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Transcribed Oral History Interviews and Material Culture

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Edited Interview with Herbert (Sonny) Geldof April 2003

Interview was held in Sonny’s house in Sandymount in the presence of his daughter Jacqui Geldof who is listed below as (JG) in the transcript. Sonny is listed as (SG) and I am listed as (MM).

1. SG: And at that time he had the Café Belge on Dame St. The war started just a couple of months after he was killed you know and I kind of took over the Café although it wasn’t my scene really you know. But it got impossible. Everything was rationed and short supply even the gas that we cooked with, you know, they cut it off at a certain time. So I sold it in 1942. That was the end of that. (JG. There’s some very interesting menu’s there).

2. MM: Tell me briefly about your father first. When did he come to Ireland or when did he come to Dublin?

3. SG: He came to England first from Belgium in the early 1900s, you know, and he came to Ireland first in 1907.

4. MM: Right. What was his first name?

5. SG: Zenon. (JG: And we’re all Zenobies, the girls, the boys are Zenon). That was him there (pointing to a picture)

6. MM: Oh right. 5’8 medium height, black hair and a moustache.

7. SG: Laugh. That’s him there with some of his chefs (JG, oh wow).

8. MM: Where is that?

9. SG: They’re young boys.

10. MM: That would have been in the Café Belge, would it?

11. SG: No, I think they were recruits for the Plaza. He was Managing Director of the Plaza Restaurant in Abbey Street. That was one of the menu cards. (JG: Was it a Cinema after that? Pappy) I think those boys were recruited from Cathal Brugha Street.

12. MM: What was his first job when he came to Dublin?

13. SG: First job, he came first to the Bray Head Hotel in Bray 1907. He was working in London; he was a chef in London. Those days they joined the brigades of chefs.

14. MM: And tell me did he serve his time in London?

15. SG: Well in Belgium first he served time as a patissiere in Bruges, famous for its pastries and cakes and anyway he worked in some of the big hotels and restaurants in London and as I say they have kind of a French chefs club and they, any advertisements for people wanted, the advertisements were display there, you know. There was one chef required for Ireland, for the Bray Head Hotel, for the season and he said he’d have a bash and then he came over. That was his first job in the Bray Head.

16. MM: And that was 1907.

17. SG: 1907 and he never went back again.
18. **MM:** Did he work more than the season there?

19. **SG:** Well I’ll tell you the truth, the Manager there was a guy called Armstrong, no the Manager in the Royal Marine in Dun Laoghaire was Armstrong and when the season was over in Bray, Mr. Armstrong asked him would he go to him in the Royal Marine. So he went there and that was probably a year. I have all the stuff from the Royal Marine in there. That’s probably from Bray, is it? (pointing to personal documents belonging to his father)

20. **MM:** The Bray Head Hotel, the 16th September 1907. Wow, wow. So he spent three years in the Royal Marine in Kingstown as it was at the time, and where did he move onto then?

21. **SG:** The Manager there from the Royal Marine, he went to the Central Hotel in Dublin in Exchequer Street and he brought him with him. It’s there still, The Central.

22. **MM:** Fabulous, fabulous stuff here. How long did he stay there do you remember. That’s to the 13th.

23. **SG:** Roughly a couple of years.

24. **MM:** He passed three years.

25. **SG:** He was in Jury’s then.

26. **MM:** 1917.

27. **SG:** And then from Jury’s, he went to the Crosshaven Hotel. Is that Crosshaven?

28. **MM:** This is Jury’s too.

29. **JG:** That was around the Rising

30. **MM:** St Anne’s Hill, oh right. This was during the Rising, 1917. He was in Jury’s during the Rising.

31. **SG:** He was in Jury’s in 1916 when the rebellion broke out and I remember him telling me that they had to lay on the floor, you know, under the window where they slept, as the bullets were flying.

32. **MM:** Because bullets were flying through the windows (laugh).

33. **SG:** Otherwise you were shot, you know. And at that time…..

34. **MM:** And sure Jury’s was there in College Green, that’s right.

35. **SG:** Yeah at College Green and at that time we lived, we had the house on the Strand Road on Merrion. That’s where I was born actually.

36. **MM:** What year were you born?

37. **SG:** 1912.

38. **MM:** So you were three or four at that time. Okay and could he get home from work?

39. **SG:** Well that’s it. I don’t think it’s in there, I’m not sure, he had…..

40. **MM:** There’s something in here saying he had rooms upstairs or something.
41. **SG:** But he had a pass. See there was an army patrol or control at Merrion Gates and to pass by you had to have a pass and he had a pass from the City Sheriff or someone to say that he worked in Dublin, he lived there and he was able to come home like that of course. (JG. Unfortunately he lived just at the gates, laugh). I have that pass somewhere, I don’t know if it’s in there or not.

42. **MM:** Was there much British army staying at the hotel at the time? In Jury’s?

43. **SG:** I don’t know, I don’t think so. They’d have been in their barracks and that you know. But I think from Jury’s then, himself and my mother went to Crosshaven Hotel and they were Manager and Manageress and he was also the Chef in the Crosshaven Hotel. He was there till, I think 1921 or something.

44. **MM:** You’d remember that well would you? You were a bit young yeah. You were around 8 or so.

45. **SG:** Wait now, before Crosshaven he went to Blarney. The Hydro in Blarney where it was for people who had special diets and all that kind of thing and we had a little cottage there and we were four at that time. My younger brother, Bob, who is Bob’s father you know, and myself and my two sisters, May and Clio. Clio has passed away, May is still hail and hearty, living in the house on the Strand Road and that there is a picture of the four of us in Blarney (pointing to a photo).

46. **MM:** Wow, wee. Clio was the eldest was she?

47. **SG:** Yes. (JG: That’s Clio and that’s Papy with the curly hair there, laugh).

48. **MM:** So then Bob was the baby.

49. **SG:** (JG: Yeah, Bob was the baby). So there he went to the Crosshaven Hotel.

50. **MM:** Wow, 1921. And how long was he in Crosshaven then?

51. **SG:** Well the references are there. I’d say 1921 or so.

52. **MM:** 1921.

53. **SG:** (JG: Where were the Black and Tans was that Crosshaven?). Yes, that was still the troubled times you know, 1921, 1922 all that.

54. **MM:** They were down in Cork sure and West Cork would have seen the battle of Crosshaven.

55. **SG:** Crosshaven was kind of quiet but there was curfew in Cork city and there was no curfew in Crosshaven and the IRA blokes and all, they all congregated in the hotel in Crosshaven and the Black n Tans from Spike Island, that was their headquarters, and they all congregated there, all hail fellow well met (laugh).

56. **MM:** So Crosshaven was like a neutral zone (laugh).

57. **SG:** The next thing the man that owned the Crosshaven Hotel, he put an advertisement in the paper in Cork saying ‘come to Crosshaven, no curfew’. Jesus the next thing of course it was raided every night then. That was the end of that. So then, he came back to Dublin then and he opened the Café Belge in Dame Street and he also had a Patisserie Belge, a little cake shop in Leinster Street. (JG: You know where Jones Shop is in Leinster Street)
58. MM:  I know exactly. Just before Lincoln Place.

59. SG:  (JG: And it was Finn’s Hotel, you know. It still says Finn’s Hotel on the side). Oh yeah. It was the last shop at the end of the college wall. It’s Lincoln Place. And it was a small shop. (JG: That was the Joyce Hotel, you know). In fact it was owned by Finn’s Hotel it was kind of the shop on the corner and that Finn’s Hotel figured in Joyce’s Bloomsday, one of the maids she lived there in Finns. She was a maid in Finn’s Hotel. And around that time he got involved in importing goods from Belgium and he formed the Belgica-Hibernian Trading Company.

60. MM:  What was he bringing in? Wines.

61. SG:  No, we did bring in some wine later but at that time it was Bentwood Chairs and also he was first to import the printed floor covering on felt base. It was called ‘belatin’ and it went very well actually.

62. MM:  And was it like a linoleum type of thing.

63. SG:  Yeah, yeah, printed, on a felt base yeah and it was very cheap for that time.

64. MM:  And easily cleaned and washed and stuff. Yeah.

65. SG:  He travelled the country himself quite a lot that time and he also imported tinned vegetables from Belgium…Petit Pois de Maline

66. MM:  Were they a novelty at that time?

67. SG:  Well they weren’t a novelty. The Irish ones were on the market you know. Every hotel he went, where he’d stay he sold them a few cases of peas, beans and carrots and what have you.

68. MM:  What was the food like in the Café Belge? Was it Belgian? Would there be Moules Frit or Waterzooi or…?

69. SG:  More or less ordinary food but it was quite good. It was very popular at the time. Customers were all the local people from around the district came to lunch everyday. The Cassidy’s from Georges Street, you know, from Cassidy’s shop. And we had a lot of the Revenue Commissioners from the Castle and we had twenty or thirty people from the bank. One of the banks there locally came everyday for lunch.

70. MM:  How many people did it…..

71. SG:  It wasn’t big. How many, I suppose it would hold thirty / forty people something like that.

72. MM:  But they’d turn it over.

73. SG:  Yeah. (JG: And Maud Gonnie McBride went there). Well yeah, they were of course occasional visitors. They weren’t local. (JG: What was the friend that went with her? Lady somebody or another was her friend). I can remember Maud Gonnie McBride coming in with the widow’s weeds and all that and her friend Madame Despard. They were a lot of people Laya Clarke who was a writer you know I remember. A lot of people, Frank Hugh O’Donnell he was a local businessman. There were quite a number of well known people used to come there you know.

74. MM:  But they would have been the middle to upper class who would have eaten out at that stage?
75. **SG:** Yeah, that’s right. We were only open for, we closed about 7 p.m. There was only a luncheon trade and high tea and that kind of thing you know. At that time they weren’t so many people would eat out, you know.

76. **MM:** At that time, now we’re talking about the mid 20s to the early 30s isn’t it.

77. **SG:** It went up….. As I say I sold it in 1942.

78. **MM:** Around that time do you remember what good restaurants; were there good restaurants, fancy restaurants in Dublin at that time?

79. **SG:** Oh yeah, the famous one was Jammet’s of course, who was a good friend of my fathers, Jammet’s and when Jammet wanted a chef he’d ring up my father and say ‘Zenon I want chef, can you recommend somebody.’ I think he was French.

80. **MM:** Was the Red Bank there at that time?

81. **SG:** The Red Bank, yes. The Red Bank they were famous for seafoods and that, and there was one there in Exchequer Street famous for its steaks and that. The hotel ….. I forget the name of it. (note. Sonny is referring to the Dolphin Hotel but can’t recall the name)

82. **MM:** Was there the Moira.

83. **SG:** No, no, the Moira was the….. **(JG:** was Wynn’s in existence at that time?). Oh yeah I think so but there was Jury’s of course on Dame Street and there was another restaurant near up the road on the other side called Hyne’s. He was a Swiss chap, and there was Pims in Georges Street, they had a restaurant. There was several restaurants around about you know.

84. **MM:** And were they all foreign owned as such?

85. **SG:** No, no. Hyne’s was but the others were not, Jury’s, who else was there? no I don’t think they were, but then about 19, that’s the belatim stuff I was telling you about (pointing to a document).

86. **MM:** Ah here the Café Belge. It looks very nice. **Maison Geldof**.

87. **SG:** **(JG:** And then didn’t granddad have a lot of Italian friends). That’s the time (pointing to an advertisement for the Café Belge) centenary of Catholic Emancipation you know.

88. **MM:** 1929.

89. **SG:** And we were opened all night. **(JG. Were you?).** They were selling beer, wine and the lot. He had a wine license but nobody cared. You could do what you liked, you could stay opened all night. **(JG:** You weren’t raided or anything?). No the police didn’t mind. It was a hectic time in Dublin.

90. **MM:** That was from the 16th to the 23rd.

91. **SG:** Yeah.

92. **MM:** That was the liberator.

93. **SG:** **(JG:** And what about do you remember when you made your confirmation you were in the Café Belge). No I was in the….. I suppose I don’t know, I was probably about thirteen, I was confirmed and had my red rosette and stuff. **(JG:** Tell him what happened). I was down in the shop in Leinster Street **(JG:** oh the cake shop). My mother was there she looked after that, but my
father happened to be there too for me and he was sitting. It had about half a dozen tables where people could have a cup of tea and cakes and he was sitting at a corner table talking to a friend of his in French, they were conversing in French, and next thing a couple of guys came in and went over to them with revolvers, you know, and accused them of being spies or something like that (laugh). And my mother came from behind the counter (JG: she was a small woman) and she was afraid of no-one and said ‘that’s my husband leave him alone, get out (laugh). And they said ‘get back behind your counter’ you know. So they went away and as they were going out, he patted my head and said to me ‘this is the happiest day of your life son’ he said to me. (laugh)

94. MM: The fella with the revolver?

95. SG: (JG: Yeah, once he saw the rosette, that was okay) (laugh) They were from Oriel House. I don’t know if you ever heard of Oriel House. It’s just around the corner in Westland Row. The corner house, that was later called Gaeltara Éireann or something. But at that it was the headquarters of I don’t what they were, IRA or something (JG: they were like Special Branch). And my father and mother knew the head men there, ‘cause they always came up for a cup of tea so he kind of told them. They knew who it was alright but said ‘say nothing, leave it alone you know! There’s no harm done’. (JG: People went into Oriel House and never came out again). They were never seen again, people that were brought in there.

96. MM: Tell me about your mother? Where was your mother from?

97. SG: She was a Londoner.

98. MM: Was she? So she came over to Bray.

99. SG: No, no. He came first to Bray for the season and then when he went Dun Laoghaire or to Kingstown, he bought her over then and my eldest sister Clio, she was born in Kingstown.

100. MM: And tell me something, do you remember the first time you were brought out for a meal?

101. SG: (laugh) We always had good meals at home you know. I can remember every Sunday there was a big roast you know. (JG: Sure I remember even as a tot we still had that, the whole family). I was never a good eater. I’d get the ‘huff’ and I’d be sent off (laugh).

102. MM: And when did you start working in the Café Belge?

103. SG: Well I didn’t really ever work there, at that time we had an office across the road in Crow Street. Do you know Crow Street? We had an office there and a warehouse down the bottom. There was a warehouse at the end, the corner of Celia Street. Kind of a long place, all viable property now! It was beside the old medical college there, right at the end of Crow Street. And every Monday morning the black van would pull up there, open the doors back to the door and they’d bring in the stiffs you know (JG: Dad!!) (laugh).

104. MM: For the medical college?

105. SG: (JG: They were not stiffs – cadavers not stiffs, It’s a wonder they didn’t end up in the café !!!). At the office in Crow Street, I never really took much active part in Café Belge.

106. MM: So you never really worked in the kitchens.

107. SG: I didn’t work there, no I never worked (JG: you did in the beginning for a week). I worked for a fortnight in the Patisserie Belge and I had an accident, I broke my arm, so I was useless. (JG: He hated making the dough you know). So I used to go into the office in Crow Street and mess around there and I kind of stuck with that. I stayed with that business and I’m still at it.
108.MM: Tell me something about technology. You know there wasn’t any electricity back then?

109.SG: Ah there was. Oh yeah there was electricity.

110.MM: But most of the – there was no mixing machines or stuff like that…..

111.SG: Very little, or very expensive. You know you had to be in a big way.

112.MM: So most of that work would have been done by hand?

113.SG: Oh yeah, we cooked with gas in the Café Belge and as I say during the war there it was rationed and they cut it off. My sister at that time, my Clio, she was Manageress in Switzer’s Restaurant. And they were in the same boat, they had no way of cooking or heating.

114.MM: And how did ye get around it?

115.SG: Someone told me about the sawdust thing. Did you ever hear of that? I made a few of them. I made one for her. It was a barrel, like an oil drum, you know, and you put a hole in the bottom and you put a pole in and stuff sawdust in all around it and the pole got wide and then you’d take out pole and it was kind of solid. And you could light that at the bottom and the flame would come around the hole, and it was quite effective. So we had one too.

116.MM: And it worked as a gas ring as such.

117.SG: You could kind of cook stuff on top of it and I made one for them as well in Switzers. But any old thing, you know (JG: As if life was not hard enough). There were the gas balloons on the back of cars. They were running cars on gas. Everything was rationed, the tea was rationed, the butter was rationed, meat was usually ok, you could get meat (JG: how could you get a menu together), sugar was rationed you know. (JG: That meant the patisserie was), oh I got fed up with it. Well I used to buy a sack of coffee beans and I’d have a few sacks, and all the customers, well the one’s I knew, ‘sell us a pound of coffee’ so I’d sell them the beans. (Only to special customers like – laugh). As a favour like, (Didn’t you say something about it was hard to keep the beans, that they would go off or something). They would, they’d get musty if they got damp or anything. (JG: And your whole thing, your whole sack of them would be spoilt).

118.MM: Where was the coffee coming from in those days?

119.SG: Well there was a place beside us, down Cecilia Street called Cantrell McDonalds or something and they had been there all the time and we always bought the coffee from them and I used get a mixture of what we’d use, a mixture of Kenya, Costa Rica and Mocha. And it made a good coffee.

120.MM: And you mixed it yourself. You blended it yourself.

121.SG: We roasted them. We had a little gas roaster, you know, and grind them then.

122.MM: During the war, how did you survive with the rationing? Did you get creative with your menus?

123.SG: It was very difficult you know and my other business was closed down. You couldn’t import anything. (See one kind of supported the other normally) We struggled along buying stuff locally and selling it back again.

124.MM: What was there, was there vegetable available and things like that?
125. SG: Ah yeah we’d get vegetables in the market. You’d get vegetables all right (JG: I suppose that was all home grown produce). Imported stuff, they were short, you know.

126. MM: Once you had the money you could eat well enough during the war.

127. SG: Ah yeah. People used to, friends used to come over from London and that to get a steak. (laugh) (JG: You’re joking) Oh yeah, we were never really short of food.

128. MM: And because like because of our neutrality we were never short of food, just imported things like sugar really.

129. SG: Stuff you could do without really you know. You had a small ration of butter (JG: not if you were trying to run a cake shop) and of course you had the ration cards you know.

130. MM: And did the ration cards work out for restaurants?

131. SG: Well, you were allowed a certain amount, it was a different system you know and you had a different quota like you know. But I have some of those ration cards still. You’d to tear them off you know when you were getting your quarter pound of butter or whatever it was, and the same with petrol. I mean there was no petrol really. Even when the war was finished we had petrol coupons you know.

132. MM: And who worked in the Café Belge? Was it Dublin people worked there?

133. SG: You know around Dublin, you know. We had one little girl there and she was quite a Chef herself. She had worked under my father. And she used to shout at them in French. She was only a small little thing. (JG: She must have learned it from Grandad – laugh). ‘Nom des Dieu’ she would say (laugh). We had three, four or five waitresses they were all local girls you know. (JG: But you had them for years didn’t you). Most of them stayed a long time yeah.

134. MM: What were conditions like those days to work? What were waiter/waitresses…..

135. SG: Waiters got a pound and six pence a week. They got there tips, 3 pence and six pence.

136. MM: What sort of hours would they work? It was good hours in your place because it closed at 7.

137. SG: We were only opened for lunch and tea like.

138. MM: And how many days a week was it?

139. SG: Just I think it was only Monday to Friday, I forget what we were opened. We may have been opened on Saturday as well but not Sunday.

140. MM: Were any restaurants open on Sunday?

141. SG: A few, but those commercial ones around like Pims and such they wouldn’t be open on Sunday. (JG: Wasn’t Grandad very friendly with the whole kind of Italian contingency. What was the name of the guy, he owned a place in O’Connell Street?) Oh yeah, there was the Broadway Soda Fountain. That was in O’Connell Street. I think its some kind of soda bar now I think. That was quite a big place and it was a guy called Geraldo Boni that owned it.

142. MM: Where was he from?

143. SG: From Italy. Oh yeah and his half-brother Ernesto, he went to school with us in Blackrock. We were in Blackrock College. Bob and myself and Ernesto were sent there too and we had to
look after him. He had no English when he came but…. (JG: and he was really handsome, and
was subjected to ..). Geraldo used to ring my father and say ‘Zenon will you come down we’ll
have a macaroni party.’ (laugh). (JG: In the evenings). He’d go down and he’d cook it for them,
a big bloody thing full of macaroni, you know, and glasses of stout and they’d have a big do there.
And there was another chap too a Belgian fellow too called Warnants, Louis Warnants he was a
commercial agent and he had an office in Pearse Street and he was trying to sell armaments to the
army all the time. Selling the ammunition from Belgium you know. And he’d give a big party, a
mussel party. I was at a couple of them. And he’d have several officers there from the army.
Have this big thing of mussels in the middle, bottles of stout and you know buckets to throw
the….. (JG: And where would you get all the stuff from?). It was only mussels. (JG: But where
would you get them)? He’d buy them I don’t know. He’d buy them.

![Figure SG.1: Advertisement and Menu for Broadway Soda Fountain](http://www.pdf4free.com)

Source: (Purcell 2007)

144.MM: What year was this?

145.SG: That would have been around the 40s I think.

146.MM: Right yeah, yeah.

147.SG: Louis spent years at that trying to sell, you see the ammunition was always bought from
England. And one fine year didn’t he get the order for the ammunition, which was for thousands
of pounds so it put him on his feet. With his commission he bought two big houses on
Northumberland Road. They’d be worth millions now, the two houses. It was opposite the Belgian
Embassy in Shrewsbury Road, on the main road.
During the 50s or so when did restaurants like, they were always the good few restaurants but when did things change. When did you see a big change in eating out habits?

I couldn’t say you know, as I say I finished with it in 1942 and I glad to get out of it. There was so much hassle trying to get stuff under black market and what have you, you know. But shortly after that I got married then. My wife had been active as Manageress in the Café and that was it. She worked in the Sweeps Stakes you know, in Ballsbridge.

Right, yeah, yeah. Where was she from?

Her mother and father were Irish but she’d been born in England. She only died there about two or three years is it. (Jackie, two-and-a-half years ago). Bob of course, Bob he was a chef too my brother.

Yeah.

You see when we were finished in Blackrock College, we were day boys there you know because we lived in Merrion on the Strand Road and when we finished there we were both packed off to France to learn French with a view to the catering trade and we were there a couple of years and before we came home our father sent us instructions to go to the Gallery Lafayette in Paris, you know and to buy the whole list of the chefs gear, the hats, the jackets with the little cloth buttons, the checked trousers, the whole lot. (JG: I suppose you couldn’t get anything here could you). Oh well, that was before the war now. That was before the war. But they specialised there in that kind of thing. (JG: of course). So we came home and Bob was put in the kitchen in the café and I think there was a full chef there as well at the time and I was shoved in the bake-house in Leinster Street, kneading the butter and baps, for a fortnight until I broke my arm and that was that (JG: accidentally, on purpose). But Bob continued in the Café and he went to London then and my father fixed him up in London and he worked in the Carlton Club, the Military and Naval Club and he was a chef in Maison Prunier. I don’t know if you ever heard, it’s a famous French seafood restaurant in London and also in Paris and he worked there for a time. (JG: Prunier’s was the place, the business). The place yeah and then at that time he had put the…the Queen Mary was being launched you know and he applied for a job on the Queen Mary and out of several hundred applicants they were ten selected and he got one of the places.

Wow.

So he sailed on the maiden voyage of the Queen Mary as a chef tournant (relief chef). I think he did seven or eight round trips to New York and then came back again and he was in the Naval and Military Club, the Carlton Club and Prunier’s.

And when he came back to Dublin did he continue working as a chef?

He got a job then, himself and his wife Evelyn, who had when she had worked in the catering trade and they got jobs as Manager and Manageress in the Bray Head.

Right.

My father had been previously, and then also they went to Crosshaven. They were Manager and Manageress in Crosshaven. And Bob worked for a time then in our own place in the Café Belge but he got a bit fed up with it then and he came and worked with me in the import business. And he stayed with us as a representative around the country until he retired. (JG: nursing his varicose veins). What? (JG: nursing his varicose veins for the rest of his life from the Queen Mary). They didn’t bother him too much. (JG: they did so, he had operations and everything on them. If it was anything like his description of working in the Queen Mary).

Do you remember his descriptions of the Queen Mary.
161. SG: Well it was terrible hard going you know from what he told me. Unfortunately I had a whole lot of menus and stuff and he had a fire there (JG: he had a fire in the house and they were all burned). But it was mostly American tourists on the ships and they did nothing but eat from morning till night. (Laugh) You could have anything you wanted at any time. The breakfast menu was anything you could ever think of. (JG: And even the butter and the ice were all, you know socles, you know this, carved). They worked all hours. (Jackie, image how they’d come along and gather a lump out of it) and you’d be just in bed and you might be called out again, you know and then the head chef would roar ‘she going to bloody roll’ (JG: when the storm is coming) and they’d have to put up the storm case around the pots and stuff. (JG: he used to love that because everyone was sick as a pig and wouldn’t be in the dining room at all) (laugh). Well sure you should have a chat with Bob, he’d tell you a few stories. But the father too he worked in all these places in London when he went first and I suppose they worked as a brigade, a Head Chef and …… (JG: if he left did he bring the brigade with him?). He’d have his Head Chef, he would have his brigade working in the Savoy Hotel or whatever and he’d say well ‘we’re leaving here boys. Meet me tomorrow morning at 7 a.m. at Hyde Park Corner’ and they wouldn’t even know where they were going and he’d bring them to some other place. (JG: that was liked worked under those in London, the Blue Murphy’s and the Green Murphy’s wasn’t it, laugh). And they moved around all the different hotels as a troupe, you know there was ready demand for them you know. (JG: so you had to stick with your brigade or you might be……).

162. SG: So that’s it.

163. MM: I know you left the restaurant business yourself but I take it you would have still eaten out from time to time

164. SG: Not so much, I was always fed well at home but my wife and myself used to on holidays, Christmas and that we’d go off, we stayed in all the best places. We had a couple of Christmases in Kenmare you know the Kenmare Hotel and in Sheen Falls. (JG: Which did you like the best was it the Park or the Sheen Falls?) I think the Park, I liked better then the Sheen Falls. (JG: was that the best food yeah?)

165. MM: And was the Park run by the great, the railways at the time, was it?

166. SG: Oh no, not at all. I forget his name. No, it’s private.

167. MM: Not, this is Brennan, no.

168. SG: Yeah, it was Brennan all right. No I don’t know. I forget the name.

169. MM: What were the places in Dublin you liked?

170. SG: We used to go a lot to Tinakilly. We spent a few Christmases there. It was nice. It was good. But we used to go up to Roly’s on a Sunday and personally I never like any of those places very much. Tinakilly was nice and so were the two in Kenmare. We were in Galway and we spent one Christmas in the Talbot

End of Side One of the Tape

171. SG: In 1911, 1912, 1910, 1911 and 1912 my father exhibits at the Irish Food and Cookery Exhibition. It was in the Rotunda in Dublin. He walked away with all the prizes. The first prizes, second prizes. I’ll show you if you come here a moment.

172. MM: Yeah. This is William Van Lear (looking at a photograph).

173. SG: Van Lear right yeah.
And where was he from?

He was Dutch. His father was a millionaire and he told him ‘I don’t want any of your money I’ll make my own money’. He was a hard case (Laugh) (JG: Who was the guy that flew a plane?)

He rescued just before the war, he rescued a lot of Jewish children from Germany. He got them out.

Did he get them to Ireland or to…..

To England. He worked here with the Hammond Lane Foundry. And, what’s your man’s name was in the Hammond Lane? Ah, god, names. Do you know the people that own the Hammond Lane?

No, no.

His father was a millionaire from the royalties from the steel oil drums you know. He got a royalty on every steel drum, you know.

Wow, yeah. Who were the other characters that used to come in to you in the restaurant at that time?

He used to come in all the time. (JG: Was he the guy that either he had a row with his wife or something and he flew over and dropped a box of chocolates over the house?) He wasn’t fighting with her then but…..(JG: Something happened and he hit the neighbour with the chocolates by mistake)

Oh, it was her birthday and he flew over garden, dropped a boxed of chocolates (laugh). He was a man. He went away to Israel. He lived in Israel the last years of his life.

The menus were they all, were the menus nearly the same everywhere you went. Was it all classical French food?

The menu for the Plaza you saw.

The menu from the Plaza is here. Wow, look at the back of it, yeah.

It will give you an idea of what and the prices. (JG. It’s a pity its all scrubbed out) You know when they’d be changing the menu like.

Yeah, cod mauniere, steak and kidney pie, minced chicken, poached ham. And how was that served? We start off with the hors d’oeuvres ot else the soup and then there was either eggs and ham, like there was another course here and then did you get your vegetables with your main course or did they come afterwards.

Oh afterwards yeah. The whole lot was 2 and 6. Imagine 2 and 6. A shilling was 24.

Sixteen pence I suppose or no it wouldn’t be it would be 13.

It was thirty old pence.

Oh Lord! (looking at menu from Plaza) Caneton au Navet.

What’s that?
194. MM: That’s duck with turnips isn’t it?

195. JG: God I’ve never heard of that.

196. MM: Fillet de Boeuf Roti Cresson - roast beef with watercress.

197. SG: That was a big plate with two pig cut up. It was a beautiful plate. I think I had a newspaper cutting. I don’t know if it’s there or not.

198. MM: I’ll have a look now.

199. SG: I don’t know if it’s there or not. What’s that?

200. MM: Geldof.

201. JG: Ah that’s when Bob was in Belgium.

202. SG: I have a (not in there).

203. MM: Newspaper, this could be it here.

204. JG: What’s in the envelope Pappy, would it be in there?

205. SG: No, no.

206. MM: It might in the back, we’ll have a look at the back.

207. SG: I have a newspaper cutting from the opening of the Plaza.

208. MM: That’s it there is it? No. Oh that’s when your father died.

209. SG: That’s a menu the same as the other one with a few notations.

210. MM: This one is slightly different now. That’s lunch hour.

211. SG: I must have it somewhere. I must look. I had a big newspaper from the opening of the Plaza.

212. MM: Oh, I never saw that.

213. SG: Ah you did. That (inaudible).

214. MM: This was when he was in the army or (pointing to official documentation of the Belgian Army)

215. SG: 1914 when Belgium were invaded. He went to Liverpool on the enlisted for the Belgium Army. But they didn’t take him then. He had four children you know. He was kind of, they were put in sections. He was put for seventeen or something or they’d been called up to sixteen when the war ended.


217. JG: Well not so lucky. He ended up as road kill instead

218. MM: Yeah. And did you, so it was mostly what you started importing like you were importing mostly furniture and floor covers and that sort of stuff.
219. SG: We used to import rugs like these (JG: But in a way it was to do with the Café because they were Café chairs. Didn’t you say he sold to every café around Ireland, they all had these chairs?) There were all different kind of bentwood chairs (JG: I still have some in my house. Pappy renewed them and fixed for me)

Looking through a scrapbook of old menus, photographs and newspaper Clippings

220. MM: This is just a dinner dance. (JG: Isn’t that lovely)

221. SG: That’s Boris Ivanosky. That’s the guy the won the race.

222. MM: And he was the grand prix races in the Phoenix Park, 1929 actually. Wow. And was that a once off or was it a regular Grand Prix.

223. SG: Ah no, they had two or three, two I think. I don’t think it’s ever been continued. That’s the signature; he was a Russian guy, Ivanosky that won it in the Alfa Romeo. You know when your young you look at the races. I was always interested in cars all right.

Looking through scrap book of various clippings and momentos

224. SG: But my father had an agency for a wine shipper in Bordeaux, Hanappier Peyerlongue and that man Mr. Peyerlongue, he was over here and went on a trip around with my father to sell the wine you know and they were in Cork and coming back by Dungarvan they were involved in a motor accident and they were both killed. The drinks fell on themselves. For some reason the French man was driving the car Mr. Peyerlongue. They were big wine shippers in Bordeaux.

225. MM: What age were you at that stage?

226. SG: Me, ah I was in my early 20s.

227. MM: You had to take over.

228. JG: It was a big responsibility.

229. MM: Take over responsibility for the family. Yeah. It’s fabulous stuff. I’d love to be able to photocopy some of these menus and stuff at some stage if that was okay.

230. SG: There’s only the one menu there.

231. MM: But even this stuff here and that.

232. SG: I’ll get you copies of them all right.

Note: It was clear that Sonny was anxious about letting some of his fathers stuff out of his hands, but following some coaxing from his daughter Jacqui and my undertaking to return them by the following day, he agreed.

233. SG: (JG: The client ordered the sole or something and the waitress asked was it not nice and) She said that’s not black sole, and she told her father in the kitchen. He came out with his chef’s hat and a big carving knife in his hand (laugh).…..(JG: And the bill on the end of it) (laugh). He says I believe you say its not sole (laugh) and he said there’s the bill from this morning from the McCabes who were the big fish mongers in the South City market there you know. (JG: Well it was on the end of a knife it wasn’t just his hand)

234. MM: (laughing) Were there any other situations like that?
Discussion for a few minutes on beverages on the Plaza Menu – appolinaris was a fizzy mineral water known as a baby polly and virol was also on the menu served with milk.

235. SG: Up to the end there in the Café Belge we served a full four course lunch, silver service for 2 and 6 pence. Two shillings and 6 pence, A shilling was twelve, so 30 pence, 30 old pence. (JG: Ah yeah but what was your weeks wages?) What. As I said waitresses got a £1 and 6 pence if I remember (JG: And did she get her keep or her food or anything?) Well she had her lunch there or whatever you know.

236. JG: And then my auntie Viv, that had the dressmaking place in Wicklow Street, she told me granddad used to send her lunch around on a silver dish with you know hot plate things.
237. **SG:** A *bain marie* like.

238. **JG:** A *bain marie* with a silver dome on the top. Somebody would be sent around Wicklow Street with it.

239. **MM:** Yeah (laugh).

240. **JG:** Could you imagine (laugh).

241. **SG:** We have some of those.

242. **JG:** They’d beat your wraps and your smoothies!!

243. **SG:** We have some of those little…..

244. **JG:** We have them still.

245. **MM:** But what do we call them at all. We call them a *cloche*. Where was the Ritz?

**Discussion on silverware, cloche's, doublefonts etc. Sonny brings in some silverware that had a monogram for The Ritz on it.**

246. **SG:** It was a new….. and he sold them all the….. (**JG:** Yeah, but where was it?) I think it was in George’s Street. I think but it didn’t last any time they went bust.

247. **JG:** Oh, Jesus.

248. **MM:** So they sold on all the stuff.

249. **JG:** And then you’d have staff having to polish the God damn things and wash them in case they’d taint the food.

250. **SG:** Yeah, yeah (**JG:** Now I have to do it) They are nice though, aren’t they?

251. **MM:** They’re lovely yeah.

252. **JG:** Such a job, it takes me four nights doing all the stuff.

253. **MM:** They’re fabulous.

254. **JG:** That’s only half of it.

255. **SG:** They don’t get anything served in them now (**JG:** No, we must start using them again) No but I mean in restaurant.

256. **JG:** No you don’t! Are you joking? You get some in Patrick Guilbauds all right!

257. **MM:** We still have some of them in the college.

**Discussion on the amount of fast food outlets in O'Connell Street**

258. **SG:** But I was just reading the other day the corporation now their tying to clean up O’Connell Street and get rid of some of those…..

259. **MM:** Unfortunately they are the only people that can afford to rent. Like you had in those days you had all the grill rooms. The Savoy would have had a grill room…..
And the Red Bank. The Red Bank was a great place. It was very popular.

Now was that mostly seafood you were saying. Did you say that was mostly seafood in
the Red Bank or…..

Not the Red Bank I don’t think. The Red Bank did steaks and all that stuff.

Yeah. I saw there in one of the menus it said about rump steak a la Café Belge. It was on,
it was the Plaza because it actually had rump steak a la Plaza but then in pencil it had a la Café
Belge written in. I was wondering what the garnish was (laugh).

Well the famous place for steaks there was that hotel in Exchequer Street and I can’t just
think of the name of it. It was near the top towards Capel Street like. Not Exchequer Street what
they call, what do they call the road down from Capel Street, from Parliament Street, Essex Street
(The Dolphin Hotel). It was famous for good steaks. I remember once having steak tartare there.

And was the raw egg on top and the whole lot?

Yeah, Raw steak, minced steak…..It was very good.

What were the other good places?

The Clarence and you know there on the quay. We used to go there for lunch quite a bit
but when it changed hands then it wasn’t the same really after that. It was the he same owner as
Wynne’s hotel. It belongs to Bono now.

That right, they do lovely food in now

Is it good now?

Oh yeah it’s very good.

When they opened that they called it the tea rooms. It wasn’t good at first it might be
better now. It was a bit messy too the way they were carrying on there you know. I didn’t like it.

Would you have eaten with John Howard when he had the Coq Hardi? or did you ever
eat in John Howard’s place the Coq Hardi?

The Coq Hardi, yes I did. Yeah we had a do there. It was very expensive I remember that.

Oh very expensive yeah. It was the most expensive restaurant, well one of the most
expensive restaurants in Dublin.

Yeah, yeah. And it wasn’t all that good either the day I was there. We had a big party
there, it was some anniversary or something.

Did you ever eat out with Sean Kinsella out in the Mirabeau. Do you remember Sean
Kinsella’s restaurant?

When it was in Dun Laoghaire.

In Dun Laoghaire yeah.

Yes I did a few times.
How was that?

It was over rated. You know. I thought it was over rated. We used to go a bit to Roly’s as well but again the wife liked and they all liked it. I never thought it was great you know. It was very noisy. The acoustics there, Jesus, you can’t hear yourself you know. I’m a bit hard to please.

Well my mother is the same. They say when you’re used to getting good food at home it’s very hard to eat out.

But Jacqui is a very good cook.

Yeah, actually I’ve eaten in her house and she is, she is very good.

Yeah, she is. She comes here every Thursday and I usually get a cordon blue meal you know (laugh). But Jenny is quite good too actually. So that’s it. Ah the best value I find in present times is the carvery lunch on the Sunday in Jury’s. Very good. Its not very…..I think its about €23-€25 for the plus the service on that, wine on that. But it’s very good. There’s a great selection there you know. It’s self-service you know. They bring you the soup and there’s a great hors d’oeuvre you know. There is a great variety of stuff. Everything, smoked salmon and the whole lot everything and then there’s two or three roasts and there’s probably chicken or different and a whole selection of sweets you know. Its very good value really. All my crowd like it.

Discussion on where I worked in Dublin and the quality of restaurants in 2003

But on a Sunday now its hard find a good place. Unless your going to pay over the odds to go to the Four Seasons or somewhere. It’s too expensive.

Yeah, it’s expensive but its good alright. Its good but its very expensive.

Discussion about a van that his father had for deliveries

You have a friction drive. They were no proper gear box. It was just a friction drive which meant that one wheel from the engine, and the one wheel going this way and when you changed gear it moved from the centre. It moved along you see.

Yeah, yeah there was no clutch as such, again he was delivering stuff into the Gresham and into where else? Jury’s was it?

My sister Clio the eldest, she used to drive the little van. She was one of the first women around Dublin driving the van. It was small, like a biscuit tin (Laugh)

But ah, you got no differential or anything.

And did the patisserie close down then at the same time as the Café?

Before it.

Oh before it.

Yeah. Before it. And that’s how the fellow got more involved in the import business you know.

That’s where the money was.

For the confectionery.
Yeah, that’s where the money way. He probably had sense.

Though he liked the confectionery all right.

Yeah. The money is in brining raw materials in or bringing different stuff in.

Well you know nowadays there’s more money in the catering.

Discussion on how tight margins are in running restaurants

Yeah. It has all right. Its funny, the old thing is that everyone, so many people have this dream of opening up a restaurant. They think its as easy as anything you know what I mean and they don’t realise the work, the hours that go into it and…..

I began to think we were in it at the wrong time you know. It was very hard to make money then you know. But with the prices now, you pay €30/€40 for your lunch.

And the rest (laugh).

And the rest. That would be cheap.

I know yeah. I know yeah. You just wouldn’t see money going now days. You just wouldn’t see money going nowadays, so you wouldn’t. I remember talking about during the war, I remember I had a lecture in college, he’s dead now God rest him, but he was Larder Chef in Jammet’s during the war. PJ Dunne was his name. He used to say, that they used to serve you know, he said all the customers used to wonder how come he had scampi and he had scallops and he had lobster when none of the other restaurants had it. And he showed us how he did it but he used this monk fish…..And he used to cut little little slivers of it and they’d become scampi. He cut rounds off them and they’d become scallops. So you have to be creative sometimes during the war.

Oh yeah. Its hard to know all right if you had scampi. The missus and myself before I was up here on the Naas Road we had, I was in Little Strand Street, that’s off Capel Street and on a Friday we used go over to a Nico’s. That was quite good. We’d get the scampi and chips and they were really excellent and I think they are still.

Yeah, yeah. They’re known for good food.

And the boss their, I’d say the scampi are good and he’d say ‘we got the best scampi in Dublin’. ‘I agree with you’ I said. ‘I think you do’. They’re great yeah. I haven’t been for a while because it was handy when I was there you know. Now I have to come down. But I must go.

Why did those Italians come to Ireland do you think?

It hard to know why.

I suppose they all have different…..

They must see an opportunity of making money.

(Laugh).

I knew a lot of them in the old days. There were the Fusciardi’s and they were all in the ice-cream business.

Yeah. The Fortes and the.
318. SG: They all do well. I had a visit there recently up in the place. They were from Fusciardi’s.

319. MM: Oh Fusciardi yeah, yeah.

320. SG: Do you know them then?

321. MM: Yeah, in Capel Street there, yeah.

322. SG: While we were there like…..

323. MM: And ye knew them well…..

324. SG: Yeah and we had a fairly big car park and they used to park in that, cars and that. Fusciardis. Morelli…..

325. MM: And then there’s Borza’s well.

326. SG: Morelli was there is Caple Street.

327. MM: They’re people I must go talk to. A lot of them were involved in importing wine and olive oil and stuff as well.

328. SG: Well, that chap that owned the Broadway Soda Fountain Geraldo Boni. He had a place near us in Cecilia Street and he used to import the olive oil. ‘Guaranteedo Purito’ What they call ‘tucca’ oil.

329. MM: And was there much wine sold those days?

330. SG: No. I mean the wine business has grown tremendously in the last years. They didn’t have all these off licence shops. You know. You could buy wine but it was hard enough, we had the age, we found it hard to sell it. But there were a few wholesale places that kind of had the trade you know. But I used to sell a few hogs head here and there. There was a place called Woods, a wholesale grocer in Dame Street. He used to buy a few hogs head and wine. But nowadays everyone drinks wine, don’t they.

331. MM: Ah they do yeah.

332. SG: Things have changed.

333. MM: What exactly was a hogs head?

334. SG: Well it was the barrel. Fifty-six gallons or something. A big barrel.

335. MM: Wow. Yeah, Yeah. And they’d tap it themselves then.

336. SG: They’d tap it themselves. They’d bottle it themselves. That was the cheapest way to do it. It’s much cheaper that way than the bottle.

337. MM: And where were you bringing that in from?

338. SG: From Bordeaux.

339. MM: From Bordeaux, yeah, yeah. Again that was through the acquaintance your father had who was killed in the car accident.
340. SG: He was killed. Bordeaux. But it was very cheap, very cheap compared to prices now. Of Course all they used was bottle tax and there was the tax itself on the.....

341. MM: And the excise or the.....

342. SG: According to the strength you know. There was cork tax and every kind of tax. More people drink wine now certainly than ever there was.

343. MM: I was just thinking here now about your refrigeration. What sort of refrigeration or what did you do in the restaurant during the war?

344. SG: We had a big ice box. A big one with glass doors and we bought ice, a big, big box of ice. You know.

345. MM: And who sold..... Was there like a Dublin ice company or something was there.

346. SG: That was their name actually. I think it was called the Dublin Ice Company. And they had these big things to grab it you know.

347. MM: Ice hooks, clamps or whatever yeah, yeah. And how long would one of those blocks last yeah.

348. SG: They'd last quite a number of days you know. But they weren't so many of them around then you know that. Modern technology took over.

349. MM: Oh yeah, there's been huge changes hasn't there. Would you have had any hygiene inspectors or anything back then.

350. SG: Don't think so. Just as well. (Laugh).I can't remember any of them fellows coming. Their fairly strict now I'd say.

351. MM: They are indeed.

352. SG: Rightly so.

353. MM: Rightly so in a lot of ways now to be honest. Some of them have lost the plot I think thought. Some of them were throwing the baby out with the bath water you know.

354. SG: Yeah. Though they close them up now quick if.....

355. MM: Oh if things aren’t right. I better go back to me children.

356. SG: Back to the wife and children.

Discussion on where I live and on route Sonny takes to work in Naas Road

357. SG: Well nice talking to you.

358. MM: Well it’s been fascinating.

359. SG: I hope it has.....

360. MM: And that stuff you gave me, oh some of that stuff is just fascinating. Some of those menus I’m going to start looking through the old books and find out exactly what some of those garnishes were and things like that its great.
If you’d like to meet my brother Bob sometime I’m sure I could arrange it.

Yeah, yeah that would be great.

He is a chef himself and he’d know more about it than I’d do.

Yeah, yeah. Where is he living?

He lives in Dun Laoghaire.

In Dun Laoghaire yeah

Crossthwaite Park South.

He’s younger than you, he’s the baby.

Well yeah.

What age is he now?

He’s only a year-and-a-half or two years younger than me. But unfortunately a few years ago there he suffered a stroke. Now he made a very good recovery but his speech is a bit.....He kind of gets the wrong words sometimes, the wrong dates.
Edited Interview with Bill (Liam) Kavanagh in Artane (11/4/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Bill Kavanagh (BK)

1. MM: Basically what I’m looking for first is that we start off with yourself and with your age, the year you were born and how you got into becoming a chef and why - just your own story.

2. BK: Well you just want it from start, as I entered Cathal Brugha Street or before that.

3. MM: Where were you born?

4. BK: I was born originally on North Wall. I consider myself like from the south-side, up by South Circular Road, Kilmainham. My mother died when I was a young child, three year old and for some years then I was basically reared by my father, and then my father married a second time. At an early age he always thought I was pretty handy at being able to help out with making say a breakfast for him or start to cook a meal or something like that. He thought at that time that I’d make a good chef. So years passed anyway and I went to the Christian Brothers, educated by them and then I did an examination for the College of Catering otherwise then known as the Domestic College of Science in Cathal Brugha Street. So at the time it was referred to what they call a corporation scholarship at that time. It was a written examination and I got that and I was called and twelve of us were selected. So we started in Cathal Brugha Street in the year 1942. A year after Cathal Brugha Street was opened and I spent one full year in Cathal Brugha Street and the industry at that particular time during the war was very short of catering staff. My first job after I completed the year in Cathal Brugha Street, I did a few exams there, you know in my class and I did very well.

5. MM: Who did you have in Cathal Brugha Street when you went there in the beginning or do you remember?

6. BK: A woman by the name of Ms. Keady and her father I heard he was the principal of Ballsbridge Technical. Ms. Keady was her name. She was a lovely woman.

7. MM: Her background would have been in domestic science?

8. BK: That’s right. It would have been the school really and she got a teaching job. They were nearly dressed as nurses then. They had this deep blue dress, lovely, lovely. Like a nurse. Spotlessly clean and that you know. And Ms. O’Sullivan was the principal. She was very strict. You know young chefs weren’t allowed to use the front stairs in case we were looking up the girls dresses (laugh). Just a point you know (laugh). We weren’t allowed to be on the front stairs in case we were looking up the skirts (laugh).

9. MM: So the girls went up the front and you went up around the side stairs.

10. BK: You when you think of it, it’s funny. There were no tights then. I started up my career outside the College of Catering in the Grand Hotel in Greystones. I worked long days there from 7 a.m. to close to 9 o’clock at night with about two hours break. I worked seventy-seven hours a week for a period of say a number of weeks and I then thought it was too long, too hard and I got a job then in the Central Hotel, at that time a very good commercial hotel in Dublin at that time. So I spent about fifteen months there and from that then I went to the Dolphin Hotel. That hotel is in Essex Street.

11. MM: That’s right.
12. **BK:** It was very well noted for its steak and good wholesome cooking. We catered a terrible lot for the racing crowd and it was a very popular place for dining. Good wholesome, very good class, good cooking there, not of a fashionable side but good wholesome stuff and it was principally noted for its steaks. The steaks were cooked in the grill-room on an open fire by a chef that went down there and it was noted very much for its steaks. We used to do all our own butchery at that time, cut the steaks and organise everything. I’ll give you an idea, some days we’d get in for steaks alone, eighteen steak pieces on one lot and then so many sirloins, fillets and that. It would be nothing for us to cut forty or fifty fillets sometimes a day you know. But however, anyway in the kitchen line of that hotel we always had a very famous soup, was know now was very popular called ‘Hare Soup’, it was very popular and we made the other natural fresh soups like Scotch Broth, Mutton Broth, Mushroom and Oxtail Soup. The range at that time was a very open range, two big fires on each side with four ovens and that’s where we did all our cooking, roast beef.

13. **MM:** Was it gas?

14. **BK:** No it wasn’t gas. It was coal. So we had to shovel all the coal ourselves and keep our fires going. But on the other side of this particular kitchen there was a gas, gas fires and these gas fires used to keep the fryers hot and they were open fryers, there was no thermostat. You controlled it yourself accordingly as you feel the heat. We always had a policy that we’d always have a few heavy sacks nearby just in case one of the fryers used to go up on fire. All our fats were really rendered down from beef fat. We didn’t use any oil, it was all beef fat right through.

15. **MM:** And did you render that down yourself?

16. **BK:** We rendered everything down. Everything. We made all our own stocks. We never bought a packet of stuff. There was no such thing as packets at that time. We cooked all fresh vegetables. We had ladies looking after the potatoes, preparing potatoes for the business. We bought in nothing in packets, everything was fresh coming in. After I moved from the Dolphin I started…..

17. **MM:** How many would be working in the Dolphin? Just while we’re on the Dolphin, how many would be in the brigade there?

18. **BK:** In the brigade at that particular time there was about I’d say about six chefs, about four commis. And then we had two ladies, one doing desserts and the other lady doing the vegetables. That was the brigade usually. A friend of mine who managed was a commis with me at that particular time, was Willie Opperman. And he and I were commis in the Dolphin together. Always working together and he became the General Manager of Jury’s at one time. I don’t know whether he’s still alive or not. Somebody told me Willie’s dead that I worked with. Willie was nice to work with you know. I worked with Willie Widmer you know. Willie Widmer did you ever hear of him? (note, Bill Kavanagh must have worked with Willie Widmer in Jury’s College Green in the late 1960s between periods in the Intercontinental and the Royal Marine Hotel)

19. **MM:** No, I’ve heard his name all right.

20. **BK:** Oh, I must say he’s the greatest. A very good chef, very good chef, good cook, very good cook. He makes the best pates I’ve ever seen in my life.

21. **MM:** Willie Widmer.

22. **BK:** And he still has his pate business. I want to say that. He’s has a place there off the North Strand. Down that road there. I have his…. he makes the best pates I’ve ever come across. Top quality. He still does it.
I left the Dolphin Hotel and I went then over to the Shelbourne Hotel. I stayed close to two years in the Shelbourne Hotel working with Maurice O’Looney as a sauce cook, on an open range, a fired range, made all our own consommés, our own stocks and everything. I also worked in the pastry house with Willie Marshall who I considered a great pastry man.

23. MM: Were the pastry ovens fired by coals as well?

24. BK: It was fired by gas. The pastry house in the Shelbourne at that particular time was really a room in itself. It was a closed area in itself. We made our own ice-cream. We did all afternoon teacakes, sponges and everything. We did buy in some cakes from Bewleys - Afternoon Tea - to help us out because afternoon teas were so popular at that time in the Shelbourne Hotel where these grand ladies and gents used to come in for afternoon teas.

25. MM: And with the ice-cream was it hand cranked?

26. BK: No not hand cranked. It was machine.

27. MM: Oh it was machine.

28. BK: Just a little thought. At that particular time it was during the world war years. No, it was just after the war years but we found it very hard at one time to get this particular ice-cream powder that we used to buy in which was known as ‘Quix’. It was an ice-cream powder. We used to mix it then with milk and leave it to stand until it started to thicken up itself and then we’d turn on the ice-cream machine and make our own ice-cream. From that Quix we used to make many different types of ice-cream, you know Casattas and so forth like that. We used to make bombes and that you know from that particular ice-cream, just different flavours to it you know.

29. MM: Would you have made any of the ice-creams based on a crème anglaise or would it all have been based on the Quix mix?

30. BK: The Quix mix. The only thing we did was that when we couldn’t get the Quix and we had a recipe ourselves. This man used to put a recipe together and we made our own ice-cream not even using eggs. What we did is we used to get custard powder. We made a very thick custard and into that custard we put vanilla essence with sugar and we allowed it to go dead cold overnight. We’d take the top layer off it because a slight skin would form and we would turn on the ice-cream machine and that would give us ice-cream. That was a quick and easy method because it was the only thing available to us at that time. I spent some time also on the sauce corner in the Shelbourne with Maurice O’Looney. He was a nice man to work with and that but of course it was all open range work. We made all our own consommés, soups, everything was fresh.

31. MM: Were the kitchens very hot back then?

32. BK: Ranges were very, very hot. The only kitchen that really proved good to ventilation was the Shelbourne Hotel kitchen at that time. But still naturally all our fryers and that were all open fryers. We kind of used oval shaped fryers. We rendered all our own fat, everybody, every place rendered their own fat from beef fat to maybe some lamb. Mostly beef because beef is first class fat. After spending some time on the sauce then I moved into the pastry with Willie Marshall which I enjoyed.

33. MM: While we’re at those years I’m thinking about the war and shortages and stuff, rationing and that. How was your experience during the war years?

34. BK: During the war years I experienced that we didn’t have, we only got a small supply of coal and we fed our fires on logs and turf. They were the two available sources of fuel that we could help ourselves out with insofar as sometimes when I think back used to laugh even as a
young commis chef we used to have to go out sometimes to chop our own logs to keep the fires going. (Laugh). On those naturally you had to supply the ovens with heat. So we had to have roast beef, roast lamb, roast pork and that was cooked in the ovens.

35. MM: But there was no problem with a supply of beef or vegetables or any of that.

36. BK: No problems, the quality of Irish beef was beautiful. It had unique taste the Irish beefs which has declined over years now. It hasn’t got the same quality. Later I’ll tell you my reasons for saying that. I then, after spending those years in the Shelbourne Hotel I was, the panel, not the panel, there was a grouping of chefs, chefs, leading chefs in the city were called together and they were opening up international… like what should I say, Irish being exchanged with French or Swiss. An exchange started up. At that particular time there was a recommendation that a commis would go away, particularly commis and the two selected commis at that particular time was myself (Bill Kavanagh) and Willie Ryan. So there was some hitch in the diplomatic side of things that we didn’t make it. Eventually we went into the Savoy London, into the Café Parisienne otherwise known as the grill kitchen in the Savoy. That was in 1948-1949. Under the chef called Monsieur Albon. This Monsieur Albon was the assistant chef to the great Escoffier. In this particular kitchen it was an eye opener for me because it contained the head chef himself, his private secretary, three sous chefs, two kitchen clerks. On every corner there was a leading chef, the chef de partie and from that came the first, second, third, fourth commis. They had a complete range in this kitchen of every corner including fourteen. I’ll give you an idea of this great kitchen which I thought was absolutely a marvellous kitchen, which it was. There was fourteen in the larder, ten in the pastry, nine on the sauce, four on the hot fish, four on the hot roast, three on the hot soup, nine on the vegetables in this particular kitchen. They had their own private water supply and they kept a lot of storage down in the depth of the hotel, in cold storage, not frozen but in cold storage because at that particular time freezers weren’t much available. So I spent about a year-and-a-half in the Savoy under Albon, a hard chef but a very good chef. When my time then was really spent at night, I really didn’t go anywhere because I was always on duty at night start at say around 10.30 or 11 in the morning but then I finished at 10.30 or 11 o’clock at night. That’s the way it worked. We did the lunch, we came back about 5.30 and continued working until say 11 at night and the only thing I could do was go home and sleep.

37. MM: What section did you work on there mostly in the Savoy?

38. BK: I worked on the vegetables and the soups and I worked sometimes on the fish and sometime on the sauce. Like I worked on everything, a little on the roast but the vegetables, the soup, the sauce and the fish, the hot fish, I didn’t do much on the larder you know. I wasn’t really interested in the hot side of the stuff.

39. MM: How many would they be feeding in the Savoy? How many covers would they be doing?

40. BK: They would be doing anything up to 240. A good night would be like 240. One good thing about it when they had a very, very large hotplate nothing in the way. There was nothing in the kitchen but it was all silver. The only thing that was put on a plate was a fried egg in the morning for breakfast.

41. MM: Everything was silver service.

42. BK: Everything was silver service, everything from cocottes to silver service, nothing more, everything even to the soups they had these little dishes, they used to called them in French Dublafont meaning double font. The base was for water, hot water and then there was the container that you put your vegetables into and on occasion you’d put a lid on it. A very spotless clean kitchen, extremely well organised, very, very well organised, I mean at that time and that was just say after the war. Supplies in the Savoy Hotel at that particular time was very dubious at times to, because they were only getting on their feet. But we still used all fresh vegetables, and
all stuff that was available fresh but it was very hard in some supplies, where meat was concerned and so forth like that.

43. **MM:** And was there any times you’d have to do, where you’d have to sort of improvise or try to dress something up as something else or whatever, if things didn’t come in?

44. **BK:** We improvised sometimes with a line of chicken. We dressed up chickens many ways and one customer said he wasn’t getting chicken he was getting rabbit. And like there was a bit of controversy at that particular time (laugh), but you know when rabbit is cooked it’s very, very hard to put that between chicken. They’re of the same colour. We used to use a lot of young, baby chickens called *pousain*. We used to use chicken *en-cocotte*. You know *pousain en-cocotte* casserole. And then we used to use sweetbreads, which was also very, very good at that time. We used liver, we used bacon, boiled bacon. They didn’t use much cabbage. The one great thing about the Savoy is the boilers where the vegetables used to be cooked were copper. Complete copper inside and outside. They were always spotlessly clean. We worked on gas in the Savoy although we had a spare range in the corner in case the gas broke down which was an oil range, which worked on oil. We never used it but it was there in case of emergency. The kitchen was quite large but extremely very well organised and we used to a... I well remember learning this then at that time that when we’d cool off soups or sauces or anything else we were always raising them up on a wooden block that was like a trestle so that the film of air would get through them at night and they were always near windows where they got the cold breeze coming in. Each corner had its own fridge that was away slightly from the kitchen so that they could bring down supplies but the main supply of any type of a like of steaks, you know chicken at certain amount of portions, and every time a portion of chicken came into the kitchen it was checked, checked to the point that it was put down on a sheet of paper as I think the amount of numbers that came through. At the end of service, each time, they had to match the docket. There was only one inconvenience in the kitchen that I noticed was when the waiters were carrying the dishes up the stairs they had go up about twenty steps to get up to the room, to the dining room. That was a very hard tough job. Well at that time there were commis waiters. They carried it up for the waiters.

45. **MM:** So the kitchen was in the basement?

46. **BK:** No the kitchen wasn’t in the basement. Basically it was on the ground floor.

47. **MM:** But the dining room was up an elevator shaft.

48. **BK:** Yeah. But you had small lifts to send stuff up to the rooms and things like that.

49. **MM:** Was there a difference there, I’m just thinking, I think I read something about the Savoy at that time or the grill rooms as in there was a formal dining room which did you have to dress up to go into the formal dining room? Were the grill rooms different? I’d read something that when the Americans came over so they weren’t used to maybe dressing in formal attire for dinner and that they were able to go into the grill room with a normal shirt and tie whereas the formal dining rooms you’d nearly be used to wear tuxedos.

50. **BK:** That’s true yeah. And incidentally that was in the Shelbourne Hotel, you had to dress for dinner. The ladies dressed for dinner. In my time when I was in the Shelbourne the gentlemen also dressed for dinner.

51. **MM:** Who were the customers back then, say in the Shelbourne?…

52. **BK:** They were basically kind of English gentry or the end of an English era really and up and coming Irish gentry also that used to come in to the Shelbourne that time, the Shelbourne Hotel because it always kept… Shelbourne even up to the present day has always kept that image to himself and I believe that since Forte took it over it changed a lot of its ways.
53. **MM:** The average man would never have gone out for dinner in the Shelbourne?

54. **BK:** No, no it was a laughable point. I’ll give you a laughable point. We used to have every lunchtime in the Shelbourne Hotel was always a buffet set-up you know. We used to have galantines and you know pates and things and I happened to be on the buffet table this day and I carved the ham, the beef, the pork, whatever the customer needed. But these couples used to come up and right in front of me they was a big passageway leading to the foyer of the hotel and this lady and gentlemen were coming out and didn’t her panties fall down onto the floor. And at that moment wasn’t her husband just a step ahead of her and she just casually stepped out of them and put them in her handbag (laugh) and I couldn’t but help laugh to myself (laughter). And the husband never even noticed you know (laugh). But anyway after that I left the Savoy Hotel and there were three second chefs and when the service was on the three second chefs were on the bone. We had a relief sous chef who would be the sauce cook and he would go onto the hot plate if the other chefs were off, you know if the second chefs were off and during that time the chef wouldn’t really call out orders himself. He would stand back and watch thoroughly, just pick up the lid of one of the silver dishes and just check it out to see if it was all right you know. He spoke French all the time. He never spoke any English. French all the time.

55. **MM:** What was the language in the Shelbourne? English?

56. **BK:** English in the kitchen although they started English menus coupled with some French explanations like for instance if it was a particular garnish on a dish they would name that garnish and that really came from the *Repertoire de la Cuisine* otherwise known as the cooking repertoire. That’s where to me the cooking repertoire was my bible. That I carried around everywhere with me because I believed it was a good book that gave me the basics of anything you know. They could elaborate in other books but this gave you the real basics of good professional cooking because Saulnier when he wrote the book got the recipes from all the leading chefs all over the world and that’s how the *Repertoire de la Cuisine* was put together.

57. **MM:** There was a repertoire from a guy in the Gresham. A guy in the Gresham wrote a repertoire as well didn’t he?

58. **BK:** I don’t have the book but I gave it to a friend, not mentioning the parties name, and he never returned it to me. A Chef’s Companion.

59. **MM:** Yeah, (Karl) Uhlemann.

60. **BK:** Uhlemann. I worked under Uhlemann, with Uhlemann.

61. **MM:** We’ll come to that eventually. We’ll keep it in sequence….

62. **BK:** That’s the sequence. After I left, I enjoyed my years in the Savoy, you know and I was told when I was leaving the Savoy that the Savoy had an exceptionally good name, which it had and I could go anywhere with the Savoy Hotel reference behind me, although it was hard work but you carried a reference. So I did get my reference from Albon, the diva himself, and I ended up as a first commis tournant which was known as the first commis relief, you know I went around the corners when they needed a relief. We both left together, myself and Bill Ryan. We came back to Dublin and I went back to the Central Hotel where I was previously a commis and I became the second chef there. The man who worked with me in the Central Hotel was Armand Hoffman who was the second chef of Jammet’s Restaurant.

63. **MM:** Was he known as Babbie?
BK: Babbie, that’s right. He was a brilliant sauce cook, brilliant. Not alone was he a brilliant sauce cook, he was a brilliant chef. He was great with food, used food extremely well. A pleasure to work with him.

MM: Where was he from?

BK: He was from the French/German border.

MM: Alsace Lorraine or around that area.

BK: That’s right. That’s where he came from Alsace Lorraine. That is exactly where he did come from. So he married an Irish girl and they had nine children, two of his boys I believe became chefs. One of the young lads worked with me in the same hotel under the father. He had the flair like the father really. He was a young boy, about fifteen or sixteen at that time. But the father was an exceptionally good chef. He spent some time in the Central Hotel coming from Jammet’s Restaurant which he was there in Jammet’s for about, oh I think he was close to fifteen, sixteen, seventeen or eighteen years in Jammet’s. Now Jammet’s as that time was considered the one of the best of twenty restaurants in Europe. The cooking was marvellous coming from Jammet’s and it was the in place to dine by all the diplomacy, the diplomatic corps, ‘whose who’ wanted to dine in Jammet’s Restaurant. A teacher in Cathal Brugha Street, two of them worked in Jammet’s. That was Paddy Dunne, PJ, he spent many years in Jammet’s and then there was Mick Ganly, he also worked there, Lord have mercy on the souls. I worked with Mick Ganly before he became a teacher. The two of us worked together in the Central Hotel in Dublin, the two of us together. Mick was always a straightforward, straight, as honest as the day is long. Very honest man to work with, nice fellow to work with. But getting back to Armand Hoffman. Armand Hoffman left I believe. He went to England for a job and soon after he’d gone to England I think he ended up in Bournemouth or Portsmouth or like that and he became a teacher in one of the schools. He was so good you know.

I spent about a year-and-a-half in the Central as a second chef and then I headed off for a.... I joined Cunard Lines, the shipping lines. My first ship was the Queen Mary. I spent six months in the first class kitchen in the Queen Mary.

MM: Was the Queen Mary on the go for a while before you joined?

BK: Oh yes it was years old, it came out before the war I believe, the Queen Mary. It was a well organised kitchen, long hours, extremely long hours. Quarter past six in the morning, you got a break for an hour in the morning and then you got another break for about an 1½-2 hours in the afternoon which you finished your work about 9 p.m. or 9.30 p.m. That’s while you were at sea.

MM: Where was it sailing from Portsmouth or Southampton or?

BK: From Southampton to New York and we called the Cherbourg in France. Sometimes at Cherbourg and sometime in Le Harve. So I spent six months on the Queen Mary in a first class kitchen.

MM: You would have seen an awful lot there.

BK: I did yeah. I met a lot of well known people but I didn’t see them because we were completely separated from the passengers, and we weren’t allowed to engage in any type of frivolous activities at all. It was basically to work, that was our job.

MM: Who would be sailing on the Cunard those days?
77. **BK**: Well you’d have first class, second class and third class. You’d have film stars and diplomats and that. This is before aerial travel came, it was really the in-place to travel. Cunard were the in-line, shipping lines at that time.

78. **MM**: But I believe there was an awful lot like ice carvings and socles and all this. The ice carvings were fabulous weren’t they?

79. **BK**: That’s true. Ice carvings. Some chefs were noted for their ice carvings and they would do the ice carving. I must say that Bill Ryan was good at ice carving. I was more in the hot kitchen I must admit. But he could ice carve and….

80. **MM**: And did Bill come with you?

81. **BK**: Yes. When he was asked to go on the SS Coronia. They were doing the world cruise. He said he was doing the world cruise and I said if your going, I’ll go and I applied to sail on the SS Coronia and my application was accepted. So we both sailed on the SS Coronia and we completed so many cruises. We were in South America cruise ending up in Havana Cuba and back to New York three times. Three different cruises and then we went on a world cruise which took us nearly close to four or five months and we travelled down from New York right down the British West Indies right down as far as Rio de Janeiro and right over to South Africa, North Africa, East Africa and West Africa. We spent so many days in different places for the sake of the passengers who were naturally high paying guests. We seen the change in South Africa at that particular time because of the apartheid you know. You weren’t allowed, under no account, to mix with black or coloured people. That was the law, that was the apartheid law at that time. However anyway we enjoyed….

82. **MM**: Would there have been any black or coloured people working on the Queen Mary?

83. **BK**: No, no, not at that time.

84. **MM**: Were the workers on the SS Queen Mary mostly Europeans?

85. **BK**: Europeans yeah, all Europeans. There was a few people on the ship that could speak the language, you know what I mean. Principally on the…. We always had for instance a Jewish chef that could cook kosher and he was principally in the small kitchen that was laid out what was known as the kosher kitchen. It was really basically say, an 8 foot x 10 kitchen just to cook for a small number of passengers. Well that was his principal job. He did nothing else but cook for them, the kosher people. So that was our cruise and our cruise went to North, South, East Africa and we then went on to Madagascar and we went up into the Indian Ocean and we went ended up in Bombay in India. So we travelled through the Suez Canal right through into the Mediterranean and then most of the places on the Mediterranean like Turkey, Italy, Haifa in Israel, Spain, France and then we came around then back to Southampton. We stopped in Southampton for a few days and for about a week or two and the passengers then travelled back then on the SS Queen Elizabeth. They just transferred just to go back. Then we set off….

86. **MM**: They were going back to New York.

87. **BK**: Principally most of the passengers at that time were American millionaires. I can only describe it in one word – millionaires. Money didn’t matter to them. Basically, more or less, elderly type of people who had made their money in the financial side of life. I’ll give you an idea. The man who held the patent of the ball point pen was one of the passengers. I remember his name well, Goldberg was his name. Anyway after doing all of SS Coronia we went also to the North Cape and a Cape cruise way up as far as Iceland.

88. **MM**: The Arctic Circle?
89. **BK:** The Arctic Circle. So we went around to a lot of places up as far as the North Cape. I have a stamped sign which says that I was there on that particular date. It was the last outpost of the Arctic Circle and Bill Ryan and I were still together. I have a stamp with his name and another fellow by the name Hunt. We went to the last outpost before we hit the Arctic Circle. We came down by Sweden, Norway, you know.

90. **MM:** I think I remember you telling me before that the boat could go so far and then the guests would go on sledges or whatever and there were picnics carried over the ice.

91. **BK:** There was actually…. A lot of the time the boat could only go so far. She couldn’t come into dock. One principal thing is that we used to have was the ship used to have its’ own launches and they used to launch these boats right down to the water and the launches used to bring us back and forth from the boat to the quayside. In normal circumstances if the passengers were going on a kind of picnic tour that they would have made up lunches for them and they’d ship them out in cold storage boxes to keep them cool for them. But we wouldn’t travel, none of the chefs wouldn’t travel if they were packed up accordingly and sent with them. That’s the way it was operated. So we did the North Cape and came back and that and I spent close to a year on the SS Corona travelling. And then I left the SS Corona then and I went on to the Queen Elizabeth. I spent nearly eighteen months to two years on the SS Queen Elizabeth.

92. **MM:** Did the SS Queen Elizabeth take over from the SS Queen Mary?

93. **BK:** No. But the SS Queen Elizabeth was a bigger ship, more streamlined. Just a small little wording about the SS Queen Elizabeth. She was launched from John Brown’s shipyard. Not really launched publicly because the war had broken out and she travelled over the Atlantic with only a skeleton crew, I believe and I had been told this by a man who I had worked with on the SS Queen Elizabeth, who was the soup chef and his name was Jimmy Speed. I always remember his name very well. He was a very good soup cook because he did nothing else but soups, so he was very good, a very nice fellow to work with. He told me he had crossed the Atlantic on the SS Queen Elizabeth and nothing in the Atlantic could catch it because it travelled so fast. He said it was never recorded but he said it was nothing for it to touch forty-one knots which is quite a lot of speed at sea. The reason they put her full steam ahead was that no submarines or u-boats could catch it. That’s why she travelled fast. During the war she was used as a troop ship way out in Australia shipping the Aussie’s back and forth to the different places because she was out of harms way of the u-boats and the submarines. I joined them in the fifties and I enjoyed the SS Queen Elizabeth. I was in a first class kitchen in the SS Queen Elizabeth. I was in the second class and I was the sauce cook there for a while although I principally spent most of my time on the sauces, soups and in Hors d’oeuvres. I used to make in one corner Hors d’oeuvres and canapés all day. I used to make up the Hors d’oeuvres trolleys that we rolled into the room during the meals. Two for lunch and two for dinner and I used to replenish them accordingly. I served more caviar than you’d have dinners. Caviar was just huge. Beluga caviar which is the best. It is a caviar which I can only describe as a greyish-blue, it’s not black, its greyish-blue and it came in pound tins. We used to make ice models. One of the second chefs used to make ice models and he would sit the caviar maybe sitting on a woman’s lap. Or when it was the cup final the chef used to make a model and sit the caviar in the cup. We used to serve caviar.

94. **MM:** What was it served on? you know they talk about mother of pearl spoons and stuff like that for caviar. They say if you eat caviar off a metallic spoon that it can taint….

95. **BK:** That’s right. That is very true. That’s very true. We had what they call ivory spoons before plastic spoons came out. These spoons were given to a ship and we had to the keep an eye on that spoon because it was such an important spoon. We couldn’t touch the caviar with a metallic spoon. It was always plastic spoons when plastic spoons started to become available. With the caviar we used to make up caviar canapés and so forth for very special customers, people travelling in first class who would have a special party. You know it could be that lady that was assassinated you know shot, her daughter became Prime Minister of India.
96. MM: Oh Indira Gandhi

97. BK: Indira Ghandhi yeah and we had a few more like that. I hear he was very nice man, the Prince of Wales. You know he was once the King of England. He travelled and he was a very nice man. Very fond walking around talking to the crew I believe. The Queen Elizabeth was a very good ship. I liked working on the SS Queen Elizabeth. And then I went during my time with the SS Queen Elizabeth, I worked as what was known as the Veranda Grill which was known as the night kitchen. We used to keep going until ten or eleven o’clock at night. The only great thing about it was we were allowed to sleep until about eight o’clock in the morning whereas the other fellows had to be up at a 6.15 a.m. That was the difference because we would cook later than the others and in that there was about five or six about, there was a second chef and you know there was a sauce cook, there was a vegetable man, there was a grill man and a larder man. That’s the way it was. Kind of a tight small kitchen. It was on the very top of the ship you know where they could span the ocean then.

98. MM: And who used to eat there? Was there a different clientele up there or was it a younger clientele or did they move between one another?

99. BK: Yeah they could yeah. It was usually people who wanted quietness because in first class on a busy ship we could serve anything up to five or six hundred people. So there was a difference you know. But because the trip took five days they could book the Veranda Grill you know. The head waiter or maybe the head steward would put these people up on the Veranda Grill tonight you know. We used to serve things like chateaubriands or racks of lamb and things like that.

100. MM: And again all that would have been carved at the table sort of thing at that stage?

101. BK: They would carve. We would grill a steak and that and we’d dress it up on the salver. We never put anything on the plate. Salvers, sometimes we used plates. Because of the nature of sea the plates had to be locked in a holder so they couldn’t slip out.

102. So after, I felt that I enjoyed my life at sea. I was about three-and-a-half years at sea. I felt that it was time for me to move on and I was told on leaving that I was a fool leaving, you know, but I said I felt that it wasn’t a life to lead for any married man with a wife and children because I had seen the result of married men and you know missing their families and things like that so I decided that wasn’t my way of thinking. So I came back to Dublin and started work in the Gresham Hotel with Karl Uhlemann.

103. MM: Right. What year would this be now?

104. BK: About 1953. Karl Uhlemann was a very, very good chef. He was in his late 60s early 70s when I met him. He was from Germany.

105. MM: But had he spent quite a while in Ireland?

106. BK: Oh he married an Irish girl and he had boys and girls here. One of his boys started off being a chef but I don’t think he continued it. He was artistic in himself, very artistic you know he could paint really. Then there was another famous chef in his time who was known as Jack Williams. You might have heard the name. He was a very good Irish chef. He was an artist in himself too, Jack Williams. There’s still a few of the William’s. I tell you one that I know of presently is Dermot Williams and he is the chef of the National Club, Sailing Club in Dun Laoghaire. The big club there, he’s the chef there. I must take the laurels of I was the man who taught him to be a chef because he worked with me in the Intercontinental which is now Jury’s and he was only a young lad. Then when I was chef of the Royal Marine in Dun Laoghaire he came and I started to give him the low down of good kitchen administration. I helped him to work the
kitchen. So he went there and at that time he was the youngest chef in Dublin. He was either twenty-one or twenty-two years of age and he’s still there. He eventually went for training in the College of Catering into what they call these refresher courses. He was very good.

**Telephone rings and interview stops for a few minutes**

107. **BK:** Where was I? In the Gresham Hotel I was working with Karl Uhleman and he wrote a book called *Chef’s Companion* and he gave me a present of it himself because I was heading off to America a couple of years afterwards. It was very nice. It had a lovely inscription, a wish from the heart and he was a very, very good chef and I think I give great credit to the man who built the Gresham Hotel from the food standpoint. It was him who created the *marie rose* sauce. People talk about this and the other but the *marie rose* sauce is made from the bases of lobster or prawns but basically that’s the *marie rose* sauce, the bases of the *marie rose* sauce.

108. **MM:** So you make like an *Americaine*? (lobster sauce)

109. **BK:** You make an *Americaine* sauce and you strain it very well and then you let it go dead cold and you mix it with mayonnaise and cream, sherry or brandy or you can squeeze maybe lemon juice. But the mayonnaise has the kick in it and that and cream and sometimes you put sherry through it and we served in the Gresham Hotel that time, we couldn’t keep up with the prawn cocktails and the lobster cocktails. We got fresh lobster in every day, and prawns in every day except the weekend. We cooked our own prawns and we used to get two, three, four boxes of prawns.

110. **MM:** And these were the Dublin Bay prawns?

111. **BK:** And this is where Dublin Bay prawns started in its real form. The same thing with lobster cocktail. It was noted and we used to serve it in this kind of a small thin glass, topped with a bit of lettuce and stuff like that but the sauce was the man that made the cocktail. So there is a mixture of sauce *Americaine* which you put brandy in it and lobster and you use raw lobster but you don’t have to use all of the raw lobster. The juice of the lobster can suffice, but you could put in a raw lobster if you cut it and you know cook it after. I’m not telling you how I make but I’m just saying that’s the way you can do it and to finish it off you strained it extremely well and you put the combination of cream, mayonnaise, we used to make our own mayonnaise and the sauce together, the three of them combined and we used to colour a little bit with a little bit of beetroot juice to give it that pinkie colour. So just to let you know. The Gresham was a very, very busy hotel, very busy. We used to make up, in the Gresham Hotel I worked in the larder a lot and also in the pastry house. We used to make our own ice-cream then too in the Gresham.

112. **MM:** Were you using the Quix in the Gresham as well?

113. **BK:** Yes, yes we did. It was a very, very good ice-cream powder. I don’t know if it’s still around today, I’m not sure. But it was very good ice-cream powder. We used to get the milk, fresh milk and let it stand and then you know….Yeah, and then we could make mainly ice-creams from that particular mixture because it was extremely versatile mix and it would hold well you know.

114. **MM:** What was the story with freezers there? I’m just thinking was it still ice boxes or were there freezers….

115. **BK:** No, we used to freeze our ice-cream you know when we’d take it out of the machine. Then right beside that there was another box where we’d put our ice-cream into and even in making casatta and things like that and we’d freeze them. We used the small square cake tins and we’d line them with greaseproof paper and then make our different colours as we were building them up. That’s the way we used to make it at that time.
116.MM: Were there freezers or did you have to make your own freezers using ice blocks?

117.BK: No, no. There was, they used to have to make their own ice at that time but we didn’t use that like. We had these, say HB (note. Hughes Brothers (HB) – Irish ice cream company) and that would come in and make sure that the freezing was right, the consistency was right and that’s how we maintained a good quality of ice-cream. So the Gresham was a very, very busy hotel particularly in the line of, from the brunch to the dinners to the dances and that. We used to do an average of two dances per week at that time. You probably heard that.

118.MM: I heard about the dances yeah. Who would go to the dances?

119.BK: Oh the ordinary, oh that time was a great night for the boy and girl to go out to a dress dance.

120.MM: But you’d have to dress up.

121.BK: Oh yes, it was a dress dance. Yeah, tuxedos or naturally the girls used to dress up beautiful, really lovely. We always had special occasions. One great admiration I say that the man who ran the Gresham was a famous man by the name of Toddy O’Sullivan. I would say, you could nearly go as far as to say himself and Hector Fabron were the most efficient managers in Dublin. Toddy O’Sullivan was a very efficient man. A man of few words but knew what he wanted. Fair but you did your job.

122.MM: Who was the other man you mentioned, Hector Fabron?

123.BK: He was the manager of the Russell Hotel and Hibernian. His father was a chef. His brother was also a chef in some big place in London. Fabron was another manager that knew his stuff.

124.MM: And where was he from?

125.BK: He was France. But I don’t think he was France, although he spoke French fluently his father worked in London when he was a head chef and so was his brother. So I think basically French was in the family. It was through Fabron that I got into the Savoy. I met Fabron before I went…. you know. It was basically through him that myself and Bill Ryan went in to the Savoy.

126.MM: O’Sullivan was Irish?

127.BK: O’Sullivan was Irish. He came from Kerry actually and I believe he was a head waiter himself. He came up in the hotel business. He had a very suave approach but a very refined approach at the same time.

128.MM: Had he worked abroad, do you know?

129.BK: I can’t say really. His wife was also a Kerry woman too you know. He had two children but he lost one of his children through a very rare…. I believe they were on holidays in Spain and the child, the girl got a very rare disease and the young girl died. He was very upset about it. That’s the Gresham. I left the Gresham and then I went to the United States and when I was emigrating to the United States, Karl Uhleman gave me a present of this book. This person has my book, asked me for a loan of it because it was a rare book. It was known as the Chef’s Companion and it was one of those that you put recipes together. I could mention the parties name but I think respectively I won’t. I must say that I left the Gresham then and went onto the States and I spend six-and-a-half years in America.

130.MM: What part?
BK: New York. I worked in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Basically I was in New York City. When I went there I started up in a hotel in America called the Victoria Hotel in New York City. After that I went from there to New Jersey. I spent another year in New Jersey working for this man called Rob Keller. I was in two of his restaurants. Tough work, hard work, a complete different style of cooking but they got from A to B quicker than we did. That’s the way they worked. I basically admired the way they worked. They had always on their mind a productive level in their mind and how much it cost and had their costing well in control. They actually showed me how to control a kitchen properly. Really properly!!!, how to get the results, what you were doing and how you were going because they kept what they referred to as papers that were an ordering system which I used here in Ireland and that it had never been cracked. It is just the say the system, it is really a very efficient way of working and I taught the young people this system that they would be able to hold control of there full production of their ordering, how much their ordering and to keep the files so the files, that a year after if they wanted to check back how much roast beef they ordered that day they would go back and be able to point what beef they ordered that particular day. Turkeys, chickens, fish, whatever the case may be, which was an extremely good system. The one thing about the American style of cooking is that they impose greater work on you than they did here, in our country or in England. They gave you more to do but their menu’s weren’t so excessive, but the quality still stayed the same. The quality taste-wise was slightly lacking due to the fact of the production levels. I couldn’t really find fault with their steaks and their beef. America produces the best beef in the world. Nothing in this country, Ireland, could compare with the American steer, nothing. It’s all marble beef and it’s reared on the plains and its allowed to develop into its own self just by keeping an eye on it. That’s the difference. Like we used to use too quite a bit in America like lobster and that, you know. Like raw lobster, we split and do what they refer to in America as a broiled lobster.

MM: That’s right, under the grill. What we’d call a grill.

BK: Over there they use the word broil. It’s grilled really. It’s very nice but personally I think it’s over-rated because you’re only playing around with the lobster. So we used to split the lobsters and crack the claws and put them under the grill and one great thing about their grills over there you open an oven over on top and you shove the lobster in and occasionally what would be a steak would be the same situation. So the heat of the grill used to heat the oven. It had the combinations on both. The combination was on both and they used to have these long forks that are tongs. Something would get burned but they had it well mastered really. I enjoyed my old days working in America. I thought they were very efficient.

MM: Did you see any food that was totally new to you or had you seen most food since you’d already been around the world?

BK: Yes I did. 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 he coated them in a choux pastry and they roll them and they cook 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.

137.MM: Squab pigeon?

138.BK: Squab, that’s correct. 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 Coulibiac. Russian Coulibiac.

139.MM: And did you use vesiga in making that Coulibiac or often you’d see a recipe and it talks about using vesiga, which I think is from the backbone of the sturgeon or something like that.

140.BK: No, no I didn’t. When I came home just after leaving ‘The Forum of the Twelve Caesars’, which I enjoyed. Very, very hard work. Well paid now, very well paid. I can’t complain about my money. I enjoyed the time because we used to get the wild.... My first experience of wild boar was it came in and the wild boar is killed and they smoke it. They smoke it with the ashes of the wood so they get all the hair off the wild boar. When it comes in all the hair is gone but the skin is black in a wild boar. So you bone it out on the same principal as a pig which it is basically and we used to marinate it in oak barrels. We used to put a red wine marinade in it and we’d leave it there for days maybe weeks on end. We used to take out, we used to have this scoop that we couldn’t put our hands in it otherwise it would turn sour. Anything marinated you should never put your hands into it, always use a fork or a dish even if its steak. We used to have another wild product. It was the wild boar. Well I boned the wild boar. The head chef said Bill did you ever bone a wild boar. I said I never did in my life and he said he’d show me and with that he just gave me an idea what to do and I did it and he was quite happy. I can’t remember what the other one was. I think it was smoked pork or something of that nature. We used to have put it.... We used to have kebabs too you know the ‘schlässlicks’ on skewers. We used to use a lot of other dishes you know there. German cooking too, some German stuff as well, you know Saurbraten, things like that. The one thing about America, the one thing about New York you can get any cooking you want in the world in New York. That’s what makes it a great city as far as cooking is concerned. You can nearly buy anything. So I worked very, very hard in this particular restaurant, like from eleven in the morning to eleven at night but it was well paid but I said I’d have to break myself of this you know which I did and I went then to a country club about thirty miles from New York. It was basically a private golf, country club and they were really basically rich American businessmen that used to come out at weekends to play golf or during the week. I went up to this club, it was called the New Rochelle Club and I was the second chef there, sauce cook and second chef. It was a very small kind of kitchen but a very healthy wide-open airy kitchen, the cleanest kitchen I ever worked in. It was spotless, absolutely spotless and a very pleasant kitchen to work in. I spent my time there for maybe over a year-and-a-half or that. The only day we had off was a Monday. It closed every Monday and the rest of the week we worked you know. I used to open the kitchen at 7.45 a.m. and then we’d break, we’d have our lunch at 11.30 a.m., then I’d break at around two for a few hours and then come back then around 5 p.m. and work until 9 p.m. every night, six nights a week. So it was hard work really. So I used to do all the sauces and I used to do the roast and that. Then another man beside me used to do the vegetables and some fish you know.

141.MM: And what was the service like over there? Was it silver service?

142.BK: No silver service. Americans didn’t apply themselves to silver service at all. They were all plate service. Their system was quick, quick, quick out. That’s the way the American worked. Quick out - from A to B that was the best way of getting things out. That was the big difference. They were fast, direct, no messing, you know, and they provided you with the equipment to do the
job. They didn’t say ah well we’ll do it this way, they provided you with the equipment. The equipment we use here has been from the American style in some of the kitchens and we have applied from them their style. I left the Country Club ….. I was looking after my second mother, my father had re-married, she died Lord have mercy on her. She was very ill so I came home anyway and I stayed with her for six months. But I had to go back because my ticket was up, I had to go back, but before I went back to America I met my wife, Lord have mercy on her, and we became engaged and I went back to America and stayed in America for eighteen months, although I was engaged to my wife at that time, and then I came back then to Ireland.

143.MM: She was from Dublin then?

144.BK: No she was a Sligo girl. She was a very good girl I must say, Lord rest her. When I left there I came home and went into Jammet’s Restaurant. You know Jammet’s, and I spent six months in Jammet’s. (note, Jammet’s Restaurant opened in 1901 but moved premises in 1926 to Nassau Street and was Dublin’s only French restaurant for many years). I remember the original Mr Jammet himself. He was French. He was a nice man. He knew his stuff. I’d say the chef worked there, was there for twenty years and Paddy Dunne worked there was close to twenty years too. He was a great lad Paddy Dunne. A great man with the larder. I took over from him when he went into Cathal Brugha Street I was the larder chef in Jammet’s with Marc Faure. And during my stay in Jammet’s Restaurant, Marc Faure left Jammet’s after twenty years. In all credit to Marc Faure, he was a very good chef and I can honestly say he made a béarnaise sauce that was absolutely unbeatable. He would let nobody make the béarnaise only himself but could he make the béarnaise. He made steak called steak Parisienne. It was basically a steak with parmentier potatoes and béarnaise sauce and he used to sell them by the lorry load. He used to always, another pet (habit) of his was he always boned out the veal when it came in each day, a leg of veal each day. He used to bone that out. That was his pride.

145.MM: What was so special about his béarnaise? Now again it was tarragon like again he was using….

146.BK: He used tarragon and he used to watch his eggs and his butter. He also used the flavour. We used to make a demi-glaze, a real demi-glaze from the veal bones. This is where a lot of people make a mistake but a young heifer beef will also make a good demi-glaze. But also the veal bones came a beautiful sweetness with it when it was made. And he used to slightly thicken it up with that at the end, give it a few drops of that and it had this uniqueness, this really beautiful tarragon and fresh butter. You don’t have to melt the butter you can soften it, I believe. Your reduction is important. You know one time they used to strain it through the tammis cloths but that was cut out, because you’d do it a much faster way that that. But I must say that it was a tough restaurant to work in but I didn’t mind you know. At that particular time I was engaged to my wife at that time and I was getting married and soon after I got married. Myself and my wife went back to America because I said I was going back. I went back to the States and I spent oh about two years again in the States.

147.MM: Can I just bring you back to Jammet’s for a minute? Who were the customers in Jammet’s at this time? We’re talking now about mid 50s.

148.BK: Yes the mid 1950s. They were basically rich diplomatic core you know. Rich people, businessmen, lawyers, you know, people who, of money people basically it wasn’t any Tom, Dick or Harry. Although they had what they referred to as a kind of grill bar at that time as well. Used to use a terrible lot of oysters. It was a great place for oysters and so forth and then they had a little, the sweet corner used to be upstairs and I can’t remember his name but he was quite good at desserts. We wouldn’t see the desserts in the kitchen, the main kitchen was a furnace to work in. It was the toughest god kitchen, it was a tough kitchen to work in.

149.MM: That was in the basement was it?
150. **BM:** It was at street level but it was cold fired again. Very, very little ventilation and you might have heard about him. I don’t know. He became.... I worked for him there. Gerry O’Connell’s brother worked there, Jimmy Connell. He was very good sauce cook. He was a very good cook Jimmy. Very, very good. He was very good and so was Mick Moore was his name. He was chef of the Grand Hotel in Malahide after I left Jammet’s because I met him one day and he told me a story. Not to say that I’m…. tried to…. I believe he was close to two years head chef and he got fed up this day anyway and he was under so much pressure, he couldn’t get staff and everything he just went over, took his knives up, this is his own story to me, took his knives up and said I’m quitting here and now. He walked out of the hotel and he never cooked since.

151. **MM:** That’s Mick Moore.

152. **BK:** Mick Moore yeah. You probably heard of him. Mike Moore was a very good cook, a very good chef, a very good head. No shouting or roaring but got the job done. But still at the same time we always had stock pots. I’m a great believer of stock pots. I’m a great believer of getting the bones of anything and working on them. Because without bones you can’t get the quality into anything. That’s my policy, that’s my belief. And also the man, if you can record this if you want, the man who suggested taking away the stock pots from Cathal Brugha Street was crazy. It done a terrible injustice to the College of Catering to take away them stockpots. An absolute injustice, because you’re talking in terms of stocks and the kids don’t know what their talking about unless you prove to them what these stocks are about. Those stocks are stocks without the bones, fresh bones whether it be fish, game, lamb or beef or anything that’s where the quality lies. That’s the point.

153. However my story, I went back to the States after I got married and I worked in New York again. I worked in New York in the Westbury Hotel in New York which was on Madison Avenue. I was a sauce cook there. There was two sauce cooks, there was a morning sauce cook and a night sauce cook and basically the kitchen was really mostly all Italians. The head chef was Italian, the man I worked with was Italian, the second chef was Italian, the pastry chef was Italian. So there basically was really an Italian…. there was only one Spanish and he worked on the roast. But I was the morning sauce cook and there was the older man and he was near retiring but a very nice Italian and he’d come in at 2.30 p.m. I would start at 6.30 a.m. and he’d come in at 2.30 p.m. and I’d have most of the stuff, the sauces ready for him when he came in. I used to have like the basic sauces like fish *veloute*, hollandaise, you know, tomato sauce. Like most of the basic sauces in bowls in a warm area, just keep them warm. And then we hot *bain marie* with the hot soup beside us, used to make the hot soups. We used to make demi-glaze where we used to get the bones in.

We’d roast bones, maybe about six trays of bones, beef bones and put the vegetables and so forth in and we’d make this demi-glaze in a huge big boiler and we’d let it cook nice and slowly and we used to strain it and then we would put it into big buckets, stainless steel buckets and sit them into this big old tanks which would have running water all the time. And we used to put the ladies in the buckets and just keep them stirring until they were dead cold. When they were dead cold we used to ship them down into a fridge down below and we used to take a bucket up when we needed it.

154. **MM:** Can I ask you a question? On the demi-glaze you made a stock but then did you mix then the stock with *espagnole* (brown sauce) or did you just keep reducing the stock down?

155. **BK:** No, what we did usually was we made it straight. What we did was we roasted the bones and then we put the vegetables in half way and then we mixed all the ingredients like mixed vegetables and so forth like that and mushrooms pairings and we’d season it up. Then we’d shake some flour and we’d bake the flour slightly with it and then we’d put some tomato puree in it and we’d stir the whole lot around. Then we’d put in to a boiler. And then we’d stir the cold water into it to completely get rid of all lumps and everything. All the flavour of everything was there and we always had an amount of bay leaf and thyme and so forth we put in and crushed peppercorns and so forth. When we bring it to the boil nice and slowly, keep an eye and stir it. We cook it for hours maybe six or eight hours and then we’d strain it. It was a hard job.
156. MM: You had to keep an eye that it didn’t burn down at the bottom.

157. BK: No, but they were steam controlled. So they didn’t burn you know. Steel powerful big boilers, very big.

Interview stopped for few minutes as Bill’s son enters room

158. BK: I must say that then after that in the Westbury Hotel then I was up to get to work from New York at 5.15 a.m. to get into work at 6.30 a.m. I was living just outside New York City more-or-less in the suburbs really. So I got in through bus and by subway you know. After the Westbury Hotel I got a job in a French restaurant. The French restaurant was in Madison Avenue, nearly in the heart of Manhattan. The name of the restaurant was ‘Le Valois’. It was really (named) after the Russian hermitage you know but it was a French restaurant and very, very good cooking there really. I spent nearly close to two years there with them.

Brief discussion on sauce valois – a derivative of hollandaise with meat glaze, and other derivatives like sauce malaisé made with blood oranges.

159. BK: Malaisé that’s right. But anyway it was a very good restaurant; very well as I said, basically rich business people and some film stars and that give you an idea. Ava Garner you know, few of those came in. The Ed Sullivan show, Ed Sullivan they used to dine there you know, it was a very well run restaurant, fast again. I used to relief the sauce chef and I used to relief the…. I was known as chef tournant (relief chef), and when they were off I used to take over to do the things like that. Very, very good cooking then, I enjoyed it really. They were a good crowd, they were like your family there. They were like a family but having said something about the Westbury Hotel as I said they were all Italians and the chef principally concentrated a lot on Italian food. You know a lot of Italian dishes.

160. MM: Was that new to you then the Italian dishes?

161. BK: They were, they gave me an insight of there style of cooking. Like they cooked with olive oil, tomatoes and that and bay leaf till the cows come home. Things like that, oregano, marjoram. I enjoyed it really. I got to know something about their pastas and that. But I used to be able to do the French style thing. One helpful thing I must say in passing was in some of the kitchens the chef. In some of the kitchens the chef wrote the explanation of the dish sometimes in French and sometimes in English. So he gave you an insight of what went into the dish.

162. I worked in a French restaurant for close to two years and I enjoyed it. I also worked, it was run by a French chef, the chef was French, the second chef was French. There was about three or four Frenchmen and two Italians. One of the sauce cooks was Italian. He was a very good sauce cook and he was twenty-five years with the boss so he knew his stuff. We used to make our own turtle soup and that you know from veal bones and pigs trotters to give the jelly flavour.

163. MM: And what did you use? Did you use the turtle herbs?

164. BK: The turtle herbs. They used to put the turtle herbs when they were making it. He used to take them up in bunches. He knew exactly how much he was putting in because he had been doing it for so long. And he knew. And he used to get the duck feet. The duck feet, the feet washed and all brought in and he’d throw them in and the flavour was beautiful. And when it was made we used to strain it and then we would have these big white crocks. There was about seven different herbs. It is actually in the repertoire.

165. MM: That’s right, for herbs, for marjoram, oregano and things like that.

166. BK: Things like that. Thyme, bay leaf, and peppercorn and things like that.
167.MM: And did you serve at that time, with the mock-turtle soup they used bits of fat from a calves head or something like that?

168.BK: We had tins of turtle, you know, we’d get tins of turtle meat and we’d open them up and we’d dice them and put them in a bowl and have them there cold. Wouldn’t start playing around with them in that you know, we used to take a spoon out of it and throw them in and put the turtle soup on top and it was there ready to serve quick. We used to serve toast with it, like a melba toast. We used to do that. I left the Le Valois and then I went to join the St. Regis Hotel in the centre of New York. In the St. Regis Hotel they had two kitchens, they had a French kitchen and they had a Russian kitchen. And in the Russian kitchen there were normally about two Russian chefs. They were really apart from us. In the kitchen I was in was the main kitchen. I was on the fish, I was the fish chef. I used to cook, look after the fish and then look after some of the soups as well in that kitchen. I spent again about six or eight months there. I enjoyed cooking there, again as I say it was mostly really French, this particular kitchen.

169.MM: Did you get to see any of the Russian stuff?

170.BK: I did, I saw the Russian chefs work on something like coulibiac you know and these Russian things you serve with a Russian borscht. Not blinis. I did blinis but the other ones, there made from a light kind of a pastry. You know a dough and into that dough you put a mixture of chicken, dill and so forth and you bake them in the oven. And when you get the borscht, pish …Pierogis. You hear a terrible lot of people say to you about the big Russian Kitchen, about this beef stroganoff. There is much argument about beef stroganoff. The real beef stroganoff is the fillet of beef and they used to slice it.

171.MM: So it wasn’t cut in juliennes or strips like it was sliced?

172.BK: No, slice it and they’d cook in the pan with a drop of oil or butter quickly and put it on the plate and they came along then and they got a sour cream sauce and put it over that with a shake of a few little capers on top and chopped egg and out she went.

173.MM: Chopped hard boiled egg is it?

174.BK: Chopped hard boiled egg, yeah. the yolk and the white just over the top. That’s the beef stroganoff. That what they did. And then they used to make chicken à la Kiev and they used to make these cornets of the butter with vodka in it and then they put it in the ice and then they’d have the supreme completely rolled around it, big supremes of chicken. And then they’d fry the supremes of chicken in a nice slow cooking oil and they would sit the, butter wouldn’t be allowed to go out because they’d seal it so well. They come along then and it was cut and they would cut it out onto a napkin and just a bit of fried parsley and out she went. And they usually served sometimes, say a sauce sabayon or a hollandaise with it. It was a sweet type of sauce. Sabayon is a nice sauce. That was the Russians, you know. Russian cookery, borscht à la Russe I liked making. I got to know how to make a really good one from them. You know you get the julienne of bacon, smoked bacon and you make the julienne of the different vegetables and then you sweat them down and then you come along when you sweat them down you put the beef stock on to them and then you cook them nice and slowly and then you get a half roast duck and you put it in and the flavour of the duck goes right through. Then you take it out and then you cut up your duck. You make a julienne of your duck and then you throw it in. Last but not least when the soup is just coming off you come along then. The best way to serve it really is cold really. Best way and you allow that to go get cold and then a very, very good idea is that when you allow that to get cold, it has all the flavour necessary you put a little julienne of beetroot you know which has the flavour of vinegar and you mix that through and then you put sour cream into that and it’s a beautiful soup. That’s the cold borscht. I don’t know if you ever tasted it.

175.MM: I haven’t tasted the cold borscht yet.
That’s a good way of serving it. But if it’s hot you lose the colour of the beetroot. If you are serving it hot you’d want to put a small drop of the beetroot juice and the julienne of the beetroot so that it doesn’t discolour in the pot. That’s just the Russian way.

After leaving them I came back to Ireland and my wife came back before me and my first daughter was born in America. So sentimentality over-ruled my mind so eventually I came back. She felt she liked home better really in herself so we came back and we settled down here you know. So when I came back here, just after I came back I applied for the, at that time the Intercontinental Hotel which was the Intercontinental and I came back and I was interviewed for a job here. I became second chef of the Intercontinental at that time. Myself and the chef at that time who opened it in 1963, was Freddie Goldinger and as I said previously myself and Freddie were in the hotel for about four or five weeks before we opened. The only man with us was a man by the name of Bill O’Keefe. He came out of the army and he worked there as the staff chef for a while so he was a nice fellow to work with, got on well together.

So while you were organising the kitchen he was feeding the staff and that sort of stuff.

He (Freddie) said to me you look after the Irish men and I’ll take care of the foreigners. Now when they all started arriving, it was himself and then he was Swiss and soon after his arrival a German second chef, the tallest chef I ever worked for. His name was Roland Fuchs. Now I have a photograph of them really you know but and Fuchs came about seven or eight weeks after she opened. I worked on the sauces as I said and I was the sauce cook for some time. We got on very well with Freddie really you know and he was a nice fellow to work with. There was a lot of the chefs, some, a lot of the teachers who were in Cathal Brugha Street were in that particular group at that time. Jim Bowe, John Linnane, Joe Erraught wasn’t, he was later. Then there was others John Gibbons, he was in that group. A man who recently died was Kevin Duffy. You probably heard that. Gerry Connell, Gerry was a nice kid always a great lad to get on with. Very easy to get on with you know and then there was…. And was John Clancy there at that stage or did he come later?

John Clancy came later. He was at the Russell. John was trained really in the Russell. Very nice fellow John. So he came after me after I left you know. So well I didn’t leave I just dirtied by bib a little bit. This commis annoyed me, I have to be honest with you, a young waiter, and I said to him ‘don’t be so cheeky’. He went out and told the head waiter and I hit him, I didn’t put my hand on him but yet I was left go for it because you couldn’t attack anybody because that was the situation. But at that time the chef had left, Freddie Goldinger. He left, he went out, oh where is it he went. He wanted me to go to Jakarta with him and well I said I couldn’t leave my wife and children you know. It wouldn’t be fair to my wife.

You said he’d come from Puerto Rico.

He was a Puerto Rico. He told me himself that he went from Switzerland to Puerto Rico. He was a very, very intelligent fellow really you know and he was a likeable fellow to work with you know. He knew what he wanted. He’d give a hand out like, you know. But when we opened up there was French that worked with me on the sauce and then there was a Swiss on the pastry, there was a Swiss in the larder, there was a Swiss in the butcher shop, the butchers as we called it and there was a Swiss on the vegetables. That was really the foreign group and then Roland Fuchs was the second chef. Tallest chef I ever worked with, he was about six foot seven or something like that. He was a very, very tall man. So I spent the…. there were tough times but they were good times.

Did the opening of the Intercontinental bring in new systems of work to Ireland?
**BK**: I can safely take the slight credit for one of our systems. We got a lot of American equipment in because the Intercontinental was a subsidiary of Pan American Airways and they had a financial monopoly and I believe Aer Lingus had a kind of a cut in the hotel at that time. They were one of the investors. The man who designed the hotel was a man by the name of Scott. He was the architect of the Busáras.

**MM**: Yeah, yeah that’s right. Patrick Scott wasn’t it.

**BK**: And he designed the Intercontinental at that time you know. However, anyway at that time at the Intercontinental we had a big opening and things like that but I as I said a lot of American equipment came in and I would nearly go as far as to say the credit, you know how they portion turkey, where you have the ham, the stuffing to get breadcrumbs, the black meat, the white meat. But that wasn’t being done in this country before that, that was all done, we got to serve the turkey, putting the ham, myself and Freddie knew the American system. We were the only two that came from America and knowing the system and what we did was we used the ham, the stuffing, the white meat over the top and portion it and then we used to put some greaseproof paper over it and then a damp cloth over it and then the ovens to heat them up. And we could roll out hundreds, that was the system. It started a whole new era of cooking. Now I made the original, what they call, what they Americans call giblet gravy. I made the original giblet gravy there. Because there was what they call the gizzard of the turkey was used you know. You know you actually cleared out from the stomach, the hard skin of the stomach and you poached the gizzards, you only poach them, you don’t boil them, you poach them until there reasonably nice and put a bit of onion through them and salt to give flavour to them and then you take the sauce from that, to help you to make a carcass of a turkey and you take the carcass of the stock, the carcass plus the gizzard sauce, what’s called the gizzard sauce and you mince the gizzards and you make the sauce and you put the gizzards after being minced straight into the sauce and you have giblet gravy immediately. That is the original giblet gravy. That came, the giblet gravy came from the American Canterbury pilgrims called at the time….

**MM**: The Mayflower.

**BK**: The Mayflower, that’s where the giblet gravy started and even to this present day in America they still apply the giblet gravy in Thanksgiving whereas we make it straight from the stock of the turkey.

**BK**: After I finished with the Intercontinental I became second chef of the Royal Marine in Dun Laoghaire. I worked in the Royal Marine Hotel and unfortunately the poor chef passed away to the big 'C' (Cancer). A very nice fellow, a very good cook. His name was Holt. He was a Dublin man but he spent quite some time in England. And having said that anyway he was a good cook and a nice fellow to work with and that, good sauce cook and unfortunately he died. I carried on as best as I could for a little while. The manager at that time offered me the job and I turned it down, then he offered it to me again and still turned him down. So eventually he came to me after a few weeks and he says now I’m offering you the job for the third time he said, I just can’t see anybody taking over, your doing a great job so I said I’d take it over okay, you know, give it a try. So with that anyway I took over anyway and applied some of my ways of the American style that I couldn’t apply before. I started to apply it there, which worked out well because I had a team of twelve of us in the kitchen only. We used to do quite a lot of weddings and we were always kind of busy. Particularly for weddings and functions, you know. After that I spent about 1969-1972 there and I became head chef. Then I opened the International Airport Hotel in Dublin Airport which was The Forte Group you know. So I opened that hotel. Again I was in the kitchen for about a fortnight on my own and so I got things the way I wanted them. The manager, John Loftus at that time, allowed me to use the system in the kitchen. But I did that and I got the kitchen going anyway. It was quite a nice kitchen now, I must say. A well designed kitchen. Sam Stevenson designed it. It was a very, very good kitchen to work in I must say. Very, very healthy kitchen to work in. Well anyway I applied some of my systems there properly.
Would he have consulted with you or with chefs before his design?

No, no. It was advertised the position and I applied for it and got it. So many people in for it and anyway I was successful, like it was only fifteen minutes from the house here to there. So anyway I was head chef there for close to eight years, nearly nine you know. I left then. I didn’t reasonably like Trusthouse Forte, the way they were operating it. They weren’t good to me to be quite honest. I did my job all right but not financially they weren’t very good. So I decided this working at night was going too far in my life. Like I was always at work. However, anyway the job in Irish Life came up and I applied for it. I went there as head chef in Irish Life (Insurance Company). Now Irish Life was basically industrial type of catering. I think personally I made a bit of a mistake going, although I applied my trade to my job. But I spent also close to eight years or so in Irish Life and it was all industrial catering, big time. Numbers would be seven to eight hundred lunches a day. I used to make practically everything fresh to be quite frank with you. Everything fresh, you. A friend of mine Derek McLaughlin worked with me there. Good chef, good lad to work with too.

He worked with you there, what years are we talking about here in Irish Life?

I went there in ’81, about ’81 and I left it in ’89.

And was Derek a commis of yours then?

No he was after coming out of Cathal Brugha Street. And I must say a very, very intelligent fellow. Good cook too, fast and no messing. But in Irish Life from the time you walked in, in the morning till the time you left it was go, go, all the way. You had to have everything ready on the counters at 12.15 and the lunch went on from that time, 12.15 to nearly 1.30-2.00 p.m. But during that period you were on the ball all the time with the supply line. Now we carved everything, lamb, beef, pork, you name it we did it. We used to have it in trays of tin, we used to cover them with silver foil and put them in the oven to heat them up. We’d always make the sauce separate and the gravy separate. We always used to do curry chicken and rice and things like that. We used to get the boiling fowl in for the curry chicken. We often sold three-hundred-and-fifty portions of curry chicken which was quite good you know. Grant it, I used to make a nice curry sauce. I used to boil the chicken in the stock and hold it over and make the sauce the next morning. So I used add carrots, onions, apples, fruit, coconut, juice, orange juice, sometimes I’d put in a tin of fruit. It was very popular I must say. I didn’t put much cream in it. I always felt it would nearly ruin the actual flavour but anyway that’s beside the point. Used to make a lot of beef dishes too, you know. Used to make steak and kidney pie, fresh. Steak and kidney mushrooms, steak and kidney vegetable pies. I used to make lasagne and spaghetti Bolognese. All these dishes that were quickly served, there was no messing.

I’m just remembering here Colin O’Daly was a commis of yours out in the airport, wasn’t he?

No, not mine. Bill Ryan. In respect to Bill Ryan, he’s like a great friend and still is. Bill Ryan I must say he’s a marvellous decorator from sugar to larder, from ice to butter models. Anything of that nature, he has a great taste for colour and that and he worked close to thirty years in Aer Lingus you know and he was what they call the teacher of Colin O’Daly, because he was very finesse and good in himself. He loved his work really. He was an exceptionally good decorator, exceptionally good. He could do anything, even with salt. He just had that….Artistic ability yeah. So anyway after spending, as I say, I left Irish Life about 1989, if I can remember and I was about two weeks at home here and Joe Erraught contacted me and told me to come in to see him. So I went in and saw Mr. Hegarty and Joe asked me would I do a class, you know. So that started off my teaching. You know I used to take the day release students, sometimes I took permanent students and things like that like first years. Then Joe (Erraught) asked me then, would I go to Crumlin (note. Crumlin VEC College was where day release chef students did their first year of training) and try and sort Crumlin out. So I went to Crumlin anyway and just try to, with
Gerry Connell and that, we tried to give the best we could and that you know. Wrote the menus and gave menus that would apply to what equipment was available to us and the time that was available to us in Crumlin. Yeah we got on, we did our best and that. They got a good theoretical training in Crumlin. They did really, I must say that. So that’s my life.

199.MM: Would Jammet’s have been always considered to be the best restaurant in its day?

200.BK: In its’ day, yeah. For food it was considered the best, the Gresham had a very high reputation. I remember, not proud of the fact, but it was considered that if you worked in the Gresham as a young chef you could go anywhere in this country and even overseas. If you went to London and you had worked in the Gresham Dublin it was regarded as an excellent hotel. It was tough but if I could write a book or an article on the most unforgettable character I ever met in my life it would be ‘Macker’, otherwise known as ‘Macker of the Gresham’. He was the second chef and then he became chef. But God knows you didn’t know what your life was with him (laughter). He was unbelievable (laughter).

201.MM: I heard some story about a goat.

202.BK: That’s a true story. That is an actual story because I was in New York when my friend who worked in the Gresham with me got this letter from his first cousin who was. He wrote the letter and he told me exactly what happened.

203.MM: Do you remember the story?

204.BK: All I could say is I’d roll around the place laughing with the excitement of it you know. I must say I’d roll around the place laughing at him (laughter).

205.MM: So what was ‘Macker’s’ real name?

206.BK: Michael McManus. He’s dead Lord have mercy on him. He was a huge slice of life in the Gresham. He was in the college. He’s some character. He was dangerous to be safe. He could let go a leg or anything at you. It was like flying saucers going around the place.

207.MM: Was there much of that now?

208.BK: It was tough. They’d throw…. I myself was part of it too, you know. I let go a few things. I let go a carcass of chicken one time and there was one fellow at the basin just right across from the larder and the head chef was walking by, Uhlemann himself and the carcass of chicken passed about four inches from his face (laugh). He went berserk!!! So I ran into the fridges to get away from the shouting and roaring and I must say, honest to God Máirtín, I had to come out and I came over to him and said ‘chef I have to speak to you for a moment’. ‘Come on in’, says he. I said ‘I have to come to apologise to you’, I said, ‘I was the one who threw that carcass of chicken and I am sorry for upsetting you so much. I truly am’. I said it would never happen again. (Laughter).

209.MM: Had you grown up with that sort of atmosphere in your training as well? Were kitchens always a little bit mad?

210.BK: Yes they were. There is a more controlled kitchen nowadays. I must admit, there’s not this, I hope not, in the kitchens now I’d be honest with you Máirtín I didn’t roar or shout. I said there was only one way to get good out of the men is put your trust in them. If you’re under pressure, their under pressure. If you let them know that, that your not just the man, look at me, your not that man, you have a team around you and there as much as you, as you are to them. That’s the way I always applied it when I was a head chef. I said I can’t do this job without you. Without you I’m lost and they all appreciated that. I want to say this to you as a young man you should apply that way Máirtín. Let the men know your honesty, what your doing and I’ll tell you
one thing and I’m only saying this as an old chef retired now don’t ever take kickbacks because I know a case, I won’t say, I seen it happen and I saw a chef nearly loose his dignity and life over it. You’re better off to get a good weeks salary or agreed salary. And you can walk out that door an honest man. It may not be the full ‘whack’ that you want but at least you know….

211.MM: Were you involved with unions at all?

212.BK: I was, I was involved with the union. I was one of the founding members of the Panel of Chefs. I was in that group, there was seven of us and the man who was at the helm, the formation of that group was Micky Mullen the past General Secretary. He did more for the catering worker in this town than anybody or did ever since. He did. He was a great man particularly where chefs were concerned. He had a son a chef. But Micky Mullen really seen the light of who was the real worker, who was the men doing the ground work. Micky Mullins to be honest with you idolised chefs. He always stood by them you know.

213.MM: And he was down in Liberty Hall.

214.BK: He was very good. He became a TD you know. He was very much, he could get, he didn’t fool around with employers, things like that. He just told them directly I’m here for this, I want this, can you do it? He gave it to them directly. He wasn’t one of these fellows who talked stupid.

215.MM: Seven of you set-up the panel of chefs.

216.BK: There was Michael Ganly, there was myself was at it, there was Billy Marshall, there was a man by the name of O’Brien, I have that thing upstairs. Anyway they were the starting group that started off this Panel of Chefs. They were originally head chefs. Originally it was a Panel of Head Chefs really to encourage greater standards of cooking in the country and that was the original intended idea. Now naturally it flourished over the years, thank God and made them feel a bit proud of themselves. You know, I, there was too much little made of them, chefs in the past. There wasn’t a price put on their shoulders like there should have been. It started to kind of give them the ground work of a better established career and recognition.

217.MM: The beginning of a profession sort of thing?

218.BK: Yeah, that’s true, I feel that at my age, I tell you I feel they weren’t really put on the pedestal they should have been put on. Like they took a lot of guff and backchat and everything else. A lot of them at that time like they ended up, I’m not saying them all now, don’t get me wrong, a few of them ended up, they became….(doing a drinking motion)

219.MM: On the drink (alcoholics).

220.BK: Yeah, on the drink. I’m not saying them all. Yeah. Like now thank God there’s more recognition of them and thank God, I lived to see the day that they can go in and nearly put their own stamp on the counter as they say, that’s what I want. The one thing I think about now that I don’t like to think that the chef takes all the cream. I think his cream should be divided amongst the people around him not being used as a kind of ‘whipping dogs’ for them, where they take the cream. I don’t believe in that. I believe in sharing the spoils with the men around me and giving them the credit that they deserve if they deserve that credit. That’s my policy, has been

221.MM: I would share that.

222.BK: I don’t believe in this shouting and roaring. There are times in the kitchen that one can…. but if you apply the trust in them as much as they trust you. You know it works both ways.
Tell me the Savoy, was there much shouting and roaring in that or was it a quiet kitchen. He would have come straight from Escoffier. He would have trained under Escoffier. You know did you ever talk to him about Escoffier or …?

No, no. Just in passing Escoffier was not straight up. My comment about Escoffier, I read Escoffier’s book ‘Guide to Modern Cookery’. In my view you could never run a kitchen on Escoffier’s books, never because you’d be running a kitchen at a loss because his cooking is so refined, so expensive that you just couldn’t run an operation nowadays on his book. While he gave, he uplifted chefs in his day that was his purpose. He was a smallish man. He wasn’t a big tall man Escoffier, a smallish man. Now this came where he was in the Savoy for a while, a smallish man but he had a great brain, he had a great food brain and anything he ever of a Melba nature that’s where that came after Madame Melba, that’s where the peach snap came from you know or anything of a melba nature. I heard he was not a good range cook but he could figure two and two together and get it right. He had a lot of people under him which could test and taste and get the thing right. So that’s how he had a good brain to be able to write books and things like that and he liked the modern cookery. He got a lot of his stuff through probing and talking to people you know. At that particular time in the 1920s he was known as the king of chefs, he was classified as the king of chefs.

