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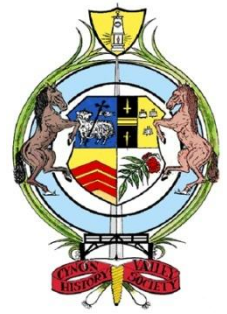
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NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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We wish you all a very Happy, Healthy 2021. Yes 2020 was a very hard year for all of you but now with the roll-out of vaccines this year life should in time slowly get back to some degree of normality.

To take your mind off the sad news we have fascinating articles by two of our 90-year young lady members and an extensive review of a biography of a famous local female nonagenarian. We continue our series about the heroic Aberdare Italians of WW2 and an incredibly brave Polish Aberdarian and finally we look at two men who helped to make this valley a better and safer place who have sadly recently died: A Councillor and a Detective.

Happy Reading!

My memories of Aberdare Girls' Grammar School

by Celia Thomas

I entered the school in September 1942. The school motto was "Gwell Dysg Na Golud" which we wore on our hats and blazers.

The ethos of our school was very high. We were expected to behave well and we did. Minor misdemeanours were rare and these were punished with order marks for lateness, untidiness or rudeness, (heaven forbid!!). The names of the offenders would be read out after prayers which were taken by our headmistress Miss Dorothy Graham, which was the most effective punishment of all.

Now I come to the teachers who taught me. They were all well-qualified, experienced and dedicated women. I remember the three Miss Rees's: Miss Annie Rees, who taught me Welsh who was always smiling; Miss Dorothy Rees taught us French which I enjoyed very much and Miss Winifred Rees was the English teacher, a very handsome woman who used to throw chalk at inattentive pupils.

My Music and Art teacher was Miss Walters and I was hopeless in both subjects. Miss Chapell taught me Mathematics, at least she tried to; I could do arithmetic but algebra and geometry were beyond my comprehension. I was never good at science either where my teacher was Miss Greenland. The only chemical formula I can remember is H₂O for water. The poor lady had a hard job teaching me!

I was luckier when it came to Latin. I liked the language and Miss Sharpe taught me so well.

My favourite teacher, who was a very special person in my life, I have kept till last. She was Miss Constance Barnes, who shared our lessons with Miss Winifred Rees. She taught us the structure of language and the delights of literature. She gave me a love of poetry

which, in my later years, spurred me to write my own. I owe her a great deal.

There were plenty of activities in our school: regular visits from the Cardiff Trio led by Patrick Piggot, talks on the dangers of alcohol and dire warnings against smoking. On one momentous occasion Dame Sybil Thorndike, one of the greatest actresses of her day, came to our school. She thrilled us with her reading of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, "Here's the smell of blood still, not all the perfumes of Arabia can sweeten this little hand".

In sport our girls competed in hockey, tennis and netball matches and often won. Once a year in May we held a Sports' Day when we performed a mass drill.

On alternate years we held an eisteddfod followed by a school play produced by Miss Winifred Rees and Miss Constance Barnes. I will remember "Pride and Prejudice" because my cousin, Denise Jones, took the part of Mr Bingley.

My years at the Girls' School were very happy and they ensured that I would lead a richer, more fulfilling life. For this I will always be very grateful.

The Valleys House: 3 David Street, Cwmdare by Hazel Hartland

(With additional material by the editor)



You have probably all been to St Fagan's Folk Museum outside Cardiff which has six houses that were re-erected from Rhydycar, Merthyr Tydfil, which illustrate different periods: 1805 to 1985. It is good to know that the Cynon Valley still has one house which



was built in 1854 which has remained unaltered since then, and one day you will be able to visit it. It is 3, David Street, Cwmdare near to the Dare Valley Country Park and is now owned by CADW. Since 1854 many miners' families have lived in it. In 1871 William Thomas, his wife Bridget and five children lived in it, the oldest Margaret, aged 17 was a dressmaker. William and many other miners probably frequented the Colliers Arms, built in 1853, which was just a few seconds walk in the adjoining street: James Street.

