

## FIVE FOOT FIVE NATION: SIZE, WALES AND THE GREAT WAR

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**Abstract:** This article examines a peculiar but significant aspect of Welsh national identity: size. Nations are often referred to in terms of their size. Likewise, their inhabitants may be described as being typically short or tall. The First World War drew attention to both the size of nations and their inhabitants. In the case of Wales, pre-existing descriptions of the country were re-shaped by the war. The article explores the correspondences between the narrative of the small nation, the short statesman David Lloyd George – who embodied Wales as a nation for many contemporaries – and the relationship between the height of Welshmen and the nation's military contribution to the war.

While much has been written about national invented traditions, the banal symbols of nationhood and the way in which nations are imagined, forged or celebrated, how nations are described in corporeal terms has tended to be either alluded to in studies of caricature and national symbols, such as John Bull or Britannia, or taken for granted.<sup>1</sup> After all, nations are small or large: what more is there to say? This article argues that, at least in the case of Wales during the First World War, the size of the nation contributed to the nation's self-image, how

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<sup>1</sup> Roy T. Matthews, 'Britannia and John Bull: from birth to maturity', *Historian*, 62, 4 (2000), 799–820.

it was seen by others and the question of whether it was considered a nation at all. National identities are dynamic and a nation's size can assume added significance in certain historical contexts.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, as was the case with Wales, the size of the nation was mirrored by the reputed size of the people. This double belittling (small inhabitants and small nation) played a part in the way Welsh identity was asserted and interpreted. Just as monuments and institutions were being built during what has been termed the rebirth of Wales, so the small nation and small man was called upon, elevated and demeaned.<sup>3</sup> Nations have bodies. The kind of national bodies examined below are, however, not the same as the body politic.

The size of a nation and its inhabitants becomes all the more important during times of conflict, and the First World War was no exception. Firstly, there were references in speeches and editorials to the small nation being savaged by a larger neighbour. Wales may not have fallen into this category but the war-time rhetoric that called on the small nation influenced descriptions of Wales, most notably through the medium of the diminutive figure of the political giant David Lloyd George. Secondly, pre-existing concerns about the vitality of the British nation assumed greater importance during the war. As an indicator of health and physical fitness, height played a part in the metaphorical and actual measurement of the male portion of the population, particularly at the start of the war when there were concerns about maintaining standards in an army composed of citizens rather than professional former

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karen Leibhart, 'Conclusion: real and imagined identities – the multiple faces of the *homo nationalis*', in Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karen Leibhart (eds), *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (trans Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten and J. W. Unger, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Edinburgh, 2009), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> M. Wynn Thomas, *Nations of Wales, 1890–1914* (Cardiff, 2016), p. 3.

soldiers.<sup>4</sup> A long-standing reputation for having a relatively short population merged with this increased interest in height and resulted in references to the short Welsh appearing alongside comments about the small Welsh nation.

By the outbreak of the First World War, Wales had acquired some of the trappings of nationhood, including a national library, university and museum. Even the most controversial issue during the rebirth of the nation, the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales, had been granted before the war had entered its second month. The conflict presented additional opportunities for the articulation of nationhood, albeit within the context of Britain and its empire. If the war did result in ‘the army of the four nations’, as the Irish-Welshman Joseph Keating observed, then each nation brought along their own military tradition and reputation.<sup>5</sup> These earlier national military identities were reinforced and shaped by the war. To some, the Welsh contribution to the war in men, material and money resulted in an acknowledgement of Wales as a nation, or at least a distinct component of Great Britain. Not appearing to fall behind other parts of the kingdom in terms of recruitment or other contributions to the war effort was an important theme throughout the war.<sup>6</sup> While it is possible to discuss the exact contribution of Wales to the war, and attempt to measure the relative contribution of the country, this article concentrates on the meaning and perception of what could be termed the narrative of ‘gallant little Wales’.

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Travers, ‘The Army and the challenge of 1915-1918’, in David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Army* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 213–14.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Keating, *Tipperary Tommy: A Novel of the War* (London, 1915), pp. 57, 60, 164.

<sup>6</sup> David Monger, ‘Familiarity breeds consent? Patriotic rituals in British First World War propaganda’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 26, 4 (2015), 520.

When he addressed 3,500 London Welshmen at the Queen's Hall on 19 September 1914, David Lloyd George dwelt on the importance of protecting small nations from Germany and Austria-Hungary. This plea by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer would soon become one of his most well-known speeches. Not only did it indicate his transition from being a pro-Boer anti-militarist to eventually becoming the 'man who won the war', the speech also captured the views of many who felt that the war could be justified on the basis of universal moral principles.<sup>7</sup> Any patriotic audience would have enthusiastically responded to the argument that Britain should uphold Article 7 of the eighty-nine year old Treaty of London that guaranteed Belgian neutrality. For the London Welsh, however, the praise given to small nations had an added resonance. They had achieved success at the heart of empire, so in their eyes the 'smallness' of Wales did not engender a sense of inferiority or impute a want of outlook or talent. Indeed, their real or imagined humble origins magnified their achievements in business and the professions. Before this audience, Lloyd George felt no need to spell out the smallness of Wales. He cited Elizabethan England's struggle against the Spanish as an example of a small nation that faced a mighty foe.<sup>8</sup> This lack of an explicit comparison of Wales and Belgium is curious. His speech was delivered the day after the Disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales Act had been given royal assent, and it might have been deemed inappropriate to make too many distinctions between Wales and her neighbour during a national crisis. Yet the Unionist and anti-disestablishment *Western Mail* was ready to draw a parallel between Wales and the recently invaded nation: 'The Welsh nation is a

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<sup>7</sup> David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, London, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *The Great War: Speech Delivered by the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George at the Queen's Hall, London on September 19, 1914* (London, 1914), p. 11.

small nation, but happy in its alliance with a powerful and sympathetic neighbour.’<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Belgium’s vulnerability was contrasted with the ‘security’ afforded by Wales’s close association with England.

In the speech, Lloyd George assigned heights to some European nations. Germany was a six feet two inch bully and Belgium its five foot five inch victim. The selection of the height of vulnerable nations at five foot five inches, which some accounts have mistakenly put at five feet, was significant because a week before his speech the height requirement for military service had been raised to five foot six inches.<sup>10</sup> A five foot five inch nation, therefore, was the equivalent of a man who fell short of the standard for the army. These short nations were praised for having a disproportionate amount of cultural and spiritual qualities. It seems strange that the idea of a small nation should be given such prominence by a government minister of the world’s largest empire. If the Germans were six feet two inches then the British Empire must have been six feet six inches at the very least. This rendition of the British Empire would, however, have jarred with Lloyd George’s condemnation of value being automatically attributed to large people and nations, which he called the ‘theory of bigness’. As an example of this tendency to equate size with value, he cited the emphasis placed by the German military on the height of soldiers, although he could have said something similar about the British army. This condemnation of the inordinate love of all things large may have betrayed concern about some features of modern life, as seen in his description later in the speech of the Germans as ‘the Road-Hog of Europe’. However, this

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<sup>9</sup> *Western Mail*, 21 September 1914.

