



Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society Vol. 18 Nos. 4 Winter 1998

THE GREAT EAST COAST BINGE, 1998

By Aunt Dahlia

With a little help from Lady Bassett, Pighooey, and Cyril Waddesley-Davenport

Some time ago, certain denizens of our east coast Chapters (Capital! Capital!, Chapter One, and the NEWTS), noted a deplorable flaw about TWS biennial conventions—to wit: Just as you're getting to know and enjoy the society of a fellow Plummie, you are wrenched away from his or her side and forced to wait two long years before you can pick up the conversation where you left off, as it were. This rather vexatious state of affairs simply couldn't continue, and we decided to do something about it. The solution was to hold a Binge of some sort during convention off-years (and, sometimes, even during convention on-years, as was the case in 1997; see *Plum Lines*, Autumn 1997). Although said Binge would always be held on the east coast, it is and always will be open to all Plummies.

That said, for this convention off-year, the NEWTS offered to host the Binge in the wilds of Long Island, New York, thus making possible a pilgrimage to Remsenburg. This decision was helped along by the very convenient

location of the Woodger family summer house, Brinkley Court, on Long Island's north shore, a mere 45 minutes away from Remsenburg. With Brinkley Court established as our base of operations, it was the work of a minute to reserve a block of rooms at the nearby Sound View Inn in Greenport and to throw open the gates to any and all who wanted to attend. (Unfortunately, our timing did not allow us to make an announcement in *Plum Lines*.)

The chosen date for our Binge was the first weekend in October. On Friday the 2nd, as pilgrims began to trickle in to the area, some found their way over to Brinkley Court, where a very pleasant afternoon was spent dispensing cocktails and getting reacquainted with friends we hadn't seen since Chicago, 1997—not to mention meeting some new friends. Then it was off to dinner, followed by our first informal gathering in the bar of the Sound View's restaurant. By the time the final pilgrims had arrived late that evening, we found ourselves with a gathering of 27 jolly souls from hither and thither about the east coast—and a couple of yons, one from California and the other who saw fit to come all the way from India to join us! (All right, so he happened to be in the U.S., anyway, and it was merely convenient timing on his part.)

We were ever so fortunate that weekend to enjoy some splendid Indian Summer weather ("provided, no doubt, expressly for our comfort and enjoyment by an approving Providence," as Pighooey noted), making our trek to Remsenburg on Saturday morning that much more pleasant. We gathered in front of the Sound View around 9:30 a.m., and after deciding who was riding with whom, we were off, a long convoy of cars led by the Newtmobile. Forty-five minutes later, we pulled up to the Wodehouse estate in Remsenburg.

Lady Bassett had previously contacted the house's current owners and had received permission for our group to tramp about the grounds, which we did with great



Plummies around the headstone Photo by Jean Tillson

enthusiasm and much picture-taking. Unfortunately, said owners were not at home at the time of our visit, making it impossible to examine the interior of the house. Nevertheless, those of us who had visited before were able to point out certain key features and identify such shrines as the room where Plum wrote some of his masterpieces. As we milled about, peering in the window of this room as if hoping to see the ghost of Himself hard at work at his favorite typewriter, Cyril Waddesley-Davenport and Rosie M. Banks (Dan and Susan Cohen), got down on their hands and knees and genuflected with all the reverence that was appropriate to the occasion. Other Plummies quickly followed suit, while their companions (and, no doubt, the immediate neighbors) looked on with amazement—or perhaps amusement would be the better word.

When we had done looking through windows and finished comparing notes on what was original and what was new about the house (which, by the way, remains on the market for a cool \$750,000), we then gamboled down the road to the cemetery where Plum and Ethel are buried. Gathering by the graveside, we oohed and ahed and snapped pictures, and some of us took turns cleaning the headstone, which had become infested with lichen. Then came a reading of favorite passages from Wodehouse, with various readers stepping forward and sharing some of the bits they loved the most in the Master's vast canon. This made for quite a laughter-filled occasion—something which we felt Plum would have heartily approved!

From there it was on to the Bide-a-Wee pet cemetery, where several of the Wodehouse pets are buried. Here we conducted more readings and looked about at other fascinating tributes to departed furry and feathered loved ones. Finally the group broke up, to go off to lunch and to spend the afternoon investigating other Long Island attractions (including the Big Duck, which has to be seen to be explained).

On Saturday night, we entered into our Wodehousian revels with all the zest and flair for which Plummies have become noted far and wide. The Sound View may never be the same again, as we 27, some in costume, began browsing and sluicing in earnest, and laughter shook the rafters (occasionally drawing sharp glances from other diners in the immediate vicinity). As Lady Bassett wrote in her report to PGW-NET: "The cocktails at the restaurant were stiff, the hors d'oeuvres out of this world, the banquet delicious. And the company—well, when is it ever other than magnificent, with all of us present? There were mercifully few speeches, wherein some of us got gifts laid on; there was a present swap (funny how many of them were Gussie newts!), and a reading (fervent and heartfelt) of 'The Aunt and the Sluggard.'" And may I add that this reading, chosen because of its references to Long Island, was a pippen—beautifully prepared by Pighooey,

and more than beautifully performed by John Fahey as Bertie Wooster; Dan Cohen as Jeeves; Shamim Mohammed as Rocky Todd; Anne Cotton as Isabel Rockmeteller; and Susan Cohen, Richard Morrissey and Yours Truly as the Narrators. Of particular note was Shamim's rousing rendering of Rocky Todd's classic poem "Be!", which caused several nearby diners to jump about ten feet into the air, then call for the check.

After the party broke up, the revelry continued as some of us sauntered into the bar and, with drinks solidly in hand, gathered about the piano, there to loudly encourage the resident pianist and singer to perform "Bill" for us. Cyril Waddesley-Davenport had very thoughtfully brought along sheet music of that classic song, to which he had affixed pictures of our Commander-in-Chief Clinton (and very appropriately, too, if you read the lyrics with current events in mind). For this particular moment in Wodehousian history (which will live forever in the memories of those present), I must turn to reports from Internet accounts of the event:

Pighooey: "In vain did this doughty chap [the pianist] try to rid himself of our, shall we say, well-oiled presence by claiming an inability to sight-read the sheet music for 'Bill' that we were all brandishing in his face... After the blighter fled the piano (under the laughable pretense of needing to get a bite to eat) we hauled up our slacks and attempted the thing on our own. Aunt Dahlia provided the chords and the rest of us proceeded to give what I am convinced must be as stirring and heartfelt a rendition of this Kern-Wodehouse classic as has ever been performed by a group of simple souls made overly sentimental and completely dead to shame by the heady effects of too much rich food, good company and demon rum (well, gin, mostly). We retired shortly thereafter (though some of us did not leave willingly) in order to avoid trying the patience of other guests (not to mention the management) a little too far."

Lady Bassett: (writing with classic understatement) "Afterward we nearly closed down the bar with our own rendition of 'Bill,' sung in nearly as many keys as there were singers; and we finally had to net a few wayward Drones and take them home before the local constabulary could be called."

Cyril Waddesley-Davenport: "The high point—or was it the low point—of the LI Binge was a bunch of drunken Plummies standing around a piano bar and delivering the worst rendition of 'Bill' ever heard on this planet. It was so bad that other drunks in the bar accused us of being 'A bunch of damn Republicans.'...My only disappointment with the binge is that we were not actually thrown out of the piano bar. Then when I write my memoirs I could describe when I was thrown out of a bar."

Lady Bassett: "Cyril is right that being actually thrown

out would have been fun—though I would stop short of wishing to have been juggled for the night and coming up before the local beak on the Monday...But, alas, the bar patrons (and of course the management) were much too tolerant and kind to give us the heave-ho. Though they may have been working up to it when we finally left, having scraped a couple of our members off the ceiling.”

It was thus with a considerable morning head that many of our pilgrims faced the final of our weekend activities: The brunch-barbecue on Sunday at Brinkley Court. However, with warm weather, beautiful scenery, and enough delicious food and drink to supply an army of Plummies, we had plenty to restore the tissues to their former glory and Jeeves’ pick-me-ups were not really needed (except for one NEWT who shall remain nameless). We played games that included “Who Am I?” (wherein participants had the name and description of a Wodehouse character pinned to their backs and had to ask yes-or-no questions of others to determine who they were supposed to be); and the traditional egg-and-spoon race, which was won by our newest NEWT, Aaron Weiss. There was also the awarding of Fabulous Prizes, much browsing amongst the foodstuffs (“If anyone went home hungry,” wrote Lady Bassett, “they have only themselves to blame”), a great deal of wrist action as bread was tossed with abandon (making the birds at Brinkley Court very happy later) and finally hugs and promises to keep in touch as the group dispersed to return to their hither, thither and yon origins—tired but content.

And now, as Pig hooey pointed out, “We have only to wait one more year to repeat many of these outrages on the public weal in jolly old Houston, so that those of you who have not yet begun saving the necessary oof had better run out and get a second job at once. Something tells me that this is going to be a convention which will live in legend and song down through the ages. Pray do not even think of missing it!”

To which Auntie can only add: Hear, hear!

Thanks to Lady Bassett (Anne Cotton), Pighooey (Jean Tillson), and Cyril Waddesley-Davenport (Dan Cohen) for their contributions to this report.

Binge participants:

Susan and Daniel Cohen	Cape May Court House, NJ
Anne Cotton	South Hadley, MA
Michael Evans	Boston, MA
John Fahey	Somerville, MA
John Graham	South Orange, NJ
Bill Isenberg	Baldwin, NY
John Kareores & Olivia Botelho	Fall River, MA
Virginia Krueger	Easton, PA
Stu & Kimberly Levine	Scarsdale, NY

Hal Lynch	Philadelphia, PA
David MacKenzie & Hope Gaines	Cape May, NJ
Shamim Mohamed	Sunnyvale, CA
Richard Morrissey	Framingham, MA
Srinath Narayan	Madras, India
Amy Plofker	Hamden, CT
Carolyn Pokrivchak	Easton, PA
Jagannathan Ravi	Bedford, MA
Charles & Dorothy Swanson	Westford, MA
Jean Tillson	Foxboro, MA
Aaron Weiss & Theresa Musacchio	Somerville, MA
Elin Woodger	Everett, MA

Except for an occasional lecture by the vicar on his holiday in the Holy Land, illustrated with lantern slides, there was not a great deal of night life in Dovetail Hammer.

Cocktail Time, 1958

PLUM ON THE INTERNET

For several years now, Wodehouse fans have been connecting to each other by way of that modern medium known as the Internet—specifically via the newsgroup that is alt.fan.wodehouse, and the mailing list that is called PGW-Net. From time to time, we will publish some of the more interesting items and discussions that are shared on these sites—our cyber version of A Few Quick Ones, if you will.

—AD

The Drone Rangers have now set up a web site providing details on the 1999 convention in Houston, Texas—so be sure to check it out! Thanks go to Stu Shiffman for setting up this excellent and informative site, which can be found at:

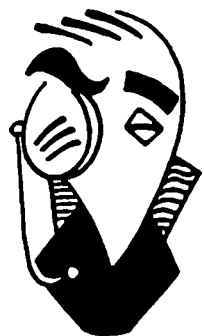
<http://www.halcyon.com/roscoe/wodtex.html>

Speaking of **Stu Shiffman**, he recently reported the existence of the following BBC2 web site, which is related to a program the network ran on PGW’s war years:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/bookworm/wodehouse.shtml>

Plummies who go to this site will find several interesting links, including one that provides an actual sound bite from one of Plum’s original Berlin recordings.

(Continued on page 13.)

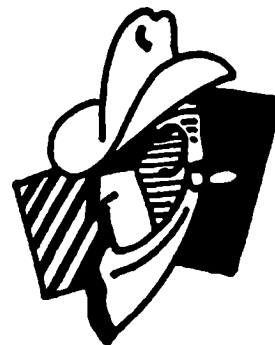


TWS

Come To Texas

CONVENTION '99

x HOUSTON x



FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY OCTOBER 22, 23, 24

The historic Warwick Park Plaza is our official TWS *Come To Texas* CONVENTION '99 hotel. *Register by April 30, '99 have a chance to win a free stay at the Warwick during the convention!* If you wish to register now, you may call 713-586-1991 (the 1-800 number does not have our rate posted yet. Our rate is \$105 per night plus 17% tax) If you win the free night, you will be told at the Banquet, Saturday evening.

Alternative hotels and one Bed and Breakfast are within walking distance of the Warwick.

