



# BY THE WAY

Occasional Newsletters from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

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## Where Was Wodehouse? And When? 1918–1921 (by Norman Murphy)

**1918. March.** Guy Bolton moves to Great Neck, the Kensington section.

*Late March.* Ethel and PG move to **121 Arrandale Avenue, Great Neck**, some three miles from Guy's house at 12 Beverley Drive. This is when Wodehouse begins to play golf at the Sound View Golf Club, which matches the Oldest Member's club in every particular.

*April 15.* *See You Later* opens and closes in **Baltimore**.

*Note.* Three biographers believe the Wodehouses came over to London in 1918 and took a house in 16 Walton Street to be near Leonora at school at Bromley, Kent. I believe this is incorrect for three reasons. From his letters, Wodehouse was certainly in America up to June and then again in September 1918. Also, as becomes clear in his letters of 1921, referenced below, Leonora did not move to the school in Bromley (southeast of London) until 1921. Further, writing and rehearsing *The Girl Behind the Gun* occupied PG's time from July to its September opening. Finally, the war was still on and U-boats were attacking American ships. So I do not think PG travelled to England in 1918.

*June 20.* PG writes to Lillian Barnett, his old housekeeper at Emsworth, from **Arrandale Avenue**. (He had been on the road for weeks trying out/rewriting *See You Later*, but it died on the road.)

*July.* Working/on tour with *The Girl Behind the Gun*.

*September 12.* Definitely at **Arrandale Avenue**; reference is his draft registration card. MTT John Dawson.

*September 16.* *The Girl Behind the Gun* opens at the New Amsterdam, New York.

*October 18. Detroit.* Wodehouse and Bolton arrive here and wait for two weeks to see if the influenza ban that has closed all theatres in Detroit will be lifted (see *The Adventures of Sally*). It isn't, so they take the show (*Ask Dad*, later renamed *Oh, My Dear!*) to a theatre in Toronto. MTT Robert Walter.

*October 30/31–November 8/9(?) Toronto.* The show plays here for a week and then returns to **Detroit**, where it starts a one-week run on November 10.

Meanwhile, *The Canary*, with a couple of lyrics by PG, opens at the Globe Theatre, New York, on November 4.

*November 27.* *Oh, My Dear!* opens at the Princess Theatre, New York.

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**1919. January.** The Wodehouses sail over to the **UK (14th crossing)** for rehearsals of *Kissing Time* (US title *The Girl Behind the Gun*) and rent **16 Walton Street**. (This house (for sale at £8 million in April 2015) has an unofficial plaque on it saying PG lived there 1918–1920. The only indication as to who put it there are the mysterious initials on it: 'L.L.A.D.' I have made strenuous efforts to trace these, but the best suggestion I have received so far is that they stand for 'Lord love a duck'!)

*May 20.* *Kissing Time* opens at Winter Garden Theatre.

*June/July.* Wodehouse return to **New York** to work on *The Rose of China*. (**15th crossing**)

*August.* PG and Ethel are back in **Great Neck**.

*November 25.* *The Rose of China* opens at the Lyric Theatre, NY. Only 47 performances.

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**1920. January 12.** From **Great Neck**: "I'm off golf for the moment. I played the day before yesterday on the frosty ground and smashed my best iron. I wonder what Marcus Aurelius would have said."

*January/February.* I believe this is when PG, Ethel, and Guy Bolton went to **Palm Beach** and joined Ziegfeld on a cruise on his yacht, where Ethel Pettit sang 'Bill'. I had great difficulty in identifying the date of this trip. *Bring On the Girls* states it was just after *Oh, My Dear* opened in November 1918, but the accompanying accounts of what PG and Bolton were doing at the time are contradictory. Having read every biography, I found Lee Davis's corroborative detail more convincing and agree with his view that it was February 1920.

*February 28.* PG writes to Townend from **Great Neck**, saying, inter alia, that he drives his own car.