<sup>10</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, ‘A nation in arms, 1914–1918’, in Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), p. 8.

passage of the speech contains a personal reference suggesting that Lloyd George's 'theory of bigness' was not only a criticism of an overbearing modern Germany but something more personal indicating an alignment between his own sense of self and his national identity.<sup>11</sup>

'The world owes much to little nations – and to little men! (Laughter and applause.)' With this statement, which evidently struck a chord with his audience, Lloyd George drew attention to his own stature. Standing at five foot four inches, he was reputed to have been sensitive about his height.<sup>12</sup> Stature is an indicator of masculinity as it usually distinguishes men from women. Equally, size separates the adult from the child. More generally, words like 'little' and 'small' have connotations of being ineffectual or of little import. These inferences were conveyed in pre-war descriptions of Lloyd George as the 'little Welsh attorney' and Neville Chamberlain's remark in 1922 about the 'dirty little Welsh attorney'.<sup>13</sup> Lloyd George's reputed response to the chair of a meeting in Carmarthenshire who expressed surprise at the distinguished politician's height was that in north Wales men were measured from the chin up betrays his sensitivity as much as his wit.<sup>14</sup> His riposte is similar to the argument frequently deployed by those who felt that Wales was not given enough

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<sup>11</sup> *Great War: Speeches Delivered by the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George*, p. 13; Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain, 1890–1945* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd George's height has fluctuated between different sources. His record on the Internet Movie Database puts him at five foot six inches: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0515906/> [accessed 27/11/2016]. Yet a contemporary source (*Seren Cymru*, 7 August 1908) mentioned that he was five foot four inches tall. I would like to thank J. Graham Jones for his observations on Lloyd George's height.

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Self, *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters: the Reform Years* (Farnham, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> J. Hugh Edwards and Spencer Leigh Hughes, *From Village Green to Downing Street: the Life of the Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George M.P.* (London, 1908), p. 147.

recognition. Part of the struggle for individual or national acknowledgement often involved the question of size, of what should be measured and how.

Lloyd George's speech to the London Welsh called for the formation of additional Welsh regiments in Field Marshall Herbert Kitchener's New Army. However, his request that the newly appointed Secretary of State for War should channel existing Welsh soldiers into a Welsh Army Corp was not granted, although Kitchener conceded to the formation of what was known as the 'Welsh Army'. The resulting controversy may have had a personal element as not only was Kitchener known for his imperious manner, no doubt honed during his time serving overseas, he also embodied many of the establishment values that had been attacked by Lloyd George.<sup>15</sup> The Chancellor of the Exchequer also engaged Kitchener over the use of the Welsh language and limitations on Nonconformist ministers serving as army chaplains, both of which resulted in comparisons being made with the Indian military. It could therefore be argued that the Welsh component represented a domestic subaltern presence in the British army.<sup>16</sup> Standing at six feet two inches, Kitchener was ten inches taller than Lloyd George. The Field Marshall may have only been a six foot two inch man and not a nation, but the Welshman thought that his physical presence and reputation intimidated cabinet colleagues.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Travis L. Crosby, *The Unknown David Lloyd George: A Statesman in Conflict* (London, 2014), p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Edward M. Spiers, 'The national response to the outbreak of war', in Peter Liddle (ed.), *Britain Goes to War: How the First World War Began to Reshape the Nation* (Barnsley, 2015), p. 51; Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: the Raising of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 96-8.

<sup>17</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. 2 (London, 1933), p. 751; Ted Morgan, *Churchill: Young Man in a Hurry, 1874-1915* (New York, 1982), p. 502; T. Royale, *The Kitchener Enigma* (London, 1985), p. 4.

Given these differences, it is easy to see how one could typify the ideal soldier and the other the typical Welshman.

As a significant political figure with a distinct national identity, the status of Lloyd George became a simulacrum of the fortunes of Wales as a whole. When the Conservative W. Holt-White praised the then Minister for Munitions in the *Daily Express*, after Lloyd George had delivered a speech in the predominantly Conservative port of Liverpool, the *Cambria Daily Leader* noted that ‘there was a time when he [Lloyd George] was not called “the little Welshman” as an endearing term but when “a little Welsh attorney from Criccieth” was supposed to be the last and best thing in contemptuous denunciation’.<sup>18</sup> This consideration of the transformation of Lloyd George’s reputation prompted a reflection on the status of Wales:

[I]t has taken a certain type of Anglo-Saxon a couple of hundred years to discover that good can come out of Wales, the virtues of the race are at last being appreciated. We remember the day – and it was not so long ago – when one had to half-apologise for asserting his Welsh nationality.

At a meeting of the St David’s Society at Manchester, less than a month after the Liberals had won the January 1910 election after the House of Lords rejected the ‘People’s Budget’, a celebrant declared that ‘for the first time very few people were ashamed to-day to say that they belonged to the Welsh nation’. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had helped Welshmen

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<sup>18</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 9 June 1915.



walk taller.<sup>19</sup> This perceived shift in confidence raises the question of what had originally made these Welsh people so humble.

Two of the more common phrases used in relation to the country the principality during the Edwardian era were ‘Poor little Wales’ and ‘Gallant little Wales’.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the virtual anonymity of the ‘for Wales – see England’ entry in the 1888 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, references to Wales as ‘little’ acknowledged that Wales was not England.<sup>21</sup> ‘Poor little Wales’ alluded to the relative poverty of the largely upland, pastoral Wales compared with its larger neighbour. A contrast between an implicitly undeclared ‘Rich big England’ and Wales was present in George Borrow’s sketch of Llangollen Fair in the mid-nineteenth century, where the small size of the stock – cattle and pigs – echoed that of the Welshmen. ‘Englishmen, tall, burly fellows in general, far exceed the Welsh in height and size’.<sup>22</sup> This literal interpretation of the term as meaning a poor country provoked responses that cited the nation’s material or spiritual wealth.<sup>23</sup> When William Ewart Gladstone used the phrase in 1880 it was not intended to be in any way pejorative; rather, it indicated his understanding of the educational and religious situation in Wales.<sup>24</sup> His political opponents were quick to exploit his use of the phrase, however. The journalist Owen Morgan (Morien) thought

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<sup>19</sup> Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales (NLW), Cymdeithas Genedlaethol Cymry Manceinion, 15467c.

<sup>20</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 22 September 1899.

<sup>21</sup> Frans Schrijver, *Regionalism after Regionalisation: Spain, France and the United Kingdom* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 293.

<sup>22</sup> George Henry Borrow, *Wild Wales: Its People, Language, and Scenery* (new edn, London, 1888), p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Cambrian News*, 19 April 1918; *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*, 21 May 1919.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Gladstone, Wales and the New Radicalism’, in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (London, 1998), p. 127.

Gladstone had insulted the country, and seven years later Joseph Chamberlain turned the phrase against Gladstone in an effort to undermine his support for Welsh disestablishment among Welsh dissenters.<sup>25</sup>

During the First World War, as Lloyd George metamorphosed from meddlesome Welsh lawyer to Minister for Munitions and then prime minister, the term ‘gallant little Wales’ came to the fore. In the spring of 1916 a Welsh-language newspaper proclaimed that no one spoke of poor little Wales anymore because a new day had dawned. Indeed, two Welsh suns shone during the war, for in addition to Lloyd George, there was the London-born Australian prime minister, William Morris Hughes, whose parents were Welsh – and there would have been three luminous sons of Wales if Charles Evans Hughes had succeeded in his bid to become president of the United States of America in 1916.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Wales had been declared gallant long before August 1914. The success of Lloyd George, who was a prominent supporter of the cause of temperance, prompted a speaker at a meeting of the British Women’s Temperance Association at Merthyr Tydfil during 1893 to claim that Wales had been transformed from being ‘poor little Wales’ to ‘gallant little Wales’.<sup>27</sup> In this pre-war context, the phrase ‘gallant little Wales’ often carried connotations of progress and equality such as when it was used in an 1895 tribute to the way in which the University of Wales

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<sup>25</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 18 April 1880; Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865–1898* (London, 1999), p. 461.

