

Season 1, Episode 4: The Flag of Wales

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Show Transcript

Why the Flag? The Flag of Wales – King Arthur’s Dragon

Welcome back to another episode of Why the Flag, the show that explores the stories behind the flags, and how these symbols impact our world, our histories, and ourselves. I’m Simon Mullin.

On the last episode, we discussed the flag of the State of Hawaii and its origins as the flag of King Kamehameha the Great and the Hawaiian Kingdom, a flag that dates as far back as 1816. And one can’t talk about the history of Hawaii’s flag without discussing the foreign invasions of Hawaii itself, first by the British, then unsuccessfully by the French, and then finally the slow, deliberate, and insidious takeover by the United States, who overthrew the kingdom and annexed the islands – making Hawaii the 50th state of the Union in 1959, an act the United States apologized for in 1993.

As the British Union Jack on a field of eight red, white, and blue stripes was being raised as Hawaii’s state flag in 1959, another flag was born that same year on an island on the other side of the world – on the island of Britain. I’m not talking about the British Union Jack of course, the flag they completed in 1801 with the addition of St. Patrick’s Cross of Ireland, but the *Y Ddraig Goch* (ee-draig-gorch), the red dragon flag of Wales that sits atop a white and green background.

As I alluded to in episode 1, the history of flags can be the stories of gods and tyrants and battle flags that rally nations and inspire quests for freedom. Flags can embody the stories that connect us to a glorious national past, pasts that are at the same time both real and imagined, and flags can be the illustration of the mythologies that bind us to one another – and it’s these mythologies that can become the spiritual foundations of nations. And that’s the kind of story we tell today.

There are few national flags I’ve come across that express its national mythology as simply, or beautifully, or eloquently as the flag of Wales: this red dragon with its right leg in the air on top of a green ground and white sky. There are also few national flags I’ve come across that are just this cool. Although their flag wasn’t formally adopted until 1959, the symbology and mythology of the red dragon has been around for over a millennium – first explored in the medieval Welsh poetry of the legendary King Arthur who led the defense of Britain against the Saxons in the 5th Century – and from the stories of the magician, Merlin, who tells a prophecy about this red dragon, foretelling the ultimate destiny of the Welsh people’s nation.

So, what does the red dragon the Welsh flag really mean, and where does this symbol come from? What do the green and white horizontal banners behind it stand for, and what is that

story? How did the Arthurian legends become the national myths of Wales, and how is it shown on their flag? And why is Wales the only nation in the United Kingdom not portrayed on the Union Jack flag – and how does that royal snub play into their national history?

As always, we'll ask, why the flag? And today, why the flag of Wales? We'll first dive into the legacy of the Welsh red dragon, and discuss both its historical roots – from its arrival on the British Isles with the Roman invaders – to its mythological origins from the legend of Uther Pendragon and King Arthur. We'll also discuss the white and green banner of King Henry VII, the first monarch of the renowned house of Tudor, and how these two symbols – the white and green flag and the red dragon – came together to create the flag of Wales we see today. Let's begin.

BREAK

For anyone unfamiliar, the country of Wales is a nation on the western coast of Britain, bordered by England to the East and the Irish Sea to its north and west, and a mere 5% of the British population. Pronounced *kemri* in the Welsh language, which means friends or companions, Wales was never a single, independent political unit, except for a brief time during the Norman conquest of 1066. Instead, Wales was always a loose collection of kingdoms and lordships, well-defended from the outside by its topography of high mountains, low valleys, dense woods, and deep rivers. For centuries during the medieval ages, the Welsh were united by language and law – and their shared antipathy to the English – but remained politically fractured by rival princes and kings who vied for territory. We'll spend a lot of time in this episode in the middle ages, so before we get too deep into this time period – the period when the red dragon and the white and green banner rose to prominence in Wales – I feel that to truly understand the historical importance of these symbols, we have to begin the story much further back in time. So, to begin, let's go all the way back to the height of the Roman Empire and their nearly 400-year occupation of Britannia.

