



Local Hotel Posts of Wales



Local Hotel Posts are a rather narrow field of Cinderella Philately. They usually only feature in Swiss collections where a small number of them sprang up in the mid 19th century, but were suppressed by the 1880s due to improved transport in that country rendering them unnecessary. A few other hotels around the world, including the Raffles Hotel in Singapore, have run a local post service, but few collections feature Welsh hotels for reasons that are unknown to me. Enclosed are four examples, each with their own way of circumventing the Royal Mail monopoly on the postal service. Like all local posts, mail items also had to have regular stamps as well, for posting onto to their final destination.



The earliest one dates from 1886 and was from Y Ffrwd (The Torrent) named after either the usual weather, or the river that runs alongside the hotel. It was a small and remote hotel in the Badlands of the Brecon Beacon hills. Printed in black on cream, it features a drawing of this hotel. It cost 1d (the old penny) for the staff to carry mail the mail 5 miles from the hotel to the nearest posting box in the village of Nant Brenin. This was done on a daily basis, including Sundays, probably by staff going off duty on their way home. The drawing of the hotel makes it look small than it actually was, and it attracted wealthy clientele, many who stayed on a regular basis.

The service lasted until 1893, when the authorities erected a posting box near the hotel and informed the owners that their service would be illegal. There were two printings of the stamp, differing mainly in the central image which is larger and makes the hotel look nearer on the second issue. There were 6,000 of the originals printed and 12,000 of the second issue, in sheets of 50; sufficient for 5 items per day during the lifetime of the service.

From 1919 to 1926 a small hotel post service was run by Coedwig Gwesty (The Forest Hotel or Hotel in the Woods), deep within the misty woodlands of the Conwy Valley in North Wales. Again, remoteness was the reason for the service. The hotel was set back from the road in its own estate, so even with a posting box near the driveway entrance there was still a walk or ride of a few miles of muddy twisting hilly track between it and the hotel.

The hotel itself was a favourite of artists and writers and others of that ilk, who would spend time there cut off from the rest of the world. They said the isolation engendered inspiration, but ex-members of staff said it was mainly for the wild parties most nights of the week! One notable artist who was a regular guest was Huw ap Lloyd who single-handedly occupied the school of Oblongism. He rejected Cubism, saying that in a cube all dimensions are equal, but with an oblong he could emphasise one or more dimensions accordingly. His work can be seen at the National Gallery in Wales by prior appointment. The stamp design shows the hotel set deep in the forest. It was commissioned off another the artist guests, Clarence Sillitoe, a native of Hampshire; probably the only

proper sale of his artwork he ever managed. He managed to depict the hotel in leafy deciduous woodland even though then, as now, it was 95% spruce trees.

From 1930 is a stamp from the Summit Hotel, atop the Great Orme, a huge limestone outcrop of limestone rock that protects the seaside resort of Llandudno from the waves. The hotel worked around the monopoly of the Royal Mail by combining a hotel post with a railway letter service. The Great Orme Tramway runs from the resort up to the top of the rock by cable operated traction. It is certainly the steepest railway in the UK with gradients of up to 1:4 (25%), and dates back to Victorian times. The combined letter fee was 1¼d. Records show that some 25,317½ items (no-one is quite sure what the ½ was) were dispatched during the 4 years that the service was in operation, but the greatest proportion were sent by day trippers on postcards home.



Though the hotel sits on top of the Orme and has a sort of circular design, don't believe the locals if they tell you that it was the inspiration behind Blofeld's hotel in the James Bond story *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. This is just wishful thinking. The fluffy white feral cats that now prowl the hilltop are also just a coincidence. The hotel later belonged to Randolph Turpin, a boxing champion from the 1950s and currently the bar has much memorabilia associated with him and the sport.

Lastly there is a more modern example, dating from 1951-1957, from the Regent Hotel in Snowdonia, situated not far from Bethesda. The hotel then was the haunt of the post-war rich (such as Swedish munitions producers who stressed their neutrality by selling to both sides in the conflict) and minor royalty (exiles and pretenders to non-existent thrones) from around the world as regular guests. Many of these were too lazy or self-important to actually post their own letters. To circumvent the rules, this stamp has no value, and according to the proprietors it was merely an advertising label that staff affixed to mail before posting on behalf of guests. In reality though, it was customary to drop a coin or two into the gratuities box when handing over a letter or postcard; failure to do so often resulted in the hotel staff reciprocating by forgetting to post said items. Hotel staff would cancel the stamps with a big X, signifying that the sender had dropped coins in the box, in black ink.

The stamp itself shows a photograph of the hotel nestled beneath the mountains. Someone has done a neat job on this photograph though, for while the proportions of the hotel are faithful to reality, the mountains in the background appear higher than in real life. When you stand in front of it now those mountains do not seem quite so impressive. Compare the stamp to the picture at the top of the other page and you will see.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 25 and it is estimated that 1,000 sheets were printed. How many were used is unknown, mint examples are common.

Every great hotel had a semi-resident retired colonel. The Regent's was Col 'Biffy' Smythe, a compulsive writer of letters to *The Times*. Luckily one of the newspaper's secretaries kept many of his envelopes sent from the hotel and one is part of this issue. Sadly none of his ramblings ever made it into print.