

WG at leisure

WG lived to write. According to his son Andrew, he was *essentially a storyteller (who) was deeply, deeply unhappy when he wasn't writing*.¹ But even the most dedicated author cannot work all the time and, after rushing headlong into his first novel and coming to a standstill after five weeks due to physical exhaustion,² the young writer came quickly to appreciate the need for discipline; of the need to work, of course, whether inspired or not, but steadily; in regulated fashion and this for the rest of his life is what he did. In 1967 he described his routine when writing a novel as *a five-day working week from 10.30 in the morning until 1 p.m., and from 5 to 7.30 in the evening*.³ By 1975, these two sessions had become one, from *after tea ... until about 8 p.m.*⁴ – thus time for work and leisure. But how did he fill those leisure hours?

(1) SPORTS AND GAMES

(a) Tennis

*I misspent my youth playing tennis.*⁵

*Three hard sets of men's doubles on a sunny summer morning with kindred souls is one of the rare pleasures that I would ask for again if I ever get to heaven.*⁶

After the Grimes moved from Manchester to Perranporth in October 1925, WG joined the local Tennis Club the following March, in time for the '26 season, and thereafter played "to distraction" until "well past forty".⁷ What is more, as with the Savile Club and the Society of Authors, he was willing not just to belong but to assume administrative responsibilities: the online history of Perranporth Tennis Club records that "Mr Winston Graham was voted to the Chair" in 1951.

One of the earliest instances of WG's name in the press – this more than six years before his first novel was published – records his participation in a Falmouth tennis tournament on Wednesday 22 August 1928. In the Men's Doubles (Level), Second Round, we read, J. B. Watling and C. H. Pritchard beat W. J. Menadue and Winston Grime 8-6, 4-6, 7-5 in what

sounds from the score like just the kind of scrap he most enjoyed. In the Men's Doubles (Handicap), Second Round, however, unnamed opponents beat Menadue and Grime more easily, 6-4, 6-2. It's perhaps just as well that WG and his partner lost the first match because in Round Three their conquerors, Messrs Watling and Pritchard, were walloped 6-1, 6-0.⁸



Lylie Robins, WG and Vera Polgreen at Perranporth, year unknown. The unseen fourth behind the lens was Vera's brother Ridley whose surname was tweaked to provide *Poldark*.

(ii) Golf

Until he left Perranporth in 1960, the sport primarily associated with WG was always tennis; thereafter it becomes golf:

*1961: He lives ... in a pleasant house in Sussex, grows roses, plays golf and enjoys a weekly visit to the theatre or ballet in London.*⁹

*1967 (i): [WG] does not stick to his daily writing routine as closely as he used to; golf and gardening, cars and cats tend to see him more often than is good for his creative soul.*¹⁰

1967 (ii): *I do play golf, although I started too late in life to be any good at it.*¹¹

1973: *When I'm not working, I like to play golf, swim or garden.*¹²

1977: *The danger [of having good ideas on the golf course] is to go and play ... too often.*¹³

1978: *When I am working I like to play golf about three times a week. I play nine to twelve holes, nearly always on my own, and I scarcely ever speak to anyone.*¹⁴

1983: *Nothing could be better for a writer [than a little golf]. Clears the head of intrusive clutter.*¹⁵

(iii) Other

WG expressed his enthusiasm for **body surfing** (i.e. surfing without a board) in both *Memoirs* (2.9) – making celestial opportunity his second request of Paradise – and elsewhere:

*Body surfing on a hot day in Cornwall is tremendous. It's a lovely feeling if you get a really heavy wave, and then another and another ... I've got a lot about surfing in Pol-dark's Cornwall. They told me to make it as autobiographical as possible, and that seemed to me absolutely the only way I could say anything about Cornwall which hasn't been said forty times before. I enjoyed doing that: it brought back so many pleasant memories.*¹⁶

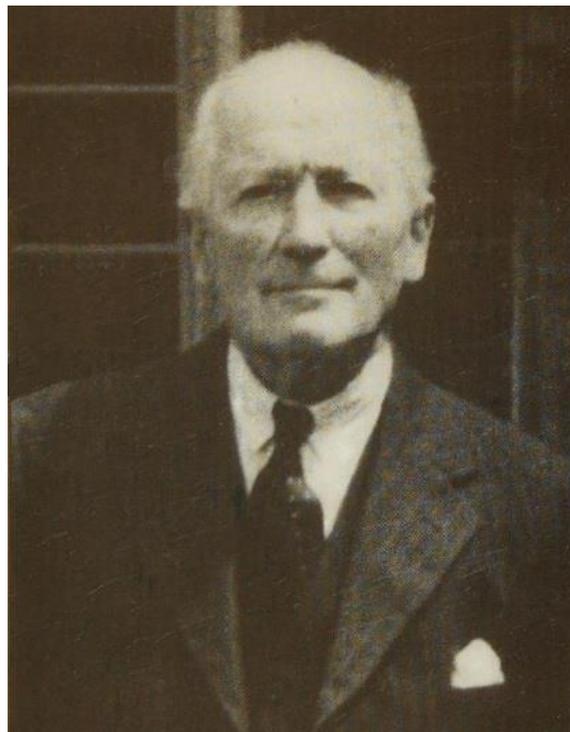
Though I'm not aware that he ever played **cricket**, and although Cornwall (having competed in the Minor Counties League since 1904) has never had a first-class team, WG was a keen follower of the County Championship game – indeed, its dubious points allocation system was the subject of his first letter to *The Times*, published on 31 July 1954. Since he was born and raised in Lancashire, which has a distinguished cricketing heritage, his love of the game is no surprise. According to *Memoirs* (1.9), one of his reasons

for choosing to live in Sussex post-1960 was *that it was a great cricketing county (though abysmal at rugby)*. Whilst it's hard to credit that this carried much weight, it is telling that he mentions it at all.

