital! gathered for a buffet dinner, wine tasting, and a doubleheader of Wodehouse presentations. First, Sven Sahlin, the chairman of the Swedish Wodehouse Society, who, with his wife Britta, was visiting the Washington, D.C., area at the time, told the 20 guests about the activities of the Swedish Society and Sven's own extensive collection

of Wodehouse first editions. Sven is a recently retired businessman and a lifelong Wodehouse aficionado. Next, Robert (“Oily” Carlyle) Rains and his wife Andrea (“Sweetie” Carlyle) Jacobson, also a lawyer, gave a narrative and projected photographs of their summer “Week With Wodehouse” tour in England, sponsored by the U.K. Society. Bob is a professor of law at Penn State University by day but, more importantly for us, a versifier, fabulist, and Wodehouse fanatic by night. By popular demand, Bob and Andrea also brought to the meeting copies of their recent collaboration, the book *True Tales of Trying Times: Legal Fables for Today*, from Willow Crossing Press.

**Capital F.O.R.M.**

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton

Phone:

E-mail:



**Chapter One**

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan Cohen

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:



OUR MAY meeting was very lively. With true TWS efficiency, I handed out copies of the membership list at this, the last meeting before dues are due again and the membership list becomes obsolete. Evelyn Herzog brought a charmingly illustrated, deliciously porcine book by Maurice Sendak entitled *Swine Lake*. Her husband John Baesch brought us a fond tribute to Wodehouse from the London *Times*, written by a man with the improbable name of James Naughtie. This name looks dangerously like a cross between naughty and nightie, and one might ask whether anyone with such a sexually suggestive name should be allowed to write tributes to Wodehouse. Perhaps a letter of complaint to the *Times* is in order. John Graham brought a delightful guest to the meeting, Thomas Schlachter from Zurich, Switzerland, who has received rave reviews for his translations of Wodehouse into German. Thomas told us about the challenges of translating Wodehouse’s books into another language, all the more difficult since humor is harder to translate than any other genre. A very interesting conversation followed on the subject of translation as an art in itself. Our meeting closed with a spirited read-aloud of Wodehouse’s golf gem “The

Clicking of Cuthbert.” Kudos to the entire cast and extra kudos to Herb Moskovitz, who, in Russian military hat and a long, lustrous black beard worthy of Rasputin, played Brusiloff with great gusto.

Our October meeting was devoted to the Divine Providence convention. In the tradition of Marcel Proust, we recaptured time past, that is, the time past of the previous weekend, by having Daniel Cohen give a presentation on the convention. He got this assignment because he gave a presentation at the convention; it was called “Gorilla My Dreams.” Under his nom de Plum of Cyril Waddesley-Davenport, the ape who went to Balliol, Cyril was the perfect choice to discuss the subject of gorilla impersonators. Dan dissected our day in Newport, the many excellent convention talks, and all the good browsing and even better sluicing of the occasion. Since many Chaps attended the convention, we all chimed in with our own various memories. We were proud of our two costume prize winners: Debbie Bellew and John Graham. On prize-giving night Debbie wore a lovely blue period costume with a wonderful hat. John Graham went dressed as a cow creamer; you can’t get more original than that. Hope Gaines and David Mackenzie showed up at the meeting with what was left of the souvenirs from our 2001 Philadelphia TWS convention. We snatched them up, especially the cow creamers. This led to reminiscing about the Philly convention. After this there was nothing left but to look forward to the next convention and regret that we have to wait two years for it. Oh, well. Our next meeting will be Sunday, January 13, weather permitting, when we will collect money to support our newts at the Philadelphia Zoo in the style to which they have become accustomed.

**The Chicago Accident Syndicate**

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



OUR CHAPTER holds bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members 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. 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:



**W**e will hold our accustomed Junior Bloodstain on Saturday, January 12, 2008, on the second floor of the Algonquin Hotel (the Helen Hayes room, just off the Dealers' Room, if we can get it). Note: new time this year, as the afternoon reception is at 1:00 P.M. Therefore, the Clients will meet at 10:30 A.M., giving us time to grab a bite if we feel it is necessary before the reception. While we do not yet have a reading chosen, anyone interested in grabbing a part should get in touch with either Marilyn MacGregor or Anne Cotton. All current Clients will receive a mailing in December; if others wish to attend, please get in touch with Anne Cotton for further information.

