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Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire

Dublin Institute of Technology, mairtin.Macconiomaire@dit.ie

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Culinary voices: perspectives from Dublin restaurants

by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire

Abstract: Despite growing interest in culinary history and gastronomy in the last three decades, the use of oral history within the culinary field remains in an embryonic stage. By discussing the strength of oral history, particularly when triangulated with other sources, and surveying some food related projects, the article focuses on the power of oral history to capture the life experiences of chefs, waiters, restaurateurs and diners. The article calls on curators of culinary libraries to build oral history archives which can be accessed electronically.

Key words: culinary history, gastronomy, chefs, haute cuisine, Dublin, food sector

There has been a growing interest in culinary history and gastronomy in the last three decades.¹ Much of the work of culinary historians is centred on written sources, ranging from cookbooks, diaries, or menus; and the voices and life experiences of most food workers (both domestic and professional) are hidden, apart from the minority who wrote cookbooks or memoirs. This article discusses the use of oral history as a tool to unlock the experiences of food workers and draws particularly on my experiences using oral history in researching the history of French *haute cuisine* in Dublin restaurants between 1900 and 2000 for a PhD at the Dublin Institute of Technology.² French cookery is considered by most Western societies to be the most refined method of food preparation. This reputation is based mainly on *haute cuisine* (sometimes known as *grande cuisine*), a style of cooking offered by high-class restaurants and generally regarded as the national cuisine of France. *Haute cuisines*, according to Amy Trubek, 'have some relationship with an elite

population, the cooks who are employed to make their food, and the ingredients and methods of preparation used'.³ French *haute cuisine* became the model and the basis for an internationally renowned cuisine that is more highly valued, both culturally and socially, than other regional or national cuisines.⁴ Evidence exists of a growing trend starting in 1953 with a festival called 'An Tóstal' for the promotion of quality Irish food in Dublin restaurants and most of today's top Dublin restaurants serve what is called 'modern Irish food'. Despite this, 'French restaurants' remain the most expensive restaurants in practically every country, reflecting the perceived superiority of French cuisine. The international dominance of *haute cuisine* can be most clearly seen by the fact that the menu, the language of cooking, kitchen organisation, and the training of cooks are all largely based on French models.⁵

The term 'foodservice' refers to the broad catering industry and incorporates both 'front of house' (managers and waiters) and kitchen staff



Pierre Rolland and his Brigade c.1958.

(chefs and porters). This paper calls on culinary researchers to use oral history to research a wide range of foodservice businesses from fish and chip shops, pizzerias, contract catering, to five star hotels and Michelin-starred restaurants. My research, however, was based on the influence of French *haute cuisine* and this therefore dominates most of the examples I present.

Dublin and haute cuisine

The words Dublin or Ireland do not immediately come to mind when *haute cuisine* is mentioned. However, two leading French chefs, the brothers Francois and Michel Jammet, opened a restaurant in Dublin in 1901 which, up until its closure in 1967, remained one of the best restaurants in the world serving *haute cuisine*.⁶ During the twentieth century *haute cuisine* was served in many Dublin hotels, clubs and restaurants and came under similar influences as Paris, London and other European cities, moving from the Escoffier orthodoxy to the influence of *nouvelle cuisine*. In 1949, another French chef, Pierre Rolland, arrived in Dublin as *chef de cuisine* of The Russell Hotel and the hotel's restaurant under his leadership also became world renowned for *haute cuisine*.⁷ Dublin restaurants serving *haute cuisine* enjoyed a 'golden age' in the two decades that followed the Second World War. The kitchens and dining rooms of The Russell and Royal Hibernian Hotels became nurseries for young Irish chefs and waiters who gradually replaced the Continental head chefs and waiters and became the culinary leaders in the 1970s. When the *Egon Ronay Guide* covered Ireland for the first time in 1963, The Russell was awarded three stars – the highest possible accolade. It was described as 'one of the best restaurants in Europe' in the 1964 guide and by 1965, the entry for The

Russell Hotel Restaurant reads 'words fail us in describing the brilliance of the cuisine at this elegant and luxurious restaurant which must rank amongst the best in the world'.⁸ The *Michelin Guide to Great Britain and Ireland* was first published in 1974, awarding one star to The Russell Hotel which also closed in 1974. *Haute cuisine* moved from the restaurants of Dublin to the country house hotels during the 1970s and 1980s. The next Michelin star was not awarded in Dublin until 1989, to another French chef / restaurateur, Patrick Guilbaud. By 2001 there were two Dublin restaurants awarded two Michelin stars each, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, and Thornton's, run by an Irish chef Kevin Thornton.

Background to the study

My initial interest in the history of Dublin restaurants was sparked when I was training to become a chef in the Dublin Institute of Technology in the early 1990s. One of my lecturers, P J Dunne, was in his seventies and had been larder chef in the famous Restaurant Jammet in Dublin for many years before commencing his teaching career. Stories of his experiences, particularly during the years of the Second World War, fascinated me. He showed me and my fellow students how he improvised in times of fish shortages by using a monkfish tail (not a popular fish in the 1940s and 1950s) to fashion scampi, collops of lobster, and scallops for an appreciative dining public. When I returned to the Dublin Institute of Technology in the late 1990s as a part-time teacher, P J Dunne had died and his stories were left unrecorded. During this time I listened with great interest to the stories of two retired chefs, Bill Ryan and Liam Kavanagh, then working as part-time teachers. Both chefs had spent years travelling around the

Liam Kavanagh and Bill Ryan in the Savoy Grill, 1948.

world cooking on various Cunard ocean liners in the early 1950s. Kavanagh had also worked in New York City for a number of years. I felt that these life stories were worth preserving. I had been reading Kevin C Kearns' books on Dublin at the time,⁹ which prompted me to use the oral history approach he had employed, with the inhabitants of Dublin tenements and customers of Dublin public houses, to collect the life stories of Dublin chefs, waiters and restaurateurs. When I enrolled on a masters degree in 2003, there was a certain reticence among the academics about the use of oral history alone and a research question was agreed: to investigate the influence of French *haute cuisine* on the emergence and development of public dining in Dublin restaurants 1900-2000 using oral history. Within a year I had transferred to the PhD register and graduated in 2009.

The academic fields of food studies and culinary history span many academic disciplines.¹⁰ Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach to the identification and analyses of research material was adopted in the above study. The main primary research methodology employed, however, was in-depth life history interviews with chefs, waiters, restaurateurs and discerning diners who had lived experiences of Dublin restaurants during the twentieth century. One of the reasons for using oral history in this project was the lack of written material available, but this was compensated by the fund of outstanding personal experience provided in the oral testimonies, enabling valuable data to emerge concerning the history of Dublin restaurants that might otherwise have remained hidden.

