

Andrew Graham – growing up with Poldark



Andrew Graham is truly the academic Renaissance Man. He keeps re-inventing himself, from economic adviser to Prime Minister Wilson, to economics tutor, then master at Balliol College. In between he raised the money and invented the Oxford Internet Institute in 2010 and then the Europaeum Scholarship Programme.

It must be in his genes. He is the 'son of Poldark'. His father Winston wrote the twelve Poldark novels from his home in Perranporth, Cornwall. [\[Only the first four were written in Cornwall.\]](#) Andrew thought his father wrote Ross the lead as his *alter ego* and his mother Jean was the basis for the female lead, Demelza – both disguised but not totally so.

The Poldark novels, first published in 1945, begat three television series – two on the BBC and one on ITV. The latest series, just finished, starring Aidan Turner and Eleanor Tomlinson, was a runaway success worldwide. A new *Poldark* series is not expected for several years.

Winston Graham was not born to be a writer but desperate to be one. He took it up after a sickly childhood, supported by an income his mother derived from shares. Later he and his wife ran a guest house in Perranporth to keep the wolf from the door. It was only when one of his novels *Fortune is a Woman* [\[actually *Cordelia*\]](#) was published in the USA that the real

money started flowing in. He then took the young Andrew into the garden and said he could now have anything he wanted. He chose an OO-gauge model railway. His father chose to send him to Charterhouse School which set him up for Oxford and life as an economist.

Winston 'never had a proper job' according to Andrew. The closest he came was in the Coastguards during the Second War, having been turned down by the Royal Navy and the RAF. In this job he met real Cornish people for the first time and listened to their stories and their histories. That formed the basis for Poldark. [\[It must have contributed to the development of the saga, but the idea was born before then.\]](#)

Winston's routine was a strict two hours writing – always in longhand – in the morning, tea at 11.00 then more writing until he went off to the local golf course for four to six holes, home for lunch and more writing in the afternoon. He kept a detailed log in his diary of the word count achieved each day. His other entries were the vagaries of the Cornish weather.

It was only when Poldark was taken up by BBC TV in 1975 that he achieved literary fame. [\[No, he was successful before that – although the TV series raised his profile further still.\]](#) But on reading the first scripts he exploded in a rage—one of the only two or three times his son saw that side of his character. He felt that Demelza – his wife in literary form – was depicted as promiscuous. He tried and failed to get the BBC to cancel the series and almost refused to watch it. Winston had relented by series two.

His son has been much more involved with the contemporary series. He met Mammoth Screen in 2014, was impressed by their enthusiasm for the books, gave his approval as literary executor and has been a consultant to both series. They have been rip-roaring successes. Must-watch moments on a Sunday night.

Andrew has had a rather different life to his father. Economics at St Edmund Hall then the Department of Economic Affairs in London followed by a call to work with Thomas Balogh – Harold Wilson's economic brain – in Number Ten Downing Street. "It was the most exciting time of my life. I was just 24." Andrew is still adept at doing impressions of the Hungarian Svengali. Later, he advised Labour leaders James Callaghan and John Smith.

The latter he thought was the cleverest of the three and a great lost leader for the party.

He then toiled away as an Economics fellow and tutor at Balliol for 25 years. His progeny includes James Purnell, who now runs half the BBC and Stephanie Flanders, the former BBC Economic Affairs editor. Andrew himself advised the BBC panjandrums in the 1980s, helping them fight off attempts by the Thatcherite right to destroy the licence fee by putting the economic case for public service broadcasting.

Declaring no interest in the job and after a false start, he became the Master of Balliol for 16 years – 11 years in his own right and five before that as stand-in for the Master who had gone off to be the Vice Chancellor. Like a mediaeval baron his job was to satisfy competing parties. He described his own style as a "What you see is what you get" Master.

In 1994 Andrew took a term's sabbatical to MIT and Harvard where attending a series of lectures on the very nascent internet proved to be his Damascene moment. He came back to Oxford determined to spread that gospel, raised £15 million and set up the Oxford Internet Institute in a Balliol back-cottage in 2001. It still exists today. After that he set up Europaeum – an attempt at European university intellectual co-operation – and is today at the age 78 actively involved in that.

Poldark's son has come a long way from Perranporth to Oxford and Leckford Place where he now lives. Asked what Winston would think of his achievement, he said he would reluctantly have acknowledged it.

John Mair, 13 November 2019

(From *My Jericho*)

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My father once wrote: "I don't think I shall ever of my own volition write a tidy ending – and the word tidy was underlined."
(AG, *Mail on Sunday*, 14 July 2019)

A brief interview with

Andrew Graham

Q When did your father start writing the "Poldark" novels?

A No-one knows exactly, but the key date could well be June 2, 1941! That was the date my father records as the day he took up wartime coastguard duty in the hut overlooking Perranporth beach. I am not claiming that the idea for the "Poldark" novels came to him at that moment, but I am certain that his ideas about a novel based on a set of families living on that north Cornish coast area a long time ago began to take seed in his mind soon after he became a coastguard.