### **The Drone Rangers**

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Phone:

E-mail:



**W**E 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 Flying Pigs**

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw

Phone:

E-mail:



### **The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels**

(San Antonio and South Texas)

Contact: Lynette Poss

Phone:

E-mail:



**W**OF THE Mottled Oyster/Jellied Eel band of merry-makers very recently had our annual fall celebration at the home of Angela and Clark Adams. The excuse for this unbridled revelry is sometimes Plum's birthday or other years Guy Fawkes Day. Clark

and Angie supply the basics, and members and friends each contribute some Wodehouse-related food item (plum wine, a pig-shaped cake, some rolls to throw—that kind of thing). Present this year were Jan Ford and Randy Anderson, Bryan and Janet Lilius, Jennifer Schmitt, Liz and Brian Davenport, and Lynette Poss. Missing were Jeremy Beers and Alan Ashworth. After we donned nosebags and chatted a bit, we took our cheat sheets out to the back yard, where we recited in unison, "Remember, remember the fifth of November, Gun powder treason and plot . . . (etc.)" and then tossed a paper effigy of Guy Fawkes (actually the hapless cardboard Pilgrim from a bulletin board display) into the flames of Clark's barbecue grill. Took the chill right off the South Texas 72° night air. Then we seated ourselves in a circle to discuss the Divine Providence experience and strain our brains over the Fiendish Quiz from the conference. We decided it was aptly named! Next on the agenda was the cutting and serving of the Tres Leches cake (adorned on top with dried plums) using the official fish slice, purchased so proudly by Clark three or so years back for just such occasions.

If there be any Wodehouse readers out there looking for a home in the San Antonio area, we would encourage you to join forces with those enthusiastic few of us who make up the Oyster/Eel. We alternate months meeting at a Barnes and Noble (as the Mottled Oyster) and then uniting at a local bistro to discuss (or not) the works of the great Plum. And we consistently have a riotous good time.

### **The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society**

(NEWTS – Boston and elsewhere in New England)

Contact: David Landman, president

Phone:

E-mail:



**M**OST NEWTS meetings lately have preparations for the convention: the traditional skit, especially grueling this time under the draconian directorship of Elizabeth Landman. Anne Cotton stepped down as president after 10 years of stellar performance. Accolades all around. A daydreaming David Landman was startled to learn that he had been elected to succeed Anne. A Christmas nottle approaches, at which time, amidst flowing bowls and Yuletide euphoria, a somber autopsy will be performed on the convention. Incidentally, in honor of his performance as Anatole, David was given the chapter's highest honor and named "A Legume In His Own Time" (one step above a crumpet).

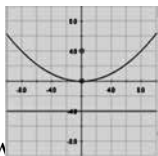
### **The Northwodes**

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



**T**HE NORTHWODES gathered on 23 at the Eckmans' lovely new townhouse to hear "The Mystery of Jeeves's Origin," the paper Mike had given at a Minnesota Sherlockian conference in July. Coincidentally, this had happened at the same time as the U.K. Society's Week With Wodehouse, on the educational delights of which Kris Fowler also reported. Subsets of Northwodes met on a couple of subsequent occasions, first to assemble the 2009 convention bookmarks—cleverly designed by Mary McDonald—and then to distribute them at the Providence convention, during which Mike, Kris, Dick Sveum, and Diane and Richard Madlon-Kaye helped make Wodehouseans more Minnesota-conscious. The cry goes round, come to St. Paul for A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie! (If June 12–14, 2009, isn't already marked on your calendar, add it now!) Hard upon the return from Rhode Island, there was a small celebration of the Master's birthday, for which Kris Bolander proposed the toasts with appropriate quotations. With the chill in the air, thoughts are turning toward the holiday gathering; details will (eventually) be available on request to any Wodehousean in the Twin Cities area.

**The Pale Parabolites**  
 (Toronto and vicinity)  
 Contact: Peter M. Nixon  
 E-mail:



**T**HE PALE PARABOLITES . . . those who bring 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  
 E-mail:



**The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation**  
 (Los Angeles and vicinity)  
 Contact: Melissa D. Aaron  
 Phone:  
 E-mail:



**W**E MEET the second Sunday of every month at 12:30 at Vroman's Bookstore, 695 Colorado, 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 Plummies 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](http://www.lahacal.org/wodehouse).

**The Pickering Motor Company**  
 (Detroit and vicinity)  
 Contact: Elliott Milstein  
 Phone:  
 E-mail:



**The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)**  
 (Portland, Oregon and vicinity)  
 Contact: Carol James  
 Phone:  
 E-mail:

**R**AY STEEN, our founding father, died last April and left us a pile—not of money, but a pile of Wodehouse books, by and about the Master. We distributed these at our last meeting. Anyone who was there and who had a claim to a title or edition knelt to thank Ray as the gift was accepted. I am embarrassed to say that I probably genuflected more than anyone present; I received the bulk of Ray's Wodehouse treasures. I am sorry he won't be at our meetings, but I am so glad to have his Wodehouse stuff.

The next meeting of the Portland Greater Wodehouse Society—the PGWs—was scheduled for 4 P.M. on December 2 in the Benson Hotel bar in Portland. We expected to hear a bit about the Providential gathering from Alekh Bhurke and read some of our favorite portions of the Master Works over drinks and snacks.

