

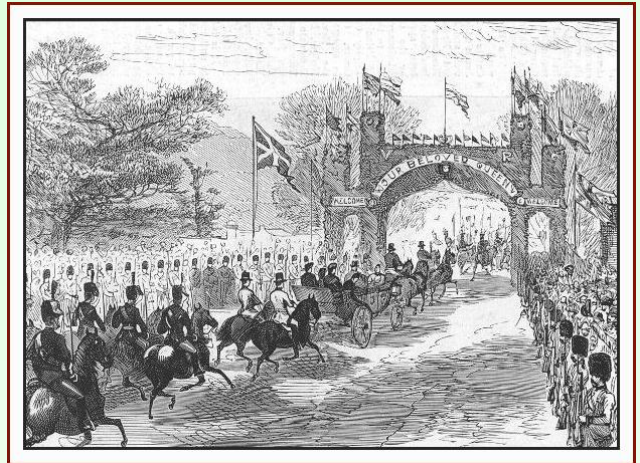


“We are not amused”



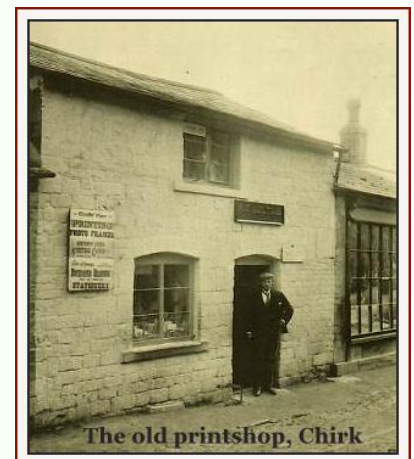
Queen Victoria's famous catch phrase is said to have been uttered in 1900 in response to hearing one of her grooms' risqué jokes, but the origins of this phrase naturally go back to Wales.

In August 1889 Victoria visited North East Wales travelling up from London in the Royal Train. A few miles short of Ruabon in Denbighshire, where the train would divert to travel up the Dee Valley, the train crossed the River Ceiriog on the impressive viaduct. Her Maj. was informed that in a few minutes they would travel through the small village of Chirk, and that the entire village had turned out to see her. As quick as a flash she snapped 'Well, I do not to see Chirk' and ordered the carriage blinds to be lowered. The worthies, tradespersons, artisans, housewives, layabouts and children of Chirk and the surrounding area saw this as the train sailed through the station and many felt both insulted and disappointed.



Why this happened is uncertain. Though widowed for 28 years Victoria may still have harboured bad feelings about an affair that her otherwise wise and devoted husband Prince Albert had had with a certain Olivia Taylor, daughter of the Lord Chamberlain. Olivia's family was 'banished' to Ireland when the story broke, where she later married. Her eldest daughter Patsy, when back in England, was subsequently one of Edward, Prince of Wales' (many) mistresses. In order to make her more respectable the Prince arranged a marriage for her to William Cornwallis-West. And this family held estates in and around Chirk! Talk about harbouring a grudge

Anyway a two weeks later Thomas O.E. Roberts, a printer from Chirk went missing, and at the same time a letter arrived at Buckingham Palace addressed to Queen Victoria bearing parodies of the Penny Black. These appear to have been accepted as valid by the Royal Mail, but would you want to slap a 2d postage due on a letter addressed to perhaps the most powerful person on earth at that time? The letter was postmarked Liverpool, but the stamps make it clear that it was the Chirk incident that resulted in the letter. Inside was a simple card echoing the stamps with a simple 'We were not amused'. Roberts was never heard of again; perhaps he emigrated, but he was said to have affected the most by the Chirk



incident. Though he was in his 50s Roberts was due to propose to his lifelong sweetheart on the noon of the royal visit day, but she rejected him, petulantly telling him that she was kept waiting and that if Roberts would rather see the Queen than her he should propose to her! He was heartbroken, but obviously Victoria remembered that phrase in the letter from 12 years previously when she uttered her famous retort.

Robert's printing shop was eventually in his closed down in his absence, and his brothers cleared the stock selling much of it off. There must have been some of the stamps within the sale lots, because the stamps occasionally appear in auctions and for sale. Roberts must have spent his last two weeks in Chirk brooding and printing trial designs and prototypes. Other designs show Victoria with her face green with jealousy or with the blinds coming down over her face. His final choice though was the 'Going, Going, Going, Gone' quartet. These are most collectable as a se-tenant strip. None of the stamps and trials were perforated. Whether this was for lack of a perforating machine, or whether it was to imitate the Penny Black more authentically is unknown. The origin of the portrait of Victoria that Roberts used is unknown, but philatelists possessing big magnifiers claim he had done some touching up in the mouth area to make her look a bit more miserable.

As usual this is as truthful as you want it to be.