



Fiscal stamps of the Druidic Courts



Not all courts of law work within the familiar justice system. Such a situation occurs in Wales with the Druidic Courts, which make judgements in some specialised areas that are poorly covered by Common Law due to unfamiliarity of some of the finer details of everyday Welsh life.

The Druidic Courts are normally held in front of three high ranking Druids, though one may be replaced by a Bard or Ovate for cases seen to be of lesser importance. Usually they travel from town to town as circuit druids, hearing cases arising since the last visit, but occasionally there is a case which needs to be heard before the next visit. Then the case is heard within the circle of stones you see in many Welsh towns. Only those within the circle are permitted to speak or hear the proceedings, and naturally all cases have to be spoken in rhyming verse accompanied by harps.

Like usual courts, fiscal stamps were used to denote payment of court fees and similar, by cancellation of the stamp attached to documentation. There were different stamps for different purposes and examples are included here. The use of these stamps lasted from 1858 up to 1974. Enclosed is a small selection of these fiscal stamps with a description of the different courts to which they applied.



Treialon Dewiniaeth

The Witchcraft Trials were not for prosecuting witches, as outsiders might imagine. The witches would be on trial for charging for spells that didn't work, those that had unexpected side effects (think toad), or unprofessional behaviour such as counteracting another witch's spells. Note that it was the complainant who paid the rather modest court fees out of the recompense that the court awarded.

One notable case involved Ceinwen of Penmaenmawr in 1931, who preyed on unsuspecting maidens who had a rival for a young man's hand. She would claim to cast a spell to cover the face of the rival in sores and pustules. In fact she did no such thing. She merely made her client believe they saw the pustules. Found guilty, it was lucky for Ceinwen that the burning of witches had died out in 1928.

The Court Fiscal stamps show a druid and are inscribed in Old Welsh in an even older typeface. The stamp values are in a rather unusual format with values of 58, 68, 77 and 99 pence recorded. The courts make a distinction between male and female plaintiffs, and this is reflected in the stamp designs with a male or female stylised mandrake root incorporated into the design.

Trwydded Trolop

The Druids make a clear distinction between the activities of harlots, jezebels, trollops and flibbertigibbets. While the first two are violate druidic law, suspected trollops can be brought before the court and interrogated about their private lives and activities. Of special interest will be the evidence of neighbours, hidden behind

their net curtains, who not only observe comings and goings, but keep detailed logs. If claims are proved the trollops are required to carry a special license (Trwydded Trolop) to continue being a trollop. Flibbertigibbets were below the age of 25 and considered as being redeemable, but after that age, and up to 45 years, they would be classed as trollops. The stamps include the 2/- and 3/- browns of 1906 and 1915. These come in a range of subtle shades and sizes due to the number of reprints required. The stamps were stuck to the licence and tied to it by a cancellation. This document may be the world's first to require the holder's image. Many took advantage of a photographer for this, but a pen and ink likeness was also acceptable.

Treialon Cwn Defaid

When venturing into the countryside one often sees a notice announcing sheepdog trials to be held soon. In Wales these have a different meaning. The Druidic Courts have sessions where underperforming dogs are put on trial and sentenced if found guilty. Usually the charge will be lost sheep or lambs, or herding the flock into the wrong sheepfold, but occasionally there are more sensational trials which may even get a mention in the South Wales Advertiser. One such case was the trial of Myffi of Llanfihangel who was found by her master's dead and partly eaten body. She was clearly guilty of all charges, for all the doors and windows of the farmhouse were locked from the inside. However, two neighbouring farmers both testified mitigating circumstances on her behalf. They told the Druids that Myffi had been expected to work solo in the worst of weather while her master stayed in and watched Pobl y Cwm on TV. Myffi's hangdog expression of repentance convinced them that she would not be a repeat offender and she found work on another farm and worked exceptionally to her last days.

The stamps are relatively high value as evidence by the £2 and £3 examples enclosed from the 1930s. This highlights the importance put on good shepherding. The stamps were used as evidence of a fine paid. One may wonder how a sheepdog can pay such a fine. The dogs are actually waged, albeit in kind from their owners. Days off can be bought, as can treats like a big bone, and most dogs will have a mortgage on their kennel. The owner will pay the fine to the court, and then recoups the money by denying those little extras. And the day when the dog can say his kennel is his own may be a couple of years further away.

Included here are the £2 green used exclusively in Pembrokeshire between 1933 and 1938, and the £3 blue which was used further north in Cereidigion from 1934 till 1942. Other local courts used stamps of the same 'snivelling dog' design but in their own distinctive colours.

As usual, truth is rather relative to your belief