**The Size 14 Hat Club**  
 (Halifax, Nova Scotia)  
 Contact: Jill Robinson  
 E-mail:



**The Soup & Fish Club**  
 (Northern Virginia area)

Contact: Deborah Dillard  
Phone:  
E-mail:



THE NOBLE AIM of the Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation. The chapter's head and sole member, Deborah Dillard, aka Mary Kent, visits school librarians to talk them into letting her give presentations on the Master's great works to their students, and she occasionally tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse.

## A Japanese Tribute to Plum

BY ELIN WOODGER MURPHY

THERE WAS a perhaps fitting coda to the Divine Providence convention when, on October 15—P. G. Wodehouse's 126th birthday—Tamaki Morimura (a Wodehouse translator), John Graham, and Norman and I met in Remsenburg for a reverential visit. There we looked at Plum and Ethel's house, took pictures of the creek where Plum once went swimming, and went to see the animal shelter the Wodehouses had founded, inside the grounds of the Bide-A-Wee pet cemetery (which includes a grave for some Wodehouse pets).

First, however, we paid our respects to Plum and Ethel in the church graveyard where the Wodehouses are buried. Here Tamaki laid a wreath of lilies and poured a bottle of water over the tombstone. This was in accordance with a Japanese belief that water has the power to purify, both physically and spiritually. Tamaki's mother had once told her that dead souls are very thirsty and glad to drink water. According to Tamaki, this is more Japanese popular belief than Buddhist creed.

After a few moments' silence, it seemed only fitting to sing "Happy Birthday" to Plum. Later we all had dinner in nearby Westhampton Beach, where we toasted his memory with champagne. Such is the power of Wodehouse's writing, which has not only brought joy to millions but has forged international friendships. It was an unforgettable afternoon.



*Tamaki Morimura stands at the gravesite of P. G. and Ethel Wodehouse. (Photo from Tamaki)*

## The Dread Business Meeting

THE DREAD BUSINESS MEETING was conducted at its usual brisk pace on Saturday, October 13. President Jean Tillson called the throng to order and proceeded to divest herself of the office by nominating Vice President/Treasurer Kris Fowler for president; this being duly seconded and approved by voice vote of those present, the badges of office—viz., the silver bell and medallion—were transferred forthwith.

Kris's first presidential action was to recognize the capital job Jean had done, both as president and as convention planner, to rousing cheers and huzzahs. She then nominated Gary Hall to fill the briefly vacant vice presidential shoes. (Gary has handled layout for *Plum Lines* for four years and is currently editor in chief.) A motion to close nominations was heard before the words were fairly out of the seconder's mouth, a sign of approval that was confirmed by the membership's hearty "ayes."

In similar fashion, Jean Tillson was voted in as treasurer, a job in which her encyclopedic grasp of the Society's workings will be highly useful.

The big upheaval in the Board of Directors lineup came with the news that Amy Plofker, after many years of exemplary service as membership and corresponding secretary as well as anything else that needed doing, was stepping down. Her colleagues were delighted to know that they will get to continue working with her as she helps in other capacities—thanks, Amy!

Ian Michaud (aka The Mixer) was prevailed upon to step into the secretary position, a nomination that Amy enthusiastically seconded and all approved. Now we Yanks will just need to remember which stamp to use for sending address changes to Canada—or give up and just send them by e-mail. [See page 27 for Ian's Wodehouse-permeated biography.—Ed.]

Relieved to have the duty roster all filled up, Kris turned the meeting over to Elin Woodger Murphy, chair of the Convention Steering Committee, who explained the process by which bids for the 2009 convention had been solicited and evaluated. Kris then came back on with her fellow Northwodes to invite all Wodehouseans to St. Paul, Minnesota, for A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie. (Yes, the dates are mentioned elsewhere in this issue, to wit June 12–14, 2009, but they will be repeated until there's a reasonable chance they're seared into everyone's brains.) The meeting was adjourned without further ado, the assembled TWS members knowing better than to bring up any new business when invited to do so, so we were able to return to the talks and other good stuff.

# Where Did Bertie Wooster Come From?

BY NORMAN MURPHY

AT THE SPLENDID convention in Providence, I took the opportunity to show various pictures which I had been unable to include in *A Wodehouse Handbook*. I hope people liked them, especially those of the Cockney Mothers' Outing of 1954. These ladies showed that very little had changed since Barmy Fotheringay-Phipps had accompanied those harpies from hell, the Village Mothers of Maiden Eggesford, on their annual outing in "Tried in the Furnace." But all those pictures were just a lead-in to something I have been trying to prove for a very, very long time.

