



# Plum Lines

*The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society*

*Vol. 15 No 4*

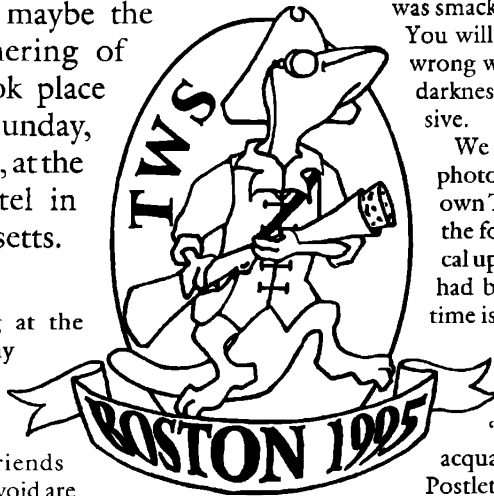
*Winter 1995*

## WODEHOUSE CONVENTION '95!

The latest and maybe the happiest gathering of Wodehousians took place from Thursday to Sunday, October 19-22, 1995, at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts.

### THURSDAY

We began gathering at the grand hotel on Thursday evening, when glad shouts of recognition rang out in the vast lobby—Wodehouse friends meeting after a two-year void are not shy. (The lobby is most impressive in white and gold, with imposing pillars, glittering chandeliers, and huge mirrors, and Versailles had better look slippy or it will lose the tourist trade.) Even the endemic rain could not quell the bonhomie. Several groups of us went forth into the rain on a 'Tour of Boston by Night,' a rich mixture of architecture and culture served up by enthusiastic and well-informed local guides who clearly loved their city. Boston, as proper Bostonians admit at the slightest excuse, has been the hub of the universe since the time of Emerson at least, and our hotel



The clever 'Minuteman' logo of the convention, shown above and on many convention items, was designed by Kate Harmon of the Boston NEWTS. The logo is a take-off on the famous Minuteman statue near Boston: a bright green newt with monocle, in a white shirt, brown vest, and powder horn, and armed with a corked blunderbuss. It's quite colorful and I would have reproduced it in color here, had not stern economic reality forbidden. See a picture of the real Minuteman on page 2.

was smack in the midst of much that made it so. You will realize that Bostonians aren't too far wrong when I tell you that even in fairly total darkness some of their architecture is impressive.

We did more than absorb culture. I have a photograph, taken that evening, of our very own Tony Ring giving a policeman's helmet the forward tilt which precedes the canonical upward lift. (The fact that the policeman had been clued in on this drama ahead of time is irrelevant.) My only regret is that the picture won't reproduce well and you won't see it.

Back at the hotel there was much 'What-ho'-ing and renewing of old acquaintance by later arrivals, and if Miss Postlethwaite had been present much business would have resulted for her. (The small dark bar of the hotel, quite clubbish in walnut paneling and discreet light, did remind me of the bar parlour of a far more famous place.)

Each registrant for the convention was provided with a tote bag filled with useful goodies—a program and much incidental information about the convention, maps, tourist guides, shopping guides, restaurant information, and various nifty stuff to make a tourist's stay in Boston more pleasant. And the NEWTS had arranged to have Plum's birthday declared P. G. Wodehouse Day in both the state of Massachusetts and the city of Boston.

### FRIDAY

On Friday morning at 8 o'clock, when Jeeves himself might just have been arising, a

contingent of TWSers was off to nearby Lexington and Concord for a chunk of history: they saw, among much else, the Minuteman statue, representing the militiamen who turned back the British soldiers at the beginning of what Americans whimsically call the Revolution, and visited the very spot where 'once the embattled farmers stood, and heard the shot fired round the world.'

And the justly famous New England foliage was at its most brilliant just then, in every shade of scarlet, orange, and yellow, fairly shouting to the passerby 'Come and be dazzled!'

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, an anteroom was opened for Wodehouse book dealers and Chapter Corner participants, and videotapes of the 'Wodehouse Playhouse' series were shown more or less continuously. Throughout the morning the faithful continued to gather, one hundred fifty eight strong, for our best-attended convention ever.

The opening session began at 2:00 p. m. with a high-spirited welcome by our hosts, the New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society, or NEWTS. Their rendition of the NEWTS theme song ended with the secret NEWTS handshake. The song, written by David and Elizabeth Landman, is nameless, and is sung to the tune of 'The Whiffenpoof Song.' Elin Woodger, Coordinator of the convention, gave a brief welcoming speech and introduced President Toni Rudersdorf. Hal Cazalet, step-great-grandson of P. G. Wodehouse, brought us greetings and good wishes from the family.

Incidentally, a reporter from Monitor Radio was present throughout the convention and put together an excellent short account of it, and some of Hal's remarks are included. The radio account is included on the 'Audiotape of Speaker Presentations' listed on the Souvenirs Order Form elsewhere in this issue.

Anne Cotton, a NEWT, was our first speaker, on 'The Old School Tie that Binds.' She discussed Plum's school days at Dulwich, illustrated with slides kindly provided by Jan Piggott, Librarian of Dulwich College, and presented the school as shown in Plum's reminiscences and in his stories.

David Landman, another NEWT, spoke on 'You, Too, Can Croon in June: Wodehouse as Lyricist.' Wodehouse wrote more than four hundred published lyrics, and at one time in 1919 had lyrics in five Broadway



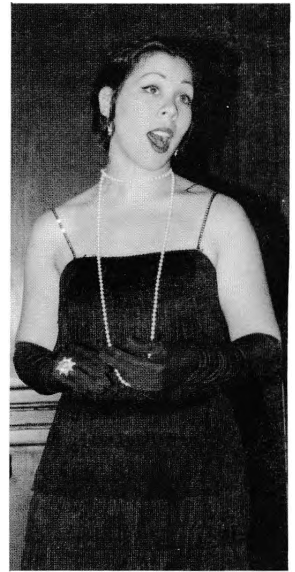
The real  
Minuteman

shows at once, a record never equaled. David, no mean hand with language himself, told how Wodehouse led the way to modern musical comedy form by integrating his songs with the story.

David's daughter Rosalind sang Plum's 'Bill,' 'Cleopatterer,' and 'The Land Where the Good Songs Go.' She and Pat Wilson sang the duets 'Bungalow in Quogue,' 'Till the Clouds Roll By,' and 'Nesting Time in Flatbush.' Rosalind's mother Elizabeth was the accompanist. It was an outstanding performance and delighted us all.

Dan Cohen, of Chapter One in Philadelphia, showed us 'The OM's Ghost Story.' It was a video of an amusing section of an old British horror film. The section was about golf, was strongly reminiscent of Wodehouse's golf stories, and seems to have been included in the film as comic relief. Dan discussed the probable influences of Wodehouse's writings on that section of the film.

Dan Garrison, representing The Chicago Accident Syndicate, gave us a number of good and amusing reasons for holding our next convention in Chicago, including, but not limited to, the excellence of the numerous free martinis served to him and Jon Lellenberg while they interviewed several hotel managers on the doubtful suitability of their hotels for the convention. Dan showed a short video of the preferred hotel—it reminded me of what went on in the Cities of the Plain, and I can hardly wait for the convention. Nobody actually responded this way, but a number of us felt like jumping out of our chairs to accept his offer. In this volunteer organization anyone who *offers*, freely offers without the



Rosalind Landman





Missy Ratcliffe    Neil Midkiff    Christine Dorffi  
Felton, Calif.    Palo Alto, Calif.    Santa Cruz, Calif.



Toni Rudersdorf's Kazoo Chorus,  
belting out a few hot ones



'Tis so!'    'Tis not!'



John Lellenberg  
Washington, DC



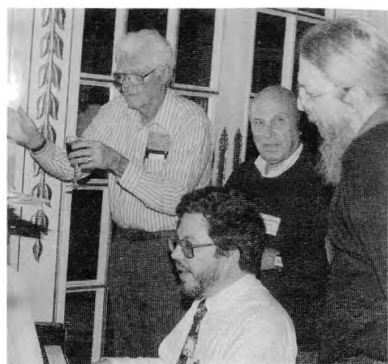
Max and Elizabeth, egggers



"...bitten in the leg by  
a close personal friend."



Norman Murphy, soulfully kazooing



Neil Midkiff, piano, and 'Sonny Boy'



Toni's Kazoo Chorus in meditative mood

Photos by Jan Wilson Kaufman



Missy

Helen



Stephen Brown    Hal Cazalet

It's harder than it looks!

application of force, to hold the next convention, is practically knighted on the spot.

Our Blandings Castle Chapter, from the San Francisco Bay Area, gave a concert reading of 'Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!' We chose the story for two reasons: we needed a short story to meet the time restriction, and we thought it would be fun to shout 'Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!' quite a number of times in rehearsal and on stage. It *was* fun, though we got some strange looks from the neighbors afterward. Dave Smeltzer, as James Belford, gave such a thunderous final 'Pig-HOO-o-o-ey!' that an encore was demanded later. The plaster may still be falling.

The day closed with the traditional Friday evening reception in one of those large, glittering white-and-gold grand-hotel reception rooms. What started as a dignified feast of reason, over a small glass of something or other as lubricant, descended rapidly into a sort of Wodehouse orgy.

A wildly exciting Egg-and-Spoon Race around the perimeter of the large room required several heats to determine the winner, and several minutes for the echoes to subside.

A Pot the Bending Baxter game, involving table-tennis balls fired from a considerable distance at a roundish target, pictured below, produced lots of fun but not many bulls-eyes. It made us appreciate the marksmanship of Lord Emsworth as never before.

The Top-Hat Card Toss was still more difficult. Believe me when I tell you that those cards had a will of their own and would surprise any number of aerodynamicists.

The names of all the contest winners are lost in the mists of a pretty lively evening.

A piano in the corner was the center of spontaneous gatherings. Neil Midkiff was usually at the controls, and 'Sonny Boy' rang out more than once.

And above and beyond all this was Toni Rudersdorf's Kazoo Chorus, kazooing away mightily, accompanied every now and then by the piano, fighting for its life. Kazoos and piano sometimes accom-

panied spontaneous singing. The Chorus was a fluid thing, forming and reforming at various times with various players, presenting songs by Wodehouse, songs in his stories, and, well, just songs. It is a curious fact that a kazoo player, joyous though he may be in the accomplishment of his art, must assume perforce an intent, even solemn, expression that clashes ever so slightly with the exuberance of 'When the Saints Go Marching In.'

It was a beauteous evening, calm and free—well, no, it was a happy, friendly evening, and we all had a lot of fun.

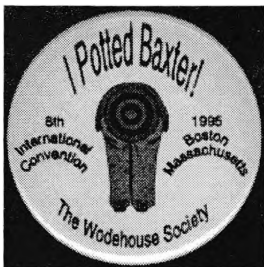
## SATURDAY

Jan Wilson Kaufman started the Saturday morning session with a discussion of 'What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing,' or costume of the Wodehousian Age, approximately the 1920s. Jan showed an amusing slide collection of illustrations of period costumes: photos, fashion plates, and story illustrations. She mentioned the Prince of Wales as an arbiter of taste and the unfortunate effect this sometimes had on Bertie—in the matter of soft shirts for evening wear, for instance. The magazine illustrations, supplied by Len Lawson, were particularly interesting in showing us how Jeeves, Bertie, and other Wodehouse characters were presented to contemporary readers.

Norman Murphy's 'Behind the Green Baize Door—Or, P. G. Wodehouse and the Servant Question' was an entertaining and (since Norman was speaking) informative discussion of the whole employer-servant relationship from Victorian times until the Second World War, when servants for all practical purposes disappeared. Norman's daughter Helen joined him on the stage and alternated with him in reading. The talk is printed in this issue.

