



## Welsh Hunting Angling Shooting etc 1912



This month's offering features the 100 year old issue of stamps promoting the 1912 Welsh Hunting, Angling, Trapping, Shooting, Coursing and Allied Blood Sports meeting at Builth Wells, on the Grug Estate of Lord Jones-Wynn-Jones. Held every three years this meeting used to be one of the highlights of the rural Welsh from all tiers of life, from landowners whose estates provided targets, the participants, the spectators, and of course the casual worker who could earn a few shillings from the menial tasks offered by the various events. The meeting had been going since a number of local clubs decided to co-operate under the umbrella of a national organisation in the 1850s, but 1912 was the only time that promotional stamps were issued. Being chosen to host the meeting was a matter of great pride, but each time it would be held on a new site, mainly because it would take decades for the wildlife to recover in sufficient numbers. It was said that from the moment that the cannons were fired to open the event, until the final shot was fired, you could hear it up to 30 miles away and downwind you could smell the gunpowder even further.

The stamps were a set of 5, featuring four of the more popular sports, and the cannons used for the opening ceremony (Gold stamp). Note how all the worthies, some on horseback are careful to stand not too close to the cannons, nor directly behind them. .

**Puffin Spearing.** (Green) Surprisingly this was not confined to those meets which took place on rocky coasts. For inland estates the ground would be prepared by the importation of several thousand puffins a few days in advance, to a large lake. The puffins would be enticed by lures that float just below the surface and resembling pilchards. The participants would use dogs (puffin hounds or *ci palod*) to help divert a swooping puffin towards its owner, who would then spear them either in mid-air or in the water. The 1912 gentlemen's winner in 1912 was Ios Jones with a magnificent catch of 72 puffins in one hour, but this was surpassed in the ladies event when Megan Jones (no relation) presented the judges with a staggering 87 caught using a double headed spear.

**The Crow Shoot.** (Purple) This shoot normally takes place near a large rookery in order to provide plenty of birds, but these are usual boosted by the release of others just before the flag is dropped. Being partial to carrion the birds are brought into range by catapults hurling chopped reject offal (and plenty of eyeballs) into the air and scattered over the countryside. The stamp shows the winner of the 1909 competition, Iorwerth Jones (no relation) of Bala with 144 crows and rooks bagged. For this he was awarded the "Sixpenny Crown", the significance of this will be revealed alter.

**Badgering.** (Blue) In the old days before bovine TB and animal rights protests badgers were welcomed on farms and estates, where they provided both food and recreation. As for recreation, anyone will realise that hunting badgers like one would hunt a fox would not provide much sport and not for long either and this event is usually reserved for lady competitors. Their short legs and stocky build means badgers are not up for much of a chase. The hunt commences with a small lad with a couple of polecats shimmying down into a sett to flush the badgers out. Knowing which hole they are likely to escape from is part of the skills required, because once out they need to be chased onto open fields rather than woodland. So a crowd will be waiting ready to bang pots and pans to direct the animals away from the trees. The ladies set off in chase and on catching one up they will tackle the animal before it can turn and defend itself. It is finished off with a deft knife stroke to the back of the neck. On the stamp, note the bustles on the ladies. These are specially designed to carry their catch.

**The Squirrel Range.** (Maroon) This was a sport where extreme patience was required. If someone's nerve broke it could ruin the event. The competitors would be lined up with their guns loaded and fingers ready on the trigger while their 'spotters' were ready using telescopes to help locate the targets. Hazelnuts would be scattered across the firing range, and gradually the squirrels would venture down and start to nibble. The skill was not just aim, but knowing when the maximum numbers of squirrels were feeding; usually in excess of 500. One person would make the decision to be first to fire, and within a second every other marksman would be firing away. Woe betide anyone too eager and letting a volley off too soon, before the squirrels had settled into a lull of false security. The Shoot wasn't a competition as such, because it would be difficult to work out who had bagged which squirrel. The marksmen were quite content to see the total bagged, though unofficial betting would take place and winners declared from the number of bodies in directly in front of the marksman. The stamp shows the unofficial 1906 winner, Llynos Jones and his spotter Gwyr Jones (no relation).

Additionally all the event finalists were presented with a special personalised proof stamp featuring their own event. The organisers also awarded themselves a proof stamp each too. It did not go unnoticed by the competitors that the organisers got the gold coloured stamp and these had more ornate edges!

It should be remembered that this event was not just a killing spree. All those creatures shot, trapped, hooked or whatever, were used as food later, with the bulk going to local orphanages giving the children a rich source of protein and fats for the next three months or more. Puffins are best stored smoked and salted before roasting giving flavour somewhere between chicken, prawn and bacon. Badger meat is rather gamey, and a bit pungent, but makes a good stew especially cooked in its own blood and a good herby stock. And badger hams will last for a long time, still remaining edible even when quite green. Everyone knows that squirrel makes a tasty casserole, but the red squirrels shot here are far superior in flavour to the greys, and pan-fried haunch is something of a luxury food. But it was the rook pies that gave the orphans a special treat. Remember the old nursery rhyme 'Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye. Four and twenty black birds baked in a pie'. Twenty-four rooks would be used to fill a big pie, while other twenty-four lives ones would be added for when the pie was cut. And they would fly out to the delight the children. Hence the Sixpenny Crown for the man whose 'bag' provided enough rooks for 6 whole pies.

1912 was the last time the event was held, because the Great War put an end to it all. Not only was any ammunition and other weaponry produced sent straight to the front line, but so many young men did not come home, and these were essential for the rapid loading of the guns, fetching and carrying the kill, and skinning and gutting the kill afterwards.