

BACK THE BERKSHIRE

A Special Supplement from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

June 2005

Message from the Chairman

The Empress of Blandings was a Berkshire sow. As one of P G Wodehouse's principal and most engaging characters she is naturally held in esteem and affection by Society members and, by association, the Berkshire breed is admired and supported by Wodehouse lovers. Many have visited Berkshires at farms and rare breed parks to pay their respects.

The Society is confident that in fifty or a hundred years time, Wodehouse's work will continue to be read and enjoyed. New generations will be captivated by the Empress, and will want, in their turn, to pay respects to members of her breed. But there are only three or four hundred Berkshires in the UK today – not enough to secure its future. The Rare Breeds Survival Trust classifies the Berkshire pig as 'Vulnerable', so there is no room for complacency. Only by increasing the numbers very substantially, perhaps fourfold, will the Berkshire get off the danger list, and be safely re-established as a viable, though still rare, breed of Traditional British Pig.



The P G Wodehouse Society (UK) wants to play its part in ensuring the survival of the Berkshire. In this supplement we remind members of the relevance of the Empress of Blandings to the Wodehouse oeuvre, explain the relationship between consumption of Berkshire meat and the breed's survival (the 'Emsworth Paradox'), list many of the farmers who sell Berkshire meat, and provide information as to where members of the Society can visit Berkshire pigs. The information provided will, of course, only be up to date when this supplement is prepared, and members should bear this in mind if planning to visit any of the places mentioned.

The pig featured in the photograph above is Patience, the first Berkshire sow acquired by Baylham Rare Breeds Farm in Suffolk. Alert members will recall that sponsorships of Patience were presented to the entertainers at our last formal dinner in October. Since then, Patience has both suffered and recovered from a nasty viral illness (which is why she was inside at the time of the photo), and is now living next door to a large white boar. This will enable the farm to judge when she might be ready for mating, at which time she will be artificially inseminated from a Berkshire boar.

The Emsworth Paradox

Our admiration of The Empress of Blandings is a good reason to care about Berkshires, but there are many more – preservation of traditional breeds, animal welfare, and the flavour of the meat.

Rare breed pork tastes better, with a fuller flavour, than commercially produced pork. Foodies and farmers alike say that once you have eaten pork and bacon from a traditional breed, you'll never go back to supermarket meat – and the special qualities of Berkshire pork are legendary. Mrs Beeton tells us that the Berkshire is

'the best known and most esteemed of all our English domestic breeds'.

Described as 'a proper pork pig', the meat is very fine-textured which gives it a melt-in-the-mouth quality, with a distinctive flavour that people describe as 'sweetness'.

The superb flavour has time to develop because Berkshires are slow to mature; commercially raised pigs are bred and fed to be ready for slaughter in half the time it takes to ready a Berkshire. Pedigree pigs tend to enjoy higher welfare standards than commercially reared animals – where commercial producers often keep their pigs indoors in 24-hour artificial light, Berkshires are always 'free-range' and the majority of breeders have less than a dozen pigs.

These are good reasons to eat Berkshire pork – and eat it we must, if we are to secure the future of the breed.

Eat the Empress?

Well, yes. We call it **The Emsworth Paradox**.

To establish viable herds and prevent inbreeding, the country needs 1,500-2,000 Berkshire sows. They would produce about 30,000 pigs a year which must be sold at a premium that, at minimum, covers the additional cost of production. The urgent need, therefore, is to establish a guaranteed niche market for Berkshire pork.

Embracing The Emsworth Paradox is the only way to ensure that Berkshires continue to be bred, to preserve the carefully nurtured bloodlines – and to guarantee that there will be a Berkshire pig available when our grandchildren feel the need to scratch a broad back with a pensive stick.

The Characteristics of the Berkshire

In 1919, C Arthur Pearson Ltd published the first edition of *The Pig: Breeding, Rearing and Marketing* by Sanders Spencer. One of the advertisements in the preliminary pages is for fifteen volumes in *The Smallholder Library*, from the publisher A F Sowter, number 6 of which is *Pigs: How to Make Them Pay* (Breeding, Feeding and Housing).

