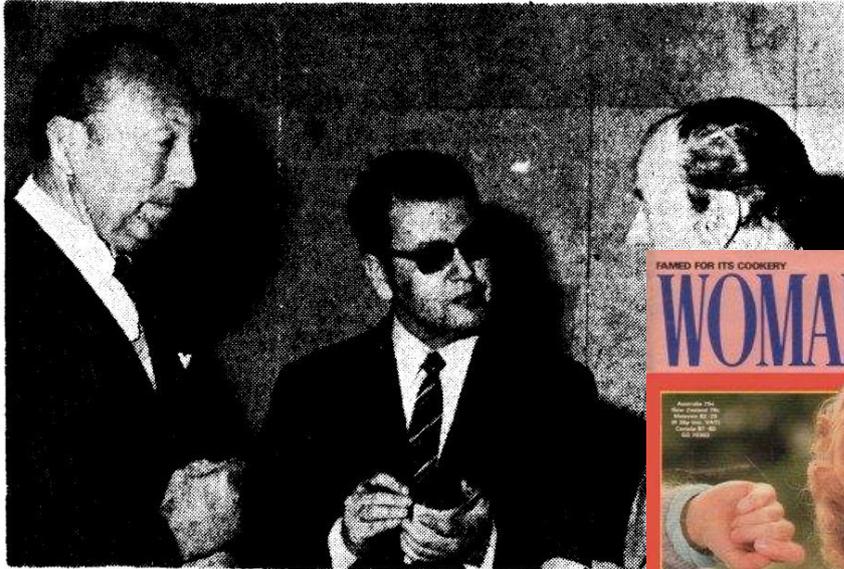


Winston Graham, famoso escritor de novelas de "suspense"

El autor de "Marnie", bajo el sol de Gran Canaria

La obra la llevó al cine Alfred Hitchcock, protagonizada por Sean Connery y Tippy Hedren



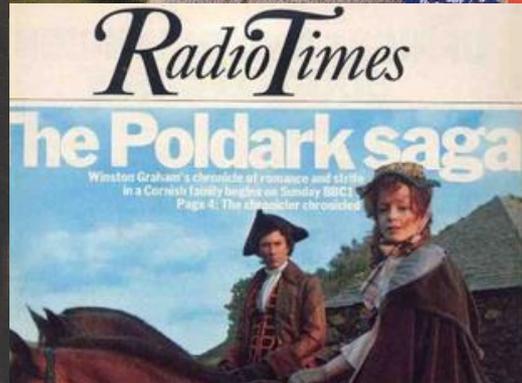
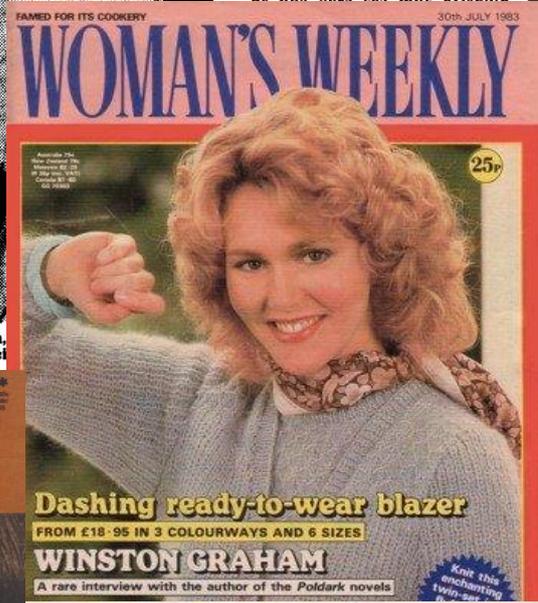
el mismo título, protagonizada por Sean Connery y la joven Tippy Hedren.

En efecto, es una película que en España, tuvo, además del título "Marnie", el subtítulo de "La ladrona". Una película muy taquillera y que llenó las salas cinematográficas.

—¿Le gustó la adaptación que hizo Hitchcock de su obra?

--La crítica dijo que era buena. A mí me pareció que le faltaba algo. Puede que el autor de una obra sea muy exigente

El famoso escritor de novelas policíacas y de "suspense", Winston Graham,zález-Sosa en presencia de don Francisco Salvá, director general de Relaci



Media moments, 1965-2015

WG: interviews, articles, profiles and more ...

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The Fragility of All Things

Winston Graham's *Héritage de Sable* by Serge Radine

WG's 1959 novel The Tumbled House was published in France as Héritage de Sable (Legacy of Sand) in 1961. This appraisal by Serge Radine, freely translated here from the original French, first appeared in Swiss daily newspaper La Liberté on Saturday 14 August 1965

Winston Graham is a nonconformist American writer. A great traveller, he is very familiar with the different countries in which he places the action of his books. Certain themes return in his work as leitmotifs: denunciation of sensationalist journalism and *arrivistes*. Writing in the suspense genre, he deals with very current topics whilst, at the same time, engaging in a meditation on the human condition.

Greek Fire, as its title suggests, takes place in Greece. Published in London by Hodder and Stoughton, it is the dramatic story of a political crime committed in contemporary Greece. Anya, a young woman from a rather troubled background, rises quickly in society from the moment she befriends influential politician George Lascou. He is extremely formidable because, unlike most hypocrites, who consciously seek to deceive others, Lascou, with his dreams of national greatness has managed to deceive himself. Elsewhere, Graham shows, the same corruption exists, in different forms, in all countries.

Anyway, Lascou's party of the extreme left is gaining popularity such that after the forthcoming elections he is likely to become his country's next head of government. For supporters of the *status quo*, therefore, he is a man to be killed.

And, indeed, he will die before the eyes of our helpless narrator, American journalist Gene Vanbrugh. Unable to count on the support of his embassy, Gene's situation is critical. Anya Stonaris, while remaining loyal to Lascou, gradually falls in love with Vanbrugh and helps him to escape. Later, after the elections, when passions have subsided, she will rejoin him abroad and marry him.

With *Pas de Printemps pour Marnie*, published by Le Livre Contemporain in Paris and filmed by Alfred Hitchcock, we change the scene. Graham

poses a riddle: who is Marnie? To judge by appearances, she is a skilful businesswoman and – which doesn't hurt – very attractive. But one fine day she disappears along with the contents of the cash register of the company she works for. Can the seductive Marnie be just a common thief? Like all of the book's characters, we vacillate between three images of the young woman: the reassuring façade, the pitiless liar and an unknown third ... This is, without doubt, the real Marnie, capable of devotion, sensitivity, righteousness. Piece by piece, through numerous details, we discover how successive shocks, suffered in childhood and since forgotten, have, little by little, shaped the true figure of a girl we cannot help but love.

And so to the third part of a triptych, *Héritage de Sable*, published in Paris also by Le Livre Contemporain. Here, as in the previous two books, Graham demonstrates rare psychological qualities which once again allow him to portray characters with two faces. So Joan, wife of young conductor Don Marlowe, loves her husband, but, in order to marry him, had thrown over publicist Roger Shorn. However, finding herself alone with Shorn one evening, she yields to her former lover. She recovers immediately, and this lapse would have no consequence if, on his return from Canada, Don did not have to defend the memory of his father, Sir John Marlowe, who had died a few months earlier, against the poisonous slanders of an anonymous publicist – none other than Roger Shorn.

But even more than for its well-planned plot and lively, finely-drawn characters, the work is especially valuable for its high qualities of observation and teaching, as in this reflection, which is unfortunately all too apposite: "Debunking is a disease of civilisation. Modern man likes to think: I'm no good, but neither is my neighbour." Proof of this is that men like Roger Shorn are able to achieve a certain power, a certain influence, and impose their judgements, their way of seeing things on people too sheepish and obtuse to resist them; this Shorn to whom, even without the indelicacy of his gesture – he stole her father-in-law's letter – Joan could not have returned, because, she says, "with you, in the end, I would no longer exist as a separate person." Deep inside Roger Shorn "well locked up, is hidden the most enormous, monstrous ego in the world."

The author also sheds light on the deplorable behaviour of the sensation-seeking popular press, which trades on the basest instincts of its public; Maurice Edelman's *The Prime Minister's Daughter*, recently considered here, touches on the same theme. Graham writes: "Gutter journalism stinks pretty badly in spite of all efforts to deodorise it." In

particular he portrays a certain Warner Robinson, editor of the *Sunday Gazette*, who publishes Shorn's defamations of Sir John Marlowe, which falsely insinuate that the great lawyer/writer had to leave the bar under suspicious circumstances and achieved success as an author only as a result of plagiarism. Robinson, emulated by many, observes that "a nine days' wonder in this competitive age is lucky if it lasts three."

Ultimately, everything will end very badly. There will be scandal and trial. Through an unfortunate loophole in English jurisprudence, Graham tells us, defamation of a dead man is less severely punished than that of someone living. Also, Shorn will not be heavily condemned, although the moral stigma remains – in addition, he will lose his only son, Michael, a generous, idealistic soul who, realising his father's possessiveness, seeks a modest home of his own. With the severity of youth, Michael judges "the lack of imagination and the screen of lies of the older generation, raised deliberately to hide their mistakes, their blunders and their incompetence." He is engaged to Bennie, Don Marlowe's sister and, wanting to marry her, imagines he must, at any price, provide this lovely girl with satisfactory material means. Moved by these feelings, he associates himself with rogues and, for him, a tragic death awaits. But don't forget that this is his first love.

As a counterpoint to Bennie and Michael, whose love is brief and unhappy, the young conductor, Don Marlowe, will come to understand during the libel suit that those to whom one believes oneself closest are unknowable. How many times, grappling with his own problems, did he think of his sister from the standpoint of his own, personal life? Can we not assume that the reconciliation of Don and Joan is the counterweight to the tragedy of others? In fact, Don, to avoid destroying everything in order to assuage his own self-love, will reconcile with his wife. Their marriage had already meant so much that a "second choice" was no longer possible.

This beautiful novel ends on two notes: peace and appeasement. Don's only mistake – one that Joan herself constantly warned him not to make – was to put his wife on a pedestal, she who was not made for heights. At the last, Don avoids the precipice over which Roger's self-esteem hurls him. Distrustful that his overly-intransigent idealism will push him in the opposite direction, he realises that revenge constitutes the first link in an endless chain. And here comes that meditation on the human condition we mentioned earlier. Don Marlowe feels a sense of pity and sadness, not just for his wife sitting beside him "but for all that had been

lost today: their marriage, Michael's life, Bennie's love, even a little for Roger's twisted hopes." Gradually, Don sees and understands

that the compulsions of life existed as elements too strong for the frail human beings that gave them existence. Like electrical forces they exerted sudden movements of attraction or repulsion, and the men and women in whom they moved were the victims of this force, not its masters.

A disenchanting reflection, certainly, but how healthy!

"*Héritage de Sable*", however, is not quite right. This shifting, slippery title does not sit well with a theme of love ripened and reborn. Doesn't a piece by the prestigious Pirandello bear a more apt title: *As Before, Better than Before?*

* * * * *

Winston Graham – the unrepentant professional

No, he said, he had not sat in a cupboard. But now that he had missed his opportunity, the idea transparently appealed to him.

I had popped the cupboard question between mouthfuls of mushroom soup. He had replied between stabs of iced melon.

Winston Graham, a craggily gentle man, is deputy chairman of the Society of Authors and possibly Britain's nearest approach to the Instant Novelist – a writer with no background outside his writing, a craftsman who knows no other trade.

I met him at lunchtime in Birmingham yesterday, a warm, unpretentious character, a self-confessed unrepentant professional.

He is a writer who thrives on being "unfashionable" in the eyes of the coterie of the kitchen sink; a man who reckons to produce a novel every 18 months and yet contrives to avoid regarding himself as a sort of literary sausage machine; a Lancastrian who lives in Sussex and looks on Cornwall as his spiritual home.

We got on to cupboards because his latest book, *The Walking Stick*, is told in the first person by a crippled girl whose efforts to assist in

separating her employers from a vast quantity of valuables necessitate her being shut inside one for an unpleasantly extended vigil.

I asked whether Mr. Graham had himself tried an exploratory sit-in, because it struck me that this would have been a likely sort of enterprise for a man so insistent on getting his ambiences spot-on.

After all, a safe-cracking episode in the same book, to be published on Monday, was written only after he had consulted a security organisation, a retired Scotland Yard man, and the manager of a firm of safe manufacturers; and had lunch with a splendidly co-operative safe breaker who shot good solid facts out of the side of his mouth like rejected cherry stones.

"He was very communicative. More than he should have been about the Great Train Robbery, which he was unfortunately prevented from joining because he was inside at the time."

The slow smile, which lurks about Winston Graham's lips with the insistence of a schoolboy in the pantry, was with us again as he spoke.

But, no, he had not sat in any cupboards.

He believes that all authors have experiences or emotions which stick out like spikes on a sea-mine; that Shakespeare fairly bristled with them, and that Jane Austen had about four and was sensible enough not to go beyond her limits.

And one of Winston Graham's spikes is claustrophobia. An interlude in a broom cupboard, he says, would have been entirely superfluous.

The Walking Stick is his 19th novel.¹ At least, it is the 19th which he is prepared to acknowledge. He has already sold the rights for what will be the sixth Winston Graham film, though he views his earlier entanglements with the celluloid world with the mixed feelings of a man trampled under-foot by a stretcher party.

Shattered

Take ... well, take one of the others, which shattered him with ruthless efficiency about ten years ago.²

"The rights were bought by an American, but nothing seemed to happen. He kept on renewing his option so long that I thought I was going to have a permanent small pension for life.

"Then I heard it had been made in Brasilia, with a Frenchman playing the lead and a Spaniard playing the woman. The book had been about Stev-

enage.³ It had been changed a little bit ...

"Fortunately, it has never been shown in England."

He sighed gently, like a breeze through a broken fence. Consternation had joined us, unheralded, for coffee.



Without a background of his own, Winston Graham seeks to communicate his interest in discovering the backgrounds of others

But Winston Graham – "I am too old to be a prodigy, not old enough for people to wonder how I still manage to write" – has known his craft too long to be abashed overmuch by the backhanders it sometimes slips him.

He has been a writer since his student days finished. "This is a disadvantage in that one lacks background. But, on the other hand, it enables me, when I need a background in a book, to get into that background and, I hope, to communicate to the reader my interest in discovering it."

He lacks a background of his own because, he says, he was a miserable, ailing youth, whose mother used a small private income to support his early endeavours.

"She knew I was mad keen to write and her attitude was a tremendous asset to me. The only thing wrong was that she should have been supporting a Shelley ..."

scheme and lobbying (via the Society of Authors) for its implementation from the time of this interview through to the eventual passage into law twelve years later of *The Public Lending Right Act 1979*.

* * * * *

Winston Graham, famous writer of novels of "suspense"

The author of "Marnie" in sunny Gran Canaria

The work brought to the screen by Alfred Hitchcock, starring Sean Connery and Tippi Hedren



Winston Graham (right), the famous writer of detective and suspense novels, being interviewed by Gonzáles Sosa; also present is Don Francisco Salvá (left), head of Public Relations at the Hotel Reina Isabel

He is a man who delivers; a writer who specialises in "suspense". Winston Graham is holidaying in Las Palmas with his wife.

He seems reserved, although sometimes gives a laugh which seems to come straight from the heart. But then suddenly he becomes serious again. Looking quite tall and slim, Mr Graham stares deep into my eyes. He switches back and forth between seriousness and laughter. But courtesy, kindness and affability characterise this Briton who has earned a living – one in which he has made a lot of money – writing detective novels in the genre of "suspense".

We surprised him last night at the party, hosted by Don Francisco Salvá, which the Hotel Reina Isabel holds on its terrace every Tuesday for its guests. Mr Graham immediately agreed to give an interview.

As we walk to a quieter place, he tells Señor Salvá:

This is the first interview I have granted to a journalist since 1967. In that year I visited many American States and had to give countless interviews, especially on television. Since then, I have tried to avoid publicity.

I thank him and he laughs again. And we are not surprised by his words, because Mr Graham seems to be a self-contained man who, when not addressed directly, says little.

We reach our destination. Winston Graham is famous – and it's not we who say so. In England and the United States, his name ranks alongside that of Alfred Hitchcock or Agatha Christie. But Mr Graham, who, as we speak, has been recognised by another compatriot, is his own man. He does not like comparisons and is uncomfortable when I suggest he is better known than the aforementioned Alfred.

And what are you doing in Las Palmas, Mr Graham?

Spending a few days off. In recent years, until now, we have been going to Tenerife, but this time we decided to come to Gran Canaria.

Mr Graham writes slowly. Well, since he began his literary career, he has written twenty novels in total, one every two or three years. And how long have you been writing, Mr Graham?

Since I was twenty.

I was reluctant to ask him how old he was now. But he must be sixty, or a little less. [He was 62]

And the Canary Islands have not inspired any of your famous works of fiction or "suspense"?

In my latest one, soon to be published, which has an unusual title – *Angel, Pearl and Little God* – the last chapter has Tenerife as its setting.

Why, Mr Graham, do you try to scare people with your books?

It is a genre. With that kind of novel, you must, as you know, and that's all there is to it. Since I was a child, I have liked everything mysterious or scary. I would say that it is my own character that inspires me to write that kind of book.

And how is life at home, surrounded by your family, stripped of the writer's skin, when your pen or pencil is set aside?

My wife and children say that I am happy, but even those who know me well think that I am generally melancholic. And that melancholy, I think, is what inspires me to follow the literary tradition I do.

Now he tells us about his style. And then he claims:

My novels are of two types: historical and suspense. But I think that over the years my style has undergone an evolution. Let's see. I started writing purely "suspense" books in which character was nowhere to be seen, as if I, the author, wasn't interested. Now it is different: it is in the character where the whole story of any book lies. In my latest, the main characters are a lawyer, a saleswoman and a boxer and I have insisted on searching, in each case, for the psychology of the character, without forgetting, of course, the story or "suspense" elements.

Which book has brought you most fame?

One: *Marnie*, that Alfred Hitchcock adapted for the screen, under the same title, starring Sean Connery and a young Tippi Hedren. Indeed, in Spain, as

well as being titled *Marnie*, the film was subtitled *The Thief*. It was a blockbuster that filled the movie theatres.

Did you like Hitchcock's adaptation?

The critics said it was good. It seemed to me that something was missing. It may be that the author of a work has high expectations and believes that the adapter and director who made it into a film have not taken full advantage of it.

Which novel earned you the most money and which sold the most?

One called *The Walking Stick*. And look what things have come to. The stick used by the actress in the film was given to me and some time later my wife had to begin using it because of an affliction that prevented her from walking by herself.

What do you think of Hitchcock?

He's a great director.

And of Agatha Christie?

That her style is out of fashion.

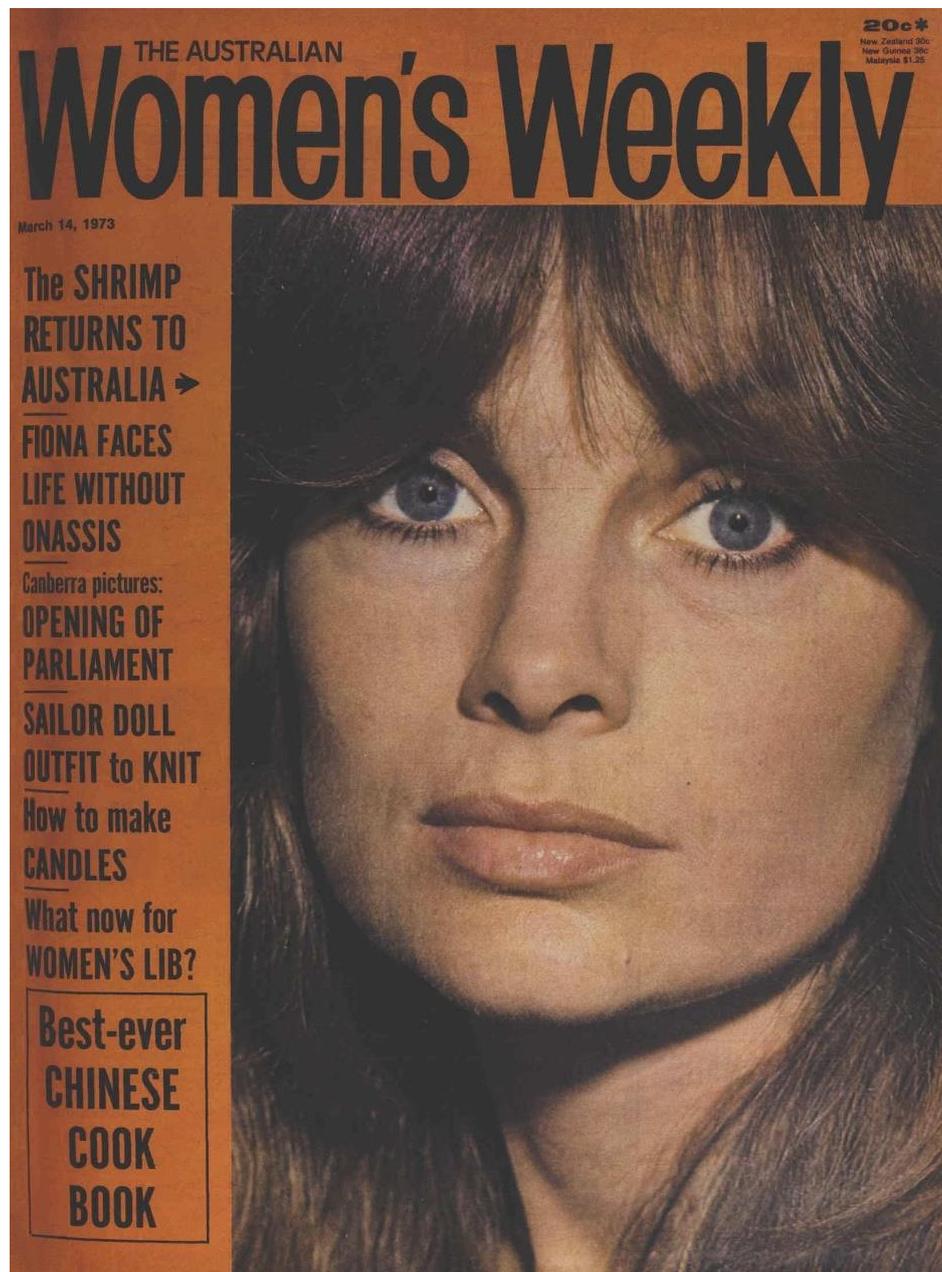
How many of your twenty-one works of fiction or "suspense" have been made into films?