Wodehouse used to say that the only character he had taken directly from real life was Rupert D'Oyly Carte, son of the Gilbert & Sullivan impresario. He never met him but had heard stories about him from a cousin who had been at school with Carte. Yet we now know from Wodehouse's letters that Herbert Westbrook was a major source for Ukridge; that Bertie's Aunt Agatha was based on Wodehouse's most fearsome aunt, Miss Mary Deane; and that the Drones was definitely based on Buck's Club, with the Bath Club providing the swimming pool where Tuppy Glossop engineered Bertie's wetting. I have been fortunate enough to find the source of many of Wodehouse's characters and locations, but proof of my longest-held theory had always eluded me.

For over 30 years, I claimed that George Grossmith, Jr.—though not the *source* of Bertie Wooster—was the man who made Bertie Wooster come alive. I pointed out that Grossmith, the son of the Gilbert & Sullivan Grossmith, had gone on the stage at the age of 19 in the 1890s playing silly young men, dude parts, and went on to do so for over 30 years. He became the best in the business, and theatrical dictionaries say he introduced the dude onto the English stage. I noted that Wodehouse said he knew lots of young men like Bertie before the 1914 War; I also pointed out that he said that he always regarded characters in his stories as though they were

real actors on stage.

The thing is—*he meant it*, and Colin Dexter, the man who wrote the Inspector Morse detective novels, agreed with him. Dexter had no part in casting the TV dramatizations, but felt he was very lucky. He said the actors were exactly right and, he added, Kevin Whateley, the man who played Sergeant Lewis, was so good that after a short time, Dexter did not think of Lewis when he wrote the stories, he thought of Whateley and how Whateley would act or react.

I argued that Bertie was a thin, insubstantial character until the early 1920s, when he became the fully rounded individual we know and love. And I pointed out that that was when Wodehouse spent two years (1921–23) working closely with Grossmith on three shows.

I claimed that Bertie, whose origins lay in the many young men like him that Wodehouse had known, became, from 1923 onward, lifelike and believable through Wodehouse's close contact with Grossmith, who, I have discovered, carried his stage mannerisms over into private life and took great pride in being one of the best-dressed men in London. But nobody really believed me.

On June 15 this year, I was shown a copy of a book, *Cricket Calling*, by Rowland Ryder. Ryder was working at Hunstanton in Norfolk in the late 1960s, where he was told that Bernard le Strange of Hunstanton Hall, where Wodehouse had stayed often, had been the original of Bertie Wooster. Ryder wrote to Wodehouse to tell him this and asked for confirmation. He then quotes Wodehouse's reply (18 April 1970):

*No, Bernard was not the original of Bertie Wooster. I started the Jeeves stories in 1916 and did not meet Bernard till 1925. I don't think Bertie was drawn from anyone—unless it was George Grossmith.*

As I said at the convention, I had to wait over 30 years to read those words—but it was well worth it!



*George Grossmith in a Bertian pose*

# The Envelope by the Toast Rack

BY DR. SOPHIE RATCLIFFE

WODEHOUSE'S characters, as a rule, don't manage their correspondence very well. Whether it hails from an aunt, fiancée, duchess or pig-napper, the envelope by the toast rack is often a threatening sight, a crumb in the butter of the Wodehousian Eden, especially if one has "a bit of a head on." It's the intrusion of the real into the fictional world, as it were. Wodehouse's own attitude to letters was—for the most part—more positive. And having been contracted by Arrow, part of the Random House publishing group, to produce a selected edition of his letters, I've been researching what he wrote, and to whom, sifting through thousands of exchanges, ranging from notes to his family to business letters and discussions of plot design. The letters offer a fascinating and unique insight into Wodehouse's schoolboy ambitions, theatrical and musical collaborations, wartime internment, and later years, as well as a glimpse of an exceptionally varied 20th-century writing life. This is a writer who cut his teeth in the serial market and finished as a novelist in the age of television—a writer who would have tapped his foot to "Blue Moon" and then seen men walk on the moon. The letters, which are to be found in archives in the United Kingdom and America, as well as in private collections, include exchanges with numerous well-known figures, from Cole Porter and Ira Gershwin to Evelyn Waugh, Arnold Bennett, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

I was born the year that Wodehouse died, and fell in love with his world when I was 14. Now teaching and researching literature and philosophy at Oxford University, I regularly prescribe Wodehouse to undergraduates when they begin to look droopy, in

need of consolation, or in the consommé. But in spite of Wodehouse's honorary doctorate from Oxford, his work is rarely to be found on the academic syllabus. One of my hopes for this collection of letters is that it will provide a useful resource and timely tribute to one of the 20th century's finest writers—and its greatest stylist. Go to any of the library shelves to study his contemporaries—Joyce, Woolf, Yeats, and Pound—and one will find a good selected edition of their correspondence. It is time that an editor did the same for Wodehouse and produced a well-researched, annotated, chronological collection. Such a description risks making the whole venture sound a touch too worthy. While I might be, at times, "steeped to the gills with serious purpose," the quality of these letters—both highly moving and extremely funny—will keep any of my Florence Craye-like tendencies at bay. There is nothing, as Wodehouse's Ginger puts it, like "the magic of a letter from the right person." If you have thoughts, or contributions to make—or indeed, if you have any letters written by Wodehouse that you feel should be included in the book—please do get in touch with me.