(*The People's Friend*, 12 August 2015)

Q What do you think inspired him to write these particular stories?

A Certainly the long hours he had for thought as he surveyed the sea and sky were key, together with sharing duties with the other coastguards. My father was from Manchester, only moving to Cornwall when he was eighteen. His time as a coastguard was when he really came to know the Cornish people. He learned about their backgrounds and heard stories of life as it had been in their fathers' and grandfathers' times. It is from these people that many of the characters in "Poldark" draw breath and life. Plus, there is the immediate scene. The coastguard hut was above Droskyn Point on Perranporth beach amidst cliffs pitted with old mine workings. An author would have to be extremely incurious not to wonder what they were like in their heyday.

Note: WG states in *Memoirs* that he took up coastguard duty in July 1940, which, in view of the above, is probably yet more evidence (see [A&M](#)) of that book's factual unreliability.

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Winston Graham was someone who habitually held his passions clenched tight to his chest, revealing little of his innermost thoughts ... Of course in the novels passions appear all over the place, especially in the characters. But that is at one remove. It is not direct. It is not the author speaking about himself. (AG, *Poldark's Cornwall*, Macmillan, 2015)

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AG at 78, now looking much like his father

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The Sunday Times, 28 August 2016

Bony, scarred, with unflinching blue eyes – meet the real Poldark

As the epic Cornish drama returns to our TV screens, the son of its author, Andrew Graham, reveals the many real-life facets of the swashbuckling Ross

My father, Winston Graham, is best known for his twelve-volume Poldark saga, the first book published in 1945, the last in 2002. But Poldark is far from the full story. Over a lifetime of writing, he published more than fifty books, almost all novels, of which seven [actually six] were filmed (including *Marnie*, by Alfred Hitchcock).

The first I read, aged ten, was a racy thriller, *Into the Fog*. I loved it and soon progressed to the Poldarks – romping through the four that then existed. Much later, especially after my mother died [in 1992], my father would occasionally consult me about his latest novel – often on a walk across his favourite Cornish beach. Cornwall and Poldark have always been part of my life.

People often ask why the latest TV series has become such a phenomenon. Of course, there is the topless scything, but that cannot be the real answer. In fact, as the newspapers ran headlines about that scene, the viewing figures dropped slightly. In any case, the 1970s TV series grabbed the public's imagination just as much as this one. No, the simplest answer is that they are great stories.

Another answer is that while Poldark is set in the late 18th century, many of the themes that underpin the plot still resonate today: rapacious bankers are on the rise while mining and fishing decline; there is poverty amid wealth, and all the desperation and anger that this can provoke; there are revolutions abroad and, to the excitement of some and the fear of others, a sense that the old order may be crumbling; there is new money versus old; and, in despair, some people turn to religion and pray for justice in the next world, while others fight for justice in the here and now.

All of these forces are at play in the conflicts between the characters. George Warleggan and Ross Poldark are driven by entirely different conceptions of the world. George desperately wants to belong to Ross's class and believes that this class should and will prosper. Ross endlessly breaks his class conventions and, to the utter fury of George, not only gets away with it, but gains admiration in the process.

I remember once asking my father how he had come up with something as complex as the Poldark story and his reply was "I could have written it on a postcard!" He meant that, in essence, it is the story of three men (Ross, Francis and George) all loving, or thinking they love, the same woman, Elizabeth.

But the genesis of a story is never simple, certainly not when it ends up as twelve novels. On one occasion he mentioned another inspiration – reading a short story [[La Donna e Mobile by Herman Sudermann – see IN PROFILE \(PART TWO\)](#)] about a woman who made a wrong decision in her youth, ruining the lives of two men who loved her.

A key part, the Cornish setting, comes primarily from my father's war-time years. He arrived in the village of Perranporth aged seventeen. He was the favoured younger son (his brother, nearly a decade older, was already married) and was supported by his mother to stay at home and write. He had no work experience to draw him into close contact with the Cornish, but during the war he was on coastguard duty in a hut overlooking Perranporth beach.

There he spent hour after hour talking to the other coastguards, listening to the rhythm of the Cornish speech, hearing ancient local stories and learning the traditions of mining and fishing. Below him was the sea, endlessly changing its mood. Around him were the dark holes in the cliffs where the tunnels of old tin mines emerged. Beyond was the three-mile stretch of Perranporth sand, which became Hendrawna in the novels. And up on the cliffs or tucked away in a coombe lay Nampara, slowly being populated with the characters of his imagination.

Then there was my father's close friend, Ridley Polgreen, tall and handsome and a bit moody – like Ross. But *Polgreen* sounded too soft – nowhere

near hard enough, nor dark enough. Thus emerges *Poldark*, wholly convincing as a Cornish name, but one that did not exist until my father invented it.

