

WG in Perranporth, 1925 to 2003



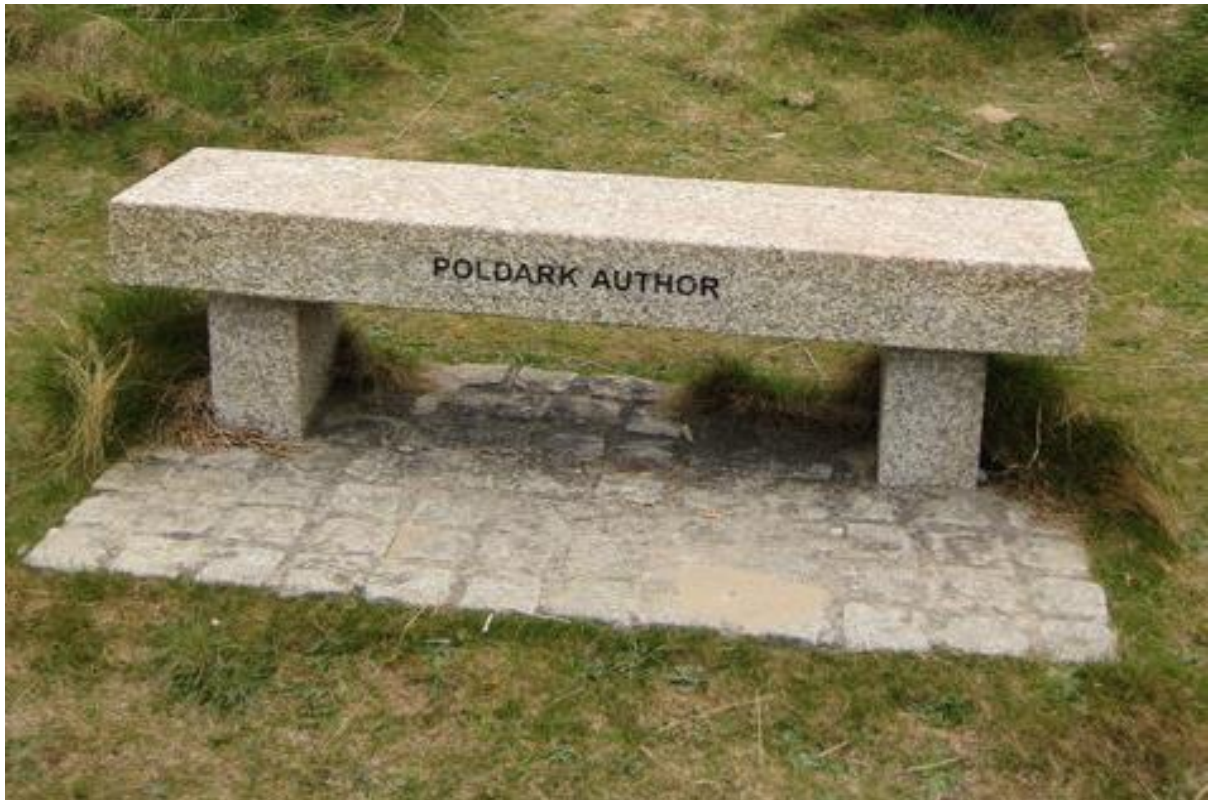
The place is north Cornwall's Perran Beach, Perranporth, the year might be 1948, 1978 or anything in between, the solitary figure on the sand, Atlantic at his back, is Winston Graham, and the single dwelling in the mid-distance, a scruffy grey wooden chalet rooted in the dunes of Penhale Sands, is Lech Carrygy (a Cornish name meaning "Flat Rocks"). It was here, in the summer of 1946, as he wrote his fifteenth novel, *Demelza*, that WG spent some of the happiest days of his life.¹

Having been hired to the writer by its owner, Harry Tremewan, the chalet is gone now, having burned down in the early hours of Saturday 2 June 1984. Its single occupant escaped the blaze, though his dog did not. The building was scheduled for demolition (because considered by Carrick Council unfit to live in) so would not have survived in any case.² A granite bench marks the spot where it stood. Erected by Perranzabuloe Museum with financial and practical help from the Parish Council, the seat was officially dedicated to "Poldark author ... Winston Graham" on 30 June 2006 – i.e. what would have been his 98th birthday.



