

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

*Volume 30 Number 4 Winter 2009*

## The Nature and the Development of the Impostor in the Works of P. G. Wodehouse

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*As at past gatherings, Elliott impressed the Plummy roomful at our 2009 convention with his erudition and humor. Here from A Little Wodehouse on the Prairie is Elliott's presentation.*

WODEHOUSE MAKES being an impostor seem so easy, but having been one myself I can assure you that it requires nerves of steel. In an introduction to the 1970 Mayflower paperback edition of *Something Fresh*, Wodehouse writes:

The one thing that might be considered to militate against the peace of life at Blandings was the constant incursion of impostors. Blandings had impostors the way other houses have mice. I have recorded so far the activities of six of them, and no doubt more to come . . .

Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard in their wonderful *Millennium Concordance* come up with a list of Blandings impostors which numbers a staggering 19 names. One wonders why Wodehouse, while clearly trying to impress the reader with a significant quantity, only comes up with six. We must assume that his definition of an impostor differs substantially from Ring and Jaggard's.

I would aver that the narrowest definition of an impostor is someone who presents himself as another real or extant person. With that definition, let's see whom we come up with.

First is Psmith, who, in *Leave It to Psmith*, comes to the castle as the Canadian poet Ralston McTodd. Next would be Sue Brown in *Summer Lightning*, arriving as the American heiress Myra Schoonmaker. Uncle Fred shows up in the springtime as the nerve specialist Sir Roderick Glossop. And finally, Sam Bagshott arrives as Augustus Whipple (yes, Whipple, not Whiffle, that famed pig specialist having undergone one of those weird Wodehouse name changes in *Galahad at Blandings*). That's a count of only four. We could possibly add Eddie Cootes, who also shows up trying to worm his way in as McTodd, but, though he fits the definition, it is unlikely Wodehouse was thinking about him; and even if he was, that would still be only five. Who is missing?



*Elliott Milstein speaks at our St. Paul convention in June of this year.  
(Photo by Ian Michaud)*

Could Wodehouse have been thinking of Bill Lister? Bill is listed twice in the *Concordance*, once as Messmore Breamworthy and once as Landseer. Both are real people, but there is a little difficulty here. Freddie Threepwood suggests the name Messmore Breamworthy when he and Gally are helping Bill work out the details of his imposture, but Mr. Breamworthy is a vice president at Donaldson's Dog Joy, not an artist, so Bill is not really impersonating him, just borrowing his name. (Also, as Messmore Breamworthy, Bill is never actually invited to stay at the Castle—he puts up at the Emsworth Arms and only visits to paint the pig—so technically he is not an impostor “at Blandings Castle.”)

Unlike Breamworthy, Landseer is actually invited to stay at the castle, and it is not Bill's fault that he is tossed out a mere 15 minutes after showing up. Landseer was also a real person—and an artist. But while Gally did lead Emsworth to believe that Bill was Sir Edwin Landseer, he backed off and changed his story when confronted with Hermione's knowledge that Sir Edwin, though real, was not extant, having long since handed in his dinner pail (October 1, 1873, just to keep the record straight), so it is questionable whether this qualifies as the type of “pure” imposture needed to reach Wodehouse's count of six. (Interestingly, there was one other act on Bill's part that the *Concordance* does not enumerate, viz., his haunting the grounds as an unnamed gardener—complete, you will recall, with Fruity Biffen's beard. I think we have to consider this an act of imposture, especially because of the beard.)

Wodehouse wrote this little introduction right after he finished *A Pelican at Blandings*, which includes Vanessa Polk, whom Gally specifically identifies as an impostor before launching into a general reflection on the issue:

. . . the Polk wench. . . . It turns out she's an impostor. It's an odd thing about Blandings Castle, it seems to attract impostors as catnip does cats. They make a bee line for the place. When two or three impostors are gathered together, it's only a question of time before they are saying “Let's all go round to Blandings,” and along they come. It shakes one. I've sometimes asked myself if Connie is really Connie.

Hard words from someone who is more responsible than anyone else for introducing these impostors. Anyway, this passage clearly shows that the impostor motif was on Wodehouse's mind a good deal around this time. But as Vanessa Polk is not impersonating a real person, this means Wodehouse's definition must

be somewhat more liberal than the narrow one I gave earlier. If, however, we adopt a looser definition, then we open the door wide enough to admit not just Ms. Polk and the Blister but also Pongo and Polly Pott as Glossop's secretary Basil and daughter Gwendolyn, respectively, and several more, in which case we would surpass the number six and are soon up to Ring and Jaggard's number of 19, and possibly more.

We must face the fact that Wodehouse was probably just plucking a number out of the air, choosing his favorite humorous numeral, six (as in “Fiend with Hatchet Slays Six” or “I jumped six inches into the air”). With Ring and Jaggard we are much closer to the mark. But even that list is not, I think, entirely accurate.

As I mentioned, they left off Bill Lister's stint as a gardener, but my biggest issue with their list comes in the very first Blandings Castle novel, *Something Fresh*. It is odd to me that Ring and Jaggard list Joan Valentine but not Ashe Marson. True, Ashe does not take a false name and Joan does, but others in the Ring and Jaggard list use their own names, e.g., John Halliday and Vanessa Polk. Remember that Ashe is pretending to be a valet in order to gain entrance to the castle so he may steal back Mr. Peters's scarab, whereas Joan was, in fact, a real lady's maid, so which is the greater imposture?

Besides, we must list Ashe as an impostor because Wodehouse, as narrator, calls him one in the book. Ashe is assembling with the rest of the domestic staff for the first time, preparing to go in to dinner and feeling completely out of place. The narration concludes: “He himself, he felt, had impostor stamped in large characters all over him.”

And what about Eileen Peavey? I think Ring and Jaggard missed a trick in leaving her off their list. While Eileen Peavey is in fact the modern poetess Eileen Peavey, she is also Smooth Lizzie, the sharpest li'l pickpocket east of the Mississippi. The false-name issue is not what makes or does not make her an impostor. The fact that she writes under a different name than the one with which she was christened should not be held against her, otherwise we must include in our list of great impostors the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, O. Henry, Saki, and a host of others. But she did infiltrate the castle with a hidden intent, which is, I think, a key aspect of imposture.

But hidden intent alone is not the whole story; otherwise we must include Percy Pilbeam, who, after all, comes to the castle pretending to investigate the pig theft but is really there to steal Gally's manuscript. Ring and Jaggard do not include him (and I would not either), although it is curious that they include Baxter merely for pretending to be on a motorbike tour.

Now, the point of all this is not to show up the errors of omission and commission in the *Concordance*, though correcting such Wodehouse luminaries as Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard does engender in one a somewhat smug pride. But we understand and sympathize. Deciding what exactly is an act of imposture and what isn't can be rather difficult in a canon so filled with plots of deception, and one can understand the difficulty they must have had in compiling their list. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile trying to determine what exactly constitutes the act of imposture.

Personally, I reject the idea of merely giving a false name as a form of imposture. Surely Oliver Sipperley had no intention of passing himself off as the founder and commander of the Red Army and Commissar of War of the Soviet Union when he gave the name Leon Trotzky in the Boshier Street Police Court. And then there is Ukridge, who is never an impostor but always gives a false name as an ordinary business precaution. (Oddly, the only impostor in the Ukridge stories is poor Corky, sent by Ukridge to interview his Aunt Julia for the weekly paper *Women's Sphere*, though he declines to give a false name.) Giving a false name is evidence of hidden intent, true, but imposture must include a motive beyond merely concealing one's identity.

I think that in the Wodehouse canon imposture must include one of three motives, two of which are his two great motives for everything: love and money. Generally, those who affect imposture for the sake of love are heroes, while those who deceive for monetary gain are villains, but this rule is not hard and fast. Let us not forget that Psmith, who comes to Blandings in pursuit of Eve Halliday, is also there to steal Lady Constance's necklace; Uncle Fred comes in aid of Polly Pott's romance, but also with the intent of extracting money. But neither Psmith nor Uncle Fred can be considered in quite the same league as, say, Dolly and Soapy Molloy, whom we first meet in *Money for Nothing*, infiltrating Rudge Hall doing their brother-and-sister-Silver-Ring-oil-shares routine.

What separates Uncle Fred and Psmith from such disreputable characters is that their motives do not include *personal* gain. They are impostors for that third Wodehouse motive, in the words of Joan Valentine (and many who follow), "the fun of it." Psmith pretended to be Ralston McTodd initially because, after spending some weeks in the fish business, he enjoyed being mistaken for a poet. He had not yet set eyes on Eve Halliday nor formed his plan to follow her to Blandings.

With such motives, it is no wonder that imposture is integral to so many of Wodehouse's stories. But like all of Wodehouse's special touches, the impostor motif

did not spring Athena-like from his head. We see crude elements of it in the early stories, such as "The Man Upstairs," "Deep Waters," "Bill the Bloodhound," "Extricating Young Gussie," and "At Geisenheimer's," to name but a few.

*A Gentleman of Leisure* (written in 1910) is a novel greatly underrated by most Wodehouse scholars, but I think it is the first quintessential Wodehouse novel. David Jasen points out that this is the first humorous story to be set in a stately home in Shropshire and to feature an amiable but dim-witted peer, the first in a long line of Drones, a tycoon, a formidable aunt, a pretty but foolish girl, and a butler. (Actually, the first two items in his list, the peer and the Drone, are one person in the book—Lord Dreever, who is not actually a member of the Drones Club, but he is admittedly a Drones-like character.)

Jasen also leaves out of this list the underworld motif, first introduced here and used to great effect later in *The Prince and Betty*; *Psmith, Journalist*; and *The Little Nugget*. Later still, and in an increasingly more comic vein, the motif continued in *Big Money*; *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*; *Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin*; and on and on.

In addition to all these standard Wodehouse touches, we also have two very nice, though not fully developed, impostors. The first, our main character, Jimmy Pitt, is caught breaking into the police chief's home on a bet. In order to pull off the situation, he must pretend to be a master cracksman. Unfortunately, this is how he is remembered by the characters with whom he dealt that evening. So he continues to pretend to be a master thief, though in order to maintain his cover without actually stealing anything, he explains that he has retired. This is a sort of quasi-impostor because the reason for the deception, the hidden intent, is not germane to the plot but merely there to force the situation.

The book does contain, however, a very real impostor, a minor character called Hargate, who has insinuated himself into the castle with the object of cleaning up on billiards. Hargate is the first of many characters to come to a country house with the intent of fleecing its inhabitants.

*A Gentleman of Leisure*, while a great seminal work, is weak in a lot of ways, and there is no doubt that the use of the impostor motif is not as fully exploited as Wodehouse will achieve later.

Shortly after, in *The Little Nugget*, Wodehouse introduces White, the butler, who turns out to be Smooth Sam Fisher, one of many who are trying to abduct the obnoxious Ogden Ford. Wodehouse plays again with this form of deception in *Uneasy Money*, but

this time it is the hero who hides his true situation in order to insinuate himself in someone else's home. His motives are only tangentially connected to love, money, or fun, but they are benign, viz., to meet and help the individuals whom he has quite inadvertently relieved of their inheritance. Lord Dawlish even takes on a pseudonym, his own name before he came into his title.

We have already covered Ashe and Joan from *Something Fresh*, which is next chronologically, and given how singularly rife with impostors the Blandings saga is, it is fitting to note that this first Blandings story is also the first Wodehouse novel in which the imposture is essential to the plot.

