

## WYNN family, of Wynnstay Ruabon

The founder of the family was Hugh Williams, D.D. (1596 - 1670), rector of Llantrisant and Llanrhyddlad, Anglesey, and second son of William Williams of Chwaen Isaf, Llantrisant. Hugh's eldest son **Sir William Williams** (1634 - 1700), gained distinction as a lawyer; he was speaker of the House of Commons, 1680-1, appointed Solicitor-General in 1687, knighted the same year, and created a baronet in 1688. In 1675 he bought the Llanforda estate, Oswestry, from the last of the Lloyd family; he died 11 July 1700. His son, Sir WILLIAM WILLIAMS (1684 - 1740), the second baronet, married Jane, daughter and heiress of **Edward Thelwall of Plas-y-ward** and great-granddaughter of the famous **Sir John Wynn** of Gwydir; he was sheriff of Montgomeryshire, 1705, and of Merioneth, 1706, and was Member of Parliament for Denbighshire, 1708-10.

The eldest son of this marriage was Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS (WYNN) (died 1749) who, in 1740, inherited not only his father's title and estates but also, through his mother, the estate of Wynnstay, which had passed into the possession of **Sir John Wynn** (died 1718/9), the last baronet of the direct Gwydir line, through his marriage with the heiress of Eyton Evans of Watstay (the old name of the mansion and the estate). After his succession to this estate Sir Watkin Williams adopted 'Wynn' as an additional surname. He was Member of Parliament for Denbighshire, 1716-41; in the 1741 election he lost the seat through a trick played by the high sheriff, although he had, in fact, fairly beaten his opponent, **John Myddelton of Chirk castle**; but this was put right in July 1742, and from that time until his dying day he continued to represent the county in Parliament, where he took an active part in the debates. There, too, Sir Watkin came to the fore as one of the chief supporters of the Stuart cause in 1745; while at home he was the leader of the 'Circle of the White Rose' - the Jacobite club started by him about 1723, which used to meet regularly at Wynnstay and other houses in the Wrexham district. But how much practical help he gave the Stuarts is still a secret. It is alleged that he wrote to prince Charles, promising to raise his part of the country on the prince's behalf and that he continued to correspond with him after the failure of the '45; however, nothing was proved against him and the government brought no accusation against him. On the other hand, there is no lack of evidence to show that Sir Watkin hated the Methodists; **Peter Williams** and others experienced fierce persecution at his hands and great was their rejoicing when he died suddenly, 26 September 1749, as a result of a fall from his horse while hunting. Sir Watkin had added extensively to the Wynnstay estate by his marriage with Ann, daughter and heiress of **Edward Vaughan** of Llwydiarth and Llangedwyn.

He was succeeded by Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN II (1749 - 1789), the eldest son of his second marriage, to Frances, daughter of George Shackerley of Hulme, Cheshire. Like his father, the second Sir Watkin was Member of Parliament for Denbighshire, 1774-89, and in 1775 was made Custos Rotulorum and lord-lieutenant of Merioneth. But he is chiefly remembered as a patron of the fine arts; he could boast of his friendship with people like Sir Joshua Reynolds, the artist, and David Garrick, the actor. He contributed generously to the Welsh school in London and started two schools of his own in the parish of Ruabon; he was the second 'Chief President' of the Cymmrodorion Society (*Cymm.*, 1951, 56-7). In the course of his childhood, his mother added to the extent of the Wynnstay property by purchasing on his behalf, in 1752, the Mathafarn estate, including the manor of Cyfeiliog, and the Rhiwsaeson estate. Sir Watkin's first wife, Henrietta Somerset, died shortly after the marriage, and he took as his second wife Charlotte, daughter of the right hon. George Grenville, by whom he had three sons Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN (1772 - 1840), and his two brothers, Charles and Henry, the trio nicknamed 'Pip, Squeak and Bubble', and two daughters.

