



# Plum Lines

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Wodehouseans! Please take note  
of the 2024 TWS convention  
articles on pages 11, 12, and 24.

## Conventions I Have Known Since 1993

BY DEBORAH FOX BELLEW

*Deborah presented this paper at the 2022 San Diego TWS convention. It is of special interest as we gear up for the 2024 convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Deborah reminisces about past conventions and the great enjoyment she has experienced at these events, often with other Bellews in tow!*

I'M SO PLEASED to be here to tell you about my memories of conventions past, all the way back to 1993—which was the first chapter-hosted convention! And here we are today, at the first *non*-chapter-hosted convention in 29 years.

Yes, there were earlier conventions that were before my first, and I must refer you to others for those stories. I have, however, been to thirteen conventions, which is pretty good, although at this point they tend to blend together as a pleasant mush in my mind. I'd like to share with you highlights that rise above the rest when I think about my convention adventures.

I was only nineteen and attending college in Philadelphia, but temporarily was at home in San Diego for summer break. My wonderful, book-loving aunt had urged me to begin reading Wodehouse back when I was thirteen, so I had already appreciated Wodehouse for several years. I started with *The Cat-Nappers*, because at age thirteen—I liked cats. I took up golf during high school in order to better understand the golf stories, and I had already developed an appreciation for Blandings Castle and Mr. Mulliner.

In those days, going online meant a slow modem with pricey per-minute internet rates. And fan clubs



*Deborah and one-third of the very cheery  
San Diego convention audience*

involved writing away for newsletters and enclosing self-addressed stamped envelopes. What with school and one thing and another, I had not attempted to become involved in any book communities, let alone anything involving Wodehouse.

My aunt noticed in an airline magazine that there would be a Wodehouse convention right in her hometown of San Francisco. Would I care to fly up from San Diego and visit her so we could attend together? Of course! We registered and planned, and eventually made our way that July to the Sir Francis Drake Hotel and walked straight into the Riveting Talks.

There we listened to in-depth explorations of different aspects of Wodehouse's life and works. Topics included "Two Authors Compared," "Writing About Wodehouse," and "Focusing a Collection," but the one

that really gripped my attention was Helen Murphy's presentation on "School Prizes and the People Who Won Them." I took as many notes as I could, but the prospect of hearing that talk again prompted me to order the video recording and also the cassette audiotape so I could listen to it in the car. I was familiar with Wodehouse's prize-giving scenes and had even won a book prize myself when I'd recently graduated from high school. (For English, not Scripture Knowledge, although I probably would have been in the running had my school offered such a thing.) That topic caught my attention and, I must say, that talk shaped my book-collecting habits for years.

So, a pleasant visit. I proceeded to join The Wodehouse Society and got a wonderful welcome letter from Rosie M. Banks (aka Susan Cohen), inviting me to join the Philadelphia chapter, which was near where I was attending college. Every so often, as school allowed, I would join them at the Dickens Inn downtown and carefully monitor my spending on the pub lunch.

But now I was on the mailing list! I received *Plum Lines* each quarter, and learned that the next convention would be in Boston in 1995, hosted by the NEWTS (the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society). That was on the East Coast! And I lived on the East Coast! Surely this would be easier for me to attend, a mere (long) train ride away. My aunt declined since it was too far from San Francisco, but I eagerly looked forward to attending, and I dragged my boyfriend with me. Although he did not read Wodehouse, being more of a science-fiction guy, I was able to offer the intriguing possibility of bread-roll tossing during dinner.

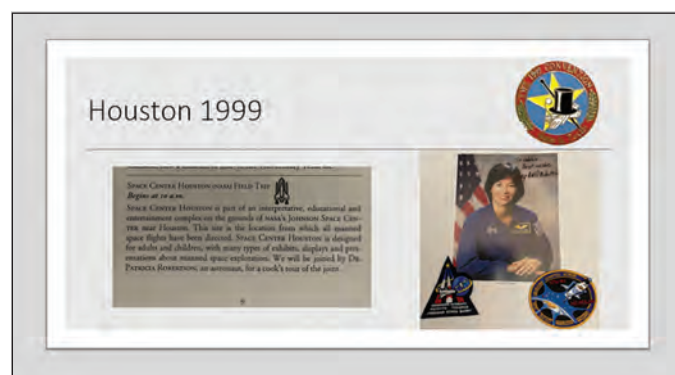
At this convention, I requested autographs from every speaker. Helen Murphy was not present, but there were erudite and entertaining talks from such shining luminaries as Jan Kaufman, Norman Murphy, Tony Ring, Peter Schwed, Charles Gould, Hal Cazalet, and Daniel Garrison.

Many of the speakers were also authors. I discovered that I needed to bring money to these conventions because authors would in turn bring their own books to sell. I was going to need to rebalance my collection perhaps away from the school-prize books and toward the Wodehouse-associated books.

The next convention was Chicago in 1997. One of my best friends was getting her law degree at the University of Chicago, so that was a perfect excuse to visit, even though a plane was involved this time rather than a train. My boyfriend was now my fiancé, and we had a great time visiting the Art Institute of Chicago with my University of Chicago friend during the hours that were not filled with Riveting Talks.

On to Houston in 1999. There was definitely a plane ride involved this time, and we did not have relatives or local friends as an excuse. By this time my fiancé was my husband. He had not caught the Wodehouse bug but had enjoyed the bread-roll throwing, and for this trip there was another draw: really amazing local tours, including NASA (of "Houston we have a problem" fame). Remember how I said my husband was a science-fiction guy? We signed up immediately.

The NASA tour was even more amazing than we had hoped. Astronaut-in-training Patricia Robertson gave us a behind-the-scenes tour. As I was preparing for this talk, I asked my husband what he remembers of his Wodehouse visits, and this tour is his most vivid memory. He recalled how we were down on NASA's floor looking into real space equipment, and if we looked way up above us, there was a viewing window reminiscent of a hamster tube where the regular people could look down at a great distance and wish they were us.



*Deborah's memories of the Houston convention NASA trip*

Another highlight for him was what turned out to be the final convention with bread-roll throwing. In this case it was tortilla throwing—Southwestern cuisine, after all. The participants expressed such enthusiasm that they even managed to lodge tortillas in the overhead light fixtures. While my husband was far from the only participant, this event led to the dropping of bread-roll projectiles from all future events. At least he was able to enjoy it while it lasted.

That brings us to 2001: A Wodehouse Odyssey, right in Philadelphia! As part of the host chapter, I learned firsthand that even having a very small helper role significantly impacted my freedom of movement during the convention. Alas, I was not able to gather autographs.

I wish that we had recorded this convention because, among the many amazing talks, Gretchen Worden presented one on collecting cow creamers. It was the kind of talk for which my notes meant nothing

because it was all in the delivery and the slideshow. If I could travel in time back to that day (again with that science-fiction theme), I would definitely wish to watch that one again.

In 2003 the society switched things up a bit and held the convention in the summer rather than the traditional time around Plum's birthday (October 15), with lodging on the grounds of a college, St. Michael's in Toronto, which Elliott Milstein had attended. This was fantastic for my schedule and also for my wallet because staying in a dorm with bathrooms down the hall was the most economical "hotel" option I had ever been offered (\$31.50 per person!). This made it a matter of course for me to attend. My husband suggested that I start attending the conventions on my own—I mean, no bread rolls anymore, after all. I did not miss the bread-roll tossing, because delicious bread is meant for eating. One special connection with this academic theme is that I am now a proud owner of an autographed copy of Elliott Milstein's Wodehouse thesis.

Los Angeles 2005: My close friend from high school lived there, and I had just gone through a difficult personal situation, so what better option than to compete in the movie-pitch competition, with my friend able to hold up my posters and props for moral support? I portrayed Ms. Perfecta Zizzbaum, pitching a modern version of *The Bachelor* in which Bertie Wooster would offer a rose to one of five would-be fiancées, with concept art of the Spice Girls representing Bobbie Wickham, Madeline Bassett, Stiffy Byng, and Honoria Glossop. I was thrilled to be awarded an Oscar-like statuette for my efforts. The Hollywood theme also lent itself naturally to autographs!



*The Perfecto-Zizzbaum chapter goes to Hollywood in 2005, and Deborah sports her prize for best movie pitch.*



One regret? This convention *was* recorded, so I took fewer notes, but the recording was lost to the mists of time and never offered for sale.

The 2007 convention was in Providence, Rhode Island. At that convention's Sunday brunch, we heard a hysterical and appropriately lengthy sermon inspired by "The Great Sermon Handicap," preached ad lib by Father Wendell Verrill on the text of "The Insult of the

Ammonites" in 2 Samuel. Did you know that there is a story in the Bible in which a group of gentlemen are deprived of the lower part of their garments and are forced to run off in embarrassment? Good thing that wasn't a question on a Scripture examination because somehow that story had not been highlighted in my Sunday-school class. Father Wendell did it full justice.

My husband and I had three children around this time, so I was definitely on my own for several conventions while my husband took care of things on the home front for me. I had children in only the even-numbered years so as not to conflict with our conventions. Well, we didn't really plan it, but it conveniently worked out that way.

I'm going to touch only briefly on these next several events, all excellent, because otherwise the next speaker will get out the big hook as in the old *Looney Tunes* cartoons, in order to "encourage" me offstage.

- In 2009 the Saint Paul convention included a delightful visit to one of my very favorite bookstores, which I had never been to in person: Uncle Hugo's Science Fiction Bookstore and Uncle Edgar's Mystery Bookstore. This convention also featured the first appearance of Maria Jette and Dan Chouinard performing together.

- The year 2011 found us in Dearborn, Michigan, with a Henry Ford Museum tour and also a custom bus tour of Detroit, immortalized in a custom book. Someone went up to the authors afterward and said, "I'm the first person to ask you to autograph this book," and they said, "Actually you are the second." Guess who had cornered them first.

- In 2013 we returned to Chicago, where most of us stayed at the Union League Club. This made me feel like Oofy Prosser. With art everywhere, it was the opposite of my low-frills dormitory experience in Toronto.



*Costumes in Chicago in 2013, including a debonair conventioneer (left) and Christine Hewitt as Cleopatterer (right)*



- The 2015 convention in Seattle was sadly scheduled over Halloween and broke my attendance streak—no convention, no matter how wonderful,

would be able to make up for missing the chance to take my children trick-or-treating. Fortunately, I was able to ease back into conventions again with visits to two architecturally glamorous locations: Washington, D.C., in 2017 and Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2019.