And the chef of kings (laugh).

Just talking about the fact you know you worked directly under one of his assistants and did his assistant run like you had said that the Savoy was very professionally run but would there be any messing, or shouting or throwing?

The only people who were shouting, when shouting went on was in the kitchen was in the ordering part at the time. Normally there was a certain amount of noise but there wouldn’t be shouting or roaring at each other. They’d be talking but once the serve started you kept your mouth shut and you listened and if you missed an order then you were in trouble. You’d always answer ‘oui’ or ‘okay’ you know. Yes. You had answer immediately when the order came in so you carried the order in your mind you know. That’s the way it was.

And was there much like, if you missed an order would you get a clout?

No you wouldn’t although I must say that Albon was a tough chef you know. I can say he made me cry one time in the kitchen but of course I couldn’t, I just had to stick it. You know we used to get, we had to keep ourselves clean and we got an apron and we got a hat you know, a necktie you know but the rest we provided ourselves, our coats. They didn’t give us the coats. It was only when we went to America that I was supplied with coats every day.

Right yeah so….

One a day.

And they did the laundry in America?

You just put your name on it and it went into a pile and it came back say maybe a Thursday or a Wednesday.

But that was in America but before that you had to do all the laundry yourself in England and in Ireland before that.

For instance when I was a chef of the Royal Marine the lads were still young commis, the lads were up from the country and that and it was hard having to pay for their outfits so one of the
stipulations of taking the job is that their laundry would be done for them and that was agreed that their laundry would be paid for and that was a great help to them. That gave the youngsters a boost. They didn’t have to pay for their laundry, they just sent them out. That was one of my stipulations taking the job. My other stipulation, Máirtín, was that I was the chef of the kitchen, I was the person that was running the kitchen, nobody else. I would consult with the manager but I ran the kitchen and I left them see that I was the boss of the kitchen you know what I mean. I wasn’t a puppet on a string for some of the managers. I did the talking in the kitchen. If you want to talk to me you talk to me in your office. That was my policy as a chef because I thought it worked the best that way. It showed them to have respect for you. That’s my point.

237.MM: In the Intercontinental did you have to do, did people have to do their own laundry in the Intercon?

238.BK: Oh no we were supplied there. But then again, quite frankly, from one chef to another, some of them abused the laundry, nicking stuff. I knew they were doing it but what can you say. Well it wasn’t fair. They were being supplied but they went further than that you know what I mean.

239.MM: You probably would have seen a fair bit of that as well with I remember you made the point that there was a very good system in the Savoy, that everything was counted, every chicken that came up and the whole thing, that there was a very good stock control system. You know….

240.BK: The stock control system was very, very important in the Savoy. You could tell how many portions of chicken you sold and how many portions of veal you sold, how many steaks you sold, what steaks, how much you sold you know. That all went down the book and they checked that afterwards because there was such a combination of people around, you know what I mean, considering that all these men had to be paid. The reason I left the Savoy was that I applied for money and I didn’t get it so I just said to hell with this. I don’t know, I felt I wanted to get home and see the family and that. Both of my brothers were head waiters. You probably don’t know this.

241.MM: No.

242.BK: Both of my brothers were head waiters. My eldest brother died at very young man, Lord have mercy on him, of a heart-attack but he was the only waiter in Dublin ever for a room to be named after him by PV Doyle and that was in the Montrose Hotel called the Robert Room. His name was Robert and he called it after him. ‘The Robert Room’.

243.MM: So he worked for PV.

244.BK: He worked for PV. He liked PV?

245.MM: I’m trying to figure out when the change happened. I’ve talked to a few people and you know there was talk of dress dances but you know for years only the rich would eat out or would go into a hotel even or a restaurant. When did that change happen where the normal man?

246.BK: After the war, because you know war creates destruction. Destruction creates construction. Construction creates production, production creates friction and friction causes war. The thing goes round in a cycle. Do you get my point?

247.MM: Yeah, yeah.

248.BK: That’s how things work. Now after destruction you have construction, that brings business. Construction brings production and production brings money or friction. Friction creates war just like in Iraq. That’s just the simplest explanation.
249. MM: But after the war there was with the construction of stuff there was more money and people started…. The normal man started to earn a bit more, things changed?

250. BK: They did. But slightly only changed because during war years there was a terrible lot of Irish people emigrated to Australia, to England, England particularly during the war because you couldn’t get anywhere else and to America they went. And even after the war even to the 1950s, I remember they went in their droves to America and Australia, mostly Australia and America. Very few started to go to England because there was quite an enormous amount of Irish already in England working on the railroads and what have you. But always when you have this affluence, it’s called ‘affluency’, like we have the Celtic Tiger. Now friction is setting in, markets are sealing up, money can’t, its nearly exploding. People are tightening their belts but as you say before the early part of the war Ireland was controlled basically by a gentry, snobbish lot of people and that’s who controlled that and kept it as such. Incidentally the Shelbourne Hotel originally was bought, the man who owned Jury’s, his name was Jury and he started up Jury’s Hotel in College Green. And after making, he used to, a lot of people coming from the country, travellers and that, commercial travellers and he did great business in Jury’s of College Green. And with that the Shelbourne went up for sale and with that he bought the Shelbourne Hotel. Now the family moved away from the Jury’s in College Green, sold Jury’s College Green to pay for the Shelbourne because they were upper echelon of society was dining and wining in the Shelbourne. Then it became the place for what they referred to, what I won’t say the gentry and rich people.

251. The cooking, when I went there, there was a Swiss then, nice poor old devil, but again life caught him. He was a Swiss called Valkin, Albert Valkin. Nice man. I suppose his wife is still alive but she is a very old woman if she is still alive. But he hit the bottle and then he started backing horses and you know. Otherwise he was a nice fellow. The Shelbourne needed a kick in the pants, it still does in my view. But as I say, I support the fact that you shouldn’t roar at lads in the kitchen because you create an animosity between you and them and if you say to a fellow ‘you little….’ you know what I mean, that doesn’t help. If you have a kitchen porter and you wash his pots your respect him as much as you respect the second chef. You put a gentlemanly bearing onto him as much as you’d put to the second chef. You don’t say wash that ‘so and so’ pot. That doesn’t come out of your mouth. Would you please wash that pot. You’d give him a status that he’s doing you a job, that he’s doing a good job but using the expression that you’re here for to do that and do it. You know what I mean, that type of thing. Do you get my point?

252. MM: Yes, and I fully agree with you. A pity there’s not more of it out there, unfortunately. You know what I mean and I think its getting there. I was looking at PV Doyle there and I remember talking to a fellow and he said to me that PV Doyle brought in the idea of the American diner when he brought in sort of the coffee dock or this idea. I suppose he was the Montrose.

253. BK: The Montrose he started. The South County.

254. MM: And the South County originally and then he sold the South County.

255. BK: He was a very shrewd operator. Like he put the South County in his wife’s name and then he opened the Montrose as a second hotel. He spent most of his time going around the hotels, he kept an eye on things you know. If you were doing a good job for PV he recognised that you know. My brother died, and at his funeral PV and his wife was at the funeral for my brother. He just came along to me and sympathised with me and he knew me when I was the chef at the Airport Hotel. He was at a couple of functions there. He said ‘if I had three or four men like him, I’d never have to worry about my business’ and that was a great compliment to him. So afterwards he named the room after him because he brought business because of his personality. He was the head waiter at that time.

256. MM: What age was he when he died?

257. BK: Fifty.
258. MM: But he worked for PV all along?

259. BK: No, he worked in the Gresham, he worked in the Royal Hibernian and that and he started off in the Gresham as a young man. He was a very suave, very clean, very honest fellow. We brought up that way to be honest with people you know. My other brother then he was in Aer Lingus all his life and he became head waiter of the Collar of Gold in Dublin Airport. My other brother, my younger brother. So anyway when that closed up he went on to a kind of inspecting foods coming on to the planes, quality control, that’s what he was. So he ended up at that.

260. MM: So what did your father do?

261. BK: My father was an office man all his life. He was in an office all his life. Yeah, my father was an office man all his life.

262. MM: But three of you went into the catering. How many was in the family? I know there was, sort of two families as such.

263. BK: Yeah, yeah, three of us went into the catering business. The other boys, one became a lithographic artist, a great artist really. A few of his pictures are over here. Then the other lad, a younger lad joined the American army and became a sergeant but he’s in America anyway. The youngest. So that’s the family really. No sisters although my mother, Lord have mercy on her, she died on a set of twins. My father I would consider had a tough life, he was a reasonably young man. But I applied, when I took over as a head chef I applied that, I didn’t start shouting and roaring at fellows you know ‘eff’n this and ‘eff’n’ that. I didn’t apply that at all because I was reducing myself and not alone was I doing that but I was reducing the young men under me or the people under me. Even with women, women are much more sensitive to pressure than men are. They take it another way.

264. MM: You just reminded me there now when did you see women chefs coming in? When did that happen in Ireland?

265. BK: Oh I’d say it’s not today or yesterday that they came in. There were some very good women cooks in their day. You know I must say….

266. MM: When you started off would there have been women cooks?

267. BK: Yeah, they weren’t head chefs now but they were good cooks. They worked in kitchens you know, like they were quite good cooks.

268. MM: But was there a difference then? Would they be paid differently then, would they if you know what I mean? Like I remember you were saying that you had in one place, in the Dolphin I think, you were saying there were maybe six chefs and two women. Would they have been doing similar work?

269. BK: One of them looked after all the vegetables and she was a powerful vegetable cook. Never got a complaint. The other one would look after desserts and that you know. Make tipsy cake, was a great favourite that time and it was fast and quick and she’d look after the ice-cream and she’d look after all the melbas and everything else like that. But it wasn’t like the high, high pressurised stuff then. Simple food, good food, rice pudding, tapioca pudding, the puddings. You don’t see it anymore. I can’t understand why they don’t make these things.

270. MM: Ah they’ll be back.

271. BK: I can’t understand why they don’t bring some of these solid good foods back like puddings and things like that, you know.
They would have always been considered as cooks or would they be considered as helpers or what…. What were they considered? Was a chef always a man?

Usually it was a man yeah. I suppose maybe they went out for more in what they called like at that time, my young time, although I went to Cathal Brugha Street at the very start the training in Cathal Brugha Street wasn’t as good then as it is now, not nearly as intensive. I remember Mr. Hegarty saying to me, saying to me one day I had class, ‘I wouldn’t talk to you. You know what to do, go ahead and do it’ (Laugh). He knew that he could trust me.

But the women, all women cooks, one of the most, two of the women I worked with impressed me very, very much as cooks, you know. One outstanding one I remember, I mean, this woman wouldn’t go round a mountain, she’d go through it with work. She was from Kerry and she was trained in Cathal Brugha Street. Her name was Margaret McGetrick. She’s married. She worked with me in Irish Life. She was really marvellous at cooking and a marvellous worker, a great worker. She could only describe she’d plough through the mountain, not around it. That’s how good she was and I always trusted her in her work and the way she did it. There was another couple of girls, I can’t remember their names now, another good cook there, she died, she left because she adopted two little twins and that took up her time. I can’t think of her name now, Ann. Ann was her name, another very good cook, very, very good cook. Like they don’t get the recognition they deserve. I mean they’re the backbone of a lot of things but they don’t get the recognition because…. This woman fought for the status of a chef because she was doing the work of a chef, this Margaret McGetrick but they didn’t give us a status of the chef, otherwise more money would be involved and with that the girl left. She told me in the end. We remained great friends. I have a clock inside given by the staff from Irish Life and she was the person responsible for me having that clock today, do you understand me. Just a point really. So anyway that’s the story.

When asked what Irish chefs impressed him during his career, he mentioned Karl Uhlemann but if focussing on Irish chefs mentioned Willie Johnson in the airport, Bill Ryan, Jim Bowe, John Gibbons, John Clancy, Johnny Hayd, Derek McLoughlan, John Linnane, John Coughlan and Tony Wallace.

What was the Red Bank like?

It was a very good restaurant. It was very good. There was a French chef in there. He not alone ran the…. he and the second chef started up the Lord Edward.

The Lord Edward yeah.

He spoke French fluently from just working with the French man and he worked with this French man who was the manager/chef in the Redbank Hotel or the Red Bank Restaurant in D’Olier Street.

The Red Bank would it be as good as Jammet’s?

It was a very good restaurant. It wouldn’t really. It was nearly on par with Jammet’s but it wasn’t just…. Jammet’s had the name. Jammet’s had the name of a really classy restaurant and the cooking was really marvellous and PJ went to teach in Cathal Brugha Street, it was I that went into the larder then you know. I used to bone out sirloin, mostly sirloin. We didn’t do much mostly steaks and then lobster.

Tell me something, point steak that was quite popular wasn’t it in all these places?
282. **BK:** In America they call it the hip. In this country they call it the steak piece but basically as a steak it’s as good as the sirloin if it’s properly looked after. The main shape, it shapes to a point and that’s why it’s called the point and the next steak to that is what’s known as the rump steak. The other part of it is usually used for stewing. There is kind of a lap on it, a floppy lap and it is not really used as a steak, although butchery nowadays will try and use it as a steak. But the point and the rump are the two best steaks of that piece. It’s the continuation of the sirloin or that’s what it is actually.

283. **MM:** I was thinking about the Red Bank and that sort of stuff and was there a place called the Paradiso on Westmoreland Street?

284. **BK:** That’s right.

285. **MM:** What was that like?

286. **BK:** There was a French man there. He was a very, very good chef and he originally worked in the Royal Hibernian and he married an Irish girl. He was the chef there and when it first opened The Paradiso was a very good restaurant. But we time, he changed, he left and the place went like that. That’s the trouble you know.

287. **MM:** Were there any other restaurant that you remember that was really at that level like you know what I mean through the years.

288. **BK:** There was a fellow that used to run a restaurant beside the Theatre Royal. You know the old Theatre Royal. The Regal Rooms. He was an Italian and he used to do Italian dishes. He was a very good chef, very, very good if I could think of his name. Ostinelli, a very oldish man. But his sauces were out of this world. Italian sauces.

289. You see Uhlemann came from the Regal Rooms which was beside the Theatre Royal. Now the Regal Rooms was a very, very good restaurant and Macker was in the Regal Rooms with Uhlemann and he came with Uhlemann to the Gresham. As I said to you Macker would fire a pot at you just as he’d look at you, you know what I mean. You probably heard the stories. These are true stories. Like it was nothing to see a lemon or an orange flying through the air (laugh) and somebody would get a crack of it. But thank God that type of kitchen is gone. I know chefs get excited and so forth like that but hopefully in my view it has stabilised itself.
Edited Interview with Frank Farren in Artane (28/5/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Frank Farren (FF)

1. **FF:** I was born in 1926 in North Kings Street Dublin. I went to St. Mary’s School in St. Mary’s Place just up near Parnell Square there. Then as a family we moved to Drumcondra in 1936 and I switched schools then and went to St. Patrick’s School in Drumcondra, the same one as the Taoiseach went to, whether that’s any claim or not (laugh). However, in those days, very, very few people, very, very few students went onto anything like university. It really wasn’t for the masses.

2. **MM:** It was elite at the time?

3. **FF:** Oh totally, absolutely, it was closed shop all along the line. In fact very few went to third level or went to college.

4. **MM:** Even second level?

5. **FF:** Even to leaving cert, very few. We were a reasonably large family, seven of us.

6. **MM:** What did your father do?

7. **FF:** Well my father was, this is interesting. My father was a compositor in the printing, which is quite a skill. Now he was involved in the volunteers in 1916. And he was still in the rebellion of 1916, not in the GPO. I’m not claiming he was in the GPO (laugh).

8. **MM:** It couldn’t have fitted them all (laugh).

9. **FF:** Well he was in the Four Court Garrison under Commandant Daly and he was out posted to Church Street, which is Father Mathew Hall. That was an outpost. He was involved in all the usual things. There was one battle in North King Street where he was. However, after they surrendered they were deported. They went Frongoch in Wales. First they went up to Ballykindler in Northern Ireland and they were there for a couple of months and then they went to Frongoch in Wales.

10. Now he was working with Healy’s the printers at that time, as a compositor. Now when he came back, that was out. They wouldn’t touch anyone who was blacklisted. So he got himself involved into shop keeping, drapery, because the mother she had, she was associated with drapery so they opened a shop. They opened a shop actually in North King Street. He wasn’t cut for it and with family pressures it just didn’t work out. So he eventually got himself involved in insurance. It was quite a common thing at that time to buy yourself some form of occupation, you bought a book.

11. **MM:** Right and you put stamps in it, is it?

12. **FF:** No, no you collected the premiums off everyone and you worked off the commission and then when you got new customers you got commission. So he was in insurance for the rest of his life. It wasn’t what he set out for, it wasn’t what he was skilled at, but however, as I say very few went on, well because he had a trade, a good trade, and he lost it. he always regretted that. He always said to us when we were at school at that time, no matter what you do get yourself some sort of a qualification. Because so many people were leaving schools at that time and just drifting into offices as office boys and just runners really and they never went anywhere. So he said get a skill, you know, so I left St. Patrick’s and I went to Parnell Square Technical School and because I
hadn’t…. I was finished in St. Patrick’s, I wasn’t going to go onto secondary and they had a course in Parnell Square at that time that was very akin to what they call the year here they have, the free year.

13. **MM:** Right, the transition year.

14. **FF:** The transition year. It was a course that was very like that and it was a course that didn’t cover anything special but covered everything in general. So at the end, coming towards the completion of that course… I never did very well in school, I never liked school. Not particularly good at it at all. But when I went to this transition course I found the whole approach to teaching was so totally different, I literally blossomed to be quite honest with you, I saw education, I saw teaching, I saw everything in a totally different light in the one year and I did very well there. I was only there for the year but like anything that came up you know and the different teachers set some sort of a test or something like. You were there sort of thing. However they announced towards the end that there were certain courses that were being run by the Vocational Educational Committee and that they were offering scholarships for students if you cared to apply for them. Now I had never….. So one of them was a chef’s course which was being done in Parnell Square at that time, not for very long. Michael Ganley did his first year in Parnell Square and his second year down in Cathal Brugha Street. I can’t honestly, even to today, I can’t honestly say what clicked me to say well I’ll have a go at that.

15. **MM:** Yeah, yeah.

16. **FF:** But the idea of not being out, being indoor and the artistic side, I saw catering from the artistic side and producing elaborate say wedding cakes or that, something with artistic tendencies and all like that. I said I’d have a go at it. No loss. So I went to the interview and there were about twenty or twenty-four lads there. It was all boys there. They never considered any girls at that time. So what they did, they called out the names of the unsuccessful and let go and when they came down to the ten I was still there, so I went into Cathal Brugha Street that September, that would have been around 1942. So this was the first chefs class that started in Cathal Brugha Street. Now they had done one the year before but that was the second half.

17. **MM:** The first year had been in Parnell yeah? So was Bill Kavanagh in that class with you?

18. **FF:** Bill Kavanagh.

19. **MM:** Was Bill Ryan?

20. **FF:** Bill Ryan.

21. **MM:** Can you remember any other name?

22. **FF:** Yeah, Frank McCarthy, Louis Taffe was a lad. There were two in that class that weren’t scholarship students, they were paying students and one of them was Prosser. They had a hotel in Enniskerry and there was a lad by the name of Nugent, regrettably a young lad died pretty young. They were in that. There was a lad by the name of Bolden, John Bolden. He only spent a few years here after. He went to America. He wound up head of catering in JFK in the Airport. Now any of them that went away seemed to do well. I did a year there but this course, we didn’t know it at the time of course, it wasn’t geared towards the industry. It was just a cookery course.

23. **MM:** Yeah.

24. **FF:** It was taught to us by domestic economy teachers. Just straight forward cooking, very basic. But none of the adjuncts that are required like costing and that. I got a placement at the end of the year. They issued placements and I was asked if I’d go to Donegal. So, the idea of, like things were very quiet at that time, the war was on. Opportunities were very rare. A lot of things
we take for granted today, common little things just weren’t available. There were scarcities. But the idea of going to Donegal like I’d never really travelled outside of Dublin (laugh) literally, Bray maybe, so I said yes I’ll go to Donegal probably not knowing myself that the placement cause I had no idea what the placement would be. It was Rossapenna Hotel, one of the greatest hotels in the country particularly at the time. It was one of the very top hotels. So I did a season there and basically just did whatever I was told to do or asked to do. So I came back to do the second year in Cathal Brugha Street which would have been 1943 and what happened was, not enough numbers of the first group reported back. Out of the twelve there were only those who I think were sent to season hotels. So there was only three or four of us or something that reported back so they couldn’t run a class with that so they decided to start another first year and they said they’d get us placements. So through the union they go us. So I was placed in the Hibernian Hotel. Now when I went to the Hibernian the difference between the attitude of management to staffs, of all grades, not just, I was only the boy, I didn’t mind being called the boy, I was the boy but you know the attitude and the general whole ambience of the place towards staff and towards, it was literally vile and that is the famous Paul Besson, Ken Besson.

25. MM:  Ken Besson

26. FF:  Ken Besson, Paul was his father. He was the proprietor. His attitude to whoever. The tasks that were being administered from my level were so menial to what I had been doing in Rossapenna.

27. MM:  In Rossapenna how many were in the crew or in the brigade as such?

28. FF:  In the brigade, about eight or nine.

29. MM:  But you were doing big numbers were you?

30. FF:  Oh yeah. I was being broken into work way beyond what you call a first year apprentice. I was down the larder, butchering sides of beef. Everything there was first rate. However every single task that was done in Rossapenna was done by hand. There was no such thing as machinery. We hadn’t even got electricity. Well we had a generator. We weren’t on the ESB grid. Rural electrification hadn’t reached that area. They had a generator but it wasn’t powerful enough to produce what would be required so we only had lighting and refrigerating. Every other item in the whole kitchen was done by hand. It was tough but it was very interesting. Extremely interesting.

31. MM:  What sort of ovens would have been?

32. FF:  All coal range. Nothing after that. Coal range even your grill had to be done by getting the oven temperature up high enough to do…..

33. MM:  It wasn’t a char grill as such it was…..

34. FF:  However I did between seasons in the Hibernian and the chef who was…..

35. MM:  Who was head chef there at the time?

36. FF:  His name was, it will come to me in a second. I always get stuck on names. However, it will come to me. His boast always was that he worked with Escoffier. (note. The chef in Rossapenna who worked with Escoffier was Kordina)

37. MM:  Right.

38. FF:  In London. He was just an apprentice. It was always his boast that he worked in the Savoy when Escoffier was chef. Now I feel he was, he wasn’t a chef to be carrying those feels.
He was a German Jew that got out of Germany in the pretty early 30s. He got to London and then when the war started he got out of London. There was a time there they thought London was going to go. So he came to Ireland. Now he came to me at the commencement of the next season which would have been 1944 and asked me if I’d go back to it (Rossapenna) so I jumped at it to go back for another season because the experience was tremendous you know.

39. **FF:** And there was a Swiss pastry cook there and a Paul Zern. I can remember his name easier. He was an extraordinary character, an absolutely extraordinary character. He was there for the two seasons I was there. He went to Rossapenna at the beginning of the season and he never left the hotel until the season was over. Never left, never. Dedicated. He hadn’t got the materials that he should have had because the war was on but he could turn out stuff practically from nothing. Amazing, absolutely amazing, a real artist.

40. **MM:** Sugar would have been one of the….  
41. **FF:** Oh sugar was one of the big things that you hadn’t got. 
42. **MM:** Even butter was being exported wasn’t it at that time. 
43. **FF:** Butter yes. Butter was being exported and a lot. We had plenty of meats and fish which was all local produce but like white bread, sugar, tea, coffee, fuel, any form of fuel, cars, cars were off the road when only doctors and ministers, or so would have a car. The bus ran from Milford to Rossapenna twice a week. Twice a week. You got the bus I think on Tuesday and Friday. So if you didn’t get out on Tuesday you had to wait till Friday. Extraordinary. When you think about it. 
44. **MM:** Yeah, yeah. 
45. **FF:** However, I went back for a second season and I progressed. I definitely progressed. I was doing basically chef de partie work. I was second year. So when I came back after that season I went to the Central (Hotel). Now the Central at that time was owned by a woman by the name of Mary Rowntree. She was the only chef de cuisine in the city. The female. But she was aging. The manageress was a Miss Mullins. Now Miss Mullins was so dedicated to the work, to the Board and to the Directors and to everybody. The morning she, the day she died she wanted to get up that morning because there was a board meeting. She had to get up. So they had to convince her one way or the other that because of weather, it was in the winter, because of weather that the board meeting had been cancelled. It wasn’t but they had to convince her because she would have to be up. Now she was from Newry in County Down. She came from the Gresham. She was manageress in the Gresham at one stage when the Gresham, before the 1916 bombing and the Gresham was in where Clery’s is now. (note. This is a misunderstanding – The Imperial Hotel was above Clery’s) 
46. **MM:** Right, yeah. 
47. **FF:** As far as I know, because the Gresham was a new building cause that was built in the early 1920s after the Rising. But she was ex-Gresham. 
48. **MM:** You’re in the Central. 
49. **FF:** Yeah, no I’m trying to think of that chefs name 
50. **MM:** Don’t worry about that, it will come back to you when your not trying. 
51. **FF:** Yeah, however, so the Central wasn’t really up to much but as I say you got the placement through the union like you know. You went to report, when you came back from the seasoned work you went to the union and the union had a so called sort of agency, posting up jobs. When you got a post well you would be reluctant to leave it too quick because there mightn’t be
something else available. Whoever came the season 1945. Kordina is that chef’s name from Rossapenna.

52. MM: What was his first name?

53. FF: Just chef to us. Kordina that was his name. So he came to me again but this time he wasn’t going back to Rossapenna, he was going to Bundoran. Basically he wanted me to go back with him to be his sous chef, you see although officially I was still just third or fourth year apprentice. The only grading you had at that time was how many years you had done.

54. MM: You’d officially served yeah.

55. FF: And that was controlled through the union and through nothing else and so if you wanted to be recognised as a full-time well you could go down along the country and do a job but rates of pay and all wouldn’t be controlled and you wouldn’t have any comeback. However, I went to Bundoran with him and there was the Hamilton Hotel which has since been absorbed into the Hollyrood Hotel. It was next door to the Hollyrood. The Hollyrood and the Hamilton were two hotels alongside each other. The Hamilton was a small hotel, it wasn’t large but it was about the best hotel in Bundoran if you take out the Great Northern. They were the two hotels that people that were looking for good hotels went to the Great Northern Hotel or to the Hamilton. And what happened there was some form (laugh) I wasn’t long there when some form of (laugh) disagreement between the proprietor, Ticky Hamilton, Ticky was known as Ticky Hamilton. He was reputed to be a very hard man to get along with. I never found him any way difficult. However my friend Mr. Kordina up and left and came back to Dublin and I carried on. I was literally there on my own. We were only talking about fifteen to twenty residents. So I carried on there, he left and I carried on. Not long after that he succeeded in getting a chef to come and a second, I was supposed to be back as apprentice. From the day that the chef left, you see, my wage increased about fourfold you know. But when, a couple of weeks later when help did come, my wage stayed the say. So I went into Ticky and you know I said I think the cashier made some sort of a mistake because I was back the apprentice you know. Ah he said it was all right but don’t tell the others. I had more than the sous chef. I had more than the second so I had a jazz time then for the rest of the season because I was in the money and I hadn’t the responsibility and I, so forth. I had a good couple of months there. So I came back then.

56. MM: What sort of money would you have been earning at that stage anyway as an apprentice?

57. FF: Well I started, when I started in Rossapenna there were two grades of pay through the unions and so forth. There was the pay that if you were living in and living out. So Rossapenna was a live in so. But my first rate of pay was ten shillings a week. That would be fifty cent a day but sure you can’t draw a comparison.

58. MM: Yeah. No but compared to what you got when you went up. You went up to…..

59. FF: So I was in Bundoran. I think…..

60. MM: Over a pound maybe.

61. FF: Oh no, well when I went there I was probably on about two pounds a week. Live in but he was paying me about five or so because I had stuck….Stuck with him. As I say I didn’t find him hard to get along with. I think if you, I always feel that if you work with professionals and your professional yourself in your attitude you’ll get on all right.

62. MM: Yeah, yeah.

63. FF: So however, when I came back from Bundoran that must be 1945. The war was just over yeah and I went to Jamnet’s. A post came up on the board in the union. The routine was if any
post they came in they’d write it up on the board and if you were interested you knocked at the window and said I think I’ll go for that you know. They’d look at you and say how many years have and their looking for a third or fourth year, blah, blah, blah. I went to Jammet’s. Now again Jammet’s was shunned by numbers because it was known to be a hard place to work so if you wanted it easy and you wanted it handy you didn’t opt for Jammet’s.

64. **MM:** When was Jammet’s opened do you know?

65. **FF:** Well Jammet’s, Louis Jammet was the owner/proprietor of Jammet. Now his father and his mother, the couple, they had a hotel in Suffolk Street where the National Bank is now at the corner. The corner of Suffolk Street and Trinity Street. Now not that present building, that’s a new building, but they had a hotel there and I’d say it was the early turn of the century nineteen, I’d say before 1910, somewhere around that period they closed the hotel and they moved down into Nassau Street and opened a restaurant so Jamments would have come from around about the 1910-1912 time. (note. Jamments moved in 1926) In and about that time, I don’t know exactly. But they changed to being a restaurant. Well I went there in 1945 and it was tough enough. A lot of unnecessary, making a big deal of things, everything was a big deal you know.

66. **MM:** Who was the chef there at the time?

67. **FF:** A Marc Faure

68. **MM:** Marc Faure. Right. And how many chefs would have been, how many in the brigade?

69. **FF:** About fourteen. In or about fourteen. The volume of trade wouldn’t have been huge, not by today’s standards like you know.

70. **MM:** It would have sat what sixty people.

71. **FF:** Oh the dining room would have sat fiftyish. There was a food bar then at the back and they did the oysters and all like that, the food bar and then there was behind the food bar there was a cocktail bar and then upstairs there was a grill room.

72. **MM:** So there was a restaurant and a grill room.

73. **FF:** Yes. And a food bar. And the grill room upstairs was the newer addition. That would have only been put in around about 1942, not long before I went to it. That was quite new, that part of upstairs was quite new. So it wasn’t a huge, but then there wasn’t a huge volume of trade available and particularly at that particular level. Even at what they called the middle grade there wasn’t the type of trade that is available today. People didn’t dine out. People didn’t frequent hotels. Ninety-nine percent of people going to employ whether they were in offices or whether they were in trades, they put their lunch in their pocket in the morning and that was it. They didn’t dine out as is being done today.

74. **MM:** So who were the customers in Jammet’s?

75. **FF:** Well you had of course the company directors, you had the diplomatic corps, you had the people out of government, you had people like judges, solicitors and barristers and top people out of Trinity and that level. So the numbers wouldn’t have been huge but it was on par with, it was classified as the restaurant, the French restaurant in Dublin. Now how exactly it compared to French restaurants in France or abroad I don’t know.

76. **MM:** I heard that during the war that you got an awful lot of business from, I don’t know was it like, was it English Generals or American Generals or had you much of that?
Ah yes. There was, they would be serving on the continent or in Britain and they get leave of absence, they get leave and of course they immediately headed here because we were badly stuck for some materials but they were worse in England because they hadn’t meats. Meat and everything in England was rationed. It was never rationed here. So they came here for a good feed to be honest, to be candid with you. So yes there would have been a fair splattering of those persons. Of course they would be in civvies you wouldn’t know them. They wouldn’t be in uniform. And you got a lot of, well when I say a lot, you wouldn’t get one everyday. But you get Indian Princes and Gaekwad of Baroda or Aga Khan or Prince of Hydrobad, these Indian Princes, and from all over the Middle East and all. Some of these oil barons and all that type of thing. Of course you wouldn’t know them they dressed in civvies like they only put on the robes when they were being weighed against themselves in gold.

MM: Yeah, yeah (laugh).

At the annual ceremony.

Tell me about that.

Oh the Aga Khan and that, they are head of their religious sects and annually their weighed in gold against their weight. Their put on a scale and they keep piling on the gold until the scale balances and that’s then the remuneration.

Oh I never heard of that.

Oh that’s….. It wouldn’t be only the Aga Khan, there were some others. There were some of these other Princes and that would be religious and political leaders at the same time you know. You got a fair splattering of those. They would be introduced usually through the Department of Foreign Affairs. They would ring up and say so and so-in-so will be going to lunch this evening/today. Be a party of three or four. Now because they never carried money, they signed for everything and then they’d be gone home a fortnight or so later whatever, their secretary would phone. They never carried money. In fact I think some of them it was against their religious.

Convictions or beliefs, whatever.

So therefore they had to be kind of introduced. So we would know maybe that day. Joseph was the Head Waiter. I never knew his second name, always just known as Joseph. He always wanted to be known as Joseph. Just Joseph. Head waiters at that time…..(Note. Josef Ruckli was his name)

Was he Irish?

He was Irish. Head waiters always just wanted to be known by their name. Just Joseph or Martin or whatever. But he’d announce at the hot press, his Excellency the Gaekwad of Borada will be coming. Of course everything had to stop for that you know. So there was a lot of bossing going on. They got no, their meal was no more than any other but it had to be…..

Yeah.

Jammet’s was tough but I was always conscious like that if the only reference you had because people didn’t need references then. They didn’t bother with them then. References were useless. Eighty or ninety percent weren’t from the people they were supposed to be from. They wrote them themselves and they got someone to sign them. References were lift the phone and ring. Where have you been? I’ve been in the Central and then you were classified as to whether you were all right or whether you weren’t all right. So I was always conscious that the only thing you had to build on would be where you worked. That was like you know. There were no exams
at the end of the term and to go and get a certification. There was no such thing as certification. So you certification was.....

90. **MM:** Was your CV effectively.

91. **FF:** And your own reputation. So I stayed there until I finished my six year apprenticeship. That would be 1948.

92. **MM:** You were there for about three years.

93. **FF:** Close on three years. Now that, by commis standards that was a fairly long run. They'd come in and after a month or two they couldn't stick this. It was tough. It was rough. Rough going.

94. **MM:** What was the difference between the grill room and the normal restaurant?

95. **FF:** Well the grill room opened for lunchtime only. Well it opened in the evening but all meals would be served from the kitchen below. It was.....

96. **MM:** It would have an open grill.

97. **FF:** Oh an open charcoal. Well it should have been a charcoal grill but we used coke. But it was an open grill. You see, a grill should be open.

98. **MM:** Yeah, that's right yeah. It's basically a barbecue as such.

99. **FF:** It is yeah because otherwise it's a salamander. If the heat comes out on top it a salamander, although they keep calling everything, everything particularly on household equipment and all the rest. You go into any of the suppliers and you say well 'what's the salamander like in that cooker? Oh the grill (laugh). It was an open grill yes and it was a charcoal grill. Now that would operate over lunchtime. Now in the evening time then they didn't really do very many meals on that at all but if a person did want a meal there it would be from the normal menu and just brought up to the.....

100. **MM:** Was the main restaurant a bit more plush, like was the grill room more.....

101. **FF:** It was more modern and it was more.....

102. **MM:** Informal as such like you didn’t have to..... Like at that stage did you still have to dress up when you were going out for dinner? How was that sort of.....

103. **FF:** No you wouldn’t but you wouldn’t go in, in casual. You’d have to be in and you wouldn’t remove your coat while you were dining or you know you’d have to be wearing a tie. But it wouldn’t be a dress, formal dress, it wouldn’t be evening, well a lot of them would be in evening wear because they were passing onto a function. To have a party coming through in evening wear wouldn’t be usual. But it was there that I of course ran into Mucky (P.J.) Dunne. Mucky was in the larder there. He operated the larder and then I was there till 1948.

104. **MM:** The kitchen was in the basement was it?

105. **FF:** No, not quite. No, it was to the back but not in the basement. There was a basement below, it was on the same level as the restaurant and the bar.

106. **MM:** What was the environment like in the kitchen? Like was the heat unbearable?
Well all kitchens at that time were because they were all up to that time and well quite into the 1950s, they were all open ranges, they were all coal fired ranges and they had to be stoked and set-up. I mean…..

Was it like a big Aga sort of thing or?

Well there was an oven on each side of the firebox in the centre and the top was flat. Solid top with rings for lifting and when you wanted extra heat you lifted the ring and put the container directly over the heat you know. There was a lot of trouble getting them up to heat because fuel was very scarce and you were literally burning anything you could lay your hands on. They used to have to watch the cookers out in the bar because they would be smashed up to get the fire going. Although it was the porters duty to try and keep the range going, well in Jammet's there were three ranges, in fact there were four, but they didn't have enough fuel to keep four going, they were working off three. So you had three open kind of fires. Now you had no way of controlling the heat coming from the top of them. It was imperative that you had lunch say at half twelve. If you had a stock pot or a soup on or whatever is that it was boiling at 12.10 at least to be ready for 12.30 and then of course to add to that then a very famous method of jaggng up or jangling up the cooker, the stockpot and that was to lift it and throw a ladle of fat underneath it. And of course the smoke and everything, so the heat and that was intense but it wasn’t below ground it was on the first floor on ground level.

And would there have been fumes from the first as well?

Oh you must be joking, fumes. Of course there were yes. So these are the things that made the task much more difficult. Like you know from the point of view of the environment within the kitchen today, today there is no comparison because you have complete control over your sources of heat today. I mean its all electric gas and I mean the very moment you don’t want it you can switch it down and depend on if you want it at six come in at ten to six and turn it up. You couldn’t do that. Those ranges had to be kept going all afternoon even though the place closed, the restaurant closed at 2 and opened again at 6. The ranges had to be kept going because for the night trade. So the kitchen never cooled down. You’d come in the morning and it was warm, quite warm in the morning cause they literally were burning overnight. A porter had to be in at 7 a.m. or 6.30 a.m. to start the range, to get the ranges going.

And you talked there about the place. Was it all split shifts you worked or?

Oh all split shifts yes because the restaurant, there was only the restaurant. They never did, very, very, rarely did a function and if they did a function it had to be a very small one because they only had a room that could take about twenty-four/thirty people. Very rare to do a function. Restaurant opened at 12.30 p.m. to lunch. Lunch would 12.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m. and then from 6.00 p.m. until 10.00 p.m.

And how many days a week would you do?

Six. Sunday, it didn’t open on Sunday. That was one advantage of restaurant work because it didn’t open on Sundays as opposed to hotel. You’d have your one Sunday in three or one Sunday in two or whatever it was in hotels. But the menus and that were was an al la carte menu which basically never changed. It was a kind of a very set, very set kind of a la carte.

With a good bit of choice.

Reasonably good choice, yes. But what was the popular luncheon meal would be a plat de jour. They would put on the plat de jour and that would sell well at luncheon time. Basically well for two reasons like you know it wouldn’t be as expensive as the a la carte menu and the other point would be it would be faster. You could go in and have a plat de jour rather rapidly and a cup of coffee and be off whereas once you were dining a la carte everything was from the time
you ordered you had to allow twenty minutes for your order because everything was done…. Nothing on the a la carte would be on tap. Nothing. Everything was fresh there was no such thing as frozen produce they hadn’t come on the market at that time. But there would never be anything canned or preserved or of any nature. Everything, everything, consequently everything was in season. There was the season for everything, the game season, the fish season, the vegetable season, you could only have the various vegetables as they were in season.

118.MM: What was the style of food like you know? Was it the same sort of dishes, was it all French classical dishes?

119.FF: Yes. Based entirely on French classical cookery.

120.MM: And was that the same in most restaurants at that time? Like even when you went to Rossapenna and all?

121.FF: It would yeah. It would be all based on fresh yeah. Yes, yes, indeed. But we worked on the rota system. You’d have your, everything was made like you know your demi-glaze and your espagnole and all. They would be produced. So maybe on Monday they’d start producing every week, start producing say a demi-glaze. You know a demi-glaze would take about three days to make as you know because you’d have to start with brown your flour, bake your bones, blah, blah. Start and make your stocking, etc. and then all your reduction and so forth. So that would start on Monday and would continue on Tuesday and Wednesday and maybe on Tuesday then they would do then a tomato sauce. A basic tomato sauce and they’d make a container of it and when that cools down it would be put in the fridge and therefore they could pull on that during the week. All the basics. You’d have the basics of espagnole, demi-glaze, tomato, curry, fish and béchamel. So when individual a la carte order came in you could get your sautéuse and your ladle and build up your individual sauce from that. The fish velouté was the basic and then you added your cream, your milk or your wine. You worked it or if it was a ladle of tomato puree or whatever it was…..

Each individual order was done that way. So the numbers couldn’t be very great because. The numbers wouldn’t be huge but proportionately it would be for its time, it would be expensive.

122.MM: Yeah, I believe it was quite expensive.

123.FF: Quite expensive. I mean I wouldn’t like to quote prices or anything but it was expensive and as I say only all items available, only if they were available totally fresh. Everything had to be fresh except the game of course. That had to be…..

124.MM: That had to be….. and they liked it fairly high.

125.FF: Oh yes, indeed. It was a great house for game, like when the game season. You’d have the full range and you’d have the full range of game.

126.MM: And was it all from Ireland?

127.FF: It would be yes all local. It would come through a supplier maybe the McConnells of Grafton Street. They’re gone now. They used to do fish/poultry/game. They were fairly high quality for supplier.

128.MM: Were Sayers there at the time?

129.FF: Sayers they were there. Byrne’s of Chatham Street.

130.MM: I remember PJ had a story of using monkfish during the war and he’d cut them like for collops of lobster and he’d cut the scampi and all from the monkfish’s tail (laugh). They used to wonder how he did it, how nowhere else in Dublin had all this fish during the war and all and he had it (laugh).
Well there are tricks of the trade in every line aren’t there however. Yes very, very about the house in Dublin if you wanted for those who want game you know and that because it would be available. Now the Jammets of course they used to buy in their wines in cask, bottle and blend themselves. So had a wine cellar below. That was in the cellar and they would do their own bottling and all like that.

Was there something called, is it a hogshead or something like that?

A hogs head yes. A hogs head is a very large, its about twice the size of a barrel and they would come from of course from France. Hogs Heads. They’d be supplied through Mitchell’s or some of those wine people you know.

But they bottled and blended. So they would have blended maybe their house wine and stuff like that and then bottled it. Very good.

Yeah. Oh yes. So wines would be, well they wouldn’t have anything like the range of wines that’s available today. But then again the particular period you’d have to keep coming back to the particular time that I’m speaking of. It’s still all the war years. Everything was scarce. Transport, like you know. You just didn’t ring a place and say get me, I want in such and such tomorrow. They may have it but they mightn’t be able to get it to you for the next three weeks. You know, things were so terribly different. Terribly, terribly different.

There was a thing called a Ki-ora. Do you remember that a drink? A thing called an Apollinaris as well or something like that. A Ki-ora. That’s from menus I’ve seen now from probably 1928 so I don’t know they may have gone by that stage.

But Jammets eventually got an opposition. There was a restaurant opened in Suffolk Street, Frascatti’s in Suffolk Street. The premises that it opened in was or is the premises now being used by the sports people.

Oh Elvery’s.

Elvery’s, the shop where Elvery’s is at the moment. Now Frascatti’s opened I think, the whole intention of it opening was to run in competition to Jammet’s. Now of course at that particular time for those who had cars they could just come along and park them outside the door. Literally outside the door. There was no even going around the corner to park your car. You parked it outside the door, for those who had cars. And Frascatti’s opened and there was people, they were Jews opened it. A Jewish group. Whytes, Jew.

Now would that be the same Whytes that ended up as Whytes in the Green or would that be different?

It’s very possible. There could have been a connection between Whyte’s the China showrooms or the China people that were in Wicklow Street. Whyte’s. But however they fizzled out.

How long did they last?

They opened twice actually. They opened and they were there about a year or maybe eighteen months and they closed. Now the grapevine had it at the time that it was the staff that closed them you know (laugh) between the carry on and all the rest. But however they reopened. They restocked and reopened a second time and they still disappeared not too long after that. They were operating on very much the same level or wanting to operate on the very same level as Jammet’s.
144. MM: Was the Red Bank opened at that stage?

145. FF: It was but it wasn’t. You see the Red Bank, there were two Red Banks. There was a Red Bank that was a popular general kind of run-of-the-mill and they closed and then they opened as a first rate.

146. MM: Okay, both in the same place in D’Olier Street there.

147. FF: Yes the same premises. But they closed as the Red Bank. They closed and reopened on a much higher grade or level. Well that would have been around 1947 or so that they closed and reopened. But they only thing I remember about Frascatti’s, one of the things was if you had a quiet night in Jammet’s (laugh) someone would be sent out to run up and have a look into Frascatti’s to see if they’re busy. One of the things I feel that damaged Frascatti’s was they were Jewish owned and the Jewish congregation started kind of using it. That’s detrimental to a restaurant because well if the Jews establish themselves in a place other people don’t go there.

148. MM: Right. Would have been, would that be the sort of anti-Semitism sort of thing or?

149. FF: Well yeah there was. I’d say they’d be a certain….

150. MM: Or was it just the Catholic thing or what was it?

151. FF: No, no, it’s just the Jewish had the name of being the shylocks, the money lenders you know. A lot of other people wouldn’t….. Like if it was known that the place was different they’d go somewhere else. I believe that’s the only experience I would imagine happening here in Dublin but I believe like in London and places like that there were certain places that were frequented by Jews. They had to depend on there own trade.

152. MM: There would have been some difficulties in the cooking anyway, the kosher food and that sort of stuff.

153. FF: But sure a lot of Jews, a lot of Jews don’t.

154. MM: I was going to ask you about that. You were saying about the various people who were coming in Indian princes and that sort of stuff. Would there have been any special diets or any special….. Or any special?

155. FF: No, no. A lot of these people once they were away (laugh), once they were away they just row in. These things only apply when their in their own circles you know. I’d say like a lot of people who wouldn’t meat here on a Friday at the time if they were in London or in Paris or something wouldn’t stop to think whether it was Friday or not.

156. MM: But tell me was there much meat eaten on. Like would you have meat on the menu on a Friday or…..

157. FF: Yes there would.

158. MM: But the black fasting that was still quite strong back then though was it?

159. FF: Well it was, it was but not in the clientele of the upper echelons you know. So it wouldn’t effect. Like if you were working in an average hotel like the Central or the Dolphin or something like that just of course two names, not saying that they were particularly, but the run-of-the-mill types of places, Friday would stand out as a very low meat day. But it wouldn’t affect like maybe in so much in the Shelbourne, Hibernian, in the Russell, Jammet’s or that type of thing you know. Different clientele. So that’s where I ran into Paddy (P.J. Dunne) and he eventually of course went into Cathal Brugha Street then and he…..
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160.MM: Where did PJ train? Was he in Jammet’s for many a year?

161.FF: He was a good few years. He was there long before, well I don’t know exactly, well a good while before I was there which would be 1945 and he was there into well into the ‘50s, well into the ‘50s. He didn’t go into Cathal Brugha Street probably until the ‘60s. He was a…..

162.MM: You don’t remember where he trained or?

163.FF: I don’t, I don’t know like his particular background prior to being in Jammet’s. I don’t quite know. (note. PJ Dunne was from Laois and trained in the Shelbourne Hotel before working in Jammet’s)

164.MM: But you moved on then anyway from Jammet’s in 1948.

165.FF: Yeah, well at the end of your six years I was in Jammet’s and of course the guy came along and well said your time is up you know. Basically what they’d be saying as well you can stay if you want to stay but you’d stay on the level you’re on. And I having enjoyed a nice season in Bundoran couple of years prior to that and having done two-and-a-half of nearly three years of the rough stuff in Jammet’s I decided I’d go out and I went to the Isle of Man. I went as sous chef to a hotel in the Isle of Man, the Marlborough Hotel. Now not a very big hotel and after three years in Jammet’s, like you know, a season in the Isle of Man was a pushover (laugh). It was like a holiday. I went over there to relax for a couple of months and when I came back from that season then I went to the Red Bank as chef de partie. And then I was in the Red Bank from that 1948 into 1953.

166.MM: Who owned the Red Bank?

167.FF: Now Montgomery Brothers. The Montgomery Brothers, one of them Niall Montgomery and one was a barrister and the other was an accountant. So they were involved in the Red Bank. Now this would be from the time that they bought the Red Bank when it was down and out.

168.MM: Yeah, middle of the road, yeah.

169.FF: Down and out and they closed it and revamped it and they weren’t hoteliers or restaurateurs, they were business men. It was a sideline investment from maybe off the income taxes they should have been paying or whatever, I don’t know (laugh).

170.MM: Yeah, yeah.

171.FF: One was an accountant and the other was a barrister/lawyer. So they were the owners and they didn’t play any particular part in the actual running of it. There was a man there when I went to it the manager was a Georgy Ennis. Now he had been manager in the old Red Bank and they kept him on.

172.MM: George Ennis is it?

173.FF: George Ennis. Georgy was a character. He was a youngish man but he was a real come-day-go-day, you know?

174.MM: Was he a Dublin man?

175.FF: No, I don’t know exactly where he came from. But activities outside of the restaurant were pretty high on agenda. So when there be any events like, Georgy wasn’t to be found. One aspect of him, he was tipping around and motor cycling and that type of thing but the type he was that he entered the Skerries 100, one year on a borrowed bicycle, borrowed leathers, borrowed
helmet (laugh). You know the type of character. He eventually left. Now when I say he left, he left the Red Bank. He went off and I do know he was involved up at what is now the junction of the Longmile Road and the Naas Road. It was kind of a pavilion there and a bit of a restaurant and he was running that. Now he was running it but of all the people he eventually went off and went to Milltown Park and became a Jesuit Priest.

176.MM: No way, yeah?

177.FF: Of all the people that you ever expected that would be…..

178.MM: You’d never put your money on him.

179.FF: I eventually, a few years after that the next thing we knew he was in Milltown Park and he was studying and he became a Jesuit Priest.

180.MM: Who was the chef at the time?

181.FF: The chef in it was a man by the name of Retty. Jean Retty. He was French and after…..

182.MM: Who was head chef in Jammet’s?

183.FF: Marc Faure.

184.MM: Oh Marc Faure but was he French as well.

185.FF: He was. Marc Faure. Now Jean Retty was a different.

186.MM: And how about the sous chef? Were the sous chefs Irish or were they…..

187.FF: Yes Irish, Gerry Ferns was a sous chef.

188.MM: In Jammet’s was it?

189.FF: No in the Red Bank.

190.MM: Who was in Jammets?


192.MM: Did he know ‘Babby’ Hoffman?

193.FF: Not that I know. Hoffman was sous chef.

194.MM: Oh sorry it was Gerry and the sous chef.

195.FF: Gerry Ferns he was Irish. He lived just down the road here. Down the end of Malahide Road. So after Ennis leaving the Red Bank, Retty became the Manager, he took over as Manager and Gerry Ferns took over as chef de cuisine. Now it ran pretty much, you know fairly much on the same level as Jammet’s but a little more looser, a little more not quite so formal like and the clientele would be a little more you might say average kind of business type people you know. Well it was run on the same principles as Jammet’s. Menus were fairly comparable and you could have no item unless it was fresh and then we had a very good….. There was a Dunn’s fish suppliers in D’Olier Street just up the corner where the Gas Company is. Dunn’s were fish suppliers. The Mr. Dunn was, had an interest in the Red Bank. Now not in the running of it or anything but he was a Director.
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196.MM: He had a financial interest in it, yeah?

197.FF: Yes and they supplied all the fish, poultry, game or anything that was required because they had their stand or they had their..... They’d be down in the markets first thing every morning and they would do the purchasing for us so we wouldn’t know what was coming. What was going at the right price and what was good quality and so forth, they’d buy and they’d be sent in, brought into us, we’d open, the kitchen started at say 9 a.m., say it would be 10 a.m. before they’d arrive so at 10 a.m. you’d have to compose your menu for the day because depending on what came in. Because they had a fish bar in the Red Bank down. They had a fish bar where they served, wouldn’t serve anything but fish. If it was a soup service it had to be a chowder, smoked salmon, blah, blah, blah and that. All meals, they stuck to that rigidly. And if a party of five came in and there was one wanted meat, they’d say sorry they wouldn’t serve you. The five would have to go to the dining room. They served fish in the dining room as well but they wouldn’t serve the one meat in the fish bar. They kept that tradition. So the menus had to be written then at 10 a.m. in the morning or whatever time the fish would arrive at. So therefore the menus there changed every day.

198.MM: Was there any strange fish served like or was it all the usual…..

199.FF: Mostly prawns, lobster, sole, cod. No not…..

200.MM: Like what about monkfish, john dory, anything like that, they wouldn’t have been much of that?

201.FF: No, oddly enough no. You see whether the fishermen were discarding because there wasn’t a market for it, they weren’t bringing it in. That’s possible. Now the Red Bank of course were famous for their oysters and that’s where the Red Bank gets the name ‘Red Bank’ from the Red Bank of the oyster fields off the coast of Clare and those oyster fields, that’s the name of them. The Red Bank and that’s where the Red Bank gets the name from the source of their oysters.......Now as I say things were improved, had been improving now because now we’re up to the stage that you had gas ranges and electric deep fat fryers and like we wouldn’t be dependent on coal ranges you know. Things were moving on and you had usual sort of mixers and mincers and that available which weren’t available say back in Rossapenna. One interesting story I’ll tell you about if I revert back to Jammet’s for a moment. Jammet’s had very little equipment; there were no electric beaters or mixers. Everything like that would be done by hand and there was a manager in Jammet’s who didn’t take much part in the running of the actual restaurants as such but I’d say he was up in the office doing the dockets and there was awful lot of reports to be done in those days but all the dockets had to be matched by hand. Because one docket came to the kitchen, one docket went to the cashier and then they had to..... So there was a lot of work. Now he was a former Chef. Besson was his name. He happened to be the same name as Besson in the Hibernian but there was no connection. But he was antiquated in his attitude and they decided at one stage to get a mixer and so they got a twenty quart, a twenty quart Hobart floor standing model. You know there quite common but they were new at that time. Besson comes along one day, early in the afternoon and I was going between the grill upstairs to the kitchen or whatever and this blender was upstairs. I must have been on chef de garde that day. Besson comes along and he looks over his glasses and he sees the mixer and he calls me. ‘Look, look a monument to laziness’ (Laugh).

202.MM: That was the mentality, ‘a monument to laziness’ (laugh).

203.FF: ‘A monument to laziness’ (laugh). So you can see this was around the time things were, this was 1945 or 1946 or 1947. The war was just over, things were beginning to..starting to change. Yeah. ‘That was his….. He wouldn’t have it at all.’ Of course what he was thinking was that the bill or the account for that would land on his desk. However Red Bank, going back to the Red Bank they had the fish bar and a lounge downstairs and then they had the front bar which was a fruit bar and then the restaurant and then the cocktail bar upstairs. Luncheon bar in the front. It
was the forerunner really to the pub grub today you know, which was unusual at the time. A thing I just want to mention to you about I’ve always felt that the hotels, now, as the hotels through the Hotels Federation or whatever it be, I think they lost out very, very heavily in not moving with the times in serving snacks and fast meals. You know like that. Right up to the very end they resisted. Luncheon was from 12 to 2 and between 12 and 2 or 2.30 they wouldn’t serve a sandwich anywhere. You were selling against yourself. And they wouldn’t serve food in the bar, you’d have to go to the restaurant or you’d have to go to the dining room. You seen things were changing but what, the penny never dropped with them. You needed a licence to serve liqueur or beer, alcohol but you didn’t need a licence to serve food. But they had the licences but the publicans didn’t need a licence to serve food and the publicans started serving food. And they took an awful lot of trade from the hotels.

204.MM: When did the publicans start serving food? I know your saying now that the Red Bank was sort of a precursor to it.

205.FF: It would be yeah. That would be somewhere that would be kind of unique. So this would be one of the things that made the Red Bank unique. That and the fish bar.

206.MM: So the thing is but the Red Bank had a full bar licence. So it acted very much as a bar as well as a restaurant as well as sort of a fish bar?

207.FF: It was the only bar in Dublin literally serving full meals over the counter. Now I’m talking about early ‘50s. Now it would be towards the late ‘50s that things really started moving, in the early ‘60s that the pubs start serving meals. Through the 1960s into the 1970s and of course today they have the better part of the…..

208.MM: Of the restaurant, the business, the market, yeah, yeah.

209.FF: Very much so. I think the hotels as catering establishments; they lost out on that one. They should have developed that. Sure they already had the bars. They already had the lounges and those lounges very often right through lunch time were lying idle.

210.MM: They didn’t have foresight.

211.FF: No. I always blame themselves for that, that they did loose out.

212.MM: What was the Red Bank like, like the décor and all, like was it like a brasserie or something like that or what was it like?

213.FF: Yes. Yeah, yeah but for its time it would be reasonably upmarket for its time. But they had the high stools around the front of the bar and they’d be a nice. I can’t, wouldn’t say it was marble but it was a high polished wooden and nice brass foot rails and then they would have a table or two seated under the window at the back. The bar, the window was out onto to D'Olier Street with an entrance on each side and the bar ran parallel to and they’d be a few tables out there in the bar. But the numbers that they would do wouldn’t have been huge, not by today’s wouldn’t be huge. You know cause with the turnover like between 12 and 2.30 you might have three turnovers. Three sittings whereas same thing in the restaurant you wouldn’t get two in with the formality and see the thing about the, wait till I……. it was still silver service. They still brought it down on silver. They had there plate warmers below but it became the first of the informal, informal like, they got the dishes and just….. There wasn’t the formality of the silver service. You know putting it on the side lamp and making…..

214.MM: They didn’t make a performance out of it as such.

215.FF: No they just brought down the plates (making motions as scraping it off the silver tray onto a plate). But they would get three sittings like and well if you had ten people, nine, ten
people sitting across the bar that would be thirty and maybe forty-five or fifty over the luncheon period you know. Again now it was, it wouldn’t have been regarded as like the average person wouldn’t go in. The price menu would, the prices would deter them. Now the luncheon, the restaurant wouldn’t do a huge luncheon trade, most of the luncheon trade was done either in the fish bar or in the front bar.

216.MM: Was there many tourists around at that stage or?

217.FF: No, no. Tourism hadn’t got off.

218.MM: It was really the ‘60s was it or?

219.FF: Oh it was well into the ‘60s touching towards the ‘70s. Even Aer Lingus they weren’t up and going at that time. Sure the government of the day wasn’t it at the very early ‘60s bought the planes and the next government coming in sold them. (Laugh) Fianna Fail government bought three aircrafts and the government changed and Fine Gael government came in and I think they had Labour back in their coalition and they flogged off the three aircrafts before Aer Lingus got going at all. So tourism as we know it hadn’t gotten off the ground. You’d get some holiday makers mostly from England, Scotland, Wales. You’d get some French and that because there were ferries coming directly from France into Rosslare. Not a huge tourist trade as such. Bord Fáilte was only kind of starting up. So it was mostly a local trade, like you had people out of The (Irish) Times across the road, good customers were most of the Directors out of the Hammond Lane Foundry which was down in Pearse St. Again you see at that time you could hop into your car. By this stage cars were becoming more popular. But you could still come up and drive into D’Olier Street, go down one side, turn around and come up and park outside the Red Bank. As long as you didn’t stop at a bus stop you were all right. There was no other, they weren’t huge numbers of cars but they were coming, they were coming on at this stage but one of the Kavanaghs. Do you know Willie Kavanagh?

220.MM: Yeah, yeah.

221.FF: Well now his brother was Head Waiter in the Red Bank.

222.MM: This is the man that went on to work for PV Doyle afterwards was it?

223.FF: Yes.

224.MM: Yeah. I forget his name but I have his name written down.

225.FF: Willie, Eddie. There were three Kavanaghs, Willie, Eddie.

226.MM: PV, he named a room, he named a restaurant room after him in one of his hotels I believe. *(note: Eddie or Eamon Kavanagh was in the Red Bank as head waiter, his brother Robert worked for P.V. Doyle and after his early death, the dining room in the Montrose Hotel was named ‘The Robert Room’)*

227.FF: Well, I was in the Red Bank from 1948 to 1953 and then I went off to the Central, back to the Central. Now at that stage the Central had been upgraded and Bill Marshall who had been in the Shelbourne was chef and I went off to the Central as sous chef. Now the Central was a fairly busy house, resident wise, function wise, luncheon trade wise, evening trade was fairly, quite brisk. Now the Hewitt Motors, they were the main Directors of the Central and the Manager there came up from the Wicklow, it will come to me in a few minutes, and it was a fairly good function trade and all the rest. So I was there for, but not on quite the same level as the Red Bank or Jammet’s like you know, more…..

228.MM: More middle of the road. Not as fancy.
229.FF: It was very good from the point of view of being sous chef because every time Marshall turned his back you were there and of course when he went on holidays and all the rest, you were doing the menus, you were doing, you know, so that’s a sous chef so it was good from that point. Yeah. Peter Huntley came up from the, he was Manager. So I was there from 1953 then to 1958 and having done what five years as sous chef I said well Frank its time you put your act together. Getting old as this stage. I was moving on and I, there was a head waiter that had been in the Central and had gone out to Malahide, as head waiter, I forget his name, it won’t come to me, and he rang me one day and he said their looking for a chef out here in Malahide. So I trotted around, well because it was time I made a move somewhere, so I went out to see the fellow there.

End of Tape One

230.MM: The Grand in Malahide, yeah.

231.FF: Now it was a busy establishment, there is no question of that. Cause because things were beginning to move at this stage, this was 1958.

232.MM: But that was very much a beacon on the Northside wasn’t it. It was very much out on its own.

233.FF: It was, there was virtually no other catering establishments within.

234.MM: Basically you had the airport at the time.

235.FF: The airport.
And nothing else was it.

No. Very, very little else except down into country club down in Portmarnock. Things were beginning to buzz on the tourist side and things were beginning to move locally. People were beginning to earn more, mix around more, dine out more, blah, blah. Things were on the move and I was there from 1958 to 1972. Now it was a Whelan, Paddy Whelan was the Head Waiters name that, he had been in the Central but he had also worked in the Hibernian in his day. I knew him from the short period I was in the Hibernian. So…..

No used to do a lot of weddings out there.

A fierce number of weddings.

There was dances as well, was there?

Oh they’d be evening dancing yes, dinner dances. One week we had a record for weddings, in one week, wait till I think now, I just want to be careful here, roundabout thirty-eight weddings in one week. Now, so the proprietor was McCabe, Luke McCabe. Now he had the bar in Dame Street, just beside the Olympia Theatre.

Is that one where Brogans is now?

I think that’s the same one. Now he sold that and he bought the Malahide. Now the Malahide had been in the hands of a Mrs. Murray for years and they weren’t doing anything. So he revamped it to, and then he got in with Bord Fáilte and so forth and put forward plans for development so a huge development took place in 1961. Well the building was actually during 1960 into 1961. It was a busy house, very busy but there was one thing about it was that when you had your kitchen there, you had your kitchen and there wasn’t anyone to…..

You were you own boss as such.

Well between myself. I can say it without any fear, between myself and the Head Waiter and the bar, between us pulling together, we ran the business because Luke McCabe died in 1964. He died of cancer and by degrees then from that period his wife took over. She took over but she didn’t take over. That was the pity of it. She left it. She left it to the Manager but yet she didn’t let the Manager manage. You can get a fair (idea), she didn’t let the Manager manage and yet she wanted people to be responsible but did not give them the authority to be responsible. And things began to shade back. Well of course as well as that there were other establishments opening, other hotels, other restaurants all around North County Dublin and so forth.

Would Opperman have opened up in Malahide around that stage? Would that have been the 1970s?

No he was into the 1970s. He opened up, it would have been into 1970s. That was after me. I was there until 1972, now he was later. But it was very busy but it was self-satisfying like. You got great satisfaction out of it like. If you were interested in your work you developed systems to suit the place there to make it run easier - systems for ordering and controlling and so forth.

Would you have developed them yourself now or would you have?

No developed them ourselves. I tell you I developed a system for ordering from the stores and stock levels and all of that and I sat down one day, I was signing in a docket and it was in the early stages of computing and the delivery docket, although there was only maybe two items on it but it was a sheet of so big, and your two items were just ticked off so I sat down and looked, why
all this here, because up to that like most items were just written on the individual docket in handwriting. So it struck me like, right so this system really means that all you’ve got to do is when you want to dispatch something, you just go down along and you tick off the item and you tick off the amount in another column. So I said why don’t I do that for the store? So I devised a system whereby all the items in the stores were listed and what would be the normal unit that you would draw out so put everything into units and what would be the normal unit that you would draw out and put in, so therefore tomorrow’s order from the stores would be pinned up today. Now if anyone around the kitchen in the various departments found they were running low they quantity that should be in stock in the kitchen would be on the list and if they saw like I should have five tins of peaches just for example. They’d look and they’d see well after last night usage and all the rest we have only two-and-a-half so I need three tomorrow to bring me back to stock level. So each individual could just go and tack in their requirement and then that would go to the stores in the morning so therefore they should be back up to stock level you see. The next day’s sheet carried over what was got out yesterday. So the sheet at the end of the week showed what you got out for the week. And then there was a column then that the storekeeper could cost, put in their costing and then you ran that then to the end of the month, so at the end of the month the last requisition sheet from the kitchen showed not only what you got out on the last day but what you got out in the previous thirty days.

250.MM:   Very good.

251.FF:    Do you follow?

252.MM:   Yeah, I do yeah.

253.FF:    So when you got the last sheet and it came to, talk again about peaches, eight tins of whatever, on the last day you didn’t get any out but for the thirty days previous to that you had got out sixty-five tins. Now, then I put numbers on them and then the numbers then I asked them in the stores to stack not under their category but under their number so any individual who didn’t even know where a tin of peaches was could be sent to the stores and get a tin of peaches cause go down and get me two number 5s or get me two number 6s so therefore at night when the stores would be closed you could get the commis and give him keys and tell him go down and get you two number 7’s. And all they’d have to do is go along the shelf, they’d come to number 7, they wouldn’t know from Adam what it was, the supermarkets are doing it today. Checkouts at the supermarkets, they don’t have a clue what there handling.

254.MM:   Yeah I know they just put them through.

255.FF:    Yeah, so systems like that, I enjoyed that to do that and I got that working. I used to keep a diary of all the functions and with a result then as the years went by you get the same functions coming in, at the same time of the year. I could look up now maybe and see well now next month we’re going to have the yacht club, we’re going to have the golf club, we’re going to have and I could tell in approximately what date they were going to us and what number they were last year. So you could hazard a good guess. So keeping files like that I was always ahead of posse. And for stock ordering and all of that, you see I could order in advance for what I know, what I’d require so that it would be in stock two days before I’d need it so you could start and get your preparation done you know. But you were left alone there was no accountant or somebody coming down from the office above to oversee any of that. You just did that yourself.

256.MM:   And you weren’t rewarded for gross profits or anything like this or there was no percentage of this or the other?

257.FF:    Well there was a percentage system and you’d get a bonus based on that.

258.MM:   What were wages like though? Like as a head chef would you be comfortable?
259. **FF:** You’d be earning twenty-four or twenty-five pounds. That was fairly. Like you’re talking about the 1960s, early 60s and I remember the sensation of the time was when a friend, he was in the Metropole, he was at one time *sous chef* in the Metropole went down to the Clarence and he was……

260. **MM:** Marley was it.

261. **FF:** No, Marley. It was after Marley’s time. But the big sensation at the time was that he was gone down there at…This was much later now. I’m talking about much nearly to the end of my term, that he was down there for five thousand a year, you know, a hundred a week, wow. I can’t think of his name again. But that was earth breaking, shattering at the time. Ah no, no, the past twenty years things have erupted. *(note. David Edwards is the chef he is talking about)*

262. **MM:** Like a chefs job was considered okay but it was nothing special. You’d be considered working class or upper working class *(laugh).*

263. **FF:** Upper working class yes.

264. **MM:** How were you considered, like was the position of a chef within society?

265. **FF:** Well within the trade, you generally were referred to as ‘Chef’. Certainly within the hotel you were ‘Chef’. You were never referred to by your name. And its only in more recent years like that the term ‘chef’ has been derogated to nothing. Everyone is chef now. Everyone is chef. Like really something should have to be done about that. I’ve been on to them in the Panel, they should be trying to re-establish like. The term ‘chef’ now is used for everything. Which is basically wrong, because you know the term chef is chief. Now there can only be one chief. Now you can be chief of anything, you can be chief of a whole range of things but it has to be chef of something and not just chef. But everyone now that steps inside the kitchen now is a chef.

266. **MM:** So then did you move from Malahide then to go to Galway was it.

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*Figs FF.2 (a): Brian Lenihan with Model of Liberty Hall (b) Frank Farren*

267. **FF:** Yeah. Well I applied for Galway and I had applied at one stage for Cathal Brugha Street (Catering College), the time that Jimmy Kilbride was appointed. I applied at that particular time.
That must have been around late 1960s. This came up for Galway, well I was becoming very conscious myself at this time that within the trade itself you were kind of at the end of the road in so much where did you go from being chef de cuisine unless you went to chef in another. But you see these establishments, like you were only going to be there for ten, twelve, fifteen years. They weren’t pensionable and so forth so that’s why I made the effort for Cathal Brugha Street. I applied for Cathal Brugha Street and at that time Jimmy Kilbride was appointed. So I applied for Galway in 1972 and I didn’t get it. Now, Galway were only setting up and so there were about three or four, four appointments at that level. But you see Des Maher had been in Athenry, someone else had been in Maynooth, so they had some teaching backgrounds you see so they kind of got preference. But when I delved into like there were one or two others that you would say were on the same level as myself and I kind of delved into and I knew Des Maher well because I used to go to Cathal Brugha Street, to Athenry, he was the Chef Instructor in Athenry and I used to go there to do the City and Guilds or to do the CERT exams and I got to know him well and he was seconded to Galway and after applying I was talking to him and he said like you know well he had felt out the field as it were and one of the reasons was, they always had a great difficulty and still have in appointments in the Colleges and the Institutes now of equating the equivalent. Like you have a certification or equivalent. Well you see now there were no certifications at that time. There was no one coming in with certifications at that time so the equivalents were always a problem and he said like one of the problems that they had was that I had only been a chef de cuisine in one establishment.

268.MM:  Right, yeah, yeah.

269.FF:   And that doesn’t exactly prove yourself. So I said well I’d better do something very quick. I better see that I have more than one establishment. So Michael Marley was in CERT at the time and he was doing work around the country like in the hotels and at some of these meetings or other like you know, curriculum developments or some of those, I was involved in that with Cert, curriculum development and so forth and he said to me, I think he read the scene that I was long enough in Malahide type of thing. He said they were looking for a chef in the Longford Arms Hotel in Longford. There after doing a vast, really updating, really in a big way. They did, they revamped the whole place, they upgraded the whole place.

270.MM:  Now Albert (Reynolds) had at this stage, had he.

271.FF:   Yeah. No it’s the brother.

272.MM:  Oh the brother had it.

273.FF:   Would you be interested? Well I was because and it had to be something quick. I couldn’t say well I’ll wait until next year or the year after. So I said well. So I went down to see them. A big help there was you see there was a house, a house available, a full house. Not living in house cause you see the brother was also a builder. And he had built this place down in, a scheme of houses down the road and two of them were kept for staff in the hotel. So there was a house available. So I went down, and like that too breaking new ground and so forth. It was a challenge. So Galway came up again the next year, I think there were two more posts advertised for the next year. So I applied and I went back to see them and I got an appointment so then the big thing then was I had to move to Galway but there was no house available (laugh). Salaries in the scheme at the time at College Teacher level, they weren’t particularly great, I don’t know about the current climate.

274.MM:  There not particularly great at the moment at college teacher level either, starting off, you know when you start off.

275.FF:   But I had a particular problem also that I had family living here you see. We’d three sons. Now the eldest was too old at this stage to say you’re coming to Galway. Now the other two you could because they could change schools and as I said to you earlier the youngest lad was
only a nip. So it was a question of providing myself, well we providing ourselves with a house in Galway and not relinquishing this one. That wasn’t easy I can tell you. It wasn’t easy to do that and I was two years commuting from 1973 to 1975 before we got established in Galway and then of course Summer seasons and all the rest I’d be back here. I’d have to throw my lot in with whatever I could get. I had to.

276.MM:  Keep the wolf from the door. And where would have done those?

277.FF:  I did with Carroll Catering and that, what I did was I got Carroll Catering. I don’t know, I saw an advertisement or something done up. Wanted Chef/Manager but I went and had a chat with them and so what the Manager said to me. I’ll tell you what I’ll do he said, I’ll use you for holiday relief but I’ll keep you in the one place. And I’ll shift whoever was in that place to relieve others. So I went over and I was in the Cement Roadstone place over in Fitzwilliam. Now they had a fairly, a good, the levels of catering differed in the different factories, jam factories and so forth you know. Very mundane type of stuff. This was reasonable you know. But not big numbers you’d only do about thirty-five-forty lunches. So that was kind of a doddle and I was in the one place and then he was ringing me then to know when would I be coming back up the next season. So I was left in the one, I didn’t move from place to place. He moved some of his permanent staff. He knew if he moved from place to place I’d have walked it. Because you know you walk into those places of a Monday morning and they’d be nothing done. You’d be cleaning the saucepans from Friday you know. So I did a few terms with Carroll Catering. I had to.

278.MM:  Tell me something now, you, the Panel of Chefs you were very much involved in the setting up of that or very early on anyway.

279.FF:  Well the Panel in 1958 and it came into being because there was a catering exhibition planned for/ to run in conjunction with a festival that was, was it the Tostal? And Michael Mullen like had been approached. All trades were approached like on an all business to put on something for the festival and it was decided to put on a catering exhibition in Busáras. It happened in Busáras and all down around the basement but they had no group so they formed a grouping of chef de cuisines that were affiliated to the union.

Figure FF.3: Frank Farren awaded Prize, Michael Mullen in the Centre
280. MM: Now Micky Mullen he was branch secretary to the Number Four Branch at the time.

281. FF: Yeah and that’s where the Panel started. Of course everything in the unions is the Panel. This Panel and that Panel, the Waiters Panels and this Panel so it just became know as the Panel of Chefs. I was always after them to drop the Panel and just call it the Chefs of Ireland you know but that beside the point. But I was involved you see in the Union being on chef’s committees and on the branch committees.

282. MM: Like when did you start getting involved in the union?

283. FF: From the time I was in the Red Bank so that was 1948, 1949, 1950, so this was 1958. For about seven years I’d been involved in chef’s committees and branch committees and so forth and I knew Michael Mullen and I got to know Michael Marley, and Michael Ganly, of course he was deep into the unions. He was in everything that was in the unions. The union band, he was secretary to the union band. He was involved in it.

284. MM: But there was a strong link between most of the chefs at the time and the union. You got your jobs through the union and such and that’s where you went.

285. FF: That’s what I was saying. There was no certification at the time. You had been a union member and they could show that you’d done the apprenticeship and they had a track of where you had been so they could recommend you to another, different. It was very touching but you were either in or you were out. I had decided at an early age, at an early stage you were better in than out. So I made it my business when they were looking for a chef’s committee, oh I’ll sit on a chef’s committee, oh I’ll sit on a branch committee. It meant passing some of your afternoons when you had breaks to go down to a meeting rather than going home but you get to know the different people inside and you got to know Michael Mullen and so forth. So that’s where the Panel started and around about 1963 there was a function. It was 1963, some branch of the union, they had a conference out in Malahide, it must have been the Transport and General Worker’s Union Conference. Two or three day conference or whatever it is and a function at the end of it but after that the next time I was down in the union, Michael came to me and asked me would I be interested in being involved in the Panel. So I could see that if I was aiming for, I was aiming at the time like to move out of the industry as such if I could into the CERT side of thing, if a Chef/Instructor had to come up for CERT I would have been applying for it like. For getting out of the trade as such because I was getting to the stage, there’s nothing at the end of this.

286. MM: You’d gone as far as you could go sort thing, yeah.

287. FF: Yeah. So I said yes I would like to be involved because again you’re better in than out. So I took up with the panel at that time. At that time it was a fairly loose group and it hadn’t any direct constitution or aims. It was just there to be used as it were for a catering exhibition coming up that each individual would round up someone in the hotels to an exhibition and that type of thing and then when CERT were very early coming in you see and you had Anna Carroll moving into CERT. Now she was an academic. She had no hotel background but she was Director of setting up a whole training scheme for the industry both like dining room, kitchen you name it. So Anna had no background so like approaches were made to the Panel to meet with CERT and help formulate committees to work on curriculum development and like CERT, like Anna and her cohorts they were only feeling their way and they had no where else to go. So I got involved in as much as CERT work as I possibly could because I could see…….This is the future. These are the people now who have the purse strings. These are the people who hold the grants, these are the people now, at that time it was only the City and Guilds, they weren’t doing a CERT examination in the colleges when they opened first, they were doing the City and Guilds but because you were involved in CERT, they were nominating people to go and do.

288. MM: External examiner and such, yeah.
289. FF: So I became an external examiner so therefore I was getting connection into the existing colleges not the regional colleges they hadn’t been build. Into Athenry, into Maynooth, into Rockwell you see. Then of course then they came and built the regional colleges and then things started to move. I always felt that there was two things wrong with building the regional colleges. They built them about fifteen years two late for me and they should have built them all up in the Phoenix Park.

290. MM: (Laugh).

291. FF: That would have suited me grand (laugh). So they should have built them all up in the Phoenix Park and fifteen years earlier I’d have been delighted. However, it meant going to Galway, it could well have been Waterford, it could well have been Cork. It’s where it came up, is where it came up. So I got involved with the Panel and part of the Panel involvement was working with the food people in the industry and doing demonstrations for different products and all of that. So it was an experience to go and do a demo you know whereas like it was like doing your work on the other side of the hot cupboard you know. So it’s all experience and it brings you in touch with the people in the food industry outside like the Knorr’s, Erin. You get to know them. So it broadens your….. So that’s how I got involved with the Panel and I stuck with the Panel then and I eventually I was President from 1984-1986. Now during my Presidency, prior to that the national catering exhibition and all the competitions were run by the CEA, the Catering Equipment Association. And they had there stamp on all those cause they run them in conjunction with there catering exhibition. But I felt that that wasn’t the thing because of course what your doing was all the certification and everything went out in the name of CEA and it was the Panel of Chef doing all the background work. So I had, while in Malahide and while in Galway we had been thinking in the Galway branch of the Panel, because the Panel broke off into branches and the Galway branch was considering an outlet for their publicity. Like you know we have to move out and we’re a panel. What are we doing? The public wouldn’t know about us and we said there should be a local catering exhibition. So we went down to see John Carney, he was Manager down in McCambridge’s. We just put a proposition to him. Look if we were prepared to run catering exhibitions in the line of competitions and a couple of demonstrations and all that sort of thing would McCambridges and such be interested sponsoring it. So he was involved also with National Wholesale. McCambridges were involved with National Wholesale so he said yes we would and so we set up the West of Ireland Catering Exhibition and it’s still running. It’s into its twelfth or fourteenth bi-annual exhibition so it’s running twenty-four years. So we ran that out in Salthill a couple of times and then we ran it in the Great Southern. Each year, every second year we had to look for a venue. It went on, it wasn’t huge but it was fairly good standard and particularly local traders, started taking stands and that in it. So McCambridge’s weren’t loosing money on it but yet they were….. So through that connection you see I said to John Carney, I said I’ll tell you what I’m interested in, I want to get the competitions, the catering competitions that the Panel are running out from under the CEA. I said if it was possible would there be scope for National Wholesale to back us? I said ‘we don’t have to be on a big scale to do this in the first instance’, so I went to see National Wholesale up here in Dublin and I put it to them and I said look the numbers of stands and all of that won’t be great but at the time we were talking buttons, we weren’t talking big money. Because we were getting individual people to sponsor the individual competitions so you were getting a hundred or a hundred-and-fifty from them for each competition. Do you follow? So the rest of it we’d run at a low cost. So I got their backing. We didn’t have a venue, we didn’t anything but at the local West of Ireland Competition the day that the CEA were down there cause they go to all these exhibitions so there was a little reception at the end, I got up and just off the top of them, I said as President, while I have a captive audience I would just like to announce the Panel are going to run the competitions that were formally the National Catering Exhibition under the title of ‘Chef Ireland’. Now at the time it wasn’t even copper fastened. So having made the commitment we went out and we came back and we looked for, myself and Michael Ganly, he was Secretary at the time. So we went off looking for venues, we tried Malahide because they had build a new.

292. MM: Ballroom and that.
293. **FF:** But it was quite suitable. There were two floors but they wanted too much. We tried the racetrack out in Naas, we tried a couple of places, the Burlington, the Burlington was quite suitable also. So we wound in the Green Isle and they were quite reasonable and a quite a big room. We ran the first Chef Ireland out there on the same years the catering equipment were running there competition. On the opposite year to the one in Galway. So you had the National and the Regional and that’s where Chef Ireland took off and they ran their competition, we did it two years out in the Green Isle and they ran there next competition without the Panel involvement and it was a washout so they came to us around 1987 or so in negotiation so we said we’d go back in but that we were part of the exhibition. That it would be the National Catering Exhibition and Chef Ireland. So that was it really. So that’s how it went off. So I can claim that much anyway, that put it on a pretty good footing and we put a pretty heavy price on it, a hefty price, that well covered us, more than covered us for our costs and we were sitting opposite them and we didn’t give a damn whether they went for it or not because we’d still go ahead and do our thing the following year again. So they bit the dust. They succumbed. So that’s where that thing took off. So that was my involvement.

294. **MM:** I was thinking there, that you mentioned before that there was a famous striker, that there may have been a few strikes.

295. **FF:** There was a strike in 1951. In most houses in town, it was the time that there was a strike to introduce the service charge. The service charge. Now it was very bitter. In some houses, I was in the Red Bank at the time it lasted a fortnight. In a number of houses it lasted a fortnight but in some of them it lasted nine months. Now houses like the Central, I know they lasted. The Central went on for nine months. It was very bitter.

296. **MM:** What exactly was behind it?

297. **FF:** It was you see, basically the waiting people were seeking a rise and they were refused a rise. What they were looking for was pay, an average workers pay. Now they were on pretty small pay because…..

298. **MM:** They used to get tips was it?

299. **FF:** Gratuities really, they were always being told gratuities but they were looking for what would be a pretty hefty rise and to put them on a workable wage rather than dependant on tips. Now you see there is undercurrents to a lot of this because I think around that time what happened was that the, see people had moved onto the pay as you earn, onto PAYE so tax wise and that you see, what the PAYE people were coming along and the waiter was saying I earn £7.50, £8.00 a week, and of course the tax people were coming along and saying well you can’t live on that so what they were doing was they were saying well you must have at least £20 a week so they were taxing £12 on the basis of £20.

300. **MM:** Of £12 tips yeah.

301. **FF:** And then of course the waiting people and that were kicking up against that and of course the old game was, well prove to us you are not earning that. Prove to us that your gratuities don’t come to that. Of course they couldn’t prove that so what they were seeking was a workable wage and theoretically it was to do away with tipping. And of course the employers wouldn’t meet that, they wouldn’t meet it all so then they came back with well status quo but a 10% service charge. And of course most of them, all of the employers, both the Federation, the Hotel Federation and the Federation, they were two, the Hotel Federation and the Federation of…..

302. **MM:** Was it the Restaurants Association of Ireland.
303. **FF:** Yeah, the Restaurant Associations. None of them would agree and it eventually came to a strike. Now as you say the like of the, there was a couple settled up even before it broke out, I think the day before. The Red Bank and a couple of other places like that, and a few others. It went for nine months and it became very bitter because as you can imagine like there was all elements involved. There was the waiting people and then of course there were those who were not waiting felt aggrieved that they were out on strike and at the end of it.....

304. **MM:** They weren’t going to get anything extra out of it anyway.

305. **FF:** So it lead to a lot of bitterness like you know and it was over a bad period of the year too. It stretched right over the winter period. But eventually.....

306. **MM:** Which were the worse places for it? Which places were out for nine months or?

307. **FF:** Well I know the Central was out for nine months.

308. **MM:** Did that mean that the whole hotel would have been shut down?

309. **FF:** Oh, closed up. I know the..... I think the Wicklow was out for the period. However, it was a sorry event and when it was all over then, the end of the day was like that the 10% didn’t go to the waiting people. It was like the employers you know kept that as a kind of ‘tiddly fund’ to kind of pay everybody you know and tips continued. It was, it was bad.

310. **MM:** Just on the animosity there between sort of the waiters and people who weren’t going to get what was the environment or the atmosphere like between front of house and sort of the kitchen? Could that have been a part of bad blood or was there always a bit of us and them?

311. **FF:** Well there was always two sides to the hot cupboard. There was always the front of the hot cupboard and the other side like you know the kitchen was behind. There was always a certain imbalance there in attitudes to like you know but it wouldn’t, it certainly wouldn’t have been improved by the strike.

312. **MM:** What was behind that do you think or was it just a cultural thing?

313. **FF:** I think it was the union pressing there standard influence because they would have been kind of..... Michael Mullen wouldn’t have been terribly long in his post at that time. I think it was a question of like.....His attitude when that dispute started some of the employers rang him to say Mr. Mullen we’ll have to come up and we’ll have to have a chat about this and his attitude was well my address is on the last letter, that’s why I’m available. He held his ground until they went down to……

314. **MM:** Liberty Hall?

315. **FF:** Well Liberty Hall wasn’t there, it was 29 Eden Quay. It was a shambles of a place but he said my office is in 29 and if you want to discuss this that’s where I’m available. It was taking them down a peg and there was a good deal of that behind it. It was establishing the union as a force within. Prior to that it had been completely ignored.

316. **MM:** You mentioned earlier on about Ms. Mullen who was working in the Gresham, this sort of dedication you know. You saw a lot of that dedication.

317. **FF:** Oh yes you did with individuals right down along the line, in all sections people, there was, there was a lot of dedication. You had to have a certain satisfaction in what you were doing to stick with it. So that’s part of the dedication and it went right through all branches of the industry.
And do you think it was quite unique to catering?

Yeah, I think it was yes, I think it was. I think so. Now I don’t know whether (laugh) it’s possibly a certain kickback from the involvement of catering from back to the big house.

The servility sort of thing or whatever yeah. That’s how I would see it yeah, yeah.

Catering come from the big houses. These were all employees who would be dedicated or have to be dedicated and there is a certain amount of…. Like I could like see myself like you know what I mean at lunch service or at a function service or something your normal time for break off you wouldn’t think of going off. No there is probably a certain historical kind of background. The same thing in your own meals and that you know, you wouldn’t think of sitting down and having a meal off the a la carte if you thought you were going to be busy and it might be required. You’d just go off and have something else you know. That type of attitude. A thing that struck me, would you be aware of the first self-service restaurant ever in Dublin?

No.

Well that was in Woolworths. They had one in Grafton Street and they had one in Henry Street. But the one in Grafton Street had no restaurant but the one in Henry Street was unique in its day because this would have even been pre-war in the 1930s. Now they had a self-service restaurant. I can’t think of, I don’t know any other establishment anywhere that had self-service.

It’s interesting the likes of the Metropole and these things, they all had grill rooms didn’t they?

The Savoy were big into afternoon teas. They used to run an afternoon tea and they’d have an orchestra playing right. A three piece orchestra. The Metropole did something similar. The Metropole were big into dances.

Now the Metropole was on O’Connell Street where Penny’s is now.

That building yeah, that was the Metropole. So yeah and Clery’s built a ballroom and were big into dinner dances but they didn’t have a restaurant. They only did evening dinner dances. They had cafes down through the shop or whatever but they didn’t have restaurants as such.

But there’s another thing about the dinner dances. The dinner dances actually, I believe were sort of a turning point where the average man and woman began actually to go out.

Socialise on an upmarket level. Yes, that’s so.

And when would that have happened or when would that have started?

That would have kind of come into being just immediately after the war. You could say 1950, or ’49 or ’50 it started and it gained its real height around the 1970s and then people not only began to move around but into the 1970s came the greater affluence and the greater mobility in frequenting these places on a daily basis. Drop into this bar and into that restaurant and into the other and have a bite of lunch and so forth, you know. It was in the 1970s the industry as such opened out.

And who do you think were the big movers now? I believe the Russell was, like. Sorry when did Jammet’s close?

It was into the 1960s. They closed somewhere around the ’65, or ’66. They didn’t survive into the ’70s. (note: Jammet’s closed in 1967)
And how about the Red Bank?

The Red Bank went on into, they would have gone into the 1970s, fairly early 1970s and then did they were bought over and became a church and a community of American, some American, their over in Bachelors Walk now. Some American priest community.

In the early ‘70s the Russell would have been in its peak. That would have been sort of one of the top places in Dublin wouldn’t it have been?

Oh yes. Around that time it would have been Shelbourne, Russell, Hibernian, Jammet’s, Red Bank, they would be the top five and then for the run of the mill then you’d the Metropole, Clery’s for dancing and that, Savoy. The Savoy ran reasonably good restaurants, like you know. And they of course had them in Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Cork. They ran reasonably good restaurants but one of their biggest in Dublin at any rate, one of their biggest was the afternoon venture.

Afternoon tea.

Yes. People went in at 3 p.m. / 3.30 p.m. for afternoon tea, 5 p.m. and then into the cinema. But at that time there was only the one cinema, it wasn’t broken up into…..

Oh right, just one cinema.

Cause then you had the Royal, the Royal. But then the Royal hadn’t got restaurants but they had a huge theatre. That seated something like 4,000 odd people.

Discussion on how ugly the building that replaced the Theatre Royal in Hawkins Street is.

Gender. You mentioned that there was a woman who was the first woman you knew of who was a chef de cuisine in the Central.

That’s the only one I ever knew. Oh gender played a very big part. Very, very few women worked in kitchens with the exception of in the pastry house or on breakfast. But in the kitchen as such there were no apprentices women. No one classified as doing an apprenticeship.

When did that change?

It changed with the colleges opening in the early 1970s.

But say when you went around to Rockbrook or Maynooth was it all men?

They were all men, all men, all male.
348. **MM:** So it was really when the actual regional colleges opened.

349. **FF:** When the regional colleges started but then for the first period in those, although the two courses, the girls and the boys were doing the same course, one was classified as the chef’s course and the other was classified as cooks. They were doing exactly the same examination, they were doing exactly the same and yet they were dressed differently and they were, one was classified as a like an apprenticeship as such you know and the other was just a cook’s course.

350. **MM:** And I take it they were paid differently.

351. **FF:** They were paid differently when they went into industry. But that broke down, that broke down fairly, into the 1970s. They broke down by the beginning of the 1980s. Well then you see CERT when they had taken on students at first they not only, this didn’t happen in Dublin because all there students for Dublin came from Dublin but they used to provide accommodation. It was supervised accommodation and then after a little while it was supervised accommodation for the girls, the boys were dropped they could go where liked, you know. When their hat was on their house was thatched, so they were left fly and the girls were under supervised accommodation and then eventually that was dropped also and they were given an allowance for accommodation and then around about that stage also they were give the option of which uniform they’d use in class, and for about a year, maybe two years you had a sort of mixture and then of course fizzled off. And now of course when they go into the industry they claim exactly the same. But you see the gender thing comes from going back to what I was talking to you now about first about, the 1940s and the 1950s and before that. See the kitchen was very strenuous, not alone from the heat point of view but from the physical point of view. All the stockpots and everything had to lifted up onto the range and taken down. There was a physical aspect to it which it wasn’t suited to women. Consequently they were normally to be found in the pastry house where the strenuous work and the heating and so forth wouldn’t be as great and on breakfast. Now in the bigger hotels, and that very often the breakfast wasn’t done from the main kitchen anyway, it may be done from a breakfast kitchen or a function kitchen or something like, because breakfast running onto 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. would be interfering with the day coming on for functions. So breakfast maybe would be done somewhere else. So breakfast and pastry were the domain of the women and that’s basically the history of it because work in the main kitchen was very strenuous. I mean you had literally thirty gallon stock pots. Now they had to lifted up onto the range and taken down, etc. and they were big coppers. Hefty work. Work was strenuous and it wasn’t easy, it wasn’t easy going at all.

352. **MM:** Who do you think were the main catalysts for change? Clearly there was a change in the ‘50s when equipment started to change. That was one sort of change.

353. **FF:** Yes. The nature of the business changed with the vast volume, with the type of equipment coming in that.....

354. **MM:** Tourism then started I suppose. I suppose An Tóstal, what was it 1958? and then Bord Fáilte starting and Aer Lingus and all of that would have made changes. What about PV Doyle?

355. **FF:** Yes, he was a revolutionary in the business but he was purely, I’d place him purely from the entrepreneurial side of things like seeing the industry as a profitable and building up a team to operate it you know.

356. **MM:** How about Micky Mullen. Would you reckon that he did an awful lot for?

357. **FF:** Well he certainly helped. But the unions today they’re still not as influential as they might be or as they should be and you see you have now such a thing like being brought in by the EU and so forth that apprenticeship is really, not really recognised now as such. You do training courses, you do training periods but you’re to be paid whatever level you’re capable of. So if you start working in an establishment today and where there was normally say, lets say a five year
apprenticeship, I think the official last time a couple of years ago it was down to four official but if you after three years, two years could show that you were capable of a chef de partie you were to be offered the position and paid the level.

358.MM: How do you feel about that?

359.FF: I think its right. I know in my case to do.....

360.MM: It was a method of keeping you down for a number of years.

361.FF: Yes, to do your full apprenticeship was certainly in my case was holding me back. It was as I'd say, three years before I was finished I was literally doing the work.

362.MM: So the end of the apprenticeship is not necessary a bad thing on one side but there are certain bad elements of it.

363.FF: But also the business, the trade has changed so much now that length of apprenticeship is not required now because its moving more into the academic side of things into the value of foods, their nutrients, their contents, their capabilities and all so forth because there is quite a vast amount of produce now that you don’t have to process. I mean most of your vegetables today you don’t process. They come either frozen or pre-sliced or whatever. Like no one in there right mind today unless they have any personal reason for doing it would go into the making of puff pastry. Too much work involved, too long, and too tedious, you can buy an excellent product. There are desserts and sweets coming on the market that you won’t equal and you can buy them ready to go. Now you can put your own imprint on them but you wouldn’t consider the time and the cost. You see a big thing too is my early stages and right up to and well into my full-time in the physical industry as such, the big factor was the food cost. Food cost was higher than labour. So you processed. You bought your spinach in big bags and you spent your time stalking it. You bought your peas when they were available fresh and you wanted to put them on the menus as spring fresh peas and all. You bought them in pods and you shelled them because produce was costing more than the labour. Now that’s reversed. The labour is costing more than the product now. So you can buy the product now cheaper than you can produce it. So that’s a big influence, a huge influence. So with the result now that literally you could run a restaurant today in a dispense kitchen if you so wished. You can buy in your fillets, striploins, Portorhouse, you name it, your cutlets, you can buy them in chined, ready to put the fruit on.

364.MM: Silver service when did it come to an end?

365.FF: Well silver service, at around about the time of the closure of Red Bank and Jammet’s.

366.MM: Late ‘60s, early ‘70s.

367.FF: Yes and the big problem in catering in the industry today is service.

368.MM: Once the silver service stopped that was nearly the end of the apprenticeship from a waiter’s point of view and.....

369.FF: But even the amount of waiting that has to be done today there is no finesse whatever in it, absolutely none. You go to a function today. I was at one fairly recently, a luncheon, a table of nineteen. It was pre-booked so it wasn’t that they were..... There was one waiting staff designated to the group. Now you can imagine going around taking the order for the first course, the first starter and the thing. It took eternity, so they got lost and so they get a help then when the first course is ready someone else appears with half of them. This person coming in hasn’t a bulls clue what goes where. You have this diabolical approach. ‘Who’s for smoked salmon? who ordered…?’; you know what I mean. Now I was contemplating being involved in running that particular function but as it so happened it went out of my hands altogether so I had basically
nothing to do with it. But if I were booking that I’d have gone to the management and said right, well we’re going to be nineteen, maybe twenty. What waiting staff are you assigning to that function? I’d make the waiting part of the menu and if he said well one well I’d say okay I’m not disputing but I just want to know, your assigning one and I’ll tell you what I want you to do I want you to employ another person to attend that function and that function only. Now I’ll pay you for four or five hours or whatever it is at the rate. What rate are you paying? Okay, you’re paying them €10 a hour. I’ll pay the €50. Put €50 on the bill but I want two persons on that one because it got to the stage that it’s irritating, absolutely irritating to sit at that table and to be approached over your shoulder. No essence of, they haven’t even the knowledge or the ability to put the plated down in front of your wife before they put it down in front of you. It just happens to be which one they want to get out of their hand first. It’s gone to that level.

370.MM: The Hibernian, you worked in it briefly. You didn’t like it. It was rougher like…..

371.FF: No, I was fairly early on at that time and you would not be allowed touch near this or go near that or you spent your time stoking the fires or shining the rail around.

372.MM: Right okay, yeah and you’d come from being hands on up in…..

373.FF: And the attitude of this man coming down, ‘oh boy’, you know. It wasn’t my scene. Oh the standard wise it was good but if you could get at it. But you weren’t allowed near it. You weren’t allowed near it.

374.MM: But was there much of that, that a lot of people, instead of sharing information or sharing work they held onto it.

375.FF: Oh yes. You see you had to get the confidence of your chef de partie or your, you had to get to the stage that they had to rely on you before they’d impart to you and you see that is why so many people and it was common in the industry at the time to move on. You never served your five or six years in the one house. No house ever taught you any further than they catered themselves. There was no one ever brought you aside here’s something that’s like ‘here something, just a simple thing like a thickening a sauce with a butter or something like that’. Now unless that’s done in that establishment no one would ever come to you and say by the way we don’t ever do this but if you want to improve that now here’s what you do. Now keep it moving and drop….. They knew that but they wouldn’t tell you because you see they depended upon whatever information they had for their survival.

376.MM: So by keeping you down it kept them up.

377.FF: So you never and I used to say that when I was out in the Malahide because we did a good trade and we did reasonably but I always said to lads that I took on at a certain stage I said look cause I organised our brigade into the union, it wasn’t the best thing but it was the only thing there was. I used to say to them time you moved on. Go look for something because you’ve advanced here…..As far as you will here. You can stay as long as you like but you’re only going to be doing the same thing and you’ve learned whatever has been done here. Now I could if I could take you as an individual bring you forward but I can’t, I’m too busy, I’ve a kitchen run. I’ve a brigade to organise, three/four weddings tomorrow morning, a dinner dance tonight, I can’t. So I used to push them and in fact when I’d be in the union I’d talk to some of the chefs, I wouldn’t look for the thing on the wall but I’d talk around to some of them and are you looking for a chef? I’ll tell you I have a lad out here now, he’s quite good now. He’s about fourth year, if you happen to be looking for someone. Now they’d maybe come back, it might be sometime you’d lift the phone. You were talking about so and so, send them into me because it’s only fair to them because they’ll advance no further than that particular establishment caterers and that’s it.

378.MM: Why do you think so many people have left the industry?
FF: Too hard, unsocial, you’re busy when other people are free. You’re busiest are at Christmas, bank holidays, big football matches, rugby, you name it, all summer. I know the time in my earliest stages you dare not even think of a week or a fortnight’s holiday between May and the end of September. Even if business turned out not to be as great in advance they just wouldn’t say to you, you can have your holidays. Holidays would start in October. Now my earliest days it was a five-and-a-half day week, with one Sunday in four. You were free one Sunday in four and it was a five-and-a-half day week. It was a fifty-four week and that was if you were in a regulated hotel. On season you worked seven days but you didn’t mind that because you had no where else to go. But the working week was fifty-four hours, five-and-a-half days and the norm was in the hotel was one Sunday in the month. So you worked three and one free and you had split hours. You go in for 9 a.m., you were out at 3 p.m., you were back at 6 p.m. until 10 p.m., late function you were on till 1 a.m., still back in at 9 a.m. As I say holiday periods out, Christmas out.

MM: Have you anything else that you think is important.

FF: No, not really. One thing I can say that, I have covered parts that were tough. I can honestly say I never didn’t like going into work. I’ve always, whatever it was or at whatever stage, whatever it was I was sufficiently interested in it to get self-satisfaction and that’s a big thing.

MM: Yeah, absolutely, yeah.

FF: It’s a big thing because that is one of the big reasons that so many go to the pubs and go to the you know because they’re cheesed off, they’re browned off, they can’t face this any longer.

MM: Why do you think so many took to the drink?

FF: Well the conditions. First and foremost they were working in an environment where drink was available. In Jammet’s for example you had a, the kitchen staff brigade had a ration of two pints a day. One in the morning time, and one in the evening. That was French restaurant style. So if you were young enough and you took to beer and that and fancied beers at all you were introduced to it to start. The whole environment, you were always in the environment where drink is available, you know, you didn’t have to cough up in a sense, you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours. Your lunch would be better than the staff lunch. So you were in that environment, that’s one. Second, is the unsocial aspects of it. Hanging around two/three hours in the afternoons, wet afternoon working in the Gresham, Hibernian wherever it was, living out in the backside of Walkinstown or you know. Even if you hop on a bus and get out there, it’s 4 p.m. before your out and 5 p.m. your coming back you know. That type of thing. So it was go and have a few drinks, or down to a snooker hall or somewhere. A big factor on the dining room, on the waiting side is the irregular pay. At least on the kitchen side you got your money each week. And you kind of budgeted for the week. The waiter never did that. He only budgeted to his next meal.

MM: (Laugh). Because there would always be tips or something.

FF: Always like the Mr. McCall or something is going to turn up. I’ll get a big one tonight. That will pay the bill so I can have another couple. These are the aspects. All these things mixed up. And I can see it on the dining side also, people just a couple, a bottle of wine and they go off and there’s another glass, a glass, there’s what five glasses to a bottle or so. They have two each and the waiter isn’t going to throw that out. I’ll give you a good one…In the Central at Christmas there was this old resident, she was resident in the Central, obviously a person who had money but only at Christmas would she buy a little bottle, a little stout bottle, I forget the name of it. It was a bottle of wine. It was one of these small ones, but always on Christmas day. The only time on Christmas day at her lunch had she one of these bottles and she’d have a glass of it and then she’d
leave it on the table and that was for her dinner. So this casual was in over the Christmas, do you see, and being the casual he didn’t know the scene and of course he went off and finished half the bottle. He was back on for dinner and of course ‘I’ll have my bottle of wine’, so he dashed to the bar, got a bottle, opened it, empty half and bring half bottle down and put it on the table (laugh). He cursed like hell (laugh)

388.MM: (Laugh). And that had to come out of his own pocket.

389.FF: Of course (laugh).

390.MM: What about violence in the kitchen?

391.FF: The only time I experienced what you might term as violence was I did about a fortnight in the Gresham, I never counted it as experience. It was when I came back from the Isle of Man, It was before I went into the Red Bank and I was in the union and it was on the thing they were only looking for someone for sick or holiday relief or someone was out side or someone was on holidays or that. The only time I experienced what you would call violence. It wasn’t violence. Well it could have been violence, like Macker, the famous Macker. He was a devil for causing a shamozzle but however there was a glass case down at the end and they used to put up like duty rosters and that and I went down and I was looking at that you see and I could in the reflection, I could see him it was like a raw potato, mashed potato, potato anyhow. He was a devil for firing at people and he just missed and he hit the corner. He could have broken the glass but it didn’t. That could have been violence you see. It was the only time I ever had anything pitched at me so I just turned around so he was right busy off doing something. He went into the larder, so I just went in after him. He was about that height. So I said ‘come here you’. ‘You do that again and I’ll kick your teeth in.’ (Laugh).

392.MM: (Laugh).

393.FF: ‘Oh sorry, I didn’t.’ Don’t make it worse by denying it I said but I said you do that again and I’ll kick your teeth in. It never happened again. No. I can’t say.

End of Tape Two and end of Interview
Edited Interview with Myrtle Allen, Ballymaloe House, (7/5/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Myrtle Allen (MA)

1. MM: You were born in, was it 1928.
2. MA: No ’24 I’m sorry to say. Next year, a big year (laugh).
3. MM: So you’ll be 80 next year. Oh my God. You’re looking well for it.
4. MA: Well, the years are there.
5. MM: Where were you born?
6. MA: I was born in Cork, Cork city, Tivoli. The other side of the harbour, I came across in the Ferry (laugh). Married a Cork man this side of the harbour.
7. MM: What’s your maiden name?
8. MA: My maiden name was Hill, my family lived and worked in Cork for generations, you know. Architects. My father was an Architect yes. My mother’s father was in the cattle trade in Cork.
9. MM: And what brought you…..Marriage brought you across the river? (Laugh).
10. MA: Marriage brought me across the river, yeah (laugh).
11. MM: The ways of true love?
12. MA: (Laugh) that’s right. And by bicycle I can tell you in those days, the war was on (laugh).
13. MM: That was….. What year was that?
14. MA: I got married in ’43 and I’ve been here in this locality ever since.
15. MM: Okay, but you weren’t in this house?
16. MA: No, we didn’t move in until 1948.
17. MM: How did you come to purchase this place?
18. MA: Well I’ll tell you my husband was in horticulture, and of course in a way, looking back on it, there were sort of boom years during the war, you see. There was no way you could spend money, there was nothing to buy and he was sending out all he could possibly produce. It was going across to England. Well, the boat to Wales or the train to Rosslare and then across and you know, everyday he was turning out tomatoes, mushrooms, cucumbers, apples and sending them all off.
19. MM: How many acres did he have?
20. MA: He had, in those days, he had, he was a partner in a small farm. When I say small, by present day standards, it was a hundred acres. I mean it was a sort of nice little farm at the time but farms are inclined to get a bit bigger at the moment. He was very lucky because there was the family living on the farm. In fact there was the remains of a family and there was just the son and

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daughter left and neither of them married as was, it happened often in those days, and they had no
way out and the old man knew my husband very well as a boy in school and he asked them to
come and help him work on the farm and that was in 1932. It was at the height of economic war
and farming was very bad and he came into, sort of the young person, and this gentleman sent him
off to England straight away to learn apple growing because the only thing that seemed to be any
hope was in horticulture. And of course Dev (De Valera) was strongly backing that at the time.
And you know Dev had the policy that we should be self-sufficient and have plenty of industry.
You couldn’t sell cattle, you know, couldn’t sell milk. Everything was rock bottom price. The
farmers were in a desperate state. So he went and he learnt apple growing and he went on an
excursion to the Lee Valley and he saw the tomato growing going on. So he came back and he
grew the apples and he picked the apples, there were already obviously orchards there, mature
orchards actually when he arrived, some and he planted more.

21. MM: Where did he go for the apples, was it Somerset or somewhere like that?

22. MA: No, it was on the East Coast of England.

23. MM: East Anglia or somewhere like that.

24. MA: Somewhere there now, I can’t think of the name of the place. I’ll probably be able to
give it to you later on. Yeah, yeah.

25. MM: And for the tomatoes?

26. MA: The tomatoes the Lee Valley. That was the great place for tomatoes.

27. MM: Where is the Lee Valley?

28. MA: I don’t know actually. I never did know. There must be a River Lee somewhere in
England. Lea possibly.

29. MM: We’ll find it out (laugh).

30. MA: Funny now that I’ve forgotten where he went to do his training.

31. MM: Oh it’s not important. It will come back to you.

32. MA: Yeah, okay, yeah. They’re still there. They’re a big family of fruit growers.

33. MM: So there were apples here?

34. MA: Yes apples were the first thing they started growing. So then he decided that he’d like to
branch out into general horticulture and this place was on the market. There was an auction of
course, we knew them, and funny enough I was introduced to him for the first time, in the dining
room here (laugh). I knew the girl living in the house and I was over at a party and em so he went
to the auction to sort of wish them well, you know, that they’d do well in the auction. There was
no bid. So they were stuck with the place and they’d already bought another place and they were
very badly stuck financially and he discussed it with the old man, his partner and they decided
they would offer what they thought would be a fair price for it, and it was accepted, so that was it.

35. That was ’47. We moved in ’48. So that was, so we had a mixed farm in those days and I mean
the kids were small. I mean that was ’48, ’58, ’64 was a good bit later, you see. Sixteen years
later.

36. MM: So ’64 you opened up as a guesthouse?
37. **MA:** Yeah, because we often thought, but not a guesthouse, no.

38. **MM:** Oh yeah, as a restaurant?

39. **MA:** We were very much aware that there was, we were very interested in food generally speaking and quality food and my husband was a great gourmet, he loved food and he was very discerning about it and I didn’t actually even know how to cook when I was married. I had sort of a vague idea all right and I done my year in the School of Commerce of Cork when I left school, something like two hours a week or two hours twice a week and I just had a, I didn’t know much. So I had to teach myself how to cook (laugh). See you had to cook in those days there was no food. See there was no petrol, nobody could get anywhere. We did get a delivery for the butcher and I don’t know whether he had a horse and trap or whether he had petrol, I can’t remember now. We would occasionally, somebody would bring a cart over from Ballycotton with fish in it, and everything else virtually we grew ourselves. We would get up to Cork. We had a certain allowance of petrol for the trucks going up to deliver the food to the train or the boat. You see we had an allowance for that. But I mean it was really, you had to just cook, I mean with all the ingredients and I had books because I was very interested. I’d bought books and there you are, you had the food, you had the cooker, you had to do something (laugh). So it was and then I eventually got a job writing the cookery column in the Irish Farmers Journal.

40. **MM:** How did that come about?

41. **MA:** Well my husband was a very, for the time, a very innovative and forward thinking farmer and we had somebody down from the Farmers Journal and he stayed the night and we gave him a meal and he said to me ‘I’m looking for somebody for the Journal, to write for the Journal. And actually I’m looking for somebody to write about art’ and I said ‘well I couldn’t do that, but I could write about food, I could write about cooking.’ ‘Oh he said that’s just what we want, we’d like a farmers wife to do the cooking column’ So that thought me a lot because every two weeks I had to have a column ready and I had to, it’s like going to a university, you’ve got to read it up in two or three different sources and I got myself extra cookery books to just read and I had enough cop on to get the best people that were writing and then you’d have to go into the kitchen and do it and you’d have to adjust the recipe to the ingredients and then write it up and then publish it. So it was a great training.

42. **MM:** Yeah, absolutely, yeah. And who were the writers at that time that sort of influenced you?

43. **MA:** Originally there was a person that nobody ever really revered at all, a guy called Philip Harben. But he wrote a book called ‘The Way to Cook’ and it was terribly simple and that saved my life first. That and the Aga Cookery Book, we’d an Aga. They were very reliable recipes and then after that, well I just read everything and a lot of things would be just astray but if you weren’t used to cooking they were not explicit enough or reliable enough. A lot of recipes they would expect you to go on your own instincts but if you didn’t have any instincts (laugh) at that stage (laugh). One or two from the School of Commerce I certainly used and I had been staying with a friend in England for (inaudible) and I used one or two of her recipes and I had books and I just took them out of the books. Em, well there was books that nobody has really heard now. There was a little tiny publication that came out in England and I had been in England for four or five months before I was married and it was called, and of course they were very short of food, it was called the ‘Country Housewives Handbook’. That was fantastic because I was in the country and this was for people in the country and they had all how the jams were to be made, the cakes that you could make and all, anything you would want. Actually it had garden tips in it as well, how to grow things, how to use surplus of fruit or bottle it or whatever. So that was great and I had another farming one, again from the Farmers, the English Farmer’s Weekly had one out called Farmhouse Fair. I had that. I had a paperback by a person called Bee Neilson. She was a New Zealander I think and she was completely exact in everything she did, so that was very good, because if you took her measurements and measured accurately the thing worked.
44. But it was amazing how many, I mean Elizabeth David, wonderful to read but you’d have to know a lot because an accurate measurement was not her strong point. She might fire you with enthusiasm but she didn’t give, really, really, accurate measurements if you were sort of really, not sure what to do. There was quite a lot of their books there. Well I have my mother’s book and my grandmother’s book (laugh).

45. MM: Had you grown up with good food at home? Was your mother a good cook?

46. MA: I don’t know. my aunt said to me once, I don’t know how you can, she said, Elsie never cooked anything (laugh). That was my mother, but I think she was just being catty. We had good basic food, very good basic food. We had a little garden and we grew everything for ourselves out of the garden. So everything was fresh. Fresh vegetables.

47. MM: But you were city folk?

48. MA: Very basic. We were outside the city, we were on the edge of the harbour. Very basic! My mother would go in, she’d get, what she reckoned was the best meat in the market and the best fish she’d buy, as far as she could, and then all the fruit and vegetables came from the garden and then you know when the bakers, we bought from the bakers, Thompson’s Van would come around in those days and that was it really.

49. MM: But it was an education, the Farmer’s Journal writing was an education in itself?

50. MA: It was actually.

51. MM: Very good. And how long did you continue with that?

52. MA: A couple of years I think, about two years. The was early ‘60’s.

53. MM: So the first fifteen years of married life it was devoted to family really and farming or even more probably yeah.

54. MA: Well I had six children in a house this size. Actually the house was divided in two. We didn’t have all of it. It was too big. It has two staircases so divided very easily but still I mean it was still a lot to keep you know. To look after the children properly, in those days the man would do the work and was meant to bring in the money (laugh) and the woman was meant to mind the house and mind the children and there wasn’t, I think it was better really cause there wasn’t this awful dashing out trying to hold down a job as well, you know. Putting your child into a crèche or something and having to….. You know what happens when the child gets sick, just go back to the child, do you stay in work and leave it? I think really it was better if you just did the children. That was it. Look after them, we looked after the house, I mean, there was men to feed, you know, a house to keep clean and…..

55. MM: Oh it was a full-time job (laugh).

56. MA: It was more than a full-time job. I used usually have somebody helping me.

57. MM: So talking about food, when would you have gone out for your first meal? When would you have experienced your first meal in a restaurant?

58. MA: Oh didn’t go as a family. As a family we didn’t go out very much at all, when I was a child. I hardly remember going out. Thompson’s in Cork. You got, not dinner, you didn’t go out to dinner, you’d go out and have lunch maybe or tea and I remember if things began to, my husband you see, he was very interested and keen on food and he had a family sort of upbringing that was orientated toward restaurant food. His father was quite a gourmet. His father long ago he used to go to Waterford on business and he would telephone the hotel, book a room and book a
sole for his dinner and he’d have then he went down exactly he’d tell them how he wanted it. He was, he had being going out with his father occasionally for meals and I remember, so I would go mainly in Dublin if I went up with him. His family lived up in Drogheda so I would possibly go up with him and we would go to the Red Bank or we went to Jammet’s and I particularly remember on one occasion the dinner cost twenty-five shillings and it was sort of pandemonium when we told people how much we paid for it you know (laugh). Wasting our money.

59. MM: And that was for how many people?
60. MA: Oh each. Twenty-five shillings each.
61. MM: Wow. What year would that be?
62. MA: It would be very early ’40’s, ’43 or ’44, I’m not sure around about there, either ’42, ’43 or ’44, I’m not sure which.
63. MM: What do you remember of Jammet’s?
64. MA: Well I remember that they did a service that I would love to have here, always liked. They would bring, what do you call it, the little serving table up to the customers.
65. MM: A la Russe, is it? (note: Gueridon service is the what was meant)
66. MA: I remember again in this instance, I think it was the sole we had, a bit flat fish, and the waiter was sufficiently skilled to, perhaps it was skinned, I’m not sure, I’m sure it was in a béarnaise sauce and he would fillet you one fillet onto the plate and you could have more or not. You know you could have what you like. I absolutely hated plated food. I mean the chef has no idea of the amount I want to eat (laugh) and I don’t want to be given a plate full of food. I hate leaving food behind, I think it’s awful to waste food and I just don’t like it. We do it all the time, I hate it (laugh). And that’s what I remember about Jammet’s you got…..
67. MM: But the silver service and the table service like that…..?
68. MA: It was very good. It was very civilised. They might put a big silver cover on it then you see and come back and give it to you later if you wanted more and I think that’s a perfect way of doing it. And then we used to go Jammet’s bar quite often and that was great fun downstairs. It was lovely. Completely tiled, in fact it was a sort of men’s place but women were allowed in. You slunk in hoping nobody would say anything and it was mainly men drinking and a lot of them having oysters and stout, oysters and Guinness.
69. MM: Yeah, there was an oyster bar there or was it just oysters?
70. MA: It was a general bar you could have any dish that was the main dining room., in the bar but very informal and very fast. Lovely, I loved it. So we often went there in Dublin.
71. MM: You mentioned the Red Bank as well. What was that like? Was that different?
72. MA: No, I’m just trying to think. The Red Bank was, was the Red Bank…..
73. MM: The Red Bank was on D’Olier Street wasn’t it.
74. MA: Yes. I think the Red Bank was fish. Don’t remember very clearly. I only went there once and again it was great fun, it was very nice. White table cloths and good fish, you know. It was grand and then there was another one, there was another one in Dame Street, if you were walking up the street from Trinity, with Trinity behind you, it would be on the right-hand side. I don’t know what it was called, they did a lot of steaks and things like that. That was good, it
wasn’t as expensive as Jammet’s, slightly more affordable (laugh). We didn’t very often go to Jammet’s restaurant actually, and then gradually then I went to the Russell, a few time. The Russell was wonderful and I remember I knew a lot more about cooking when I went to the Russell and I was able to, I remember, they did, we’re not doing it all now, and it’s lovely. In those days if you were serving fish with hollandaise sauce, you didn’t fill the plate with hollandaise, you in French they call it napé, it that the word you use and on the fillet, just off the side of the spoon, shake it off so that it’s not all over the plate, just barely covering it and then they put it under the grill and brown it. It was the first time I’d come across that and it was just so good. I still think it’s the best way of serving it, but fashion!!!

