

Gorsedd y Beirdd —
from Primrose Hill 1792
to Aberystwyth 1992

by

Geraint Bowen, M.A., Ph.D.

Reprinted from the
Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion
1993

PRINTED BY GEE & SON, DENBIGH

GORSEDD Y BEIRDD — FROM PRIMROSE HILL 1792 TO ABERYSTWYTH 1992*

by GERAINT BOWEN, M.A., Ph.D.

I wish to thank you for granting me this opportunity and privilege of talking to you in London about the *Gorsedd y Beirdd* (The Gorsedd of Bards), a movement founded by Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) and which held its first meeting in this city in 1792.

In a lecture broadcast in the Welsh Service in 1963, which was in part a resumé of his major work on Iolo Morganwg, Professor Griffith John Williams said that Iolo Morganwg, a stone-mason by trade who spent long periods working in the London area in the 1770s and 90s, was 'a man of immense learning and of astonishing versatility. He was in his early years a romantic poet, and throughout his life a romantic dreamer. Everybody agrees that he was the greatest authority of his day on the history of Welsh literature and on many aspects of Welsh history . . . His manuscripts show that he was a musician who had composed scores of hymn tunes, and that he took a great delight in collecting folk-songs. He was a theologian who helped to establish the Unitarian denomination in South Wales, and a politician who revelled in the excitement of the early years after the French Revolution.'

It is said that Dr. Johnson once met Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg) in a London book-shop and is reported to have remarked to a friend: 'To-day I met Edward Williams. Thank God there's one honest man in London'. Indeed, during his lifetime, his honesty was not questioned. But it is a well known fact that he composed poems and attributed them to such poets as Dafydd ap Gwilym and that he also manufactured prose documents, literary forgeries, that did, when they began to be

* A lecture given to the Society at the British Academy, 23 July, 1992.
Chairman: Professor Tegid Wyn Jones, Secretary of the Society.

uncovered by John Morris-Jones and later in the twenties of this century by Griffith John Williams, prejudice many academics against his most enduring creation, the society of bards known originally as *Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, 'Bards of the Isle of Britain', commonly called to-day *Gorsedd y Beirdd*, 'the Gorsedd of Bards'. However it must be remembered that literary forgeries were not uncommon in the romantic eighteenth century. The Scottish author, James Macpherson, in the 1760s published three volumes that purported to be the Gaelic works of Ossian, but were largely his own invention, namely *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland and translated from the Gaelic*, *Fingal, an ancient Epic Poem in six Books*, and *Temora, an ancient Epic Poem in Eight Books*. Thomas Chatterton, a Bristolian poet, claimed to have discovered poems which he attributed to a supposed 15th century Bristolian author called Thomas Rowley. Thus he did much to enhance the civic pride of his native city. But this sort of romantic activity was not the only influence on Iolo.

This lecture is not, however, a lecture on Edward Williams's (Iolo Morganwg's) literary forgeries and other works. My time is limited and I intend to confine my remarks to the birth of the movement which he created and its growing pains, *Beirdd Ynys Prydain* (Bards of the Isle of Britain).

I should like to say a word about his choice of name for the society. Iolo opted for the word *beirdd*, rejecting the word *derwyddon* (druids), probably because the Welsh people by the eighteenth century were not familiar with that Welsh word and its meaning, as druidism had long been dead, ousted from the Welsh scene by the Romans in the main, and the remnants assimilated by the Celtic Church. Dr. John Davies of Mallwyd, author of *Dictionarium Duplex*, published in 1632, and Thomas Wiliems of Trefriw in his unpublished dictionary written thirty years earlier, were the first to explain the meaning of the word *derwyddon* which had disappeared from the vocabulary of the Welsh since the Gogynfeirdd, the poets of the Princes. Dr. Davies explained *derwyddion* by reference to the Latin *sapientes, vates*, wise men, philosophers, prophets. But William Owen (Pughe) in his *Dictionary* (1826) gave a similar meaning to *bardd*, namely priest, philosopher and the current popular English word 'bard', a word popularized with the publication in 1757 of Thomas Gray's romantic poem, 'The Bard'.

But let us look more closely at the title 'Bards of the Isle of Britain'. Why 'of the Isle of Britain'? Why not 'of Wales'? The answer is simple. Iolo had gathered from the works of earlier authors that the Welsh bardic school was of druidic ancestry. We can mention John Leland, whose work *Commentarii de Scriptores Britannicis* was written in 1540 and published in 1709, and Sir John Prys, author of *Historiae Brytannicae Defensio* (1573), who stated that the Welsh bardic tradition was Brythonic and Celtic in origin with its seat of power in Britain. Edward Lhuyd had attributed many of the *englynion* which he saw in the Red Book of Hergest to the druids. Lewis Morris would have it that the body of literature known as *penillion telyn* was produced by the druids and Evan Evan (Ieuan Fardd) would have us believe that many of the Welsh proverbs, as published, for example, by William Salesbury in *Oll Synnwyr pen Kempero ygyd* (1547), were common sense utterings of the Welsh people dating back to the druids.

The antiquary, John Aubrey, F.R.S. had brought to light megalithic remains at Avebury in 1646 and had suggested that the stones of Avebury and Stonehenge, and indeed all the stone circles and *cromlechau* of Britain, were set up by the druids. During his visits to houses of the Welsh gentry in his search for Welsh manuscripts, Iolo had seen early Welsh texts in manuscripts describing the Welsh poetic art as *Cyfrinach Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, 'the secrets of the Bards of the Isle of Britain', and collections of their instructional triads known as *Trioedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, 'Triads of the Bards of the Isle of Britain', which appeared in print later in the *Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales* in 1801 and were rightly described by the editors as an important part of the oral tradition of the bards. Iolo was also familiar with volumes of verse extolling the Welsh kings and princes as Kings of the Isle of Britain. He knew that the extant works of Taliesin and Aneirin were Welsh poems to British kings that ruled territories over-run later by the English invaders from the Continent. Wales to Iolo, as to the Welsh poets, kings and princes of pre-conquest days, was in reality a shrunken cultural and linguistic Isle of Britain, and the Welsh were the only people who had the historical right to use such a title, and the Welsh language was the true British tongue, not English.

The Welsh in Tudor times called themselves *Brutaniaid* or *Brittani*, and their language 'Britysh' or 'the old British tongue':

'the language that by continuall misnomer . . . is called Walshe', as William Salesbury wrote in 1550. It should be remembered that the English Crown regarded the words Britain and British as inappropriate terms to describe their title until the advent of James from Scotland. It is no wonder that the Prince of Wales, according to the *Gwyddoniadur*, betrayed his unease on hearing that a *gorsedd*, an assembly of bards, claiming the name Bards of the Isle of Britain, was to be held in London and actually witnessed the initiation of new members.