The Marriott Medical Center, 1.2 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-796-0080

The Patrician Inn, B&B, .3 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-523-1114

Days Inn, .5 miles from the Warwick. Phone: 713-523-3777

All about Bread-roll Tossing

Those who wish to toss bread should register "BRT" (bread roll tosser). Those wishing to be placed in a toss-free zone should register "BFZ".

Parrot Music:

The Drone Rangers will entertain us with a few poems from PGW's, The Parrot, put to music by the inimitable Mike Skupin.

It is possible other chapters will also have musical adaptations of PGW's poems for our listening pleasure. If so, please let us know in advance so we may arrange times for sing-alongs.

Doggerel Verse Contest.

Send your entry to: Sylvia Bernicchi: 2332 Park Street, #J, Houston, TX 77019. The best will be selected by our brainy judges and the winners will be asked to read their entry at the banquet. Our judges have a keen instinct, not only for poetic style, but also for the poet who turns to an amusing mush when asked to speak in public.

Skits:

NEWTS - 25 minute skit

Chicago Accident Syndicate - 30-40 min. Skit

Blandings Castle West - 30 - 40 min. Skit

Good Gnus Competition:

The Drone Rangers Challenge other Chapters to a competition of who can render Good Gnus (the poem from Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court) to music and perform it best.

Alternatively, Chapters may have a copy of the existing version of Good Gnus put to music by D-Ranger, Mike Skupin. If the challenger can best the D-Rangers at their own music, not only will the sound be heard around the world, but a nice prize will be awarded as well.

So far members from Sweden have admitted to having a version of Good Gnus ready to meet the challenge, and the NEWTS have agreed to compete using their version.

Any more willing to accept the challenge?

Games & excursions:

There will be Cricket, a la Wodehouse. For those who only want to watch, a pavilion is provided. For anyone who wishes to have tea and watch or play Cricket, a modest fee will be assessed.

Golf at the course across from the Warwick will take the form of the Sandy McHoots golf tournament. See the registration form for details.

Play:

Friday night there will be a Wodehouse play, exactly which one has yet to be determined, performed by Main Street Theatre, a little theatre group that is famous in Houston for its excellence.

Roommate matching Service will be available for the 1999 Convention.

Since the Warwick will charge the same for a double or a single room, a nifty way to save a few clams for betting at the races is to share a room with another TWS member. To do this, contact Toni Rudersdorf at (713) 522-6220 and have your name put on the list. Your preferences for a roommate will be noted before being completely ignored.

Talks:

Norman Murphy: Wodehouse among the animals

Tony Ring: Limp Lavendar Leather

Mike Skupin: The Musical Theatre

Dan Cohen: Wodehouse at the bar; a lecture-demonstration of drinking in Wodehouse stories.

Elin Woodger: Lady Constance's Lover: Sex and Romance a la Wodehouse.

Darlene McNaughton: Medical marvels in Wodehouse.

Plan now to close up shop, hang "*Come To Texas*" on the door, and light out for Houston in 1999.

THE "QUICK" MYSTERY

Bob Creamer has noted a most unusual sentence in "The Shadow Passes" in *Nothing Serious*. It occurs at the beginning of a paragraph a little more than halfway through the story, and runs as follows: "Thinking quick, he saw the policy to pursue."

"Quick" is an adjective, not an adverb. And Wodehouse wrote impeccable English except in rare direct quotes from a member of the lower orders. "It suits you beautiful," for example, when Mabel compliments Bingo on his tie in "Jeeves Exerts the Old Cerebellum." But Bob's quote is in narrative, not dialog.

Bob found that the *American Heritage Dictionary*, at

the end of its mini-essay on "quick" adds this "Usage Note: In speech *quick* is commonly used as an adverb in phrases such as *Come quick*. In formal writing, however, *quickly* is required."

"What should we think?" asks Bob. "Did Wodehouse, beautifully formal in his exposition, however hilarious, slip up? Was it simply a typo? Or did PGW recognize that in speech 'quick' is commonly used as an adverb and so used it that way in the Crumpet's story?"

Jane Austen, a well-regarded author, uses "quick" as an adverb eight times in just six novels—three times in dialog and five times in narrative. (I know this because I have Jane in my computer, strapped down and hollering, so it's easy to find out what she wrote.) Plum is a purist by comparison.

—OM

A FEW QUICK ONES

William Hardwick found an advertisement in the London *Daily Telegraph* for the Old Vicarage Hotel in Worfield, Shropshire. It offers as principal attractions (1) its proximity to the village of Stableford, where, as it correctly claims, the youthful Plum spent his summer holidays with his parents, and (2) Apley Hall, which it claims on the basis of no evidence at all is the original of Blandings Castle. Still, it's nice to see Plum's commercial drawing power so well demonstrated.

Marilyn MacGregor, ever vigilant Wodehouse-wise, solved an acrostic in *The New York Times* of November 23 and found that the author of the quotation was "none other than our own Peter Schwed. The quotation, from his new autobiography *Say, Could That Lad Be I?*, was 'Attractions during free time at Fort Bragg were strictly limited. The PX offered ice cream and juke boxes, but one look at the town of Fayetteville was enough to make you decide that a second look would be one too many.'" You'll find the quote in the middle of page 122 of Peter's book, briefly noted in the last issue of *Plum Lines*.

Erik Quick came across this purported quote in *The New York Times*: "P.G. Wodehouse once said that living in the English countryside was like living inside a wet lettuce." Did he really make the statement, and if so, where? It sounds more like a comment in one of his letters than a line from a story.

Our Spring '98 issue of *Plum Lines* mentioned a book called *Wodehouse at the Wicket*, part of the Millinennium Concordance, and noted that it can probably be purchased in the U.S. through dealers Charles Gould or Frits Menschaar. In fact, writes **Norma Frank** of Mystery Books, this is a new book that can only be purchased on a retail basis.

William Hardwick notes with concern that an English columnist has suggested the ennoblement of Sir Edward Heath as "the new Earl of Sidcup." Since the original Lord Sidcup was Roderick Spode, with "an eye that can open an oyster at sixty paces" and a more than passing resemblance to a gorilla, William doubts that Sir Edward Heath would wish to resurrect the title.

Murray Wilson (otherwise known as Honest Patch Perkins) has another conundrum to present to the readership. He writes: "I believe I have shown in the past that an interest in newts was a perfectly healthy and normal one. What shall we say, though, of smashing statuettes of the Infant Samuel at Prayer? In a fairly long and much traveled life, I have never knowingly seen such a statuette, yet the Wodehouse stories are full of characters who vent their feelings by smashing one. What incident in his own life lies behind that?" An intriguing question this—does anyone out there have an answer?

Chris Riff reports from London: "A little item from the 7 December *Times* features a photo montage with Sudeley Castle in the background, owners Mr. and Mrs. Dent-Brocklehurst in the center, and P. G. Wodehouse on the left. The photo has the following caption

Spiffing news for Henry Dent-Brocklehurst. Sudeley Castle, the Gloucester pile enjoyed by the dashing blade and Lili Maltese, his model wife (pictured together) is the model for Blandings Castle in the P.G. Wodehouse Jeeves and Wooster books. "Sudeley had to be Blandings because it's the only castle in the South of England that's perched below a hill, rather than on top," enthuses Henry. "Perhaps we could invite everyone to Sudeley for a Blandings reunion?"

Chris adds: "Putting aside Mr. Dent-Brocklehurst's claims (which others are more qualified to judge), I will note that Sudeley Castle was used as the site for Blandings Castle in the television production of "Heavy Weather" a couple of years ago, featuring Peter O'Toole as Lord Emsworth." (Norman Murphy, whose authority I would be the last to question, picks Sudeley as the original of the building itself on the basis of more substantial evidence than is presented here by its owner, and Weston Park, in Shropshire, as the original of the estate. See Norman's *In Search of Blandings*. — OM)

Terry Kitchen caught an item in the Summer '98 edition of *Atlantica*, the magazine of Iceland Air. In an article about the Ivor Spencer International School for Butler Administrators in Dulwich, entitled "A Typical, Traditional English Butler," author Richard Middleton writes: "These are servants whose demeanour is always correct, polite and attentive. They are unruffled by catastrophe and always control their emotions. They do everything with a light tread and silent precision, and cough to establish their presence 'like a sheep with a blade of grass stuck in its mouth,' as Jeeves creator P.G. Wodehouse described it." Once again, our man Jeeves sets the standard!

Pig-weighing has gone high tech. **William Hardwick**

found a news item about an English camera and associated computer that “accurately” determine the weight of a pig by merely photographing it. The absence of the ponderous old pig-weighting scales will remove much of the chic and glamour long associated with the Shropshire Agricultural Show.

Here’s news for those of us interested in the Empress’s porcine relations. **Francine Swift** writes that she nearly collapsed with laughter after reading her October 1998 issue of *National Geographic* because “When we were in London in January, the British media was agog with the escape of a couple of young Tamworth shoats from a Malmsbury butcher. The precious porkers swam the river, ravaged gardens, and rooted up park plantings, but eluded the butcher, animal control, the Human Society, and a couple of rugby-playing cops for nearly a week. The press dubbed them ‘Butch and Sundance.’ They were finally darted by a police sharpshooter and one of the tabloids bought them and gave them to a rare breeds farm to ‘live out their days in peace.’ Well, according to the *Geographic*, they have now been immortalized by a stone carver as part of the decoration/restoration of a 13th century chapel in Hereford cathedral.” Francine’s final comment on this episode: “Pity they weren’t Berkshires!”

William Hardwick notes that the Folio Society, an upscale English book club, recently offered a boxed set of six Bertie and Jeeves novels for the price of postage alone, as an inducement for new members to join. If these sets are like the other Folio Society productions I’ve seen, they offer Wodehouse in an unusually attractive, readable, and durable form. Not cheap, but those I’ve seen are worth the price. Write to The Folio Society Ltd., 44 Eagle Street, London WC1R 4BR.

Jean Tillson recently read Robert Graves’ memoir *Goodbye to All That*, written in 1929 and revised in 1957. She points out that Graves is yet another great writer who has paid tribute to Wodehouse in his own work. The relevant excerpt: “The first distinguished writer I remember meeting after Swinburne was P.G. Wodehouse, a friend of my brother Perceval, whom he later gently caricatured as ‘Ukridge.’ Wodehouse was then in his early twenties, on the staff of *The Globe*, and writing stories for *The Captain* magazine. He gave me a penny, advising me to get marshmallows with it. Though too shy to express my gratitude at the time, I have never since permitted myself to be critical about his work.”

Sally Shubert also sent along a mention of Wodehouse found in Malachy McCourt’s book, *A Monk Swimming*. We remember, of course, what his brother, Frank, had to

say about Plum in *Angela’s Ashes*. Malachy, it seems, is just as heartfelt a fan. He writes: “To my utter delight and surprise, he belonged to that society of unregistered maniacs devoted to the works of P.G. Wodehouse, so it was with glad cries we fell on each other’s necks, quoting the Gospel According to Jeeves and the mewlings of Bertie Wooster.”

Several people have written to point out the mentions of Wodehouse in a recently-published book entitled *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight* (Faber and Faber). My information shows that it is only available in the U.K. If anybody knows of a supplier for this book in the U.S., could you please pass on that information?

Lands’ End, the American mail order company, offered British regimental ties recently. Among them was “Dulwich Alleyns,” looking correct to my fading memory of the real thing: alternating diagonal stripes of dark blue and black, with narrow white stripes in between. Handsome, but don’t dream of wearing one unless you’re entitled to do so—you’ll be cut by the county.

JD and OM

Aunt Dahlia and the Oldest Member

WODEHOUSE AUDIO TAPES

William Hardwick has forwarded an advertisement for several Wodehouse short stories available on audio tape. One of the double-cassette boxes contains “Jeeves Takes Charge,” “The Rummy Affair of Old Biffy,” “Clustering Round Young Bingo,” and “Without the Option.” The other box contains “The Artistic Career of Corky,” “The Aunt and the Sluggard,” “Jeeves and the Unbidden Guest,” and “Jeeves and the Hard-Boiled Egg.” All stories are unabridged and are read by Martin Jarvis, an excellent reader on other tapes I have heard. I believe other Wodehouse audio recordings are available from the same source. For more information write to Telegraph Books Direct, PO Box 1992, Epping, Essex CM16 6JL, or e-mail telegraph@bms.ftch.co.uk.

