

## 'THE VOICE CONVENTIONAL'

### Druidic Myths and Freemasonry

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The nomination of Dr Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Wales, as the next Archbishop of Canterbury has caused controversy in some quarters, particularly because of his views on gay clergy. Last August, Dr Williams was involved in a more unlikely controversy, when, in recognition of his contribution to Welsh culture and literature, he was initiated into the *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain*, the Assembly of the Bards of the Island of Britain, a body of distinguished Welshmen which since the nineteenth century has organised the ceremonial associated with the *eisteddfod*. The ritual of the *Gorsedd* purports to be Druidical, and evangelical groups in both England and America complained that Archbishop Williams was participating in pagan ceremonies, a view which caused offence in Wales, where the intimately-linked *gorsedd* and national *eisteddfod* are the chief institutional expressions of Welsh-speaking culture. The fact that the Queen (whose bardic name is Elisabeth o Windsor) and the Duke of Edinburgh (or Philip Meirionydd) are also members of the *gorsedd*, was hardly mentioned.

The *gorsedd* is a separate body from the *eisteddfod*, and they have distinct histories. *Gorsedd* is a word which is difficult to translate. It originally meant a mound or barrow, and so by extension was used for a throne, and thus came to be applied to formal judicial gatherings. The *eisteddfod*, whose name derives from the Welsh word for sitting, is a musical and literary competition whose origins can be traced back to at least 1176. The *gorsedd* did not become linked to the *eisteddfod* until 1819. The *gorsedd* elaborated the ceremonial aspect of the *eisteddfod*, and helped turn the informal local *eisteddfodau* of the eighteenth century into the imposing spectacle which is the modern Royal National Eisteddfod. The *gorsedd* comprises three orders, which are, in ascending order of seniority, *ofyddion* (ovates), who wear green robes; *beirdd* (bards), whose costume is sky blue; and *derwyddon* (druids), the most distinguished order, into which Archbishop Williams was initiated, who wear robes of pure white. The head of the *gorsedd* is the Archdruid, who is elected for a term of

three years. National and provincial *eisteddfodau* are summoned by the Recorder, an official of the *gorsedd*, who, a year and a day beforehand, reads a proclamation, headed by the motto, 'The Truth Against the World', which invites all people to attend the *eisteddfod*, to be held 'in the face of the sun and the eye of the light', 'where no naked weapon shall appear against them'.

Each day of the *eisteddfod* commences with a meeting of the *gorsedd*, which is held in a circle of twelve stone pillars, specially set up for the occasion. A large flat-topped stone, known as the Logan stone, is placed in the centre of the circle. Facing it, and marking the east, is the Stone of the Covenant, at which the Herald Bard stands, and behind this are the Portal stones which are guarded by purple-robed Marshals. The right hand portal stone points to sunrise on midsummer day, while the left-hand stone is aligned with the rising sun at midwinter. The shadows thrown by these stones form the pattern /|\, symbolising the name of God. The Archdruid with his court and retinue enter the sacred circle, and the meeting of the *gorsedd* is proclaimed by four great trumpet calls, one to each point of the compass.

The meetings of the *gorsedd* contain a number of ritual components which are repeated by the *gorsedd* in such major ceremonies of the *eisteddfod* as the *coroni*, the crowning of the poet who submits the best volume of poetry, and the *cadeirio*, the enthronement of the poet who submits a long poem in a strict metrical form. These elements are:

A proclamation of peace. The Archdruid, standing on the logan stone, cries 'A oes heddwch' (Is there peace?), to which the assembly replies, 'Heddwch' (peace). The herald holds a great sword, which is taken in and out of its sheath three times to signify peace.

The reading of the *gorsedd* prayer.

A roll call of bards, both living and dead.

The presentation of the *corn hirlas* or horn of plenty (literally 'the long blue') by a young married woman, dressed in scarlet robes, representing the local community.