The word *gorsedd* has had many meanings, such as 'mound', 'tumulus', 'throne', 'court'. Iolo in an early report to the press equated it with the English word 'congress', and William Owen (Pughe) in his edition of the works of Llywarch Hen which appeared in 1792-4 used the term *cylch cyngrair*, adding a translation 'circle of federation'. Edward Jones (Bardd y Brenin) in his book *Bardic Museum* (1802), in addition to *gorsedd*, used such terms as 'tribunal meeting' and 'supreme congress', and describes it as an 'ancient form of Druidical Assembly'. David Samwell calls the *gorsedd* an 'eisteddfod'.

Iolo reporting to the London paper *Morning Chronicle* in 1792 claimed that it was held 'according to ancient usage'. Such a claim infuriated John Walters, the lexicographer, rector of Llandochau near Cowbridge and Iolo's mentor, and he declared the movement to be 'a wild invention'. But to the romantic London Welsh of the late eighteenth century and especially to members of the recently established Society of the Gwyneddigion, the survival of the Bardic Order since the druidical, Brythonic and Celtic days was welcome news. It was a boost to their image. In Iolo the Bardic Order had been made flesh once more: it had dwelt amongst them and they had seen its glory.

In a letter to Gwallter Mechain of 17 February 1793, David Samwell writes: 'I do not know whether you saw an account of our druidical meetings ar bryn y briallu yn agos i Gaerludd [London]. Iorwerth ab Gwilym [Iolo Morganwg] made our Eisteddfod cut a figure in the newspapers, and that is something.'

All the London Welshmen whom I have already mentioned were members of the Gwyneddigion Society and it was at a series of meetings held by this society in the Bull's Inn, London during the Summer of 1891 that it was decided to hold a Congress of British Bards on Primrose Hill, a mound of sorts in what was then open ground in the direction of Hampstead.

Why choose Primrose Hill, you may ask. I suggest that the answer is that John Toland, the deist, author of *The critical History of the Celtic religion and learning, containing an account of the Druids* (1740) and founder of the Ancient Druid Order, had held his first meeting on 22 September 1717 in the very same spot. There is no evidence that Iolo or any other member of the Gwyneddigion were members of the Ancient Druid Order, although there had existed since 1761 a Welsh group of this Order. A certificate of membership of the Welsh group is still in safe keeping at the National Library of Wales (MS 12497C). It is embellished with the head of a druid and oak leaves with the words *Nis gwyr namyn diwyd dderwydd* 'No one but an industrious druid knows it'. The certificate was awarded in 1780 to John Lloyd, Hafodunos, Llangernyw, who later in 1797 became M.P. for Flintshire. A tradition was held by the Druid Order that the druidic system had been established by Hu Gadarn and that Aedd Mawr, his successor, introduced the system to Britain and appointed three archdruids, one for London, one for York and one for Caerleon.

Another druidic movement, called The Ancient Order of Druids, was established in 1781 by Henry Hurle, a native of Bristol who had settled in London. What had come to be known as druidism obviously had its appeal, but did not attract the Gwyneddigion who were too deeply immersed in the task of publishing the extant Welsh poetry and prose and too aware of their Welsh identity. These London-based English druidic brotherhoods were to them un-British and had no real affinity with Wales and the British language, literature and culture. Druidism or Bardism without the Welsh language was a meaningless, soulless -ism, a dead -ism.

But I should add that The Ancient Druid Order, like the Oddfellows, Freemasons and Forresters had lodges in Wales in the nineteenth century, and like the Welsh philanthropic movement, *Yr Iforiaid* (The Iforites), held *eisteddfodau* from time to time. The most famous of these was held in Swansea in 1841. In addition to holding *eisteddfodau*, members of the Druid Orders, Oddfellows, Iforites, Forresters, Freemasons, and even naval cadets and local volunteers, joined in the Gorsedd procession usually held at the proclamation of an *eisteddfod*. In a press report of the Eisteddfod held in Abergavenny in 1838 it is stated that two archdruids of the Druid Order were in the ranks, and Cawrdaf,

a member of the Gorsedd and editor of the Oddfellows' Welsh newspaper, *Y Gwron Cymreig*, who presided at the Gorsedd initiation ceremony, wore the regalia of the Oddfellows as he performed his duties of initiating. The military were frequently involved in *gorsedd* processions. At the Conwy Eisteddfod of 1861, a reporter has it that the Llandudno Volunteers, on the arrival of the Gorsedd procession at the triumphal arch (of the Castle) which led to the *gorsedd* site, 'defiled and with presented arms, admitted the passage for the rest of the train'.

But to return to the early London days. William Owen (Pughe) actually started his own Welsh club called Yr Ofyddion and David Samwell founded a club called Y Caradogion which met weekly in the Bull's Inn, assembling around a table known as Arthur's Table with a painting on the wall of Caradog (Caractacus) challenging the dictates of a Roman General. Both were early converts to Iolo's new movement. William Owen (Pughe), F.S.A. was a little eccentric. He became a convert to Joanna Southcott, a Devonshire virgin who claimed that she was about to bring into the world a spiritual man, Shiloh, a saviour, as predicted in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 49, verse 10: 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.' If this had happened once, why should it not happen again?

David Samwell (Dafydd Feddyg), as his bardic name suggests, was a medical man. In his late twenties he had served Captain James Cook on his third voyage to the Pacific in 1778-9, had witnessed the discovery of the Sandwich Islands and the murder of Captain Cook on the Island of Hawaii, and had been the first to write an account of that murder: *A Narrative of the Death of Captain Cook*, published in 1786. He was in 1798 recruited to serve as member of the medical corps that was called to attend the British prisoners of war in Fontainbleau.

Iolo decided to create a Welsh druidism calling it *Barddas* (Bardism or Bardic Learning), a synthesis of what he gathered or thought or declared was the teaching of the Brythonic druids and the Welsh Bards. He composed a series of triads along the lines of the authoritative triads of the Welsh poets, the *Trioedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* to which I have already referred, and published them in both Welsh and English in 1794 in *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*, a volume of his English poems which he dedicated to

the Prince of Wales. He called his triads Ancient British Bardism, adding that 'North Wales BARDS have nothing at all of their ancient and genuine Bardism' and claiming that he had found the triads in a manuscript written two centuries earlier by the Glamorgan poet, Llywelyn Siôn. They appear in the printed work under the headings, 'Trioedd Braint a Defod (Institutional Triads)', 'Trioedd Barddas (Theological Triads)', 'Trioedd Doethineb (Ethical Triads)', 'Trioedd Paul (Paul's Triads)' and 'Trioedd Cerdd (Poetic Triads or Triads of Song)'. All this was faked evidence of the continuation of bardism.