Though neither WG nor Jean had ridden as children, "just after the war we took lessons and did a bit of **riding**". (*Memoirs*, 2.7)

He enjoyed **snooker** too, which was played at the Savile to either Standard or Club rules. Here, speaking in 2003, is Ken of Gentleman's Hairdressing, Claridges:

*I started doing Mr Graham's hair in 1975. When he'd been staying at the Savile, I took an hour off in the morning to go and play snooker with him.*¹⁷

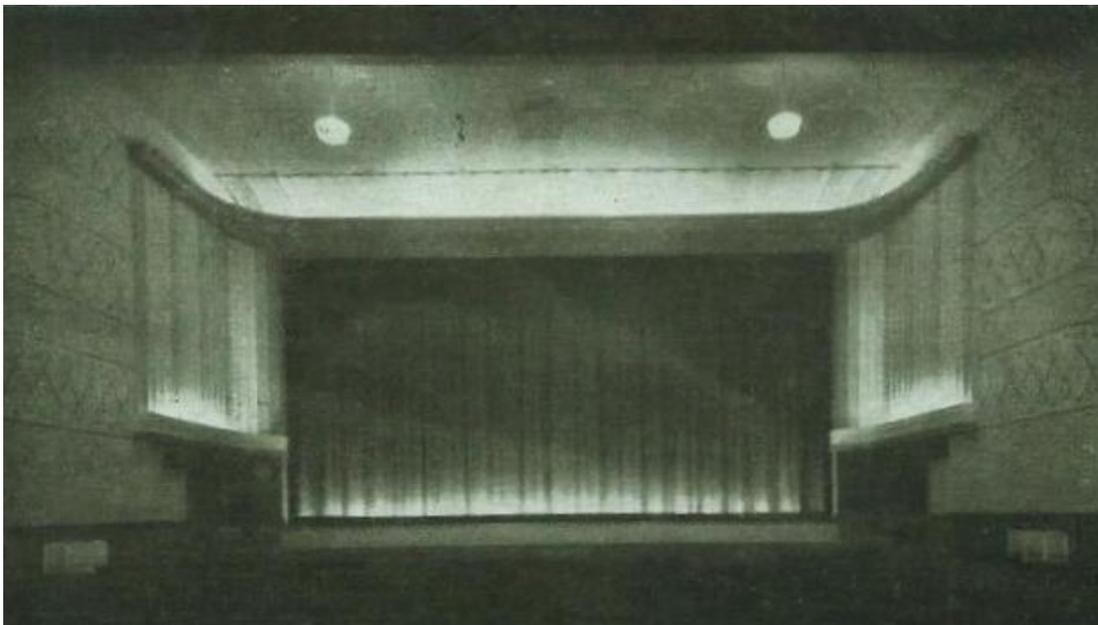


In the period 1937 to 1956, Tom [ATTLEE](#) (1880-1960; above) was a good friend to WG. In a letter dated 24 February 1948, whilst considering how best to return one of the author's manuscripts, he wrote:

*I can't see a chance of running over, I'm afraid, in the car in order to return the M.S. Will you come here? If so, supper and **darts**.*

(2) AMATEUR DRAMATICS

WG reports in *Memoirs* (1.3) becoming involved in the early 1930s in "amateur theatricals in the village Women's Institute", which led to him acting in plays he considered "frightful" and "contrived" – so, whilst retaining the titles and storylines, he re-wrote and improved them. On the strength of this, an unnamed "someone" persuaded him to write a play of his own, which, in six weeks, he did. *Seven Suspected* was first performed in Perranporth's Palace Theatre (interior below) on 30 May 1933 with both Winston and his wife-to-be Jean in the cast. It is instructive to note that the part WG wrote for himself was that of a waiter who, rendered dumb by a war-wound, can only communicate by writing.



Though he was still a year away from having his first novel accepted for publication, the play's positive reception must have encouraged its author greatly; in any event, in less than a year – on 18 April 1934 – his next, *At Eight O'Clock Precisely* – was staged in Redruth, with Winston and Jean again treading the boards, he as Peace, she Lucy.

Though no other details of WG's acting career are known, he clearly remained an Am. Dram. supporter all his life: by 1957, he had become one of six patrons of The Perranporth Players (with actress and *Take My Life* co-author Valerie Taylor another)¹⁸ and, as of 1995¹⁹ (and so probably until the end of his days), remained one still.

(3) GARDENING

*I love to potter in the garden.*²⁰

*For recreation – although I have a collection of pictures – my main interest lies in plants and shrubs.*²¹

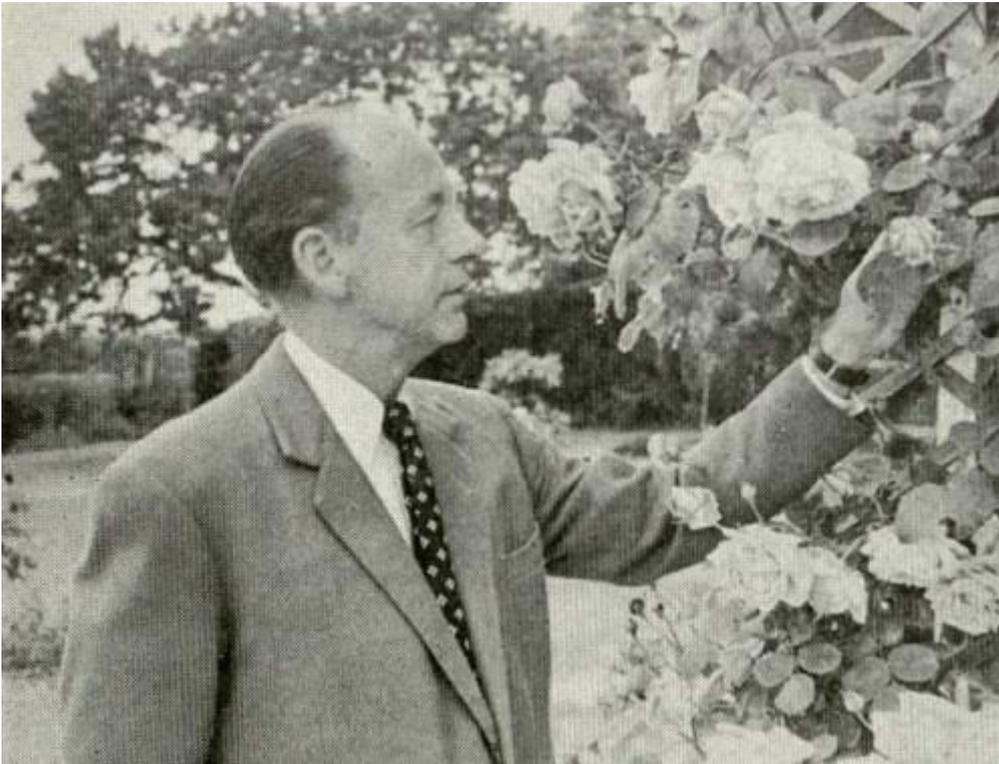
*His garden, with imaginative topiary and rhododendrons at their best, is his pride.*²²

