Plum Lines

The quarterly newsletter of The Wodehouse Society *Vol. 21 No. 4* *Winter 2000*

Lady Constance's Lover: Romance and Sex à la Wodehouse

By Elin Woodger

A talk delivered at the Houston convention of the Wodehouse Society, October, 1999. Elin is, as all right-minded members know, president of our society, co-editor of *Plum Lines*, and an All-Around Indispensable. —OM

And now for the juicy stuff. Here is some advice from Lord Uffenham for all you lovelorn men out there:

> Grab her! Seize her! Fold her in a close embrace. A really close embrace. One that'll make her ribs creak. Kiss her, too, of course. Kiss her repeatedly. At the same time saying "You are my mate, dash it," or something to that effect. That'll do the trick.

The trick, of course, is for a Wodehouse hero to win the woman of his dreams, a situation that we encounter repeatedly in Plum's novels and stories—and one that almost always meets with success in the end. It is this aspect of the Master's vast canon that we shall put under the microscope today, touching on matters of romance and sex—yes, sex—that make his works so dashed entertaining, and, at times, titillating—yes, titillating.

Any dedicated reader knows that romance is paramount in Wodehouse. Wherever we are in Plum's imagination, whether in the Drones Club or on the idyllic grounds of Blandings Castle, whether on the golf links or out in Hollywood, there is one overpowering theme that is constant in almost all of his stories and novels. And that theme is Love. Love sells—it always has—and Plum knew it and milked it for all it was worth. Rarely will you read a Wodehouse novel or story and not find love at the root of the story-line.

Yet beyond the monetary rewards of writing about love, I believe that Plum was truly a romantic at heart. Look closely at some of his early work, for example, and you will find a lot of talk about affinities—the instant attraction of, as he described it, "soul-mates destined for each other from the beginning of time." No wonder so many characters in Wodehouse fall in love at first sight—and you will usually find that it is the men doing the falling. The male of the species has only to take a single look, and he knows, as in this example from *Hot Water*:

> Walking before him, like a princess making her way through a mob of the proletariat, came a girl. And at the sight of her, Berry's eyes swelled slowly to the size of golf-balls. His jaw dropped, his heart raced madly, and a potato fell from his trembling fork.
>
> For it was the girl he had been looking for all his life—the girl he had dreamed of on summer evenings when the western sky was ablaze with the glory of the sunset, or on spring mornings when birds sang their anthems on dewy lawns. He recognized her immediately. For a long time now he had given up all hope of ever meeting her, and here she was, exactly as he had always pictured her on moonlight nights when fiddles played soft music in the distance.

All right, so it's a bit sappy—but still romantic. And it proves a point Plum loved to emphasize, time and again: Love strikes us when we least expect it. It is efficiency expert Hamilton Beamish who learns this in *The Small*

Bachelor. A practitioner of a philosophy he calls Sane Love, which is followed in due course by Sane Marriage, Hamilton informs us that "The mating of the sexes should be a reasoned process, ruled by the intellect." Early on, he explains his ideal plan for marriage, a scientific approach that involves careful consideration and sorting of the appropriate candidates until he chooses his ideal mate—and he will not, he says, allow passion to blind him to any faults in her disposition.

But Fate has another plan for Hamilton, who, like so many Wodehouse characters, is not immune to the power of affinities. It is on a bus that he notices "a girl of chic and élan. One may go still further—a girl of espiéglerie and je ne sais quoi." He studies her closely, approving highly of her apparel and her schoolgirl complexion, complete with "the skin you love to touch."

> . . . But it was her face that he noted most particularly. It was just the sort of face which, if he had not had his policy of Sane Love all carefully mapped out, would have exercised the most disturbing effect on his emotions. . . .
>
> Sad, reflected Hamilton Beamish, as he stood upon the steps of Number 16 and prepared to ring the bell, that he would never see this girl again. Naturally, a man of his stamp was not in love at first sight, but nevertheless he did not conceal it from himself that nothing would suit him better than to make her acquaintance and, after careful study of her character and disposition, possibly discover in a year or two that it was she whom Nature had intended for his mate.
>
> It was at this point in his reflections that he perceived her standing at his elbow.

After Hamilton takes a bit of dust out of the girl's eye, the two proceed to have the sort of stimulating conversation one often has when meeting one's affinity for the first time:

> "I saw you on the omnibus," he said.
> "Did you?"
> "Yes, I was sitting in the next seat."
> "How odd!"
> "It's a lovely day, isn't it."
> "Beautiful."
> "The sun."
> "Yes."
> "The sky."
> "Yes."
> "I like the summer."
> "So do I."
> "When it's not too hot."
> "Yes."
>
> "Though, as a matter of fact," said Hamilton Beamish, "I always say that what one objects to is not the heat but the humidity."
>
> Which simply goes to prove that even efficiency experts, when they fall in love at first sight, can babble like any man of inferior intellect in the same circumstances. Strange and violent emotions were racking Hamilton Beamish's bosom: and, casting away the principles of a lifetime, he recognized without a trace of shame that love had come to him at last—not creeping scientifically into his soul, as he had supposed it would, but elbowing its way in with the Berserk rush of a commuter charging into the five-fifteen. Yes, he was in love. And it is proof of the completeness with which passion had blunted his intellectual faculties that he was under the impression that in the recent exchange of remarks he had been talking rather well.

This, then, is the position in which many a Wodehouse hero has found himself: Hopelessly, dizzily in love in one fell swoop, to such an extent that it affects his entire life, not to mention his golf game. But what of the female of the species? Rarely do we witness *her* falling so hard all at once. Rather, she is mixed up with some other man who is all wrong for her; or she is so bally independent-minded that she is initially immune to our hero's charms; or she has certain romantic notions about desert sheiks and heroes that rather intimidate her would-be suitor; or for her it may simply be a case of dislike-at-first-sight—until she learns better. It seems to take longer for your typical Wodehouse heroine to realize that her predestined mate is right there, and she has only to open her arms to him to experience a lifetime of joy and fulfillment. Or so Wodehouse would have us believe.

How, then, to get the woman to sit up and take notice of the man? Like Lord Uffenham, Uncle Fred advocates the caveman sort of approach, something that he calls the Ickenham system:

> "It's a little thing I knocked together in my bachelor days. It consists of grabbing the girl, waggling her about a bit, showering kisses on her upturned face and making some such remark as 'My mate!' Clench the teeth while saying that, of course. It adds conviction."

In *Service With a Smile*, Lord Ickenham offers this advice to a reluctant Jimmy Schoonmaker, who has a hankering for Lady Constance. "You needn't stick too closely to the script if you feel like gagging," he tells Jimmy, "but

on no account tamper with the business. That is of the essence."

Indeed, the "business" portion of the proceedings—that is, physical contact—is the crux of the Ickenham system. In "Life With Freddie," Freddie Threepwood explains to Joe Cardinal that any struggles on the part of the female half should be ignored, "...And in grabbing her by the wrist don't behave as if you were handling a delicate piece of china. Grip firmly and waggle her about a bit."

Yes, it's a bit rustic as systems go, but it certainly seems to work in Wodehouse's world, as Wilfred Allsop discovers. In *Galahad at Blandings*, Tipton Plimsoll urges Wilfred to employ an Ickenham-style approach in his courtship of Monica Simmons, although Wilfred needs a little fortification before he proceeds:

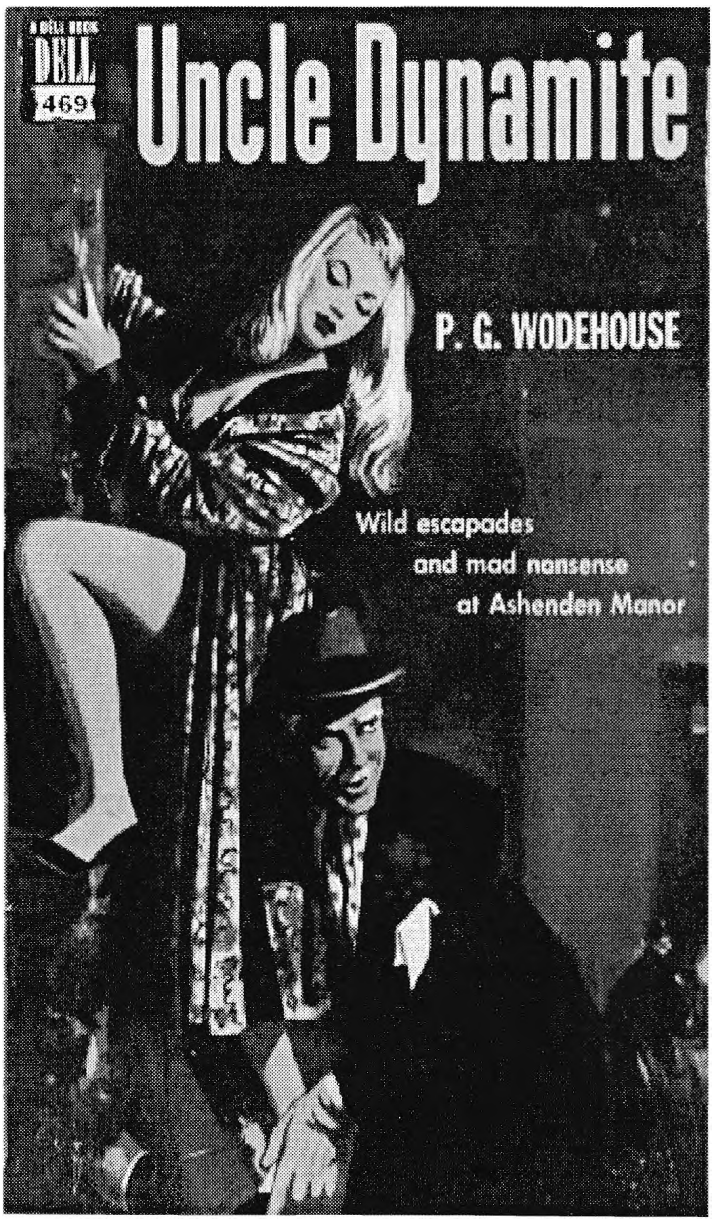
> The few mouthfuls he had had time to imbibe from Tipton's flask had done their beneficent work. Once more he was feeling strong and masterful, and when she came back, he was ready for her. He strode up, he clasped her in his arms, he kissed her.
>
> "My woman!" he bellowed in a tone somewhat reminiscent of a costermonger calling attention to his brussels sprouts. Tipton had been perfectly right. It was, as he had said, as easy as falling off a log.

In *Money in the Bank*, Jeff Miller is loath to take the caveman route—until Fate throws Anne Benedick into his arms:

> Jeff was feeling oddly breathless. For the first time, he found himself swinging over towards the school of thought represented by Lord Uffenham, wondering whether, after all, there might not be something in the latter's crudely expressed but not unintelligent counsel. There had unquestionably been something about the feel of Anne's slender body in his arms that had seemed to satisfy some deep hunger in his soul.

