

WG : THOUGHTS ON SOURCES AND MOTIVATION

A mighty oak bears no resemblance to the humble acorn from which it sprang; a forest fire is out of all proportion to the flickering flame that set it off. Results don't always mesh with beginnings. It might be plain in the case of some novels how and why they came into being, their degree of artifice, deliberately or otherwise, insufficient to conceal the thinking behind and process of their creation: *Hard Times* by Dickens is one such; *Heart and Science* by Wilkie Collins another. But WG was seldom so straightforward a writer. Yes, in his early days he ground out creaky thrillers, mainly for the fun of writing them, for the experience the challenge brought him and for the buzz – *I became known as the local author* – of seeing them published, albeit for next to no material reward.¹ But once youthful exuberance was curbed and he began to take his work more seriously, one of the key exemplars of that change was the distance between a book's conception and writing, which lengthened, often very considerably. Having conceived a group of characters, experience taught him to let their tale simmer, let it mature, sometimes for years before attempting to write it down – and fortunately he had the patience and self-discipline, not to mention the self-confidence, to put that conceit into practice, to the immense benefit of his craft. Since it is so far from an exact science, he also needed the cursed determination to rework, rework and rework again prose that, when it *was* written, refused to please. Plainly, then, what eventually came out was never as clean, pure, simple or readily identifiable as what went in, thus, in coming to answer the question of who or what motivated him to write a certain book, don't expect to find many clear-cut answers. Nonetheless, in some cases, based mostly on the writer's own testimony, aspects and elements can be cited and people (friends and strangers, usually nameless) identified.

From his youngest days he was a "voracious reader"² so, by the time he came to write, was doubtless replete with plot ideas either cribbed wholesale or adapted from his book-a-day³ habit (early favourites were Buchan, Mason, Wodehouse, Stevenson ... and every conceivable type of ephemeral writer)⁴. Though storytelling was his primary purpose in writing a novel, it was not the only one:

Although I have always had more to say in a novel than the telling of a story, the story itself has always been the framework on which the rest has depended for its form and shape.⁵

And while his characters might have a basis in friends, acquaintances or perhaps just chance-met strangers, there would always be something of himself in there too:

Do I use real people? Occasionally. Every author does⁶ [but] there has to be something of myself in every character created, or he will not come alive.⁷ I draw on bits of myself with every character.⁸

Indeed, some such self-reference shows plain:

In 1940, WG turned thirty-two. The protagonist of *No Exit*, published that year, is the same age. What's more, John Carr's physical characteristics closely resemble those of his begetter; so too his quietly competent but phlegmatic, self-effacing demeanour. He also, like WG, is a keen gardener.

WG placed a significant personal marker on the very first page of *Ross Poldark* (1945), with Charles Poldark's dismissal of 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 Ann. The simile is reprised by Revd. Whitworth in *The Four Swans* (1976).

The account of Joshua's reaction to young Ross's pneumonia in *The Miller's Dance* (1982) closely mirrors that of the author's father when WG contracted the illness, as recounted in *Memoirs*, 1.2.

In *The Dangerous Pawn* (1937) Val Leigh gives an impassioned account of the torment he suffered as a teenager with an urge to create living under the benign but oppressive rule of an unsympathetic parent. It is hard not to see reflected in this anguished relationship that of young WG and his own father.

Another dysfunctional father / son relationship is central to the narrative of *The Green Flash* (1986) – though this time it is more violently resolved.

When in *Tremor* (1995) WG's describes the pain and disorientation caused by a life-partner's loss and the slow healing process that follows, he is surely drawing on his own recent experience as a widower lately parted from his wife of fifty-three years. He also invests some of his own life experience into that of Matthew Morris, a young writer in that novel.

In *Stephanie* (1992) James's potted history of Great War veteran Harrison the greengrocer accords closely with WG's *Memoirs*, 1.2 reminiscence concerning his elder brother Cecil (also a shopkeeper). For several other minor aspects of *Stephanie* drawn from life, see [LATE-ERA NOVELS](#). Etc, etc.

With some of this in mind, let us now consider the books, either collectively (the early novels / Poldark) or individually, as below:

(1) The early novels

(i) Most of WG's early novels – i.e. those published in the period 1934-1942 – conform to a basic template in which a single man in his late twenties or early thirties is thrown by circumstance into close association with a single woman who is younger, slight, pretty without being beautiful but endowed with exceptional spirit. He is ordinary but also, when tested, found to be practical, capable, courageous, resilient, true. The two fall in love and, as the curtain drops on their story, though no assurance of a fulfilled future together is given, its possibility is more or less strongly suggested. *The House with the Stained Glass Windows*, *Into the Fog*, *Night Journey* and *My Turn Next* all adhere closely to this pattern. Other novels introduce slight variations: in *Without Motive*, the lady makes her entrance only in the second half of the story, in *The Dangerous Pawn*, she is unhappily married to another man, in *The Giant's Chair*, she rather than he is the tale's lead character, in *Keys of Chance* the man is crippled, and in ensemble pieces *The Riddle of John Rowe* and *Strangers Meeting* the two are part of a company of characters rather than leading protagonists. But only one novel of the period – *No Exit* – bucks

the trend altogether, its leading man provided with no love interest other than the one waiting faithfully at home. (He writes dull letters signed "All the best, John"; she seems more interested in her golf game.) The point of all this is that it is hard not to see in all of these fictional serendipitous man/woman pairings something of the real Winston and Jean Graham ("I draw on bits of myself with every character", he said) and is it hard to regard all the earnest last chapter declarations of unswerving devotion as anything other than love letters from author to mate, whether prospective or actual. (The couple were married in September 1939.) The Graham family have acknowledged that aspects of Jean's character are reflected in Demelza Poldark née Carne⁹ but I would suggest that the winning, small stature / big personality combination WG described so often and seemed to love so well springs from the same source.

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(ii) In 1936 and 1937, WG delivered a speech entitled *The Novelist at Work* at least three times. Fortunately a near-complete draft has been preserved in the Graham archive of Truro's Royal Cornwall Museum. Concerning his 1935 novel *The Riddle of John Rowe*, WG discloses that his decision to write the book sprang from his knowledge of the remarkable history of an unnamed local resident:

Shortly after completing [my first novel] a man came to live in our district. He was unusual; roused curiosity. Casual inquiry elicited his story: he had held an educational position in India. On his way home during the war he was torpedoed in the Channel and, after being picked up, spent more than a year in a Cornish hospital with complete loss of memory. His family had believed him dead, but he was traced by accident and now reunited with them. Although his memory had not returned, he was otherwise normal, though quiet and reserved. Such a story is not unique in fiction, but the discovery that it could happen in fact gave me both an idea [for a book] in not-quite-usual form and the courage to use it.

WG also confirms that, whilst he "very seldom" drew major characters "wholesale from life", one *John Rowe* character – Professor Crabtree – *was* modelled on a living person; was in fact "as good a reproduction as I could manage of the headmaster [Rev. A. F. Fryer] of my old school [Longsight Grammar]". This revelation is of particular interest because, of all the book's characters, Crabtree is notably the most vital.

Finally, though the novel's closing chapters are set in Portugal, WG concedes that he had never been there. But, he observes, "the more I write, the more I become aware that successful novel writing depends not on the quantity of your experience but on the quality of your imagination."

(WG: *The Novelist at Work*, draft typescript, RCM archive, Truro)

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(iii) The plot of *Keys of Chance* (1939) opens at a public séance during which medium Robert Clapton relays to his audience a message supposedly from the spirit of a passenger killed in a plane crash in France two years previously. The message alleges that the crash was caused deliberately by three conspirators who adulterated the plane's fuel before take-off; their motivation "financial gain". WG had no need to dream up this opening, since back in 1930 something very like it happened in fact.

After R.34 had made the first transatlantic crossing by an airship and then the first *return* crossing by any aircraft in 1919, it seemed that airships would provide the most efficient means of servicing the increasing demand for commercial long-haul passenger transport by air. The Germans started a transatlantic service in 1928 and in the summer of 1930 the British R.100 made a successful return trip to Montreal, Canada. In October of the same year, its sister-ship R.101 set out on a proving flight to Karachi, India with senior government officials including Air Minister Lord Thompson on board. But a few hours after take-off, the ship encountered stormy weather and crashed near Beauvais in northern France. All twelve passengers, including Lord Thompson, and thirty-six crew lost their lives; six crew survived.

