



## **Wordsworth, De Quincy and Dove cottage**

*Being in the Lake District*

### **Tour guide**

Hello, do come in. Can I take your ticket? You're very welcome. We're going to start a tour in a minute or two. If you would just like to wait in the first room here.

### **Commentator**

Dove Cottage in the Lake District. This little house has become synonymous with the life and work of the romantic poet William Wordsworth and attracts visitors from all over the world.

### **Tour guide**

Well good afternoon to you all. You're all very welcome. I'm going to show you around the house. It's famous, of course, as being the home of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth and he came to live here with his sister, Dorothy, and they moved in just before Christmas in 1799. So William was twenty-nine then and Dorothy was just coming up to her twenty-eighth birthday. But the house, we think, was getting on for 100 years old then. They only lived here, the Wordsworths, just eight and a half years, so not very long, but it's always been kept as an important place for him and for us because he does seem to have written most of his best poetry in that short time that he lived here.

### **Commentator**

Amongst the famous poems that he composed here were *Home at Grasmere*, 'Michael' and 'To Daffodils'.

### **Tour guide**

Wordsworth had described the house as being a lakeside house; they looked across the meadow to Grasmere Lake and the hills beyond, so it would have been lovely. This has always been known as his writing chair, the little corner chair. He didn't have a desk, he said a desk is an instrument of torture, but he could write leaning on the arm or pulling it up to a chest.

### **Commentator**

In coming here, Wordsworth set out not just to write but to live his idea of the life of the poet. Simon Bainbridge and Sally Bushell, from Lancaster University, are both experts on this period in Wordsworth's life.

### **Simon Bainbridge**

Wordsworth makes a very grand claim for the life that he's going to live in Grasmere, which is that he's going to live a life of divinity and truth. At the same time, I think, what we need to recognise is that Wordsworth is choosing a deliberately simple life, you know, a life where he's withdrawn himself from the big metropolitan centres of London and Bristol, and he's going to be able to focus on his writing in a specific place where he feels he'll have an integral relationship with the environment.

### **Commentator**

The beauty of the lakes had drawn many visitors since the middle of the eighteenth century and was a popular destination for walking tours. Wordsworth will have been aware that this setting was an ideal one within which to create his myth of the Romantic poet and his relationship to nature.

### **Sally Bushell**

Grasmere represents for Wordsworth the very heart of the Lake District, so it has a double power, if you like. The place itself, and you can clearly see looking around us how encircled it is, how much it kind of holds you within itself, and that was obviously of great importance to Wordsworth, to feel surrounded by landscape and the hills.

### **Commentator**

Wordsworth was born in the Lake District but had left some years previously. It was on a walking tour with his close friend, the poet Coleridge, that he visited Grasmere, and resolved to settle here permanently. Shortly after moving into Dove Cottage, Wordsworth shared his excitement about his new life with his friend.

### **Jeff Cowton**

This is a remarkable letter. This is a letter that was written by Wordsworth to his great friend Coleridge. That must have taken quite some time, to write a letter of that length. He talks about the arrival at Dove Cottage, the house, Dorothy being busy, Dorothy very busy preparing the house. They're racked with toothache, he says. He talks about the neighbours. He talks about it being cold. Wordsworth wants to go skating, very keen to go skating.

### **Jeff Cowton then voiceover**

*D is much pleased with the house and the pertinences, the orchard especially. In imagination she has already built a seat with a summer shed on the highest platform in this our little domestic slip of mountain. The spot commands a view over the roof of our house, of the lake, the church, Helm Crag, and two-thirds of the vale.*

**Jeff Cowton**

He talks about writing poetry. So they've just arrived, all the work to set up, but Wordsworth starts writing poetry.

**Simon Bainbridge**

I think there are two main strands to Wordsworth's writing when he arrives in Grasmere. On the one hand, he has a grand ambitious project to write an epic poem called *The Recluse* which is going to be a philosophical poem about man and nature and human life. At the same time, he's very interested in writing about the place in which he has settled, Grasmere itself.

**Sally Bushell**

*Home at Grasmere*, the poem that Wordsworth starts when he first moves to live in Grasmere, it's written very much out of a particular moment of arriving and celebrating with shared place, the sharing of place with people for the first time. He begins with this recalled scene of himself running down this very slope as a child, and seeing this place and sort of imagining himself in that place in the future. And he's constructing there, for himself, a sense of return, a sense of revisiting of some place that's fundamental to him.