I was thrilled to hear that the 2021 convention would be held in San Diego, the town where I grew up. And with a few twists and turns, here we are—in 2022.

But wait, there's more!

As you can tell from my recollections, I particularly enjoy the talks and the day trips and the chance to see people who are so passionate about Wodehouse that they share their writings and their research and their stories, and I adore collecting mementos such as autographed programs and books. A quick Facebook poll showed that many others enjoy these aspects as well, but we must not overlook . . . the shopping; the performances; the ability to purchase and wear extreme hats, tiaras, and evening ensembles; and the skits at Sunday brunch.

I am very happy to have been able to join you today and to share these memories with you. Indeed, you are the only audience in the entire world to whom I could have given this talk! I hope you have all been able to create your own happy Wodehouse convention memories here in San Diego and look forward to creating more with you in the future.



*The Sphinx Grand Ballroom in the Almas Temple was the site of the Saturday banquet in D.C. in 2017.*



*NEWTS skitting in 2005 in Hollywood*



## Exciting TWS Dues Changes!

BY LYNN VESLEY-GROSS

**O**CTOBER 2023 will bring not only P. G. Wodehouse's 142nd birthday but also some much-needed changes to the membership structure for TWS. Costs for everything are rising, and dues have held level for more than five years.

Good news: We will accept new memberships or advance renewals (for as many as three years) through October 31, 2023, at the current rates of \$35 for one year, \$65 for two years, or \$95 for three years. Go to [wodehouse.org](http://wodehouse.org) and click "Membership" for instructions.

Impending changes include the introduction of new categories of membership—"Household" and "Student"—and, beginning in November, a modest increase in dues. In the past, membership has been based upon on a postal address for journal subscription. Now it will be attached to an individual.

Starting November 1, 2023, individual memberships will be \$40 annually. Multiple years may be purchased in advance at \$70 for two years and \$100 for three years. Included with membership is a subscription to the quarterly journal, *Plum Lines*, and an annual membership roster useful for keeping in touch with other members and forming regional chapters. You also receive intermittent society updates via email, and email newsletters are coming soon. TWS membership is still required for each attendee at the biannual convention.

Multiple members receiving post at the same address who each wish to join may elect to share a single mailed issue of *Plum Lines* and take advantage of our Household Membership. Two or more people at an address may all be full members with all privileges while sharing one *Plum Lines* subscription. Household rates are \$60/\$90/\$120 for 1/2/3 years, respectively.

Full-time students may join and receive *Plum Lines* for \$20 annually.

There is no longer an insert with membership information included with your mailed *Plum Lines*. The date of the last issue in your subscription is printed on the envelope. Since Spring 2023, renewal notices have gone out only by email sent from [tws.plum.lines@gmail.com](mailto:tws.plum.lines@gmail.com). Please check that your spam filtering will not choke on them.

# Wodehouse, Ages, and Aging

BY TIMOTHY KEARLEY

IN *The Old Reliable*, Wodehouse wrote, “There’s only one real cure for grey hair. It was invented by a Frenchman. He called it the guillotine.” At 73, I am well stricken in years. That’s much weller stricken (or should that be “well strickener”? Jeeves would know) than Uncle Fred, the eternally sixty-something-year-old with the demeanor of a slightly inebriated undergraduate. I don’t recall how old I was when I first encountered Uncle Fred and the biblical phrase Wodehouse used to describe him, but at the time, age sixty lay many years ahead for me. “Well stricken in years”—so very amusing then, but not so much now. Musing on my increasingly Methuselan condition, I wondered how Uncle Fred’s creator felt when he came to be my current age, when the pace slows and the finish line flickers onto the horizon. Did Wodehouse face the prospect with equanimity, or was he rather put off by the process? These thoughts led to considering how Plum felt about all the ages he’d been through and about aging in general, especially as he moved into his last three decades.

In the course of learning about these things via his quasi-autobiographies, biographies, and published letters, I also started thinking about the extent to which PGW may have bunged into his writings any personal attitudes about ages and aging across the years. Wodehouse is noted for creating characters who fail to grow appreciably older over many decades and also for settings that are lodged permanently in the Edwardian era, or that at least retain an Edwardian sensibility even if the setting moves on a bit in time. But did Plum’s treatment of his characters alter at all as he experienced their ages himself? Or, since he created most of his leading actors (as he thought of them) in his amazingly productive thirties and forties, did he refrain from changing them over the years even as he acquired new, personal insights into how it might actually feel to be of their vintage—to be the Oldest Member, for instance? Answering these questions fully would require an intense rereading of the Master’s entire oeuvre, a task beyond the scope of one as well stricken in age as I am. Instead, I offer here a few preliminary observations about these deep waters.

In ascertaining the ages of characters in the Wodehouse canon, I frequently consulted Garrison and Midkiff’s *Who’s Who in Wodehouse*, where it is noted many a time that Plum could be vague and erratic in assigning ages to his characters. I also employed Paul Kent’s *Pelham Grenville Wodehouse* and several of Tony

Ring’s contributions to Wodehouse studies. So I, too, often will be vague here, using “about,” “-something,” and “-ish” in discussing ages.

## Infants and Toddlers

WE CAN BE QUITE certain that Plum had little use for infants throughout his life. He invariably portrayed them as unattractive entities who looked like mass murderers suffering from painful gumboils, or, at best, resembled poached eggs. They could be useful in earning their fathers £20 for serving as models of cartoon villains, but that’s about it. Ditto for toddlers. Wrapped in yards of swaddling clothes, they gorge themselves on sweets and turn into sticky little imps who will foul a gentleman’s attire if he’s so careless as to come within their reach. Thank goodness for nurses, who are whizzes at wrapping and unwrapping the little nuisances. A reader of Wodehouse can’t imagine him voluntarily holding a toddler—no knee dandler, he. When looking into a mirror, the two-year-old Pelham doubtlessly thought, “Crikey, how much longer until I’m eighteen?”

## Young Children

SOME OF THE FEW preadolescent and early adolescent children in Wodehouse improve on infants and toddlers. Mike Jackson’s four sisters, whom PGW wrote about while in his twenties, are chirpy, energetic cricket devotees. Fourteen-year-old Marjory Jackson idolizes her cricket-playing brothers but doesn’t hesitate to critique their efforts, either. In real life, Wodehouse interacted easily with some young girls. When he was about twenty, Plum played what his biographer McCrum calls an avuncular role with the three Bowes-Lyon girls, who were ten, twelve, and thirteen (similar in age to the three older Jackson girls) when he dedicated *The Pothunters* to them.

Later, when he was 35, PGW got along famously with his new wife Ethel’s eleven-year-old daughter, Leonora, whom he adopted in short order. Perhaps it was his interaction with Leonora that caused him to write in *Uneasy Money*, “At age eleven or thereabouts a woman acquires a poise and an ability to handle difficult situations which a man, if he is lucky, manages to achieve somewhere in the later seventies.”

There’s no indication Wodehouse associated similarly with any boys in this age group. His preadolescent and early adolescent boys tend to be

bulgy and spoiled, such as fourteen-year-old Ogden Ford, or England's premier fiend in human shape, Thos Gregson. They are disrespectful of Drones, making rude comments about their attire, and often must be taken to plays and films by the young men at the command of the aunts or girlfriends of the latter. A boy can be tolerated only for the sake of a good and deserving aunt or his attractive older sister, viz. Bertie's squiring of Bonzo Wooster for Aunt Dahlia and Bingo's tolerant tutoring of the pestilential Oswald Glossop for Honoria's sake.

Wodehouse started writing when he was five and read Pope's translation of the *Iliad* at six, but there's no indication that as an adult he spent time with boys who were similar to his young self and with whom he discussed ancient Greek literature while taking turns at the nets. Perhaps PGW gave to Mike Jackson his own attitude towards boys: "It was [Mike's] view that a boy should not be exhibited publicly until he had reached an age when he might be in the running for some sort of colours at a public school." (*Psmith in the City*)

### Teens

SOME TEENAGE BOYS, however, ease into full personhood in Wodehouse's eyes. His older teen, public-school boys are worthy of respect when they are athletic, run a school paper, have musical talent, or are generally witty, such as Mike, Charteris, Fenn, and Psmith, respectively. Plum himself displayed all of these attributes in his halcyon days at Dulwich when he was a heavy forward in the rugger First Fifteen, batted and bowled his way onto the cricket First Eleven, boxed, edited the school newspaper, and sang in shows.

Wodehouse wrote of such boys, on the verge of manhood, when he was approximately that age himself, just after he left Dulwich for his short-lived banking career. He ceased writing about them in his twenties when he was still not far from them chronologically and, in some respects, emotionally. It would have been extremely interesting to see how Plum might have portrayed these older boys later in his life. Would he have continued to give his preferred protagonists the same virtues, and would he have approved of the public-school code when in his sixties and seventies? For instance, would he have still condoned prefects using physical force against house members who broke the code, as Kennedy did vis-à-vis Walton when the latter chose to skip a critical First Fifteen practice?

### Young Adults

MOST OF Wodehouse's protagonists—especially his creations of the peak years of his thirties and forties—are young adults in their twenties and perhaps

early thirties. Mike and Psmith move from their public-school years into their twenties, while numerous other young adult actors of that approximate age come to the stage: Jimmy Pitt and James Crocker; Sally Nicholas and Lady Maud Marsh; Ukridge; and, of course, Bertie and the Drones, who seem to be in their mid-twenties. (Bertie is reliably established as about 24 when we meet him in "Jeeves Takes Charge," with Jeeves probably about ten years his senior.)

PGW knew these people of whom he wrote, as he'd been their ages himself not long before. He was in his thirties when he invented his Jimmys and Sallys and in his thirties and forties when he conjured up Bertie and his pals. Wodehouse clearly viewed the decade of one's twenties as the time a person should be optimistic and energetic, full of the will to win, pursuing success in love and in a career (Drones aside). Physical attractiveness was fine in Plum's world, but being fit, energetic, and good-natured was more important. Carrying too much weight and being lazy or gloomy definitely were traits to be eschewed. Galahad Threepwood's godson, the artist and future pub owner Bill (Blister) Lister, for instance, looks like a kindly gorilla, but he's a sturdy fellow who's got the right stuff for pretty Prudence Garland, whereas we know the handsome but self-absorbed and easily depressed playwright Gerald Foster can't be allowed to end up with the cute, generous Sally Nicholas.

