

## The South Wales Race Riots of 1919

### Background

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the south Wales coalfields had become an important part of Wales's economy. There was also a significant growth in the steel industry which was based around Port Talbot and Margam.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, the population of south Wales had increased dramatically. Cardiff was now Wales' largest town, and in 1905 it was granted its new status as a city. It had a population of around 173,000 in 1901, compared to 6,000 in 1801, and this increase was mainly due to Cardiff's growth as a thriving port. Seaports had also developed around Newport and Barry, from where goods such as coal, steel and copper were exported to the rest of the world.

Recruitment for the First World War in 1914 caused a shortage of seamen in the ports of Cardiff and elsewhere. This provided opportunities for more individuals from colonies of the British Empire to settle and work in south Wales.

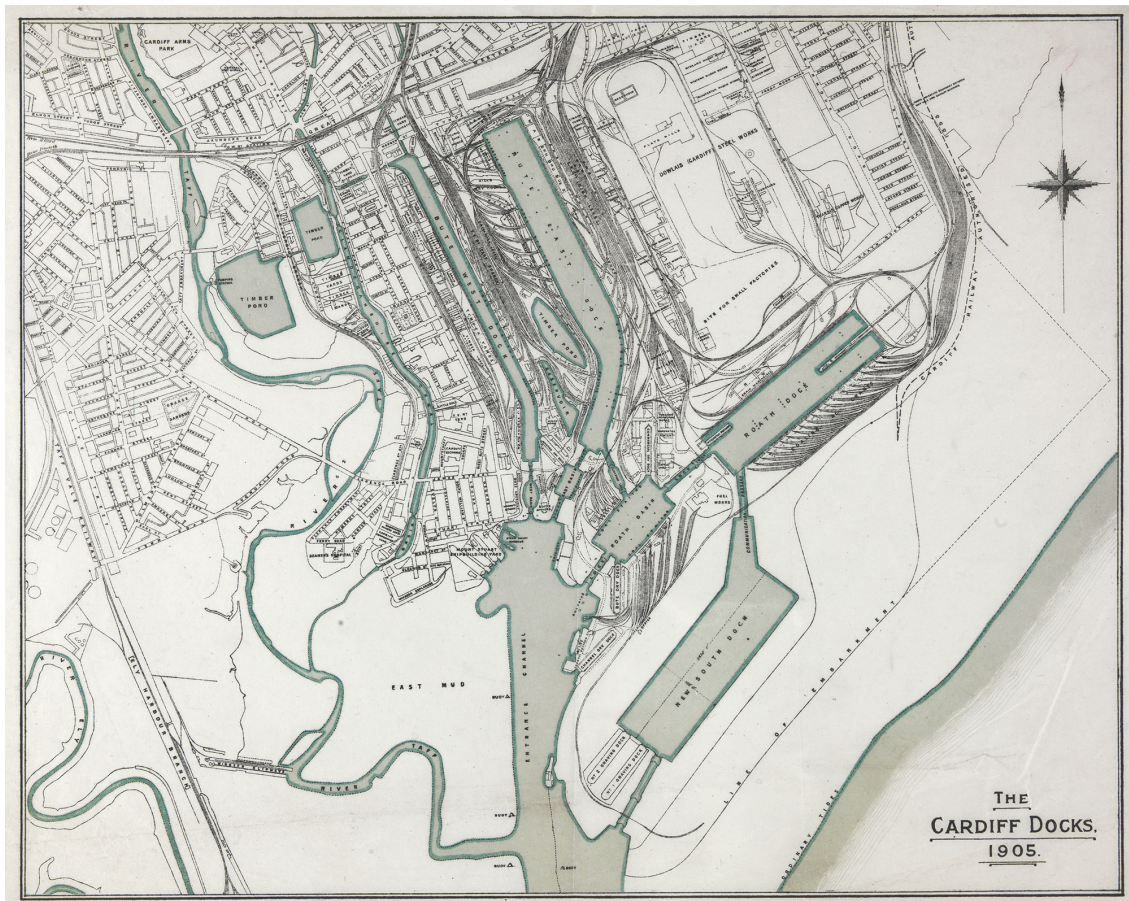


*Western Mail*, 17 June 1919

In Cardiff, the multi-cultural community in the Butetown, Adamstown and dock area grew significantly. The new immigrants included, among others, African, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, Arab, Somali and South Asian sailors and sea-merchants.

## Causes of Unrest

- The end of the war caused a major economic slump in the shipping industry, which led to high unemployment in the area.
- Demobilised soldiers returned from war to face the prospect of no income. There was competition for work, and some felt that immigrants had taken their jobs.
- Many soldiers and members of the public felt that soldiers were treated poorly and shown a lack of respect, having fought so bravely “for king and country”.
- Soldiers had believed the promise made by the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, that they would come home to a “Land fit for Heroes”
- People’s opinions were being challenged. Some were suspicious of immigrants, especially if they were involved in relationships, romantic or platonic, with white people.
- Housing was in short supply.



Map of Cardiff docks, 1905



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CANADA  
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NEW ZEALAND

All answer the call.

Helped by the **YOUNG LIONS**  
The **OLD LION** defies his Foes.  
**ENLIST NOW.**



## What happened?

Among the demobilised soldiers were men from the British colonies, some of whom settled in Britain after the war. Racial tensions increased, and a series of riots broke out across parts of Britain during the summer of 1919, including Liverpool Glasgow, Newport, and Cardiff.

In mid June violent clashes occurred in Newport and Cardiff, with serious incidents in parts of Butetown and around the docks. As the riots escalated, stones were thrown and houses were attacked, smashed and looted. Arab lodging houses and restaurants were attacked, and the police were called in to patrol the affected areas.

The riots came to an end after a few days after buildings and homes had been wrecked and lodging homes burnt down. Tens of people were hospitalised with injuries related to the rioting, tens more were arrested, and soldiers were used to break up the conflict in parts of south Wales. Three men died as a result of the riots in Cardiff.



*Western Mail*, 14 June 1919