Tony Ring, an Englishman, did not, in spite of the title of his talk, 'Wodehouse in the Pavilion,' attempt anything so mad as to try to describe to a largely American audience the technical aspects of cricket. Instead he described Plum's playing of cricket and writing about cricket. The first part of his talk is included in this issue; the second part will appear next time.

The morning concluded with a brisk and brief business meeting presided over by President Tony Rudersdorf. Elliott Milstein became our new president and Dan Garrison our vice-president, for the next two years. Other offic-



A button we wore at the convention



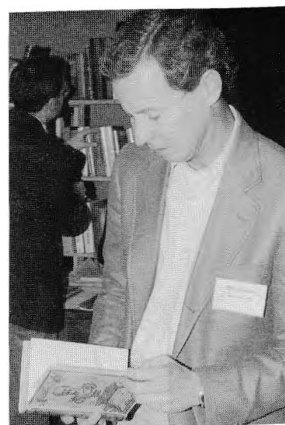
Sean Harmon  
Newt cricketer



Dan Garrison  
Chicago Accident Syndicate



John and Tana Fletcher  
Maidenhead, England



Peter Cannon, New York



Newts performing 'Agatha Agonistes'  
by Max Pokrivchak



Doug  
(*'The Rogue'*)  
Stow  
Half Moon Bay  
California



John Fahey   Charles Bishop   Hal Czalet  
Boston   Santa Cruz, Ca.   New York



Book browsers,  
browsing it up



Dave Smeltzer  
(*This is what we do  
at a convention!*)



Norman Murphy of London at Boston Common



Elaine and Tony Ring  
Great Missenden, England



Marilyn Nancy Randall   Florence   Anne  
Revelers reveling to an almost unbelievable extent

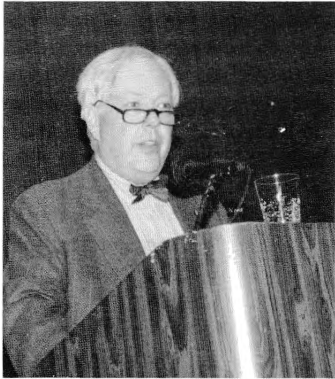


Len Lawson  
ex-president

ers continued to serve: Marilyn MacGregor, membership secretary, Tom Wainwright, treasurer, and Ed Ratcliffe, *Plum Lines* editor. Elliott will have a regular column in *Plum Lines*, and I urge you to read his column in this issue. It may, just may, be time for us to Organize, and you should have your say on the question.

Dan Cohen opened the afternoon session with a brief account of 'The Search for Rosie M. Banks,' printed in this issue. (Tip: they identified the author!)

Peter Schwed, Plum's American editor for a quarter of a century, discussed 'Wodehouse as Light Verse Poet' and read several pieces, including the immortal 'Good Grus.' Except among rabid fans Wodehouse is unknown as a versifier, though he excelled in light verse. Many of us wish that the little book of Plum's poetry entitled *A Parrot and Other Poems* could be reissued to include more poems.



Charles Gould

to his talk—you will, I hope, be reading it in full in a forthcoming issue.

Hal Cazalet presented a delightful entertainment, 'Non-Stop Dancing—A Musical Tribute to Plum.' Since most of us don't know Hal, it's just as well to pause here and give you a brief sketch of him. He was born in London and is the step-great-grandson of P. G. Wodehouse. He is a composer and performer and is a young artist at the prestigious Julliard Opera Center. His recent appearances include Macheath in Benjamin Britten's version of *The Beggar's Opera* and Mr. Angel in Mozart's *The Impresario* with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center in Washington D. C. He has written two musicals: *Street People*, which was performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1989, and *First Night*, which recently received its American premiere at the Aspen Music Festival this past summer. His interest in Wodehouse leaped forward after seeing Edward Duke's *Jeeves Takes Charge* and learning to tap dance with him on the stair-

case at the Cazalet home. He enjoys living slightly on the Tabasco side of life in New York, where he can play the odd game of golf and avoid most of his aunts.

Now you won't be surprised to learn that Hal made a very professional and quite delightful presentation of several songs.

First, a short piece from 'The Mikado' to show what Broadway music was like before Wodehouse, and then 'Sonny Boy,' 'You Can't Make Love by Wireless,' and 'Non-Stop Dancing,' accompanied by Elizabeth Landman. The audience responded with a standing ovation.

Hal then read what was to me the highlight of the convention: his father's account of his last visit to Plum and Ethel in Remsenburg in September, 1974, a few months before Plum died. It was a touching account that only a family member could provide, describing an intimate visit to a man we all love, and we were privileged to hear the story read by a member of the family. (The story is reprinted in this issue.) The applause that followed was heartfelt. Hal's singing and reading made, as Richard Osborne writes elsewhere in this issue, a 'glorious occasion.' It was a great pleasure and a privilege to have a member of the Wodehouse family at our convention.

Dan Garrison discussed (I present the title here as it was shown in the program)

'What Every Young Girl Should Know  
About the Three O'Clock Race—  
Or, Wodehouse and the Plain Style'

Dan could have called it 'What Plum Did with his Classical Education,' and you will find it in the next issue.

In the interval between the afternoon general meeting and the evening dinner, The Clients of Adrian Mulliner gathered at the Senior Bloodstain for one of its infrequent meetings. The Clients is a group of Wodehouse-and-Sherlock Holmes fans who gather and cross-pollinate, sluice, and browse during our



Hal Cazalet





Margaret and Doug Stow with prize



President Toni Rudersdorf with *The Captain*



More 'Sonny Boy' — or is it 'Bill'?



Tom Wainwright



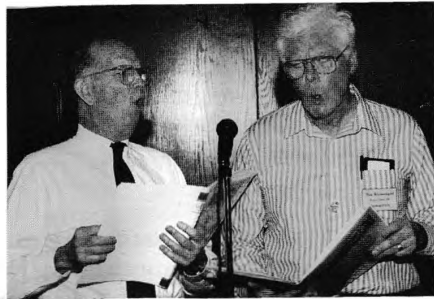
Imposters, impostung



Susan Jewell and Tina Garrison



Margaret Slythe



Ed Ratcliffe, Tom Wainwright: "Pig-HOO-ey!"



New President Eliot Milstein, Charles Bishop



Florence Cunningham



... and it was *this* wide!



Curtain call for 'Agatha Agonistes'



Elin Woodger



Dustin Strauch!!



'What do you read, my lord?'  
'Words, words, words.'

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conventions and Sherlockian conventions. You're wondering where the Senior Bloodstain is? Wherever they meet!

Cocktail time (wouldn't that be a great title for a book!) came around none too soon, and many of us showed up in Wodehousian costumes. I can only recall a few: Florence Cunningham was Dolly Molloy, dripping with glitz and glamor from headdress to twinkling toes. Two imposters imposed in imposing beards. Could these have been Joyeuse and Love in Idleness? I never thought to ask. I can only say that the beards were not of



Peter and Antonia Schwed

A copy of the Convention Quiz was distributed to everyone as part of their Welcome Package, and I'll reprint it in the next issue. Tony Ring was one of the winners of the quiz, and I regret to say I've lost the name of the other winner. NEWT Jean Tillson, an accomplished artist, prepared the two exquisitely appropriate prizes: a cigar and a coconut, properly inscribed and decorated.

Dan Garrison presented a certificate of appreciation to your blushing editor for his work on *Plum Lines*. It was greatly appreciated and will appear, framed, above my computer desk as soon as I get this issue out the door.

These are only some of the events of a happy evening together; I can't begin to remember all that went on. Doug Stow won a prize, and Tom Wainwright won a prize, and a number of other people won prizes, but what they were for I cannot tell you, and Elin Woodger was awarded an edible newt. It was large, and brown, and came from a bakery, and looked delicious.

After dinner Stephen Spaulding read short selections from the works of—now let me see, who was it?—oh yes, P. G. Wodehouse! Including, but not limited to, the prize-giving at Market Snodsbury Grammar School.

## SUNDAY

Our convention concluded with the traditional Sunday morning brunch in that glittering white-and-gold room I mentioned earlier. It was a protracted meal with lots of table-hopping—nobody wanted the wonderful weekend to end. Lots of talk, lots of promises to meet at the next convention, and then, reluctantly, one by one and two by two, we were gone. It was all over.

Well, not quite over for some of us. We had been invited beforehand to attend the Head of the Charles Regatta. No, it had nothing to do with Charles I and that unfortunate incident outside the window of the Banqueting House. It's our own version of Boat Race Night, or more properly Day, on the Charles River. 'Those who are staying on after the convention,' wrote Elin, 'can stroll down to the Esplanade and watch a bevy of beautiful boats along with other platoons of pretty people. Strictly informal; police helmet snatching not required, but strongly encouraged.' I didn't hear of anyone getting ten days without the option, so I suppose those of us who went behaved themselves or were remarkably fleet of foot.

My memory may be warped by the proximity of the event, but this seemed to me the best Wodehouse convention ever. More fun, more great performances,

thesquare-cut Assyrian type. John Bae sch gave an excellent imitation of a Dulwich schoolboy and won the prize as the funniest character. Anne Cot-

ton was Lady Bassett in a sun helmet and other accouterments of a big game hunter. She won the prize as the best representation of a Wodehouse character.

At this point in the press of high-spirited activities things got a little unscheduled, and sometimes two things, or at least one-and-a-half things, happened at once. Elin Woodger, nominally the coordinator, finally tore up her notes and let things flow for the rest of the evening. A good time was had by all.

The NEWTS performed *Agatha Agonistes*, an original playlet in the Wodehouse style by Max Pokrivchak. Bertie has come to Boston to hide out from Aunt Agatha. He meets a playwright, tells him stories about Aunt Agatha, the playwright writes a thinly-disguised-Aunt Agatha play that wins wide renown, Agatha hears about it, and descends upon Boston in search of Bertie. Only Jeeves and a long cruise save him. The play was presented with energy and style, won enthusiastic applause, and deserved much more than a one-night run. No less an authority than Norman Murphy called it one of the best Wodehouse skits he has seen.

A table contest, Best Use of Table Objects for Describing a Golf Shot, had many entries and was won by Sean Harmon with a simple and very clever design which I cannot possibly remember.



more informative and entertaining talks, more bread-rolls thrown, all backed up by the warm hospitality and awesome forethought and preparation of the NEWTS of Boston. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for making this convention the glorious success that it was. (I must also mention the beautiful convention programs designed and hand-printed for us by Doug and Margaret Stow of the Blandings Castle Chapter. My copy is so handsome I didn't even use it in Boston—it's a keepsake.) Twenty-two NEWTS and President Toni Rudersdorf are listed as convention planners and I wish I had space to give proper credit to them all, but the chief credit must go to Elin Woodger, described only as the Coordinator. To us non-NEWTs, who simply walked into the hotel and had a wonderful weekend of fun, it all seemed effortless. Only those who have made such preparations themselves know how much planning is needed, how many details must be seen to, how many meetings attended, how much equipment gathered, and how many phone calls made, to make such a gathering as this successful. To Elin, more than to any other individual, we owe our gratitude and our thanks.

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Above all we are grateful to our beloved  
Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse  
whose life and work we meet to celebrate.

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## SOMETHING NEW

**D**an and Susan Cohen have found three new (to me at least) sources of Wodehouse on audio tape. All rent or sell and accept credit cards.

Chivers Audio Books currently offers nine PGW novels. 'Chivers,' writes Dan, 'is an English company that has just recently begun to expand its services in the U. S. The tapes are quite expensive. But Chivers has far and away the best products to offer. Their readers, such as Jonathan Cecil and Jeremy Sinden, are British actors who understand the language and the characters.' All their recordings are unabridged and 'fully voiced, meaning that the reader interprets the text dramatically and presents a separate voice for each character.' Order by phone at 800-704-2005.

