

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

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A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, was the scene, the members of The Wodehouse Society were the players, and a good time was had by all at A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie, our biennial convention, June 12–14, 2009. Our sponsor, the Northwodes chapter, was the perfect host.

For those who were lucky enough to attend, there were warm reunions with old friends, many occasions to meet new friends, and sufficient browsing and sluicing opportunities. We enjoyed oodles of humor and even a fair dose of edification and illuminating information about the life and writings of P. G. Wodehouse.

For you who were not able to be there, how lucky you are to hold this issue of *Plum Lines* in your hand! For your pleasure and perusal, you'll get a full convention report and our traditional four-page spread of color photographs.

We were blessed with a dedicated crew of scribes and photographers who recorded the event for you and posterity. There is even a video, compiled by the Very Rev. Wendell Verrill, which you will find on www.youtube.com, by searching for "tws st paul northwodes."



*St. Paul native son F. Scott Fitzgerald and Colonel Norman Murphy share a casual moment.
(Photo by Elin Woodger Murphy)*

Kris Fowler and her merry little band of Northwodes organized and executed a convention that sparkled like the sun off the waters of the upper Mississippi. The weather was absolutely perfect for three days, allowing all of the events to come off without a hitch: a fierce cricket match, a delightful riverboat dinner cruise, and a day at the races. The indoor activities were no less blissful. We enjoyed a night of music as famed singer Maria Jette entertained at the Friday opening reception, presentations on Saturday by various Wodehousean luminaries and invited guests (including a professor of pigology who brought us our first live interactive Empress quiz), and skits by the Chicago Accident Syndicate and the Northwodes themselves.

All in all, a topper. Of course, business was conducted along the way, with dread duties foisted upon new officers while retiring officers breathed well-earned sighs of relief. But perhaps the most important announcement came from Elliott Milstein and his Pickering Motor Club cohorts: In October 2011, the next convention will be hosted in Detroit. Stay tuned to future *Plum Lines* issues for more details. And now, read on and enjoy!



*Convention instigators:
Northwodes Kris Fowler
and Rhys Parry
(Photo by
Barbara Combs)*

Catch the Cricket Bug: Friday Afternoon

BY DEBBIE BELLEW

ON JUNE 12, 2009, passersby at St. Paul's Harriet Island Park on the banks of the Mississippi were treated to the rare sight of several dozen intrepid Wodehousians participating in the biennial Cricket Experience.

I had been looking forward to this for quite some time. I have been to many conventions, but this was the first time that my schedule and the weather aligned so I could actually play. My experience with cricket had previously been limited to reading the Wodehouse school stories, watching Monty Python sketches, and reading Douglas Adams's *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy, and I confess I was frankly puzzled about how the game worked. I knew that there were two bases, known as wickets, and that they were guarded by batsmen. I knew that a bowler tried to knock the top of the wicket, known as bails, off the upright part, known as stumps, and that the batsman tried to deflect the ball away so this wouldn't happen. I knew that the batsmen exchanged places when they ran. I knew that I should wear white. And I knew that a game could potentially last for days. All the rest of it, such as when to swap from fielding to batting, or Wodehouse's mysterious references to "leg before wicket," was a closed book to me. I hoped to understand enough at this event to get a better appreciation of the Master's stories.

Upon arriving at the well-attended game, a bit late but fortified by a delicious lunch, I boldly volunteered to be put into the game anywhere I could be of help. The Old Florentians generously took me on and placed me in the field, where I had an excellent view of the Noddors batting. As cottonwood drifted gently through the sunlit field, I studied the play taking place before me and determined:

1. The game is far more interesting from close up than it is from the more distant spectators' area. For example, I had an excellent view of the ball occasionally going directly through the stumps without actually knocking them over (although I was assured this would never actually happen in regulation play, as a real ball is wider than the tennis ball we were using).

2. All players needed to be alert at all times, as our society plays with far more enthusiasm than skill. (Exception: The captains, Shamim "Pongo" Mohamed and Bill Franklin, played with as much skill as enthusiasm, and therefore generously took a back seat in order to give everyone else a fair chance.) I have never been good at games and was pleased to discover



*Tamaki Morimura wields the cricket bat fiercely.
(Photo by Shamim "Pongo" Mohamed)*

that among this company, I wasn't half bad—indeed, I was giddy with the unaccustomed feeling of athletic competence.

3. Throwing the bat aside, as in American baseball, is a definite faux pas.

4. It is a bad idea to accidentally knock off your own bails while batting, but since this was a Cricket Experience rather than a Cricket Game, the umpires (Tony Ring and Robert Bruce) were generous about do-overs.

5. Luckily, The Wodehouse Society Cricket Club instituted several house rules specifying how many runs were automatically earned if your ball hit local landmarks such as the nearby large tree; this spared us fielders from having to run too fast after well-hit balls.

6. Bowling is fun, especially if you don't worry too much about having the proper form, which is some odd combination of simultaneous overhand and underhand that is nothing like American baseball pitching.

Batting was even more enjoyable than fielding: I had a grand time running back and forth, getting to be up at bat for as long as 20 minutes at a stretch—so different than American baseball or softball, in which three strikes rarely last longer than a few minutes—but I never got the hang of exactly when my time at bat would be over. Eventually I was simply asked to give someone else a turn.

More knowledgeable souls kindly answered several of my questions during the break. In particular, I learned that leg before wicket (or LBW) is a type of error in which the batter uses his body, rather than his bat, to block a ball that otherwise would have hit the wicket; this is similar in concept to a soccer player illegally using his hands to block the ball.

In the end, the Old Florentians beat the Noddors by a score of 59 to 38, but surely everyone would agree that the score was not particularly important to the Experience. Pongo and Bill then treated everyone afterwards to a demonstration with an actual cricket ball. It made a more satisfying thwack than the tennis ball, but seemed much more dangerous to catch without benefit of a baseball mitt, so I was glad to keep well out of the way.

The icing on the cake, for me, was being recognized that evening (along with Tim Kearley) as one of the day's Most Stylish Cricket Players. Since my outfit was not particularly notable, I believe mine was a thinly disguised award for Most Enthusiastic Player, a title I am happy and honored to receive. In the words of fellow cricket newbie Prof. Bob Rains, it was "the best cricket I've ever played."

Postscript: I'd hoped to come away conversant with Wodehousian cricketisms, but any illusions I entertained along this line were shattered when Colonel N.T.P. Murphy came up to me after the game and said, "Be sure to write that (someone) caught (something) sharp (something) across leg (something) . . ." Alas, it remained completely Greek to me. Perhaps at the next convention . . .

"And, mark you, laddie, if you belong to the Archæological Society you get off cricket. To get off cricket," said Psmith, dusting his right trouser-leg, "was the dream of my youth and the aspiration of my riper years. A noble game, but a bit too thick for me. At Eton I used to have to field out at the nets till the soles of my boots wore through. I suppose you are a blood at the game? Play for the school against Loamshire, and so on."

"I'm not going to play here, at any rate," said Mike.

He had made up his mind on this point in the train. There is a certain fascination about making the very worst of a bad job. Achilles knew his business when he sat in his tent. The determination not to play cricket for Sedleigh as he could not play for Wrykyn gave Mike a sort of pleasure. To stand by with folded arms and a sombre frown, as it were, was one way of treating the situation, and one not without its meed of comfort.

Psmith approved the resolve.

"Stout fellow," he said.

Mike (1909)

A Gathering of Plummiess: Friday Night

BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN

THE EVENING OF June 12, 2009, was a grey, sad, pathetic, depressing time. The Detroit Red Wings lost the final game of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Fortunately, I was at The Wodehouse Society convention in St. Paul, where all was joy and gaiety. The cocktail party was the usual affair of many meetings with the usual attendant "what ho"-ing. Although a number of conventioners had been around all day—many at the cricket game, others out and about—a number of members first showed here, and the noise level grew as more and more joined the throng and the sluicing exceeded the browsing. The Northwodes did all attendees proud with a lovely spread and a subsidized bar, which added much to the festivities.

Historically, the Friday night binge has been limited to two or three hours of meet and greet over a few quick ones, but of late convention organizers have added some kind of light collation and Clean, Bright Entertainment. Regular conventioners will readily remember the BBQ and skits in Hollywood and the sandwich board and skits at Providence.

The Northwodes threw tradition to the wind and, as a result, gave us all a spectacular evening. The dinner was a feast that would have made Anatole proud. Those of us who have been to several of these gatherings caught our breath as we entered the lovely banquet room. Sitting at our tables and beginning with the salad (serving bread rolls was still not dared), we read that our entertainment that evening—far from amateur performances—was to be a single program of songs from a professional chanteuse.

But first, of course, had to come the cricket awards. Tony Ring and Robert Bruce, our transatlantic cricket gurus, had officiated the function and were thus called upon to announce the results and hand out the awards. They were so excited that they failed to announce that the Old Florentians beat the Noddors by 21 runs.

Three prizes were awarded. The first two were for "elegance on the field": Tim Kearley won in the male division and Debbie Bellew romped home first on the distaff side.

