

## HEDD WYN (1887 – 1917)

Ellis Humphrey Evans was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1887 at Trawsfynydd. Following a basic education he left school at fourteen to begin to become a shepherd on his father's farm, Yr Ysgwrn. He began writing poems at about eleven, and from the age of 19 competed regularly in Eisteddfodau. Much of his work was inspired by the Romantic poets such as Shelly; not surprising perhaps that a young shepherd should muse on nature and religion. In 1910 he took the bardic name Hedd Wyn, and won the first of his 6 chairs at Bala Eisteddfod in 1907.

The First World War cast dark shadows across every community in Britain. Conscription began in 1916, it required a son of the family of Yr Ysgwrn to join the British Army. To avoid his younger brother being sent, Ellis enlisted. He received training at Litherland Camp, Liverpool, but in March 1917, he was temporarily released from duty along with other soldiers for seven weeks to help with ploughing and planting of land. He headed home to Trawsfynydd. During this time he began work on a new 'awdl' Yr Arwr (The Hero), his submission for the forthcoming National Eisteddfod. It was a wet year, and he stayed longer at home on the farm to get the work done, than was allowed. The military police collected him unceremoniously from the field and he was detained at Blaenau before being transported to Belgium and then on to join the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers at Fléchin, France.

His departure had been so sudden, that he'd forgotten the poem for the Eisteddfod, so wrote it again on his journey. It was in Fléchine, while awaiting orders that he finished 'Yr Arwr' and signed it '*Fleur de Lis*'. It was posted on 15 July 1917, the very same day that his Battalion marched towards what would become known as the Battle of Passchendaele.

Back in Wales, the crops ripened and harvesting began. In September that year, the National Eisteddfod was held at Birkenhead. The ceremony of the Charing of the Bard was held on 6 of September in the presence of the Welsh speaking British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George.

At the appointed time, the pseudo name of the victorious bard was announced "Fleur de Lys". The trumpet's fanfare invited the bard to stand and make himself known, but nobody stood. Instead, the Archdruid solemnly announced that the winner, Ellis Evans had been killed in action six weeks earlier. He had been wounded during the Battle of Passchendaele, and died of his wounds on 31 July 1917. The carved, empty chair was draped in a black sheet and has been known ever since and the 'Black Chair of Birkenhead'.

Ellis H Evans is buried at Artillery Wood Cemetery near Boezinge. After the end of the War, a petition to the Commonwealth War Graves commission succeeded in having additional words added to the simple name 'E H Evans' on the plain gravestone. Ever since it has read '*Y Prifardd Hedd Wyn*' (English: "The Chief Bard, Hedd Wyn").