More of Ross's physical appearance came from a chance acquaintance my father made on a train just after the Second World War:

A young flying officer . . . tall, lean, bony, scarred, withdrawn but pleasant, heavy lids over eyes of that pale blue that doesn't flinch at much, convalescing after a crash: broken leg, couple of ribs, scratch on his face; lucky really. Just waiting to pass his fitness test; any day now. A quiet man but tense, purposeful. A vein in his neck; a sort of high-strung disquiet. I took in everything I could about him, knowing, knowing this was to be the man. (WG in Poldark's Cornwall)

Indeed some of Poldark's early themes reflect the broader post-war period in which they were written. Ross, too, returns from a war at the beginning of the series. Like many people in 1945, he finds the world to which he has returned torn apart; and, as in the mood of post-war Britain, Ross seeks to make a better and more just world for the future.

My mother would have reinforced this mood and been another great source of inspiration. She was energetic; she was an optimist; she could hardly go to Perranporth village without coming back with a funny story; she had an exceptional eye for detail and she was, at least in part, the model for Demelza, Ross's wife.

It is true that in his short story *Meeting Demelza* (2003) my father denies this, saying, "Not at all. Not at all." However, he continues:

Some characteristics, yes . . . her vitality, her resilience, her warmth that made so many people care for her, her ability always, always to find pleasure in small things, perhaps most particularly her gamin wit.

To this must be added that my mother first met my father when she was thirteen – exactly Demelza's age when she first meets Ross.

Does this mean my father is Ross? Absolutely not. Temperamentally, they were quite different. Moreover, my father was not a physically energetic man, still less a swashbuckling one, nor even an outspoken one – his cutting remarks were the ones he wrote. But in his imagination? He was a private man, but I know he would have loved to be faster with the trenchant reply. And, as men, would we not all like to have the strength – and the nerve – to grasp a scoundrel by the collar and slam him down across the table? Ross, in my view, may well be one version of my father's *alter ego*.

One time when my father probably did behave like Ross was in 1975 when he received the first four scripts of the original TV series by the BBC and London Films. He was not pleased. They had changed the story, scrambled the Cornish dialogue and, above all, so distorted the character of Demelza that he demanded the "whole thing cancelled, wiped out, forgotten". (*Memoirs*, 1.5)

Winston Graham is not around to give his verdict on the current adaptation, but of one thing I am certain. The desire of Mammoth Screen, its creator, to hold true to the stories, to be historically authentic and to capture the real Cornwall has been remarkable and my father would love the new version.

However, I am equally sure his reaction to Aidan Turner's topless scything scene as Ross would have been more mixed. While accepting Turner's account that the shirtlessness was only because the day was exceptionally hot, my father would still have resented undue attention being given to a single shot. But he was a realist. And despite his desire for privacy, he would have welcomed the publicity this scene has given to his writing.

He would also have had a clear view of whether Ross rapes Elizabeth, in a scene that appears in the coming season and has already been the subject of controversy.

In the fourth book in the Poldark series – *Warleggan* – this scene is indeed consistent with the potential for rape. But what actually happens is left entirely to the imagination. My father would never have left it so by chance. The only way to judge what he intended is to read the novels as a whole. From earlier scenes as well as from Elizabeth's immediate reactions

and later mixed emotions, it is clear that what finally occurred was consensual sex. My father was not coy about rape. When it does occur, as in a later Poldark, my father says so. I am therefore sure that the television portrayal of these scenes is entirely true to my father's intentions and writing.

What he would have enjoyed is the fact that we are still having this debate. As with, I suspect, most writers, my father's greatest desire was to continue to be read and to be evaluated by what he wrote. He felt strongly that his private life was his own business. After all, it was no less a writer than Tolstoy who declared that there was no point in investigating the writer as a man because a writer is "incarnate in his works".

And so it is that in the Poldark novels the spirit of my father lives on.

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Excerpt from a BBC interview with Andrew Graham (date and location not stated) posted on Poldarked.com on 19 February 2015

Do you have any memories of Poldark from the series filmed in the 1970s? Was it a nice connection to have Robin Ellis back for [Mammoth Screen's reboot]?

AG: I wasn't on set much at all [in the seventies] – my mother and father were a great deal – but we got to know a lot of the actors very well: Robin and Angharad Rees, Clive Francis, Ralph Bates, Christopher Biggins etc. It was very clear that all the actors liked my parents and vice versa. My parents liked to have parties, so all the actors came over ... for lunch at our house in Sussex, so we got to know them very well indeed. They were a lovely set of people – and to have Robin back is great. I think he's really enjoying it. There is a real affinity for him [and his presence] is a nice link to the past.

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When Mammoth Screen's five series of *Poldark* were aired in the USA on PBS Masterpiece, every episode was followed by ***Mining Poldark***, a podcast running between twelve and forty-one minutes which offered listeners a "behind-the-scenes pass to all five seasons". The first thirty-five podcasts (covering all of Seasons 1-4) were co-hosted by Masterpiece employee Barrett Brountas (BB) and Robin Ellis, as was the forty-third and last, and these focused on the development of characters and the unfolding of the story. However, the remainder were given over to interviews with key *Poldark* personnel, namely screenwriter Debbie Horsfield in podcast 36; Heida Reed ("Elizabeth") in 37; Jack Farthing ("George") in 38; Beatie Edney ("Prudie") in 39; Harry Richardson ("Drake") in 40; Kerri McLean ("Kitty Despard") in 42 and, in podcast 41, dated **4 November 2019**, series consultant Andrew Graham. Here's what he had to say:

BB: The time-jump between *The Angry Tide* and *The Stranger from the Sea* is eleven years and, during this fifth season, Debbie Horsfield's original effort attempts to bridge that gap. How do you think your father would have responded to the plot-lines this season?

