

My Ivers! A Pass Through Poldark (1783-1820)

During the last quarter of 2017 I read Winston Graham's twelve Poldark novels, *Ross to Bella*, 1783 to 1820, in series order. Though I'd read all of them individually before, this was my first non-stop voyage through Poldark complete. Below are some observations:

Abbreviations: *RP* = *Ross Poldark*, *D* = *Demelza*, *JP* = *Jeremy Poldark*, *W* = *Warleggan*, *BM* = *The Black Moon*, *FS* = *The Four Swans*, *AT* = *The Angry Tide*, *SFS* = *The Stranger From The Sea*, *MD* = *The Miller's Dance*, *LC* = *The Loving Cup*, *TS* = *The Twisted Sword* and *BP* = *Bella Poldark*. *RP 2.4* = *Ross Poldark Book Two, Chapter Four etc.*

Though Poldark complete comprises twelve novels published between December 1945 and May 2002, it is perhaps more useful to look on the saga as having been conceived and delivered in five (arguably four) distinct and readily discernible tranches:

(1) **A post-war quartet** (*RP, D, JP, W*), plotted as a single cohesive entity (WG called it "one very long novel which broke off at convenient points"¹) covering the period February 1783 to Christmas 1793 and published between December 1945 and November 1953.

(2) **A '70s trilogy** (*BM, FS, AT*), again plotted as a single entity, covering the period February 1794 to Christmas 1799 and published between October 1973 and September 1977.

(3) **An '80s trilogy** (*SFS, MD, LC*), again plotted as a single entity, covering the period June 1810 to January 1815 and published between October 1981 and October 1984.

(4) **A 1990 standalone novel** (*TS*), covering the period January to December 1815 and published on 8 August 1990.

(5) **A 2002 standalone novel (BP)**, covering the period July 1818 to Christmas 1820 and published on 10 May 2002.

Though *in retrospect* these dozen novels comprise an impressively imposing single canon, they were never conceived or written as such – indeed, after each pause-point was reached, WG appeared to believe his saga was concluded and his job done:

(1) *Warleggan* was published in 1953 as "the final Poldark novel".

(2) When interviewer Ted Harrison asked him in December 1977 whether there would be any more Poldarks, WG replied: "I doubt it ... Certainly I finished [*The Angry Tide*] feeling that this was the end of all I had to say."²

(3) In 1983, while writing *The Loving Cup* (tenth Poldark novel and last of the second trilogy), WG told a *Woman's Weekly* interviewer: "The number ten is a nice round figure. I think it will then [after the book's completion] be time to finish writing about the Poldarks and Warleggans."³ However, that he chose to enlist Jeremy in the 52nd Oxfordshires suggests that even then his mind was projecting ahead to Waterloo, a battle in which that regiment played so decisive a part. On publication, *LC's* jacket cautiously stated that it "concludes – for a time – the Poldark saga" and when in February 1987 Susan Hill asked him the usual "all done?" question, WG replied: ""Well, there's one more I can write, but I don't think I'm going to write it yet ..."⁴ (this from a man just sixteen months shy of his eightieth birthday) – so, clearly, by then if not before, *TS* was on the stocks of his subconscious.

(4) Like *Warleggan* 37 years before it, *The Twisted Sword* (1990) was published as "the last novel of the Poldark saga".

(5) In June 2002 WG blithely assured Charlie Lee-Potter that *Bella* was definitely the last Poldark novel because "I shalln't live to write another"⁵ – which, sadly though inevitably, proved correct.

About successive phases of the saga, too, a slightly different aura which is not surprising since, though not written by a different hand, they were written by a man at different times of his life and stages of his career, thus, one might reasonably expect, with an altered mindset, outlook and perhaps intention.

The post-war / '70s method-change

The post-war quartet, Poldarks I-IV, stand apart, conceived and written when WG was a relatively young and inexperienced author; undertaken and delivered as a single, self-contained entity (albeit in four parts) via a *modus operandi* subtly different this first time around from what it would become in later years in the hands of an older and wiser writer in search of a more ambitious and stimulating challenge. Though sketched on a relatively confined West Country canvas, the first four novels teem with abounding vitality; behind the main protagonists, a populous supporting cast jostle and swarm like a Bruegel painting come vigorously to life. Strongly plotted, the overriding central tale (of Elizabeth choosing Francis over Ross and all that followed) works itself out against a backdrop of mostly parochial concerns: mining, banking, smuggling, wrecking, jealousy, rivalry, loving, living, betrayal, honour, loss. Though WG took scrupulous care to recreate aspects of the era (1783-93) – the food (or lack of), the clothes, the modes of speech, the primitive medical practices and so on – his concern in this regard was not so great at this point as it would become.

The first quartet also abounds in masterly descriptions of the natural world – most notably of the sky and the sea, the multifarious moods and demeanours of which would surely have been more carefully noted and read by all his protagonists than their more comfortably situated twenty-first century successors.

So, the author draws a vivid clutch of three-dimensional characters and plots pleasingly broad and long. So far, so good, but not very unique – indeed, perhaps a little too Catherine Cookson if not quite Mills & Boon. But the essential element that sets WG's Georgian / Regency romance apart is the wonderful wealth of contextualisation; adding, thanks to so much erudition

so lightly delivered, so significantly to the reader experience (and to see what's left when most of it is stripped away, just watch the sorry TV spin-offs: the difference like that between a five-course banquet and a packet of crisps or a world cruise and a day trip to Bognor).⁶

Though evidence of this is seen from the outset, a greater concentration on historical authenticity is in evidence from *BM* (first of the '70s trilogy) onwards, as the core strengths of the novels move from ***plot and people*** to ***plot and period***. To this end, the author deliberately denies himself the absolute freedom a writer of fiction would usually expect to enjoy by pledging himself wholeheartedly to the aim of recreating an authentic rather than an imagined past, realised as persuasively as possible via exhaustive reading, documentary research and the rigorous suppression of fantasy in favour of fact.

Every reader will know that the books cover more or less lightly the French revolution, the rise and fall of Napoleon and so on – i.e. historically real events, faithfully if (for the most part) superficially reported. But the remarkable thing about all of the books, and about *BM* to *TS* in particular, is the extraordinary extent to which not only events but also people, places and trivia of all kinds are real rather than imagined; are wholly factual. WG sets away his core cast of characters to act out their destinies against a backdrop of the period recalled authentically in (so far as is possible) all its eclectic diversity of aspects. Thus, in the larger sense, their story is already written and, when drafting Poldark, WG assigns himself the task not of starting with *tabula rasa* and letting his mind roam free (as would be the case with *The Walking Stick*, *Marnie* or most of his other novels), but rather of taking the events of his chosen timeframe and working out the lives and interactions of his characters *within those immutable confines*. Among the numerous factors WG considered are:

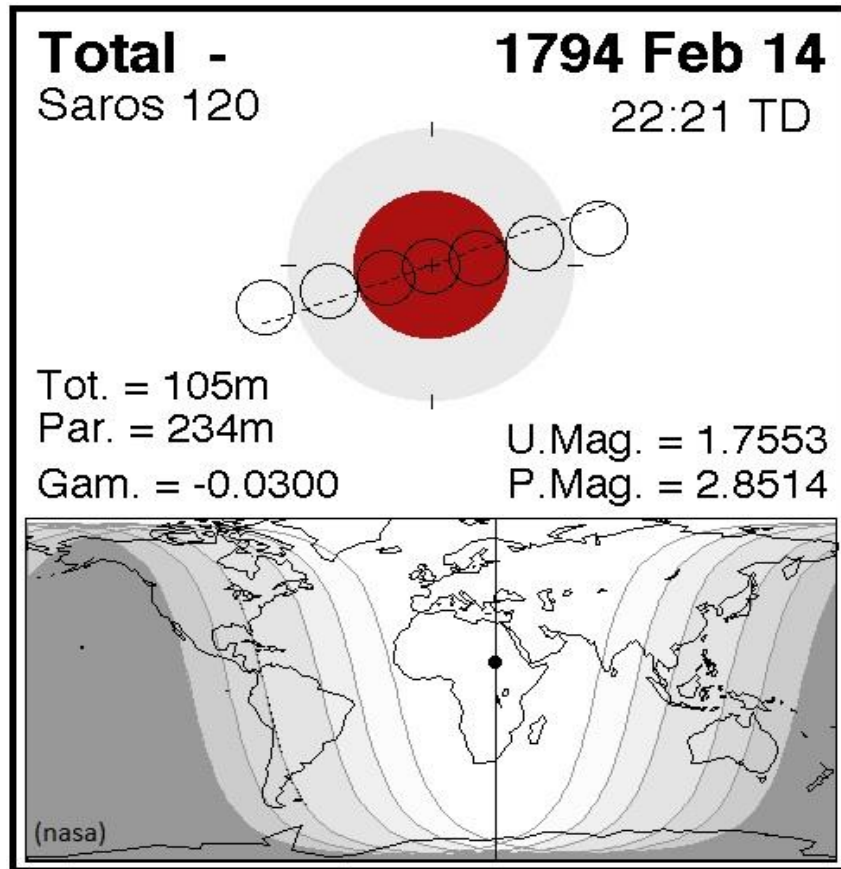
Historical events and figures

Where historical fact was concerned ... WG admitted to sometimes being bound by real events: *But I also find myself*

stimulated by them ... I didn't know anything about Gurney until Jeremy Poldark became interested in steam power. I was stimulated by Gurney's life, but I'm also bound by the facts. I would never distort any real people in order to fit them into [a] book and I wouldn't distort Jeremy's discoveries to anticipate anything that really happened in Cornwall.⁷

When in *JP* 1.11 Dwight Enys names three men he studied under in London – Dr. Fordyce who taught physic, Dr. Leake (midwifery) and Mr. Percival Pott (surgery) – he names real people. Similarly, when in *W* 2.4 he tells Ray Penvenen that "ninety years ago one of my ancestors was High Sheriff of Cornwall", his claim is supported by the fact that in 1709 the holder of that office was indeed Samuel Enys. Similarly, the reader is informed in *SFS* 2.4 that John Trevanion of Caerhays was "Sheriff of Cornwall at some early age" – which is also true: Trevanion held the office in 1804, aged 24. We are told in *W* 3.3 that James Blamey serves "under Admiral Gell", which would be Admiral John Gell (1740-1806). Bull and Trevithick (*W* 1.4), the two young Redruth engineers engaged by Ross to build a steam pump for Wheal Grace are strong steam pioneers Edward Bull (c1759-1798) and Richard Trevithick (1771-1833). After marriage to his sister Jane in 1797, Trevithick became the brother-in-law of Hayle Foundry owner Henry Harvey (1775-1850), whom we meet in *SFS et al.* So too inventor of the compound steam engine Arthur Woolf (1766-1837). Polymath Goldsworthy Gurney (1793-1875), mentioned in the WG quote above, features prominently in *LC*. All are genuine historical figures. Geoffrey Charles marries Amadora de Bertendona, whose ancestor Don Martin de Bertendona (1530-1604) "commanded a squadron of the famous Armada and ... each of the succeeding armadas" (*LC* 1.1): quite true, as WG himself confirms in *The Spanish Armadas* (Collins, 1972).

Most readers of *BM* will be aware that the book's title refers to a total lunar eclipse that took place on the evening of 14 February 1794 on the day Valentine Warleggan was born – Aunt Agatha calls it a "black moon" and regards it as an ill omen – but what not everyone will appreciate is that there was on that date across all of Europe and Africa (see NASA data below) just such an eclipse. Nothing about the event as described is made up.



Total lunar eclipse, 14 February 1794

In *BM* 1.3, though Dwight puts to sea on the imaginary HMS *Travail*, his ship is part of a squadron commanded by the very real Captain (later Admiral) Sir Edward Pellew (1757-1833) aboard the very real HMS *Arethusa*. (In 1.8, Pellew's wife is correctly identified as Susan and the family home as Trevery, which – not stated – was and is near Helston.)