"My family emanated from Somerset where my grandfather worked in Clarks shoe factory in Street. Come the First World War the owners of the factory, who were Quakers and Pacifists, refused to make boots for the army so they closed the factory resulting in the

redundant workers having to seek work elsewhere, hence the move to Wales where there was work in the coal mines. I cannot imagine the effects on my grandfather, in particular on the change of working in the mines from working at a clean factory bench, not to mention the family having to adapt to a very different way of life in south Wales as it must have been for "newcomers". Had they remained in Street, after leaving school my mother would have worked in Clarks factory, as was customary. However, in Wales the only option for her was to be sent out to do washing for other families although she begged to be allowed to train as a nurse.

I was born in the Depression in 1930 and lived with my parents in the Aberaman area. At the age of three, I was left to live with my grandparents: George and Fanny Marsh in 3, David Street, Cwmdare, while my parents moved to London to find work and somewhere to live where I would have joined them. But, come the Second World War, all children were evacuated from London so I remained with my grandparents in Cwmdare.

At 15 years of age I attended Marshalls Secretarial School to learn shorthand, typing and book-keeping, my mother decreeing I was to have a better future than she was given. From Marshalls I was engaged as a secretary to the Office Manager of Purma Cameras Ltd who moved from Leamington Spa to the Rhigos Industrial Estate. The Manager was Frank Brock of the Brocks Fireworks family. The work experience there served me well for the rest of my career. After two and a half years I moved to London and then worked in Germany for two and a half years returning to London where I now live—plus Cwmdare!"



In 2012 CADW bought the house from Hazel because of its uniqueness, as it has remained almost completely unaltered inside and out since the time it was originally built. What makes it special is that it is the only one in that street, and in the valley, that has retained its original character. Its rubble walls have not been rendered over, and its ash windows have not

been replaced. The main living room still has the original fireplace dated 1854 and the winding stone chimney staircase. It is proposed to undertake research into its history and past occupants.

For the last 8 years many repairs and much conservation work has been carried out on the house. There is no date yet when it will be open to the public.

The Heroic Aberdare Italians Part 2



Tired of the gnat-like annoyance of Bardi's pro-British activities and the partisans sabotaging their supply lines, the Germans came on 17th July 1944 to vent their spite on this irascible town. First, they bombed Bardi for an hour. Everyone went and hid in the fields round the town. Amazingly only one person was injured and that was a wife of a Fascist! Then 15,000 Germans moved up the road in light tanks and lorries firing machine guns and throwing small bombs. To safeguard the population, the partisans

retreated to the mountains and white sheets and flags were hung from the houses to show the Germans the guerrillas had gone.

Men and boys hid Mrs Pini's husband (who worked at the Corner Café, Canon Street, Aberdare) with several other men in a tunnel with wood piled over the entrance and just a small pipe to feed in fresh air. They stayed there a month. Others hid under straw in barns, in cellars and many fled to the mountains.

John Franchi, a café owner from Abercarn, aged 23 was on holiday in the area with his father and stepmother Mr and Mrs Jo Franchi who had a café in Penrhiwceiber. John helped dozens of British soldiers to escape and made constant treks to the mountain hideouts taking them food and clothes. He kept two officers for a year in a hut built of wood and mud on a mountainside.

Giorgio Mascherpa, who spent many years in his café in Canon Street, Aberdare had retired to Bardi. German troops swooped on his house, searched it and found a loaded revolver beside a statuette of the late Duke of Windsor. They took him outside and stood him against a wall intending to shoot him. A line of soldiers raised their rifles. "Have you anything to say before you die?" asked the captain. Giorgio aged 70, said: "Only that I wish I could see my four children in Aberdare". The captain waved away the firing squad and Giorgio, dazed, was told to go home. He died a natural death at the age of 85.

Others were not so fortunate. Two priests and seven other Italians who were caught helping the British were shot in a village square as examples.