The presentation by a young girl, also dressed in scarlet robes, of a 'basket of flowers from the land and soil of Wales'.

The performance of the *dawns y blodau*, a floral dance, based on a pattern of gathering flowers from the field.

The banner and other regalia of the *gorsedd* further elaborate the Druid symbolism. The various symbols on the banner of the *gorsedd* include golden garlands of oak and mistletoe, the mystical sign of the three rays, the slogan 'Truth Against the World', the Welsh dragon, a crystal ring symbolising the sacred circle of the *gorsedd* and the word 'Heddwch' (peace), surrounded by oak leaves, a leek, a daffodil and mistletoe. Similar imagery recurs in the banners displayed in the *eisteddfod* pavilion.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was widely believed that the *gorsedd* was of enormous antiquity. The eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* declared that the *gorsedd* was 'as old at least as the time of Prydain the son of Ædd the Great, who lived many centuries before the Christian era', and thus by implication created by the Druids. In 1907, the eminent astronomer and director of the Solar Physics Association, Sir Norman Lockyer, gave a lecture in Swansea on the *gorsedd*. Lockyer was among the first scientists to suggest that Stonehenge and the Pyramids had astronomical functions. But, for Lockyer, the *gorsedd* put both Stonehenge and ancient Egypt in the shade. He declared that 'in my opinion your *gorsedd* in Wales is a thing forty centuries old. That is a long period of time. It makes the *gorsedd* I take it just about the oldest thing that we have on the planet connected with any human activity past or present'. Lockyer reached his conclusions by examining the alignment of the stone circles used by the *gorsedd*. He urged that further inquiries should be instituted in Wales, and declared that there were many points at which Welsh tradition would be of the utmost value to science.

This research has indeed been undertaken, but, far from confirming the antiquity of the *gorsedd*, it has established that the *gorsedd* is a modern creation. In particular, the Welsh scholar Griffith John Williams has demonstrated how the ceremonies of the *gorsedd* were invented in the late eighteenth century by Edward Williams, a stonemason who, under his bardic name of Iolo Morganwg or Ned of Glamorgan, was one of the most accomplished but eccentric Welsh poets and scholars. Iolo was born in 1746 in the hamlet of Pennon in Llan Carfon in Glamorganshire. His father was a stonemason. Iolo was too sickly to attend school, and from the age of nine worked desultorily at his father's trade, while at the same

time making up for his lack of schooling by constant private study. Iolo's parents spoke English at home, and he learnt Welsh from an enthusiastic scholar of Welsh poetry who lived nearby. After his mother's death, Iolo left Wales and worked as a mason in different parts of England, finally pitching up in London, where he cut an exotic figure in the London Welsh community and, as a self-taught genius, attracted a great deal of attention in the literary world.

Iolo described himself in a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* as follows:

Edward Williams is now about forty years of age and lives by the occupation of a journeyman mason. He is remarkably sober and temperate, very seldom drinks any strong liquor, and, if he sometimes tastes them, it is in very small quantities, and was never seen in liquor. His food is almost entirely vegetables; and he is a professed Pythagorean in respect of animal food. He has other singularities; none of them, however, to my knowledge, of a vicious cast. Though not in the least given to wastefulness or extravagance, he is but a poor economist; and when was a poet known to be otherwise!...Edward Williams lives the life of a hermit...He is never seen walking without a book in his hand. In his religious opinions he seems inclined to Quakerism, though he professes himself of the Established Church. He has acquired considerable reputation in his trade.

