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Monarchy and National Identity: Wales and the 1953 Coronation

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ABSTRACT

The Coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953 seemingly heralded a jubilant celebratory Britishness, conjuring a symbolic and homogenous national unity. However, by examining the Coronation in Wales, this article challenges this impression, and contends that responses to the event were diffuse and fragmented, and as subject to malleability by 'local' agendas as much as by 'top-down' monarchical power. This 'negotiated appropriation' of the Coronation unearths not so much the 'naturalness of Britishness' in Wales, but, the elusive perplexity of its national identities. Through a multi-layered approach – exploring both elite Welsh 'national' perspectives and a 'grassroots' case study from north-east Wales – it is evident that various forms of self-interested pro-monarchism, republicanism and apathy made the Coronation and the subsequent royal visit to the Principality significant cultural indicators in 1950s Wales.

Keywords: Coronation; Wales; Welsh; Monarchy; Britishness; 1950s

Introduction

At the turn of the 1950s, Cliff Bere, one of the founders of the Welsh Republican Movement, stated that 'The English Crown still forms an important part of the English machinery of domination', accusing politicians of all hues of being willing 'to avail themselves of the English crown's usefulness...as a means of maintaining domination upon the Celtic nations of Britain.'[1] Bere's language is suggestive of an insiduously powerful monarchy, one whose shedding of its 'formal' political role had enabled it to cultivate a surreptitious ceremonial supremacy geared towards the maintenance of a national status quo.[2] The accusatory reiteration of 'English' showcased his belief that the cloak of a 'British' royal family was merely a placating device, a token designed to conceal the insignificance of the Welsh and Scots within an essentially English nation state.

[1]Cliff Bere, *The Welsh Republic* (n.d. but c. 1949-50), Cliff Bere Papers, National Library of Wales [NLW]..
[2] On the developments of the monarchy's ceremonial power, see William Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism* (London, 1996).

The subsequent outpouring of triumphant Britishness heralded by the 1953 Coronation of Elizabeth II was, as to be expected, subject to much vitriol by the Welsh Republicans, who viewed it as another step in the suppression of a distinctive Welshness. This was, after all, a grandiose imperial event, with celebratory participation being actively encouraged at a local level on Coronation Day itself and during the subsequent royal tour of parts of Britain. In contrast to the 1951 Festival of Britain, when organisers adopted a 'four nations' approach and established an official Wales Festival of Britain Committee, there was no overarching Welsh structure coordinating Coronation celebrations in Wales. Instead, it was an interaction between the British 'centre' and localities, mostly circumventing an all-Wales platform.[3] In images, recollections and the collective memory, celebrations across Wales seem to echo those in other parts of Britain, conveying a sense of a 'joyful' community spirit. Martin Johnes encapsulates this in his depiction of the occasion in Caernarfon, a town in the Welsh-language heartland of north-west Wales, which hosted street parties, Coronation services in places of worship, open-air dancing, fireworks, communal television-watching and a 21-gun salute. Even though Caernarfon could be considered a special-case, since it was home to one of Edward I's medieval castles and prided itself on its royal connections, Johnes emphasises that 'There was nothing unusual' in these types of events, and celebrations of a similar vein were held across Wales.[4] The *Western Mail*, one of the leading English-language newspapers in Wales, was excitedly brimming with details of the ceremonial, and hosted a weekly column entitled 'Coronation Column for Boys and Girls.'[5] This conspicuous enthusiasm, the aura of monarchical mystique embodied in the glamour of the young royal couple and the revelation on the day of the Coronation that Everest had been 'conquered' by a British Commonwealth Expedition, seemed

[3] Becky Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation. The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003), 52 and 228-229.
[4] Martin Johnes, *Wales since 1939* (Manchester, 2012), 198-199. See 'Memory Archive – The Royal Family', People's Collection Wales, https://www.peoplescollection.wales/collections/1040186 (accessed 2 March 2022) for a range of images from across Wales displaying similar modes of celebration.
[5] Rob Gossedge, 'Wales and the Crown: Coronation, Investiture and Jubilee, 1953-2012', in Irene Morra and Gossedge (eds.), *The New Elizabethan Age* (London, 2016), p. 100.

auspicious for the coming of a modern age of Britishness. Jan Morris, who as James Morris was the correspondent that first transmitted the news about the climbing of Everest, described the 'mystical delight' of the Coronation and Everest coalescing, heightening a sense that fate was heralding a new Elizabethan-age and seemingly imbuing a reinvigorated British ascendancy.[6]

Arguably, though, the visual uniformity of Coronation celebrations disguised the multiplicity of meanings associated with the occasion. In her study of ritual, Catherine Bell refers to a process of 'negotiated appropriation', implying that events, such as royal ceremonials, do not give rise to an absolute dominance by one social group or mentality, but instead involve articulations of consent and resistance by different sections of society, enabling the ritual to be appropriated and moulded to suit a range of interests. For Bell, monarchs cannot merely project a homogenous 'central power' and retain legitimacy; instead, rituals and ceremonials become subject to various means of appropriation, as diverse social and institutional groupings negotiate and promote their own agendas in their wake.[7] Indeed, as an imperial event being marked at the grassroots, the extent to which the Coronation could trumpet a homogeneous Britishness – one that radiated from centre to periphery - is questionable. As this article contends, in Wales, it exposed competing visions of identity, as it became a microcosm of societal frictions over tradition, modernity and national belonging, at a time when the numbers of speakers of the Welsh language, seen as an essential marker of Welshness, continued to decline.[8] Providing 'Welsh' ownership of the event was seen by some national elites as a means of legitimising it as a worthy 'British' nation, whilst for many civic leaders, it was an opportunity to promote local distinctiveness within a paradigm of 'loyalty'. However, apathy,

[6] James Morris, *Coronation Everest* (1953 and 2003), p. 1. For a retrospective reiteration of this as a cultural watershed see Morra and Gossedge (eds.), *The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity After World War II*.
[7] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992, Oxford 2009), esp. pp. 197-223.
[8] The 1951 Census showed a decline of 21.4% in the number of Welsh-language speakers since 1931, leaving the percentage at 28.9%. Source: John W. Aitchison and Harold Carter, 'Yr Iaith Gymraeg 1921-1991: Persbectif Geo-ieithyddol' in Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams (eds.) *Eu Hiaith a Gadwant*? (Cardiff, 2000), p. 42.

discord and, as seen from the Welsh Republicans, active distaste of the 'English' monarchy also shaped the discourse, making the Coronation and the subsequent royal visit to the Principality significant cultural indicators, not only of the nebulousness of Welsh nationhood, but also of the power and limitations of the monarchy in the 1950s. The article will argue that although it's possible to perceive the Coronation as a top-down 'British' subjugation, the event could also at times be proactively used, negotiated and appropriated 'from below', by individuals and organisations, to represent diffuse interests, thus illuminating the intangible complexity of 'national' identity in mid-twentieth century Wales.

Many of the existing publications with 'Coronation' in their titles could be classified as 'souvenir' histories, being broadly commemorative and pictorial in style, reflecting the fears of the sociologists Edward Shils and Michael Young, who, in a 1953 article, lamented the absence of serious academic discussion about the event and its significance.[9] Whilst Shils and Young conservatively viewed the ceremonial as a moral force for British unity, Norman Birnbaum in a 1955 riposte criticised them for ignoring signs of public disinterest and resistance to the event.[10] As Philip Ziegler suggested in 1978, many people were neutral, if not negative, about the Coronation, but were still enticed into its web.[11] In 2004 Henrik Örnebring, through a media studies lens, argued that Shils and Young's perspective on the Coronation as an 'unproblematic occasion of national unity' had become the 'dominant interpretation.'[12] However, as Örnebring illuminated in his exploration of public responses to the ceremonial, this sense of national togetherness was in many respects a media construct,

[9] See, for example, Christopher Lloyd and Hugh Roberts, *Ceremony and Celebration: Coronation Day 1953* (London, 2003); Peter Street, *Long Live the Queen: Britain in 1953* (Sutton Publishing, 1953).Edward Shils and Michael Young, 'The Meaning of the Coronation', *The Sociological Review*, 1, (1953), pp. 63-81.
[10] Norman Birnbaum, 'Monarchs and Sociologists: A Reply to Professor Shils and Mr Young', *The Sociological Review*, 3 (1955), pp. 5-23.
[11] Philip Ziegler, *Crown and People* (London, 1978).
[12] Henrik Örnebring, 'Revisiting the Coronation: A Critical Perspective on the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953', *Nordicom Review* 25 (2004), p. 177. See also Örnebring, 'Writing the history of television audiences: The Coronation in the Mass Observation Archive', in Helen Wheatley (ed.), *Re-viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London, 2007), 170-183.

which tended to discount more dissonant voices on concerns such as 'crass commercialization', cost or doubts about the significance of the Coronation in Scotland, on the British 'periphery'.[13] By contrast, Edward Owens in 2019 argued that the televising of the Coronation formed 'A national community of viewers...united through their shared empathetic ties to the queen'. This 'emotional community' may have experienced the day via different domestic rituals and mindsets, but their feeling of belonging to a national family resonated beyond their living-rooms due to the power of television broadcasting.[14] However, apart from such in-depth explorations of media and the significance of the ceremonial for the BBC,[15] historical scholarship on the Coronation tends to be limited to sporadic appearances in research with a broader scope. For examples, in historical surveys of Britain in the post-war decades it is usually depicted along with the 1951 Festival of Britain as a signifier that the grimness of 1940s of austerity was dissipating.[16] It is also a pivotal marker in works that periodise a 'New Elizabethan Age', with Morra and Gossedge arguing for a reframing of Britain's literary and cultural past in light of the ascension of Elizabeth II and the 'Elizabethans'.[17] The Coronation also makes an appearance in analyses of monarchy and national identity in the modern period, but often as a sidenote, overshadowed by seemingly more revelatory events from the Victorian era and the 1936 Abdication of Edward VIII.[18]

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[13] Örnebring, 'Revisiting the Coronation', pp. 186-188, 193.

