

GUTUN OWAIN, or GRUFFUDD ap HUW ab OWAIN (fl. c. 1460- c. 1498), poet, transcriber of manuscripts, and genealogist

Name: Gutun Owain

Gender: Male

Occupation: poet, transcriber of manuscripts, and genealogist

Area of activity: History and Culture; Land Ownership; Literature and Writing; Poetry; Royalty and Society; Scholarship and Languages

Author: Thomas Roberts

A gentleman of Dulleston in the manor of Traean in the lordship of Oswestry [cf. [Holbache, David](#)]; he had lands also in the adjoining parish of S. Martins, and is said to have been buried in that church. He was a bardic disciple of [Dafydd ab Edmwnd](#)'s, and became a *pencerdd*, like [Dafydd](#), of great skill in complicated metres. Further, he became a scholar and genealogist of repute, and his manuscripts in our libraries exhibit a wide range of interests - he was a diligent chronicler and copyist: we have, in his fine hand, copies of the old 'Bruts,' of the lives and genealogies of the saints, of the prosodic 'grammars' of bardic teachers, of mediaeval religious prose, of medical and astronomical works, of Welsh proverbs, and of the pedigrees of noble Welsh families.

He is sometimes styled the historian of Basingwerk and of Strata Florida abbeys; there is no proof that he was ever at Strata Florida, but he certainly stayed at Basingwerk, where in all probability he wrote the portion of the '[Black Book of Basingwerk](#)' which is in his hand - a large part of 'Brut Tysilio' and the whole of 'Brut y Saeson' down to 1461. Another of his manuscripts contains copies of 'Brut y Brenhinedd' and 'Ystoria Dared,' together with a paraphrase of 'Brut y Tywysogion' and a chronicle of his own period down to 1471. His, too, is our earliest copy of the Welsh 'Book of Heraldry,' and of the 'Grammar' which contains the bardic rules laid down by [Dafydd ab Edmwnd](#) in the Carmarthen eisteddfod of the supposed date of 1451; Gutun Owain's 'Grammar' and his arrangement of the *cynganeddion* and of the strict metres formed the basis of the 16th century treatises on Welsh prosody. We have several calendars by him, and one pedigree-book - the sole survival in his own hand, but the frequent references to him by later genealogists prove that he was their authority on the pedigrees of Gwynedd and Powys and the March; again, he was one of the main authorities used by the commission which was appointed to trace the Welsh descent of king Henry VII.

One old record makes Gutun contemporary with Edward IV. It has also been asserted that he accompanied [Dafydd ab Edmwnd](#) to the Carmarthen eisteddfod. If we were to accept [lolo Morganwg](#)'s date for this (1451), then Gutun must have been a mere lad at that time; but the date is very uncertain. Again, the dates '1455' and '1456' which have been assigned to one of Gutun's manuscripts ([Llanstephan MS 28](#) at N.L.W.) must now be rejected - true, the dates are in his own hand, but they are not evidence of the date of the manuscript itself, being merely reproduced (as was usual with transcribers) from the archetype which he was copying, and therefore evidence merely of the date of that archetype. It may indeed be stated with fair certainty that not one of his eight manuscripts is older than 1470. True, some of his own panegyrics can be dated 1462-5, and no doubt his love-poems belong to his early life, but the greater part of his work falls between 1470 and 1500. Eleven of his elegies can be definitely dated between 1476 and 1498, and all his poems to [Dafydd ap Ieuan ap Iorwerth](#), abbot of Llanegwestl (Valle Crucis), must needs belong to the years before [Dafydd](#)'s election in 1500 to the see of S. Asaph - not one of Gutun's *cywyddau* and *awdlau* to this patron of his has any mention of the promotion, nor have we any elegy by him referring to the bishop's death in 1503. It is now known, too, that the attribution to Gutun of [Peniarth MS 129](#) (written after 1500) is incorrect - that manuscript is clearly not in his hand, and cannot therefore serve as proof (as was till recently thought) that the poet was alive even in 1500. An anonymous elegy upon him speaks of the brevity of his life, and it seems likely enough that he did not live into the 16th century.

Gutun Owain was a master craftsman in verse. All his poetry is 'court poetry'; there are *cywyddau* of petition or of portrayal (*dyfalu*), of panegyric or of elegy. Closely following the precepts laid down in the professional 'grammars,' he lauded the virtues of his patrons - their noble blood, their bravery, their culture and sagacity, and above all, the splendour of their mansions and of their housekeeping. He is at his best in petition and elegy, in the imaginative ingenuity of his tropes and similitudes, in the warmth of his praise of bard or abbot or nobleman.

Author

Thomas Roberts, (1885 - 1960)

Sources

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Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, iv, 207-21, xv, 99-109

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Handlist of Manuscripts in the National Library of Wales

Acton Griscom, '[The "Book of Basingwerk" and Ms. Cotton Cleopatra B.V I-II, Y Cymmrodor](#), xxxv, 49-116

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E. J. Jones, *Medieval heraldry; some fourteenth century heraldic works* (1943)

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G. J. Williams, *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* (1934)

selection of Gutun Owain's poetry in *Gorchestion Beirdd Cymru* (1773, 1864), 2nd ed., 199-223

E. Bachellery, *L'Oeuvre Poétique de Gutun Owain* (Paris 1950), 2 vols.

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Gutun Owain](#)

Works

NLW Archives: Peniarth MS 129: Llyfr achau Gutun Owain

NLW Archives: NLW MS 3026C: Calendar, a treatise on urine, etc.

NLW Archives: NLW MS 7006D: Llyfr du Basing

Additional Links

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