Our observant member James Hogg noticed that the photograph of *A Berkshire Sow* which appears opposite page 32 was from *A Painting by Wippell*, and has suggested that Wodehouse may have seen either the original painting or this book and used its artist's name as his inspiration for his pig expert Whiffle.

The author lists the following characteristics for each of the 'Pure Breeds'. The Breed Standard for the Berkshire has barely changed today:

Colour	Black, with white on face, feet and tip of tail.
Skin	Fine, and free from wrinkles.
Hair	Long, fine and plentiful.
Head	Moderately short, face dished, snout broad; and wide between the eyes and ears.
Ears	Fairly large, carried erect or slightly inclined forward, and fringed with fine hair.
Neck	Medium length, evenly set on shoulders; jowl full and not heavy.
Shoulders	Fine and well sloped backwards; free from coarseness.
Back	Long and straight, ribs well sprung, sides deep.
Hams	Wide and deep to hocks.
Tail	Set high, and fairly large.
Flank	Deep and well let down, and making straight under line.
Legs and Feet	Short, straight, and strong, set wide apart, and hoofs nearly erect.
Imperfections	A perfectly black face, foot or tail. A white ear. A crooked jaw. White or sandy spots, or white skin on the body. A rose back. A very coarse mane, and in-bent knees.

Pedigree Berkshire Pork Retailers

Taken from the lists of The British Pig Association

Acknowledgements

The authors offer grateful thanks to the following, who generously shared information and their time:

Sharon Barnfield, John Mason and Jo Wykes-Sneyd of the Berkshire Pig Breeders Club

Marcus Bates of the British Pig Association

Richard Lutwyche of Traditional Breeds Meat Marketing

Tony York of Pig Paradise, Staffordshire and Derbyshire

Ann Wilson of The Ginger Pig, London and Pickering.



The Origins of the Empress

In the very first paragraph of *Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey*, the story published in 1927 in which the Empress was introduced to the public, she was described as a 'black Berkshire sow'. Forgive the tautology, for all Berkshires are black, the question naturally arose as to whether there had been a specific porcine acquaintance on whom Wodehouse based his character.



Members met this Berkshire family on the Millennium Tour in 2000

We know where he found his plot for *Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey*, see page 5, and there is no evidence to show that he had been contemplating using a pig as a character before September 1926. But Norman Murphy is convinced that he has traced the origin of the Empress herself, as detailed in the Penguin reprint of *Sunset at Blandings* (2000), and his arguments are summarised below.

He pointed out that Wodehouse had struggled with the third Blandings novel, *Summer Lightning*, from 1926 until its first appearance in the monthly magazine *Pall Mall* in March 1929. This conclusion is probably drawn from a comment made in a letter to Bill Townend dated March 10, 1928 to the effect that he had just had a profitable weekend in Droitwich, getting the missing links in *Summer Lightning*, 'which I had by me for eighteen months'. He confirmed in a later letter that he had been writing and rewriting the book during the summer, and must have written one hundred thousand words to achieve thirty thousand. Unfortunately, none of this can tell us about the nature of the missing links. But it may be more than a coincidence that just eighteen months before the March 10 letter, on September 14, 1926, he would have been reading about Fred Patzel's exploits. It is easy to assume that having decided to write the story *Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey* he might have started thinking about how to involve the Empress in a novel.

A decision to make her a major character required that she be described in significant and accurate detail. Wodehouse paid his first visit to Hunstanton Hall, whose owner was Charles Le Strange, in 1924, and would have been aware that Glenny II, one of the Jersey cows about which he was obsessed, won three championships (county, regional and national) in successive years, 1929, 1930 and 1931. Norman Murphy believed that she might have been the

model for the Empress, and became convinced by his researches that in the vicinity there would have been a pig which Wodehouse had met.

First, he would always take a long walk in the afternoon as part of his routine, whether he was at home or staying away. Furthermore, he disliked the extensive social contact at Hunstanton Hall in which he was supposed to participate, and this may have helped to determine the route of his walks. When Norman discovered a route which might have enabled him to avoid fellow visitors, he followed it and noticed a small ruined structure amongst the nettles beside a kitchen-garden wall. On closer inspection, it proved to have been a pigsty. Murphy concluded that with his catholic liking for all animals, Wodehouse would have established friendly relations with the pig in residence.