Oral history in culinary history

There are very few culinary history archives in the world. Most culinary material culture rests in the attics of individuals that have no understanding of their historical relevance. Equally, a wealth of undocumented information rests in the memories of the men and women who worked in the foodservice industry. The use of oral history in culinary history is still at an early stage. Despite growing culinary collections in libraries such as the Schlesinger in Harvard, New York Public Library, Oxford Brookes, or the University of Adelaide, none has a culinary oral history archive. There are, however, a number of oral history projects in the wider areas of food and wine. The California wine industry oral history series was initiated in 1969 with funding from the Wine Advisory Board, but it was not until 2002 that the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of the University of California, Berkeley,¹¹ inaugurated the 'food and food ways' interview series, which include interviews with chefs and other food workers, with funding from the wine industry. More recent oral history projects in America include the South-



ern Foodways Alliance 'Gulf Coast Foodways Renaissance Project: An Oral History Initiative' in the University of Mississippi,¹² and the Delta Food Oral Histories in the Delta State University, which seem to have grown from the potential loss of both New Orleans and the Gulf Coast's culinary heritage following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

In the UK, the British Library houses a number of life story collections including the 'An Oral History of the Wine Trade', 'Food: from Source to Salespoint', and 'Tesco: An Oral History'.¹⁴ Recent research published in *Oral History* has included papers on the poultry industry,¹⁵ cooking tools as inalienable possessions,¹⁶ and memory of food, family and conflict.¹⁷ Some Australian food related oral history sources also exist.¹⁸ Other culinary related oral history projects have been inaugurated in recent years worldwide, some linked to the growing Slow Food movement, and there have been attempts to capture the influence of the ethnic food cultures of immigrants on their host communities. For example the Irish Taste Council recently commissioned an oral history project to interview food artisans including fishermen, farmers, butchers, bakers and cheese makers, in order to capture the traditional techniques and knowledge they hold before they disappear forever.¹⁹ This paper encourages more culinary researchers to engage in oral histories with foodservice workers and calls on curators of culinary libraries to build culinary oral history archives that would be accessible online. Among the groups that researchers could interview, are waiters, chefs, restaurateurs, sommeliers, fast food workers, fish and chip shop owners, Chinese or Indian takeaway workers and owners, kitchen porters, environmental health officers, food critics, and culinary educators.

Methods

There is a dearth of research on Dublin restaurants and this study is in keeping with the post-modern historiography of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, particularly through the technique of oral history. Previously, historians focussed mainly on written sources found in archives and in memoirs or personal papers. Paul Thompson reminds us that much of this documentary data is suspect.²⁰ Reports, accounts of war and political diaries are written by the upper echelons of society; the winners write the history and generally represent only the victorious in any conflict and present solely their view. Women, and the lower classes in society, which would include foodservice workers, were less likely to be questioned or have their voices heard. Georg Iggers discusses how history's subject matter has recently shifted from social structures and processes to culture in the broad sense of everyday life and how, 'history has assumed a human face as attention is given to individuals, common folks not just the high and mighty'.²¹ Arjun Appadurai suggests that performing 'genealogies of the present' can create a more historical picture of present situations.²² The methodology of this study was motivated by the pioneering work of Kearns in Dublin's urban folklore and oral folk history.²³

Focus Groups and Strategic Conversations

Focus groups with colleagues, lecturers in professional cookery, pastry and restaurant service in the Dublin Institute of Technology were employed in a semiformal manner to inform the research process and to identify key individuals as potential sources of information. Some of these colleagues were also interviewed for the research. John Ratcliffe²⁴ suggests holding at least one or two strategic conversations with 'remarkable people', who might not be central to the study itself, but have the capacity to think creatively and differently. One such interview was held with Garret Fitzgerald, former *taoiseach* (prime minister) of Ireland. Fitzgerald argued that lack of immigration in Ireland led to catering workers and other service industry workers such as the banks receiving significantly higher wages than their counterparts in England. He observes:

It always struck me as the perverse thing in economics, we were such a poor country that we were emigrating but nobody immigrated here, and because there was no immigration they could unionise the staff in hotels and restaurants, which they couldn't do in England.²⁵

Traditional documentary and archival evidence were examined and compared with

primary sources to provide a robust account of the history of Dublin restaurants from 1900-2000. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin suggest that to build dense, well-developed, integrated and comprehensive theory, a researcher should make use of any or every method at his or her disposal, keeping in mind that a true interplay of methods is necessary. They also stress that the research design, like the concepts must be allowed to emerge from the research process:

Remember, the idea behind varying methods is to carry out the most parsimonious and advantageous means of arriving at theory. Such a task calls for sensitivity to the nuances in data, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility in design and a large dose of creativity.²⁶

Census reports

Census reports covering the twentieth century available in the Central Statistics Office (CSO) library were analysed for statistics and data on restaurants, restaurant workers, and foreigners working in the hospitality industry. The 1911 census became available online in October 2007 and this research tool was harnessed to better understand patterns of employment and the role of foreign employees in restaurants and hotels in Edwardian Dublin.²⁷ Analysis of the census reports show a number of errors and discrepancies such as the listing of Michel Jammet as being born in London rather than France, and the fact that they list only seven foreign born chefs in Ireland in 1911, despite my research identifying at least thirteen foreign born chefs in Dublin alone.

Material culture

Material culture is utilised by many different disciplines and as such the definitions of it can vary. One writer defines material culture as the study through artefacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time.²⁸ For social historians in particular, material culture is a useful tool to gather information on groups other than the elite. This is valid for restaurant and other foodservice workers. Since the life stories of the 'working class' were not often recorded, and very rarely in their own words, some of their story can be extrapolated by studying the material objects left behind. The main types of material culture analysed in this research were photographs, menus, advertisements, and awards. Menus can indicate the type of food, including price, and also the style of service employed in particular establishments at a specific moment in time. Some cutlery, crockery, delftware and other catering equipment

were also studied. Silver service has nearly disappeared in Irish restaurants but was very popular for much of the twentieth century. These items are also powerful in sparking memories within interviewees.²⁹ Photographs help to remind interviewees of the names, talents, and peculiarities of individuals with whom they worked. By scanning old menus and photographs and imbedding them within the dissertation, I have effectively created my own archive.³⁰ Much of this material is imbedded in my doctoral thesis.³¹ It is my intention to build an online culinary archive through Dublin Institute of Technology's Arrow website, in which I will place all the material culture I collected during my research, making them available to other scholars.

