

DARPL – TEACHERS’ NOTES to accompany power point slides. (Please tailor slides according to your needs / age of learner, as notes are a guide)

John Ystumllyn

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Note – A selection of suggestions for teacher questions are posed in blue as below:

Slide 1	Cover slide
Slide 2	Guide on how to use ppt slides
Slide 3	<i>What is the connection between? An 18th century painting of a Black man and a yellow rose? – This will be explained during the course of the PowerPoint. Learners may like to guess the connection initially.</i> The man in the picture is John Ystumllyn. John was captured and brought to north Wales in the 18th century, from (probably) West Africa as a young boy. Little is known about where in West Africa John was captured, but according to local records, it was reported that he did recall ‘being next to a river in the forest when the white men came to take him’. As an eight year old boy, he was sent to the Ystumllyn estate in Criccieth, as a ‘gift’ to the upper-class Wynn family. The fashion at the time, in Georgian Britain, was for young Black boys to act as pages / servants to wealthy families, and this was seen as status symbol. This is probably why John was ‘gifted’ to the Wynn family. Black boys were victims along with other Black people of the Transatlantic slave trade. The UK played an integral part in this trade along with other European countries from around 1500 to 1900. The Williams-Wynn family was one of Wales’s wealthiest families in the 18th century. They owned much land in Wales. It is remarkable that John’s life is documented and that he became a popular figure in the area. <i>You may wish to pose to learners, why this would have been the case ?</i> More of John’s life is detailed in wider notes below.
Slide 4	A painting of the Wynn family estate in north Wales, where John originally worked and lived. The photograph is of the local church, St Cynhaearn’s church, Ynyscynhaearn. A Memorial to John Ystumllyn is at Saint Cynhaearn’s Church in Ynyscynhaearn.
Slide 5	Slide 5 – depicts an image of a ‘slave gang’. Black men, women and children were captured and enslaved during the Transatlantic slave trade and shipped across the world to various locations. John was shipped to the UK, where he then arrived in north Wales. There is information on this trade in ‘further reading’ below.
Slide 6	John Ystumllyn (born unknown – died 1786), was also colloquially known as Jac Du or Jack Black. We know from historical sources that he eventually became a gardener and is the first recorded and documented Black man to live in north Wales. This does not mean there were no other Black people living in north Wales at the time. Black people were are not documented). Where John originally came from is uncertain, but it seems likely that it was West Africa. When he was still a young boy, he was taken by the Wynn family to its

	Ystumllyn estate in Criccieth; he may have lived elsewhere in the UK before this. When he reached north Wales, he was christened and given the Welsh name John Ystumllyn. We also know that he spoke both English and Welsh, having being schooled in some way. He was taught horticulture in the estate garden where he worked as a gardener and, according to local accounts, “grew into a handsome and vigorous young man”. It was also remarkable that the family arranged for his portrait to be painted by a local artist. You may wish to ask learners, why this was remarkable? The image on the PowerPoint is thought to be of John at around sixteen years of age. This suggests that he was held in high regard by the family. It was not typical, in that there are few surviving painting of Black Georgians. The painting is inscribed and dated: ‘John Ystumllyn 11th May 1754’. By this time he had been at Ystumllyn for about eight years. The portrait shows him to be dressed in his working clothes, but it also depicts him as a proud and confident young Black man – again, very rare for its time. Local information of the time suggests that he was popular with the community and began a relationship with a local girl named Margaret Gruffydd whom he eventually married. They lived in Ynysgain Fawr, where they worked as land stewards. It is recorded that they had seven children, with five living to adulthood. Decendants of the Ystumllyn family still live in the local area. John died in 1786 and was buried in St Cynhaearn’s Church.
Slide 7	Racism – Technically the word ‘racism’ did not exist in the eighteenth century, however, it doesn’t mean it didn’t happen in Wales. (The Oxford English Dictionary, currently suggests that the word racism, was first defined in 1903 and the term racist in 1919. It seems that both terms were rarely used in the early 20th century). Local reports of the time suggest that John did suffer racism from the local community, with reports that describe occasions where this occurred. One such incident was when local boys, ‘blackened up’ and pretended to be John while visiting shops in the local area, to order things in his name. These stories seem to suggest that he did face racism during his life in the small rural community. Henry Wigstead, in his book ‘Remarks on a tour to North and South Wales in the year 1797’ gives us an insight into attitudes of the time – he writes: <i>“On our return to Dolghelly, we found the town in an actual state of riot and confusion; we could not approach our inn, for the croud of surrounding peasantry. On inquiring into the occasion of this tumult, we were informed that a Gentleman had just arrived, with – a black servant! This phenomenon had set the Welsh in an uproar, it being the first time such a tinted being had made his appearance here: the poor fellow was persecuted by them wherever he went, and both his master and him were actually forced to continue their route sooner than they intended, in consequence.”</i> This demonstrates, a very negative attitude to race. How have attitudes to race and racism changed more recently in Wales?
Slide 8	This is the grave stone of John Ystumllyn -