Sometime later, some of John's family and some other Italians were lined up against a wall before a firing squad. A few seconds before they were going to be shot a courier arrived with the news of the attempt on Hitler's life. On hearing this, the Italians were released, the Germans moved out leaving a garrison of Fascists in Bardi and the outlying villages. But the Fascists were poor fighters and soon the partisans captured the town and the Bardi Taffies turned the town into an escapers' paradise. Yet that was not the end because in January 1945, the Germans came back and many had to hide including Mr Franchi who spent a week in a cellar underneath a cow shed. Miss Rena Strinati, from Cwmaman, said, "There were men hidden in the caves and we couldn't go to give them food because we would have left tracks in the snow".

Some Germans saw the funny side of the Welsh Italians' escape organisation. One searching for Allied escapers, after looking under mattresses and in cupboards, then turned to Mrs Linda Strinati with a grin and said, "What's happened to your lot then? Got fed up and poisoned them?"

Eventually came the Allies liberation, and the brave Italian Taffies were at long last free.

After the war hundreds of letters arrived in Bardi from privates, generals, official bodies in Britain and the Commonwealth thanking the Italian Taffies for their courageous help. In many houses hang framed certificates from General, later Earl Alexander of Tunis, recording his grateful thanks. One of the Aberdare Italians who received a certificate was Angelo Ferrari (brother of Victor Ferrari) who had done courageous work helping Allied soldiers to escape. He had been on holiday in Italy when the war broke out. He did all in his power to help British servicemen.

Britain and its Allies owed a great debt of gratitude to these heroic Welsh Italians who risked their lives to help their soldiers.

Acknowledgement: I have used articles by Yvonne Thomas from the South Wales Echo, 27-29th May 1964 of which I am very grateful.

[I am sure many of you have memories about the Italian families/cafes in our valley. I would be most interested to hear about them. Ed.]

Councillor Alby Davies M.B.E.

"You've given birth to a little fighter, Mrs Davies", declared the midwife when Alby Davies was born in 1933. Her words would ring very true, Alby Davies fought all his life. His early days were spent at Carnetown Infants and Junior School. He was then 10 years of age when he started to box with Dai Dower (who went on become British Flyweight Champion) and he had a few friendly battles with him in his backyard.



Alby Davies (2013)

In 1945, Alby won the British Schoolboy Championship at the weight of five stone seven pounds. Winning the championship was not without its trials as Alby recalled. "When we arrived at the YMCA where we were staying, Dai had to eat my dinner because he had great difficulty making up his weight. I was starving and parched but I had to watch.

Dai was on first and he won. When he came off, he had an ice cream. When I won my round, I thought I was drying up, I went off to buy an ice cream and they had sold out. It was my biggest disappointment I think I ever had."

Later he won the British Army Cadet Championship no less than three times and the All Star championship. He classed the special moments in his life as those when he delighted his father and brothers by being so successful in boxing that he was presented with a silver globe of the world for the best individual performance at one boxing championship. It was a very special moment.

Then it was on to soccer. He turned professional as a player when he was seventeen-and-a-half-years-old. A Welsh youth team cap followed as did three successful seasons with Newport County. A spell in the army followed where he was a Physical Training instructor but sadly, he lost his form as a player and came back to Abercynon and settled down to life as a miner. Even then Alby showed his sporting skill this time at cricket with the Abercynon Cricket Club. Two professional boxing fights followed when he was 23 but the time had come for other things like marriage. He met his future wife Wendy Wonder at the Empress Ballroom, Abercynon.

His career in politics sprang from his position as Assistant Secretary of the Abercynon Lodge of the NUM. In 1962, he became a councillor for Abercynon, a position that that he held for an impressive 46 years. His political career spanned three councils: he started in Mountain Ash UDC, then in Cynon Valley Borough Council, where he was the Leisure Services Committee chairman for 22 years, then on to Rhondda Cynon Tâf Borough Council. He was Mayor of Cynon Valley in 1981–82 and Mayor of RCT Council in 2004–05.

In the New Year's Honours List for 2003 he was awarded the MBE after 31 years of service to his community. As a committed councillor he found his life very challenging and rewarding. He was a remarkably nice man — always willing to talk and genuinely interested in other people and their lives and problems.

He stepped down from this rewarding position as a Councillor in May 2017 and sadly died in October 2020, aged 87.

