

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
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There is now light at the end of this very long tunnel of Covid-19. I hope you are able to visit friends and family more.

What is there in store here? We continue our series of the Cynon Valley Italians with the story of the Servini family and the battle that the Ferrari brothers had over their farm at Cwmbach.

We look at the late David Davies, Wales's oldest man from Aberdare, the origins of cricket in the valley, the regeneration of Mountain Ash Town Hall and a brave Cynon Valley family who started a laundry in West Africa!

A veritable miscellany. Happy Reading!

THE SERVINI FAMILY



Marcello Servini and Angela Marengi



Marcello with all his children. Giacomo is 5th from the right of the top row. Fredrick is 4th from the right of the bottom row. Marcello is in the centre.

Marcello Servini (1884–1970) came from a hamlet called Servini, a village near Bardi in northern Italy. He was a small landowner there and came to South Wales in 1902 to seek his fortune because he was told that the miners were paid in gold sovereigns for their hard work! He came as a blacksmith to the Rhondda Valley where he worked in Ferndale colliery and later as a coal miner in Cwmaman, and then at a local tinsplate works. He was an entrepreneur: saving his wages to open a wholesale frying oil and fish business in Aberaman where he opened a cafe near the Blaengwawr Inn and subsequently in 30 Lewis Street, while living down the road at No.22.

He later expanded to Aberdare where he opened two more cafés. There is still one at 2 Cardiff Street, Aberdare which was opened in 1934.

The other shop is now Giovanni's Fish Shop on the corner of Victoria Square and was known as The Dairy.

He also opened up a gym in Aberaman. He married Angela Marengi and had nine children: Giacomo, Tino, Frederick, Lino, Rosie, Judith, Jo, Aldo and Irene.

Giacomo (James) (1908–1996) was the eldest son and was known as Mino. He was educated at Ruskin College, Oxford but because of problems in the family business, he was called home before he could finish his studies. He was not an entrepreneur like his father but he carried on the business. He married Maria Rabaiotti and they had six children: three boys and three girls: Angela, Adrian, Gabriel, Robert, Rita and Sandra.

Before the war he bought a farm in Redwick near Newport. James was interned for six months at the start of the war but later when he was freed, he looked after Italian POWs, which was rather ironic! A female cousin came to visit Maria, she met Guiglielmo a POW; they married after the war and went back to Bardi where he became the bank manager there!



Servini's Café, Cardiff Street

Frederick Servini (1918–2007)

One of Giacomo's sons was Frederick who was one of nine children. He returned to his family's original home at Bardi at an early age. But his mother Angela died when he was 15 and he was faced with a tough choice — continue his education in Italy or go back to Wales to join the family business. He chose the latter, joining the business — Servini's café in Aberdare town centre in 1934, and never looked back. At first, he ran the café with four of his brothers, but they gradually left the business. In 1969 his wife Caterina, known as Rina, joined him and they both managed the cafe until 1984 when they retired and left it to their children Marino and Francis.

Mrs Servini said her husband never complained about his health. He would wander around the town even though he had cancer and people would be surprised to hear that he was so ill because he was so cheerful. Frederick battled with lung cancer but died aged 88 on 27th May 2007.

The current owner is Nick Servini's cousin Marino. He said he did not plan to run the shop and had done a course in hotel management before his father put pressure on him as he approached retirement. He has now put the business up for sale as his children have gone into different careers.

Sources: "Why café culture has a rich Italian flavour in Wales," by Nick Servini, BBC website, 12 Feb 2020, and www.servinis.com

I would like to thank Robert Servini, one of Giacomo's sons for the information about his father & grandfather.

The Battle of Pant Farm: The Ferrari Brothers v. Aberdare Council

In 1944, the Ferrari brothers Victor & Paul bought Pantygerdinen Farm of 340 acres for £3000 and spent £8,000 improving it including building a new concrete silage pit. They also constructed a road 600 yards long from the main road to the farmyard, reclaimed 25 acres of mountain land, and fenced and drained the whole area. It was one of the most productive farms in Glamorgan in the early 1950s.