## Dedication of the Proclamation

PAUL ABRINKO, who won the Providence Wodehouse Day proclamation at the convention, has dedicated his winning bid as a donation in memory of his father, Joseph Abrinko, who died on October 15, 2000 (PGW's birthday).

## The Russian Wodehouse Society Announces: An Old Home Week in Moscow

WHAT? A Wodehouse Week in *Moscow*? As in *Russia*? It's not as far-fetched as you might think! In August 2008 the Russian Wodehouse Society will sponsor just such an event, based on the numerous Russian references that can be found in P. G. Wodehouse's books. (Read Masha Lebedeva's ongoing series in *Wooster Sauce* to see what we mean.) Plans for our Old Home Week in Moscow include visits to the Kremlin (though not to the part where big shots can be met) and the palatial Tsaritsyno (the would-be Moscow residence of the Russian empress Catherine the Great), as well as walks around Literary Moscow, where the Great Russian Authors once lived and worked. We are also going to visit one or two suburban mansion-houses of the Great Russians.

While the exact date is not known at the time of going to press, it will be in August next year. Full details regarding the date, our program, and all other important information will be provided in the Spring issue of *Plum Lines*. However, if you are interested in taking part in this event, don't hesitate to contact us now so that we may provide you with more information as soon as it is available. Your prompt response will encourage our own enthusiasm about this very special week. Please email Masha Lebedeva.

# The Mystery of Jeeves's Origin

BY MIKE ECKMAN

*Mike gave this talk at the Norwegian Explorers Conference on July 7, 2007. The following is part one of two.*

**I**FIRST WANT to thank Elin Woodger and Norman Murphy, two eminent Wodehousians who reviewed early versions of this talk and made many valuable and helpful suggestions.

The British humorist Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was born in 1881 and died in 1975. He wrote continuously during the last 72 years of his life, producing about 100 books, and at his death he was working on the novel eventually published as *Sunset at Blandings*. Because of some unfortunate events during World War II, he lived in the United States after the war. Despite this, he continued to write about the England he left behind, using the many memorable characters he created. My favorites among the characters are the gentleman's personal gentleman Jeeves and his employer Bertie Wooster.

Wodehouse introduces us to Bertie's extended family, which contains more aunts than Bertie thinks necessary; troublesome uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews; and his old school chums. Not much information is given with respect to Jeeves's background. There are references to his many relatives, but we never get to meet them, except for Uncle Charlie Silversmith, a butler at Deverill Hall.

But the information given about Jeeves's family in the stories does not answer the question: Where did Jeeves come from? I feel that Doyle and Holmes are keys to understanding Jeeves's origin.

Wodehouse's admiration for Arthur Conan Doyle is well documented. In a 1925 letter to his friend Bill Townend, Wodehouse wrote:

Don't you find as you age in the wood, as we are both doing, that the tragedy of life is that your early heroes lose their glamour? As a lad in the twenties you worship old whoever-it-is, the successful author, and by the time you're forty you find yourself blushing hotly at the thought that you could ever have admired the bilge he writes.

Now, with Doyle I don't have this feeling. I still revere his work as much as ever. I used to think it swell, and I still think it swell.<sup>1</sup>

Wodehouse either used this letter as a source or had an

excellent memory when he wrote an introduction to *The Sign of the Four* in 1975, shortly before he died:

When I was starting out as a writer—this would be about the time Caxton invented the printing press—Conan Doyle was my hero. Others may revere Hardy and Meredith. I was a Doyle man, and still am. Usually we tend to discard the idols of our youth as we grow older, but I have not had this experience with A.C.D. I thought him swell then, and I think him swell now.<sup>2</sup>

Even in 1975 Wodehouse was still using the word *swell*. But he admired more than just Doyle's writing. He probably met Doyle for the first time when he interviewed him in 1903. According to Dick Sveum's article in the *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections* newsletter, the interview covered Doyle's "opinions on ballooning, parachuting, and the soundness of the race as well as his experiences on an arctic whaler."<sup>3</sup> We know that the two played cricket together and lunched at the Constitutional Club.<sup>4</sup> By the time Wodehouse wrote his 1925 letter, according to Norman Murphy, he "had become a success and he looked at his fellow authors with an objective eye."<sup>5</sup> Keep this in mind as you listen to the continuation of the letter to Townend:

And apart from his work, I admire Doyle so much as a man. I should call him definitely a great man, and I don't imagine I'm the only one who thinks so. I love that solid, precise way he has of talking, like Sherlock Holmes.<sup>6</sup>