Sources : Aberdare Leader 22nd May,1986 and Cynon Valley Leader 18th April,1996.

Jerzy (George) Prygodzicz

Jerzy Prygodzicz was born in 1916 in Lyzszce (pronounced Wish-che) a small village near the Pinsk district in Eastern Poland, now part of Belarus.

Jerzy's father Jacob was a farmer and a well respected member of the community who became the head of the village, (similar to a mayor).

One of six children, aged approximately 23, Jerzy fought first against the Germans when they invaded Poland in 1939. As a member of the Polish cavalry, he was sent into battle against the might of the German army with their tanks and heavy artillery.

Poland was heavily defeated. Troops who survived made their way back to their hometowns only to find that the Russians and Germans had carved up Poland between the two countries (Ribbentrop/Molotov Pact 1939). The Poles thought that Stalin would come to their aid, but the opposite was true.

During the Russian occupation of the east of Poland, Stalin had the intelligentsia and important people rounded up and either executed, sent to prisons or exiled to camps all across Russia. (The infamous incident is the Katyn massacre, part of a series of mass executions of nearly 22,000 Polish military officers and intelligentsia carried out by the Soviet Union, specifically the NKVD in April and May 1940).

Jerzy and his father were sent to prison. The rest of the family were transported in cattle trucks to Siberia.

When Hitler invaded Russia in June 1941, Stalin asked the Polish Government, in exile in London, to allow the Poles to fight with the Russians against the Germans. General Anders fought for the right of Polish prisoners, and those in exile, to have the choice to either fight with the Russians or make their own way across the borders to fight with the Polish II Corps being formed as a body attached to the British 8th Army. Stalin accepted this but only allowed a short period of time for the Poles to get out of Russia. (The family's belief is that Jerzy, by whatever means, including walking, got to Persia (Iran now) to fight with the British army, as did many other Poles). Apparently, there is a cemetery near Tehran for those that died as a result of the journey. (A similar trek occurred from Eastern Russia into India.)

In Tehran, the Polish soldiers were fattened up and sent to North Africa to fight. After the North Africa campaign, Jerzy went to Italy and fought at Monte Cassino — very few Polish soldiers survived the battle.

On 16 May 1944, soldiers from the Polish II Corps launched one of the final assaults on the German defensive position as part of a twenty-division assault along a twenty-mile front. On 18 May, a Polish flag followed by the British Union Jack were raised over the ruins of Monte Cassino. Jerzy was one of the lucky Polish soldiers who survived this hard-



A Polish Bugler at Monte Cassino

won victory, although thousands died in the battle.

At the end of the war Jerzy was one of thousands of Eastern Europeans who did not want to return home because of the influence of Stalin in their countries, and chose to emigrate.

Believing he was on his way to Canada, he found himself disembarking in the UK. He said nothing, partly because he didn't want to be sent back to Poland. Being shot by the Russians as a returnee was a big threat in those days. (The Cossacks incident: Cossacks who fought against the Soviet Union in WW2 were repatriated, handed back by the Allies, to the Soviets who sent over 40,000 to the gulags in Siberia).

In 1946 he arrived in Wales. It's not known why he chose Wales because several of his friends settled in England and Scotland.

When he arrived here, he wanted to buy a farm but the banks wouldn't lend him the money — presumably because he was not a British citizen, (he was made a British citizen in 1954). He then chose mining because it was well paid with the bonus of free coal.

When the Poles and other Eastern European men settled in the Aberdare area, they lived in dormitories in Hirwaun for the first few years.

In April 1948, Jerzy Strzadla was murdered in Aberdare Park and Jerzy [Prygodzicz], (a speaker of six languages), assisted the police as a translator as many Eastern Europeans were interviewed about the incident.

On a happier note, every Saturday night there was a dance in the Hirwaun Welfare Hall where Jerzy met Averil Jones. They married in January 1949, buying a house in Mill Street, Trecynon, and went on to have three children, two boys and a girl.

Sadly, working on the coalface at Glyncastle Colliery, Resolven, Jerzy died in a mining accident on 19th September 1963.

