



# Plum Lines

The quarterly journal of The Wodehouse Society

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## HI HO, DRONE RANGERS!

By Ed Ratcliffe and Elin Woodger

**W**HAT HO, Houston! The city known as a rip-roaring upstart showed a civilized face as we gathered for our 1999 Wodehouse Convention the third weekend of October.

First off, the weather. Who'd've thunk we would have experienced such balmy temperatures in Houston, way down yonder in South Texas? Many of us doubted the Drones' reassurances that this was a lovely time of year in Houston, given the reports of 90°-plus temperatures and high humidity just the week before. But lo and behold, the Plum gods smiled on us and granted clear, dry, pleasant days, and nights that were downright cool. Heaven!

And the civilized face? Well, our convention hotel was smack in the middle of quite a slab of culture. Like Gussie Fink-Nottle, who lived entirely surrounded by newts, we were entirely surrounded by several museums and manicured parks. The hotel itself had just been beautifully restored to its grand appearance of ye olden days of 1924.

(Here our English members smile tolerantly.) Our hosts, the Drone Rangers, could hardly have found a more beautiful hotel or a better location.

### THE WODEHOUSE SOCIETY

*Come to Texas*

1999 CONVENTION



PROGRAM, GUIDE  
& SONGBOOK

Our conventions, which used to kick off with the Friday night cocktail reception, have in recent years had so much happening during the day on Friday that people are flying in on Thursday to get an early start on the fun. Never was this more true than in Houston. Large numbers of us descended on the city on Wednesday and Thursday, and by Thursday evening the festivities were in full swing, as Plummies from far and wide gathered in the bar at the Warwick Park Plaza to sluice in style with old friends and new. As Alekh Bhurke reported to Internet compatriots, "The air was thick with the general feeling of having returned to the fold."

At the registration table we were presented with a bag of entertaining souvenirs, among them a long wooden pencil whose upper half had

been bent, by some miracle of modern science, into the silhouette of a pig. We hear that Norman Murphy promptly used his as a monocle.

Later that Thursday night, a small party made its way to the No Tsu Oh Coffeeshouse (that's Houston spelled backwards) to hear NEWTS singer-songwriter Terry Kitchen perform his original folk songs, and one not-so-original composition: "Bill."

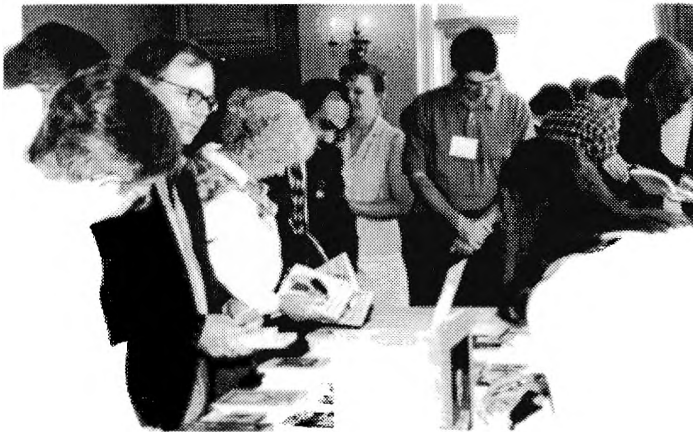
**F**RIDAY dawned bright and sunny, and the Drone Rangers had provided a choice of happy activities in which to indulge: An excursion to NASA for some lucky souls, an outing to San Jacinto battlefield for others, cricket in a nearby park for a large number of hardy individuals, and, back at the hotel, an all-day extravaganza of games, books, and films (including treasured tapes of episodes from *Wodehouse Playhouse*). Games Master Brad Frank was particularly ingenious with his homemade indoor miniature golf course, over which he ruled dressed in impeccable (and undoubtedly magic) plus-fours. Egg and Spoon Races and Pot the Top Hat with a Hazel Nut were among the entertainments. Cleverly situated at the entrance to



The 1928 Essex and some of its cargo: (l to r) Pongo Mohamed, John Fahey, Sailesh Krishnamurthy, Jean Tillson, Tim Rice, Umpire Tony Ring, Alekh Burke

park, cricketers played on a pitch located near an elegant and decorative pagoda (hereafter referred to as the pavilion) where tables of catered food and drink had been set up for players and spectators. Thus provided for, we spent a leisurely day taking turns at batting, bowling, and fielding. We played revised TWS Rules cricket, which not only ensured a complete lack of competition but also enabled us to learn the fundamentals of the game.

Umpire and scorekeeper Tony Ring, looking simply smashing in a white lab coat and what appeared to be a white Panama hat, officiated the game with considerable panache and patience. He was ably assisted by field umpire Dr. Kenneth Rolston, who was largely responsible for all the pre-cricket arrangements and had supplied the equipment. (Many thanks and three cheers go out to Ken and his son, Ziri, who worked like beavers to make the whole day a success.) Most of those who wished to play were dressed in the appropriate whites, or at least some-



Bookbuyers browsing

the games room were several bookseller's tables, offering PGW books and memorabilia, and a table set up by Chapter One of Philadelphia, displaying the delights of that city to lure us there for the 2001 convention.

One of the OM's purchases was a little English paperback entitled *Titles and Forms of Address: A guide to correct use*. It's a popular (twentieth edition!) book advising us how to address a peeress in her own right, for example, or the widow of the eldest son of a baron—whether formally, less formally, socially, on an envelope, or in the salutation of a letter. The OM expects to use it every day.

Meanwhile, back at the cricket ground, major treats were in store. The Drone Rangers had spared no effort to create an experience as close to a real cricket match as possible. They had even rented a remarkable white 1928 Essex touring car with which to ferry players and spectators between the hotel and the cricket grounds. At the



Charles Bishop, shown batting, played impartially on both teams



Batsman Neil Midkiff doesn't seem to frighten Bill Franklin

thing approaching whites, and a good many were adorned with the official TWS Cricket Club patch created by Jean Tillson. The players separated into teams led by Gussie Fink-Nottle (aka Alekh Bhurke) and Pongo Twistleton-Twistleton (aka Shamim Mohamed). As players began to realize that they were all comrades in the game of "what-the-heck-are-we-doing-out-here?" inhibitions disappeared and a good time was had by all. Even the spectators enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and many of the players surprised themselves and others with their fine play and unerring grasp of the game. Well, "unerring" might per-



No, it's *not* a pagoda—it's a pavilion!

haps be an exaggeration; let us just say that they tried and for the most part succeeded. Someone (was it Pongo?) said it best: "TWS members playing cricket are something like dancing pigs. The wonder is not how well they dance, but that they dance at all."

The captains' strategy proved crucial, as Gussie ably demonstrated. "Lady Bassett [Anne Cotton] was on my team," he wrote, "and I put her (and this should prove my superior strategic skills beyond any doubt) in the slips from where she could unsettle the opposing batsmen with her famous stares, reputed to open oysters at 20 paces. It worked like a charm." Pongo's team scored 23 runs before losing the last of their 11 batsmen. The players then broke for browsing and sluicing in the pavilion, now so crowded that spectators were overflowing onto the lawn, and a caricature artist hired by the Drone Rangers nearly broke his hand churning out drawing after drawing of cricket-loving Plummies.

Gussie's team batted in the afternoon and the first 11 batsmen scored 42 runs; technically the game should have ended at this point, since the morning team had only 11 batsmen. But several latecomers were allowed to bat and their runs were credited to Gussie's team, which eventually scored 70 runs, giving the appearance of a rout. But the game was played purely for the fun of it, and all that mattered were the smiles on the faces of players and spectators.

A footnote to this story: At the Saturday banquet, prizes in the form of Murray Hedgcock's *Wodehouse at the Wicket* were grandly presented to three players whose behavior on the field best exemplified the spirit of TWS Rules Cricket according to its motto, "Risus, Vestimenta, Convivia," (Laughter, Clothing, Feasting). The prize-winners were Anne Cotton, Tim Andrew, and Charles Bishop.

Later that Friday afternoon, The Clients of Adrian Mulliner (a group of Wodehouse and Sherlock Holmes fans) held its Senior Bloodstain, a meeting that coincides with our Wodehouse convention.

Then Friday evening rolled around with the traditional cocktail reception, the "official" opening of our convention. This and all our solemn deliberations on Saturday were held on the top floor of the hotel, which was given over to our exclusive use. Whether we were thus honored or quarantined by the hotel management was a matter of some debate.

By now most of the 170 or so conventioners had arrived and the air was filled with cheery "What-ho"s and other view halloos. Early in the evening a musical eruption began, the result of a challenge issued by the Drone Rangers to set Charlotte Mulliner's immortal poem, "Good Gnu," to music. First up at the bat was the Swedish Wodehouse Mixed Choir, directed by Sven Sahlin, who

also served as soloist and chorus, aided and abetted by a few Drone Rangers. That his rendition sounded suspiciously like the Swedish national anthem will not be commented on here; suffice to say that Sven acquitted himself well. Then the Drone Rangers took center stage and, with a full regiment of singers and musicians, performed their version of the Mulliner epic, set to music by Mike Skupin. They were followed by a largish nottle of NEWTS, whose interpretation of "Good Gnus" came complete with mimed actions depicting the dramatic events of Char-

lotte's poem. Finally, Neil Midkiff sat down at the piano and sang each verse of the poem, sometimes ingeniously altered, to musical phrases adapted and spliced from Berlin, Porter, Gershwin, and Kern. (Auntie's personal favorite was the verse which ended, "My sweet embraceable gnu.") Unfortunately, as Neil did not have a microphone, only those closest to the piano were able to hear his song.

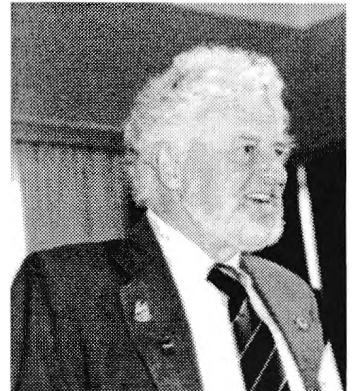


A nottle of NEWTS, miming gnus

Thus happily entertained and filled with the milk of human kindness (not to mention a g & t or two), a large number of Plummies proceeded to the nearby Main Street Theatre, there to enjoy a perfectly splendid production of *Oh, Kay!* This 1926 musical comedy by Wodehouse, Guy Bolton, and George and Ira Gershwin had a strong story line, lovely music (how about "Someone to Watch Over Me"?), and clever dialogue. It ran for 469 performances in New York and London—a smasharoo. The Houston revival was presented with gusto, brio, and skill. The actors clearly had lots of

fun and the audience had even more. We were reminded of the remark by George Jean Nathan quoted in Lee Davis's *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern*: "The wondrous lovely madness of the night went out of American life with the Twenties. You are a lucky man if you got a taste of it." *Oh, Kay!* may, even in this distant time, let us glimpse that lovely madness.