When his father died in July 1789, the eldest son and heir, Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN III (1772 - 1840), was a boy of 17. He was Member of Parliament for Beaumaris, 1794-6, and for Denbighshire, 1796-1840; he was also lord-lieutenant of Merioneth and Denbighshire. But he was more interested in military matters than in politics. In 1794 he raised a cavalry regiment - 'The Ancient British Fencibles' - and took part in the suppression of the Irish rebellion, 1798. He married Henrietta Antonia Clive, eldest daughter of **Edward, first earl Powis**; and died 6 January 1840. He was president of the second Cymmrodorion Society from 1820 until his death.

With regard to the two brothers of the 3rd Sir Watkin: the elder, CHARLES WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN (1775 - 1850), had a distinguished political career. He was Member of Parliament for Montgomeryshire, 1799-1850, under-secretary to the home office, 1806-7, and secretary of state for war in lord Grey's ministry, 1830-1. Charles married Mary, eldest daughter of Sir Foster Cunliffe and they made their home in Llangedwyn. There is an article on his daughter, Charlotte, in the *D.N.B.*

His other brother, Sir HENRY WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN (1783 - 1856), elected to go to the foreign office and was, in turn, ambassador in Saxony, Switzerland, and Copenhagen. His wife was Hesther Smith, the daughter of Lord Carrington

The title and estates were inherited by the eldest son of the 5th Baronet, Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS WYNN, the 6th Baronet (1820 - 1885). He had been born in the family home in St. James's Square, London, 22 May 1820 and was educated at Westminster School before going to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1837. When he entered into his inheritance in 1840 he was under-age to follow his father in the family seat for Denbighshire but he was elected M.P. in July 1841 and he retained the seat for the rest of his life. He did not make a name for himself in the House; it is said that he never made a speech there but voted consistently for his party. According to **William Rees** ('Gwilym Hiraethog') he was not a fluent speaker and was halting in his speech. Nevertheless, he was well regarded as a landowner and benefactor in spite of the oppressive attitude of some of his agents and there is no doubt about his popularity among ordinary folk. As a mark of respect, for his memory, when he died, as one of the gentry, a countryman and patron of eisteddfodau the Denbighshire Liberals decided not to nominate a candidate for the vacant seat were the Tories to select his young successor to represent them. He was shown great respect throughout his life. There were great celebrations on the family estates when he was born. He was 12 years old when Princess Victoria and her mother stayed at Wynnstay and gave further distinction to the family. That was when the 'King's Head' hotel in Llangollen became the 'Royal Hotel'. There were even greater celebrations when he came of age in 1841. He married his cousin Marie Emily, daughter of Sir Henry Williams Wynn, K.C.B., in St. James's church, London, 25 April 1852. A tragedy, which brought a host of messages of sympathy from individuals and public bodies in Wales, occurred 5 March 1858 when a large part of Wynnstay mansion was burnt, destroying many treasures, including the valuable library of Welsh MSS. Among the messages received was an address from the Calvinistic Methodist Association in the North. The present house was rebuilt and Sir Watkin began to re-establish the library by purchasing the genealogical MSS. of Joseph Morris, Shrewsbury. He held his family's traditional offices in the administration of Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire, and with the 1st Denbighshire Volunteer Corps and the Montgomeryshire Yeoman Cavalry. He was the chief officer of the Free Masons in north Wales and he was responsible for establishing a number of lodges. There was a special room for them in Wynnstay. He had an interest in the National Eisteddfod and was called upon to preside as the 'Prince of Wales' on chairing day. He was accepted as a member of the Gorsedd of Bards under the name 'Eryr eryrod Eryri', the family motto which confirmed the eagles of **Owain Gwynedd** on his coat of arms. He was president of the

Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion and such was his interest in the Welsh School at Ashford that a special memorial service was held for him in Ashford parish church. His health was frail in his last years. He regained a measure of health following a Mediterranean cruise on his yacht 'Hebe' in the winter and autumn of 1875-76. Sir William Jenner attended him in his last illness. He died Saturday 9 May 1885 at Wynnstay and was buried in Llangedwyn the following Friday.