Six – *Take My Life*, *Night Without Stars* (titled in Spain *Noche sin estrellas*, which is based on the life of a blind man), *Fortune is a Woman*, *The Sleeping Partner*, *Marnie* and *The Walking Stick*, which will be released in London in a few weeks.

Winston Graham, purveyor of fear through his novels, usually lives in England, about fifty kilometres from London, in a place called Sussex.

* * * * *

On 14 March 1973, *The Australian Women's Weekly* published the following interview, given by WG to Gloria Newton, to help launch *The Spanish Armadas*:



WINSTON GRAHAM TURNS TO WRITING HISTORY

English novelist Winston Graham had an unusual start for a writer. Most collect rejection slips before their work is finally accepted. His first book, written at 22, was accepted.

"It was the first thing I had ever written – I'd done no articles, had never written for radio and TV.

"The book didn't make any money and the publisher had a problem persuading people to buy it – but it was published. This same pattern was repeated for quite a few subsequent books of mine.

"Oh, I was very fortunate. I did have reviews. One critic wrote that his readers should 'Keep an eye on Mr. Graham – he has come to stay.'

"It was psychologically good for me. Even though sales were poor, people did read my work and some told me what they thought of it. I wouldn't have got all this if I had been writing rejected manuscripts."

Mr. Graham, tall, slim, reserved, with the typical dry wit of the Lancashire-born, recently spent two weeks in Australia promoting his latest book, a straight history of the attempted Spanish invasions of England and Ireland in the 16th century.

Writing has made his entire working life.

"I had just left school when my father died," he said. "My mother, who had a tiny private income – pitifully tiny by today's standards – knew what I wanted to do and decided to stake me for a few years.

"She must have had monumental confidence in me, because my chances of succeeding in the writing field were very remote.

"My first book was a thriller, and it was terrible. But I suppose some people enjoyed it. I know that I wouldn't give permission for it to be reprinted.

Despite those early setbacks, success came to the author after World War II when he wrote a best-seller "The Forgotten Story."

"I matured suddenly." (The war itself was six years in the Coastguard service, a time of boredom, and also a time of considerable excitement.)

Today, nearly 30 years later, his work has been translated into 16 languages, and in America eight of his books have been major book-club choices.

Six of his novels (one of them "Marnie") have been filmed and a seventh, "Angell, Pearl and Little God," has just been bought by Paramount.

"Ideas for stories seem to come automatically. I've always been interested in people, and I feel the only reason for a strong story line is to 'meet people'.

"Do I use real people? Occasionally. Every author does. I can put myself inside another character and think and feel as he does.

"For instance, the oily little solicitor in "Angell, Pearl and Little God" – I knew him intimately, knew every thought in his mind."

Winston Graham is a Jekyll-and-Hyde character as regards writing, he told me. He likes modern suspense such as "Marnie," which Alfred Hitchcock directed, but he also likes an occasional incursion into history.

The 16th century has always interested him. His historical novel "The Grove of Eagles" was set in the period of the Spanish armadas naval expeditions; and a series of works set in Cornwall belongs to the same period.

That is why he hesitated when first approached to write a book about the second Spanish armada, the big one in 1588. "I said the subject had been covered too often.

"My publishers' reply was, 'Well, why don't you write about the *four* armadas? Few people know that there were more than one.'

"After "The Grove of Eagles" and the extensive research I put into it, my knowledge about the second and third armadas was extensive, but I knew little about the fourth, the expedition to Ireland, an attempt to link it with Spain and oust the British.

"So I accepted and wrote it in a year. One of the greatest problems was finding out about the Spanish captains. Luckily, I got hold of a book, written by a Spaniard about 1890, which gave character studies of these men.

"You see, I was interested in everyone who took part in those great battles. Generally in history it is only two or three figures, two or three incidents, that capture the imagination and eventually come to monopolise the pages to the exclusion of other only slightly less worthy incidents and people.

"I went to Spain, to Toledo, Cadiz and Madrid and read in the State archives. Thank God for photostats! When I got back to England I knew what I wanted, so was able to send for it.

"The historical tensions between England and Spain had been of long standing, going back 30 years – to the first armada to sail from Spain to England, one of peace, taking Prince Philip II to marry Mary of England.

"Then, to my mind, the third armada of 1597 put England in greater danger than the second. The whole of the English fleet was off raiding in the Azores and the country was not on the alert in any way when a great fleet of Spanish warships began to rendezvous off the coast.

"I knew very little about the fourth expedition, to Ireland, a landing which was very substantial. I found its history fascinating, and discovered so many things for myself that it gave me pleasure to share them with others.

"Here were great characters, including Brian Mac Hugh Oge Mac Mahon. How many people have heard of him?"

The result of Winston Graham's 12 months' work is "The Spanish Armadas," an exciting, brought-to-life history of the 30-year conflict between England and Spain in the 16th century.

The characters come through vividly. Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Sir Walter Raleigh, Drake, Spain's Henry II, the Duke of Parma, and the inquisitors of Spain; and so does the clash of the two great fleets.

With it are 32 pages of magnificent colour plates of the characters involved in the web of intrigue and fighting, some by Titian; and 109 black-and-white illustrations, with old maps and contemporary drawings of people and events in that era.

Graham likens the 16th century to pre-war Germany with its concentration camps, spies, secret police and intimidation.

"Yet, there was honour. One of the points I made in this book – one not made by any historian before – is that when the big armada sailed for Calais, its captain, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, successfully brought it through the English Channel with the loss of only two ships out of 142, with Drake hunting him all the way.

"The Governor of Calais, M. Gourdan, was a Catholic, and Medina, assuming he would help, appealed for more ammunition. It had actually been promised him by the Duke of Parma, who should have been there to meet the armada.

"Gourdan refused, but sent the Spaniards fruit and vegetables, and the French flocked around the vessels to sell food at exorbitant prices.

"It never seemed to have crossed Medina's mind that he still had 18,000 trained soldiers aboard his ships.

"Calais had only a small garrison and it would have taken the Spanish half a day to capture the town and gain a splendid harbour in which to refit for an invasion of Britain.

"But France was a neutral country and Medina an honourable man. Could you imagine the Germans, or any other race for that matter, doing that today?"

Winston Graham is married with two children. His son is a lecturer at Balliol College, Oxford; his daughter is married to an American and lives in San Francisco.

His wife, whom he married in 1939, is not herself a writer but "an author's friend." "She always reads my books and is the only person I can discuss them with. She is most able in her judgments."

They live in Surrey, in a part-18th-century house, greatly enlarged at the beginning of this century. "A bit of a mixture but a nice house to live in. When I'm not working I like to play golf, swim or garden – I'm keen on gardening. Also we like the theatre and cinema."

Although so many of his books have been adapted for the screen, Graham has never had any desire to try playwriting. He wrote the script for the screenplay of the first of his books to be filmed, "Take My Life."

"But when I took a look at the finished product I didn't recognise it.

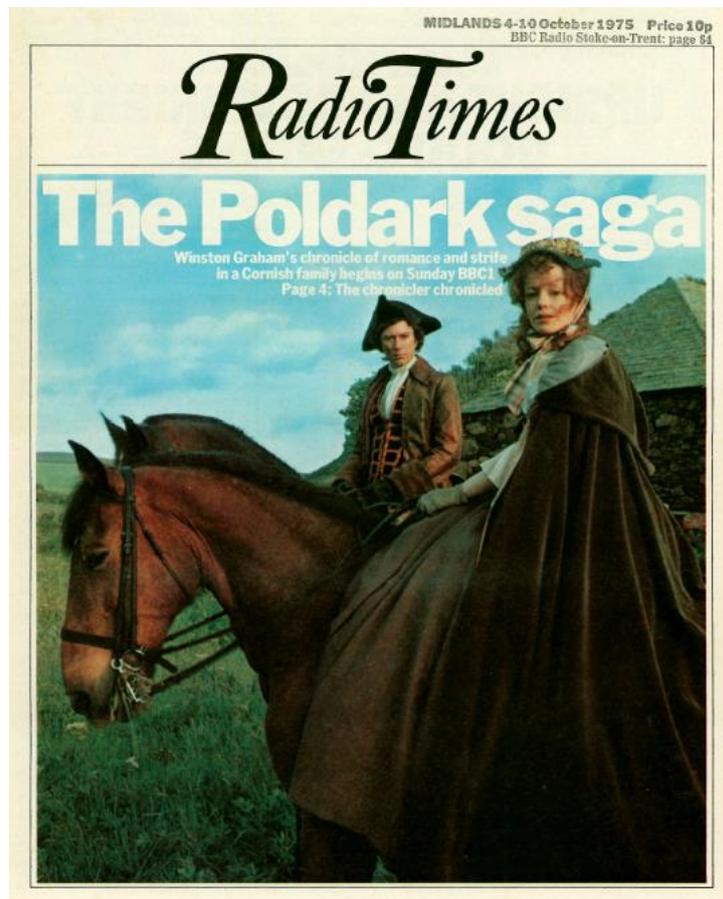
"Now when I sell the screen rights I just hand over the book and leave it to the company. Does it hurt? Sometimes, yes. Especially when they destroy my characters.

"Only one was so mangled that I refused to have my name associated with it. It was just bare bones, all the characters gone."

Source: trove.nla.gov.au

* * * * *

On 4 October 1975 *The Radio Times* published an interview given by WG to Tim Heald to help launch the BBC's *Poldark*.



*Winston Graham's four Poldark novels were written some 30 years ago. Set in the 18th century and the wilds of Cornwall, they follow ten years in the life of Ross Poldark, the young hero. The saga, which opens this week as a new serial, has sold steadily since the war and other books by Graham have run into many editions round the world. But the author himself remains relatively unknown. **Tim Heald** discussed his work with him.*

Figures in a Cornish landscape

WINSTON GRAHAM first became a full-time professional novelist when he was 17. It was a precocious beginning which has paid handsome dividends, for in a career which spans almost half a century Mr Graham has never had to do anything but write books. Half a dozen have been made into films and others have run into countless editions round the world from Japan to Finland. The **Poldark** saga itself first began to appear just after the war and has sold steadily ever since. In the six years since the four *Poldark* books went into paperback they have sold around three-quarters-of-a-million copies. Against a background of tin mining in the 18th

century, the story tells of Ross Poldark's return to Cornwall from the American War of Independence and his romances with Elizabeth and Demelza.

For a writer of such sustained success Mr Graham remains strangely unknown. 'Authors,' he says, firmly, 'should be judged by their work and not by how many wives they've had or even the conditions in which they write.' So strictly has he adhered to this that for the past seven years he has steadfastly refused all requests for interviews, only unbending now for the televising of the Poldarks and submitting to a positive glut of journalistic intruders – three at least. 'I don't seek publicity,' he says, a shade glumly. 'I'd rather do without it if possible.'

He never reads reviews, doesn't employ a cuttings agency, and when he was sent the results of two other recent interviews, both he agrees very pleasant, he skimmed through them virtually with his eyes shut. When I went to see him at his rambling Victorian home, he was immensely charming but worried about his earliest books ('I've carefully suppressed them all') which he always asks people not to write about. He says they always ignore him. However he happily talked about Cornwall, where the Poldark saga is set and where he has spent much of his adult life, though for the past 15 years he's lived in Sussex, which is his second favourite English county.

The family moved to Cornwall when his father, a wholesale chemist in Manchester, became ill. Within a year he had died, and his mother agreed to back Winston with the small legacy she inherited, thus allowing him to concentrate on writing.

Almost immediately he became fascinated by Cornish history and particularly by the period of its greatest prosperity in the 18th century. 'It was our chief metal-producing area,' he says, 'and although the population was only 200,000 it returned 44 MPs at a time when Manchester and Birmingham had none.' All around him was the 'detritus' of the mining industry and men in their seventies could remember working the mines when they were still thriving. He picked their brains and read avidly, compressing the results into four huge notebooks, only about a fifth of which he used for the Poldarks.

Until he left the Duchy, Graham lived in and around Perranporth, though now when he returns for regular holidays he tends to favour Falmouth. Earlier this year he went back with the BBC to look for locations and clambered down 1,100 feet of the old tin mine which is being used for the location of the mine he calls 'The Grambler' at Polperro. Much of his intimate knowledge of the county and its past has been culled from written sources. The detailed descriptions of tin mining, for instance, are drawn mainly from *Mineralogia Cornubiensis* written by a Redruth doctor, William Pryce, in 1778.

Even now his study has rows of Cornish books dominated by *Lake's Parochial History of Cornwall*, and he often relies on contemporary accounts by travellers like James Silk-Buckingham or draws inspiration from the short stories of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.

Such dedication to authenticity pays off, he believes. He was particularly pleased once when a Cornishwoman came up to him and said, 'I want to ask you something important. What is a hornywink? It was a word he'd used in one of the Poldarks so he was able to tell her at once that it meant 'a downtrodden person.' She was delighted because she hadn't heard the word since she was a young girl.

After a lapse of 20 years, he recently went back to writing more Poldark episodes. 'I won't pretend it was easy,' he says, 'it was like breaking the sound barrier.' But, after initial difficulties, he soon found himself able to recreate the old style and ambience.

It isn't, however, the Poldarks which have brought him most prosperity. He has always tried to alternate modern with historical fiction and books like *Marnie* and *The Walking Stick*, both contemporary and suspense thrillers, later successfully turned into films. 'I've never had a job in a solicitor's office or a bank,' he says, 'so I can't write about those things with a natural authority.' Instead he has to do original research. When he was writing about loss adjusters, for instance, he found a Lloyd's underwriter who introduced him to every loss adjuster in Britain. When he was researching burglary and crime, he not only consulted Securicor and Chubb, the lock people, he also invited a safebreaker to lunch.

From such methods and a writing day which nowadays starts after tea and continues until about 8 pm, he has achieved independence and such enviable appendages as an Alfa Romeo, a fine five-acre garden with a pool and a tennis court and a collection of modern painting.

Now with the typescript of *The Four Swans*, the latest Poldark, newly delivered, he is about to embark on a new modern book. Typically, he picked up the idea in a chance conversation with a man he met on the beach at Terrigal Bay, New South Wales.

The Sunday Times, reviewing the latest in 'the chronicle of family fortunes and mishaps in 18th-century tin-mining Cornwall,' enthused over 'the minutiae of the tin trade, the natural beauty of the Cornish coast ... above all the flair Mr Graham has always shown for making his people seem to think and behave in a convincingly period fashion.'

* * * * *

Tired looking, dispirited Poldark

WITH the formula as before — even more so — how could the BBC be pessimistic about their new serial **Poldark**? They should have been for the very reason that it was so startlingly like so much they have done so often before; but how could they when they had veteran adapter Jack Pulman doing for Winston Graham what he had done for (or to) Tolstoj?

Winston Graham however, is no classic author of stature and trivialisation brings his work down to a cipher. At least that is the effect judging from the first plodding episode (BBC-1 Sunday, October 5, 7.25pm).

Some fine Cornish landscape shots introduced the story loading it with atmosphere — a promise instantly belied by a stagey, highly reminiscent scene in the coach bringing Ross Poldark back from the American War of Independence.

The plot of the returned heir believed dead is so routine that it demands a credibility in terms of excitement and characterisation that this scene-setting episode I was quite unable to provide. That it will pick up later is more than likely — purely on the inherent interest that this sort of romantic adventure story generates almost automatically; but on the question of whether it was worth doing at all or whether it has been done well I can get emphatic. No to both.

Although one can but applaud that novels by living authors are now running regularly in the dramatisation stakes it does seem a little odd to choose a sort of sub-Hugh Walpole tetralogy embellished with vaguely Dickensian characters. The latter half of the twentieth century could be better represented. Classic serialisations have been a BBC success and their producers have developed a pattern for coping with them irrespective of author,

time or place, but almost always with dash and flair. In contrast, **Poldark** looked tired, directed without spirit and generated a lifeless *deja-vue* air. The formula for the classic serial without the classic.

A lack of faith too seems to pervade the cast. The acting, on the whole, being as hackneyed as the characters and the lines they have to say ranging from a pull-out-all-the-mechanical-stops from John Baskombe as a Dickensian solicitor (without the rich dialogue) to a downright inept performance from Jill Townsend as the ex-fiancee who marries Poldark's cousin. I never expected to see an actress playing a lead on television who actually had trouble articulating.

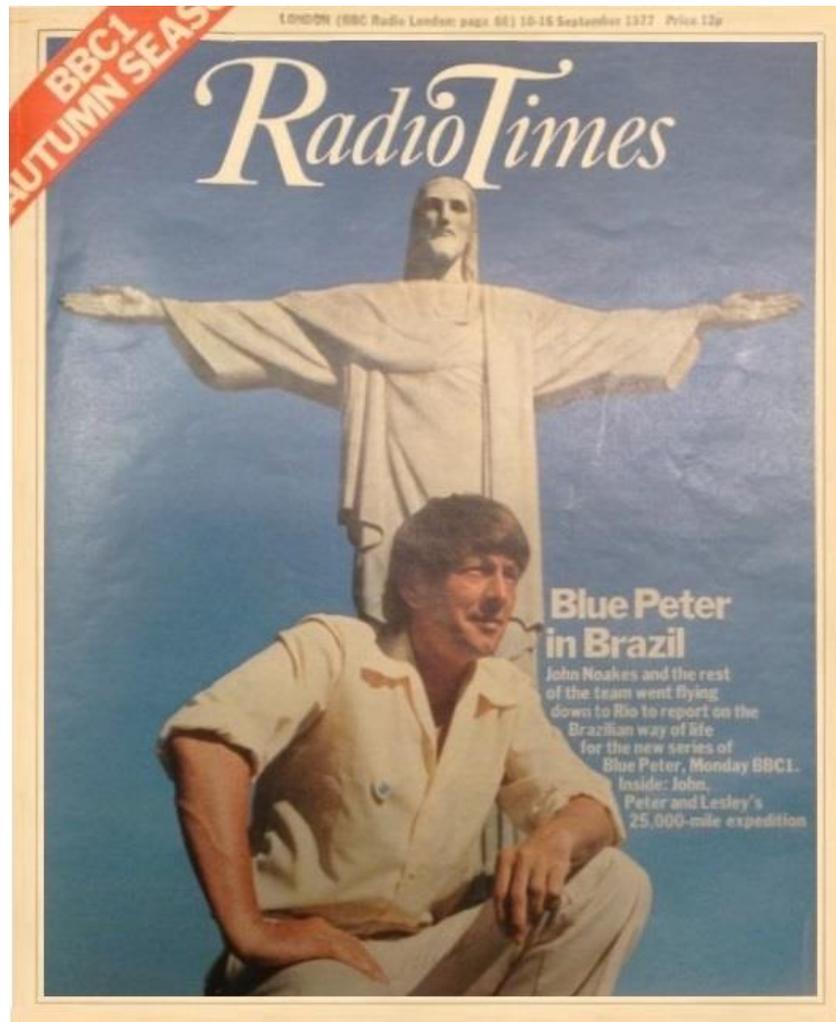
Clive Francis in the role of the cousin brought at times a kind of sinister panache which, I gathered, had nothing to do with the role of the weakling in which he is cast but rendered him vaguely interesting. Robin Ellis' hero is personable and broods nicely but has to work hard to bring some life into his scenes.

In a production where a clap of thunder comes just where expected there was little to note; though one comes back again to the story-telling as being the chief saboteur. A long flat scene near the beginning, incredibly boring, dealing with the complications of the inheritance brought action to a halt, dealing it such a vital blow that it could only limp thereafter.

A dispiriting start. Much now obviously depends on how the plot develops and on later characters introduced, and there is a big audience waiting to get hooked on family sagas, so **Poldark** may well achieve some ratings if it ceases to clash with *Upstairs Downstairs*. On this showing it certainly couldn't stand much competition.

(*The Stage*, 9 October 1975)

Back in the seventies, after the BBC's first 16-part series of *Poldark* ended on 18 January 1976, fans had to wait almost twenty months before the start of Series Two on 11 September 1977. To refresh memories and whet appetites, the *Radio Times* of 10-16 September 1977 ran this handy WG-penned résumé:



Ross, Demelza and the Warleggans return in a new series. For RADIO TIMES Winston Graham, author of the famous *Poldark* novels, writes about his leading characters – and introduces us to some new ones.

When Ross Poldark returns in 1783 from the American War of Independence, he finds his father dead, his small estate in ruins, and Elizabeth Chynoweth, the girl he loves, engaged to marry his cousin, Francis Poldark. His reputation for being an eccentric and a non-conformer is confirmed when he picks up and marries an urchin wench, Demelza Carne.

