



Plum Lines

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WCY + 7

Queen Mother unveils the blue plaque

The August *Plum Lines* reported the unveiling of a blue plaque by the Queen Mother at Plum's former residence in London on June 3, 1988. The Queen Mother made the following remarks on that occasion.

I am particularly pleased to have been invited to unveil this plaque as for many years I have been an ardent reader of P.G. Wodehouse. Indeed, I am proud to say that his very first book *The Pothunters* was dedicated to members of my family.

Sir Pelham Wodehouse succeeded in the great ambition of so many novelists: not only has he brought new words and expressions into the English language but he has also created characters whose names have become household words - Jeeves and Bertie, Lord Emsworth and his prize pig, the Empress of Blandings, and even Aunt Agatha to name but a few, live on as immortal characters.

Nevertheless I think that Wodehouse's greatest gift is that fifty or sixty years after many of his books were written they still make us all laugh, and I am sure that generations to come will continue to laugh at them just as much as we have done. What an encouraging thought for the future!

P.G. Wodehouse lived in this house from 1927 until 1934, and I am delighted to unveil the plaque which now records this.

Mr. Edward Cazelet, Lady Wodehouse's grandson, opened the ceremony with the following statement.

Your Majesty, my Lords, ladies and gentlemen, may I say how deeply honoured we all are as devoted Wodehouse fans that Your Majesty should have seen fit to accept our invitation to come to unveil this plaque on the old Wodehouse home.

Plum would have been so surprised and so deeply touched that this ceremony should be taking place. He was always somewhat in awe of important occasions. I like to think of him, had he been alive today, peeping down at us from a second floor window, perhaps making a chink between the curtains in order to see what was going on.

I remember, some years ago, Your Majesty paying Plum a compliment which I know he would have valued more than any other. Your Majesty said that after a long and busy day there was no better way of ensuring a good night's sleep than by reading a Wodehouse novel before turning in. This meant that one passed into that happy and tranquil world of Wodehouse and one would go to sleep with a smile across the face.

May I on behalf of all of us and in particular on behalf of all Plum's family thank Your Majesty for coming here. May I now ask Your Majesty to unveil the plaque.

Continued on page 2.

The Peke followed him. It appeared to have no legs, but to move by faith alone.
"Goodbye to All Cats "

After the unveiling, at a small private luncheon in the house, several speakers recalled personal experiences related to Plum. A few excerpts follow.

Mr. Frank Muir introduced the speakers and said that as Plum had always hated long speeches, all speakers were to be limited to two minutes - and even by now, if Plum had been present, he would probably have been inching his way along the wall toward the door. Mr. Muir spoke movingly about the occasion when he visited PGW at Remsenberg and sat buried under a hundredweight and a half of rescued stray dog.

Sir Nicholson Henderson said that PGW's contribution to Anglo-American relations was immense. Millions of Americans read him and therefore expected British diplomats to behave like Bertie Wooster, which he, when he was in Washington, was able to manage. But the Foreign Office expected greater wisdom and less wetness, so one had to aspire to a mixture of Jeeves and Wooster in order to succeed.

Mr. William Douglas-Home quoted his favorite passage from Wodehouse:

It was a beautiful summer morning. She went out of the house into the garden and approached her father.

"What are you doing, Daddy?" she asked.

"Painting," he replied, for there were no secrets between them.

Mr. Douglas-Home offered a fiver to anyone - including Her Majesty - who was able to establish the source of this passage. Mr. Richard Osborne won the fiver by quoting from *Barrie's Dear Brutus*.

Lady Donaldson recalled visting the house when the Wodehouses lived there. She spoke about PGW's shyness and intense dislike of parties. She and her father, Frederick Lonsdale, were invited to a smart party at the Wodehouses. The front door was opened, not by the butler, but by Wodehouse himself. "Don't come in," he said, "You'll hate it."

I'm indebted to Richard Osborne for the material used in this account. - OM

A Christmas Sonnet

Amidst December's chill, or rain, or freeze
 We sought the Angler's Rest, where holly shone
 By firelight, and two brave Christmas trees
 Stood bright in corners whence the light had flown.
 And there, hot Scotch and lemon at his side,
 Sat Mr. Mulliner - his tales of yore
 We'd heard, and now no longer could abide:
 If you've heard one, you've heard them all before.
 We ordered Bitter, Bass, a Gin-and It,
 And slunk into one corner, next the tree.
 And Mr. Mulliner cared not one whit,
 But 'gan a talk about a nephew he
 Had told a hundred times before - aye, there's the rub!
 We grabbed our rods and drove him from the pub!

