

## Cuhelyn the Bard Lecture notes

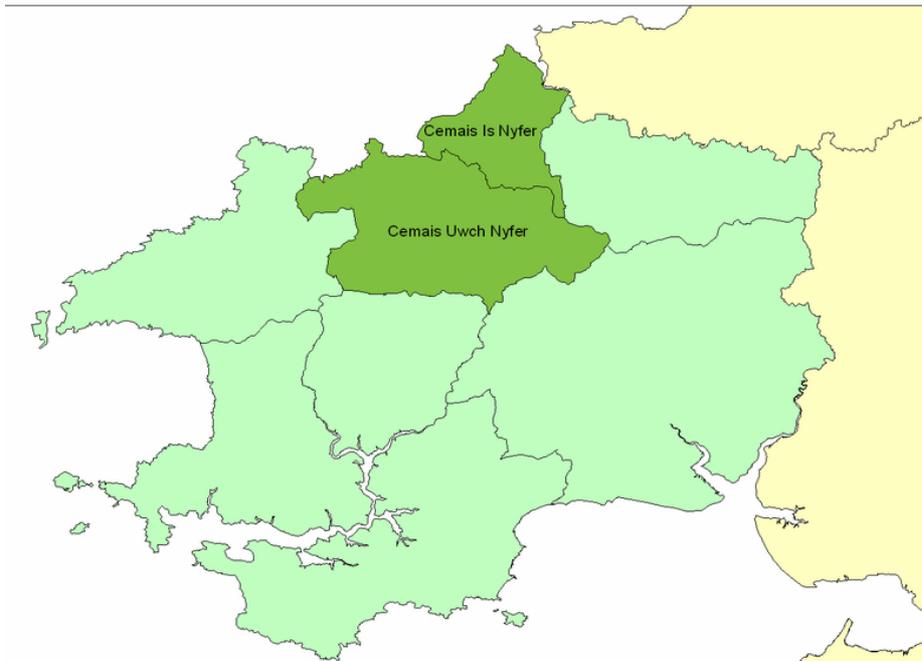
### 2. The Gogynfeirdd period, 1100 to 1400

Modern borders of Wales become clearer. Three main kingdoms: Gwynedd, Powys, Deheubarth.



### 3. Cuhelyn the Bard

- A powerful nobleman in the commote of Cemais around 1100-1130.



- Son of Gwynfardd Dyfed, possibly *pencerdd* to Rhys ap Tewdwr.
- Ancestor to around 150 noble families in the SW.
- Developed into a folk hero, whose exploits included winning Cemais through his prophetic abilities.
- Ancestor to Gwrwared Gerdd Gymell and Dafydd ap Gwilym.

#### 4. In Praise of Cuhelyn the Bard

(trans. Gwilym Morus)

Lord God	permit me awen	amen, may it be so
fervent praise	powerful declamation	pride of the host
with the dignity	of Ceridwen's song	diverse inspiration
diverse riches	ready utterance	for skilled declaimers
for Cuhelyn Bard	craftsman	of beautiful Welsh
a gift of poetry	a fitting present	bereft of enmity
song's ornament	unbroken praise	is brought to you
deserving in your eyes	a company of bards	with poecy of consistent length and rhythm
clear large horns	as befits them	fortunate war-maker
people's protector	ferocious retinue	judges' council
host-leader	great his gift	before those that call for favours
of little blame	of notable alliance	praise snatcher

art's zenith	for a hundred solstices	for the zealous assembly
fervent, ferocious wolf	steady as harsh law	frequent criticism
a warrior like Eiddol	he founded order	a choice, wise man
chess champion	leader of Britons	urger of fury in battle
regularity of praise	the rule of praise	in mead-feast court-session
mead dinner contributor	knight on the battle field	place of supremacy
this lord governs the protection	(generous Peter of the four corners of the world)	of the kingdom with a great court
nobleman of the powerful custom	extraordinary custom's defender	urger of wrath in battle
bright ruler of poecy	raise a blissful song	bestower of his nation's greatness
a mater of excitement to enemies	he is fervent concerning me	I praise the one with with a ready hand
regular gift-giver	a ruler with many abodes	splendid and wise
swift battler	his poetry sweet as honey	magnanimous in battle
x x x	x x x	x x x
x x x	he who has the heart of a giver	like a wild wave over a beach
marrow of beautiful poetry	meditation of remembrance songs	fair wonder
pourer of liquor	you own riches	and fluent praise

music sounds	as from an excellent musical instrument	detailed master-work
the fullness of justice's work	fulfilment of a fine favour	lord of quality
a gift, I implore	I ask a gift	I snare a roebuck
powerful wind's charge	is the rushing fire	of the war-lad
deserving of red gold	he of generous praise	brings fine glory
free with his wealth	strong, excellent defender	deserving total praise
he gains for himself	he maintains his patronage	against the wrath of enemies
he has upheld a law	he has maintained his spirit	against <i>awenyddiaeth</i> of week augury
against great wickedness	Cuhelyn's gift	gladdens the heart
Wise Cuhelyn	elegant his Welsh	generous with his wealth
the bardic troop of Aeddan's ancestor	sing skilfully	lion in the slaughter
an abundance of song	deserving of a chair	it is a fine work
the steeds of war	and beautiful deer	follow him
snarer of kings	rule of song	in the lively contest
his steeds full of tricks	many respect him	the retinue hail him
company's protector	people's patron	famous for his gift
causing a host to swoon	noble and attractive	dignified in appearance
upholder of a multitude	desirous of a ship	port's treasure

the brightness of torches	with the power of a	ferociously casting
	half-wild animal	down the brave
light of reason	he knows much	totally excelling
may the provider of feasts	enjoy peace	from this day on