On the horizon looms George Warleggan, son of a new-rich family, whose business conduct reflects a standard of ethics that the Poldarks instantly and openly reject. When Elizabeth, widowed in a mining accident, agrees to marry George, Ross, goaded beyond endurance, calls upon her one night and takes her by force.¹ This does not, however, prevent the marriage, nor does it stop George, unaware of what has happened, from establishing himself in the old Poldark home, only four miles from where Ross and Demelza live.

When Demelza married Ross and became mistress of Nampara she left behind six younger brothers. Two of them, seeking an escape from the poverty of their home, journey from Illuggan to see her and ask for work. Sam, the second eldest, has recently seen the Light and possesses all the fervour of Cornish Methodism to help him on his way. But Drake, the youngest, dark-eyed and as attractive as his sister, brings trouble to himself and the household.

Agatha Poldark, in her late nineties and living almost alone in a run-down mansion, is persuaded to give George and Elizabeth shelter when they are homeless after a riot. Although discarded and disregarded by George, her spirit will not be put down, and her indomitable presence continues to pervade Penrice.

Morwenna Chynoweth is the eldest of four daughters of the late Dean of Bodmin, and a cousin of Elizabeth Chynoweth, now Mrs George Warleggan. Tall, short-sighted, shy and dowerless, she is engaged by Elizabeth to be governess to the 10-year-old Geoffrey Charles, her son by her first marriage to Francis Poldark.

¹ In view of conflicting opinions concerning the nature of Ross's liaison with Elizabeth (see [WG AND RAPE](#)), the author's declaration here that Ross "takes her by force" is of particular interest.

Creating a sensation on paper and television

'Every character a writer creates has a bit of himself in'

THE mild-mannered, gently spoken man who opened the door resembled neither Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde — yet admitted to being both.

Author Winston Graham lives and writes in Buxted, and has become a household name to millions of TV viewers who follow the Poldark series.

But the man who has created this expansive, enthralling story of Cornish life on which the series is based, has also created some of the most compelling psychological thrillers of recent times.

"It's the Jekyll and Hyde side of my personality," explained Winston Graham, "and I find the change stimulating."

In fact it takes most people some while to register that the author of Poldark is also the author of, among others, Marnie, and The Walking Stick, both of which have been filmed.

He did consider writing under a different name, but then decided that Winston Graham might just as well get the credit for both sides of his "split personality."

Mr Graham has lived in Buxted since 1961, coming to Sussex after 28 years in Cornwall.

"I decided to leave Cornwall because it was becoming too comfortable for me. I chose Sussex because, after Cornwall, it was the only other county in England where I would want to live."

The second Poldark series to be televised is likely to draw even larger audiences than the first, but is hardly likely to make Winston Graham's fortune.

That was made way back in the late 1940s when the Poldark books first appeared. There was a break of 18 years before he decided to embark on further Poldark novels and it was during that time he wrote thrillers.

His thrillers are taut and disciplined. "But I enjoy the breadth and freedom of the historical novel," he explained, "and that is why I returned to Poldark in 1973."

The new series began only a few months from the point where the first one finished, and there was no indication at all of the 18-year-gap in the writing of them.

Winston Graham is delighted with this second television version — particularly as he managed to persuade the producer to stick to the original script.

In fact he is supervising each one himself, and has spent several weeks on location with the cast.

He is one of those rare beings — an author who approves the choice of cast by a producer. In fact he has become firm friends with them all, and took time off on location in Cornwall to photograph some of the stars himself.

Is Ross Poldark in any sense a self-portrait? "Not really," Winston Graham replies, "but every character a writer creates must contain

a tiny part of himself." If this were not so, the characters would be wooden and unconvincing, he believes.

Ross interests him as a character because behind the colourful, swashbuckling figure there is always an element of self-criticism.

Winston Graham has been fortunate enough to spend all his working life as a writer. Helped by some money left to him, he began writing for a living while still in his teens and every book he has ever written since then has been published — though he refuses now to have some of those early novels reprinted.

He cannot remember ever wanting to do anything else with his life except write, but admits that long periods of illness as a child, plus the promptings of a mother with a very vivid imagination, fanned the flame.

It takes him up to three years to complete a novel — principally because he cannot communicate on a typewriter and writes every word by hand.

The study where he works at his home in Buxted overlooks a vast garden which extends to several acres and includes a tennis court and swimming pool.

Most of his writing is done

between the hours of 4 pm and 8 pm and the only person with whom he will discuss the problems of a novel is his wife, Jean.

The Graham's have a son and a daughter — their son is an economics don at Oxford and their daughter is married and lives in Crowborough.

Regretfully, Winston Graham has little time to participate in the village life of Buxted, as he travels up to London a good deal, and is often away on location.

In addition he has been writing one final book in the Poldark series, *The Angry Tide*, completed in April.

Winston Graham looks back on his highly successful career as a writer without regrets. He admits there is a danger that a writer may live someone else's life more vividly than his own and feels that one should write as one lives — not live first and write about it later.

The committed writer, he says, will write whatever happens. Nothing will stop him. Without that kind of commitment, he will fall by the wayside.

"I have lived a marvellous life," says Winston Graham "and would not have had it any other way."

Carole Buchan, *Sussex Express*, 28 October 1977

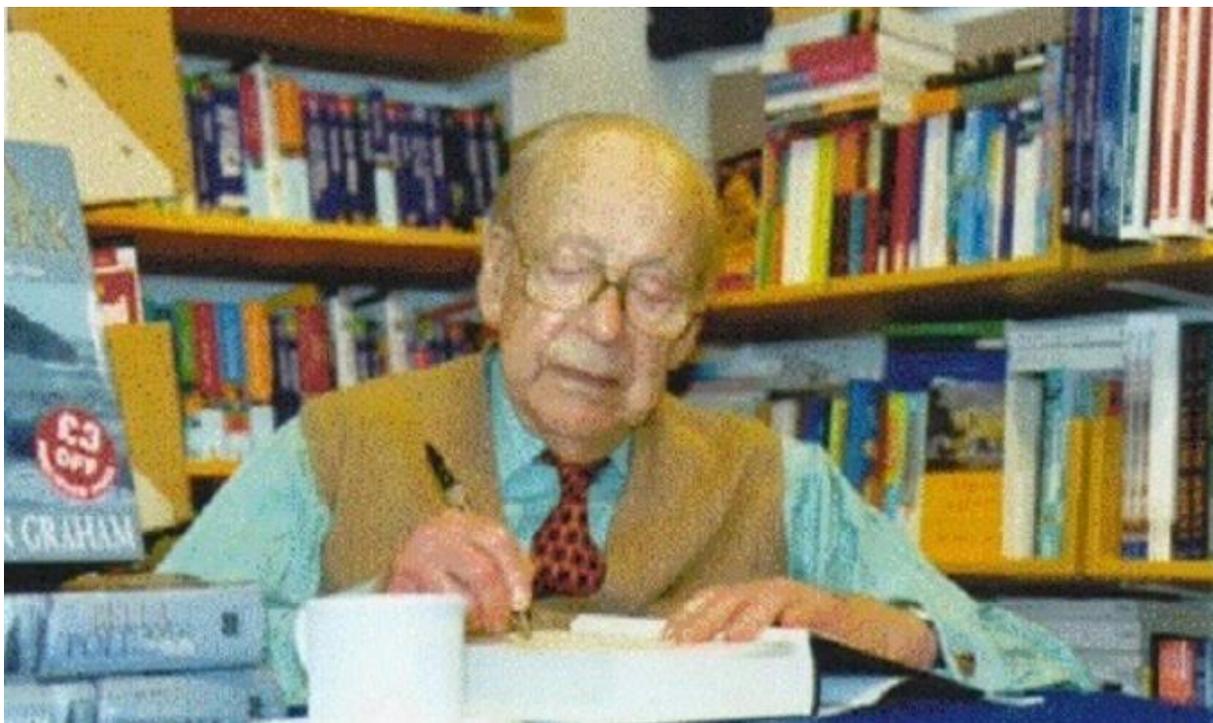
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Creator of the Cornish saga goes back to a hectic time

In 1977, after a long day down in Cornwall signing copies of *The Angry Tide*, WG spoke to journalist Tim Minogue:

My modern novels do get equal recognition with the Poldark series, among literary people, anyway – at least, they get better reviews. Poldark may be very popular in Cornwall, but Cornwall is only a very small part of England, and England is only a very small part of the world. Not many people can please both the critics and the public. Graham Greene can, and now John Fowles. I never read reviews unless they are in the paper I happen to buy. I met Somerset Maugham in 1955. He said an author can only be satisfied if he knows he's done the best to please himself. That's what you must do if you're going to be an author and not a hack. I have no ambition other than to write more novels, better novels, different novels.

Sunday Independent, 30 October 1977



Another book-signing – this time, *Bella Poldark*, 2002

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DESERT ISLAND DISCS, 26 November 1977

Most readers will be familiar with the format of Desert Island Discs: guests, invited to imagine themselves cast away on a desert island, name eight pieces of music they would like to have with them; between clips of their choices they are then encouraged by the show's host to talk about their life and times. At the end of the programme they are asked to nominate which one of their eight picks they regard most highly and also to choose one book and one "luxury" (which must be inanimate and of no use in escaping the island or allowing outside communication).

On 26 November 1977, deviser and presenter Roy Plomley's guest was author Winston Graham. Below is a transcript of their conversation as broadcast. At the time of writing, all episodes of DID, including this one, may be replayed or downloaded via BBC Radio Four's comprehensive interactive online DID archive.

Opening theme: *By the Sleepy Lagoon* by Eric Coates

RP: This week our castaway is the novelist Winston Graham. Mr. Graham, how do you view the idea of a spell on a desert island?

WG: Er, with a certain amount of trepidation, because I have never been able to look after myself very well. I've got hands which I use all the time for writing, because I write in longhand, but they're not much use, I would have thought, for building a boat or constructing a house or a shed and I've never cooked much for myself all my life.

Is music an interest of yours?

I'm very fond of music and I never seem to have quite enough time to listen to it as much as I would want to or go to concerts as much as I would want to. There always seems to have been in my life something that I have had to do more.

Do you play an instrument?

No, I don't, to my great grief. When I see a piano, I could scream.

[Chuckles] What's your first record?

Well, er, when I was a small boy my mother used to play every Sunday evening. It was a sort of ritual. She played at other times of the week, but this was a sort of

hour every Sunday and I could whistle perhaps sixteen or seventeen of the pieces that she played, but I know only by name about half a dozen and the one I've chosen is the Impromptu in A Flat by Schubert, which she played rather meditatively and I think that this particular record, it's played in very much the same way.

(1) Franz Schubert : Impromptu in A flat major, D935 No. 2; soloist Alfred Brendel

What part of the country do you come from, Winston?

From Lancashire – I was born in Manchester.

With Poldark in mind, I expected you to say Cornwall.

Well, I moved there – my family moved there – when I was seventeen and I lived there for upwards of 28 years. I think probably, wherever I die, my spiritual bones will rest there.

You're an honorary Cornishman.

Oh, yes, I think so, now.

Were you a bookish lad?

Yes, I was rather a miserable young man in the sense that I was always ailing and this, I think, put one back into oneself more and I was always reading. I was a voracious reader, really.

What did you want to be?

A writer.

Right from the beginning?

Yes, right from the beginning.

Now, you can't just start writing as a vocation, as a career, because it takes a long time without some kind of private income. Could you manage that?

Well, er, my father died when I was nineteen, two years after we'd got to Cornwall and my mother had, in fact, a small private income – minuscule by today's standards, but she was able to stake me for a few years and this is what she did.

So you bought a typewriter and some paper and sat down and said, "I'm a writer, aged nineteen."

I bought paper. I don't use a typewriter very much, but I bought paper and started in that way and I started writing and I did a variety of unsuccessful things until I was 21 and then I started my first novel and I completed it and it was published about two or three years later. Of course, it made absolutely nothing, so that I was still dependent upon my mother, but at least it gave me a reason for living and for doing what I was doing and I went on from there.

Let's have your second record before we go on from there.

Well, at, er, just around the outbreak of war, er, I met Benno Moiseiwitsch and some months after this, when he was bombed out, I – greatly daring – invited him to come and spend a few weeks with me in Cornwall. Greatly daring because, of course, I was young and newly married and waiting call-up. But he accepted my invitation and he came down and he played a great deal, the Rachmaninov Piano Concertos Number 3 and Number 2 and it was a magical time to hear this wonderful music sounding through the house in that grim cold January month before he went away again.

(2) Sergei Rachmaninov : Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor; soloist Benno Moiseiwitsch

At this particular time we had a good but upright Beckstein piano and it was like an elderly or a middle-aged maiden lady with her first love affair. It sang and it glowed and after Moiseiwitsch left it went very, very flat and it took weeks of tuning to bring it up to pitch again.

What's your next record? That also concerns Moiseiwitsch, doesn't it?

Well, er, while Moiseiwitsch was at our house he learned the Beethoven Piano Concerto Number 3 for the first time. He was going to play it in Liverpool the following month and this is particularly reminiscent to me of the time when he stayed with us.

Unfortunately, Moiseiwitsch never recorded this piece.

No, I was afraid he hadn't.

So, who would you like to play it – to represent him, as it were?

Well, nobody, surely, better than Rubinstein?

(3) Ludwig van Beethoven : Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor; soloist
Artur Rubinstein

Now, you had started your writing career. Having sent your first novel off to the publisher, how many did you send it off to before it was accepted?

Er, three.

And meantime you were busy on another?

Yes.

Were you sticking to the sort of places and people that you knew?

Er, no, I wasn't. I think there's a very considerable distinction between two types of novelist. Perhaps the better type of novelist, if you may say so, starts with his own personality and works out from that. I, perhaps the longer-staying type of novelist, start much further out, looking for things that perhaps I didn't then totally comprehend or understand, and the longer I work and the older I grow and the more I write the more I come closer into my own self, as it were.

Did you feel in those early books there was a steady progress going on in your ability to handle stories and characters?

I didn't notice much progress for a time and I think nobody else noticed much progress. I mean, I had no difficulty, as you observe, in finding a publisher but I had great difficulty in finding a public.

Did you have periods of discouragement?

Oh, yes, certainly, because one knew that the first novel didn't make much money but when the third novel didn't make much money one began to wonder whether one was really going to succeed at all.

Were your early books more or less on the same lines?

The first three were plain, straightforward thrillers; the fourth was a straight novel. My publisher said that it was ten years in advance of the others but commercially he could shake me, because I'd changed my style.

Yes, which publishers don't like, of course.

No – nor do readers.

How long did it take you to do a book?

Oh, it varies enormously.

I'm talking about the early ones.

Oh, the early ones, I suppose about fifteen months.

Are any of them still in print?

They're not in print because I won't allow them to go into print. There are certainly one or two publishers who would like to put them out, but to my mind they're not mature enough and they should stay decently interred.

Which was your first success?

Well, I suppose ... The war came – I'd written several before the war – and then the war perhaps in a way matured me and the reading public had become more book-conscious at the end of the war and I wrote a book called *The Forgotten Story*, which was a story of Falmouth at the end of the nineteenth century, and that I think was really the beginning of things. Then shortly after that I wrote a film script which was made into a film and that was the way it began.

Record number four.

Well, living on a desert island, I feel I would really like to hear sometime the sound of human laughter, if only to remind me of my own humanity and what better way to hear it than to listen to one of our much regretted and great comics, Gerard Hoffnung, addressing The Oxford Union and telling them *The Bricklayer's Story*?

(4) Speech at The Oxford Union by Gerard Hoffnung

Now you told us one of your early successes was this novel about Falmouth and the nineteenth century. You have always been fascinated by local history.

Well, living in Cornwall as I did, I came to be deeply appreciative of, obviously, firstly the beauty of the scene, then the people, whom I came to like much later, but very sincerely, and then their history, which was an infinitely more exciting history than one supposed. Eighteenth century Cornwall at that time was of much greater importance to England than it is today, returning 44 Members of Parliament and the strategic position of its coastline and the tin and copper that was being raised.

Hence the first Poldark novels, which, of course, are set in the reign of George the Third.

Yes, precisely.

Now you wrote them in two batches, didn't you? How many were in the first batch?

There were four in the first batch. I know people think that these were sequels, but they were not. They were just one long story which happened to break off in convenient parts, and when I'd finished the fourth, which is called *Warleggan*, I felt that this was the end of what I had to say and to start again would have meant all the dangers of what a sequel can offer, which is staleness and repetitiveness, so it was eighteen years before I came back to them and then there seemed to me to be a new theme starting up and this has filled three more novels.

Now, the Poldark books really paid off when the BBC did them a couple of years ago on television in how many instalments?

Sixteen.

But you didn't adapt them?

No, I didn't.

As a result, the storyline was changed quite considerably, wasn't it?

Yes, very considerably in the early instalments and in the later instalments, yes.

Isn't there a difficulty when long historical novels like that are adapted for television that the background and history are sacrificed for action so that as a result one is left possibly with melodrama - at any rate, with the basic human situations and not much to support them?

Well, this is what I was very much afraid of and I think it has happened to some extent because they could have been extended into a longer number of instalments than sixteen very easily. But, rather to my surprise, I find that a great many people have discovered some historical background still existing, even though it isn't as strong as it was in the books.

Doing the historical research must be very enjoyable. It must be rather a temptation to sit down and start going through the old records, digging up what you can.

Oh, yes. With this last book, *The Angry Tide*, I did nothing except research for five months before I started it and it's enormously stimulating, especially if you go back not just to the history books which are all right for history, but go back to the diaries and journals and things of that sort. They give you a wonderful picture of the day.

You've been down on the locations in Cornwall supervising shooting of the new series.

Yes, I have, yes.

You've enjoyed that?

Very much. Oh, it's been very stimulating because everybody connected with it has been marvellous and thoroughly professional, everybody concerned, and I use the word "professional" as the highest form of praise.

Haven't you wanted to do the adaptations yourself?

Well, for the first four I was not invited and for the last three there was no prospect because I was writing the last novel and would not have been able to do that had I been doing the adaptation.

You were right up to deadline.

Yes.

They were waiting for it ...

They were. They were very considerate. They didn't knock on my door or ring me up or anything. They assumed that I would turn the book in in due course, which I did.

Let's get back to music. What now?

About 1950, I think, I met a man who'd got a small private recording outfit and he'd just recorded a group called Los Paraguayos. He gave me a copy of this and I very much enjoyed it and have never really lost my affection for it. I would like you to play a piece which I find totally incapable of pronunciation. It's called Recuerdos De Ypacarai.

(5) Recuerdos De Ypacarai by Los Paraguayos

Now you mentioned having written a film script quite early in your career. In fact, quite a number of your novels have been made into films – *Marnie*, for example.

Yes, Hitchcock. Erm, six altogether have been made.

Take My Life ...

Take My Life, Night Without Stars, Fortune is a Woman, Sleeping Partner, Marnie, The Walking Stick – is that six? I don't know.

It seemed like six. Tell me about your writing discipline. Do you work so many hours each day or so many words each day? How does it work out?

It's a difficult question. I'm always being asked this. Obviously when a novel is in full flow you can write for long periods every day and my most creative time is from five in the afternoon to about eight. But if you are just beginning a novel and the whole thing is in a sort of state of flux, you can sit down at your desk happily enough but it doesn't necessarily follow that you'll do any work and if you go and play a round of golf you may have a better idea there than while you're sitting at the desk.

A very good excuse.

It is indeed a very good excuse and the danger of that, of course, is to go to play golf too often.

You've given a lot of time to the interests of your fellow writers. You were Chairman of the Society of Authors for several years.

For two years.

And you helped the fight for authors to get a Public Lending Right which, alas, they still haven't got.

Which, alas, they haven't got. No, I was with Alan Herbert when he first began this campaign and I stayed with it for a long time, but I've rather lost touch with it now. Alas, it seems to be stagnating. I think the only thing to do is to start chaining ourselves to the railings of 10, Downing Street. [PLR was finally introduced in 1982]

[Chuckles] Right, record number six.

I suppose fourteen or fifteen years ago I heard this song by Jimmie Rodgers called Kisses Sweeter Than Wine. It's a little sentimental, but it seems to me to sum up

quite well a fairly decent philosophy of life. It's one that I wouldn't quarrel with.

(6) Kisses Sweeter Than Wine by Jimmie Rodgers

Now you were rather modest early on about your practical capabilities of looking after yourself.

I wasn't modest, I was truthful.

And you can't do any campfire cookery? You were never a boy scout?

No.

I'm worried about you.

Yes, I'm worried about myself. I would perfectly certainly stay there until somebody tried to pick me up.

Well, I do hope things work out for you because there's nothing, really, we can do.

No. I have, I suppose, a certain instinct for survival and I imagine that, necessity being the mother of invention, I would breed certain schemes.

Yes, work at that, Winston, [both chuckle] and record number seven.

This is The Four Seasons by Vivaldi. The whole thing is absolutely marvellous.

Why does it appeal to you so much?

I've no idea. I think if you're going to ask this question I might as well answer it now: if there were one record that I had to take to the island, this is the one I would certainly take. Also, of course, it wouldn't be a bad idea if I were marooned on a desert island – I presume it will be a tropical one; I hope you wouldn't want to put me on the Aleutians or something – it would be nice to have a record of the four seasons where there would probably be only one or two, and I'm very devoted to it.

