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Newsletter - Cylchlythyr

October 2020

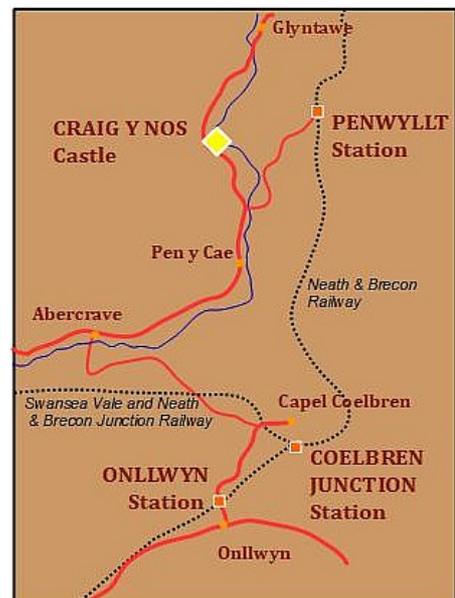
A Story of Adelina Patti – Part 1

by Eifion Williams

Most inhabitants of the upper reaches of the Swansea, Dulais and Neath valleys will undoubtedly know Craig - y - Nos Castle and the world famous celebrity Adelina Patti who lived there. But how many realise how famous she really was; who she was and what is her history?

Because of her fame many 'fables' have grown about her, some true while others stretch the imagination. It is a fact that she owned her own carriage on the railway in which she travelled to Neath, Swansea, Brecon and London. She also had her own waiting rooms at Penwyllt railway station and in Neath Lower station.

The village residents of the Upper Dulais and Tawe valleys would somehow or other learn when Adelina would be passing through in her carriage, and some of them would gather on the village station to see her. On one such occasion, my late aunt was standing with other children on the station in Coelbren to see Adelina. She was spotted by Adelina who was so taken by my aunt's golden hair that she gave her a gold sovereign with the comment "*just like your hair*" !!!



Madame Adelina Patti's private railway station
on the Neath & Brecon Railway in 2008

Picture courtesy of Glyn Williams



Coelbren junction area ca.1898
Map by Tim Fearnside

Now to Adelina:

Adelina was born in Madrid on February 9th 1843. to Caterina Barili an operatic soprano and native of Rome and Salvatore Patti, her second husband of Sicilian origins and an operatic tenor with an interest in theatre management, They christened her Adela Juana Maria Patti, but for most of her life she was called Adelina Patti. Adelina was proud of being of Italian parentage although born in Spain.

Four years later the family moved to New York where Catarina Barili resumed her operatic career whilst Salvatore was engaged in operatic management. Adelina was often taken at this young age to hear her mother sing. This experience had a profound effect on her, Adelina recounted later. In her bedroom at night she would copy her mother's singing and improvise her costumes to copy her mother's performances. She astonished her family one evening with a rendering of an operatic aria whilst standing on the kitchen table. About the same time the family ran into financial difficulties when the theatre which Salvatore managed closed and he had to sell some of the

family's possessions. They realised that Adelina a child prodigy in possessing a remarkable voice for one so young may be able to help restore the family finances. So began Adelina's public career.

In 1850 in The Triplers Hall, New York, Adelina sang in a Charity Concert. This led to a tour which lasted three years. The tour party performed across America and visited Canada, Mexico and Cuba. During this tour she was escorted by her father Salvatore and her brother-in-law, Maurice Strakosch, her accompanist and voice tutor. After resting her voice for a few years she embarked on a second concert tour in 1857 which toured the Southern States of America and the West Indies. Once again escorted by her father and brother-in-law. This successful tour marked the end of her career as a young concert artist.

