

— ISLE OF WIGHT —
**HIDDEN
HEROES**

Primary School Education Resource

**Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) Pioneering Victorian
Photographer**



Who was Julia Margaret Cameron?

Julia Margaret Cameron was a pioneering Victorian photographer responsible for turning photography into an art form, experimenting with soft focus and pioneering the first photographic close-up portraits.

What did she do?

Julia Margaret Cameron received her first camera at the age of 48, a present from her daughter to amuse herself with after moving to the Isle of Wight from London.

She grew to develop a passion for photography and was both as interested in the science behind the developing process (referred to as 'wet collodion') as she was with framing her photographs with an artistic and intellectual eye.

Julia created most of her photography right here on the Isle of Wight at Dimbola Lodge. She moved to Freshwater after visiting friend and poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, in 1860 (If you didn't already know, Tennyson lived a little further along the lane at Farringford – recently restored and open to the public).

Julia was so taken with the Island she made Dimbola Lodge her family home – naming it after the beloved Dimbola plantation in Ceylon (pronounced Dim-boola or Dim-bolla depending on who you speak to).

Getting into photography in the 1860s was a risky business. The equipment was heavy and cumbersome. Photographs were developed from glass plates using hazardous chemicals such as silver nitrate – which indelibly stained countless tablecloths as Julia rushed into the dining room with wet pictures to excitedly show her husband.

Photography in Julia's time was very labour intensive. The people she photographed had to sit still for ages while she worked, in close proximity to dangerous chemicals, mostly in the dark in an old greenhouse in the garden of Dimbola. She would often use her own children and staff as subjects in her photographs.

She photographed mostly people in framed portraits and also she would create visual stories based on Bible stories and literary works such as Romeo and Juliet. Her style was similar to the Pre-Raphaelites with subjects staring off into the distance, posing limply and lit softly.

Within just one year of opening that very special present from her daughter, Julia was a member of the Photographic Societies of London and Scotland.

In a scene once dominated by men, Julia Margaret Cameron was responsible for turning photography into an art form, experimenting with soft focus and pioneering the first photographic close-up portraits.

In 1875, Julia and her husband moved to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and she passed away just a few years later. She's thought to have died having nursed her son through an illness and some people have speculated that her health had been affected by the chemicals used in her photography. Her husband, Charles, passed away a year later.

But her unique photographs went on to inspire generations of photographers, and to this day, exhibitions of her work attract photography fans from around the world.

Why is Julia a Hidden Hero?

- Through her experimentation with soft focus and pioneering the first photographic close-up portraits, Julia Margaret Cameron was responsible for turning photography into an art form.
- She photographed some of the most famous people of her time including Charles Darwin, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and the astronomer John Herschel.

Julia Margaret Cameron Facts

- Julia would include imperfections such as fingerprints and streaks on her photographs. Those who chose to criticise her work claimed this was due to her technical inadequacies or the damp climate, but many artists, particularly the Pre-Raphaelites, saw her work for what it was... pure beauty.
- Julia had to mix her own chemicals to develop her photos, some of which were volatile and explosive, and spread them on a large sheet of glass and then rush to take the picture in time before the mix all dried out.
- Her former home now houses Dimbola Museum and Galleries, with permanent displays and visiting exhibitions.
- Within a month of receiving her first camera she made the photograph she called her 'first success', a portrait of Annie Philpot, the daughter of a family staying in the Isle of Wight. Cameron later wrote of her excitement: *'I was in a transport of delight. I ran all over the house to search for gifts for the child. I felt as if she entirely had made the picture.'*
- Julia liked to use matt paper, non glossy, for all her photographs. She said about this: *'It is the dull quiet surface of a photograph, however rich in tone and tint it may be, that constitutes, I think, the harmony of the work.'*

Julia Margaret Cameron Timeline

1815 - Born in Calcutta

1820-34 - Educated in Europe

1834-1938 - Return to Calcutta

1836-7 - Convalescing in South Africa

1838 - JMC marries Charles Hay Cameron in Calcutta

1848 - Moves to London

1855 - Visits Tennyson in Freshwater

1857 - Moves to Putney Heath

1860 - Moves to Freshwater

1863 - Daughter gives JMC her first camera

1864 - Takes first photo considered a success (Annie Philpot)

1865 - Wins first medal (international comp)

1866 - Buys second larger camera

1870 - Joins Freshwater cottages and renames it Dimbola Lodge

1874 - Publishes Annals of my Glass House

1875 - Moves to Ceylon

1879 - Died - "having caught a bad chill"

Educational Resources

School Trips

In the summer of 1865 Cameron began using a larger camera, which held a 15x12 inch glass negative. © Dimbola Museum and Galleries



Visit Dimbola Lodge, the home of Julia Margaret Cameron

Dimbola Lodge was the home of the celebrated Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron. It is now a Museum and Gallery dedicated to her life and work, which also showcases contemporary exhibitions from photographers around the globe.