Recorded Books offers six novels in 'single-voice readings.' 800-638-1304.

Blackstone Audio Books offers ten novels. 'Blackstone is adding Wodehouse titles,' writes Dan. 'They have picked up some of the earlier and less popular works like *A Gentleman of Leisure* and *Picadilly Jim*. 800-729-2665, or P. O. Box 969, Ashland OR 97520.

**William Hardwick** writes that Audio Books in the UK is currently offering a 'dramatisation' of *Uncle Dynamite* on audio tape for £7.99, as well as *Blandings Castle* read by Martin Jarvis, price unspecified. From within the UK call 0171-491-4117.

**Barbara HELLER** finds that Barnes and Noble currently offers *Women in Wodehouse* and *Wodehouse is the Best Medicine* for \$7.98 each plus shipping and handling. Call (201) 767-7079.

## CHAPTERS CORNER

**E**lliott Milstein, our new president, suggests that we begin a 'Chapters corner' in every issue of this journal, where each chapter can tell the rest of us what it's been up to and what it's planning to do unless prevented by the authorities. 'I think it would be great to hear what people are doing locally,' writes Elliott, 'and it would encourage others to form their own chapters.'

It's a great idea. Just let the rest of us know what you're up to, as little or as much (within reason) as you wish. Some chapters already send me their local newsletters and I quote from them when I remember to (I often forget, as you must have noticed). Continue that practice if you like, or send me a paragraph or more of highlights—I wouldn't be so likely to forget in that case. I look forward to hearing from you.

## HELEN MURPHY, LOOT COLLECTOR

**H**elen Murphy in London has kindly consented to act as a collection point for dues of UK members of our Society. Just write your cheque to Helen Murphy for the equivalent of US \$15 and send it to Helen at 16 Herbert Street, Plaistow, London E13 8BE. She will deposit the cheques, convert the resulting loot to US currency just once, and send the result to Treasurer Tom Wainwright. A hassle-free service for other UK members, for which many of us are grateful. To answer your question: yes, Helen is the daughter of Norman Murphy, the famous kazoo player.

# 'HEAVY WEATHER'

A review by Tony Ring

Tony's review of the of the new TV film is quite favorable. And here I want you to follow me very closely: **this film will be shown in America on the Public Broadcasting System on Sunday evening, February 18.** By the time you read these words, that month is this month. Do not, repeat not, miss the show. (Tony's review was written before Christmas.)

It was certainly a privilege to attend the press preview screening of the TV film *Heavy Weather*, which will be shown on BBCr during the evening peak viewing hours on Christmas Eve. I am delighted to report that it is a production that members of the Society will undoubtedly enjoy, and would strongly recommend that Chapters make noises in the ears of their local TV companies to ensure that it is shown in all parts of the USA.

Perhaps the first question that members will ask is, 'What about the screenplay?' Have no fear, all is well. It is Wodehouse. Enthusiasts will spot some reworking here, a few insertions by David Livingston (the writer of the screenplay) there, but that is inevitable where the challenge is to condense a 250-page book into a 95-minute film. There is one surprise right at the beginning, as the reason for Hugo Carmody's decision to quit as Lord Emsworth's secretary is plausibly demonstrated. It is Livingston's creation, but it successfully helps to condense the early action from the book into quite a short phase of the film.

And secondly, the casting? Pink politics were rejected in the UK for the first time in about three years as there was an outcry from a shocked public about the possible use of a pink pig for the part of the Empress. After a feature article in *The Times* and an expression of concern from a former Archbishop of Canterbury (who said the Church is out of touch with things that *really* matter?) helped to influence the casting of Gertie (Gertrude, Old Bell Stonebow), a genuine black Berkshire, one somehow had confidence that the casting of the mere human characters would be inspired. Peter O'Toole, a confirmed Wodehousean, was invited to play Lord Emsworth and in what he called 'a dream role' conveyed a mixture of total awareness about matters porcine and familiar disinterested dreaminess about all else. One small scene perhaps did not ring true, as Lord Emsworth answered the telephone himself instead of waiting for Beach to do so. This scene had a valid purpose as it was used to explain to the viewer why Lord Tilbury actually travelled down to the Castle to see Galahad, but it was a little incongruous. Nevertheless, Peter O'Toole's performance may be seen

as that of the definitive Lord Emsworth.

Apparently the six weeks spent filming were a riot of fun and laughter, a sort of prolonged TWS convention or the Pelican Club brought to life, as O'Toole, Richard Briers (Galahad), Ronald Fraser (Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe), and Bryan Pringle (Pirbright) told anecdote after anecdote of their forty years in the theatre since studying together at drama school. Richard Briers in the role of Galahad was superb as usual, making light of reported health problems. Ronald Fraser, appropriately menacing, sent a shiver up and down the spine whenever he appeared, as did David Bamber (Pilbeam), who has only just stopped making us cringe as Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*. And when commenting on the activities of the men-menaces, one must not overlook Richard Johnson's Lord Tilbury, whose pleading with Galahad to be allowed to publish his book would have melted all but the sternest heart.

And speaking of menaces, what about the Aunts? Judy Parfitt played Aunt Constance as though she had been rehearsing for years, and whilst a purist, aware from *Full Moon* that all the sisters but Hermione were tall and stately, might argue that there were too many inches difference in the heights of Constance and Julia, there is no doubt at all that Sarah Badel's Lady Julia Fish had exactly the right iron-hand-in-a-velvet-gloveishness. In particular her first scene, when Sue Brown comes across her in the train from London, carried just the promise of troubles to come that we would wish to see.

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Perhaps the first question that members will ask is, 'What about the screenplay?' Have no fear, all is well. It is Wodehouse.

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The younger set were by no means out of place. When Ronnie Fish (Benjamin Soames) first complained to Sue Brown that he was short, the camera angle did not make him appear so. But we did not appreciate at that moment just how tiny Rebecca Lacey (as Sue) really is! By the way she plays her part, Sue Brown will step straight from many people's fantasies on to the screen. Sam West, as Monty Bodkin, was deprived of one or two of his most promising scenes in the book by the needs of the screenplay, and as a result seemed perhaps less the mentally challenged Drone than anticipated. But, like Ronnie Fish, Monty caught the period flavour, and most viewers will have no quibbles.

And finally, what about Beach, the butler? When



First edition, 1933

the BBC televised the Blandings short stories in the 1960s, they cast Ralph Richardson as Lord Emsworth and Stanley Holloway as Beach. Ralph Richardson was not tall and thin, and by no stretch of the imagination could Stanley Holloway ever have been called stout and imposing. I dare say that Roy Hudd would have been an equally poor choice thirty years ago when he was a mere slip of a lad, but it is as if he had been in training for this role, as he is now a man 'who has made two chins grow where only one had been before', with 'a waistcoat which swells like the sail of a racing yacht.' He was an excellent foil to Peter O'Toole and Richard Briers.

Verity, Verity, we say unto you:

Please try to ensure a video version will be available on both sides of the Atlantic in due course; and

Please may good fortune allow you and Jack Gold to find the main actors free simultaneously to work on one of the other Blandings books in due course.

But for what we have just received, we give thanks.

Verity Lambert was the producer of *Heavy Weather*.

## NEW BOOK OF PGW LETTERS PLANNED

A major attraction at the Boston Convention was a portfolio of photocopies of letters that Plum wrote to Peter Schwed, his publisher and editor for more than twenty years. Ranging from discussions of the book he was currently working on, to charming personal correspondence about their respective families, Peter had collected a batch of them over the years, too precious to risk being put on public exhibit during the three days of the convention, but surely of great interest to the attending members of TWS. Hence the photocopies.

A number of people wondered if it would be possible to obtain copies and, urged to do so by some, including Charles Gould, prominent dealer in Wodehousiana, Peter decided to try to arrange for a book to be produced, a handsome presentation volume of 64 pages, reproducing faithfully in facsimile fashion all the letters, plus inserted commentary and letters by Schwed amplifying points in the letters. Also included is to be the article Peter wrote for the splendid Morgan Library book, *P. G. Wodehouse: A Centenary Celebration*, entitled 'Wodehouse's Editor: A Painless Job.'

The book will be privately published by Graphic Image, a firm Peter knows personally which is experienced in producing handsome books for clients as varied as Tiffany's and Neiman Marcus. Peter intends to finance the project himself and hopes to recoup his gamble from sales, the major portion of which inevitably would come from an offering that will appear in a later issue of *Plum Lines*. So there will be a very limited number of copies run off, numbered and signed by Schwed, and no more copies will ever be produced. The price will probably be in the \$40 range and any unsold books will be destroyed rather than offered at a reduced price. So any copy that you may wish to purchase at the time when books are offered, as a present for yourself or some other lucky Wodehouse fanatic, is sure to become a rare book over the years and increase in value.

*Plum Lines* will keep you informed about this project.

Blair Eggleston [was] a man who wore side-whiskers and, if the truth were known, was probably a secret beret-wearer as well.

*Hot Water*, 1932

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Elliott Milstein

Elsewhere in this illustrious journal you will no doubt have read all about the glorious events of the 1995 Wodehouse Society in Boston: the excellent presentations, the fabulous music and singing (not to mention kazooes), the hospitality of the NEWTS, the games, the costumes, the laughter, the bread rolls, the skits, the feast of reason and flow of soul. What may have been left out (and quite rightly too) was the (\* yawn \*) business part of the meeting, in which I was elected as your new president and Dan Garrison as your most able VP. I am deeply honored by the vote of confidence and I trust (actually I hope desperately) that it is not misplaced.

Well, we will soon find out, because almost immediately I was given the task of chairing a committee to look into defining a formal structure to our society and recommending specifics to the membership. In essence, it will be the job of this committee to write our society's constitution and by-laws. Some 20 intrepid Plummies have already signed up for this ignominious task, for which I am most grateful, and I would like to invite the membership at large to add their two cents. Just to give you an idea of some of the issues we will be struggling with:

1. Should we have a board of directors? Who sits on it?
2. Who exactly are the officers? How are they appointed? What are their duties?
3. What is the exact status of the 'Chapters' of the Society?
4. Are we The Wodehouse Society of the United States? North America? International?
5. How are dues set and what exactly may they be used for and not used for?
6. How is the site of the biennial convention chosen? Who exactly is responsible for putting it all together? How is it funded?

Well, that's enough to start with. But almost certainly more to come.

Preliminary discussions in Boston revealed that there are basically two schools of philosophy at work here. I like to characterize them as the 'Emsworth School' and the 'Baxter School.'

Basically, the Emsworthians hold that we should keep the dues low—just enough to publish *Plum Lines*—don't meddle in the activities of the chapters, keep things loose and easy, leave well enough alone; in other words, let me wear what I want, potter about, and look at my pig. For

them, The Wodehouse Society is there to publish *Plum Lines* and have a party every two years.

The Baxter school is more earnest. They want us to always be DOING something, like holding membership drives, petitioning Congress for a Wodehouse stamp, publishing a scholarly journal or CD ROM and the like. They like order, goals, and chains of command. They want projects, definitions, status reports, financial statements, and feasibility studies. For them, the Wodehouse Society has a higher purpose in life.

And of course there are all the shades in between. And I think a compromise can and should be reached. We can promote and achieve great things and still foregather biennially to toss a few bread rolls while weighed down below the Plimsoll line.

I believe that good decisions can only be made by consensus built from discussion. That is why I would like as many of you to participate in this debate as possible and why I will strive to continually communicate with all of you by this newsletter as well as E-mail and other correspondence. (Yes, I am afraid I fall into the Baxter camp.)

