



*Celebrating the heritage, achievements and relevance of
military medicine*

Friends of Millbank Book Review

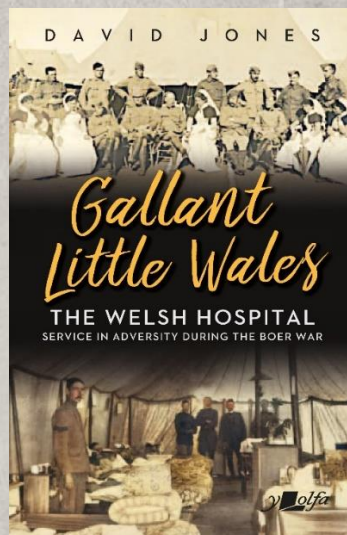
Gallant Little Wales

The Welsh Hospital – Service in adversity during the Boer War

David Jones

Publisher: Y Lolfa (June 2023) (www.ylolfa.com)

ISBN: 978-1-80099-396-9 (paperback, 126 pages)



Review by David Vassallo

This is an inspiring, informative and compassionate account of the heartening response by the Welsh people to an international crisis, in rapidly funding, equipping, manning and deploying a 150-bed civilian field hospital to war in support of the Royal Army Medical Corps to face the daunting tribulations of unfamiliar wounds and epidemic typhoid disease. The volunteers served far away from home for months at great personal risk to themselves, overcoming adversity (including the deaths of the senior surgeon, matron and four other staff) to deliver outstanding surgical, medical and nursing care, and learning from their intense experience to help others thereafter. It held my attention throughout and should hold yours too. The book is aptly named, also recalling the heading of a contemporary account of the hospital's send-off by the Prince and Princess of Wales, who rightly recognised the patriotic effort and goodwill that went into creating the Welsh Hospital.



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The author is David Jones, a highly respected and recently retired Welsh orthopaedic surgeon with a passion for history. He has done justice to his forebears in bringing this story and that of many individual personalities to light for a modern audience, highlighting the relevance of human interaction and many lessons hard learned in adversity and in conflict. He has thoroughly researched the history of the Welsh Hospital and its volunteer staff, amongst them fellow surgeons John Lynn-Thomas (Cardiff Infirmary), Professor Alfred Hughes (then Dean of the Medical School at King's College, London), Professor Thomas Jones (Owens College, Manchester), Robert Mills-Roberts (Llanberis Quarry Hospital, appointed as Chief Surgeon), and others, several of whom later built on their experience to distinguish themselves in the Territorial Force during the Great War and in civilian life. The matron (Miss Marion Lloyd) and the nine nursing sisters were drawn from the newly formed Princess Christian's Army Nursing Service Reserve. David sets them all in context, and moreover gives a good account of the vicissitudes of the Boer War itself.

The author rightly highlights the relationship with key military medical staff, particularly the newly promoted Lt Col Alfred Keogh, talented administrator and organiser, who commanded two hospitals of the fledgling RAMC, and who worked very closely with the Welsh Hospital. Keogh's organisational skills in the Boer War catalysed his promotion to Director-General Army Medical Services in 1905, and his close relationship with the Welsh Hospital volunteers materially influenced his reforms of the Army Medical Services, his association with the Territorial Force, and his leadership of the British military medical services in the Great War. The importance of such close civilian and military medical co-operation was heeded in two world wars and multiple other conflicts to date; this lesson was learned through toil and sacrifice – Gallant Little Wales helps us to remember this.

Gallant Little Wales is being published just as the RAMC celebrates 125 years of existence; the RAMC has come a long way and progressed much since its baptism of fire in the Boer War, when civilian voluntary resources such as the Welsh Hospital had to be mobilised in its support, and doubtless it will continue to develop and earn its laurels in years to come. I am glad to see that the voluntary spirit remains alive and well in the RAMC and the wider Defence Medical Services, not least in Wales. Thus, the medical and nursing reservists of Cardiff's 203 Field Hospital (which restructures this year as 203 (Welsh) Multi-Role Medical Regiment) deployed twice as a formed unit to Camp Bastion Hospital in Afghanistan to care for war wounded and ill in recent years.¹ Welsh reservists were also involved with the setting up of Nightingale hospitals in the COVID pandemic. They are worthy successors to their compatriots in the Welsh Hospital of the Boer War – they can read this story with pride and empathy, and can continue to be inspired by it as they prepare for future conflicts.

This account should also be of interest to the civilian volunteer doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and supporting staff, many from Wales, who today step forward to man the United Kingdom's WHO-certified Emergency Medical Team (a civilian field hospital, run by the frontline medical aid charity UK Med), or who volunteer with MSF or the Red Cross, in

¹ See the history of 203 Field Hospital, Camp Bastion Hospital, and other DMS medical units at <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/unit-histories/>





response to natural or man-made disasters, where life-threatening wounds and epidemics continue to present as much of a challenge as they did to the Welsh Hospital.²

This motivational story of goodwill, of leadership and the volunteer ethos, of the benefits of close civilian and military medical co-operation, and of resilience and innovation in the face of adversity, remains as relevant today as yesteryear. It has interest and lessons for all, not least if you are a regular or reservist in the DMS, or a civilian, attached to a field hospital or EMT deploying to a war zone or natural disaster, or if you are involved in the medical response to an aggressor who is wantonly causing untold suffering and destruction in a European nation, and threatening World War, even as I write.