Wodehouse's own life and values are reflected in those of his twenty-ish protagonists. He continued to play cricket and rugby football into his early twenties for his employer, the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, and occasionally for other clubs. He also remained connected to his younger days by staying in touch with happenings at Dulwich and with some of his school chums. In his thirties and forties, of course, Plum himself achieved great success writing lyrics, plays, short stories, and novels. Although he largely ceased to play organized sports of any kind in his thirties, he kept physically fit with walking and his "daily dozen" exercises, activities which grounded his life ever after. Perhaps most importantly for his long-term mental and physical health, Wodehouse found love and married at age 35. His wife, Ethel, could have fit comfortably into one of his novels: neither beautiful nor well-born, she was vivacious and hardworking, and had persevered in the face of considerable adversity, including single motherhood.

### Forties

INTERESTINGLY, Wodehouse's world is nearly devoid of characters in their forties. The age doesn't seem to have created many distinctive character possibilities for

him. The strikingly handsome Lady Constance Keeble is in her mid-forties, as is the breezy, hearty Wilhelmina (Bill) Shannon, female lead of *The Old Reliable*, but few other women of this age appear in Wodehouse works. The only prominent forty-something males I found in his writings are those two dynamic businessmen, the publishing giant Lord Tilbury and the film magnate Ivor Llewellyn. (Smedley Cork, Bill Shannon's intended, could be in his forties, as he's roughly Bill's contemporary, but he seems more fifty-ish, since he's described as a "portly senior" and grey-haired.)

Wodehouse's own forties were extremely productive and successful in every respect. In addition to producing some of his best work, PGW remained physically fit, not only with his daily dozen and walking, but also with twice-daily swimming sessions when living in California. However, his first brush with mortality also occurred in this period, when he was hit by a car. He thought for a while that his "world had ended," and the notion of "here today and gone tomorrow" acquired some reality. Plum also stopped eating meat for a short time in his forties after seeing a lamb slaughtered in the field, but he was too fond of his cut off the joint to be a vegetarian for long. Yet, as we shall see below, being overweight enlarged as a theme in his writings during his forty-something years.

### Fifties

THE FIFTIES ARE A fertile age for Wodehouse characters and comprise the second-largest group in his writings. Most of his fifty-somethings exist primarily to provide problems that twenty- and thirty-something-year-olds (often their children or nieces or nephews) must overcome to achieve happiness, e.g., the Duke of Dunstable, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, J. B. Duff, and Mortimer Little. Lady Constance Keeble aside, it would seem, from figuring marriage and childbearing ages, that many aunts and uncles of twenty- and thirty-something nieces and nephews would be in their fifties, though Plum doesn't specify their ages for the most part. (Bird fancier Alexander Worple, 51, and Mr. Meggs, that martyr to indigestion, 56, are exceptions.) Surely some of the Wooster and Threepwood aunts are in this category, especially given that Bertie addresses his good and deserving Aunt Dahlia as "aged relative."

It's interesting to see that most of the fifty-ish men in Wodehouse have put on substantial tonnage, owing to their having succumbed to the pleasures of the table. This inflated condition has caused the digestive systems of many to give them the elbow, and, as a consequence, they are irascible, e.g., Dunstable, Parsloe, Duff. A few

of the fat uncles, such as Mortimer Little (later, Lord Bittlesham) and Uncle George (Wooster), retain their good spirits, for the most part, despite their afflictions. On the other hand, Uncle Willoughby (Wooster), Lord Worplesdon, Alexander Worple, Sir Watkyn Bassett, and Sir Roderick Glossop are simply irritable without the excuses of overweight and indigestion. Very few of Plum's men manage to avoid excessive poundage in their fifties: Raymond (Beefy) Bastable and James Schoonmaker have put on a little weight since their days as star athletes, but they retain impressive physiques that help them overawe others.

The main exception to the physical and psychological depredations of the fifties in PGW's work is Galahad Threepwood. We meet Gally in *Summer Lightning/Fish Preferred* (1929) when he is in his mid-to-late fifties, still lean and effervescent even though his hyperactive life makes it seem he hadn't gone to bed until he was fifty. He ages to 57 in 1933 (*Heavy Weather*), then so defies time as to recede to his early fifties in 1965 (*Galahad at Blandings/The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood*).

Wodehouse started creating fifty-something characters when he was in his own thirties; Uncle Willoughby, Lord Worplesdon, and Alexander Worple are of this era. But, as noted above, he started making the distinctive characteristics of excess weight and irritated stomach linings more common in his adult character delineations when he himself was in his forties. It is at this period that Mortimer Little, Uncle George, and Gregory Parsloe, for example, puff onto the stage. Given Wodehouse's enjoyment of both fitness and food, it seems fair to say his fifty-ish characters may reflect his concerns at forty-something about how his own fifties could unfold.

Plum's observation of many men this age likely made him vow to avoid perennial gastritis and the need to join the likes of Uncle George in frequent trips to Harrogate to slim and take the waters. It was in his own fifties that Wodehouse began to reflect seriously on aging. Although he kept fit, he began to be more conscious of mortality. At age 54, he found himself quite disturbed at the "gap" left by Kipling's death, due to the significant role the latter's writings had played in Plum's youth. Soon after, when Plum was 55, Ethel was hospitalized with kidney problems, and his sometime collaborator George Gershwin died of a brain tumor.

It also occurred to Plum that he was then the same age his father, (Henry) Ernest Wodehouse, had been at the time when Plum left Dulwich. PGW wrote to his long-time friend Bill Townend: "Isn't it difficult to get accustomed to the idea one is now at the age when most people settle down and don't do a thing?" Plum went

on to recall his father “tottering to his armchair and settling in it for the day” after his early retirement from the British civil service due to poor health. .

It may be useful at this point to note the differences in life expectancies existing in the Victorian and Edwardian eras and the present era. In 1845, when Ernest was born, the average life expectancy for an English male was about 42, and it had risen only to around 44 in 1881, when Pelham entered the scene. Currently it is around eighty. However, the earlier short expectancy was largely due to childhood illness and war. A Victorian or Edwardian Englishman who survived those things could expect to live into his early seventies; Ernest Wodehouse made it to 84 despite his ill health. The current median age of death for an English male is about 82.

At age 56, in the wake of finishing *The Code of the Woosters*, Wodehouse wrote to Townend that he lacked the drive and the command of language that he used to have. The two men frequently complained to each other about the difficulty of coming up with new plots, but PGW hadn't previously questioned his facility with language. However, given the quality of his work to come, clearly this concern was premature. In the August 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, a study of Wodehouse's use of language in the twenty novels he published between 1934 (*Right Ho, Jeeves* and *Thank You, Jeeves*), when he was 53, and 1974, when aged 93 (*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*), concluded that he “showed no decline in language production with age”; his vocabulary size remained unchanged, and his “mean clauses per sentence” (a measurement of verbal skill) “actually rose significantly.” Their research shows that ordinary mortals demonstrate an age-related decline in language production starting in their mid-seventies. This tends to verify the sense that, as he aged, “Ace” Wodehouse may have lost some speed on his fastball, but he could still hit the corners and remained a master of his craft.

But, of course, the decade of PGW's fifties was capped disastrously by his internment at age 58 when World War II began. A picture accompanying a *New York Times* story about Wodehouse's plight in December of 1940 finds him looking quite old and worn.

### Sixties

VERY FEW Wodehouse characters are in their sixties for certain. Lord Emsworth is pushing sixty, if not quite there. *Something New* (1915) puts him at 56 and *Summer Lightning* at 59, so he does age. Moreover, Plum describes him variously as “a fluffy-minded old man” and “an elderly gentleman,” making it seem

that he wanted Lord E. to be seen as a senior citizen. Wodehouse was in his mid-thirties when he created Emsworth, and, casting myself back to that youthful era, I can easily see how sixty would seem to mark the threshold of elderly status from that perspective. I agree with Paul Kent that sixty-ish seems to be Emsworth's proper classification.

PGW produced one definitely sixty-something major character—Frederick Altamont Cornwallis Twistleton, aka Lord Ickenham. Uncle Fred is said to be sixty, if a day, even though he acts like a youngish 22, stepping high, wide, and handsome whenever he breaks free from Ickenham Hall and his wife, Jane. Plum was in his mid-fifties when he created Uncle Fred, and about fifty when he produced the only slightly younger Gally; hence, he was much more their contemporary when he created them than he was of Lord Emsworth when he brought him into existence.

It's not much of a stretch to surmise that, as Wodehouse approached sixty, he enjoyed creating a couple of characters roughly his own age who were fit and lively, stirred things up, and strewed happy endings instead of being the largely quiescent victims of fate, like Lord Emsworth. In his own sixties, PGW brought onto the scene Lord Uffenham and Sir Aylmer Bostock, both in their fifties, but they add nothing new to the canon concerning that age.

Wodehouse's own sixties were a time of turmoil for him, what Paul Kent calls his “lost years.” The inevitable effects of aging combined with the fallout of his ill-considered Berlin broadcasts and the death of his beloved Leonora to make his seventh decade extremely stressful. Plum definitely began to feel himself aging in this era. His correspondence with Townend is replete with observations and complaints about how his eyes were dimming and his natural force abating; e.g., an intense period of writing had left PGW with vision problems, and he assured Townend that he, too, tended to get tired now: “After all, we're both heading for seventy.” Around the same period, Plum complained to Denis Mackail that he found himself relying on technique rather than exuberance in his writing. In his later sixties Wodehouse lamented to Townend that he was not as keen as he used to be and had no zest for sitting down to write a short story.

An interesting indication of his sense of what being in one's sixties meant to him is his astonished query to Townend as to why a mutual acquaintance who was 67 would want to marry. Plum wrote that he was able to understand why a 50-year-old man would want to tie the knot, but not one of 67, which seems to indicate Wodehouse saw the sixties as the age of antiquity's

onset, at least for certain purposes. While Plum thought it appropriate to keep working (how could he not keep writing?), he seems to have developed a sense that some areas of one's life should be allowed to disappear at a certain age. Continuing to write into one's sixties seemed natural to PGW, but not to woo anew.

Perhaps this is not terribly surprising as it is in this decade that his first significant health problems arose. Wodehouse had a "giddy fit" (probably a minor stroke) at age 68 and another at 69, the latter of which caused him to be hospitalized for ten days. His doctors feared he might have a brain tumor, and Plum wrote to Townend that if such was the case, it would be *finis* for him since he might not survive such an operation at his age. Fortunately for Wodehouse, the stroke hit him when he was near Oscar Hammerstein's doctor's office. Plum was dressed in his usual casual manner and looked, on first glance, like a bum when he wandered in; but the doctor's receptionist, noting that Wodehouse's sports coat was Savile Row, declared he wasn't a bum but an Englishman. They sent him promptly to a top-flight hospital, where he recovered fully.