I love that last line. Romance is indeed part of the struggle to satisfy a certain kind of hunger; so, for that matter, is sex. And you will find that many of Plum's best romantic characters are very hungry indeed.

This brings us to the subject of sex and its prevalence in Wodehouse. Yes, that's right—I have dared to put the words "sex" and "Wodehouse" together in the same sentence. If this seems strange, it may be because of a myth that circulates periodically to the effect that Plum was uneasy with the subject of sex, that he had no real feel for women, even that he was himself asexual. Those who adopt this view point to such blots on the landscape as the numerous dragon aunts, the dictatorial Florence Crayes, the overbearing Honoria Glossops, and the gooey, goofy females like Madeline Bassett. Even Frances Donaldson has contributed to the myth, writing in her biography of Wodehouse that he was "out of reach of the female sex" and that "If Plum could have written a respectable love scene, we might not have had Bertie Wooster." To this I say: Piffle. Plum did too write many a respectable love scene—some, in fact, were nothing short of eloquent. And believe me, there is a lot more sex in Wodehouse than we have ever given him credit for. You just have to have the right kind of mind to find it—which, fortunately, I do and I did. And so, obviously, did the illustrator of this particular book cover:



Pure Womanhood in Distress being Rescued by a Big Strong Man

So where's the sex? It is subtle, I'll grant you. You won't find vivid descriptions of lustful encounters, with bodices being ripped open and steam pouring out of the pages. Not for Plum the D.H. Lawrence approach to the subject. To the best of my knowledge, the closest two of his characters come to actually having sex occurs in his atypical short story, "In Alcala," which tells the tale of the electrically charged relationship between writer Rutherford Maxwell and chorus girl Peggy. The bittersweet ending is unusual for Plum—Peggy reveals that she is a "kept woman," by which token she would be certain to ruin Rutherford's life, so naturally she leaves him.

In this and in other far less melodramatic stories, Plum used intimations of sex in ways that allowed the reader to employ his or her imagination to fill in the details—which can, of course, often be far more titillating than explicit descriptions. Take, for example, the mental images conjured up by this scene from *The Small Bachelor*:

> But . . . nobody could deny that, as she stood there half-dressed for dinner, Molly Waddington was extremely ornamental. If George Finch could have seen her at that moment . . . . But then if George Finch had seen her at that moment, he would immediately have shut his eyes like a gentleman; for there was that about her costume, in its present stage of development, which was not for the male gaze.
>
> Still, however quickly he had shut his eyes, he could not have shut them rapidly enough to keep from seeing that . . . Beyond all chance for evasion or doubt, Molly Waddington was cuddly. She was wearing primrose knickers, and her silk-stockinged legs tapered away to little gold shoes. Her pink fingers were clutching at a blue dressing-jacket with swansdown trimming. Her bobbed hair hung about a round little face with a tip-tilted little nose. Her eyes were large, her teeth small and even. She had a little brown mole on the back of her neck and—in short, to sum the whole thing up, if George Finch could have caught even the briefest glimpse of her at this juncture, he must inevitably have fallen over sideways, yapping like a dog.

Often it is the physical aspects of men and women that draw them together—an elegant profile, the way a nose tilts, the shape of a mouth, and so on. And more often than not it is the erotic reaction to these physical characteristics that does the victim in. Here, for example, is Kirk Winfield's reaction to Ruth Bannister in *The Coming of Bill*:

> If there are degrees in speechlessness, Kirk's aphasia became doubled and trebled at the sight of her. It seemed to him that he went all to pieces, as if he had received a violent blow. Curious physical changes were taking place in him. His legs, which only that morning he had looked upon as eminently muscular, he now discovered to be composed of some curiously unstable jelly.
>
> He also perceived—a fact which he had never before suspected—that he had heart-disease. His lungs, too, were in poor condition; he found it practically impossible to breathe. The violent trembling fit which assailed him he attributed to general organic weakness.

Similarly, it takes only a glimpse of his old love Sally for Pongo Twistleton to realize how he feels about her, as he experiences "strange thrills...shooting through his streamlined body." As for poor Dudley Pickering in *Uneasy Money*, Claire Fenwick's sexual power makes it completely impossible for him to resist her, much as his Subconscious Self would have it otherwise:

> What a gelatine-backboned thing is man, who prides himself on his clear reason and becomes wet as blotting-paper at one glance from bright eyes! A moment before Mr. Pickering had thought out the whole subject of woman and marriage in a few bold flashes of his capable brain, and thanked Providence he was not as those men who take unto themselves wives to their undoing. Now in an instant he had lost that iron outlook. Reason was temporarily out of business. He was slipping.
>
> "Dudley!"
>
> For a space Subconscious Self thrust itself forward.
>
> "Look out! Be careful!" it warned.
>
> Mr. Pickering ignored it. He was watching, fascinated, the glow on Claire's face, her shining eyes.
>
> "Dudley, I want to speak to you."
>
> "Tell her you can only be seen by appointment! Escape! Bolt!"
>
> Mr. Pickering did not bolt. Claire came towards him, still smiling that pathetic smile. A thrill permeated Mr. Pickering's entire one hundred and ninety-seven pounds, trickling down his spine like hot water and coming out at the soles of his feet. . . .
>
> . . . He was staring worshippingly at Claire. With rapturous gaze he noted the grey glory of her eyes, the delicate curve of her cheek, the grace

of her neck...No more doubts and hesitations for Dudley Pickering. He was under the influence.

Men are not the only ones who experience these surges of adrenaline and losses of self-control. In *Jill the Reckless*, Jill Mariner is smitten with Derek Underhill, and a ride with her love in a taxi-cab becomes a revealing experience:

> The touch of his body against hers always gave her a thrill, half pleasurable, half frightening. She had never met anybody who affected her in this way as Derek did.

It is very much a physical thing between these two, although they are not affinities; their attraction is sexual in orientation, and it is this sexuality that Jill fears even as it stimulates her. It is much the same thing for Derek:

> Then the sense of her nearness, her sweetness, the faint perfume of her hair, and her eyes, shining softly in the darkness so close to his own, overcame him. He crushed her to him. . . .[But] Jill absent always affected him differently from Jill present. He was not a man of strong imagination, and the stimulus of her waned when she was not with him.

It will take solid, steady Wally Mason to bring Jill to her senses at the end of the book—a Wally who inspires "nothing of the fiery tumult which had come upon her when she first met Derek," and whom she would discover that she needed "as she needed the air and the sunlight." Before she reaches that point, however, she must encounter the repulsive Ike Gobel in a scene that also vividly conveys a strong sense of sexuality—but unpleasant in this case:

> He stared again at Jill. The inspection was long and lingering, and affected Jill with a sense of being inadequately clothed. She returned the gaze as defiantly as she could, but her heart was beating fast. She had never yet been frightened of any man, but there was something reptilian about this fat, yellow-haired individual which disquieted her, much as cockroaches had done in her childhood. A momentary thought flashed through her mind that it would be horrible to be touched by him. He looked soft and glutinous.

Not all of Plum's forays into sex were limited to his early novels and short stories. He often allowed it to invade other locales—the hallowed halls of Blandings Castle, for example. In *Heavy Weather*, when Lady Julia learns that Galahad is interested in the welfare of Sue Brown because Sue is the daughter of his long-lost love, she is quick to wonder aloud whether the girl is Gally's daughter, and even goes so far as to ask him about it directly. He is not Sue's father, of course, but it is interesting to contemplate our Gally having an illegitimate daughter in the world, for this would confirm that he (as I'm sure was the case for many Wodehouse characters) had an honest-to-goodness sex life. Plum was just too much of a gentleman to give us the details.

Sex could even afflict, if only temporarily, the senses of Lord Emsworth himself:

> Ever since his brother Galahad had introduced him to the relict of the late Cedric Stubbs . . . strange and novel emotions had been stirring in Lord Emsworth's bosom. He was a man who since the death of his wife twenty years ago had made something of a lifework of avoiding women. He could not, of course, hope to avoid them altogether, for women have a nasty way of popping up at unexpected moments, but he was quick on his feet and his policy of suddenly disappearing like a diving duck had had excellent results. . . .
>
> To Maudie, however, he had felt from the start strangely drawn. He admired her looks. Her personality appealed to him. "Alluring" was the word that suggested itself. When he caught Maudie's eye, it was as though he had caught the eye of a woman who was silently saying "Come up and see me some time." And this—oddly enough—struck him as an admirable idea.

Somebody once told me (I think it was my *Plum Lines* co-editor) that Plum once said, "Sex is not funny." I have a hard time believing this, as he clearly knew how to make good use of the double entendre. He worked it to particularly wonderful effect in many of his plays, especially his adaptation of Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*, and if there were enough time we would be reviewing the crucial scenes in that work, having to do with an overheard conversation and a peach. But we can easily find similar scenes elsewhere that center around scandalous misinterpretations of innocent situations—as in "The Purification of Rodney Spelvin," wherein William and Jane Bates, along with two detectives, secrete themselves in Anastatia Bates' apartment, in hopes of discovering what is going on between her and a certain poet:

Crouching in her corner, Jane could see nothing, but every word that was spoken came to her ears; and with every syllable her horror deepened.

"Give me your things," she heard Rodney say, "and we shall go upstairs."

Jane shivered. The curtains by the window shook. From the direction of the alcove there came a soft scratching sound, as the two detectives made an entry in their notebooks.

For a moment after this there was silence. Then Anastatia uttered a sharp, protesting cry.

"Ah, no, no! Please, please!"

"But why not?" came Rodney's voice.

"It is wrong—wrong."

"I can't see why."

"It is, it is! You must not do that. Oh, please, please don't hold so tight."

There was a swishing sound, and through the curtains before the window a large form burst. Jane raised her head above the Chesterfield.

William was standing there, a menacing figure. The two detectives had left the alcove and were moistening their pencils. And in the middle of the room stood Rodney Spelvin, stooping slightly and grasping Anastatia's parasol in his hands.

It is, of course, a golf lesson in progress, but it is more fun to think the worst.

Finally, let's take a look at a scene that occurs towards the end of *Sam the Sudden*, when Soapy and Dolly Molloy are attempting to search Sam Shotter's house, but suffer a series of interruptions. Pretending to be Sam, Soapy tries to deal with two visitors at the front door, a constable selling tickets to a charity and a vicar. The constable finally leaves after Soapy purchases a ticket, but the vicar lingers on:

Soapy eyed him bleakly. How did one get rid of vicars? Short of employing his bride's universal panacea and hauling off and busting him one, Soapy could not imagine.

"Have you been a resident of Valley Fields long, Mr. Shotter?"

"No."

"I hope we shall see much of each other."

"Do you?" said Soapy wanly.

"The first duty of a clergyman, in my opinion—"

Mr. Molloy had no notion of what constituted the first duty of a clergyman, and he was destined never to find out. For at this moment there came from the regions above, the clear musical voice of a woman.

"Sweet-ee!"

Mr. Molloy started violently. So did the Rev. Aubrey Jerningham.

"I'm in the bedroom, honey bunch. Come right on up."