The younger of his two daughters died when she was 14 but the elder, Louisa Alexandra (1864 - 1911) had married her cousin HERBERT LLOYD WATKIN WILLIAMS-WYNN (1860 - 1944) on 26 August the previous year. This nephew and son-in-law, therefore, succeeded to the title and estates as the 7th Baronet. He was born 6 June 1860, second son of Herbert Watkin Williams-Wynn, the younger brother of the 6th Baronet. He was educated at Wellington School and Trinity College Cambridge where he took his B.A. He was M.P. for Denbighshire from May to November 1885 but the constituencies were restructured before the general election in December to create two constituencies in place of a single two-member seat. He stood as candidate in east Denbigh but was defeated by the Liberal candidate, **George Osborne Morgan** and though he stood again in 1886 and 1892 he was not successful and the Wynnstay family lost the representation which had been, in a sense, their heritage. He devoted himself, thereafter, to his local activities, serving his community faithfully for close on 60 years. He was elected to Denbigh county council as member for the Ruabon district in 1888 retaining the seat for the rest of his life. He was chairman of the quarter sessions, 1905, High Sheriff of Denbighshire, 1890 and Lord Lieutenant of Montgomeryshire. He served on the commission of peace in a number of counties; he was a member of the Territorial Army, raising a cavalry regiment during the South African War. He supported the ambulance service and was created a knight of St. John's. During World War I he established a munitions factory at Wynnstay and in 1939 he gave the stables and other buildings for government use. He had a deep interest in engineering and construction and he did much to improve his estates. Following his father and grandfathers he was Master of the famous Wynnstay hunt and a presentation was made to him in 1935 after 50 years in that office. For many years he held high office with the Freemasons and like his predecessors he set up many lodges. A keen churchman he was a member of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales and as a lay reader he took services in local churches as well as being a faithful member of the congregation at Ruabon parish church. He spent his life simply and unpretentiously amongst his people and like any other farmer he would work on the hay with his workers. He placed a large collection of estate papers in the National Library for safe keeping and invited the Library to collect and conserve other documents which were at risk when the army took over some of the buildings. At the same time he placed the Wynnstay MSS. in the National Library for safe keeping. He died in Wynnstay, Saturday 24 May 1944 and was buried in Llangedwyn. He and his wife had divorced in 1898; she died in 1911. They had a son and 2 daughters.

His son, Sir WATKIN WILLIAMS-WYNN (1891 - 1949), the 8th Baronet, succeeded to the title. Born 26 January 1891, he married, 14 September 1920, Daisy, youngest daughter of John Johnson Houghton, Westwood, Neston. Inheritance tax severely affected the 100,000-acre estates and the 8th Baronet could afford to spend only brief periods at Wynnstay. He moved to Belan on the edge of the park and then to Llangedwyn. The Llwydiarth estate in Montgomeryshire was sold and Glan-llyn estate, Meirionnydd, was accepted by the Treasury in lieu of part of the inheritance tax and was transferred to the care of the Agricultural Land Commission to be administered by the Welsh Sub-commission. Plas Glan-llyn, Glan-llyn Isa house and some land were leased to Urdd Gobaith Cymru for use as a youth camp. Wynnstay was sold to Lindsifarne public school. The gentry period of the Wynns of Wynnstay thus came to an end. Though the 8th Baronet had had little connection with Wynnstay since his youth, he showed the same virtues as his father and grandfather when he came into his inheritance, and had the family circumstances been different, he would, without doubt, have faithfully continued the family tradition. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he graduated B.A. in 1913. He served with the Royal Dragoons in World War I and was wounded. He took up his father's social and religious activities in the community and local government. He was High Sheriff of Denbighshire and undertook the modernisation of the administration of what remained of the estate. He and his wife had a son and 3 daughters. The death of his son in a fire in Barford camp, Barnard's Castle, 18 January 1946, was a heavy blow. Sir Watkin died at Ruthin Castle, Monday 9 May 1949 and he was buried at Llangedwyn 12 May.