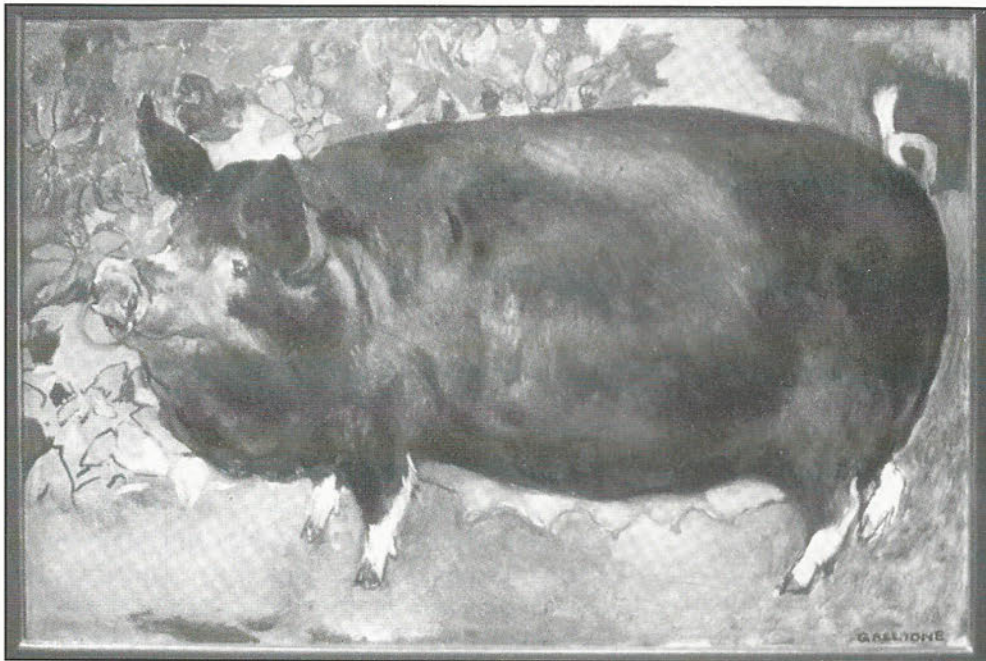
He then had a stroke of luck in meeting Tom Mott, whose father had been chauffeur at the Hall in the 1920s. Tom remembered both Plum and the pigsty and confirmed that in the mid-1920s the pig had been black. And he amazed Norman by producing a photograph of the animal! Although it was subsequently established that the pig in that photograph had been a large black, a breed which has a substantial number of features which to the layman's eye are somewhat similar to those of a Berkshire, we must bear in mind that Wodehouse did not visit Hunstanton between September 1926, when he read about Fred Patzel and April 1927, when he would have had to deliver *Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey* to his publisher at *Liberty* magazine. It is more than likely that he would not have been certain about the actual breed of the Hunstanton animal.

Whatever the correct explanation of this minor discrepancy, we are again indebted to Norman Murphy for his researches.

Hog-Calling in Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey

When and why did Wodehouse decide that Lord Emsworth should have a pig-fixation, and introduce the Empress of Blandings as a character? She first appeared in the short story *Pig-Hoo-o-o-o-ey*, which was published in the American weekly magazine *Liberty*, in July 1927, and in the British *Strand* magazine the following month. The inspiration for the story was obviously gained during one of Wodehouse's visits to the USA in late 1926, when he would have read about the exploits of Fred Patzel in the *New York Sun* and other papers.

Fred Patzel was one of the best-known practitioners of the art of hog-calling, a way of letting one's free-range charges know that the time has come to put on the bib and tucker and sit down to feed.



An Oil Painting of the Empress by Jan Gallione

He perfected his technique in the wild wastelands of Nebraska and in September 1926, after a hard-fought contest against Hughie Henry of Kansas City in particular, he was pronounced the champion hog-caller of the universe.