Iolo's quaker sympathies afterwards turned to unitarianism, and he was the leading light in the establishment of the Unitarian Association of South Wales in 1802. Robert Southey described Iolo in his poem *Madoc*, where he refers to him as 'Iolo, Old Iolo, he who knows/The virtues of all herbs of mount or vale/Whatever lore of science or of song/Sages and bards of old have handed down'. Iolo was active in promoting the myth of the twelfth-century Welsh Prince Madoc who was supposed to have discovered America, and among the various exotic schemes in which Iolo was involved was an expedition to contact the Welsh-speaking Indians thought to have survived in the Missouri valley. In 1794, he published his *Poems, Lyrical and Pastoral*. Subscribers to the volume include Hannah More and Thomas Paine. The following year, Iolo presented an ode to the Prince of Wales on the occasion of the Prince's marriage, and insisted on appearing before the Prince in a mason's leather apron and carrying a trowel.

In 1797, Iolo returned to Wales, setting up a shop selling books, tea and other commodities in the small town of Cowbridge. A fierce opponent of slavery, Iolo's

shop window advertised 'East India Sugar, Uncontaminated by Human Gore'. Iolo, like many other London Welsh, was a fervent supporter of the French Revolution in its early stages, calling himself 'The Bard of Liberty'. Iolo also displayed in his shop window a book with a cover marked 'The Rights of Man'. Government officers, believing that Iolo was selling Tom Paine's proscribed book, seized the volume, only to find it was a copy of the Bible. Iolo quickly found the constraints of running a shop irksome, and moved to Flemingstone in the Vale of Glamorgan, from which he restlessly explored the South Welsh countryside on foot. Buoyed up by endless cups of tea and his imagination fired by the laudanum which he took for his asthma, Iolo sat up late night after night, documenting the bardic system which his extraordinary mind had conjured up. Iolo's biographer, Elijah Waring, recalled the chaos of Iolo's study: 'to find a desired paper, it was necessary to make a long voyage of discovery amongst a crowded archipelago of documents scattered about his tables, shelves, and floor'.

The title of this talk, 'The Voice Conventional' is taken from a poem by Iolo, 'The Voice Conventional of the Bards of Britain', which purports to describe the structure of the order of bards in pre-Christian Britain. In Iolo's system, 'The Voice Conventional' was one of three ancient methods of bardic memorisation. Iolo claimed to have transcribed many lost texts from ancient manuscripts in Welsh castles which recorded bardic and druidical laws. Before Iolo's time, work on recording and documenting ancient Welsh literature in the eighteenth century had focussed on North Welsh literature. Iolo argued that the South Welsh traditions were more ancient and purer. 'The North Wales bards', he wrote, 'have nothing at all of the ancient and genuine bardism'. Iolo claimed that the descendants of the ancient bards in South Wales by the end of the eighteenth century numbered only a handful of people, the most learned of whom was a John Bradford of Bettws. Iolo alleged that he had been invested by Bradford into the Chair of Glamorgan of the Primitive Order of Bards of the Isle of Britain.

Iolo's claim to be the last representative of an ancient South Welsh bardic tradition provided the occasion for the emergence of the *gorsedd*, which made its first public appearance in 1792, at, of all places, Primrose Hill. On this occasion, ceremonies similar to those now performed at the *eisteddfod* were performed by expatriate Welsh poets led by Iolo. A notice in *Gentleman's Magazine* declared that

the purpose of the ceremony was 'to give the English reader an idea of what, though very common in Wales, has never been properly known in England. The Bardic Institution of the Ancient Britains, which is the same as the Druidic, has been from the earliest times, through all ages, to the present day, retained by the Welsh, and is now exactly the same as it was two thousand years ago'. Throughout the rest of his wanderings, Iolo continue to promote and elaborate the *gorsedd*, carrying small stone pebbles in his pocket to form the sacred circle, and constantly promoting his motto, which he claimed for the druids, '*Gwir yn erbyn y byd*', 'Truth against the World'.

