

GRAHAM, WINSTON 1909- Author

Address: b. c/o Doubleday & Co., Inc., 575 Madison Ave., New York 22; h. Treberran, Perranporth, Cornwall, England

The county of Cornwall, England, a familiar setting in opera, ballet and literature, has attracted the interest and talent of the British author, Winston Graham. He first moved to this coastal countryside from Manchester at the impressionable age of seventeen. Some twenty years later he began writing a series of historical novels about eighteenth century Cornwall, *Demelza* (Ward, Lock, 1946; Doubleday, 1953), *The Renegade* (Doubleday, 1951), *Venture Once More* (Doubleday, 1954), and *The Last Gamble* (Doubleday, 1955), which follow the fortunes of Ross Poldark and his wife Demelza, a miner's daughter.

The lists of the Doubleday Dollar Book Club have included several of Graham's books: *Cordelia* (1950), *Night without Stars* (1950), and *Fortune is a Woman* (1953). *Demelza* was a selection of the Book League of America in 1953.

Descended from Lancashire stock, Winston Mawdsley Graham was born in 1909 in Manchester, England to Albert Henry and Anne (Mawdsley) Graham. His maternal great-grandfather, Thomas Mawdsley, worked with the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury and others on the factory legislation of the 1840's and 1850's.

A delicate boy, Winston left school at the age of sixteen and continued his education with a tutor. He began writing novels at the age of twenty-one, and, he has said, "owes a great deal in the early stages" to his mother, who, by then a widow, supported him and enabled him to "devote his whole time to writing when the achievement was hardly enough in itself to justify it." Graham's early novels were destroyed when the firm which published them was "blitzed" in 1941. ("I would not wish to resurrect any of them," he commented recently.)

For five years during World War II Graham served in the Coastguard Service. He resumed writing with *The Merciless Ladies* (Ward, Lock, 1944), which was purchased for filming. However, this was prevented by the recession which occurred in the British film industry at that time; his books *Take My Life* (Ward, Lock, 1947) and *Night without Stars* were later produced by the J. Arthur Rank organization.

Night without Stars, a suspense novel whose hero is a partially blind English lawyer, was called by James Kelly "credibly motivated and compelling as to character and place" (*New York Times*, September 3, 1950). The background of *Cordelia*, a novel of a young woman and her domineering father-in-law in Manchester in the 1860's, was "its most distinctive element" according to W. K. Rugg (*Christian Science Monitor*, January 26, 1950). Virginia Kirkus called it "a substantial and rather soberly romantic story."

Riley Hughes (*Catholic World*, March 1952) commented that the chief merit of *The Renegade* "lies in its circumstantial historical background, with its fund of information about the trades and manners of eighteenth century Cornwall, rather than in the slight love story." *Demelza*, another of the Poldark series, "is more than a collection of romances. . . . It offers realistic and somber descriptions of Cornish farmers, fisherman and miners pushed to the verge of revolution by unjust laws" (W. A. S. Dollard in the *New York Times*, March 8, 1953).

The reviewer in the *Saturday Review* (March 12, 1955) observed that Graham in *The Last Gamble* "engineers the adventures of the Poldarks in a manner that hangs on to the reader's interest." Whitney Betts (*New York Times*, May 9, 1954) wrote that *Venture Once More* "is a leisurely novel which transports the reader to its milieu and makes its characters one's friends." Other books by Graham include

The Forgotten Story (Ward, Lock, 1945 and 1949), *Take My Life* (Ward, Lock, 1947), *Jeremy Poldark* (Ward, Lock, 1950 and 1953) and *Warleggan* (Ward, Lock, 1953).

Francis Iles observed in the London *Sunday Times* that *The Little Walls* (1955) was "a quite remarkable achievement" and Francis Grierson in the London *Daily Mail* commented: "An absorbing story, a brilliant study in psychology, and an acidly witty characterization of believable people." Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco *Chronicle* described Graham's *Fortune is a Woman* (1953; a Doubleday Dollar Book Club choice, 1954), a suspense novel of fraud in the art world, "an extremely good, readable, exciting story."