All those interested in participating in the Wodehouse Society Organization Committee can contact me directly by mail or E-mail. We will be kicking off the activities by February, 1996 so I hope I will hear from you by then. Of course, feel free to join in at any time if you have an idea or opinion.

I look forward to hearing from you.

She spoke so quietly, so meekly, her whole air like that of a good little girl remorseful for having been naughty, that a wiser and more experienced man than Lionel Green would have climbed the wall and pulled it up after him.

*Money in the Bank, 1946*

# THE SEARCH FOR ROSIE M. BANKS

by Susan Cohen

A talk delivered at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October, 1995

Earlier this year one of our Chapter One members, Bob Nissenbaum, who is among other things a book dealer, picked up a paperback book called *Surgical Nurse*, published by Pocket Books in 1959. The book was an example of the genre of nurse novels that were popular at that time. What attracted him to the book, however, was the author's name, Rosie M. Banks! [An announcement of this discovery and a reproduction of the front cover appeared in the Summer 1995 *Plum Lines*.]

Now let me just read briefly from the description of the book on the back cover.

Nurse Althea Jones, young and lovely, worshipped her boss, Dr. Mike. He was a brilliant surgeon. Handsome—and married. So Althea did not admit—even to herself—that she loved him.

But the day came that shattered her life. Dr. Mike leaned down and kissed his pretty nurse. Not a friendly kiss but one filled with unleashed passion. Then he recovered his control and the moment was over—for him.

But for her, that was a moment of beginning. How could she forget, ever, the pressure of his lips of hers?

How could she ever marry anyone else, knowing that her heart belonged to him? She knew it was hopeless. But there had to be a way, somehow, somewhere, someday!

Now I think you will agree that this is heartthrob fiction for the masses, and pretty high on the frightfulness scale. While not up to the immortal *Only a Factory Girl*, it is clearly worthy of Rosie M. Banks. *Surgical Nurse* was in its third printing, so somebody was reading it.

We were consumed with the desire to find out more about this Rosie M. Banks. We contacted our literary agent Henry Morrison. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Henry had worked in the offices of Scott Meredith, Plum's agent. Henry remembered that at some point a request came in from Pocket Books to use the Rosie M. Banks name on a series of nurse novels—about six of them. The request was given to Wodehouse, who approved and apparently thought it was a pretty funny idea.

Our next step was to contact Bill Grose, editorial director of Pocket Books. Grose was not at Pocket Books in the late 50s, but he dug into the archives and while he was not able to find a contract for *Surgical Nurse* he did find contracts for *Prison Nurse*, *Teenage*

*Nurse*, *Settlement Nurse*, and *Navy Nurse*. All of these were written under the Rosie M. Banks pseudonym by a New York author named Alan Jackson. Grose didn't know anything about Jackson except that his wife was Phyllis Jackson, a big-time agent for MCA Artists Ltd.

The U. S. copyright office came up with a slightly different list of Banks/Jackson books: *Surgical Nurse* (copyright 1959, renewed 1987), *Settlement Nurse* (1959, renewed 1987), *Navy Nurse* (1960), and *Ship's Nurse* (1962).

Our next informant was Lawrence Hughes, now Editor at Large for the Hearst Book Group and in the late 1950s an editor at Pocket Books. Hughes knew Jackson, and wrote as follows: 'The idea of using Rosie M. Banks may have been Alan's; on the other hand, it could have been the creation of Herbert M. Alexander, the editor-in-chief of Pocket Books. Both Herb and Alan were great Wodehouse fans. They were good friends, and it was Herb who proposed to Alan that he write the Nurse books. . . Alan also wrote a novel under his own name entitled *East 57th Street*, published by Simon and Schuster in 1962.'

Hughes's letter also said that Alan Jackson had for many years been East Coast story editor for Paramount Pictures, and that his older brother C. D. Jackson had been publisher of *Fortune* magazine and went on to become an advisor to President Eisenhower. 'C. D. graduated from Princeton and I have a hunch that Alan was also a Princeton graduate.' Hughes concluded: 'Alan was a most charming man, a marvelous raconteur and a demon backgammon player, as well as a voracious reader.'

Alan Jackson died in the late 1960s. His brother and wife are also now dead. The couple had no children. While Alan had a daughter by his first marriage, no one we talked to knows anything about her.

Unless there are some references to Rosie M. Banks, nurse novelist, in the Wodehouse papers, this is probably all we will ever know about this literary footnote. But if you find any other Rosie M. Banks nurse novels, let me know.

What most impressed me about this little project was the cooperation we received from a number of high-powered publishing people. Some of them don't normally return phone calls, but for this they were willing to spend some time, particularly when they found that the results were to be presented at a Wodehouse Society convention.

# A VISIT TO THE WODEHOUSES

by Sir Edward Cazalet

A talk delivered by Sir Edward's son Hal Cazalet at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October, 1995

This account, read by Plum's great-grandson Hal, describes a visit by Hal's parents, Edward and Camilla Cazalet, to Plum and Ethel in Remsenburg, Long Island, in September 1974. The visit occurred just four months before Plum died. The account was written by Sir Edward and begins as he and Camilla arrive by car at Remsenburg, a village on eastern Long Island.

The contrast, upon entering the Wodehouse home after staying in and driving from all the modernity of New York City is about as acute as can be experienced.

As we drew up in the car, 'Plum' could be seen writing at his desk in his summer room ('the front patio'). This immediately adjoins the front door. Two dogs started barking. A wire fly-proof door slammed in the house and Nella's voice could be heard calling 'They're here, dear'. (Nella is Plum's sister-in-law, still alive at 92 in London.) We reached the front door at the same time as Ethel. She was covered in jewels and as I went to kiss her, she inclined her head with the obvious purpose of preventing me disturbing her make-up. Plum remained immobile at his desk even though we must have been making quite a noise. It subsequently transpired that his hearing has become pretty bad.

Ethel took charge. Nella was told to go and make tea and Plummy was told to put on his hearing aid. Camilla had by this time introduced Ethel to Norman Hickman, who had driven us down from New York. We had suggested that he should stay for tea before driving on. Ethel immediately told him with great conviction that he looked like a film star.

We then went in to see Plum. He had lost a lot of weight since I had last seen him two and a half years before. Also his movements were much slower and unsure although this was not so surprising as he had had a fall three weeks previously and had cracked two of his ribs. Nevertheless it soon became apparent that Plum's brain was as clear as ever. As I shook hands with him I noticed that his hand was half closed—as though with arthritis. This explains why his handwriting has recently become so shaky and spidery.

Tea was served in the best English tradition with all the silver on display. A mass of thinly cut cucumber sandwiches had been prepared and were laid out on a Victorian dumb waiter. In fact there were only cucumber sandwiches to eat. Plum ate one sandwich and then said

that he wanted something which was not a cucumber sandwich. Ethel told him that he was not allowed anything more anyhow. Ethel then engrossed herself with Norman. When she realised that he was something to do with Wall Street she shouted out, 'Plummy, do you realise that Norman knows all about the Stock Market?' A pained look came over Plum's face and he was clearly at a loss for anything to say. Norman then told Plum how much he enjoyed the *Golfing Stories*. Plum immediately walked round, using his stick, to sit next to him. We were then telling them about our journey from England, when Plum suddenly said to Norman, 'I cannot understand this Dow Jones thing. It always seems to be going down and yet you still get much the same dividend. I cannot see what Ethel is so worried about'. As Norman manfully started an explanation, Ethel asked him what would happen if her shares went down to nothing. Before Norman could answer this, she asked Plummy to tell Norman something about the *Mulliner Stories*. Plummy immediately said, 'You know, the name Mulliner came to me in a flash. I knew straightaway that it was right. I have always been awfully pleased with it'.

Ethel again started talking about her stocks and shares whilst Nella handed round more tea. Suddenly I realised that Plummy was no longer in the room; so that even with two cracked ribs and a walking stick he was still able, at the age of 93, to perform his vanishing act.

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'You know, the name Mulliner came to me in a flash. I knew straightaway that it was right. I have always been awfully pleased with it'.

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Ethel insisted on taking us out to a local restaurant for dinner. We knew that while she would love this, Plum would hate it. We tried to reach a compromise by persuading her to come out with us and to leave Plum behind. However, Plum would have none of this. So at about 7 pm Ethel started mixing some cocktails. She stood behind the Bar aglow with make-up and jewellery and with a cigarette, which had a



long end of ash, drooping from her mouth. She mixed martinis consisting of 98% neat gin, with the remainder cigarette ash and scent (the latter coming from the ice which she had handled). Plum suddenly appeared and asked where his carrots were. 'Coming, dear,' called Nella who then appeared with a plate of raw carrots which she took to Plum's room where he had disappeared with his martini.

We drove to the restaurant for dinner. Plummy, who had difficulty in balancing himself even with a stick, was particularly resentful of being helped. As we entered, a large and enthusiastic proprietress greeted him and said how thrilled she was to have him there. He hated this. As he sat down he said: 'What a dreadful place this is.' When he was asked if he would like an 'appetiser,' he said he would like raw carrots. This caused consternation and Ethel silenced him. After this the only thing that he asked for was roast beef. Because the noise was considerable it was impossible for Plum to hear anything, and so conversation with him was out of the question. We had hardly begun the main course when Ethel began calling for 'doggy bags.' She then started to watch my plate in such an intense way that I felt guilty at eating any of the meat which was on it.

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The accepted practice is to feed about one-third of your meal to the dogs.

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The following evening we had dinner at 7 pm. As Nella brought dinner in, the two large and overweight dogs (one very nice Alsatian type mongrel called 'Boy') and six cats moved from the kitchen into the end of the sitting-room which is used as a dining-room. The accepted practice is to feed about one-third of your meal to the dogs. This includes ice-cream which they eat with obvious relish. We chatted about the family during dinner. After dinner I talked for about an hour with Plum. He wanted to find out about England and did not want to discuss himself. It was also an effort for him to talk for any length of time so I was obliged to do most of the speaking. He first of all asked about the Pakistani Cricket Tour; he wanted to know *precisely* the rules of a one-day match. He said that, although much in the world was changing, he thought this was probably right. Nevertheless he felt that, on the whole, people would not be any happier.

He said that when he had started work in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank he had been paid £80 per annum which had been supplemented by his father making him an allowance of a further £80 per annum. His lodgings had cost £1 per week and he had lived

like a king. He went on to say that once you started having prime ministers who had not come from the old schools it was all bound to change anyway. He said that he was thrilled to have heard recently that he was going to be put in Madame Tussauds; he said that he reckoned that this was a lot better than a knighthood. (In fact he was to be knighted only three months later.) He asked about the English countryside and said that it was this above all that he would like to see again in England.

On the following day, whilst Ethel and I were out walking, Plummy suddenly appeared and went to sit next to Camilla on the sofa. This was a great compliment. He told her that he continued to read and reread Shakespeare and that on the whole he preferred the comedies—in particular *Midsummer Nights Dream*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*.

Later on that day, I went in to see Plum to say goodbye to him as we were returning to London that evening. He was reading *Smokescreen* by Dick Francis. 'His plots are really imaginative', he said. I told him that we had to go. He began to get out of his chair. I told him not to move. As we shook hands he said 'Goodbye, old boy. We have loved seeing you.' As I left his room, I could not resist looking back—after all he was ninety three and I wouldn't be going out to Long Island again for some time. Plum was already back in his book, fully absorbed.

That was the last time I saw him.

## BRIEF ENCOUNTER

William Hardwick and David McDonough found this Susan Hill item recently in the English *Daily Telegraph*. It's part of 'A new series in which writers choose the fictional character with whom they would most like to spend an evening.'

In adolescence, one wants brooding, tragic heroes; later, sardonic sophisticates. Now all I ask for is a damn good time.

