



Welsh Fairy Tales Poster Stamps



Poster stamps in the USA and mainland Europe were a common means of advertising a product or to entice buyers into brand loyalty. British examples are less frequent. However in the 1930s the makers of Quicka Bara Brith (just add milk, eggs, dried fruit, spices, sugar, colourings, dihydrogen monoxide) put collector's stamps in little packets in their ready to bake mixes. One of the most popular showed scenes from the book of Traditional Welsh Fairy Tales. Series one featured five such stories. The stamps came in little transparent envelopes to protect them, and this is the only way to collect them these days. They were adapted for the stamps by different artists who later went on to lesser glory.

The Golden Leek starts with Young Evans finding a golden leek growing in his vegetable patch. "Lucky me" he thinks, "I'll be rich!" He decides to celebrate with a slap-up meal, spending all his money on bread and honey, beer and meats, fruit and wine. But as he sits down to eat it all by himself he finds he cannot open his mouth. All that food and he cannot eat it! Rather than discard the Golden Leek, which to the reader is obviously the cause of his distress, he sits and waits day after day to be able to open his mouth. All the while the food rots on his table and he loses weight, and dies of starvation. It is then that an elf or gnome creeps in and takes the Golden Leek. It reappears in a lady's garden, a lady known to be the town gossip. But once she finds the Leek she cannot stop herself talking about her friends and neighbours; but its all terrible lies that she just makes up. Those she has maligned soon have had enough of her and drive her out of town, into the woods where she dies destitute. The story continues along the same lines with each new owner thinking they'll be rich, but becoming the victim of their own fatal vices.

The Story of the Broken Wagon starts with Hywel the Carter loading up his horse drawn wagon on a Monday with coal to from the pits. But he overloads it to save making two journeys, and the wagon side breaks. So he has to unload it all and take it to the carpenter for repairs. On Tuesday he reloads the wagon, but just as he sets off his horse throws a shoe, so he has to unhitch the horse and take her to the farrier. On Wednesday the harness snaps, on Thursday a wheel breaks and on Friday its an axle that lets him down. On Saturday he checks everything before setting off but going up the hill the coal slides off and end up back in his yard. He takes Sunday off and on Monday overloads the cart again and lo and behold the wagon side breaks.

The Kindly Old Lady is always a favourite tale. It starts with young Tomas, a rather foolish boy, running away from home because his parents want him to milk the cow and feed the chickens. He sets off down the road and follows it heading for the big city, but soon gets lost; and it is getting dark and it is starting to rain. Then he meets the Kindly Old Woman who invites him back to her cottage, and says she will give him a good meal and a bed for night. But the roast he eats that night is delicious and the bed warm and

soft. In the morning he asks the old lady if he can have his breakfast in bed as he is so comfortable. She agrees. Then he decides that he won't set off the city straightway. He will stay with the old lady for a while. She feeds him delicious meals every day. Sausages and bacon for brekky, succulent roasts, tasty liver and onions, the best steak and kidney pudding he has ever tasted. And lazy Tomas neither helps the old lady, nor does she ask him to help her. But then after a couple of weeks, despite everything he finds he is homesick and tells the Kindly Old Lady that the next day he will return home. That morning he wakes to find himself not in his bed, but tied up in what must be the cottage's cellar. He shouts and shouts until the Kindly Old Lady appears and he demands to be allowed to go. "Oh no" exclaims Kindly Old Lady, "I couldn't let you go after I've fattened you up so well. I can now go and find another foolish boy who needs good meaty meals and warm bed" as she starts to sharpen her meat cleaver.

The Old Man of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwylllantysiliogogoch concerns an elderly gent out collecting firewood one day and getting lost. He wanders into a village and starts to ask a passerby the way, but being old and dodderly he cannot remember more than the 'Llanfair' part of his village's name, and that is quite common in a place name and the man cannot help him. He then asks a lady sat on a bench, but cannot remember anything but the 'gwyn' part of the name and she falls asleep while he struggles to remember. He meets others but each time his memory fails. Later the people he has met are in the pub and begin talking about him. Between them from the fragments of the name they work out he is looking for Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwylllantysiliogogoch, and of course it's the next village. They go to find the poor old man to tell him he just has to go down the road, turn left and it's a mile further on. But of course he has wandered off in the other direction and is never seen again.

The Lazy Scarecrow tells the story of Merfyn, the scarecrow who failed to scare the birds. Farmer Huw puts Mervyn in his wheat field and tells him to keep the birds away, but when he returns later in the week all his wheat has been eaten and he calls Merfyn the laziest scarecrow he has ever seen. Huw then puts Merfyn to guard his cabbages with the strictest instructions to frighten the birds. Again the same thing happens; and again and again for each crop. Finally Merfyn decides the only way to keep the birds away is to wave his arms in the air. It works, so for the next few days Merfyn is waving madly and jumping around and the crop is untouched. But when Farmer Huw returns he doesn't notice his crop is safe. All he sees is a dancing scarecrow, who must be possessed. So he lights a match and creeps up behind Merfyn, who is still dancing around, and sets light to Merfyn. Straw and old clothes burn very well, and soon Merfyn dances no more.

Addendum: The original paintings used for these stamps used to hang in the Children's section in the Welsh National Gallery in Cardiff, until they disappeared one day after a primary school art exhibition was packed up and dispatched. One painting turned up in a car boot sale in 1985 and was bought for £3. The others are considered lost.