

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

Volume 36 Number 1     Spring 2015

## Wodehouse Books as Machine Gun Shields and Other Matters

BY TODD MORNING

I RECENTLY WROTE an article about the removal of P. G. Wodehouse's books from several British public libraries following the Berlin broadcasts (*Plum Lines*, Winter 2014). As I was researching this topic, I came across a few additional mentions of Wodehouse in wartime British newspapers that I thought would be of interest to members of The Wodehouse Society.

During the war, British papers devoted most of their space to the military news from the fronts. Every so often, however, they would delve into lighter material, opening the way for Wodehouse to make an appearance. For example, a report entitled "How Airmen Spend Their Time" from the January 31, 1940, *Derby Daily Telegraph* included information on the favorite books of the brave RAF pilots: "In fiction, first favorite is P. G. Wodehouse with Edgar Wallace and Dorothy Sayers as strong claimants for second place."

In my article on the censorship of Wodehouse in British libraries, I tried to make the case that some Wodehouse biographers have exaggerated the extent of public anger following the Berlin broadcasts. The sentence quoted above is pre-Berlin broadcast. And yet a similar article called "What the Boys Read in the Desert" from the Angus, Scotland, *Evening Telegraph* on December 1, 1944 (three years after the Berlin broadcasts), shows that Wodehouse remained popular with British servicemen: "The present order of popularity is Thorne Smith easily first, then A. J. Cronin, with the Leslie Charteris series of 'Saint' books very close behind. Then comes P. G. Wodehouse with Edgar Wallace next most popular."

A side note: I had never heard of Thorne Smith. It turns out that he wrote *Topper* and *I Married a Witch*. According to an internet source that I came across (I know, it is always risky using the internet as a source), the 1940s editions of Smith's novels were known for their racy illustrations, which may explain why this now obscure writer's books appealed to men stationed at remote North African and Middle Eastern outposts.

A different take on Wodehouse's popularity appeared in the February 26, 1942, *Western Morning News* in a report entitled "Women's Taste in Literature: Light Novels Popular in Exeter." The article (which perhaps wisely lacked a byline) gave an overview of the books checked out by women at the Exeter Public Library and included some additional editorial comments. It began with the news that books on gardening, beekeeping, wartime cookery, and poultry were

### **Convention 2017 Could Be Yours!**

BIDS ARE NOW being accepted to host TWS's 2017 convention—our 19th since the society's founding. Each convention is made special thanks to the venue and the efforts of the hosting chapter or group. Information on the criteria for hosting a convention can be found at [www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org); click on the "Conventions" tab and look for the link to "TWS CSC's charter"; or write to Elin Woodger at [elinwm@btinternet.com](mailto:elinwm@btinternet.com) for the details. All bids from potential convention hosts must be sent to Elin by June 30, 2015.

frequently checked out of the library by the women of Exeter. The article went on: "But the majority of women are still chiefly attracted to novels of a light character. During the long hours of fire-watching they prefer the companionship of detective novels, love stories, or P. G. Wodehouse to that of more serious books."

The reporter probably should have stopped there, but he (as you will be able to tell from the next quote, it is a safe bet that the reporter was a man) chose to continue:

Books that stimulate thought such as those on history, political economy, religion, and art are not often sought. Women, it would seem, show little inclination to probe into the deeper causes of the universal upheaval that so drastically affects their lives. Nor are they interested in tracing the beginnings of movements that grew into the Fascist, Nazi, and Communist regimes in order to gain a more balanced view of the present events and truer insight into the possibilities of the future. It is difficult to understand this attitude of compliance on the part of women at a time when democratic ideals are threatened. The explanation that they deserve relaxation after a hard day's work is barely adequate. Perhaps if in this country, as in Nazi Germany, controversial books were banned, women might discover to their amazement that they possess social consciences.

Yikes! It's a good thing this fellow never encountered Honoria Glossop. She would have soon set him straight.

Finally, I came across these survival tips from the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, August 27, 1940, when the Battle of Britain was at its height. My guess is that few present-day Wodehouse collectors have thought of using his books in such a way:

A Manchester business man has been experimenting in improvised defenses. He is Mr. W. Marshall of Sale, and he is pinning his faith in Longfellow, Ethel M. Dell, and P. G. Wodehouse to defend against Nazi airmen when he is motoring in a danger zone. Mr. Marshall claims to have made the roof of his car bullet-proof and splinter-proof with a double lining of thick volumes by these and other authors. Just above his head is an extra heavy piece of "armor plating" consisting of children's encyclopedias and annuals borrowed from the family library at his home. The author of this

scheme was machine-gunned in France while serving in the motor transport section of the B.E.F. during the last war, so he knows what he is doing. He tells me that the books are held in position under the roof of his car by sections of wire mesh secured to the wooden cross beams of the roof. Mr. Marshall says: "The protection given by the books is enough to stop machine gun bullets, splinters from anti-aircraft shells, and flying debris. It is cheap and can easily be fitted to most makes of cars. I think people who motor in areas where there are frequent air raids would be well advised to adopt this scheme. If they are not required as armor, the books will come to no harm in the car anyway."

My advice is to avoid strapping your Wodehouse books under the roof of your car. You may find, however, that your Ethel M. Dell romance novels are more expendable and better suited to the purpose.



## Convention Update!

BY TOM SMITH

SMITH IN PSEATTLE, the 18th International Convention of The Wodehouse Society, is just eight months away. So stay ahead of the game! You may find that October 29, 2015, will sneak up on you like a thief in the night, as Shakespeare or one of those other brainy coves said, and arrive before you know it. You will say to yourself, "Self, did I make a reservation at the splendid Fairmont Olympic hotel?" Or, you may ask your valet if he sent in that registration thingummy with the requisite spondulicks. Well, it is not too early to do either. In fact, rooms at the Fairmont are going fast, so you'd better get on that. That registration form is pretty important, too. Our registration desk is fully staffed waiting to process those forms and checks.

Many who attend have never been to a convention before and are not sure what to expect. Here's the general rundown: Wodehouseans from around the world

will gather in Seattle to talk about Wodehouse, read Wodehouse, browse, and sluice. The registration desk will open in the Kensington Room on the Mezzanine of the Fairmont Olympic on Thursday, October 29.

There are no official activities scheduled for Thursday. However, Anglers' Rest, the convention host, has arranged some guided tours. The first tour is a trip across Puget Sound on a Washington State Ferry. Intrepid travelers will walk from the Fairmont Olympic down to Pier 52 to catch a ferry to Bainbridge Island and back. At the current rates, it costs \$8 for the round trip and \$4 for ages 6–18 and 65+. For greater flexibility, we will offer this trip both in the morning and in the afternoon.

We also have scheduled trips to the Seattle Center via the Monorail. The Seattle Center and Monorail were built for the 1962 World's Fair. The 74-acre park is now the site for the Pacific Science Center, the Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum, Chihuly Garden and Glass, and the Space Needle. For this trip, the group will leave the hotel and walk to the Monorail Station at Westlake Center, board the Monorail, and arrive at the Seattle Center. Your guide will give you a quick introduction to the Center, and then you are on your own to visit the activities there. It costs \$2.25 (\$4.50 round trip) to take the Monorail. General admission to the Science Center ranges from \$11.50 for children to \$19.50 for adults. There are IMAX films, laser shows, and frequent traveling exhibits. They have an excellent planetarium. Fees for those exhibits vary, depending on the package you buy. More information is available at [www.pacificsciencecenter.org](http://www.pacificsciencecenter.org). Tickets to Chihuly Garden and Glass range from \$12 for children to \$18 for adults. Chihuly's website is [www.chihulygardenandglass.com](http://www.chihulygardenandglass.com). Tickets for the Space Needle Observation Deck start at \$12 for children and \$19 for adults. You can also get a Space Needle and Chihuly combination ticket. Or you can eat lunch at the Sky City Restaurant in the Needle, which includes a visit to the Observation Deck. Then there is the Experience Music Project and Science Fiction Museum. Prices range from \$15 to \$25. Like the Ferry trip, we will run groups to the Seattle Center in both the morning and afternoon.