During one of the first interviews with Herbert (Sonny) Geldof (1912-2005),³² I was shown a framed Diploma of Merit from the Irish Food and Cookery Exhibition 1912 that was hanging on the wall, which was won by Geldof's father, Zenon, a Belgian chef who came to Ireland in 1907. Further research revealed that the Irish Food and Cookery Exhibitions were held in Dublin from 1909 to 1912. The names of prize winners published in the newspapers, when cross-referenced with the 1911 census data helped me draw a clearer picture of restaurant workers in Edwardian Dublin than had previously been known.³³ A theme that emerged from this research was that many foreign chefs came to Dublin by chance, met an Irish girl and settled in Ireland. Some others met Irish girls while working in London and moved to Ireland following marriage and particularly the arrival of children.³⁴



Diploma of Merit won by Zenon Geldof.

Creative interviewing and 'insider' research

Oral history is an interactive and cooperative technique where the roles of researcher and researched overlap.³⁵ A particular strength in this research project was that the researcher, a chef by trade, could draw on first-hand experience in the restaurant business in Dublin, and engage in a dialogue where mutual respect and understanding led to very detailed conversations, and secured fresh and significant data. John Ratcliffe states that it is rare for a researcher to have the standing and proficiency in a particular field to fulfil this requirement.³⁶ There is debate about whether 'insider research' compromises validity.³⁷ In the case of Foster, a black female teacher researching black female teachers, it is argued that her insider status is likely to have enhanced the validity of the research.³⁸ This shared experience leads to what Jack Douglas describes as creative interviewing, and derives from the tradition of oral history. The word 'creative', however, refers primarily to the interviewer, not the respondent. Douglas notes:

Creative interviewing involves the use of many strategies and tactics of interaction, largely based on an understanding of friendly feelings and intimacy, to optimise co-operative, mutual disclosure and creative search for mutual understanding.³⁹

This creative approach leads to the disclosure and probing of details that may not have been revealed to a researcher from another field. Even with the closeness I shared during my research, there were certain topics, particularly alcoholism, which some interviewees preferred to discuss 'off the record' or by making drinking gestures rather than verbalising that a colleague might have had a problem with alcohol. Despite this, the strength of oral history, according to Peter Burke, 'is the strength of any methodologically competent history. It comes from the range and the intelligence with which many types of sources are harnessed to pull together'.⁴⁰

Validity of evidence

Oral sources, like all other sources need to be considered critically. Using what Norman Denzin calls 'triangulation', the insights gained from oral sources can be compared and combined with standard archival and published sources to produce a truer picture of the past.⁴¹ One example of this is how oral evidence from Jim Bowe, who worked as a *chef de partie* in the Intercontinental Hotel in Dublin from 1963-1968, can explain the reasons behind The Intercontinental Hotel losing its star rating in the *Egon Ronay 1967 Guide*. He suggests that it is when the foreign chefs, who had come at the opening of the hotel in 1963, left that the standards dropped:



Picture of P J Dunne.

Yes, very much so, the reasons for it was profits, number one, a change in management affected things... for whatever reason the whole thing changed. Now, I'm not knocking our own, but when the foreign *chefs de parties* left, the management thinking would be 'ok, the honeymoon is over, let's start making money here'. There were a lot of cutbacks.⁴²

Trevor Lummis concludes that even 'hard' contemporary statistical evidence is still what somebody told somebody, and if truth is concealed the facts will be erroneous.⁴³ Kevin C Kearns, who pioneered urban folklore in Dublin, questions why archival sources like the diaries or memoirs of politicians, clergy or business men should be considered any more valid than oral evidence since he notes that common people have nothing (or significantly less) to gain by not telling the truth, compared to some of the more affluent members of society.⁴⁴ Alice Hoffman contends that when undertaken in the most professional way, oral histories may be superior to many written records, noting, 'archives are replete with self-serving documents, with edited and doctored diaries and memoranda written "for the record"'.⁴⁵ In thirty years of using oral history, Kearns points out that his research has never been challenged by any academic; on the contrary, most modern histories of Dublin draw on his work.⁴⁶

Identifying informants

The challenge in oral history is to 'track down' members of the 'old crowd' as they are affectionately known.⁴⁷ John D Brewer explains the importance and urgency of seeking out this 'small number of survivors whose life experiences will be lost to future generations once they

pass from the scene'.⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier, it was my memories of stories of Jammet's restaurant during 'the Emergency' (Second World War period) from a deceased teacher of professional cookery, P J Dunne, that led me to identify the need to record the life stories of two surviving chef / instructors from that period, thus initiating this research project. In 2002/3, a number of informal focus groups were held among the academic staff in the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) to formulate a rough outline of the principal hotels and restaurants of Dublin's past, and the key individuals who worked in them. This process proved extremely beneficial as I developed a rough picture of the restaurant landscape and was familiar with many of the key individuals' names when they came up in the subsequent interviews. These sessions identified some of the first interviewees, and as previously mentioned, some members of the focus groups were also interviewed. Each interviewee was asked to suggest other individuals who would be worth interviewing. Anna Bryson calls this the 'snowball sampling' method.⁴⁹ Having interviewed thirteen individuals and received various old menus and photographs that helped illuminate the past, influenced by the methodology used by Simon Guest,⁵⁰ it was decided to make a public call for information using radio programmes and other media. A twenty-minute interview on the Marian Finucane Radio Show on RTE Radio One (average listenership 372,000 according to JNLR 2004) was secured on Tuesday 16th November 2004. The response was exceptional. Over forty-five responses from individuals including retired chefs, waiters, discerning diners and relatives or friends of catering workers furnished stories, names of potential interviewees, pictures and copies of old

menus. Another method which was attempted, but to no avail, was sending a letter to the editor of a national newspaper.⁵¹

The interview process

Interviewees were originally contacted by telephone, email or letter, and the background to the research project was explained. A suitable time for an interview was sought and the interviewees were asked to make any relevant material such as photographs, menus or newspaper clippings they had available on the day of the interview. The interview process followed best practice.⁵² For this research, each interviewee was brought through their life in chronological order, although other interview techniques are equally valid. I focussed particularly on whether there was catering in the interviewees families, how they got involved in catering, their education and training and the various positions they held over their lifetime. Interviewees were asked about technological changes they had witnessed, patterns of eating out, trade union involvement and also gender within the restaurants in which they worked. Interviewees were also asked to identify who they felt the main pioneers / instigators of change were during their working life.

