**P. G. Wodehouse (1881-1975)**

**Prof Carolyn Oulton**

P. G. Wodehouse only spent two years at Malvern House Prep School in the Kearsney area of Dover, between 1892 and 1994, and it may indeed have been ‘a very bad choice for a dreamy impractical boy who loved reading.’ [[1]](#footnote-1) But the experience also inspired the early education of Bertie Wooster, and few of his fans would argue with that.

Wodehouse later collaborated with the comic writer George Grossmith Jnr (son of [Pooter’s famous creator]( /19c/19c-grossmith-biography)) and their 1923 cabaret \_The Beauty Prize\_ includes a song ‘A Cottage in Kent’ with words by Grossmith.

Otherwise Wodehouse expressed few regrets at leaving the county. At 13 he was sent to Dulwich College in London, from whence he seems to have returned only to play cricket against Tonbridge. Like his friend [Arthur Conan Doyle](/19c/19c-conan-doyle), the adult Wodehouse remained an enthusiastic sportsman and maintained a longstanding friendship with professional cricketer and Dulwich old boy, Billy Griffith, who lived conveniently near Wodehouse’s daughter Leonora Cazelet and her husband in the village of Shipbourne.

Wodehouse’s relationship with fellow amateur A. A. Milne seems to have been rather more troubled. As evidence that ‘my personal animosity against a writer never affects my opinion of what he writes’ Wodehouse once commented that while ‘Nobody could be more anxious than myself… that Alan Alexander Milne should trip over a loose boot and break his bloody neck’, he nonetheless regarded his play \_*The Dover Road\_* as ‘about the best comedy in English’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

During his visits to Fairlawne Wodehouse would have been within visiting distance of [Conan Doyle](/19c/19c-conan-doyle), and also met other writers including [Hugh Walpole]( /19c/19c-walpole-biography).[[3]](#footnote-3) Here too he spectacularly failed to witness the arrival of his granddaughter Sheran in 1935. As symptoms became alarming on Good Friday, an ambulance was summoned and Leonora was taken to hospital in the early hours of Saturday morning. Wodehouse woke in the morning having slept through the resulting commotion.[[4]](#footnote-4) Sheran [married in 1968[(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVZ-sfRjwxw>) with the Queen Mother (an acknowledged Wodehouse fan) in attendance.

At least Wodehouse does seem to have retained some grasp of Kent history, however tenuous. ‘You remember what [Hengist](/medieval/hengestandhorsa) said to [Horsa](/medieval/hengestandhorsa) before the battle of whatever it was?’ chirps a character in \_Money in the Bank\_, ‘Horsa, keep your tail up!'

**Bibliography**

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1. McCrum 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. To Denis Mackail 27 November 1945. Ratcliffe 375-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ratcliffe 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Letter to Olive Grills 26 April 1934. Ratcliffe 244-245. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)