But it is in 1917 with *Piccadilly Jim* that the impostor truly comes into his own. You could not conceive a more intricate impostor plot, nor one so well executed. As Basil Boothroyd would say: "Don't try it. You're not up to it." Here, not only is the imposture germane to the plot, it is the plot itself. Jimmy Crocker, feeling that he has made life in London too hot for his poor dad, decides to go to America and, en route, falls in love with Ann Chester. Before he can reveal his name to her, he discovers that she hates him (though she does not recognize him). So, when called upon to identify himself, he gives her a false name.

While in America, she talks him into impersonating himself, so that he is Jimmy Crocker impersonating Algernon Bayliss, impersonating Jimmy Crocker. Once ensconced in his aunt's house, he finds his father there impersonating a butler. Worst of all he meets an old friend of his, Lord Wisbeach, who turns out not to actually be Lord Wisbeach but, you guessed it, another impostor. Jimmy is unable to unmask him without unmasking himself, but he is still one up on the crook in that Jimmy knows he is really Jimmy while the crooks thinks he is not. Got all that? Here we have the three motives again, Jimmy doing his bit for love, his old man butling for the fun of it (or the love of baseball), and the ersatz Wisbeach on site to pull a job.

It is several years after *Piccadilly Jim* before Wodehouse returns to using the impostor plot device, and of course it is at Blandings with *Leave It to Psmith*, which, we have shown, has three impostors, or four, if you include, as Ring and Jaggard do, Susan the housemaid, who is actually a detective.

By this time Wodehouse had become particularly keen on imposture as a plot device, and from this point he used it quite frequently. Even Bertie and Jeeves take their turns at it. Bertie has to fill in as Sippy in "Without the Option," and *The Mating Season* has the delightful plot twist of Bertie going to Deverill Hall as Gussie Fink-Nottle while Gussie shows up later as Bertie. Catsmeat

Pirbright could also be considered an impostor as he fills in as Bertie's valet. In the later novels, even Jeeves comes on stage impersonating, if ever briefly, Inspector Witherspoon of Scotland Yard in *Stiff Upper Lip*, Jeeves and Bertie's accountant in *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, while Sir Roderick Glossop unbends enough to impersonate a butler in *Jeeves in the Offing*.

I have always been fond of *Money in the Bank's* impostor motif. I don't think Chimp Twist qualifies as an impostor simply because he uses the *nom d'affaires* J. Sheringham Adair. But here we have the unusual and original plot twist where the owner of the country house that is the setting of the story is the impostor, with Lord Uffenham acting as his own butler, Cakebread. It is, however, Jeff Miller who is the real star when he shows up impersonating J. Sheringham Adair. Jeff is very much in the Psmith mold. In fact, he uses almost exactly the same argument in excusing the crime of imposture that Psmith does. Psmith, wooing Eve, says, "Consider, also, how little you have against me. What, indeed, does it amount to, when you come to examine it narrowly? All you have against me is the fact that I am not Ralston McTodd. Think how comparatively few people *are* Ralston McTodd." Jeff, explaining why Mrs. Cork did not throw him out in learning of his imposture, says, "A fair-minded, clear-thinking woman, she realizes what a venial offence it is not to be J. Sheringham Adair. As she pointed out, she is not J. Sheringham Adair herself, nor are many of her best friends."

If we are looking for the Wodehouse locale most densely populated with impostors, it is not, contrary to Wodehouse's own opinion, Blandings; no, we must leave Shropshire and indeed all of England. Hollywood, by its very nature, is a fertile ground for impostors. It is a place where actresses like Minna Nordstrom are really parlormaid and gorillas are really Balliol men. But here again we get on shaky ground regarding definition. In a place so rife with deceit, deception, guile, and impersonation, what can we say really constitutes imposture? If we employ our most liberal definition, then virtually everyone in Hollywood is an impostor, and certainly the novel with the most impostors is *Laughing Gas*, where every domestic servant is an actor and even kidnappers are really would-be scriptwriters. Brinkmeyer's English butler, Japanese gardener, Filipino footman, and Gunga Din—reciting chauffeur make four. But what about those kidnappers, George, Eddie, and Fred? Other than the fact that Fred was once an extra, we don't really know if they were impersonating kidnappers or the real thing. Was Eggy Mannering impersonating a vocal coach, or was he really trying to start a new career? And what about our

main characters, Reggie Havershot and Joey Cooley? Can we say they were impersonating each other when their souls switched bodies? We are in such a gray area here, we could even say that April June, while wooing Reggie, is impersonating a human being when she is in reality a female dog that rhymes with the word *switch*. Like everything else in Hollywood, it is all chimera.

But the Wodehouse novel with the greatest number of true impostors and the most convoluted impostor plot still takes place outside of England, in that other

land where deception reigns supreme, France. I speak, of course, of *Hot Water*. Packy Franklyn poses early on as a barber, but that is just to warm things up. Blair Eggleston, writer of stern, stark novels and secret fiancé of Jane Opal, finds himself unwittingly coerced into becoming Jane's father's valet. But the plot really gets going when Packy insinuates himself into the Château Blissac as the Vicomte

de Blissac by the most ingenious ruse. The Veek, as the Vicomte is known among his acquaintances, while celebrating the Festival of the Saint, gets into a contretemps with his intended host, J. Wendell Gedge. Both were sunk rather deeply beneath the Plimsoll line at the time, so Packy takes advantage of their faulty memories to convince each that one had murdered the other and must lie low. He then proceeds to the château in the Vicomte's place. Once there, the impostors come thick and fast. There is Medway, Mrs. Gedge's maid, who pretends to be a detective but is in fact Gumshoe Gertie, erstwhile and future partner of Oily Carlyle, who himself later arrives as the Duc de Pont-Andemer. When Mrs. Gedge arrives and exposes Packy, he readily drops one imposture for another, pretending to be a detective from Mrs. Gedge's insurance company. However, although there are now two fake detectives, Wodehouse introduces a real one; it seems that Mrs. Gedge's secretary, Miss Putnam, is actually an employee of the James B. Flaherty Agency. And just to round things out at the very end of the book, Mrs. Gedge is blackmailed into accepting the final resolution of affairs after being exposed as Julia, Soup Slattery's former partner and the sweetest little inside stand a safecracker could ever have.

So how many impostures is that? I count nine, but I may have missed one.

Of course, the ultimate impostor story in the canon takes place not in Hollywood, nor France, nor again at Blandings, but in the suburbs of London. "Uncle Fred Flits By," while a short story and thus, by its shorter duration, not really lending itself to holding the record for the greatest number of impostors, certainly has the most concentrated use of them, as it introduces as its main character the ultimate Wodehouse impostor, Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, fifth earl of Ickenham. Here, to quote Ring and Jaggard, "within a period of what, realistically, could not have been more than an hour, and probably was considerably shorter, there were seven different impersonations." Remember, however, that only four were conducted by Uncle Fred, while the other three were thrust upon the unwitting Pongo. The initial motive proffered by Uncle Fred was simply to get out of the rain, but we all know it was for purely for fun. Later, the love and money side of it come into play, but only after the imposture is in full swing.

Though Uncle Fred goes on to a great career in imposture, this first outing was the feat he was most proud of, as we can tell from his recitation of the event to Bill Oakshott in *Uncle Dynamite*:

My dear fellow, at The Cedars, Mafeking Road, in the suburb of Mitching Hill last spring I impersonated in a single afternoon and with complete success not only an official from the bird shop, come to clip the claws of the parrot, but Mr Roddis, lessee of The Cedars, and a Mr J. G. Bulstrode, a resident of the same neighborhood. It has been a lasting grief to me that I was given no opportunity of impersonating the parrot, which I am convinced I should have done on broad, artistic lines.

In *Cocktail Time*, Wodehouse goes even further, asserting:

It was his modest boast that there was nothing in existence, except possibly a circus dwarf, owing to his height, or Gina Lollobrigida, owing to her individual shape, which he could not at any moment and without rehearsal depict with complete success.

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Sadly, though he appears in two more books after *Uncle Dynamite*, Fred does not impersonate anyone in either (other than two very brief scenes in *Cocktail Time*, one as the fictional Inspector Jervis and the second as Secret Agent Number X3476). Of course, it would have been impossible in *Service with a Smile*, as he was already known at Blandings, but I think there is another reason. Having married Pongo off in *Uncle Dynamite*, he is alone, and in Wodehouse, an impostor who is having fun generally is paired with one for whom the experience is, well, not so much.

Pongo's constant mishaps and terror at being discovered are a perfect yin for the yang of his Uncle Fred's classy impersonations and indestructible sangfroid. From the train ride to Blandings on, practically all of *Uncle Fred in the Springtime* is a *pas de deux* of Pongo's frenetic pessimism and Uncle Fred's breezy insouciance. My favorite passage that shows this occurs immediately after Baxter informs them he is aware they are impostors:

Rupert Baxter continued to tap his fingertips together and to project through his spectacles as stern a glare as they ever been called upon to filter, but he was conscious as he did so of a certain sense of flatness. Unmasked Guilt, in his opinion, should have taken it bigger than this man before him appeared to be doing. Lord Ickenham was now peering at himself in the mirror and fiddling with his moustache. He may have been feeling as if the bottom of his world had dropped out, but he did not look it. . . . [Baxter] restored his composure with a glance at Pongo. There, he felt, was Unmasked Guilt looking as Unmasked Guilt should look.

Besides Uncle Fred and Pongo, there are other such pairings. Blair Eggleston's misery is an excellent foil for Packy Franklyn's grand time. Of course, in arranging things thus, Wodehouse is deliberately trying to show Packy as the preferred suitor of Jane. But consider *Spring Fever*, where both Mike Cardinal and Stanwood Cobbold are sympathetic characters, yet Mike Cardinal, impersonating Stanwood, is enjoying himself thoroughly while Stanwood shows up later awkwardly and unhappily filling in for the millionaire Rossiter.

I think all of us like to see ourselves as Uncle Fred or Psmith or Jeff Miller, carrying the whole thing off nicely with detachment and *savoir faire*. I know I did. Then, suddenly, I was called upon to actually do it myself. Let me tell you: it's a whole different thing when you are living it rather than reading it.

IT WAS BACK in 1981, the early days of the Reagan administration. Reagan had begun his campaign of deregulation with, you may remember, the airline industry. One of the early benefits of the campaign was that we were suddenly infested with a number of cut-rate airlines. In the summer of 1981 New York Air had a big promotion to highlight their \$49 fare from Detroit to New York City. For the first 49 people who bought a ticket, they could get a return ticket for 49 cents. My friend Ken Fink, never one to pass up a bargain, camped out in the Detroit airport and procured two round-trip tickets to New York for under \$100!

I do not know how many others Ken approached to join him on his metropolitan jaunt before he came to me. I'd like to think there weren't too many. Ken knew well that New York is my favorite city in the universe, and it was nice of him to think of it as a trip for both of us.

Now, these were lean years for us, just out of school, and after the ravages of the Carter years, pickings were slim. Kenny was slaving away as a cub photographer for a not-so-great nonmetropolitan newspaper, and I was a traveling salesman opening new territories for my father's tiny company. Somehow we could never get our schedules and our budgets to agree on a trip. The deadline for using the tickets was fast approaching, and Kenny's \$100 bargain was about to expire into a big mistake.