The action described by WG which sees Dwight shipwrecked is based on a real naval engagement between British and French ships which took place in the western reaches of the English Channel on 23 April 1794. WG reduces the number of participating vessels from five British and four French to three and two. He correctly names one British ship – *Nymphe*, to which he relocates Pellew – but contrives the names of the other two (the *Travail* and *Mermaid*) as well as both opponents (he states *Héros* and *Palmier*; actually *Engageante*, *Pomone*, *Résolue* and *Babet*.) WG also adapts the outcome of the engagement to suit his plot.

The invasion into north-western France by Royalist sympathisers described in *BM* 2.5 happened just as WG describes it, and was led by the men he names, who met, as related, the individual and collective fates he attributes them. WG uses the invasion as a pretext for Ross to lead a small band into Brittany to free Dwight from Quimper prison – another real place, a former convict turned gaol. He accurately describes its appalling conditions and even name-checks one of its more notable inmates: Lady Anne Fitzroy, who was interned there for nine months after the ship she was travelling on from Lisbon was taken by the French. Thus Dwight's liberation by Ross and Co. is a fictional episode cleverly embroidered into documented historical fact.

In the later books, in order to better serve his story, WG is shameless in bestowing on Ross an uncanny Forrest Gump-like ability to follow the spotlight of history: thus he not only meets the Prince Regent on the eve of his assumption of regnal duties but is apparently able to persuade him when no-one else could that the war against France must be pursued (*SFS* 2.2) – thus neatly explaining away an otherwise perplexing *volte-face*. In France on behalf of his confidant, prime minister Lord Liverpool, Ross happens to be an eye-witness to Napoleon's triumphant return from exile into Paris's Tuileries Palace (*TS* 1.15). Once escaped from internment and while still deep behind enemy lines, Ross manages to find and win the confidence of Wellington's Chief Reconnaissance Officer, Colquhoun Grant (who apparently chose to ride about uprisen France wearing a British army redcoat), which gives him, on the eve of Waterloo, immediate unopposed entrée (*TS* 2.12) into the Duke's inner circle, virtually all of whom, within twenty-four hours, will be maimed or killed. Even Demelza gets in on the act, being party to smuggling out of France Louis XVIII's crown jewels in the care of the king's jeweller Sieur Meniere (*TS* 1.14). Of course, no-one needs to be told that the Prince Regent, Liverpool, Napoleon and Wellington are real historical figures – but so, too, are Colquhoun Grant, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Sieur Meniere (which WG misspells Menieres), General Sir Hussey Vivian (born in Truro, as WG notes) and the dozen other Wellington acolytes individually named in the text. So too the treacherous French pair the Duke of Otranto (alias Minister of Police Joseph Fouché) (1759-1820) and Jean-Lambert Tallien (1767-1820). So too society hostess Madame de Staël (1766-1817), husband Albert de Rocca and

daughter Albertina. So too the Duchess of Wellington, aka Kitty Pakenham (1773-1831), whose favourite brother Ned was indeed killed at the Battle of New Orleans, as noted in *TS* 1.5. The epoch-ending battle of Waterloo is described (saving, naturally, the presence of two Poldarks) with meticulous exactitude. We learn (it came as a surprise to me, anyway) that one of the combatants was Napoleon's brother Jerome. Before the dust of battle has had time to settle, after receiving from financier Nathan Rothschild (1777-1836) an education in the finer points of what would today be called insider trading (*TS* 2.9), George makes a killing of his own.

In *LC* 3.4 we find Ross hobnobbing with social reformer and philanthropist Robert Owen (1771-1858); earlier, in *AT* 1.3, he reports not only two meetings with William Wilberforce but also having being moved in April 1798 to make a rare speech in the House in support of a motion introduced by the abolitionist which was defeated by 87 votes to 83. Ross's speech may have been fictional, but the debate, the date and the result are anything but.⁸

Nonetheless, *WG* is not afraid to take some liberties when it suits him. For instance, in *AT* 3.13, Mr Chynoweth announces the death of George Washington five days before it happened and probably some weeks before anyone in Cornwall would have heard about it and then goes on to quote an arresting statement made by John Adams some *fifteen years* before the ex-President actually wrote the words in question. In *FS* 1.9 Dwight inoculates Jeremy at a time (1796) when Edward Jenner himself was making his first pioneering experiments in what would become known as vaccination and two years before he published his findings. In *AT* 3.4 – thus 1799 – Enys and Jenner meet after which Dwight tells Ross: "Of course there have been inoculations against the smallpox for some years, but this (Jenner's "discovery") is different." It's hard to believe that a Cornish country doctor would have been practising the technique in 1796 even so. In *BP* 1.1 (thus 1818) *WG* uses the expression "Paul Pry" to denote a snooper or nosey parker – yet the John Poole farce from which the term sprang into popular usage didn't make its stage debut (at the Haymarket Theatre, London) until September 1825. At bit later in the same book, Philip Prideaux tells Cuby and Clowance he's just been on an archeological field trip "to Chysauster ... near Gulval ... I believe a man

called Borlase has written about it." And the site is real enough, but William Borlase was not born until 1848 and didn't publish any such book until more than fifty years after Prideaux mentions it.

Geography

When I first started ... I tended to allow my imagination to run much more and invent houses and places ... but nowadays [1984] I generally try to be much more factual if I can.⁹

In respect of geography and topography, the young WG perforce imagined Nampara and its neighbouring villages, coves, mines, estates and landmarks. But Nampara overlooks a very recognisable Perran Sands – renamed in the books Hendrawna – with nearby St Agnes (in which Stippy Stappy Lane runs down to Trevaunance Cove) thinly disguised as St Ann's. Marazanvose, even more thinly disguised as Marasanvose (indeed, in *BP*, even this changed spelling is abandoned in favour of the real thing) is moved three miles nearer the north coast and Illogan becomes Illuggan, which is more or less where the faction ends.¹⁰ For once the author shifts from this wellspring of his story into the country beyond, then places – Truro, Redruth, Bodmin, Falmouth, St. Ives, Launceston, Plymouth, Penzance, Roscoff – become real, adding verisimilitude (in contrast to Thomas Hardy, for instance, whose Wessex contained Casterbridge, Budmouth, Shaston and more but no Dorchester, Weymouth or Shaftesbury).¹¹ As the saga unfolds, its canvas expands exponentially, taking us to London, the Scillies, northern Europe and Portugal before eventually withdrawing to its Cornish root.

The history of Truro

As mining money gradually transformed Truro from a workaday mercantile port into "the London of Cornwall", WG charts something of the town's development through the thirty-seven years of his saga with occasional references to civic improvements: in *FS* 1.8 (thus 1796) we hear of "the County Library ... opened four years ago in Princes Street [with] some three hundred volumes ... available to be borrowed." The year is correct, although

the library opened in Pydar Street and only moved to Princes Street in 1920. *FS* 1.9 (thus still 1796) tells of "great disorder" in "Powder Street and its neighbour ... because the block of houses known as Middle Row was being pulled down and a large new street was soon to be opened." WG refers here to Lemon Street, the laying of which actually started two years earlier than he states. The twenty-bed Cornwall General Infirmary was opened in 1799, as described in *AT* 2.13, although, for plot purposes, WG advances the date from 12 August to the spring.

Families and country seats

It came as a surprise to me to find that, once away from the immediate vicinity of Nampara, WG dispatches his characters more often than not to real homes, accurately described in their real locations and lived in by real people. Thus is history brought to life. To give a few examples: in *FS* 1.4, Ross and Demelza are invited to Tehidy to dine with Lord and Lady Basset. Both Bassets are said to be diminutive. He is Francis, she is Frances and their daughter is also Frances. WG describes Tehidy like so:

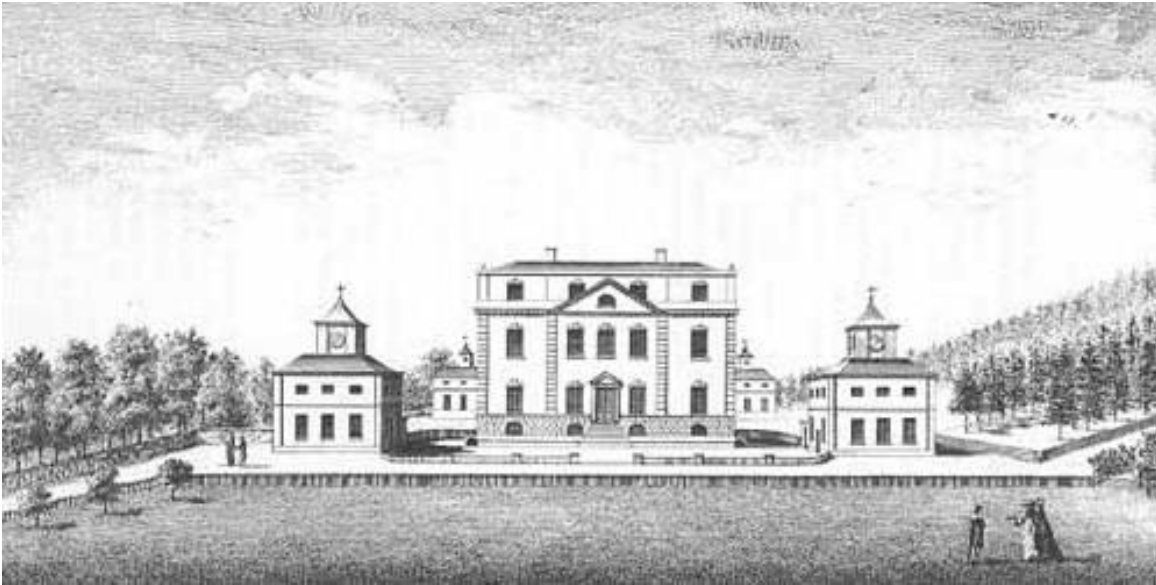
The house itself was an enormous square Palladian mansion sentinelled at each of its corners by a 'pavilion' or smaller house, one of which was a chapel, another a huge conservatory, and the other two accommodation for the servants.

The image of the property on the next page shows that WG's description is wholly accurate, as are all details pertaining to its then (1795) occupants.

When in *SFS* 3.8 Demelza and Clowance go to stay with Lord Edward Fitzmaurice at Bowood in Wiltshire, all the features of the grounds of the house that the author mentions – the lake, the cascade, the Doric temple, the hermit's cave, the Lansdowne Mausoleum – are factual, as again is the detailed roster of personnel.

In *BM* 1.8, when Ross is invited to Ralph-Allen Daniel's home, Trelissick, sited by the Fal "near King Harry Ferry", WG reimagines very little: the Daniel

family, whose wealth derived from tin and copper mining, occupied Trelissick (now owned by the National Trust) from 1790 but only took ownership in 1805 (i.e. eleven years on from the timeframe of WG's story). The property does indeed stand by King Harry Ferry – in operation then and, voted in 2004 one of the ten most scenic ferry trips in the world,¹² to this day.



Tehidy

The patrician Boscawens at Tregothnan may be added to the list; so, too, Samuel Thomas [Spry] of Tregolls and Henry Prynne Andrew of Bodrean, who, when casting decisive votes in the 1797 Truro parliamentary election (*FS* 3.8) are not imaginary councillors, but very real ones, disinterred from a distant past to live again whilst serving the author's purpose. *AT* introduces the Carlyons at Tregrehan and Christopher Hawkins at Trewithen, once more the genuine article. So, too, the Trevanions at Caerhays (*SFS et al*) – excepting, of course, the fictional Cuby, though even she is named after an adjacent parish. Lanhydrock and Cotehele, mentioned in *MD* 1.5, are both real, near Bodmin and Tavistock respectively, so too the Prideaux-Brunes of Prideaux Place, Padstow, The Glynnns of Glynn, the Sawles of Penrice, the Trelawnys of Trelawne, the Vyvyans of Trelowarren, the Beauchamps of Pengreep and the Gregors of Trewarthenick (all *BP*). The lesson is probably this: unless there is good reason to think otherwise, assume that what you're reading has a factual rather than an imaginary basis.

