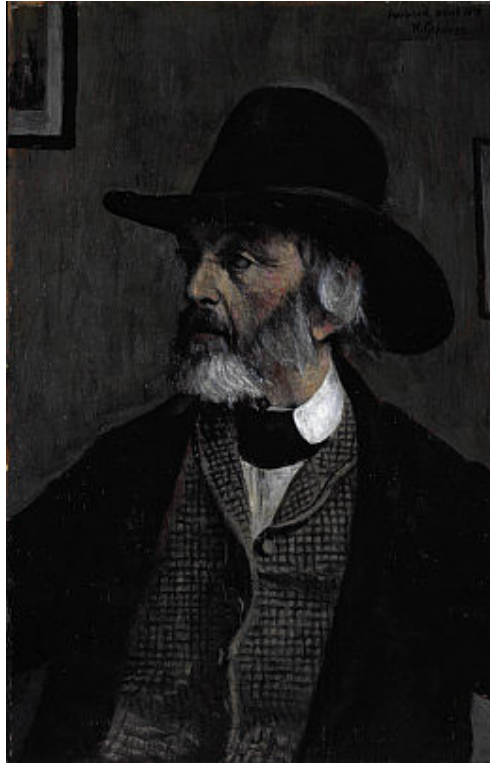


Thomas Carlyle and Juniper Green



Thomas Carlyle by Walter Greaves about 1879.

Thomas Carlyle, 1795 - 1881. Historian and essayist

A giant of nineteenth-century thought, Thomas Carlyle was the son of a stonemason and was born in Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire. After graduating from Edinburgh University, he began to produce the articles, translations, essays and histories which were to make him world-famous. Carlyle and his gifted wife Jane lived in London, and their home in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, became a place of pilgrimage for intellectuals from all over Europe. Greaves was a neighbour and made the studies for this portrait while Carlyle was sitting for James McNeil Whistler.

National Portrait Gallery of Scotland.

There has long been a tradition in Juniper Green that Thomas Carlyle, that eminent Victorian, spent some time in the village not long after his marriage to Jane Welsh. Thomas Carlyle was born on the 4th December, 1795, at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire the second son of James Carlyle, and the eldest child of his second marriage. Thomas and Jane Carlyle married on October 17th, 1826 at Templand, Thornhill, in Dumfriesshire and moved to Comely

Bank, Edinburgh, their first home, on the same day. It follows that any sojourn by Carlyle in Juniper Green must have been in the late 1820s.

The earliest mention of this tradition so far found is in 'Old and New Edinburgh' by James Grant Vol. III Chapter XXXVIII p. 323 where it states:

"Near Woodhall in the parish of Colinton, is the little modern village of Juniper Green, chiefly celebrated as being the temporary residence of Thomas Carlyle some time after his marriage at Comely Bank, Stockbridge where, as he tells us in his "Reminiscences" (edited by Mr Froude), "his first experience in the difficult task of housekeeping began". Carlyle's state of health required perfect quiet, if not absolute solitude; but at Juniper Green, as at Comely Bank, their house was much frequented by the literary society of the day and among others, by Chalmers, Guthrie, and Lord Jeffrey, whose intimacy with Carlyle rapidly increased..."

This large publication in 6 volumes was printed around 1883 shortly after Carlyle's death in London on the 5th February 1881. It can be found on the Web at: www.oldandnewedinburgh.co.uk/

The Chalmers referred to, one presumes, would be Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847). Thomas Chalmers was appointed to the chair of Divinity at Edinburgh University in October 1827 having previously been at the University of St Andrew's. The best known Guthrie of the period is Thomas Guthrie (1803-73) who, like Chalmers, was both a minister and social reformer. He was in Paris for two years after leaving Edinburgh University in 1825 before becoming minister at Arbirlot in Angus in 1827. Like Chalmers, Guthrie was later a leading member of the Free Church and indeed its Moderator in 1862. Lord Jeffrey (1773-1850), literary critic and judge, is best known for his editorship of *The Edinburgh Review* from 1803 to 1829.