Seventy-one interviews were undertaken. The interviewees' years of birth ranged from 1911 to 1969. Thirty-seven interviews were formal face to face interviews that were tape recorded and lasted an average of two hours. The remaining thirty-four interviews were carried out over the telephone due to distance, age and convenience to the interviewees. Research notes were taken during these interviews. Some individuals were visited or telephoned more than once to clarify certain topics, dates or events. One interview of a very elderly individual was carried out by his grand-daughter using a questionnaire I had provided her. I also transcribed an archived radio interview with a deceased prominent individual in the Irish hospitality industry.

Editing, coding and analysing the data

Each tape-recorded interview was transcribed and then edited. Some interviews were over 20,000 words in length. Each thread of the edited interviews was numbered for ease of referencing as practiced by Mary Muldowney.⁵³ By using these threads, it is easy to find where a certain topic is discussed in a particular interview. For example when discussing the high esteem in which Pierre Rolland was held in Dublin catering circles, the references (Ryan 2004:~67; Clancy 2008:~44) refer to thread sixty-seven of the interview with Bill Ryan (7th January 2004), 'Rolland was a God, in Dublin he was the God in the cheffing business you know', and thread forty-four of the interview

with John Clancy (22nd January 2008), 'Rolland sat on a stool at the hotplate. The hotplate was dressed with white linen, and all the *cloches* were there, all spotless, spotless!... Now, Rolland was treated as a God, he was a God in that kitchen'.⁵⁴ The principal approach in coding and analysing data utilised in this research was the grounded theory approach outlined in Strauss and Corbin.⁵⁵ This enables the researcher to develop a theoretical interpretation while still grounding it in the empirical reality reflected in the data.

Themes emerging from the oral testimony

A number of themes emerged from the various oral history interviews including education provision, career patterns, migration, gender, unionisation, tension between chefs and waiters, and alcoholism. Interviews with two life long friends Liam (Bill) Kavanagh and Bill Ryan, both born in 1927, reveal how both became chefs by chance, since other trades were closed. Ryan notes that based on his results in technical school he should have been directed towards becoming a draughtsman:

Actually I should have been directed into draughtsmanship or something but the college, Marino, never said a bloody word you know they never had me down doing anything. There was very little work, I could not get into a bakers union I couldn't become a baker because it was closed trade. I couldn't become a plumber, I couldn't become a brick-layer, I couldn't become a carpenter. [You needed] a father or an uncle, to get you into the union... It's ridiculous, so you couldn't get in. So my father said to me one day, I see something working in the technical [school], I see a notice went up, boys can apply to get into Cathal Brugha Street or Kevin Street, not Kevin Street, some other technical school. Three trades were open. Watch making, boot making and chefs grants, but you would have to do an exam you see and anyways I did the exam and I got this exam.⁵⁶

Both Ryan and Kavanagh won scholarships for the Apprentice Chefs course and were in the first group that attended the course in Saint Mary's College for Domestic Science, opened in 1941, in Cathal Brugha Street, which later became the Dublin College of Catering. A few years later, in 1948, they both won a scholarship from The Panel of Chefs of Ireland to work in the Savoy Grill in London under one of the legendary chef Escoffier's protégés, chef Albon. They both subsequently spent many years travelling the world cooking on Cunard ocean liners, and Liam Kavanagh spent a number of years in



the 1950s working in New York City in restaurants such as The Forum of the Twelve Caesars, Le Valois, La Crémaillère à-la-Campagne, The Four Seasons and in The Country Gentleman Club in Saratoga Springs. Kavanagh described some of the new dishes he saw and learnt to produce at this time:

I worked in this particular restaurant right in the heart of Rockefeller Centre in New York after I left the Victoria Hotel and I came back from New Jersey, I opened this restaurant called 'The Forum of the Twelve Caesars'. It was in Rockefeller Centre, which is basically one of central points of New York. This restaurant was known as 'The Forum of the Twelve Caesars'. They reckon they had three hundred and sixty-five items on the menu. It was an incredible restaurant. It gave me a new insight into cooking, completely. They had wild boar on the menu, they had wild lobsters you know in tanks, they had trout live, they had pheasants cooked in clay, they had chicken cooked in clay. The baked potatoes were baked in ashes, charcoal ashes, that's how they worked. That would give you an insight. They got snails, French snails, and they coated them in a choux pastry and they rolled them and they cooked them and with that they came along when the sauce was made.... The sauce for to cover that was made from spinach, creamed spinach with Pernod through it and it gave a beautiful taste. That was only one of their dishes and that was only a small thing. They used small, wild pigeons and you probably heard them talking about it recently, they used to serve it quite a bit there, you know pigeon....

Squab pigeon. We used to make dishes with squab chicken. We used to put boiled rice in it and cook it and it was boned. We used to have it encased in the greaseproof paper and then we'd cook it with the boiled rice and we used to serve a sauce with it. Quite nice. We did a lot of things like *coulubiac*. Russian *coulubiac*.⁵⁷

Kavanagh returned to Ireland for the opening of the Intercontinental Hotel, Dublin, in 1963. Bill Ryan returned to Ireland in the late 1950s and following a few years in the Gresham, Jury's and Moira Hotels, he spent around thirty years working in Dublin Airport Restaurant, which was noted by *Egon Ronay* for the quality of its cuisine. Both Kavanagh and Ryan became part-time culinary instructors in the Dublin College of Catering in the 1990s, where I made their acquaintance.

Unionisation

One of the themes emerging from the older respondents was the importance of the Number Four branch of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (IT&GWU) particularly under the leadership of Michael Mullen, who became secretary during the famous 1951 Dublin hotel strike.⁵⁸ In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the union agreed to allow foreign chefs and waiters work in Dublin as long as they trained indigenous workers. A photograph of staff picketing outside the Royal Marine Hotel in Dun Laoghaire during the 1951 strike includes a German chef, Günter Heinz Finger (far right)⁵⁹. By the late 1950s, however the union took a less favourable view of foreign workers, as told by the Swiss chef Michel Treyvaud who came to Dublin from Scotland with his Irish wife:

Photo of striking workers during the 1951 strike.



