



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

*Thomas De Quincy*

### **Commentator**

Dove Cottage remained associated with Wordsworth due in part to the writings of its next occupant: the journalist Thomas De Quincey.

### **Julian North**

Clearly this was a way for him of emulating Wordsworth by actually moving into his own house.

### **Commentator**

De Quincey had admired Wordsworth for some time. Before going up to Oxford, he had written Wordsworth a fan letter.

### **Julian North**

Wordsworth replied, very kindly inviting him to Dove Cottage. De Quincey went there on two occasions intending to visit Wordsworth, but on both occasions De Quincey's nerve failed him just at the last minute and he had to turn back. On the third occasion he actually managed to meet Wordsworth and he became very friendly with the family, stayed with them for long periods.

### **Commentator**

De Quincey wrote about meeting the Wordsworths in essays for *Tait's*, a popular literary magazine of the time. He provided the public with a rare insight into their life and in doing so he fed into the celebrity of both Wordsworth and Dove Cottage. Here he describes his first impressions.

### **Julian North reading**

*'... very prettily wainscotted from the floor to the ceiling with dark polished oak, slightly embellished with carving. One window there was – a perfect and unpretending cottage window, with little diamond panes, embowered, at almost every season of the year, with roses; and in the summer and autumn, with a profusion of Jessamine and other fragrant shrubs. From the exuberant luxuriance of the vegetation around it, and from the dark hue of the wainscoting, this window, though tolerably large, did not furnish a very powerful light to one who entered from the open air. However, I saw sufficiently to be aware of two ladies just entering the room, from a doorway opening upon a little staircase ...'*

### **Julian North**

And those two ladies were Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth. These essays by De Quincey changed the perception of Wordsworth in the sense that they told the public about Wordsworth the man and they gave a very mixed picture. He tells us, for instance, that Wordsworth has mean shoulders, bad legs and that he walks like a caid, which is a kind of insect. He tells us that his wife had a squint, that Dorothy was unfeminine in her movements. He also talks about Wordsworth's lack of chivalry towards women, the fact that he opened new books with a buttery knife at the breakfast table, all kinds of little details that obviously fascinated the early Victorian readership.