Julius Caesar invaded Britain twice in the 1st Century BC, first in the year 55 BC and then in 54 BC, in order to halt British aid to the Gauls during the Gallic Wars in what is modern-day France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and western Europe. Although the Romans kept a small presence on the south-eastern coast of Britannia, it was the Roman Emperor Claudius who began a full-scale conquest of the island a little over 100 years later in 43 AD. After the defeat of many of the tribes that make up today's England, a Roman general named Publius Ostorius Scapula was appointed the second governor of Britain by Emperor Claudius, and he immediately set his sights to the unconquered west – with his eyes on mining-rich territory of Wales.

On the eve of the Roman invasion in late 47 and early 48 AD, Wales existed as a conglomerate of five major tribes: the Deceangli and Ordovices in the north-east and north-west, respectively; the Demetae and the Silures in the south-west and south-east; and the Cornovii, who ruled in the central borderlands. The Roman invasion of Wales was a classic story of divide and conquer, first attacking across the River Dee in the north to divide the neighboring tribes of the Welsh and English highlands. Cut off from their allies to the north, the Deceangli quickly fell in the year 48, opening up the rest of Wales for Roman incursion. But the Silures in the south of Wales

would not go down without a fight. Led by the King Caratacus, whose own powerful tribe, the Catuvellauni, were defeated by the Romans in Battle of Medway in 43 AD, the Celtic Silures engaged in a valiant and protracted guerilla war against the Romans, even destroying a Roman legion. But his insurgency didn't last too long, and King Caratacus was defeated by Scapula's forces in the Battle of Caer Caradoc in the year 50 AD. So impressed were the Romans by this Celtic king, that instead of executing him after the battle, they sent him to Rome where he gained the favor of Emperor Claudius, who pardoned him and allowed him to live out the rest of his life in exile. But this devastating military defeat and sacking of their king only strengthened Welsh resolve – and only hardened their resistance. It would be another twenty-five years for the Silures to be conquered. And it wasn't until the late 70s when the Ordovices fell to a Roman general named Gnaeus Julius Agricola, which put the virtual entirety of England and Wales into Roman hands.

Julius Agricola was named governor of Britannia by the Roman Emperor Flavius in 77. And after defeating the Ordovices – and thus conquering Wales – he quickly moved north to Caledonia, but you'll know it better by its modern name, Scotland.

Around 83 or 84 AD, after minor skirmishes with the Caledonian tribes, Agricola pushed his legions north, meeting head-on with nearly 30,000 Caledonian Scottish warriors. Protecting their granaries from the Romans was their only chance to survive the winter, so surrender was not an option. They had no choice but to fight. And though they fought valiantly, what happened next was a slaughter. Called the Battle of Mons Graupius, Agricola's auxiliary forces are said to have butchered up to 10,000 Caledonian warriors, sending the remaining tribal forces retreating into the woods, utterly defeated by the Roman conquerors. Although Agricola returned to Rome a hero, dubbed the Conqueror of Caledonia and believing that all of Britannia had been subjugated under the Roman eagle, Roman power was beginning to spread far too thin to maintain a military presence and occupation force throughout all of its new lands. This occupation proved all too difficult to manage in 85 and 86 AD when the Romans themselves suffered crushing defeats on The Danube in the Dacian Kingdom in modern-day Romania. Most of the Roman forces had to be dispatched from Scotland into Central Europe to resolve the more pressing military crises, saving the Caledonians from total destruction and conquest. Thus, the Romans pulled back south, holding their line at what is today the border between England and Scotland.

In 122, Hadrian's Wall was built to defend Roman Britannia from the warring Caledonians, stretching 73 miles from the east to the west coasts of northern England. In an effort to push Roman territory north, the Antonine Wall was built in 142. But by the year 211, after years of guerilla attacks from the Scottish tribes, the northern Antonine Wall was abandoned, and the Roman's pushed back to Hadrian's Wall, which would mark the northernmost border of the Roman Empire for the last 200 years of its existence.

All of this history is leading up to the year 175, when the emperor Marcus Aurelius stationed 5,500 Sarmatian troops in Britain – many along Hadrian's Wall – to help defend Roman Britannia from the guerilla attacks and invasions by the Caledonians to the north. The

Sarmatians were an Iranian people who had moved westward during the Roman Empire, known to be a feared cavalry force which occupied lands in the Eastern European Steppes. Brutally accurate archers, the Sarmatians would use something called a *Draco*, a dragon-headed standard with a long fabric sleeve that would whistle in the wind – howling like a dragon as they marched. This standard had two purposes: the first, to determine wind direction to assist their archers; and the other, to strike fear in their enemies in battle. The Sarmatians originally adopted this dragon motif from the Han Empire in China and introduced the dragon as a symbol of dread, power, and strength to Britannia in the 2nd Century AD, when they were stationed there as a Roman auxiliary force. The dragon had arrived in Britain.