Then he found a talking point. The Wodehouse centenary exhibit was opening in a week. We could fly in just for the day, catch the exhibit, a play, do some shopping, and fly out. Our friend Curtis, then a struggling actor, could put us up for the night. Sounded great. Unfortunately, a little research showed that the exhibit opened the week I was to be out of town on business. The week after, the tickets were no good. Could I cancel my trip? No. Could Ken take a day off work? No. What to do?

Now I want you to know that Kenny, may he rest in peace, was a scrupulously honest individual, but when there was something of great import in the balance, he would unbend far enough to pull the old schoolboy trick of not exactly lying, but not really telling the truth. And what Kenny did was this.

He called the Wodehouse centenary and got James Heineman's secretary. He explained that he was with the *Oakland Press* (the newspaper he worked for was in fact located in Oakland County—not his fault if she thought he was from San Francisco), that he happened to have a photographer and a reporter in New York this Saturday (well, he was a photographer and I had been a reporter for my university newspaper) and could they

get admittance to the exhibit even if it wasn't open yet. Somehow he was able to create the image of full-page spreads all over northern California, and doors were opened, passes printed, red carpets unfurled, and plane reservations made.

We arrived in Gotham bright and early, breakfasted, and shopped. Before our afternoon rendezvous at the Morgan Library, Ken wanted to again go over the plan: remember, we are from the *Oakland Press*—try to avoid mentioning just where this Oakland was. If necessary, he would flash his quite legitimate press pass. Once in a while Ken would take pictures but say nothing. It was up to me to carry the day. I was feeling more and more like Corky about to interview Ukridge's Aunt Julia.

He gave me a real reporter's notebook and instructed me on a few simple tips. Don't get involved in lengthy discussions on the development of the Drones Club or the difference between Galahad and Uncle Fred (which, would, of course, be my natural inclination). Instead, I was to ask questions like "How much did it cost?" and "How many people are you expecting?"

As it turned out, Ken need not have worried. Jimmy Heinemann (he asked me to call him Jimmy) met us at the door, and except for one sticky moment when he said, "So you're from California" to which I answered, "Well, Michigan really," he took control.

The exhibit was not completely set up yet, but it was mostly done. For those of you who went, you will remember that Jeeves greeted you at the door, or actually a life-size cutout of Jeeves. Kenny took a picture of Jimmy and me standing next to it. Jimmy no doubt had visions of this picture, 8 x 10 on every doorstep in the Bay area. Smiling next to him, I knew it was destined for my scrapbook alone.

I got a brief autobiography of Mr. Heinemann and how he came to be so interested in Wodehouse. He gave me his phone number as well as the name, address, and phone number of Bill Blood (telling me I should get in touch as he was organizing a society for Wodehouse). I used neither for fear of being unmasked as the impostor I was. Like Pongo, who was instructed to tap his teeth with a pencil and smell of iodoform, we tried as much as possible to look like real newspaper people. Ken, of course, had the advantage over me that in that he was one, but I did my best, dropping the occasional journalistic expression and trying to act like something out of *The Front Page*.

It must have worked because we got the red carpet treatment for sure. And soon I was too absorbed and enchanted to feel any guilt or discomfort.

I was shown the special case dedicated to the Empress of Blandings, the two cases on Jeeves and Bertie,

the five doctoral theses on Wodehouse (three of which were in French), the case on imitators of Wodehouse, the magazines, first editions, playbooks, sheet music, and on and on. I held in my hand *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, which Wodehouse took into his internment, and opened his diary to December 13, 1904, and read "I set it down that I have arrived" when he had toted up his take as a writer and found it to be substantial. Jimmy and I did, in fact, discuss the fine points of various novels and stories. I gave him a copy of my thesis, *The Growth of Sweetness and Light*, and he gave me a copy of *P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration*. He invited Kenny and me to the opening gala and the performance of Edward Duke's *Jeeves Takes Charge*, which we politely declined. The thing was, in a word, a love feast.

It was a magical afternoon for me, and I always regretted that I did not take the plunge and stay for the opening. So what if sales in Cincinnati slipped? So what if Kenny and I were exposed? Would that have stopped Uncle Fred? Would it have stopped Psmith?

I received a very nice note from Jimmy shortly after our visit. I wanted so to write him and explain, but fear held my hand. I wanted to believe that Jimmy would be enough of a Wodehousean to appreciate the fact that we were impostors and why we did it, but I couldn't help thinking that most people are not pleased to find out that they have been had.

We did it out of fun and out of love, and yes, there was a monetary gain (that book is quite valuable now), so it was a truly Wodehousean imposture. But was it wrong? Before you judge us for so deceiving this kind man, mark the sequel.

On June 26, 1998, I was seated in the fifth row at Sotheby's for the auction of the Heinemann collection, prepared to purchase one or two lots of books to fill in my little collection. As the event was nearing the end, and I was quite done purchasing the few items I wanted and could afford, I was gripped with one of those mysterious urges one gets at auctions and impulsively—nay, uncontrollably, as if moved by some outside force—I raised my paddle.

When the mists had cleared, I found myself the proud owner of Lot 147, a lot of innumerable items whose description in the catalogue goes on for several pages. I had no idea what possessed me to bid on it. But when, several weeks later, a truck arrived at my office and dropped off five massive crates, each one sufficient to hold a grand piano—I do not exaggerate, ask my poor suffering wife—I knew that Jimmy Heinemann had gotten me back for my deceptive effrontery as an impostor.

# A Mulliner Menagerie: Numbers 6 & 7

BY KEN CLEVENGER

*As regular readers are aware. Ken has written a series of articles about all that is reptilian, mammalian, or fowlish in the Mulliner universe. He continues his series, focusing now on Mulliner's worms and reptiles.*

## No. 6 (Worms, Part II)

THERE ARE SIX Mulliner stories that feature—OK, only just mention—worms. Far and away the most common meaning is not the long, slender, soft-bodied, legless, bilaterally symmetrical invertebrate we typically think of when the word *worm* is employed. Only in one story, “Came the Dawn,” is the worm a real worm. There our wriggling hero (or heroine? How does one tell?) is the worm in “Darkling (A Threnody),” who shares the billing with frogs, toads, and nameless creeping things. The slow-worm mentioned in a seventh Mulliner story, “Something Squishy,” is a favored public-schoolboy pet, but despite its name it is a legless lizard, not a worm.

In four of the other five wormy tales, the worm is essentially the same character each time: always a male and perceived (sometimes wrongly) as a worm by a female or a non-wormish male—that is, as a foul, craven, bad, or at least very timid person.

“The Code of the Mulliners” is the most wormy story of the lot. The hero, Archibald Mulliner, is mistakenly thought “wormlike,” meaning timid, by his girl. And then there is Isadore McCallum, a well-known theatrical agent, who never gets to appear in person to defend himself against Miss Yvonne Maltravers’s rather vociferous and repeated accusations of being a worm. In “Monkey Business” the ultimately clay-footed (only slightly better than being legless) Captain Jack Fosdyke disparages the timid Montrose Mulliner with the epithet “crawling worm.” But what price Porillas!

Another strong manly man character, the golfer Sidney McMurdo, disparages two wholly innocent fellows in “Those in Peril on the Tee” as worms, their sole offense being that they prefer to not marry Agnes Flack. In “The Juice of an Orange” it is again a female who castigates her beloved as a worm for accepting a reduction in salary imposed by a dynamic Hollywood studio boss. The heroine is Mabel Potter; Wilmot Mulliner plays the worm, at least until the denouement, and Mabel, not content with merely calling him a worm, embellishes the term with the admittedly apt image of a “cold-asparagus-backed” worm.

Just when you think that a word means what it means and such things are more or less fixed, Plum crosses you up. In “The Story of Webster” the heroine lovingly greets her hero with “What ho, Worm!” and displays “maidenly devotion” as she says it, if we can believe the author. Such a term of endearment is a bit hard to swallow. In her defense, however, the hero in question, Lancelot Mulliner, had just “lovingly” addressed her with a cheery “Hullo, Reptile!” and dreamily envisioned her as a “golliwog,” which research shows is not an animal at all, as I first supposed, but rather a bogeyman.

I think it was Buddy Holly who wrote, “Love is strange.”

## No. 7 (Reptiles, Part I)



AS MENTIONED in the preceding article, in “The Story of Webster” Gladys Bingley was lovingly called a “reptile.” It appears that Mulliner men find reptile to be a fit and proper term of endearment. In “Buried Treasure” Brancepeth Mulliner addresses Muriel, the love of his life, with that same scaly sentiment. But the only other “reptile” appearance is used as a disparaging term in “Those in Peril on the Tee.”

Also included in the Mulliner reptile repertoire are snakes, which slither into eight stories; vipers, which are present in three tales; lizards, alligators, serpents, and pythons, each represented twice; and a crocodile and a cobra, each of which appear once.

Something there is that doesn’t love a snake, as the poet Frost perhaps intended to write. Whether the enduring archetypal image of the serpent is a product of the story of Genesis or derived from millennia of real-world experience with silent, venomous killers, snakes are, as noted in “Those in Peril on the Tee,” loathsome. But in Mulliner, a named animal (Sidney the Snake) gets what amounts to top billing in “Something Squishy.” And the role is reprised, at least in cameo appearances, in “The Awful Gladness of the Mater” and in “The Passing of Ambrose.”

The other snake references are rather garden-variety. In “The Ordeal of Osbert Mulliner” a snake is a bad man. In “The Story of Webster” a snake fulfills its classic role as it startles a person. The snake-in-the-grass image appears in “The Rise of Minna Nordstorm,” while in “Something Squishy” a strong, menacing man seen while exercising is said to have muscles rippling like snakes.

The last snake image is my favorite. “Strychnine in the Soup” is a story in which Wodehouse includes not

one but five fictional mystery novels, apparently one of his favorite literary devices. One is the euphonious “Strychnine in the Soup” by Horatio Slingsby. The snaky piece of fiction is “The Murglow Manor Mystery,” wherein, we are told by Mr. Mulliner, the one who dunit was the plumber, who glued a snake in the shower and, when hot water melted the glue, the snake slipped down, bit the Bart., and escaped down the drain undetected. A Draught Stout objects that the plumber appeared in Chapter Two and Sir Tuttle, the bitten Bart., only dies several chapters later. Wodehouse blithely accounts for this apparently inconsistent delay by explaining that when the plumber first came to do the bath repair work he had forgotten his snake and had to go back to get it.

In Reptiles, Part II, we will scale the heights of reptilian references in Wodehouse’s Mulliner tales. See you later, alligator!

“When I used the term ‘Viper,’” said Mr Zizzbaum, “I was speaking thoughtlessly.”  
“The Rise of Minna Nordstrom” (1933)

## Why Chillicothe?

BY WILLIAM (TOM) THOMAS

IN *Laughing Gas* (1936) P. G. Wodehouse recounted the experiences of homesick 12-year-old movie star Joey Cooley. Poor Joey is kept on a strict diet in Hollywood while dreaming of the fried chicken, southern style, his mother used to cook for him in “little old” Chillicothe, Ohio, his hometown, “where hearts are pure and men are men.” Wodehouse cited Chillicothe 11 times in this short novel. Later, in *Ring for Jeeves* (1953), published in the United States the next year as *The Return of Jeeves*, Wodehouse introduced readers to “Rosalinda Banks of the Chillicothe, Ohio, Bankses, with no assets beyond a lovely face, a superb figure and a mild talent for vers libre, [who had] come to Greenwich Village to seek her fortune and had found it first crack out of the box.” Twice married to multimillionaires and twice widowed, as Rosalinda Spottsworth she is soon worth forty-two million dollars and has no apparent intention of returning to Chillicothe with them.

