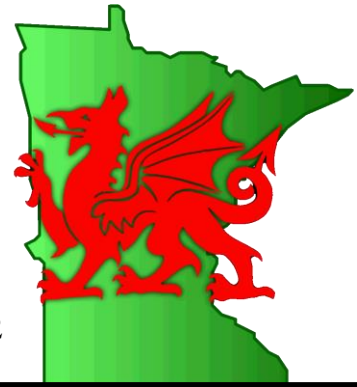


# St. David's Society News

Gwanwyn/Spring 2025

Vol. 43, Issue 2



## May 4 Gymanfa Ganu planned in St. Paul

The St. David's Society's Centennial Gymanfa Ganu [Welsh Hymn Sing] will be held on Sun., May 4, 2:00 p.m., at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church [SAPLC], 2323 Como Ave., St. Paul. *Note: All construction work is completed, so all entrances are open.*

**Gymanfa director Naomi Karstad**, St. Paul, is a lifelong lover of communal singing. Her roots in the Swedish/Norwegian tradition fostered a love of singing hymns and singing with others.

Karstad began her choral career with the Gustavus Choir and remembers being part of *Gymanfaoedd* led by Ellis Jones there. It was there she discovered there were other ethnic groups that loved to sing in harmony!!

She has sung with the Bach Society, Minnesota Chorale, the Minnesota Opera Chorus, MacPhail's Sonomento and numerous church choirs. Naomi is currently on the voice faculty at MacPhail, is the choir director at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Sunfish Lake, and loves to sing opera when the opportunity presents itself.

**David Evan Thomas**, St. David's Society member, will accompany on the grand piano. [See article about David on next page.]

The Gymanfa Ganu will be livestreamed at the SAPLC youtube channel: <https://tinyurl.com/SAPLC-livestream>

**Marianne Reininger**, Minneapolis harper, will play Celtic tunes on her pedal folk harp, while singers rest their voices. She retired from teaching kindergarten for 42 years in Wisconsin to take care of her granddaughters in Bloomington. She loves to travel at any opportunity. She enjoys playing piano, harp, handbells. She and her son perform with a faith-based drum group throughout the Midwest. She is excited to be part of the Gymanfa Ganu.

### **IF YOU OWN A WELSH HYMNAL, PLEASE BRING IT ALONG!**

SAPLC members will provide Welsh cakes [*Pice ar y Maen*] and Welsh tea (free) after the singing. *Cawl Cennin*, Potato Leek Soup, with Soda Bread, prepared by an SAPLC chef, will be served later.

- **Reservations are required for the soup supper (\$5/person).**
- **When reserving, please indicate if you prefer vegetarian potato leek soup.**
- **Please contact Mary Mergenthal at [mary.mergenthal@gmail.com](mailto:mary.mergenthal@gmail.com) or call her at 612-670-8510. YOU NEED TO RESERVE BY MON., APRIL 28, so the chef can properly prepare.**
- **Reservation payment will be collected May 4. (Cash or checks payable to St. David's Society of Minnesota. No credit cards.)**



**Naomi Karstad, Gymanfa conductor**



**Welsh church commissions  
music by David Evan Thomas**

St. David's Society member David Evan Thomas, two-time McKnight Foundation Fellow, and noted Welsh-American composer, has been commissioned by St. Mary's Priory Church in Abergavenny to compose a setting for choir and organ of Psalm 121, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills."

It will be performed this summer for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of choirmaster Tim Pratt's tenure. The treble voices in the choir are a mix of girls and boys.

The church, located in southeast Wales, is rightfully proud of having served the people of Abergavenny and the surrounding area for over one thousand years.



**Marianne Reininger, Gymanfa harper**

**Newsletter Editor:** Mary Morris Mergenthal

**St. David's Society of MN Board members:**

Janice Barbee, president; Pam Rose, treasurer and membership chair; Ron Adams; Hywel Roberts; David Richards; Shannon King

## March 1 — A grand celebration of St. David's Day

On March 1, the very day that celebrates our Welsh patron saint, the St. David's Society of Minnesota, gathered to commemorate him, to celebrate the centenary of Plaid Cymru [the National Party of Wales], to enjoy leek soup and sandwiches, and to sing a few Welsh songs.

President Janice Barbee and Board member Hywel Roberts got us in zoom contact with Welsh storyteller, Daniel Morden, originally from Cwmbran, south Wales. Daniel told us the ancient stories of *The Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach* and *Taliesin*. Mary Morris Mergenthal shared personal memories of contacts with Plaid Cymru leaders.

We sang several songs that Plaid Cymru has sung in protests and marches, for instance to protest the flooding of Capel Celyn, the government's resistance to Welsh radio and TV stations, and the treatment of miners. Ryan ander-evans led us in singing *This Land is Your Land* after we watched a video of a Welsh version that was popular in the 1960s. We sang along to *Men of Harlech*, which was sung in the House of Commons to protest Brexit! And we watched a stirring recent performance of Dafydd Iwan, a former president of Plaid Cymru and a famous songwriter and singer in Wales, singing *Yma o Hyd (We are Still Here)*. And here's a link to a speech the actor Michael Sheen gave using "yma o hyd": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fpV0OFC0vc>

Best, of course, was greeting old friends and meeting the good number of new attendees. If you missed the event, don't miss our next: the Welsh Hymn Sing on May 4, 2:00 p.m., also at St. Anthony Park Lutheran Church.