Language

On the third page of the first Poldark novel, we're confronted with the word *hornywink* (Odgers: "half-starved little hornywink though he is"). These lines come from the *Radio Times* of 4 October 1975:

[WG] was particularly pleased once when a Cornishwoman came up to him and said, 'I want to ask you something important. What is a hornywink?' ... 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.

Other sources claim that *hornywink* means *toad* (which best fits this context) or *lapwing*, but whichever meaning you choose to ascribe, the word serves as a colourful introduction to WG's sustained use of Cornish dialect and idiom, rendered not excessively or tiresomely but with judicious skill and care, sufficient to lend authenticity and so enhance the reader's experience, but always with a pleasing light touch.

What I have tried to do ... is write about [the Cornish] as they really are – or as I think they are – as I have known them, as I have read about them, as I have met them and liked them and laughed with them and talked to them: old miners, young rugby players, old fishermen, young lawyers, middle-aged butcher boys, clerics and farmers, doctors and dentists and dustmen. And their wives and sisters and daughters. And listened, of course.¹³

If you read the complete canon you'll learn along the way that *veers* are young pigs and *meaders* mice, that a *whitneck* is a weasel and a *chet* a cat; that a *drumble-drain* is a bumble bee and *long cripple* (according to Jud) an adder, that to *teel* is to bury and that *croust* is a workman's lunch; that *half-saved* to a Cornishman means weak in the head and more besides. You may be left wondering about "nashed and allish", "Johnny Fortnight" and various other Paynter phrases.

In fact, WG was very particular about ensuring, as far as possible, that all his characters spoke with genuine eighteenth century voices:

*Before I began to write any of the Poldarks I would always read Sterne, Swift, Gay, Chesterfield, Sheridan, in order to get something of the flavour and cadence of the speech of those days.*¹⁴

He was upset during the production of *Poldark* (BBC, 1975) whenever the scriptwriters lapsed by putting twentieth century idiom (e.g. "You must be joking!"¹⁵) into the actors' mouths. In reading the books, his extreme care in the precise use of language is apparent throughout. Indeed, in the entirety of the canon, I can recall only two occasions on which a word or phrase jarred on my mind's ear. In *MD* 3.3, concerning Conan Whitworth, WG asks: "Was he too going to turn into a dude like his father?" According to Merriam-Webster, *dude* was first used in print in 1876. Nonetheless, instinct tells me that WG would not have chosen to use the word without good reason to believe it was period-specific, even if not generally recognised as such. Later, in *BP* 1.3, he refers to the possibility of Bella becoming "a star" [performer], which, rightly or wrongly, sounds a concept altogether too modern for 1818.

As any reader will know, the dialogue throughout his dozen novels is a consistent delight. Rather than rehash more or less arbitrary chunks of it – *My Blessed Parliament! Ye great lootal! Ye've slocked my dattur!* – here, I suggest the best way to enjoy it is to read or re-read it for yourself. Redux or anew, a world of pleasure awaits.

Diminutives

The books abound with diminutive names: Jim, Jinny, Ben and Katie Carter, Zacky Martin, Will Nanfan, Prudie Paynter, Ray Penvenen, Keren Smith, Nick Vigus, Sam Carne and more, as is quite natural and as you might expect. But it struck me that even in the most informal, congenial or familiar setting, Jeremy never once becomes Jerry, Clowance never once Cloe or Clo, Stephen never Steve. And though we do finally get to "Bella", it is only after enduring

an awful lot of "Isabella-Rose". Though we are privy to many very intimate exchanges between Ross and his wife, I don't recall her once being addressed as anything other than Demelza – never Melza or Mella or Mel. Geoffrey Charles never becomes Geoff and seldom just Geoffrey. Caroline is always Caroline. Harriet, Morwenna, Rosina, all those three-syllable names. Even at their most loving, Valentine and Selina never resort to Val or Lena. Indeed, although a name ripe for shortening, the only character allowed to use a diminutive of Valentine is the mentally deficient Agneta, who calls him Vally. By the time of *BP*, the Poldarks have been on familiar terms with Lieutenant Havergal for some years and all understand he wishes to marry their daughter. But still he's Christopher rather than Chris (which Bella calls him just twice, once in a letter to Demelza and once to his face). You can imagine the patrician Elizabeth sneering at the informality of Lizzie or Liz, but should not Francis have been allowed some private pet name for his wife? Or Mrs Chynoweth for her daughter? WG was perhaps keen to convey that life back then was to some degree much more mannered, more decorous, more starchy and formal than it tends to be now. But behind closed doors, particularly those of Nampara, among a loving family more than happy to kick over the traces of convention, the dearth of diminutives rings false.

Publications

*Newspapers are a useful source of information, but when I was writing the early books the only contemporary newspaper was the Sherborne Mercury. It was printed in Dorset and the man who delivered it to Cornwall was known as a 'Sherborner'. He used to bring the post as well. But now that the story has reached 1810 I've caught up with the West Briton and the Royal Cornwall Gazette.*¹⁶

Nearly all of the titles WG cites – *The Sherborne Mercury* and *The Exeter Chronicle* (BM), *The Times* (SFS et al.), *The Morning Post* and *Rees's Cyclopaedia* (SFS), *The West Briton* (MD), *The Royal Cornwall Gazette* and *Le Moniteur* (TS), *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Morning Herald* (BP), even *The History of Primrose Prettyface* (W), *Mineralogia Cornubiensis* (JP) and *The*

Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal (TS) are both real and appropriate to the period in question (see quote above). However, he either slips or uses artistic licence when twice referring to *The Spectator*, first in *TS* 2.1 and then again in *BP* 5.2 (its readers Clowance in 1815 and Demelza in 1820 respectively) since *The Spectator* was not published (except briefly from 1711-14) until 1828. Similarly, a review of Bella's operatic debut in *The Barber of Seville* is printed, we hear, in Paris daily *Le Monde* (*BP* 4.2); that paper, however, began publication only in 1944.



In *W*, WG describes how, by innocently changing hands, a children's book called *The History of Primrose Prettyface* becomes instrumental in unmasking an informer. First published by John Marshall circa 1781 and still in print today, the book is both real and period authentic.

The weather

You might think a novel's weather would be summoned up by its author and manipulated freely, within the bounds of reason, to serve his plot. After all, a warm year, a wet year, it makes little difference to the reader. But, as with so much else, it seems that significant weather events in Poldark are rooted in historical fact, thus pushing the tale ever closer to some version of recreated "reality". In *BM* 2.3 an exceptionally cold snowy winter sets in on Christmas Eve 1794 and doesn't let up until finally a spring thaw causes flooding in many regions. And the real weather back then?

*The winter of 1794/95 was exceptionally severe, with the very cold conditions setting in on Christmas Eve 1794 (though it had been cold since November). The frost then lasted, with some breaks, until late March ... On 23 February, the Severn was frozen over, and so was the Thames ... April brought significant flooding.*¹⁷

The summer of 1797 is described in *FS* 3.8 as "hot" and "lovely" which is again in accordance with meteorological records. In *LC* 2.1 the winter of 1813-14 is described as "the hardest ... for many years" – it was, in fact, "one of the four or five coldest" in the last 330 years¹⁸ and the last (to date) in which the Thames froze over.

WG is equally scrupulous about the precarious fortune of harvesting and its effect on food supply (which perhaps explains his insistence on paying close attention to the turning seasons). While the country was at war (which was nearly all of the time), food importation was compromised, meaning that the poor especially depended on a sufficiency of home-grown produce (i.e. a good harvest) to survive. Social unrest, including some riot and wrecking, fuelled by poverty and semi-starvation form part of WG's plot, as, given his self-imposed *reportage* straitjacket, was perhaps inevitable. Here is a brief account of the reality back then:

The government was most anxious about the state of food supplies between 1795 and 1801. The year 1793 was a good

average harvest year, but 1794 was below average, as was 1795 ... Reports from country districts of corn riots continued into the spring of 1795. The problem appeared to be at its worst in the West Country. Scarcity, high prices and concomitant unrest continued into the summer of 1795 and there was eager anticipation of the new harvest. [Its failure meant that] the produce of the 1795 harvest would not last until the future 1796 harvest [and] that further scarcity, high prices and unrest would certainly follow. This was indeed the case in late 1795 and early 1796. In fact the 1796 harvest turned out to be a good one ... and as a result a period of "relative" plenty existed. This lasted until the summer of 1799 ...¹⁹

and what the reader finds is that WG reflects these conditions pretty much exactly. In fact, his regard for the historical record is such that when narrative purposes require him to deviate significantly from it he feels obliged, almost apologetically, to point it out. Thus:

I have taken some liberty with the dates at which the Truro elections took place, but the events as here recorded are otherwise very much as they actually happened ... The date of the Camborne riots differs from fact by a year.²⁰

Food

In his foreword to her *The Poldark Cookery Book* (Triad / Granada, 1981), WG first acknowledges the help and advice given to him by Jean:

*I am able to describe the making of bread in *The Black Moon* because my wife tells me how it is done.*

He then goes on:

As to the composition of the meals in the novels – the menus if you like – this has been a sort of collaboration between her and

myself and the writers of the time. Historians as such are rarely forthcoming about food: they tend to brush it aside in a couple of paragraphs, Diarists, having experienced – or suffered – it at first hand, pay it much more attention. From the original William Hickey's scathing remarks about the inns of Falmouth, to Staniforth's visit to Lord de Dunstanville at Tehidy – not to mention Boswell's; from Jenkyn's News from Cornwall to James Silk Buckingham's comments on his brief stay in the county, all have helped to contribute to our knowledge of the food and menus of the time. So of course does Polwhele – there are fewer pleasanter sentences than that in which he writes: 'Returned home to my wife and drank very agreeable tea with her sweetened with kisses.' Werner, Moritz, Simond, Dudley Rider, Christopher Wallis, the Torrington Diaries, are informative to a greater or lesser extent. And there are recipes and menus from the great houses of Cornwall – to be found in the County Records Office – which never achieved the permanence of print but are none the worse for that Books on cookery were far from scarce even in those days. The London Cook by William Gelleroy was to be found in one or two of the great houses of Cornwall. Farley's The London Art of Cookery had reached its tenth edition by 1804. Verral's The Cook's Paradise and Mrs. Glasse's The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy were frequently reprinted. A book published in 1828 opens with an apology for being 'yet another cook book'.

In reading the books it is clear that WG paid close attention to what was being eaten (or not) – and drunk – not just in the upper echelons of society but right across the social spectrum and his persuasive rendering of scenes involving food and drink, whether in banquet hall, dining room, parlour, Blight's Coffee Shop, The Bounders' Arms, Reath Cottage or *alfresco*, is another of the saga's myriad strengths. If you didn't like syllabubs in those days, or fancied the idea of a few vegetables with your meat, you were out of luck. But, as WG makes plain, the most pressing problem for the majority was sourcing a steady supply of anything approaching sufficiency at all.

Medicine

Another field requiring diligent research – according to *Memoirs* 2.8, primary sources this time included *Surgeon's Mate, The Diary of John Knyveton, Surgeon in the British Fleet During the Seven Years War, 1756-1762* and Fordyce's 1789 book on fevers.²¹ WG is well-versed in all the rudimentary treatments – the Peruvian bark, the Melrose water, the salt of wormwood and so on; also in the nonsensical flummery – "an acute gouty condition of the abdominal viscera which is manifesting itself in severe cramp-like spasms of the extremities" (AT 3.15) – that passed back then for "diagnosis". In SFS 1.5 we meet King George III's "mad doctors ... [who] were now the six most important men in the kingdom" and come to feel the weight of responsibility upon them. Two chapters on, we are introduced to two pioneers in the treatment of mental illness – Dr Pinel, director of a French asylum called Bicêtre and Mr William Tuke, a Quaker merchant of York – and learn something of their methods. The absence of even the most basic understanding of pathology, bacteriology, even anatomy in those days is effectively conveyed.