The final prize, "The Spirit of Cricket," was a little complicated. This prize was awarded to the person who was able to "retain sangfroid when the ball they bowled went through the batsmen's wicket (which shouldn't be possible) without losing their rag." Incredibly, this



Maria Jette belts it out in high style. (Photo by Shamim "Pongo" Mohamed)

happened to two people, so the prize was awarded by a coin toss. The winner was Shamim Mohamed (Pongo to his friends); second place went to Tad Boehmer.

Finally, the stage was taken by the lovely, charming, and talented Maria Jette and her accompanist, Dan Chouinard. Ms. Jette is a professional opera singer with over 45 roles to her credit, not only in Minneapolis-St. Paul, but around the world. Fortunately, besides having a lovely voice, Ms. Jette is quite the Wodehouse scholar, bringing to her repertoire an understanding and brilliance that a random songstress would lack. In a program of eight songs, one would expect most of them to be scored by Jerome Kern, but only two Wodehouse-Kern songs were on the program. Ms. Jette cleverly eschewed repeating Sylvia McNair's performances from "The Land Where the Good Songs Go" (though she did that particular song as an encore). Instead she treated us to more obscure songs, including Wodehouse's very first lyric, "Put Me in My Little Cell" from *Sergeant Brue*, and some of Wodehouse's reworks of his more famous hits: "The Train that Leaves for Town" (instead of "The Enchanted Train") and "Boat Song" (instead of "Go Little Boat").

She finished with "Bill," choosing the *Show Boat* lyrics over those from *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*, thereby igniting some controversy. The evening was, after all, supposed to be a rendition of Wodehouse lyrics, but the *Show Boat* version was changed by Oscar Hammerstein. Acting as any good investigative reporter would (I was after all a professional reporter for an afternoon in 1981), I cornered Ms. Jette on the subj. and taxed her with the issue. "I always believed that Plum did the *Show Boat* lyrics as well," she replied, "and, while I do like 'I know that Apollo / Would beat him all hollow,' frankly I prefer 'Are not the kind that you / Would find in a statue.' C'mon. Plum had to write that!"

I am pleased to say that I took the opportunity during this interview to ask Ms. Jette if she would perform at

the Detroit convention in 2011 and, wind and weather permitting, she accepted. So, for those whose lives are a little duller by having missed this performance, you can sign up soon for Detroit 2011 and see what Ms. Jette will delight us with then.

I cannot close without a word about Mr. Chouinard. Most of us have been entertained at one time or another by Neil Midkiff and we certainly appreciate the wonderful job Steven Blier did on the Cazalet/McNair CD. Mr. Chouinard is well in their league, top of the line. With the enchantment of a performance like Ms. Jette's, it is easy to overlook the accompanist, but not in this case. We will be hard-pressed to find someone to equal Mr. Chouinard in Detroit. Ms. Jette has two years to turn him into a Wodehousean and bring him along.

The evening broke up shortly after the conclusion of the performance, and smiles were everywhere on this summer night as we filtered out, some to the bar, others elsewhere. It was then we heard the tragic news from Detroit. Ah well, there is always next year.

Let the Talks Begin: Saturday Morning



Len Lawson, past president of TWS, kicks off the Saturday talks with his stories of the society's early days. (Photo by Ian Michaud)

THE SATURDAY MORNING Riveting Talks lived up to their billing. While just a dash of detail will be given here, many of the talks will be presented in future issues of *Plum Lines*.

First up was Len Lawson, a very early member of TWS, whose speech was entitled "The Early Days of The Wodehouse Society." Len shared many fascinating details about the founding of the society and the early issues of the *Plum Lines* predecessor (*Comments in Passing*). Len showed slides that featured pages from *The Tome*, a hefty book in which TWS's history has been carefully preserved. He mentioned that The Wodehouse Society was founded by Bill Blood in Pennsylvania, and that the first convention was held in July 1982, with a total of 16 people at the Saturday night dinner.

Norman Murphy's presentation, "Betting on Bertie," was, of course, a remarkably enlightening talk, first about Wodehouse and horse racing, then touching on betting in general, and finally culminating in

revelations about the Great Gaiters Handicap of 1958. (This talk will be offered virtually in its entirety in one of the next issues of *Plum Lines*.)

Next up was Northwodes member Faith Sullivan, author of seven novels, some set in the fictional town of Harvester, Minnesota. Her book *Gardenias* was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award, and *The Empress of One* is the winner of the Milkweed National Fiction Award and the Benjamin Franklin Award. Mrs. Sullivan is a frequent speaker to literary groups. She told us of a book-group discussion years ago when she was asked what writers served as lifelines when things got challenging, and she answered, “Wodehouse.” We listened with rapt attention as she read intense passages from her manuscript-in-progress, entitled *Good Night, Mr. Wodehouse*.

We then were highly entertained by a real-life pig expert in the shape of Professor Thomas Molitor, a professor at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine. You can see a summary of his talk, slides, and quiz on pages 15–16 of this issue.

Mike Eckman took a turn at the podium to tell us about an American writer who might be considered a counterpart to Wodehouse: the Minnesota-born Max Shulman, creator of a series of books featuring a character named Dobie Gillis. Though Shulman’s brand of humor is very different from PGW’s, Mike made certain comparisons between the writers and amused us with quotes from the Dobie Gillis books.

The final speaker in the morning session was Elliott Milstein, who told us all about impostors in Wodehouse. Elliott examined the numbers of impostors to be found in the various novels (especially the Blandings stories) and wondered aloud about what is and isn’t an act of imposture. He also noted that the ultimate impostor story is “Uncle Fred Flits By,” where four impersonations were taken on by Uncle Fred and three were “thrust upon the unwitting Pongo.” Elliott concluded by sharing a personal story of his own imposture, when he and a friend gate-crashed the Wodehouse Centenary Exhibit in New York City in 1981.

It was a fine and varied slate of speakers, and the edified attendees went off in search of sustenance to prepare for more revelations in the afternoon.



Faith Sullivan touched soulful chords as she read from her current work.

(Photo by Ian Michaud)

Erudition Extended: Saturday Afternoon

BY KAREN SHOTTING

THIS REPORTER MANAGED a nap during the Dread Business Meeting but did hear a rumor that *Plum Lines*’ esteemed editor may have been elevated to some sort of august position. (*Details on page 17 —Ed.*)

After the business proceedings concluded, Brian Taves woke us up with his presentation of “Hollywood’s Wodehouse: A Show and Tell.” And show us he did—a first-rate selection of vintage, rarely seen clips of Wodehouse on screen. Brian started with a clip from *Those Three French Girls*, the only item that was from a screenplay written by PGW. Fans of *Leave It to Psmith* recognized a truly Wodehousean moment captured on film when PGW, who loved to recycle good material, used the efficient Baxter as a model for a funny scene of the three girls taking arms (so to speak) against their sea of troubles. Like Baxter, their motto seemed to be “say it with flower pots”—which flew fast and furiously at their offending landlord who was set upon evicting them from their cozy apartment. Another highlight was provided by David Niven’s portrayal of Uncle Fred in “Uncle Fred Flits By.” Mr. Niven brilliantly captured Uncle Fred’s imperturbable insouciance as he invaded the Roddis homestead, ostensibly to clip the parrot’s claws, with a bemused Pongo gamely tapping his teeth and attempting to smell of iodoform. Other film clips captured the matrimonial sweepstakes in *A Damsel in Distress* and a typical Hollywood script conference from “The Nodder.” *Piccadilly Jim*, featuring Robert Montgomery in the title role, was notable for its supporting cast, which included a couple of actors, playing Mr. Crocker and his fiancée Eugenia Willis, who later went on to captivate generations of filmgoers in *The Wizard of Oz*: Frank Morgan (the wizard) and Billie Burke (Glinda, the good witch). Ms. Burke is also noteworthy because she was also Mrs. Florenz Ziegfeld, employer of P. G. Wodehouse on Broadway.

Our next speaker was Dick Heymann, TWS’s intrepid investigative reporter, who tickled our funny bones with his imaginative version of a series of letters exchanged between St. Paul’s own F. Scott Fitzgerald, Rosie M. Banks, and P. G. Wodehouse. The correspondence between FSF and Ms. Banks gave us a hint as to why FSF may have taken up the use of alcoholic stimulants to aid in literary composition: La Banks recommended that he put a little gin in his orange juice if he was having trouble getting started on a novel. Dick also “unearthed” Plum’s suggestions (alas,

not adopted by FSF) of ways to improve Fitzgerald's draft of *The Great Gatsby*. After a masterful summary of the entire novel in one nine-line sentence, the letter continues with a number of perspicacious nuggets, including advice that Fitzgerald might consider brightening the atmosphere a bit by moving some of the action to one of the many golf clubs in the vicinity of West Egg and that the book could be improved by giving Daisy a personality. He also suggested balancing *Gatsby's* ominous aura by showing more of his bright and cheerful side.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate rounded out the afternoon's performances with their own flight of fancy in the playlet "Bertie and Jeeves in Lake Wobegon." This clean, bright entertainment featured a bountiful, bouncing Bertie, an unflappable Jeeves, and many perky natives of Lake Wobegon. Although, as far as we know, Wodehouse never visited St. Paul, this bit of humor gave us a taste of how he could have incorporated its inhabitants into his oeuvre had he been so blessed.