Society members enjoyed folk tales of Wales on St. David's Day. They were presented via Zoom by Daniel Morden from Abergavenny in southeast Wales. Photo by Sally Evans.

## Laurel Bradshaw, teaching Welsh and Welsh dance for decades

Your editor asked Laurel when she first started learning Welsh and why. Her full reply is available on our web page <https://stdavidsofminn.org>. Read on for her edited comments.

"I have always loved languages in general. When working on my MA in musicology at the University of Iowa, a I took medieval Welsh. I attended my first Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu [WNGG] in Minneapolis (1987).

2 – Tell us about becoming a Certified Welsh Folk Dance Instructor, please:

"I was also into folk-dancing in Iowa City. After I got bitten by the Welsh bug, I tried teaching some of them to the folk-dance group.

I applied for a job in a small-town public library (Oneonta, N.Y.). The salary was laughable but I was desperate.

The silver lining was that I had learned about Welsh Heritage Week, and, lo and behold, it was to be held in New York, and



I could commute there from Oneonta. I was told there was one more opening in the Welsh folkdance certification course that was being offered for the first time (and so far, only time) in North America. Was I interested? You bet I was!! That was in 1988. After that course, I was one of 11 certified Welsh folk-dance instructors in North America.



3 – When did you first start teaching Welsh?

That job in New York only lasted a couple of years, and then began more fruitless job hunting. The economy had crashed and libraries were closing, not hiring. Finally came to live with my sister in St. Paul. So that got me here at the tail end of 1990. Within a week, I was going to Tapestry for folk-dancing, and I met someone who told me there was a Welsh minister at Plymouth Congregational. That was Vivian Jones, of course. I went to check it out, and Martha Davies (then Martha Dickey) was serving tea after the service. The rest is history!

Martha introduced me to the St. David's Society, and I found there was a group

trying to start a Welsh folk-dance group, or at least learn a few dances to perform at the St. David's Day banquet. I had had a taste of learning modern Welsh at Welsh Heritage Week. Because I had taken the medieval course I could read Welsh, but not speak it. So WHW threw me into the Advanced Class, which proved to be just fine! But it was sort of baptism by fire. I then picked up some books and tapes to keep learning on my own.

Martha was teaching Welsh then. I think it was about three years later, that she met Phil Davies, married and moved to Iowa. So, I took over teaching the Welsh class after that, about 1994 I think, and I've been doing it ever since.

I eventually got a job subbing for the Minneapolis Public Library, and I never did finish my MA musicology thesis, or go on to do medieval studies. But I've sure had a lot of fun with Welsh folk dancing and teaching the language classes, and doing more genealogy, and going to Welsh Heritage Week many times, including going to Nant Gwrtheyrn [*Welsh Language Centre for Adult Learners in disused quarrying village in north Wales*], and singing with Crempogau [*Welsh language quartet composed of Society members*], teaching Welsh to members of a church choir planning to go Wales, and then getting to sing with them, and doing the Celtic Festival at Murphy's Landing, and leading Traed y Ddraig [*StDS folk dance group, "Feet of the Dragon"*] for 25 years (!). It just keeps getting better and better.

Now that Siân Frick is no longer teaching, I'm the one who gets asked. Dan Proud and I have been doing a Welsh folkdance session at NAFOW the last two years. And we've been asked to do it again this year in Ottawa. So even though that first job in New York turned out to be a disaster, nevertheless, it put me where I needed to be for all the rest that followed.

## Learn Welsh THIS YEAR!

### Update on Twin Cities Welsh classes

Welsh classes continue, taught by the Laurel Bradshaw. NEW information on where and when: In-person on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays of each month: i.e., April 12 and 26. Where? 8844 Stevens Ave. Questions? Please text or call Laurel at 952-607-8670.

### Summer Welsh classes further afield

**July 20–27, 2025, Cwrs Cymraeg** [Welsh Course]. One-week Welsh language immersion course sponsored by Cymdeithas Madog, Marist University, Poughkeepsie N.Y.; Scholarships available for all ages. For information and registration: [www.madog.org](http://www.madog.org) or [speakwelsh.org](http://speakwelsh.org); [secretary@madog.org](mailto:secretary@madog.org)

**July 20–27, 2025, Welsh Heritage Week**, Rio Grande University, Rio Grande, Ohio. [www.welshheritageweek.org](http://www.welshheritageweek.org) For information and registration: Beth Landmesser [hwyl@ptd.net](mailto:hwyl@ptd.net) (570) 814-7689.



Oh, rapture! **Holly Windle** (Rapturous Maiden) and **Richard Rames** (Dragoon Guard) have been at it again. They were cast members in the recent Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company's production of "Patience," which ran through April 6 at The Conn Theater in Minneapolis. *Photo by Sally Evans.*

### NAFOW 2025

**Ottawa, Ontario – Aug. 27–31**  
**North American Festival of Wales**

Sponsored by the Welsh North American Association.

