Erddig was the home of the Yorke family for nearly 250 years, right up to the 1970s. The family made their fortune from buying land, marrying into money and trying to be self-sufficient, rather than from possessing an aristocratic background. Perhaps this explains their generally square dealing with the serving classes.

A bit of background
Erddig was the home of the Yorke family for nearly 250 years, right up to the 1970s. The family made their fortune from buying land, marrying into money and trying to be self-sufficient, rather than from possessing an aristocratic background. Perhaps this explains their generally square dealing with the serving classes.

THE SECRET

A love story between two of Erddig's family servants has been transformed into a walk taking in little visited parts of the estate and tracking the places that the happy couple explored during their snatches of free time.

Servants were not generally encouraged to mix: single sex living quarters and long working hours limited any prospects for fraternisation. But the nurse Lucy met her future husband during her daily care of the youngest boys.

Romance blossomed and after Ernest survived the war, they were married in 1919. Once the boys grew up, Lucy's role as governess was redundant and she and Ernest opened a butcher's shop. She returned to Erddig during World War Two as housekeeper.

"The boys would ride ponies and Ernest the footman had to prepare and escort them. Lucy would come along as the boy's nurse and the two got close and closer."

- Pat Roberts, a volunteer guide

Mark Rowe, our walking pro, has discovered this secret walk for you to explore. Now you can follow in his footsteps...

He fell in love with walking in the wilds of Hertfordshire, while growing up in the suburbs of north London.

Today, Mark has worked regularly for the Trust's Great British Walk and The Independent on Sunday. He is also a contributing editor to BBC Countryfile Magazine. He is however, still learning how to fold an OS map in a force eight gale.

Distance: 2 miles
The walk

The dovecote
The red-brick dovecote is the starting point for my walk, and I follow the Plas Grono drive before heading downhill along a track that winds through woods towards meadows.

The Cup and Saucer
I bear left across a wooden bridge. Nearby is the hydraulic ram that pumped 10,000 gallons of water a day into the cisterns of the house and a few paces away is the ornamental cylindrical cascade, known locally as a Cup and Saucer.

Coal-black waters
We walk along the field edge with a brook nudging closer to our path. It’s shallow and peat-coloured, thanks to the local coal mine. While the mines closed in the 1980s, the water, known as Black Brook, runs through the old workings and is coloured with sooty particles.

This is my favourite part of the walk; it’s a little off the beaten track and I imagine Lucy and Ernest feeling secluded enough perhaps to walk arm in arm without being overlooked.

The old entrance to Erddig
I glance up and am slightly surprised to find myself overlooked by the house. The elevated facade is impressive for a rear view, with large door and nine windows on either side. In fact, this was the original entrance to the house before the family realised it took the brunt of autumnal and winter storms. Behind us is farmland managed by tenant farmers with pleasing views towards the uplands of Snowdonia.

There’s a little more walking through meadows before the path flicks uphill among beech trees to the Forest Drive. I scamper up the track, imaging Lucy and Ernest increasing their pace, perhaps worried about being scolded for being late. The walk’s not yet done, though, as the views here are easy on the eye: several elegant cedars and a monkey puzzle sprout up from the grounds.

A special bond
“Their parents were often away and Lucy was something of a surrogate mother.”
– Pat Roberts, a volunteer guide

A visit to Erddig allows you to see how fond the boys were of Lucy. Throughout your visit see if you can spot evidence of this close relationship in letters, photographs and momentos. There are some particularly fascinating pieces on display in the house.

Discover more special places on foot at: nationaltrust.org.uk/greatwelshwalk

Words by Mark Rowe. Photography © National Trust Images. Illustrations © Rob Salter.