Reflecting on all this, Wodehouse mused that he'd been going along as if he were in his forties, eating, drinking, and smoking too much. Most importantly, he noted how he always had looked at himself as "a freak whom age couldn't touch," but that he now accepted that "one must be one's age." (Of course, this begs the question of what "being one's age" means at each point in time. Not many men in their late sixties would have gone on the exhausting road trip with a summer theatre tour that Plum endured in August 1950.)

At 69, Wodehouse told Townend that he was getting depressed about turning seventy, in part because of the biblical assumption that seventy "is the end of all things." Reading the obituaries first thing every morning also reminded him that all flesh is grass, and the passing of his friend Denis Mackail's wife around the same time made the abstract notion of death extremely concrete. Looking ahead, Wodehouse already couldn't help but consider how he would be eighty in ten more long years. Yet, around the same time that Plum was musing on seventy being the end of all things, he told Townend that he felt as if he was fitter than he'd been in London in 1926 (in his mid-forties) when he ate, drank, and smoked to excess. Moreover, PGW kept writing through it all, even if not at the same pace he'd maintained previously.

All in all, Wodehouse found his sixties to be a time of physical and artistic struggle, but he mostly maintained a stiff upper lip in the face of it all and never considered tottering to an armchair and idling all day.

## Seventies

IN SOME WAYS, PGW's seventies were better than his sixties. As Sophie Ratcliffe has pointed out, he seemed to regain confidence in his writing, and this was reflected in the several well-regarded books he created during this decade. Physically, however, Plum declined noticeably, and the one identifiably septuagenarian character Plum created in his own seventies may reflect his distaste for this age. Literary agent Howard Saxby, Sr., is 75 and seemingly gaga. Saxby is absent-minded, yammers away in non sequiturs as he knits, and gives every appearance of being non compos mentis. (Of course, this may be merely literary agent cunning intended to baffle both importuning clients and publishers.) To be fair, though, the Oldest Member, whom Wodehouse created in his early years, has an excellent memory and is an articulate storyteller. Wodehouse described the OM in 1919 as having stopped playing golf when the old gutty went out, which was around 1900; so, assuming this avid golfer would have played at least into his fifties, he would be well into his seventies when expertly relating his stories.

Many Wodehouse devotees will be surprised to learn that the Master could be rather querulous in his seventies. We tend to think of him as having been a mild, uncomplaining, cheerful chap all of his life, but this definitely isn't true of him as a septuagenarian. PGW had good reason to be grumpy in his seventies, as many of us do when we've had our three-score-and-ten and find ourselves classified as old folks. He suffered from ongoing giddy fits, arthritis, and lumbago; his bladder was complaining; and he experienced the typical septuagenarian slowing of both mind and body. Plum's walks decreased in length from five or six miles daily in his early seventies to three miles as he approached eighty. His physical ailments also made it hard for him, he said, to touch his toes or catch the cat, and his lessened mental acuity caused him to "never [get] a thing right the first time," forcing him to "build a story in layers, like a coral reef." ("Ah yes," commiserates many a septuagenarian author.)

The detrimental effects of aging became a major theme in Plum's correspondence. At 71 he already was thinking ahead and remarking to Townend how "appalling" it would be for the two of them to be 78. "Shades of the prison house begin . . . to close upon the growing boy," was how he felt about reaching par. Increasingly health-conscious, Wodehouse told Townend that "we septuagenarians must watch our health very closely if, like Old Man River, we want to keep rolling along." As Wodehouse neared eighty, he referred to himself in a letter to Guy Bolton as "an

old wreck,” and when the actress Marion Davies died in 1961, aged 64, PGW remarked to Bolton that few people he knew were still alive. (Plum doesn’t appear to have cogitated much about an afterlife; he seems to have been agnostic and content with “we’ll have to wait and see.”)

One month from eighty, in his most extended thoughts on the subj., Plum wrote to Townend: “I always supposed the whole idea of the thing was that others might make the Obituary column but that I was immortal and would go on forever . . . [but] I, too, must ere long hand in my dinner pail.” Hence, it’s no shock to discover him confessing, “I find in this evening of my life, that my principal pleasure is writing stinkers to people who attack me in the press.” For example, to journalist Nancy Spain he wrote, “You certainly made a pretty bloody fool of yourself over *Performing Flea*, didn’t you. . . . I’ll give you a tip . . . always read at least some of the book before you review it. It makes a tremendous difference.”

In private correspondence, Wodehouse also offered quite a few cutting remarks about several people, wondering about Rex Harrison, for instance, “Who ever started the idea that he has charm? I had always considered Professor Higgins the most loathsome of all stage characters, but I never realized how loathsome he could be till I saw Sexy Remy playing him.” Television, Plum judged, was “so frightful, it is difficult to say which is its most repulsive feature.”

Plum’s experiences as a septuagenarian are lamentably common, for the seventies usually are a time of physical and mental decline. From early middle age into the decade of the sixties, a person’s physical capabilities drop significantly but gradually before falling off the cliff in the seventies and beyond. Senior track athletes’ performances, for example, decline gradually by about 3.4% a year from age 50 to age 75, then plummet. Sarcopenia—the age-related loss of muscular strength—also strikes, starting with an 8% per decade loss from age forty that increases dramatically after seventy. These phenomena are but parts of a general accelerated decline in mind and body. (Note: I have trademarked “Accelerated Decline” as a name for a band comprised of aged rockers but am willing to negotiate a license with readers of the present work.)

Moreover, Plum’s fondness for writing stinkers may have been an expression of yet another unwanted visitor to the septuagenarian man—Irritable Male Syndrome (seriously, it’s a thing), which sometimes occurs during andropause as a gent’s testosterone decreases and estrogen increases. Nevertheless, Wodehouse didn’t craft himself a hemlock cocktail, and neither need we

fellow codgers. With his beloved daily routine, Plum was rather in advance of modern enlightened thought which emphasizes that all of these age-related declines can be slowed through continued activity. Modern enlightened t. indicates that activity slows the rate of decline and that a training program of six months to a year can even increase an oldster’s VO<sub>2</sub> max (maximal oxygen consumption—a measure of aerobic fitness) by some 25%, amounting to the restoration of “an estimated twelve years of vigor to one’s life.”

PGW sometimes felt his old pep, writing to Evelyn Waugh that he felt the same as he did twenty years before, and that he supposed “in due course I’ll fall apart but as of even date I’m in great shape.” At 75 Plum reported “still ticking over briskly” and eating and sleeping well. In his late seventies, he wrote to Townend that, despite “not being quite the man [he] was,” he continued to do his before-breakfast exercises, touched his toes fifty times, and walked three miles a day. (Wodehouse always claimed that he hadn’t missed a day of his daily dozen since he started them in 1919.) And, of course, he kept his brain on its toes by writing for several hours every day, without fail.

### Eighties

WODEHOUSE DID NOT “altogether approve of turning eighty,” for, as he wrote to Townend, “at eighty things begin to get serious.” In Plum’s case, Ethel’s hospitalizations were the source of the seriousness in his life. While his own health didn’t really improve, it did stabilize, and he seems to have come to terms with the depredations of old age. In this, as in other difficult times in his life, PGW didn’t remain serious for long. “Life becomes tranquil once you get the hang of being a very old party” was the way he put it.

He didn’t complain as much in this decade as in his seventies about what he no longer could do, but rather was proud of what he still could do. At the threshold of Plum’s eightieth birthday, his many interviewers found no signs of “senile decay” as they conversed with him. He continued his daily dozen, along with the fifty toe touches, and three miles of daily walking. Shortly before turning ninety, Wodehouse noted that he’d gained only seven pounds since leaving Dulwich more than seventy years previously. (He did muse, though, that given the amount of time he spent urinating, he probably just should remain in the bathroom—the universal complaint among us pensioners.)

The numerous tributes given Plum by fellow writers and an adoring public when he turned eighty seem to have acted on him like a large dose of Buck-U-Uppo Grade B. Wodehouse also overcame his snide

seventies, reverting to his more tolerant self. As he put it, “a kid of seventy-five is full of juvenile prejudice, but we octogenarians can take it.” Hence, fewer stinkers to critics emerged from his typewriter. This renewed tolerance further revealed itself in a developing taste for daytime television soap operas, even though they cut into his writing time. He and Ethel were devoted at various times to *The Edge of Night*, *Secret Storm*, and *Love of Life*. (I found this particularly endearing, as my father grew similarly hooked on *Love of Life* in his late seventies and eighties.) Wodehouse also was very fond of *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, which he thought the best thing on television. Most importantly, despite slowing down, in his eighties Wodehouse produced seven entertaining novels, some of which involved his most beloved characters (including *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*; *Service with a Smile*; and *The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood*), as well as one short-story collection (*Plum Pie*).

### Nineties

**I**N HIS NINETIES, Wodehouse proved emotionally up to the ever-increasing challenges of advancing age. Although his heart problems had him reporting that he panted “as if running for a train” when going upstairs to Ethel’s room, and noting that after all of his ninetieth birthday interviews, he “couldn’t walk without stopping and gasping,” PGW kept up his daily dozen as best he could, thinking it “pretty good for an old fossil of ninety.” However, after he fell in his yard at 91 (“it was like a stroke, but wasn’t one”) he had to walk with a stick, and he ceased his daily three-mile stroll. Still, nearing 93, Plum confided to David Jasen that “you may as well get as old as you can.” He also announced he was going to try for 100.

Maintaining this can-do attitude, Plum persevered with his craft in the decade of his nineties, writing several more highly readable books, such as *Much Obligated*, *Jeeves*; *Pearls, Girls, and Monty Bodkin*; and *The Cat-Nappers* (aka *Aunts Aren’t Gentlemen*). So, those of us who are shocked to find themselves suddenly being the Oldest Whatever (as I found myself the Oldest Competitor at a recent track meet) can take heart at Wodehouse’s approach and the continued productivity of his later years. My aim is to have it said of me, as Plum wished it would be of him: “But he did take trouble.”



## Nashville 2024: Call for Riveting Talks

BY MARIA JETTE

**R**IVETING TALKS: There’s that intriguing term again. Something to do with TWS conventions, scholarship, and the primitive urge to grasp a detail of Wodehousiana firmly by the shoulders and murmur into its shining, upturned face: “My theory!”