One of the son's, much later, wrote an historical novel 'Savage Journey,' very loosely based on his father's family early World War II experiences, highlighting the suffering of tens of thousands of Polish people and soldiers in the early 1940s when they were imprisoned or deported by the Russians. The book is written as a tribute to his father and those who suffered. Having written two sequels to the book he hopes to get them published eventually.

(I would like to thank the children of Jerzy for giving me this information and for Ricky Antanelis of D&R Tiles for informing me about the family. Ed.)

Detective Chief Inspector Reginald Briggs.



Reg was born during World War II in 1940 in the small south Wales valleys' village of Bedlinog.

He was very popular at school. When he was ill, he received letters from his school pals saying, "We are missing you; we are not having any fun!"

1959 was a very important year for him for two reasons: he joined the South Wales Police Force and he married Merys Jones whom he had been courting for a year. They moved to Hirwaun, then Penywaun, then Llwydcoed before settling in Landare. They had two children: a daughter Mera and a son Rhodri.

Reg was a strong, no-nonsense character who rose up the ranks and eventually became Detective Chief Inspector in the Aberdare & Pontypridd areas, later joining the Serious Crime

Squad in Cardiff. He retired at the age of 53 and started his own company: R.B. Investigations, which he ran for seventeen years before finally retiring.

In 2000, Merys became seriously ill and he looked after her wonderfully till she died in December 2012 aged 73, after 53 years of a very happy marriage.

Reg was the life and soul of many parties and had many hobbies. He was a good fly fisherman, and a very keen golfer. He was popular at the Aberdare's 19th hole, which became his second home. Among other interests were gardening (he gave me many good gardening hints) and later in life he sang in the Côr Meibion Cwm Rhondda. He was very proud of his grandsons Alex and Louis and granddaughter Cerys.

His final year was a happy one despite knowing he had a terminal illness. He celebrated his 80th birthday in February, followed by Alex's 18th, then a family holiday in Spain. He died on 23rd October 2020.

On the day of his funeral, the streets of Landare were lined with scores of people, who paid their respects to this very popular, wonderful gentleman.

(Reg was our genial next-door neighbour for 14 years. I am very grateful to his daughter Mera who has given me this information. Once Aberdare Library re-opens, I hope to write about some of the crimes that Reg solved).

Book Review

By Hywel J. Davies

'Elaine Morgan: A Life Behind the Screen': Daryl Leeworthy. Seren, 2020, £9.99

In the summer of 1959, Elaine Morgan, of Little Row, Abernant, was considering how best to follow her drama-documentary, *'Black Furrow'* (1958), largely inspired by the opencast mining then taking place on her doorstep. By way of contrast, Elaine hit upon the idea of writing about the 'Fifties' enthusiasm for holiday camps, such as Butlins and Pontins – 30 years before *'Hi-de-Hi'* was to make Ruth Madoc a household name. How better to research the topic, she thought, than to visit the holiday camp in Pwllheli, while making a holiday of it. Elaine's husband, Morien, however, was not keen. Nothing daunted, she suggested that neighbours, Celia and Noël Thomas, should join them. Morien and Noel, both teachers, and both closely connected to the local Labour Party were firm friends. Where Noël went, Elaine reasoned, Morien would surely follow. And so it turned out. Elaine visited north Wales, did her research – only to find that the BBC had decided to cancel the script. It was, however, a temporary blip and the following year her first major serial, *'A Matter of Degree'* appeared on TV.

Daryl Leeworthy's new biography of Elaine Morgan, *'A Life Behind the Screen'* is clearly a labour of love. Author and subject, after all, have much in common. Both were educated in Pontypridd and Oxford; both display a commitment to adult education and both make the south Wales Valleys the focus for much of their work. Similarly, Elaine, for all her consistent support for Welsh-medium education, devolution and Welsh nationhood, could not conceive *'of voting for any other party'* than Labour (161), while Daryl's magnum opus, to date, is his championing of Labour's long-standing hegemony in the Valleys, *'Labour Country'*, published in 2018. His biography of Elaine Morgan is a fitting tribute to someone who packed so much into a long life, and whose response when faced with challenges of poverty and privilege, of prejudice and pollution, was one of defiance. In such circumstances, Elaine was determined to say, first and foremost to her own community, *'it does not have to be this way'* (172).

