

WG INTERVIEW, TSW, 5 AUGUST 1983

At the time of writing (2017), the British Film Institute's online BFI Player offers a near four minute free-to-view video clip, supplied by SWFTA (South West Film & Television Archive) and originally aired on independent channel TSW (Television South West) on 5 August 1983 recalling a short interview given by WG to reporter Mike Whitmarsh (MW, below) to promote the author's then latest book, *Poldark's Cornwall*.¹

Transcript

[0:00] Standing in an unidentified Cornish² churchyard with a copy of the book in his hands, MW starts with lines delivered straight to camera:



Like any writer worth his salt, Winston Graham has strong opinions, not least about the visual changes made to Cornwall since the eighteenth century setting of the Poldark novels. But

this book is also a celebration of what remains, brought into vivid focus by the lens of Simon McBride. [MW opens the book, which the camera shows briefly in close-up.]

[00:20] The shot then cuts to and remains on this view whilst MW's voice-over continues:



Winston Graham admits to an early love affair with sunshine, sand and sea, and the camera proves that Cornwall still offers those potent ingredients.

Clouds of spray began to lift off the sea and drift away like sand before a storm. Here and there the cliffs were smoking.³

But the romance is tempered with realism. Like Ross Poldark before them, modern Cornishmen still have to graft a living

from the sea, the mines and the tourists, so, are the novels based on fact or simply fantasy?

[00:52] The clip now cuts to WG, who answers this and subsequent questions whilst standing in a blustery breeze:



WG: Most of them have some basis in historical fact and, of course, most of the incidents, or a great many of the incidents, do derive from incidents that have occurred in Cornwall.

[1:03] MW: *You talk about the ruination of Cornwall in the twentieth century. What grieves you most?*

WG: I don't think it's ruined. I think that because if one compares it for instance to some of the places on the Costa Brava or in Greece, Cornwall is marvellously unruined. But I naturally grieve for the extreme growth of the sort of bunga-

lows – what Quiller-Couch⁴ called "bungalow eczema" – and I grieve for caravan parks which have no – after being there fifteen years don't even have a tamarisk tree to mask them from the rest of the countryside, and I'm sorry for some of the commercial development.⁵

[1:44] MW: *You even, I think, suggest a tax on caravans crossing the Tamar?*⁶

WG: *Well, yes, I shall probably have that held against me for a long time, but my feeling about caravans – I may be wrong – is that they bring most of their provisions with them and that they really don't, in spite of holidaying in Cornwall, they don't do a lot for the Cornish people who live here, and for that reason I think it would be a good idea to tax them and spend the money on providing good amenities for those that do come.*

[2:16] MW: *And the towns – you talk of modern planners hacking the heart out of Truro, for example. How, exactly?*

WG: *Well don't you find the heart being hacked out of it? There's hardly a building going to be left soon, of the original eighteenth century Truro, which may have had its sordid parts, but had a lot of beauty as well.*

[2:37] MW: *You talk about the invasion of tourists, but surely the impact of Poldark on television must have prompted thousands of people to come here. Are you proud of that?*

WG: *Not a bit. But that's what I say in the book, I'm afraid. When I die, if Saint Peter's a Cornishman as I suspect, I shall certainly not mention the fact that I've written the Poldark books, else he probably won't let me into Heaven.*

[3:01] Finally, on to this closing shot with more MW voice-over:



The story of the mines that failed, the great houses that were lost, are all grist to the writer's mill, like Trerice, once the home of the Arundels. That became Trenwith for the Poldarks. Other locations like St. Enodoc, once buried in sand, have actually been improved. That, and St. Winnow, on the Fowey, were ancient long before the Poldarks held their fictitious weddings. The name Demelza lives on in a twentieth century hamlet, and the real-life workers of Cornwall, the miners and the fishermen, provided Graham with composite characters for his books. It's all too easy for a novelist to see only the quaintness of Cornwall, but Winston Graham is honest enough to tell us which way he thinks the tide is running.

