



The Welsh Government in Exile



Governments in Exile are not unusual; you just don't hear about them much. They come about through war, particularly civil war, repressive regimes, or simply being overthrown. Stamps are issued by them. The Polish Government in exile in WWII used them for mail to their navy which they still controlled from London. The group pushing for independence for the South Moluccas in Indonesia, and based in Holland, have issued well known full colour stamps of the islands' wildlife. In the days of before Saddam, Iraqi rebels overprinted stamps with slogans in Arabic and IRAAQ. Not so often seen are the stamps of The True Welsh Government (TWG) or Llywodraeth Fflas Cymru.

The TWG has the unenviable claim to being the one longest in existence, although for much of its life very little is known about it. By 1284 King Edward I of England had completed his conquest of Wales and the former royal houses, now lordships, paid fealty to their English overlords. Welsh hero Owain Glyndwr was born in 1354 to an influential family descended from the Princes of Powys. Their family estate at Sycharth was less than a mile from what is the current Welsh-English border. He did military service for King Richard II across England, before the King went as mad as a box of frogs. Richard was deposed by a rival, Henry Bolingbroke (Henry IV) in 1398. As usual in those times the new king had a bit of a purge. Richard was starved to death imprisoned, others lords were hung drawn and quartered or expelled from the kingdom. Glyndwr may have got off light when the courts ruled in favour of a neighbour in a simple land dispute. But this spurred a rallying call to the Welsh and a series of revolts followed. Glyndwr was proclaimed *Tywysog* or Prince of Wales in 1402. He held court at Harlech Castle and headed a parliament at Machynlleth. But initial success foundered. Henry countered the rebellion tactically and one by one the Welsh strongholds fell or the lords switched allegiance. Glyndwr's family were captured and imprisoned, but Glyndwr was still free. Henry finally gained control in 1412 and Glyndwr disappeared, never to be seen again apparently. There is one theory that he disguised himself as Siôn Cent, a Franciscan priest at the home of his in-laws near Abergavenny. But the TWG maintain he and his inner circle decamped to Brittany to plot a counter attack if and when the French were willing to assist him. This never came about because the French had little interest in Wales and the Welsh only wanted the Welsh lands.

Seventy years and three generations on, and the TWG claim it was their help that put a Welshman on the English throne - Henry Tudor. They negotiated unhindered passage and men for Henry's army through the English-Welsh borderlands on the way to the Battle of Bosworth in return for a return of a true Prince of Wales. But Henry reneged on the deals made. His claim to the monarchy was tenuous and expediency won. He kept the English lords and barons happy to keep their support.

Apart from odd records of letters to various Popes and Holy Roman Emperors nothing is heard from them until the 1790s; the years of republicanism. They petitioned France for help, but instead the French decided to help Wolfe Tone and his protestant republican uprising in Ireland. When that failed they were loathe to waste money on another lost cause. America was petitioned for help. In the War of Independence an American ship under the command of John Paul Jones had put a landing party ashore in Whitehaven, more as morale victory than a serious assault. This was taken as an example. A Welshman by the name of Sir Henry Lewis whose signature is on the Declaration of Independence was sympathetic to the cause. His house had been destroyed in the war and family arrested, but this also came to nothing after Lewis died.

The twentieth century brought further opportunities and a new approach, first with the League of Nations and then the United Nations. The TWG keep asking for observer status, and get rejected on the obvious grounds that they do not represent a nation or people that aren't already represented there. Regardless they now hold parliamentary sessions and

allocate a budget for Wales and pass new laws. These edicts are duly delivered to Cardiff and London. They get a printed Thank You slip in return. One would have thought that they might have joined in with the growth of Welsh Nationalism and thrown their lot in with Plaid Cymru, but that party is viewed as complicit with England as it works within the establishment. They prefer to be outside, rather than inside the tent, doing the deed. Currently the TWG claims embassies in West Falkland, Canada, South Africa, Western Australia and a handful of other places. Their support may be greater than first imagined, and they seem to be financially secure. Their money rumoured to be income from careful investments from bequests and donations from sympathisers.

The TWG claim to have started using stamps for their official mail in the 1880s. Only official mail stamps are actually issued. Naturally these are not recognised by the UPU, so are not valid through normal mail channels. To prevent any embarrassment the mail is couriered and personally delivered, and must be signed for over the stamp and on a copy on a receipt. They purposefully do not sell mint stamps to collectors so any that find their way into albums will have been smuggled out of one of the embassies or the HQ in Morlaix in Brittany.

The stamps have naturally featured Owain Glyndwr, and also others who have been seen as sympathetic to the cause, or were anti Welsh-Establishment. The earliest stamps from 1887 depict Owain and Sir John Wynn ap Morys of Gwydir. He is one of the adopted Welshmen, and though a Member of Parliament, his quest to prove he was of Welsh royal descent and to promote that marked him out.

The 500th anniversary of the Welsh Rebellion (or War of Independence as the TWG prefer to call it) was commemorated with another stamp. It featured the same (the only) picture of Owain. Henry Lewis who stood up for them in the 1790s is on a rather ornate stamp dating from 1926. His signature from the Declaration is shown. More recently a pair of stamps showing a dragon coat of arms appeared. They are unusual in that the arms are in the black and yellow of St David for airmail use, and green and red of the Welsh flag for surface mail.

You will have noticed that none of the stamps carry a value. This is a reflection of the fact that the pre-Conquest peoples of Wales did not have their own coinage. Much trade was done by barter, and cattle (not sheep!) were exchanged for larger trades. Neither do they use the currencies of their overseas embassies. The stamps are not so much used as evidence for pre-paid mail, but to authenticate mail from the TWG.

They have used the Welsh dragon symbol but are not limited to red dragons. The daffodil as a Welsh symbol is quite modern and is not even considered, and though the leek association goes back through the centuries it is rejected because the green and white colours of the Tudors is said to be based on the leek, and it was Henry Tudor who went back on his deal with the TWG.

There is just one little problem with this story. Much of the information is sourced from the TWG itself, and the little that isn't could be good modern forgeries slipped into the old records. It's been done before, and will be done again. Are these stamps just meant to look dated? And why concoct such a tale? Perhaps one day we will find out the truth.