WG has written extensively of his lifelong love of gardening, awakened, he reports, by a Naure Study primer, read at the age of nine and retained through life, in which he pressed the leaves of local trees. In Chybean, his first Perranporth home, he found the rockery "strange" and "really exciting" then, in Tresloe Vean, his base from 1926 to 1939, activities associated with its garden – a half-acre of "hideously shallow soil" – became the predominant motif of his diaries. At Treberran, his home from 1939, he attempted with some success to improve the poor soil and limit the depredations of North Coast exposure with strategically-placed breeze block walls.²³ But it was his last home, Abbotswood, Buxted, which posed the greatest challenge. On taking possession in the autumn of 1961, he found its neglected five-acre garden "just discernible among rank weed and overgrown bushes" and the assiduous campaign of reclamation and restoration which followed is described in detail in a *Homes and Gardens* article published in 1965.²⁴ Giant ponticum rhododendrons were removed to be replaced by other, more congenial varieties. Two acres of weed-choked meadow were incorporated into the lawn. An invading army of moles was repelled and beds of roses were planted, also many weeping and other tree species, native and exotic. A kitchen garden was established and a ruined grass tennis court replaced by a slightly larger hard one. This involved the felling of seven trees, which, though regretted at the time, he came later to realise was not enough.

By 1983, the five acres had become twelve²⁵. A journalist who visited in 2000/2001 recorded her impression:

He lives in an elegant eighteenth-century house set in extensive grounds in the heart of the Sussex countryside. The mellow stonework, the sundial, the rosebeds and the

*sweeping lawn leading to a meadow create a classic, timeless air, rather like their master.*²⁶



In Abbotswood's garden, circa 1962

When WG first came to Perranporth he was an unknown but fiercely determined youth who found his calling, grew into manhood, settled, married and raised a family there, all the while closely and intimately involved in the life of his local community. Conversely, on arrival at Buxted he was an established fifty-three-year-old author whose children had lives of their own, so it is perhaps not surprising that Winston and Jean never became as actively involved in the local community as had been the case in Cornwall. But neither were they wholly remote. In 1969, WG entered produce in Buxted Horticultural Society's Autumn Show with mixed results; though his roses and onions from sets placed only third, his pair of marrows scooped the first prize in their class of four shillings. Whether or not WG actually joined the Society is not clear, for local non-members were allowed to enter the show, and a 1978 list of 148 members does not include his name – but Jean certainly did, serving from 1971 to 1988 as President. Once in office, one of her first acts was the solicitation of a number of trophies to be awarded at Society events, among them The Winston Graham Cup for the most successful rose-grower in the Summer

Show, which is still awarded to this day. (As of June 2022, the most recent winner, in 2019, was Mrs Victoria Taberman-Pichler, who kindly supplied the image below.) Jean also inaugurated Society Coffee Mornings, the first of which was held, with a Bring and Buy Sale, on 3 July 1971 at Abbotswood, where "the weather was excellent and the gardens much admired".^{27, 28}





Above: BHS President Jean Graham (in fur coat) planting a beech tree at Buxted Boys' Club on 17 November 1973. On the left is Society Chairman Lady Bourne.



At Abbotswood, tending roses

To what extent does WG's zeal inform his work? Most pointedly, perhaps, in the character of Demelza who, throughout the **Poldark saga**, strives gamely, as did her creator, to maintain a garden on Cornwall's unforgiving north coast. Despite repeated sometimes grievous setbacks, her abiding love of flowers remains. "How are your hollyhocks?" WG asks her in **MEETING DEMELZA (2003)**, and, a few lines later, when she's gone, sees only "waving grasses and some bracken and hart's-tongue fern."²⁹

In **The Giant's Chair (1938)** Agatha Syme is a "gardening expert" who writes "much-syndicated gardening articles for the Press"; she and dinner guest Christopher Carew swap knowledgeable table-talk on the subject. Fifty-four years on, in **Stephanie (1992)**, James Locke is not only another keen gardener but also "on the Chelsea Flower Show Committee". Locke, we learn, has a lifelong interest in plants, particularly rhododendrons, and planned the garden of his father's new house in Sussex – WG had a lifelong interest in plants, particularly rhododendrons, and, from 1961, planned the rehabilitated gardens of his own new house in Sussex.

In **The Merciless Ladies (1944)** the Lynns' gardening endeavours are lightly touched on and, elsewhere, allusions crop up regularly:

The Dangerous Pawn (1937) *Everything [in the cottage] was neat and in high repair. The garden, about six yards square, was filled with marigolds, dwarf dahlias and tiny button chrysanthemums, and there were two fine Hugh Dickson roses grown to an extraordinary height. At the gate was a big blue hydrangea; and on the wall surrounding the garden and on the walls of the cottage itself a giant sedum grew, with rosettes larger than dinner plates.*

Keys of Chance (1939) *"This is Miss Seymour, Joseph. I brought her down to see our garden."*

"I'm pleased to meet you, Miss. 'Fraid there isn't much to see this time o' year." He looked at Mary keenly with his pin-point eyes.

"No," she said. "But you see I've been exiled from a garden so long that the sight of the leaves and the smell of the earth is a treat for me."

Joseph's eyes almost disappeared in a singularly charming smile.

"Sir," he said to the other man, "this lady is one of us."

... ..

In half an hour they parted from Joseph. As he left them the old gardener said:

"The last week in J'ly's the best time to see this garden, Miss. Also my own, which I've built up in forty year. There's the roses full out then, and the delphiniums aren't over. Sweet peas is still good, and I'm aiming to have clarkias. If you should be coming down ..."

"Thank you, Joseph," said the girl. "I should really like to."

"You've made a conquest," said Raymond, when they were sitting over the fire. "Joseph is your friend for life. And he's not as easy to please as [bulldog] Moses."

"It was just lucky," said Mary. "I happened to be interested in gardening."

Fortune is a Woman (1952) *I went up to the greenhouse. She was picking tomatoes. The plants were nearly done and looked shrivelled and a bit spotty; but there was still a fair crop. On a bench were some plant pots, and a fern standing in water. For a few seconds she didn't see me, and I looked at her.*

Marnie (1961) *"If you like roses go out in the garden. They've been very early this year, but there's a bed of Speke's Yellow round the corner."*

One of several pertinent passages in **The Ugly Sister (1998)**
Fetch ... knew, to my shame, far more than I did when as a child I'd had infinite freedom to explore the woods and lanes of Roseland ... Early wild daffodils, sedum (which she called orpine) scarcely yet above ground, golden saxifrage just showing yellow on the edge of a wet valley in Kea, beside it the Cornish moneywort struggling for space; on the scrub-land of Carnon ... were many other small flowers and mosses

to be stooped over, a little sample of each put in Sally's basket to examine and identify when we got home.