BLANDINGS CASTLE VISITS HEARST CASTLE

By Jan Wilson Kaufman

Owners of large country houses always like to keep an eye on the possessions and splendors of other large demesnes, so the inhabitants of Blandings Castle, the San Francisco Bay Area's Wodehouse Chapter, recently made a six hour pilgrimage down the California coast to see William Randolph Hearst's extravagant hilltop castle. There is nothing else in the world quite like this collection of buildings. It was constructed in the Twenties from parts of European abbeys, castles, and great houses which Hearst had admired, bought up (some say plundered), shipped to California, and assembled here into a great house with satellite buildings. The result could be a ghastly jumble, but is in fact a magnificent country seat on a hilltop overlooking the Pacific, the masterpiece of the architect Julia Morgan. Hearst Castle, as it is known, has been a California state park for a number of years.

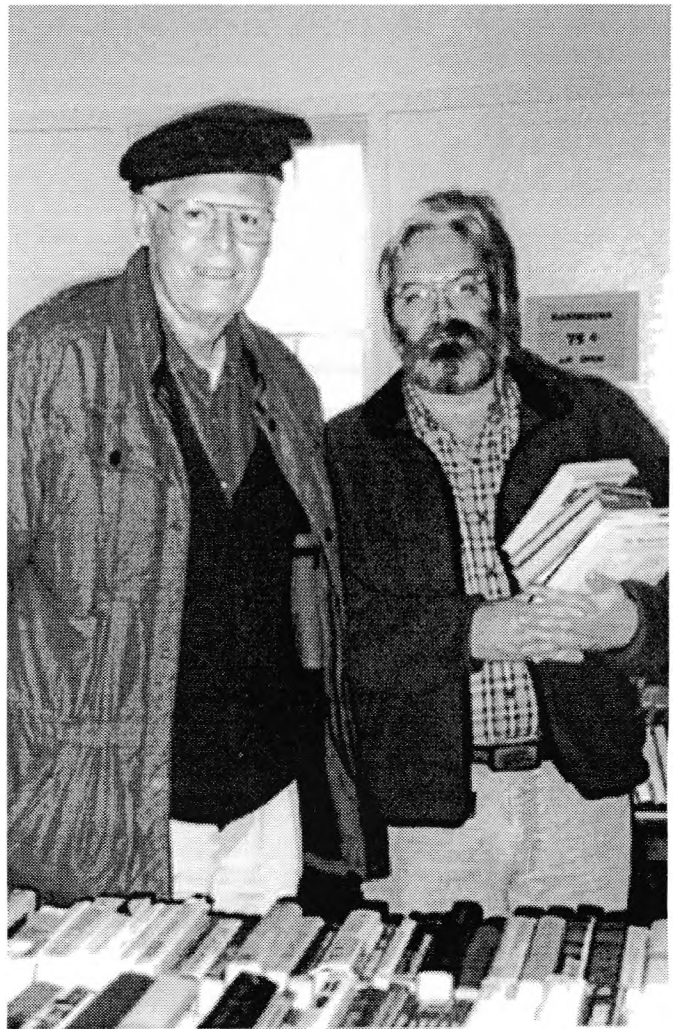
Although we found no Gutenberg Bible in the library, and nothing in the grounds to compare with the well-known three-time silver medal winner of the Shropshire Agricultural Fair, our group conceded that Hearst Castle did have some redeeming features. The outdoor swimming pool (not to be confused with the indoor) would awe a self-indulgent Roman emperor. Hearst insisted on calling the place a ranch, and despite the magnificence of the dining room, paper napkins were used at every meal.

Plum, Ethel, and their Pekingese Winks paid a week-long visit to the castle in 1931. The Wodehouses were invited partly because Plum was a celebrated writer, but mostly because he was a friend of Hearst's long-time mistress Marion Davies. Plum first met her in New York in 1917 on the set of "Oh Boy!" when she was a breathtakingly lovely young blonde, with a saucy vivacity he compared to Nell Gwynne's.

Plum wrote about this visit in a letter to Bill Townend quoted in *Yours, Plum*, saying: "...I have been spending a week at Hearst's ranch. He owns 400,000 acres, more than the whole of Long Island. [Actually this is only half the size of Long Island.—OM] The ranch—ranch, my foot; it's a castle—is about halfway between Hollywood and San Francisco. It's on top of a high hill and just inside the entrance gates is a great pile of stones which if you ever put them together, would form an old abbey which Hearst bought in France and shipped over and didn't know what to do with, so left lying by the wayside. The next thing you see having driven past this, is a yak or a buffalo or some other creatures of the wild in the middle of the road. Hearst collects everything including animals, and has a zoo on the premises, and the specimens consid-

ered reasonably harmless are allowed to roam at large. You're apt to meet a bear or two before you get to the house, or a elephant, or even Sam Goldwyn."

The twenty-one Blandings pilgrims took the special evening tour, which stresses the heyday of Hearst's Castle in the early Thirties, so we saw an approximation of the life the Wodehouses saw there. We looked with interest at Hearst's heavily ornamented interiors with their strong ecclesiastical feeling, due to all the religious paintings and sculpture. Docents dressed in clothes of the early Thirties added period verisimilitude. In the most elaborate of the guest houses a lovely brunette in a peach silk peignoir sat primping at a dressing table as we closely observed the



Tom Wainwright and Doug Stow at the book sale near Hearst Castle. Photo by Jan Wilson Kaufman.

details of bedrooms and bathrooms. Clothes actually worn by Hearst were laid out on the bed as if he were going to appear at any moment. In the vast assembly room, formally dressed docents played bridge, read newspapers and chatted before dinner.

Plum described dining: "Meals are in an enormous room, and are served at a long table, with Hearst sitting in the middle on one side, and Marion Davies in the middle on the other. The longer you are there, the further you get from the middle. I sat on Marion's right the first night, then found myself being edged further and further away till I got to the extreme end, when I thought it time to leave. Another day, and I should have been feeding on the floor."

The Wodehouses stayed in the Renaissance Venetian Suite, which was not shown on our tour, but it was easy to imagine the opulence of the bedrooms filled with antique furniture and architectural fittings plundered from many European castles and monasteries. Plum said, "There are always at least fifty guests staying here. All the furniture is period, mostly with the sales tags still attached, and you probably sleep in a bed originally occupied by Napoleon or somebody."

The tour ended with 1930s newsreels in the ornate theater with red silk walls and golden caryatids, where Hearst's guests used to see all the Marion Davies movies, as well as all the latest films from Hollywood.

I prepared a handout for the other pilgrims, quoting Plum's letters about visiting the castle, life in Hollywood, meeting Marion Davies, and some anecdotes from Samuel Marx, Plum's story editor at MGM.

There would probably be a great deal of trans-Atlantic interest in a TWS trip to Hollywood. Some of the landmarks Plum wrote about are no longer there, like the Garden of Allah and the Brown Derby, but palm trees, bougainvillea, and the Pacific Ocean still abound. Among the Wodehouse sites still to be seen are two of the Beverly Hills houses they lived in, the MGM Studio, Marion Davies' beach house, and the grounds at the University of California where the Hollywood Cricket club played.

Besides the Hearst tour, the Blandings Castle group also enjoyed looking at the stars by the light of blazing bonfires on the nearby beach. We ate several convivial meals that didn't resemble Anatole's, but still were very toothsome. In the charming nearby village of Cambria, we poked about in stores full of 20th century objects generally called "collectibles," which would not have been old enough to interest W. R. Hearst, but amused us. Our most serendipitous find was the Friends of the Cambria Library Sale where a good selection of hardbound books were sold at the exorbitant price of 75 cents per inch. Even though we found no Wodehouse books, most of us still managed to carry off boxes of lesser authors. One of the

Cambria Library volunteers, George Wilson, who learned about our group from TWS Past President Florence Cunningham, showed his qualifications as a potential member by saying that his favorite Wodehouse opening question was "How do you feel about human sacrifices?" We felt he had the heart of the matter in him.

Blandings Castle members attending included Charles Bishop, Gabriel, Benjamin, Marge and Arnold Blustein, Florence Cunningham, Kathy Haug and Jay Seeb, Jan Kaufman, Len and Shirley Lawson, John and Nancy Leone, Bill and Frances Peniston, Doug and Margaret Stow, Robin Sutherland and Jose Padgett, and Tom and Beth Wainwright. Doug and Margaret Stow were invaluable in planning the logistics of this trip.

You can't go by what a man in my position promises. You don't really suppose, do you, that you can run a big studio successfully if you go about keeping your promise all the time.

Pearls, Girls, and Monty Bodkin, 1972

MANGOLD WURZELS

REVISITED

In response to an article by Denver Elkins in our last issue of *Plum Lines*, Murray Wilson writes:

We who grew up in the Britain of the earlyish part of this century were perhaps less insulated from the harsh realities of life than those who have followed, or who grew up in a kinder, gentler environment. We knew all about mangold wurzels, or mangel wurzels as we called them in the Midlands. Some of our favorite childhood reading and BBC Children's Hour listening involved the fictional characters Earthy Mangold and Wurzel Gummidge. So mangold wurzels held no fears for us, but Denver Elkins can rest assured the secret is safe with me.

Murray followed this up with a later message that he recently saw the film *Land Girls*, and he felt he "must warn anyone who wishes to remain happily ignorant about mangold wurzels not to see it. Hope I am not too late, as the film has been out for a while."

PLUM AT THE MILLENNIUM: THE "BEST STORY" VOTE

By Susan Cohen

BRING ON THE GIRLS! ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET! The ballots have been counted. The results are in. In case you've forgotten, Clarence-like, what the contest was about, let me refresh your memory. Hutchinson will publish a new anthology of Wodehouse's work to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Master's death in February, 2000. Though the final decision on what goes into the book is Hutchinson's, the publisher will take into account the views of TWS members worldwide. The point of our contest was to find out what Wodehouse stories (not novels) TWS members thought the best, in the hope that Hutchinson would include them. After all, who better than TWS to point the way to the stories most likely to appeal to new recruits as well as long-time Plum fans.

We (the TWS committee helping with the book) believed the fairest way to find out what our members thought was simply to ask them. We suggested you select an over-all favorite story, as well as what Jeeves and Wooster you preferred, which Ukridge, Golf story, Drones Club, Blandings Castle and Mulliner. Granted, you could argue that there is a difference between "favorite" and "best," but we are not school masters. We felt that whatever you liked best was best.

I am not going into the worldwide results of the contest at this time. That vast subject will be taken up later. Since my job was counting the American ballots, it is those I want to tell you about. Though the top selections, all excellent choices, were by and large predictable, there were many unusual results along the way. And while we were scrupulously honest, some ballots couldn't be counted. Some because they arrived too late, some because they listed novels, not short stories, others because the stories were listed in the wrong categories and the ballots were so out of whack we couldn't figure out what the sender was talking about.

Well, I don't want to keep you in suspense another moment, so here are the winners:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) Jeeves and Wooster | "The Great Sermon Handicap" |
| 2) Ukridge | "Ukridge's Accident Syndicate" |
| 3) Golf | "The Clicking of Cuthbert" |
| 4) Drones Club | "Uncle Fred Flits By" |
| 5) Blandings Castle | "Crime Wave at Blandings" |
| 6) Mulliner | "Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo" |

Finally, the Overall Favorite (let's have a fanfare here!):
"Uncle Fred Flits By"

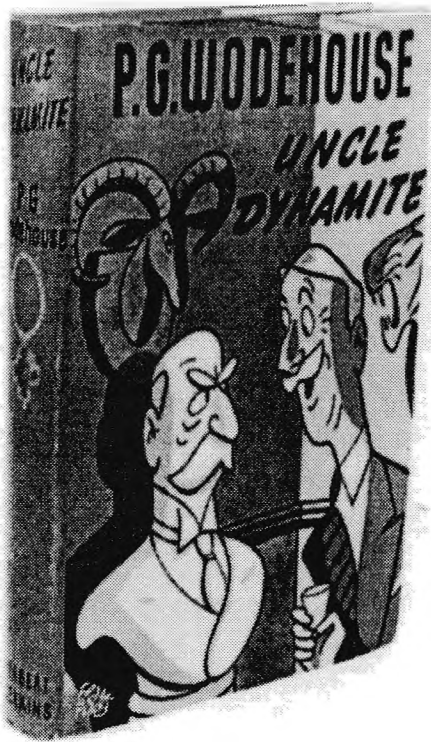
Other popular choices were:

"The Old School Chum"
"The Purity of the Turf"
"Jeeves and the Yuletide Spirit"
"Jeeves and the Song of Songs"
"Ukridge's Dog College"
"The Coming of Gowf"
"Goodbye to All Cats"
"Tried in the Furnace"

"Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey!" fared well, as did "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend." So did "The Truth about George," "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court," "Strychnine in the Soup," and "The Story of Webster." Fewer people voted for Ukridge stories than for stories in other categories. And some members even went so far as to say they disliked Ukridge. What? How can that be? Ukridge, the magnificent loser, faces the world proudly, his yellow mac a badge of noble courage. I like the hard edge to these stories, but apparently not everyone does. To be fair, not everyone voting had read Ukridge, or the golf stories either. Jeeves and Wooster stories seem to have been read the most.