So where did Iolo get the idea for the *gorsedd* and particularly its ritual? Throughout Iolo's lifetime, there were constant suggestions that he was a freemason, and that the *gorsedd* was a form of freemasonry. Iolo hotly denied he was a freemason. Nevertheless, the idea that the *gorsedd* is in some way related to freemasonry has never really gone away, and has recently been taken up again by scholars. If the *gorsedd* was indeed derived from freemasonry, then this would emerge as one of the most important examples of the social and cultural impact of freemasonry. In linking the *gorsedd* to the *eisteddfod*, Iolo performed an extraordinary act of social engineering. He created an institution which would enable Welsh language and literature to be preserved as a living force strengthening and invigorating the Welsh sense of nationhood. At a time when English is emerging as the international *lingua franca* and small languages disappear daily, it is a remarkable fact that, within a few hours of London, there is still a vibrant Welsh-speaking culture. Iolo's *gorsedd*, by elaborating the *eisteddfod* into the chief focus of Welsh nationhood, played a fundamental role in preserving a Welsh-speaking culture. If freemasonry played a role in creating this national institution, then the *gorsedd* would provide us with a prime example of what freemasonry has achieved 'beyond the craft'.

In recent literature, the suggestion that Iolo was a freemason was first made by Phillip Jenkins in an article in the *Welsh History Review*, in which he argued that freemasonry provided an important vehicle for the maintenance of Welsh Jacobite aspirations, and saw Iolo as linked to this tradition. However, the only evidence cited by Jenkins for Iolo's masonic status is the coincidence that he was a stonemason. Nevertheless, the statement that Iolo was a freemason was taken up by Gwyn Alfred Williams in his book on the Prince Madoc myth and elsewhere. Williams twice claimed that Iolo had said that the secret books of the freemasons had preserved the

Druidic traditions, but does not give a specific reference to any of Iolo's writings for this statement. Williams also declared that 'Freemasonry and Unitarianism ran as underground currents through this first phase of the Welsh revival' and that 'Many of the leading figures of the Welsh revival were freemasons'. One reference by an American merchant writing to Iolo's associate, John Evans, while Evans was engaged in the search for Welsh Indians suggests that Evans may possibly have been a freemason, but this is a flimsy basis on which to build such a substantial claim, and by no means provides evidence that Iolo himself was a mason. It seems that it was supposed connections such as these which prompted the historian Raphael Samuel to comment that, in investigating the history of freemasonry, the best starting point might be the *eisteddfod*.

There are a number of further coincidences which might be used by an optimist or enthusiast to suggest a connection between the *gorsedd* and freemasonry. The link between the *gorsedd* and *eisteddfod* began in 1819, when the *gorsedd* ceremony was performed by Iolo in the garden of Ivy Bush hotel in Camarthen, which had been the cradle of Welsh freemasonry. The first royal *eisteddfod* was at Denbigh in 1828, when the *eisteddfod* was honoured by a visit from, of all people, the Duke of Sussex. *Eisteddfodau* were held by the London Welsh at Freemasons' Hall in the 1820s, one of which was held under the patronage of the Prince of Wales. A uniform used by the *gorsedd* at the Liverpool *eisteddfod* in 1884 appears to have been based on masonic regalia. However, there is no reason to think that all these are anything more than coincidences, reflecting the way in which the historical paths of two very similar institutions will cross from time to time. There is no reliable evidence that Iolo was a freemason. Indeed, if anything, Iolo's strong sense of solidarity with his fellow working masons may have meant that he was hostile towards freemasons. His insistence on attending the Prince of Wales wearing a working apron and bearing a trowel sounds very much like a working mason seeking to score a point against a Grand Master. Moreover, there is little in the *gorsedd* ceremonies which can be linked to masonic precedent - the strongest parallels are perhaps in the treatment of God as a generalised supreme being, but this probably mainly reflects Iolo's unitarian beliefs.