[14] Edward Owens, *The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media and the British Public, 1932-53* (London, 2019), especially Chapter 6, 'This time I was THERE taking part': the television broadcast of the 1953 coronation'. p. 354, 367-370. Owens builds on the work of Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (London, 2002).

[15] For further work on media and the Coronation see Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British broadcasting: Serving the Nation* (Oxford, 1991); Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Sound and Vision* (Oxford, 1995); Jeffrey Richards, 'The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and film', *Court Historian* (2004), pp. 69-79; Laura Clancy, "Queen's Day, TV Day: The British Monarchy and the Media Industries', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 33 (2019), pp. 427-450.

[16] See Peter Hennessy, *Having it so good: Britain in the 1950s* (London, 2007); David Kynaston, *Family Britain 1951-57* (London 2010).

[17] Morra and Goessedge, *The New Elizabethan Age.*

[18] See David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 101-164; Philip Williamson, 'The monarchy and public values 1910-1953', in Andrzej Olechnowicz, *The Monarchy and the British Nation 1780 to the* Present (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 223-257; Antony Taylor, *Down with the Crown'. British Anti-monarchism and debates about royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), pp. 226-23.

There is also an overshadowing of the Coronation in the history of modern Wales, mirroring the fact that regional interpretations of the ceremonial have been on the historiographical margins, even though Gillian McIntosh's work on the Coronation visit to Northern Ireland demonstrates the potential of such enquiries in unravelling how royal rituals could be manipulated by grassroots political agendas.[19] The key exception to this neglect in the Welsh context is a chapter by the literary scholar Rob Gossedge, which provides comparative insights between the 1953 Coronation, the 1969 Investiture of Charles as Prince of Wales and the Queen's 2012 Diamond Jubilee.[20] He probes the perspectives of a range of Welsh writers on those spectacles, with the Coronation spotlight on the London-Welsh poet David Thomas, the Anglo-Welsh writer Dylan Thomas and the Welsh language academic and nationalist, Saunders Lewis.[21] Gossedge concludes that 'The Coronation attracted wildly different responses from literary Wales – indifferent silence, sacramental reverence, even sheer disgust', suggesting that the opinions of cultural elites were varied on the event, and certainly not always homogeneous: a theme that will be pursued in this article.[22]

Overall, however, in their quest for national particularism, historians of twentieth-century Wales have been far more preoccupied by the 1911 and 1969 prince of Wales investitures than with responses to more nominally 'British' ceremonials such as the Coronation. Both investitures have been framed as symbolic snapshots of a Welsh identity in flux: from the innocuous 'cultural' nationalism of the Liberal Wales of the Edwardian era, to the Labour Wales of the 1960s that contended with a more assertive and separatist form of 'political' Welsh nationalism.[23] An overriding theme, however, is the function of such royal rituals in

[19] Gillian McIntosh, 'A Performance of Consensus? The Coronation visit of Elizabeth II to Northern Ireland, 1953', *Irish Studies Review*, 2002, 10, 3, 315-330.
[20] There are useful passages too in Martin Johnes's important survey work, *Wales Since 1939*, pp. 198-199, 203-204.
[21] Rob Gossedge, 'Wales and the Crown: Coronation, Investiture and Jubilee, 1953-2012', in Morra and Gossedge (eds.), *The New Elizabethan Age* (London, 2016), pp. 68-94.
[22] Gossedge, 'Wales and the Crown', p. 98.
[23] Owain Llŷr ap Gareth, 'From the Medieval to the Starship Enterprise in Three Acts: Contesting the Representation of Wales through Royal Ritual 1911-2007', *Contemporary Wales*, 23, 1 (2010), pp. 36-51; John S. Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales 1911-1969* (Cardiff, 2008).

projecting a relatively harmonious coexistence of Welshness and Britishness, echoing findings on the monarchy in Victorian Wales, and exemplifying what the political scientist Richard Wyn Jones has termed the 'naturalness of Britishness' for the Welsh.[24]

This 'naturalness' stemmed in part from the temperament of Wales's relationship with the British state. Wales entered the 20th century still ruled by clauses instigated in the 16th century Acts of Union of England and Wales, which meant that there was no Welsh government, with the Welsh language barely having any official role in public administration.[25] Additionally, the 1846/1847 Blue Books report on the state of the education system in Wales had denigrated the Welsh language as backwards and immoral, motivating many Welsh elites not to revolt, but instead to ingratiate themselves with Britishness to prove the worthiness of Wales.[26] Although many leading Welsh Liberals campaigned for Welsh 'Home Rule' in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, their attention was focused more on religious reforms, particularly enshrining the rights of Welsh nonconformists and disestablishing the Church of England in Wales. Whilst the chapels in Wales were important crucibles for the Welsh language, the impact of industrialisation, technological modernisation, war, rural depopulation and concurrent secularisation saw some dramatic declines in the number of Welsh speakers, dropping from 49.9% in the 1901 Census to 28.9% in 1951.[27] Whilst this caused angst for many Welsh cultural nationalists - in particular the founders of Plaid Cymru in 1925 who felt that the British-Welsh paradigm of the past was damaging Welsh life – voters in Wales overwhelmingly opted in this period for Labour (and also the Conservatives and Liberals),

[24] Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Codi'r Hen Wlad yn ei hôl, 1850-1914* (Llandysul, 1989); John Davies, 'Victoria and Victorian Wales', in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverley Smith (eds.), Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922 (Cardiff, 1988), pp. 7-29; Richard Wyn Jones, *Rhoi Cymru'n Gyntaf: Syniadaeth Plaid Cymru*, p. 27.
[25] Gwilym Prys Davies, 'Statws Cyfreithiol yr Iaith Gymraeg yn yr Ugeinfed Ganrif', in Geraint H. Jenkins and Mari A. Williams, *Eu Hiaith a Gadwant? Y Gymraeg yn yr Ugeinfed Ganrif* (Cardiff, 2000), pp. 207-210.
[26] This is a particularly prevalent argument in Simon Brooks, *Why Wales never was: The failure of Welsh nationalism* (Cardiff, 2017). See also Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books* (Cardiff 2011) and Martin Johnes, *Wales England's Colony?* (Cardigan, 2019).
[27] John W. Aitchison and Harold Carter, 'Yr Iaith Gymraeg 1921-1991: Perspectif Geo-ieithyddol' in Jenkins et al, *Eu Hiaith a Gadwant?,* p. 32 and 42. For more details on this see Johnes, *Wales since 1939,* esp. chapters 1 and 6.

suggesting that British unionism, at least in an economic and governmental sense, was still a powerful force. The emotional sentiments of Plaid and nationalist splinter groups, such as the Welsh Republicans, were the exceptions, and not the norm. However, a desire for greater recognition of Wales was clearly in the air, as evidenced in reforms including pre-Second World War administrative devolution to Cardiff in the realms of education, agriculture and health; the Welsh Courts Act of 1942 giving more rights to Welsh-speakers within the legal system; the Labour government forming the advisory Council for Wales and Monmouthshire in 1948/49 and the Conservatives creating a Minister for Welsh Affairs in 1951 (a precusor to the appointment of the first Secretary of State for Wales as a Cabinet post in its own right in 1964).[28] But although core elements of Welsh nationhood were shifting by the time of the Coronation, and aspects of Welsh identity were becoming more assertive, Wales remained firmly in the British orbit, Britishness in Wales was still vigorous and demands for democratic devolution were relatively muted.[29]

This research builds on the suggestion in existing historiography that representations of the monarchy illuminate hybridity, but by exploring the Coronation - a ceremonial with few distinctively Welsh components - it showcases to an even greater extent the artificiality and ambiguities inherent in the identities of mid-20th century Wales. The article will firstly examine what can be termed 'national' responses to the Coronation. In the absence of devolved Welsh governance, this was predominantly an intelligensia-led discourse predicated on opinions within political parties, cultural organisations and in the columns of the press. Whilst much of this discussion reflected a consensual attitude towards the monarchy, there were also clear attempts to appropriate the Coronation to fulfil particular agendas. For example, the

