

The John Dunn Show, BBC Radio 2, 27 June 1991

John Dunn talks to *Winston Graham*

JD: Is it [*The Twisted Sword*] really the last? Are there going to be no more Poldarks?

Well, I think it has to be in the natural sort of expenditure of time. The first four were a group ... and the next three were a group and these four are a group. There had to be a fourth of these following *The Loving Cup*, which is *The Twisted Sword*, even though it's four years later or five years later but, after this, one would have to take an enormous start again, with all the characters beginning something fresh. There are obviously a lot of loose ends left, but then loose ends exist in any family, whether it's fictional or real, and it seems to me that this is about the time when I should suitably draw it to a close.

Because it could go on - I mean, as you say, there are characters there aplenty. It could go on almost indefinitely.

Oh, indeed. My young son, when he was very young, spoke of a tiddle wave and I think only a tiddle wave could get rid of all the Poldarks.

[Chuckles]

Coming in from the Scilly Isles.

Well, you've got Ross and Demelza, of course. They're doing okay, actually, aren't they? Really rather ... Are we allowed to say that Ross gets knighted? I've said it, haven't I?

Yes, you have said it. Yes, I think that's reasonable. Yes. Yes, he has moved from being a rebellious character to being a semi-conformist, but then he accepts his knighthood with a very disgruntled manner and he does it only because Liverpool convinces him that it's necessary for him to have a title to move in Paris. Incidentally, this is not just fiction, nor are any of them fiction. Liverpool did in fact appoint a man to go to Paris in this way to look at the French army and discover what sort of chances there were of a rebellion against the government of Louis.

'Cause he'd sent Poldark off on a similar mission before, hadn't he, to Portugal?

Oh yes, there had been two or three missions. Those are, as it were, in the intervening ten years between the end of book seven and the beginning of book eight. There are none actually described in the books.

And Demelza's there, Jeremy, and is it Clodance or Clowdance?

Clowance.

Clowance - two children - are obviously still there as well. What about the Warleggans? What's happened to the Warleggans?

Oh, they're very much in this book and they are in the four books. In the first and second of them, of course, George, having been bereaved of his Elizabeth, ehm, marries again; marries Lady Harriet Carter and there's a great deal in the books of the struggle he has keeping up with this aristocratic and arrogant lady who treats him with a degree of amused contempt and yet at the same time looks after him in a way and there's a sort of conflict there between his meanness and his love of having a titled lady and the sister of a duke as his wife.

It was Elizabeth that in fact united the two families by marriage. I mean, they were actually sort of enemies, but it was Elizabeth ... She was a Poldark, wasn't she?

No, Elizabeth was ... No, she *divided* the families. Elizabeth was a Chynoweth who was going to marry Ross -

Oh, that's right.

- and Ross was supposed to be dead and she decided to marry his cousin Francis, so this was the sort of ... ehm ... the bone of contention the whole way through between Ross and George.

Do you have a set of flow-charts up on your wall at home with all the characters and all the relationships and all the doings that they get up to so that you know where you are?

I have absolutely nothing. I have endless books - exercise books full of notes, all inchoate and unindexed - and I have one page in one book [actually in each of Poldark's five to ten] which says what date everyone was born. Apart from that I have nothing at all, except I reach into my memory or occasionally have to turn up a book and look.

Do people ever catch you out?

Er, very seldom. I've caught myself out once or twice. I hate to confess it on radio, but I think that the date of Elizabeth's death in *The Stranger From The Sea* is slightly different by several days from the date of her death mentioned in *The Tumbled H-* ... The, ehm ... ehm ... What was it called?

[Laughs]

I've lost it. *The Stranger From The Sea* was number eight and *The Angry Tide* was number seven. Those were the two where there was a slight difference of ...

[Chuckles] It's amazing that you can remember any. I think it's extraordinary.

That, of course, was one reason why the BBC, having done two television series, wanted me to do a third, and I said there was no way in which I could do a third because Elizabeth was the point of conflict and, once she died, there was nothing more, and they said, "Come on, Winston, what about the children?" and I said, "Well, I don't really like sagas which go on and on, from one generation whistling through to another and so on" and they said, "We'll give you a couple of scriptwriters - sympathetic scriptwriters - to help you through your blockage" and I said, "Well, it isn't a blockage, it's an endage" and finally the whole thing fell through and it was only about four or five years later with their words whispering in my ears and a lot of letters flooding in and my own *addiction* to Poldark, as it had become by then, I thought, "Well, there's no harm in going on one generation more" and, of course, in the end of them, even now, Demelza's only forty-five and Ross is fifty-five, so that -

But isn't there a possibility, therefore, that these last four books could in fact be made into a television series?

Yes, there is. There has been a variety of people who're trying to do it. There's been an option taken out two years ago, but, more recently, one of the companies bidding for the franchise in Channel Three Wales and The West, it's called, have bought an option again and announced that, if they are awarded the franchise, the last sixteen episodes or last four books of Poldark will be their first major drama series.

Because Angharad Rees and Robin Ellis - obviously, if they were prepared to play the parts - would be about the right ages.

This is the extraordinarily lucky thing; yes, very, very, very lucky. Unfortunately, George Warleggan, Ralph Bates, died about three or four months ago - he was fifty-two - so if it were ever done again, we would have to get another George, but I hope we should get the same Ross and Demelza.

What did you think of the television versions?

Well, I wasn't pleased with the earlier stages, but I made a lot of noise, which didn't make me very popular, but the second series I was granted a sort of special status, as it were, and obviously no author has the right to dictate but at least he has a right to be consulted, and I was consulted and I worked with them all through and my own feeling is that the second series was considerably better than the first.

So you didn't actually do the television scripts, then?

No, I don't do television scripts, no. I've never done them. I did a film script of one of my novels called *Night Without Stars* for The Rank Organisation and the director said he was delighted with it and the producer was very pleased with it and I went to America while it was being made and when I came back I couldn't follow the story, so I thought that was the end of my attempts to do scripts. The director had decided that he knew better than I did and he claimed the debit titles.

[Laughs] But when they were making the second series of Poldark, were you around on the set? Did you go along to the recording?

Oh, yes. All the time. All the time, yes. I was in the series as well for a short period.

Were you? You had a part in it?

Yes, yes, because they said ... the actors said that Hitchcock had had a part so that I had to have a part, so I was given a part greeting the wedding group as they came out of church - Drake and Morwenna - and I was in costume and raised my hat and kissed Morwenna and it was one of those occasions when the weather was rather like it is today, rain and drizzle and things, and the director couldn't get the set right, couldn't get it right, so every time Morwenna came out of the door of the church I had to take off my hat and kiss her and in the end I whispered to her, "I think I'm getting more fun out of this than the bridegroom" and she replied out of the corner of her mouth, "Yes, and more than he's ever going to get, as well!"

[Laughs] That's lovely.



John Dunn (1934-2004)

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