

Lady Mary's Walk Audio Trail *Script*

Welcome to the Lady Mary's Walk Audio Trail, which starts from Sawbench car park in Gwydir Forest Park.

Track 1: A landowning-teenage Lady (*listen on leaving Sawbench car park*)

Lady Mary: "I have walked this path many times since my father died. I can think and dream here. I love the chapel. My father, Sir Richard Wynn, the 4th baronet, built it in 1673, the year before he died. It's there I feel closest to him. Oh, but forgive me! Where are my manners? My name is Lady Mary Wynn. I'm sixteen years old. Soon I must leave this beautiful valley. Walk with me and I shall tell you more of my family.

My beloved father, Sir Richard, was a wonderful man. A man of such strong beliefs. Indeed, he suffered prison to ensure our noble king, Charles 2nd, reclaimed his rightful throne. And what a devoted husband he was to my dear, troubled mother! I can only hope my own marriage will be as loving. My mother died but two years before him. I wonder still, did he die of a broken heart? Now I am almost all that is left of our family. I try not to be lonely, for am I not the daughter of the Great Sir Richard Wynn. I have the deer park, the hop fields and the vineyards. I have nigh on eighty thousand acres. Can you imagine it? Me, little Lady Mary, the largest land owner in North Wales! Ha! And yet, I shall be the last of the Wynns of Gwydir, for very soon I am to be packed off to my new husband Robert Bertie. Oh I know at sixteen it's high time I married, but I shall miss the forest, our beautiful summer house on the hill and the echoes here of my dear family. And what a family we are! This land would still be thick with outlaws were it not for my ancestor Maredudd, and everyone knows the reputation of my great-grandfather, Sir John Wynn. He entertained many of the finest folk of the past through here. When I was a little girl, my mother told me such tales of the flat-bottomed boats coming off the Conwy, bringing cargoes of spices, fine wines, exotic foods and even tobacco from foreign shores to Sir John's door at Gwydir Castle. Let's walk a little more..."

Track 2: A noble outlaw relation (*listen at the turn-off to the viewpoint bench*)

Male voice: “You’re not one of Herbert’s swag-bellied louts, are you?”

Lady Mary: “Did you hear that? I wonder was it the ghost of one of the outlaws? Perhaps Dafydd himself. Dafydd ap Siancyn. Who doesn’t know that name? Nobleman and outlaw. Two hundred years ago his stronghold was deep in this forest. He and his gang hid from their enemies in a cave higher up this hill, Carreg y Gwalch. They were truly outside of the law. They resented English rule. Locals say that after each sortie, he and his men would disappear into the forest dressed in green and they’d pretend to be fairies to scare off unsuspecting passers-by and English soldiers. Dafydd was a famous archer, as skilled as that famous English outlaw Robin Hood. It is said that he once came across a group of soldiers gathered in a circle, looking forward to dinner from the pot. As they reached for their wooden spoons, he strung his bow and, taking sure aim, sent an arrow right into the pot! Splashing and burning the faces of the diners who scattered howling in all directions. Many in Llanrwst and throughout Wales consider Dafydd a true hero. In his history of the family, my great-grandfather Sir John, writes that Dafydd was a distant kinsman of ours and once he fought alongside my ancestor Ieuan ap Roberts during the long wars between the houses of Lancaster and York. When Edward seized the throne, Conwy was on the side of the usurped King Henry. My ancestor Ieuan joined a Lancastrian force along with Dafydd, and they torched the Yorkish town of Denbigh. King Edward was so mightily incensed he told his man Sir William Herbert of Raglan to lay waste to the whole of Conwy. The Lancastrians were scattered before his army. My ancestors were forced to flee and down the valley in front of you every tree, every bush and every house was burnt to the ground by Sir William and his army. They say the smoke and flames could be seen from as far away as Chester. The name of Black William still makes men in the valley shiver with terror. They say, there’s still treasure undiscovered within the dark vaults of Dafydd ap Siancyn’s cave, somewhere on Carreg y Gwalch. Yours for the asking, if you’re brave enough to take on the ghosts of Dafydd and his bowmen.”

Track 3: From bandit country to a family estate (*listen where a narrow path diagonally leaves the forest road*)

Lady Mary: “It is perhaps hard to believe, but my family has not always lived in this valley. We came here scarcely 200 years ago, but we certainly changed the place when we did come! For the better, I think. My ancestor, Maredudd, son of Ieuan, was the first. He already had great estates in Eifionydd, but he didn’t care for his family’s blood thirsty habits of settling disputes by killing one another. So when he saw an opportunity to acquire land and settle elsewhere Maredudd seized it. In those times the Conwy valley was a very different place. This whole land was in the hands of bandits. For 20 miles in any direction, no-one was safe from those cut-throat bandits.

Watch out! That was close!