If you remember our discussion about the Roman standards from the first episode, these vexilla would be topped with all types of animal motifs – including the aquila, or eagle, which was the symbol of the Roman Empire. Adopted from these Sarmatians and other Scythian steppe peoples, we have evidence that the Romans added the *Draco*, the dragon, to their legionary standards by in the 250s and 260s AD under Emperor Gallienus. The troops of Emperor Aurelianus shortly after him also had *draconarii* – dragons – amongst his standard-bearers. And on the Arch of Galerius, which still stands in Thessaloniki, Greece to commemorate Rome's war against Persia in 290, several *Dracos* can be seen carried by both infantry and cavalry alike. Thus, the dragon became a regular standard in the Roman military in the 3rd Century AD, and was certainly a ubiquitous sight in Roman Britannia.

The dragon motif as a Roman symbol catapulted in the 4th Century AD, as both Emperors Constantius and Julian had personal *Dracos* made for them from royal purple material, which would make them identifiable to their troops in the heat of battle. And the *draconarii*, or dragon standard bearers, were held to a significant status in the Roman army as an elite and terrifying unit. In fact, a new high rank of officer was created in the late 4th Century, called a *magister draconum* – or master of the dragon bearers, the head of the *draconarii*. And it has been proposed that the name of King Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon – or Uther the Head Dragon, who in post-Roman Britain carried a dragon as his battle standard – well, Pendragon might just be a late Welsh translation of the Roman rank of *magister draconum*.

So, historically speaking, the dragon on the Welsh flag can probably trace its origins from the *Draco* of the Iranian-Eastern European Sarmatians, which they adopted from the Chinese Han Dynasty, and then elevated by the Roman army through their standards – their proto-flags. The question is now, how and why did the Welsh tribes adopt the dragon as their own? History can only tell us half the story. We have to look to medieval Welsh mythology to get to the heart of the red dragon's ascent.

When we come back from the break, the Roman Empire will fall, the dragon left behind in Britain will rise from the ashes, and the story of Uther Pendragon, King Arthur, and the dragon of Wales will become legend. We'll be right back after this.

BREAK

Welcome back to the show.

By the time “the eternal city” of Rome was sacked by King Alaric and the Visigoths in 410 AD, the Roman Empire had been split in two over a century earlier by Emperor Diocletian: The Western Roman Empire, which incorporated much of Western Europe and Britannia; and the Byzantine Empire, with its capital at Byzantium (which would later be named Constantinople, and modern-day Istanbul). With the Visigoths threatening the very existence of the Western Roman Empire, the Romans first withdrew from northern and western Britain – including Wales – in 383, and then officially ceded rule to the British tribes with their full departure in 410, as all of their resources were needed to defend their homeland from the Germanic invaders.

Byzantine historians tell us that on the eve of Roman departure, the Romanized British pleaded with Emperor Honorius to help them fend off barbarian incursions, including the Scottish tribes who saw their chance for revenge, but in response, he somberly penned letters to the cities of Britain that they must now “guard themselves.” The age of Roman Britannia was over, and the Western Roman Empire, with their once-fearsome dragon-bearing standards, fell on September 4, 476, when the last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, abdicated his crown to the barbarian king Odoacer. The Middle Ages had officially begun.

The collapse of Roman rule in Britain created a power vacuum on the island, leaving it poorly defended from the sea-faring Saxons, a Germanic tribe of raiders and pirates who began migrating to Britain and settling along the southern and eastern shores. In the midst of this social strife, British territory was divided by warring clans, vying for political control. At the same time, Saxon migrations grew, expanding their territory and establishing a number of kingdoms – which can be identified by those names that contain the suffix “sex,” like Sussex and Wessex. And this is the very period when the mythological stories of Uther Pendragon, King Arthur, Merlin, and the Welsh red dragon take place – these stories of Roman-British heroes who fight to defend the Britons in the west from the invading Anglo-Saxons encroaching on their eastern border.