On returning to Wales in 1795 Iolo refrained from imposing his ethical, philosophical and religious ideas, which wrongly assumed that druidism was a monotheistic cult, on his newly initiated *gorsedd* members. He had by now found another channel to his beliefs. He had become a professed Unitarian. Iolo was present at the first meetings of the Unitarian movement in 1774 and its establishment by Theophilus Lindsey. He was partly responsible for the establishment of the Unitarian Society in South Wales, and it is generally believed that he drew up the constitution of that society; it is known that he composed three thousand hymns. It is known also that he frequently attended Quaker meetings at Quakers Yard, not far from Pontypridd and participated in the establishment of such movements as the Philanthropists and the Friends of Nature. But his Unitarian connection and his radical ideas attracted poets who held similar ideas to his own during the early stage in the history of the *gorseddau*, at the same time alienating poets who held more conservative ideas.

However, Iolo, recognized for his mastery of the Welsh poetic art and his profound knowledge of the Welsh literary tradition, was a person held in high esteem by the Gwyneddigion. He had been instructed in the secrets of the strict metres and *cynghanedd* by John Bradford of Betws Tir Iarll in Glamorgan, a weaver descended from a family from Bradford-on-Avon that had in the mid-seventeenth century settled in the Vale of Glamorgan. John Bradford had learned the poetic art from the grammar written by Siôn Dafydd Rhys and published by Rhys's patron Sir Edward Stradling of Saint Donat's in 1592. Iolo refers to this fact in a romantic way in Elijah Waring's *Recollections and Anecdotes of Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg)* (1850): 'I saw John Bradford who without delay . . . bad me step into the garden with him and taking out of his pocket a blue ribband invested me with the

insignia of the Primitive Order of Bards of the Isle of Britain in the Chair of Glamorgan.'

Iolo, on hearing in the smoking-room of the Bull during his early days in London the endless bragging of the men of Gwynedd that the laurels of literary superiority belonged to the poets of Gwynedd, had tried to silence their braggadocio by falsely stating that the Welsh bardic tradition was traceable to King Arthur. He claimed with authority that it was in Arthur's court in Caerleon in Gwent (a district in the ancient kingdom of Morgannwg) that Taliesin, Aneirin and Myrddin met to formulate the basic rules of Welsh prosody. It is significant fact that he called such bardic meetings *gorseddau*, without in any way linking them with druidism. But later, after a careful study of the numerous books on druidism that were available at the time, including William Stukeley's *Stonehenge* (1740), which declared druidism to be a patriarchal religion, and *Mona Antiqua Restaurata* (1723) written by Henry Rowlands an Anglesey priest, a work which brought Wales into the forefront of all discussions relating to British druidism, Iolo lost sight of his Arthurian legend and claimed that Welsh Bardism was the creation of the druids later perpetuated by the bardic school and he actually gave the names of the druidic founders, Plennydd, Alawn a Gwron. To Iolo, in spite of his frequent comments that bardism was handed down orally, this meant that the druids were pioneers in literacy and were literate from early days, having their own alphabet. He invented what he described as a druidic alphabet, and called it *Coelbren y Beirdd*, attributing its making in biblical fashion to Divine intervention.

In his tale about the garden meeting with his bardic teacher, he stated that he was invested with the insignia of the 'Primitive Order of Bards of the Isle of Britain in the Chair of Glamorgan'. He frequently claimed, after the death of Edward Evans, an excellent *cywyddwr* from Glamorgan, that he was the sole surviving member of the Bards of the Isle of Britain and that the chair of Glamorgan was the only surviving chair or department or school of the ancient movement. All new qualifying bards had to be invested by him personally, as he was the only surviving bard, Primitive Bard or *Priŷardd*.

If some of you think that this was arrogance on his part, I should like to refer to John Wesley's claim that he had the exclusive right to ordain the first Wesleyan ministers!

Iolo stated that originally there were four chairs, Gwynedd,

Powys, Dyfed and Morgannwg with Gwent. In these provinces the bards whom he had initiated would be responsible for the initiation or certification of bards in their specified districts. London (Caer-ludd) belonged to the Chair of Glamorgan with Gwent.

It is significant that he ignored all the territorial changes brought about in Wales by medieval conflicts, and imposed by the English by means of the Statute of Rhuddlan of 1284 and the Act of Union of 1536. Ignoring these political and civil changes gave his society the desired sense of antiquity.

You may judge the Gwyneddigion to be a credulous lot. But it must be remembered that they lived in a period when the Biblical chronology as taught by Archbishop James Ussher, namely that the world was only a few thousand years old, was accepted by all. Bishop John Bale in his volume on British Authors, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum* in 1557, had convinced the Welsh that they were descendants of Japheth, a son of Noah who had survived the deluge, and that the Welsh language, Gomeraeg, was the language spoken by Gomer, the son of Japheth, thus linking the Welsh language to Hebrew and druidical teaching to the Patriarchal religion of the descendants of Japheth. When a Welsh Gorsedd was established in America late in the last century, Armenians were allowed to join, as men like the Rev. Thomas Edwards (Cynonfardd), the first Archdruid of America, a Congregational Minister in Edwardsville, Pennsylvania and one time Minister of Ebeneser Welsh Congregational Church, Cardiff, had trustworthy Biblical evidence that the Ark had come to rest on Mount Ararat in Armenia and there was great probability that the Armenians and the Welsh were ethnically related. There was another popular tradition going around to which I have already referred, namely that the Welsh like the Jews had their Moses or their Abraham, known since medieval days as Hu Gadarn. According to Iolo's version this Hu the Mighty had led the Cymry from Deffrobani or Ceylon, the place where the human race originated according to Isidore of Seville, and first settled in Glamorgan in 1500 B.C. Gwilym Cowlyd of Llanrwst, a bizarre character who rejected the literary superiority claimed by the Chair of Glamorgan, offered another version, namely that Hu Gadarn had chosen Gwynedd as his landing-place, and predated his coming by 200 years, to 1700 B.C. The Welsh did not think themselves crazy, neither should we think that they were. Such was the ethos of the period. Like

Theophilus Evans, author of *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* (1716), Iolo and his contemporaries accepted myths as truths. Do not blame them, blame the period. The age of historical criticism had not yet arrived.

One of the conditions of membership of the Gwyneddigion was the belief that Madog had discovered America and that Welsh was spoken by some Indians in the upper valley of the Missouri. Supported by the Gwyneddigion, Iolo himself planned to visit the spot with John Evans, a native of Waun-fawr in Arfon. He changed his mind, but John Evans set off on the journey on his own. Having failed in his quest, he undertook the mapping of the sources of the Missouri, ending his life in New Orleans as a cartographer in the service of the Spanish authorities.