A dull flush reddened the Rev. Aubrey's ascetic face.

"I understood you to say that you were not married, Mr. Shotter," he said in a metallic voice.

"No—er—ah—"

He caught the Rev. Aubrey's eye. He was looking as Sherlock Holmes might have looked had he discovered Doctor Watson stealing his watch.

"No—I—er—ah—"

It is not given to every man always to do the right thing in trying circumstances. Mr. Molloy may be said at this point definitely to have committed a social blunder. Winking a hideous, distorted wink, he raised the forefinger of his right hand and with a gruesome archness drove it smartly in between his visitor's third and fourth ribs.

"Oh, well, you know how it is," he said thickly.

The Rev. Aubrey Jerningham quivered from head to heel. He drew himself up and looked at Soapy. The finger had given him considerable pain, but it was the spiritual anguish that hurt the more.

"I do, indeed, know how it is."

"Man of the world," said Soapy, relieved.

"I will wish you good evening, Mr. Shotter," said the Rev. Aubrey.

Yes, we are all prone to put the wrong connotation on things if we have the right kind of mind for it. Speaking of which, did you wonder about the title of this talk at all? Did Lady Constance indeed have a lover? I am firmly convinced that she did. Oh, Plum was very delicate about it, of course, being the gentleman that he was, but all the clues are there. Think about it. "Her faith in this man was the faith of a little child. The strength of his personality, though she had a strong personality herself, had always dominated her completely." He is described as her "idol," and she stares at "his dark, purposeful, efficient face in dumb admiration." She is obviously smitten with this man, because she is forever trying to get him back into Blandings Castle—we can only speculate as to why she really wants him back. And we can only read between the lines when we are told:

It was a moment when Lady Constance would have given much for eloquence. She sought for words that should adequately convey her feelings, but could find none.

"Oh, Mr. Baxter!" she said.

Whether there is any truth to this rumor about Lady C., I leave to you to sort out.

And now I have one final word of advice for you men: Once you win the object of your adoration, you must fold her in your arms, using the interlocking grip. This, I assure you, is the Wodehouse-approved method.

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to Anne Cotton, John Fahey, John Graham, John Kareores, David McDonough, Neil Midkiff, Tony Ring, and Jean Tillson for all their assistance in researching and/or delivering this paper.

A Few Quick Ones

Elliott Milstein recently shared the following via PGW-Net: "*The Economist*—a magazine I have been addicted to for the past 20 years—will generally reference PGW about 3 or 4 times a year. Sometimes it's a quoted reference and sometimes rather more subtle, as in a review a few years back on a book about Nietsche that began 'Many critics, like Jeeves, find Nietsche fundamentally unsound.' But recently they really outdid themselves. In the Britain section they have a full page piece called 'What Ho Jeeves.' It covered some local scandal that hasn't made CNN so I hadn't the foggiest idea what it was about, but the nub or gist was that they covered it as if written by PGW. In other words, the scandal was so ludicrous, it read, as 'twere, like a Bertie Wooster short story. The writer really knew his stuff as there were many, many direct quotes and the pastiche itself wasn't bad. You might be able to access it at www.economist.com."

A note on the type: Our new headline typeface, Galliard, replaces the Mantinia we have used for some years. Mantinia lacks an italic and has dangling punctuation: SEE THEM, OVER THERE; AND THERE. Galliard has neither defect, and its use for headlines as well as text reduces the number of typefaces on a page, always a Good Thing. Outcries will be listened to, but probably will not change our minds.

Society Spice, Aunt Dahlia, and The Oldest Member

Pigs *Have* Wings

Gary Hall and Francine Swift, separately, sent this story about a high-flying porker. The article appeared in a Lincoln, Nebraska, newspaper on Sunday, October 29, 2000:

FAA Concerned by Flying Pig

Philadelphia — The 300-pound Philadelphia pig that went hog-wild while flying first-class to Seattle on a USAirways jetliner has given new life to an old malady.

It's the first-ever reported case of the Swine Flew.

Federal Aviation Administration officials plan to question every flight crew member about the Oct. 17 incident, and they are demanding from USAirways a passenger list for Flight 107 from Philadelphia to Seattle-Tacoma Airport.

"We're looking at whether or not the airline complied with its own plan for the transportation of animals," said FAA spokesman Jim Peters. "Each airline has its own policy, approved by the FAA, and we need to determine if it stuck to its own game plan," Peters said.

"Although the pig slept through most of the flight, the FAA must determine if it presented a safety hazard," he said.

A source close to the investigation said punishment could be meted out once everybody involved in the barnyard caper is interviewed.

"They want to question the pig, too, if they can find it," quipped the source.

According to a USAirways internal report, the two female owners of the porker claimed it weighed only 13 pounds when they asked permission to take it on the flight.

But the source close to the investigation said airline employees in Philadelphia, when confronted by the pig's bulk, cleared the porker for takeoff anyway.

"What was going on in the minds of the Philly terminal people to let a pig onto their plane that took four people to wheel up to the gate?" asked the source.

"How did they fail to get a read on this one?"

USAirways spokesman Rick Weintraub confirmed that the pig did fly first-class on the jet.

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"If this trend continues," responds David Landman, "the airlines will have to issue frequent-fryer miles for chickens, frequent-byre miles for cows, and frequent-mire miles for pigs."

Pilgrimage to Patzel Land

By Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall

Last October, during the TWS Convention in Houston, Colonel Norman Murphy discovered that my wife Linda and I live in Lincoln, Nebraska, only 100 miles or so from the late Fred Patzel's rural home near Madison, Nebraska. Mr. Patzel was, of course, the real-life Western States champion hog-caller (1926) who taught James Belford the ancient and sacred art in "Pig-hoo-o-o-ey!"

Col. Murphy immediately commissioned us to investigate the Madison area personally. He hoped we could return with photographs and perhaps even a taped hog-calling episode. Recognizing that such research would not only be beneficent to our immortal souls, but may score us a drink at the Philadelphia convention, we eagerly accepted the commission. Little did we know what adventure awaited us . . . .

In the months that followed, we contacted some of the good folk of Madison (population 2,135 not counting the hogs), including Carol Robertson at the Madison Historical Society.

Carol had a wealth of information. She informed us that the honorable Mr. Fred Patzel was born December 20, 1878, on a farm outside Madison, that he passed away in April of 1956, and that he is buried in the Crown Hill Cemetery in Madison. She offered other family information and described an annual celebration in early June called "The Days of Swine and Roses." It formerly included a car show, a Hog-Calling Contest (of course), and an Ugly Pick-Up Contest (presumably referring to trucks). Later, due to declining attendance, they dropped the hog-calling and replaced it with a nine-hole golf tournament! We wondered if Fred Patzel's descendants could simultaneously warn fellow golfers of their approach AND improve the appetite of the local hogs.

We had missed this year's celebration, but if there is hog-calling next year, we will be there next year, barring death or incarceration.

We planned a visit to Madison on October 1. The great day dawned clear and warm. Free of conflicts, or at least those of the scheduling kind, I grabbed Linda, a camera, and a cup of coffee, hopped into our jalopy, kissed Linda, spilled the coffee, and turned north to the Promised Land.

We passed towns named Bee, Friend, Surprise, and Rising City. We motored past the Big Weedy Creek. We tooled to the west of Wahoo, far from Funk, and soon approached our goal via Columbus. Over a last hill we came, and spread before us in the valley was the mighty village of Madison. (Yes, Nebraska DOES have hills and valleys!)

Grave of the "hog-calling champion of the Western States" in Crown Hill Cemetery, Madison, Nebraska. The card carries an inscription to Fred by Gary and Linda. Photo by Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall.

On the outskirts of Madison lies a large meat processing plant, apparently the one David Landman mentioned in this summer's *Plum Lines,* that was nearly named "Patzel's Memorial Pork Packery." We cruised leisurely through the town, sleepy on the hot Sunday afternoon. We zigzagged up and down the boulevards, including the quaintly named "Twelveth" street. Past the local auto body repair shop, where snazzy marketing techniques are not as important as honesty. The big sign read: "Boss Said to Change the Sign So I Did." We found the local residents pleasant, but sparse. In rural Nebraska, if one simply raises one's index finger from one's steering wheel, the result is a friendly wave from whomever is within sight.

On we traveled, passing Lutheran and Catholic churches, stopping to test the tightly locked doors of the museum and library, and at last to the other side of town. The land was flat from there to South Dakota, seventy miles away. We turned back and found not one but two cemeteries, including Crown Hill. Not wishing to alarm Madison's living residents, we restrained our morbid delight.

After an hour's search through the ranks of gravestones, Linda made the discovery. With a shout, I hurried over, and there, on a low stone marker, was inscribed "Fred W. Patzel, 1878 - 1956." We had arrived at the spot

where the great man was laid to rest. Beside Fred's gravestone was that of Emma, his first wife, who, sadly, had passed away at the tender age of 35.

Leaving a kind but melancholy note on Fred's grave, we considered our next move. I had only the sketchiest information about the whereabouts of Patzel's birthplace, but we decided to forge ahead. Little did we know that we were about to enter. . . the Patzel zone.

Twenty miles west of Madison, at a "tee" in the road, we were faced with a north/south decision. Carol's direction were vague, and we had to rely on intuition and luck. I paused for a fateful fifteen seconds at a stop sign, then chose to proceed north. "We'll only go as far as the first farm, and then turn back for home."

Over the hill we winged, sixty miles an hour in our green Mercury. A farm to my left, a black pick-up truck coming to a stop on the farm road to my left, a mail-box to my right. Linda said, "Maybe he's a Patzel," and at that moment I saw the name "Patzel" on the mailbox. At the same time Linda made eye contact with the fellow in the truck, and between them flashed some telepathic communication about which I can only surmise.

Quickly I pulled into a turnoff a quarter mile ahead, turned the car around, and saw the good fellow returning to us! Linda and I leaped from our car, and discovered in seconds that this man, Dan Patzel, was not only a relative of Fred but had oodles of information about Fred and the family. Dan invited us up the road to his father's place to see family pictures and memorabilia. Astounded by this sudden closure of the multiple degrees of separation between us and Fred, we followed.

Dan's father Glen is an 82-year-old farmer, tough as a tree on the open prairie. As a youth, he worked in California canneries and farms for $10 a month; in Minnesota he slept in barns, earning $35 a month. Though he recently suffered a neck injury for which he uses a wrapped towel as a home remedy, he brushes it off and tends his crops and cattle up the road from his son 54-year-old Danny, who has raised hogs from the time he started high school. Now Danny is involved in raising disease-free hogs, a concept worthy of Lord Emsworth himself.

They regaled us with stories of the family. It all began with August Patzel, born in 1849 in Pomerania, Prussia. August came to the new world at the age of 24 and worked his way through Ohio, Wisconsin, Nebraska (in a sod house), Iowa, and finally became an early settler in Madison County, Nebraska. In 1875, he married a na-

The Patzel family, possibly around 1930. Fred is the tall man on the right and his father August, from Pomerania, is the stooped man near the center. Photo courtesy of Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall.

tive Prussian, Miss Regina Ebert. They suffered extreme hardships, but brought seven children into the world, including the famous Fred.