The most interesting results were in the Mulliner category. Lots of stories were selected, many getting only one or two votes. No one story, not even the winner, truly dominated. Does this mean that the Mulliner stories, as a group, are the favorites?

Some results were surprising. I expected "Jeeves and the Impending Doom" to score higher. I love that swan.



Uncle Fred as he appeared on a 1948 dust wrapper

Even though it was not my first choice I would have sworn that "Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend" would win the Blandings Castle category. "Crime Wave at Blandings" beat it handily. Yet "Lord E. and the G. F." was second in the Overall Favorite category. Third place in the category was a four-way tie of "The Story of Webster," "Jeeves and the Song of Songs," "The Great Sermon Handicap," and "Jeeves and the Old School Chum."

It must be noted that the school story "Pillingshot, Detective," brought out what can only be described as passion in two of our members, John Baesch and Alekh Burke. Alekh even forwarded a letter from a young fan named Emily Weatherfoot, a golden-haired child who promised to send the money from her piggy bank if "Pillingshot" won. I resisted the bribe.

Lots of TWS members sent in interesting comments with their ballots. Robert Creamer, who described himself as stubbornly independent, condemned the entire contest for putting the stories in competition with one another. After "venting" he went on to list his choices, and defended them vigorously. But he wasn't alone in finding it painful to make choices. Lots of people struggled. Many wrote of how they had wavered, going back and forth between stories, how they had delayed sending in their ballots because they couldn't make up their minds. I agree. Choosing among Wodehouse's masterpieces is tough. Maybe, in the end, even impossible. But we do have our favorites, and as far as the new millennium is concerned, the hero of the hour is Uncle Fred, flitting by.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Dan Garrison

Oh, I say! Oyez oyez, and all that rot . . . The word is going around the clubs that a place for our 2001 TWS convention must be settled upon before all the world's computers go round the bend. Numerous places such as French Lick, Indiana, Nihill, Montana, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (wherever that is), and Seattle, Washington have been mentioned. Partisans will be primed with pitches in favor of these and other venues. Any chapter or band of members may propose themselves as host. The final decision is up to TWS members present at our business meeting in Houston, with perhaps some advice from the Executive Committee.

When preparing your nomination of a venue, bear in mind arguments that can be brought to bear in favor of one place or another:

- (1) Has the area you propose been represented recently as a convention site? We have historically shown an inclination to spread the fun around.
- (2) Are the costs of travel, lodging, and hosting a convention attractive?
- (3) Are there sufficient members at or near the convention site to perform the duties attendant upon its various activities? Bear in mind that it is the local gang and not TWS at large that does the work of putting on a convention.
- (4) What peripheral attractions, such as distilleries, casinos, and cricket pitches, make your convention site an attractive destination?
- (5) Is there a hotel available that is sufficiently big and brash to host the kind of people likely to attend a TWS convention in largish numbers?
- (6) Do the bobbies attach their helmet with a chin strap?

These are not official criteria or anything like that; they are meant simply to suggest a few of the arguments likely to be employed in the heat of the moment to beguile the assembled m. and catch the brass ring.

As a member of a group that recently hosted a TWS convention, I can testify that it was a terrific pleasure to do so, and so say we all in the Chicago Accident Syndicate. So bait your hooks! Please let me know as soon as possible if you are preparing to nominate your chapter, city, or group to do the honors in 2001. Just send me a letter at 1228 Simpson St. Evanston, IL 60201, or an e-mail (d-garrison@nwu.edu) to set things in motion.

THE DENTAL WODEHOUSE

By Jay Weiss, DMD

Jay Weiss is a retired orthodontist who has been a member of the Wodehouse Society since 1983. He edits the *Bulletin* of the Essex County Dental Society and the newsletter of the Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest, both in New Jersey. Jay made these remarks in somewhat different form (and in French!) last September in Corsica at the first World Congress of BBDENT, an Internet organization of francophone dentists (we are *not* making this up!).

—AD

The distinguished American poet, Elizabeth Bishop, once wrote what she called a poem. It was about her dentist and she called it "In the Waiting Room":

In Worcester, Massachusetts,
I went with my aunt Consuelo
To her dental appointment and I sat down
and waited in the dentist's waiting room.

Bingo Little could have explained what was wrong with that quatrain, if, indeed, it is a quatrain. "There isn't a damn word in the language that rhymes with Consuelo," he would have told Ms. Bishop. "Ye gods," he would have added, "you really could have spread yourself if your aunt had only been called Jane." Bingo knew. He had the same trouble with "Cynthia" in "The Great Sermon Handicap."

So when P. G. Wodehouse wrote about dentists and their waiting rooms, which he did fairly often, he didn't express himself in rhyme as he did for the new gnu, of the animals' "Who's Who" who came in view in the short story, "Unpleasantness at Bludleigh Court." Unlike Ms. Bishop, he simply gave us the facts. Although not accompanied by an aunt, Mordred Mulliner met the girl of his dreams while waiting for an appointment with his dentist. "There is something about the atmosphere of a dentist's waiting-room that breaks down conventional etiquette," Wodehouse wrote in "The Fiery Wooing of Mordred." It is clear, a careful study of his oeuvre reveals, that Wodehouse liked dentists.

He probably decided to marry Ethel Rowley Wayman because the future Lady Wodehouse never said a word when, according to biographer Barry Phelps, Plum "had to be driven to New York from Long Island with raging toothache." Within days Wodehouse proposed—to Ethel, not the dentist. But the DDS had played a key role. He not only cured Wodehouse's toothache but he also helped him find what Phelps described as "that reassuring combination of aunt, nanny and wife" who would relieve him

from dealing with "the boring and time-consuming matters of everyday life that keep a man away from his typewriter." Plum's subsequent writings demonstrate how grateful he was.

In the novel *Laughing Gas*, a young English nobleman and an American child movie star, Joey Cooley, are sitting in the Hollywood waiting room of two dentists who share office space. Joey asks, "Does your tooth hurt?"

"Like the dickens."

"So does mine. Coo!"

"Coo here, too."

"Where does it seem to catch you the most?"

"Pretty well all the way down to the toenails."

Then they are called in, by their respective dentists, I.J. Zizzbaum and B.K. Burwash, to have teeth extracted under nitrous oxide anesthesia. When they awaken, they discover their "souls" have changed places. It takes Wodehouse another 200 pages to unravel this unusual dental blunder.

People admire their dentists, Wodehouse believed, not only because they provide convenient sites for amorous or extra-corporeal encounters but also for what they can do. In *Leave It to Psmith* (the "p" is silent as in ptarmigan) Freddie Threepwood asks his father, Lord Emsworth, "I say, guv'nor, do you think I might go up to town with you this afternoon?"

"What!"

"Fact is, I ought to see my dentist. Haven't been to him for a deuce of a time."

"I cannot see the necessity for you to visit a London dentist. There is an excellent man in Shrewsbury, and you know I have the strongest objection to your going to London."

"Well, you see, this fellow understands my snappers. Always been to him, I mean to say. Anybody who knows anything about these things will tell you greatest mistake go buzzing about to different dentists."

Wodehouse's dentists do, indeed, perform well. In *Summer Moonshine*, when Joe Bulpitt loses his upper denture, his attempts to talk turn into gibberish and he looks as though he had been clawed by a bear. Only a dentist can make him fit for human society.

Before the dentist works his magic, the toothache might even be helpful. Reggie Pepper's friend, the artist Archie in the story "Concealed Art," was on the verge of starvation when he got the idea for what proved to be an immensely successful comic strip, "The Doughnut family...the best thing in its line in London."

"I got the idea one night when I had the toothache," Archie explains.

But the prospect of getting into a dental chair terrorizes some Wodehouse characters. In "First Aid for Dora," Jeremy Corcoran, a thinly disguised young Wodehouse,

recalls a frightening encounter with Julia Ukridge. "My emotions," he says, "on entering Heath House were such as I would have felt had I been keeping a tryst with a dentist who by some strange freak happened also to be a duke."

Wodehouse even uses dental discomfort as a metaphor for Life: What is "wrong with this world of ours...is the fact that Misery loves company and seldom gets it. Toothache is an unpleasant ailment," he writes in *Damsel in Distress*, "but, if toothache were a natural condition of life, if all mankind were afflicted with toothache at birth, we should not notice it. It is the freedom from aching teeth of all those with whom we come in contact that emphasizes the agony. And, as with toothache, so with trouble. Until our private affairs go wrong, we never realize how bubbling over with happiness the bulk of mankind seems to be."

But we are not all afflicted with toothache at birth and so we need dentists, those splendid fellows. They not only abate the agony and make us fit for human consumption, they also provide us with wives.

PLUM ON THE INTERNET

Jay Weiss has relayed news of "Jeeves: Your Cyberspace Butler" as told in the November 24 issue of *The Harvard Crimson*. "Ask Jeeves" is an Internet search engine that works by asking it such questions as "What are the best restaurants in London?" The cyber-butler will then attempt to match the question to templates in its database and find the closest answer. This differs from other search engines, where keywords must be used to effect a search—i.e., "London+restaurants."

Writes the *Crimson's* reporter: "Overall, Jeeves is capable of answering some six million possible questions. These range from such matters as 'Is Madonna's mole real?' to the more metaphysical issues of 'Am I in love?' and 'What is the meaning of life?' (although Jeeves's answer to the latter question leaves much to be desired.) The Web sites that provide Jeeves's answers are high-quality informational sources selected by the Ask Jeeves staff. In fact, many of the answer-providing sites are the leading sources of on-line information regarding those subjects, and the answers provided tend to be extensive and satisfying. Without Jeeves, it would take hours of Web surfing to track down such informational sources." The URL for the Ask Jeeves web site is <http://www.aj.com/>

CHAPTER REPORT

In lieu of a full-blown "Chapters corner" (we promise it will resume in the next issue!) we have this report of the meeting of a tiny but spirited chapter. For the uninitiated I'll point out that Soapy is Phil Ayers, Dolly is Florence Cunningham, and both (see para. 5 below) are past presidents, ready to be cast in bronze at a moment's notice. —OM

I wish to report on a recent chapter meeting. On January 23, 1999 at the stroke of noon Soapy and Dolly Molloy met at a secret location in Kent, Washington and held a meeting of "the secret nine."

A most delicious aroma of soup met Soapy as he entered Dolly's current home. The soup was later laced with a secret known only to Dolly and the chef at the world famous Canlis restaurant in Seattle. The chef is still looking for his secret bottle that disappeared during Dolly's visit. The soup, fruit, and cabbage rolls really hit the spot.

After solving many of the current problems facing our nation, Dolly and Soapy spent some time in literary criticism. They came to the opinion that P.G. Wodehouse was and is still the epitome of any who aspire to the title of "author."

Soapy told Dolly of his wonderful trip last year to the banquets of the English and Dutch Wodehouse societies, and she told him of her trip to Hearst Castle with the Blandings Castle members. Soapy had so much fun he forgot to sell phony stock and Dolly enjoyed herself so much she kept her fingers out of the merchandise.

They decided that all past presidents of The Wodehouse Society should have statues of themselves erected at the expense of someone else. However, the likely outcome would be that members of the Wodehouse Society would lace themselves with Buck-U-Uppo and paint the statues pink or red.

After a wonderful afternoon of good talk, food, and fellowship the meeting was adjourned when we saw Constable Oates and Inspector Jervis coming.

We hope that Nurse Amy of Whidbey Island will attend our next meeting, perhaps in June if none of us is in Wormwood Scrubbs. She used the excuse of a broken arm and a bad cold to miss this one. Also we may have a new initiate swelling our ranks to four. What is lacking in numbers is more than made up for in spirit and fun. We hope other chapters have as much of both.

Respectfully reporting,

Your obedient servant,

Soapy Molloy

MR BLAIR, PG WODEHOUSE, AND THE ENTENTE CORDIALE

By Helen Murphy

There is a saying among the English upper classes: "Speak French fluently, but only to the French." Prime Minister Tony Blair apparently took this advice to heart last spring when he went to France and addressed an assembly entirely in French. English newspapers made such a fuss of this event that Helen Murphy was inspired to dash off the following article. —AD

All foreigners are funny. When we are foreign, we are under an obligation to be funny too. So was it really fair to the French (never mind the loyal voters back home across the Manche) for Mr Blair to address them with such *insouciant* fluency the other day, when we could have had instead a remark of the "I am a doughnut".type? Mr Blair is a patron of the PG Wodehouse Society-UK and should know better. One of the Master's most lauded opening sentences, from *The Luck of the Bodkins*, runs thus:

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.

