

Broughton Inn in 1815 and 1819

[From: *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, volume 1, 1970, pages 69 and 204].

The Broughton Inn was the large house which still exists in the centre of the village, a few doors down from the shop.

1. On 15th February 1816 Thomas Carlyle wrote to Robert Mitchell, describing a journey he took to Edinburgh by coach in snowy weather on 20th December 1815. He wrote about a night he spent at the Broughton inn:

“The kitchen, I remember, when I entered it, was filled with shepherds and carriers – and in the midst, like a breathing Iceberg, stood our guard describing with much emphasis the hardships of the day. Two female passengers had taken possession of another quarter of the house – and left the two Hibernians and me to pass the evening as we best were able. I did not by any means like my comrades... both seemingly exceeding vain as well as stupid – I spent an unhappy evening.”
Unfortunately only one bed had been allocated for the three of them, and one of his companions took the middle position. He decided to continue on his own – “I left them next morning and set out on my forlorn expedition at four o’clock. It was truly an Icelandic scene. The wind had subsided during the night – all was silent – and the moon disclosed the dreary expanse of snow, which in many places was drifted into heaps of several feet in depth. I made but indifferent progress – for after infinite flounderings (at one time, literally up to the chin in snow) the sun rose upon me in the wolds of Lintoun.”

2. Extract from letter written on 11th November 1819 by Thomas Carlyle to his brother John. Thomas was making a journey to Edinburgh, and stayed the night at Broughton Inn:

“Wet weather is not good to travel in; no more, are dirty roads; but to every ill there is a worse; and I consoled myself by reflecting that had the wind been in my face, and the roads eighteen inches deep instead of two, my progress must have been suspended altogether. As things happened, it was impeded merely; for between five & six o’clock, I arrived at Broughton-inn, tired indeed but scarcely wet, and whole in lith [joint] and limb.

“Broughton-inn, I take to be one of the worst in the British empire. The servants and the usual guests seem not to know cleanliness even by name; fire exists nowhere but in the kitchen, & were their victuals as nutritive as they are indigestible, a man might fatten on a meal per day.

“Tired of smoking in silence, I asked for a bed before seven o’clock, and having with some dexterity contrived to hang my clothes upon two perches that arose from the bottom of my only chair – sad remnants of a back that had belonged to it many years ago – I lay down upon a bed which if not so clean, was yet a little (tho’ but a little) softer than the *oaken couches*, used in the days of good Queen Bess. So I slept soundly till four o’clock.”

Chris Lewin