It is obvious that the members of Gwyneddigion belonged to a period when the Welsh in their national deprivation had been obliged to depend on the uplift which myth and fiction provided. To-day our national pride rests on the facts of history. We are very much aware of the greatness of our literary past dating back to the 6th century. We do not need myths and fiction. In the late eighteenth century this literary past, thanks to the Gwyneddigion, was beginning to be unveiled. It is this urge to restore the glory of the past that explains why the Gwyneddigion, at the bidding of its prime mover Iolo Morganwg, decided to convene a meeting to initiate new members of *Beirdd Ynys Prydain* on 21 June 1792. The Welsh public were informed of their intention through a notice or scroll, 'sgrol cyhoeddi gorsedd', that had appeared a year or so earlier in a publication called *Awdlau ar Destynau Cymdeithas y Gwyneddigion i'r Eisteddfodau* (Llundain, 1791). 'requesting those who wish to become graduates and licentiates in the art of poetry in the privilege and usage of the Bards of the Isle of Britain in the Chair of Morgannwg, Gwent, Erging, Ewias and Ystrad Yw' to attend. The reference to the Chair of Morgannwg implies that the initiation would be presided over by the only surviving Bard, namely Iolo, and his name appears on the scroll followed by the title *Bardd wrth Ffaint a Defawd Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, 'a bard in the privilege and usage of the Bards of the Isle of Britain'. The scroll mentions six London Welshmen and two poets from Gwynedd, namely Dafydd Ddu Eryri and Hywel o'r Eryri, whom Iolo assumed would submit to his scrutiny or 'Barn Gorsedd'. Iolo Morganwg, Owen Myfyr and William Owen (Pughe) had sent personal letters to Dafydd Ddu Eryri, a well

known master of the Welsh poetic art, inviting him to be invested as 'bard of the Chair of Glamorgan', but neither he nor Hywel Eryri made the journey to London. To poets of Gwynedd of such standing, the invitation was an insult. To be graduated in the Chair of Glamorgan was degrading. However, the *gorsedd* was held on the day of the Summer Solstice 1792, and William Owen (Pughe), David Samwell and Gwallter Mechain, a student at All Souls College, Oxford were initiated as 'Bards', and Edward Jones (Siôn Penllyn), who was appointed harpist to the Prince of Wales in 1790, as 'Ovate'. The first *gorsedd* was not reported in any London paper, but we can glean from various sources that the above mentioned were initiated, and that Iolo Morganwg read an English poem, 'Ode on the mythology of the Ancient British Bards', which he published later in his *Poems, Lyric and Pastoral*. There he explains that the poem was also read before its publication at *gorseddau* held at the Autumnal Equinox and Winter Solstice 1792. It should be noted that Iolo when dating his *gorseddau* was using what purported to be a druidic system. By discarding the ecclesiastical calendar he hoped to give historicity to his *gorseddau*. He coined the word 'alban' to mean one of the solar quarters or solstice, Alban Arthan: Winter Solstice, Alban Eilir: Vernal Solstice, Alban Hefin: Summer Solstice and Alban Elfed: Autumnal Solstice.

Iolo sent a report on this Autumnal 1792 Gorsedd to *The Morning Chronicle*. He gives the location, Primrose Hill, the date, 22 September, and the time, 'whilst the sun is above the horizon', calling it 'a Solemn Bardic Day' and adding 'The wonted ceremonies were observed. A circle of stones were formed, in the middle of which was the Maen Gorsedd, or altar, on which a naked sword being placed, all the bards assisted to sheathe it,' symbolizing the fact that the bards were heralds of peace. The 'bards' were Iolo Morganwg, William Owen (Pughe), David Samwell and Edward Jones. The Bardic traditions and several odes were recited — English odes, explaining that 'this was an intention to give the English reader an idea of what, though very common in Wales, has never yet been properly known in England.' He added that, by using the English language in the ceremony, the Bards of the Isle of Britain were thus proclaiming the English tongue also a *bardic* language, and daringly hinting that the Bards of the Isle of Britain was also an umbrella movement for Welsh and English bards alike. The session ended with a proclamation

that the next *gorsedd* would be held in the same place 'when the next winter solstice occurs' and with the announcement of the title of the poems to be recited at that *gorsedd*. But by the 8th of November Iolo had changed his mind and announced that the winter solstice *gorsedd* was to be held 'in the Long Fields, behind the British Museum' and that Edward Jones, the harpist to the Prince of Wales, would be required to attend and lecture on specified topics and 'renounce his claim to the title and character of Bard' as he had only been invested in the *gorsedd* as an ovate. We have not found any evidence that this third *gorsedd* was held, but David Samwell in a letter to Gwallter Mechain dated 17 February 1793 refers to Edward Charles (Siamas Gwynedd), the Secretary of the Gwyneddigion Society, John Jones, Glan-y-gors, Vice-President of the Gwyneddigion, Thomas Jones, Recorder of the Gwyneddigion and Daniel Davies as 'London Welsh Bards', which is sufficient evidence of Iolo's proselytizing skill. We have reference to only one other Primrose Hill *gorsedd*, namely the one held on 22 September 1793, when Iolo read two poems, one English and one Welsh. According to the *Gwyddoniadur* the Prince of Wales was amongst the onlookers. Iolo at this *gorsedd* conferred the Order of Ovate on the English novelist and poet Anna Seward, a friend of Dr. Johnson, Boswell and Walter Scott. In her letter to Iolo written three weeks after the first *gorsedd*, she made this comment:

Permit me to express my concern that nature made you the fatal present of a spirit and an imagination so raised above the sphere in which you were destined to move, since in every age they have much oftener proved great misfortunes than blessings to their possessor.

We know of no other early London *gorseddau*, probably because there were no other London Welshmen who deserved membership. Early in 1795 Iolo had left London for his home in the Vale of Glamorgan. There was to be no more compromising in the matter of language. He immediately announced that it was his intention to hold *gorseddau* annually on Bryn Owain (Stalling Down) near Cowbridge, where 'every one will rejoice at the sight of a Bard and a lover of Poetry'.

We knew very little about these early Glamorgan *gorseddau* until Iolo Aneurin Williams deposited Iolo's papers in the National Library in the 1950's. On examining these documents we can with certainty state that he held at least nine *gorseddau* during the years 1795 and 1798, at least three on Bryn Owain, three on

Mynydd y Garth, Llanilltud Faerdre, two on Mynydd y Fforest near Cowbridge and one in Glyn Ogwr, the first of the nine on 21 March 1795 and the last on 21 September 1798. Iolo's new society was beyond doubt suspect like all secret societies by the late nineties because of the war with France. The Oddfellows and many other similar lodges were obliged to cease activities and the Cowbridge Volunteers kept an eye on Iolo's bardic meetings. He refers to this in a letter to Owen Myfyr remarking that 'at least twelve justices of peace and a hundred Cowbridge Volunteers had on one occasion watched us, seeking evidence to accuse us of being anti-royalist.' The authorities undoubtedly found it difficult to differentiate between Iolo's concern for the current state of Welsh poetry and his personal social and political beliefs. This should not surprise us, for Iolo was well-known for his radical views and proudly called himself 'The Bard of Liberty'. He had during his London stay become a keen supporter of Tom Paine, the author of *Rights of Man* (1790/2), whose name appears as a subscriber in Iolo's volume of poetry and whose effigy was burnt in public in Cardiff in 1792. At the Glyn Ogwr *gorsedd* Iolo read a poem entitled 'Breiniau Dyn' (The Rights of Man), calling king and priest two devils and in the same breath praising the French Revolution.