Our conventions are about Wodehousian fellowship, of course, but beyond the browsing and sluicing lie many finely honed thoughts about character origins, pig husbandry, cocktail history, and discoveries; musings about all things Plum; and reflections on the fine points of PGW’s writing, from his possible and probable influences (banking, cricket, dogs, love, transatlantic ocean voyages) to the most challenging pronouncements, such as Wodehouse’s Greatest Novel.

Have you uncovered a dark secret that will set the Wodehouse world on fire? Did you spend the pandemic retooling Anatole’s menus into plant-based form? Did Bertie Wooster turn you into a spats devotee and an evangelist for same?

**We want you!** You and your talk, that is. It can be strictly verbal; it may include PowerPoint; it may involve theatricality and/or music; it may be quite serious and a bit amusing or it might be a frothy dose of scholarly sweetness and light. We have eight slots available, and request that each talk be no longer than twenty minutes, give or take ninety seconds or so.

To get the old juices flowing, take a look at the treasure trove of previous convention talks via the *Plum Lines* index, beginning on page 13: <http://www.wodehouse.org/extra/index2022.pdf>

For more info, or to submit your topic, précis, or fully formed product, email Riveting Talks Wrangler Maria Jette ([mariajette@mac.com](mailto:mariajette@mac.com)). The deadline is midnight on December 31, 2023, and the chosen speakers will be notified by January 31, 2024.

Our San Diego Riveting Talkers were almost all first-timers, and all were fabulous. Will 2024 be your year to etch your name in the annals of Riveters?

# Nashville 2024 Convention Plan Well Under Way

## BY ELLIOTT MILSTEIN



*Vanderbilt University in the autumn*

**Y**OUR CONVENTION COMMITTEE has been hard at work, and the vague outline of the events schedule previously discussed is starting to come into focus. For those of you planning to attend, we provide here an idea of what to look forward to. For those not yet planning to attend, read on, get enticed, and prepare to clear your calendar for September 26–29, 2024, and to begin looking for tickets to Nashville, Tennessee, for the 22nd InterNASHonal Convention of The Wodehouse Society: Plum Crazy in Nashville.

Festivities begin Thursday night with the usual meet and greet in the bar. The Nashville Marriott at Vanderbilt University boasts a beautiful outdoor patio bar, the perfect site for a large group of Plummies to gather, meet old friends, make new friends, browse and sluice, discuss Wodehouse, and take part in a number of games and activities (some of which may surprise you). Of course, if you come earlier in the week or day, the city of Nashville and environs offer plenty of sightseeing opportunities.

But don't go to the Cheekwood Estate or the Country Music Hall of Fame before the convention starts, because we have arranged a special tour of those places on Friday, from 9 AM to 3:30 PM. The fun continues that evening when we will all tramp over to the Vanderbilt University Library for a very special presentation by the Curator of Special Collections and the official dedication of The P. G. Wodehouse Special Collection. This special presentation will be followed by a special reception, during which small groups will be conducted to a special "Treasure Room" of special editions of Wodehouse as well as other special treasures of their overall collection. Isn't that special?!

The lineup of speakers for the Saturday Riveting Talks is still in its nascent stage (and yes, we are still looking for speakers, skits, cross-talk acts, etc.; see Maria Jette's article on page 11), but we're already collecting

some interesting concepts. If the last convention's slate of speakers was indeed truly the best ever (as numerous attendees have averred), this next one is likely to blow the lid off.

In order to help move things along and make life easier, we are featuring a Saturday lunch, so you don't miss a second of the afternoon's activities. Lunch is optional, and there are several other options within walking distance of the hotel. But the committee thought this added feature would be advantageous for many attendees.

Of course, there is a Saturday night reception, and of course there is a gala banquet, and of course there will be costumes in abundance, and of course there will be prizes galore, but in addition to these usual features, a concert and singalong will follow. Yes, Maria Jette (Madame President to you!) and Dan Chouinard will grace us again with a riot of songs from the Wodehouse Canon and elsewhere of that period, and then lead us in singing numerous other favorites, complete with "Bill" and "Sonny Boy."

Sunday's brunch rounds out the weekend as usual, but with perhaps a few new twists. What exactly? Well, time will tell.

Everything is upgraded. Everything is special. And if you have missed other historic occasions in the World of Wodehouse, don't miss the exciting dedication of The P. G. Wodehouse Collection at Vanderbilt University.

Watch this space for more information. Also, check out the convention Facebook page "Plum Crazy in Nashville" and our own website for more information and the registration form (which may perhaps possibly be available even as you read this).



*A riverboat at sunset passing downtown Nashville*

# The Swiss Fondue Dished Out by Sir P. G. Wodehouse

BY ASHOK KUMAR BHATIA

*This is an abridged and edited version of Ashok Kumar Bhatia's full article. Ashok is a Plum fan of Indian origin based in Norway. His Wodehouse-related posts can be seen under the category "What Ho!" at <https://ashokbhatia.wordpress.com>. Ashok is grateful to Neil Midkiff and Tony Ring, who made several suggestions towards improving the contents of this article. The author is also grateful to Chris Starling, President of the Anglo-Swiss Club of Lucerne, who reviewed this article before its publication. The complete, encyclopedic article, which has many more references to St. Bernard dogs, mountain echoes, flamboyantly dressed Swiss mountaineers, and more, can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/juf9rmn2>.*

WHENEVER SWITZERLAND is mentioned, some might think of its trademark dish, fondue. A few other things that pop up in our minds include cheese, chocolate, banking, cuckoo clocks, watches, lakes, and snow-topped mountains which often look like giant chocolate-pistachio ice cream cones covered with a drool-worthy vanilla topping.

Many of the attributes of this beautiful country have figured in the stories written by Plum during his highly creative life. Here we'll look at some of the ways he depicted Switzerland—dotted with lakes, mountains, and greenery—in several of his narratives. All these references combine to make a delectable fondue.

## William Tell Told Again

AS EARLY AS 1904, Wodehouse wrote the story of this legendary character from Switzerland. The book comprises prose and verse with illustrations. The main prose element was written by Plum, while Philip Dadd supplied the frontispiece and fifteen full-page illustrations, all in color. The illustrations were each accompanied by verse written by John W. Houghton, who also wrote the prologue and epilogue in verse.

## Swiss Waiters

SWITZERLAND IS FAMOUS for its hospitality as well as for its grooming of staff in the best traditions of the trade. Swiss waiters are frequently mentioned in Plum's works. To those of us who have travelled to Switzerland in modern times and have been impressed by the quality of service in Swiss hotels, Wodehouse's disparaging references to Swiss waiters are difficult to understand, unless Switzerland had a policy of exporting their less-competent staff to work in other countries.

In "Farewell to Legs," Evangeline speaks of Legs Mortimer thus: "I met him when I was over in Switzerland last winter," and she goes on to say that "Legs yodelled to the waiters because they were Swiss."

Doctor Sally captures a scene from Hotel Superba, which stands on the Esplanade of Bingley-on-Sea:

In addition to the sunshine, there entered also the strains of a dance band, presumably from the winter garden below, where Swiss waiters prowled among potted palms and such of the Superba's guests as wished to do so were encouraged to dance.

There are Swiss waiters in *The Girl on the Boat*. Those "at the Hotel Magnificent, where Sam was stopping, are in a class of bungling incompetence by themselves, the envy and despair of all the other Swiss waiters at all the other Hotels Magnificent along the coast."

## Swiss Cheese

SWITZERLAND PRODUCES over five hundred varieties of cheese. Most of Wodehouse's references are related to the many holes found in Emmentaler, the variety most often called Swiss in English-speaking countries.

In *Stiff Upper Lip*, Jeeves, Bertie Wooster describes the viciousness of the dog Bartholomew's bites:

You can't go climbing out of windows under the eyes of an Aberdeen terrier so prone as Bartholomew was always to think the worst. In due season, no doubt, he would learn that what he had taken for a burglar escaping with the swag had been in reality a harmless guest of the house and would be all apologies, but by that time my lower slopes would be as full of holes as a Swiss cheese.

In *A Pelican at Blandings*, Johnny Halliday describes to Gally the grilling he, as defense attorney, was obliged to give Linda Gilpin as a witness in a court case, leading to a split with her: "It was my duty to examine her and make it plain to the jury that she was cockeyed and her testimony as full of holes as a Swiss cheese."

In *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?*, these are the thoughts of Horace Appleby when he thinks of an encounter with Charlie, who loves carrying a gun on his person:

The thought that somewhere in the recesses of Charlie's neat custom-made suit there lay concealed the gun which had started all the unpleasantness would have been enough to disconcert a far braver man, for it was a gun, Horace suspected, as liberally pitted with notches as a Swiss cheese, and one more, he feared, to be added almost immediately.

#### Swiss Navy Admirals

**I**N *Heavy Weather*, this is how Lady Julia opens the conversation with Lord Tilbury:

"So this is where you get out all those jolly little papers of yours, is it? I must say I'm impressed. Quite awe-inspiring, all that ritual on the threshold. Admirals in the Swiss Navy making you fill up forms with your name and business, and small boys in buttons eyeing you as if anything you said might be used in evidence against you."

#### Merry Swiss Peasants

**I**N *The Prince and Betty*, the casino on the tiny island of Mervo had various cubicles representing different countries. Each of the rooms was furnished and arranged in a different style. The note of individuality extended even to the croupiers. Thus, a man with money at his command could wander from the Dutch room, where croupiers in the costumes of Holland ministered to his needs, to the Japanese room, where his coin would be raked in by quite passable imitations of the Samurai. If he had any left at this point, he was free to dispose of it under the auspices of near-Hindus in the Indian room, of merry Swiss peasants in the Swiss room, or in other appropriately furnished apartments of red-shirted Bret Harte miners, fur-clad Esquimaux, or languorous Spaniards.

#### Of Swiss Vice Presidents

**I**N "The Rise of Minna Nordstrom," Ben Zizzbaum is the chief executive of the Zizzbaum-Celluloid Corporation. His wife—that would be Mrs. Zizzbaum—is planning a party for 111 guests, including the Vice-President of Switzerland.

"Open House" introduces us to Eustace Mulliner, who ends up taking up an assignment at the British Embassy in Switzerland. He does exceedingly well in his job, and is awarded the Order of the Crimson Edelweiss, Third Class, with crossed cuckoo clocks, carrying with it the right to yodel in the presence of the vice president.