*April 4.* PG sails on the *Adriatic* to the **UK (16th crossing)**. He almost certainly rents **16 Walton Street** again, though I haven't confirmed this – but see October 1, below.

*May 28.* PG plays cricket for **Emsworth** House v. Red Company. This seems to be his last game in Emsworth.

*August 7.* PG writes from **Park Farm, adjoining Quinton Farm, Felixstowe**. This later became a golf course. I believe the building is now a ruin.

*September 9.* PG writes from the **Constitutional Club, London**.

*September 13–27/30.* PG staying at **Constitutional Club**; Ethel at Chingford visiting relations. On the 27th he writes from the club to Leonora: “Living here for the last two weeks . . . in another few days we move into the house.”

*October 1.* PG writes from **16 Walton Street, London**.

*Note.* Where did Leonora go to school and when? The biographers give conflicting accounts, but it is clear that Leonora was at Ely Court, Ely, until summer 1920 (see letter of September 27 from PG to Leonora forwarding a letter from her previous school at Ely). On November 20, PG wrote from 16 Walton Street, hoping she was enjoying her new school at Felixstowe. She stayed there until May 1921 since, on May 21 that year, PG wrote to her saying he is glad she is enjoying the new school, which was the Old Palace School, Bromley.

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**1921. January–February.** PG still in London at **16 Walton St** and reports on two Dulwich matches in the February 1921 *Alleynian*.

*February 21.* Wodehouses visit **Paris**, then go to **Biarritz**. Phelps says: “One reason for the Wodehouses’ peregrinations between the wars was to reduce their heavy tax burden.” As early as 1921, they left for Paris because PG found that if he stayed in UK for more than six months in a financial year, he would pay UK income tax not only on everything he earned in UK but also, in full, everything left from his US income after the US had taxed it. They still retained the Walton Street house; see letter of April 2.

*March.* PG goes down to **Emsworth** to concentrate on his writing.

*April 1.* The Wodehouses arrive at **New York** on the *Adriatic*. (**17th crossing**)

*April 2.* PG writes to Leonora from **Hotel Biltmore, 335 Madison Avenue**. The hotel has gone now, replaced by the Bank of America Plaza in 1981, though the old Biltmore clock, once a famous meeting place, still hangs in the bank's atrium. The Wodehouses stayed here because they were selling or terminating the lease on their house at Great Neck. PG's letter asks Leonora if she has had “much trouble clearing up and getting out of Walton Street?”

*April 20.* Wodehouses leave **New York** on the *Olympic*. (**18th crossing**)

*May 1.* **Emsworth** House School. PG is staying there while working on a show, probably *Sally* or *The Golden Moth*. He writes that he only got one game of golf at Great Neck in the 20 days he was in New York. Leonora, age 17, is about to leave Felixstowe for the Old Palace School, Bromley, Kent.

*May 13.* PG writes from the **Constitutional Club** to Denis Mackail.

*May 20.* From **8 Launceston Place, Gloucester Road**, to Leonora: he hopes she likes her new school, where they speak French all the time.

*June 15.* Writes from Launceston Place.

*July 3.* Ditto.

*July/August.* **Birchington-on-Sea, near Margate, Kent**. In 1921 PG, Ethel, and (probably) Leonora went for a holiday at Birchington. They met Frederick Lonsdale, the successful dramatist, and recommended the Old Palace, Bromley, as a school for Frances Lonsdale, later Frances Donaldson, with whom Leonora became great friends from their time there.

*September 10.* *Sally* opens, Winter Garden, Drury Lane, London.

*October 5.* *The Golden Moth* by PG and Fred Thompson, music by Ivor Novello, opens, Adelphi Theatre, London.

*September–November.* In **London** since he reports on four Dulwich matches in the December 1921 *Alleynian*. Address either still at 8 Launceston Place (see July above) or 11 King Street.

*December 21.* PG writes to Leonora from **Flat 43, 11 King Street, St James**, announcing Front Line's win in a Hurdle Handicap at Hurst Park. Ethel had bought the horse and registered her racing colours as scarlet cross bands and black cap.