The baronetcy was inherited by his uncle, Sir ROBERT WILLIAM HERBERT WATKIN WILLIAMS-WYNN, Plas-yn-cefn (1862 - 1951), the 9th Baronet. The 5th Baronet had 2 sons, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn (1820 - 1885), the 6th Baronet, and Herbert Watkin Williams-Wynn, M.P. for Montgomeryshire 1850-62, who married Anna, daughter and heiress of Edward Lloyd, Cefn Meriadog, Denbighshire. They had 3 sons, (1) Edward Watkin who was drowned near Windsor in 1888, (2) Sir Herbert Lloyd Watkin Williams-Wynn (1860 - 1944), the 7th Baronet, (3) Robert William Herbert Watkin Williams-Wynn who became the 9th Baronet. Born 3 June 1862 and educated at Wellington School and Christ Church, Oxford, he joined the army, serving with the Imperial Yeomanry in the South African War 1900-01 and being mentioned in dispatches as well as winning the D.S.O. He was made hon. Capt. in 1900. He was a Lieut. Colonel and commander of the Montgomeryshire Yeomanry, 1906-1917, and went out with them to Egypt in 1916. He was commander of the South Egypt division from 1917 to 1919. He stood unsuccessfully as the Conservative candidate in Montgomeryshire in 1894, 1895 and 1900 against **Arthur Charles Humphreys-Owen**, Glansevern. He was awarded a C.B. in 1923, K.C.B. 1938. He was Master of the Flint and Denbigh hunt from 1888 to 1946 and he also had an interest in the Wynnstay hunt. He married in 1904 Elizabeth Ida, 2nd daughter of George W. Lawther, Swillington, Yorkshire, and they had 2 sons and 2 daughters. He died at his home, Plas-yn-cefn, 23 November 1951.

He was succeeded by his son, Sir OWEN WATKIN WILLIAMS-WYNN, the 10th Baronet (1904 - 1988).

## Authors

**Emyr Gwynne Jones**, (1911 - 1972)

**Evan David Jones**, (1903 - 1987)

**Dr Brynley Francis Roberts**

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Wikipedia Article: [Williams-Wynn baronets](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Sir William Williams, 1st Baronet, of Gray's Inn](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Sir William Williams, 2nd Baronet, of Gray's Inn](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 3rd Baronet](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Robert Williams \(died 1763\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 4th Baronet](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Charlotte Williams-Wynn \(aristocrat\)](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 5th Baronet](#)

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## Images

Thomas Kirby, [Sir Watkin Williams Wynn](#)

Samuel William Reynolds, [Sir Watkin Williams Wynne Bart](#)

Michael Angelo Rooker, Paul Sandby, [Wyn-Stay in Denbighshire seat of Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, bart](#)

Joshua Reynolds, [Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn and Lady Henrietta Williams-Wynn \(Somerset\) his wife, in masque costume](#)

Joshua Reynolds, [Charlotte \(Grenville\), Lady Williams-Wynn \(1754-1830\) and her Children](#)

Pompeo Batoni, [Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn, 4th Bt., Thomas Apperly and Captain Edward Hamilton](#)

W. & D. Downey, [Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 6th Bart. of Wynnstay](#)

John Owen, [Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, 6th Bart. of Wynnstay](#)

Electric Photo-Printing Company, [R. W. Williams-Wynne](#)

## Sound and Film

Hilary Peters: [The World of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn](#)

## Additional Links

RCAHMW: [Historic Place Names: Wynnstay](#)

NLW Archives: [Wynnstay Estate Records](#)

NLW Archives: [C. W. Williams Wynn, Wynnstay](#)

Wikidata: [Q20734718](#)

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