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Coffee Culture in Dublin: a Brief History

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire
Dublin Institute of Technology, mairtin.Macconiomaire@dit.ie

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Dr. Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, Dublin Institute of Technology.

Introduction

In the year 2000, a group of likeminded individuals got together and convened the first annual World Barista Championship in Monte Carlo. With twelve competitors from around the globe, each competitor was judged by seven judges: one head judge who oversaw the process, two technical judges who assessed technical skills, and four sensory judges who evaluated the taste and appearance of the espresso drinks. Competitors had fifteen minutes to serve four espresso coffees, four cappuccino coffees, and four "signature" drinks that they had devised using one shot of espresso and other ingredients of their choice, but no alcohol. The competitors were also assessed on their overall barista skills, their creativity, and their ability to perform under pressure and impress the judges with their knowledge of coffee. This competition has grown to the extent that eleven years later, in 2011, 54 countries held national barista championships with the winner from each country competing for the highly coveted position of World Barista Champion. That year, Alejandro Mendez from El Salvador became the first world champion from a coffee producing nation.

Champion baristas are more likely to come from coffee consuming countries than they are from coffee producing countries as countries that produce coffee seldom have a culture of espresso coffee consumption. While Ireland is not a coffee-producing nation, the Irish are the highest per capita consumers of tea in the world (Mac Con Iomaire, "Ireland"). Despite this, in 2008, Stephen Morrissey from Ireland overcame 50 other national champions to become the 2008 World Barista Champion (see, http://vimeo.com/2254130). Another Irish national champion, Colin Harmon, came fourth in this competition in both 2009 and 2010.

This paper discusses the history and development of coffee and coffee houses in Dublin from the 17th century, charting how coffee culture in Dublin appeared, evolved, and stagnated before re-emerging at the beginning of the 21st century, with a remarkable win in the World Barista Championships. The historical links between coffeehouses and media—ranging from print media to electronic and social media—are discussed. In this, the coffee house acts as an informal public gathering space, what urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls a "third place," neither work nor home. These "third places" provide anchors for community life and facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction (Oldenburg). This paper will also show how competition from other "third places" such as clubs, hotels, restaurants, and bars have affected the vibrancy of coffee houses.

Early Coffee Houses

The first coffee house was established in Constantinople in 1554 (Tannahill 252; Huetz de Lemps 387). The first English coffee houses opened in Oxford in 1650 and in London in 1652. Coffee houses multiplied thereafter but, in 1676, when some London coffee houses became hotbeds for political protest, the city

prosecutor decided to close them. The ban was soon lifted and between 1680 and 1730 Londoners discovered the pleasure of drinking coffee (Huetz de Lemps 388), although these coffee houses sold a number of hot drinks including tea and chocolate as well as coffee.

The first French coffee houses opened in Marseille in 1671 and in Paris the following year. Coffee houses proliferated during the 18th century: by 1720 there were 380 public cafés in Paris and by the end of the century there were 600 (Huetz de Lemps 387). Café Procope opened in Paris in 1674 and, in the 18th century, became a literary salon with regular patrons: Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and Condorcet (Huetz de Lemps 387; Pitte 472). In England, coffee houses developed into exclusive clubs such as Crockford's and the Reform, whilst elsewhere in Europe they evolved into what we identify as cafés, similar to the tea shops that would open in England in the late 19th century (Tannahill 252-53).

Tea quickly displaced coffee in popularity in British coffee houses (Taylor 142). Pettigrew suggests two reasons why Great Britain became a tea-drinking nation while most of the rest of Europe took to coffee (48). The first was the power of the East India Company, chartered by Elizabeth I in 1600, which controlled the world's biggest tea monopoly and promoted the beverage enthusiastically. The second was the difficulty England had in securing coffee from the Levant while at war with France at the end of the seventeenth century and again during the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13). Tea also became the dominant beverage in Ireland and over a period of time became the staple beverage of the whole country. In 1835, Samuel Bewley and his son Charles dared to break the monopoly of The East India Company by importing over 2,000 chests of tea directly from Canton, China, to Ireland. His family would later become synonymous with the importation of coffee and with opening cafés in Ireland (see, Farmar for full history of the Bewley's and their activities). Ireland remains the highest per-capita consumer of tea in the world.

