

In this issue we continue the serialisation of the book

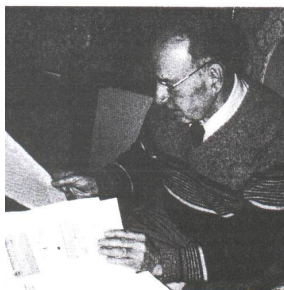
“ITALIANS IN IRELAND: A BRIEF HISTORY”

by Concetto La Malfa

PART III

The spiritual father, as it were, of the Fish and Chips business in Ireland was an Italian gentleman called Giuseppe Cervi who started selling fish and chips to the Irish in the 1880's.

Giuseppe, a well-respected character in the local community, opened the first fish and chips restaurant in Brunswick Street (today's Pearse Street) in Dublin. This profitable business was in later times continued and developed by a number of Italian families who, like the Cervis, came from the same area in Italy, namely Ciociaria, south of Rome north of Naples.



The late Bernardo Cervi, grandchild of the famous Giuseppe



Pearse Street, once Brunswick Street, where Giuseppe Cervi opened the first fish and chip shop in Dublin

Parallel with the development of the fish and chip industry was the introduction of Italian ice cream parlours. At the beginning, just as Giuseppe Cervi had done with chips, ice cream was sold from carts on the street. But soon the first fish and chips restaurants began to offer the much sought-after Italian ice cream.

Fish and chips restaurants were a thriving business for many decades, and still are although in recent times their number has declined.

Their cooking formulas have remained quite unchanged and a good percentage of Irish customers still queue to get the proverbial “one and one” (one of fish and one of chips).

It is quite amusing that sometimes Irish people who have never been in Italy have asked me what are the fish and chip shops like in Italy. The answer I have always given is that the formula of the fish and chip shops in Ireland is only a pale copy of the so called *rosciccerie* or snack-bars in Italy.

Nonetheless, as I mentioned earlier, those who

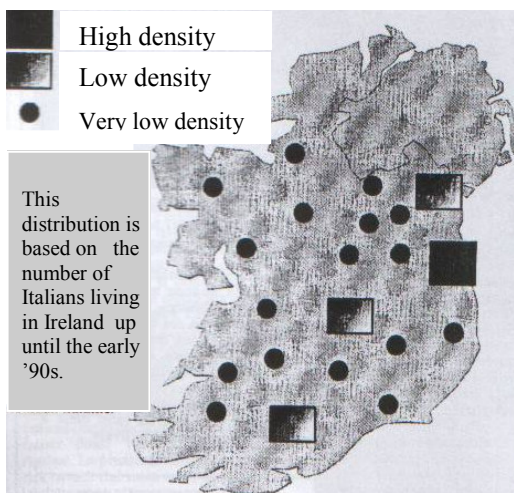
have been engaged in this business deserve great admiration and respect, firstly for their working hours (they seem to have worked and still work when the majority of the people enjoy themselves); secondly for the useful service they have rendered through the years by filling a niche which was there to be exploited and, last but not least, unlike many other communities of Italians in other parts of the world, they have actually given work to the local people rather than knocking at their doors for work.

Up until the early '90s the Italian community, consisted of just over 2000 first generation subjects with Italian passports together with about 1000 second, third and even fourth generation Italians with a total of about over 3000 subjects. (To-day There are an estimated 8.000 Italians living in Ireland).

But an interesting point is that 65% of these Italians came from the same region, which is Ciociaria, an area in the region of Lazio south of Rome and north of Naples and the majority of this 65% originated from the province of Frosinone.

Sixty five per cent of the Italian community lived in Dublin and 65% were traditionally engaged in the restaurant business, mainly the fish and chips business.

Distribution of Italian presence in Ireland up to the early '90s



The fish and chips era, with its ice cream parlours and amusement arcades lasted a few decades. This was a business run by a limited number of large Italian families, the Fortes, the Cafollas, the Macaris, the Fortes, the Di Mascios and the Borzas just to mention a few.

In more recent times over the last ten to fifteen years or so, we have witnessed in Ireland, especially in Dublin, an unprecedented development of the restaurant business.

Some of the old fish and chippers, or at least their offspring, have opened proper Italian restaurants. Fresh Italians from other regions of Italy have come here to

open good restaurants, and this has given work to many Italians as well Irish waiters and waitresses.

These restaurants seem to have opened at an amazing rate.

But the phenomenon in Ireland of these Italian restaurants deserves some comments.

There is an ongoing debate, on occasions covered by the Irish media, about the authenticity of the so-called Italian restaurants in Ireland.

The picture is pretty clear.

A small percentage of these restaurants have just an “Italian” name, and what they offer in their menus is only a rough copy of what Italian cuisine should be like.

Some of these restaurants, which shall remain unmentioned, could be classified as “adventurers” as they are cashing in at a time when the formula “Italian” is ever so popular.

Then we have the main bulk of proper Italian restaurants, meaning Italian-owned and run restaurants. They all try



Antonio Nico (1906-1987)
Emigrated to Ireland 1935
Co-founder in 1975 of ITALIAN MACARONI COMPANY,
later ROMA FOOD



1987: Mons. Moloney blesses the official opening of the Club House of Club Italiano, Tibbradden, Rathfarnham, Dublin. Pictured beside Mons Moloney is the late Donato Borza, whose factual contribution to the construction of the Centre was invaluable.