August Jr. (Fred's brother) begat Glen Patzel. Glen begat Danny, who married a beautiful wife, and with her begat two children.

So Farmer Glen is the nephew of the hog-calling champion of the Western States. Glen knew Fred Patzel well, and we shook the big hand that shook Fred's. He spoke of Fred's hog-calling ("He'd screw his face up so big"), and the immense power of his vocalizations. Danny himself has a strong, rich baritone, and one can easily believe that he could produce calls that could be heard across several miles of gentle Nebraska hills. However, neither Glen nor Danny demonstrated a call, deferring to Fred's memory instead.

Glen Patzel, on the left, and his son Danny, holding a plaque commemorating the more than 100 years of farming by the pioneer Nebraska family. Photo courtesy of Gary Hall and Linda Adam-Hall.

The Patzel's influence is still felt in the arts. Danny's cousin's daughter's son was the fellow in the mask with a chainsaw in the infamous Olympic Nike commercial. (Should Nike develop a more civilized commercial, perhaps with a hog-calling theme?)

We were reminded that a couple of Patzels live in our city of Lincoln. One of them, remarkably, attended high school with Linda and appears with her in a yearbook picture.

Finally we bid farewell and began our trek home with many Patzel photos, though sadly no recording of hog-calling—yet. Our hearts were warmed by the Patzel's hospitality and our lives illuminated by this astounding day of chance and discovery.

Mr Mulliner's Hangout

By John Scott PC

Whilst (as they say in M.O.E.) I was hiking the Coast to Coast walk through the North York Moors last month I turned a corner in the village of Glaisdale and lo and behold came across Mr Mulliner's hangout: The Anglers Rest. While I did not get a shot of the comely and efficient Miss Postlethwaite (it was 5 PM or thereabouts and the pub appeared to be closed), I did get a great photo of the sign featuring a largish troutlike fish and that marvelous name. Mr. Mulliner LIVES!

> The task of composing a sermon which should practically make sense and yet not be above the heads of his rustic flock was always one that caused Augustine Mulliner to concentrate tensely. Soon he was lost in his labour and oblivious to everything but the problem of how to find a word of one syllable that meant Supralapsarianism.
>
> "Gala Night," *Mulliner Nights*, 1933

Chapters Corner

By Sandy Morris

As the year winds down, Plummies do not. They forge on with ever more discussions about PGW and of his works. And they do seem to consume a prodigious number of meals in the process. Chapters Corners being devoted to describing the activities of Plummies in groups, here's the latest scoop of what your cohorts have been up to the past few months.

Blandings Castle Chapter, in the San Francisco Bay Area, has caught us up with their doings, most of which consist of lunch, lunch, and more lunch. In February, the gathering at Rhoda Robinson's Telegraph Hill cottage enjoyed lunch, but especially German chocolate cake and lemon meringue pie. Oh, yes, they also viewed book displays and perused the catalogue of the recent Christie auction in London of the Wodehouse collection of Michael Carter which made over $110,000. At the special April meeting, the Castle gang hosted special guests Tony and Elaine Ring, from Great Missenden, England, at a "very toothsome" potluck lunch. Tony showed slides of his library, which houses his collection, and shared tapes of songs with Wodehouse lyrics, sheet music, and manuscripts. In early December, the—guess—potluck lunch was at Neil Midkiff's home and offered reminiscences including videotape from those who had visited England on the Millennium Wodehouse Tour in July. Oddly enough, in none of the newsletters received from Blandings Castle was there so much as a whiff of imposterism.

Chapter One, Philadelphia, gather on a Sunday afternoon approximately once every two months, except in the summer, at the Dickens Inn, Headhouse Square. In October, the epic event of the afternoon was an outstanding presentation with slides of the Millennium Tour of England. Be it known, however, that much of their time was devoted to preparations for TWS 2001 Convention. This group has things well in hand. In November, they gathered to read a PGW story aloud.

The Drone Rangers, Houston, met in September at a Barnes & Noble bookstore to hear Sylvia Bernicchi's review of *French Leave*. They have been rehearsing their warblings like mad so that, in December, they will treat the families and friends of the children who are pediatric patients in MD Anderson Hospital to a spectacular Drone Rangers Christmas Sing-A-Long.

The Pdrones Club (the P is silent), St. Louis, enjoyed lunch in the English pub atmosphere of The Tap Room microbrewery to discuss *Code of the Woosters* in October. And, in their relentless search for Anatole, they celebrated their seventh anniversary dinner in November at Café de France in downtown St. Louis. The beautiful as well as delicious meal was capped by a lively discussion of Donaldson's biography of PGW, with an emphasis on the wartime internment and broadcasts.

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Chapter of Pasadena, California, met in September at their regular time and place, 12:30 PM on the second Sunday of the month at the Pasadena Borders bookstore, to discuss *Laughing Gas*.

It would seem that Plummies have been enjoying themselves with food and talk about PGW. And not one communique indicated a propensity for throwing even one little roll.

Chapters Calendar

Well, not much to the 2001 calendar yet. If you're planning to be in any of the neighborhoods, feel free to contact the chapter representative and ask about a meeting. No doubt things will pick up soon.

Blandings Castle (Bay Area, Northern CA)

Capital! Capital! (Washington, D.C.)

Chapter One (Philadelphia, PA)

Drone Rangers (Houston, TX))

Mottled Oyster Club (San Antonio, TX))

NEWTS (New England)

Northwodes (Minneapolis/St.Paul, MN)

The Pdrones Club (St. Louis, MO)

Sunday, April 8, 2:00 PM, afternoon tea and swim with optional period dress at the home of Murali Sundaram, St. Louis County.

Sunday, June 3, 2:00 PM, either golf or cricket with tea afterwards at the home of Barbara Hertenstein, Lebanon, Illinois.

Saturday, September 22, noon, lunch at Llywelyn's Pub, 4747 Mcpherson, St. Louis.

Wednesday, November 14, 6:30 PM, Eighth Anniversary Dinner, Café de France, 410 Olive, St. Louis. (Reservations required)

Books and short stories for all events to be determined.

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation (Pasadena, CA)

Calling all chapters! To see your goings-on on the printed page—well, the bits you want to see printed—and to list your coming events, it is imperative—or, let us say, devoutly to be wished—that you contact me *via* snail mail newsletters or telephone or e-mails. The spring issue deadline is February 10th.

Convention 2003?

It is time once again to cast our glances forward and think about when and where our happy group will gather for its biannual Plummy celebration in 2003. We have tried but not always succeeded in spreading our conventions around the country—going back ten years, one sees that we met in New York in 1991; San Francisco, 1993; Boston, 1995; Chicago, 1997; and Houston, 1999. Meanwhile, thanks to Chapter One, we will gather next year in Philadelphia. Ideally, we would like to have the 2003 convention in the midwest or on the west coast, but much depends on what chapter is brave and willing enough to take on hosting duties.

So let's hear it from all interested chapters out there. Think you can do it? Help and support is always provided from previous convention planners, so it all comes down to whether you have the moral fiber and the personnel to plan what always turns out to be a rousingly good party. If you are thinking you might like to put in a bid to host Convention 2003, please let Auntie know. While there's plenty of time to decide, I would like to receive all expressions of interest in hosting by July 2001.

Tony Blair's Defection

Joel Brattin found this item about the debased literary taste of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

In his article "Take Me to Your Reader," published in the 16 and 23 October 2000 issue of the *New Yorker*, Anthony Lane discusses the favorite reading of several politicians. (Al Gore favors *The Red and The Black* by Stendhal; George Bush likes Eric Barle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.) Lane notes that "Tony Blair seems to have spent the first half of his career gleaning a good education—private school and Oxford—and the second half covering it up. . . . even P.G. Wodehouse, of whom Blair formerly pronounced himself a fan, dropped mysteriously from his list of favorite books, as if the gin-based aroma of the Drones Club were too rich and snooty an atmosphere for the cleaner, more puritan air of New Labour."

Dave Barry's Excellence

By glorious contrast, Joel Brattin and Tina Griffin separately discovered the following about humorist Dave Barry. In the Northwest Airlines flight magazine *World Traveller* for October 2000, Barry is quoted on his favorite writers: "Barry got his kicks from his dad's books, finding humor in P.G. Wodehouse's upper crust, 'veddy British' stories about the comic shenanigans of dimwitted aristocrat [?] Bertie Wooster and his very bright [valet], Jeeves. . . . '[Robert] Benchley's my idol,' says Barry. 'And I love P.G. Wodehouse. I read everything by them when I was growing up. When I discovered them, I said, 'Now that's funny.' I still read them to this day. . . ."

The Brits Do It Right

By Elin Woodger

You have to hand it to those Brits—they sure know how to put on a party. On October 19, 2000, approximately 120 members of the P G Wodehouse Society (UK), including yours truly, gathered at Grays Inn in London to celebrate the Master's birthday with stylish, er, aPlum, shall we say. And as they proved with the Millennium Tour in July, nobody can throw a Wodehousian bash quite like our UK compatriots can—this one complete with black tie.

One of four Inns of Court (one cannot become a barrister in England unless one is a member of an Inn of Court), Grays Inn was destroyed during the Blitz in 1941. Nevertheless, it now looks very much as it did in its original pre-Tudor days. The hall in which we ate was 75 feet long and 35 feet wide, with a ceiling that hovered 47 feet above the floor. The dark oak paneling, candelabra, and paintings lining the walls only added to the sense of being in a place richly steeped in history. And indeed it is—Norman Murphy told us it is the only place left in England where curfew is still rung.

We began with a reception upstairs, where we were surrounded by portraits of some of Britain's greatest legal minds, many with beetling brows and stern looks, as if they were about to sentence us to ten days in the jug for pinching a policeman's helmet on Boat Race night. In addition to the usual hoi poloi, we had a number of special guests in attendance, including the UK Society's president, Richard Briers, OBE (whom Auntie had been all agog to meet); the Spanish ambassador to Britain and his wife; the secretary and journal editor of the Netherlands Wodehouse Society, Josepha Olsthoorn; Griff Rhys Jones, actor, Society patron, and after-dinner speaker extraordinaire; and an almost full complement of Cazalets, with only young Hal missing from the throng.

Chairman Norman Murphy

After being herded downstairs to the dining hall and finding our assigned seats, we paused for the grace, delivered by Chairman Norman Murphy—in Latin, no less. Then, whilst we chattered away with our table mates, we buckled down to the eating, and good eating it was. Each item listed on the menu was accompanied by the name of a Wodehouse character. Thus, we enjoyed an appetizer of Smoked Salmon and Crab Roulade Lord Uffenham; an entrée of Pan-fried Supreme of Guinea Fowl Jerry Shoesmith; a dessert of Chocolate Tiramisu Roderick Glossop; Cheeseboard Lord Biskerton; and Coffee Lord Emsworth. All this in addition to three selections of wine, Graham's Six Grapes Port, and a mouth-watering assortment of petits fours and Grays Inn Chocolates. Each course was served with awe-inspiring precision, as a group of waiters and waitresses surrounded a table—one server per diner—and, on cue, put down their plates simultaneously. Synchronized swimmers at the Olympics couldn't have done better.

