



The Taliesin Tradition

with Dr Gwilym Morus

Beginning March 17th at the Quaker Meeting House, Aberystwyth.

Taliesin is one of the most renowned figures of Welsh folklore, his tale told for almost a thousand years the length and breadth of Wales. But how and why did the historic 6th century Taliesin become the mythical bard? What does his myth mean and how did it develop? What is the real meaning of the peculiar and esoteric poems recorded in *The Book of Taliesin*?

This short course will attempt to answer these questions as well as many others regarding Taliesin, Chief of Bards. By suggesting new interpretations of the medieval texts, Dr Gwilym Morus will guide participants through the labyrinthine twists and turns of the Taliesin tradition, separating out its different historic and mythic strands, giving deeper insight into the practices of the medieval Welsh bardic schools and their use of mythology.

Course Outline

Week 1 - *The Book of Taliesin* and the historic poems.

The Book of Taliesin is the primary source for Taliesin poetry. This medieval manuscript records not only the very early 6th century poems composed by the historic Taliesin but also the later legendary and prophetic poems composed by later bards working in his voice. In the first part of this seminar we will look at the manuscript as a whole, suggesting its possible uses by medieval bards. In the second part we will look at current research into the historic Taliesin, with particular focus on the poems attributed to him, what they tell us about 6th century Britain and the bardic practices of this period.

Week 2 - *The Taliesin myth in medieval Welsh poetry: Prydydd y Moch.*

Many generations of Welsh bards have included aspects of the Taliesin myth in their poetry. By looking at the most important examples this session will assess what the Taliesin myth meant to the medieval bardic schools and how it informed their own practice of myth making. We will focus in particular on Prydydd y Moch, one of the greatest Welsh bards of his time who served the

royal house of Gwynedd as chief bard between 1174 and 1220. He is also closely associated with several poems in *The Book of Taliesin*, an association that gives a rare insight into the less formal activities of court bards.

Week 3 - 'Angar Kyfundawt' and other poems from *The Book of Taliesin*.

'Angar Kyfundawt' is the longest poem found in the *The Book of Taliesin*, and also one of the most intriguing. Possibly composed by Prydydd y Moch himself, this poem conveys many esoteric ideas closely related to the Taliesin myth. By also referring to some of the other legendary and prophetic poems from the manuscript this seminar will sift out their relevant features and what they tell us about the Taliesin Tradition.

Week 4 - The Tale of Taliesin, Taliesin's Grave and Taliesin today

The Tale of Taliesin was first written down in the late medieval / early modern period. By comparing and contrasting the different manuscript versions the core elements of the myth will be brought into view. The Tale of Taliesin is also associated with Taliesin's Grave and the Cletwr valley, an association that could have important implications for our understanding of the mythical bard. To finish we will look at how Taliesin's poetry still influences the modern bardic tradition of Wales and how his fame as a mythical figure has spread to the rest of the UK and beyond. By looking at the extent of his influence in modern culture this last part will assess the Taliesin Tradition today.

The course consists of 4 x 2 hour seminars, held once a week at the Quaker Meeting House, Aberystwyth. The first session will be held on March 17th at 7pm and then will run every Monday evening until April 7th.

The course fee is £30 for all four seminars or £8 for each individual seminar; this covers participation, all course materials and access to the course tutor via e-mail. All texts discussed will be provided in their Welsh original and in translation.

To register your place, please email welshmythology@gmail.com. More information about Dr Gwilym Morus and his courses is available at the website welshmythology.com