The National Laboratory of Psychical Research had been founded in 1925 to carry out examination of psychical phenomena. In October 1930, two days after the crash of R.101, a medium there called Mrs. Garrett began relaying messages from Flight Lieutenant Irwin, one of the crash victims. He was said to have complained through her that the engine capacity had not been increased when the airship was enlarged, leaving it underpowered, that the gasbags had been leaking and that there had been insufficient trials. These points were later confirmed by the official enquiry, which found that the immediate cause of the disaster was gradual loss of gas through holes worn in the gasbags.

(*Looking Back At Britain : Depressions Years : 1930s*, The Reader's Digest Association Ltd., 2010)

(2) The Merciless Ladies (Ward, Lock, 1944)

(i) Though *The Merciless Ladies* tells of the lives of a celebrated artist and other idiosyncratic characters, of friendships, of passions (love and hate) realised and frustrated, of a sea voyage and of a death that might be murder, at its heart is a lawsuit concerning libel. And what is libel? Traditionally, libel is "the publication of any statement which exposes a man to hatred, ridicule or contempt." Because it is both a crime and a civil wrong, a victim of libel may either prosecute in the Criminal Courts or sue for damages in the High Court, or both. Although by its Latin derivation *libel* means *a little book*, a libel need not be in writing – thus, in the definition above, "statement" does not necessarily imply words and "publication" means only showing the libel, in whatever form it may take, to some third person.

WG is not the first author to be aware of the dramatic potential inherent in court cases, nor will surely be the last. The circumstances of his imagined case, *Marnsett v. Stafford*, are unusual – a woman objects to her portrait being hung among a series depicting royal courtesans of history (although what she really objects to is the unflattering nature of the work itself) – but not without precedent. Below are three cases – two from the nineteenth century and one contemporary to his work, that may well have influenced his thinking:

The judge who sums up in *Marnsett v. Stafford* makes reference to the very real *Monson v. Tussaud's Ltd. (1894)*. The alleged libel in this case resulted from the display at Madame Tussaud's waxworks of an effigy near to although not in the exhibition's Chamber of Horrors. The subject of the effigy, one Alfred John Monson, had lately been tried for murder and attempted murder in Scotland *but not convicted* and he argued successfully that placing his effigy close to the Chamber of Horrors, even though not in it, tainted him by association. Though he won his case, his victory was a hollow one, with the jury awarding damages of one farthing.

Though the objection of "taint by association" is common to that case and WG's, the supposedly libellous matter – a waxwork effigy and an oil painting – is not. But *Whistler v. Ruskin (1878)*, a case of particular notoriety, *did* centre around a painting, although the alleged libel was committed not by its execution or exhibition, as in *Marnsett v. Stafford*, but by words written about it following its display. After viewing a painting by James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) called *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) wrote:

For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay [owner of the gallery where the work was displayed] ought not to have admitted works ... in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face.

Whistler sued Ruskin for libel and won – but, like Monson above, was awarded contemptuous damages of one farthing and no costs, which, required to pay himself, proved more than enough to bankrupt him. Ruskin fared little better; appalled by what he saw as Whistler's moral victory, he resigned his professorship at Oxford feeling his very right to be a critic had been denied by British law. Thus did the professional and emotional fallout from the case affect both men for the rest of their lives.¹⁰

A third case, *Marlborough v. Goringe's Travel & News Agency Ltd. and others* (1935) is perhaps most relevant of all to WG's *Marnsett v. Stafford* since the alleged libel in this instance was perpetrated not by words or "taint by association" but by a work of art – in fact, a cartoon. Published in an American magazine called *Hooey* which was imported into the UK by the defendants, the drawing showed two standard rose trees closely intertwined in a garden bed, each bearing a single rose. The two roses, bent towards each other, just touch as though kissing. In the background, a gardener talks to a stout lady in front of a stately mansion. The caption under the drawing reads: "I guess we shouldn't have planted the Duchess of Marlborough and the Rev. H. Robertson Page in the same bed."

The Duchess of Marlborough sued the magazine's importers, even though none of them had any detailed knowledge of its content and even though roses named The Duchess of Marlborough (a brilliant lilac) and the Rev. H. Page Roberts (yellow with red shading) were varieties registered with the National Rose Society. The judge took "a very serious view" of the case and "the foul emanation from the printing press" which caused it to be brought. The Duchess won, and received her costs, an unqualified apology from each of the defendants and undisclosed damages.

(Ref: *Hatred, Ridicule or Contempt*, Joseph Dean, Constable & Co., Ltd, 1953)

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(ii) Tom Attlee was an important early friend and mentor of WG – for much more on him, see [WEA](#) and [ATTLEE](#). Attlee lived with his wife Kathleen at Leory Croft, near Falmouth. What follows is written by Tom's daughter-in-law Peggy:

[WG] ... often visited Leory Croft and [was] intrigued by what [he] found there. Many years later, one of Tom's grand-daughters living in Australia picked up a book by Graham called The Merciless Ladies. Among the minor characters she suddenly recognised her grandparents:

The most noticeable characteristics of Dr Lynn were his height, his long jaw and his disreputable appearance ... When he had occasion to go walking on the road he was frequently mistaken for a tramp ... He had a certain amount of hair in those days, though even then most of it grew round his ears. His eyes were very keen and small and grey, his mouth wide with the lips narrow and clever, his voice deep and rather low, and he had a cultured accent which went oddly with his clothes.

The most striking characteristics of Mrs Lynn were her height, her long jaw and her disreputable appearance. Husband and wife were, in fact, sometimes taken for brother and sister. But Mrs Lynn was proportionately taller for a woman, and her untidiness in a woman was more noticeable. She had blue eyes, of a startling vivid blue, wispy fair hair and a very high colour. Her voice was high-pitched and less attractive than her husband's. To see these two strange long-legged creatures gardening together like angular scarecrows, and conversing in English as it should be but seldom is spoken, was a study in the incongruous I was then too young to appreciate.

The story had opened with a visit by a schoolboy to this family, and went on to mention other recognisable features of the Attlee household: the lack of domestic help, the piles of books, the cobwebs, the cracked crockery, the candle stumps and even that "the house was lit by gas produced from a private plant in an outhouse, which Dr Lynn tried to keep in order." Mrs Lynn, it was said, took a few special pupils in advanced Greek. Of

course, the development of the story was not true to the lives of the Attlees, but there is no denying the origin of some elements of the setting.

WG, by his own admission, seldom drew characters straight from life (see above, but also *Night Without Stars* below); characters may *derive* from real people, but seldom *are* them.¹¹ "A writer who puts his best friend in a book is still at heart a reporter."¹² But – exception to every rule – Tom and Kath Attlee must have seemed to him heaven-sent, ready minted, to be taken down, unimprovable, as is. Just as he greedily absorbed all the characteristics of the "Ross" he met on a train in 1940,¹³ so too these Attlees. "Kathleen," writes her daughter-in-law,

had occasional bouts of ill-health, including trouble with her legs, but she seldom missed her daily bathe. For a long time this was in the creek; only in her later years was she content with a dip in a bathtub fixed at the bottom of the cliff, which filled with fresh sea water at every high tide.

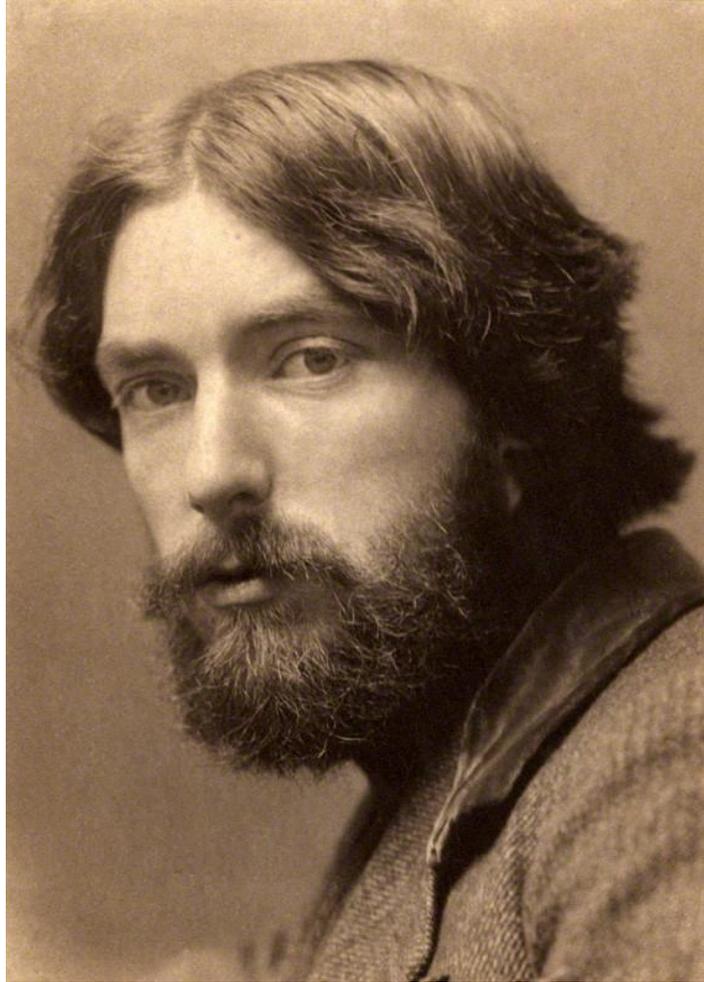
How could any author worth his salt pass up such material?