Charles E. Gould, Jr.



Convention phase two is in Kalamazoo

Our 1989 International Convention of The Wodehouse Society will be held in two locations. Phase One will be held at Dulwich College, London; Pauline Blanc is chairing the planning committee for Phase One. Phase Two will be held at Kalamazoo, Michigan; James Thorne chairs the Kalamazoo planning committee. Dates and other information will be announced.

Bill Blood, President

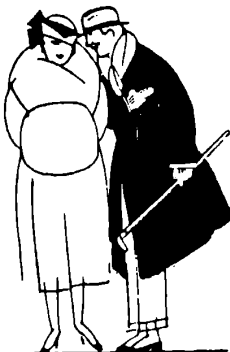
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Jim Thorne in Kalamazoo tells me that his committee needs information from us to decide whether to hold the convention in August or October. August is hot in Kalamazoo, but many academic people would be free to attend. October is cooler and the convention could be held close to Plum's birthday, but some academic people could not attend easily. Jim expects the convention to run from a Friday evening to the following Sunday morning. *If you are thinking of attending the convention in Kalamazoo*, will you please let Jim know whether you would be more likely to attend in August or October. This is neither a commitment to attend nor to attend at a particular time. It's just an expression of preference.

If you would like to contribute to the program, his committee will be glad to consider your ideas.

San Francisco chapter elects absentee president

The reins of power have passed into new hands in our San Francisco chapter. Carl Wells is a new father and needs relief from presidential duties. Carl's presidency was memorable for the wonderful San Francisco convention he organized. At our recent October 15 birthday meeting, Carl remarked feelingly that it had been three years since he missed a meeting and was elected president. We elected Tom Wainwright our new president. Tom was not present at the meeting. There's a moral in there somewhere.



A few quick ones

Our supplement in this issue describes the adventures, intellectual and physical, of Ms. Victoria McClure in writing her Master's thesis on Wodehouse. In addition to the signal honor of membership in The Wodehouse Society, she has a B.A. in English (1984) and an M.A. in English (1985), both from Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She is presently a lecturer in English at the same university, and is working on an M.A. in Classical Humanities.

How many of us set up library exhibits or other public displays for Plum's birthday in October? I know that Charles Bishop, Pauline Blanc, and Florence Cunningham prepared exhibits, and I hope many another member of our dauntless band did the same. (Charles once again appealed to the baser appetites by offering tea.) We're carrying out one of the stated purposes of our Society when we do this: "The Society strives to keep the literary legacy bequeathed by Plum fresh in the public mind. It encourages young readers to read, confirmed readers to continue reading...and libraries to lend the works of this master of gentle satire and sparkling humor." Besides, I hear that librarians welcome this participation by the public.

The front page of *The Daily Telegraph* of London, October 5, carried a large photograph of a very happy young man, a gold medal hanging from a ribbon around his neck, borne aloft on the shoulders of equally happy boys. The caption reads, "Pupils of Dulwich College welcome home Martin Grimley, physical education teacher at the school, who was one of the gold medal-winning British hockey players at the Olympic Games." Congratulations! Plum would be proud and pleased.

Nancie Burkett, who has faithfully provided address labels every three months and membership lists every year, has turned the job over to our treasurer, Katy Kilgore. This change simplifies Katy's work and mine, and relieves Nancie of work that could not have been really thrilling. Thank you, Nancie, for a job well done.

Katy assures me that the computer kink that put our last names first on the current address labels will be straightened out by next issue.

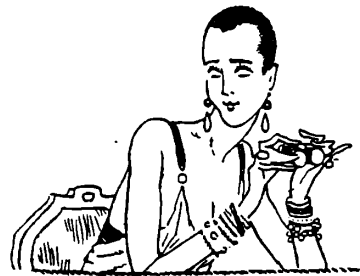
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The Oldest Member

A lively set for a theater party

Twenty members of our San Francisco chapter got together on Sunday, September 26, for a highly enjoyable theater party. We gathered for brunch at the Hotel Mac in Point Richmond, then trooped in solemn procession across the street to see Wodehouse's *The Play's the Thing* performed by The Masquers, an amateur but accomplished theater group.