THE CORNISH FARM (1947) *No one had touched the apple trees in the semi-walled garden for about five years, and before the leaves had fallen I was at them with saw and pruning knife and creosote, not because I believed this occupation would ease our financial stress but for pure love of aesthetic form. Nothing looks worse than an apple tree gone to overgrowth, nothing better than one pruned back to its fruiting spurs.*

MYSTERY AT BROME (1938) and **THE CIRCUS (1974)** both feature felonious gardeners. (**THE JAPANESE GIRL'S** narrator becomes one too.) The plot of BROME turns on specialised botanical knowledge possessed by the perpetrator and solver of that story's crime – also, of course, by its author.

(4) ART COLLECTING

The timeline below suggests that WG began first to "dabble in" and then start seriously to collect modern art only after his early-sixties relocation from Cornwall via Cap Ferrat to Sussex:

1959: The lounge walls [of Treberran] are decorated with traditional paintings, portraits of glamorous film-stars... and one of Moiseiwitsch, an old friend.³⁰

1967 (i): Now living [in Sussex], he dabbles a little in modern art, cherishes a Siamese cat (and) indulges a fondness for music and golf.³¹

1967 (ii): Buying paintings is one of my extravagances.³²

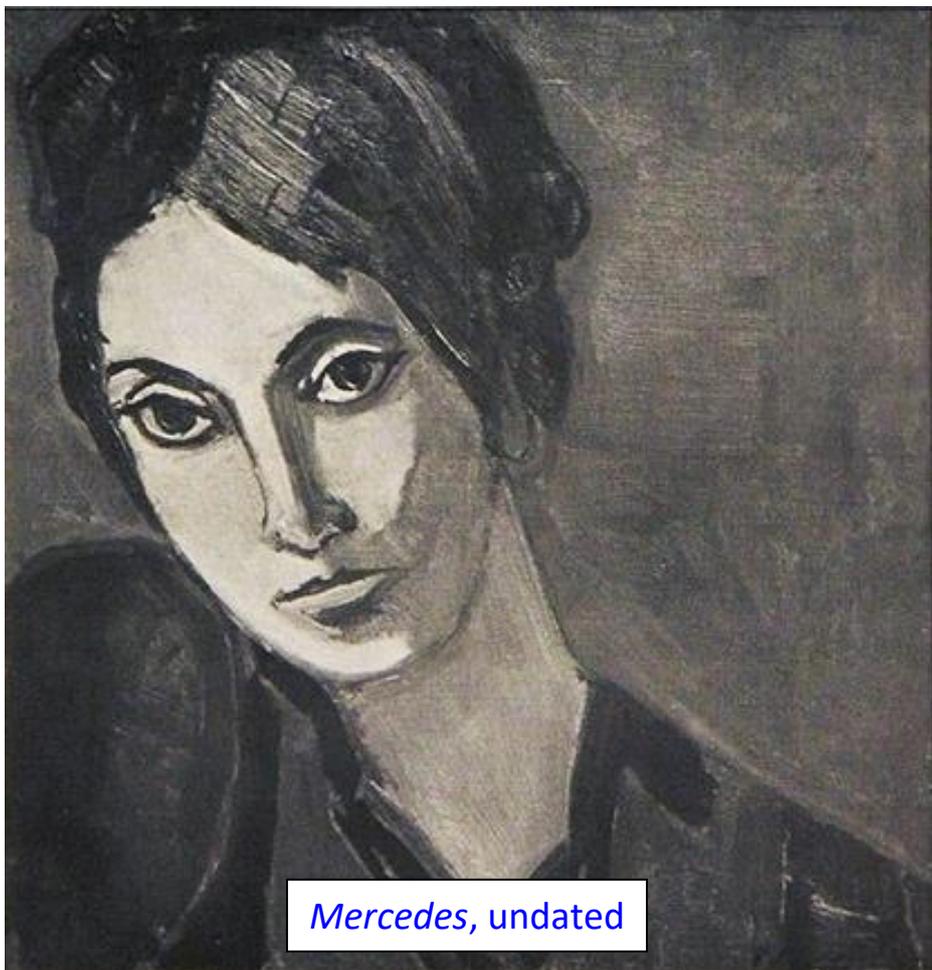
1975: [He now has] an Alfa Romeo, a fine five-acre garden with a pool and a tennis court and a collection of modern painting.³³

1995: [Abbotswood] is full of beautiful antiques, paintings and photographs.³⁴



The newspaper headline concerning Saddam Hussein suggests this photo dates from the early nineties. Note the artwork on the wall above the bed.

Little is known about WG's modern art collection. In *Memoirs* (2.2) he gives a detailed character-sketch of Verena /Vérène /Vreni Mettler³⁵ (1914-78), a "sad woman (with) the strange arid fatalism of some Swiss (who) never quite attained her ambition as a painter", two of whose works he owned. Images of the artist and some of her paintings are reproduced below:



Mercedes, undated



City Life, undated



Untitled, undated



Geneva Rooftops, undated



Summer Bouquet, 1974



Seaside, 1959



Southern coastal landscape with village in background, 1974

(5) READING

My parents didn't have a big collection of books ... but there was a ten-volume 'New Edition' of Chambers' Encyclopedia. This was a goldmine. I read the volumes endlessly, hopping from one subject to another like a honey-drunk bee ... and when a lending library was discovered I was able to borrow sensational novels which I lapped up at a phenomenal rate.³⁶

*Young Winston spent his [many] days off school doing maths problems and reading – "what I liked, everlastingly, some good, some bad."*³⁷

*[As a lad] I was always reading. I was a voracious reader, really.*³⁸

*I discovered the public library and read a novel a day for years.*³⁹

*Hodder ... published John Buchan, A. E. W. Mason, Sapper, Eric Ambler, Philip Oppenheim and Dornford Yates – the sort of books I liked to read.*⁴⁰

*My early favourites were Buchan, Mason, Stevenson, Wodehouse ... and every conceivable type of ephemeral writer.*⁴¹

*[As a young man] I very much kept myself to myself. I was entirely bookish: I adored ... Maugham, Galsworthy, Graham Greene, Arnold Bennett, Rosamond Lehmann and Quiller-Couch.*⁴²

A 1955 biography lists WG's recreations as travel, lawn tennis, swimming, shooting home movies, rose-growing, wall building and reading and his favourite authors as W. Somerset Maugham, John P. Marquand, Joseph Conrad, Raymond Chandler, John Galsworthy, Graham Greene, Arnold Bennett and Nigel Balchin.⁴³