Following this fine display of erudition and entertainment, we slipped on the old feedbag and restored our tissues with a bit of the strengthening tea, tasty scones, and assorted tea sandwiches and sweets served by our genial host, the St. Paul Hotel.

Cruisin': Saturday Night

BY GARY HALL

SATURDAY NIGHT ARRIVED, and the convention glitterati began to gather on the pier at Harriet Island for our dinner cruise on the Mississippi. Some had walked the few blocks from the hotel, but most had piled into the efficient buses for the short trip. Fortunately, only one chorus of "99 bottles of port on the wall" was heard during the brief journey.

We believe that our ship of Plums, the *Betsey Northrup*, left the dock promptly at the scheduled time, though we have no absolute proof. The transition from dock to river was so smooth, and most of the Wodehouseans were already prepping for the journey at one of the two well-stocked bars (or perhaps at both), that no one noted the actual departure time.

Once asea, or ariver to state it accurately, the conversation gurgled and gushed like the river below us, as the crowd ebbed and flowed between the upper and lower decks. Up top, one had a gorgeous view of the St. Paul skyline and could debate whether we were going upstream or downstream. Down on the main deck, one could stay out of the cooling breezes. Various discussions percolated, and references to bows, starboards, and afts abounded. Tamaki Morimura

wandered about attaching buttercups to one and all, Anne Cotton most closely resembled a crew member in her white sailor suit, and Christine Hewitt slunk about as an Ouled Nail dancer, a symphony in blue.

Eventually, we all took our seats in preparation for our sumptuous feast. Again, the Northwodes outdid themselves: the buffet was varied, well prepared, and welcomed heartily by the hungry river-faring throng.

All the while, at least until the official events of the evening began, we were entertained by a fabulous quartet of multi-instrumentalists, who seemed almost to have floated upriver from New Orleans, given their mastery of Louis Armstrong's repertoire and many other jazzy favorites. In their picnic-table red-checked shirts, they were a highlight of the evening. Our own Noel Merrill carried his banjolele throughout the evening, though our fears that he would be annexed by the band proved to be unfounded.

Eventually, Kris Fowler called the group to order and the business commenced. First and foremost, the Very Reverend Wendell Verrill led a toast to our dear departed Plummies, each of whom has been documented in these pages after their passing.

Kris then unveiled dessert, which happened to be two cakes commemorating, respectively, the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Northwodes chapter and the soon-to-be (in 2010) 30th anniversary of The Wodehouse Society. Gary Hall, who earlier that day had been voted into the presidential seat, wielded an Excalibur of a cake knife and commenced slicing.

Awards of various flavors followed, with Kris and helper Rhys Parry calling the multitude of winners to the front of the room:

*ff*riendly Quiz



Master Class

- 1 Ian Michaud
- 2 Elliott Milstein
- 3 Tony Ring



Fan Class

- 1 Susan Diamond
- 2 Karen Shotting
- 3 Jelle Otten

Costume Prizes

- Most Subtle Costume: **John Graham**
 Best Couple: **Bob Rains and Andrea Jacobsen**
 (aka Oily Carlisle and Gumshoe Gertie)
 Best Golfer: **Ken Clevenger**

Sweetness and Light Award: **Tamaki Morimura**
(aka the Buttercup Girl)

Young Man in Spats: **Tad Boehmer**

Bertie Wooster Banjolele prize: **Noel Merrill**

Most Original/Cleverest: **Susan Collicott**

Most Wiggly and Writhing: **Christine Hewitt**

Soppiest Girl: **Katherine Jordan**

(aka Madeleine Bassett)

Costume Stamina and Endurance: **David Storlie** and
Rachel Grippen

Best Nautical Costume: **Anne Cotton**

Bonniest Baby: **PJ Abrinko**

Our river-faring vessel returned to its mooring spot, and a warm glow settled over the crowd. As we disembarked and meandered back to the hotel, we had already begun to reflect upon the memories made that night. Some of the heartier souls landed in the hotel lounge, while others slipped back to their rooms high atop St. Paul, to rest up for another day in Wodehousean paradise.

Sunday Cheer and Partings—for Some!

BY NORMAN MURPHY

THE TRADITIONAL last-day brunch was, as always, a competition between the physical and cerebral. The physical aspect, the browsing of superb food, did well for about the first 15 minutes, but after that the cerebral took over and one could hear the feasts of reason and flows of soul across the room. The food was excellent and the sweet pastries were particularly popular, which is why, later on in the proceedings, there was approbation at our table for the farsighted person who had procured an extra supply for our common use. This prudent move aroused some envy amongst neighboring tables, but since it was a Wodehouse occasion, we followed the example of Sir Philip Sidney and graciously allowed them to share our largesse.

PJ Abrinko, the runaway winner of the Bonny Baby competition, was again the center of attention and delighted everybody with his obvious enjoyment of the proceedings. He laughed and chuckled throughout as though he had been a Wodehousean all his life—but then, when one thinks about it, he has.

Kris Fowler introduced Hilary Bruce, chairman of the UK Society, who told us about the Wodehouse exhibition at the Heywood Hill bookshop in London in

the fall. The UK Society is involved in this, and Hilary described how an offhand suggestion of hers to have a picture of a Berkshire pig outside the shop had led to some unusual traffic problems in London's Mayfair on Saturday, May 30. Ably assisted by Stephen Fry and David Cazalet (Wodehouse's great-grandson), the pig, Gloria by name, adapted to the bustle of London admirably and took camera-flashing tourists and raucous remarks from taxi drivers in her stride. Her Empress-like gracious manner, we learned, was such that three police cars had paused, looked, and passed on without comment. (A pity in some ways. It would have been nice to have seen a London traffic cop trying to find her pig's Walking License amongst the myriad subsections of the Road Traffic Acts.)



The Northwodes enact The Code of the Woosters. Clockwise from top left: Rhys Parry (Jeeves) and Mike Eckman (Sir Watkyn Bassett); Christina Heinrichs (Stiffy Byng); Bonnie Sample (Dahlia Travers); Dick Sveum (Announcer and Butterfield).

(Photos by Barbara Combs)

The draw was then made for the raffle prizes, and winners included Amy Plofker, Maggie Wynne, and Hilary Bruce, while Evelyn Herzog won the Grand Prize, Jean Tillson's superb portrait of the cat Webster in prelapsarian mode (before he took to demon drink).

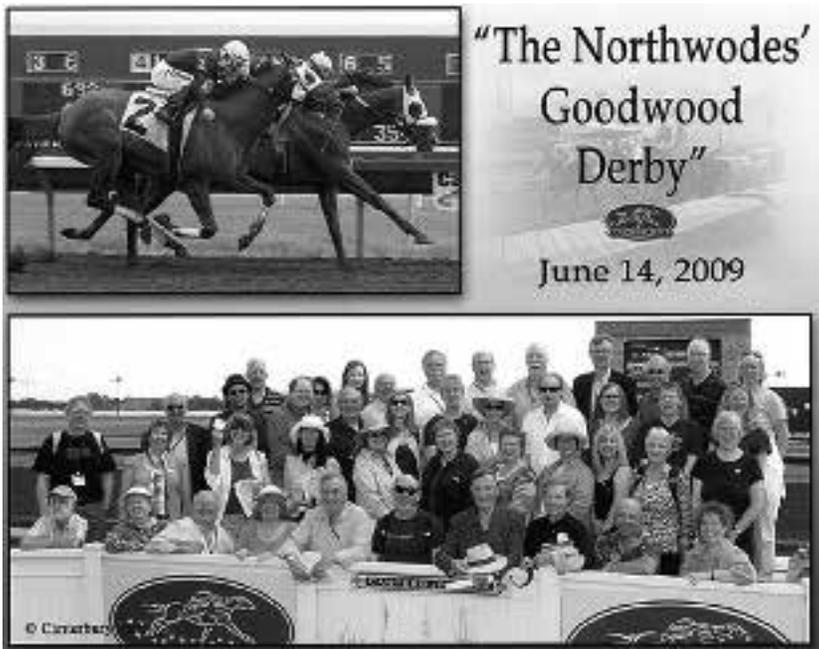
We were then entertained by the Northwodes, who gave us a superb rendering of chapters 13 and 14 of *The Code of the Woosters* and showed us once again how Wodehouse's words can be even funnier when you hear them spoken.

The proceedings concluded with a standing ovation for Kris Fowler and the Northwodes, who had put on such a superb convention. And, as always, people stood and talked and laughed for another hour, unwilling to break the spell and go home.