On Friday, October 30, we will repeat the tour schedules to the ferry and the Science Center. This allows you to do both of the trips and fit in other activities on your own. Weather permitting, we plan to revive the Wodehouse Cricket Experience. Given that the Convention is scheduled in Seattle during the rainy period, there is a chance we may not pull this off, but the planning committee is making the effort.

On Friday night, activities officially begin. We will have a dessert buffet and reception in the Garden Room at the Fairmont Olympic. The reception will be followed by the music of Maria Jette and Dan Chouinard. The dessert buffet requires advance registration, and there is a fee of \$40.

The centerpiece of Saturday's activities is the series of riveting talks by Wodehouse experts. The talks kick off at 9:00 AM in the Metropole Room in the Fairmont Olympic. It's still a little too early to let you in on the list of speakers, but rest assured we have good ones lined up. Some of the speakers are old favorites who have many conventions under their belts. We also have some speakers making debut performances. You will need to register for this event as well. Admission to the talks is \$35.

We realize it may be difficult for some of you to take this next bit in, but not everyone who comes to the convention wants to listen to our panel of experts expound on Wodehouse. For those misguided souls, we have arranged another little trip for Saturday afternoon. Seattleite Jennifer Psmith will take those interested on a jaunt to the Seattle Wine Outlet, where one of the city's wine experts will preside over a tasting of local wines. This trip requires advance registration and there is a \$25 fee to cover expenses. Note that if you decide to go on this outing, you will miss the afternoon talks.

Saturday's events are capped by the traditional cocktail hour and banquet. As usual, prizes will be given for various costumes. As it happens, the convention's banquet is scheduled on Halloween. Many convention attendees dress in costume, but this year we will also provide masks, which you may decorate, if you desire.

This brings us to Sunday. The highlight of Sunday's traditional brunch is a skit by the New England Thingummy Society (NEWTS), followed by fond (and tearful, as you see fit) farewells.

That can't be all, you say. And you are right. We will have the traditional rummage sale of Wodehouse memorabilia, silent and live auctions, and much, much more.

To make sure you have a place at the table, send in the registration form included in this issue of *Plum Lines*. If you misplace it, you will find the registration form on the society's website ([www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org)) at <http://www.wodehouse.org/extra/RegistrationForm.pdf>. Note that the convention organizers have also set up a website with much more information at <http://tws2015seattle.org>.

For any other questions, you can send an email to the friendly registration desk at [twsregistration@tws2015seattle.org](mailto:twsregistration@tws2015seattle.org). See you in Pseattle!

# Multum in Parvo: Writing *The P. G. Wodehouse Miscellany*

BY NORMAN MURPHY

THERE I WAS in November 2013, happily settling down to a job I knew would take months—sorting out a filing cabinet full of over forty years' worth of Wodehouse notes—when the call came. I received an email saying the History Press of Stroud, Gloucestershire, was looking for someone to write a book to be titled *The P. G. Wodehouse Miscellany*.

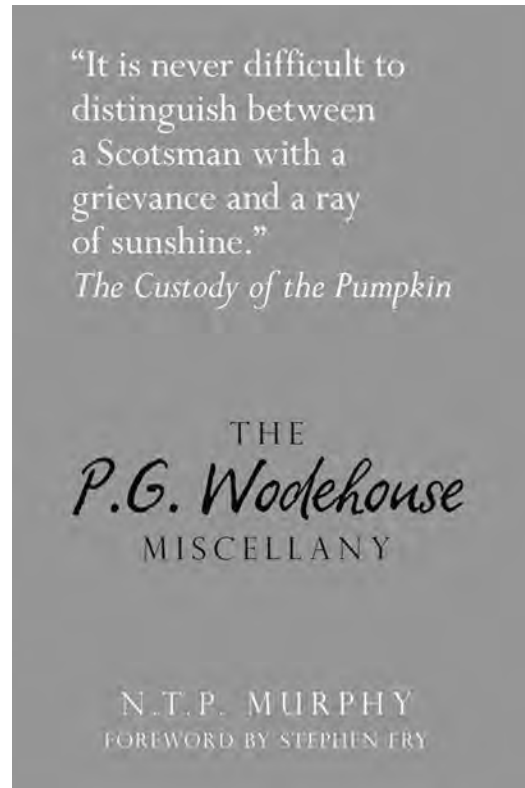
It seemed an interesting idea, so I sent them a copy of my *Wodehouse Handbook* and asked if they were interested in something along those lines. They were and they sent me a contract. The money was just about okay, but the shock was in their stipulation that the book must not exceed 25,000 words. I am not good on numbers, but that struck me as being very short. It was; it works out at sixty pages of A4-sized paper!

I realized I had a problem. Sixty pages to cover Wodehouse's long life, his 98-plus books, his theatre and film career, TV adaptations, Wodehouse societies and websites—and somehow give a flavor of his humor? I decided to write twenty pages and then review the situation. I did so and the review made me feel rather like Napoleon at Moscow: things were not going as planned. What to do now?

Then I remembered I'd been here before. My first job in the Ministry of Defence back in 1967 was to write briefs for a four-star member of the Army Board. The briefs could be about anything—the choice of a new tank, introduction of a new radio, amalgamation of two regiments, or an argument with the Air Force on some topic or another. The point was that the brief could never be longer than two sides of A4, no matter how complicated the subject. Background, aim, factors for and against, conclusions, and recommendation, all within two sides. Suffice to say, I soon learned the hard way to “write short”—very short.

I went through the twenty pages of my draft with this in mind. Adjectives? If in doubt, take them out. Adverbs? Who needs adverbs? “Executed properly”? “Done well” uses fewer letters. So the long days wore on. And since it has been made clear to me that writing “Singing in the Rain” instead of “Singin' in the Rain” is apparently as bad as burning the flag, I made sure Neil Midkiff cast his eye over it before it went off.

Looking back at it now, I'm proud of it. I believe it does encompass Wodehouse's life and 75 years of writing, and I did manage to get in three sections of “Images”—those passages we all love so much and which only Wodehouse could have written. These



include the Scotsman with the grievance, the opening sentence of *The Luck of the Bodkins*, and my current favorite, which is from *The Return of Jeeves*:

It was a confusion of ideas between him and one of the lions he was hunting in Kenya that had caused A. B. Spottsworth to make the obituary column. He thought the lion was dead, and the lion thought it wasn't.

We'll see how it goes.

*The P. G. Wodehouse Miscellany* has just been published in the U.K. and will be available in the U.S. in May. List price is £9.99/\$18.95. It will be available in bookstores and can be ordered through online retailers.

He was not a fisherman himself, but he knew all about fishermen. They became, . . . when engaged on their favorite pursuit, virtually monomaniacs. Earthquakes might occur in their immediate neighborhood, dynasties fall, and pestilence ravage the land, but they would just go on fishing.

*Money for Nothing* (1928)

## Tim Richards's *Mind the Gap*

TRAVEL WRITER Tim Richards has published a “fast-paced reality-bending adventure,” according to the publicity materials sent to us by HarperCollins Australia. It’s an ebook available through Amazon.com and other outlets for \$2.99 (ISBN 9781460704028). As Tim points out, this is not a Wodehouse-themed book, but “PGW has a respectful cameo appearance in the epilogue, set in 1941 Berlin.”

Given our relationship with Tim, we thought it OK to give *Mind the Gap* a bit of a plug. You might recall his article about his visit to Toszek (Tost) in the Spring 2012 *Plum Lines* to research Wodehouse’s wartime internment. Tim is a freelance writer from Melbourne, Australia. The novel is summarized as follows:

Darius Ibrahim is not having a good week. He’s been threatened by a knife-wielding maniac on a London train, interrogated by a mysterious warrior woman beneath the city’s streets, pursued by a military death squad in Melbourne, had his new girlfriend kidnapped and held hostage in Prague, and been captured and taken to another world. And it’s barely been three days since his life started to fall to pieces. On top of all this, he’s developed a bizarre ability that allows him to teleport in quite unusual circumstances—an ability that several deadly enemies will do anything to gain control of. In a desperate struggle involving alternate worlds, Egyptian mythology, ancient prophecy, malevolent felines, underground railway stations, and the power of dreams, can Darius long survive the arrival of his newfound power?