President Richard Briers, OBE

In due course Mr. Briers rose to issue an official welcome to all present and to impart the happy news that membership in the UK Society has reached the awe-inspiring number of 800. He then proposed the Loyal Toast. He was followed by Sir Edward Cazalet, who, prior to offering a toast to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, transmitted greetings from that very Queen Mum. Said greetings included the quoted words of Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright: "May you all have a binge to stagger humanity."

We were appropriately staggered when Griff Rhys Jones advanced to the microphone and delivered a rapid-fire address that left many of us weak with laughter. Among other comments, he included some on our surroundings, noting that, "I've been soaking up the atmosphere, so if you're wondering where the atmosphere has gone . . ." He also spoke at length on being a Wodehouse fan and on the Society and its journal (about which he noted, "It's erudite—it's fascinating—and it's seriously unhinged"). He concluded by comparing some of his own public speaking experiences to those of Gussie Fink-Nottle and General Sir Wilfred Bosher. However, it was not his pants but our sides that split as

we roared our approval.

That was just the beginning of the entertainment, though. As desserts were passed around and cigars lit, we sat back to enjoy a delightful skit entitled "The Hot Spot," described in the program as "a light soufflé of a musical comedy." This original presentation—featuring both professional and amateur actors—was presented as a cabaret, complete with a sprightly batch of Wodehouse songs. The cast featured Lara Cazalet as Madeline Bassett, Simon Day as Gussie Fink-Nottle, Lucy Tregear as Honoria Glossop, Ted Hands as Bingo Little, Tim Taylor as a constable, Sir Edward Cazalet (appropriately garbed and bewigged) as the judicial Sir Watkyn Bassett, and Ned Sherrin, who also directed, as a rather tall and portly Ronnie Fish. The audience was treated to such Wodehousian nifties as "The Enchanted Train," "Napoleon," "Bill" (as only Lara can sing it), and "Oh Gee Oh Joy." It was all presented with great fun and flair, and it ended far too soon.

Gryff Rhys Jones

As did the evening itself. To our amazement, clocks and watches were registering the hour of 11 PM as we said our goodbyes and pushed homeward. With full stomachs and happy hearts, we carried away the memories of yet another splendid Wodehousian gathering. Congratulations, UK Society. And Happy Birthday, Plum!

Photos by John Fletcher.

Ask Jeeves, But Don't Ask Much

By Andy Aaron

Sharon Singerman found this article in the *New Yorker* of November 8, 1999 about the limitations of Ask Jeeves, the Internet search engine. Excerpts follow. (The Ask Jeeves logo from the Internet did not appear in the magazine.)

Alexa McCann, an Ask.com publicist, says, "You can type in a question as if you were asking a friend, and our natural-language technology figures out what you're asking. Then Jeeves will take you to a specific page."

Not exactly. When you ask a question of Jeeves, you aren't taken anywhere. Instead, several jazz riffs on your question appear on the screen, and you are asked to click on the one that most closely resembles your original query. Then you are referred to an appropriate Web site for an answer. Jeeves's reformulations may retain the sense of your question, or they may be wildly off base. The Web site wants users to feel that they are talking to a polite, knowledgeable valet, but it's more like talking to a roomful of valets who have been drinking heavily.

We decided to test-drive Ask Jeeves by asking the valet some questions about himself.

Q. Do you agree that Michael Ovitz's background as a Hollywood superagent will allow you to tap into his insider knowledge of the entertainment industry?

Ask Jeeves: Where can I learn about the home-improvement subject framing: interior details?

Q. Are you excited to meet Robin Williams and Cameron Diaz?

Ask Jeeves: Where can I find personal ads?

Q. How does Jeeves feel about merchandising, animation, and placement in movies and television shows?

Ask Jeeves: Where can I buy TVs on line?

Q. Will you appear in a movie some day?

Ask Jeeves: What day is it?

Q. How tall is Jeffrey Katzenberg?

Ask Jeeves: Where can I find a concise encyclopedia article on altitude?

In order to test Ask Jeeves's contention that the Internet butler is not based on Bertie Wooster's valet, we took some dialogue from Wodehouse and tried it out on the Web site:

Bertie Wooster: What is it Shakespeare calls sleep?

Wodehouse Jeeves: Tired Nature's sweet restorer, sir.

Ask Jeeves: Where can I learn about brain mechanisms of sleep?

Bertie Wooster: What do you suppose has happened, Jeeves?

Wodehouse Jeeves: It is difficult to hazard a conjecture, sir.

Ask Jeeves: What if I use Ask Jeeves and still can't find an answer?

A Mainly True History of Bread-Throwing Threw the Ages

By David Landman

Part II
Bread-Throwing in the Middle Ages

Fyll not thy mouth to full of bread
Lest thou of force must speake;
Nor blow not out upon thy fellowes
Thy crums when thou doest eate.*

These feeble verses from *The boke of Nurture, or Schoole of Curtasye* (c. 1475) indicate the degree to which the art of bread-throwing had been infected by the gothicism of the Middle Ages, or as they were popularly known, the Dark or Pumpernickle Ages. This grotesque and fantastic sensibility informed not only the surrealism of Bosch, the hemidemisemiquavers of Ockeghem, the gargoyles and bulbous ogees of the cathedrals, but it tainted as well the art of bread-throwing which, as our quotation indicates, had spawned, among other freaks of nature, bread blowing.

Another of these *lusus naturae* was the trencher heave. In the great halls of the nobility, diners ate off thick slabs of bread called trenchers provided by the Master of the Rolls. Wooden plates were, of course, available, but, as recent research has shown, the gravy-soaked trencher created the greater splash in society. A knight seeking to impress fair damozel found no surer way to make his mark than by blotting the escutcheons of his rivals with adroitly thrown trenchers. This fact accounts for the spectacular rise of the Dry Cleaners' Guild (motto: No Habit Too Dirty) until its wealth rivaled that of the king.

The greasy trencher also served as an early form of theatrical review. The story is related of the chance meeting of the troubadours Thibault de Champagne and Bernard de Ventadorn at the Friar's Clubbe, then as now a show biz watering hole. The following dialogue ensued.

Thibault: Bernie, well met. How's Bayeux?

Ventadorn: So so, Tubby. And you? Hast a gigge?

Thibault: Ay verily; 'tis at the Duke's revels this 'een.

Ventadorn: Of what matere ist thy shtick?

Thibault: Y open with some knokke-knokke gestes, and then close with a gai rendition of "When 'tis fleur-de-lys time in Thuringia."

Ventadorn: Knokke-knokke gestes? Art madde? Hast lost thy baubles? Surely thou dost not intend to use that olde chestnut, "Gawain'a Syt Ryght Down and Wryte Myself a Lettre?" Or, worse, "Arthur the Balle is Over"?

Thibault: Nay, Y have all newe material for the which have Y payed a prettie groat. Listeneth. Knokke knokke.

Ventadorn: Alle ryght. Who ist ther?

Thibault: Pepin.

Ventadorn: Pepin who?

Thibault: (sings) Pepin out with my baby.

Ventadorn: Merry gup with a wanion, thou shalt petard [bomb, ed.]. Shalt be luckie if thy noddle is thy onlie bodie parte displayed on castel wall. Blessed is the tyme wherein we are met. Hast not herd, his Grace hates knokke-knokke gestes.

Thibault: Sayest thou so? What shalt Y doe?

Ventadorn: Because thou art a true fellowe and a merrie, Y shall proffer thee a sans fayle devise. Singest thou Sonne Boye. 'Tis the Duke's favourite. Singe it loude and clere, and thou shalt abide ever after in wele and habundaunce.

Thibault: Grammerci for thy curtesye, kynde Ventedorn.

Ventadorn: Breke a jambe, swete Thibault.

Thus it was that Thibault confidently entered the Duke's mead hall that evening little dreaming that he was

*This was obviously written by the same tone-deaf lyrist who penned "Loch Lomond." The attempted rhyme of "Speake" and "eate" is a dead giveaway. Ed.

the fourth troubadour so advised by the cunning Ventadorn. And no sooner had the words "When that it is greye aloft" left his lips, than sodden trenchers rained upon him from above and below the salt. As the Hungarian ambassador was in attendance, an even hotter fire broke upon him from above and below the paprika. Breaded cap-a-pie as a cutlet, Thibault sought sanctuary in a nearby monastery where he took a despondent vow of silence. When last seen, he was a street mime performing the invisible wall bit in front of Loew's Crusader in Joppa.

Ventadorn, his competition effectively routed, offered himself as a last-minute replacement and wowed the Duke with his rendition of "Sweete Charlemagne"—"Oh, I just found joye / I'm as happy as a babee boye / With a manor house in Haut Savoy / When I'm with my sweete Charlemagne." Bestowed upon him in gratitude was not only the manor he so subtly begged, but also a cameo appearance on "Everybody Loves Raimundo, King of Sicily—Or Else!" Ventadorn, the chronicles relate, went on to become a headliner at the Palace.

Among the commonality, equally aberrant customs flourished. They took deepest root in the eccentric soil of England, where, it is believed, many of them are practiced in secret to this day. In Eastbourne in Sussex, for example, it was the custom against the time of a good wife's labor for the husband to provide a large bread called the Groaning Loaf, the first slice of which was cut into small pieces and pegged at the wife during her travail. The groaning referred to was invariably the husband's after his wife had recovered sufficiently to express her views on the matter. It was further believed that if the crusts were thrust in a young woman's smock, she would dream that night of a handsome French waiter serving croutons.

There festered at Westminster School a particularly nasty ritual called Tossing the Pancake. At 11 AM on Shrove Tuesday one of the abbey vergers, followed by the cook who carried a pan containing a single pancake, entered the classroom. The cook tossed this cake over the beam in the roof. It was then scrambled for in a melee by the twenty boys, and the lad who survived carried the largest remaining piece to the Deanery where he was awarded a guinea and several back issues of *National Geographic*.

Of the heinous perversions of the noble art of bread-throwing, the transfer of the actual act to animals was undoubtedly the greatest. In Herefordshire on the Eve of Epiphany or Twelfth Night, we are sorry to report, a large loaf with a hole in the middle was provided. The master then led a procession of his servants and tenants to the barn where he stood the finest of the oxen pints of strong ale until the creature signalled his readiness by humming the opening bars of "Viva Espana." The bread was then put on the ox's horn through the hole, and the ox was tickled to make him toss his head. If he threw the bread behind, it was the mistress' property; if before, the bailiff claimed the prize. If he gored the master, he was treated to a ploughman's lunch, a free week in Cancun, and the right to park his char-a-banc sideways at Ascot. This custom echoes in the ancient "Wassail Song": "Here's a health to the ox and to his right horn. / Pray God send our master a good leech if that whackin' great brute catches him in the sweet breads."

