

## **R S Thomas 2017 Festival Report** – Another success

The Festival covered three days in September.

It started with a walk up the Einion Valley and across the river to the Foel led by the naturalist and photographer, Jeremy Moore and the RSPB warden, Russell Jones.

During the afternoon there were two lectures: the first by Peter Lord - author of *The Visual Culture of Wales*. His theme was about the artist wife of R S Thomas '*M E Eldridge, in context: Welsh Environment and English Romanticism*'. It was recorded by Planet magazine. The second lecture was given by Professor Jason Walford Davies of Bangor University who had recently been given correspondence by a French writer, well known to R S Thomas called Marie-Therese Castey. R S even persuaded her to learn Welsh.

The church was full for the service on Saturday with the Bishop of St Davids', The Rt. Rev. Joanna Penberthy preaching a sermon on how her beliefs and even her entry to the ministry were inspired by the poems of R S Thomas she learnt as a school girl. Afterwards she blessed the newly restored holy well nearby dedicated to St Non.

Again there were two lectures in the afternoon. Ifor ap Glyn followed up the holy well restoration by explaining how holy wells were all around the kingdom from Buxton to Eglwysfach. Professor Tony Brown, Emeritus Professor of English at Bangor University and Co-Director of the R S Thomas Research Centre with Jason Walford Davies gave an interesting lecture on the interrelationship between R S Thomas and his artist wife M E Eldridge and the inspiration and encouragement she gave to him.

The final day was an inspiration with a poetry reading by Gillian Clarke who was the National Poet of Wales and Ifor ap Glyn who is the National Poet of Wales. Afterwards Gillian autographed copies of the new book of poems '*Zoology*'.

The final event of the Festival was the Poetry Competition. 47 poets wrote 74 poems. The first prize of £250 went to the poet who wrote '*Gwynfor's wake*', 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £100 to the poet who wrote '*Now*' and two other poems were highly commended. An anthology of the poems is being planned and edited by Professor Barry Thomas and it is hoped to get it printed in time for Christmas.

The Iron Room performed a great service to the Festival and we have to thank all those who provided endless delicious sandwiches, scones and cakes of all sorts. Penrallt Bookshop brought books relating to the Festival and Planet was represented with copies of the magazine for sale. Archive films were shown from time to time.

The organisers were delighted that once again they can report the event was a success and an enjoyable experience with full houses for most events.