Wodehouse incorporated into his story virtually word for word the newspaper reporter's description of Patzel's technique, putting it into the mouth of his story's hero, James Belford, as he explained the procedure to Lord Emsworth:

You want to begin the 'HOO' in a low minor of two quarter notes in four-four time. From this, build gradually to a higher note, until at last the voice is soaring in full crescendo, reaching F

sharp on the natural scale and dwelling for two retarded half-notes, then breaking into a shower of accidental grace-notes.

James Belford, who had been trained on the Nebraska Prairie, also believed (like the *New York Sun* reporter) that to produce real results, you needed a voice:

... that has been trained on the open prairie and that has gathered richness and strength from competing with tornadoes. You need a manly, sunburned, wind-scorched voice with a suggestion in it of the crackling of corn husks and the whisper of evening breezes in the fodder.

Patzel was regarded as someone who loved art for art's sake, and in modern parlance would be regarded as 'not precious', as he made his call known to the public in the form of a score of words and music.

During the practice period for the 1926 tournament, which took place in Omaha, in Patzel's home state, Thomas M Kilmartin of Griswold sued the city of Council Bluffs, claiming that one of his hogs leaped out of a truck and was killed when he heard Fred

Patzel's call being broadcast through his local municipal radio station.

Some years later, in 1933, the champion was visiting the studios of radio station WJAG, Norfolk, when the announcer, Karl Stefan, asked him to break forth into the yodel that had brought him national fame. His call was so loud that it overloaded the broadcasting lines and blew out more than two hundred dollars worth of tubes. The station was off the air for three minutes until spare tubes could be inserted in the system.

Hog-calling competitions are still held today in the USA and Canada, but rarely with such consequences.

The Empress in the Blandings Stories

As mentioned elsewhere in these pages, the Empress made her bow in *Pig-Hoo-o-o-ey*, but this was her only significant role in a short story, for she was destined for much greater things.

By the time of her first novel appearance, in *Summer Lightning*, George Cyril Wellbeloved, the pigman who had, when not in jail, tended assiduously to her needs, had sold his soul for gold to Emsworth's neighbour, Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, himself hoping to mount a successful challenge for the Fat Pigs medal with his sow, The Pride of Matchingham. It was thus not surprising that when the Empress disappeared, Lord Emsworth's brother Galahad, who had suffered at Parsloe's hands in their youthful men-about-town days, should jump to the conclusion that Parsloe had inspired the kidnapping. More adventures, related in *Heavy Weather*, set just ten days after *Summer Lightning*, were in store for the Empress before the Shropshire Agricultural show. Now there seemed to be two factions after her: Monty Bodkin, who happened to be Parsloe's nephew; and Lord Tilbury, a third pig-fancier and Monty Bodkin's ex-employer (although his more determined attempt to win ownership was deferred until *Service with a Smile*).

The Empress demonstrated an open and philosophical contentment with her lot, and a stoic willingness to endure what vicissitudes Fate may have visited upon her. She may or may not have been conversant with Shakespeare's works, but she obviously endorsed his *obiter dicta* to the effect that 'travellers must be content'. She was to endure kidnapping and recapture; imprisonment in a gamekeeper's cottage; in a rival's sty; in an admiral's kitchen; in a duke's bathroom; in a floosie's bedroom; and in a secretary's caravan; and she knew what it was like to be the subject of blackmail. She was threatened with dieting and early morning gallops; menaced by quantities of Slimmo; was aware just what it meant to wake with a morning head from a surfeit of whisky; had her portrait painted as though she still had that head; and on one notable occasion was all but entered for the Grand National or the Greyhound Derby. Such was The Empress's stature and importance that a young American realist, Penny Donaldson, was surprised to find she was not on the telephone.

The Empress was under even greater threat in *Uncle Fred in the Springtime*, when the unpredictable but wholly self-centred Duke of Dunstable decided it would be in Lord Emsworth's interest to be rid of his pig, and expected his nephew Alaric to purloin her

on his behalf. The mercenary young man refused, but this did not help the Empress one bit, for the untrustworthy Baxter, by then the Duke's secretary, transferred her to Dunstable's ground floor suite at Blandings Castle where, trapped in the bathroom, she came across a room without food for the first time in her life. Unless a cake of shaving-soap counts as food.

