

## The Courtship Letters and Poems of Philip Wodehouse (1633)

In early January 1633 Philip Wodehouse, of Kimberley, Norfolk, courted Mistress Anne Bacon, of Culford, Suffolk. He was twenty-five and she was eighteen years old. There remain in manuscript a few letters and poems which, whilst they engage briefly with the conventions and formal approaches of the prospective seventeenth-century suitor, also provide evidence of the poetic devices of a witty lover anticipating both frustration and failure. They are to be found amongst the correspondence of Anne's mother, Lady Jane Meautys Cornwallis Bacon (c.1581–1659).<sup>1</sup> Although the verse is addressed to the daughter, the letters, dating from 2 February to 1 July 1633, are to the mother and to Mr Pead, a gentleman intermediary whose help Wodehouse tried to enlist. Much as the young man longed for a union with Anne, it was to his greatest regret that his advances were considered unwelcome. Not only did he lack the necessary financial resources to marry the daughter of the wealthy Lady Bacon, but he had already been rejected by another aristocratic family, for reasons she sought to ascertain through her brother-in-law, Sir Edmund Bacon. Wodehouse's reluctant acceptance of defeat is held in check by the restrained politeness of his correspondence, and there is an underlying wit in the poems which, together with the letters, indicate a young man of some civility, grace and good humour.

We know little of Anne Bacon at this time, except that she was born in 1615, the first daughter of Lady Bacon and her second husband, the gentleman painter Sir Nathaniel Bacon (1585–1627). The fact that the love poems had been hidden away gives some indication as to Lady Bacon's desire to keep control of her daughter's marriage, but there was reason for this. Two years earlier Frederick, her elder son and heir to the Cornwallis estates, had upset delicate negotiations she had set in train by secretly choosing and marrying, without his mother's knowledge or consent, a lady-in-waiting to the court of Queen Henrietta Maria. A rift had developed with the angry Lady Bacon, healed only through the good auspices of the king and queen.

Evidently fearing that her daughter might lose her own large 'portion' to a bounty hunter, she did not wish for a repetition of this kind.

The brief courtship between Anne and Philip was therefore over by the summer of 1633 when he realised that, even if she returned his affection, a union must be out of the question. We can only venture to guess her sentiments, but the light-hearted poems do give some hint as to the warmth of friendship and probable fondness shared by the young couple.

Six years later Anne married her mother's cousin, Thomas Meautys (c.1592–1649), whom she had known since childhood. He was twice her age and a high-ranking civil servant. Formerly the private secretary to his distant cousin Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, he had been made Clerk to His Majesty's Council in 1619, and had entered Parliament for Cambridge Borough in 1621. When his patron died in 1626 he inherited Gorhambury, Hertfordshire, and subsequently succeeded to the Clerkship of the Writs and Processes in the Star Chamber. In 1634 he became Clerk to his Majesty's Privy Council Extraordinary, the duties of which he performed until August 1645 when the office became virtually extinct. Anne lived with her husband at Gorhambury and, in February 1641, he was knighted at Whitehall. On his death the estate was inherited by their only daughter, Jane, who died at the age of ten years in 1652. Gorhambury then passed to Thomas's elder brother, Henry Meautys.<sup>2</sup> Anne married again, to Sir Harbottle Grimston (Speaker of the House of Commons and Master of the Rolls, 1660) who bought back Gorhambury with the aid of his mother-in-law, Lady Bacon. They had one daughter, Anne, who also died young, being only four years old.

Philip Wodehouse entered Parliament for Norfolk in 1654, and succeeded to the Baronetcy of Kimberley in 1658. He married Lucy, daughter of Sir Thomas Cotton of Conington, and lived till 1681. Said to be a man of great learning and a skilled musician, he bequeathed to his son, Edmund, an autograph notebook containing a substantial collection of his own epigrams, verse translations and other poems.<sup>3</sup>

The gentle nature of Lady Anne Bacon Meautys Grimston received recognition from Burnet in *History of His Own Times*: 'She had all the high notions for the Church and the Crown, in which she had been bred, but was the humblest, the devoutest, and the best tempered person I ever knew of that sort. . . . She was always very plain in her clothes and . . . passed but for a servant, trusted with the charities of others'.<sup>4</sup> When she died in 1680, at the age of sixty-five, she might or might not have known of this record of her earliest affections; it was buried deep at Culford, amongst her mother's carefully sorted and be-ribboned papers.