Pant Farm, Cwmbach

In September 1953, Aberdare Council wished to acquire 53 acres including the best of the land including the farmhouse and buildings to build houses. Consequently, the heart of the farm, into which the brothers had put 10 years of work, would be wiped out. The council had rejected 17 alternative sites offered as being unsuitable but wanted to acquire Pant Farm for housing.

The National Farmers Union and members of the Country Landowners Association had rallied to the defence of the brothers because they thought it would sabotage such a valuable food potential; these were still the days of food rationing. It produced 50 to 60 gallons of T.T. milk daily and grew a large proportion of the feeding stuff required by the stock.

In December of 1953, there was an Inquiry at Aberdare about the council's application for compulsory purchase of the farm. Mr Roderic Bowen, QC, MP, argued that the farm was a model one and it was impossible to exaggerate its productive value. If the council had to take agricultural land, they should take the least productive. The brothers lost the case but they appealed to the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

In July 1954, the Minister had refused to confirm the compulsory order which the council had served, so the Ferrari brothers breathed a sigh of relief — but the council were determined to fight on.

The council appealed and the case went to the High Court which, I believe, the Ferrari brothers won.

Maybe Victor, his wife Rosa, Paul and his wife Maria felt they could not hold out much longer and in the end around 1960, they sold their farm and land (I believe) to Drury Estates (Southern) of Kettering, when the present housing estate was built. I have to thank Haydn Williams who looked through the title deeds of a friend's house to find this information. Some people have thought that Haydn Harries, an Aberdare financier, bought the farm and its land on behalf of Landare Estates (Ltd).

I am not sure about the information in the previous paragraph. If any member knows more about this, I would be very pleased to hear from them.

Sources: *Western Mail*, 12 September & 24 October 1953; and *Aberdare Leader*, 24 July 1954.

David Davies: Wales's Oldest Man

In 1995 when David Davies was 108, he was confirmed as Britain's oldest man by the Guinness Book of Records. He was also the oldest surviving member of the Welch Regiment who fought in World War 1 and the oldest World War 1 veteran. He lived most of his life in Aberdare.

His life started in a simple fashion on 18 August 1886 he was born on a farm called "Y Wern" at Wern Rhiwonen outside Lampeter, Cardiganshire. He had three brothers and three sisters and the family were Welsh speaking. His school was three miles away but he walked there every day. When David grew up, he did not want to stay on the farm so at the age of 18 the family sent him to work with an uncle in London who owned a dairy. London was a culture shock for a young man from the country and he was amazed to see the crowds going to work each day and said it was as if they were going to a Gymanfa Ganu!

After two years he returned home and was told by a friend of a job in Aberdare Labour Exchange but when he arrived, the job had gone. He was employed in Mr John Isaac's grocery shop in Victoria Square, (where Ferrari's was). After three happy years there, he was offered a job as a book-keeper with Joshua Davies and Son, Wholesale Provision merchants with premises at Aberdare High Level Railway Station.



David Davies with his daughter Haulwen and son Oswald

In later years, David worked for J.D. Price, Merthyr Tydfil. This was another provision business. He worked as a travelling representative conducting all his work using trains and buses as he didn't want to drive, although the firm wanted to give him a car.

He became a member (later he would become a senior deacon) of Bethania Calvinistic Methodist Church, Aberdare and there met his future wife Mabel Saunders-Morgan, the daughter of a master tailor who had a shop in Monk Street, and who was a tailor to the Llewellyn's of Bwllfa. They married and had a daughter named Mattie, (Martha).

In 1915, when he was 28, David enlisted in the army and joined the recently formed Welch Regiment. He was a Sergeant in a Lewis Gunner detachment and fought at the Battles of the Somme, Third Ypres participating in the assault of Pilckem Ridge and at Passchendaele. He was grateful to survive having been wounded three times. When his old regiment wanted to take him back to France to see the Welsh memorial at Mametz Wood, he refused saying: "I NEVER WANT TO SET FOOT IN THAT PLACE AGAIN". He did however have a fund of lighthearted stories he would relate about his time in the army.