75. MM: That’s it. Ah sure it goes round in a circle doesn’t it?

76. MA: It does (laugh). If you get enough you get the full flavour, and piles of rich stuff. So those were my memories of the Dublin restaurant. So we didn’t really go out much in Cork. The odd time we’d go to have a steak in the Oyster Tavern or…..

77. MM: Was there any outstanding restaurant in Cork?

78. MA: I think Oyster Tavern was really the best one. I mean the thing was steak then, to have a steak. And it was lovely, the open grill fire, oh it’s a pity it’s gone.

79. MM: It was cooked in the room as such?

80. MA: Cooked in the dining room, yes, yeah. It’s a great pity it’s gone. It was panelled you know so it was a lovely room and then you’d go out into the bar and of course it was really glamorous. I was delighted because when I was younger I wasn’t allowed to go there (laugh) but it was a great thing to grow up (laugh) and go. That was great. It really was sort of club like, and of course anybody could go in, and you see smart people. That’s the other thing that’s fun. You’d see smart young people there and that’s what you saw in the Hibernian (Dublin). The Hibernian of course was very good too and they had this wonderful big hall that you entered and if you sat in that hall like anybody who was in Dublin, didn’t matter who it was, whatever celebrity you’d see them walking through sooner or later. It was great fun.

81. MM: But there was, you talk about style and that, you know, you dressed up to go out those day didn’t you?

82. MA: Everybody dressed much more then. You wouldn’t go out in jeans (laugh).

83. MM: Do you remember the likes of dress dances or that sort of thing at all or…..?

84. MA: We didn’t really go to very many but I suppose we did a few hunt balls around here, you know, go to a few hunt balls. When you were young the first ball you traditionally went to was a charity ball. There was one for one of the hospitals in Cork and that’s where, if you were just out of school, seventeen or eighteen, the first dance you were allowed to go to was the Victoria Hospital or one of the hospital charities, and I got engaged (laugh). I rang home, I’m getting engaged to be married the night of course I was there and my father said ‘you are not, get Ivan to come to see me tomorrow morning’ (laugh). ‘You’re not to announce it’ (laugh). It was funny. I’ll tell you what I remember, there was a few private dance too. People gave dances in their house and I remember leaving home, I suppose we left at about six or seven o’clock in a winters night, it was dark, you’d be wearing trousers I expect, I don’t know what I wore and you’d put on your dress when you got there and then an awful thing at about two o’clock in the morning at a winter’s morning, like late December or early January and you know the way your absolutely dead tired, at the end of a dance at two o’clock in the morning and it could be raining or frosting or anything and out of the dress and back into the pants and onto the damn bike and out in the weather to cycle home again (laugh).
85. MM: The torment of it. (laugh).

86. MA: Wretched (laugh). It was horrible but we did it. So that was it.

87. MM: So when you started here you started as a restaurant.

88. MA: But first of all we started the farmhouse just. The farmhouse yeah and then when I went into business with the restaurant in 1964 but in a very small way. I mean, I had no restaurant training, I was just going on sort of common sense and having been around enough to observe. I was influenced to some extent I suppose, but it was very different, by Heidle MacNeice and she’d had what really was the forerunner of the modern restaurant, the Spinnaker in Kinsale. There also was another one, I think Man Friday and it’s still there I think, that one also opened about the same time. I think it was owned by the man that started the whole concept of Kinsale gourmet circle, Peter Barry, I think, the same name as the TD. I think he was Peter Barry.

89. MM: And when was the Spinnaker opened?

90. MA: They would all have opened, you see there was no petrol in the ‘40s, there was not much, we had food alright, we always had food thank God in Ireland, although we’d be short of sugar and tropical fruits and things like that and they didn’t open until things began ease out, I would say about the end of the ‘50s or very early ‘60s they opened. Early ‘60s I would say, about four or five years before me. The English restaurant, the sort of well known English country house restaurants they all opened about the same time. And if you know the one’s up in the lake district, Miller Howe, Sharrow Bay and a lot of the others, well know restaurants in country houses opened in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s when people had petrol, both food and petrol (laugh).

91. MM: Yeah, lovely, the two were linked?

92. MA: Yeah, to get there and to have something to eat when you did get there!!!

93. MM: So how did it blossom or did it take a while to take off? How did you advertise or was it word of mouth?

94. MA: Well I put an advertisement the first day, just the day before I opened, in the Examiner and it said ‘dine in a country house, telephone so and so, telephone such and such a number for reservations’ and that was all, and I put no name in it because I didn’t want everyone to be knowing what I was doing. I remember driving down the front avenue and quite rightly I was aware of the fact that it my last day of freedom when I could get in the car and go off anywhere I wanted to and I knew I’d be tied to routine after that, for the rest of my life, and I was right. I pottered down the drive and I met a car coming up and it stopped. The man looked out the window and he said is this where the restaurant is? and I was delighted with myself. ‘Yes’ I said. ‘Oh’ he said ‘I’m from Woodford Bourne and I want to sell wine to you’ (laughter).

95. MM: They didn’t hang around! (laugh).

96. MA: And then we just left it there until somebody wandered (in). We had a couple of parties for friends just, the first two nights we just had friends in to sort of a trial run, we didn’t charge them of course. To get into it exactly and then we just sit and wait and if somebody came there was all excitement (laugh).

97. MM: How long did it take to develop or to take off? Were there ups and downs?

98. MA: Fortunately I had one or two very good customers through the winter that just kept me going. I had one or two regulars quite quickly because they realized I had something that they wanted, but it really was slow. You see the lucky thing was, because it was here in the house, we had no capital expenditure. We were able to clean up our kitchen and use it. I had enough
gumption to get rid of the cats (laugh). You know, it didn’t matter if we had few people because we didn’t have to pay anybody back.

99. MM: Anyone that came was a bonus as such?

100. MA: Exactly I mean I reckoned as it was my hobby, I reckoned my husband, he was meant to look after us anyway and produce the money for us. I mean that was the deal in those days (laugh) so that I knew I mustn’t loose money because we were still paying back for the farm. I mean we were pretty tight and if I had been asked to build a new kitchen as they did subsequently I just would never just have done it. There is no question about that. So it didn’t matter that we were going slowly and we went slowly for about two years until that first guide, the 1966 Egon Ronay guide to Ireland came out and they gave me a very, very good rating. That didn’t do anything but they published, they published an account of it in The Irish Times and the business exploded. Three times as many straight away. We were into it then.

101. MM: And never looked back?

102. MA: No, not really no, not really. 1966 and then we had to put on rooms because of the licensing laws, you see. I just didn’t want the place to be a pub; I didn’t want a pub license. And they were very expensive, you had to buy two, you could only put them together, the one. Because they were inclined to reduce the number (of pubs) in the country. Perhaps they were terribly expensive, they of course went much more expensive again, but of course if you don’t have the money, you don’t have the money.

103. MM: Just when you started off did you sell wine at the beginning?

104. MA: Wine. I could get a wine license, straight away I had a wine license but you had people that would like a glass of brandy when they finished their meal or a gin and tonic when they arrived but you couldn’t sell it. As my husband always used to say ‘no Irish drinks allowed’. You couldn’t sell Irish whiskey, you couldn’t sell stout, you couldn’t sell Smithwicks, just not allowed. But French wines and Sherries and you know what takes. And I mean when we very small and you know the customers you chance giving them a glass of brandy if they wanted it after dinner but you couldn’t, that wasn’t on for very long, you just couldn’t do it.

105. You couldn’t live like that so then we had the difficulty of knowing what to do and we put on, a hotel had to have ten bedrooms, I don’t know if it’s still the same, and it had to have a dinning room to hold everybody that was staying at once. Those were two of the things, and we could do that easily and we did that but we registered as a guesthouse, which was also allowed and it was just allowed, it wasn’t really properly correct but it was passed and I think the idea was you could be that while you were waiting to get a hotel status. But we didn’t ever want to be a hotel because we did not want to have to comply with the Inn Keepers Act, which decreed that we would have to serve meals to the traveller at all times. And it was as much as I could to do to produce dinner in the evening, I couldn’t even think about giving anyone a cup of tea or anything during the day because we were flat out. There was myself and a girl from the village that had a very scanty knowledge of cooking and that was it, and we might have twenty for dinner and just the two of us and we were trying to do it really well, you know, four courses and it was all new to us, and we were really novices really. I knew how to cook but restaurant cooking is a different thing to cooking at home.

106. MM: And was it a set menu or did you?

107. MA: I did, I always had a set menu. Always three starters, and three or four second courses, and three or four main courses.

108. MM: But there was always three or four choices?
MA: And we always changed the menu every night so it was a complete thing. We got in what we wanted, cooked it and finished it. It worked all right anyway. That’s why I had to know my numbers.

MM: Did the family eat afterwards? Did the family eat well on what didn’t go?

MA: I suppose we did in the early days but then when we got a little bit bigger I went into lunch and I served a buffet lunch every day and that would be very much leftovers and all of sort the home cooking thing. I used to charge 5 shillings, I think it was. I know it wasn’t very much, 5 shillings for lunch and we’d sell things like Shepherds Pie or Fish Cakes or if I had meat, it would be a cheap cut of meat or using up meat someway or another and pretty simple stuff. Scotch Eggs I remember, I remember getting French people in, they were delighted to see Scotch Eggs. They thought it was great and I remember one day a helicopter arrived, and they came in for lunch. I remember thinking what did it cost them to come here by helicopter? (laugh) and their going to get a bit of Shepherds Pie, you know something very, very inexpensive, five shilling lunch and come by helicopter for it (laugh).

MM: Who was that?

MA: I don’t know who it was.

MM: And you were saying that you had a few regulars from early on. Would they have been local or would they have been business people from Cork?

MA: Once I started lunch we got a lot of business people out from Middleton and they came very regularly. A quite good trade and I kept them until the hotels and the other little restaurants started up in Middleton by then, I don’t know what we were doing. That’s when business people didn’t really, it wasn’t worth there while to come out here. We still do lunch but it has never been as big as dinner.

MM: How many rooms do you have now?

MA: We have only 32. We had 33 last year but my daughter-in-law put two into one to make a nice big room. We’re still at it. In the yard there we’re actually building, we’re putting a little conservatory outside.

MM: So how did that progress from the 10 rooms to the 32 or the 33?

MA: Well you see I’ll tell you how and why. We went along and we did very well. We continued to very well in the food cards. It was interesting actually, I’m digressing a bit now but one year I got top in every prize. Top Michelin, top Good Food Guide, top Egon Ronay and everybody knew I was serving terribly simple food like rhubarb and nobody else would. I’d serve cabbage and everybody else would be looking for peppers or something, you know, peppers and tomatoes and so that it had the funny effect and the chefs, it sort of was nice for me really because suddenly people realised that I was doing something right, this young one, this young farmer’s wife, you know, down there in Cork and she was getting the honours. It was a great help to the whole concept of Irish food, I think, the fact that it was appreciated. I don’t have them now, I mean even Rory (O’ Connell) in the kitchen who is very good, we haven’t got back any of those accolades. But you were asking me….

MM: Did you feel at the time that there wasn’t the confidence in our own native produce at the time, that people were following the sort of French classical training?

MA: Yes absolutely, French yes, it was largely, yes. I mean a lot of chefs anyway cook for style. I mean I’m sure you know the term ‘chefing it up’. You know (laugh) you’d have a fillet of plaice and your mother would cook it maybe very nicely on a pan and put on a plate with a bit a
lemon (laugh) but get a chef and the chef would have God knows what would be on it (laugh) and my whole philosophy was and my original advertisement was dine in a country house and my whole philosophy was we are a country house and so we behave like a country house and give country house food which we means basically which we did. Go out and pick the vegetables in the garden, bring them in, cook for the dinner right away. Going over to Ballycotton to see what the boats bring in, bring it back put it straight on the pan for whatever way you were cooking it for dinner and then obviously I’d use the meat. I cooked deliberately in a country house style and it was the critics really that wanted this. It suited them, they’d got to that point. So it was a little help in a way, I have to say, I know, that sort of cooking was recognised. Did you ask me something else?

122.MM: Ah no we sort of talking about how it moved from ten bedrooms to thirty-two?

123.MA: Well I’ll tell how it came, that happened. Well really what happened was farming went down. First of all we found we were paying for the farm through the mushrooms and tomatoes which were always very good for bringing in money and we had it all worked out and the first thing that happened was in the early 1970s the price of fuel shot up and the price of wages shot up and bang the glass houses became uneconomical. The Dutch, clever boys, had there own gas in the North Sea which they subsidised for their horticultural trade, and before we knew it they had undercut us from the Cork market not to mind any other market with their fruit. The French chaps came in and undercut us with their apples. The Americans gave Marshal Aid or something to the Far East to grow mushrooms (laugh). They undercut us with the mushrooms and just this happens in farming, you know, its up and down really and then suddenly my husband turned round, he always took the money anyway (laugh) and I was making the money not him (laugh) and also that it was the bedrooms that were making the money. So he pushed and pushed and pushed for more bedrooms. ‘Oh goodness we’ve got enough of them’, I’d say and he’d sat ‘well we really need six more to make it economical’. He went on to his dying day saying ‘if we had another six’. I’d say ‘Oh don’t I couldn’t bear it’ (laugh). So that’s how we got as we are and it did a lot to keep us afloat really. I mean if we hadn’t the restaurant and rooms I doubt if we’d be still on the farm. We might have managed because I suppose as well as that we’d have put more energy maybe and time into the various, we might have been more meticulous about the various lines that we were running, we might have managed. But I wasn’t much of a farmer, I never had anything to do with those, always left that department to him, so I was purely in the house and with the children. I did nothing else until I started here. I don’t know whether he’d ever manage the farm on his own to get it, to keep it running or whether we would….. The house, you see, takes a lot of up-keep; a house like this is expensive just to keep the rain out. I think these houses; a farm could never support a house like this.

124.MM: From tomatoes, there was a big glass house movement at one stage, wasn’t there, as in the government backed glass house movement?

125.MA: Yes and down in the Claddagh or somewhere there outside Galway they put up glass houses. Dev.

126.MM: Yeah, and it was Dutch people who were brought in to do this. Can you explain that too me just the fuel side of things, where did the fuel come in with the glass houses?

127.MA: They were running on oil and the fuel suddenly….. I think the glass houses are cold at the moment. I don’t have any heat in them. We have just one proper steel house left and my son has that over at the cookery school. But I don’t think there using any fuel now, I think it’s just too expensive. The price of oil went up, why was it, I don’t know about 1970s the price shot up.

128.MM: I remember now around 1977 was particularly bad?

129.MA: It could have been, around 1977, I can’t tell you what and everybody went bust, I mean we had at that stage now, My eldest girl was about, well she was older then, but when she was
about 15 or 16 we had contact with the French Parisian family and she used to exchange. She went over twice or three times and she’d stay with them and learn French and their daughter would come over here and learn English. And it was interesting because they were in the business of selling flowers, and selling them to all the hotels and restaurants in Paris and they were a very well known firm in Paris, in Versailles and years later Madam (the mother of the family) arrived here with a friend and came in for lunch and of course I went to talk to her and she told me the whole business had gone. Her husband was selling paint, her son was terribly disappointed, I don’t know what he was doing but he was just looking forward to going in and taking over the business. And right through Europe the businesses that were dependent on oil went, particularly the flower business.

130.MM: So the accolades were coming from the guides and when did people start to copy the formula or start to copy the simplified food?

131.MA: I don’t really know, there was never anything particular. I don’t know. All I knew was that vaguely being aware, you know. There was more emphasis being given to local food. It’s big now and it’s a major thing now. But what was it saw the other day, I don’t know whether it was actually the Department of Education, a paper or something and it was definitely stating to be sure to use local foods.

132.MM: I know now there’s a lot of movement, the Slow Food Movement and these people, their setting up local classes for sort of teenagers and stuff and bringing a local butcher or bringing in a local, to try and actually get more focused on stuff.

133.MA: The smaller producer.

134.MM: Yeah, yeah, it’s great. Again you’ve stayed true to your style of food and even the style of food being served, you still stay true to the sort of country house?

135.MA: I think we do fairly well. Rory is, at the moment I tend to do what my kitchen, six or seven years ago I suppose and Rory, Darina’s brother is a chef here and he is a very artistic person and he ‘chefs it up’ a great deal more than I did, (laugh) but he does it very well. We do have our own gardens still and we do get as much as we can of the things. He’s a little bit more intricate than I would have been with the plate (laugh).

136.MM: How did you get involved then with the likes of Eurotoques and when did you start?

137.MA: Well I’ll tell you the man that was starting off Euro Toc just wrote to and asked me, he told me what it was, what he was doing, asked me if I’d start it and I…..

138.MM: Was it Paul Bocuse?

139.MA: No it was a man call Pierre Romeyer and he had a three star restaurant in Belgium but I think was because the meanwhile (laugh) for my sins had run a restaurant in Paris as well as running this place for three or four years (laugh).

140.MM: Tell me about that.

141.MA: Well I tell you what at a certain stage in the ’70s the export board, what are they called, Córas Tráchtála CTT asked me to do sort of food for an Irish week abroad and I did it in Brussels once or twice and I did it in Holland and I did it in New York and particularly on the continent I was terribly conscious that Irish food does just went down a bomb. I was very particular. I’d bring over my own flour, I’d bring over my own salmon, I’d bring (laugh). And oh they’d say you can buy it there, and I’d say no where I’m going to get the fresh stuff here at home because I know I’ll get the stuff I want and it was terrifically successful and then I came home and I said to Paddy O’Keeffe in the Irish Farmers Journal, he was the Editor and I knew him, ‘we should have an Irish
restaurant abroad because people love our food and it would help to sell Irish food’ and he thought it was a good idea and I knew FBD, the insurance, they had money for investment and I suggested they might do it and actually, in point of fact nobody understood what I was really saying to them either, you know. They were thinking of profit and I had said and nobody listened, it would be something that would break even…

142.MM: And that it was really a marketing ploy for the island of Ireland as a food island as such?

143.MA: Yes exactly. Like the Swiss, there was a Swiss restaurant in London. I don’t know whether they made money or not but the name of Swiss food was over London because it was lovely and Paddy, I knew exactly what I wanted and then they were wondering… They thought it was a good idea and they’d go ahead with it and they were looking for somebody to run it and they asked, I think I even told them about it, a chap called Robinson who was doing very, very well. He had a Michelin Star, he had a restaurant in Wicklow, just as he got his star his marriage broke up, that’s nothing new in the restaurant business, and he was out, finished. He’d lost his restaurant, he’d lost his star, he’d lost his wife, everything gone and he was a very good chef and I suggest I told him. He went in and he didn’t understand. You can’t think of something and have a plan and then somebody else carry it out. He didn’t even want to talk to me because he was very well qualified and he wanted to do his own thing. I understand that but it wasn’t what I had seen with my experience. He did a French restaurant, he had it very well designed by a very good designer, totally into natural décor and he was trained in Lausanne and he did French food. There was nothing the French wanted less than French food from an Irish restaurant, and it didn’t work. Darina and I were giving, it was the first three month course actually and we were doing sort of pilot scheme in our own kitchen here and I remember the phone rang and I picked it up and it was just about to start demonstrating, and this was Paddy O’Keeffe to say ‘this man has left the restaurant, what on earth are we going do. We’ll have egg all over our face’. Oh I said ‘I’ll do it for a bit’ (laugh) just like that without thinking. I found it very hard to concentrate on the class for the rest of the morning. But so I think probably that’s why they asked me to start Eurotoques in Ireland because they knew I’d be in France, running. Well the restaurant, I mean didn’t do well financially at all, but it did very, very well in the guides and it was very well know. We got very good reviews.

144.MM: What was it called?

145.MA: La Ferme Irlandaise.

146.MM: La Ferme Irlandaise. And where was it in Paris?

147.MA: Well it the middle of a square called Place du Marche Saint Honore and it was between, you know the way everything is in a triangle and one side of the triangle was the Avenue de l’Opera and on the other side of the triangle, oh where the Ritz is now, and then the third one was the Rue Saint Honore.

148.MM: So it was very central.

149.MA: And that was Place du Marche and that was the market place for Saint Honore. It was very good and it was all little food shops and it was lovely. I remember going over, it was really so funny, let the staff get bigger and bigger, I didn’t let anybody go and so as to get enough staff together to open the next restaurant and so then if we weren’t busy enough and I had all this staff, everybody got their holidays which they never normally did, their fortnight in July you can have your holidays now (laugh) and we were all ready to go by the middle of August. So we drove up a couple of cars, I’ll never forget it, and half the staff go into the cars, they were all crying, one person rushed back, I’ll have to get some tea towel. I said I’m sure they will have them in Paris. They were running back to get everything they wanted, you know.

150.MM: So you were staffing them from here.
MA: From here, I let my own staff double and then we divided it in the middle of August and half stayed here and half went to Paris, roughly half. So it was really funny. Then I got there just after them and they were opening next day and I remember they were kind of fussing around and they’d come from the other restaurants in the square and they advised us ‘now don’t be too cheap’ they didn’t want us to undercut them, and there was a man in a shoe shop next door and he found me stitching covers onto the cushions, you know. I had all done in Irish cottage furniture. I chucked out all the international stuff and I had big settees and settle beds and things like that. I was stitching on the fabric, so wait one minutes, he rushed back and he got one of his big staplers and of course he had them on a minute for me (laugh) and they were lovely. It was a wonderful time, the middle of August, Paris is so quiet. Everybody is leisurely, everybody is relaxed and happy and there’s none of that awful sort push that there’s normally in the city at other times of the year. I that’s why they offered to do I’m sure, to start Eurotoques in Ireland. So I had helped Ivan to start the IFA, the NSA as it was, the farmers association, he go stomping around the country and I used to go with him because I used to be fascinated by the whole thing. It was exciting. I reckoned I had an idea of how to start a national organisation as a result.

MM: So Ivan was paramount to the start-up of the IFA?

MA: Oh yes, he was one of them. Of course he was in Macra na Feirme. We were all in Macra na Feirme at one time and then Macra spawned the IFA and he went straight into it. We used to go around the little towns everywhere and had meetings, and show films, and encourage people to join the IFA, farmers.

MM: I was reading recently about Horace Plunkett and the co-op movement and the whole thing, you know.

MA: That would be earlier again.

MM: Yeah, oh much earlier. The whole thing about the butter market and all of that Newcastle West and all the Drum Collachair and all these places you know.

MA: They all had butter markets.

MM: They set up a butter market, they set up one because the firkins were being brought into Cork city to the big butter market and then they set one up in Newcastle West.

MA: Oh did they?

MM: The idea was the farmer could bring them in there and then they could be moved on mass you know, that sort of way, you know rather than…..

MA: They used to walk.

MM: They used to have to wrap them in cabbage leaves and all to try to keep the sun off them and all sorts of stuff. It’s fascinating when you think how things have changed so quickly you know that.

MA: What I need to do at the moment and wanting to do badly and I have somebody that else that wants it too is that is to find out about the old mills and soda bread. I mean I know bread soda came in about 1830s and I think it took on very quickly in Ireland but I don’t know about the flour mills and the sort of bread they made. You see this is the sort of thing when it’s gone, it’s gone, nobody can bring it back. But the reason it has come to my mind is that there’s a little mill, a little steam roller mill in Cookstown and I used to get their flour. A lot of people did and the mill packed it in about two years ago and…..
164.MM: Is this Cookstown up North is it?

165.MA: No Cookstown near Macroom. Any of the brown flour you had to mix it half and half with white to rise but this brown flour would rise with almost no white flour in it. And I keep wondering whether it’s the flour stoned milled in the 19th century, it would have been damper because they wouldn’t have the drying. I was thinking that the grain was softer and goes flatter and it might have risen better than it does now. The stoned flour, the dried wheat, stone ground won’t rise on its own. Well if you were making bread out of stoned ground flour as you would have done in say 1860 and you would have bread soda which you know…..How does the loaf turn out? (laugh). I’ll never know will I? But I would like to get hold of the steel roller mill people but I might too, yet! I might be able to get access to it.

166.MM: How did the cookery school start?

167.MA: Well that started from the same queue: Darina and I were doing this first three month course. Mainly the reason we put it on, we put it on in January, we had extra rooms that were going to be empty till Easter and my youngest daughter decided she wanted to learn how to cook and we’d gone round schools in London and they were very expensive and they couldn’t take her, they were full up and all this, and we said ‘so what, we’ll do it ourselves’ and we put on a three month course and we’d do the whole sort of repertoire of cooking from the very basics to as far as we’d go. So we did that and then Darina said I’d love to have a school and I said do. I used to put on courses in the winter time. That would have been about 1982 or 1981.

168.MM: Which daughter is this?

169.MA: My youngest daughter. She ran the Crawford Gallery then for a bit in Cork. She’s got a family now, small children.

170.MM: But Wendy had been cooking for….?

171.MA: Wendy had been cooking, she never did afterwards, mind you (laugh).

172.MM: Did she not, no?

173.MA: No (laugh). Well she looked after the dining room actually cause I could cook you see and it just took the two of us. She was in the front and I was in the back (laugh).

174.MM: How long was she in the Russell?

175.MA: About a year I would think, in the kitchen, only in the kitchen.

176.MM: And she looks after the shop now I believe.

177.MA: She does. It’s her shop. From very soon after we opened she was in a little house in the garden and it had a glass door looking out and she had a shop there. She realised that it was good. It was great for people staying, somewhere for them to go in the evening time, wander down and look. They love it and so she’s always in the shop.

178.MM: I’m thinking now about sort the changes in food. Okay we’re in 2003 now and say things started with yourself in 1967 and through the ’70s. In the last 30 years or so what do you think are the significant milestones? Who do you feel have made a significant impact, maybe starting with the 70s, is there anyone in particular in the ‘70s?

179.MA: Well there was no doubt that in the early days, The Russell and Jammet’s had wonderful influence on food. I mean they were very, very good. It was different to what they are doing now, but they were very good and they had this wonderful lot of waiters. I mean Dublin, I think was
one lot of Jammet’s or the Jammet’s waiters still left and there in a little fish restaurant in
Ballsbridge next to Roly’s.

180. MY: Oh the Lobster Pot?

181. MA: The Lobster Pot. Now those are the last I’ve seen of the Dublin waiters, and they are
wonderful, impeccable really. They’re wonderful. They were all trained as people in Jammet’s,
the Russell and probably the Hibernian as well. They were marvellous; Dublin was blessed with
them for all these years. The influence on food has gone down through the country through
Declan Ryan in Arbutus, through ourselves and if you think of all the people Declan has put
through, all his commis going through and you see the thing about it is now, things are different
because there’s such an interest in food and people travel so much and they read so much. I mean
those early days there wasn’t the experience or the education or the know-how coming into the
country at all. I mean there was Elizabeth David who opened up Mediterranean food for the UK
and I suppose she had some influence here as well. Well I suppose she was educating the
consumer more than the restaurant. The restaurants were firmly held in the sort of grip of the
French system of cooking, the Escoffier sort of teaching, still. I don’t suppose it’s so strong now,
it can’t be at all now.

182. MM: Well it’s changing but you still see quite a bit of it you know.

183. MA: But I had great respect for French classical cooking because it was wonderful. If you get
a French chef into the kitchen he’s always good.

184. MM: But most of the menus were the same back then, wherever you went?

185. MA: Yeah, they would have been very much and you would get, going down through the
country, you’d get vegetables, they were destroyed, you know, with the cooking (laugh).

186. MM: Yeah, totally overcooked.

187. MA: Yeah you’d get wonderful quality meat, certainly would be well cooked (laugh). Very
basic, brilliant food, wonderful food everywhere. Raw materials…..

188. MM: Raw materials but totally overcooked (laugh). Cooked to death!

189. MA: The beef might not be very well hung all right (laugh), it could be tough.

190. MM: I was looking at in the early 70s, there was the likes of Ballylickey mentioned, there was
Newport House up around Mayo and there was the Cashel Palace, I think was mentioned as well
or maybe that was later on. There was only really a handful, like Arbutus Lodge really was you
know, Declan Ryan and his brother Michael, they did wonderful work didn’t they?

191. MA: They did. And Declan in my opinion, and I have said it to them myself Declan was the
best, a terribly fine cook, he was a wonderful bread man. I was always telling them, ‘Declan, you
stay in the kitchen and put Michael in the dining room because Michael is very affable, great fun,
very nice’. Declan’s a brilliant cook and they swapped roles and it was a pity but anyway.
Michael made a great job with Isaacs. Ian and Cannice Sharkey used to work with him.

192. MM: Do you remember places like Snaffles and the Soup Bowl, and places like that in Dublin?

193. MA: I do. I don’t think I ever went to the Soup Bowl. I think I might have done once all right,
one night, which was fine you know. Snaffles was good. It was unusual you see. It was great.
Snaffles and Heidle Mac Neice in Kinsale, they were all the start of the trendy little restaurants,
with lots of atmosphere, lots of buzz, young people coming in and something different. Different
sort of food, they were great, they were real trend setters.
What followed those, were there any others that sort of made it followed those?

Well no, I don’t think followed them so much as developed what they were doing really, and who came next? I don’t know who came next. It kind of died down after that, L’Ecrivain I don’t, that’s not going so long you see. John Howard…..

John Howard Le Coq Hardi?

Yes he was the person that followed on. Then there was a few others like the Dubliner, the Grey Door, none of those were the same.

There was a fellow now, Rolland had a place out in, I think it was Pierre Rolland’s son, had a place out in Dalkey and then the Guinea Pig was out in Dalkey as well, Mervyn.

Yeah, no didn’t ever go. But then there was the man, the chef in Roly’s, what’s his name? Colin O’Daly. He was the next one to come in and he was very good. It was such a pity when he changed, it’s awfully dangerous you know, moving restaurant. You go into a restaurant and make a name, that’s what they’re coming for. You move it, nothing is right.

The same thing nearly happened to Michael Clifford in Cork?

It did happen to him badly and I think unfortunately Kevin Thornton, is the same trouble now.

Last Monday week, he was voted 25th best restaurant in the world by a poll which is interesting, you know.

Oh my God, he needs that. He needs an injection of money or something. You see I think that’s the think, a really good chef is really an artist and he’s not a businessman. The really good businessman is never a good chef (laugh) because he’s watching the margins. He knows when to stop pouring the ingredients (laugh).

Do you remember The Mirabeau at all or Sean Kinsella?

I do indeed yes.

Did you ever out there?

I did, I ate in The Mirabeau. It was great. It was very stylish and quite good food. It was good fun. He did things slightly differently you know, which was great.

He was flamboyant I believe or…..?

Well I was never in the set that was really taking the roof off (laugh). We were quieter people coming up from the country, interested in food, we weren’t really throwing ourselves around (laugh) too much. He was nice. I tell you why he was a great chap. When I got my Michelin star he was one of the first to write and congratulate me.

Ah, that was nice.

I thought a lot of that. So you know he was a real person. But again he couldn’t cope with the finances. And the same, poor Michael Clifford was the same, you know. It was that, they’re really concentrating on food. They should have somebody else that looks after the money and just tell them what to do.
Discussion about Colin O’Daly

212.MM: I’m thinking about other people, the funny thing is that there is not all that many people who go the long road, who’ve been there, consistently over any long period of time. I’m thinking say Aidan McManus now in the King Sitric has been there for quite a while. Mervyn Stewart is still there. Ernie Evans then….

213.MA: Poor Ernie, yes.

214.MM: Did you know Ernie?

215.MA: I did yeah. I never thought Ernie was that good actually but he was a tremendous host. I mean that was a great place to go to Glenbeigh, the hotel. He was just great fun and the food was good enough. Oh yes I have stayed Glenbeigh, I have been their. I always, I don’t know if I ever stayed with his mother. I was always to stay with his mother to see what she did and her little was quieter. In many ways it suited me a little better. It wasn’t mobbed with a big Chelsea crowd with lots of drink it would have been more comfortable really. Just seeing what she was doing and I never really saw what she was doing. It’s a great pity I didn’t. One thing, in a different place, I in fact I went over with Kevin Thornton, I do believe it was, perhaps it wasn’t, I also had been with Kevin Thornton but I used to go over to the Bocuse d’Or competitions as a judge and we’d be there for a few nights and we’d go out around and the Mère Brazier Restaurant it’s still there, you know the famous woman chef and I went there and it was absolutely extraordinary, it was like going into a museum. They had the same dishes on and they were flat, they weren’t exciting, and the whole thing was sort of *passe* you could call it, it was gone, it was another era. I wondered whether it was that we’d all moved on and you know like you go into your old, old aunt’s home or your grandparent’s home and it’s…..

216.MM: You look at the décor and you go….How could you have hung those curtains (laugh) or whatever?

217.MA: Exactly, yeah!... Whether it was that or whether it was that they hadn’t got the quality of ingredients that she used to cook with, I didn’t know. I remember being puzzled about it.

218.MM: So maybe based on that our expectations have risen?

219.MA: Yes, eating in a different way, the food that was for eating in a different way.

220.MM: Yeah, so that the old times aren’t always the best necessarily as such. Maybe a lot of it is rose tinted glasses?

221.MA: Some of it anyway. Some of it I’m afraid.

222.MM: And how often did you go to Lyon for that competition?

223.MA: I went about three or four times but I didn’t really enjoy doing it in the end and I kind of got out of it (laugh).

Discussion on who represented Ireland at Bocuse d’Or competition in Lyon over the years which included Colin O’ Daly, Kevin Thornton, Neil Mac Fadden, Eugene Mc Sweeney, Nevin Maguire.

224.MM: What do you think of those sort of competitions or had you, were you involved with sort of any other sort of competitions or judging.

225.MA: Well I used to go to them. Well I’m always completely different to what other judges think (laugh). I never tally with what they say because I’m always looking for quality in the
particular food rather, well I don’t know but I usually am for whatever reason. What do I think about them? Well I suppose, well you do see, I mean you see all sorts of innovation which is good fun to know and all that and the skills are great, you know, what they can do with food and how they can present it. It’s great. I don’t think it would ever make probably good restaurant (food) because it’s too time consuming, but so what, you know. It’s great to do it once, to have the ability. It is an art form and it’s well worth looking at you know. Both I found the whole thing eventually, I was getting older then, I was getting into my 70s and all the standing and I had arthritis in both knees as well and that didn’t help and all the tasting got too much.

226. MM: When did you see, I’m thinking about sort of the beginning of the 90’s and such and sort of a big movement towards celebrating Ireland as a food country, you know what I mean.

227. MA: Oh yeah, the Irish food. The trouble was I started a Paris restaurant too soon. It was before the time. They would have done very well now and they might have seen the point of it now.

228. MM: But the Paris restaurant, was it backed, did CTT, did they back it?

229. MA: No, not particularly. The only people that backed it were FPD.

230. MM: But then they were backing but you were paying them back as such (laugh).

231. MA: Yeah, they were the hard men you know, really. Well I wasn’t even paying back, they were generous enough actually I should say that. But it was, the money just was not coming in, you know. Not as it should do, and we had a lot of trouble. You see the trouble with that restaurant, the lease was running out, it was a wonderful situation and it was a very good buy but then when you were in, you discovered why. The lease was running out, nearly gone and eventually it ran out and they didn’t renew it because the building was owned by the mother-in-law I think of the man that lived in the flat above the restaurant, he didn’t want a restaurant there and he fought and tried to get us out as only a French man can fight. And he did the most extraordinary things: I mean he complained about us to everybody. He complained about us to the health authority, the bar authorities. He complained we were making too much noise at night. You name it, he did it. He was always having the police around for something or other we were supposed to be doing wrong and my son-in-law was there a lot of the time. He’s great and he had very good French and he’d have them all in drinking Irish coffees and things like that. We laid the tables outside on the pavement for lunch. He’d lean out his windows and he’d throw crumbs on the table. Before we knew where we were we’d have a half a dozen pigeons messing the cloths (laugh). And one day we were all here in Ballymaloe and we had a girl there and she was managing. She’s French. She rang up in a state and she said a whole lot of mice had fallen through the ceiling in the middle of the lunch service (laugh). And the whole lot ran out screaming (laugh). I don’t know he got them in and dropped them into the restaurant. I mean that’s French, French people are extraordinary. I mean it’s very funny what they’ll do.

232. I was working in the kitchen here and I had the French pastry chef who had come to work with me and he was good and he was proud of himself but he was making puff pastry and I knew it wasn’t going to rise. I could see what he was doing. I knew there was no hope so I very quietly went round and made another batch of puff pastry and made the vol-au-vent or whatever it was that I wanted and put it in the oven and went off and said nothing, let him do his too. I didn’t want that, I mean it definitely wasn’t going to work and I wasn’t having to go into the dining room with that. So anyway after a while Darina comes round, she was in the kitchen some times. ‘Who turned this oven off’ she said. ‘Cause I knew who turned it (laugh). Just typical French. It’s great (laugh). It’s like, you see that in the paper today, Chirac send Tony Blair a case of wine worth £1,000 and said ‘you are friend’. Yesterday was Tony Blair’s birthday.

233. MM: His 50th birthday, that’s right.
And he got a case of wine from Chirac and it’s just like that in the Euro-Toques. I had a terrible row over, there was a man, a French chef and he was abominable in a meeting and I had this pretty powerful, I had just been resigned as President and I had power, I still have it if I wanted it but I keep out of it and I was shocked and I wrote to the head of the French Euro-Toques and I said he must resign or apologise and I put it very strongly. The next time there was a meeting he was there. What did he do, he came up and kissed me (laugh).

(Laugh). The best way of disarming you!

Oh, they’re something else!

How long did you spend with Euro Toque?

Oh I’ve been in it and still in it. You see I started it here in 1986.

And what do you think you’ve achieved with it?

We haven’t achieved as much as we would have hoped to have achieved, definitely, but because we were fighting the food laws. But the only thing is you know, constant dripping wears away the stone, we’re now beginning between us all it’s, again between the constant resolutions going up and the constant demands that we’d be making, Europe and also we know that other people, we’ve seen laterally, it was just, at first we didn’t know how to tackle the whole thing.

It was started because this man living in Brussels could see what they were doing to the animals, the hormones; you know all the terrible things. It was not producing good food, because you can’t have top level cooking unless you have top level food and we were lobbing, lobbing as best we could, but not directly, for better quality food all the time and now and since then I’m still in it. The Euro Toque is still going ahead in for instance in Wicklow doing wonderful things, David Byrne. We had him over and they had all, the Dublin Euro Toque members had got all the small producers from all over the country, they had the most fantastic spread and we had, they had a sort of conference before and they had influenced, David Byrne. By now, we’re not the only people because Slow Food has started up since and their doing a bit in a different way and I know the producers, there now is a network because now, a consumer, like you were saying, ‘use local food in Ireland, there is a consumer movement. I don’t mean an organised consumer movement.

But a trend as such or a……?

A trend coming in and they’re beginning to bend and they have a new, I’ve asked them to send to it to me. They have a new sort thing out that now, that there’s a sort of theory that they’re going to work towards that food is produced in a traditional way, that has always been safe, should not be subjected to the new legislation, and that the artisans be relieved and kept there, which is right but that is now coming from the Food Safety Authority in Europe. You see they were tremendously manipulated by, and still are, by multinationals. And this was closing down all the butchers with the multi-nationals, absolutely. I know it is because I’ve heard the same argument coming from a lot of meat factories here and then you go to somebody in Europe and they say oh they tell me in the parliament and they tell you exactly the same thing as somebody in the meat factory would tell you. So I know that. It’s very slowly in all these years had a big effect, I think. One of the influences only.

I remember around two years ago there was the launch of the Bridgestone Guide above in Dublin in the Ely Restaurant but I remember you were talking about a local mill or bakery that had just shut down because one more legislation was the straw that broke the camel.

I was talking about that.
246. MM: You were talking about it you know. I meant to write to you at the time or the whole thing, I’d been watching Duncan Stewart in that ‘Our House’ and he was in an old house and there was a grant available for a couple who had bought this old house. There was a grant available to put the new roof on it because it was a historical, like because the house was no more than a 120 years old and it was in Dublin. But there was a grant available for that. Now surely because it was to do with heritage, then surely our food is as much a part of heritage? Is heritage only bricks and mortar? It’s terrible you know.

247. MA: It is terrible actually because like we were saying, about the flowers like there’s no way you’ll ever know. Food above all things!

248. MM: I see there are some people who are keeping seed banks (the seed savers) and there holding onto these things, once they’re gone, once they’re mutated or whatever they’re gone for ever. So fair play to people who do that sort of work you know.

249. MA: It’s illegal. This is the EU again, and this is the power people like, you know the big cloth people in America – Monsanto. They’re (The Seed Savers) not allowed to sell them. You can’t buy them from them. And you can join the organisation. They don’t charge enough. I suppose they need their members, as many as possible but it’s absolutely wrong. I mean it’s dangerous for the planet.

250. MM: I was going to ask have you seen much of a change or what do you think of the quality of student? Are people getting involved in restaurants now or kitchen, but then most of the people you would experience would come mostly through the school wouldn’t they?

251. MA: We always get them from Cathal Brugha Street. Every year we have somebody, you know. We sometimes have a lot of Australians through a hotel school and we have two Tunisians that did a hotel school in Tunis.

252. MM: Very good.

253. MA: (Start of tape 2) Clean up, you know how to cope with the electricity when it goes wrong. That’s what it’s all about.

254. MM: That you need to be multi…..

255. MA: The waste, I do think the waste and the environment problems at the moment should be something thought about. Maybe it is. (Laugh). I think, God knows what’s going to happen to me. I went into the kitchen the other day and I’d forgotten something. I knew that the Health Inspector had been there and I’d forgotten something. I knew that the Health Inspector had been there and I vowed I’d keep away from it. Not responsible. But anyway I came head on in front of her and I just asked her who she was and she told me and I said ‘is that a plastic uniform you’ve got on’. She said ‘yes’. ‘But what do you do with it when you’re finished?’ ‘Oh’ she said ‘we throw it away’. ‘Do you mean to say you’re adding more plastic to the waste’. I thought (laugh) you shouldn’t do that. So they’ll take it out on me. (Laugh). I couldn’t help it, I’ve suffered so much at their hands.

256. MM: When did you, you know that’s another very interesting thing, the legislation, when did you start to notice Health Inspectors?

257. MA: Well I had them in first day. Well, you had to make sure. Well you had to have one in, to get your wine licence and yeah they were grand, they said just don’t keep anything on the floor. You know lift everything up and that was fine, no problem. When I had the new kitchen I notified them again, to make sure that everything was spot on, as what they’d want. It was fine and then we ran into trouble because we always used well water in the house. The whole area came to a stage where the wells were being polluted and we got a sickness in the house and I was out of my mind!! I suppose I did it wrong. I said to the doctor, ‘oh for goodness sake, just tell them will
you, ever would the Health Inspector come out to me and see what’s wrong’. And that man did not stop until he had me in court, and that was really awful. He was out to get me.

258.MM: You had invited him as such.

259.MA: Yeah and he came and he had me. You know it’s like asking. The mouse asking the cat to come in (laugh) to share the settee! (laugh)

260.MM: When was that?

261.MA: I suppose it was some time in the ‘80s. So I’ve had a great respect and disregard for them ever since. Em, one shouldn’t, but if you have an experience like that…..

262.MM: Yeah, yeah. And what was forced? Did you have to change like, did you have to invest in different, separate refrigeration or what was that?

263.MA: Well we do all that all the time. We do what they ask us to do.

264.MM: What were the big changes you had to make?

265.MA: Because of that. Oh he was determined, I mean a funny thing, I mean you’d have the kitchen really clean but he’d find something. He’d always find something and he just was horrible. The funny thing was if I wasn’t there everything was all right so this particular day I wasn’t there. My son-in-law was there and showed him around. He gave him a clean bill of health. Next time he came and everything was spotlessly clean but a bag of fish had arrived and somebody pulled it across the kitchen floor and that was the only thing, the streak on the floor. Nothing else, everything else was perfect and he just laid into me at that stage and then I got the summons and that was it really you know. He was just out to get me if he could and he always can.

266.MM: He had the power and he wanted to show you?

267.MA: When it went to the court, the judge was looking at it and he said ‘oh’ he said ‘yes, and the previous one she was perfectly clear, there was nothing wrong, the kitchen was perfect and at that’, ‘fine her five shillings or five pounds’. It was nothing. Just five pound (laugh). And that Judge on New Years Eve he would come and end up in my kitchen at about three or four o’clock in the morning you know (laugh) and have a glass of champagne and looking for something to eat (laugh).

268.MM: That’s good. The other things that have changed over the years but then hasn’t changed as dramatically since you were involved was the likes of the sort of the gas, Aga’s like?

269.MA: Well the Aga’s didn’t last long. That was a disaster! (laugh).

270.MM: When you started off first running the family home, was a solid fuel cooker?

271.MA: It was an Aga, yeah. We started off with that but we then got an ancillary one very quickly and then we had to take everything out.

272.MM: So it was gas after that?

273.MA: Gas.

274.MM: No, because I’ve been talking to one lad, he was in the Dolphin (Hotel) during the war and he says that the coal was short and that it was turf that they were using time. He said that
sometimes he’d be going out as a commis chef and he’d be chopping logs out the back to feed the stove (laugh) and that sort of stuff.

275.MA: That’s right. And it would be soaking wet, the turf. No, we were always on gas and the Aga in the home.

276.MM: I’m trying to think what other things there are. Is there anyone who has really impressed you in Ireland food wise over the years?

277.MA: Well of course the old chefs, I was very impressed by them when I was young, Rolland and the one that was in Jammet’s. Let me think now, John Howard I have a great respect for, I must say and Patrick Guilbaud’s restaurant I had great respect for.

278.MM: Guillaume

279.MA: Yeah, the ones that are getting the top accolades are very, very good, all of them.

280.MM: Yeah. What do you think of the standard of food in the country generally?

281.MA: I think it’s come on in leaps and bounds. I mean you can get a really good meal. The funny thing is I had family that came home to me after being in England for a few, a week or something. Oh they couldn’t get back to Irish food, the food in England was desperate.

282.MM: So we’re getting places as they say?

283.MA: I think we are, yeah and I think we’ll hold on to a certain standard. Hopefully we’ll be able to hold on. But the only trouble is they’ll have to actively regard food as a culture that’s worth keeping because I mean the people that are producing the really good food and I’m at the moment actually getting out a book listing the ones in Cork and their doing it because they just passionately believe in it. There not doing it for, their doing it for peanuts, their doing it because can do it, they know it marvellously good and some of the cheese makers are doing very well fortunately, because the vegetable growers are sort of pathetic you know. Organic, beautiful organic vegetables and the farmer’s markets are great saving to them because they’re getting proper prices for them. And people won’t pay the price for food and they’ll never pay the price for food and they reason nobody want them to, I mean the Farmer’s Journal came out with in 19….., it’s quite a long time ago like in the ‘50s or ‘60s, 70% of the industrial wage was spent on food and at the moment something like 30%. Now, okay supposing you weren’t going for good food, supposing everybody was going to spend 70% of their wages on food, okay, nobody can buy cars, nobody can go on holidays. To begin with they won’t want to, secondly the whole economy is simply is going to go sideways. I mean it’s built in. The only thing that always amazes me is the way actually petrol can go up. Petrol goes up and before you know where you are it’s absorbed into the system. It goes up and that does seem to get absorbed into the system.

Food would have to go up very slowly and should go up. There’s no intention of it really except this consumer swing back to more natural foods. I mean to read the Farmer’s Journal they’re only thinking of getting it cheaper and cheaper.

284.MM: Is there any foods that you don’t seem much of now-a-days that you know were common or that you enjoyed or…..?

285.MA: I suppose, I must think what they were. Well, take fish. There was a little man in Cork and he had a business which was for exporting bass, bream, and salmon. He’s gone. It’s terrible. They’ll come to their senses and try and save it and save the fish before it’s too late and it’ll upset the whole ecology of the sea and everything. It’s dreadful what they’re allowed…..
Discussion on Mark Kurlansky’s books *Cod* and *Salt*.

286. **MM:** Did you hear, there used to be stories in the war, people coming over to Jammet’s, like American Generals and stuff coming over to Jammet’s to eat or…..?

287. **MA:** The whole of England came over to eat steaks here. They did, England, not Americans, English. The big thing was to come over to Ireland for weekends and they were just going mad for steaks. There was no steaks served in England, you see, during the war. I mean it was rationed. They had enough in one sense but they were very short, they couldn’t eat what they wanted. And then you see they were very hungry through the ‘50s. So it was like ’43 it started, was it, ’39 it started, ’45 it finished and it was then shortages of food went right on through the ‘50s. Worse than during the war, they say, in England.

288. **MM:** Because the whole system had changed. The women had taken over (laugh). They had to!

289. **MA:** But during the war years, yeah and then the fellows came home and a terrible upheaval really.

290. **MM:** It’s interesting all right. But anyway it augured well for yourselves here because there was plenty, there was after the economic war, there was great markets to be had? It was a blessing in disguise in a way.

291. **MA:** It was a blessing in disguise, it didn’t last though!

292. **MM:** The Economic War went on for about seven years, didn’t it?

293. **MA:** It did (the Economic War). It was for almost the ‘30s. I don’t know what year De Valera was elected. I remember the elections actually and of course my family would have been Fine Gael you see and De Valera got in and it was terrible. When DeValera got in it wasn’t particularly terrible (laugh). I noticed things to be just the same (laugh). As far as a child was concerned, as to what was going to happen (laugh).

294. **MM:** And how about Ivan’s family, were they Fianna Fail or were they Fine Gael?

295. **MA:** No they would have been Fine Gael. Look, if you were Fianna Fáil in those days you didn’t mix with Fine Gael. We started *Macra Na Feirme* in the village, my husband and I don’t know who started it from out there. I remember Ivan being asked to go out to a meeting, this business started up and they got quite strong and then we women joined in and but it was said that there were families in Shanagarry that never spoke to each other, since the Civil War until the young people joined in *Macra Na Feirme* and met each other again. All living farmers, not in the village but you know in the area.

296. **MM:** I’d heard that said about the GAA before that you had brought because people came in to play in match, people who would have fought on separate sides and that it was the game that brought them together again because they would have never…..So *Macra* had the same effect.

297. **MA:** *Macra* had the same effect, yeah.

298. **MM:** Now the Irish Country Women’s Association was already there or…..

299. **MA:** No it was only started in ‘40s.

300. **MM:** Oh right, okay. So that was part of *Macra na Feirme* then was it?
115

301. **MA:** No, no. It was quite separate. No the Irish Country Women’s Association, Country Markets’s was started in the ‘40s. I don’t know when the Irish Country Women’s Association, it may have been earlier.

302. **MM:** Actually there is a book on it. There’s a book, I just noticed recently on it and I must actually get it and have a look at it.

303. **MA:** You know people were very idealistic, at the, coming up to the trouble times, and immediately after it and it was dreadful that it all exploded into a Civil War. But because there was so many people of every class and creed, that were full of plans for Ireland you know.

304. **MM:** Yeah. There was the whole revolution, like the sort of Artistic Revolution you know what I mean. The language and the sport and the art and everything…..Everything was blossoming. And theatre and everything, yeah, yeah.

305. **MA:** Everything, suddenly Ireland was taking a new life.

306. **MM:** And it was all wiped out in the Civil War.

307. **MA:** It was wiped out, a lot of it and a lot of people disillusioned. Not completely everybody but I think the Irish Country Women’s Association, I don’t know if it was started as far as back as that or whether it was later, I just don’t know. But I know country markets was started about the ‘40s.

308. **MM:** What was the philosophy behind the country markets?

309. **MA:** Oh it was particularly one person, Gonne was her name, I can’t think of what her Christian name was. I used to know her as Ms. Gonne and she was in the Irish Country Women and the whole idea was that you and I’m sure that you would have these groups of or you had already the groups of Irish Country Women and that they would be able to sell their stock. I mean it could have happened in the ‘30s and that they would have a little market where they could bring their cakes and their eggs and their garden produce and their sweet peas or whatever they had, and they would have a little place where they could sell it. A very good idea! It’s a pity, I think they made a mistake of having it always indoors. The farmer’s markets are outdoors and even though they got drowned last Saturday all right, but if they’re outdoors they’re seen but on the other hand country markets are stuffed, their stuff goes in the twinkling of an eye. You could sell it all right.

310. **MM:** They were very strong then, there was always this sort of country fair, the competition then between the best cake and the jams?

311. **MA:** Well that was very much Macra na Feirme. They had the competitions. I don’t know if the Country Women did or not.

312. **MM:** And that was set up or Macra na Feirme had those competitions, would it be once a year or would it be…..

313. **MA:** In the summer time. There was in those days, they’d be a group in Shanagarry and there be was one in Cloyne, they’d be one up here in Dungourney, all around the little villages, all around Cork and they’d each have their field day and they’d each have their competitions and then in Lent each one of them be putting on a play and what else did they do throughout the year. They were very good to teach people how to speak in public, they had all sort of public speaking and debates and things like that.

314. **MM:** So really they were an integral part of the community and the social side of the community?
315. **MA:** They were. And I notice now the young farmers, even still I notice they come across as being very well able to speak, very well able to express themselves.

316. **MM:** The Allen family are Quakers? Were you a Quaker?

317. **MA:** I wasn’t. No I wasn’t when I got married. I became a Quaker after a bit.

318. **MM:** Did that, excuse my ignorance, do Quakers drink?

319. **MA:** Well a lot of them don’t and most of them would never drink to excess. Most unlikely, but most of them now-a-days would have a glass of wine. But they would, all of them, if you had a bunch of Quakers in the pub, supposing you had four Quakers there definitely would be one or two that wouldn’t touch, they wouldn’t have anything. They’d be one who’d have a glass of wine and in moderation. They drink in moderation.

320. **MM:** And do you, I’m trying to remember the philosophy. Is there quite a strong work ethic isn’t there within the Quaker....

321. **MA:** Not really so much. You see what actually happened they weren’t allowed to go university originally and so the bright ones started businesses and the businesses did very well and they had direct, their ethics were that you had to be fair, and you had to state what you thought your goods were worth. You asked for that price and that was the big thing in the early 18th Century, you know. You never asked for more than you thought it was worth and you very carefully managed your business and if you went into debt, if you went bankrupt, you had to leave the society. You must not go bankrupt. You had to mind your business.

322. **MM:** And yet not be greedy as such, only charge what was.....?

323. **MA:** Charge what was..... That you were supposed to have your solid business, what you were doing, you were serving the community, you were doing it honestly and that meant you had to look after it pretty well (laugh).

324. **MM:** You know I actually remember, was it the likes of Maguire and Patterson and Guinness’s would have followed the same tradition I think. Maguire and Patterson’s were the whole idea of this sort of what we call human resource management and all that sort of sprung from that Quaker movement.

325. **MA:** It could have been because I think Guinness’s were not, they were Church of Ireland.

326. **MM:** Yeah, but it was the Maguire and Patterson’s who started off first and they had, I think they were Quakers but they had a welfare officer but they really looked after their staff as such. They had this sort of, they felt nearly responsible for their staff or they felt sort of a family sort of thing which was good. No I worked with.....

327. **MA:** Guinness’s did too.

328. **MM:** Guinness’s yeah, Guinness’s were very good that way as well. Very, very good and again had the swimming pool and everything you know the doctor and the whole lot yeah.

I worked with an old pal of yours around ten years ago, Dick Fletcher.

329. **MA:** Oh did you?

330. **MM:** In, on the Galley in New Ross.

331. **MA:** Yeah, yeah.
MM: So I used to make your brown bread (laugh). It was the Galley brown bread (treacle bread) but it was the Ballymaloe brown bread. But I saw then in your book, I noticed I was looking at your book yesterday in the library and you had said it had come from an American recipe was it or…?

MA: No, no that was a slight adaptation of, it was an English woman actually that first published that recipe way back during the war and I had a neighbour in Shanagarry and she brought down this loaf of bread to us to try. She’d seen it and made it. We thought it was lovely you know, we’d never tasted anything so nice and we all started making it.

MM: Everywhere I’ve gone since I’ve made it and I’ve made sure that the students, every student I have makes it. One tin of treacle, three-and-a-half pounds of wholemeal flour, a dessertspoon of salt and two pints of tepid water and an ounce each of fresh yeast or else half an ounce of….

MA: You know exactly what’s in it (laugh).

MM: And the trouble is I used to make it in batches of four so if someone asked me ‘what’s it for one loaf?’, ‘ah here, just divide it down yourself’ I say (laugh). But it’s beautiful!

MA: That’s extraordinary. (laughing) Well she lived to be a very old woman. She was a food nut, if you like and I think she’s still alive somewhere in the North of Scotland. She’s well into her 90s. She must be 100 now.

MM: It’s great to see how recipes move along.

MA: Yes it’s very funny where recipes go. I mean I would say like recipes, cooking is like talking, you listen to what somebody says and it kind of goes in and then you start saying it yourself, it’s like that with cooking.

MM: But even I think as you were saying about Elisabeth David, that really you had to understand what she was talking, she’s so passionate about what she was talking about you had to some idea to pick up on what exactly she was saying (laugh). It wasn’t for the novice (laugh).

MA: I’ve been let down two or three times by following her too closely (laugh).

MM: Well I was reading there yesterday (laugh) throw a cup of flour in and the cooking (laugh). How did come about actually, that was 1977 and that was the cook book. How did that come about?

MA: I’ll tell you how it came about, I was doing the morning, I’d get the lunch, I’d go off where I was actually but just before you came in today, em, you rang me, I was down in the bog house, and I wasn’t with it because I was working very hard on something else and I wasn’t even thinking of what was going to happen after lunch and anyway I was going off to my retreat and I was passing the shop through car park and I saw three people looking through the window of the shop, and the shop was closed, and I could just see that they looked like slightly interesting people, not the usual run of the mill. So I just went up to them and I said you know, are you wanting to get in or something, are you alright and they said we really came down for lunch but we know it’s too late and I said ‘come in and we’ll look around and find you something’. I kind of felt it was the right thing to do so I turned back into the kitchen and sat them down in the dinning room and I got them something. Whatever we had and when they’d finished their lunch they decided they were going to cancel their flight and stay for the weekend and they actually were, the party consisted of an American man, I don’t know whether you knew him, he was the cartoonist in the Sunday Times and a Welsh couple, he was, he actually had a job in dock yards, administrating and she also had his own little publishing company, and she worked with him.
They were a couple, and anyway by the time they’d had their lunch they decided they’d stay the weekend. By the time they’d stayed the weekend they decided they’d come back for their summer holiday and by the time, just before they came to the end of their summer holidays they asked me if I’d do a book with them, and he would illustrate it, and they other man would publish it. We ran into a lot of trouble because the other man was very peculiar. He never published it. I had to actually in the end, it was there sitting there for years, like two years or more and in the end Paddy O’Keeffe said he’d publish it but I knew he couldn’t because I’d signed with the other man and I actually had to fly over and buy it back before it came out. I can’t remember the price – a few hundred.

He was just, they were very difficult to deal with right through. It’s full of mistakes because they, it’s still full mistakes, I’m meant to be editing it again and getting it straight but I don’t know how to get time to do it, I’m doing another book at the moment. It’s quite different. But I’d be writing something and I’d send it over. ‘Is this the way you want it?’ Because they wanted it laid out that way, the recipe is more or less on one side and the write-up the other side. ‘Is this the way you want it?’ They’d say ‘yes’ and they’d keep it and then they’d say we want the rest of it right away. And it was just one autumn and I spent the whole autumn sitting in the kitchen, writing, writing, writing and I used to send it off in such a high, without coming back and checking it myself, they’d let the mistakes go through and then they never published after that, after such a hurry it never came out and then I was staying with Mel Kavanagh in London and a letter came through the post one morning and oh yes, this man had rung, Mel was supposed to get an advanced payment and he rang and he said it had gone in the post. But it didn’t come, didn’t come. Suddenly a letter came, an envelope came and Mel opened it and there was no money in it. That was happening all the time. You couldn’t deal with them.

MM: And had they given you a down payment or..?

MA: No.

MM: And yet you had to buy the rights back?

MA: Yes.

MM: They had actually got you to sign something?

MA: They had gone to a little bit of expense all right in getting laid out. They had cost some expense.

MM: It shows you, forewarned is forearmed with these thing, you know what I mean. They can get complicated.

MA: Publishing is a jungle!

MM: So you’re working on something else at the moment?

MA: I’m only just working. It’s really a listing.

MM: Oh that’s what you were saying.

MA: I’ve a lot to do with a consumer group in Cork. I sort of partly started that. It’s called Free Choice Consumers and we meet once a month. It’s very interesting. We have it on a different subject every month. It’s nearly always food or related to food and we get the people in that are doing that sort of thing. We then get a good listing of all the people that are in, we have a shellfish people, people collecting shellfish in March and we now we have all the data on the shellfish.

MM: So this is all the edible shellfish around the country?
358. **MA:** Around Cork, only County Cork, just Cork, that’s enough I think, I couldn’t do anymore. I certainly couldn’t attempt to do anymore, I wouldn’t dream of doing it. I am doing it for Cork and for myself to keep the stuff coming in. It was very useful, what we find out is very useful to know.

359. **MM:** New contacts, new people.

360. **MA:** Yeah, it’s much bigger and more comprehensive and more time consuming than I thought it would be.

361. **MM:** I know yeah. These things always are (laugh).

362. **MA:** They always are (laugh). Well that’s it.

363. **MM:** That’s brilliant!

**End of Interview**
Edited Interview with Andy Whelan in Cathal Brugha Street (3/6/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Andy Whelan (AW)

1. MM: So tell us what year were you born.
2. AW: I was born in 1938 in Sandymount and I lived in Sandymount until I was twenty-eight years of age when I got married.
3. MM: What did you father do Andy?
4. AW: My father was a bread van driver. I was the youngest of eight children.
5. MM: Who did he work for, Johnston Mooneys was it?
6. AW: Kennedy's, Peter Kennedy's.
7. MM: Where were they?
8. AW: They were Parnell Street and they were in Ringsend, just behind the Greyhound Stadium now in Ringsend. They were a very big operation at the time, yeah. He had worked with them, ah, he was there during the Tans and all that sort of thing so they were a fairly big operation at the time. The other big ones were Bolands and Johnson Mooney’s, they were the three main ones. Subsidiary of Kennedys was the DBC which…
10. AW: Yeah they looked after the cakes and the pastry end of things you know. So they were small, mainly it was just bread he sold. He had a particular round. He went around Donnybrook and all that area you know. So all of us in turn, all the boys would go out and give him a hand delivering the bread, that sort of thing you know.
11. MM: And when would he have started off with sort of a motorised van as such because I’m sure that only came around mid 20s or 30s?
12. AW: He started off with the horse and cart and then he went from that to the electric van, it must have been around the mid 50s I think, around the early 50s or mid 50s and the disadvantage of that was when you were delivering the bread was that with a horse the horse moved with you whereas with the van you were slower because you had to get back into the van to move it on you see.
13. MM: (Laugh) the horse was on auto pilot (laugh).
14. AW: The horse was on auto pilot you see so it was better in that respect. So yeah I lived in Sandymount up until I was married and I started off in the local school, the Star of the Sea and then I went from there to the Christian Brothers in Westland Row and I left after doing my Inter Cert and I started here in the college in 1954. And at that time it was a very small college. There was only twelve of us in first year chefs and twelve in second year chefs and I think there was a household management course and a hotel management course as well. Very, very small.
15. MM: Did you come straight from Westland Row to here?
16. AW: Yes I did yeah.
17. MM: And was there an exam to do to come in?

18. AW: There was an exam to do and it was very basic. It was more or less of the, em, what would they call it at the time, the primary certificate. So I’d gone on to second level, I left after enter. So I came in here, I did the exam and I got a place in here.

19. MM: Was it a scholarship you got?

20. AW: Yeah it was a scholarship at the time. Now, very small. Oh I can’t remember the exact amount but it was a very, very small amount of money anyway. You did the two full years, you didn’t go out. You had a break in the summer and came back in and did second year and em, say the place was much smaller. The cafeteria is down where the office is now and the restaurant was up on the third floor. That was a restaurant as such. Oh you know, the day before you were in the restaurant you did you meal in class and then you went into the restaurant the next day. And you had a system, they tried to run it on the partie system which wasn’t too effective because the chef would take the order. He was the sous chef, he’d go around the different tables, put down the orders and then they’d do that and then they’d come in and pick it up and all that sort of thing. An antiquated kind of system. But they tried to base it on the partie system.

21. MM: And who was teaching there Andy at the time?

22. AW: Two guys, one fella was called Murphy, although he was French, the name Murphy, Beucaire Murphy and the other guys name was Andler, a Swiss guy, they were two chefs. Murphy left after the first year, after my first year here and he was replaced by Michael Ganly and then PJ Dunne came in as the larder chef. The larder was just outside kitchen 17 because there was no extension. That was just the end of the college and then…

23. MM: And he’d come from Jammets.

24. AW: He came from Jammets.

25. MM: And where did Michael come from?

26. AW: Michael Gamley came from the Moira Hotel.

27. MM: The Moira Hotel.

28. AW: Yes, yeah that’s where he came from. Now I never had him in class. I dealt with the Andler in the second year.

29. MM: The Moira was that Andrew Street?

30. AW: Trinity Street was it?

31. MM: Or Trinity Street that’s right yeah. It’s a car park now isn’t it.

32. AW: Yeah, that’s right. I think they were connected to Jurys somewhere.

33. MM: In College Green at the time wasn’t it.

34. AW: The Moira was a subsidiary of them. I think there was some connection between them. But I’d never, I used to see Mick around but I never had any contact with him and then at the end of the second year we did an equivalent to what would be a City and Guilds exam and then we were placed out in industry. And I went over to the Gresham and I hated it. I didn’t know how I was going to stick it because it was such a different culture altogether coming from here over to there which was totally unprepared for what you went into and again I was on the partie system
but there was huge amount of staff. To give you some idea, that I started off in the larder and in the larder there were five chefs and there were five commis and then you did your stint around. You did larder and then you went out to veg. Usually they’d start you on the vegetables but for some reason or other I started on the larder and then I went around the different corners. But a huge, huge staff you know. You’d often wonder was there too many staff at the time you know? But then when you break it down, like people on their days off, and all that sort of thing. Yeah it may have worked alright. At times there probably was but if you had the insight to say at the time, yes you could, you know you could streamline this sort of thing and you know make it easier. Perhaps we could have done but it was massive.

35. MM: Was Uhlemann the chef there at the time?

36. AW: Uhlemann was head chef and Michael McManus was the sous chef.

37. MM: And were they long, they mustn’t have been too long in the Gresham by the time you arrived or were they?

38. AW: Oh they were. Uhlemann originally was German obviously and he was captured in the First World War and he was imprisoned in Oldcastle…

39. MM: In County Meath yeah.

40. AW: And my mother was from County Cavan but the nearest town for shopping was Oldcastle, and he got to know that so we struck up a kind of a relationship, because he knew a lot about Oldcastle and all that sort of thing so he was…

41. MM: But he never went home then.

42. AW: Never went home, never went home, no. He went from there and he got, he went to what was known as the Regal Rooms you know where the, Hawkin House. There was a restaurant there and the funny thing about it was that when they converted into a cinema they still left the old format of a restaurant because the balcony was around here so if you were lucky enough not to get a seat in the main cinema you went up to the balcony. You’re viewing was restricted. Until that, like years later they knocked the whole thing and then they built a new cinema there but that was restaurant at the time and then he went from there. I think McManus joined him in the Regal Rooms and then he went from the Regal Rooms, he went to the Gresham and McManus came with him to the Gresham as well.

43. MM: It wasn’t part of the Theatre Royal was it?

44. AW: No.

45. MM: It was two separate cinemas around Hawkins Street.

46. AW: That was one cinema and the other one was the Regal Rooms. I think they were both owned by Odeon or Rank but they were two different cinemas altogether. The Royal was a different thing. The Royal was show the film and a sing along, you know that sort of thing. Good value for money you know.

47. MM: And was Uhlemann like, he was a trained chef and then he happened to be in the German army?

48. AW: I think so. At the time I joined now he was getting a bit older, you know and he had this high chair that he used to sit, I believed he suffered; he had a rupture you know. And ah, so he had a high chair he used to sit on that and he’d direct all operations from this high chair. He’d sit there and there was total silence in the kitchen when he came in. Like he arrived in the morning time,
he used to arrive that little bit later so there was a little banter going on first while and then once he arrived total silence.

49. **MM:** Yeah.

50. **AW:** And (laugh) he just got on with it except for a few wags that would get it up for him you know like. Throwing dishes here and there and unfortunately, like he wasn’t able to move so you’d wait for the shout and then it came but my God when he did shout you ran, you know. So he retired then after I don’t know how many years after that but McManus took over and he was a hard task master too. He was some man to work for.

51. **MM:** Where was he from, was he a Dub was he?

52. **AW:** McManus was from, no, was he a Dub? I have some idea that he came from up around Meath somewhere. I thought that now, I thought that now, I’m too sure. He definitely wasn’t from Dublin. Now I can’t remember where he was from but he was a hard task master but he was very good. Like he enjoyed a terrible lot of slagging over the years, people saying, you know, this and that. But I always being a hard task master but at the same time he worked very, very hard and he expected you to work just as hard with him, you know. But he had this terrible habit of, he did a dish and then he’d show you how to do it and then you did it the next day and he’d say ‘like where did you learn to do that’ and you’d say ‘you showed me chef’, ‘oh I never showed you that’ because he kept hopping and I think I inherited this thing of compromising and improvising with food when you’re when doing something. You do something different, you never do it the same so although you’d have a basic menu, a basic recipe there, you’d add your own little bit into it and I think that’s where I got that from you know I’d say. Something different put it in there. And he could never remember, I should have written it down at the time. He didn’t write it down but I think he was cute enough not to write it down simply because he would change it so often. But again as I say he got a lot of criticism but I thought he was brilliant like. Like the workload that he did in the day time and he had, his expertise was something like, like mostly sauces now. Mostly in the sauces but there was nothing that he couldn’t turn his hand to. Like when they were doing, when they were starting off sugar work first of all, like he started to learn how to do sugar, they started to do baskets, all this sort of thing. Nobody else was doing it at the time and he was doing it at that time. I know we were making loads of mistakes obviously at the time but he kept at it, kept at it, you know. Like one of the things he would do would be when he was doing the sugar, like he’d boil up the sugar of course and like glucose and all that sort of thing and onto a marble slab and then he’d pick it up with the scoop and then he’d roll it and then he’d throw it to you and you have to pull before your hands started to burn and the next guy, he got the sheen on it.

53. **MM:** Yeah, yeah.

54. **AW:** And then he had this old pattern thing that he had, big nails with the tops off them and he started weaving the sugar in and out to make the baskets. But he did it. Like he was afraid of nothing! He was afraid of nothing and he’d go, rather than going off in the afternoon he’d go over to his office and he’d start reading and he’d start reading and he’d read up ideas and come back with his ideas and try and introduce them again. You know we’d go along with that (laugh) but the same time he could be a devil on his day you know. Professionally he always had this idea that you wanted for parties, for functions, you always had to have plenty of food you know. Loads of food and ah, like we’d know ourselves there was too much there but you’d just have to have it and didn’t want to run short and so most of functions were done up in the ballroom. The old kitchen was, the old Gresham kitchen was you went down a slope and it was underground and then years later then they had, no sorry, at that time, even at that time the ballroom was on the first floor and it had its own kitchen. Its own kind of, not so much a kitchen…

55. **MM:** A sort of a servery or something like that?
56. **AW:** Yeah, yeah and hot plates and all that sort of thing. A hot press and all that sort of thing but when the function would be on, you know, some of the staff had to go up to do that and the rest were left downstairs and you thought say you the restaurant to look after, you’d have the grill room to look after and all this sort of thing and then the request would come down for more vegetables. You might be up to your eyes and say ‘ah’. It would probably be a young fella that would come ‘the chef wants more peas’. ‘Ah tell him feck off’. And unfortunately the young fella would go up and say (laugh).

57. **MM:** (Laugh).

58. **AW:** And you’d hear this running down the kitchen, you’d hear the run and scatter, scatter (laugh). And he’d just click his fingers, give it to me, give it to me and you’d have to get it somewhere. You went to all sorts. It was the best lesson you’d ever get for being able improvise, to get stuff in a hurry. To heat it, to give it up to them, you know. And then you’d see it all coming back and they’d say ‘ah we didn’t need it’ but they didn’t think that. You needed it then, you’d have to have there and that was it you know. But it was a good lesson, it was a good lesson, tremendous pressure, I mean. You know tremendous pressure you worked under the whole time and when I went there first I used to hate it. ‘I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him’ you know. Then you’d go off home every night dreaming how you’d kill the guy, you know. But then as you got to work with him then, you know, you knew his style and you knew what his standards were. He had very high standards, very, very high standards. If a dish wasn’t right, it didn’t go out and that was it. That was it, no way, that was left. Even streaks like, you know, there was a guy, we had a big old fashioned grill, charcoal grill and the orders were rolling in you know. But he always stood at the hotplate and he’d check it, check it and if it wasn’t right you’d have to start all over again. So you knew, you had to get it right first time but a great learning curve, you know.

59. **MM:** How many restaurants were in the Gresham? Like there was a grill room wasn’t there.

60. **AW:** You had a grill room, you had a restaurant and then you had private functions up on the first floor. You could have as many as, particularly for weddings around Easter time you’d have the small weddings. Now the big weddings in the ballroom, of course, The Aberdeen room and then the smaller ones were all held up the floor so you’d have the different function rooms up the floors for twenty, you know, all that sort of thing and Easter Monday was a big day because there were no weddings during Lent. So Easter Monday was the big day for weddings you know. You know you’d sell the menu, the different priced menus but they’d always be different somewhere along the road. They had a certain standard for certain one, like starter either a vol au vent mushrooms, something like that. Turkey and ham, you know, that type of thing. But when you got them all together it was very hard to keep track of them all as well as doing the grill room. The restaurant was easier because the restaurant mostly concentrated on *table d’hôte* menus so they had their own little hot press up there, a little servery up there and you supplied that in the evening times. So that was easy enough you know. This was the big one, the grill room was the big one where you had to, this was the, you know the main one really and then when you had dances and that sort of thing you had to have so many people on, looking after that function as well. The old Aberdeen ballroom could hold up to as many as, I think I remember 650 people at one time. You know that looks like a number.

61. **MM:** And at a dinner dance that would they all be fed?

62. **AW:** Oh yeah. And in some cases you’d have breakfast on departure.

63. **MM:** On departure, yeah, yeah.

64. **AW:** And not only did you serve, you held back then and then you started cooking the breakfast. Breakfast on departure then. So it was a long night you know!

65. **MM:** But again it was all silver service wasn’t it?
66. **AW:** Ah no, not really. It was after a while. Initially it was all plate service. It was plated and you’d put the rings on and put them in the hot press and heat it up that way but I believe before my time they used to have, they had to use the boiling water on them to heat them up that way you know. But in my time now…

67. **MM:** How did that operate?

68. **AW:** They just plated it up…Plated all up and then poured boiling water…In the heater oven, and hoped to God nobody got food poisoning (laugh). But at my time you carved it except it was steak or roast beef, then it was carved in the room. But mainly turkey and ham was all kind of, it was just plated and put on the ring, put on the plate, ringed and put in the oven and then when the service time would come like the soups were already downstairs and that was brought up at the last minute and then they served from that in big jugs and that sort of thing. And then soups were taken away and then the hot plates were all taken out and usually, I think vegetables were served separately. It would be served separately. So you’d just gravy on the plates and then you take them that way. Very, very, quick. Very, very, quick.

69. One very amusing story that, em, em, we used to have, sometimes you’d have consommé on the menu right. The idea was that you’d have the consommé in the big stock… Now the consommé was always made up in big, big stock pots so get all the mince, you get all the clarification and you put it in, you brought it up slowly up to the boil so that near service time then you just opened the taps at the end and into the muslin, the usual sort of thing, into the big pots and they were put on the range anyway and they were kept there and during the dance, the dancing, the band was Neil Kearns. That was his band at the time. So he was the signal for the soups that they were ready to serve, supper was they always played the *Pasa doble*.

70. **MM:** Right (laugh).

71. **AW:** So you knew then. Once you heard that it was time so anyway we had the consommés on the range and for some reason and I could never understand why but they always seemed to thicken the consommé slightly with arrowroot, just slightly. It was easier for pouring or something. But anyway the guy…

72. **MM:** Or it might hold the garnish or something there.

73. **AW:** I don’t know what it was but the guy anyway he mixed it up and he put bread soda right. So the signal came for the *Pasa doble*. Soups away, alright, so you have to take the soups down off the range and he carried them up the steps, one behind and one in front. Carrying them this way. Soups away. The guy put the, as he thought the arrow root in, was bread soda. Soup started to bubble and bubble and bubble and somehow he managed to get word to Neil Kearns that you know ‘give another go to the *Pasa doble*’. So he said ‘well did you like that?’ We’ll do it one more time.

74. **MM:** (Laugh).

75. **AW:** He looked at use and not yet because in the meantime they were doing all sort of tricks trying to get the consommé back. He said ’we have a request from that gentleman down there’, he wanted it again (laugh). He’d played the bloody thing four times at this stage (laugh). The sweat was pouring off the guys in the dance floor.

76. **MM:** (Laugh).

77. **AW:** When they were over the first course, nice hot consommé he loved it (laugh). Well that was fun. You know, there was no such thing as you’d look for volunteers at night time to do the dance you know but there was not such thing as, you never said no. ‘Will you do the dance? Will
you do late duty?’ ‘No’, ‘What?’ ‘Oh yes, I mean yes, I mean yes’. There was no such thing as volunteering. If you didn’t volunteer you were gone, that was it you know (laugh).

78. MM: If you sign me up I’ll volunteer (laugh).

79. AW: And even like, the threat was always there funny enough in those day because jobs were scarce, this was the 50s now, it’s a little bit different now. They’d say ‘we’ll run you out of here, and you won’t get a job anywhere else in the city of Dublin’, you know. You’re saying ‘oh God I have to do it’ and that was it and then occasionally like if you’d say I’d no transport and one of the fellas had a bicycle and he’d lend you the bicycle to get you back. But more often or not you kind of walked home. They were long days, long days but you kind of got used to them after a while. No days off of course.

80. MM: And was it a six day week or a seven day week? Like how did it work?

81. AW: Well you had a day off. You had a day off and you had an early day but more often or not you didn’t get it off.

82. MM: Oh right yeah (laugh).

83. AW: You know you said that ‘you’re in tomorrow’. You were told you were in tomorrow but ‘it’s my day off’. ‘What’ but if you came in on your day off you got off about 3 pm you know. Time off was very, if you wanted a day off you kind of booked it about a year in advance. (Laugh) if you got it you were lucky.

84. MM: How about holidays Andy, did you get holidays.

85. AW: Ah we got holidays. We got two weeks. Oh yeah you’d have them together but you had a draw for them. You wouldn’t always get them when you wanted. You just got them when you could get them. Usually you find yourself going into October maybe for summer holidays that sort of thing. No holidays for showing, no holidays for Spring show. Nobody off. Anytime there was big functions on forget about it. You know that was it even if you had arrangements made you had to cancel them. But then gradually what came in then after a while we had this, em, rather than having this split shift, you know, which was a terrible drag. I never minded so much when I was young, when I was single but when you got married then and you found that on the split shift that you were finished at 3 pm and then you had to go back at 5.30 pm and you’d like to go home to see the kids and you were missing out. You missed out a lot that way. I remember even one Christmas day going to work early and by the time I got home my children were gone to bed so I missed the whole bloody lot you know.

86. MM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

87. AW: You’d say ‘ah there must be something better than this’, you know and gradually of course the college did come along after it. After that then they decided to go for a split shift. One on until 3 pm and then the other took over at 3 pm until the end and it worked out grand. That was grand you know and things were getting good and conditions were getting good and then…

88. MM: When did those improvements start?

89. AW: They started in the 60s, yeah, yeah. In the 60s they came in and things were getting very good at the time and then they started to go back again. They started to cut back on staff and all this sort of thing and there was change of management in the hotel and there was a terrible lot of uncertainty, you know. It got to a stage before I left that you were so low on stock, you know, it was a case we had to over and borrow stuff. If you got a big party in there was this arrangement you’d go over to Maurice O’Looney over in the Shelbourne, borrow sirloin and bring it back in a taxi and then it got to a stage like Maurice used to ask like who owns the bloody sirloin (laugh).
That sort of working on a shoestring, and the standards were going down all the time. They were going down. You know you could see it going down and a lot of things were happening at the same, there were more hotel opening up so the Gresham although it had. The Gresham had the name just for upper class people which was really wrong. The great thing about the Green Isle when he (PV.Doyle) opened it up, he marketed it to say this is the workers hotel and they went there. And you know the Gresham still had this aloofness about it that people just wouldn’t go into it, you know. Like, it was wrong.

Fig. AW.1: (l–r) John Clancy, Joe Erraught, Gerry Connell, Andy Whelan, Jimmy Kilbride, Bill Ryan, Bill (Liam) Kavanagh, Tony Campbell at Andy’s Retirement Party, Cathal Brugha Street

90. MM: Like when you started there, you started there in 1956 or something like that was it?

91. AW: 1956.

92. MM: So the clientele there were sort of fairly up market, not totally up market?

93. AW: Yes, yes they were.

94. MM: Like who would be coming there?

95. AW: Oh you’d all the big ones sort coming. You know you had all the stars like Elizabeth Taylor or President Eisenhower, Nixon stayed there. George Peppard I remember. Lester Piggott, all those guys stayed there you know.

96. MM: And how about the Irish? Who would be the Irish? Would there be a lot of Anglo Irish?

97. AW: Just after the war business was great because they used to come down from the North, down for a meal down here because there was rationing still up there that wasn’t here. We could provide good meals down here and go back up but I wouldn’t have identified all that many. Christy Sands would now know more the people that came in. Christy has a great memory but I’d just say ‘oh yeah’ and I’d forget. But Christy has like a photographic memory. So the big ones you would remember. Other people you just…
But when did that change like, when did the change come, when going to a hotel because more democratized?

I think the Green Isle was the start of that.

Was it yeah?

I think so yeah. I think they started catering for working class.

The Green Isle was PV Doyle’s first hotel.

Yes. There was a big break away from that. It got the name, although they were expensive enough but for some reason it got marketed that it was that type of hotel and it took off from there.

Yeah.

Before that you wouldn’t dream of like… Like the big treat for us was going into Bewleys, you know that type of thing. But very little eating out. Even ourselves we wouldn’t bother eating out.

Like when did you first eat out?

I think I started when I started courting, I think I started bringing my wife or my future wife out at that time to places like… Oh you’d be eating out, you know you’d eat out after say a night out on the town with a few pints but other than that you’d eat in the burger joints. That type of thing came in. The burger places were starting to come in. Not McDonalds now. Just burgers, there was a place around there in North Earl Street where the Kylmore used to be and that was kind of a little restaurant, a late night restaurant. And there was one down along the quays there.

And were they run by, were they run by Irish people or were they run by foreigners or Italians?

The Last Post, that was a famous one for the bowl of soup. The French onion soup. That was that one. The eating out as such, I suppose I started eating out around the 60s, around that time you know, but before that you wouldn’t dream of eating out. I suppose the thing was that you were in it, in that environment all the time you know, being well fed, you were always well fed by the hotels. Like the best of things. The breakfast was set up every morning, everybody sat down for breakfast and at lunch you sat down or you went down for your lunch but the head chef at the time would always sit in the kitchen and have his lunch. He’d invite a few people to sit with him you know. And he insisted on having whatever was on the lunch, he insisted on having everything on the table, like a couple of entrees and a roast and then he got to taste them all. He’d let you know if it wasn’t right you know. It was a good…

Quality control as well yeah, yeah.

It was a good way of doing it, you know, that he had control on it and then of course you came back in the evening time and you had another meal there, a snack before you started and then later on in the night you had dinner. So you were well fed you know. You had no desire to go out anywhere really, you know and then you had a drink ration as well what they used to call the sweat rash.

The sweat rash yeah. And what was that? say two pints a day or something or was it a bottle of…
Ah it was very little and it was at the discretion of the old head chef one time to distribute these. A few bottles of this but they got more generous after a while you know through bribery to the barman and all this sort of thing (laugh).

When you were starting out like say in say ’56 or around that time like I suppose there wasn’t that many top restaurants or restaurants in Dublin.

Jammet’s was the big one and the Hibernian was very upper class as well. The Russell Hotel in Stephens Green was a big one there. Em, the Shelbourne of course, the Gresham. More hotel orientated rather than restaurant orientated. Restaurants actually with the exception of Jammets, I can not think, oh there was another one in Grafton Street called Mitchell’s, the wine people who had a little restaurant. And there were was one or two others there. I can’t remember, but I remember doing a bit of work in it, it was Fullers restaurant on Grafton Street.

On Grafton Street.

Yeah that was half way up Grafton Street that was another one like that. There was the old Paradisio.

That was Westmoreland Street.

Westmoreland Street yeah. And the other big one then was Barry’s up here.

Oh Barry’s Hotel.

Apart from that, Clery’s was another restaurant. And then you have the kind of the ordinary type of, ah, Woolworth’s famous for their big sausages.

Was Woolworth’s the first self service restaurant was it?

I think it was, I think it was, yeah. The guy that worked there actually he came to work in the Gresham afterwards, Eamon Williams and he, ya, I think that was the first big one. They always specialised in these large sausages you know.

Bangers.

He was a great worker too but some great workers that way came. They never stopped working actually.

So when did restaurants sort of come on the scene as, like was it more the ‘70s then or the ‘60s?

Yeah there was one guy opened up there on the top of the old building there in Dolier Street where the Harp restaurant was. That was a big one at the time.

Yeah there was one on top of the, sort of looked out over the sea or something?

Yeah, that’s right, that was a big one alright at the time but let me see was there any big ones around. No you tended to go to a hotel, to a restaurant in a hotel. That one I particularly remember and the other ones of course were more or less, they were lower, not lower class but they tended to go for the normal type of steaks.

Yeah they were more sort of cafés or such.

Yes, yes, so I’d say early…
132. MM: There was a place there called, let me think, a steak house there near the Pro Cathedral, the Palace.

133. AW: Yes, the Palace.

134. MM: Now where would that have fitted? That was sort of a middle to upmarket steakhouse?

135. AW: The Palace was unique in that it was a restaurant here and then at the back of it was a snooker hall. You had to walk through the restaurant to go to the snooker hall. And they had this style, that you had the steaks were on display, people picked out the steaks. The chef cooked it in the room for you. Well I suppose it was good at the time. There was a lot of forward thinking in it, that kind of stuff came in later on. But we were there, we spent a lot of our time down there in the Palace.

136. There’s another one, just ah, another point was that a lot of the cinemas had restaurants. The Savoy had it. The Adelphi had it…The Carlton had one, they all had restaurants and the Metropole. The Metropole was unique, it had restaurants, it had snack bars, it had all sort of cinemas, a ballroom, you know a huge operation altogether.

137. MM: Where was the Metropole again?

138. AW: Where Penneys is.

139. MM: Where Penneys, it was BHS then?

140. AW: That’s right. And around the corner then was another one called the Capital and they had a restaurant as well. They all had restaurants in them.

141. MM: That’s down towards the GPO Arcade down there was it on Princes Street, right.

142. AW: Yeah and it was quite a normal thing that you would go maybe and have something to eat in the cinema first of all before you went into the cinema, you know.

143. MM: So what was the main thing, was it sort of a mixed grill or a steak or something like that.

144. AW: Omelettes, Plaice and steaks. There was no…

145. MM: Was the gammon with pineapple, did that come in then or was it later on.

146. AW: Oh I think that was much later on. I think it was all fairly straightforward. It was either roast chicken, a half roast chicken or steak or plaice and chips and everything was with chips. And what was the other big one then, yeah plaice, chicken, steak. They were the ones, pork chops. Yeah but em, yeah, that was it, that was the restaurants as such you know. I can’t remember, I’m sure there are lots more, you know places change so much you kind of think there was a restaurant there or there was something there or, you know.

147. MM: Trying to keep track of them all, yeah. It’s funny you were talking about McManus and you’re talking about that he should have written things down but Uhlemann did write things down. He kept his, what is it, the chef’s companion is it?

148. AW: Yes, yes, yes.

149. MM: And what sort of thing, I know you have a copy of that…

150. AW: It’s not mine, it’s actually Liam Kavanagh’s before I go (pause).
Ah that’s it there. Yeah. Actually I’ll take this and make a photocopy of it and I’ll give…

And afterwards I’ll have to return it.

And I’ll do a copy for you.

There’s stuff in it there. It’s like a time, it was his own interpretation.

And that’s himself is it?

No, that’s not him. That’s some other guy, I don’t know who. Apple bombe, apple charolette, these are the popular ones, (inaudible) we didn’t do all of those. Escalope, these are the popular ones here. Cordon bleu was popular, (inaudible), these ones here were all very popular and the schnitzel was very popular, *ala crème* was popular too. The schnitzel…

The wiener schnitzel?

They were the more popular ones there yeah. And the sole ones, the most popular ones would be the *bonne femme* and that sort of thing. He didn’t cover, he wrote them all and when you read into them nowadays you say ‘oh God that’s not right’. He put his own interpretations. (Referring to the book) That was given to Liam. They’re very rare and as I say I have to give it back to Liam now. He was Governor of the Order of Merit International and all that sort of thing. Culinary Master on ship.

Yeah, yeah.

And a very good artist too, a very good artist.

Were you working there when Liam was working there?

I was Liam’s *commis*.

You were Liam’s *commis* were you, yeah. I’m trying to remember now, Liam came there, had he been to America by the time he came there or…

He’d been on the ships.

Oh he’d been on the ships, that’s right.

Himself and Billie Ryan were on the ships.

But he hadn’t gone to America yet. He went to America I think after the Gresham. How was Liam to work with?

He was very good (laugh), he was very good. And Bill Ryan then was the, do you remember Billie?

I do yeah.

Billie was doing the chef across in the pastry house. The kitchen was designed to go straight from the larder and then the pastry house was over here and then you went down another passage way and just here then they used to have a big slab. We used to have the *hors d’oeuvres* up there and then you went to the main kitchen along here. Roast corner here, sauce corner over there, vegetable corner down there and down at the back were two little women and they did the potatoes all the day. They supplied the potatoes.
171.MM: Oh the turning spuds.

172.AW: Buttering potatoes, doing all sort of potatoes but they were absolutely marvellous in that, the two women, both their husbands in invalids and they used to do so many potatoes and then run home and get him his breakfast, come back...Come back, do more potatoes, run home, get him his dinner, come back. Jesus you'd wonder how they ever did it you know.

173.MM: Yeah, yeah.

174.AW: And then you’d never miss them until their day off or one was out sick or something but the amount of potatoes and they just sat down. The potatoes were delivered, they just put it into the machine, turned them. They used to use all the old milk churns for the dances and all. Filled them up, you know, and the bigger ones then were for the chips. Some young fella had to cut the chips by hand and then you had to pick out the good chips and throw the bad ones to the side. They were used up for soups I think. And on a Friday then the range was, four big windows, four this side, four that side and the racks on top and the top of that was full of chips for lunch and they all disappeared at lunchtime. So you can imagine the eating culture at the time and you’d have to do more then after that, no frozen chips.

175.MM: Would they have been blanched first?

176.AW: Oh yeah they were blanched first, blanched, put up there...Another big tray of plaice you know, Fridays, particularly Fridays. A big, big tray of plaice and all the crumbs, the crumbs had to be made. They had this idea too that it saved the bread and the porter’s job, one of his jobs was to make the breadcrumbs. So he dried the bread, put it in an old mincer and he got the breadcrumbs that way. Crumbed them up, croquettes were all made by hand, all the time. But on a Friday, very little meat was sold it was all fishes. And then occasionally he’d decide to put on Irish stew and all the Irish stew was all individually put up on the range so you had four ranges full of little casseroles.

177.MM: Oh little casseroles yeah.

178.AW: And you were going round with the stock and topping these up every so often. (laugh) You had to start off with your meat, you know, cutting onions and the potatoes. The potatoes went in and he kept some of the potatoes back and he made a kind of puree with them and they just went on top but each one was individually served. And when he had that on he said ‘oh Jesus this is ridiculous’, that you had to have, you’d have a standby. Of course that was maybe a big pot...A big pot of it just in case. But it was all, the whole range was taken up with this and you’d get nothing on it. That was a disaster really you know (laugh).

179.MM: What fish was sold, like was it the old reliable or...

180.AW: Sole and plaice. I even remember him first of all coming in, brining in monk fish which was rather cheap at the time and they thought that it would be a good idea to try, if they got the monk fish, and you know the way you can breakdown between the fibres of the monk fish and sell them instead of prawns because prawns were working out too expensive.

181.MM: Yeah, yeah.

182.AW: They tried that. I remember experimenting with it. They, it was too much bother, they didn’t bother in the end but that was looked on as a cheap type of fish. You know cod was cheap and smoked haddock, cheap. Now smoked haddock was used mostly for breakfast and you know and it was used occasionally for lunchtime.

183.MM: Would you have served kedgeree for breakfast or?
Breakfast was very standard. It was bacon, egg, sausage, all the different types of eggs, that type of thing. Occasionally then you used to get this order in for brown hash, the Americans used to... But a big one at the time was the brown bread. You made your own brown bread and it was made on huge slab, baked off and it went down a treat with the Americans because they’d never come across it.

And was it a soda bread or yeast bread?

It was soda bread. Brown soda bread. So I used to get loads of requests for the recipe but like it was done in bulk so you could never try to break it down.

And was it a soda bread or yeast bread?

It was soda bread. Brown soda bread. So I used to get loads of requests for the recipe but like it was done in bulk so you could never try to break it down.

Scale it down to get it…

But it was a big one at the time the brown bread. The pastry area was the only place where we employed cooks. There were two cooks there and again kind of no proper layout because the pastry house was here and the ovens were kept down here so there was constant up and down the whole time you know. But like that, they worked away, they just kept supplying, supplying, supplying all the time and then they would leave, they would always leave a supply of cakes for the afternoon teas and all that sort of thing. There was, I know when I go on myself one of the things I used to say like ‘just leave a sponge at night time’ because you get loads of requests for birthday cakes. And once you have a sponge, you can just fill a sponge and write on it happy, whatever it was. They just worked away quietly all the time supplying the stuff. You know and you’d sell, the amount of afternoon teas, ah it was the hundreds at least.

And who would have made the sandwiches?

The sandwiches were made in the still room.

And was that women again?

All women there yeah. They just made the sandwiches yeah. The other big one was the orange juice for the breakfast; they all had to be squeezed, freshly squeezed oranges. So some poor young fella he’d have to squeeze three or four cases of oranges in the old fashioned way. You know cut them and squeeze them. And you’d see this yellow thing coming out (laugh), he looked like an orange and you’d fill it up now, put it by for the next morning. But it had to be fresh orange juice every morning and they’d tray up all the bacon of course and you know keep the fat from the grilled bacon for frying the eggs on.

But that changed after a while too where they had their own self service, like what’s in operation nowadays in the hotels but traditionally you were always individually served. The breakfast chef came on at 6 am I think it was. The porter already had the porridge made and he would start off then preparing breakfast. Breakfast went on until 11am, I think it was. And then the breakfast chef usually gave a hand, oh yeah the breakfast chef went up stairs to the side hall which was the service area for the restaurant and he did the lunch and that was his day. It was a long day too, 6 am to 3 pm. It was a long day but ah, breakfast was just traditional stuff. There was not kind, no kedgeree as such, you know. You might get the occasional order for omelettes and that sort of thing. That really threw him around (laugh). He was only used to the traditional stuff basically eggs and that sort of thing you know.

Were any of your brothers or sisters or whatever involved in catering?

No, no.

So it was just a pure chance that you went into it?
197. **AW:** Pure chance, just pure chance, and you know people say ‘I’d love to, I’ve always wanted to be in’, no I just saw this ad and I went for it and I just stuck with it then. I liked it after a while. I just got to like the part of cooking and all that sort of thing and got to like the feel of food really. That was the whole thing, got the feel of the food and that. Particularly the sauce area, I love the sauce area because you could experiment all the time. The other ones like the vegetable were monotonous. The larder was mostly butchery.

198. **MM:** Yeah, yeah.

199. **AW:** I loved the sauces, even up today now. I love experimenting with different sauces, just to experiment, experiment you know. Traditionally, traditional stuff, I still experiment.

200. **MM:** As you say, following Macker’s tradition!

201. **AW:** Not quite, you never get the same dish twice and I’m a ‘hoor’ for the butter and all that sort of thing too, you know. Butter was everything, butter in everything and cream in everything too you know. Rich, rich food, yeah.

202. **MM:** When you started was it coal ovens in the Gresham, do you remember?

203. **AW:** No, no, no, they were gas ovens. The coal ovens were before my time. I can’t remember them just the gas ovens. Just the traditional type of gas oven but great demarcation lines in the kitchen too. If the roast corner were very busy and they asked could they use the ovens on the sauce corner side, it was up to you to look after them. They’d never open the oven and say like ‘this was ready’, that was your baby. So real, in a way the partie system was, you know, it had its drawbacks in that way. There was too much demarcation in the sense that you just…They stayed within those limits and that was it.

204. **MM:** Yeah, yeah.

205. **AW:** Whereas when they started you know the breakdown and that sort of thing and they got into the rationalisation of the kitchen and that sort of thing there was more co-operation really. You know you’ve a bigger area to cover, you know that sort of thing but that was one of the disadvantages I found at the time that it was so rigid. They were so rigid in it. You know I remember even as a young commi like walking from, I think I was on the veg at the time, coming from there up to hot plate and I walked in front of a table and the fella bawled me out of it for walking in front. Ridiculous you know. They were all very protective of their space.

206. **MM:** But how about their knowledge as well, like were they protective of what they knew? Like as a young commis would people bring you aside and say here look at what I’m doing here?

207. **AW:** Some would. The likes of Liam (Kavanagh) would. He would always show you things. Others, no, they were a bit protective, you know, of the knowledge that they had and others seemed to have, other would seem to work away. They worked better on their own without having a commis with them. They seemed to; you were a distraction to them. They seemed to work and they’d have a deadline. There was one guy on the sauces and actually he was a sauce cook at the time and like he was, sauce were also responsible for the soups as well. The soups and the sauces but he had a deadline and he had to finish every day at 12 noon and he worked like a black until 12 and he had everything ready and lunch started at 12.30 pm. That was his deadline but if you asked anything you were a distraction to him. He’d say ‘go over and chop parsley of something but keep out of my way’. You see he had his own system so in that way you know they weren’t very forthcoming with their information. Ah you’d pick up things of course, you know. Maybe some you’d pick up the hard way, like you know. How do you know that’s cooked? how do you know? and if you had to ask. You were given certain tasks and it was more like a corrective thing, like if you did it wrong. Now do it again. This is a learning process. There
wasn’t much information coming as to why you did it wrong. But having said that, there was a lot of knowledge going around I suppose and you would pick up things if you tried.

208.MM: How many was working in there? You said there’s about five in each section so would there have been thirty/thirty-five.

209.AW: Well I had an old photograph. I was doing a book by Christy Sands, the old staff and I think I remember counting something in the region of forty something. You see the system at the time was that in those days you had to do seven years apprenticeship or training or whatever it was and on your sixth year you became known as an improver.

210.MM: Right.

211.AW: So you had a certain amount of improvers and then you had the chefs de partie, chefs really should have been called cooks, improvers and then commis. But once you got to an improver you started looking around unless they offered you a job. More or often they let you go at that stage. You were ready for…

212.MM: You were one of the lucky ones.

213.AW: Or unlucky.

214.MM: Whatever way you’d look at it yeah.

215.AW: People often say like why did you stay there so long but it was a kind of culture and you kind of grow with it you know and I liked it and at the time I was moving up along the ladder too, you know that sort of thing. You felt more secure at it and the options at the time weren’t all that good outside so you know I stayed there and I felt comfortable there.

216.MM: Trade unionism, was that strong in the Gresham?

217.AW: Very strong.

218.MM: Because I know that originally people got their jobs through the union and if you wanted a new place you’d go down to the union office, you’d have a look at what was available and that sort of stuff.

219.AW: But that was a type of thing now, that was more for casual work.

220.MM: Right, okay.

221.AW: But it was very strong, it was very strong and I think only for trade unionism at the time I think it would have been, I don’t know what kind of conditions we would have been working under. We’d a very strong trade union leader at the time called Michael Mullen and he was a very, very, like he wasn’t afraid to have a go at the bosses. He was very strong, a strong minded trade unionist and if something was wrong, he’d… We had the usual system the shop stewards and all that sort of thing but it was a strong trade union emphasis. Even the head chef was in the union so it worked really, really well. Most, I think all the staff were in the trade union, were trade union members. The only ones that wouldn’t be in the trade union at the time were the receptionist upstairs you know and eventually they did because (inaudible) were coming. But at least you were secure in the fact that you were a member of a union and that. You know it had its draw backs, you’d strikes and things like that. You’d have to go out, you didn’t have to go out but you felt it was your duty to go out with them.

222.MM: Were there many strikes?
AW: In my time I think I had two. I think was two, yeah there was two strikes. One which didn’t really involve us so much it was some of the maintenance staff but we felt obliged at the time. We couldn’t pass the picket so we were out on strike and hard old going too trying to survive because…

MM: When was that?

AW: I think it must have been, I know I only had one child at time. She wasn’t very old, she was only about a year old so it must have been in the ‘60s. Yeah ’60s I think it was. And then there was another one after that, it wasn’t as long and I think it was in the ‘70s. The first was, when I say long, two weeks or something like that.

MM: And you were starting to feel the pinch?

AW: You were yeah, yeah (laugh) and you had more responsibilities at the time too. If you were single you wouldn’t give a sugar but at that time you had it. The usual things you’re after getting your house, you had the mortgage and all this sort of thing. There was a lot of pressure on you at the time. But, that was the thing, you stood by the people and that was the right thing to do at the time. There’s not questions asked. I’ve been in a union since I was sixteen. I was a member of the ITGWU, what do they call it now the…

MM: SIPTU yeah.

AW: And then I joined the TUI down in the college, you know.

MM: The second strike in the ‘70s was that to do with the restaurant or the catering?

AW: It was something to do with the restaurant or something to do with the change in management. I can’t exactly remember what it was but it wasn’t a very long one. It was a short one.

MM: Sorted out quick enough.

AW: Yeah it was sorted out quick enough.

MM: The women really only worked in, they did damn hard work but they were in certain sections as such?

AW: Yes, yes. Two old women on the potatoes, two young cooks in the pastry section and the rest were all like washing up and all that but the staff, the kitchen staff were all chefs.

MM: When did that change?

AW: It changed I think when Noel Cullen took over. I think he introduced the first, he said he introduced the first chef at the time. She was a young commis.

MM: You don’t remember who she was do you?

AW: I can’t remember her name, no. I know there was a lot of publicity about it but there was nothing said about the two women. Probably they might have been considered cooks whereas this girl was considered a chef at that time.

MM: Yeah.

AW: You always had cooks like even in the college here you always had cooks. You had three classfulls of cooks and they stayed up in Mountjoy Square, there was a convent up there where they had there lodgings. There was always segregation there. There was always cooks and chefs
and then I can’t remember when they amalgamated the two into one. I think I was here (College of Catering) at the time. Yes I was here. I had taken over a teaching position at the time when they decided to… First of all they decided to all have the one uniform and I think it was there then they had…

242.MM: When did you start here part-time? Like you started part-time first didn’t you.

243.AW: Yeah, ’75, 1975. One day per week and…

244.MM: And who asked you to come in or how did that come about?

245.AW: I think the request came across from either Bob (Lawlor) or Joe Hegarty and they were looking for somebody to fill in and nobody seemed to be interested so I came across and they said okay. Joe said ‘okay I’ll give you chance’ and I took it and then I stayed with it until 1978 I got a full-time appointment.

246.MM: Right, yeah, yeah. And was the place expanding or had someone left?

247.AW: Who had left at the time? Let’s see now, no it was expanding. We hadn’t replaced anyone. Three of us started together, Jim Bowe. Sorry four of us started together Jim Bowe, Joe Erraught. Joe was already the larder chef here but he got a full-time position here, what were called in those days, a class three teacher. Anne Tracey was the other one. Jim Bowe, myself, Anne Tracey and Joe Erraught were all appointed at the one time and we were appointed as class threes and we were class threes for a while and then everything started to happen. You know they introduced new grades. There was, the old grade was a class three and assistant lecturer I think it was. Is that right, yes. And then they did away with that and they had lecturer/college teacher. So we went from class three to college teacher and then after so many years we were entitled to go for lecturer. I think that could have been one of the agreements. One of these 479 or 584, something like that. Anyway we were all upgraded to lecturer and I think they’re trying to change that back again. All the ads now, all the ads in the paper are all assistant lecturer.

248.MM: Yeah. Who do you think the main catalysts for change in the restaurant industry over the last fifty, thirty, twenty years what ever? As in clearly the big changes happen around the ’70s.’60s. When did tourism kick off?

249.AW: Well we had it to a small degree. We always had tourism to a small degree. As I said to you early on coming down from the North and whether they were classified as tourists as such I don’t know but the tourist, the Americans started coming in the ’60s I think it was. I think it was steadily growing but you always had an English, the English tours were always here anyway and I think they all, I always got the impression they wanted to talk more about the American tourist than the English tourists although the English tourists would spend more. I don’t know what it was maybe because they were so close, resentment there you know.

250.MM: Familiarity breeding contempt or something?

251.AW: They were better spenders. The Americans were not good spenders and then gradually the continentals started coming in. The word started spreading! When it started to take off really I can’t really say but you always, as far I know we’d always have tours coming in. It was a standardised thing. The tour was always brought in early, limited choice of food. Get them out as fast as you can. Typical tourist type of thing.

252.MM: It was a real sort, it was using up space before the main people came in.

253.AW: Yeah there was good revenue. It was revenue that you normally wouldn’t get in anyway and you room was empty so why not fill the room and get rid of them. I used to be concentrating on the main business of the evening time. It was a good…

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You felt that the quality of the Gresham went down, it was at it’s peak like…

‘60s.

When you started coming up to the ‘60s like, it was at it’s peak. It was the place but then…

I thought it was…

Was it hotels in general sort of started to make way towards restaurants?

Well there was a few things. There were a few factors. I think one of the things was that where the new hotels were coming in the likes of the International one which is now Jury’s…

The Intercon.

They had facilities like people could drive to the hotel and walk in you know. The Gresham hadn’t got that, they’d no parking facilities, that type of thing started to hit people. You know the facilities weren’t there. They at the time were slow to change. Now Eoin Dillon, he was a great one for bringing the change but unfortunately I think Eoin would have been brilliant there had he been left to do the job but he still had the old boss kind of breathing down his neck.

Was that O’Sullivan, was it?

O’Sullivan was more or less in the background. Dillon had brilliant ideas, absolutely brilliant ideas but he just wasn’t given the opportunity. I think had he been left at the time I think the Gresham would have been the major player in the field at that stage because he proved that when he went over to the Tara in London. Introducing the computerised booking system and all that sort of thing and year after year getting the hotelier of the year type of thing, you know. He had a brilliant mind and you could see the minute he took over he had his, he started to even change the idea, change the outlook. We were slow to, like being entrenched in a certain way and having gone through the system and then this man coming in and telling us you know. Gradually he bought us around and gradually there was confidence started building up in him because we could see where he was going and then he just left all of a sudden. It was a pity because what came in after him then they hadn’t got the calibre. I think when it was sold then it was sold to a fella called Tunney and we always got the impression that he was a speculator, that it was just another asset that he was going to keep. The hotel wasn’t so much, he wasn’t hotel background he was…

A businessman or…

Yeah a businessman as such. It started to slide a bit at that stage you know. It never got back then. I don’t think it ever go back after that no. Maybe that’s a biased opinion but I felt myself once the slide started coming its very hard and you know changing the structure of the building and all this sort of thing. That type of thing and it’s very hard to get them back again once you loose them.

Discussion on origin of the Gresham

It wasn’t that big really. Like it was only after years that this part here went over, you know.

The extension.
It wasn’t all that big. It had a name. You’d always say was it the wrong type of marketing that they were doing. They were marketing (inaudible) and it was unfortunate. Oh people would ‘oh Jesus where do you think you are in the Gresham’, you know that sort of thing.

(Laugh). What’s his name McManus took over from Uhlemann then as head chef. That was around what, the ‘60s?

The ‘60s yes, yes.

And who took over from McManus.

A chap called Barney Nealan. Barney Nealan took over from him.

And when did he take over?

At that time what happened actually was that McManus was there and they started to introduce redundancies so Barnie said he would go for it and I think McManus got in there ahead of him for the redundancy so Barnie took over.

So he had a good age on him Barney Nealan?

Oh he had…

Was he acting as sous chef?

He was sous chef. A brilliant carver, and I never saw anybody as good as him at carving. He’d shave the turkey, he’d get so many portions out of it and always, he was always immaculate in his dress. He was one, he’d really stick out now in a kitchen. He always wore a very, very tall hat and his uniforms were immaculate no matter what type of work he was doing. And he had certain standards too and he liked certain ritual. When he finished work at night time he went down for his pint and he always drank the first one down to there and then he’d order a second one. And that was it. No matter who else came in that was it and he’d get his bus and go home but a great man for the figures too. Great man for working out the profits, he costing his menus. He had them down to a T. A brilliant mind that way. He left, went, got an offer to go to Clery’s. Went to Clery’s and went into partnership with Halpin, a fella called Stephen Halpin in Clery’s and then they opened another restaurant down in the Ilac Centre called Hallins I think it was called. Do you know that one?

I’ve heard of it yeah, yeah. I remember it vaguely.

So he went on. He said the best thing he ever did was get out. So ah, a very likeable type, a different type of a class altogether from…He was a likeable type. Whether you like him or not but I suppose that’s wrong to say in a head chef, but a gentleman.

Yeah he was highly respected as such.

Very highly respected, and you’d anything for Barney like you know. Great approach about it. You know I often think myself that he’d a great influence on me too in that kind of way. There was never any shouting as such and he got the work done. He kept control all the time but the work was done. Everybody like him. He respected everybody and you know it was an easy ship to work in at that stage, in that respect, that he got through the work but there was no real…

Agro.

Agro as such yes. Yeah he was great, a man before his time really you know.
You mentioned costings there and that type of stuff. Did GPs or all this sort of stuff, was you know, did they play a big factor in it or did the chef control it?

He did yeah, he did yeah, yeah. Again McManus was brilliant at that too. I remember on particular year that the profits were so high that he could afford to buy all the turkeys for the Christmas season, this was only in the start of the year for the following Christmas because the profits, you had to use up the money, you know.

Yeah, yeah.

But profit, they were always, you know you’d always have the same scare tactics during Lent. Business was down, people weren’t eating, so he’d give you time off. I often remember he’d say ‘the boss is coming down to hide some of those commis down the pot house’. You know (laugh). So he’d looking on to see how many staff you had and it was always kind of a bit, always the case, he’d always come down the wrong time when they’d be a lull in the business. A lot of people in his kitchen. But yeah, brilliant mind as regards to the costing. Costing everything. He was good. I always thought Barney had the edge on him but Barney would know immediately how much it was costing him and they had it down to a fine art and I think he had a better head for figures. McManus would be, what’ll I say, he’d have the kind of the cute element about him that he’d know while I think Nealan had the edge that he was more into the figures man. He’d have it down like you know. He could give you precise details on where you were loosing out, what to buy in, what sort of thing. So he was a great loss when he went. He was a great loss, we’d all great respect for him you know.

Who took over from Barney then?

Em well we ran it on a kind of a adhoc basis for a while, between Charlie Lyons and myself. And I knew this was coming up, this place was coming up so Noel Cullen then took over from him.

Was he in the Gresham at the time or was he somewhere else?

No he came from somewhere else. I think Charlie went off because Charlie Lyons didn’t want it either and he invited him in as far as I know and then I think I only had about ah, maybe a couple of months there when no one was there. A very short time.

Noel would have come in fairly young wouldn’t he?

He would, he would yes. He came in. He was young. I can’t remember what age was but I hadn’t got a lot, I think it was. If it was about nine months there with him I was, because I know the interviews for here, came up in February or March, I think it was February and I know they didn’t make the appointments, well they made the appointments but you didn’t take up your position until September.

Yeah, yeah, the usual.

So you were there but you were just kind of…

Marking time yeah, yeah, yeah.

Marking time, that was it you know.

Very good. Why do you think, you know the way there’s sort of huge turnover in people leaving the business now, you know, was there always that turnover in people, yeah?
There wasn’t at that time because you’d nothing else to go to. There was, you’d think of all the people that left in my time but they went to other positions. The guys that I know went to American, a lot of them went to the airport which was the big job at the time because of all the perks that were going with it.

Oh because you could maybe get flights and stuff like that yeah.

So there was a turnover at the time.

**Discussion on when Dublin Airport started operating**

Oh Jimmy Flahive, yeah, Was he the first television chef?

It was a skills thing. How you’d chop an onion.

So he was out in the airport?

Who was he followed by, Monica lick the finger. What was her name? (note: Monica Sheridan also known as finger licking Monica became a television personality)

I wouldn’t know her now but.

I can’t remember.

Then there was another fella. Wasn’t there another fella who worked for CIE at one stage who used to do.

Nicky O’Neill. Did you know him?

No I didn’t know him but when I took over they’d be talking about him alright but I didn’t know him, no.

He came on then. He was more radio I think.

Ah he was more radio, was he, yeah, yeah.

No Flahive was the first.

He used do a programme I think from Bus Aras. Maybe it was a radio programme from Bus Aras or something like that, yeah, yeah.

Actually my first recollection of, you know, the Chef Ireland thing. They used to hold it in Busáras at that time and I entered a *croquembouche* at the time but it didn’t get anywhere.

Were you involved in the panel Andy?

Ah I joined the panel. I didn’t join the panel until later on.

Were you here when you joined?

No I was in the Gresham. I was just about leaving the Gresham, ’76 or something like that when I joined the panel.

And like who, like Frankie Farren was big in it at the time?

Davy Edwards was the one at the time. Who was it, I can’t remember. I was never all that much involved in it. I think I was secretary one time, secretary to the Leinster branch. That’s
as much as I went into it, you know. Em, I’m still a member, you know, it’s easier to be a member than not to be a member. Oh Flahive that brings back memories and ah…

323.MM: Was he Irish that fella?

324.AW: He was, he was yeah, he was yes, yeah. I’m just thinking, the class that was with me here in the college one of them went over to the Hibernian and became head chef, Nicky Closkey and David Edwards was in my class too.

325.MM: Right, Davy Edwards yeah.

326.AW: And Oscar Gantley, do you know Fergus’s brother. He was in my class.

327.MM: Wow and is he still chosing? Oscar?

328.AW: Oscar is living in Galway. He’s in the RTC. And who else. I can’t remember. They were the big ones, they were the ones I can remember. There was only twelve of us.

329.MM: Now were some of them, most of them came in scholarships. Were there some paying people as well?

330.AW: There could have been one or two. I think we were all on scholarships. I think we were all on scholarships. Go down and get your two and six or whatever it was (laugh). If you broke a bowl it was stopped (laugh).

331.MM: It was stopped out of your wages yeah (laugh).

332.AW: You might end up owing them money really like than you giving you money you know. Everything was kind of very rigid. Ah it was a different set-up altogether. You know when you think back now to what you were doing and like we had Andrées O Muineacháin as our teacher. And his idea of teaching Irish was to teach it in song fashion you know. So he had us all singing songs, down where Michael’s (Mulvey) office is now. And he’d a few books along the wall in cases. That was the library as such. But he more or less, he was more or less in charge of the chefs and that sort of thing you know. Nice old lad.