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

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(iii) The novel's protagonist is the gifted but turbulent Paul Stafford. A perceptive New Zealand reviewer wrote these thought-provoking lines:

Parts of Paul's life-story bear an uncanny resemblance to that of Augustus John in his heyday of high living, majestic disregard of accusations of prostituting his art for commercial purposes and his notorious pursuit of women. A description of Paul's second wife's mother exactly describes John's sister-in-law. Coincidence? Perhaps ...



Augustus John (1878-1961)

(M.L.G. in the *Nelson Evening Mail*; review undated, circa January 1980)

(3) The Poldark novels

See [ACORNS](#), [MPC](#) and [PASS POL](#).

(4) The Forgotten Story

During my time as a coastguard I spent many long hours looking down at ... the weed-grown timbers ... of a French ship called La Seine which had been driven ashore in a January gale in 1900 ... [One of our watch], Tom Mitchell¹⁴ ... had seen the vessel actually come in and the following day, as a boy of nine,

*had clambered over the ship. He was able to tell me all the details of the wreck and I pondered over the lives of the people who had been drowned and those – the majority – who had been saved.*¹⁵

On one of my infrequent days off I took my wife to Falmouth and found a rather disreputable café-restaurant where the proprietor did not send round to take your orders but bargained fiercely with you as you came in as to which joint you should have some slices of, these being arrayed on the counter at his side. As sometimes happens with an author, two fairly disparate scenes come together to make a novel, and from these scenes – the shipwreck and the café – emerged The Forgotten Story.

(*Memoirs*, 1.5)

(5) Take My Life (film and book, both 1947)

WG described actress Valerie Taylor (1902-1988) as "a highly strung, highly articulate, highly intelligent, beautiful but rather overpowering young woman" who one evening told him she had thought of "a brilliant opening for a film". A month or so later, he went back to her with suggestions of how it might be developed. "She immediately lit up, and henceforward rang me up persistently, full of suggestions and wanting to know if I was making progress." So, through late 1945 and early 1946, despite having much else – family matters, demobilisation, *Demelza* – on his plate, he found himself working with Miss Taylor on the screenplay that eventually became [\[1947 Cineguild film\] Take My Life](#).

After the finished script was sold by Christopher Mann Ltd. to the Rank Organisation, Rank hired WG as a consultant and, after tinkering unproductively with other projects, he was "directed to the development of the script of *Take My Life*." With Taylor otherwise engaged in Stratford upon Avon, this WG did on his own – or ostensibly so, for when the film was released, its writing credit read as follows:

*Adapted from an original screen story by Winston Graham
and Valerie Taylor*

*Additional dialogue by Winston Graham and Margaret
Kennedy*

The subsequent novelisation of the screenplay, which yielded *Take My Life* (Ward, Lock, 1947) was, of course, the work of WG alone. Its dedication is to Valerie Taylor.

(Memoirs, 1.6 / Take My Life (film))

(6) Cordelia

Wandering through the local parish churchyard of Perranzabuloe [in the mid-1940s], I had seen a weather-beaten tombstone, on which one could only discern the name and the date. 'Cordelia, 1869.' The name was in large letters which stretched from one side of the stone to the other, and standing there in the misty afternoon light, I began to wonder what sort of person this woman had been, how old she was when she died, how she had come by this attractive but romantic name, what her life story was, if only she could have told it to me.

During the last years of my mother's life, I listened as with a sense of something soon to be lost, to her reminiscences as a young girl in the Manchester of the 1880s and 90s. [Among the family members she recalled] was an uncle, a rich dyer, who built Acacia Hall in Burnage, and something of his life story is reflected in the life of Mr Ferguson in the novel I then wrote. Some of the characters and much of the background reflected things my mother had told me, including the character of Mr Slaney-Smith, the atheist, who was based on Jack Slaney ... a great friend of my grandfather.

(Memoirs, 1.6)



Sacred

to the Memory of
CORDELLA

daughter of

M^r Richard Jenkin of Lambourn

AND WIFE OF

Stephen Hoskin, of this Parish

who departed this Life Sept^r 25th 1835

Aged 32 Years.

ALSO ELIZABETH, THE DAUGHTER OF

Stephen & Cordelia Hoskin

who died the 23rd Nov^r 1832

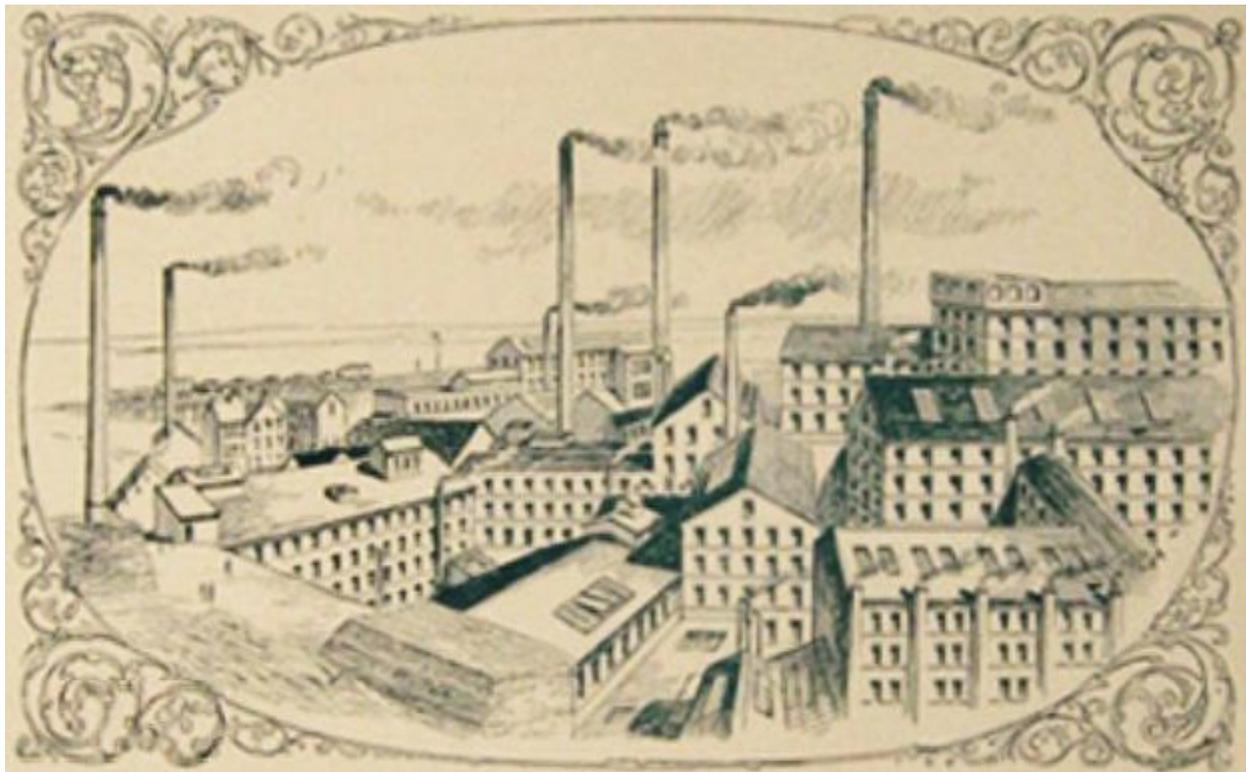
Aged 3 Years & 8 Months

son of Caroline their daughter

and wife of Thomas Newkell

Standing alongside the short path between the lychgate and vestibule of Perranzabuloe Church, the stone above is surely the one WG cites in *Memoirs*. It commemorates the lives of Cordelia Hoskin (née Jenkin) who died, aged 32, on 27 September 1838 and her daughters Elizabeth and Caroline. Other than by WG, "1869" is not mentioned – so why revise the date? Perhaps in part to obscure his source, but, more importantly, to better serve his story. After all, the tale he was telling was essentially that of his mother, Annie Mawdsley, who was born on 10 September 1868.