(7) The opening of Winter from Antonio Vivaldi's Four Seasons; soloist Pinchas Zukerman

I have a rather comic memory of this particular piece, as it happens. 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 45 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.

[Laughs] It's the sort of thing that makes concert-going worthwhile. And your last record: what have you saved for the end?

Well, being on a desert island, if I can't have a Girl Friday, I would like a lady's voice. Rita Streich has a superb voice and I would like to hear her sing what in English I think is called The Nightingale and the Rose.

(8) Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov : The Nightingale and the Rose, Op. 2/2;
soloist Rita Streich

Now you've told us which one disc you would take if you were only going to take one and that was The Four Seasons. One luxury to take with you – what's that going to be?

I don't know. I think that I would probably take a large number of exercise books and a large number of biros because this would give me some sort of an outlet when I was in distress.

One book to take with you to read apart from that conventional little list of the Bible and Shakespeare and big encyclopaedias?

I think I would take Benham's Book of Quotations. It's actually a very old book of quotations but it's better, to my mind, than the Oxford and there's such a marvellous variety of thought - abbreviated thought – and poetry and quotations from the Greek and from the Latin and from the Bible. I think this would probably be as useful to me as any other book.

Right. And thank you, Winston Graham, for letting us hear your desert island discs.

Thank you, Roy.

Goodbye, everyone.

Closing theme

To commemorate WG's appearance on his long-running programme, Roy Plomley presented the author with a copy of his book *Desert Island Discs* (William Kimber, 1975) inscribed

*To Winston
Castaway No. 1412, with gratitude and good wishes
Roy (1977)*

* * * * *

Writer Lynne Lewis

(1) 2002

I live in mid-Cornwall and I must say that Winston Graham's novels have really made the historical past of Cornwall come alive for me. I was lucky enough to meet Winston when he appeared at the Daphne du Maurier Literary Festival in Fowey in May 2002 to mark the publication of *Bella Poldark*. WG spoke at great length and then spent a couple of hours signing books. He took such great pleasure in speaking to each and every one of us in turn as he signed our books and I had the feeling even then that it might be one of his last public appearances. He seemed to be savouring every moment.

(2) 2008

To celebrate the centenary of his birth on 30 June 1908, an exhibition entitled *The Life and Times of Winston Graham* ran from 14 June to 13 September 2008 at Truro's Royal Cornwall Museum. The exhibition was officially opened on Saturday 28 June with a lecture – the Winston Graham Centenary Lecture – delivered in Truro Town Hall by WG's son Andrew. Guests included Andrew's sister Rosamund and other Graham family members, Ian and Marjory Chapman, WG's former housekeepers Gwen Hartfield and Tina Creelman and *Poldark* actors Angharad Rees, Jane Wyman and Christopher Biggins. Tickets cost five pounds and the hall was packed.

In his talk, Andrew spoke of his father's dedication to writing – typically Winston would write 2,000 words a day, an activity around which the rest of the family's daily routine revolved. While it wasn't always easy living with a novelist, the number of books published by WG bears testament to his lifelong dedication to his craft. Andrew described his mother Jean – Winston's wife – as a tower of strength, a very versatile, energetic lady who kept everything going very beautifully. He saw her as a free spirit and said that, although Demelza's character was not wholly Jean's, some of his mother's qualities were recognisable in the fictional heroine, such as her resilience, her courage and her ability to find pleasure in small things. Andrew said that although many people sought to identify qualities of Ross in his father, he personally thought that, outwardly, there were none to be seen. Ross was a swashbuckling type and while Winston could assume this exciting persona through the character he created so vividly, in real life the author's nature was quite different. Andrew spoke of his father's love of trilby hats. Winston had six or seven and would wear one whenever possible – even to the beach (see below) – at a variety of angles to suit circumstance or mood.



With Garrick (and trilby) on Perranporth beach

One of these hats, and a walking stick, were on display in the exhibition. Also to be seen were an assortment of late 18th / early 19th century artefacts, in keeping with

the timeframe of *Poldark*, and two original costumes from the television series – a summer dress and straw hat of Demelza's and one of Ross's outfits – together with original designs by John Bloomfield for costumes worn by Ross, Demelza, Jud, Prudie, Dwight and Caroline. Other personal WG memorabilia included his old Imperial typewriter, manuscripts, school reports and selected letters, including a very sad one in which he announces to a friend the death of his wife, plus lots of nice stills from *Poldark* and photos from Winston's life.



Above: WG's long-serving Imperial typewriter

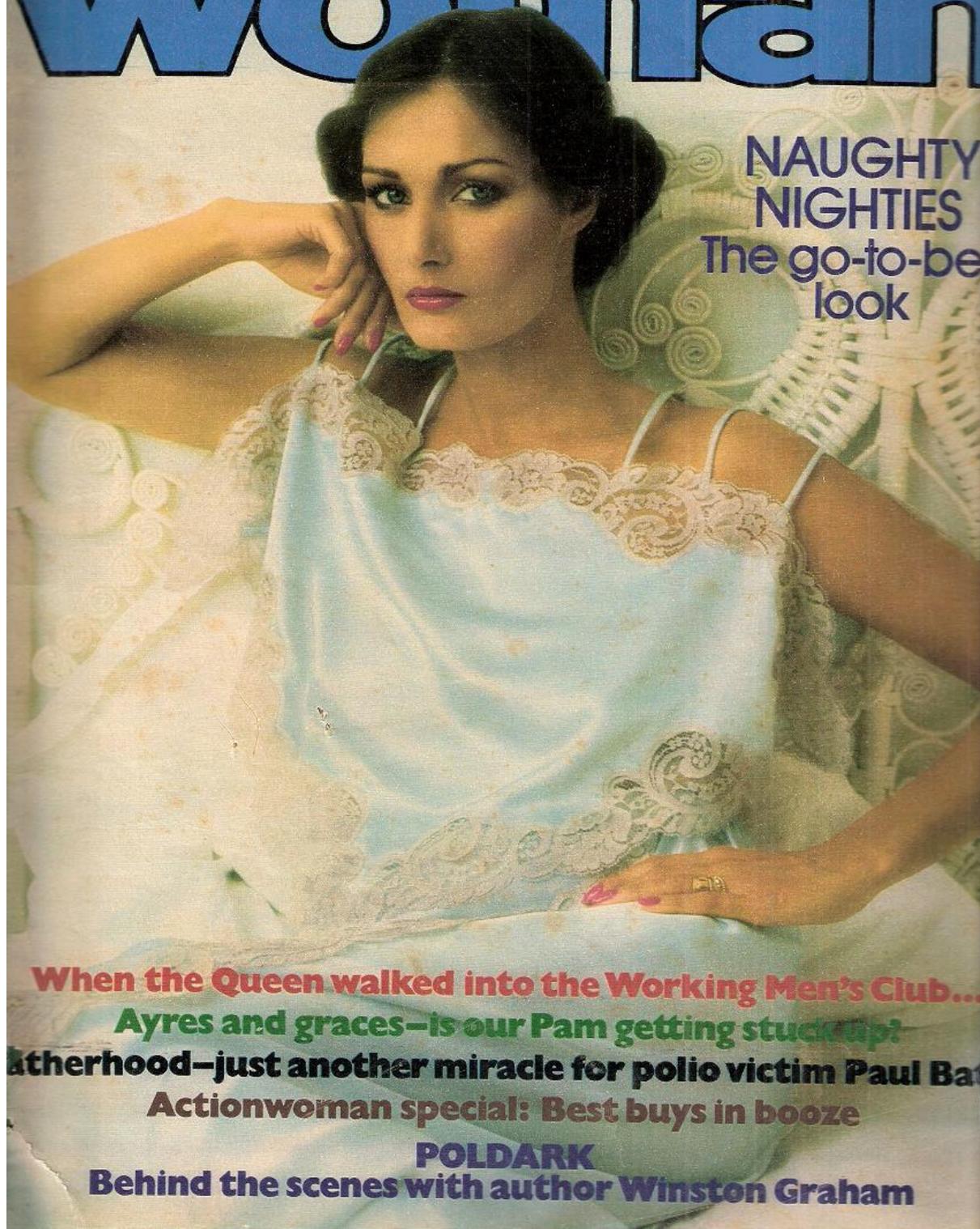
Left: another trilby hat / beach moment

Compiled from posts by Lynne Lewis at ibdof.com on 4 December 2003 and poldark.activeboard.com on 30 June 2008 plus copy from *The Falmouth Packet* of 29 March 2008 and *The West Briton* of 25 June and 1 July 2008. Attempts to contact Ms Lewis were unsuccessful.

World's greatest weekly for women

December 10 1977

woman



**NAUGHTY
NIGHTIES**
The go-to-be
look

When the Queen walked into the Working Men's Club...

Ayres and graces—is our Pam getting stuck up?

fatherhood—just another miracle for polio victim Paul Ba

Actionwoman special: Best buys in booze

POLDARK

Behind the scenes with author Winston Graham

To help readers adjust to the gloomy prospect of no more *Poldark* (with Series Two having concluded the week before), on 10 December 1977, *Woman* ran this breezy WG-penned feature:

EXCLUSIVE by Winston Graham

The man who created Ross and Demelza tells us how a new Cornish legend was founded. Beginning in a remote wooden bungalow on a cliff edge, where he wrote the first novels, he takes us through the years until, with his own camera, he recorded the making of the latest series for BBC television.

POLDARK – how it all happened

When I was in my late teens I read a short story – hardly more than an anecdote – by the German writer, Herman Sudermann, about a beautiful woman who made a wrong decision in her youth, which ruined the lives of the two men who loved her.

This remained in my mind and would not be banished; years later that seed came to life in the story of Ross Poldark, his cousin, and Elizabeth Chynoweth, whom they both wished to marry.

My family had moved to Cornwall when I was 17 and my first novel was published when I was 23 [\[actually, 26\]](#); but it was quite a while after this that Poldark began. By then, to the inevitable attraction of the county had been added an interest in its history, particularly its history during the period when it loomed far more importantly in the scheme of things than it does today. In the eighteenth century, Cornwall returned 44 Members to Parliament; there was also the productivity of its tin and copper mines and its strategic position in times of war. Society, too, in the county was much more self-contained and active.

I had no intention of writing anything like a saga. But there was the theme I wanted to express, dealing with the Ross-Elizabeth-Francis triangle, which it was clear I had not even begun to complete by the end of the first novel. Into it also had come the engaging and vital character of Demelza, who by now was intent on altering the shape of the story. (Her name, incidentally, comes from the name of a tiny hamlet on the Cornish moors: there have been many girls christened Demelza since.)

Two of the books I wrote in a small wooden bungalow I had hired, remote on a cliff edge, and I would walk to it daily with haversack containing a sandwich lunch.



Photo captions (1) Ross Poldark, owner of 100 acres of rather barren farmland – or, if you prefer, Robin Ellis, who got bowled in a cricket match by an American-born actress called Jill Townsend ... (2) Elizabeth Warleggan who, in spite of two husbands and a brief affair with Ross, still manages to look virginal. On location, Jill Townsend alters the effect with that cigarette – and that look. (3) In this picture of Judy Geeson, everything's in period except for the chairs. But the trailing gowns and feathered hats of Caroline Penvenen just don't make comfortable rainwear. (4) Ross's wife, who had never been a raving beauty but whose charm and exuberance of spirit always drew men's attention. Angharad Rees sits on the cliffs of Pentire-glaze, waiting to be Demelza. (5) Sawle Cove, which in real life is Portquin, National Trust territory, and so deserted that it could still be part of the eighteenth century. There wasn't an ice cream kiosk in sight. (6) The Rev. and Mrs. Ossie Whitworth, who was Morwenna Chynoweth, visit the Warleggans. The two characters lurking in the background are not minions of the house, but television crew. (7) Julie Dawn Cole as Roscarrack, combining a 1970's sprawl with a 1790's costume. And looking altogether too nice to be the really rather outrageous Rowella Chynoweth. (8) Demelza with

her brothers, Drake the blacksmith (left) and Sam the Methodist preacher. Cornwall is still dotted with eighteenth century chapels from when Methodism swept the West Country. (9) A French fishing village on the coast of Cornwall. Well, it's Portholland really. And it can take the best part of a day to recreate the eighteenth-century scene.

When the tide was in I would have to scramble along the edge of the beach to reach the place dry-footed, and would find when I got there all the books, papers, histories spread out as I had left them yesterday, and there for about six hours I would write and dream and write again.

So the first four books were not, as is generally supposed, sequels of one another but one very long novel which broke off at convenient points. The end of the fourth book, *Warleggan*, was the end of the tale. The results of Elizabeth's mistaken choice had by now worked itself out, not only in the lives of Ross and Francis but in her own. The fact that, in the writing, the Ross-Demelza relationship had become far more important than any other, did not affect the original theme.

* * *

Of course I did not "finish off" the characters, for by then they seemed as much alive as I was, but any further development of them would indeed rank as a sequel, with all the dangers of repetition and staleness that that word holds. So for 20 years, during which there was a constant procession of letters asking me to continue, I answered with explanations and polite refusal.

It was not until 1971 that, having written a succession of modern novels, I seriously considered writing just one more Poldark. It was in its own way as much of a challenge as starting something quite new.

So *The Black Moon* was begun, and after initial difficulties, gradually began to flow, just as the others had. And as I wrote it a new theme appeared, growing entirely out of the circumstances of the old. And this theme – which involves the parentage of Elizabeth's son, Valentine Warleggan – has taken three novels to develop and complete.

Although these books are novels, I have wherever possible involved history in them. In the book *Demelza* the death of Ross's servant, Jim Carter, from

inexpert blood-letting while he is serving a prison sentence is taken from an incident in Wesley's journals; the horrifying description of Launceston prison comes from a contemporary account.

In *Jeremy Poldark* the rich heiress Caroline Penvenen is taken with what is suspected to be a morbid sore throat, which young Dr. Enys discovers to be no more than a fishbone; this happened in reality to Sir William Fordyce and is related in his book *Fevers*, published in 1773.

In the new books, *The Memoirs of William Carnsew* were invaluable for their insight into eighteenth century Cornish Methodism; in *The Four Swans*, the rivalry between the Falmouths and the Bassets for the Truro parliamentary borough and the elections which took place, is taken from contemporary letters; the raid on Quiberon in *The Black Moon*, when an Anglo-French force landed in Brittany to raise the Standard of the King, is from the account of a French officer who took part. When I was near completion of *The Four Swans*, the BBC announced their intention of making a serial of the first four Poldark novels. It was pointed out that I should be the first living writer to have a family saga done on television.

I went to Cornwall with a BBC team in February 1975 to help them pick out locations. It proved difficult, for Cornwall has suffered rapid development since the last war, and it is hard to find a cottage without a TV aerial, or a lane without road signs. Happily, the National Trust has secured large areas of the cliff coast, and here and there the neglected cove still exists.

People are always asking me what my reactions are when I see my characters portrayed by living actors: do I feel pleasure, disappointment, surprise? The answer is, of course, all three. But I have been singularly lucky in both Poldark productions to have actors and actresses who are close to the original conception.

Even those who have not been absolutely right in appearance have nevertheless got into the characters in such a way as to overcome this difficulty. In one or two cases they have even created characters not quite at one with the characters in the book but equally interesting.

In the second serial the filming of the outdoor scenes, chiefly in Cornwall, was done in seven weeks in the autumn. Again, I went with the BBC to pick

out locations. Whereas last time the film unit had moved about, this time we looked for a central base and locations within reasonable distance of it.

Eventually it was decided to focus our attention on the little town of Lostwithiel. The farm which I had originally recommended for Nampara, but which had not been available for the first series, was only half an hour away; so was the desolate little inlet of Portquin and the magnificent cliffs of Pentireglaze. The farthest afield we had to go was St Mawes, where the castle was used for the French Fort Baton; Porthluney Beach, Caerhays, was used for Hendrawna beach of the books; some harbour scenes were shot at Charlestown.

Moving a unit for a day's shooting is quite a major enterprise. A 40-seater coach is needed to convey the artists, extras and technicians. Then there are props wagons and a make-up caravan, electric vans for generating and lighting, a "grips" van with cameras and equipment, a catering van and miscellaneous cars.

Sometimes, if a location is difficult to access, this lumbering caravanserai has to be left in a nearby flat field or farmyard, and from there everything is ferried to and fro by Land Rovers and jeeps. Organisation of a month's filming on location is planned to the last detail before it begins: what shall be shot and when, what actors are needed, what extras, what props (three donkeys, or a stage coach, or two pistols), and technicians go ahead to prepare a site by weaving branches around a new fence or disguising a telegraph pole, or in some cases by the complete recreation of an eighteenth century scene.

* * *

Six films have been made for the big screen from my books including of course *Marnie* directed by Alfred Hitchcock – and I have been variously involved in the production of them. But only with the first of these, *Take My Life*, have I been so involved as I was with the second Poldark serial.

I was enormously impressed by the thoroughgoing professionalism, and the goodwill that pervaded the whole team. Among the actors, the greatest enemies on the screen are the greatest friends off, and to be a part of this camaraderie has been a really splendid experience.

Instead of avoiding each other in their leisure time, as might well happen to people working together, often in trying conditions, they stayed together all day and talked, ate and joked into the evening. One new member of the cast said to me: "I've never been on a unit like this, we're always having parties."

And conditions can be trying. During our first three weeks in Cornwall the weather was perpetually foul. In one scene Morwenna Chynoweth (Jane Wymark) takes her charge Geoffrey Charles (Stefan Gates) paddling on Hendrawna beach and meets Drake Carne (Kevin McNally). This, which was meant to be a lovely day in hot sunshine, was rehearsed with mackintoshes and umbrellas in driving rain and a force six wind, the actors shivering with cold. Then it was shot in brief intervals when the rain relented. In such circumstances it is not easy to be cheerful and philosophical.

On hot days it can be equally trying to stand about in heavy eighteenth century clothes. This is specially true for the girls who, slim enough in all conscience, have to compress their waists into the tight-fitting bodices of another age. And so many things can go awry.

A scene may go through splendidly but the cameraman is not satisfied; a second time something in the background has gone wrong; a third time and an actor, who has done it perfectly twice, fluffs a line. Or a motor bike goes by, a threshing machine starts up, and it all has to be done again.

On one particularly bad day when cold squally showers were beating across the countryside I made a remark about the rain to a technician, Chris Hastie, and he replied: "I'm alive, I'm well, and I'm working. What does the weather matter?" This seems to sum up the attitude of the whole unit, and one wishes it were an attitude more prevalent throughout England today.

Sometimes, of course, there is fun "off scene". Judy Geeson has a delightful small dog called Tara which featured in the first serial and which will sing a duet with her if she pitches the right note. A private competition one afternoon among the other actors to produce the same result was won jointly by Christopher Biggins (Rev. Ossie Whitworth) and Ralph Bates (George Warleggan). My own efforts only elicited a suspicious stare from Tara.

Towards the end of the first period of filming, Captain Fortescue, who owns the great estate of Boconnoc, arranged with Robin Ellis and Ralph Bates that a charity cricket match, Poldarks v. Warleggans, should take place on his ground.

A few hundred spectators were expected and about four thousand turned up. Most of them seemed more interested in getting autographs than in watching the cricket, but the cricket proceeded nevertheless, with some of the technicians in "long johns" and other in denims and tricorne hats.

Highlight was when Ross Poldark was scoring all around the wicket and George Warleggan had exhausted all his regular bowlers. He called Mrs. Warleggan up from the boundary and asked her to bowl. Jill Townsend, who is American, knew nothing whatever about cricket and had to be told where to stand and what to aim at. Whereupon she bowled Ross Poldark first ball.

There was something curiously significant about this, as if it were symbolic of a major theme of the story. Nevertheless, Poldarks won by a narrow margin. Which is no doubt how it should be.

* * * * *

I do not know how near to the truth of life in the eighteenth century [the Poldark] novels are; all I know is that they are as near to the truth as I can make them.

WG, Poldark's Cornwall

* * * * *

Profile

An interview with BBC correspondent Ted Harrison recorded at WG's home on 22 December 1977 and broadcast on BBC Radio 4's Profile on either 9 or 16 January 1978.

TH: The works of the novelist Winston Graham have gripped the imagination of thousands of people around the world for over thirty years. A number of his books have been made into films and his Poldark series has become a great success as a television serial. To meet Mr Graham is to meet a shy but immaculately courteous English gentleman. I visited him at his country home and asked him whether at the age of eighteen when he had first begun writing he had intended writing to be his career?

I don't think I thought of it as a career. I don't think I thought it was unusual. I think it was instinctive for me to want to write and I just started writing. I don't think I looked that far ahead to feel that I was definitely taking up a career. All I wanted to do was to write a novel and to get it published and to go from there. About that time I wrote a play¹ which was performed successfully by amateurs, but immediately after that my first novel was published and I never after that thought of the play form because the novel was obviously what was offering me the opportunity of making a living. I didn't have any encouragement from my family, and my mother, who had a small private income, absolutely tiny by today's standards, had the enormous and marvellous faith in her son which many mothers misguidedly do have in their sons, that I might make a writer, and she had that sort of faith. I don't think it was encouragement from any other member of my family.

Was she also your critic when it came to showing your work for the first time to somebody else apart from yourself?

No, I don't think she was, but I think that I've always been very secretive about my books and there's scarcely ever been much criticism either invited or given between the time that I have written them and the time that I've sent them off.

Your books have always been books about subjects that you've had to research in that you've been a writer from such an early age that nothing has ever been strictly autobiographical.