A good starting point in investigating the background to Iolo's thought is his 1794 publication, *Poems Lyric and Personal*, which bore on its title page the motto claimed by Iolo for the Druids: 'Truth against the World'. Iolo provided extensive

commentaries and notes on the poems in this volume. Three major themes emerge from these. First, Iolo stresses the primacy of oral tradition as a guardian of truth. He wrote: 'The bards and druids (both one and the same people) of ancient Britain had, before letters were known, reduced the arts of memory and oral tradition into a well systematised science...This well guarded tradition was a better guardian of truth than letters have ever been...Macpherson, Chatterton, Pinkerton, and others could never have sported with the bardic tradition as they have done with letters.' The irony here, of course, is that Iolo was appealing to a bardic tradition to create a hoax which was far more long-lived than anything achieved by Macpherson or Chatterton. Second, Iolo emphasises Wales as the only true guardian of this Druidic tradition - this was particularly audacious since Druids were at that time important national symbols in many other places besides Wales. Iolo declared that 'the druidic theology also still remains in Wales, where it was never entirely abolished; yet druidism has been sought for everywhere but in Wales and the Welsh Language, where it is only to be found'. A third theme to emerge from Iolo's commentaries is his contempt for those scholars who, in searching for the Druids, ignored Wales. Iolo complains that 'Our modern, in other respects, very learned antiquaries, whenever they dabble in British or Celtic etymologies, run into the wildest absurdities. Why is it so? There are Welshmen, well skilled in their native language that would, without any high interest, afford those gentlemen any information in their power, and be highly gratified in being so called upon.' Iolo was particularly contemptuous of English literary depictions of Druids, describing Gray's famous poem *The Bard* as 'truly ridiculous'.

By the time Iolo was writing, there was a substantial corpus of English, Irish and French writing on the Druids, who since the sixteenth century, because of the paucity of hard historical information about them, had proved useful as a vehicle for the development of national historical myths. Seventeenth-century English writers, for example, portrayed the Druids as the root of an indigenous religious tradition which ultimately produced the English Reformation. Similarly in France and Germany, the Druids were a significant component in developing mythological views of a pre-Roman national past. This process of using the Druids as ciphers in national and religious disputes continued in the eighteenth century. The Irish freethinker John Toland used the Druids as a vehicle to satirise the established church and particularly the Irish priesthood. William Stukeley, an antiquarian who carried out pioneering

fieldwork at Avebury and Stonehenge, was incensed by Toland's work, and sought at length to show how the religion of the Druids embodied the original wisdom of the patriarchs. As a result, Stukeley's druids sound almost like Church of England clergymen, who had simply had the misfortune to be born before the arrival of the Messiah. In Scotland, James Macpherson, in both the Ossian forgeries and elsewhere, portrayed the Druids as the people who had taught the Celtic highlanders their qualities of tolerance, lack of malice and valiance, while also giving them an understanding of natural philosophy. The pervasiveness of the Druidic image by the middle of the eighteenth century is evident from the way in which James Wheeler's 1747 manual on the cultivation of oaks was entitled *The Modern Druid*.

It seems that it was William Stukeley who first suggested a link between freemasonry and the druids. As is well known, Stukeley became a freemason in the hope that it might assist him in his investigations into the Druids. Sometime later, John Cleland in 1766, using one of those false etymologies which so exasperated Iolo, proposed that the word freemason was derived from the same root as a maypole, and thus of Druidic origin. Similarly, the wayward drunken Anglesey poet Goronwy Owen joined a lodge at Walton in Liverpool in the belief that freemasonry 'was a branch of my old ancestors, the Druids of yore'. However, these occasional suggestions that freemasonry may have had Druidic roots are less important than the role of freemasonry in helping to shape the popular image of the Druids. An important area which requires further research is the extent to which books such as Anderson's *Constitutions* or William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* helped shape knowledge in provincial England of such subjects as the orders of architecture or early history. The earliest editions of Anderson's *Constitutions* accepted Inigo Jones' theory that Stonehenge was a Roman monument, and do not refer to the Druids at all. The 1756 edition of the *Book of Constitutions*, however, while still accepting Jones's theory on Stonehenge, includes a short description of the Druids, claiming that they had 'many of the uses of masons amongst them'. William Preston also began his history of masonry with a substantial description of the Druids, and a strong hint that perhaps there were parallels between the Druids and freemasonry. Since so many lodges possessed copies of the *Book of Constitutions* and Preston, they must have been among the most widely-read books in late eighteenth-century England, and certainly helped shape popular ideas of the Druids.