[28] See Duncan Tanner et al (eds.), *Debating Nationhood and Governance in Britain 1885-1945* (Manchester, 2006), esp. Chapters 4-6.
[29] Duncan Tanner, 'How devolution died: the British Labour Party's constitutional agenda, 1900-1945', in Tanner et al *Debating Nationhood*, pp. 233-256; Andrew Edwards, 'Labour, nationalism and the problem of Welsh devolution, c. 1939-1964', in Chris Williams et al (eds), *The Art of the Possible: Essays in memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015), pp. 143-161.

prominence in the narrative of 'Tudorality' – i.e. laying claim to the 'British' Royal Family by means of the 'Welsh' Tudor connection – was an elite endeavour aimed at embroidering a Welsh distinctiveness to proceedings. However, the Coronation also highlighted the blurred lines of Welsh 'nationalism': a phrase that was simultaneously associated with a range of perspectives, from such 'loyal' Tudor-Welshness, to Plaid Cymru's muffled ambivalence and the anti-English militancy of the Welsh Republicans. In the second part, the focus will move towards the grassroots by deploying a case study of Coronation preparations from the Vale of Clwyd in north-east Wales. By using, amongst other sources, local government records, in both English and Welsh, this section will demonstrate that cultures of indifference and dissension were far more prevalent in the build-up to the occasion than the scenes of merriment on Coronation Day itself would suggest: for instance, commemorative souvenirs could become sites of conflict in skirmishes over civic pride. Moreover, by surveying examples from a region commonly characterised as belonging to 'British Wales', the work will suggest that such a label can mislead, as diverse constructs of Welshness, Britishness and localism could be appropriated differently in towns and villages only a few miles apart.[30] The final segment of the article situates the royal visit to parts of Wales in July 1953 as a point of convergence between these mutable identities. Whilst the presence of the queen on Welsh soil could be viewed as the wielding of 'British' power, at the same time it also facilitated 'national' agendas – such as bestowing royal prestige on the National Eisteddfod of Wales – and enabled displays not only of local gratification, but also of celebratory restraint in communities which hosted the monarch during her visit.

A 'Welsh' Coronation?

[30] British Wales due to the weakness of the Welsh language and the attractions of the English border. Ref to Balsom three-Wales model in Osmond (1985).

When Elizabeth II was crowned on 2 June 1953, she was attired in a dress embellished by a design of a Welsh leek: part of a range of emblems representing various UK and Commonwealth nations.[31] This was a superficially decorative, yet ultimately bland, portrayal of Wales, which was mostly kept to the margins of the ceremonial. With no formal committee to coordinate Welsh celebrations either, official recognition of Welshness in the Coronation ritual was trifling at best. Such a vacuum meant that any 'Welsh' ownership of the event would need to be contrived through more discursive means, such as the time-honoured tradition of reiterating Wales's unique yet loyal connection to the monarchy, predominantly through the Tudor 'lineage'.

Once elevated as Henry VII following the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, Henry Tudor never again visited Wales, and neither did any of his Tudor successors.[32] However, his birth in Pembroke Castle and his ancestral links to the Tudors of Penmynydd on Anglesey provided enough of a spectral association with Wales for him to be viewed as a *'Mab Darogan'* (Son of Prophecy), enabling an impression that the Tudors were a Welsh dynasty. This impression survived a Hanoverian detour, and morphed into a belief, encouraged by elites in Wales, that the British monarchy was, at its heart, Welsh. Such co-existence with the monarchy, particularly at moments of ceremonial intensity largely shielded the royal family from being viewed as an alien force, and epitomised what the historian Paul O'Leary has termed the 'self-conscious loyalty' of nineteenth-century Liberal nationalism, which strove to illustrate that the Welsh were both worthy and equal British subjects.[33]

[31] Christopher Lloyd and Hugh Roberts, *Ceremony and Celebration: Coronation Day 1953* (London, 2003), p. 86.
[32] John Davies, 'Victoria and Victorian Wales', in Geraint H. Jenkins and J. Beverley Smith (eds.), Politics and Society in Wales, 1840-1922 (Cardiff, 1988), p. 8. For Henry VII and Wales see Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales* c.*1415–1642* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 237–43.
[33] Paul O'Leary, 'The Languages of Patriotism in Wales 1840-1880', in Geraint H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Welsh Language and its Social Domains* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 559; As John Ellis has shown in the context of the 1911 Prince of Wales Investiture, a special 'Welsh' devotedness remained prominent in the narrative, Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales, 1911-1969* (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 44-45.

Although Gossedge argues that such 'Tudor enthusiasts' were in short supply by 1953, this article contends that, in fact, their rhetoric still remained conspicuous (even if the Liberals did not), with Cynan - the Archdruid of the National Eisteddfod of Wales and a prominent Welsh language poet - highlighting in an Eisteddfod Coronation greeting to the Queen the historical interdependence of the Crown and Wales: an interdependence governed by the Welsh roots of the Tudors.[34] This bond ensured the loyalty both of Cynan himself, and the Eisteddfod as an institution, to the new Queen, particularly since she had been invested as a member of its *Gorsedd* of Bards in 1946. *Y Cymro*, a weekly Welsh language newspaper, reflected similar sentiments, stating that Wales was proud that the Tudor link was being sustained, carrying a column by its resident psychologist outlining why the Welsh, as the original 'Britons', were well-suited to being governed in a constitutional monarchy, and adorning the cover page of its Coronation issue with a photograph of the Queen alongside an image of two folk dancers in Welsh 'dame' costumes who had been competing at the *Urdd* (Welsh League of Youth) Eisteddfod.[35]

A similar narrative was also weaved in English. In a radio broadcast entitled 'Wales and the Crown', the writer and artist David Jones viewed the monarchy as the 'special inheritance' of the Welsh.[36] An elaborate historical Coronation pageant performed in Bedwellty, an industrial area in south-east Wales, was not short on romantic Tudorality either, stipulating that Elizabeth I was a 'red-headed Welsh woman.'[37] Although not averse to highlighting the mistreatment meted out to the Chartists and the oppressive exploitation of Welsh miners, the pageant ended on a fervent high, discussing the progression 'to a new era, led by a new Queen, led in hope

[34] Rob Gossedge, 'Wales and the Crown: Coronation, Investiture and Jubilee, 1953-2012', in Morra and Gossedge (eds.), *The New Elizabethan Age* (London, 2016), pp. 68-94, pp. 70-71; *North Wales Chronicle*, 29 May 1953; *Western Mail*, 1 June 1953.
[35] *Y Cymro*, 20 May 1953 and 5 June 1953.
[36] David Jones, 'Wales and the Crown', Welsh Home Service 23 July 1953, LE 1/3, NLW. [published in David Jones, *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings*, ed. Harman Grisewood (London, 1959), pp. 39–48]. For more on David Thomas and the Coronation see Gossedge, 'Wales and the Crown', pp.103-105.
[37] *The Pageant of Bedwellty: The Long Journey* (1953), NLW ex1040, National Library of Wales.

and the fire of youth and fortune – the second Queen Elizabeth.'[38] The blend of tradition and modernity inherent in the script enabled the pageant to emphasise a nominal continuity with the Tudor reign, whilst the earnestness for the 'new' era helped to consign Welsh victimhood (often at 'English' hands) to the annals of the past. This seemingly effortless coexistence of Britishness and Welshness was captured in a *Western Mail* cartoon on Coronation day, which featured John Bull, adorned in a Union Jack jacket, and surrounded by an array of Welsh dragons and royal symbols.[39]

Although Tudorality was a means to establish 'Welsh' ownership of the monarchy, it could also lead to contested claims about the authenticity of such labels. Motivated by the Coronation, the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion appealed in 1952 for the inclusion of Wales on the Royal Arms. As with other past claims, this was rejected on the grounds that it could open the floodgates to similar demands from all Commonwealth nations. However, as a compromise, the Privy Council suggested augmenting the existing 150 year old Royal Badge of Wales, which featured a red dragon, by encasing it with a royal crown and a scroll including the 15th century inscription *'Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Gychwyn'* ('The Red Dragon did start'). This would be etched on all government correspondence and publications related to Wales, as well as on Coronation souvenirs.[40] Conservative Home Secretary and Minister for Welsh Affairs, David Maxwell Fyfe, presented this to Cabinet by stating that the new design 'would go some way to meet the desire of Welsh people for some further heraldic recognition of the Principality.'[41] Gwilym Lloyd George, sitting as Minister of Food in Cabinet, argued that the Welsh would prefer the honour of inclusion on the Royal Arms, particularly since they were not recognised on any Union symbol. However, he acknowledged that the updated Royal Badge at least

[38] *The Pageant of Bedwellty: The Long Journey* (1953), NLW ex1040, National Library of Wales.
[39] *Western Mail*, 2 June 1953. The *Western Mail* was mainly a regional paper for south Wales during this period.
[40] Cabinet Memorandum, Arms for Wales, CAB 129/59, TNA.
[41] Cabinet Conclusion, Minutes and Papers, CAB 128/26, 12 February 1953, TNA.