A Day at the Races: The Finale

BY MAX T. K. POKRIVCHAK

AFTER THE TEARFUL farewells that marked the end of the formal convention program, those of us not needing to shuffle off to Buffalo ASAP had the rare opportunity to spend a leisurely afternoon watching Minnesota's finest fillies, mares, and stallions earn their daily feedbag. Two waiting buses whisked us to Canterbury Park racetrack, where Jake the bookie provided us with racing forms and the latest hot tips. We arrived just in time for the Main Event, the second heat of the day, officially listed in the program as The Northwodes' Goodwood Derby. Heavy action was placed on Songanddancelady at 7 to 2, and though she was nosed out by Alpha Tammy in the stretch, those of us prescient enough to place win/place/show bets earned a little pocket change for our efforts. As the race's sponsor, we were invited to have our picture taken in the winner's circle, where none smiled as brightly as Mr. Bill Franklin, who had correctly picked the trifecta (the top three finishers in order) and who was immediately hit up for a quick tenner by those less fortunate than himself.



*A cheery convention subset prepares their betting forms and two-dollar bills.
(Photo compliments of Canterbury Park)*

We retired to the shade of the mezzanine and settled in for the duration. Though Raisin Bread scratched in the third, and So My Name's Cart (a TWS fave after all the Sidney Carton references in that morning's Northwodes reading of *The Code of the Woosters*) faded in the fourth, a pleasant time was had by all as fortunes were won and subsequently lost, or vice versa. Rhys Parry cleaned up in the sixth with an inside tip on Captain Canaveral, and Amy Plofker did the Broadway Special proud with a string of inspired choices. Karen Shotting voted the straight Plum ticket, placing bets on any and all horse names that had the slightest connection to the world of Wodehouse.

Northwode Bonnie Sample showed us the stables and mounting area, where we could see the horses and jockeys up close. Jose Ferrer (the jockey, not the actor) turned out to be the day's biggest winner, taking three of the ten heats.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Canterbury's full range of racetrack snacks, from the World's Tallest Butter Pecan Ice Cream Cone enjoyed by Tony Ring to the more modest malt cups, peanuts, and popcorn partaken by the rest of us.

After a final glance at the vintage Cadillacs in the entranceway (a foreshadowing of the 2011 TWS convention), we retired to the parking lot to await our chariot. Never one to miss a chance to flutter, Kris Fowler quickly arranged the Post-Goodwood Bus Pool on what time our vehicle would appear to take us back to the hotel. The winning entry (5:59 PM Central Daylight Time), held by yours truly, paid at 8 to 1.

"You know how it is when someone comes slinking up to you in the club and tells you that some cripple of a horse can't help winning even if it develops lumbago and the botts ten yards from the starting-post. I tell you, I regarded the thing as a cautious and conservative investment."

"Jeeves and the Impending Doom" (1927)

*Canterbury Park was a friendly venue to all, though perhaps not profitable for some.
(Photo by Elin Woodger Murphy)*



Random Notes on Canterbury Park Racing from a British Point of View

BY NORMAN MURPHY

RACING ON A SUNDAY? Scandalous! But Wendell Verrill had gone to morning Mass on behalf of us all, so that was all right. In passing, Wendell told us the sermon had been the shortest he had heard in his life—two minutes at the outside, so perhaps the priest was racing too, a good omen for us.

Administration: America has its racing very well organized. In England, from memory, one spends one's entire time standing around on wet grass. Here, there was seating for everyone who wanted it. A great improvement, and food and drink of every variety was close at hand. And, on my tenth visit to America, I at last found a soft drink I liked. I happen to loathe Coke and Pepsi, but an iced and chilled Mountain Dew (especially with a drop of gin in it) touched the spot nicely. I shall always remember Canterbury Park kindly for solving that problem.

It was splendid to see the second race named The Northwodes' Goodwood Derby, and we were honored by being asked to go down to the Winner's Enclosure for a group photograph before the race.

The Mustard Pott aspect: I was surprised how quiet the crowd was. In Britain, the final stretch in any race is usually marked by everybody shouting their heads off. This was a much more decorous affair, and I got the strong impression that our group made more noise than the rest of the crowd put together. Perhaps they were more accustomed to it than we were.

One thing I did miss were bookmakers. In Britain, their stands and their raucous calls of "Nine to one on Baby Boy, two to one the field bar none" between races keep the tension going, and the fact that they offer different odds adds to the excitement.

Still, our group didn't do too badly. The Woodger-Murphy syndicate decided the jockey named Jose Ferrer was clearly the man to follow, with the odd side bet as a tribute to our retiring president on Ohbeegeeewhyen (his dam was Clean Up Kris). Although we plunged heavily in the best Bingo Little manner (one bet was for five dollars!), we managed to finish up nine dollars and sixty cents ahead of the game. A satisfying and happy result from a very happy and enjoyable afternoon, and another triumph for Kris and the Northwodes.

Preserving Those Old Wode Houses

DEAN MILLER, of the Chicago Accident Syndicate Chapter, and known also in St. Paul as the Occasional Jeeves, has a good Little Wodehouse on the Prairie anecdote to tell. It occurred around noon on June 12 (Friday), near our posh hotel. Dean relates:

Whilst ambling down a nearby street, flaneuring fit to bust, I was attracted into a sort of artistic boutique (no, it wasn't Eulalie's), and I was impelled to check out the wares there set forth. The salesperson, a young, blonde, and attractive woman, was kind enough to inquire as to whether I was visiting in the area (the aura of Chicago was evidently strong on my person—perhaps it was the two-toned golf shoes) and I replied that, yes, I was at the St. Paul Hotel with The Wodehouse Society. She took this in.

I found an object I wanted to purchase; we concluded the deal and then, making conversation while I counted out the simoleons, the young lady said, "Are you interested in preserving old houses, then?" Oh, dear me. I hastened to explain the particulars of P. G. Wodehouse and of the organization dedicated to getting him canonized as the greatest humor-writer of the 20th century, and thereby was able to spread the word to one more innocent soul. Onward!

Wode Web Version 2: Your Ideas Needed!

DEAR PLUM LINES READERS: The Wodehouse Society is considering changes to our website, which you know well at www.wodehouse.org. The Web Steering Committee (Amy Plofker and Ken Clevenger) is asking current website visitors to share thoughts about what to change, add, or preserve as the new design process goes forward. You may e-mail your comments to Amy or Ken. Any input will be gratefully appreciated. The current website has served us well, but it's now time to consider some spiffing, a bit of the old spit and polish, as we look to spread interest in P. G. Wodehouse.

The Cabaret Girl CD

REVIEWED BY IAN MICHAUD

A NEW RECORDING of a P. G. Wodehouse musical is always a welcome event, and Plummies everywhere have reason to celebrate this set from last summer's Ohio Light Opera Festival in the delightfully named town of Wooster, Ohio. Recorded with the spoken dialogue and with a 32-page booklet containing the complete libretto, this CD set is a must for fans of Wodehouse's career in the musical theatre.

The Cabaret Girl, written with composer Jerome Kern and actor/impresario George Grossmith, was one of the hits of the 1922 London season, running for 361 performances at the Winter Garden Theatre, but until very recently, was completely unknown in North America.

This Ohio Light Opera production was billed as the show's American premiere, which isn't completely accurate. The actual American premiere was in April 2004 at the 42nd Street Moon theatre in San Francisco. The OLO production, with a 29-member orchestra ably conducted by Michael Borowitz, was the first on this continent to provide the full flavor of Kern's orchestration. (The show's Broadway premiere earlier this year, staged by Musicals Tonight! was reviewed in the Summer *Plum Lines* by Gus Caywood.)

The young OLO cast does full justice to both Kern's music and Wodehouse's lyrics, with not a weak link to be heard. Soprano Lindsay O'Neil and tenor Stefan Gordon are just right as the young lovers Marilynn and Jim. He likes the quiet life in the country and might lose his inheritance if he marries the wrong sort of girl. She likes the bright lights of the city and is a cabaret artiste. Any Wodehouse reader will readily suspect that trouble is in the offing for the young couple.

The comic relief is supplied by the squabbling business partners Gripps and Gravvins, played with zest by Jacob Allen and Anthony Buck, who were clearly having as much fun as the audience in the following Act I duet:

GRAVVINS: Your parents missed / A golden opportunity: They should, / Of course, have drowned you / In a bucket as a child. / Mister Gripps, I'd like to mention / That your gifts are wasted here.

GRIPPS: Mister Gravvins, I don't take you. / Kindly make your meaning clear.

GRAVVINS: Well, a job you'd do much better / Would be selling fish and chips.

GRIPPS: You're a blighter, Mister Gravvins.

GRAVVINS: You're a bloater, Mister Gripps.