The recurrent suggestions of a connection between the Druids and the freemasons, given a kind of official backing by these hints in both the Book of Constitutions and Preston, made it inevitable that, at some point, somebody should come up with the idea that there should be a purified form of freemasonry with the 'hidden' Druidic components restored. And it seems that this is what happened in 1781 when the Ancient Order of Druids was founded at the Kings Arms Tavern in Poland Street in London. The founder was, according to the traditions of the order, a man named Hurle. It has been suggested that he was Henry Hurle, a builder and surveyor of Garlick Hill, but this cannot be substantiated. The traditions of the order state that Hurle and the other founders were freemasons under the Ancient Grand lodge who had taken a particular interest in the history of the Druids. The order self-consciously saw itself as a revival of the Druids and it was declared that, in establishing a grand lodge, the aim was to preserve information about the druidic community and promote the practice of those fraternal precepts which had distinguished the Druids. No example of the ritual first used by the Order survives. A number of the non-masonic orders using ritual lost their original ritual as a result of legislation in 1799 and, when the ritual was reinstated, borrowed heavily from masonic components. It is unclear whether this happened with the Ancient Order of Druids. However, in the earliest surviving rituals for the order, the masonic dimension is clear: lines from masonic ritual alternate with specious druidic references. Someone has, very clumsily, tried to reinstate the Druidic component of freemasonry. The kind of mixture of druid and masonic symbolism which characterised the order is evident from the following description of a Druid apron supplied by the Grand Secretary of the Order in 1932: 'The All-Seeing Eye represents God or the Great Archdruid of the Universal ... the 'pavement' is made up of triangles and the archway will probably represent one of the trilithons as seen at Stonehenge; the scales represent justice; the Sun was looked upon by the Druids as the source of light and life', and so on.

The Ancient Order of Druids became very popular. It seems that Past Grand Arch Hurle was particularly active in promoting the order, opening three lodges in Bristol and Bath in 1789 and 1790. From the West Country, the Druids spread to Wales, becoming particularly popular in the 1820s and 1830s. The Ancient Order emphasised that it was not a mutual benefit society; as one correspondent pointed out in 1865, 'we have no benefit principle in its usual acception in our constitution, but

exactly resemble the freemasons in this respect'. However, unlike the freemasons, the Ancient Order enjoyed no protection under the law and was, strictly speaking, an unlawful society. Consequently, different Druid groups constantly split away to form friendly societies which would enjoy some legal protection, leading to the formation of the United Ancient Order of Druids, the Sheffield Equalized Druids and so on, through an increasingly fissorous process. Interestingly, some of these groups seem to preserve a confused tradition of a descent from freemasonry, referring to a proclamation by John Toland on Primrose Hill for all Druids to meet on 22 September 1717 at the Apple Tree Tavern (which magnificently mixes up everything).

Writers on the history of the *gorsedd* such as Dillwyn Miles have suggested that Iolo was influenced not by the Ancient Order but by other Druidic organisations. However, they seem to have been misled by the various legendary histories claimed by some Druid groups. It seems that the Ancient Order of Druids was the first in the field of Druid revivalism, and were almost certainly an influence on Iolo. Iolo of course drew on many other sources, and in particular his deep reading of old Welsh sources, but insofar as there was a masonic influence on him, it probably came indirectly, via the AOD. Then a curious thing happened. The Ancient Order of Druids and its various offshoots, such as the United Ancient Order, themselves began to be changed by Iolo's fabrications. There is not time here to look at this process in any great detail, but it is encapsulated by a book published in 1836 by the Revd D. James, curate of Almondbury in Yorkshire, called *The Patriarchal Religion of Britain or a Complete Manual of Ancient British Druidism*, dedicated to the Ancient Order of Druids in the West Riding of York. James explains that the AOD was devoted to preserving information about the ancient Druids, and to cultivating the social and moral virtues which distinguished the original Druids. James had no doubt as to the best place to look for information about druids: Wales. And he also had no doubt as to the Welsh scholar who was best informed about the Druids: Iolo Morgannwg. James's manual of druidism is in many respects a small primer of Iolo's ideas.

