

A RESEARCH SAMPLE • NORTH WALES

The house that held a family’s story

Yr Ysgwrn and the Evans family of Trawsfynydd

A documented example of family history, house history and evidence-led storytelling

c. 1830–2012 | Meirionnydd, Wales

THE HOUSE	THE FAMILY
Yr Ysgwrn, near Trawsfynydd	Evan and Mary Evans
A nineteenth-century hill farm	Their eldest child, Ellis Humphrey Evans

In the hills above Trawsfynydd stands a stone farmhouse whose significance reaches far beyond its walls. In one generation it held the daily work of a large rural family; in another, it became a place of public remembrance. This short case study follows the Evans household through the life of its eldest child, the Welsh-language poet Hedd Wyn, and traces how a family home became part of the national story of Wales. [1–6]

Prepared as a portfolio demonstration of how a commissioned family or house history can be researched, written and presented. This is a synthesis of published institutional sources, not a claim to have discovered previously unknown relatives or original archival records.

Prepared for: MD FlowDesk | Research demonstration | English-language sample

1 The people and their place

A concise historical profile, with each asserted relationship tied to a published source.

Place. Yr Ysgwrn is a traditional stone farmhouse above Trawsfynydd, in what was historically Meirionnydd and is now within Eryri National Park. The farmhouse is dated to 1830 by the heritage site's official account. [1]

Family. The household was that of Evan Evans and his wife Mary Evans, née Morris. Their eldest child, Ellis Humphrey Evans, was born at Trawsfynydd on 13 January 1887. The heritage centre identifies him as the first of eleven children. [2, 3, 5]

Arrival. The Evans family moved to Yr Ysgwrn in the spring of 1887, when Ellis was still an infant. The heritage site describes the property at that time as a 168-acre hill farm associated with the father's family. That description is not, on its own, proof of legal ownership or title. [1, 2]

A small, verified family network

Evan Evans + Mary Evans (née Morris)	Parents of Ellis Humphrey Evans; reported in the Dictionary of Welsh Biography. [3]
Ellis Humphrey Evans (1887–1917)	Their eldest child; known as Hedd Wyn, poet and shepherd. [2, 3]
Robert Evans; Ann Evans	Named siblings of Ellis in published heritage accounts. Other siblings are not individually established by this sample. [2, 4, 6]
Gerald Williams	Son of Ann; Hedd Wyn's nephew and a later custodian of Yr Ysgwrn. [4]

Relationship check: the evidence here verifies several links, not a complete eleven-child family tree. Missing names, dates, marriages and descendants would require civil, parish and census records before publication as a full genealogy.

WHY THIS MATTERS A credible family history records precisely what is established and what remains unknown. A familiar surname or residence is not enough to prove a relationship.

2 Before the Black Chair

The farmhouse as a working home, and an eldest son's education and writing.

A stone building and a working landscape

The house was not built as a monument. Its rooms had practical roles: the heritage centre identifies a kitchen, parlour, three bedrooms and buttery, alongside farm spaces including a stable, coach house and hay loft. The 168-acre holding linked domestic life to seasonal labour on the surrounding land. These physical details help us imagine how family members shared space, work and responsibility, but they do not provide a room-by-room account of this particular family's routine. [1]

Rural Wales and the written word

Ellis attended local elementary school and Sunday school. He left school at about fourteen to work on the farm, where he cared for sheep. Formal education was limited, yet literary culture was close to home. The Dictionary of Welsh Biography describes his father as an amateur poet and also notes poetry in the maternal line. The source does not supply a securely verified full identity for his maternal grandfather, so this demonstration does not extend that branch further. [2, 3, 5]

Ellis wrote in Welsh and developed his craft through the eisteddfod tradition. In 1907 he won his first bardic chair at Bala. The official heritage account describes him as a poet rooted in the local landscape, drawing on faith, nature and the cultural life of his community. The farmland above Trawsfynydd was therefore not simply the family's livelihood; it was also a setting that helped shape his imagination. [2, 5]

The household in context

The evidence offers a compelling story of two forms of labour: the visible work of a hill farm and the less visible work of writing. We know Ellis combined the two, but individual diary entries, working accounts or personal correspondence would be needed to reconstruct particular days with confidence. In a commissioned history, those distinctions would remain visible rather than being filled with invented dialogue or scenes.

HISTORICAL CARE “The family lived in a working farmhouse” is supported by the sources. “Mary always sat by the kitchen fire while Ellis wrote” would be an invention unless a reliable contemporary account establishes it. We do not make that leap.

3 The war enters Yr Ysgwrn

1916–17: the conflict between obligations to home, conscience and country.

The introduction of conscription in 1916 reshaped the choices facing the Evans family. Official accounts describe Ellis as a Christian pacifist and record that the family could retain one son for essential farm work. Ellis entered military service rather than his younger brother Robert. This is a reported family decision, not evidence of a conversation whose exact words survive. [2, 6]

In February 1917 Ellis trained with the Royal Welch Fusiliers at Litherland near Liverpool. During temporary agricultural leave he returned to the farm and worked on his poem Yr Arwr (The Hero), which would become his entry for the National Eisteddfod. The Dictionary of Welsh Biography records that the poem was completed during his military service; the National Library of Wales preserves a final draft manuscript, catalogue reference NLW MS 4628C. [3, 5, 6]

On 31 July 1917 he was killed at Pilckem Ridge, during the opening phase of the Third Battle of Ypres. He was thirty years old. He did not return to Yr Ysgwrn. [2, 3, 4]