reinforced the Welsh Tudor link.[42] But, for Prime Minister Winston Churchill the new design was 'odious', expressing nothing but 'spite' and 'monstrosity', especially since the wording was 'untrue'.[43] To an unionist of Churchill's ilk, even this minor visual concession was read as an inflammatory, even separatist gesture which over-indulged the 'Labour' Welsh. In reality updating the Royal Badge of Wales was a banal manouvere, driven by agendas that wanted to embed Wales in the union, and not rupture the link

The *North Wales Chronicle* was almost swooning in its praise, viewing the new Royal Badge as a means of legitimising a monarchical Wales, saying that 'considerable satisfaction' had been shown towards the incorporation of 'our own Red Dragon, the badge of the early Tudors', which was 'a recognition of the dignity of the nation, and of the responsible place held by Wales in the affairs of the Queen's realms.'[44] However, others were more lukewarm, and did not view this as such a respectful gesture. Even the emphatically pro-union and pro-monarchy *Western Mail* had doubts, since they felt the new badge undermined to an extent the 'traditional' Tudor banner.[45] Plaid Cymru's monthly newspaper, *Y Ddraig Goch*, and its annual conference warned that Wales, and not the 'College of Heralds', should have ownership over its own symbols, and that the new Royal Badge should not be viewed as a replacement for the Welsh flag.[46] The Welsh Republicans expressed that overshadowing the Welsh dragon with a large crown was a derogatory move, symbolic of Wales's subservient position.[47]

This abrasive hostility by the Welsh Republicans exposed a nationalist agenda very much at odds with the compliant Tudor-Welshness that loomed large in Coronation discourse. The Republicans had coalesced during the late 1940s, disillusioned with Plaid Cymru and its policy

[42] Cabinet Secretary's Notebook, CAB 195/11/19, 12 February 1953, TNA.
[43] Cabinet Secretary's Notebook, CAB 195/11/19, 12 February 1953, TNA.
[44] *North Wales Chronicle*, 6 Mawrth 1953.
[45] *Western Mail*, 22 May 1953.
[46] *Y Ddraig Goch*, March 1953; Plaid Cymru Archive, Conference Proceedings 1-3 August 1953, A40, National Library of Wales;
[47] *Y Cymro*, 22 May 1953.

of calling for dominion status for Wales: a measure that involved acknowledging the British monarch's sovereignty. By contrast, in their pursuit of an independent Welsh state, the Republicans engaged in theatrical and controversial gestures, such as 'charging' the 'English' Crown with genocide for intentionally attempting 'to destroy Wales as a nation', and engaging in a flag burning campaign targeting Union Jacks fluttering in 'Welsh' public spaces.[48] They also practised a feigned indifference to the Coronation. Their chief polemicist, the writer Harri Webb, conveyed the ceremony's hollowness in an editorial in *The Welsh Republican*: 'This is not an event of any great historical importance, and has no relevance at all to Wales... And this Coronation, at which the Standard of Wales will be carried in Westminster Abbey by the chairman of the Midland Bank will, we hope be the last opportunity which anyone will have of hailing an English Monarch as sovereign of Wales.'[49] They also challenged the dominance of the Tudorality narrative, deeming Henry Tudor to be a 'London Welsh careerist', who had used a Welsh army to gain the throne but had then forgotten all about Wales in the drive for 'English power'. For them, it was a 'brief dynasty', ending with the 'barren and embittered' Elizabeth I, and 'It is fitting that the sickening cant about 'a new Elizabethan age' be left to modern Welsh lickspittles and time-servers and that the stark truth of history be remembered by all good Welsh people.'[50] Arguably, even though the Welsh Republicans only numbered in the low hundreds, their disapproving interpretation of a fawning Tudorality not only raised questions about the truncated nature of the Tudor connection, but also demonstrated a disputed nationhood, where, in this instance, those gleefully providing a veneer of 'Welshness' to an 'English' monarch were regarded as traitors to the 'true' Wales.

[48] Resolution of the Welsh Republican Movement, September 1949, Cliff Bere Papers 5, NLW; Flag Burning at Caerphilly Eisteddfod, Court Cases 1950-52, Cliff Pere Papers 8, NLW.
[49] *The Welsh Republican*, June-July1953.
[50] *The Welsh Republican*, June-July 1953. See also Gweriniaethwr, *The Young Republicans: A record of the Welsh Republican Movement* (Llanrwst, 1996).

Furthermore, although such resentment was at the margins of public debate, the Coronation was also a thorny issue for others who appropriated a less militant Welsh nationalist 'brand'. As various analyses of Plaid Cymru have suggested, the party did not possess strong republican tendencies: a reflection of an ideological inheritance from its inception in 1925 which prioritised preservation of the declining Welsh language and culture more than 'independence', and could see these, under suitable circumstances, co-existing within the British Commonwealth. During the interwar years, it was commonplace for party meetings to close with a toast to the King, and the party's opposition to the 1937 Coronation was considered to be a miscalculation.[51] By 1953, Plaid president Gwynfor Evans was treading on eggshells, fearful that any republican tinge could be damaging for party unity, thus exacerbating what was already an ineffective electoral record.[52] For example, a query from its Denbigh and Flint branch requesting an official response from the Plaid Executive Committee regarding the forthcoming Coronation was met with a policy of *'tewi a sôn'*: basically to 'keep quiet' on the issue. As Plaid's Secretary J. E. Jones explained, whilst the party was not an anti-monarchical one, it was also the hour of the queen of 'England', so keeping mute was the most conciliatory course of action.[53] Later in 1953, there was concern in the party's higher echelons that provocative republican views were being aired by some Plaid members, but demands that they be disciplined were rejected lest this damage the party's image.[54]

These tensions struck at the contradictions in Plaid's constitutional policy, and were aired in the columns of the press. D. J. Williams, a prominent party member and literary figure, expressed his vexation over the issue. On the one hand, he felt that Plaid's policy of calling for

[51] Laura McAllister, *Plaid Cymru. The Emergence of a Political Party* (Pen-y-Bont ar Ogwr, 2001), p. 160; Richard Wyn Jones, *Rhoi Cymru'n Gyntaf: Syniadaeth Plaid Cymru* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 149.
[52] Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor: Rhag Bob Brâd* (Talybont, 2005), pp. 46-47, 150-151. This was in contrast to the Scottish National Party, which undertook a campaign of defacing postboxes and issuing a legal challenge to 'Elizabeth II' on the premise that Scotland had no 'Elizabeth I'. See Peter Lynch, *SNP: The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 86-87.
[53] Executive Committee Easter 1952, Agenda and Minutes, A40, Plaid Cymru Archive, NLW.
[54] Executive Committee January 1953, Minutes, A40, Plaid Cymru Archive, NLW.

Dominion status meant that he could participate in the celebrations; but, his instincts were stubbornly against this, as the queen was a symbol of the rights of another nation to rule Wales.[55] Plaid's befuddlement was epitomised in the views of its most dominant personality, the conservative nationalist and writer Saunders Lewis, who had been party president between 1926 and 1939. Increasingly disillusioned with and distanced from the party, he remained a leading, yet controversial, figurehead. In the aftermath of the Coronation, he published a letter in *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, the only Welsh newspaper to openly oppose the ceremonial, arguing *'Nid yw coroni brenhines yn bechod'* ('crowning a queen is not a sin'), where he chastised 'sourpuss' responses to the queen, and, instead, welcomed seeing red dragon flags hanging in homes, cars and shops across Cardiff to mark the occasion: an unusual, yet welcome, sign that urban inhabitants who did not speak Welsh, and 'knew nothing' about Wales, were willing to mark the occasion as 'Welshmen'. For him, the monarchy, as the enabler of a multi-national Commonwealth, was the only buffer against 'English rule', and therefore the best hope for the survival of Welsh nationality and culture. Although he was castigated by the paper's editors for his views, and deemed to be one of the 'Odd Welshmen' by the poet Pennar Davies, Lewis retorted by accusing his detractors of lacking 'political common sense'. Whilst *'Saisgarwyr'* (English-lovers) were manipulating the Coronation to strengthen the 'English' grasp on Wales, it was the duty of the 'Welsh' to appropriate institutions such as the monarchy for their own ends i.e. to fortify the case for dominion status, so that Elizabeth II would also become Queen of Wales.[56]

Although Saunders Lewis's standpoint overlapped with Tudor-Welshness in its acquiesence with the Crown, it was also conspicuously different, as he did not seek to legitimise a Welsh monarchy via the Tudor past. In fact, for him, as for the Welsh Republicans, the Tudors were

[55] *Y Ddraig Goch*, August 1953.
[56] *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 24 June, 1 July and 8 July 1953; T. Robin Chapman, *Un Bywyd o Blith Nifer. Cofiant Saunders Lewis* (Llandysul, 2006), pp. 309-310.

historical bêtes noires: not a Welsh dynasty, but aggressors who were complicit, via the 16th century Acts of Union, in the demise of the Welsh language and its high literary culture.[57] In contrast to the Republicans and the emasculated Plaid Cymru, however, Lewis saw, in welcoming the new queen, an opportunity to channel the Coronation towards the realisation of a significant transfer of power to Wales: a nation he pictured as being blighted by a political impotency that was imperilling its traditional culture.