Yet this is not a work of hagiography. For example, while considering Elaine's work in Norfolk as one of the few women tutors for the WEA in 1942, Daryl notes her *'strong left wing views'* as she drew attention to the capitalist propaganda of the press, radio and cinema. None of this, however, appears in Elaine's autobiographical writings. The conclusion is that *'she carefully weeded out her more radical politics'* when the situation

required it (52). Again, on a number of occasions, mention is made of Elaine's preferred image as an ordinary mother and housewife, battling against the odds of childcare and isolation. (Dylan was born in 1946 and Gareth in 1949.) When, together with Morien, she moved to Burnley, the impression given is that it marked the end of her teaching career. Such was not the case. Indeed, Daryl notes that Elaine's life in Burnley was '*far more frenetic than it had been in Norfolk*'. He continues that it '*suites Elaine to be thought of as ...the provincial outsider*' whose career owed more '*to luck rather than dogged determination and ability*' (57-58). Was this commendable modesty on her part, or perhaps a wish to down-play those barriers that might discourage other women from following in her wake, or something altogether more calculating? Daryl keeps us guessing. One way or another, even when Elaine had become a highly regarded scriptwriter for radio and TV, it was the sobriquet of 'housewife-dramatist', with its '*whiff of amateurism*' that stuck (88/142).



Elaine Floyd
in her first year at
Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, 1939

Another well-nurtured myth that this biography challenges is that it was the loneliness of life in an isolated farmhouse in Radnorshire that impelled Elaine to start writing. Morien, at that time, having left Burnley, was teaching in Abertillery, and returned home only at weekends. In fact, however, Elaine had already cut her teeth as a writer much earlier. As a child in Hopkinstown she had entered and won writing competitions in the '*Daily Herald*'; aged eleven she had even sold her first short story to the '*Western Mail*'. In 1934 Elaine won that newspaper's essay competition for St David's Day, and at Pontypridd Girls' Grammar School, as well as writing poetry and winning prizes at the school eisteddfod, she was awarded the school's English prize while in the Sixth Form. In 1939, she was the first girl from Pontypridd to win a place at Oxford where literary connections abounded. In particular, in 1950, just before her sojourn in Radnorshire, Elaine had sent a script to the BBC which resulted in an invitation to a live broadcast for '*Woman's Hour*'. By the mid 1950s she had provided '*Woman's Hour*' with more than half a dozen scripts.

None of this, however, detracts from Elaine's remarkable career. Her early life in 1920s Hopkinstown was typical of her time, place and class. Poverty, lodgers, unemployment, dole, strikes and soup kitchens set the scene, while religion, politics and the local library provided the means of distraction. Immigration, too, had long been a feature of coalfield life — in Elaine's family's case from the West Country. A distinctive feature on her father's side is that at least 5 generations of males were given the name 'Israel'. Nothing is made of this in the text and Elaine similarly ignores the matter in her autobiography, '*Knock 'Em Cold Kid*', published in 2012. Yet it seems strange that such a significant cultural feature passes without comment in both instances.

Daryl's biography opens by charting Elaine's progress from Hopkinstown to Oxford, where she rubs shoulders with some of the movers and shakers of wartime Britain and becomes the first woman chair of the Oxford University Democratic Socialist Club in 1941. Inevitably, it also lifts the lid on detail of a more intimate sort. The account of Elaine's first love affair — with Drummond Alison, tragically killed on active service in 1943, aged 22 — tugs at the heart: he was the love, we're told, "*for whom she forever yearned.*" (50) Later we learn of her 'domestic discontent' faced with Morien's 'intransigence' whenever the matter of a third child was raised (73/74). (The issue was resolved with the adoption of Huw Morien in 1960)

It is not sex, however, that prompts a sense of almost prurient intrusion, as much as that other fascinating feature of human affairs — cash. We learn, for example, that by the early 1960s Elaine was earning the equivalent in today's money of £40,000 p.a. This made her at the time "one of the highest earners living anywhere in the south Wales Valleys" (109). Yet, when the time came to leave Abernant, it was not in the leafy suburbs of Cardiff North, or among the literati of Hampstead, that Elaine chose to live, but in Aberffrd Road, Mountain Ash. That, too, speaks volumes of her values and loyalties.



