

## **John Ystumllyn**

(birth unknown – 1786)



Colloquially known as Jac Du or Jack Black, John Ystumllyn was an 18<sup>th</sup> century gardener, a well-respected member of his community and the first well-recorded black person of North Wales.

Although his origins and birth name are unknown, it is believed that around 1746 he became a victim of the Atlantic Slave Trade and was abducted from either West Africa or the West Indies and brought to the Wynn family of Ystumllyn estate in Criccieth where he was christened and given his Welsh name. With the help of the locals, John became fluent and literate in both Welsh and English.

It became apparent that John had a natural skill for horticulture and craftsmanship whilst being trained in the estate garden. He became a proficient gardener, knowledgeable plantsman and skilled craftsman.

John and Margaret, a local maid, were married in 1768. After a short period working in Dolgellau, both John and Margaret returned to work for the Wynn family who gave him a large, ancient garden and cottage at Y Nhyra Isa in recognition of his service. Their marriage was most likely the very first record of mixed race marriage in Wales.

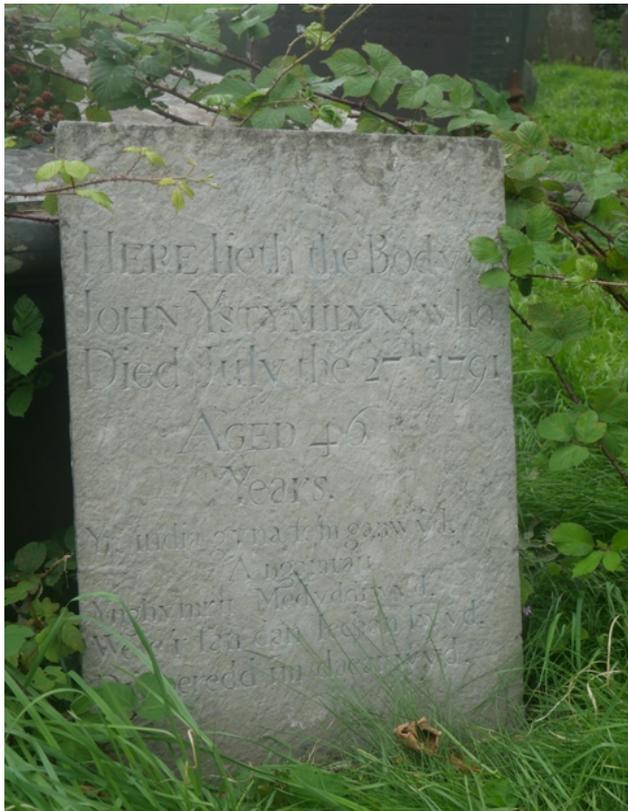
John died in 1786, survived by his wife and five children. After his death, a small monument was constructed in his place of burial at St Cynhaearn's Church.

### **His legacy**

Writing in 1962, Tom Morris described the story of Ystumllyn and Margaret surviving in Wales as "something of a legend; the memory of their courage – which braved the barriers of colour and class in 18th-century Wales – still lingers on".<sup>[10]</sup>

In 2018, commemorating [Black History Month](#) in the United Kingdom, John Ystumllyn was included on a list of 100 "Brilliant, Black and Welsh" people, featured on [WalesOnline](#).<sup>[17]</sup>

In October 2019, again to celebrate Black History Month, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* introduced 23 new biographies of black British people, curated by historians [Miranda Kaufmann](#) and [Anders Ingram](#). This selection included Ystumllyn, who Ingram cited as "the most emblematic of the theme of this release", a man "whose settled life existence in rural Wales reminds us of the persity of the historical experience of black people in Britain".



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