## PGWnet: Google and Madame Eulalie

BY NEIL MIDKIFF

*Leonard Goldstein, in a PGWnet discussion, explained how he had located a quotation attributed to Wodehouse in a recent Daily Telegraph article. “All I did was Google ‘No bad man may wear a monocle’ and it was the first citation in the results. I must say, Madame Eulalie comes through a surprising proportion of the time in inquiries like these.” Neil Midkiff responded with the following helpful hints.*

USING GOOGLE to find longer phrases works well in searching for early Wodehouse content from the Madame Eulalie website. We have the vast majority of his pre-1923 work as originally published in magazines and newspapers. But if your keyword is a single word such as “monocle,” you’ll do better with one of two options:

Using the first option, in any Google search box, enter “monocle site:madameeulalie.org”, which restricts the search to Madame Eulalie instead of the entire Web.

This method works very well for searches on common words which return a large number of hits, as the full browser window is used for search results in the ordinary way.

To use the second option, go to the home page of madameeulalie.org, use the Google Custom Search box at the top of the right sidebar, and enter “monocle.” The results are shown in batches of ten in the right sidebar, which can get a little cramped for space, and if there are over a hundred hits you can’t always get to the last ones. But it’s convenient for many searches since you don’t have to type the “site:” restriction there.

There is another advantage to visiting the Madame Eulalie home page often: the scrolling banner at the top of the page highlights our recent discoveries of new material and other additions to the site.

Either of those methods will return eleven hits for “monocle.” In this case a full Google search on “monocle Wodehouse” would not have been your best bet, as the *Vanity Fair* article was published under the nom de plume of “Pelham Grenville.”

I should mention that in addition to the corpus of early Wodehouse on Madame Eulalie, even some of the later books will return a few search hits on keywords mentioned in the annotations section of our site, which we haven’t publicized as well as perhaps we might. If you haven’t explored those notes, visit <http://madameeulalie.org/AnnotationsMenu.html>.

# Edwin Robert Adams

WE HAVE SOME very sad news to report. The oldest known member on our membership roster, Edwin Robert Adams, passed away on November 4, 2014.

Robert's daughter, Lynette Poss, sent the following statement:

No doubt, Edwin Robert Adams is dining these days with Plum at their new club, whatever that may be called. From the terrace of their club I'm sure they are able to admire many a sunset the color of underdone beef. That thought cheers me up a bit. I will have to think up a name for that club. But Dad will have to be a social member only, since he never played golf. Dad was 100 years and almost 7 months old, you may recall from last year's *Plum Lines* article about him, having celebrated his century on April 11, 2014.

Bob Adams was a member of TWS for more than twenty years. He was able to complete his collection of first-edition Wodehouse books shortly before he died, so I know that at least that part of his mission on earth was fulfilled. He will be much missed by his fellow Mottled Oysters/Jellied Eels (of which he was a founding member). His passing is lamented by his family and friends—really, everyone who knew the cheerful fellow.

Here is a photo of our family reunion which was held at my house in his honor, on January 24. We all held Wodehouse books because they were such an important part of his life.

So we might say, "The Oldest Member is dead. Long live the Oldest Member!" I know there will be someone to take on that role and responsibility. The next person in line has large shoes to fill, whoever he/she may be.



# Life Imitates Art

BY KEN CLEVINGER

MY PARENTS are Wodehousians. They read Plum's stories out loud, have his books on their shelves, and are members of TWS. That's the good news.

The sad news is that my 91-year-old father is now confined to a skilled nursing facility due to a couple of debilitating strokes.

More good news: Recently, I was in my hometown for a visit. My mother, being just 89, lives independently in the same progressive-care retirement community, very close to my father. Many of the retirees are mentally sharp, broadly interested, and widely traveled and read. I am chuffed to say their "Academy" program director, a retired university professor, had invited me to speak on "P. G. Wodehouse and Winston Churchill: Contemporaries in Different Eras." As you may imagine, however, there are other elderly stroke victim residents in the same situation as my father.

My talk had gone, if not well, at least without flung foodstuffs. I was feeling that sense of sweetness and light one gets from a welcome duty being done. As I left my father's room, an elderly wheelchair-bound lady (whom I'll call Maud) beckoned me over to her side in the common lounge. I had spoken to her before, earlier in the week. Sadly, she could not express herself in a completed sentence. Of course, she had not attended my "Academy" program. Her individual words were clear but still failed to form a completely articulated thought. She seemed frustratingly aware of her debility. But definitely she wanted to communicate something.

So I sat down and tried to be kind and patient. She seemed to recognize me as someone she thought she knew. But still no clearly expressed thought emerged. However, she drew my attention to her leg by rolling up her pant leg and revealing a badly bruised knee. It looked tender and likely to be hurting. I expressed sympathy but wanted to escape the situation gracefully. I am not a doctor and do not even play one on TV.

Then suddenly I was hit with a mental image resulting in an almost uncontrollable giggle fit. You probably have guessed the source of my mirth: Plum's "Indian Summer of an Uncle." I could hear myself, like Bertie, having to say something along the lines of: "Not spines. Knees, yes. Spines, no." Unlike Bertie, I was rescued by an attentive, caring staff member. I fear my Maud found no titled lord to rescue her. But was the genesis of "Indian Summer of an Uncle" a real, potentially embarrassing circumstance known to Plum? Or is it a case of life imitating art?

# Chapters Corner

**W**HAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? We welcome you to use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Chapter representatives, 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, please get in touch with the contact person listed.

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**Anglers' Rest**  
(Seattle and vicinity)  
Contact: Susan Collicott



**Birmingham Banjolele Band**  
(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)  
Contact: Caralyn McDaniel



**Blandings Castle Chapter**  
(Greater San Francisco Bay area)  
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe



**The Broadway Special**  
(New York City and vicinity)  
Contact: Amy Plofker



**M**ISS POSTLETHWAITE must confess, dear readers, that on December 12 she was unfortunately remiss in her secretarial duties, having left her steno pad in co-President Shreffler's vehicle. Having discovered the omission, she (a) realized that the notes were then in a garage several stories beneath Gramercy Park and (b) that to retrieve them, she would have to send co-President Shreffler back out into the dark Eve of Saint Lucy. Surely not as forbidding and frigid as the Eve of Saint Agnes, but still! She checked the cabinet drawers

of the Burman Room at The Players and decided to use the back of an actor's handy 8x10 headshot. As the club is frequented by players of all aspects, Miss Postlethwaite chose the photo of a gentleman whose dashing features and come-hither gaze called to mind David Niven. Thus the notes jotted on the back of the portrait are rather sparse, as she spent much of the evening contemplating the phiz of this matinée idol.

Still, we may extrapolate that the meeting held many charms of its own. We celebrated the approach of the holiday season by adding to the groaning board of sweets and offering a grab bag of Wodehousian trinkets, along with a leaflet of wintry songs that allowed the Special to limber up the larynxes for Luceil's Caroling Songfest on February 21. A highlight which is bound to become a Broadway Special tradition was dipping into that aforementioned grab bag and pulling out some type of Plum-related object, with the attendant requirement that one must identify said object's significance to the Master. Fortunately, many objects were patently obvious, i.e., an A-to-Z patterned box, paperback editions, a water bottle, and a packet of licorice in the shape of a Scottie dog. To cap it off in great style, Mark Anthony had donated a glamorous bottle of champers and a recipe for a May Queen cocktail, plucked by lucky Lady Evelyn Herzog.

How pleasant to recall that happy gathering in mellow December! We are now shivering, snowbound, plotting to haul all groundhogs before the local beak who'll bung 'em into the Old Bailey along with the prisoner Trotsky until the next Boat Race Night when a bucket of May Queens bring warmth in that merry month!

**Capital! Capital!**  
(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)  
Contact: Scott Daniels



**C**APCAPPERS braved the weather to meet at the end of January. Our goal was to share our favorite first pages from the Wodehousian canon. Each member came armed with at least one favorite. As we made our way through the selections, each reading seemed more charming than the one before. In a few instances, the mere recitation of the title was enough to evoke scattered chuckles. We finished just in the nick of time, as the restaurant staff entered our room to invert the chairs and place them on the tables.

## Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Herb Moskowitz



**T**reacherous driving conditions prevented most of the Chaps who were planning to attend the January meeting from reaching the welcoming doors of Cavanaugh's on Head House Square. Those who did manage to attend decided to postpone the planned reading and discussion of the "The Amazing Hat Mystery" until the March meeting. We instead engaged in a general conversation about the Master. We discussed the history of our chapter and the founding of The Wodehouse Society, Mulliner stories, "Uncle Fred Flits By," *Wodehouse Playhouse*, John Alderton and Pauline Collins, and Sherlock Holmes, and by the end we had solved all the problems of the world.

We also enjoyed good food, fine drink, and each other's company. Among the company was Dan Gespass, a transplant from Pittsburgh who found out about us on TWS's website. Welcome, Dan!

We were sad to note the passing of longtime Chapter One member Carolyn Pokrivchak. She attended each TWS convention from NYC '91 through Toronto '03, regaled our chapter meetings with highlights from her Wodehouse and black pig collections, and instilled a proper reverence for the Master in her offspring.

The next meeting will be on March 1 and the next after that is scheduled for May 17, at which session *Inquirer* reporter Jake Blumgart will be our guest.

## Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison



## The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Elaine Coppola



**A**JUNIOR BLOODSTAIN took place at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City on January 10, during the annual Baker Street Irregulars weekend. It featured another premiere performance of a Gayle Lange Puhl work. "The Riddle of the Refurbished Room" was staged (without rehearsal) with a dramatic reader

(accompanied by puppet, custom-made by Ken Vogel) for each of the characters. The plot, in a nutshell, is that Bertie and Jeeves find Aunt Agatha under the influence of a strange group of women called the Four Violettes. They enlist the genius detective Sherlock Holmes to investigate. The musical prelude and finale were provided by Karen Wilson.



*The Clients bloodstaining in NYC*

## The Den(ver) of the Secret Nine

(Denver and vicinity)

Contact: Jennifer Petkus

**T**HE DEN(VER) of the Secret Nine has little to report other than that six of the Niners discussed *Hot Water* at our January 11 meeting and it was universally hailed with no qualms or equivocations from anyone. Our next meeting is 12:30 PM on March 8 at Pints Pub in downtown Denver, when we'll discuss *French Leave* (winter seems to foster thoughts of France).

The Secret Nine does want to extend hopes of speedy recovery to member Larry, who is currently languishing in the hospital. We can only assume he has loaded his tablet with some Wodehouse to keep himself entertained.

## The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Carey Tynan



## The Flying Pigs

(Cincinnati area and elsewhere)

Contact: Susan Brokaw





**Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham**  
(Buffalo, New York, and vicinity)  
Contact: Laura Loehr

**The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society**  
(Tennessee)  
Contact: Ken Clevenger

**The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels**  
(San Antonio and South Texas)  
Contact: Lynette Poss



**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society (NEWTS)**  
(Boston and New England)  
Contact: John Fahey



**NEWTS AS A CLASS** are a comfortable lot. They like their browsing, they like their sluicing, they like the convivial joie de vivre of nottles. Noblesse oblige reigns supreme.

Your intrepid reporter is one who likes to step out now and again. Our December Holiday Nottle was once again ably hosted by Ellen Donovan and Bob Norberg at their condominium clubhouse. While preparing the nottle notice, I became inspired. This is a nottle that we look forward to with anticipation each year. Why not elevate said nottle? Why not make it a legend in the annals of nottledom? The invitation went out with these startling words: Black Tie Optional.

The day of the gathering, I made my appearance in black-tie attire. I must say there's something about the act of donning the coat and tie that elevates a chap. The tie may not be knotted just so, attention may not be made to the buttoning of the coat, but all in all it raises one up.

I stood in the clubroom surrounded by Newts dressed in festive sweaters, comfortable shoes, and the occasional shooting jacket with patched elbows. They stood there placidly munching cheese and crackers and staring at me with mild curiosity. I was starting to feel not so elevated. And then *she* made her entrance.

Stefanie Adams, aka Stiffy Byng, floated into the room resplendent *en gowne*. The world stopped. Not only did her radiant beauty dazzle us, we learned that her gown was wholly her own creation—designed and

expertly made by her own hands. It was as if a jolt of energy had been injected into the room. Conversations became more animated. The tinkling of laughter (and glasses) increased. The nottle was elevated.

A new tradition has been born.



*Resplendent Newts Stefanie Adams and John Fahey*

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



**ON MONDAY**, October 6, the Northwodes met to discuss *Cocktail Time* at Sweeney's Saloon in St. Paul. Originally scheduled for the Dale Street Room at Sweeney's, we requested a move to a quieter spot as the room was no more than the portion of the bar facing Dale Street. With a quieter room and appropriate food and drink, we could appreciate Uncle Fred's incomparable ability to spread sweetness and light despite the machinations of Cosmo Wisdom and a disappointing performance by Albert Peasemarch.

Faith Sullivan generously and rashly invited the Northwodes to a P. G. Wodehouse birthday celebration at her house on October 18. Faith and her husband Dan provided a more-than-ample spread of food and drink within the appropriate surroundings of a book-filled house. Faith reported that with luck her book about the woman who reads Wodehouse would be available for Christmas 2015.

Continuing in the spirit of the season, the Northwodes shared the burden of browsing and sluicing supplies with hosts Holly Windle and Richard Rames at their Minneapolis home on December 6 for a player-piano party. From the hundreds of piano

rolls, Richard had identified the ones with Wodehouse lyrics and several versions of “Sonny Boy.” Wine, beer, and moxie helped facilitate the singing and the consumption of the various foods (some healthful). The Steinway foot-pumped grand player piano was put through its paces, and several intrepid members took on the burden of the required pumping. Throughout the afternoon, we gathered around the piano to sing the aforementioned tunes as well as Christmas carols and other old standards. A silver cow creamer graced the center of the table and is destined to travel to our various meetings to become our mace, indicating the official and sanctioned nature of the meeting.

[Note: Kris Fowler would like to thank Special Correspondent Mike Eckman for providing these notes in Kris’s stead.]

**The Orange Plums**  
(Orange County, California)  
Contact: Lia Hansen

**W**HO WAS THAT COVE? There’s a song about the sort of chap he is, if I remember correctly it goes, “*Tum tum tum tum tumpty-tum. Ta ta tum tum tum tum tumpty-tum . . . For he is an . . .*” What is he?

An Englishman, sir, for he is an Englishman.

Yes, that’s it. We were pleased to meet this chap. Our friends from Perfecto-Zizzbaum brought along one of their chums when they visited us last. He is a university man. That is to say, he went to Cambridge. Evidently there is no other university in England worth mentioning. When asked about policemen’s helmets and boat races he was not forthcoming, but he did have a rather amusing story involving lost keys, punts, and a stolen magnet.

Regarding stories, at our December meeting we encountered a group who are devoted to stories of another genre. We were, perhaps, a bit too enthusiastic in our enjoyment of pub grub, Christmas crackers, and beverages, and the other group was undoubtedly enthusiastic in their seasonal merriment. It was inevitable that the two camps should come face to face. We discovered that they are fans of the TV series *East Enders* and know and enjoy the works of PGW. The Orange Plums know of the TV show and some of us enjoy it. Maybe it was the emotion of the season or the influence of the seasonal beverages, but we pledged to meet again. I hope we do. I’m sure they have lots of stories to tell.

A funny thing about stories: some can be told over and over again, some can be read over and over. When you find a group of like-minded people, stories can be discussed over and over. So it is with the Orange Plums. For the last two meetings, we’ve tried to get through *Joy in the Morning*. But we find there is always another line to savor, another passage to share, another question to pose. It’s so gratifying to know that although we put *Joy* aside for now, there is more of it to look forward to (with joy!) when we meet in March to discuss “The Amazing Hat Mystery.”

**The Pale Parabolites**  
(Toronto and vicinity)  
Contact: George Vanderburgh



**T**HIS SMALL ASSORTMENT of P. G. Wodehouse fanatics gathers for lunch on an irregular basis in the puffy lounge at Massey College and then ascends to the dining hall for a quiet lunch. The Robarts Library around the corner has a good assortment of Wodehouse titles if you have access to the stacks. As a retired faculty member, I have borrowing privileges of up to 100 books, six months at a time. An email from any Wodehousean tourist who happens to visit Toronto could incite us to arrange a meeting at Massey. Not much happens in the middle of a Canadian winter other than idle afternoons of whimsical reading.