AG: I think you have to go back a step and think a little bit about how I, from the viewpoint of the literary estate, had to think about it, because I think that probably – my father's not alive, so I couldn't ask him – but I had to try and ask the question that you've just asked really of myself and what it seemed to us was that actually there is quite a lot that's already in place. I mean, if you start with *The Stranger from the Sea* and the subsequent novels, a variety of things happen which make it impossible for other things to take place in the earlier period – some people are alive, some people are dead and that fixes certain things. And then you go back to the end of *The Angry Tide* and the very tragic, awful death of Elizabeth and a set of things are in train from that as well. And then there are one or two extra clues – my father wrote things about what was happening to Ross and Demelza in *The Stranger from the Sea* and so that pins things down. So you've got things coming forwards from *The Angry Tide*, things coming backwards from *The Stranger from the Sea*, and then in the middle of all this is something which I think my father would have been incredibly keen on and which I think Debbie Horsfield has treated really beautifully, which is the actual historical events. My father did extraordinary research for the novels and Debbie has done the same, so a lot of the things that happen in

the novels are based on real events, real characters, and I think that that three-way pindown, if I can put it like that, would have made my father feel that, if anybody could have pulled this off, Debbie had succeeded.

BB: So was history a particular interest of your father's and how do you think he came to begin including historical events in *The Stranger from the Sea* onward, when he hadn't really had so many historical figures in the earlier books?

AG: I think in his mind there wouldn't have been the disjunction that you've implied, because I think what happened was, before he ever wrote a Poldark, he'd written about another eight, nine, ten novels and I think what happened was he was then in the Second World War as a coastguard and he was sitting there meeting people from Cornwall and really engaging in conversation with them and the cliffs around him, where this coastguard hut was located, they had the old mine workings, and I think there was a combination of him beginning to be interested in the surroundings and the people telling him about what had happened in the past and that's where his passion for the history began, and so in all those early [Poldark] novels – the first four that he published – there's absolutely accurate accounts of what happens with the emergence of banking in this period, what's happening to the fishing, what's happening to the mining, what's happening to the landscape and the farming and the rise of new money, so he had already done all that historical research and indeed I think some of the figures who appear – some of the banking figures – they are real people in Cornwall at that time and so when it carries on in the subsequent books, in *The Stranger from the Sea* and afterwards, the final novel goes all the way through to Waterloo and there are real figures – but I don't think there was any separation between the historical authenticity of the earlier books and the historical authenticity of the later books.

BB: I find it fascinating that there he was serving in Cornwall at this moment when the world is shifting, at the time of the genesis of Poldark, where there are also real shifts. The spirit of that coming through, that moment in history he was living in, must somehow have impacted the series.

AG: I think that's absolutely right. I mean, there was a sense in Britain during and after the Second World War that they just really didn't want a

return to what had been happening in the twenties and thirties and so there was a kind of optimism and my father says somewhere that in general his writing seems more touched by the milk of human kindness than by death and destruction, it's because he feels he had a life which on the whole was optimistic and moving in the right direction, and that then comes through into the novels, and I think that's what's part of their great appeal. I mean it's not as if there aren't some really tough, nasty people and some really awful things that happen, and people are very ill and a lot of people die and people are caught in these incredibly difficult circumstances, but, deep down, people I think can read the novels and have a sense of hope. I mean, Ross and Demelza, they keep going, they have a sense of integrity about themselves. Even George Warleggan, this really disagreeable, mean, avaricious banker, is obviously incredibly cut up by the death of Elizabeth and it's clear that he really loved her, and you can feel a sense of engagement with George. I'm very objective about my father's writing but I think that when the bad guys are also people you can like, you know that the writing's going well.

BB: You've mentioned in a previous interview that your father wrote a letter in October 1980 when he began writing *The Stranger from the Sea* and that he "felt stirrings again after four years" and then he spent the rest of his life writing Poldark novels – 1981, '82, '84, 1990 and 2002, just a year before his passing. So obviously his career extends far beyond Poldark, but was Poldark the central story of his life?

AG: I think I want to rather surprisingly say no. I think Poldark and Cornwall and my mother were probably the three great loves of his life, but Poldark wasn't the centre of his life because, amazingly, he wrote twelve Poldark novels but he probably wrote another thirty novels and I think that my father was essentially someone who was a storyteller and he was deeply, deeply unhappy when he wasn't writing and you mentioned that late on in his life he returned to writing the Poldarks and wrote a great many, but in that later period of his life, exactly as in the earlier period of his life, he interspersed the Poldarks with other novels. He wrote a book called *Stephanie* in 1992, *Tremor* in 1995, *The Ugly Sister* in 1998, so all the time he keeps coming back to Poldark, sometimes with very, very long lags, because that family is there and they keep ticking away in his head, but he's a writer. He's a writer. That's what really drove him.

