

THE REV. JOHN THOMSON. HRSA. SCOTTISH LANDSCAPE PAINTER

AND

MINISTER OF DAILLY AND DUDDINGSTON.

The Rev John Thomson was born in the Manse at Dailly on 1st September 1778, descendant of James Thomson of Newton of Collessie and Weddersbie in Fife. John's father, grandfather, great grandfather, and cousin and several other relations through marriage were all Presbyterian ministers. He was the youngest son of the Rev Thomas Thomson by a second marriage to Mary Hay, widow of a Mr Lockhart.

His father's first marriage was to Peggy Hope, daughter of Sir Alexander Hope and they had issue of a daughter Margaret who later married her cousin James Thomson, minister in Girvan. Her mother Peggy Hope died a month after giving birth to a son Thomas who died in infancy.

Young John Thomson attended school at Dailly which was at that time situated within the churchyard just beyond the present main gateway and was described as "little better than a shed with a thatched roof and the plainest of furniture". It was here under the guidance of Dominie James Welsh that John, like all other children from Dailly, was instructed in English, French, Latin, Writing, Arithmetic and Book - keeping.

John was later taught Greek and Latin by his elder brother Thomas who was to become one of Scotland's leading Advocates. During his early years John had also become proficient in Astronomy, Geology, Optics and Chemistry and was a great lover of nature, often leaving his home at the manse at 2 a.m. to climb Kirkhill or Hadyard Hill just to watch the sun rise.

As a young boy John often visited Tom McMurtrie the village carpenter who resided in Rone Cottage near to the manse and he was instructed by the carpenter in the rudiments of painting. On one of John's visits to the workshop McMurtrie had just completed a chest for a parishoner about to emigrate to America and Johnny or Jock as he was called by his brothers and sisters was invited to decorate the chest and on it's lid he painted a yellow bunting, and so it came about that he got his first commission to paint.

In 1791 at fourteen years of age, John was shipped off to Glasgow University and in November 1793 he was entered at the University of Edinburgh to continue his study for the ministry. Whilst in Edinburgh he lodged with his brothers Thomas and Adam and it was during this period that he became acquainted with many persons who later rose to eminence, amongst them Walter Scott a friend of his brother Thomas. During his last month in Edinburgh John took lessons under Alexander Nasmyth the celebrated Scottish Landscapist.

On 17th July 1799 John Thomson was licensed by the Presbytery of Ayr as a preacher of the Gospel. His father had died on 19th February the previous year and a strong influence was brought to bear on the Crown with whom lay the patronage of Dailly and he was presented by George III to his father's place as minister of Dailly, his ordination took place on 24th April 1800.

Within twelve months of his ordination John married Isabella, daughter of the Rev John Ramsay minister of Kirkmichael who bore him two sons and three daughters. Their eldest son Thomas became a physician and was for some time Mayor of Stratford - on - Avon. The youngest son John attained the rank of Captain in the Royal Navy and later served in the East India Company Maritime Service. Isabella the youngest daughter married the celebrated Scottish artist Robert Scott Lauder. RSA.

Following the death of his wife Isabella, John married the wealthy Frances Ingram Spence widow of Martin Dalrymple to whom she had five children. The second marriage had issue of a further four children, in all a total of fourteen children, or three families in one. When introducing the children to visitors Mrs Thomson would say, "That's my family, that's John's family but these are ours". at this point John would interrupt saying, "There all Jock Tamson's Bairns" and thus he coined the well known Scottish phrase.

As minister of Dailly John Thomson neglected his parish duties and often had to be searched for by members of the Kirk Session to remind him to attend his services. His love of painting took him to the local estates with easle or scetch book and when not engaged in painting he spent much of his time playing the violin and the cello. Neither of these pastimes endeared him to his staunch presbyterian flock and when a vacancy arose at Duddingston moves were made to get him to accept the charge.

His move to Duddingston brought him into closer contact with the men of eminence that he had met during his university years. All of the paintings done during his time at Dailly were given away by him to his friends in the parish and it was only on his arrival at Duddingston that he started to sell his works which brought him an annual income of £1,800 in addition to his stipend of about £300 making him a wealthy man.

The Rev John Thomson died at Duddingston on 28th October 1840 aged 62 years having spent fortyone years in the ministry.

David M Hunter. FSA Scot.  
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Dailly.