The play was fun, the fellowship of kindred souls was, as always, a great pleasure, but the reason for our gathering on that particular day was to meet Fergus Horsburgh. Fergus is a Wodehouse Society member who lives in desolate surroundings in a suburb of Montreal - i.e., there isn't another living soul anywhere near Montreal who belongs to the Society. Fergus must, therefore, associate with scurvy knaves, poltroons, and other non-Wodehouse-readers to an almost unbelievable extent. It can't be good for him. When we heard that he would pass through California on a trip around the world, we invited him



to stop off and meet some local TWS members. So Fergus was our guest of honor at brunch before the play. He made a brief and witty after-brunch speech, proposed a toast, and added considerably to the pleasure of the day for all of us. It was fun to have him with us.

Pongo spoke a little huskily, for he had once more fallen in love at first sight.

Uncle Fred in the Springtime

Something new by Len Lawson

In his early days PGW, as we all know, wrote school stories and humorous articles. What may not be so well known is that he wrote poetry for newspapers and magazines such *The Globe*, *Daily Express*, *Punch*, and the British *Vanity Fair*. Hutchinson (Century Hutchinson Ltd, Brookmount House, 62-65 Chandos Place, London WC2N 4NW) has just published a book of some of these early poems by PGW called *The Parrot and Other Poems*. It is primarily made up of poetry written before 1910 but it does contain "Printer's Error" and "Good Gnu". Here is an excellent opportunity to read some of PGW's early work that hasn't seen print since its first appearance. The price of the book is 7.95 pound sterling in England. If any one of you booksellers is offering this book, please let me know so I can pass the word along to other members. [I bought a copy by mail from Parkers of Oxford, 27 Broad Street, Oxford OX2 7LP, England, for the price quoted above and a couple of dollars for postage and handling. - OM]

I have received catalogs from Charles Gould, Kent School, Kent, CT 06757, from Limestone Hills Bookshop, Glen Rose, TX 76043, and from Bertie Books, P.O. Box 8874, Lowell MA 01853. Limestone had several issues of *The Strand* magazine and several volumes of *Captain*, along with a number of first editions and a book of poems by PGW's brother Armine.

Charles Gould had one of his larger catalogs with a wide variety of offerings. He still has copies of the facsimile of *The Globe By the Way Book* and he is also offering Dr. Garrison's *Who's Who in Wodehouse*, both at the original publisher's price. Following is his description of another item.

A Reader's Collection

For the first time, I am offering a Complete Collection of the novels of P.G. Wodehouse. The Collection includes, in one edition or another, (some first, some reprints, some collections), every work listed by Ms. McIlvaine on pages 93 and 94 of the Original McIlvaine Bibliography. Every book is in good condition or better: all are better than the average second-hand Reading Copy. Details available upon request. About \$2500.00.

Now don't rush to your phone to order this item, because it has been sold. Charles tells me, however, that given a little prod he would be willing to put together another such collection. If you're interested, drop him a line.

I recently picked up two interesting items. They are textbooks that I found in the English section of a used book store. Their titles are *Adventures in English Literature* and *English Literature: Four Representative Types*. The first has PGW's "Uncle Fred Flits By" along with a biographical sketch and suggestions for study of Wodehouse. (The first suggestion is a question, "Which of Uncle Fred's movements surprised you?" Personally I found his actions perfectly reasonable.) The second book contains PGW's *America, I Like You* along with a biographical sketch and a lengthy discussion of his style. I certainly recommend this second book because it is an inexpensive way to get a book that is usually rather expensive.

Does anyone know of other textbooks with PGW stories? How about anthologies in general? I have a list of over 80 anthologies that contain Wodehouse stories. If you send me information on textbooks and anthologies I'll put together a list and make it available to members. Send me the book title, editor, publisher, publication date, and name of the story by PGW.

Found on a scrap torn from a corner of a newspaper page:

Finally, 21 years after it appeared in England, Harper & Row has brought us one of the indispensable texts of English comic literature. *The World of Jeeves* (\$22.95) contains all the short stories P.G. Wodehouse wrote about the world's most resourceful valet, who sorts out the affairs of the addled toff who employs him.

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Wanna fight about it?

John Duffie writes:

"I still get a warm feeling whenever I think of the fun I had at [our San Francisco convention last year], and have been wondering if something of the same atmosphere could be stimulated by correspondence between members. We should make admirable pen pals. To stimulate interest and give the members something to argue about, I attach a list of what I consider to be Wodehouse's five best short stories, and am prepared to defend them against anyone who takes the trouble to write, warning prospective debaters that we Wodehousians are an intensely stubborn breed."

