

Extract from *The Heysham Peninsula*,
Ch.5 They came to Heysham

J.M.W. Turner RA & Rev Dr. Thomas Dunham Whitaker, Rector of Heysham 1813-1819.

JMW Turner visited Heysham during August 1817. We know he came because he made sketches from which he later painted a picture of Heysham with the Cumbrian Hills in the background, *Heysham and Cumberland Mountains* (British Museum)

It has been suggested that Turner stayed a night or so at the house called variously the Old Rectory, the Rectory, or Greese House which is at the bottom of Main Street. This could not possibly have been so.

The famous historian Rev Dr Thomas Dunham Whitaker and Rector of Heysham at this time, friend of Turner, writes in *A History of Richmondshire*:

“Opposite to the church on the south side is the rectory, an irregular building, of which the oldest and meanest part was built by Mr. Bushell rector in the latter end of the seventeenth century.....

Above the rectory begins a line of perpendicular rock, which shelters both that and the village at once from the sun and the storms.....”

Is it likely that Turner would have been invited to spend even a night in a ‘mean’ house when there was a suitable inn, the Royal, to accommodate him?

The fine building of Greese house is well documented. It was built by the Rector of the time, said to be William Ward MA, who was Rector from 1636, with a break, until at least 1650, and probably until his death in 1670. This Rectory house was taken over by the Clarkson family who had a long reign as rectors of the parish; in this case the date over the lintel (1688) would be inaccurate, and quite a few years too late. There is a carved beam inside the house giving an earlier date.

The Rectory that T D Whitaker encountered was ‘south’ of the church, that is, in the same position, or parallel to, the present Rectory. That could make it the original part of the Bushell's rectory building demolished in the 1970s. That particular building had many additions and extensions and there are drawings and photographs in existence. The first structure could very well have been ‘mean’. As Dr Whitaker was an absentee Rector it is not very likely he took frequent advantage of its shelter.