Lech Carrygy in May 1980.³ The bungalow was actually one of two with a shared vantage point: if you look carefully at the photo on page one, the other can be seen on the extreme left of the picture just slightly nearer sea level than Lech Carrygy. Coincidentally (or perhaps not) it too was destroyed by fire within a few months of the Lech Carrygy blaze.

Below: the Winston Graham Memorial Seat, at the north end of Perran Beach on the South-West Coastal Path. Note the birth year error. Museum staff took the dates from WG's *Times* obituary, thinking that a source of such impeccable repute couldn't possibly be wrong ...



... In fact, obituaries in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and more all reproduced the same misinformation, deliberately disseminated by WG himself. A metal plaque later affixed to one end of the bench reads:



THIS SEAT IS IN MEMORY OF WINSTON GRAHAM, PRESIDENT OF THE MUSEUM 1985 - 2003. IT IS AT THE SITE OF THE CHALET 'LECH CARRYGY' WHERE HE SPENT HAPPY TIMES AND WHERE HE WROTE THE NOVEL 'DEMELZA'.

As a novelist, Winston Graham was not above having an air of mystery about his age. The inscription on this stone, like many of his obituaries, states he was born in 1910 but he was actually born in 1908.

ERECTED BY THE MUSEUM WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF PERRANZABULOE PARISH COUNCIL AND PERRANPORTH GOLF CLUB.



The view from Lech Carrygy. The headlands across the bay are Droskyn Point (with Chapel Rock before it), Shag Rock and Cligga Head. The wreck of *La Seine* in 1900 between Chapel Rock and Droskyn Point inspired (at least, in part) *The Forgotten Story*.

The Grime family – invalid father Albert, mother Annie and seventeen-year-old Winston – moved from Victoria Park, Manchester to the north Cornish coast in October 1925, with elder brother Cecil and his bride Elsie following (into separate accommodation) six months later. Though the decision to move, motivated by the indifferent health of both parents, was a family one, the choice of *where* to go – which would critically influence the course of his brother's life and career – was made by Cecil. In September 1924 he chose a holiday destination at random from a railway guide, stayed in Perranporth and "fell instantly in love with ... county and ... village."⁴ After that, though Southport and St Anne's (on the Lancashire coast) had been under consideration, Cecil's new-found enthusiasm for Cornwall won the day.⁵



WG's parents, Albert and Annie in the 1890s

After a period in rented accommodation,⁶ Mr and Mrs Grime bought and moved with their younger son into Tresloe Vean (meaning "Little Tresloe") in Perrancombe, Perranporth. A mile south of the village (see map on

page fifteen) down an unlit, muddy lane, the house had no electricity, no piped water, no telephone.⁷ On WG, the change from

*the suburb of a big city to a small wind-swept Cornish village made a very deep impression: [here] everything was lush: weeds and grasses fought together with campion and wild garlic; gorse rioted; bluebells and parsley overflowed the hedges. And the weather was omnipresent: wind and rain and monumental cloud; glinting sun and washed blue skies; with the tramp of the great surf never far away and the seagulls crying.*⁸

The death of Albert, aged 60, following a second stroke in November 1927 left mother and son alone. Thereafter, though he did no paid work, she loyally supported him while he set about creating of himself – slowly, painstakingly but with unswerving determination – the writer he was destined to be.



Tresloe Vean, Perrancoombe, Perranporth – home of WG with his parents until Albert's death in November 1927, then with his mother until September 1939. The house is still owned by the Graham family.

Early in 1939, by now intending to marry, WG bought Treberran⁹, a small "private hotel" located at 4 St Michaels Road, Perranporth, a mile from Tresloe Vean. Built in 1924 and occupied first as a private dwelling, the property changed hands in November 1934 to become, after extension, a summer guest house run by a Mrs Jaggar; it was, according to WG, "the best house in the village".¹⁰ From mid-1939 his fiancée Jean catered for paying guests at the couple's new home while WG continued to board with his mother. After their wedding in Perranzabuloe Parish Church on 18 September¹¹ and a brief honeymoon at the Old Coastguard's Hotel in Mousehole and the Godolphin Arms in Marazion,¹² the pair settled together in Treberran, where, the following year, Annie joined them, to remain until her death in 1949.

WG served through the war as a Perranporth coastguard, which allowed him time to write and to think; also to live at home. Through the early part of the conflict, he made use of Tresloe Vean (then empty) to begin *Ross Poldark*.¹³ In the weeks before his eventual demobilisation (with Tresloe Vean presumably occupied once more) he "shamelessly"¹⁴ wrote in the Coast Guard station; its closure in 1946 sent him to Harry Tremewan and Lech Carrygy. From Treberran to the remote chalet and back was – see map below – quite a hike; then again, to offset the physical and mental effects of sitting all day reading and writing, probably just what the doctor ordered.