Unfortunately, as the rhythm of life and expectations have changed, the Club House is now in disuse

their best, in different ways, to get close to the Italian cuisine, some of them, for purely commercial reasons, have adopted a hybrid formula in their cooking to please the tastes of their Irish customers who may wish to have an Irish touch to the Italian dishes they order.

Industry

Let's now leave the restaurant scene and move on to other areas.

Members of the large Forte family emigrated to Ireland are connected to the sale of Fiat, Lancia and Alfa Romeo cars. Every Italian car lover knows Sweeney and Forte Dealers on the Howth Road in Dublin as the first Italian car dealers established in 1935.

In the field of industry, one of the most respected Italian businessmen in modern times in Ireland is Luciano Vergnano who is an active member of the Irish-Italian Business Association. In 1960 Luciano established in Shercock, Co. Cavan, a textile industry called Tabetex which is still thriving.

Italian business interests in Ireland are quite substantial. There are some 100 Italian companies operating in various fields especially in the financial, insurance and software sectors, not to mention the conspicuous presence of Ferrero in Cork as an industrial plant producing some of its products for the European market.

Italian representative Institutions and Offices in Ireland

Italy is represented in Ireland by three main official offices: the **Italian Embassy**, the **Italian Trade Office** (now part of the Italian Embassy) and the **Italian Cultural Institute**.

There is also a representative body called **COMITES** (Committee of Italian residents abroad) which has a liaison function between the Italian community with its requirements and problems, if any, and the Italian diplomatic representative office and the Italian Emigration Authorities.

ALITALIA had for some time an active office in Dublin representing the Italian national airline.

There is also an **Irish-Italian Business Association** with many Italian and Irish businessmen and

businesswomen as members.

One interesting feature of our diplomatic presence in Ireland is that the residence of the Italian Ambassador, **Lucan House**, is one of the most beautiful residences of the Italian diplomatic service abroad.

From an associative point of view, there is a **Club Italiano** founded in the early '70s which had a social function club house constructed in the Dublin hills in the area of Rathfarnham. For many years in the past, this Club organized courses of Italian Language and Culture for Italian families' children living in Ireland, funded by the Italian Government.

Of relatively recent foundation is “**Club di Dublino**” which aims at promoting better interaction within the Italian and Irish communities, facilitating and supporting the expression of the Italian community in all areas and promoting events of a social



Lucan House, Co. Dublin

and cultural character.

The principal function of Club di Dublino is to organize high profile events such as lectures by famous Italian literary or political figures as well as charity dinners to raise money for deserving causes in Ireland.

There is also an Irish branch of the **Accademia Italiana della Cucina** with an active Committee that organize yearly culinary events in Dublin and outside Dublin.

In 2005 two enterprising Italians, Marco Giannantonio and Maurizio Mastrangelo, founded in Dublin “Flavour of Italy” a company which started a School of Italian Cooking.

Other small Italian associations or clubs exist in other centres. In Sligo, for example an “**Amicizia Club**” was recently founded with assistance of Giovanni Molinari, an active Italian living there. The Italian community, that is by and large Catholic, has had a chaplain for nearly 70 years, namely **Mons. John Moloney**, now in his '90s, who, naturally, is a fluent Italian speaker who has seen more births, christenings, confirmations, weddings and deaths amongst the Italians than he can remember.

In the field of Sport and Entertainment

The list of sport achievements and enterprises by some individual Italians is quite long

covering different sports including clay pigeon shooting and snooker. Incidentally, in the field of sport, there is the extraordinary example of a **Filippo Fusco** who, at the age of 38, stopped smoking and drinking

and trained as a kick boxer and even became a coach of teams that have represented Ireland internationally winning many competitions.

There is also the example of a **Romano Morelli** who, at the very senior age of 30 plus, took on cycling and has won many races in Ireland setting an example for younger competitors.

Sport, especially soccer, has been an Italian passion. For many decades many football teams of young Italians have competed and still compete in the Irish Amateur League. And this sport has been nurtured a lot amongst most Italian families.

Between the '20s and the '50s we also had an international rugby player named **Jack Arrigo**, a national cricket player by the name of **Joe Caprani** and an international boxer and international boxing referee named **Benny Carabini**.

Apart from sport, in the world of entertainment we have had beautiful young ladies who have achieved popularity in Ireland, namely **Michelle Rocca**, who in 1980 was elected Miss Ireland, and **Tamara Gervasoni**, who in 2002 was elected “Rose of Tralee”.

Talking about entertainment and social events a man called **Barbato Borza** was an icon within the Italian community. Barbato, son of the late

Donato Borza, who in the 80s was almost single-handedly responsible for the construction of the Club House complex in Rathfarnham belonging to Club Italiano, had an inborn passion for organizing grand social events including masked balls of a Venetian flavour. He teamed up with famous opera singers of renown such as Regina Nathan, who featured in the lavish ceremony marking the opening of the restored Custom House by the Liffey. For the occasion Barbato recreated an 18th century atmosphere with personalities dressed in period costumes.



Romano Morelli



The late Barbato Borza, a passionate organizer of special social events



Michelle Rocca, Miss Ireland 1980



Tamara Gervasoni, Miss “Rose of Tralee” 2002

Part IV in next issue



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