333.MM: And was the kitchen taught through Irish as well or was it…

334.AW: No. In my first year we had this guy called Murphy and like you know (laugh) he was very good but he didn’t seem to be getting in, he didn’t seem to fit in well. You wouldn’t understand at the time because you were just a student but he didn’t seem to get on well women here you know. Mostly all women but very simple type of things you’d be doing. You know just doing soups or stuff like that and then you had to present it and he’d go down, he’d always make some comment. Like he’d taste the soups like that, it’s piss (laugh)…

335.MM: He was French you said, even with the Murphy surname. And you don’t know where he came from or where he had been working or anything, no?

336.AW: Beaucaire Murphy but you know the usual thing like. Fond of the old dogs, or the horses and he’d call you over, put that on the horse. But a very simple type. You know it wouldn’t the intense type class that you’d have nowadays. You did one or two items in a class.

337.MM: That was it.

338.AW: That was it, that was it, yeah. And you had that a couple of times a week and we used to do butchery then with PJ you know and that was harmless too when you think about it. Making a dem (demi-glace) one day or you were just shelling fish or something. You know it was harmless
type of stuff when we were sort of. Like I’d always remember PJ afterwards he’d say to see that
guy ‘I thought him everything he knows’ (laugh). God you did alright yeah (laugh).

339.MM: Talking about that like who do you think people who came through the college while you
were here who have gone on to do well in Ireland or abroad, like who would impress you at the
moment.

340.AW: Beside yourself Máirtín (laugh).

341.MM: Beside myself (laugh).

342.AW: Em, Ciarán O’Catháin was one. Now I didn’t teach Ciarán but he was here when I was
here when I was teaching. He’s Head of the Athlone Institute now. Worked the system, very
clever, did the chefs course, did the H&C course went onto do a degree course and right through
the system and got to where he is. Got a job down in, somewhere in the North and then he
eventually ended in Athlone. Em, anybody else that went through the college that I can think of.
There were some good one. Martin Callan was another good one. Do you remember Martin
Callan, no, he worked in Switzerland for a few years? I don’t know where he is now. There was
one year here I had a class and I think they had to be unique, they were all so, it was a brilliant
class to teach you know. And you know when you’re just coming up at the time you’re kind of
harder on them I suppose at that stage and but every one of them went on to do something. There
was one guy, his name slips my mind but at the time you used to have to interview for the course,
for the chefs course here and he was a bank, he worked in a bank and Jim Bowe and myself were
interviewing. I said you must be, you know, you’re having us on. No says he I want to get out of
the bank and he came on and he went. He went on and he became a head chef somewhere and you
know really progressed. Really liked it you know. But people that went through the college here I
don’t, can I think of any big names. Names, I’m hopeless on names, I can remember faces alright.

343.MM: I remember you were saying Michael Martin was a student here at one stage.

344.AW: Michael Martin he was a student here yeah. Em, James Carberry. And his sister was
student here as well. People that you’d meet afterwards. I’m hopeless on names, I just can’t
remember their names. No they went through it alright you know. You tend to put so many
students through your hands you just can’t remember. I find it very hard to remember them all.

345.MM: The silver service, we were talking about this briefly. When did plate service sort of take
over as the main thing do you know? Like you were saying they did plate service in the Gresham
alright for certain functions and stuff like that.

346.AW: I think plate service came about em, I can’t remember when it came in. But you could
see from out point of view putting up things on silver service and occasionally would be called
away to their phone and the order was brought back in again after they were plated. They didn’t
seem to have, I don’t know whether they had a skill or not or they just but it never looked the
same. It was only after, I think we started introducing plate service then maybe late ‘70s or early
‘70s because of that sort of thing. You could see that all your efforts going out…The customer
should see exactly as you put it out. What left you is what they got, you know, whereas the other
way, God knows. Especially dishes with sauces on them, because older guys especially, there were
a lot of old guys there so they didn’t, you know, nothing…they just plonked it on. It’s the same
like with bar staff serving meals in a pub, the way they just plonk it on you know. They could do
with a course there on presentation. It’s all important to me anyway how you present it, how it
presents on the plate. Not this heap of stuff. Not quantity. You know that it looks well so you
can eat right away. Silver service I don’t think any, you know I wouldn’t think there’s anybody, I
don’t think there’s anywhere doing silver service now. If there is it’s very rare.

347.MM: Yeah.
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348. **AW:** And it’s so slow too isn’t it. You have to bring in and out and presenting it and putting it on the lamp, putting it on the plate, you know all that sort of…

349. **MM:** When you started out, the menu would nearly be the same in every restaurant or every hotel, would it be?

350. **AW:** Ah no, no, no, no, it was always different. You always had a… *Table d’hote* menus tended to stick to the same format. One or two starters, two soups, one fish and entrée and a joint, two or three sweets. One cold, one hot, that type of thing. *À la carte* changed a bit you know. *À la carte* they would change a bit depending on the popularity of a dish. There was always great demand for veal dishes, always a great demand for steak dishes. Always a great demand for the fish, steak and veal. They were the big sellers at the time but gradually they were changing them around you know. There was one particular one in the Gresham now, there was a great seller but then as the culture changed, this one was called a veal, it was called an *escaïope à la maison.* And it was a veal dish which was crumbled and the tomatoes were marinated beforehand. Tomatoes were put on top after being marinated in a drop of cream, shallots, they’re put on top of the veal and there was some type of a garnish like a tomato and fresh spinach with a small bit of nutmeg in the spinach and then the marinade was reduced down and it was thickened with either an egg yolk, yeah I think it was, coated over the veal glazed and there was cheese on top of it. Now that was a great seller but you know people’s eating habits changed and they went back to the more plainer type of food again, you know. Other ones then, other ones were, oh the sole dishes were always very popular. All of the steaks of course from porter house steaks down to the minute steak.

351. **MM:** You had point steak as well I know…

352. **AW:** Point steaks, we always bought in the whole…

353. **MM:** The whole steak piece as such.

354. **AW:** The whole steak piece and then you got your *chateaubriand* from that, your points, and you got your rump steaks from that. Great sellers.

355. **MM:** Your t-bones, your porter house.

356. **AW:** T-bones, porter houses, yeah, yeah.

357. **MM:** Did you do carpetbags?

358. **AW:** Yes carpetbags.

359. **MM:** And you’d fill them with oyster?

360. **AW:** The carpetbag was filled with oysters yeah and I think they sautéed it, I don’t think they grilled it. They just sautéed it and then they’d always make sauce some sort of an oyster sauce to go with it you know. Big seller too, big seller. Plank steaks.

361. **MM:** What was the plank steak?

362. **AW:** It was actually, it was served on a plank. I can’t remember now did they cook it, couldn’t cook it on the plank. Wait till I see. No I forget that one. Another big one was *spinach en branche* thing. Spinach which was cooked, pressed and cut into diamond shapes and served up that way. *A lot of work.* That even on the dances years ago they all insisted in bringing fresh vegetables, so you’d have fresh celery, trolleys full of fresh celery.
363. MM: Oh was that served in a sort of béchamel or something?

364. AW: Ah mostly a demi glaze.

365. MM: Yeah sort of like a braised that sort of thing.

366. AW: There was always stock pots going. You always had your estoufađe (brown stock) and developed into a demi glaze. All of the meat places were on there too. What’s the fish with meat glaze on it?

Discussion about fish garnishes

367. MM: And the deep fat fryers. When did ye get your modern deep fat fryers as such.

368. AW: They were always there. There was a deep fat fryer, well the old fashioned were the big things up on the The vats. Up on the range. Very dangerous. There was one went on fire at one time. The place was destroyed, no sorry that’s wrong. It was a guy lifting a roasting tray full of meat up on to the range and it splashed and it went in on the range but a flame shot up, caught the fan overhead and the fire just ignited right around the fan and oh it was so dangerous. Like I was so frightened you know. Just run, run and then eventually when we were left back in again the place was just destroyed. The fireman came. They’re job was to put out the fire.

369. MM: Tell me were you there for the famous goat episode?

370. AW: I was, I was.

371. MM: Tell me about it.

372. AW: Again it was McManus. He had this idea, he had seen this display. It was done for I think King Feisel or somebody like that. And it was a lamb, carcass of lamb which had been cooked on a spit and displayed as such and he got this idea that he would do it with a goat and he was looking for a goat for a while and the potato man eventually got him a goat. We were all working and we saw this thing going up along the kitchen and you could see the goat, baa, (laugh). So he was brought up and who was going to kill the goat? You know. So it was given to this guy. The job was given to this guy to go in and kill the goat. There was a peculiar layout of the kitchen because just below the kitchen here, on this side here there was a boiler house, so the goat was brought in there. And the guy was to do it, anyway, he didn’t do a very good job on it. The poor old thing was screaming you know. I think he eventually choked it to death, you know. So they got, they went through the skins and all that sort of stuff and one of the lads for a bit of skit he got his girlfriend to type out this letter. It was supposed to be from the Department of Health saying that we have learnt that you, we have heard that you have slaughtered an animal in your kitchen which is contrary to this law (laugh).

And you couldn’t look. He threw it all over the place. He oh no, not all but in the meantime the boss had heard about it and he contacted Mickey Mullen in the Union. Do you know what he’s after doing now? He’s after killing a goat (laugh).

So the story went around all over the place. They had to destroy it, cut it up into small little sections and (inaudible). It was a good idea I suppose you know but it was a bit silly, it was a bit silly really.

375. MM: It hadn’t been thought out (laugh).

376. AW: It was something that hadn’t been thought out. Just goes to show you, you know. It was a good idea at the time.

377. MM: So Gerry’s Connell’s brother was there at that time wasn’t he. Is it Johnny, or is it Jimmy Connell.
378. **AW:** No he didn’t stay very long with us. He was I think he was there at the time year. There was great commotion but it was a kind of a sickening. Do you ever hear an animal that’s in agony. It was a real kind of a sick, the majority of use, but this big farmer guy, he choked it to death. They hadn’t even thought out how they were going to slaughter it or anything like that. Everyone was reluctant to do it but then this one guy then reluctantly agreed to do it but did a very bad job on it. It left kind of a bad taste and a bad…

379. **MM:** And a bad memory.

380. **AW:** A bad memory yeah. Like you’d hate to be cruel to any animal but you know it was bad idea. He covered up by getting rid of the evidence (laugh).

381. **MM:** Very good.

382. **AW:** Is there anything else I can help you with?

383. **MM:** No I think that’s covered nearly everything. PV Doyle I think, I was looking at sort of main catalysts for change and I think like you know it was PV Doyle opened up the Green Isle and then he had a big role then in democratising sort of hotels for the normal. Dress dances as well I think had a thing there did they because every one had to dress up or something.

384. **AW:** There again it shows you the forward thinking. The Aberdeen Room, the Aberdeen Hall was a beautiful hall altogether and it could hold up to approximately 600/650 people could have been in there and they got the this ideas that the dress dances as such were dead and they decided to split the Aberdeen Hall in two rooms, upper and lower and never thinking that the debs thing was going to arrive on. And then they were very restricted in the numbers they could take, like they were down to a couple of hundred and then again lost out on business there.

385. **MM:** When did the debs kick in?

386. **AW:** That kicked in, it must have been, let me see my own daughter.

387. **MM:** Was it the ‘70s?

**End of tape and end of interview**
Edited Interview with Christy Sands in DIT Cathal Brugha Street (5/6/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Christy Sands (CS)

1. MM: When and where were you born?

2. CS: I was born on 17th November 1937, the twelfth and last child (four had died before Christy was born) at home in Lower Erne Street, near Pearse Street in Pearse House which were new corporation flats. My family had lived in tenements in Sandwith Street owned by the O’Donoghue family of the public house fame. When the tenements were cleared the choice was to go to Phibsboro, which was the beginning of Cabra, or Collins Avenue which was really Donnycarney. The reason my family stayed local was that my father was a Docker, his father was a checker (on the docks) and later on became a confraternity man in Westland Row. Larkin established the union for the Dockers, and the established Dockers, including my father, got the button, which meant you had to be employed before men that didn’t have the badge.

3. MM: Would your father have been involved in the 1913 lockouts?

4. CS: He would have been involved; he did loose his job as a carter. My father came from Carlow. Two older brothers became Dockers to a limited extent and the button stayed in the family. I was told I’m still entitled to it!! My father joined the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and was in the Dardanelles in Turkey. He was invalided out with frostbite.

Discussion on origin of the Sands family from Kerry and other family history

5. MM: Where were you educated?

6. CS: I went to City Quay Boys National School just before my third birthday to keep the school in teachers because the area was becoming depopulated. I went to school with my brother, who later died aged twenty nine, to put me on the roll. Later on aged ten or eleven, my father brought me to Westland Row for a place in the Christian Brothers, for although there would have been money involved, the British Legion would have paid it. Anyway I didn’t go. The Christian Brothers had a deplorable reputation for bashing people, even the fellows that were good, they felt they needed to bash them from time to time. At the time, I felt that I didn’t see why anyone should be bashed. Now my mother was left handed and had a terrible time at school and she didn’t get involved, but my father was very annoyed I wouldn’t go and I went back into my school teacher Jack Duffesy, to tell him I wasn’t going and he tore strips off me. So as a result at fourteen, I started work.

7. I can remember that easily, my brother Bill, he was known in the business as Willie, he was working probably at the Gresham at the time and he arrives down at my mothers and said to me ‘did you look for a job?’ It hadn’t occurred to me that I should leave school (laugh), I was with my pals, playing a bit of football and so all, and I was always in the top three in school in the regular monthly tests Jack Duffesy did, and I was happy enough with that. But anyway my brother says to me a few days later that ‘they are looking for someone in Jammet’s’. I didn’t know where Jammet’s was, we knew what he was working at, and we knew that he, above all, was earning good money.

8. MM: What was his position in the Gresham?

9. CS: He was eight years older than me, although he was the nearest brother to me in the family, I had a sister two years older than me and I think there was one or two in between that died. He was tallish, quite good looking, and played semi-professional football for Drumcondra. He started off as a messenger boy in the local shop, then a fish suppliers – the two big suppliers at the time were Dunn’s and McCabe’s – and the story was that he was delivering to Jammet’s, and
football was big in Jammet’s. Someone in senior position in Jammet’s recognised he was a good footballer and asked him if he wanted a job. The football in the hotels and restaurants was huge at the time, I’ve written about it in the Hotel and Catering Review. So he went in as a commis (waiter) and he was earning big money, remember we had the effect of the war itself and the shortage after the war. He went into Jammet’s as a commis, he was older than fourteen, and I think within one or two years he was a waiter in the Shelbourne, than after a while he was in the Russell for a short time and then in the Dolphin, and Jammet’s and the Dolphin were the places that made huge money, The Dolphin was the sportsman’s hotel, all the racing people went to the Dolphin, and certainly Shamrock Rovers, because Rovers was owned by the Cunningham family who were bookies, they had anything worthwhile in the Dolphin, maybe other clubs didn’t but anyway. He was there when the strike happened in 1951, the strike for the implementation of service charge, and it started in November and certainly around January or February he went to London for work, and I remember certainly one of his was that the London hotels and restaurants were so important that they wouldn’t take on immigrants without doing an apprenticeship, and he was twenty two and was married with at least one child, so that didn’t suit him so he came back here.

10. Because the strike went on for so long, Michael Mullen, the union man, he was a tower; he was outstanding at the time. He had been brought into the union, Michael Quigley was the branch secretary when the strike begun but although he was an extremely nice person, he wasn’t all that competent and he let things run and probably there shouldn’t have been a strike, but there was and it went on for seven months, couldn’t believe it. It was actually settled before Christmas and someone on the employers side managed to turn around and say no, were not going back. They had actually agreed a settlement.

11. MM: But it didn’t affect every one, the Red Bank only closed two weeks?

12. CS: No, businesses were allowed to settle. Jammet’s settled, never went on strike, Toddy (O’Sullivan) in the Gresham settled, and that was the makings of Toddy, for Toddy got all of the business, but not alone that, for as some places were picking up extra business, and not alone were The Gresham picking up spare business but they were creating new business because Toddy was an amazing figure in that sense. He as a remarkable marketing genius even though the word marketing had never been used, but he was. In many ways he wasn’t a very pleasant individual, but as an hotelier he was a marvel. They built up extra business and the union committee agreed that they could employ the strikers; that the strikers could take work while on strike, and as a result my brother went into The Gresham. In a very short time he was offered promotion.

13. MM: So he was on strike from The Dolphin?

14. CS: The Dolphin was the place, big money, big money, but he went into the Gresham, more than likely Toddy himself had picked him out and then offered him promotion, but after a while when the strike was settled he had to make up his mind was he going back or not, and he decided not to. In the meantime, the strike had started in October or so, an in the first Monday in November in 1951 I started in Jammet’s. I had gone in the week before, probably on the Wednesday, I went for an interview. Now an interview back then was not like today, I just went along, more than likely it was arranged, you see that brother died at twenty nine, so obviously there is so much more we could have talked about, but, he came along and said ‘go up to Jammet’s’, he may have even said ‘ask for somebody’, I don’t know. But I do remember going in the front door, I don’t remember if I asked (for someone), there was always a porter in a little hallway, anyway I do remember being brought upstairs, and I do remember as I passed through the room itself, I wouldn’t have had a recollection of the room at the time, it was just a wonderland as far as I was concerned, but I do remember someone at the side saying ‘hello young Sands’, and that was Jimmy Beggan, and I did his obituary in the Hotel and Catering Review and Jimmy was a marvellous individual. My brother had played so much football and he was considered to have been very good, I remember at Sonny Brennan’s funeral, who had been head waiter in the Shelbourne, a few years ago some lads saying that Willie was very good.
15. MM: Was Josef the head waiter in Jammet’s at the time?

16. CS: Josef Reukli, yeah, Josef. Well anyway, I went in and they said start on Monday at 10am. I went back to school the next day and told my teacher Jack Duffesy ‘good news, good bye, good luck’. That was it because once you got a job you could leave (once you were over fourteen).

Discussion on his class friend who won the Lotto

17. CS: So I started at 10am on the Monday. Now they hadn’t a job in the restaurant, I wanted to be in the restaurant, my brother was in the restaurant, I didn’t know anything about it, and certainly I would never have cooked. Fellows didn’t cook, the mother cooked, and if a fellow or a father was cooking, you’d say ‘what’s wrong with the mother or the sister?’ it was as simple as that. Now that’s in the ordinary Dublin or Irish household. So I started in what they call the still room, When you went in the front room in Jammet’s there was this luxurious restaurant, lovely place, very impressive etc. and further and the back was the grill room and below the grill room was the bars and above the restaurant looking out on Nassau Street was the Blue Room which was a function room, not used to often, and beside the Blue Room, or between the Grill Room and the Blue Room was this (space) and in that corner was a man called Andy McGlynn who was an oyster opener, and he did all the shellfish, prawn salad, lobster salad and all that sort of stuff; and over in that corner was Jacky Byrne who was then the pastry chef, but in fact had only returned from illness and had been the grill chef, so it was a kind of light job to bring him back; and over in that corner was the wash up. Wash up was always staffed by a female (May Bradford), and this was only a light one where they’d wash a few glasses, cups and maybe make a bit of toast or whatever may be needed at the time, not a lot. And over here was a lift that came up from the kitchen. There was only one kitchen although there were four dining rooms. This was a hand lift, completely rope operated and all orders from the kitchen came up on that lift. My job was to collect the food from the lift and put it in an oven, and when the waiters were ready they would serve it inside to the customers.

18. MM: So there was sort of a holding oven as such?

19. CS: Yeah, not in the professional sense, it was quite amazing that people paid such good money; Jammet’s was very expensive in the overall scene. The Dolphin wasn’t nearly half as expensive, even though they did huge business and many of the same people, the same clientele, but now that was part of my job. But my first job in the morning was to de-shell all the shellfish when it came in. All shellfish came in alive, it was cooked alive, cooled and brought upstairs and I would have to de-shell the prawns, lobsters, and occasionally shrimp, and very occasionally crayfish. That was about it, shrimp didn’t appear too much, Americans talked about them often but they rarely appeared. That was up to me, I would take the head, crack the body, open the shell, take out the tail; you were doing a bad job if you didn’t get the tail out with it. With the lobster, split the lobster and take out the coral, leave it aside and chop it for use later on. The shellfish was all for Andy in the corner, very nice man, liked his jar, well then a lot of them did. You knew P.J. Dunne?

20. MM: I did indeed.

21. CS: Well later on, I went on to be the sommelier upstairs and I had my own bar and, jaysus, the amount of drink you had available! I mean you could fiddle left, right and centre. I mean you didn’t even have to fiddle, for their stocktaking was unbelievably loose, and so on. Like if you hadn’t got something to eat, you would just go down to P.J. and give him a large brandy and you got a fillet steak or whatever, Jajsus, it was unbelievable. But, whatever, having done the shellfish, you then had to chop the parsley. Wash the parsley, take the heads off away from the stalks and with a large kitchen knife, chop it very fine and left it to dry out a bit so it was ready. Most of that was for downstairs, a little upstairs, yet I really see that as a English sort of thing, the kitchen was mainly French people, but it was done. It was important to somebody. So as soon as
that was done, I had to clean down the lift, there was a hot plate near the lift and all that area was cleaned and got ready, then go to have something to eat around 12pm.

22. MM: The shells would have gone back down for bisque and stuff?

23. CS: Oh, yeah, the stockpots were amazing, as they often say about the French, the French use everything except the pig’s squeak. You know, and they did, there’s no doubt it, as I say Andy opened all the oysters. We know that oysters shouldn’t be opened in advance, but there was no question, they got their oysters fresh from Galway and they were opened as required. Now oysters were sold down in the bar but there was a barman down there who became all Ireland champion later on, Eamon Preston, he looked after all the oysters down there. Andy only looked after the oysters for the restaurant and the Grill Room, and occasionally if they were cooking, if they were doing oysters au gratin, (MM: or carpetbag steak) Rockefeller hadn’t really appeared by that time, they had that in the Gresham later on, but whatever they were doing, Andy would provide the bivalves. Well, I believe Andy had been an oyster man in The Bailey Restaurant which had earlier been called ‘The Dive’, and that was above all an oyster bar.

24. MM: And was it called ‘The Dive’ or known and ‘The Dive’?

25. CS: I think it was called ‘The Dive’.

26. MM: I think Dave O’Connor (retired colleague of Christy’s) started in The Bailey around that time, so I can check with him.

27. CS: Around the time that I was in Jammet’s, The Bailey was being resurrected. John Ryan, do you know of John Ryan? John Ryan, the writer, he wrote a number of books on Bohemian Dublin in the 1960s, he was also a broadcaster, he did pieces on Sunday Miscellany (radio series). He suggested that Jammet’s was the last bastion of French cooking in Europe when France was occupied, that was own type of expression. Around the time I was talking about, in the early 1950s, John Ryan’s own story is that he was in or around auction rooms somewhere and they were auctioning The Bailey Restaurant and he ended up buying it and he knew nothing about running a restaurant.

28. Now John Ryan is of the family that did own the Monument Creamery in O’Connell Street which is a very famous place beside the Carlton, and they went on to own the Kylemore Bakery, etc., etc.

29. MM: You mentioned that he took over from Besson. Now Besson was in The Hibernian, wasn’t he?

30. CS: No, no, you see, I the way I don’t know about the bar. We’ll leave the bar aside because some people see a bar as being reasonably easy to run whereas a restaurant is a bit more complicated. Certainly the restaurant came under the umbrella of the Besson, I call it the Besson Group. I don’t think it was such a thing. Now Besson was therefore the Hibernian, the Russell and now the Bailey. So some staff from the Hibernian etc. would have been involved to some extent. It would have been kind of part of a rota that they would, so the restaurant….. I remember at that time passing by the Bailey for instance and looking down the gratings and seeing one of the chefs in his whites digging out coal for the fire, you know I mean, you had to remember too that while the French produced marvellous food, hygiene wasn’t always a big consideration. Now I don’t remember an instance like that in Jammet’s or any of the fellows that I would have known but certainly there was no obsession with hygiene, the way a lot of us think there should be, you know, that it is such a huge thing. But that was part of the Bailey at the time and the Bailey was quite good, it went on till, sure it went till I was here for a while. I was here at least ten years while the Bailey was still a decent restaurant (c.1982). Then it just kind of faded away. But that was John Ryan’s involvement there. Now I had gone in as I say, for about three months I was in that position, and then I moved into the restaurant as commis and went down as a commis and a huge influence there at that time was Jimmy Beggan. He was still there, Jimmy was a senior
waiter and he was very important all the way through. I mentioned him from time to time. His son Brian was on the radio only recently representing the Irish fashion business (Libra Clothing). It was Brian who rang me the day the father died and he said you’re the first one I’m ringing to spread the word around his old pals ‘cause I used to bring Jimmy in here, himself and PJ Dunne when we had the final restaurant test for Advanced Service Course, and they used to love coming to see something be flambéed or that sort of thing, you know. I have pictures of the two in here on certain occasions but Jimmy was there. Now the wine waiter in the restaurant, remember the restaurant was downstairs, that was really top-class; That was it; That was the highest you could go in Ireland, the restaurant. The grill room was a kind of a make shift, it was a bit of an in between, even in décor, it had been modernised, it was (turned) into art deco, Monsieur Jammet, Louis, the boss, his wife (Yvonne) was an artist you see, there are Stations of the Cross in certain churches around Ireland. I wouldn’t know any of the names which were designed and maybe even made by her. (note: Dun Laoghaire and Limerick Churches)

Discussion on the Origin of Jammet’s Restaurant from Andrew Street to Nassau Street

31. MM: Was the grill room a bit more casual or something?

32. CS: It was, and it was really an overspill because people I mean people didn’t really go into Jammet’s to be casual, you know, if they did, they’d go to the bar. They could have their food at the bar. There were a few very well known businessmen. Now Jack Toohey was a very famous man at that end. He had a ladies fashion shop just at that end of Grafton Street opposite what’s now Arnotts. Now Jack Toohey writes, you see letters in the Irish Times every now and then because he seemingly has retired down to Connemara and to my knowledge he was Jewish although neither the name nor his appearance was Jewish but I think clothing business was mainly Jewish but he was one of the people who would go into the bar, hardly ever come into the restaurant. There were others would come here, there but the grill room was really an overspill, it wasn’t really, even in my own case when I was promoted first to waiter or improver as they called it then you were put upstairs, kind of to wear you in a bit. Although they were the same staff, they wouldn’t have liked to be called secondary you know. They had to earn a living and all that but they were very different in that sense. Down below Josef Reukli. Now Josef went on after…..

33. MM: But he was Irish was he?

34. CS: No, he was German/Swiss. I think it was from Bern, but I’m not sure. Jimmy Beggan was the great man for that and when he’d come in here we used to go over all sort of things. But Josef afterwards ended up head waiter in Cruise’s in Limerick which was a big, big comedown, but that’s the way it was. But the head waiter in the restaurant was Seamus O’Byrne. Now Johnny O’Byrne who owns Dobbins, that’s his younger brother and I think Johnny had worked in Jammet’s as well. I’m not absolutely sure. Dobbins has celebrated, what is it, 30 years? Seamus was a wonderful person to work with, wonderful person. I don’t know Johnny

35. MM: Yeah. Josef was maitre d’hotel was he?

36. CS: Josef was the head waiter. We didn’t use words like maitre d’. That was an Americanism that came in after. Seamus was sommelier. And there was a real sommelier. Not alone was Seamus the sommelier in Jammet’s, the French, I presume it was the French Embassy but the Wine Board or whatever it was at the time instituted annual exams and that included tasting and so forth and Seamus won it for the first three years. And they had to ask him not to enter again and Seamus took me under his wing, that was part of what he, he used to bring me his books and even bring me for lessons and so on and give me lessons and I did a few of the exams. It obviously didn’t sink extent but then he was really wonderful. Now, he left Ireland when I was still there so that was in 1957 or thereabouts, 1956. His eldest son had asthma and I think it was severe asthma and he was advised that a warmer climate would be better and he went off to what we knew at the time was Rhodesia, I think it was Southern Rhodesia and he well, the wine people all wanted him to get involved. Brian Hamilton, they were involved in, they were certainly importers of Martell I
know that and they wanted Seamus involved and various other people and he didn’t at the time and he went to work for some sort of restaurant or restaurant company in Rhodesia with the family and came back here after about 15 years.

37. Now he did have a restaurant. Seamus opened a restaurant in Temple Bar called the Granary. The Granary was producing above all pastas, all made on the premises. Oh it was huge success, lovely stuff. That would have been yeah let’s say 20 years ago. The ‘80s, It was unusual in that it was kind of cafeteria. Very high quality food, very high quality fresh food. Cafeteria. I do remember going. My wife and myself, and we collected the trays and there was an old lady in front of us and her big problem was how do you get the food from here to there, because that wasn’t around at that time and in turn they had an upstairs place and they had a few steps which made it all the more complicated and maybe cause them problems. It became Duggan’s later because there was a chap named Duggan who I think had worked in the Gresham as a trainee manager and either him or one of his brothers was a rugby international.

38. MM: Right Jim Duggan, was there a Jim Duggan, no?

39. CS: More than likely, the family bought it, you see especially with the trainee managers that we had in the Gresham. Joking and all that sort of thing but a lot of them, the senior people, especially the head waiters or head chefs they were very good at their job, would be looking at these (trainee managers) and saying ‘college failures’. They were often the member of the family who couldn’t do anything academically, if you like, or couldn’t pass their exams so the family bought them something or whatever. There were a lot of them like that. But that was, Seamus a wonderful fellow to work with and like he took a personal interest in me for one reason or another and I can clearly remember one instance and I would have even said it to students here occasionally the customer asked me for a box a matches, now in both Jammet’s and the Gresham cigarettes were never, couldn’t be put on the bill, they had to be paid in cash. So although a customer might have a £100 bill if they asked for a packet of cigarettes they had to pay the money, they wouldn’t be put on, and that was part of control, control was very difficult on cigarettes and alcohol. You couldn’t do much for the alcohol but the cigarettes and that’s why now almost every place has machines. They don’t handle cigarettes. You could say it’s a loss of profit, but it’s a loss of loss. But I remember it was something like a penny, or whatever it was and I gave the customer the matches and Seamus was watching me and he said to me ‘you didn’t get the money’ and I’d paid it, you see, and I said ‘no, no’ and he said ‘hold on, that’s your money, now whether you’re shy or embarrassed or not that’s your business, you’re here as a professional, you go to that person and say that will be a penny or whatever and collect it’ which you have to. And that was it, and that was it, he said. That’s the professionalism, the show must go on. And he said ‘you’re entitled to your own feelings and opinions but you are here to do a job, do it.’ A wonderful fellow, wonderful fellow. That was Seamus.

40. Now I was there as little as two-and-a-half years, it certainly wasn’t three years; usually you did at least three year, when I was then promoted up to the Grill room as sommelier up there. They had a small bar. Oh sorry downstairs Seamus O’Byrne had his own bar, like he made cocktails for instance and looked after the wines. Now the whole stock including bottles of beer but no draft beer, draft beer was available in the bar and would not be served in the restaurant and there was no such thing as getting two bottles in a glass or things like that. A bottle, and the bottle never went to the table. The bottle was poured and served if you had beer. They didn’t push beer in any way but it was there, but above all cocktails, shorter drinks and so on.....

41. MM: What sorts of cocktails were served back then?

42. CS: Oh, above all, the dry martini and the Manhattan. They were the big ones and the Rob Roy, the very traditional American ones. There was no things like the Harvey Wall banger and all these and even the Alexander and that sort of thing, they’re all ‘newish’, they’re all ‘newish’, certainly above all and in fact Seamus used to do something which I did often in the Gresham later. The Americans are terrified of European cocktails and I remember getting a group of eight
Americans in one evening in the Gresham and saying to them ‘would you like cocktail before?’ and they saying ‘yeah I would, I don’t like your martinis here’ and I said ‘I’ll make it for you here.’ (at the table) And what I used to do is I’d bring a glass of gin and I’d bring a tiny little measure of Vermont and I’d actually dip a spoon in the Vermont and then stir and say ‘that’s it’ and very often they’d have a second one, you know because you’d do it at the table for them and do it exactly and you’d say ‘you tell me.’

Anecdote about American couple in the Gresham called Sullivan

43. CS: Terry O’Sullivan wasn’t Terry O’Sullivan, he’s Terry O’Faoláin. He only used the name, which was his wife’s name; because he was an army officer and he was writing articles and he shouldn’t have been so he used the wife’s name. That’s why Nuala O’Faoláin is, that’s her proper name and that’s his daughter. And other people, there was the ‘Pope’ O’Mahony who was a wonderful fellow on the radio. The ‘Pope’ O’Mahony and he used to hold court and he was great, he used to have great history programmes and he’d be saying ‘oh yes and their descendants from…..’ and he’d go on and on and he used to have little parties and gathering in the Gresham for historical societies and all these people. ……..But Jammet’s, as I say in there…..

44. MM: You had been promoted to the Grill room.

45. CS: That was at the most two-and-a-half years and then gradually in the grill room, they left the bar and so on.

46. MM: Was there an open grill in the grill room?

47. CS: Oh yes, very much so.

48. MM: And who used to cook, was there a chef cooking?

49. CS: Well, Jacky Byrne, there was a chef there yeah. In fact the chef when I arrived first was John Tisdell, a very handsome fellow, very good pianist and actually related to the famous Peggy Dell. Peggy Dell was actually Peggy Tisdell and when Joe Loss signed to sing around Britain she changed from Tisdell to Dell and went on to be very, very, famous but John, he would get the grill ready and get everything going, the big charcoal grill, slope and bars, a drip tray, a big desk countered front with a big, big selection. I used to do a grill tray here with PJ, PJ used to give me the whole range of cuts and fish particularly sole on the bone and so on and…..All right in front. Now porterhouse and t-bones were kind of American things and they were just kind of appearing and they weren’t all that, above all the point steak, the rump steak, because that was, see this grill was a male thing, the women weren’t all that pushed. They’d be into sauced dishes but not alone that but, I’m not sure if they had a grill in the Dolphin, but they did have one in the Metropole, what it was then the new Metropole, and that was set up by Michael Marley. You knew Michael Marley?

50. MM: I know of Michael.

51. CS: Well Michael Marley had come over from London where he had trained and the Elliman’s, they were the Jewish family who owned the Metropole and the Royal and various other practically all the theatres of Dublin at some time. They decided to create the Metropole with a cinema, ballroom, restaurant, grill room, bars, the lot. You might say an entertainment centre and Michael Marley was recruited to come over and Michael told me himself because I did some national surveys (with CERT) with Michael in 1980 or thereabouts and we had a great time.

52. MM: Is Michael still alive.
53. CS: No he’s dead now. But his brief was to set up this restaurant which was to take over from Jammet’s. And part of that was that he went in, he was sent in at least once a week with his wife to have dinner in Jammet’s and that was to be replicated. Now, the Ritz that you mentioned.

54. MM: That’s right yeah.

55. CS: There was a picture and it included a man call Harry Chartaine. And Jimmy Beggan told me Harry Chartaine had been brought from France to create the Ritz to take over from Jammet’s. That would have been in the mid ‘30s where the Metropole was the mid ‘40s or late ‘40s. Harry Chartaine, I remember that name well. But however remember in the mid ‘30s in Dublin, there was also the Regal Rooms.

56. MM: That’s right, that’s where Uhlemann started wasn’t it?

57. CS: The Regal Rooms were huge and it was to be…..

58. MM: And (Michael) McManus was there with Uhlemann as well?

59. CS: It was the Café de Paris in London, that sort of thing and it was to be bigger here. It was to be better here and they recruited all over the place but there was various people I met who had been involved somehow. I know Tommy White who was famously connected with the ballroom in the Metropole and then went on to be a full-time official in the transport union. I knew Tommy well and the unusual thing about him is that he had been a chef in the Regal Rooms when it opened. I think it only lasted about a year because it was such a big undertaking. Now there would be stuff in the newspapers of the time. I would think about 1935, around the mid 30s. Tommy worked in the kitchen. He was a chef in the Regal Rooms and low and behold when I knew him he was a waiter in the Metropole. Now he was in the ballroom, and the ballroom didn’t require a huge amount of skill because it was a bit rough and ready compared to the restaurant, and then he went on to be and what I didn’t know about Tommy later until his actual funeral, I was at his funeral and, you never heard of Matt O’Neill did you? Matt O’Neill was famous as secretary of Dublin No. 4 Branch, the hotel and restaurant branch but even more so…..

60. MM: That was after Micky Mullen?

61. CS: Yes, but even more so because he did the eulogy over Brendan Behan’s grave at the request of Kathleen, his mother, because they were school pals up in Crumlin and they were in Na Fianna and probably the Curragh together.

Discussion over the killing of Superintendent Gantly during the Nolan and Laverty chase in Pearse Street c.1947

62. CS: Anyway getting back to Jammet’s certainly after three years I was working as a waiter, it would have been much earlier than that. I was earning amazing money and the fellows I’d gone to school with (laugh) one of my main friends was on Irish Shipping and he’d be away, they used to go on contract, and they’d be away for six months, possibly a year but usually six months, occasionally three and he’d be flush when he’d come back and we’d be going to dances. There was three of us. The other lad worked in Arnotts and the lad from Irish Shipping, he’d be buying the lot because he had the money, and then in the middle of it then the whole thing would fade away, then we’d have to pay for him, and so on. But I remember my brother was going to visit relatives in England with his wife and he said to me ‘why don’t you come’ and as it happened I had a week available, I went in and got it and I had the money. Now at the time I had my money in the post office, you wouldn’t think of doing a bank account at that time, and a cheque, Jesus no one ever thought about having a cheque, and what I had to do was, his own father-in-law was a regular of the famous pub, Toners in Baggot Street and I had my money in the post office, and I had my post office book but it took a week or whatever to get it out. You had to write and wait, and all this but when I gave my book to the barman in Toners and he gave me the loan and
whatever. I mean I was flush, it was no problem with the money and we went off and had a great time over there, went to three football matches and I wrote about it in the Shelbourne (FC) Programme a while ago and among the people I saw playing was Bobby Robson who is now the manager of Newcastle.

63. MM: I know, yeah.

64. CS: When it came to the winter at that time there was huge extremes between summer and winter. Jesus, it was unbelievable, and it got worse even later when I was involved in, I got involved in the union later. I was a member of the union in Jammet’s, a historic piece there, (pointing to his union card) I brought it in for a different reason but two historic items there. My first union card and my first Labour Party card.

65. MM: Yeah 1964.

66. CS: And you can see signed my Michael Mullen.

67. MM: Michael Mullen, the Branch Secretary?

68. CS: And Tommy Wright wrote that and Tommy Write got my because…..

69. MM: And that 29a Eden Quay, that was before Liberty Hall?

70. CS: Yeah, yeah. Mullen was amazing, he’d been a labourer in excide or drydex batteries and somehow anyway he’d come, he was from up around the Coombe. I remember him coming in Jammet’s. He was brought in to do something about the strike. It was a mess, a fucking mess. My view is that the real reason the strike happened 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 or that’s what happened and that’s what did happen and as a result they drove it, and got it through and once they were out they stayed out and the problem…..

71. MM: They wanted their double or treble cut of the…..?

72. CS: I was one of the people that as soon as I got involved I said ‘no’. If there is a difference it should be paid by the employer, we should all get a point or whatever, you know, and so on. Now first of all I don’t agree with service charge. I think we should have never gone for it although I benefited from it, but that’s another matter. Anyway we had the redundancies, now Michael Mullen had brought in this idea and I mentioned it when I wrote about the strike I think it was. But I mentioned in one of the articles, I don’t know if you got any of the articles in the Hotel and Catering Review.

73. MM: I haven’t gone through them yet.

74. CS: The football is one, and the strike as well but Mullen had brought in this ‘weeks about’ as we call it. That was if you had ten chefs for instance but you only needed eight you didn’t sack two. Two of them took a week off. Now they could sign on the dole, they could do ‘nixers’, go for a holiday, whatever they wanted to do and they were back the next week. Then the next two went and so on which was really very, very sensible. I mean you want your staff there, you want the people you know, the people who know their job and are proven. It was great, so the first year when I was a waiter there was redundancy and I think it was probably one. Now I’d have been the one to go but Mullen had already said this, and it worked, and the week you were off you could go to the dole and sign, and I remember I signed in Werburgh Street and I mightn’t have signed for the one week, when I think about it because I was flush and I was single and all. I was the only one in the family not married, there was just myself and my mother. My parents had split up, had separated which was very unusual at the time. I was 11 or so and it was just my mother and myself and, ah sure, people who owed me money, like if anyone was short. I’ve a brother-in-law
in particular and in fairness to him when I was a bit short later he made sure that he got me money, you know. The ‘weeks about’, we went, that was all right. Then the next year it came to ‘weeks about’, it came to redundancy and two of the senior people said ‘no we’re not doing weeks about, we can’t afford it.’ Now the two of them seemed to be very comfortable and all that sort of thing and the two of them were those sort, they were pals and that sort of thing and however it doesn’t matter, anyway as a result I was the youngest of the waiters, so I had to go. So I worked throughout that winter. You could do casual work around. Did a few jobs in The Hibernian, Shelbourne, The Central. Did you know Liam Kavanagh? Well, Liam’s brother Bobby was the head wai
ter, and Bobby and my brother were good friends. They played football together.

75. MM: Is this the same Bobby who went working for PV Doyle?

76. CS: The Robert Room in the Montrose is called after him, and PV drove to his death. PV’s policy was, you see, that whereas there were two head chefs, or two head waiters, he would employ one and give them 40% more, but he was still saving his 60% and drive them to their death. One head waiter, I would call a friend of mine, much as I disagreed with, he used to go from one Doyle Hotel to another to borrow cutlery and stuff when he needed to. And I’d said ‘you’re crazy, you’re crazy, you’ll drive yourself’ but it did happen to Bobby. Bobby had a heart attack and went back too early. I was interviewed for that job, I was asked, I knew the Gresham was on the turn. I could see that things, I was the shop steward in the Gresham for my last five years and I was involved in all sorts of unions. I was on the first Dining Room Committee of the CERT when the CERT was formed and so I could see the Gresham was at best (inaudible).

77. MM: This is around what time now, the ’60s?

78. CS: Well let’s see – Jammet’s ’51, the Gresham ’56, ’66, about ’70. Sixty-nine, ’70 you could see. Toddy was due to retire.

79. MM: I believe there was a young guy there (Eoin Dillon) but he wasn’t really let manage, he went off to the London Tara after that or something.

80. CS: Ah there were many of those. Oh, Toddy wouldn’t let anyone do anything. Ah sure there was an Englishman, Bennett, I didn’t know him very well, there was another Englishman then, I knew him well. They were his assistants and Bennett got his photograph in the paper for something or other and, be Jaysus, Toddy tore strips off him. ‘Any pictures going in is mine’, and that’s the way it was. Oh, he was the boss, he was MD, the manager and director. Even the directors knew, they wouldn’t give him proper titles, they had to be very careful with him. But he was, he was powerful. But you see in his last few years I could see, they weren’t restocking for instance. Although I left school at fourteen, I hadn’t even sat my primary cert, hadn’t even failed my primary cert, but I still always wanted to learn and I actually thought in my teen years, I considered strongly going to England, although I had sisters in England and that. The real reason was they then had the new free education. That’s where John Hume and all those got their university. John Hume’s father was unemployed for all his life, you know, and it was the British labour government brought in the new education thing and so if you were in Britain then you could go on to university and so forth and I always had that sort of thing in mind, but I always did bits and pieces in between and I did courses up in the College of Industrial Relations which is now the National College of Ireland, moved over here now with Joyce O’Connor but that was the Jesuits beside Gonzaga and I did industrial relations so then later did the diploma in social studies but I was always looking at those sort of things and we did economics and all. I remember in one case I got an A for my economics paper and so forth and watching things going on and seeing and I was always involved in the training aspect. Michael Mullen and Matt O’Neill and those would often ask me would you go on their committee and even when CERT was formed first I was actually approached. I did apply for the first training advisor which was given to Kevin O’Mara, and I often think how lucky I was that I wasn’t selected because I was far too young, you know. I mean I had good training in the sense of Jammet’s and the Gresham and all that. That happened in
the Tara in London, a young guy only twenty five as manager, and they had to bring in Eoin Dillon to sort it out.

81. **MM:** I believe Eoin Dillon was great in the Gresham?

82. **CS:** Eoin was a trainee. As he says himself a ‘pot walloper’ he went in at the beginning. Eoin had been at the Sorbonne in Paris, remember Eoin’s father was a professor in Galway, professor in Celtic Studies I think. They were a very wealthy family, they had a house on Merrion Square and Galway and all that and Eoin had been in the Sorbonne but for one reason or another he ended up ‘pot walloping’ in the Gresham as he says. I did a piece on Eoin Dillon in the *Hotel and Catering Review* as well (c.1988). I’d known him, he was chairman of the first Dinning Room Committee on CERT and I was a member of the committee and we had many a disagreement. A great fellow to work with because you could disagree with him, you could have rows with him and then professionally come along and say how’s everything. Now Eoin was a ‘pot walloper’ as a trainee manager, you know. How long he stayed in the Gresham I’m not sure. Then he went off wherever, wherever, then he came back as Food and Beverage (manager) in the Shelbourne. The Shelbourne was on its last legs. I have said, I’ve written it must be in the *Hotel and Catering Review* piece I did, the reason, the person responsible for having the Shelbourne where it is today is Eoin Dillon. Now what I mean by that was we were coming in to the EU, the EEC, office blocks, ah Jesus, everyone with a few shillings wanted to build office blocks. That was where all the money was. Even if we didn’t do anything, other companies were going to come in because we were in the EEC.

83. Now at that time in the Gresham whatever national agreement there was at that time there was a clause in it that if the employer baulked at paying the money that the union side could see their books, they have to prove to them so Toddy had said they couldn’t afford it so we said ‘well all right then we have to see your books’ and the union got in an economist and an accountant and so forth. Actually Manus O’Riordan who is still with the union there, he’s an economist and we had him in. And Toddy, you see, they were saying the way things were going in the hotel business that they’d make more money selling it or turning it into an office block and we said ‘well prove it, prove it’. So it didn’t hold water, you know, so we got our rise whatever. But the Shelbourne was the same. Now the Shelbourne had really stuttered. You see Toddy had americanised the Gresham. You see the Shelbourne was made into the American, the hotel for Americans. The Shelbourne was still the British hotel, it was still the colonial hotel and remember a sign of that is that up to quite recently, every rugby event took place, and whatever about soccer being a foreign game, rugby was the Anglo game and that was the real, and that even up to recently was where all the money was. But however they were the three hotels, there were only three (A) hotels, you see. There was the Shelbourne which was if you like British or British style and Captain Peter Jury was the MD and he was so British, captain from the British forces. Ken Besson’s Hibernian was the French continental. Now the French rugby team, the only rugby event that didn’t happen in the Shelbourne, the French rugby team stayed in the Hibernian. You know that signified that. The Gresham was the American hotel and that meant all the stars came. Now Grace Kelly went to the Shelbourne but then Albert came to the Gresham and that was like, it was some organisation that had her, they often say this is the Grace Kelly’s suite and all that. Like she may have stayed there once where she stayed in the Gresham three times or whatever, that sort of thing, you know. Laurel and Hardy stayed in the Shelbourne, but only because there was so many dances and all that going on in the Gresham that they’d believe there was too much noise and they moved out. But other than that, anyone, Bob Hope there last week, they had a picture in *The Irish Times* of him in the Gresham.

84. **MM:** Where did the Russell come in at this stage?

85. **CS:** The Russell when I was in Jammet’s the main competition was the Red Bank but even more so the hotels. Restaurants were very important, even when I was doing my day-release here with Kevin O’Rourke, Kevin O’Rourke was saying you didn’t have this string of trainee managers as you had then and the deputy manager, the deputy for the manager when he was off was the head
waiter because he was the one meeting the customers and all that. Now that changed drastically. Go back to the service charge, that’s something that I’ve never written, but my own view is first of all the strike should never have happened, it was pushed by a number of very strong head waiters and they had power as well even over their own waiters, and they got it through. But the real beneficiaries of the service charge in hotels were the porters. Remember first of the all, the rooms, they didn’t increase food charges throughout because there was criticism of it because locals would go in occasionally. I remember a fellow stood up in the Dáil and he said he’d been in the Shelbourne and he was charged so much for ‘a piece of meat and two potatoes’. You know that’s the way he put it. ‘A lump a meat’ and so on, and that’s the way he saw it. And (the porters) they did really get huge money out of it as a result and whatever about the staff in the restaurant, but in my cases the staff in the kitchen because you were in a hot house, Jesus the moneys the porters were getting in comparison. See I always suggest even with the students here that however bad conditions in the restaurant, they can’t be bad because they have to be there for the customer. So you can’t have a waiter going in and out of a dirty place because they’ll be dirty whereas they can get away it in the kitchen. Don’t forget the Gresham when I went in there they had a little notice on their menus that people were invited to examine their new kitchens and they had little tours around the kitchen.

86. MM: And was Uhlemann there?

87. CS: When I went in first, now Andy Whelan, I thinking Andy was I’m not really sure….

88. MM: Andy was there from ’56.

89. CS: Well I was about that time but we went in, in different ways. The ‘weeks about’, as I say, and then these two people said ‘no’ so I was out for the winter. Now Seamus O’Byrne was now the head waiter. (Josef had gone to Limerick) He’d been sommelier and he said to me. But Seamus O’Bryne, agreed that I would be back at Easter and you see Jammet’s didn’t do many functions but if there was one, he wanted me there and so and then I did the bits in the Shelbourne. The Shelbourne ballroom was new then, Earl Gill was the band leader.

90. MM: Can I just ask you a question, do you remember a competition from a place in Suffolk Street where Elvery’s is now called Frascati’s?

91. CS: No, I don’t. Funny now, Ostinelli’s in Hawkins Street, that’s another matter.

92. MM: Was Frankie Farren in Jammet’s when you started?

93. CS: No, I knew of Frankie and you see football and union business were things, above all football, if they had played they’d be out at the matches or something like that and then they’d be a prize given or something and you’d meeting somebody and there was a lot of dances. Dancing and the cinema was big. There were very close connections between the hotel and restaurant workers branch of the transport union and the cinema and there were a lot of, for instance the Oppermans there were Oppermans chefs or managers and one of the brothers Carl was a cinema manager. There was a lot of that and when the, during the strike one of the things Micky Mullen did was organise a lot of regular dances. The ‘Barby’ out near Bray Woodbrook, down the golf course there, I don’t know what’s there now but it was the ‘Barby’. I think he used to get that for nothing. You see part of the reason you’d get it for nothing was it was isolated and they wouldn’t get big crowds all that often so if they could get someone to use it. Now the Metropole used to give, even later in the Gresham they used to give us the use of the ballroom say on a Monday night for nothing but there reason was, they’d get it on the bar. There was no food and it was just informal but they’d make it on the bar because there was a lot of dances and they were always supported by hotel, restaurant and cinema people.

94. Remember every cinema had a restaurant of some sort. The Capital had a wonderful restaurant. Have you ever heard of Sheila Conroy? Sheila Conroy was Chairperson of the RTE Authority.
among other things. She was a waitress in the Capital. The Capital was a lovely place. Now it wouldn’t have produced the standard of food like Jammet’s and that but it was lovely like, the English type high tea, which was the idea, high tea. Where you’d get a salad or a grill, you really wouldn’t have a started, that wasn’t part of a high tea. You’d have a main course, salad or a grill, you’d have bread and butter, a pot of tea and either on the table or to come later was a selection of cakes and you could get the lot together. Now the last place in Dublin that did high tea to my knowledge was Wynn’s and it’s appropriate that it’s Wynn’s because Wynn’s was near the cinemas of O’Connell Street and the Abbey Theatre because if you go back now remember to the ‘50s and ‘60s when the majority of married women did not work outside the home, right, if there was a show or a film on the wife would come in to meet the husband from work, they would then have their high tea and go on to the show. Wynn’s was the last place they had it in that sense. The Grand Hotel in Malahide did have some years ago a high tea on which included soup for instance which is completely out of context in my view, like it was an early dinner rather than, but Wynn’s my wife and myself even though we weren’t, when I was here with Kevin O’Rourke doing day release, that is.

95. MM: Now did you come in to do day release in Cathal Brugha Street?

96. CS: Let’s say, when I was probably sixteen, they started this new scheme where I presume the employer paid and they sent their commis, and I came over from Jammets, about 3.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. or thereabouts and Kevin O’Rourke was newly arrived as lecturer in restaurant management, let’s say. Now he also did hotel management. Now at the time he was the only one did what you might call front of house stuff. PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly, and Jim Kilbride would have been doing the kitchen area and I don’t know, had you talked to Andy (Whelan)?

97. MM: I’ve talked to Andy, yeah.

98. CS: Well you see there was a man here called Beaucaire Murphy.

99. MM: He was French.

100. CS: An interesting name. And don’t forget the famous Mrs. O’Murphy, the woman of was it Louis XIV. There are paintings of her in face, nude paintings of her, Mrs. (Louisa) O’Murphy. She was a very famous person of the French court so and don’t forget it may well have been a spin off from the Wild Geese.

Discussion on the Wine Geese

101. MM: But Kevin O’Rourke was the lecturer here and that day release would have happened from Jammet’s right. How long did that go on for?

102. CS: We only did one year. I did one year. I presume it was probably September to May or thereabouts. I used to come out of Jammet’s into Grafton Street and meet two lads from the Wicklow, the Wicklow Hotel was a good hotel at that time on Wicklow Street. Ah there would be different restaurants in the building now. The building is still there. It fizzled out finally when it was bought by John Costello who built the Royal Dublin (Hotel). He built the Royal Dublin. At that time it was owned by Lord somebody or other. I remember that there were redundancies, and I remember Micky Mullen the branch secretary having huge problems trying to contact this character, Lord somebody living in England, you know, the Wicklow.

103. MM: The three of you used to come up?

104. CS: Walk across, past the Savoy and at the time the dealers would be outside the Savoy asking us to go in and buy tickets. Dublin was the highest cinema attendees certainly in Europe if not in the world and Sunday nights were reserved to tickets only and tickets would go for three or four times there face value, no matter was on because the place was packed. A huge number of
people were regulars, they went every Tuesday and got their ticket, whatever was left on Wednesday or Thursday was sold but people used to leave them in their will even. They’d leave them to someone in the family – Sunday night in the Royal, for instance.

105. MM: They’d have a lifetime ticket sort of thing?

106. CS: Huge, but they were after us to go in, and of course, well I wouldn’t go in. I do know one lad took it and went out the back and someone says ‘by Jesus if they (catch your), you’re head is gone’. There was a fellow lived in Dorset Street, (called) Sartini, he controlled it. He gave them their money and he had to get double back so they had to get treble or more and they’d be after you.

Anecdote about a courting couple and black market cinema tickets.

107. That was it but now and here’s another thing that happened here (Cathal Brugha Street). Now the old restaurant, probably when Andy started the restaurant was up, Tom Farrell’s room, you know Tom Farrell’s room (on the 3rd floor), that was the restaurant. Quite a long place and then there was a very big kitchen behind it but we used to come along, Kevin O’Rourke would be there, it must have been 3.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. I forget now exactly. But we’d come along and we’d be given whatever task it was, do this, do that and the other and then about fifteen minutes to go you then had to strip off all the tables and put everything back. Nothing was used. You’d no food. So it was all clean and all that, all put back and he’d come out and inspect everything, he’d go through the whole lot and one incident then was that and I was telling the Lord Mayor. I had the Lord Mayor out for lunch and I was telling him because he didn’t even actually realise that we were actually a subcommittee of Dublin Corporation. This whole thing was built by Dublin Corporation. But anyway Kevin O’Rourke comes in and he says ‘now there’s a problem, something has been stolen’. Seemingly somebody had left an apple pie or apple tart to cool and some of the lads had attacked it and it was eaten and I could clearly remember him saying ‘that is the property of the corporation’, it wasn’t the property of the college or the VEC, it was the property and we all had to pay 3p a head and the two lads from the Wicklow, whether they had it or not, they said they hadn’t and I had to give them the loan of the three and I never got it back and I never really thought I’d get it back but then again Jammet’s were the aristocrats of the restaurant business and it was always expected they had money, you know that was the way it was.

108. Now Kevin O’Rourke did a few tests at the end and he had me picked out to win the overall but in fact I didn’t, a chap called Paddy Cassidy from the Gresham won, and it would seem that the tie breaker, the crucial difference was, as I told you there was a grill in Jammet’s and it was a very important part, obviously, to the grill room. The final question that it seems he won on and I lost on was ‘describe grill sole on the bone’, and I went through the fact that you dust it with flour, you coat it in oil, you put in onto your grill, your already hot grill bars and so forth and making sure to turn it and so forth, and so forth and that it would be layered with the bar, you would see the bars on it etc. and then so on and serve it onto a salad or a ring of lemon and a sprig of parsley and all that sort of thing but seemingly the answer that was taken as correct was that it was cooked in butter and then marked with grill bars.

109. MM: Oh right.

110. CS: And seemingly that’s what they did in the Gresham at that time and as it happens Kevin O’Rourke had just come from the Gresham and the three examiners were all their training in the Gresham and so, O’Rourke had picked me out to win and my brother to win, there was a head waiters one at the time and my brother did win the head waiters. Then later how I came in here (to teach in Cathal Brugha Street) was some years later when CERT was set up, Eoin Dillon was chairman of the Dining Room Committee and the Dining Room was big. They don’t pay much attention to it now because that was seen as the front of the house, that was dealing with the customers and Eoin Dillon was the Chairman and I was one of the people nominated, I was nominated by the union, John Murphy of the Gresham was another one on, Kevin O’Rourke here
was on, Kevin O’Meara who was then with CERT, there was a chap named Cronin who was the instructor in Rockwell. Rockwell was big at that time. A number of the colleges, Rockwell and where?

111.MM: Maynooth was it, and Athenry?

112.CS: Tony Conlon had been there and John Gibbons (Athenry), but we had the feeling that these were set-up to provide catering facilities and above all it was Michael Mullen and Mullen was to chair the first Chairman of CERT and.....They weren’t there to provide training for the individual, they were there to provide services for their own people and that was the strong feeling and gradually Mullen worked at it and got it switched around. Maynooth was kind of combined with Galway, into Galway the one in Galway. Rockwell continued on for a while but eventually was phased out. I was extern for, certainly I was extern for the Maynooth.

113.MM: Sure Rockwell went on until the ‘80s.

114.CS: Well I was extern in its last few years down there but you could see, it was a Father Duggan, he was the one, they were all afraid of him and he used to come in when Kevin O’Mara and I were doing the restaurant competition, when we were going to Olympia in London every second year I put forward the view that we should have ours in the in between years. Have a similar one here. So when we set it up Kevin O’Mara and myself were asked to do the restaurant side so we did it for a number of years over there. Kevin knew him from being, because Kevin had direct contact and he’d come in and he’d be (inaudible) but by God the pressure you could see. He very seldom came near me because he didn’t know me.

115.MM: Now this was Father Duggan?

116.CS: Father Duggan, I think it was, but he was ‘oh Jesus’ and if a Rockwell student didn’t win, the look of his face alone!!!

117.MM: And where would these competitions have been held?

118.CS: In our case they were in the RDS.

119.MM: And was that part of the CEA at the time, or was it with Chef Ireland?

120.CS: Sure they only came in and for some reason then people left. We were the ones who were setting it up and then the catering suppliers got in on the act and so on and I forget now and after a while then I know Kevin wanted to get out of it anyway. Let someone else get in and do it. I felt the say so we just said ‘right good luck’. I think it was Jimmy Brown, maybe Fran Cullen.....

121.MM: That took over the competitions?

122.CS: I had this kind of homespun philosophy of my own of a kind of a five year cycle. I believe in your own life if possible to make a worthwhile change at least every five years. Ideally it would be your job but a lot of people can not change their job. Now we’re lucky in here in that you can create courses, I mean, if I created the advanced service I would say mainly on the impetus of Jim Kilbride. When Jim was setting up the advance courses (City & Guilds 706/3) he said it to me and we’ll go, I’m going to go around such a place, getting this, that and the other. Come on with me and I went to a lot of the places. Bewley’s Bakery and all those sort of places and then finally, then when it was starting for the first few years I used to do things on service and cheeseboards and wine and things like that. Then when I set-up the wine course it was on Tuesday night in fact to tie in with the chefs so the chefs who’d travelled could do it that night if they wished and of course it was Kilbride saying ‘you know we need the advanced service to link in’. It never really did link in but it complimented and that’s when I used to bring in Jimmy
Beggan and PJ Dunne after he retired and they’d be chatting away and they’d be real old fogeys like the….. The French restaurant, the old foggy sitting there and he watching everything and pretending nothing, that’s the way Jammets was. Louis Jammets was (sigh).

123. Some years ago down in Kerry, when I came in here first I lost a fortune. Jesus I lost a fortune. When I decided I was moving on from the Gresham, as I say, for instance I was asked to go for a few positions in CERT and I went for the one that Kevin O’Mara got and there were of us I think in the final interview, and like they were giants compared to myself but Kevin was the best man for the job and like he was marvellous but there were other very good people there certainly should have been way ahead of me. So when they were opening Restaurant Na Mara in Dun Laoghaire they had a big ad in a Sunday paper looking for a restaurant manager and I ended up in the last three. And Brid O’Donoghue was interviewing, do you know Brid O’Donoghue at all. Bridge O’Donoghue was personnel with the Great Southern, I ended up in the last three and then when they started…..

124. MM: Was that ’64 or something or when was it?

125. CS: Well I came in here isn’t it ’70, so ’68 or ’69 or thereabouts. The reason they created the Restaurant na Mara was, their had been exhibitions and competitions and the seafood side had been considered so successful by Dr. Hogan, the then Chairman of CIE Group and they owned of course the building and it was in their view under utilised. He came up with this idea of a complete seafood (restaurant) and when I was being interviewed Brid O’Donoghue. There were different things about Restaurant na Mara and I said ‘Brid leave it, forget about it’ and Brendan Maher was the Managing Director of Great Southern at the time. Same as Eamon McKeon now and she said she rang me at home one evening and said ‘will you come out and see Brendan?’ ‘Ah’ I said ‘Brid there’s no point, there’s a few things I just can’t, wouldn’t accept.’ For instance like there was to be a head chef, a restaurant manager, that was it, no one else for instance and I said right away I’d only do a forty hour, five day week. But she said they were open for six days. I said ‘I expect to have an assistant’. I’d be responsible. If my assistant made a mess of it, I’d be responsible too, I’ve no problem with that but I’m not going to be here morning, noon and night. And she said ‘will you come out and see Brendan Maher.’ And I did go out and see Brendan Maher but I said really it’s, I know the Gresham is in difficulty but I’m not going to go into something else. Now as it happens, they brought back Peter Dowling and I knew Peter well. He’d had been with them and he’d left them. They’d the Soup Bowl, you know of the Soup Bowl.

126. MM: Yeah, yeah on Molesworth Street.

127. CS: He had gone into partnership with Peter Powrie to buy the Soup Bowl but sure it didn’t work out. Peter Dowling was too nice a fellow

128. MM: Who owned the Soup Bowl?

129. CS: Well Peter Powrie was one. I don’t know really. So they were only little kind of boutique restaurants compared to, they were the little things, there was Bentleys in Molesworth Street around that time and these were often owned by English or English type people and like they were fashionable and Bentleys disappeared, and Jimmy Kelly I knew well was left high and dry, eight kids, no redundancy and lucky enough he’d kept his union membership and the union got after you man and eventually got him some money and the poor fellow, Jimmy died himself about five years after. He was a little fellow, had been a jockey, a trainee jockey, excellent at his job, absolutely, but when Bentley just kind of disappeared over night, it may not have been owned by Bentley but whoever owned it.

130. MM: There was another place…..
131. CS: Eugene McSweeney was involved with another Bentley’s. That was kind of a resurrection of the name. But you have those things around the place. (note: that Bentley’s was in Baggot Street and both Alan O’Reilly and Kevin Thornton worked there under Eugene)

132. MM: There was a place on Leeson Street, the something rooms, the Tandoori Rooms

133. CS: But they were all later, they were all coming later. No the Green Rooster was a famous one in O’Connell Street and it was kind of a late night restaurant with waiters and the whole lot. Good quality stuff, now it wouldn’t have challenged the Gresham or the Russell after, that sort of thing but it was like the novelty thing that was in O’Connell Street and every now and then you’d see a waiter coming out because someone hadn’t paid their bill. That sort of stuff (you know).

134. MM: Where on O’Connell Street was the Green Rooster? There is a building at the moment but it has an oval shaped window on it, was it near there?

135. CS: Oval, you mean a half round. That was The Rainbow. That is beside the O’Connell monument. That was the Rainbow Café. That was a huge Buddy Holly café, that was the in place where Buddy Holly, I can remember standing on the stairs with three of my colleagues, all young waiters in the Gresham, maybe six months or at the most a year before I got married, and I got married in ’61 and we were waiting to get in there for a ‘tutti fruity’, just simply ice-creams, that’s all nothing else and Buddy Holly on the jukebox signing ‘I love you Peggy Sue’ and I was going to get married to Peggy in six months time. Imagine, no alcohol!!! Not a question of alcohol. Now the fellows with me would knock back the alcohol equally as well, but there we were. Just amazing compared to the way teenagers and are now, absolutely amazing, you know. Oh, that was the Rainbow. I mean it was huge and that was the Rainbow. They had it coloured. I think I mentioned that in the Gresham book.

Discussion on the Pissoirs of Dublin, the Laurence Photographic Collection, and the Gilbert Library in Pearse Street.

136. MM: How long were you in Jammet’s?

137. CS: For five years.

138. MM: So basically you went from Jammet’s, you worked casual for a while and then you went to the Gresham.

139. CS: No I didn’t really, in the sense that I only worked casually to fill in the time until I went back to Jammet’s. Now it was Seamus O’ Byrne, now I mention Bobby Kavanagh, Bobby you see was in the Central, and I did a few jobs and Bobby wanted me to go in full-time but I didn’t want to go in. The Central was dodgy, nothing wrong with the place but it wasn’t doing business. Its reputation was gone. Bobby was a very nice fellow.

140. MM: They closed during the strike for the whole year, the Central.

141. CS: They were all ruined by the strike. They were ruined by the strike. That was the end. In the piece I did on it I suggested they limped along until they closed or sold or whatever. And Toddy was one of the big ones because he positively went out and got the business. He didn’t just wait for it to happen and he went out and took all their business and even by having some of the waiters there, they were coming over, they knew. At that time even in a place like the Capitol, you’d get to know one of the waitresses or the waiters. And like up around the Four Courts for instance, some of the old waiters, I remember a young waiter, like maybe Albert Mulligan, you know, when he was let’s say in his twenties, and he went in there as kind of holiday relief or whatever, and like the old judges and all would be coming in and they wouldn’t even order. They’d say ‘Tom knows’ and Jesus, Tom is off on holidays and he (the judge) wouldn’t even say what he wanted because that’s it, I am so and so and I’m here every, ‘ah Jesus, what do you do?’.
And of course, if anything was wrong, and so on. Ah. The Four Courts was another one there. And you know the Four Courts the building that’s there now, the red brick they actually built that as an extension and then sold the bloody thing. You know like it’s probably true about a lot of the things in the hotel sense, the famous expression, the college failures, in the sense that a lot of them, when the going was good, the going was good but when things got rough they hadn’t a clue.

142.MM: Yeah, yeah.

143_CS: And like I say I saw that happening in the Gresham and I said ‘nah!’ . The Bailey had advertised at that time as well for a head food barman. Now part of my time in the Gresham as a commis, I spent, I think it was, three months in the bar. You really were only fetching and carrying the food because the bar men were big. Bill Grimes a head barman had property all over the place. Ah especially during the war, and many of them and above all the porters but many of the staff who had contact with the customer were agents for black market as well. Like if someone had stuff available, if someone had a case of whiskey, even if you had a totally legitimately in your own house you could now get ten times for it or whatever so who do you sell it to, or who do you contact. And they knew the people. Someone would say ‘have you heard anything about’ and there’s no doubt, for instance the man who had been head porter of the Great Southern in Eyre Square in Galway, when he died they only then realised that he owned at least half of the property in Eyre Square.

Discussion on hotel porters owning property etc.

144. The Porters they were the link then, and Toddy when I did interview Toddy O’Sullivan, I interviewed him after he retired out in his house out in Killiney. Oh Toddy a very proud individual, you know, whereas I was on the union side, we had many a row and in fairness to him, in fairness to him I had many a row with Toddy, he wasn’t as good as Eoin Dillon in the sense that you could get back on him but he was all right as well. Our son, we were married. We were very respectful when our son was born. In other words we were married in June, he was born in March and the people were counting on their figures but four years later and nothing else had happened so we decided to adopt a child. There were children for adoption at that time and as a result I had to get personal references and so and the first person I went to was Toddy. I got him in the hall and I said ‘Mr. O’Sullivan my wife and I are hoping to adopt a child, I need a personal reference would you mind’ and he said ‘I’d be delighted’. In fairness to him within half an hour his secretary was down with a glowing reference and at that time I wasn’t involved, I wasn’t officially involved as a union representative, a bit earlier than that and there was a chap named Bart O’Brien. Jim Bowe knows him well. He was a wonderful waiter, a wonderful footballer. Played with him and played against him. Wonderful footballer and his son was around there, a Porter in the Gresham and there were a lot of the family waiters and chefs and all but Bart was the being sacked for bad timekeeping and maybe something else, I don’t what but at that time when union, if the union were coming in for your case you could nominate someone and Bart said ‘will you go up’ and I said ‘grand I’ll go up’. Bart was a nice fellow. I didn’t agree with bad timekeeping and all that but he was very good at his job and a great fellow to work with and all that so. I went up and I said when they were talking and I said ‘look’, I said ‘I’m not defending bad timekeeping, I don’t agree with it’ and Toddy said ‘I know, I know, if we’d more people like you we’d be doing’, like this back handed compliment in front of the union officials and all and then of course he proved it later, very soon after when I was offered promotion. That was unusual, I was only twenty-five, like for a big place like that and I turned it down. Then they decided to bring in someone for the job. Bring in someone and like we’d a service staff of a hundred people and ah, they were all up in arms, Jesus we should be getting internal promotion, you know. Ah, there was threatened strike and Mullen said to me he said ‘you’d better take that job’ he said, ‘there is going to be war’. And I said ‘Well I’ll take it now because I believe they offered to buy me’ and now I can take it on my own terms. But as well as that, I was loosing money. See you have to start at the bottom. There were twelve head waiters and you had to do the (inaudible) before you could work up. But later when I came in here as I say, ah Jaysus, I lost a fortune.
Discussion over summer consultancy work Christy did for Great Southern Hotels and Jury’s to make ends meet.

My Jesus the amount of money. When I was in here after my first pay cheque or whatever Jesus I couldn’t pay my bills. Now I know tipping and service charge and all that was high.

MM: What year did you start teaching in Cathal Brugha Street, Christy?

CS: 1961, oh no, ’70. ’60 I was married. ’71, ’71. And that was November. November ’51 I was fourteen and then went out working. Five years later in November I finished in Jammet’s and went to Gresham.

MM: Your five year cycle?

CS: Yeah went to the Gresham and I was there for fifteen years. The last five of which I was the senior union representative and I was also on the CERT Committee and I was teaching part-time in here for that five years. And the reason I was teaching here, Kevin O’Rourke left a note for me to come in to see him in the Gresham and I came in and he said ‘I need someone to do part-time, will you do it?’ First of all it’s a compliment to be asked, you know, and then he said like what he had in mind and like if I needed anything just leave a note and he’ll get it organised for me. I left notes and I never got anything out of him (laugh). And then I started to come in, I used to get the stuff I needed like cruets for oysters and all this and I’d get them all together in the Gresham, now Eoin Dillon wouldn’t, I never even said it to Dillon. Dillon wouldn’t have minded anything like that and I’d leave them in here, be Jesus the cleaners would tidy them away or……. But see the reason I could do this was I worked in the Gresham where the car park is now that was an open site, that was the car park there, I used to park my car there and I could come in here and get in the car and go home and get back for 6.30 p.m. Now to get home meant to get in and have a cup of tea. That was all. Psychologically if I couldn’t get home, you know, psychologically and then at night if I arrived home and the lights were out I might as well be three hours late and in fact I did something in the Gresham later which caused a bit controversy cause when Paddy O’Neill was the Restaurant Manager and I was about fifth in line but whatever happened I don’t know but Dillon, Owen Dillon and I was still the union representative at the time and going up and having a row with him and that sort of thing and he came along to me one day and he said ‘I want you to take over when O’Neill was off’, I said ‘I don’t mind’, I could have claimed more money and all but the knew the place wasn’t going as well as it should and I said ‘I don’t mind’, but I said ‘if the other lads complain I’ll have to agree with them’ and they didn’t complain so then it happened when he was off which was at least two days I was in charge and at night time we’d have maybe seven/eight waiters on and they were all on till 11 p.m. or 11.30 p.m. There were two on who’d go their supper at 10.30 p.m. and come back and say till 2 a.m. or whatever until finish but they all finished at say 11.30 p.m. or 12 and what I used to do at 10 p.m. I’d say ‘look we’ve eight on, four will do or five will do because we’d no bookings or whatever. Now sort it out ourselves who goes. So whoever it was could go out and have their supper, get out and get a bus, didn’t have to buy a car, people were buying cars when they didn’t absolutely need them but they felt they had to have them and after a while Dillon calls me in one day and he says ‘whatever your doing the night you’re here will you tell Paddy O’Neill because their complaining that O’Neill’s not doing’. I said ‘oh no, Eoin, I’ll tell you and you tell Paddy O’Neill cause he’s my boss’, he was eventually owner of Rafters (Restaurant) in Rathmines where Eugene McSweeney was for a while. He was the head waiter, Eugene was the Head Chef and I forget who owned it but when things started to go they opted out. I think Eugene had got an offer from the Berkley Court in fact and as they opted out and O’Neill became the owner.

I still think he was one of the reasons the Gresham turned down the way it did and I also blame Michael McManus. McManus got a huge amount of publicity as a great head chef, he was a lousy head chef. He had a few pals that he used to butter up and in fact there is a string of people, Mervyn Stewart who had the Guinea Pig in Dalkey was one of them, and because they were talented he got rid of them. He had his own cronies and one of them one day when I, we had
minute steaks on the dinner and they were like rashers and I went down before I served it. The commis brought the meal and I said ‘ah, hold on’ and I went down and I said to the chef, I says chef ‘are they our minute steaks’ and he’s looking at me and he calls over one of his pals and you’d know him, I’m not saying. And he then tries to ridicule me and I left him there and I said to his pal, you come near, you’ll get this dish. You mind your own business. Oh it was typical Macker. For instance we worked every second Sunday. He had all his cronies on Sunday. The (inaudible) if you were his assistant you had the also-rans, as it happened he got the better of it because there were a few of them, you probably never heard to the name Christy Sherwin. Did you ever hear of the name Frank Sherwin?

151.MM: I’ve heard of Frank Sherwin.

152.CS: Frank Sherwin was a TD. The new bridge beside Heuston Station is the Frank Sherwin Bridge. Frank was a TD for a short while. He was mainly on the City Council and he used to cycle around but his son Christy went in as a commis in the Gresham, after a while went to work in Manchester and came back after a while and worked on the sauce corner in the Gresham and for lunchtime then the beef trolley was big. He used to go through ten ribs of thirty portions or thereabouts at lunchtime. That would be the restaurant, the grill room, the function room, the ballroom possibly and all that, a huge amount. But in the restaurant he was on, Christy Sherwin was on, he would put the beef on to cook in the morning. A silver man would polish up the trolley and have it ready and at 12pm he’d go up to the staffroom and he would shave etc. and come down, immaculate, oh Jesus if we only had a video of him. He was hard, but on the sauce corner for instance customers that you knew might come in and say ‘think I might have sole en femme or I might have’ and you might say ‘ah’ because you’d know who was on the sauce, and if Sherwin was on hot, no bother and every now and again you’d get a stranger like an American or someone and they’d say ‘God that was wonderful’ and I’d say ‘would you like to meet him’ and I’d bring him out.

153.MM: Because you knew he was neat as a pin, yeah?

154.CS: Ah Jesus. Now he was very, the commis chefs used to complain, and I’d say ‘you’re right to complain’ because there’s no way because he would, he was a rascal, but he was brilliant to work with and he when he was on the sauce and he was a mad Manchester United supporter long before all this thing that started and he was a fanatic for Sinatra but wonderful person, absolutely wonderful at every, the bones off the carving trolley, a dog wouldn’t suck them.

155.MM: There was nothing left on them?

156.CS: He was magnificent. You know everything he did. Now as I say I’d have to have to have a row a few times because the commis chefs would be complaining or something like that and I would be trying to say to the commis, ‘you know, Jesus, I don’t agree with this hit them hard type of thing but you’re going to learn more off Sherwin than you’ll learn off anyone else’, but McManus was a head and I was trying to get across to Dillon that between having McManus down there and having Paddy O’Neill up here sure the place was falling apart and…..

157.MM: Whereas Uhlemann, you would have worked under Uhlemann as well?

158.CS: See Uhlemann when I saw him he was only sitting on the chair examining things. See when I went in that was November/December ’56.

159.MM: Sure he was nearly, he was coming to the end?

160.CS: He was sitting on a chair and I went into the ballroom, now that was Paddy Kingsbury, now that was casual but it was ‘horseman’ and that’s the word he used. That was that you were permanent casual in other words and there was a hierarchy and there were something like eight women. In the first ten there were two men, they were probably about number six and number
seven, the rest were all women and then there was a chap called Danny Lyons and myself, we were kind of eleven and twelve. They used to get a lot of small functions, especially small weddings, just twenty people or so and Danny and I did all the weddings. The reason being, you would not have a woman serving, especially the head table on a wedding. That was simply out, now.

161.MM: What was the story with gender there? Were there any women working on the floor in Jammet’s?

162.CS: Jammets now, that’s one of the stories of Darina Allen. Darina Allen says that when she was leaving (Cathal Brugha Street) here, she wanted to go to Jammet’s for her work experience if you like or for her first experience and it wasn’t possible. So Mary Murnihan suggested she go down to Myrtle Allen’s new restaurant down in Cork and that’s where she met her husband and that sort of thing. Now at that time in Jammet’s the kitchen was totally male, the restaurant was totally male, the grill, the bars, except there were three bars. If you come in from Grafton Street there was a stairway that brought you to the grill and then you could go through to the restaurant and this here was the cocktail bar, a little American cocktail bar, John Farrell ran that with Johnny Kinsella as his assistant. The food bar was over here, there was a division here, there was a small bar at the back which was the smoke room. The two staff in there were two women, but it was men only. Two women. There was no food, that was only drinks. Two women and two cocktail barmen over there and four/five barmen there were very wealthy. Bill Grimes especially. He was fabulously wealthy. Among the ways they got the money in fact as well was, now the Head Waiter, the (inaudible) was a great one at this too. Someone would say ‘have a drink on me’ so they’d put a drop of lemonade into a glass and they’d put the half crown in their pocket (laugh). Paddy Flynn by the way he was the Head Waiter up in the grill room. Porky he used to call him. He lived out in Artane. That was the first person I knew who lived in Artane.

163.MM: We were talking about the, we’re talking about the sort of the gender so there was a hierarchy?

164.CS: Well in Jammets as I say, two women in the bar and there was a woman, the office manager, a Miss Riordan and there was a Mrs Gaffney and maybe one or two girls, there were one or two girls working in the office, two cashiers so there might have been eight at the most ten females. Oh the wash-up was always female. Oh sorry no. The real wash-up, the plongeur and the plates and all that, were all done by men. When you come through from Nassau Street in through Jammet’s Restaurant there was a lovely stairway going up here. In this corner here the cash desk was here, a very impressive cash desk. Then there was a little bar. That’s where Seamus did his cocktails and all that. Just in slightly under there, and the lift was that woman May Bradford who did, she washed the cups and the glasses and the side plates, that’s all. All the heavy stuff went out and it went out this door which was the kitchen and the near side of the kitchen say this was the kitchen, that section there was the wash-up, the plongeur and the plates and there was a man named Sam Mills and Jim Dunne, they were all men, all men on the wash-up and Jim Dunne was a brother of PJ Dunne who had come to Dublin after him and left Dublin before him.

165.MM: Where was PJ from, or where did they come from?

166.CS: Mountmellick. Well his obituary is in the Hotel and Catering Review by me and at his removal one of the people I was talking too introduced himself as Jim Dunne and I said ‘well I knew PJ’s brother Jim Dunne’ and he says ‘yeah that’s my father’. He had gone back, he’d gone back to Mountmellick or wherever but the wash-ups and then on the far side of the kitchen was a larder and that’s where PJ Dunne was Lord and Master. Now it wasn’t larder in the sense that you did your hors d’oeuvres and all the hors d’oeuvres were done upstairs by Andy McGlynn, you know on salads and all that. It was only meats and fish. It was really only meats and fish. And there was a little hatch and at that time fillets especially were very, very scarce, very scarce and
you used to get all the personalities, for instance Harry Kernoff was a very famous painter. If it’s by Harry Kernoff it’s worth a few bob.

167.MM: There’s a picture by Harry Kernoff of Jammet’s and you know where it is at the moment? It’s in the Merrion Hotel.

168.CS: And there’s another one, I’ve bits and pieces. I loaned a file to a chap named Seamus Harper, he’d been a neighbour of Joe Hegarty’s. He’d been a commis in Jammet’s after me and I knew him and I knew his sisters and all and we went to dances together. I wouldn’t say we were friends. But he came in here anyway, he came in and had lunch. Hegarty brought him in, he knew I knew him and he was having some health problems, he’d had to give up his job and he was trying to do some writing and I loaned my file in Jammets and he has died since and I never saw it. There were little things. There was a drawing by Augustus John, you know some outstanding individual like that and above all it showed the Four Seasons, the panels were Four Seasons and it showed the one over what I would call table three besides the cash desk but PJ was down there and above all fillet steaks and I remember above all on Saturday night Harry Kernoff. Harry Kernoff came in every Saturday night and he’d send PJ down a glass of brandy, whatever it was and therefore PJ, Jammets was wrong in many ways in the sense of today, for instance they wouldn’t have had larder dishes or anything. They simply used the cracked plates or the chipped plates and out would go two fillets. Two fillets for Mr. Kernoff. That was it. PJ had got his…. PJ was an alcoholic you know. Oh Jesus the stuff but there were other like that. Now Lord Wicklow, he was a famous one and Mrs. Yeats.

169.MM: Whose wife was that?

170.CS: The poet. WB. ‘I will arise and go now’ Now Jack was the painter.

171.MM: Who else used to, there was a lot, was there Crown, Princess of this, that and the other?

172.CS: Well above all there was the Ally Khan. The Ally Khan was the big one. The Ally Khan was at that time married to Rita Hayward. Rita Hayward was the beauty of the world, a film star. Strawberry blonde and within a short time he ditched her and he had Gene Tierney and she spelt it Gene. She was obviously of Irish decent. Now later she appeared in the Gresham a few times. But when the Ally Khan was lets say when the Ally Khan was in Ireland, I think it was table twelve was reserved for him and if he didn’t appear they could send him a bill for the meal he didn’t have. And one thing I remember about him above all was one of the first things he’d do was he would take off his coat and put it on the back of the chair. Now that was completely out in a place like Jammet’s, but no one ever said anything to him. And another fellow I met and he was the same table as it happens, was Danny Kaye and he’d been on in the (Theatre) Royal. Another one in the European sense, you’ve probably never even heard of the name but in France they had a huge pop singer, Jean Gabin. I remember he stayed in the Hibernian and ate most of his meals in Jammet’s. Ah, you probably never even heard of Ma and Pa Kettle. Marjorie Main. They were in and she was the crankiest old hag you ever met. She moaned and groaned the lot. Ma and Pa Kettle they were like little cartoons, like short films. They were hugely popular. They were fill-ins. Films were all at varying lengths so if you wanted to fill two hours they had to put in this, that and the other, cartoons for the audience but you had short films. Mother Reilly’s films for instance used to be just kind of fillers and Ma and Pa Kettle they were Edgar Kennedy at the time I remember was one of them as well that he, they didn’t make big films, they just made short films but…..

173.MM: Who were the big…?

174.CS: Well Robert Taylor was the first of the big ones that I remember that came into Jammet’s and as I say the American women went up, ah like to see Robert Taylor, holy Jesus, he was huge. He was making the Knights of the Round Table. Now that was made afterwards by John Boorman out in Wicklow.
175. MM: Excalibur. Who were the rich Irish who used to go in?

176. CS: They all went in fact, now, one in particular who was like the Larry Goodman of his day, Noel Cuddy. You know what’s now known as the Regency Hotel. That was their home. They lived there. Noel Cuddy and his wife was Peggy. He was a small dark man. He was the big man in cattle and the British army bought masses of cattle. Dublin cattle market was crammed. Hanlon’s pub on the North Circular Road.

177. MM: On the corner, yeah, where Drumalee is now? Anamoe Road – the Ford of the Cattle?

178. CS: They used to drink it out on the road and the traffic couldn’t get through, it was so. It was later then in the Gresham, for instance, especially the Welsh dealers who’d be buying for the British army and they’d have wads, it was all cash. Wads, and they’d play a card game and they’d be wads of money and then some of them would play all night, they’d just go straight onto the market. Unbelievable money but Noel Cuddy was the big man in Jammet’s and his wife Peggy was a tall, blond woman and they took a shine to me as a commis, and low and behold when they found out that my real name was Noel, that my first name was Noel ‘ah’. Then later they, probably at that time they used to go to the Gresham as well but then when I went to the Gresham they were coming and then when they realised that I was engaged to get married to a Peggy ‘ah Jesus’ I always got my few bob. As a commis at least a half crown. If I only smiled at them, never mind do anything, I always got, Noel Cuddy. Now their two sons Bobby and what, one of them I know was Captain of the Royal Dublin and I think one of them was President of IRFU. Certainly they were big in rugby and golf.

Now the Cuddys themselves used to come into the Gresham at that time. The Gresham Saturday night dance was big. Tony O’Reilly used to come in and Andy Mulligan when they were young lads on the Irish rugby team, now long before they were married or anything like that. You know he was big at eighteen. He was only eighteen when he went to Australia with the Lions, eighteen or nineteen and he was huge.

Discussion on socialism and state companies

180. MM: The other thing I was looking at there is things like social customs, like the black fast days, lent, fish…..

181. CS: Ah for instance now Christmas Eve I think he was still Taoiseach at the time, it was John A Costello or he had been whatever but he was still important in politics so John A Costello. Now his wife had died and as it happens Jamments used to use the Blue Room every now and then when they knew it was (inaudible). No, no they used it as a restaurant when and I remember him, it was in the Blue Room which might have been his own choice because he was a quiet man, he was a legal man, he had been Taoiseach or he was Taoiseach and it would have been probably Declan the son and the daughter and simply having fish, that was it. That was poached fish, there was no way it was going to be anything else, you know. Sean McBride is another one and Sean was very, well of course James Dillon, like he’d be in and he was the great author of the Dail. Lets see, what’s his man, the Aran man, O’Flaherty.

182. MM: Liam O’Flaherty.

183. CS: Liam O’Flaherty. Christmas Eve I remember having him in for lunch. Liam O’Flaherty, Professor Leventhall of Trinity. He was a great literature person, you know, he was Jewish and Sean, now I always mixed up Sean Keating and Sean O’Sullivan, both painters. Sean Keating was the father of Justine Keating. I think it was Sean O’Sullivan but the three of them coming in for lunch, coming up from the bar into the grill room. See they wouldn’t be coming often enough to qualify for the restaurant. Coming up and having, and they had Pommard, a red burgundy which was O’Flaherty’s choice and I think they had two or three bottles. They certainly had more than
one and they were there that evening and stayed and had dinner. They didn’t leave the table except to drain themselves or whatever.

184. That was a Christmas Eve. There were two famous horse people. All the horse people used to go but there were two famous ones. First of all there was a fellow named Joe Harold who was a bookie. Now I knew nothing about bookies but in this kind of English comedy films you had the bookies. The loud checks suit and all this and they used to dress like that but in a sophisticated way, in the way he was acceptable in Jammet’s. But he didn’t come in the normal. He used to come straight from the race meetings and he had one particular table, table six which was when you come in the door it was just around the corner here, quiet little corner and he’d come in a half five and we weren’t off till six usually but they’d serve him and always had a runny camembert and French filter coffee made at the table. Bring the whole filter along, put it there and he’d move on and he usually had something like two or three lamb chops, boiled potatoes, you know, basic fair and especially on a Saturday cause he came in early he’d be gone and that table usually then was reserved for Harry Usher who was a famous trainer at the time and at that time I suppose he was about 70, it’s very hard to judge ages from your own age.

185. CS: Dolly Faucettes was around past what we know as the college in Bolton Street. And it was famous whore house or ‘knock’n’ shop and there’s a lot more about Dolly Faucettes in Kevin Kearns book about Dublin pubs.

186. MM: That’s right.

Discussion on Fred Carno’s Circus and Stan Laurel

187. CS: But they were the main ones and as I say the places they’d mentioned as competition had been the well the Red Bank, the Bailey, the Russell came on after. The Russell really wasn’t at that time.

188. MM: But the Russell did become the best place in Dublin at one stage (in the 1960s).

189. CS: At that time, well don’t forget that the hotel standards were very high. The hotel restaurants standards were very high. Certainly the Hibernian was very high and Jammet’s used to recruit a lot of their staff from I suppose, at least half the staff were French and they used to recruit young lads over and they would have to be on a work permit and a lot of them went on then into the Hibernian and one of the, probably the most famous of all that did that was in fact Roger Noblet and he was made redundant when the Hibernian closed and went back to I think it was Brittany, to his own place. He’d always planned for that although I think his wife is Irish. I’m not absolutely sure. But in my time I remember Roger Gaultier and there was a chap name, Rossi married a girl, one of the girls in Jammets from Limerick and I know they went to either America or Canada and some years ago there was a call on the radio, something about someone, they were mainly French. Funnily enough, I missed the excitement one night but one Saturday night, whatever happened, the pressure etc. and Gaultier and Marc Faure the head chef got at each other with knives. (Note: The Irish Hotelier – Dec 1949 – mentions a Theophile Gautier as opposed to Roger)

190. MM: Jesus.

191. CS: Oh it was big thing. I think PJ would have been there and I think he had to try to get in between them and so on. It was real hot stuff, really hot stuff.

192. MM: When did the Hibernian come to an end? Was it in the 70s?
CS: I forget those. I don’t know….I know some of the lads had either been in or were in the Advanced Cookery Course with Kilbride at the time because I remember Jimmy saying ‘some of them are in the Hibernian so long they’d never be able to work anywhere else’, you know.

The nearest to Jammet’s at the time was thought to be the Red Bank. That was owned by the Montgomery family and certainly the last one as far as I remember was a solicitor and I think they had their offices in Grafton Street. There was a Montgomery Solicitors as far as I know. Now the one person who did know a little more about that was Albert Mulligan. Albert had worked in the bar, in the food bar.

CS: That’s right. There was a chap name Mohan. I was talking to Frankie there a while ago just after Michael Ganly’s funeral and there was a chap, see a few of them had gone from Jammet’s and I just knew the names and again it was football because anyone who was any good at football they’d say ‘ah Jesus do you remember such a body playing a match’ and Jammet’s was huge with football, unbelievable, you know, it was unbelievable at times. Now there were two waiters, there was a waiter there, Tommy Foley, in Jammet’s and there was the one that I was put to train with most of the time, it was immaculate, absolutely immaculate. Now he ended with a bad drink problem, I was at his funeral but you knew he was jarred because his accent would change, he’d get very posh and then he had little curl he used to drop and they’d say ‘ah Jesus Foley is jarred again’ and that was accepted you know. Like for instance the waiters in Jammet’s at certain intervals they would slip across to O’Donovan’s pub and Paddy Wilson who, he died many years ago, he kind of took me in charge to some extent as well and even though I was only a commis, he’d say ‘keep an eye on those now’. Like you didn’t have double systems and all that, and they’d stay there for ages over their coffee and petits fours and liqueur and so forth and he’d say give me a call and I’d go over to the O’Donovan’s and tell them if they needed a bill or something and at the time if a waiter went off early, due to go off early, there was some kind of an early finish, and they waiter beside would be in charge and as I got a little bit more experienced, Paddy Wilson used to say to me ‘you look after them’ and I’d say ‘but the waiter beside he’s….’ He’d say ‘ah sure, you can’t trust, he’s not very good, you’re better’. This was like fast promotion. Oh there’s an incident yeah that happened when I was promoted first as a, God I wouldn’t have been seventeen, sommelier in the grillroom and there was a function in the blue room and there was a shop in George’s Street, do you know the market in George’s Street.

MM: I do yeah.

CS: Oh sorry back to the Ivor Green one, they had a sort of a staff meal. At that time most companies had a dress dance or something. The Gresham had a huge dress dance every year for the staff. Free tickets for the staff and all that but no alone was there free tickets but if anyone who wasn’t going you got you’re tickets off them to bring your friends. I remember at a party of about sixteen and no one paid, you know (laugh), Jesus this is great. Well you had to hire a suit,
well we didn’t have to hire, well most of us had a suit but they had to hire the suit but this dinner
was on anyway it would have been only about thirty people and it was a bar inside, a bar in the
room for them and at a certain point the bar had to close, that was part of the deal or part of the
law, I’m not sure, but I went to Ivor Green himself the boss and I said ‘we’ll have to take the bar
away soon, is there anything you want’, and he said ‘just leave something’ whatever it was maybe
a bottle of liqueur and he said ‘that’s it thanks for very, good bye’ and I said right and I started to
take it away, now I was seventeen at the time, commis wore white coats, when you were promoted
you wore black tails so I was in my black tails by then, and I remember getting dressed and
coming down and all the staff waiting and saying ‘oh look him now in his new, oh Jesus coming
down in this new uniform’ ah. But I’m taking it away, packing it up and this particular individual
comes over as now it was a shop manager and it was a fellow named Bobby Lawless as I
happen to remember because he was also a part-time musician and he used the trade as ‘Roberto
and his Latin American music’ and he came along and he said what are you doing with that. I said
I’m taking it away. ‘You’ve not right’ he said. ‘You didn’t talk to me.’ I said ‘sorry what do you
mean’. You didn’t ask me if that was all right. I said ‘I spoke to Mr. Green’ and ‘you should have
asked me’. Just happened it was like we were there outside the door, there was a little landing
there, just happened that the boss himself, Louis Jammet was passing by and I just said ‘Mr.
Jammet, this gentleman is complaining’ I said, ‘he seems to think I’m fiddling the bar or
whatever’. Oh Jaysus, Louis tore strips off him. ‘This young man is trained by us, we know him.
No way we’d have anyone who would engage in that’. But here I was seventeen ‘ah Jaysus’ there
was no ifs or buts about it, you know. That I was one of their people and that was it. And after
all, if I was Jammets as Jammets. So that was part of the atmosphere. The one thing they were
lousy on were so called staff meals. The Gresham later was far superior.

201. But Toddy, like the accountants and all that, they can’t believe that you didn’t have real
accounting, you didn’t have in Jammet’s, I mean in Jammet’s, I told you this, say the stocktaking
for instance, if there was a glass sherry to go into a consommé or a glass of brandy for flaming,
you had cooking sherry and cooking brandy but when you got a docket from the waiter for a glass
of brandy, you could dock it against the real brandy, the office didn’t know the difference and
Jesus the, now one of the office girls came down to me one morning and she says ‘I’m coming
down to do stock’, I said ‘oh holy Jaysus’. I had to do a real stock. Well you see all you did at the
time was you took the dockets for, you waited till you had ten glasses of whiskey, then you got a
bottle and you didn’t do real stock and I said ‘holy Jaysus’ and the amount of stock I had over and
I went around to staff and I said ‘will you take a bottle of sherry, will you take a bottle of brandy,
will you take’. One of the waiters Gerry Reffo, Clery’s had a good restaurant and his father was
the Head Chef. Reffo had come from Italy and his brother became the Restaurant Manager.
When that closed he was one of the competitors for Restaurant Manager in Restaurant Na Mara
because I was in the lift on the way up with him. That was the son from Clery’s now. But the
brother Gerry worked in Jammet’s and Gerry was about six foot six, terrific fellow, absolutely I
met Wembley. I went over to see Ireland play England and getting off the, Wembley had its own
tube station and getting off I was late, I’d taken the directions down wrongly, I was late, and I
turned not knowing which way I was going and I bumped into this fellow ‘Gerry, Jesus imagine’
and Is p e n t h ee v e n i n gw i t hh i m . B u tt h a td a yh ew a so na f t e r o o nd u t y ,w h i c hm e a n ty o u s t a y e d
on till seven or eight. You went away at seven if you had no business but you waited till nine if
you had to. The others were there till twelve but Gerry on duty and I’d bought (inaudible) and I
said ‘Gerry will you take it’, he said ‘I’ll take a bottle of Grand Marnier’ and first thing right
away, into a coffee pot and he’s sitting for the afternoon drinking coffee (laugh), not coffee but
Grand Marnier and I didn’t care as long as I didn’t have stock over. And that was how you could
give, as I say PJ, large brandy, no bother, no bother but then even in the Gresham the same. You
see ‘Toddy took the view that once he was making money he didn’t care. I remember talking to
one of our accountancy people and they saying ‘what was the system’ and I tell them ‘there was
no system’ (laugh).

202. There was a woman called, we called her Ms. Shorts. She couldn’t reconcile the dockets you see
and something wrong, for instance some of the fellows used to write something and get a large
whiskey and some of them did it deliberately and they weren’t hiding it and they would pay her at
the end of it, they would but she was Ms. Short, she had to account for. This was a Ms. Broderick, an older woman and like the sort of woman who should have been a nun and like when they were saying ‘Ms. Short’, ah Jesus. She’d be chasing after some of the notorious ones and ah the sort of fiddles that would go on but Toddy, and the food you could eat what you like.

203. Once Toddy, now Andy Whelan would tell you there was one time the Gresham, see Christmas was big in the Gresham, Jesus huge. I think I’d pictures of the buffet and all that in the book but Andy would tell you that, they so much, they were making so much money at one time that around August they go around the producers and they would buy so many turkeys and hams, etc. and pay them cash so that when the books were done they wouldn’t have that much, you know. Just this profit. It was unbelievable and of course we got our share because we made sure then that we got better conditions or better this or better that and in fairness it was reasonable unfortunately Eoin Dillon later he got the tip end of the wedge because by the time he came, he by the way when I say he went, he came back to the Shelbourne, his success as Food and Beverage Manager in the Shelbourne was immense, that was only Food and Beverage, he wasn’t the boss and then he became the General Manager. He created the grill bar which was the first certainly in Ireland. People queued up Kildare Street to get in. Now imagine queued to get in for a meal in a hotel and the reason was that Kilbride was the man there. Maurice O’Looney was the head chef. O’Looney was past it and so he couldn’t, Dillon knew he couldn’t do much about Maurice O’Looney.

204. MM: Is this the Shelbourne now?

205. CS: Yeah he brought Kilbride in to do specialist work if you like and above all Kilbride was kitchen percentages and the grill bar then was had a menu above all things like mixed grills and all that which were all bits and scraps and the Shelbourne was dying on its feet. They had this terrific L-shaped dining room with hardly any customers. Wonderful staff, wonderful staff. There was a Head Waiter there Jack McMeninly wonderful fellow and very nice fellow, great to work with, great staff there but there customers just faded away and Dillon created the grill bar. A huge success. The Hibernian brought in the Bianconi as a copy, the Russell did the Robert Emmet as a copy and all over the country you can see there’s a place down in the International in Killarney and you can see a room which is a copy so even the coffee dock in Jury’s later was partly a copy. It was a huge success.

206. MM: And what was the success. What made the grill bar so different, that the food was served all day was it or…..

207. CS: No first of all it was price. The cafés in O’Connell Street had introduced food, mainly grills and fries so they were greasy spoon type but they were cafés, they were ice-cream parlours and then they brought in this which partly ruined in the sense that you’re having a ice-cream or coffee and the auld smells as well but at that time they were aimed at £1 a head. A £1 a main course and that’s what Dillon did, Dillon brought in the coffee dock in the Shelbourne, now you now had commuters, see Dublin was contained within the canals up to about 1940s, it was only in the ’40s that it began to expand. The new suburbs were built and then you had people who couldn’t travel home and this was now a kind of a lunch room if you like and the people used to queue to get their lunch in the Shelbourne at a £1 a head as it was then, had to be able to say ‘oh I had lunch in the Shelbourne’, didn’t say I had lunch in the cheap part of the Shelbourne, I had lunch in the Shelbourne and to make that a success, as well as having access inside the hotel you had to have access from the street, because a sufficient number of people would not have walked through a hotel at that time, they just didn’t have the confidence. Around that time I remember two lads sitting behind me in the bus and one saying I was in the Shelbourne today, delivering a message, they were Messenger Boys. And he said ‘well you know you’d usually you’d have to have a £20 sticking out of your top pocket to be allowed get into the Shelbourne’.

208. MM: What year are we talking about here now? Was that grill bar…. 

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CS: And the Shelbourne was more snobby remember. Now the Sheldbourne, the British attitude like, the snobbish etiquette is more British. Now really wealth Americans……

MM: That mightn’t look that wealthy.

CS: Become more snobbish. They become more because they copy the worse of the British, you know, but that’s only a small numbers. The Americans are much more egalitarian to a large extent but that’s in the obituary for Eoin Dillon. Or in the article. I didn’t do an obituary for him. Someone else did. Then when he did that he brought in what was it called a grill bar, a grill room, a middle room. Paul Cooke who then went to CERT had just come back from America and he put him in charge, the saddle room. Another huge success, huge and then with the remainder of the restaurant he upgraded that and brought back a bit of trolley work and all that sort of thing and the success of that established the Shelbourne and then it held on. Other than that it was gone, it was gone and that was remember just across the road from Hume Street and so like the area was in decline if you like. Now there’s been two/three books about the Shelbourne and in no case…..

MM: There was one up to ‘48 or so.

CS: And in no case was that. What’s her name Bohen (Elizabeth). That’s a different, that’s a just a personal thing hers but there was one brought out I think in the Eason’s Irish series and I think, I remember saying it to yeah, the Managing Director of Easons at the time, I remember talking to him and saying there was no mention of this and the real problem was they got most information from the owners of the time which was Trusthouses and Eoin Dillon had kind of walked out on Trusthouse, he couldn’t stand them, couldn’t….. I was on the committee at the time and we used to meet in the Shelbourne to accommodate him, occasionally we would meet somewhere else and he wasn’t usually all tied in his head. This company, as it happened when Toddy retired he was the obvious replacement and he was head hunted and the story was that he was getting £50 a week in the Shelbourne, he was getting £100 in the Gresham and that was it. And then later things didn’t work out very well. The Gresham had lots of problems, not necessarily of his making and he had some health problems as a result and the Tara had that young lad in and realised that, that wasn’t going to work and they head hunted Eoin Dillon and it suited him. I met him a few times over there and then when I did a piece for the Hotel and Catering Review, for Frank Corr, I sent him a copy and he said ‘I didn’t really want to do it but he said it looks much more personal than the others’ but he said have you spoken to him about it. He didn’t want something published that….. and I said ‘no’ but I said ‘I’ll tell you I’ll send him a copy’ so I sent him a copy in the Tara and I said to him ‘have a look at it and give me a call’ and he rang me and I remember talking to him ‘up there’ up on the corridor on the phone and I said to him ‘what do you think’ well he said ‘I’m not dead yet’.

MM: Yeah.

CS: In other words it was eulogy and I said ‘no I said the point I’m making Owen is I’m just trying to give credit, I mean we’d many a row, I’ve no problem about that but we in Ireland are good at looking at a grave and saying wasn’t he a nice fellow but very often they don’t say that’.

MM: Until someone dies.

CS: They don’t, you see. So that was published anyway. That was published in the Hotel and Catering Review and later Joe Erraught was at some seminar or other and he came back and he said that he’d met Eoin Dillon’s son who had done the hotel management degree in, what do you call it Strathclyde. He said he met the son and the son had asked specifically to thank me, to say how much the family had liked it. Well I said well it’s only a matter, I think we should say things about people. It’s far better to say it while their alive but it’s not always easy.

MM: Talking about the Shelbourne did you ever hear the revelation that Hitlers brother was a waiter in the Shelbourne. Is there truth in it or not?
CS: Yeah and he married a girl was it Brady or no Dowling. Ah, there was a lot of German here. Remember as well as what’s his name in the Gresham, there was a waiter in the Gresham, Victor Starsteiner, I think I must have mentioned him in the book. There were quite a number of Germans here at the time. Now they weren’t all running. Michael Quinn who has died since, I think I referred to him in the book as the storyteller. He was a great man, he was from the North and he was a great man to get chatting on a slack night, you know, great man and his son I know is a Garda Sergeant, Paddy Smith knows his son but he, I remember him telling me, Victor Starsteiner went back to America or back to Germany for a break and came back, that would be maybe in something like ’38, 1938, oh he said ‘Hitler is the best thing ever happened for this country, wonderful person’ and don’t forget here in Ireland in the ‘40s the Jews weren’t welcomed in hotels and restaurants and most Jewish people, they did actually change their name and most of them had to and if they rang up for a booking, with a Jewish type name they would be told they were full.

MM: What was behind that?

CS: There was pro German. Well I suppose there was sort of part IRA as well in the sense that, was it Sean Russell who was the leader, he went to Germany to talk and he went to talk to the Nazi’s. He didn’t just go to talk to Germans, you know.

MM: Frank Ryan as well.

CS: Frank Ryan is different in that he was out of the country and all that. No Sean Russell his statue was in Fairview Park and the story was that when they put in first he had the Nazi salute and they had to take it off and put a new arm. They had to change it. Now it wasn’t, it was only a kind of quarter size or one of the size. I remember the statue all right but there’s no doubt that they had that, that Michael Quinn now who was a daily communicant, now he was an extremely nice person and daily communicant, no, very, very big family, he had a big family and great man for telling the stories but Victor Starsteiner thought Hitler was the greatest ever and he said he wasn’t the only one. However I’ve drifted a bit. If there’s anything that I mentioned or anything that I didn’t you can take note of it.

MM: I’ll make note of it and I’ll come back over it.

CS: Or even drop a note into my post box if there’s some area that I touched on and didn’t do enough or didn’t touch on and so on.

MM: You’re a gentleman.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Jimmy Kilbride in Drumcondra (8/10/2003)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Jimmy Kilbride (JK)

1. MM: Where were you born, Jimmy?

2. JK: I was born in Fitzgibbon Street in 1929.

3. MM: You knew Brendan Behan then did you?

4. JK: Well he was about a hundred yards away, and I’d say a bit younger than I was, but I couldn’t remember whether he’s younger or older than I am.

5. MM: Where the flats are now. They wouldn’t have been there at the time, it would have been the tenements and but that was it.

6. JK: That was it. One was born there and one did one’s best.

7. MM: Any other family?

8. JK: Five sons and that was it. Father was a carter, a mother was a mother.

9. MM: And who was he carting for or what company?

10. JK: The B&I, a horse and cart type of thing. That was all the fashion in those days. Went to school in Gardiner Street, that was the place for very small children and, St. Canice’s on the north side of the road, which was an establishment which did not appreciate at all. It was a dump. They were Christian brothers, well they were brothers anyway. Whether they were Christian or brothers, they were holy you know and that was it (laugh). But that was it and there was one guy in it called Callanan, Mr. Tom Callanan and he had sixth class and I started school when I was three. Actually I was in school at the end of my second school and very soon, the middle of September I would have been three so I was always the youngest in the class.

11. MM: Where did you come in your family Jimmy? There was five brothers, where did you fit in?

12. JK: Oh in the middle, two older and two younger?

13. MM: So again it made sense that your mother had two younger then and…..

14. JK: That’s right she was probably expecting somebody else, Lindsey or somebody after that. She would have actually expecting (inaudible) and how and ever he would have been an infant, they were just getting you out, you know what I mean, which meant I was always the youngest in the class. You got a few thumps for being the youngest. That was childish, so effectively then I had to stay in sixth class, I was twelve when I was finished school for that time, you know and I had to stay on another year and I wasn’t even the age when I finished and how and ever when I was around thirteen. Mr. Callanan I must say was a very good guy.

(inaudible – problem with tape quality).

There was a problem with the batteries and the side one of the tape ran slowly and is inaudible. Below is a summary of the interview written directly afterwards from the notes taken and fresh memory.
15. Jimmy Kilbride was born September 1929 in a tenement in Fitzgibbon Street. He was the middle child of 5 boys. His father was a carter for the B&I and his mother was a mother. He went to school in Gardiner Street, just a few weeks before his 3rd birthday. He was always the youngest in his class and often got a few punches for this honour. From there he moved to St. Canice’s on the North Circular Road next door to O’Connell’s Schools. It was run by the Christian Brothers but he found them neither too Christian nor too brotherly. He had to do sixth class twice because he was too young to leave school. In sixth class they were very concerned with your soul. The Head came in told them ‘never to look at the naked female form’. Jimmy recalls that ‘it was intellectually offensive’ and total nonsense. He had a good teacher a Mr. Callanan who suggested he do scholarship exams for apprenticeships. He convinced him to sit two, lest he didn’t get one that he would have the other to fall back on. Jimmy passed both exams and had a choice of following an apprenticeship as a cobbler or a chef.

16. Jimmy decided to pursue a career as a chef partly because he would be well fed, which he subsequently always was. He started in Cathal Brugha Street College, and after about six months a call came from the Gresham Hotel to the college looking for an apprentice and Jimmy was picked to go. The year was 1941 and the Gresham was overrun with business. The head chef was Karl Uhlemann and Michael McManus was the sous chef. He started on the vegetable corner peeling potatoes and making chips with five women. There were machines for peeling potatoes and a large machine for chipping them that you had to use all your physical power to force the potatoes through the contraption. He started on a wage of nine shillings a week with one day off a week and every second Sunday free. He soon learnt that if you worked your day off, you got seven shillings, and if you stayed back in the afternoon and worked your split you would get four shillings. So it was possible to earn more on your day off than for a whole weeks work. There were opportunities to earn extra by working the dinner dances, and there were also some unofficial ways of boosting your earnings. Karl Uhlemann was very fond of him and Jimmy used to get him his supper every evening. Many of the other chefs preferred to be working without the head chef overseeing them and would coax Jimmy to offer Uhlemann his supper earlier and earlier as time went on. Service would begin at 6pm and supper was offered to the Chef as early as 7.30pm. Karl Uhlemann used to give Jimmy half a crown for his troubles every week.

17. These were the war years and the Gresham was extremely busy full of British holiday-makers in search of a decent meal and also British and American soldiers on leave. Although there were shortages and rationing in the country, there was no shortage of food in the Gresham. This was directly due to the efforts of Toddy O’Sullivan who was manager at the time and spent much of the war years scouring the county purchasing food on the black market. Jimmy remembers getting a call in the kitchen to go down to the back door where they would unload sides of bacon and casks of butter (often rancid) from O’Sullivan’s car.

18. During the war years there was a lot of money around. A system of compulsory holidays was introduced in England so that the munitions factories would never be short or have to shut down. This led to a steady stream of visitors to Dublin and the Gresham all year long. The only quite time was around holy week. Jimmy remembers a neighbour from Fitzgibbon Street who went from a wage or £2 a week as a street cleaner in Dublin to £24 a week in a munitions factory in England, albeit working 18 hours a day and 7 days a week.

19. There were loads of Americans stationed in Northern Ireland who used to come down south for good food and dancing. Prostitutes followed the sailors and the soldiers around and it was the doorman’s duty to keep an eye on what was going on within the hotel. Guests were allowed to bring visitors to their rooms but the visitor could not stay the night without paying. The doorman’s duty was to keep abreast of who was going to what room and to move them on before morning. American Military Police used to roam the streets and dancehalls keeping an eye on their charges. Jimmy suggests that the Americans were allowed to be in uniform, but the British soldiers or even the Irish in the British army had to be ‘in tufty’ (civilian dress).
20. There was plenty of meat, fish and eggs in the south and this was like the land of milk and honey to visitors from Britain. Jimmy remembers six sailors ordering two Porterhouse steaks and six fried eggs each. Because the waiters were dressed in the black and white cardboard collars the soldiers all called them ‘sir’, even though you could often see the shirt through the jacket because the fabric was worn that thin. There were lobsters, prawns, oysters, salmon trout, sole, brill and turbot in great abundance. Jimmy used to eat two-dozen oysters a day at one stage. There was an allowance of wine in the sauce corner, which often had to be salted to stop people drinking it. Karl Uhlemann had an allowance of beer every day that he seldom drank and these bottles often found their way back to the bar exchanged for cash. It was a good life for a young man, plenty to eat and drink, swimming out in Dollymount Strand on the split shifts in summer and cycle trips up to the Phoenix Park in winter. The environment in the kitchen was extremely hot, one day a temperature probe has hung in the Gresham kitchen and it measured 120 degrees Fahrenheit. They bought their own uniforms, usually white surplus sailor’s pants, as checks were scarce during the war. He only had two uniforms and he recalls getting quite dirty especially when on the vegetable corner. Toddy O’ Sullivan once told him to change more frequently but he says if he changed any more frequently he would have ended up working naked!!! The uniforms were laundered for them in the Magdalen Laundry in Seán Mc Dermot Street. He remembers the poor girls in the laundry, who were effectively used as slave labour, sending notes out in their laundry for cigarettes. He says that the lads were very good in wrapping 10 ‘Woodbines’ (cigarettes) up in their laundry and sending it in to the girls. The Magdalens did all the Greshams’ laundry.

21. It was an exciting time with Hunt Balls, Military Balls and there was plenty of glamour. The young chefs used to be peeping through the door to see the style but Toddy O’ Sullivan would soon drive them away. The Gresham had some great chefs like Paddy Brady but Jimmy recalls on reflection that the standard of cooking wasn’t all that great at the time although the basic foods were excellent, like the steaks, grills, fish, lobsters, oysters (etc).

22. Jimmy stayed in the Gresham for around 5 years and then he went to the Clarence Hotel for approximately six months. He found the standard of food to be very basic, serving boiled pigs cheeks to country farmers and clergy. Many of the chefs were chefs in name only and had little real understanding of food or cooking. Jimmy had started reading voraciously from the age of 14, scouring the city’s libraries for cookery books, and felt it was incumbent on him to learn as much about food and cooking as possible to become a professional chef. He returned to the Gresham for a short while, where his old school companion, Seán Kinsella, had taken his place on the sauce corner. Seán was always a very dapper character and Jimmy remembers him once outside the hotel in a full riding outfit ‘like a gentleman off to open his own stables’. There was another classmate of Seán and Jimmy’s, a Vincent Dowling, who went on to become head chef of Jammet’s prior to his untimely death in his early 40s.

23. After a brief spell back at the Gresham, Jimmy went out to the airport around 1949. The airport was still in its infancy having opened in 1940. Johnny Opermann who had been employed by the American army providing catering to their troops in Northern Ireland during the war managed the catering operations. Jimmy Flahive (who became Ireland’s first television chef) was the executive chef and it was here that Jimmy Kilbride excelled and built a real reputation for himself. The Dublin Airport Restaurant was later called the ‘Collar of Gold’ and it was considered to be one of the best restaurants in Dublin at the time. One English writer said it was the second best airport for food in the world. Jimmy recalls the feeling of pride going to work and walking around the airport like a pilot surrounded by beautiful airhostesses – ‘it was magical’. At this stage it was still a novelty to see a plane take off and all would rush to the windows to view the sight. He left the airport after ten years following and altercation with the headwaiter Eddie Kavanagh.

24. He worked for a little while in Industrial Catering and then went to the Shelbourne Hotel on the invitation of general manager Eoin Dillon to try and raise the standards. Eoin Dillon had been a trainee manager under Toddy O’ Sullivan in the Gresham and had worked in the kitchens for six months as part of his training when Jimmy was in the Gresham. Food in the Shelbourne Hotel was quite poor at the time and kitchen food gross profit percentage was ridiculous at around the 29%
mark. Jimmy brought in a food costing system. The Union was extremely active in the Shelbourne at the time and ‘you couldn’t piss without the union’. He started to turn things around, called in the seven chef de parties and agreed with Eoin Dillon that if they reached their required 65% kitchen percentage that they would get and extra £2 a month, if they reached 66% - an extra £3 etc. The kitchen changed from a place of plenty and waste to a lean profitable kitchen and they started to reach the required targets. Captain Jury got wind of this after a while and told Eoin Dillon that he was not going to pay the staff twice: ‘we are losing the master – servant relationship’. Once the incentive went, the profit margins began to drop. Jimmy started running courses for the young apprentices in the Shelbourne and that was one of the factors that got him his job in the college.