	The simple sandstone memorial sits in the graveyard of St Cynhaearn's Church, Ynyscynhaearn. Here, Ystumllyn was baptised, and was then buried in 1786. The memorial was erected posthumously. In 1999, the church was made a Grade II listed building. The memorial's inscription gives his age at the time of death as forty-six, but incorrectly gives his date of death as 1791. The gravestone inscription is attributed to the Penrhyndeudraeth musician and poet Dafydd Siôn Siâms (1743–1831). Yn India gynna'm ganwyd a nghanrau Yng Nghymru'm bedyddiwyd Wele'r fan dan lechan lwyd Du oeraidd y'm daearwyd. Translation reads: India was the land of my birth but I was Christened in Wales This spot, marked by a grey slate is my cold, dark resting place. There are a few anomalies here. It was thought John was eight when he was brought to Wales. This would mean that he was 54 not 46 when he died. It is probable, that his age was calculated from the date of his baptism, not birth. The gravestone is inscribed with the words 'India was the land of my birth' it is more likely, that the 'India' reference, refers to the West Indies, which could mean that he was abducted from a West Indian plantation, where he was born and raised.
Slide 9	Another historical source that mentions John is found in a short Welsh-language pamphlet, entitled John Ystumllyn neu 'Jack Black' (1888), by the Tremadog writer, Robert Isaac Jones (1813–1905), published under his bardic name, Alltud Eifion. This pamphlet was written 102 years after John Ystumllyn's death. Jones collated the various oral traditions that have mentions of John Ystumllyn that had been passed down through his family, largely from his grandfather who had been John Ystumllyn's doctor near the end of the gardener's life. This publication was subsequently adapted into Jones' Y Gestiana (1892), and translated into English. The work was criticised by The Daily Post, as 'peppered with racial stereotyping' in its biography of Ystumllyn, citing it in an editorial as an example of the early racial prejudice against Black peoples integration into Wales.
Slide 10	This details the John Ystumllyn Rose - This commemorative rose - will be planted in the grounds of Buckingham palace. It is a special rose as it named after John Ystumllyn who we know is one of the first Black gardeners to live in Britain, in north Wales. The campaign to have a rose named after John was led by Zehra Zaidi, the founder of the group 'We Too Built Britain'. This organisation tells the hidden stories of underrepresented people in the UK. The yellow rose was displayed at the RHS Chelsea Flower show, and will be planted in Buckingham palace rose garden. <u>We Too Built Britain,</u>

	of <u>St Cynhaearn's, Ynyscynhaearn</u> Learners could research other ways that Black people have been commemorated throughout Welsh History?
Slide 11	End slide. Please note, materials have been co-created for DARPL and should not be used out of context.

Further reading:

Green, A. (online) John Ystumlynn: An African in 18th Century Eifionydd. Gwallter, A blog and more from Swansea. <https://gwallter.com/books/john-ystumllyn-an-african-in-18th-century-eifionydd.html>

Wigstead, H. (1800) Remarks on a tour to north and south Wales in the year 1797. London, p.48. Available online at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=BN4uAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

Useful websites:

Centre for the Study of the legacies of British Slavery:
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>

Haringey Council. Black History timeline. Black Georgians:
<https://www.haringey.gov.uk/culture/black-history/timeline>

National Archives – Research guide on British Transatlantic Slave Trade:
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-transatlantic-slave-trade-records/>

The History of the British Slave Trade. Liverpool Museums.
<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/history-of-slavery/transatlantic-slave-trade>

The Slave Trade and the British Empire. An Audit of Commemoration in Wales:
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/the-slave-trade-and-the-british-empire-an-audit-of-commemoration-in-wales.pdf>

Twm Morys in BBC Radio 3's 'The Essay' talks about the life of John Ystumllyn:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0000d8m>

Buckingham Palace: Black Welsh gardener's rose planted
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-61545591>