



Guto'r Glyn and his musical companions

As part of the conference a concert was held at the National Library of Wales on the evening of Tuesday 11th September 2012, where **Dr Sally Harper** of the School of Music, Bangor University, introduced striking new reconstructions by **Peter Greenhill** of the original performance rhythms of a number of Guto's poems, performed here by the group Datgeiniaeth. It has been Peter's breakthroughs in decoding the tablature of the famous, enigmatic Robert ap Huw manuscript that have brought about the opportunity of restoring the rhythms of the medieval poetry,* and so the concert also featured some of Peter's translations of the medieval instrumental music in the manuscript, here played by **Paul Dooley**.

It was fitting for a *pencerdd*, a chief poet, as Guto became, to remain seated whilst his companion the *datgeiniad*, the reciter, performed his poems. Poets below the status of *pencerdd* would take on the role of reciter themselves. The performance was rhythmic, and the reciter could accompany himself either by beating a staff or by playing a stringed instrument, or, ideally, the reciter would be accompanied by a specialist string instrumentalist. The specialist string instrumentalists, the *purorion*, primarily played purely instrumental music, of the unique type found in the Robert ap Huw manuscript. It appears they used either the bowed *crwth* or the small harp with twenty-five metal strings, whereas reciters used the *crwth* or the lighter harp with horsehair strings and bray pins.

1. *Marwnad Llywelyn ab y Moel* (Guto'r Glyn poem 82) arr. Peter Greenhill; performed by Gareth Siôn.

This elegy, probably dating from 1440, is delivered at a solemn tempo, which enables the listener today who is unused to hearing *cynganedd* in rhythm to get to grips with the subtleties of the various types of balance the *cynganedd* gives to each line, and of the slippery syncopations of the consonant rhymes against the beat. Added to those is the syncopation against one another of the two end rhymes in each couplet, which is

* Peter Greenhill, 'Bardic Rhythm: The Implications from *Cerdd Dant* Studies', *Studia Celtica*, XLV (2011), 131–53.

mandatory in this metre - the *cywydd*. The *cywydd* emerges here as a remarkably unpredictable rhythmic phenomenon - the syllables of barely any two lines have exactly the same timing.

2. *Profiad yr Eos* (extract) + *Caniad y Gwyn Bibydd* + *Profiad Brido ar Isgywair*, all translated from the Robert ap Huw ms. by Peter Greenhill; performed by Paul Dooley.

These short pieces illustrate the great expressive range of the instrumental music of medieval Wales which was recorded in a special tablature, just as the whole venerable tradition was becoming extinct. The second piece here is clearly for light entertainment, whereas the others have gravitas and grandeur. The musical system was believed to have its origin in Ireland, and certainly its principles were very different from those of the music of continental Europe. Note in particular that its harmony was astonishingly advanced. The composer of the third piece, Brido, a famed harpist from before Guto's time, is mentioned by Guto (poem 113, line 58).

3. *Awdl i Ddewi* (Dafydd Llwyd, extract) arr. Peter Greenhill; performed by Twm Morys & chorus: Gareth Siôn, Rhys Trimble, Gorwel Roberts.

This incitement to battle, possibly related to the Battle of Bosworth of 1485, is in a much more rhythmically regular metre - a variant of the *cywydd llosgyrnog*. It has all the power of sentiment and, in performance, the directness and the capacity for mass involvement to account for why bardism was considered to be such a serious political force.

More performances by Datgeiniaeth can be viewed [here](#).