**The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation**  
(Los Angeles and vicinity)  
Contact: Karen Shotting



**P**ZMPCO HAD its largest turnout ever for its December holiday meeting at La Grande Orange Cafe in Pasadena. Two members of the Orange Plums joined us, and the browsing, sluicing, and feast of reason and flow of soul were of the highest order (as was the volume level in the restaurant, unfortunately).

January’s meeting featured Stanley F. Ukridge and his great Accident Syndicate. We discussed the big, broad, flexible outlook (karma?) and a host of other topics (as usual).

In February, our focus was on the Drones Club in four short stories:

“The Purity of the Turf,” a Jeeves, Wooster, and Bingo Little story, featuring the nefarious Rupert Steggle, Harold the page boy, Mrs. Penworthy, and Prudence Baxter, among others.

“Fate,” which contains one of PGW’s most memorable quotes about Freddie Widgeon, i.e., “if all the girls Freddie Widgeon loved and lost were placed end to end . . .”

“The Amazing Hat Mystery,” which is inexplicable—it must have had something to do with the fourth dimension.

“Tried in the Furnace,” in which we learned of a well-honed knockabout cross-talk act, and of love blossoming then being extinguished forever because of a school treat and a village mothers’ annual outing—“tried in the furnace” about sums it up.

March’s fixture was “Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!”

We generally meet on the second Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM at Book Alley, 1252 East Colorado Blvd, Pasadena, California. Join our Yahoo! or Facebook Group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PZMPCo/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/373160529399825/> for more information on upcoming readings and occasional changes of schedule and venue.

### **The Pickering Motor Company**

(Detroit and vicinity)

Contact: Elliott Milstein

### **The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club**

(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)



**T**HE PITTSBURGH Millionaires Club gathered on February 8 to browse and sluice and read aloud “Came the Dawn,” which includes the famous threnody to Briggs’s Breakfast Pickles (see page 13). We’ll meet again on March 11 for another round of risibility.

### **The Plum Crazyies**

(Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and vicinity)

Contact: Betty Hooker



**O**N NOVEMBER 30, 2014, the Plum Crazyies met for afternoon tea at the home of Diane and Ed Hain. Members delighted the hosts with bountiful contributions of clotted cream and assorted baked

goods. Despite the Carlises’ donation of a bottle of Prosecco, no rolls were thrown. Special thanks to friend and tea aficionado Colette Silvestri, who prepared “Mr. Woodhouse” tea, a blend from the Jane Austen collection.

In advance of the meeting, members were sent a copy of “Jeeves Takes Charge,” a short story originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* and later in *Carry On, Jeeves*. “Jeeves Takes Charge” begins with Bertie’s first encounter with Jeeves after Bertie is “reluctantly compelled to hand the misguided blighter [Meadowes] the mitten.” Asked to “dig up another specimen,” the registry office sends Jeeves. Bertie is reeling from the previous night’s revelries, and Jeeves solidifies his new position by offering Bertie a restorative and subsequently successfully derailing Bertie’s engagement to Florence Craye.

Following tea, members viewed the video of “Jeeves Takes Charge,” the premiere episode of the British series *Jeeves and Wooster* starring Stephen Fry and Hugh Laurie. This episode is mostly based on “The Pride of the Woosters Is Wounded” and “The Hero’s Reward,” both published in *The Inimitable Jeeves*.

While not perhaps official business of the Plum Crazyies, it is noteworthy that our fearless leader, Betty Hooker, and her husband, Tom, were honored by a visit over the New Year’s holiday from Wodehouse translator extraordinaire Tamaki Morimura, her husband Susumu, daughter Ririko, and son Reijiro. No slouch himself, Susumu is a visiting scholar at Harvard University during the winter term. Tamaki has translated numerous Jeeves and Wooster novels and story collections into Japanese and has also assisted the artist who creates mangas of those stories. She does this work “on the side,” when not teaching law or raising three children with her philosopher husband. During their brief stay in southern Pennsylvania, the Morimuras visited the Amish country and Gettysburg. Despite all temptation, they wisely avoided shoo-fly pie.

On January 17, the Plum Crazyies attended a production of *Nice Work If You Can Get It* at the Hershey Theatre. The musical is based on material written by P. G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton with a score and lyrics by the Gershwins. Members assembled at Houlihan’s for lunch before the show, where they were invited to share a favorite Wodehousean quote, poem, or song.

### **The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs)**

(Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James



**The Right Honourable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney**  
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)  
Contact: Jelle Otten

ON THE AFTERNOON of Saturday, November 22, the Knights paid a visit to Huize Doorn, near the village Doorn. Huize Doorn is a manor house, purchased by the last German emperor, Wilhelm II, to be his residence-in-exile following his abdication of the German throne after World War I. Emperor Wilhelm II was Queen Victoria's eldest grandson. This resulted in the emperor's interest in English literature and specifically P. G. Wodehouse.



*Huize Doorn in its original incarnation*

About two years ago Vikas Sonak and Jelle Otten discovered that five books written by Wodehouse were still standing on the bookshelves in Huize Doorn (*Plum Lines*, Spring 2013). Unfortunately, the Knights could not view the books during this visit.



*The modern Huize Doorn*

Later that evening, the Knights went to Kasteel Stapelen (Stapelen Castle), near the village of Boxtel, about fifteen miles northwest of Eindhoven. Stapelen Castle was built in 1293. In 2009 the castle was completely renovated. Local historian Peter Glas told us how the castle is related to English history. On September 15,

1794, a certain Lt. Col. Arthur Wellesley made his debut in a war action, during the War of the First Coalition (1792–1797). He was defeated by the French army. Why is this significant? Because this particular Wellesley later became the first Duke of Wellington, the famous victor in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

During dinner, Gera Wemmenhove sang the aria “Che fero momento,” from Gluck’s opera *Orfeo and Euridice*. Jannes Koster presented a quiz of Wodehouse quotations. Peter Nieuwenhuizen brought excerpts from Wodehouse’s novels. In the meantime, Anatole had prepared the most excellent dishes imaginable.



*Wilhelm II's bookshelf at Huize Doorn*

The farewell after the dinner was cheery as we received a goodbye present in the form of a gift booklet with the story “The Man, the Maid, and the Miasma” from *The Man Upstairs*, in Dutch translation.

The next meetings of the Knights are scheduled for June 6 and October 17 at 1 PM. We will meet at Mulliner's Wijnlokaal, Lijnbaansgracht 266-267, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

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



That his legs should have become temporarily unscrewed at the joints was a phenomenon which he had been able to bear with fortitude. That his head should be feeling as if a good many bees had decided to use it as a hive was unpleasant, but not unbearably so. But that his brain should have gone off its castors and be causing him to see visions was the end of all things.

“The Story of William” (1927)

# Stu Shiffman

STU SHIFFMAN, one of the members of the Anglers' Rest chapter in Seattle, died on November 26, 2014.

In addition to being a member of The Wodehouse Society and an attendee at the convention in Dearborn in 2011, Stu was a highly accomplished "fan artist," and was a Hugo Award nominee for Best Fan Artist fourteen times, winning the award in 1990. [Note: "Fan art" traditionally describes original artwork related to science fiction or fantasy and appearing in fanzines. This is accurate for Stu's work. A more modern definition relates to artworks that are derived from a character or other aspect of a work of fiction.]

Stu was born on February 12, 1954, in New York. He became active in fandom in the 1970s, and throughout his long career he contributed artwork to fanzines and convention publications. He won the Rotsler Award for life achievement as a fan artist in 2010.

Stu was also a devotee of "alternate history," a genre of fiction in which the stories relate historical events, but with different outcomes than in real history. He was a guest of honor at various conventions in his field. Stu also wrote some short fiction.

According to some of Stu's compatriots in fan artistry, he was always fascinated by science-fiction traditions and he loved to incorporate them in unexpected settings that might involve anything from cartoons of talking animals to intricately rendered Egyptian tomb art and hieroglyphs. He also had a special interest in drawing literary characters like Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Burroughs's John Carter.