His religious, social and political views are manifest in the sort of subjects which he usually set for candidates who sought bardic honours.

One of these successful candidates and one of the faithful at his early *gorseddau* in the Vale was Thomas Evans (Tomos Glyn Cothi), a trader in woollen cloth from Gwernogle near Carmarthen and a frequent visitor at the fairs of the new industrial valleys, who later became the minister of the first Unitarian church built in Wales and who was imprisoned for two years in Carmarthen jail for translating the 'Marseillaise', the French National Anthem, into Welsh.

Iolo at the London *gorseddau*, in order to hold his English audience, appears to have refrained from loading his remarks with details about the bardic aims of his movement, but at the first meeting of a small group of local aspirants for the new poetic honours, held on Bryn Owain in 1795, he outlined his aims as follows:

All bardic *gorseddau* should be held in accordance with the ancient and primitive customs of Beirdd Ynys Prydain.

The poetic art of the penceirddiaid (chief poets of the medieval nobility), who were so instrumental in preserving the Welsh language from erosion, should be upheld and mastered. This meant cutting out verbosity, language errors and the excessiveness which 'cynghanedd' could inflict.

Bards should refrain from using versification to corrupt the morals of the Welsh nation.

Only discreet persons and lovers of peace can be initiated members of the Chair of Glamorgan of the Order of the Bards of the Isle of Britain.

There is no evidence that Iolo held any *gorseddau* in Glamorgan during the Napoléonic wars in the years 1799-1813. But during his tour of Gwynedd in search of unpublished manuscripts, he met Dafydd Ddu Eryri, 'Bardd Cadeiriog Gwynedd', whom he had in 1791 hoped to initiate at the first London Gorsedd. He now offered again to initiate him, not as a member of the Chair of Glamorgan but as a member of the Chair of Gwynedd of the Bards of the Isle of Britain. Much to his surprise and joy, the offer was accepted and at a 'secret' *gorsedd* held on Bryn Dinorwig in the parish of Llanddeiniolen in Arfon on 16 October 1799, with Iolo presiding, three of the leading poets of Gwynedd were 'initiated and graduated', namely Dafydd Ddu Eryri, Ieuan Lleyn and Gutyn Peris. To Iolo this was a break-through and a conquest. The Chair of Gwynedd had been 're-established' and the Bards of the Isle of Britain restored to the royal seat of the rightful kings of Britain after years of languishing. Dafydd Ddu Eryri seemed to be enchanted by this exciting development and decided to hold a second *gorsedd* 'according to the customs of the Bards of the Isle of Britain' on the same site on the Tuesday of Whitsun week 1800. He called the *gorsedd* 'the Chair of Dinorwig'. He presided at this session and initiated at least two other Gwynedd poets, Hywel Eryri and Siôn Lleyn. But this enthusiasm did not last. Dafydd Ddu Eryri, a Methodist, was soon made aware through various sources of Iolo's radicalism, his Unitarianism and his strange belief in the transmigration of souls. He accused Iolo in one of his poems of being a pagan and a demon, and advised his fellow poets not to compete or participate in *eisteddfodau* where Iolo adjudicated. But he never at any time doubted the historicity of the Bards of the Isle of Britain. It was his disgust with Iolo's beliefs and his unwillingness to allow 'London-based misguided expatriates' and Southwalians to interfere in a patronizing way in the poetic activities of the Gwynedd poets, casting doubt upon

their literary standards, that infuriated him and changed his attitude towards the Bards of the Isle of Britain. Twenty years passed before the next *gorsedd* was held in Gwynedd.

With the termination of the Franco-British war and the fall of Paris in 1814, Iolo decided that it was safe for him to reassemble his adherents, this time on a site in Eglwysilan, just across the river Taf from Pontypridd, known as Y Maen Chwŷf (Rocking Stone); and with the assistance of Gwilym Morganwg, a native of Llanddети in Breconshire and owner of the New Inn, Pontypridd, who under Iolo's instruction had become a veritable master of Welsh metrics, at least two *gorseddau* were held there in 1814, one in 1815 and another in 1817. These *gorseddau* were generally held following the *eisteddfodau* that were usually held in the New Inn, and when Iolo Morganwg was invited to become a co-opted member of the new Cambrian Literary Society of Dyfed and had attended the first meeting which was held on 26 October 1818 under the chairmanship of Bishop Burgess of St. Davids, where it was decided to hold an Eisteddfod in Carmarthen on 8-10 July 1819, he immediately issued a notice or scroll announcing that a *gorsedd* would be held in an enclosure near the town of Carmarthen — thus, he claimed, re-establishing Cadair Dyfed, calling it the Chair of the Province of Dinewr, and adding that it would be held under the patronage of Lord Dinewr under the crown of George the Third, king of the Isle of Britain.

I should explain that all the committee members of this first Provincial Eisteddfod except Iolo were Anglican Churchmen, but nonconformists were permitted to compete at the Eisteddfod. Iolo's expertise in Eisteddfod matters could not be ignored. Even Dafydd Ddu Eryri was personally consulted by the secretary of the Society on eisteddfodic traditions, and in order to calm his suspicious attitude to any literary projects outside Gwynedd, it was decided to send him an award (or bribe) of £10 as a mark of appreciation of his literary achievement.

The chair at the first Eisteddfod was for an *awdl* to Sir Thomas Picton, the local hero of Waterloo, and was won by one of Iolo's first Primrose Hill initiates, Gwallter Mechain, who was by that time Vicar of Manafon in Montgomeryshire. Another typical subject in another poetic competition at the Eisteddfod was 'An Elegy to Queen Charlotte'. These are examples of the sort of subjects which the provincial *eisteddfodau* set in order to win the support of the establishment after the war with France, but they

were subjects which Iolo and his followers would not have set. At the close of the chairing ceremony Iolo approached the winning poet and tied a blue band to his right arm, the insignia of his bardic grade in *gorsedd*. It is also said that Iolo approached Bishop Burgess begging him to allow himself to be initiated as druid by Iolo. The Bishop concurred and Iolo tied a white band on his right arm.