Coffee houses have long been linked with social and political change (Kennedy, Politicks; Pincus). The notion that these new non-alcoholic drinks were responsible for the Enlightenment because people could now gather socially without getting drunk is rejected by Wheaton as frivolous, since there had always been alternatives to strong drink, and European civilisation had achieved much in the previous centuries (91). She comments additionally that cafés, as gathering places for dissenters, took over the role that taverns had long played. Pennell and Vickery support this argument adding that by offering a choice of drinks, and often sweets, at a fixed price and in a more civilized setting than most taverns provided, coffee houses and cafés were part of the rise of the modern restaurant. It is believed that, by 1700, the commercial provision of food and drink constituted the second largest occupational sector in London. Travellers' accounts are full of descriptions of London taverns, pie shops, coffee, bun and chop houses, breakfast huts, and food hawkers (Pennell; Vickery).

Dublin Coffee Houses and Later incarnations

The earliest reference to coffee houses in Dublin is to the Cock Coffee House in Cook Street during the reign of Charles II (1660-85). Public dining or drinking

establishments listed in the 1738 Dublin Directory include taverns, eating houses, chop houses, coffee houses, and one chocolate house in Fownes Court run by Peter Bardin (Hardiman and Kennedy 157). During the second half of the 17th century, Dublin's merchant classes transferred allegiance from taverns to the newly fashionable coffee houses as places to conduct business. By 1698, the fashion had spread to country towns with coffee houses found in Cork, Limerick, Kilkenny, Clonmel, Wexford, and Galway, and slightly later in Belfast and Waterford in the 18th century. Maxwell lists some of Dublin's leading coffee houses and taverns, noting their clientele:

There were Lucas's Coffee House, on Cork Hill (the scene of many duels), frequented by fashionable young men; the Phoenix, in Werburgh Street, where political dinners were held; Dick's Coffee House, in Skinner's Row, much patronized by literary men, for it was over a bookseller's; the Eagle, in Eustace Street, where meetings of the Volunteers were held; the Old Sot's Hole, near Essex Bridge, famous for its beefsteaks and ale; the Eagle Tavern, on Cork Hill, which was demolished at the same time as Lucas's to make room for the Royal Exchange; and many others. (76)

Many of the early taverns were situated around the Winetavern Street, Cook Street, and Fishamble Street area. (see Fig. 1) Taverns, and later coffee houses, became meeting places for gentlemen and centres for debate and the exchange of ideas. In 1706, Francis Dickson published the *Flying Post* newspaper at the Four Courts coffee house in Winetavern Street. The Bear Tavern (1725) and the Black Lyon (1735), where a Masonic Lodge assembled every Wednesday, were also located on this street (Gilbert v.1 160). Dick's Coffee house was established in the late 17th century by bookseller and newspaper proprietor Richard Pue, and remained open until 1780 when the building was demolished. In 1740, Dick's customers were described thus:

> Ye citizens, gentlemen, lawyers and squires,
> who summer and winter surround our great fires,
> ye quidnuncs! who frequently come into Pue's,
> To live upon politicks, coffee, and news. (Gilbert v.1 174)

There has long been an association between coffeehouses and publishing books, pamphlets and particularly newspapers. Other Dublin publishers and newspapermen who owned coffee houses included Richard Norris and Thomas Bacon. Until the 1850s, newspapers were burdened with a number of taxes: on the newsprint, a stamp duty, and on each advertisement. By 1865, these taxes had virtually disappeared, resulting in the appearance of 30 new newspapers in Ireland, 24 of them in Dublin. Most people read from copies which were available free of charge in taverns, clubs, and coffee houses (MacGiolla Phadraig). Coffee houses also kept copies of international newspapers. On 4 May 1706, Francis Dickson notes in the *Dublin Intelligence* that he held the Paris and London *Gazettes*, Leyden *Gazette* and *Slip*, the Paris and Hague *Lettres à la Main*, *Daily Courant*, *Post-man*, *Flying Post*, *Post-script* and *Manuscripts* in his coffeehouse in Winetavern Street (Kennedy, "Dublin").

Henry Berry's analysis of shop signs in Dublin identifies 24 different coffee houses in Dublin, with the main clusters in Essex Street near the Custom's

House (Cocoa Tree, Bacon's, Dempster's, Dublin, Merchant's, Norris's, and Walsh's) Cork Hill (Lucas's, St Lawrence's, and Solyman's) Skinners' Row (Bow's', Darby's, and Dick's) Christ Church Yard (Four Courts, and London) College Green (Jack's, and Parliament) and Crampton Court (Exchange, and Little Dublin). (see Figure 1, below, for these clusters and the locations of other Dublin coffee houses.)