The 200 years following the end of Roman rule is the least well-documented period of British history, leaving room for the legend of King Arthur to help fill the void. Although this time period has little written history from first-person accounts, we do know that British princes continued to use Roman-style *Dracos* as battle standards, a tradition that lasted long enough to become the red dragon flag of Wales we see today. All of that said, for this next part of our story, I ask that you suspend your disbelief as we discuss the mythological rise of Uther Pendragon and his legendary son, King Arthur.

As I mentioned earlier, King Uther, known as Uther Pendragon – or the head dragon – may very well have been a Romano-British officer with the Latin title of *magister draconum*, or head of the dragons, leading the dragon standard-bearing soldiers of Roman Britannia. Knowing that the dragon standard survived in Britain well after the fall of Rome, it is not out of the realm of possibility that this ruler would carry on Roman military traditions – or that Briton kings like Uther saw themselves as defending the true Roman Empire in absentia.

King Uther would have lived sometime between 410 and 495 AD, and his story is found in Geoffery of Monmouth's book, the *History of Kings in Britain*, written in the 1130s. However, Uther appears several times in earlier Welsh tradition, a legend of Welsh folklore in the centuries prior.

Uther is said to be the fourth son of the Roman general Constantine III, who declared himself Western Roman Emperor in 407, and established his reign in Gaul to defend the British island from the invading Saxons. The legend goes like this:

As a child, Uther and his older brother, Aurelius Ambrosius, flee Britain to their Uncle King Budic I of Brittany in north-west France to escape the Saxon invaders. After the death of his father and his eldest brother Constans II, who was co-emperor with Constantine, Uther and Aurelius return from exile to dethrone the Saxon King Vortigern, who overthrew their kingdom and stole their rightful crown. Eventually, they kill Vortigern, and Aurelius ascends to his father's throne. King Aurelius sends Uther and his magician-prophet, Merlin, to bring the "Giant's Ring" from Mount Killarus in Ireland and reconstruct the ruins in England as a tribute to their recently departed ancestors who died in the Night of Long Knives under King Vortigern – a site magically put back together at a place known today as Stonehenge.

Years later, on the night of King Aurelius's death, a red-orange dragon-shaped comet lit up the sky over Britannia, and Uther took the crown under the title of "Uther Pendragon" as tribute. He then ordered the construction of two gold dragons, one of which is used as his battle standard. This, according to legend, is when the dragon flag of the ancient Welsh was born.

Much of Uther's story focuses on his campaigns against the Saxons to the East and the Irish invaders to the north, and ultimately being poisoned and killed by the Angle tribe that occupied the territories north of Saxony. (A quick side note: Anglo-Saxon is the term historically used to describe these Germanic tribes, the Angles and the Saxons, who settled in Britain after the fall of the Roman empire.) Anyway, Uther Pendragon's most famous anecdote concerns the saucy details around the night his famous son Arthur was conceived. The legend says that Uther falls in love with the Duke of Cornwall's wife, a woman named Ygerna. Even though the Duke of Cornwall, a man named Gorlois who occupied the Tintagel Castle, was instrumental in his battle victory over the Saxons, Uther was going to have the woman he wanted. Uther attacks Gorlois' camp and secretly kills the duke, and persuades Merlin to use his magical powers to transform Uther into Gorlois's likeness. Uther, who now looks like the Duke of Cornwall, enters the castle, seduces Ygerna, and the legendary Arthur is conceived. Thus, King Uther, the head dragon, would have a son.

Now, there is much written and speculated about King Arthur, from his first appearance in a 6th century Welsh poem called *The Gododdin* in which a heroic Arthur is spoken of, to the 15th Century stories of Camelot, the Knights of the Round Table, and his quest for the Holy Grail. It has even been suggested that the historical basis for the Arthurian legend is a Roman military officer named Lucius Artorius Castus, who may have been stationed at Hadrian's Wall with a

contingent of Sarmatians – who carried the dragon standard – and fought valiantly against the barbarian invaders. And because the British people adopted Roman names for centuries, Arthur could very well be a Welsh translation of the name Artorius. We just don't know. However, we do know that Britannia was left in chaos and uncertainty in the centuries following Roman departure, and that a heroic legend like King Arthur would promise stability and strength and national unity in the face of confusion and disorder. And that is precisely what Uther and Arthur's dragon represents – continuity over chaos.