SATURDAY morning began with a continental breakfast to rally the troops, who then trooped into a large meeting room for the solemn deliberations mentioned above. Bill Rudersdorf, principal perpetrator of the convention with his wife Toni, welcomed us to Houston and presented the morning's master of ceremonies, President Dan Garrison, who introduced the first speaker.



Dan Garrison, presiding

Tony Ring spoke to us on the subject "Limp Lavender Leather." It was, of course, all about Plum's poetry. As most of us know, Plum was a superb composer of light verse, most of it written in the first decade of the

century. A slim volume of that early verse entitled *The Parrot and Other Poems* was published in 1988. Some gems are embedded in the later stories—"Good Gnus" leaps to mind. And "Printer's Error" is a stand-alone masterpiece. We will merely tell you that Tony's entire first sentence, uttered in a stentorian voice of the utmost earnestness, was the single word "BE!" The rest, as



Tony Ring, being stentorian

someone has said, is silence. For now.

One of the editors of this journal, who shall be nameless but whose initials are Elin Woodger, gave the next talk. Its title is rather racy. Are you ready? "Lady Constance's Lover: Sex and Romance à la Wodehouse." Plum's stories are known for their innocence about sex, but Elin is a modern, liberated woman, and when she tells us that there is sex in Wodehouse, we must believe her, scarlet though our faces may be. Her talk began with the titillating phrase, "And now for the juicy stuff," went into daring detail about the Ickenham system of wooing,





Mike Skupin, movie maven

discussed romance of several kinds, and touched more than once on how Wodehouse talked *about* sex without ever *talking* sex.

Mike Skupin discussed “A Damsel in Distress: The 1937 Movie from a 1999 Perspective.” Mike did what the OM believed impossible: He convinced him that there is merit in what he had always thought was (beyond Fred Astaire) an almost worthless movie. In addition to giving us background details on the making of the movie—including some delightful quotes from George Burns—Mike provided a little historical context that helped explain certain whys and wherefores—to wit, what in heck were Burns and Allen doing in a Wodehouse story, and *Joan Fontaine*, for pete’s sake???

Mike is a composer as well as a movie-discusser, and after a coffee break he and a dozen other Drone Rangers presented music he had composed to accompany verses from the *Parrot* book we mentioned earlier. “The Rhyme of the Sitter-Out” and “The Cricketer in Winter” were, probably for the first time anywhere, presented as lyrics. We laughed, we clapped, we laughed again. Mike wielded a guitar and banjolele, Toni Rudersdorf sang and played a bassoon, and the OM was laughing so hard he couldn’t take notes on the other performers. His apologies to them

all—they deserve more recognition.

Then, in response to many requests, Neil Midkiff sat down at the piano and gave a reprise of his very amusing and clever performance of the evening before, combining musical phrases from popular composers with the poem “Good Gnu” by Wodehouse—words that were never, ever, meant to be sung to that music. “If this music has any merit at all,” said Neil, “it is because I have trod on the toes of giants.” In this connection we wish to register a complaint with management: there was so much laughter we could hardly hear him.

Norman Murphy spoke on “Wodehouse and the Animal Kingdom,” the story of his investigation that covered 15 years and ended in triumph last February—since when, he said, he had been bursting to tell the surprising re-

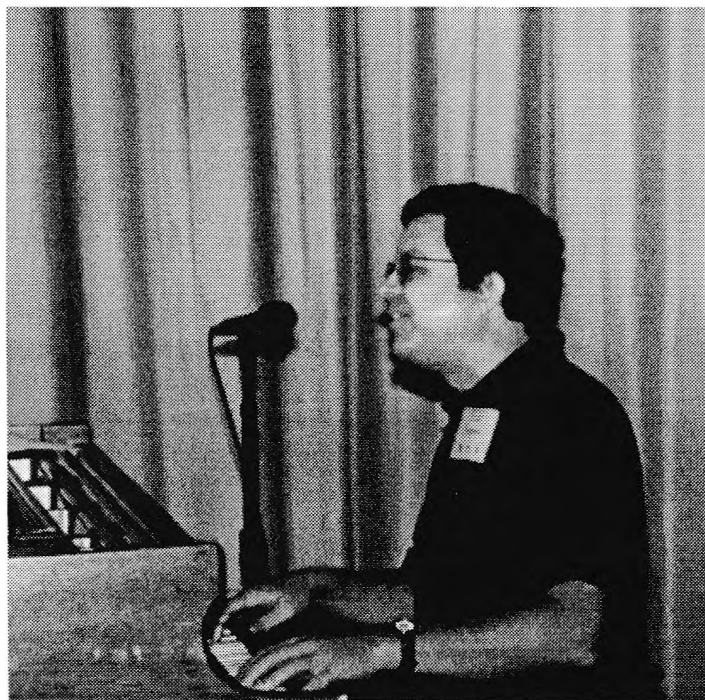


Norman Murphy, astonishing us

sults. You can read the text of his talk elsewhere in this issue, but it can never take the place of hearing Norman in person. We know of no one else who conveys such a sense of excitement in describing his discoveries or has so much pleasure in presenting them to his listeners. You shoulda been there. The applause was tumultuous.

After lunch President Dan Garrison led us briskly through a business meeting whose principal business was the election of Elin Woodger to succeed him and the election of Susan Cohen to the vice presidency. (See separate “Message from the Prez” for a précis of TWS business discussed at the convention.)

Chapter One of Philadelphia presented us with a number of persuasive reasons for holding our next convention in—uh, let me see—did they mention the name of that place?—Philadelphia! We were easily persuaded, so



Neil Midkiff, being very funny indeed





Dan Garrison hands over the Tome to new president Elin Woodger

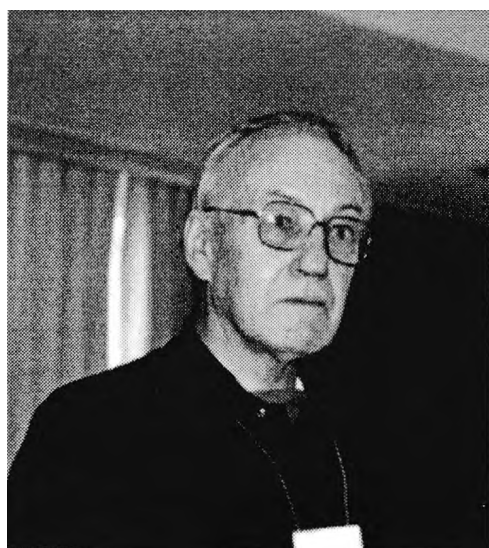
it's Philadelphia in 2001 and it's going to be fun.

**John Fletcher** then spoke, to inform us of the P.G. Wodehouse Society U.K.'s website and the quiz thereon. While our own TWS website is still in development, John has had the UK site up and running for over a year

now and it is well worth a visit. Links are provided to current news, reports of past happenings, ongoing events, and other Wodehouse-related websites. In particular, John welcomes any and all on-line Wodehousians to take part

in the weekly (and dastardly) quiz, for which there is sometimes a "guest quiz-master" (a winner of a previous quiz, usually). To access the UK website, go to [www.dipse.co.uk/wodehouse/](http://www.dipse.co.uk/wodehouse/).

**Norman** **Murphy** appeared again to tell about plans for the Millennium Tour in



John Fletcher—he doesn't usually look like a Scottish elder rebuking sin from the pulpit

England next July. Norman will lead this tour as he did the 1989 Pilgrimage, and if the new tour is anything like the earlier one, it's going to be a wonderful week. (Last-minute word: the tour is completely booked. Sorry if you didn't get your reservation.)

**Tony Ring** told us about the new Wodehouse anthology due out soon from Hutchinson, Plum's London publisher. Tony displayed the dust jacket and announced that Stephen Fry ("Jeeves" of recent TV memory) will write an introduction. Story selections were not announced, but Hutchinson has taken some care in choosing the sto-

ries, and we have high hopes for the book. You will read all about it in *Plum Lines* as soon as it appears.

In addition, Tony informed us of other projects in development, one being a CD of up to 25 of Plum's song lyrics as sung by some big names, including operatic soprano Sylvia McNair, and the very talented Hal

and Lara Cazalet, Lady Wodehouse's grandchildren.

Along the same lines, a book that will contain as many of Plum's lyrics as possible is now in the research stage, and in this regard, please see the article "Languishing lyrics longed-for" elsewhere in this issue.

Finally, work has begun on updating Elaine McIlvaine's masterly bibliography of the Wodehouse canon in the form of an addendum. Society members will be called upon for help in this project; details will be published in the next issue of *Plum Lines*.

**Dan Cohen** gave a talk soberly entitled "Wodehouse at the Bar, a lecture-demonstration of drinking in Wodehouse stories." Don't be fooled. It was neither clinical nor scientific, but Dan is a good actor and an even better speaker, and it was funny. He enlivened his talk with the use of many props, including an array of bottles and decanters and sniffers, and his choice of quotes from the canon had us wishing for even more. Dan's talk, with his apt selections from "The Story of William," also provided a great lead-in for the Blandings Castle reading at the banquet that evening.

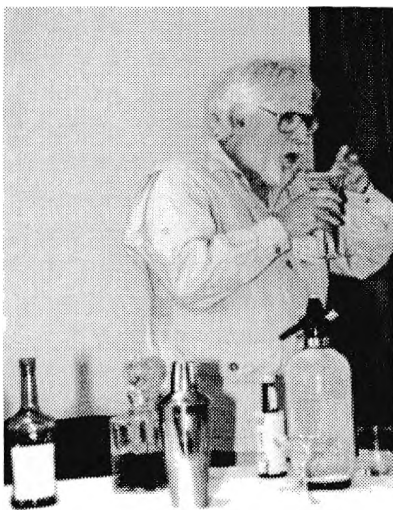
**Wendy Westfaul** of the Drone Rangers followed with an enlightening discussion of "Medicinal Marvels in Wodehouse," and indeed she uncovered many marvels which appear to have had their basis in fact. We know



The immense power of the presidency passes into new hands



Tony Ring displays the dust jacket of the new PGW anthology



Dan Cohen sacrifices all in the interest of science

If you're frustrated by the brief descriptions of these talks, don't despair—we plan to publish many of them in future *Plum Lines*.