On the other hand, the Labour Party perceived no such ramifications in the event: for them, it was not a live 'political' issue, and this reflected the party's consensual and self-legitimising alignment with the monarchy, which had deposited republicanism to the more radical fringes of the left. [58] This approach, however, often manifested itself more as apathy than fervent pro-monarchism, as is evident from the records of the Labour Party in Wales. In the period 1952-53, there was not one reference to the Coronation in the Welsh Regional Council of Labour minutes or in meetings of its prominent branches. [59] Although Goronwy Roberts, the Labour MP for Arfon and pro-devolutionist, complained that there had been 'unpleasant snobbery' in Wales surrounding the Coronation, such sentiments were rare, and refrained from entering republican terrain.[60]

This encapsulated the self-serving nature of Welsh 'national' responses to the Coronation. Whilst in the main loyal to the Crown, they also pandered to particularist political and cultural agendas. Such 'negotiated appropriation' was pervasive, and the vying over the Welshness of the event demonstrated that it was about more than the straightforward absorption of 'British'

[57] Saunders Lewis, *Egwyddorion Cenedlaetholdeb/ Principles of Nationalism* (1926).
[58] Antony Taylor, *'Down with the Crown': British Anti-monarchism and debates about royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), 209-238.
[59] See for example Minutes of the Welsh Regional Council of Labour, 1951-53 and the Executive Committee Minute Book 1949-1955, Rhondda West Divisional Labour Party, Labour Party Wales Archives, NLW which demonstrates far more of a fixation with organising fundraising prize draws than with the monarchy.
[60] *Y Cymro*, 15 May 1953. One of the rare, yet vocal critics, within the Labour Party was the MP for South Ayrshire, Emrys Hughes, Welsh-born, son-in-law of Keir Hardie and author of the cutting publication which derided the financial burden of the monarchy, *The Crown and the Cash* (Glasgow, 1953).

power. Whilst there was certainly a strong desire, exemplified in Tudorality, to sculpt a Welsh nation that was in harmony with British values, the essence of such a nation was both distinct and contested: lacking its own political infrastructure, the Wales of the 1950s was very much a malleable notion, a dynamic which also suffused Coronation celebrations at a local level.

The Coronation at the grassroots: locality and monarchy in the Vale of Clwyd

Eric Hobsbawm argued that nations were 'dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analysed from below.'[61] This was particularly apt for the 1953 Coronation, since not only was the 'national' (UK) ritual celebrated on a 'local' stage, but it was also the first in the age of the television, bringing the mystique of monarchy directly to the hearth. By exploring the Coronation in both urban and rural parts of the Vale of Clwyd in north-east Wales - a region on the margins of Welsh historiography due to its perceived 'British' ardour, as embodied in Welsh language decline and cultural anglicisation – this section demonstrates how rigid notions of 'Welsh' and 'British' can be undermined by the diversity of grassroots agendas and the staging of local identities.

The revelry of Coronation day celebrations was preceded by a year or more of planning, stretching back to the aftermath of the king's death and the proclamation ceremonial in February 1952. In the market town of Denbigh in the Vale of Clwyd, the event saw:

> ...a large crowd...filling Crown Square and part of High Street, to hear the reading by the High Sheriff...All the schoolchildren in the Borough were present at a small piece of pageantry and an historic moment which they will be able to remember for the rest of their lives...the ceremony deviated slightly from tradition, so that a prayer for Divine Guidance for the new Sovereign and for her subjects could be offered in Welsh...After another fanfare God Save the Queen and the Welsh National Anthem were played by the Mental Hospital Band.[62]

[61] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 10.
[62] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 16 February 1952.

This was clearly being imprinted as a community event of great significance to future social memory: one that incorporated participation from a broad-range of society, spanning civic elites to patients at the local psychiatric institution. In contrast to perceptions of the Welsh language as representing old cultural traditions, its inclusion in a local proclamation ceremony was, in this instance, viewed as a turn towards modernity. The combining of *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* with the British national anthem not only associated the vernacular to a ritual marking Britishness, imperialism and the Crown, but in the process seemingly legitimised its use as a public language in Wales, at a time when there was increasing concern about its survival and relevance in the modern world.

Elsewhere in the Vale of Clwyd, even though the increasing anglicisation of the seaside resort of Rhyl was symptomatic of the Welsh language's weakness in north-east Wales, the town's memorial service to George VI was strongly bilingual. Readings from the Scripture were conducted in English and Welsh, with prayers and hymns similarly offered in both languages.[63] In contrast, the rural town of Ruthin – where nearly 60% of the population spoke Welsh, compared to less than a fifth in Rhyl - saw its proclamation service hosted entirely in English, by a mayor standing resolutely beneath a Union Jack. The *Wrexham Leader's* Welsh language column, *'I'r Cymry'* ('To the Welsh people') was exasperated by the linguistic servility on show in many areas, and argued that it was only in Caernarfon – a royal town in the Welsh language heartland – that the language was given acceptable official recognition.[64] However, the assumption underpinning this generalisation was questionable. From the Vale of Clwyd examples, the most strongly Welsh-speaking town conducted its ceremony exclusively in English, whilst the other two incorporated both English and Welsh elements. This not only demonstrated that the Welsh language retained a salience beyond its precipitous statistical

[63] *Rhyl Leader*, 15 March 1952.
[64] HMSO, *Census County Report Denbighshire and Flintshire 1951 (*HMSO, 1951); *Wrexham Leader*, 15 February 1952.

decline, but also that there was no clear-cut correlation between Welsh language vitality and the articulation of Welsh language monarchical deference.

Moreover, loyal enthusiasm for the monarchy was quite haltingly expressed in many parts of north-east Wales. Far from being greeted by an outpouring of jubilance, the process of planning Coronation celebrations was often discernibly tepid. In a sparsely attended public meeting in Denbigh, the mayor explained that there were numerous demands on the Town Council's funds, and so there should be no expectation of extravagant spending to mark the Coronation, beyond the usual 'tea parties, flag-flying and mug buying.'[65] In Rhyl, the town's Publicity Committee was criticised for only instigating a day of official celebrations, and there were fears in the local press that its reluctance to make a 'big splash' of the event was a missed opportunity for its visitor industry.[66] Such apathy, however, was also interspersed with heated internecine rivalries. In some rural areas there were complaints that preparations were shrouded in mystery, having been monopolised by local parish council cliques.[67] Additionally, the vexed question of Coronation memorabilia created existential tensions relating to tradition and modernity for many local authorities. Flintshire Education Authority, for example, decided that the county's schoolchildren would receive a New Testament in either English or Welsh as a souvenir, following lobbying from nonconformist ministers, with one declaring that giving children a copy of 'the most valuable book in the literature of the world' would be far preferable to handing them a 'beaker', and would be '…a gesture…in tune with the Christmas Message of our gracious young Queen and with our best British traditions.'[68] This conflicted with decisions taken by some of its district councils. St Asaph Parish Council, for example, had opted for a

[65] Minutes 22 October 1952, Denbigh Borough Council Coronation Folder, BD/A/846, Denbighshire Archives. *Denbighshire Free Press*, 20 September 1952 and 2 May 1953.
[66] *Rhyl Journal*, 29 September 1952; *Rhyl Leader*, 4 October 1952.
[67] For example, in the village of Llansannan local people were still unsure of local Coronation plans up to May 1953, with complaints that they had donated money to the celebrations, but had no idea how it was to be spent, *Denbighshire Free Press*, 30 May 1953.
[68] *Rhyl Journal*, 25 January 1953; Dr Haydn Williams to local authority clerks, 27 February 1953, Coronation 1952-53 Rhyl UDC Folder, UD/F/1/253, Flintshire Archives.

china mug adorned with etchings of the new queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, since 'young people will not take much interest in a New Testament', and Rhyl Urban District Council had already placed an order for 4,000 mugs before being told it was a county, and not a district, decision.[69] Meanwhile, in Denbighshire, the Director of Education stressed that mugs would be distributed to its schoolchildren 'due to the increasing interest and value which will attach to these souvenirs with the passing of time.'[70] Many of its rural parish councils were disgruntled with this decision, since they felt a New Testament had more moral value.[71] This battle for the civic soul was not mere posturing from different layers of local government, but also one that demonstrated the contested material embodiment of the Coronation: a secular mug could be viewed simultaneously as a conduit of continuity, progress and a vacuous modernity. Nonconformist Wales may well have been entering its death throes by the 1950s, but its lingering mindset, combined with the Coronation being a 'Christian' ritual, meant there was a symbolic expectation for religiosity to be recognised at community level.

