



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

### *Finding Inspiration*

#### **Jeff Cowton**

I think the importance of manuscripts can come in a number of ways. I think there is always that impact of seeing a poem perhaps that you've known through your life, and here you can see it in its original form. It's a very emotional experience and it's a very special experience. And I've seen people here who are almost lost for words. Secondly, they can show the mind of a man in motion. You can follow the thought patterns, the draftings, the working method, so you can see the development of Wordsworth's mind.

#### **Simon Bainbridge**

Much of Wordsworth's writing, particularly from this period of the early part of the 1800s, is very place specific. He's very keen to link himself to the location, and to link the kind of poet that he is to the location. The place we're standing now is called Greenhead Gill, a gill being a river running through a narrow valley. This is a very important place for Wordsworth's poetry because it's the setting for his fantastic poem 'Michael'. Wordsworth locates the key action of 'Michael' just up the valley from here where the farmer who's the protagonist of the poem builds a sheepfold, or promises to build a sheepfold with his son Luke.

#### **Commentator**

We know about how Wordsworth composed through the detailed descriptions in his sister's diaries.

#### **Jeff Cowton**

Dorothy's journals begin in May 1800. There will be references to Wordsworth perhaps stopping on a walk to write a poem; there will be references to him being able to compose or not being able to compose. There are many instances where Dorothy will record an incident, perhaps a meeting with someone or a site, that will then appear in Wordsworth's poems a year or two later. And Wordsworth will say, of course, that Dorothy gave him eyes and she gave him ears. And she very much is the observer. The writing of 'Michael' took place towards the end of 1800. Wordsworth set about seriously writing the poem. And a few days later William and Dorothy go in search of a sheepfold and she records in her diary:

**Jeff Cowton then voiceover**

*After dinner we walked up Greenhead Gill in search of a sheepfold. We went by Mr Oliff's and through his woods. It was a delightful day and the views looked excessively cheerful and beautiful.*

**Simon Bainbridge**

These are the opening lines of Wordsworth's poem, 'Michael', a Pastoral poem. And they give a very detailed description of this specific place, so you'll hear reference to Greenhead Gill, the gill here; you'll hear reference to the steep mountains, which are behind us, which form the setting for the majority of the poem.

**Commentator**

Dorothy's descriptions of Greenhead Gill are echoed in Wordsworth's poem.

**Simon Bainbridge then voiceover**

*If from the public way you turn your steps  
Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill,  
You will suppose with an upright path  
Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent  
The pastoral Mountains front you, face to face.  
But, courage! for beside that boisterous Brook  
The mountains have all opened out themselves,  
And made a hidden valley of their own.  
No habitation there is seen; but such  
As journey thither find themselves alone  
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites  
That overhead are sailing in the sky.*

**Commentator**

There are clear parallels in Dorothy's journal.

**Voiceover**

*The colours of the mountains soft and rich with orange fern; the cattle pasturing upon the hill-tops; kites sailing as in the sky above our heads.*

**Commentator**

The tragedy of 'Michael' is that Luke never returns. The story questions Wordsworth's celebration of homecoming as seen in his earlier poem *Home at Grasmere*.

**Simon Bainbridge then voiceover**

*The length of full seven years from time to time*

*He at the building of this Sheep-fold wrought,*

*And left the work unfinished when he died.*