The **NEWTS** of Boston ended the afternoon with an amusing original skit appropriate for the cow country we were in: "Bertie and the Bum Steer," written by Stephen

Brown and David Landman. The tale centers around Aunt Dahlia's efforts to obtain for her husband Tom the largest cow creamer in the world, owned by a Texas cattle baron. Bertie's efforts to help result in his becoming engaged to the baron's daughter, Woo Woo (imagine Aunt Dahlia's horror at the thought of a niece named Woo Woo Wooster), and of course only Jeeves

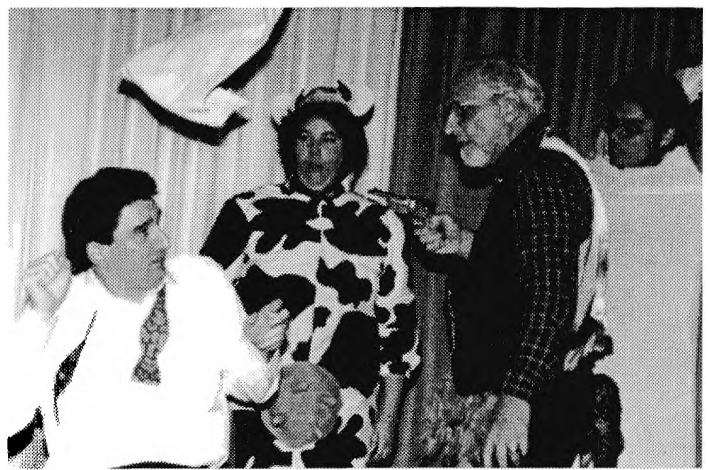


Wendy Westfaul presents her Many Medicinal Marvels

is able to save the day. The group featured too many **NEWTS** to be mentioned here, alas, but they were excellent and the group received a well-earned ovation.

A couple of hours off for good behavior, and we gathered again for the **Saturday evening banquet**. What can one say about a TWS banquet? The Drone Rangers did themselves well with a feast of Tex-Mex fare, served buffet-style, which was enjoyed by a vast array of Wodehousian characters in costume, from flappers to bobbies to greasy birds. Diners were divided into two sections,

now where Plum may have gotten his inspiration for such innovative scenarios as Chimp Twist's health farm, the bath houses sought out by Uncle George, and the patent medicines that proliferate in Wodehouse stories. Many of Wendy's slides were of particular interest, showing real advertisements making marvelous claims for miracle remedies. Fascinating stuff.



Things are hotting up on the ranch in "Bertie and the Bum Steer"

breadroll-throwers in one room and non-throwers in another. Alas, this arrangement was not quite as successful as hoped for, due to the unfortunate proclivity of some throwers to throw non-bread items such as tortillas, and of others to hurl entire rolls at opponents as if they were Roger Clemens trying to beat back Mark McGuire. We have now come so far from the original Dronesian spirit of casually tossing bits of bread about as to turn our banquets into a free-for-all and thus to turn many former bread-tossers firmly into the anti-bread camp. It will probably behoove us to re-examine this issue and find ways to regulate the tossing, if the tradition is to continue. (Yes, Auntie knows that she is inserting an editorial into a report, but she feels this must be said, and now that she is prez she feels emboldened to say it, pelted with breadrolls though she will be.)

Missing from the evening activities, due to broken microphones, were the traditional toasts to the Queen Mother, the Cazalets, absent friends, and Plum himself. But the Drone Rangers more than made up for any lacks by providing the



Lt. Col. Norman Murphy and Princess of the Outer Isles Elin Woodger at the banquet



Revelers reveling at the banquet

Windsong Band that provided splendid music for dancing. We were also entertained by a spectacular fireworks display (a happy coincidence) that we viewed with ease from our eyrie atop the Warwick Park Plaza. The local newspaper described the display with typical Texas modesty as “the largest combined use of music, fireworks, lasers, and lighting ever held anywhere in the world.” We were suitably awed.

And, of course, the revelers found many ways to keep themselves entertained. Marilyn MacGregor reported that she witnessed one admiring Plummie approach Norman Murphy with a request to sign his breadroll. This Norman graciously did, and the ecstatic fan went off saying that he intended to have the roll shellacked. We don’t know whether the request was due to Norman’s excellent talk that afternoon or his appearance that evening. He was resplendent (there’s no other word) in his British army officer’s “dining kit,” and even after years of retirement he fitted quite easily into the slender uniform.

The highlight of the evening, however, had to be the Blandings Castle reading of “The Story of William.” Fortunately, some enterprising souls managed to get the microphones fixed in good time, thus making this traditional event possible and sending a sigh of relief throughout those who had been eagerly anticipating it (it wouldn’t be a convention without a reading from the denizens of Blandings, after all). In light of Dan Cohen’s talk in the afternoon, not to mention the soused condition of some members of the audience, the Blandings choice of story was entirely à propos — and, as it turned out, beautifully delivered. It was hilarious, and the Blandings readers were cheered for their splendid rendering of a truly splendid story.

All too soon the evening drew to a close, although this did not stop many revelers from continuing the celebrations into the wee hours down in the bar and elsewhere. There were reports that Gussie Fink-Nottle went searching for newts in the fountain on the rotary near the hotel, and those reports appear to be backed up by photographic evidence that can be found on the web site (see below).

SUNDAY morning brought the traditional farewell breakfast, which, unfortunately, many of us had to miss because of early departures. Nevertheless, the room was filled to the brim with hungry, chattering Plummiess, many of them with morning heads in desperate need of a Jeeves restorative. They settled for a very full (and delicious) board of eggs, meats, and other goodies. Auntie passed around the room, gathering comments, and she is happy to report that she heard many superlatives, and “marvelous,” “splendid,” and “outstanding” were repeated time and again. Particular praise was lavished on the Drone Rangers for the magnificent job they had done in providing such a variety of events, including the marathon of Wodehouse films on Friday. Many bravos go out to Toni and Bill Rudersdorf and all their co-perpetrators for a job that was more than well done; it was nothing short of superb.

Then, all too soon, it was time to say goodbye, as more and more travelers left to return to their homes, there to languish for two years until they can come out again for the 2001 convention in Philadelphia. But a dozen of us stayed on in Houston and gathered for a final, quiet dinner Sunday night. (Well, all right, it was not too quiet, given the level of merry-making that went on, including a number of Flanders & Swan songs.) We mention this dinner because these final revelers took care of the one lack in the previous night’s banquet. With all due respect, toasts were offered to the Queen Mother, to the Cazalet family, and to the primary reason we were all there: our beloved P.G. Wodehouse — whose life and works draw us together every two years into a celebration of all that is joyful in this world. And what could be better than that?



For more reports of the convention and additional pictures, be sure to visit our web site at [www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org) and the UK society’s website at [www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse/](http://www.eclipse.co.uk/wodehouse/).

Photo credits: All photographs used in this story were taken by Jan Wilson Kaufman, our staff photographer.



# CONVENTION VOLUNTEERS

Special thanks to Dr. Marshall McCabe, who funded the Good Gnus Awards.

It takes a team of Plumies to put together a successful convention, as this list of volunteers demonstrates. Note that a mere two-word job description, such as Anne Bianchi's "Cricket organizer," may describe work that stretched over weeks or months. Our gratitude goes to these twenty-nine Drone Rangers for a job so well done!

Sylvia Bernicchi	Registration; singer
Anne Bianchi	Cricket organizer
Bill Brenza	Games
David Cherry	Beer server at cricket match
Jane Cherry	Beer provider for cricket match; registration; singer
Brad Frank	Films; games; registration
Thomas Glidden	Singer
John Hannah	Registration; treasurer
Rebecca Joiner	Book donations
John Lowsley	Games
Beverly Maurice	Locator of band and of San Jacinto re-enactors
Becky Momberg	Singer
Colleen O'Brien	Games; singer
Elaine Ring	Registration
Kenneth Rolston, M.D.	Cricket organizer
Ziri Rolston	Cricket assistant
Gloria Robertson	Registration; banquet place cards
Bill Rudersdorf	Driver to NASA/San Jacinto; program; overall coordinator
Toni Rudersdorf	Registration; banquet place cards; program; musician; etc.
Toni and Bill Rudersdorf	Wine donation for cricket match
Carl Schleicher	Singer
Stu Shiffman	Convention '99 webmaster
Mike Skupin	Composer and director of music; musician
Marjorie Thompson	Books and memorabilia tables; films; registration; singer
Kathy Smith	Singer
Carey Tynan	Singer
Elizabeth Wells	Wine server at cricket match; musician
Wendy Westfaul	Books and memorabilia tables; registration
Shiree Lee Willson	Driver to NASA/San Jacinto



Finally, here they are: Toni and Bill Rudersdorf, Chief Perpetrators of the convention

I don't know if you have ever come across a play of Shakespeare's called *MacBeth*? If you did, you may remember this bird MacBeth bumps off another bird name Banquo and gives a big dinner to celebrate, and picture his embarrassment when about the first of the gay throng to show up is Banquo's ghost, all merry and bright, covered in blood. It gave him a pretty nasty start, Shakespeare does not attempt to conceal.

But it was nothing to the start Bingo got on observing Nanny Byles in his midst. He felt as if he had been lolling in the electric chair at Sing Sing and some practical joker had turned on the juice.

"The Shadow Passes," 1950

# WODEHOUSE AND THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

By Norman Murphy

A talk delivered at the 1999 Wodehouse Society convention in Houston, Texas. Unfortunately I can't reproduce most of the slides Norman used in his talk, but I have indicated their presence in the text that follows. —OM

Ladies and gentlemen:  
This talk was originally to have been about dogs and cats. How Wodehouse knew them in real life and how he used them in his novels. But instead, I'm going to tell you a detective story or, at least, talk you through an investigation which has taken me some fifteen years to complete. It's divided into three parts.

The first part begins with the simple question — where did “Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey” come from? In that short story James Belford tells us that in Wisconsin they call “Poig, Poig, Poig” to call pigs. In Illinois they use “Burp, Burp, Burp,” while in Minnesota, they shout “Peega, Peega, Peega.”

So the next question is, how did Wodehouse know?

Well, I found the answer to that some five or six years ago, in the Wodehouse archive over in England.