25. A teaching job in Dublin College of Catering, Cathal Brugha Street was advertised and Jimmy applied. The competition was tight with Michael Mc Manus, his old sous chef from the Gresham among the applicants for the job. Jimmy admits that he made good preparation for the interview by canvassing the current Lord Mayor, a Fianna Fáil representative, who happened to be on the college council and, low and behold, he got the job. Jimmy found the job a bit stifling at first, working with domestic science teachers who had little or no experience of professional cookery. The few colleagues who did have professional cookery experience were P. J. Dunne, Michael Ganly and Kevin O’Rourke.

26. He only heard of Hotelympia (the bi-annual culinary competition in London) when the viceprincipal was informing him with pride that the college had won a bronze medal in the past. He took two girls under his wing for training and the following year at Hotelympia they won a gold and silver medal respectively. Jimmy didn’t get to travel to London that year as he was still new in the job and his more senior colleague Michael Ganly went with the students. It was a number of years before he did get to Hotelympia but when he did go with his City & Guilds 706/3 students he swept the boards.

27. Students at that time were sitting the City and Guilds of London 706/1 and 706/2 exams. At first, Jimmy claims to have been only two steps ahead of the students, but he kept reading voraciously and he was intrigued with the exams. He decided to do the City & Guilds 706/3 exam, which was the master chef examination. At that time you sat both the kitchen / larder and pastry exams in the same day. An external examiner arrived from London and you were only given the menu on the day and had a number of hours to prepare your plan of work and ‘mis en place’. Jimmy had seen the list of raw materials that had been forwarded to the college and he had figured out nearly exactly what was coming up. He was given the menu and by 12.30 he had all ‘mis en place’ prepared and asked if he could bring forward the 3pm starting time. This was agreed and he passed the exam with flying colours. Jimmy was one of the first Irish chefs to pass the 706/3.

28. Shortly after that, he started running the 706/3 in Cathal Brugha Street. He was extremely impressed with the quality, commitment, interest and dedication of the Irish chefs who did the course. The first year they went to Hotelympia they wiped the boards with gold medals. Jimmy had them all prepare work plans for whatever dish they were producing and also got them to cost the dishes. All dishes were presented on fine crockery and served on linen tablecloths, silver cutlery and candelabras. An appropriate bottle of wine was served with each dish and the bottle was opened and a glass poured prior to the service of the dish. This sort of attention to detail had never been seen before but the following year everybody was doing it. He also feels that there was a deliberate policy of not awarding medals to the Irish chefs. Bob Lawlor was principal at the time and wanted medals and this meant that there was never a problem getting the best of ingredients. Jimmy’s 706/3 students won many medals in both national and international competitions over the years. ‘There were so many great people did the course who were like blotting paper – they would suck you dry’. He remembers one student from Cork who left home at around 3am to come up and do the course and would then drive back down again. Of all the students who passed through the course he remembers Noel Cullen and Jim Bowe as being particularly excellent.
29. During the summer holidays from college he kept busy working in various jobs. He worked with the Great Southern Hotels as a consultant, which enabled him to travel the country and advise them on standards, and training needs. He also worked out in the Aer Lingus flight kitchens, which he found intriguing. He worked for a while in the Mirabeau Restaurant before Seán Kinsella bought it. It was owned by an English man with an interesting limp and a woman. He remembers they kept an ‘iron lung’ of beer in the garden for the chefs. He recalls how Seán Kinsella bought his Rolls Royce from a customer who was falling on hard times. He bought it during the bank strike partly to get rid of money that was piling up since he was afraid it might be stolen. Kilbride remembers going for a drive with Kinsella in the Rolls one day and Seán had a bit of business to do in the Burlington. Jimmy asked him to stop and let him into the back of the car. Seán pulled into the hotel and the concierge Charlie Lyons, who had been sous chef in the Gresham, was nearly bowing and scraping on seeing the Rolls Royce pull up. He opened the door of the Rolls Royce and when Jimmy stepped out, quite gallantly, Charlie saw who it was and said ‘you bollix’!!!

![Image](http://www.pdf4free.com)

Figure JK.1: Jimmy Kilbride at Andy Whelan’s Retirement Party

Side 2 of tape

30. MM: When did you start reading?

31. JK: When did I start reading? I tell you I was reading cookery when I was fourteen. I got something out of the library, I didn’t understand a word of it but I read it. But I always had what you’d call the intellectual curiosity. It wasn’t that I had any great brains or anything like, I substituted with memory.

32. MM: Well you seem to have done all right.

33. JK: It was all very good. It was all very interesting and that and I particularly I had a great grá for the 706/3. I think it was the best happening in the cookery world.
34. **MM:** But even from looking, from talking to lots of people, that the 706/3 was really sort of fuelled, gave a whole bunch of people within the country this extra, it brought them up an extra level.

35. **JK:** It was good all right, but they were there for it. Now there was a lot army lads, sergeants in the catering department and that, people like Noel McHugh, he was a headman in the army. He was a head sort of sergeant, there was only one guy over him in the sergeant field but for some reason or another he wasn’t an examination man and he wanted his own business. I don’t know where he’s gone to now but he had the shop selling this, that and the other and more power to him. I’m sure he opened it.

36. **MM:** Ah he’s doing very well from that now.

37. **JK:** I hope he is, a very good man. I’ll tell you something about him, he worked like a hound for the exam and he was all ready and he fell on the way in and I’m convinced myself his nerves were in rags and he not so much consciously threw himself down but he did pull himself back up. I am really am convinced of that, he was going around this way so he had himself covered, which was healthy. He had tremendous ability, safe as a house, he could work in his own way along, bang, bang, bang and no hassle and he was cool, calm and collect. Now there were great lads now out of the army. Great lads, great lads.

38. **MM:** Who sort of made most impressions, like you mentioned Noel Cullen earlier on but who made the most impression did you think of the lot that went.

39. **JK:** Now that’s hard now, of them all?

40. **MM:** Yeah, yeah, or even a few people.

41. **JK:** Yeah, Jim Bowe actually is brilliant; there is no question about that. Bowe is class, absolutely class, gets a bit ratty on occasions but he’s very, very good and he’s brilliant, we worked out in the industry on nixers and various things and he’s a brilliant worker and a great organiser and extremely knowledgeable, there’s no question about that. So had the brain but I’m not too sure, if he has enough patience. You know but other than that I mean I have great admiration for Jim Bowe, absolutely great admiration. Who would be great now? What’s his name, the lad I mentioned before but forgotten now……

42. **MM:** This is Noel Cullen.

43. **JK:** Well Noel Cullen obviously. Noel Cullen was in a class of his own, there is no question as a human being, he’s definitely a class of his own. He had an aura about him, that you knew he was going and once he was triggered there was nothing going to stop him. I think he went very quickly to the Gresham, then he went to the Shelbourne, then he went to, whose the organisation. He went to CERT. Quickly from there he went over to the school in America that was taking students over from here to swap. Johnson and Wales that’s what it was and once he was there he was offered a full-time job, very quickly. I’d say he studied like be damned but he ended up missing a (inaudible). What’s his name, there’s another chap, he’s dead since. What the hell was his name?

44. **MM:** Where did he work?

45. **JK:** He was teaching in Baltimore. He died, Aidan Martin would know his name. Very bright lad, very good, more a pastry cooked though than what we would call a kitchen chef. It’s virtually impossible, there was so many of them. There was one girl, she went off and she was teaching in South Africa and then she was teaching in Zambia. There’s guys teaching in Australia, I can’t remember their names now. There guys, nearly everywhere there was a guy teacher I know, he was teaching in Cork at the time and he was coming up and down and the last I heard he
was teaching in Switzerland. There’s rakes of them and a lot of them went off and you know, it’s not like they get lost or anything like that, I’d say they did extremely well. One guy, another guy he was working in the Hotel in Ballsbridge, not Jurys.

46. MM: The Intercontinental or the Berkley Court?

47. JK: Well it was one of those and he, where did he go, it will come back to me now, Australia and he mentioned the name of the company to me. He was home on holidays and even I knew the company, and he was made chef of Irish cuisine, of European cuisine for all the hotels. A lot of them have got these sort of jobs you know and it’s not just the 706/3 which did give them a kick off but they have the native ability. That’s important, that’s terribly important, that the native ability is there. You can push a guy to an exam, you really can, you can figure out an exam ahead of the exam itself.

48. MM: I think, it was Tony Campbell who was saying that there was one group and he was saying I think you had to have inspired because you told them that they were all going to be millionaires and out of that, that actually quite a number of them are, which is amazing (laugh).

49. JK: Which is brilliant (laugh).

50. MM: Which is brilliant, you know what I mean. I think it was Eddie Sheridan was in it. I think the fellow from Master Chefs (John Coughlan), oh I forget his name now, but then again he’d be the same. There was a few of them in it and sure enough you know what I mean and again as you said was I supposed you said they were like blotting paper, like again you don’t become a millionaire without having the ability but what you instilled in them, you instilled in them the belief.
They all emerged, there is no question about that, with a degree of self-confidence. That’s terribly important, you know. It was one of the best things that happened and it’s not on now. I don’t know why. I think it’s very unfair. I know you can have the…

They’ve got these advanced one but again I didn’t do the 706/3 you know what I mean. I’ve seen some of them you know what I mean but I think one of the problems that I saw was that you had a dwindling pool. Because when I, again I would have just missed you and as far I understood you had to before you even came back to do the 706/3 or to do an advanced course you’d have to have done at least five years experience before so you were bringing something with you. But what happened then is that the numbers came down and people starting coming straight from the two years course and the advanced course and sure they weren’t bringing anything with you, you know what I mean. You had no life experience you know. That was reading on it anyway.

I ended up with extreme admiration for the Irish chef. Yeah I really did. I’d give them the chance, one they grabbed it, they sucked you dry, they were brutal, absolutely fabulous.

But looking at you know starting off, looking at issues of sort of class distinction, was it a certain socio-economic type who worked in kitchens and other ones in other positions or was there a cross-section?

The standard of cuisine when I was 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 was poor. It was very poor. For instance the Clarence Hotel, they used to have pigs cheek on and the clergy used to come in and eat them. Pigs cheek, and damn it all, get corned beef or some bloody thing.

But you’d eat the fat, it was absolutely awful. Awful I mean. There was no standard, you know, there was no standards at all and there was nobody pushing standards. That was the great problem. In the Gresham there was an awful lot of, the standard wasn’t there. Obviously things like steaks and that were brilliant and they had oysters, lobsters and that.

The simple things that you didn’t have to do much with?

That you didn’t have to do too much with you know but there really wasn’t a good standard. That’s on reflection, you know. I know I’m probably talking about guys who worked very hard and all that and they did work very hard but nobody had any formal training. That was the problem, nobody had formal training, none, none, none and I mean a new chef is coming up. The poor unfortunate would be like myself, wouldn’t be able to boil an egg (laugh). It was absolutely fantastic but sure there you are. You sort of when around like the sort of, you were like Nellie, you were sort of learning as you go you know. Terrific.

When would have been the first time you ate out?

Out in a restaurant. Oh, I suppose I was 16 or 17. When I was working on the sauce there was Michael McManus was the sauce cook. There was another guy on and I was the ‘dog’s body’ but I began to make money. Uhlemann was entitled to X number bottles of beer a day and I became the idol of his eye!!!. There was no question of that, he used to give me a half crown every week when I was going home because we used to get his meals and all that and the boys would be saying to me, you know, everybody was back at 5.30, he’d be back at 6.00 or 6.15 and he would stand at the cheek in and he’d be roaring in blah, blah, blah and the boys would be
saying is there any sign that he’d go home and then they’d say to me ‘get him his supper’ and I used to have to give him his supper every night and I go over at 7.30 with his supper only to get rid of him you know. This is how at the end of the week he’d give me a half crown. It was a big deal at the time but he had an allowance at times that nobody else had and I had the job. Now the kitchen then had an allowance for X number of bottles of wine for the sauce corner. People fought to the death over those bottles (laugh) and we used to have to end up doing was putting salt on them. You’d just put the salt in them. But Uhlemann wouldn’t drink his beer and he had a little room of his own and I used to into this thing and I’d take out two or three bottles of larger with me and I’d go back up to the bar and I’d put them in to the bar and then he’d give me the money. I was making fortune. I had a bike, I had a suit, it was £2.50 and all that sort of thing. So I can’t complain about it but then I was moved off the sauce, I lost a lot of my sources of profits. I tell you who got the job immediately after me was the lad who had the hotel out in the, not the hotel, the Restaurant out in Dun Laoghaire, remember…..

64. MM: Restaurant na Mara. Oh Mirabeau……

65. JK: Mirabeau…..Sean Kinsella, yeah. Sean Kinsella and I were in the same in the class.

66. MM: Right, in Cathal Brugha Street?

67. JK: No it was in school. There were three chefs that I know came out of it, myself, Vincent Dowling and Sean Kinsella. The three were in class together. But Sean was always a demonstrator. On his day off some how or another he’d get bought a riding outfit and he’d have jodhpurs on a brand new bike and where we’d be sitting outside where we come out and he’d say oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I just wanted to see so and so. They wanted to see the gear, ‘mar dhea’ he was going off to open the stables and (inaudible) horseman. You know this was Sean, he was loose and he had the thing. He was the same when he came back, we had him in the college, he never even got to make money, that was his problem. He invited you to the house and all that. He was really all heart but hadn’t a clue how to make money. You know he could get money in but he didn’t know how to hold onto it. And I found this was the same in an awful lot of chefs, don’t know how to control their money, that’s the name of the game. You know, if you want to open a business, you have to know how to control it. Now I made more money in ten years when I was running the business than I nearly did the previous fifty. I was working 58 years, far more and I handed over a business well in excess of a million probably two million pounds to the son, you know. I think young Irish chefs should sort of get in there. All you need is neck. The first three years are scary(Laugh). If you get over that I swear to God you’d get over anything. (note: Jimmy Kilbride retired from teaching aged 60 and opened Kilbride Cuisine which he ran until he was 70)

68. MM: Tell us about Kinsella, Kinsella he went into the, he arrived on to the….. He went on to the commis chef.

69. JK: He started in a place that’s gone now (Frascatti’s on Suffolk Street). It was sort of a very flamboyant restaurant. There was all sorts of advertising and it lasted for about a year and….I can’t remember and he got a job in the Gresham straight away as an apprentice and he was far better dressed than any of us, you know the rest of us were in rags but he had brand new gear and he’d lovely runners and all sorts. We used to wear, the grill with the crap on your feet, imagine, we used to buy the second-hand boots in the Army and the Navy store. One of those and we used to wear those and for pants we used to buy sailors white pants and wear them. It was absolutely ridiculous but…..

70. MM: Talking about that, what was the story on uniforms, were you supplied with uniforms or…..

71. JK: Oh not at all, you were supplied with nothing.

72. MM: So it was a bit of a ‘motley crew’ like the way you were dressed in the kitchen.

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73. JK: In the end you had to be dressed but everybody wore a white pants. The reason you wore white pants was because during the war you couldn’t get checked pants, that was the reason and you could get a sailors pants. Now an actual military sailor’s pants. You could get it in these places, very cheap and it would last for about ten years and this sort of stuff. Big wide legs on it and you’d buy a think in Hopkins.

74. MM: BB Hopkins, yeah, yeah.

75. JK: In Pearse Street, for hats and that sort of stuff. I don’t think we wore neck ties, but did we wear neck ties? I can’t remember now. I do remember, we did, and the longer you did, the stuff was, the hotel did the laundry. And all you had was two outfits. It was as much as any person could afford in those days, you know, and if you were in the vegetables you would be ‘manky’ (filthy) and as Toddy O’Sullivan would say ‘I say Kilbride’ he says ‘have you no other uniform’. ‘No sir, no sir.’ ‘But send them out more often’ but sure if you sent them around more often you’d be going around the place naked you know, (laugh) which is very interesting. It went down to the, eh, in Sean McDermott Street where all the poor unfortunate girls that had been pregnant were slaving their lives away.

76. MM: In a Magdalene Laundry.

77. JK: The Magdalene laundry and they’d write up little notes in your thing asking for cigarettes so you’d put ten cigarettes and you’d wrap them up in your laundry. So you’d have to put your name on it.

78. MM: So that’s where your laundry went.

79. JK: It was well done and it was done on slave labour and that’s very important. I meant to say it was done very cheap, I have no idea what it cost but I’d say now all the laundry out of the Gresham would have gone out there, the sheets and everything. There was a linen room in the Gresham where all the stuff was you know and Ms. White or Mrs. White was in charge of two women in that place and they were forever folding sheets and whatever and it went down there and I’d say was done very cheap. The labour costs were very….. So that’s it, they’d be looking for cigarettes, the lads, fair dues to the lads they would stick a packet of woodbines or something in…..Just wrap it in your gear and you’d tied up your gear with the sleeves and your name on it and then that sort of thing. That just goes to show, that was just a sort of connection bit, the awful things that were happening in the country/city at the time. It was all, I suppose it was a degree of life, we used to cycle everyday out to Dollymount (Strand) and have a swim and it was lovely during the summer on our split or else in the winter you cycled up into the Phoenix Park. You were young and full of energy and the point about one thing was, the mother was right, they were going to be a chef because at least you’ll be well fed. You were well fed. There was no question about it. You were eating very well and there was no limit put upon what you could eat or what you’d get. There was no problems about that you know so to that extent it stood by us all you know. It made us all strong (laugh). (Inaudible) and we’ll head off.

80. MM: All right. You were talking about the first place you went for a bite to eat.

81. JK: God now I really couldn’t remember. There was a place down in O’Connell, down towards O’Connell Bridge on the right-hand side. God I can’t remember the name now. That’s probably the first time I went into a restaurant.

82. MM: It wasn’t the Rainbow Café or something like that or…..

83. JK: No, it was a restaurant, it was a restaurant. (The Green Rooster) I can’t remember the name of it now. After that we’d go out we sort of get into the brain. You’d be addressing the waiter or waitress as (inaudible) (laugh).
84. MM: What do you think, you know, there was a time where only certain people could have gone the Gresham?

85. JK: There was no question about that. There is no question about that.

86. MM: There was a clear distinction about who would have gone or you wouldn’t have gone. When did that change do you think? Who had the effect of changing that?

87. JK: I suppose the ‘60s, the late ‘50s, the ‘60s now even in the ‘50s you would have been going out but there’s no doubt about it. I’d say mid ‘50s onwards it began to get better and the ‘60s of course were the great breakthrough. Everybody was as good as everybody else. But there was more money around I think. There was more money but there was this great break, nobody had any appreciation and rightly so, than what was really rich type of thing, you know, and education improved to no end. I mean education was appalling. I was in school from about September ’32 until…..’41 or something or whatever, the ‘40’s and…..Certainly I found St. Canicé’s an appalling experience, certainly in the upper level and when you were leaving they were very concerned about your soul, but in other words when you were in 5th, 6th, 7th, there was no 7th, there was 5th and 6th, they were very concerned about your soul because they knew….. I remember the head brother, the head brother that was in Canicé’s was a person who I have absolutely an utterly dislike for currently, and always had it but there was another, it was attached to Canicé’s it was the working class, it was attached to O’Connell’s. It was the working class O’Connell’s and the head brother in O’Connell’s was actual head over both and we were all leaving, technically leaving when I was twelve so I had to be there when they were all there, and your man came up to tell us all about life outside and I do remember this ‘you must never look upon the naked form’, you know, ‘it’s a mortal sin’. And you heard all this sort of shit you know. This is ridiculous when you think, like you know. It was intellectually offensive, even then it was offensive, and all this nonsense they went on with and bashing the kids and all that sort of stuff.

88. MM: Particularly what is revealed now and what went on, the hypocrisy in the whole lot.

89. JK: That’s it yeah, oh absolutely, poor show, poor show.

90. MM: What do you think about PV Doyle? Like do you think he played a role, (inaudible) sort or even before that or were the dress dances before that, like were the dress dances sort of a democratising effect?

91. JK: He did (PV Doyle). The dress dances, no, no, no. The dress dances were both in the Gresham and the Shelbourne and the big ones were the military balls and everybody was in the gear, you know the long tail and the girls had long dresses.

92. MM: And you’d be able to hire that stuff out or whatever?

93. JK: Oh yeah, well I presumably, well one would hope they weren’t…… There was all hunt balls and various things of this nature and if say it was Arnotts had the ball, well you can be pretty sure (inaudible). ‘Them’s was working class dressed up as their betters’, I must say it was a very splendid sight to see them all. They had lovely lamps and all that sort of stuff and they’d be all swirling around the place, slow waltzes and all that sort of stuff and it looked breathtaking. We obviously knew our betters knew how to enjoy themselves, you know. There was no question about that. Toddy O’Sullivan, we used to push open the door and look in, and he’d shout ‘hello, move away from there boys’, and he’d call us away and there was a chap, I can’t remember his name now, he was an improver at the time, apprentices, improvers and whatever, and then you were out of your time, but Toddy is looking in the door to see if one of us was looking in and he gets a smack of potato on the back of the head (laugh), and he nearly had a fit. He came running down to the kitchen and he said ‘chef, chef’ and I remember Uhlemann was standing in his normal place calling out the orders and ‘chef, anybody come down here recently’ and Uhlemann didn’t
see anybody. The man went in, ‘zoom’ and was chopping onions at this stage, and he never found out, but he thought that Paddy Burtonshaw (did it). Burtonshaw was an excellent, excellent person, he was the larder chef there for a long time. Very, very good and he was very cheeky as it were, he wouldn’t take any crap from anybody and Toddy was convinced it was him.

Discussion about the Gresham that he did not want made public

94. MM: And what about the whole gender thing, again as you said, there were girls doing the veg or women on the veg?

95. JK: There was five women on the veg.

96. MM: But there were never women chefs or where were the women chefs?

97. JK: The first woman chef came out of the college and it was one of my girls and Noel Cullen was the head chef in the Gresham and Bowe and I got in touch with him and we asked would he take one on as a form of apprentice and he said ‘of course’. I think it was two actually and that was the first in this country. Fair dues to him. So it was Bowe and I who pushed the first women and it was him who had no problem whatsoever. He said he’d have no problem in taking them on.

98. MM: Prior to that in the Central Hotel there was some woman chef in her 40s. I think it was the Central or prior to that but I know that there this famous Ms. Mullins or whatever who left the Gresham…..

99. JK: She was the Manager of the Gresham. She went over to the Central.

100. MM: And she was there to the day she died. Even on her death bed, the day she died seemingly she wanted to get out of bed to attend to a Board of Director’s function or something like that and they had to convince her that it was snowing outside or sometime to make sure she stayed in bed you know. They were different times you know.

101. JK: (Laugh) They were different times, different values.

102. MM: But it’s funny because it’s changed so much, you see. Did you see a change in the ‘80s. Where would John Howard or the likes of that fit in, or Colin O’Daly?

103. JK: No, he was very good and John, both of them now were excellent people and John Howard, I suppose was the best of them, he used to make money and that’s what it was about. You don’t open a business to be the best cook or the best food in the country. The primary function of any business is to make money. If you don’t make money you won’t be there very long. It’s dead simple. I think more chefs should get out on their own but with the intention of making money. It’s very necessary. They need to live within costs and all that and it’s not a very difficult thing.

104. MM: And he’d a great understanding though about wine as well, John Howard and he does them for some exclusive cellar.

105. JK: He had two or three bottles that he’d be selling for £400 and he wouldn’t sell them and if you asked for them he’d tell you were gone or something. He simply had them on to boost his image. Marketing (laugh). Even though the people who went there got the message, the Charlie Haugheys and that, they’d just sign the bill without looking, you know that sort of stuff.

106. MM: And about the Mirabeau, who owned it before Sean Kinsella?

107. JK: I worked in the Mirabeau before Sean Kinsella got it. I can’t remember the name, there was a guy, he was elderly, he was English with an interesting limp, war wounds, the plane. You
know yourself and a lady. Whether they were husband and wife I simply don’t know but they were extremely nice people and I’ll tell you how extremely nice they were. There was a big long garden out the back and there was a shed, and up in it was an iron lung of (beer) and it was absolutely free and (inaudible). No problems he said and you went up and then he’d occasionally come in and that sort of thing, no problems so we were excellent now people and Sean Kinsella bought it from them.

108.MM: Was it called the Mirabeau at that stage. It was the Mirabeau but they named it and Sean simply ran it on the same way. So that was it.

109.JK: And Sean ran for a number of years, didn’t he. He was skating on very thin ice and he’s still alive and…..You see I know him for a long time.

110.MM: But he had a Rolls Royce outside the thing?

111.JK: He bought the Rolls Royce, there was a bank strike, you couldn’t get rid of money, they were piling up there in the corner sort of thing and he was getting worried about there was cash in the premises, and lady so and so who was obviously a client, a customer and she was falling on hard times and she had a Rolls Royce and she wanted to sell it and Sean, it fell into Sean’s lap and he told me himself, he wanted to get rid of money and he paid a very, very remarkable price, I mean very reasonable and now he has arrived and I met him one day and he said ‘come on and we’ll get out on the Rolls’ and we were driving around and he says ‘I have to go into one of the hotels, in the Burlington’. I said ‘stop the car, quick’ and I jumped into the back, you know. I was sitting in the back and Seán was driving (laugh). The guy who was at the gate…..Not so much the doorman, the concierge, he was an ex-chef and I can’t remember his name now. (Charlie Lyons) I don’t know if he’s still alive or dead but he would be sort of rather gentle when he’d see a Rolls Royce coming and he’d sort genuflect a number of times, you know. So the car comes in and Seán, fair dues to him, he doesn’t turn the car, he drove it straight in like this and your man rushed up to the door and virtually fell on his knees to let me out, you know. And I stepped out rather gracefully and he looked up and he said ‘you bollox!!!’ (Laugh) I thought it was brilliant.

112.MM: Look, thanks a million for your time.

113.JK: Not at all, you’re welcome.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Arthur McGee in his home in Monkstown (6/1/2004)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Arthur McGee (AM)

1. MM: What year were you born?

2. AM: I was born in 1937 which makes me 67 years old now. This year I qualified for the old age pension. I started working as a chef in 1951 in the Russell Hotel in Stephens Green in Dublin and the reason I wanted to be a chef was in my last year in school in St. Michael’s in Inchicore in sixth year, there was a teacher called Mr. McDonald and his wife taught in another school in Inchicore and because of the fact that there were no restaurants in Inchicore at the time he had to do his own cooking for lunch. One day he asked me to go down to the common room, where there was a cooker, and light the gas for his pot of stew, which I did, and gradually then I began to do more. I ended up peeling the potatoes and making the stew myself and I would be asking my mother for recipes to change the menu for himself and his wife, and that was in 1950 and at the end of the year when I was leaving he called me aside and he asked me did I ever think of becoming a chef. I didn’t even know what a chef was and he explained that a chef was a guy who did the cooking in a hotel and he thought that there was going to be a good future for chefs and that I should think about it, and that’s what got me interested in it. When I got home, I told my father that I didn’t want to go to school anymore, that I wanted to become a chef and that was the holidays, the holidays began in June I think, and my father and mother wanted me to go and do what my elder brother did, to go on to be educated and he had got his leaving cert. Which was a highly prized certificate at that time and I decided no that I wanted more to be a chef.

3. My father, at that time it was difficult to get jobs as a chef because there were very few hotels taking on young people, and my father had a friend who was a chef in The Gresham Hotel who was called Michael McManus, and the head chef in The Gresham at the time was a guy called Karl Uhlemann, a German. This Michael McManus was a brother-in-law of, my father was a guard and another guard who worked with him a fella called Peter Pringle, he was Peter Pringle’s brother-in-law and that’s how he knew him and my father went and asked him if he could get me into The Gresham, and he told my father there was agreement with The Gresham and the catering college that The Gresham would only take first year apprentices from the college and that I would either have to go to the college or else get a job in another hotel and then be taken in as a second year. So we watched job applications and that sort of thing looking for to get a job as a chef but there were very few and on the 9th Nov I went shooting with my father, we got a 25 bus to Lucan and we got off at The Dead Man’s Inn, which was out in the country at the time, and we started shooting pheasants. My mother got the paper after we went shooting and she saw an advertisement saying “Boys to train as chefs” and she got the bus out after us and she listened to the shooting, the sounds of the shots and she found us, and that would never happen nowadays because there was more shots fired on one day shooting then than would be fired in the whole season now. If you went looking for a guy shooting now, you’d never find him, there was birds to be shot – they were, they were plentiful.

4. So, we stopped the shooting and went home and I went with my father down to the hotel and Pierre Rolland was there, a big tall French man, he didn’t speak English and my father told him I wanted to be a chef. Eventually, he told us to start the following Monday and I started, but then a few others started the same morning and my mother had to buy a uniform of course…

5. MM: Where was the uniform bought?

6. AM: I don’t remember. In fact, this friend of my father used to give us second hand uniforms too, I don’t know whether it was in the beginning but I remember afterwards we used to get his cast-offs.
7. **MM:** That’s Michael McManus?

8. **AM:** Michael McManus, yeah. At the time there was an agreement, the guy that owned The Russell was a fellow called Ken Besson, he owned The Russell and The Royal Hibernian and at the time Michael Mullen who was director general of SIPTU, at that time he was the hotel secretary of The Irish Transport and General Workers Union and himself and Ken Besson made an agreement that he would allow Ken import a head chef who was Pierre Rolland and the Irish guys, well Rolland was indenture Irish commis for 5 years and what Rolland did was he brought in the book of commis and he’d look at them and he’d let them know then after a couple of weeks, and only the ones who he considered to be up to scratch he got to sign, sign the indenture form and when I was there, there were some of the Irish fellows in the brigade were signed and some of them weren’t and it was obvious from the treatment of both of them, you need to be told who was signed because he was reasonably polite and nice to the guys who weren’t signed but the guys who were signed he be giving them a rough edge – do you know what I mean? There was two standards of treatment, so after I was there nearly three months I’d say and he asked me to sign, and it was big, it was a momentous occasion when you’re fifteen five years seems like a lifetime and my father brought me back to The Gresham and I remember being in the cloak room of The Gresham, the staff cloakroom, and Michael MacManus brought me in a big silver dish of ice-cream and spoon and I lorried into it but my father was seeking his advice and he said that he was getting me into The Gresham as a second year commis which was higher, in wages and all, and my father left it up to me but I decided anyway I would sign with The Russell because I liked it. After the first couple of days I thought I wouldn’t stick it because of the heat and all the rest of it.

9. **MM:** This is before you were after signing, your first few days were difficult…?

10. **AM:** Not just before no, after I started…the smells and all the rest of it and the heat, the kitchen was down underground and the ventilation wasn’t good. We didn’t have electric hot fryers, the Pasteur and the pots of fat, there were two pots of fat left at different temperatures on the range, a very hot one and a medium sort of one.

11. **MM:** All that fat, was it rendered down fat?

12. **AM:** It was rendered down, it was usually a pot rendering larder scrapings, collect all the fat and would be rendered, I’m sure they bought some fat in too. Some of the, one of the fryers was oil and one was fat.

13. **MM:** How did they control the temperature?

14. **AM:** They kept it roughly, they didn’t control it. They didn’t control it really, you had an educated guess or somebody would spit into it to see how hot it was. You could tell by the sizzles or the smoke, the smell if it was going too hot.

15. **MM:** Was it coal fired?

16. **AM:** No, it was gas. The only coal was a charcoal grill for steaks and chickens and meat, a genuine charcoal grill.

17. **MM:** How big was the operation there at The Russell? How many people were working there? How many chefs?

18. **AM:** Rolland was the chef de cuisine and then there was Roger Noblet, the sous chef, and there was a larder chef, French, sauce chef, French, pastry chef, French, entremetier chef, French, and a French tournant. The tournant was the guy who took over from the other fellows on their days off and that’s the way it was. In the beginning, you see, Rolland was there, I don’t know what Rolland’s contract was but he was there long term, his wife and family were there but his chef (de parties) would come over on a year contract or an 18 months contract and a lot of them came for
the purpose of learning English and they went on afterwards to America where the big money was.
It was decided by the company that rather than teach the French guys English that they taught us French. In the beginning in the afternoons we used to have to go to a French teacher to get lessons, French lessons and actually I stayed in The Russell for 11 years and became fluent afterwards.

19. I remember one time when I was about, I suppose I was about 23 years old, so that would have made me what, 8 years in the place, we used to meet in a Winter Garden Palace, it was a pub across the road from The Russell, and we’d be free in the afternoon and we’d meet there at a quarter to five as it were and were back working at half five and we’d have a few pints before we’d go back, and one day I was with a couple of the girls, French girls, and I was introduced to a French fellow who had come to The Royal Hibernian the previous week and he said to me “you must be a long time over here” and I said “why would you say that?” and he said “because you have the local accent”. He actually thought I was French. We used to amuse ourselves when a new chef de partie was coming and he wouldn’t have a word of English and he’d be mad keen to learn and he’d be asking you things like look at the clock and he’d say “what time is it?” and we’d say “you’re a silly bitch” and he’d be practicing it and sometimes he’d forget and he’d ask you again “you’re a silly bitch” and the only strangers that would come into the kitchen would be a girl that used to come down for the menu book and bring it upstairs to fill up the menu’s and this guy would be showing off his English “you’re a silly bitch”. Another thing was that Pierre Rolland’s English was very bad in the beginning but he was learning and he would try and say my name “McGee” he’d pronounce ‘maggie’ so all the boys would be laughing’, I became known as Maggie, but there was another fellow called Aidan Johnston, the last time I heard of him he was the chef in Green-Isle (Hotel) and Rolland was trying to pronounce Johnston and he says ‘Yostun’ and somebody else picked it up and said “Yostun, yeah”. Instead of being Aidan Johnston, he ended up being Yostun.

20. MM: How many commis chefs would have been under each of these chef de parties?

21. AM: Well, my first job was not even in the kitchen, outside the kitchen, outside the hotplate, you see the kitchen was down in the basement and there were tunnels from the back yard, passageways, but outside the hotplate there was a wooden table up against the wall and there were four commis chefs stood at the table and a bag of spinach would be emptied onto the table and you’d pick each leaf, take the stalk out, and there was about 4 bags of spinach done everyday and those four commis were on the veg but there would be two other commis inside on the range and doing other things, more senior. Eventually, when you were in you were on the right hand side and you were second from the right and also when we were eating – a big long table in the larder Rolland would sit at one end and the chef would sit on the right hand side and the pastry chef might sit on his left then, the hierarchy all the way down. I sat opposite him first, Rolland, then I worked my way up.

22. MM: Did you eat well?

23. AM: The best meal we ate was on a Thursday night, I often tell this to kids nowadays. What we ate on a Thursday was spaghetti plus chicken and the chicken was collected the whole week and the chef (entremetier) cooked it you see. He cooked the spaghetti and the saucier would cook the chicken. There would be tomato and garlic and all that sort of thing and you wouldn’t chicken what’s chicken necks, the neck yeah and it was far better food than we got at home, we used to look forward to it and that was the best meal of the week. Another thing we used to get was ox tongues and hanging out of the back of the ox tongues would be the pipes and the fat and all and we’d cut the ox tongue what was left and make burgers out of that. Another thing we couldn’t get was tea. There was one pot of tea came down and the guys at the end of the table didn’t get any tea and we ate dry bread, mostly with butter if it was there. A guy called ‘Morris’ was the stock manager and he used to go down to Grafton St. to the monument and he’d buy a cheese-board. What was left over the night before he’d come down and ceremoniously, the French guy, he’d eat what was left of the cheese. I can remember recently in the Court Hotel in Killiney say recently ten years ago, staff objecting to basic chicken, they wanted breast. Things have changed!
24. MM: How many rooms were in The Russell?

25. AM: I don’t know, the size of the business was in Horse Show Week the international riding teams generally stayed in The Russell and that was the peak week, that and the Spring Show, were the peak two weeks of the season and we got no days off. If you got 100 covered the house bought a drink for all the chef’s so you’d do it in Horse Show Week maybe and in Spring Show Week and maybe odd occasions in between but frequently we would be playing push halfpenny on the table because there would be no business really, all the meat and that would be done and sometimes, I’m not sure how many tables were in it but it was very, it really was an impressive place. I never saw anything to match it, simple little things like serving a pheasant, we used to have these big long ‘torpedo’ silver flats about four feet long, from that to different sizes all the way down. About half the silver flats, they would get fried croutons and a mixture of egg white and flour and they would grease the flat and stand up these croutons along the side of the dish with the pheasant would be served on and we would have the, we would get the feathers off the cock pheasant, one of the nicest meat, the nicest tail and the nicest head on them and we would have the two wings, the head, the breast and the tail and a little turnip you see, that way and the turnip is done in the centre of the flaps and we’d spread out the wings and stick a bit of wire, bull wire into the wings and they’d bend it around and they’d stick it in one side of the turnip and do the same with the opposite wing, and then we’d have a stick, a ‘straplin’ stick up through the head and we’d stick that in the front and the same with the tail at the back. It would look like a pheasant anyway. We’d send the pheasant up. It looked a million dollars. The garnish and that, you know.

26. Another thing we used to sell, bombe bursa, they call it. What it was a little mould of ice-cream, a bombe. Basically the chef would get an order for this and up on his oven he would have his melted sugar and the whisk with the top cut off it like.

27. MM: For spun sugar?

28. AM: Sugar, yeah and he would have maybe a nice elephant or an eagle or something in the deep freeze and he’d take it out and he’d get this torpedo again and he would have a lime filled glass case full of sugar baskets and vases of roses and all that sort of thing. He would reach up and he would also have serviettes done in the shape of gondolas and he would put one of these on end of this big silver torpedo and one at the other end and he’d put the ice thing in the centre. First he had a bicycle lamp, a bicycle lamp battery with a bulb passed the wires and he’d twist the two wires together and the bulb would light and wrapped around the bulb would be a bit of coloured paper to darken, and he’d stick that on the dish and then he would plonk down the eagle on top of it and there would be a light coming up through the eagle and he’d have the spun sugar then around that and then he would have little butterflies made out of choux paste and he’d plonk them around the spun sugar and he would have a basket, a big basket of roses and a few petits fours around that, and then two waiters would carry that up and they would dim the lights in the restaurant as it went in. It looked a million dollars and all they were actually selling was the ice-cream and the décor. When the thing would come back down, the ice-cream would go back into the fridge and the sugar basket would go back into the lime.

29. MM: They’d be re-used?

30. AM: And they’d wait to the next order. It really was terrific yeah.

31. MM: But you were there from what 1951 to ….

32. AM: I was there for 11 years to ’63. The first five years I was indentured. I have a copy of the indenture out there. They’re not mine, they’re Louis Corrigan’s. One of the guys in the photograph, Louis kept his. I had no regard for them. Louis kept his but we promised to look after the…..
And the first five years, did things get better or did wages go up or?

Oh it was brilliant. Wages went up every year in line with the union. In the second year you earned so much more than the first year and the third year you earned so much more —

What were the wages like though?

My wages when I started first were 17 shillings and 6 pence and out of that, 5 shillings went, was mandatory stuff for the union, there was a strike on, the hotel strike was on when I joined and we had I can’t remember but it was for the strikers anyway, they had a name on it. It was a gratuity and they stopped —

A third of your wages?

Yeah, we’d no say in it.

The Russell wasn’t affected by the strike?

No the Russell and the Hibernian, they paid. It was about paying the waiters the gratuity and but then that’s what they done so they weren’t closed. Ken Besson was the most enlightened guy that I ever met, working for. He promised me, see he had a thing called the Commis Training Scheme throughout Hibernian and Russell Hotel. He was concerned with our general education. He would bring us off (different places), he brought us to Dáil Éireann, to the public gallery in Dáil Éireann to look at how the young fellows worked and that sort of thing. We used to go out to Guinness’s to see how they made the beer and off to Jacob’s (biscuit factory). We did something educational one afternoon every week, just to educate us. And another thing he did, there were also commis waiters signed on a well as commis chefs, and he joined up a commis chef with a commis waiter and he stopped 2 and 6 pence a week, which is 12.5p from each of our salaries. We opened a joint back account and he guaranteed us that in 10 years we would have the expertise and the finance to open our own place. Wasn’t that very considerate? When you consider so much exploitation of catering staff, that you hear, you know. It was very nice. Another thing he used to do, at that time there was a hotel and catering soccer league, and the Russell and Hibernian had a joint team and they used to play and that was very interesting. I was never on the team because I wasn’t good enough. Besson would go to the matches and he would say beforehand as an incentive, if you win this I’ll take you to Paris for the weekend. And he would. He’d take them all off. Treat them like Lords. Some of the fellows, Louis Corrigan was a footballer and Willie Woods, even some of the General Managers used to play.

It was very strong I believe?

In fact there was a guy now, Paddy Roberts, he was the pastry chef in the Gresham when I was in the Gresham. He’s still working in the Gresham. He’s retiring in May. For my book I was hoping that he would nominate the team that played for the Gresham when I was in the Gresham. So that was it. So I stayed eleven years in the Russell and then I went to —

When you came out of your indenture after five years you then became a chef de partie, did you?

Yeah, a chef de partie and I ended up —

Like did it come to a stage that he kept you on? Was there a decline in the amount of French working there and then more Irish?

Oh yeah, we replaced all the French chefs, all the French fellows that were interviewed left. Jackie Needham was a fellow senior to us, an Irish guy, he was the chef and he had drink problems, plenty. But there was no French at that stage.
47. MM: And at what stage did Pierre Rolland leave then? In '59 is it or…?

48. AM: I’m not sure what year he left. He went to the Bahamas. He had an agreement where he would go to the Bahamas. Actually he left us and he went to the Bahamas for the winter. He did that a couple of years and came back to the Russell and then he went to France for the European season. He had a restaurant in France. But he head hunted back to the Russell and when he came back to the Russell I was the Head Chef in the Great Southern Hotel in Parknasilla and when I heard he was back I was courting Fabian (Arthur’s wife). I wasn’t married at the time to Fabian. I was going to get married and I called into the Russell when he came and welcomed him back and he wanted me to come back and I said ‘Jesus I couldn’t leave Parknasilla in the middle of the summer.’ And Ken Besson was on the Board OIE (Óstáin Iarnród Éireann – Irish Railway Hotels) and I went back to Parknasilla and I got a nice letter from Liam Ryan. He was the Operations Manager of the OIE and he was congratulating me on all I did for the company, wishing me well in my future. So I went back to the Russell then. So I inflated my wages in Parknasilla. I said I was earning ‘so much’, more than that, that I was going to buy a house. He said ‘In November you come with me, in November you come with me to the Bahamas and then when you come back, you buy two houses.’ The attractive part to me was going to the Bahamas in the winter where the big money was. So I did go back to the Russell and when November came (inaudible) wanted me to stay in the Russell. He was Director of the Russell at that stage and that was one of the reasons he went back. He was made a Director but he didn’t honour his agreement so I went to the Gresham then. I was only in the Gresham only a short period.

49. MM: We’ll take it up here. But we started off saying you finished your indenture after five years, you’d stayed for another five years or so, six years or so. You worked your way up through all the different type of chefs, the chef de partie, the different sections, you worked with Jackie Needham. Who else did you work with there?

50. AM: Well Nicky O’Neill by about a couple of months, Ned (Eamon) Ingram and his brother Colm. Johnny Kilbride, Jimmy’s brother. Your man that was chef in the airport, what do you call him, Jimmy Doyle, chef in Dublin Airport. Louis Corrigan who was an indentured chef in the Russell and we all at that time, everybody in Dublin at that time wanted to work in Guinness’s because Guinness’s paid you well.

51. MM: There was great benefits as well wasn’t there?

52. AM: Yeah there were great benefits and they were such good employers. Everyone applied to go to Guinness’s and the only one that was hired was Louis Corrigan. And it turned out afterwards that they privatised Guinness’s, they privatised the catering. Louis ended up in the laboratory in Guinness’s. He wasn’t a chef at all his last few years.

53. MM: Yeah. What was the scene like? We’re talking here now about the ‘50s – from the beginning to the end of the ‘50s. What was the competition like? The Russell was very high up there wasn’t it?

54. AM: The Russell was streets ahead.

55. MM: Was it ahead of Jammet’s?

56. AM: Well I’m not familiar with Jammet’s, I would say so. Roger Noblet now, who was a German in the Russell, he ended up he was a chef in the Royal Hibernian, he was a chef in Jammet’s and he aspired to improve himself when he went to the Russell. He believed it was higher than Jammet’s I suppose. I suppose it was more solid and bigger.

57. MM: And how about the Royal Hibernian? Was it a very good place? Was the Winter garden there in the Royal Hibernian at the time?
There was a Winter Garden Palace pub across the road but I’m not sure about the Hibernian. When I was in the Russell my first outdoor catering thing I was about a fourth year commis maybe, and there was a Mrs. Eileen Plunkett, she was Dutch and she was married to an American guy called (inaudible) but she was actually Eileen Plunkett, one of the Guinness’s and she owned Luttrelstown Castle and one Christmas, Rolland called me to say that I was going out to Luttrelstown Castle. I never heard of Luttrelstown Castle until then but you daren’t disagree, when you were told to do something. There was a car coming for me in two hours time or whatever at 2.30 p.m. and it would pick me up. So I was going around and I was borrowing knives and things I might need out their. Rolland told me I was going to be the chef and Eileen Plunkett was a friend of Ken Besson. She got onto Rolland and Rolland didn’t want to release any of his chefs, he released me probably considered I knew enough like to get by. He didn’t want to upset his own brigade. The car eventually arrived and at that time we were driving down Grafton Street and it suddenly dawned on me that I forgot a vegetable cutter that one of the lads was going to lend me. So I asked your man to drive around and he said ‘can you not buy it’ and I said ‘I haven’t got any money’. He said ‘don’t worry about the money.’ I said ‘we’ll get it in Reads in Parliament Street.’ This was a Butler, this was an English fellow and we parked the car, that time you could park anywhere, and he came into the shop with me and he said ‘is there anything else you want, you might need.’ Well I said ‘I might need this, I might need that.’ I got a whole new lot of stuff and he paid for it and we up to Luttrelstown Castle and the following day the chauffeur brought me into Finlater’s (grocery store) in O’Connell Street, just across from the college.

Where Eircom is now?

I was introduced as the chef in Luttrelstown Castle and the manager of the place and they were all cow, cowing to me. I was delighted with myself, the first time ever to be out of the Russell, you know. Suddenly I was maturing and the manager brought me around to the different apartments and introduced me to the different department managers as the chef in Luttrelstown. I was delighted with myself, but I stayed actually nineteen days there over Christmas and a lot of the time I didn’t have to cook because they were eating out and at one stage on New Year’s Eve, I think there was a ball and the caters were Lawlor’s of Naas and one thing I remember, there were three different orchestrations, one of them was a band on a platform in a tree. Money was no object. The guy that now teaches chefs in CERT, Matt Dowling. I brought him as a commis you see and Matt is much younger than me but I was a chef de partie and he was only a commis but he was a good commis but when the work was done, I’m kind of confused now, Matt arrived later. He wasn’t there the first time I was there but sometimes they would be eating, on occasion you might have to do a dinner but I was getting paid, I was courting a girl in Dublin and Luttrelstown Castle to get to so I called into the Russell for my wages on the Friday and I got my wages a couple of weeks and I got friendly with Footmen. There was a Mr. Higgin’s, he was the Butler, he was the head, then there was one Irish Footman and a lot of contract Footmen from England. They were working for agencies. When Christmas was over and the group broke up, they went away. The estate agent was paying off the staff and I wasn’t getting into the queue. He had a cashbox and a ledger and he said ‘why aren’t you getting in?’ Sure I said ‘I got my money from the Russell.’ Don’t be a gobshite. Get in, all the extra hours. So I got into the queue anyway and I walked, eventually my turn came and the guy looked at me and he said ‘name’ and I said ‘Arthur McGee’ and I said ‘chef’. And he said ‘how much?’ And I said ‘3 pounds, 17 and 6’, which was fourth year commis money at the time and he said ‘would you settle for 3 pounds 15’ and I said ‘I would’. I was talking about per week and he was talking about per day. He handed me 19 weeks plus I was after getting paid in the Russell. Nice story (laugh). But at the time I was in the Russell, the Russell had the contract for the Diplomatic Corps in Iveagh House. Whenever a new Ambassador would come to Ireland the day he would present his credentials to the President, there would be banquet in Iveagh House and the Russell always did that, and I did that with Mick Nolan, the waiter, for years and years because I was just picked to do it, you know. I was probably, I’d be one of the least missed out of the Russell.
61. At one stage, another time, this is a remarkable story, it’s hard to believe. I was there in 1950 something. Princess Grace of Monaco and her husband Prince Rainier came on a state visit to Ireland. (note: State Visit was in 1961) Eamon DeValera was the President at the time and I got a call or somebody in the Russell told me that on Monday morning a car was going to pick me up. I lived in 23 Bulfin Road, Inchicore which is working class, corporation estate.

62. MM: I know it well.

63. AM: Yeah and to go to Áras an Úachtarán. Now this was a big major media event, Princess Grace coming to Ireland and I knew that she was there and I also knew that Lawlors of Naas and Mills used to do the catering in the Áras and I was wondering why they wanted me on Monday. I even wondered should I bring a uniform and I thought they wanted me to supervise like. I have to laugh when I think of it. It wasn’t for me. But I arrived anyway. The car arrived to 23 Bulfin Road and it was DeValera’s old black Rolls (Royce). Do you remember the old black rolls? With a chauffeur and I went out and it was the first time ever before and ever since that a guy went to work from Bulfin Road in a chauffeur driven Rolls! But we got to the Áras anyway and there was a big crowd of the celebrity seekers around the gate and the cops and all the rest of them pulled them back and they all surged around the car and they were disappointed to see me sitting in the back with….. The reason for that in the media it was taken that she was coming out, that she was planting a tree in the Zoological Garden during the morning. But we went in anyway and into the kitchen and I put on my uniform and I walked in and I met this woman, the housekeeper and I said to her ‘who’s doing the catering’ and she said ‘you are’. And Jesus I couldn’t believe it. No word of warning or no and she had the menu. The menu was veal, new potatoes, strawberries, peas, proper peas, fresh and potatoes and the veal and the veal was cut all wrong.

64. MM: Oh yeah against the grain?

65. AM: It was cut like what you see in a butchers shop now. Round steak. So all the different muscles were there and you couldn’t dress it up. It should have been taken muscle by muscle.

66. MM: Seam butchered yeah?

67. AM: And the seam taken out of it and all that but it wasn’t, and Jesus I couldn’t believe it. And in the kitchen there was a crowd of about fifteen young girls wearing check skirts, kitchen maids and none of them knew anything. I couldn’t believe it. I made a sort of a stir-fry out of the veal. I remember there was strawberries and cream. I remember whipping the cream and slicing the strawberries. Sticking the slices of strawberries around the cream and at about half twelve, quarter past twelve all the girls disappeared and I was on my own. And first of all before 12.30, I saw the guy who was the chauffeur, mid morning I saw him wearing the livery of a hall porter guy, you know the yellow and grey stripes. He was opening the door because Princess Grace was exiting to plant her tree in the….. He was wearing the hall porter’s uniform. The next thing at lunch time he appeared. He was the head waiter. But the girls reappeared, they disappeared about 12.30 and they all reappeared in black and white and lacy, they were all waitresses. I was told afterwards that they were from an orphanage in town. Hard to believe it and Princess Grace and Prince Rainier pealed their own spuds because there were bowls of boiled potatoes. I couldn’t believe it. There was a French woman there, I’d say she was an aid of the Princesses and I remember explaining to her that our President was unique insofar he was big into the frugal life and all that, and that there was no insult intended to anybody. I told the housekeeper that I wanted at least a week’s notice if this was ever done again. I went a couple of times again, Cardinal (inaudible) was one fellow I remember and the following day…..

68. MM: But did DeValera pick the menus?

69. AM: No there wasn’t a menu.
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70. MM: The stuff was bought...?

71. AM: And obviously, whoever cut the veal, the butcher whoever he was, didn’t have a clue. He wasn’t used of dealing in restaurants like, he would have known and the funny thing about it, on the Tuesday, the Prince and Princess gave a meal in the Royal Hibernian in DeValera’s honour, they were hosting it for DeValera and the menu had been printed in the media, Roger Noblet was the chef and I knew he was going to pull out all the stops and Jesus I couldn’t believe it, I couldn’t believe it anyway, DeValera was famous for his frugal living and dancing at the crossroads and.....

72. MM: And it carried through into when he was entertaining as well (laugh).

73. AM: I discovered the other day, the papers that were released, he worried about whether he could live on his pension, in his old age. Shortly before he retired. I worked with him a couple of times. I slept in his bed when I was in the Great Southern in Killarney., the chef there was there when I went. I met him last month. He’s now 80 and he’s written a book, Frans Knoblaugh, German. But he was the Executive Chef in the Great Southern in Killarney and he had a row with Brendan Maher who was the Operations Manager partly because I was there and he left and he went to Rockwell College. They had the school there and he used to get me into sleep in DeValera’s room. DeValera was a maths teacher there for a while.

74. And then when I was in Parkinsilla you had DeValera to eat a couple of times, you know.

75. MM: And where did you go after doing your ten years in the Russell, you left, I know you came back then again later. But where did you go directly after leaving the Russell?

76. AM: After I left the Russell I went to the Gresham.

77. MM: And McManus was still there?

78. AM: McManus was still there, Uhlemann had gone, McManus was now the chef. And I know for a fact that McManus did not want to be the chef. The company were paying the head chef’s wages, giving him an increase when Uhlemann left to bring in another continental and the union members objected. They wanted McManus to be the chef and when I was there, there was another guy from the Russell, Willie Woods was there at the same time and we couldn’t believe the low standards of the Gresham. Willie would say to me ‘Jesus would you look at what there serving over there.’ And these guys were serving this little (inaudible) and the Gresham had a great press in..... Christy Sands book now, The Gresham for style and all that, most people believed including myself that the Gresham was a terrific hotel because and I think it was, what happened in the Gresham happened in the Mirabeau. Toddy O'Sullivan was looking after the press, the same as the guy in the Mirabeau was, and he was getting all this wonderful stories, wonderful coverage because the standards in the kitchen in the Gresham were desperate.

79. MM: Really, now Sean Kinsella had been in the Gresham, training in the Gresham, but he’d gone by the time you arrived?

80. AM: I think he was breakfast cook in the Gresham. But he ended up, his problem was he ended up on a Saturday night; half the punters wouldn’t be paying. They would be writing nice stories about him. And I’m sure that must have happened with Toddy O'Sullivan, that he knew who to look after and he got all the good press. I was amazed and I don’t know about any other department except the kitchen, but the standards in the kitchen..... There was absolutely no control for example.

81. In the Russell, I remember one time in the Russell when Rolland was there, I came in on a Monday morning and they used to have a small little buffet upstairs and there were cooking, they’d have a cooked chicken on it maybe but I was cooking this chicken and the chicken was in
the oven and I was talking to the boys about what a great night I’d had the night before, and the girls I met and I forgot about the chicken for a short period, and you know the way the skin on the chicken blisters. It goes black a bit and there was no question of getting another chicken but Rolland, I had to admit it, you see, so Jesus there was war. I was a branler. You know what a branler is? The French for wanker.

82. MM: Oh right (laugh).

83. AM: All the commis were branlers in the Russell. That chicken ended up in the office, in the pot in the office and for about three weeks anybody who came into (the kitchen) suppliers, or anybody, (inaudible) Mr. McGee, go into the office, Mr. McGee is the roast chef in the best hotel in Ireland. He made it that (pointing to the chicken). Oh Jesus, I was mortified. I remember one time Nicky O’Neill was the vegetable chef, he was cooking cauliflowers, he cooked three cauliflowers and he slightly overcooked them. He cooled them off, hid them, brought them home to his mother and bought three more cauliflowers. Nicky still gets nightmares with Rolland. He’s 67 years old now.

84. MM: Oh he was really a tough chef?

85. AM: Oh yeah, tough.

86. MM: And how did you think about that sort of style, how did you feel? Were you ever afraid to go into work?

87. AM: No, no. I was used to discipline I suppose from my father and my father was a strict man. All fathers were at that time you know. When I was a young gurrier around Inchicore, a young teenager going around with the fellows, the extent of our crime was to break speed lights, bulbs and if a Garda, or if you saw a Garda or Garda uniform we fled in a panic, now the kids are hiring cars, they’re stealing cars and they’re going up to the Garda station, they’re trying to get the cops to chase them. It’s a different world; really it’s a different world. It’s like the story of the chicken necks.

88. I used to go to the Monument Creamery for my father’s dinner, one duck egg and there were eight kids. We had eight kids, my father was a Garda and he’d take the top off the egg and we’d all be looking at him and he’d give it to one of us and the following day he’d give it to someone else. You know a duck egg.

89. MM: The Monument, that was on O’Connell Street?

90. AM: No. No, there was a whole (lot of them). There was one in Kilmainham, down in Kilmainham Cross. They were all over the place. They were a whole chain you know, famous, sort of up-market dairies, you know.

91. MM: And you’d go for your pint of milk and stuff after the pictures and stuff like that…?

92. AM: One thing we used to do in The Russell when we got paid on a Friday, Nicky O’Neill used to do this. Nicky was a non-drinker. He was a very sensible fellow. When he became eligible to drive a car, he went out and he bought a car, a second-hand Ford Prefect. The rest of us didn’t have ‘tuppence’ like. Nicky was a non-drinker. We used to go to O’Connell Street to Caffola’s and we’d eat ‘melancholy babies’, ice-cream and we might eat three of them if we had the money. We used to gamble. Another thing we did in the Russell, we’d play cards and we’d play cards all night, sometimes in the lady loo because the night porter when he’d catch us he’d throw us out and he wouldn’t go near the lady’s loo. And some of the fellows were married, waiters, and there was a fellow called Willie Ainscott and sometimes we ended up…… He lived in Drimnagh, and when we were thrown out of the Russell, he’d come up to my house and we’d go up to his house and we would be playing cards and we would hear his wife getting up in the
morning, it would be daylight and we’d all sneak out. He might have lost his wages and he might owe a month’s wages and we’d be giving him £2 each to have some money to give to his wife. That’s what we did. Terrible. That’s what we did for crack like you know. I didn’t do anything like that when I became engaged.

93. MM: Knocked it all in the head?

94. AM: Knocked it all in the head. I sold my car. I had a car. Another story I should tell you, there was a succession of chefs to replace Rolland, big name French guys and none of them succeeded, there was about four or five of them except this guy, a small little Belgian fellow, I can’t remember his name, but he came in and called all the chef de parties together and he said he was here, and he had the contract for a year, and he would like us to help him to run the place the way Rolland did, and he was a humble sort of a guy, he wasn’t a dictator, so we said ‘do you want us to run it?’, and he said. ‘Oh yeah’ he’d be glad for any help at all, menus or anything like that. So we actually wrote the menus and did the ordering and we ran the whole place the way the Russell used to run and at the end of his…. He bought a car, an Austin 840, a red Austin 840 and he promised me, I got friendly with him, I used to take his wife shopping on a Tuesday and on a Friday morning. His wife didn’t speak English. I used to go and translate for her, and I remember bringing him out shooting. He was interested in shooting and I bought him out with my father and my brother Charlie, shooting and I used to sell the game and pheasant, partridges and duck and all that sort of thing and he would buy them and he’d pay the top market price, you know. When he was leaving, he offered me the car for what the garage offered him for it, so that’s where I got my first car. I had a reason for telling you that, but it’s gone out of my head.

95. MM: So you had the car when you were in the Gresham then. How long did you stay in the Gresham?

96. AM: I was thrown out of the Gresham. I went into the Gresham in November and in January there was a belt tightening operation, the last two into each department were to go, and I was one of the last two, so I was out and for a while I was unemployed and I remember going to Werburgh Street unemployment exchange for my entitlements and I stood in the queue for about ten minutes and there was no movement in the queue, and we were standing there and it was a depressing place and I walked out of it, I never got any unemployment money, I couldn’t stick it and my next job then. There was a job advertised for the Royal Hotel in Bray. I got the job but I went out and I remember Fabian and I went out and we had a celebratory dinner, because in those days you had to nearly wait for a chef to die nearly before the job would come up. But we had it made.

97. I got this thing out in Bray but the timetable for the staff was, we start at 4 p.m. today and you’d work to dinner and the lunch tomorrow and you’d be finished at 4 p.m. tomorrow and you were off until 4 the next day, but the thing was I was supposed to be on both shifts and I remember the amount of business that they did, especially if Wexford were playing in Croke Park. The lunch used to go on until about 3.30 p.m. and lunch would be off and immediately there would be high teas and you would have, they used to have mixed grills on a skewer and cooked it in baskets in the fat fryer, the standards were brutal and there was no such thing as fresh potatoes they all were all mash or smash or packet chips, I mean I’d never seen before but I only stayed for a short time. I actually went back to the Great Southern again.

98. (note. Slight confusion over chronology of events)

99. MM: But had you been in the Great Southern prior to that?

100. AM: No.

101. MM: You came from the Russell, you went to the Gresham, you were only there for a few months because they had a belt tightening and then you were unemployed…..?
And that year I went as head chef. My first job when I left the Russell, my first interview was to go as head chef to the Great Southern in Bundoran. There was a fellow called Julienne Chapman, was the Manager and Nicky O’Neill who was ex-Russell, he had gone to America, he worked in Chicago in a big hotel and he came back as Executive Chef in CIE. We were still very friendly, we were buddies and he told that they were looking for a head chef in the Great Southern Hotel, Bundoran so he arranged an interview with me in the Great Southern Hotel, Sligo. We went up and we met Julienne Chapman and it was agreed I would, they would pay me so much and I would go. Now this was the end of June, nearly the middle of June and in fact Nicky brought me as a visiting chef, Nicky was involved in the Great Southern Hotel Bundoran, the Lobster Festival, we used to have at that time and he brought me up just to see it, to work there, to see what I thought of it. So there was myself and Johnny McCarthy, you know Johnny McCarthy was an executive chef in the Great Southern in Galway. He was the president of the Panel of Chefs that year and often Byrne he’d send off a photograph there of the Great Southern, he was in Sligo, the Great Southern in Sligo and Nicky and I were doing this Lobster Festival Dinner on Saturday night and the sous chef, Michael Walsh and his brother was the sauce chef, I can’t think of the brothers name, but anyway Julienne Chapman was the manager so, I agreed to take the job so I told Chapman, I was still working in the Russell Hotel. I wouldn’t leave the Russell until I got a letter guaranteeing me my wages 52 weeks of the year, because at that time the season was very short, Bundoran would close and I wanted to make sure that I got paid all the year round. So there was a bit of a delay before he got the okay for that, but eventually I got the letter and I gave my notice in the Russell and the next thing was Chapman contacted me, could he meet me the following Sunday in Sligo, now it was into July at this stage. So Nicky and I, Nicky and Terry, Nicky’s wife and Fabian and I, I wasn’t married at the time, we went to meet Chapman and Chapman told me that he announced that I was going to arrive at such date as head chef and Micky Walsh said ‘as soon as I went in they were going to go out’, himself and the brother and the others, they were going to go out on strike. So Chapman had discussed it with the powers that be so it was decided that they couldn’t, that they were over a barrel, that they would have to give into the lads. So Chapman asked around the company and Brendan Maher was the chef in the Great Southern Killarney and he said ‘he would take you’. So I didn’t mind but had I gone into the Bundoran, I wouldn’t have lasted two days because I would have been turning potatoes like I did in the Russell. That’s all I knew and then I went to Killarney and my title was Speciality Chef and there was this German guy I was telling you, Frans Knoblaugh, was the chef and I was to work in the Grill Room and there was a Grill Chef there, (inaudible) he’s a Hungarian Jew.

He’s still around?

He’s in the midlands somewhere, some castle.

I heard talk of some consultant or something or other.

His family were all killed in the gas chambers.

Right.

But this Dr. Collins saved him and his sister. There was a television programme done about him and all that. But anyway Maher who didn’t get on well with the chef, Frans, got me as Speciality Chef in the Grill Room where they only did the à la carte which is only a fraction of the business, most of the business was in the restaurant, tours, you know. Maher told me put dishes on the menu, everyday a different dish, the same as was in the Russell, used the same ingredient, now the chef will be on to you to cut down the costs because they used to get bonuses from the (inaudible) and all. ‘Ignore all that’ he said and I said ‘okay’. He gave me a commis as well one of the commis out of Frans brigade and Frans was always cribbing he never had enough staff and all that. He didn’t really for what he was doing. They used to make bread rolls for lunch. One of the chefs, one of his chores was to make the bread rolls for lunch and the bread rolls for dinner. That was 800 bread rolls a day. When you think of it now, Jesus, and he’d be there with the two hands, but there was friction you see, Frans wasn’t blaming me, he was blaming Maher because he
was fighting with Maher long before I arrived. I was cutting steaks one day for Maher for Frans and Maher came in and ‘what are you doing there’. I said ‘I’m cutting steaks’. He says ‘I’m not paying you, what I’m paying you to cut steaks’. He had a row with Frans and the following Sunday, this was in the middle of the summer, July or August and they ran out of potato salad in the buffet at lunchtime and there was a crowd of mad people, and I got involved and I was peeling potatoes and Maher came down and he attacked Frans and Frans said ‘I’m going’. Now that was on a Sunday and the following Saturday night was the centenary of St. Brendans, the seminary down there and DeValera and the whole Diplomatic Corps were coming in and they were talking about this for weeks beforehand so Frans left anyway on the Sunday morning, walked out and Jimmy Freeman was the sous chef so Jimmy came in on the Monday with a sick note for a week to get him over the Saturday night. So Maher was up on a heap. I had never proved myself, I didn’t know, you know. He didn’t know if I could do anything or not and he said ‘I can’t see what you’re worried about, it’s only a dinner.’ So he sort of agreed to let me at it. So I called the Brigade together, Frans was German and he used to be always cribbing about the Irish ‘gobshites’, the Irish were lazy and this, that and the other. I said now, you can prove if Frans was right or he wasn’t right. I’ll do this on Saturday night but I want you fellows to help me. We’ll let him see that the Irish fellows aren’t really ‘gobshites’. But we did it anyway and it was a roaring success. I remember I did the fillet sole bruchelle, fillet sole on the torpedos and I showed the waiters beforehand the way it was glazed under the salamander and all that and I showed the waiters how to serve it. You know I filled them all in. The main course was duck, which they used to do standard in the Russell, like a little orange basket, a bit of parsley, like they still do under the flap, segments around and they all thought that was marvellous, well done. That was one of the successes like. But Frans left. Frans didn’t come back. Frans now says it was the best thing that ever happened to him had he stayed there, he would never have had Linden House.

109.MM: Right yeah. This is the same man whose 80 years old now.

110.AM: It’s in the book and all. He’s promised me, his book is being printed at the moment.

111.MM: Very good.

112.AM: But there will be some information in that book that I will be able to use because of my connection with Rockwell. The last couple of years. He used to do Rockwell and then he’d run the hotel in the Summer like when the kids would be off for the Summer holidays. His son runs it now.

113.MM: Jim Bowe taught there as well in Rockwell. You were then made head chef down in Killarney?

114.AM: Well Maher was the General Manager you see. Now he decided that myself, Jimmy Freeman and a fellow called Noel Gannon, Noel is still alive, Jimmy Freeman is dead, that the three of us would be joint head chef but it couldn’t work. We were all claiming to be head chefs when things were good but if there was any sort of trouble we were pushing responsibility but I was only wintering in Killarney. The following season I went down to Parknasilla and it was from that I went back to the Russell and then…..

115.MM: And you were head chef down in Parknasilla?

116.AM: Yeah the photograph. I was head chef in yeah and I went to the Russell. And I went back to the Russell for more money than I got as head chef in and then you see I went back to the Russell from in the middle of the summer and your man didn’t honour his agreement to take me. I left and then I went to the Gresham and I was thrown out of the Gresham and I went to Bray and then the following summer I went back to Great Southern Hotels and I was the head chef in Mulranny and I was…..

117.MM: In Mayo.
118. **AM:** Mayo, yeah. Between Westport and Achill, right on the coast. A lovely place. I was there when I got married. Johnny Carroll was the fellow in Galway.

119. **MM:** You’re in Mulranny then, oh that is when you went back then, you went back after your time in the Royal in Bray you went to Mulranny.

120. **AM:** Yes, right.

121. **MM:** So you stayed with the Great Southern then for a while.

122. **AM:** You see the Mulranny only operated, I can’t remember the season but it operated from say June to the end of September/October and then I went to CIE Catering.

123. **MM:** Down in the central kitchen in Heuston was it?

124. **AM:** And trains, specials to Knock and rugby specials. They’d run a train from Cork to Lansdowne Road for rugby Internationals and they…..

125. **MM:** The specials to Knock were huge weren’t they?

126. **AM:** They were.

127. **MM:** They do 400 breakfasts, 400 dinners or high teas.

128. **AM:** They do all the wash-up as well. One thing about that there were complaints from the, what do you call them people who go to Knock? The pilgrims, that they were being ripped off by the staff on the trains and what they used to do was they would get the sugar bowl or something and put two half crowns in it, the waiter and he’d come along and he’d say ‘the gentleman in the next seat asked to pass that around?’ I think they’re having a whip around for the chefs. (Laugh). The chefs never got anything. There was a hue and cry in the company that they were going to eradicate this and they had all sort of supervisors on the train, and the guys would create a distraction in one end and get the supervisor down and they do this carriage (laugh). Another
thing they used to have in CIE was Guinness’s used to, they would take every publican from Killarney and his wife and they’d run a special train from Killarney to Dublin and busses to meet the train in Dublin and bring them to the Brewery and treat them like Lords and bring them back to the train, and they would have lunch on the way up and dinner on the way back, and they would be a certain stock of drink on the train and they would be a stock taking at the end of it and some of the whiskey bottles would have names as Gaeilge. Did you ever see that?

129.MM: I haven’t no.

130.AM: Powers and Jameson and all that. They would be for the tourist I suppose. But I remember waiters looking and I’m not taking that ‘shit’ because the label was in Irish because everyone would know where it came from, you know. They’d be looking for stuff with the labels and the company knew that was going on because it was a sale for them.

131.MM: Whatever was missing was a sale for them…..?

132.AM: It was charged up.

133.MM: Yeah, yeah.

134.AM: People turned a blind eye to it, like you know. Another thing in the winter there was a fellow called Gerry Murphy and he was the head attendant, the head attendant is the chief catering guy on a train and he lived in Mallow and he used to get the Cork train up in the morning and I think it was 6.45 a.m. out of Kingsbridge back to Cork and this might be the month of January and there would be nobody on the train. And Gerry used to say to me ‘make four’, I’d go over you see and the train would be pulling out we’ll say at 6.45 a.m., I’d get there maybe, I lived in Fairview at the time. I would arrive you see if the train, not sure I think it used to be 6.45 a.m. the last one and your supposed to work that to Cork, overnight in Cork, I mean there were guesthouses in Cork across the road from the station that they slept in, which I often did and you’d get the Cork train up in the morning and that would get in about lunchtime and you’d be free then the rest of that day. But Gerry would say ‘make four ham sandwiches’ and then he’d say ‘go home’ and I would get out of the train on the side of the train away from the station and at that times there wasn’t the big, you could get under all the trains and come out on the far side and I’d get the 24 bus up to Fairview to Fabian and the following morning at 1 p.m., the train would be due in at quarter to I’d be there waiting for the train to arrive in among the mailbags and the train would pull up and I’d hop out to the lads and I’d say ‘good luck lads’ and back on. I was only putting in the hours, there was no point. Another time the Manager, what was his name, Dermot, he was a Catering Manager anyway before Tom Mythen. Oh yeah, I was a pain in the arse, he wanted nothing to do with me, and he said to me at one stage, I want you to travel on these dining cars, travel around on the dining cars and make suggestions. And I’d get on, on the train to Galway with my……

135.MM: Notebook.

136.AM: No, I wouldn’t make any notes or I wouldn’t insult the fellows like. I was only there for the winter like I didn’t want to dirty my copybook and I’d sit and I’d be reading my cowboy book or whatever my detective. We’d go to Galway and we’d come back, he never looked for reports or anything you know. Just you watch my fellows he’d say. Dermot Kelleher, that was his name. He was Nicky’s boss you see and Nicky would say that Kelleher would say ‘he doesn’t like lamb but he loves chops.’ (laugh) What he meant he didn’t like roast lamb but he like lamb chops. He was a nice fellow. I don’t think he had any catering experience like he used to depend a lot on Nicky.

137.MM: Had you anything to do then with Restaurant na Mara when that opened up?

138.AM: I opened Restaurant na Mara first. There was a guy, it coincided with the Dun Laoghaire Festival.

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Figure AM.2: Arthur McGee teaching in the Great Southern Hotels

139. **MM:** The Seafood Festival or something?

140. **AM:** The sailing or a special week, a gala week and there was a tearooms there and they had the hot water machine for making tea/coffee and that was all. There was no kitchen or anything and I was told about it. So we hired these bottle gas things, the bottle gas would be under the table and the square to hold the pot and we opened for a week. It was one of the best restaurants I was ever in. The food was brilliant in it. We had the….. we used to get boxes of fresh prawns and we had piles of commis from the hotels and we would cook relays of prawns inside in the stock, the stock was much richer than it should be and we would be selling prawns all over the place and a lot of the company fellows brought their guests out, it was a sort of a PRO thing for the company as well. But myself there, there was a guy, he was the head waiter in the Great Southern in Galway on the Rooftop. Barney Casey, he has a restaurant now in Galway.

141. **MM:** No, I’m thinking of another fellow, Barney (Nicolson) who was there for a long time as the head waiter. He finished up.

142. **AM:** Oh yes, that was after it opened especially but what I’m talking about was the first time it opened.

143. **MM:** And when it opened, how long did it stay open for that first time? Did it just stay open for a week?

144. **AM:** Just for the week. Just for the duration of the festival. They took it down and somebody got the idea that it was such a brilliant idea that they should open permanently and they built a kitchen and all the rest of it then. At that stage I think I had left the company, and when it opened I think maybe I was in Killiney.

145. **MM:** Was that around the early ‘70s or late ‘60s?

146. **AM:** Fabian when did I start in Killiney?

148. AM: And when did Restaurant na Mara open?

149. FM: Before that. You were in the Great Southern Hotels.

150. AM: No, that only opened for a week at that time but when did it open permanently?

151. FM: Oh I’m not sure. Oh I remember you were working with CIE when you came up to do it.

152. AM: Yeah, I was yeah.

153. FM: It was in the ’60s.

154. AM: And a fellow called Peter Dowling. He was a head waiter there. But there was a lot of the big guns put into it to see that it went right, like you know.

155. MM: Malone was there wasn’t he? The guy who was in Jury’s after that. Peter Malone was a chef?

156. AM: Peter Malone? I don’t think so, was he?

157. MM: He was as far as I know.

158. AM: Peter Malone was a commis waiter with me in Mulranny.

159. MM: As far as I know he was there as a chef at one stage and then Dave O’Connor was there. Ben Smith was there, I think, when it opened to start off with.

160. AM: Bernard Smith yeah. Bernard taught in the college a bit there.

161. MM: He still teaches there.

162. AM: Does he and is he working anywhere?

163. MM: No he’s full-time in the college that last 8 years or so, I think. He used to be with FXB’s as well.

164. AM: Yeah, that’s right.

165. MM: So you went from Great Southern then to….. How did you end up going to the Killiney Court (Hotel)?

166. AM: Well my last year in I was working with a fellow called Niall Kenny, he was the manager, I was the chef and I had lots of opportunities to go (inaudible). At that time hotel managers came from middle class backgrounds and generally they weren’t very bright. They didn’t have the ability to enter the professions, you know what I mean, for one reason or another and at the end of pile they put a black suit on them and they called them a hotel manager especially in the Great Southern Hotels because they didn’t have authority anything. There was a Purchasing Officer in head office, a fellow called Harry O’Mheara and his assistant and he bought everything. There were specifications for food, a serving could only weight so much and be such a length and all the rest. Chops and fair ends of lamb, eggs were so many grams and all the rest of it and the wages were done in head office and the stocktaking was done from head office – the bar stocktaking, and the food stocktaking. Assuming that the heads of department knew what they were at, there was a reasonable waiter and a reasonable barman and a reasonable controller and a reasonable chef, the manager had little to do.
Anyway my last year in, what I was saying there, I had many opportunities. Lots of these fellows had wealthy families, families relative to mine, wealthy and lots of them aspired to open their own restaurants and I had many offers to go, join them, cut you in so much of the profit percentage and all but I was never interested on setting until I was promoted as executive chef and my home was in Fairview and the head office with Frank McMahon now was in Hume House in Ballsbridge and I used to operate from there. When I was made executive chef I thought I had it made, and I didn’t have to wear a uniform or anything. I was a ‘big shot’. There was a 11 hotels in the company at the time and I’d a write to the Managers and say I’ll arrive in your establishment on such a morning, usually Monday and I’d go say maybe to Sligo on Monday 7th January and I’d be there for a week and I’d walk into the kitchen and I could see the range shinning and I knew they were polishing for a week before I arrived in (laugh). I thought I had it made. I was married at this stage. Frequently the Manager would meet the train and I’d have dinner with him and they’d be fruit and flowers in my rooms and one of the best rooms and all. They were all keeping well in from this hot chef from head office that could put them in the ‘shit’. You know by a bad comment or whatever, but I was going around. Well that was terrific for the first while and then it became a right pain in the ‘arse’ when I got used to it. You know what I mean. First of all I sort of missed the physical thing of being in the kitchen, a bit, not much, but I did miss it and also it was a drag being away from Fabian and the kids and frequently as executive chef I was expected to be in Bundoran for a lot of the festival and Kenmare for the Seafood Festival and Killarney for all the big things and usually Galway for the Oyster Festival and usually the big nights were the Saturday night and I can remember being in the Great Southern in Kenmare which in now the Park Hotel and for the Seafood Festival Ball, Saturday night and I remember travelling over the mountains at 4 a.m. in the back of a van with drums and all the bands. The band were from Cork and the reason I did that was there was a train out of Cork on a Sunday morning and there wasn’t a train out in Killarney or Kenmare so I’d get home so I’d be with Fabian on a Sunday for at least one day and it began to wear thin and one time I was in Killarney, I met Niall Kelly, he was the manager, in when I was a chef in the last year and then I used to meet him when I’d be in Killarney. He was looking after me like all the other managers and I was impressed with his go. When he was in the ratings, the room occupation rates were the best ever. He used to overbook. Sometimes be in the ‘shits’, he’d put them up in the village or in his own house and all that. He was driven and the was egotistical, he had a massive ego, he wanted to succeed at everything. He was talking we’d open our own place. But I also discovered that he did the same thing with Jimmy Kilbride when he was in the college. Yeah he was looking at places when he was in college and he was being nice to Jimmy. But anyway he was promoted then from to Killarney and I was in Killarney one night and I was ‘bitching’ about this day, that it was a pain in the ‘arse’ that I was away from home so much and all that. So he suggested that I situate myself in Killarney.

At that time there were four hotels in Kerry. There was the Killarney Great Southern, the Killarney Great Southern Inn in Killarney, two of them in Killarney, one in Kenmare and one in and he said it doesn’t matter where you are in Kerry you’ll always get back to Killarney at night and he would, you know Killarney, the Garden Cottage beside the railways they used to, some of the executive staff stayed in it and also some of the overflow from the hotels stayed in it. It was quite comfortable and he broke walls and made a two bedroom, two bathroom apartment for me with a kitchen and all the rest for Fabian and at that stage I had one son and Fabian came down to live and we lived in there. So I would ring over for grub, electricity and phone, everything was on the house. I rented in Dublin you see so it suited me down to the ground. We were still looking at places and all the rest but he eventually, his father-in-law FX Buckley, which is FXB’s father. They used to go on binges and he went in binges and he woke up after buying the Court Hotel in Killiney and he offered a third of it to Niall but Niall had no money, but he went guarantor for Niall to borrow the money for the third. £78,000 they paid for it. So Niall had a third, and then he wanted me to go to Killiney, so at that stage Fabian and I agreed that Killarney, with the kids coming and all that, if they wanted to go to university our future should be in Dublin, rent the place out here in Killiney. It had been a failed hotel, it was closed for two years and the reason it was failed they had problems with the chef. The chef was looking for more money or something.
and the guy who owned went, broke down to the front gate and took the sign down and it was closed for two years.

169. I was interested in it but I didn’t want him to know that. I kept…..

170. MM: You wanted your negotiation position to be stronger.

171. AM: I ended up getting three times salary as executive chef in the Great Southern to go plus accommodation. You see you negotiated the cash. Accommodation wasn’t included because he knew I had the house in Fairview. But when we agreed the cash and I said ‘accommodation’, he said ‘oh Jesus’. I wanted FX to buy a house or to hire a house for me, you know. Eventually we agreed, there was a lodge, a two bed roomed cottage in FX’s garden out in Killiney just across the road from the Canadian Embassy, next door to Bono and they renovated that for me so we moved in there and I moved to the Court. And one of things I did, he was offering so much percentage of the profits and all that sort of thing and I said ‘no, I wanted 1% of the turnover’. He was delighted to hear that because there was no turnover but I was thinking long-term, and I spelt it all out to them and I told him that I was going to work my ‘arse’ off and when I grew the business to such a level that it could support me, I would withdraw then and just…..

![Figure AM.3: Arthur McGee with other Executives from Great Southern Hotels](image)

172. MM: Be sort of an executive man or something like that.

173. AM: Yeah, just run the thing without hands on and that’s what I did. I can remember Brendan Maher coming who was our boss in the Great Southern Hotels, he was the Operation’s Manager, one Sunday. They opened there I think in May and probably one Sunday afternoon about 4.30 p.m. and I was the mountain of pots after doing a full lunch and Niall and I washed the kitchen floor, the tables and all that. There was no kitchen porter and I was washing the pots and Maher, I
remember Maher standing behind me and I didn’t know he was there and he said ‘Jesus you wouldn’t do that for me’ and I looked up and I said ‘you wouldn’t pay enough’. (Laugh). And that’s what I did in beginning, I was my own everything. Eventually then when I grew I can remember one year we went to Falcarragh with a crowd from Ceolás and we went on a bus on Friday evening from Parnell Square and we came back on the Monday and how many weddings had I missed in the Court? Eight, there was three on the Friday, three on the Saturday and two on the Monday. Now those were eight weddings. There was the dining room, there was the grill room, there was the bar food and there was room service and I was on 1% plus my wages. And I knew that was going to cause problems when I went in. And it did.

Discussion on problems he had in the Killiney Court Hotel but eventually overcame.

174. MM: Who were the main agents of change in improving the quality of food or dining in Ireland during your lifetime?

175. AM: Well I would say myself that Ken Besson and Michael Mullens, that combination, to allow people like Rolland in as against, the opposite to that was the union members in the Gresham insisting that McManus stay on because McManus couldn’t teach them anything and there was all this continental talent at the time which they were cutting themselves off from.

176. MM: The possibilities to learn?

177. AM: The possibility to learn and move forward. Yeah, and also Ernie Evans. I can remember when I was in the Great Southern Hotel in Killarney, I told you there was three head chefs but eventually I was appointed head chef when the three and that thing didn’t work and I extended the menu over other Great Southern Hotel menus and I think there were five selections in the dinner menu which was an extensive menus, some of the hotels, most of them only had three and Jimmy Freeman who lived Killorglan he was the sous chef and he came into me one day and he was at a function in Glenbeigh, GAA function or a Fianna Fáil function in Ernie Evans place and I said ‘what did you have to eat’ and he said ‘he had this and his wife had that and his other friend had that’, there was a big selection and I said ‘how many people?’ Oh 250 or something and I said ‘how did they do that?’ Well he said ‘it starts about 7.’ And that’s what was happening. He started about 7pm in the evening and he did the relays. I couldn’t believe it. I went especially over from Killarney to experience it. I couldn’t believe it. I went especially over from Killarney to experience it. I couldn’t believe it. I was so impressed with the menu. I told you earlier that I copied his menu. Plagiarise, is the word, when I came to Killiney. When I came to Killiney first, Niall Kenny was doubtful that it would work, and I insisted on it because I was coming back into Dublin and I had no reputation in Dublin and I knew that people would be impressed when they saw this menu as I was when I went to Glenbeigh. And even the cheeseboard that they had in Glenbeigh was massive. It was a table and they used to import this big, there was one big round of cheese about 4’ across and I didn’t know what it was but it really was impressive.

178. I once got a bad meal a couple of years afterwards I was on holidays in Kerry and I drove about 40 miles out of my way for lunch and I had mussels and the mussels had been.....
Some of them had been opened or whatever they were?

They weren’t alive or whatever. They were put into a sauce and the sauce, the pot had been put into the oven, where there might have been… the ones over the sauce were exposed to the heat and the ones underneath were all raw. I couldn’t believe such bad standards; it just goes show that you can get bad standards everywhere. But also I went to his restaurant, he invited me and Fabian to his restaurant in Donnybrook and Seamus McFadden, Niall’s brother was the chef there at the time and we had one of the best meals I’ve ever had in there.

On that subject when was the first time you went out to eat a meal yourself or did you go out often?

No I didn’t. My father, I told you my father was a garda and my father and my mother only ate in a hotel once and that was when they got married. I have brothers who are gardas and they go out frequently. They also consider themselves to be gourmet to tell me if it was good or wasn’t good, you know. Working class, gardas and tradesmen were average income earners, didn’t eat in restaurants, only the top levels of society ate there. I remember I met Fabian the week before her 21st birthday and she had never met a chef. She was very social, she used to dance every week, twice, a couple of times a week and she never met a chef. I can remember dancing with girls and you’d be ‘chatting’ them up and they would ask you ‘what do you work at?’ I’m a chef and some would say ‘you’re a what?’ I said ‘I’m a chef’. ‘What’s a chef? You cook in a hotel?’ They couldn’t believe it. Cooking was only for women and talking about pulling the birds, it was the opposite. Being a chef had no esteem yet I could see that the French guys in the hotel were very proud of the fact that they were chefs. Well if you were a pastry chef in a village in France or Switzerland you were esteemed, yes. And that’s the way it was, crazy.
184. AM: That changed when fellows like me and other chefs generally started to go to the Canaries. I’m going on the 7th February to the Canaries for a month. I go every February now for the month and I go for a holiday in the autumn and I go for weekends and stay hotels and I live in a nice house and when chefs began to live in nice areas and go on nice holidays and generally had a good standard of living. Then it became sort of socially acceptable.

185. MM: But when did the people, say the likes of your brothers, who consider themselves to be sort of gourmets now, start eating out?

186. AM: They didn’t want gardas!!! Well I can remember hotels, and there would be a sign outside the hotels saying residents only. I mean Irish people were a pain in the ‘arse’. The only wanted foreigners and the standards were brutal; you could shove a couple girls into the kitchen and make a fortune. The hotel would be full and it wasn’t until competition began, hotels began to be built and they started to go out. I remember the signs coming up, ‘open to non-residents’.

187. MM: Well you know when you went out, were you aware when you worked in the Russell were you aware of other chefs in other restaurants?

188. AM: No, except the Hibernian because we were linked.

189. MM: And you never went to Cathal Brugha Street?
190.**AM:** No, never did and my opinion of Cathal Brugha Street, even though I don’t know what Cathal Street is like now. I remember all the ex Cathal Brugha fellows, Cathal Brugha Street students, management students, everyone talked about ‘Jugged Hare’ and all the crap. I heard all my life from stupid hotel managers about ‘Jugged Hare’ and never have I seen ‘Jugged Hare’ on the menu in Ireland. It’s gone to the stage now if you gave a hare to a chef he wouldn’t know how to skin it. When I was a child we lived in Bulfín Road in Inchicore and when I was too small to put my leg over my fathers, the bar of my fathers bike, you know the way you put your leg under the bar and cycle it, I used to cycle down to Ballyfermot, where lower Ballyfermot is now with my father’s shotgun, wrapped in a cloth, tied under the bar of the bike and there was two cartridges in my pocket and I’d be warned by my father, it was a double barrel shotgun to put only put one shot into the gun at the time for safety reasons. I would cycle out to Chapelizod, this was before myxomatosis, rabbits were plentiful and I would creep up into a corner, the rabbits would be out playing and I would try to line them up to try and get two or three with the one shot and I’d shoot my rabbits and I’d tie them onto the handlebars of the bike and I’d wrap up the gun again and I’d cycle with my leg under the bar back home. I would skin the rabbits, gut them and leave them oven ready and hang the skin, the skins, and we used to sell them and hang them in the loo, we had an outside loo in the house, attached to the house but outside the backdoor. We used to hang the skins up there to dry. But I would leave the rabbits oven ready for my mother and then I’d go to school. Imagine if you saw a kid coming down the road now with rabbits hanging out the handlebars of the bike and his legs under the bar. His father would be arrested. We all had our chores to do. That was my chore, we used to shoot rabbits. And then I’d come back at lunchtime and maybe eat them or that evening.

191.**MM:** I saw The Irish Times magazine there when I came in from two days ago or something like that and it has a picture of Richard Corrigan in it as one of the people to look out for, for the future, you know and he said he’s never happier than when he has some young rabbits frying on a pan with butter. (Laugh). It maybe on its way may you know.

192.**AM:** We had all sorts of money making things. My father was a….. My father when he was 17, his father, my grandfather was Sinn Fein. He lived in Auchnacloy (Co. Tyrone) and there was a sweep of prominent Catholics at the formation of the Northern State and my grandfather was put on the SS Argenta which was prison ship in Belfast Dock and my father was the eldest of ten children and he, at that time there was no social welfare and only stayed healthy if you went into the poorhouse and my grandmother was too proud to do that. But my father actually kept the family alive on rabbits and hens and fish and stuff like that. You know, he was brilliant at it and he passed a lot of that on to me. My brothers, I still shoot. I have a Springer spaniel out there and my brothers shoot and one of my nephews shoot. That’s the way things were. We used to net rabbits too and sell them up to the game.

193.**AM:** There’s a fellow, I working in a Clarets there in Blackrock at one stage, years ago, about 14 years ago and they used to sell a lot of rabbit, but there was actually a barman, a local barman in the pub across the way, he used to go up to Killiney to ferret on his split shift and he’d come back with the rabbits, you know (laugh).

194.**MM:** In 1952, see I’m doing some research for my book now. In 1953 I think I was the value of the export of rabbits was seven times greater than the value of the export on butter. In 1953. All rural dwellers used to snare rabbits and shoot rabbits and net rabbits and all that and sell them. They used to export them. There was a place down near the Five Lamps. I remember going in and they’re would be mountains of rabbits, selling rabbits that my father shot. Unbelievable and now……

195.**MM:** Did the myxomatosis put a stop to all of that, did it?

196.**AM:** There were no rabbits for years then.
MM: That just decimated the population or did it stop people, just gave them a bad name?

AM: Oh it decimated the population. Also it gave them a bad name. Fabian used to eat rabbits and she doesn’t eat them anymore now.

MM: The people who worked, how about women in kitchens?

AM: There was one woman I knew in a kitchen, she was in the Royal Hibernian, Mary. She was a Larder Chef and she was known in the business as ‘Chef the Knickers’. And she was the only woman and when I was executive chef in Great Southern Hotels I can remember in Hume House, Mrs Calvert was my boss and Brid O’Donoghue in the research and development department and I used to run the training, the chefs and Mrs Calvert told me that they were keeping some places in the next course for women, for girls and I said ‘sure you couldn’t have girls in a kitchen’ and they said ‘yes’ and I said ‘the kitchen was no place for girls.’ You couldn’t expose them to what goes on in the kitchen and they insisted. But I said ‘well I want to register my protest, I have four sisters and I would hate any of them ever to have to go to a kitchen.’ I was shocked at the idea.

MM: Your reason was the language and the labour and the…..?

AM: Hard work and the language and not an environment for ladies. But since then I’ve changed my opinion. I now think that girls are better, their more dependable, there’s less problems with drink and all the rest of it from females than there are from males. Some of the brilliant fellows I had went off the wall with drink. In fact I wouldn’t let them drink, I would let them drink at night but I wouldn’t let them drink in the afternoon. That was forbidden in my brigade because although I did it when I was a chef de partie myself.

MM: That was the culture at the time.

AM: Yeah, we used to drink 4 or 5 pints before we’d go back in the afternoon. Yeah, but we never took so much that we couldn’t operate. Some fellows I knew now, terrible problems. You see in a hotel……

MM: Why do you think chefs drank?

AM: One of the reasons was on lots of occasions they didn’t have to pay for the drink, they’d look after the barman and the barman would look after them and the barman would keep his stocks right by putting on a few bottles of wine for a wedding or something. He could do that sort of thing, and also the freedom, the gap in the working day, I think that’s stopped now. There’s not so many people now working split days but everybody in my day worked a split day so you were hanging around. We used to go, when we were younger, before I started drinking, we used to go to the pictures, the Delux Cinema in Aungier Street and the Green Cinema in Stephen’s Green and I remember we actually got friendly with the usherettes and I can remember one day we’d have to leave about 5.20 p.m. because you daren’t be late, you had to be back in the Russell in your uniform at 5.30 p.m. and the film mightn’t be over at that stage. I remember one usherette in the Delux asked me why we left before it was over and I told her I had a bad heart and the doctor told me never to wait for the climax of the film (laugh). She was all sympathy for me (laugh). We had to be back and there was no question of staying and watching the film and going back five minutes later, Jesus your life wouldn’t be worth…… The Russell was a place, one little thing they had, they had a tank of trout.

MM: Oh this for trout au bleu.

AM: Trout au bleu in the……And they had the tank in the restaurant and they also had a tank in the kitchen and they used to replenish the one in the restaurant with the one in the kitchen. They used to give them bits of liver and all the rest and tie it on the string and fish for the trout and we’d
let them swallow the liver and pull them up out of the water. There would be war then if we were
captured. But that was a big thing *trout au bleu* and it wasn’t a very nice thing. It’s just the fact
that they turned blue.

209.MM: You just threw vinegar over them. You killed them and then threw vinegar over them,
was it?

210.AM: You killed them and you put them into vinegar and the vinegar turned the slime on them
blue and you poached that and you served it was a garnish of poached carrot and rings of onion
and that sort of thing. It wasn’t a nice dish at all, the fact it was just different. A gimmick which
was the whole business, full of gimmicks. I think (inaudible) cuisines is a bit like (inaudible). I
mean if you could, I’m at the stage now and I’m reading this food and wine magazine and I can’t
even read the recipe. I don’t know what the ingredients are and then if I enquire from my sons
about that sort of thing, it turns out to be bread roll with oil in it.

211.MM: Oh right like a *bruschette*, *crostini*, and all that stuff?

212.AM: All these names. They strive to….. You see in my day all the menus were the same. We
all operated from the same…..

213.MM: The same repertoire as such?

214.AM: Yeah. *Repertoire de la Cuisine* so in every hotel you went into, there was *fillet au gratin*
and there was *lobster mornay* so you could compare one with the other. Now you go in and you
can’t compare, everything is different. No two chefs are doing the same thing so you can’t say
this one is better than that one. It’s a way of preserving the mediocre chefs really.

215.Another thing there was no such thing as hotel waiters…..

216.MM: Okay, yeah, yeah.

217.AM: I heard a girl on the radio last week and she was the President of the Guild of Food
Writers in Ireland and there are 23 food writers, writing and talking about foods from the industry.
In my knowledge that didn’t happen at all.

218.MM: Well who was there, Theodora Fitzgibbon?

219.AM: Yeah I knew Theodora Fitzgibbon.

220.MM: She would have been sort the beginning of that?

221.AM: But she didn’t criticise restaurant, she wasn’t a restaurant critique. She was a food writer
on various things. I have a book there. One of her books there which was described to Fabian and
I. We met her, I met her in, there was a cookery weekend laid on toward the end of the season,
you know, she was one of the stars to talk to. That’s where I met her first and at that time she
lived in Dalkey and talking about Jugged Hare, she was complaining she couldn’t get a hare and
she heard I was shooting and she asked me could I shoot her a hare. And I remember one time I
was out with my younger brother Tiarnan and he shot a big hare and I said ‘I wanted to give it to
her’ because I promised it to her and he was carrying the bag and after about an hour I walking
about and he ‘forget about Theodora Fizgibbon, I’m knackered.’ And I told her that story and she
wrote about it in Image Magazine after that.

222.And when I bought her down the hare she was sitting in Shankill and Fabian came with me and
she opened a bottle of wine and we ate it at about two in the morning and I invited her back to
where we were living in Killiney and her husband, George Morrison was her husband, and he was
the producer of *Mise Éire* – an interesting guy. She used to drink the wine and George used to be
trying to keep her on the straight and narrow and she’d say ‘piss off George’ she’d a really….. She was a good client in the Court. I respected her. I thought she didn’t ‘bullshit’. She didn’t give recipes out unless she tried them.

223. MM: Did the clientele in the Killiney Court change over the years? Was it a fairly exclusive place to go in the ‘70s?

224. AM: When it opened first as I told you we opened with Ernie Evan’s menu, and my sous chef when we opened first was just out of Rockwell College, first year commis which I liked to get in those day because you’d mould them. What was your question there a moment ago?

225. MM: How did they change the clientele or stuff change over the years?

226. AM: For a number of years after I became familiar with the menu, I struggled. I remember the first Saturday night we opened in the Court we opened with an invited group, mostly friends and family, the Buckley family and that sort of thing and I think there was about fifty of them, and I can remember standing in the middle of the kitchen and Niall’s wife was in helping, we had no staff and Niall’s sisters-in-law was in, and they’d say ‘what will I do with this’ and I remember standing there and saying to myself ‘what in the name of Jesus am I doing there’, you know. It was a mistake to open.

227. Well after a while I’d say maybe 18 months we got on top of the menu and we became old hat and got used to it and the rest of the staff got used to it and then I suggested that we advertise in the back of The Irish Times. We used to advertise every Tuesday and I have some of the menus in there on file I can show you if you like. The same as that menu there and we would book the space in advance and if we didn’t book the space you might end up on the inside and we booked the top of the centre column and I would write and I would have last week’s menu and the week before but I’d write it completely different but basically the same but different ideas. I’d make sure that I was different and underneath we’d say similar menu available each evening. In fact in the beginning we had the different course, the starters priced at 50p, I think, and the soups so much and the joints and the sweets and the coffee. You could come in and have a starter and a coffee. We were that hungry for business and then we began to get popular but the standards were so good, I mean they were the Russell standards of food and they were the standards in the restaurant because John O’Dowd was nowhere else only and there were standards in the bar because Ailsbury Brennan was nowhere else except, oh he was in London, I can’t remember, some gourmet place in London one winter and John was in Switzerland one winter but basically they were the standards. We were advertising in The Irish Times and you know where it is situated, next to the railway line, next to Capital City and I was convinced it was going to be the best hotel in Ireland and should have been the best hotel in Ireland, it was on its way to being the best hotel Ireland until Niall started to fight with his father-in-law and money began to go, not they were fighting, money began to be the reason we were there. We used to do three sittings for example, you’d come in a party of four or a party of six and as soon as you were finished your sweet you’d be sent upstairs for coffee so the table could be set-up again. And you’d go upstairs and they’d be a couple of young children upstairs serving the coffees and they’d be no seats up there and it was chaotic, you know. That brought it down and then they went into weddings and when they opened first they only had one room, one dining room and then they built on a restaurant, so the restaurant became the restaurant and the dining room became the grill room and then they built on a ballroom and then they built on other ballrooms so we went from being….. Another thing when we opened first, for the first few years we were silver service, and then we went on to plate service to simplify things and to cut costs, and you know….. At the stage I realised I was in it only for the money, it wasn’t going to be….. But it should have been. It was easier for it to become a gourmet hotel than not, you know.

228. MM: But sure the location of it? One of the best locations in the country?
229. AM: It had everything going for it. When you think of places like Cong and Ashford Castle. This was here next to where the money was you know.

230. MM: I was thinking there about a minute ago, Horse Show Week, you’d never get any time off Horse Show Week or Spring Show Week, but what did you get off? Did you just get one day off a week normally or how did it work?

231. AM: When I was in the Russell my day off was Monday. We got every second Sunday and then there was an advancement, we got a half day. I can’t remember how old I was but in the beginning we got three days a fortnight, every second Sunday and Monday every week, generally early in the week when there was no business like you know.

232. MM: How about the Panel of Chefs? Did you ever get involved with them?

233. AM: No and the reason is, this makes me sounds like a snob which I am, an intellectual snob. My first awareness of them I think was on the telly and I would see them in their gold chains and they would be inner city Dublin accents. I mean a poor command of English and I didn’t want to be associated with that sort of an image. That type of snob. Basically that was it. I can remember I was at, Nicky O’Neill used to do charity work for St. John of Gods out in Leixlip, and one of the things he was, he’d charge £50 a head one time with the Panel of Chefs. A dinner in Malahide Castle and Fabian and I, he invited Fabian and I to it. Because Nicky was organising he put us onto the table that Gay Byrne was on and his wife and the fellow next to me was the Chairman of Dublin Tourism, I can’t remember him. There was that couple and then there was Gay and the wife over here. But the dinner was a gold medal winning saddle of lamb dish that had won in a catering competition and the dinner was organised by the Panel of Chefs. They cooked it you see. At the end of the meal then, Nicky or somebody said ‘we’re now going to have a few words from the President of the Panel of Chefs’ and I was cringing to myself, oh Jesus no and this fellow stood up and the perfect English, he gave a perfect speech. It was Eugene McGovern and that was intellectually a world away from the earlier Presidents of the Panel of Chefs. You see I was about ten years in the business before I met another fellow that wanted to be a chef before he was a chef. I mean they all drifted into the business. The guys in the Gresham were there because it was a job or somebody knew there was a job going and they went in, not because they wanted to be chefs. I didn’t know anybody who wanted to be a chef except myself until later. Now my young nephews wanted to be chefs and they were going to school and they’d tell you they wanted to be a chef and all that but in my day nobody wanted to be chefs. They just happened to be chefs.

234. MM: They fell into it, sort of thing.

235. AM: They fell into it and then they started this organisation but I didn’t want to be any part of the organisation and also I was never into the ego end of it. I was only in it for money. Some fellows in the restaurant business, in the hotel business they get involved in buffets or doing things and they’d do it for the glory. I wasn’t in the glory really and I never entered competitions or anything like that so I wasn’t. I often thought to myself, I met a fellow last week Eoin Harris, do you know him the writer?

236. MM: I do yeah, I know him. I know him through my father.

237. AM: Yeah, he swims here all the year round. He’s a neighbour just down the road and I admire him as a writer and he knows, I told him I was writing this book and I wasn’t aware of any book that he had written and I asked him did he ever write a book and he said ‘no’. He wrote screen plays alright, he never wrote a book. And I said to him ‘why didn’t you ever write a book’ and he said ‘because I might get bad reviews’ and I think that is the reason why I never entered the competitions – that I might not win it. I probably wouldn’t win it anyway, but I’m trying to analyse my behaviour. There was a catering exhibition in *Bussia*. Have you any data on that? The dates.
238. MM: I can find out the dates.

239. AM: He (Rolland) came back with his arms full of prizes and he was in great form. I think he was surprised. But was a fellow called Brian Loughrey, a commis about my age, actually younger than me and he was a commis in the Larder and he did a thing, they used have a buffet and *hors d'oeuvre* buffet every day in the restaurant and he did this square *hors d'oeuvre* dish used to go onto the trolley and he did a egg mayonnaise that was done every day in the Russell and we were all laughing and he entered this competition and we are all laughing at him. He won a gold medal.

240. MM: (Laugh). The key to winning any competition is to do stuff you do everyday, day in day out because you know it so well, you know. I think where people go wrong is they try and do something totally different and they make a mess of it.

241. AM: But another thing which happened after that, that competition, Rolland met chefs in other hotels which he was isolated from in the Russell and he only met them there and some of them asked them could they come to the Russell on their days off and to work. And they worked for nothing, they weren’t paid for it and they’d come and they work and we were there all the time and we didn’t really appreciate it and these fellows, married men, fellows like yourself now would come and work just to learn. And Rolland agreed to let them in like if he was friendly with them and all that and there was a fellow called, oh what was his name, I can’t think of his name. He opened a shop called the Sugar Basket in Meath Street, Dessie Allen. Well this fellow opened a place in Meath Street and he’d learnt this sugar in the Russell. One thing that Rolland did one time, he had a pastry chef, a French pastry chef and he was slagging him, attacking him over the standard of something he did and your man said to him ‘you do it so’ and Rolland got in and he did it and he did it better than the pastry chef. He was that good. He was able to do it. Oh yes, yeah. Another pastry chef that impressed me one time, when I executive chef at Great Southern the, we were in the Research and Development Department and that team got the idea of having a central kitchen because we had free transport on the trains and all and from the central kitchen you’d send the stuff out to the various hotels and pre-cooked stuff frozen and at that time Leeds University, the Department Food and Leisure Science in Leeds University who were the world leaders in pre-cooked frozen foods and I was sent over to the University to learn it and I did a meal for the Board of CIE and you had to get a special import licence and all from the Department of Agriculture and pack in dry ice and fly it over and we gave it to them at a Board meeting and the decision was taken to go ahead with this thing but it was knocked by the Government because the back benchers were ‘bitching’ about the, they didn’t want kitchens to go from Killarney.

242. MM: They didn’t want to loose their jobs?

243. AM: They didn’t want to loose their jobs and this sort of thing. It was a brilliant idea at the time but I was, that pastry chef. They also had in the Hilton Hotel in Amsterdam in the coffee shop they had this system installed pre-cooked frozen foods where they had a restaurant menu, full restaurant menu and you’d order something and the chef would leap into the deep freeze and he’d get the stuff out then in plastic bags and he’d put them onto and then he’d go down into a vat of boiling water for some minutes and he’d cut it and put it out in garnish and send it out and I was over in Amsterdam for it. That was in 1969 because I remember that the crack started in the North that year and the locals thought we were refugees from the war, Fabian and I. And I went in anyway, this chef from Ireland coming in, they weren’t paying me, you see, I was only a guest and the head chef who was German brought me around and introduced me to the different *chef de parties* and he brought me into the pastry house and this old Belgian fellow, a pastry chef, he leaned up and he took down a globe and he spun it on its axis and there was the raised mountains and all the rest and he panted off Ireland and the whole thing was made out of sugar. Wasn’t that good? I was impressed with that. Another thing I did when I was with the Great Southerns, I did some meals for, do you remember in Brugges one time I did an Irish meal I lead a group of chefs. The funny thing about it was we were there, we arrived on a Tuesday morning and the function
was on a Saturday night, it was in a hotel school in Brugges and it was an Irish night and I had the menu and all. There was four of us, the chef in the Three Lakes in Killarney and a girl chef from Longueville House in Mallow. And another fellow from the Court, he’s in the South Bank now or what used to be the South Bank. Seamus McNally. But I got chatting to the chefs in the college and they were telling me that the previous victim were a German crowd in and the Dutch don’t like the Germans and the Belgians don’t like the Germans and they were saying the German’s weren’t very nice, they didn’t accept any help. And I said I’d accept all the help I could get. It ended up anyway they were the chef and I was the commis and it was a thundering success. We came out into the spotlights for television and everything and everybody was, we met a lot of the Irish that were in Brussels and they were saying ‘Jesus we weren’t looking forward to it but it was terrific.’ Sometimes compared to the other continental ones the Irish generally didn’t have a good…..

245.MM: Have a good name for cuisine?

246.AM: No. It was the Belgian fellows really who did it and had I been allowed do it off my own back the Belgians spent about three hours over dinner in the starter and then you’d wait for half an hour before you put, had that been me I would have tried to cram the whole lot into a hour-and-a-half, you know. Before I went to the course, I was to go in May to do a meal in Berlin and the Great Southern Hotels and I had to tell them then that I was going to the course and they sent Nicky O’Neill instead.

247.AM: I’m doing a thing, but I haven’t done it but I have an idea in my head, you know the Sunday miscellany on RTE I the radio on Sunday morning. My kids Rory was saying to me that the book was such a long-term thing I should do Sunday miscellany. I sent away for the rules and I have done a thing, I don’t know where it is now, about the eradication of pike from the lake in Áras an Uachtarán. This happened now in the ‘30s, the late ‘30s and when I was a child with my father, pike were deemed to be vermin, aquatic vermin, I mean we never fished for pike and if we caught one accidentally, we’d kill it. Leave it on the bank, you wouldn’t bring it home.

248.MM: Ah you wouldn’t bring it home.

249.AM: And now the Inland Fisheries people have laid down a rule that you can only kill one pike a day, pike are so highly prized now and in those days, I mean I can remember when the Inland Fisheries used to net the pike from lakes and throw them up on the islands and let them rot. They were all trying to preserve the lakes for trout. But now pike is highly esteemed.

250.MM: I remember catching pike with my father years ago. What I remember about it is do you remember Lough Mask, but I remember after gutting it and the little triangular heart and it was lying on the rocks and it was still thumping even, I couldn’t believe like the fact it was a spontaneous movement of the muscle even when it was out of the body and the whole but I couldn’t believe that this thing was still thumping.

251.AM: I still do a bit of fishing. I fish for trout down in tributaries of the Boyne and the Boyne down around in Meath. I’ve a brother living in Trim and another brother living in Enfield and even here sometimes when the mackerel are in I walk down to the West Pier and get little mackerel yeah, and well spinners and if I catch three or four I come back and cook them immediately and they’re lovely.

252.MM: You couldn’t beat fresh mackerel, their lovely, beautiful. I think what it was the fish was only really available around the coast and the fact that people all over the country had to eat it, so they got poor quality salted fish quite often.

253.AM: When I was a schoolboy I went for two summers to Connemara, you know to learn Irish, the Gaeltacht and in the month of August the mackerel would come in and there would be billions of mackerel and before the mackerel there would be billions of fry and nobody ate the fry, you
know the white bit and they used to bring donkeys down onto the beach to bring the mackerel back up. It was such a heavy weight. You’d catch little baskets and all the rest of it and they used to open them down the back, not the belly, down the back and open them that way and rub them with salt and hang them on ropes all across. You’d walk into the house and they’d be all hanging on ropes all over the place. That was their protein for the winter.

254.MM: Wrasse was the other big thing they did. What they call the ballach down there, the rasp, know as ballachai bui as in sort of yellow wrasse I suppose because they go yellow with the salt on them you know what I mean. I know my father used to bring them back from Connemara and we used to leave them out…..

255.AM: So your father is a Connemara man?

Discussion on Connemara and the Irish language

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Bill Ryan in his home in Artane (7/1/2004)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Bill Ryan (BR)

1. **BR:** Ok, right you want to ask me questions or whatever.

2. **MM.** Well you start of with your surname, the year you were born and where you were born and

3. **BR:** Well I tell you what my memory is not as good as it used to be, you know anything but because, I was born in 1927 so that makes me 76 now and I definitely feel my memory is slipping quite a bit. Well I tell you, em, there is no catering with my father and mother because in those days when I was born I came out of a family of seven, one girl, five boys, my father and mother finished off with no catering whatsoever.

4. **MM:** You were born in Dublin I take it?

5. **BR:** In Dublin. In the top of North Circular Road, just off North Circular Road near O‘Connell’s school, around the corner from O‘Connell’s school. Okay anyway, so I was quite clever, all of my brothers and sisters, they were quite clever at school and they went on to be civil servants mostly and the banks and others things like that.

6. **MM:** What did your father do Bill?

7. **BR:** Actually he worked with the Dublin Corporation and when there was massive unemployment. He always had a job, what he did was he was a porter in the technical schools and he was technical and he was working in the technical schools up in Parnell Square which is the Writers Museum now. Okay, so he was the hall porter there and he was also responsible for all the cleaning of the building. I will tell you more about that in a few moments. When I was in school, I know myself I was always in the first three in my class although there would be about 50 in our class at school and of course we got the leather. I went to “Canice’s” (St. Canice’s school) on the North Circular Road, around the corner from O’Connell’s (school) and for not normally being able to spell some silly word like marmalade or something you got the leather. That was considered a big word.

8. **MM:** Yeah

9. **BR:** But I actually got the leather, but anyway in those days, thank God they have changed, I didn’t do too bad at school. But anyway when I was 13 and a half it was time to leave. I was in seventh class and there was no more places to go except get a scholarship into O’Connell’s. Two boys out of our school could get a scholarship into secondary school because you know they had to be able, I missed it by about one place. And I was furious, now a friend of mine now I used to sit, we used to sit beside each other and of course, we had great, good pals but we always competition, he bettered me, and he got in, I didn’t get in, and another guy from the other side of the class. Anyway so what did I do, I came out of school at thirteen and a half and I went to Marino Tech. and kind of finished off this primary sort of education, although, I had a primary cert. I did that and when I was in that school there I really took to drawing like woodwork drawing 100 out of a 100, metal work drawing 100 out of a 100. This is a fact.

10. **MM:** Yeah.

11. **BR:** But metalwork itself 0, 50 out of a 100, woodwork 0, maybe 50 out of a 100. I loved this and of course I loved the geometry. Drawing this, drawing this, everything got to do it. 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 every little work, I could not get into a bakers union I couldn’t become a baker because it was closed trade.

12. MM: Yeah.

13. BR: You know what a closed trade is?

14. MM: Yeah.

15. BR: I couldn’t become a plumber, I couldn’t become a brick-layer, I couldn’t become a carpenter.

16. MM: You need to have a father or some relation in the trade.

17. BR: Yes. 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, 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, but in the mean time for the summer holiday after leaving school I was working in the post office delivering telegraphs you know. I knew Dublin inside out, on a bicycle, and who should I meet there only Liam (Bill) Kavanagh, as a boy there were boys there you know, we were good little pals there you know so forth. The catering classes had moved from, which had been held up in Parnell Square to Cathal Brugha Street, it was only open a year, a magnificent building. My father knew the head chef who was working up in college, who had being teaching I think. It was Karl Uhlemann, he had been teaching up in Parnell Square.

18. MM: Right.

19. BR: He left there then and he went to the Gresham Hotel. He was in the Regal Rooms before that.

20. MM Okay, so he was teaching before going to the Regal Rooms and before going to the Gresham.

21. BR: He was teaching up in Parnell Square. My father actually knew him, he said he was a lovely gentleman and all that, but he had forgotten about him you know. But maybe dad said, maybe you would like to be a chef maybe. I said I would rather be that than a watch-maker so anyway off I go and I got in. I did a little bit of a test for getting in and, no other than a written examination for to get into the Cathal Brugha Street. I think there were only 24 boys in the class and the whole college, everything else was domestic economy. Beautiful girls all over the place and we weren’t even allowed to talk to them or look at them, and we weren’t allowed to follow them up the stairs. You know the main staircase we weren’t allowed to go up there. We had the small cloak room around down, near where the larder is there now. It is under the stairs that is where we used to change and I remember the first day I went in there as kids we were all putting on our new chefs uniforms and hats and laughing at each other. Because you are only fifteen I was only fifteen and a half and there was a young lad Joe O’Neill became a great, very good friend of mine. And his first day, because lot of boys didn’t put on long trousers until they were nearly fourteen, this boy was wearing a chefs uniform the first day out he had no long trousers, he was wearing shorts. His shorts and then the jacket and tie, of course he was the only boy. We all laughed at this.

22. MM: Yeah, yeah.
23. **BR:** And God look at him in his shorts. The next day he came in he was wearing his long trousers. So, Joe became a very good chef friend of mine. To be honest with you he became an alcoholic.

24. **MM:** Right.

25. **BR:** We palled around together; we’d play snooker together so forth. But we had different direction from each we left Cathal Brugha Street.

26. **MM:** Who was teaching in Cathal Brugha Street at the time?

27. **BR:** Miss Keady, and oh I loved her because she was the most spotlessly clean, looking well figured women. Beautiful eyes and a lovely figure of a women. I think she was gorgeous, gorgeous absolutely gorgeous and she was strict, but that didn’t matter. She put a boy out of class one day. A jug of milk would come in to do the whole lot you know, and whilst she went out, don’t know where she went, when she came back, there was a boy in the class who took up the whole jug of milk and drank it all. She had him expelled.

28. **MM:** Expelled? How?