BB: Your sister Rosamund has said that Demelza was partly based on your mother, Jean Williamson [who] helped with the details because she was so observant. What was their literary relationship like, between the parents, and what did her observation of detail look like?

AG: I think it's probably difficult to overestimate the impact of my mother on all of this. She was the only person with whom he really talked over his novels. He said on one occasion to me that he would never tell anybody the story of a novel because then he'd lose the impetus to tell it – but he told it to my mother and, much, much more than that, my mother would see little things in newspapers and draw them to his attention and say, "Winston, what about that?" So my mother was prodding him and, in that sense, she's very like Demelza, she's saying to my father, "Do this. What about this? What about this?" And then, as Rosamund my sister has absolutely correctly said, she would spot [\[AG is presumably referring here to the filming of *Poldark, Series Two*, in 1977\]](#) whether someone had changed their dress, whether the picture on the wall wasn't quite straight, whether the colour of the fabric didn't match another bit of fabric, what had they eaten for lunch – all of those little tiny details –

BB: It all comes together to create such a world; not just the characters but the world-building is a huge part of the appeal –

AG: Absolutely. The other thing which – I didn't really think about this when I was a young person reading the novels, and I'm not sure that everybody thinks about it now, but the significance of locating the books in Cornwall, with the rise of banking and the rise of mining, is that in the late eighteenth century, Cornwall was absolutely at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution. That's why the new banks were being set up. That's why people were making money. That's why people were beginning to make steam engines, and so it wasn't just a lost south-west corner at the tip of England, it was a very vibrant part of the country and I think that adds to the sense of the history and why there's a battle between old money and new money and between the classes, because it was where the social fabric was under pressure at the time.

BB: I've been lucky enough to have co-hosted this podcast with Robin Ellis who played Ross in the original 1970s adaptation of your father's novels. I

understand that your father wasn't such a big fan of the first season of *Poldark* but that he came to really cherish Robin's work and that they even became very good friends.



Mining Poldark co-hosts Robin Ellis and Barrett Brontas

AG: My father's annoyance with the first series by the BBC was nothing to do with Robin or Angharad or any of the key actors. It was simply that he had done this deal with the BBC and he trusted the BBC and he actually knew the person whom they were going to be using as the scriptwriter, but when the script of the first episode appeared, my father – he had a pretty strong temper, my father, and he absolutely hit the roof because they had changed the character of Demelza and made her look like a cheap woman just trying to take her knickers off at the drop of a hat and my father actually tried to cancel the whole contract but, luckily for him and luckily for us, that wasn't successful.

BB: Did they take his feedback and change it or did they say, "Hang on, next week she's the Demelza you know and love"?

AG: They changed it a little bit, but nothing like enough. I think one of the things that has been so beautiful and so pleasing about the second adaptation that Mammoth Screen have done is that they captured the Ross/Demelza relationship exactly as it is in the books. I think the whole seduction scene between Ross and Demelza is exactly [right]. One or two people, by the way, being very, very observant, have said in the novel and in the TV series exactly the same, she says, "I can't undo the buttons, the hooks on the back of my frock" and some people have written in to say that in those days frocks were done up at the front, so I think that's one bit of artistic licence that my father allowed himself. He probably knew they were done up at the front but he just thought, in terms of the depiction of the scene, it needed to be at the back.

BB: He was right! [Both laugh.] Now, obviously the Poldark story continues well beyond this final season – almost twenty years, in fact, so, can you offer our listeners a preview of where Ross and Demelza and all their friends end up in the next two decades? A little teaser?

AG [hesitates]: I think not. Well, obviously I can because I've read the books. I could say this happens and this happens and this happens [but] what I would prefer to say is that – I may not quote the exact line, but there's a line at the beginning of *Anna Karenina* when it says something like: "All happy families are happy in the same way; all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way" and what I think my father felt he was doing, particularly as the Poldarks went on, and then on again, he was trying to write something that he thought was actually really difficult: he was trying to write the story of a marriage that continues and is ultimately together and happy, despite all its tensions and the frictions between Demelza and Ross. This isn't a boring happiness, this is an interesting, live happiness and I think – you referred to the letter that I got from this woman who was a fan and in it I think my father said the Poldarks will never end; will never have a tidy ending, because life's not like that. But he really engaged with Ross and Demelza and their children, living out their life with all the difficulties that we all face when we're realistic about it and yet going on loving each other.

BB: I think you sense that in the series thus far, so I love that that continues, because there's so much truth in it. A marriage, a long marriage can be

something like a dance where they come together and then they move apart and then come together in a new way. It's beautiful. With all the swashbuckling and adventure and derring-do, at its heart is this marriage between these two very specific, really wonderful, complicated characters and the way they grow together.

AG: Absolutely.