Among his favorite authors are W. Somerset Maugham, John P. Marquand, John Galsworthy, and Graham Greene. Aside from reading Graham enjoys, traveling, lawn tennis, swimming, and rose-growing. With Mrs. Graham, who was Jean Mary Williamson before their marriage in 1939, he spent two months in the United States in 1950, and later visited the West Indies. The Grahams have a son, Andrew Winston Mawdsley Graham, and a daughter, Anne Rosamund Mawdsley Graham. The writer has blue eyes, dark brown hair, stands six feet and weighs 170 pounds. He is a Liberal-Conservative and a member of the Church of England. His clubs are the Savile, Brook Street and Mayfair.

Reference

Author's & Writer's Who's Who (1948-49)

From *Current Biography Yearbook 1955*, edited by Marjorie Dent Candee, the H. W. Wilson Company, Bronx, USA, 1956. Ms. Candee's text is an adaptation of a biographical sketch by Earle F. Walbridge which first appeared in the November 1955 issue of *Wilson Library Bulletin*, a magazine for librarians from the same publisher. The original text is reproduced below:

Winston Graham

Cornwall is an "unusual county," says the English novelist, Winston Graham, who lives there. Names as diverse as Tristan, Sir Hugh Walpole, and Diana Adams (in the ballet, "Picnic at Tintagel") have made it a familiar word in the allied arts of opera, literature and the dance. Mr. Graham first came to this coastal countryside from Manchester at the impressionable age of seventeen, in 1926, and "this unusual country began to influence my creative thoughts"¹ and eventually his work. Twenty-five years later he began publishing his well-known tetralogy of historical novels about eighteenth century Cornwall, *The Renegade* (1951), *Demelza* (1953), *Venture Once More* (1954), and *The Last Gamble* (1955), which followed the fortunes of Ross Poldark and his wife Demelza, once his kitchenmaid. At present he is working on a modern novel [[The Sleeping Partner](#)] dealing with electronics, and another set in the mid-seventeenth century² – in Cornwall.

Winston Mawdsley Graham was born in 1909³ at Manchester, England, the son of Albert Henry Graham,⁴ a wholesale chemist, and Anne (Mawdsley) Graham. The family was Lancashire stock on both sides at least as far back as 1800.⁵ His maternal great-grandfather, Thomas Mawdsley, though of humble birth, did much work with the Earl of Shaftesbury and others on the factory legislation of the 1840s and 1850s.

A delicate child, Winston Graham left school at sixteen, but later had some private tuition.⁶ He began writing novels at twenty-one, and says he "owes a great deal in the early stages to my mother, who, then a widow, supported me and enabled me to devote my whole time to writing when the achievement was hardly enough in itself to justify it." All these early novels were destroyed when the publishing firm was blitzed in 1941. ("I would not wish to resurrect any of them.")⁷ Graham served during the war for five years in the Coastguard Service. He resumed writing with *The Merciless Ladies* (1944) which, with another novel, was bought for filming. The slump which hit the British film industry at this time prevented that, but *Take My Life* (1948) and *Night Without Stars* (1950) were given major productions by J. Arthur Rank. *Night Without Stars* was published in the United States the same year as *Cordelia*; both were choices of the Dollar Book Club.