So, what do the Welsh Arthurian legends tell us about the dragon?

Historians believe that Welsh kings of Aberffraw – now a small community on the shores of the Isle of Anglesey – first adopted the *Draco* standard in the early 5th Century to signify themselves as a powerful authority and the rightful heirs to the Roman tradition after they withdrew from Britannia. If so, this would line up perfectly with Uther Pendragon's adoption of the dragon standard at this same time, with the legacy carried on by his son, Arturus Pendragon – King Arthur.

By the 7th Century, the symbol is said to have evolved into the Red Dragon of Cadwaladr, the royal badge of the king who reigned in Gwynedd, in north-west Wales, from 655 to 682, cementing the red dragon in Welsh history forever.

But let's get back to the mythology.

King Arthur's mythic status as a Celtic hero can be found in the 9th Century *Historia Brittonum* – the history of the Britons – possibly authored by the Welsh monk Nennius around the year 828 AD. He describes King Arthur leading the charge in the legendary Battle of Mount Badon, striking down 960 Saxon warriors himself and stopping the Saxon expansion in its tracks for decades. If we take this story on face value, we can then open our minds to the possibility that Arthur would have been carrying his dragon standard with him into this important and decisive battle – a victory that has its earliest references written down in the 6th Century AD, around the time when the battle would have taken place. In fact, centuries later, Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *History of Kings* of Britain, would assign Arthur a dragon on his helmet and as his battle standard, reinforcing the dragon motif into Welsh Arthurian mythology.

Another great mythological character from this time is a man named Myrddin, or Merlin, who was a prophet and a magician, introduced into the Arthurian legend as a wizard by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Combining the two separate stories of one Myrddin Wylt – or Merlin the Wild, a mad prophet – and Aurelius Ambrosius – Uther Pendragon's older brother – Geoffrey created the character we know today as Merlinus Ambrosius, but you know him better as Merlin. Based on this genealogy, Merlin would be King Arthur's uncle. And his mad uncle's prophecy about the two dragons would reverberate through Welsh folklore for centuries.

First written by Nennius and then expanded on by Geoffrey of Monmouth who adds Merlin as the protagonist, the story of the two dragons goes like this.

The Saxon King Vortigern – you’ll remember him, he’s the king who stole Constantine’s throne – well, he’s trying to build a tower on the land that he had just conquered from Uther Pendragon’s father. But every night, after the workers had retired for the evening, the tower would fall and they would have to start over again. Frustrated, King Vortigern demanded that his wise men go out and find a boy who was not born by mortal man – because he believed that if he sacrificed this boy and sprinkled his blood on the grounds of the tower, that his pagan gods would allow it to stand. The wise men bring the nine-year-old Merlin to the king, as he is believed by the Saxon men to be the son of an incubus and a nun – a boy not born to a mortal father. As they prepare his execution, Merlin explains to the usurper king that killing him would do nothing for his tower because beneath the king’s tent was a pool, home to two dragons, one red and one white. When the king’s men dig, they find the two serpents sleeping, and when they woke up, these two dragons began fighting, rocking the earth – strong enough to knock the tower to the ground.

I’m going to quote Geoffery of Monmouth’s account of the story:

“At length the red one, apparently the weaker of the two, recovering his strength, expelled the white one from the tent; and the latter being pursued through the pool by the red one, disappeared.”

Merlin then asks the king’s wise men; do you know what this omen means? They shrugged. The nine-year-old goes on to tell his prophecy:

“I will now unfold to you the meaning of this mystery,” Merlin says. “The pool is the emblem of this world, and the tent that of your kingdom: the two serpents are two dragons; the red serpent is your dragon, but the white serpent is the dragon of the people who occupy several provinces and districts of Britain, even almost from sea to sea: at length, however, our people shall rise and drive away the Saxon race from beyond the sea, whence they originally came; but do you depart from this place, where you are not permitted to erect a citadel; I, to whom fate has allotted this mansion, shall remain here; whilst to you it is incumbent to seek other provinces, where you may build a fortress.” “What is your name?” asked the king; “I am called Ambrose,” returned the boy; and in answer to the king’s question, “What is your origin?” he replied, “A Roman consul was my father.”

This Roman consul, of course, was Emperor Constantine.

