



## Bus Parcel Post Labels of Bala Traction



From the late 1940s to the mid 1960s the single-decker coaches of the Bala Motor Traction Co were to be seen on their convoluted routes between the villages and hamlets between Corwen, Bala and Barmouth. The company was run rather autocratically by Obediah Griffiths-Jones who friends referred to him as a fuss-pot, and others poetically as 'that \*\*\*\*'. Never seen without a tie, shiny shoes and bus inspectors cap, he prided himself on the punctuality of his buses. There is a story that he drove off once leaving half a queue behind saying they were making him late and they could catch the next bus on Thursday.

Like many other bus companies a little extra income came from offering a letter and parcel post service. This was permitted within the GPO monopoly on post if, like the railway companies, the items carried were taken to the bus company and were collected in person by the recipient, either at the depot or meeting the bus on its route. The charges levied had to be higher than the equivalent service offered by the Royal Mail. It was possible for letters to continue their journey if posted at the end of the bus journey, but they had to have additional Royal Mail stamps affixed. So the service was usually reserved for items that were required the same day or difficult to wrap up with brown paper and string. The sender could telephone the addressee and say that the parcel would be collected that afternoon, when the 4:30 from Bala arrived.

Griffiths-Jones certainly earned his appellation 'fuss-pot' when it came to the postage labels used for payment of carriage. Though, in general similar in style to many other bus company parcel labels, he had the labels colour coded according to the contents. Yellow for food or pink for implements etc. He took this further towards the final years of the company by having labels for each category of item carried, still within the colour code. Thus there were labels for live chickens, potatoes (sack), carrots (sack), eggs, cheese, hay or straw, scythes, broomsticks, personal letters, business letters. There was even one, in somber black, for cremated ashes, but rather insensitively described as 'Human Remains'. Collectors are sometimes disappointed that the labels are in English rather than Welsh, but Griffiths-Jones was of the firm belief that Welsh was the language of the home and family, English was the language of business and commerce.

The labels themselves were printed by Cerrig Printers, a small concern situated behind the High St in Bala. They came in rolls of 50, with roulette perforations between labels, so were imperforate along the other edges. Griffiths-Jones, being rather parsimonious, only ordered a single roll at a time and would divide these up between the offices in Bala, Corwen and Barmouth. If a parcel was to be collected by the bus en-route the sender had to notify the bus depot of where it was to be collected and what it was, from a public telephone, and the driver would be issued with a single example of the appropriate label. If the item being sent was a novel delivery Griffiths-Jones would place an urgent order with Cerrig Printers for a new label.

The company ceased trading in 1965, ironically when the only competition, the Western Region railway line that followed a similar route to his buses, had just been closed as part of the Beeching axe of unprofitable lines. The routes were taken over by the familiar green Crossville buses.

Because of the wide range of labels produced combined with the low stocks kept at the office there are few specialised collections of these labels, and no collector can be sure they have a complete collection. Despite his fastidiousness for using the correct label, Griffith-Jones did not seem to keep records of what labels were printed nor how many. Collectors tend to have a variety of labels of different types and are often delighted to find a new type previously unrecorded. For a fullish list please consult Bus Parcel Labels of Bala vols 1-5 and addendums 1-4.

So the labels distributed here are merely a representative sample of those issued and commonly available, though there may be a rarer item or two in the mix if you are lucky.