This form of initiation, that is outside the *gorsedd* circle, was sometimes resorted to later, for example when David James (Dewi o Ddyfed) initiated Bishop Thirwall of St. Davids on the stage of the Eisteddfod Pavilion at the Swansea Eisteddfod in 1863. Burgess probably regretted this move later. He was very much of the establishment and an outspoken anti-Unitarian, publishing tracts attacking the theological works of the Unitarian divine, Thomas Belsham. But the spread of Unitarianism was to Burgess a local problem also. He deplored the dependence of parishes in his diocese on Welsh clerics educated in Unitarian academies and nonconformist colleges, such as those established in his diocese by Unitarians like Tomos Glyn Cothi, Dafydd Dafis Castell Hywel and the Presbyterian College at Carmarthen. His solution to the problem was the establishment of St. David's College in Lampeter.

At the *gorsedd* held the day following the Dyfed Eisteddfod numerous clerics were initiated by Iolo, including John Jenkins, Vicar of Ceri, who later arranged for an oak chair to be made with the name of the Dyfed Eisteddfod carved in Iolo's invented alphabet and presented it to Gwallter Mechain.

It is obvious that Burgess did not share the enthusiasm of his clergy for Iolo's Bardic Movement. Iolo had emphasized all along that there was nothing alien to Christianity in Bardism. It was, according to him, christianized druidism or christianized Celticism. The Welsh clerics were far more aware of, and at ease with, the anti-Roman Catholic attitude of the early Celtic Church than Burgess was, and were happy to endorse Iolo's interpretation, in so far as it gave support to this anti-Roman Catholic or pro-protestant tradition which had been given prominence in some Welsh books in the attempt to justify the breakaway from the Papacy in Tudor times.

When the next provincial Eisteddfod, the Powys Eisteddfod, was held in Wrexham in 1820 Bishop Burgess objected to Gwallter Mechain's intention to hold a *gorsedd*, and the *gorsedd* was not held. This did not prevent John Jenkins (Ifor Ceri) and other

clerics from secretly holding *gorseddau* in their parishes. One was probably held in a cemetery in Llansilin and another in the grounds of the vicarage of Llangynyw in Powys when Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, a philanthropist, Oxford graduate and Hebrew scholar who had been convinced of the linguistic connection between Welsh and the language spoken in Noah's Ark, was initiated. These secret *gorseddau* were in no way linked to an *eisteddfod*, and even when held, they were only infrequently reported, and we have to depend on indirect evidence of them, such as certificates and explanatory notes in published works. Needless to say, both the Gorsedd and the Eisteddfod had to contend with the religious upheavals of the nineteenth century. The Calvinists were reluctant to participate in both, even objecting to the singing of Welsh folk-tunes like 'Hob y deri dando' on the stage of the Eisteddfod.

But some Arminian Wesleyans, like the Unitarians, were pioneers of the Gorsedd Movement. William Ellis Jones (Cawrdaf), poet, artist, journalist and Wesleyan, who, according to his certificate of membership, was initiated at the Provincial Eisteddfod of Caernarfon in 1821, presided at the *gorseddau* held during the Provincial Eisteddfod of Carmarthen in 1823. In the weekly, *Seren Gomer*, the editor explained, probably at the behest of Burgess, that the *gorsedd* was in no way an official eisteddfodic event. Indeed the *gorsedd* meeting became very much a fringe event at most Provincial Eisteddfodau. Cawrdaf was also the officiating bard at the famous *gorsedd* held at Abergafenni in 1838 where Villemarqué (Kervarker), a Breton nobleman and author of *Barsaz Breizh*, was initiated to be known in the *gorsedd* as Barz Nizon. In the *gorsedd* held by Cawrdaf in Cowbridge in 1839, an Unitarian and Chartist pub owner from Trecynon, Aberdâr, William Williams (Carw Coch), was initiated. He became the treasurer of the first National Eisteddfod held in 1861. David Griffith (Clwydfardd), a clockmaker who presided at most of the important *gorseddau* during the formative years of the Gorsedd between 1835 and 1894, was a Wesleyan preacher.

In fact the movement for the greater part of the last century was completely dominated by the only educated section of the *werin*, the ministers of religion and the clerics of the Anglican Church. Iolo Morganwg had opened the way by declaring that clerics and ministers of religion *ipse facto* could be members of the *gorsedd* and could be initiated as Druids, whereas others had

to be recommended or had to prove their worthiness as poets, authors or harpists before being considered as Bards or Ovates. The Gorsedd was as a result dominated by ministers and clerics. Iolo, as one would expect, being a good Unitarian, did not provide his new movement with a very orderly structure such as a body of rules and a constitution. Indeed it was only after the publication of some of his manuscripts in 1848 that the Welsh people became really aware of his intentions. But the lack of a sound national organization and strict rules led to disintegration and permitted innovations that would have enraged the founder. For example, John Williams (Ab Ithel), vicar of Llanymawddwy, introduced the Trinitarian doxology at the *gorsedd* ceremony at which he presided in Llangollen in 1858. Myfyr Morganwg, a watchmaker and lay preacher with the Independents, declared himself to be the Archdruid, a title that Iolo had rejected, adopting the style of Archdruid of Britain; he also rearranged the stones on the Rocking Stone site in Pontypridd on the lines of the serpent temples of the Middle East described by William Stulkeley. Ceiriog in 1873 made a vain attempt to establish within the Gorsedd Movement a new elitist group to supervise the work of the Gorsedd and called it Urdd y Ford Gron (The Order of the Round Table), reverting to Iolo's earlier abandoned claim that the bardic tradition was founded by Taliesin, Aneirin and Myrddin following discussion at King Arthur's Court. And Gwilym Cowlyd, poet, printer and convert to Anglicianism, offered the archdruidship of his breakaway *gorsedd*, Gorsedd Taliesin, which met on the banks of Llyn Geirionnydd near Llanrwst, to Daniel Lewis Lloyd, the Bishop of Bangor. He also offered membership of his *gorsedd* to the Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic of Wales, not to mention the Chief Rabbi, calling the National Eisteddfod Gorsedd the Gorsedd of Satan, a counterfeit fabrication or fraudulent imposition and the Gorsedd of the Disestablishmentarians. The Bards of the Isle of Britain were not impervious to interdenominational feuds. The Archdruid Dyfed, a Methodist preacher, was presented with a *stola*, as worn by priests, with the Methodists insignia of a dove on it, and he wore it at every *gorsedd* ceremony for fifteen years and later Archdruids did the same. The unknown presenter of the *stola* wanted to make it known that at last a Methodist had arrived. When Gwyndaf, an Independent Minister, became Archdruid, the dove was removed and a red dragon took its place.