The guest house remained open through the war years but, with the advent of peace, two children, and belated success for WG as a writer, reverted after that to the private residence it first was. It remained the Grahams'¹⁵ family home until early 1960.

At some point after that, again in new hands, the property was renamed Nampara Lodge to become first a guest house once more, then later, after redevelopment, a ten bedroomed hotel. After closure due to structural defects, it was demolished circa 2008. On the site now stands a terrace of five houses, built in 2011, called Nampara Row.

It should be noted that the names Nampara Lodge and Nampara Row are *not* just predicated on WG's work but have, rather, quite genuine historical associations with the site (about which more below).



Nampara Lodge (formerly Treberran), 4 St Michael's Road, Perranporth
this page : front / next page : rear



Nampara Lodge (formerly Treberran): the home of WG and his family from September 1939 until early 1960; also of his mother from 1940 until her death in February 1949. The bay-windowed room seen in the top right quadrant of the upper image was WG's. The lower image shows the view, including beach and sea, from that window.



Nampara Row, the terrace of five houses that now stands on the site of WG's former home.

WG developed a mutual rapport with his Cornish environment and its people slowly but surely; deep enough, indeed, that it was never to leave him. Just a year before he died, and more than forty years since he quit the county, he said:

*I love the smell of the air, the sound of the real Cornish voices, the bleakness, the cliffs, and of course the beach. I used to sit on the beach endlessly at one time and I can think of few more enjoyable pastimes.*¹⁶

But he was never just a beach bum. Indeed, WG seems to have plunged with great enthusiasm into community life in his new-found home. He not only played tennis, but served in due course as trustee and chairman of the Tennis Club.¹⁷ He not only took part in amateur dramatics, but, when asked to do so (and before he was a published novelist) wrote a play to be performed for the benefit of the unemployed. The result – *Seven Suspected* – was not only staged for three nights with gratifying success in the local cinema (with both WG and Jean in the cast) but later also produced in several other towns. In 1956 he wrote an article on Historic Perranporth

for the town's *Official Guide*.¹⁸ By 1957 he had become one of six patrons of The Perranporth Players (with *Take My Life* co-author Valerie Taylor another).¹⁹ In the same year he donated funds to the Town Band.²⁰ He became involved "over the years"²¹ in Christian outreach movement Toc H and served for several years as a sidesman at St. Michael's Church.²² He not only attended WEA (Workers Educational Association) lectures but became secretary of his class²³ and gave lectures himself.²⁴ Through these activities he met influential friends Tom Attlee and Fred Harris,²⁵ who would both help with aspects of his writing.



Anyone for tennis? With Lylie Robins and Vera Polgreen, 21 June 1927

WG left Perranporth early in 1960 to live briefly in Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera and then, after a lengthy spell of house-hunting, in Buxted, East Sussex for the remainder of his life. But though he never again lived permanently in Cornwall, he maintained his association with the county, visiting frequently ("one to three times a year"²⁶), often staying at the Crantock Bay Hotel in West Pentire, Newquay²⁷ just a few miles up the coast from his former home. And in 1985 he reaffirmed his especial bond with Perranporth by accepting the office of President of Perranzabuloe Museum, which designation he held until his death in 2003.²⁸ (He was their first; the Museum opened in 1987. In 2016 the role was assumed by WG's son Andrew.) Though an honorary position, WG was both a staunch advocate and financial donor.²⁹

Perranzabuloe is the name of the north Cornish coastal parish that includes the settlements of Perranporth, Perrancoombe, Goonhavern, Bolingey, Ventongimps, Penhale Sands, Cold Harbour, Mount, Hendra Croft and Callestick. The Perranzabuloe Museum is located in Oddfellows Hall, Ponsmere Road, Perranporth, next door to the Methodist Church, the shadow of which may be seen in the lower right corner of the image below. Built circa 1871, Oddfellows Hall is now (as of 2004) owned by the museum.



