



Noswyl Chocolates

Collectors stamps



There will be few now living in Wales who can remember Noswyl Chocolate bars. Failing elderly memories and the inevitable will have reduced the numbers, for the company went out of business in 1930. But for those that do it will possibly be more for the free stamp sets that came with the bars, than for the taste of the chocolate. Back in the early part of the twentieth century you couldn't be too fussy about your sweeties, and you devoured whatever came your way or could afford; Noswyl's never could claim to be a Welsh Cadbury's. They survived for 50 years out of a mix of patriotic purchasing, competitive pricing, and having a good collector base for the free stamps that came with the bars. They even claimed to have come up with the free collector's stamps concept before Nestle and Tobler, but there is no hard evidence for this. Early company records no longer exist after a distracted employee put them out for disposal and carefully filed and indexed a month's worth of scrap paper. Nevertheless it is recalled that the early stamps were never in sets. Every so often a random new one would go into the packaging for the bars. It was only much later, c1914, that sets of stamps were introduced, being replaced every 3 months or so.

Noswyl's Chocolate Bars came in five memorable varieties:

O'Natural - a bitter blend darkened with fine anthracite from South Wales

Nutty Frutty - milk chocolate flavoured with elderberry raisins and toasted acorns

Surf and Turf - layers of chocolate alternating with seaweed, samphire and burdock

Minty Crispy - delicately flavoured by the Welsh speciality, *Mentha somniferum*

Fruity Crème - flavours of sea buckthorn, whortleberry, rowan and a special surprise

Each autumn hundreds of children, with a promise of a sick note from their mother, would take a week off school and set off into the countryside with baskets collecting the plants and fruits for the next year's supplies. They could earn up to 10/- (50p) if they achieved their quota for a particular commodity. That might not seem much nowadays, but then, for those from poorer families, it was the equivalent of six months pocket money.

The themes of the stamp sets were popular with both girls and boys, fascinating and educating them at the same time. The themes were always Welsh or Welsh inspired, and of the more memorable sets include Coastal Sand Dunes, Druid Regalia, Bravest Pit Ponies, Private Owner Railway Coal Trucks, How Your Sheep Communicate, Welsh Castle Garderobes, Welsh Slugs, and Famous Rune Translators all come to mind. The company even sold albums for the stamps. You could opt for a single set album at 6d (that's old pence) or 2/6 for a deluxe yearly edition. Those can do their sums will realise that that price is 25% more than buying single set albums, but it did look better and the release was timed such that it made them a regular Christmas stocking item.

As has been said, there was one stamp in each 2d bar of chocolate, any of the five varieties that were on sale. There was only one in stamp in the larger family bars too. This was deliberate, as the smaller bars had a slightly higher profit margin and so, although the larger bars were better value for a family, Mum might buy four small bars to satisfy the collecting urges of the child. Another trick the company used was to concentrate one or two of a set in those varieties that sold poorly, or ensuring each area of Wales was a bit

deficient of one stamp. Not everybody realised this and many bars were sold with kids getting swap after swap looking for that elusive last stamp of the set. The company did, however, offer a trading service so that collectors could complete their stamp sets. They could get a form from the sweetie shop, or from within the 6d album and state which stamp or stamps that they needed, enclosing 2 swaps for each want. Somewhere there are probably bags of the spares sent in, used now as loft insulation or something.

The set of stamps chosen for this double issue of Welsh Oddities is Plants of the Welsh Moorlands. This is because the dispatch coincides with the on-line release by The Caru Foundation of The Apple Tree, one of Huw Puw Caru's short stories. In the story the central character, whilst hiking across the wild moorland of the Berwyn Mountains, recalls that set of stamps which he collected as a child, and he could still recall the plants and identify them on his walk. The set is also unusual in having a sinister 13th stamp in the set, and a suitably named plant was chosen for the stamp. Included with the stamps is a copy of the single set stamp album. Collectors will have to make their own minds up as to whether they lick their stamps and place them in the album or not. The stamps have a brief description of the featured stamps printed on the gummed side. Children would read and memorise these snippets and know how Witch Pepper got its name, how Dogbane was used, be warned of the consequences of eating Dragonberry, or where to find Tears-in-the-Rain. Happy days!

You can read The Apple Tree and other Caru stories here

[http://www.muba.eclipse.co.uk/Huw Puw Caru/html/short_stories.html](http://www.muba.eclipse.co.uk/Huw%20Puw%20Caru/html/short_stories.html)