I think a lot of things eventually become autobiographical. One of the great problems, of course, of being a writer from the very early days is that one hasn't had a background of a lawyer or a doctor or something of this sort, but on the other hand, I think, I hope that over the years one develops a fairly sensitive set of antennae and one sets them out or puts them out in a particular area or a particular direction and they enable one to find that background that one is aiming for. Sometimes the backgrounds are things that I did know. More often than not, they are backgrounds that I didn't. In, of course, the Cornish novels, the background, in so far as it's not historical, I knew intimately. I knew the whole of the coastline and the weather and the people of Cornwall very well.

How did you set about researching the history, to make sure that the dialect was right, that the slang of the time was right, that you had the price of tin right?

Oh, simply reading. Endlessly reading. If you go back into the manuscripts of those days, there are quite a lot that can be found and these do give you the price of tin and there are cost books and when I first went to Cornwall there was quite a residue of old miners, men who had been miners in Cornwall, perhaps, or had been abroad mining and come back to live in Cornwall and they knew a lot about the old Cornish tin mines and copper mines and, of course, nearly every Cornishman is a historian at heart and they're very keen to impart any information they have. As for the dialect, this again is something that I studied by conversation and also by a number of dialect books that I was able to read and study and turns of phrase which I collected which are marvellous and innumerable all over Cornwall.

How many Poldark novels have you now written?

Seven.

Are there going to be any more?

I doubt it. It's difficult to say at this moment. Certainly I finished the last feeling that this was the end of all I had to say. You see, I wrote the first four a long time ago and many people think that they were sequels of each other but they were not. They were one novel which happened to break into convenient parts for publishing. Then I felt that I'd said all I had to say about

them, that that was the end of the story, the end of the shape that I had made, and therefore it wasn't for many years that I again took up the story of the Poldarks. I then began another group which have come to three novels and it's taken me three novels to express the theme that I had when I began *The Black Moon – The Black Moon, The Four Swans* and *The Angry Tide*. That is now complete again. I wouldn't say that I could never write another Poldark novel, nor would I say that I'm contemplating one at the moment.

The Poldark novels became extraordinarily well known with the television version. What did you feel about that, to see the characters that you created having to be made into flesh and blood in the form of actors and actresses? Were they the right faces?

I have very, very few complaints about the actors and actresses. I think that in certain cases where they were different in appearance they were so often able to make some adjustment of their own character or of my character so that the two became one and I have no real complaints about the actors or actresses at all. The first series there were parts of it I didn't like at all because there were considerable changes from my books, particularly the first four episodes and the last two episodes, but the last series they have kept very close to the books at my insistence and, on the whole, I think they've turned out very well from my point of view.

Is the world of television very different from the world of the film-makers?

Of course, compared to the world of the film-makers, everyone is very ill-paid in television. In the world of the film-makers, everybody is grossly overpaid. I think that, on the whole, I've found myself more in sympathy with the actors and the technicians in the television world. They are totally professional and without any apparent form of excessive egoism. They all seem to work together as a splendid team, whereas I think, in the film world, the prizes are so much greater in every way, even for the writer, that I think they become more competitive one with another.

You yourself, though, had a sojourn in the film world and turned down many of the potential prizes. What happened in that particular episode of your life?

Oh, that was a long time ago. That was when I was just finishing *Demelza*. I'd written a film script called *Take My Life* and it was bought by the Rank

Organisation and they decided to make a film of it and they thought, quite mistakenly, that I was their sort of golden-haired boy who was going to write a lot of scripts for them, so I was brought up to London and given a flat – a free flat and a secretary to work for me and a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce to take me to and from Denham Studios, as it then was, every day and it didn't really work out. I left them after, I think, six months, finally and totally disillusioned with the whole idea of becoming a scriptwriter, I think probably about a month before they decided that they were disillusioned with me and I then went back to Cornwall determined to write a novel that nobody would ever turn into a film, just to ensure myself that I wasn't becoming solely a scriptwriter, which I did. It was a novel called *Cordelia* and to my surprise that was the first book which made an entry into the American market and it sold 540,000 copies in hardback in America. That was in 1950. I had six novels made into films. Three of them were quite close to the originals, three varied enormously – I mean, some were so distant that one could hardly recognise the novels. Others like the Hitchcock film had enormous differences which I didn't agree with and didn't like.

Did it make you angry?

Yes, it did, but I felt that a professional writer writes a novel and any attempt to alter that novel by one comma is something that he must resent and refuse to accept with all his might, but once a novel is sold to a film company, a novelist cannot then break his heart over something that is happening in another medium. It's part of the professional hazard, as it were.

So you've become very philosophical about this. In the early days, would it have worried you a lot more?

Oh no, this was fairly well in the early days – well, not so far ... the Hitchcock was 1963, I think. Before that there was an earlier novel that was very badly distorted,² but I think I've been philosophical in that respect all along. I've cried all the way to the bank.

Looking back on your career as a writer, what do you think of your first works?
The first five?

Well, I don't like them at all. A carpenter, an ordinary carpenter who hasn't been trained spends his time learning to use his planes and whatever the

other tools are and a writer such as myself who has never been trained and had no sort of tuition or any particular literary background, except plenty of books to go at, also has to learn to use his pen, and these books were books which I think are – show too much evidence of a failure of sheer technical ability. There's nothing particularly wrong with the stories except that they're just, I think, badly written and I won't allow them to be republished because so often in my life I've come across a book, perhaps in a library by someone and thought "This is a marvellous book" and I've gone next time on a railway journey and bought a paperback in a stall and got on the train and thought "Gosh, this is terrible!" and I looked it up and discovered that it was published about 25 years ago and was one of this man's early works, not worth reading, and I don't think that should happen to me.

I believe you take between eighteen months and two years to complete any individual novel. Do you describe yourself as a perfectionist?

Yes, I suppose I am. They vary. I suppose the shortest I've done was about eleven months but the most was three years – *The Grove of Eagles* and *Angell, Pearl and Little God* both took me three years. I think I am in the sense that I hate to let it go. Once the book is written then there's endless rewriting to be done and that part I can go on with quite happily, but the thought of letting it go without one more read-through and one more checking and one more adjustment of adjectives or cutting out of adverbs, this is something that I find very difficult to allow to happen.

When you're writing, are you totally absorbed in the idea and the environment in which you're writing or do you have an imaginary reader that you always bear in mind?

I have myself. When I'm reading a book I get very easily bored and if I'm writing for myself then I tend to be afraid of boring myself so I think the only reader I consult is myself. Once the book is published or written then I naturally hope other people will like it, but I think it's much more a subjective judgement at the time.

Are you the sort of person when reading somebody else's work, the sort of person who will notice the little mistakes? And they stand out?

I'm not, I suppose, so terribly critical. I think that there are certain things which immediately put me off – the overuse of adverbs is one of them which

I detest very much in anybody's writing – but I think, on the whole, I make allowances because I know it's such a jolly hard job.

Would you advise any young writer these days to set out in the way that you set out at the age of eighteen or nineteen determined to become a professional writer and just setting down to do it?

I don't think any writer worthy of his salt needs advice or anything else. I think that if he's got the urge within him he'll do it irrespective of anything that I or anybody else might say. It's extremely difficult to get one's name known. I was lucky in the sense that I had very little difficulty in getting my books published³ but I had a great deal of difficulty in getting any sort of a public, and this was the time of disillusion and disappointment – for quite a number of years when I was publishing novels and was known as a novelist and yet nobody much was buying them. I suppose I should add a particular tribute to the publisher⁴ who on those occasions still went on merrily publishing them.

* * * * *

NOTES

¹ *Seven Suspected*, first performed in Perranporth on 30 May 1933

² *The Sleeping Partner*, which was filmed in Brazil and released in South America as *Sócio de Alcova* and the USA as *Carnival of Crime*

³ WG glosses over the extreme difficulty he had in getting his first novel accepted for publication. Only after that did things go more smoothly.

⁴ Ward, Lock & Co, Ltd

* * * * *

Winston Graham Goes A Second Round

by Joan Geoghegan, *Opelousas (Louisiana) Daily World*, 25 June 1978

Author Winston Graham achieved notoriety in the U.S. as the author of the Masterpiece Theatre series "Poldark." As of June 4, "Poldark II," a second instalment of adventures of Ross Poldark, also written by Graham, is running for thirteen consecutive Sunday nights on the Public Broadcasting Service.

Slightly bruised from an argument in [\[with?\]](#) a London cab, the greying Mr. Graham ushered us into his New York City hotel suite with his left hand. Luckily, he joked, he wasn't planning on signing any autographs.

Winston Graham did not write the Poldark series for television. Rather, he wrote four novels – "Ross Poldark," "Demelza," "Jeremy Poldark" and "Warleggan" – from 1947 (*sic*) to 1953. He explained:

"I wrote the four books back in the ice age. They completed a cycle: the relationship between Ross and Elizabeth. It's the story of a man who is deprived of the woman he loves, then discovers, once he has her, that he is really in love with his wife."

His inspiration for the Poldark family saga came from his home soil. "I was rather an ailing young man," he said. "My family moved to Cornwall when I was seventeen. When I was nineteen, my father died. Mother, fortunately, had a small private income, and she staked me for a few years.

"Writing worked very quickly for me. I had no difficulty in getting my first book published. I did have the greatest difficulty in finding readers.

"I'd been in Cornwall a number of years. I love sand and sea and cliffs. It took me a while to get to know the Cornish people and for them to get to know me. They're a rather clannish Celtic race.

"I read history and found that eighteenth-century Cornwall was more important. They had forty-four members of Parliament as opposed to five now. However, they were all 'rotten boroughs' owned by the gentry.

"Any writer uses what he is and where he is," continued Mr. Graham. Since he was living in Cornwall, its people, its history and its landscape became the Poldark novels.

Are the characters in the Poldark series based on real people?

Mr Graham answered: "Elizabeth and George are based on people I knew. Most are composite characters. I got Ross's appearance sitting on a

train opposite an aircraft pilot with a scar on his cheek. He had the melancholy air, which Poldark exudes.

"There are exact parallels to Elizabeth and George, but no one is exactly parallel to Ross Poldark."

After the first four novels were published, Mr. Graham went back to writing modern novels. However, the Poldark series never went out of print, and the author continued to receive letters begging for a continuation of the saga.

In 1963 he published a history (*sic*) of sixteenth-century Cornwall, then wrote "The Walking Stick," "Angell, Pearl and Little God" and "Marnie" (*sic*), which Alfred Hitchcock made into a movie.

In returning to the Poldark series he decided: "It would never be the same Poldark, but going back and trying again was like fighting¹ the sound barrier. It took five years to write the second series – 'The Black Moon,' 'The Four Swans' and 'The Angry Tide.' All are united by the theme of the parentage of Elizabeth's child."

Winston Graham had just finished "The Four Swans" when the BBC made a series of the first four books.

He wasn't involved in the production of the first series and admitted, "I didn't approve of certain changes in the beginning and the ending. They were historically impossible. Burning of Trenwith would never have happened in England, nor did you ever see Cornish people turned out of their lands."

With the second Poldark series, however, Mr. Graham made it a condition that he have script approval.

"I didn't write the scripts because I was working on the third novel. I did drive very carefully when I was abroad." He feared that a sudden death would precipitate an inaccurate production.

Although he was dissatisfied with some aspects of the first "Poldark" series, he conceded: "I shouldn't shoot the first series down. It was a tremendous success."

However, once he finished "The Angry Tide" in March of 1977, he travelled to the BBC's Cornwall location to oversee the entire shooting of "Poldark II."

He raved at the BBC's technical expertise and insisted that every last person was dedicated to his job.

"In the first episode Ross comes back from the war. He is riding home in a red cloak and a hat worn Wellington-style, pointing forward. The day

after the scene was shot, the research girl discovered hats were worn Napoleon-style, pointing sideways, at that time. They re-shot the entire scene."

Are any of his other works up for a Masterpiece Theatre production?

Mr. Graham answered that many of his modern novels were made into films and very little material remains available for television. However, his novel, "The Tumbled House," was just bought by Granada Television in England for a miniseries-type production. If American viewers are lucky, the show may find its way to U.S. TV.

Since viewer response was responsible for the second "Poldark" series, will rave reviews of "Poldark II" precipitate a "Poldark III"?

"I think I've been working too hard," Winston Graham responded. "I wrote four novels in the sixties; a history of the Anglo-Spanish War, short stories and five novels in the seventies – also a play, which will be produced in Salisbury, England, this October."

And, no, he doesn't think there will be any more "Poldark" novels forthcoming.

"Poldark II" takes place between 1794 and 1799, and features the swashbuckling hero struggling with the corrupt Warleggan in Cornwall, and as a Truro representative in Parliament, struggling for social reform.

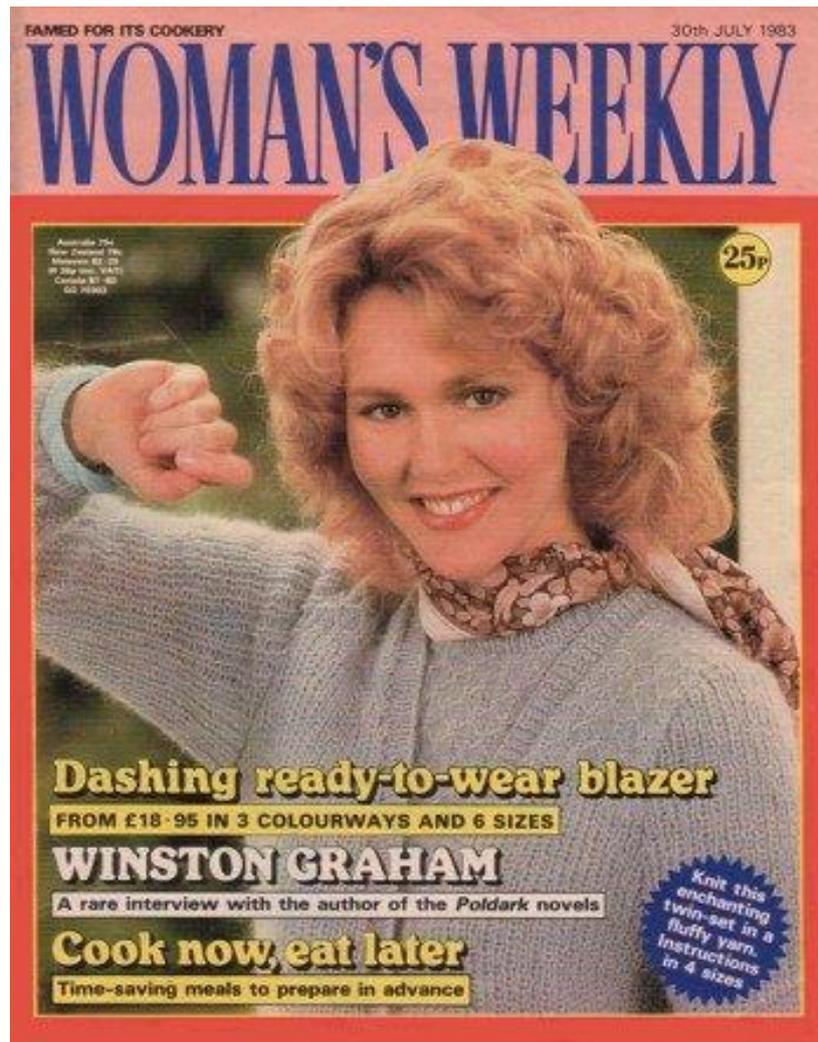
Winston Graham insists that Captain Ross Poldark is not too good to be true. "People in Parliament were trying very hard. There were people like Ross. Some of Ross's battle for penal reform was taken directly from Howard's book of 'Penal Reform.'"

The understated, greying author may be a citizen of the twentieth century, but he clearly admitted, "Ross reflected the ideas of the author looking back on the day."

Winston Graham has given his readers and viewers a romantic hero who champions the underdog and rights social wrongs. Ross Poldark is a refreshing addition to the 1978 season.

¹ Ms Geoghegan wrote "fighting" but the word WG probably used (as on several other occasions) was "breaking"

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The Poldark Author

Winston Graham gives a rare and fascinating interview to Ian Woodward – and we meet the prolific writer whose work has had worldwide success

When veteran Hollywood star Van Johnson was in the West of England last year making the television series, *The Forgotten Story*, based on the novel by Winston Graham, the actor and the author met for the first time. The impulsive, extrovert American put his arms round the publicity-shy English creator of the Poldark books and kissed him.

"But you look so young," said Johnson. "I thought you were dead!"

"A lot of people do," replied the author, rising to the occasion with equal good humour.

Winston Graham, certainly, is alive and well and living in considerable comfort on his twelve-acre estate in Sussex, where he is at work on his tenth Poldark novel. At the front door he repeats (playfully) what he had said two days earlier on the telephone.

"This is the first interview I've given in five or six years. It's not something I customarily do. You're going to be responsible about it, aren't you?"

He leads the way into an elegantly furnished reception room, which has a winter's chill about it. He switches on one bar of a three-bar electric fire which, under the circumstances, makes very little difference to the room temperature. Condensation clings to the panes of the Georgian window like snow on a Dickensian Christmas card.

"Why," one asks the best-selling author well-known for his aversion to publicity, "why have you made it almost a life's vocation to shy away from the Press?"

"First of all," he answers, "because their observations are often quite wrong, which I don't mind so much, and because their memory is frequently haywire and they twist things round in their heads."

"Would your publisher like you to do more publicity?"

"Oh, yes. My first publisher often said, 'If you don't like publicity, you've chosen the wrong profession'."

"Graham Greene won't give interviews at all."

"No, he won't. I rather agree with that. Max Reinhardt, who publishes us both, says it's unnecessary for authors to be publicised in any way. This will certainly be my last interview for goodness knows how long." A faint curlicue of a smile. "You caught me off guard when you telephoned. I'm rarely caught off guard."

Winston Graham, tall, balding, straight-backed, resembles an affable but business-like bank manager on his day off. Wearing a brown checked sports jacket displaying a pinkish silk handkerchief from the breast pocket, an ochre silk tie set against a yellowish-brown shirt, and fawn trousers with

knife-edge creases, the author of *Ross Poldark*, *Demelza* and *Warleggan* has indeed just returned from a round or two at his local golf club.

"Nothing could be better for a writer," he says. "Clears the head of intrusive clutter."



The seven-bedroomed mansion which he shares with his wife, Jean (above, with Winston), comprises several once-adjoining houses and cottages which, through the centuries, have gradually been converted into one multi-faceted, multi-directional property. It is perched halfway up a gentle hill and commands a splendid view of the neighbouring countryside.

The room in which we are sitting, although adorned with several oil paintings, is most conspicuous for its many framed photographs of the Graham family – of daughter Rosamund and her three children, and son Andrew, a university don. Their faces beam down at you from every angle. "I am at my happiest," he tells you, "with my family around me."

As Rosamund is married to an American and lives in California, his happiness would seem to be governed by the price of a return air ticket. Yet he seems to be ridiculously contented. His life is certainly well-ordered, with milk and honey blessed.

He has always specialised in the writing of two very different types of books: the modern suspense (or thriller) and the historical novel set in Cornwall. All his modern novels have either been filmed (*Take My Life*, *Night Without Stars*, *Fortune is a Woman*, *The Sleeping Partner*, *Marnie*, *The Walking Stick*), been bought but not yet filmed (*The Forgotten Story*, *The Merciless Ladies*, *Angell*, *Pearl and Little God*), or had options taken out to film them (*The Tumbled House*, *After the Act*). Way back in 1967 the film rights for *The Walking Stick* brought its author a reputed £80,000.

Almost all his books, too, have enjoyed phenomenal sales and been translated into fifteen languages, not least the Poldark sagas, set in eighteenth-century Cornwall and chronicling the adventures of squire Ross Poldark. He is a rich man – which is why as late into his life as ten years ago he was finding it somewhat ironic to have to describe himself as "the most successful unknown writer in England".

And then, between 1975 and 1977, BBC Television adapted the swash-buckling Cornish novels into two series: twenty-nine episodes. *Poldark* became a world-wide hit, made stars of Robin Ellis, Angharad Rees, Jill Townsend and Ralph Bates – and put Winston Graham's name firmly on the tongues of the British people. For, until then, Britain had been virtually the last country to recognise the author's talents, certainly in terms of number of books sold. And yet, since the war, he has made more money from his books than practically any other resident author – *Marnie* alone, twenty-two years ago, sold two and a half million copies in eight countries in a single year.

"Oh, yes," he says, shovelling two large spoonfuls of glucose into his tea, "the Poldark television series made me immeasurably better known in my own country. Although it didn't greatly alter my circumstances, it did change my life slightly. I'd been making a very good living up until then, though three-quarters of my income came from America. Nearly all the films were either American-financed or American-made, and the books themselves were disposed of in great numbers through book clubs and various other sources in the United States. Therefore, I was very happy in my life. Then *Poldark* was shown on television, and the series completely made my reputation here. The result is that a great deal more of my income now comes from England. My name is known now in the British Isles. 'Poldark' is almost a household name. Everybody knows who Poldark is or was, and I find that very pleasant."

He peers into the middle distance. "It's very nice," he affirms, "to be known in one's own country. One now feels complete."

That completeness was vindicated a few months ago when, in the New Year's honours list, he was awarded the OBE.

"I was pleased and gratified," he says quietly. "I'd like a few more authors to get that sort of thing, though so few do. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that members of the government, or whoever decides these things, go to the theatre more often than they read books."

