

***Poldark* : what happened next?**

After five seasons, *Poldark* drew to a close last night, its eponymous hero striding towards a rowing boat bound for France where life as a government spy awaited him. For the past four years, the nation has been [held] rapt by this tale of the smouldering mine-owner and principled rebel, Ross Poldark (Aidan Turner), his spirited wife, Demelza (Eleanor Tomlinson), the villainous banker, George Warleggan (Jack Farthing) and Elizabeth Chynoweth (Heida Reed), Ross's childhood sweetheart, whose indecision had repercussions that nearly ruined the lives of the three men that loved her and sowed the seeds of her own demise.

It was, of course, the second time that Winston Graham's sequence of Poldark novels, written between 1945 and 2002 and set in 18th and 19th century Cornwall, had been adapted for the BBC. Its predecessor, broadcast between 1975 and 1977 and starring Robin Ellis as Ross and Angharad Rees as Demelza, cast a similarly effective spell. It prompted the probably apocryphal but still charming story that vicars across the country had to alter the time of Sunday evensong, so empty were their pews. Winston's son, Andrew, who is 77 and literary executor of his father's work, recalls a cricket match between the Poldarks and Warleggans in 1975 [actually 1977], played in tricorne hats and jeans, near where the cast were filming in Lostwithiel. They were expecting a few hundred spectators, he tells me – about 6,000 turned up.

The first TV adaptation dramatised books one to seven of the eventual twelve, as did the revival (although that moved slightly further towards the eighth). In the case of the seventh, *The Angry Tide*, which was published in 1977, the same year as the second series, Winston was reportedly only pages ahead of the scriptwriters.

After that, he really did think he had finished, says Andrew, who has a copy of a letter that his father wrote to a fan in Hawaii, in 1980, in which the author says:

*One thing I felt sure of was that The Angry Tide was the end;
the true dynamic of these novels removed by Elizabeth's*

death. However, four years later, stirrings are occurring and it looks as if I shall have to set some more words on the page.

Anyone not wishing to know what happens beyond book seven, please skip to the next paragraph. Those who can't resist should know the following: Ross and Demelza are with us to the end, as is George, though he's made a disastrous business decision and been robbed by Ross's son, Jeremy. George also remarries, [\[his bride this time\]](#) a noblewoman, though she's only in it for the money. Drake and Morwenna end up running a ship-building business in Looe. Geoffrey Charles returns from war with a Spanish bride and reopens Trenwith. Dwight Enys becomes physician to mad King George III, and he and his wife, Caroline, who lost their baby daughter to a heart defect in series four, go on to have two more children. George's son, Valentine (actually fathered by Ross) turns into a bit of a cad, then dies. Jeremy also meets his maker, but honourably at the Battle of Waterloo. Their youngest daughter, Bella, the one Demelza tells Ross she is carrying at the end of last night's episode, goes on to be a talented singer and actress on the London stage.

Given the richness of this material, why did the current series not keep going? Because between books seven and eight Winston moved the narrative on by eleven years, so Ross and Demelza are in their late 40s. Winston, who came from Lancashire, never gave the reason for the gap, although Andrew surmises that it was partly because his interest had moved. "He was entering old age, and he thought it would be interesting to see what had happened to Ross and Demelza's children – that is, indeed, where the energy of the novels that haven't yet been televised comes from. What sort of men and women do Jeremy, Clowance, Valentine and Bella become? That means, of course, that the way has been carefully paved for any future adaptation of the remaining Poldark books. Do I think it's likely in the next year or two? No. Do I think it's possible five, six, seven years down the line? Yes, perfectly, if the circumstances are right," Andrew says.

By circumstances, he means actors. He'd want Turner, Tomlinson and co. to resume their roles (a mid-nineties ITV film of [\[The Stranger from the Sea, the eighth Poldark novel\]](#) tanked, Andrew believes, because they didn't cast Ellis and Rees).

Winston only ever intended to write one Poldark novel, its plot so simple, he later told Andrew, that it could be contained on the back of a postcard. In fact, he came up with the first four in eight years, in a remote wooden bungalow on the cliff edge near his home in Perranporth. [\[In fact, only *Demelza*, the second, was written there.\]](#) At high tide, he'd arrive with wet feet.

"Winston had", says Andrew, "an absolutely iron discipline; a routine he kept going until only a month or so before he died [at the age of 95 in 2003]. He didn't believe in waiting for the creative urge. He said the most important thing was to get to his desk and the second, not to answer a letter. He'd often work until seven or eight in the evening. It was quite hard living with him.

"Even so, he was extremely capable of enjoying himself. If a good summer set in, off to the beach we went. The summer of 1955, which was glorious, I don't think he wrote a word for two months."

If the core of the early Poldark novels is Elizabeth's prevarication, then the relationship between Ross and Demelza soon surpasses it, becoming the beat to which the later novels drum. Andrew says: "Tolstoy wrote at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.' While not trying to claim that my father was Tolstoy, I believe he wanted to show the opposite – a marriage that had plenty of bumps, plenty of conflict, but that was ultimately happy.

"The Cornish setting is as pungent a theme. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the county was of great importance, with forty-four members of parliament, tin and copper being raised from its mines and a coastline that was precariously positioned for times of war with France. It was also at the heart of the Industrial Revolution, where Richard Trevithick developed the steam engine, which is explored in a later book called *The Loving Cup* when Jeremy becomes fascinated with how steam might revivify the mines.

"Winston adored Cornwall, particularly its strange mix of the heart-wrenchingly romantic; the beauty of it and the grittiness of it, too," Andrew says. "He loved the changing weather – a howling gale one day and flat calm the next. Cornwall is not a place about which you can be neutral.

Indeed, during his 1977 appearance on *Desert Island Discs*, Winston, who had by then [\[not lived\]](#) in Cornwall for [\[almost eighteen\]](#) years, told Roy Plomley that 'wherever I die, my spiritual bones will rest there.'

According to Andrew, his father had had a huge row with the BBC at the beginning of filming [\[of the 1975 first *Poldark* series\]](#). He had felt entirely relaxed, leaving them to get on with it, but was appalled when he got the first couple of scripts because he felt they had misrepresented Demelza; they'd made her into a tart.

"He wanted to cancel, but couldn't. Luckily for him and for all of us it was after he'd signed the contract," says Andrew, who remembers a significant thaw between series one and two.

It seems unlikely that we have heard the last of Cap'n Ross. TV has a habit of recycling its greatest hits, and Winston's stories and characters have a constant presence in the public consciousness. The last, as yet unfilmed novels, while moving through the generations, perpetuate the sputtering acrimony between Ross and George. Despite the slight softening between the pair we saw at the end of last night's episode, their feud is never really resolved. As Andrew says, "My father said in that 1980 letter:

I don't think I shall ever, of my own volition, write a tidy ending

and I think that he very much believed that."

Lucy Davies, *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 August 2019

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