

## **Westbourne Local History Group Evolves! by Roger Wilding**

The Group has decided to move on from being (primarily) a group of authors by running, in addition, public meetings on Westbourne local history topics. Admission is free to all meetings.

The first on 4th November demonstrated local and family history tools and others are planned for December, January and February. At the December meeting, Jim Clarke will lead a presentation/open forum regarding his project on lost shops and businesses in Westbourne. All input and contributions will be welcome. For more details email Jim at [jim@clarkeuk.net](mailto:jim@clarkeuk.net)

Watch for publicity or view:-<https://westbournevillage.org/organisations-clubs/history-group/history-group-news/>

Throughout his life 'Plum' had an endearing love of animals. He was surrounded by dogs in his family home and missed them tremendously when sent away to boarding school and College. But one of the great attractions on being able to have a house of his own for some ten years between 1904 and 1914 at 'Threepwood' in Record Road, Emsworth, was that he acquired his beloved dog Nance. She grew into a large, amiable and friendly dog devoted to Plum and he was devoted to her. In the mornings he took her along with him on his walk to the station in order to send off his daily contribution to the 'By The Way' column in *The Globe*. One of his favourite evening strolls was to go with Nance along the Havant Road, perhaps to call in at his aunt and uncle's house on the way, and join a small circle of friends at a local hostelry for a convivial evening discussing events of the day.

Later, writing from America to his housekeeper Lillian about his somewhat unexpected and sudden marriage to his new wife, Ethel: "knowing me, you will understand the importance of marrying someone who was fond of animals. She is very anxious to meet Nancy. Our puppy is awfully nice, but no dog will ever be like Nance".

Most of the later posed photographs of Plum and his wife, whether it be on one of his English sojourns, in France or at his American home in Remsenburg, show them accompanied by a dog: "The white dog .... is our Peke Squeaky, who is an absolute angel, and we have a cat which sleeps on my bed every night".

Once settled in America, for some seven years the Wodehouses kept two establishments, one a duplex penthouse apartment on the 14th floor of a building at 84th Street and Park Avenue in New York City and a house in the hamlet of Remsenburg, Long Island, which later became their permanent home. He described the house on Long Island as "at the end of what is picturesquely known as Basket Neck Lane,

and has 12 acres of ground which lead down, through a wood, to a very attractive creek".

### **Bill**

The first animal to arrive at Remsenburg was Bill: "A foxhound has turned up. It came into the garden and sat down, looking on. It was in an advanced state of starvation, and so covered with swollen ticks that it took two hours to get them off and only the keenest eye could discern that there was a dog underneath. It took a vet working day and night to pull him round. The poor animal had hardly any blood left in him and had to be taken to the vet for transfusions. ... We can't imagine where he came from. He is a beautiful dog and an expert here tells us that he is one of the famous Colonel Whacker hounds from Kentucky. There are one or two packs on Long Island so I suppose he must have strayed. It is clear he is a dog of impeccable breeding, obviously accustomed from birth to mixing with the smart hunting set – there are several packs on the island – and why he is not getting his nose down to it with the other foxhounds is more than I can tell you. I imagine that he just got fed up one day with all that Yoicks and Tally Ho stuff and felt that the time had come to pull out and go into business for himself. It is agreeable to be able to record that his only worry today is having to watch his calories, for he is putting on weight terribly. A fox seeing him coming would laugh his head off."

Wodehouse's life with Bill was not without its ups and downs however. Writing to a friend he said:

"Life, always difficult, has been much complicated of late by the eccentricities of Bill the foxhound. We brought him up from Remsenburg, [to New York] having nobody to leave him with there, and he decided right away that city life was not for him. Alighting from the car, he flatly refused to enter our apartment home, evidently suspecting a trap. With a terrific expenditure of energy

*Continued overleaf*

*P G Wodehouse and his animals contd.*

I dragged him as far as the lift, and again he jibbed. I finally got him in, and then he refused to emerge. Assisted by the lift man, I got him out, and then he stoutly declined to go through our door, which he obviously assumed to be the Den of the Secret Nine. When the time came to take him for an airing, he refused to go out of the door, into the lift, out of the lift, across the lobby and out of the front door, and on returning from our stroll showed the same disinclination to go through the front door, across the lobby, into the lift, out of the lift and through our door.

“This went on for about a week, when he suddenly decided that his fears had been ill-founded and that there were no plots against his person. The only trouble is that he now wants to be taken for a walk every quarter of an hour or so, and I see no prospect of ever doing any more work. I take him for a mile hike before breakfast, a three miler in the afternoon and perhaps another mile after dinner. It’s doing wonders for my figure, of course, but it has made me practically a spent force as a writer.”

### **Guinea hens and kittens**

Their second arrivals came when Plum and his wife went to a man’s birthday party and somebody had given him two guinea hens as a present. Ethel asked him what he was going to do with them, and he said “Eat ‘em”. Ethel was horrified and asked if “we could have them, so we took them away and built a large run for them in the garden, and they settled down happily”.

A few nights later their third visitor turned up. “We heard something crying in the dark and went out and there was a tiny white kitten about three inches long. This was added to the strength.

“About a week after that I was walking to get the mail when I saw a car ahead of me suddenly swerve and it seemed to me that there was a small dark object in the

middle of the road. I went up, and it was a black kitten. I picked it up and put it on my shoulder, and it sang to me all the way to the post office and back, shoving its nose against my face. We called it Poona.

“The fact that Poona being at a loose end and deciding to clock in and take pot-luck I can understand, for Long Island is full of stray cats walking through the wet woods waving their wild tails, but she, too, has been added to the menagerie, so the score now is one foxhound, two guinea hens, Squeaky the Peke, one of two we brought from New York, and two kittens, and we are hourly expecting more cats and dogs to arrive. I think the word must have gone round the animal kingdom that if you want a home, just drop in at Basket Neck Lane, where the Wodehouses keep open house. Bill, the foxhound and Poona, the cat are both strays who turned up from the great outdoors and seemed to be of the opinion that this was Journey’s End. The bright side is that all our animals get along together like sailors on shore leave. Bill, the foxhound has the most angelic disposition and lets the kittens run all over him, whilst Squeaky of course would never dream of hurting anything. A very united family, thank goodness.

“Our garden is a sort of country club for all the dogs within a radius of some miles. They look in for a bowl of milk and biscuit most afternoons, and there is never any shortage



*Lillian Barnett, P G’s Emsworth housekeeper, with her dogs*



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