



Huw Puw Caru's Stamps



Huw Puw Caru (1873-1967) was a Welsh author of note; the note being an untuned B flat. Largely ignored during his lifetime by publishers, critics and the public, the trend continued after his death. It is only recently that his work has started to become available again due to the tireless (and painstaking slow progress) of The Caru Foundation. Caru has been associated with stamps from the Welsh Oddities series twice before. The Welsh Regionals of 2001 Unusual Plants of Wales featured some of the plants central to his tales in *Shortest Stories*, and commemorated the 127th anniversary of his birth. The Welsh Fairy Tales poster| stamps depicted five of his children's stories; the Foundation only very recently confirming his authorship of these after finding the original manuscripts being used to line his sock drawers. It should be noted that the Foundation is trying to re-create Caru's home in fine detail at the Welsh National History Museum at St Fagans. Consequently all the author's possessions are currently in the Foundation's care.



Caru himself was a singular and unconventional character. Many authors write under a pen name. Huw Puw Caru was his real name, and he lived his day to day life under a pseudonym, even to the extent of his marriages. It is not quite true to call him anti-authoritarian. While he refused to acknowledge formal authority, he was always keen to impose his own on others; usually those who could be accused as being jobs-worths, and those whose deficiencies of intellect were compensated by application of the rule-book. Caru was, however, willing to accept the authority of those who impressed him, though those people were most likely to be friends and not in any position of power. He would be willing to follow them on their escapades which usually ended up the steps to the magistrate's court.

Caru had a love-hate relationship with the Royal Mail. On the one hand it brought him some cheques for the meagre royalties for this published works¹, letters from his few literary fans, and provided him with stamps for his collection. On the other hand it brought bad news from publishers and agents, summonses from the police, final demands, and threats of legal action from solicitors. In regard to the second category Caru did not see why he should have to pay for a stamp for a reply to a letter that he had not instigated. The concept was alien to him, and he started sending replies without a stamp.

Then he had an idea. It came to him one weekend at The Forest Hotel (Coedwig Gwesty) in the Conwy Valley. Caru went there periodically to mix with others of an

¹ It is believed that Caru had an additional income from a trust set up by his paternal grandfather who was a ship's master sailing out of Newport docks. Legend has it that he regularly landed contraband having bribed Customs to look the other way.

artistic temperament and 'to take the waters'. At least that was what he told his wife. In fact these get-togethers often involved wild parties in the woods, drinking of quantities of wine and absinthe, and the sampling of the local mushrooms. As subscribers to The Oddities know, this hotel operated its own hotel post service. Caru was impressed by the concept of printing one's own stamps, though not to be used as a private postal service. He saw them as an opportunity to make his feelings known to those he had to reply to and had issues with. He talked his ideas over with artist Huw ap Lloyd², another regular at the weekend parties, and the other Huw soon came up with some artwork for the stamps. There was a bit of disagreement between the two. Huw ap Lloyd was the founder (and sole pupil) of the school of art known as Oblongism, and Caru wanted square shaped stamps, just to be in charge of everything. After an arm wrestling match which ended in stalemate they compromised on a diamond format, ... and another round of drinks.

It was decided that four stamps, each with different wording, would cover most eventualities. The first one produced was destined for replies to solicitor's letters and said "Who will rid me of these turbulent parasites" around the sides. The main illustration showed a tapeworm, head louse and flea. It was printed in peppermint green. While Caru had approved the artwork, he was dissatisfied with the final printing of the stamps. With his typical modesty he decided that his face was sufficient for the main image, and that the decorative background surrounding it should be dropped. The other three stamps followed that design format. For begging letters and requests for donations he had a "Charity, like chastity, is a rarity and best avoided" stamp in slate blue. Caru disliked having to reply to unsolicited mail, so often didn't. Once the stamps were printed, and there was no enclosed reply postage he used a "Postage Paid by Addressee" stamp, printed in subdued ochre. Finally for replies to the police and the courts, a frequent occurrence, there was a claret stamp with "No longer, or no shorter, at this address" stamp. His reckoning on this was that using literacy licence and the fact that he was still the same height as always he was. He was not making a false declaration.

However, Caru either lost enthusiasm for this, or simply over-ordered the supply of stamps; or quite possibly he actually and eventually took note of the possible punishments that may arise from his continued use of his own stamps. Whilst cataloguing the Caru possessions The Caru Foundation unearthed a folder of complete sheets of these stamps. So we are privileged and honoured that have allowed a limited distribution of these sheet to enthusiastic collectors. And not only that, but a number of envelopes sent out by Caru have been collected from a wide variety of sources, and one of these is also included in this Oddities issue. The covers are notable for the use of the rare Welsh postage due stamps, which were only used on a limited basis during the latter part of the 1940s.

Don't forget to check out <http://www.muba.eclipse.co.uk/Huw%20Puw%20Caru/index.html>

² These two were once in court charged with affray. The prosecutor could not resist saying "the defendants, to wit, two Huws".