#### 5. Awen and divine inspiration.

*"Lord God                      permit me awen                      amen, may it be so"*

This deep regard for the poet as one who was divinely endowed with occult powers persisted down the centuries among the Celtic peoples, . . . [a] conception of the essential nature of poetry is implicit also in the Welsh word *awen* for poetic muse or inspiration, for its has credibly been shown that this word is semantically related to Welsh *awel*, 'breeze', both forms being derived from the primitive Indo-European root *\*au(e)-*, 'to blow'. According to the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis (1146?-1223) there were still bards in Wales in his day called *awenyddion*, that is, 'inspired poets' or 'seers', who, it was believed, were endowed with profound intuitive faculties.<sup>1</sup>

#### 6. Ceridwen.

*"with the dignity                      of Ceridwen's song                      diverse inspiration"*

- Patron goddess of the medieval Welsh bards.
- Features in the Tale of Taliesin as the keeper of the Cauldron of Inspiration: a symbol for poetry, memory, creativity, inspiration and the bardic tradition as a whole.
- An element in the mythologising process.
- Possibly the remnant of an early pre-Christian deity, but in medieval poetry is always positioned after God, the original source of all inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Ceri W., 'The Historical Background of Early Welsh Verse', in Jarman, A.O.H. *A Guide To Welsh Literature* (Swansea, 1976), p. 16.

- 7. Declamation.

• "*diverse riches                      ready utterance                      for skilled declaimers*"

- A specialised class of performers declaiming bardic poetry
- Preserving an oral tradition
- The skill of rhythmic declamation

## 8. Strict metre poetry.

*"deserving in your eyes      a company of bards                      with poecy of  
consistent length  
and rhythm"*

- Rhupunt byr:

The line is divided into 3 parts of 4 syllables each. The end of parts 1 and parts 2 rhyme (usually unaccented), and the end of part 3 carries the main rhyme. Parts 2 and 3 alliterate.

4 syllables	4 syllables	4 syllables
rhyme A	rhyme A	rhyme A, main rhyme
alliteration	alliteration	alliteration
Cerdd gymwynas	ced gyfaddas	cas amddifad

- This is an example of *cynganedd sain*, or 'sound harmony' that is also used in other metres, and is one of the four basic types of *cynganedd*.
- The first thirteen lines rhyme alternately on *-ad, -aid*.
- The next fifteen lines use a proest or half rhyme, where there is a similarity in vowel sound and a correspondence in consonants. Only particular categories of vowels and diphthongs are considered to rhyme. This particular category is known as *lleddf broest*: *-aeth, -oeth, -wyth, -aith*.
- The next eight lines rhyme in a pattern of *-en -en -yn, -en -yn -yn, -en -yn*.

- The last twelve lines use a proest rhyme again, this time of the *talgrwn* diphthong category: *-aw*, *-ew*, *-yw*, *-iw*, but not in any given order.
- As well as the complex rhyming, there is internal alliteration between the separate parts of almost every line.
- The musicality of strict metre poetry:

*"music sounds as from an excellent detailed master-work"*  
*musical instrument*

#### 9. The mead-feast and the bardic contest.

*"regularity of praise the rule of praise in mead-feast"*  
*court-session*

*mead dinner contributor knight on the battle field place of supremacy"*

- Contests of original and traditional material such as poems from the Book of Taliesin.
- Probably judged by a *pencerdd*.

*"snarer of kings rule of song in the lively contest"*

- Usually held on important occasions such as festivals and holidays.
- Roots of the *eisteddfod* tradition.
- The awarding of a bardic chair, signifying the bard has the right to sit as an official in the court, part of the nobleman's formal retinue.

*"the bardic troop of sing skilfully lion in the slaughter"*  
*Aeddan's ancestor*

*an abundance of song deserving of a chair it is a fine work"*

- Mead and liquor as an element in court ritual. The serving and drinking of mead creates a formal bond between patron and patronised.

10. The public ritual of praise.

*"nobleman of the extraordinary custom's  
powerful custom defender"*

- The authorising of political power.
- The authorising of cultural or artistic power.
- The function of bardic authority in the conditioning of social norms.
- The function of public ritual as a medium for the transmission and regulation of the most important cultural symbols.

11. The public ritual of gift giving.

*"a gift, I implore I ask a gift I snare a roebuck"*

- A bard's traditional status bestows on him the right to receive patronage.
- The gifts given often become testimony to the generosity of the patron, which he is then in turn praised for.
- A formalised relationship that became part of public court ritual and custom.
- The *canu gofyn* genre was very popular for well over 600 years.

12. The spiritual potency of the bard.

*"he has upheld a law he has maintained against awenyddiaeth  
his spirit of week augury*

*against great wickedness Cuhelyn's gift gladdens the heart"*

- Prophecy as an act of war.
- Supernatural power as an important aspect of the bardic persona.
- The authority of divine grace and divine inspiration.