I was taking down a box file from a shelf when I saw behind it a piece of paper crumpled up in the corner. Being a nosy devil, I took it out, uncrumpled it, and found it was the back page of a New York magazine, almost certainly *Vanity Fair*, from the mid-1920s. There was no name or date on it but the advertisements were clearly from that period and the typeface was remarkably like that used in the *Vanity Fairs* I have seen.

And I knew it was the back page because each column finished off an article elsewhere in the magazine. And the left-hand column was clearly the end of an article on hog-calling — and there it was. In Wisconsin they call “Poig, Poig, Poig.” In Illinois they use “Burp, Burp, Burp,” while in Minnesota, they shout “Peega, Peega, Peega,” and all the rest of it. And across the page, Wodehouse had written in firm black ink: “Good. I can use this.”

Now, the next question is, what was an article on hog-calling doing in *Vanity Fair* anyway? It was a smart, sophisticated New York magazine and I do not recall ever hearing of Mrs Vanderbilt or Dorothy Parker and their pals practicing their hog-calling down Fifth Avenue. So why the sudden interest?

I believe the answer lies in the man whose name I looked for very hard on that piece of paper but I couldn't find

anywhere. It was a name we all know, and which had always struck me as having the ring of fact rather than fiction. The man in “Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey” who taught James Belford the master word to call hogs:

“...Fred Patzel, the hog-calling champion of the Western States. What a man! I've known him to bring pork chops leaping from their plates.”

Remember him now?

Over the next three years or so, I discovered four things about this chap: His name was indeed Fred Patzel; he was a champion hog-caller; his call could be heard three miles away; and his call was “Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey” without the word “Pig” at the beginning.

And there the matter rested for another couple of years till I came across my notes again and realised I still had a lot to find out. Now, we don't have hog-calling in Britain so I had to find out the rest of the story the hard way. And the hard way meant writing off to various States across America asking about hog-calling in general and Fred Patzel in particular.

As you can imagine, I heard nothing at all for a long time. But I persevered and eventually the Nebraska State Tourist Board passed me down the line to Fred Patzel's home town, Madison, Nebraska. And they gave me the information I was looking for. I don't know if Madison is the hog-calling capital of America, but in any event, they have a festival every year, on the first weekend in June, with the splendid title of The Day of Swine and Roses!

And this is when they hold their famous hog-calling competition — as well as a husband-calling and wife-calling competition. There is clearly more to this than I thought, because the Madison people tell me that hog-calling is judged on

honesty and sincerity, volume, clarity, harmony, heart appeal, intellectual appeal, stomach appeal, and general appeal!

Now, Fred was a farm-labourer up in Madison and seems to have won the hog-calling competition regularly in the 1920s and nobody took much notice—apart from the hogs, I suppose—till 1926 when something happened. There are two versions of the story and I'll tell you my favourite first.

In that year, Fred won yet again and was presumably standing there looking modest and saying that it was nothing really, when he got a message to go along and be interviewed at the local radio station. As you will all appreciate, this was big stuff in the 1920s. No television, no talkies; everybody listened to the radio. So, no doubt highly flattered, Fred went along and probably told them what his favourite breakfast food was, what good books he'd read recently, and all the rest of it. And then the interviewer made his BIG mistake. He asked Fred to give his call on air. And Fred did so—and blew every valve ["tube" in American] in the control room, and the station went off the air till the engineers could come in and repair the damage!

The other, duller version is that in 1926 Fred won the first (?) hog-calling championship of America, getting himself a gold-medal and \$700 by doing so. He then went on tour round America for some years and it wasn't till 1933 that he put radio station WJAG Norfolk off the air when the producer wanted to add a little atmosphere to the feed market report. Whichever story is correct, he DID put a station off the air.

Perhaps someone here today can look up that old *Vanity Fair* and see which version is correct. But either version, I believe, was sufficient to give *Vanity Fair* the idea for the article, which in its turn gave Wodehouse the basis of that splendid short story.

What happened to Fred Patzel afterwards I don't know. His name is still known in Madison but not for his hog-calling. I said just now that Fred was a farm-labourer. He was also the local ditch-digger and gravedigger, and was very good at it. And it is for that that his name is kindly remembered up there in Nebraska:

No sewer ever ran backward if he dug a ditch; no water line ever had the tiniest kink. Families were consoled with the thought that their dear ones lay straight, level, and true in their perfectly sculptured graves.

The second part of my talk begins with the question— if the Empress of Blandings was, well, conceived if you like, in "Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey" by way of Fred Patzel and *Vanity Fair*, when and how did she become the staple element of life at Blandings, the centre of every Blandings

Castle story?

The "when" is easy—that's *Summer Lightning*, or as you call it, *Fish Preferred*, which first came out in July 1929. The "how" is much more complicated.

Now, "Pig-hoo-o-o-ey" was first published in July 1927 but there is a letter to Townend from Wodehouse, written, I recall, in late 1926, in which Wodehouse says he is trying to work out a new full-length Blandings novel—the one we now know as *Fish Preferred*. It is the third Blandings novel but *it is a very significant book in Wodehouse's career*. As he said to Townend, the first two Blandings novels, *Something Fresh* and *Leave It to Psmith*, had dealt with the adventures of outsiders visiting the castle. This time, he wanted to write a novel based on the Threepwood family themselves—and he found it difficult. Very difficult. In fact, he seems to have become completely stuck.

He grumbled about it in another letter to Townend in Spring 1927 and again later in 1927, though he did have other things on his mind. It was on July 27th 1927 that he wrote:

I'm sweating blood over *Money For Nothing*, and have just finished 53,000 words of it. Meanwhile, I have to anglicize *Oh, Kay* by August 9th, attend rehearsals, adapt a French play, write a new musical comedy and do the rest of *Money for Nothing*, as far as I can see, by about September 1st. It'll all help to pass the time.

And then, at last, in the summer of 1928, he reckoned he had *Fish Preferred* the way he wanted it, though he had to re-write the first 30,000 words four times over.

Now, what does *Fish Preferred* do? It sets the standard for every Blandings Castle novel for the next forty-five years. From *Fish Preferred* onwards, we know that the Empress will be the calm centre of the action. She is the eye of the storm. No matter what impostors, burglars, or con men get up to, no matter what Lord Emsworth's sisters may threaten, the Empress is always there.

From *Fish Preferred* onwards, we know that whoever controls the pig, controls Lord Emsworth's cheque book. From *Fish Preferred* onwards, Pigs Mean Power! So the obvious question is—where did this idea come from? What put Lord Emsworth's fixation with the Empress into Wodehouse's head?

As always, we have to ask, where was Wodehouse living? Whom was he meeting when he carved out the first full-length Empress of Blandings plot?

[*Slide of Hunstanton Hall, a Stately Home, seen across a small lake. See page 13.*]

This gracious building is Hunstanton Hall in Norfolk,

the home of the LeStrange family from 1137 to 1954. It is an important Wodehouse location, as important as Peacehaven down in Valley Fields. This is the house in Norfolk with the moat running round it, which as you can see, and as Wodehouse told us in at least two stories, was eventually widened on this side to make the decorative lake before you.

And to those of you who have heard this before—don't go away. Like the Empress, there is a twist in the tail.

It is the home of Bingo Little in "Jeeves and the Old School Chum" in which Bertie and Jeeves drove thirty miles to the "Lakenham" Point to Point races. In real life, it is thirty miles to Fakenham Point to Point races.

This is the home of Bobby Wickham in "Mr Potter Takes A Rest Cure." And the punt in which Mr Potter used to rest is based on the punt Wodehouse loved to write in, moored just under the wall over there.

This is the home of Aunt Agatha in "Jeeves and The Impending Doom," and the Octagon, the small building where Bertie and the Cabinet Minister took refuge from the angry swan, is real enough. It is on a small island 400 yards up to the right, exactly as Wodehouse described.

And if you have read *Money for Nothing*, you know all there is to know about Hunstanton Hall because Wodehouse set that story here and then had to spend the first page of the book shifting the whole place 150 miles to the west to try and disguise it.

Now, we can describe Lord Emsworth as an unmarried—well, a widower, but you know what I mean—landowner with a gracious Stately Home and an obsession with breeding a prize animal.

And who was the owner of Hunstanton Hall when Wodehouse stayed there in the 1920s? It was Charles LeStrange, an unmarried landowner with a gracious Stately Home and an obsession with breeding a prize animal. In his case, it was Jersey cows and I think it no coincidence at all that Charles LeStrange's best animal, Glenny II, won the silver medal at the Norfolk County Show in 1929, the East of England championship the following year, and went on to further glory by winning the Blythwood Bowl in the national championships the year after that.

With a lead like that, it was with me the work of an instant to identify the Empress with Charles LeStrange's prize cow. And I boasted of my discovery for years. But last year, I began to have doubts.

You know what doubts are like. They grow, they fester, and then four factors suddenly came together. The first two may seem a little odd but you'll see their importance in a moment.

The first factor is that in the 1920s, Wodehouse had got into a fixed routine. He spent each morning at his

type-writer, took long walks in the afternoon, four, six, eight miles, and then a couple of hours in the evening back on his typewriter or reading a novel. And he did not like that routine being disturbed. If he couldn't get his afternoon walk, he used to get cross and tetchy.

The second factor is that, although he liked Charles LeStrange and loved staying at Hunstanton, he hated the social life and grumbled about it in letters to Bill Townend. The County insisted on making afternoon calls, all anxious to meet the famous Mr Wodehouse, and the famous Mr Wodehouse hated being met. He wanted to spend his mornings typing in the punt and his afternoons in a good long walk. And if the County arrived, he couldn't escape.

The third factor is Wodehouse's anxiety over detail. He was incredibly sensitive about getting his facts right. In his late 80s, he drove fifty miles across Long Island to talk to a jeweller about false and real pearls. He described dogs and cats so well, their emotions, their hopes, and dreams, because he owned dogs and cats all his adult life and knew them from soup to nuts.

And just think how much we know about the Empress. We know what she looks like, the mild questioning expression on her face—a feature unique to Berkshires I believe—the noise she makes when she cats, the rustle as she moves through the straw of her sty. Wodehouse would never dream of writing that from his imagination. *There had to be a real pig somewhere.*

The fourth factor is the clincher so far as I am concerned. In the January 1929 edition of the *Strand* magazine is an article by Leonora Wodehouse on her step-father. Amongst other information, she tells how he hates meeting people, has a strict routine of work in the morning, how he hates to miss his long afternoon walks, and then she says:

Sometimes I think of him as being amazingly faithful—I mean about places and things. An old pigsty, if he once knew the pig that lived there, is Heaven to him always...