<sup>26</sup> *Y Tyst*, 31 May 1916.

<sup>27</sup> Rosanne Reeves, *Dwy Gymraes, Dwy Gymru: Hanes Bywyd a Gwaith Gwyneth Vaughan a Sara Maria Saunders* (Cardiff, 2014), p. 27.

treated female students.<sup>28</sup> A ‘gallant’ Wales had been announced even earlier. Here, once again, Gladstone entered this etymological genealogy when he referred to ‘gallant Wales’ in a pamphlet about the Irish Question. This portion of the text was seized upon by those who felt that ‘the custom to speak of our country as “poor little Wales”’ was outmoded.<sup>29</sup> The absence of ‘little’ in Gladstone’s pamphlet may not have been significant in itself, but a ‘gallant Wales’ as opposed to ‘gallant little Wales’ was not diminished by an implicit relationship with a larger neighbour.

The origins, meanings and occasional contestation of the phrase ‘poor little Wales’ and ‘gallant little Wales’ provide some means of understanding the shifts in the ways in which Wales was perceived and how the Welsh saw themselves. Despite the obvious differences between the two expressions, both referred to Wales as ‘little’. With a land mass and population, including Monmouthshire, less than either England, Scotland or Ireland, Wales was in quantitative terms the smallest of the four nations. Its population amounted to 5.3 per cent of the United Kingdom in 1911, considerably less than Ireland (9.7 per cent), Scotland (10.6 per cent) and England (74 per cent).<sup>30</sup> At a time when maps and statistics were a common means of portraying empire, such figures and representations would probably have played a part in the way in which Wales was perceived. Wales was also rendered smaller by

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<sup>28</sup> Beth Jenkins, “‘Queen of the Bristol Channel Ports’: the intersection of gender and civic identity in Cardiff, c. 1880–1914”, *Women’s History Review*, 26, 6 (2014), 910–11.

<sup>29</sup> *North Wales Express*, 17 September 1886; W. E. Gladstone, *The Irish Question. I. – History of an Idea. II. – Lessons of the Election* (London, 1886), p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> Neil Evans, “‘A world empire, sea-girt’: the British Empire, state and nations, 1780–1914”, in Stefan Berger and Alexei Miller (eds), *Nationalizing Empires* (Budapest, 2015), p. 66.

its attachment to the flank of its larger neighbour thus making it easier to compare the relative size of the two. The question of size was something that came up during speeches about Wales. ‘Vitality is not a question of size’, said the Liberal Ellis Jones Ellis-Griffith before citing the example of the energetic but far from numerous white population of South Africa.<sup>31</sup>

From the late nineteenth century, certain events and trends added to, or reinforced some of the associations carried by smallness. There was the vulnerability of the ‘small nation’ mentioned by Lloyd George and the *Western Mail*. Small size could also suggest immaturity or youthful vigour – the *Cymru Fydd* movement (established in 1886) was commonly known as ‘Young Wales’. Whereas earlier expressions of Welsh identity had prioritised the idea that the Welsh were the Ancient Britons or Cymmrodorion, those who called for greater recognition of Wales from the late nineteenth-century placed more emphasis on Wales being a new nation. From the viewpoint of earlier assertions of Welsh identity, the idea of England being the senior of the two would have seemed peculiar. However, the assertion of a new, Liberal and Nonconformist Wales that looked to the future rather than the past probably influenced the chair at a meeting of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1895, who announced that the union had little to fear ‘so long as there was the close and fraternal union that existed between gallant little Wales and wise, strong, old England in working out free Church principles and problems’.<sup>32</sup> There was also the association of being little with insignificance seen in concerns that politicians who lacked Gladstone’s insight saw Wales being more like a county than a country and would therefore feel little need to pass legislation

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<sup>31</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Ellis Jones Ellis-Griffith Papers, 58, 65.

<sup>32</sup> *Western Mail*, 7 May 1895.

that pertained solely to Wales.<sup>33</sup> During a period when many were articulating the smaller nation's distinctive features, size contributed to the thoughts of those who reflected on the nature of Wales and its relationship with England.

The war presented an opportunity for Wales to be recognised as a martial nation on a par with its neighbours. This military Wales, however, had to be accommodated alongside the existing tendency to portray the Welsh as a passive people.<sup>34</sup> The impression of a peaceful Wales was iterated in many contexts, ranging from comments by anti-vivisectionists that the Welsh were a 'people [who] are exceptionally free from the vice of cruelty' to the concern that the 'sensitiveness inherent in the Welsh character' was being eroded by the popularity of boxing.<sup>35</sup> Nonconformist opinion that the army tended to degrade the morality of young men reinforced the reputation of the Welsh as being a people who had left their war-like nature in the distant past.<sup>36</sup> As Gladstone told American visitors to Hawarden in 1895, the Welsh were now 'the most peaceful nation in Europe'.<sup>37</sup> Soon afterwards the pro-Boer sentiments expressed by Welsh Liberals, including Lloyd George, furthered the impression that the Welsh were not a martial nation. A review of *Gwlad Fy Nhadau* (Land of My Fathers)

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<sup>33</sup> *Herald Cymraeg*, 19 August 1886.

<sup>34</sup> Mike Benbough-Jackson, 'Celebrating a saint on his home ground: St David's Day in St Davids Diocese during the nineteenth century', in William Gibson and John Morgan-Guy (eds), *Religion and Society in the Diocese of St Davids, 1485–2011* (Farnham, 2015), pp.174–7.

<sup>35</sup> *Cambrian News*, 7 December 1900; *Carmarthen Journal*, 16 November 1916.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Evans, 'Loyalties: state, nation, community and military recruiting in Wales, 1840–1918', in Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> *Merthyr Times*, 6 August 1896.

indicates how far this reputation had spread. Compiled in 1915 by two academics, Morris and Lewis Jones, the book contained patriotic essays, poems and songs, and profits from its sale went to the National Fund in aid of Welsh Troops. A reviewer in an English newspaper hoped that as well as raising money the book would help change perceptions of the Welsh:

The ordinary Englishman, it is to be feared, has not hitherto associated the ordinary Welshman with warlike feelings. He has, on the contrary, been inclined to put him down as a national pacifist, if somewhat of a parochial belligerent ... It is true that the fighting qualities of the Welsh have not been singled out during recent years as those of the Irish and Scotch have been.<sup>38</sup>

Although Wales was not the only nation to draw on the medieval period for inspiration during the First World War, the mining of the distant past for military treasure had a particular significance among the Welsh.<sup>39</sup> As well as providing a chivalric sheen to the call to arms, the period lent Wales a more martial mien. Even in the final month of the Battle of the Somme, a time when the parallels with the Middle Ages were thought to have become anachronistic, a Welsh local newspaper drew a comparison between the campaign and Agincourt.<sup>40</sup> During his speech of 19 September 1914 Lloyd George referred to the Welsh as ‘the race that faced the Normans for hundreds of years in a struggle for freedom, the race that helped to win Crécy, the race that fought for a generation under Glendower against the

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<sup>38</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 14 October 1915.