BB: Do you have a favourite Poldark memory, either from the books or from your own experience, in the world of Poldark, from your family? Is there any one memory that you have that is your favourite?

AG: I'm not big on "one moments" – I think life's too rich to be captured in a single moment, but I could pick out two or three. There's a totally spectacular shot of when Demelza is really cross with Ross and has gone down onto the beach dressed in a long red dress and is walking through the white surf – oh, fantastic! Just incredible! The sense of frustration, the annoyance and the beauty of the world around her and everything – that's an amazing moment. I think the other thing you asked me, what goes on in the later novels, one thing I would be willing to say is, the enmity, the really deep enmity between Ross and George, that continues and I think that that drives the novels right through to the very end and what reminded me of that is the scene, again on the beach, when Ross and George confront each other [when, in response to George's question: *What is it that you believe, Ross?* Ross replies: *That belief is a beautiful thing*]. It's just a great, great line.

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The David White Show, BBC Radio Cornwall, 10 June 2014

AG: When, at the age of twelve or thirteen, I read [my father's early Poldark novels], I thought, "This is a fantastically good story! Where's the next one?" At that stage, he'd already written four so I romped through them and then thought, "What else do I read?" Of course, my father had other novels, so I read those. It got to the stage where I'd read all of them and I was waiting for him to write the next one. A trick that my father missed was that if he was going [from Cornwall] to London, which he did about

once a month, my sister Rosamund and I would extract from him a promise on Sunday morning that he would tell us a story, and he had these fantastic kids' stories that went on about Jack the Traveller, and we never had a little recording device. There would have been a whole set of kids' stories.

DW: Didn't he write them down?

AG: No, he came in and just talked them.



AG (left) and DW

DW: What was he like when he was writing?

AG: He was extraordinarily disciplined. Absolutely the same time every day. He said he didn't believe in waiting for the creative urge. He was a man of enormous routine, which was quite hard work sometimes for the rest of us. Tea at a quarter to eleven in the morning with just the right amount of sugar, lunch had to be ready at the right time ...

DW: That's a generation thing, though, don't you think?

AG: It was partly generation but it was partly – he had one patch soon after the war when he was taken to London to write screenplays for film studios and he found he just couldn't do it and had to get back and discipline himself. He used to write down every single day in his diaries from the age of seventeen or something how many words a day [he had written]. He recorded the weather – *wild and wet today* – and *1213 words*. That was it. Kept himself at it.

DW: [Did Mammoth Screen offer you a part in *Poldark*?]

AG: They didn't offer me a part, but my wife and I did go on as extras in one scene. I thought if I went and did a bit as an extra, we'd get to learn more about how the whole thing is made.

DW: Boring, though, isn't it, being an extra?

AG: Quite boring, quite hard work, long day. The extras come from all possible walks of life – you know, there's an archeologist, another one's a scientist, another one's a farmer – wonderful people come as extras.

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Free Thinking, *Landmark: Marnie*, BBC Radio 3, 18 October 2017

on which a panel, chaired by Matthew Sweet and including AG, discuss Hitchcock's 1964 film of WG's novel

MS: What did your father make of what Hitchcock did with his novel?

AG: Like every novelist probably, you're in a difficult situation because the film is not a novel, there are bound to be dramatic changes, the whole book is written in the first person and you can't just film sitting inside somebody's head. Added to that, my father had a huge admiration for Hitchcock, so he was more or less ready to let Hitchcock do whatever he liked and Hitchcock *did* do more or less whatever he liked. The central bit of [the film] follows the novel but, after that, there are huge variations, and one

of the more excruciating things [for me] as my father's son was having to sit through films that had been made of his books. It wasn't easy to know, if you didn't know him, what was going on, but the silent squirming that would take place made it very clear that there were some bits of the film he didn't like at all.

MS: Can you tell us what they are? Do you remember?

AG: Well, he hated what I regard, like him – what Hitchcock himself confessed were the dreadful backdrops. Many later critics have attached huge meaning to these backdrops, so maybe they weren't so dreadful after all.

MS: How interested was your father in Freud and psychoanalysis?

AG: I don't know about Freud in particular, but I know he went and talked to a lot of people about the underlying psychology and psychiatric treatment that might be appropriate and I've heard people say that his writing about Marnie was remarkably on target in terms of what we know of modern psychiatric knowledge; even quite on target today as opposed to just then.

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The Poly, Falmouth, 19 September 2015

AG: I remember on one occasion we had gone to try and find a small beach on this wet and windy sort of day, and the radio came on saying there had been big gales in Cornwall and trees had blown down west of Truro. My father growled: "There isn't a tree west of Truro!"

(Source: poldarkcountry.wordpress.com)

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Rosamund Barteau



On 21 August 2015, TV station Valley PBS, which serves California's Central Valley, broadcast a near-ten-minute film of WG's daughter reminiscing about her father. Passages of Rosamund talking to camera (above) are interspersed with a lovely collection of family photos, some reproduced below, plus brief clips from the first (2015) series of Mammoth Screen's Poldark.