The cut-throats didn’t worry my ancestor Maredudd, he said he’d prefer to fight outlaws and thieves than his own blood and kin. For him, this was his big chance. The valley was neglected and empty of farmers, the plague had killed many and the rest of the law-abiding folk fled from the bandits, so there was land for the taking; if you were determined enough and bold enough to try. It was a risky undertaking. Maredudd lived in constant fear of ambush. Even when he went to church he would leave his home bolted and guarded and would post look-outs on high ground. If anyone attacked the house the guards would raise the alarm and muster the congregation. And at prayer, Maredudd would be kneeling in full armour with his sword at the ready. He and his family travelled under the protection of a personal body guard of 20 stout archers. At first, he lived with his wives, mistresses and his 20 children at Dolwyddelan, but around 1500, when his growing family needed more room, he moved his entire household to Gwydir Castle, which is our family home still. In time, Maredudd tamed this wild and lawless land. To many, he was a hero, especially to my great-grandfather Sir John Wynn, for it was Maredudd that made our estates and built Gwydir Castle. Of course, all this happened long, long ago, but it was laid down in my great-grandfather’s book of our family history. A required reading in my family! And it was Sir John himself who made the name of Wynn resound throughout this valley and beyond. I’ll tell you some more of him soon.”

Track 4: A historic forest bowling green (*listen at the bowling green*)

Lady Mary – “I wish this walk were named after me, but some say it’s in tribute to my Gwydir passing through time on this forest walk. Here it’s so easy to slip back into the past, back to my great-grandfather’s days.”

Male voice 2 – “Ah, my Lord Leicester, a fine bowl sir, you will steal the game away from me for sure.”

Lord Leicester – “John, you flatter me, the day is yet to come when i beat you on your home ground.”

Male voice 2 - “Perhaps. I believe you’re holding the point, but, there, ah, i may yet take back the advantage.”

Lord Leicester – “Nicely played John”

Male voice 2 – “A lucky shot, my Lord.”

Lord Leicester – “Lucky or not, the game is yours.”

Male voice 2 – “Yes, so it seems.”

Lord Leicester – “And in fair exchange, perhaps a little more of that delicious wine.”

Male voice 2 – “Of course. May i suggest some sweet meats too? They’re newly arrived from naples.”

Lord Leicester – “Ah yes. Mmmm. Exquisite. What other delights have you?”

Male voice 2 – “just this morning a fine cargo of walnuts, salad oil and all manner of spices. Perhaps, my lord, you would like to take some back to london with you?”

Lord Leicester – “a small hamper will do well.”

Male voice 2 – “I shall have a selection prepared for you, to enjoy with your friends at court.”

Lord Leicester – “Excellent my friend. Now, do we have time for another game?”

Lady Mary – “my Great-Grandfather loved bowls. He had this beautiful green laid down himself. It was 50 years ago he died, in 1627, but i still see him in my mind’s eye when i walk up here. In truth, i’ve been lonely since my dear parents passed away. My only solace is amongst these trees and in my

imaginings. When my great-grandfather was alive the whole forest was full of people, especially here at the bowling green. I heard tell of the banquets. Sir John once moved in such glittering circles. Anyone who was anyone passed through here on their way to Ireland, or even the Americas! Many of them stayed at our magnificent summer house, Gwydir Uchaf. Take one last look at the view. If you're very quiet and still, you too might hear the sound of a distant game of bowls and smell the scents of a summer afternoon drifting across the years."

Track 5: A noble but controversial ancestor (*listen before getting back to Sawbench car park at the glimpsed view of the Gwydir Uchaf summer house*)

Lady Mary: “I wonder, do you believe in ghosts? They say Sir John Wynn’s ghost still inhabits these parts. Could that of been him on his way home to the castle? It would not surprise me. He was an imposing man, some say overbearing. Tall and broad shouldered, he always dressed exquisitely. He wore the finest, Spanish leather shoes, velvet coats lined with taffeta, red, quilted waist coats and pearl-coloured, silk stockings. Once you’d met him, you were not likely to forget Sir John Wynn. Some called him a tyrant. They say his soul is cursed, that it lies at the bottom of the waterfall in Betws-y-Coed. I believe they confuse firmness for tyranny. A heartless man would not have helped set up the grammar school and the town alms houses as he did. Is it not true that a wilful man will always have enemies? He did tend to get on the wrong side of his peers. When he asked Bishop Morgan to confirm the lease of the Llanrwst rectory, the bishop refused and wrote back: “You are a sacrilegious robber of my church. A perfidious spoiler of my diocese. An unnatural hinderer of teachers and good scholars.” How Sir John’s blood must have boiled when he read that letter! Sir John’s family was one of the first true gentrified Welsh families. He built our beautiful summer house here at Gwydir Uchaf in 1604 to house his powerful guests in style. Although our lands provided a good income, Sir John always owed money. By the time he died in 1627, he was £25,000 in debt. Even now that is a huge fortune. Much of it he spent in court, defending our family name. He was most successful in public office. When new laws allowed Welsh landowners to join parliament, he quickly became an MP. He was knighted in 1606. How proud he must have been! And then, in 1611, he had the great honour of being made a baronet, one of the senior knights in Wales. My great-grandfather in truth was unstoppable. He lived by his motto: “profit and pleasure”. The death of his eldest son, Sir John, in 1614, hit him hard. He was busy at work on his tome, “The History of the Gwydir Family”, right up until that point and then, he just stopped writing. The book remained unfinished. After, he spent most of his time here at Gwydir, but to the last he continued to build the grand name of Wynn.

Now, I do believe I have told you all you could possibly want to know of my family. Would you give me leave to go and sit a while in peace? Farewell.”