That is a remarkable thing to say. Not a favourite bench at a cricket ground, not a favourite seat at a Rugger pitch, not a favourite armchair in a club. But a pigsty!

And the point I want to emphasise is that the *Strand* published that in January 1929, which meant Leonora must have written it some time in 1928, long before *Fish Preferred* was published. And remember the Empress had only made one appearance, in the short story "Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey" in a magazine two years before.

Nowadays, we all associate Lord Emsworth with pigs, but until *Fish Preferred* in January 1929 his enthusiasms



included pumpkins, star-gazing, yew alleys, roses, and Jersey cows. Only a few enthusiasts would have picked up the allusion, and most people must have thought what an odd thing it was for Leonora to say.

So there was a pig and pigsty somewhere. But where ?

Let us now, in the finest tradition of detective stories, reconstruct the crime.

It is lunchtime at Hunstanton Hall in the Spring of 1928 and, in the dining room, Charles LeStrange has just announced to the assembled house-party that various neighbouring families are calling that afternoon. Ethel and Leonora make gratified noises and wonder what to wear.

Wodehouse grunts. He has spent a long morning working and realises that if he wants any exercise at all, he has to escape. He has to perform the "Wodehouse glide" his family spoke of so often, his trick of sliding out of a room before anybody noticed.

So what does he do? Well, I can tell you. He left the dining room, grabbed his cap, made sure he had his pipe, tobacco, and matches, and then—concentrate on that slide. He came out of those French windows, turned to his right, crossed the moat on the left hand side by the little bridge, and then came down to this left-hand corner of the lake, crossed over by the bridge at the end, turned left again and—*came straight to the spot where I took this photograph.*

The reason I can say this so confidently is because I've seen the ground. If I had used a wide-angle lens, you

would see that the house stands in open, rolling parkland. The drive comes in from the left and another road goes out to the right. Apart from a few oak trees scattered about, you can see for about half a mile in every direction.

But on this side of the lake, things are different. A belt of trees and shrubs runs all the way down this side of the lake. Behind that belt of trees is a high brick wall protecting the large kitchen garden.

So, from the house, looking over the lake, all you can see are trees, shrubs, and parts of the high wall. Just where I took this picture, the path bends to the left slightly and as soon as Wodehouse had passed this spot, he was out of sight of the house. He could then wander up and down the kitchen garden or walk on through the woods to the village a mile or so away.

So, just past this spot, hidden from the house, he probably paused, lit his pipe and relaxed. And he did so in the angle of the kitchen garden wall and, right beside him in that angle, was . . . Well, let's have a look at what's there today.

*[Slide of crumbling brick wall.]*

This sad crumbling piece of brickwork is all that remained in 1986 of the Hunstanton Hall kitchen garden pig-sty!

And, if you think that Wodehouse could walk past a pig-sty without making friends with the pig, then you don't know much about P.G. Wodehouse.

Of course, even though I believed this was THE pig-sty, the one Leonora referred to, there are still plenty of questions. Remember, I'm talking of more than seventy years ago. Was this the only pigsty at Hunstanton? Were there several pigs in here or only one? If there was only one, what sort of pig was it? Was it an ordinary white pig or a less common black pig ?

Well, earlier this year, I managed to make contact with an elderly gentleman, Mr Mott. His father was Charles LeStrange's chauffeur and Mr Mott grew up at the Hall in the 1920s. He remembers Wodehouse well; he once got a bag of sweets from him at Christmas.

He remembers going for rides in the punt on the lake



Hunstanton Hall, Norfolk. This is the slide Norman Murphy showed at the convention.

with his father. He remembers the punt being re-painted and having the name "Plum" put on it, because Wodehouse used it so often. He remembers this pig-sty and confirms it was the only one at Hunstanton. He confirms there was only one pig in it that used to be fed with the milk from the Jersey cows and the vegetables from the kitchen garden.

And then I asked the last, vital question. Was it an ordinary white pig or was it a black pig?

It was a BLACK pig.

And then I got the reward that comes to all clean-living, pipe-smoking detectives. Over the phone, I heard Mr Mott say the marvellous words:

"I've got a photograph of the pig somewhere."

It was only about two inches by three inches, taken over seventy years ago by Mr Mott as a small boy, but my son Tim has done the best he can with it, and I should have a fanfare of trumpets sounding now, or a heavenly choir, but I haven't. So I shall just show, with IMMENSE satisfaction and a positively sinful degree of pride [the following picture]:



Mr Mott's black pig at Hunstanton Hall

Not a particularly fat pig; but it doesn't have to be. Charles LeStrange, obsessed with his Jersey cow winning the County Show, was not concerned with that element. What I had spent all that time looking for was a black pig at the right place at the right time.

Now I do not claim this was the only pig Wodehouse knew in his long life. But I do know Wodehouses's movements at an average of every ten or twelve days from 1920 to 1930, and I can tell you that there was not a pig-sty at his houses in London, at his flat in New York, or at the

house in Long Island. And I also know that Wodehouse visited only two other country houses in this period and then only for four or five days.

Whereas he stayed here at Hunstanton regularly from 1924 onwards, including a two month stay in 1926, another couple of months in 1927, and another month or so in 1928. Exactly when he was writing "Pig-hoo-o-o-cy" and *Fish Preferred*. This is a pig, a black pig, he would have come to know very well.

If ever there was a pig in the whole wide world that gave Wodehouse the inspiration for the Empress of Blandings—and there had to be a pig somewhere and Leonora confirmed it—then THIS pig is THAT pig!

My third and last section begins with the question: When *Fish Preferred* did at last come out in 1929, why was it that the English newspapers and magazines that reviewed it, made so little mention of Lord Emsworth's obsession with his pig? And the answer is that, in England in 1929, there was nothing particularly unusual about it. Now, I raise this point deliberately because there are still people who find it hard to believe that Wodehouse's England ever existed. Well, it did. He dramatised it, he made it funny. But it was there to be dramatised. It was there to be made funny.

There were people all over England just as obsessed as Lord Emsworth was. Charles LeStrange with his mania for his prize Jersey cow was just one among hundreds of landowners up and down the country, all intent on growing a bigger pumpkin, a better rose, breeding a fatter pig or a larger sheep.

And if we ask why so many landed gentry spent their time in pursuits more properly the job of their pigmen, cowmen or gardeners when they could have been out hunting, shooting, or evicting their tenants, then we have to go back to the 1760s, to two men, Thomas Coke and Charles Townshend.

These two chaps were Norfolk landowners, and at what seems to have been about the same time, they must have looked out at their rolling acres—probably in the rain—and said to themselves: "I wonder if these acres could do something more than just roll?" And they started farming scientifically. Draining the land, rotating the crops, selecting better strains of grass seed and corn seed, selectively breeding cows, pigs, sheep and all the rest of it.

They started making money—a lot of money—and, much more important, their tenant farmers started making money too. And other landowners came along and had a look and said "Gadzooks!" or "Cor luvva duck!"—whatever landowners said in those days—and they started having a crack at it. And before you could say "English Eighteenth Century Agricultural Revolution," EVERY-

BODY was coining it.

Which meant by 1810, we had some pretty weird animals wandering about the place. There was the Durham Ox which weighed two or three tons, and the poor old thing died because its legs couldn't take the weight any more. There was the Yorkshire Hog which was twice as big as any other pig in the country, and up in Leicestershire, the new miracle sheep showed it was at last possible to provide good meat and good wool from the same animal.

And in 1820, we saw the first of the County Agricultural Shows. Despite all the pious guff they give you about being founded to encourage scientific and farming skills among the rural community, I recently learned that they were really started for the reason we all suspected—to settle arguments amongst landowners as to who had the biggest pumpkin, the fattest pig, the best cow and all the rest of it. The shows became the tradition throughout the 19th century and lasted up to 1939.

You might have been Prime Minister, achieved immortal fame winning chunks of the British Empire, but if you wanted to hold your head up amongst your fellow landowners, you devoted your time to raising a prize daffodil/rose/pumpkin/pig or whatever. Admittedly, your pigman, cowman, or gardener did all the work, but you made his life a misery and took the credit. And naturally you spent much of your time trying to steal someone else's gardener or pigman if they were better than yours.

The custom was badly hit by the 1914 War and I suppose the last War killed it off. Though the tradition is not quite dead. The coalminers and steel workers in the North East of England still have tremendous competitions for growing giant leeks and onions. And I am PROUD AND HAPPY to inform you that barefaced cheating and skulduggery of the WORST sort still continue unabated. Every year there are reports in the Press of buckets of herbicide being thrown over garden fences, of prize plants being attacked with spades; and it is not unknown for anxious growers to spend the ten days before a competition sleeping in a tent beside their prize vegetable.

And the pig was at the centre of all this activity, because a pig can turn waste vegetables into good meat faster and more cheaply than any other animal. The Black Berkshire, by the way, was reckoned to be the best of the lot in this respect. And of course, you could raise a pig as easily in the back yard of a small cottage as you could in a palatial stately home.

But it mustn't be forgotten that pigs also make very good pets. In the 1870s the Reverend Robert Hawker, whose hymns I'm sure you all know, walked to his church every morning accompanied by his three cats, two dogs, and his pet pig. The animals all sat quietly at the back of

the church while he read the Morning Service and then walked in procession back to the rectory with him afterwards.

In America, in the 1890s, when Newport, Rhode Island really WAS Newport, Rhode Island, one of the sights of the Newport season was to see one great lady, a Vanderbilt I think it was, going for her afternoon drive in her carriage with her pet pig seated beside her on a blue cushion.

And recently the Duchess of Devonshire wrote that her grandmother also used to take her pet pig to church. And before I go any further, a quick plug for the Duchess of Devonshire. I have never met the lady, but I have a soft spot for any busy duchess who in response to queries about her grandmother's pig from a complete stranger—that's me—replies by return of post and in her own hand.

As some of you will know, she is one of the famous or notorious Mitford sisters who caused so much comment in the 1930s. The eldest was Nancy Mitford the novelist; two became ardent Fascists; one became a Communist; one was perfectly normal; and the youngest, Deborah, when she was eight years old, told her family that when she grew up she was going to marry a duke and become a duchess. And she did and she is.

Well, actually, she married the younger son but never mind. She is about the best duchess we have around at the moment and her stately home, Chatsworth, is as busy and is running as well as it was a century ago.

And those of you interested in such things will need no reminding that she is connected to the highest in the land. Your land—not my land! She is related by marriage not just to the Kennedy family, but to Fred Astaire as well.