When asked towards the end of 1977 to recommend books he had enjoyed that year, WG named three: *Daniel Martin* by John Fowles ("like listening to a violinist of perfect pitch after being in the company of amateurs"), *Harry's Game* by Gerald Seymour ("one of the six best thrillers I have ever read") and *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala ("a beautiful evocative novel of India ... each of its two contrasting and parallel stories contributing to the poignancy of the other"); when answering the same question in 1981 his pick was *Loitering with Intent* by Muriel Spark ("full of the eccentric juice of good writing").^{44, 45}

WG occasionally wrote book jackets puffs, as here:

It's emphatically a book to be read at a sitting ... an original picture ... a group of green berets trained, almost over-trained, in the art of war. (Re Death Finds the Day by Alan White, Harcourt Brace, 1965)

{The author} has a poet's eye for creating a scene and he uses language in such a way that, without pretentiousness, it etches itself brilliantly on the mind. (Re Cruel in the Shadow by Lorn Macintyre, Collins, 1979)

A small, rich, wise book, full of pathos and an essentially home-bred humanity that is becoming more and more scarce in the world. (Re A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck, Random House, 1979)

A magnificent novel which must surely be shortlisted for a Booker Prize. (Re Wings of the Wind by Ronald Hardy, Collins, 1987)

Excellent and splendidly written, the characters fully grown and demanding the reader's attention and involvement. I wait for more. (Re Coronach by Kimberley Jordan Reeman, AuthorHouse, 2007)

He also puffed *Blood, Earth & Medicine* (Parrett Press, 1991), a collection of "very striking and evocative" poems by James Crowden, a distant relative. WG recalls in *Memoirs* (1.3) that, to help while away long dreary hours of coastguard duty during the war, he would read surreptitiously by torchlight – usually poetry. Though he published very little verse of his

Perranporth discussion group on Thursday enjoyed a talk by Mr. Winston Graham, well-known novelist, on "Why read poetry?" Quoting from a wide range of poetry, Mr. Graham conveyed much of his own appreciation to his audience and left them asking for more.

own,⁴⁶ he quotes Emerson, Larkin, Johnson, Dekker and Tennyson in *Memoirs* and Catullus, Meredith, Mrs Browning, Housman, Keats and others elsewhere.⁴⁷ This snip (left) from the *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser* of 24 November 1980 conveys some idea of his feelings about the form.

Late in life, WG found another way to turn his love of reading to practical use:

GRAHAM LORD (1943-2015) was a Southern Rhodesia-born novelist, biographer and journalist who served as literary editor of the *Sunday Express* from 1969 to 1992. In the mid-1980s he became increasingly exasperated by the type of "precious, pretentious, unreadable" novel which tended to win the Booker Prize – but why? In 1994 he declared:

The Booker has in fact been won for years by quite the wrong sort of novels, mainly because the judges are academics or critics who are terrified to seem philistine in their choices.

Having determined to do something about it, Lord persuaded his editor, Robin Esser, to inaugurate the *Sunday Express* Book of the Year Award, an annual anti-Booker prize worth £20,000 (making it the most lucrative British fiction award then on offer) to an author whose new novel had to be both "stylish" and – unlike too many Booker contenders – "compulsively readable".

The Award was bestowed eight times (1987 to 1994) to Brian Moore for *The Color of Blood*, to David Lodge for *Nice Work*, to Rose Tremain for *Restoration*, to J M Coetzee for *Age of Iron*, to Michael Frayn for *A Landing on the Sun*, to Hilary Mantel for *A Place of Greater Safety*, to William Boyd for *The Blue Afternoon* and to William Trevor for *Felicia's Journey* before being discontinued. Shortlisted non-winners included Graham Greene, Margaret Forster, P. D. James, Barbara Vine, Angela Carter, Michael Dibdin, Jennifer Johnston and Edna O'Brien.

Lord framed the rules, chaired the judging panel and selected his fellow judges, who over the years included such luminaries as Kingsley Amis, Roald Dahl, Hammond Innes, P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Auberon Waugh, John Mortimer, Susan Hill and **Winston Graham**.

The period over which WG served is not known.⁴⁸

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(6) ARTS AND CULTURE

His pleasures ... are numerous – wine, a good television programme like Yes, Minister, a good play, a good film, a good book, a good ballet ("I've been to a lot of ballet") and the occasional opera.⁴⁹

When in the late summer of 1960 WG finally decided to reject the life of a tax exile on the Côte d'Azur, one of several reasons he gave in *Memoirs*, (1.8) was missing London's theatre and cinema. The following year, after learning that Alfred Hitchcock had paid \$50,000 for *Marnie's* screen rights, he assured the director:

I have been an admirer of your work for so very long, and I think I have seen every film you have made since THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH ... I thought your last film PSYCHO one of the most brilliant.⁵⁰ [*Though Hitchcock filmed this twice, in 1934 and 1956, WG surely refers here to the earlier Peter Lorre version.]*

It was written of him, also in 1961, as previously noted (see page two) that *he ... enjoys a weekly visit to the theatre or ballet*. Classical music was another pleasure. In 1977, five of his eight *Desert Island Discs* were choices in the classical genre, featuring works by Schubert, Rachmaninov, Beethoven, Rimsky-Korsakov and Vivaldi, to whose "absolutely marvellous" *Four Seasons* he declared himself "very devoted".⁵¹ In 1963, an "unforgettable" South Bank evening prompted him to contact American conductor Lorin Maazel (1903-2004):

I feel, though a stranger, that I must write and thank you for the superb concert you gave on Thursday last at the Festival Hall. My wife and I first heard you in Monaco in August 1960 when your conducting electrified the orchestra there into giving a performance such as I have never heard from it before. You have, I believe, something in common with the late Thomas Beecham ...⁵²

WG related another concert-going experience to Roy Plomley:

I was in Venice two years ago and they were celebrating the tercentenary of Vivaldi's birth – I don't think anybody knows actually when he was born but they decided to make it then – and we went to a concert on one of the islands and it was a large hall and the cellist was a man – a large man with a suit about two sizes too big for him so that his coat-tails swung and his trousers hung like elephants round his rather big feet. And I was in the front row, and during the middle of one of the movements both he and I saw an enormous black beetle walking across the stage. And there were two members of the orchestra, ladies in long frocks, so he cast an anxious glance around the audience – he wasn't playing at that moment – and gradually edged his way towards the black beetle, not moving his cello, so that his cello began to take on an angle of about forty-five degrees, until the black beetle came up against a large black boot. He then glanced anxiously around the audience again and, with a marvellous Chaplinesque flick, flicked the black beetle into the wings and then slowly resumed an upright position just in time to pick up the music.⁵³

Opera was another love, though only when traditionally staged. WG twice wrote to the press (*Times*, 23 July 1994 / *Daily Telegraph*, 12 September 2000) to complain that having to book Glyndebourne seats months ahead of a performance exposed patrons to the danger of being confronted on the night with a "modern" or "experimental" production quite unsuited to their taste, leading to "a great deal of frustration and disappointment." (He was similarly dismissive of "intellectual" modern novels⁵⁴ – modernity, it seems, held a greater appeal in some fields of art than others.)