Winston Mawdsley Graham was born and raised in Manchester's middle class suburb of Victoria Park, the son of a prosperous wholesale chemist. The firm was called D. Mawdsley & Co. and was started by Winston's maternal grandfather. When Winston was seventeen, his father had a stroke and was forced to retire and the family moved to Cornwall.

The impressionable young man fell in love with the place the moment he arrived there, although he also endured a painful period of re-adjustment. "It was a period of considerable isolation," he recounts today. "We'd left all our friends behind, all our roots; and then, less than two years later, my father died. My mother and my older brother and I lived together for a little while, and we used to go for long walks. I observed things."

At this time there were quite a lot of old Cornish miners still alive, and he talked to them – sat and listened to them. He became interested in dialect. So he studied that, plus local history.

"I was rather a rickety young man," he says. "I had pneumonia twice, as well as things like tonsillitis and bronchitis. My mother knew there was only one thing I wanted to do, which was write. She had her own private income, and she told me: 'If you want to write novels, I'll support you for a few years.' That was a tremendous, wonderful privilege for an apprentice writer. If one had actually been earning a living, the sheer effort of having to write 'after hours' would have been an awful struggle. Without this financial support, I would probably have got there in the end, but it would have taken a lot longer."

His day-to-day existence was comforting and comfortable. He either wrote or played tennis, and some days he even did both. "I was tremendously ingrowing as a young man," he confesses. "I've only outgrown, if ever I have outgrown, since I grew up, got married and had children. I very much kept myself to myself. I was entirely bookish: I adored the works of Maugham, Galsworthy, Graham Greene, Arnold Bennett, Rosamond Lehmann, and Quiller-Couch. I misspent my youth playing tennis, too, because you had nobody to let down but yourself. I was always terrified, when I was young, of making a duck, missing a kick, and somebody else shouting 'What have you done that for?' If you play a bloomer at tennis, if you're playing singles, you only have yourself to blame. Nobody else can shout at you."

To those around him, during the years of apprenticeship, he was regarded as a member of the idle rich. The need to earn a penny, although desirable, was never essential. He had time to expand and explore his literary intellect.

"I was looked upon as being a bit shiftless," he says with an openness that smacks less of candour than guilt. "Anyway, if I'd said in those days that I wanted to be a novelist everybody would have hooted with laughter. Novelists who made a living out of writing just weren't heard of in the extreme south-west of England. There was Joseph Hocking, but he was about sixty-six, and there was Quiller-Couch, who was about the same age;

it was all right for elderly gentlemen. Everybody thought it would be quite impossible for me ever to make a living out of writing. To write a novel was 'not quite done'. It was something which retired schoolteachers or university professors did in their old age.

"It was purely because of my mother's faith in me that I persevered – but then mothers do have these extraordinary beliefs in their children. I somehow managed to succeed in my chosen craft – I've done nothing else but write for a living – but it was very rash of her."

He was twenty-one when he wrote his first book, twenty-three when it was published. Another four novels followed. But Winston Graham is not especially proud of them, and won't even tell me what they were called. "I don't allow anybody to see them these days," he explains simply. "They haven't been reprinted and they'll never be reprinted. When I wrote them I was like a carpenter who used tools without having any guidance. But those five books were a tremendous asset to me at the time. They showed that I was no longer a 'do nothing'. I was seen to be doing something."

Night Journey appeared in 1941, followed by *The Forgotten Story* and *Ross Poldark* four years later. From this point on, Winston Graham has known nothing but success – an all-too-easy phrase to use, but in this case it is no exaggeration. He himself admits that most of his novels "have hit some sort of jackpot".

"There's always been a kind of joke attached to the title of my first successful book," he says. "I once said to my agent, when I was a young man, 'What's happened to *The Forgotten Story*?' and he said 'It's forgotten!' It's been a continuous joke ever since. The truth of the matter is that it's never been forgotten. It's never been out of print since it was first published. It was bought as a film by Gainsborough Studios in the ice age, though it was never made; and this year we've seen the television series. So I've done pretty well out of it."

For a short period, soon after finishing *Ross Poldark*, he was discovered by the film industry, which thought he possessed all the potential of a great screenwriter. They gave him a flat in London and a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce. The flirtation lasted fifteen months and ended in mutual disaff-

ection. Although *Take My Life* achieved much acclaim as a film, he came to the conclusion that if he stayed on as a script-writer he would produce novels like potential scripts. Returning to Cornwall, he was determined to write a novel that nobody would want to film. *Cordelia* sold more than half a million copies in America; *Fortune is a Woman* did nearly as well. "I suddenly became independent of England for the mainstay of my livelihood," he says. "From now on I began to depend more and more on my American market for other books. The sale of film rights to my books has also been a wonderful bonus." The ninth "Poldark" saga, *The Miller's Dance*, came out last December. The tenth Cornish novel, still on the drawing board and still without a title, will be published next year. And then?

"The number ten is a nice round figure," he says. "I think it will then be time to finish writing about the Poldarks and Warleggans. It will be thirteen years since my last modern novel was published, which is pretty grim to contemplate."

It is the modern novel, he explains, that has always attracted the film industry, certainly as far as his own experience is concerned. *Marnie*, about a girl whose early life had turned her into a compulsive thief and an emotional block of ice, became a highly successful Hitchcock film with Tippi Hedren in the title rôle. *The Walking Stick*, which tells the story of a doctor's daughter who works for a big firm of art dealers and finds herself involved in a major art theft, received fine performances from Samantha Eggar and David Hemmings in the eventual film. So why, despite the fine track record of modern thrillers, has none of his Poldark books reached the big screen? "There have been one or two attempts," he explains. "About seven or eight years before the Poldark series, Associated British Pictures envisaged turning the books into a sort of Cornish *Gone with the Wind*. We had an excellent script, but the film would have run to about five hours. They considered cutting it to about three and a half hours. But to compress the first four books into that sort of timescale would have meant butchering the stories. It fell through eventually, chiefly for financial reasons. So until television came along there really wasn't the ideal medium for the books.

"The BBC made a beautiful job of adapting the books for television, and it was very well cast. Robin Ellis in particular, as Ross Poldark, was as near as

one could possibly get to the character – in fact, he was altogether better than one would have dared to hope. He was an enormous asset to the series, this dynamic, handsome, lanky figure."

The poster for the Poldark series still hangs in his study, along with signed paintings and photographs of the actresses and actors who have appeared in the television and cinema adaptations of his books. "Meet my repertory company," he says as he shows you around the large room, brightly illuminated by fluorescent lighting.

The room has a well-ordered chaos about it. Copies of all his books line the shelves. Proofs of his next book, *Poldark's Cornwall* (published this month by The Bodley Head), lie on his desk. There is an electric typewriter, though he still writes everything longhand, always rewriting his novels completely "after a month of misery."

After twenty-one years residence there, he still calls the house "my pride and joy". The family moved there after living in Cornwall for more than two decades. "I have a great love of the sun," he says, "and back in 1960 we decided to go and live in the South of France. So we sold our house in Cornwall, stored all our furniture, and, with two children, a few books and things, went down to Cap Ferrat in two cars. We rented a villa and for a while I rather liked this new way of life. But I couldn't put down roots in France at all; I'm a very bad linguist. I found the sun, which is such a friend in England, too oppressive: this enormous weight of the sun on you all day. At the time I was re-writing an historical novel, *The Grove of Eagles*, about sixteenth-century Cornwall, and I found myself a bit out of touch with sources. So we came back home. But I felt it was a bit of a confession of defeat to leave and, ten months later, to return, and so we thought we'd try the only other county in England which attracted me, which was Sussex. We lived in a nearby house for fifteen months, and we loved the area so much that we began to look at other properties. A friend of ours said 'Come and look at Lady Gossage's place. It's a beautiful house.' After we'd had a look round the place, I said to my wife: 'If anybody thinks I'm going to buy that broken-down old ruin, they're very much mistaken!' But having spent another three months looking at infinitely more broken-down properties, we came back to Lady Gossage's house. Her husband was Sir Frederick Gossage, who was in charge of barrage balloons during the war."

Winston talked to an architect and a builder. It had "possibilities", they said. On their advice he went ahead and bought the rambling mansion, the earliest part of which had been built in the eighteenth century – the period of the Poldark books.



WG in his garden

"It's a curious house. From some views, it's still hideous on the outside, but inside it's not bad. It all centres round the main hall. It's not really a difficult house to run, although it's probably biggish for two people."

Among the amenities of the twelve acres of ground ("semi-meadow, semi-lawn") are a tennis court and a heated swimming-pool. The setting is best described as tranquil. If it were not for the wind, you could hear a pin drop.

"I'm disappointing to most Sussex people," he then tells you, "because I'm not particularly a horsey man – and Sussex is a great county for horses. But I love to potter in the garden, and get in a round of golf, and, when the weather's kind, swim in the pool. The tranquillity of the place is very congenial, though it's not essential to my job as a writer. When I was hauled into the film industry, I had an office at the end of a corridor which looked out into a courtyard, and I found it difficult to concentrate because it was so quiet. Now back in Cornwall I had a writing-room which looked out over the front lawn, and the two children would be playing cricket out there and it wouldn't disturb me in the slightest. Having said that, I don't have the greatest concentration: I'm very easily diverted. If we ever left this house, one of the things I would certainly look for would be quietness, with enough room to roam around. I've been used to space.

"I go back to Cornwall two or three times a year. As a writer of Cornish novels, these visits are quite essential. I could never have embarked on the Poldark books without knowing Cornwall, and I've got it in my blood now. It will always be my spiritual home. I think we probably would have gone back to Cornwall to live years ago, but my wife has asthma and she finds that the dryer atmosphere of Sussex suits her much better. So Cornwall as a permanent dwelling-place must be ruled out."

He admits that he constantly seeks Jean's advice about plots and chapters and other literary problems. He even says that he is a better writer for being married to her.

"I often talk over problems with her," says Winston, "and sometimes she's able to suggest a definite solution, and sometimes just talking to her helps me to find a solution. She's the only person I ever discuss my novels with. I never discuss them with my agent, my publisher, or anybody else. Ideally," he adds, "it would be better if nobody saw the novels at all. I'm always very reluctant to let them go. I hang on to them until the very last minute, because, once they go, I always feel they're out of my hands.

"I'm always embarrassed on the publication day – the fact that strangers are reading my innermost thoughts, whether they are thoughts of love or thoughts of murder. It's something that comes out of me and, in a way, I would prefer to keep those thoughts private."

His pleasures, he then divulges, 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 ("because Jean is more musical than I am").

"I still do a lot of surfing," he says.

"Surfing?"

"Oh, yes; 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. No, I don't stand up like the surfers in Hawaii and eastern Australia!

"I've got a lot about surfing in *Poldark'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."

As we walk to the door he says: "My whole life has been devoted to writing novels; apart from a single play and a volume of short stories, I've done nothing else. I've never even had any stop-gap jobs. But you learn a lot just by living. You don't have to go to Paris to 'live'. Over the years I have developed the ability to get into other backgrounds. What keeps me writing is the simple fact that I wouldn't be happy if I weren't writing. I wrote a lot yesterday, but I don't write for great lengths of time these days: it may only be two or three hours a day. I laze with the greatest of ease. If I get on the beach in Cornwall or the South of France, there's no sense of irritation because I'm doing nothing. But after a period, particularly if one is at home," says the very alive Winston Graham, "I feel I want to have something to show for having been alive that day."

Poldark 10 is in good hands.

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40 Years On – Remembering VE Day

In a two-page feature in *Woman's Weekly*, 11 May 1985, Beryl Reid, Brian Johnston, Frank Thornton, Magnus Pyke, Norman Wisdom, Ludovic Kennedy, Ivy Benson and Winston Graham were asked to recall how they spent VE (Victory in Europe) Day, 8 May 1945. Here is what WG told Ian Woodward:

I was on leave in London with my wife on VE day and that evening we went out into the streets to join in the celebrations but we got

*caught in the crowd somewhere in Whitehall. There were hordes of people in a very narrow area under an archway, and there were people pushing from one area and people resisting from the other end, and there were two or three policemen who seemed helpless. We just had to hope we wouldn't get crushed to death – it was a very frightening experience for such a wonderful, momentous occasion. My emotions on VE day were very much like those in a famous newspaper cartoon of the period in which all the evil beasts of the night were being banished from our battered land and sunshine was coming out again, at last. I hadn't been writing at all during the war,¹ but not long after VE day my novel *The Forgotten Story* was published.²*

¹ A strange thing to say, since *Night Journey* (1941), *My Turn Next* (1942), *The Merciless Ladies* (1944), *The Forgotten Story* and *Ross Poldark* (both 1945) were all written wholly or partly during the war.

² *The Forgotten Story* was published in February 1945, three months before VE day.

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THE MASTER OF POLDARK

Author Winston Graham waits in the wings for a new Ross and Demelza to hit our TV screens

Winston Graham is enjoying our attempt to find a piece of Kent coastline which resembles the granite cliffs of Cornwall. The writer of the Poldark novels has a dry sense of humour and as we drive up to yet another sweep of chalky white rock face, he points out amiably that Cornwall's crags are usually black.

The idea is to photograph Graham somewhere Cornish-looking. His latest novel, *Tremor*, is set in Morocco, but he is best known for the historical tales of the Cornish Poldark family. It is a world of smuggling and saucy wenches to which a whole new generation will be introduced when HTV puts out a Christmas special which has yet to be scheduled.

Graham had a hip replacement earlier this year and is not in the first flush of youth, so we try to cheat by finding somewhere nearer home. "If you'd asked me, maybe I could have thought of somewhere," he says.

Graham is secretive about his age, but he was already a well-established and well-paid novelist and screenwriter by the time the BBC series of his Poldark books made him a household name in the Seventies. By 1962, he had earned enough to leave his beloved Cornwall to become a tax exile in France. "I didn't put down any roots at all, I didn't feel happy. I decided I'd rather be taxed in England than bored abroad."

He came to Cornwall at the age of seventeen when his family moved from Manchester to improve his father's health. The young Winston was bedevilled with pneumonia throughout his childhood, supplementing his patchy education with voracious reading. "I discovered the public library and read a novel a day for years."

Once in Cornwall, he started writing and never looked back. "I'd wanted to write all my life, to tell stories because I loved reading them." However critical he is of his early work, he had a natural gift for old-fashioned storytelling and believable characters. His knack for dialogue meant they translated well to the big screen. *Marnie* was made into a film by Hitchcock with Sean Connery trying to cure Tippi Hedren of frigidity.

"I didn't like the film at all; the story was distorted and a lot of subtler points were lost. When it came out, the critics disliked it, but now they look

on it as one of the most important of Hitchcock's canon. God knows why. I remember Hitchcock complaining about the cost of using Sean Connery."

Forthright as ever, he doesn't mince his words about the first *Poldark* television programmes. "I didn't like the series, they destroyed the character. I'd made a great study of eighteenth-century dialogue to get the language correct and they said things like 'You must be joking.' I made a fuss and the second series was more faithful."

Colin Firth may have been setting female viewers' hearts aflutter in the recent series of *Pride and Prejudice*, but two decades ago Robin Ellis was doing an equally stirring job, striding about in tight breeches, tempted by the charms of the spirited guttersnipe Demelza and the delicate, vapid Elizabeth.

Graham has no doubts about his books' appeal. "They were romantic, which is a four-letter word in the ears of the critics." Yet, although passions may lurk, you won't get creaking bedsprings in his work. "I just think it is more effective when it is not all spelled out."

Behind the plunging necklines was a solid historical context. Graham read *The Times* and the local Cornish newspapers from the 1790s, contemporary diaries, chronicles and sermons. So if he says characters rise at cocklight and sleep at cockshut, that's probably how they described it themselves.

The original *Poldark* series finished when the BBC ran through the first seven books and Graham said he had written all he wanted to. Yet, five years later, he found himself returning to the characters, writing four novels taking up the story of Ross, now an MP in London, and the new generation. HTV finally revived the characters, producing the peak-time Christmas special to test the water for a series next year. At first it was reported that the original stars, Robin Ellis and Angharad Rees, would play Ross and Demelza, but bosoms were well and truly heaving at the Poldark Society when John Bowe, of *Prime Suspect*, and Mel Martin, of *Lovejoy*, were cast instead.

Winston Graham is in a difficult position because he didn't have any say in the casting and he knows the original actors, particularly Angharad Rees. He treads carefully. "I met the two new people and I find them very good actors and very charming and delightful and I'm entirely behind them."

He went on location for the HTV special and produces snapshots of a ball scene shot in Bath. Still observant and interested in people, you suspect

he is a little lonely since the death of his wife, Jean, and may welcome the diversion of going on set.

He and Jean met in Cornwall and were married for fifty-three years. "We met at church – very respectable. I was nineteen and I just thought she was a nice schoolgirl. It was some years before it became something more."

He still lives in the large house they used to share in the Home Counties, with a swimming pool and tennis court. It is full of beautiful antiques, paintings and photographs, including one of Graham standing next to Charlie Chaplin as they both stand as godfather to theatrical producer¹ Max Reinhardt's child. Graham and Jean's son Andrew is a fellow at Balliol College, Oxford and daughter Rosamund is married with three children and lives in California.

The couple used to travel at least three times a year, visiting Morocco in the early sixties after the earthquake which decimated the city of Agadir. It inspired his latest novel, *Tremor*, about an ill-matched assortment of people whose lives are changed by the disaster.

Graham says he has always been a romantic. "I have a dry sense of humour, but so did Jean. She could reply in a flash – and yes – certain things about Jean went into Demelza's character, particularly her gamine sense of humour and ability to find happiness in small things. We both swore that if one lived longer than the other, as one obviously would, that the one left would live life to the utmost and I've been doing so."

Although he says he will never write another Poldark novel, another contemporary novel is starting to form in his head. Meanwhile, Poldark enthusiasts from the Seventies, pining for the Ross of old, can be of brave heart. From Graham's snapshots on set, actor Nick Gleaves who plays the stranger from the sea, stealing the heart of Ross and Demelza's beautiful daughter Clowance (Kelly Reilly), cuts as dashing a figure as Ross did.

¹ Ms Hinton has confused two men of the same name – the Austrian-born American theatrical producer (1873-1943) and WG's friend and publisher (1915-2002) were not related.

Victoria Hinton, *Daily Express*, 18 November 1995

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Cornish Steam

After considerable delay, HTV's *Poldark* (an adaptation of *The Stranger from the Sea*) was scheduled for broadcast on the ITV Network on 2 October 1996. This background "mini-interview" of WG by Jennifer Selway was published in *The Observer* on 22 September 1996

Remember *Poldark*, that seventies TV favourite? Well, now it's back. But the Poldark Appreciation Society is not happy that HTV has dropped original stars Robin Ellis and Angharad Rees (Ross and Demelza). The 5,000-strong society, who love visiting old Cornish locations, took to picketing HTV's offices.

Winston Graham, 84, writer of *Poldark* (and also *Marnie*, filmed by Hitchcock), finds himself at the centre of the row.

Is it true that the ITV Network thought the new, two-hour *Poldark* so dreadful that it refused to screen it last Christmas?

It was just a horrible rumour. It simply wasn't ready.

It sounds as though the Poldark Appreciation Society appreciates the old BBC series rather than your books.

It does seem to be that way. After the first BBC series in 1975 I said they couldn't do a second series unless they changed the scriptwriter, the director and the producer.

It seems TV can take all kinds of liberties with classical literature, but when it comes to *Poldark* ... Do you mind the way the novels are designated as popular fiction?

A little. And please don't refer to them as "bodice-rippers". It's a term I dislike. I've always said I'll give £100 to anyone who can find any bodice-ripping in the books.

Are you still president of the Poldark Appreciation Society?

I don't know. I haven't heard from the society for some time.

Would you like to be?

I'm not sure. I'll see what kind of reaction there is to the new film.

[The film was *not* well-received and HTV's tentative plans to produce the ninth, tenth and eleventh Poldark novels were dropped.]

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From the *Sussex Express*, 28 October 1977 – see pp. 26-27

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A Cornish cliffhanger

An off-screen row has eclipsed the on-screen drama of the latest version of 'Poldark'

THIS should have been the happiest of times for that troubled Cornishman Ross Poldark. Over the past 50 years he has survived every manner of disaster, from war, near bankruptcy, the closure of his mine and a threatened hanging at Bodmin Assizes to become a distinguished MP and the patriarch of a proud dynasty.

His adventures began in 1945, with the publication of Winston Graham's *Ross Poldark: A Novel of Cornwall 1783-1787*, the first of 11 bestsellers; in the Seventies he was known as the sexiest man on television, when his two 12-part BBC series became required viewing for an audience of 15 million (in Cornwall, the saga proved so popular that churches rescheduled their evensong services on Sunday nights); on video, his exploits have outsold every costume drama save *Pride and Prejudice*.

And now HTV has made a new Poldark film, *The Stranger from the Sea*, to be shown this Wednesday, in which Ross Poldark might have stood fair to win the hearts of a fresh generation of ardent fans. Instead, he faces the worst crisis of his career.

Each episode of the original series presented viewers with a new cliffhanger. Would Ross be able to save his estates and mines from arch rivals the Warleggans?

Would he regain the heart of his estranged wife Elizabeth? Or would he succumb to the charms of his saucy servant girl, Demelza? Smuggling, adultery, mining disasters, betrayal, political intrigue, fist fights, shoot-outs, wigs, heaving embonpoints and tight breeches — Poldark had the lot. But now the on-screen drama has been eclipsed by an off-screen row.

