

The Oernant Tramway Post

The Oernant Tramway ran from the slate quarries along and beyond the Horseshoe Pass (Welsh: *Bwlch Oernant*) in Denbighshire, down to the dressing sheds and canal wharf just east of Llangollen. The down traffic was gradient assisted with a long incline about two-thirds of the way down, while the empty trucks were hauled back by horse traction. Most of the route of the trackway can still be seen (see photo) and can be followed on large scale maps (see over page). The tramway was operated as a separate enterprise to the independent quarries which paid a toll fee for each train journey.



The Oernant Tramway Post started in 1848; again the quarries paid for the service. A trip down to Llangollen meant a 16 mile round journey with a 1,000 foot climb on the way back. So to post or deliver a letter would mean a quarry manager could be away the best part of a day, so it was economical sense to pay the ½d surcharge charged to the tramway. Like the quarrymen, the managers would live near the quarries allowing long working days for enhanced pay, without that climb in all weather conditions. Both quarry business and personal mail would be carried. While the quarrymen were largely illiterate they could get help to write a letter home, so some personal mail was carried.

Originally the GPO 1841 imperforate 1d red stamps were used overprinted 'OERNANT TRAMWAY' and '½d Surcharge'. While this would not be approved by the Post Office it was tolerated locally, possibly because everyone knew everyone else. However in 1852 the arrangement came to the notice of the authorities who promptly banned the use of surcharged stamps. The tramway company responded issuing a separate pair of stamps or labels, again with a ½d value, for the ferrying of mail down to Llangollen. They were roulette perforated. One showed a quarry scene, the other a horse-train, in black on pale yellow with a horseshoe design used to cancel the stamps. A normal stamp would need to be affixed if the letter was to be posted on, but the label had the advantage that if the addressee was in Llangollen the letter would be delivered by hand, by some street urchin who didn't get his ears boxed in lieu of payment, for no additional cost.

Very few examples of either the 1d red surcharged stamp or the ½d label survive. When the quarries closed and the tramway was dismantled all existing stocks of the label were apparently burned. The odd used example does turn up when an old house in the area is cleared. There are no reliable figures of the number of labels printed and it is believed that the surcharged 1d reds were only stamped with the surcharge as and when needed.

Of course, only some of this is true.