The next question to ask is, where stands the pig today, so far as the old aristocracy is concerned? And the answer is, quite well, even in these days of the Welfare State and death duties. In 1994, *Country Life* magazine had an article on "The Stateliest Pigs in Britain." Another member of the Society, Francine Kitts, picked it up and wrote a revue of it for *Plum Lines*, but I have the advantage of the screen, so I'll show you some pictures from it.

[Slide of a pig.]

This is Lucy, a Tamworth, the property of the Phillipses of Kentwell Hall in Suffolk. Mrs Phillips likes talking to her and believes that Lucy talks back in "a series of contented grunts, a somewhat soporific noise, in between a snuffle and a clearing of the throat."

[Slide of another pig.]

This fine fellow is Glascote Dictator XVIII of Bunkers Hill, Pillerton Hersey, Warwickshire, the property of Iain Whitney. *Country Life* magazine pointed out that, unlike most animals, pigs enjoy hard alcohol. Indeed, in studies

into alcoholism, apparently some pigs drank a quart of vodka a day! But then, we all knew that from Wodehouse anyway, didn't we? This chap apparently prefers the odd drop of Guinness and it didn't do him any harm because he became national champion in 1994.

[Slide of another pig.]

Many of you will have heard of the photographer, Lord Lichfield, who took this slide. He lives at Shugborough Hall where they have a record of pigs kept back to 1800, which isn't really that surprising since he is descended from the Coke of Norfolk whom I mentioned just now. This is his pig, Hamlet, a Tamworth, who has learned to show off by standing up on his hind legs to greet visitors to his sty.

Now, while all these pictures show that the spirit of Lord Emsworth lives on, they lack a certain something.

Cast your mind back to all those pictures we have seen of proud animal owners in the 18th century. They're roughly all the same. There's a man dressed like George Washington, tricorne hat, black tail-coat, breeches, and buckled shoes. He's standing there, looking incredibly smug, holding a lead with a dog, or a horse, or a cow, or a pig at the end of it. And always, always, in the background, is his Stately Home.

You know the sort of thing: "Sir John Hawkhurst and his racehorse Eclipse at Stanborough Castle," or "The Earl of Middlewick and his fox-hound Ponto at Dreever Castle."

Remember them now?

Well, one lady at least knows how to be photographed properly with her pig, in the old tradition. May I present, as my last picture, the Duchess of Devonshire, her pig Primrose with, of course, her Stately Home behind her.

[Slide of Duchess petting pig, with Stately Home in distance.]

Just think how Lord Emsworth would have envied this picture. Just think how Wodehouse would have enjoyed it. I reckon this picture has everything.

Fashion historians amongst you will note the hard-wearing tweed skirt "as worn" by a hard-working Duchess. And when I say hard-wearing, I mean hard-wearing. That skirt will do fifty years as a skirt and then do another fifty years as a dog blanket!

But there was something about this picture that puzzled me. So, as always, when I didn't know what I was trying to say or how I should say it, I went to ask [my wife] Charlotte.

And, as always, she knew exactly what I was trying to say and how I should say it. And it is with her words I shall end my talk. Because they are also a tribute to the good old aristocracy whose eccentricities in fact and in fiction have given us all so much pleasure over the years.

Look at the way the Duchess is patting that pig. How could I describe that weird combination of ducal condescension and affection for a prized family pet? How could I put that into words? Charlotte saw it immediately.

"Oh, that's easy. That," she said, "is real, hands-on duchessing!"



My atlas tells me that Madison, Nebraska, is a small town of 2,135 people in the east-central part of the state. Two members of our society, Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall, live in Lincoln, Nebraska, not too far from Madison. They have accepted a commission from Norman to try to find out what happened to Fred Patzel in his later life. Maybe they can even find out which of those radio stories is true. We await their report with breathless anticipation.

—OM

## UPDATE ON WODEHOUSE PLAYHOUSE VIDEOS

As we have reported in recent *Plum Lines*, our society and others are trying to persuade the BBC to release commercial videotapes of the excellent 1970s series entitled *Wodehouse Playhouse*. Many of us think it's the best Wodehouse ever to appear on television or film. Individuals have written to the BBC, and now **Tony Ring** reports that The International Wodehouse Association, a coordinating committee of representatives from six national societies, recently submitted a petition to the BBC urging the release of the tapes. A BBC executive replied, in part, as follows:

The release on video of items from the BBC archive can be a difficult matter. In many cases the BBC did not secure video rights and these rights have to be obtained from all of the talent involved in a production with appropriate rights payments made or agreed. Accordingly, there is a quite high threshold sales level below which it is normally not economically viable for us to issue a video on commercial release...[We] will respond to you in due course.

Keep those letters headed for the BBC! Specifically, point them toward:

Ms Laura Palmer  
BBC Worldwide Americas  
747 3rd Avenue  
New York NY 10017



## A FEW QUICK ONES

**Murray Wilson** writes: "I was very interested, but not surprised, to learn that Jack Stewart had found *Types of Ethical Theory* to be a genuine work on the subject... Perhaps the next discovery may be the three volumes of *Percy's Promise*. Did Plum write the quotes from *Percy's Promise* in Chapter 15 of *Spring Fever*, or did he take them from a three-volume original published in 1869? Maybe Mr. Stewart can find it, too. Just think how grand it would look on his mantelpiece along with *Types of Ethical Theory*, with two statuettes of The Infant Samuel at Prayer as bookends."

**Beth Carroll** found yet another mention of Plum in a work of fiction, this one on page 111 of *Village Diary* by "Miss Read": "As P.G. Wodehouse truly says of the tap-room, 'The rich smell of mixed liquors, the gay clamour of carefree men arguing about the weather, the Government, the Royal Family, greyhound racing, the tax on beer, pugilism, religion and the price of bananas—These things are medicine to the bruised soul.'" Beth goes on to ask: "Where is this from? Is this Wodehouse?" The quote has no familiar ring to it at all. Is there a reader out there who can identify the source?

A source close to Auntie has reported that among the exhibits now showing at the Castellani Museum in Niagara University (Niagara, New York) is a painting by an artist named Stephen Campbell. The title of this oeuvre? "Reading P.G. Wodehouse in a Treehouse." It would be interesting to know which book is being read in that treehouse; perhaps somebody in the area can go take a look and report back to *Plum Lines*.

And over in England, legislators are getting into the proper spirit by allowing weddings to be conducted at Paddington Station, according to **Helen Murphy**, who notes that the weddings would be held "in the room previously kept for Queen Victoria's use. There was a fuss made because railway stations are not considered romantic. What nonsense. Journeys end in lovers' meetings, every wise man's son doth know. And of all the railway stations in the world (apart from Cartmel, in Cumbria, where *Brief Encounter* was filmed), where could be more romantic than the station whence all and sundry departed to impost, to paint/kidnap pigs, to lurk at the Emsworth Arms, and *always* to end up with The Girl at Blandings."

Most readers write to tell us of references to Plum that they've seen in articles or novels, but **Jim DeFilippi** went one better, noting that "As a novelist and proud member of

TWS, I pleased myself by slipping a Plum reference into my latest book, *Duck Alley* (The Permanent Press, 1999). On page 174, the narrator says, 'I considered P G Wodehouse to be the best of all writers—not just the funniest, but the best. A rumor had spread that accused him of collaborating with the Nazis in World War II. The book (*Wodehouse at War*) cleared up the story, got to the truth, completely exonerated him. Each time I finished reading it, I was left with a good, clean feeling, like the one I'd get after dropping off a load of garbage at the dump.' Since *Duck Alley* is the story of a good man wrongly accused, the reference fit perfectly. Maybe I should have called the book *Newt Alley*."

*AD and OM*

Aunt Dahlia and The Oldest Member

## LANGUISHING LYRICS LONGED FOR

By Barry Day

Barry is the editor and annotator of the 1998 book *Noel Coward: The Complete Lyrics*. His next book, described below, is of interest to all Plummies, and anybody who can help will surely be praised to the heavens. —AD

Even many fans who have read every word of Plum's fiction over and over again remain unaware of the extent to which he was enjoying a totally separate career as librettist and lyricist on the Broadway and West End stages. From 1905 until the mid-1930s, most often in collaboration with Guy Bolton, he was turning out shows that shaped the future of popular musical theatre on both sides of the Atlantic.

With the assistance of Tony Ring, I am now collecting and placing in its historical context his work as a lyricist for a book, *Lyrics of P G Wodehouse*. We are currently trawling libraries and personal collections for relevant material. While we have turned up most of the known published material, in some cases dating back almost a century, there are tantalizing references to songs cut from shows, and Plum himself makes frequent reference to the fact that he kept his hand in as a lyricist until the end of his life.

If any *Plum Lines* reader has any material (letters, lyrics, sheet music, libretti, notes, programmes, posters, photos), whether original or copies, which they believe could be of interest, Tony or I would love to hear from you.

# L'AFFAIRE MARTINEAU

By Elin Woodger

Alas, poor Jack Stewart—and alack for your *Plum Lines* editors! We were all a-twitter when we published Jack's marvelous article in our last issue, announcing the discovery of what we thought had heretofore been an undiscovered bit of Wodehousian trivia—to wit, the actual existence of *Types of Ethical Theory*, the book with the mind-numbing style quoted by Bertie in "Jeeves Takes Charge." This book, as you might recall, had been penned by one James Martineau, D.D., S.T.D., D.C.I., L.L.D., whose capacity for dense, nearly unfathomable prose may be unequalled in the history of writing.

That Martineau and his book actually existed came as news to your editors—and to a great many readers, as well, who commended us and Jack Stewart on what we thought was a dashed exciting announcement. But a few quick-witted individuals wasted no time in blotting out our excitement with the news that, in fact, *Types of Ethical Theory* had long since been discovered by the renowned Wodehouse scholar Richard Osborne, who revealed the book's existence in a talk he gave at London's Lyttelton Theatre on April 8, 1982:

A man who shall be nameless because, alas, I have lost his letter, has discovered the author of *Types of Ethical Theory*....I am happy to report that the author is, or was, a Dr. James Martineau, 1805-1900, referred to in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as a 'unitarian divine,' and author of many philosophic books and treatises, including one long essay on Spinoza, which I expect Jeeves has read....

It was James Hogg who supplied this quote to us, and according to John Fletcher and John Graham, it can be found in a publica-

tion entitled *Three Talks and a Few Words at a Festive Occasion in 1982* (published 1983 by James Heinemann in a printing of only 500 copies, some of which may be available through Charles Gould). John G. also informs us that Mr. Osborne reprinted his lecture in his 1991 book, *After Hours* (also published by Heineman). In addition, in his 1993 catalogue, Barry Phelps gave credit to his friend and fellow bibliophile, Vic Warren, for discovering Martineau in a Tunbridge Wells bookshop. Whether Mr. Warren was also Mr. Osborne's source is not certain.

