

TESTUN A CHYD-DESTUN
(TEXT AND CONTEXT)
POETS OF THE NOBILITY FORUM, 19 MAY 2018



(from the left) Gruffudd Antur, Eurig Salisbury, Dafydd Johnston,
Ann Parry Owen, Dylan Foster Evans, David Callander

It was a glorious sunny day once again for the annual Poets of the Nobility forum – the twenty-fifth forum in the series.

This year we decided to pursue a slightly different course, and instead of a series of papers on a specific theme, speakers were invited to choose one poem each, allowing them freedom to follow whatever path they wished.

Ann Parry Owen chose to discuss a praise poem for Prince Owain Gwynedd composed by Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr between 1165 and 1170. The *arwyrain* was a specific type of poem justifying a prince's right to be leader. Attention was drawn to the great emphasis on the prince's military skills in this poem, and to a number of allusions to poems by the sixth-century Taliesin for Prince Owain ab Urien and his father, Urien Rheged.

Dylan Foster Evans turned our attention to 'The Goose-shed', a narrative poem by Dafydd ap Gwilym. This is a very amusing poem where the poet explains to us how he succeeded in avoiding a jealous husband by seeking refuge in a goose-shed; however he was attacked there by a huge mother-goose protecting her goslings. Dylan carefully guided us through the text, highlighting its levels of irony and various possible interpretations. We also learned about the importance of geese in the Middle Ages, not just for the economy, but also as guard birds.

Dr David Callander discussed a long poem by Tudur Aled to Saint Winifred, a *cywydd* based on her Life. A certain man named Caradog became enraged when Winifred rejected him, and decapitated her; however she was restored to life by St Beuno, who reattached her head to her body, and a health-restoring spring appeared on that spot. David showed how ignorance of the *prose vitae* has often led to misinterpretation of certain lines in the poem, and even to criticism of Tudur Aled's poetic craft.

Following lunch, Gruffudd Antur's chosen text was a praise poem by the fifteenth-century poet Dafydd Nanmor for Rhys ap Maredudd ab Owain of Tywyn near Cardigan, for whom Dafydd acted as household poet. In the poem, the poet explains how he was exiled from his native Nanmor following an affair with a local married woman, Gwen o'r Ddôl. Gruffudd argued that the poet was never actually exiled, and that the story was a literary device to praise a patron's daughter.

To end the day's proceedings, Eurig Salisbury looked across the border and to Guto'r Glyn's famous poem to the town of Oswestry where Guto lived in later life as a burger. Unlike a number of poems of the period that depict towns as being rather unsavoury places, Eurig showed how Guto emphasized the beneficial aspects of urban life – the health-enhancing food (white bread, meat and beer), and especially the warmth of the buildings. Guto also mentions the cosmopolitan aspect of urban life, referring to women's hairstyles and dress fashions.

We are extremely grateful to the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol for their generous sponsorship of the forum, and for working with us to ensure that the day was a great success.

To download a PDF booklet of texts discussed on the day, visit <https://bit.ly/2J2fQsu>.

Ann Parry Owen, May 2018
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