

21 February 2012
[Accessibility help](#)
[Text only](#)

/wales north west

ABERGELE



[BBC Homepage](#)
[Wales Home](#)

Gwrych Castle

Last updated: 02 December 2008

Mark Baker from Prestatyn has a great interest in Abergele's Gwrych Castle, and is the author of two books on the subject. He describes its creation.



"Most days for the past few years I have passed Gwrych on my way to and from school or university. The prominence of this castle and its stupendous charm magnetise many who pass by on the busy A55 expressway.

I always think that the library bay windows remind me of a smiling face in the hillside, like an old friend welcoming you back home.

Gwrych Castle has been lonely and uninhabited since 1989. She nestles in the hillside woods, surrounded by super-abundant greenery which adds a patina of age. Gwrych can claim to be one of the most stupendous, picturesque, romantic buildings in the whole of Europe. A fairytale white castle, with its world-famous 18 towers, stretching like a diamond snake in a green mere, waiting to be given a new and glorious life.

Called a folly, unlike its counterparts Penrhyn and Bodelwydden, or even Eastnore Castle, Gwrych was a blueprint for most of the Victorian mock castles along the north west coast. Built by Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh and enlarged by his descendants, it is one of the first gothic-style faux castles to be erected in Europe.

The story of the Heskeths begins with Richard de Heskeyth, Lord of Heskeyth, whose grandson was alive in 1271. It is claimed that the Heskeths obtained much of their lands by marriage into a wealthy Cheshire family that had their origins in Staffordshire. They were known as the Fighting Fittons.

Mary Fitton, a maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth I and dismissed from court, was undoubtedly the Dark Lady of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Early in the 14th century, Heskeyth's great great grandson assumed the arms of Fitton.

When Lloyd Hesketh Bamford-Hesketh's father died in 1814, he came into an immense fortune and employed Charles Augustin Busby to do an initial design of a gothic style building with a central oblong block.



VOLUNTEERING
here to help

[more from this section](#)

Abergele

- [A magical VE day](#)
- [Bryngwenallt Hall](#)
- [Debating the cause](#)
- [Great train disaster](#)
- [Gwrych Castle](#)
- [Gwrych Castle](#)
- [Haunted Gwrych](#)
- [Llangernyw tour](#)
- [Memory lane](#)
- [Stroke club](#)

related www links

[Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust](#)



- [BBC Local](#)
- [North West Wales](#)
- [Things to do](#)
- [People & Places](#)
- [Nature & Outdoors](#)
- [History](#)
- [Religion & Ethics](#)
- [Arts & Culture](#)
- [Music](#)
- [TV & Radio](#)

Local BBC Sites

- [News](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Travel](#)

Neighbouring Sites

- [Mid Wales](#)
- [North East Wales](#)

Related BBC Sites

- [Wales](#)
- [Cymru](#)
- [Gogledd Orllewin](#)

The west end contained the state apartments and the east the private apartments and connecting these was a large, circular keep surrounded by a semi-curtained wall.

A contemporary of the period stated that Gwrych was one of the most amazing 19th century castellated mansions and one which, in the age it was conceived, would have been assigned to the realm of the sublime rather than picturesque.

From old photographs, the area was never so overgrown. Much of the massive structure remains covered in ivy and one of the higher towers has been demolished. Nearly all of the beautiful stained glass has been broken or stolen. Many of the internal heraldic windows have been completely removed, the cast iron windows are rusting and the smell of rotting wood and plaster lingers in the air.

In winter, the rain pours through the roofless building onto mounds of fallen debris. Water cascades down the ancient hills and floods the castle basements. Even in the hottest and driest summers, Gwrych Castle is still damp. The plaster on the ceilings and walls has become so saturated that it has collapsed with the weight of the water.



Whole floors have crashed down and damaged the structure, and it is not safe to enter any part of the building. This is a dreadful prospect, since lay reports have indicated that the castle is basically still solid and has withstood many battles.

It is a romantic dream, once a luxurious residence of the ancient Heskeths who resided there, allowed to decay and deteriorate. Its amazing interior has almost vanished, leaving parts of her palatial park, gardens and exterior seriously neglected. It is in danger of becoming no more than a pile of Grade I listed rubble.

[More on Gwrych Castle.](#)



[BBC Homepage](#)
[Wales Home](#)

Gwrych Castle

Last updated: 26 April 2006



"Lots of people have told me about their memories of Gwrych Castle," writes Mark. "Mrs Doris Thornton, born in 1920 at Tan-yr-Ogo gatehouse, can remember Winifred Hesketh, the Countess of Dundonald. Doris says that she can remember Winifred leaving her apartments and descending the marble staircase in her ceremonial robes.

Doris recalls the countess's bedroom as being green, white and mauve. Her rooms overlooked the amphitheatre and the estate which led to the sea shore.

Doris can still remember the taste of the delicious tomatoes which were grown in the castle's greenhouses and she recalls her father sweeping the drive. Her mother was a very dear friend of the countess and was one of her closest staff.

Doris left Llanddulas at the age of 16, but before she left, she went to the sale of the castle furniture and bought the countess's luggage chest. On 19 May 1998, Doris presented me with this irreplaceable chest on BBC One's Country File programme, in recognition of the campaign for Gwrych Castle. This was a tremendous and unexpected honour.