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(7) CARS

When you are about to interview an author in his nineties, you don't expect him to turn up in a sports car capable of 150 miles per hour, but Winston Graham was not your average man.⁵⁵

*As we drove to lunch along lanes with bluebells, he told me that he still drives a Jaguar and never, in seventy-four years of motoring on four continents, has he had any kind of misdemeanour. Not even a parking fine.*⁵⁶

In *Memoirs* (2.9) WG dispassionately appraises the assorted cars that served him more or less faithfully through the long seventy-four-year span noted above. These, in chronological order, were a Morris Minor (with different number plates front and back), a Wolseley Hornet ("that triumph of British engineering"), a Standard Flying Twenty (sold to him by *Take My Life* director Ronnie Neame), an Alvis Three Litre Drophead ("the pride of our lives"), a Jaguar 3.4 Saloon ("like a coffin on wheels"), two Aston Martin DB6s (the first "the fastest thing I ever drove"; the second "not a great car") and two Jaguar XJS V12s (the first did him "extremely well, and the second was even better"), together with various Minis, a Riley ("new-style, alas"), an Austin Healey Sprite and three Alfa Romeo Spiders as "secondary" cars.



Three of WG's cars: a Mini, Alfa Spider and Jaguar XJS V12, circa 1977

Also in *Memoirs* (1.8) WG relates how he, Jean and Andrew drove across France in Alvis and Mini in the spring of 1960 at a time when Minis, just

out, were a comparative rarity in the UK and a complete novelty abroad. Many heads were turned.

Not surprisingly, more than a little of this interest surfaces in WG's fiction, most obviously (and autobiographically) in *The Green Flash* (1986), whose spiky protagonist David Abden owns successively a clapped-out Mini, a 1965 Austin Healey 3000, an Aston Martin DB6 with a Vantage engine and manual gear-shift, a twelve-cylinder fuel-injection Jaguar XJS and a Ferrari 400, five litre (and, for good measure, his ex-con pal Van drives "a little Morris"). But as early as *Into the Fog* (1935) we find Eline Vincent in a twelve-six Wolseley club coupé; in *Without Motive* (1936), Peter Tenby's Boanerges is an elderly Riley and Ruth de Floy's throaty roadster an Alfa Romeo; the car Mary Seymour hires in *Keys of Chance* (1939) is "an old Morris"; in the original *Fortune is a Woman* (1952) Oliver Branwell's two cars are a fifteen-year-old, two-seater MG and a black Standard 16 – which, on revision, become a ten-year-old, two-seater Riley and a grey Wolseley saloon. In *After the Act* (1965) Morris Scott and his wife drive a big white Alfa, which she crashes into a Mini; Bob Loveridge's car in *THE MEDICI EAR-RING* (1965) is a Jaguar Mark 10; in *Stephanie* (1992) Henry Gaveston runs a twenty-five-year-old Alvis Grey Lady and his wife a Mini; in *Tremor* (1995) the bank robbers' switch-car is a Mark 9 Jaguar and Lucille Loveridge (*THE MEDICI EAR-RING*, 1971) and Ken Morgan (*THE WIG-WAM*, 1970) are two more Mini drivers. Other notable cars include a Delage in *The Tumbled House*, a Jensen in *Angell, Pearl and Little God*, a Bentley in *Keys of Chance*, a Daimler and a Bentley in *Fortune is a Woman*, a chauffeur-driver Daimler and faux-ambulance Citroën in *Stephanie*, a Talbot in *The House with the Stained Glass Windows*, an MG coupé and nefarious Rolls Royce sports saloon in *My Turn Next*, a Ford V8 in *Strangers Meeting*, a BMW in *The Green Flash*, a Chrysler in *The Merciless Ladies*, a Buick in *Greek Fire*, a Benz in *John Rowe*, a Ford Zodiac Estate, a Sunbeam Alpine and Renault Fours in *Tremor* and a Triumph Spitfire in *The Walking Stick*.

(8) TRAVEL

Though WG began to garden before he was twenty, in other areas of his life he was a relatively late bloomer: he waited until he was thirty-one to marry and by the time his literary talent began finally to be recognised was thirty-seven, pushing forty. As for travel, though he eventually undertook

a very great deal, there was far more in the second half of his life than the first. Through the twenties and thirties, dependent on his mother, he earned very little, which precluded opportunity; then came WWII followed by post-war austerity. Happily, the passing of this era and the belated upswing in WG's fortunes neatly co-incided such that by 1950 he found himself (thanks to *Take My Life* and *Cordelia*) more comfortably situated than ever before, with the world at his feet and a partner keen as him to go out and find it. And this, together, they did.

Rich life-experience was naturally helpful to WG's work. In 1967, when asked by Arthur Pottersman about its relevance, he said:

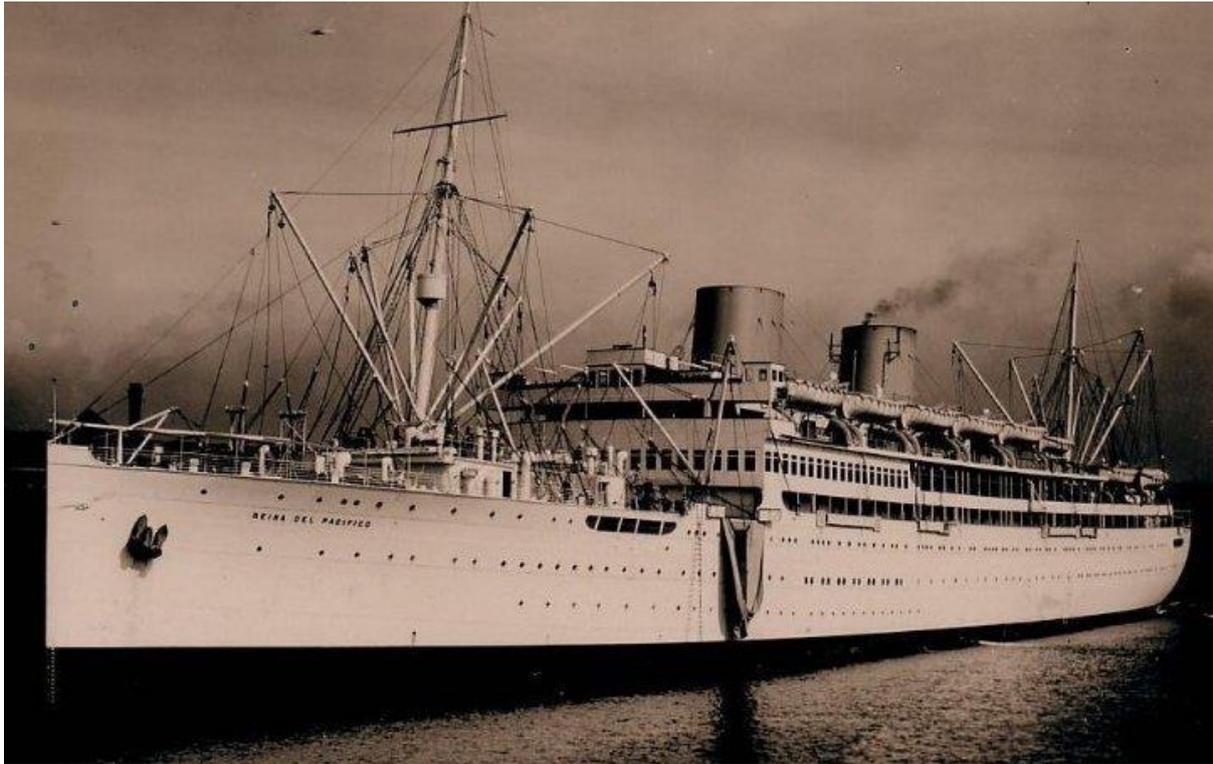
*I have simply been living, and that contains a lot. You don't have to whore around in Paris to live. Everything is grist to the mill; everything is accumulative*⁵⁷

but this was not his main incentive to travel – indeed, WG was as happy to write about places he'd never seen – Portugal in *John Rowe*, India and Singapore in *The Dangerous Pawn*, South Africa in *Strangers Meeting*, Italy in *Night Journey* – as those he had. Addressing this point specifically in a 1937 speech, he told his audience:

*The more I write, the more I become aware that successful novel writing depends not on the quantity of your experience but on the quality of your imagination.*⁵⁸

On their first major trip abroad together, Winston and Jean sailed from Southampton on the *Queen Elizabeth* on 29 September 1950 then, after time spent with Ken McCormick and other Doubleday staff in New York, travelled by train down to New Orleans, a city he did not like at all – *Every other corner ... is a cheap night club. Even the banks have neon signs*, he wrote.⁵⁹ Via Miami, Jamaica and the Bahamas, the couple arrived back in Plymouth aboard *SS Reina del Pacifico* on 7 December after a "very uncomfortable" twelve-day⁶⁰ crossing from Nassau, all of which set the benchmark for countless further adventures to come across five continents and forty happy years. (For more, see, *Memoirs*.)

[Below: SS Reina del Pacifico – built in 1931, scrapped in 1958](#)



* * * * *

(9) CONVIVIALITY

*He loves hosting gatherings at his long table, mixing local friends with actors.*⁶¹

*This "unclubbable man" has been a pillar of the Savile ever since [he joined].*⁶²

*I know a lot of people. I get around.*⁶³

WG affected a low public profile, labelling himself "a private man" and "the most successful unknown novelist in England"⁶⁴ – but was far from being a withdrawn, reclusive or solitary one. He loved the company of friends – men and women – of whom he had a very wide circle throughout his life. He belonged to three London clubs – the Savile, the Beefsteak Club and Pratt's – and, of the first, at least, was a very active member from the day he joined in June 1950 until he died. Another of his reasons for not settling in Cap Ferrat (see pages three, four and twenty) was that he "lacked the stimulus of (his) London friends (and) missed the Savile".⁶⁵



Boconnoc, Lostwithiel, '77: (i) lunch on location; (ii) at the Poldarks v. Warleggans cricket match. Robin Ellis, third right in the first picture and in the middle of the second, wrote in 2003: *The Winston I knew loved a party ... He enjoyed being at the centre of an event.*⁶⁶



WG, 1999: *I like women's company and I enjoy listening to them.*⁶⁷ (i) At a Poldark Appreciation Society lunch in 1994; (ii) with Janette Eathorne on 12 May 2002



With Greta Gynt (top) circa 1946 and Arlene Dahl circa 1956



Above: with *Poldark* cast and crew at Pebble Mill, Birmingham, 1977



In the wine cellar



* * * * *

(10) FAMILY

The two images above of WG dining *en famille* underscore the importance to him of this facet of life. Both his children remember him fondly:

Andrew: A trick my father missed was that if he was going

*to London, which he did about once a month, my sister and I would extract from him a promise on Sunday morning that he would tell us a story, and he had these fantastic kids' stories that went on about Jack the Traveller, and we never had a little recording device. There would have been a whole set of kids' stories.*⁶⁸

*Rosamund: As a father he was fun, because he took us to fantastic places and he'd play cricket on the beach and we'd play tennis ... He wasn't the way that many fathers are today, I don't think. He wasn't terribly involved. It was very sort of Mother took care of the children ... and Father was Father – but he was a nice father.*⁶⁹



WG and Jean at home

A reading of *Memoirs* confirms the centrality to WG's life of Jean, his wife of fifty-three years (1939-1992), their association

*full of passion and laughter, constant amicable companionship and enduring love*⁷⁰ ... *her optimism a blessing for her, a blessing for me and a blessing for the children.*⁷¹

Of them he writes: "There has been a companionate friendship between us which has seldom been disturbed." The brief account in *Memoirs* (2.9) of his son's remarkable career is suffused with paternal pride; concerning Rosamund, he expresses his chagrin in a 1967 letter that her impending marriage to an American, whilst an otherwise happy event, will result in a separation from her father of several thousand miles:

*A very nice chap but, oh dear, [California is] a long way away and heralds to some extent the break-up of our quartet in a way an English marriage would not.*⁷²

* * * * *

Words written about WG and his memoir in 2003 stress his kindness, warmth and the affection in which he was widely held:

*All his publishers had nothing but affection for him. Ian and Marjory Chapman, at Collins when the Poldark series was televised, said: "He was the perfect companion. He was like family." His last publisher, David North of Macmillan, agrees: "He was the most charming man you'd ever meet. He knew I liked Dover sole and we would have that if we met in London and he'd have it prepared if I visited him in Sussex."*⁷³

*To read his memoir is to meet a charming, decent, old-fashioned sort of character with an enormous capacity for friendship and a wonderful interest in other people.*⁷⁴

* * * * *

Despite all of the above, it's hard not to conclude that WG derived greater satisfaction from his work than anything else.