Dr. Megan Williams, Executive Secretary  
P.O. Box 1054, Trumansburg, NY, 14886  
[IHQ@theWNAA.org](mailto:IHQ@theWNAA.org)

**Minnesota Welsh Hymn Festival**  
**Sun., Sept. 28, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.**

**First Presbyterian Church, Mankato, Minn.**

Mari Morgan, New Jersey, director of North American Welsh Choir, is expected to direct the singing.

Special music featuring Minnesota poets and musicians is also being planned.

Contact Minnesota Welsh Ass'n Board member, Sally Evans, [stpaulsally@gmail.com](mailto:stpaulsally@gmail.com), (612) 600-0520, for more info.

**To the St. David's Society, with gratitude —**

“Through the window by your cradle shines a moonbeam soft and clear..”

So begins “Suo Gan”—the lullaby we sing our one-year-old Ellis every night.

“Calm sets the sun over the hills of Caernarvon...”

So laments “Morfa Rhuddlan,” from “Songs of the Dragon,” assembled by the Welsh National Gymanfa Ganu Association. My latest album (called “Homeward Annwyl”) starts with this melody.

“Gentle friends, here we come to ask—may we have leave to sing?”

So goes the Mari Lwyd, which tops our Christmas tree every winter. Welsh cakes are a year-round treat.

Five years ago, I had nowhere near this connection with my culture—and I can't thank you all enough for sharing your Welshness with me. Heck, I even lifted this essay format from Ilene Dawn Alexander's piece in [Today's Harlech](#).

I am forever grateful for the ways you all have helped me learn my Welshness. Thank you.

— ryan ander-evans



Borth-y-Gest in Gwynedd, north Wales, near Porthmadog, is said to be the launching site for Madoc ab Owen Gwynedd. According to folklore, he was the Welsh prince who sailed to the Americas in 1170. Some claim, therefore, that he discovered America before Columbus, landing perhaps near Mobile, Alabama.

*Photo by Debra Eckley Roberts, Borth.*

## Well-Read Dragons Book Group

11:45 am - 1:00 pm on Zoom: [StDS Zoom Link](#).

Meeting ID 820 6997 0508; Passcode 153429

**On June 7<sup>th</sup>, we'll be discussing *Sugar and Slate* by Charlotte Williams OBE**, a Welsh-Guyanese award-winning writer, academic, and cultural critic. This book won Wales Book of the Year in 2003.

Excerpts from nation.cymru review:

"*Sugar and Slate* is a 'classic', enshrined in the pantheon of Welsh literature, yet too little known...Williams pushes us to ask what 'Welsh' means, what Guyanese means, as much as her luminous words and intricate structure force a deeper understanding of 'classic'.

In her very first paragraph, Williams says, 'the Africa thing hung about me like a Welsh Not, a heavy encumbrance on my soul: a Not-identity; an awkward reminder of what I was or what I wasn't...'

Despite the difficulties of this land, Williams loves 'poor old mixed-up Wales ... its contours and its contradictions'... She demands that we rethink what it means to be 'proper Welsh', to love language and landscape without demanding a particular colour or accent, to be Welsh without imposing a homogenous lie on the many of us who cannot aspire to the mythical ideal.

In our complicated national conversation, we all need subtlety, imagination, a genuine historical understanding and love for the many parts of ourselves."

**And on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, join us for a discussion on *Clear* by Carys Davies.**

Carys was born in Llangollen and grew up in Newport and the Midlands. She has won numerous awards for her novels and short stories. *Clear* was picked by the New York Times as one of the best historical fiction books of 2024.

From Goodreads:

1843. On a remote Scottish island, Ivar, the sole occupant, leads a life of quiet isolation until the day he finds a man unconscious on the beach below the cliffs. The newcomer is John Ferguson, an impoverished church minister sent to evict Ivar and turn the island into grazing land for sheep. Unaware of the stranger's intentions, Ivar takes him into his home, and in spite of the two men having no common language, a fragile bond begins to form between them. Meanwhile on the mainland, John's wife Mary anxiously awaits news of his mission.

Against the rugged backdrop of this faraway spot beyond Shetland, Carys Davies's intimate drama unfolds with tension and tenderness: a touching and crystalline study of ordinary people buffeted by history and a powerful exploration of the distances and connections between us. Perfectly structured and surprising at every turn, *Clear* is a marvel of storytelling, an exquisite short novel by a master of the form.

**Membership Info** (also found on our website: <https://stdavidsofmn.org>)

Individual Annual (July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025) — \$25

Partner/Family Annual (July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025) — \$40

*(2 adults & may inc. children under age 18 under same roof)*

Individual Lifetime (one-time payment) — \$225

Partner/Family Lifetime (one-time payment) — \$300

**Please make checks payable to ST. DAVID'S SOCIETY OF MN**

**Mail to: Pam Rose, Treasurer**

**8514 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.**

**Bloomington, MN 55425**

**Please be sure to indicate name(s), address, phone number, email.**

Also, please indicate if you have no email or seldom use it and if you prefer to receive the newsletter by email or USPS mail.

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