The street party, epitomised by jelly and patriotic flag-embracing, is the form of celebration most commonly associated with the Coronation. However, this impression distracts from the rather ubiquitous application of the Coronation brand during the summer of 1953. Annual carnivals and sports days were re-classified as 'Coronation' events, and religious services denoted as 'special' Coronation gatherings. Whilst this could be construed as an unquestioning submission to the Crown, the popularity of the new queen was also utilised by local elites to foster interest in traditionally innocuous community events, thus elevating their prestige. For example, in Rhyl the annual 'Rose Queen' pageant morphed into a 'Coronation Queen' event,

[69] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 7 February 1953; Beresford Bros. Stoke to A. E. Edwards, 4 April 1953, Coronation 1952-53 Rhyl UDC Folder, UD/F/1/253, Flintshire Archives; *Denbighshire Free Press*, 21/3/53.
[70] Edward Rees to Denbighshire headmasters, 20 May 1953, 'Coronation' Folder, Aled Rural District Council, RDD/B/1/89, Denbighshire Archives.
[71] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 7 February 1953.

and a local football derby between Denbigh and Ruthin was defined as a 'Coronation' match.[72] Similarly, time-honoured Welsh language entertainment was prefixed with some 'Coronation' glamour. As the *Denbighshire Free Press* reported, 'The [Denbigh Coronation] committee has remembered that this is Wales by arranging a traditional Welsh event for the Saturday night – a *noson lawen*.'[73] This rather gestural method - capitalising on 'normal' community activities and repurposing them as nominal Coronation events - illuminates not only the rather tokenistic, even indolent, approach to marking the ceremonial, but is also suggestive of its appropriation to buttress existing local practices and identities.

Therefore, the Coronation protruded into community life in multiple ways, which also reinforces the claims of the sociologists Ralph Fevre, Andrew Thompson and Graham Day that Wales can be imagined in many different shapes and forms: a process that becomes even hazier when locality is taken into account.[74] Whilst it's fair to say that 'Wales' *was* being imagined in the course of celebrations in the Vale of Clwyd, this was not necessarily in the same incarnation as the Tudor Wales being propagated by national elites. As a teenager in a rural, Welsh-speaking village nestled in the Denbigh Moors, Elwyn Jones recalled most members of the community turning into 'Britons for the day', who saw no point in displaying the Welsh dragon emblem or speaking Welsh to mark a celebration that was so patently 'English'.[75] However, such a rigid and deliberate approach to identity may well be infused by an air of hindsight. Another interviewee from the same area recalled being quite bored by the ceremonial, and far more interested in the conquering of Everest.[76] Indeed, the Coronation's

[72] *Rhyl Leader*, 6 June 1953; Denbigh Borough Coronation Programme, Denbigh Borough Council Coronation Folder, BD/A/847, Denbighshire Archives.
[73] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 9 May 1953.
[74] Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson (eds.), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 12. Also Thompson and Graham Day 'Situating Welshness: 'Local' Experience and National Identity', in Ralph Fevre and Andrew Thompson (eds.), *Nation, Identity and Social Theory: Perspectives from Wales* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 28.
[75] Mari Elin Wiliam interview with Elwyn Ashford Jones, Pwllglas, 16 March 2008.
[76] Lois Thomas interview with Gareth Williams, Wrexham, February 2011, *Media and the Memory in Wales,* https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140131010245/http://www.mediaandmemory.co.uk/contributors/contributor.php?id=cac01190 (accessed 1 June 2017).

hybridity was evident in the following fare from a nearby village, which honoured the day with a *noson lawen* incorporating '[*cerdd dant*] verses specially composed by T. R. Jones Tan y Fron being beautifully sung…to the accompaniment of the harp', and intermixed this traditional style of Welsh music with a fancy-dress competition and a parade of Morris Dancers through the village. The only 'national' anthem sung on the day was 'God Save the Queen'.[77] In Ruthin, a display of Welsh folk dancing was on the same programme as a theatrical performance of *Merrie England*, and in Denbigh, its *noson lawen* shared a platform with a military Royal Salute in Denbigh Castle.[78] In its reluctance to engage in exuberant Coronation celebrations, one of Rhyl's flagship events was a bilingual religious service in the Pavilion Gardens, a local tourist attraction.[79] With signifiers of 'Britishness', 'Englishness' and 'Welshness' on show in most of these cases, classifying such multifarious expressions of identity is almost a meaningless exercise, since the celebrations traversed typecast boundaries. For example, a village in the heart of the Welsh countryside was as comfortable with 'English' folk dancing as it was with 'Welsh' customs, and an urban seaside resort was willing to embrace a religious service with a distinct Welsh language component, incomprehensible to most of its inhabitants and visitors. This reflects Hobsbawm's perception that looking at nations 'from below' can reveal 'the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.'[80] Arguably, the conflation of identities inherent in local Coronation celebrations suggest the uncompromised naturalness of identity for many people, with activities being driven by the pursuit of tradition and enjoyment more than explicitly distinct notions of 'Britain' or 'Wales'.[81]

[77] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 13 June 1953.
[78] Coronation Entertainments Committee Minutes, 27 January 1953, Ruthin Borough Council Minutes, BC/B/13, Denbighshire Archives; Denbigh Borough Coronation Programme, Denbigh Borough Council Coronation Folder, BD/A/847, Denbighshire Archives.
[79] *Rhyl Leader*, 6 June 1953; 'Rhyl UDC United Service on the occasion of HM's Coronation', 31 May 1953, Coronation 1952-53 Rhyl UDC, UD/F/1/253, Flintshire Archives.
[80] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 10.
[81] This mirrors the conclusions of Edward Owens, *The Family Firm,* 351-535.

A novel example of such 'enjoyment' in 1953 was the advent of television, with the Coronation seemingly instigating a rush to buy the devices.[82] Even though considered to be an invention that heralded a move from communitarian values to individualist ones, initially it held the promise of reinforcing the unifying functions of the ceremony, as it enabled a living-room ritual, where friends and family congregated together around a neighbourhood television. Joe Moran quotes a Mass Observation researcher on the London Underground who noted the abundance of people carrying bags of food and bottles in anticipation of a joyous (and potentially intoxicating) day: 'They were all people going to TV parties.'[83] Television could also be a focal point for 'official' local celebrations. In Denbigh Infirmary a television was secured so that patients at the hospital could watch proceedings, and in Rhyl, the Entertainment Committee organised the broadcasting of the Coronation in its Pavilion for a small entrance fee.[84] However, there were fears that less altruistic personal agendas were coming into play as well, with accusations that Coronation tea parties had been arranged on days not inclusive of the ceremonial itself so that adults would be able to watch the whole event on television. For example, St Mary's Church, Denbigh, organised an 'early' Coronation service because '...everyone who can possibly get near a television set will be too engrossed in the Coronation ceremony itself to have much time for anything else.'[85] For one Welsh-language columnist, the 1953 generation was 'fortunate' to be able to witness the ceremonial at first hand, reflecting Tom Nairn's later claim that television never 'seriously menaced the mystique' of monarchy, since its function was to deepen 'Regal penetration'.[86] That this 'penetration' was achieved by means of English-language commentary often into Welsh-speaking homes barely registered

[82] For recollections of the television and the Coronation in Wales see The Coronation of Elizabeth II on *Media and the Memory in Wales* https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140131010028/http://www.mediaandmemory.co.uk/themes/coronation.php (accessed 1 June 2017).
[83] Joe Moran, Armchair Nation: An intimate history of Britain in front of the TV (London, 2013, 2014), p. 77.
[84] *Rhyl Leader*, 18 April 1953. North-east Wales was the region of Wales with the best television reception at this point, due to its proximity to the border, see John Davies, *Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales* (Caerdydd, 1994), p. 199.
[85] *Denbighshire Free Press*, 9 May 1953.
[86] *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 1 June 1953; Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London, 1988), p. 219.

a flicker of complaint on a local level. [87] This demonstrated that language identity was not a conscious concern, and was trumped by a blend of royal power and aspirational individual desires to indulge directly in the glamour of royalty, in exactly the same way as happened in parts of England. Edward Owens in his study of Coronation essays written by pupils at West Kirby Girls' Grammar school in Cheshire found that television was 'the key conduit through which they could experience a sense of national inclusion' since physically attending the celebrations in London was not an option.[88] In this regards the new queen, the television and leisure-time fun combined as alluring symbols of the age of 'affluence'.

Undoubtedly, the Coronation was a ritual very difficult to avoid at grassroots level, be that in terms of souvenirs, planned events or a saturated application of the phrase 'Coronation'. However, even though there was commonality in the experiences of 1953, this did not necessarily entail homogeneity, harmony or a one-way subjugation. As demonstrated in the Vale of Clwyd, a 'British' part of Wales could observe the ceremonial in a multitude of ways and languages, reflective not only of diverse national identities, but also the appropriation of the event for local and even personal agendas. In the process, it exposed the woolliness of notions such as 'Welshness' and 'Britishness', along with the limitations of top-down royal encroachment: elements that were further displayed during the royal visit of July 1953.

