



Newsletter 21 – April 2013

Adelina Patti Special

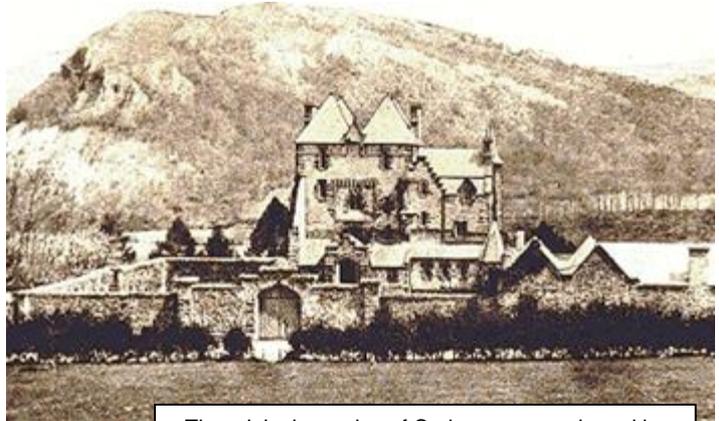
Welcome to our Newsletter. We invite you to contribute articles, tips, questions and answers for others to share. Feedback is always welcome. Have you missed an edition? Read the archived Newsletters on our website.

April Meeting Review

As always the meeting was in two sections

- **Helen Whyte** – Helen introduced the first in a new series of short talks on using parish records. In today's talk, she explained the meaning (in Britain) of the term parish, and the origins of parish registers in the 16th century.

- **Len Ley: Madame Patti (1843-1919)** – Len paid us a return visit, this time to talk about the premier opera singer of the Victorian period, Adelina Patti. For the last 40 years of her life, she lived at the gentleman's residence which she bought and transformed into a castle at Craig-y-nos in Breconshire's Upper Tawe Valley. Len has met with and interviewed a variety of people who had connections with Patti in one way or another. As a result, he has developed a great respect and admiration for the lady who was regarded as the Queen of Song and the original 'Queen of Hearts'. His unscripted talk was enjoyed by a packed house – reminiscent of the packed houses to which Patti sang. He spoke of her public life as a performer, but also of her time at Craig-y-nos and the wonderful relationship she enjoyed, not only with her staff but also with the local community to whom she was Lady Bountiful.



The original mansion of Craig-y-nos, purchased by Adelina Patti, in 1878.

Len's history of Craig-y-nos and Adelina Patti can also be read on the Powys Archive webpage at: <http://history.powys.org.uk/history/ystrad/craig1.html>

Remember that both sections of the meeting can be accessed in audio and visual format on our website.

Adelina Patti – A Breconshire Resident from 1878-1919

It is 170 years since the birth of Adela Juana Maria Patti (known as Adelina) in February 1843 to her operatic parents, Salvatore from Sicily and Caterina from Rome. She was born in Italy while they were on tour. I will not rehearse her life story here, since there are very good books and websites available for that purpose. It is important, however, to highlight her legacy as a resident of Breconshire for the last 40 years of her life and to record that of all the places where she toured and lived, her heart was in Craig-y-nos (Rock of the Night).

Adelina was particularly drawn to the people of this area and her work for local charities was recognised officially, when in May 1897, she was made the first female Honorary Burgess of Brecon town. Her portrait hangs in the Council Chamber of the Guildhall in Brecon and can be seen on the BBC-Your Paintings website at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/adelina-patti-18431919-178222>

At a lavish ceremony, usually reserved for royal visitors, she was also presented with a casket made of oak from an old beam taken from St John's Priory Church. Inside the casket was the scroll which entitled her to the Freedom of Brecon. She later stated "*Amongst the gifts I am proudest of is the splendid casket containing the freedom of the city (sic) of Brecon. I love Wales and I love the Welsh people and this is the tangible reminder that this love I have borne them for so many years is returned.*"

Patti gave annual charity concerts for the poor of Brecon, Ystradgynlais, Ystalyfera, and other places. Her generosity made her loved and admired, and she would regularly send to an ailing resident of the Craig-y-Nos area a basket of fruit picked from her own fruit trees, many of which were exotic and grown in her Winter Garden. Anecdotes of her generosity were recounted by the older members of the vicinity for decades following her death.

The religious ceremony of her second marriage (to Ernest Nicolini) was performed at St Cynog's Church, Ystradgynlais in 1886, and of her third marriage (to Baron Rolf Cederstrom) at St Michael's Roman Catholic Church, Brecon in 1899.

The lavishness of her marriage to Nicolini is interesting, not only for the official guests but also for the local population. The residents of the villages in the Upper Tawe Valley decorated their villages with banners and garlands. In turn, Patti provided refreshments for 3,000 local children, and new clothes for the 300 poorest of them. Thousands of locals turned out to line the route between Craig-y-nos and the church at Ystradgynlais, seven miles away. The school children who sang at the wedding were rewarded with refreshments after the ceremony. That evening, "tons of fresh meat, wagonloads of white bread and pastry and huge casks of strong beer" were made available for the neighbours around Craig-y-nos. That night, there were fireworks and the firing of cannons in the grounds of the castle, whilst on a nearby mountain top, a huge bonfire, visible for miles, was lit by locals to mark the occasion.