#### Of Wars and Treaties

**I**N *The Luck of the Bodkins*, Albert Peasemarch, the well-intentioned but goofy steward onboard the New York-bound ship RMS *Atlantic*, says: "What caused the war? That bloke in Switzerland shooting the German Emperor."

The incident usually considered to have been the immediate cause of the First World War was the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian Emperor, at Sarajevo in Bosnia, by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip. Peasemarch surely has his facts mixed up.

In *The Swoop!*, Wodehouse treats us to a scenario wherein England has been invaded by as many as nine armies at the same time, including the Swiss navy, which, somewhat out of normal character, had bombarded Lyme Regis and landed troops immediately to westward of the bathing machines. Elsewhere, the narrative also mentions a Swiss general who had missed his diamond solitaire.

In "Ukridge's Dog College," Ukridge approaches George Tupper, who works at the Foreign Office. According to Ukridge, Tupper listens to the Ukridge story "with the serious, official air which these Foreign Office fellows put on when they are deciding whether to declare war on Switzerland or send a firm note to San Marino, and was reaching for his checkbook before I had been speaking two minutes."

"A Bit of Luck for Mabel" has Ukridge again touching George Tupper for a fiver. However, this time around, he is not in a positive frame of mind:

"It's very bad for you, all this messing about on borrowed money. It's not that I grudge it to you," said Tuppy; and I knew, when I heard him talk in that pompous, Foreign Official way, that something had gone wrong that day in the country's service. Probably the draft treaty with Switzerland had been pinched by a foreign adventuress. That sort of thing is happening all the time in the Foreign Office. Mysterious veiled women blow in on old Tuppy and engage him in conversation, and when he turns round he finds the long blue envelope with the important papers in it gone.

*We suggest that you read the full article. It is a great catalog of the other Swiss elements in Wodehouse, and worthwhile to check out. Note that a fuller version of this article has been published in Wooster Sauce no. 107 (September 2023).—OM*

# Trouser This

FOR THOSE who like challenging puzzles and clever wordplay, you may want to take a gander at *The Shipping Forecast Puzzle Book*, by Alan Connor. In an article published in the *Guardian* on July 3, Connor looked at wordplay and crossword clues concerning articles of clothing. (The full article can be viewed at [tinyurl.com/mrnt3ufj](https://tinyurl.com/mrnt3ufj).) Wodehouse fans would appreciate his observation on trousers:

One of my favorite ways of being misled in a puzzle is when a word looks very much like, say, a noun and turns out to be a verb. Since the 1860s, if not before, someone taking possession of something—especially if the something is money and the taking is underhand—has been said to be “trousering” whatever it is. P. G. Wodehouse was fond of the term; journalists still are.

## I Say, Jeeves!

BY MONIQUE FAITH BOODRAM

*Monique Faith Boodram entered this piece in the The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)’s essay competition (junior division), and we feel our membership would love this chance to read it. A prolific writer and thinker, Monique is present on many online forums, including Goodreads.*

ON MY FIRST attempt at reading *Stiff Upper Lip, Jeeves*, I wanted to go scrambling for the Junior Ganymede Club book in hopes of cracking the code of B. Wooster’s written language. Bertie says, “I could see at a g. that [Jeeves] wanted no piece of [the Alpine hat].” Interest increased when I arrived at chapter 4 of this narrative: “And I can tell you why I was all of a t.” I did not at first know what these single-letter abbreviations stood for. However, it is only a puzzle until we grasp the context. The puzzle dissipates once the “g.” is replaced with the word “glance”—because the phrase “at a glance” suits the sentence perfectly—and once we recall Bertie being “all of a twitter” after Gussie Fink-Nottle made a short statement of disgust regarding Madeline Bassett and rushed off in a cab, leaving no explanation behind.

This read could have ended meaninglessly had I continued to absorb words empty of purpose or, as David Heddenorf called it, “Reading that Isn’t Reading” (*Sewanee Review*, available online through Jstor with the proper credentials). But it was impossible to carelessly flip through the pages of this novel. The single letters narrated by Wooster helped me regain

focus on my desire to attain some pleasure from Jeeves’s and Wooster’s return to Totleigh Towers. To me, this small instance proved Wodehouse’s genius tactics with both his expert linguistic style and his plotting skills, tactics that have contributed to getting readers engrossed in his humor all round.

Most commendable are Wodehouse’s intricate plots. Like a cytoskeleton networked with filaments and fibres, plot points are positioned to create fine detail within. One would think it easy to wind up lost in complexity, yet its simplicity makes it easily accessible to many. However, this lucidity can make one take plot structure for granted, at the least not taking it into serious consideration in regards to influencing audience engagement. As Armenuhi Martirosyan stated in “Descriptive Language and Idiomatic Phrases in P. G. Wodehouse’s Novels” (on the Armenian Folia Anglistika website, at <https://tinyurl.com/4rmc3xjj>), his linguistic style usually makes the first impression on us readers. However, Wodehouse put great effort into his plots, which help us to see that the stories are not just linguistic escapes for the logophiles.

Given the story line in the Jeeves series, we initially become invested in Wooster’s drivel, then his acquaintances’ nonsensical dramas, and finally the sanity that Reginald Jeeves has to offer to his gentleman in Wooster’s trying times. Plotting becomes dependent on the quirky actions of the fictional individuals involved. Likewise, the way the plots are presented to us is dependent on the raconteur chosen; furthermore, they are created to illuminate the story with humorous yet captivating accounts of his experiences. We can see that the correlation between plot structure and narrative perspective is as important as Wodehouse’s linguistic style on the whole.

### We Woosters

IN THE COMPANY of Bertram Wooster, we are given the brimming details. He is the perfectly well-rounded chap for this sort of narrating thing. The accounts are full of dialogue, personal commentary, and praise for Jeeves, which comes around at various intervals. Developing readers’ interest in the story starts by acquainting them with Bertie, not only as the one who witnesses the events and is responsible for telling the story, but also as a character who plays an active and key role in the storyline and the humor that comes with the narration.

Being the upper-class bachelor that he is, Wooster may be up to speed in regard to his associates’ exploits, but he reveals these minimally when it comes to odd interests that effectuate the plot. Bertie is not blinded

enough to become an overly biased narrator. Do not be disappointed when he does not worship the back of Chuffy's head or the ground that Honoria Glossop walks on, as Pauline Stoker or Bingo Little may have done, respectively. (Bertie is more worried about apparel that disturbs Jeeves.) Being a spirited chump makes it easy for him to get in the soup. Leave it to Wooster, because the matter can be and ultimately is taken to the more capable mind of the efficient valet. If all were really left to Wooster, consummation of ideas such as pushing Oswald Glossop off a bridge and getting a check suit like Monty Byng's would be much more likely.

Jeeves is the element of soundness in the Wooster universe. He has a particular skill for observing and inquiring about matters surrounding his employer's acquaintances, making him the brain of all operations. His solutions are shaped to assist with solving various idiocracies regarding cow creamers, young lovers, aunts, and so forth. Sometimes their problems are brought to Wooster so they can get advice from Jeeves, as Bingo Little did when he fell in love with Mabel, Honoria, Charlotte Corday Rowbotham, etc. Sometimes characters present their problems just to involve Wooster in their own little plans.

If hesitant to oblige, Bertie may be threatened with some proposition that may put him in a very uncomfortable spot. Such was the case when Stiffy Byng forced Bertie to steal a black amber statuette. Complying with Stiffy's demands ensured that she would not tell all about Gussie eating steak-and-kidney pie behind Madeline's back. In a way, this contributed to prolonging the threat of Bertie returning to a torturous engagement with soupy Madeline. Conflicts like this haunt Wooster like ghosts and are humorous highlights of his chronicles.

#### Art in the Narration

INSTEAD OF understanding Bertie's character from a narrator's point of view, we begin to know the fellow like a friend. His personality is evident throughout and enhances the comical effect. Consider the short narrative by Jeeves, "Bertie Changes His Mind." Jeeves's position as a mature, articulate intellect changes one's mindset about the story. We are now at the side of the gentleman's gentleman. He writes the story as though it was advice to novice valets, offering in one case this description of his employer: "Mr. Wooster is a young gentleman with practically every desirable quality except one. . . . In the presence of the Unusual, Mr. Wooster is too prone to smile weakly and allow his eyes to protrude." This conjures amusing images in our minds as we observe through Bertie's lens.

In "Jeeves and the Yule-tide Spirit," Bertie is set on staying at Skeldings Hall to get revenge on Tuppy Glossop and to be with Bobbie Wickham. When the prank turns sour and Bobbie's mischief has an adverse effect on his infatuation, Bertie finally comes to his senses and heads for Monte Carlo, as Jeeves had recommended and favored from the start. This pattern of Bertie's challenges and Jeeves's rescues recurs, except in most stories it is told from the Wooster perspective. As a result, we are, as Richard Carlson said (quoted on Instagram in Martirosyan\_66), consumed by Wooster's drivel, which resembles that of "a butterfly caught up in the brandy"—a unique feature that reflects Bertie's characteristics, ranging from incorrectly referring to literature and cliché phrases to making clarifications as if he is having a casual conversation. You might find yourself thinking, "Yes, Bertie—I follow you. Pray continue." Or you might be laughing from the hilarious descriptions. Imagine Old Little, tumbling downstairs like a ton of coals, or Roderick Spode, who looked "as if Nature had intended to make a gorilla, and had changed its mind at the last moment."

#### In Perfect Timing

THIS EXCERPT of dialogue between Aunt Dahlia and Bertie might sum up our feelings towards the Jeeves stories:

"No, I expect you'll wriggle out of it somehow, as you always do. I wish I had a fiver for every time you've been within a step of the altar rails and have managed to escape unscathed . . ."

"Quite. Still, it's no good trying to pretend that peril doesn't loom. It looms like the dickens."

Though we are familiar with the pattern of the plots, Bertie's narration frequently makes us wonder if he really will get out of the peril. Like Dr. Watson, who felt doomed at Baskerville Hall without Sherlock Holmes, Bertie broods when the end seems without answer. Watson becomes relieved and baffled when Holmes arrives and clears the muddy water; Bertie acts similarly. He may be shocked by Jeeves, for example, releasing cats and Sir Roderick Glossop's stolen hat when he is lunching at Bertie's, but he becomes delighted with gratitude once Jeeves explains that the concealed measures were taken for his employer's benefit, steering the threats away. Can we refrain from sharing Bertie's reactions of certain awe after experiencing the resolution of these farcical affairs? I hardly think so.