Stu also wrote frequently and fascinatingly for *Plum Lines*, usually illustrating his articles with apt drawings. The editorial introduction to his first article, "Wodehouse and the Gangsters" (*Plum Lines*, Autumn 2000), noted that Stu described himself as a "consulting cartoonist." His ninth article, "Lord Ickenham and Time Travel," appeared in the Winter 2011 issue.

The Wodehouse Society will miss the talented Mr. Shiffman very much, and we'll certainly raise a toast to Stu, and other members who have passed since our last convention, in Seattle in October. He is survived by his longtime partner and wife, Andi Shechter.



Stu Shiffman

# Darkling (A Threnody)

BY L. BASSINGTON MULLINER

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(The dramatic, musical comedy, and motion picture rights of this Threnody are strictly reserved. Applications for these should be made to the author.)

Black branches,  
Like a corpse's withered hands,  
Waving against the blacker sky:  
Chill winds,  
Bitter like the tang of half-remembered sins;  
Bats wheeling mournfully through the air,  
And on the ground  
Worms,  
Toads,  
Frogs,  
And nameless creeping things;  
And all around  
Desolation,  
Doom,  
Dyspepsia,  
And Despair.  
I am a bat that wheels through the air of Fate;  
I am a worm that wriggles in a swamp of  
Disillusionment;  
I am a despairing toad;  
I have got dyspepsia.

## A Few Quick Ones

BONNIE JONES, a member of the Chicago Accident Syndicate chapter, sent along a trio of Quick Ones of interest. First, on the January 9 *Late Show with David Letterman*, Jeff Goldblum compared the plot of his new movie *Mortdecai* to a P. G. Wodehouse story. [We're glad to hear that the versatile Jeff is so well read!] Then, in Dorothy Sayers's 1927 Lord Peter Wimsey novel *Unnatural Death*, Bonnie found this quote: "Lord Peter paused, in the very act of ringing the bell. His jaw slackened, giving his long, narrow face a faintly foolish and hesitant look, reminiscent of the heroes of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse." Finally, in the 1976 movie *Murder by Death*, the British detective Dick Charleston, played by David Niven [why are we not surprised?], arrives at the mansion and calls the butler Jeeves. The butler, played by Alec Guinness, corrects him, giving his name as Bensonmum. [We're sure that Mr. Guinness could have done a great turn as Jeeves, also!]

# The Bohemians of the *Vanity*

BY DAVID McDONOUGH

**V**ANITY FAIR has released a volume entitled *Bohemians, Bootleggers, Flappers & Swells: The Best of Early Vanity Fair*. Edited by current *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter, the volume includes pieces by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, Stephen Leacock, Noel Coward, Jean Cocteau, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, and many others.

The very first essay in the book is “The Physical Culture Peril” by Wodehouse, from May 1914. It is a slight, humorous piece, well-written of course, but something that could just as easily have been done by Benchley or Frank Sullivan a few years later. It does contain the prescient lines “Man is by nature so irregular that, if he takes a cold bath every day or keeps a diary every day or does physical exercises every day, he is sure to be too proud of himself to keep quiet about it.” Facebook, anyone?

The brief bio at the back of the book mentions that Wodehouse was so prolific that he frequently had several pieces in the same issue of *Vanity Fair*, and so resorted to nom de plumes such as C. P. West (for Central Park), P. Brooke-Haven (after the Long Island town), and Pelham Grenville. Doubtless fooling nobody.

## Letter to the . . . Treasurer

**K**RIS FOWLER received a note with a membership renewal that is worth sharing for the joy of it. It arrived in December from John [“No damned computer!”] Koenig, Jr. John says: “I greatly enjoy *Plum Lines*. I own about sixty Wodehouse books, and I’ve been a reader of Wodehouse since the age of fourteen when I discovered him in the Philadelphia public library. I am 98 now and read via my great ‘Reading Machine’ from the dear old V.A. I go along, like Bertie Wooster, dodging life’s banana peels. Cheers!”

It is possible that, after the sad passing of Edwin Robert Adams (p. 6), John is the current oldest member on the society’s membership rolls. For the moment, until we hear otherwise from our members, we will make that assumption and bestow the title on John.

Wodehouse lives on, and as long as our little society carries the torch, we can guarantee as much. As Lynette Poss said in the article (p. 6) about her father, Bob Adams, “The Oldest Member is Dead; long live the Oldest Member!”

# Plum and Crosswords

BY NEIL MIDKIFF

**I**PICKED UP Alan Connor’s *The Crossword Century* (Gotham Books, 2014) from the library recently and was quite pleased to find an entire chapter titled “Plum,” about crossword puzzles in Wodehouse.

Connor cites Plum both for his recognition of the social importance of the crossword fad in the Twenties and Thirties and for being an avid solver himself.

The cases of George Mulliner and Susan Blake in “The Truth about George” and Sir Buckstone and Lady Abbott in *Summer Moonshine* are, of course, mentioned, but Connor goes so far as to cite what he claims is the first mention of crosswords, in passing, in the story “High Stakes” (1925), in which Bradbury Fisher gets onto the Sing-Sing prison crossword team. (See *The Heart of a Goof* or *The Golf Omnibus* for the story.)

This may well be true; at least the Madame Eulalie search engine doesn’t find “crossword” in any of the pre-1923 stories. Indeed, the crossword fad didn’t break out of a single New York newspaper until Simon and Schuster (just getting started in publishing) put out the first books of crossword puzzles in 1924, which were wildly successful beyond anyone’s dreams.

There’s a puzzling reference to Mervyn Mulliner in *Hot Water*, so apparently Connor’s research notes got scrambled at some point.

Connor quotes Edward Cazalet as saying, “When [Plum] got *The Times*, he could do the crossword instantly, filling the answers in as if he was writing a letter.” But the author claims that Wodehouse preferred the twenties-style straight definition clues to the more elaborate cryptic puzzle wordplay that emerged in the 1930s. He quotes from a 1945 letter to Denis Mackail asking for an explanation of a particularly cryptic clue, and from another letter in the same year, saying that he has given up the *Times* puzzles, feeling humiliated that he can only fill in about three words a day.

Wodehouse had characters in later books who continued to reminisce about the good old days of the Sun God Ra and Large Australian Bird Emu.

Perhaps the best bit from Connor is this:

It’s no surprise that Plum, as Wodehouse is fondly known, adored crosswords—like his stories, they consist of language pared down to an elegant minimum and assembled, jigsaw-like, to a symmetric whole, all to no higher purpose than whiling away some time and raising a few smiles.

# Review of *Top Hole!*

BY KAREN SHOTTING



ON NOVEMBER 15, 2014, Gerald Dickens, a great-great grandson of Charles Dickens, performed *Top Hole!*, based on four of Wodehouse's golf stories: "The Coming of Gowf," "Ordeal by Golf," "The Salvation of George Mackintosh," and "The Letter of the Law." The show was presented as part of the Riverside Dickens Festival. Mr. Dickens told me that he had consulted with Tony Ring when he was putting the thing together, and mentioned how helpful and informative Tony had been (naturally).

The performance was at the Oak Quarry Golf Club in Riverside, California, and was billed as the U.S. premiere, so I was wondering if he had performed it in England. If perchance it plays in your fair city, I recommend that you try to see it.



*Gerald Dickens (center) and other Top Hole! chappies*

He is very faithful to the text, and his portrayal of Alexander Patterson's ritualistic preparations before each swing (a hilarious description of which can be found in "Ordeal by Golf") as well as the First Grave Digger's (Joseph Poskitt's) hammer throwing (see "The Letter of the Law") were absolutely masterful. He was dressed in plus fours and had minimal props: three books (one being Wadsworth Hemmingway's essential tool, a rule book), four stools, and a few antique wood-shafted golf clubs. One of these was, of course, a niblick—because if one was to kill George Mackintosh,

it was unquestionably a niblick shot. (Funny, I had never thought about the name "Wadsworth Hemmingway" until I heard him say it.)

Because this was a Dickens group, most folks attended in Victorian dress, although there were a few in proper golf attire. Queen Victoria herself attended, along with the Prince Consort, Albert, even though she had long been dead by the time the stories were written. But what's an anachronism or two among friends? There were some pretty magnificent costumes (or "impressions," as I believe is the correct term), and I told them they should all come to the Pseattle convention.