The earliest to be referenced is the Cock Coffee House in Cook Street during the reign of Charles II (1660-85), with Solyman's (1691), Bow's (1692), and Patt's on High Street (1699), all mentioned in print before the 18th century. The name of one, the Cocoa Tree, suggests that chocolate was also served in this coffee house. More evidence of the variety of beverages sold in coffee houses comes from Gilbert who notes that in 1730, one Dublin poet wrote of George Carterwright's wife at The Custom House Coffee House on Essex Street:

> Her coffee's fresh and fresh her tea,
> Sweet her cream, ptizan, and whea,
> her drams, of ev'ry sort, we find
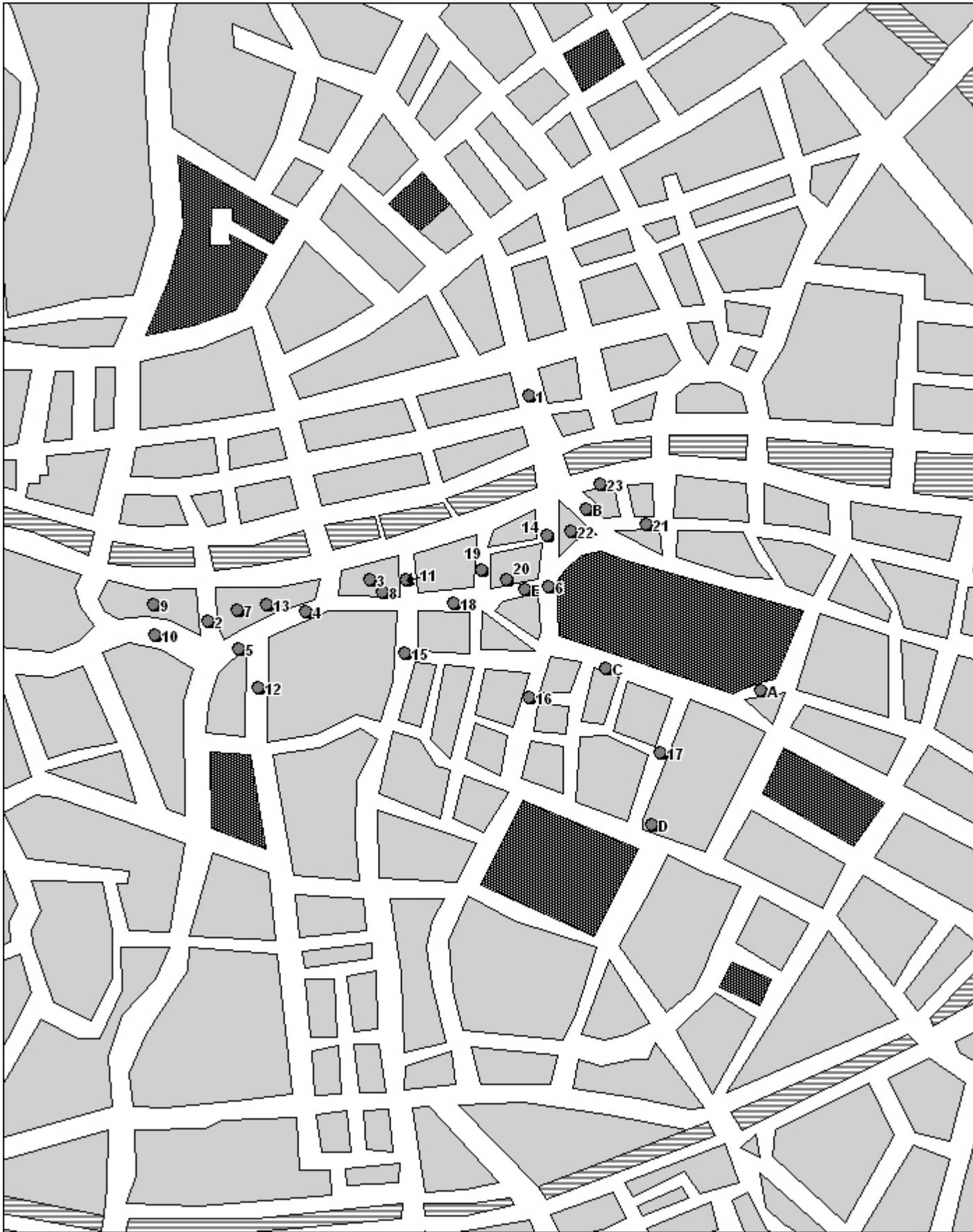> both good and pleasant, in their kind. (v. 2 161)