WG's information concerning "an uncle, a rich dyer, who built Acacia Hall" is also misleading, due to the odd coincidence that The Acacias was built by a man *named* Dyer – to wit, Connecticut-born Joseph Chessborough Dyer (1780-1871). But the property was indeed acquired and occupied during Annie's adolescence by a family of dyers related to the Mawdsleys by marriage: Henry Hunt Crabtree (1816-1888; Annie's great uncle) and his son William Henry Crabtree (1846-1904) operated Henry Crabtree & Son's dyeworks at Openshaw and Ardwick (below, in 1896). It is presumably the life of the patriarch, Henry Hunt, which informs the character of Frederick Ferguson.





(1) Rev. A. F. Fryer, headmaster of Longsight Grammar School, with pupils and staff, date unknown (2) R.101 at Cardington, Bedfordshire



(1) R.101 near Beauvais, France (2) Medium Eileen Garrett (1893-1970)



(1) Tom Attlee (1880-1960) (2) Valerie Taylor (1902-1988)



French barque *La Seine* was driven ashore between Chapel Rock and Droskyn Point, Perranporth on 28 December 1900 and wrecked the following day.¹⁷ Viewing its remains (lower image) whilst on coastguard duty during the war inspired WG to write *The Forgotten Story*.

(7) Night Without Stars

(i) Ten years ago or more I met a man in a train who had just had an operation on his eyes and he was seeing actual things for the first time for about 25 or 30 years and he told me that one of the things that happened to him as soon as he recovered his sight was a middle aged man came up to his bed and said: "Hello, Father," and that made an enormous impression on me and for some time I felt I wanted to write about it, but it seemed to me to fall always into the rather conventional and somewhat sentimental story of the blind man recovering his sight. And a couple of years later I was in Paris and I met a very clever and intelligent Frenchman [Marcel Brandin] who had been a member of the Resistance and he was then suffering already the beginnings of the bitter disillusion of a man who had worked and fought and killed for his ideals and was seeing a return of the old France that he thought had gone forever. And those two people didn't seem to have any connection. A few weeks later I was in Nice and I went into a shoe shop and was served by an attractive French girl whom I got talking to and heard a little of her story and from that time there seemed to grow a story of an Englishman who had been blinded in the war who went to the south of France to recuperate and fell in love with a girl he never saw and came into contact with and eventually conflict with a Frenchman who had lost his ideals; from being anti-German had become antisocial and eventually something of a criminal. That was something of the way the story of Night Without Stars came into being.

(The Art of Suspense, The BBC Home Service, 25 May 1961)

(ii) Night Without Stars [was] an exceptional book – in my case – because all the three principal characters derived plainly from people met and, as it were, docketed. Usually it is not so.

(WG, undated Report to Writers, RCM's Truro archive)

(iii) True dedication

When for Night Without Stars [WG] needed to describe an eye operation, he went to see an eye operation. "I talked over details at length with a specialist,¹⁸ and wrote the passage. Then a week or so later he rang up and asked me if I'd like to see the operation performed. I said, "God, thanks, no!" But after twelve hours of indecision – if I was a writer, what was I thinking of, turning that down? – I got dressed up in surgeon's coat and mask and went along and saw it all at close quarters. Afterwards the surgeon's wife laughed to see the colour of my face. I never mind dead people; but to see the surgeon cut his patient's eye made me feel terrible."

(Arthur Pottersman, *Argosy*, December 1967)

(8) Fortune is a Woman

(i) *Winston Graham ... got the idea for this story after helping a girl to change a wheel on the London-Cornwall road and hearing about the insurance world's new specialist – the adjuster – and the tricky inquiries he has to make.*

(ii) *When WG needed to know about the insurance world for Fortune is a Woman he went to see an old tennis-playing friend from Cornwall who was also a member of Lloyds. "My friend said, 'Of course, come up,' and he put a director of his firm at my disposal, who took me round all the loss-adjuster firms. They all greeted him, obviously anxious to oblige. I picked on one, and with the right sympathetic approach I managed to stay in their office and even go out on jobs with them for a few days."*

(iii) *All my books have some point of view to put over, although sometimes it may have been so disguised that nobody discovered it except myself. In Fortune is a Woman, for*

instance, although ostensibly it was a novel about an insurance agent who got involved in a fraud and involved with a woman whom he thought was in the fraud, it was also to me an attempt to contrast two men, one who before the war had been a down-and-out and whom the war had made, given him self-respect, given him a position, given him something to live for, and one who before the war was one of the landed gentry and whom the war had broken physically, financially and, in the end, morally. Mind you, I disguised the thing so well that probably nobody notices what I'm about, but I like to have something to say. To me it makes the novel doubly worth writing.

(The Farmer & Settler, 8 January 1954 / Argosy, December 1967 / Books and Bookmen, October 1959 / The Art of Suspense, The BBC Home Service, 25 May 1961)



WG talking to director / co-writer Sidney Gilliat at the UK premiere on 13 March 1957 of *Fortune is a Woman*.

(9) The Little Walls

My dear Winston

I think that my comments on "The Little Walls" may expose my deficiencies in appreciation instead of illuminating the quality of the book: because certain purposes in novels and methods of achieving those purposes provoke no admiration of the work of art even though I can recognise it as a work of art I think you set yourself an impossible task in making that particular character the narrator. He is an egoist and though the exploration of an egoism is a legitimate and fruitful theme for a novel, the narrator must not be the egoist: he is disabled by his egoism from doing that job. For the character that is under the microscope must be revealed; the egoist will only describe himself. Moreover, we expect a vivid presentation of circumstances to reveal character; and the egoist is interested not in circumstances but in his own reaction to them ...

(Start of a letter, dated 11 March 1954, from Tom Attlee to WG. The original is held in the RCM, Truro archive. The letter documents Attlee's response to having read an early draft of *The Little Walls*. To what extent, if any, WG was influenced by Attlee's observations is not known.)

(10) The Sleeping Partner

(i) WG, in bemusement, on recalling the filmed version of this book (which starred French, American, Brazilian and Argentinian actors and was shot on location in Rio and Brasilia):

The book had been about Stevenage.

(*Birmingham Post*, 31 March 1967)

(ii) Could the wise and philosophical dying intellectual Curtis be another Tom Attlee-influenced character?

(11) Greek Fire

I'd often had the idea of writing a novel in which a man is wanted by the police and to escape them he joins a party which is being shown round a newspaper and as the newspaper is being printed so they come gradually to the end and the proprietor of the newspaper proudly takes a paper off the press and there is a photograph with WANTED over the top of the man who is a member of the party. And that was rather a sort of a carrot in front of a donkey, that was something which one should work towards. But by the time I got there I nearly cut it out because it seemed to me it was striking a slightly false note. But I kept it in because it was the thing I had been moving towards.

(The Art of Suspense, The BBC Home Service, 25 May 1961)

This account, in which WG talks about a memorable scene in his 1957 novel *Greek Fire*, is somewhat disingenuous, since he wrote exactly this scenario into his 1940 novel *No Exit*. What's more, parts of the text of the earlier novel are cannibalised for reuse in the second. Of course, there's no reason why a writer should waste good material, but WG's habit of selectively reimagining his past is regrettable. As for the fugitive who comes face to face with his own WANTED notice, did the idea come from *The 39 Steps*? Buchan (a named early favourite – see page one above) published his novel in 1915 with Hitchcock's film version following twenty years later, so either source is possible.

(12) The Tumbled House

(i) Intention ("Roger Shorn" is an amoral, self-serving journalist):

I felt there were things that I wanted to say about Roger that seemed to me the most important things in the book. I don't believe, contrary to some people, that sophistication is all. I think there's got to be a basis – some sort of ethical and moral

behaviour. And on the whole I find that among the people that I like and know in London, even the most sophisticated, there is a point beyond which they will not go. There's the thing that's done and the thing that's not done, not in any snob sense but in regard to ethical behaviour. But there are the few others who don't believe in that and I felt that I wanted to put over something of the effect that a man like Roger might have on a fairly close circle of people.

(Books and Bookmen, October 1959)

(ii) Another libel case (see *The Merciless Ladies* above):

In the *Times* of 25 April 1975, Philippa Toomey wrote: "[WG's] next novel may come, like *The Tumbled House*, from the memory of a famous court case." The one she had in mind – the one, evidently, *he* had in mind when plotting the book – is *Wright v. Lord Gladstone (1927)*. It is a fundamental concept of law that the dead cannot be libelled – so what can the son of a dead man do if someone starts saying scurrilous things about his late parent? Though the attack may be untruthful or unjustifiable, he can in law do nothing – nothing, that is, except force the author of the attacks to sue him, the dead man's son, and thereby have to justify his claims, in his own defence, in court. This is the basis of *Wright v. Gladstone* (in which the son of the late Victorian Prime Minister forced an author into court by libelling him at his club and in the *Daily Mail*) and also of WG's *Shorn v. Marlowe* in *The Tumbled House*.