Who better to give it me than the dapper little man with the monocle, P. G. Wodehouse's The Hon. Galahad Threepwood, blot on the Emsworth escutcheon, the Earl's younger brother? He'd pick me up in an open tourer and we'd bowl down to the races, eat jellied eels, and win quite a bit. Back to town to change, then champagne at the Ritz bar, before a music hall—the old Tivoli, where his great love Dolly Henderson sings 'The Boy I Love Is Up in the Gallery.' Dinner at Romano's—oysters and an excellent steak—then the foxtrot, the lancers, and the military two-step till he sees me home, perky as ever, at dawn. Gally is charming, full of gossip, opens doors, walks on the outside of the pavement, and is *utterly* safe in taxis.

# THE PLOT THAT THICKENED

by David McDonough

I'm happy to tell you that David McDonough is a member of the Wodehouse Society. He wrote this article for the October 1995 HEMISPHERES, the inflight magazine of United Airlines, and we are grateful for his, and its, permission to reprint it here. The article has generated more than three hundred inquiries about our Society. Many of these inquirers have become members, and for his significant contribution to our membership list we hereby make David a Knight Commander of the Order of the Blazing Saddle.

Every two years, a group of people gets together in some major city in the United States to wear vaguely Edwardian clothing, throw rolls at each other, and debate the proper procedure for stealing a policeman's helmet. So far, the law has turned a blind eye to this kind of behavior. The reason? These goings-on can mean only one thing: the biennial convention of The Wodehouse Society.

This October, the Society meets at the Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston to honor P.G. Wodehouse, one of the greatest humorists of the 20th century. The world knows Wodehouse primarily as the creator of two great comic characters: Bertie Wooster, that amiable, aimless, rich young man about town, and his sagacious and resourceful valet, Jeeves. Their adventures are legend: Bertie gets engaged to some impossible girl, or is set to an annoying task by one of his domineering aunts, or gives ridiculous advice to one of his lovelorn friends, and it is up to his guardian angel, Jeeves, to pull him out of the soup.

Their escapades are, indeed, the stuff of genius. But Wodehouse produced many other wonders: Mr. Mulliner, who narrates the improbable adventures of an improbable series of relatives; Lord Emsworth, that dimwitted flower of the British aristocracy whose greatest affection is reserved for his pig, the Empress of Blandings; the affably condescending Psmith ('the P is silent, as in pshrimp'); and Gussie Fink-Nottle, that tee-totaler and keeper of newts.

Pelham Grenville Wodehouse was born in the England of Victorian times. He began his lengthy and prolific writing

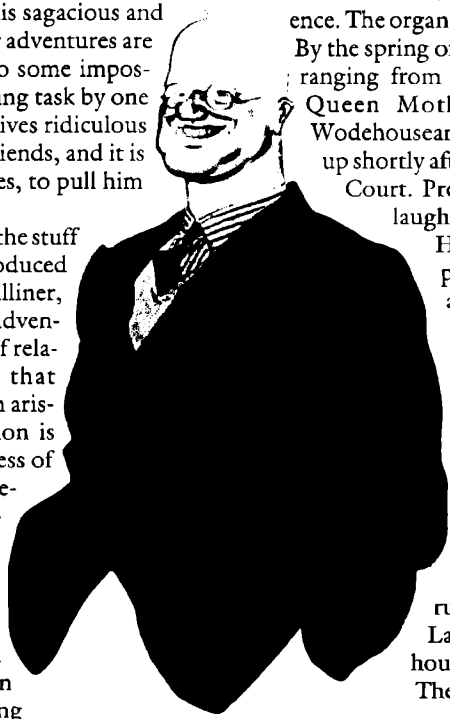
career while still at school in the 1890s, writing short pieces for the dozens of magazines that catered to the schoolboys of the era. Many Wodehouse scholars have argued that he really never left his schooldays behind. His characters, even the ones created sixty years later, tend to babble in a hilarious combination of schoolboy slang and English upper-class patois. Their code of conduct consists of blind loyalty to friends and an innocent, helpless, chivalric devotion to women. And their mental capacities—well, the average Wodehouse hero is described by other characters as having 'just about enough brains to make a jaybird fly crooked.'

Wodehouse left school at the turn of the century, and aside from a brief stint in a bank, never worked at anything but writing for the rest of his life. Between 1902 and his death in 1975 at the age of ninety three, he produced ninety-three books and countless articles and short stories. He also found the time to write a number of plays, fashion two scripts in Hollywood, and flourish, in the late teens and early '20s, as one of the theater's greatest lyricists, working primarily with the legendary Jerome Kern. (The current Broadway hit revival *Show Boat* features one of their biggest hits, 'Bill.')

In 1980, a few of Wodehouse's fans formed a loose-knit group, existing for no other purpose than to make devotees of Wodehouse aware of each other's existence. The organization has grown steadily since then. By the spring of 1995, there were over 500 members, ranging from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (an early and enthusiastic Wodehousean) to Judge Robert Bork, who joined up shortly after his rejection for the U.S. Supreme Court. Presumably, he was in need of a good laugh. Also recently enrolled are the actors

Hugh Laurie and Stephen Fry, who played, respectively, Bertie Wooster and Jeeves on the recent BBC television series *Jeeves and Wooster* (shown in the United States on PBS, the programs were not a universal hit with Wodehouse aficionados). Members come from as far away as Australia, Sweden, and Japan. In fact, every continent is represented except Antarctica, and it is only a matter of time before those six-month-long nights send somebody rushing to an icy shelf at the Enderby Land Public Library to discover Wodehouse.

The Society is more organized today;



there is even a branch of the group on the Internet. Members pay an annual fee of \$15 and receive a quarterly publication called *Plum Lines*. ('Plum' was Wodehouse's nickname, a corruption of his Christian name. Many of us in the Society refer to him simply as 'The Master.')

The summer 1995 issue of *Plum Lines* includes a reminiscence by a man who met Wodehouse when both were civilian prisoners of the Germans during World War II. (True to his cheerful, easygoing nature, Plum whiled away the time by sitting in a padded cell in a converted lunatic asylum and writing one of his best novels, *Money in the Bank*).

Also, there is an essay on why Wodehouse is so popular in India (perhaps the Indians found Bertie Wooster an acceptable explanation for British behavior in the Empire), a thoughtful piece on whether Bertie was correct in asserting that a diet high in fish was responsible for Jeeves's great brain power, and a series of short items by members who have found references to The Master in books, articles, and letters. And then there's information on the convention, eagerly awaited by anyone who has not had a fill of Wodehouse-mania during the year.

The convention, excellently organized by the Society's Boston chapter, the NEWTS (The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society), will contain the requisite number of lighthearted lectures ('Wodehouse as Lyricist,' 'P.G. Wodehouse and the Servant Problem'), skits, and games. But all of these things are window-dressing, sidelights to the more serious business of the convention. After all, there are grave issues to be discussed, such as which of the girls Bertie narrowly escapes marrying was the most awful—Honorias Glossop, who wanted to mold Bertie's frankly nonexistent intellect, gets my vote. And then we will need to decide which of Plum's descriptions of the hearty Honorias's laugh is better: 'like a squadron of cavalry charging over a tin bridge,' or 'like waves breaking on a stern and rockbound coast.'

These last two phrases will give you an idea of why Wodehouse is regarded as the best user of the English language since Dickens, and why he is guaranteed to make you laugh out loud at least once per page. If you are not convinced, try this opening sentence from *The Luck of the Bodkins*, a favorite of many Wodehouseans: 'Into the face of the young man who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at Cannes there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty, hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to talk French.'

We will also get on with the never-ending discussion of which is the best book with which the virgin reader should begin. This is an ongoing controversy. There is one school of thought that would advocate

plunging right into a Jeeves and Bertie novel, such as *Right Ho, Jeeves*, which contains the classic scene where Gussie Fink-Nottle distributes the school prizes. Others claim darkly that the Bertie Wooster saga has received far too much attention and would steer the novice reader to one of the Blandings Castle stories, perhaps 'The Crime Wave at Blandings,' in which Lord Emsworth gets hold of an air rifle.

School prizes, valets, eccentric aristocracy... all of this conjures up a distinctly bygone flavor, and so Wodehouse has been frequently referred to as a comic chronicler of the Edwardian era. While it is true that his young manhood coincided with that time period, it would be more accurate to say that he created his own world, which may or may not have ever existed. Things change very little in his universe in the seventy-five years between his first and last novels, and this refreshing indifference to time and tide is one of the reasons that he continues to be beloved and even revered.

Wodehouse's work is set, for the most part, in an English Never-Never Land, peopled with likable, idle young men, imperious older relatives who won't cough up suitable allowances, and absent-minded peers in drowsy castles, whose nieces want to marry impoverished curates and whose nephews want to marry chorus girls. It is always summer in Wodehouse, and weekend house parties, golf, and nightclubs occupy the time. If there is nothing else to do, the young men can always gather at the Drones Club. When mildly inebriated, they might attempt to steal a bobby's helmet; otherwise, they may pass a restful evening tossing cards into a top hat or flinging rolls at each other.

Which, of course, is exactly what we of the Society will be doing in Boston. Two years ago, at our meeting in San Francisco, the waiters refused to bring us extra rolls to use as projectiles, but we are assured that their counterparts at the Copley Plaza have been properly briefed. They will not blink an eye even as we dress in our Wodehousean garb, sing our Wodehousean songs, and try, in our own way, to re-create that idyllic world of The Master, the world where, as Evelyn Waugh wrote, 'There has been no Fall of Man.' Although, if there had been a snake in Bertie Wooster's Eden, there is no doubt that Jeeves would have sidled up behind Bertie, and just as he was about to bite into the apple, whispered, 'Injudicious, in my opinion, if I may say so, sir.' To which we of the Wodehouse Society would reply, 'Never mind the apple. Concentrate on the Plum.'

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## NEW MEMBERS







# WODEHOUSE IN THE PAVILION

by Tony Ring

This is the first part of a talk delivered at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October, 1995. The second part, dealing mostly with Plum's writings about cricket, will appear in the next issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**H**ad I been presenting this paper a year or so ago, I would have been at a loss to know how to start. After all...I mean to say...trying to talk about cricket to Americans? OK, the first overseas tour ever taken by the MCC, the leading cricket club in the UK, had been to the United States in 1859, but only the Oldest Member would remember it. So how to get over that awkward introduction?

And then...the baseball strike. Our national newspaper, the *Times*, informed us that, 'faced with the gaping void that once was baseball coverage, American television have begun broadcasting cricket matches complete with sub-titles.' One American sports commentator pointed out that it would be good for America to have cricket played in all professional baseball parks during the strike. In this way, the US could be weaned from a pre-adolescent game to one more befitting a great nation. Far be it from *me* to comment on such a politically sensitive statement!

Now may I ask you to put up your hands if you come from one of the following six cities: Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, or Toronto.

A good number.

Please keep your hand up if you know that your city is one of the six competing in a new competition called, with typical American understatement, the World Cricket League, for the title of World Champions. Thank you.

You may be also surprised to learn that there are now over three hundred cricket clubs in the US, and sales of the *US Cricketer* magazine have jumped from two to ten thousand in the last three years.

So I will gladly adopt the notion that you all now know as much about the game as I do, and, on the assumption that you read the spring issue of *Plum Lines* there is no need for a detailed explanation of the game. Perhaps all I need to say at this stage is that international matches which last five days are called test matches, and that the leading cricket club is the MCC, whose headquarters is at a ground called Lord's.