Well, of course, we were abashed to learn that our monumental discovery was not so monumental, after all; but as John Graham noted in a consoling e-mail, "Some others (like me) forgot that they had known about Martineau, so Jack Stewart's article in *Plum Lines* remains (to my mind) a welcome addition to Wodehouse scholarship." John Fletcher agreed, noting that Mr. Stewart's article "was breaking new ground to a large new audience." All of which, of course, helps as we lick our wounds.

John G. furthermore wasted no time in finding a copy of the book for sale via the Internet (as several others did, apparently), and upon obtaining it, searched long and hard (well, about 30 minutes) until he found the passage that Jack Stewart had given up looking for ("The postulate or common understanding involved in speech ...etc."). For those who were wondering, it can be found on page 260 of the third edition.

Yes, that's right—the *third edition*. Amazing but true—such was the success of this edifying volume that the publisher saw fit to publish it at least three times! And now we must give a respectful nod to John Fletcher, who provided a mound of information regarding Martineau and his grand opus. Wrote John F:

I do not know yet with certainty how many editions of *Types of Ethical Theory* there were; but I have photocopies of the title pages of the two volumes of first (1885), second (1886), and third editions (1901). The second and third editions are called 'revised' editions but whether this means there were

## Three Talks and a Few Words at a Festive Occasion

Talks by

RICHARD USBORNE

on Thursday, 8 April 1982

WILLIAM DOUGLAS-HOME

on Tuesday, 13 April 1982

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

on Wednesday, 28 April 1982 at the

Lyttelton Theatre

and an address given by

ANGUS MACINTYRE

on Tuesday, 6 April 1982 at

Strand House

LONDON

1983

two more editions, second and third unrevised editions, or whether he just revised the first edition for the second revised edition and then revised that for the third revised edition, I am not sure. They are just as your printed title page except that they all omit 'New York' and 'Macmillan & Co.'

John has provided page numbers in all three editions for the quotes from "Jeeves Takes Charge," and for those who would like these references, please apply to the editors. But that's not all. John has also informed us of the existence of a Martineau Society (web site address: [www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/martineausoc.htm](http://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/martineausoc.htm)). Yes, such is the devoted following of the good doctor that he actually has his own Society, which is headed by the Rev. Dr. Jacob Schulman, Chaplain Emeritus and Fellow of Harris Manchester College at Oxford, who now lives in Texas. There's more: John has in hand a flysheet for Dr. Schulman's next book, which is entitled *A Fine Victorian Gentleman: The Life of Charles Wellbeloved*. No, we are not making this up. "I think," wrote John, "James Hogg ought to write a companion volume, *A Fine Edwardian Pig-man: The Life of George Cyril Wellbeloved*. But he may not have enough time." (James, as most of us know, wrote *Lord Emsworth's Annotated Whiffle: The Care of the Pig*, in 1991.)

Be that as it may, it remains true that a perusal of Dr. Martineau's grand opus reveals a labyrinth of prose that is, for the most part, incomprehensible to us lay people. Thus, John asked Mr. Alan Middleton of the Martineau Society if the relevant passages from "Jeeves Takes Charge" could be translated into a form of English understandable to the average Wodehousian. Mr. Middleton in turn applied to Dr. Schulman himself, who obligingly read the passages in Wodehouse, then wrote as follows:

The paragraph, "The postulate or common understanding involved in speech is certainly co-extensive, in the obligation it carries, with the social organism of which language is the instrument, and the ends of which it is an effort to subserve," interprets roughly as follows:

A conversation has to be understood in terms of who is speaking and the context in which it is made. That is, don't take at face value what the person says but ask, what point is he or she trying to make?

The next one is longer and takes some explanation. Here goes. The paragraph, "Of the two antithetical terms in the Greek philosophy one only was real and self-subsisting; and that one was Ideal Thought as opposed to that which it has to penetrate and mould. The other, corresponding to our Nature, was in itself phenomenal, unreal, without any permanent footing, having no predicates that held true for two moments together; in short, redeemed from negation only by including indwelling realities appearing through," translates roughly

as:

There are two contrasting ideas of reality. The first is that the highest reality is thought, mind, intellect, or spirit. The second is that reality consists of what is known through the senses, the physical world. That is, that is real which can be felt, seen, tasted, weighed, measured, and such; and the logical relations between them. That is what we know as phenomena or happenings. Yet the physical world is only a superficial part of reality and receives its meaning only as we understand it in terms of mind or intellect. In other words, it is not enough to know that this is an apple. How did it get here? What forces of nature caused it to be lying on the ground? How does it fit into some larger scheme? That, the Greeks would say, is necessary to know the true apple. Applying that to a person, one may describe a person superficially in terms of height, skin colour, physique, weight, and body characteristics. At a deeper level we can know a person by the education, employment, religion, hobbies, family, and such. But to know the real person we must understand what drives or motivates him or her: what ideals control his/her life; what goals and aspirations provide the deepest satisfactions. That is the real person, his 'spirit'.

I'm not sure I've simplified it much but I hope it helps some.

Best regards, Frank Schulman.

So there you are—enlightenment at last, and many thanks to Dr. Schulman for his enlightenment!

Thanks also to John Fletcher for following through on this matter like a bloodhound. Like John Graham, he has helped to ease the pain of our embarrassment by noting (in a letter to James Hogg): "True, it was published by Heineman, but we know that does not amount to telling the public. If you consider that the talks were delivered and the booklet printed in England in a limited edition of 500 numbered copies, this is not really 'publication.' It meant I fear that copies went to a few people already mostly in the know. So even if Usborne had added to what Wodehouse had written more than Martineau's name, I don't think he could really complain of being gazumped. And I think that *Plum Lines* has added enough of interest, including photographs of the title page and the page with one of the 'Carry On, Jeeves' quotations, to claim a world scoop."

So, vindicated at the end, we close this chapter of L'Affaire Martineau.

## WHAT? AGAIN?

Incredible though it may seem, the issue of Wodehouse and the Berlin broadcasts has once again risen from the ashes. "I suspect," wrote Francis Wheen in his article of September 22 for *The Guardian*, "that half a century hence this reheated canard will still be served up at regular intervals, the blackened and desiccated carcass disguised with large dollops of orange sauce." And he may very well be right.

What happened to set off the latest round of discussion regarding Wodehouse-as-traitor, reported in newspapers around the world, was the recent release of previously classified MI5 documents concerning the investigation into the Berlin broadcasts and some payments of money that Wodehouse had received following his release from the internment camps. Although these documents revealed little that was not already known, certain reporters leapt on them with glee and proceeded to spew forth a number of articles with headlines such as "Wodehouse Secretly in Pay of Nazis" and claims such as "Writer was paid huge salary by Hitler, says MI5." Thus, for several days in September this year, the papers were filled to the brim with poorly researched articles by writers making unsubstantiated accusations against Plum on the basis of a few facts uncovered in some old files. One article even claimed that Prime Minister Harold Wilson had been "kept in the dark" about Wodehouse's "espionage" activities in order to push through Plum's knighthood, which, it is implied, would never have been granted had all the facts been known (even though they were).

An example of the slanted way in which the controversy was reported is contained in this excerpt from an article in *The Independent* of September 17, 1999: "Wodehouse, who made a series of controversial if jokey radio broadcasts from Berlin in 1941, later excused himself as being naive rather than a collaborator. However, the documents dispel the widely held notion of Wodehouse as vain but harmless. His MI5 file reveals a more sinister character, with extreme right-wing views and even Nazi sympathies, who had also secretly worked for a Berlin film company that produced propaganda...."

"The programmes were regarded as a propaganda coup for the Nazis because they could inspire a sympathetic view of Hitler's regime in America. The author implied that he expected Germany to be triumphant by saying that he thought he would live under the German Reich for many years, if not for ever. When he became aware of the adverse reaction in Britain, Wodehouse wrote to the

Foreign Office, apologising for his 'inexcusable blunder'. But according to evidence gathered in the MI5 files, he spent the next couple of years of the war living comfortably in a fourth floor suite at the Hotel Adlon in Berlin, probably at the Nazi regime's expense.

"Eventually Wodehouse returned to Paris to live at the Hotel Bristol. Although he claimed it was because his wife was upset by the Allied air raids in Germany, it now seems that it was to conduct propaganda work at the behest of the Nazis."

The most damaging revelations to come out of the MI5 files concerned a payment of money that was made to Plum following his arrival in Paris, as well as, presumably, a monthly "salary" from the Nazis (approximately 150 pounds) and four special payments totaling 400,000 French francs (then equivalent to £1,000). Wrote reporter John Coles: "If...the creator of Bertie Wooster and his valet Jeeves had ever returned to Britain, he would have been put on trial for treason."

Needless to say, the amount of invective weighed against Wodehouse as a result of these articles wounded many a devoted Plummie's heart; and, not surprisingly, a number of defenders quickly rose to the fore. Chief among these—in addition, of course, to Norman Murphy and others of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK)—were Iain Sproat, author of *Wodehouse at War*, probably the best analysis of the Berlin brouhaha ever published; and Francis Wheen, a journalist who is also a member of the U.K. Society.

Meanwhile, Tony Ring and others in Great Britain wasted no time in assembling the troops and putting together an intelligent response to the bad press in the form of a letter that was sent to all its members. An edited version of their letter, signed by Tony on behalf of the UK Society's committee, follows; as this will show, in the long run the issue continues to be a "tempest in a teapot" that has been aggravated by poor research on the part of reporters wearing blinders. When the matter is finally laid to rest for eternity remains to be seen. The (edited) letter:

The reports are based on documents recently released by MI5. However, it is essential to bear in mind that to put them into context one must take into account the contents of a number of files of other government departments which have been in the public domain for at least several months. Taken as a whole, the conclusions reached by MI5 and sensationalised by the Press are discredited, both by the contents of these other files and by the findings of the Cussen Report. [Major Cussen interrogated the Wodehouses in Paris within a few days of their liberation and submitted a thorough report on the matter



in September 1944.]

We anticipate that a comprehensive and authoritative article will be written in due course. In the meantime, we hope the following will be of interest:

1. In a manuscript comment on one memo, dated 30 December, 1946, Mr. G C Allchin, Head of the Consular Department at the Foreign Office, wrote: "I think it unlikely that the payments to PGW were in reward for pro-German activities. They are probably advances from his own funds in France or derived from Switzerland or elsewhere. These funds were of course controlled by the German authorities."