The Cabaret Girl, by Jerome Kern, P. G. Wodehouse, and George Grossmith. Performed by Ohio Light Opera. Conducted by Michael Borowitz (Albany Records 1103/04; 2 CDs, 114 minutes)

It can't be denied that the plot creaks a bit, and the show's cabaret concept means quite a few of the musical numbers were written as audition arias or show numbers for the cabaret artistes and don't serve to advance the plot or develop the characters, which was one of the groundbreaking trademarks of most of the Wodehouse/Kern musicals. There's also some recycling of material. Those of you who own John McGlinn's 1990 recording of *Sitting Pretty* will recognize at least one of the musical numbers, while the London opening night audience that laughed at the following slab of spoken dialogue would have another opportunity to laugh at the same line a few months later in *The Adventures of Sally*, the novel Wodehouse was working on at the same time he was writing *The Cabaret Girl*:

"Kindly lower your voice."

"I can't. I'm a tenor."

Creaky plot or not, Kern's music and Wodehouse's lyrics sparkle from beginning to end under the baton of Maestro Borowitz and should have you humming and singing along for days.

One word of advice: Shop around and compare prices. As of the current date, the American Amazon.com site has this recording listed for \$32.98, which is about \$3 or \$4 lower than the usual retail price for a new double CD opera or operetta recording with full libretto booklet. But the British Amazon has it listed for £39 (US\$63), while the German site wants €47 (US\$65) for it. As for the Canadian Amazon site, it seems to think \$87.41 (about US\$75 at the current rate of exchange) is a fair asking price! I'm unable to fathom the rationale for this pricing policy as I purchased my copy for the normal retail price (about \$40 Canadian, if I remember correctly) at my local classical music record shop in Vancouver. *The Cabaret Girl* is also available directly from the record label at albanyrecords.com.



Ouled Nail dancer Christine Hewitt and Barbara Combs color the deck lively. (BC)



And the band played on . . . to the delight of the crowd. (BC)



Robert Bruce escorts Hilary Bruce, Chairman of The P G Wodehouse Society (UK). (BC)



The James J. Hill Reference Library reading room (SC)



Newly annointed Prez Gary Hall cuts the TWS 30th anniversary cake. (BC)



Barbara Jacobitti, dashing and feathered (BC)



Joe Coppola, John Baesch, and Evelyn Herzog (BC)



St. Paul was the home of Charles Schulz. (EW)



Susan Collicott rakes in a costume prize for her text-clue shawl. (BC)



Lord Emsworth's girl friend (aka Marilyn MacGregor) (EW)



Maria Jette effortlessly wows us. (SM)



VP Ken Clevenger and his wife Joan (BC)



Debbie Bellew sports her cricket prize. (DB)



The action continues on the cricket field. (SC)



Robert Bruce's skillful Wine Glass Carry (BC)



Pat Yong and Brian Taves (BC)

Photographer Key

- BC = Barbara Combs
- EW = Elin Woodger Murphy
- SM = Pongo (Shamim Mohamed)
- IM = Ian Michaud
- SC = Susan Collicott
- DB = Debbie Bellew



The Mighty Max Pokrivchak prepares to bring joy to Wodeville. (SM)



Bob Rains, as "Oily" Carlisle, shows off his fancy spats. (IM)



Paul Abrinko and Monika Eckfield proudly display PJ, the winner of the Bonny Baby award. (IM)



Bill Franklin and Carey Tynan (BC)



Marjanne and Jelle Otten come aboard. (BC)



Elaine and Tony Ring listen intently. (BC)



First Lady Plum Linda Adam-Hall and Gary Hall (BC)



John Baesch, Evelyn Herzog, Anne Cotton, and Amy Plofker on deck (BC)



Kathy and Tom Smith, post-buttercupping (BC)



The Chicago Accident Syndicate skitting merrily along (IM)



Elise and John Fahey in a restful mood (EW)



Francis Taunton exhibits perfect style. (IM)



The Very Rev. Wendell Verrill and Anne Cotton enjoy a jolly time among the napkins. (EW)



*Tamaki Morimura
buttercupped one
and all. (BC)*



*Noel Merrill ukes it up.
(IM)*



*Jean Tillson, jolly raffler
(EW)*



*2011 Convention Chief Elliott
Milstein, Chris Dueker, and
Tim Andrew (BC)*



*A Plummy rainbow: Tina
Garrison, Elaine Ring, Elyse
Milstein (BC)*



*Maria Jette, Susan Garrett,
Carey Tynan (IM)*



*Sandy McHoots (Hal
Brayman) (IM)*



*Katherine Jordan channels
Madeline Bassett. (EW)*



*Karen Shottling at
the races (EW)*



*Maggie Wynne as
Claude and Eustace's
mom (EW)*



*Northwodes Christina and Peter
Heinrichs relax in the throng (EW)*



*Ken Clevenger caught
clubbing around. (IM)*



*Terry Kitchen (aka Max
Pokrivchak) entertains at the
Black Dog Coffeehouse. (IM)*



*Ian Michaud, Lynn Vesley-
Gross, Barbara Combs, and Tim
Kearley (BC)*



*Cheerful Nancy
Horn (BC)*



*Bob Rains and Andrea
Jacobsen as Oily and
Gertie (BC)*



A lovely quartet: Quizmeister Lynn Vesley-Gross, Debbie Bellew, Andrea Jacobsen, and Kathy Jordan (BC)



Sandra and Leonard Goldstein bask in the glow of the opening reception. (EW)



The glorious Landmark Center, across the street from the St. Paul Hotel (DB)



Pongo displays, as always, his sartorial majesty. (EW)



Robert Bruce, the chap in pink, oversees the action. (IM)



The Mayor of St. Paul saw fit to proclaim June 12, 2009, as P. G. Wodehouse Day! (IM)



Rachel Grippen and David Storlie in high style (BC)



Elin Woodger Murphy and Colonel Norman Murphy test each other's sea legs. (IM)



Susan Pace and husband, the Rev. Bill Scrivener, are pleased with the proceedings. (BC)



Non-smoker Tad Boehmer emulates the style of smoker Norman Murphy, whilst Mandy Fassett refuses to pass judgment. (EW)



Susan Collicott would have us consider the (unpopulated) powder room to answer the question: Did we indeed live in luxury at the St. Paul Hotel? (SC)



Elyse and Elliott Milstein (BC)



Tim Kearley finds the grand hotel lobby to his liking. (BC)



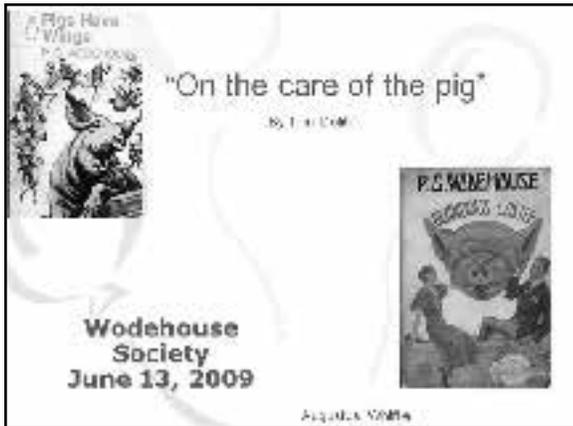
St. Paul convention chief, outgoing TWS President, and current TWS Treasurer: Kris Fowler at last finds a moment to relax. (IM)

On the Care of the Pig

BY PROFESSOR TOM MOLITOR

REPORTED BY GARY HALL

We were highly entertained at the St. Paul convention by Tom Molitor, as he gave us a presentation entitled "On the Care of the Pig." Dr. Molitor is a great authority on the subject at the University of Minnesota, where he is a professor in and chair of the Veterinary Population Medicine arm of the College of Veterinary Medicine. He has researched pig diseases and immunology for more than 30 years, and his research and comments have appeared in 140 publications. If this isn't enough pig cred for you, he lives on a farm in Lakeville, Minnesota, with his wife and three children. Following is a summary of his presentation, which included the first live interactive electronic quiz in the conference room at the St. Paul Hotel. Enjoy!



AFTER SOME introductory information, Professor Molitor (hereafter referred to as Tom) proceeded to the heart of his topic: "Empress of Blandings: The Real Story." The person at the end of each row of rapt attendees was given a device to record the row's consensus answer on the computer at the podium. Tom proceeded to throw some piggish fastballs and sinkers our way. We present here Tom's quiz and some additional comments from the good professor. (Quiz answers are found on p. 22.)

Q1: Should the Empress of Blandings be appropriately referred to as a sow?

- A. Yes, she is a female pig.
- B. No. She's a pig, OK, but "sow" is not appropriate.
- C. No, she's not even a *sus scrofa*.
- D. I don't know, I don't care, I'm just here for the fine convention.



Professor Tom Molitor ponders a weighty question about the Empress. (Photo by Ian Michaud)

This proved to be the most challenging question of the afternoon. After the answers came in, Tom gave us a quick education in Pig Terminology, including relevant words like *sow*, *gilt*, *barrow*, *boar*, and *grow-finish*. Then Tom tossed us another curve:

Q2: The Empress of Blandings has won the following awards:

- A. Silver medal at the Fat Pigs class at the local Shropshire Agricultural show
- B. Pignapped multiple times
- C. Ribbon winner at "best of show"
- D. A & B
- E. None of the above

This one's a bit tricky in the way it's phrased, and after this item, the students were now warmed to the task, and brains were fully engaged. The remaining questions generally had an 80% or better rate of correct response by the ten teams.