Nor did Holy Church escape farinaceous sacrilege. There was, for example, the Chuck Cheesing, a Whitsuntide custom which survived until recently at St. Briavel's in Gloucestershire. Every householder in the parish paid a penny wherewith to buy bits of stale bread and hard cheese which were carried to church in baskets. After the service the congregation pelted the preacher with these missiles. This was considered jolly good community fun, ranking in popularity only behind a good hdq.**

It was at a Vatican chuck cheesing that Pope Urban accused Clement of Geneva of knocking off his tiara with a wedge of weevily bread. The charge was denied, upon which the Church split into rival factions: those who supported the substantiality of weevils, and those who held for symbolic weevils. An attempt was made to patch things up at the Council of Worms, but the conclave degenerated into pandemonium.

Unrepentant, Clement removed to Avignon where he set up a rival court known as the ABC tearooms. The initials stood for Aerated Bread Company,*** an allusion to the belief (now known to be false) that there can exist no corporeal weevils in aerated bread.

Decency forbids us to categorize further the carnival of misrule to which the noble art had sunk in the Middle Ages. It was time for a reformation. A time to return to the anti-bread-throwing mores of the ancient world. And thus was born the Renaissance.

(Conclusion next issue)

**Hanging, drawing, and quartering, a hideous punishment repugnant to decent folk everywhere because of its repeated participles.

*** Not the Aggravated Babylonian Captivity as some scholars have claimed.

> He had . . . just that extra four or five inches of neck which disqualify a man for high honours in a beauty competition.
>
> *The Small Bachelor*, 1926

In Search of Blandings Redux: The Wodehouse Millennium Tour

By Robert Bruce, John Fletcher, Murray Hedgcock, and Elin Woodger (AD)

In our last issue we described the adventures of the Wodehouse Pilgrims in London from the beginning of the tour on Monday, July 17, to Thursday, July 20, 2000. Our concluding account describes their further adventures in the English countryside from Friday, July 21 through Sunday, July 23.

Friday, July 21

Auntie: To everybody's astonishment, 47 seats were filled at nine AM, when the bus pulled away from the curb. As we exited London, our driver, Graham Restell, introduced himself over the PA system and instructed us on matters related to coach etiquette. We didn't know it yet, but the skillful, confident Graham was about to become another hero of the tour.

Murray: As we set out, we eyed our neighbours on the coach and wondered if we would get on happily or need to seek a quick seat change at the first stopover. No worries indeed: the buzz of amiable conversation was soon rising in intensity, only to be stilled by the announcement that the first and somewhat improbable item on the day's program would be a chat by your correspondent, under the title "PGW and MBH," in which I would be so bold as to draw parallels between my life and times and those of The Master.

Weston Park in Shropshire—the Blandings estate

The first mild attempts at humour appeared to be too mild, as I strained my ears for welcome chuckles, which proved slow in coming. But everyone was in kindly mood, and soon murmurs suggesting they were at least listening began to seep through the ether. At the end there was kind applause.

Then John Fletcher moved into the chair to give the first of his readings from Wodehouse—"Tried in the Furnace," from *Young Men in Spats*, an appropriate selection about an ordeal involving old school ties, vicar's daughters, and school treats. It went well, there was obvious relish and demand for more, and from that point John's career as an audio-tape reader must surely develop.

Our first visit was to one of the most significant of the Murphy-researched sites: Weston Park. With his flock off the bus and gathered by the house, sheepdog Murphy explained that the grounds of Weston Park were, to his mind, the grounds of Blandings. He then pointed us in various directions and ordered us to go ahead.

It was all magic: it helped to half-close the eyes and think hard about Blandings stories and scenes—and suddenly you would realise that you were looking at exactly the right spot. Most suited to your correspondent's approach to life, the universe, and everything was the spreading tree under which Galahad Threepwood would rest, think, snooze, and sometimes hold court from his hammock. Norman pointed out marks [found by Hilary Bruce] where hammock ropes had cut into the bark.

After a relaxed and pleasant lunch in the Old Stables, a mini-expedition headed into the woods to examine the gamekeeper's cottage, which in its time concealed Lady Constance's necklace and the Empress of Blandings. But the sharp-eyed Neil Midkiff had Doubts and questioned the provenance of the cottage: it was just too modern

and too clean. Your correspondent became of the Midkiff school of skepticism on being told there were no bullet holes in the ceiling (from the stray shots loosed in Freddie Threepwood's direction during the climax of *Leave It to Psmith*). [Note: Norman later confirmed that Neil was right. Since the 1989 tour—and as John Fletcher had posited—the old cottage had been torn down and the charming but nondescript structure we saw erected in its place. —AD]

Auntie: Weston Park was undoubtedly where it all began to "click" for the pilgrims. Jelle Otten put it best: "Weston Park was when it came to me in the first moments—I felt at home. When I saw the balustrade where Monty Bodkin and Sue Brown talked together, I was so happy."

Murray: After Weston, we took a quick look at Shifnal, the pleasing market town that Norman believes to be the original of Market Blandings—again a reminder of how close to the England of his day was Plum in his research and his writings. But the look was not too quick for the keen-eyed to dart into second-hand bookshops and come back loaded with Wodehouse gems.

On to Stableford in Shropshire and The Old House, the Wodehouse family home from 1896 (when Plum was fifteen) until 1902, the year he left the Hong Hong and Shanghai Bank to tackle full-time journalism and writing. We were as much enthused by the new-built gardens as by the modest-sized 350-year-old house.

Onwards: Villages and small towns that Plum had known in younger days, long since used as settings for his writing, usually with minor amendments to the true names, were flashed past, or visited, or read about from the series of maps and briefing notes handed out regularly. Most notable was Bridgnorth, which, as Norman explained, appeared under its own name in *Mike* (1909) and in *Do Butlers Burgle Banks?* nearly 60 years later. There was also time for a quick look at Rudge Hall (its real name), seat of the Carmody family and also known as the Big House in *Money for Nothing*.

Auntie: Finally we arrived in Wolverhampton, where we were to stay the first night. After dinner, some of us trickled down to the hotel's media room, where videotapes were popped into the VCR and viewed with relish. These included an episode from the old BBC series, *The World of Wooster*, followed by two episodes ("The Nodder" and "The Code of the Mulliners") from what was—in this aunt's opinion—the only television adaptation ever to get it right: *Wodehouse Playhouse*. Finally sated, we went to bed.

Saturday, July 22

John: We left Wolverhampton after breakfast in a light drizzle which soon lifted, returning us to the glorious tour weather which the committee had specially provided.

First to the Lygon family at the Old Rectory, in the village of Hanley Castle, where in PGW's time the vicar had been the Rev. Edward Isaac, married to Lucy Apollonia Wodehouse, and was thus P. G.'s uncle. The Old Rectory was the original of "old Heppenstall's" rectory in "The Great Sermon Handicap." Norman explained for fans of Evelyn Waugh that we were, so to speak, Revisiting Brideshead, because living in the rectory at present was Miss Lygon, of the Earl Beauchamp's family, who were the originals of the Marchmain family in *Brideshead Revisited*. Their country seat, Madresfield Court, was only five miles away.

Then to nearby Hanley Castle and its 15th-century grammar school. Norman took us into the hall where Gussie Fink-Nottle had given away the prizes. The school was now having its summer holidays, and it was being used to store furniture while they moved things around. He apologised for that, and told of the time when he had

HANLEY CASTLE GRAMMAR SCHOOL — circa 1910.
from a drawing by H. J. Damsell, a former Art Master.

revealed to the headmaster the school's connection to Wodehouse, only to be invited to make a speech at the prize-giving the following year. (Cheers all round.) Then into the dark church, to find Wodehouse and Isaac plaques and graves, and out into the daylight again, to look at the village and sluice at the excellent pub, where the landlady enjoyed a bumper Saturday.

Auntie: For many of us, Hanley Castle was even more special than Weston Park and Sudeley Castle. The trapped-in-time atmosphere of the place, and especially the small homey Three King's Inn, struck a deep chord. As Erik Quick noted, "It was more than anything, I think, touching. I had no impression of what Market Snodsbury would be. Blandings conformed to my impressions, the idea in my head. But Market Snodsbury [Hanley Castle] brings the whole thing into focus."

John: Back on the bus, we journeyed a few hundred feet to Severn End, seat of the Lechmere family—better known as Brinkley Court, country house of Aunt Dahlia. Here Graham, our driver, did one of his stunts, squeezing slowly through the gates and hedges so that spiders were nudged away from their haunts on both sides of the coach. Brinkley Court was not at its best, being clad in scaffolding, but even so was obviously just the place to spend a few days bringing young lovers together.

Next was lunch at The Star in Upton upon Severn, just down the road. This might almost be Market Snodsbury. Citing *Much Obliged Jeeves*, Norman indicated the location of River Row, the street in which Bertie had tried to persuade Mrs. McCorkadale, the Labour candidate, to vote for her Conservative opponent.

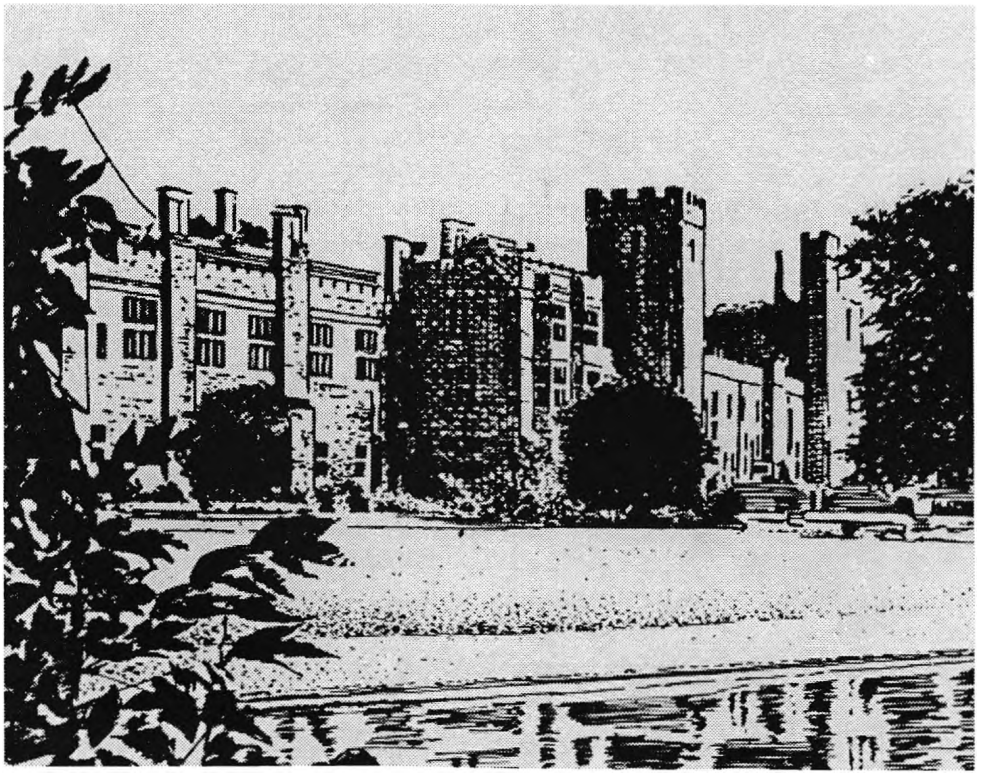
Before and after lunch, our bookworms had scoured the shops and brought back various trophies. One of these, an early edition of *The Head of Kay's*, was auctioned on the bus and bids, starting at £5, rapidly rose to £30 before it was sold.