Terrace Lane
Freshwater Bay
Isle of Wight
PO40 9QE

01983 404344

<http://www.dimbola.co.uk>

Ideas for Incorporating Julia Margaret Cameron into the Classroom

Julia Margaret Cameron and other Hidden Heroes can link into many areas of the [National Curriculum](#) including history and art and design.

Below is a breakdown of subject areas and content quoted from the National Curriculum where it might be appropriate for Julia, plus some ideas for study:

History

Link to [National Curriculum for history](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study>

Ideas:

- Research Julia Margaret Cameron in context within the wider history of the development of photography.

English

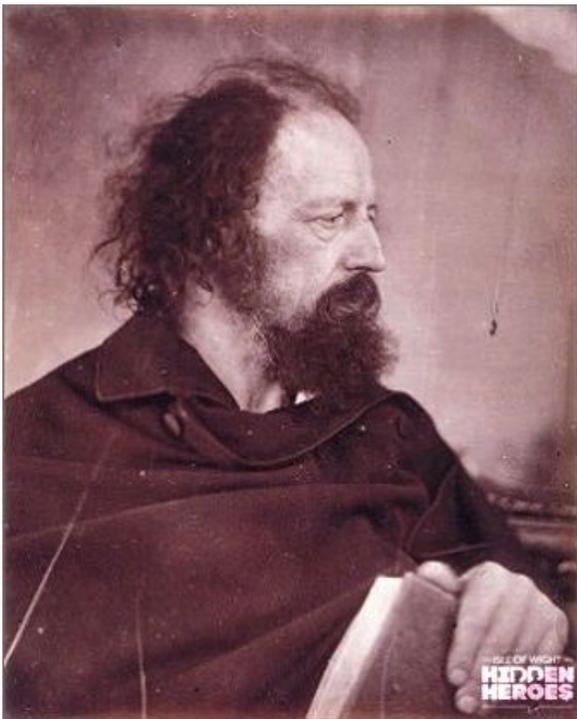
Link to [National Curriculum for English](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>

Ideas:

- Julia Margaret Cameron was friends with a wide range of artists, thinkers, writers and scientists called the Freshwater Circle. Study some writing and poems from people like Alfred Lord Tennyson and Lewis Carroll.
- Julia took many photos depicting myths and tales from bible. Write your own work inspired by one of Julia Margaret Cameron's photos, or some writing about one of her favourite portrait subjects.

Art



Portrait photo by Julia Margaret Cameron of Alfred, Lord Tennyson © Public Domain

Link to [National Curriculum for Art and Design](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-art-and-design-programmes-of-study>

Ideas:

- Take some of your own classmate portraits on digital cameras and use digital photo software/apps or filters, to try and recreate the slightly blurred, tinted look of Julia's photos.

- Study the traditional photographic development process of how photos were created in Julia's time, and compare to today.

Science

Julia Margaret Cameron was fascinated with the whole scientific process of developing a photo to capture the image of her subjects. There's plenty of scope for linking Julia with science.

Link to [National Curriculum for Science](#).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-science-programmes-of-study#upper-key-stage-2--years-5-and-6>

Ideas:

- Study the types of chemicals Julia mixed together. What happens when they are mixed? How does a picture appear in the chemicals? Research the Wet Collodion process.
- How does photography work? It's all about light. Research how a pinhole camera works and compare to modern digital camera today - they still need light to work well!

Website Links

<http://www.dimbola.co.uk/>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/julia-margaret-cameron-and-the-v-and-a/>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/julia-margaret-cameron-working-methods/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Margaret_Cameron

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/sep/22/julia-margaret-cameron-victorian-portrait-photographer-exhibitions>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julia-Margaret-Cameron>

Books/Research

- Immortal Faces - Julia Margaret Cameron on the Isle of Wight by Brian Hinton. ISBN: 1870947134.
- Julia Margaret Cameron - the allure of Photography by Bob Cotton.
- The Cameron Collection: An Album of Photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron by Colin Ford. ISBN: 9780442301330.