When released from hospital at the end of the war he returned home to his wife at 22 Elizabeth Street, Aberdare. Unfortunately, their daughter Mattie had died, aged 10 months, whilst David was away. He returned to working for Joshua Davies.

Later, Mr & Mrs Davies had a son Oswald, born in 1920 and a daughter Haulwen, born in 1921.

Mr. Davies was interested in amateur dramatics and was a member of the Little Theatre. He would take part in their Welsh language plays. He read the *Welsh Gazette*, *Y Cymro* and was the Secretary of the Ceredigion Society whose headquarters was at the Café Mona, the proprietor D. Rees Jones being a "Cardi". At one time there were 126 members from Abercynon to Resolven. He was also a past president of the local Cymrodorion. He was also a member of the Loyal Order of the Moose.

When World War 2 started, Mr Davies was 53, so he joined the local Special Constabulary as a sergeant. Oswald his son enlisted in the army and served in Norway and the Far East.

Mrs Davies died in 1969 aged 78. Mr Davies lived alone at 2, Gordon Villas, Cwmbach Road supported by his daughter Haulwen. Unfortunately his son Oswald had died aged 66.

At a ceremony outside Aberdare Library, his old regiment (the Welch) came to honour him with a full March Past, led by the Regimental Goat. It was an impressive event and Mr Davies loved it. The ceremony was followed by a regimental dinner held in a hall in the Sobell Sports Centre, which had been decorated with large maps showing areas where his regiment had seen action.

The BBC would come on his birthday and ask the age-old question, "To what do you attribute your long life?" He would reply with two things, one of which was a nightly tot of whiskey and no one can remember the other!

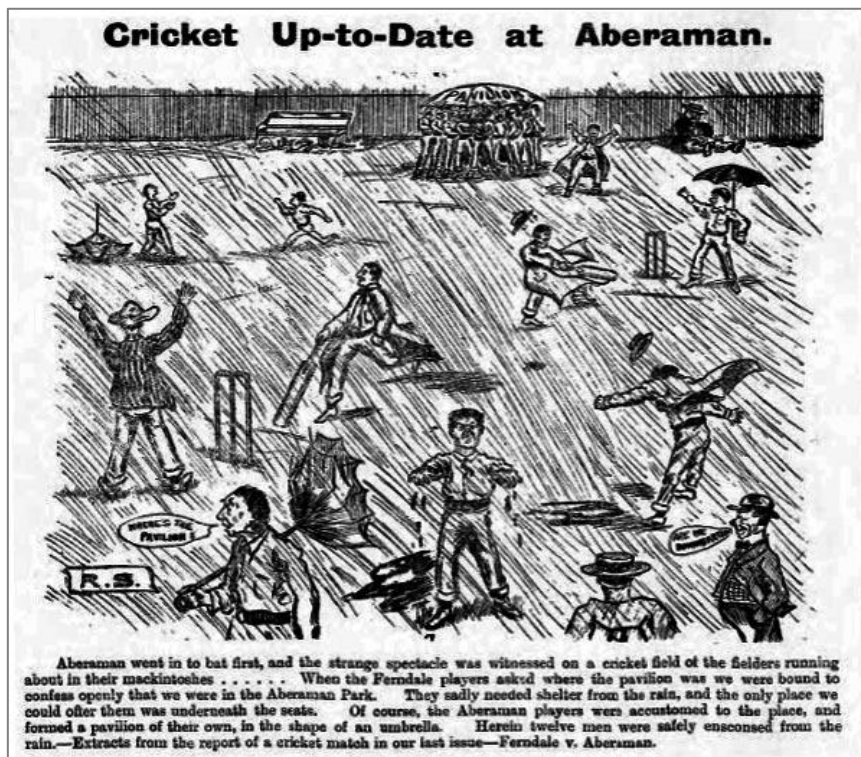
Aged 100, he was still active and sprightly. He did his own shopping and was often seen around Aberdare, but a year later, he became less active and decided to go into a nursing home, where he became the first resident of the newly built Beeches Nursing Home in Aberdare.