(Hatred, Ridicule or Contempt, Joseph Dean, Constable & Co., Ltd, 1953)

(iii) Background

WG was elected to the Savile Club in June 1950 and remained an active and enthusiastic member for the rest of his long life. Brook Street, Mayfair, on which the Club sits, runs between Grosvenor Square at one end and Hanover Square at the other. In *The Tumbled House*, the Hanover Club to which both Roger and Don belong is clearly based on the Savile. WG calls its secretary

Dear Arthur Lyne,

Here with the novel at last,
delayed a little beyond its normal
season by the printing strike.

Again thank you for all the
quite invaluable help and advice
you gave me in this novel, from
its inception right through to the
finished article. I really am
most grateful.

Sincerely,

Winston Graham

8th October, 1959.

Arthur Jeffery Lyne (1913-2009), a partner at solicitors Nalder & Son of 7 Pydar Street, Truro, provided "quite invaluable help and advice" to WG during the writing of *The Tumbled House* "from its inception right through to the finished article", as this warm dedication confirms.

Laurence Heath; this presumably a tip of the hat to his then agent Audrey Heath. One of "the best bits of repartee" heard at the Savile – memorable enough to be quoted in *Memoirs* almost fifty years later – WG puts into the mouth of *Tumbled* character Sir John Marlowe:

"One of the judges, Bartram I think it was, interrupted counsel to say: 'Nevertheless, Mr Marlowe, it must be admitted that your client behaved towards these ladies on horseback with a singular lack of gallantry and courtesy.' Marlowe at once replied, 'My Lord, with due respect I submit that, as this was the third infringement, my client was entitled to consider that the age of cavalry was past.'"

(*Memoirs*, 1.7 / *The Tumbled House*, chapter 17)

(13) Marnie

(i) *Graham conceived the character of Marnie from a combination of two women he knew in Cornwall. The first was a tall, good-looking young lady named Christine who took care of their youngest child when Graham and his wife were in London. "She seemed alright except that she was constantly taking baths, about three a day usually," Graham remembers, "and she was in constant communication with her mother. On one occasion she left the letters lying about, and I found a letter from her mother warning her about the evils of men and that she must never consider having any connection with them at all. Why that was so, I never knew. She sublimated her interests in horses and spent all her spare time riding" ... A few years later the girl committed suicide.*

Just before that, during World War II, Perranporth received many scores of evacuees. A family was put up in a cottage near us. It consisted of a mother and three children, the father being in the navy and therefore usually absent. There were also in the

village a large number of soldiers, some English but later many American. Mrs A., the evacuee mother, was highly respectable, and the three children fairly well behaved ... One could see [her] in the morning, out for her walk to the shops, trailing two children and walking with an entirely affected knock-kneed walk, almost as if in reaction to the thought that she would ever open her legs to anybody. In fact she took it upon herself that it was her patriotic duty to offer comfort to the poor boys who were so far from home. It was kept very discreet, but it got about that if a man she fancied came to her cottage late at night and tapped on her window, Mrs A. would pick up her youngest little girl, who normally slept with her, take her into the next room, and then gently slide open the window.

This went on for many months. Then Mrs A. found herself to be pregnant. Her husband was far from home, and no one – but no one – was to be told. Of course the village, like most villages, eventually got to know the truth. But she still denied it. Being very slim, she was able to wear disguising clothing until near the end. When the pains came on, she got the old charlady next door to help her, and she was delivered of a fine healthy boy. Her determination to keep it secret was eventually thwarted by a persistent haemorrhaging, so her helper went to call the doctor. While the other woman was away, Mrs A. strangled the child and wrapped it in a newspaper and hid the body under the bed in the spare room, where it was later discovered.

The mother was found not guilty because of 'puerperal insanity'.

The incident had further repercussions. After the war, the youngest child began to steal, and it seemed curious to Graham whether it was a consequence of the mother's deprivation. He derived the idea of Marnie stealing from this real-life event, together with an article he had read in the Sunday Express newspaper about a girl who kept stealing from

her employers and reappeared in various guises. "She took jobs in restaurants or theatres and absconded with about £500 each time."

(Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie, Tony Lee Moral, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013 / Memoirs, 1.9)

(ii) In the mid-1950s, WG had dinner with film director Sandy Mackendrick (*The Man in the White Suit; The Ladykillers*), who said to him:

"D'you know, Winston, your women characters are always particularly good, attractive, intelligent, they are real people, real women, with real emotion. But they are all what I might call white ladies, people who embody the right side of life. Have you ever thought about writing a book about a grey lady, one who is maybe a transgressor of some sort?"

So far as I know, I entirely forgot his suggestion, but it has occurred to me more recently to wonder if it had lodged itself in my subconscious and had itself contributed to the genesis of Marnie.

(Memoirs, 1.9)

(14) The Grove of Eagles

The origin of this long and detailed historical novel about Cornwall and religion and Spain and the later Armadas derived from a day when I was reading some eighteenth-century papers while writing the third or fourth Poldark novel. The entry referred to one 'John Killigrew of Arwenack, governor of Pendennis Castle in Cornwall, who in 1596¹⁹ sold his castle to the King of Spain.' This seemed such an outrageous and outlandish statement that I felt I must someday find out the truth about it.

That would be in the late 1940s. Twelve or more years later, having done some of the research,²⁰ I sat at the window of a villa in Cap Ferrat in the South of France and, looking over the brilliant blue of a Mediterranean harbour, began to describe the feelings of a fourteen-year-old boy, Maugan Killigrew, lying in his bedroom at Arwenack in 1583 and staring out at the blue smile of the waters of Falmouth Bay.

(*Memoirs*, 1.10 / *The Craft of the Historical Novelist*, The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, New Series, Vol. VII, Part 4, 1977)

(15) After the Act

(i) When the film of *Night Without Stars* was being cast, WG went with producer Hugh Stewart and director Anthony Pelissier to Paris and spent a day auditioning French actresses all hoping to land the part of "Alix", the female lead. It seems that WG's preference was "a delightful young girl called Nadine Alari"; however, not only did she not get the part, but no French actress did – it went, rather to Romanian-born Nadia Gray. But WG and Nadine kept in touch:

After that first meeting, five years before, when we had taken a strong liking to each other, we had met several times, and she had invited me to see the French farce in which she was then playing, and after that to join her and her company for the annual dinner and dance and other festivities, held annually in the Place de la Concorde on the 13th of July, when all the actors and many of the notorieties of Paris congregate for a tremendous party which goes on all night. I wrote about this in After the Act.

(*Memoirs*, 2.2)

(ii) In a letter to his friend Richard Church, after Church had favourably reviewed the novel in *Country Life*, WG acknowledged that:

... although I am not like [the book's murdering playwright protagonist] Morris Scott – happily – the literary ectoplasm that stretches between him and me is probably shorter, his profession being what it is, than in most of the characters I create ...

Indeed – when Scott tells his agent: *"I can't write about the characters until they are ... alive,"* or when he discloses that he is reluctant to be quizzed, even by his wife, about his work-in-progress, saying: *"It was enormously a question of mood. Ordinarily I was tongue-tied: the act of speech dissipated the creative impulse; if I talked about it I had already done it and there was nothing left. Only now and then would something bubble up and because of its urgency spill over into speech; then she was valuable and stimulating, wise and perceptive. But the initiative had to come from me,"* the voice of WG sounds clear.

(WG to Richard Church in an undated letter held by the Harry Ransom Center, the University of Texas at Austin, TX, USA / *After the Act*, 1.3 + 1.4)

(16) Night Journey (The Bodley Head Ltd., 1966)

Night Journey was written in 1940 and published in 1941. It sold about 700 copies and then the type and sheets were destroyed in an air-raid.

It is one of only two spy stories I have ever written. Since its day, much has happened to the spy story and much to the spy. Life in the sub-world of espionage has become more savage, more sophisticated and more ambivalent. Yet I hope this novel may still perhaps have some small interest and some entertainment value – both for itself alone and because it was written in the darkest days of the war. I have revised it for this publication, but have not attempted to alter its judgements with the superior hindsight of twenty-five years.

W.G.



(1) Pendennis Castle with Falmouth behind (2) Arwenack House



Nadine Alari (1927-2016)



Agadir, Morocco, before and after the earthquake of 29 February 1960: the setting of *Tremor* (see page 48 below)

(17) The Walking Stick

Did The Walking Stick actually derive from some personal experience?

