

Eisteddfod



Eisteddfodau are traditional Welsh cultural competitions in literature, music and dance. To win at the National Eisteddfod in Wales is a great prize. North America also has a history of eisteddfodau. The Cynonfardd Eisteddfod, begun in 1889, is still going and is regarded as the oldest annual eisteddfod in America. Surprisingly, an eisteddfod had never been held in conjunction with the National Gymanfa Ganu weekend until it was introduced by Alan Upshall at the National in Bellevue, WA, in 1994. It has been continued every year and is now a regular part of the North American Festival of Wales.

In past years we've held competitions in recitation, both in Welsh and English, in hymn singing, solo youth and adult voice competitions, and, last year, competitions in instrumental solo music, visual arts, and hymn composition.

In spite of the cancellation of the live Festival of Wales this year, we inaugurated a poetry competition, for a poem in Welsh or in English on the theme of Gobaith/Hope. The winner in each language would get a prize of \$250. The contest attracted 13 entries in Welsh and 20 entries in English, from six nations spanning four continents. All entrants submitted under a pseudonym and were unknown to the judges, Menna Elfyn and Eurig Salisbury for Welsh, Tony Curtis and Robert Dayton for English.

And the winners are... Christine James for her poem *Gobaith*, and Robert Walton for his poem *Alphabet*.

gobaith gan Christine James

wrth gyrraedd Porth Madryn: 1865 a 2015

Rywle rhwng myth a hanes,
rhwng 'chredwch-chi-byth
ac addewid, rhwng ffaith
a phumed gainc rhyw fabinogi
gwych am daith arwyr tua machlud
dros Iwerydd – i Annwfn neu
i ddrych o Gymru'r dychymyg
ym mhen draw byd ...

... rywle yma,
ie, rywle fan hyn,
ar draeth Madryn, dan frath
y gwynt, rhwng symudoledd twyni,
a thwmpathau prysg y paith,
anweddodd hud eu breuddwyd
dorfol, o'r diwedd,
yn ddiriaeth
fwy sylweddol na'u gobaith.



Before her retirement, Emerita Professor Christine James was Head of the Department of Welsh at Swansea University. Her research interests focus primarily on the literature of late medieval and early modern Wales, in particular the native lawbooks (the Laws of Hywel Dda) and religious texts, and she has published numerous articles in these fields. In recent years she has become increasingly interested in Elizabethan 'journalistic' ballads in Welsh, and the evidence which they provide regarding the role played by Welsh men and women in the exciting political events and cultural developments of that period. Professor James is also an authority on literature emanating from industrial south-east Wales, and in 2001 she edited the complete poetical works of one of Wales's most significant 20th century poets, D. Gwenallt Jones. She is also a published poet: she won the Crown at the National Eisteddfod held in Snowdonia in 2005, and her first volume of poetry, *rhwng y llinellau* (2013), won the Welsh Book of the

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Year Competition in the category for Welsh-language poetry in 2014. She was Archdruid of Wales 2013–16, the first female to be elected to that position, and is currently the Gorsedd Recorder.



Alphabet by Robert Walton

The new girl's name was as hard to say and spell
as the words in Welsh our teacher posted on the wall
but we knew she came from a distant, different land

so when Mrs Jones called her out to write
on the board, we watched her snake-braid of hair swing
at her back as she stepped from her desk to the front

and we sat with eyes and mouths of stone when she held
the stick of chalk mid-air, a tilted axis,
a wand with gnostic powers concealed in its tip.

The week before, we'd had some fun with codes
that marked the pirates' buried treasure on the chart,
but in the map of stems, loops and tails

Arianna Lambadarios inscribed, all I could see
were soaring fiery eagles, the gleaming fins

of dolphins leaping the waves, a team of horses
hauling a chariot through the skies: a terpsichorean
pomp of creatures whirling around the classroom
as if they'd sprung from her breath, she stood so close

to the board. Mrs Jones held us in the compass
of her gaze: Thank you, Arianna, diolch yn fawr iawn.
Now this, children, is the origin of all our writing,

so let me hear you repeat after me ... Alpha, Beta,
Gamma, Delta ... And as the new girl returned to her seat,
I stared at her lips for the next wonder to emerge.

Robert Walton was born and brought up in Cardiff before going on to study English Literature at Exeter University and then moving to Bristol to start a long career as an English teacher in state comprehensive schools. He won the Welsh Arts Council's New Poet Award in 1978 with his first collection, *Workings* (Gomer Press), but soon afterwards stopped writing for 20 years for reasons that remain a mystery to him. Since taking to the pen again after a year's teaching in Australia, he has written a range of short scripts for theatre and the poetry narrative for a television drama-documentary *Fighting to the End: Sisley in Wales* (BBC2 Wales: dir. Colin Thomas), while his second collection of poems, *Sax Burglar Blues*, was published by Seren Books in late 2017. In recent years, he has completed a later-in-life MA and PhD at Cardiff University, where he now teaches Creative Writing, and has presented several academic papers to NAASWCH (North American Association for the Study of Welsh History and Culture). He lives in Bristol with his wife Carol, a French cat called Summer, and a tenor saxophone that has been the torment of numerous music teachers and neighbours for many years.