Wodehouse not only liked the way that Doyle and Holmes spoke, he really enjoyed the Holmes stories. In his introduction to *The Sign of the Four*, he stated "like all the rest of you I am never happier than when curled up with Sherlock Holmes . . ." <sup>7</sup> This love of Holmes was evident during his school days at Dulwich College from 1894 to 1900. In his biography of Wodehouse, Robert McCrum states: "The highlight of Wodehouse's month was the arrival at the West Dulwich station bookstall of the latest edition of the *Strand*, with the new Conan Doyle Series."<sup>8</sup>

It is evident from his writing that Wodehouse did indeed read, enjoy, and remember the Holmes stories. In "Sherlockian Plums: A Study in Contrast," Marilyn MacGregor states that "although I've not read everything,



I've discovered 141 examples of distinctly Sherlockian references in 72 of Wodehouse's far more numerous novels, short stories, letters, introductions, articles and plays.<sup>9</sup> In a later article, Marilyn reported finding more than 200 references to Holmes in Wodehouse's 72 years of writing.<sup>10</sup>

Although I have not read everything Wodehouse has written, I too can attest to the many references to Holmes in the Jeeves stories.

Reginald Jeeves is employed as Bertram (Bertie) Wooster's gentleman's personal gentleman, sometimes called a valet. In the popular press, Jeeves is often mistakenly called a butler. A gentleman's personal gentleman is different from either a valet or a butler. He looks after his employer in every way.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in order to keep within my time limit, I will refer to Jeeves as a valet, replacing nine syllables with two.

Bertie and Jeeves's adventures are recorded in at least 34 short stories and 11 novels. With the exception of two of the works, Bertie is the narrator. Jeeves relates one of the stories, while the narrator of one of the novels is unidentified.

In *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes*, Kristin Thompson argues that Wodehouse took character relations and narrational tactics from Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, making Jeeves into a brilliant problem solver reported on by the less astute Bertie. Jettisoning the mystery element of the original, Wodehouse substituted a comic inversion of the standard romance, with the happy ending consisting of Bertie successfully escaping marriage rather than achieving the traditional final clinch in the last scene.<sup>12</sup>

Wodehouse, however, was not parodying the Holmes stories. The Jeeves stories stand on their own. As with the Holmes stories, the reader can enjoy the Jeeves stories as a connected series without a commitment to follow every episode.

In his paper "Elementary, My Dear Wooster!" J. Randolph Cox writes about the similarities between the Holmes and Jeeves stories. Besides similarity in structure, there may be similarity in origin. As Cox writes, "Doubtless, Bertie has dictated these records to Mr. Wodehouse, who in turn has used his art to fashion them into a readable narrative, retaining the style and flavor of the original narrative."<sup>13</sup>

Was Wodehouse acting as Bertie's literary agent just as Doyle did for Watson?

Just as the Holmes stories often start with the "cozy" at 221B Baker Street, problems often arrive at Bertie's Berkeley Mansions flat at breakfast. Jeeves may have a proposed solution immediately or may have to think on the problem for a while. A trip to the country may

be required. If Bertie attempts a solution, it usually just complicates the issue and causes Jeeves more work. Although Jeeves does not express his opinion of Bertie's mental capacity to his face and often gently advises Bertie against certain courses of action, I am sure that his thoughts were often the same as those expressed by Holmes to Watson in "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax": "I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing."<sup>14</sup>

Since Bertie, like Watson, is ignorant of all of the causes of the events he narrates, Jeeves, like Holmes, must explain the successful resolution of the problem as Holmes does at the conclusion of a case. After the conclusion, Holmes and Watson may go to dinner, while Bertie may have a nightcap and Jeeves retires with an improving book.

Except for the earliest stories and one novel that takes place after World War II, all of the Jeeves stories seem to take place in an unspecified period between the World Wars. When Jeeves and Bertie visit the United States, prohibition seems to be the law of the land. Depressions and strikes are not factors in the stories. If I were to write a poem about the stories and the relationship of Jeeves and Bertie, the last line might be "And it is always nineteen twenty-five."<sup>15</sup> As with Holmes and Watson, Jeeves and Bertie are most comfortable in a certain atmosphere. But instead of gaslights, hansom cabs, brandy, and pipe smoke, there are nightclubs, two-seaters, cocktails, and cigarette smoke.

Kristin Thompson points out that Jeeves's ability and Bertie's attitude change over the years as the stories are written.<sup>16</sup> In the earliest stories from 1915 and 1916, Jeeves uses coincidence to solve problems. In the middle period of 1918 through 1925, Jeeves has become smarter but still uses coincidences to solve problems and Bertie is resentful of Jeeves's skill. The late short stories from 1926 through 1930 have Jeeves actually manipulating events and Bertie sometimes becoming resentful. In the 11 novels written between 1934 and 1974, Jeeves continues to manipulate events.