In the photo on the left, Gerald Dickens is the gentleman with the beard; the man holding the golf bag is the owner of the vintage clubs, and, of course, you recognize Queen Elizabeth II's great-great grandmother in the photo below (smiling and wearing bright colors because Prince Albert was still alive).



*Queen Victoria was delighted by the proceedings.*

## *Jeeves Intervenes*

IF YOU LIVE in or near Seattle—or if you are planning a trip there in advance of our convention this October—there is good news. Taproot Theatre will be staging a production of Margaret Raether's play *Jeeves Intervenes* from May 13 to June 13. Adapted from the short story "Jeeves and the Hardboiled Egg," this play has enjoyed several successful stagings all over the country. For further information about *Jeeves Intervenes* and to purchase tickets, go to <http://taproottheatre.org/jeeves-intervenes/>.

# Convention Ho!

*Tom Smith sent along this discussion of the upcoming convention from the perspective of two of our favorite Wodehouse characters. Enjoy, register, attend, enjoy!*

I NEEDED Jeeves's unparalleled mental faculties for a few moments, and he shimmered in right on cue. I launched the first volley.

"Jeeves, I have some questions about this Psmith in Pseattle wheeze that Aunt Dahlia says I must attend."

"The 18th International Convention of The Wodehouse Society, sir? I will endeavor to give satisfaction."

"First, what's with the 'P' and the 'P'?"

"Well, sir, Rupert Psmith, a character created by P. G. Wodehouse, decided to add an initial silent 'P' to his surname in order to stand out from other people who shared the name 'Smith.'"

"I see, Jeeves. I know all about 'Comrade' Psmith, but what about the 'P' in Seattle? Certainly there are no other Seattles that Seattle must set itself apart from. Or at least there are bally few Seattles."

"It seems that one of the organizers of the convention rather fancies himself a wit. By beginning Seattle with a silent P, it may remind Wodehouseans of Mr. Psmith."

"But Psmith never went to Pseattle, did he Jeeves? Pardon me, I mean Seattle."

"No, sir. Not to my knowledge. I believe he only made it as far as New York City."

"Let's put that aside for the mo., shall we, Jeeves. I think I shall wear my Harris Tweed suit in Seattle."

I expected Jeeves to lift an eyebrow at that, but as Dickens, or one of those brainy coves, said, "still waters run deep."

"Ordinarily, I would object to Harris Tweed in the city, sir, but Seattle is not London and standards of dress are, shall we say, less formal in the former."

"Really, Jeeves? Do say more."

"It is not uncommon, sir, to see people at the opera or symphony dressed as if they had just come from the garden or a mountain trail."

"I say. So it's as bad as that?"

"I am given to understand that it may be worse. Some people, so I am told, actually wear socks with their sandals. Many wear short trousers year-round."

"Egad! Year-round? The weather must be clement in Seattle. Bicky Bickersteth was telling us at the Drones Club that it rains a lot in Seattle. There seems to be something amiss, Jeeves."

"Due to its location on Puget Sound, nestled between two mountain ranges, the weather is usually mild, sir."

But October is the beginning of the rainy season, so I've taken the liberty of packing your mackintosh and an umbrella."

"But I thought Seattleites don't carry umbrellas. We want to blend in with the local populace, you know."

"That's not strictly true, sir. It seems that Seattle leads the United States in sales of umbrellas. I am told that the reason many of the natives do not carry umbrellas is that they have misplaced them."

"Well, we shan't be needing sunglasses, then."

"Oddly, enough, sir, Seattle also leads the United States in sunglass sales."

"Why is that, Jeeves?"

"If I were to hazard a guess, sir, it is because even during the rainy season, there are often what are referred to as 'sun breaks.' The bright sun in contrast to the regular gray skies causes a degree of discomfort. It seems that Seattleites also misplace their sunglasses between sunbreaks."

"Seems like an umbrella and sunglass shop would be a real winner in Seattle."

"There may be something in that, sir."

"Okay, Jeeves. So we have a tweed suit, umbrella, and sunglasses bunged into the grip. Bicky was telling me that lumberjack shirts and denim trousers are all the rage in Seattle."

"You are not suggesting . . ."

"No, Jeeves. I can tell by that arched eyebrow that even if I packed such clothing myself, I would not find it in my bags once we arrived."

"It is possible that it could become misplaced, sir."

While the Wooster pride took a bit of a hit from this zinger, I've found that it's best to let Jeeves have his way in these matters.

"Well, then. And what travel arrangements have you made? Sea voyage through the Panama Canal?"

"No, sir. We can fly to SeaTac International Airport from Heathrow. Several major carriers have direct flights, including Virgin Atlantic and British Airways."

"Very good, Jeeves. How do we get from SeaTac to our hotel?"

"I have arranged a private car. However, there is an excellent light rail train that leaves the airport every fifteen minutes and arrives just one block from our lodgings at the Fairmont Olympic Hotel downtown in just under 45 minutes. There is also a downtown hotel shuttle bus as well as taxis."

"Tell me, Jeeves, this Fairmont. Is it the goods?"

"As you say, sir. It is one of the finest hotels in Seattle. Some say *the* finest."

"So you won't find men in lumberjack shirts and denim trousers infesting the Bar Parlor, then, Jeeves?"



"No, sir. While there is not a dress code at the Fairmont, the standard of dress in the hotel seems to be a bit higher than in the rest of the city."

"That's good to know, Jeeves. Bicky tells me there is a Starbucks on every street corner. Is that true?"

"While there are numerous outlets of that establishment, sir, it is an exaggeration to say that they are on every corner. I believe there are competing coffee establishments around the city as well."

"I say, is there one near our hotel? I was hoping to try a Starbucks coffee."

"There is a Starbucks just across the street. We are also very near the original Starbucks in the Pike Street Public Market."

"Tell me about this Public Market, Jeeves."

"It is the largest farmers market in Washington and it is open year-round."



"Lots of vegetables on offer, then, Jeeves?"

"Yes, sir, but you will find many other things. There are several fine used-book stores and clothing stores. Many interesting handcrafts are available. There is a wide assortment of restaurants and music establishments. And there is the famous fish market."

"Fish market?"

"Yes, sir. Seattle is quite famous for its fresh seafood. At the center of the Public Market, you will find the fish market. Employees are known to entertain the public by tossing fresh fish across the Market."



"I say, Jeeves. I don't think Rupert Psmith would enjoy that."

"I think not, sir. Given his family connection to that industry, he has developed something of an aversion to fish markets."

"That may not be the thing for Psmith, but bung that down on the list of things to do while we are there."

"Yes, sir."

"And then there's that Space Needle thingy."

"Yes, sir. At 605 feet it offers quite a view of Seattle, the Puget Sound, and the Olympic Mountains."

"Splendid. Make a note of that, too. What about the convention itself, Jeeves? Is there browsing and sluicing and throwing of bread rolls?"

"If reports from previous conventions hold true, the organizers will ensure that libations and provender are readily available. Unfortunately, owing to some unpleasantness at a prior convention, the throwing of bread rolls has been banned by the authorities."

"So, then, to recap: browsing, yes; sluicing, yes; tossing of bread rolls, no."

"Precisely, sir."

"I understand that there will be lectures, Jeeves. I'm not so keen on lectures."

"When I was at the Junior Ganymede Club the other day, I noticed someone had listed the speakers for the event. I am sworn to secrecy, but I assure you there are some quite interesting speakers lined up."

"No Aubrey Upjohns?"

"No, sir."

"No Fink-Nottles, certainly?"

"No, sir."

"Just give me one name, Jeeves."

"I am not at liberty to divulge any names at the present."

"Rules of the guild, what, Jeeves?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, fill out that registration document, toss it in the post, make our hotel reservations, and pack our bags. I'm as excited about this Psmith in Pseattle as a man who has something to be excited about."

"Yes, sir. I have already made our arrangements."

"You are a wonder, Jeeves. Go ahead and throw out that lumberjack shirt."

"Thank you, sir. I have already taken the liberty of sending it to Mr. Ralston McTodd, the Canadian poet."