[Oddfellows Hall, Ponsmere Road, Perranporth: home, since 1987, of
The Perranzabuloe Museum](#)

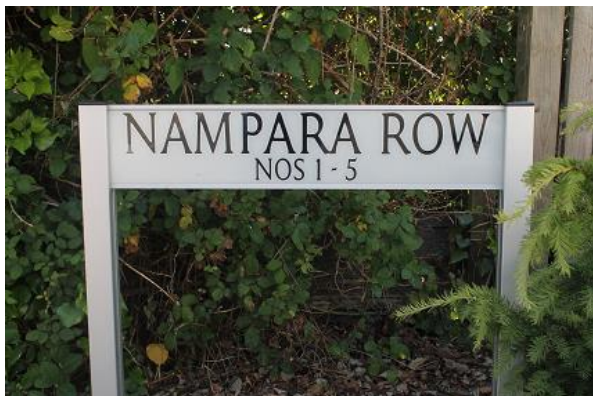
The Museum, in the upstairs part of the Hall, includes displays on the locality and its personalities, not least, of course, WG. A ringbinder contains a selection of clippings, letters, artefacts and memorabilia pertaining to his life and a display case in the corner includes a number of interesting objects including one of his beloved trilby hats, a (quite valuable!) pile of some of his earliest novels (i.e. those written in Perranporth) and the large metal house-sign that can be seen above the front

door of Nampara Lodge in the photos on page eight above. The Museum offers for sale the "Poldark Walk": a laminated A5 self-guided walking tour of the town that takes in St Michaels Road, the tennis courts and the sites of the wartime coastguard lookout station and Lech Carrygy.



The WG display case in Perranzabuloe Museum. The house sign in the lower right corner reads: *Nampara Lodge Hotel, Former home of novelist Winston Graham, Author of Poldark novels*. The photo in the top left corner shows the draper's shop run by WG's brother Cecil and his wife Elsie, next door to the chemist's of Cyril Polgreen,³⁰ father of WG's friend Ridley.

Through recent (and not so recent) history, Perranporth was a mining village and its present-day town centre car park is called Wheal Leisure to commemorate not WG or his Poldark novels but, rather, the copper mine of that name which occupied the site from the sixteenth century until its closure circa 1840.³¹ Similarly, Ramoth Way, branching north off St Pirans Road, recalls not the old, half-blind horse Ross inherited from his father,³² but Wheal Ramoth which, having once worked the ground above Perran Beach, was already, on an 1880 map, tagged "tin mine (disused)". A 1906 map shows beyond St Michaels Road to the south of the village two tiny hamlets called Nampara (sometimes Namparra) and, on the other side of Liskey Hill, Hendrawna, recalled in today's Hendrawna Lane (see map below). What's more, when some of this land was sold in 1920 (by auction in Oddfellows Hall), who should the owner prove to be but Reverend E. H. Enys.³³ So when WG reimagined the magnificent Perran Beach as Hendrawna Beach³⁴, homed Ross in Nampara, mounted him on Ramoth and introduced young Dr Enys, he didn't reach far for his names. Such meaningful local associations (and there were several more, of course)³⁵ must surely have been appreciated by those of his readers who were aware of them.



In contrast to such borrowings, Morwenna Gardens, in the north-east corner of Perranporth, probably *is* a quiet tip of the hat to the town's distinguished former resident. So too, Nampara Walk, a 300-metre path that runs south along Perrancoombe from its junction with St Michael's Road. Formerly Healey Walk, it was renamed circa twenty years ago and given the new sign shown above in 2015.³⁶

[Next page: a map of present-day Perranporth showing the location of selected WG-related sites](#)

[illegible]

Perranzabuloe Parish Church
one mile that way

Perranporth then (1925; note Lech Carrygy) ...



... and now

NOTES AND SOURCES

^{1, 12, 13, 14} *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan, 2003, Book One, Chapter Five

² The event was front page news ("**Night fire destroys 'Poldark' bungalow**") in the *West Briton Argus* of Monday 4 June 1984.



³ The photos of Lech Carrygy on page two and the front of Nampara Lodge on page eight were taken by, supplied by and have been used with the kind permission of Colin Brewer. The photo on page one of Perran Beach is from *Poldark's Cornwall* (The Bodley Head and Webb & Bower, 1983). The photos on page nine of the rear of Nampara Lodge are from the Poldark Active Board. The tennis photo on page eleven is a retouched image of a paper copy in the Perranzabuloe Museum archive. The photo of WG's parents is from *Memoirs* and that of old Perranporth from the Frith Collection. All with thanks. Other pics either via Google images or taken personally. The kind assistance of staff at the Perranzabuloe Museum, and of Colin Brewer and Karin

Easton in particular, is much appreciated.