P. G. Wodehouse had links with cricket virtually all his life, initially as a player, then as a spectator and reporter, and finally as one who incorporated the

idiom and spirit of cricket into his writing. His pure cricket writing was restricted to a few articles and poems in his early days, and the specific reporting of a few games for the Dulwich College magazine, *The Alleyman*, in subsequent years. Cricket featured in two of his school novels as the major part of the fictional plot, and in others in a more peripheral role, and it was the crux of more than twenty short stories. Despite circumstantial evidence to the contrary to which I shall briefly refer later, cricket was always more important to Wodehouse than baseball, although the essential similarity between the two facilitated his appreciation of both games. For instance, the poem 'Missed,' which was written in 1908, and concerned the depths of despair to which a fumbling fielder falls in a game of cricket, could, by changing just five words, have been a poem about baseball. Both the sentiment of the poem and the language hold good today, so I thought you might like to hear it. [The headline and illustrations are copied from the original publication.—OM]

## Missed!

The sun in the heavens was beaming,  
The breeze bore an odour of hay,  
My flannels were spotless and gleaming  
My heart was unclouded and gay;  
The ladies, all gaily apparelled,  
Sat round looking on at the match,  
In the tree-tops the dicky-birds carolled,  
All was peace—till I bungled that catch.

My attention the magic of summer  
Had lured from the game—which was wrong.  
The bee (that inveterate hummer)  
Was droning its favourite song.  
I was tenderly dreaming of Clara  
(On her not a girl is a patch),  
When, ah, horror! There soared through the  
air a  
Decidedly possible catch.

I heard in a stupor the *bowler* [pitcher]  
 Emit a self-satisfied 'Ah!'  
 The small boys who sat on the roller  
 Set up an expectant 'Hurrah!'  
 The *batsman* with grief from the wicket [batter]  
 Himself had begun to detach—  
 And I uttered a groan and turned sick. It  
 Was over. I'd *battered* the catch. [fumbled]



Ah, the *bowler's* low, querulous  
 mutter [pitcher's]  
 Points loud, unforgettable scoff!  
 Oh, give me my driver and putter!  
 Henceforward my game shall be golf.  
 If I'm asked to play *cricket* hereafter [baseball]  
 I am wholly determined to scratch.  
 Life's void of all pleasure and laughter;  
 I bungled the easiest catch.

Wodehouse's first recorded game of cricket was a Junior Cup match for the Upper IIIB against the Upper IIIA at Dulwich in the summer of 1894, when he was just eleven. An inauspicious debut, perhaps, as he scored no runs in two innings, and took no wickets, but he did cling on to a decidedly possible catch. From such a low point things could only improve, and they did. Playing for the Classical Sixth against the *Modern Sixth* and Remove a few years later, he had a match that cricketers of any standard dream about. He took six wickets out of a possible ten in the *Modern Sixth's* first innings, and improved that to nine in the second innings. What's more, he made twenty runs, a score that none of the opposing team reached in either innings! He played in the school third XI in the 1898 season, when his team won all its games, and at the beginning of the 1899 season, the *Alleynian* described his prospects for the year in the following terms:



Wodehouse bowls a good length ball, but his bowling will have to be very good to compensate for his batting and fielding, which are very weak indeed.

He became a member of the Dulwich first XI during 1899, and although it would be paltering with the truth to say that he was consistently successful, he did take seven wickets in an innings against Tonbridge. Batting in the match against the Old Alleynians—Dulwich Former Pupils—he fell victim to his brother Armine. Generally he had a good season, taking plenty of wickets for his school house Treadgolds, and in the last match of the season he took seven wickets for the Sixth against the Engineers, including the hat-trick. A hat-trick is the quaint name given to the feat of taking three wickets in successive balls, and is fairly uncommon.

Although Wodehouse played for Dulwich again in 1900, he was relatively less successful, possibly because the team as a whole was stronger and he had fewer opportunities to shine. One of the younger members of the team was a fast bowler, N. A. Knox, and in 1907 Wodehouse was to ghost an article entitled 'On Fast Bowling' in Knox's name in the *Daily Mail*.

After leaving Dulwich he returned to play at the school on at least a dozen occasions, with considerable success. From 1904 to 1908 he took his own XI to play the school, and he made at least four appearances for the Old Alleynians. He also played for the F. P. Knox XI, the J. M. Campbell XI, and the F. D. Browne XI.

It is the dream of every cricketer to play at Lord's cricket ground, the home of the MCC, and although PG played against MCC twice while at school, each of these games was at Dulwich. He did fulfill his dream six times between 1905 and 1912, however, playing at Lord's against the Actors and the Publishers. At this time he was a member of the Authors team known as the Allahakbarries, a name derived from the Arabic for 'Heaven Help Us,' led by J. M. Barrie.

For many people, opening the batting with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at Lord's would be the summit of their lifetime achievement, and although we might think that Wodehouse's career subsequently reached greater heights, he must have experienced a wonderful feeling at the time, rather like that which Bertie Wooster enjoyed on the few occasions he managed to slip one over on Jeeves. He played cricket regularly with Conan Doyle, with whom he became close friends, making a number of appearances at his country home, Windlesham, as well as with A. A. Milne, E. W. Hornung, author of the Raffles stories, and his old friend Bill Townend.

In a match in 1905, he bowled out the actor H. B. Warner for six runs. Warner played Christ in the 1927 de Mille film 'King of Kings,' and I can claim to have something in common in with Wodehouse, for playing cricket some seventy years later, I had the actor Robert Powell out caught for a duck. Powell had played Christ in the BBC television serial 'Jesus of Nazareth.'

It is not clear for how long Wodehouse continued to appear in cricket matches, but undoubtedly his regular visits to the US from the mid-teens, coupled with his incredible workload, would have made regular games impossible. He certainly continued to watch top class cricket, and in 1913 paid a momentous visit to Cheltenham to watch Gloucestershire play Warwickshire, whose team included the professional Percy Jeeves.

It is unlikely that Wodehouse actually played in the US, although he was a founder member and vice-president of the fledgling Hollywood Cricket Club when it was created in 1932 by Sir Charles Smith (who had bowled Wodehouse out in 1905), with the help of, amongst others, David Niven, Cary Grant, Errol Flynn, Boris Karloff, and the same H. B. Warner whom I mentioned a minute ago. PG took the minutes of the inaugural meeting, and donated \$100 towards equipment.

His last recorded appearance was at the Tost internment camp when, aged fifty-nine, he bemused the opposing batsmen with the spin and swerve he got from a ball made by sailors winding string round a metal nut.

*Interruption by a cricketing NEWT (Sean Harmon):*

**Sean:** I thought I heard someone talking about cricket. Can anyone direct me to the Boston Cricket Club's ground?

**Tony:** I'm sorry, I'm a stranger round here. Perhaps one of these ladies or gentlemen can help.

*Business with Elin Woodger giving directions.*

**Sean:** Thank you very much. As you can tell, I am a bit lost and I don't want to be lost—it's our last game of the season.

**Tony:** No, wait a minute. I have been ex-

plaining a bit about cricket to these ladies and gentlemen, and perhaps you can help. Could you hold your bat up? Would you mind letting people have a closer look? (*Passes it around audience.*) And this protective equipment. You're wearing pads and gloves. You don't wear these all the time, do you?

**Sean:** No, only while batting. Fielders don't have any protection, except the wicket-keeper...

**Tony:** In baseball, he would be the catcher?

**Sean:** Yes, that's right. The wicket-keeper wears pads and bigger gloves than these.

**Tony:** So let's get this right. When batting against bowlers who are bowling at perhaps ninety miles an hour, you just wear pads and gloves? No body or head protection? And when you field, you might be standing five yards from the batsman, and you don't wear gloves or pads or a helmet or anything? Isn't the ball rather hard?

**Sean:** Some people wear a helmet for batting or fielding close to the batsman, but that's only evolved during the last ten years or so.

**Tony:** So P. G. Wodehouse wouldn't have known anything about helmets?

**Sean:** Who?

**Tony:** (*Shaken to the core, ushering him out with Elin's help.*) I think it's time for you to go. Thank you very much for helping to explain a bit about the tools of the game.

**Who** is P. G. Wodehouse? Huh! I assumed all cricketers were civilised. It shows how wrong you can be.

Wodehouse was, as we all know, a great correspon-



Sean Harmon and Tony Ring

dent, and he kept in close touch with cricketing friends.

I have a manuscript letter to a fellow member of the Authors team, Elliott O'Donnell, covering three topics: an Authors match in which O'Donnell was playing, a forthcoming cricket match in which Wodehouse regretted his inability to play, and a short report of the P. G. Wodehouse XI v. Dulwich game of 1906.

More interesting, overall, are two letters to Denys Wilcox in the 1930s. Wilcox had been a Dulwich student who had impressed Wodehouse with his cricket, and had gone on to make a century in the annual match at Lord's between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, taken just as seriously as the annual aquatic competition familiar to us all. (Since Wilcox had scored 157 runs, it would have been understandable if his celebrations had earned him an appointment the next day at Boshier Street magistrates court, but there is no report of their having done so.) Wilcox was planning to take up school-mastering as a profession and had asked PG if he could use his name as a reference on the prospectus for the preparatory school which his grandfather had started in 1901 with the aid of a financial contribution from his uncle, a certain Lewis Carroll.

The school, in Southend, Essex, was called Alleyn Court, and is still owned and run by the Wilcox family today.

Wodehouse continued to be interested in Dulwich cricket, making frequent references to the team's prowess in his letters to Bill Townend, which can be found in *Performing Flea*. He reported the 1907 match against Brighton for the *Alleynian*, and, with a flair for the nifty phrase, included the following:

With our entire troupe of bowlers (i. e., pitchers) bowling like cripples trying to do the Nashville Salute, the outlook seemed gloomy.

I leave you to show me afterwards what the Nashville Salute looked like!

He also wrote about their matches against Tonbridge in 1932 and 1935 for the *Alleynian*. Then in 1938 Dulwich won all their school matches and PG treated the entire team to dinner and a night out at the London Palladium, although he did not himself accompany them. The youngest member of the team, Trevor Bailey, was only fourteen and had to persuade the school that he was old enough to go on the outing! Bailey not only became Dulwich's best known cricketer, playing sixty-one times for England, principally in the 1950s, but became the butt of some caustic reporting by Wodehouse on the St. Paul's match in 1939. With great prescience—since Bailey was to achieve a reputation as a slow-scoring, defensive

batsman when playing for England, Wodehouse reported that:

Bailey, who had been in a sort of coma for about an hour and twenty minutes, got a four to leg...

This is very much the forerunner of an after-dinner joke used by speakers for years after Bailey retired, to the effect that a spectator at a cricket match fell asleep and had a nightmare: that he was watching Trevor Bailey bat—and then awoke and found that he was.

Wodehouse's other act of prescience in relation to cricket was, of course, to name the opposing captains in the Wrykyn/Ripton match Burgess and Maclaïne, the infamous pair who spied for the USSR some forty years later.



The last part of Tony's talk will appear in the next issue.

## A TRIBUTE

Jay Weiss recently came across an unusual tribute. He writes:

The Reverend Carroll E. Simcox was, and perhaps still is, editor of *The Living Church* a national Anglican weekly magazine. In his book, *Notes to the Overworld*, he wrote:

A friend of mine had been wretchedly sick for many months, with one of those ailments that defy diagnosis and sure-fire treatment. Old doc Simcox (that's me) thought that with all the other medicinal things she is taking, a spot of P. G. Wodehouse wouldn't do her any harm, so I sent her a copy of *Leave It to Psmith*. It worked splendidly. Sure, we're praying for her, too. But I think God slipped that prescription into my mind. After all, King Solomon was hardly a dope and you remember what he said: 'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine' (Proverbs 17:22).

She gave a sort of despairing gesture, like a vicar's daughter who has discovered Erastianism in the village.