The local or provincial loyalty of the bards also had a devastating effect. Ab Ithel, Vicar of Llanymawddwy, claimed in 1858 that the Gorsedd of Powys was founded by the three Powys poets, Llywarch Hen, Brochwel Ysgythrog and Gwron ab Cynferch. Gwilym Cowlyd a few years later, convinced by false reading of a line in the Book of Taliesin, announced to the nation that Taliesin Tad Awen had founded the Gwynedd Gorsedd on the shores of Llyn Geirionnydd, and he held *gorseddau* in what he called the ruins of Taliesin's Court for forty years. Myfyr Morganwg, after the death of Taliesin ab Iolo, claimed to be in line of succession to Iolo. He claimed ascendancy over all *gorseddau* and *gorseddogion* and produced a rehash of druidism and eastern cults which was challenged by some *gorseddogion* but left others such as Ab Ithel, Eben Fardd, Yr Estyn and Glasynys convinced. All four, at their request, were initiated as members by Myfyr Morganwg. But Gwilym Cowlyd would have none of it. His Gorsedd, he claimed, was the true Welsh Gorsedd. He adopted the Prince of Wales feathers as the insignia of his movement. His Gorsedd, he claimed, was the Gorsedd of the Principality of Wales and Myfyr Morganwg's Gorsedd had authority in Gwent only. The best proof of the sad state of the movement at that time is the fact that Ab Ithel held a *gorsedd* in Dinas Mawddwy in 1855 at which he initiated members while he himself was not even a member.

Gorseddau were frequently held independently of *eisteddfodau*. This was most frequently the case when Iolo presided. Taliesin ab Iolo held his 1834 *gorsedd* on the Rocking Stone in Pontypridd a month after the Cardiff Eisteddfod. Myfyr Morganwg's *gorsedd* for the first few years followed a tavern *eisteddfod*, but he soon abandoned the eisteddfodic activities. Ioan Ceri held a *gorsedd* on Bron Aran in Ceri in 1821, Cawrdaf held a *gorsedd* on Cadair Idris in 1824 and Thomas Richards a *gorsedd* on the lawn of his vicarage in Llangynyw in 1827. One could quote examples of *gorseddau* being held to proclaim *eisteddfodau* that did not, in the event, happen. Such was the *gorsedd* held in Beaumaris in 1859 by H. H. Davies (Pererin), but an alternative venue for the *eisteddfod* was later preferred, that of Denbigh. Another example is the 1878 proclamation *gorsedd* at Llandrindod. This happened during a crisis-period of ten years in the history of the National Eisteddfod, when the Gorsedd of Bards, without the support of the

bankrupt and defunct governing body of the National Eisteddfod, sought to preserve the national festival.

In spite of the disintegrating influences, local loyalties and lack of truly national awareness amongst the *werin*, being a member of the Bards of the Isle of Britain meant above all a dedication to bardic tradition and Welsh identity. The survival of the movement depended on this loyalty to the Welsh language, the bardic art (Cerdd Dafod) and the art of harp playing (Cerdd Dant). Gorsedd members provided the eisteddfodic know-how, the linguistic fluency required to stage the *eisteddfodau*, to lead and to adjudicate; and to the public the *gorseddogion* appeared to be in control of the Eisteddfodau. Some *eisteddfodwyr* seemed to be loyal to the National Eisteddfod for political, religious and class reasons and tended to favour more anglicised festivals, and even used the Eisteddfod platform and transactions to attack the Gorsedd and its obsession with the Welsh language and the bardic traditions, arguing for more English and for cosmopolitan music competitions. But the Gorsedd itself failed to remain aloof from these factors. Membership was granted to non-Welsh speakers, Eisteddfod patrons from amongst the anglicized gentry, members of Parliament, Trade Union Leaders and even members of the Royal Family.

In 1888, in order to prevent the further erosion of the role played by the Gorsedd in the National Eisteddfod and of the basic principles so dear to the Welsh enthusiasts, the leading Gorseddogion decided that the time had arrived to restructure their loyalty-based Gorsedd, to establish themselves as an organized body with permanent officials and to draw up a constitution. The new society was to be called Cymdeithas Gorsedd y Beirdd. The faithful and loyal were asked to contribute financially, enabling the secretary at least to recoup his expenses. Regalia and robes were almost non-existent. Myfyr Morganwg in 1850 and Ab Ithel in 1858 had tried to introduce robes, but most of the bards could not afford such items. White, blue and green arm bands were worn at times by the more enthusiastic, and the chaired or crown bards were permitted to wear their medals and crowns in *gorsedd* meetings. The sword used in the ceremonies was usually a military ceremonial sword borrowed for the occasion and the trumpet or Corn Gwlad was usually provided by the guest trumpeter himself. I should explain that the sword and the trumpet were only used within the *gorsedd* circle originally, but

they gradually became part of the chairing and the crowning ceremony. The presiding bard at these platform ceremonies originally asked the question *A oes heddwch* 'Is there Peace' and the answer would be *Heddwch* 'Peace'. This signified that the losers and the congregation had accepted the verdict of the adjudicators, and the successful poet would then be chaired or crowned. But with the increased participation of the Celtic nations in the *gorsedd* ceremony at the turn of the century, Hwfa Môn adopted the cry to signify peace amongst the Celtic nations. Later David Lloyd George, Prime Minister during the Great War, who was the usual guest speaker at the Chairing Ceremony, made good use of the custom to brighten his image.

But probably the most difficult problem facing the Gorsedd of Bards was the poverty of its members. Patrons of the bigger *eisteddfodau* from time to time would promise financial aid to poets if they attended, and aid was granted according to mileage travelled. Promises were sometimes made but not kept. The patrons, the anglicized gentry who had come by carriage to the *eisteddfod*, usually barricaded themselves as listeners on the side of the platform away from the 'humbler class of bards' who had in most cases walked barefoot to the *eisteddfod*. When the invited gentry revelled and guzzled in the home of the local patron in the evenings, the bards would resort to the taverns, and like typical supporters of any national event would end up arguing about the prizes awarded, and fighting.

The struggle of the gentry towards the end of the century to win the democratic vote in Wales against the Liberal challenge is manifest in the open patronage shown by them to the Gorsedd of Bards.

During the National Eisteddfod held in Liverpool in 1884 a local enthusiast offered a set of robes to the Bards. Unfortunately, they were a poor imitation of those worn by the Freemasons and it was decided to discard them.