Just as Holmes is critical of Watson, Jeeves is certain of Bertie's shortcomings. In the only short story that is not narrated by Bertie, Jeeves relates the events and states: "Mr. Wooster is a young gentleman with practically every desirable quality except one. I do not mean brains, for in an employer brains are not desirable."<sup>17</sup> In another story, before leaving on his vacation, Jeeves advises his replacement that "You will find Mr. Wooster . . . an exceedingly pleasant and amiable young gentleman, but not intelligent. By no means intelligent. Mentally he is

negligible—quite negligible.”<sup>18</sup>

In one of the earliest stories, Bertie admits his dependence on Jeeves.

“After this,” I said, “not another step for me without your advice. From now on consider yourself the brains of the establishment.”

“Very good, sir. I shall endeavour to give satisfaction.”<sup>19</sup>

As later stories document, Bertie did take steps without Jeeves’s advice. But even though Bertie resents Jeeves’s skill at times and rebels against it, he holds his valet in the highest esteem. He writes: “If I had half Jeeves’s brain I should have a stab at being Prime Minister or something.”<sup>20</sup> He attributes Jeeves’s intellect to his large head size and the fact that he eats tons of fish.<sup>21</sup> Bertie would agree with Holmes’s statement that a large hat size indicates a large brain and “a man with so large a brain must have something in it.”<sup>22</sup>

As Watson does for Holmes, Bertie’s narration contains references to Jeeves’s prior triumphs. One listing includes “the Sipperly Case, the Episode of My Aunt Agatha and the Dog McIntosh, and the smoothly handled affair of Uncle George and The Barmaid’s Niece. . . .”<sup>23</sup>

Bertie does not mention unrecorded cases, but in the introduction to a collection of the Jeeves stories Wodehouse, obviously inspired by Doyle and Watson, writes:

. . . for as regards Jeeves and Bertie all has not yet been told. The world at present knows nothing of Young Thos. and his liver-pad, of the curious affair of old Boko and the Captain Kidd costume, or of the cook Anatole and the unwelcome birthday present.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately for us, Wodehouse died before he could record these adventures.

With Bertie’s ability to get into trouble, his penchant for getting engaged, and the problems that his like-minded friends from the Drones Club have, Jeeves has numerous opportunities to display his powers. Bertie admits that “I rely on him absolutely in every crisis, and he never lets me down. And, what’s more, he can always be counted on to extend himself on behalf of any pal of mine who happens to find himself knee-deep in the bouillon.”<sup>25</sup>

Although Bertie is happy to employ Jeeves as a valet, he is proud of his talents. In a glowing recommendation to a friend in need of Jeeves’s special skills, Bertie

says: “If you didn’t live all the year round in this rural morgue, you’d know that Jeeves isn’t so much a valet as a Mayfair consultant. The highest in the land bring their problems to him. I shouldn’t wonder if they didn’t give him jeweled snuff-boxes.”<sup>26</sup>

There is no record of jeweled snuffboxes in the stories. The reward Jeeves receives for his work is often Bertie’s submission to his will, especially in the selection of clothing, grooming, the playing (or, more accurately, not playing) of musical instruments, and travel to a destination that Jeeves desires to visit. And, there is also the odd five-pound note. The monetary rewards from Bertie are sometimes matched or exceeded by others whom Jeeves has assisted. These funds supplement his valet’s salary, which in the mid-1920s was probably 65–80 pounds per year.<sup>27</sup> (This salary is equivalent to about \$4,000–\$5,000 today.) In “Clustering Round Young Bingo,” Jeeves receives a total of 95 pounds (about \$5,800 today) from the various parties, including Bertie.<sup>28</sup>

Jeeves is a stickler for sartorial correctness. He would never let Bertie be seen with a tie that was not correctly knotted. He advises Bertie that “There is no time, sir, at which ties do not matter.”<sup>29</sup> Also particular about trousers, he advises, “The trousers perhaps a quarter of an inch higher, sir. One aims at the carelessly graceful break over the instep.” When Bertie responds with “There are moments, Jeeves when one asks oneself, ‘Do trousers really matter?’” Jeeves advises that “The mood will pass sir.”<sup>30</sup> Like Holmes, Jeeves would both see and observe and have no trouble deducing the importance of John Clay’s trouser knees in “The Red-headed League.”

