



Some Stamps of Hughesovka



Hughesovka is a Ukrainian city on the banks of the River Don, founded in the Nineteenth Century by the Welsh industrialist John Hughes. In the excellent Malcolm Pryce novel "From Aberystwyth With Love" it is said to be the only Welsh speaking community East of the Greenwich Meridian. It was modelled on a street plan of Merthyr Tydfil giving it a rather grandiose and exotic air.



Before the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe the people of Hughesovka lived their lives watching over their shoulders, and surviving on cabbage soup and Russian tea. After the collapse things got worse. They lived in fear of being denounced, as denouncing one's friends and neighbours is the only way to move up. You would denounce a friend to get his job, or his larger apartment. Those denounced would never find out who denounced them or even why they were denounced. Ten years in a labour camp on the Kolyma Peninsula was the standard sentence.

So the people dreamt of visiting their homeland Wales, especially to see the bright lights of Aberystwyth and take a dizzying ride on the Cliff Railway, but few managed to escape. Those that did returned after a while, but had obviously been captured by the state police and were brainwashed into thinking life was better in Hughesovka.

Mainstream philately is of the opinion that Hughesovka stamps are merely local post issues or bogus, as if that was a reason not to collect them! I hope that by publicising this issue some evidence to support the claim that the stamps are fully fledged official issues will emerge, and that Gibbons can be petitioned (pitchforks and flaming torches if necessary) to catalogue them.

Meanwhile back (or forward) to this issue. This set of 8 stamps was issued in 1981, in four values and four colours, and depicts scenes of Hughesovka at the start of each decade from 1901 till 1971. They show the rise in development, sophistication and social improvement over those 70 years. Hughesovka has grown and evolved; the only constant being the inevitable police informant lurking in the shadows and watching everybody.

The 20 kopek brown stamps show Ploschchad John Hughes in 1901 and the Hughesovka Ballet House in 1911. The former is the huge square in the centre of the city, near the railway station. A large statue of John Hughes, made from Preseli bluestone, dominates the centre of the Ploschchad. In the distance you can see the onion domes of the great cathedral. The square was the scene of the Pancake Day Revolt in July 1917, forgotten by the history books as it was overshadowed by the Russian Revolution. Historians still debate why it was called the Pancake Day Revolt as it occurred in July. The Ballet House overlooks the square and is famed for the winged angels who look down over the entrance and appear to be watching your every move. It was here, on the opening night in 1873, that Rippemov premiered his masterpiece, *Duck Pond*. A certain other composer was in the audience that night and is believed to have plagiarised much of this ballet, and presented it on a much grander scale.

The 40 kopek green stamps show Vulkitsya Kreshchatyk in 1921 and the Central Railway Station in 1931. Vulkitsya Kreshchatyk is one of the main streets of the city; some of the shops have something to sell much of the time. The tram system today is still the same as it was 90 years ago; even the same tickets, which are collected up each night and re-used. The railway station became a request stop for the Orient Express in 1931. The city was proud that this great train stopped there, but the Bureau for the Promotion of Anti-Capitalism prohibited the illustration of one of those trains on the stamp. The station café was used from the Soviet film version of *Brief Encounter*.

The 80k stamps commemorate the city's founding, showing the Museum of Our Forefather's Suffering from 1941 and the John Hughes Mausoleum in 1951. The Museum is dedicated to the memory of the oppressed Welsh folk whose descendants were rescued by Hughes and left their homeland to forge a bright new future. John Hughes' embalmed (or rather pickled) body used to be displayed on Sundays and holidays in a fine classically inspired mausoleum at the end of Bulvar John Hughes. After the body was getting rather dog-eared it was replaced by a rejected waxwork model of Lloyd George. The obvious switch has not reduced the city-folk's desire to pay homage to the great man.

The 1 Rouble grey stamps show the more modern advances in social housing in downtown Hughesovka with views of Prospekt Bakunina from 1961 following the mass transportation of the peasants who previous lived in a commune there, and Merthyr Tydfil Naberezhnaya where many of the apartments are said to have either water or electricity.



There is an interesting sub-story behind these stamps. A routine check by a junior clerk in the Department of Revolutionary Purity noticed that the stamps measured exactly 1 by 2/3 Ukranian vershoks, an obsolete Imperial unit of length. It became apparent that the designer of the stamp was Tomas the Unrepentant Purveyor of Tsarist Values, a suspected member of the Welsh Underground. He was sentenced to 20 years hard labour, and unsold copies of the stamp were destroyed. It is also rumoured that the Cyrillic, after swapping odd letters here and there and transliteration into Welsh, harbours some anti-government slogans. Unfortunately Ukranian is not my strong suit, but if you want to try and decipher go ahead. But remember, it is just a rumour.

Mention has already been made of denouncement. Often no evidence was required, but sometimes it helped. Consequently mail was often intercepted, opened and inspected for any anti-state material or sentiments. The Hughesovka Post Office offered a surchargeable service for a sender's mail to pass through without inspection. The fee was 2 roubles in addition to the normal rate. This was the equivalent of nearly one week's wages. The stamps were manually overprinted Денонсации возмещение (Denouncement Indemnity) and the envelope clearly marked. Sadly this extra payment was wasted. Envelopes are sometimes such thin paper that a letter can often be read through them.