Chillicothe, then and now a community of about twenty thousand, is not to be mistaken for towns of the same name in four other states. It isn’t unusual for Chillicothe to lend its name and character to fictional settings, due in part to its place in history as Ohio’s first capital, but more probably it is its distinctive name and presumed midwestern innocence and integrity that

Joey Cooley holds dear. In *A Wodehouse Handbook*, Wodehouse scholar Norman Murphy didn’t suggest a specific reason why Wodehouse selected Chillicothe as the hometown of Joey and Rosalinda, other than perhaps to further a private joke or to contrast it to the bustling life of Hollywood and New York.

If it is a private joke, could it have been shared with Rex Stout? He is best known for creating Nero Wolfe, the cerebral, corpulent, stay-at-home detective who loves fine food and rare orchids nearly as much as intriguing mysteries, and he is nearly as well known for creating Archie Goodwin, the streetwise and witty younger detective who teams with Wolfe to solve many of them. In *Rex Stout: A Biography* (1977), John McAleer related that in 1805 Stout’s great-great-grandfather purchased 1,200 acres of the original tract on which Chillicothe was founded in 1796, that his mother’s family in the 1890s had known Chillicothe well for 90 years (he was born in 1886 in Indiana), and that Stout had been in Chillicothe at least once as a child. McAleer quoted Stout as saying that “Chillicothe is a funny word, without being silly.”

These two authors thought highly of each other’s literary achievements. It would seem reasonable to assume that Stout referred to Chillicothe first because of his family’s connection to the area, but Stout didn’t mention the town until 15 years after Wodehouse published *Laughing Gas*. In “The Cop Killer” (1951), a married couple who are in the United States illegally tells Goodwin how much they love this country, to which he replies, “Wait till you see Chillicothe, Ohio, where I was born. Then you *will* love it.” Ten years later, in *The Final Deduction*, Archie walks to a favorite New York restaurant, “where someone makes chicken pie the way my Aunt Anna used to make it in Chillicothe, Ohio, with fluffy little dumplings.” We might speculate instead that Stout’s use of Chillicothe was triggered by Wodehouse’s repeated reference in *Laughing Gas* to the town Stout already knew. If so, what prompted Wodehouse’s use of Chillicothe in the first place?

Wodehouse could have passed through Chillicothe, in southern Ohio between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, on one of his six cross-country train trips to or from Hollywood in 1929 through 1937, but he didn’t have to be in Chillicothe, of course. All he would need was a map of the Midwest to discover Chillicothe, Dubuque, Kokomo, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Kalamazoo, and other unusual names. Why Chillicothe? Perhaps we’ll never know, but those of us here in Joey’s and Rosalinda’s hometown would be delighted to hear from *Plum Lines* readers who might point us toward the answer.

# Betting on Bertie, or Wodehouse and Horse Racing

BY NORMAN MURPHY

*Norman continues his fine tradition of revelatory talks at TWS conventions. Here, from the St. Paul convention in June 2009, is his latest enlightening address.*

I AM GRATEFUL to Kris Fowler for suggesting this topic since I had to omit it from *A Wodehouse Handbook*, which was quite long enough already. And, if you have been clever enough—or kind enough—to read it, you will remember that my aim, as always, was to demonstrate that Wodehouse was writing of a real world. He just made it funnier. The problem is that the world has become so grey, so dull, people find it hard to accept that there were really were men like Bertie Wooster or Lord Emsworth.

Now, though Wodehouse constantly mentioned betting on horses, I suggest that his closer-than-normal connection with racing is often overlooked. And on one occasion he also proved to be a successful racing tipster.

It is often forgotten that he once owned a racehorse himself. Ethel was the nominal owner, but Wodehouse paid the bills. I think he only owned it for a year, but *Front Line*, a five-year-old, won the *Hurst Park Handicap* on December 21, 1921, at the very nice odds of 9–2. And in case you are interested, I can tell you that Ethel's racing colours were scarlet cross bands, white sleeves, and black cap. Some 11 years later, in 1932, Leonora, Wodehouse's beloved stepdaughter, married Peter Cazalet, who was a leading steeplechase trainer. And many of you have met Wodehouse's grandson, Sir Edward Cazalet, the only High Court judge to have ridden an Open steeplechase winner under Jockey Club rules.

I should point out that amateur riders still compete in the *Grand National*, the longest, toughest steeplechase in the world, I am told, and they have won it quite often. Some of you may have met Lord Oaksey at Wodehouse Society functions in England. He was a steeplechase jockey and won over 200 open races, big ones too, including the *Whitbread Gold Cup* and the *Hennessey Gold Cup*; he rode in the *Grand National* 11 times and came second in 1963. And Peter Cazalet was champion trainer in 1950, 1960, and 1965, so he was clearly good at it.

Now, knowing you all want to know, I did some research into the names of the many racehorses Wodehouse mentioned, 74 by my count. I telephoned Weatherby's, the firm who have run the official stud book since the first Mr. Weatherby was secretary to

the Jockey Club in 1770, and I regret to inform you that Wodehouse seems to have invented most of his racehorse names and Weatherby's have no note of Bluebottle ever winning the *Cambridgeshire*. I tried a dozen names in vain but I did get one. At the end of *Summer Lightning*, or *Fish Preferred*, Gally Threepwood told Sue Brown the story of Tubby Parsloe and the prawns. He began: "It was at Ascot, the year Martingale won the Gold Cup." The girl at Weatherby's picked that up at once. Martingale did not win the Gold Cup at Ascot, but Martingale the Second won the Gold Vase at the Ascot meeting of 1911—but that is the only one I could find.

You should all know by now that recently in England, we have seen several racehorses named after Wodehouse's characters. Bertie Wooster (trained, oddly enough by a Mr. P. G. Murphy), P. Smith, Aunt Agatha, and Gussie Fink-Nottle all did fairly well, and British newspapers gave them the collective name of "the Wodehouses." The list grew with Plum First and Winsome Wooster, and you will be delighted to hear that in 2002, that most unlikely of racehorses, Madeline Bassett(!), stormed home at Lingfield Park at a splendid 7–1.

When Kris asked me to do this talk, she mentioned *The Cat-Nappers* and asked if racehorses really do have cats as stable companions. The answer is—yes, they do. In July 2008 the columnist Sandy Toskvig wrote that she was puzzled by the expression "he gets my goat" and discovered to her surprise that goats used to be used as companions for racehorses to keep them company and calm them down. And I quote: "Unscrupulous rivals were known occasionally to spirit away the farmyard friend, thus causing distress all round." Just like *The Cat-Nappers*.

Experts now agree that since horses were originally herd animals, they like company—and goats, chickens, dogs, and cats are all common companions.

It goes back a long way, to Eclipse, the 18th-century racehorse from whom just about every champion today is descended. He was never beaten in his 18 races, hence the expression that you still hear after 200 years, and which Wodehouse used in his books: "Eclipse first; the rest nowhere." His stable companion was a parrot who kept Eclipse amused by squawking versions of the biblical psalms at him as well as popular songs of the day.

Seabiscuit also had a stable companion, a goat, but because she was always eating his hay, he got fed up with her, picked her up in his teeth, and dropped her

outside the stall. His trainer, Tom Smith, then found a little palomino pony called Pumpkin, and Seabiscuit and Pumpkin remained inseparable till Seabiscuit died.

In an Internet discussion among racehorse owners last year, one had a horse whose beloved companion was a pot-bellied pig. Another said his horses didn't like goats but loved sheep. A third chap supported the goat theory and said one of his horses would take his goat pal for rides on its back. Another owner said that when he was down to only one horse, a cat gave the horse the companionship needed and, at night, would snuggle up to him in the stable. Isn't that sweet?

I conclude this section with Sandi Toskvig's splendid bitchy remark when she noted that you can stop a horse swaying about in its box by installing a large mirror. I quote her again: "Apparently they are the Victoria Beckhams of the barnyard and like nothing better than to stand perfectly still and pout at themselves."

Now, why did Wodehouse make betting on horses such a constant feature in his novels? The answer is simply that it played a major role in English social life—at every level. Ronnie Fish persuaded Beach to help him steal the Empress by promising him something really hot for the Goodwood Cup, and this went all the way up and down the social scale. Why? Simply because there was then nothing else to bet on. We stopped having national lotteries back in 1826, we didn't have any casinos, boxing matches were illegal till about 1910, and football pools didn't make any real impact till the mid-1930s. If you wanted to have a little flutter, horse racing was the only way of doing it.

Of course, you could always play a friendly game of Persian Monarchs with Mustard Pott, but that would need much more money than the shilling or half-crown a bookmaker would take off you.

But in those days, everybody had their eye on the big prize—the Calcutta Sweep. In Wodehouse's *A Man of Means*, you will recall Roland Bleke had bought a ten-shilling ticket for the Calcutta Sweep and won £40,000. It was the big dream of every small gambler from its inception in 1871 till the 1930s. And, because I have been asked to do so, I shall try to explain how it worked.

Some Britishers out in India missed being able to bet on the Derby, so they started the Calcutta Sweepstake. They sold tickets at two dollars a go, and a week or so before the race, all the tickets were put in a big drum there and the names of runners in the race were put in another drum here. Someone drew the name of a runner, someone else drew a sweepstake ticket, and the ticket holder then had that horse put down to him. The holder of the ticket for the winning horse then got a lot of money.

In 1930 the Irish Hospitals Sweepstakes began, and

it soon became bigger than the Calcutta Sweep. The majority of Irish Sweepstake tickets were sold in the U.K. and the USA and the fact that such sweeps were illegal in the U.K. and in most American states did not stop people buying them. The British government declared the sale of tickets illegal, but somehow very few people were prosecuted—and in Britain, you did not pay tax on your winnings since officially the Sweep didn't exist. In America, on the other hand, the authorities not only seized letters addressed to the Sweepstake authority in Ireland, they confiscated the money inside as well—and if you were lucky enough to win, they taxed you on it. But in the 1960s, casinos and gambling became legal in the U.K. and many parts of America—and the Irish Sweep faded quietly away.

Let's consider Bingo Little, who, you will remember, used to have dreams which he believed were divine guidance on which horse to back. Well, that wasn't unknown in real life either.

There are several well-known examples, including Lord Kilbracken, who died in 2006 having enjoyed an eventful life. He began by running a successful bookmaking business as a schoolboy at Eton; went on to Balliol, Oxford, which I shall come back to in a moment; fought gallantly in the war, winning the Distinguished Service Cross; joined a newspaper as a racing correspondent; escorted Jayne Mansfield on her tour of the U.K. in 1957; tangled with the Mafia in a search for Nazi loot in 1963; and then unmasked a fraudulent art dealer who had swindled clients out of millions. But he is remembered in the racing world for his dreams of winners while he was at Oxford. One night he dreamt of two horses winning, both at 7-1. The dream was so vivid that he looked in the newspaper, found their names, and he and a few friends backed them. And they both won. This happened again and again and again, nine times in all, and on the last two occasions, he even registered the names at a post office before the race with a time stamp to show he was genuine.