Entertainments

When WG sends his characters off to the theatre or opera or stages some less formal dramatic entertainment, the productions and venues concerned are usually both real and timely. For example, we are told in AT 3.4 (thus 1799) that Ross takes a box at Drury Lane to see "Mr John Kemble, Mr William Barrymore and Mrs Powell in *The Revenge*, a tragedy in five acts by Edward Young." Though *The Revenge* was first staged back in 1721, it was revived at Drury Lane in December 1801 with the actors named above, so WG tweaks reality here just minimally. In MD 1.5 (thus 1812), Jeremy attends the Assembly Rooms in Truro to see "The Shamrock Players ... performing *The Tragedy of The Gamester, or False Friend ... The Milliners* and ... *The Village Lawyer*." The first of those pieces was written by Edward Moore in 1753 and the third dates back to 1787. Only *The Milliners* (1828) is not quite contemporary. In TS 1.4 (thus 1815), it's back to Drury Lane for "Morton's comedy *Town and Country*, with Mr Kean playing Reuben, and after it a musical piece called *Rubies and Diamonds*." The details of the play are factual

in all respects and WG doubtless used a valid source for the musical reference also. When in *BP* 2.12 (thus early 1820), Fredericks tells Bella that Rossini's *Barber of Seville* was first performed in England "at the King's Theatre ... three or four years ago" he bends the truth only slightly (since the first performance was on 10 March 1818 at the venue named). A letter from Havergal to Bella in *BP* 5.2 (1820) refers to the pair having gone the previous year to "the Royal Coburg Theatre ... just across the river by the new bridge ... [to see] a spectacle and melodrama called *Trial By Battle*." The theatre, now known as The Old Vic, opened in 1818, the melodrama, written by William Barrymore, was first put on in 1818 and the "new bridge" (i.e. Waterloo Bridge) opened in 1817, so WG invents or time-shifts nothing. In *BP* 5.5 he mentions two more "new" theatres, the Surrey and the Olympic; they opened in 1782 and 1806 respectively, thus more reliable data. By the time Clowance takes the part of Maria in *The School for Scandal* during amateur theatricals at Bowood in *SFS* 3.9, the play (which premiered in 1777) was already thirty-four years old, so WG's reference is wholly appropriate. Similarly, when in *TS* 1.11 the Poldarks go with friends to the French Opera in the Rue de Richelieu in Paris in 1815, the production they see – *Castor and Pollux* – dates back to 1737.

When it comes to popular songs, however, the situation is less clear-cut. At an 1813 Trenwith party (*LC* 1.14), young Bella sings "*Ripe Sparrergrass*" and *The Frog and the Mouse*. She wanted to sing *The Highwayman* "but had been bullied out of it" and had been about to sing *Cherry Ripe* when she was persuaded by popular acclaim to render *The Barley Mow* instead. *Ripe 'Sparr-gras*²² has words by Dr. Swift set to music by William Hayes (1706-77), so would certainly not be out of place in Bella's repertoire; *The Frog and the Mouse* is plainly a variant of the ancient ballad *Froggie Went A'courting / Kitty Alone*; *The Highwayman* circulates most widely as a cantata comprising a 1906 Alfred Noyes poem set to music by Deems Taylor, although some earlier folk version is entirely plausible; the words of *Cherry Ripe* date back to the seventeenth century with music somewhat later and *The Barley Mow* is another venerable traditional standard, the text of which appears in James Henry Dixon's *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry in England* (1846), where it is described as "sung at country meetings in Devon and Cornwall." So far, so good.

But, at the end of *RP*, Demelza scores a success with two songs, *I d' pluck a fair rose for my love* and *I suspicioned she was pretty*, again at Trenwith, and the online consensus seems to be that **these lyrics were purpose-written for his narrative by WG**. This conclusion is supported by Mike O'Connor, who scored the first of them for Mammoth Screen's 2015 production of *Poldark*. He states:

*Winston Graham quotes some folk songs in his books. We used authentic tunes for those ... At a couple of points Winston wrote lyrics intended to sound like folk song to achieve a dramatic purpose in the tale: 'I d' pluck a fair rose' is one of those ... I wrote the music [to which this lyric is set in Poldark Series One, Episode Four].*²³

Given that *RP* was published thirty-nine years before *LC* at a time when WG's commitment to across-the-board authenticity was not so absolute as it would become, the idea that, during the war, while he was writing *RP*, he would choose to compose two lyrics to suit his narrative purpose rather than disinter pre-existing ones from the archive seems credible. Having said that, once into the '70s and '80s trilogies, it would be less so.

Hotels, inns and taverns

Though it's hard to be sure all of the time, in many and probably the majority of cases, when WG mentions such places they are real rather than imaginary, as in The King's Arms, St Austell, The London Inn, Lostwithiel and The White Horse, Liskeard (*AT* 3.2; three early staging posts when coaching east from Truro); The Norway Inn, Devoran (*MD* 2.3; a gaming rendezvous used by Valentine, Andrew Blamey and friends); The Star and Garter, Pall Mall (*BP* 1.9; where Clowance and Bella put up); The Pulteney Hotel (now The Bath House), Piccadilly (*BP* 2.12; where Bella and Christopher attended a Count Von Badenberg party); The Mitre, Hedge Lane, The Fountain Inn, Plymouth and The Rising Sun, off the Barbican, Plymouth (*W* 4.4/5; accommodations used separately by Ross and Dwight during Ross's mission to reunite Dwight and Caroline); The Red Lion and The Fighting Cocks (two historic Truro inns

mentioned repeatedly in the post-war quartet); The King's Head, Portsmouth (later became The Shamrock Tavern, now demolished) (*BP* 4.2; patronised by Ross and Clowance on their way home from Rouen); and many more.

Incidentally, how long did it take to travel by coach to London? Through most of the books, the time quoted is five days. In *BP* 3.2, Havergal says: "Four days' ... at the least," which, assuming some road improvement, sounds reasonable enough. But earlier in the same book (1.5), Demelza tells Fredericks: "It takes two or three days by coach, and you cannot be certain sure by sea, sometimes shorter, often longer." Can she be right? Well, in *BP* 4.3, Fitzmaurice *does* travel non-stop by coach and four from London to Penryn in "two days", despite the "atrocious" West Country roads. Six months later, in *BP* 5.10, Ross and Demelza take the Royal London Mail, "a service ... in operation for five years [that] on an average trip ... took thirty-five hours to travel from the Red Lion Hotel in Truro to the Saracen's Head in London." But, in describing their trip, WG makes plain that it takes not thirty-five hours but fifty-nine (i.e. six a.m. Friday to five p.m. Sunday) – so believe what you will. In observing that "soon ... they would need to go by coach only as far as Bath and then take a steam train," Demelza was being a little psychic, since there was no steam passenger service anywhere until 1825 and no GWR until 1833.

Folklore

Before they left Edward saw the miners building a bonfire out of driftwood and broken pit props. Then he realised it wanted only ten days to November the fifth.

He said to Ross: "So you celebrate this old anniversary as far west as this?"

"Very much so. This is Wesleyan country, and to celebrate the defeat of the Catholics is always a popular feast."

"They were a few fanatics, weren't they. Better, surely, to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada."

*"Oh, they do that as well. And Hallowe'en, which is soon upon us. The Cornish are always looking for some excuse to have a feast." (*BP* 5.2)*

SFS 3.3 begins:

Midsummer Eve – or St John's Eve – the saint being John the Baptist – is a magical night. The height of the summer solstice, when the sun, having reached the tropical points, is at its furthest from the equator and appears to stand still. The time of human sacrifice, of sun worship, of the gathering of serpents, of the breaking of branches, of the foreseeing of death.

Among the Celts of Cornwall it has been a special, a supernatural night back into pre-history, but first Puritanism and then Methodism had frowned on the commemoration of pagan practices, so that gradually it had become a simpler feast, a night for bonfires and courting couples and a few brief ceremonies into which there entered more fun than belief.

WG then proceeds to describe this 1811 St John's Eve, writing of a torchlit procession with singing, a Cornish incantation given by the Lady of the Flowers (a reluctant Caroline), a bonfire with dancing and fireworks (both bought and homemade), a second procession and then a visit to the churchyard to watch for apparitions of those destined to die in the year to come. WG quotes two verses of a song which begins:

*Robin Hood and Little John
They both are gone to the fair – O*

A publication called *Early English Poetry, Ballads and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages, Volume XVII* (The Percy Society, 1845) identifies this as *The Furry-day Song*. After reproducing a more complete lyric than WG's abridged version, editor James Henry Dixon comments:

At Helstone in Cornwall, the 8th of May is devoted to revelry and gaiety. It is called the Furry-day,²⁴ supposed to be a corruption of Flora's day, from the garlands worn and carried in procession during the festival. A writer in the Gentleman's

Magazine for June 1790, says, "In the morning, very early, some troublesome rogues go round the streets [of Helstone], with drums, and other noisy instruments, disturbing their sober neighbours, and singing parts of a song ... During the festival, the gentry, tradespeople, servants, &c, dance through the streets, and thread through certain of the houses to a very old dance tune ... The Furry-day song possesses no literary merit whatever; but as a part of an old, and really interesting festival, it is worthy of preservation.

The song WG cites, then is local, venerable and probably aired just as readily by country folk on Midsummer Eve as on other festive occasions.

In *MD* 3.3, he samples folklore again by way of "an old farmhouse dance" – the Miller's Dance – that, according to Paul Kellow "is just an excuse for a noisy lark" but from which WG skilfully milks added meaning as Clowance is passed from hand to hand. Indeed, it's hard not to think that the author only made Stephen a miller (for it has precious little other bearing on his story) so as to be able to work this connection in. The dance is performed to the traditional song *There Was An Old Miller*, the first verse of which, as quoted by WG, goes:

*There was an old miller who lived by himself
He ground the corn and taxed the sun
The money he made he put on a shelf
But when he came to count his wealth
One ... two ... three ... it was gone!*

In *Old time Songs and Ballads* by R. Dunstan & C. E. Bygott (Schofield & Sims Ltd., Huddersfield & London, undated, circa 1932), the book's authors quote a variant lyric, but also shed light on that curious phrase "taxed the sun":

In olden days, many, if not each of the villages in the land had its own wind or water-mill, and to it the farmers and villagers took their corn to be ground.

In return for his services the miller was entitled to a handful from each bag of grain or meal, which was called his "grab" and it is easy to understand that such a custom gave many opportunities to a greedy or unscrupulous miller of enriching himself at the expense of others. Hence the traditional words of verse 1:

There was an old miller who lived by himself
By grinding corn he grabbed his pelf
One hand on the hopper and one on the tab
As the wheel went round he took his grab

Some versions of the words have "in the bag" where we have "on the tab" indicating that the miller helped himself to both grain and meal.

So "taxed the sun" presumably refers to the miller's custom of exacting his personal tribute and therefore levying his own "tax" on [the grain grown by] the sun.

In *TS* 4.4, WG gives the last verse of a traditional cumulative song he calls *the Dilly Song* but which is also known as *Green Grow the Rushes-O*, *The Twelve Prophets*, *The Carol of the Twelve Numbers*, *The Teaching Song* and *The Ten Commandments*. Sometimes sung as a Christmas carol (as in *TS*; the choir follow it with *Noël* and *Joseph Was An Old Man*) and popular across the English-speaking world, in *One Hundred English Folk Songs* (Dover Publications, 1976), editor Cecil J. Sharp notes that "the song was very common in Somerset and the whole of the West of England."

Fashion

Each time a new swell of either sex is introduced, my eyes glaze over during the three or four lines of detailed description of their apparel: "Francis ... was dressed in a fashionable manner, with buff-coloured breeches, a yellow waistcoat, and a narrow-waisted coat of dark brown velvet with a high collar."