Elaine Morgan

Elaine's marriage to Morien in 1945 was formative. With his background in the Ynysybwl ILP and Labour Party, the SWMF, the Co-operative movement, his support for the Communist Party in reaction to the rise of Fascism in the 1930s, and his experiences as a member of the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War, Elaine had met a kindred spirit. He was, she writes, "the first reasonable Communist I'd ever met" (55). Oxford and work for the WEA in Norfolk had already helped define her political loyalties, and it is no surprise to find Elaine being talked of as a potential Labour parliamentary candidate. Nearer to home, however, the status of women in peacetime Britain demanded attention. Often they found themselves pushed out of work and subject to wildly different rates of pay, compared to male colleagues. Elaine's feminism was a product of her socialism, but that did not mean that the Labour Party was beyond criticism. It was 'very backward' on this issue, she wrote (63). Thus, in 1955 her debut play for TV, 'Mirror, Mirror', was broadcast, a feminist-themed work, which, however, 'almost ended (Elaine's) scriptwriting career before it had really begun'. It was, sniffed one male reviewer, 'a wearisome little affair' (78).

Nonetheless, greater triumphs were to follow, and Daryl is a sure guide as we follow him along the path of Elaine's achievements. Another play for TV, 'Eleven Plus', in 1955, was much more warmly received, as was her first attempt at a drama-documentary in 1957, 'F.S.U.', based on the real-life Family Service Unit. Meanwhile, with Morien back teaching in Pontypridd, and the family now settled in Abernant, Elaine was able to re-engage with WEA classes in Aberaman and Aberdare, while teaching at Aberdare College of Further Education. This was also a period of considerable involvement with CND, and her TV series 'Barbara in Black' in 1962 and her first full-length play for the stage, 'Licence to Murder' in 1963, both drew on this background. A sequel to the partly autobiographical 'A Matter of Degree' (1960) followed in 1965, entitled 'Lil', with Jessie Evans, the Mountain Ash-born actor in the title role. But perhaps it was those hugely popular TV series that Elaine wrote in the 1960s that most stick in the memory — such as 'Dr Finlay's Casebook', 'Maigret', 'The Onedin Line' and the 15-part 'One of the Family', based in the Valleys, with its strong female leads and class-edged narrative.

We're reminded also of Elaine's work as an adapter of classic literature for broadcasting, beginning with Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, 'Mary Barton' in 1964. This was followed, among others, by 'Marie Curie', an adaptation of Vera Brittain's 'A Testament of Youth', and a TV setting of Howard Spring's 1940 novel, 'Fame is the Spur'. Such work brought Elaine widespread acclaim, including being recognised as 'Writer of the Year' by the Royal Television Society. However, a later adaptation of the novel 'Death of a Ghost', though well received by audiences, is described as 'the most light-weight literary adaptation' (136). Moreover, it was one thing to adapt inspiring and heroic lives, especially when there was an underlying feminist message: Richard Llewellyn's 'How Green was my Valley', however, was another matter. The book's cosy romanticism and 'thin caricatures' seemed to perpetuate what Daryl calls a 'conservative mythology' and what others have termed 'neo-fascist modernism' (124). Major revision was called for, and Elaine drew upon memories of her own childhood for inspiration and a more cutting edge.

