



## The 1971 Postal Strike Emergency Posts in Wales



The 1971 British Postal Strike lasted for 43 days from the 20<sup>th</sup> January till the 6<sup>th</sup> March. It was the first full and most extensive walk out of postal workers. Because of this, for the duration of the strike, the Royal Mail relinquished its monopoly of the post, and independent firms could act as emergency postal services. Usually written authorisation was required, but in some cases it was given verbally. Consequently many hundreds of small postal services arose almost overnight, and these have provided collectors with a vast array of Cinderella philatelic material. Much of it was genuine postal material even if some was produced purely with collectors in mind. Some of these services claimed to have handled in excess of a million items during the course of the strike, so they were not all small concerns and a lot of activity took place. But even now, 40 years on, some new ones are still being discovered. Not only this, but as the strike occurred when the UK moved from good old £sd to decimal currency there are revalued overprints on the old currency and new value sets to collect.

Here are presented some stamps from Welsh examples of 1971 Postal strike stamps, some from those services that have only recently come to light.

Many of the postal services were provided by taxi cab companies, who could act as local couriers. One such as this was operated by Little David Cars in Flintshire covering the area between Abermorddu, Saltney and Hawarden, not far from the English-Welsh border near Chester. The A.S.H. Dai Bach courier service used a small fleet of the new mark 3 Ford Cortinas, which are featured on the stamps. These were cheaply produced and roulette perforated. They may have been late-comers into providing an emergency postal service because only decimal currency stamps are recorded, in values of 15p and 25p. This service was only recently reported in the autumn of 2012, which quite coincidence, if you see what I mean.

A more flamboyant service was provided in Cardiff by a Mr Lee, who originally came from Hong Kong as a young man having bought a boat ticket to Canton (the city now called Guangzhou) in 1936. How was he to know that Cardiff boasted a district near the docks called Canton? The price of the ticket should have given him a clue, with Canton just up the river from Hong Kong, and Cardiff 6,000 miles further away. Anyway he settled in and became a colourful local character, always making a living with some scheme or other. Mr Lee was one of the first to be authorised to run a postal service and he did so with relish. Out came an old bicycle rickshaw from a previous venture, which he cleaned up and repainted oriental style. He became a familiar figure in the centre of Cardiff on his rickshaw piled up with letters and parcels during those 7 weeks.

The stamps were in values of 2/- and 5/-, later 10p and 25p, and naturally show Mr Lee's pride and joy; his rickshaw. These stamps have been found in collections filed away under China, as they are inscribed Canton Postal Service and 广州邮政服务.

Back up in North Wales the Dee Valley Postal Service covered the area between Llangollen and Corwen along the old A5 stage coach route. It was run by a group who called themselves the Old Ladies of Llangollen, and they are pictured thus on the stamps. But considerable doubt has been placed on this description of them. For those who do not know of them, the original and famous Ladies of Llangollen were originally from 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, but fled from their families to avoid being forced into marriage. Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby lived together at Plas Newydd Hall on the outskirts of the town, and received many famous artists and writers as guests there. But their fame came from living together, never marrying and their habit of dressing in male clothes, and so scandalised the local society of the time. It has been suggested that the Old Ladies reversed this, and were neither old nor ladies. This is borne out with some locals remembering them well, ferrying the mail at speed on motorbikes up and down the A5, albeit dressed in the traditional welsh female attire. So far only a 25p stamp has found its way into collections.

During the strike arrangements were also made for mail to be posted abroad via emergency post regulations. Again special stamps were prepared for mail to specific countries. For the inhabitants of the remote Welsh Antarctic Daipendency, for who mail was a lifeline, help was at hand. A trial printing of the new decimal definitives, which were delayed anyway, were pressed into service with an EMERGENCY POST and a higher value overprint in red. Thus these hardy souls had a preview of these before the rest of the world and the philatelic community in particular. Four values seem to have been brought into use, and they feature the local fauna. These trial printings do in fact differ significantly from the finalised stamps, and would be an interesting addition to main stream philatelic collections..

The 1p Enormous Squid was revalued 10p. The Enormous Squid is reported to grow up to 50 metres long and is able to drag entire ships down to the depths of the Antarctic Ocean. Because of its size it has been suggested that it should be cooked twice as long as usual squid on a high heat.

The 3p Obese Penguin was revalued 15p. The Obese Penguin may not be the tallest penguin on the planet, but it does have the greatest girth. Its rarity is due to its short life span, and it has recently been discovered that it is the only bird in the world to have type II diabetes. This does not seem to stop them eating as much as they can, hoovering up fish and plankton for 8 hours a day. The Welsh scientists are studying this bird in the hope of improving the overall health of the city of Cardiff.

The 5p Ruswal was revalued 25p. The Ruswal is the southern version of the walrus. Its distinction is that its tusks are lower teeth growing upwards; useful for breaking the ice when surfacing from the depths. And while the Walrus is also noted for its moustache, the Ruswal has a beard.

The 10p Sea Serpent was revalued 50p. Officially known as the South Cardigan Bay Sea Serpent, to distinguish it from any others, is only known from the seas off the Daipendency. No net is big enough to catch one, no dead specimens have ever been found, and no photographs have ever been taken of it. However, it has been seen by several of the Welsh seal shepherds and scientists living there and though they had forgotten their cameras on the days it was sighted luckily they had the foresight to take sketch pads and pencils with them. It is one of these sketches that is used on the stamp.