I had checked the papers and saw it was no problem because lots of restaurants were looking for chefs, but when I came over I found it very hard to get a job because of [the Union]. I went to Jury's, yes, I went to the Gresham, yes, 'you can have a job but you have to be in the union'. And you had to have a union card, and where do you get a card but in the union. You go to the union but you had to have a job, it was like tennis, you go here, you go there!!! I couldn't get a job. When I saw some of the restaurants (where he could get work) oh my god, I would prefer to be unemployed or wait until I found something even if I have to go back to Scotland or Switzerland, I said to Breda [his Irish wife], 'I'm not going to work in there, no way', my pride would not let me do it.⁶⁰

In the late 1950s and early 1960s there were fewer foreign chefs or waiters working in Dublin, having been replaced by foreign trained Irish chefs and waiters. The catering branch of the IT&GWU, during this period, strongly opposed the employment of foreign staff. Oral evidence from Christy Sands and Arthur McGee suggests that some Irish chefs and waiters were pressurised to take senior positions, in order to exclude suitable foreign-born candidates.⁶¹ Jim Bowe confirms these assertions: 'there was a lot of that alright, OK, maybe some of them didn't deserve, or didn't have the background needed for promotion'.⁶² Nevertheless, this change did offer opportunities for some talented individuals. Two Irish chefs, Vincent Dowling in Restaurant Jammet, and Joe Collins in Jury's Hotel, Dame Street, were sent abroad – to Paris and Switzerland – for training before returning to

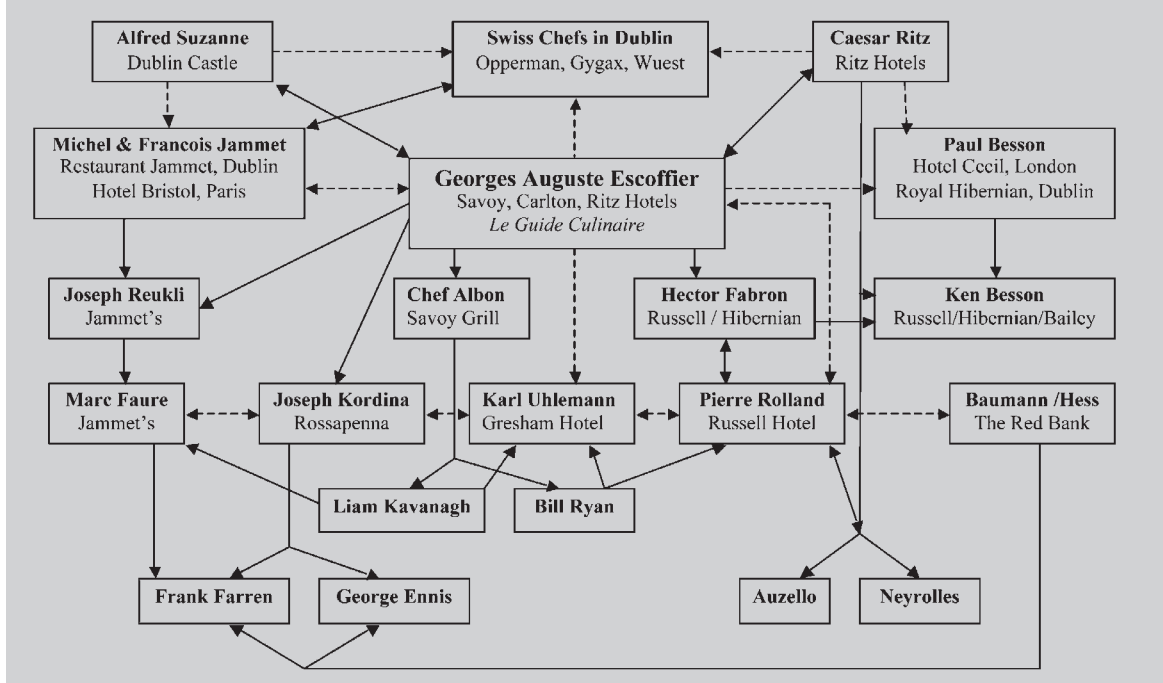
become *chef de cuisine* in their respective restaurants.⁶³

Conflict between Chefs and Waiters

Another theme emerging from the research was the traditional conflict and animosity between chefs and waiters. There are a number of reasons for tension between the front of house staff (waiters and managers) and the kitchen (chefs and porters). Firstly, all communication from customers comes to the kitchen through the waiting staff and any mistakes made in ordering places more work on the already tense working atmosphere of a professional kitchen. The converse is that the waiter has to endure complaints from customers for any mistakes made by the chefs. Chefs often consider themselves as artists rather than tradesmen or craftsmen and yet the more creative their food, the person who gained financially was the waiter who received the tips. Oral evidence of waiters goading chefs across the hotplate by placing large denominational paper money received as tips on their foreheads can be balanced with the knowledge that two chefs interviewed during my research lost a particular catering position for physically assaulting a waiter. Some of the tension, it is suggested, might stem from the 1951 strike. It was the introduction of service charge for waiters which led to the 1951 strike in Dublin hotels. Christy Sands, who began his career as a waiter in 1951, suggests:

My view is that the real reason the strike happened was that all the head waiters or most of the head waiters saw that they would be getting double points and treble points, seemingly in certain places in London that's what happened, and that's

Chart linking chefs with George Auguste Escoffier



what did happen and as a result they drove it, and got it through.⁶⁴

The service charge system favours those in higher positions as they draw a larger percentage than the normal waiters. The strike went on for seven months and during this time chefs stayed out in solidarity with their co-workers although they were not going to benefit one way or the other from the outcome. Not all restaurants or hotels were on strike, some establishments such as the Gresham Hotel and Jammet's Restaurant settled early on. Ironically, some of the waiters who were on strike in one restaurant went to work in a non striking establishment during the strike.⁶⁵ Waiters lost much of their power when the wave of *nouvelle cuisine* swept Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, since it signalled the end to a large extent of traditional silver service. With *nouvelle cuisine*, chefs plated all of the food in the kitchen and waiters moved from practitioners of the table arts to become plate carriers.

