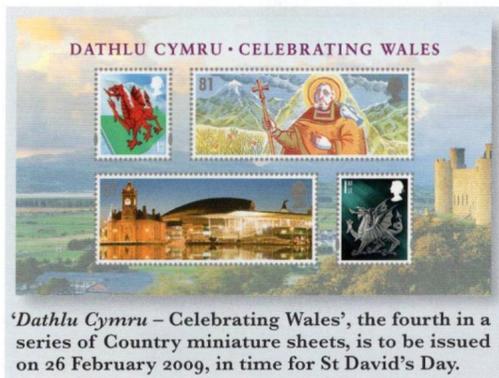


Celebrating Wales

The last in the series of Country miniature sheets, by Karen Foy

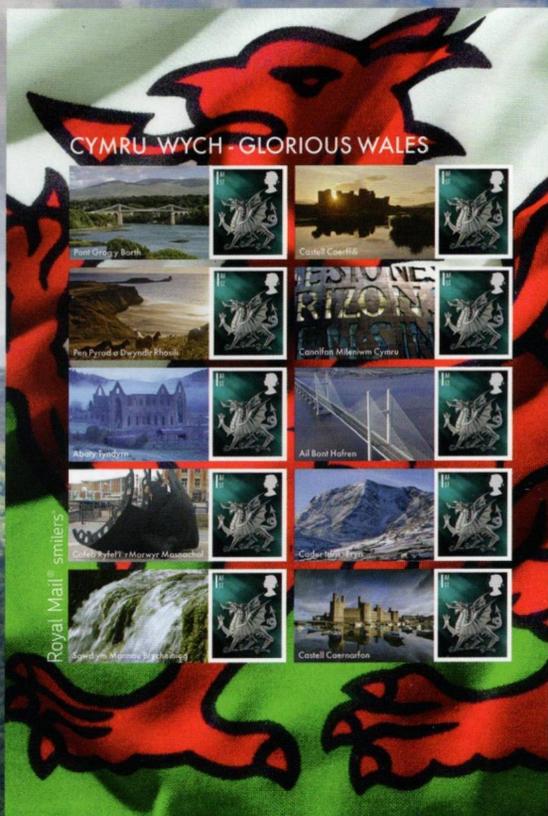


COMPRISING two 1st class stamps and two large-size 81p stamps, the new miniature sheet will take its place alongside its predecessors of Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, issued in 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. Printed in litho, the sheet measures 123mm × 70mm, with stamps set against a backdrop of rural Wales, and would not be complete without a glimpse of the obligatory castle – in this case Harlech, which was originally featured on the 1s3d Landscape stamp of 1966 – making this the perfect tribute to a country proud of its heritage, language and culture. East Anglian design company Silk Pearce has worked with Royal Mail to produce this series by combining the best elements of both traditional and contemporary design, ensuring that every sheet provides a snapshot of each country's unique identity.

A lasting legacy The first of the larger stamps is a specially commissioned image of St David, in a landscape format. Known as *Dewi Sant* in Wales, St David is known for preaching, educating and founding monastic settlements throughout the country, as well as other monasteries further afield. His spiritual pilgrimages took him to both Jerusalem and Rome but it is in Pembrokeshire that he established a monastery from which to spread the word about his beliefs. Born in the area around 500AD, St David created a location which was to become one of medieval Christendom's most important shrines, and was even visited by William the Conqueror. Here, David enforced a strict regime, dictating that the monks should plough their land without the aid of animals, avoid eating meat but instead enjoy a diet of bread flavoured with salt and herbs, refraining from beer and drinking only water. It was a simple life for those who followed him, devoid of personal possessions with evenings spent reading, writing or in prayer. Each believed that this self-discipline and commitment would help them to serve God.

Large crowds would gather from far and wide to hear St David teach his holy work. Some would make the pilgrimage in the hope of finding a cure for an illness or a sick relative back at home whilst others wanted to show their devotion to God by bathing in the sacred waters near the holy site, even taking small bottles of the water home in the belief that it would protect them on their journey. On one occasion in Llanddewi Brefi, those at the back of the crowd complained that they could not see the preacher. At this point it is said that the ground on which St David was standing, rose up, elevating him before his followers, and a white dove settled on his shoulder as a symbol of God's blessing. Today, the village of Llanddewi Brefi is thought to be located on the spot where this miracle took place. ▶

Right: the Glorious Wales generic sheet issued 1 March 2007 has 10 labels featuring scenery, buildings and landmarks of Wales. Below, a view of the Watkin Path, one of the six main routes to the summit of Mount Snowdon, in the Nantgwynant Valley, Snowdonia.





The three Welsh stamps from the miniature sheet issued in 2008 for the 50th anniversary of Country stamps. The leek and dragon are symbols long associated with Wales.