Alexander Cordell's *'Rape of the Fair Country'* in 1975, and Jack Jones' *'Off to Philadelphia in the Morning'* in 1978, were of a similar genre, but less in need of restorative surgery. But perhaps the masterpiece of this 'Welsh turn', as Daryl calls it, was *'The Life and Times of David Lloyd George'* in 1981. Taken together, along with an earlier adaptation (for ITV) of a short story by George Ewart Evans of Abercynon, all this work presented 'some of the most famous and enduring television adaptations of the late 20th century' (117). It also delivered aspects of Welsh history to audiences yet unaware of its richness, while at the same time rescuing the role of women from 'a largely male-orientated historical record' (130). Further historical research in the mid 1980s led to a number of one-off biographical programmes, while two particularly noteworthy series, *'The Burston Rebellion'* and *'The Diary of Anne Frank'* both won a number of awards. Elaine's final scripted broadcast was a contribution to 'Woman's Hour' in November 1990; but by then she had achieved even greater celebrity in an altogether different field.

Desmond Morris' 1967 bestseller, *'The Naked Ape'* seemed to offend every feminist bone in Elaine's body. The so-called Tarzanist assumptions that underpinned Morris' book implied such a subsidiary role for women that female evolution appeared almost inexplicable. Elaine's riposte came in the form of her own bestseller, *'The Descent of Woman'* in 1972, making her 'one of the stars of international feminism' (139). One woman, writing in the 'Times', described Elaine's book as 'an essay in building up feminist pride in our origins' and a demand for 'more self-respect' (143). If we juxtapose these words with Elaine's own from the 1997 campaign for a Welsh Assembly, when she insisted that 'those opposed to devolution suffer from a terminal lack of self-esteem and self-confidence', we get a sense of much that motivated her (129).

Feminist ideas, of course, had not been absent from Elaine's earlier work; but the zeitgeist of the 1970s ensured the existence of an enthusiastic audience. Other works included *'Liberation Now'* in 1971-2 and *'A Woman's Place'* in 1978. Guest appearances on TV shows, too, such as *'No Man's Land'*, strengthened her voice. However, there was a danger that the centrality of Elaine's evolutionary argument was being lost in the hubris of feminist outrage. To re-set the kaleidoscope she published a sequel to *'The Descent of Woman'* in 1982, entitled *'The Aquatic Ape'*. A third, fourth and fifth publication followed, so that by the time Elaine reached the age of 80 in 2000 her celebrity as an anthropologist was of a kind she had enjoyed as a scriptwriter earlier. The Norwegian Saugstad Prize for her contribution for scientific knowledge was followed in by an OBE and a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009.

Daryl's biography is a delight to read, thoroughly researched (though with an occasional inconsistent correlation between textual citations and notes), and with a comprehensive list of Elaine's writings — books, plays, short stories and essays. Even more valuable, perhaps, is the detail of her broadcasting career, complete with title, programme, network, channel and date. He also lists the articles Elaine wrote for the 'Western Mail', under the title 'The Pensioner' after 2003. Here, as elsewhere, her questioning spirit, her warmth and humanity and her love for those who knew her best, all shine through. Elaine announced her retirement as a columnist in 2013 and died the same year. Her work is the enduring memorial to her achievements; but as part of the Hidden Heroines Project we await with anticipation the proposed statue of Elaine, by Emma Rodgers, to be unveiled later this year outside Tŷ Calon Lân in Mountain Ash.

Society News

Old Aberdare Volume XI

A volume to celebrate our 50th Anniversary this year is in the process of being compiled. The subjects include:

The family background of the poet Alun Lewis, John Ewington and the Taff Vale Strike, the history of Medicine in Aberdare, the Aberdare Town Plan, the History of the Little Theatre and the Reuben Silverman cartoons.

The editor David Leslie Davies with Steven Graham and Colin Rees are busy working on the book which will be published later this year.

Mrs Tydfil Thomas

Mrs Thomas, who is one of our Vice-Presidents is 96 this month, we send her our best wishes and congratulations.

Lectures by Llafur

Although we are unable to hold lectures, Llafur, the Welsh People's History Society have produced a series of on-line lectures which include such subjects as Slavery, and the Swansea Copper Industry which are well worth watching.

Recent Historical Television Programmes

- Britain's Most Historic Towns with Alice Roberts on Channel 4
- British History's Biggest Fibs with Lucy Worsley on BBC 2

Cynon Valley Museum

The Museum is still closed but their various exhibitions can be seen online including the history of the Nos Galan races.

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.

Acknowledgement

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