My father was an atypical father because he didn't go away to work. I didn't realise that that wasn't normal until I went to school. We determined how much noise we could make by whether father was upstairs working and I would have a duster that I would wave out the window at my friend across the valley, indicating whether or not I would be going to her house to play or whether she would be coming across to play at my house. Although I went away to boarding school at quite an early age, our summers were spent in Cornwall and travelling Europe on the continent quite a lot.

Father had to discipline himself because when he started out he didn't have any known way to be published, and so he had to discipline himself. He was very strong and self-disciplined. He would work in the morning; quite often he would break at about eleven to go and play golf and then he

would come back to lunch and then he would quite often work in the afternoon and then break for tea and then – I discovered after we went to boarding school that he and my mother (below, left) would talk about what he'd worked on during the day when we were gone and particularly at tea-time. She was his sort of sounding-board and muse.



As a father he was fun, because he took us to fantastic places and he'd play cricket on the beach and we'd play tennis. I never played golf; could never get golf, but he was a nice father. He wasn't the way that many fathers are today, I don't think. He wasn't terribly involved. It was very sort of Mother took care of the children in that respect and Father was Father. He wasn't very well as a child and, not necessarily an escape, but he loved reading. He didn't have a lot of different books when he was growing up, but what he had he read voraciously and my understanding was that grandma was able to help my father; support my father. He lived with his mother and so she was able to support him while he did the writing. I think the first one, in fact I'm sure the first one was called *The House with the Stained Glass Windows*. It was a mystery. I haven't read it in years. I think there's only one copy – I think Andrew has it. I think the second one was *The Riddle of John Rowe* and I think the third one was *Into the Fog*. [In fact, *Fog* came before *Rowe*.] *The House with the Stained Glass Windows* I remember Andrew telling me very specifically: "You need to read this, Rosamund" – we had a big house – he said: "You need to read this in the wintertime

when nobody's around and the wind is battering the window; the rain ..." – in other words: "You need to be scared" – nice brother! – so I read it and it seemed to me at the time quite scary.



Ross Poldark was the first sort of ... I'm trying to think what he wrote before that because he wrote *Ross* in '45 and four [Poldark] novels by '54 [1953] and that's all he planned on writing as far as Poldark [was concerned]. I'm not going to say very much, but I know that he regretted doing some things in those four books that he wished he hadn't, had he known he would write another eight thereafter, because he did things ... But anyway, he always said to me, which is sounding a little pompous, that I was his lucky child. He adored both of us but he always felt that my birth bought a fortune to him. I was born [in March 1946] right after *Ross* was published.

The premise [of *Ross Poldark*] is that the hero, Ross, returns from fighting in the Americas, the War of Independence, and he's been gone and assumed dead and he comes back to his beloved Cornwall, not even knowing that his father had died, and he comes back expecting to return to his girlfriend Elizabeth, who, because they thought he was dead, had recently become espoused to his cousin. So he returns to nothing. He returns to an estate in devastation, father dead, no inheritance, and his

love about to marry his cousin. And from then my father wove this fictional family through the actual historical fact of the time, which is why it's so fascinating, because he was a huge researcher; the name he came up with, Poldark...



He had a twenty-year hiatus from 1954 until, I think *The Black Moon* – I should have looked this up – I think *The Black Moon* was published in 1975 [1973] and that had been twenty years and at that time he was talking to his publisher and one of his editors who happened to be good friends of my father's and he said: "I'm sort of wondering what I should write next." In this twenty years he'd written a whole series of modern novels, one of which was *Marnie*, that was made into the film by Hitchcock and probably *The Walking Stick* was in there as well; that was made into a film. So '74, '75, he's talking to Ian and Marjory [Chapman] saying: "Well, what do you think I should do?" and Marjory said: "Why don't you revisit Poldark?" and so my father went back to the drawing board, if you will, and thought: "Well, this is where I left them; what do I do with them now?"

He was not involved in any of the scriptwriting [of the 1970s *Poldark* episodes]; basically he signed a contract. Again, you have to understand that I know a fair amount about my father but I don't have all the detail – so, he signed a contract; he was thrilled; it was great; they were going to

make a television series; the BBC; quality television, out of these books and I think they started making this series in '75, which was about the time possibly when the suggestion was: "Why don't you revisit Poldark?" so then from 1975 until 2002 he wrote the remaining eight, interspersed again with different novels.