Named in his honour, St David's Cathedral now stands on the site of the original monastery. David is thought to have died on 1 March 589, and is buried at the Cathedral ensuring that this would be an important place of worship for generations to come. From the 12th century onwards, 1 March became a national saint's day – a time for celebration and feasting. David now took his rightful place alongside contemporaries of the British Isles – Saints George, Andrew and Patrick.

A picture of the past The Welsh are fiercely proud of their country, so the miniature sheet would be incomplete without an example of an existing 1st class definitive accompanied by a stamp featuring the country's national flag. With two equal horizontal stripes of white and green, the Welsh flag is both distinctive in colour and in its choice of image. Used as the symbol of a warrior or leader since ancient times, the large red dragon also represents independence and was adopted by the Tudor ancestors of King Henry VII as a tribute to his Welsh supporters. By 1901 it had become the official symbol of Wales, and the flag in its current form was flown at the investiture of the Prince of Wales in 1911, to help raise its prominence. This mythical creature has been drawn in many styles but on the flag, the red dragon – which is also known as the dragon of Cadwallader, Prince of Gwynedd – always faces to the left and covers equal portions of the green and white stripes. Coincidentally, these two colours are also those of the 'leek', another national emblem of Wales.

What is particularly appealing about this latest postal rendition is that the image has been illustrated to show movement, perhaps suggesting that the flag is flying proudly in a breeze, very much as it can be seen each day above the National Assembly Building on Cardiff's waterfront.

Great expectations 'Celebrating Wales' is not only a tribute to our past but an acknowledgment of our hopes for the future. Chosen as the image for the second 81p stamp is a glimpse into the 21st century with a snapshot of the National Assembly of Wales – the hub of Welsh parliament also known as the *Senedd*.

In July 1997, a White Paper was published by the Labour Government outlining plans to devolve power to Wales. It was decided that a new building was needed from which parliamentary debates would take place, presiding over issues which would include education, economic development, health, transport and the environment.

Costing a controversial £67 million pounds, the building was to become an architectural icon. It was designed by Lord Richard Rogers, and completed in February 2006 after a three year delay. Modern in appearance and constructed from concrete with slate walls, an undulating steel roof and a decorative timber ceiling, it incorporates numerous 'green' features including the use of renewable energy to construct, heat and maintain. At the heart of the Senedd is the debating chamber where the Assembly members meet to discuss all issues which will eventually have an impact on the whole of Wales.



Definitive deliberations and comparative commemoratives If you're looking for stamps with a patriotic feel, then this latest addition is definitely for you. Why not complement your Celtic collection by tracking down similar themed examples? In 2008, Royal Mail issued a nine-stamp miniature sheet celebrating the 50th anniversary of the introduction of regional stamps for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Originally the four countries which make up the United Kingdom shared definitives, but requests for 'regional' stamps unique to each area began in the 1930s. In August 1958, after years of debates and deliberations, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man were finally allowed their own stamps, illustrated with recognised emblems and themes. In the 50th anniversary sheet, the 1st class Welsh stamps depict a passant dragon and a leek – symbolic images forever connected with Wales.

The Welsh symbols of the leek, dragon, daffodil and the Prince of Wales' feathers are featured on the current Welsh country stamps, first introduced in 1999. Originally the daffodil design was used for a non-value stamp designated 'E' for European rate, but later changed to a denominated stamp. Issued as a 40p in 2004, the European rate has increased since, yielding 40p, 42p, 44p, 48p, and now 50p stamps on which the daffodil, carved in Welsh slate, is set against a monochrome navy blue background.

For those who love their commemoratives, the set of six stamps issued on 15 June 2004 as part of the British Journey series gives us a scenic view of the beautiful landscape of Wales, including the Brecon Beacons, Dee Valley, and Marloes Sands. The labels adjoining the Welsh 1st class country stamp on the 'Cymru Wych – Glorious Wales' generic sheet of March 2007 show some of the country's best-loved landmarks, such as the Menai Suspension Bridge, Caerphilly and Caernarfon castles, Tintern Abbey, and Cader Idris. A further five labels on the 'Glorious UK' sheet of September 2008 depict the Welsh Assembly, Harlech Castle, statue of a miner at Tony-pandy, St Govan's Chapel, and a beach scene at Helvetia, Rhosili.

As with all the countries in the UK, Wales has a rich and diverse heritage. The 'Celebrating' series has pushed the boundaries to include something for everyone, by remembering our past but looking forward to the future, adding a mix of modern and traditional design, fabulous photography and exclusive artwork showcased on a medley of definitive and commemorative stamps neatly displayed in minisheet format. In truth, the perfect package – what more could anyone ask for! ●

The set of six British Journey stamps issued in June 2004 features views of the beautiful Welsh landscape. Above: the daffodil country stamp design, originally used as a non-value 'E' (European rate) stamp. The daffodil was carved from Welsh slate.