As I mentioned earlier, Wodehouse was once a racing tipster. He probably didn't mean to be—but he was. So here goes. In Britain and America, certain jockeys seem to dominate the racing world at various times. You had Willie Shoemaker, Eddie Arcaro, and Tod Sloan before them. In the U.K., the jockeys we remember are Fred Archer in the 1890s, Steve Donoghue in the 1920s, and Gordon Richards in the 1930s to 1950s. Now, by 1953 Gordon Richards had been champion jockey 26 times and was universally admired for his honesty and skill, but in his 35 years of racing and 27 attempts at the Derby, he had never won it.

The year 1953 was the Coronation Year of our Queen, and in the Honours List, two days before her coronation, the Queen, who knows more about racing than most of us, gave Richards a knighthood because of the respect in which he was held and his influence in making racing respectable too. He was the first jockey ever to receive the accolade, and everybody thought it was a splendid idea. And the following Saturday, Sir Gordon, as he now was, rode out for his 28th—and last—Derby. Well, to everyone’s delight, the fairy tale came true, and Richards at last won the race on Pinza.

And the point of all that is—cast your mind back to *The Return of Jeeves*. The hero wanted Ballymore to win the Derby, but, if you remember, Wodehouse told us the race was won by Moke the Second, ridden by Gordon Richards. The book came out in the U.K. on April 22, 1953, seven weeks before the Derby. If you had followed Wodehouse’s tip and bet on Richards right away, you would have got yourself a winner at odds of 10–1 or better.

I am sure you all recall the Great Clothes Stakes which Mustard Pott ran in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*. In a letter to me, Wodehouse said that was based on the Great Hat Stakes, which he had read in Arthur Binstead’s book *A Pink ‘Un and a Pelican*. It was a true story from 1902, when two men ran a book on what hat would be first through the doors of the Criterion Bar in London after the clock struck eight o’clock. It was won by a turban worn by the Hindu waiter bringing in curry from the Indian restaurant next door. So—fact in 1902 became Wodehouse’s fiction in 1939, and in 2005, it became fact again in the Ascot Queen’s Hat Scandal, which equals anything Wodehouse wrote.

In 1995 a U.K. bookmaker named Paddy Power initiated a new fun bet for Ladies’ Day at the Royal Ascot race meeting. This is the very posh meeting where the Queen arrives every day from Windsor Castle and drives down the course in a horse-drawn landau. And the bet he started was—what color hat will the Queen wear on Ladies’ Day, the third day of the meeting, when every woman attending tries to outshine everybody else? It was just a fun bet, a pound here, five pounds there, and everybody enjoyed it. Other bookmakers started doing it as well, and it was just a pleasant little diversion till 2005—when *somebody got inside information*.

Paddy Power’s firm realized something was happening on the morning of Ladies’ Day, when the betting on brown was so heavy that the odds went from 12–1 to 8–11 against in two hours. And William Hill, the U.K.’s biggest bookie, was happily taking bets of £50 and £20 on brown, but when someone tried to bet £1,000 in cash, they closed the betting. Two hours later, the Queen duly drove down the course wearing a brown

hat. Paddy Power said it had cost him about £10,000 and added: “If it had been a horse race, we would have asked for a stewards’ inquiry!”

I want to finish with a Wodehouse story we all know—“The Great Sermon Handicap.” It is clear this was Wodehouse’s memory of listening to long sermons at school when he and his fellows would pass the time by betting how often the vicar would sneeze, how often the new curate would say “Er,” or, as in that story, how long the sermon would take. The obvious question is—what was the clerical equivalent? What did clergymen bet on in similar boring circumstances? I found the answer in some old newspaper cuttings I thought I had lost years ago.

I should explain first that, every ten years, every Anglican/Episcopalian bishop from around the world comes to London to attend the Lambeth Conference, chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a very big event in the Episcopalian calendar.

Now, most of you have led sheltered lives and are too young to know what a properly dressed bishop looks like, so this picture shows Anglican—that is, Episcopalian—bishops at the Lambeth Conference of 1948.



Look at them closely: the short double-breasted coat, the apron over their chest, then the breeches and below that—gaiters, buttoned up the sides.

Let’s look at those gaiters more closely: Long, thick, and black—those are what bishops and senior clerics bet on in what I now name as the *Great Gaiters Handicap of 1958!*

Swept along by the social revolution of the 1960s—when, in my view, the world began to go to hell in a



handcart—bishops and senior clerics had started to wear the dull grey suits we know today. The result was that, in February 1970, there was a series of letters in the London *Times* about clerical dress. A bishop had written in to deplore this growing informality in clerical costume and said how few bishops or church dignitaries now wore the correct attire of frock coat, apron, knee breeches, and gaiters. He felt it detracted from the dignity of their high office, and he believed it was because so many were “spindle-shanked” and could not “carry their gaiters.” He also said how warm the long, thick gaiters could be during Evensong in a cold, unheated English cathedral.

In reply, the Archbishop of Wales wrote: “I became Bishop of Swansea and Brecon in 1954 and never wore gaiters at Lambeth meetings or anywhere else.” He said that the then Archbishop of Wales reproved him for it and tried to get Archbishop Fisher (Canterbury) to “rebuke me as being improperly dressed.”

He then came to the nub, and I quote directly from his letter (*italics mine*): “I am inclined to think that the Lambeth Conference of 1958 marked in more senses than one a climactic moment. *The weather became very hot and bishop after bishop shed his gaiters.*”

“Two or three of us drew up a list of five or so of the likely diehards—and *put our money on* (I use the episcopal titles) Canterbury, Rochester, Exeter, Wales, Meath and one other whose name I forget.

“We were right in nearly all of them, but were disconcerted by the eleventh-hour arrival of a Canadian bishop in full attire. He turned out, however, to be a freak as he had been bidden to a fashionable wedding!”

The archbishop could not remember the runners-up but remembered that the ultimate winner was—the Archbishop of York, “who remained gaitered to the end!”

I am sure you all appreciate by now that the clear moral of this talk has been—always remember that no matter how funny or how unlikely the events Wodehouse described may seem to us today, somewhere, sometime, someone has done something just as funny, just as unlikely in real life.

## “The Dong with a Luminous Nose”

BY BOB (OILY CARLISLE) RAINS

*Fear not, gentle reader. Plum Lines remains a family-friendly publication. As you will see from this interesting nugget, Bob Rains is merely enhancing previous scholarly research.*

AS PART OF MY arduous researches in preparation for an August address to the Capital! Capital! Chapter on “Poets, Poetry, and Plum,” I pored over that corker of a book, *Pigs Have Wings*, with Norman Murphy’s *A Wodehouse Handbook* ever open by my side. As I came across passages in *Pigs* that sounded poetic or jogged some distant memory from junior high school English class, I would dive into Norman’s vade mecum and almost always surface with a literary allusion. With Norman to guide me, I uncovered quotes and misquotes from, and references to, more poets than you could shake a stick at, even if you cared to do so. Plum sprinkled *Pigs* with allusions to Psalms and Shakespeare, Burns and Byron, Wordsworth and Whittier, Carlyle and Cowper, even Irving Berlin and Yip Harburg, among many others. It seemed that Norman had done all my work for me and that all I had to do was stand up in front of the Cap! Cap! chaps, freely crib from him, and reap the adulation of my awed audience.

But—and I say this with a mixture of sorrow and pride—in one respect, the great Norman Murphy, the Master’s master, let me down. At the end of Chapter 2 of *Pigs*, the ever ebullient Gally reassures Beach the butler, “tempests may lower and storm clouds brood, but if you

put your affairs in the hands of Galahad Threepwood, you're all right." Well, that sounded awfully poetic to me, but I searched Volume 2 of Norman's *A Wodehouse Handbook* in vain for "tempests may lower and storm clouds brood."

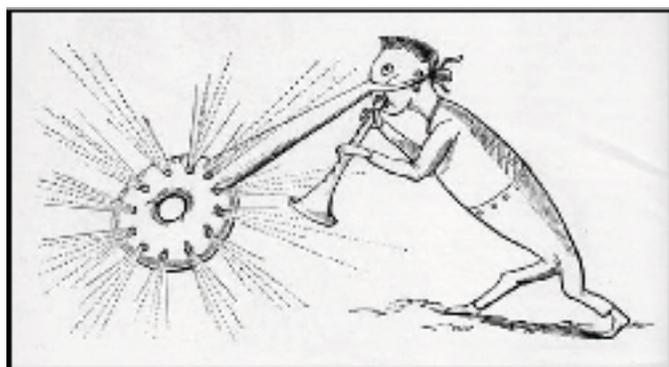
I was stymied until an Internet search revealed that "storm clouds brood" is a phrase from a nonsense verse by the Victorian poet Edward Lear (1812–1888). In Lear's 1877 book *Laughable Lyrics* the first stanza of the first poem ends:

When Storm-clouds brood on the towering  
heights  
Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore . . .

So, there it is: an allusion that eluded Norman Murphy.

Or, perhaps not. Perhaps it was Norman's British sensibilities, so much more refined than those of his American counterparts, that prevented him from listing a poem with the most unfortunate title "The Dong with a Luminous Nose." Perhaps Norman felt that proper ladies and gentlemen might not wish to read about dongs, with or without luminous noses, while studying the works of the ever proper Plum, works which many have commented are notable for their lack of s-e-x.

Now, when Lear penned "The Dong with the Luminous Nose," he provided his own drawing, so that the reader would know exactly what he intended. Below—unless you avert your eyes—you will find Lear's Dong with a Luminous Nose.



This got me to wondering whether "dong" meant in England in 1877 what it means today in the USA. So I hied me to the excellent library of our local liberal arts institution, Dickinson College. Intimidated by the electronic card catalog—there's an oxymoron!—I wander'd lonely as a cloud through the reference section in search of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but to no avail. So, swallowing my pride, I slunk over to the reference desk with the big "Ask Me" sign over it and asked the sweet young thing working there where I might find the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I purposely

did not say *OED*, so as not to confuse her. No matter, she had never heard of that obscure reference work, nor had any of the other student librarians. But the SYT took pity on the doddering old man who had asked her such a silly question and showed me how to search for the *OED* on the library's computer.

With her help, I finally found the actual, corporeal *OED*, which was conveniently shelved on its spine with the bottoms of the pages facing out, devoid of identification. And this is what I learned:

The capital *D* "Dong" was coined by Lear in 1877 and is, of course, a fabulous creature with a luminous nose. The small *d* "dong," described as coarse slang for penis, is a chiefly U.S. usage of unknown origin, first noted in 1930 in *American Speech* V, p. 390.

Why has Norman Murphy hidden this critical information from his, and the Master's, devoted followers? When I taxed Norman with this gross omission, he paled visibly and said, "You're right! I missed it! How could I have been so stupid. Thank you, Bob, thank you!"

Of course, that is what I hoped he would say. In fact, he drew himself up to his full height, looked down his long nose at me (via e-mail, that is) and said, "Sir, I am British. And my *Wodehouse Handbook* is meant for family reading. Did you ever seriously think that I would include such coarse items? It might be acceptable in America, but not, thank Heaven, in Britain!"

Here's the final tally as I see it. Norman Murphy has found and identified literally thousands of poetic references in the works of the Master, and I have found one. So, who's the Master's master now? You decide.

. . . that this ethereal being straight from Fairyland could have stooped to love him—him—an earthy brute who wore sock-suspenders and drank coffee for breakfast . . . that was what robbed George of the power to articulate. He could do nothing but look at her.

