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MY POLDARK CHARACTERS by WINSTON GRAHAM

I am sometimes asked how the names in the Poldark novels were chosen, what particular principles or preferences, if any, guided me in the search for suitable names.

Long years ago when I first began to consider a novel about 18th-century Cornwall, and a family living on the north coast in those days, it seemed necessary that I should find a surname for them which would sound essentially Cornish and yet which would not be the name of an actual family with whom these people could be identified or confused. At that time my closest friend was a young man called Polgreen, and the change – from Polgreen to Poldark – seemed to be just what was necessary, not merely because the change was slight but because it gave the name a heavier and more memorable sound.

Later, when the novel was already under way, I was seeking a Christian name for the Illogan girl who is picked up as a waif at Redruth Fair. Again it should be unusual and Cornish but I did not want a conventionally romantic Cornish name such as Morwena or Loveday. Then, driving across the Goss Moors one day, I saw a signpost marked Demelza, and it seemed at once not merely to be right but to give an added vitality and personality to the character already in being.

Similarly, in looking for a name for the banking family who came to represent the powerful new mercantile class and the natural opposition to the Poldarks, a place-name provided the answer. Warleggan was not only the right length but, I believe, gives the right impression – of power and industrial strength. Sometimes a name comes into one's mind before

there is a character attached to it at all. Such a one is Tholly Tregirls, who appears for the first time in "The Black Moon." The name existed in my mind for several years before it began to take on the rudiments of the character who finally emerged. Many names in the books, of course, come direct from reading 18th century – and earlier – Cornish history. Ezekiel Scawen, Will Nanfan, Hugh Bodrugan, Charlie Baragwanath, Nick Vigus, Kerenhappuch Smith, are examples.



Tregirls Beach, Padstow

So far as place names occur as place names, descriptions of towns are as accurate as I know how to make them; but where north coast topography is concerned I use a little licence: for instance, the original of Mongoose House is not in Mongoose village. Trenwith House is further east than one would suppose and is partly modelled on Trerice. Bolingey River was known in the 18th century as Mellingey River. Thurston Peter has a theory that Perranzabuloe took its name not from Peran in Sabulo or Perran in the Sands, but from the Irish village of Saul – in Gaelic Sabhull and in Latin Zabulum – which was where St. Piran originally came from. Hence my use of the name Sawle to describe a village partly based on old Perranporth.

NB: all spellings are reproduced accurately as printed.