Wales's oldest man David Davies died peacefully in his sleep on 24th April 1995 at the age of 108 years, 8 months and 6 days. He had lived a full and varied life.

I would like to thank Mr Davies's daughter, Haulwen, who herself is a sprightly 99-year-old, for much of this information.

Further information was extracted from the *Cynon Valley Leader* of 21 August 1986 and 4 May 1995.

The Origins of cricket in the Cynon Valley



Aberaman Cricket Club playing Ferndale in the rain
A Reuben Silverman cartoon, *Aberdare Leader*, 25th July 1908

The father and founder of cricket in this valley was a Mr Richard Palmer Larke landlord of the Bruce Arms, Bute Street, Aberdare, who founded the Aberdare Cricket Club sometime in the late 1840s to early 1851.

The first recorded match took place when Aberdare played Dowlais away, which was a disaster for Aberdare as they lost by 8 wickets. In their two innings, there were 6 ducks (6 players scored no runs) and only one player scored more than 10 runs!! The Dowlais club did not play much better, no player scored more than 10 runs but the Aberdare bowling was poor: in the two innings, they gave Dowlais 32 runs, 22 wides and 10 byes.

Source: *Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian*, 23 August 1851

In their second recorded match, Aberdare fared no better losing to Aberaman cricket club whose captain was R.C. Partridge.

W.H. Stephens and T. Hollier were Aberaman's best batsmen and helped them to win by 31 runs. P. Jones was Aberdare's best player scoring 21 runs but all the others scored less than 10 and there were 7 ducks in the Aberdare's two innings.

Source: *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 August 1854

In their return match a week later, Aberdare played better, their founder scored 11 and 21 in his two innings, but even he could not stop Aberaman winning by four wickets. The best part of the match for Aberdare was a "very excellent repast", provided for both teams by their founder, which made their losing seem not so important!

A year later Aberdare's winding-up match in October was not played against Dowlais or Aberaman, they probably did not want to lose again but they played against themselves!:

"On Thursday last, the winding up match of the season took place between the members of the Aberdare Cricket Club, in a field near the Canal Head, kindly lent for the occasion by Mr Fothergill. The match was between the "Marrieds" and "Singles." The day was, fortunately, a fine one, and a very large assemblage of spectators were upon the ground. The match, which was one of the most interesting and exciting ever played at Aberdare, resulted in the defeat of the "Marrieds" by the "Singles," by one wicket. In the evening, in celebration of the match, the whole body of cricketers, with their friends, numbering together between sixty and seventy of the most respectable inhabitants and tradesmen of the town, sat down to a dinner at the Bruce's Arms, which could not have been surpassed, and which reflected very great credit upon the worthy host and hostess, Mr and Mrs Larke. Mr John Jenkins, surveyor, was called to the chair, and Mr Godfrey occupied the vice chair, each fulfilling their respective duties most admirably, and adding greatly to the harmony of the evening. After the usual loyal and patriotic toasts, the party broke up at about three o'clock on Friday morning." [Their feasting was probably better than their batting! Ed.]

Source: *Merthyr Telegraph*, 6 October 1855.

A year later, their closing match ended in another great feast:

"ABERDARE CRICKET CLUB – We have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the admirable mode in which our Aberdare friends wind up their season's amusements. On Wednesday last the cricketers of Aberdare joined by the Aberaman and Merthyr clubs played their closing match for this year, the field was numerously attended, and

the play was superb.

In the evening, an excellent repast was provided for them at the Queen's Hotel, Aberdare by the worthy host Mr E. Watkins, and a better dinner cricketers never yet sat down to. Our worthy friend and townsman Mr Gawn filled the chair, with Mr William Williams, of Gadlys, the vice-chair. Toast, song and sentiment were the order of the evening. We cannot dismiss this year's club without paying tribute to its gentlemanlike conduct, nor can we pass over without mention the name of Mr R.P. Larke, the father and founder of the club in this district. We trust again to obtain a re-union of the Aberdare, Aberaman and Merthyr clubs."