The Empress's abode was reached by way of the drive which skirted the lawn outside the garden suite of the Castle. It passed a thick shrubbery and curved past a flowery meadow adjoining the kitchen-garden. In the meadow was the Empress's modest home, adorned with the triple crown of three red rosettes, commemorating her three consecutive triumphs as winner of the Silver Medal in the 87th, 88th and 89th Annual Shows of the Shropshire County Agricultural Society. Her personal attendants included Percy Pirbright, Edwin Pott, Monica Simmons, Cuthbert Price and the repetitious George Cyril Wellbeloved, not to mention the temporary assistance given in a similar role by James Belford, whose American experience of hog-calling under the tutelage of Fred Patzel was used to good effect during her first silver medal campaign.

In the Empress's first post-war appearance, her principal role was as model, for Lord Emsworth wanted an artist to paint her portrait to hang with those of his ancestors. It was not her fault that Galahad introduced into the Castle to be that artist a suitor deemed unacceptable for the hand of an Emsworth niece. Neither was it her fault that the wealthy American Tipton Plimsoll could only be encouraged to propose to another niece, the vacant blonde beauty Veronica Wedge, after the appearance of the Empress in her boudoir had caused her to scream with fright.

The Empress acted as a model again in one of the later works as Lord Emsworth vainly pursued his dream. And in her last substantive appearance, in *Galahad at Blandings*, she became the target of the young Huxley Winkworth's thoughtless teasing. When Tipton Plimsoll's open hip-flask of whisky was dropped in the sty, the result was an Empress with a morning head and a short temper. Her irritation was made public by the simple act of biting Huxley's finger, an act which enabled Lord Emsworth, by insisting on calling the vet in case the Empress might have caught anything, to so insult Huxley's mother, who had had designs on him, that peace was ensured for the rest of his Lordship's life

We should be eternally grateful to the Empress.

Rare Breeds Farms with Berkshires

**PLEASE BE AWARE THAT
CONTACT DETAILS MAY
NO LONGER BE CURRENT**

A Great Family Day Out

Many families have found that a visit to a Rare Breeds Farm is a very popular day out with or without children, and with the summer holidays approaching, we suggest members consider the following farms, each of which have one or more

Berkshires. Although opening times are given, it may be advisable to check that the farm is open on the particular day of the week you wish to visit. The entrance fees given are those for adults and children, and the age limits may differ.

Aldenham Country Park

Dagger Lane, Elstree, Hertfordshire WS6 3AT
020 8953 9602 www.hertsdirect.org.uk/aldenhamcp
10.00 to 18.00 Free (£ 4.00 parking)

Baylham House Rare Breeds Farm

Mill Lane, Baylham, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 8LG
*Home of Patience, the Berkshire sow sponsored by
The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)*

01473 830264 www.baylham-house-farm.co.uk
11.00 to 17.00 £ 4.00/£ 2.00

Cholderton Rare Breeds Farm Park

Amesbury Road, Cholderton, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 0EW
Pig-racing at weekends and during school holidays

01980 629438 www.rabbitworld.co.uk
10.00 to 18.00 £ 4.25/£ 2.95

Cruckley Animal Farm

Foston-on-the-Wolds, Driffield, North Humberside YO25 8BS
01262 488337 www.cruckley.co.uk
10.30 to 17.30 £ 3.25/£ 2.50

Deen City Farm

39 Windsor Avenue, Merton Abbey, London SW19 2RR
020 8543 5300 www.deencityfarm.co.uk
10.00 to 16.30 Free

Home Farm Temple Newsam

Temple Newsam Estate, Leeds, W Yorkshire LS15 0AD
0113 2645535 www.leeds.gov.uk
10.00 to 17.00 £ 3.00/£ 2.00

Hounslow Urban Farm

Faggs Road, Feltham, Middlesex TW14 0LZ
020 8751 0850
10.00 to 16.00 £ 3.00/£ 1.50

Newbrook Farm Experience

Frankley Green Lane, Birmingham B32 4AX
01562 710901
10.00 to 16.00 £ 2.00/£ 1.00

Newham Grange Leisure Farm

Colby Newham, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS8 9AE
01642 515601 www.middlesbrough.gov.uk
09.30 to 17.30 £ 2.20/£ 1.30

Stow Estate Trust

Home Farm, Stow Bardolph, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE34 3HT
01366 382162 www.churchfarmstowbardolph.co.uk
10.00 to 17.00 £ 4.50/£ 3.50

Wimpole Home Farm

Wimpole, Arrington, Royston, Hertfordshire SG8 0BW
01223 208987 www.wimpole.org.uk
10.30 to 17.00 £ 4.90/£ 2.80

How Berkshires became endangered

In the 1950s the government commissioned the Howitt Report to find ways of improving farming efficiency and international competitiveness.