Here are John's selections:

"Lord Emsworth and the Girlfriend"

Kipling said this was the perfect short story. One of the all time great lines occurs in it - "A function like the Blandings Parva School Treat blurred his conception of Man as Nature's Final Word."

"Uncle Fred Flits By"

A beautifully crafted story that perfectly portrays one of Wodehouse's most delightful creations, Pongo Twistleton's Uncle Fred, a man with enough joie-de-vivre and gall for an army. (The narrator states, "I don't know if you happen to know what the word "excesses" means, but those are what Uncle Fred, when in London, invariably commits.")

My favourite line comes after Uncle Fred and Pongo have taken shelter in a stranger's home to get out of the rain, and the former tells Pongo to pretend he is a veterinarian come to trim the parrot's claws: "I should like to find you by the cage, staring at the bird in a scientific manner. Tap your teeth from time to time and try to smell of iodoform."



A statuette that had been on the mantelpiece, a thing about a foot long with no clothes onShakespeare it may have been, or Queen Victoria. . . .

"Pig-Ho-o-o-o-ey!"

Lord Emsworth faces an appalling crisis as his prize pig, the Empress of Blandings ("as nearly circular as a pig can be without bursting") suddenly refuses to eat. The reader is treated to a treatise on pig calls, much like Melville's dissertation on whales in *Moby Dick*. There is a happy ending, as the final pig call dies away to be replaced by a magnificent collection of adjectives: "And suddenly, as it died, another, softer sound succeeded it. A sort of gulpy, gurgly, plobby, squishy, wofflesome sound. . . .The Empress was feeding."

"Jeeves and the Song of Songs"

My liking for this story probably stems from my dislike for the lugubrious song, "Sonny Boy", which plays such an important part in it. Jeeves, in order to break up an unfortunate romance, persuades Bertie, Tuppy Glossup, and Cora Bellinger each to sing the song to a tough audience at the Oddfellows' Hall in Bermondsey East, after two local artists had already sung it to open the programme. Five hearings of the same tripe bring out the vegetable-throwing proclivities of the cloth-capped crowd, but Jeeves gets his way.

"The Great Sermon Handicap"

Claude and Eustace, Bertie Wooster's schoolboy cousins, decide to liven up the summer with a handicap based on the length of sermon preached by local ministers. They devise form charts based on past performance, allow handicaps and post odds. Being con men at heart, Bertie and the boys decide to call on the Rev. Francis Heppenstall and beg him to preach a sermon on Brotherly Love, originally given to him some years previously, which was known to last fifty minutes. As might have been expected, Jeeves comes out the winner.

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Writing on Wodehouse

Victoria E. McClure

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In 1984, in a moment of great insanity, I decided to get a Master's Degree in English. In that same moment (it was rather a long one) I decided to write a thesis rather than take extra courses. At that time, I wanted to write on Charles Dickens. That sounded like such an "Englishy" thing to do. I pictured myself joyously thumbing through *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* and slowly accumulating cobwebs as my brilliant piece of original scholarship took shape. Wrong. There is one problem with a thesis, as well as with a dissertation, both have to be original work. Some time, when you are feeling especially masochistic, take a stroll to the nearest university library and imagine yourself writing a thesis on Charles Dickens. Yes, dear reader, there are small mountains of research on Dickens. Everything from the sublime ("The Law and *Bleak House*") to the ridiculous ("An Analysis of Pip's Use of Personal Pronouns in *Great Expectations*") can be found. Dickens was not for me. So, I trundled home and tried to think of another topic. The light dawned. Sitting on my shelf was my Wodehouse collection. I grinned; I smirked; I suddenly felt very pleased with myself.

Despite the fact that I love Plum, he and his writings did cause some problems. First, I had to convince my thesis director that this was a viable topic. This was not as hard as I thought it would be, but it wasn't easy. After that point, I had to find out what had already been written. That turned out to be the easiest part of the ordeal. Thankfully, the Texas Tech library had a copy of *P.G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration*. Thus I was able to have on hand a bibliography of everything written and published on Plum. After looking through the articles, I discovered that very little had been written and the scope was relatively narrow. Most people had written on Bertie or Jeeves or the golf stories. If my fading memory serves, there was even a dissertation from India. With my worst fears (5000+ articles, all in esoteric languages) calmed, I began to think of topics. I decided that Bertie and Jeeves were out - I love them, but I would have needed to read the other dissertations - anyone for Hindi? The Mr. Mulliner stories came into view after I had done some more reading. Then came the leg work. I was informed that I would need to find and read all the Mr. Mulliner stories and go from there. There are worse things to do. However, another problem arose. My collection at the time contained 38 titles, and not a Mulliner among them. For some odd and unknown reason, the gods smiled (or smirked) and led me to the