Reluctantly WG told me how, more than 25 years ago, he had fallen in love with a lame girl. "She was very beautiful, very charming. She just happened to have a lame leg. I felt that she wouldn't accept love, and that's what happened."

(Arthur Pottersman, *Argosy*, December 1967)



When I was writing The Walking Stick, there was a robbery in an art gallery and the breaking in of a safe and I wanted to know exactly how this should work so through a friend I got an introduction to the wife of one of the Train Robbers and she had as a chauffeur one of the best-known petermen – if they

are well-known – in England and I entertained him to lunch and asked him all about breaking into a safe. I then went along to the best safe-makers in England²¹ and tried out his knowledge of how to break into a safe with the way they would prevent it and then I took it all back to him again and told him: "Ah, but they say this," and he said: "Oh, but I would do that," and then I eventually wrote it and it was then finally vetted by the safe people to make sure that it was right.

(WG to an unknown interviewer at Trerice, Newquay on 27 March 1974)

NOTE: though WG's wife Jean suffered two strokes in 1967, the second of which affected her walking, the book was written before either of them – though its title did come from her.

(18) Angell, Pearl and Little God

(i) This novel had a prolonged gestation and proved very difficult to write, with WG switching from first to third person narration and back again, then trying multiple narrators before deciding that third person narration was the only way that worked. The WG archive at Truro's Royal Cornwall Museum holds an early 150-page draft of its opening chapters which sets the story in a fictionalised Bristol and shows that neither "Angell" nor "Pearl" were, at the time of its writing, anything like realised in their final form, although Godfrey was. WG writes in *Memoirs*:

The first character to present himself [was Angell], a stout, greedy, middle-aged lawyer. For years I had had the idea of such a man marrying a pretty shop girl or factory girl less than half his age and then allowing the events to move forward, the tragi-comedy to work itself out from there. [But then] Little God [started to emerge] from the mists and [threatened] to monopolize my attention absolutely. At first, just a tough little rowdy on the make, ready to turn any sort of dishonest penny, he shortly changed in my mind to a mechanic respraying stolen

cars and handy with his fists, earning a few pounds here and there sparring in the London East End gyms; and from there he gradually developed into a chauffeur and suddenly into a man with a career in boxing and the ability and the ambition to get to the top.

Though it took three long years and so much hard work to write, it proved, at least, effort well spent. You would think, though, in all that time, he might have found a more enterprising title!

(*Memoirs*, 1.10)



(ii) Wilfred Evill (above)²² was a London solicitor, art collector and Savile Club member who – corpulent, hectoring, mean-spirited and egotistical – seems to have repulsed most of those he met. Here's WG:

... during the war, I am told, [he] always ate at Claridge's Causerie (fixed price) before coming on to the Savile for dinner,

and often managed to talk in a loud voice about the food he'd eaten in the hearing of some members who had recently lost a son or a brother. He was a great art collector, and one of the last things I heard him say was: "I'm going to buy more Stanley Spencers. I hear he's got cancer." A few years later I used him as a character in one of my novels ...

Yes, and as "Wilfred Angell", very thinly disguised.²³

("Hang Your Halo In The Hall!" A History of the Savile Club by Garrett Anderson, The Savile Club, 1993)

(iii) WG gained experience and assimilated knowledge of the arcane world of professional boxing mainly through the good offices of promoter Mike Barrett (to whom *Angell, Pearl & Little God* is dedicated).

Several times I borrowed a seedy raincoat from the Secretary of the Savile Club, wore my oldest trilby, and slouched down to the Thomas à Beckett pub in the Old Kent Road, where with a stub of cigarette in my mouth I would prop up the bar ...

Then by chance I got an introduction to ... Mike Barrett, and he generously opened every door ... I attended meetings between the various promoters when their protégés were being matched. I went to weigh-ins, sparring bouts, sat behind the scenes in the dressing rooms before and after they went up to fight. I even attended the pay-outs.

(Memoirs, 1.10)

(19) The Japanese Girl and other stories

(i) These short stories span a fairly long literary life. One of them was one of the first things I ever wrote; two were written as recently as last year.

Many of them have their origins in fragments of personal experience. The title story stemmed from a chance meeting with a Japanese girl in a train to Brighton. 'The Basket Chair', though written recently, derives from an unpleasant experience I had in my youth when recovering from pneumonia. 'Cotty's Cove' is to be found on any large-scale map of Perranporth beach, just south of Wheal Vlow adit; though I don't believe the comb is still there. 'The Cornish Farm', which was originally written for broadcasting, is not based on any existing farm, but I knew a man very like Frank Boduel. 'At the Chalet Lartrec' comes of being benighted on the Bernina Pass in the first snows of winter.

The idea for three of the stories I owe to the chance conversation and reminiscences of friends. 'The Old Boys' to Mr Fred Harris, 'I Had Known Sam Taylor for Years' to Mr Maurice Goldman, 'Jacka's Fight' to Mr Gareth Johns.

W.G.

(ii) There may be a few amongst you who have read my one book of short stories. In it is a short story [VIVE LE ROI] about the death and the burial of William the Conqueror. Well, all the material facts for that I got from a contemporary account by Ordericus Vitalis, which is as near as even the most conscientious historian can get to the truth of the matter ... But in fact Ordericus Vitalis was thirteen when William died. In other words he depended on an eye-witness, or possibly even hearsay, and who knows how good his information was?

((i) The Japanese Girl, Author's Note (ii) The Craft of the Historical Novelist, The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, New Series, Vol. VII, Part 4, 1977)

(20) The Spanish Armadas

(i) *[WG] hesitated when first approached to write a book about the second Spanish armada, the big one in 1588. "I said the subject had been covered too often. My publisher's reply was: 'Well, why don't you write about the four armadas? Few people know that there was more than one.' After The Grove of Eagles and the extensive research I put into it, my knowledge of the second and third armadas was extensive, but I knew little about the fourth, the expedition to Ireland, an attempt to link it with Spain and oust the British. So I accepted and wrote it in a year."*

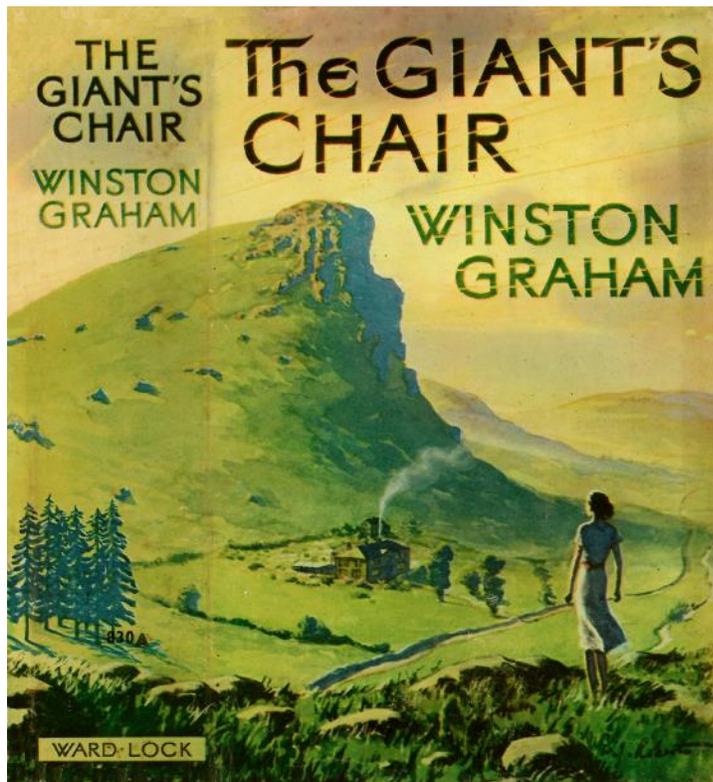
(WG to Gloria Newton, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 March 1973)

(ii) *When ... I came to write [The Spanish Armadas] I felt very strongly that almost all [previous] Armada books treated all the sea ... fights in a vacuum, or at most related the sailing of the first to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, as if that were the cause of the war and not just a contributing event. So I decided to write about six introductory chapters as well as one or two linking the various battles.*

All through the writing of [the] book I had five volumes of Rowse on the shelf behind me ... The England of Elizabeth, Tudor Cornwall, Sir Richard Grenville, The Expansion of Elizabethan England and Raleigh and the Throckmortons; but I only turned to them occasionally for reference. It seemed to me ... I needed a new view of history [if I was] to attempt a survey of thirty years in about 150 pages, so I read and took copious notes from four lives of Philip II, three of Elizabeth, two of Mary Queen of Scots, and many others on the general Elizabethan scene, and then began to write ...