Monty Bodkin had promised his fiancé that he would be sure to practice his French, so he continues:

... though he knew that it was going to make his nose tickle, he said:
"Er, garçon."
"M'sieur?"
"Er, garçon, esker-vous avez un spot de l'encre et une piece de papier — note-papier, vous savez — et une enveloppe et une plume?"
... The strain was too great. Monty relapsed into his native tongue.

Nevertheless, the waiter returns in due course with "the fixings."

"V'la, sir! Zere you are, sir." ... He was engaged to a girl in Paris who had told him that when on the Riviera he must be sure to practice his English.

Could Mr Blair not have managed some *faux pas* along Monty's lines, in order to give his hosts that pleasant glow of superiority?

In fact Monty Bodkin's French falls well below the standard set by some of PG Wodehouse's other characters. Bertie Wooster, though mentally negligible in other respects, and in need of help in translating Shakespeare

and Latin (*rem acu tetigisti* springs to mind), is rather a whizz when it comes to French. Three books selected purely because they happen to form an omnibus volume, *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*, *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*, and *Jeeves in the Offing*, have French on practically every page. Some examples include:

"*J'y suis, j'y reste*, Jeeves," I said, becoming a bit Parisian.

However, when the *J'accuse* stuff was over and I was asked if I had anything to say, I did my best. I admitted that on the occasion about which we had been chatting I had extended a foot causing the officer to go base over apex, but protested that it had been a pure accident without any *arriere-pensee* on my part.

I was in my room, having shed the moistened outer crust and substituted something a bit more *sec* in pale flannel.

"I see what Bertie means, darling," said Kipper. "He wants —"

"*A point d'appui*."

"A what?" said Bobbie.

"Sort of jumping-off place."

I understood the spirit which had prompted the words. It was the *preux chevalier* in him coming to the surface. You can stir up a Cheesewright till he froths at the mouth, but you cannot make him forget that he is an Old Etonian and a pukka Sahib. Old Etonians do not brawl in the presence of the other sex. Nor do pukka Sahibs. They wait till they are alone with the party of the second part in some secluded nook.

Hot Water is set almost exclusively in St Rocque, Brittany, and stars the louche Vicomte de Blissac, who at one point falls into the sea from his rowing boat. Wodehouse uses this incident to provide information on the Gallic temperament that Mr Blair will surely have borne in mind:

From a dozen neighbouring boats there rose immediately a babble of alarm. The French are an emotional race. When they see drama unfolding itself before their eyes, they do not treat it with well-bred silence. They scream and shout and jump and hop.

Another character, Packy Franklyn, has to persuade his bossy fiancée that he is visiting the area from worthy and unfrivolous motives, so he writes to tell her that he is

going to St Rocque because

...there he would have a chance of learning a little French, and you never knew when French might not come in useful. . . He opened the letter again to add a postscript to the effect that there was probably a picture gallery in St Rocque.

Later Packy, impersonating (of course) the Vicomte, meets a crook impersonating a Duc. Both are American and neither is fluent in French.

For the space of perhaps a quarter of a minute the French aristocrats stared at one another dumbly. Here, you would have said, watching them, were two strong, silent Frenchmen.

Mr Carlisle was the first to recover from the shock.

"*Parfaitement*," he said.

"*Alors*," said Packy.

"*Parbleu!*"

"*Nom d'une pipe!*"

There was another pause. It was as if some theme of deep interest had been exhausted.

Another lesson to be learnt from *Hot Water* is that diplomatic activities in France are fraught with perils beyond the purely linguistic. Discussing his wife's ambitions for him to become American Ambassador, the uxorious Mr Gedge discovers that those who fill this role

"...get kissed all the time by Frenchmen." It had been Mr Gedge's belief until he heard these words that he had explored to their ultimate depths the drawbacks to representing his country in an ambassadorial capacity. He now perceived that the last and most hideous of them had escaped his notice.

Members of the Drones Club are constantly popping over the Channel for golfing weekends at Le Touquet (where Wodehouse was to live until his internment by the Germans), or to lose money at casinos at Cannes or Nice. But there are always the hazards of pronunciation. Who can forget Freddie Widgeon giving his last *mille* to someone who had the same old school tie, and who allegedly worshipped him in their youth, only to discover that what the chap had really been after was simply a meal, and, worse, that he had been at a different school after all?

The most picturesque Wodehousian speaker of French (and English) must surely be the chef Anatole, "God's gift to the gastric juices." When not preparing menus almost beyond poetry (recollected by Bertie in tranquility as "Le Caviar Frais, Le Consomme aux Pommes d'Amour, Les Sylphides a la creme d'Ecrevisses, Les Fried Smelts, Le Bird of some kind with chipped potatoes, Le Ice Cream and of course, les fruits et le cafe") he is prone to give vent to phrases such as "cool as some cucumbers." But it is

when he is naturally disturbed by the sight of Gussie Fink-Nottle goggling on the other side of his skylight that his English deserts him and he might burst out with "*marmiton de Domange*" or "*pignouf!*"

Let us hope that Mr Blair will be able to use his fluency as a *piece de resistance* to sort out the *hurluberlu* over World Cup ticket allocation and souvenir *couteaux*.

But we should question whether French really counts as a foreign language at all. *La reine le veut* still authorises Acts of Parliament as it has done for centuries. The reason we have so many synonymous couplings, especially in matters concerning Church and State, is that the Normans needed to use a French word *and* an Anglo-Saxon one to make sure they were understood through all the social strata, without let or hindrance. One can easily assemble a dossier of chic cliches to ensure social cachet and prevent faux pas. Perhaps we should replace our historical claims to their territory with a new one on their language—it would at least mean that the Quebecois had nothing more to complain about.

At any rate, let us hope is it from the works of PG Wodehouse that Mr Blair garnered his expertise. Humour is, after all, the most effective *lingua Franca*.

TWS WEB SITE POSSIBLE?

By Aunt Dahlia

Many web sites are devoted to P.G. Wodehouse—his life, his work, and his fans—and to such groups as the P G Wodehouse Society of the UK. But we have no official TWS web site. Is any member willing to be Official TWS Webmaster? Perhaps a pre-existing site can be revamped or expanded to fill the bill.

As President Dan Garrison and I contemplated all that could go into this proposed site, our minds boggled. In addition to providing information about membership in TWS and links to such pages as the convention site, the UK site, home pages of dedicated fans, and so forth, we might also provide a history of the society, its officers, and conventions; updates on the activities of our chapters; news of interest to Plummiess (i.e., the latest on Wodehouse theatrical and film works); pages for favorite quotes; photographs; information about the Master's oeuvre; and so much more.

Auntie would be happy to work with any obliging soul willing to oversee a Wodehouse Society site. If you are interested, please write to Aunt Dahlia at: Ewoodger@aol.com. Stay tuned (or wired, if you will) for further developments!

WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE

REISSUED?

Word has come to us from a right-minded citizen, Mr. Len Brand, that he has managed to talk the BBC into considering the publication of videotapes of that fine television series from the early 1970s, *Wodehouse Playhouse*. This is splendid news for Wodehousians everywhere, since most knowledgeable Plummies consider this series to be the best representation of Wodehouse stories ever done on film. Starring John Alderton and Pauline Collins, the episodes are primarily faithful adaptations of the Mulliner stories, with an occasional golf story thrown in for good measure. Wodehouse himself introduced each story in the first season of the show.

For years, there has been talk of finding some way to bring *Wodehouse Playhouse* back to television, or at least making videotapes of the series available. Now, thanks to Len Brand, there is a strong possibility that this dream will come true—but your help is needed to see it through! According to Len, the BBC is collecting opinions regarding the *Playhouse* and will be measuring the stack before it comes to a decision. He writes: “In order to get *Wodehouse Playhouse* released on video, we need to get as many people as possible to contact:

Ms. Laura Palmer
BBC Worldwide Americas
747 3rd Ave.
New York, NY 10017

“She has indicated that the BBC has already started to take notice of the steady trickle of requests they get about the show. So we need to initiate a convincing demonstration of our support for this project. She does not want to be barraged with e-mail. I think she wants to see individual letters come from all over the place, so that she knows there is real demand out here and not just a few fanatics inundating her with spam. Anyone who is interested should send a nice letter showing their interest in buying the videotapes and their fond remembrances of the old show [if, that is, you do have fond remembrances—AD]. We should also emphasize that we want the whole series, not just some bits and pieces dribbled out over several years.”

So there you have it—pull out the jolly old pen and paper and waste no time in writing to Ms. Palmer to express your interest in and support for making *Wodehouse Playhouse* available to the masses again!

One other thing: Len is interested in knowing if anybody has a complete list of all the stories that were shown

on *Wodehouse Playhouse*, as he feels that will help him in his periodic reminders to the BBC “to keep the campaign moving along.” If you possess such a list, please bung it along to Auntie, who will gladly forward it on to this great campaigner.

SUPPORT FOR

BETTING ON BERTIE

Our last issue of *Plum Lines* included an item about a song (“Brain”) from the musical *Betting on Bertie* that has been included on a recent CD recording of *Anastasia: The Musical* released by Original Cast Records. We also mentioned a possible cast recording of the full *Bertie* show. As we know, *Betting on Bertie* was one of Wodehouse and Guy Bolton’s pet projects before they died—the last musical they were to write together, and the first to incorporate Bertie and Jeeves as leading characters in the plot (something which Plum had previously eschewed, if that’s the word I want). They worked on this jolly little musical in tandem with composer-songwriters Robert Wright and George Forrest (the show biz legends who created *Kismet* and *Grand Hotel*). Wright and Forrest, together with collaborators Walter Willison and Doug Holmes, have been working like beavers to get a fully-mounted production of *Bertie* on stage. Those of us who had the privilege and the pleasure of seeing staged readings of the work have been ever since keeping our fingers crossed hoping that the Wright and Forrest dream will come true, and that Plummies everywhere will have the chance to enjoy never-before-staged- or-recorded Wodehouse lyrics.

A cast recording of *Bertie* will go a long way to achieving such a devoutly-to-be-wished consummation, and should therefore be encouraged with every means at our disposal. If you wish to support this worthwhile project, please write to Bruce Yeko of Original Cast Records and voice your support. If all goes well, the cast recording will take place in the spring or summer of 1999 and we will all be able to enjoy these rare and delightful Wodehouse lyrics at last.

Write to: Bruce Yeko, Original Cast Records, Box 496, Georgetown, CT 06829. Email: ORIGYeko@aol.com. Let’s get a good clamor going to get this recording into the stores—it would certainly be a jolly good way to welcome the spring!

—AD

BREADROLL THROWING FOREVER!

By Dan Cohen

I want to weigh in on the bread-throwing controversy and come down squarely on the side of those who throw.

Bread throwing at convention banquets is one thing that elevates TWS above the level of mere literary society to the exalted realm of sheer looniness, in which the participants try to actually, however briefly, become part of the wonderful world created by P. G. Wodehouse.

It's not new. In his introduction to the 1975 edition of *The Code of the Woosters* Alexander Cockburn writes of an experience his father had in Hungary during the mid-twenties. He was invited to a simulated Drones Club made up of "ruined aristocrats and adventurers of every description. They attired themselves in Woosterish spats and behaved according to what they conceived to be the dictates of young Englishmen of the upper class. The high point of the evening was the 'bread throw'—the Hungarians would toss rolls about. . ."

My first TWS convention was in 1991 in New York. The high point, as in Hungary, was the bread throw. There I was, crawling around on the floor in the full soup and fish trying to find extra pieces of bread with which to pelt opposition tables.

While I did not get any wine spilled on me in Chicago (having prudently drunk every available drop before the bread throwing began), I did get a full glass of water in the lap. I gave as good as I got, and loved every moment of it.

Most of us lead lives of, if not quiet desperation, at least of gritty responsibility. Very few of us have been hauled up in front of the beak on boat race night, or any other night. And I seriously doubt if there are many ruined aristocrats or adventurers of any description among us.

But once every two years we get a chance to behave like irresponsible English public school boys. Granted many of us are very old boys indeed, and about half of us have never been boys at all. The only brush we have ever had with public school is with institutions with names like The Warren G. Harding Middle School. But at the banquet we become, for one brief shining moment the Barmys, Bingos, Pongos, Stiltons and Stinkers of our dreams. We are not in some hotel dining room which tomorrow will be hosting a convention of hardware salesmen—we are in the Drones Club, Mayfair, London.

Sure the waiters, the management, and passing aunts think we are a bunch of inebriated fools—that is the whole point.