(*RP* 1.3); "[Unwin] was dressed in a brown nankeen riding suit which had been cut by an expensive tailor, highly polished brown boots so dark as to be almost black, and a black silk cravat. The points of his collar stood up at each side of his face." (*BM* 1.3); "Clowance was going down tonight in a Grecian round robe of fine Indian muslin. It had a demi-train, and robe and train were trimmed with a silver fringe. The sleeves Mistress Trelask had called Circassian, and the bosom was trimmed *à la Chemise*. Her hair was dressed rather flat but with curls on the forehead and the fullness of it confined behind with a row of twisted pearls. She wore white satin slippers with silver clasps." (*SFS* 3.8); Elizabeth was wearing a full white satin skirt with a pad at the back to expand it and make the waist look smaller, a tight bodice of azure satin and a paler blue toque. George, elegant in a new black coat much cut away, with wide revers on both coat and waistcoat, and two rows of silver buttons ..." (*AT* 2.13); Ossie [was] looking at his most extreme in a new coat of ribbed orange velvet with double lapels – the inner ones green striped – and the palest lavender stock ..." (*BM* 3.12); and so on.

Table talk and gossip

When WG's characters, real and imaginary, gather together to socialise at a house party, a public function, a cliff-top walk or whatever it may be, the writer necessarily invents their dialogue. But the *subject* of their dialogue is never simply meaningless arcana or ephemera, but, rather, reflects closely upon the society in which they live. So, as we today might talk of the latest Royal birth, so here: in *FS* 1.4, the talk is of Prinny (the Prince of Wales), his newborn daughter Charlotte and the child's mother Princess Caroline, whom the Prince has "deserted ... altogether ... to live openly with Lady Jersey" because "in addition to being fat and vulgar, she smells to high heaven." In *SFS* 1.4, we read that:

Conversation at the table for a time was concerned with [food] riots in the north of England, the depreciation of the currency and the scandal of the Duke of Cumberland [Ernest, fifth son of King George III, whose Italian valet, Joseph Sellis, was found dead in the Duke's apartments at St James' Palace with his

throat cut; the coroner's verdict of "suicide" was not widely believed].

When Harriet asks George what can be more important than hunting, he says: "*The affairs of the kingdom.*"

And what else concerns him?

"*Affairs of the county. Do you not live in Cornwall, ma'am?*"

"*I live in Hatherleigh,*" she replies. "*Just over the border – in England.*"

... ..

"*Mr Gratton,*" said Lady Harriet, "*what would you say to emancipating the Wesleyans for a change? Now the Prince of Wales has taken up with Lady Hertford I suspicion we shall all be psalm-singing before long.*"

There was a laugh, and talk turned to bawdy speculation as to the nature of the Prince's relationship with his new favourite.

In LC 1.4:

Gossip around the town was of a shipwreck in the fog off the Lizard: a tin-ship moving up channel, five men missing; of a musical festival to be held at the Assembly Rooms next Tuesday at which the principal draw was to be the renowned [Italian opera singer] Madame Catalini; of a Society for the Prosecution of Thieves just formed in Truro under the patronage of Mr Paul, the mayor; of the bad harvest, of the wicked poor price of tin.

Thus does WG use this as another means by which to subtly inform and entertain in one.

Days of the week

Whenever WG mentions a specific day of the week – e.g. that All Hallows' Day 1795 (Dwight and Caroline's wedding day) fell on a Sunday (FS 1.2) or that

Christmas Day 1799 fell on a Wednesday (*AT* 3.12) or that 17 January 1815 (Jeremy and Cuby's wedding day) was a Tuesday (*LC* 3.10) – his facts are historically accurate. Even though it may not seem important to the reader, he adheres faithfully to the calendar at all times.

When I came upon a reference, also in *AT*, to 9 December 1799 being "two days before full moon", I checked to find that full moon that week was actually on the twelfth, meaning that WG was just one day out. Sadly, however, other references to phases of the moon (e.g. in *RP* 3.2 when Ross rows Demelza round to Sawle to watch the pilchard fishing or in *TS* 2.10 when Ross is at large in France after escaping from confinement at Verdun) bear no relation whatever to the historical record, showing that the *AT* near-match was just a fluke. Of course, given the relative difficulty of accessing such data at the time the books were written, it is hardly surprising and certainly no criticism is intended. Yet, if he were at work today, with such information far more readily to hand than it was back in the day, I don't doubt that WG would have his full moons and new moons paying strict obeisance to the lunar calendar (as did the titular Black Moon) in line with other more readily ordered aspects.

Churches

WG may move churches about – St Minver is not in Marasanvoze, as stated in *BM* 1.4, but miles off, near Wadebridge – but seems not to make up names: the church in which Verity and Andrew are married, identified in *D* 3.3 as King Charles the Martyr, Falmouth, is real; furthermore, since it dates back to 1664, they could indeed have married there. George and Elizabeth were wed in "the quiet little church at St Feock" (*MD*, Collins, 1982, 1.8, though the reference is removed in later editions), another venerable edifice. Dwight and Caroline were married in St Mary's, Truro (now Truro Cathedral) (*FS* 1.2). In *BP* 3.5, Jane Heligan fought off the serial killer by the Norman St Allen Church, Zelah. In *BM* 1.10 we read that Methodism in Grambler had fallen "as low as Bodmin church spire" which doesn't mean much unless you know, as all the book's characters would, that in 1699 the church (then Cornwall's largest) lost its spire following a lightning strike. All true.

Trivia

One of the most pleasurable aspects of reading the books is constantly coming across random facts and lore, often slipped in and sometimes just hinted at so casually as to pass the inattentive reader by. The '70s trilogy in particular is replete with them. Some selected examples: in *BM* 3.11 we learn that "the present Archbishop of Canterbury was the son of a grazier" (that would be John Moore (1730-1805), whose father was indeed a butcher and grazier. Remarkably, in the 2008 Pan reprint of this title, the key word has been changed, quite wrongly, to *glazier*). *FS* 2.7 recalls the most recent hostile invasion of the British Isles, which occurred at Fishguard, Wales in February 1797 when four French ships briefly put men ashore before hastily withdrawing. If you've ever used or perhaps just wondered about the expression "as quick as you can say Jack Robinson", *AT* 1.9 provides an albeit disputed explanation of its origin. In *AT* 2.3, Drake makes the surprising observation that "Opie lived round here" – he being John Opie RA (1761-1807) who was born between St Agnes and Perranporth and spent the first twenty years of his life in and around Truro before departing for London and painterly fame. *MD* 1.13 discloses that *Pride and Prejudice* was published anonymously (in fact, as "by the author of *Sense and Sensibility*", who was identified only as "A Lady"). In *AT* 3.4 we learn that dahlias were first imported as a foodstuff (as a potato substitute) and only put to a secondary decorative use when the root's flavour failed to please, and in *LC* 1.7 that salt and wine were both, in times of war, contraband commodities. In *SFS* 1.4 we find that the steeplechase "is become fashionable in Devon"; similarly, in *MD* 1.5, come across "a new drink called ginger-beer". In *TS* 3.4, the ailing Andrew Blamey Snr is treated to good effect with "Dr Withering's new drug digitalis" (derived from foxgloves and still in use today). Dr Anselm discloses in *AT* 3.9 that "the penny post comes at midnight". We learn of duels fought between Canning and Lord Castlereagh (*SFS* 1.7) and Sir Christopher Hawkins and Lord de Dunstanville (*SFS* 2.5); also that Russian war-wounded were billeted in Great Yarmouth (*AT* 3.7) (and were so hungry that they took to "drinking the oil out of the street lamps"). Stones were thrown and an airgun was fired at the King's coach as he travelled to the opening of Parliament, with the coach (then empty) later overturned and "near wrecked" (*FS* 1.4). Expat West Country MPs used to meet as "The

Cornish Club" in Wood's Coffee House in Covent Garden (*AT* 1.3). WG works into *TS* 2.2 "a splendid remark" made by Baring during one of the *Corn Laws* debates of 1815: seeking to limit the country's population to suit its supply of home-grown corn rather than regulating the supply of corn to meet the needs of the population, he suggested, was not lengthening the bed to fit the man but, rather, shortening the man to fit the bed! Perhaps I should get out more, but I never knew until finding Drake about to undertake the task that working oxen were shod (*AT* 3.10); or that Bristol is (or was) pronounced locally *Bristow* (*SFS* 2.3); or that Lord Byron, who was related by marriage to the Trevanion family, kept "a wolf, a bear, a monkey, a parrot and a tame crow" (*BP* 5.6). In *SFS* 1.6 (thus 1810), WG writes of "the disc of the sun ... like a six-shilling piece ..." – and such coins were indeed minted by the Bank of Ireland in 1804. In *FS* 1.8 we're advised that in the district of St Margaret's Church, Truro "had lived Condorus, the last Celtic Earl, who had perished soon after the Norman Conquest." (In the Pan 2008 reprint of this book, the poor man's name is rendered *Condoms* ...) At the opening of *SFS* 2.8 we attend a musical evening at which Nicholas Carveth plays "the clarinet, in its improved form just introduced by Iwan Muller." In *MD* 1.4, young Isabella-Rose bursts into a room "with the speed of a Congreve fire rocket" (a weapon of war developed in 1805, so another timely reference). *LC* 2.4 tells us that, two days after the fall of Paris in April 1814, Napoleon tried to poison himself. In *TS* 1.4, Fitzmaurice advises the Poldarks, about to leave for France, to take knives and forks with them to offset a cross-Channel shortage. In *BP* 2.12 we learn that in 1820 London boasted five bridges over the Thames and, in Oxford Street, the longest city street in Europe. In *TS* 4.4, Ross makes casual reference to Jonathan Hornblower, inventor of the compound engine, whose "father had thirteen children and gave them all names beginning with J." He lists six, then dries up, though "used to know them all." London-based historian Edward Gibbon (1723-1792) was six years an MP for Liskeard without once setting foot in the town (*MD* 3.8). Furthermore, "while still a young man he suffered a rupture and thereafter persistently neglected it. In his latest years such was his corpulency ... that he developed a varicocele and thereafter was perforce buttoned up in the morning and never opened till he was undressed at night, so that every need of nature was performed in his clothes." Fleas in your coach? Try Dr Leach's Fumigatory Powder (*AT* 1.1).

The canon, tranche by tranche

Though *RP* (1945) and *D* (1946) make a strong opening to the post-war quartet, *JP* (1950) is a step up. Though particularly potent in its first half, the novel is excellent in all respects bar one: its rather puzzling title. For Jeremy does not even appear until the book's final few pages and then, new-born babe that he is, is given neither time nor opportunity to become any sort of established character (indeed, he is outshone to the point of eclipse by the book's other late arrival, James Blamey). Given the titles of P1, P2 and P4, *Francis* would perhaps have been more fitting. But the book reminds us how good WG always was in writing lawyers (here Ross's advocate Jeffery Clymer) and trials (see also *The Merciless Ladies* (1944), *Take My Life* (1947), *The Tumbled House* (1959) *et cetera*). *W* rounds off in swaggering style this first absorbing visit to Poldarkland, which will prove unlike any other.

After the initial quartet followed by a break of eighteen years, WG returned to his saga with *BM*, a novel with less domesticity and warmth than its predecessors. Yes, there is an obvious need to broaden his canvas and expand his cast, but Drake, Morwenna and Tholly struggle to fill the shoes of Dwight (imprisoned), Verity (all but ignored) and Francis (dead). The second half of *FS* reads better than the first, except for the wretched Delemza / Hugh Armitage storyline, which rings jarringly false from silly popinjay-poesy start to mawkish finish. It may be seen as the author's response to a dramatic imperative – the need to introduce a (or, more accurately, another) worm into the bud of the Poldarks' idyllic marriage; to insert a bit more grit into the oyster. But however you try to argue its case, to recognise the narrative necessity, the episode itself shouts "plot contrivance" in a disappointingly unsubtle and unpersuasive way.

