



Eisteddfod

The Eisteddfod /ai'steðvɒd/ is a week-long event with lavish ceremonial rituals (involving druids, swords, and mystical symbolism) that takes place every year during the first week of August, with the venue alternating between north and south Wales.

The earliest recorded eisteddfod was held in 1176, when Lord Rhys hosted a gathering of bards, musicians and performers at his castle in Cardigan. But it wasn't until the 18th and 19th centuries that the eisteddfod developed into a form recognisable as a precursor to the modern National Eisteddfod. Its aim was to create a burning interest in poetry, raise standards and create a focal point for the arts in Wales.

The history of the elaborate, modern-day ceremonies, in which poets compete for the prestigious chair or crown, can be attributed to the idiosyncratic fantasies of one man — Iolo Morganwg. He invented the concept of an assembly of bards — Gorsedd y Beirdd. The Gorsedd has been an integral part of the Eisteddfod since 1818, and the first official National Eisteddfod as we know it today took place in Aberdare in 1861.

Here are some famous Gorsedd ceremonies.

Proclamation ceremony

Gŵyl y Cyhoeddi takes place exactly one year and a day in advance of the next Eisteddfod. This ceremony is held within a circle of stones - Cylch yr Orsedd - which is erected on the site of each National Eisteddfod as a mark of having visited the area.

Crowning of the bard

Seremoni'r Coroni (crowning ceremony) is one of the main events of the Eisteddfod and is held on the Monday afternoon of each Eisteddfod. In an impressive spectacle, a unique crown, fashioned by a local craftsman, is awarded for the best poem written in free verse.

Prose Medal

Y Fedal Ryddiaith (the prose medal) is the prize for best volume of prose. It is held on the Wednesday afternoon and the winner is awarded a medal. The prize is celebrated in an official ceremony similar to the chairing and crowning of the bards.

Chairing of the bard

The Friday afternoon of every Eisteddfod culminates with the elaborate Seremoni'r Cadeirio (chairing ceremony). A unique chair, or throne, created by a local carpenter, is awarded for the best poem written in a traditional form of Welsh verse using a strict metre known as cyghanedd.

Other ceremonies

The pavilion plays host to other notable ceremonies during the week. Dysgwr y Flwyddyn (Welsh learner of the year), the Drama Medal and the Daniel Owen Memorial prize for best novel are all honoured, albeit on a smaller scale than the main Gorsedd ceremonies.

The National Eisteddfod celebrates the richness of the language and culture of Wales. But other eisteddfodau (plural of eisteddfod) are also popular all over the world.



Source of the text: bbc.co.uk