We passed along the road to Pershore, where Bertie had endured his midnight bicycle ride without lights, passing signposts on which his vivid imagination had seen Aunt Agatha perched. And so to Sudeley.

I would love Sudeley Castle even if it had no Wodehouse associations and were not obviously the building we know as Blandings Castle. I find some of the exhilaration there which I find in Wodehouse. It is often said that at Blandings the sun shines all the time, despite the titles of the great Blandings stories, *Summer Lightning* and *Heavy Weather*. In my mind it is made not of Cotswold stone but of some precious metal, gold perhaps, or shining silver. And the sun was shining as our photographs from that day show.

We had only an hour and a half at Sudeley. It was a Saturday, so there were many other visitors. The rooms are small, but because the Castle is built around a large court, from the outside it seems enormous. The yew alleys seemed bigger than in 1989, and the gardens seemed better than ever. Angus McAllister (or was it Thorne?) and his team had been hard at work.

Auntie: As he had done elsewhere, Norman gave us a few quick facts about Sudeley (among other things, it had once been the home of Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's last wife) and then left us to wander about the place at will. But, dedicated to his task, he stationed himself by the yew alley, where he grabbed passing Wodehousians and demonstrated the ease with which one could secrete oneself among the yews. Finally, as he prepared to leave, he performed his *entrechat*, exuberantly kicking his heels in the air. As Neil Midkiff noted, our chairman was "actually dancing with glee at the idea that he was spreading the gospel of Wodehouse and the environment and the stories behind the stories. It was a real joy."



Sudeley Castle in the Cotswolds—this is Blandings

John: Eventually away to dinner at the Hotel de la Bere in Cheltenham. This was both palatial and mysterious. A wedding recep-

tion was progressing well (and continued to progress well—and loudly—for six more hours). Several of our party conducted tours round their bedrooms, so impressive were they.

At dinner we sat round large tables, ate well, and Sven Sahlin proposed toasts, starting with Graham the driver and going on to many others. I went to my great bed early. There were revelries no doubt, but I slept through them. [For an account of some of the revelries, see Robert Bruce's report on the web site. —AD]

Sunday, July 23

Robert Bruce: We got underway at 9:30 AM, rattling on through the bosky countryside of Worcestershire, and were regaled by John Fletcher's reading of the prize-giving ceremony from *Right Ho, Jeeves*. This was so well done that in the end he put our lives at risk. Despite not being a Wodehousian, Graham, our excellent driver, was laughing as much as anyone.

Shortly we arrived at our first visit of the day's programme: Cheney Court, where the schoolboy Wodehouse had lived with a menage of aunts. Colonel Murphy was in his element once more, pointing out that the only time the house appeared in the Wodehouse oeuvre was as Deverill Hall in *The Mating Season*, the name Deverill having been taken from the five villages running along the valley below the house.

A commemorative photograph was taken of our chairman along with Elin Woodger and Sven Sahlin posing in the manner of an illustration drawn by one of the aunts, Aunt Louisa, for the book *Mr Zinzan of Bath*, which had been written by yet another of the aunts, Miss Mary Deane, who served partly as inspiration for Aunt Agatha. Pedants pointed out that the photograph was being taken in the wrong part of the garden. Our chairman replied that it looked better from the lawn than from the area which was now a car park.

The house, now used as a college by Linguarama to teach languages, contained a fine wooden staircase in a corner of the living room where we were encouraged to imagine the boy Wodehouse falling down in an unruly fashion. Wide lawns stretched away towards cornfields; it was easy to see how a young Plum could have escaped into the countryside.

Then it was back on the road again to pass Ditteridge and catch a passing view of the house that was home to Sir Roderick Glossop. Our chairman's belief in this matching up was, he explained, confirmed by information that in Wodehouse's time the local doctor, Dr Henry MacBryan, who ran a private mental hospital just down the hill, had possessed an enormous bald head and beetling eyebrows.

We then drove to Corsham, where Corsham Court was noted as a possible source for the idea, though little of the detail, of Blandings. Wodehouse visited here when he was seven years old and recalled skating on the nearby lake where the Court looms on the skyline, much as Blandings did to lovelorn souls mooching by its lake.

We ate a hearty meal of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and apple pie at the Methuen Arms. Speeches were made. Our self-styled "Oldest Member," Wim Duk thanked the whole party for being such enjoyable and happy people. He then announced the old Dutch custom of saying goodbye by kissing the nearest person to you—and promptly raced to the other side of the room to buss the tour organiser, Hilary Bruce. She was spared no blushes as our chairman then presented her with a copy of *In Search of Blandings* that had been signed by every appreciative member of the expedition.

After a brief visit to the local cricket ground where Corsham were playing Trowbridge in a key cup-tie, we reboarded the bus and headed Londonwards to what the chairman had only announced as "a final surprise." After some time the coach left the motorway and headed perilously but skillfully down some increasingly tight, narrow, and leafy lanes, arriving in the end in a farmyard.

The surprise was that we were to see some prime Berkshire pigs. The bus erupted with cheers, and there was a stampede as our pilgrims hastened to the task of porcine perusing.

We were met by Sir Richard Body, the crusading agricultural Member of Parliament. He was clutching a copy, not of Whiffle's immortal *On The Care of the Pig* (Popgood & Grooly, 35s), but the equally comforting 14th edition of Fream's *Elements of Agriculture*, and he regaled us with tales about Berkshires. In particular, he told us of the great Newbury show chase, when his prize pig had bolted, knocking over a few judges, and disappeared before reappearing with some pigs of a quite different breed when they were being shown.

Although earlier there had been clouds, "The sun has come out for the Empress," said our chairman in triumph, "as it always does." Enormous Berkshires grunted happily as we scratched their backs. Tiny piglets went into a huddle at the back of their sty as we stuck our snouts over the wall. Marilyn MacGregor and others were pleased at being able, at last, to settle the great tail controversy—for once and for all. "They curl anti-clockwise!" went up the triumphant shout. Our chairman tried out his plastic Hog Call. Two Berkshires promptly turned tail and went back inside their sty.

We departed a remarkably happy band of Wodehousians. We spent the short drive back to London studying the criteria for the "standard of excellence for the Berkshire breed," as laid down by the Berkshire Pig

Breeders Club. Some mused on how it is understood that people begin to resemble their pets, or their objects of affection in the animal world. Who did we know with "a fine face," with ears "fringed with fine hair and a light jowl," with shoulder blades "fine and well-sloping," with a back "set high," with flesh "fine and free from wrinkles," with hair "long, fine and plentiful," and, the clincher this, "standing well on toes and a good walker." Why this was none other than our chairman, Colonel NTP Murphy, the beloved Norman.

And with that we arrived back at the hotel by Kensington Gardens to say fond farewells and drift away, exhausted but supremely happy, to our respective homes to muse and to dream about a wonderful week

Auntie: We pilgrims were universally favorable in our opinions of the tour. **John Looijestijn** summed up the feelings of many when he noted how well organized it had been, and how well everything had fit into place. "I will be reading the stories with more delight now that I can place certain things," he said.

Said **Gus Caywood,** "The thing that stands out the most is the grounds at Weston—the atmosphere, the gardens, the fragrance of the flowers—all of it really did bring me back to the Lord Emsworth era." **John Graham** added, "I'll never read the Blandings books the same way. Weston Park and Sudeley Castle have really transposed the way that I'll read all of Blandings. It's going to be more real to me than it ever was, and that is an unexpected pleasure."

There were numerous comments about the group itself and "meeting so many wonderful people," as **Susan Brokaw** put it. **Suzanne Duk** commented on the mix of nationalities and the overall cheerfulness of the group, while **Tony Ring** noted: "It was wonderful to see how forty-seven people all stamped their personalities on the tour." The solidarity theme was emphasized by **Murray Hedgcock:** "You're all together on this one. It's a united community for a few days."

Masha Lebedeva joined us from Russia. "I feel like I've met a miracle society," she said. **Sven Sahlin,** president of the Swedish Wodehouse Society, had similar thoughts: "All you nice, wonderful Wodehousians are the people that attract me the most. They are diverse and yet focused on one interesting thing—P.G. Wodehouse."

Robert Bruce probably provided the best summation of the experience: "It was rather like having a huge magic carpet that was rolled out in front of us, with everything in its place, whatever we wanted to be there. We had a most wonderful time." This, as his wife **Hilary Bruce** noted, had been the aim: "What we wanted to create was people being happy and being happy together."

They succeeded beyond anybody's expectations. The extraordinary effort put into the tour by Hilary, Norman, Tony, Helen, John, Murray, Robert, and others—the seamless manner in which it all unfolded—Norman's Wodehousian erudition and the passion with which he shared it—the places we saw, transporting us back in time, and the friendships we made thanks to our mutual devotion to Wodehouse—as so many people said, it was all nothing short of magical. Good show, old things. Jolly good show!

The Pilgrims: Sylvia Bernicchi (Houston, TX); Anne Bianchi (Houston, TX); Susan Brokaw and Dirk, Luke, and Clay Wonnell (Cincinnati, OH); Hilary and Robert Bruce (London, England); Goran and Ulla Bulow (Stockholm, Sweden); Gus Caywood (Chappaqua, NY); Chris and Joyce Dueker (Atherton, CA); Willem and Suzanne Duk (Amsterdam, Netherlands); John Fletcher (Maidenhead, England); William Franklin (San Francisco, CA); Stephen Fullom (Waltham Cross, England); John Graham (S. Orange, NJ); Murray Hedgcock (London, England); Masha Lebedeva (Moscow, Russia); John and Paula Looijestijn (Lagoa, Portugal); David MacKenzie and Hope Gaines (Cape May, NJ); Marilyn MacGregor (Davis, CA); Neil Midkiff (Sunnyvale, CA); Helen Murphy (London, England); Norman Murphy (London, England); Per Mykland (Chicago and Norway); Jelle and Marjanne Otten (Deventers, Netherlands); Andrew Parker (Chessington, England); Amy Plofker (Hamden, CT); Erik Quick (Arlington, VA); Tony and Elaine Ring (Great Missenden, England); Sven Sahlin (Akersberga, Sweden); Thomas Schlachter (Zurich, Switzerland); Ake and Louise Skeppare (Sigtuna, Sweden); Jean Tillson (Foxboro, MA); Nick Townend (Crewe, England); Adrian and Dorothe Vincent (Carlshalton Beeches, England); Christina Wasson (Chicago, IL); Elin Woodger (Southold, NY).