Sure there are those who object to such silliness. The

fait of heart should be given a bread-throw-free zone of their own. I can't promise I won't sneer as I pass—but I won't throw any bread there. And we should try to limit ourselves to throwing only small pieces of bread, not whole, hard-as-rock, day-old rolls. The decencies must be observed, even in the heat of battle.

But give up bread throwing—never! It would be a real loss. The biennial bread throw comes as close to a religious ritual as I am comfortable with.

Besides, it could be worse. We could emulate Uncle Fred with a slingshot and brazil nuts!

BREADROLLS AND ALL THAT

By Elin Woodger

The item in the last *Plum Lines* concerning breadroll-tossing at conventions set off a storm of discussion, both pro and con, and some of it quite heated. This is a difficult issue to address, since there are sound arguments for both sides of the equation. Some of us like to have our spot of fun, considering breadroll tossing to be sacred territory, and woe betide those who attempt to restrain our bits of bread from hitting their targets. However, others don't quite share the same feeling of elation when we are beamed in the eye by a piece of crust or splashed with wine when a roll knocks over our glass. This is understandably upsetting to those who can appreciate the Drones spirit but don't necessarily want to engage in it.

A compromise was reached on the issue when planning the Houston convention. As Toni Rudersdorf of the Drone Rangers wrote: "...the pro-bread faction is very vocal and rambunctious. I am afraid that if we banned bread altogether, they would not be stopped. Therefore, the Drones have asked the Convention Hotel (the Warwick) if we may cordon off the dining room into Tossing and Non-Tossing sections." The Warwick agreed, and the banquet room will be divided into two sections, for throwers and non-throwers. Registrants can indicate their choice on the registration form in this issue.

In the meantime, we have learned from Toni that the Warwick Plaza Hotel has changed management, and at this moment we do not know how the new managers may feel about the subject. If we are still able to toss bread, Toni asks that all bread-tossers keep their ammunition within bounds. This is only fair—so let us toss with care!

WODEHOUSE AT BLANDINGS CASTLE, A CONCORDANCE

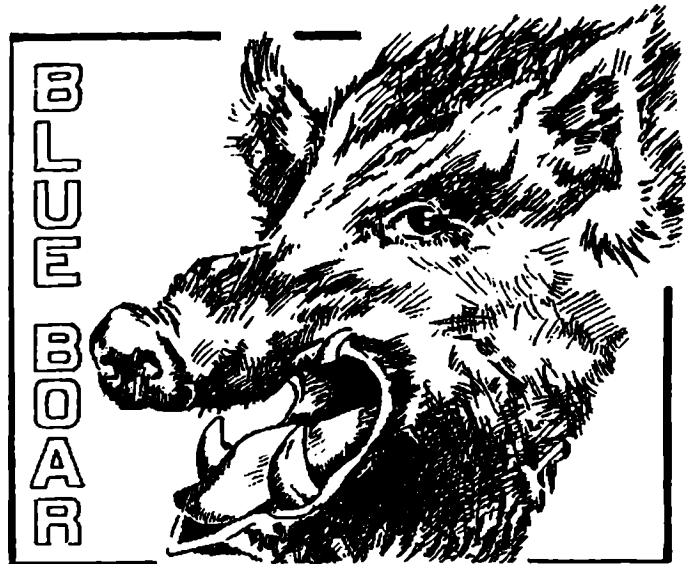
By Jan Wilson Kaufman

Tony Ring, author of the ambitious Wodehouse concordance reviewed below, is not only a very active member of our Wodehouse Society, based in America, but president of the P.G. Wodehouse Society (UK) and editor of its newsletter. And now president of the new International Wodehouse Association (see story in this issue). —OM

Millennium will undoubtedly be the one of the most overworked and misused words this year, but the recently published *Wodehouse at Blandings Castle* by Tony Ring and Geoffrey Jaggard, the fifth volume of the ambitious series called the Millennium Wodehouse Concordance, is truly such a stupendous piece of scholarship that it actually deserves the word Millennium. It was a vast undertaking for Tony Ring to read, record, and categorize every book, as well as to compare all the variant stories written and rewritten by Wodehouse and published in obscure magazines. Started in 1994, the author plans to finish the series with Volume Eight in the year 2001.

While this volume takes Blandings as its main theme, it also includes *A Damsel in Distress*, which prefigures the Blandings novels, and includes a short story and two novels featuring that great charmer Uncle Fred, the good old Earl of Ickenham. Only those who have read *Uncle Dynamite* can appreciate the photo on page 49, which startled the printer so much he called the publisher to be sure that it was indeed the image meant for that page. According to the preface, an important purpose of this concordance is to encourage readers, by the different references, allusions, and comments in this work, to read or reread the stories to which they refer.

Citing Geoffrey Jaggard as joint author seems to me to be very generous on Tony Ring's part. The late Geoffrey Jaggard wrote *Blandings the Blest* in 1968. It was a pioneering work, but Jaggard's book takes 224 pages and Ring's version has 309 pages and covers all the new material since then. A comparison shows that most of Jaggard's citations have been revised and many entries have been added. There are descriptions of every character, animal, song, pub, pig, book, alias, artwork, car, newspaper, place, card game, popular author, movie star, medical remedy, hotel, poetical and historical allusion, and other subjects too diverse to categorize, but all are mentioned somewhere in the great saga of Blandings Castle, making this a fine and funny reference book. Among the useful topics given special coverage are: the many impostors at



Pub sign for the Blue Boar, one of a series drawn by Amber Sanchez for *Wodehouse at Blandings Castle*.

the Castle; a list of pig men and women; trains to, and from, Market Blandings; many choice quotes; a family tree which illuminates all the family ramifications of the 8th Earl of Emsworth and his ten sisters; and 27 of the stories suspected to be included in *The Reminiscences of Galahad Threepwood*.

Wodehouse at Blandings Castle is a hardcover book with a dust jacket, 28 rather crude illustrations by Bernard Cavan, and a set of Blandings pub signs drawn by Amber Sanchez.

THE MILLFLEET CHARTER

Endorsed October 17, 1998 at Oud-Zuilen, The Netherlands

The Wodehouse Societies gathered here have pursued ways to express their solemn wish to find a platform for international co-operation. Therefore they have decided to establish the **International Wodehouse Association**. With the I. W. A. as an instrument, they aim at enhancing the knowledge and understanding of the works of Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, in order to further and intensify their bonds of friendship and communication and to establish a world-wide network of P.G. Wodehouse enthusiasts. On this festive Saturday, October 17th, 1998, representatives of the P.G. Wodehouse Societies of the United States of America, The Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have gathered at the Second International P.G. Wodehouse Memorial Dinner near Zuylen Castle, The Netherlands, to add their signatures to this Charter of Millfleet.

(signed)
For The Wodehouse Society
(TWS, U.S.A.)
Daniel H. Garrison

For the P.G. Wodehouse Society
(PGWS, The Netherlands)
George H.F. de Ceuninck van Capelle

For the Swedish Wodehouse Society
(SWS, Sweden)
Sven Sahlin

For The Drones Club (TDC, Belgium)
Kris Smets

For the P.G. Wodehouse Society-U.K.
(PGWS-U.K., Great Britain)
Tony Ring

Oud-Zuilen, October 17th, 1998

THE MILLFLEET CHARTER

P R E A M B L E

More than twenty years after his death, the cultural legacy of Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse is still enjoyed around the world.

Translated into many languages, his novels, short stories, plays, and lyrics give pleasure to millions. Some read him for the intricacy and humor of his plots, some enjoy his incomparable use of the English language, and others find pleasure in the Arcadia he created.

It is a measure of the affection and admiration in which his work is held that Wodehouse associations have sprung up around the world, ranging from societies with nearly a thousand members to small dining clubs. Whatever their size, they all have this in common—enjoyment of Wodehouse's work and pleasure in the companionship of fellow enthusiasts.

A happy and fruitful liaison already exists among the various national organizations. Joint functions have been held, information on new Wodehouse publications passes amongst societies, and a vast network of contacts and friendships has been created.

As a result of this world-wide interest, certain projects have been suggested whose success depends on the co-operation of Wodehouse societies. It is these suggestions that led to the concept of an **International Wodehouse Association**.

The object of this Charter is to build on the current friendly liaison and co-operation amongst Wodehouse societies by providing a framework in which such liaison and co-operation in matters of common interest can be further developed for the benefit of all Wodehouse enthusiasts.

A I M

The aim of the International Wodehouse Association is to provide an international forum for the furtherance of enjoyment of the works of P.G. Wodehouse by means of closer liaison and co-operation amongst member societies including, where appropriate, the encouragement of joint projects and research into his life and work.

PRINCIPLES

The International Wodehouse Association is a voluntary alliance of Wodehouse societies. It is an international, not a supra-national, organization designed solely to build on the present happy liaison amongst societies by encouraging further cooperation amongst them and, if asked to do so, by assisting in the co-ordination of proposals and projects of Wodehouse interest.

It is stressed that member societies within the Association remain completely independent, retaining their own identity, integrity, and constitution. They have the right to join or withdraw from the Association as they wish and to participate in its activities only insofar as they are happy to do so.

The organization and procedures of the Association are set out in the Annexes attached. Prefatory notes have been added where necessary to preclude possible misunderstandings.

ANNEX 1

MEMBERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

Prefatory Note

Memorandum of Understanding on the Status of Societies

Wodehouse societies were created at different times in different countries, and because of geographical and other factors have tended to develop disparate organizations and activities. For example, The Wodehouse Society of the Netherlands was the first to be founded and, because of its situation, its members can foregather often. The Wodehouse Society has members all over the world, although its officers and 85% of its members live in the United States. For practical reasons, its conventions are held biannually, though subsidiary chapters have been formed which meet more frequently.

The Association is based on the premise that the goodwill, friendship, and consensus of Wodehouse enthusiasts will prevail over any minor variance of opinion on the seniority, precedence, or titles adopted by member societies.

For the purposes of this Charter, the phrase "Wodehouse Society" is held to mean "any society whose membership is effectively open to the public on payment of a subscription and which is a signatory to this Charter." For the avoidance of doubt, there is no restriction on the number of societies from any one country which can be signatories, but the names of later signatories must be sufficiently different from earlier signatories from the same country to eliminate possible confusion.

Membership of the Association will comprise all Wodehouse societies which are signatories to this Charter from time to time. Each society will appoint a representa-

tive member to the International Wodehouse Association. A President will be appointed to act as co-ordinator of the I. W. A. For ease of communication, this Office will initially be held by the PGWS-U.K.

ANNEX 2

The IWA exists to promote the wider enjoyment of the cultural legacy of P.G. Wodehouse through co-operation, liaison, amity, transfer of information, and encouragement of research amongst Wodehouse societies. If asked to do so by any member society, the IWA will undertake a co-ordinating role for specific projects.

Explanatory notes:

Co-ordination Example: New editions of books of and about Wodehouse are sometimes little known outside the country of origin. The promulgation of such information through the IWA would be very useful to collectors elsewhere.

Liaison Example: Although some of us know of the existence of societies outside our own national borders, many of our members do not. Any Wodehouse enthusiast from abroad should know if and where a Wodehouse society exists in the country he is visiting.

Transfer of information Example: The exchange of information on good bookshops would save visiting members from other societies much time (and money).

Encouragement of research Example: Several studies of Wodehouse's life and work have been published, including doctoral theses. The IWA is the ideal forum through which to channel inquiries on such publications.

Co-ordination Example: The selection of a Wodehouse anthology chosen by enthusiasts around the world necessitates some form of co-ordination somewhere.

A central diary Example: To enable societies to avoid clashes of dates, IWA may circulate periodically to representative members a 12-month calendar of known events being held by all member societies.

Publicity Example: Publicity concerning Wodehouse events, publications, etc. may from time to time be generated on an international basis by co-ordinated efforts of the various societies. Hard copy of major publicity achieved could be circulated (with broad translation into English) to enable other societies to consider possibilities in their country.

Signatories to the Millfleet Charter

P.G. Wodehouse Society	The Netherlands
P.G. Wodehouse Society/U.K.	United Kingdom
Swedish Wodehouse Society	Sweden
The Drones Club	Belgium
The Wodehouse Society	United States

Candidate Members of I.W.A.

Amici de Wodehouse	Italy
Russian Wodehouse Society	Russia
P.G. Wodehouse Society of India	India
Indian Wodehouse Society	India

Board of the I.W.A.