Sir Edmund Bacon to Lady Jane Bacon<sup>5</sup>

SISTER,

This evening the messenger I sent to London is returned; what I have learned of his sendinge ys, that the busynes wherein my cosin dealt was the treaty of a match betweene Mr Philip Woodehouse and the daughter of the L. Lovelace,<sup>6</sup> wherof I sayde somewhat to you when we last mett. That gentlewoman is nowe assured to one of the country where my L. lyveth, so that there ys an end of that negotiation. This ys the awnswere to what I promised to enquire after. I will seale up these lynes to you with a larg acknowledgement of y<sup>e</sup> debt I owe you for your kinde visitacion, and so leave you for this tyme, being

Yo<sup>r</sup> very loving brother,  
EDMUND BACON.

I remember well the busynes treated on at Hacqueneye, and the portion was 500£. There was some difference about the payment of some part of yt, which was the speciall cause why the match went not forward.

Redgrave, February 2nd, 1632–3.

From Philip Wodehouse to Lady Jane Bacon

MADAM,

It might accuse me of more ingratitude, than I am guiltye of, if I should thus abruptly goe from Culford, wherby y<sup>e</sup> licence of your favour I lately had some hopes of future comforts; which now being faded (missing y<sup>e</sup> shower should make them prosper) yet must I not depart unmannerly; and therefore doe I send this blush-lesse paper to crave yor La<sup>ps</sup> last pardon, for my not personall attendaunce to kisse yo<sup>r</sup> vertuous hands and those of your fayre daughter's, to whose sweet innocence and beautye I never shall forbear my best of wishes; but (Madam) may she have a matche of such a birth and latitude of fortunes as may deserve the bountye of your fullest portion, of which my many wants made me unworthy. Yet may this richer mate possesse so right a minde, as he may temper his estate w<sup>th</sup> modest order, or else the greatest lands soone languish into sicknes of consumption; next, may this riche and sober husband be owner of a hart that is religious to love with chaste affections and honour your La<sup>p</sup> w<sup>th</sup> dutious observaunce. Thes are my zealous vowes to you and yours. Thus must I take my leave, and leave you most unwillingly, for I professe myselfe

Madam,  
Your most devoted servaunt  
PHILIP WOODEHOUSE

Feb ii

To the hono<sup>ble</sup> and my most honoured Lady y<sup>e</sup> Lady Bacon present this at Culford.

Philip Wodehouse to Mistress Anne Bacon

I do not here endeavour to seduce  
 Thy vertuous thoughts with vanity of words,  
 Those blandishments befit a courtiers muse,  
 Whose flashye complements such faith affords,  
 My simple style is made of sober truth,  
 The stuff w<sup>ch</sup> artless nature me hath lent,  
 Wherin I offer to the tender youth  
 Theis tuneless notes, now sett in discontent  
 When first I saw thy face on Elden playnes,  
 Whither for healthfull sports I did repayre, 10  
 Greife ther begann presages of my paynes,  
 So soone thou wert driv'n thence by weeping Ayre,  
 Then was I planet strooke, by those bright eyes,  
 The starr's that ledd me not long after, where  
 I might upon their Lustre more advise,  
 And view their motions in their proper sphere;  
     This was the dwelling of a stately Dame,  
 Who her meridian passed had of yeares  
 Yet she retayn'd a beautye might enflame  
 The greenest object in her sight appear's.  
 Beauty & vertue both did her adorne, 20  
 Grave speeche and prudence gave her pleasing grace,  
 So as she more than seemed bravely borne  
 Both of a Moutas & a Metis Face,  
 Her goodly garbe & gracious aspect  
 On me, a stranger and before unseene  
 In her fine edifice, made me reflect,  
 Her breeding was in Court of some great Queene,  
 So noble and so debonayre she was  
 As to allow me harbourage a whyle, 30  
 Where I such harmonye did heare (A-lasse)  
 And saw such pictures, as my sense beguyld  
 Some pieces were by forrayne Master's wrought,  
 Some by y<sup>e</sup> moderne pencill's of our land  
 Others from Italy were safely brought  
 The best was drawne by his Dedalian hand  
 Who more than by Apelles arte had limm'd  
 A virgin to the life, which there I saw  
 So like y<sup>e</sup> Ladye, as his eyes are dimm'd  
 Who think's not she assisted him to draw; 40  
 His patterne, or Idea sure she was,  
 Her features to this face he did impart,