WG was an author used to proceeding slowly and deliberately, at his own pace, writing and rewriting until he got it right. *AT* was probably the first novel since his early pre-war days produced under deadline pressure (that imposed by the BBC's decision to press ahead with Series Two of *Poldark* before all three source novels were written). And does it show? Only perhaps in the Monk Adderley episode, which seems more grafted onto that worked seam-

lessly into the text. Nonetheless, *AT* closes this trilogy strongly. As previously noted, the generous helpings of historical subtext served up throughout are a major plus.

For all that the post-war quartet and the '70s trilogy were published twenty years apart, the timeline of their collective narrative follows an uninterrupted continuum from 1783 to 1799. But with tranche #3, the '80s trilogy, the narrative takes a ten year leap forward to 1810, plunging the now 50 year old Ross into high politics. More new characters – most notably Ross and Demelza's two children Jeremy and Clowance, now grown into young adults, plus Stephen Carrington, the eponymous stranger – but, in contrast, Drake and Morwenna are banished to exile in Looe, Sam and Rosina are dispatched to virtual oblivion in Pally's Shop, Tholly disappears and even Dwight is reduced to a cipher with no more than the occasional walk-on (though his wife Caroline fares better). The plotting is thinner this time, such that both *SFS* and *MD* are dull – the first at its best when following Ross into the world of Westminster politics but mostly a trite recounting of Clowance's and Jeremy's troubled love-lives and the second, perhaps the weakest of all the Poldark novels, skewed by a long-winded account of a stagecoach robbery that concludes the book in a dreary and altogether unsatisfactory fashion (so much so, indeed, that *WG* is moved to include an apologetic Author's Note concerning the unresolved "ending"). As might be expected, *LC*, as *AT* before it, proves the best of the trilogy, although with the oh-so-convenient death of Mr. Rose (supposedly the only witness to the stagecoach robbery) *WG* manipulates his readers with less than his usual felicity. (And why could George not have used driver and guard for the same purpose?) Also, the development of Jeremy's character throughout this trilogy – his ability, though untaught, to successfully design a steam engine (then cutting edge engineering), his planning and execution of a felony at the risk of his life for no good reason and his precipitate decision to buy himself into the army, again for no good reason – remains unconvincing.

In *TS*, *WG* breaks new ground by immersing his readers in European rather than domestic politics, moving his characters like chess pieces towards the inevitability of Waterloo. The first time I read this book, I remember not

particularly enjoying it. This time through, I found it wholly satisfying. A fine achievement.

And so on to the valedictory *BP*, its author now in his nineties but plainly gripped by an irresistible compulsion to write. With the country finally entering a prolonged period of peace after so many years of war and Ross having retired from the political arena, WG both draws his narrative back to its parochial beginnings and, via the eponymous Bella, takes his readers into a world hitherto unexplored: that of the professional stage (first opera and then drama), which, like history, was another of the writer's abiding interests. The historic catch-up interludes that were so enjoyable a feature of previous novels are here mostly gone (we're offered a couple of letters early on from Canning to Ross and later an instructive recounting of the return from exile of Caroline, mother of George IV's only child and determined to become his queen). The Poldark siblings' love-lives again occupy centre stage with Valentine entertainingly assuming Smelter George's pantomime villain role and Butto a splendid left-field nemesis. The plotting feels a little by-the-numbers, formulaic – WG had, after all, been at his work for a very long time by now – and the last quarter of the book is, by his or any other standard, excessively romantic and melodramatic. Though dismayingly error-strewn (more on this below), the text maintains interest to the end.

To further spice his cake, WG throws in a slow-burn murder mystery. But though a Poldark first, it fails to grip because the conventions of the genre (which WG would know well) are not followed: thus we're offered not several possible culprits but one, readily identifiable from an early stage, clue-planting is clumsy and Prideaux makes a less than compelling sleuth.

Right up until the completed manuscript was sent off to the publisher's, the title of this book was *Valentine*, and, in view of the secondary associations attached to that word, it's perhaps a pity it was subsequently changed.

*But I woke up at about four o'clock one morning and realised it was no longer a book about Valentine, but about Bella. I had become fascinated by her story.*²⁵

Bella's character, like Jeremy's before it, fails to convince. Extravagant or hyperbolic character arcs are perhaps a necessary component of fiction; after all, if an author's characters are not to some degree larger than life there's no story to tell – or, at least, not one likely to engage. But there should ideally remain some fundamental sense of conviction, of verisimilitude, of touching base with fictional reality. This is a sense with which the exemplary Ross and Demelza are richly imbued, but both Jeremy and Bella lack.

In contrast, Harriet in the later books becomes an ever more enjoyable character, with her implacable pragmatism – "I just take people as I find 'em"; "In the *best* society hardly anyone can be certain who their father is" – more than a match for the calculating George's bloodless, amoral vacuity. In *BP* especially, she comes into her own.

Highs and lows

Memorable passages include: George's dispassionately icy assessments of the marriage prospects of first Morwenna (*BM* 2.1) and then Valentine (*MD* 1.5); also Valentine's comprehensive checkmate of his plans (*LC* 2.10). Falmouth's summation for Ross of recent political history and shifting allegiances (*FS* 3.7) and Ralph-Allen Daniel's attempt to talk Ross into accepting a JP appointment (*BM* 1.8) are both riveting; so too, for quite different reasons, the deaths of Agatha (*BM* 3.13) and Jeremy (*TS* 2.13). Drake and Morwenna's first kiss (*BM* 2.1) is another moving scene.

Lows: the Hugh Armitage / Demelza liaison; the *Poldark* meets *Walking Stick* stagecoach robbery; the unpersuasive character developments of both Jeremy and Bella; Havergal's request to pay his addresses to a child (albeit a precocious one) *just turned thirteen*; *MD* – edges out *BP* as least satisfying book of the twelve.

Sexual politics

I have written elsewhere about the vexed question of whether Ross did or did not "rape" Elizabeth and don't intend to rehash the arguments here. I will say

that the conclusion I drew then has not been altered by re-reading the canon. However, I did note in passing two explicit references to Ross "taking Elizabeth against her will": first, in *FS* 1.12, he states: "I took her against her will – though in the end I do not believe it was so much against her will", then, in *BP* 5.8, *WG* describes him being carried semi-conscious into "the very [Trenwith] bedroom where he had taken Elizabeth against her will twenty-seven or more years ago".

On the wider question of sexual politics in the late Georgian / Regency period, *WG* spells out plainly that women were effectively chattels with few rights or protection either under law or the accepted tenets of society. When George considers how best to marry off Morwenna, he seeks to dispose of her as he might an oil painting, a piece of property or shares in a mine and with no more consideration of her feelings than if she were a brood mare or cow. When Selina marries Valentine, she cedes to him her house, her land, her fortune and her body. He burns down the first, plunders the second, squanders the third and would be perfectly happy to violate the fourth at the first show from her of physical reluctance, serial adulterer though he be. Indeed, he regrets that, in law, a man cannot rape his wife. "We should have to pretend we were unmarried for the occasion," he tells her chillingly (*BP* 1.8). Later, when the couple are estranged, he heaps more sorrow on her hapless head by stealing away their two-year-old child. But "Valentine refused to use the word 'kidnapped'. He claimed that he had simply resumed possession of his own son. Kidnapping one's son was like raping one's wife, a contradiction in terms" (*BP* 5.2). Thus does the man assume all rights for himself while granting the woman none.

WG wrote feisty female characters – Demelza, of course, also Caroline, Harriet and more – but all are constrained by the limitations society places on their options. Demelza thrives and blossoms at Nampara, but when Ross proves unfaithful, what can she do other than either accept his behaviour or return to poverty and drudgery at Illuggan? The young Caroline has money but is acutely aware that, once wed, she will lose it as Selina above. Dwight won out over Unwin because he desired the woman rather than her wealth; even so, Caroline's freedom of choice ends with her wedding. And high-born

Harriet sees her marriage to George clearly for what it is: one of mutual convenience, trading herself, "a moderately attractive widow with no money to speak of", to a rich man who gains "position", while acknowledging it also to be the union of "a self-willed woman" who "relish(es) a challenge" and is "sexually attracted... by the transparent ugliness of his moral character" (*BP* 4.5 – WG: born writer to the last).

The unquestioned, entitled assumption of men is repeatedly stressed. The odious Ossie, who, WG tells us, "raped" his wife on their wedding night" (*BM* 3.11) "saw women mainly as objects, differently attired from himself, suitable to receive unmeant compliments, mothers of children, static but useful vehicles for perpetuating the human race, and frequently but only briefly as the nude objects of his desire ... They were there for a purpose; they existed for his pleasure and not for their own" (*FS* 1.4 / 2.2). Valentine considers "that in the end all women were alike" (*BP* 1.6); WG himself recalls "an old saying that all women were the same when the candle was blown out" (*FS* 3.1) – and, it's true, though only to the extent, equally crass, that all men are too. Stephen believes that "women never fundamentally disliked a little rough treatment" – indeed, "more than one had told him it was their secret dream" (*MD* 3.5). Ross, having been at the very least "rough" with Elizabeth, is in no way abashed; rather, when Jeremy is hard-pressed to know what to do about Cuby, he counsels: "Why don't you just take her?" "This is the nineteenth century," his shocked son tells him. "I know," says Ross, "but people change little whatever century they live in" (*LC* 3.7). And the depressing sequel to that exchange is that, after having been commendably appalled by Pop's advice, Jeremy then (sort of) follows it. Even the conscientious Dwight is not above asserting male privilege. In *D* 2.13, Keren offers him kisses:

"A thousand. Or twenty thousand. Or a million. They're yours for the asking."

He put his hands up to her face, pressed it between his hands. There was a sudden tender vehemence in his touch.

"If I take there'll be no asking."

Times have changed – or, if Ross is to be believed, maybe not.

Extraordinary Robbery — The Brighton coach was robbed on Wednesday last of Bank notes to the amount of 4,000l. in the following manner:—The notes were sent in a locked box from the house of Weston, Pinhorn, and Co. in the Borough, to the Union Bank, at Brighton. The box was deposited beneath the seat of the coach. On the arrival of the coach at Brighton, in the evening, the clerk of the bankers at Brighton proceeded, according to custom, to unlock the seat, when he found it had been broken open, and robbed of the box. The coachman, on being applied to, said that six persons were booked for inside passengers at the office in London; that at the time of the coach starting, only two, a gentleman and a lady, dressed in the first style of fashion, who seemed to be man and wife, entered the coach. Two gentlemen were taken up on the road, and the others never appeared at all. On the coach reaching Sutton, the lady was suddenly TAKEN ILL, and remained behind at the inn; that at this time a passenger from the top of the coach got inside, that on his arrival at Riegate, the two gentlemen inside, pretending that the friend they were going to see at Brighton, had returned to London, left the coach. The coachman thus lost all his four inside passengers, by whom it is clear the robbery was committed between London and Sutton, which place is only eleven miles distant.

From the *Lancaster Gazette* of 15 February, 1812

Other

(1) The government Packet Service that operated exclusively out of Falmouth from 1689 to 1850, and which provided employment for WG's Blameys, is faithfully described.

(2) In *MD* 3.5, WG reprints a report, headed "Startling Robbery", allegedly from *The Morning Post* of 23 November 1812, concerning the theft "on Monday last the 16th inst. [of] between £3,000 and £4,000" from a stagecoach travelling from London to Brighton. Unfortunately, the British Newspaper Archive's set of *Morning Posts* from November 1812 is incomplete, with the 23rd not among those present. But a report from *The Lancaster Gazette* of 15 February 1812 (see previous page) appears to report the same robbery and I can't help but wonder whether WG revised the dates and perhaps other details to suit his story.