1971: Journalists ... are always asking me what my interests are. They go away and write down things like travel, roses, cats, fast cars, swimming, tennis and golf – and it's all true, of course, after a fashion ... But my [deeper] interests are

*centred around work – people, places, situations – dull, perhaps, for everyone else but fascinating to me.*⁷⁵

1973: *I began [The Black Moon] with a sense of adventure but in some trepidation; but after a few chapters the thing caught fire; and, whatever the ultimate reception from the press or the public, the book gave me such pleasure to write that I count the last few months of last year as among the happiest of my life.*⁷⁶

2003: *I have had a lot of happiness in my life, but those next few months [writing Demelza through the spring of 1946] rank high among the high spots.*⁷⁷

and, to finish where we started:

Andrew Graham: *My father ... was deeply, deeply unhappy when he wasn't writing.*

* * * * *

NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ *Mining Poldark* #41, PBS Masterpiece, 4 November 2019

² From *The Novelist at Work* – an address given by WG in 1937, the notes of which are held in the Graham Archive of the Royal Cornwall Museum, River Street, Truro

^{3, 31, 37, 57, 63} *Argosy*, December 1967

^{4, 33} *Radio Times*, 4 October 1975

^{5, 15, 16, 20, 25, 42, 49} *Woman's Weekly*, 30 July 1983

^{6, 7} Book Two, Chapter Nine of WG's *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan, 2003

⁸ *Western Morning News and Mercury*, 23 August 1928

⁹ Author profile, *Marnie*, Reader's Digest Condensed Books, 1961

¹⁰ *Birmingham Post*, 31 March 1967

^{11, 32, 75} Author profile, *The Walking Stick*, Reader's Digest Condensed Books, 1967

- ¹² *Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 March 1973
- ^{13, 38, 50, 53} *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 26 November 1977
- ¹⁴ *Writers' Favourite Recipes*, ed. Gillian Vincent, Corgi, 1978
- ^{17, 73} *Daily Express*, 15 July 2003
- ¹⁸ Perranzabuloe Museum WG archive. The Palace Theatre opened in 1929 and was demolished in the 1990s.
- ¹⁹ *West Briton*, 7 September 1995
- ²¹ Letter to an unnamed correspondent, 25 March 2002
- ^{22, 55, 61} *Times*, 7 May 2002
- ²³ *Memoirs*, 2.11
- ²⁴ "In My Garden" by Winston Graham, *Homes and Gardens*, October 1965
- ²⁶ Angela Wintle in Brighton's *Evening Argus Weekend* magazine, 20/21 January 2001
- ²⁷ *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 26 September 1969
- ²⁸ buxtedhorticulturalsociety.org.uk/history
- ²⁹ *Scryfa*, Volume One, Giss 'On Books, 2003
- ^{30, 41, 54} *Books and Bookmen*, October 1959
- ^{34, 39} *Daily Express*, 18 November 1995
- ³⁵ Around the start of World War II, WG wrote an unpublished story, SIGH NO MORE, LADY, whose attractive female protagonist is a Swiss miss named Vreni Hemminger, for whom Fraulein Mettler was surely the inspiration. As for her forename, she was born in St Gallen in the German-speaking part of Switzerland as Verena (diminutive "Vreni") but after her marriage in 1940 lived in French-speaking Geneva where she used the variant Vèrène – so both are correct.
- ³⁶ *Memoirs*, 1.2
- ⁴⁰ *Memoirs*, 1.3
- ⁴³ *Wilson Library Bulletin*, November 1955
- ⁴⁴ *Sunday Express*, 18 December 1977
- ⁴⁵ *Sunday Express*, 6 December 1981
- ⁴⁶ He wrote verse for characters – Peter Crane in *Strangers Meeting*, Brook Ferguson in *Cordelia*, Don Marlowe in *The Tumbled House* and Poldark's Hugh Armitage among others – and rounded off MEETING DEMELZA, the last of his work to be published in his lifetime, with lines of his own. A small

number of his unpublished poems may be read in the WG archive at RCM, Truro.

⁴⁷ The Tennyson attribution is a matter of dispute—for more, see [FOREWORDS](#), pp. 30-31. Housman is quoted in *My Turn Next* (1942), Keats in *The Merciless Ladies* (1944), Meredith in *The Tumbled House* (1959), Catullus in *Poldark's Cornwall* (1983), Psalms in *The Twisted Sword* (1990), Mrs Browning in WG's foreword to Simon McBride's *The Spirit of England* (1989), Hemans in the foreword of *Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly* (Michael Joseph, 1987) *et cetera*



At leisure

⁴⁸ *Times*, 26 October 1994 / *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 2015

⁵⁰ Letter dated 4 April 1961 from WG to Hitchcock; original held by The Margaret Herrick Library, the Fairbanks Center for Motion Picture Study, 333 South La Cienega Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California, 90211, USA

⁵² Letter dated 3 February 1963, provenance unknown

⁵⁵ Michael Williams, *Cornish Guardian*, 4 March 2016

⁵⁸ See [NOVELIST](#)

⁵⁹ Notebook Three, RCM, Truro

⁶⁰ In *Memoirs*, 1.6 WG states "eight days" but the ship left Nassua on 25 November (*Shields Daily News*, 29 November 1950 *et al.*) and arrived in Plymouth on 7 December (*Daily Mirror*, 8 December 1950), which makes twelve.

⁶² Garrett Anderson (the book's author) in *Hang your Halo in the Hall!*, The Savile Club, 1993

⁶⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 1962 *et al.*

⁶⁵ *Memoirs*, 1.8

⁶⁶ Robin Ellis, *Times*, 14 July 2003

⁶⁷ *Sussex Life*, February 1999

⁶⁸ *The David White Show*, BBC Radio Cornwall, 10 June 2014

⁶⁹ Valley PBS, 21 August 2015 (quote recast)

⁷⁰ *Memoirs*, 2.10

⁷¹ *Memoirs*, 2.1

⁷² Letter dated 1 January 1967 to Richard Church; original held by the University of Texas at Austin's Harry Ransom Center, USA

⁷⁴ Val Hennessy, *Daily Mail*, 17 October 2003

⁷⁶ Letter from WG to his Doubleday editor Ken McCormick dated 8 June 1973; original in the Doubleday and Company records (1882-1992) held by the Library of Congress.

⁷⁷ *Memoirs*, 1.5

The help of Victoria Taberman-Pichler and Samuel Reller of the Kunstmuseum, St Gallen is appreciated.

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