I actually have a picture (above) with the original Ross, Robin Ellis. My son found this picture of me with Robin's arm around me and in the background there's this minute dot and my oldest son said to me: "What's that minute dot?" and – I think he knew – I said: "It's you!" so I'm thinking to myself: "What a good mother! Here I am having this hunk with his arm around me and my poor little waif son is off in the distance all by himself." He was about two. I didn't really go on the set a lot. Father got a cameo role, as Hitchcock does. He had a cameo role in it. My brother was an extra in this [\[2015\]](#) one and I'm hoping to go back. I said to them when I was in England last, I said: "Could I be an extra?" and they said: "Absolutely! Do you wish to be aristocracy or of the poor?" and they looked at me and [said]: "Oh, we'll make you landed gentry." So, yes, it had a resurgence. Father always called himself the most successful unknown author in England – that was his sort of moniker. My brother had quite a lot to do with everything, if you will, in the sense that he is listed [\[by Mammoth Screen\]](#) as a consultant. Debbie Horsfield – actually the whole crew, but

Debbie Horsfield, who's the scriptwriter, has really followed the novels. You can't obviously follow them to the letter of the books because there's so much in them and you have a finite amount of time in which to put ... even eight episodes for two novels means you have to ... but she's followed them and Andrew and I are delighted with the way in which this adaptation has been made. Certainly Demelza's portrayal is very faithful and it's exciting and Aidan [\[Turner, who plays Ross\]](#) and Eleanor [\[Tomlinson, who plays Demelza\]](#) and [the other cast members] were all interviewed in England and [when] Eleanor showed up at the audition, she'd borrowed her brother's clothes; she showed up looking like a boy because [Demelza] obviously starts off looking like a tomboy and an urchin. Aidan ... they're all very nice. I have a lovely picture of him and me and my daughter at the showing in London. I think everybody is cast well and [it's] going along nicely; it's a big success in England. I think it's doing well [here]. It's difficult – the States are so large – but I think it's holding its own with the ratings.



I married an American [\[Douglas Barteau \(1937-2013\)\]](#). I met him in San Francisco. It had nothing to do with the ballet, but he was in San Francisco and we ended up here because it was a great place. It's not a great place now but when we moved here it was a fantastic farming community and

very safe for children in Tulare which was very small – about eighteen thousand. So, as I said, we arrived in Tulare with two children who were born in England and then we had our daughter there and I worked at COS [the College of the Sequoias, a public two-year community college located in Visalia, California] for years and I worked at Tulare County Office of Education [as Director of Human Resources] for years and it was a very good place to have a family.



We think [my father would] be thrilled because of the beautiful way in which [the rebooted *Poldark* has] been made. Obviously the reception is great, but the fact is that the scripts are marvellous, the acting is fantastic, the directing is fine, the producing is fine, it's such a quality product. Mammoth Films and the BBC are now looking forward to another eight episodes of *Jeremy* and *Warleggan*, the third and fourth books, and we can only hope that they're successful and we've got a few more books to cover.

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***The Times*, 18 June 2018**

Poldark scriptwriter Debbie Horsfield:

I have talked quite a lot to Winston Graham's son and he's very clear that his father meant the *Poldark* story, the whole saga, to be a story of a successful marriage, and he's clear that that doesn't mean a marriage without hiccups, but a marriage with longevity, which is what Winston Graham himself had

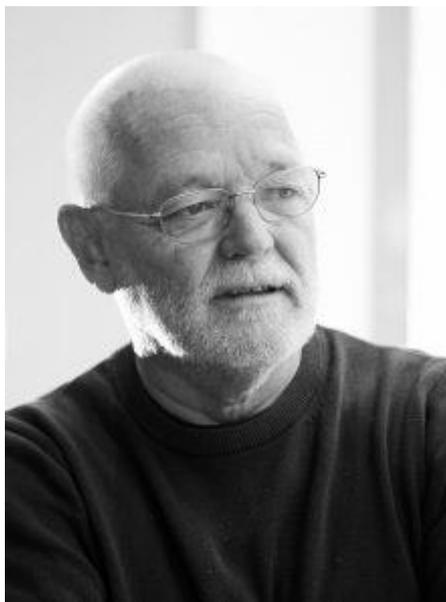


Winston Graham is great at writing women, so it's not like he's short-changing his female characters. I think, interestingly, he's less good at writing children, or parenthood. I think I probably do come into my own a bit if I'm writing about parenthood. A good example is that in [*Demelza*], the death of Julia is covered in two lines.* Now, for me, it beggars belief that you wouldn't make that a massive part of the show.

* The profound effect of Julia's death on her parents is noted not only at the end of *Demelza* but in parts of *Jeremy Poldark* and *Warleggan* also. "Covered in two lines" is fatuous.

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Bert Biscoe



The long-standing President of Truro's Old Cornwall Society made these remarks in August 2022:

WG understood that Cornwall has two histories – that of its own, which is more prevalent nowadays, mainly due to the work of Drs Payton and Deacon at the Institute of Cornish Studies, and that which is imposed on it by its English overlords ... I think his novels continue to contribute to a wider comprehension and acknowledgement of the Cornish history. His quest for integrity and authenticity has well served the Cornish, whom he always represented honestly and with affection – many warts, naturally, but also many virtues and idiosyncrasies ... His writing betrays acute powers of observation and learning. I think, if pressed, I might say that, after the great Q [\[Arthur Quiller-Couch\]](#), Crosbie Garstin and Ann Treneer, WG can be said to be the father of the post-war Cornish novel – very much more so that Daphne du Maurier, and as an historian (although this was always bound up in his fiction) he would outshine Rowse's Cornish credentials.

(personal communication; used with permission)

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