Mr John Edelnand was one of the Jewish refugees who were at the castle during World War II. John was evacuated from Halberstadt in Hartz Mountains, central Germany. He was sent to the castle with three hundred other Jewish children, ranging from 14 to 18 years old.

Gwrych camp was run like a Kibbutz and an established routine emerged. The children were not only fed and clothed, but were thoughtfully looked after. John said that the children had to share everything; even the trips to the local cinema were alternated.

He has very happy memories of the castle. Nostalgically, John remembers Dick Edward delivering milk and bread to the castle every morning and also helping Mr Reid at Hen Wrych Garden.

John last visited Gwrych in 1990 after 46 years. He was appalled by the state of the building and gardens and said they were sadly neglected."

Written by Mark Baker from Prestatyn.



HISTORY
people, places, events

[more from this section](#)

Abergele

[A magical VE day](#)
[Bryngwenallt Hall](#)
[Debating the cause](#)
[Great train disaster](#)
[Gwrych Castle](#)
[Gwrych Castle](#)
[Haunted Gwrych](#)
[Llangernyw tour](#)
[Memory lane](#)
[Stroke club](#)

[related www links](#)

[Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust](#)



[BBC Local](#)
[North West Wales](#)
[Things to do](#)
[People & Places](#)
[Nature & Outdoors](#)
[History](#)
[Religion & Ethics](#)
[Arts & Culture](#)
[Music](#)
[TV & Radio](#)

Local BBC Sites

[News](#)
[Sport](#)
[Weather](#)
[Travel](#)

Neighbouring Sites

[Mid Wales](#)
[North East Wales](#)

Related BBC Sites

[Wales](#)
[Cymru](#)
[Gogledd Orllewin](#)



[BBC Homepage](#)
[Wales Home](#)

Haunted Gwrych

Last updated: 24 August 2006

Mark Baker returns to tales of his favourite building in his new book, *Myths and Legends of Gwrych Castle*. Here's just a taster of some of the spooky goings on in the Abergele folly.



Stephen Sharpe's father was once the organist at Gwrych during the late 1960s and during the summer holidays he would stay in one of the flats in the Castle. He and his family would regularly see and hear the ghost of a woman in white, although they never once felt threatened by her presence.

In the early 1980s, a guest of the owners was staying in the Telescope Bedroom with her little dog on the second floor of the Round Tower, which had one window facing the sea and another facing the West Terrace. Only certain parts of the building had electricity at this time, but luckily this particular bedroom was lit unlike the other rooms on the second floor.

The door to the room had no handle so a piece of wood was used to lean against it to keep it closed, and so it happened on windy nights that one of the windows would fly open forcing a draught to open the door. Sometimes, she would walk the corridors late at night with a torch, checking that all was locked and sound before retiring to bed.

But often the guest of the owners had the feeling of 'some presence' which was never malevolent so it did not instil fear. The little dog was not so friendly towards the unseen forms and would growl or bark at thin air!

One night, the lady visitor was woken up by the strangest sounds from the corridor outside. It was a swishing noise, like someone stroking a feather against the wall and a whisper-like 'shhhhhh'. Frightened, there was not just one sound, but hundreds of little sounds that were like a wave reverberating along the whole of the corridor, back and forth.

Lying in bed for a few moments, too afraid to move, her courage returned and she removed the wood stop, took a deep breath and opened the door. The corridor was black with flying bats! Fortunately, in the morning all the bats had disappeared but she paid closer attention to what she heard in future.

During the later years, people staying at the Castle would report strange noises emanating from various parts of the building, but they could never find the source of these happenings. Tony Kennedy was manager of Gwrych for five years and he recorded that from his first floor flat, which was



[more from this section](#)

Abergele

[A magical VE day](#)
[Bryngwenallt Hall](#)
[Debating the cause](#)
[Great train disaster](#)
[Gwrych Castle](#)
[Gwrych Castle](#)
[Haunted Gwrych](#)
[Llangernyw tour](#)
[Memory lane](#)
[Stroke club](#)

[related www links](#)

[Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust](#)



[BBC Local](#)
[North West Wales](#)
[Things to do](#)
[People & Places](#)
[Nature & Outdoors](#)
[History](#)
[Religion & Ethics](#)
[Arts & Culture](#)
[Music](#)
[TV & Radio](#)

Local BBC Sites

[News](#)
[Sport](#)
[Weather](#)
[Travel](#)

Neighbouring Sites

[Mid Wales](#)
[North East Wales](#)

Related BBC Sites

[Wales](#)
[Cymru](#)
[Gogledd Orllewin](#)

previously named 'The Rhuddlan Suite', he heard creaks and rattles filter down the halls to his rooms. He is quoted as saying, 'You hear a lot of noises, but I usually dismissed them as being bits of plaster falling off the walls, which is a common enough occurrence here.'

Archive Terms of Use

This document is made available for archival or reference purposes and should only be used for private (non-commercial) purposes. These pages may contain materials or content which do not belong to the BBC and in particular materials or content which belong to members of the public whose identities may or may not be known. Whilst the BBC had the necessary rights, permissions and clearances to include and publish them as part of the former 'Where I Live' BBC website, the BBC may not have the right to allow users to use, copy or exploit them or to distribute them to others. No such usage is permitted and the BBC cannot process requests for permission to do so. For more information about deleted or discontinued web pages on the BBC, go to: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/help/web/mothballing/>