Figure 1: Map of Dublin indicating Coffee House clusters

1 = Sackville St.; **2** = Winetavern St.; **3** = Essex St.; **4** = Cork Hill; **5** = Skinner's Row; **6** = College Green.; **7** = Christ Church Yard; **8** = Crampton Court.; **9** = Cook St.; **10** = High St.; **11** = Eustace St.; **12** = Werburgh St.; **13** = Fishamble St.; **14** = Westmorland St.; **15** = South Great George's St.; **16** = Grafton St.; **17** = Kildare St.; **18** = Dame St.; **19** = Anglesea Row; **20** = Foster Place; **21** = Poolbeg St.; **22** = Fleet St.; **23** = Burgh Quay.**A** = Cafe de Paris, Lincoln Place; **B** = Red Bank Restaurant, D'Olier St.; **C** = Morrison's Hotel, Nassau St.; **D** = Shelbourne Hotel, St. Stephen's Green; **E** = Jury's Hotel, Dame St.

Some coffee houses transformed into the gentlemen's clubs that appeared in London, Paris and Dublin in the 17th century. These clubs originally met in coffee houses, then taverns, until later proprietary clubs became fashionable. Dublin anticipated London in club fashions with members of the Kildare Street Club (1782) and the Sackville Street Club (1794) owning the premises of their clubhouse, thus dispensing with the proprietor. The first London club to be owned by the members seems to be Arthur's, founded in 1811 (McDowell 4) and this practice became widespread throughout the 19th century in both London and Dublin. The origin of one of Dublin's most famous clubs, Daly's Club, was a chocolate house opened by Patrick Daly in c.1762–65 in premises at 2–3 Dame Street (Brooke). It prospered sufficiently to commission its own granite-faced building on College Green between Anglesea Street and Foster Place which opened in 1789 (Liddy 51). Daly's Club, "where half the land of Ireland has changed hands", was renowned for the gambling that took place there (Montgomery 39). Daly's sumptuous palace catered very well (and discreetly) for honourable Members of Parliament and rich "bucks" alike (Craig 222). The changing political and social landscape following the Act of Union led to Daly's slow demise and its eventual closure in 1823 (Liddy 51). Coincidentally, the first Starbucks in Ireland opened in 2005 in the same location.

Once gentlemen's clubs had designated buildings where members could eat, drink, socialise, and stay overnight, taverns and coffee houses faced competition from the best Dublin hotels which also had coffee rooms "in which gentlemen could read papers, write letters, take coffee and wine in the evening—an exiguous substitute for a club" (McDowell 17). There were at least 15 establishments in Dublin city claiming to be hotels by 1789 (Corr 1) and their numbers grew in the 19th century, an expansion which was particularly influenced by the growth of railways.

By 1790, Dublin's public houses ("pubs") outnumbered its coffee houses with Dublin boasting 1,300 (Rooney 132). Names like the Goose and Gridiron, Harp and Crown, Horseshoe and Magpie, and Hen and Chickens—fashionable during the 17th and 18th centuries in Ireland—hung on decorative signs for those who could not read.

Throughout the 20th century, the public house provided the dominant "third place" in Irish society, and the drink of choice for itd predominantly male customers was a frothy pint of Guinness. Newspapers were available in public houses and many newspapermen had their own favourite hostelries such as Mulligan's of Poolbeg Street; The Pearl, and The Palace on Fleet Street; and The White Horse Inn on Burgh Quay. Any coffee served in these establishments prior

to the arrival of the new coffee culture in the 21st century was, however, of the powdered instant variety.

Hotels / Restaurants with Coffee Rooms

From the mid-19th century, the public dining landscape of Dublin changed in line with London and other large cities in the United Kingdom. Restaurants did appear gradually in the United Kingdom and research suggests that one possible reason for this growth from the 1860s onwards was the Refreshment Houses and Wine Licences Act (1860). The object of this act was to "reunite the business of eating and drinking", thereby encouraging public sobriety (Mac Con Iomaire, "Emergence" v.2 95).

Advertisements for Dublin restaurants appeared in *The Irish Times* from the 1860s. *Thom's Directory* includes listings for Dining Rooms from the 1870s and Refreshment Rooms are listed from the 1880s. This pattern continued until 1909, when *Thom's Directory* first includes a listing for "Restaurants and Tea Rooms"*.* Some of the establishments that advertised separate coffee rooms include Dublin's first French restaurant, the Café de Paris, The Red Bank Restaurant, Morrison's Hotel, Shelbourne Hotel, and Jury's Hotel (see Fig. 1). The pattern of separate ladies' coffee rooms emerged in Dublin and London during the latter half of the 19th century and mixed sex dining only became popular around the last decade of the 19th century, partly infuenced by Cesar Ritz and Auguste Escoffier (Mac Con Iomaire, "Public Dining").