29. **BR:** He drank the whole pot, there was no more milk for the class and that’s hard to believe but she was a very good cook she was and she really the mean legal members still a lot of what she thought us, you know. We were all around, up at around twenty it was up the stairs two flights up in Kevin Street. Then we had to go to other classes as well we had to do maths, we had to do English, and French and so forth. I used to pick up the French very well, same as I did the Irish one time. I remember being first in my class in the Irish and the French down there I was thrilled. So anyway after about a year we had to get a job some place you know, after just a year we got a cert. Anyway this chap came down to me his name was Canice McGorry, he lived in Marino where we were living at this time and he said if I work in Clery’s restaurant. I’m a commis-chef there, he said, and I’m looking for commis-chefs I believe you are just leaving the college. Yeah I am. He said it would be a great job, anyway the war was still on it was about 1943 or 1944 you see so I went there scared out of my living life, (laugh) scared. Anyway met this head chef his name was Reffo. He was Italian. So he just said ‘will you start tomorrow?’ He wasn’t much interested, just will you start tomorrow? I said okay, shaking. I started, I stayed there four and a half years and it was a common kind of a restaurant. No high class about it at all, but learn about navarin of lamb or you could learn about roast beef and steak and kidney pie that kind of stuff. Fried fish because he was Italian and was still into fried a lot. We did thousands and thousands and I loved the excitement of it. There was two / three restaurants going because of the war in Clery’s. There’s one in basement, one on the first floor and one up beside the ballroom. The famous ballroom they had. Anyway three going from one kitchen and each floor there was a hot plate, food was sent down to them. I remember the ultimate number of lunches they did, there were queues up around O’Connell Street to get in. I remember the very highest number we ever did was 1700 lunches. One thousand seven hundred lunches and I thought, I still think back that he must have been the greatest chef I ever met because his control, his buying, food was so hard to get that period during the war, but he could do all this and control. There were a few rough diamonds working in the place, all women cooked the vegetables. I loved it. I loved the excitement of it. It was like playing a football match you would always get excited playing a football match. I loved it because of the pressure, pressure. I loved it. I loved trying, although I was a commis, I loved being better than the chefs, faster than them, quicker than them. Now during those days, most chefs, I won’t say no chefs, most chefs were really square pegs in round holes. Because of the employment situation, you did not go to be a chef because you wanted to be a chef you could be in the wrong place so there were multitudes of chefs and they were really in the wrong business. Not like today, like you have people like you, you know.

30. But anyway I took a liking to it. I was 100%. I loved the excitement of it more than anything, of getting things done. I always loved the presentation end of it, you know the presentation of it on a
plate. I was never interested into looking into a bloody big stock pot. Boiling and stocking and moving and boiling the likes of mutton or corn beef or whatever. The presentation is always impressed; they would up to the present day. So anyways, after four and a half years I suddenly woke up one day and said I know nothing. What do I know in this place?, nothing. I suppose I knew as much as any of chefs did. I recognised that, so anyway I was in the union and the union had a note going around. They wanted to, hotels were picking up business in Dublin after the war and were trying to move up a grade from war times and structures. They wanted to move up a grade, the Gresham wanted to move up, all the hotels wanted to move up. And they wanted to bring in foreign chefs because the chefs in Dublin weren’t that high class at all and the lack of materials in the country. Certain fruits you didn’t even see and you wouldn’t know what an aubergine was like. They were lucky to know what an orange was. So they were bringing in foreign chefs in to the county and the union said “no can’t bring in foreign chefs or there will be a strike”. No foreign chefs. So anyway, the Hibernian, because they are really a continental hotel they suggested with the union that they maybe send away some of the young promising chefs from the business in Dublin over to Switzerland to learn in return for some foreign chefs coming in. So the union agreed to this. So the first year they put up an advertisement, and I applied for it. Who else applied only Liam Kavanagh who was working in the Dolphins Hotel I think, it was the Dolphins hotel, the old Dolphin.

31. So me, I applied, I was union. Okay you can go, you are willing. Liam Kavanagh was the other guy, only sending two for the first six months of the year. I mean we were due to go to Switzerland or France, but when it came to almost getting on the boat, the manager of the Hibernian who was running this, he was the contact, he said ‘I’m very sorry but I just cannot, cannot get you into the country because you move from another county to another county during the war. They were strict passport rules and all this kind of stuff. ‘But I can get you into the Savoy hotel in London’ he said. ‘I trained in the Savoy hotel’, Fabron was his name.

32. MM:  Hector Fabron.

![Figure BK.1: (l-r) Bill (Liam) Kavanagh and Bill Ryan](http://www.pdf4free.com)
33. **BR:** Very nice man, I really liked this man you know, he was straight to the point, efficient and knew what he was talking about. So I said okay I will go to the Savoy. He said it was all French kitchen, ‘I’ll get you into the best kitchen in the Savoy’ which was the Grill Kitchen not the restaurant kitchen but the Grill kitchen. I agreed, oh my God, Liam and I we met we went down to the boat, parents and all came down to wave us off. Oh god, I remember Liam, he was sick as a dog going over that weekend, but we got the night train down to London and I had a brother who was working outside London and he came down to meet us. He showed us straight up to the hotel on the Strand, you know the one, you know it?

34. **MM:** I know it, I know the Savoy.

35. **BR:** We went in, right through the front with our tied up leather paper cases with the rope around them. Straight into the hotel, we were ushered down (out of the public sight), lucky enough it was Sunday morning and we went up to the kitchen. There was a kitchen clerk. Clerk “what do you want?” He said in French. ‘Qu’esque c’est ça? or some bloody thing and we said ‘were over here from Ireland’. Are you hungry?

36. **BR:** He gave two bowls, silver bowls of black coffee and a dry roll. That was it, so anyway, we hung around until the sous chef came in. He introduced us to the head chef, Albon, so we started the next day.

37. **MM:** Monsieur Albon he had worked under Escoffier, hadn’t he?

38. **BR:** That’s right, he had been a commis-chef. He was a bit of a swine, to say the truth. I didn’t care for him that much. But he danced like a swine. Actually when he danced, I really mean danced he jumped up and down of the ground. I don’t mind to tell you, my first day was absolutely unbelievable because I did not know one word that they were saying, I did not know the word of anything in French. Open this, close that didn’t mean a thing to me, put this on the table. It didn’t mean a thing. What is it anyway?

39. But it was amazing under pressure, the store man there, nice Italian store man, got us digs (lodgings) up in this lovely house up the other side of Camden Road. But anyway, Liam and I we got on quite well there. First job I as on there was on the sauce corner there for two weeks. Actually I hated, all I seemed to do was turn vegetables, turn little vegetables. You know olive size vegetables, you know, bain marie’s of them. I was sick and tried of that, I didn’t ever seem to get near the range. So anyway, after a few weeks later, a sous chefs, one English sous chef and two, the others were French. I think we had three sous chefs and one head chef. And he said he’d get me one of the roast corners. I left like leaving actually, you know. He got me on to the roast corner and there was only three of us working on the roast corner. I left like leaving actually, you know. He got me on to the roast corner and there was only three of us working on the roast corner. I was made first commis, next to the chef.

40. All commis had a bench system, you are not an apprentice. It could be first commis up to one hundred years of age, you are an assistant, so I was made first commis to the roast cook. An English guy and I actually loved the roast corner. They went through so much game, partridge, plover, golden plover, green plover, grouse, wild duck, canard sauvage, all this kind of different stuff. It was brilliant with all the garnishes. All the roasts we did; duck, chicken, everything, you know, and I loved it. And all the fries in the fritture and I used to just love the roast corner and there was a lot of pressure on it. We had to make the different cherries, stuff the golden duck and all this. We cut all the potatoes for the fritture, the pommes alumettes, pommes pailles, pommes frits, all cooked to perfection. Perfection, really I mean, and you have to be fast as well. Of course all the peelings and trimmings went up to the soup corner for the soups. Anyway, I was on there, I was on there for about six months or so. Now this is going to be a long story for you I hope...(laugh)

41. **MM:** I’m here for a few hours. Don’t you worry.
42. **BR:** So anyway, I was on there for about six or seven months when they got short in the larder. There was a fish cook in the larder. A man prepared fish, he was an Italian and his name was Kibuki, anyway he was short of a commis in there and the larder group the garde manger he had two apprentices with him, he was okay so he asked me if I would go in there. Okay they were nice the way they were asking, you know, we like you on the roast but we like it…..

43. When I went in I was working with a cook, he would say bonjour, now everyone would say bonjour every morning. Kibuki was an old man and he perhaps seemed, and when I was young they nearly shivered when I shook hands with him and he realised that and he used to have a dirty rubber because and used to be always right around fish, smelly rubber. And he noticed me when I was hesitating, he used to put him rubber over his hands and shake hands with the rubber which made it worse you know. But eh, he was always in trouble with Albon, and there was always something going on there, a fight going on or something. Then we had veal, not veal, sturgeon on the menu one day and we used to cut these scallops in sturgeon and they used to call the “veal of the Volga - veau de Volga”. Veau de Volga, that’s it in French. You have to really flatten them out well or if you didn’t when they were salted but when they went out they swelled up they blew up they just swelled up.

44. Albon used to come in and he would complain about the way they were butchered, and one day Kibuki was standing over this table and he was doing some goujons, sole goujons, black sole goujons, and his hands were all crummy, you know, and Albon came in from the kitchen with a couple of cooked veau de Volga, I never forgot this he came in with a couple of cooked veau de Volga, and he was shouting at Kibuki and he flung them at him and they went into the flour and the flour came up all over Kibuki’s face. And then, his glasses, he was like it was snowing, he couldn’t see you know and Albon stormed out up into his office, swilling back the wine and he always drinking wine and then Kibuki said “nobody speaks to me like this”. He had his own hotel as a young man, a small hotel down in Torquay, he told him that the waiters robbed it on him. But anyway “nobody speaks to me like this” he said “nobody”. When I finished, when my lunch is finished I go to see him, you know, Albon.

45. I said maybe you won’t. What does he do, off he goes into Albon and has his knives wrapped up in his dirty old cloth and he said “bon soir, au revoir” he said and off he walked out of the hotel. Next thing the sous chef comes into me and he said you will be responsible for the fish from now on and we used to decorate the occasional turbot for up in the room, the salmon and part of them, and all the lousy jobs like cleaning a bag of muscles everyday and all this. Let’s see, I was shaking but I got on alright, but I was doing my job without a commis. I was responsible and I was doing it for months and months and I never got anyone or I never got any more money. So I went and saw the second or sous chefs who used to double as the kitchen clerks and I told them that I wanted more money, you know. My wages was five pound ten a week, five pound ten a week and they are paying a pound a week for digs. I didn’t mind that because I used to eat in the hotel, except you couldn’t eat in the hotel on your day off but sometimes you did but that wasn’t allowed you know.

46. You weren’t allowed to eat in the kitchen which I thought was strange in the Savoy kitchen, we had to go to the staff restaurant but when I was working at the roast corner this roast cook came, an English man, Sid, and he said he hated the head chef and at the start the dinner in the evening time and you these large roast chicken maybe on, and Albon would come down and he would say five portions, four portions, three portions and he added up how many portions of chicken we had, and that number was given to kitchen clerk so he knew exactly what was left on the roast corner. And that would be checked at night time to see if it was over, you see. And so, Sid was his name, the English fellow, (laugh) he used to say to himself “who does he think he is, five out of that chicken,” “we will get six, one for you and one for me and another four out of this one instead of three” and that’s how we did things around the corner. Never went up to the staff restaurant, it wasn’t a bad restaurant just didn’t like it. But it was always most enjoyable.

47. I want to go back to one thing I saw when I was working in Clery’s restaurant, I really loved it, I wasn’t there a few days and the plate was cleared off for lunch and all the soup was up in the bain
Marie’s, you know. There would be about three soups up in the bain marie’s, you know and the waitress she would usually help themselves under the old fashioned plates you know and off you’d go. So he was a very good man, Reffo. He must have made a fortune, nothing went to waste. I’d say not that much grease went to waste, he skinned the stockpots day in and day out when he finished work he put it into the other fat and melt it down because they did all their own butchery.

48. MM: And they rendered all their own fat.

49. BR: All the chops, everything was rendered down and even the skimmings off the stockpots. But anyway he was very careful over money. Anyway he said that this kitchen porter, his name was Malachy, some names come back to me, anyway get the soup of the hot plate now this was at about twenty to three, get it down he said so where will I put it chef he said “over there at the sink and put something underneath it” to cool it down. Malachy had just brought over the soup and at this time Reffo, he had fish and I think they were plaice, and he was putting them in batter, plaice on the bone. He was putting down in a fat fryer, the frittura, you know, and as he had one of the fish up in hand full of batter he said “Malachy did you do what I tell you?” he said “Yes chef.” “Where’s the tomato soup” he said. Malachy said “I didn’t think you wanted it, I poured it down the sink”. You see. “Malachy come here, come here” (laughing) And he had the fish in the plate and flung it and hit a smack across the face. This plaice with all the batter (laugh).

50. BR: And he hit him and he roared at him in Italian and smacked him across the face.

51. MM: So he literally got battered.

52. BR: He got battered, and you know I always thought about someone being battered and he really was battered. I meant to tell you about it earlier.

53. MM: Reffo. How would you spell that?

54. BR: R-E-F-F-O. I can’t remember his first name.

55. MM: And was from Italy, you don’t know what part of Italy he was from? Or do you know how he came to Ireland or anything?

56. BR: I don’t know how he came but there was something about after the First World War and all this with you know with Italians leaving and some of them were interred in the Isle of Man like. Uhleman was interred during the First World War and he was interred because he was German but I don’t know much about Reffo. I do know that before he came to Clery’s he had been head chef in the old Central Hotel. He was taken away from, he was offered to come over to Clery’s because Denis Guiney brought Clerys in 1941. You know Clery’s?

57. MM: Yeah, yeah.

58. BR: It was Denis Guiney who made the changes, it was a very high class shop then. But Denis Guiney bought it, brought him down a little bit. He was more or less always needed to turn it into another Woolworths, for clothes and everything you know. It had a very high standard before the war, Clery’s had a very high standard but it was not that good after that, cutlets instead. I don’t know much about much more than that. But I would say he was great at saving.

59. MM: He must have been on a kitchen percentage or something.

60. BR: He might have been, he might have been. But he was not, he was not a bully to the staff or he would never stop you from eating a steak. You could go in actually, one of the kitchen staff and get yourself a fillet steak. He wasn’t mean to the kitchen staff at all.
61. But anyway, going on about the Savoy Hotel. They wouldn’t give me a rise in the hotel and I said I’m not going to do Kibuki’s job if I don’t get a rise. They offered me 10 shillings as a rise and I said I wanted more and they wouldn’t give it so then. So I said ok, big smoke I said. I went out and I saw Liam Kavanagh, I don’t know what corner he was working on, I think he was on the soup corner. Liam I said I’m after giving a weeks notice, and I’m leaving. We stayed in the same digs like you know he was a good friend, very good friend. And anyway he said “if you are leaving I’m leaving” so we came back to Dublin. I tell you where I went, I went and I saw Fabron. (Hector) Fabron said “I had good reports from you when you were in the Savoy Hotel, I kept a cheque on you” he said, and I would like to offer you a job in the Russell Hotel. You know the Russell Hotel?

62. MM: Yeah, yeah.

63. BR: It wasn’t too long open, it wasn’t too long. It was one of those new hotels after the war where things were improving in Dublin, Pierre Rolland was there and all the chefs were either Swiss or French. He said ‘you’ll go in there as a commis’, “what kind of a commis” I said. “A first commis” he said. He didn’t say an apprentice or anything like that. I said I would be delighted to go in there and learn, because it was getting a very good reputation and actually I did go in and he was an excellent chef, Rolland, he really was, he was clean, he was efficient, he was fast and what ever he did it was good, he had great control over the kitchen. He was clever. He would order twenty chickens and he would check every chicken individually and he might pick out three or four and send them back. Every chicken of course it was all free-range. So you struggle for more scrutiny than what you see today. So it was the same with the ducks, everything came. So I was there for eight months and I was working with this Swiss on the sauces. I was working on the sauce corner. We had a coal range, I used to have the coal range. He was a very excitable Swiss chef, he was a brilliant chef but he was so excitable, it used to get me down. He used to wear me out because he never stopped bossing me, bossing me, bossing me. He wasn’t friendly towards me at all, he was impatient with me all the time, he was impatient with others around the kitchen as well. In ways, I thought he was a bit of a nutter!! Anyway, say you were glazing something under the salamander before it went out, he would never trust me that it was the right glaze. You know, I would like a lovely uniform glaze, I wouldn’t let it go black, you wouldn’t be able to hide it anyway if you did

64. But I like presentation. But, he would never be satisfied, he would do a ‘jiggly dance’ if you were doing the lobster or something filled up with, you know, or prawns mornay which had to be glazed or something. It would never suit him, he was a perfectionist of the highest degree, you know, and he lost his patience over it. So anyway, one day during lunch, the fire never suited him, it was either too hot or too cold. I’d have never coaled it properly you know, he’d always found something wrong. One day there was a dish on at lunch time and it was “Pousain Grand Mere”. I think that was the name of it. Do you know what “Pousain Grand Mere” is?

65. MM: I know the dish, I probably don’t remember the exact garnish but yeah.

66. BR: The garnish is kind of finished off with a jus and you have petit mushrooms and petit onions and a pommes parisienne, cocotte like a casserole, it comes like a casserole. All the Parisianne potatoes, they were always par-boiled, par-boiled and finished in butter. Never anything but butter, always butter, a lovely glaze on them, really good. It was nice cooking, but one day everybody seemed to be…, it was the height of the summer, it was extremely busy for the Russell Hotel, but when we got busy we got busy. It was a horse show week. Anyway, he was very excited. Anyway Rolland was always in control of the hotplate, everything went out and he didn’t like, he threw it back, you know.

67. Charlie was sauce cook and he was nervous of Rolland and we were going very short on garnish. He had Parisienne potatoes put in water already and when he was going short what he did instead of par-boiling them he put them into the fritture, a cooler fritture and he kind of par-boiled them in

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the *friture* like you do when you are doing *pommes frit*, blanching first. I saw him doing that and then got them back into the butter. Then he called me for more,” get more, get more, make more will you” says he, so I put them in the basket and put them in the fat, you see. I did what he does, you know, that’s what he wants, you know. He came over and he saw what I was doing, it didn’t satisfy him, and there was a pot of potatoes – *pommes parisiennes*, which I had scrubbed earlier on that morning. They all had to be perfect, not half *parisiennes*, not there. Anyway, he got them, he took up the pot up off the table and he slammed it down in front of me like that. Bashed it down the table, all the water came up in the air and my hat was wringing wet, wringing. And I had a chip basket beside me and I took it up and let it fly and I hit him a crack with it right across the head and I said “I don’t care what genius you are, great culinary genius you are, by God you are not going to get away with that with me. He kept saying “sorry, sorry, sorry” in English. And I said “by God you are not half as sorry as you are going to be” because this time, I chased him around the kitchen (laugh). Who was coming out from the larder only Rolland? I flung the basket after your man because he was running, really running. Scared stiff he was and the basket hit Rolland (laugh). The God, Rolland was a God, in Dublin he was the God in the chefing business you know. Anyway, oh my god, I was shaking and everything went quite and I went to the chef’s cloakroom and I sat down and had a smoke. Do you smoke?

68. **MM:** No I don’t

69. **BR:** Neither do I now, I packed it in, but I took a smoke to calm my nerves. And I sat there, at this time the lunch was getting over now, you know. It was nearly half past. I said “I know I’m sacked after hitting Rolland and hitting your man”. So I just my clothes on the floor and I didn’t go back to work. We used to work overtime there but the Irish guys never got any money, we didn’t. The French chefs were paid twice as much money as any chef in Dublin or they wouldn’t have come to Dublin. Really because they were getting about 24 pound a week in those days when any chef from Dublin, no matter who he was got about 12 pounds a week. There were a few *commis* like myself there. When we sat down for lunch every day, the French chefs had a bottle of wine on the table and they also had steaks and escalopes of veal or whatever. So anyway, the very best of it, the Irish guys were given hard boiled eggs. This was also boiling up in me, and one day they were having entrecote’s and I took one of the entrecote’s and I took one of the entrecote’s and brought it down to my plate and I started eating it, and there was up-roar because they were a steak share. I juts let on I didn’t understand like “*non compret*” “*Non compret*”. .

70. Your man came in, Rolland, to sort it out and he shouted, started shouting and I let on that I didn’t understand. I knew it damn well what he was on about. He got one of the other chefs to go out and get another steak anyway, to get himself a steak. All these things had been building up, but after I was at home for 3 days, 3 or 4 days I’m not going to sit here because they owe me a weeks’ wages and I didn’t get it. All the times were piling up and he never gave me a thing so I went back over to the hotel. Fabron was manager, so I went up to ask if he was about. And he said, I remember what he said, he said “Willy” he said “you go back down to your work” he said “just apologise” he said. “We are very happy with you”. I said to him “If I have let you down, I’m sorry, but Charlie, I said, has really been driving me absolutely around the bend”. I said “it has never happened to me before all the years that I have worked, a few years anyway, I said, never had that kind of pressure before at any stage”. “Charlie” he said, “is the best sauce cook in Europe”, that’s what he said to me. And he said “but we have to put up with his tantrums”. He said “I’ve put up with it because he is a genius”. “He is, I know he is” says I But I said “my temperament couldn’t have put up with it, I snapped and I apologise about doing it”. He said “I want you to go and apologise to Rolland and Charlie” and he said “I will be very happy when you come back, I have been speaking to Pierre about you and Pierre said that you are absolutely what they wanted down there, he is very happy with you. All as you have to do is to apologise” he said “and your job is safe” “Thank you very much”, I said, but I just couldn’t so he said “well I don’t know what to say”, “well” says I, “what you can say is that they are going to pay me every bit of overtime that is owed to me and my weeks wages”. He said “certainly, make up a list of all the overtime that is due, take it into the girl in the office and certainly we will pay it to you” So I went in to the girl in the office and she said “hold on until I get this verified”, she came back and said that’s what you
are owed, so I was delighted leaving getting away if was like I was getting out of prison. You know because the hours were very long there because you know when you went you were working. The hours were very long. It wasn’t recognising any Irish trade union or anything like that (note. It was a Union house and Michael Mullen supported the owner Ken Besson introducing the foreign chefs on condition that they employed and trained young Irish chefs). It was an independent group, as if you were working on the continent.

71. MM: They had a system of indenture or did that come later on? Did you have to sign it for 5 years or was that there already?

72. BR: That came up later.

73. MM: Was the quality of what you saw in the Russell higher than what you saw in the Savoy?

74. BR: Yes it was. That’s because it was a smaller kitchen. The Savoy was high but it wasn’t as high as it should have been because it was coming out of the war, don’t forget it was about 1948. There was still rationing. Eggs, fish, we used to use powered eggs. Omelettes for breakfast they were using powered eggs. The omelettes they looked like pancakes. So there was a lot of things, there was plenty of meat, plenty of game and plenty of fish but there was lots of stuff they didn’t have because of the ration was still on in England. It went on until the 50’s actually.

75. MM: Was there much stuff sold as something else, or any of that going on?

76. BR: There was, there was one thing that they did do. Lapin, Rabbit, they used to use some rabbit instead of chicken, there is no doubt about it. The French are very clever about that stuff, you could go to France next week and eat rabbit and you wouldn’t know it because there are such good cooks. You could eat horsemeat and you wouldn’t know it, unless you looked for the vein, the blue vein, the blue blood!! (laugh). There was a bit of rabbit that went on. The Hibernian, they were never booked up but the Russell I thought the food was very good. The fish dishes were good, and the stuff that came out of larder, was beautifully presented. I never worked in the larder. I was all the time on the sauces.

77. MM: I believe they used the ‘torpedoes’, the big long trays. The big long silver trays, they would dress them up, like pheasants dressed up with feathers etc.?

78. BR: Always was dressed up like. Very nice…I must tell you something, they used I must let you in on a secret. I haven’t told many people about it, but we used to use truffles there nearly the size of an egg. was always fudge to make, always for decoration. Fish, salmon, other fish (inaudible). So I left there anyway. So anyway, started looking at the paper and one day they were looking for a chef for a restaurant in Carlow.

79. MM: Carlow.

80. BR: Carlow, what will I do. I think they said the money or something was good. I went down there as a chef, head chef (laugh) sure I hadn’t a clue. But anyway I went down their, they were very nice people; they owed one of the biggest bakery in Leinster. I remember working down there and I stayed with them for a few months but I missed Dublin you know. It really was a quick production kind of trade, grills etc. I loved it there, one day there was a fair on. Fair day used to be really busy because I was the only chef in the place. And the woman that washed the dished peeled the potatoes for me.

81. MM: This was in Carlow town itself?

82. BR: Carlow town, yes. It was a nice restaurant.

83. MM: What was it called?
84. **BR:** Bradberries. It’s different now. I went past it there and I went in for a cup of coffee. It looks like a good restaurant now. It was nicely laid out, it’s kind of a café now or something. But it was a good restaurant but, on fair day we would be swamped. Swamped, I would get fresh soup and everything and all the chefs I believe that were there before me, they used to make powdered soups, I used to make fresh soup with finely diced vegetables. There was a butcher across the road and I used to get meat from him and I would get all the bones I could from him and make stock and roast them in the oven. I used to do stuff that they never saw in the country before. I was killing myself I was trying to do things a bit too fancy. I stayed down there for a few months and one day at the end of fair day, the women had a shop in front and the women was responsible, the mother of the man who owed the business. She was responsible for the shop and was also responsible for the restaurant really. He used to run the bakery around the corner, it was a very fine bakery. It was a big business all over Leinster.

85. One day she came in, it was the evening time. This is just an incident and she had six live chicken, three in each hand with their legs. She said here you are chef I brought you half a dozen chickens. I said ‘what do you expect me to do with these half a dozen chickens?’ She said ‘they are lovely, fine gorgeous chickens, I bought them for you for the kitchen’. I said ‘they are alive, what am I going to do with them?’ She said ‘I will get Joe in the yard to wring their necks and bring them in’. I was shaking my head.

86. So off he went and brought them back in, and they were covered in hair and lice!! I used them but I burnt them on the gas, the lice, you know. They were a very nice family.

87. **MM:** So you were six months in Carlow, where did you go then?

88. **BR:** I came back home and my father was walking up O’Connell Street and who did he meet but Karl Uhlemann and he says he remembers him from the Tech in Parnell Square and he said ‘I have a son a chef’ and Uhlemann said to him ‘why don’t you send him in to me in the Gresham?’.

So I went down to the Gresham Hotel and started. I was a bit scared going into the Gresham. I think I heard word that Uhlemann was a bit of a bully or something. And I was thinking, I was in the Russell Hotel and there was a bully there and I didn’t want to go through the same thing again. But I needed a job anyway and Uhlemann said ‘you start the next day’, but I had to see Toddy first. You heard of Toddy O’ Sullivan?

89. **MM** I did indeed.

90. **BR:** Well Toddy said ‘well whatever the head chef wants that’s ok with me’. So I went in the next day and I was working on the roast corner and Michael McManus, ‘the headcase’, did you know him?

91. **MM:** Never met him, no.

92. **BR:** Well he was a legend, and he was working on the sauce corner opposite me and he was also the second chef. And he was eying me up and down, he eyed me up and down, and the snide remarks, you know ‘what would you know anyway?’ and I was there for a couple of weeks and he hardly spoke to me, he would come along at night time, he was there for a couple of weeks and he hardly spoke to me, he would come along at night time, the Gresham was a terribly busy place at that time, and he would come along at night, you were meant to be off at nine o’ clock and he would say ‘you, you are on the dance’, he did this a few times, I was only new so I didn’t like to say ‘no’ like, but this night he came over to me around half past eight and he said ‘I want you to open those tins of peas for me’, a big gallon tins of peas, there was a dance on that night for three or four hundred or so. The tin opener in the veg corner didn’t work, and I said to him ‘how am I going to open these?’ and he said ‘any fool could open them, get yourself a chopper’, you know this kind of thing, and he was passing remarks, ‘he can’t open a tin of peas, any child can do that’. This kind of stuff was really getting me down and I was finished at nine o’clock and I left the peas and I went down to the locker room and Jimmy Flahive was working there as a casual, and he was
the kind of guy who would pump information out of you. He was asking ‘where was I from?, where had I worked before?’ And I told him I had worked in the Russell Hotel, and he had for some reason found out that I had been in some trouble in the Russell and he asked ‘What happened to you with the sauce cook in the Russell?’, and I told him ‘to be quite honest with you, I hit him with a chip basket’ and he said ‘oh, is that right?’, so Flahive goes off and next minute McManus came in, the ‘headcase’, and he said, ‘Willy’, his attitude had suddenly changed and suddenly had got very nice, ‘How are you doing now, are you happy in your job now?’ he says ‘I heard you were working in the Russell Hotel’ (laugh) ‘tell us what happened over there?’ and now I said, now is my chance to get at him so I said ‘the second chef over there, I didn’t like him, so I blasted him with a basket’ you know, as if to say, you annoy me and I’ll give you the same (laugh) and do you know what he said to me? He said ‘I’m delighted to hear that, I hate these foreign bastards in the country, I hope you did him proper’, this is what he said to me, you see he was of the era when all the foreign chefs were coming in to the country and showing the like of him up… but Macker was a good chef, for he served under Uhlemann and what I really liked about him was he was fast, I love to see a chef with a bit of speed, no messing, and getting on and doing a good job. The guy who takes his time, for some reason they always seem to get away with it.

93. Anyway from then on, Macker and I were like that (two fingers entwined), and I couldn’t so anything wrong (laughing), ‘thank you son’ he’d say, he called everybody ‘son’, ‘that’s great son!’!!!

94. They were short for someone in the larder and they sent me down to work with a guy called Frankie Plummer, who was one of the best workers I ever came across, he was very well read and you could talk to him about anything, he read, read, read. He could talk about history, travelling around the work, inventors, he was great. I loved working with him in the larder. So I spent about a year in the larder with him.

95. **MM:** So tell me this, was Jimmy Kilbride there at this time?

96. **BR:** No, he had just left.

97. **MM:** Well, if he had just left was Seán Kinsella there then?

98. **BR:** Seán Kinsella came while I was there. He was buff to the heels, but in a way you’d like him.

99. **MM:** After working with Frankie Plummer, I went in to the pastry house, and who was there but only Joe O’Neill, you know the fellow I talked about earlier in the short trousers, and as soon as I went working in the pastry house there, there was a girl called Pauline, and she was very good and she used to do all the baking and small fancies and that. We used to do all the large gateaux and bavorois and triffles and make the fresh ice cream every day. But Joe was a great chef to work with, he was fast, and clean, and he had great ideas, imagination, great presentation and I loved this the presentation, without going overboard, you know, and he used the piping bag better than any chef I ever saw. When he did cockle shells, they were perfection!!!

100. Previous years when I was working in the Savoy Hotel, I got friendly with this old man, he was an oyster man in the hotel, all he did was open oysters, he’d wash them before bringing them up to the room and he’d open them with one hand and he was so fast, perfection, he had a special trolley. Anyway we got friendly and he told me his brother had been working at sea for the union castle line, who had been going down from London or Southampton down to Cape Town and back and a few places in between, and it sounded pretty good, and I always had this inclination to try that. So when I was in the Gresham one day Macker said to me that there was a young chef who said he knew me and that he had worked in the Savoy Hotel and his name was Bill Kavanagh. He said ‘If you recommend him, Macker and I were great friends now, he thought I was a genius, He said ‘if you recommend him, I’ll take him on’. So I said’ Oh yeah, Liam, he’s a great fellow’ and
that is how Liam came to work in the Gresham Hotel and both myself and Liam were there in the Gresham for maybe another year, and I was going over to London on a bit of a holiday to my brother, and I said to Liam, when I’m over there I was thinking of dropping down to Southampton to see about getting a job on one of the big liners… it sounds exciting, you know.

101. And he said ‘I’ll go over with you’ we went over and we went down to Southampton for a day and we will go down to look up the catering superintendent on the Cunard-White Star line, on the SS Queen Mary and the SS Queen Elizabeth, and we went down. Southampton was levelled during the war and it was still pretty rough and from where we were at the main street we could actually see the SS Queen Mary down at the docks and sticking out of the water way down the other end, I was mesmerised by the size of it, I never saw anything like it in my life. So we went down and met the superintendent and we had a talk to him individually and he was the top man on shore, down on the docks. He asked us for references and we told him we worked in the Savoy Grill which made a bit of an impression and we said the Gresham Hotel, and in those days, we kind of puffed it up, saying that the Gresham was probably the leading hotel in Ireland next to the Shelbourne and the Hibernian. ‘Ok’ he said ‘if you go home and give your notice at the Gresham, say you finish on the 27th, from that time you will be on the payroll here as second assistant cook, but you have to be passed by the medical, and the board of trade, and the union etc’. So that meant we had to stay in Southampton for another day to get all these things done, I had to get a number of teeth out (laugh) after doing the medical. He had said ‘Just wait in Dublin and you will be on the payroll and you will get word from us’.

102. Liam got word after three weeks, a telegram that he was to join the SS Queen Mary immediately and about a week after that I was saying to myself, he’s gone and I’m not, but then I got a telegram that I was to join the SS Queen Mary and that was that. And I went on as second assistant sauce cook in the number one kitchen. They had three kitchens: Saloon, Cabin and Tourist. We were in the saloon kitchen, and on the sauce corner, there were about twelve working on the sauce corner and I was back turning vegetables and pushing sauces through tammis cloths which I feckin hated, so I’d do it back again, and when I started back again the sous chef asked me how did I like it? There were loads of sous chefs, and I told him I didn’t like it. I hadn’t even spoken to the head chef, he was above us all, he was like god off somewhere.

103. MM: The Wizzard of Oz!!!

104. BR: He was known as the Black Prince, the chef was, but anyway the sous chef said that there may be a job going in the larder. So a couple of days later he said ‘go down to the larder straight away’. It was a big larder which catered for the saloon class and the cabin class but it didn’t do any butchery, they had a big butchery shop on the ship, but they did veal galantines and this sort of stuff, caviar, foie gras, terrines of foie gras, canapés, salads, cocktails, crab cocktails, lobster salads and all this kind of stuff. And the larder cook was a fellow called Charlie Pile, and he said ‘over there, go over there’, a big long table, ‘over there, you are the hors d’oeuvres cook’. There were four chefs working on the hors d’oeuvres and for lunch time they put up eight trolleys of hors d’oeuvres – twelve on each, you could turn the handle on it and they would be sent in to the dining room, two trolleys in each corner. It was a magnificent dining room, you never saw anything like it with the height of it going up – it was beautiful, the first time I ever saw all tables being round, it was full of class, oozing class – this was first class, you know, saloon class. The hors d’oeuvres went in on trays to cabin class. There were four on the hors d’oeuvres, two were doing canapés and I was working with a little Jewish cook by the name of Tojo, that’s what they called him and Tojo wasn’t the best, he used to kind of disappear every now and then but I got on all right with him, I had a flair for making canapés or anything like that, stuffed crab claws, cocktail hors d’oeuvres they used to call them, stuffed eggs and all this on silver salvers up to the lounge for special parties. It was a terrible busy job and anyway they made me first assistant not second assistant. So I was on this about six months and I was working away and one day we got a warning down the tannoy that they were expecting weather, to close the port holes, but we had heard it before and it was very warm with the gulf stream and that near New York, the heat was unbelievable and myself and this salad cook, a fellow called Gussy Boggins, never bothered to
close the portholes and we had silver dishes lined up along the table full of beautiful cocktail hors d'oeuvres when next thing a wave came along this side and everything, all down along this marble topped table disappeared down the scuppers. I was drenched to the skin, even my shoes were full of sea water!! (laugh) I don’t know where my hat went, found it later. I had to go down to get changed and everybody in the larder were breaking there hearts laughing at us but everybody got stuck in and we all got stuck in making more hors d'oeuvres and canapés from the fridges underneath that had all the mis en place in them. They were meant for that night but we had to stay back that afternoon and get stuck in. That was one day.

105.BR: Did Liam ever tell you about all the knocking (stealing) that went on?

106.MM: No, but go on, tell me

107.BR: I don’t know but all these English people or Scottish people they believe that all this knocking is perks. Those days only people with money could afford to travel on those liners and it was very expensive to go to the states or Canada. There was no jet aircraft of that, most people had never been, or if they had they were never coming back!! There was lots of money to be made, these guys used to create their own wrap ups. Because it was such a rich company, people paid so much money, and you could be held up at sea for an extra week, so they had to carry a lot of extra stock, and passengers never went short, they could have as much caviar as they wanted. At anytime of night or day, they could be fed, so there were lashings of food. No control over the supply or anything, so all the guys in the kitchen they used to filling up big boxes on the way out and on the way back and there was a barter trade with the stewards, the bedrooms stewards even used to be flogging stuff, bits of carpet from the rooms and pictures of the walls etc. Selling them. I never did it, I have to be honest with you, never did it, imagine selling stuff – I’ll have a ham for you, what do you want? A sirloin of beef!! It was unbelievable.

108.Anyway, this fellow Gussy Boggins, was on the salad and he used to have all these gallon tins of mushrooms, petit onions, pears and peaches, because the Americans were mostly going out and back and they loved salads. And a salad to them was maybe lettuce with a half a pear filled with cream cheese and a walnut on top. Fruit, you know. Anyway one day this fellow came down, a steward, to Gussy and said, can you help me out? Will you be able to look after me on the way back?’ I was ear wigging. ‘What do you want?’ said Gussy. ‘Will you get me a tin of peaches and a tin of pears and a tin of cherries?’ ‘Ok’ said Gussy come to me at a certain time etc. And there was paper lining around the tins and Gussy would use a razor blade and switch the labels from the pears onto the petit onions or mushroom tins and when the steward came back, he would had gussy ten dollars or five dollars, all American money, Gussy would say sure he won’t be here the next trip, he’ll probably be on another ship anyway and if he did complain I’ll just say there must have been a mix up in the factory. He was the smartest guy, Gussy, I really liked him for his attitude.

109.After about six or seven months the sous chef said ‘you are doing a great job there on the larder, would you like a promotion?’, ‘The SS Coronia is our number one cruise ship, it is not as big as the SS Queen Mary and it goes all over the world, and they are looking for a hors d’oeuvres cook, would you be interested in taking the job?’ he said. ‘Tell us more’ says I, ‘Well you get a bonus for cruising’, says he, ‘but you would need another chef with you if you can recommend somebody, but the SS Coronia will be sailing on the first of January’. ‘Now it was December in New York and it would be doing three cruises down to the West Indies and back again and after that they would go on a big cruise – a five month cruise, do you think you would be able for that?, and see if you have somebody in mind who could help you’ he said. So I went to Liam Kavanagh and I said ‘I’ve been offered this job and I would really like to take it up, you know, would you be interested in coming but you would be my assistant, you wouldn’t mind being my assistant, would you?’ Liam was a bit hesitant, Liam didn’t like that because he always was one to put himself forward, he always did, but he came on with me anyway and the first place we went to after leaving New York was Bridgetown in Barbados. There was nothing there then, It is probably covered in hotels now, but the first thing I heard going down was a voice, I think it was Bing
Crosby, coming from a bar, singing Galway Bay, so we had to go in and have a drink! But after
that went to Cuba and Trinidad and Jamaica and maybe as far down as Venezuela and back to
New York and then back again and we used to do three cruises, for they were what we call cheap
cruises, for the people working in the big stores used to send their staff in winter time on holidays,
and they would pay for the cruise maybe down to the West Indies and back. So they weren’t the
highest class of people, but they were nice people, young people and they used to eat like hell – it
carried about 800 passengers.

110.BR: Am I boring you stiff?
111.MM: Not at all!
112.BR: Anyway after that the big cruise was the India / Africa cruise back up by the Suez Canal
and back again.
113.MM: But they were a different class of customers, were they millionaires?
114.BR: Suddenly the passenger numbers came down to about 350. We used to get paid overtime,
the leading chefs in the kitchen used to barter with the head chef, depending on the cruise as to
how many hours overtime we would get each day because we worked seven days a week. We
usually got six hours overtime a day. So the money was much better than what I was getting on
the SS Queen Mary. But when we got back to Southampton, we did smaller cruises, like a six
week cruise around the Mediterranean or up to the North Cape, over the Reykjavik and down the
coast of Oslo, Stolhokm, around the north of Scotland and down around Ireland and into
Glengariff and back to Southampton and then the passengers would go back to New York on the
SS Queen Mary.
115.MM: Did you get off at Glengariff at any stage?
116.BR: Oh yeah, The best time I ever had was … the English fellows I worked with loved
Glengariff for we used to go up to Casey’s Hotel, we’d come ashore on the SS Coronia’s own
launches, there was a toilet and all on them and an awning overhead, and we’d come in from out
Bantry Bay and spend an hour and half on shore in Casey’s Hotel with pints of Guinness and all
that and we’d do around six of those cruises during the summer and then until November when the
ship went into dry dock for about a month. But we’d always take it in turns to take a cruise off, the
six week cruise and the company would pay you to come home.
117.Well Liam left, he was in more jobs than I was, he used to move around, then he went on the SS
Queen Elizabeth, one of the cruises we did was the coronation cruise , 1953, I remember we were
coming up from Cape Town into Port Elizabeth and I had never been there before and I always
tried to get a look at a place that I hadn’t been in before, the passengers would be getting ready to
go ashore on excursions and there was a bit of slackness in the work. And at this time there were
bulletins going up in the kitchen that the King of England was very, very seriously ill and nearly at
the end, and Princess Elizabeth was on her way to Australia on a cruise with Phillip, any way I
was up on deck coming in to Port Elizabeth and I looked up at the flag on the ship and I saw it
been put at half-mast. This meant the king was dead, and I came back into the kitchen and went to
the larder where I was working and I said ‘the king is dead’, and I remember them well what they
said, ‘what the hell would you know about it Paddy?’, so I said ‘listen, would anybody like to take
bets on it? I’ll bet you the king is dead, I just have that feeling!! (laughing) that he is dead’, and
they were telling me to ‘eff off’, for they were always taking the, you know me being Irish and all,
and the next thing it came over the tannoy that ‘the king is dead, long live the queen’, and they
said ‘you know somebody up in the bridge or something’ and I just had that feeling (laugh).
118.You see they were always taking the piss out of the Irish but they never succeeded in taking it out
of me, because I used to agree with them. They would say ‘Is it true there are pigs in the parlour?’
and I used to say ‘yes’, so they didn’t know what way to take me and dropped it when they were
getting no satisfaction. But they used take it out on Liam Kavanagh, and he used to be dancing with anger ‘don’t you be talking, what would you know?’ and I used to say ‘for God sake, Liam, get a grip, don’t rise to the bait, you always rise to their bait’, and he’d fight with me saying ‘you won’t stand up for your own kind’.

119.MM: So you were about three years at sea before coming home?

120.BR: Yeah, but anyway I came home to the Gresham, I was back in Dublin and I looked up Frankie Plummer, the friend of mine in the Gresham, the great reader, and he said ‘Willy, I wish you were back here, I was talking to Joe Flaherty (the assistant manager) and he said that you can come back anytime you like’. So I had been getting a bit tired of the sea and I went back to the Gresham Hotel but it had changed a bit and I was working everywhere in it and anyway.

121.MM: What was the standard like in the Gresham at this stage compared to the Russell?

122.BR: It was completely different, I won’t say completely but it was lower. But it was more on an American style, because a lot of Americans used to come and stay in the Gresham, for instance now, when I was at sea, the first time I ever saw coleslaw in my life was at sea, for it is an American style dish. And when I came back to the Gresham I was asked to put up the hors d’oeuvres trolley, and that was no problem to me (laugh), and the first day I made my own coleslaw, and I put it on the trolley. And they said to me ‘what are you doing, chopping up raw cabbage?’ I said ‘yeah, white cabbage, with mayonnaise, that’s coleslaw’, ‘what do you call it?’ He thought I had said cold slaw. And waiters were actually bringing it back into the kitchen, saying you are putting raw cabbage out on the trolley?, and I’d say ‘yeah, it’s coleslaw’. After a while it started to go very well and the dishes of coleslaw were coming back empty, and they said ‘whatever it is, they want more of that’. They said ‘what do you call it again?’ I must have been the first to bring coleslaw in to Ireland!!! And then it caught on.

123.Another thing I started, when we were doing these cocktail hors d’oeuvres on the SS Queen Mary, big round dishes, there was a guy there and he wasn’t bad making things out of pastry butter, pastry margarine, and I saw him one day with a swan made out of butter and he told me it was made out of pastry margarine, and I said that’s very good but in the back of my mind I said to myself ‘I bet I could do better than that, I know I can do better than that!!’ And all the guys were around saying ‘isn’t that brilliant’, and I said yeah that’s brilliant but I knew I could do better, but I didn’t want to show the fellow up and It wasn’t my particular job to do it, but it was always an inkling in the back of my mind so anyway when I got back to Dublin, I stayed in the Gresham, the second time I was in the Gresham until Frankie Plummer got accused of something and was let go. He was sacked in the wrong, he really was because he was the most trustworthy man you could meet, anyway he went to work in the Metropole and kept on saying ‘would you like to come over to the Metropole, I was telling Marley that I recommend you’, and I went over and hated it! I hated it!

124.MM: Right

125.BR: None of the chefs in the kitchen were allowed touch anything, (Michael) Marley was on this kitchen percentage, a halfpenny or a penny a meal, you know. And the stuff he was giving to the staff, you know, he would buy in laps of beef and would boil them and cut them so thin on the slicing machine , all the cracked plates were used for the staff, and the staff maid would slap on two slices on meat on the cracked plates at ten in the morning and put them in the hot plate and wheel them up to the staff hall and take them out at twelve o clock. And I don’t know how they ate such rubbish, every day they had tapioca, every day!! So I said ‘I’m not going to stay here’, I stayed about a week and then said I’m leaving.

126.Well (Jimmy) Flahive, who I had known in the Gresham Hotel, had been made head chef in the Airport and he heard I was leaving the Metropole and he got in touch with me and asked would I go out to him and I stayed with him in the Airport for about a year. That’s when I met Jimmy
Kilbride and Willy Johnston. Willy Johnston was a great chef, he had trained under Uhlemann, and Jimmy Kilbride was a very good chef, he was sauce cook there, I was on desserts there, but in the night time you would have to work on the range. Everybody worked on the range, because half the staff would go off, it was a different kind of set up in the airport, in the Collar of Gold. You worked 9 to 3 one day and the next day you were 9 to 11, so every second day was a half day but when you were there, you got your *mis en place* and whatever it was and got it ready.

127. **MM:** Had the Collar of Gold just opened then or was it opened a while? Had Flahive opened it up?

128. **BR:** It had been opened a while, there had been an English man at first, a man called Clifford Steer, who was a very good chef, because I met him for a while, I’ll tell you how I met him, I had a bit of a row with Flahive in the airport. Flahive was a very good administrator, absolutely great, but he wasn’t a good chef, but I liked him. He was very enthusiastic about any work that was done in the kitchen, he controlled things very well, he bought things well, and he was clean. He had Opperman up above him and he really ran the place, really. Anyway Opperman would have been a good chef too, I remember one night I was on the sauce corner and I was running out of escallops of veal and anyway, the larder was upstairs, and Opperman was in the kitchen, he always loved being in the kitchen for he had been a chef in his younger days in the Regal Rooms or something, and he said ‘what’s the matter?’ and I said we were running out of escallops of veal and I didn’t have the time to be running up to the larder and I told him there was a leg of veal up there but that it wasn’t sectioned or anything. He was up the stairs in a flash and he was down with lovely escallops and the next day I was up in the larder and the leg of veal was perfectly sectioned. He knew what he was doing! Flahive couldn’t have done that but was good in other ways!

129. Anyway I had a bit of a row with Flahive because he wasn’t understanding about something, some order of that, and I said that I can’t take any more of this and he told me to get out, and I told him to ‘Eff off’! I shouldn’t have. But everyday Jimmy Kilbride used to say to me ‘he wants you to go up and apologise to him’ everyday, but I said ‘no, I’m leaving’, I wanted to go back to sea actually!!

130. **MM:** But the Collar of Gold, the level of food there was fabulous, wasn’t it? Was it up to the same level as the Russell?

131. **BR:** Ah no, it was a different style, you can never compare French with English really, for some reason, I can’t put my finger on it, they use so much wine and butter in the French kitchens, you know in the other kitchens you are not using as much wine or butter!!

132. **MM:** But it was simpler food but good food, was it better than the Gresham though?

133. **BR:** Oh I think so, I think so, but the *table d’hôte* in the Gresham was quite good, the one that Uhlemann used to write every day was quite good, but as Uhlemann was getting older, Macker used to change the menu on him to make it easier for himself in the sauce corner. The assistant manager used to do the ordering every morning but Macker would change them after Uhlemann was gone home around 8 at night, and Uhlemann wouldn’t notice the next day! You see Macker was fast, he was quick, so that was it and anyway I went back to sea again and did a world cruise and many small cruises, Liam was gone, he was working in America by this stage. He left the SS Queen Elizabeth and was working in America. I went back to the Gresham for a short while after leaving the airport but I didn’t like the set up. Uhlemann had retired and Macker was head chef proper then, but he was bringing down the standard. I couldn’t believe how the standard was gone down, he was making the menus easier, it was ridiculous!!! And I stayed for a few months and I said no, so that’s when I went back to sea. I wrote over to Cunard and told them I had been with them before and they asked me would I join the SS Coronia back in Larder, meeting it in
Liverpool on the 27th December. And I didn’t like leaving the Gresham on Christmas Day, you know, so I went in and I worked on Christmas Day and I told Macker I was finished today, and he didn’t like it but anyway I was gone.

So I did a big world cruise, all the way around the world to Japan, across the Pacific to Honolulu, to Mexico, and all these places through the Panama canal, down South America and around Cape Horn and anyway when I came back after doing that, I felt it was not the same as it had been when I went to sea first, you know.

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MM: The magic had gone out of it

BR: Yeah, the magic and novelty had gone out of it, and I think I felt I should start to settle down and get married and so on (laugh). So I came home and a friend told me the Willy Opperman had taken over Jury’s Hotel.

MM: Was this Jury’s in College Green?

BR: Yes, it was horrible, it was the dirtiest and the filthiest kitchen I had been in my whole life, I don’t know how anyone got away with it! I was used to much better where you put on white gloves and be spotless and everything’s bloody soap, and I went into this muck hall, you know, so anyway.

MM: And the place, was it just old or was it just badly run?

BR: Nothing, I went over on the sauce corner, there was no door on the front of the range and all the red core was coming out while we were working! Ashes! There was a gas range beside it, old fashioned and all the bars on it were missing, there was only about three bars left in the range from here to there, you know, and they were buckled completely and there was stalactites, stalagmites of big black fat all around on the floor. The chef’s cloakroom instead of having the door, there was this potato sack hanging up on the door and there was no lockers!, you had put them on nails up on the wall and I’m after coming off a luxury liner (laugh), I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t even know what to be doing, there was no control in the place and this woman was making salads or something and I said ‘are you all right’ and she said, I said ‘can I do anything for you?’ and she said ‘can you make me some mayonnaise’ and I said ‘certainly I will, how much do you want?’ ‘Make a gallon’ (laugh) and I went down to stores and I put in an order for some oil and eggs or something. The store man saw this gallon of oil and he said ‘gallon of oil, I’m here twenty years and I’ve never given out a gallon of oil.’ (laugh) But I said ‘I want to make mayonnaise, how do you make mayonnaise?’ ‘Don’t care how you’re make it you’re not getting oil from me.’ So I came back to the head chef, the Liverpool man, he just wouldn’t talk to me. I think Willy Opperman wanted me to go in as head chef, because he said there will be movements.

MM: Yeah, yeah, there was politics involved.

BR: Yeah politics, so anyway I met him, and oh yeah and there was an old chef there, years and years Dan Brady, a character, and the store man and he were pals and he came out and I heard him saying to Dan Brady ‘I’m here twenty-five years and I never got a gallon of oil in my life.’ ‘And he’s walking in the place and he can get a gallon of oil.’ (Laugh). So anyway what they used to do (laugh) but they did what they were still doing during the war they used to boil up water and vinegar and a little bit of sugar and salt, and mustard and they used to thicken with cornflour and coloured it a little bit yellow, that was mayonnaise.

MM: That was mayonnaise.

BR: You see that’s what they did. But I said to the manager when he asked me how I was getting on, I said ‘I’m out of here at the end of the week, I couldn’t stay here.’ So he said the Moira Hotel is a grand little hotel. Will you go to the Moira Hotel?
MM: There were sister hotels, weren’t they?

BR: Yeah and I went over there and I actually liked the Moira Hotel. We had a chef there called Vinnie Hayes, he was a nice guy, nice working and I went in next to him, you know, and I liked it because he used to be on the range one night and I was the range, so it was every second day off at 6 p.m. So I had the run of the place and I ran the kitchen at night time and so forth and it was a grand little hotel. Very nice meals there and I liked the plat de jour that they’d put every day, you know, they’d be about six different fish dishes and six different, tournados, suprèmes of chicken and all this kind of stuff, you know, little waste, it was nice, nice soups and all that. A guy there they used to call Dessie Allen used to do desserts and come on at 6 p.m. and make the gateaux’s and Dessie Allen, he became a friend of mine. He opened a shop up in Meath Street, a confectionery shop and he got stuck into making sugar baskets because he was a friend of this guy who worked in the Russell Hotel, the pasty chef, but Dessie he was a good baker but he wasn’t a very good finisher but anyway when I saw him and he trying to make sugar baskets in the afternoon in his own time or whatever you know, I got involved and I wouldn’t go off in the afternoon and I used to start making sugar baskets with him and I loved making the sugar baskets and when Grace Kelly came to Dublin, there was a big presentation for her over in Dublin Castle and they wanted, whoever got the order for all savouries, vol au vents, and all this kind of stuff, cheese fingers or whatever, Dessie Allen got it, he had this shop up on Meath Street, he got it on condition that he could supply a sugar basket on the middle of the table with the Monaco colours on the ribbon, so he couldn’t, so he came to me and asked me would I do it. Thank God, because the basket was….. Dessie had good hands, he could pull the sugar but I could…..

MM: But you could weave it as such.

BR: Yeah, I could shape it yeah and I made the ribbons and I made all the flowers for him, but at the same time I thought it was hard work, you know, and now let me see…..

MM: What year was that?

BR: I went back to the airport. What, oh yeah?

MM: What year are we talking about now?

BR: What year is it now? In the late ‘50s maybe gone ‘60s it was, it would be around the 1960or so cause I’m to getting mixed up in my times and all. I went back to the airport.

MM: How long were you in the Moira now?

BR: Five years. Five years and I loved it yeah and the New Jury’s was after being, the old Jury’s was knocked down.

MM: You weren’t there in ’59 when there was a farewell dinner for Pierre Rolland that was done in the Moira in 1959. I don’t know if you were there for that.

BR: I don’t remember that.

MM: Maybe you were there just after that or whatever. Actually next time I come round to you, I’ll give you a look at, I have the menu and I have, your man Dessie Allen had signed the back of it.

BR: Dessie Allen, he left me, you see, he wanted me to go into partnership with him in the shop and I didn’t think Dessie was very reliable because he was very fond of the jar, you know, and I stayed in the Moira a good few years because I enjoyed it and they wanted me to go off to the new Jury’s which was opening across the road when they knocked down the old one and they
wanted me to go over and go in as chef over there. I never had any aspirations to be head chef, never. But anyway they wanted me to go over and I said ‘not me’, you know. I used to do any jobs they wanted done over here and come over.

159. Gerry Lane a guy I knew, I met him at sea and he also worked in the Gresham, he was head chef there, he came in as head chef, Gerry Lane and I had to go over when they had special parties on and all that to help out and Gerry Lane wasn’t able for the job, you know. I could see him fading away, he got like an old man, you know, and he died. He actually died about two or three years afterwards but then the German came to the, what’s his name as head chef and I said to Willie Opperman. ‘I don’t want to work over there’. He still forced me to go over even as second chef. Willie I said ‘I love the Moira Hotel’.

160. He came to me one day and he said to me ‘there’s a guy I used to know years ago when I was a commis chef in the Dolphin Hotel, his name is Bill Kavanagh’ he said. ‘Bill Kavanagh of course I know him.’ ‘A great pal of mine’ he said. ‘He’s given your name’ he said ‘would you recommend him for a job’ he said to me.

161. MM: Was this for the Intercontinental now.

162. BR: No for the new Jury’s that was opening in College Green.

163. MM: Right okay yeah.

164. BR: And I said, he said ‘I’ll take him on if you say he’s any good’. (Laugh). This is what he said to me. And I said ‘oh yeah he’s a brilliant chef, he’s good, nice a fellow you could meet’. Well he said ‘he’s mentioned your name, he’s after coming back from America’. He worked in America. ‘Oh yeah’ well I said ‘sure look at all the experience he worked in the Savoy Grill, he worked in the Cunard Line, he worked in the SS Queen Elizabeth, he worked in America, in some of the best restaurants in New York. He must have worked in about a dozen different high class restaurants in New York.’ He had great experiences; you couldn’t get anybody better than that. Well he said ‘I’ll take him on if you say so’ Willie Opperman said. So he went to work there and then from there Bill went out to the new Jury’s out in the.....

165. MM: The Intercontinental.

166. BR: He went to the Intercontinental. I went then, I was spending too much time over in the new Jury’s and I wanted to stay in the Moira Hotel and eventually Willie said ‘I don’t want you in the Moira Hotel, I want you in the Jury’s, so that’s it.’ Well I said ‘that’s it, I’m not staying’ and I left. I came home here, I was cutting the grass and only two days afterwards a knock on the door but Jimmy Flahive. He said ‘I hear you’ve left the Moira Hotel’. You see Johnny Opperman and Willie Opperman were brothers and he was working there and Johnny Opperman was in the airport and asked me to go there, so I went back and I spent twenty-seven years in the airport, the Collar of Gold. I got stuck into a rut then, got married. Are you married?

167. MM: I am yeah.

168. BR: Are you in a rut.

169. MM: I’ve got two kids (laugh).

170. BR: You’re in a rut (laugh). So there you are and in the meantime I always remember your man doing this job with the butter, the pastry butter and I started doing things. I think they reckoned I was some sort of genius with it! I remember the first exhibition I went in for, I used to like going to the exhibitions when I was younger. I always won a gold or silver or gold medal or certificate, you know. But anyway I remember I sent in this dish of fish, a cold dish fish, I baked them in round pastry case in the shape of an oyster shell and I had another oyster shell standing up, held up with lobsters prongs, you know, but it didn’t seem right when I had all these other fish,
little lobster, crabs, stuffed sole, kind of frivolities and so on, but it looked nice. I remember not being too fussy about it I remember at the time but I suddenly got this idea and didn’t make this little chef out of butter, standing behind, holding the lid, like as if he had opened the lid to expose it like this, I always thinking of something mad, you know. When I went in anyway, didn’t I win first prize and I got a medal for it and it was the only butter thing, well I’ll call butter, it’s not butter, it was the only thing at the whole exhibition in butter. People were coming along saying ‘look at the chef, look at that little chef.’ The following years there were a few things made out of butter (laugh) and some were absolutely dreadful. One fellow had this, he had a board, you could see it was a bread board and he had butter on it and he had a farm scene but he didn’t know…..

171.MM: He’d no scale obviously.

172.BR: He didn’t know it was pastry margarine and he was using fresh butter and the thing was near melting and I couldn’t believe and I was laughing and I said to the fellow ‘next time you try it try pastry margarine.’ But as the years went every catering exhibition that came along there was more butter, imagine they had one section, do you remember that.

173.MM: Yeah, yeah.

174.BR: There was a whole section and I was the one who really started that off. Well I did other things at catering exhibitions like made things out of chocolate you know, horse and cart, you know, with vegetables and fruits on them and all this kind of stuff. I did a lot of stuff out of butter, you know. I did lots of models, you know and I used and a Scandinavian crowd took over then for the airport, SAS. They were very good, very business like, fair and what they would tell you, you could see everything was realistic, what they spoke. Made sense, you know and we did some buffets out there. I used to be always in the buffets, you know, I used to do the boar’s head and pigs and all this kind of stuff but I used to do them, the woman on the rock in Copenhagen.

175.MM: Oh yeah, yeah, the mermaid.

176.BR: That was my favourite and I think I got something for that at a catering exhibition as well and marzipan, good quality, good quality marzipan you know, you could make fantastic stuff. I won a medal in Torquay Catering Exhibition, it very big it was and I won a bronze medal there and that was about a ham dish I did. I’ll explain about the ham dish if you like. But the marzipan that came from Holland and Germany it was unbelievable. I saw the basket, to me it looked like a real basket and it was made from marzipan and in it was all these mushrooms upside down and tossed around and everyone of them was made and different kinds of mushrooms, they had even a tiny bit of soil in the roots even and you know in between the mushroom.

177.MM: I know what you’re talking about the feathering or whatever, yeah.

178.BR: The feathering, I couldn’t believe it. On came, these guys their not chefs they must be something else, you know, artists! But anyway I’ll tell you about the ham. I got this idea from the Russell Hotel really and I thought, well it was in the back of my mind for years and I said I’d have to have a go at it. I’ll tell you two things about the Russell Hotel but I saw this ham, a beautiful ham, a long shaped ham, they don’t cut them anymore but there was such a thing as a shaped ham one time. Do remember shaped hams?

179.MM: You’re talking when they come up and take part of the rump with it as well, is it.

180.BR: A long ham and Rolland had one, it was for an exhibition and anyway, It was covered in a lovely pastry, short type of pastry and lovely decoration on the pastry, beautiful ham frill which he made from tin foil himself. Beautiful, very artistic and in the middle of the top of the ham was a lid, an open lid, which he had opened, it was propped up by a fork and inside the ham was chaud froid, you know, a beautiful picture on it and I said that’s some masterpiece.
181. **MM:** And there was a picture in the *chaud froid*?

182. **BR:** Yeah but the whole thing… But the whole ham was covered, wrapped and baked in pastry. But when you looked in there was a *chaud froid* ham. It was a beautiful thing! I never saw anything like it. But I did it myself in my own time over in Torquay and I got a bronze medal for it. But it wouldn’t be as good as Rolland’s or I would have got a gold medal for it. But there was a whole ham section.

183. **MM:** I heard he went down to the catering exhibition in Busáras and he came back and everything he put in for he got gold medals.

184. **BR:** Oh Rolland and do you know what he had down there, I think it was that is where I saw it, and anyway he had made a vase out of sugar and in it he had one tulip and rose as if they were growing there in different directions.

185. I went in and I made a wheelbarrow, a fancy type of wheelbarrow with gum *pastillage* and I made it with a few different colours in it, not too much, a few different colours, and in it I had made these marzipan roses, I must have made about a hundred of them and I was pretty good at making the roses this time but out of it I picked say about my best eight roses and I made about a hundred or so, so I could pick my best eight so I found out how to make roses this colour, you know dark, the real dark, really dark.

186. **MM:** Like burgundy?

187. **BR:** And what you did, how to make them was God you made them with an orange marzipan and what you did was you got the red powdery stuff in a muslin and for a slightly second you got the rose and you flashed over steam and you shook, beautiful…..

188. **MM:** The little sort of glisten that you get on a rose.

189. **BR:** Absolutely perfect, so I had about three of them, yellow ones and I had pale ones beside the colour and I had it ready in the Gresham Hotel on this dish, for this particular section, just to finish it off, it was ready on the dish the night off and I was in this pastry house by myself and I went down this corridor to get something and when I came back the barrow shaft underneath had broken and it was down like this and the roses was spilling out of it. Barney Neilon I don’t know if you’ve heard of him.

190. **MM:** With the broken barrow (laugh)

191. **BR:** Barney was nice, a very nice fellow and anyway he said Willie that’s magnificent he said, ‘what are you going to do’. I said ‘I can’t do anything, lash it off the bottom or something Barney’. He said ‘he said it’s too good to lash it off the bottom, after all the effort you’ve put in’. He said ‘send it in as it is’.

192. **BR:** And so I wrote, I got on a piece of chocolate and in old English I wrote ‘Ye olde barrow’ and I put a little plaque beside it and sent it in anyway. I was awarded a gold medal for it. The head chef in the Metropole had sent in baskets of flower with sugar.

193. **BR:** And so I wrote, I got on a piece of chocolate and in old English I wrote ‘Ye olde barrow’ and I put a little plaque beside it and sent it in anyway. I was awarded a gold medal for it. The head chef in the Metropole had sent in baskets of flower with sugar.

194. **MM:** Was that Marley at the time?

195. **BR:** Yeah, actually he was second, you see. Anyway I went up, the judges were over from France, they were French you see and I went up, brought it up, I was nearly kissed on each cheek but anyway your man gave me a gold medal. Came back to the Gresham and nobody else in the Gresham had won anything and they were ‘Macker’ was over the moon, ‘you beat these foreigners
and all this.’ He hated foreigners you know. Next morning I got a phone call from Mickey Mullen, ‘Willie we want to see you and bring your gold medal with you please.’ Okay I said maybe they want a photograph and so I went over there and Marley over there you see and he was President of the Chef’s Committee which eventually became the panel of chefs, so they had the results on the table in front of them, all who got medals and all that and he said ‘see here in a certain section you were awarded a gold medal.’ I said ‘yes I have here with me.’ I was delighted, you know. He said ‘there has been a mistake’ and I said ‘what kind of mistake?’ He said ‘chef Marley here from the Metropole, he got the gold medal, you got the silver medal.’ ‘No’ I said ‘I was awarded by the French guys’. ‘But looking at the marks here’ he said ‘Marley got something like 98 and you only got 97 marks out of a 100’ and you’ll have to give him the medal. And like and idiot I gave it over, thinking back, I should have said no.

196.MM: It was a fix?

197.BR: Marley was a big man in the union you know. Well I don’t know if it was a fix, I won’t say it was but I…..

198.MM: Possession is nine/tenth of the law. Tell us about you went back to the airport, right, Flahive came looking for you as such now, was Kilbride still at the airport at the time.

199.BR: No he was gone and he was gone to the Shelbourne as second chef and…..

200.MM: And now what’s his name now, Eoin Dillon.

201.BR: Owen was manager of Shelbourne Hotel.

202.MM: He knew him from being a commis in the Gresham before that.

203.BR: Well I remember when he was in the Gresham he used to be calling out the orders in the kitchen, you know, on a microphone and you know and eventually he became general manager of the Tara Hotel in London.

204.MM: He did very well for himself.

205.BR: He did, oh yeah.

206.MM: So who was in the airport then when you went back that time then?

207.BR: Willie Johnson was second chef.

208.MM: So Flahive was head chef?

209.BR: Very good administrator.

210.MM: But he was more an executive chef than a head chef?

211.BR: He would have been a perfect executive chef but don’t get him to stuck on the range beside you because he couldn’t, he’d blow his top, you know what I mean. No matter how much you were swinging on the range he couldn’t come over and help you. Oh my god, Saturday nights there were bedlam, but I used to love it for some reason.

212.MM: The busier the better?

213.BR: That’s right, I was that kind of person. I was going to tell you a little secret of mine. A little secret I used to carry. When I was in the Russell Hotel, Rolland used to have to little decorations and on his display skewers he had lovely truffles, and like whole tomatoes peeled,
everything glazed and turned and that and I used to be mesmerised by this and asking myself how
does he do that? Ah he said to the larder chef one day, these truffles must be very expensive, they
looked nearly the size of eggs. He said ‘there’s a trick to that, Rolland wouldn’t tell anyone.
They’re not really truffles at all’. ‘There not!’ says I, ‘there the most perfect truffles I ever saw’,
so I said ‘how does he do them’. ‘Oh’ he said ‘he does them behind closed doors.’ So there was a
*commis* there and he used to have sometimes, you know, have to get him his tea or coffee or
whatever and I said to him ‘will you found out what he’s doing with those truffles?’ And the
*commis* did (laugh). And I said ‘how do these truffles come about because nobody could
(inaudible)’. He said ‘their made from coffee flakes.’ And how does he make them from coffee
flakes. He said ‘he binds them with gelatine, coffee flakes with gelatine and then he makes into a
paste and then he drops them into ice water, you know. I tried it. I could make little knobs on
them at all.

214.I was doing a buffet out at the airport one day cause I liked decorating salmon and all this sort of
stuff and I had a few of these lovely truffles on and Johnny Opperman who thought he knew
everything, he didn’t love me because I didn’t really like him at the time because he thought he
was better than everyone, as a manager, you know. No chef would come up to him, he knew
better than them, you see and Flahive was perfect for him, so then like he complained to Flahive
that I was using too much truffles and it was stupid what looking for, the expense of the things, he
was stupid to be buying them in and all that sort of stuff and I said there not costing you anything,
not a penny. But he said ‘where did you get them from?’ And I said ‘All I can tell you is their not
truffles, you can examine them as much as you like.’ He did and he never copped on.

215.MM: But they would have that, when I think of that fine coffee grain, they would have that
same texture as a truffle.

216.BR: So there you are now. You can you use them in decorations but don’t ever try (laugh) to
eat them. I think I’ve told a lot of things that you didn’t want to know.

217.MM: No, no, it’s all what I’m interested in hearing. A few things I want to ask, what about
special black fast days or lent or you know were there certain things like over the years that have
changed or was there certain times when people would only eat this, that or the other, you know
what I mean. Was it always fish on Friday?

218.BR: Of course. Fish was always the thing on Friday but it’s a long time gone now, it’s all
gone now, you’d hardly remember it. It’s so long gone now I hardly remember it but there’s no
doubt about it omelettes and fish, stuffed omelettes even, you know, and fish stuffing with prawns
whatever, they were always the things on Fridays and you sauce and I mean prawn dishes, these
were all the things in vogue at the time, but not in England.

219.MM: It was an Irish catholic thing really.

220.BR: There was a degree of it in England as well but not like…..

221.MM: Not the same extent. Technological changes like when you started on like you said some
places were coal like up in the Russell there was a coal range as such and you were stoking it and
all this sort of stuff trying to keep control of temperature and all that sort of stuff. That all
changed over the years then?

222.BR: It did indeed, I remember working in the Savoy Hotel kitchen, every morning you came
in there were loads of rats in it. I remember Princess, she was Princess at the time dining up in the
dining room, royalty herself and her pals, socialists, often used to have dinner parties of ten or
twelve up in the…..

223.MM: Is this the current Queen.
Yeah but when she was Princess then. I think she’s fifty years Queen but you know I’m going back a long time you know. I remember her having dinner parties and I remember actually cooking what they call a *cote de boeuf roti* I personally cooked it for her, and the chef would go off early on the roast corner and I remember the sauce cook and the vegetable cook sending over a big garnish tray this size for it, asparagus etc. and I’d organise the jus and always fresh watercress in the sauce pot. Beautiful fresh watercress in the sauce pot and they used big dome lids, everything went out. I never saw a waiter nearly in all the time I was there!!.

You mean everything was carried up stairs and it was the *commiss* waiters?

It was the *commiss* waiters. The chef came down and handed in the docket, explained whatever he wanted to do. Anyway he called out the order. You didn’t see the waiter after. The *commiss* brought it out and when the chef, Alban or one of the *sous chefs*, I can’t remember his name, they roasted it down the kitchen, no microphone, roared for that dish away. You had to walk up with it like that, beautiful silver, all the silver was all engraved all around that not like plain dishes, all engraved dishes you know, and there was a silver room near by, never hardly ever saw a plate, it’s all plates now, but everything was silver then, but the man in charge of the silver wore a morning suite and he used to bring in the silver and put it on the range up over you, the different dishes that you’d required on each corner and on the vegetable corner they used dishes called *doublefonts*.

Right, yeah that had the hot water inside?

And you’re on the vegetables, you had your boiling water on the bottom part at the back of the range. When the chef called it away, had your vegetables straight out of your chaud pan and whatever, you know, straight in to the lid up on top onto a doilies on another silver dish and carry it up straight up to the hot plate like that. That was it. I mean that was class for Royalty.

The other thing is like say gender in kitchens, like women. I know women worked in kitchens on vegetables and stuff like that like where did you see the first sort of woman chef?

Well the first woman chef I saw she was Clery’s when I went in but she was more like a grill cook. She could cook steaks and do fish and chips and that kind of stuff. I know I never worked in the Hibernian Hotel but I believe there was a larder cook there called Mary Murphy and I heard that she was an excellent larder cook, that she could decorate and anything better than any chef there. I met her one time at some place at some function or other but I never worked there. I tell you Liam worked in so many places I always call him Liam but.....

I know him as Bill, you know what I mean......

He worked in the Hibernian, he worked in the Shelbourne, he worked in the Central.....

He worked in Jammets.

His brother worked in the Red Bank.

His brother yeah. His brother would have worked with you then in Collar of Gold.

Oh yeah, Eddie. Ah Eddie was all right, he was okay, you know.

That was the end (laugh) of Kilbride up in the Collar of Gold I believe.

You see I tell you Jimmy Kilbride is a very well read guy. I tell you when he went out of the Shelbourne Hotel he went straight into Cathal Brugha Street and at that point I knew Michael.

Ganly.
Michael Ganly and for a short time I was on the chef’s committee over in the union for a short time and Michael Ganly was there. I didn’t care for that kind of stuff. It was too much. An awful lot shop talk but I used to see him at the catering exhibitions and I got a phone call from him in the airport one day and he asked me would I drop in to talk to him and see him and he said come in here as a part-time lecturer, that was years and years ago and he said ‘Jimmy Kilbride is here and he’s recommended you as well to come in’. But I said ‘how can I do that’. It was very awkward to organise everything out in the airport because on the seven day in the kitchen where I was anyway, on a seventh day. Well you’d have to say well every second week I’m coming into the college come in on that day and it would have interferes with things like that. Now if I’d been working in the flight kitchen they all came in at six in the morning and finished at two and so they could take all afternoon classes or night classes or whatever they want. That’s how the (inaudible).

And Gerry Connell.

And Gerry Connell and Jim Bowe.
And Jimmy Rock and a number of them. When did you start teaching in the college?

When they were in college, after twenty-seven years in industry.

And at what age did you retire at?

Sixty-three. Bill Kavanagh was in the college and as soon as I retired he said Michael Ganley recommended me as well to go in so I went down and I saw Joe Erraught and Joe Erraught said come in past nine and I said okay. He said would I do classes working back to back with Liam Kavanagh, and I said ‘that’s handy Liam I said because they’ll be doing first year classes and second whatever. I said ‘you write out the menus for your classes and I’ll give the kids and duplicate the order’. And we did back to back.

You do one week and I’ll do the next.

No he was in one class, say kitchen 20 or 21 and I was in the other.

How many years of that did you do like when did you stop that?

I think I was doing for about 5 years, 6 years maybe 7 I don’t know. It was beginning to loose the appetite.

I’m not even half your age and I’m loosing track (laugh).

I liked the college, I often felt that I’m sorry I didn’t get into this earlier.

I have a question for you, there was a guy, Colin O’Daly, was he a commis of yours?

Colin O’Daly worked with me for five years. He was, when he started his father had a good job in the airport in maintenance, he was like maintenance manager which was a very big job in those days and Colin had been delicate when he was young, he was in and out of hospital so he didn’t get much education and couldn’t go on to college so anyway he was fond of cooking, Colin was at home, and his father asked could he come into the kitchen, to become a commis chef. Jimmy Doyle had become head chef at this time. They had a funny way in the airport. Whoever stayed the longest was next up on top.

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Jimmy Doyle was quite good actually, he was, and when he became head chef he became a bit of mad man but he was very good when he was just as a chef. But anyway he said ‘oh yeah send him in’ and Colin came in, a little skinny young fellow, couldn’t speak and there were a few hard young fellows in the place as there always in, tough little guys and Jimmy Doyle says ‘I’ll let him work with you and keep an eye on him’, and I said ‘yeah that’s okay’. And he turned out a very nice lad you see and everywhere he was with me for five years. If I was in the larder or I was doing anything any job, I had Colin or if I was on the desserts and he also got very interested in the artistic, I used to do all the buffets and they used to be very big buffets with galantines and pheasants with feathers and all this kind of stuff and he loved working with me on the range and he became a very, very, good commis and he was nearly ‘over the top’ good, you know what I mean. I remember one night in particular, I mean we were swinging for the roof, he and I would be doing that and another chef would be doing the vegetables you know. So we had an order for four portions of lobster, or was it glazed lobster thermidore, and I had shown him how to do the gondolas…..

With the napkins like?

But I had invented myself, it was me who invented putting tin foil in them
To give the shape to give them the strength yeah.

And I invented that myself and I discovered that by accident out in the airport and gosh we used to make lovely ones, and Opperman didn’t know how they were made and I think he was a bit jealous, going on ‘where did ye get these?’ And I’d say ‘ah no there all right now.’

They came in the back door with the truffles (laugh).

Because they used tin foil they could bend them up that way or we could reverse that way. But one and if you had something like that, two portions maybe of lobster, but anyway one night we were swinging, game in the oven and ducks here, prawns hanging out of here and an order for four portions of this you know, normally we’d just put them in a doilies or something, out you know, out on a silver dish you know. And I said to Colin ‘what are you doing?’ And I looked over and here he is making the gondolas (laugh) for the four portions. God we haven’t time to be making gondolas, get over here. ‘But, but, Willie I though that’s what you’d like’. He was a very good young fellow you know. And Colin he left after five years because you had the leave the airport after you did five years you know. Ah he was a great lad and he had so much interest and he loved anything I was doing, you know. I would say now, I nurtured him a lot in those five years. Lucky enough after he left the airport he went onto much better things because he went to Ashford Castle, places like that where he learnt from chefs who were after coming back from continent, who had served their time in the continent and he really went up and up and up and then he opened a restaurant in Blackrock and he invited me out. Oh I had a lovely meal out there because he was very good. My wife and I and two of my family were with me there about three months ago.

In Roly’s.

Yeah and I had never been to Roly’s but I rang up and made a booking. He had been in touch with me before and he said why don’t you come out for a meal? I felt like nearly like he’d be giving it to me and I felt like nearly I wanted a free meal and I didn’t want to be looking for a slap up meal but anyway about three months ago I decided I’ll pop in but I won’t tell him I’m coming. So I went out. But we had an excellent meal. It really was an excellent meal. It was lovely. I saw him in the background wearing a chef’s uniform but I kept away from him, kept my head down and when we were on our dessert I saw him going by and he had a suit on him and I said he’s going home so I said I’ll slip out the side and I’ll meet him going through, you see, and as I went out somebody said are you looking for somebody and I said ‘I’m looking for the boss Colin O’Daly’. He says ‘oh he’s upstairs, he’ll be down in a minute and I’ll get him for you.’ I said, How are you Colin?’ and ‘Oh my God’ he said ‘Willie Ryan I haven’t seen you for a good long time.’ My hair was gone grey and on and on. ‘Why didn’t you tell me you were coming here,’ ‘Don’t worry about that.’ I paid the bill, I think I had paid the bill. He got some drinks for us all and all that kind of stuff. Upstairs was packed and downstairs was packed.

The most successful restaurant in Ireland.

So he said you’ll have to come out again and have a proper meal with me. And I said ‘oh of course’ but I don’t like interfering with big business like that. And he was interested in a place and he opened it up in Florida.

In Florida that’s right yeah.

And he said ‘no he said I got rid of that’. I said ‘you were always a little bit artistic’ and so he was.

I was only looking yesterday he exhibited four paintings in…..

New York.
271.MM: Well there was an exhibit in Dublin that I just saw reviewed in the paper and his paintings were highly praised.

272.BR: And he has exhibited in New York.

Discussion about art and Bill’s painting

273.BR: But the first Chinese restaurant opened in Dublin was ah I think it was called the Luna in O’Connell Street. This was a foreign restaurant apart from Jammets maybe a bit of French and that kind of stuff and I remember like I said, I was only going with Rita at the time ‘a Chinese restaurant opened in Dublin, we’ll have to go there one night.’ ‘Oh I don’t think, I heard about this place kitty cat’.

274.MM: Kitty cat, yeah, yeah, yeah.

275.BR: I like Chinese food, I like all kinds of food. I can eat nearly anything so I went along, we went along and I order something like chicken chow mein and (inaudible) so the waiter came along, the Chinese waiter and said ‘what will you have’ and I said ‘chicken chow mein’ and he said to Rita ‘what will you have’ and she say ‘can I have a bacon and egg please if you don’t mind.’ (Laugh). And I still slag her over it. And she says ‘I did not’. I said ‘you did’, I know that. It’s wonderful for today’s chefs because you have seen so much different foods around the world. There is so much immigrants into the country that’s bringing these dishes as well as people who are going and bringing them back. But it’s fantastic the food, but you will still get some bad food in some places.

276.MM: Unfortunately. Did you eat out much over the years in Dublin?

277.BR: No not much.

278.MM: Where would you gone, where would have gone now for your birthday or for an anniversary or somewhere, so would you ever have gone out somewhere nice like…..

279.BR: My son is married to a Chinese girl. He lived in Singapore for a while with her and he got married out there. She’s an excellent cook because she went to university; I think she went to Cambridge or some place. She’s an engineer like my son but to help to pay her way through college in London, that’s where he met her in London she worked in a restaurant but she worked part-time in a restaurant waiting and she used to give a hand in the kitchen in her spare time and she’s actually good at cooking. She learnt a lot there and I can see it now cause I love being invited to her house. She’s excellent and she always puts up something different. She also has the continental, not the continental the…..

280.MM: The oriental.

281.BR: The foreign, oriental touch. Oh God she’d put you to shame now she would and I like going to Chinese restaurants, I do I have to say it and she’s brought us out to a few places when she was in London, she brought us to a few good restaurants. But in Ireland, in Dublin I’m not inclined to go out.

282.MM: They say when you’re used to good food at home it’s very hard to go out isn’t it (laugh).

283.BR: It’s nothing classy but good simple food.

284.MM: I’d better hit the road or I’ll be divorced!!!
Edited Interview with Matt Dowling in CERT House Amiens Street (19/2/2004)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Matt Dowling (MD)

1. MM: When and where were you born?

2. MD: I was born in Inchicore. I was actually born in Crumlin, Stanaway Road in 1945. My Dad worked on CIE railway and moved to Inchicore when I was about six years of age as it was quite near where my Dad worked.

3. MM: So he worked in the works?

4. MD: Yeah, he worked there in the (Inchicore) works, alongside a lot of men but when I was about 14, I was supposed to go to James’ Street (school). I was the oldest of a big family. There was seven sisters after me so there was no way I was going to James’ Street for six years and money was short enough. You just knew yourself, it wasn’t as if somebody ever told you. So I took the option of going to technical school, V.E.C., in Inchicore. Well, I certainly excelled there. I suppose because I love Irish, it helped me through all of my exams. You were given top marks in Irish and it pulled you through on your average score.

5. I remember one day, going home and father was working with this guy and his son happened to be a waiter in the Russell and he said to me ‘There’s a job going in that hotel, do you want to be a chef?’ Well my uncle had been a chef in England, and was a chef and been in the British army and had come out and worked with Henley on Thames in the regatta there and he always had plenty of money, big cars, fast suits and every time he came home, we got money off him so, it certainly looked very promising to me. So I said ‘yes, I didn’t mind’ and my father actually brought me down to the schoolteacher, Mr Brick, who was the schoolmaster at the time and explained. I think it was about April or I think it was March when he brought me down but I started in the Russell in April in 1960. He told him that this job came up, it looked very promising, they were going to indenture me, which they did and would they release me from school and could I go back and do my exams. Well, they actually agreed, so I went to the Russell, my father brought me down, the guy who was a waiter obviously set up the interview and I remember going there as a young boy, fourteen years of age. That would be a scandal nowadays – child labour! (laugh) Father brought me down, it was evening time and the French chef was there and the second chef was a fellow called Jackie Needham. Becky was the head chef.

6. MM: Was Rolland gone then or…..?

7. MD: Rolland had been there and gone back to the Bahamas. He spent a few years in the Bahamas in the interim. Didn’t come back ‘til near the end of the 60’s, so Becky was the head chef.

8. MM: So what was his first name, or well whole name?

9. MD: I don’t remember what Becky’s name was, but Becky was always his name. Jackie (Needham) was the second chef, and he’s since deceased.

10. MM: That’s only recently, only a year ago?

11. MD: Yeah, about a year ago, yeah. And Jackie spoke excellent French but as flat (accent), as flat could be. I remember interpreting him to the chef; he asked me if I knew any languages and I thought I was great telling him I had fluent Irish, and the two of them just laughed at me. I was very upset about this. And while I didn’t know any French, I could certainly read a body language at fourteen years of age. So I think after that, they must of told my father I could start and I had to
go back to the school and sign to say I was leaving and I think I started that Monday, had no uniforms and my father had to go and get a trading cheque, and I had never heard of such a thing.

12. MM: A trading cheque?

13. MD: Yes, a trading cheque. It was a thing that different companies used, Blackrock catering company and other different companies used; it was like a loan of money. You could buy your goods there and pay back on a weekly basis. That time you weren’t supplied with uniforms. You had to buy everything: a hat, an apron. Only thing you didn’t get was shoes, there was no such thing as safety shoes then. You’d get your worst pair of shoes, ones with no heels on them, and its no wonder why we all have varicose veins actually (laugh)!

14. So I remember going in and starting on my first day, obviously extremely nervous. But there was a guy there called Arthur McGee. And Arthur McGee lived in Inchicore. I didn’t know him, but he had obviously found out about me. I suppose, you don’t so much notice it or realise it as young people, but as adults we are quite nurturing.

15. MM: He was from Bulfin Road wasn’t he?

16. MD: That’s right. His father was a policeman. And I remember the first job I put on the roast and he was the roast chef and I was put in the roast corner. And by God! What I think they learn in fourteen weeks, we learned in four months there, could have been anything. And your basic job was starting off chopping the parsley, cutting the chips for the staff, pounding the salt in the mortar, sifting it and distributing it around to all the chef de partie, running in and out for the pots for the chef. When an order came in, you’d have to go and get the pot. He’d leave it on the floor underneath where he was working. You brought it out to the ‘plonger’ – kitchen porter. He washed for you and you waited for it and brought it back and you always had to be spotless. So everyday you went in, you had an inspection by the head chef, the sous chef or the chef de partie and I stayed there, in the Russell ’till the end, ’till it was actually closing.

17. MM: ’Till ’74?

18. MD: In between that. Then, after six months you were told by the company, if you were good after six months, they would tell you and the company was in debt to you and you were never let be forgotten that at home. Everyday you went home, you’re mother would ask you ‘what did you learn today and don’t forget, you indenture is coming up soon, I hope you’re behaving yourself in there’. So there were double threats, there was a threat from home, there was threat from your family and there were threats from the job. Your mother was saying ‘don’t you come home here and tell me you got sacked, your father would be very disappointed’. You know, you were pressurised and you were only fourteen. So you weren’t left open to any choice so you weren’t able to think ‘I might go to the Shelbourne or I might go to be a pageboy’. And you’d greatly envy the pageboys; they were getting lots of money. Think about 35 shillings a week, at 32 and 6. Actually it was 32 and 6 we started on and it went up to 35 shillings. Your mother took the 30 shillings and left you with the 2 and 6. And I never told her the next year I got my rise but she knew I got a rise every year so she collared me for retrospection (laugh). So I tell you, money was fairly tight then. But, well I loved it.

19. MM: So what sort of hours were you doing first?

20. MD: We were doing, I was on shift. A five-day week with two days off every week, which was great. In the early stages, you had a day and a half off, which was very good and that was every week. That was every second Sunday and a day and a half so, you got a day and a half off and every second Sunday and that’s the way it worked. My half-day was nearly always Saturday, because I spun a sad story to the chef. My father, well he actually wasn’t well but he used to do these collections of money and I always helped him, even when I was a young fellow, so I told him he needed me to help him, so they were fairly good. So when you really look back on life, you
know they actually were really good. You know, you look back and there are always negativities but they really were good. So I must have been a flying young commis, I was getting fattened in there. Ah, I never saw so much trifles, gateaux’s, eh Paris Brests, millefeuille, jelly!!!

21. MM: And you got to sample all of these like? What were the staff meals like at this stage?

22. MD: Well, the staff meals were great. Well the staff, the kitchen ate in the kitchen and it was up to the chef de partie to provide. There was a set menu, a group menu done by the chef de cuisine. He actually wrote out the staff menu every day and that was for all the staff. But there were always luxuries for the head chef, or the kitchen staff. Always luxuries. The patisserie had a commis and he was trying out choux pastry one day and he made buns and sent them in, mostly for the evening tea. Em, the meals were reasonably good. You could nearly list them off: Monday was the roast chicken and the roast potatoes and the veg. Tuesday was the casserole and the roast potatoes and the veg. Tuesday was the casserole and Wednesday was spaghetti bolognaise but no one would eat it, no one would eat pasta in the bolognaise or the macaroni, just wouldn’t eat it and Thursday…

23. MM: Who ate, now at this stage was there many foreign chefs working in the kitchen?

24. MD: Yeah, quite a few. The pastry chef was always foreign and the head chef was foreign and they nearly always had another foreign chef or two, foreign commis there as well. And the manager was Petrel at the time, before Fabron, he was also French. The whole place revolved around French, the menus were in French, the orders were in French, the chefs called out the orders in French, and you had to learn it fast. You had to say ‘ouì chef’ instead of saying ‘yeah, I’ll get them now’. You know, so there was all of that. And so yeah, the staff food was very good. You know, we all came from a humble background and on a Sunday we were getting legs of lamb, carved and freshly cooked. My farther said ‘bring home a bone’ and you know, he’d say ‘ask your man to leave the head on it’ (laugh). You know, so they were great and the food was very good. And after six months there, we got indentured. There were quite a few students, or what do you call them? Commis that started with me and we became friends with them and they had their night off on Tuesday nights and you were sort of encouraged by all the chef de parties to meet them, particularly the country lads who had nowhere to go. You’d go into Dublin, go into the city, go into Caffola’s, fifteen years of age, go into Record Hop, you know. No drink involved, it was all very easy. An easy life, and you were encouraged. The next night they’d all be enthusiastic about what you did ‘Where did you go?’ If you didn’t meet him or didn’t turn up, you’d be admonished and told you were a bad boy and told not to do it again.

25. MM: So the nurturing was there to look after the country boys as well?

26. MD: They made sure they did that as well, yeah. And we all got on great. Then we all became indentured and I suppose it was one of the highlights of my father’s career because I was a young boy, fifteen years of age, told I was going to get this apprenticeship. Went in, Ken Besson was the owner of the Hotel, so he in turn then was in the Hibernian. Very few humble people went to the Hibernian for drinks on a Thursday evening. Suddenly, he was invited in with lots of other people. A friend of mine comes to mind, a fellow called Willie Summers. His dad worked on the buses as well and I’m sure he had the same kind of banter and chat. But they were given free bar, a few free drinks; they were all pleased with that. You know and we were all indentured. Now I still have my indentured document. A little bit frail since the years since the 60’s, a little bit frail, still have it, signed by your parents or guardian, signed by the Manager and signed by Ken Besson, the owner of the hotel. And you were then asked to join an in-house saving scheme and none of us wanted to that, we were only earning small money, the last thing we wanted to be doing was saving. If my mother gave me the money to save that would have been fine, but she wasn’t doing that. But the whole idea was that you pal up a waiter and the two of you would save and there would come a time when the two of you would of earned enough money to put a down payment on a franchise or even a restaurant. Besson was before his time and he wanted us to do that and he was going to help us to get these premises. I don’t know of anyone who ever did it, nobody. Now I think it was before his time and I partly believe that we lacked education, that we weren’t sure of ourselves, we
were all great chef and great cooks but when it came to accounts, we were all fearful. And a lot of the stuff was beat into us too, there is a lot of people ready to rip you off, so we had to be careful!

27. **MM:** You were afraid to take the risk, essentially?

28. **MD:** Yeah, but after that we became first years, then second years and so on. And I remember I was on the deserts but we were from the roasted veg. and I loved the veg., the veg. corner was great. People nowadays have no real love for veg. but if you ever worked in the 60s as an entremetier, you had a love for veg. and the soups and your garnish and your farinaceous dishes and we had to do all that and you had to give all your garnishes to the chef de partie who always wanted something new but that was great, I loved it. I was there for a year and I loved the veg. and a lot of us loved the veg. Everything was fresh. And it was always the 1st of May, it stuck in your mind and the fresh pod peas would come in, the French beans would come in. The spinach would come in a different colour. All along it was this big coarse like white cabbage leaves and all of a sudden you get these lovely spring leaves, gorgeous stuff to cook with. And you got a real. Love, a real feel for food! This chef de partie, Jackie Needham, the second chef, whatever he saw in me, he thought I was a good little worker and he put me on the sauce corner after that and wouldn’t let me off it. And I was there for a long time; I was there for two and a half years on the sauce corner.

29. **MM:** So how long would you have, so you started off, so how long would you have spent on the veg before going on to the sauce?

30. **MD:** I’d had about a year on it. Six months in the roast and that seemed to be easy enough, a year on the veg and then onto the sauce corner. I never, and I was there from ’60 to ’74 and I never was into pastry, I never got a chance to get into the pastry house. It seemed to be a closed shop. Now there was always French patisseries, they either liked you or disliked you. If you made an effort to speak their language, they liked you. There was a group of us, cocky young lads and we didn’t want to speak their language because they would speak in French to each other and we resented all that. We had to learn their language but they didn’t have to learn our language, so we resented all that. In hindsight we were all stupid, we would have been better off going the other way, if we’d known, ah sure, old shoulder now, but we resented some of it. But the pastry chef, you couldn’t get into the pastry, you had to be a really nice guy and you had to, you had to be very polite. You had to be a ‘lick ass’, I won’t use that word!

31. **MM:** Sycophantic we’ll call it. (laugh)

32. **MD:** Yes, yes you could certainly call it that (laugh). But I ended up on the sauce and I was on the sauce for about three years and then Rolland came back. I’m not sure when Rolland came back, I’m sure it was ’65. There was a good few chefs working in there with me then, there was Willie Woods, Ned Ingram, Colm Ingram, his brother, Arthur McGee, I think he was still there, he may have left in ’63. They were guys I remember Jackie Needham and a fellow called Ken Martin. When Rolland came back, he restructured the whole set-up, the way he wanted it run. He still had the chef de partie system but he empowered us, which was great. It gave some of us extra money above other chef de parties there. Just to make sure that he was going to go away in the end of August, say September, went back to the Bahamas. Jackie Needham took over as head chef. He came back then in May and he wanted the whole place to run smoothly, even if he wasn’t missed. But he was greatly missed because he had a great presence. It wasn’t like what he really done, but it was his presence alone that really made you, you know, he demanded tremendous respect. And even to this day, I do see why he got it. But we’d get extra money. And he’d go away again in September, we’d get increased by, I think it was 10 shillings a week which was a big lot of money to us, it was a huge bonus to us. Of course when he came back, he’d take it all back off you. ‘Cause what you did then is you go cry to the manager saying you’ve got the live, so you’d leave the 10 shillings. Then the next time he’d go away, you’d look for it again. So it was games, well we weren’t greatly paid, we were well paid but not greatly paid. That was a bit of fun. I suppose when he was there, well, everyone looked forward to him coming, because we knew it was going
to be busy. There was a tremendous air of, people who had a French chef, in Dublin in the 60s and the place had to be plush. Now I think the Russell proved that. I suppose then I was made second chef when Jackie Needham went. Myself and Ned Ingram shared second chef. That was a huge moral boost but it was difficult because don’t forget, you were young, you weren’t getting trained enough, I see that now as a downfall. I see it now, as a trainer now, you weren’t really educated enough for these roles. You were being promoted within a ladder that was there and you could only do a step up the rungs. But everyone around you were the same people. You weren’t able to change any of their personalities. In fact, some of them resented you getting that job and them not getting (it). Maybe they didn’t even want it but they resented you being enterprising as well. So that became a great difficulty when you became, sort of, the sous chef, especially on a Sunday, some of them wouldn’t be pulling their weight, for a better word, or weren’t conforming, as we call it now. What happened after that then? Eh, Rolland left for good; he went back and left for good.

33. MM: But the busiest time was the summer? Say spring into summer?

34. MD: Ah spring into summer, yeah. From May ‘til September was the time we knew. And they were the real hype. You know, what we called ‘swinging’, not sure what it’s called now. But we did 100 covers in the restaurant and it was only a 70-seater restaurant. So if you do 100, you have to do a turnover of another 30 people. Now we did 100, I mean, that was called so busy that you actually got free beer. If you were under 18, you got a mineral, if you were over 18, you got a free beer. And that was given out in the dispense bar. I’m sure you’re familiar with the dispense bar. That was great. But I mean, if you were only at 90 you’d actually be dragging them in off the street you’d want to get another 10. If you only got to 70, you wouldn’t want to do another 20. But if you got to 90 and it was 10 o’clock, everyone would hang on or if you’d only done 85 and you knew you weren’t going to do another 15 and it was 10.30, you’d all be clearing down. The chef would let you go off early, but you were expected to stay if it was busy. The Horse-Show Week was the hype of the hype of the earth. At that time, in the 60s, don’t forget, the RDS was the place for the show jumping, the Aga Khan actually stayed in the Russell. So the fact that his presence alone, with people and tours, and we didn’t even do tours but busloads of people came. And just for him to be dining in there, the whole feeling of ambience in the place and elegance. People loved to know that the Aga Khan was there, and he was well promoted by the newspapers; there was television but not as great as it is now. So we loved it. And we would be swinging for lunch and dinner. And people would actually come for lunch and they’d go to the horse-show and then come back for evening dinner. Now, they go to the horse-show, they have their lunch there and they’re marquees and all. So that has greatly changed because they have seen the markets there. So they don’t want people going back to the Russell or the Shelburne so we’ll see what we can do. So the Horse Show was great and no one got a day off on the Horse Show, which was great again because the whole brigade was together. It was the only time we ever had; I think, 24 in the whole brigade. There was 24 in the brigade altogether and no one had a day off. You got overtime at some stage, later on. No wonder the place closed down, we all got so much overtime! But it was great, we enjoyed it. Then September, there always came a lull, October, a lull. Lunch trade would be reasonably good but you’d do maybe 40 or 50 for lunch.

35. MM: But it was still a busy thoroughfare because, was it Harcourt Street Station was still open, wasn’t it?

36. MD: Yeah, It closed in the mid 60s. All of Harcourt Street was huge, it was full of small B & Bs and small hotels there and even though a different type of clientele would stay it, it was a huge big thoroughfare right onto Stephen’s Green. Stephen’s Green was the place to be. And all the elite would stay in the Russell. Now we in the kitchen, we never bothered about who was there. It was unimportant. You know, how many was booked for dinner? How many was booked for lunch? And we’d only be screaming ‘you’re on this, you’re on that’.

37. MM: There was never any ‘airs or graces’ about who you were actually feeding, it was just put the food out?
38. **MD:** No. We’d just hear and the orders would come down the aboyer or the head chef would call out the orders for Mr so-and-so. But it wouldn’t mean a thing to us. I mean, he could say ‘très soineé’. Now depending on how he said ‘très soineé’, you knew what he was really saying. He said ‘très très soineé, passion’, it meant ‘you be careful, it’s a good customer’. But he didn’t tell you that, it was just are we doing ok? Is everything going to be très soineé? So we had all of that, you learned all those words and you had to learn them. And I remained on the sauce and became the head sauce chef. And it was a tough job, I’ll tell you that. It was physical, it was tough. Someone said ‘you never put on an ounce of weight’ and I said ‘sure I wouldn’t have time to’. But you had your lunch from 12 till 12.30 and if you were going to be busy or if you knew you were going to massacred, for a better word, at 12.30, the orders are piling up at twenty-five past, you certainly weren’t going to have lunch, and that’s where you got a great development of other people working in the organisation. Like kitchen porters and like stillroom maids and we used to have a woman that used to do, sort of, pantry maid, for a better word - she would peel potatoes and scrub carrots and she’d prep some *mises en place*, set the staff table. But if she knew one of the chefs were busy, she would make you tea or a sandwich, she would go and get it upstairs and bring it down and say ‘I know you didn’t have lunch, there, have a sandwich’. You’d have it while you’d be there. And that developed a huge camaraderie and that was one of the things I found, certainly in the Russell anyway and although we still see each other, were always still the best of friends now because, you know, water under the bridge and you loose some of the pebbles – yeah and I do say that. Whatever happened then?

39. **MM:** But there was good rapport in the kitchen?

40. **MD:** Tremendous rapport. We loved it. And we were actually told that not to be looking down, not to be going down for jobs anywhere else, that we were the elitists. It was imbedded into us, I actually believe that till this day. And I meet friends of mine, Jim Bowe, he’d say ‘ah sure Jim works in Jury’s’ and I’d say ‘ah Jim, would you stop, you know, you should have come to the Russell, for real training!’ I would get a belt off him, you know. (laughing)

41. **MM:** The more I’m talking to people, the more I see what you’re saying is true, though, that talking about the likes of Bill Ryan and the likes of that, lads who worked all over the world and that they really said that the Russell was where it was at. That it was the equal of anywhere in England or anywhere abroad, you know, it really was.

42. **MD:** Well, if it wasn’t right, if the food wasn’t right going across the hot plate, it wasn’t going across the hot plate. No *cloche* went on it.

43. **MM:** But even he was talking about lovely presentation and stuff, you know, they’d bring out the long, em what do you call then, not javelins but em, they used call them, the big long, sort of flats, you know…

44. **MD:** Ah yes, torpedo. The torpedoes. But everything was silver. Everything went in silver. And the flats went from number one, flat two, three, four, five and then those were torpedoes. And it was depending on how many cutters you’ld be sending out. But it was all silver service. The veg was all silver service, there was no, there was never plate service. Actually what I said there was a contradiction. The only plate service was breakfast and a grilled sirloin. They were the only plate service. Other than that, they all went in silver. No matter what it was. There was *Ris de Veau* or *Cervelle*, for a better word or *Rognons*.

45. **MM:** Now tell me this, did you always have, because of this, you know, did you always have *fleurons* with your fish and did you always have, like your eh…?

46. **MD:** Only certain, only certain, there was *Chablais au natural*, was with turned mushroom and with *fleurons* on it.
47. **MM:** So did you always have indications of portion like that or some way to indicate portion, or was it sort of...?

48. **MD:** Oh yeah, we had a torpedo and we had four fillet soles and we’d four *fleurons* on it and four mushrooms, but you’d definitely have that. They would be counted upstairs by the waiters, well before they came into the room. So it was checked leaving the hot plate, it was doubled checked going upstairs and before it went into the room so there was no making a ‘fu-fa’ in front of the customers. Because that was all done Gueridon service: present it, Gueridon, and then plate it then from the Gueridon and back on to the customer. So if you were ever short of three, two pieces of fish, there was trouble. You couldn’t serve a table six if you were short of two pieces of fillet of sole. That would be sacrilege.

49. **MM:** Tell me something, we’ll talk about eh, just gender in the kitchen, like I take it, it was just a whole male kitchen except for the woman working, as you said, the woman working in the back?

50. **MD:** Oh yes. The one lady. And we all referred to her as the lady. There was no women. There was no women in the restaurant. Eh, there was *commis* waiters in the restaurant who wore the white aprons down to their, almost to their ankles. Headwaiters all wore collars and bow ties. There was one lady who served breakfast and there was a breakfast cook. Mainly a breakfast cook. After that the whole brigade was all men. My day was great because..

51. **MM:** And did that stay up till ’74?

52. **MD:** Yes. It went right through, even in the restaurant. Well basically what happened in the Russell was Rolland left and went off, he was retiring as well. His son worked with him as well. His son was always there, he died since, Henri was there as well. And Rolland was great too, Rolland was well able, his wife was, she was like his secretary, the rosters were always typed up. At that time no one could type, certainly not any of the chefs anyway. Not like we’re all computer literate now which is tremendous. But he would take off the roster, bring the roster home in the afternoon and he’d come back then with two or three copies. He’d be printing one outside his door and one on the other door and one on the wall. That would be the week’s roster. It would be all typed and very neat, neatly done. We’d all be amazed at the...

53. **MM:** The organisation of it?

54. **MD:** Yeah, the organisation of it. It ups him to be a sort of a more, eh, sort of apt person, much more than we’d be. Far more educated, to get all this done. Well maybe he got it done upstairs in the office I don’t really know, but it looked like he brought it back from home. Now he probably did get it done in the office and we never called it ‘the office’, it was always called ‘the control office’. Not sure if you ever came across that before.

55. **MM:** But you looked up to him as such. Like for all these little extra things, made him stand out much more so?

56. **MD:** Well he was always immaculate. His hats had to be done in the Harcourt Laundry. And they had to be round, they were never flattened, they had to be round. They would come back and the insert, cardboard insert would be inside the hat. And the boy from the laundry would bring it down. We’d see him coming in. And that was a status in itself. And he was always immaculate. And he endorsed on us to be always clean as well and I don’t think it ever needed to be said because you took it from example. So everyone else, all the *chef de parties* were like that, you had to be like that. The record would stand out and they might say ‘what sort of home did you come from?’ - Like I do now when I’m training I say ‘what sort of home do you come from, is that the way that the way you are at home?’ Well, what else is there about the Russell?
57. MM: You would have been there then when em, like I know, the Michelin, the Michelin, you had the...

58. MD: The Egon Ronay star

59. MM: You had the Egon Ronay star. I have eh, at home. The Egon Ronay. You had actually a Michelin Star in ‘74? You’d. ‘Cause I think the Michelin came in ’74 but it had one just before because I actually have the copy.

60. MD: Oh right, nice one, you must show me that because I was there as the head chef in ’74 and I was probably helping to gaining all that. We had the Egon Ronay and if ever you lost a star or...

61. MM: When were you aware of the fact that this idea of stars or guidebooks was important?

62. MD: Ah when you were either in your third or fourth year. You would know. If you lost a star, there would certainly be a lot of admonishment. The Management, the place would be dull. Because if you lost a star meant you would loose customer and if you lost customers you’re going to loose staff. And all that also has a knock on effect ‘cause it could be you. And they might close this restaurant, or they mightn’t run this and they mightn’t run that and all the rumours, the grapevine rumours that goes around. We were always aware of stars and we strived for it. I recall one time I was in charge of the kitchen one night, and this order came in and I don’t know why I looked at it, but I recall it was ‘eggs Benedictine’, you know, and a few other items on it that wouldn’t be the normal, run of the mill that someone would come in and have it for starter and then have a Ris de Veau as an entrée, and then have a main course. But I said, but I recall saying to the chefs and the people in the kitchen around me, we were more colleagues trying to run the job than actually tiered management, you know. And I’d say ‘look, this looks V.I.P and I have my doubts with all that. That looks to me like Egon Ronay’, so I used to have the hollandaise made from 6 o’clock. You’d go back at 5.30; you’d make a batch of hollandaise then you’d go for your tea till 6 or half 6. This order came in at 8 o’clock so I went out into the reduction, put on your fresh, get your hollandaise up, start your tammis and put it through your tammis and poach the eggs at the last minute and send it up and make sure there’s a muffin and everything, none of your old toast. And it was just something we just clicked on. So I recall the next day and we were called to the manager’s office and when you were called to the manager’s office it was always a great trepidation because you would never believed you were going to get rewarded. Always you believed it would be an admonishment, you know. And he says ‘this order that came in yesterday’, he says eh, ‘how did you know it was Egon Ronay’? I says, you know, ‘I didn’t, it just seemed the style of order, it wasn’t a normal order that would come through’. So a fella, Bill Ogley, I think was the waiter and he was in the office with me and he turned to Bill Ogley and says ‘there’s a young chef who could even identify a customer’s different needs and you’re the head waiter talking to this person and didn’t even recognise that’, he says ‘you surprise me.’ So he was admonishing the waiter in front of me, which I felt bad about as well. But it was about the group with the Egon Ronay, but we retained our star. But I stayed there for a long time, till ’74. The Russell then came into bad times. Jackie Needham took over as head chef. Unfortunately, things didn’t work out his health didn’t work out well for him, a lot of it just deteriorated, some did the better chefs. Eamon Ingram had left; a lot of the good chefs had left.

63. MM: Did Eamon go straight to the Lord Edward after that?

64. MD: That’s right, yeah. He’d left. He was a good mentor of mine as well. I still have great respect for him, doesn’t mean I’m a great friend of his, but it’s a great professional respect for him. He was very good to me when I was young. Eamon went to the Lord Edward, still stayed there.

65. MM: Had Colm (Ingram) stayed long there?
66. **MD:** Colm stayed until the end. Colm stayed until ’74.

67. **MM:** He went on the boats, I know he was on the boats.

68. **MD:** Yeah, Colm stayed yeah. He was second chef to me and we should have been, we would have been better off, in hindsight now been joint chef de partie. You know, instead of having split shifts and having one head chef, you would get, he was there before me and the two of us would jockey. Because one position, one gets there one, one is behind. The one who was behind was there with a screwdriver or a dagger to let the air in, and telling all your mates ‘look at the way he’s doing it now and look at the way he’s doing it now.’ But Colm, in the end of the Russell in ’74, basically what happened in the Russell was, what I believe, the problem in Dublin became the bombings, The Monaghan Bombings, The bombings on Talbot Street. They became a knock on effect. A lot of our English visitors weren’t coming, certainly American’s weren’t coming and business people weren’t coming. They were doing business in England. A lot of the hotels on Harcourt Street started to close down because the influx of those businesses used to come and go to Bray for their holidays and they stopped coming. Then we had the burning of the (British) Embassy, now I think it was the Embassy in ’73, I’m trying to recollect because the Russell closed in ’74 and I think the Embassy closed in ’73. It burnt in ’73. Now that time, we had a directive problem, the Irish Transport General Workers Union told not to work. I recall Hector Fabron was the manager at the time and I was the head chef at the time, I mean, you were torn between the devil in the deep blue sea, you were the chef, you had responsibility to your employees, your subordinates, your other chefs. You were a union member and you had customers to look after, you had people staying in the house and you really didn’t want to protest.

69. **MM:** So the directive came down from the union not to work because of...?

70. **MD:** It, there was a one day strike.

71. **MM:** This was all based on all that happened in the north or...?

72. **MD:** Yeah, what happened in the North. You remember all the killings and the shootings. Bloody Sunday.

73. **MM:** Bloody Sunday. Yep, yeah.

74. **MD:** And I called Fabron, I don’t know where his loyalties really lied. He was a very active Fabron. You never really met the man did you?

75. **MM:** No, I never met him.

76. **MD:** Well he was a very paunch. His mother was French or his father was French and his mother was English but he came to Ireland, he worked in Scotland for a long time. But he was a stickler, now really for standards and hygiene he was excellent. But he was so good that you’d have to bring up your menus in the morning to him. He’d sit in his office and he’d read the menu. He’d do his corrections of his spelling, humble you, sitting at the end of his table ‘I told you before Dowling, there’s an ‘e’ over that line.’ You know, that’s the way he’d speak to you. And he still didn’t call you Matt or still didn’t call you chef and that was the downside of always getting a boy. He never gave a real reason. He had respect in ways but never had that real respect, you know. And he’d say ‘Ris de Veau again today, my god, you must be sick of it.’ So you couldn’t have put anything on the menu twice or three times, you’d change it, it wouldn’t be too bad. You know, make a pané or do it braised or fried in batter, you couldn’t have it the same way. And he’d be there every morning. But at that time we got the directive to strike, well it wasn’t a strike, it was a one-day stoppage and I said ‘what are we going to do with in-house people?’ You knew well you couldn’t stay in because if you did you were going to be a scab and you really wanted to do something. So he said ‘leave it with me.’ So he actually spoke to his clients and said ‘will you leave a number of stuff ready.’ So we left pousains ready and we left chateau potatoes ready and
we left a number of veg ready. But don’t forget, at that time, we had no microwave. Everything was chaudfond into the pot and do it all. He looked after it, said he’d looked after it. But one of my saddest days I have to say, was seeing that Embassy burn – it was my saddest, saddest day. It was a great bit of fun, comradeship going down telling this other country that, you know, we don’t want you killing people up there on us. That was great, it was fun but there was a lot of thugs there and that’s basically what happened and they went and they did that. And after that then we knew the saddest day in the Russell hotel was that evening when Fabron said, he says ‘this is the end of the Russell.’ He actually pre-empted what was going to happen. And we were owned by the Kingsley – Windsor group, the Lyons group hotel, Kingsley – Lyons group. They knew after that, what they were going to do, and they weren’t going to plough big money into the place.

77. MM: There was a story in the Hotel and Catering Review, an article about a brick coming through the window. Now, you don’t know when that was or? No I think it was to do with the Union Jack had been flown during the Horseshow?

78. MD: During the Horseshow? Yeah. I don’t know about it. And again, you’d be young and you’d only hear about it and it would only be glib sort of, talk. And you’d be, it had nothing to do with me. But it would. And the Union Jack and all the flags were flown on top of the Russell.

79. One of the other great things that the Russell did was they actually entertained external affairs. So we entertained external affairs so Iveagh House and Dublin Castle, so one of our prime customers was the government. So we would have, if there was a minister over to be entertained from any other country, we would, the Russell would submit, I say we as a collective term, three menus would be submitted to the department and they would select one of the menus and come back and that would be the menu for the day. So you always submitted three menus. And then you would always be hoping to be picked as one of the chef de partie to go to Iveagh house. Now, the ones that I think got picked was definitely the ones who didn’t have a great love for alcohol because Iveagh House was one of those places where there was free liquor and no control, so if you were a chef there and no one in charge of you, the managers didn’t go. So the headwaiter, a headwaiter was sent, the chef was sent, a team of commis or other chef were sent depending on the number. It was never any more, Iveagh house was never anymore than 40 people, max, you know. It was Dublin Castle for 100 (people), there would be a group of us, we would pick up the best, we always felt if you were picked to go to Iveagh House, you were good as well. That would always create some resentment as well, but it was up to the other chef de parties if they wanted to do it.

80. MM: Was there much problem in the catering with the drink?

81. MD: No, not really, yeah. The problem like in Iveagh House because if there was champagne over and there was half bottles sent down to the kitchen mostly the waiters would bring it down and they would drink it, so that would be a problem but it wouldn’t be a problem during the day. There was never a problem with on the job drinking. What I always see was the problem with this afternoon break, when you had a split yeah, and the split shift when you a lot of these mature guys that had no where to go and they go off then and they used to go to the Green cinema or go down to the Grafton (Cinema). Very few places to go in the afternoon, we used to go to the Winter Garden across the road we might have three or four pints in us and we would be fairly loaded. We would sober up and we would sweat it off for eight o’clock, you know, but there is never any access to alcohol. There was alcohol in the kitchen, there was red and white wine there was Brandy and there was Tia Maria, there was always Kirsh, there was always Maraschino, Sherry and Port.

82. MM: But it was treated with respect?

83. MD: But there was no, that wasn’t drank. Now certainly, the Irish chefs didn’t drink the wine at that stage. They love it now, but at that stage, we weren’t cultured enough. And we were learning. And there was one or two chefs, as I said, that liked a drop of the ‘crater’ or something, but you knew who they were, you know. But other than that, there was never, there was actually a
great pride in our work. You just wouldn’t get drunk. But there was occasions of course, you
know, there was occasions. But I was training with a great group of chefs. I mean, Louis Corrigan,
he’s in that photograph. He works in Guinness’s, Arthur McGee, em, Nicky O’Neill’s brother,
Vincent, you know, eh, Vincent O’Neill, he was a great veg chef. He loved it, and he was a great
veg chef. And he knew all the garnishes. Nowadays they just do a pea soup, what’s called pea
soup and there was twenty pea soups in the Russell, of all different garnishes.

84. MM: Now you’re sort of talking about Egyptian and all this sort of stuff?

85. MD: All garnishes, lambsale etc.. They would go by a Repertoire (de la Cuisine). If we
weren’t busy, you had to go to the office, you were thrown into the office and you read it. And you
said to the chef, not the head chef, the chef de partie ‘we’ll try that one tomorrow, we’ll try that
one tomorrow’ and he’d tell the chef, he’d say, the head chef would say ‘what soup do you want to
put on tomorrow?’ and he’d say ‘put on that one’ because he’d be encouraging you to cook the
reps that you would need as well. So they were greatly accommodating. The other group that was
always there was Larouse Gastronomique, was always in the kitchen. Now, they were two books
that were always there. Drink, I can’t remember how many people who liked a drink. I mean, as
life went on there was a few who were bordering on, touching on alcoholism because they liked
their drink. But generally, it went unnoticed.

86. MM: How about the technology, sort of thing, like by the time you got in the 60’s, you sort of
had gas and you had..?

87. MD: Yea they were just getting them in the 60s, yeah. They were just getting rid of coal fires,
they used coal fires and they were getting in the gas and the kitchen was small and it wasn’t long,
it was ’62 that they extended the kitchen downstairs. And it was still always downstairs, real,
upstairs downstairs type of house in Stephen’s Green. Down stairs was the dungeon. Even, just
off Harcourt Street was a chute came down Harcourt St on the Russell corner and Stephen’s Green
corner, chute came down..

88. MM: For deliveries and stuff.

89. MD: Deliveries of veg and potatoes would pull up there rather than come all the way around
the yard. There wasn’t great change, it did go from gas, and we certainly didn’t have what we have
today. There were no microwaves.