<sup>39</sup> Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> *Cambrian News*, 20 October 1916.

greatest captain in Europe'.<sup>41</sup> To avoid England being cast as a villainous six feet two inch nation, such calls on the past involved some selective use of evidence skirting and selection of material. For a variety of reasons, the Hundred Years War was a popular point of reference. Shakespeare's short but pugnacious Fluellen, possibly based on Dafydd Gam, afforded a well-known personification of the Welsh at Agincourt, albeit one that a contributor to the *Cambria Daily Leader* who tried to establish the 'Fighting Reputation of the Welsh' did not feel entirely comfortable with: 'Small of stature, pragmatical of speech, disputatious and choleric in argument, chivalrous in conduct and indomitable in fight, we can all recognise the essential truth of the Master's portraiture of the Welsh character, notwithstanding the touch of caricature which rather distorts its features'.<sup>42</sup>

Caricatures of the Welsh had not disappeared by 1914. Some of the features depicted in *Henry V* remained, had accumulated additional meaning and were joined by other features more in keeping with the early twentieth century. George W. E. Russell, who had written a biography of Gladstone in 1891, celebrated how the four nations came together during the First World War, noting that each maintained its own identity and how this made 'the strength and the flexibility of the whole'.<sup>43</sup> Even so, one nation remained underappreciated: 'I turn to Wales. Here our traditional view has been purely comic, except when the comedy was relieved by brutality. Welshmen were small; Welshmen were poor; Welshmen ate leeks; Welshmen ignored the rights of property; Welshmen could speak no intelligible language.' Here Russell appears to allude to Fluellen, and talks of a 'traditional' view, but his message

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<sup>41</sup> *Great War*, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 22 September 1914.

<sup>43</sup> *Cefn Chronicle*, 31 January 1915.

was addressed to the present as he asks people who, unlike him, have ‘no drop of Welsh blood in their veins to compare John Bull’s view of the Welsh with the reality’.

Alongside the older short, pilfering Stuart Welshman there was a newer variety, whose similarity in stature belied some differences. By the outbreak of the First World War considerable attention was being paid to racial differences between Europeans. On either side of the Atlantic, academics and those who adopted or popularised academic studies, contributed to what has been described as a ‘fracturing of whiteness’.<sup>44</sup> Whereas the white population of the United States of America had frequently been defined against both African- and Native Americans, the arrival of migrants from southern and eastern Europe resulted in more emphasis being placed on differences among those of European stock – a trend that had been presaged by attitudes towards the Irish and Germans earlier in the century. Although Britain did not experience migration on the scale or nature of that which occurred in the United States of America, there was much interest in supposed physical and psychological differences between and within the four nations. A tendency to differentiate one group of Europeans from another in the New World took place at a time when there was much interest in the consequences of movements to the British Isles during the Dark Ages.

The most widespread distinction was that between Saxon and Celt. The latter were assigned qualities associated with the mind and spirit. While these were not entirely negative, the absence of the qualities that were thought of being typically Saxon implied some fundamental

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), p. 38.



weaknesses in the Celtic psyche. Whereas the Saxon tended to build and forge unity, the Celt split into various groups. The Saxon type was persistent and carried out tasks, while the Celt manifested a zeal that rapidly burnt out. According to the then prime minister, Herbert Asquith, Kitchener was of the opinion that ‘the Welsh were always wild and subordinate and ought to be stiffened by a strong infusion of English or Scotch’.<sup>45</sup> Even what were considered positive features, such as a powerful imagination, poetic tendency and interest in non-worldly matters like religion, could be seen as impractical or feminine traits.<sup>46</sup> In this, there were considerable similarities between estimations of the Celt and other races of the empire who were portrayed as childlike.<sup>47</sup> In his assessment of the effect of the war on the Welsh, the Anglican Scholar J. Vyrnwy Morgan observed that the ‘Welsh have the nature that tends towards excitement’.<sup>48</sup> The comparisons between Celt and Saxon were expressed in language that was also used to distinguish differences in generation and gender.

Wartime, however, provided opportunities to challenge generalisations about the racial maturity and efficacy of the Celts and of the Welsh in particular. The author of an account of life in a Scottish military camp that appeared in a Welsh publication noted how the behaviour of Scottish spectators during a game of football countered the common view that Celts were ‘demonstrative’. On this occasion the English supporters were the more vocal, while the

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Brock and Eleanor Brock (eds), *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford, 1982), p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> John S. Ellis, ‘Reconciling the Celt: British national identity, empire, and the 1911 investiture of the Prince of Wales’, *Journal of British Studies*, 37, 4 (1998), 393–4.

<sup>47</sup> J. A. Mangan, ‘Images for confident control: Stereotypes in imperial discourse’, in J. A. Mangan (ed.), *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience* (London, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> J. Vyrnwy Morgan, *The War and Wales* (London, 1916), pp. 201, 203.

Scots ‘knew how to keep the rein tight on it’.<sup>49</sup> This instance of English volubility was noted by the author in an attempt to show that it was not just the Welsh who were ‘proverbially demonstrative’. Such defensiveness about the reputation of the Welsh Celt was also betrayed by men on the frontline, one of whom wrote that the conduct of the Welsh and other Celtic people in the war had refuted the claim ‘that the Celts lack perseverance’.<sup>50</sup>

These psychological distinctions were accompanied by physical differences between the Welsh and other inhabitants of the British Isles. In short, a particular kind of Welsh body and an associated mentality came to embody the Welsh as a whole. Late Victorian and Edwardian anthropologists may have categorised different types, but in their quest for accuracy they tended to refine national categories and thus identified more than one variety of Welshman. Scholarly distinctions between types tended to be based on a geological-like theory that there were layers of inhabitants with earlier populations overlaid by later invaders who were, generally, more intelligent and organised. These classifications and hierarchies appear simplistic, but the form they took in the wider culture of the time was even cruder. An illustration from a popular late Victorian/Edwardian history displayed ‘The Two Types in South Wales Today’ – a tall, well-dressed fair-haired man descended from the Celtic conquerors, and a much shorter, darker man in less becoming dress whose ancestors were the earlier, pre-Celtic inhabitants were thought to have originated in the Iberian peninsula.<sup>51</sup> In

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<sup>49</sup> *Llais Lafur*, 23 October 1915.

<sup>50</sup> Harry Jones, ‘The persistence of the Celt’, in T. E. Elias (ed.), *New Year Souvenir of the Welsh Division, January 1917* (Cardiff, 1917), p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> O. M. Edwards, ‘Celtic Britain’, in H. D. Traill and J. S. Mann (eds), *Social England: A Record of the Progress of the People*, vol. 1 (London, 1898), p. 2.

another popular history of the period, Thomas Stephens estimated that the height of the average Celt was five feet nine inches ('some inches taller than the Iberian').<sup>52</sup> It was this more diminutive of the two that came to represent the typical Welshman. According to one archaeologist, Lloyd George was in 'stature, skull-formation, complexion, temperament ... Iberian un-alloyed'.<sup>53</sup>

This image of the short, stocky Iberian type was accompanied by statistics that suggested that the Welsh were the most Iberian of the British people. One of the most commonly cited studies on height conducted by the Anthropometric Committee reported that the Scots were the tallest (five foot eight and three quarter inches), followed by the Irish (five foot eight inches), then the English (five foot seven and one third inches) and the Welsh (five foot six and a half inches). When it came to weight, however, the Welsh were the second heaviest at (11.3 stone), lighter than the Scots (11.8 stone) but weighing slightly more than the English (11.07 stone) and the Irish (eleven stone).<sup>54</sup> These figures provided a ready means to differentiate the four nations, and they were reproduced in a popular anthropological study, John Munro's *The Story of the British Race*, originally published in 1899 and twice republished before 1914. Munro claimed that his work would replace information about races based on histories of the British Isles with a synthesis of 'the young and growing science of

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Stephens, *Welshmen: A Sketch of their History* (London, 1901), p. 15; E. M. Wilmot-Buxton, *Peeps at Many Lands: Wales* (London, 1911), p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 28 June 1917.