Merlin, or Ambrose, went on to explain to the king that the red dragon represented the defenders of Britain, although weak and exhausted from battle today, would one day rise up and expel the white dragon of the Anglo-Saxons. He warned the king about the prophecy of the Bear of Cornwall – or *Arth* in ancient Welsh, which means bear, so here he’s talking about Arthur – who would end the Saxon advance and push them from power, delivering victory to the true people of Britain. And as you know from earlier in the episode, this Merlin Ambrosius, or Aurelius Ambrosius, and his brother Uther, would one day kill this Saxon King Vortigern,

reclaim Romano-British power in the name of their slain father Constantine, and make way for King Arthur Pendragon, who would rise to defeat the Saxons in the decisive Battle of Mount Badon. And that's the Arthurian legend of the red dragon.

When we come from the break, we're going to skip ahead about a thousand years, jumping past the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066 and the English invasion and gradual conquest of Wales in the 13th Century, and we're going to land in the late 14th and early 15th Century to discuss a man named Owain Glyndŵr, the Prince of Wales, and his golden dragon flag of revolution against English rule. We'll be right back.

BREAK

By the turn of the 15th Century, the red dragon of Wales was firmly under English control. But the golden dragon of rebellion was rumbling beneath their feet. In 1399, Henry Bolingbroke usurped the crown of England from the French-born King Richard II, naming himself Henry IV. And in the chaos of the ensuing power struggle, an old Welsh nobleman by the name of Owen Glendower saw his chance to free Wales from the grip of England. Now, Owen Glendower was no stranger to war – or to English royal politics. Born in the mid-14th Century to a wealthy Welsh family with ties to English aristocracy, he fought for the English king Richard II against the Scots at the northern border in 1385, and then served as a squire to Henry Bolingbroke in the Battle of Radcot Bridge in 1387 against Richard II, who was deposed shortly after. When Glendower returned to Wales from his service, he saw poverty and strife, with the Welsh economy in ruins after years of English exploitation and oppression. But behind the poverty, he also found a people who were fed up, just looking for a reason to rise up against the crown. In 1400, his long-running land dispute with his neighbor, a royalist named Reginald de Grey, escalated into a full-blown rebellion against English rule, and Glendower proclaimed himself the prince of Wales in opposition to London. Now, this Reginald de Grey was also a Welsh nobleman, and held the position of a marcher lord – someone appointed by the English king to guard the border between England and Wales. But because Reginald was a royalist, his minor dispute with the native hero Glendower was all the Welsh powder keg needed to ignite, sending the country into rebellion against England.

On November 2, 1401, Glendower led his rebel army against the English in what is known today as the Battle of Tuthill in north Wales. While it was a minor skirmish in the 15-year rebellion, this battle is famous because it was the first time he flew his new battle standard – a two-legged golden dragon on a white field. By flying this flag, he was adopting a deeply symbolic dragon motif to legitimize his cause as the same fight as that of Uther Pendragon and King Arthur and Cadwaladr and all of the kings and princes – both historical and mythological – who took up arms in the name of Welsh independence for nearly a thousand years. And his choice of flag had the intended effect: it gave the people hope. This dragon flag galvanized the Welsh nation around a man for whom they long awaited – the Mab Darogan, or the Son of Destiny – a figure of messianic Welsh legend who was said to one day free Wales from foreign control.

By 1404, what had started as fierce guerilla attacks on English border grew into a full-scale national revolt with Wales following their chosen son of destiny under the legendary golden dragon flag of Uther Pendragon. His success even inspired the French armies who joined him on his march to Worcester, capturing castles and land, and raising the dragon flag on their new territories. But, unfortunately for Wales, Glendower was not the man the prophecies had promised. By 1408, the French were suffering more casualties than they cared to lose and abandoned his cause, and his army fell to the English shortly after. On the run for the next seven years, the golden dragon died quietly in 1415, buried in secret under the cover of night by a small number of supporters, a gravesite still unknown to this day. That was the end of the last ever native prince of an independent Wales – but the dragon was destined to return. Like the legend of King Arthur, Welsh folklore has it that Owen Glendower – the Mab Darogan – will return to lead the defense of Wales if the nation is threatened again. And to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the uprising, in the year 2000, his golden dragon flag was resurrected and can be found flying all over Wales today – and especially brought out at Welsh rugby and soccer matches against England.