Lt. Col. Norman Murphy, Honorary President

Tony Ring, President

Prof. Dr. Daniel Garrison, 1st Vice President

Dr. George de Ceuninck van Capelle, 2nd Vice President

Kris Smets, PhD, 3rd Vice President

Sven Sahlin, Secretary General and Treasurer



The Genesis of the Millfleet Charter (*also to be known as the Belle of Zuylen Agreement*)

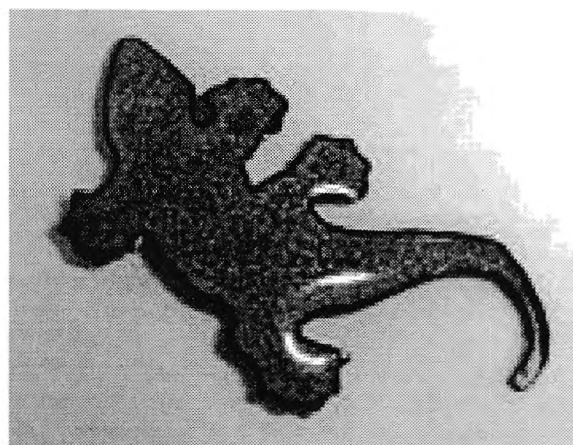
In October 1996, the President of PGWS made contact through the Internet with TWS President Elliott Milstein, SWS President Jacob Bagge, and the Vice President of TDC, Johan Heylen.

While exchanging Wodehouse news, the idea of forming an international forum for the Wodehousian clubs came up. In further contact, the idea was worked out and an opinion of the plan was asked from the wisest of all, Norman Murphy. When Norman gave his blessings to the idea, Kris Smets, the Chairman of TDC, arranged a meeting at Millfleet Hall, the seat of TDC, where PGWS-UK, SWS, TDC, and PGWS met and in principle found common ground for what is now called The Millfleet Charter.

Norman Murphy and Tony Ring undertook the great task of re-writing the text into understandable *English* English. The product of this true Wodehousian co-operation is presented and signed on this joyous occasion.

PINS REDUX

Our last issue of *Plum Lines* included information on two lovely pins that have been made available by artist Stan Elfbaum of Foxboro, Massachusetts. Because the picture quality was so poor, we wanted to give readers another gander at these pins, as well as another chance to place orders for them. The pins are shown below close to life size.



PLUM'S SHERLOCK: DOYLE'S INFLUENCE ON PGW

A talk delivered at the Chicago convention of The Wodehouse Society, October 1997. Marilyn, in addition to being our Membership Secretary, is active in many other ways in our society and is one of the founders of The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, a Doyle-Wodehouse cross-pollination group.

By Marilyn MacGregor

Beginning as a schoolboy, Wodehouse admired the writing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In a 1928 letter to William Townend,¹ Plum wrote, "Do you remember when we used to stand outside the bookstall at Dulwich station on the first of the month, waiting for it to open so that we could get the new *Strand* with the latest installment of Doyle's *Rodney Stone* . . . and the agony of finding that something had happened to postpone the fight between Champion Harrison and Crab Wilson for another month?"

The admiration continued. In the last year of his life, Plum wrote an introduction to a paperback edition of *The Sign of the Four*.² In it, he said: "When I was starting out as a writer—this would be about the time Caxton invented the printing press—Conan Doyle was my hero. Others might revere Hardy and Meredith. I was a Doyle man, and I still am. Usually we tend to discard the idols of our youth as we grow older, but I have not had this experience with A.C.D. I thought him swell then, and I think him swell now. . . like all the rest of you I am never happier than when curled up with Sherlock Holmes . . . As the fellow said, there's no police like Holmes."

Wodehouse goes on in that introduction to say he and Doyle were great friends, "our friendship interrupted only when I went to live in America. He . . . used to have cricket weeks at his place in the country, to which I was nearly always invited. And after a day's cricket and a big dinner he and I would discuss literature."

Don't you wish you could have sat quietly in a corner and listened? What a pity those conversations weren't somehow recorded so we could hear them today. Not that Plum always agreed with Doyle's judgment. In a 1934 letter to Leonora Cazalet³, speaking first of H. G. Wells, Plum wrote that he ". . . simply gasped when Wells said that the Bulpington of Blupp was as good a character as Kipps. It meant that his critical sense was absolutely dead . . . I felt the same when Conan Doyle used to say that the later Sherlock Holmes stories were as good as the early ones."

Even if all the later stories were not as good as the first, think how dreadful it was for Plum and other fans when they read Doyle's "The Final Problem," dashing Holmes to death at the foot of the Reichenbach Falls. Unlike

today, when we can immediately continue on to "The Empty House," where our hero returns from the apparently dead, Sherlockians thought "The Final Problem" was indeed final, and, as you may know, they mourned greatly. Men in the City wore black armbands (and this is staid, unemotional London, remember, at the turn of the last century) and one outraged enthusiast addressed Doyle as "You brute!" Consequently, a few years later, when Holmes reappeared alive and well, Plum wrote his joyous lyric "Back To His Native Strand"⁴ to the tune of "Archie" in the operetta "Toreador." Here's the lyric:

OH, SHERLOCK HOLMES lay hidden more than
half a dozen years.

He left his loving London in a whirl of doubts and
fears,

For we thought a wicked party

Of the name of MORIARTY

Had dispatched him (in a manner fit to freeze one).

They grappled on a cliff-top, on a ledge six inches wide
We deemed his chances flimsy when he vanished o'er
the side.

But the very latest news is

That he merely got some bruises.

If there is a man who's hard to kill, why he's one.

Oh SHERLOCK, SHERLOCK, he's in town again,
That prince of perspicacity, that monument of
brain

It seems he wasn't hurt at all

By tumbling down the waterfall.

That sort of thing is fun to SHERLOCK.

When SHERLOCK left his native Strand, such groans
were seldom heard;

With sobs the Public's frame was rent; with tears its eye
was blurred.

But the optimists reflected

That he might be resurrected:

It formed our only theme of conversation.

We asked each other, Would he be? and if so, How and
where?

We went about our duties with a less dejected air,

And they say that a suggestion
 Of a Parliamentary question
 Was received with marked approval by the nation,
 And SHERLOCK, SHERLOCK, he's in town
 again,
 Sir CONAN has discovered him, and offers to
 explain.
 The explanation may be thin,
 But bless you! we don't care a pin,
 If he'll but give us back our SHERLOCK.

The burglar groans and lays aside his jemmy, keys, and
 drill;
 The enterprising murderer proceeds to make his will;
 The fraud-promoting jobber
 Feels convinced that those who rob err;
 The felon finds no balm in his employment.
 The forger and the swindler start up shrieking in their
 sleep;
 No longer on his mother does the coster gaily leap;
 The Mile-End sportsman ceases
 To kick passers-by to pieces,
 Or does it with diminishing enjoyment.
 For SHERLOCK, SHERLOCK, he's in town again,
 That prince of perspicacity, that monument of
 brain.
 The world of crime has got the blues,
 For SHERLOCK'S out and after clues,
 And everything's a clue to SHERLOCK.

Plum did admire Doyle's ability to grip and he definitely approved of Doyle's decision on the names of his two best-known characters. In that same 1928 letter to Townend, Plum said "Odd how important story names are. It always takes me about as long to get them to my satisfaction as it does to write the novel. Did you know that Conan Doyle originally intended to call Dr. Watson Ormond Sacker? It can't have taken him long to see that that was wrong. If you have a stolid, ordinary character, you have to give him a stolid, ordinary name. He could have called Holmes Ormond Sacker, though I wouldn't have recommended it, but not Watson. Sherlock Holmes, by the way, started out as Sherringford Holmes. Did you know that?"

One doesn't have to be a Sherlockian to agree with me, I'm sure, in rejoicing that neither Holmes nor Watson ended up as Ormond Sacker nor Sherlock as Sherringford. Indeed, the notion seems almost inconceivable. Once we've read a story in which the author has married a character to the exactly right name, that name seems inevitable. Who else could that smooth-talking black-mailer be but Charles Augustus Milverton; who the plain, modest and brave "Solitary Cyclist" but Violet Hunter; or

how better the introduction, "Mr. Holmes, I am the unhappy John Hector McFarlane." Consider, too, the almost unbelievably stiff pomposity which goes so well with the character of Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and Hereditary King of Bohemia.

Whether or not Plum discussed character names with Doyle, his own efforts to get them right paid off. "Bertram Wilberforce," for example, must precede "Wooster" not "Jeeves." Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe wouldn't be the same with only one "Parsloe" and Angus McAllister couldn't be Hamish or Jock. Madeline Bassett just has to be the sort of girl who would naturally think the stars are God's daisy chain and Honoria Glossop quite obviously played hockey as a schoolgirl, galumphing robustly up and down the field. As for Psmith, can you possibly imagine his personality devoid of that silent "P"?

Also in the matter of names, we had a masterly compilation of Mulliner names and relationships in the Autumn and Winter 1996 issues of *Plum Lines* by Robert Creamer. I quote one item: "It is clear from the stories that two of Mr. Mulliner's brothers, Wilfred and Joseph, have only two sons each, none of them named George. But Mr. Mulliner does have three nephews named George. Each of these Georges must have a separate father, because no father gives two or three of his sons the same name." Bob Creamer, a fellow Sherlockian as well as a Wodehousian, admits he temporarily forgot the three brothers Moriarty, all named James. Did Plum lose track, or was he subtly echoing Doyle?

Allow me to digress for a moment to a puzzle I discovered recently. Doyle has been lauded for the clarity of his writing, and in the example I'm about to cite the words are clear enough but the meaning eludes me. In "The Six Napoleons," Dr. Watson speculates that the person responsible for smashing busts of Napoleon might have received some "hereditary family injury through the great war." Now we know that wars are exceedingly destructive and family influences may be strong, but I should be glad to have some Jeeves explain to me what an "hereditary family injury" might be.

"H"umorist" is not the word that springs first to most of our minds in connection with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and I am indebted to Jon Lellenberg for bringing to my attention a short column by Doyle from *The Speaker* of January 30, 1892.¹ Entitled "The Gamut of Humour," Doyle begins: "What is one man's treat is another man's poison. Everyone has his own conception of humour, and . . . You may convert your neighbour in religion, you may persuade him in politics, you may bend and twist him in every opinion that he has got, but you never yet succeeded in making him see any merit in a joke

if his own unaided wits did not detect and appreciate it.” Doyle goes on to say he’d like to arrange a gamut of humor commencing “with the finer forms of wit, and work onwards to the most robust kinds of humour.” He then asserts that “English writers are more witty than humorous; Americans more humorous than witty. You smile with the one, and you laugh with the other,” and he concludes “when we think of it we cannot but realise that humour is a very tender and precious thing, not to be sneered and snorted at . . . but rather to be encouraged to assume every novel shape which can adapt it to the infinite variety of the human mind.”

Now, while Doyle thought about humor and appreciated it, to my mind he was no model for Wodehouse in writing it. Let me give you an example of Doyle as lyric writer by quoting a portion of a passage from *The Game Is Afoot* edited by Marvin Kaye. It is titled “Regarding ‘The Adventure of the Two Collaborators.’”

I quote: “Richard D’Oyly Carte, one of London’s shrewdest theatrical producers teamed up James Barrie and Arthur Conan Doyle to write *Jane Annie; or, The Good Conduct Prize*, billed as ‘a new and original English Comic Opera’ . . . The show opened at the Savoy Theatre on May 13, 1893, and ran approximately two months. It was one of the worst failures in the history of the D’Oyly Carte Opera Company.” Parenthetically, I’ll point out that this was a tad over a year since publication of Doyle’s piece on humor.

Kaye continues: “Ever a champion of literary underdogs, I used to think that *Jane Annie* could not be all that bad. . . . But I eventually succeeded in tracking down and purchasing a rare copy of the libretto and regret to report that *Jane Annie* richly deserved its fate. Except for a few moments that feebly echo Gilbert and Sullivan, it is unbearably cloying. Here, for instance, is part of a song that Bab, ‘a bad girl,’ sings early in the first act:

Bright-eyed Bab I used to be,
Now these eyes are lead;
Languor has come over me,
Hangs my little head.
Now my figure once like this—
Droops like autumn berry;
Pity me, my secret is,
Me is sleepy very!

Thirty-seven years later, in the August 1930 *Strand*, Doyle and his editors foisted on the public a presumably humorous story called “The Parish Magazine.” I thank Len Lawson for hunting down a copy for me. To condense drastically, two young people perpetrate a cruel hoax on an unsuspecting printer. In great distress at the apparent repercussions, he thinks of leaving town. The

Rotherheath Society of Bright Young People then discloses that it endeavors to make the world a merrier and more lively place by the exercise of wit. They’ve offered a prize for the members who “could most effectually put the wind up some resident in this suburb,” and they disclaim responsibility by telling victims that “they have unselfishly sacrificed themselves for the general hilarity of the community.” The printer is presumably bought off by a silver medal, whisky and soda, and a good cigar, and the story ends thus: “So Mr. Pomeroy eventually went out into the night, thinking that after all youth will be served, and it would be a dull world without it.”