Although Guthrie seems to have been out of Edinburgh after 1825 it is possible that these eminent men did come to Juniper Green to see Carlyle around 1827.

The story of Carlyle in Juniper Green appears again in Shankie's 1902 history of the Parish of Colinton. He also refers to a passage in Carlyle's "Reminiscences" about a short stay by his family in Juniper Green. (However a local historian has researched Froude's "Reminiscences" and has been unable to find any mention of any sojourn in Juniper Green!) Nevertheless the tradition persisted and in the letter pages of *The Scotsman* in 1933 we find the following:

Carlyle's Sojourn at Juniper Green

Montpelier House, Juniper Green,
June 27, 1933

Sir,—It has been duly recorded that Thomas Carlyle, during the first months of his married life (which were spent at Comely Bank, Edinburgh), came out to Juniper Green, an isolated country village then, for a period of peace and

quietude during the summer months, and to be free from the intrusions of his friends of the famous literary coterie.

It is to be regretted that so little general interest has been taken in the life and work of this great man that few of even the very oldest in this district had ever heard he had sojourned in the village of Juniper Green. After several years of scrutiny, I can now place the maximum of confidence in the statement to me of a gentleman who has made an intensive life-long study of local folk-lore, historical landmarks, and things generally of antiquarian interest.

It is now opportune that reliable evidence such as we have about Carlyle's early married life should be put on record before it is lost, it may be for ever. One fact, incidentally, everyone does know is that Juniper Green has always been, and is even yet, distinguished for the manufacture of snuff. In fact, the village is today in possession of the only snuff mill remaining in Scotland.

For many generations the manufacture of this commodity has been carried on in the village by a family of the name of Watt, probably, the oldest in the district; and the most recent manufacturer of that name died in the village only a few months ago. It was this late Mr Watt's father who guaranteed the information as to the particular house Carlyle stayed in at Juniper Green, according to my friend's statement to me, and this is the most reliable evidence in existence so far.

When I called upon the present owner-occupants of the house some time ago, they were agreeably surprised to hear for the first time (although the resident lady's father had also lived there) that their house was so distinguished.

The cottage which has a fascinating view of the Pentlands, stands high and well back from the main roadway, with a flower garden in front and an old-fashioned stone-arched gateway which gives it the old world touch which would appeal to Carlyle and his bride (Jane Welsh).

It was probably one of the very few houses situated there at this time, and it was to this peaceful little arbour – with no railways, buses or aeroplanes to disturb the peace – that the great essayist, reviewer, pleader, and famous Judge-to-be (Jeffrey) came to discuss literary matters with the future author of “Sartor Resartus”

“But what interest can one have in such a surly man, who could not even fully appreciate the company of the excellent wife he was blessed with?” is a frequent question put by people who have their being only on the very surface of life.

In these present times of scepticism, discontent, revolution, and chaos, Carlyle stands out as an apostle of “the truth and nothing but the truth.” He did not believe in the prevalent custom, either in political or civil life, of being all things to all men. In his last interview, given to a journalist in his 80th year, he said that both the Press and politics of his time were “a world of lies.” If we stand back and make an honest, unprejudiced view of the present world

today, how much truth do we find in the Carlylean conviction that “men were mostly fools or liars.”

Carlyle may have been rugged and even rude, but he stands out today as the immovable rock against which the waves of untruth in all their various aspects can dash themselves to passion but which they cannot shift. – I am &c.

Wm. C. RITCHIE, Capt.

Captain Ritchie was obviously convinced of the truth of the tradition although he does not mention the name of the house. However locally it is considered to be **Mount Pleasant** on Lanark Road and there is no doubt that the description by Captain Ritchie still applies to this pleasant and modest house despite the fact that modern day buses and aeroplanes may now disturb its peace.

To sum up there is as yet no contemporary evidence of the tradition that Carlyle holidayed in Juniper Green soon after his marriage but there seems to be something

Thanks are due to David Geary for finding the Scotsman article.