Foibles and personal touches

(1) Young WG loved the word *bubbling* and its derivatives, using it no fewer than twenty-four times in the post-war quartet, principally in respect of streams (ten usages), but also laughter (3), emotions (3), the sea, rain, fire-wood and more. Half a century on, in *BP*, he loves it still, with seven more usages, including these lines from 2.5:

[Geoffrey Charles]: *"I believe the seed has been sown. All it requires is a visit from you bubbling with enthusiasm, and we shall carry the day."*

"Go on," Ross said to Demelza. "If you water the seeds you will carry the day."

Geoffrey Charles laughed again.

"With bubbles?" Demelza asked.

"With bubbles."

(2) Another favourite word was *crowing*; when they vocalise, most of his fictional babies *crow*. (Eleven usages in the post-war quartet.)

(3) His mother had a cousin called Essie (a diminutive of Esther)²⁶ and it seems WG liked the name, bestowing it on James Blamey's sister in *JP*, Demelza's niece in *BP*, Cordelia Blake's sister in *Cordelia* and an acquaintance of David Abden's in *The Green Flash*. (We learn in *FS* that the Reverend Osborne Whitworth's first wife was Esther, too, though pointedly *not* Essie.)

(4) Though all writers of fiction must mine their lives as well as their imaginations to some extent, with WG no exception, he placed a significant personal marker on the very first page of *RP*, with Charles Poldark's dismissal of Cousin William Alfred as "a yard of pump water" preserving for posterity a phrase previously used by her elder sister to describe the author's "delicate" mother.²⁷ For good measure the phrase is reprised by Revd. Whitworth in *FS* 2.6. WG slips another slice of autobiography into *MD* 2.3, in which Ross's account of his father's reaction to young Ross's pneumonia closely mirrors that of WG and his father as recounted in *Memoirs* 1.2.

(5) When visiting Cornwall during the second half of his life, WG seemed to favour the Crantock Bay Hotel in West Pentire when staying on the north coast and Falmouth's Greenbank Hotel when on the south. The hiring of horses in *LC* 1.3 and *TS* 2.8 from Falmouth's "Greenbank Stables" is probably a private tip of the hat to the latter.

(6) Andrew Graham confirms that WG based the character of Demelza, at least in part, on Winston's wife and Andrew's mother Jean,²⁸ and, like any father, WG must have used the experience of raising his own two children to inform his descriptions of the character and behaviour of his fictional young too. Thus the books will surely include numerous intimate or familial references only recognisable or at least certainly more meaningful to the author's immediate family than anyone else.

Discontinuity, discrepancy, error

*(1) I didn't dare to read the first four books through [before starting *The Black Moon*], for I knew if I did that that would finish it ... Only sufficient dippings to refresh the memory.²⁹*

(2) *I never ever carry a notebook – though when I come to the task of writing I almost always wish I had!*³⁰

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

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

Do people ever catch you out?

*Very seldom.*³¹

(4) *I could have glossed over what I didn't know ... Only half a dozen [experts] ... could have told me I was wrong ... but I hate to be corrected on such things.*³²

In a connecting sequence of books written intermittently over so huge a period of time (1940, when *RP* was started, to 2002), it was always inevitable that discontinuity and other errors would creep in. It appears (see quotes above) that WG made things harder for himself than he need have done by declining to use anything other than the most rudimentary *aides memoire*. I sense that the compilation of slips and gaffes below³³ is only the tip of a medium-large iceberg:

In *BM* 1.4 we learn that the second nearest church to Reath Cottage is St. Minver, Marasanvose. Three chapters on, its name becomes St. Ermyn's.

In the post-war quartet, the distance between Nampara and Trenwith is always three miles; later (see *BM* 1.2, *SFS* 1.6, *LC* 1.3 etc) it becomes four.

Similarly, in *BM* 3.12 the distance between Nampara and Killewarren is stated to be "a dozen miles"; by the time of *BP* 4.4 it has shrunk to "about four". Perhaps on the same tectonic plate, the Gatehouse (residence of the unmarried Dwight Enys) starts off on Treneglos land (*D* 1.9) but, by the time Stephen proposes to wed Clowance in *SFS*, it belongs to Ross, who suggests that the couple, once married, should live there. Possibly at some point there was a Treneglos-Poldark business transaction, but, if so, we're never told.

In *FS* 3.1 WG misspells the name of the POW camp – it should be Kergilliack, not Kergillack – near Penryn. The new Truro Library is in Princes Street in *FS* 1.8 but in Prince's Street in *AT* 2.4. All through the saga, standing at one end of Hendrawna beach are the Dark Cliffs – twice in *BP* (2.3 and 3.3) WG calls them the Black Cliffs but then later in the book (4.5) reverts to their proper name. Musical director of the King's Theatre is either Peter Reumann (*BP* 1.5) or Pieter Reumann (*BP* 5.2). Farquhar, the dog who succeeded Garrick, and who first appears in *LC* 3.2, becomes in *BP* 5.4 Frobisher. (Yes, of course it could be another dog, but Occam's razor says it's another muddle.)

Captain Malcolm McNeil in *W* becomes plain Hector McNeil in *FS* 1.4 before resurfacing in *SFS* as Brevet then Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm McNeil (the rank-changes due to promotion but "Hector" surely a mistake). In *MD* 1.4, Jane Gimlett is misnamed Mary. Tren crom's first name is William in *D* 2.1 but Hubert in *BM* 1.11.

We are told in *SFS* 1.6 that Andrew Blamey retired four years back (i.e. in 1806) but in *MD* 2.3 this becomes ten years back (i.e. in 1802). In *LC* 1.1 (thus 1813) Blamey is said to be "in his late sixties" though is in fact (depending when his birthday falls) either sixty-four or sixty-five. In *TS* 3.4 (well into 1815) his age is stated correctly to be sixty-seven. Demelza's birthday is another fraught subject. In *RP* 3.1 she records her age in the parish register on her wedding day as eighteen, which WG declares is "an anticipation of fact by three quarters of a year." He informs us, then, that she will be eighteen in March 1788, and was thus born in March 1770. But twice in the 1945 Ward, Lock edition of the same book she tells first her father (2.5) and then Ross (2.6) that her birthday is in May, saying on 30 May to Tom Carne: "Seventeen

last week" and then to Ross: "I'm seventeen. I been seventeen two weeks." It's interesting to note that, in subsequent editions of the book, to keep the waters muddied, those lines are revised to "Seventeen" and "I been seventeen for weeks." But we're told that on 20 June 1810 (*SFS* 1.3) "her ... fortieth birthday had just come and gone." And in *AT*, which opens in mid-May 1798, we meet her in 1.1 with "her twenty-eighth birthday just gone." In *BP*, which covers all of 1820 – the year she turned fifty – her birthday is not mentioned at all.

In *LC* 3.7 the "cloudy moonless December night" that *WG* describes actually falls in early January. Similarly, throughout *TS* it is maintained that Jeremy won over and married Cuby in December 1814, despite it being stated quite explicitly in *LC* 3.8 that he enticed her to elope with him on the evening of 12 January and married her on 17 January 1815.

In *AT* 3.13 (thus late in 1799), Demelza suggests to Ross that they both care too much, to which he replies: "It's a signal failing in two people who have been married fourteen years." But, since the pair married on 24 June 1787 (*RP* 3.1), Ross (or *WG*) is eighteen months out. Similarly, in his *BP* Author's Note, *WG* states that George married Harriet ten years after Elizabeth's death. But she died on 14 December 1799 (*AT* 3.15) and the pair married on 1 May 1812 (*MD* 1.8) – a gap of more than *twelve* years rather than ten. In the same Note, *WG* states that Demelza has five brothers, which is half-right, since *SFS* 3.9 records the death of one of her *six* younger brothers, but since the Note attributes five children to Ross and Demelza, even though only three survive, why is the same courtesy not extended to Demelza's lost brother? (For good measure, the Note also carelessly misspells the name of Warleggan & Willyams' Bank.) Elizabeth became a widow on 15 September 1792 (*W* 1.6) and remarried on 20 June 1793 (*W* 4.1), so when *WG* writes of George and Elizabeth in *BM* 1.9 (thus September 1794) that: "This was their only meal alone. Two years of marriage had seen subtle changes", he overstates the length of their union. And on the very next page when he has George think: "It was not an accident that she had survived for nearly two years as a widow", he similarly overstates the period of her widowhood. Still on the same page, George, now brooding on Geoffrey Charles, muses: "Leaving him at Trenwith

in the charge of his ... uncle and aunt would be a gentle way of severing the tie." That "uncle and aunt" are Geoffrey Charles's *grandparents* Chynoweth. In *BM* 2.2, we read that Ross has "more or less given way on the matter of allowing a new preaching house to be built out of the ruins of Wheal Grace" – but the derelict mine that provides the stone for the new Meeting House is *Wheal Maiden*.

In *MD* 1.1, Demelza says: "Julia would have been twenty-two this May" (i.e. May 1812). But Julia was born in May 1788; in 1812 she would have turned not twenty-two but twenty-four. In *BP* 1.9 (thus February 1819), WG relates of Christopher Havergal: "Yet spying Isabella-Rose in Paris three years ago ..." But it was *four* years ago. In the next chapter of the same book, Ben Carter tells Esther Carne that Surgeon Enys has been in the district "twenty-odd years" – but Enys arrived in 1788, more than *thirty* years back (though in this case was WG wrong, or Ben Carter?).

It is perhaps significant that *BM* and *BP* seem to show more errors than other books, since *BM* was started in 1971 after eighteen years away from Poldark and *BP* undertaken when the author was in his nineties and had eleven booksworth or thirty-five years-worth of Poldark history to try and keep straight. And his care with ages, dates and time periods is by now less than fulsome. For example, in *BP* 2.6, Prideaux states in December 1819 (re Waterloo) that "It is only three and a half years yet" – but he's a year out (and, given his experience there, would be hardly likely to forget). Two pages on, he says: "It is less than a year since I was before a court-martial ... in Jamaica" which again is clearly wrong since we were first introduced to him at Cardew fifteen months back in September 1818. In *BP* 2.8, WG again addresses the question of the character's recent past by having him associate his return to Cornwall with the murder of a Cardew parlourmaid. Yet the murder took place in February 1819, at least five months after we know Prideaux was in the county, so again WG's timekeeping is lamentably slipshod. In the same chapter, Demelza tells Ross: "In June (1820) we shall have been married thirty-two years" – but the pair were married in 1787 (see above), so again, she (or he) is a year out. In *BP* 4.2, when it *is* June 1820, Ross claims: "My elder daughter is a widow of twenty-seven ..." But Clowance was born on 20

November 1794 (*BM* 2.1), making her now twenty-five. And the Carters fare no better. In *BP* 2.10, (thus January 1820), Ben is said to be thirty-one and his mother Jinny "in her sixties". Yet Ben was born in March 1785 (*RP* 1.17) making him thirty-four and his mother, who was seventeen when she first took up with husband-to-be Jim (*RP* 1.10) and thus born in 1767, can only be fifty-two or, at most, fifty-three. In *BP* 4.7, Christopher, talking of Bella, says: "I fell in love with her when she was fourteen ..." But he didn't. Very creepily, he fell in love with her just a couple of weeks after she'd turned *thirteen* (*BP* 5.13) and he was a worldly twenty-two (*LC* 2.2). In *BP* 2.6, whether intentionally or otherwise, WG muddles members of the Sawle family of Penrice. WG introduces the then (1819) High Sheriff of Cornwall as Sir Charles Brune Graves-Sawle. Born in 1816, Charles did eventually become High Sheriff in 1872, but the office-holder in 1819 was his father Joseph. In *BP* 3.6, WG tells us that Cary Warleggan will be "eighty-one later this year" (i.e. 1820), but, born in 1740, he will in fact be eighty. Similarly, in *BP* 3.4, Edward Fitzmaurice tells Clowance he is thirty-three – yet in *SFS* 1.9 (thus 1811) he was twenty-seven, meaning that he must now be thirty-six.

