



Many of you, I am sure, will be familiar with the ballad **The Last Rose of Summer**, a poem written by Thomas Moore in 1805 and set to a traditional Irish air in 1813.

Thomas Moore was an Irish author, political satirist, romantic poet, composer and singer. A close friend of Lord Byron and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley

But do you know that he lived for many years at **Bromham** and died there in 1852?

He was born on 28 May 1779 at 12, Aungier Street in Dublin, Ireland. above the grocer's shop where his father had set up business the previous year. From a young age Moore showed an interest in music and other performing arts and at one-point thought of becoming an actor. He first attended a local school on the street where he lived before entering Samuel Whyte's English Grammar School in Grafton Street, reputedly the best in Dublin, where he learned the English accent with which he spoke for the rest of his life.

In 1795 he entered Trinity College, which had recently allowed entry to Catholic students, in an effort to satisfy his mother's dream of him becoming a lawyer. There he met members of the United Irish Society who were inspired by the French Revolution and dedicated to catholic emancipation and political reform. Already with an "*ardor for the national cause*" because of his religious background, his contacts at Trinity intensified this, reflected later in some of his ballads, an estimated 30 of which touched on Ireland and her destiny.

After graduating from Trinity in 1799, Moore studied law at Middle Temple in London. However, it was as an author, poet, balladeer and singer that he found fame. Moore had tremendous charm and was a gifted performer. It was due to these facts, as well as his talent, that his performances in the drawing rooms of the aristocracy were amazingly successful. Despite his vocal Irish national politics, he became immensely popular and counted the Prince Regent (later George IV) among his patrons

In 1811 he married an actress, Elizabeth "Bessy" Dyke, younger sister of tragedienne-to-be Mary Ann Duff. whom he met while acting in amateur theatricals in the Kilkenny Theatre, the leading actresses such as Bessie and her two sisters coming from the professional Dublin stage. Moore did not immediately tell his parents of his marriage, possibly because she was an English Protestant, but more probably because his marriage to a woman without independent means would not help his financial prospects. His marriage was generally thought to be very happy, although his wife avoided fashionable society to such an extent that many of her husband's friends never met her. Sadly, however, his personal life was to be dogged by tragedy as all of his five children died within his lifetime, Olivia Byron as a baby of a few months of age; Anne Barbara, age 5, d. 1817; Anastasia Mary, age 14, d. 1828; John Russell, aged 19, d. 1842; and Thomas Lansdowne, age 27, d. 1849.

In 1817 he published **Lalla Rookh**, an Oriental romance, the work consisting of four narrative poems with a connecting tale in prose. It was an instant success, giving Moore a reputation equalling that of Byron and Sir Walter Scott and earned him £3000, the highest price ever paid for a poem by an English publisher at that time.

But his most enduring success was his ten-volume work **Irish Melodies**, published between 1807 and 1834, 130 of his poems set to music, much of it based on old Irish airs. It contained such titles as: **The harp that once through Tara's halls; Believe me, if all those Endearing young Charms; The Minstrel Boy and The Last Rose of Summer**. From the moment the **Irish Melodies** first appeared they were a huge success earning him an annual income of £500 for over 25 years.

They were translated into nearly every European language, including Polish, Hungarian, Czech and Russian and in the United States of America alone over a million copies of the *Last Rose of Summer* were sold.

He was at the height of his fame as a poet and in great demand by society but because of the expense of London life and the endless round of engagements that made work impossible, he decided to look for somewhere cheaper and quieter to live in the country. The Marquis of Lansdowne suggested he might consider finding a home near Bowood, his house in Wiltshire, and promised to find out what was available. In November 1817 Moore and his family left their cottage in Hornsey, full of sad memories following the deaths of their two daughters, and moved into a small thatched cottage with a pretty garden at Bromham, Wiltshire, three miles away from Bowood. The house was called Sloperton Cottage and was to be their home for the remainder of their lives.

Once installed there, with free access to the library at Bowood, he settled down to work once more on several literary projects, including a political satire, a collection of *National Airs*, the seventh volume of his *Irish Melodies* and a biography of Sheridan, the playwright, who had died in 1816. In October 1825 *Memoirs of the Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* was finally published after nine years of intermittent work. Following his painstaking research using original material, his use of interviews with people who knew Sheridan, it proved a great success - a thousand copies were sold in ten days and it went to three editions in a fortnight - and helped to give Moore a more serious reputation among his literary contemporaries.

His greatest friend was Lord Byron who gave Moore his memoirs with instruction to publish them after his death as a literary executor. However, following the death of Byron in Greece, in 1824, great pressure was brought to bear on him not to do so by some of Byron's friends, Lady Byron, Byron's estranged wife, and Augusta Leigh, Byron's beloved half-sister, who feared that Byron's papers might contain indiscreet or scandalous material. Moore was forced to allow their destruction but felt he had betrayed his friend. To make amends, after gathering together five hundred and sixty-one of Byron's letters and interviewing many people who had known him, he produced *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notices of his Life*, in two volumes, published in 1830.

Almost immediately he began a third biography, that of the revolutionary leader of the 1798 Irish rebellion. *The Life and Death of Lord Edward Fitzgerald* was published in 1831 despite English fears it might lead to a further insurrection. The final volume of *The Melodies* appeared in 1834 and the remaining years of his literary career were devoted to producing a four volume *History of Ireland*, completed in 1846.

He continued to be sought after in the grandest houses but as time passed, he went to London less and less though still happy to perform, to the accompaniment of a piano or a harp, at Lacock Abbey and at Bowood to the delight of Lord Lansdowne's guests.

Moore died at his home, Sloperton Cottage, on 25 February 1852. He is buried in St. Nicholas churchyard, Bromham, within view of his cottage-home.

Drawing of Sloperton Cottage.
E.G.