Irish Cafés: From Bewley's to Starbucks

A number of cafés appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, most notably Robert Roberts and Bewley's, both of which were owned by Quaker families. Ernest Bewley took over the running of the Bewley's importation business in the 1890s and opened a number of Oriental Cafés; South Great Georges Street (1894), Westmoreland Street (1896), and what became the landmark Bewley's Oriental Café in Grafton Street (1927). Drawing influence from the grand cafés of Paris and Vienna, oriental tearooms, and Egyptian architecture (inspired by the discovery in 1922 of Tutankhamen's Tomb), the Grafton Street business brought a touch of the exotic into the newly formed Irish Free State. Bewley's cafés became the haunt of many of Ireland's leading literary figures, including Samuel Becket, Sean O'Casey, and James Joyce who mentioned the café in his book, *Dubliners*. A full history of Bewley's is available (Farmar). It is important to note, however, that pots of tea were sold in equal measure to mugs of coffee in Bewley's. The cafés changed over time from waitress- to self-service and a failure to adapt to changing fashions led to the business being sold, with only the flagship café in Grafton Street remaining open in a revised capacity.

It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that a new wave of coffee house culture swept Ireland. This was based around speciality coffee beverages such as espressos, cappuccinos, lattés, macchiatos, and frappuccinnos. This new phenomenon coincided with the unprecedented growth in the Irish economy, during which Ireland became known as the "Celtic Tiger" (Murphy 3). One aspect of this period was a building boom and a subsequent growth in apartment living in the Dublin city centre. The American sitcom *Friends* and its fictional coffee

house, "Central Perk," may also have helped popularise the use of coffee houses as "third spaces" (Oldenberg) among young apartment dwellers in Dublin. This was also the era of the "dotcom boom" when many young entrepreneurs, software designers, webmasters, and stock market investors were using coffee houses as meeting places for business and also as ad hoc office spaces. This trend is very similar to the situation in the 17th and early 18th centuries where coffeehouses became known as sites for business dealings.

Various theories explaining the growth of the new café culture have circulated, with reasons ranging from a growth in Eastern European migrants, anti-smoking legislation, returning sophisticated Irish emigrants, and increased affluence (Fenton). Dublin pubs, facing competition from the new coffee culture, began installing espresso coffee machines made by companies such as Gaggia to attract customers more interested in a good *latté* than a lager and it is within this context that Irish baristas gained such success in the World Barista competition.

In 2001 the Georges Street branch of Bewley's was taken over by a chain called Café, Bar, Deli specialising in serving good food at reasonable prices. Many ex-Bewley's staff members subsequently opened their own businesses, roasting coffee and running cafés. Irish-owned coffee chains such as Java Republic, Insomnia, and O'Brien's Sandwich Bars continued to thrive despite the competition from coffee chains Starbucks and Costa Café. Indeed, so successful was the handmade Irish sandwich and coffee business that, before the economic downturn affected its business, Irish franchise O'Brien's operated in over 18 countries. The Café, Bar, Deli group had also begun to franchise its operations in 2008 when it too became a victim of the global economic downturn.

With the growth of the Internet, many newspapers have experienced falling sales of their printed format and rising uptake of their electronic versions. Most Dublin coffee houses today provide wireless Internet connections so their customers can read not only the local newspapers online, but also others from all over the globe, similar to Francis Dickenson's coffee house in Winetavern Street in the early 18th century. Dublin has become Europe's Silicon Valley, housing the European headquarters for companies such as Google, Yahoo, Ebay, Paypal, and Facebook. There are currently plans to provide free wireless connectivity throughout Dublin's city centre in order to promote e-commerce, however, some coffee houses shut off the wireless Internet in their establishments at certain times of the week in order to promote more social interaction to ensure that these "third places" remain "great good places" at the heart of the community (Oldenburg).

Conclusion

Ireland is not a country that is normally associated with a coffee culture but coffee houses have been part of the fabric of that country since they emerged in Dublin in the 17th century. These Dublin coffee houses prospered in the 18th century, and survived strong competition from clubs and hotels in the 19th century, and from restaurant and public houses into the 20th century. In 2008, when Stephen Morrissey won the coveted title of World Barista Champion, Ireland's place as a coffee consuming country was re-established. The first

decade of the 21st century witnessed a birth of a new espresso coffee culture, which shows no signs of weakening despite Ireland's economic travails.

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