

**NOTES FOR RHEIDOL PRIZE PRESENTATION,  
HAY-ON-WYE, 24 MAY 2019**

Good afternoon – and thank you very much for coming today, for the New Welsh Writing awards.

I'm the sponsor of the Rheidol Prize for writing on a Welsh theme or subject and I'm going to take a few moments to explain how I come to be here.

I'm from Llanelli originally, but my working life was spent in the Diplomatic Service, which took me around the world. Thirty years ago I was a junior British diplomat in Finland. My job there as I saw it was to get under the skin of Finnish life. I was

powerfully struck then by what a relatively small country could achieve culturally.

However, I also recall a friend who knew the Finnish cultural scene better than I did regretting that, despite its strengths, it did not always reflect a response to Finnish conditions and traditions. It wasn't Finnish enough, in short. That struck a chord with me, in my own thinking on the culture of the country where I had grown up.

Shortly afterwards I met Robin Reeves, at the outset of his mission to turn the NWR into the standard bearer for English-language writing in Wales. I was

about to go to Japan and took out a subscription to the NWR to help keep me abreast of thinking in Wales. I remember Robin saying he was amazed that someone had actually followed up on a promise made in a pub! Anyway, I have taken the NWR ever since. It has been an important cultural barometer for me.

Cut forward to 2017. I had begun to feel, after the Brexit referendum, that perhaps there were areas of Welsh life that needed to be understood better, voices that needed to be heard, even if their message might be difficult. I was worried that the NWR was perhaps not as representative as it might be of all

strands of Welsh thinking, and I wrote to Gwen Davies with a view to cancelling my subscription. I was perhaps rather acerbic, as sometimes I am in writing. Some of you may have seen extracts from my letter which Gwen included in the NWR.

I have to admire Gwen's response, which was to challenge me to support the NWR in encouraging a broader range of writing. So I have, and that is the context in which the Rheidol Prize has come to be, and that is how I come to be here today. I should say I was very pleased with the winning entries, and proud of my role in encouraging them; I am glad this initiative has borne fruit.