⁴ *Memoirs*, Book One, Chapter Two

⁵ Looking back late in life at his brother's serendipitous choice, WG mused: "How could I have written stories about Southport?" (Valerie Grove, *The Times*, 7 May 2002)

⁶ This was in Chybean (literally "small house"; below in 2009), the first of three bungalows in St. Michael's Road standing alongside (to the west of) Treberran (see page 15 map). The property has since been demolished.



^{7, 26} *Poldark's Cornwall* (as above)

⁸ From the foreword of *A Poldark Quartet*, Collins Collectors Choice, 1980

⁹ The house name, mentioned fifteen times in *Memoirs*, is spelled Treberran on eleven occasions but Trebarran on the other four. The regional press, while not consistent, favours Treberran too, so – see also note 15 – I'll stick with that.

^{10, 21} *Memoirs*, Book One, Chapter Four

¹¹ Reported in the *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser* of 21 September 1939. WG's best man was his brother Cecil.

¹⁵ WG formally changed his name from Grime to Graham on 2 June 1947. The legal announcement of this, in *The London*

Gazette of 6 June 1947, confirms, incidentally, the house name as Treberran.

¹⁶ Simon Parker interview in the *Living Cornwall* section of *The Western Morning News* of 14 May 2002

¹⁷ The online history of Perranporth Tennis Club records that "Mr Winston Graham was voted to the Chair" in 1951. He joined the club on 26 March 1926

¹⁸ See [FOREWORDS](#), pp. 22-29

^{19, 20, 29} Perranzabuloe Museum archive. As of 1995, WG was still a patron of the Players (*West Briton*, 7 September 1995) and probably remained one until his death.

²² Perranzabuloe Parish Magazine records that WG was re-elected sidesman at St. Michael's in the years 1952-57. When he first became one is not clear. A sidesman, usher or Assistant Churchwarden in the Church of England is responsible for greeting members of the congregation, overseeing seating arrangements in church and for taking the collection.

²³ *With A Quiet Conscience – A Biography of Thomas Simons Attlee (1880-1960)* by Peggy Attlee, Dove & Chough Press, 1995

²⁴ In a letter dated 17 January 1942 to Frank Swinnerton he wrote: "In days of peace I used to do a bit of minor lecturing to W.E.A. and Toc H people ..." WG joined Perranporth Toc H on 18 July 1934.

²⁵ As well as being a fount of historical knowledge, Fred gave WG the idea for his short story *The Old Boys*, while Tom was an important early mentor. For more on both of them, see [WEA](#).

²⁶ www.winstongraham.org/lifeandtimes

²⁷ The Perranzabuloe Museum archive includes a copy of the letter, dated 8 October 1985, sent by WG to Mrs Higgins accepting the office of President.

³⁰ Despite his Cornish surname, Cyril Polgreen was born in Acton, London in 1875 and still there in 1881. By 1891, he and his family were in Millbrook, south-east Cornwall, a stone's throw from Devon, where Cyril was an apprentice chemist. By the spring of 1897, however, he was back out

of the county, living in Andover, Hampshire, where he married Annie Mary Reeves, a local woman nine years his senior; in 1901 he was an assistant chemist and in 1911 a retail chemist there; the couple's children Edward Ridley (1901-1934) and Alexandra Vera (1904-1998) were born there. When precisely the family relocated to Perranporth is not known. Annie died in 1936 and Cyril in 1950.

³¹ See contemporary press reports. The mine seems to have closed in 1840, with attempts in 1844 and thereafter to re-open it not successful.

³² *Ross Poldark*, Book One, Chapter Two

³³ *The West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, 9 September 1920

³⁴ Or did he? In a piece entitled "Of Cornish Coves and Cliffs" in *The English Country Home* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987) WG wrote:

It was [West Pentire] and the headland that juts out beyond it making the western claw of Crantock Bay, and the further bay beyond of Porth Joke ... which helped most to make up a picture of the Nampara of the Poldark novels.

³⁵ For example, Hoblyn's Cove is just north of the town and Trevaunance Cove a little south. See also [ACORNS](#), page four. Even Poldark, though contrived, *sounds* authentic, for *Pol*, meaning *pool* or *harbour*, occurs commonly in both Cornish surnames – Polglaze, Polgrean (or -green), Polwin, Polwhele, Polsue, Polson – and place names – Polgooth, Polbrock, Poldhu, Polkerris, Polmear, Polzeath *et cetera*. WG chose well.

³⁶ With thanks to Colin Brewer

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