And colours, which my memorye doth passe,  
 Yet some sweet parts I'le tell you of by harte,  
     The tresses as an amber grove did seeme,  
 The forehead lovely as a lillye feild,  
 The cheekes as roses almost blow'n, I deeme,  
 The eyes like sparkeling Diamonds, light did yeild,  
 The lipp's in colour like to currall shewe,  
 The teeth like polisht Ivorye white & pure, 50  
 The neck and brest of fayrest marble hewe  
 With veins like azure, if they be not bluer;  
 But whither runn's my penn? Stay, blurr no more  
 this pourtraicture, w<sup>th</sup> thy poor draughts & lines,  
 Ther is a carelesse curtayne drawne before  
 To keepe thee from this picture's golden shines  
     Ah, goulden shine of pictures – tis your flames  
 That to this Pride-blind world gives all the light,  
 The blackest vice, if rich, your blaze enflame's,  
 Bright vertue, poore, with darkenes you benight, 60  
     Yet may I not inveigh agaynst y<sup>o</sup> power –  
 Of the All-mistris Gould w<sup>th</sup> my complaynte,  
 She may relent, and in some happy hower  
 So mylde may prove, as pittye my restraynt  
 Milde may you also prove (I wish sweet mayde)  
 But that in nature only, not in name,  
 Names are uncertaine, truth is oft betray'd  
 By bould reports, or misbeleaved fame./  
     I buzze too long before I doe relate  
 my sute, which thus (fayre Sweete) take thou in hand. 70  
 First to thyselfe be thou my advocate  
 Then to that Ladyes worth, which may commaund  
 My freedom when she list. She hath the mighte  
 To give enlargement, which may loose those fetters  
 That now withould me, from thy pretious sight,  
 And make's me urge thee, with theis ill-writt letters.  
 If this deere matter thou wilt please to move,  
 Thy fee shall be my everlasting love,  
 And for thy willingnesse, although it misse's,  
 I'le give thy hands a myriad of kisses. 80  
     Your unfaynedly loving servaunt  
     PHILIP WOODEHOUSE

Feb 28

To the beautifull and best-deserving gentlewoman Mrs Anne Bacon at Culford this.

Philip Wodehouse to Lady Jane Bacon

MADAM,

You may well marvell at this my second circumstance of scribles, I having lately intimated my hopelesse cause of iteration, which still remainys inexorable; yet, Madam, soe I finde y<sup>t</sup> there is nothing harder for humanity to suffer than a sodaine desertion of honest & sincere affections; which fraylety I advertise now to manifest, where I doe see a mind so religiously fayre and full of honour as will abhorr advantage out of commiserable infirmitys; and thus to my purpose, Madam, the poynt of difference which I perceive is likely to delay (if not dissolve) my happinesse is that too much desired thinge, called portion; which pertinent handmayde (this over-provident age is so enamour'd on), as w<sup>th</sup>out her smiles we dare not serve the mistris; yet I protest this feare in me proceeds only from y<sup>e</sup> dependanage of my estate, w<sup>ch</sup> denye's me ability to doe otherwise, and I am therefore at this tyme bold to solicit your La<sup>ps</sup> favour this farr unto me as to respite for some few dayes your conclusive proceeding w<sup>th</sup> any other; unless of a superlative eminence in birth and fortune, for then I would not sinne against her meritts I so much admire, as to desire her diminution. Within short tyme I hope to see some noble friends of my affinitye, whose power I will emplotre to use persuasions, y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> present demands may in some equall manner be made more agreeable to your La<sup>ps</sup> disposition. Not many dayes after our Norw<sup>ch</sup> Assises shall be the longest tearme I crave of yo<sup>r</sup> La<sup>ps</sup> protraction, where Madam no prisoner will be more gladd of his reprivement, than I of yor La<sup>ps</sup> pardon & performance hereoff. Now Madam, if you shall please to measure my weakenes in other things, by this my effaminate imbecility, I must confesse myselfe a composition of imperfections, and that I can alledge nothing for excuse, but this old adage: *To love and to be wise transcends mortalitie*

Thus I subscribe myselfe still Madam  
Your most humble and desirous servaunt  
PHILIP WODEHOUSE

Feb 28 1632

To the right noble Ladye the Lady Bacon present this at Culfoord.