<sup>54</sup> J. F. Munro, *The Story of the British Race* (London, 1899), p. 193.

anthropology'.<sup>55</sup> The statistics were also reported in the British press both before and during the war.<sup>56</sup>

Height was accorded particular importance in military circles, and it is worth turning to both the Volunteer and Territorial forces to illustrate what was at stake in discussions about the national physique and how some military figures viewed the Welsh body before the First World War. In 1905 the then Secretary of State for War, Hugh Oakley Arnold-Foster, suggested that the height requirements for the Volunteer forces needed to be strictly applied in order to improve the force. He felt that the re-organisation of the Volunteers would remedy the ills identified during the Second Boer War and would help prepare the nation for any future invasion.<sup>57</sup> The enforcement of a uniform standard height for the Volunteer Force was, however, considered a 'vexed point in Wales'.<sup>58</sup> There had been earlier efforts to defend the reputation of the less than imposing Welsh Volunteers. When over a thousand departed from Southampton to South Africa in 1901, the *Cardiff Times* reported that they were 'conspicuous not as regards height, for compared with other detachments they were of short stature, but for hardiness and general fitness they admitted no superior'.<sup>59</sup> Attempts to highlight other corporeal characteristics to compensate for a lack of height came to the fore during the First World War.

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<sup>55</sup> Munro, *The Story of the British Race*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Whitby Gazette*, 3 March 1911; *The Diss Express and Norfolk and Suffolk Journal*, 3 August 1917.

<sup>57</sup> A. J. A. Morris, *The Scaremongers: The Advocacy of War and Rearmament, 1856–1914* (London, 1984), p. 103.

<sup>58</sup> *Liverpool Evening Express*, 26 July 1905.

<sup>59</sup> *Cardiff Times*, 2 March 1901.

To understand this sensitivity about height and Welsh military identity it is necessary to consider contemporary views on shortness. Some of these were sketched by Lt Col. Charles à Court Repington, military correspondent for *The Times*. The Welsh component of the newly-formed Territorial force had taken part in manoeuvres in the summer of 1910 and had therefore drawn the attention of senior military figures. Speaking at Aberystwyth, the Australian-born General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Command Sir Charles Burnett cautioned Welsh Territorials not to rest on the laurels of Fishguard – a reminder that it was not only the medieval period that was called upon when the Welsh wanted to establish their martial credentials.<sup>60</sup> Repington's assessment, which was repeated in the Welsh press, foreshadows topics that became all the more urgent during the First World War. Although Repington did not place undue emphasis on the importance of height, he mentioned the reports by school medical inspectors that revealed only 68 per cent of Welsh school boys had developed to the average standard height for their age. As a result, 'Welshmen must feel some anxiety about the physique of the race', he commented. A Welsh paper summarised this comment with the column heading 'Welsh physique criticised'.<sup>61</sup> Herefordshire was one of the three English border county battalions that had been included to bolster the numbers of the Welsh Division. These Englishmen were, according to Repington, 'considerably above the Welsh standard of physique'. Moreover, the Welshmen were lacking in mind as well as body. His suggestion that the Welsh were innately disinclined to organisation and discipline

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<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 8 August 1910; J. M. Davies, *O Gwmpas Pumlumon* (Aberystwyth, 1966), p. 19.

<sup>61</sup> *South Wales Daily Post*, 12 August 1910; *Cambrian*, 12 August 1910.

prefigured those of Kitchener. Like a native people, the average Welsh soldier was a 'scout by nature', whose strength lay in 'hill fighting'. 'He is not a born NCO like the Scot.'<sup>62</sup>

With the mobilisation of manpower at the outbreak of the First World War, concerns about the height of recruits took on an even greater importance in military circles. The question of the height of Welshman was thrown into relief when the minimum height requirement for new recruits was set at 5ft 6in on 11 September 1914. This adjustment was an effort to manage the volume of volunteers who had come forward during the first month of war.

Although height requirements were not as strict for engineers, medics and ex-soldiers of the line, many recruits were crestfallen after being denied the opportunity to serve on the front line. This relatively high height requirement was reduced by October and again by November, when it was set at the pre-war figure of five foot three inches, but the gradual reduction in height requirement and the variation across different regiments meant that the issue of height remained a topic of much discussion, and not only in Wales, as concerns about dips in the number of recruits towards the end of 1914 mingled with complaints from those who were turned away by recruiting sergeants.<sup>63</sup> In England and Scotland reservations about the 5ft 6in limit and later height standards were not framed in a national context. There were comments from mining districts in the north-east of England about how the height standard should not override other marks of military masculinity, but these arguments wedded bodies to an occupation rather than a national or racial type.<sup>64</sup> It was a different case in Wales.

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<sup>62</sup> *The Times*, 9 August 1910.

<sup>63</sup> *Surrey Advertiser*, 16 September 1914; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 September 1914; *Hamilton Advertiser*, 19 September 1914.

<sup>64</sup> *Newcastle Journal*, 14 September 1914; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 17 September 1914.

Those responsible for recruitment in Wales often referred to the relative shortness among Welshmen. In mid-September, Major Anderson thought the 5ft 6in requirement excluded a large portion of men who sought to join the Swansea Battalion of the Welsh Regiment. His comment that Welshmen were ‘as a rule ... below the average standard of height’ identified the Welsh as being an exception, an outlier from a British statistical mid-point.<sup>65</sup> In response to the 5ft 6in requirement, the *Western Mail* referred to the ‘average Welshman’ as being between five foot two inches and five foot four inches, while the *South Wales Daily News* reckoned that five foot six inches was ‘slightly above the average height of Welshmen’, without indicating when or how this average was calculated.<sup>66</sup> This estimation meant that even when the minimum height was lowered to five foot four inches on 23 October 1914, the putative average Welshman would have difficulty joining the colours.<sup>67</sup> Major Lucas of the 8<sup>th</sup> Wales District observed that any requirement over five foot four inches would hamper recruitment in Wales.<sup>68</sup> There is evidence that the height restrictions were not adhered to by all recruiting sergeants.<sup>69</sup> On one occasion the intercession of a Welsh mayor secured a swift reduction of the requirement.<sup>70</sup> Their existence not only posed a barrier to joining the army, they also slighted many men and suggested that the War Office did not think that ‘the short

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<sup>65</sup> *Western Mail*, 14 September 1914.

<sup>66</sup> *Western Mail*, 19 September 1914; *South Wales Daily News*, 22 September 1914.

<sup>67</sup> Beckett, *Nation in Arms*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 23 September 1914.

<sup>69</sup> Gervase Phillips, ‘An army of giants: height and medical characteristics of Welsh soldiers of the First World War’, *Archives: the Journal of the British Records Society*, 22 (1997), 143.

<sup>70</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 22 September 1914.

man is really a Man [sic]'.<sup>71</sup> The limitations imposed by the 5ft 6in standard, an unambiguous example of Lloyd George's 'theory of bigness', became one of the arguments used in favour of founding a Welsh Army Corp.<sup>72</sup>

Any comments in favour of reducing the height requirement were seized upon by newspapers that were keen to demonstrate the part Welshmen could play in the war. Efforts to reduce the height requirement during the early part of the war drew on medical opinion that height should not be the overriding factor when selecting soldiers to serve on the front line. The champions of the small man often referenced the Japanese and their victory over Russia in the war of 1904–5.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, short men provided less of a target, were not as expensive to clothe, transport and feed and there were no limits placed on height in the Royal Navy. Despite applauding those soldiers with 'small bodies and a big soul', and expressing relief at the removal of certain restrictions by November 1914, the *British Medical Journal* clearly saw the short man as occupying a particular, unspectacular, almost cog-like role during a war of attrition. 'The cavalry and artilleryman requires to be big and powerful, but as to those who burrow in the trenches how can it matter whether they are 4 ft. 9in. or 5ft. 6in.? We are not out for a show and a parade but to win – a war of sieges and attrition.'<sup>74</sup> Earlier comment in the journal had recommended that 'there is nothing to be gained by mere size and beefiness in the infantry' and had scoffed at 'Fredrick the Great's 7ft. Irishman'; what was needed was

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<sup>71</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 12 December 1914.