Others have noted the similarity in Jeeves’s and Holmes’s skills and abilities. Manly Wade Wellman has even proposed that Jeeves is the son of Holmes and Mrs. Hudson.<sup>31</sup> Having parents such as these would help to explain Jeeves’s power of reasoning and his dedication to a life in service. But the life in service could imply that he was raised with no knowledge of his father or his father’s profession.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jasen, David A., *P. G. Wodehouse: A Portrait of a Master* (New York: Mason/Charter, 1974), 102.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan, *The Sign of the Four* (New York: Ballantine Mystery Classic, 1975), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Sveum, Richard J., “100 Years Ago,” *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections Newsletter* Vol. 7, no. 2 (June 2003), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Murphy, N. T. P., *A Wodehouse Handbook, Volume 1: The World of Wodehouse* (London: Popgood & Groolley,

2006) 92, 217.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>6</sup> Jasen, 102–103.

<sup>7</sup> Doyle, *The Sign of the Four*, vii.

<sup>8</sup> McCrum, Robert, *Wodehouse: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 28.

<sup>9</sup> MacGregor, Marilyn, “Sherlockian Plums: A Study in Contrast,” *Baker Street Journal* Vol. 45, No. 4 (New Series), 135.

<sup>10</sup> MacGregor, “A Hatful of Brains and a Trace of Heredity,” *Baker Street Journal* Vol. 50, no. 2 (New Series), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Murphy, 92, 152.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, Kristin, *Wooster Proposes, Jeeves Disposes* (New York: James H. Heineman, 1992), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Cox, J. Randolph, “Elementary, My Dear Wooster!” *Baker Street Journal* Vol. 17, no. 2 (New Series), 80.

<sup>14</sup> Doyle, “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax,” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1988), 946.

<sup>15</sup> The reference is to Vincent Starrett’s sonnet “221B,” which has the last line: “And it is always eighteen ninety-five.”

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Wodehouse, P. G. “Bertie Changes His Mind,” in *The World of Jeeves* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 592.

<sup>18</sup> Wodehouse, “Scoring off Jeeves,” in *The World of Jeeves*, 37.

<sup>19</sup> Wodehouse, “Leave It to Jeeves,” in *Enter Jeeves* (New York: Dover, 1997), 19.

<sup>20</sup> Wodehouse, “The Artistic Career of Corky,” in *The World of Jeeves*, 82.

<sup>21</sup> Wodehouse, *The Mating Season* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 247.

<sup>23</sup> Wodehouse, *Right Ho, Jeeves* (New York: Penguin Books, 1953), 216.

<sup>24</sup> Wodehouse, *The World of Jeeves* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), xi.

<sup>25</sup> Wodehouse, “Jeeves and the Hard-boiled Egg,” in *The World of Jeeves*, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Wodehouse, *The Mating Season*, 225.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, 126.

<sup>28</sup> Wodehouse, “Clustering Round Young Bingo,” in *The World of Jeeves*, 363.

<sup>29</sup> Wodehouse, “Jeeves and the Impending Doom,” in *The World of Jeeves*, 374.

<sup>30</sup> Wodehouse, *The Code of the Woosters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 83.

<sup>31</sup> Wellman, Manly Wade, “The Great Man’s Son,” *Baker Street Journal* Vol. 1, No. 4, 326–336.

## Holiday Gift Alert!

HOW OFTEN has someone said to you, “What do you see in P. G. Wodehouse?” and you have wondered precisely which answer to give out of the 30 or 40 that immediately occur to you? Well, help is at hand. As a taster for the reissue of some 40 Wodehouses in paperback next year by their sister company Arrow, Hutchinson will be publishing *The Wit and Wisdom of P G Wodehouse*, compiled and edited by Tony Ring, available now from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

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## Ian Michaud, Our New Membership Secretary

IAN, who resides in Vancouver, British Columbia, discovered Wodehouse in 1965 when the CBC used *The World of Wooster* as a summer replacement series. Although he couldn’t quite make out what a “bally cove” was, Ian could see that this Wodehouse fellow would require further exploration. A paperback of *Thank You, Jeeves* was his first Wodehouse book—but certainly not his last.

Fast forward 32 years. Ian (online nom de Plum “The Mixer”) saw some enthusiastic chatter on a Wodehouse internet newsgroup about the 1997 TWS convention in Chicago, and he decided to join up in time for the 1999 Houston convention. When not studying Wodehouse, Ian spent 30 years working in the broadcasting industry until he grew weary of rising at 4:00 A.M. to do his part to pad the bulging bank account of the Toronto billionaire who owned the radio station. Now Ian works from home and devotes his spare time to Wodehouse, listening to opera, supporting Borussia Mönchengladbach, and laughing at the comical antics of the Vancouver Canucks.



Ian Michaud  
(Photo by  
Barbara Combs)

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*We appreciate all your articles, Quick Ones, quotes, and observations. Send them on!*

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Thanks for all the terrific convention photographs. If you have other convention or Wodehouse-related photographs or graphic images, please feel free to send them along to Gary Hall at the address listed to the left (preferably via e-mail attachments or online photo services). Thanks!



*Paul Abrinko and Monika Eckfield came across this important sign while hiking in Marin, California.*