Six weeks later, at the Birkenhead National Eisteddfod on 6 September 1917, the winning poem was announced under the competition name Fleur-de-lis. The poet's death was then revealed, and the chair was veiled in black. The Black Chair later came to Yr Ysgwrn, transforming an object of literary honour into a symbol of grief and remembrance. [2–5]

A short chronology

c. 1830	The present farmhouse is dated to this year by the official heritage site. [1]
13 Jan 1887	Birth of Ellis Humphrey Evans in Trawsfynydd. [2, 3]
Spring 1887	The Evans household moves to Yr Ysgwrn. [1, 2]
1907	Ellis wins his first bardic chair at Bala. [3, 5]
1916	Conscription and a choice affecting Ellis and Robert. [2, 6]
31 Jul 1917	Ellis is killed in Flanders. [2–4]
6 Sep 1917	Posthumous Eisteddfod victory; the chair is veiled. [3, 4]
1 Mar 2012	The property transfers to Eryri National Park Authority. [4]

4 A family house becomes a public memory

The later custodianship of Yr Ysgwrn matters as much as its famous inhabitant.

The story of Yr Ysgwrn did not stop in 1917. The preserved interiors and furnishings, including the celebrated Black Chair, gradually made the house a destination for people wishing to understand the poet and the losses of the First World War. Eryri National Park Authority explains that much of the furniture and decoration has remained in place since Hedd Wyn's time. [4]

A family connection helped keep that memory tangible. Gerald Williams, son of Hedd Wyn's sister Ann, became the farm's custodian and welcomed visitors over many years. His role provides one verified link between the generation that lived through the war and the generations who came to learn the story. [4, 6]

On St David's Day in 2012, Yr Ysgwrn was transferred to Eryri National Park Authority with support from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Welsh Government. Preservation then entered a new phase: the home and its contents could be cared for as part of the public heritage of Wales. [4, 6]

What this house tells us

A local history may begin with one person but ought not end there. Yr Ysgwrn allows the researcher to consider the relationship between household, land, language, labour and memory. We can distinguish three connected histories: the physical farmstead established in the nineteenth century; the Evans family who lived and worked there; and the shared public meaning the house acquired after the war.

For descendants researching a less famous farmhouse, exactly the same method applies. One begins with the address and people known to the family, tests relationships against records, builds a chronology and identifies where a property's history intersects with the wider history of its parish and region.

A NOTE ON SCOPE Yr Ysgwrn is a widely researched heritage site. This piece is a demonstration of presentation and source discipline—not an original scholarly contribution to Hedd Wyn studies, and not a substitute for full archival research.

5 The evidence behind the narrative

An illustrative research ledger, separating published claims from direct examination of original records.

CLAIM	SOURCE USED	STATUS
House dated c.1830	Official Yr Ysgwrn farmhouse history [1]	Published account
Evan and Mary, née Morris	Dictionary of Welsh Biography [3]	Published biography
Eleven children; family move	Official Yr Ysgwrn biography [2]	Published account
Ellis's education and poetry	National Library of Wales [5]; biography [3]	Corroborated
Yr Arwr manuscript exists	NLW digital exhibit, MS 4628C [5]	Archival item identified
Ann → Gerald Williams	Eryri National Park heritage page [4]	Published account
Legal title to property	No deed or title record inspected	Not established
Complete Evans family tree	No parish/civil/census images inspected	Not established

Confidence and limitations

For this sample, “published account” means a statement reported by an institution, not independent verification from an original birth register, census return or deed. Multiple institutional pages can draw on the same underlying research and therefore are not necessarily independent corroboration. The identified Yr Arwr manuscript is primary material, but its full contents were not transcribed or analysed for this demonstration.

What a fully commissioned study would add

- Compare the 1891, 1901 and 1911 census households for Yr Ysgwrn and nearby addresses; record all household members, birthplaces and occupations as written.
- Locate civil birth, marriage and death entries and appropriate parish/chapel registers for Evan, Mary and their children; test name variants and dates.
- Examine estate deeds, land tax or valuation records, tithe/Ordnance Survey maps and local archives to distinguish occupation from ownership.
- Check local newspaper notices, family letters and memorial records, with permission and appropriate privacy care where needed.

6 Sources and research standards

Clickable source descriptions are provided so a prospective client can independently check the basis of the story.

[1] Yr Ysgwrn heritage site — Farmhouse

Building date, rooms, 168-acre farm, 1887 move.

<https://yrysgwrn.com/en/history/farmhouse/>

[2] Yr Ysgwrn heritage site — Hedd Wyn

Eleven children, early years, conscription and poetry.

<https://yr-ysgwrn.snowdonia.gov.wales/en/history/hedd-wyn/>

[3] Dictionary of Welsh Biography — Ellis Humphrey Evans

Parents, Mary's maiden surname, literary career and death.

<https://www.biography.wales/article/s-EVAN-HUM-1887.html>

[4] Eryri National Park — Yr Ysgwrn

Preservation, Gerald Williams and 2012 transfer.

<https://eryri.gov.wales/discover/history-and-heritage/yr-ysgwrn/>

[5] National Library of Wales — Yr Arwr, Hedd Wyn

Archival manuscript NLW MS 4628C and context.

<https://www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/manuscripts/modern-period/yr-arwr-hedd-wyn>

[6] National Heritage Memorial Fund — home saved for nation

Family details, service timeline, Gerald and conservation.

<https://www.memorialfund.org.uk/news/home-iconic-first-world-war-poet-saved-nation>

Our research promise

Each finished history should (1) distinguish original records from later accounts, (2) provide a date or date range for each event, (3) mark conflicting evidence, (4) preserve Welsh place-name spellings where appropriate, (5) obtain permission before reproducing personal photographs or protected archive material, and (6) state plainly what the available evidence cannot prove.

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