*Laughing Gas*, 1936



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# P. G. WODEHOUSE AND THE SERVANT QUESTION

## OR, BEHIND THE GREEN BAIZE DOOR

by Norman Murphy

A talk delivered by Norman and Helen Murphy at the Boston Wodehouse Convention, October, 1995

The phrase 'the servant question' may not be all that common over here, but it was in constant use in England from the 1840s up to the 1950s, and *Punch* had a Servant Question joke just about every week for its entire one hundred ten years.

From 1919 onwards, after the Great War, the jokes in *Punch* dealt with the difficulties of finding servants—and of keeping them. Good servants had become so hard to get that the most respectable members of Society bribed and poached each others staff without any compunction whatsoever.

When Wodehouse told us in 'Carry On, Jeeves' of Aunt Dahlia pinching Anatole from Mrs Bingo Little and of Mrs Bingo swiping Aunt Dahlia's housemaid, he was, as always, describing a current phenomenon his readers recognised.

After 1945 the Servant Question was simply one of finding any servants at all, a situation we read of in *Ring for Jeeves*. And now, in 1995, I don't suppose there are half a dozen households in England with the numbers of staff we read of at Blandings.

Though I'm delighted to be able to tell you that when I had lunch at Sudeley Castle, one of the two originals of Blandings, a few years ago, we were served by a butler and a footman, so there are still some around. But most of the Stately Homes of England get by nowadays on a couple of live-in servants supplemented by girls from the village who come in each day.

The great days of domestic service in England were from the 1870s to 1914, the late Victorian and Edwardian period, as Wodehouse said in one of the last interviews he gave:

'I know my Blandings is entirely out of date now. I don't suppose anybody can keep up an establishment like that any more, but I don't feel like spoiling it.'

In those days domestic service was an honourable, even an enviable, calling, especially if you were poor. It offered food, warmth, shelter, security, and respectability.

Of course, money went a long way then. When Wodehouse was growing up, a married bank clerk on \$250 a year would have a servant in the house; a maid-of-all-work commonly referred to as a 'slavey.'

If you had two housemaids they would be known as the upper housemaid and under housemaid because that is

what they did: the upper housemaid cleaned the upper side of things, the top surfaces of tables, mantelpieces, the piano, chairs, and sideboards; whereas the under-housemaid cleaned the things underneath, the legs of the tables and chairs and the floors, carpets, and fireplaces.

If your income was \$4,000 a year, you probably employed five or six staff, as we saw in the TV series 'Upstairs, Downstairs'—a very realistic picture of a household of the period.

And then there were the Stately Homes of England. At the turn of the century there were about five thousand of these, each the centre of its own little world. Wodehouse described every stage, every gradation of the English social scene—from his early stories of young men in lodgings with slaves and tousled housemaids, right through to the splendour of the Steward's Room in Blandings Castle. Where did he learn about the servants he wrote of so accurately?

'I know my Blandings is entirely out of date now. I don't suppose anybody can keep up an establishment like that any more, but I don't feel like spoiling it.'

He first met them at the age of six in a South London dame's school he attended with his brothers. He said that it was here that he came to admire the indomitable spirit of the Cockney housemaid, best exemplified by Elsie Bean, housemaid to Mugsy Bostock in *Uncle Dynamite*.

'Elsie Bean was a friendly little soul who, though repeatedly encouraged to do so by her employers, had never succeeded in achieving that demure aloofness which is the hallmark of the well-trained housemaid. Too often in her dealings with the ruling classes in circumstances where a distant 'Yes, sir' or 'No, madam' would have been suitable, you would find her becoming expansive and conversational.

'I'll tell you what's the matter with her. She goes on at him about how he mustn't leave the Force. It's 'Don't you do it, Harold,' and 'Don't let Elsie talk you into acting against your true interests,' all the time. I



haven't any patience.'

And who can forget her perfect description of Mugsy Bostock:

'Dishpot!' cried a clear young voice, this time unmistakably that of Miss Bean. Sir Aylmer started. These were fighting words. 'Who called me a dishpot?'

'I did,' replied Elsie Bean with quiet fortitude. 'An overbearing dishpot, that's what you are, and I would like to give my month's notice.'

As a boy, Wodehouse spent his holidays with his grandmother and four spinster aunts at Cheney Court in Wiltshire, better known to us as Deverill Hall. They took him along when they paid formal calls on their neighbours and Wodehouse told us how he enjoyed having his tea in the Servants' Hall. And it was at Cheney Court that Jan Kaufman and I discussed the significance of the green baize door.

Nowadays most of us only see green baize on a pool table, but up to 1939 it was a badge of office in large households. Green baize was what you wrapped your silver and gold plate in. When the butler and footmen got down to the task of polishing the cutlery, they put on green baize to do it. It was the symbol of the butler's world and, in every Big House, the door to the servants' quarters was covered with green baize. There

were at least four reasons for this. Firstly, it showed every visitor to the house where he was not allowed to go.

Secondly, the doors were swing doors and the baize muffled the sound of their movement to and fro.

Thirdly, since you were carrying trays, decanters, and scuttles full of coal, the doors got pretty battered so the green baize acted as a protective layer.

And, fourthly, it was widely believed that green baize kept the smells of the kitchen away from the family side of the house.

At Cheney Court the servants were almost certainly all female except for the gardener whose name we know was Thorne, the name Wodehouse borrowed to give to the Blandings Castle head-gardener in *Something New*.

When his parents came back from Hong Kong the family moved to Shropshire, where Wodehouse accompanied them to garden-parties at the local Stately Homes, including Weston Park, which we will look at more closely in a moment.

In the archives is a fascinating note made by Wodehouse after a visit to the impressive mansion of cousin Henry Bargrave Deane, where Wodehouse stayed in the early 1900s. He records that he got a lot of information from the servants in this house on what they did and what their jobs were like.

He learned that footmen had one name, Charles or John, for upstairs and another, Fred or Bill, for downstairs. He also learned that they liked to stay in a house for two years or so, long enough to show they could hold the job down and short enough to enable them to build up a good set of references so they could apply for a job as a valet or butler.

And in Norfolk Street in London, now called Dunraven Street, Wodehouse employed in the late 1920s:

- a butler, Cecil Pavey;
- a footman, William Anns;
- a chauffeur, Andrew Nicoll;
- a cook, Daisy Serle;
- two housemaids, Sarah Wallace and Elsie Wright;
- a parlourmaid, Bessie Ashdown;
- and a scullery-maid, her sister Phyllis Ashdown.

Once again, the TV series 'Upstairs, Downstairs' gives an accurate picture of what life must have been like below-stairs here. But this was as nothing to an establishment like Blandings Castle with its incredible below-stairs etiquette that we read of in *Something New*, the first Blandings Castle story. In that book Ashe Marson and Joan Valentine travel to Blandings Castle as, respectively, valet to Preston Peters and lady's maid to Aline Peters, and Joan gives Ashe some advice on his entry into High Society Below Stairs.

'Don't you know the rules of precedence among the servants of a big house are more rigid and complicated



Anatole, servant of the senses

than in society?"

Ashe was astonished. He had grown up in a middle-class home with a cook-general and a housemaid and he supposed that, in large establishments at dinner time, the butler and footmen would just troop into the kitchen and squash in at the table wherever there was room.

Joan disabuses him.

'As Mr Peter's valet you come after the butler, the housekeeper, the groom of the chambers, Lord Emsworth's valet, Lady Ann Warblington's lady's maid. . . then it's the Honourable Frederick Threeepwood's valet and myself and then you.'

'I suppose I charge in at the head of a drove of housemaids and scullery-maids.'

'My dear Mr Marson, if a housemaid or a scullery-maid tried to get into the Steward's room and have her meals with us, she would be lynched, I should think.

Kitchen maids and scullery maids eat in the kitchen. Chauffeurs, footmen, under-butler, pantry-boys, hall-boys, odd-job man and Steward's Room footman take their meals in the Servants Hall, waited on by the hall-boy.

The still-room maids have breakfast and tea in the still-room and dinner and supper in the Hall.

The housemaids and nursery-maids have breakfast and tea in the housemaids' sitting-room and dinner and supper in the Hall. The head-housemaid ranks next to the head still-room maid.

The laundry-maids have a place of their own near the laundry, and the head laundry-maid ranks next above the head-housemaid. The chef has his meals in a room of his own near the kitchen. . . Is there anything else I can tell you, Mr Marson?"

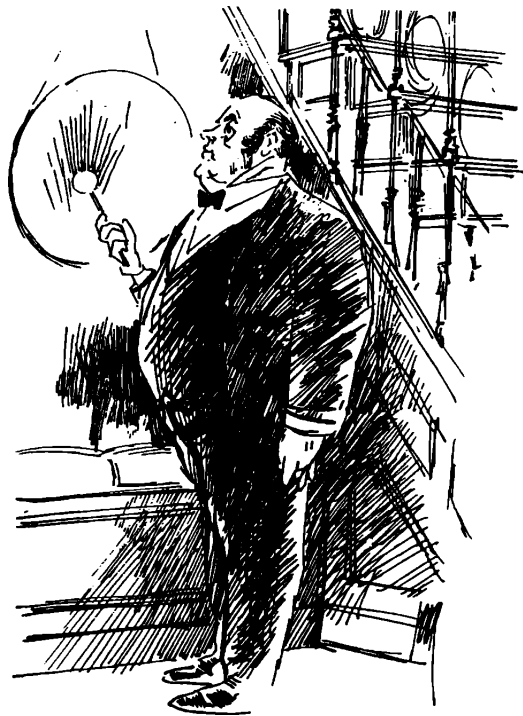
Wodehouse wasn't exaggerating. That is exactly how it was in England up to 1914 in oh, about five thousand Great Houses.

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The servants we find amusing today were people of immense dignity because they had reason to be. We call them servants but an equally accurate title would be heads of department.

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And now I must destroy—or at least attack—an illusion cherished by us all. If Beach was really the *butler* at Blandings, then he was *not* the senior servant. The butler was the one who greeted you at the door, who seemed lord of all he surveyed, but he was merely the front-of-house man. It was the housekeeper who ruled the house and she was someone whom visitors probably never saw.



Beach, master of servants

In *Something New*, although Ashe Marson was ushered into the august presence of Mr Beach, it was Mrs Twemlow the housekeeper who formally welcomed him to Blandings Castle.

When a new bride was brought to her husband's ancestral home, the gardeners and stable staff lined up to welcome her outside the front door, the butler and footmen greeted her in the hall, but the housekeeper, as senior servant, waited for her on the great staircase, and it was the housekeeper who formally handed over the keys to the establishment. And it was the housekeeper who kept the household accounts.

But, if you wanted the butler to be the senior servant—and many households did—you gave him another title and called him Steward to the Household or The House Steward. The title made *him* top dog, and then *he* did the household accounts, as well as being the awesome individual who met you at the front door. And you will recall that when Ashe Marson dined that first night at Blandings, he did so in the *Steward's Room*. I think that Beach was not a butler at all; but the House Steward, and I am sure Wodehouse knew the distinction perfectly well but felt that

it would be too difficult to explain to his readers. So he evaded the issue and made Beach a butler instead.

There was a theoretical green baize door *outside* the house as well as inside. The flower gardens and the vegetable gardens were the domain of the head gardener. The terraces, lawns and flower beds you walked around as a member of the family or a visitor were 'the pleasure grounds.' And you would have no more thought of wandering into the gardens than you would of poking your head behind the green baize door.

We may regard these Stately Homes as symbols of ostentatious wealth, but they were far more than that. They were business enterprises, like the big plantations in the Carolinas in the 1840s or the ranches in Texas in the 1890s. Like them, they got their income from the crops and animals raised on the estate, they brewed their own beer, shod their own horses, and depended on their own resources for meat, vegetables, fuel, and forage.