HTV stands accused of besmirching Poldark's name and ITV Network Centre has allegedly dismissed him as unsuitable for primetime Christmas viewing. The tabloid press has decided that he is boring ("Poldarrgh!" as one headline put it), and his most loyal supporters, the 5,000 strong Poldark Appreciation Society whose membership extends from St Ives to New Zealand, have all but disowned him. Where did it all go wrong?

Founder of the Poldark Society Val Adams is in no doubt: the troubles began with the fatal decision to film *The Stranger from the Sea* with a completely new cast. Ross will now be played by John Bowe; his wife Demelza by Mel Martin. But according to Adams, "it wouldn't have mattered if they were being played by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh."

For Poldarkian purists, she says, there can only ever be one Ross and Demelza — the sparring duo played in the original BBC

series by Robin Ellis and Angharad Rees. "I've no disrespect for John Bowe," says Adams. "But speaking from a woman's point of view, he has no sex appeal. In Winston Graham's first Poldark book, Ross is described as having 'strongly set cheekbones, wide mouth and large strong white teeth'. Just like Robin. But not a bit like John Bowe." Nor, apparently is Mel Martin up to scratch. "She just hasn't got that twinkle in the eye, that urchin quality that Angharad had."

NO LESS an authority than Winston Graham disagrees. "I'm irritated with the Poldark Society for clinging so obstinately to the original series," he says. "Both Bowe and Ellis are admirable as Ross Poldark and the two ladies are both brilliant as Demelza. I think the new film reflects my book *The Stranger from the Sea* fairly faithfully. It's marvellously well done."

Besides, he says, the original series didn't always stay true to his books. "It drove me mad to begin with because they insisted on changing the character of Demelza." (Such indeed was his disappointment that he would not allow a second series to be made unless the BBC changed the scriptwriter, director and producer.)

"It's no different from lots of actors playing Macbeth or Hamlet," says the film's producer Sally Haynes, conceding nonetheless that both Ellis and Rees were initially approached to play the roles last year before "negotiations broke down", and HTV was forced to recast.

In publicity terms, this may have proved a costly mistake. It led 50 members of the Poldark Society to march, in full 18th century fig, on HTV's headquarters in Bristol. It also prompted whispers that the new Poldark was going to be a pale imitation of the original. At one early preview screening, it was claimed, the audience had either hissed or jeered or fallen asleep. Further, it was no mere coincidence that ITV Network Centre, which had originally scheduled the drama for Christmas Day last year, decided to replace it at the last minute with *Ghost*.

The truth, according to director Richard Laxton, is rather more prosaic. Network Centre is always rescheduling programmes in order to fox the opposition, he says, and besides, it would have made absolutely no sense running the pilot episode of a new drama in a slot traditionally reserved for Hollywood blockbusters and Bond movies. As for that yawn-inducing screening — it was a complete myth. "I know it was, because I hadn't even finished editing it at the time."

Why, then, has *Poldark* — *The Stranger from the Sea* come in for so much stick? "Whenever you revive something like this, you are dealing with a lot of people's prejudiced opinions," says Laxton.

The original series was invariably gripping, and has not really dated (as suggested by sales of 90,000 copies of the first Poldark video). "There was drama for the men and romance for the ladies," enthuses Val Adams. "It appealed to all ages and both sexes, as it still does today. Like all good period drama, it's timeless."



[John Bowe, who plays Ross, with author Winston Graham](#)

Arguably, by modern standards, the production is a mite creaky. There is a distinct shortage of outdoor action sequences (too complicated and expensive); the interior scenes are rather flat and unrealistic (filmed on video in a Birmingham studio, they look more like a play than a film); and some of the acting seems a bit hammy ("Ye're moi daughter and ye'll do what oi tell 'ee").

You realise how daunting the task facing the makers of *The Stranger from the Sea* must have been. Deviate too far from the original and they would inevitably offend that vast, ready-made following acquired by the old series; change it too little and it would look stale, dated and uninviting for newcomers.

LAXTON, whose parents took him on an obligatory trip down a Poldark mine in his youth, and who sat faithfully through all 24 hours of the two BBC Poldark series before making the new film, believes he has got the balance about right. "It's like *Z Cars* and *The Bill*," he says. "One's not stronger than the other. They're just different."

Certainly, Laxton's Poldark is more lavishly realised than the original. Modern audiences would expect no less. "In the Seventies," says Laxton, "television drama was an offshoot of the theatre — several characters talking in a room. Most of it was shot 'as live' on a set, which meant you could film a short

scene in about an hour. But today, people want a more cinematic approach, with plenty of location footage. So scenes that would have taken an hour can now take a whole day to film."

Much of the film's £1.5 million budget went on set-pieces — a hunt, a village fair, a stormy sea voyage — which, in the Seventies, would have been deemed costly and unnecessary.

The acting, too, is more naturalistic. There are moments in the original *Poldark* (no doubt helped by the presence in the cast of Christopher Biggins) which recall the thigh-slapping archness of Restoration comedy. Its successor, on the other hand, is gritty, authentic and decidedly uncamp. It's especially noticeable during the love scenes: in the old version, even the most passionate kisses are executed with closed mouths; in the new one, saliva is exchanged, bodices are ripped and hands wander with lubricious abandon.

No, contrary to popular report,

the new-look *Poldark* is definitely not limp or boring. The action scenes thrill; the sex scenes titillate; the Cornish location shots look magnificent; the acting, by Bowe, Martin and newcomers Kelly Reilly and Ioan Gruffudd is first-rate; and the storyline is as strong as ever. But, as Winston Graham points out, quality has little to do with the current *Poldark* debate. "The problem is that Robin Ellis's Ross and Angharad Rees's Demelza found a special place in many people's hearts. There will be those who'll find it quite difficult to change their allegiance."

Considered objectively, there's every chance *The Stranger from the Sea* will secure the 10 million viewers it needs to guarantee further instalments. But, in the case of a saga as tempestuous and emotive as *Poldark*, objectivity may yet prove a commodity more rare and elusive than veins of copper in the Wheal Grace mine.

James Delingpole, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 1996

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A passion for writing

Winston Graham, writer of psychological thrillers, crime novels and historical sagas, talks to Victoria Kingston in his Sussex home

If you're not a particularly bookish person, perhaps you won't know of the huge diversity of novels by master storyteller Winston Graham; perhaps you won't have read his Cornish romances, his tense thrillers, or realise that he wrote the novel *Marnie* which became an Alfred Hitchcock movie starring Sean Connery and Tippi Hedren. But certainly, you will know the Poldark novels, if not in print, then in the long running, phenomenally popular BBC series which spanned the 1970s. Winston Graham, a resident of East Sussex for the past thirty years, has had a love affair with Cornwall that has lasted all his life and inspired some of his greatest work.

Born in Manchester, he moved to Cornwall at age seventeen because his father's illness necessitated early retirement. Young Winston listened to the fishermen, the old miners, the tales of smuggling. The countryside enchanted him and the people fascinated him. "I don't know whether the eccentrics make Cornwall what it is, or whether Cornwall makes the eccentrics what they are," he told me.

Writing was always his vocation. "I never wanted to do anything else," he says. "I wanted to tell stories. When I was at school, I won a prize or two, and when we moved to Cornwall, I began writing seriously." Two years after the move, when Winston was only nineteen, his father died. "I had been an ailing youth, so my mother staked me in my choice of writing as a career. It was a wonderful act of faith on her part." His first novel was published when he was twenty-three,¹ and made no money, but the publishers still regarded him as a good prospect.

Winston married Jean in 1939 and his writing continued. Then just after the war, he wrote a film script, *Take My Life*, which was bought by Rank Studios. He was called to London and hadn't enough ration coupons to buy a decent suit. Resourcefully, Jean went to Petticoat Lane and bought him one from a market stall. This was the start of his successful career. With the publication of the first Poldark novel, *Ross Poldark*, he had the obligatory flat in London, the secretary, the big car. But the trappings of success were only secondary. "The self-discipline is important," he says. "You need to drive yourself all the time."

The Poldark novels were a huge success – he wrote eleven² in all – and they sold well for some years before the BBC approached him about a series. In a strange situation of life imitating art, Winston was writing the sixth and seventh books while the BBC were filming the second. Millions of people tuned in each week to see Robin Ellis and Angharad Rees in an absorbing and romantic love story, with a staggeringly beautiful Cornish backdrop. The BBC wanted more – and more. Winston told me: "They wanted me to keep writing them, but I couldn't do it. The books all came from inside me. They were not contrived." Soon after, the sale of video recordings of the series broke all records, and the Poldark Appreciation Society was formed, and still has a large membership. The Cornish locals also got caught up in the enthusiasm. Knowing that Winston had based a portion of the plot on historical facts, they all wanted their own ancestors to feature in the books, even if that meant claiming the villains of the piece! "I heard of two prominent Cornish families who were arguing about which of their forefathers were the model for the Warleggans," Winston says with a smile.

Despite his deep love for Cornwall, the Grahams retired to the South of France, but Winston says: "We didn't put down any roots there. We decided to try Sussex. My wife Jean had bad asthma and it cleared up in the Sussex air, so we settled here. We've lived here for thirty years."

Winston's latest novel, *The Ugly Sister*, set just after the Napoleonic wars, is a moving story of Emma Spry who is born with a facial deformity which threatens to wreck all her chances of finding a good husband. Her beautiful sister is the favoured one, and her mother's ambitions lie in her own theatrical aspirations. The novel is written with unflinching honesty and perceptiveness, lyrically depicting the beautiful Cornish landscape that he knows so well.

What is so intriguing in *The Ugly Sister* is that he writes it in the first person, with Emma telling the narrative, thus entering into the internal world of the female mind, something not always done successfully by male authors, but nothing new for Winston Graham. "I like women's company," he says. "And I enjoy listening to them. I am also fascinated by the first person narrative. In *Marnie* it was important to use this because I could betray her without telling the reader her psychological flaws. I was a third of the way through it and I suddenly found it awkward to write about the man/woman relationship, so I abandoned it and wrote it in the third person. I was then writing what she did, and I found it lost its immediacy

and insight. I felt I was too much outside of what was happening. So I went back to the first person narrative and it worked much better this time." He also used the technique for *The Walking Stick*, a novel that was a great commercial success and eventually a film starring Samantha Eggar and David Hemmings.

In *The Ugly Sister*, the house in which the girl grows up is part of the fabric of the novel – and it's a real house. "I'd been looking at Place House at St Mawes for sixty years. I'd seen it empty, seen it during the war – it's a gothic, slightly sinister house. A few years ago, I went to lunch with the Spry family, and I thought I could use their house as a model, but change the name, as Daphne du Maurier did in *Rebecca*. Instead, they said I could use their ancestors and the real names. So the main story is mine, but I use some real people. I had to choose the year in which to set it – and I'm interested in the development of steam in the 1830s, so I chose Emma's birthday as 1812."

It is hard to imagine a writer with more diversity of material to his name. Winston Grhama has written psychological thrillers, crime novels and historical sagas, all of which he enjoys. "I like change. I always find the impulse to write again if I write something different. The thriller has a strong structure, with taut sentences. With something like Poldark, it's a different technique – you can spread yourself more." In every sense, he has become a great storyteller, a modern classic. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and in 1983 he was awarded the OBE. At the same time, he is very modest, a man of quiet humour, somewhat bemused by the fame he has acquired through the writing he loves.

With such diversity in his repertoire, where will he go next, I asked him. "I like to take time off," he admitted. "At the moment, I'm an empty well." I pointed out that he could go anywhere he liked from this point. "Yes," he said. "That's true. But what I don't want to do is go nowhere." Somehow, I find that prospect very unlikely.

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¹ It was published in 1934, when he was twenty-six

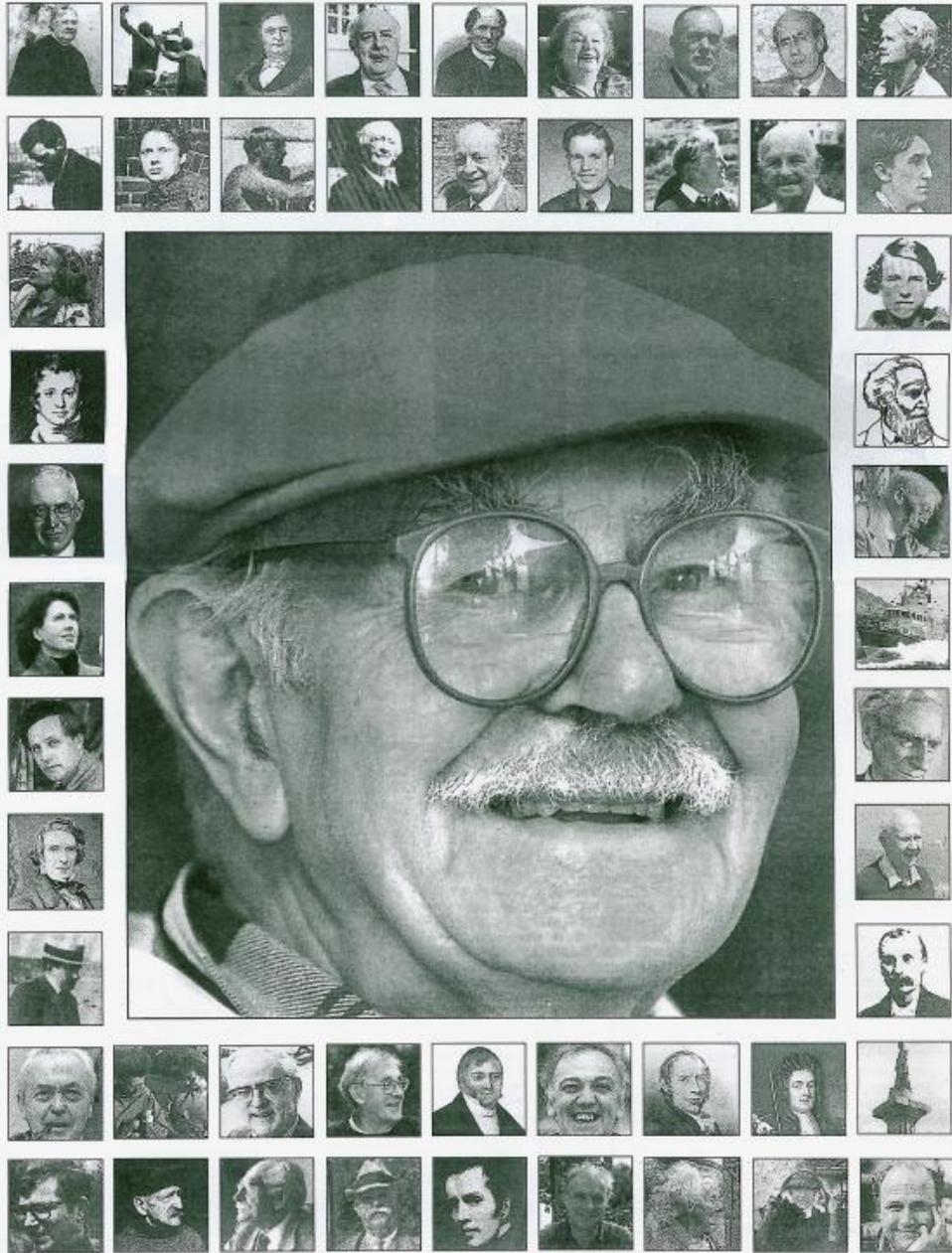
² True at the time of writing, though eventually there were twelve.

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The *Cornishman*

£1.95

Fifty famous Cornish Folk



Fifty Famous Cornish Folk was written by Michael Williams and Douglas Williams and published by *The Cornishman* in 2000. See if you can spot WG on the cover ...

Winston Graham

... he lived in Cornwall for 30 years ... his affection for the place shines through every page.

WINSTON GRAHAM may not be a Cornishman by birth but he has absorbed Cornwall and Cornish history in particular like a sponge.

Apart from the immense readability of his Poldark novels, the pleasure they have given and the sales they have brought to Cornish bookshops, Winston Graham has been an outstanding ambassador for Cornwall's tourism.

The way in which he has drawn discerning visitors to Cornwall is beyond measure. Now recognised as one of the world's leading novelists, he has written more than 30 books and his works have been translated into 17 languages.

As for his television series based on the Poldarks, they have been seen and enjoyed in as many as 21 countries.

The critic Richard Church has said of Winston Graham: "A master of the art of pure storytelling, in the same class as Graham Greene."

Winston Graham's family moved to Cornwall from Manchester when he was only 16 – they lived at Perranporth – and though he later moved to Sussex, he has retained a deep interest in Cornish history.

The colour, the detail, the authenticity of his Cornish novels are the result of careful caring research. He spent many hours combing the archives of libraries and museums. His descriptions of tin mining, for example, were based on mining material written by a Redruth doctor called William Pryce in 1778, and other material came from studying accounts of travellers like Thomas Staniforth and James Silk Buckingham.

I had the good fortune to meet him on one of his visits to Cornwall. He is a kind man, an attentive listener and sharp observer. When I hit upon the

idea of publishing a small local publication to tie in with the *Poldark* TV series, he was generous in his co-operation.

Back in 1980, his publishers launched Collins Collectors' Choice which comprised of a Poldark Quartet. The author, in his Foreword, recalled coming to Cornwall and early days as a writer:

"But although I began to write very early, and found a publisher who was brave enough – and rash enough – to publish me, I did not write about Cornwall for quite a time. This was because, although I instantly took to the scene, I did not quickly get to know the Cornish people. I remained an outsider, a visitor in temperament if not in fact. It took a number of years, and I can point to nothing in particular, no single event, no special friendship that produced the change. It just happened that as time passed I came to know Cornish people and I suppose they came to know me. And at that stage I believe an affinity grew up. It was soon after this that the Poldarks began to take shape."

Winston Graham is a master of the short story too: a model for the aspiring author. Construction, shape and pace are in all his stories, short and long. He shows the importance of conflict and dilemma, his characters developing in the eye and the imagination of the reader like a photograph in the photographer's darkroom.

His selection of names is interesting. Demelza, the heroine of his Poldark novels, for example, grew out of his curiosity about the Cornish hamlet of that name. "I'd seen the sign to it driving across the Goss Moors," he told me, "and when that sign was taken down I was sorry I hadn't bought it. It would have made a nice Cornish memento."

If ever outstanding talent and a fictional name matched perfectly, this was such a case, Angharad Rees positively captivating viewers of the small screen with her portrayal: an urchin, a miner's daughter, brought up in squalor and poverty, being transformed into a gentleman's wife. Hers was a role of incredible contrast and growth, from a fourteen-year-old waif to maturity.

George Warleggan, Ross Poldark's bitter rival, too grew out of another Cornish place name. Warleggan is a Bodmin Moor parish, an area of the moor overshadowed by the sad lonely ministry of the eccentric Frederick William Densham who ended up with no congregation, but continued preaching to cardboard figures in the pews.

Winston lived in Cornwall for 30 years and his affection for the place shines through every page of *Poldark's Cornwall*, which was published by Webb & Bower with Bodley Head back in 1983.



WG in 1977

His text and the brilliant photographs by Simon McBride surely make it one of the best ever books on Cornwall. In it, he recalled Trerice near Newquay, which was then privately owned, and how it was offered to him for £12,000 just after the last war. He says he first discovered Cornwall in an early Morris Minor and then a Wolseley Hornet. "I drove all over the country, up and down precipitous hills, around the endless blind corners, through narrow lanes ... and walked the cliffs and almost empty beaches."

There have been other Cornish books: his *The Grove of Eagles* is about the Killigrew family in Elizabethan Cornwall and *The Forgotten Story* is set in 19th Century Falmouth. And we must not forget his factual book *The Spanish Armadas*. It was, of course, from the Lizard that the Spanish fleet was first sighted. Cornish men and women on that July afternoon in 1588 saw it coming and heard the cannon.

But, of course, his fame locally lies firmly with the Poldark books. He told journalist David Clarke that starting work on the fifth book after a gap of [18] years was "rather like breaking the sound barrier."

Robin Ellis, who played the star role of Ross Poldark in the first two series on the small screen, had this to say of the books: "They are an accurate, moving picture of Cornwall in the 18th Century. They also tell a marvellous story with complex characters who push the action along with their own obsessions."

Over the years, Winston has kindly autographed many of his books for me. He has inscribed them all with thoughtfully personal words – so typical of the man – and in his correspondence he is invariably prompt in response and courteous in tone.

For all his fame, he remains a very private man rarely giving interviews and preferring instead to let his books speak for themselves.

In a feature he wrote for *Country Homes & Interiors*, published in 1986, Winston Graham recalled meeting a stranger in Cornwall, a young man with a pointed beard, who complained about upcountry writers who came down, writing about the place – and making money out of it.

"I asked him if he had any particular writers in mind. He replied, 'Well, this chap Winston Graham ...'"

Written by Michael Williams and reproduced with his kind permission.

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David Massom interview, 2000

AN INTERVIEW WITH WINSTON GRAHAM

The famous name to go with *Marnie* is Hitchcock, as it was his film that everyone remembers, but the story is better told by the author of the novel, Winston Graham.

"The book was in print when my agent called me to tell me that we had an anonymous offer from Hollywood for the screen rights to *Marnie*." Winston Graham, though ninety now, speaks as if the event had only happened a few days ago, so clear is his telling of the story. "It was for quite a few dollars and my agent explained first of all that it must be anonymous because it was someone with a high profile who wanted the story."

Winston Graham was at a loss as to what to do and his agent suggested they ask for double the fee. "We got what we asked for but we were told that the contract had to be signed within two weeks."