<sup>72</sup> *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 25 September 1914; *Amman Valley Chronicle*, 24 September 1914.

<sup>73</sup> *The Scotsman*, 17 November 1915; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1914; *Western Daily Press*, 22 July 1915.

<sup>74</sup> *British Medical Journal*, 2, 2813 (1914), 928; *Glamorgan Gazette*, 4 December 1914.



the ability to march.<sup>75</sup> Welsh newspapers took note of such arguments and stressed the ‘power to march that the short Welshman possesses’.<sup>76</sup> Determination, grit, stoicism: these were the qualities needed in a citizen army.

Later researchers, as well as contemporaries, thought that reductions in the minimum height standard for some front line regiments in September 1914, and later in February and May 1915, to five foot three inches, five foot two inches and five foot one inch respectively, showed that the War Office recognised that Welshmen were shorter than average.<sup>77</sup> While this was so, it is not necessarily an indication of the unique position of Welsh men. For instance, the standard for the Royal Warwickshire Regiment was set at five foot one inch in February 1915.<sup>78</sup> These local adjustments to the height requirement may well have been interpreted as reactions to the racial make-up of the area, but they could just as well be a means to boost recruitment and were not necessarily founded on anthropometric data. By the same token, complaints about the strictures of the height standard may have provided a means to deflect attention from a dip in the numbers of volunteers.

An even clearer association between height and national standing arose during discussions about the formation of the Welsh Guards. The establishment of a Welsh Division (known as the 43<sup>rd</sup> until April 1915 when it was renumbered the 38<sup>th</sup>) was a success, albeit a partial one

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<sup>75</sup> *British Medical Journal*, 2, 2805 (1914), 593.

<sup>76</sup> *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 6 October 1914; *Amman Valley Chronicle*, 8 October 1914.

<sup>77</sup> Colin Hughes, *Mametz: Lloyd George's 'Welsh Army' at the Battle of the Somme* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Gerrards Cross, 1992), p. 27; Beckett, *Nation in Arms*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 25 February 1915.

because a second division was not raised.<sup>79</sup> For some, however, it would be an even greater achievement if Wales were to have its own regiment of guards. Such units were traditionally responsible for guarding the monarch and set a greater height requirement for recruits than other regiments. They epitomised the ‘theory of bigness’. Scotland and Ireland had their own regiments of guards, formed respectively in 1642 and 1900. The establishment of the Irish Guards after the Second Boer War led to calls for a Welsh equivalent. As the author of the first official history of the Welsh Guards put it: ‘The claim of Wales became obvious with the formation of the Irish Guards.’<sup>80</sup> An uneven distribution of recognition both among and within the four nations is a recurrent theme in British military history. It is especially noticeable in the greater emphasis placed on the participation of Ulster during the Great War compared to the rest of Ireland.<sup>81</sup> The lack of a regiment of Welsh Guards contributed to a feeling that Wales was once again being overlooked. This sense that other nations were well ahead of ‘poor little Wales’ was also felt by those who attempted to form Welsh regiments based in English cities where Scottish and Irish equivalents were already in existence.<sup>82</sup> Seeing as there were already three Welsh regiments of the line, the *South Wales Daily News* argued, why could not Wales be granted a regiment of guards too.<sup>83</sup> Lt General Francis Lloyd set in motion the formation of the battalion and was proud to have managed to gather enough men to put on a parade on St David’s Day, less than a month after they were given the go ahead on 6 February 1915, although a Scots band played the march. Lloyd summed up the significance of this regiment in his introduction to the regimental history that

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<sup>79</sup> J. E. Munby (ed.), *A History of the (38<sup>th</sup>) Welsh Division* (London, 1920).

<sup>80</sup> C. H. Dudley Ward, *History of the Welsh Guards* (London, 1920), p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Timothy Bowman, ‘Ireland and the First World War’, in Alvin Jackson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford, 2014), p. 604.

<sup>82</sup> *Liverpool Courier*, 28 October 1914; *Western Mail*, 17 September 1914.

<sup>83</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, 26 September 1914.

was published shortly after the Great War: 'the Principality should take its place among the nations of the British Isles in finding a regiment to assist in the guarding of the throne.'<sup>84</sup>

There was, however, another issue regarding national stature that did not feature in the official history of the Welsh Guards. Joseph Aubrey Rees's letter to *The Times*, noted that the regiment would not take long to form 'especially, as might, perhaps, be necessary, if the standard of height, usual in Guards Regiments were slightly reduced'.<sup>85</sup> Rees, secretary of the National Association of Grocers' Assistants and historian of the grocery trade, did not make an explicit connection between the potential problems of raising enough men for the Welsh Guards and the perception of the Welsh being shorter than other nations. It is possible that his call for a reduction in height was an effort to speed up recruitment rather than an allusion to the physique of Welshmen. Editorials and letters in the Welsh press, however, associated the height of the Welsh, with national identity and the formation of the Welsh Guards. One singled out St John Broderick, Secretary of State for War and member of the Irish Unionist Alliance between 1900 and 1903, as having argued against the establishment of the Welsh Guards because there were not enough tall men in Wales, a 'stock answer' that concealed the underlying reason 'that the English mind had not yet become familiar with the doctrine of Welsh nationality'. In a rebuttal to the classification of the Welsh as being short, the editorial concluded testily: 'We are not all of the Iberian Stock.'<sup>86</sup> Another paper, however, was more concerned about the requirement being five foot eight inches, the same as other guards' regiments. Citing the anthropometric data in *Story of the British Race* as evidence that the

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<sup>84</sup> Ward, *Welsh Guards*, p. v.

<sup>85</sup> *Carmarthen Journal*, 11 September 1914; *The Times*, 2 February 1915.

<sup>86</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 13 February 1915.

average Welshman was an inch and a half below the minimum requirement for the guards, the *Western Mail* feared that not enough men would be accepted for the prestigious unit.<sup>87</sup> In the event, the minimum was reduced by an inch.<sup>88</sup> The standard for the Irish Guards was lowered by the same amount, whereas by the spring of 1915 the long-established Grenadier, Coldstream and Scots Guards reinforced their status by setting a minimum of five foot eleven inches.<sup>89</sup> A comment from one Scottish newspaper on the first official appearance of the Welsh Guards at Buckingham Palace illustrates how the image of the Welshman was often entwined with height, as well as how shortness carried negative connotations: ‘Their fine physique lent little support to the assertion of the anthropologists [sic] that the Welsh are a race of short men.’<sup>90</sup>

At the other end of the scale from the guards were those who were admitted into battalions recruiting men who fell below the five foot three inches standard that was established towards the end of 1914. Men who were between five feet and five foot three inches tall but were able to meet the other requirements for front-line duty were commonly, although not exclusively, given the nickname ‘bantam’, after the small but aggressive bird. The initiative to admit short but otherwise able-bodied men was taken by the Liberal MP for Birkenhead East, Alfred Bigland, and resulted in the formation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment at the start of December 1914.<sup>91</sup> Welsh recruiters expressed apprehension that this

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<sup>87</sup> *Western Mail*, 27 February 1915.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 July 1915.

<sup>89</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 1 April 1915.