Her decision to marry Cederstrom in Brecon led to the Borough of Brecon declaring a municipal holiday. *The Brecon County Times* on 27th January 1899 expressed the satisfaction of the inhabitants of Brecon with these plans, "not only for the incomparable songstress that she is, but for the many kindnesses she has showered upon us." Brecon was "stirred to its foundations" with shields, banners, flags, arches, streamers and bunting decorating the town and thousands lined the route from Brecon station to the church in Wheat Street. The wedding party and the guests had arrived by special train and Patti would have had her own Pullman carriage. After a short ceremony, the wedding party departed in similar fashion.

Patti's relationship with her neighbours is demonstrated in a number of anecdotes. Encountering a tramp on the road near Craig-y-nos, Patti told him to go to the door of the castle kitchens to be fed.

Christmas for the children of the locality was a special time during Patti's residency there. It was one time in the year when she insisted on being in residence at Craig-y-nos, "or the children would think that evil days had fallen upon them." She provided refreshments for hundreds of children in the area. In a letter to her nephew, Alfredo Barili, in 1892, she wrote that she had provided tea for over 3,000 children and "Yesterday I gave my annual distribution of money to all the poor old people of the district – it was a most touching sight and everyone, myself included, cried."

Christmas for the staff at Craig-y-nos was also pleasant. Patti would join the servants in their hall to share champagne and sing Christmas songs. In her theatre on Christmas evening, there would be a staff dance, at which Patti would dance with the chef, butler and footman whilst her husband danced with the senior domestic females. Everyone would be given Christmas gifts; according to Ethel Rosate-Lunn "cheques and jewellery for the house steward and the personal maids, costume lengths for the head maids and... the under maids."

By now the lavish lifestyle which she had enjoyed with Nicolini was long gone. At its height, Craig-y-nos employed seventy indoor and outdoor staff, but by the time Ethel Rosate-Lunn joined the staff as laundry maid, in 1909, she said that there were 18 indoor members – "the house steward and his wife, Madame Patti's two personal maids, three housemaids, three laundry maids, chef, three kitchen maids, butler/valet, two foot-men, and an odd job man." During WW1, of course, the male servants had to go to



The opening night of the Theatre, in 1891, which Patti added to the original mansion.

war and a skeleton staff provided the labour needed to grow the vegetables, tend the fruit trees, and look after the grounds and the Winter Garden (now the Patti Pavilion in Swansea).

When a member of her staff retired, he or she would receive a pension and those with no alternative accommodation were given a room at the castle for the rest of their days.

On her death, her servants were generously rewarded: those who had worked for her for two years prior to her death received with one year's wages, while more senior and long service staff were left specific amounts of money.

There is much more to read about Adelina Patti and her wonderfully furnished home at Craig-y-nos. She was certainly a diva but I think that at Craig-y-nos, her "*Home Sweet Home*", she was able to achieve the home life she had always craved and although she was childless, her love of children and her genuine care for others was shown in the life she led at Craig-y-nos.

Booklist and Resources

- Cone, John Frederick "*Adelina Patti Queen of Hearts*" Amadeus Press 1992 ISBN0-931340-60-8
- Klein, Herman "*The Reign of Patti*" Century, New York 1920 – available on the internet as a free download
- Hibbert, Tony "*Fresh Flowers for M'Lady*" Fineleaf 2011 ISBN 978-1-907741-02-9
- Brinn, David "*Adelina Patti a brief account of her life*" Brecon Beacons National Park 1988
- Briwnat Jones, Gwyn "*Craig y nos, Adelina Patti's Home Sweet Home*" Gomer Press 2004 ISBN 1 84323 358 4
- Rosate-Lunn, Ethel "My Recollections of Madame Patti" *Brycheiniog* Volume V11 pages 179-186 – available to read at the National Library of Wales:
<http://welshjournals.llgc.org.uk/browse/listissues/llgc-id:1380216>

Other webpages

- <http://www.jlb2011.co.uk/walespic/archive/980203.htm>
- <http://www.craigynoscastle.com/history.htm>
- <http://history.powys.org.uk/history/ystrad/craig1.html>
- <http://www.youtube.com/> – search for "Adelina Patti" and listen to the recordings of her voice made in the early 1900s. Remember that she was past her prime by this time and her high notes had gone, but the power is still there in her mid-range voice.
- <https://www.google.co.uk/> – use Google Images to search for "Adelina Patti" and "Craig-y-nos", you will see some wonderful images of her and of Craig-y-nos at various times in its history.

NEXT MEETING

Date and time: Wednesday, 1st May 2013 at 2.00pm

Venue: Brecon Cathedral – meet inside the Cathedral **before** 2:00pm

Subject: Brecon Cathedral: A guided tour of the Cathedral by the Cathedral Staff

NOTE: This meeting is *not* at Brecon Library

BLFHS WEBSITE: Our website address: www.blfhs.co.uk

CONTACT DETAILS:

If you wish to respond to or comment on an item in this newsletter, or contribute to the next newsletter or to our website, please contact our Chairperson:

Hilary Williams

Maesycoed, 39 Camden Road, Brecon LD3 7RT

Tel: 01874 624432 E-mail: chair@blfhs.co.uk