# Chapters Corner

**W**HAT IS YOUR chapter up to these days? Please send all news to Gary Hall (see back page). Note that webmaster Noel Merrill keeps chapter items posted on the society website. It's good to send advance info about upcoming events to Noel; his contact information is on the last page of this issue.

## Anglers' Rest

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## Blandings Castle Chapter

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## The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)

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## Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

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## Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

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**W**E MET IN PERSON ON June 17, 2023, at Cavanaugh's Pub in Headhouse Square, welcoming new member Sarah Ream and two former members, Robert Gordon and Stephanie Patterson. Our discussion topic for the meeting involved two Mulliner stories: "A Slice of Life" (1926) and "George and Alfred" (1966). These provided an opportunity to reflect on changes in Plum's writing over four decades.

We began with our typically wide-ranging lunch discussion, touching on topics such as the Red Sox/Yankees rivalry, a Bob Dylan concert, novelist Carl Hiaasen, the preceding day's local Bloomsday

celebration of *Ulysses* and James Joyce, and the virtues of bookstores versus online shopping (namely, serendipity).

Mark Reber led our discussion of the two stories. He shared the passage on Mulliner from Richard Usborne's *Plum Sauce*, which touched on some of the attractive features of the stories, including the consistent setting of the bar parlor in the Anglers' Rest, the inclusion of Mulliner relatives, identification of patrons by drink rather than by name, and the amusing style of narration. Mark showed us the cover illustration (which Wodehouse detested) from the first edition of *Meet Mr. Mulliner*. The group shared appreciation and mild criticism of the two stories, with the earlier one more likely to evoke laughing out loud. Mark also reviewed the evolution of "Alfred and George" from a 1912 story, "Rallying Round Old George," which was narrated by Reggie Pepper.

Other discussions related to procuring noms de Plum, valued former members of Chapter One, and past Wodehouse Society conferences, including the one in Philadelphia in 2001. We have resumed the tradition of sending a donation to the Philadelphia Zoo for the support of Gussie the newt, which is noted in a sign in the Reptile House.

In attendance were Steve Wieland, Susan Barr, Ben Wieland, Karen Reber, Mark Reber, Rebecca Reber, Robert Sloan, Robert Gordon, Stephanie Patterson, and Sarah Ream.

—Robert Sloan

## Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

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**W**HAT HO, fellow Plummies! I'm ringing in as official scribe and member of the co-chair triumvirate of the Chicago Accident Syndicate. While our chapter has been ably represented at conventions (thanks to all and sundry members in attendance at same) and the PGW Zoom meetings (thanks mostly to Mary-Carol's steady attendance), there's been no chapter news in these pages since before Covid.

Life changes and the vagaries of time have taken their toll. But the Syndicate prevails. Expect to hear more in future *Plum Lines* issues of doings in the Big Windy. I think I just made that name up. I'd say we're back—but we were never really gone!

—Will Saddler

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**The Drone Rangers**  
 (Houston and vicinity)  
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**The Flying Pigs**  
 (Cincinnati area and elsewhere)  
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 billscrivener47@gmail.com  
 or lspace@cinci.rr.com



**WHAT, HO!** The Flying Pigs are back! After a long hiatus, we met for cream tea on Saturday, July 29, at the home of Bill Scrivener and Susan Pace. We had four new members! Wow! We had not met for two years and had a lot to talk about. After an hour of spirited conversation, with our tummies full of cucumber sandwiches and scones with clotted cream and jam, all washed down with Ceylon tea and champagne, we dove into a group reading of “The Great Sermon Handicap.” It was great fun. We plan to get together again on

Saturday, October 28, so all Plummies in the vicinity should let us know who you are so that we can put you on our distribution list so that you’ll know all about the next gathering.

—Susan Pace

**The Fourth Dimension**  
 (Zoom Chapter)  
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 (Please email Freda to be added to the Zoom invitation list.)



**A** HEARTY “WHAT HO!” from the Fourth Dimension. Recent highlights include reading “Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!” aloud. We were suitably gobsmacked by James Belford’s hog call, beginning, as it does, with “a low minor of two quarter notes in four-four time” and building from there. Various Fourthians gave of their best and imitated this prairie aria. Our research concluded that birds are intrigued, dogs like to join in, and cats remain unimpressed. No pigs were present.

We also enjoyed learning the real-life history behind this delightfulness, as noted in Elin Woodger’s Riveting Talk “It Takes a Thief” from the Summer 2023 *Plum Lines*. Further details can be found in David Landman’s article “Fred Patzel: Pavarotti of the Piglot” at <https://tinyurl.com/pgw-patzel>.

Speaking of riveting talks, Elin will kindly reprise hers for us on Saturday, October 7. Let joy be unconfined!

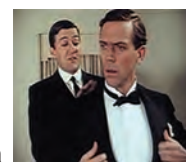
Lastly, please note that beginning on October 7, our Zoom meeting ID will be changing. From here on, just email me (address above) to be added to the invitation list. You’ll be sure to get the current link. As always, feel free to peruse our past and future events at [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) under “The Fourth Dimension: A P. G. Wodehouse Society Zoom Chapter.” Hurray!

—Freda Kirkham

**Friends of the Fifth Earl of Ickenham**  
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**A Little More Bertie Than Jeeves**  
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**The Melonsquashville (TN) Literary Society**  
(Tennessee)

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**The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels**  
(San Antonio and South Texas)

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

(Boston and New England)  
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**T**HE NEWTS expected our June Nottle to be on a lovely sunny summer day in the bucolic bower of our hosts Indu and Jaganathan (“Ravi”) Ravi, but alas, it rained. We met indoors. Spirits were high, conversations were learned yet sparkling, and, as always, the comestibles were a delight—here, toothsome salads; there, enticing meat offerings; and always plenty of delicious, delightful desserts and a well-chilled bottle of champagne.

We read the first part of “Comrade Bingo,” with the original 1922 illustrations by A. Wallis Mills from *Strand* magazine. What will happen next? Will Bingo Little marry the billowy-curved Charlotte Corday Rowbotham (thereby saddling him with old Rowbotham as a father-in-law), and click at Goodwood? We think not, but look forward to reading the second part of the story, “Bingo Has a Bad Goodwood.” There may be a clue in that title, but despite our discussion and pondering, we haven’t found it yet.

—Roberta Towner

**The Northwodes**

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**T**HE NORTHWODES strive to be current, so we met on June 23 to discuss *Leave It to Psmith*, which, though 100 years old, seems to be in the zeitgeist. Comrade Bruce Willey shepherded us through the major themes of Elliott Milstein’s recent article in *Plum Lines*. Elliott argues that it’s Plum’s greatest because it was right at the beginning of Plum’s middle period, one-third of the way through his writing career. He’d found his voice and his retinues were sorted out. *LITP* was his second Blandings novel and the fourth Psmith novel, in a combined universe, which he hadn’t done before. This was Plum’s 31st book (some early ones are not so hot) and was followed by his master period up until 1950 or so.

Comrade Maria Jette liked the clockwork complexity of the plot. Mike Eckman noticed that every character was related in some way. Karen Langenfeld said that the best connection was between Psmith’s father and Lord Emsworth, though they never met. Comrade Joel Langenfeld thought Baxter seems to be an outlier to Mike’s theory. Well, yes, Baxter is an outlier. Holly Windle summed up Ralston McTodd as a swine, and you must wonder if Cynthia is a sap for reconciling with him. Giblets—forsooth!

Maria loved Psmith’s elegant, genteel style of speaking. His polite, debonair air reminded her of David Niven. Richard Rames suggested he’s supercilious—but “in an adorable way” (added Maria).

Katherine Thomas observed that most of the people who responded to Psmith’s ad seemed to be Scotsmen, offering schemes not different from modern phishing emails from deposed Nigerian princes.

Mike found Psmith to be a combination of Ukridge and Uncle Fred in this book. Psmith, unbidden, acts to help others. Always broke, his first aim is his crusade, his knightly quest. We discussed the similarities between Jeeves and Psmith. Both are major movers of their stories. Mike observed that Psmith, unlike Jeeves, is not a great plotter; he happens to have good things happen to him. Maria noted that he’s good at improvisation. Richard remembered that Psmith at some point actually does say, “I shall endeavour to give satisfaction.”

Our group was rather cynical about the lovers in this book. We predicted that the Aileen Peavey and Edward Cootes romance is doomed. We see only strife for Ralston and Cynthia McTodd—too much drama

there. And my hardhearted reading group thinks that Ronald Psmith and Eve Halliday won't have a lasting and happy marriage. Psmith as a husband is just too much to handle.

—Mike Engstrom

### The Orange Plums

(Orange County, California)

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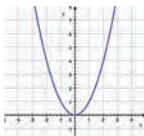


### The Pale Parabolites

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### The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)

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THE PICKERINGS met at the Bieneman residence on May 21, 2023. Ann and Charlie were gracious hosts. The reading assignment was *Leave It to Psmith*. We welcomed our newest member, Ariel Helfer, a professor at Wayne State University. He teaches history of political philosophy with an emphasis on Plato and the Greeks. We are confident that he will fit right in.

In addition to reading the assigned book, several of us also read Elliott's riveting paper (published in the Spring 2023 issue of *Plum Lines*), in which he argued the case that *Leave It to Psmith* is Wodehouse's greatest novel. It is certainly the best of the Psmith books. We have now read *Mike and Psmith*; *Psmith in the City*; *Psmith, Journalist*; and *Leave It to Psmith*, in that order. Unlike the first three, *Leave It* has many of the humorous descriptive passages that are one of the hallmarks of Plum's best writing. It was interesting to watch his writing style develop in the course of the four books.

We also reminisced about Norman Murphy and TWS conventions of the past. The year 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Detroit chapter, aka the Pickering Motor Company. We will have to think of something we can do to commemorate the event.

The next meeting was to be in August (notes in a later issue of *PL*). The reading assignment was *Galahad at Blandings*, aka *The Brinkmanship of Galahad Threepwood*.

—Robert Walter

### The Pittsburgh Millionaires Club

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### The Plum Street Plummies

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### The Right Honorable Knights of Sir Philip Sidney

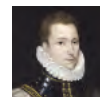
(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

Contact: Peter Nieuwenhuizen

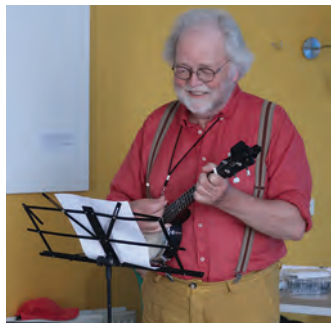
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<https://wodehouse-society.nl>



THE CITY OF DEVENTER, famous for its annual book market with hundreds of book stalls, was the place to be for the Knights of Sir Philip Sidney on June 17. It was a warm and sunny day on the banks of the river IJssel. We saw photos of the coronation of our patron, Queen Camilla, who had invited us to London for the May 6 event. Board member Tony Roodnat told about the plans for a Wodehouse journey to England next year, hopefully with several members of our chapter.