McIlvaine Redux

Just a reminder that Tony Ring and company are continuing to look for updated information on the Wodehouse canon to be included in a supplement to McIlvaine's bibliography that will be published next year. According to the latest *Wooster Sauce*, the deadline for receipt of all contributions has been moved to the end of January, 2001; we here in the United States should aim for a bit before that to give David Landman, point man on this side of the Atlantic, time to compile and send material to Tony. For details refer to the Spring 2000 issue of *Plum Lines*, page 16, and send your contributions to: David Landman, 197 Woburn Street, Lexington, MA 02420.

The Philadelphia Convention, 2001

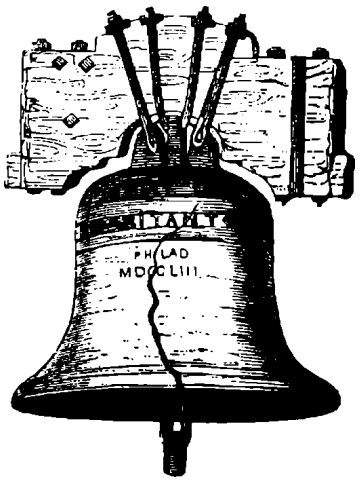
By Susan (Rosie M. Banks) Cohen

Mike Jackson played cricket in Philadelphia, as we are told in *Psmith Journalist*. Well, if Mike Jackson thought Philadelphia was the place to be, doesn't that mean you should be there, too? And what better time to be there than during the glorious, stars-and-stripes-aglowing 2001 Wodehouse Odyssey Convention, the real Philadelphia convention, not that little Republican thing that occurred in the city last August. The convention, hosted by Chapter One, will run from Thursday, October 11th, through Sunday, October 14th, 2001, at the Sheraton Society Hill Hotel.

Don't delay! Before you read another word call the Sheraton at (215) 238-6000, ask for the in-house reservation desk, and tell them you want to book a room for the Wodehouse Convention. Everyone will be there. If Benjamin Franklin were still hanging around Philly he would be there. And I rather suspect his ghost will haunt the convention that weekend, shouting "Bring On The Girls!" as Ben never was one to pass up a good time.

Even non-Wodehouse fans have enjoyed our conventions. It is one of the great virtues of TWS that it is welcoming, friendly, and free of the snobbery that afflicts many other literary societies. So if you are a Wodehouse fan and your mate is not, bring your mate anyway. You will have several days of laughter and joy. Those preferring to attend alone will soon be surrounded by new friends, and faster than you can sing "Sonny Boy," you will feel at home.

Speaking of home you are no doubt aware that Philadelphia is the historic home of democracy, the cradle of American freedom and liberty, the place where George III got the good old Bronx cheer and a sock in the eye with a hard roll. Declarations of Independence and Constitutions once burbled out of this old city, and the cracked Liberty Bell still reigns supreme. But what is creating a new country compared with Philadelphia's chief contribution to civilization, the creation of the Wodehouse Society by Captain Bill Blood. Yes, the city of brotherly love is the society's baptismal font, and we of Chapter One are proud to have TWS cofounder Franklin Axe as our Oldest Member

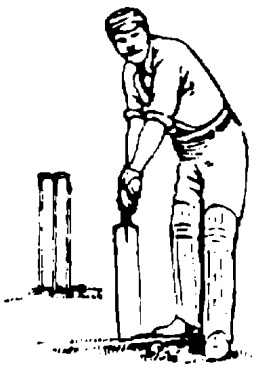


Conveniently, our convention hotel is very close to Independence Hall, so you will easily be able to visit the site where these United States were born. And while you're there you will see the painting "Signing of the Constitution," by artist Louis S. Glanzman. As a member of Chapter One Lou has graciously volunteered to sign posters of his painting, which you can obtain at the site's Visitor's Center.

On Thursday, convention arrival day, there will be a twilight tour of the historic Society Hill area for those attendees ensconced in the hotel by dusk. The tour will be led by Philadelphia born and bred Herb Moskovitz and Gretchen Worden, director of the famed Mutter Medical Museum. What these two don't know about Philadelphia isn't worth knowing. Following a dinner at the restaurant of your choice those on the tour will return to the convention hotel for the sluicing of a lifetime. Gretchen, a trained volunteer tour guide, will lead a more extensive tour of the historical sites on Convention Friday morning.

Gretchen will also give a deliciously charming talk on her fabulous cow creamer collection on Convention Saturday, when witty, informative speeches about Wodehouse and Wodehousiana will be presented for your edification and amusement. Besides speeches there will be a few even lighter diversions. Nor will our convention lack for music.

When it comes to cricket Philadelphia is a gold mine. The city boasts the British Officers' Cricket Club, bristling with tradition, while nearby Haverford College possesses what has been called the greatest collection of cricket memorabilia in the Western Hemisphere.



TWS cricket, of course, has its own sterling traditions, chiefly that you can play without having the foggiest notion what the game's rules are or how to whack a ball, catch a ball, or bowl it. So don't be shy, just join in the rollicking cricket events planned for you on Convention Friday, and you'll have the time of your life. Don't worry about making a fool of yourself. You will be surrounded by people making fools of themselves.

On Friday afternoon there will be of bunch of infor-

mal cozy get-togethers, made up of small bands of Wodehouse fans interested in a particular aspect of the master's works or life. Attendees are free to roam from one get-together to the next. John Graham will oversee a discussion of collecting Wodehouse books for those new to collecting, considering collecting, or experienced at collecting. Dan Cohen will lead one on listening to Wodehouse. He'll play portions of audiotapes for those curious about what to buy. If you'd like to lead a discussion on a particular Wodehousian subject just let me know. Since this is a new convention event and we don't know how many people will show up, those leading the discussions can always adjourn to the bar and sluice if no one comes. Worse fates could befall you. Indoor games (not team sports) will also go on during this time.

If you are a fan of Sherlock Holmes as well as Wodehouse, you should know that there will be a meeting of the Clients of Adrian Mulliner on Friday afternoon. Anne Cotton and Marilyn MacGregor are in charge of this event, and they will announce time, place, etc. at the convention, or maybe even before.

As for logistics, Philadelphia's airport is a mere eight miles away, so you'll have a short drive to the hotel. Our hotel has a van which routinely picks up guests outside the baggage area. The price for this service, round trip, is only $18 per person. A train from the airport gets you into central Philadelphia for $5, but then you have to take a cab or lug luggage onto mass transit from central Philadelphia to the hotel. As for those swarms of Wodehouse fans on the East Coast, Philly is easy to reach by AmTrak or car. Parking in the hotel garage is a reasonable $14.50 a day, and there are cheaper parking facilities in the area.

A small city, Philadelphia is famous for its fine museums, including that Victorian treasure preserved in aspic forever, the Wagner Free Institute of Science, where under the chairs in the lecture hall there are racks for gentlemen to store their high hats. There is the wonderful Rosenbach Museum and Library (Dr. Rosenbach is mentioned in *The Small Bachelor*), which has phenomenal art and rare books, as well as manuscript collections. Greta Garbo (also mentioned in Wodehouse) fanciers will find a steamy collection of letters there. So go see the joint.

The city is also known for its many landmarks and great architecture. Best of all you will be able to do much of your sightseeing on foot. Should you get tired there is always mass transit. Close by you can hunt down used-book stores, browse antique shops, and tour museums on Convention Friday. Perhaps you'll want to visit the Philadelphia Zoo to see the newt exhibit funded by members of TWS. Every year Chapter One adopts the newts and contributes to their care in honor of that divine newt expert and orange juice guzzler Gussie Fink-Nottle.

For energetic walkers, I highly recommend the Reading Terminal Market, where wonderful meats, poultry, chicken, cheeses, etc. are sold. There you will find excellent inexpensive ethnic lunches, served food-court style, and best of all, one of America's finest ice cream counters, given pride of place on PBS's ice cream show. Its name, get this, is Bassett's. How can a Plummie not want to eat ice cream scooped out by the soupy Madeline herself.

So as you can see we have plunked you down in a hotel in a terrific neighborhood, a neighborhood near the river, a neighborhood loaded with good inexpensive restaurants and shops, so if you don't want to leave the area at all you will be able to enjoy yourself and find plenty to do. As for the hotel itself we in Chapter One think it's quite special. It is relatively small so Plummies can easily take it over, thus showing any humorless guests staying there how life should be lived. There are patios and alcoves where small groups of Wodehouse fans can gather together.

And, best of all, we will have the cheerful hotel bar all to ourselves for one night. Yes, on Thursday evening it will become the Anglers' Rest, sluicing for Plummies only! You will be able to swill down Green Swizzle Woosters and May Queens. Even the Empress of Blandings can't outswill you that night. Sing to your heart's content in the bar if it makes you happy, or imitate a clucking chicken. The person you cluck to may have crept up to your room when you weren't looking to hide a fretful porpentine in your bed. Ah, friendship!

For when all is said and done the best thing about a Wodehouse Convention is not the great guest speakers, not the games, not the charming cricket, not the Wodehousian prizes, not the Wodehousian costumes, not the rest of the activities. It's being with other Wodehousians, People who Understand, People who Share Your Passion. It's escaping for a few days into the magic world created by our favorite genius.

So it's onward to the 2001 Wodehouse Odyssey Convention, THE true millennial event, the one the world has been holding its breath and waiting for—lo, these thousands of years. Do not remain in darkness next fall. Come into the sparkling light! Be there in Philadelphia when it counts!

Rosie M. Banks

Announcing the Great Plum Paragraph Contest!

The denizens of Chapter One, hosts of the 2001 convention of TWS, have devised a contest for all interested parties.

Last year, on the Internet, someone made the mad mistake of asking what other writers the people in TWS read—in other words, who is your second favorite writer? The question unleashed a torrent, if torrent is the word I want, Jeeves, of replies. It seems that Plum fans have reading habits that are exotic, eccentric, and evocative.

We challenge those reading habits. Pick out your favorite Wodehouse paragraph, or one that you consider typically Wodehousian, and rewrite it in the style of one of your second-favorite authors. That is the only rule. The contest will be judged by a blue-ribbon panel of Plummies, all of whom have been chosen by Ouija board.

Send it any way you want, before September 1, 2001. Send it in Esperanto if you wish, or in telegraph form like Lord Emsworth.

Winners will be announced at the convention in October 2001, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Enter early and often. Cheating and chicanery are encouraged. Please don't send perishables. Void where prohibited by law. Relatives and employees of the Wodehouse Society are more to be pitied than censured.

> A sort of writhing movement behind his moustache showed that Sir Aylmer was smiling, and in another moment who knows what beautiful friendship might not have begun to blossom. Unfortunately, however, before the burgeoning process could set in, Sir Aylmer's eye fell on the remains of the what-not and the smile vanished from his face like a breath off a razor-blade, to be replaced by a scowl of such malignity that Pongo had the illusion that his interior organs were being scooped out with a spade or trowel.
>
> *Uncle Dynamite*, 1948

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Dues are $20 per year, payable to the Wodehouse Society.