



John Thomson, Dailly Minister and Landscape Painter

Dailly Parish Church minister John Thomson oversaw the marriage of our direct ancestors John Watson and Jane Lambie. He went on to become one of Scotland's most famous landscape painters.

The Rev. Thomas Thomson served as the Dailly Parish Church minister for 43 years, from 1756 until his death in 1799. He, his father and his grandfather before him along with a number of others related through blood or marriage were Presbyterian ministers.

After his first wife died, Thomas married Mary Hay, a widow. Thomas and his wives had a combined eight children, including son John.

Local schooling was handled by the church in those days. Young John attended a small school in the churchyard where his father was minister. He also regularly visited Rone (Roan) Cottage, home to carpenter Thomas McMurtie, who instructed him in the basics of painting. On one of his visits to the cottage, McMurtie had completed a wooden chest for a parishioner who was about to emigrate to the United States. He asked John to paint it, giving John his first commission.

In 1791, when he was just 14 years old, John was sent to Glasgow University. Two years later, he headed for the University of Edinburgh, living with his brothers Thomas and Adam while there. John originally studied law, but he shifted his focus to the ministry.

While he was in Edinburgh, John started to meet people who would later rise to fame. Walter Scott, for example, was a friend of his brother Thomas. In his last month in Edinburgh, John took painting lessons from well-known Scottish portrait and landscape painter Alexander Nasmyth, which is believed to be his only formal training in painting.

John's father died in Dailly on February 19, 1799. John was licensed by the Presbytery of Ayr as a minister on July 17, 1799. The patronage of Dailly Parish lay with the Crown, so John's supporters advocated on his behalf. Persuaded, King George III presented John Thomson to take his father's place as minister of Dailly. John was ordained in this role on April 24, 1800.

When a ministry position opened up at Duddingston, close to Edinburgh, members of his congregation pushed him to accept it. Some accounts suggest that he didn't need a lot of coaxing, as this would bring him a lot closer to the more prominent people he had met during his years at the University of Edinburgh.

He remained at Duddingston until he died in 1840, but his painting got a lot more support while he was there.

When he lived in Dailly, most of what he painted was given away to friends, and much of it has since been lost to history. At Duddingston, he often sold his work, bringing in an income that was seven to eight times his ministerial stipend, making him relatively wealthy. Demand for his work soared, and much of it now survives in private collections and at museums.

Three of John Thomson's paintings follow.



Loch-an-Eilean, Rothiemurchus, Inverness-shire, by John Thomson, Tate Gallery, 1835



A View in Scotland, by John Thomson, Tate Gallery, date unknown



A Cliff Scene (Fast Castle), by John Thomson, National Galleries of Scotland, date unknown

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