Clockwise from upper left: Annet de Waart receives her membership certificate; Donald Duk talks about his latest translations; Hanse Sprokkreef reads his favorite passage; Leonard Beuger sings his arrangement of "Morning Carol."

New member Annet de Waart received her membership certificate, and Hans Sprokkreeff read his favorite passage of a Wodehouse novel. Translator Leonard Beuger showed us the manuscript of his translation of *Jill the Reckless*. One of our former members, Cees Hilberdink, donated his Wodehouse book collection to the society, so all members present could choose some of his books via a tombola. Artist Donald Duk recently translated ten poems by Wodehouse into Dutch, added illustrations in his own hand, and published them into a booklet. Leonard Beuger had composed a melody for the short poem "Morning Carol," which he sang in English and Dutch while playing the banjo.



The Knights toy duck competition

Because of the beautiful weather, the Knights had an outdoor competition with toy ducks in a soap dish, just like Bertie Wooster in *Right Ho, Jeeves*. We recalled

that this competition made him the old merry Bertram again. Our winner received a bottle of port.

After this contest, our president, Peter N., showed us a novelty: a magazine from the Dutch Indies from 1939, called *Wereldnieuws en Sport in Beeld*, with the final installment of a Dutch translation of *The Code of the Woosters*. This magazine was only available in the Dutch Indies in those days before WWII.



Peter then gave a talk about the fictional bookcase of Bertie Wooster, a lecture he had given at the 2022 Harrogate Wodehouse gathering in England. The Knights closed the meeting with an Anatolian meal outdoors in the sun in Deventer.



A fabulous day of Knights

The next meeting: October 14 in Amsterdam.

—Peter Nieuwenhuizen

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**The Size 14 Hat Club**  
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)  
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## Et Voilà!

BY OLE VAN LUYN  
AND KEN CLEVINGER

THE CONJURER showed the audience his hands: nothing in them! He pulled out his pocket linings: empty! He took off his top hat, tapped it twice with his magic wand, said, “Et voilà!”—and a flock of doves flew out of it. The audience never knew how it was done.

And then there was the scrutiny of all of P. G. Wodehouse’s novels in order to list the French words and expressions used by the Master, with their meanings. Et voilà! The job has been completed!

The novels have been checked, page by page. Almost all contained French words, some more, some fewer, but in two (*The Luck Stone* and *William Tell Told Again*), not a single French word was found.

In 2020 Ken Clevenger and Ole van Luyn, respectively in Alcoa, Tennessee, USA, and in The Hague, The Netherlands, began corresponding about cocktails in the Wodehouse canon. In passing, a remark was made about Plum’s occasional use of a French word. This led these two men to try and collect such words. And that was the beginning of the internet lexicon entitled “Le Mot Juste.” Go to <https://wodehouse-society.nl/French-Words-Le-Mot-Juste>,” et voilà! Scroll down to find the many words.

That you can do so is thanks to Peter Nieuwenhuizen, president of the Dutch P. G. Wodehouse Society, who offered his society’s website for posting and hosting, and his own intellect and efforts to transfer the French words to those dedicated web pages. And while we are at it, we also need to pay special tribute to Dan Garrison

and Neil Midkiff for sharing the coding methodology used in their magnificent *Who’s Who in Wodehouse*.

Why “le mot juste”? Because this expression, which Wodehouse used dozens of times, is a term coined by Gustave Flaubert, the author of *Madame Bovary*, meaning the precise and uniquely right word for the circumstance at hand. Comparing two such different authors as Wodehouse and Flaubert makes sense only if one sees both as excelling in the craft of telling a story and also finding, with uncanny precision, the precisely right words for it.

In North America the project was principally assisted by dedicated correspondents Sophie Delhaes of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; and Ken Clevenger. Ian Michaud and Neil Midkiff must be thanked for their contributions. Sophie, an expert francophone, says that she “enjoyed hunting for all those French words because I discovered so much about Auguste Escoffier, Anatole’s alter ego (or the other way around). In previous readings of Wodehouse novels and short stories, I had always more or less assumed that the fancy French names of various dishes were the figment of a vivid imagination. But no! They were prepared by real people!”

Ken, on the other hand, admitted that he was a very poor student of French in high school and college and only later realized how useful the language would have been if he really knew how to read, write, and speak it. This project gave him a wonderful chance to brush up a bit, and even more to help him understand how Wodehouse, who had studied French all through his six years at Dulwich College, and lived and traveled extensively in France, had used his French language skills so deftly.

Of course, with any job of work, however much you love it, there are potential downsides. Sophie, who tries to read some Wodehouse every day, noted that her “main problem was sending emails to colleagues! Reading the books went ever so well, but then, somehow, those books and their lists of French words seem to sit next to my laptop and wait for such a long time for me to put said lists into emails.”

In The Netherlands, Ole studied French in primary and secondary schools and had worked in French-speaking Africa for seven years: no problems with the language there. He found three fellow members of the Dutch society who were interested in reading any Wodehouse novel and hunting for French mots while doing so. Josepha Olsthoorn was one of them, and when asked whether it was fun to collaborate on Le Mot Juste, she said that “reading Wodehouse is always a pleasure, of course, and searching for French words gives it a new



perspective. You peruse a favorite book. Or you reread another slightly less favorite book, which often turns out to be more enjoyable than you remembered after all. Or not.”

Dutch Wodehouse society member Jeroen Hofland answered that he “would define Wodehouse as a wordsmith and wizard, but PGW’s penchant for incorporating the French language in his works had never really stood out to him until he took part in the Le Mot Juste project. To be able reread his works like a word detective on the lookout for his French tendencies has really brought me to another level in my appreciation of Wodehouse!”

And then there is Marcel Gijbels, who studied French at the university level. He said that while hunting for French words, he “feels an urge to read with care, and, doing so, discovers unexpectedly beautiful turns of phrase. . . . Moreover, when looking up the etymology of English words, it is a private joy to discover how many contemporary English words have been taken from French and other languages.”

Et voilà! With the help of Wodehousians on both sides of the Atlantic, all of Plum’s novels have been perused, studied, and vetted in order to find those French words that English-speaking readers may not know. Of course, you may already know that *cocotte* means either a kitchen pan or a trollop, and have no problems with a *châtelaine*, or shout “*va-t’en!*” to someone you dislike—in which case you may still be too late for Le Bal Bullier. Et voilà!



“How do you do, Duke? I am Mrs. Gedge’s secretary.”

“Mademoiselle!” said Mr. Carlisle, bowing.

Miss Putnam beamed upon this worthy upholder of the politeness of the ancien régime. “I hope you had a pleasant journey?”

“Most, thank you. The sea was like a . . .”

“Mill pond?” said Miss Putnam. A student of crossword puzzles, she was seldom at a loss.

“A meal pont. Exactly.”

*Hot Water* (1932)

## A Few Quick Ones

FROM LONDON comes the sad news that Simpson’s—the iconic restaurant that appeared in *Something Fresh*, *Psmith in the City*, *Cocktail Time*, *Big Money*, and *If I Were You*—is no more.



Founded in the Strand in 1828, Simpson’s closed during the pandemic in 2020 and never fulfilled repeated promises to reopen. Now its famous interior has been ripped out, with furniture and kitchens sold at auction. For those Wodehouseans fortunate enough to have dined there, though, the memory will never die.

\*\*\*\*\*

A JUNE 5 article in *Jewish News* on the last season of the Prime Video series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* began with a statement of which we heartily approve: “P. G. Wodehouse is the greatest writer of comic prose in the history of literature and, therefore, to those of us of a certain disposition, the greatest writer full stop. His work, like that of the Ramones, is essentially the same thing recycled and reworked in a variety of different ways but when that thing is so good, who could possibly complain?” Who indeed? See [tinyurl.com/y7tbptps](https://tinyurl.com/y7tbptps).

\*\*\*\*\*

P. G. WODEHOUSE is known to have many famous fans, but few among us would have suspected that the late Charlie Watts, of Rolling Stones fame, was one of them. He was, in fact, an avid admirer of numerous great names in literature, including Wodehouse, and had amassed a large and valuable collection of books and jazz memorabilia by the time of his death. The collection will be auctioned off at Christie’s, London, on September 28–29, and among the Wodehouse titles being sold is a first edition of *Carry On, Jeeves*, appraised at between £4,000 and £6,000 (app. \$5,000–\$7,600). Stay tuned for the outcome!

[A] couple of fivers cannot crackle in the hand of a man who has received direct information from an authoritative source that a seven-to-one shot is going to win the two o’clock race at Hurst Park without starting in his mind a certain train of thought. The car was scarcely out of sight before the Serpent had raised its head in this Garden of Eden—the Little home was one of those houses that stand in spacious grounds along the edge of Wimbledon Common—and was whispering in Bingo’s ear: “How about it, old top?”

“Bingo and the Peke Crisis” (1937)

## Call for Convention Contributions: Silent Auction and Rummage Sale

BY BILL SCRIVENER

**G**REETINGS FELLOW WODEHOUSIANS! As we prepare for our next TWS convention in Nashville in 2024, we are hoping that you might have some relevant or thematic items to contribute items to the rummage sale and silent auction.

Silent auction items would be things you consider of particular value that would be worth more than the few doubloons that we would normally charge for rummage items.

So please start putting items aside now. You will be able to bring them to the convention itself or ship ahead to one of our volunteers, whose address will be provided in a subsequent issue of *Plum Lines*.



Ann walked on to her compartment. She felt as if she had just read a whole long novel, one of those chunky younger-English-novelist things. She knew the whole story as well as if it had been told to her in detail. She could see the father, the honest steady butler, living his life with but one aim, to make a gentleman of his beloved only son. Year by year he had saved. Probably he had sent the son to college. And now, with the father's blessing and the remains of a father's savings, the boy was setting out for the new world, where dollar bills grew on trees and no one asked or cared who anyone else's father might be.

*Piccadilly Jim (1917)*

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*We appreciate your articles and observations. Send them to Gary Hall at the email or USPS address on this page. Deadlines are February 1, May 1, August 1, November 1.*

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