



# Ailbe Preseli Y Brenig



Who is Ailbe Preseli? This is the pseudonym adopted by one of the most famous names ever, back in 1958. No idea? Then let me ask you this. Why does the seaside resort of Porthcawl in Glamorgan host the largest convention of Elvis Presley impersonators in the world<sup>1</sup>? The answer lies in a combination of a little known piece of Rock'n Roll history and Elvis's ancestral roots. It is commonly believed that the only time Elvis stood on British soil was a refuelling stop over at Prestwick Airport in Glasgow, when he had completed his military service in Germany.

However recently there have been claims that his first visit here was in 1958. British singer Tommy Steele has admitted to taking Elvis on a brief tour of London that year. This in fact was only part of his visit, for while en-route to Germany Elvis's plane had technical problems and had to make an emergency stop at Cardiff Rhoose Airport. The date was 25<sup>th</sup> September. It took several days to effect the repairs and Elvis made good use of this time. The GIs were put up at a caravan park in the seaside resort of Porthcawl. Elvis declared that the Coney Beach funfair there was every bit as good as Coney Island. He had at least six rides on the Ghost Train, while The Sizzler, he declared, was too exhilarating for more than two goes. He also enjoyed the donkey rides.

The next day, news having escaped that Elvis was in the area, he got an invite from the Aberkenfig Male Voice Choir to sing with them. Elvis was deeply impressed by them. His own singing career had started with gospel songs at his local Assembly of God church, and he was quite moved by their renditions of his favourite hymns sung in Welsh. The lyrics of one of his hits was transcribed into Welsh on the spot, to become 'Yn fy Nharu i Dendro' and Elvis sang this, giggling a bit at his own pronunciation, with the choir providing backing. Choirmaster Ieuan Jenkins declared Elvis a natural at the Welsh language, at least for an American tackling the language for the first time. Elvis also took the lead on Ar Hyd y Nos, perhaps his favourite Welsh song. These two songs were recorded at the Bridgend Recording Studios, and are now perhaps one of, if not the rarest, Elvis recordings. The tapes no longer exist, but there is an acetate disk that resides in a safe deposit box in the hidden tunnels beneath Cardiff Castle. This vault also houses the crown jewels of the medieval Welsh Princes, the 'lost episodes' of Pobl y Cwm, and reputedly the Holy Grail. That's how valuable this recording is. However the Beware of the Dragon sign on the reinforced doors to the vault is thought to be a hollow deterrent<sup>2</sup>. Acetate discs are often used to sample the recording as a disc before going into production. The grooves are cut into a lacquer over a plastic, aluminium or even stiff card former. They are not expected to be used for repeated playing, and it may be that the preserved disc is actually unplayable. What is certain is that the un-named owners have no wish to play it. It is now over 50 years old and may have physically deteriorated. The acetate surface may crack or crumble. And what if it did play and it was found to be something quite different? Best to leave it unopened like a bottle of 1787 Chateau d'Yquem. For younger readers this recording looks similar to those large black discs that your parents used to play and are too big to slot into a DVD player.

<sup>1</sup> When Elvis Presley died there were just 175 Elvis impersonators in the world. By 2007 there were an estimated 85,000.

Using this growth rate, by 2019 one third of the world's population will be wearing rhinestone suits and have a quiff.

<sup>2</sup> To gauge the value of this recording, an early acetate of The Velvet Underground, with versions of songs that would appear on their first album sold for \$155,000 way back in 2006.

So what about his ancestry? The common belief is that he can claim Cherokee and Scottish forefathers, but the evidence for Welsh ancestry is gaining in credence. Firstly there is the village of St Elvis in Pembrokeshire. The name is an Anglicisation of the Welsh name Ailbe. The church in the village is dedicated to St Ailbe<sup>3</sup>. It is situated in the shadow of the Preseli Hills; Preseli / Presley; the similarity is obvious. His mother was well aware of this. Her name was Gladys, which is of Welsh origin, and Elvis's twin brother who died at birth had the middle name Garon, an unusual but very Welsh name. His maternal grand-mother was called Doll Mansell, perhaps a descendant of the famous Mansel family of Oxwich on the Gower peninsula near Swansea. For those who still doubt, in 2008 an image of Elvis mysteriously appeared on a piece of slate in the garden of a house (belonging to someone who wishes to remain anonymous) standing in the shadow of the Preseli hills. If in doubt do a Google search!

Back to Porthcawl. 2013 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the current Elvis festival there, but the roots of this goes back to 1998 when WELVAL, the Welsh Elvis Festival, was staged. This you will have noticed coincides with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Elvis stepping on Welsh soil. All the Welsh Elvis tribute acts performed, rendering versions of many of his hits sung only in Welsh, and the cinema screened a Welsh re-writing of one of The King's most well know films. Llanelli Glas is the story of a conscript to the Welsh Foreign Legion returning to his home town in South Wales. His mother wants him to make a steady living at the tin works, but all he wants to do is play rugby and go bumming around on the beach. It was low budget, with amateur actors. In several shots you can see the palm trees were in big pots and borrowed for the beach scenes. All in all it was well received by the fans, perhaps mainly because all the songs from Blue Hawaii were there and sung in Welsh.

The stamps included here were produced both as promotional material for the event and as souvenirs for those attending. There were four designs which came in sheets of 16 stamps, with decorated selvedge. The designs link the WELVAL event to what happened back in 1958

The first stamp allegedly shows Elvis at the Coney Beach Fairground on the rollercoaster. He seems to be enjoying himself. Apparently he jumped into the empty seat next to the girl and asked "What's your name?" She replied "Gwladys". Elvis said "That's my mother's name!" This is rumoured to be the first time that line was used to try and impress a girl. Subsequent repetition by anyone has been tied to the law of diminishing returns. Gwladys was last heard of working as a district nurse somewhere near Doncaster.

The next shows the legendary acetate disc of Elvis's recording of Ar Hyd y Nos. Where the photograph of it comes from is unknown, but has lead to rumours of a second copy. Whether there is or not, this photo shows that the record label was initialled by Elvis.

The third stamp depicts a scene from Llanelli Glas modified from the promotional poster, with Gareth Humphries in the lead role of Ailbe Preseli. Gwladys's daughter Brenda, under her stage name of Chepstow, played Preseli's love interest in the film. Check out the other Trivia on IMDB. A single taken from the film, 'Roc a Hwla Bâbi' reached #39 in the Welsh top 40 in 1999.

The final stamp shows a word picture of many of The King's hits as transcribed into Welsh, and which were performed ad infinitum at WELVAL. There may be an exclusive extra for the first to let me know the original English titles for these songs. Contact me at the Cinderella Stamps Forum. Allowance will be made for delays in the post for overseas subscribers, but no conferring please!

---

<sup>3</sup> It was St Ailbe who christened St David, the patron saint of Wales