To my unaided mind it’s neither witty nor humorous, and I’d not even mention it except that Plum included the story in the 1934 volume he edited, *A Century of Humour*. Was it the funniest Doyle story he could find, included because they were friends? Did Plum honestly think it funny? I suspect we shall never know.

To be fair to Doyle on humor, however, I must tell you that I have heard from several reliable sources that his Brigadier Gerard stories are not only well done but have lovely bits of humor. And as William Lyon Phelps said, “Any darn fool can take a whack at tragedy but you have to be touched with genius to write comedy.”

Let us move on to the most felicitous, as Jeeves would say, Doyle influence—Plum’s inclusion of references to Sherlock Holmes throughout the years of his writing career. I began collecting them some years ago and so far have found 210. Here’s a selection:

The earliest I’ve found is in Volume One of Tony Ring’s *Plum Stones*, in the story “The Strange Disappearance of Mr. Buxton-Smythe,” of December, 1901.⁸ It is: “In looking over the notes I have made from time to time of the cases unravelled by the peculiar methods of my friend . . .” The last one, “Sherlock Holmes could have taken her correspondence course,” appears in the posthumously published *Sunset at Blandings*.⁹

In the early stories, Plum mostly sticks to a pretty direct quote of Sherlockian phrases, as these, again from “The Strange Disappearance of Mr. Buxton-Smythe”:¹⁰ “That basket-chair will be your fancy, I think,” “. . . can you leave your practice for a couple of days?” and “. . . appears to be a very pretty little problem.” Every now and then, however, we find a zinger such as this pastiche exchange: “‘Wotsing,’ said Rose, without moving from his position (closed eyes and touching finger-tips), ‘look up St. Asterisk’s in my scrapbook.’ I replied that as Rose was himself able to reach the book without rising whereas I should be obliged to get up and come round the table, the best and wisest course would be for him to get it himself. He did so.”¹¹

The next quote, from *The Pothunters*,¹² published in 1902, was a year before Holmes rose from the dead and

Plum could write "Back To His Native Strand." It is: "He would frequently observe, like the lamented Sherlock Holmes, the vital necessity of taking notice of trifles."

Plum had fun devising spoof echos of Holmes's unwritten cases, as in: "Yet he had his failures. The affair of Graham's mackintosh was one . . ." from 1903; another, "...the now celebrated affair of the European, African and Asiatic Pork Pie and Ham Sandwich Supply Company frauds . . ."⁴, a different 1903 story; "...poring tensely over the papers connected with the singular affair of the theft of the maharajah's ruby,"⁵ 1925, and one of my favorites, which neatly fits in Plummy characters: "The world at present knows nothing of Bertie's cousin, young Thos., and his liver-pad, of the curious affair of old Boko and the Captain Kidd costume, or of the cook Anatole and the unwelcome birthday present"⁶ from 1958.

Here's a hodgepodge of items over the years. From 1901: "...with an intelligence which some of these Scotland Yard bunglers would do well to imitate."⁷ From 1902: "...slightly discomposed by this Sherlock-Holmes-like reading of his thoughts..."⁸ From 1903: "Ah ... I remember the case now. It was out of my usual line, being"⁹ Another 1903: "Just cast your eye over that butter. You follow me, Watson?"¹⁰ From 1908 "...one of those great minds which become restless unless fully employed"¹¹ and also: "...one's handicapped at school when one tries to work the detective act. Sherlock Holmes wasn't wondering the whole time that he was hunting for clues whether he would get expelled."¹² From 1912: "You are like Sherlock Holmes. After you've explained a thing from start to finish or . . .from finish to start—it becomes quite simple."¹³ From 1916: "...started her apiary with . . .a book of practical hints, and a second-hand queen . . ."¹⁴ From 1923: "I don't pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes or anything of that order"¹⁵ From 1925: "... looking as Sherlock Holmes might have looked had he discovered Doctor Watson stealing his watch,"¹⁶ and from 1933: "I dropped a pot of jam . . .on to my Uncle Alexander when he came to visit us in a deerstalker cap with earflaps, as worn by Sherlock Holmes."¹⁷

We have deductions, as in 1938: "...see a chap walking along the street and deduce that he is a retired manufacturer of poppet valves named Robinson with rheumatism in one arm, living at Clapham"¹⁸ And, from *Sunset at Blandings*, "Sherlock Holmes . . .would have deduced instantly that he was not in a good temper. 'Elementary, my dear Watson' he would have said. 'Those snorts tell the story.'"¹⁹

Regarding Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, Lord Emsworth "...entertained feelings similar to, though less cordial than, those of Sherlock Holmes toward Professor Moriarty."²⁰ And about Aunt Dahlia, Bertie said "I won't

say that she omitted no detail however slight, but she certainly didn't condense."²¹

Finally, there is the hound. One need not be a Sherlockian to have read *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and to be aware of how skillfully Doyle built up suspense as Dr. Mortimer told Holmes of the death of Sir Charles Baskerville—leading up to the last line of chapter two when Dr. Mortimer says, "Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!" Plum grips us with this passage: "What ensued was rather like the big scene in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The baying and the patter of feet grew louder, and suddenly out of the darkness"²² except that the lovely Plummy twist is that what comes along at a high rate of speed is Sam Goldwyn, a shaggy dog of mixed parentage with a solid body and a tongue like an ant-eater's, looking like Boris Karloff made up for something.

In conclusion, I recommend one story from which I've not quoted because if I began I'd be sorely tempted to give you the whole thing. It is "From A Detective's Notebook,"²³ to my mind one of the finest Sherlockian pastiches as well as an excellent Mulliner story. It is also the foundation story for the Clients of Adrian Mulliner, an irregular group of fans both of Sherlock Holmes and of P. G. Wodehouse. We are, to expand on the words of Plum quoted at the beginning, never happier than when curled up with Sherlock Holmes, unless we're curled up with P. G. Wodehouse.

Notes

1 Letter to William Townend, July 20, 1928, *Author! Author!* Simon and Schuster, New York, 1962

2 Introduction to *The Sign of the Four*, Ballantine Mystery Classic, May, 1975

3 Letter to Leonora Cazalet, December 19, 1934, *Yours, Plum*, ed. Donaldson, Penguin Books, 1992

4 "Back To His Native Strand," unsigned, *Punch*, May 27, 1903

5 "The Gamut of Humour," A. Conan Doyle, *The Speaker*, January 30, 1892

6 Regarding "The Adventure of the Two Collaborators," Appendix I, Miscellaneous Notes, *The Game Is Afoot, Parodies, Pastiches and Ponderings of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Marvin Kaye, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994

7 "The Parish Magazine," A. Conan Doyle, *The Strand Magazine*, August, 1930

8 "The Strange Disappearance of Mr. Buxton-Smythe," December, 1901, *Plum Stones*, Book 1, ed. Ring, 1993

9 *Sunset At Blandings*, Chapter 8, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1977

10 "The Strange Disappearance of Mr. Buxton-Smythe,"

op. cit.

11 "The Adventure of the Split Infinitive," 1901, *Plum Stones*, Book 1, ed. Ring, 1993

12 *The Pothunters*, chapter 10, 1902

13 "The Odd Trick," 1903, *Tales of St. Austin's*

14 "Bradshaw's Little Story," 1903, *Tales of St. Austin's*

15 *Sam The Sudden*, Chapter 13, 1925

16 Foreword, *Selected Stories by P. G Wodehouse*, 1958

17 "The Adventure of the Split Infinitive," op. cit.

18 *The Pothunters*, chapter 16, op. cit.

19 "Dudley Jones, Bore-Hunter," 1903, Appendix, *His Last Bow*, The Oxford Sherlock Holmes

20 The Tabby Terror," 1903, *Tales of St. Austin's*

21 *The Luck Stone*, chapter 8, 1908

22 *The Luck Stone*, chapter 15, 1908

23 *Psmith Journalist*, chapter 19, 1912

24 *Uneasy Money*, chapter 5, 1916

25 "Aunt Agatha Speaks Her Mind," *The Inimitable Jeeves*, 1923

26 *Sam The Sudden*, chapter 23, 1925

27 "The Amazing Hat Mystery," *Young Men In Spats*, 1933

28 *The Code of The Woosters*, chapter 3, 1938

29 *Sunset at Blandings*, chapter 8, op. cit.

30 *Pigs Have Wings*, chapter 1, 1952

31 *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, chapter 11, 1974

32 *The Mating Season*, chapter 24, 1949

33 "From A Detective's Notebook," *Punch*, May 20, 1959, and *The World Of Mr. Mulliner*

OF MONOCLES AND MEN

The following letters-to-the-editor in the *London Times* were forwarded to us via the Internet from Ashe Marson, otherwise known as TWS member Chris Riff, currently on sabbatical somewhere in South Shropshire. This marks yet another occasion when ever-alert Plummies have prevented a potentially disastrous faux pas, making it possible for sweetness and light to reign forevermore. —AD

London Times
Tuesday, 24 November

Sir,

Eye say!

Fans of Plum have won a topping victory. Penguin, which is reprinting 40 books by P.G. Wodehouse, was to

depict Bertie Wooster on its covers wearing a monocle. But when the P.G. Wodehouse Society (UK) discovered the publisher's plans, it became awfully steamed up, complaining that Plum had been far too much of an individual to wear something so clichéd as a monocle. After the fans' intervention, Penguin wisely redesigned its covers.

"The entire thing is a myth," says Norman Murphy, the society's top hat. "It has just sprung up because of the artist Charles Crombie, who drew him in *The Strand Magazine* with a conspicuous monocle between 1919 and 1939. It has no basis in the text at all."

But John Mortimer, the author and Plum fan, is disappointed to discover the truth. "I always thought he had a monocle. When I was a young man, I wrote off to Gamages for the eyewear because I wanted to look like him." Many others who have shared similar desires will feel equally upset by the crushing news.

Yours etc.

Jasper Gerard

London Times

Friday, 27 November

Sir,

Apologies are due from the P.G. Wodehouse Society for their denial that Bertie Wooster ever wore a monocle. Not "in the text" eh? Then why did Bertie wear a monocle when his portrait was painted by Gwladys Pendlebury in "Jeeves and the Spot of Art?" The painting wound up as an advertising poster for Slingsby's Superb Soups in London and the Bouillon Supreme in Paris, so clearly full disclosure was made to the public back in the 1930s.

Yours etc.

D. Lessman

London Times

Friday, 27 November

Sir,

Bertie Wooster probably wore a monocle for the duration of one (sadly, unwritten) short story before Jeeves very properly put a stop to it. But he was never, ever, known as Plum. This was the nickname of Wodehouse himself:

"In 1881 I was christened Pelham Grenville—and not a thing to show for it except a small silver mug. I remember protesting at the time vigorously, but it did no good, the clergyman stuck to his point. (*Performing Flea*, 1953.)

Yours sincerely,
Ben Stroude

London Times
Monday, 30 November

Sir,

The P.G. Wodehouse Society has some sympathy with Mr. D. Lessman's comment (letter, November 27) about the eyeglass attributed to Bertie Wooster in "Jeeves and the Spot of Art." Yet it only appeared as a 6-in diameter monocle on an advertising poster for soup, which was described by Bertie as "a bally libel on the Wooster face."

Consider the extraneous evidence. Lord Emsworth's pince-nez were forever being lost, lorgnettes of aunts and lady bishoppesses were constantly peered through. Galahad Threepwood's monocle was polished so frequently the author forgot whether he should replace it in his right or his left eye.

Bertie simply could not have worn a monocle for 14 books without it being used in the plot; if he had not

simply mislaid it, he would surely have bought it an Old Etonian ribbon of which Jeeves disapproved.

Yours sincerely,
Tony Ring
Editor, *Wooster Sauce*
The P.G. Wodehouse Society

As an addendum to this, we take note of a letter received from **Mark Richard**, in which he writes: "In his piece on the National Film Theatre series, Tony Ring blames the 1966 *World of Wooster* [TV] series with Ian Carmichael for introducing to an already fallen and wretched world the textually insupportable notion of a Bertie who affects a monocle. Question: On the cover of my Penguin paperback of *Right Ho, Jeeves*, the cover illustration also depicts Bertie, as he takes off on his bicycle, displaying a monocle. Coincidence? Or still more evidence of a vast right-wing conspiracy? You decide."

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