Source: *Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian*, 24 October 1857

Aberdare's performance would improve so much that at the Aberaman cricket ground they "beat the Cardiff club by five wickets to spare. The playing was good on both sides, and the day being remarkably fine, there were a large number of spectators. The Aberaman band was in attendance on the field, and contributed much to enliven the day's proceedings."

Source: *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 21 July 1855.

Cricket would soon have an opponent: A Volunteer Rifle Corps. A local Corps was formed in 1859 in Aberdare.

Cricket in Aberdare in the very early 1860s took a downturn. A reader wrote in *The Cardiff Times* of 12 May 1860:

"Can any of our Aberdare readers inform us what is the reason that this old English game has not been revived at Aberdare this season? Where are Messrs. Larke and Gabriel? (Mr Larke gave up the Bruce Arms in February, 1857 and may have then have left the cricket club.) We hope that the exciting and patriotic attractions of the drill have not altogether weaned them away from it"

The Volunteer Rifle Corps seemed to be a more attractive activity than hitting a ball with a bat. There was a brief renaissance the following year when there was a match in early July 1861 between Aberdare and Mountain Ash Veterans which Aberdare won "totally unexpectedly". Mr Meredith Llewellyn was praised for, "the trouble he has taken in the (re)formation of this very promising club." But it did last as the following letter shows:

CRICKET. To THE EDITOR OF THE "ABERDARE TIMES." Sir,—I rejoice to find that our Aberdare Volunteers have not entirely driven our bats, balls, &c., to the British Museum, as I see that Mill Street intends taking a show this summer. I must say that Aberdare is very lazy in this matter; why have we not our Cricket Club as well as other important towns which can boast of their Volunteer Corps? I cannot see that a Cricket Club is incompatible with a Rifle Corps in Aberdare more than in other places. It seems as if the Rifle Corps has made a corpse of the noble game of Cricket, but if you ask why, I doubt not but that you will be puzzled to answer the question. The Volunteer Corps has not rifled Aberdare of all its young men, as is sufficiently proved by the numbers who are seen pacing the streets every evening for the want of some more recreative enjoyment. Then why not form an A.C.C. at once? Could not a meeting be called at some convenient place in Aberdare, and members be enrolled then and there. I am a comparative stranger and therefore could exercise but little influence in favour of such a movement, but still I will join heart and hand in any suggestion which has for its object the establishment of an Aberdare Cricket Club.

I am, yours obediently, 'LILLYWHITE'

Source: *Aberdare Times*, 10 May 1862.

Lillywhite's suggestion bore fruit and in that year a meeting was held at the Stag Hotel, Mill Street, to establish a Trecynon Cricket Club.

In August 1864, a match was played between Aberdare and Rhymney away, Rhymney winning by 18 runs. But Aberdare would now start winning. In the return match on their home soil, they beat Rhymney by an innings!

The year following in June they would again win by an innings, this time by beating Merthyr. They were now on the up and up!!

Cricket grew greatly in popularity in the valley so by the end of the century there were 23 cricket clubs in Aberdare alone!

Mr Larke and all his players would be aghast and turn in their graves at English cricket chiefs today now wishing to replace the word "wickets" with "outs" and replacing the word "batsmen" with the word "batters". It may be a gender neutral word but as one commentator has said "batters is a repellent term that reminds people of a fish and chip shop!"

Aberdare Steam Laundry



Geoffrey Evans, our previous editor, kindly wrote an article about this laundry situated in Abernant in the *Hanes* Autumn issue of 2015. The last two sentences of the article from the *Western Mail* of 11 March 1892 showed a society that kept class distinctions:

After it was formally opened, in the evening a dinner took place at the Boot Hotel, under the presidency of Mr David Davies, J.P., the catering of Host Hughes being most satisfactory. The whole of the employees were also entertained at the Cardiff Castle Coffee Tavern. [The workers had coffee and biscuits while the "crachach" (nobs) had a 3-course meal! Ed.]