Tom then showed us the Wikipedia definition of the Empress, which uses words like *enormous* and *fictional*. (Yes, fictional, but based on truth, as we know courtesy of Norman Murphy!)

Q3: Pigs can be housed at all the following except:

- A. A meadow with a house
- B. A bathroom
- C. A caravan
- D. A two-seater
- E. An empty cottage

Q4: Which of the following statements are not true regarding the nutritional requirement of a pig?

- A. A pig must consume not less than 57,800 calories a day.
- B. A pig cannot skip a meal or she becomes a "spent force."
- C. One of the favorite foods of the pig is potatoes.
- D. A pig can subsist by eating grasses.

Q5: The Empress or her rival the Queen of Matchingham has consumed all of the following except:

- A. A “well filled flask of scotch”
- B. Tea and crumpets
- C. Six bottles of Slimmo
- D. Galahad’s book

Tom quoted two sources after this question. First was from G. Sauber: “Any sow showing nervousness, especially around farrowing, give a shot of whiskey or beer.” Next was T. Molitor himself: “The pig is the only animal that voluntarily consumes alcohol to levels of intoxication.” Presumably excepting humans, of course.

Q6: Known causes for nervousness of the Empress include all of the following except:

- A. Dangling food such as potatoes
- B. Not being able to find truffles in the meadow
- C. Loss of the pigman and his special call
- D. Exiting the sty into the meadow

Q7: Why do pigs have rings in their noses?

- A. To prevent rooting in the mud
- B. To facilitate pignapping
- C. To present a more sophisticated appearance
- D. To differentiate domesticated from wild pigs

Following the quiz, Tom quoted Lewis Carroll (“The Walrus and the Carpenter”) in regard to winged pigs, and told us that 5–7 correct answers means you’re experts in both pigs and Wodehouse, 3–4 means you know some Wodehouse, but need work on pigs, and 0–2 means you should enroll in his “piggy class” at the University.

Tom’s closing advice: “All I need to know about life, I learned from a pig.” Those lessons follow the quiz answers on pages 22–23. Tom left the podium to great acclamation and perhaps a few squishy snuffling noises. We were greatly pleased to have been entertained and educated by a true leader in the pig field.



Conventions, Anyone?

THE CONVENTION STEERING COMMITTEE (CSC) has made some changes in the charter that guides TWS’s convention planning process. This committee selects the next convention chapter from the applicants, helps advise the convention planners, and even fulfills the role of convention host in the event that no chapter volunteers for the job. The new charter adds Kris Fowler to the committee, joining Elin Woodger (chair), Elliott Milstein, and Jean Tillson.

In addition to this, the charter now specifies that there will be no more than five committee members at any time and that the members with the longest tenure will rotate off the committee as new members are added.

The CSC will also be collecting data from the organizers after each convention about their planning, organization, and administration, in order to maintain a cumulative convention database so that future convention planners may benefit from past experience.

In the new charter, chapters may request extra monies from the Convention Reserve Fund (CRF) according to certain guidelines. The rest of the modifications describe in detail how the CRF is handled. These funds may be provided to convention hosts up front, but with the understanding that the money will be repaid in due course.

The size of the CRF will be reviewed periodically, so that it is appropriate to serve its purpose, but not so large as to conflict with our not-for-profit status.

Lest this article be too dry, we must mention that the final section of the new charter dubs the future convention’s coordinator as Ukridge and the current convention’s coordinator as Baxter, and proceeds to describe the exchange of information and services between the two using this Wodehousean shorthand. (Wodehouse’s Ukridge might not be the right person to place in charge of the CRF, but, of course, any real-life Plumies would be much more trustworthy.)

The Convention Steering Committee wants to remind you that it’s time to begin considering YOUR bid for the 2013 convention. While Detroit holds the cards for 2011, chapters who are interested in sponsoring the 2013 event should prepare their proposal by approximately mid-January of 2011. (The exact deadline date will be announced in a future issue of *Plum Lines*.)

To request a copy of the new charter, you may contact one of the committee members. Once the new charter is finalized, you may view it on our website at <http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter.html>.

Board Meeting and Dread Business Meeting

THE BOARD of TWS met at the St. Paul convention to deal with the Inner Workings of our organization. Here are the highlights of the session; should this summary not cause sufficient suffering, the full minutes are available from any society officer. Thanks to Ian Michaud for documenting the official gathering. This abridged version doesn't pretend to convey the sheer fun of sitting through a Wodehousean board meeting, but you should catch a bit of the flavor and some useful information.



Amendments were suggested to the Convention Steering Committee charter as mentioned in the article to the left. When finalized, other charter changes will be made public in glorious detail.

Kris Fowler is investigating the costs and logistics of scanning all past *Plum Lines* issues to make an electronic collection available to all members. (The last five years or so would not require scanning, since Gary Hall has been saving .pdf files of these since beginning *PL* layout duties in January 2004.)

There was a discussion about giving members the option of receiving *Plum Lines* electronically via e-mail. No decision was reached.

Amy Plofker and Ken Clevenger agreed to head a Website Steering Committee to begin the process of replacing the website with a dolled-up interactive version. The project is in the organizational stage, and more details will be offered as available. (See page 9 for more information.)

Ken Clevenger agreed to investigate possible programs and uses for a bequest of \$1,500 (Canadian) from Mr. Fergus James Brown to be used for "Canadian initiatives."

Gary Hall mentioned that he's still using the 2003 version of Adobe InDesign and Photoshop for *Plum Lines* layout. Monies were approved to upgrade.

In addition to the board items above, the Dread Business Meeting was held on June 13 in its traditional post-lunch time frame. Several convention attendees were actually spotted remaining awake throughout. Here, more or less, are Ian Michaud's copious and excellent notes:

(1) After stating her intention to chair the shortest Dread Business Meeting in TWS's history, Kris called

for nominations from the floor for the Society's officers. The following nominations and results followed:

Nominated by Kris and seconded by Len Lawson, Gary Hall was acclaimed as President.

Nominated by Gary and with numerous seconders, Ken Clevenger became TWS Vice President.

Nominated by Kris and seconded by Norman Murphy, Ian Michaud returned to duty as Membership Secretary.

Nominated by Jean Tillson and with multiple seconds from various parts of the room, Kris Fowler was acclaimed as Treasurer.

(2) Kris reported on the Board's plans to redesign the society's webpage and asked for volunteers, especially people with technical expertise in the field.

(3) Treasurer Jean Tillson reported the society is in healthy financial condition as per the Treasurer's Report published in the Spring issue of *Plum Lines*.

(4) Elliott Milstein and David Warren of the Pickering Motor Corporation reported their plans for the 2011 convention in Detroit, A Motown What-Ho(e) Down. The convention will be held on October 13-16, 2011, to celebrate Plum's 130th birthday, with the Cadillac Hotel to be the site of the festivities. Plans include the option of a night out at the Detroit Casino on Thursday, guided tours and a cricket game at Greenfield Village on Friday, and a Friday night dinner aboard the *Detroit Princess*. Saturday will have the traditional lineup of talks followed by an evening banquet, with the Farewell Brunch to conclude the weekend on Sunday morning.

(5) Kris accepted a motion (quickly seconded and unanimously approved) to adjourn at 2:30 P.M. Ian reports in his notes that he was informed by seasoned convention observers that she failed in her attempt to set a new record for dread brevity.

The motion picture magnate was, indeed, agitated in the extreme. As he sat there in conference with his wife's sister Mabel, his brow was furrowed, his eyes bulged, and each of his three chins seemed to compete with the others in activity of movement. As for his hands, so briskly did they weave and circle that he looked like a plump Boy Scout signalling items of interest to some colleague across the way.

The Luck of the Bodkins (1935)

A Few Quick Ones

Here's our compilation of Wodehouse sightings from various media sources. Thanks to all contributors; special thanks to Evelyn Herzog and John Baesch.

A. A. Gill, in his Television column in the *Times* (London), suggests that Wallace & Gromit have "strange undertones of Wodehousian misogyny" in a noncomplimentary piece about the clay stop-action animated characters.

In Barbara Hall's "Bookwise" column in the *Sunday Times* (London) of February 15, 2009, the first clue reads: "Discussing his personal problems with his butler, this Old Etonian mentioned that he had won the Scripture Knowledge prize for knowing about Balaam's ass. Involved in a cat-stealing plot, he also correctly answered: 'What do you know of the deaf adder?'" (Of course, it's Bertie Wooster in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*.)

In the April 26, 2009, *Times* (London), Chris Jeffries and Patrick Sawyer's article "Britain put to the honesty test" tells of a reporter who tested Londoners' honesty by leaving £20 cash in an unobtrusive place. In the final paragraph, they quote Dr. Gary Wood, a social psychologist, who mentions P. G. Wodehouse's habit of tossing stamped letters out his window "to see if people would post them on his behalf, and most of the time they did."