(WG to A. L. Rowse in a letter dated 8 November 1971 held by the University of Exeter's Special Collections Department)

(21) Woman in the Mirror



(i) Whilst a publisher's note in *Woman in the Mirror* acknowledges that

Some of this book is based on an earlier novel by the author, The Giant's Chair, published in 1938

this rather understates the case. Although some significant plot details are changed, the guilt is shared more widely, a couple of names are tweaked, the number of characters is reduced and some of their fates revised for both better and worse, the basic story and lead characters remain the same. Even the book's title was only revised by the publisher at the eleventh hour.²⁴

* *

(ii) Though the story is in any case unusual (thus not easy to predict or second-guess), there may be even more to the tale than casual readers are likely to perceive:

*Winston Graham gives double value in his latest novel. Not only does *Woman in the Mirror* have intensity as a thriller; it is also a carefully controlled parody of [Charlotte Brontë's 1847 masterpiece] *Jane Eyre*...*



Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

(From *The Melbourne Herald*, 13 August 1975; reviewer unnamed)

(22) *The Merciless Ladies* (The Bodley Head Ltd., 1979)

Foreword

I have resisted suggestions that this novel should be reissued because there were one or two scenes in it that did not seem to me quite right, and I was waiting to find time and the mood to

do something about them. These, I hope, have now been improved. Although the book was not contemporary when written, I have taken the opportunity of this revision to double-distance the events described by giving them the perspective of today.

W.G.

(23) The Green Flash

(i) Where did David Abden come from?

Well, again, this all stems from many years back when a very well known Hollywood film star [Gregory Peck] came to Paris and met a pretty young reporter [Veronique Passani] who was half Russian, half Italian and they fell in love and three or four years later [in 1960] I met them in the south of France and with them was the young girl's mother [Alexandra Passani aka Chouchoune²⁵] who was Russian – tall, elegant, very handsome, highly intelligent – and she took rather a liking to me and I didn't take that sort of a liking to her, although I think I admired her more than any other woman I ever met. It always stuck after that in my creative guts – supposing that a younger man should fall in love with an older woman, which isn't unusual, I'm sure, and supposing against the law of probabilities, with all the vicissitudes that go on between them, they still remain in love, there must come a tragic time when the woman is too old to be sexually attractive to the man, and for that man, no other woman will do.

Then what?

Exactly. And that was the sort of thing which started The Green Flash. The sort of impulse.



Alexandra Passani *aka* "Choucoune" (1907-1985), whom WG came to know during his residence through the spring and summer of 1960 at Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera. Photo courtesy of her granddaughter Cecilia Peck – with thanks.

(ii) More on "Chouchoune":

[In 1960] Madame Passani ... was a distinguished Russian woman, still in her forties [born in 1907, she was a year older than WG; both were in their early fifties], an intellectual of great charm and force of character, with formidable good looks that appeared and disappeared with her moods ... [She] took a great fancy to us, and our friendship blossomed and lasted for years. Her charm of character and personality made a great impression on me, and generations later she surfaced as Shona in The Green Flash.

(iii) But what "world" should the book's narrative be set in?

The one calling that seemed to provide absolutely the right ambience was perfumery ... So I proceeded on those grounds ... I got an introduction to Desmond Brand, the then managing director of Helena Rubenstein, and he put everything I asked for at my disposal. I visited the works, the testing laboratories, the big commercial suppliers, the shops, the beauty salons. Desmond Brand was a very down-to-earth character. He emphasized the commercial, no-nonsense side of the business, but was willing enough to utilize the mystique, the romantic advertising, the bally-hoo that has grown up around the whole subject of perfumery.

After the story refused to take off and stalled for a year, WG met an English tourist in Terrigal Bay [between Newcastle and Sydney on Australia's east coast] who, on a wet afternoon, began to tell WG his life story:

It was such an extraordinary story that I should have gone straight upstairs afterwards and written it all down. Stupidly, I did not, but enough of it remained in my memory, and some of it was riveting ... Among a number of things he told me was that when estranged from his wealthy wife he was invited to

her birthday party at the Dorchester Hotel, and he went along feeling this to be the first move towards a reconciliation. When he got there he found all the other eighteen guests were men, and they were all homosexuals.

This scene appears in The Green Flash ... The character of David Abden ... owes something to that meeting ... but derives from other men as well.

((i) Susan Hill interviewing WG on BBC Radio Four's *Bookshelf* on 26 February 1987 (ii) *Memoirs*, 1.8 (iii) *Memoirs*, 2.11)

(24) Cameo

(i) Author's Note

In 1942 I wrote and published a suspense novel called MY TURN NEXT. I have written CAMEO on the same theme, but time has given a historical slant to what was a contemporary tale.

W.G.

(ii) [In] 1943 ... a flight lieutenant ... told us we must provide accommodation for six pilot officers. For this the government would pay us 6d a night. Of course we welcomed the young men – all younger than I was – and we made many warm friendships, none of which, alas, endured. Our young men were constantly changing; and not many survived the war. We lost two while they were staying with us – not from enemy action but from hideously ordinary flying accidents. They were the cream of youth: supremely fit, intelligent, high-spirited, zestful, courageous but fatalistic. There were some Poles among them too – equally splendid men. I have written about two of them in my novel Cameo.

(Memoirs, 1.5)

(25) Stephanie

(i) *For a good many years I have known two men, both now elderly, who while vastly different in most ways, have one thing in common: they were 'war heroes'. One of them had been parachuted into France, blew up bridges, fought with the Maquis, was captured and tortured, and later was involved in action in North Africa and the Far East. Yet for all the time I had known him, he was the gentlest of men. The other was in the Parachute Regiment, fought with great bravery and the utmost recklessness all through the war and – it is said – ran himself into further debt every leave because he did not expect to survive. He is not now such a gentle man as the first but is quiet, courteous and shy.*

It seemed to me that both these men illustrated a peculiar paradox: that for a short time a human being can become a trained killer, and then when that short term is over, can return to the fold, sober, law abiding, reliable, as if nothing had happened. (These are not ordinary soldiers, where the change is not so extreme, but the real killers.) And I put to myself the question: if in later life a situation should arise when violence was again justifiable – not in another war but in their own lives – would they briefly revert to what they had been in their youth?

For some years also I have had a club friend [David Jackson] who is the chief police surgeon at Heathrow and deals exclusively with the smuggling of drugs ... I began to study the drug question, interviewed people, trying to see all around it. On one of my frequent visits to India I happened to meet a drug dealer in Bombay. So it all began ...

(Memoirs, 2.11)

(ii) The London Club of Stephanie's father James and his friend Henry is the Hanover (see page 25).

(26) Tremor

(i) In *Memoirs*, WG describes at length an incident-packed trip he took with his wife across Morocco in the early 1960s. In an unreliable car with a "battery in terminal decline", it was with "great relief" that they reached Agadir:

Agadir is not at all like the other Moroccan towns, being a Europeanized seaside resort built around one of the finest beaches in the world. When we first saw it, it was all freshly rebuilt or still rebuilding after the momentous earthquake of 1960, when over 12,000 people died, and ... the entire town could as well have been struck by an atomic bomb.

Rooted there for three days while a new battery was at last procured, we had ample time to observe the scars and to hear the stories of people who had undergone the nightmare of the earthquake yet had somehow survived.

It was a very suitable subject for a novel, and I decided that when the novel that I was then writing was finished, I would write this.

When that time came, however, I was put off by a disinclination to write a novel about a number of disparate people whose separate stories come together only because of how they are affected by the earthquake – their lives terminated or their problems otherwise resolved ... I tend to write the sort of novels I like to read, and such composite stories have never greatly appealed to me. So I shelved it, and it was only some years later that I finally used the idea.

(ii) *[Winston and Jean] used to travel at least three times a year, visiting Morocco in the early Sixties after the earthquake which decimated the city of Agadir. It inspired his latest novel, Tremor, about an ill-matched assortment of people whose lives are changed by the disaster.*

((i) *Memoirs*, 2.7 / (ii) *Daily Express*, 18 November 1995)

(iii) June Moulton was born in Plymouth in 1929. Her mother Vera Anne was a cousin of WG's (her mother Mary – June's grandmother – and WG's mother Annie were sisters), making June a first cousin of WG's, once removed. After her marriage in 1952, June's surname became Crowden. In the *Western Morning News* of 30 September 2003 her son James Crowden wrote:

As a young girl of twelve, my mother was evacuated to Perranporth from Newton Ferrers [Devon] in 1941 ... WG and his mother welcomed them and arranged for them to rent a chalet owned by Donald Healey's parents a few houses away from Treberran ... Much later WG wrote a novel called Tremor which had as one of its characters a woman who went off to New Zealand. This was based on my mother's experience and letters about sailing she sent him from the Bay of Islands. The character was called Ann, after my grandmother.

