

WE REMEMBER YOU WELL



A fond farewell to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother
from The P G Wodehouse Society (UK)

June 2002

Recollections of a Momentous Day in June 1988

On Friday June 3rd, 1988, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother honoured the late Sir P G Wodehouse by agreeing to unveil a plaque at the house which he and his family had owned and occupied for several years in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Wodehouse fraternity would like to pay its own tribute to The Queen Mother with an account of that day's proceedings including much material that has never previously been presented to the public.

The proposal to place a plaque commemorating Wodehouse's time at 17 Norfolk Street (once Dunraven Street) had been the brainchild of Michael Pointon, who had obtained Wodehouse's own approval before approaching English Heritage as long ago as 1974.



Edward Cazalet, pictured below with Nancy and Patrick Wodehouse, invited Her Majesty to unveil the plaque in the following terms:

"Your Majesty, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I say how deeply honoured we all are as devoted Wodehouse fans that Your Majesty should have seen fit to accept our invitation to come and unveil this Plaque on the old Wodehouse home.

Plum would have been both surprised and deeply touched that this ceremony should be taking place. He tended to be in awe of important occasions.

I like to think of him, had he been alive today, peeping

down at us from a second floor window, making a chink between the curtains to see what was going on.

I remember, some years ago, Your Majesty paying Plum a compliment which I know he would have valued more than any other. Your Majesty said that after a long and busy day there was no better way of ensuring a good night's rest than by reading a Wodehouse novel before turning in. This meant that one passed into that happy and tranquil Wodehousean world and one would go to sleep with a seraphic smile across the face.

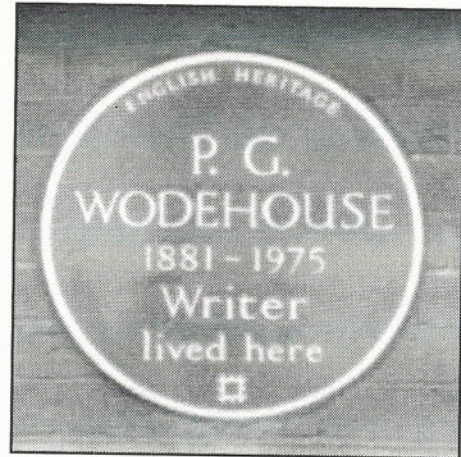
May I on behalf of all of us and in particular on behalf of all Plum's family thank Your Majesty for being with us today. I now invite Your Majesty to unveil the Plaque."



The Plaque Unveiled



The Queen Mother giving the address reprinted below



The Queen Mother unveils the plaque

The Text of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother's Address

"I am particularly pleased to have been invited to unveil this plaque as for many years I have been an ardent reader of P G Wodehouse. Indeed, I am proud to say that his very first book *The Pothunters* was dedicated by him to members of my family.

Sir Pelham Wodehouse succeeded in the great ambition of so many novelists: not only has he brought new words and expressions into the English language but he has also created characters whose names have become household words - Jeeves and Bertie, Lord Emsworth and his prize pig, the Empress of Blandings, Galahad, and even Aunt Agatha to name but a few, live on as immortal characters.

Nevertheless I think that Wodehouse's greatest gift is that fifty or sixty years after many of his books were written they still make us laugh, and I am sure that generations to come will continue to laugh at them just as much as we have done. What an encouraging thought for the future!

P G Wodehouse lived in this house from 1927 until 1934, and I am delighted to unveil the plaque which now records this."

The dedication in The Pothunters was:

TO JOAN, EFFIE AND ERNESTINE BOWES-LYON

What Some of the Guests Said

Frank Muir (pictured below with William Douglas-Home) acted as Master of Ceremonies. Before he introduced the guest speakers he made it clear that their contributions were expected to be short!

As Plum had always hated speeches, all speakers were to be limited to two minutes - and even by now, if Plum had been present, he would probably have been inching his way along the wall towards the door.