Nurseries for Culinary Talent

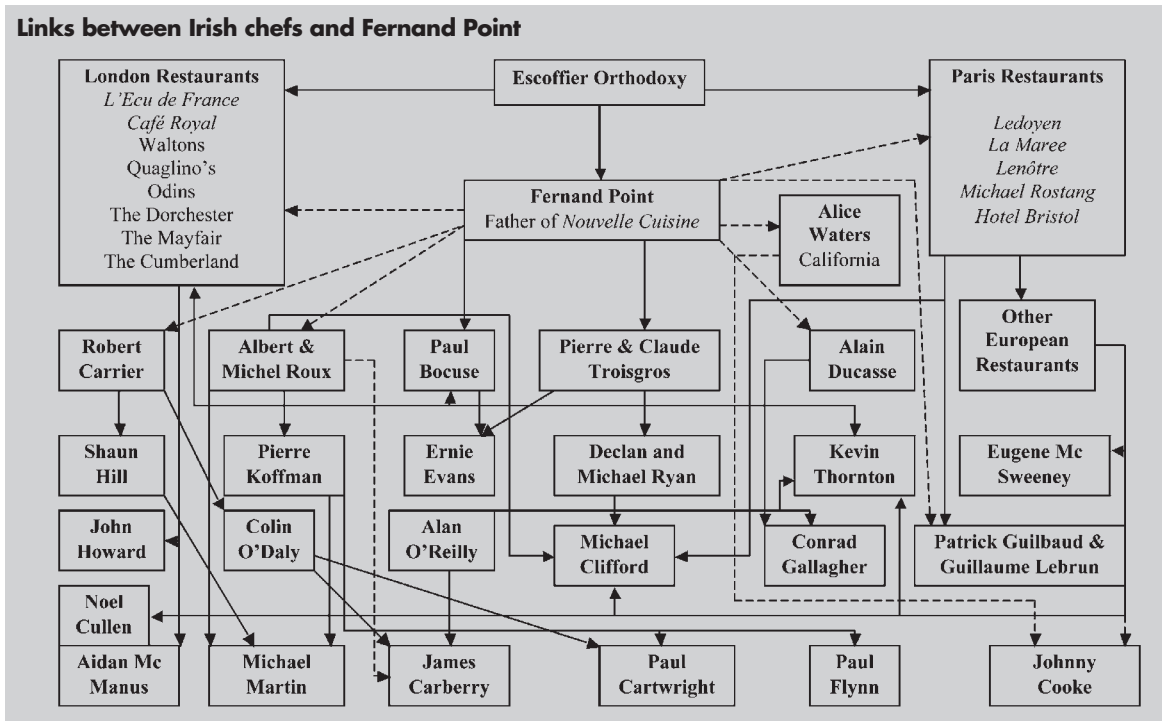
The importance of restaurants such as Restaurant Jammet, The Russell, The Royal Hibernian, and The Red Bank Restaurant as nurseries for culinary talent was highlighted in a number of the oral testimonies.⁶⁶ The Jammet brothers, and later Louis Jammet, are among the few individuals who emerged from the research as being pivotally influential to the development of *haute cuisine* in Dublin restaurants during the twentieth century, in the way that Auguste

Escoffier, Fernand Point, Paul Bocuse, and both the Troisgros and the Roux brothers have been in France and England. Michel and François Jammet were contemporaries of Escoffier and Caesar Ritz. By opening Restaurant Jammet in Dublin they introduced both Irish customers and their Irish employees to Escoffier style *haute cuisine*, which remained relatively unchanged under the next generation of the Jammet family until the closure of the restaurant in 1967. In 1963, *Egon Ronay* described Restaurant Jammet:

As if by magic the turn of the century has been fully preserved beyond the swing door...Space, grace, the charm of small red leather armchairs, *fin-de-siècle* murals and marble oyster counters exude a bygone age. Ritz and Escoffier would feel at home here.⁶⁷

Another contemporary of Ritz and Escoffier, Paul Besson, came to Dublin in 1905 from the Hotel Cecil, London. Besson was central to most developments in hospitality and catering in Dublin during the first half of the twentieth century. Paul Besson's son Ken fulfilled a Fernand Point-like role in Dublin restaurants around the third quarter of the century 1947-1974. He was responsible for the introduction of some key individuals such as Pierre Rolland, Hector Fabron, Claude Auzello and Maurice Neyrolles to Ireland. Fabron had apprenticed under Escoffier in London and oral evidence

Links between Irish chefs and Fernand Point



suggests that this was also true of other chefs (for example Kordina, Uhlemann) working in Ireland during this period.⁶⁶ *The Irish Hotelier* (February 1954) suggested Rolland was 'among the ten most distinguished culinary experts in France'. As previously mentioned, a number of Irish chefs also trained in the Savoy Grill, London under Escoffier's colleague Albon, as part of an exchange programme organised by Fabron. Besson-controlled kitchens, particularly The Russell under Rolland, became nurseries for culinary talent in the same way that Point's kitchen in *La Pyramide* provided training for a new generation of French chefs such as Bocuse and Jean and Pierre Troisgros. Knowledge transfer also occurred as chefs moved between the various kitchens in Dublin. There was a rise in French chefs, managers and waiters working in Dublin after the Second World War, facilitated by an agreement between Besson and the IT&GWU, which led to the first-class training of a generation of Irish catering staff who became the culinary leaders in Ireland during the following decades.

International knowledge transfer

Dublin's golden age of *haute cuisine* ended with the closure of Restaurant Jammot (1967), The Red Bank Restaurant (1969) and The Russell Hotel (1974). New restaurants such as Snaffles and The Soup Bowl, opened by enthusiastic amateurs, became the new venues for Dublin gourmets. Some of the kitchen and dining room staff from the newly closed restaurants found

positions in these new establishments and in restaurants such as the Lord Edward, The Old Dublin, and in country house hotels such as Ashford Castle which had become the centre of *haute cuisine* in Ireland in the 1970s and early 1980s. This new phenomenon of *haute cuisine* in country house hotels was partly due to individuals such as Declan Ryan (Arbutus Lodge, Cork) and Ernie Evans (The Tower Hotel, Kerry), who had trained directly under Bocuse and the Troisgros brothers – 'disciples' of Point. Other Irish chefs such as Jim Bowe, John Howard and Noel Cullen also worked in London's top restaurants and in Switzerland in the late 1950s and early 1960s where they came under the influence of both Point and Escoffier. Point indirectly influenced other chefs / restaurateurs.