90. MM: How about ventilation and stuff? Was it a very hot kitchen?

91. MD: Yeah, very hot kitchen. There was just extraction. Open the window, open the door.
There was, we probably did have HACCP employed, but when I think about it nowadays, there
was sawdust on the floor. There was a gas strike in Dublin at one time, it was great because we
opened up all the old furnaces and got bags of coal in and we were able to cook, we were one of
the few hotels in town, cooking with two old gas stoves. So that was terrific. There was a glimmer
of gas coming through to keep the pipes and we were able to keep hot stuff on that and we
improvised by making up hot plates. And do you know, that greatly stood to me as years went by,
was how to set up kitchens and how to improvise. And the other thing that greatly helped me was
going to Iveagh House was how to organise. You did your checklist. Chef gave you the job. Every
other chef de partie had to contribute to that menu so if I was the saucier, and there was fish on,
I’d have to have the sauce ready, had to have the, the pastry chef had to have the fleurons ready,
sauce chef had to have the turned mushrooms ready, the veg chef had to have the veg ready, if
there was garlic butter, I’m just saying for the word, the rouge chef had to do it. The larder had to
have your meat ready, had to have your trivets ready, your fish ready, prawns had to be peeled,
ready. They even had your lettuce chiffonade.

92. MM: But you had to, you’d check you had everything before going as such? That everything
was ready.

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93. **MD:** You would have your own check and do the check then. And then the van would come and load it. Now if you were short, you’d have to come back, now it can be far. But you actually, there was trepidation; you were made feel inadequate if you had to come back. If there was an accident or something happened, it wouldn’t be too bad, but even at that, you know. But it was very….

94. **MM:** Do you remember who, I know you mentioned you didn’t really care who you were cooking for in the Russell itself, you were just doing your job as such, but when you got into the Department of Foreign Affairs, were you aware of who..?

95. **MD:** Ah, yea, I know. Well for the first time, one of my personal first real achievements was being picked and I was only a commis there three years there, two and a half years and Kennedy came over. Now when did Kennedy come? ’63? Now I was three years in the Russell and I must have been ok. And I was selected as one of the commis to go to the Iveagh House, the runner. Because I was enterprising and I was, probably kept my head down and I might have been a bit of a ‘lick-ass’, maybe there’s a better word, I don’t know. I was probably a nice young fellow at the time. But I remember going up to Iveagh House and that was one of my biggest thrills of all because it was the first time the president of America came to Dublin, first of all and secondly, we were all vetted. So policemen came to our house, detective or policemen came to the house to interview my parents to see if we had anything against the Americans and why, what did they think of this that and the other, they, I wouldn’t say they were interrogated but they were asked a number of questions to see how they felt. My father was chuffed that his son was going to cook for the president of America. I didn’t say there was a hundred others doing it, as far as he was concerned. His son was cooking for Mr. Kennedy himself. (laugh) But that was a great thrill and the buzz in the place at the time. The pastry chef was making these one of these submarines out of pastillage, you know, and that was a bit of fun. We all stayed back and they presented…

96. **MM:** And they presented the submarine that had been passed down through the wars or something like that.

97. **MD:** Yeah, the pastry chef he’s a Belge. Vivian was a Belge but Vivian made it, but of course, the head chef presented it, Rolland presented it, much to disappointment of Vivian because he said, ‘look I did all the work and your man is going in with it’, but that’s the way it is, architects design, builders build and your man takes all the credit. (laugh) But em, the buzz there was that time for Kennedy was terrific, really now. And following that day, we went to do another function for him in The American Embassy, so the Russell catered for that as well. So it was another day out. A group of us going there. (note: Pierre Rolland’s grandson informs me that it was his father Henri who presented the submarine because Pierre had broken his leg by tripping over his grandson)

98. **MM:** Where was the American Embassy at that time?

99. **MD:** It was in the Phoenix Park.

100. **MM:** Oh right. It was up in the Ambassadors residence as such.

101. **MD:** We also did you know your man Slazenger. Slazenger was a great customer. Slazenger, the fellow that does the tennis racquets. Well he had a place, you know Powerscourt at the time. And there was another great outing there, and we were all young commis chefs as well. We were to go down there, his daughters 21st. Well the Russell actually imported French chefs to do the buffet. Now this buffet was exquisite and even by today’s standards it was still exquisite. I mean, there was no camera, no nothing, you know again, just do your job whatever you’re in charge of. You’re in charge of chef de personnel - the lowest of the low. But, however these had these oh, and they were great, these like films of copper for crimping lady’s and to set off the aspic, lift off the aspic and do all the truffle, do the crimping of the lady’s. These were on the top of torpedos, you
know, it was the food you’d want but the most thing was this decorative effect. This is art on the plate! Yeah, that’s what’s modern today.

102.MM: Unbelievable.

103.MD: Another great customer was the McCalmont family, Mount Juliet. So they were other great customers of ours. They always came to the Horse Show. They always booked into the Russell for the Horse Show week. It was strange to see those two great places still there. Mount Juliet was a house. I worked there. I went down, the Russell sent me down there to do work. I went down to Powerscourt to do work there and went to Ken Besson’s house to do work there, went out to Lady (inaudible), she was one of the Guinness heirs out in Luttrellstown Castle. She was a customer of the Russell and she was looking for a chef so she rang the Russell. They sent Arthur McGee and myself out and when Arthur left the Russell, I sort of left my calling card, they rang me direct. But once you told the Russell you were going there, you took your own time, you worked out there. That was good. That was good, that was tremendous experience and well paid. But tremendous experience and great life experience as well, to help yourself and where I am today, I’m almost ten years on television so, a couple of months on radio and in Fáilte Ireland (originally CERT) twenty-four years.

104.MM: You came from eh, you came from, in ’74 the Russell shut down, you were head chef. Where did you go from there? Did you go to the Hibernian then or?

105.MD: I went then, we went to Sachs hotel at that time. There was a numbers of us then. The Sachs hotel was looking for staff. They were revamping the place. It was the old Morehampton Hotel. And a number of us went down to them. The assistant manager there, Oliver McMahon, he’s in the A.I.B bank. He had heard of this and he approached a number of us. Niall, another guy, a chef, three of them actually, two other chef out of the kitchen. I went as head chef, second chef, sort of third chef. And then the headwaiter went with a group of his men. And we built up the Sachs; we went in there, worked, I think, four years.

106.MM: And when Sachs opened up, did it try and sort of take over the difference from the Russell or whatever, to fill that void?

107.MD: It did. We did and that’s what we did. And it was difficult because the Russell had its own clientele, its own name and its own style. And we had different management, you know, a new style of management, had to find our feet again and we weren’t getting paid as well we should have been. But we were fairly committed for a long time. I was there for four years. Unfortunately, a new style of management came in; Tully took over with a different concept of what hotels should be. He was a meat baron, he wasn’t a hotelier. His heart wasn’t into loosing money, his heart was making money. Eh, but we ran it successfully for four years and I have to say we’re very proud of it. We got into the Egon Ronay Gourmet awards. And that was one of the greatest things. I was very disillusioned when it actually closed. We were given the option of franchising it or leaving. There was never sacking us, we were never sacked. But I wasn’t sad to leave the Russell, I wasn’t glad to leave it. I wasn’t glad but I wasn’t sad.

108.MM: Yeah, you’d been there before, I mean, you were ready for a change?

109.MD: Yeah, I was ready for a change and this new challenge came so actually, that was great because I was only twenty eight years of age, so this was a whole new challenge and I was there for four years. And I have to say I was devastated leaving there because you were called in and told ‘your services are no longer needed; we’re going to franchise it. If you’d like to franchise it, you’re welcome’. But I know what I know about the hotel business and all the pitfalls. That’s all I see, not all the money. It was the pitfalls. I didn’t want to be minding the till on my day off! (laugh)

110.MM: So where did you go from there?
Well, I left there, ah, like, I had to do a re-evaluation then.

Were you married at this stage?

Ah married with children, two children, no, three children, three children at the time. I had to do a re-evaluation. Wasn’t really keen now, on going on this night work again, bursting bollix for other people. And I went to see this accountant, friend of mine and he gave me two choices. ‘Look’ he says ‘you can do two things, you can go out and join the system or go it alone’. You know, he says ‘if you keep working for someone, that will always happen to you.’ There was a job that came along; I was approached by Sutcliffe Caterers through somebody to go to Leinster House. And the attraction of Leinster House was great because there was no evening work, the latest you would ever be was nine o’clock and that would only be when the House was sitting. Now the House only sat four months of the year and that was only two nights, so it was only Tuesday and Wednesday night and you’re never going to be doing dinners up until nine o’clock, the last dinner was half eight. The last dinner was going to be seven, half seven for stragglers. I went to Leinster House as a head chef. I must say, I enjoyed it, but I have to say, it was an eye opener really. We thought that doing 100 and getting a free beer, you’re suddenly doing 400 lunches and 300 high-teas all one after another in a go and eh, you probably pretended to a lot more than you did at the time. But I never forget the first week I was there and high tea started and this lady, this a lovely woman, started frying the eggs at 2 o’clock. I mean she was poaching eggs in vats of oil all day for the evening tea. I mean, the whites just set, the yellow still raw and all on trays, ready to scoop off for the evening tea and the bacon and the sausages was all trayed up and half cooked and in the oven or the salamander. And that was all going out and when it was a real ‘Belfast Fry’ that they got, that was their tea. That was a tough job. I worked for this catering company; there were head chefs there when I arrived who’d worked for the government before the catering company took over. I was the buffer in between so I can tell you; it took all your personal skills. Keeping everyone on board. Yeah, but once you proved your ability, you’ll always get respect. And one you respect them all to do their job, you still get respect. And if you’re half decent to people, you know, you’re not hug breaking the cook, you’re not hug breaking you, the kitchen, they’ll get on with you. And then, I was there two and a half years and I was getting fed up there, I seen this place in Clonskeagh was after starting, small training school by CERT.

Oh right, up in Roebuck.

Yeah, up in Roebuck, you know. I’d seen a couple of people had got jobs and they were really my peers. I just doubted their ability, certainly to teach it was ok to cook, not to teach. So what you really forgot was that you were actually teaching every day. You were getting the job done, you know. You forgot you were a teacher. You didn’t actually have these credentials to say you were a teacher. But I remember ringing up Pierce Hingston, Kevin O’Meara, Michael Marley saying ‘is there any more jobs up there’ the answer I got was, ‘you wouldn’t go for the job if it was there’ meaning it was gone. Fortunately in my life there was twists, there was a guy came over from England in 1979 to take up the job of teaching. But when he actually started teaching it wasn’t academic enough for him. So he went back to England and the vacancy was there. I’m not sure whether they advertised or not but I was approached again, I had applied, so took the job and I have to say, I’ve liked it ever since. Now, one says, ‘why weren’t you more ambitious and open your own restaurant?’ and I says for answer to that, I’m a financial coward, I admit that, my wife would never re-mortgage the house, you can do what you want but don’t re-mortgage the house.

Mine’s the exact the same! (laugh)

My house and children, you can go, pack up, you can take your car but you’re not taking my children or my home and putting us into a B & B. So that makes you a financial coward. But I had many offers. Many people wanted me to go with them. Michael Wright particularly, he had great foresight at the time; he was the fish merchant that was supplying to us. He wanted me to go open a restaurant with him but again, dedication of hours; very difficult, you have to have your
quality of like, you have to have. I do believe, if your wife is with you and she wants that as well, then she has to have the drive. But if she’s a house wife, stay-at-home mother and wants companionship, your companionship, she wants your reward, she wants your money and she wants the other things and she still wants you there, she doesn’t want you burnt out and they’re a part of the reasons. So I enjoyed cert in Clonskeagh. And I have to say I was very well treated by Kevin O’Meara; very well treated. But he was, I was very good at the time, eh, I was obviously a very astute chef, I was able to, anything he put on paper I was able to put on a plate. So we made great accolades for ourselves. We got well voted within圈子, so that Roebuck was the place to dine. Particularly for companies who were going to bring ministers in or who wanted business done and they might have wanted different grants or that you know, they’d bring them there and say ‘this is what we’re training, we’re training, this is what we’re training these people to go out and do outside’ so we’re all good, you know.

118.MM: But was that the beginning of the, that was the beginning of Cert, wasn’t it as such, or?

119.MD: Well, that was the beginning of the training of it. All the other now came from the colleges, don’t forget it was all done through Cathal Brugha Street, and the like, and CERT monitored that. But the actual, in 1979 the first time CERT opened a training centre, actually trained. Don’t forget, they started that for a need. There was a high unemployment at the time and the government saw the need to train people and they trained all these unemployed people and there was a criteria, you had to be six months unemployed before you could get on the course. And they were training people for six weeks in a block, and they were hoping they would go on then to Cathal Brugha Street, or go on into industry and get trained in industry, and it was hoped that that would happen. Whether that happened or not, I’m not really sure.

120.MM: But a lot of people who are still there (in industry), started there you know?

121.MD: Well when we say that, it’s very rewarding, now I don’t do a lot of following up but you’d see guys around your age who’d say ‘do you remember me?’ and I’d say ‘no’ ‘I trained with you in 1980 in Roebuck’.

122.MM: So did another six thousand! (laugh)

123.MD: (laugh) I only remember the really good ones, or the really bad ones. But I have to say, I’ve loved training ever since and I enjoyed it and I still enjoy it. I, well, when you get good groups, I really enjoy, when they eat out of your hand. I love that ‘cause they produce what you just tell them. All you do is give them a recipe and a couple of ingredients and a format and the whole product just ends.

124.MM: Now you’ve been involved now, since 1960 right? You’ve been involved I the restaurant business as such. I know in 1960 you were totally fresh and all that sort of stuff right? But were talking now about 44 years, all right? What are the main changes you’ve seen?

125.MD: Well I suppose, eh, one of the things I suppose is taking the bully boy tactic is gone and that’s one of the greatest things. ‘Cause we did have a lot of fear, we may have respected everyone but there was a lot of fear. Sometimes I think, it’s gone too far now, that there’s less respect, they don’t want to call chef anymore, they want to call Matt and there’s that and that’s a huge change. Attitude change to young people. They’re not committed enough, if they don’t have a day off and its going be a very good night, they’re not committed about the breakfast the next morning. And you see that, or the lunch and they come in and they drag their feet. Now that’s what I see training come in. They don’t have a high cleanliness, that has to be instilled in them continuously, that’s another thing. Now the Kitchen area, I feel, now certainly the department of the environment greatly helped us all. Extraction, lighting, and all the good qualities we’ve been given, that greatly helped. HACCP is one of the greatest things ever been implemented. Now a lot of chefs fight against it but I think HACCP is one of the greatest things ever implemented because you have track record of all your food produced, temperatures and its right for the customer. Now as you
say, the downside there’s a lot of recording but if you have something to monitor and it helps you to do it, it’s the best thing.

126.MM: Was there, just on that there, do you remember much food poisoning?

127.MD: No, never had a case, not that I remember, no, no. We had a temperature probe, a thermometer in the fridge. That would be looked at it every morning and in the afternoon when we came back. No one told me it should be at 4 but we always knew that’s where it should be, you know, so there was that there.

128.MM: You were aware of it without being aware that you were aware of it.

129.MD: There were thermometers there for sugar boiling but that was about all. But there were no thermometers there for cooking. There is also the Alto-shams, the slow cookers, the new steamers, microwaves, they greatly helped the chef. Modern cooker styles, oven, level ovens as well, eye-level ovens, they were great. I mean most of the guys I speak to that are my age they all have back pain.

130.MM: Ah, back pain from all that bending down.

131.MD: All have back pains; it’s always bending down, taking the big pots. I mean, you even had to render your own fat. I’m teaching trainees and I know they call me ‘Crusty’ now, you know. But I’d say one day we’d be doing a sirloin, whole side, take the suet off say ‘what can you do with that?’ and they’d say ‘throw it in the bin’. I start telling them what you can do with, making Yorkshire pudding, but no they wouldn’t do that, ‘my ma wouldn’t use that’. So you’d make a bit of dripping. ‘Ah no, wouldn’t use that, my Da says it’s bad for his heart’. You know, I’d tell them, we had to pound all that, break it all up, put it into a vat, like a big round, put it into the oven, leave it there at half two come back at half five, take it out. Now we were only 16, 15 and 16 and how we weren’t scalded I don’t know. Two guys taking it out on each side and straining that and that was the fat than for the fat fryer for the chips for the staff or for the friture. But they’d laugh at you if you tell them that nowadays. Tell them you had to go pound the salt and put it into jars and put the big gab block, put it onto a tray, leave on the hot plate for two days.

132.MM: Dry it out, yeah.

133.MD: Think of this massive block. You’re up to the pestle and mortar in the corner, right, now the chef didn’t tell you to get a mask, he didn’t say ‘that’ll be dangerous going up your nose son’, he didn’t say that, you just pound that and the chef, the pastry chef is waiting for a jar or that in a hurry just get it out. And you pound it to sieve it and you get it and you fill all the jars. And that was your job every day. And you were on the roast corner it was your job to give, to make sure for the sauce chef, chop the parsley, you had to fill it with parsley. The three stations got parsley, the larder station, they got parsley. But I used to hate the sauce chef ‘cause he was the one, he didn’t care about the parsley he just threw it at everything, you know, more parsley ‘Persille Monsier Dowling, s’il vous plait, allez, allez, allez’. (laughter) You don’t be long in learning the French!

134.MM: Did you eat out?

135.MD: Yeah, a good bit when I was young.

136.MM: Where did you go?

137.MD: I used to go to Trocadero and I used to go to the Green Tureen, that was years ago. That was Shan Mohangi. I often see that story on telly. (note. In 1963 Shan Mohangi, a 22 year old medical student murdered a sixteen year old Hazel Mullen in The Green Tureen)
That was Harcourt Street, wasn’t it?

Yeah, Harcourt Street and there was a place down off eh, it was near the Rainbow there on O’Connell bridge, eh it was the Green Rooster. And we’d go there and you’d feel the bee’s knees. And there used to be a big old charcoal grill there. I mean you would go there and you were young and you were courting because you were impressing and you knew the menu, there was French on it, so you definitely knew it, you know. So I enjoyed that. We were encouraged to do all that. We were obviously encouraged to go places and only encouraged, certainly after work, certainly, greatly, great camaraderie you know, if there was a good show going down on in the Crystal (Ballroom). We would go down there after work or up to Harcourt Street to the Four P’s. (Provinces Ballroom) The only thing was they’d bring you along for the night. And I was driving the car, my father’s car when I was 17 and I was very popular with the boys, I could bring them all home and didn’t drink, didn’t drink till I was 28 years of age, you know, took a long time, didn’t like it I suppose, didn’t like it have the money, was too mean. Different guys did different with their money. But I did well, I enjoyed catering and I still recommend it. I don’t really want people in my family to go into it, it’s tough.

When did see, or like, when do you think you saw maybe girls starting to come into kitchens or when did it happen or?

Well in Sachs, it was cheaper to have some females, came in and that was what? ’74 or ’75? And young girls started going to college, yeah? And then, they didn’t have many in Sachs.

Did you go back to college at all? You didn’t, did you go back and do the Jimmy Kilbride thing? (note: Jimmy Kilbride ran advanced cookery courses for senior chefs in the Dublin College of Catering, Cathal Brugha Street leading to the City and Guilds 706/3 qualification)

Oh yeah, I went back and did that.

When did you do that?

Eh? 70 let me think, eh ’74, eh I was in Sachs, ’78. That was great. No because that, no that was great and what was great about doing that was that it actually endorsed what you knew. I mean I didn’t know, and I say this modestly, I didn’t know I knew so much, you know. I used to go down to and Jimmy would be giving his class and one day he was giving his class, he was talking about doing Supreme de Salmon Condorcet.

Right, yeah, yeah, cucumber and the tomato, yeah, yeah.

Cucumber, yeah and he’s explaining all of this, you know, and he says ‘obviously’ he says ‘you’ll get your tomato and you’ll make a concassé, and you’ll get your cucumber and you’ll turn it’. Now to me, I didn’t know any other way and I asked him in front of the class ‘why Jimmy, is there another way?’ And all the lads in the class started laughing, thought I was winding him up and I wasn’t. ‘Oh’ he says ‘maybe if you weren’t out of the Russell ’he says ‘maybe you might be able to slice the tomato and slice the cucumber and out it on top of it’, ‘Oh, that’s interesting’. So I was always, I always got the slagging in there ‘oh is there another way?’, you know. Although I enjoyed, Kilbride’s class and then I got a lot of theory out of it, stuff I wouldn’t have read and maybe think of my methods training and I watched his methods of training and it was quite good, it worked for him. Now people learn from whatever works. And they learned from it. And I adopted some of it, not all of it, I adopted some of it. But I did enjoy the sessions.

Who was the, who did it the year you did it? Or who was in your class do you remember?

Paddy Brady was with me, Willie Sommers, eh Dave O’Connor. They spring to mind.

And how was eh, how did you, was that your first contact with Cathal Brugha Street?
151. MD: Yes. And Hegarty didn’t want to take me on, neither did Kilbride and obviously I hadn’t applied for anything before hand but I persisted, I went back a few times and asked, you know. Very persistent I was to do that. I got in and I got on grand. (note: Joseph Hegarty was the head of School of Hotel and Catering Operations in Cathal Brugha Street)

152. MM: Did that come through the union or anything or how did you eh, hear about it?

153. MD: No not through the union. I just, I don’t actually know where I heard about it, maybe heard about it through Willie Sommers he told me about it. A friend of mine, he worked in the Hibernian and we used to be good friends and we worked together for 14 years in Roebuck and through CERT, you know. So I’d say that’s where I probably heard about it, you know. But I get on reasonable well. Mick Ganly would be a great mentor of mine down there, lord rest him, got on pretty well with him.

154. MM: Yeah, how did you find Mick? Like was he, like he was quite, he was fairly old fashioned wasn’t he?

155. MD: That’s what I loved about him, that suited me. I still wanted to shoes, I still wanted the respect and I still don’t want him standing outside my uniform outside the back door smoking, I think it’s disgusting. And I actually deplore it. And that’s what I said the HACCP is great because they can’t go out the door and I don’t think chefs have enough respect for themselves any more. Some of them might have an air and grace about themselves, that’s good, but I don’t think they’re respectful enough, they let themselves down, that’s how they let themselves down and that’s how people see them then. And it’ll become that they’re only craft skilled workers, might be a plasterer or builder or an ordinary Joe Soaps, yeah, if they don’t respect themselves, they won’t gain respect.

156. MM: So who do you think was the leading lights now since say the 80s?

157. MD: Chefs in Dublin?

158. MM: Yeah. Who do you think is taking over the mantle of the Rolland and the eh, Uhlemann and the you know?

159. MD: I don’t know, well Thornton is brilliant, I mean I like his style. I think your man Nevin has become very good, Nevin Maguire is an up and coming young chef. He’s good and he’s got a good lightness and that’s what I like about him, met him a few times and he has no airs and graces and now I was on television and that was after 10 years and it doesn’t really pull any punches. In fact, if you’re too high and mighty, you have less friends, you know and that’s what they tell you. I remember.

160. MM: Yeah, they’ll soon put you down.

161. MD: Yeah. No one greatly shines. Ill tell you now, I’ve never watched chefs on television maybe I’m being somehow prejudice but I really like Jamie Oliver, I tell you, its his style I like and I think it’s a new approach to young people, like that what I think is good, he has his jolliness, his food is fun. Yeah and he’s not being dull and dreary but there is that side to it and there is that dirtiness and there is that in the background and nobody ever tells you you’re great and nobody tells it’s a great life. Because if you’re doing great lunches everyday, they don’t want to be telling you everyday because your head is big enough but you know it’s a great lunch so give it out. Like that’s where it’s instilled in my own training, so don’t be look in for any accolades, did you not do a good job today? Well then you know, don’t be waiting on them, the waiters aren’t going to tell you, they’d be happy enough to get their tips, because the better you are the better the customer gives more money and the better they get on and they’ll respect you in different ways.
162.MM: How did you end up getting on, tell me, or how did it happen?

163.MD: Well, Willie Summers and myself we were in Roebuck, there was a reception up there one day. This guy was standing beside and was just talking to us and he was a producer of a program Ireland’s Eye. He was just talking to us. Willie and I had been doing a few bits of demonstrations outside just to keep our hand in, for Knorr CPC, ‘cause they were sponsoring the panel of chefs and he said ‘you did demonstrations, I’m very interested in that’ he says. Anyway he had us on this evening programme. It was a recorded programme which is bad eh, we went down. Basically what he wanted, he wanted, he wanted, this other eh, I can’t even think what he wanted was this Ready Steady Cook to be on it and he seemed really annoyed but that kind of personality, really, he was a serious guy, always on the cautious side. I mean I was hoping it would work out, and Willie wouldn’t make it unless it was going to work, you know. And your man saw this and we were doing all that and we were getting on grand for a while and eh, CERT didn’t like the style of it and your man was giving us red aprons and it made us look like comedians and their men weren’t going to be comedians. Few different heads didn’t like it and they pulled us off it. And then what happened then after that was eh, the co-producer of that particular show was Noel Smith and he opened up this magazine programme ‘Live at 3’. And he rang me one day – would I be interested? And I had to approach the manager and he said ‘yeah go for it’ so I went for it. And I was on it for 10 years you know, and I loved it, I really did. At first I was always nervous because you know, they’d tell you ‘do you see that red light? Look at that camera’, you know, but I couldn’t do it, I just conscious, you know. Eventually I got around to do. What happens is you get to know a lot of the guys, you work with the same guys, the floor guys, the crew, the floor manager, the props manager he’ll be good to you, you know, the runners will be good to you, the presenters even, they’ll relax you after a while. There was a great camera man there Daniel O’Connell, and Daniel O’Connell, I used to love me going there because we’d have loads of things in colour, he used to say ‘bring the colour, bring the bit of colour’ he used to love the bit of colour. But Dan was great, he was always, he would tell you how to work the camera, he was a cameraman. He’d be saying ‘don’t be lifting that’, you know, ‘you’re not in a restaurant, you’re not on a demonstration, this is a show’, you know, you’d be showing and saying ‘look at that’ and the cameraman would be running up, you know but I loved ‘Live at 3’. The reason I left was because it stopped ‘Live at 3’ actually stopped and then there was a lull there for a while and this new programme came on and they needed new people. I mean it was getting to the stage of almost 60 now so I didn’t want to be on ‘Live at 3’ wearing glasses and wrinkles, you know, I want the image to stay the way it was, you know, the picture stays the same, the man moves on. (laugh) No, no, no, no, you’re always saying that. I wanted to get off it, while I’m young and handsome and virile! (laugh) you know, the picture remains but the man moves on. Ah it was great. It was great company, I loved it and I heard I was good at it. A lot of people have said it to me, I don’t know it. (laugh)

164.MM: It would give them great confidence actually to be involved in something like that.

165.MD: Yeah and then to be able to tell all their friends and, so there was all that. I loved the television and I heard I was good at it. A lot of people have said it to me, I don’t know it. (laugh) You can tell me the same. (laugh)

166.MM: What do you think you would be most proud of now, looking back over the say, 44 years or whatever?
167. **MD:** My own achievement? Well I suppose, certainly sticking with it and still have a lot of
good attributes to be able to pass on to the young people today. And I know I’ve been a member
on the panel of chefs and I’m very proud to think I’ve represented the country many times. I’ve
been in Olympia, got my silver medal in the Olympia, got my gold medal in Germany.

168. **MM:** When did you get involved in the, was the panel, did the panel sort of get back together,
was it ’79?

169. **MD:** ’78 yeah.

170. **MM:** It started in ’54 or something like that but then there was a lull period for quite a while.

171. **MD:** It was ’78 and again it was through word of mouth, I was working in the Sachs at the
time. You know, people don’t have to meet people to know about people. People actually talk
about, in this little city, people just talk ‘your man is great’ ‘hear your man was there for ages’,
‘gas man, you should meet him’ or ‘you should send a few people up here, they love him’ or
‘you’ll always get a good commis off him’ and that’s the way word of mouth goes, if you get a bad
commis and he’s dirty and all, you’d say ‘where did you work before’ and he says he worked in
so-and-so, you’d throw your eyes up to heaven, I heard, I hear about the chef down there and
that’s the bad name they get. But in ’78 Noel Cullen and Eugene Mc Govern and through the Irish
Transport and Irish Workers Union and through Mick Mullen we started because there had been a
lull and it was a great organisation and you would be affiliated to anybody that you, that had an
association with cooking and food or whatever wines guilds and menus and *Clef d’Or*. I think its
great to be affiliated because you keep in touch, you meet people, you’re not stagnant if you keep
moving with them. But I’ve been on the panel now since 1978 and that’s about 25, 26 years now
and I’ve been there that long and I still go to the meeting and I still enjoy it. Now that has greatly
changed and there’s new blood in but I just look at them and let because they need that as well. It
gives them a platform to air their own views and to help themselves and to promote themselves as
well and I think it’s good for them to have that amenity, someone view you, say a member of
Panel of Chefs but you have to prove, it doesn’t matter what you say, you have to prove with your
food what you actually do. It doesn’t matter how good a chef you think you are, if you go and
work for a company, you’ve got to prove to your customers, to your clientele, to the staff, to your
owners, managers that you’re worthy of what you said you were going to do. It has to go on the
plate, has to be consistent and you have to make money. You can be the greatest of chefs but can’t
make money – great cooks, you know. Go to the bank manager with truckloads of money behind
them, ploughing it in, lost cause. You have to be able to make money and that’s the real crunch as
well. I’ve done most of that I think, I’m not sure what my other peers would say to all that, I’ve
been in Fáilte Ireland now for 24 years and I do believe I’m held in high accolades among them,
I’m popular with them, I get on well with all the staff here. I can’t get on well with everyone
because we’re all human and our personalities sometimes clash but even when I was in Sachs, I
still remained good friends, I mean the Russell I still go to meetings with those guys, still remain
good friends. So people, it’s the respect they, you build up for your attributes and what you’ve
given, not what you’ve taken.

172. **MM:** If you were to start all over again, is there anything you would do different?

173. **MD:** Ah, well certainly, yeah. I would certainly be more educated, I certainly would. See the
dangerous thing with staying in college too long is that ‘chefing’ looks like craft skilled; if you
stay in college too long you want a job that’s academic. Now you want to be a chef, you might
want to be an owner so if you could combine both of them, keep saying that to young people. Go
and still get an education, still go because what we did was we didn’t have enough money when
we were young and when we got money we wanted to spend it and we certainly didn’t want to go
spend it back in school on courses. Now there’s a new generation that does realise that, that there
is no future without education, and there is no future without computer literacy and what’s further
on down the line, we don’t know. But I didn’t, I never knew, I never saw myself 20 years ago,
ever mind in the 60s, being able to type, being able to do my own word documents, do my own
menus, do my own power point presentations, keep all my access of all my students, e-learning, teach e-learning I didn’t think I’d be able to do all that but I am. But that’s one of the things I definitely we didn’t, I would have done. Certainly I would have, certainly would have, go and definitely learn another language and I keep endorsing that to people. I have a fair knowledge of Irish because I kept with it and if I kept better with it I would have got the programme on television, you know, but you would have to be fluent. I’m not sure if French is the thing to learn but any language is a tremendous thing. I think it’s part of education, you know, and reading. Now there’s too many things out there to distract you there’s, first of all when you’re young your money thing, your dancing, there’s the girlfriends, the mates, the alcohol you’ve all the other abuses now that it revolves around. And it’s difficult, young boys they all want flashy cars and they all want to be out and its difficult even going to, starting going to college its difficult for them to stay in and study ‘cause they’re known as swats and they don’t want to be labelled. So they go out with their mates and all have difficulty so it’s all linked pressure. So what you’d like to do is not is not always the value that you can have because you have all these other types of pressures, if you’re sitting in your room and even your parents come up ‘you better go out son, you’re being a recluse, there’s girls out there you know’. (laughter) There’s truth in that you know! (laughter)

174.MM: And on that note, I’ll thank you very much.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Johnny Opperman in Blainroe (28/4/2004)

Máirtin Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Johnny Opperman (JO)

1. MM: So what year were you born Johnny?

2. JO: I was born on the 27th February, 1917. So I’m 87 years of age at the moment.

3. MM: And you’re looking well for it!

4. JO: My parents, my father was Swiss and he came over here, I think it was in 1912, 1911 or ’12 on a trip. He was at the time, he had gone to England, to Buxton, from Switzerland as his first trip outside Switzerland having completed his apprenticeship, and the time of King Edward’s visit here to Ireland there was some sort of an excursion and I don’t know why he ever thought of it but he went on this excursion to Dublin and he met my mother and then there was a subsequent visit after that and after that then he must have proposed and I suppose he had all sort of problems then because he had to change his religion to become a Catholic and that took some time. Anyway…..

5. MM: Where was your mother from?

6. JO: Dublin, oh yeah. Her father was a master baker.

7. MM: What was her maiden name?
8. **JO:** O’Farrell and then they got married then in 1912 I think or 1914, no 1912 that’s right. 1912 or 1913 and they settled down and they opened a shop, a pastry shop in Camden Street, right beside there was a cinema there called the Deluxe Cinema and they opened this restaurant and at the back of the restaurant was a dance hall but this was a little different to the modern dance halls and they were doing very well. Then when the war broke out my father went back to do his, he was called and as a true Swiss he went back to Switzerland to do his military duty and when he went back then he was away for a while, I think six months or maybe less. Anyway the people thought he was a German and I needn’t tell you his place was boycotted. Mother was trying to keep the shop going and it went broke, they had to get rid of it. So then he started here in Dublin and I think the first place he was into was Jammet’s, after Jammet’s then he went…..

9. **MM:** He was a chef by trade or a *patissier*?

10. **JO:** Oh yes he was a *patissier* to start with but he had also some training in cuisine. So there was no such a thing as that time as a separate *patisserie* you know so he had to make up his mind that right if he wanted to get on he also had to be a chef as well, a kitchen chef and he went into Jammet’s.

11. **MM:** Did he stay long there?

12. **JO:** I don’t know how long he stayed there but he went into Jammet’s, he spent some time there and then he went into Jury’s in the Green, not the Green…..Dame Street and then he after the Gresham Hotel was burnt during the….1922…..But after that then…..He reopened that and he was there until, Ms Mullins was the manageress at the time and he was there until about 1940 I think. It would have been about that I think and then Toddy O’Sullivan took over.

13. **MM:** So Karl Uhlemann would have succeeded him?

14. **JO:** Now he was with O’Sullivan for a while but then O’Sullivan wanted his own people so he let the father go and then brought in Uhlemann at the same time and it was very awkward because at that particular time I knew Uhlemann very well, well sort of a father (figure) but I knew him more because he was an artist and when I was training one of the places I went to was the Regal Rooms Restaurant and he was the chef there and I used to go to the museums with him, to the art galleries. He was a fine man. Anyway the father left then, so in the meantime I had started my apprenticeship in the Shelbourne Hotel and I was under the, everywhere in the Shelbourne at that time was a real, I mean there was a *gardemanger*, there was a *poissonier*, there was a *pâtissier* and there was the *saucier* who was the next, the head chef and then there was the veg chef and the *rotisseur*.

15. **MM:** So the full partie system?

16. **JO:** There was the full thing and there was hardly any English spoken in that place at that time.

17. **MM:** Can I take you back a second. Where did you go to school? Where were you living in Dublin?

18. **JO:** Oh sorry. When we were first married we were living with my grandmother in Synge Street.

19. **MM:** That’s where you grew up?

20. **JO:** That’s where I was born. Then we left there and we went Homeville in Rathmines and we were there for many years and in the meantime I went to college, the Newbridge College, no I first went to the Christian Brothers in Singe Street.

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21. **MM:** That would have been your primary education?

22. **JO:** That’s right yeah. Then I went to Newbridge (college), and I was in Newbridge for five years 1927 till 1932 and then I started my apprenticeship. I wanted nothing else but to follow in my father’s footsteps.

[Image: Newbridge College Pre-Junior Cup Team 1929-1930]

23. **MM:** And you would have been a bit of an exception coming from Newbridge College to the Shelbourne kitchen?

24. **JO:** I hadn’t thought of that, that’s right and…..

25. **MM:** Like Newbridge College was fairly well to do. It was one of the top schools. You had sort of the Blackrock College, you had the Newbridge, you had the Belvedere, you had the Clongows and a few others yeah?

26. **JO:** And I then started, at first I was going to become a priest, the usual jazz, you know, but I knew all along I wanted to go into the business, the catering business because I was interested in nothing else but, that even at home, you know, and I started my apprenticeship in the Shelbourne Hotel and I think that was the year of the Eucharistic Congress.

27. **MM:** 1932 isn’t it?

28. **JO:** And we were in Homeville in Rathmines and I remember at that time, you know, the dining room in the Shelbourne used to be cleared out for the night time, and these cubicles put in and beds to house the people…..for the Congress. There was that many people from France and many is the night I walked home, no bus or anything else, that time they didn’t think of sending you home by taxi. (Laugh) And I served my complete apprenticeship in the Shelbourne.

29. **MM:** Who was the chef there at the time?

30. **JO:** The chef at the time was a man called Otto Wuest. He later became the catering manager of Lewis’s in Birmingham.
31. **MM:** Lewis’s, and where was he from?

32. **JO:** Swiss. At that time there was only my father – one, Guigax – two, Baumann – three, and Wuest – four, Hess – five. There was only five Swiss in Dublin at that time.

33. **MM:** But they held senior positions?

34. **JO:** Well they were all head chefs except Hess who was the manager of the Red Bank at that time. Guigax was the head chef in the Savoy. Baumann was the head chef in the Red Bank Restaurant, and Wuest was the head chef of the Shelbourne.

35. **MM:** And then your father was head chef in the Gresham?

36. **JO:** Hess was one of the first few who had a car in Dublin at that time (laugh). So you could imagine.

37. **MM:** Sorry what was your father’s first name?

38. **JO:** Charles. Carl in fact, but Charles they used to call it here.

39. **MM:** What was the food like and who was working there in the Shelbourne at the time?

40. **JO:** The Shelbourne, all the chefs were Swiss except one, the roast cook was a fellow by the name of Reilly and he was a little fellow. A wonderful character and the, I forget the name now, there was a woman, I forget her name now and she was the veg chef. The head chef was Otto Wuest and the second chef was Charles Muller.

41. **MM:** Now Jury, Captain Jury in charge here?

42. **JO:** He was the head man and the boss at that time, the Managing Director, no the General Manager was a man by the name of William Powell. Now the Shelbourne, at that time, apart from the kitchen being absolutely the best and whole set-up, each department on its own. It also had its own linen room and the head pâtissier at that time was a man by the name of Waldmeyer. Fritz Waldmeyer yeah and Fritz Waldmeyer married the head seamstress in the Shelbourne, the one that took care of the all the linen and she was the one when it would come in, she would examine it and they’d have little girls working there sewing and everything else, a complete unit. Now on top of that you went out and they had, first of all you had the big washer where all the china and everything was washed up. Another separate entity and beside that then they had what they called the silver room where at that time all the silver was hand polished and all the big dishes and the covers, God there was stuff there that was absolutely magnificent, and even in the kitchen we used nothing else but copper pots.

43. And there used to be a man, he’s dead and gone now I’m sure by the name of Collie. He was the one who used to tin all the pots when they needed tinning, you know, and here’s an interesting one. The present manager of the Four Seasons, the Assistant Manager at that time was his father, I think it was Tom Brennan, I forget now. But a great character, I knew very, very well. A fine big man he was, and he was the assistant manager of the Shelbourne Hotel that time. Now next to the silver room where all the silver was polished and all the cutlery was taken care of as well and there was a head man there in charge of that as well, and they had their own special uniform at that time. Then you came to what you call the still room, where all the toasts were made, the breads housed and the tea and coffees and anything like that, that was taken care of, that was a separate unit altogether but again all working as a unit. Right opposite that then was the dispense bar. There was no public bar at that time in the Shelbourne. Oh no you’d put your nose up a thing like that and that was run by a fellow by the name Bill Daly and at that time my understanding was that the lounge waiter he paid for his job.

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44. MM: He would make his money in the tips?

45. JO: His money in the tips but you didn’t bring such a thing as a….. If you ordered a gin and tonic he would put the tonic into the (inaudible) and leave the bottle there. He made his money by putting money in the other. But when I say, I understand he gets to pay for his job but the devil wouldn’t want a float on the plate and at that time the Hospital Trust started up and they invited newspaper people from all over the world and they used to stay in the Shelbourne and no matter what they ordered they got and it was paid for by the Hospital Trust…. and it was nothing to see staff going round smoking cigars that size (indicating large cigars). It was unbelievable the amount of money that was spent at that time by the Hospital Trust. Anyway I left there and went to the The Regal Rooms and the head chef at that time was Karl Uhlemann.

46. MM: Now the Regal Rooms was down next to the Theatre Royal wasn’t it?

47. JO: Correct, and they tried to start off with having a fancy restaurant, you know, but like a fast food fancy restaurant, but it was alright for a while, but like all fast food efforts it ran its course, and the manager at that time was a son of, oh God he used own the Dolphin Hotel. Jack (note: Nugent), I can’t think of his name anyway. He wasn’t his son, he was a relation of his, because the son was a different man. I left there then…..

48. MM: Sorry while you were in the Regal Rooms, was McManus in the Regal Rooms the same time?

49. JO: Yes.

50. MM: And how was he, while he was in the Regal Rooms?

51. JO: I want to tell you something. What’s his name, Uhlemann, he was very thin skinned, you know at times, and he used to plod around you see and himself and McManus always had words but McManus had words at will, he was the best character. One day Uhlemann walked into the toilet and he came out half pulling up the trousers and he says ‘there’s no toilet paper inside’ and McManus shouted back ‘there’s plenty of sand paper in the equipment room’, you see, and Uhlemann went back into the toilet and the dirty bastard and he was out like a shot, holding his trousers in one and getting pots and firing them at McManus and the language and you think….. I can picture that still. Anyway…..

52. MM: The food in the Regal Rooms, when you say fast food like, do you mean entrées quick? Was it still silver service or was it plate service?

53. JO: There was a certain amount of silver service, there was. It was targeted at the theatre and it was the first effort I think they had of trying to do a restaurant, shall I say, that would suit certain pockets.

54. MM: More the middle classes as such.

55. JO: But it went so far they had to….. It didn’t close down but I believe afterwards they had to more or less make it…..

56. MM: Change it or whatever?

57. JO: Not silver service, no, and at the time….. McManus was a character and he got involved with two women. Do you know the story?

58. MM: I heard something about it all right.
59. **JO:** So he got that involved he didn’t know what to do and at that particular period he was (inaudible) at the Gresham and I forget his name and he married the two women within two days and of course he was up for bigamy and he got a year in prison for it but fair dues when he came out he went back in there. He was probably a year doing some minor job but other…. He was a bloody good worker and he had a sense of humour.

60. **MM:** And did he hold on to one of the wives or did he loose both.

61. **JO:** I think he lost both. (laugh) Anyway that was that episode. I left there then and my friend Whist got in touch with me, he was opening the Cellar, oh no not Whist. My father was in the Gresham. He tried to do something about the pastry work and he had a pastry chef in from Switzerland. The brother of the man that taught me in the Shelbourne, Waldemeyer and he was tall and stately and everything else. He could just not stand a place like this.

62. **MM:** Poorly equipped?

63. **JO:** And he stayed there for a while and then maybe he stayed there for a year-and-a-half or so maybe two and then he went to the Norbury House Hotel in (Droitwich) England and when he went there he got me in there as an apprentice as well but this was a different place. This place was somewhat like the Shelbourne in the old days. There were (inaudible) everywhere and the quality of the cooking was unbelievable. We even had different kitchens for visiting dignitaries of different countries like we used to get a lot of these Sultans and all these. They brought their own kitchen people with them and we had special kitchens for them. They made their own curries and all that type of thing. It was a wonderful place.

64. **MM:** Was there English chefs working there or were they continental or were they mixed?

65. **JO:** There was a lot of continental people there.

66. **MM:** But a good few English as well?

67. **JO:** Oh yeah. But you see England even at that time wasn’t great and you know the odd place like the people who used to stay were the rock stars and all these people and at that time an aeroplane, there was no, but at that time a plane used to leave (France) every day, land in Croydon and then was sent down by special train to Droitwich with all the fresh vegetables and fruits from the south of France and that happened every day. All the food used to be sent in by train from London, the only thing they used to buy locally was the eggs, milk and cream you know. But the hotel…..

68. **MM:** This is still before the war, this is around 1938 or so?

69. **JO:** I was there the night the war broke out and I mean the place was owned by the Times newspaper at that time.

70. **MM:** Wow.

71. **JO:** But that place used to be fantastic. The only reason they built the hotel where it was built was because they used the Brine Baths and the Brine Baths at that time, people would come in for a bath two weeks. I’d see people coming in and their legs and arms and that intertwined and after about seven or eight days they’d be up dancing on a Saturday night because they used to put them in the Brine Baths, they used to serve them afternoon tea or whatever they wanted and everything would float. They wouldn’t sink. Only very, very wealthy people and we had a, I’ll never forget it, we had a head waiter at that time who was a bloody genius. A fellow by the name of Kemo, an Italian and he could, I never saw him making any notes but he would remember everything that everybody wanted and you know like when he came into the, he would never dream of walking in the kitchen itself but outside when he came in everybody would take bloody of what he was going
to be because he in himself was a man to be respected because he had everything at his fingertips. He was fabulous. But that’s the type of workers that were there.

72. I was there until the night the war broke out and we’d all gone out with all the lads, we all drunk, I can picture it this minute. They all had to be in the barracks. They were all called up and they had to be in the barracks by midnight and we left them all in and they were trying to pull me in as the well. The guard no, you haven’t got, out you go. The following day I went back home and I was in a train from Hollyhead, no from Droitwich to Hollyhead and I was right at a window in the corridor of the train. Literally banged up like that there was that many people in the carriage and that’s how I came home. I was home two or three months at the time doing odd jobs around and then I got my call up papers for Swiss army because when I was born I was registered in Switzerland by my grandfather and I had (inaudible) when I could afford it. Military tax because I didn’t do military duty. Anyway when the war started or when I got my call up much to the dismay of my parents I said I want to go and do my military duty because I thought I was going to learn a couple of languages and at the same time probably get to know more about my home base and I got as far, I got my ticket, my travel papers the lot but France capitulated in the meantime so I was turned back, I couldn’t get through so that ended that episode. My next place after that was to the, you know I can’t name the place.

73. MM: Was it Northern Ireland was it?

74. JO: Yeah, I’ll think of it now in the minute. Not Derry. Derry yeah what am I talking about. I answered an advertisement and I got a job there as chef in the City Hotel.

75. MM: Where would the advertisement have been? Would it have been in the newspaper?

76. JO: In the newspaper, it must have been. And I went up North and interesting enough I had no passport or anything else at the time only my military passport from the Swiss. I went up alright by train naturally, and went to the hotel, but then when I went to get my ration book and all this type of thing I had to put in my passport. Jesus at 3am the following morning the police (arrived). ‘Come down to the police station’.

77. MM: Thought you were a spy?

78. JO: Anyway I had to give names in Dublin and everything else, and that was sorted out, and I spent a good part of the war years there, and I went from there then and I took over the stewardship; I was called the steward at that time of the base in Derry for the American army and navy. I was only a little fellow and ran the whole thing. I was catering for over 30,000 at that time in different sections and we had, the amount of stuff that came in was unbelievable, unbelievable. We even brought our own vegetables and everything else.

79. MM: Where was the food coming from?

80. JO: America. And even to come to think of it people had lost their lives bringing stuff over, cabbages and turnips and carrots. One time they sent over five tonne of butter, in ordinary wrappers with oranges and lemons and all that type of thing. But sure the butter was all tainted. And we had to sell it to candle makers and subsequent to that all the butter came in tins. Come to think of it, we used to take in barrels of corn beef, Jesus it must have been corned for years. That was the only thing, the meat, the bacon, the hams and to see this thing and that thing you know when…..

81. MM: When there was such shortage everywhere else. Was there much of the black market going on, since there was so much of this available?

82. JO: The black market was more by the, what you call it, the Americans than anybody. My God they would. The foods they used to get. They used to have their own containers, clear the
table and put all the tinned fruit. They were dining and wining now, like they’d never dreamed in their life to be, you know. And anyway, that went on till the end of the war years.

83. **MM:** How about just before that, you were in the hotel in Derry. Was there a problem getting rations for the hotel in Derry?

84. **JO:** Yes. I’d forgotten, this is an interesting one. All the women used to come over from Burtonport, which is in Donegal. And it was amusing to see they’d come in little thin women, Jesus they’d be that size you know and they’d be nothing to get ten or twenty dozen eggs from them. Their coats were made with little pockets in them for the eggs. It was unbelievable how much stuff they carried and everybody knew. Now and again they’d stop them but they had it well organised because people on the border, they got their own.

85. I left there and then I took over the Glen of Antrim Hotel as manager and here again like getting foodstuff we had what you’d call the food inspectors and again the Glen of Antrim Hotel was practically out at the sea but at the back it was hilly you know and it was all woodland and once the, we had a name for it, once the bush telegraph started from as far away as up on the coast…..

86. **MM:** Is this on the northern side or the Donegal side or the other side?

87. **JO:** It would be up near, I’ll think of it now in the minute. It would start there….. It was a wonderful place for lamb and you’d be carrying whole sides of bloody lamb and hanging them up with cloths and sheets and all sorts of things. Tied and hanging them up in the trees until they went and at that time we had some of the Directors of the hotel, they were suppliers in Dublin in Belfast of pork and bacon and all that type of thing. We were never short of anything. The only trouble was when you got the meat you had to take everything and…..

88. **MM:** Hide the stuff?

89. **JO:** And it was all right now for a while because they’d come and they’d do that for a while and that would be it. In the summer time, in the winter time the problems then was with all the fishermen and the fishermen at that time in the winter they wouldn’t be any money flowing you see and they’d nothing to spend on drinks so a lot of them used to be drinking them mentholated spirits and when they’d look to use the toilet the bloody smell was unbelievable and when you’d get that smell you were supposed to call the local police cause it used to set them bloody mad. I didn’t tell, you very, very seldom I did because you’d take your bloody life in your hands you know (laugh). That was down there with the mountains you’d be lost for the rest of your life.

90. **MM:** In the summer now there was plenty of fish coming in.

91. **JO:** Plenty of fish, beautiful stuff. All sorts of fish, real good, never short of it you know. You didn’t eat a lot of meat at that time because I mean you didn’t use a lot of beef at that time because (a) there was no necessity, the lamb down there was absolutely magnificent and then you’d all the fish you wanted.

92. **MM:** Yeah, was salmon still a rich man’s fish back then?

93. **JO:** Yeah it was, yeah, but then the salmon used to come in, Christ, the bloody thing was still alive when it came in. You know bloody big salmon and they’d to come up to the store and they’d have the whole thing there, you’d select what you wanted. Everyday! that was everyday.

94. **MM:** What other type of fish, what was the most common type of fish?

95. **JO:** Well you got everything. I mean when you come think of it you got cod, you got turbot at times, that type of thing you know. Good quality fish, and plaice, all the prawns you wanted, and of course there a lot of lobster because there was a very jagged coast you know.
96. MM: Oysters?

97. JO: Oysters, not a lot of oysters no. Ah, oysters at that time, wasn’t that popular. Oysters only became really the same as prawns, only in latter years really, come to think of it, did prawns and oysters and all become really popular? That was a wonderful, I really enjoyed the excitement was there as well everything else you know.

98. MM: Who stayed in the hotels at that stage?

99. JO: Oh God we got a lot of people from southern Ireland there. Do you see, there’s no where else to go …

100. MM: Yeah because they couldn’t travel because of the petrol ration and all that sort of stuff?

101. JO: Or you had that or else, they went from that to England or Scotland and we’d get the Scottish people over into, because that mainland at one time was united. I mean you could see on a clear day you could see the Mull of Kintyre.

102. MM: Yeah, yeah.

103. JO: I mean there no such thing as Americans.

104. MM: I was going to say they were so well fed in their own base anyway. They’d no need to come (laugh). How did you end up getting a job in the base? Because you were in the City Hotel first, then you went to the Glens of Antrim Hotel and you ended up in the Base.

105. JO: Oh that was a very interesting one. Well now, all the high blokes from the Base used to be in the hotel dining and Jesus I’m trying to think of his name now, most of these men were all big business men in the States who had joined this thing called William Fuller and Company. And they had all very big salaries and these were I forget what they were called but anyway they were hoteliers, construction men, you know. And the one man in charge of all this was a man Jesus I forget his name, anyway and he had the hotels in California and he was in charge of the catering and one day he came to me and said to me would I be interested in coming to work for them. And naturally I asked him one or two questions, anyway I left and in I went to the American company and I became then after six months your man, he was called the Chief Stewart and after six months little did I know but he was going back to California and I was given his job.

106. JO: Jesus when I come to think of it. I was there until the end of the war but during the time I was there your man had written to me a couple of times wanting me to go to California to look after one of his hotels, Jesus I needn’t tell you when I went and told them at home. The mother, ‘now son, no bloody way!’ Anyway I have nothing to complain about. I stayed there until the end of the way and then I was offered, at the end of the war I was offered a job in the Railway Restaurant in the Great Northern Restaurant in Belfast. It was a top quality restaurant and I went there as chef and spent maybe a year or fifteen months there. I stayed there actually until the end of the war with Japan because the night I see, Jesus I’ll never forget it, it was one of the roughest nights I was ever in my life. It was the night the amnesty was signed with Japan. I was there for, I forget I was there for about a year-and-a-half.

107. MM: When you say it was one of the roughest nights, do you mean because it was so busy because everybody was celebrating.

108. JO: No, no.

109. MM: You were celebrating yourself was it.
JO: Afterwards, yeah. I left there and in the meantime again I had looked at an ad in the paper and the ad in the paper was to open the, to take over the International Hotel in Bray and it was to be reopened after the army had been in there for nearly twenty years so can imagine the state of the bloody place. And the people that owned it at the time Corscadden. I went there and they hadn’t a clue about restaurants or hotels or anything but anyway we got the place open and the place had to refurbish. We had to start at the bottom. And we got it going after a lot of difficulties and all sorts of problems, you know, and I think I was there two years and then I was approached by the Jury Company. They were interested in opening the Moira Hotel at the time and then from then onwards we opened the Moira. Then I was asked would I take over the catering in the airport.

MM: Now the Moira, was the Moira only opening or had the Moira been opened? Did you open the Moira?

JO: Yeah and when I left I asked them to take my brother Willie and he took it over from me. Then I was approached about the job in the airport and at that time it was the airport and Aer Lingus and …

MM: Who approached you can you remember?

JO: I do, it was Major General Hogan and he was the Assistant General Manager at the time.

MM: And would he have been a customer in the Moira or is that it?

JO: Yeah, I remember as clear, I can picture the night he approached, he… come up 'I want to talk to you', you know. So I went out to the airport and I took that over and I spent twenty-one years there. And it went from one thing to another in there you know.

MM: Now when you opened up first was the Collar of Gold Restaurant there or did you open it up?

JO: No I opened all that. I opened up the shops everything. There was nothing there.

MM: Had things just moved because when Aer Lingus started first it started in Baldonnell didn’t it? And then they moved to the current site?

JO: Yeah. That’s when I went and at that time Christ when you come to think of it the size of the place, and the size of it now. It was wonderful. I spent twenty-one very, very happy years there. Everything was, you knew everybody, everybody knew you, you knew all the staff. It was that size you know.

MM: And who had you, you came there as sort of manager, and you had say Jimmy Flahive is it?

JO: No, we took him after. There was nobody there at that time when I went you see. I’m trying to remember, there was only women and stuff like that. The staff catering and everything else was done from one spot. The whole place had to be reorganised. I mean new buildings came up and then you had kitchen set-up for staff catering of that size and you couldn’t do, you had to, space was limited to a certain extent in the old building you know. It was only as things go bigger that we opened up kitchens separated from the, you know and all the, and we started that time the outdoor catering.

MM: Right.

JO: I mean we were catering for, we catered at that time for some of the biggest at that particular time. We catered for I remember one was for two thousand people in the RDS. And
Christ when I come to think, when we jotted down all the stuff we had to have, miles of bloody tablecloth, you know all that type of crack and we had to organised our own catering equipment.

125. But we were lucky in one sense because we had such huge quantities of equipment. We were able to use our own knives and forks and that was the whole idea in the back of my mind when we started the thing. We started the outdoor catering like where we’d sell stuff to the shops and that was from the by-products of all the stuff that we used to be putting on the aircraft. That’s how that started. Yeah, then as things went on we had a succession of different chefs. Jimmy Flahive then became chef then. He was a very good man, and at that time when that started then we’d other places opening up. Like for instance, we had the catering with a couple of thousand staff. The planes, three, four, five thousand meals a day going out of it you know. And that was a different thing altogether. So there was a huge ah …

126. MM: Was the restaurant always called the Collar of Gold?

127. JO: No it was called the Dublin Airport Restaurant first. And that’s where we had all the dancing and started the wedding breakfast and all that type of thing.

128. MM: It became, it was sort of a magnet for all of North Dublin wasn’t it?

129. JO: We were doing so much business that the hoteliers in Dublin tried to stop us and took us to court to stop us getting our license yeah.

130. MM: People used to go to the airport just for the novelty, to try and see the planes …

131. JO: Oh sure, Jesus, we had I mean, we would be booked out, New Years Eve from the, say after New Years Eve it was booked out for the next (New Year’s Eve). Saturday night dinner dances; that was the place to go. Very interesting when you come to think of it, that was the place to go.

132. MM: Was it at this stage then that you got married or was it at this stage …

133. JO: I got married when I was manager of the, oh I’ll never forget that, that was the time that the catering people were out in strike (1951). And my wedding breakfast was in Dun Laoghaire. The Royal Marine (Hotel) and interesting enough, you know, the union people got onto me and said we’re very sorry but we can do nothing about it but you’re going to have a rough time (laugh). Because that was one of the places where they were a bit tough! Militant ah yeah, Jesus, only the other day I was thinking about, my daughter was fifty years of age the other day and her birthday, the day she was born I remember we had a very big wedding breakfast down and I’d everything set-up and these people had to be sure that I was going to be there. Oh Jesus half eleven, I got a call from the house, you’d better come down here and I was driving into the nursing home and my hand out (inaudible) to tell them I had a pregnant woman inside yeah. And I only got back (to the airport) at the start wedding and about twenty minutes afterwards I got a call to say ‘look you’ve a daughter’. My God I remember that.

134. MM: And you were out at the airport at that stage! The whole idea of this wedding breakfast, people had their weddings in the morning wasn’t it?

135. JO: Oh yeah, and you see all the whole thing was we’d changing rooms, they’d change, going out in the air.

136. MM: That’s right they were heading off in their honeymoon or whatever and that’s why it was ideal?

137. JO: Absolutely fabulous.

138. MM: And how many would people have to a wedding at that stage.

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139. **JO:** Oh you were talking about maybe a hundred and twenty. Oh that would be the maximum because we had to have space, what you call it, travellers and I mean they were number one. Oh Christ many of the time I was in hot water over that (Laugh). Of course the announcement would be coming over you know and you’d be trying to keep people quiet and somebody would want a big speech you know and you’d be accused doing something that wasn’t in the interest of aviation you know (Laugh). But it was all fabulous.

140. During that period then I became Chairman of the European Catering Committee and we used to meet twice a year. I was three years Chairman of that, every six months we met in different and you know when you come to think of it at that time like the, what would I say the, the word I’m looking for would be, the commercial concern there was between different companies trying to one outdo the other. And yet we, as it were, all the Catering Managers from all over Europe, used to meet every six months. We were a wonderful bunch of men, we used to discuss everything and pass on things that went well and this and that, you know, and there was never any, we always used to say ‘you know the bloody politicians weren’t caterers’. I often remember saying that. The wonderful camaraderie that was with these men and catering was unbelievable and in a time when it became very restricted at what one could do on the aircraft, how one was helping the other and in particular the Scandinavians when that happened. They got everything to economy; the only thing you could serve was sandwiches. And the Scandinavians at that time were tops in what they could do with the sandwich.

141. **MM:** Yeah their smorgasbord and all that?

142. **JO:** They were absolute, and I mean there was no problem, they’d think to help you and give you ideas. Ah Jesus they were fabulous. Em and then I left there …

143. **MM:** And you mentioned that you were also on a committee for Cathal Brugha Street as well?

144. **JO:** Oh I was yeah. I forget, there were eight of us. We used to meet every two months and it was discussing how it should be run and …

145. **MM:** Really how to develop catering education as such?

146. **JO:** And a big problem at the time, I won’t like to because I might hurt somebody. The big problem at the time was em …

147. **MM:** There was more of a domestic slant on the training as opposed to a commercial?

148. **JO:** And we were trying to, which we subsequently did get it down, that we were able to get people that were in the job and set it up as a proper entity you know. Oh yeah we used to meet maybe …

149. **MM:** It’s interesting now because one of the first guys to go in like that, say Jimmy Kilbride, he’d spent time with you in the airport?

150. **JO:** That’s right, Jimmy Kilbride and Jesus the other fellow …

151. **MM:** Mucky Dunne, is it, PJ Dunne.

152. **JO:** Dunne served his time with me in the Shelbourne Hotel and his brother-in-law, and I was telling you about the pastry cook in there, Fritz Waldemeyer married Paddy Dunne’s sister.

153. **MM:** Wow.
Paddy at the time was very fond of the beer, but he was years older than I was and I mean I wasn’t into one bit booze or anything, but Paddy been in and he was working with Fritz and he was a great bloody character. He came for Mountmellick (County Laois). Yeah, but a bloody character.

So he was in the Shelbourne before going to Jammet’s?

Oh yeah (inaudible).

In the Shelbourne. Just thinking now actually about sort of restaurants at that time, now you had Jammet’s, you had the Red Bank, were there any other, you had the Regal Rooms maybe.

No Regal Rooms was practically gone. You had the Gresham, you had the Royal Hibernian. Now the big one at that time was The Russell. You had the Shelbourne, I mean the Shelbourne at that time now.

Like when you started there it was very good?

It was, oh yeah, but it had gone down then, and you had the Gresham. Like the ones we’d go to. I would spend I’m sure three or four nights a week in Jammet’s. I could afford to spend three or four nights a week in Jammet’s and have change out of maybe five or six pounds. That would give you some idea.

The money you were on?

And that was at the back bar. There’s a back bar in Jammet’s. Things weren’t expensive at the time.

But the front, the main room was expensive yeah?

It was expensive, but nothing like the expensive nowadays. The Hibernian the standard of the bar service there was fabulous. Again the catering in the Hibernian was beautiful. I think the first, you might say, the first taste we had in Ireland here of food to a very high standard with very small portions was the Russell.

And that was under Pierre Rolland.

And Pierre Rolland, his father taught me when I was in Norbury House in England, the first job I went to outside of Ireland.

Pierre Rolland’s father? (note: This is unlikely according to Pierre’s daughter)

And by Jesus he was some chef I’d tell you. We used to sit at the table and you sat down at that table according to your station of life and he’d sit at the top there flanked by all his men at they were and we the little fellows down the end and we sat down at the one time, there was no tittering and got special, the what’s his name cooked. The entremetier, he was the one that made the staff food and everybody else ate from the same plate but that was it. But he was the chef and then like the manager, the management changed and this famous French manager came to the hotel and like everything else when he came after a certain time he brought his own people. And at that time came this famous Eugene Kauffler who subsequently became the Head Chef in the Dorchester. He was a Swiss, fabulous man and these were all the people he was under at that time. Ah yeah.

How was the Red Bank?
JO: Red Bank the restaurant, there was a French chef there and his food when I used to go to it like for instance, when I was much younger I went to a couple of weddings there and it was a great place for a wedding. The food there was very good because at that time management had all changed and the chef there was a French chef (Jean Retty). I used to go there a lot because Hardy’s the fish people had an interest that, in the Red Bank and I used to pal around with Paddy Hardy and we used to go there a lot. Between it and the back bar in Jammet’s and then at times I used to maybe of a Saturday night to the Hibernian or the Gresham. Both places the food was excellent. The other place, where did I say it was? The Russell, you only went there when you were brought there. Now there were small restaurants.

MM: Do you remember the Café Belge?

JO: The Café Belge that was in Dame Street. The Café Belge was again was more of lunch trade than anything else yeah. And that was run by Geldof, yeah. God she became a famous bridge player and he was Belgian and he subsequently opened when they closed Café Belge he opened a delicatessen.

MM: He had the patisserie I think on Leinster Street.

JO: Maybe he had. But he had what you call it …Where’s the Independent? Middle Abbey Street. You went up steps I remember it because we used to go there with my father.

MM: There was a place there called the Plaza? That was where the Adelphi Cinema was. And Geldof, he was General Manager or something of that when it opened. That was 1928.

JO: Ah the Plaza. Oh, I danced there yeah, oh yeah the Plaza. Oh that was a beautiful place when that opened. I forget what the hell happened there. See money at that time don’t forget …

MM: See the Wall Street Crashed happened in 1929 I suppose.

JO: When you come to think of it on one had the money that’s going round nowadays and I often think, I say to myself how the hell did my parents, we always had a good home, we were never short of anything that I can remember. We were all sent to good schools.

MM: How many of you were in the family?

JO: Six of us, three boys and three girls. Two went to catering, Willie and myself and Karl he was an accountant. Both dead. Three sisters all married. One of them was a Hickey, she managed Hickey Fabrics. Another one is in England and she’s over ninety and another one is in Canada. All married, all good cooks (laugh). Extraordinary cooks.

MM: There were other places that came later on, there was the Tandoori Rooms, they came later on?

JO: Now that was Butt. One other place to go to at that time, because Mike Butt was a bloody character, and he ran a good restaurant and he had very good Indian food. When you talk about those type of restaurants, Jesus I can’t remember his name, near The Royal, Jesus I nearly had his name there, he was an Italian – Ostinelli, and Ostinelli was a typical Italian and he never lost it. He (inaudible) with his hands you know and Ostinelli thought he had the greatest restaurant in the world. The food he served was great if you wanted just pasta and that was really the beginning of a lot of these restaurants.

MM: So he was sort of maybe the first pasta house in Dublin?

JO: Yeah now the one before that now, there was a one in …Lincoln Place, Bernardo’s, It was a great place to go to. Anyway wait till I tell you, there was another one in Mary Street, an
Italian one as well. Just below the fruit market, on that line there. I tell you that place used be jammed of a weekend so you want and try find out the name. I forget it now. (Alfredo’s)

185.The Green Roosters when you said the Broadway (Soda Fountain). The Green Rooster used to be a marvellous place… O’Connell Street. Ah Jesus I can tell you I was a young fellow. I remember we used to go there, why because the owner of the place had two of most beautiful looking daughters you saw in your life (laugh).

186.MM: And was he Irish or was he foreign?

187.JO: No he was Irish yeah. I forget his name, anyway now you’ve opened up, you just mentioned another one way.

188.MM: Sorry I mentioned the Broadway Soda Fountain?

189.JO: The Broadway Soda Fountain was just a soda fountain. There was a place in Cathedral Street famous for its Steaks. The Palace, but the steaks were absolutely fabulous. The same as the Dolphin (Hotel).

190.MM: My next door neighbour at home and her sister, God bless her, both of them are dead now, but they were waitresses in the Palace. Ann Mackey and Lilly Ryan. And I believe you used to pick out your steak?

191.JO: Oh yeah, and the steaks. There was no such a thing as top sirloin streak and that you know it was striploin. They were what you’d call a point steak, rump steaks and t-bones and you could eat them with your bloody fork. Then they had the Dolphin, and the Dolphin was one the places to go to one time. All horse people used to be there and Jesus they didn’t, if they weren’t interested in horses, they were interested in what you call it, greyhounds. And I remember there many is the time I went there with my wife and there’d be nothing for you … I tell now the style of the place. It was nothing for a waitress to sit down beside you and take your order and say ‘how’re things going’ (laugh). And they used to have the open grill and the open grill, again, oh my God, the steaks they had there and the chops as they would call it, fancy names and …

192.MM: They had a thing there called hare soup. What was that like?

193.JO: That’s right yeah. The stuff was actually, I never forget my life when I saw the insides of that kitchen. Like the Metropole kitchen too at one time, it was famous, but I can tell you could have sown button potatoes in it!

194.MM: There was so much dirt in the ground yeah.

195.JO: Jesus, the chef in it at the time was a French man, a very old man and in fact when I opened the International in Bray, I took him on there but at that time he’d gone from bad to worse. And, ah they were famous for their monkey gland steaks and all this type of thing. Their steaks were great. Very,… fabulous drinking place and like the fellows in the bar in here at that time, sometimes used to be keeping these horsy folks in money. They might be broke for a bloody week or two weeks, you know. Then all of a sudden they’d be full of money and they’d come in and while a fellow might give them a £100, which was a lot of money of that time. Jesus they’d get £150 back …You know, that’s the way things were.

196.MM: So the waiters and all were acting nearly as loan sharks?

197.JO: Ah sure Jesus, go on, that was famous too. Ah …

198.MM: You had one level of restaurant which was the Jammet’s, the Russell, the big hotels. Then you had under that then you had the likes of the Green Rooster …
199. **JO:** You had the Green Rooster, you had the Metropole, you had the Savoy. You had the Palace, Clery’s. Yeah, I mean you didn’t have these restaurants outside the city you know, people didn’t have the money. Oh, there’s another place now that was great. The Wicklow Hotel, that used to be a good watering place.

200. **MM:** And the Metropole and all they would have, again people would have gone there, they might have been going to a show or something like that. They’d go there for their high tea. There was sort of omelettes and all that sort of stuff.

201. **JO:** Of course. Correct and on top of that don’t forget to say they used to have the big ballroom there. I mean some of the biggest dances in the city were held there. Christ you got dressed up, oh Jesus. My God, when I come to think of it the standard of novelties, I’m talking about hats and all this type of thing that they used to have at that time. You wouldn’t buy them for €5 or €6 a piece now. They were all hand outs. But of course the Gresham too was a good place at the time. You had the two, you had the restaurant and you had the grill room. Ah, Shelbourne was never a place in the latter years that one would ever … When they opened the Saddle Room now that was different, then it became a …

202. **MM:** They opened up a grill room isn’t it?

203. **JO:** It was called the Saddle Room, on the side, and they had a separate entrance to it. And that started off that, then they had the restaurant, I remember there going a couple of times to the restaurant. It left a lot to be desired.

204. **MM:** Now at that stage was Maurice O’Looney, head chef at that stage?

205. **JO:** Ah I forget, I think he could have been yeah. But it could have been of a better standard because the equipment they had in their office Jesus unbelievable.

206. **MM:** Yeah they’d great equipment because I remember Jimmy Kilbride said when he was there for a while, Eoin Dillon had brought him there. And when he left the airport, he says like the standard was very poor (in the Shelbourne). He was brought in to try and bring up the standards.

207. **JO:** Jimmy was a great character, a great character. And I can tell you he was one fabulous bloody worker. You could rely on Jimmy a hundred percent. And if you couldn’t rely on Jimmy, be Jesus, he’d be kicking the ass of somebody to make sure that everything come up all right. You could put your trust in him. He was a fabulous man. He started off, he had different businesses and that and I was always thrilled when I heard he was doing well because he was good lad. (note: Jimmy Kilbride became a very successful entrepreneur)

208. **MM:** Yeah. But he, I heard at one stage the Collar of Gold won the best airport restaurant in the world? When was that?

209. **JO:** That’s right. I forget now when it was but it wasn’t called the Collar of Gold at that time. It was still the Dublin Airport Restaurant. Yeah. It would have been around about, I went there in 1949, ’59 somewhere ’60 odd I think. I used to do very well there. God, we had some magnificent big banquets there. Very high standard.

210. **MM:** That’s right, ice carvings and all that sort of thing?

211. **JO:** Billy Ryan was very good at that. Oh, he was very good. A very quiet young man, yeah, a very quiet young man but he was artistic, artistically he had a wonderful pair of hands. A wonderful pair of hands.

212. **MM:** Do you remember Peter Powrie?
213. **JO:** Peter Powrie was in the Soup Bowl. A very good place to go. Another good place. It had atmosphere, you were sitting on top of each other. Everybody knew each other and then the place next door.

214. **MM:** When did you open up your own place Johnny’s or was that after the Kiltiernan thing like or what came first?

215. **JO:** Kiltiernan came first.

216. **MM:** Okay and how did that come about? You were at the airport, did you finish the airport?

217. **JO:** I was at the airport and my brother came to me one day and said to me, you know, ‘there’s a place well worth looking at’, and I knew the people that owned it at the time. They were famous builders and that. And one of the brothers used to live a couple of doors away from me, so I went, I met Matt one day and I asked him about this place and he said to me ‘you should talk to them, I don’t think they’re interested in developing it you know’. So I went and had a look at it and I thought to myself, and the site was beautiful, beautiful. But there was another place at that time near Grafton Street, The Wicklow Hotel, and we were very interested in buying that, the brother (Willie) and myself, and I went to the banks and they would have, but unfortunately somebody else got in ahead and whatever. You know how these things happen and it was from that that we got interested in Kiltiernan. Ah, Kiltiernan would have been a great success but for the fact, that place was already booked out completely for six months until all the bombs start going in …

218. **MM:** The Dublin bombings, the Monaghan bombings, the North, the whole lot.

219. **JO:** And that place we hadn’t a booking left over night. Everything was cancelled.

220. **MM:** Tell me how it began though?

221. **JO:** First of all, we had to get people interested in it which we duly did. Our own money plus my brother-in-law plus some Americans I knew and some Irish investors, and we put the thing together.

222. **MM:** Now was a there a building there or were you building from scratch?

223. **JO:** Oh no, we had a site plus we’d a convent and a church. The church and the rooms next to the church had to be knocked. The main building, that was left standing, we had to rebuild the whole catering block and all that. That was all built. We got into various problems. Costs went out of the roof. Where we were told the sewage system was ample, we had to build a whole new bloody system, which cost a fortune. And various things went against us in the matter of the ground. The ground was full of different springs. We had a hell of a job putting down foundations, and at that time the time the idea of a club and spending x amount of money, which we were getting, and what the people weren’t anxious about was, that they wanted the club and the hotel and the restaurant to be exclusive to them. And there wasn’t a hope in hell of anything happenings there with the thing and we found it very hard to get members. I think in the end we got about maybe a hundred, if that.

224. But the facilities were there. All the golf was there, the swimming pool was there, the exercise rooms, all the equipment was there, that wasn’t enough. And like when you come to think we were asking that time £300. Jesus you’d be lucky now for £300 a week. Anyway, it went bankrupt. It was before it’s time.

225. **MM:** You had Cassius Clay there at one stage?
226. **JO:** Oh God, we had Cassius Clay, the names we had there we had Paul Newman and people like that. I used to breakfast nearly every morning with Paul Newman. You know he’d be up at 6 a.m., he’d go into the sauna room and he’d have to have specially, all the fruit juice had to be done, just a second before he’d come up. A lovely, lovely man. We’d all those people.

227. **MM:** Because they were all involved in Ardmore Studios at the time?

228. **JO:** We had famous, what’s the famous … Sean Connery, yeah and God there was many other fellows. The rooms were beautiful. They were all fully equipped with everything, a bar, everything you could ask for. Yeah, but like everything else it was before its time and the time it happened wasn’t conducive. Anyway …

229. **MM:** Sure everything, so much closed at that time. The Russell shut down at that time?

230. **JO:** Everything, anyway after that I got a call one morning from Rome and it was from a man, a big caterer in Rome that used to do our catering in the airport, of the airline and he asked me was I interested, he said to me ‘I heard you’re now free at the moment’, you know. How the hell? … He said to me ‘would I be interested in taking a job down in England’. So I said well I’ll go and have a look at it. So it was taking over all the catering at London airport, Heathrow, and they had the contract. And there was only the one place at the time. And they had a catering there and they had another division somewhere else down a bit. Anyway I went to see them and your man told
me that they were very disinterested in the present caterers and would I take over the job. So I
said well I’d have to have a look at the terms and all. And I told them at the time I’d have to take
my family here, and yet, there was no problem in that. Anyway I was going through the, back to
the airport that day behind the scenes and I met a fellow I knew very well, from when I was
chairman of the Catering Committee and he was in I think it was TWA. So I said ‘where, what are
you doing here?’ I told him and ‘Jesus’ he said ‘be very careful, they’re doing our catering, we’re
going to get rid of them.’ So I thought now I’d better be very careful here. I thought to myself,
now if I took over this job after the place going wallop and it wouldn’t look too well on the CV
you know.

231. I was offered a very handsome...Package you know. So I came over and I discussed it with
Eileen and she said ‘I can’t’ but I said ‘maybe I’d be very careful’, you know, so I thought about
it. And I waited for the fellow to call me and then told him I wasn’t interested. Something else
had come up in the meantime, you know. So he said ‘I’ll call you again in the afternoon’ which
he duly then but I said to him ‘no’. In the meantime just to show you what happened, they did
loose the contract. Now of course I would have been blamed for that! But in the meantime a friend
of ours who was in the auctioneering business used to be in the catering, Joe Lucy. I’m sure
you’ve heard of him.

232. MM: I’ve heard of Joe Lucy alright yeah.

233. JO: He called me and told me well there was a place in Malahide that you might be interested
cause if you put a little thought in, and that’s how I got involved in ‘Johnny’s’ (in 1974). I had a
look at it and thought what I could do with it and then I knew if I gutted that place.

234. MM: Was there a restaurant in it before?

235. JO: No. It was a house. It was a fine house, beautiful rooms. It was the basement that I
gutted out. I purchased that whole house for £11,000 at that time, and em, I got clearance from the
bank to buy it, you know, and a friend of mine at the same time helped me with it, you see, as an
investor and em, I spent that morning that we opened in the County Council office here in Dublin
where they had sent me a telegram, and I got it, to say that if I opened that day, that for everyday
opened they’d fine me a £100 until I got permission. I had permission but I had to go in and spent
the morning there.

236. Anyway I came back home around midday, 1 pm had to get stuck in then to get everything.
Every single thing that could every bloody go wrong, you know, went wrong that day. I’m not telling
you one word of a lie. Firstly the day, had pissed from the heavens, all the people that I had
booked, Haughey, the O’Connors, the whole lot of them, they were at the races that day and the
races were cancelled and they’d been out there, and of course they came back all jarred every
bloody one of them. I remember the fellow who was looking after the parking of the cars, and we
had objections by the way also from neighbours. We overcame that, but that day, Christ I’ll never
forget it. I didn’t think I’d ever see another bloody customer. First we were cooking everything to
order, pheasants, the bloody lot!! Everybody came in at the one time, everybody came in half
jarred. Everybody was looking for service. Christ it was chaotic. At 5am I was still, myself and
the wife washing up, and tears running down our eyes, thinking that’s you know, that’s the end
now.

237. We opened up on the Monday, Sunday we spent all day in bed and at the same time we got up
to prepare for the Monday. Didn’t think we’d get much but we didn’t do too bad on the Monday, but
we never looked back after that! Until one day a good customer of ours, a solicitor who said to me
I don’t what the hell you’re opening of a Monday night. He says ‘you need a day off, you’ll kill
yourselves’, because he said ‘you won’t loose bloody one customer’. ‘You should close on a
Monday and have a good weekend off.’ And I thought and I said to the wife, what we did, we just
called the staff together and said ‘as and from tonight we’ll close on a Monday’. We never had a
problem after that. It was marvellous.
238. **MM:** And were you opened on the Sunday?

239. **JO:** Oh no. Sure we were working to what, 4 am to 5 am on a Saturday.

240. And that’s it up to today.

241. **MM:** But you left, you were in Johnny’s, did you not go working for Bord Failte at some stage?

242. **MM:** No. I thought you’d gone work for Bord Fáilte?

243. **JO:** Not that was Willie.

244. **MM:** So basically when you finished in Johnny’s you sold it to Patsy McGuirk is it?

245. **JO:** I didn’t sell it to Patsy McGuirk no. I sold it to a conglomerate (in 1989) right and they sold it afterwards to Pasty McGuirk but the people that bought from me weren’t going to open it up as a restaurant. They were going to put in a whole system of computers and that type of thing. Patsy is still there and he’s doing very well indeed.

246. **MM:** Was there much in Malahide at the time food wise?

247. **JO:** No, no. The Grand was very poor at that stage. We were the only restaurant opened in Malahide at that time.

248. **MM:** There must be around forty of them now?

249. **JO:** Oh the King Sitric, ourselves were the two restaurants, Aidan McManus.

250. **MM:** Probably in the ‘70s was when the like of the King Sitric, the Mirabeau, the Guinea Pig, Rolland, Pierre Rolland’s son Henri in Kiliney. These were a new wave of sort of chef proprietor…

251. **JO:** Correct yeah. Killiney that’s right.

252. **MM:** What else opened up, em (pause). I suppose the Mirabeau was very famous for its showmanship or such?

253. **JO:** Showmanship. God he was a gas man. He really was. But you know you’re man, when you come to think of it, he had a Rolls Royce at that time. And he used to be at the football matches and all and in the back of the Rolls Royce, would be every bloody thing you could think of, you know. Wines and everything else and it was really a pity when you think, the people who we used to listen to, the journalists and everything, the way they used to talk about the man behind his back, you know.

254. **MM:** Yeah, talking about that, what’s his name who was out with you at the airport? He became the first TV chef, Jimmy Flahive.

255. **JO:** Jimmy Flahive, yeah.

256. **MM:** When did the media suddenly start getting interested in food and you know and food writers started writing about food and things like that?

257. **JO:** Well the first one that really came to attention was Lucy Burke. Helen Lucy Burke. She, you know, they can say what they like about the woman. She really forced standards you know. Now there was very few, the odd time…
258. MM: I suppose people like Theodora Fitzgibbon had been around.

259. JO: No, what Theodora Fitzgibbon yeah but she wouldn’t have, she didn’t have the same punches as Lucy Burke. Lucy Burke was writing and she was causing such mayhem that people began to take notice, (Pause) and then there was the Terry O’Sullivan (Nuala O’Faolain’s father), his Saturday column used to be marvellous. He’d have some restaurant in it, you know. And that’s how all that started you know. His column was in The Evening Herald. And, ah (pause) that’s about it. I’m just trying to think now, but really of any standard, it was Lucy Burke’s who started that. She was the one that really led. A lot followed you know.

260. MM: I’m just thinking the other fellow who opened up around the same time in the ’70s was John Howard. He opened up the Coq Hardi.

261. JO: Now John Howard was a famous chef. I mean a good one. And his food was excellent.

262. MM: Did he train under your brother or he started off I think in Jury’s? He was in Jury’s in Dame Street I think at one stage?

263. JO: Well he probably was but I don’t know whether he was under Willie or not ah, I forget now to be frank with you. But he couldn’t have been at that thing because the brother brought in em, (pause) Willy Widmer. Willy Widmer that came from Switzerland. And he put standards on me, he was the one that put the standards on Jury’s at that time and he subsequently opened the, em, (pause) the Boyne Valley Hotel. And did a wonderful job there and has since retired, and now he’s the one that opened up this gourmet (company) for making pates and all that type of thing. And he supplies all the good restaurants and everything else in it.

264. He really brought the standards into Jury’s yeah. He was an outstanding, an international chef, he was. A young man, fabulous.

265. MM: Do you remember a fellow called Armar Hoffman?

266. JO: I do, he was a German. He went down to Kildare or Tipperary somewhere.

267. MM: Right he was in the Central (Hotel) but I think he was in Jammet’s, then I think in the Central.

268. JO: In the Central Hotel at that time was the father’s assistant chef in the Central. Tall fellow, again a fabulous bloody worker. But you know at that time, he died, I think he’s dead, his name escapes me at the moment but he was in the Central. I forget now his name. He was a lovely fellow.

269. MM: But that would make sense because that Mrs. Mullins. When she left the Gresham she went to the Central so she would have probably brought him with her. (note: Miss Mullins was the manageress of the Gresham until Toddy O’Sullivan took over)

270. On the subject, Miss Mullins being the famous sort of woman of the catering industry, she was totally dedicated, were there many women working within the industry? Was it mostly men in the kitchens except for maybe the vegetable section is it?

271. JO: A lot of women serving, waitresses, and no there wasn’t that, washers of course were always women. Well there was always a few (cooks) but never women chefs but that’s now started since the colleges…and they’re turning out some very good ones.

272. But the standards we have nowadays here, are comparable to anything else in any of the big cities, very, very good. As I say the only thing is, and we’re turning out some bloody good cooks. Very
good cooks, the basic, you’d never think. I remember in our time Jesus even to mention somebody going into, frankly I think the easiest way to explain it, (pause) if a family got in touch with you, they’d say to you look I have a son or a daughter who were useless as anything academics or anything would you be able to give them a job in catering. That wouldn’t happen anywhere nowadays. I mean you have very high standards of education and everything else now. You know, the whole thing has changed but I can tell you I remember when they’d call you up and say, you know, could you place him or her. Things have changed, that’s changed, the original idea of the hotel school and that, also the school in Shannon, and a different outlook altogether. People got interest in their own businesses and that, and as I say one of the great movers of the time was this fellow Micky Mullins.

273.MM: Now you were saying that Micky Mullins, yourself, Ken Besson. Who else would have been involved in that sort of movement to try and improve college catering education? Ken Besson was the Hibernian wasn’t he?

274.JO: That’s right. Ken was Irish. His father was Swiss. I’m just trying to think who else was there at the time.

275.MM: What about Hector Fabron, was he, or did he come later?

276.JO: No Hector was there, but Hector - academic wise Hector wouldn’t have been interested but not in pushing things the way we would like to, do you understand what I mean. Em (pause) Hector wouldn’t have a, he wouldn’t have the (same) outlook that like we would have had.

277.MM: And would people like Michael Marley were they involved at all.

278.JO: Michael Marley, yeah another man yeah. Yeah I forgot about Michael, another man who was interested always in that particular period as well. He was (involved in the Panel of Chefs and worked in the Metropole) yeah. I’ve forgotten a lot of these sort of fellows you know?

279.MM: When is the first time you ate out yourself?

280.JO: When was the first time? Let me put it this way I was born in a family where there was always interest in food and like I knew a lot about food before, you know, many of the young people of that time would have had the opportunity because we had it at home. We had wine with our meal and all this type of thing, you know. Not everyday but particularly at the weekend and that and em, we were offered wine, and if you wanted to take it you took and you didn’t if you didn’t. There was no thing about it. When was the first time I ever went out for a meal? Jesus that’s a hard one! (Laugh). The first time I ever went out for a meal I would think was the first time I went on holiday to Wales. Oh well of course now as a small child we visited Switzerland when I was four or five years of age, and when I went to Switzerland and I mean it took three days to get there. I went with my sister and stayed with my father naturally at home. Em, and like you couldn’t afford but twice I went, at four and I went again at about eight years of age to Switzerland and interesting enough one of the personal tragedies I felt in my life was, being in Aer Lingus and could travel as often as I want to, and take my parents with me to Switzerland. And my father that time was dead I always think that was a tragedy, mind you he was more Irish than the Irish themselves but still he was Swiss, you know.

281.MM: Technological changes that you would have seen over the years, you would have seen a huge change from coal ranges to stoves, and then refrigeration?

282.JO: Unbelievable. Coal ranges. The Gresham or the Shelbourne a huge range there was there. What it would be ten, twelve, fourteen feet. They were all coal. They were fired up everyday and the head kitchen porter had to make sure the doors were stoked and the bloody heat of those things. Fabulous ranges, there weren’t nothing buckled in those I can tell you. Machinery we had, you’re making the ice cream; you made it by the hand. Em, but refrigeration wasn’t a big thing
because in the Shelbourne at that time when I started big blocks of ice used to come in every day and in the poissonry, what we’d call the fish department there was an all enclosed in glass, sliding glass doors and inside that was all tiled, white tiles with a drain off in them and that’s where all the fish was, on top of fresh ice. There was a fridge there, but that was only meat was in it. And that was all, a big thing of…

283.MM: Was that fridge, was that an electrical fridge?

284.JO: Yeah it was run by a big motor and it was outside. And the bloody belt on it you know and ah also in the butchery all that, there was blocks of ice in the…In behind again, an area where there was all tiled. Of course everything in it filled the Shelbourne, from top to bottom was tiled. And God of a weekend you had to made, there was no fresh bread in there for the weekend and you had to make your own French bread rolls and this was a bloody big thing of dough and that you had to knead that dough and belt it yourself you know. I was an amazing young fellow at that time, I wouldn’t have that amount of strength to do it but it was done. Moulded up and the French bread was baked in the oven. It’s all marvellous that kind of thing.

285.MM: Now were they electrical ovens?

286.JO: All electrical ovens. No electrical yeah, or were they, Jesus now you have you. And I think they were gas and all the pastries and everything was made at that time and you had another place, a big box and ah glass fronted you know and underneath was all lined and you had your Pièce Monter there. The baskets made with sugar and all that in dry air so that there was nothing.

287.MM: The lime was to absorb the moisture, yeah. You mentioned fish there, how about the whole idea of you know, this whole black fasting and things like that you know, the fish on Friday and that sort of stuff.

288.JO: Friday’s (pause) only one thing I remember about really Friday. If you were on guard of a Friday there was a set fish used to come in and it was always in the afternoon and you’d have a bloody big steak and the steak was to be made that it looked like a piece of, what you call it, of piece of grilled turbot (pause). Fish God when you come to think of it Jesus you’d commit bloody murder rather than eat a bit (laugh) of meat on a Friday. (Laugh) when you’d come to think of it, God almighty. The changes (pause).

289.MM: Do you think that affected peoples attitude towards fish?

290.JO: I do because ah I think a case and point if you just think about it (pause). I’m absolutely amazed and I can’t believe it at times how easily people took to no bags, no plastic bags. They’re doing exactly the same now with smoking. If our religion at the time was less a thing about eating meat on a Friday there would be nothing about it. They’d probably eat more bloody fish than they would eat meat. But you were forbidden and that was it.

291.MM: What I’m saying is did people not eat fish on other days of the week because they considered it to be…

292.JO: That’s right yeah, Penance food. Now they can’t eat it because it’s gone too expensive!

293.MM: What would you consider you’d be most proud of looking back over your time?

294.JO: My God (pause) well I suppose really I’d have to say the happiest years of my life were in the airport because I was in where it was new, it was growth and ah it was exciting. Really exciting. The people that you knew were fabulous people. They were all dedicated to this new concept and everybody I met in the airline business in most countries were exactly the same. Ah it was an exciting history, part of history. Yeah (pause). Running your own business, opening your first business although it was doomed to failure really due to lack of funds was again a very happy
period. But nothing compares to the thrill there was at that time. Meeting other nationalities and how they looked upon life. It was marvellous yeah.

295.MM: Were you to do everything again would you do anything different?

296.JO: No I’d do it exactly the same (laugh), both the bad and the good. One learns from the other yeah. Extraordinary.

297.MM: Isn’t that great (laugh). Do you think there’s any one particular period or one time when things really changed you know, sort of, I have this vision, you know, correct me I’m wrong. I have this vision that sort of at one stage eating out was for the rich. And that now eating out is for everyone.

298.JO: That’s right, the war, number one and the (pause) what shall I say? The involvement, number one, of the airline business. If you really look into it, it really was the beginning, or the opening up of one’s eyes or one’s vision. It helped to open up the visions to of people here in Ireland and people began, things began to happen. There were jobs and factories and everything. That’s the period which seemed to be slowly but surely devolving. And involvement in a brighter life, seemed to come out, and slowly but surely as things got better. You could see that people were having standards of living. Better standards, they were going out the odd time. The Irishman himself changed. That’s the feeling I got. The feeling I got was, he wasn’t the man that wanted to go out on his own with the lads. That stopped. They began to wheel out the pram. He began to go and take his wife out at night time. He began to take interest that the wife was a little more than just staying in the house and taking her out and have nice clothes. All that type of thing, you could see that change happening, all for the better. Like for instance, people like Dunnes, their stores opened up. You could see, many is the time I said, you could see families becoming better dressed. Things were happening you know.

299.MM: Yeah, yeah. Do you think PV Doyle would have had any role in it?

300.JO: Another man that I think had great visions, and he had the money to bring them about. You know, apart from building places, he had the concept that to build them, he had to fill them and ah, that needed marketing and that started. Managers at that time, later on he began to send them out. Go to different meetings and that and sell your product. All this was evolving at the time you know.

301.MM: I suppose we were coming more sort of confident.

302.JO: Confident is the word yeah. Confident as a nation yeah and little things that were happening really gave, now again you take an outfit like Aer Lingus at that time, I mean that was the pride of the nation and people began to you know sit back a bit, Jesus we can do this and you know. But this is true, that’s what was happening. Factories were doing well. We were turning out products. I remember a time that, for instance, Newbridge cutlery and that, holy Jesus for anybody, Christ do you see the stuff they do nowadays. I’m only too happy to bring people down to see it. It’s marvellous. That’s all happening, that’s all... Businesses began to get interested in people. Em, and I think too, no matter what people might say, unions at the time were very important. They helped to see that people could see the ends of their work. Their labour, what they were doing because they were getting ah, they were getting compensated for their hard work and that all, everybody has that input and it was all coming together at the one time.

303.MM: Yeah, it’s amazing.

304.JO: What time is it? Jesus Christ 2.15 pm. I’ll make a sandwich or something (turned tape off).
Discussion while tape was turned off about professional chefs coming to Ireland from the continent and being classified as domestics

305.MM: The whole thing there they had professional status on the continent and they came to Ireland and they were considered domestics.

306.JO: Now you see, there is a part of your thing that should be brought out you know. (Pause – making tea).

307.MM: Did your father speak French at home?

308.JO: A little but not really, you know. You know, when you come to think of it, that man’s life, he would leave maybe 8am, get in, do all the orders you know and that type of thing. He’d be working then up to maybe 2 pm or 3 pm. Get the tram home, and he’d get home and he’d be back into work at 5.30 pm.

309.MM: Yeah he’d be home for an hour at most.

310.JO: Yeah and you’d be doing that not five days of the week but six days of the week or 5½ days maybe and every second Sunday you’d get off but you’d be working every other and what bloody chances did they have at that time of learning and teaching. You know when you come to it.

311.MM: When you come to think of it, it was all on the mother’s shoulders wasn’t it. And would you have picked up an awful lot French then in the kitchen in the Shelbourne?

312.JO: Yeah and the genes are there. They thought me an extra language at school, German and Latin…

313.MM: Was it the Jesuits in Newbridge College?

314.JO: Dominicans. I was never a great academic anyway. Then when I wanted to become more academic, I had no bloody time (laugh). (Pause).

Discussion on what brought the Swiss to Ireland

315.MM: Your brother Willie where did he do his apprenticeship? Was he younger than you?

316.JO: Oh yeah much younger. The two youngest in the family were the first two to die, yeah. Willie started in I think it was the Dolphin (pause). God I’m not too sure. I think it was the Dolphin. Em, Willie was never serious at first. Willie wanted to be an actor. And he was more or less at the Acting School in the Abbey (pause) and then I think they told him one day, that’s about all he’d ever be. So (pause) I think it was in the (pause), I think it was in the Dolphin.

317.MM: But he went on then later on to have a share in the Dolphin did he or did he own it?

318.JO: He owned it with (Eamon) Andrews, yeah, but they made an utter mess of it. Eamon Andrews at the time was interested in dance halls and stuff like that. They thought they were going to set-up this thing, oh it was dreadful. (note: they turned it into a German Beer Cellar and disco) All they had to do was to clean the place up. Don’t even (inaudible) just clean the floors and that. They’d a ready business, my God pouring in there. What did they do they set up this bloody thing, Christ it was dreadful, dreadful. Well, it just didn’t go that was it. Ranch style!!! It was bloody dreadful now. Em I remember the first night I went out, Jesus they were gone mad.

319.MM: Where was he before that though?
JO: Willie, when I left the International in Bray I’d ask (Inaudible) to take him on. I took over the Moira, when I left the Moira Hotel I got the Kidneys at that time, for them to take on Willie and then Willie when they started to rebuild and to redo Jury’s, Willie had the vision and the know how, and he was the one that started and put Jury’s into what it was.

MM: So this is where the Intercontinental is now or where the, no Dame Street yeah, so brought then Willie Widmer and the whole lot in.

JO: Correct but years afterwards when they bought the Intercontinental they wanted Willie then to be the Marketing Director. And he felt that was a lower job, head strong. I suppose he was right but anyway. He went from better to better you know and ah (pause) he did all sort of things then. He went into antiques and made a fortune from them, you know. So but always had the interest in the business you know. Extraordinarily.

MM: It’s in the blood (laugh).

JO: In course it is, it’s in the genes. Genes are a remarkable thing. And some of them were politicians as well you know. Like Haughey, and Donagh O’Malley, I’m thinking of John Hanlon, ah, (pause) like it was characters that you go into a place, they were like singing and holding court, but there were such characters, story tellers. Jesus you never hear of those nowadays. All they want to do is go into a bar and just get jarred. (Laugh)

Years ago, you’d go into Jammet’s and all the different airline managers would be around. They were all characters but all business blokes you know. One famous fellow, I can’t remember his name, and he had his birthday the same day as myself. We used to call each other the twins. He was the greatest story teller of all times, and you could just listen to him telling a story, the same story three time over in one night, but it would be different every time he’d tell it. And when he’d get to the end, he’d turn half snigger because he knew the end of it. Characters, Christ, I’ve seen a fellow and he could be sliding down the bar, but if he told you he was going to do something in the morning, it was done. You know they were that type, they were fantastic characters.

MM: Oh I better hit the high road.

JO: I started a little wee shop at the departure gate and we used to sell bacon, sausages, all Haffner’s stuff and even Jews used to call me and they’d take the bacon and sausages, I’d wrap it up for them but keep it quiet. And that was all. That started as a small. That grew very big. You know that was during the war years when you couldn’t get a decent sausage or rash or bacon in England. It was extraordinary.

MM: Whereas now you have all the different, everyone’s in there now the Hanlon’s and all the whole lot. Smoked salmon and the best of cheeses and this sort of stuff.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Declan Ryan (DR) in Arbutus Lodge, Cork (11/3/2005)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Declan Ryan (DR)

1. **DC:** When they dined, you know. So it was that old money that kept the Russell and the Hibernian and probably the Red Bank and to a degree Jammets all going. There was no tourism in it. It was sort of old, old money.

2. **MM:** Sort of Horse Show week and the Spring Show week and they were the big one?

3. **DC:** They were the big ones yeah. You’d earn an extraordinary amount yeah.

4. **MM:** Well part of the model I’m following is I’m sitting down talking to people and to come up with a life history model, you know what I mean. I’m looking at people when they were born, where they were born, education, sort of were there catering families, that sort of stuff. Looking for patterns in things like that.

5. **DC:** It was quite extraordinary hitting it in Dublin at that time, as I did. They spoke a Dublin accent so dense that I could hardly understand what they were saying never mind anything else (laugh) but there was a tradition of apprenticeship.

6. **MM:** You were born in Cork.

7. **DC:** Oh yes. Born in 1943 and then I worked in the Russell I had already done a hotel management training course in London, in Hendon College of Technology so because of that the guys in the Russell kitchen used to call me ‘scoff’ – short for Escoffier because you see I knew all the classical garnishes and all that sort of thing straight out of my head, they had it in the hands but I had it in the head (laugh). I had trained in London under chef instructors who had done their apprenticeship in the Ritz within five or ten years of Escoffier retiring, so I mean I was that close to a direct link or lineage.

8. **MM:** To bring you to that stage had there been, like how many was in your family. What did your father or mother do or?

9. **DR:** I’ll show you the photo’s. (pointing to photographs) The Blackthorn House in Cork, a rather famous Cork institution. That was my grandfather; that was my father. We got into hotel business almost by accident. What happened was somebody made my father an offer for the house we were living in that he felt he couldn’t refuse. You know, you’d be up against it at times and he was having difficulty meeting his payments and all this sort of thing and somebody gave him a big offer. The only thing is he had to be out by a particular day. That was grand. He took the offer, and then he went looking for somewhere else, and my mother was a difficult woman and he couldn’t find anything to please her and eventually he took over a holiday house in Crosshaven which is down in Cork harbour, belonging to a friend as a temporary thing and then they found a guesthouse for sale in Crosshaven which was designed by the architect who designed quite important public buildings in Cork. He was quite a guy.

10. **MM:** The Gandon of Cork? (laugh).

11. **DR:** A little bit later but I think he designed Cork railway station and things like that but they bought it with the idea of using as a private house. The only problem was the woman who was selling it was selling it, well she was selling it now, possession was after her season because she had bookings which she wanted to honour and we were coming to a stage where the owners of the house we were staying in wanted to come on holidays and my father was getting desperate, so he went to the woman and said ‘look if I honour you bookings can we get in no?’, so she said ‘yes’.
He said to my mother ‘look it doesn’t matter if they don’t like what we do, they can feck off, we
don’t care, we’re not going to continue in this business’ but in fact they loved the business, they
loved it and there was money in it, so they did it for a couple of years and then there was a guide
to Europe written by the editor of the American Esquire Magazine and he mentioned two places in
Ireland and one of them was ours. So the manager of the tourist office in Cork who was a pal of
my fathers and he said to him ‘look you’re doing a terrific job but you’re too far out, I need you in
Cork’. He said ‘I know a house that’s for sale that would make a perfect hotel, why don’t you buy
it?’

12. MM: The Arbutus?

13. DC: So my father bought it (Arbutus) for £3,500 in 1960 and the idea was, he had another
friend an architect John Green who was one of the architects who did the Cork Opera House and
who would convert it to a hotel so that was grand, he bought it. John did a plan and the plan
would have cost £50,000 to do. Now he’d spent £3,500 on the place and your man is looking for
£50,000 to convert it to a hotel so my father nearly fainted and he said ‘I can’t fund that sort thing’
so he said ‘can you do it in stages’. ‘No’ all or nothing. So my father was nearly going bust and
Fergus O’Farrell, do you know the Fergus O’Farrell shop in Dublin? They still have the shop in,
what’s the name of the street that the Mansion House is on?

14. MM: Dawson Street.

15. DC: Dawson Street, it’s at the bottom of Dawson Street. There’s an arcade there and they
have a sort of a, a sort of a souvenir shop there and he used to supply souvenirs to the Blackthorn
House in those days and he came down. He became a friend and he came down on one occasion
and my father sort of said to him ‘look I’m going mad, what am I going to do? I’ve nothing to
spend, I can’t afford to do what the architect wants’ so Fergus got out a player’s (cigarette) box
and he said ‘look do you see that big room there, you put a corridor there, you put a door there,
you put a door there, that’s two bedrooms. See this room here you put a corridor there, a door
there, a door there, a door there, that’s three bedrooms, that’s five bedrooms and you put a hole
through the wall there and you can tap into that to put out your sink drains and he said you get that
done he said and I’ll get the furniture organised for you. I’ll make the furniture for you’. So he
went away thinking no more of it and three weeks later my father rang and said ‘right we’re ready
for the furniture now.’ (Laugh).

16. He got a builder and they put up partitions. There’s no way they’d pass any kind of a building
code today. Plaster board with sheets of newspaper pinned in between as soundproofing (laugh).
No it wasn’t plaster board, it was soft board (laugh) and about the same time while we were living
in Crosshaven one of our neighbours was actually Derry Clarke’s aunt. Carrie Roche, Roches
Stores and I used to babysit for them and Carrie was at that stage a thirty year old extremely,
extremely glamorous female. I was about sixteen at the time (sigh) and Carrie told me about her
friend who was the manager of the Rock Hotel in Gibraltar. She said a ‘wonderful job hotel
management.’ So anytime I was asked what I wanted to do after that coming up to my leaving
cert I’d say ‘hotel management’ with visions of the Rock Hotel in Gibraltar and the sun setting
over the Mediterranean and swanning around ‘and Carrie said…” (laugh). Unfortunately somebody
took me at my word and before I knew where I was I had an aunt who was a sort of mover and
shaker and she lived in England and she had me booked in. She had done the research and she’d
got me a place and then I’d come with a bang into the hotel school. Bang just like that (laugh).
So I did a lot of my education in that sense because when I finished the hotel school they placed
me as a trainee manager with a group which no longer exists but at that stage had big old-
fashioned hotels. These great big stately piles in the North of England, in Harrogate and places
like that and I think they were a subsidiary of one of the steel companies.

17. MM: You don’t remember the name of the company?
I think they were probably Russell Hotels or something because the headquarters was the Russell Hotel in Russell Square in London which is the most extraordinary Victorian pile. You have to see it to believe it. It looks like a bloody museum, you know. All of these red brick statues in imposing positions outside and I got a job there, first of all as a placement as a trainee chef as part, there was this business where you spent so much time working as a chef, so much time working on reception, so much time working everywhere else, and I’d done all this but my kitchen placement had been in the Russell. Then I went back to the Russell as a trainee manager. This is the Russell in London. No connection whatsoever (with The Russell in Dublin). Eventually my father rang me and said ‘look we’re up the walls, can you come home’. But I said ‘but I want to go on and train further in Germany’. ‘Look do Germany later, come home we’re stuck.’

So I gave my notice, came home with my black jacket and my striped trousers and my delusions of grandeur. At that stage he could get trainee managers and manageress out of the Imperial and Metropole in Cork trained by Dougy Vance who was one of the great trainers of management people at the time for £10 or £12 a week but what he couldn’t get was anybody to do the cooking. So there was me with City and Guilds 151 I think it was called or 151a I’ve forgotten (laugh) and that’s all I had, plus my kitchen experience from the Russell where I ran the pastry when the pastry chef went sick (laugh). There was quite a big pastry. That was a separate kitchen, quite a big kitchen at that. And then I got thrown into the deep end here but after a year of it I found that some of customers knew more about food than I did. There’s nothing worse than having your customers who know more about your job than you do and I bought a copy I think of the Egon Ronay guide and that said that best restaurant in Ireland was The Russell, and it said quite a lot of kind things about it and I said this to my father. I said ‘look I don’t know enough about what I’m doing, I need to go and get further work experience’, and I showed him what it said about the Russell. And he said ‘oh I know Hector Fabron’ because at this stage he was already in the Irish Hotels Federation and Hector was deeply involved in that. They were both on the management committee of it or something.

He served as President for a term, probably was at that time.

So Hector took me on so I spent a full winter in the Russell and…..

Which year was that?

Probably about ’65 or ’66. It was a winter so Rolland wasn’t there. He’d gone to the Bahamas with half the brigade and Michael was the head chef and Matt was sauce chef and I the sauce commis (laugh). And I worked in pastry when I went there first of all with a Belgian, what was his name – Guido Nostradama. Guido was one of the most ugly men I think I ever met but he was a really good pastry chef and I got on very well with Guido and worked very well with him, I was very happy working with him. In fact when I came home, I mean having worked the winter in the Russell and having met my wife in Dublin, my wife to be in Dublin, Guido came down, he was just finishing in the Russell and he worked with me for a little while and we did buffets and we did everything and Guido said ‘you know you’re going to have a Michelin star here in about three years, four years time’ and I couldn’t wait that long for a Michelin star, but he was right (laugh). And it took me probably six years but he was fairly right in that I did achieve the Michelin star.

So he came down with you? What do you remember of the Russell?

They were the greater shower of gurriers that God ever made. They fought like devils and they cooked like angels and they were, I mean I think Rolland had beaten them into shape. I don’t think you’d get away with the sort of tactics he must have used in these guys today, but they could cook like magic. They only knew the one way: Rolland’s way. That was the important thing.
26. **MM:** Was Arthur McGee there at that stage? He’d gone had he?

27. **DR:** Arthur McGee the name doesn’t ring a bell. Michael (note: Jackie Needham is who he means) had been the sauce chef and he was promoted to head chef when Rolland wasn’t there. Michael was a genius of a sauce chef. In fact Rolland used to say that he was one of the best in Europe and I think he could have been right. I know he developed a terrible thirst afterwards (laugh) but the guy could get a sauce. I learnt an awful lot about sauce making from him and how he did it and how he got it right and you know what he did. I learnt an awful lot from him but I was lucky afterwards in that I the manager of the Irish tourist office in Paris came over and he liked what we were doing and we sat him down and we were talking to him and I said to him I don’t know what I’m doing. I had written two or three cases in France, one stars and they’re not even giving me a reply. He said ‘look I’ll get you into Troisgros’ and three / four weeks later he rings up and he says ‘ring Pierre Troisgros, it’s all organised you can go’.

28. **MM:** Roanne is it?

29. **DR:** Roanne, yeah. Now this was, I mean after La Pyramide, Troisgros was the leader of the nouvelle cuisine brigade. Paul Bocuse and Jean Troisgros.

30. **MM:** Jean and Pierre Troisgros were the two brothers.

31. **DR:** Yes but only one of them worked in Pyramide.

32. **MM:** Sorry they were the sons. I’m just after finishing the Bernard Loisseau book, *The Perfectionist* and who else worked there Guy Savoy. Guy Savoy trained there as well.

33. **DR:** It was the old boy, a bit like my father, my father didn’t know anything about cooking but he encouraged me all the time and the difference was that old man Troisgros was a hard task master and anything that wasn’t true, anything that wasn’t honest it was *cinema*, and that was his most dismissive term. He said *du cinema* and I met Jean-Baptiste I think his name was and that’s where I learnt to shake off the shackles of Escoffier. Up to then I felt I was cheating if I didn’t do things the classical way. And there I went to Troisgros and they didn’t do it the classical way. They simplified it. They had self-confidence and I mean some of the things they were doing, would have been things that I would have instinctively wanted to do but was feeling guilty about doing so I sort of flew from there on, you know, I was quite prepared to chance my arm at anything after that.

34. **MM:** How long were you there?

35. **DR:** I was there for a month and it was the most releasing month of my life. I mean I’d get up 5.30 a.m. to work with the pastry chef and then I’d start in the main at 8.30 a.m. and I’d work through till 11 p.m. that night. Okay, it was a split shift but even so! I mean by the time 11 p.m. came around I can tell you the eyes were in bits having been up since 5.30 a.m. (laugh) but that’s how I learnt. The *Oeufs à la Neige* and things like that were very much part of the Troisgros *Chariot des Desserts* and I mean I came home and we simply what Troisgros had been doing. Now, we had Michelin star already, we’d got the Michelin star.

36. **MM:** How many stars had Troisgros at that time?

37. **DR:** Three. And they kept three the whole way through because afterwards the eldest son, who was Claude Troisgros, Pierre’s eldest son, Pierre rang up and said ‘since you have the *l’étoile de l’Île* – the star of the Island – will you take my son?’ Of course I took him (laugh). If Troisgros wanted it, Troisgros got it, as far as I was concerned (laugh) and he worked for me as sauce chef and then went back to France and couldn’t settle after Ireland because we weren’t, while the lads worked hard they played hard and he found it very liberating and he couldn’t cope with the sort of the rigidity in France afterwards. So he had a row with the father and he went off to Brazil and he
ran a big kitchen in a big hotel in Copacabana beach and then he married a Brazilian girl and he
now I think has two restaurants in Brazil and he’s had one restaurant in New York which I think
the lease ran out on it or something like that but it was one of the most talked about, while it was
there, but I had a lovely story. One of my customers at the time was saucier for me, her husband
was a lawyer and they went to a law conference in Brazil, and they were staying in a hotel and
whatever meal she got she called the waiter over and she said ‘have ye got a French chef?’ and he
said ‘madam all the kitchen brigade are French here’, ‘ah, but have you got a French chef whose
worked in Ireland?’, and out came Claude (laugh).

38. **MM:** Recognised him by his sauce?

39. **DR:** Recognised the sauce and I’m deeply impressed with that I can tell you.

40. **MM:** So you came from training in the Russell in England, being called back home…..

41. **DR:** Not knowing, and with my City and Guilds and no more. Working for say a year,
realising how little I knew and going to the Russell for the winter. Then getting a reputation on
food. I mean by 1970 we had, we were in the Good Food Guide, we were in the Egon Ronay
Guide and one American had said we were listed as one of the outstanding restaurants in Europe,
so I mean we were hitting it by 1974, really were hitting it.

42. **MM:** Do you know when Egon Ronay started here? I know Michelin started in 1974.

43. **DR:** I don’t know. It had to be in the ‘60s. (note: Egon Ronay covers Ireland first in 1963)

44. **MM:** Because you hadn’t even read about it, I’ll trace that back myself.

45. **DR:** The thing was I was using the Good Food Guide and the Egon Ronay Guide but I think it
was the Egon Ronay that excited me, funnelly enough I met the chief inspector for Egon Ronay
afterwards who he was a withered old Hungarian who had an absolute weakness for Mille Feuille.
If you did a good Mille Feuille, you were there (laugh) and as it happens we used to used in the
early in days, we used to have a policy that anybody who was on their own who sounded
interested when we sat down to eat ourselves which was when everybody else was finished we sit
in a little alcove we’d invite them to join us for a drink and we invited him over and we were
going the following day on our holidays to the Strand in Rosslare, Kelly’s and he was going back
the following day so we invited him to have dinner. We invited the Egon Ronay inspector (laugh)
to have dinner with us in Kelly’s.

46. **MM:** And did you realise it was him.

47. **DR:** Not at all he told us afterwards.

48. **MM:** Serendipity.

49. **DR:** But he was one of our fans through the years and he nominated us for three stars from
Egon Ronay and I can remember that happened in 1981/1982 and Ronay came over with Johnny
Apple, R.W. Apple who I think he was the New York Times’ European correspondent and R.W.
Apple was one of the great gourmet and he was a great pal of Egon Ronay and the two of them
flew in to Cork, had lunch and flew out again.

**Note:** We are joined by Bens, a French pastry chef living in Cork

50. The Michelin people are so powerful, even in Ireland they’re kind of powerful, though they
weren’t powerful enough for me unfortunately but I know that they went to Michel Troisgros,
who’s the son who took over the business and said look the place isn’t quite up to the three star,
you’ll have to do something with it and he knocked the whole building down and rebuilt it.

299
To maintain the three stars?

To keep the three stars and the rooms now are just amazing. I would say that anybody who wants to define excellence almost has to go and see what Troisgros do, because they do it so well. I mean he was chef of the year last year with Gault Millau and I mean I got there for my 60th birthday and then he wouldn’t charge us. Thanks be to God!!! (laugh). So it’s a pretty amazing place. The standards are just..... Troisgros are the tops now. I know that Ronay, not Ronay, Gault Millau the only place they’d ever given a sort of a perfect mark to has been Troisgros.

They gave 20 out of 20 to Bernard Loiseau (pointing to a book) this is called The Perfectionist: Life and Death in Haute Cuisine, it is about Bernard Loiseau who trained with the Troisgros brothers and then had the Cote d’Or.

You see the Troisgros, they were generosity itself, and the kitchen was staffed, they was a permanent saucier, a permanent pastry chef and everybody else was a stagiere. There was one or two apprentices all right, but mainly they were stagieres just going through and they had their management system worked so well that you could walk into their kitchen and on the first night you could be given a job and you could do to a Troisgros standard and then they’d block build, they could extend you. Quite extraordinary but that was management, that was using the brain. It was absolutely brilliant. I mean I used to do the Salmon with sorrel sauce which was one of their signature dishes. I was doing that within a week of arriving there. Now I mean.

They made their name on that. That was the dish that defined them?

But everything was extremely simple. If there was a way of simplifying a dish they simplified it, and I mean to this day I have an instinctive distrust of cinema, something with too fussy a garnish, labour intensive for the sake of being labour intensive, as is a certain rather famous restaurant in Dublin!!! This wasn’t the Troisgros philosophy. Troisgros philosophy was get the flavour right, get things to balance and keep it simple and that’s what they did.

And did very well.

And yes I mean there was about twenty in the kitchen and we all worked like mad. I mean we really worked hard but I mean I can remember Jean Troisgros coming in to the larder and trying to teach his dog to jump over the larder table. Can you imagine that in Ireland? (laugh) And the only time I saw him really cross and the only time I think I ever got a real bollocking there was the staff supper was usually about 5.30 p.m. and on this particular night it was a soup and when I got it was totally unseasoned, and I seasoned it up and ate it, and the next thing Jean arrives in down to the kitchen and he goes through the entire brigade, ‘did you have the soup?’ and ‘did you do anything about that seasoning?’ because it was given to all of the rest of the staff as well you see.

But the fact that you had adjusted the seasoning?

No, the fact as we as professionals, as chefs had let this go without comment. Were we chefs or what were we? How dare we? The only time I ever got fucked out of it. We were all murdered!! murdered!!... And this was a staff meal that was unseasoned, but you see, that was the mentality that you were working with. The extraordinary thing is there was no tolerance of mistake, and there were no mistakes made. Now I mean, in my own kitchen, I know mistakes were made all the bloody time, and I couldn’t ever get across to them, no mistakes but that’s how it worked. Extraordinary place.

You see you came back and you took over the kitchen. Your brother then took over with the front of house or was your father looking after the front of house?
62. **DR:** My father was doing the front of house and I took over front of house in 1970. I had done sort of five or six years in the kitchen at that stage and that’s probably enough to do you know (laugh) and at that stage I also had the problem that I needed somebody out front who could sell what I was doing, you see. This was my problem and that’s why I came out front originally. I mean the thicks that I had front of house couldn’t understand what I was trying to do, or explain to customers.