When the Gorsedd was held in Wreccsam in 1888 Philip Yorke of Erddig, author of *The Royal Tribes of Wales*, known as 'one of the worst dressed men in Wales', presented his ceremonial sword for use in *gorsedd* and at the chairing and crowning ceremonies. At the Bangor Gorsedd of 1889, when Queen Marie of Rumania was initiated as a member, Sir John H. Puleston, who fought against David Lloyd George in the Caernarvonshire election in 1892, offered to meet the cost of providing robes to the

Gorsedd. Prof. Hubert Herkomer, a Fellow of the British Academy, designed the robes, but as for the head-dress worn by the Archdruid Clwydfardd which was in the shape of a bishop's mitre, we cannot be too sure who designed it, as Herkomer, along with T. H. Thomas (Arlunydd Pen-y-garn), the Herald of Bards, later regarded it as inappropriate. These were the robes worn in the Caernarfon Gorsedd in 1894 when Edward Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra were initiated as members. The accumulation of robes created a storage problem, but fortunately Lord Mostyn offered to store them in Neuadd Mostyn. A number of the gentry also volunteered to act as trustees. At the Llandudno Gorsedd of 1896 Sir Arthur Stepney of Llanelli presented a Banner designed by Arlunydd Pen-y-garn to the Gorsedd and at the Newport Proclamation Ceremony Hwfa Môn wore for the first time the tiara and breastplate designed by Herkomer and jointly paid for by Herkomer and W. Mansel Lewis of Strade, Llanelli. At the Cardiff Gorsedd of 1899 the Great Sword, also designed by Herkomer, was presented by him to the Gorsedd, and Lord Tredegar presented the Horn of Plenty designed by W. Goscombe John. When the Archdruid Dyfed in the Bangor Gorsedd in 1906 appealed to the gentry to present a harp for use in the *gorsedd* circle, Ab Eos Môn, a well known *penillion* singer, protested against the endless grovelling to the gentry, saying that the time had come for the *werin*, the ordinary people, to uphold the dignity of the Gorsedd and he offered one of his own triple harps to the Archdruid.

Gorsedd y Beirdd was totally immersed in the cultural life of Wales throughout the last century and its leaders were without doubt the élite of the Welsh cultural scene. Although Iolo had stated that *gorseddau* could be held in any place, the Welsh Bards were reluctant to hold *gorseddau* beyond Offa's Dyke, except in the case of Liverpool and Birkenhead, which were regarded as cities built on ancient Brythonic territory owned by a tribe called y Gordofigion.

A request by a contingent of London Welshmen that the National Eisteddfod be held in London was discussed at a meeting during the Eisteddfod at Aberdare in 1885. The Londoners convinced the Eisteddfod authorities by arguing that the Gorsedd and National Eisteddfod were due to be held in South Wales in 1887 and that Iolo had stated that *gorseddau* could be held in London as long as they were held under the patronage of the

Chair of Glamorgan. Clwydfardd, the Archdruid, immediately announced the outcome of the deliberations from the *maen llog*. Gwilym Cowlyd of Llanrwst, the outspoken rebel Bard of the Taliesin Gorsedd, shouted in a high voice that the Gorsedd of Bards had no right to arrange for a *gorsedd* to be held outside the Principality. Whereupon Clwydfardd replied that the Gorsedd could hold its meetings in 'Cymru, Lloegr a Llanrwst' (Wales, England, and Llanrwst). The following year a *gorsedd* proclaiming the London Eisteddfod was held in the Gardens of the Inner Temple following a banquet given by the Welsh Societies of the city in the Freemasons' Tavern in honour of the Gorsedd of Bards when toasts were drunk to Cymru Fu, Cymru Fydd; Gorsedd y Beirdd; the Eisteddfod; the Pulpit and the Press; the President and the Ladies. The proclamation ceremony seems to have been a sad scene. It rained, which meant that no robes could be worn. 'The archdruid', so the Press reported, 'stood bare headed for a long time in the drenching rain . . . Mounting the central stone which represents King Arthur's Chair, the Archdruid held out crosswise two gold hilted swords, upon which all the bards laid hands while the Druid in a loud voice asked: A oes Heddwch?'

A short explanatory pamphlet on this London festival held in the Royal Albert Hall on 9-12 August 1887 explained that the motto of the Gorsedd was 'Dan Nawdd Duw a'i Dangnef', adding that 'It is the motto of the Chair instituted at Caerleon, according to tradition by King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and it was to the Province of this Chair that the old city of London was attached.'

The next London *gorsedd* was held in the Gardens of the Inner Temple in Alban Hefin 1908 for the proclamation of the 1909 Eisteddfod, and it was conducted by Hwfa Môn. The proclamation programme was exclusively in Welsh with the title of the Gorsedd and Eisteddfod printed on the title page in Iolo's invented alphabet. The chairman of the local Eisteddfod Committee was E. Vincent Evans who was also Secretary of the National Eisteddfod. The Gorsedd banquet 'held in the King's Hall' was chaired by Lord Aberdare and entertainment provided by the London Male Voice Choir led by Merlin Morgan.

The Eisteddfod itself was held on 15-18 June 1909 and Kensington Gardens was the venue chosen for the *gorsedd* ceremonies. This Eisteddfod was a memorable one. The sumptuous banquet provided by Lord Tredegar was attended by three

hundred guests. Representatives from both Ireland and Brittany were present at the *gorsedd* ceremony, and amongst those initiated as members was D. R. Hughes (Myfyr Eifion) who later became Secretary of the National Eisteddfod. And, last but not least, the archdruid Hwfa Môn was given the honour of awarding the highest poetic awards to two of our greatest poets, W. J. Gruffydd and T. Gwynn Jones.

During this century, the Gorsedd has witnessed the establishment of Breton and Cornish *gorseddau*, its closer incorporation into the National Eisteddfod, and (thanks especially to the contribution made by Cynan, Recorder of the Gorsedd and twice Archdruid) the refinement of its rites and ceremonies, regalia and pageantry. As a body the Gorsedd seeks to promote the Welsh language, to enhance the status of the Welsh creative artist and enrich the cultural life of the nation and honour its promoters.

The Gorsedd of Bards is celebrating its bicentenary this year [1992]. An exhibition on the History of the Gorsedd was opened in the National Library of Wales on 18 June. The proclaiming of the Powys National Eisteddfod to be held in Llanellwedd on 4 July will also be a bicentenary celebration and during the Eisteddfod week in Aberystwyth in August a banquet will be held at Neuadd Pen-bryn under the chairmanship of the Archdruid, W. R. P. George.

The Gorsedd has also decided to introduce a new ceremony at the Aberystwyth Eisteddfod, the ceremony of investing the best Prose Writer of the Year with the Prose Medal which since 1951 has been awarded in a drab ceremony which has for years been criticised as being unworthy of the occasion and contrasting dismally with the pageantry of the Gorsedd crowning and churning ceremonies. Creative prose has been very much neglected by the Eisteddfod in the past, mainly because creative prose in the form of novels and short stories were regarded by the puritanical *eisteddfodwyr* as detrimental to morality. During the last fifty years there has been a change of attitude, and the Gorsedd in its bicentenary year gladly wishes to make the Welsh nation more aware of this by granting equal recognition and status to creative prose writers and poets alike.

Finally, to mark the bicentenary of the first *gorsedd* ever held on Welsh territory, the governing body of Beirdd Ynys Prydain have decided to hold a special *gorsedd* on Bryn Owain, in the

Vale of Glamorgan, on the very site where it was held on 21 March 1795.

[A full account of the history of the Gorsedd may be found in the volume by Geraint and Zonia Bowen, *Hanes Gorsedd y Beirdd* (Llandysul, 1991). See also Dillwyn Miles, *The Secret of the Bards of the Isle of Britain* (Llandybïe, 1992). Eds.]