Only forty years after Owen Glendower's death, England was once again in turmoil. From 1455 to 1485, England was rife with civil war, known as the Wars of the Roses, between two houses claiming the English crown – the House of Lancaster, represented by a red rose, and the House of York, with its white rose. On August 22, 1485, a young Lancastrian Welshman named Henry Tudor, a man with his own claim to the throne, marched into battle against the better trained and better equipped Yorkist King Richard III. He raised his colors, a flag with horizontal bands of green and white to represent the Tudor clan, and placed the legendary King Cadwaladr's red dragon of Wales on its ground, using this symbol of Welsh ancestry to gather support and gain safe passage through Wales on his way to invade England. It is said that in the thick of battle, Richard came within a sword-strike of the young Henry, but lost his helmet and was struck dead when a Lancastrian blade came crashing into his skull. And upon learning of Richard's death – the last English monarch to ever die in battle – the Yorkist army disintegrated, and the Tudor clan claimed not only a decisive victory, but the English crown by right of conquest. Thus, the Welsh red dragon on a field of white and green, Henry Tudor's battle standard, would live on in renown. Henry Tudor was coronated Henry VII, King of England and France and Lord of Ireland, on October 30, 1485, with his royal coat of arms depicting the red dragon of Cadwaldr holding up the English crown.

The Welsh Tudor dynasty held onto the English throne for 118 years, adopting the green and white banners on both their decorative royal flags and ensigns, and adding the red dragon to their naval battle flags. Although the Tudors were a Welsh dynasty by blood, their allegiance quickly turned strictly to England. Henry Tudor's son, Henry the VIII, passed the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542, today called the Act of Union, officially annexing Wales under English law and making English the official language of the unified kingdom, confining the Welsh language to the working and lower classes. Largely due to this law of annexation, Wales was considered merely a territory of England, not a country or a national people, thus their symbol is the only country within the United Kingdom not to be incorporated into the Union Jack. In fact, this was the law of the land for the next 450 years, repealed only – and only partially – as

recently as 1993, the same year, if you remember from episode 3, that Bill Clinton officially apologized for that nation's annexation of another country – Hawaii.

At the turn of the 20th Century, the *Y Ddraig Goch* flag took on a new meaning as Welsh nationalism rose in the countryside. A region rich with natural resources dating back to before the Roman conquest, the surge of 20th Century industrialization brought an influx of non-Welsh speaking working peoples out of the English cities and into Welsh mining towns. Whether you call it xenophobia or nationalism, this influx pushed the national dialogue toward independence – and if not independence, then at least some semblance of sovereignty. In response to this national fervor, in 1901, the red dragon became the official symbol of Wales under law, and rose to prominence in its current form in 1911 at the investiture of Prince Edward in 1911, that is the coronation of the prince of Wales. With a second wave of Welsh nationalism following the world wars, the motto *Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Cychwyn*, which means “the red dragon inspires action,” became the new royal badge of Wales in 1953 and added to their dragon-laden flag.

And finally, six years later on February 23, 1959, after feverish lobbying by a group called the Gorsedd of the Bards, an order of Welsh poets, writers, musicians, and artists who claim lineage to ancient Celtic-Welsh ritual and tradition, Queen Elizabeth the II approved the national flag you see today – the resurrection of Henry Tudor's battle standard – as the official flag of the country of Wales.

And that is the end of the story of the flag of Wales. So, to recap, what do the symbols of the Welsh flag mean? Green and white are for the Tudor clan who rose up against all odds to defeat Richard III and claim the throne by right of conquest. And for the Welsh red dragon, well, that has several origin stories: some are rooted in history, while others are written into legend. But for the Welsh national mythology, all of these stories – from the Chinese-inspired Sarmatian Roman battle standards to Uther Pendragon's comet to Merlin's prophecy to the Red Rose of the Lancastrians defeating the White Rose of the Yorkists – all of these stories are important to tell their national history and ground their collective identity. And to be honest, wherever the dragon truly came from may not matter in the end, because this symbol is the Welsh peoples' story of continuity in the times of chaos, deliverance in the face of destruction, and national tradition over foreign occupation.

That's it for this episode of why the flag. You can read show notes at flagpodcast.com and follow us on Instagram @flagpod. And make sure you subscribe to this show on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Stitcher, and don't forget to give us 5 stars in the app – it really helps. See you next time.