In the March 18, 2009, issue of *Country Life*, the headline "Hire a modern Jeeves" tops an article about a London service called CityButler. For £5 a month and a specific fee per service, they'll do "almost anything": book theatre tickets, arrange entrance to exclusive nightclubs, etc.

In his February 22, 2009, "Can't. Stop. Writing." column in the *New York Times Book Review*, Geoff Nicholson describes how he and best friend Rob agreed that "Wodehouse was hot stuff" when they began reading him in their teens.

Michael Dirda reviews Daniel Mueenuddin's new book *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, and describes the character Mian Sarkar in the short story "About a Burning Girl" as "half Sherlock Holmes, half Jeeves." An interesting combination!

Neil Lyndon, in his review of the Mercedes-Benz E250 in the March 29, 2009, *Daily Telegraph*, calls the vehicle

"a robotic Jeeves" due to its numerous "ways of ensuring that you will not run into danger . . ." In fact, he says that the car is "so nannyish that it does everything except pour a cup of coffee."

In the April 28, 2009, *Times* (London), Valentine Low describes the electronic tag that real-life butler Gary Lindley has been forced to wear after a conviction for assault. The fellow has fine credentials as a servant, including a stint at Buckingham Palace and his current gig with the Countess of Arran. Still, Low points out that "Jeeves, according to most Wodehouse scholars, never wore [an electronic tag]." [Yet another mistaken "Jeeves as butler" reference, of which we could show many examples!]

In the *Telegraph* Pubquiz of March 15, 2009, Marcus Berkmann asks, in question #5, "In PG Wodehouse's Blandings books, what is Lord Emsworth's family name?" [We'll let you answer that one as a chorus!]

Ken Clevenger, while reading some non-Wodehouse work, came across this line: "I suspected that he wrote poetry and was ashamed to admit it." Ken says that it struck him as very Plummish, but the source was obviously not. After researching, he found that it is actually from Whittaker Chambers's 1952 biography *Witness*. Chambers was describing a former fellow Communist who was allegedly a part of the so-called Soviet underground apparatus among U.S. government employees in Washington, D.C., of which Alger Hiss was the most notorious. To this man's credit, he was also described as "bookish" and one who "liked to discuss philosophy with other people." [Absent any treasonous espionage activities, based on the humor in his writings, we might forgive his undoubtedly youthful political indiscretion!]

Karen Shotting found this description in the *Kirkus Review* of Carola Dunn's *A Damsel in Distress*: "A combo of P. G. Wodehouse and *Boys' Own Adventures*, laced with reminders of the all-pervasive class distinctions of the era . . ." And, of Dunn's own *The Winter Garden Mystery*: "Manners (P. G. Wodehouse-style) and mystery get equal time in a low-keyed story with considerable charm."

Diane Madlon-Kay noticed that L. C. Tyler's *The Herring Seller's Apprentice* was shortlisted for England's "Last Laugh" award, given annually for the year's best

humorous crime novel. Chapter 18 features Chief Superintendent Emsworth and Constable Beach. From that chapter: “Emsworth racked his brain for other possible causes of distress. In his experience the usual front runners were parental objections to one’s plans for marrying a chorus girl (33–1), the threat of the theft of a prize pig (10–1), or an impending interview with his sister Connie (2–1 on).”

In an article entitled “Second Wind for a Toad and His Pals” in the July 10, 2009, *New York Times*, Charles McGrath notes Kenneth Grahame’s early years in the banking business, and compares him to “P. G. Wodehouse, another aspiring writer with a blighted childhood” who held a similar job at a young age.

In the May 23, 2009, *Telegraph Magazine*, Christopher Hirst writes of the comic potential of the cucumber. One of the examples he provides is that of the dyspeptic havoc wrought on Bertie Wooster’s Uncle Tom in *The Code of the Woosters*.



The Fiery Fever

Musings of a TWS Prez

BY GARY HALL, AOM



THERE WAS AN interesting conversation between the lectures at the St. Paul convention. Len Lawson, one of the key figures in the society since its very early days, argued the case that the title of Oldest Member had previously always been bestowed on the Editor in Chief of *Plum Lines*. I countered the point, contending that Ed Ratcliffe had earned the lifetime title of Oldest Member for his masterful and long service as EIC, as well as for his untold contributions in humor and guidance to the society. The debate raged on.

Right, then. Here’s my solution. Given the frightfully tremendous power bestowed upon me as president of TWS for the next 2+ years, and as current EIC, I hereby adopt (for the purposes of editorial notes in these pages) the moniker of Apprentice Oldest Member, or AOM.

So, when you see the AOM tag in future *PL* issues, you’ll know it’s Gary Hall continuing to strive to reach the Olympian standards set by TWS’s true and only OM, Ed Ratcliffe.

Chapters Corner

IT’S FUN BEING with other fans and reading about what others 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). If you’re not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member, you may get in touch with the contact person listed.

Anglers’ Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)

Contact: Susan Collicott

Phone:

E-mail:



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)

Contact: Caralyn Campbell

Phone:

E-mail:



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:



JULY 17 FOUND the Broadway Special gathered once more in their usual haunt, the Card Room at The Players on Gramercy Park, for an investigation into the works of Wodehouse and Arthur Conan Doyle. In attendance were the usual suspects as well as a gaggle of Sherlockians who wandered in with deerstalkers atop their pates in deference to the Special’s custom of sporting varieties of headgear. Another intermittent tradition was observed as we adorned the classic busts of famed actors with said chapeaux to add a fillip of insouciance to the proceedings. The story chosen was “The Smile That Wins,” along with relevant ephemera sent along by Ian Michaud to supplement the theme: “Dudley Jones, Bore-Hunter”; “Sherlock Holmes’s Lament”; “From a Detective’s Notebook”; and two of Wodehouse’s magazine pieces, “Introduction to A.C.

Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* and "Grit: A Talk with Arthur Conan Doyle." It was a particularly thoughtful discussion, touching on the friendship and mutual admiration of the two men and their distinctly different styles of storytelling. We veered slightly into our almost universal disdain for pasticheurs, who seem to think imitating great work is within their feeble powers. As Mickey Fromkin declared, "Every writer of distinction is unique and inimitable." You said it, kiddo!



*The busts at The Players
(photo by Philip Shreffler)*

The evening continued downstairs in the Grill Room, where ten of us dined, drank, and discoursed, until a Club member dashed in crying, "Ladies and Gentlemen! Please raise your glasses—we've lost a fellow Player tonight. To Walter Cronkite!" As Sherlockians would have it, we rose to "stand upon the terrace" for that unique and inimitable journalist, then headed out into a Manhattan sadly diminished by his loss.

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson

Phone:

E-mail:



ON AUGUST 16, the Capital! Capital! members gathered at the Army-Navy Country Club for a barbecue buffet and to hear amusing banter by Bob (Oily Carlisle) Rains on the subject of "Poets, Poetry, and Plum." Oily was ably assisted by helpmeet Andrea (Sweetie Carlisle) Jacobsen, and they both were suitably attired for the theme. Oily addressed the cosmic issue of what do W. H. Auden and W. S. Gilbert have in common, besides the W?

Upping the ante for future speakers, Oily employed music and a PowerPoint presentation to divert the audience's attention from any deficiencies in his

research. Since Oily can never remember exactly what deconstructionism is, he didn't attempt to do any.

The audience expressed its appreciation by not throwing overripe fruit and vegetables, as they had threatened if the presentation became tedious.

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:



(We'd like to thank Bob Nissenbaum for this Chapter One report; Susan Cohen continues to tend to Dan in the wake of his stroke earlier in the year. We are happy to hear that he is recovering well.)

THE CHAPS gathered in Philadelphia's Olde City at our usual watering hole, the Dark Horse Tavern in historic Head House Square. We browsed and sluiced, and rendered a comic performance of a play entitled *Wooster, M.D.*, authored brilliantly by our own John Sherwood, who has considerable theater experience. This takeoff on *House, M.D.* was performed by the members along with John's guest, Katari Brown, as Dr. Agatha Gregson.

Borrowing liberally from many sources, including Conan Doyle, Gilbert and Sullivan, and even Mae West, Mr. Sherwood pulled it off smoothly.

The premise is that after *House* ended its run in 2023, the producers restored the series with some slight alterations, borrowing heavily from Plum and the others mentioned above. (The Gregson name, with apologies to those who know the Conan Doyle canon, was craftily snatched by Wodehouse from the name of an early Scotland Yard inspector.) But I digress. In Sherwood's play, Dr. Wooster interacts problematically with Dr. Spode, Dr. Fink-Nottle, and his aunt Dr. Agatha Gregson, until Dr. Jeeves comes onto the scene and brilliantly clears up all the messes, eschewing credit for himself (he only takes cash) and bestowing it all upon Dr. Wooster.

The cast was enthusiastic, and the brightest of the shining stars were the author and his guest Katari, whose well-honed "U" accent caused your intrepid

reporter to ask if she was English. "No," she replied self-effacingly, "I'm from Michigan, actually!"