"Some time later I had lunch with Hitchcock and nearly told him that if I'd known it was him I would have sold it for half the fee, not double." Winston Graham was not impressed with Hitchcock's version of his novel, but then again nor were the critics. "The critics did not like it to begin with, but now they treat it as a classic. Hitchcock did everything in bold print and with big brush strokes and that lost much of the subtlety with the story of *Marnie* and I did not like that."

"I'm not very communicative when it comes to talking about myself." He says with genuine modesty, "I'm not one of these chaps who goes around signing my books and doing personal stuff. I've never committed burglary, buggery,

sodomy or molested anyone so I don't think I'm a very interesting person." This is from a man who has written thirty novels that have been translated into seventeen languages, six films and the *Poldark* TV series.

"People in Cornwall think it rather unfortunate that I have written modern novels. They believe I should only write *Poldarks* and West Country historical novels." Life began in Lancashire some ninety years ago and when he was seventeen his parents moved the family to Cornwall. Despite his protests of a boring life Winston Graham has had just the opposite. For example, during his war years it was rumoured that he was a lighthouse keeper. "That's not actually true, I applied to join the Navy; I thought they were the least uncivilised of the services, but they turned me down and so did the army. In the end I joined the coastguard and spent my time patrolling beaches and such like."

The big question to any author with a character as strong as *Marnie* is who was she based on? "Marnie was a mixture of two girls that I knew in Cornwall. One was frigid and the other was anything but and she helped out with the soldiers and sailors. Just like Marnie's mother. She had a daughter who also stole for a living."

Two years ago Winston Graham gave up writing but he was never happy just doing nothing and now feels that it is lovely to get back into his study. It would be a shame for such a fascinating talent to go to waste.

© David Massom 2000

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Autobiography reveals a private author's secrets

*Last Saturday evening a party was held in London's Savile Club to celebrate the life of one of Cornwall's best loved authors – the late Winston Graham – and to toast the launch of his autobiography. **JAMES CROWDEN** went along.*

This was a great celebration of one man's life and work. Even Winston's cook, Ted Bailey, and Ken the hairdresser turned up, as well as Hugh Stewart, who made Winston's first films. [He produced *Night Without Stars*.]

Demelza [Angharad Rees] looked wonderful and the conversation flowed up the great sweep of the staircase into the ballroom. There were speeches by his son Andrew, his daughter Rosamund, and grandchildren Max and Anthea, as well as his publisher.

The chandeliers and mirrors glittered and the hubbub of tales bounced off the mirrors. And yet, as I listened, some of my own memories began to surface. Memories that I had inherited from my grandmother and mother who had lived in Perranporth with Winston during the war. My grandmother was Winston's first cousin and had remembered him growing up in Manchester.

Winston was always a discreet but very likeable figure in our family. Writers are strange animals because they live in many different worlds. They live in the minds of their characters and in the age within which they have set their story. They are storytellers and their imagination lives on long after they are gone.

Winston always seemed to be there on the fringes, working away in his study and whenever he had finished a novel he would catch up on his correspondence – always finding a few minutes to write a card or a short letter. He was a keen observer of human nature and had a very good sense of humour.

Winston Graham was born in 1908 and brought up in Manchester. His father was a tea importer and his mother's family ran a firm of grocery wholesalers. His great-grandfather on his mother's side was Thomas Mawdsley (1800-1875), who was one of the three founder members of the Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners.

In the 1840s he campaigned vigorously to get the Ten Hour Bill through Parliament. He co-operated with the Earl of Shaftesbury and went to London for six months to give testimony to various select committees on the appalling working conditions in Lancashire cotton mills. It was a long process, and the Act was finally passed in 1850 [1847]. Thomas Mawdsley was also a Chartist.

When he died in 1875, his cousin James Mawdsley took over as general secretary of the Cotton Spinners and even stood alongside Winston Churchill for the dual parliamentary seat of Oldham in 1898 [1899].

Churchill was fresh from the Sudan and the battle of Omdurman. Mawdsley was overweight but Tory. An unlikely running pair. They both lost. James Mawdsley did not stand again but Winston Churchill became a Liberal and after the Boer War [no, in 1900] got in as MP for Oldham.

Winston Graham's mother Annie was a staunch Liberal and so when her son was born she named him Winston after Churchill and Mawdsley after her uncle. [This is nonsense: his birth name, in full, was Winston Grime.] Winston Mawdsley Graham was proud of his early socialist roots and was always aware of those less fortunate than himself.

My own grandmother and Winston were first cousins. And they got on very well indeed. Their mothers were sisters. When the family moved south to Cornwall in the 1920s, they all moved south together. Winston's parents settled in at Perranporth and the boy himself started writing when he was seventeen. Their house was a bungalow called the Coombe on a road running inland from the sea. [It was called Tresloe Vean and the road Perrancoombe.] In the back garden there was a stream. He worked hard and the apprenticeship was a lonely one. Winston's father, who had been invalided for many years with a stroke, died in 1927.

My mother remembers visiting them every summer holiday in the 1930s when they took bed and breakfast in a house next door. It seemed unusual that a young man did not go out to work but he would appear from his bedroom where he was writing and then escape back there fairly quickly. He was a quiet, shy, serious, very slim young man who, though balding slightly, seemed younger than his years. He always enjoyed a good laugh.

Winston's mother Annie was very delicate and had "palpitations" – yet she lived until she was eighty. Winston himself had a weak heart from childhood meningitis and pneumonia and although called up when the Second World War came, he was rejected on health grounds.

As a young girl of twelve, my mother was evacuated to Perranporth from Newton Ferrers [\[Devon\]](#) in 1941. They drove with their suitcases crammed into their Vauxhall 10 and then laid the car up on blocks until the end of the war. Winston and his mother welcomed them and arranged for them to rent a chalet owned by Donald Healey's parents. It was only a few houses away from Treberran, where Winston and his new wife Jean (Williamson) lived. Winston's mother Annie still lived with them and had a bedroom downstairs.

Winston's brother Cecil also lived in Perranporth, where he ran a gentleman's and ladies' outfitters. It was a small close-knot community and the war years brought them even closer. They often prepared meals together and played bridge long into the night.

Although he could not be in the navy or the army, Winston did volunteer for coastguard duty where he wielded a heavy-duty pair of binoculars and stared out to sea for several years. My mother remembers him walking on and off watch in his long khaki greatcoat with the word COASTGUARD on the shoulder and a black peaked cap with a badge. The coastguard hut was on the cliffs beyond Droskyn Castle Hotel, along a narrow cliff path just above jagged cliffs.

Winston told me that he did a lot of his writing there and when, at night, he had a good idea he would jot it down, but because of the fear of U-boats he had to turn away and scribble by the light of a torch which he shielded with his coat. Despite his weak heart Winston was said to be able to play a pretty mean game of tennis ...

His earnings from writing were not very much at this stage and his wife Jean ran a guesthouse which kept them during the war. She was a wonderful cook and always organised things in a most pleasant and hospitable way. During the war guests became long-term residents. These included two Dutchmen, selling bulbs, trapped in Britain at the outbreak of war.

Benno Moiseiwitsch stayed for three weeks and practised on the piano in his bedroom for hours on end. They remained good friends. It was an émigré culture in Perranporth during the war. Then the Americans came.

Winston was able somehow to keep his Wolseley car on the road and would use the meagre petrol rationing to do some vital research. His son Andrew, now an economist and Master of Balliol in Oxford, was born in 1942, the first Poldark novel, *Ross Poldark*, was published in 1945 and Winston's daughter Rosamund was born in 1946.

The war years were formative times for Winston and after the war some of his finest novels appeared. *Marnie* was made by Hitchcock into a film starring Sean Connery and *The Walking Stick* was taken up by MGM.

This gave him time to indulge one of his greatest pleasures, historical research, which he carried out with relish during his thirty years at Perranporth. [\[But by the time the films were made he was living in Sussex.\]](#)

Much later [\[1995\]](#) Winston wrote a novel called *Tremor* which had as one of its characters a woman who went off to New Zealand. This was based on my mother's experience and letters about sailing she sent him from the Bay of Islands. The character was called Ann, after my grandmother.

Those wartime years spent in Perranporth were never forgotten and Winston always sent his latest books at Christmas to my grandparents. We shall miss him greatly.

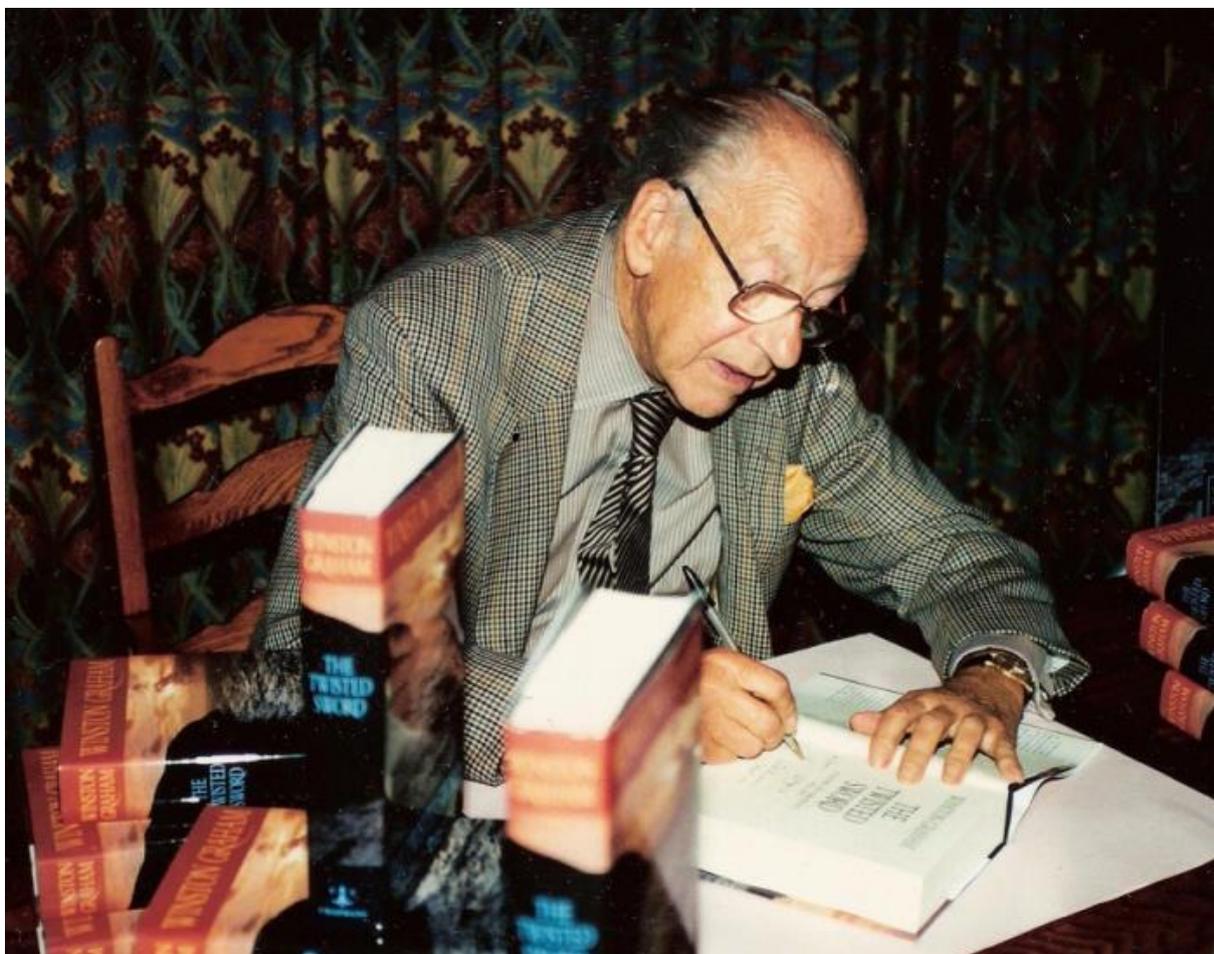
I believe his stature as a writer will grow and Winston Graham the man will at last appear from behind the Poldark scenes. He shunned publicity and preferred the privacy to work. It is perhaps fitting that his last book [\[Memoirs of a Private Man\]](#) should be about himself. He loved Cornwall and history and the Cornish people. Above all he loved the long, jagged coastline. It is as if his binoculars are still scanning the sea.

Western Morning News, 30 September 2003

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Michael Williams, writing in the *Cornish Guardian* on 26 January 2011:

It has been said that I have interviewed more authors in Cornwall than anybody else alive or dead. Meetings with Winston Graham remain golden memories. He lived at Perranporth from 1925 until 1959, a love affair with [Cornwall] that lasted the rest of his long life. Winston had the air of a detective, more Inspector Maigret than Sherlock Holmes, a good listener, a skilful observer. He greatly admired Angharad Rees, who captivated TV audiences as Demelza in the Poldark series, based on his novels. He told me: "Whenever I invited her to lunch at my club, my popularity leapt. Men would think up excuses to come over and speak to me." Unlike most authors, he was not keen on giving interviews. As he once reflected: "I've always been more interested in others than myself – though there has to be something of myself in every character created, or he will not come alive."



Winston Graham was kind and generous. He granted me permission to publish two Poldark titles [[Poldark Country by David Clarke](#) and [Making Poldark by Robin Ellis](#)] at the time of the TV series and there was never a hint that he wanted a slice of the royalties – he even wrote to me indicating how delighted he was that they were doing so well. A gentleman and a great writer, he deserved a knighthood.

Winston Graham: 'I found the atmosphere and history exciting'

By *Cornish Guardian* (Michael Williams), posted 4 March 2015

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 150mph, but Winston Graham was not your average man.

His Poldark novels were not only highly readable and bestsellers, they also translated into superb light television drama, with the whole of Britain gripped every Sunday night to see the latest saga of the dashing Captain Ross Poldark, who had returned to his Cornish estate from the American Revolutionary War to find that his bride-to-be, Elizabeth, believing him dead, was about to marry his cousin Francis.

Ross's romance with the servant girl Demelza Carne and the financial uncertainties of tin mining, all played against a superb backdrop of Cornish countryside, was compulsory viewing when the series was first broadcast in the UK between 1975 and 1977. It gained audiences of about 14 million viewers and was so successful that some vicars rescheduled or cancelled church services rather than have them clash with the transmission of the Poldark series.

I was one of those devoted Poldark fans and had an added interest in that I was covering the filming for the *Western Morning News*.

I spent an evening or two in local hostelries with some of the cast and crew, including a memorable night at the 1975 Padstow May Day.

I also met Winston Graham at that time, as he made occasional visits to the film set, and he graciously took part in the pictures I took of the wedding scene filmed at St Winnow Church. He had also spoken to me to compose an obituary for the paper when his wife, Jean, whom he had met at Perranporth in 1926, died at their home in Sussex in 1992.

However, when we met at the Carlyon Bay Hotel in 2002, where he arrived in a new Jaguar sports car at the launch of his last novel, *Bella Poldark*, he

was nearly 94. It was probably his last interview before his death in July, 2003.

He was accompanied by his daughter Rosamund Barteau, who had lived in St Agnes for many years.

Winston was in jovial form as he remembered his days in Cornwall.



Winston Graham (1908-2003)

"If I wrote it today Ross Poldark would be a captain in the SAS who had been abroad or spent a considerable number of years in Ulster and various places, and had returned with a scar wound on his face and had come back to a rather broken down farmhouse, probably somewhere just outside Truro, where the lanes are still narrow and no one cuts the hedges so that they are a riot of bluebells and campion and white flowers.

"He might have a small legacy from an uncle but be rather poor, and his aim in life would be to agitate for Cornwall to have more autonomy from central government in London.

"With that he would be persuading the Cornish not merely to welcome visitors, as they do now, but to be a bit more upmarket in their ambitions to attract the right sort of visitors."

I asked him whether he thought he might find Elizabeth and Demelza among the local girls, and he told me with a twinkle in his eye: "I saw one or two the other day who were quite attractive and I don't think he would have any trouble finding good-looking girls down here. One wouldn't expect him to pick up a waif from Redruth Fair, whose father beat her – that could be rather out of date."

He said he thought there was a George Warleggan among the Cornish aristocracy, but would not be drawn into who it could be.

Winston said it was Cornwall itself which prompted him to write the Poldark novels. "I moved from Lancashire with my family when I was 17 and fell in love with the countryside immediately.



Jean Graham née Williamson (1912-1992)

"But it took me five years to get to know the Cornish people, and the more I got to know the Cornish people, the more I liked them. I found the whole atmosphere and the history exciting and romantic."

His own first meeting with Jean Williamson was in church at Perranporth when he was 18 and she was 14. Their friendship was very much fostered by her mother "who seemed to like me".

In January, 1937, he decided to go to a dance at the former Droskyn Castle Hotel (now flats) and noticed Jean had changed greatly from their first

meeting: "She had so much more character than anyone else there, male or female."

Later, when he was dancing with her, he said: "I can't afford to marry yet, but when I can, will you marry me?"

Her smiling bright eyes met his for a few seconds, then she said: "I think I just might."

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By Anna Pukas, *Daily Express*, 10 March 2015

Poldark returned our screens last night, back in the prestigious Sunday evening showcase slot it occupied 40 years ago. Much comment and many column inches have been devoted to this revival that is said to follow the original novels more closely than the 1970s' version.

If so, that is a wise move for it transpires that Winston Graham, the creator of this tale of passion and betrayal set in 18th-century Cornwall, hated how the BBC chose to portray his characters. In particular he detested the way Demelza, the feisty servant, was changed from spirited tomboy to a slut. According to his daughter, Graham was so angry that he wanted to stop the series being transmitted.

"Dad blew a gasket when he saw the first episode of the original series," says Rosamund Barteau. "He was so angry about the way they had changed Demelza into a floozy that he wanted to get the production stopped, He was absolutely livid. In the novels she was a tomboy but the producers had some salacious need to make her sexually loose. In one scene she even offered to pull down her knickers for a shilling. That was certainly not in any of the books."

The first BBC series was adapted from the first four *Poldark* novels (there were twelve in all) and first shown in 1975. After viewing the first episode Graham feared the rest of the series would deteriorate into schmalz. His daughter reveals: "He tried everything to stop the show from airing but he didn't have any editorial control. It was not until the second series that he

HOW POLDARK CREATOR HATED THE BBC'S FIRST TV ADAPTATION



ICONS: Robin Ellis
and Angharad
Rees in the 1970s'
version and Aidan
Turner and Eleanor
Tomlinson, inset, in
the current series

was able to have any input."

By then *Poldark* had become such a huge hit at home that vicars were known to change the times of their evening services in order not to clash with it. The second series was based on the next three books. In total *Poldark* ran for 29 episodes. It was sold to 40 countries and was especially popular in the US where it was shown on the prestigious Masterpiece Theatre slot. In a national poll in 2007 American viewers voted it the seventh best British series ever broadcast.

Robin Ellis, who played Captain Ross Poldark, became a national heart-throb. Demelza was played by Angharad Rees, whose tumbling red hair spawned a fashion for perms. The heart of the drama lies in the relationship between Ross and his future wife Demelza, which crossed the class divide. He, though impoverished, is from the officer and gentleman class while Demelza is only a servant.

The portrayal of Demelza was doubly uncomfortable for Graham because he had based the character on his own wife Jean. Their daughter Rodamund reveals that Jean not only inspired Demelza but helped her husband in other ways.

"Father was the author but my mother helped with the details because she was very observant. She saw everything and remembered it all. Dad would write something every day. Every afternoon he would have tea with my mother for an hour when he would bounce ideas at her."

Though he was born in Manchester, Winston Graham moved to Perranporth, Cornwall when he was 17 and lived there for more than 30 years, bringing up his children Rosamund and Andrew there and setting his twelve *Poldark* novels there. The first, *Ross Poldark*, was published in 1945. The last novel, *Bella Poldark*, was published in 2002, only a year before Winston Graham's death at the age of 95.

He was hugely prolific, producing a book a year from 1934 until his death.¹ Graham's last book was his autobiography *Memoirs of a Private Man*, published in 2003 shortly before he died.²

Not so: ¹ 50 books in 69 years ² *Memoirs* was published 10 weeks after he died

Though the cast of the 1970s' series spent eight weeks filming the first series on location in Cornwall, it was sometimes all too obvious that the moving background had actually been projected on to a screen behind the characters.

For Robin Ellis and Angharad Rees, their Poldark characters proved to be career-defining, forever linked to their names by the phrase "best known for". Though both continued to work neither ever appeared in anything as high profile again. Rees started a jewellery design company and died of pancreatic cancer in 2012, aged 63. Robin Ellis now lives in France and writes diabetic cookery books although he does have a cameo role in the new series.

The mantle of Ross and Demelza now passes to the brooding Irish-born Aidan Turner, 31, whose biggest role to date is the dwarf Kili in *The Hobbit* and *Death Comes to Pemberley* actress Eleanor Tomlinson, 22, who coincidentally also has a brother called Ross. With the 2015 version the Cornish landscape is likely to become an important character in its own right and the production will also benefit from much-improved special effects.

In the end Winston Graham embraced the 1970s' *Poldark* series and so has his daughter, who runs a Poldark-themed guesthouse in Idaho. But she says her father would have liked the 2015 adaptation much more.

"I've seen the first episode and I could sit and watch it again and again. Eleanor's Demelza is wonderful and her Cornish accent is good, not too strong but enough to know where she is supposed to be from. My dad would be proud of what the BBC have done."

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