*A Damsel in Distress* (1919)

## The Wode Wide Web

ATTENTION READERS OF *Plum Lines*! The Wodehouse Society is planning changes to our website, which you know well at [www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org). Some of you have already contributed ideas and comments, and we thank you muchly. Should you have additional input for the Web Steering Committee (Amy Plofker and Ken Clevenger), you may e-mail your comments to Amy or Ken. Any input will be gratefully appreciated.

# Extract from The Darius Transitions Book One: Mind the Gap

(AVAILABLE VIA WWW.THEDARIUSTRANSITIONS.COM)

BY TIM RICHARDS

*Tim Richards is a freelance writer based in Melbourne, Australia. His current novel, Mind the Gap, features an epilogue appearance by P. G. Wodehouse. Tim has kindly given permission to reprint this extract and states: "It's important to note that Plum only appears in the epilogue; this teaser will be expanded in Book Two, in which Wodehouse will be a supporting character." Intriguing stuff! Read on. (All text copyright Tim Richards.)*

## Epilogue: Tiergarten

A THOUSAND KILOMETRES away and almost seven decades earlier, an artefact flashed into the sky over Berlin. It would be hard for an observer to report anything meaningful: it was, he would have said, both substantial and insubstantial, both sharp-edged and soft, both sleek and squat. Intermittently coming into sharp focus against the blue sky, it descended rapidly toward the city.

Below, a tall, balding man stepped briskly onto one of the paths threading through the trees of the Tiergarten. Once within in its leafy surrounds, he could no longer see the Brandenburg gate with its swastika banners, and he breathed a sigh of relief. His stride slackened a little, but he still moved forward at an impressive clip.

Approaching from the other direction, Captain Klaus Lemberg was taking his time, walking slowly and thinking of very little. It was rare that he managed to slip out of the army's general headquarters to spend some time alone in the park. It was, he felt, a necessary antidote to the focused intensity of work within the HQ, especially now that the army had driven deeply into the Soviet Union.

Looking up, he noticed a man approaching. *About sixty*, thought Lemberg, sizing him up in an offhand manner that came naturally to an intelligence operative. *Looks like the war hasn't affected him much*, he thought. *Probably complains over breakfast that the coffee isn't as good as it used to be, then reads the sports results rather than the news on the front page.*

Lemberg, however, was wrong. The man did have the war on his mind. He was wondering how the devil he was going to get out of this benighted city and out of Europe altogether. To America, hopefully. Then his thoughts were cut short as a flash of light caught his eye. Looking up, he saw a . . . something . . . blinking on and off (pulsing?) . . . as it plummeted directly into the forest up ahead.

"Good heavens!" he cried out, then for the first time noticed the German army officer a few metres ahead of

him. He'd spoken aloud in English, having been unable to make the slightest progress in learning German in his months in Berlin.

Lemberg stopped dead in his tracks, fixated on the man. "Was . . .?" he began in surprise, then switched languages. "You are English?" he asked with some suspicion, his hand straying toward the pistol at his hip. It seemed unlikely that the British were sending elderly gentleman behind enemy lines to spy for them, but you had to be prepared for anything these days.

The man looked sheepish. "Er, yes," he said, glancing around as if looking for companions. "I am. And I seem to have lost Ethel. She won't be happy with me wandering off like this. Hell's foundations will be quivering, you might say."

Feeling baffled, Lemberg was about to quiz the man further, when two more individuals appeared at the far end of the path, moving rapidly toward the stranger.

"There you are!" cried the woman, who was clutching a small dog as she advanced. The man beside her, wearing a suit that looked like an American cut, was familiar to him, and Lemberg relaxed a little. He was Werner Plack, who was connected in some way with the Propaganda Ministry. Close to the Nazis and a little too smooth for his own good, but no threat.

"Sorry if I startled you," the stranger said as his companions approached. "I thought I saw something come down up ahead. Must have been a trick of the light." He turned to leave, then, as if thinking himself rude, turned back and stuck out his hand. "Pleased to meet you," he said. "I'm PG Wodehouse." Then he turned again, and strode toward his wife.

Lemberg gazed after him in wonder. So this was the famous English author who had been captured in France! His radio broadcasts from Berlin to his American readers had quite set the cat among the pigeons in his homeland, or so Lemberg had heard.

He glanced over his shoulder for a moment, back toward the centre of the great city park. What had he said about . . . ? But it was gone, washed from his mind by the surprise of the chance meeting. Shaking his head, he continued his walk, nodding to the trio as he passed them.

Five hundred metres west, in the heart of the Tiergarten, the artefact pulsed softly as it embedded itself into this corner of space-time. Unseen by any eye, it waited.

*To be continued in Book Two, in which Plum will be a supporting character. You may purchase Mind the Gap at [www.thedariustransitions.com](http://www.thedariustransitions.com).*

## A Few Quick Ones

*Thanks to all contributors; special thanks to Evelyn Herzog and John Baesch, prolific QO finders.*

In the July 2 *New York Review of Books*, Michael Dirda writes a thorough review of *The Complete Ripley Novels*, a collection of Patricia Highsmith's Ripley stories. Many of the biographical details and comparisons are rather dark. However, at one point Mr. Dirda mentions how travel to exotic locations can make one "grow exuberantly, amorally free." He then states: "As a result, the Ripley novels can sometimes appear more fantastic than realistic, as artificial as commedia dell'arte, as unlikely in their vertiginous plot developments as a P. G. Wodehouse novel."

\*\*\*\*\*

**Karen Shotting** found the following in Laura Levine's oddly titled *Killer Blond, a Jane Austen Mystery*, a book about a contemporary, not-very-successful writer living in Los Angeles: "There was something about [my client's daughter] that reminded me of the young Jane Austen. Maybe it was the book she was reading. *Stiff Upper Lip* by the British humorist P. G. Wodehouse. When I was a teenager, I was crazy about his books. In fact I still am. But it's not every day you see a teenager reading Wodehouse." Karen comments that, even though Ms. Levine did not get the PGW title quite right, the author's heart is in the right place.

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**David Landman** sent an item about the Walker Cup golf tournament from the September 12–13 *Wall Street Journal*. In John Paul Newport's article "A Most Gracious Throwback," he compares the civility of this event to "the days of Bobby Jones . . . and P. G. Wodehouse."

\*\*\*\*\*

**Diane Madlon-Kay** spotted the following in the September 27 *New York Times*: "And like Danny they were tutored by a Mitteleuropean who, to borrow a phrase from P. G. Wodehouse, was either a man of about 150 who was rather young for his years or a man of about 110 who had been aged by trouble." Also, in the "Women's Fashion Winter 2009" section of the October 18 *New York Times*, Diane spotted this: "But if you're a mere mortal like me, wearing a cardigan over a matching short-sleeve sweater risks making you look like an elderly aunt from the pages of P. G. Wodehouse."

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In the July 2009 *Telegraph Magazine*, there is an ad for a "Jeeves light" created by Jack Phipps for Innermost.

## Three Wodehouse Walks

REVIEWED BY NEIL MIDKIFF

**NORMAN MURPHY**—The Man Who Knows Almost Everything—has once again blessed us with an essential volume. *Three Wodehouse Walks* distills many years of his reading and research into a handy little paperback which will lead the intrepid reader on three tours of the neighborhoods of London which P. G. Wodehouse wove into the backgrounds of his stories.

Along with more than a thousand other lucky folks over the last few decades, I've had the privilege of following Norman as he points out the sites where Wodehouse and his characters lived, worked, studied, played, browsed, and sluiced. Since the publication of *In Search of Blandings* in 1981, Murphy has made it clear to all who love Wodehouse that his stories take place not in some fantasy world but in the actual settings that Plum knew best, or in very slightly fictionalized versions of them. The three London Walks included in this volume can be enjoyed in many ways: as a recollection and expansion of Norman's tours, for those of us who have already been guided by him; as an imagined tour, for those who haven't been fortunate enough to have this experience; as a practical step-by-step guide around London, for those who can use this volume to retrace the Walks as the text points out the sites and tells their stories; and as a virtual tour guide, for those who can navigate the mapping and imaging resources provided by Google to take Internet-enabled users anywhere in the world to most of the sites on the tour (more about this below).

Walk 1 introduces us to Bertie Wooster's West End of London, the London that Wodehouse knew in the 1920s, and takes up slightly over half the volume. We start at Green Park Underground Station, with walking directions to find Bertie Wooster's "Crichton Mansions, Berkeley Street"—actually 15 Berkeley Street, where Wodehouse himself lived in 1922. Within a few short blocks we find Aunt Dahlia's London townhouse (in reality the home of Plum's theatrical collaborator Ian Hay); Halsey Court, the home of several of Wodehouse's young heroes (actually Hay's Mews); and the Junior Ganymede Club (in reality The Only Running Footman, a pub for the servants of the Mayfair townhouses). Continuing on, we learn of the real clubs on which the Drones Club was modeled; visit Aspinall's jewelers, Bodmin's hat shop, and the antique store where Bertie sneered at a "modern Dutch" cow-creamer; and even see where Psmith cornered his employer Mr. Bickersdyke in a Turkish bath.

Walk 2 covers areas that Wodehouse knew in his early life as a bank employee and later as an independent author, journalist, and theatre lyricist. Among other sites, we find the Criterion Bar, as patronized by Gally Threepwood, and the Café de Paris, real-life model for Mario's Restaurant in numerous stories, as well as Bow Street ("Bosher Street") Police Station, the Savoy, Simpson's, and Romano's.

Walk 3 takes us to the South London suburb of Dulwich, where Wodehouse attended school for most of his teen years and on which he based the idyllic suburb he renamed "Valley Fields" in several stories over many years.

This brief appreciation can only touch on the highlights of each tour; Murphy adds numerous backstories of London history (and a few very welcome stories from his own life) as we follow these paths, and in every case we find ourselves surprised and better informed about one of the most fascinating cities in the world. I can only hope that Norman will follow up this volume of London Walks with an equally useful practical guide to the rural locations at Weston Park, Sudeley Castle, Hanley Castle, and other sites which form the background of Blandings Castle and other country settings in the Wodehouse stories, as some of us experienced them on the Millennium Wodehouse Tour and other excursions.

I don't have space to provide instructions to those who would like to follow these tours through the "Street View" facilities of Google Maps and Google Earth, but for those who have already explored these Internet tools or who need a good reason to begin exploring them, here are two links which show how Norman's book can be useful even to those who may not find a trip to London to be practical.

Aunt Dahlia's town home (47 Charles Street, Mayfair): <http://tinyurl.com/y1b6lh7>—then rotate your view to the other side of the street to see *The Only Running Footman*.

Peacehaven, Mulberry Grove, Valley Fields (2 Acacia Grove, Dulwich): <http://tinyurl.com/y9j6tso>—complete with yellow-glazed "jaundiced" bricks and stucco sphinxes beside the door.

An order form for the book is enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines*, with special pricing for those who order promptly. I'm confident that *Three Wodehouse Walks* will be a valued addition to any Wodehouse reader's library.



# 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:

THE BIRMINGHAM Banjolele Band has been busy lately. We met in late August at the Vestavia Hills Public Library to finalize plans for the November reading at the Carpe Librum bookstore in Knoxville scheduled for November 14. Thanks to Noel and Lucy Merrill for taking charge of the meeting at the last minute, and thanks to Joan and Ken Clevenger for arranging the November reading at Carpe Librum.