public library where I found *The World of Mr. Mulliner*. With joy in my heart and one of the more rollicking psalms on my lips (not really, but it sounds good), I proceeded to violate copyright for 45 minutes. After a dose of Xerox machine flash burns, I had all of the Mr. Mulliner stories in one form or another. Much to my chagrin, I discovered I had to do something with them.

The first thing I did was list each story with its publication date, alternate title (if there was one) and main characters on a sheet of paper. After that, I did the same thing on note cards. I have no idea why I did that, possibly infatuation with note cards. From this I got some rather odd pieces of information. Mr. Mulliner has 35+ nephews. Also, due to alternate titles, it is possible to look up the same story several times and not realize it. That is a joyous experience. After I had diddled around for several weeks, my advisor pulled me aside and suggested that I might try to write something. Brilliant woman - always knew what I needed to do.

Over some school break or other, I wrote. There was, however, another problem. We all know how wonderful Plum is - that was the problem. I didn't particularly want to analyze plots; I wanted a collection of famous lines. Needless to say, my first draft was 27+ pages of plot summary and hit the round file. Something good did come out of all this - I found a topic. There was great rejoicing. The clergy and the writers had come out as main characters in many of the stories and were logical choices, at least to me, for subject matter. I also came up with a title: *Fish and Soup - Clergy and Writers as Sources of Humor in P.G. Wodehouse*. I would like to be able to say that the rest was a breeze - it wasn't. Plum has fairly straightforward plots, but the sub-structure is unbelievable. For example, in "The Fiery Wooing of Mordred", the Sprockett-Sprockett family is attempting to burn down the ancestral pile in order to collect the insurance money. Thus, underneath the seemingly innocent and funny exterior, the reader finds a sub-structure containing a very pointed commentary on the system of taxation in England. This was rather a revelation to me because I had always viewed Wodehouse as an amusing writer who had a bit less fluff than some other humorists. As I read on, I discovered even more commentary. In "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court", Wodehouse confronts the plight of writers and their need to have a "soul" or some sort of artistic mindset. They cannot be mere mortals with mundane thoughts; they must think deep thoughts on deep topics and be able to discuss at length all sorts of esoteric ideas. This is Plum's comment on the arts in general. He tells us in his ever-amusing way that we as a society have quit appreciating art for its own sake. We have gotten to the point where we believe that if we understand something, it cannot be "art", it must be something else.

This brings me to another point. The world of Wodehouse has always seemed rather self-contained, at least to me. His characters have lived in a sort of bubble which kept them removed from the cares of everyday life. After all, can you see Bertie

Wooster filling out a tax return? However, the time I spent writing and reading and find sub-structures showed me that Plum was very much in the real world. While his characters were funny and bright, their situations in many cases were not. The Sprockett-Sprocketts with their affection for arson are funny; the fact that they are going to these lengths to avoid unreasonably high taxes is not. This double level is one of the beauties of Plum. He makes us laugh. However, if we choose to, we can go past that laughter and see a man concerned with the state of human beings and with the state of society.

This awareness of the world was not something I had expected. We are all aware of social comedies which make some statement about society. In my experience, the comments have been about the decline in the quality of mustard, not about taxation. I believe this is why many people have no respect for comedy. They see comedy as shallow and having no real purpose other than to make people laugh at silly people doing silly things. These are the same folk who think writing amusing anecdotes is easy. For this reason, Wodehouse, along with others like Evelyn Waugh, have been neglected, both by critics and by the educational system. The common comment is, "We can't teach that, it's not serious!" A colleague of mine in the English Department runs into this problem when she teaches Gilbert and Sullivan in her Victorian Literature class. The scandal created by this unprecedented departure from the tomes of the Brontës, Dickens and other forms of "light" reading is amazing, truly amazing. But, I keep forgetting, laughter is forbidden to serious scholars teaching serious students in serious universities. The work I did while writing my thesis taught me this about literature as a whole and about Wodehouse in particular: We take ourselves too seriously. We rely on tragedy to teach and comedy to provide an escape from reality. If we would only open our eyes and our minds we might find that both forms fulfill both functions.