[3:50] End

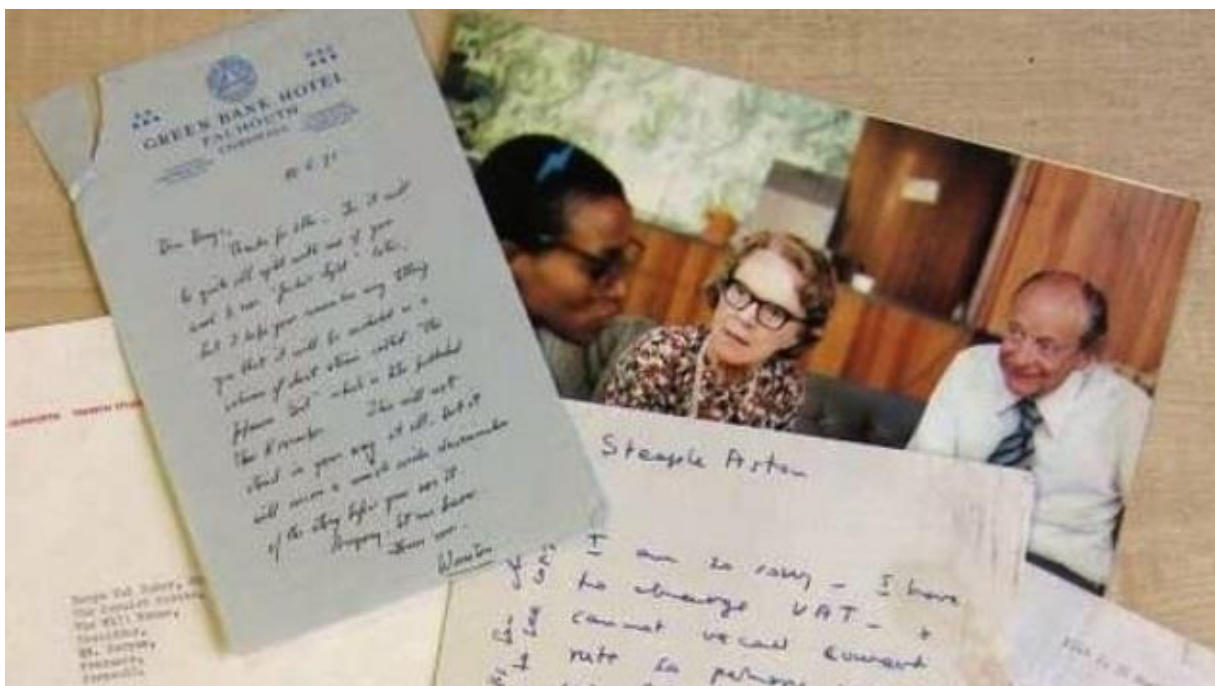
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NOTES

¹ With text by WG and photos by Simon McBride, *Poldark's Cornwall* was first published by Webb & Bower in association with The Bodley Head Ltd in 1983.

² Where was this footage shot? The BFI states "Location: Perranporth", which is clearly wrong. WG appears to be standing outside The Greenbank Hotel, Stratton Place, Falmouth with the village of Flushing visible across the Penryn River behind him. The location of the church at the start of the clip (though *not* in Perranporth) is unknown.

WG is known to have been a patron of The Greenbank Hotel. The photo below shows part of an archive of Denys Val Baker papers. The uppermost letter, from WG to DVB, is on Greenbank headed paper.



³ These two sentences, quoted not quite accurately by MW, are from Chapter One, Book One of *Demelza*.

⁴ Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944) was a Cornish (Bodmin-born) writer who published under the pseudonym "Q". Though

a prolific novelist and literary critic, he is probably best remembered now as the compiler of *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1918*.

⁵ WG was making a similar argument as far back as 1960 – see [NOVELIST](#), page 15.

⁶ Flowing north to south across all but four miles of England's south-western peninsula, the River Tamar forms the majority of the border between the counties of Devon and Cornwall. Thus, in this context, "crossing the Tamar" means "entering Cornwall".

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