During the war years, WG and June established a mutual rapport which endured until his death in 2003. As of 2022, June – seen below in 2015 feeding a calf – still lives in New Zealand.



(iv) As mentioned on page 30 above, in July 1950 aspiring French actress Nadine Alari auditioned in Paris for the part of "Alix" in the Rank Organisation's forthcoming film *Night Without Stars*. She was passed over because, according to WG, [director] "Anthony Pelissier's standard of judgement was not so much which girl would appeal to an audience as which girl appealed to him." Nadine Deschamps, the beautiful young French actress in *Tremor* flies to Agadir having just failed to secure a lead part in an unnamed Rank Organisation film (its director "Mortimer Morton") for the very same reason. Clearly one Nadine served as template for the other. The author of the novel behind the film, though also unnamed, is described as "a rather ingenuous but charming young man."

(v) In Chapter Two of *Tremor*, WG has Big Smith, one of his gang of robbers, whistle *Mighty Like a Rose* (meaning "very much like a rose") because "when he was a boy he had seen a play in which the murderer whistled *Mighty Like a Rose* before his next killing." The song, written in 1901 by Frank Leiby Stanton and Ethelbert Nevin, was featured by Emlyn Williams in his play *Night Must Fall*, a psychological thriller first performed in 1935. WG himself saw the play in Dijon in 1955, starring none other than Nadine Alari!

((iv) *Memoirs*, 1.6 / (v) *Memoirs*, 2.2)

(27) The Ugly Sister

(i) *Winston Graham was in Cornwall last week ... and took time to speak about [The Ugly Sister]. "The setting has been there for a very long time and I have been aware of its existence for a long time too," he said. "Before the war I saw this strange Gothic building across the water from St. Mawes. Because it faces north, it can look quite sinister. I visited it at the time because it was empty and also went to the church. "During the war the lawns were covered in Nissen huts and it took on quite a different character, but still had a mystery about it. And I thought at the time it was a wonderful position, almost an island." Three years ago he was invited to lunch after*

discussing the possibility of writing a novel based on Place House. The house is now owned by the Grant-Daltons, who are descendants of the Spry family, who lived there in the 1800s. "I said to the owners there were two ways of approaching the subject. "I could either do a Daphne du Maurier and call the house something different, fill it with entirely fictional characters and, like du Maurier's Menabilly, burn it down at the end if I wanted to. Or I could use the history of the house and its various inhabitants." The Grant-Daltons opted for the latter. "They said I was the only author they would allow to do this, which was rather flattering."

(Western Morning News, 3 August 1999)



[Place House, St Mawes, Cornwall](#)

(ii) In The Ugly Sister, the house in which the girl grows up is part of the fabric of the novel – and it's a real house. "I'd been

looking at Place House at St Mawes for 60 years. I'd seen it empty, seen it during the war – it's a gothic, slightly sinister house ... I had to choose the year in which to set it – and I'm interested in the development of steam in the 1830s, so I chose Emma's birthday as 1812."

(Victoria Kingston, *Sussex Life*, February 1999)

* * * * *

NOTES AND SOURCES

¹ *Memoirs of a Private Man*, Macmillan, 2003, Book One, Chapter 3. WG states that his first four novels earned him £138 in total and he never made, back then, more than £60 a year.

² *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 26 November 1977

³ *Daily Express*, 18 November 1995

⁴ *Books and Bookmen*, October 1959

⁵ *Memoirs*, 1.10

⁶ *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 March 1973

⁷ As 5

⁸ Arthur Pottersman, *Argosy*, December 1967.

⁹ *Memoirs 2.4 / Poldark's Cornwall*, Macmillan, 2015, introduction

¹⁰ Artists v critics, round one, Jonathan Jones, *The Guardian*, 26 June 2003

¹¹ *The Craft of the Historical Novelist*, The Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, New Series, Vol. VII, Part 4, 1977

¹² *Report to Writers*, Truro archive, undated

¹³ *Poldark's Cornwall*, The Bodley Head + Webb & Bower Ltd, 1983

¹⁴ WG's *Maid of Pendennis* (renamed in later editions *The Grey Cat*) foundered off Sawle on 9 December 1898; *La Seine* off Perran Beach on 28 December 1900 – their stories are *not* the same. Nonetheless, Tom Mitchell figures in both. WG acknow-

ledged the valuable contribution of an eye-witness prepared to share his memories by namechecking him (*FS*, Epilogue, page one) in his novel.



Perranporth coastguards, 1941: WG (whose body language speaks volumes) is front right – but which is Tom Mitchell?

¹⁵ The wreck occurred in December, not January 1900; all 25 crew were rescued; no lives were lost.

¹⁶ *Grace's Guide to British Industrial Health / Around Manchester*, Nigel P. Barlow, Manchester Publishing, 2016

¹⁷ *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 3 January 1901

¹⁸ Truro-based ophthalmologist A. Gerard East, to whom *Night Without Stars* is dedicated. WG was put in touch with East by Cornwall's then Medical Officer Dr Reginald Curnow, whose grandson Dan Atkinson relates an account of the hospital visit rather different from WG's:

One of my favourite Graham stories involves his research for one of his novels, during the course of which he asked my grandfather to arrange for him to witness an eye operation. Cautioning WG

that such operations were pretty gruesome, my grandfather did as he was asked. As the surgeon removed the anaesthetised patient's eye from its socket and lay it on his cheek, there was a loud thud as the great novelist passed out cold on the floor of the operating theatre. (Lion & Unicorn, 30 January 2021)

¹⁹ In the two references cited, WG records 1596 in one and 1597 in the other.

²⁰ In his three-page Postscript for Purists at the end of the novel, WG provides detailed information concerning the numerous sources consulted during the course of its research.

²¹ In his *Independent* obituary of WG, Jack Adrian reports that the person whom WG consulted was "Chubb's then managing director, R. J. Pilgrim."

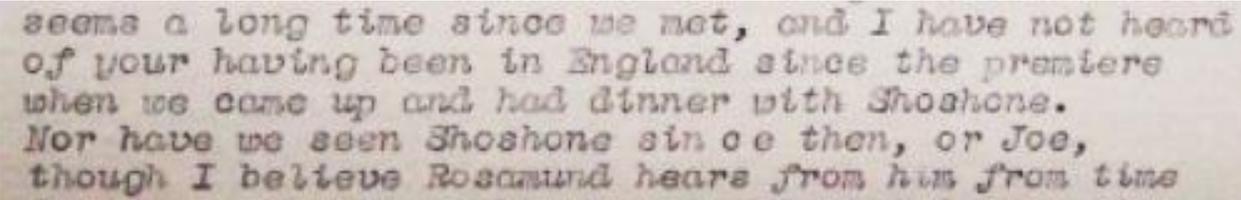
²² Wilfred Evill (1890-1963) was a long-time patron and sometime legal representative of artist Stanley Spencer (1891-1959) and would "sometimes take pictures in lieu of fees" (Colin Gleadell, *The Telegraph*, 21 June 2011). When Evill's art collection was eventually auctioned in that year, it fetched over £41 million. The pencil sketch of Evill on page 37 above was drawn by Spencer in 1942.

²³ Angell's club, the Hanover, which is WG's fictional version of the Savile, figures in *The Tumbled House*, *Angell*, *Pearl and Little God*, *The Merciless Ladies* (1979 version only; in the 1944 edition it's the Sage), *The Green Flash*, *Stephanie* and 1971 short story I HAD KNOWN SAM TAYLOR FOR YEARS. Like *The Tumbled House* – see page 27 – *Angell*, *Pearl ...* also features a minor character named Heath.

²⁴ Both in the RCM notebooks in which the story was redrafted and in Bodley Head publishers' letters concerning the book to WG, the title *The Giant's Chair* is used.

²⁵ Both in *Memoirs* and in a letter dated 1 November 1963 he wrote to Gregory and Veronique Peck (excerpt below), WG

spells this name "Shoshone"; but in an email to this author dated 10 February 2018, Madame Passani's granddaughter Cecilia gives the correct French spelling – *Chouchoune* – reproduced here.



seems a long time since we met, and I have not heard
of your having been in England since the premiere
when we came up and had dinner with Shoshone.
Nor have we seen Shoshone since then, or Joe,
though I believe Rosamund hears from him from time

* * * * *