A professional operatic career:

In November 1859 at sixteen years of age, Adelina Patti made her operatic debut; she sang the title role of '*Luciadi Lammermoor*' at the New York Academy of Music. During her first operatic season she performed fourteen roles and toured the eastern seaboard of the United States. This tour ended in New Orleans in the winter of 1860 – '61 and proved to be a very successful year. It led to a visit to Europe chaperoned by her father and brother-in-law. Their arrival in England in April 1861 unfortunately coincided with various plots and intrigues in London related to theatre management and especially young performers' contracts. However, after much wrangling the outcome resulted in the eighteen year old singer securing her first European role. On the 14th May she was booked to play Amina in Bellini's '*La Sonnambula*' at the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden¹ under the management of Frederick Gye. The house was half empty and the reception cool but Adelina's performance made up for that; the audience gave her a rapturous applause. This boded well for Adelina's reputation, so much so that she received a Royal Command to appear before Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. Her success was also noted by Charles Dickens in his '*All the Year Round*'² in which he wrote that "*she possessed not only great and welcome promise but also that talent for success - charm.*" That charm was evident throughout her life.

At the end of her successful London season, she went on a short European tour. Whilst in Holland, on one night she was invited by the King to sing at the Royal Palace. Patti requested a fee of 3000 francs. For such a high fee the Dutch Cabinet was asked to authorise its payment; so at an early age Adelina knew the value of her voice.

Patti returned to Covent Garden for the 1862 season and her appearances were dubbed "*Patti Nights*" which were by all accounts a '*sell out*'. Her London season was followed by a second European Tour. Once again she had "*right royal welcomes*" - in Paris, the Emperor and Empress, Napoleon III and Eugenie, were so delighted that they presented her with a magnificent bracelet in diamonds and emeralds. In Austria, her every appearance at the Vienna Karl Theatre was attended by the Emperor Franz Joseph.

All this attention poured on a young twenty year old should have had a profound effect on Adelina; but she settled down to an opera singing life involving a demanding series of engagements - a London Opera Season followed by continental tours. She settled in semi-rural Clapham where she rested whilst still being chaperoned by father and brother-in-law. It would seem that her mother took little interest in her daughter's career; she had in fact returned to Italy and was singing herself.

In 1865 Adelina engaged Karolyn Baumeister, known affectionately as her "... *beloved Karo*", who was to become a constant companion and friend for over fifty years. Also in that year she gave a series of concerts at the St James' Hall, Regent Street followed by her first performance in Italy. Here her fellow Italians "*shouted, applauded and wept like children with sheer delight*"

In May 1866, Adelina first met Ernesto Nicolini - a French tenor who sang Edgardo to Adelina's Lucia in '*Luciadi Lammermoor*'. His voice so disappointed the audience that his contract was cancelled and he returned to France!

In July 1868, Adelina Patti married Henri, Marquis de Caux at the Roman Catholic Church Clapham Common; they had met through the French Emperor and Empress who generally sought Adelina's company when she was in Paris. The Marquis was eighteen years older than Adelina but held an important position in the French court.

Patti's success continued and in 1868 - '69 she pleased audiences in Russia even impressing Tzar Alexander who appointed her "*Imperial Court Singer*" and awarded her the Order of Merit set in diamonds and emeralds.



Photograph of Adelina Patti's wedding to Marquis Henri de Caux, 29 July 1868. © V&A Collection
<https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/here-come-brides/a-romantic-frame-of-mind>
Accessed 29/10/20

The first two years of their marriage went well until they began to disagree more and more. At the same time, Nicolini returned to London (a refugee fleeing the Siege of Paris) and in the summer 1871 he was invited to join the operatic company which included Adelina on an engagement at Bad Homburg. This seemed to indicate that his voice had improved. Coincidentally, Adelina and Nicolini's family rented adjacent villas while in America. While at home Adelina would hear constant quarrelling next door which caused her initially to loath Nicolini, but during her duets with him in the opera the loathing melted away and turned to love.

In time the Marquis became suspicious with more and more quarrelling between himself and Adelina. By 1877 matters came to a head and a formal separation was entered into by the couple.

In 1878 Adelina's brother-in-law organised a tour for herself and Nicolini. They appeared in Rome, Naples, Milan, Genoa and Florence. This tour was very successful but was marred somewhat when Nicolini's wife and '*friends*' set on Nicolini. The newspapers had a field day, describing how Nicolini had been '*beaten and kicked down the stairs*'.