The story of the Welsh Hospital will continue to touch people's hearts as long as the need to respond to conflict persists on this earth.

I unreservedly recommend Gallant Little Wales to you. Enjoy, and be inspired by volunteers.

It can be ordered for £9.99 through <https://coles-books.co.uk/gallant-little-wales-by-david-jones> and via <https://www.gwales.com/bibliographic/?lang=CY&tsid=3>

Col (retd) David Vassallo FRCSEd MA L/RAMC
Chairman, Friends of Millbank
May 2023.

A Short biography of the author

David Jones served 17 years as a consultant orthopaedic surgeon in Oswestry, and another 17 years as consultant paediatric orthopaedic surgeon at Great Ormond Street Hospital. He has a passion for history. Gallant Little Wales is his first book.

David has kindly agreed to deliver a talk about 'Gallant Little Wales' to Friends of Millbank in 2024. Watch out for the programme. The registration link will appear on our website in due course.

² You can read more about UK-Med and its volunteers at <https://www.uk-med.org/>



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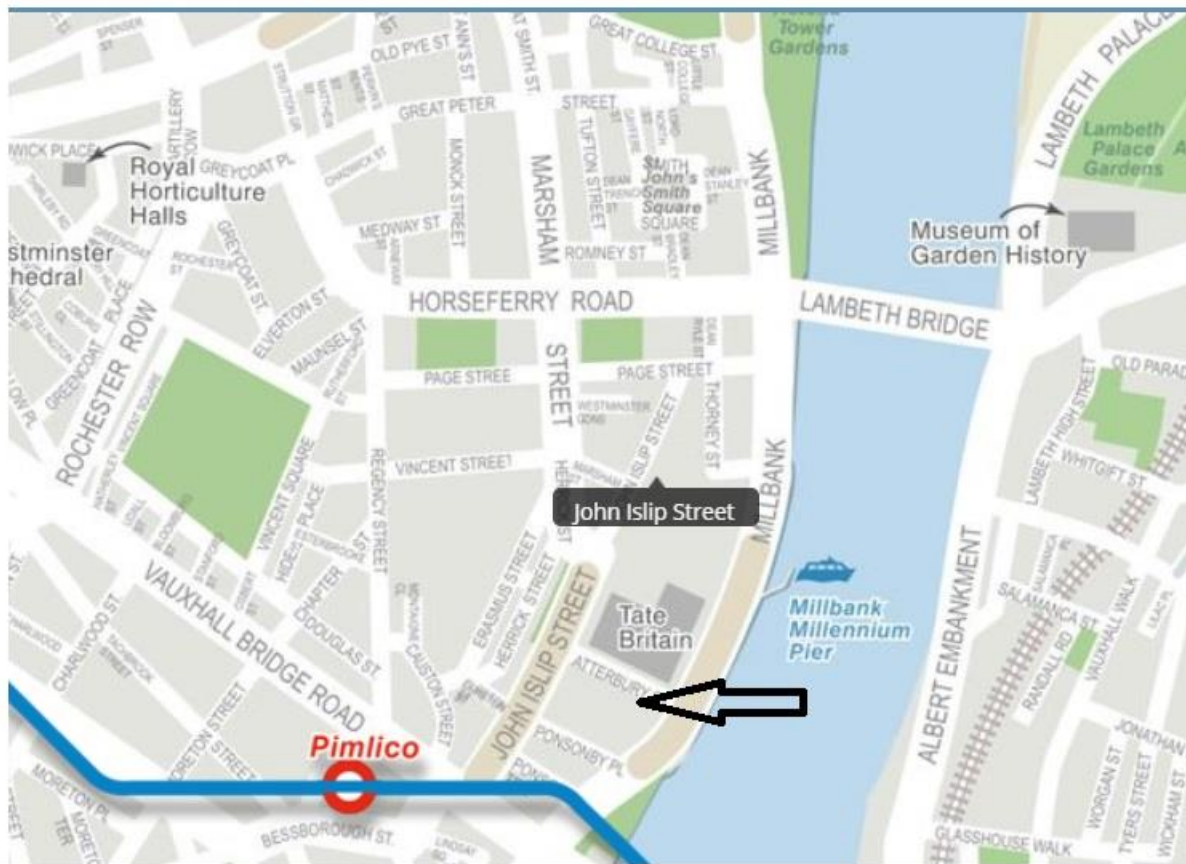


Our military medical history talks at Millbank (Chelsea College of Arts, formerly the Royal Army Medical College)

We hold monthly talks, open to all, at Millbank, also streamed on Zoom, on the last Friday of the month apart from December, with none in August. We meet for light refreshments from 1730hrs. The talk commences at 1830hrs, followed by supper locally at 2000hrs. See programme and registration link on www.friendsofmillbank.org New members and guests always welcome.

The College entrance is via Atterbury Street, opposite Tate Britain (as arrowed below).

LondonTown.com - John Islip Street Location Map



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