Wodehouse readers don't usually need a reason to browse, sluice, and celebrate, but the best reason comes in October! The BBB observed the happy occasion of the Master's birthday at the home of Bill Crowe and Jane Pearson on the evening of October 15. Thank you, Bill and Jane, for a wonderful night, and we hope everyone had the ingredients on hand for Jeeves's bracer for the following morning!

## 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:



**T**HE BROADWAY SPECIAL celebrated Plum's natal day (a bit late) on October 25 at the Fifth Avenue home of Luceil Carroll. Her gracious apartment was bursting with Plummites who were themselves bursting with excellent food and drink catered by Luca Restaurant—collations worthy of Anatole himself.

The main order of business was a Wodehouse Birthday Musicale with Lenny Metcalf back again at the grand piano, expertly tickling out tunes from the British music hall and the American songbook. Provided with stapled song sheets about the size of a novelette, the Special acquitted itself well in crooning almost everything of which one can think—except “Sonny Boy.” It was yet another afternoon at Luceil's for which we can't thank her enough.

Our most recent meeting was held on December 4 in the Card Room at The Players Club. Report forthcoming!

### Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson

Phone:

E-mail:



### 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:



**T**HE CHAPS held their fall meeting on September 13 at our usual haunt, the Dark Horse Tavern on Philadelphia's venerable Head House Square. In the absence of our longtime heads of state, Susan “Rosie M. Banks” and Dan “Cyril Waddesley-Davenport” Cohen, the chair was ably filled by our admirable Russian novelist, Herb “Vladimir Brusiloff” Moskowitz, who refrained from disparaging his fellow writers—he spit him of nobody.

We were treated to a glowing report on the recent convention of The Wodehouse Society by those who had traveled by covered wagon to the wilds of Minnesota in June. John Graham, John Baesch, Evelyn Herzog, and others chimed in with the news that the cricket match was unsurpassed, if not in expertise, at least in enthusiasm. We were glad to learn that the Saturday talks were a triumph.

Highlights included talks by former TWS president Len Lawson (“The Early Days of The Wodehouse Society”), by the ever-entertaining Elliott Milstein, and by a real-life pig expert from the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine. All those who attended agreed that the riverboat dinner cruise was another highlight.

After lunch our conversation turned to erudite subjects. From Poe to Dickens and back to Wodehouse, we spoke of many things. We passed Brusiloff's cell phone around as we placed a call to Dan and Susan Cohen. We are happy to report that Dan continues to recover from his stroke, and we made tentative plans to hold the next Chapter One meeting in November, in Cape May, New Jersey, where Dan and Susan would, we hope, have a chance to join us.

### 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:



**T**HE DRONE RANGERS have enjoyed life in beautiful Texas and other places during the summer of 2009. Some DRs went to the Texas Hill Country to browse and sluice with the Mottled Oysters and discuss *Psmith in the City*, while others got enthusiastic about foreign climes and flew away to Turkey en masse.

As well as dining, reading Wodehouse books, and getting together to see vintage videos, the Drones held their October meeting in the home of Susan Pierce, a favorite of right-thinking Drones everywhere. Susan prepared one of her feasts for us (lissen, lemme tell ya sumpin'—this beazel can cook up a storm!), and feasting at chez Pierce is a pleasure to evoke glad cries from Drones far and wide. Even Charles Chester, who has hardly been heard of in five years, came out of hiding to join us for this gustatory delight!

You are invited to join us should your Texas travels bring you to Houston when the Drone Rangers are

gathering.

### 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:



OCTOBER 17 found us celebrating Plum's birthday at the residence of Clark and Angela Adams. Clark was not able to dig up his fish slice, but he did have handy the Infant Samuel at Prayer in case any of our members became overwrought. Fortunately there were liberal libations and tissue restorers on hand, so the statuette survived the evening intact. The Oldest Member graced us with his presence, but Clarence, Ninth Earl of Emsworth, was called upon to fill in with golf stories, due to the dearth of the OM's supply. Also among those present were Liz Davenport, Zoila Valentino, Bryan and Janet Lilius, Jan Ford and Randy Anderson, Cecilia Etheridge, and Bob Adams, who entertained us with his famous performing acrobatic spoons. We missed Clare Koontz, who was not able to join us after all due to an unforeseen eventuality.

In keeping with one's tradition of letting *Plum Lines* deadlines pass by, your correspondent has failed (up till now) to report on our last outing, which took place in Fredericksburg, Texas. We were honored to have among us one Toni Oliver, who came from Houston to join us. *Psmith in the City* was the selection for the month. Ephraim Gadsby was there to greet us as well, and we had a grand time looking at Toni's photo album of pictures from a tour of Wodehouse's London. The tour looked like great fun and something to consider for the future of the MO/JE.

### The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)

(Boston and New England)

Contact: David Landman

Phone:

E-mail:



THE NEW ENGLAND Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS) continues to be the object of international attention. Our September meeting, held at the Arlington home of Roberta Towner and Larry Smith, was honored to host Mrs. Anasuya Vamathevan, originally of Sri Lanka, now residing in Australia. She introduced her son, NEWT

Sudhakar, to Wodehouse, a good deed for which she was by executive fiat awarded Honorary NEWTship. In addition, long-absent NEWTS Madelaine "Maddy" Grant and Larry "Larry" Stelmack returned to the fold, and, following the example of newts in the wild who, when chuffed, fold themselves practically in half, we all—literally—bent over backwards to welcome their return. It was a sight one is not likely to see again in this lifetime. The nottle (for that is what we call our meetings) was so convivial, the flow of wit and soul so compelling, the groaning board so lavish, and the attention span of the president so short, that the scheduled activity—whatever it was—was tabled. One expects forever. (Next nottle: December 12!)

### The Northwodes

(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)

Contact: Kristine Fowler

Phone:

E-mail:



THE NORTHWODES thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the convention and spent some time afterward patting each other on the back and generally basking in the memories, as at the July 27 celebratory high tea hosted by Christina and Pete Heinrichs. Maria Jette not only brought a vintage cocktail mix (for White Ladies) but also thoughtfully provided recipe cards, which have doubtless been pressed into service in subsequent cocktail parties from Forest Lake to Eden Prairie.

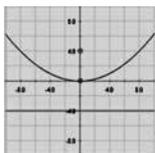
Another drink caught our fancy at the September gathering chez Terry d'Souza: new member Jeannie Hanson managed to find some English wine, which turned out to be of the currant variety, flavored with ginger. This proved an unexpectedly appropriate complement to the chicken satay and other eastern delights prepared by Chef Terry. "Buttercup Day" was declaimed, to general edification, and Tamaki Morimura's prize-winning evocation of same, as exhibited in the convention photos, much admired.

A mere month later a merry band gathered at the Happy Gnome for the annual Birthday Toast to the Master—an anniversary shared by new member Jeff Grapevine, although he had to duck out early to get to his official celebrations. Not so the remainder, who made full use of the second-floor bar as well as mental notes to collar the space next year.

Rightly feeling that we can never have too many chances to get together, Angie Meyer organized a book discussion of *Thank You, Jeeves*, which drew over a dozen participants to the atmospheric University Club on October 27, for which location we again have members (of the Northwodes and the U. Club) Christina and Pete to thank. Brainy discussion ensued, covering dictaphones,

parasangs (good thing Dick Sveum had his iPhone), Bertie's generous character, and how the dickens he and his cohorts managed to stay slim given the lush, well-lubricated dinners that prevailed. Further flights of erudition are to be expected at future book discussions: Angie has set an every-other-month schedule, with both halves of *Mike* up for December. Rhys Parry calculated that at this rate we'll have about 15 years' worth of material—a happy prospect indeed.

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



**T**HE 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:



**S**EPTEMBER STARTED auspiciously here in sunny southern California as PZMPCo hosted UK visitor Francis Taunton with a cream tea at my house.

The following day we headed off to Woodley Street Park for a cricket tutorial and picnic lunch (or "cricknic," as Doug would have it) at the Hollywood Cricket Club. (After the cricket experience at the St. Paul convention, I felt I was ready for additional tutelage.) We found a shady tree under which to set up our chairs, and Francis proceeded to share his wisdom regarding slow and fast bowlers, fielding placements (which are not fixed as in baseball), and bowling strategy. I've forgotten now who won, but it was a lovely day, and I think with an additional ten years or so of study, I may be ready for a test match at Lords.

We are looking forward to the reprise of David Niven in "Uncle Fred Flits By" in November and our annual holiday tea in December, when we will be honored with a visit from Carey Tynan from the Drone Rangers. The venue for tea has not yet been selected, so sign on to the

PZMPCo Yahoo! newsgroup for updates or contact me.  
 PZMPCo meets on the second Sunday of the month at 12:30 pm. Meetings are at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena unless otherwise noted.

**PGWinWNY**  
 (Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)  
 Contact: Laura Loehr  
 Phone  
 E-mail:



**P**GWINWNY met on Sunday, November 8 (since there was no Bills game that day, which no one cares about anyway) at the Plaka Restaurant on Delaware Avenue in Kenmore. We discussed "The Great Sermon Handicap" and "Uncle Fred Flits By." There is a potential field trip in the spring to visit a pig farm between Rochester and Buffalo (suggested by our PGW friends in Syracuse—thanks, Carol!) where black Berkshires are raised. We promise not to put pork chops or ribs on the menu that day.

**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:



## Jackie Gister

**J**ACKIE GISTER, one of the charter members of the Western New York chapter (PGWinWNY), passed away in September. Laura Loehr says that Jackie was an enthusiastic participant in chapter activities and that she will be sorely missed by her family and the chapter.

# Collecting Wodehouse: Related to *Mike*

BY JOHN GRAHAM

WODEHOUSE'S LONGEST and best school story, *Mike*, was published 100 years ago this past September 15. It was also his last. After *Mike*, Wodehouse never again published another novel exclusively about and intended for public-school boys. A first or early edition of *Mike* with its colorful green boards remains a cornerstone of any good Wodehouse collection. And for such an important title, it is also one of his more affordable ones: as of early October, abebooks.com was offering a first edition for as low as \$650 (and as high as \$8,000). Early reprints by A. & C. Black can often be found for less than \$250. If you are interested in acquiring a copy, be sure to read the two-part series on *Mike* by Nick Townend that is now appearing in *Wooster Sauce*. Nick is a leading authority on all of Wodehouse's school stories, and there is little I can add to what he has written. As a result, I thought I'd use this collecting column to honor *Mike* by looking at a couple of school stories written by other authors that have interesting and surprising Wodehouse connections.

In September 1909 Wodehouse was in New York (staying at the Hotel Earle in Greenwich Village) when he met a young writer named Leslie Havergal Bradshaw, then a magazine editor for *Success*. The two struck up a friendship and correspondence that was to continue until at least 1915. We know this from a series of letters Wodehouse wrote to Bradshaw, which were auctioned by Sotheby's in 1982; what we do not know is much about Bradshaw himself. Norman Murphy told me he always assumed that Bradshaw was American, but in a 1985 article about the Sotheby's auction, Richard Usborne referred to Bradshaw as English. My Google search turned up the following abbreviated description in the online version of *Burke's Peerage & Gentry*:

LESLIE HAVERGAL BRADSHAW, of New York, USA, newspaper proprietor and publisher; company director; author and theatrical producer; born 16 Feb 1892; educated Winchester, King Edward VI School, Southampton, and Cambridge University.

