



BY THE WAY

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Wodehouse's Magistrates and Magistrates' Courts

In this issue, we look at the other side of the Coin of Justice, and consider the individuals responsible for its administration at first instance, and their places of work.

The Magistrates

Sir Watkyn Bassett

The one-time resident beak at Boshier Street Police Court, he presided when Bertie Wooster was charged with trying to separate a policeman from his helmet. When Sir Watkyn retired from the bench shortly afterwards, Bertie decried his story of a large inheritance, and commented that he had amassed enough in fines to live in luxury.

He continued to administer justice from Tottleigh Towers, whilst self-evidently committing such offences as blackmail and breach of contract.

(‘Without the Option’ in *Carry On, Jeeves*; *The Code of the Woosters*; *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*; *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves*)

Jimmy Briscoe

Chairman of the Board of Magistrates at Maiden Eggesford, he fined his friend Mr Cook for moving pigs without a licence.

(*Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*)

Marmaduke, Fifth Baron ‘Chuffy’ Chuffnell, JP

The JP for his home base of Chuffnell Regis, he used his powers to good effect to acquit Bertie Wooster from various charges as part of a ruse to allow Sir Roderick Glossop to swear to the sanity of the late George Stoker, second cousin of J Washburn Stoker, thereby enabling the remaining Stokers to inherit considerable wealth and smooth the way for his, Chuffy's, marriage to Pauline Stoker.

(*Thank You*, *Jeeves*)

Clarence, Ninth Earl of Emsworth, JP

He was unable to accede to Colonel Fanshawe's request to attend him at Marling Hall in his capacity as JP, in order to try a prowler lurking in the vicinity of its back door who had been locked in the cellar by the butler, as he was himself that prowler.

(See particularly ‘Sticky Wicket at Blandings’ in *Plum Pie*)

Esmond Haddock, JP

The Squire of King's Deverill, Hants, enjoyed himself when hearing a charge against Catsmeat Potter-Pirbright on the evidence of Constable Dobbs, which was discredited when it was realised that Catsmeat was the brother of Esmond's fiancée Corky.

(*The Mating Season*)

Sir Joseph Moresby

A magistrate at Boshier Street, he spoke harsh words to Bobbie Wickham after convicting her for speeding, and took ten pounds off Bingo Little.

(‘Something Squishy’ in *Mr Mulliner Speaking*; ‘The Word in Season’ in its *Punch* original)

Sir Gregory Parsloe-Parsloe, Bart, JP

The view of history will be that this unscrupulous baronet had no right to carry the proud title of Justice of the Peace. From both a moral and a legal perspective there are good reasons to believe that any decisions he made from the bench would be suspect, even putting to one side the indiscretions of youth which led to his exploits being described in no less than five separate chapters of the Hon. Galahad Threepwood's *Reminiscences* (chapters 4, 7, 11, 18 and 24, for those readers who wish to check).

For in his more mature years, his moral judgement could be challenged when:

- a he had to employ Percy Pilbeam to recover some indiscreet letters written to a lady;
- b he unethically inveigled pigman George Cyril Wellbeloved into his employment from that of the Earl of Emsworth by the promise of higher wages; and
- c he imported a pig from outside the county to compete against the Empress of Blandings in the Fat Pigs Class at the Shopshire County Show, in clear contravention of the competition's code of conduct.

His failure to marry the youthful Maudie Montrose is another example of his cavalier pursuit of self-interest. Having invested the honeymoon money on a horse, he claimed that it was having written to her with the wedding venue's address while celebrating the hundred-pound betting win, that caused his instructions to be misread – his 4 was seen by Maudie as a 7. But when she failed to appear, he went on the honeymoon by himself anyway.

Far more serious, however, are the blatant crimes he is on record as having committed for personal gain whilst a JP, such as:

a conspiring with Lady Constance Keeble to offer Percy Pilbeam £500 to steal the manuscript of the book of Reminiscences written by his neighbour Galahad Threepwood;

- b providing George Cyril Wellbeloved with a shotgun and instructing him to let intruders have it with both barrels; and
- c having Beach incarcerated in prison by falsely accusing him of purloining his pig, when the pig in question proved to be the Empress.

When one bears in mind that he had ambitions to become a politician, presumably because he was licking his lips at the thought of what was in it for him, the picture of the man's lack of moral fibre, and his unsuitability to be a JP, is complete.

(See especially *Pigs Have Wings*)

Sir Wandersbury Pott, JP

Founded a local museum which he presented to the burghers of Bottsford Mortimer.

(‘Tried in the Furnace’ in *Young Men in Spats*)

The Courts and Adjacent Police Stations

Bosher Street Magistrates' Court

Also known as Bosher Street Police Court, it saw action in several stories. In addition to those mentioned above, they include:

- a the conviction of Ronald Fish (in the name of Edwin Jones) for disorderly conduct at Mario's Restaurant in *Summer Lightning*;
- b the experience of Lord Uffenham and Old Sammy on Boat Race night in 1911, referred to in *Something Fishy*;
- c the conviction of Oofy Prosser with a fine of ten quid in *Ice in the Bedroom*;

and others.

Bow Street Magistrates' Court

Percy, Lord Belfer, heir to the Earl of Marshmoreton, was humiliated here after punching PC C231 in the stomach and being fined ten pounds, for a very amusing account in rhyme of his arrest, had been provided the previous day to early readers of *The Evening News*.

(*A Damsel in Distress*)

Chelsea Police Station

Freddie Rooke and Nellie Bryant were held here pending receipt of a cheque for ten pounds, presumably for bail, after they rescued the parrot Bill from a potentially very sticky end at the hands of two men ‘of the lower orders’.

(*Jill the Reckless*)

Jefferson Market Police Court, New York

Billy Windsor was sentenced here to thirty days on Blackwell's Island for hitting a policeman in the eye.

(*Psmith, Journalist*)

Marlborough Street Police Court

Horace Davenport was fined for jabbing Marie Antoinette at a ball with an assegai.

(*Uncle Fred in the Springtime*)

Vine Street Police Court

Another popular location, the scene of, *inter alia*:

- a Mervyn Mulliner's fine of ten pounds for stealing strawberries ('The Knightly Quest of Mervyn' in *Mulliner Nights*);
- b Percy Worplesdon's visit in the company of a girl named Tottie, which caused the deferral of his marriage to Bertie Wooster's Aunt Agatha for thirty years (*Joy in the Morning*); and
- c Claude and Eustace Wooster's spell at the adjacent Police Station cells pending payment of ten pounds for bail, after they tried to steal a motor lorry in pursuit of their membership of the Oxford blood club, The Seekers ('Sir Roderick Comes to Lunch' in *The Inimitable Jeeves*).

Vinton Street Police Court

Where Bertie Wooster spent a testing morning after being arrested while night-clubbing with Florence Craye, and chivalrously protecting her reputation.

(*Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit*)