On a serious note, we sorely missed our fearless leaders, Susan "Rosie M. Banks" Cohen, and Dan "Cyril Waddesley-Davenport" Cohen, who were home resting after Dan suffered a stroke. It is the first meeting they have missed in probably 18 years. Dan is on his way to recovery, and we all hope it is a speedy and complete one. The meeting was presided over (if you can label our meetings ever "presided over") very competently by Herb "Vladimir Brusiloff" Moskovitz.

It was suggested that we consider selecting a story to discuss, and the idea was set forth that we select one revolving around one of our members' noms de Plum. Stay tuned!

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

Phone:



The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Oliver

Phone:

E-mail:



(Apologies from the AOM: Toni sent this report for our Summer issue, and your dedicated Editor, in modern terms, spaced it. As a result, here it is, late but no less enjoyable!)

IT HAS BEEN an exciting time in Texas, what with going to see *Charley's Aunt* on stage and attending the movie festival at the Museum of Fine Arts, where we saw such gems as *Oliver!* and *The Phantom of the Opera* with Lon Chaney. It is well known that the Drone Rangers live for pleasure only, and in the name of pleasure we have dined out at various restaurants seeking one that actually has staff who speak French. Many claim to be French, but we found only one where Toni's new friend, Fred, may speak his native tongue with the staff and explain the menu to us, so we will know before we order what we are getting. This is rather fun since most of us have studied French at some point

and feel that, while a Frenchman is in our midst, we should take the opportunity to practice. Luckily, Fred can endure a pretty longish evening of Drone Ranger blithering in French before his eyes glaze over.

The most recent book read by the DRs was *Joy in the Morning*, a favorite of all. We brought out a paper prepared in 1996 by Drone Ranger John Hannah (bless his memory) and enjoyed again the writing skill that John shared with us for so many years. We also reread the poem about *Joy in the Morning* by Ogden Nash and wrapped up the evening with a song about the same novel written by Drone Ranger Dr. Marshall McCabe.

Exhausted, we fell upon the fruit and shrimp at the tea table and recounted to each other all our exciting adventures since the last meeting. As always, you're invited to join us whenever you're in the Houston area.

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:



The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: David Landman

Phone:

E-mail:



AFTER ALMOST three solid weeks of rain in the Northeast, the NEWTS suspended work on their ark long enough to foregather at the western Massachusetts home of Lisa and Tom Dorward. As if in honor of the occasion, the day was uncommonly sunny, and the waterlogged members took the opportunity to dry out, each upon (or in one case under) his or her individual rock. Tom Dorward conducted a tour of the 18th-century structure he and Lisa have renovated and displayed the antique clocks repaired under his expert hands. Globetrotting NEWT Elizabeth Hamilton, on leave from her State Department post in Istanbul, made a happy appearance, and *muy simpático* new member Sudhakar Vamatevan was welcomed enthusiastically. We ate and drank like there was no tomorrow; based on the look of the dark clouds that rolled in, we wondered

indeed whether there would be. (Fortunately, we have it from reputable sources that there was a fine tomorrow!)

The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone: 651-602-9464

E-mail:

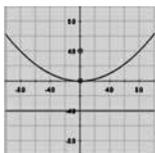


The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)

Contact: Peter M. Nixon

E-mail:



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

The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)

Contact: Sallie Hobbs

E-mail:



The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)

Contact: Karen Shotting

Phone:

E-mail:



THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the Board of Directors of the Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Company has determined that the schedule for the next three months shall be as follows:

- August reading is *The Code of the Woosters*.
- September (at Alice's) reading is "Uncle Fred Flits By." We will also have a reprise of the David Niven *Four Star Theatre* presentation of "Uncle Fred Flits By."
- October reading is *Something Fresh*.

PZMPCo meets on the second Sunday of the month at 12:30 P.M. Meetings are at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena unless otherwise noted. For anyone who wishes to join us, please contact Karen Shotting (information above) for directions.

PGWinWNY

(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)

Contact: Laura Loehr

Phone:

E-mail:



DUE TO CIRCUMSTANCES far beyond our control, the picnic that Shirley and Laura planned for August 2 had to be cancelled. Wait until next year!

We've been invited to spend a day this fall at the Chautauqua Institution at the Spencer Hotel, since the hotel owner is a Wodehouse fan. We'll plan to take her up on this, probably sometime in October, so look for an announcement with more details.

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:



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:



Answers to Tom Molitor's Pig Quiz

Q1: B. Since the Empress has not had a litter, she is a gilt, rather than a sow.

Q2: D. Per Tom, pignapping the Empress is certainly an award—for the pignappers! (*Note: This raised controversy in the room, and like any good professor faced with a mob of students armed with rather solid electronic answering devices, he allowed A as an acceptable answer, also!*)

Q3: A. The Empress avoids the meadow. Tom gave credit for this question and these answers to Richard Usborne's "Thirty postulates for relaxed reading of P. G. Wodehouse."

Q4: D. Eating grasses is not sufficient to subsist. Augustus Whiffle's *On the Care of the Pig* was the authority for this answer.

Q5: B. Tea and crumpets were never provided to the Empress in any of Wodehouse's writing. (*It's unclear and a matter of some debate whether she would have accepted had it been offered to her.*)

Q6: B. Although truffles do attract female pigs (they have a similar smell to the male pig pheromone), the Empress was never given the chance.

Q7: B. To facilitate pignapping, pull or push the ring.

As his presentation neared its conclusion, Professor Molitor showed a slide that postulated that "All I need to know about life, I learned from a pig." Lessons included:

- Live high on the hog.
- If life gives you slop, then pig out.
- The sty's the limit.
- Always keep a little something in the piggybank.
- Don't hog the conversation.
- Oink, wallow, and be merry.
- Don't squeal on your friends.
- Think pig and you'll go far.

[Obviously, there's much we can learn from our curly-tailed friends!—AOM]



Might you have any additional questions?

Convention Contest Entrant

Oily and Sweetie Carlisle, aka Bob Rains and Andrea Jacobsen, offer their entry to the convention contest that never happened. Here is their story of "A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie."

Once upon a time, in the Great Lakes District, there lived a proud and expansive empress. Although famous for her largesse, this empress was not known for sowing her wild oats. She was only flesh (and a lot of it) and blood, and one night, fresh from a relaxing mud bath, she ran into a steamy boar. One thing led to another and some time after their spicy encounter, the empress enlarged the population of her hamlet by the addition of three lovely little empresses-in-waiting.

When the EIWs had gotten themselves around enough eggs (but surely not b.) to step out high, wide, and plentiful, they packed up their toothbrushes and headed across the Wilder open prairie to seek their f. and f. The first little EIW found herself on the banks of a mighty river and floated downstream. After several days, she washed ashore and decided this was the place to settle. She built herself a sty of mud, but one day her evil Aunt Katrina blew in and swept away her happy h.

The second little EIW set out westward, drawn by the amber waves of grain. But she did herself a little too proud on oats and brews, and built herself a sty out of bicarbonate of soda. Unfortunately, her acerbic Aunt Acid arrived and neutralized her nest.

The third little EIW visited many of the prairie's lakes and ate her fill of fish fillets. This diet made her brain very smart indeed, which meant she knew all about Aunt Katrina and Aunt Acid and Aunt Agatha and all the other awful aunts. She decided to build a glorious edifice that would endure for ever and ever. So, she built a Little Wodehouse on the Prairie and lived happily ever after.

"What's a mere thirty days in the second division? A bagatelle. I can do it on my head. Let Bassett do his worst. And," I added in a softer voice, "when my time is up and I come out into the world once more a free man, let Anatole do his best. . . . On the night when I emerge, I shall expect a dinner that will live in legend and song."

The Code of the Woosters (1938)

Basham on Wodehouse

COLONEL THOMAS L. SMITH, RET., who goes by the nom de Plum of Major Plug Basham (and in fact is the nom de Plum administrator on PGWnet) has compiled his Wodehouse writings into a topping book called *Basham on Wodehouse*. Collected here are several articles that have graced the pages of *Plum Lines*, such as “My Own Private Jeeves,” “P. G. Wodehouse: Master Spy,” “From Ex-Sgt. Beale to Colonel Pashley-Drake: The Military Man in Wodehouse,” and others. In addition, there are two previously unpublished works by Tom/Plug. You may find your copy on Amazon.com. [*Any volunteers out there to review Basham’s fine collection? Let me know if so. —AOM*]



“. . . None of your wafer slices of bread-and-butter. We’re good trenchermen, we of the Revolution. What we shall require will be something in the order of scrambled eggs, muffins, jam, ham, cake, and sardines. Expect us at five sharp.”

“Comrade Bingo” (1922)

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Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries,
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Website Development & Maintenance:
Shamim Mohamed, aka Pongo

We appreciate your articles, research, Quick Ones, My First Time tales, and other observations. Send them to Gary Hall via e-mail or snail mail at the addresses above!

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You can read Norman and Elin Murphy’s report of the St. Paul convention for the UK Society under “Recent Events” on the UK Society’s website at <http://www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk>.