The servants we find amusing today were people of immense dignity because they had reason to be. We call them servants but an equally accurate title would be heads of department.

McAllister had thirty men under him at Blandings, and Beach and Mrs Twemlow controlled nearly as

many more. They were proud of their position because their department was their empire and their employers recognized this. This is why, at the end of 'The Crime Wave at Blandings,' when Lord Emsworth dashes into Beach's pantry from whose window he will shoot Baxter again, Beach is astounded. It is the first time in eighteen years that Lord Emsworth had been in there.

When the heroic Gladys of 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend' asks for some flowers, Lord Emsworth is dubious. You didn't just go out and pick flowers whenever you liked, you asked McAllister first. That was the way things were.

Nancy Mitford summed it up very well in one of her novels when a young man, obviously *nouveau riche*, suggests to the heroine they go riding. She says they will have to ask Williams, the groom. He is surprised and suggests they just ask her father. He owns the horses, doesn't he? Her reply is scathing:

'Don't be silly. Horses don't belong to the people who *own* them. They belong to the people who *look after* them.'

And that is why Wodehouse could say, with perfect accuracy, 'his face bore the pained, indignant expression that one sees on that of a butler whose master has been to the wine-cellar without telling him.'

And it still applies. As an officer in the British Army, I had the theoretical right to enter the Sergeants' Mess whenever I wished. They were under my command but, in thirty years, I never dreamed of doing so—unless expressly and formally invited by the Regimental Sergeant-Major.

Let's consider a Great House Wodehouse knew well—Weston Park in Shropshire, which some of you have seen and which is certainly the original of the Blandings estate. The lake and boathouse are some distance in front of the house, the Greek temple is off to the right, the cottage in the woods still further off. The terraces, the stables, the pig-styes, the kitchen gardens, and Galahad's cedar tree are all there, with the road to Shrewsbury running past them and the hamlet of Blandings Parva, sorry, Weston under Lizard nestling behind the house and gardens.

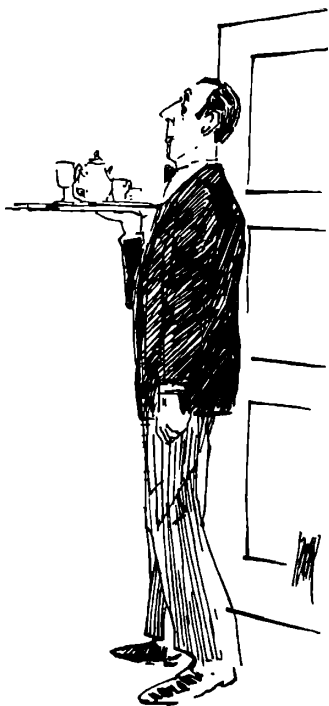
In her book *The Edwardians*, Victoria Sackville-West drew a picture of her childhood home, Knole in Kent, a place very similar to Weston Park and Blandings. She described the owner of the estate wandering out into the stable yard, and how

he felt the placid continuity, the vitality of the world around him. The whole community of the great house was humming at its work. In the stables men were grooming horses; in the workshops, the carpenters plane sent the woodchips flying, the diamond of the glazier hissed upon the glass; in the forge, the hammer rang upon the anvil and the bellows sighed.

In the slaughterhouse, the keeper slung up a deer by its four feet tied together, in the shed an old man chopped kindling.



Wellbeloved, one-man  
Servant Problem



Jeeves, servant supreme

His thoughts turned to the house itself for there also was activity; the pestle thumped in the kitchen, the duck turned in the spit, the laundrymaids beat the linen in the coppers, the gardener's boy dumped a basket of fruit on the dresser, and in the still-room the maid stirred a cauldron of jam upon the fire.

The housekeeper counted the sheets in the linen cupboard, putting a bag of lavender between each. The butler, having stored away the plate, turned the key of the lock in the strong-room door. His thoughts wandered away over the estate to the farm where a new Dutch barn was being built, to the cottage where his workmen were already stripping off the tiles from the roof, to the field where a gate was being repaired. . . .

When Wodehouse knew it in the late 1890s, there were thirty indoor servants at Weston Park. It would take too long to give you all their names and the wages they got, so I'll just say that the House Steward was Jonas Ellingham, there was a French chef, Leon Lefevre, the Valet and Groom of the chambers was John Nott, the Housekeeper was Mrs Sarah Lamb, and Her Ladyship's Maid was Marian Scorer. The other staff comprised an under-butler, four footmen, a ladies footman, Steward's Room boy, and a pony boy. In addition, Mrs. Lamb supervised the work of four laundry-maids, five house-maids, two still-room maids, a dairy maid, two kitchen

maids, and a scullery maid.

In the stables, there were at least a dozen grooms and stable-boys under the command of John Beavan, the head coachman. The agent George Carter worked in the estate office, as did the estate bailiff James Craig and James Thomas the chief clerk.

The parkland was looked after by the park keeper and head game-keeper William Mason. The splendid gardens were tended by James Hope, a Scotsman of course, with thirty-four gardening staff under him.

Of course things weren't perfect all the time. Servants were very sensitive on what they should or should not be expected to do. For example, when the American Ambassador was staying at Warwick Castle, I think it was, in the 1890s, he was invited to join in a game of tennis. But he was slightly surprised that he and the other players, a couple of earls and a viscount, had to mark out the tennis court themselves under the respectful but unhelpful gaze of a dozen footmen and gardeners. The Countess of Warwick was not at all embarrassed. Marking out the tennis court was the task of the odd-job man and it was his day off—and she wouldn't *dream* of asking one of the other servants to do it.

It all sounds very far-fetched, but I read last year that the servants in the Harvard Club in New York went on strike for just this reason. It's reassuring to see these fine old traditions carrying on.

And of course there were some unfortunate incidents, such as the occasion when a gamekeeper handed his master a gun that both men thought was unloaded, but which went off accidentally and killed the master. Everybody was terribly sad about it and nobody blamed the gamekeeper at all, but there were some raised eyebrows when the grieving widow erected a gravestone with the inscription 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'

And there was the famous occasion when Mrs Ronald Greville, one of England's great hostesses, was giving a tremendously smart dinner and suddenly realised her butler Bowles was drunk. She grabbed her writing tablet, scribbled on it the words **YOU ARE DRUNK. LEAVE THE ROOM AT ONCE** and handed it to him.

Bowles bowed, took it, read it, nodded gravely, and then with that touch of genius that only alcohol can produce, went to the sideboard, put the note on a salver and, to Mrs Greville's consternation, made his ponderous way down the table to the most dignified man in the room, Sir Austen Chamberlain, His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and presented the note to him with the words, 'With Madam's compliments, Sir.'

As I said, there are few servants in England today, but there are some—which meant that in January there was a headline in the *Daily Telegraph* that had strong echoes of Tipton Plimsoll and Bill Lister in *Full Moon*. It read::

### Jilted Millionaire in Poker Attack on Duke's Gardener

A court was told yesterday that a wealthy property developer whose wife walked out on him to live with the head gardener of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester attacked his rival with a poker next day. . . .

But as Wodehouse said, all the real butlers and valets have gone now. In *Over Seventy* he mourned the passing of the great butlers of the Edwardian period but hoped the separation of butler and employer will not last for long:

I tell myself that when Clarence, ninth Earl of Emsworth, finally hands in his dinner pail after his long and pleasant life, the first thing he will hear as he settles himself on his cloud will be the fruity voice of Beach, his faithful butler, saying "Nectar or ambrosia, m'lord?"

Well, I'm delighted to end with the thought that sometimes it seems as if it might be like that. Lord Lovat, chief of the Clan Frazer, was a Commando officer who formed his own regiment in the last war—Lovat's Scouts, from his servants and the tenants on his estate—as his father and grandfather had done before him. (And you can say what you like about the English aristocracy, but they have always been willing to go out and be killed for their country's sake.)

Lord Lovat took with him his piper Bill Millin, who served throughout the war and piped the regiment onto the beaches on D Day. When Lord Lovat died this year, the saddest photograph of all was that of Bill Millin playing a last lament over his master's grave.

And back at Weston Park, when the third Earl of Bradford died, the whole county came to his funeral, but he was carried to his grave by:

- his steward Jonas Ellingham
- his valet John Nott
- his coachman John Beavan
- his head gardener James Hope
- his gamekeeper William Mason
- his agent George Carter.

They buried him in a mausoleum in the grounds, tucked away up behind the gardens, and outside the mausoleum are other gravestones with familiar names on them, the names of the servants who carried him to his last rest. They lie here, beside their master in death

as they were in life, separated from him now not by a green baize door, but by a sward of green English grass.

They have all gone now. But the characters they helped to create—Voules, Mrs Twemlow, McAllister, and Sebastian Beach—will live on as long as there is a Blandings Castle story in print and people to read it.

## A FEW QUICK ONES

You, dear reader, along with about seven hundred other members, have probably been wondering why you haven't received a recent issue of *Plum Lines*. I had hoped to get out a bubbly, enthusiastic issue in November about our great Boston Convention, but before I could do that the Real World set in with unusual severity and caused an unavoidable delay of more than two months. I regret the delay and I'm happy to report that all is hotsytotsy once again.

Richard Usborne, Wodehousian extraordinaire, sends his thanks and appreciation for the Boston Convention tote bag, the souvenirs, and the many remembrances of well-wishers. They were 'brought across the pond,' he writes, 'by the Colonel and other Murphys. I totter poorly with [the bag] along our nearby—our only nearby—shopping street.'

'I hear many good things,' he continues 'about that party, especially the glorious occasion of Hal Cazalet singing 'Sonny Boy' to you.'

Richard was unable to attend the convention because of poor health. He is a resident of the Charterhouse, London.

### A note from David McDonough:

In the June 26th/July 3rd [1995] issue of *The New Yorker*, Anthony Lane is musing on the books that graced the best seller list fifty years ago, in 1945. There is one he can't abide:

This tale of the north is called *Earth and High Heaven*. It was written, if written is the word, by Gwethalyn Graham. I admit, in retrospect, that I should have seen trouble coming. There's a P. G. Wodehouse story in which Bertie Wooster falls for a girl named Gwladys. His Aunt Dahlia is appalled. 'No good can come of association with anything labeled Gwladys or Ysobel or Ethyl or Mabelle or Kathryn,' she says. 'But particularly Gwladys.' I would second that, adding only that a novelist called Gwethalyn somehow constitutes the worst menace of all.

For those Plum novices out there, we might add that

the above Wodehousian quote is from 'Jeeves and the Spot of Art,' in *Very Good, Jeeves*.

Regards,

Daffyd McDonough

P. S. You may be interested to know that the spell-check on my PC absolutely refuses to pick up 'Gwladys' or 'Ysobel' or 'Ethyl' or 'Mabelle' or 'Kathryn'. [Mine just accepted all of them as good words. I must have a Welsh spell-check. — OM]

**William Hardwick** sent a note last September saying that Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber was reviving his musical *Jeeves*, which he first staged in London twenty years ago. Playwright Alan Ayckbourn, who wrote the original stage play, and Lloyd Webber have revamped the original show. The original musical bombed, because (I hear) someone thought he could improve on Plum's plots; let us hope this one involves less tampering.

As those who attended the Boston Convention cannot forget, no matter how hard they try, I played the part of Lord Emsworth in a reading at that event. In fact, on four separate and distinct occasions in the past four years I have been asked—rather too pointedly and for reasons I prefer not to examine—to play Lord Emsworth in Wodehouse skits. After every performance I have received the most lavish praise: 'Pure type casting!' and 'You didn't need to *act* at all!' are typical comments. There's a message in all this, but I—ah—cannot, at the moment, recall what it is.



The Oldest Member

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## VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes  
Tom Wainwright

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