Night Without Stars, a suspense novel whose hero is a partially blinded English lawyer, was called by James Kelly in the *New York Times* "credibly motivated and compelling as to character and place." Reverting to the scene of its author's birth, *Cordelia* pictured life in Manchester in the 1860s; its heroine had a domineering father-in-law. In the *Christian Science Monitor* W. K. Rugg thought the background of the book "its most distinctive element," while Virginia Kirkus called it "a substantial and rather soberly romantic story." The "circumstantial historical background" of *The Renegade* was also praised by Riley Hughes in the *Catholic World*, "with its fund of information about the trades and manners of eighteenth century Cornwall." *Demelza*, a Book League choice, was "more than a collection of romances. It offers realistic and somber descriptions of Cornish farmers, fishermen and miners pushed to the verge of revolution by unjust laws," according to the *Times*. Ross is found not guilty of rioting in *Venture Once More*, "a leisurely novel," according to Whitney Betts in the *New York Times*, "which transports the reader to its milieu and makes its characters one's friends." Like other reviewers, the critic in the *Saturday Review* thought that *The Last Gamble* "engineers the adventures of the Poldarks in a manner that hangs on to the reader's interest."

Francis Iles declared in the London *Sunday Times* that *The Little Walls* (1955) was "a quite remarkable achievement," and Francis Grierson commented in the London *Daily Mail*: "An absorbing story, a brilliant study in psychology, and an acidly witty characterisation of believable people." Lenore Glen Offord called *Fortune is a Woman* (1953), a Dollar Book Club choice, and a suspense novel of fraud in the art world, "an extremely good, readable, exciting story." James Sandoe in the New York *Herald Tribune* mentions its "satisfactory deliberateness and a steady tug of tension which breaks out fitfully into various violences and a fierce if genteel romance."

Unlike his other writer friends, Winston Graham has never had any other occupation than writing, and finds time for a number of recreations and hobbies: travel, lawn tennis, swimming, taking movie films, rose-growing, wall building, and reading. His chief likes are "Maugham and Marquand, Conrad and Chandler, Galsworthy and Graham Greene, Bennett and Balchin."⁸ With Mrs. Graham, who was Jean Mary Williamson before their marriage in 1939, he spent two months in the United States in 1950. They made their way home via the West Indies.⁹ The Grahams have a son,

Andrew Winston, and a daughter, Anne Rosamund; both also have Mawdsley as a middle name. Their home is at Treberran, Perranporth, Cornwall. The writer is a Liberal-Conservative, has blue eyes, dark brown hair, stands six feet and weighs 170 pounds. He is a member of the Church of England, and his clubs include the Savile Club, Brook Street, and Mayfair.¹⁰

* * * * *

NOTES

¹ The quotes and personal information used in the article were presumably fed to its author via either Doubleday (WG's US publishers) or Carol Brandt, his local literary representative

² Can this mean *The Grove of Eagles*, even though the century is wrong? Nothing else would seem to fit. If so, WG must have started work on the book much earlier than previously acknowledged. (He states in *Memoirs* 1.8 that he didn't begin *writing* it until 1960.)

³ Yet another example of WG's reluctance to disclose that he was born in 1908

⁴ In *Memoirs* he fails to mention that he was born Winston Grime, second son of Albert and Annie Grime – but only here does he go further and retrospectively attribute to his parents the assumed surname that would later be his but was never theirs.

⁵ In June 1976 he told a Cornish audience: "So far as I can go back, I appear to be about three-quarters Lancashire, three-sixteenths Westmorland and one-sixteenth Welsh." (*The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, New Series, Volume VII, Part 4, 1977)

⁶ An interesting revelation – on which subject or subjects? English, perhaps?

⁷ This WG's first (but far from last) public disavowal of his early novels

⁸ It is notable that the lists of interests and favourite authors are both trimmed back between publications, presumably

at WG's behest. I wonder if the family still have the home movies he liked to shoot?

⁹ In October 1950 the Grahams crossed to New York on the *Queen Elizabeth* then travelled by rail down to New Orleans, a city WG did not like: Canal Street is "ugly" and "hasn't even got a whore's allure", he wrote. "Every other corner ... is a cheap night club. Even the banks have neon signs." (Notebook 3, RCM Graham archive, Truro)

¹⁰ The article ends with a misunderstanding – WG refers to a single club – the Savile, Brook Street, Mayfair – which inadvertently becomes three!

* * * * *