Philip Wodehouse to Mistress Anne Bacon

To thee (yet deere) if not despising me  
This lines are sent alone thy face to see,  
For to thy mother now I dare not wrighte  
Since she was pleas'd me & my penn t'indighte  
Of a conspiracye her gold to winn,

Which sordid play I am no gamester in;  
 Let them use crafte to compasse their request  
 Whose hopes upon a single lapp doth rest,  
 T'is innocence and candour still entire,  
 Wherwith I only covett to acquire:/ 10  
 Some spiritts poynted are so sharpe & fine,  
 They penetrate beyond a playne designe,  
 And I have oft heard *Statist's* loose their plott  
 As well with over, as with undershott;  
 I would thy Lady knew how little sad  
 I am, that other's by my misse are glad,  
 If other's will take up, these I left free,  
 I doe not envy them, though they might mee,  
 Nor may I yett runn madd, although that Fate  
 By my misfortune made's thee fortunate; 20  
 It may fall on me as a heavy thinge,  
 And so some freezing melancholy bringe  
 Which tyme will melt; I'le not sigh now for itt,  
 But sing in mirth, mirth best my humour fitts;/.  
 How fare's thy stomach now this flesh-lesse Lent?  
 When naught but Neptune's cattell may be spent,  
 By proclamation now for eating fishe,  
 Papist and Puritan meete in a dish;  
 Thus crosse religions kindly must digest  
 A Policye, which pyne's me I Protest; 30  
 O Policye! T'is now thy subtile caste,  
 That make's men a divers sense to taste,  
 Fasting yett keep's off fatnes that's uncleane  
 So t'is my comfort to be poore & leane,  
 Poore men are sayd heav'n soonest to inheritt,  
 For few are rich in purse, and so in spiritt,  
 Yett ther be those heav'n so shines on their face  
 As giv's them happinesse of goods, & Grace:  
 Thies licens'd are to buy on their behalfe  
 A Norfolk Dumpling or an Essex calfe, 40  
 The calfe I doubt they'll choose as ther is reason,  
 For shortly veale and Bacon come in season;  
 The Dumpling is a drye, and drawing food,  
 Asking more Suffolk butter than's thought good;  
 For health of heart, and t'is too meane a dyett;  
 For palatt's that in playne fare take disquiett;  
 I'le not persuade it then with my low voyce  
 But may thy appetite take highest choyce!  
 I am content; yett here in doth tell

a Lye, which I recant, and so farewell.

Thy earnest loving though idle-writing servant  
PHILIP WODEHOUSE

My service I can not forgett  
unto thy Lady Mother yett,  
although another she preferr  
still I will love & honour her,  
and her's; so to my pretty freind  
thy brother I my love commend;  
which first & last to thee I vowe  
untill thou giv'st me willowe bowghe.

March 25

To the thrice virtuous and fair gentlewoman Mrs Anne Bacon present this at  
Culford.

### Philip Wodehouse to Lady Jane Bacon

MADAM,

I must confesse I was resolv'd of silence since y<sup>t</sup> my last unseasoned  
lines unto your daughter prov'd so unhappy objects of yo<sup>r</sup> sight and cen-  
sure; but now I doe resume y<sup>e</sup> modest boldnesse of wrighting to yo<sup>r</sup> La<sup>P</sup>:  
excited hereunto by some few syllables of favour, exprest in Mr Peads my  
loving freind's late letter; yet my rude stile no longer shall detayne you,  
then while I make this honest protestation. That, though the meanesse of  
my fortunes may make your La<sup>P</sup> unwilling to bestow, or us unable to  
accept of yo<sup>r</sup> designed portion, on such tearmes as propounded: yet will I  
still psist in all observaunce towards you & yours, no lesse religious &  
confident than any other you shall be pleas'd to looke upon w<sup>th</sup> your more  
liberall countenance. Thus if I may continue in ye list of yo<sup>r</sup> La<sup>Ps</sup> humble  
servants, my ambition shall be to wayte upon you and rest

Your La<sup>Ps</sup> true honorer  
PHILIP WODEHOUSE

London July 1 1633

To the honora<sup>ble</sup> the Lady Bacon at Culford, Suffolk.

