

Wogan, BBC1, 1 February 1988

Terry Wogan: *Poldark* became one of the most watched television drama series of the 1970s. Now it's becoming one of the most watched drama series on Monday afternoons and Tupperware parties all over the nation are abandoned as matronly hearts quicken at the sight of dark, dashing, fiery Ross Poldark, forever in love with Elizabeth but wed to Demelza - the scoundrel.

[a Ross / Demelza clip from Series One is played]

I love it. Welcome *Poldark*'s creator, Winston Graham, and the fiery one himself, Robin Ellis.

[Applause. Enter WG + RE]

Good. Welcome to both of you and welcome back to the series. It's great.

RE: I wish I had the words that were just said, I think they were really wonderful, those words.

TW: When the BBC first said that it was going to do daytime television, they said we're going to revive things, we're going to ask you to tell us what you want revived, number one on the list was *Poldark*. It seemed to exercise a great hold on people, didn't it?

RE: Good story, I think

TW: Did you write it for film or anything, Winston?

WG: No, no, entirely for novels. I wrote the first four in the ice age of the 1940s, early fifties, then I left them for twenty years and then I started again in 1972 with another series of three books. By that time, when I was halfway through that, then the BBC decided to make a television series of the first four. In spite of the long list of my books, I'm a slow writer. I've had a long list, a long time in which to do it. By the time they'd finished the first and badly wanted the second, I'd only written two books more instead of three. So in a very civilised way they said "Alright, we'll take the three, the third on trust." And so while the first episodes of the second series were being made, I was busy writing the final episodes of that series. And they didn't even ask what was going to happen. All that did occur occasionally was that I got a telephone message from the casting director saying "Bill

Bloggs's contract is due for renewal next month, will he be in the last lot?"
That was all.

TW: It was fun to make, was it?

RE: Wonderful, yes, yes. Well, I had a good collection of friends with me. Angharad was wonderful to work with, and Ralph Bates and Richard Morant. It was a great crew. It was great.

TW: You did it on location, of course?

RE: We did a lot of filming, yeah. We spent about four months over the two years, I suppose, in Cornwall. That was lovely.

TW: But the BBC don't throw money around. Isn't there a lovely story about you ... They wouldn't even give you anything to sit down on in between takes?

RE: Ah, yes, the BBC are a little parsimonious.

TW: They are a little close with the money, yes.

RE: We were on the beach on a day off at Padstow and we saw these deck chairs and we thought we're filming all day tomorrow in the open air, so we bought all the chairs from all the shops on the beach and we put our names on the back just like they do in films ...

TW: Hollywood style.

RE: Yes, absolutely, and we turned up and sat in a huge circle. Absolutely no reaction from the crew at all.

TW: They didn't offer to reimburse you, or anything?

RE: No, no.

TW: You were a horse quite a lot, weren't you?

RE: Ah, well ...

TW: Obviously, this thing of acting with animals ...

WG: Ahorse, you mean in the "ride" sense. Not the hind legs only?

TW: No, certainly, not in the pantomime tradition, no.

RE: Well, when I wasn't thrown, I was ahorse, yes. I only ride on television. I grit my teeth, get on, and ... But I had two wonderful horses. One was called Dennis and he was in the first series, and I'm convinced that he smiled as we went through camera. I thought I'd be doing the acting and he'd be doing the horse bit, but he seemed to be doing both.



TW: The old acting horse. Now did the local Cornish people fling themselves into it as well?

RE: Well, they certainly did, yes. We were ... Equity allows the BBC to employ local people if it's outside a certain area and this was far away, so we had the local Cornish people and there was one wonderful scene. It was a wrecking scene when there's a wreck on the shore and the whole day was taken up and it started with these very clean, very respectable twentieth century Cornishmen going into make-up and coming out absolutely filthy, dirty, disreputable Cornishmen. We all gathered on the beach and a huge tower for the camera was built, covering the whole scene, and we were all waiting, rather like the beginning of a marathon. The director shouted "Action!" and hundreds of Cornishmen rushed into the sea and grabbed

hold of the barrels and all the loot and I was really convinced that a lot of private scores were settled that day. It was very, very rough. I was convinced of this when at one point I heard one of the professional stunt men who were employed with us shout to one of the extras in desperation: "Hold on, mate, it's only a play!"

TW: Did you make a cameo appearance yourself in this, Winston?

WG: I did.

TW: You did a touch of the old Hitchcocks?

WG: I did, yes. First of all I might mention one of the most disreputable characters, Jud Paynter, in the series, the disreputable servant, people often ask me where he came from. Well, of course, you get things out of people and then they go into the subconscious and they come up later. This was a particular man I used to watch going to the pub every night, cycling to the pub, every night of his life and I wondered why he bothered to use his bicycle, as it was only 150 yards away, till I discovered on the way home he used the bicycle to lean on.

TW: Something to lean on! You've written dozens of successful books. I wonder why... Why do you think *Poldark* is so, so inordinately ...

WG: It's been more successful in England, I think, but of course the others have been successful in the way of films, six have been films ...

TW: You wrote *Marnie* ...

WG: But, you were asking me about taking part in the *Poldarks*. I didn't see anything of the first series much because, to put it as little as we can, there was a certain coolness grew up between myself and the producer of the first series so I didn't see anything until about halfway through when I went into my club one day and saw a young man standing against the bar telling two of his friends about a rather disagreeable time he'd had swimming around in a tank in a Cornish mine the day before. And I said "Are you Clive Francis?" and he said "Yes, who are you?" and I said "Winston Graham," rather apologetically, and he put his arms round me and said "We wondered where you were. We didn't think you liked us at all." And I said "But I like and admire you all." And that has really been the case ever since.

TW: That was because they made Demelza pregnant when she wasn't?

WG: Well, little bits of things like that, yes. And they didn't use much of my dialogue, I must admit. However, in the second series there was a great sort of pressure by various people on the set, actors and others, that I should take part, do a Hitchcock on it, you see, so they put me in as a yeoman farmer greeting a clergyman as he came into church, you see, and what I had to say was "Mornin', Zur!" and I did it very well, I thought, even ... I don't think even Robin or ...

TW: It's not easy. People think that's easy.

RE: You did it very well there.

WG: ... Olivier could have done better with the shortness of the script. But when it came out, I wasn't in it.

TW: The face on the cutting room floor.

WG: Absolutely.

TW: That's a disgrace. I wouldn't write any more. (To RE): You were quite the sex symbol when you were making that. Did you get many interesting offers?

RE: Ehm ...

TW: I don't just mean in Cornwall, I mean generally ...

RE: I suppose so, Terry, yes. You should know more about that ...

TW: You've forgotten, haven't you?

RE: I have, yes, yes ...

TW: It'll probably come up again now they're repeating the series.

RE: Well, it is dribbling back.

TW: Be prepared, that's my advice to you. And thank you both for joining us. Good luck as *Poldark* is reshowed.

RE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Applause]