It was at this time that Nicolini and Adelina together bought Craig-y-Nos to provide a quiet retreat and resting place between the heavy engagements.

¹ The theatre was known as the Royal Italian Opera House at this time following a second rebuilding after a fire in 1856. In 1892 it was renamed '*The Royal Opera House*'

² '*All the Year Round*' was a Victorian periodical, being a British weekly literary magazine founded and owned by Charles Dickens, published between 1859 and 1895 throughout the United Kingdom. Edited by Dickens..." Wikipedia Accessed 26/10/20

Story to be continued in next issue.

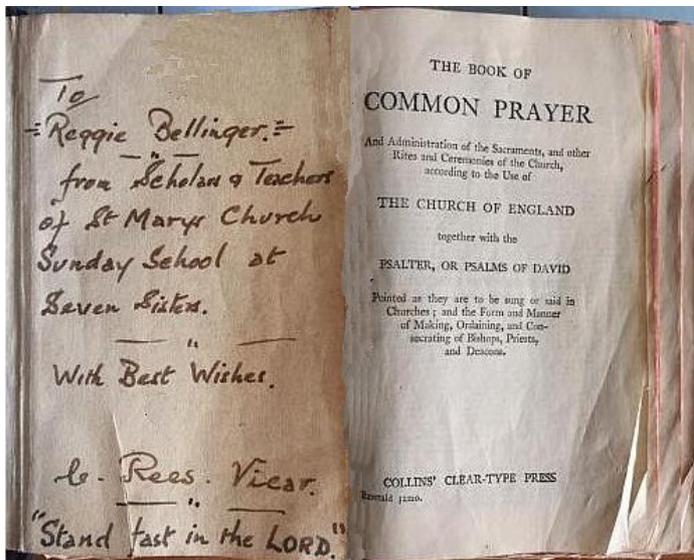
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Arrivals (and departures) in Seven Sisters

by Irene Fearnside (nee Bellinger)

Similar to many people during the lockdown, I have been sorting boxes of old files from the attic and from my late mother's home. Hours pass quickly when looking at old photographs that haven't been seen for years and even reels of cine-film which sadly I cannot now view for lack of the appropriate equipment!

Among other items was this Book of Common Prayer which belonged to my father **Reggie Bellinger**. It was presented by the '**Scholars and Teachers, St Mary's Church at Seven Sisters**' to him as a member of the Sunday School or perhaps even on his Confirmation? Unfortunately, there is no date on the inscription – does anyone know when the Vicar, C. Rees who has signed the book was the incumbent at the Church?



The story of the Bellingers in Seven Sisters began when my great grandfather Henry and his wife Bessie left Dorset to come to Seven in the early 1900's. Bessie was from the Farthing family and I understand that there are still Farthings in the Seven Sisters area.

Henry and Bessie had two sons, Ernest and Reggie (snr) and a daughter Hilda. Sadly, both sons who had taken jobs in the mine died young, 32 and 23 respectively, as a consequence of their work. Hilda married a Thomas Edmonds in St Mary's Church in 1922.

Interestingly, having started this story with my father's Prayer book from St Mary's Church it turns out that his father Ernest was buried at the Brynbedd (Pen y Banc) Cemetery while his grandparents and uncle Reggie(snr) at the Welsh Soar Chapel! Apparently, quite a mixture of religious affiliations!

Having heard the story in the last Newsletter about the English Bethany Baptists setting up their own chapel as an offshoot of the Welsh Salem Chapel I wonder if there was some movement between the church and chapel institutions?

My father Reggie (jnr) was born in 1920 in Maesteg but then moved to live in Mary Street until he was about 12 years old. After the death of his father Ernest, he moved to Aberdulais/Tonna ending the direct connection of the Bellingers with Seven Sisters.

It is only with my research into the family tree and searching the old photographs and files that I have found myself reviewing the Bellinger story again.

Obituary

It is with great sadness that we report the recent passing of another member of the Society, **Lyn James**.

All members who support the Society are greatly appreciated and Lyn was one such person.

We send our sincere condolences to the family and wish them good luck and health in the future.