Iolo's ideas even infiltrated the ritual used by the AOD and its offshoots, so that the net result was an extraordinary mixture of crass eighteenth-century Druid images, Iolo Morgannwg and masonic ritual. Thus, in the ceremony used in 1848 for the opening of *gorsedds* by the Independent Order of Druids, which had been established in Bolton in 1829, the ceremony is conducted by the Grand Arch, who

proclaims Iolo's slogan, 'The Truth against the World', then turns to the inside Tyler, and reminds him that the first part of a Druid's duty is to see that his gorsedd is secure from intrusion. Similarly, the lecture used by the United Ancient Order of Druids for the inauguration of Past Arches in 1906 was a pot-pourri of Iolo's ideas on Druidism, emphasising the bardic science of oral tradition and again using Iolo's motto, 'The Truth against the World'. This traffic was not, however, entirely one way. From an early date, members of friendly societies joined the processions of the *gorsedd* at the *eisteddfod*. At first, members of the *gorsedd* were distinguished only by ribbons worn on the arm. Consequently, the members of the friendly societies, and particularly the members of the Druid organisations, looked more imposing than the *gorsedd*. This prompted the members of the *gorsedd* to start wearing special vestments. Likewise, the title Archdruid seems to have been a late borrowing from the Ancient Order of Druids.

One of Iolo's favourite images was that of building castles in the air, and the *gorsedd* was a huge but enormously influential 'castle in the air'. In conclusion, what lessons do the *gorsedd* and its cross-relationship with the masonically-inspired Druid friendly societies offer, as we consider freemasonry 'beyond the craft'? The first is that in looking to investigate freemasonry outside craft freemasonry, we should not restrict our scope to those bodies which have received some kind of recognition from official freemasonry. The Ancient Order of Druids has had no official contact with freemasonry virtually since its inception, but it nevertheless represents a major offshoot of freemasonry. The process whereby particular orders somehow remained part of the masonic world was a complex one, and the range of bodies inspired by freemasonry is wider than those currently familiar to freemasons. For example, when the temperance organisation the Good Templars was established, there was considerable discussion as to whether it was a spurious masonic sect, and it does indeed seem to have drawn some inspiration from the masonic templar orders. Second, the phrase 'beyond the craft', so frequently applied to bodies like these, is perhaps misleading. It suggests that the aim of these degrees and orders to create something over and above freemasonry. In the case of the druid orders, however, the aim was clearly to try and embody what was, in the view of the founders, the essence and origin of freemasonry, not to go beyond it.

But the most important lesson of the story of the *gorsedd* and the Druid orders is that it shows the complexity and richness of the process whereby tradition is invented. Iolo's 'castle in the air' has been one of the central examples by which historians have become aware of the process by which the supposedly ancient myths and traditions so dear to many nations were invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many examples of this process, ranging from the *gorsedd* to coronation rituals, are gathered together in an influential book edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger called *The Invention of Tradition*. Hobsbawm's introduction to this book includes the following quotation, which I would like to offer as a kind of epigram for our discussions this weekend:

'History is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction. The past is an essential element, perhaps the essential element in these ideologies. If there is no suitable past, it can always be invented. Indeed, in the nature of things there is usually no entirely suitable past, because the phenomenon these ideologies claim to justify is not ancient or eternal but historically novel'.