The Queen in Wales

The Queen's post-Coronation tour incorporated England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and, lastly, Wales. Historiography on royal visits stress their potency not only in weaving monarchical power and legitimacy, but also in constructing and entrenching blatant, yet

[87] Manuscript Drafts (Coronation), Wynford Vaughan Thomas Papers, Broadcasting 28, C1989/14, NLW.
[88] Owens, *The Family Firm*, pp. 343-344.

ultimately placid, sub-national identities: for example, the 'Tartanry' and 'Balmorality' inherent in royal visits to Scotland.[89] In this sense, the physical spectacle of a royal tour could also be refracted by localities for their own self-aggrandising purposes, as indicated by Dr Haydn Williams - a pioneer of Welsh medium education in north-east Wales and secretary of the Rhyl National Eisteddfod of 1953 - who stressed that the Welsh would benefit from being associated 'as closely as possible' with the Queen's visit, a factor that was evident in the monarch's presence at obvious civic locations, such as Cardiff and the royal town of Caernarfon, but also her stops during her two day visit in other incarnations of Wales, including coal-mining valleys, rural areas and seaside resorts.[90]

Whilst Welsh Tudorality did not capture the imagination as a royal bonding exercise as successfully as its Scottish cousins, it formed the essence of the Welsh national narrative surrounding the royal tour. The 'Loyal and Dutiful Address' produced by the Association of Welsh Local Authorities in anticipation of the visit accentuated the Queen's 'close' and 'personal' relationship with Wales, which stemmed from the Tudor connection: a connection that had been replicated in a modern-day context by the post-war initiation of Elizabeth as an Eisteddfod 'druid'. For the Association, this action had enshrined her as part of a historical Welsh cultural tradition, and ensured a bond between her and 'our country'.[91] However, even though the Address was brimming with ingratiating comments, by applying ownership to 'our country', seeing the visit as an opportunity for the 'Welsh nation' to pay tribute and commenting that 'The Welsh people have always taken a lively interest in their own affairs', the Association was simultaneously demarcating a Welsh distinctiveness.[92] This distinctiveness had a political hue, as the reference to 'own affairs' alluded to a wider dialogue

[89] Eric G. E. Zuelow, "Kilts Versus Breeches': The Royal Visit, Tourism and Scottish National Memory', *Journeys*, 7, 2 (2006), pp. 33-53.; Alex Tyrell, "The Queen's 'Little Trip': The Royal Visit to Scotland', *The Scottish Historical Review* (2013), pp. 47-73.
[90] Ceremonial: Coronation 1953 state visit to Wales, WO 32/14737, TNA; *Rhyl Leader*, 16 May 1953.
[91] Loyal and Dutiful Address, 2 June 1953, X49 Association of Welsh Local Authorities, NLW.
[92] Loyal and Dutiful Address, 2 June 1953, X49 Association of Welsh Local Authorities, NLW.

in the 1950s concerning the (mis) governance of Wales, which was crystallized in the (failed) cross-party Parliament for Wales campaign.[93] The Address signatory and Association president, Alderman W. Emyr Williams, was an avid pro-devolutionist, and the wording bears his imprint, turning an otherwise predictable statement of deference into one that had more symbiotic implications, appropriating the Coronation visit to moderate, yet political, nationalist ends.[94]

The royal visit also unleashed a bout of civic boosterism. For example, the Queen's time in Swansea saw a civic ceremony led by the mayor in Brangwyn Hall, with the 'loyal welcome in song' including a 'homage from ancient Wales', Welsh folk songs and a Glamorganshire harp tune.[95] In the Rhondda, the crowd sang 'We'll keep a welcome in the hillside', and in Llanelli banners adorned the streets with 'God Save the Queen' written in Welsh on them.[96] All of these celebrations, of course, aimed to demonstrate loyal enthusiasm to the Crown, but they did this by promoting both local and national identities. Whilst such impressions indeed could reflect realities – i.e. the relative strength of the Welsh language in the vicinity of Llanelli – often these projections were aspirational, and far from grassroots life. For example, Swansea's modernising, urban culture in the 1950s was very much at odds with the stereotypically Welsh civic celebrations that it offered.[97] Nonetheless, this unthreatening Welshness was clearly seen as an acceptable representation of the locality in welcoming the new monarch: a harmless distinguishing mark.

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[93] Andrew Edwards, 'Labour, nationalism and the problem of Welsh devolution, c. 1939-64', in Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (eds.), *The Art of the Possible. Politics and governance in modern British history, 1885-1997. Essays in Memory of Duncan Tanner* (Manchester, 2015), pp. 143-161.
[94] A Labour councillor from Wrexham. See entry for William Emyr Williams, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, National Library of Wales http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/s2-WILL-EMY-1889.html?query=emyr+williams&field=name (accessed 23 August 2017).
[95] Swansea Borough Council, *A loyal Welcome in Song for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh in the Brangwyn Hall*, 9 July 1953, W. Emlyn Davies 220, NLW.
[96] *The Guardian*, 10 July 1953; *Western Mail*, 10 July 1953.
[97] Colin Rosser and Christopher Harris, *The Family and Social Change: A study of family and kinship in a south Wales town* (London, 1965).

Additionally, the royal visit could also be used for more calculated purposes. During this period, as Martin Johnes has shown, Cardiff was angling to be pronounced as the official capital of Wales, but it faced competition from Caernarfon in north Wales, which used its historical royal connections and its location in the Welsh language heartland to further its cause: two selling-points that its rival in the south lacked.[98] Whilst the civic greeting in Cardiff included a military band performing Welsh traditional airs, Welsh folk dancing and a rendition of Rule Britannia, in this instance it was usurped by Caernarfon's use of its royal heritage, hosting a ceremonial in the medieval castle constructed in the wake of Edward I's conquest in 1282, which had also been the location of the most recent prince of Wales investiture in 1911.[99] The town had already petitioned in 1952 for the infant Charles to be proclaimed prince of Wales - with an eye on the bounty and prestige of a future investiture – and there was a fervent expectation that the Queen's 1953 visit would see such an announcement being made, heightened by gestures such as the transportation of carpets from Buckingham Palace to the Castle, and the fact that this would be the first 'live' outside televsion broadcast from Wales.[100] For A. Watkin Jones, Head of Welsh Programmes for the BBC, this was 'quite an occasion' for the Corporation, and it should capitalise on the 'full value' of publicity from the Queen's visit to the 'capital of North Wales'.[101] *Y Cymro* newspaper speculated that Charles was about to commence learning Welsh ahead of his (undeclared) investiture, and another urged this to be accomplished in haste as the absence of its own 'prince' meant there was 'something missing' in Wales.[102] However, the clamour for such 'princification' of Welsh nationhood was not shared by the monarchy, and the most dramatic news the press had to report from

[98] Martin Johnes, 'Cardiff: The Making and Development of the Capital City of Wales', *Contemporary British History*, 26, 4 (2012), pp. 509-514; *Programme. Coronation visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Caernarfon Castle*, 10 July 1953, XM/2641/51, Gwynedd Archives.
[99] *The Guardian*, 10 July 1953; Celebrations in Wales including ceremony at Caernarvon Castle, WORK 21/224, TNA.
[100] John S. Ellis, *Investiture: Royal Ceremony and National Identity in Wales 1911-1969* (Cardiff, 2008), p. 149; Coronation visit to Wales: Ceremony at Caernarvon Castle, Caernarfon Works Committee meetings, CM 21/2, TNA.
[101] Memo from A. Watkin Jones, 4 June 1953, 29894 BBC Miscellaneous Papers, 1953 in Sam Jones collection, Bangor University Archive.
[102] *Y Cymro*, 12 June 1953; *Rhyl Leader*, 13 June 1953.

Caernarfon was that the Queen had deigned to feed the Welsh Fusiliers' regimental goat with asparagus leaves from her bouquet.[103] Charles remained unproclaimed as a future prince of Wales until the Commonwealth Games in Cardiff in 1958, in a process eventually dictated more by the British government's political expediency than the entreaties of the Welsh.

There was additional disappointment in some quarters that the ceremonial at the Castle had been too high-brow and not 'Welsh' enough: of the fifteen individuals selected to accompany the royal party, only four of them were considered to be of Welsh 'blood', a factor that exemplified the illusory qualities of the Tudorality connection.[104] Furthermore, whilst the local artisans presented to the Queen at Caernarfon – a quarryman, a farmer and a stalwart of the Welsh choral scene – represented the stereotypically 'rural' and mythically 'classless' Welsh *Gwerin*, this was increasingly, in light of industrial decline and depopulation, a nostalgic imagining of a bygone Wales.[105] Indeed, whilst Caernarfon's attempts to appropriate the Coronation visit - both for an announcement of an investiture and to bolster its campaign to become capital of a 'modern' Wales - was to prove fruitless (Cardiff was officially announced the capital in 1955), its hosting of the monarch reinforced its status as the royal town of the Welsh past, and helped it secure the kudos of hosting the Investiture, when it finally materialised, in 1969.