# Something Fresh: The Writer's Craft

BY MARK REBER

*Mark gave this talk at a 2014 meeting of Chapter One in Philadelphia. Members of the chapter so appreciated his paper that we offer it (abridged) to the entire society. We've taken out the plot recap that Mark provided for those less familiar with the story, and have left his other sections for you.*

IN THIS TALK, I want to discuss aspects of *Something Fresh* that illustrate how Wodehouse, by 1915, had already mastered his craft. In this version adapted for *Plum Lines*, I'll assume you know the plot, and we'll get directly to a discussion of the narrator and characters. In regard to the plot, suffice it to say that this is an aspect of Wodehouse's craft that is on clear display in this relatively early novel. It is deftly organized into three classical stages or acts. Wodehouse makes skillful use of plot devices from pulp fiction and drawing-room farces. Early events lead smoothly to later events. All the plot threads are neatly tied up at the end. Wodehouse was a master at that. There are no loose ends, and the action moves along at a satisfying pace, with time for delightful side stories.

## The Narrator

I'D LIKE FIRST to discuss the narrator with regard to Wodehouse's craft. The voice of the narrator in *Something Fresh* is quite distinctive, although not as distinctive as, say, Bertie Wooster's or Mr. Mulliner's. This narrator is, of course, not an identified character. But he has some qualities that certainly make him seem like a Wodehouse character. He presents himself at times as a novelist, at other times as a historian. In both roles, he clearly wants the reader to understand how difficult and unpleasant it is for him to have to report certain facts and events. At the beginning of section 4 of chapter 3, he describes himself as a novelist, saying that other members of his profession are now preferring to write motion-picture scenarios. This would be infinitely more simple and pleasant, he says:

If this narrative, for instance, were a film-drama, the operator at this point would flash on the screen the words: MR. PETERS DISCOVERS THE LOSS OF THE SCARAB, and for a brief moment the audience would see an interior set, in which a little angry man with a sharp face and starting eyes would register first, Discovery; next, Dismay. The whole thing would be over

in an instant. The printed word demands far greater elaboration.

A few paragraphs later, having just described Mr. Peters yelling at Aline in his rage over the missing scarab, the narrator says: "You see now why we prefer writing motion-picture scenarii. It is painful to a refined and sensitive young novelist to set down such a scene between father and child."

But in the first section of chapter 4, the narrator describes himself as the "official historian." Mr. Peters, about to hire Ashe to retrieve the scarab, begins to tell him the tale of its theft. The narrator comments:

Shakespeare and Pope have both emphasized the tediousness of a twice-told tale; the Episode of the Stolen Scarab need not be repeated at this point, though it must be admitted that Mr. Peters's version of it differed considerably from the calm, dispassionate description the author, in his capacity of official historian, has given earlier in the story.

It is almost as though the narrator is a nonfiction reporter and has played no role in the creation of the events he describes.

Another feature of the narrator is his intent to present himself as someone in the know, wiser—and considerably older—than his twenty-something characters. Remember: Wodehouse himself was only 32 when he wrote *Something Fresh*. Early in chapter 5, the narrator launches into a speech on the "modern young man" and how his lack of inquisitiveness makes him unfit for adventure. He contrasts Ashe favorably with other modern young men in this respect. But a few pages later he is critical of Ashe's lack of sympathy for poor Beach, who complains to Ashe about his physical ailments, telling him, "I suffer from my feet."

It is the flaw in the character of many excessively healthy young men that, though kind-hearted enough in most respects, they listen with a regrettable feeling of impatience to the confessions of those less happily situated as regards the ills of the flesh.

There is a hint of something all-knowing and superior in this remark. This attitude is also evident in a later

passage about George Emerson, whom the narrator has referred to several times as a superman. The narrator describes George's efforts to get Aline to marry him:

The trouble with these supermen is that they lack reticence. They do not know how to omit. They expand their chests and whoop. And a girl, even the mildest and sweetest of girls—even a girl like Aline Peters—cannot help resenting the note of triumph. But supermen despise tact.

One feature of this narrator that contrasts with these others is his nonjudgmental and detailed presentation of characters' thoughts and feelings, as they occur, moment by moment. This is most evident in scenes with the young couples, where long paragraphs describing their reactions to each other sometimes substitute for dialogue. At the beginning of chapter 5, when Ashe and Joan are sitting together on the train to Market Blandings, Ashe is initially feeling good:

Yes; he was happy. The rattle of the train shaped itself into a lively march. He told himself that he had found the right occupation for a young man in the Spring.

Joan's feelings are different, but complicated:

She, like Ashe, was contemplating the immediate future, but, unlike him, was not doing so with much pleasure. She was regretting heartily that she had not resisted the temptation to uplift this young man, and wishing that she had left him to wallow in the slothful peace in which she had found him. . . . [But] their eyes met and there was nothing for it but to talk; so she tucked away her hostility in a corner of her mind, where she could find it again when she wanted it, and prepared for the time being to be friendly.

Meanwhile, Ashe is reacting to her:

Only a few minutes back, on the platform of Paddington Station, he had sensed a coldness, a certain hostility—so different from her pleasant friendliness at their first meeting. She had returned now to her earlier manner and he was surprised at the difference it made. He felt somehow younger, more alive.

They engage in several pages of lively dialogue. Joan starts to have "a distinct feeling of friendship"

toward Ashe, but then notices that her descriptions of backstairs etiquette are unnerving him and wants to take advantage of this. She makes the suggestion that he get off at the next station and return to London. Ashe reacts silently:

He was feeling hurt and angry. Her sudden coldness, following on the friendliness with which she had talked so long, puzzled and infuriated him. He felt as though he had been snubbed, and for no reason. . . . A rebellious spirit took possession of him. He didn't care! Let her be cold and distant. He would show her that she had no monopoly of those qualities. He would not speak to her until she spoke to him; and when she spoke to him he would freeze her with his courteous but bleakly aloof indifference.

We can only be impressed that Wodehouse has given us a narrator who can present this kind of interactive inner life of two characters. It gives them a humanity that goes beyond the norm. This works even for a modern reader who is more accustomed to inferring characters' thoughts and feelings from dialogue and from descriptions of characters' physical gestures.

### Characters

*SOMETHING FRESH* is the first Blandings novel, to be followed—if one includes the unfinished *Sunset at Blandings*—by ten more novels and nine short stories. We should therefore mention the characters who will continue to play important roles in the saga and how they are presented here.

In this book we meet four people we will encounter again. Most prominent is Lord Emsworth, and he is delightfully depicted as we will always see him, as the "potty" absentminded peer with little interest in the running of the estate or any other practical matter (except, in this book, a practical investment in Freddie's marrying a rich American). He is a collector here, but a somewhat indifferent one. And I don't think we will ever get to see his museum again. We have to wait for later installments of the saga for the Empress, the prize pumpkin, various pig men, Angus McAllister, and Lord Emsworth's rival, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe.

Beach is vividly presented in *Something Fresh* in his stiffness and formality. We learn a lot here about his reign in the servants' world behind the green baize door and about his ailments. In some ways, he is a more rounded character in this novel, but he is definitely the Beach we will come to know well.

Rupert Baxter is presented here as he is in later books. He is efficient, indefatigable, and resented by the domestic staff. Unlike in later Blandings stories, he is well regarded by Lord Emsworth here. Baxter's true reforming zeal will emerge in later books when he has Lady Constance Keeble as an ally and prompter.

The Hon. Freddie Threepwood is also the same clueless gambler and thriller enthusiast who appears in later stories. In the next Blandings novel, *Leave It to Psmith*, Freddie will again be involved in an attempt to steal a valued object from a relative at Blandings. Freddie will appear at times in future installments, at least until his marriage, after which he will become a zealous salesman of dog biscuits.

At the end, we'll stick with the master to give us the proper summary: "Lord Emsworth sat and smoked, and sipped and smoked again, at peace with all the world. His mind was as nearly a blank as it is possible for the human mind to be."

As he beheld her, Lancelot's heart leaped like a young gherkin in the boiling-vat. In her face . . . was concentrated all the beauty of all the ages. Confronted with this girl, Cleopatra would have looked like Nellie Wallace, and Helen of Troy might have been her plain sister.  
"Came the Dawn" (1927)

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