Foreign influence in knowledge transfer increased in later years as air travel expanded. Some Irish chefs such as Johnny Cooke (Polo One, Cooke's Café) worked in America and returned in the late 1980s with the latest Californian food ideas, influenced by Alice Waters and Jeremiah Towers. Other Irish chefs such as Kevin Thornton (The Wine Epergne, Thornton's), Michael Martin (La Stampa, The Tea Rooms), Shay Kirwan (The Commons), Paul Cartwright (Roly's Bistro), Paul Flynn (La Stampa, The Tannery), James Carberry (ESB, DIT), John Dunne (Les Frères Jacques, The Park, Duzy's), and Conrad Gallagher (Morels, Peacock Alley, Christopher's, Mango Toast) returned to Dublin having worked in the

kitchens of Michelin starred chefs such as Albert and Michel Roux, Nico Ladenis, Pierre Kaufman, Shaun Hill, John Burton-Race, Raymond Blanc, and Anton Edelman in England, and with Paul Bocuse, Jean and Pierre Troisgros, Georges Blanc and Alain Ducasse in France, some of whom have been previously discussed. These returning Irish chefs, in turn, trained the current generation of Irish chefs in the latest techniques of *haute cuisine* which remained firmly rooted in the French culinary canon. Both the direct and indirect links these chefs have with both the Escoffier orthodoxy and the *nouvelle cuisine* methods of Fernand Point and his disciples are shown in Figure eight. These links were identified from analysing the oral interviews and also from secondary sources.⁶⁹

Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud

The most influential individual in Dublin *haute cuisine* restaurants during the last two decades of the twentieth century was Guilbaud, whose role in Ireland along with his chef Guillaume Lebrun may be compared with that of Bocuse in France or the Roux brothers in England. There were diverse connections between the leading Irish chefs and restaurateurs and their French and English counterparts. Many of these individuals were central to the renaissance of *haute cuisine* restaurant in Dublin in the mid 1990s.⁷⁰ For the last two decades of the twentieth century, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud set the standard of *haute cuisine* that other restaurants emulated. Their kitchen and dining room also acted as nurseries for young talent, both Irish and foreign born, with some restaurants even advertising that their chef was 'ex-Patrick Guilbaud's' as a marker of the high standard of food they served.⁷¹ An advertisement for Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud in *The Irish Times* (23 June 1983, p 20) promised new Irish cooking or *La Nouvelle Cuisine d'Irlande*. Guilbaud notes that one of the key reasons for the restaurant's continuous success is that they try to be as good as they can and renew themselves constantly:

We have new blood coming in every eighteen months in the restaurant. We change our staff; we let them go after eighteen months, except the top guys. This brings new blood into the restaurant all the time.⁷²

This continuous training of new staff at such high standards ensured a steady flow of staff for other restaurants in Dublin such as Sebastian Masi who became head chef in The Commons and later chef/proprietor of Pearl Brasserie, Stefan Couzy who was *Maitre d'hôtel* in The Park and later co-owner in Duzy's, and Bruno Bertha who was waiter in *Le Coq Hardi* and later owner in Bruno's. Ex-Restaurant Patrick Guil-

baud staff have been involved in most successful Dublin restaurants during the last twenty years.⁷³

Jimmy Kilbride and the City and Guilds 706/3 programme

The influence of working with some of France's leading chefs such as Troisgros and Bocuse was also identified as important in transferring culinary knowledge from France to Ireland.⁷⁴ One such individual was Kevin Thornton, who in 2001 became the first native Irish chef to be awarded two Michelin stars. Thornton, however, attributes more credit for his success to Jimmy Kilbride (his lecturer on the advanced City and Guilds 706/3 programme in the Dublin College of Catering) than to his foreign experience. He points out that Kilbride opened his mind to the history of food and instilled in him a confidence in his own ability. He recalls that Kilbride was the only person he was ever nervous cooking for, when he came for a meal at the *Wine Epergne* restaurant, noting 'it was like cooking for the master'.⁷⁵ Jimmy Kilbride ran the City & Guilds 706/3 course from the late 1970s to beginning of the 1990s, and his students became the future teachers, entrepreneurs and leaders in culinary matters in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century. He engendered a love of learning in them and he instilled confidence in Irish chefs that they were world-class. Kilbride recalls being extremely impressed with the quality, commitment, interest and dedication of the Irish chefs who attended the course, noting that the first year they went to Hotelympia (an international culinary competition held in London) they won numerous awards.⁷⁶ Another one of his students, Noel Cullen, credits Kilbride with giving him pride as a chef and recognised that the advanced cookery programme made a significant contribution in raising the consciousness and self-awareness of Irish chefs.⁷⁷

Total assimilation

A number of interviewees spoke of their own memories of working in Dublin restaurants, but also had memories and stories of their foreign-born fathers who had been industry leaders in Ireland during the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ Some current foreign-born restaurateurs resemble the Normans who arrived in 1169, in that they have become more Irish than the Irish themselves. Patrick Guilbaud discusses whether his food is Irish or French:

It is Guillaume's [head chef] and my food, people say we are French, of course we are French, I am born in France so is Guillaume and Stefan [*Maitre D'hôtel*], but Guillaume is here twenty eight years and he is only forty four, he is living longer here than he

did in France, in his family he has two sons and a daughter and is married to an Irish lady, he is bound to have Irish ideas and so his food is modern Irish, I don't like the term modern Irish because it means nothing. His food is his food, it is Guillaume's food. It is the way Guilbaud's is designed it is the restaurant's food. It is a mixture of French and Irish, because the product is local product, we try and work with local product.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The field of culinary history has been growing steadily in the last three decades but despite this the use of oral history in the culinary sphere remains relatively rare. Much of the data required for a better understanding of culinary history is ephemeral and survives in both the memories and material culture residing in the minds and the attics of old chefs, waiters and restaurateurs. Samples of both oral

testimonies and of material culture acquired during interviews were included in this paper to illustrate the rich fund of information they contain. This article has argued for the use of oral history among culinary historians to gather and preserve parts of the 'living past' before it perishes with the informants.⁸⁰ The links between Irish chefs and restaurants and those in other countries are clear but these would be unknown and undocumented were it not for the comparative analysis of the in-depth oral history interviews I carried out during my research. I focused on *haute cuisine*, but this paper calls on future researchers to use oral history as a tool to unlock the life stories of all foodservice workers internationally. It calls on curators of culinary libraries to build oral history archives which can be accessed electronically. It took the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to remind many Americans how fragile the culinary diversity and traditions that surrounds us all can be.

NOTES

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10. Nancy Duran and Karen MacDonald, 'Information Sources for Food Studies Research', *Food, Culture & Society*, vol 9, no 2, 2006, pp 233-243.
11. http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/food_wine/food.html.
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13. <http://www.deltastate.edu/pages/1303.asp>.
14. <http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpprestyle/sound/ohist/ohnls/nlsfood/food.html>.
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25. Interview with Dr Garrett Fitzgerald, politician, born Dublin 9th February 1926, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 21st February 2005, ~-30.
26. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
27. Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 'Searching for Chefs, Waiters and Restaurateurs in Edwardian Dublin: A Culinary Historian's Experience of the 1911 Dublin Census Online', *Petits Propos Culinaires*, vol 86, 2008, pp 92-126.
28. Robert Blair St George, *Material Life in America: 1600-1860*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988, p 18.
29. The links between material culture and memory, particularly the use of photographs is discussed in Chris Wright, 'Material and Memory: Photography in the Western Solomon Islands', *Journal of Material Culture*, vol 9, no 1, 2004, pp 59-71.