The report recommended focusing on just three breeds – the Landrace, the Large White and the Welsh. Breeding and 'improving' them would increase production, making pig farming more commercial.

While the strategy was successful, we have to live with the consequences: supermarket pork that is often insipid, and the Berkshire pig vulnerable to extinction.



Photo by courtesy of British Pig Association

Did you know?

The lack of prairies, coupled with Berkshires' friendly and inquisitive nature means there is no hog-calling in Britain.

Berkshire meat is highly prized in the USA and Japan.

Although Berkshire pigs appear black, Berkshire meat is like any other pork; the skin is pink – it's just the hair that is black.

Fat pig prizes have not been awarded since about the 1980s, when fat and lard from pigs became unfashionable.

The Royal Berkshire Show

The Society will Sponsor the Berkshire Champion of Champions

Every year, The Berkshire Pig Breeders Club crowns its Champion of Champions at the Royal Berkshire Show, Newbury and this year, the P G Wodehouse Society (UK) is honoured to provide the prizes for the competition.

Winning the Champion of Champions rosette is no mean achievement. Throughout the summer, Berkshire pigs will have been strutting their stuff for the judges in qualifying classes across the country; first-prize winners (and occasionally second-prize winners) become Champion Berkshires and thus qualified to compete for the Champion of Champions title. In the qualifying classes, they will have beaten other Berkshires, or perhaps coloured pigs of such other breeds as Gloucester Old Spot or Tamworth. Entrants for the Champion of Champions can be of either sex and of any

age – what they have in common is their overall excellence, health and fitness and conformity to the breed standard (see page 3).

As we watch these pigs of impeccable breeding set their ears – *fairly large, carried erect or slightly inclined forward, and fringed with fine hair* – at a jaunty angle, the better to attract the judges' attention, we should be aware that there is a serious reason for the Society's sponsorship of the competition. These are the best pure-bred Berkshires in the country – pigs that will perpetuate the Berkshire breed in all its porcine perfection. Initiatives like this encourage owners to continue to breed Berkshires, so that future fans of the Empress have the chance to see a pure-bred Berkshire in all its glory.



*The 2004 Champion of Champions: Kilcot Memaïd 2
Owned by Mrs Sharon Barnfield
Photograph: Anthony Mosley (who also provided that on page 3)*

May the best pig win!

Join In The Fun

The Royal Berkshire Show will be held on Saturday and Sunday, 17th and 18th September, 2005, at the Newbury Showground, Newbury, Berkshire. One of the country's top ten agricultural shows, last year 70,000 visitors enjoyed a great day out.

There are hundreds of family-friendly attractions at the show: Showjumping, heavy horses and livestock events, a Craft Marquee, Food Fair and Flower Tent and on both days, Main Ring entertainments that include a Pipe Band and an Activity Ride by the Metropolitan Mounted Police.

For Society members, the highlight of the show will be the judging of the BPBC Champion of Champions class which takes place at 10.00am on Sunday 18th September, in the pig judging ring. Rosettes and prizes will be presented immediately after the competition.

Getting to the Show

The Showground is adjacent to Junction 13 of the M4/A34. There are several large car parks.

Dates

Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th September, 2005

Hours

8.00 to 18.00 both days

Buses

To and from the Showground from Newbury Bus Station and Thatcham Broadway every half-hour.

Tickets

May be obtained in advance (£10.00 adults/£7.00 concessions) by telephone (01635 247111) or online at www.newburyshowground.co.uk, or at the gate (£12.00 adults/£10.00 concessions).

We hope to see you there.