<sup>90</sup> *Daily Record*, 2 March 1915.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen McGreal, *The Cheshire Bantams: 15th, 16th and 17th Battalions of the Cheshire Regiment* (Barnsley, 2007).

scheme would hinder their efforts to form a Welsh Army Corps.<sup>92</sup> Between December 1914 and March 1915, four Welsh bantam battalions were established, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Glamorgan, which were the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the Welsh Regiment, then the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the South Wales Borderers. While some military historians have argued that the bantam battalions have been overlooked, others suggest that they were of questionable military value.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, they played a part in drawing attention to the drop in recruitment and highlighted the importance of the volunteer principle. Besides, the bantam battalions provoked responses that offer insights into notions of military masculinity and, in the case of this study, national identity.

Bantam battalions not only provided an opportunity for shorter men to establish, or re-establish, their sense of masculinity, the units enabled Welsh commentators to assert a more martial national identity, and to make further links to medieval history through comparisons with the short warrior Ifor Bach, Lord of Senghenydd.<sup>94</sup> In order to secure acceptance of the bantam battalions by the War Office, those who supported the short soldier placed emphasis on the width of a recruit's chest rather than their height. Chest measurements were as much part of the selection process for the army as the height standard but it had generated far less controversy. No objections to the chest requirements were founded on nationality or occupation. Not only was the male chest taken as a signifier of lung capacity, it was also a

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<sup>92</sup> Aberystwyth, NLW, Welsh Army Corps Records, Recruiting, C12/13.

<sup>93</sup> Sydney Allinson, *The Bantams: the Untold story of World War One* (London, 1981); Peter Simkins, "Each One a Pocket Hercules": the Bantam experiment and the case of the thirty-fifth division', in Sanders Marble (ed.), *Scraping the Barrel: the Military Use of Sub-standard Manpower* (New York, 2012), pp. 79–104.

<sup>94</sup> *Western Mail*, 11 February 1915, 30 August 1916.

common indicator of strength. As was the case with height, the stringency of these requirements varied according to unit and over time as the demands on manpower increased. Despite this, the quality of being broad was still an important part of military masculinity and, in Wales, national identity.

Welshmen were frequently referred to as being ‘sturdy’. This picture of the well-built but hardly towering figure was connected to two embodiments of the Welsh nation and Welsh masculinity: the miner and the Iberian. These occupational and racial types posed a challenge to a narrow definition of military masculinity based on height and an impressive appearance on the parade ground. When he wrote that taller men may have been ‘more pleasing to the feminine eye’, but that war was not all about appearance, a lecturer with the Swansea battalion associated the traditional image of the ideal soldier with impractical, feminine standards.<sup>95</sup> More recently, another academic has noted that this feminine gaze ‘removes [the] subject from the territory of the phallic masculinity into an abject space that bourgeois culture understands as feminine’.<sup>96</sup> If this view of the feminised tall soldier did not provide enough solace for the short soldier, then there was the way in which the German enemy was often embodied in the form of the tall Prussian Guardsman. What better antithesis to this giant, overbearing brute than the Welsh bantam, or even just the short Welsh soldier? Indeed, the

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<sup>95</sup> *Rhondda Leader*, 12 December 1914.

<sup>96</sup> Maurizia Boscagli, *Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder, CO, 1996), p. 170.

opportunity to evoke tragic and comic images through contrasting the two was common during and after the war.<sup>97</sup> From this perspective, being short had its advantages.

As an unambiguously masculine occupation that required courage and physical strength, coalmining rated as the most dangerous and arduous civilian occupation. There was also a tendency to see Welsh miners as being short. This amalgamation of shortness and fitness in the body of the south Wales miner was in marked contrast to inter-war interpretations that saw shortness as evidence of the effects of poverty.<sup>98</sup> Reductions in height requirement, from five foot six inches to five foot three inches for a miners' battalion in October 1914, were thought to be the result of the south Wales miner bring 'a short type of man'.<sup>99</sup> This was probably something of an exaggeration, as mining was not the preserve of those under a certain height. What is more, the intimated overlap between the Welsh Iberian type and the mining valleys overlooked the large number of English people who moved to work in the region. Such conflation, however, communicated a clear, easily transmitted image. As Hywel Teifi Edwards has shown, the miner was a familiar type that could be portrayed as a pious

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<sup>97</sup> London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), interview with Thomas John Price, 9492; *ibid.*, interview with Aled Parry, 14766; Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (London, 1929), p. 211; *Y Dydd*, 28 July 1916; *Western Mail*, 25 March 1918.

<sup>98</sup> Steven Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales* (Cardiff, 2006), p. 96; Roderick Floud, Annabel Gregory and Kenneth Wachter, *Height, Health and History: Nutritional Status in the United Kingdom, 1750-1980* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> *Western Gazette*, 9 October 1914.

autodidact or a wasteful pleasure seeker. This two-sided image was accentuated during the war as the volunteering, self-sacrificing collier stood opposite the truculent, selfish striker.<sup>100</sup>

In practice, however, it was difficult to detach the loyal military miner from those less positive images, particularly when there was strife in the workplace, such as when south Wales miners went on strike in July 1915 in protest against the introduction of the Munitions Act. This may have been more of a large-scale labour dispute than a politically-motivated act, let alone an expression of any anti-war sentiment, but it still drew accusations of treason.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, some felt it necessary to defend the reputation of the miner. T. J. Williams, MP for Swansea District, described a ‘short, red-faced man’ who had joined the army. He was one of the ‘miner-soldiers’ who found it onerous to be ordered around by second lieutenants who were the sons of shopkeepers and drapers. Nevertheless, ‘these tough wiry little men will acquit themselves on the battlefield as well as any goose-stepping guards who ever came out of Potsdam’.<sup>102</sup> Whereas Williams the politician combined the miner-soldier identity, the journalist T. Andrew Richards preferred to describe a transformation from one to the other. Before the war Richards claimed to have traced the man who inspired Charles Dickens’ character Joe Gargery, the blacksmith in *Great Expectations*, and his account of the ‘Bantam soldier of the Rhondda Valley’ has elements of the kind of reportage that introduced readers to another social class that featured in the work of Dickens. Richards stressed the ‘uniqueness’ of the Bantam soldier from the mining districts of south Wales and how they

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<sup>100</sup> Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Arwr Glew Erwau'r Glo: Delwedd y Glöwr yn Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, 1850–1950* (Llandysul, 1994).

<sup>101</sup> Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2000), p. 35.

<sup>102</sup> *Llais Llafur*, 10 July 1915; London, IWM, interview with George Richards, 9929.



transformed into a chrysalis while undergoing training before hatching as a soldier.<sup>103</sup> 'In appearance he strongly resembles our brave allies the Japanese'. Both of these assessments of the short soldier appeared in Liberal and socialist-leaning newspapers, and although they praised the short miner-soldier, these accounts hinted that others were less enthusiastic about the bantam miners. This suggests that they were not an unproblematic emblem of Welsh masculinity. Indeed, the memoirs of a Welsh veteran suggest that it was the presence of many unrespectable Englishmen from the English midlands in the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the South Wales Borderers that led to that particular bantam battalion finding it difficult to find billets among the civilian population.<sup>104</sup> This was one case where the ethnic heterogeneity of Welsh regiments that has been identified by Chris Williams appears to have resulted in embarrassment and some tension.<sup>105</sup>

As the earlier reference to the Japanese indicates, the bantam's bodies were exoticised. Indeed, the word bantam itself has oriental origins: the fighting fowl is thought to have originated in Bantam, a town on Java. For Welsh bantams, their association with the Iberian type meant that it was not only their height that rendered them more like non-European races. According to the anthropologist John Beddoe's 'index of Nigrescence', the Iberian type was closely related to the races of north Africa.<sup>106</sup> Despite being considered one of the earliest

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<sup>103</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 12 March 1915.