Such kudos did not merely sprout from delight at having a royal affiliation, but also, of course, involved financial opportunism.[106] The nascent Wales Tourist Board (est. 1948) called its 1953 guidebook *The Crown and Wales*.[107] On the one hand, this could be discerned as an earnest declaration of loyalty; however, on the other hand, the Board was staking a 'Welsh' claim in

[103] *Yr Herald Cymraeg*, 13 July 1953.
[104] *Y Cymro*, 26 June 1953
[105] 'Artisans to be presented to the Queen', 29894 BBC Miscellaneous Papers, 1953 in Sam Jones collection, Bangor University Archive; Prys Morgan, 'The Gwerin of Wales: Myth and Reality', in *The Welsh and their Country*, eds. I. Hume and W. T. R. Pryce (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1986), 134-150.
[106] Ellis paints a commercialised picture of the 1969 Investiture pp. 94-95 and p. 174.
[107] Wales Tourist Board Executive Committee, 12 February 1953, Wales Tourist Board Papers, A/1986/116, Box 2, NLW.

the monarchy for commercial purposes, hoping it would prove attractive to prospective visitors. This was evident in the attitude of its chair, Huw T. Edwards. Edwards was a trade unionist and Labour councillor in Flintshire, a Welsh-speaker who leaned towards the more 'nationalist' wing of his party, and who rejected the offer of a knighthood based on his unease with a hierarchical honours system.[108] However, he was, above all else, a pragmatic Welsh patriot, who could see the advantages of the royal glow of the summer of 1953, and pressed for the monarch to visit as many places in north-east Wales as possible due, in the main, to the tourist value. It was at his insistence that the Queen grace both the Llangollen International Eisteddfod and the pavilion of the National Eisteddfod of Wales: a festival that in Coronation year happened to be held in Rhyl, on Edwards's doorstep.[109] But, in a similar vein to its dampening down of Coronation celebrations, Rhyl Urban District Council held a restrained enthusiasm and tempered the visit with warnings of financial constraints, clearly not viewing it as a potential tourist bonanza. It stressed that it would 'under no circumstances' purchase street decorations, and felt that the cost of hosting the visit should be borne by the county council, since the Queen was on an official visit to Flintshire and not just Rhyl.[110] Its begrudging attitude was understandable to an extent, since the monarch was only in Rhyl town centre for a total of three minutes, did not venture out to the streets to meet locals or visitors, and for the most part was ensconced in the Eisteddfod pavilion meeting select dignitaries.[111] These included Welsh literary elites, local councillors and representatives from aristocratic circles, in a greeting that involved a symbolic procession of 200 druids from the Gorsedd of the Bards, along with obligatory renditions of Welsh folk songs and national anthems.[112]

[108] Paul Ward, *Huw T. Edwards: British Labour and Welsh Socialism* (Cardiff, 2011).
[109] Huw T. Edwards to H. A. Strutt, Home Office, 8 September 1952, Huw T. Edwards Papers, A2/69, NLW.
[110] Rhyl UDC Clerk, Rhyl UDC Royal Visit Folder, UD/F/A/254, Flintshire Archives; A. E. Edwards to W. Hugh Jones, Flintshire Council Clerk, 20 June 1953, Rhyl UDC Royal Visit Folder, UD/F/1/254, Flintshire Archives.
[111] Programme of Queen's Visit, 10 July 1953, Rhyl UDC Royal Visit Folder, UD/F/1/254, Flintshire Archives.
[112] W. Hugh Jones to G. O. Williams, 30 May 1953, Alderman G. O. Williams Papers, D/DM/118/24, Flintshire Archives.

For the *Rhyl Leader,* this fleeting visit by the monarch was proof not only of the town's 'loyalty', but also of the Crown's strong attachment to both Rhyl and the rest of Wales.[113] However, such a mutually appreciative portrayal concealed a complex intertwining of identities, with Rhyl acting as a funnel for a range of local and national yearnings. Whilst there was clearly civic pride invested, it was harnessed by financial concerns and a perception that the royal tour would be of limited value to the resort. This was at odds to the more 'national' standpoint adopted by the Wales Tourist Board and the National Eisteddfod of Wales. The former saw, in making royal overtures, an opportunity to enshrine a 'Welsh' industry, and the latter sought to elevate its 'special' connection to the Queen in the continuing quest for Tudorality. So, whilst fealty and deference to the Crown certainly featured in the spectacle provided in Rhyl, there were also self-interested agendas at play in moulding a Welsh royal relationship.

James Loughlin concluded in a study of Ireland's tempestuous history with the monarchy that royal visits could be used to legitimise 'alien' rule.[114] However, this legitimisation could also be appropriated by more regional manouverings, as evident in Northern Ireland's unionist government's use of the 1953 royal visit as a vehicle to validate its own protestant loyalism.[115] In the far milder political climate of Wales, the absence of a Welsh government meant that disparate plans for the royal visit were more open to various local and institutional agendas. Whilst Tudorality was a driving force in stimulating expressions of a special relationship between Wales and the Crown, this loyalty was often construed with an egotistical heart, as 'national' and 'local' elites aimed to base the monarch's visit around the advancement of their own causes or localities (or, at least, not to their detriment). Often, as in the case of Caernarfon, this was an *attempted* appropriation more than a successful one, and did not prevent a cynical

[113] *Rhyl Leader*, 25 July 1953.
[114] James Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2011).
[115] Gillian McIntosh, 'A Performance of Consensus? The Coronation visit of Elizabeth II to Northern Ireland, 1953', *Irish Studies Review*, 2002, 10, 3, 315.

Baner and Amserau Cymru from arguing that the pomp of the royal visit was a scheme to awe the 'dumb masses', thus concealing an act of dominance by 'England' so that it could keep its 'claws' in Wales.[116] However, such opprobrium was very much a minority position, especially since 'loyal' celebrations to mark the queen's visit did not intend to subsume a Welsh national identity, but, instead, to raise awareness of its difference. Although this difference was demarcated in a safe, consensual, often artificial way, harking back to increasingly anachronistic Welsh 'traditions', at its core it was designed to promote Wales as something that was reliably British yet, at the end of the day, not England.

Conclusion

In his Marxist critique of monarchy, Tom Nairn deplored the royal family's role in sustaining the 'glorious backwardness' of the British state.[117] The docile craving by Welsh elites for a special recognition in an Anglo-centric Coronation might seem to support such a perspective, as it involved an acceptance of the British monarchy and a rejection of any radical antiroyalist sentiments. Nonetheless, as demonstrated in this article, the servility of Tudorality was also a fragile attempt to fashion a Welsh consciousness, reinforcing Catherine Bell's argument that 'there can be no movement down from the top without a conduit from below.'[118] So, whilst purveyors of Tudor-Welshness displayed consent with the British monarchy, they also assigned the Coronation and the royal visit with a Welsh particularism, thus appropriating them for the benefit of cultural shibboleths such as the National Eisteddfod of Wales. However, appropriation enabled not only expressions of loyalty, but also resistance, most viscerally from the Welsh Republicans, whose version of Welshness was completely antithetical to any tinge

[116] *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, 15 July 1953.
[117] Nairn, *Enchanted Glass*.
[118] Bell, p. 200.

of Britishness. Furthermore, by mining a range of civic responses to the Coronation, the work contends that looking beyond the nostalgia-stained street-party impression unearths a fragmented process of 'celebration' far more marred by tokenism, dissonance and apathy than acknowledged in popular memory, revealing not so much the presence of straitjacketed 'Welshness' or 'Britishness', but instead a rather misty amalgam of identities.

These findings underscore four key points. Firstly, in adopting the prism of appropriation, it becomes evident that the royal status quo was sustained as much by permitting difference as by imposing uniformity. Secondly, moving towards a sub-British perspective challenges dominant scholarly and popular assumptions, originating with Shils and Young, that the Coronation was a standardized experience, and reinforces Henrik Örnebring's conclusions on the often exclusionary nature of the 1953 '...media-constructed national 'we'.'[119] The article thus demonstrates the potential of adopting 'Four Nations' approaches to twentieth-century royal ceremonials. Thirdly, the case study of the Vale of Clwyd shows that probing a regional angle uncovers a rich seam of material nestling at a local level, illuminating a complex percolation of tradition, modernity and self-interest. Finally, although Welsh historians' fascination with the distinctly Welsh investiture ceremonies is understandable, examining responses in Wales to 'British' ceremonials is also fruitful, indicating how a stateless nation with a haemorrhaging vernacular read multiple meanings into a UK event. Ultimately, researching the assorted layers connected with the 'Coronation' trademark exposes the pluralist elusiveness of Welshness - and, indeed, of any pre-packaged identity - more than the 'naturalness of Britishness' in 1950s Wales.[120]

[119] Ornebring, 'Revisiting the Coronation', *Nordicom*, p. 193.
[120] See ft. 12.