Lady Donaldson (pictured below, with novelist Tom Sharpe), P G Wodehouse's 1981 biographer, recalled an occasion when she and her father, the playwright Frederick Lonsdale, were invited to a smart party given by the Wodehouses at Norfolk Street. The front door was opened, not by the butler, but by Plum himself. "Don't come in," he said. "You'll hate it."



Sir Nicholas Henderson, former British Ambassador to the USA, spoke of PGW's contribution to Anglo-American relations which, he said, was immense. Millions of Americans read him and expected British diplomats to behave like Bertie Wooster, as he felt that he had achieved when Ambassador in Washington.



Jimmy Heineman, pictured above (left) with Richard Osborne, recalled the day when he had been a sergeant in the American army, stationed in London. In 1943 Queen Elizabeth had visited the Churchill Club. He had been one of the men who had been ordered to smarten up and, as she walked round the club, to behave normally. When the Queen had approached them, he tried to take refuge next to Wing-Commander Edwards. As the members of the club had been instructed to introduce themselves, Heineman, very flustered, had given his name as Wing-Commander Edwards. The latter had quickly recovered from the shock and announced himself as Wing-Commander Heineman. Mr Heineman said he was relieved and glad to be able at last to set the record straight after 45 years.

Edward Cazalet was the final speaker, commenting on the important contribution made by Ethel, his grandmother, in helping Plum's work by suppressing the parties and social occasions which she so much enjoyed. He reminded his audience of Malcolm Muggeridge's description of Lady Wodehouse as "A mixture of Mistress Quickly and Florence Nightingale, with a touch of Lady Macbeth."



17 Dunraven Street (once Norfolk Street)

The Mayfair address of Norfolk Street, where the Wodehouses lived at number 17 for several years, was renamed Dunraven Street in 1939 after the Earl of Dunraven who had formerly lived there.

It had been built in the neo-Georgian style in 1897/98 by Sidney R J Smith, who was also the architect responsible for the Tate Gallery.

In 1916-1917 the house was used as a depot for soldiers returning from the front in France, before being used as a private residence from 1918-1920 by the Marquess of Carisbrooke GCVO, a grandson of Queen Victoria.

The Wodehouses took over the lease in 1927 and retained it until 1934. There were spells during which they were in Hollywood or France when their daughter Leonora lived there, and other times when it was let furnished to a third party. On one occasion Plum's wife Ethel, who had long wanted a racehorse, returned from Sandown Park having bought Front Line in a selling-plate. "Plum, I've bought a horse," she shouted up to him. "Have you got it with you?" he replied!



The Guest List

Some forty guests attended the ceremony on the 3rd June, including the then owner, Mr Fernando Ogara. Among those present were Kingsley Amis, Mr & Mrs Edward Cazalet, Mr & Mrs Anthony Cheetham (Mr Cheetham was then head of Century Hutchinson, the publisher), biographer and book-dealer Joseph Connolly (pictured on page 3, with Jenny Bent), Lord and Lady Donaldson, William Douglas-Home, Benny Green, Jimmy Heineman, Sir Nicholas Henderson, Lord Montagu, Frank Muir, Norman Murphy, Barry Phelps (a leading contemporary Wodehouse book-dealer), Michael Pointon, Lord Quinton, Tom Sharpe, Margaret Slythe, Richard Osborne, Tony Whittome, Oliver Wise, Mr & Mrs Patrick Wodehouse and Lord Wyatt

Lunch

The menu for lunch was:

Prawn Soufflé
Sliced Breast of Chicken, Young Peas, Jersey New Potatoes, Green Salad
Dessert Fruit of Peaches, Nectarines, Grapes and Strawberries
Stilton, Brie and Cheddar with Biscuits, Butter, Celery and French Granary Bread
Coffee, Cream and Coffee Sugar with Petits Fours

Two wines were served at the meal:

Chablis 1985
Chateau Millet 1978