In *RP* 1.16, after a visit from her father, Demelza tells Ross: "He was marr'ed again last Monday ... (to) ... the Widow Chegwidden." The next time Tom Carne calls at Nampara, we are told (*RP* 2.5): "Since his last visit *when he had announced his coming marriage*, [Demelza's] feelings for him had changed." This may be a mistake on the author's part, or the first statement may be a lie deliberately told by Demelza to lessen the chance of Ross sending her back to Illuggan.

We are told in *TS* 1.6 that Ross visited Paris in 1803; however the year in which Ross travelled with Dwight to France was 1802, during the brief Anglo-French peace (*SFS* 1.7). WG is also slack with dates in the letter written in August 1819 by Canning to Ross (*BP* 2.1). First, fretting, after Peterloo, about the possibility of revolution in Britain, Canning observes: "It is only twenty-five years since [Louis XVI] went to the guillotine" – but that, in January 1793, was *twenty-six* years back. He then refers quite precisely to Wellington's great victory [at Waterloo] of "three and a half years ago" – but the battle at this point was more than *four* years ago.

Napoleon's family name is rendered *Buonaparte* in *FS* to *LC* but *Bonaparte* in *TS* onwards. (Napoleon used both, so why not *WG* – though a consistent use of one or other would be preferable.) Another inconsistent spelling is that of *whim* (a sort of windlass, as in horse whim or steam whim): whenever it occurs in the first nine books, it is spelled as here; then, unaccountably (on a whim, perhaps?) throughout *LC*, it is spelled *whym*, before in *BP*, reverting to the former spelling.

In *LC* 1.11, we are told that the great table at Trenwith had, for three hundred years, "resisted all attempts at removal" – yet, in *RP* 1.4, had been "pushed out of the way" for cockfighting. In *MD* 2.4, Ross tells Demelza: "It was not only for Canning's blue eyes that I remained [in London]." Though the remark is tongue-in-cheek, it would probably have irritated *WG* to learn (or perhaps he knew?) that Canning's eyes were brown.



George Canning (1770-1827)

In *TS* 4.4, Demelza and Ross go to the wishing well previously visited, as the author notes, by Drake, Morwenna and young Geoffrey Charles in *BM* 1.6.

However, the well's description in the two books differs markedly (in *BM* it sits on a cliff-top but in *TS* is at the entrance of a cave). When a third visit to the well is made by Clowance and Edward in *BP* 4.5, the description returns to a closer approximation of the first go round.

Several characters have problematic back-stories: thus Betty Devoran is Lord Devoran's niece in *BM* 2.3 but his daughter in *MD* 2.6; Stephen Carrington is picked up off a raft at sea in *SFS* 1.5 but then described in *LC* 3.2 as "an unknown man who was washed up on (the) beach" and the commodity he wished to ship from George's quarries in Penryn was either "granite" (*TS* 1.9) or "cement" (*BP* 1.2); Sir John Trevaunance is either "widowed and childless" (*W* 1.1) or "a confirmed bachelor" (*BM* 2.1); Caroline's aunt, Sarah Pelham, is "married to a rich merchant, with seven children" in *W* 2.6 but in *AT* 3.5 gads about the metropolis before returning home with "her 'special friend' ... who enjoyed London social life and most of all, it seemed, Mrs Pelham". To confirm her altered status, the same lady is then described in *BP* 1.5 as "personally lonely ... [having] ... had no children of her own." In *SFS* 3.5 she visits the Enyses at Killewarren, but when, in *BP* 5.13, Demelza invites her to spend Christmas at Nampara, says: "You must know how often Caroline has pressed me to stay with her in Cornwall (but) I have never travelled further west than Staines! It is *true!*" When young widow Jinny Carter marries Whitehead Scoble in 1790 she has three children, Ben, Mary and Katie; he, a "widow man in his thirties", has none and no more are born to the couple (*SFS* 2.5). Yet in *W* 2.8, we hear that young Jeremy is playing at Nampara with "Jinny Scoble's two little boys"; in *W*, Ross breaks his marriage vows with Elizabeth at Trenwith on 9 May 1793 after which Demelza can't quite bring herself to do the same with McNeil at Werry House nine days later. Yet when, the following Christmas, they come finally to talk of it (*W* 4.7), Demelza says (carelessly on WG's part): "I went ... to that ball. It was but *four days* after you had gone to Elizabeth." Was the scar on Ross's cheek the result of "a bayonet cut in the face during a local skirmish" while he was in "New York" (*RP* 1.3) or a "chance sword-thrust in Pennsylvania" (*W* 3.6)? Take your pick. Similarly, in *D* 1.1, Mrs Zacky Martin states: "I've had eleven [children] o' my own" whilst we are advised in *TS* 4.1 (a book published 44 years later!) that she has "had eight children of her own." The Poldarks' fifth child is called Henry "after an uncle

of Demelza's" (*MD* 3.5) – or is he? For according to *LC* 1.9 he is named after "Ross's grandfather", so, once again, take your pick. In *LC* 2.4 we learn that Selina Pope and her two step-daughters attended the wedding of Stephen and Clowance and that, after the service "a small dinner was held for all the invited guests in [Nampara] library." But three chapters on we're told that "Selina ... had never been to Nampara before." *BP* 3.6 badly mangles the advice Ross gave Selina in *LC* concerning the acquisition of mineral rights, suggesting that she was being asked to sell them to Unwin Trevaunance when in fact she wished to (and did) buy them *from* him. In *SFS* 1.4, Harriet Carter (Warleggan-to-be) is "about twenty-nine"; eight years later, in *BP* 1.6, she is thirty-nine. Maybe in her younger days, like *WG*, she used to knock a couple of years off.

Corrections

In the Collins first (1981) edition of *SFS*, the mistake concerning McNeil's first name is repeated: in 3.1 he is "Brevet Colonel Hector McNeil". However, in the 2008 Pan paperback edition of the book, the name has been corrected to Malcolm. That someone cares enough to have made such a correction is heartening news. However, that the same mistake remains uncorrected in *FS* is not. Most, though not all, of the lapses noted above could easily be silently corrected. All that's wanting is the will. Whoever now has charge of *WG*'s literary estate would serve his memory well if a little judicious editorial emendation was set in train. But don't hold your breath – after all, the 2008 Pan edition of the post-war quartet bizarrely claimed that the four novels were first published in 1945-53 by Werner Laurie. You might think, when the books were reprinted in 2015/16, that so basic an error would be corrected. If so, think again.

Summary

The Poldark novels are period romances, yes, but also so much more. By deliberate choice, narrative freedom is made subservient to historical fact, such that the imagined drama of the novels takes place in a past not so much imagined as conjured, recreated, recalled and, in being made "real" rather

than merely whimsical becomes, as a visceral, vital part of our common heritage, all the more fascinating; all the more valuable for that. The books' primary purpose is to serve up an engaging romance (in the widest sense of that word), which they surely do – but also, at the same time, offer a compelling social, political and military history – thus four books in one – and when the balance is right, which is nearly all of the time, the end result is superb. WG said of the last novel, *BP*:

*I don't know how much evidence there is in this book of my love of Cornwall, but I very much hope it is clear, because that is the impression I hoped I would give. It was part of the book, but it was also something that I wanted to say.*³⁴

Through the character of Edward he does speak directly and unequivocally of that love: "I never want to leave ... You've introduced me to Heaven" (BP 4.6). But then that love shines, if not always expressed quite so explicitly, through all twelve novels. The saga stands as a wonderful testament to a gifted author's lifelong love of place, of life, and most of all of unswerving dedication to his calling. Better still, it's not by sitting on a shelf all in a row looking smart that the novels best impress, but open, in your hands, before your eyes, telling their creator's tale whilst unlocking a portal to the past as only he knew how. When I reached the lovely last sentence of the last novel – "We're home!" – I felt a tinge of sadness quicken the glow of pleasure the entire voyage had given me, but, overriding all, a profound sense of gratitude towards the hand that held the pen that gave us – and the ages – Poldark.

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NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ WG writing in *Woman* magazine, 10 December 1977

² Interview given to BBC correspondent Ted Harrison on 22 December 1977

³ *Woman's Weekly*, 30 July 1983

⁴ To Susan Hill on *Bookshelf*, BBC Radio 4, 26 February 1987

⁵ To Charlie Lee-Potter on *Open Book*, BBC Radio 4, 9 June 2002.

⁶ Alistair Cooke memorably dismissed seventies *Poldark* as "God help me, nothing but distorted plot." Of course, television and literature are utterly different media, and if you enjoy any or all of the TV iterations then good luck. But those who believe that TV alone is capable of serving up the full-on Poldark experience are sadly misguided, for it hasn't yet, never can and never will. But the good news is that all twelve books are still in print – and a book without a reader is like a bride without a groom, so what are you waiting for?

⁷ The David Clarke Column, *Cornish Life*, January 1985

⁸ *William Wilberforce* by William Hague, HarperCollins, 2007, page 290

⁹ As 7

¹⁰ When Sam and Drake first show up looking for work (*BM* 1.2), Sam reels off a list of mines around Illuggan that have recently failed. From Dolcoath to Unity, all names and fates are factual.

¹¹ But Hardy wrote in the present or near-past and WG more than 150 years in the past, which is perhaps enough to account for this difference.

¹² *The Independent*, 4 December 2004

¹³ *The Craft Of The Historical Novelist* by WG, reprinted from *The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, New Series, Volume III, Part 4, 1977

¹⁴ WG's *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan, 2003, Book Two, Chapter Five

¹⁵ WG cites this example in *Memoirs*, 2.5, although it doesn't sound particularly anachronistic. Indeed, WG himself twice comes close to using the expression, first in *LC* 3.7 when, after Ross encourages Jeremy, who is anguishing about Cuby, to "go over and take her," his son replies: "Are you – *joking*?" and then again in *BP* 1.2 when Clowance, chatting with Paul Kellow about Daisy developing a slight cough, says: "You are joking."

¹⁶ As 7

¹⁷ Stephen Hart / Martin Rowley: *British Weather from 1700 to 1849*

¹⁸ As previous

¹⁹ *Malthus and his Time* by Michael Turner, Springer, 1986

²⁰ *The Four Swans*, author's note

²¹ WG states James Fordyce but surely means William, whose book on fevers was first published in 1773

²² WG mentions the song in each of the last three Poldark novels and, in doing so, manages to spell the second word of its title in three different ways, all wrong! In *LC* 1.14 he writes *Sparergrass*, in *TS* 1.6 *Sparrergras* and in the error-freighted *BP* both *Sparergrass* (1.3) and *Sparrergrass* (4.1). Oh dear.

²³ Posted on 6 April 2015 by Mike O'Connor on mudcat.org



Helston Furry Dance

²⁴ WG had firsthand experience of the event, stating in 1976: "It was years before anyone could persuade me to go to the Helston Furry Dance – though when I did finally go I greatly enjoyed it." (As 13)

²⁵ To Simon Parker in the *Living Cornwall* section of *The Western Morning News* of 14 May 2002

²⁶ *Memoirs*, 1.2

²⁷ *Memoirs*, 1.1

²⁸ *Poldark's Cornwall*, Macmillan, 2015, introduction

²⁹ *Poldark's Cornwall*, Webb & Bower in association with The Bodley Head Ltd., 1983

³⁰ In a letter dated 6 February 1970 to Richard Church, after Church had wondered in a *Country Life* review of *Angell, Pearl and Little God* whether his friend "has a photographic memory ... or does he carry a notebook?"

³¹ From WG's 27 June 1991 guest appearance on BBC Radio Two's *John Dunne Show*

³² WG to Arthur Pottersman about *The Sleeping Partner* in *Argosy*, December 1967

³³ I noted some of these errors as I read the books; others were spotted by sharp-eyed posters on the Poldark Active Board. With thanks to all.

³⁴ As 25

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