Although this seems to be our man, the question of nationality remains unanswered. Also, the date of birth is a bit awkward: was Bradshaw really just 17 when he and Wodehouse met in 1909?

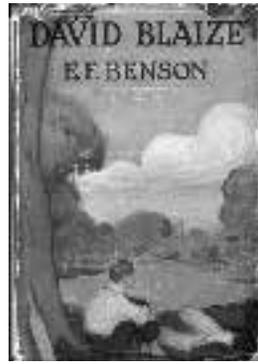
In March 1910 *The Captain* (*A Magazine for Boys*

and "Old Boys") printed a two-page article appended to the final installment of *Psmith Journalist* entitled "Impressions of P. G. Wodehouse," which was written by Bradshaw. As Ken Clevenger reminds us in his summer 2009 article in *Plum Lines*, when A. & C. Black published *Psmith in the City* in September 1910, Wodehouse dedicated it to Leslie Havergal Bradshaw. Two years later, Black published a school story by Bradshaw himself, called *The Right Sort*. The verso of its title page reads: "To / P. G. Wodehouse / The Right Sort." As far as is known, this makes *The Right Sort* the very first book ever dedicated to Wodehouse. In all, the *Addendum to McIlvaine* lists ten later books also dedicated to Plum, from *The Booby Prize* (1924) by Herbert Westbrook to *Halloween Party* (1969) by Agatha Christie.

Earlier this year, when a first edition of *The Right Sort* was offered for sale on eBay, I pounced. The seller was knowledgeable enough to note the Wodehouse connection, hoping no doubt to extract a higher price from us poor buyers. (As it turned out there were few other bidders and I got it well below my maximum price.) Aside from the Wodehouse dedication, what attracted me most to the book was its colorful illustrated front cover, which is reproduced on the next page. At least in format and design, the book is a close cousin to *Mike* and Plum's other A. & C. Black publications.

As it turns out, the connection may be even closer than that. For starters, it was Wodehouse himself (now back in England) who convinced Black to publish *The Right Sort*, although he was unable to get them also to run it as a serial in *The Captain*. From a Wodehouse letter to Bradshaw dated January 26, 1912, it seems that the original title for Bradshaw's story was *The Head of Chester's*. Perhaps that was thought to be too close to Wodehouse's own *The Head of Kay's*. In any event, not only did Bradshaw alter the title, he also changed the name of the school to Acton.

There is a further and intriguing connection between *The Right Sort* and *Mike*, although I have been unable to explore it completely. At the Sotheby's auction in 1982, besides the letters, another item up for sale was a group of three autograph notebooks penned by Wodehouse from 1902 to 1909 containing "ideas for plots, anecdotes, jokes, short passages, dialogues, phrases, etc." According to the catalogue, Wodehouse gave these notebooks to Bradshaw (probably in 1909) along with an undated letter that instructs: "Use any public school stuff you like in [the] accompanying notebooks, but don't swipe my other notes." Fortunately, the winning bid on the notebooks was placed by Plum's grandson, Edward Cazalet, who allowed Richard Usborne access to them for an article on Wodehouse's apprentice years



### Shared school story ideas?

(*Encounter*, 1985; also reprinted in his book of essays *After Hours With P. G. Wodehouse*). Having read both Usborne's article and Bradshaw's book, I could find no obvious link between Plum's notebooks and Bradshaw's story. Of course, Usborne's primary interest was in connecting passages in the notebooks to Plum's *own* stories. He was not interested in Bradshaw's use of them, and I doubt he ever read *The Right Sort*.

So, did Bradshaw get some ideas for his own school story from Wodehouse's notebooks? Short of a visit to the Wodehouse archives at the Cazalets' home, I suppose I will never know for sure—and neither will you. But, having read *The Right Sort* (twice), I can tell you that Bradshaw was certainly influenced by Plum's published school stories. As in those tales, there are plenty of pages devoted to action and suspense on the playing fields; there is nocturnal intrigue as well, when both our hero and his nemesis venture outside school walls without the headmaster's permission. But there is also one aspect to Bradshaw's story you definitely will not find in a Wodehouse school story: our hero (Acton's star athlete) Templeton falls head over heels for Evelyn, the elder sister of his school friend Dale. True, their romance remains distant and chaste up until the story's final paragraph, but nevertheless young hormones do fuel a decidedly un-Wodehousian subplot.

Male hormones are also hard at work in another school story with an interesting Wodehouse connection. This time the author was the prolific English writer E. F. Benson, who is best known today for his exquisite six-book provincial social satire concerning Mapp and Lucia, and for his equally well-crafted ghost stories. In 1916 Benson published a poignant school story called *David Blaize* (with Hodder & Stoughton in London; Doran in New York); the book proved to be so popular that he published a sequel to it in 1924, *David of King's*. (Coincidentally, in 1916 he also published a book titled *Mike*, but it was not a school story.) By the time he wrote *David Blaize*, Benson was already a mature and well-established author; his venture into the school

story genre, unlike Wodehouse's, did not constitute an apprenticeship, and his readers were not exclusively, or even primarily, schoolboys (or old boys). Like much of Benson's work, his two school stories are beautifully written, but they are remembered today largely for their subtle and tender descriptions of the unrequited yearnings of affection between young David and an older model student, Frank Maddox, the school's prefect. Again, not really the world of Wodehouse, I hear you saying. Just wait.

In *David at King's*, David and Frank have graduated from their beloved Marchester and find themselves in a new setting (Cambridge). About halfway through the story, David goes up to London to visit the club he has just joined—the Bath Club. He enters nervously and spends some time reading in a smoking room armchair “because that is the way people behaved in clubs.” Eventually, exploring his new property further:

. . . he discovered the swimming-bath filled with pale green water and surrounded with header boards and athletic apparatus. A row of rings on ropes stretched from one end of the bath to the other, and these (being more of his property) seemed well worth investigation. . . . [A]fter supplying the stale news that he was Blaize, a new member, to the bath attendant, he undressed and pommelled a ball and experimented with dumb-bells in order to get hot before his bathe. Then there were the rings over the bath: you swung forward, holding on to one, so he gathered, and caught hold of the next; got up momentum by swinging on the two, and letting go of the first, advancing to the third. This acted beautifully, and he was about halfway down the bath when his hand slipped, and he fell with a shriek and a loud splash into the pale-green water.

Three years after *David at King's*, in December 1927, Wodehouse published “Jeeves and the Yule-Tide Spirit” in which, of course, we learn for the very first time about a similar (albeit more sinister) mishap experienced by one Bertram Wilberforce Wooster in the swimming-bath of the Drones Club.

*Editor's Note: As many readers will know, Bertie's mishap at the hands of Tuppy Glossop was in fact a not-uncommon incident in the real Bath Club in Dover Street in the 1920s. Norman Murphy has documented such occurrences; see In Search of Blandings and A Wodehouse Handbook.*

# Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

COMPARED TO THE splendid goings-on in St. Paul this past June, one might think the Wodehouse scene in England has been dull by comparison, but all sorts of things have been happening. There have been the usual fun-filled UK Society meetings and cricket matches as well as a wonderful theatre adaptation of *Summer Lightning* in Keswick, Cumbria, which Norman and I had the pleasure of seeing. But this year's biggest event was Plum Pie, the exhibition on Wodehouse put together by Edward Cazalet and Tony Ring for the London bookshop Heywood Hill. It ran from September 21 to October 16, and nobody could have imagined what a success it was going to be, nor the effect that it would have on Heywood Hill, a London institution. This small, elegant bookshop has been in operation for more than 70 years (see [www.heywoodhill.com](http://www.heywoodhill.com) to learn more about them), and to fit an exhibition into its limited space took a lot of imagination and hard work. But Edward, Tony, and the Heywood Hill staff came up trumps.

Panels detailing significant aspects of Wodehouse's life and work were cleverly affixed to cabinet doors, and cherished objects owned by Plum—including the umbrella he had won in a golf tournament and his beloved typewriter—were put on display for all to ooh and ah over. Photos abounded, and throughout the shop, bookshelves displayed quotes from Wodehouse that had customers' laughter ringing upstairs and downstairs ("Her face shone like the seat of a bus driver's trousers"). It was all simply marvellous.

On Plum Pie's opening night, the great and the good—including Plum's nephew, Patrick Wodehouse, as well as Richard Briers and the Duke of Kent—crammed into the shop to hear Hal Cazalet sing (always a memorable experience) and Henry Blofeld (a well-known journalist and cricket commentator) describe a cricket team composed entirely of Wodehouse characters. The evening was delightful, and the BBC put together a slideshow about it that can (I hope) be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/ybpb4x>.

Publicity for the exhibition—which began when Stephen Fry strolled down Curzon Street with a Berkshire sow named Gloria (see *Wooster Sauce*, September 2009)—was extensive and resulted in people coming from all over the country. One newspaper article concerned the Wodehouse Walks that my spouse was conducting during the exhibition, in conjunction with his just-published book, *Three Wodehouse Walks* (see the review on p. 16 and the flyer enclosed with this issue of *Plum Lines*). Unfortunately, the article did not make clear that people needed to book for the walks first, and as a result Norman ended up with huge crowds—and the need to schedule more walks. Once-weekly walks became twice-weekly during weeks 2 and 3, and during the exhibition's fourth and final week, he ended up doing five walks—one of them with a group of 32 people! Ah, well, it keeps him fit and out of trouble.

But the excellent press that Plum Pie received did more than make Norman's life difficult—it also presented problems for Heywood Hill's staff, who were overwhelmed by visitors and sent out an appeal for help to the Society. Members (including yours truly) responded, taking turns to act as exhibition guides, an experience that resulted in a surge of new members for the Society and new friends made—which in turn resulted in the largest-ever turnout



*Barbara Combs and Joan Clevenger enjoy the UK Society meeting at the Arts Club in London on October 13.*



*Patrick Wodehouse and Edward Cazalet at Heywood Hill  
(Photo by Ginni Beard)*

for a Society meeting on October 13. The exhibition also attracted friends from the States, including Carey Tynan, Barbara Combs, and Ken and Joan Clevenger—a huge bonus from my point of view.

And the pièce de resistance? On the final day of the exhibition, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Stephen Breyer—both Wodehouse fans—showed up to view Plum Pie. They had been preceded the previous day by Justice Antonin Scalia. Now if only the rest of the Court's justices also read Wodehouse! Wouldn't it be splendid if Wodehousian metaphors began to appear in the Court's august rulings?

## Herb Woodger

IT IS WITH sadness that we note the passing of Herb Woodger, 85, in July this year. Herb was a longtime member of TWS who, many years ago, introduced his five daughters to the joys of reading Wodehouse—a wise bit of parenting that not only brought them a lot of laughter but also played an indirect role in one of them marrying a prominent Wodehousian across the pond. He was able to attend two conventions, Boston '95 and Providence '07, and at the latter one he was first onto the dance floor at the conclusion of the Saturday banquet. His sense of humor and zest for life inspired many. We will miss him.

## Vernon A. Fagin

VERNON A. “VERN” FAGIN of Studio City, California, passed away in June. Vern had been a member of The Wodehouse Society since 1996.

## Jean Thomas

JEAN THOMAS of Florham Park, New Jersey, passed away in August of this year. Jean had been a member of The Wodehouse Society since 1999.



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*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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