In the *Aberdare Times* of 10 September 1892, Jane Austin, [not The Jane Austen! Ed.] was summoned for ten shillings' damage caused by absenting herself from work there. Jane left because she said that "all the other girls were on to her on Tuesday

and Wednesday and she would not take it". The manageress said, "There were 28 girls employed and it was a difficult thing to manage them!" The judge fined Jane ten shillings.

New information about the laundry has come to light thanks to Mr Douglas Ellson, who has very kindly sent me some fascinating documents.

The first one is an agreement about John Oakley Wicks being appointed the manager of the steam laundry on 19 July 1905.

The second one is rather amazing as it is an indenture dated 7 January 1907, appointing John Wicks as the manager of the West African Power Laundries Ltd in Sierra Leone. His wife Amy would be the manageress and his two daughters Dorothy & Lucy would be their assistants. One cannot be impressed by their great adventurous spirit to leave Aberdare and go to the fever-ridden Sierra Leone!



An Agreement made this 19th day of July One thousand nine hundred and five Between The Aberdare Valley Steam Laundry Company Limited of Aberdare in the County of Glamorgan hereinafter called the company of the one part and John Oakley Wicks of the Laundry House Aberdare aforesaid Laundryman hereinafter called the manager of the other part

Dated 7th January 1907

The West African Power Laundries Limited
and
M^r J O Wicks & others

Agreement
for
services to be rendered

THIS INDENTURE made the seventh day of January 1907 between THE WEST AFRICAN POWER LAUNDRIES LIMITED of 37 Monsell Road Finsbury Park in the County of Middlesex (hereinafter called "the Company") of the one part and John Oakley Wicks of Laundry Cottage Abernant Road Aberdare in the County of Glamorgan Amy Beatrice Wicks the wife of the said John Oakley Wicks of the same address and Dorothy Margaret Beatrice Wicks and Lucy Lillian Rose Wicks daughters of the said John Oakley Wicks of the same address of the other part

The Refurbishment of Mountain Ash Town Hall.



Built in 1904 at a cost of £5,000 the building served as the HQ of Mountain Ash Urban District Council. It is now owned by RCT County Borough Council who are in the process of redeveloping it into a vibrant co-working hub, which will provide flexible workspace for new businesses. Jeremy Morgan and I went to see how the work was progressing and were impressed that the company carrying out the refurbishment were taking great care keeping the original features and very sympathetically improving them, for example the polishing of the wooden floor of the upper room, which was where the MAUDC committee meetings were held.



The beautiful ceiling of the committee room

Local History Books

- Lord Ted Rowlands has published a full-length biography entitled "Revolution and Reform: The life and times of Josiah John Guest, Ironmaster and Member of Parliament 1785–1852". He was the great ironmaster of the Dowlais Ironworks, and M.P. for Merthyr & Aberdare. Also, he was the main promoter and the founder chairman of the Taff Vale Railway, which helped greatly to develop the industries of Merthyr & the Cynon Valley. It is priced £10 and Jeremy Morgan, our Secretary will take orders, email: jeremymorgan_hissoc@outlook.com
- Wales is justly famous for its choirs. Dean Powell has written the book "A Royal Choir for Wales". It explores the role that conductor Griffith Rhys Jones, "Caradog", played when his 400 strong Choral Union triumphed at the Crystal Palace. In addition, it describes in great detail two great Rhondda choirs: The Royal Welsh Choir and the neighbouring Rhondda Glee Society who battled each other in gigantic musical contests. Priced £12.99, it is available by contacting the author, email: dean@llantrisant.net

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge RCT Libraries for the reproduction of the photographs of Servini's café, Mountain Ash Town Hall, Aberdare Laundry and Pant Farm; and Reach plc for the reproduction of the Silverman cartoon of the Aberaman cricket match.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome.

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