<sup>104</sup> E. Beynon Davies, *Ar Orwell Pell: Atgofion am y Rhyfel-Byd Cyntaf, 1914–1918* (Llandysul, 1965), p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Chris Williams, 'Taffs in the trenches: Welsh national identity and military service 1914–1918', in Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds), *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 142, 150.

<sup>106</sup> John Beddoe, *The Races of Britain: a Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* (London, 1885), p. 11.

inhabitants of the British Isles, by this measure the Iberian was the most ‘foreign’ of all the British races. Being cast as an outsider within, however, helped the Welsh bantams to foster a particular martial identity. ‘The dark Iberian Welshman like the Gourka [sic] and the Japanese is short in stature, but intensely hardy.’<sup>107</sup> Of the two Oriental Others, it was the Ghurkha, who fought alongside the British, who proved to be the more popular comparison. Such was the popularity of the association with the robust mountain-dwelling Nepalese that the *South Wales Daily News* was keen to claim responsibility for coining the phrase the Welsh Ghurkhas.<sup>108</sup> That said, at least one Welshman felt that the need to compare Welsh soldiers (or singers or boxers for that matter) with those of other nations was ‘a sign of nationalist debility’,<sup>109</sup> while in his survey of the Welsh Ghurkhas and the Welsh Guards the Welsh-American John Morgan of Garfield, questioned the ability of the Welsh Ghurkhas to match average-sized opponents when fighting hand-to-hand.<sup>110</sup> Even so, the comparison took root and spread. There is evidence that Australian troops used the nickname when referring to the short Welsh soldiers.<sup>111</sup>

Ferocious-sounding nicknames may well have impressed some, but recognition of the value of the short soldier from the medical profession was especially welcome. A discussion was held on 9 February 1915 at the Royal Sanitary Institute on the theme of ‘Tall vs Short soldiers’. The meeting was opened by Dr Marcus Seymour Pembrey, a physiologist at Guys

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<sup>107</sup> *Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 25 September 1914.

<sup>108</sup> *Aberdare Leader*, 23 January 1915.

<sup>109</sup> *Llais Lafur*, 23 January 1915.

<sup>110</sup> *The Cambrian*, 35, 12 (1915), 7.

<sup>111</sup> Edgar Wallace, *Kitchener’s Army and the Territorial Forces* (London, 1915), pp. 36–7.

Hospital who had established a reputation as an expert on the physiology of marching and had advised the Army Medical Committee. Pembrey stressed the relative nature of height when he remarked that a typical Scot would be classed as a tall Welshman. It is revealing that one Welsh national daily newspaper reported that Pembrey singled out the Welsh Ghurkhas as examples of how ‘short’ need not mean ‘meek’, although this statement is not repeated in the published version of his talk and it may have been a misinterpretation of what another speaker said about the Ghurkhas. Even so, Pembrey’s comments about the benefits of shortness provided further support for the idea of the Welsh Ghurkha.<sup>112</sup> From their role in the battle of La Bassée in late October 1914 onwards, the role of the kukri-wielding Ghurkhas in the war had been popularised in the press. Little wonder that the members of the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Welsh Regiment who bore the nickname reportedly preferred to be called ‘Welsh Ghurkhas’ rather than bantams.<sup>113</sup> A comparison with the Ghurkhas cast the Welshmen as an Occidental version of a martial race at a time when the Welsh were not regarded as a particularly martial nation. By placing emphasis on race over the degrading influence of environment, Pembrey went some way to absolve the short fighter of accusations of being a runt. Just as the *Western Mail* had earlier called upon the French surgeon M. Piquet, who had developed an equation for the optimum soldier that favoured those with a lower core, so the paper made much of the verdict at the Royal Sanitary Institute that the short soldier was potentially the better soldier.<sup>114</sup> Doubtless this provided some compensation for both the emphasis that was placed on height by the most respected regiments and the negative associations of shortness.

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<sup>112</sup> *Western Mail*, 11 February 1915; *Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, 36, 3 (1915), 105–13.

<sup>113</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>114</sup> *Western Mail*, 24 February 1915; *ibid.*, 11 March 1915.

No matter how many people argued about the usefulness of the short Welshman, it was the tall individuals and units that stood out in the newspapers and journals of the time. As the following examples show, the ‘theory of bigness’ held the commanding heights. A recruitment drive led by Captain Rhys Williams in mid-Wales during 1915 attempted to enlist policemen. One of the recruits, who was a policeman in Merionethshire, was praised for his ‘fine physique’. His height meant that he was the ‘[t]allest man in the Welsh Guards’.<sup>115</sup> Towards the end of 1916 a Denbighshire newspaper reported that the first policeman from the county had died in action. John Henry Adams of Bodfari was ‘a man of fine physique, standing well over six feet’.<sup>116</sup> When R. Silyn Roberts thanked Welsh Americans for their donations towards ‘alleviating suffering in Wales’ he referred to the formation of the Welsh Guards, recorded their height and chest requirements and noted that this achievement ‘proves that the spirit of Llywelyn Fawr and Owen Glyndwr is still alive in Wales’.<sup>117</sup> These taller men may have typified the martial spirit of Wales past, but they did not possess what were widely considered to be typical Welsh bodies.

This article has considered the interaction between the war and an overlooked part of the Welsh cultural history: the notion of Wales as a small nation and small people. This is not to say that size was the only feature associated with Wales and the Welsh. A variety of pre-existing perceptions of Wales and the Welsh were brought into relief by the conflict, some of which provided opportunities for the Welsh to articulate a distinct identity. One feature that

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<sup>115</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, 19 April 1915.

<sup>116</sup> *Denbighshire Free Press*, 9 December 1916.

<sup>109</sup> Bangor University Archives and Special Collections, R. Silyn Roberts Papers, 626.

was often mentioned in the context of Wales and the Welsh was size, and one of the champions of the small happened to be Lloyd George. A small nation and a short man was well placed to play a part in a war against an overbearing, monstrous foe. The distant past, comparisons with non-European races, and images of the miner contributed to the valorisation of shortness. All the same, the utilisation of smallness or shortness was not without its problems. Prevailing associations between size and vulnerability, immaturity and powerlessness influenced judgements about the small and short. ‘Gallant Little Wales’ was still a ‘little’ Wales surrounded by larger neighbours all of whom possessed more prominent military identities. Overlapping medical, political, anthropological and military discussions reveal how a ‘struggle over the meanings of representation’ had consequences for Welsh national identity.<sup>118</sup> In some quarters there was concern about the lack of recognition of Wales and the Welsh and attempts were made to challenge oversights, slights and assumptions about the Welsh. Any future history of a Welsh ‘collective inferiority complex’ would do well to consider the perception and valorisation of size.<sup>119</sup> Altogether, the emphasis on size provided a counterpoint that drew attention to Wales and the Welsh and, more importantly, enabled those who were keen to champion Wales to feel that the country was being acknowledged. At least being small meant being seen.

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<sup>118</sup> Joseph S. Alter, ‘Subaltern bodies and nationalist physiques: Gama the Great and the heroics of Indian wrestling’, *Body and Society*, 6, 2 (2000), 68.

<sup>119</sup> Chris Williams, ‘Problematizing Wales: an exploration in historiography’, in Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (eds), *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 9; Richard Wyn Jones, ‘The colonial legacy in Welsh politics’, *ibid.*, p. 30.