2. Mr. G H Wakefield of MI5 spent several months trying to obtain specific information about the four payments made between May and August 1944, presumably to add to the weight of evidence should any prosecution take place. After failing to do so, he wrote on 25 July, 1947 to Mr. Allchin: "I feel fairly confident...that if he were doing anything at all to earn these payments—of which we have no evidence whatsoever—it was not of a very treasonable character." On receiving this letter a member of the Foreign Office staff had added, "I hope that this file is now finally closed," and Mr. Allchin, in his reply to Wakefield, wrote: "It looks as if the file might now be closed, never, let us hope, to be re-opened."

3. On 4 June, 1947, several months after the payments in question were known to all the authorities concerned, another member of the Foreign Office staff had commented, after receiving information from a member of his staff which had been requested by MI5: "I feel bound to observe that it seems to me most regrettable that we should still be pursuing this matter more than two years after the end of the war in Europe. I do not think that anyone would seriously deny that 'L'affaire Wodehouse' was very much a storm in a teacup. It is perfectly plain to any unbiased observer that Mr. Wodehouse made the celebrated broadcasts in all innocence and without any evil intent. He is reported to be of an entirely apolitical cast of mind; much of the furore of course was the result of literary jealousies."

4. Whilst trying to assist Mr. Wakefield with his investigations, the Foreign Office also conducted a search for mentions of Wodehouse in German documents, but Mr. A C Johnston confirmed on 21 July, 1947 that "there is no sign of him in the lists of British broadcasters for the enemy."

Had Wodehouse been engaged in any work of a propaganda nature for which he was receiving remuneration, it is inconceivable that there would have been no evidence whatsoever. The Germans would have promoted his name in any such event, but nothing appeared....

Another point highlighted by the Press....was that, if

he had returned to the UK, Wodehouse "would have been" prosecuted, and some went so far as to imply that this decision arose as the result of the disclosure of the payments. This again is a distortion of what the files actually reveal. The Director of Public Prosecutions had previously advised that there were no grounds on which to proceed, but a letter of 18 December, 1946 to Mr. Wakefield, reporting a conversation with the Director, makes it clear that the Director's view had been influenced by a new interpretation of the law relating to broadcasts on enemy radio. The judge in the William Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) case had ruled that the motive which prompted a broadcast was immaterial. In the light of this new interpretation, the Director now believed that Wodehouse should be brought to trial so that a jury could decide his innocence or guilt in relation to his 1941 broadcasts (which had been light-hearted in content and made to a neutral America). Furthermore, the letter records that NO final decision whether or not to prosecute was taken as Wodehouse was not in the country.

The hope expressed by the Foreign Office that the file could now be finally closed appears to have been fulfilled, in the longer term if not immediately. Unequivocal statements were made on the Government's behalf in 1965 when Plum was considering a visit to this country for family reasons to the effect that the question of a prosecution did not arise, and these were, of course, followed by the grant of his knighthood in 1975.

Detailed points remain to be addressed. The totality of the evidence available supports the Foreign Office view that the payments were probably from his own funds, quite possibly foreign royalties which he had disclosed to Major Cussen in his account of his financial position.

—AD

He was stoutly opposed to the idea of marrying anyone, but if, as happens to the best of us, he ever were compelled to perform the wedding glide, he had always hoped it would be with some lady golf champion who would help him with his putting, and thus, by bringing his handicap down a notch or two, enable him to save something from the wreck.

"Honeysuckle Cottage," 1927

"Last night [this Englishman] was explaining the rules of cricket to this American girl and answering all her questions on the subject, and, as he didn't at any point in the proceedings punch her on the nose, one is entitled to deduce, I consider, that he must be strongly attracted by her."

*Money for Nothing*, 1928

## NEW MEMBERS

## TIE-PROCURER NEEDED

Back in the Spring 1999 issue we announced that gorgeous Drones Club ties in plum, black, and gold could be ordered from Angus McAllister (David McKenzie). Now Angus informs us that he has retired from the procurement of cravats and has returned to gardening and to listening to the complaints and unsound demands of Lord Emsworth. “Unfortunately,” he says, “orders for ties continue to trickle in, demonstrating the good taste of our members as well as their unexcusable tardiness, since the order cut-off date was July.”

Angus is looking for a replacement tie-procurer to manage the acquisition of another batch (the greedy supplier insists on minimum orders of 25 and, of all things, some cash in advance!). The work is gruelling but, of course, satisfying (if unprofitable for the TWS middleperson).

# A MESSAGE FROM THE PREZ

By Elin Woodger

It seems hard to believe that another convention has come and gone, and now it's two long years until the next one. A profound "thank you" goes out to the Drone Rangers for putting together such a smashing good time in Houston this year. The Chapter One folks in Philadelphia will have a hard act to follow, but there is no doubt they, too, will put together a time to remember for all of us who are fortunate enough to attend the 2001 convention.

For those who could not be in Houston, a summary of Society business discussed seems to be in order and therefore follows. I should note that this was presented at the business meeting by my predecessor, Professor Dan Garrison, who, during his tenure as president, represented our interests in the formation of the International Wodehouse Association and signed the Millfleet Charter (see *Plum Lines*, Winter 1998) as an IWA officer. Dan reported that the Society's Board of Directors met on October 22 and officially ratified TWS membership in the IWA, which makes the matter a done deal, to everybody's satisfaction.

That's the good news. However, Dan went on to report that Tom Wainwright, who has served as TWS treasurer for innumerable years, has asked to step down from that post, effective as soon as possible. Accordingly, Dan announced Tom's pending resignation to the assembled masses in Houston and asked for volunteers to replace our irreplaceable treasurer. Two splendid chaps stepped forward almost immediately, and after a quick consultation, the Board gave the nod to Erik Quick of Washington, D.C. (Many thanks go to our other volunteer, Michael Evans.) In his new post, Erik will not only assume responsibility for Society monies and the membership list, but will also see to it that TWS has filed the appropriate papers and clarified its status with the IRS as a nonprofit organization. Let's all extend best wishes and our deepest thanks to Erik for taking on the job—and our heartfelt gratitude to Tom for all his years of service to the Society.

And speaking of service, it is the Society's custom to recognize and reward all those who have gone above and beyond the norm in promoting Wodehouse and his work, not to mention TWS, by gifting these individuals with honorary memberships. This year the Board voted to honor Tony Ring in this way—and a highly deserved hon-

or it is, as anybody who knows him would agree. Tony is one of the mainstays of our group and is richly deserving of many laurels for all that he does to keep Wodehouse in the public consciousness.

Other business discussed by the Board of Directors and subsequently announced by Dan Garrison to the Houston assembly included the expenses that have been incurred for setting up and maintaining the official TWS web site ([www.wodehouse.org](http://www.wodehouse.org)). Shamim (Pongo) Mohamed has been our unofficial webmaster from the beginning, and a jolly good job he has done, too. It was therefore voted that the Society should assume all costs for the web site domain and maintenance, with the site itself to be considered an extension of Plum Lines. After having his arm twisted a bit, Pongo has graciously agreed to continue acting as our now-Official Webmaster. In this regard, it was deemed necessary to anoint him with an appropriate "nom de Plum," making Pongo one of the few Society members (if not the only one) to be blessed with two noms. And what is our Webmaster to be called? Why, "Webster," of course!

After Yours Truly was elevated to the presidency during the elections portion of the proceedings, nominations were taken for the office of Vice President. Presented for a quick approval was Susan Cohen of Chapter One. Well known to many of us as a tireless campaigner for Plum, Susan will make an excellent VP for the Society—and, down the road, a superlative President—so be sure to bung a friendly bread-roll of congratulations in her direction. And all best to her chapter as they begin their work to host the 2001 convention. (In that regard, it would be greatly appreciated if you could fill out and return the questionnaire that has been enclosed with this issue of Plum Lines; it would greatly help in the planning of future conventions.)

That covers official TWS business. And now, as our Society tiptoes into the Millenium, the question comes to mind: Where do we hope to go in years to come? We are by nature not a very active group. Most of us seem quite content to receive our four issues of Plum Lines every year, pay our dues, and attend the biennial conventions, letting our involvement go at that. But our membership rolls have declined recently; lapsed members now total over 800. While it is inevitable that we will lose members for any number of reasons, I cannot help but

hope that we can and will acquire new members, not only to replace the ones we lose but to increase our ranks. We are united in our joy and appreciation for Wodehouse, and we should be spreading that joy as much as we can.

So when the opportunity presents itself, I hope you will try to do your part to preserve and promote the Wodehouse name and canon. There are any number of ways this can be done. Form a chapter in your area, advertise your meetings, and encourage chapter members to bring guests. If you already have a chapter, recruit new members from the lists that appear periodically in Plum Lines, and invite a local newspaper to do an article about your group. Encourage your school and public libraries to stock up on Wodehouse books. Encourage a local book club to include a Wodehouse volume on their reading list. Write to the BBC to urge them to release Wodehouse Playhouse on videotape. Support and attend any productions of Wodehouse works on stage. Write a Wodehouse-related article for a newspaper or magazine (or Plum Lines, for that matter).

If you have ideas about ways in which the Society might become more proactive, and especially notions about how we can boost our membership rolls, do please bung them along to me by mail or e-mail. As we enter a new millen-

nium, we don't want to lose sight of the beauty and laughter that Plum has brought into so many lives over the years—and will continue to bring as long as our Society and others around the world are here to keep his name and works alive for all the years to come.

Tally-ho,

Aunt Dahlia

It is an excellent thing that women should be encouraged to take up golf. There are, I admit, certain drawbacks attendant on their presence on the links. I shall not readily forget the occasion on which a low, raking drive of mine at the eleventh struck the ladies' tee-box squarely and came back and stunned my caddie, causing me to lose stroke and distance. Nevertheless, I hold that the advantages outnumber the drawbacks. Golf humanises women, humbles their haughty natures, tends, in short, to knock out of their systems a certain modicum of that superciliousness, that swank, which makes wooing such a tough proposition for the diffident male.

"The Rough Stuff," 1922

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## VOLUNTEER OFFICERS

Information and new memberships  
Marilyn MacGregor

Dues payments and address changes  
Tom Wainwright

Contributions to *Plum Lines*  
Ed Ratcliffe, OM                      Elin Woodger, AD

Dues are \$20 per year.

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