### Philip Wodehouse to Mr Pead

GOOD SIR,

I receiv'd yo<sup>r</sup> letter, & must returne my thanks for the courteous  
addresse thereof, although the matter containe's but small encouragement;

for M<sup>r</sup> Morse assured me his too supine or subtle information is like to be the death of my desired fortune; yet I'le impute it to my owne unhappinesse; for though I know him not by face, by fame I know him honest, and so discreet w<sup>th</sup>all, as to apply himselfe unto his Ladye's pleasure.

Unto your relation y<sup>t</sup> my Ladye should thinke my father faulty in delays, which under favour on her part is more probable, I dare assure you S<sup>r</sup>, she is mistaken in his disposition; she may accuse me rather of that crime who have delay'd my father almost thies five moneths, in hope of her employment; of which she may esteem me much unworthye I confesse, in respect of her fayre daughters vertuous meritts, though not of her demanded mony portion; for that is no such rarity, y<sup>t</sup> any sober man, in this unsober age, shall need despayre of, although, as mine, his fortunes be exiguous.

Those propositions w<sup>ch</sup> yo<sup>r</sup> letter mentioneth by M<sup>r</sup> Morse sent unto M<sup>r</sup> Scrivener to w<sup>ch</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Lady willeth a present answer: ther are no such things acknowledged by Mr Morse to be entrusted to him & so I am unable to returne y<sup>e</sup> duty of answer. But I entreat you to acquaint the Ladye y<sup>t</sup> my full purpose is to attend upon her person before few weekes be runn & then to kisse her fayrest hands if in the meantime she doth not inhibite me with her disfavour.

Thus w<sup>th</sup> my due respects I shall remayne

Yo<sup>r</sup> gratefull freind to love and serve you

PHILIP WODEHOUSE

S<sup>r</sup>, I desire you would endeere my most devoted services unto sweet M<sup>rs</sup> Bacon, whose beauteous memory is oft my contemplation.

London July 1 1633

S<sup>r</sup>, As I was sealing up this letter, yo<sup>r</sup> propositions sent to M<sup>r</sup> Scrivener were brought unto me by M<sup>r</sup> Dade a Suffolk gentleman in w<sup>ch</sup> ther be something of so illiberall a consequence as I assure myselfe should I digest them yo<sup>r</sup> daughters fathers freinds might deeme me despicable, nor can I thinke y<sup>e</sup> Lady doth demand them unless for tryall of my disposition. If otherwise, I should disdayne y<sup>e</sup> pride of any portion.

### Philip Wodehouse to Mistress Anne Bacon

Goe blotted paper to the beauteous mayde!  
whom thy sad master would, but may not see,  
age therfore in his stead! be not affrayde,  
thou hast no parent that inhibite's thee;

First w<sup>th</sup> a tender kisse, touch that fayre hand,  
which out of senselesse wood, can fetch sweet sound;

then stoope unto her feet which gracefull stand,  
or can, w<sup>th</sup> measur'd motion, grace y<sup>e</sup> ground;

But if Diana-like she goe's to chase  
the fearfull beast's; stay hence will spring thy smart:  
witness that fatall coursing tyme, & place,  
where she both kill's a hare, and wounds a harte;

A harte that vowe's revenge, & will pursue  
Love to sweet Bacon, or bid Love a-dieu

Your not Least-Loving servaunt  
PHILIP WOODHOUSE

To the virtuous and fayre gentlewoman Mistress Anne Bacon at Culford give this.

University of York

JOANNA MOODY

#### Notes

- 1 D/DBy C25, reproduced by courtesy of Lord Braybrooke, Audley End, and Essex Record Office. See *The Private Correspondence of Jane Lady Cornwallis Bacon 1633–1644*, ed. Joanna Moody (London: Associated University Presses, 2003).
- 2 See A. C. Bunten, *Sir Thomas Meautys, Secretary to Lord Bacon and His Friends* (London, 1918).
- 3 MS Lt. 40 in Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.
- 4 Cited in Bunten (1918), p. 103.
- 5 This letter was published in *The Private Correspondence of Jane, Lady Cornwallis 1613–1644*, ed. Richard, Lord Braybrooke (London, 1842), p. 254.
- 6 Sir Richard Lovelace, created in 1627 Baron Lovelace, of Hurley, Berks, had by his second wife, Margaret Dodsworth, two sons and two daughters, of whom Elizabeth married Henry, son of Sir Henry Marten; and Martha, Sir George Stonehouse, Bart. Sir Edmund supports Lady Bacon's impression that the young man is not a suitable match for her daughter, presumably as a result of problems over money not materialising.

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