- 30.** The creation of an Irish culinary archive during the research process was remarked upon by my external examiners, who pointed out that most historians work with existing archives but that due to the lack of research in my field to date, I had to create my own archive.
- 31.** Mac Con Iomaire, 2009, (<http://arrow.dit.ie/tourdoc/12/>).
- 32.** Interview with Herbert (Sonny) Geldof, businessman and son of chef / restaurateur, born Dublin 1912, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, April 2003.
- 33.** See Mac Con Iomaire, 2008.
- 34.** Examples of these are Carl Opperman and Ernst Gygax, both Swiss chefs, whose children became leading figures in Dublin catering business. See Mac Con Iomaire, 2009, vol 3, (<http://arrow.dit.ie/tourdoc/12/>) for transcribed interviews with Johnny Opperman (28 April 2004) and Fred Gygax (19 May 2005).
- 35.** A Errante, 'But sometimes you are not part of the story: oral histories and ways or remembering and telling' in S Nage Hesse-Biber and ML Yaizer (eds) *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 36.** Ratcliffe, 2002.
- 37.** See Pauline Rooney 'Researching from the inside – does it compromise validity? A discussion', *Level 3*, May 2005, Issue 3.
- 38.** M Foster, 'The power to know one thing is never the power to know all things: methodological notes on two studies of black American teachers' in A Gitlen (ed), *Power and Method*, London, Routledge, 1994.
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- 40.** Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- 41.** Norman Denzin, *The Research Act in Sociology*, London: Butterworths, 1970.
- 42.** Interview with Jim Bowe, chef and lecturer, born Dublin 1942, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 30 April 2008, ~94.
- 43.** Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, London: Hutchinson, 1987.
- 44.** Telephone interview with Kevin C Keams, professor of geography and oral historian recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 10 January 2005.
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- 46.** Keams interview 10th January 2005; books citing his work include Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, London: Hutchinson, 2003; and Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, Dublin: Profile Books, 2004.
- 47.** Keams, 2001, p 9.
- 48.** John D Brewer, *The Royal Irish Constabulary: An Oral History*, Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queens University, 1990, p 18.
- 49.** Anna Bryson, "'Whatever you say, say nothing": researching memory and identity in Mid-Ulster, 1945-1969', *Oral History*, vol 35, no 2, 2007, pp 45-56.
- 50.** Simon Guest, 'Cure, Superstition, Infection and Reaction: Tuberculosis in Ireland, 1932-1957', *Oral History*, vol 32, no 2, 2004, pp 63-72.
- 51.** I sent a letter to the editor of *The Irish Times* but it was not published. I did however make contact with one interviewee following letters in *The Irish Times* concerning the death of Renato Sidoli, ex-manager of the Unicorn Restaurant.
- 52.** As per Yow, 1994.
- 53.** Mary Muldowney, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Women in Belfast and Dublin: An Oral History' (unpublished PhD), Department of Modern History, Dublin: Trinity College Dublin, 2005.
- 54.** All transcribed interviews are available in volume three of Mac Con Iomaire, 2009, <http://arrow.dit.ie/tourdoc/12/>.
- 55.** Strauss and Corbin, 1998.
- 56.** Interview with Bill Ryan, chef, born Dublin 1927, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 7 January 2004, ~11-17.
- 57.** Interview with Liam Kavanagh, born Dublin 1927, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 11 April 2003, ~136-8.
- 58.** Further information on the Dublin Hotel Strike can be found in Annemarie Piso, 'Unionisation in the Dublin hotel industry', *International Journal of Tourism Research*, vol 5, no 3, 2003, pp 211-224.
- 59.** Photo was provided by Gunter Heinz Finger's daughter Maureen Mooney who contacted me after hearing the call for information on the radio, interviewed 19 May 2008.
- 60.** Interview with Michel Treyvaud, chef, born Switzerland 3 June 1937, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 4 February 2008, ~31.
- 61.** Interview with Christy Sands, waiter and lecturer, born Dublin 1937, recorded by the Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 5 June 2003 ~114, and interview with Arthur McGee, chef, born Dublin 1937, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 6 January 2004 ~78.
- 62.** Bowe, 2008 ~98.
- 63.** Mac Con Iomaire, 2009.
- 64.** Interview with Christy Sands, born Dublin 1937, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 5 June 2003, ~70.
- 65.** Sands, 2003 ~9-14.
- 66.** Interview with Frank Farren, chef, born Dublin 1926, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 28 May 2003; interview with Arthur McGee, chef, born Dublin 1937, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 6 January 2004; interview with Gerry Connell, chef, born Dublin 1946, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 15 January 2008.
- 67.** *The 1963 Egon Ronay Guide to Great Britain and Ireland*.
- 68.** Interview with Frank Farren, chef, born Dublin 1926, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 28 May 2003~36; telephone interview with George Ennis, chef and later Jesuit priest, born Dublin 1923, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 11 May 2005 .
- 69.** Mac Con Iomaire 2009, vol 2.
- 70.** Interview with Kevin Thornton, chef, born Tipperary 1958, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 12 August 2008; Interview with Giles O'Reilly, chef, born London 1960, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 19 May 2008.
- 71.** Mac Con Iomaire, 2009, vol 2.
- 72.** Guilbaud, 2008, ~128.
- 73.** Mac Con Iomaire, 2009.
- 74.** Interview with Declan Ryan, chef /restaurateur, born Cork 1943, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 11 March 2005; Thornton, 2008.
- 75.** Thornton, 2008.
- 76.** Interview with Jimmy Kilbride, chef /culinary lecturer/entrepreneur, born Dublin 1929, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 8 October 2003, ~28.
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- 78.** Interview with Johnny Opperman, chef / restaurateur and son of Swiss chef, born Dublin 1917, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 28 April 2004; interview with Fred Gygax, chef and son of Swiss chef, born Greystones 1929, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 19 May 2005; interview with Róisín Hood, daughter of French restaurateur Louis Jammot, born Dublin 1935, recorded by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 18 January 2006.
- 79.** Guilbaud, 2008, ~128.
- 80.** Emyr Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1957, xiii.

Address for correspondence:
mairtin.macconiomaire@dit.ie