63. **MM:** They couldn’t articulate your business sort of thing?

64. **DR:** Yeah that’s it because I could sell it myself. And that worked, and I was lucky at that stage I got a chef who would do what I wanted doing. Now later on, he became a liability because he couldn’t change. There was only the one way the way he had learned originally, and the little short cuts he had slipped into it, but I couldn’t get him to change and that’s why I was thrilled to Claude Troisgros working for me because they’d take change from him whereas they wouldn’t from me (laugh).

65. **MM:** Right. How many were in your family?

66. **DR:** Five of us. Three sisters and the one brother Michael, and Michael we sent to train.....Hector Fabron got him working for, what’s the name of the famous traitor in Place de Madeleine in Paris? Fauchon

**Discussion on Poulain, the famous Parisian baker.**

67. **DR:** No Michael worked with Fauchon to start with and then at that stage we were beginning to do trips to France on wine because at that stage we began to get a serious reputation for our wine list and we used to visit Louis Latour and all of these guys and on one of these (visits) we stayed in Romorantin which is near Chablis because were visiting Chablis the following morning. And Patsy met the patron, they were doing some sort of building work at the time and there was just the one toilet and she met him inside in the loo (laugh) and invited him back to the table and we sat down and we sort of said ‘by the way my brother is looking for somewhere to do a stage, would you give him a stage and we had the guy so drunk he said ‘of course yeah no problem’ and that’s why he got in there and at that stage Romorantin had two stars and eventually it went to three stars, I think it’s back to two now because the father has retired and it’s the son running it, but I mean it’s the most luxurious of places. You’d spend a €1,000 a night not a bother, you know. I mean it’s a seriously expensive place, but it is beautiful. Again we stayed there for nothing (laugh) and eventually he sent his, the young man there sent his fiancée Brigette to learn English to Arbutus so she spend a year as a stagiere working with me. That was terrific as well. She was a nice girl.

68. She’s the lady of the house there now. Michel Loren was the father and again he would have been dismissed as cinéma by old man Troisgros. I have another way of putting it which came up at a management conference I once I went to. ‘The mountains are in labour and a mouse is born’. All this work, all this fuss. Troisgros never lost the sight of the big picture, the big picture was what it was all about. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

69. **MM:** I think what’s happened as well, times have changed, you know what I mean, and fashions have changed?

70. **DR:** And now they have a menu à l’ancienne. An old fashioned menu, where all these so called modern things, modern classics are now on it and they’ve moved on again completely.

71. **MM:** Now Troisgros’s son, when he took over, he embraced the whole Japanese simplicity and style.
He's very influential in Japan but there was always a Japonais in every two or three star kitchen at that stage in the ‘70s there was a Japonais working there. And the funny thing is, nobody could tell one Japonais from another so on a guy’s day off he’d slip in another guy and they sort of worked, they knew each other, you see, and they told each other how something was done and they would, like me, spend their money on going to another three star and eating while they were (off duty), you know, and they knew what was on the menu and how it was done and all this sort of thing and they’d go and work there and nobody ever knew (laugh). But the Japanese were great. I got on very well with them. In fact I went to, what’s his name, Alan Chapel. I went to Chapel with the Japonais when I was there and I mean his speciality was a Gateau du Foie Blonds. It was like…..

Yeah he was using chicken livers almost like a foie gras and I mean the Japonais could tell me how it was done. I mean this thing when you just cut into it (licking of lips) I can still remember the texture of it (laughter).

You’re making me hungry!

But I’ll never forget that Gateau du Foie Blonds and Michael got to work in (Alain) Chapel afterwards. We got him in there as well (laugh).

Had he been home in between?

He had been home in between, yeah he had. So we used the French connection. The French at that level are very good at networking and once they accept you, you can get into any of them because they’d pick up the phone and they’d ask somebody for you. They were great. But the generosity of Troisgros and the openness of Troisgros was just stunning absolutely stunning but the father was the character (laugh).

Jean Baptiste. Yeah. And I know that in America now one of the top restaurants the Zuni Café. I have a friend called Frank Riordan who is from St Louis, and that girl was a neighbours child and she wanted to do an exchange to France and whatever arrangements they had fell through and they asked Frank who was a friend of the Troisgros if he could organise anything so he rings up Jean Troisgros and says ‘what can we do?, do you know anybody who would take her’ and so the next thing he gets a phone call ‘tell her to come and the exchange will be our daughter Catherine will be staying with you’ (laughter). He couldn’t believe it.

So she came and Frank said to her ‘right, everything that Jean Baptist says to you, write it down’, so she kept a diary and he formed her food philosophy. Now she wasn’t working in the kitchen. She was going to school there and learning French but he formed her food philosophy by sitting down and talking food and dining with the family every night. And now she’s one of the best in the world.

It’s a real spider’s web isn’t it?

Discussion on Frank Riordan’s understanding of Haute Cuisine and French Gastronomy

You’ve mentioned that at one stage you had two separate one stars. How did that come about?

In 1981 I bought the Cashel Palace Hotel and six months later the Michelin Guide came out and we were in it with a star.
85. **MM:** That was only for two years was it or so that it was in there.

86. **DR:** Yeah and I had it for one of those years and then I had to sell it because that was the year that bank interests went up to 25% and VAT went up by 8% in the one year. And I had a £250,000 borrowed.

87. **MM:** Chez Hans was there.

88. **DR:** Hans was there at the time and Hans got a star as well. We were competing. I mean we were great friends.

89. **MM:** But there’s nothing like competition itself, you know what I mean, because it keeps people sharp and plus it brings people in?

90. **DR:** But in fact there weren’t enough people. I mean we traded well, we did very well there. I mean, we turned over more in bar food in the buttry there, in the basement sort of little restaurant, off the main road, than the whole hotel had turned over the previous year before we bought it. I bought it off Vincent O’Brien (Horse Trainer). But I mean, we did get a Michelin star and I mean that was stunning, because they trusted us enough to give us a Michelin star after only being there for six months. Unbelievable, so we had the two places then and I had Michael running here (Arbutus) and I was up above.

91. **MM:** I got from Derek Brown (Editor of Michelin Guide), he sent to me a chart with all the Michelin’s in Ireland from 1974 to 2000 but I was looking at this, you know, the way you see sort of blips, you see some coming out like the Cashel Palace, but now I understand why.

92. **DR:** I just moved the sort of operation up to Cashel. We sort of duplicated what we were doing here. We put in a lobster tank and we had fresh lobsters there, and we had all that sort of thing going and there was a good customer base of people. There was a lot of money there.

93. **MM:** Rich farmers and the horses…..

94. **DR:** The horses in particular. Unbelievable. They were the days of the £50 tips. Jesus Christ. I mean I wasn’t making a £50 profit on the bloody meal that was served but the staff were getting a £50 tip out of it (laugh). But the problem was,… that made you look at your tips, that’s bad, very bad and I was worried about that. Very worried about that, but sure, anyway that’s about it. What else can I tell you?

95. **MM:** When you were in Dublin, now when you went to Dublin did you sample, now you were there 1965 now Jammets closed 1967, did you eat there?

96. **DR:** I ate in Jammets in basement, because that was the only way I could afford to, with the smell of the gents toilets coming out at you (laughter). But it was slow, but the food was pretty good. It was a good classical kitchen.

97. **MM:** Was Marc Faure there was he or…..?

98. **DR:** I have no idea who was there, no idea. I never saw the main restaurant, it was only the basement I ate in with the concrete floor and you sort of sat up at the bar counter and you waited, and you waited until they had time to serve you.

99. **MM:** That was the oyster bar, is that what it was called?

100. **DR:** I don’t know what it was called. I used to take my then fiancée there for dinner. The Red Bank was the other one we really liked at that time.
How was that?

Ah it was beautiful, lovely. The food there was simpler and they weren’t over ambitious, they kept things simple and right. That was what I liked about it cause I’ve always been suspicious of too fussy food ever since.

How do you think, had Michelin been around in those days, in the ‘60s. You know I suppose it’s always hard to tell because you can’t really look back in that way.

The Red Bank might have had one but it would have been slightly iffy. The Russell definitely would have had one, the Hibernian would have had one. I don’t think anybody else would..... The Gresham was crap. Now the Gresham might have had a big reputation but I remember eating there and Jesus the green beans tossed in margarine, why did they bother? (laugh)

I think once Uhlemann retired, I think things went down as such. And I think it was trading on his reputation a lot.

It was. It was very sad. I know at the time we didn’t think much of the Shelbourne but I never actually ate there at that particular time. I ate in the Saddle Room later but I know it wasn’t one that sort of caught the imagination at the time.

Do you remember the Tandoori rooms? Mike Butt or sorry was it the Golden Orient or maybe the Tandoori....?

Yeah I remember Mike Butt and got on quite well with him. I mean, to me he was more a sort of a press personality than anything else, like your man who was out.....

The Mirabeau. Seán Kinsella.

Oh Lord.

I’m trying to think who else the ‘50s, the mid ‘60s now I’m trying to think what else was there at the time. There was a lot of sort of middle of the road stuff, like the Green Roosters and there was sort.....

There was all these sort of late night places, you know, theatrical with all the things up on the walls. Trocadero, that sort of thing was there all right but the centres of excellence that I can remember were Jammet’s and the Red Bank and the Russell and Hibernian and I would certainly have rated the Russell as being infinitely the better of those, because Hector was a perfectionist. I only learned that, much, much later, in that Hector had forgotten more than I would have ever know, you know. I remember going to Jaboulet’s (Rhone Valley Winemakers) for the first time and tasting a particular wine and saying ‘brilliant’ to find out that the exclusiveness for Ireland lay with the Russell. The only person who could have that wine in Ireland was the Russell. He had agreed it with Gerard (laugh).

But he had trained in the best. He had trained in the Savoy and he spent a while in Prunier’s as well and stuff but he was in the Savoy.

He and my parents were best of friends afterwards and they used to go around together an awful lot and he used to come to Arbutus an awful lot and I know that.....

He married a Clare woman was it. Was she from Ennis or somewhere like that?
116. **DR:** But I know that he arrived down on one occasion with a copy of the menu from the last night of the Russell (signed) ‘To Declan, worthy carrier of the gastronomic flag’, you know (laugh) which was very touching. You know which was very nice of him.

117. **MM:** Do you have it?

118. **DR:** I have it somewhere. I mean I have a file of all of that stuff, you know.

119. **MM:** When was the restaurant handed over, when did your parents step back? Was your mother involved in Arbutus or was it just your father?

![Photo of Michael and Declan Ryan, Arbutus Lodge, Cork](image)

**Figure DR.1:** Photo of Michael and Declan Ryan, Arbutus Lodge, Cork

120. **DR:** Well my mother originally ran the kitchen but once I came back from England she sort of pulled back and I got lumbered with it and my problem was the steak and chips and the prawn cocktail (brigade) and I wasn’t into any of that.

121. **MM:** I know, but you had to put it on?
122. **DR:** No, this was it and I would lose customer rather than do it for them and it used to drive my father spare, but fair dues, he backed me, he did back me. I mean I don’t know how he didn’t hang me to be honest, you know (laugh). Because they were doing a sort of a middle of the road, good home cooking sort of thing and I come in with my ideas, my fancy ideas (laugh) and he let me away with it. Personally, I would think I would have throttled me if positions were reversed (laugh).

123. **MM:** How were things moving at that time because you know you see that there’s sort of what they call I suppose the gastronomic renaissance that happened where Cork had been a desert for years.

124. **DR:** At that stage Cork was the most exciting place in the country because you had Ballymaloe, you had ourselves (Arbutus Lodge) and you had Ballylickey and we were the three best in the country.

125. **MM:** But this all happened in the mid 60s.

126. **DR:** You see tourism began to play a part. You see the old aristocracy who were supporting the places in Dublin were dying out, the ones from Powerscourt and people like that were going to the Russell. They were beginning to die out and it was tourists that were giving me the main impetus for excellence because they appreciated what I was doing. I mean there was a good solid local backing as well, but not a knowledgeable. The knowledge was coming in during the summer.

127. **MM:** You know it’s funny because the sort of pattern, the more you look at it the pattern becomes sort of, as in the old money in Dublin and that was dying out didn’t seek change. They really wanted the traditional dishes, the traditional Escoffier type dishes that they had grown up with and that was it and that type of service whereas things were changing on the continent and then it’s with the new blood and coming from France and from around you that you saw then this sort of change.

128. **DR:** And I think I was probably the first person in Ireland to have gone to France and looked at what was happening in France and being mind blown by it. I remember the first three star Michelin meal I ate in France. It was Les Baux de Provence – Oustau de Baumanière and I had asparagus, a plate of asparagus, the spears were that size (indicating with finger) and boiled like that.

129. **MM:** Oh my God. Now was this white asparagus or green asparagus.

130. **DR:** No this was green asparagus, I think and after than I had a leg of lamb between two of us, stuffed, bone out, stuffed with kidneys in pastry, carved at the table. Oh no, no, I mixed up the actual starter. The first course was a Gateau de Ris de Veau – veal sweetbreads in pastry that size, they were just between the two of us.

131. **MM:** Nearly like a pithiviers sort of thing.

132. **DR:** Yeah, so you had this as a starter and then you had the asparagus and then you had the leg of lamb and then brought along a sweet trolley (laugh). You know how your tummy tells you when you’ve had enough to eat? This food was so good, it was so exciting that the normal controls didn’t work. And we had a food hangover that lasted three days after it. Stunning, stunning. And, when I can tell the meal now and that was 1968/ 1969, the first time I ate there, and I still remember the meal!!! It says a lot (laugh). Thirty-six years later!!!
We had the situation now (late 1960s) where Cork suddenly took off. Ballylickey was owned by the Graves, and he had a Michelin star. Myrtle Allen was in Ballymaloe and she, you know, you can see the Graves had the French connection.

He had all French chefs. His wife is French. I don’t know about what her family was. I mean his connection was with Robert Graves, the poet. He was the step-son of Graves.

But he’d had the French connection, then you’d the French connection through Troisgros and through Rolland indirectly through Rolland and there was no French connection with Myrtle. But, what happened there is that she did what she wanted…..

No she just concentrated on raw materials and has concentrated on raw materials ever since.

And was rewarded for it.

Absolutely, absolutely

How about say the likes Kinsale. Was there ever anything, was that just….?

There was nothing serious. That was just a very, very good PR exercise. There was nothing ever. Certainly I never saw anything that I admired down there. I mean there was at one stage, miles and miles and miles later a guy that had trained with me opened a restaurant there, an American, but in general no.

It was nice food but it wasn’t serious?

Touristy.

I didn’t live through that time, I’ve read up about the time, but it’s good to try and get the opinion of somebody who has been there, and who has experienced the Russell and who can make a comparison, you know?

I remember at one stage in Dublin going one night to a restaurant called the Soup Bowl.

Peter Pourri?

The Soup Bowl was the bee’s knees and we ate in the dark off melamine plates we drank wine which was good quality but it was too young and the following night we went to the Russell where we ate in splendour with superb silver and a bottle of wine that I spent years trying to repeat. It was *Les Bonnes Mares* and it was one of the greatest Burgundy’s I’ve ever drunk and the meal in the Soup Bowl cost me more and it was crap. And it was the *nouveau riche* Dubliners who knew nothing as against the old style where you actually had to know something to realise how good it was. (laughter)

He was some operator Peter Pourri?

He was yeah. He was an operator all right.

I believe he had a lot of waitresses…..

Or dolly birds…..

And a lot of actresses yeah who worked as waitresses and one of the reasons was because they were able to remember the lines and they used to learn their lines, so they were able to learn because I think the menu was done off a blackboard sort of thing so they’d say this, this and this is
on tonight. But was there anywhere else in Dublin like that, at that time or things that you
remember or…..

152.DR: Not that I can think of. If my wife was here she might remember them but she’s not so.

153.MM: So would you have gone to Dublin much in the ’70s or ’80s.

154.DR: A fair bit because my wife is from Dublin. I met her while I was working in the Russell
and we married in 1968.

155.MM: Was she in the business? Is that how you met her?

156.DR: No she wasn’t. She was in the bank but we used to go up to Dublin fairly often to visit
the in-laws and all this sort of thing and then we’d go out for dinner while we were in Dublin and
all this sort of thing, you know cause I mean I’ve always reckoned that I learn as much by eating
in restaurants as I ever did while working kitchens.

157.MM: Absolutely yeah. Again I’ve brought the students to L’Ecrivain on Saturday because I
think it’s such an important part of their education, you know.

158.DR: Yes, and no where better. The last meal I had there I think was I think it was the best
meal, no the second last meal that I ever had there I think it was the best meal I’ve eaten in
Ireland. Full stop, full stop!!!

159.MM: Where did you, you mentioned Mr. Kinsella earlier on, did you eat in the Mirabeau?

160.DR: I remember going in and they had this sort of buffet as you went in of food on display
and then they arrived to the table, ‘your duck this evening sir’, ‘you sole this evening madam’, and
I remember the whiff off the sole and the duck was already cooked but I mean it was just vulgar.
It was again the nouveau riche.

161.MM: Do you remember a fella called Noel Cullen, he took over as head chef in the Gresham
and he was head chef in the Shelbourne at another stage but seemingly at one stage he had brought
quality in the Gresham up.

162.DR: Noel Cullen he was in the Circle of Chefs wasn’t he?

163.MM: He was one of the people who really got the Panel of Chefs going.

164.DR: The Panel of Chefs and another guy who had his son funnily training in the Russell and
he was the chef for Ranks.

165.MM: Oh Marley was it.

166.DR: Marley.

167.MM: Michael Marley.

168.DR: Michael Marley. The son was Michael as well I think. Michael junior.

169.MM: Now I wasn’t as familiar with the son.

170.DR: I don’t know what’s happened to the son but Michael Marley was quite an important
influence on me in a way because I got asked to do an Irish food fortnight in Rotterdam, because
we had a management consultant who used to stay with us who was interested in food and who
used to consult in this hotel, the Ryan Hotel in Rotterdam, and I got this formal invitation to do
this and I said to my father ‘I can’t do this, I haven’t the experience’, so we passed it on to the Panel of Chefs or to Bord Fáilte, who passed it onto the Panel of Chefs. I’m not sure quite how it went now but I know it ended with Michael Marley doing it, and I remember he did all sort of Irish things. He did pork chop Renmore with apple and honey and cream and he did chicken Hibernia which I robbed from him in Rotterdam and it became our signature dish (laugh).

Figure DR.2: Postcard of Arbutus Lodge, Cork

171.MM: So you went with him.

172.DR: Yes. I got invited because I had done the original organising of the thing I was still invited over for the week, well they did it for a fortnight, but I stayed there for a week I think. And what I did was I went over and I stayed there for the week and I was in the kitchen watching how things were done and all that sort of thing and then that was 1974 because I went on to Troisgros after that and then I came back and I used those dishes plus Troisgros dishes and that’s where we really took off then.

173.MM: Because 1974 was the first year of the Michelin in Ireland and then I think eight or I can’t remember how many solid years, you were there every year.

174.DR: We were there until 1985 anyway, 1985/1986 something like that.

175.MM: So that shows actually that you had by the time you got to go for the Troisgros you had quite a bit experience of practice under your hand so it meant that you were in a position when you went there you could understand and use your time there well.

176.DR: I did, by God I used every minute I was there, every second of it but I can remember hearing Jean Troisgros saying that I was no chef, and he was right in the sense that I was more an
ideas person rather than a hands on person, and having said that I was still doing the samaun au l’osseil and I was still doing the gratin dauphinoise and all that sort of thing and I didn’t have the French but the interesting thing was there was an American, he was a French language teacher so was staying in the hotel and he was interested in food and he asked if he could come into the kitchen, and he used to come in and he’d talk to all the lads and he could talk about politics and football and everything like that and I couldn’t do that, and I wouldn’t even know what they were talking about half the time, but once the service started he couldn’t understand a word they were saying, and I knew exactly what they were saying.

177.MM: Because the Russell had been totally French?

178.DR: No, more than that. They wouldn’t say ‘deux cote de bouef sauce beaujolais à la moelle’, they would say ‘deux moelle’. And I’d pick that up and I knew what I had to do then, you know, I had to get the dishes of gratin under the salamander and so forth. (laugh) I knew exactly what was happening and who was doing what and what had to be done and he couldn’t make out a word of it and yet he had fluent French and I didn’t (laugh). It was interesting.

179.MM: There seemed to have been a move around that time, those ‘70s, the mid ‘70s about this idea of sort of creating these Irish dishes as you say, you know, Supreme de Vollaile Hibernia, chicken Hibernia, you know?

180.DR: Michael Marley was the guy who had been doing that and I just robbed it on him, but I then refined it further because I put things like drisheen on the menu. I went right back to the drisheen, the local blood sausage, sheep bloods sausage with tansy sauce because tansy is what they used to flavour the driseen with when they were making it in the old days and they had stopped putting in the tansy…..

181.MM: Tansy, remind me again, is it a flower or something?

182.DR: Tansy is a weed or an herb depending on your definition. Somebody put it nicely to me, they said ‘an old fashioned herb, the sort granny used to use’. But I know I told them about it on the BBC, the food programme, Radio 4 on one occasion and it came out that it was an abortificient, so now I’m wondering what granny had been up to (laugh). The other thing we did, we used to do crubeens.

183.MM: And did you bone them out and all that?

184.DR: No what we did was Pied de Porc pané except we mixed the crumbs with Cork mixed spice, the ones that they used for the spiced beef in Cork so they were slightly spiced. It was really a very a version of Pied de Porc à la Saint Malo. But it was a variation of that using Cork spiced beef and there was an old boy in the market who gave me his recipe for spice mix and all this thing to put into it and I remember there was a guy we used to buy the crubeens off of. He was Cappoquin Bacon. He was one of the Murphys from Cappoquin and he used to say you’d get more for a pair of crubeens than we get for a hundredweight, because they used to export to the West Indies by the container load. I used to say ‘it’s all in the bandages’ (laugh). What we used to do we’d split two of them, bandage two of them onto a splint and then cook them very, very slowly so that they kept their shape, they didn’t burst out or anything and then we’d split them in half, dip them in butter and in dried spices, crumbs and then we’d put them under the salamander.

185.MM: So you’d have them boned out, like you’d cook them…..?

186.DR: No they weren’t boned out. They were slow cooked, you’d go through the bones like butter.
But that’s interesting because you’d use the same sort of technique that we used for cooking a lobster if you want it for a showpiece, you know, with the board on it as such to keep it from (curling up)

Yes, and what we’d do then is let set in the jelly. We’d cook them with white wine and carrots and everything like that and you’d have a big pot in at the back of the cold room of jelly and then you’d just take one out when an order came in and you’d split it in half, peel off the board, peel off the bandage, split it in half, melted butter, dried crumbs and then under salamander. When it was bubbling it was ready. Dead simple. So we had crubeens, and we called them crubeens you and we had the tripe and disheen, and we had tripe and onions on in the bar and we had the disheen with tansy sauce on in the restaurant.

Now was the tansy sauce a bit like the sorrel sauce or was it a cream sauce or what was it?

It was an old fashioned peppery buttery white sauce with a little tansy on it. A little bit of tansy.

Like a béchamel. A peppered béchamel with the tansy.

And the point is if we put in too much tansy, tansy is very, very strong, you could only put in a little so you wanted a hint. That worked with the muttony flavour of the sheep’s blood and you could see why they’d put in originally.

To be honest, I ate disheen for the first time last year.

You wish you hadn’t (laugh).

I thought it taste, to be honest, I thought it tasted of Fairy (washing up) Liquid to be honest. Not that I was ever eating Fairy Liquid but I can imagine.....

It’s muttony

Mutton is nice but there was texture...... I love black pudding.

It’s like a crème caramel in texture and it mustn’t boil. It mustn’t boil. If it boils, it toughens and it’s no use, throw it away. The other thing we had to be extremely careful on how we did that as well. We used to do the Cote de Boeuf then from Troisgros. We used to age the ribs for three weeks after they were aged by the butcher, the butcher would age them I think for about ten days or something like that and we’d hang them then for three weeks and they were totally, totally black and then we’d trim off and you’d do it about that thick leaving the rib bone in it, season it and seal it both sides and into the oven on the pan and when it was rare, we wouldn’t serve it any other way except rare. Up to the table, carve it at the table, carve it right across the grain and we used to do a sauce Beaujolais à la moelle with that. You take a big pot of beef stock, you know, really good marrow bones.

And take the marrow out?

Sometimes, yes but I mean we’d get two lots of marrow, you know, one to do the moelle and one to leave in the bones and we’d brown the bones and this was one of the things I learnt in Troisgros ‘don’t let the fucking stock boil’. They used to have it trembling, and what they would have, is they would have pots all over the place, all trembling and they used to put wire racks on top of them and you’d sit things in the warmth up there, but these were all going all the time and reduce, reduce, reduce and we used to do a pot down to that and then we’d take red wine from that down to that, and you’d marry the two and monter au beurre and there was your sauce. There was no thickening whatsoever, absolutely none.
201.MM: The natural gelatine on reduction, yeah?

202.DR: And then we’d put in the beef marrow then at the last second and this was again Troisgros genius as far as I was concerned. You had to get an acidity to the sauce that was cut by the beef marrow. It was there for a reason, you know, there was nothing done for show in a Troisgros kitchen.

203.MM: It was there for a reason. Yesterday my second years, we were doing Italian cookery. We made Osso Bucco and you realise how important the gremolata is. It’s the sharpness of the lemon.

204.DR: It is, absolutely, critical, it just totally…..

205.MM: It marries the whole lot together. It’s just with the risotto.

206.DR: As far as I’m concerned there’s only one risotto to serve with it, that’s a saffron risotto.

207.MM: Yeah that’s what we did.

208.DR: That works with it as well.

209.MM: There’s thought of a subtle…..

210.DR: Absolutely magic.

211.MM: I said to the students I said ‘we talk about molecular gastronomy, listen, that dish, you’ve all tasted it, you now know why classical cuisine will never die, because it’s good, those classic.’

212.DR: But I mean I remember the first Pesto Genovese I made, pounding the fresh basil in a (pestle and) mortar with the garlic and I didn’t use, what is it (pecorino) sardo, I used parmesan but just seeing all the basil leaves disappearing; but what came out of it, magic, my God. That was the days before Magimixes!!

213.MM: The old robo-coupé.

214.DR: But it was great. That was one of the things I brought back from France was a roube coupe. A two horse power one. It was a big one. I still have it down in the basement.

215.MM: The guy who started, this guy he actually made it, he started off Roger Vergé, he started off as a salesman selling robo-coupé’s. That was his job. That’s what he did, he went around all the kitchens selling and he used to demo’s and sell them and then he got into the business.

216.DR: I still have mine in the basement. It was a good invention. We had a stainless steel bowl.

217.MM: When did you finish up here and why did you finish up?

218.DR: Staffing was a major problem. I couldn’t get the skilled staff I needed in the kitchen in particular.

End of Tape, End of Interview
Edited Interview with Dr Garett Fitzgerald (GF) in Ranelagh (21/2/2005)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Dr Garett Fitzgerald (GF)

1. GF: I never dined out as a child, we lived in Bray and in Blackrock and Temple Road, and I can’t recall ever dining out as distinct from being on holidays once or twice.

2. MM: What was food like in your home?

3. GF: Oh, very simple, very straight forward, we were very traditional eaters to an extent that has caused problems ever since (laugh), porridge and bacon and eggs, and a main meal would be meat, potatoes and vegetables. I never, my mother tried to make me eat cabbage when I was four and I gagged on it and I never ate vegetables since then unless it was peas, which I always ate, and celery from the age of thirty three and later on asparagus preferably white, and globe artichoke leaves with melted butter, so that is the extent of my vegetable I’m afraid. I don’t eat salads and I don’t like, I can’t take garlic at all, it is a family thing, one of my brothers had an allergy to garlic but I certainly had an aversion to it, I don’t like onions, I know they are used but once they don’t personally appear and you don’t see them. So it was very traditional food, a chicken would have been I suppose in those days unusual, but then the relative value of food has changed. In that period bacon was much more expensive than beef, yes, but then bacon came down with the drop in the price of grain which led to other products which changed, if you look at the price of the statistical abstract back to the thirties, the consumer price index, you would see the extraordinary change in relative prices at that time. Anyway, very plain food, tomatoes, my mother grew tomatoes, but I didn’t eat them and my mother didn’t eat them, my mother classed tomatoes as vulgar, why ever that may be, I do remember having tomato soup and tasting it when I was eight and realizing that you could taste the soup even if you don’t like what it is made from, that was a great breakthrough. Very simple food at home, we had a large garden originally in Bray, we had a lot of strawberries and a lot of raspberries and my mother would make a hundred pounds of strawberry jam and a hundred pounds of raspberry jam, and jellies, loganberry jelly and raspberry jelly in a bag.

4. MM: Was your mother a good cook?

5. GF: No, she hated cooking, she didn’t like cooking at all, she did like the garden and bottling fruit and making jam but she didn’t enjoy cooking and avoided it as much as possible. In fact we always had somebody to do the cooking and that. When my father saw his career in the Dáil coming to an end, because Killkenny became a three-seater, there was only one Fine Gael seat there, which a local man named Gaffney would get who was pushed in there in 1932 in a placing he knew nothing at all about, we left Bray and came to live in Blackrock in a grand house with a garden, Montpellier Manor in Temple Hill, and then we came into Temple Road and built a house there during the war, and we lived in flat in Montrose in Donnybrook and even there my mother grew raspberries, there was a field that the landlord grew raspberries – New Zealand Lloyd George – I’ll always remember, my son has been trying to find them, they’ve disappeared completely now. The nearest to them now he is planting in Mayo and the other place. But when we moved house, it was very obvious that we had no income because there was no pension for ministers then, at least no income of a visible kind, my mother may have had some money put by, but my father’s died in 1928, we were told that we wouldn’t be able to have people preparing food for parties, so we would have to prepare it ourselves, so one brother would be baking and one would be roasting, and I’d do the puddings. I remember making ice cream out of milk and cream, out of butter and milk originally, we had a cream machine which existed and you pumped it through, half a pound of unsalted butter and three quarters a pint of milk and you’d get pint of cream and then putting fruit into that, tinned strawberries and tinned raspberries and the juice of that into it and into it to make trays of it in the fridge. We had a frigidaire and set them of for ice cream, and we had to live more simply after that.
6. So from not eating out at all, and when we went to college, and then when I got involved with my future wife, we used to go around looking at places and seeing where we could eat, we went to some of the odd places, the Regent Hotel in Kildare Street and the Majestic Hotel in the bottom of William Street. They were just hotels and we didn’t know that hotels didn’t do very good food. We also went elsewhere, we went to Jammet’s, I remember once examining the menu in Jammet’s and working out that if one was very frugal, and you simply had the soup, lamb chops, potato and vegetables, and a serving of ice cream and coffee, you could do it for seven and sixpence (laugh). This would be at the end of the war, so your minimum price for eating in Jammet’s would be that, but you never did that and it set you back more than that, but we did go to Jammet’s on special occasions, we also dined in the Russell, which was rarely, the Hibernian more frequently before it closed. Where else? From 1957 on which was much later, I became a member of the Royal Irish Yacht Club accompanying the professor of Economics, dined there quite a lot, had to dine there every Sunday night until 1972 when he died. There was a restaurant in Dun Laoghaire down towards the sea; there was a chef there, what was his name?

7. MM: Was this before Kinsella and the Mirabeau?

8. GF: Was it Roger? Roger somebody? We had guinea fowl there, I hadn’t come across guinea fowl before that, and it was excellent, with a grape sauce, I’ve always stuck with that as a dish. Ate there quite a bit and also in the Guinea Pig in Dalkey occasionally.

9. MM: How was Jammet’s after the war, it had been renowned to be one of the five best restaurants in Europe at one stage.

10. GF: I have no information about that, but certainly it was highly thought of in Dublin as the place to go, I do know about that, but of course the windows were broken during the riots at the end of the war when the pro-Germans rioted, Haughey and others, well I won’t say that Haughey was rioting but he brought down the flag in Trinity which started the riot.

11. MM: This was a pro-German riot?

12. GF: Oh, yes, we were much more pro-German during the war than people like to remember.

13. MM: Do you remember any American soldiers in Dublin at that time?

14. GF: Yes I do, and as late as 1949, my eldest son was been born and I went and had a meal in the Gresham, and there was a shortage of space and they asked me if somebody could join me at the table and I agreed and this American soldier who thought he was in the Republic of North Wales (laugh) and his main concern was to establish the age of consent for girls in Ireland, it was a curious encounter, that was as late as 1949, I can date it precisely, October ’49, 10th October ’49 (laugh).

15. MM: I’m well aware that they were based in Northern Ireland and in Derry particularly and that they came to Dublin to eat, but some say that they came in full uniform?

16. GF: No, well I don’t remember that, after the war they may have been allowed to, but not during the war, they would’ve been very strict about that, for obvious reasons, the whole neutrality thing, so, no I wouldn’t think so, but perhaps after the war. I remember several American soldiers staying with us and visiting us but I don’t think they were in uniform, I can’t remember. Not during the war, they came across from England.

17. MM: These are some of the things I’ve heard but am trying to clarify by talking to a cross section of people to see.
18. **GF:** No not during the war, but possibly afterwards, I can’t be certain. They came from England as well, you see. Of course Britain had meat and sweet rationing until about 1954 which was very late, which meant that people came here to eat right into the 1950s and of course we sent them meat and we had a turkey business, in Aer Lingus plane loads of turkeys were sent over to them and they were all brought into the place where people checked in for the airport in Cathal Brugha Street. There were mountains of turkeys there and we sent them out three tons at a time. That was big business at the time and I was involved in planning that. So that meat problem went on for quite a long time and did affect tourism, we had meat tourism which kind of disappeared after that (laugh).

19. **MM:** There is this new thing that they call gastro-tourism, but we had it for at least ten years during the emergency and after that.

20. **GF:** Well, I can tell you, I wrote three articles on food from a dietetic point of view in 1955 or 1956. I was guided by a woman who was a friend of my wife, who was working in Cathal Brugha Street, Jean Norton, and she advised me on it. What I did is that I took the Household Budget Inquiry of 1953 published in 1955 and did an analysis of diets right down to the poorest families, which would be less than thirty shillings a head per week for a family of seven or more, but there was very little dietary deficiency except among that poorest ones – the lack of milk. Of course we have always had a very consumption, the highest consumption of food in the world – New Zealand and ourselves – the reason for that is because we were a meat producing country, so meat was relatively cheap, we were a poor country so we ate potatoes and bread. So we ate heavily at both ends of the scale and that is not common. In countries that are well off enough to eat a lot of meat don’t bother with potatoes and bread much, so we when you look back over records you will find us up in the 3,250 calories along with New Zealand, and also relatively high were Argentina and Uruguay because of the meat factor. That was an important element.

21. **MM:** Where were those articles published?

22. **GF:** Published in *The Irish Times* in 1955, I think. My first article was in 1954 but was published in either late ’54 or early ’55. Wait now, they might have been published a bit later, maybe in ’56, oh, wait now but not later than ’56 because I sent them in to be published the same time that I sent in some articles on wine tasting. They were frivolous because I had a wine tasting group and I decided to make a few quid writing articles while I ran a wine tasting group, but unfortunately *The Irish Times* transposed my name on the wine tasting ones and not on the food ones, so my erudite articles on food, I got no credit for. But I can date that to the extent that because my name was on the wine ones, they could tease me about that, I was in London for negotiations with British Airways for Aer Lingus in 1954, 1955 and 1956 and I ended up in 1956 and I remember the chairman asked me to choose the wine in the Ivy restaurant, I was very embarrassed, so the articles were certainly published before 1956. But I was simply looking from the point of view of carbohydrates, fat and protein, people nowadays look at more subtle than that approach, so what I wrote would probably not be too acceptable today but I was concerned with the adequacy of the diet and I argued that the food subsidies which we had during the war were unnecessary and they disappeared and were introduced by our government in 1977 just to get out of a hole we were in as regards a pay round and later on we were bedeviled with food subsidies right up to the eighties, I’m afraid.

23. **MM:** While you were in Aer Lingus, had the Dublin Airport Restaurant or the Collar of Gold become popular?

24. **GF:** Oh, yes, it was a very popular place to eat, a very fashionable place to eat, not now like Jammet’s. Now it was run by Johnny Opperman and it was seen as a good restaurant, it wouldn’t be the same as Jammet’s but it was a good restaurant and popular with its location in that you could see the planes. They had dinner dances on Wednesdays and Saturdays but they weren’t allowed to advertise, because we would be competing with the private sector, so it was only about word of mouth that you would know about the dances, and I’ll tell you about that bit too. The only
time in my life that I ever won a spot prize was dancing there once, ‘the next person to produce an
Aer Lingus timetable wins a prize’. I took it out of my pocket immediately and won the prize
(laugh). So yes that was popular, people did go out and eat there even if you weren’t flying at all,
I’d forgotten that, it’s a good point.

25. **MM:** There was a guy there called Jimmy Flahive, who became the first television chef, who
happened to be working out there with Johnny Opperman.

26. **GF:** I remember the name, anything else about that.

27. **MM:** Just thinking of you having eaten in the Ivy restaurant in 1956 which would have been
fairly well-known in London at the time, would you have noticed any difference between the
quality of food between England and Ireland?

28. **GF:** No, well it depends where you go, I wouldn’t be an expert anyway, my tastes are very
modest, no but I do remember on my honeymoon in 1947, there was very little food and there was
a strict price control system – nothing more than five shillings. But certain restaurants were
allowed to charge more such as the Savoy for example, or Simpsons on the Strand, they had the
suppers but the most you could spend was I think twelve and sixpence, absolute maximum. We
went to Simpsons on the Strand because Joan’s mother had been there in the ’20s and that and so,
and went along at 12.30, the first people in the door and the menu had chicken on it and the
chicken was off already, the chicken was on the menu just to get people to come in. There was no
real meat at all there at that time. We went to the Savoy twice.

29. **MM:** From talking to chefs who worked over in England at that period, they said that a lot of
the chicken was actually rabbit (laugh) or other birds.

30. **GF:** The other thing is that in 1966 the BBC ran a programme on the Savoy Hotel that the
Savoy tried to have stopped by injunction and failed, and the interesting thing was, from my recall
or recollection, is that for both the chefs and waiters, the pay was six pounds a week, which in
Dublin at that time the trade union man, Micky Mullen had pushed up to twelve pound a week, so
it was interesting. 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 with the immigration and that and the result was that they were paying twice as much
here as they were in England. That is true of many areas, the banks paid far more, the bank staff
were grossly overpaid here compared to England, and a lot of people like that. We always had a
tradition of relatively high pay for middle class kind of jobs. Skilled jobs, just talking about
relative pay, but I remember that it spread around the country and it really had a big effect on the
tourist industry because Ireland was always a dear place to eat, early unionization because of the
absence of immigration. You had a poor quality of food mostly, when you got better food that
price jumped, they were unionized and charged a lot so, good food began in West Cork around the
’70s and spread along the coast but unfortunately it hasn’t reached Donegal yet (laugh). The little
restaurants in West Cork and so on.

31. **MM:** I think good food was for the elite up until a certain time.

32. **GF:** There was never intermediate level that you would get on the continent or in England
even to eat comfortably and pleasantly well up to a point but not expensively, it never developed
quite the same way here, our whole traditions developed a different way, now I may be
exaggerating that, I’m no expert.

33. **MM:** At one stage, I’m not sure was it while working for the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF), you
were traveling around and you stayed in about forty different hotels?
34. **GF:** I was a consultant to them (IHF) for eighteen months, but it wasn’t because of that, I forgot what I did in the consultancy for them for eighteen months from early 1964 to mid 1965 when I started the Senate, sure I got them to nominate me, but I did travel around a lot because when I left Aer Lingus I went to Trinity to do research on input into Irish industry and I wrote to a hundred and fifty firms and visited fifty of them around the country to trace how much of their inputs were imports and how much were home produced for a study I was doing. I brought the family with me around the country and so visited an awful lot of hotels at that time and the children’s definition of a hotel at that time was the there was two staircases, that you could run up one staircase and down another – as you can do in this double house and which the grandchildren do and love it (laugh). But we got around the country a lot, that was in 1958/9, and in 1961 I did a tour a country, eleven different places with the Rome Treaty, explaining the EU to people. So I did a lot of traveling around in the late 50s early 60s. Some places were extraordinary, they were a hotel in County Laois with the damp sheets, we had it again in Kerry in Easter, you had to take the sheets of the bed and the blankets were soaking wet, so the standards were not very high.

35. **MM:** Do you remember the standard of food at all?

36. **GF:** Generally it would be poor, there wasn’t much to be said for it, even in places like Cork, it wasn’t great in the Victoria Hotel. I don’t recall any memorable meals, no (laugh), it came later that good restaurants began to open around the country.

37. **MM:** So Dublin was the only place or one of the only places to get a good meal up until a certain time?

38. **GF:** There were some good hotels but when they started I can’t tell you. Ballylickey House with the Graves, I stayed there, and the Zetland Hotel in Galway, and of course Ashford Castle, I stayed there a couple of times – which I couldn’t afford to now. There really were some good places like that.

39. **MM:** Yes but they didn’t really start until the 1960s.

40. **GF:** We had a couple of wine tasting dinners in Jammet’s. I remember one that cost I think five guineas for the wine, very good wine – 1945 Burgundy it was a Corton – but the real cost of wines was so low then when compared to now, we started in 1953 and ran it for about ten years on Sunday nights at home with friends of mine, once a month. We took a particular place, and we had the best wine and the worst wine. The best wines were like the Latours and Lafittes and so on at twenty eight shillings for the ‘45s and ‘47s, the dearest wine in Dublin was in the Gresham at two guineas, but you could buy it, a 1950 Yquem – not a very good year – but the dearest German wine was a thirty seven shillings. There were seven wine merchants in Dublin and I prepared this catalogue with them all in geographical order, all the wines in Dublin in the different wine merchants – sixteen pages single spacing. I did that just to see where you could buy the wine most cheaply – Thompson & D’Olier were the best followed by Findlaters.

41. **MM:** There was Morgon as well, wasn’t there?

42. **GF:** They were expensive; they were half a crown dearer than anyone else because they advertised. You wouldn’t go near Morgon’s, it was a waste of time, in Dawson Street. Mitchell’s was the next dearest after that. Now Thompson and D’Olier was a marvelous place, there were people sitting up on high desks like in Dickens’s time, using, I think, steel pens rather than quills, a stove in the middle with a pipe going up through the ceiling (laugh), no sign of drink anywhere, and you were brought down to the cellars and these massive cellars which because of the slope of the ground, at the end of the cellar, you were level with the back of the next street behind Eustace Street. Half way down Eustace Street on the left as you are going down, then the ground slopes uphill towards the Castle or the Poddle I suppose, At the back there was a big door where the wine came in at ground level and further back there was this spiral staircase which brought you up to the shop.
43. Findlaters in the top of O’Connell Street were the next best, and there was also a curious little place near the Regent Hotel in Kildare Street. But the cost of that including cheese, was six shillings and sixpence – and eight shillings a person but for that you got to drink the best wine in Dublin as well as the worst. All it taught us was the higher the price, the better the wine (laugh).

44. MM: Had you anyone to bring you through with tasting notes or that?

45. GF: Oh, yes, I have my tasting notes still, in the early part I used to keep notes on all the wines, I have them somewhere in a box somewhere, there very interesting, we tried the ’34 and ’37 Sauternes as well, it was good fun.

46. MM: They’d be worth a small fortune now.

47. GF: If you want to calculate it now, you multiply by twenty five which would have been thirty five pounds for the dearest clarets in Dublin and the Chateau d’Yquem would have been fifty pounds in today’s money, which is quite extraordinary. In the 1970s when we had a dinner in Iveagh House, there would be about twenty or twenty five people in the dining room there, the Hibernian supplied the food and the cost was twenty two pounds per head. In 1975 we had the presidency so there was extra money but in 1976 we hadn’t realized that finance had cut back on things and by mid March we had hardly any money left to do us the rest of the year. So I got Ritchie Ryan to give us another five thousand and I decided that the only way to handle this was to have visitors to one of my clubs. So I remember visiting the Royal Irish with the Tasmanian Prime Minister and his staff and it was three pounds a head with wine left over, against twenty two pounds in situ. So there is some price difference there.

48. MM: I remember the Russell used to do all the functions for Iveagh House, and when they shut down in 1974 the Hibernian took over, since they were part of the one group of hotel, originally owned by Ken Besson.

49. GF: They once arrived with this salmon and it was dropped on the pavement, so it took an hour and a half to re-cook and bring it up again from the Hibernian (laugh), whoever that was for I can’t remember.

50. MM: I think Aer Lingus took over a lot of the state functions particularly in Dublin Castle and that.

51. GF: Well, Dublin Castle would be the Taoiseach’s Department. I remember getting involved in that as Taoiseach but I would have delegated a lot of that out, I wouldn’t be involved in any detail about the food.

52. MM: It was in Foreign Affairs that you would have been involved in Iveagh House. I’ve cooked up in Iveagh House myself in my day…… Micky Mullen who was in charge of the union has come up in a lot of the research I have carried out, did you know him well?

53. GF: Oh, Bernardo’s in Lincoln Place, we’d often meet in Bernardo’s. It was a popular place, and politically popular, Micky Mullen would be there, and Michael O’ Leary would be there, it was a kind of Labourish kind of place, but we often dined down there, sure I was close to Labour people. I’d forgotten about Bernardo’s.

54. MM: How about Ostinelli’s?

55. GF: No, Red Bank in the early period when I was taking my wife out, there yes, I remember they used to sit you back to back and you often had people beside you, and we often sat in silence listen to these extraordinary conversations (laugh).
MM: As people still do in restaurants (laugh). There was also another place called Alfredo’s?

GF: Oh, yes, I ate there a couple of times, it was popular too.

MM: He was quirky, I believe, you had to knock on the door or book ahead or something?

GF: Oh, yeah, that is right, I was only there a few times. It was Italian as was Bernardo’s and then there was Quo Vadis there briefly on the corner of Andrew Street, I remember as a boy when I started in school in Belvedere I lived on the far side of Bray. I’d get that 8.05am bus in and a forty five minute journey so I’d get to school for 8.50am, forty five minutes from the far side of Bray to the north side of Dublin, and then after school we’d get the 4.00pm Wicklow bus home because we lived on the far side of Bray we got the Wicklow bus not the Bray bus. But it meant you had lunch in Harrison’s in Westmoreland Street, which had a very odd smell unlike anywhere else, that was only for about six months till March ’37 because I went to Blackrock then so I’d get home much more easily. Harrison’s was there relatively there, but then the Trocadero was there upstairs beside the Irish Times, the original Trocadero.

MM: There was actually a vegetarian restaurant there on Westmoreland Street at the turn of the century which shows how food is very cyclical.

GF: Also the Tea Rooms, I mean Mitchell’s particularly on Grafton Street, my parents would have gone to Mitchell’s, the McEntee’s would have gone to Mitchell’s. I think they had this machine where they sent the order across on a wire, but I’m not sure. Lee’s had that, Lee’s shop. I could be wrong about that in Mitchell’s, the waitresses had these uniforms with the frilly caps where they had these flask sandwich came, and they also sold lady cake by the pound, which was plain Madeira cake with white icing and they would cut you off a chunk. So once a fortnight, I got a pound of Madeira Cake and I was very popular with my friends. My mother had a system that she always sent a bar of chocolate with a letter and if you didn’t write back there would be no more chocolate, so she ensured a correspondence with her sons, she was very practical.

GF: There were a lot of Milk Bars around too at the time?

GF: There were a lot of Milk Bars and I remember before the war being in London in the Milk Bars and the phosphate which was just fizzy water with colouring in it, milk shake, strawberry milkshake, and I remember the prices ranging from three pence in the East End to four pence in the City to five pence in the West End (laugh), I noticed that in 1936/7 going around with my parents.

MM: There was a place called the country shop?

GF: Oh, yes, that was very important. Very important, that was run from the 1930s by the Irish Countrywomen’s Association and they were wonderful people. The country shop was very important because my brother was in University here and when I was in the Department of Foreign Affairs we as a family used to meet there for lunch because my son and daughter had got married by that stage. You went in downstairs where there was a shop and a restaurant and you went upstairs where there was a bar and behind there was another restaurant and in behind there was a place you could have lighter food, shortbread biscuits and things like that. I ate there for lunch for forty two pence, I remember as foreign minister – just soup, coffee, and shortbread biscuit. Very important, I was very sorry it closed, it was a great tradition.

MM: When did it close?

GF: It must have been the 1980s, it was great, the variety, and it was all home-made food.

MM: I think I read that you used to take your students there at one stage?
GF: Yes that would have been in the 1960s, which was good.

MM: How about the likes of the Gresham, did you ever eat there?

GF: Being in Aer Lingus I once spent three days eating in the Gresham in 1957 when we were negotiating with Seaboard and Western to run a service for us, we had lunch and dinner in the Gresham for three days running as the negotiations went on, I remember. I used to have lunch there quite a bit, I once had a lunch there with a fellow who had an epileptic fit, which I hadn’t come across before and it was quiet disconcerting. I never took it to greatly, but what the Gresham was great for was the dances. The Saturday night dance was 8-12am, no food, five shillings during the war. The dress dances as they were called, run by schools etc. would be twelve and sixpence with dinner, wine would be extra from 9.00pm - 2.00am. They were great occasions. My wife went every Friday night in the autumn before I knew her in ’42 to dress dances in the Gresham. There were also dances in the Metropole and Clery’s but not that many, the Gresham was the place, and when (Ronald) Reagan was here, the only one genuine thing he said as he was leaving on the steps of the plane in the middle of the speech, and nobody could hear him except myself and a few ministers and Charlie Haughey who gate-crashed the group because of the noise of the planes and people were miles away, ‘when I came to Ireland first in the June of 1948 I walked up O’Connell Street to the Gresham and walked in and heard music in the back and he went and opened up the door and there were these gentlemen in tuxedo’s and girls in white dresses dancing there’, and it was absolutely genuine, the only real thing he said in the whole time he was here and nobody heard it (laugh), so those dances were great and I think Kingsbury was the Maitre d’Hotel who was in charge, he was important at that time in our lives. On one occasion Joan came out, before I knew her, and there was a handsome cab outside, during the war every horse drawn vehicle was resurrected and on this handsome cab was Alexis Fitzgerald, Tom O’Higgins and chap called Kenny, one on the roof of the cab, one on the horse and one ready to drive off. Alexis gave the lecture on law at nine o’clock the next morning and Joan was wondering would he be there, she decided she better turn up and he was there (laugh). So that was very important, not the food in particular, but they were great occasions socially amongst students in University at that time or among the middle classes.

MM: In one way the dress dances democratized things because you could hire a suit if you couldn’t afford to buy one?

GF: My mother had a suit made for me while I was still in school but I was still growing and so I had one, but it was white tie and tails for dinner dances, which I only came across twice since; the funeral of Paul VI and a dinner in Middle Temple in 1984. Even in all the palaces of Europe, it was all dinner jackets, even eating with the queen in 1977 it was a dinner jacket, its all gone now completely, we all used to have them as well as a dinner jacket.

MM: There was much more pomp and ceremony?

GF: Oh, yes there was, and then morning suits for weddings, the only damn thing that I had is my father had a morning coat, I used to wear that with some striped trousers, and when I went to get it extended later on when I got larger, I brought it in and the tailor said ‘that’s not a morning coat, that’s a London office coat from the 1920s’ (laugh). When my uncle died in an air raid in 1941, my father must have inherited this and was wearing an office coat as morning dress (laugh) for weddings.

MM: Do you remember the Palace, near the Pro-Cathedral, which was famous for its steaks?

GF: No, but the Dolphin was famous for its’ steaks, I didn’t go to it much, friends of mine did. What was the other one up that direction? The Clarence, I went there once and didn’t think much of it.

MM: How about the Moira?

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GF: The Moira, yes, I ate there once or twice. When we left Aer Lingus, a group of us went in there and had a dinner a year or two later, I remember I had the menu. Not often, the clubs of course, I was a member of the Royal Irish since 1957, I still am, which is now forty seven years, the University Club, you only dined there if you ordered you wine by lunch time. But how would you know that? There was also The Stephen’s Green Club but I never got there as Taoiseach, but I am an honorary member of the Reform Club in London.

MM: When did your connection with the Reform Club start?

GF: I wrote to them in 1997 to see if I could stay there since I was out of office and they wrote back and offered me honorary membership. The previous honorary member was Roy Jenkins and the next one was the famous Duke of Gloucester. I’m happy to be a member, as an honorary member you don’t pay a sum.

MM: The Clubs in Dublin, were they used much?

GF: Oh, yes, the Kildare Street Club closed, it was a huge place, an amazing place, its there were the Alliance Francaise is now, you could go around from corridor to corridor, I was there with George O’Brien who was a professor of Economics, so I’ve been there. Then you had the University, and the Stephen’s Green Club, you had United Services which is gone now, I dined there occasionally, but nothing memorable.

MM: A lot of these Clubs predated the restaurants as the places to dine in Ireland, and in England with the Reform of course famous for Alexis Soyer as the chef. He was over here during the Famine.

GF: Yes of course, they wrote to me, they want me to subscribe to a memorial they are doing for him. I think they wanted to know if the government would subscribe. I must write them back on that, yes the lamb cutlets Reform from the Reform Club.

MM: When you were eating with the likes of President Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher, how important was food in diplomacy even in your time in Foreign Affairs, how important was food and wine?

GF: In Brussels the tradition was that you got a very good lunch and that was it. A meeting might go on until 2am but that was it unless you could get some slightly stale French bread, with no butter in it and whiskey, quite curiously, but I introduced wine. I made the whiskey Irish whiskey and they had never had wine before, very odd. The wine stuck, but when the British came in they brought in their whisky. Food was very good at the lunches alright, it was all you got. I found the food in general was international food, they would not have garlic, and it didn’t pose any problems for me although I am quite fussy about food.

MM: Would you have let people know that you had an aversion to garlic?

GF: No, well people in Dublin know me, when I’m dining here the waiter will come over to me and say ‘there’s no garlic in it’ (laugh). It is interesting that I never had any trouble with food, garlic is not used in international food. I dined once in Buckingham Palace, I had lunch there.

MM: How was that?

GF: The Queen doesn’t eat much (laugh). I’ve eaten in all the palaces for lunches, the tradition is that when the European Council meets that the head of state, president or monarch invites you to lunch, I’ve been to all the palaces I think.

MM: Have you ever eaten in La Tour d’Argent or any of these big restaurants in France?
93. **GF:** No, I haven’t.

94. **MM:** During your time in government, starting in the mid 1960s, was there awareness for the need to improve the quality of food in hotels and restaurants or were efforts solely based on improving bedrooms, bathrooms *en suite* etc?

95. **GF:** That is right, more than that; food was more subjective, difficult to measure, I suppose, so the classification of that was left to guidebooks of various guides, I wasn’t involved in that.

96. **MM:** Michael Mullen became a TD at one stage?

97. **GF:** It could have been 1977, I didn’t take to him, he was very republican.

98. **MM:** He got involved in the hotel and catering section of the IT&GWU during the famous hotel strike of 1951. Some of the hotels were closed for over six months, but some of the smart places like the Gresham settled early and took a lot of business from the other places.

99. **GF:** Yes I know, but at a price in terms of that relevant cost compared to London and other places.

100. **MM:** That is an interesting point you have made.

101. **GF:** It is, somebody should look into it, you should look into it, or somebody should.

**End of Interview**
Edited Interview with Tony Sweeney and Annie Sweeney in Dalkey (18/4/2005)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Tony Sweeney (TS) Annie Sweeney (AS)

1. **TS:** As I was saying, Máirtín, I have been eating out or dining out in Dublin for over sixty years, and the first good restaurant that I ever went to was Jammet’s during the war years. I had come back with my mother from England and we had moved in with my grandfather Senator J.J. Partson at the Curragh who was a great race-horse trainer of his day. Any way we started going to Jammet’s on an occasional basis and as I say that was my first introduction to gourmet cuisine. That was probably the heyday of Jammet’s Restaurant, apart from the fact that there was no real competition for them in the line of good food, you had all these Americans coming down on R&R from the North of Ireland and British Officers and all that, so they had a major clientele that I suppose no other restaurant in Ireland had at that time. I was packed every day for lunch and every day for dinner, it was really the heyday for it, and afterwards when we got married my wife and I used to go to it on a very regular basis. By then the custom had grown up of Christmas Eve lunch becoming a really big thing there, I don’t know if you have come across a reference to that?

2. **MM:** I have, yes, one of the waiters I interviewed mentioned that John A. Costello was a regular diner there on Christmas Eve but followed the black fast and ate fish that day.

3. **TS:** The shops in Dublin then used to close, no shop was open after lunchtime on Christmas Eve, so the ladies who came in to do their last minute shopping all adjourned to Jammet’s. I think lunch ran from 12pm right up to about half an hour before dinner began (laugh).

4. **MM:** It was probably the busiest day of the year for them?

5. **TS:** Absolutely, they were totally booked at night as well, and for both lunch and dinner that night, you booked from year to year (laugh). There was no point in ringing Jammet’s and saying ‘I’m coming today’, if you weren’t booked twelve months before hand it was full (laugh).

6. **MM:** Where and when were you born Tony?

7. **TS:** I was born in London in 1931, all my grandparents would have been born in Ireland but my father was born in London and my grandfather Sweeney was a detective inspector in Scotland Yard. Then he died, he’d been gassed a several times during World War I, he didn’t die from war wounds but he died in 1940, it cut short his life. Then we came back to Ireland. But the other thing about Jammet’s, was Annie’s parents were over in the late 1950s and Mr. Jammet came over and they were talking French and he joined in and asked where Annie’s parents were from and they said Limoges, and he said they were born close to Limoges, I don’t know if that accords with any information you have? He claims that he was born in that corner of France if not Limoges itself.

8. **MM:** That was Louis (Jammet) himself?

9. **TS:** Yes that was Louis himself indeed, and we remained regulars in Jammet’s until it started to go down hill a little bit.

10. **MM:** Before we go to the end of it, what do you remember of Jammet’s, it was considered to be the best restaurant in Dublin at one stage?

11. **TS:** It was, and had been for a very long time. They had moved in 1926, I hadn’t realised they had moved as late as that, I thought they might have moved from Andrew Street even earlier than that. But certainly as the sole French restaurant, as a place where the food was really top quality, whether you ate in one of the three restaurant parts, either downstairs, upstairs or in the bar; the main restaurant was on the ground floor and the one problem they had with the main restaurant...
was that they had no cocktail bar and this was one of the reasons it eventually closed. What we called 'young Jammet' I think closed it down, is that he was refused to put a cocktail type bar or a bar on the ground floor just beside the door, that was the story anyway, that he said ‘I’m giving it up, and packed it in’. But there was a big staircase and you had was a Grill type of restaurant on the first floor, you could go downstairs into this oyster bar, but the entrance to that was the alleyway on Grafton Street, which was a discreet entrance that professional men could slip in quietly (laugh) down the alleyway into Jammet’s.

12. **MM:** There was a tradition, at that time, which had started in London that the Grill Room would have been less formal?

13. **TS:** That’s exactly how it was, slightly less expensive, I think the menu was somewhat different, but cooked in the same kitchen.

14. **MM:** Did you have to dress in a certain way in the main restaurant?

15. **TS:** Well, everybody would have been suited with a shirt and tie, and the ladies would have been dressed in whatever was the fashion in the ‘40s and ‘50’s. I must ask Annie about that. The head waiter at the time, Willie O’Regan said that he had been an apprentice jockey and he had every look about him of somebody who had been, he was a very dapper little man, but a very small man. One of my things, since my family had been in racing, is that so many people who were apprentice jockeys and didn’t make the grade, their life in those days nearly came to an end, became stable hands or something, but Willie promoted himself very well and was a first class head waiter. And then Jimmy Beggan was the assistant head waiter and was promoted when Willie retired. There is a bill for you from Jammet’s (pointing to bills) from 1964, from all the bills I have had these are the only two I have left, one from Jammet’ and one from the Russell.

16. **MM:** This is from 1965 (pointing to the Russell Bill). I’ll take these and scan them if that is alright, and bring them straight back.

17. **TS:** That’s fine, no rush. When I heard you on the radio, I thought that bills from that time might be uncommon. Maybe you come across a few?

18. **MM:** No, photographs and menus and that, but bills, no. I was lucky that Ken Besson’s daughter had some of the invoice books from fish merchants etc. I have some other bits and pieces but the bills give the price of a meal at a certain time.

19. **TS:** Exactly, but those are dinners for four.

20. **MM:** And they are around the same time - £11 and £15 which was expensive at the time.

21. **TS:** Oh, it was, yes, they were in terms of earning power they were never (cheap), but whatever, from the mid ‘60s in Dublin there you are, two examples, and you can decipher the sort of dishes that are on them. Boars Head, salmon fume, foie gras, hors d’oeuvres, prawn cocktail. I’m looking at the hors d’oeuvres at seven and sixpence, that’s 37 pence or 50 cents in Euros.

**Discussion with Tony and Annie, who had entered room about the history of the Jammet family.**

22. **TS:** Máirtín was asking about the dress code in Jammet’s, do you remember?

23. **AS:** For men it was lounge suits, the women didn’t go in trousers because it wasn’t the fashion at the time, you always dressed up, men would never go without a collar and tie.

24. **TS:** And you would certainly never take off your jacket in the place (laugh), a man who would take off his jacket would be the subject of a cartoon (laugh). He’d been thrown out.
25. **MM:** It was probably a bit looser in the oyster bare, because you had the likes of Liam O’Flaherty, and Sean Keating eating there.

26. **TS & AS:** Oh, it was, it was less formal there, at the back of Jammet’s.

27. **MM:** Who do you remember eating there?

28. **TS&AS:** Tommy McKearns who had the Vauxhaul franchise, and is most famous in motor circles as the man who turned down the Volkswagon franchise. Stephen O’Flaherty was a salesman in McKearns and he took it on (laugh).

29. **MM:** That’s the O’Flaherty who now has MSL?

30. **TS:** That’s right, other customers included Brendan McCormack who’d be the Gerald Keane of his day among solicitors, a lot of racing people, that friend of ours Lady Swinford, she was a regular, Peg Watt, before we were married it was very much army people from the north who were there, and later towards the end you had the film stars from Ardmore Studios.
31. **MM:** Just on that army issue, did you ever notice them in uniforms or in civvies? I’ve been hearing mixed reports. Some say the Americans were in uniform and the British weren’t, whilst others say that there is no way that they could have been in uniform.

32. **TS:** There may have been a mixture, but I certainly do remember seeing them in uniform. You would have had diplomats as well, the British Military Attaché would have been in full uniform at all times in Dublin whether we were neutral or not, as would I’m sure, his German counterpart, so it is hard to tell. They were packed with military people during the war anyway. That was Jammet’s heyday for business!

33. **AS:** That was during the war? sure it was the only place at that time in Europe you could eat.

34. **MM:** Gastro-tourism began in Dublin during ‘the Emergency’ (laugh).

35. **AS:** ‘The Emergency’, I like that!

36. **TS:** My wife, as you no doubt have gathered, is French and was in France during the war.

37. **AS:** During the war we had nothing, I remember finding at the end of the war, white bread – wow – that is white bread! I had never eaten a banana in my life, or even an orange either. I didn’t know what a banana was.

38. **TS:** Limoges is only a few miles from Oradour, the site of the famous massacre. They were been delayed on the way up to Normandy to fight the D-Day landing thing.

39. **AS:** It was a lovely day and we were in the bar with my grandfather, it was a lovely day and we were only about fifteen miles from Limoges to Oradour, and all of a sudden the smoke came into the blue sky. And everyone was wondering what was happening, and you could feel it, as children, you could feel the fear of the grown-ups. Immediately we were pushed into houses, windows shut, curtains drawn, terribly hot but for forty eight hours we never went out of the houses until eventually news came to the town that by that time everyone was dead, they had burnt all the women and children in the church and had murdered every single man in the village, and that was burning and the church was burning.

40. **TS:** And only one little boy escaped from a town of over six hundred.

41. **MM:** Otherwise they wouldn’t have known what happened? I suppose the remains would have spoken for themselves.

42. **AS:** (laugh) And here you were having a jolly good old time dining out! (laugh)

43. **MM:** Where else was there at that time in Dublin? I read an article in *The Bell* and it mentioned the Unicorn. Did you ever eat there at that time?

44. **TS:** For me, the Dolphin Hotel was number two, I would think at that time. I never ate there until maybe the late 40s or the 50s. I was never there during the war years, and it didn’t aspire to high class or anything. It was very good ordinary well cooked food, as far as I remember. It stayed in one family’s hands for about thirty years and it was a particular coterie of people who used to go there a lot. I did history in UCD and Professors Dudley Edwards and Desmond Williams, and all the lecturers and that, they were real regulars in the Unicorn because it was only down the road from Earlsfort Terrace where UCD was at that time. There was a very much an intellectual sort of crowd that went to the Unicorn.

45. **MM:** Whereas Jammet’s had a bohemian crowd, with Mac Liamóir?

46. **AS:** Many of the artists went to the old Hibernian.
47. **TS:** As eating places, the Dolphin would not have been a place that many people would have stayed in but it would have had a very bohemian (laugh) crowd. Along with the sporting crowd, you got a lot of lawyers there, it was across the road from the Four Courts, Nugent was the owner. There was a famous picture in the bar there, ‘Mine host’ was the title of it, and that was Nugent Senior. His nephew was Michael, but there were rooms upstairs where there poker games, and it was one of those kind of places where, shall we say, there was a ‘matey’ atmosphere among the staff. I think we were there with the Cuddys, or that the Cuddys were at the next table, but the waiter went over and put his arms around Michael Cuddy, who was the host, and said ‘Ah, my old segocia, how are things?’ (laughter)

48. **MM:** The staff were very familiar? (laugh)

49. **TS:** Extremely so (laugh), the staff would certainly not have been allowed to serve, certainly in the downstairs part of Jammet’s! (laugh) The Cuddys were big cattle dealers and the son became big in the IRFU.

50. **MM:** They lived originally in what became the Crofton Airport Hotel in Whitehall, I think.

51. **TS:** That’s right, I’d forgotten that. Jimmy Beggan was the head waiter in Jammet’s then. The Dolphin was famous for its steaks and they were another crowd who made a fortune during the war – the steaks business for the people from the north.

52. **AS:** And also there was the old Buttery Bar downstairs in the Hibernian.

53. **TS:** That was another great haunt for what might be called ‘the society of the day’. I made a reference to it in the racing book we did, I’ll see if I can find it in the index. There were three dining rooms as such, the bar was downstairs and they served food in the Buttery, the Lafayette was the main restaurant and Stux-Rybar did the decoration for that, he was an American interior designer who married to one of the Guinness family.

54. This man was a great habitué of the Buttery (reading from The Sweeney Guide to the Irish Turf 1501-2001) ‘Dublin during the war years was an extraordinary place with the nearby racecourses acting as a backdrop to a cosmopolitan social scene that embraced the Shelbourne Hotel, with Miss Mack, the oh, so discreet switchboard operator, the Buttery where Cocktails were mixed by Jack and George and Restaurant Jammet with Willie O’Regan, a former apprentice jockey was head waiter. Like other neutral capitals on the periphery of occupied Europe, spies proliferated and Buttery gossip centred on such shadowy figures like Frank Sutherland. Some thought he worked for British, others for German intelligence, but there were those who had an each way bet that he was a double agent.’ (laugh) There were all sorts of people around then. Frank Sutherland, when I say he was shadowy, it’s because he never seemed to do any work, he lived extremely well and nobody knew where his money came from, it may have come from absolutely legitimate sources but everyone had the greatest doubts (laugh).

55. **MM:** The Red Bank was depicted as full of spies during the war also in a play recently in the Abbey called Improbable Frequency.

56. **TS:** Yes the Red Bank, another place which we frequented, but it was very adequate, honest to goodness food, like the other place of that ilk, The Moira in Andrew Street. Jury’s would have been a lower bracket. The Hibernian we have mentioned, the Russell was another Ken Besson hotel but was not as much for its rooms as much as its restaurant and bar and that sort of thing. Monsieur Rolland was the chef. He belonged to a generation of chefs that I suspect there are none left, in that at five o’clock every morning he would go down to the market to pick the vegetables and fruit for the day and not only would he go down and pick it, he would then go back to the hotel and wait for the delivery and check that they had brought what he had ordered (laugh), and
regularly would say ‘that is not the cauliflower I ordered’. I don’t think there is many people in the business today do that and then go on to cook all day!’

57. **MM:** **Cuisine de Marché!**

58. **TS:** He was superb; he was the best chef I ever came across, I thought.

59. **MM:** Was the Russell under Rolland better than Jammet’s?

60. **TS:** It was better, I think it was better. I’d say that Jammet’s was probably... Jammet’s kept a great standard, but maybe the flair was with the Russell, just because your man (Rolland) was such a perfectionist. There are dishes that I associate with certain restaurants and one of the things that I’ve never had anything to equal it was his lobster bisque – *Bisque d’Homard* – that for me was the best soup I ever had in my life. There are other dishes, but that sticks in my mind.

61. Funny enough, that article mentions a dish (referring to an article John Ryan had in the Irish Times) clearly John Ryan and myself had similar tastes, ‘I’ve never tasted anything to compare with Jammet’s cuisine. Two memorable dishes in particular remain in the memory of my palate namely the Sole Jammet, and the Minute Steak Béarnaise’, and they were two of my favourite things in it too. And when we first went there, there was only the two of us, we got married in ’57. We could then have a *Petite Marmite Henri IV* which was a very good, probably their best soup, and two Minute Steak Béarnaise with the *Pommes Parisienne*, and I never took a drink so I probably had some orange or something and Annie would have had a snipe of Champagne, and the bill was £3 – 15 Shillings including the snipe of Champagne. Do you remember that Annie? *(Calling to Annie who re-enters the room)*

62. **AS:** Don’t forget the snipe of Champagne and an Irish Coffee was included in it also.

63. **MM:** Do you remember what was in the Sole Jammet, was it prawns?

64. **TS:** Yes, I think it was, it was one of their speciality dishes but it slips my mind now, it was one of their signature dishes.

65. **MM:** I’ll ask one of the guys who worked there, I believe they added some meat glaze into their Béarnaise which made it special like a Foyot or a Valoise in Classical terms.

66. **TS:** Whatever it was but as I said Sole Jammet and it were two of John Ryan’s favourites and also ours. But after that we moved on to the Russell and after that to the Hibernian when the Russell was sold. We usually had one restaurant which was our regulars and we’d visit others as well.

67. **AS:** They used to have the French dinners in the Hibernian.

68. **MM:** That’s right, about 1972/3, Roger Noblet was the chef and they had these French Gastronomic Seasons.

69. **AS & TS:** And they were very good, especially very good during the early ones because they used to bring the French chefs over and later on, I think economy set in, they were getting more the recipes than the chefs. The chef from the different regions came over in the beginning and they really were very good because he brought his *commis chefs* with him as well. They were sensational; we went to virtually all of them, every season.

70. **MM:** I have a copy of the menus from the first season and I’ve been told that an awful lot of Irish people at the time got their gastronomic education at those gastronomic seasons.

71. **TS:** I’d say so, yes, I’d say they did.
The first big Irish chef who started around that time, John Howard, in the early days when he just started his lunches were superb and so terribly cheap, when he had just started. After that (laugh) prices went up.

Then Jimmy (George) in Bentley’s in Molesworth Street, it was a small place downstairs, I think it became La Disque after that. Molly was the waitress. Jimmy wore a pencil moustache and yachting gear. His brother in law was the cook. The business was very steady, because he was the first person in Dublin to have three sittings for lunch (12.30, 1.15, and 2.00pm) and filled three times the place. At night never did a great business, the food wasn’t good enough for eating out at night. Jimmy George was his name, he was English and he was like a character from a yachting programme on television, typically naval officer type, but probably nothing of the sort. I suspect he was probably black-marketing at the time rather than fighting for his country. (laugh)

The photo I saw of him would remind me of the George Cole character in St. Trinians.

It was a very good small helpings, light lunch and the regulars were there every day and I think we were there the day the Jimmy decided he had to put up the prices and I think he put it up from 5 Shillings and sixpence to 6 Shillings and there was ructions from the regulars (laughter) ‘what’ there was no living, an extra sixpence for lunch! (Laugh)

There was another place on Wicklow Street around that time called Michaels, do you remember it?

I don’t recall that one, no.

What about the Soup Bowl?

There was a restaurant up around Chatham Street called the Golden Cock, and indeed The Clog, that Dutch restaurant was famous for a potato dish it served like a colcannon. The Soup Bowl came later

How about Snaffles?

No, wouldn’t have ever have been there, maybe once, but the Coq Hardi and then we moved on to, we used to go to the Grey Door and also the restaurant in Pembroke Street, she was a first class cook but completely scatty – she used to entertain the crowd and you could be there until four in the morning.

There were a few places like that, you had the Green Tureen, and the Green Rooster.

The Gresham under Toddy O’ Sullivan had a bit of a golden age with Princess Grace of Monoco type of patron stay there. He ran it to a standard, but when he left it collapsed. Two things, he left and then the bombings in ’73/’74. Nobody went up that part of town after that.

Did you eat in the Shelbourne at all?

Yes we did but the food was not the best. What do you call that you do to sauces, reducing? They never reduced the sauce properly, the sauce was good but always swimming in sauce. There was no finesse in it. It was a good hotel to stay in, and it still is.

It was a place to meet people, you first met in the Horse Shoe Bar and then went on and ate somewhere else.

The Bailey was another place we went to for some years. It was the first seriously good fish bar. The fish bar was something that was really special to it.
88. **MM:** Was there not a fish bar also in the Red Bank Restaurant?

89. **TS:** Yes but this was more, I don’t know, there was a definite difference between them. There are fish bars and fish bars! John Ryan I think owned it at this time, I think he did. Anthony Cronin was one of his bosom pals.

90. **MM:** The picture I have is that Jammet’s started the whole thing in 1901 and that they were the standard bearer of French *haute cuisine* up until the Russell appeared with Pierre Rolland.

91. **TS:** Yes, up until about 1960, for sixty years you could say that they set the standard.

92. **MM:** Well, I suppose you did have a certain amount of haute cuisine in the hotels, in the Gresham, in the Shelbourne, in the Royal Hibernian. I think the English went to the Shelbourne, the French to the Royal Hibernian and the Americans to the Gresham.

93. **TS:** That seems about right.

94. **MM:** Then when Pierre Rolland came around 1947, he really lifted it up, and talking to the guys that trained under him, they all did well, he took them in and he gave them an excellent training. When that shut down, some of that crew went to Sachs Hotel in Morehampton Road. Do you remember that having a reputation for good food for a while?

95. **TS:** Yes, but it was pretty short lived. I would have thought that the Hibernian really took over the mantle when the Russell closed. They had those French dinners, and then there came the chef / proprietors, the likes of John Howard and Sean Kinsella.

96. **MM:** Did you eat with Kinsella? I believe he was an absolute showman, but what was his food like?

97. **TS:** His food was terrific, excellent, but his helpings were huge. His portion for one would feed an entire family. We always had to tell him, ‘half portions’ and even that was too much but he was a first class chef and so was John Howard and they were the first of that new breed of chef / proprietors. Another man who had very good inexpensive food was Barry Canny in ‘The Olive’ upstairs in Glasthule where Daniels is now, and for five years it was probably the best value food in Dublin, but he wasn’t a chef himself, he was front of house type of man. We are talking the 80s now because what happened is that the chef emigrated to Australia and he himself opened Browns Hotel on the Green, which was the first of those boutique hotels. He is in Peploe’s now. His chef was outstanding in The Olive.

98. **MM:** Dublin seems to have died from an *haute cuisine* perspective in the mid to late ‘70s, some of it maybe from the Dublin bombings and then the oil crisis, but was there a certain Anglo-Irish gentry that had been the customers in the Russell and Jammets and came to an end around the 1970s?

99. **TS:** You had the Guinness’s and that sort of family all right, but inflation from the oil crisis time was 20% per year, and a lot of people who had what you might call good incomes from rents and property in 1970 were decimated by 1980, because they were on long leases and they couldn’t put up the rents.

100. **AS:** And there was that man out by Howth, Johnny Opperman, he had Johnny’s Restaurant.

101. **MM:** I spoke to Johnny, he’s a great guy, he is around 89 years old now. He was out in the airport for years, did you ever eat out in Dublin airport?
102. **TS:** Paul was the head waiter in the airport hotel and he had come from the Russell. Michael was a long time head waiter in the Russell and Paul was the deputy head waiter in the Russell, Paul was tall and Michael was small. The Opperman’s were probably there when they went out first.

103. **MM:** A lot of them went out to the airport when it first opened. It became an exciting place to work.

104. **AS:** The restaurant used to be very good in the early days anyway.

105. **MM:** I think it started off as the Dublin Airport Restaurant and then it was called the Collar of Gold and then it was called something else later on. Jimmy Flahive was out there.

106. **TS:** Yes I heard of him, he was a television chef. We had been in the Hibernian for a number of years and when Michael Governey went to PV Doyle’s hotel The Berkley Court, that became our major hotel and we’re there still. Michael was an outstanding manager, he really was.

107. **MM:** I must go talk to Michael because he had trained under Hector Fabron.

**Discussion over a collection of rare food almanacs that Tony had bought over the years for Annie including Grimod de la Reyniere’s *Almanach des Gourmands* 1803.**

108. **TS:** There was a Scandinavian restaurant there as well called The Grey Door and then the Russian restaurant called The Old Dublin on Francis Street. That was very good too.

109. **MM:** Yes, the chef there was Eamon Walsh. Do you remember the Intercontinental Hotel when it opened up?

110. **AS&TS:** In the beginning as well it was very good, but it didn’t sustain the quality. They had a French manager at the beginning. They had a great restaurant in the Intercontinental that was very nice, it was up on top, and we ate there quite a number of times and the food was great, and the view of course was superb, and there was dancing also – The Martello Room.

**End of Interview**
Edited Interview with Fred Gygax (FG) in Greystones (19/5/2005)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Fred Gygax (FG)

Fred had written down much of his story in a copy book which he gave me so the interview was slightly different to the usual format. Below is an amalgamation of the notes and the transcribed interview.

1. Fred Gygax, the oldest of six children, was born in Greystones in 1929. His father Ernst Gygax (1897-1953) was Swiss and apprenticed as a chef in England, where he had relations in the trade, working in hotels in the seaside resorts, and on ocean liners prior to coming to Ireland in the 1920s. His first job in Ireland was as head chef in the Royal Hotel, Glendalough. In 1926 he spent some time as temporary roast cook in the Shelbourne Hotel. He later moved to the Grand Hotel in Greystones, which later became the LaTouche Hotel, where he met his wife, Rose Ward. In 1929 he was appointed head chef in the Savoy Restaurant in Dublin's O'Connell Street. The Rank Organisation, who also owned the Metropole and the Theatre Royal, owned the Savoy. He was a good friend with Charles (Carl) Oppermann, another Swiss national, who was head chef in the Gresham Hotel at the time. He mentioned to his son Fred that he once played in goal for the Gresham Football team.

2. Fred Gygax’s father was an extremely quiet man who was fond of gambling on greyhounds. Ernst specialised as a sauce chef but as head chef in the Savoy he had to do everything. Fred grew up living on Griffith Avenue, near the Rise, and was schooled in O’ Connell’s schools and later in Rathmines School of Commerce. He was sports mad and wanted to be a professional golfer like his uncles, but his father wanted him to be a hotel manager. In Rathmines he studied typing, shorthand, accountancy and other general business subjects. In 1948 he started as an apprentice in the Metropole, which had been closed for renovations at the time. Michael Marley, from Belfast, was the head chef; Bill Ryan was sous chef and Fred started in the pastry house with a Swiss patissier named Mr. Senn who was very stern but went back to Switzerland after a year or so. His first job prior to the re-opening was to skin a large sack of almonds; it took him a whole week. His fingers had blistered. At 17 ½ he was older than the other apprentices but he as a quick learner and got on well with all his co-workers.

3. He moved around the different sections of the kitchen working for a while under Willie Opperman who was the larder chef. Tommy O’Mahony was the grill chef and Paddy Burtonshaw took over as sous chef when Bill Ryan moved down to Shannon. The restaurant manager was Mr. Boyle and the general manger for Ranks was Mr. Margey. During this time he played football with the Metropole, which had a great team. They trained twice a week in Shelbourne Park in Ringsend and in 1949 they won the Hotel Cup, beating Jammet’s in the final in Tolka Park. Both teams went out to the Sands Hotel in Portmarnock to celebrate and he remembers it being a hectic night.

4. In September 1949 he decided to go to Switzerland for three years to finish his apprenticeship. His relations got him a start in a small country bakery in Windist Kit Aargan, working 80-hour weeks with the owner Mr. Obrist. At first he found it difficult, not knowing the language (Swiss German) but he just got on with it. After six months he received a letter from the Swiss military, saying he had to do military service (he had a Swiss passport). At the barracks he failed a medical, having a broken ankle (from football) so instead of the full service he joined the Auxiliaries and was called out on some manoeuvres. During his sixteen months with Mr. Obrist, he had been attending the Bakery school in Baden. Early in 1951 he got a job in the Hotel Elite, Hauptsstrasse, Zurich in the patisserie department. After a while he moved down to Laussane (French speaking) and worked in Buffet de la Gare. In Switzerland he sometimes met up with Ivan Waldmeyer whose father Fritz was pastry chef in the Shelbourne Hotel. In Lausanne he also met a young Swiss commis chef who would, years later employ him in Dublin in the Intercontinental Hotel.
5. He returned to Dublin in 1952 and spent six months looking for work without success. This was a combination of jobs being scarce at the time and the fact that his union membership had run out during his time in Switzerland. He had offered to keep up his dues whilst he was away but was reassured there would be a job for him on his return.

6. When this promise proved false he went to London on the famous ‘Princess Maud’. Having walked around many top hotels and asking for work, without success because work was scarce, he went to an agency and through them he got a job at Lyon’s Corner House in Soho. It was like working in a factory, one man could be making meringues all his life whilst another made éclairs. After a while he moved to a restaurant called ‘the Wayfarers’ near Marble Arch, where the confectionary was extra special, which was run by continentals. There was no English working there; he was considered Swiss. He later worked for an Italian group of cafés where his pastry boss was a Yugoslavian who had been with General Tito’s partisans during the war. He didn’t like London much and in 1953 he returned home. It had been his father’s dream that they would both open a confectioners shop but he unfortunately died of Leukaemia. Paddy Burtonshaw replaced him as head chef in the Savoy.

7. An Irish lady had tracked him down in London and asked him to work for her in her cake shop in Rathgar, Dublin. She proved to be high on expectations and low on physical resources (only one oven in the shop). Having worked in a few small operations for a while, Johnny Opperman offered him a job in Dublin Airport as pastry chef. The airport at that time was riding a gastronomic wave. Mr. Flanagan was head chef but was replaced with Jimmy Flahive who had Jimmy Kilbride as sous chef. They catered for a lot of dress dances and corporate parties. Other chefs at the airport at the time included Jackie Hitchcock, Jackie Grant, Dessie Cuningham and Jimmy Doyle.

8. MM: What was the Savoy like at that time?

9. FG: The Savoy in those days (1929) was a very upmarket restaurant, silver service, waitress and waiter service, plus music - an orchestra, they had a band box where the orchestra changed, over the years everything changes particularly with the war years. During the war years it was very difficult to keep everything going, no food, no fuel, well a certain amount of food, very little fruit, and they got through it somehow or other. He used timber to keep the ovens going, timber and anything they could get their hands on, wet turf (laugh).

10. MM: I believe the Phoenix Park was full of wet turf? (laugh)

11. FG: Absolutely, there were mountains of turf in the Phoenix Park and it all wet, they didn’t even cover it, just left it in the open. It’s unbelievable

12. MM: So it started off high class (the Savoy), quite upmarket with French Classical Cuisine and then it went down market a bit?

13. FG: It was upmarket with all that kind of thing when it opened but as the years went on it began to go down market, probably for the reason that the place was not making enough money. You see, you would get people come in and order tea and scones on a set table of silver and sit there all day over a cup of coffee, so that didn’t pay off. So they had to change it, the whole idea.

14. MM: It was also a cinema, though?

15. FG: The Cinema was there right beside it, but Ranks owned the lot (the cinema and the restaurant) like they did in the Metropole and in the Royal, they owned them too. Mr. (Louis) Elliman was the chief man for the Ranks Organisation. Anyway they all answered to him.

16. FG: At the Metropole at the time the kitchen was up on top of the building, three or four stories high and everything went down by chute by lift, the orders would come up by chute and the kitchen clerk would take them off, read them out, and then wait for them. He’d be saying ‘it’s time
so and so went’ and you’d hear ‘ready chef’, all this shouting going on, and then the food would go down. The cinema was there and the ballroom also. The band leader was Coughlan (he was a Saxophonist), I knew his brother Johnny Coughlan, that was 1948 at the re-opening.

17. There was a great atmosphere in the Metropole, Mr. Marley ran it very fairly, but like military, you had to be on time, you didn’t necessarily have to go on time (laugh) but you had to be on time. You had most afternoons off, there would be someone there to mind the place until you got back alright around 5pm, that is where the football came in – (showing picture of the football team that won the hotel’s cup from Jammet’s in 1949) That’s Mr. Margey, that’s Mickey Mullen, that’s Paddy Donaghy who was my pastry chef after Mr. Senn left – he was from northern Ireland and was a great little footballer, That’s Franky Mahony, that’s (his father) Tommy Mahony who worked in the Grill in the Metropole. The Grill was in the basement and he’d go down at 6pm until 12am as a grill chef. He’d bring down all his mis en place steaks, point steak, rump steak, fillet steaks and bring it down with him, and salmon steaks, all that stuff, mixed grills, that’s what he’d do. (pointing to the photo) That’s Mr. Boyle, he was a manager, Mr Margey was the chief bottlewasher, the head man, that’s me, I didn’t play that day, I was injured. That’s your man Tommy White from the union, he was actually a waiter in the Metropole and was a shop steward and later worked as a union official with Mickey Mullen. There are a lot of names there that I can’t remember.

18. MM: What’s this other photograph?

19. FG: That was taken at the airport, that’s the chef Flanagan that was head chef there before Jimmy Flahive, that’s Dessie Cunningham, that’s myself, and did you ever hear of May Devitt, she was a famous singer, but that was her son but Devitt was her maiden name, and that’s Marcella Bracken, she was helper with me in the pastry department in the airport, I think that fellow’s name is Jimmy Doyle, I’m not too sure. Someone said that’s a terrible photo, look at the aprons they’re filthy. (laugh)

20. MM: Was there much shouting or screaming in the kitchen in the Metropole?

21. FG: All kitchens had that at the time, you had to be heard over the din, it wasn’t malicious, you had to shout, there was no other way. I never saw anything more though in any kitchen I worked in. I enjoyed working in all these places. It was great fun. Everybody seemed to enjoy their work, the camaraderie and all, a bit of a laugh, you helped one another out a lot, no pulling back. No such thing as ‘the union wouldn’t let me do this or that’, it had to be that way, and when people went on holidays, you covered for them, that was it. There was no thing like saying ‘that’s not my job’, there were people depending on you to get the stuff out, that is the way it was. You see people moaning in other industries that certain things is not their job, it doesn’t work like that in hotels, as you know!!!

22. MM: Were there any women working in the kitchen?

23. FG: Not as chefs, they were doing the sandwiches and coffees and there was plenty of waitresses, when I was in the Savoy, there were no waiters, it was all waitresses. Female chefs were strangers; they were to come in future years. I suppose Cathal Brugha Street started that of, when the girls came in to Cathal Brugha Street and they started learning to be chefs, but then they were called cooks, we had cooks, we never had chefs. I suppose they were cooks until they were called chefs, there is a lot of lady chefs around everywhere now. I suppose you could say the kitchen was fairly rough and tumble, carrying heavy weights, carrying heavy pots, it was a physically rough business. I don’t know what happens today if they have to carry a big pot, whether they get somebody to do it for them.

24. MM: When was the first time you ate out in a restaurant?
25. **FG:** First time I ate out was when I was at Punchestown races with my father in 1947, my mother, my father and myself came back into town and went to the Red Bank in D’Olier Street. At the time, the Red Bank had a good name for food, but at that time there was nothing exotic about the food in any of the restaurants, it was just after the war and the stuff wasn’t there for any of what is happening in any of the upmarket restaurants today. The way it was cooked was important and the service. It was simple enough food, but presentation, time, and I suppose the ambience of the place was important and the Red Bank had that.

26. **MM:** Would you have ever eaten in Jammet’s or the Dolphin?

27. **FG:** No, they were hotels, The Dolphin was used by the racing people, usually to eat in these places, you stay there, the racing people used to go there. After a while the racing people, the Prendergasts and the O’Briens used to come the Intercontinental Hotel – the New Jury’s at the time – to eat, they had a special place called the Martello Room which was the highest point in the hotel and all the racing people used to come there after the races for a big celebration. Certain hotels and restaurants were where people used to meet after the races, I think the Red Bank was one of them but I was very young, only seventeen, I wouldn’t have been eating there, I had no money. In the Metropole I was earning thirteen (shillings) and fourpence a week (laugh).

28. The Capital had a restaurant, the Carlton Grill was famous but they were all the same, grilled food, quick, in and out. The Green Rooster was famous because it opened late. It and the Paradiso on Westmoreland Street opened late. People would go there after the cinema, after the races, after the dogs, people would have been out entertaining and they wanted to start eating at eight or nine o’clock at night and they would still be there until after midnight.

29. **MM:** There were a lot of Milk Bars around at that time? What was available in a Milk Bar?

30. **FG:** I used to go to one in North Frederick Street called Fred’s Milk Bar. You would go into a Milk Bar like that and it was sixpence for a glass of milk, a big pint glass, and there was a lot of straightforward simple confectionary like snow cakes and rock buns. And you would get your rock bun and glass of milk for a shilling after having a dance somewhere in Parnell Square or these places, and then you would cycle home. It was just simple food, milk and cakes and maybe a few sandwiches. We were simple people at that time, we didn’t know much.

31. **MM:** Did the Monument Creamery have a Milk Bar?

32. **FG:** No, they had a café, and also the Kylemore had a café. The Monument was on North Earl Street. The Broadway Soda Fountain was called a soda fountain but it was actually a café, it was very famous at that time, well known all over the whole country, people would come to Dublin and meet up at the Boulevard, again simple stuff, tea, cakes and sandwiches. (Note: The Boulevard was run by an Italian Geraldo Boni) There was also Clery’s, which had a restaurant which did good business, it was sit down on the first floor.

33. **MM:** Was the Russell open at this stage?

34. **FG:** Oh, yeah the Russell was open, they had a good football team, I don’t know much about the Russell except that it was a very upmarket hotel, and people used to go to The Russell, The Hibernian, that kind of hotel. The chefs in the Hibernian and the Russell generally speaking were foreign chefs, a lot of them. There wasn’t that many Irish chefs there at the time but the Irish chefs took to the business very well. A lot of them went abroad to learn more, as you know, they are still doing it.

35. At that time jobs were scarce, and no matter what kind of apprenticeship you wanted in anything, you had to be lucky to get into it. Be it printing, carpentry, painting, you had to have a connection to get into anything, and you did your three to five year apprenticeship practically working for nothing in those days, just happy to be doing something and learning something. In those days,
people in clothing shops had to pay a fee to be there, had to pay a certain amount of money up front just to be taken in. (laugh) I presume I got into the Metropole since my father was in the Savoy, because in those days it was very hard to get in anywhere.

36. MM: How many working in the Savoy at the time?

37. FG: I can only talk for when I was there. We had fourteen in the kitchen between the chefs and commis. We used to cook for 120-200 people.

38. FG: Mickey Mullen said ‘sorry Fred, it is not in our hands at the moment, it is in the hands of the chefs committee and they look after the jobs for the catering industry’. I think I was offered a job here or there but I had to forget about it, go through the union, the chefs committee held the power. The chefs committee were representatives of the different hotels, but I’m not sure how they were picked, I never met the chefs’ committee even to talk them about it. I put my application in but nothing was forthcoming, eventually when I got a job in Ireland having spent two years in London.

39. FG: After Bill Ryan left to go to Shannon, Paddy Burtonshaw took his place as sous chef in the Metropole. Paddy was from Dublin, lived in Whitehall, he then took over as the head chef in the Savoy in 1953 when my father died. And he was still there years and years later when I went back to the Savoy.

40. MM: When you went to Dublin Airport, did you concentrate totally on confectionary?

41. FG: That’s interesting; in the airport we had to do the confectionary, sweets, and also did a lot of the confectionary for the planes which went through the flight kitchen. Jackie Grant was in charge of the flight kitchen, but I also had to prepare things like Beef Wellington, I’d put the pastry around it and decorate the pastry, things like cheese straws, anything of a pastry nature, any mis en place, things like fleurons. It was rough heavy work to get all this stuff moving, you know, and I was in the airport when the Transatlantic flights, and we got orders to give the fresh rolls for the flights, and that was grand until I had a little tête à tête with Mr. Opperman at the time. He said ‘we have to have rolls every day’ for this flight and I said I only have so many staff, and he said get them in on a Sunday and I asked the crew if they would and they said ‘no way’, so I told him and he said ‘sack them’, and I said ‘I tell you what, I’ll give you a weeks notice and you sack them’ (laugh).

42. MM: That was the end of you.(laugh) How long had you been there?

43. FG: Around two or three years, but I wanted to work there forever, I didn’t want to leave, but it was very difficult.

44. MM: Did Bill Ryan take over from you?

45. FG: No, I left and I was no sooner gone and within a week an Austrian guy was in my place, I feel Johnny Opperman was under pressure to get me out of there, he was a friend of mine, still is, but I think he was under pressure to get this Austrian to get this fellow in, whether that is true or not. Any way things soured between us. The Austrian fellow only lasted six months and the same thing happened to me also happened to the next Irish fellow who took over and the next thing they shut down the confectionary department and they started buying the stuff in. (laugh) It was cheaper for them to outsource.

46. That’s what I should have done instead of opening up the shop, I could have gone into outsourcing.
47. MM: Was that the next thing you did, open the shop? You had been in the Metropole, then off to Switzerland, then back to Ireland and no work so off to London, then back to Ireland and a few little jobs before the airport and then to the Savoy?

48. FG: Yeah, I went to the Savoy, I got a job from Mr. Margey. I met Mr. Margey and asked him if there was any chance of a job. ‘By God’, says he, ‘how did you know there was one going here?’ ‘I didn’t’ says I. I was married with a couple of children at this stage and I knew I wanted to open my own place but my own place was delayed through a building strike by two years. I was in the Savoy around five years, I came back one day after holidays to get something out of my locker and Paddy Burtonshaw said to me ‘sorry Fred, but your job is gone’, and I said ‘what, it can’t be gone like that’, he said ‘yeah, we can’t afford you’. We were supplying the Metropole as well as our own place with confectionary. Now when Mr. Margey gave me the job, he said ‘I have an idea, I want to introduce a thing called a king size cake, a large cake that’s bigger than the normal cake so that a person can have one large cake with a cup of tea or coffee – a large individual éclair, a large *mille feuille* slice and they’re to cost one shilling’, so I got to work on that. You know the confectionary they sell everywhere now, well that was the start of it. There was never king size cakes anywhere prior to that, everybody seem to take it up, it snowballed after that, in Bewleys and everywhere. Kevin Duffy was working with me and he had to carry them over the Metropole in boxes or trays on his head (laugh).

49. So they couldn’t afford me and I said ‘Ok’, I didn’t go to the union or anything and I was wandering where to go, so I went to Kevin Duffy who had been abroad in India and been abroad in Switzerland and had come back and got a job as assistant confectioner in the new Jury’s or The Intercontinental. Whoever the confectioner who was there had left and I went to Kevin and said any chance of a job in this new place and Kevin had worked with me in the Savoy as an apprentice. ‘Why don’t you see the chef’, says Kevin, ‘there is somebody missing here’, so I went to see the chef (laugh). ‘So you are looking for a job’ said the Swiss chef, ‘yes chef’, says I, he looks at me and says ‘you don’t know me?’, and I said ‘no chef’. ‘I think you do, do you remember in Lausanne and we were friends and we were in the *plage* (swimming pool) and we were boxing and you punched me on my nose and there was blood all over my body, do you remember that?’, and I said ‘Jesus, is that you?’

50. MM: This was Freddy Goldinger? That’s hilarious.

51. FG: We had a good laugh over that and he said ‘I suppose you want a job after all that?’ and I said ‘yes chef’ (laughter) Good God, this is donkeys years later and here was the same Freddy Goldinger who was an apprentice himself at the time and he wasn’t even an apprentice in the same place that I was working, I had just met up with him. We were only fool acting with the boxing gloves but it looked terrible in his bathing togs, it looked as if I had hit him with a hatchet or something (laugh). So I got the job there until I left to go to the shop in Raheny.

52. MM: It just goes to show you how small the world is.

53. FG: I met Bill Ryan when I was over in London, in the Soho, he was going up the steps of the new Lyons Corner House and we were talking about old times and when a fellow told us we were blocking up the stairs, so we parted ways (laugh).

54. MM: Tell me about Bill, this is Bill Ryan that went down to Shannon airport, he would have been older than you?

55. FG: When you met Bill first, you would think he was Italian, a foreigner because he trained with all these foreigners in the Royal Hibernian, he did his apprenticeship there as far as I know, and he spoke French and he was a great guy, he got into it in a big way. He was very big man, very much in command, so Marley and him could not have got on, he was there as second chef in the Metropole for a short time. But Bill and I used to go greyhound racing up in Santry near the
Swiss Cottage in the fields, before this industrial estate was built, and this flapper meeting was going on, where the hare was been pulled around the field on a pulley.

56. I wanted to tell you about Croke Park. Croke Park was a big day for us in the Savoy when there were finals or semi-finals on.

Fred Gygax ran a Confectionary shop in Raheny for years before retiring to Greystones, Co. Wicklow.

End of Tape, End of Interview
Edited Interview with Roisin Hood in Enniskerry (18/1/2006)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Roisin Hood (RH)

Interview begins while looking over a scrapbook of news clippings, photographs and old menus

1. RH: I don’t have a huge amount but I’ll show you what I do have, they used to shoe on horses here. John Boyne is it. A friend of his gave him this and a menu from Maxim’s and another menu from somewhere else which I can show you if you like.

2. MM: This was Maxim’s in Paris?

3. RH: Yeah. Because I don’t know how that friend of Johns got them. Do you know what I mean? I think he said the person had worked in the restaurant at one stage, but that’s the grill room, (in Jammet’s Nassau Street, designed by Noel Moffett) and that is the stairway to the offices upstairs and then the main staircase is there. That’s it yeah. (Pause – viewing documents). You can see a little more of the place but if you like now I’ve a book inside, just show you the internal bits, hold on.

4. MM: So the Boeuf à la Mode (in Paris) was your mothers/fathers restaurant.

![Figure RH.1: Wine List Cover from Le Boeuf à la Mode](http://www.pdf4free.com)
5. **RH:** This is Yvonne Auger. It’s a north of France name……No I’m just looking to see if I’ve a photograph somewhere and it’s in a book of photography, Dublin and it has two little *commis* waiters standing in front of the Three Paintings. I’ll go in and have, you’re happy to have a look at these things. (pause)

6. **MM:** The Maitre d’ what was his name?

7. **RH:** Josef, I think was Swiss. *(note: Josef Reukli was Swiss German and went to Limerick after Jammet’s)* Now he would have been when I was nine, ten, eleven, maybe twelve around age and I don’t know who came after.

8. **MM:** What year were you born do you mind me asking?

9. **RH:** I was born in 1935, so I was born here, and Patrick was born here, but Michel and Raymond were born in Paris.

10. **MM:** Who was the eldest?

11. **RH:** Michel was the eldest, and he married Liz (inaudible) who was a sculptress and he was living in London when he died. He died very young, he died in his fifties, cancer, and you know smoked heavily and of course London, no clean air there and he just went unfortunately and he was an architect. Then there was Raymond, Raymond married Don (inaudible) he’s a doctor and they immigrated to the States in ’52 I think and then there was Patrick, five-and-a-half years after being born he was Patrick and he inherited the restaurant and then there was myself who gave another five-and-a-half years down.

12. **MM:** So Patrick would have been born in ’29, so shortly after them coming to Ireland, like they were only two years in Ireland really.

13. **RH:** When Patrick was born. It’s a pity he’s not still alive because he died ten years ago because he would have had a lot more hands on experience of restaurants. My interests when I was a child were horses and dogs. I haven’t changed greatly in seventy years (laugh). So it’s just lovely to come across so much history because you come across even in fiction books, Jammet’s come up and Madam Jammet will come up in one fiction book, ‘Always on your Mind’ I think it was called and its extraordinary to see them written into fiction you know and doing things, you don’t know whether they really do them (laugh), going to weddings and stuff. It’s just fascinating.

14. **MM:** Actually there’s a lovely story, I must get for you. There is a fellow called Godfrey Graham who was a camera man in RTE and he’s just brought a book out on his sort of memoir’s but he was working on one story, he met a woman, an artist, she was a ballet dancer in Paris who had been in Dublin during the war and she had a great story from the restaurant. I’ll get it for you because it’s really nice.

15. **RH:** Because I can sort of remember the war and Michel, my eldest brother was in the Free French Forces with *de Gaulle* and that you know, I don’t remember names because I was too young to remember so when you say who the head waiter was I haven’t got a clue.

16. **MM:** Yeah because I have people who worked there so I have a lot of those names. It’s just actually trying to get the background and stuff like that advertisement is fabulous which shows, sets out sort of exactly when they were opening, who they were aiming at. And the other thing is it tells me for sure as well that Francois had been head chef in the *Boeuf a la Mode*, you know, I didn’t know that for sure, you know what I mean so that sort of spells it out which is brilliant you know and things like, you know because like there’s no doubt that like it was the place, and it was really, it fell down, when your father died it fell down a bit, the reason was…..
17. **RH:** It was all a bit of a disaster. Patrick really wasn’t the right person. The person who should have inherited really was Michel because Michel cooked and he had a feel for things. Patrick was very shy and I mean to inherit a restaurant where it’s all about dealing with unions, dealing with customers, dealing with wholesalers he was totally and utterly overcome, but I think because he was still single and living at home and my mother had to be looked after, my father thought that was the way to go. Now he did try and change it before he died. He had signed the business over but unfortunately it didn’t work out.

18. **MM:** Like your father died suddenly enough wasn’t it? It wasn’t prolonged?

19. **RH:** He died of a heart attack. Now I know the year he died, he died in ’64 because my youngest son was born then and I remember my mother came to see me in Holles Street and she said ‘Louis is very sick’, they’ve said if he gets flu he’ll be debilitative and he died in October of that year so that was October ’64. So it was very, very quick cause he had worked up to then. He loved going in. I mean he used to go down to, I went down to the market a few times with him and he loved that. I mean in a funny way he was a real Dubliner (laugh) you know, and he loved the old chat and he’d…..

20. **MM:** Did he go to the market often?

21. **RH:** I think he did it for ages because he used to go in, he used to drive me into school and he’d go on down then. I remember he’d have his list of wild duck or whatever he had to get. He was a great man for singing, if he’d an order he’d be singing it out at home. Wild duck or whatever and off he’d go (laugh). I think he liked that and he was good with customers because I think he was a good listener, he just listened and let them talk away and that and you see Patrick wasn’t and Patrick would have loved a job that started at nine and finished at six and I think it ran on for a while because the staff kept going for a while but I mean then, you know, it breaks down if there’s nobody at the top. It’s not going to work.

22. **MM:** Now I’ve been going through Egon Ronay comes to Ireland first in 1962 for the 1963 Guide and I’ve tracked all those back and I’m looking at….. Like it starts of being a two star restaurant, do you know what I mean and being very much, you know, they’re talking about sort of the old world charm and the whole thing about it and then after 1964 it slips to a one star. It was a one star up until 1967. Now that said the only other, there was no other two star, the only other two star, the Russell was actually a three star.

23. **RH:** The Russell was very good.

24. **MM:** The Russell dropped from a three star to a two star after a while and again that’s when Rolland left, you know what I mean, so you can see, it’s only when you, you can see the movement.

25. **RH:** And then the thing of the Italian restaurants coming in. Do you remember, God you wouldn’t remember was it Alfredo’s.

26. **MM:** Alfredo’s yeah it was down Mary’s Abbey and Bernadlos was in Lincoln Inn.

27. **RH:** Bernardo’s was in Lincoln Place, that’s the one I was thinking of. And then you got places like the Soup Bowl coming on line. The sort of, I don’t know whether you’d call them bistros but that sort of name sort of thing, it’s just funny and it’s also…..

28. **MM:** And there was another one as well, there was a place on Leeson Street, Snaffles.

29. **RH:** Oh Snaffles was good. I remember Snaffles, now compared to Jammet’s which, lets face it, was Edwardian, and then when, look labour was cheap and all sorts of things, came into it. I mean it really did. To run that sort of restaurant with that number of staff, you know, it wouldn’t
be feasible I think in the ‘70’s when Snaffles was running. They had a small menu but it was very good. I loved going to Snaffles. There was a nice little atmosphere in it and it was a good place.

Figure RH.2: Postcard of Jammet’s Interior with Waiters

30. MM: Did you eat out? Do you remember eating in Jammet’s like as a child?

31. RH: It sounds funny but I used to go the Grill Room for lunch. I went to Alexandra’s and I used to walk down and have my lunch in there.

32. MM: Where was Alexandra, was it on the Green?

33. RH: It was Earlsfort Terrace, opposite UCD it was then.

34. MM: Oh yeah that’s why the Conrad was called the Alexandra Restaurant at the time it was called the Alexandra, yeah that’s right?

35. RH: The block belonged to the school and right round into Hatch Street. I think they had two, now they may have been rented, they had two lovely big houses in Hatch Street, amazing.

36. MM: So you’d go down for your lunch?

37. RH: Yes trot down for my lunch, have my lunch, and trot back again.

38. MM: On your own or would you bring a friend?

39. RH: No it was very strict in those days. They used to ring and see if you had arrived. They were very strict on girls and where they went and that so you really had, so I never brought them, I’d bring them home occasionally and we used to walk down. I forget who the grill chef was and then if it was very…..

40. MM: But the grill room itself now, is the grill room now that area that was designed by…..

41. RH: (Noel) Moffett. (pointing to a picture of it) That’s the grill room yeah.
MM: That’s it here but there was also an Oyster Bar was there?

RH: That would have been down stairs. The grill room was upstairs. You came up the main staircase and you turned left and went down two little steps and then up some steps and you were in but you could come in if you went in from the bar, the bar end of it which was off Grafton Street.

MM: Yeah, Adam’s Court.

RH: Adam’s Court. Now when you came in you went up the stairs and you would come up here and that door swung, you see there’s your door opening and it swung like that, and pivoted. It was very smart but this sort of furniture…..

MM: This was 1944 I think, if I’m not mistaken because I have a thing that I came across yesterday from Moffett. He says they were refurbishing a very up market restaurant in Dublin in 1944 so that would have been this. The downstairs room would have stayed the same. That didn’t change at all.

RH: Oh absolutely. See I wouldn’t be allowed in the bar, and even when I was going out with David I think I went into the bar once as my father wasn’t too keen on that.

MM: Well I suppose you had a lot of boys, like the bar now you had the likes of Liam O’Flaherty and Sean O’Sullivan, colourful characters.

RH: Well I mean I met them all up in the Bailey’s anyway (laugh) but not on your own patch. So they you are. They were very colourful. (Inaudible).

MM: Now what was the difference say between the grill room and downstairs? Was it a more limited menu?

RH: Yeah. It was just grill. It was basically steaks, you know, chops, stuff like that, and it was done on a charcoal grill. The charcoal grill, that was, there was a passage way there, there was
more tables here and there was a roundabout thing like an alcove, which again had that glass, you
see it there, that glass.

52. MM: Right the sort of glass brick sort of thing.

53. RH: And it had leather benches and you could sit and I think there was two or three tables in
that. Then there was the doors into the kitchen which were great fun, people coming in and out
and then immediately on the right of those doors there was the charcoal grill, so you could see
your steak being done, and I think that possibly, I can’t remember, vegetables I think would have
done in the kitchen. I don’t know whether it would have been cheaper, you know what I mean. It
probably would have been in that…..

54. MM: Well it probably was quicker as well.

55. RH: So it was used a lot. I mean I can remember sitting at a table with Dunphy West, who
was the jewellers and that because there was no where else to sit, you know, that was funny.

56. MM: So you might have sort of communal seating? You made up a table?

57. RH: Yeah, and everybody in Dublin knew everybody so you weren’t really going to get too
stuck, you know. It was nice anyway.

58. MM: Who were the other clients? I believe a lot of the Trinity professors…?

59. RH: Well you would have got professors; I’m trying to thing now, Con Leventhal, Professor
Sheedy maybe, Michael (Mac Liamóir) and Hilton (Edwards) they would have been in the
restaurant sometimes. I’m trying to think.

60. MM: Would you have had the legal people as well?

61. RH: Yeah, they would have had. You see I haven’t got the visitor’s book because Patrick sold
that. Now do you know where that is? I could find out.

62. MM: That would have been amazing.

63. RH: A friend of Grattans who was in the wine trade, I’m just trying to think, knows where the
visitor’s book is. You might get a look at that because that would give you a huge amount of
information about who went there to it.

64. I mean obviously in the early days it would have been, you know, the aristocracy such as it was
and people from the (Dublin) Castle and things like that. Oh we got a lot of Dublin businessmen,
people you know, (inaudible) Serge Phillipson had come originally. He was Jewish, came from
Poland to Berlin to France to over here and he was going to set-up business and try and get his
wife and his daughter and his mother out of Europe because the war was on at that stage, and he
set-up the Donegal hat factory. And he was a great friend of my fathers. Unfortunately his family
didn’t get out, they were taken inside the camps, absolutely awful. But his daughter did because a
French farmer who’d lost his daughter, his daughter had died, had papers, so he took her in and he
passed her off as his daughter and nobody said anything luckily but the other two were betrayed
with a cousin, because that cousin had a stamp collection somebody wanted. Could you imagine
it. They were in the South of France. They were sort of relatively safe until that happened, but
there you are. But anyway Serge was a great friend of my fathers. Now he used to always eat in
the grill room. Come in nearly every day, you know and a lot of people. It’s very hard. It’s so
very long ago. (note: Serge Phillipson, Louis Jammet, and Victor Waddington were known as
‘The Three Musketeers’ since they were close friends of Jack B. Yeats along with a fourth friend,
Howard Robinson. Serge Phillipson’s brother in law was a French Jew called Henri Orbach who
opened a hat factory in Galway which Serge managed. Orbach was prominent with the Jammets as part of the French Benevolence Society)

65. **MM:** It’s another era altogether isn’t it?

66. **RH:** Oh it’s just so long ago and it was such a strange era for me because when you’re at the tail end of a family, they all seem to be growing up except you, that sort of thing so you’re plodding along looking at it but as I say for names and stuff like that, I wouldn’t be a great help. I tell you another great friend of my family was Jean Albette I think and he came over here to run Dublin Corporation. He was an engineer and he’d been in the Great War as well. He was a lovely man, big tall man with blue eyes. Very French looking but North of France looking rather than South of France looking and he’d had a real old bash. He’d the top of his head blown off, part of it and he’d bought into the area where they took the wounded and somebody had looked at him and said ‘oh he’s dead, put him in the broom cupboard’, because they were only saving those they could save and he said he could hear, but he couldn’t move his hands or anything at all. Everything gone and they put him in there. They left him there for a day-and-a-half or something and eventually I suppose when they got most of injured soldiers sorted, and they went in and he was very lucky because maggots had formed in the wound but they kept the wound clean, and he was saved.

67. He was an engineer so he came over and my father was an engineer before he came so that was the connection there and he was lovely and we saw a lot of him and I think he ate in the restaurant too.

68. That’s what I think it was. And who else? I’m just trying to think of people who ate in the restaurant, that’s more difficult. I mean there was all the business people, solicitors, a lot of them if I remember now and anybody who was in business and doing work, doing fairly well, shall we say (laugh). I will try and get that information for you though.

69. **MM:** Did your father make money out of it, because like when it started off it went fine but then it probably would have been harder then to keep the tradition going and keep his staff and everything like that.

70. **RH:** He kept going through the war and a bit after the war. They hit a bad patch when we moved up to Kill O’ The Grange, from Monkstown to Kill Abbey, and there was a lot of money spent on the house there, and my father went into debt for the first time ever and I mean he would be half way up the stairs and he’d turn the lights off (laugh).

71. Now it pulled us out of debt so there was money coming in and I mean they led a very comfortable life. I mean there was never real hardship and it cleared the debt so it must have still been making quite a bit of money because for that to all have kept going and right up the fire, the time of fire, my father was making a very comfortable living from it and they still had a nice house in Kill Abbey and that so and it was doing well. But I think what Michel said it would run into trouble because, I suppose wages were starting to go up and people getting harder to get maybe as well I don’t know about that. Presumably that might be coming on board too. I would think the kitchens needed refurbishment. I remember Michel saying that my father should close it down and re-organise the kitchen. Now Patrick didn’t, he closed it down and he sold it, and he bought Boland’s House in Lansdowne Road. On the way there, where the rugby…..And now he was going to open there. Now he was very badly advised because he bought on the site that wasn’t commercial so then he had to start applying for planning permission at that stage and he then, in a way mercifully, he ran into problems because I just don’t see him, able to get it up and running.

72. **MM:** Did he want to open up another restaurant, was it or?

73. **RH:** So in a way, you know, sometimes these things work out for the best. My mother died then shortly afterwards and he’d only himself to look after then.
74. MM: So he had sold the restaurant prior to your mother dying?

75. RH: Yeah he had, because he needed her signature. I remember saying ‘go over to the States and get her signature’.

76. MM: How long had your mother been in the States?

77. RH: She’d only been there, I think she went, again I’m trying to think. I went over in March for a holiday with David and my family so she would have been there…..

78. MM: This would have been 1967?

79. RH: There she was there say from February. No wait a minute, no we went in March, that’s right. She had left and gone, she wouldn’t go to the doctors here. I think she knew she was dying. She knew she had cancer and I kept saying to her ‘you must go and see a doctor’. And she said ‘no, no, no’. And I said ‘come you’ve got to’. She said ‘no, I’ll go when I go to France next’ and then she got very ill. She was having, I think, minor strokes at this stage so I got in touch with my cousin, she was there, and she said ‘she’s going to have to go over’ and I couldn’t because I had three children here and get her on a plane and have somebody on the other to meet and take her straight down to Nice because that’s where her sister lived and she wanted to go to the doctor down there so she did that. That would have been maybe the end of February. We went over in March, towards the end of March because we had her birthday there and we got a phone call from Gilbert saying that my mother wanted to go to the States and she was ill and would Don come collect, that’s my sister’s husband so Don flew over to Nice.

80. MM: What part of the States were they in?

81. RH: They were in Massachusetts; they were very near Boston, about an hours drive from Boston. So he went over and she was really terminally ill at that stage. The doctors told her and he said ‘would you like to come over?’. She was very fond of Don. Loved her two son-in-laws, she was lovely with them and really did love them. She said ‘no I’d like to go back’, so he got her into hospital in Boston because he was working in hospital, he was able to keep an eye on her and that, and I always remember her sitting her in bed and Raymonde and I would come in and she sitting up and sorting the pillows so she wouldn’t get bed sores and being really nice and daughterly, and we weren’t getting too much of a reaction back, so we’re sitting there and Don walks into the room and says to her ‘Yvonne what have been doing all day?’ and she says ‘waiting for you to visit’ (laugh). Oh I said ‘bloody hell’, all he had to do was walk up the stairs. We had to arrange babysitters and do the lot. It was just so funny. He was very good. She wasn’t meant to have alcohol but she loved a glass of wine. Of course you can have a glass a wine, so we fixed that up. So they got her a little bottle, you know these little ones but she wasn’t eating anything and she was dead by August. It was quite quick.

82. MM: She would have been youngish?

83. RH: Sixty-seven, so she was young. It was very, very quick. There was only three years between them and then Michel died.

84. MM: Because Louis, your father would have been what, he would have only been around sixty-five or so, would he.

85. RH: Yeah, he would have been sixty-five when he died. No he’d have been seventy. He was born in….. He was six years older than my mother. So he was born in 1894. He was born in France and 1894 because he was six years older than my mother and she’s was born in the 1900s. He was in the French Army during the Great War and he was wounded.

86. MM: He was lucky actually not to loose his hand or……
And he was also in a way lucky he was wounded because.....

He might have been killed otherwise.

And he was lucky, one surgeon looked at his arm and he said to them don’t let them take it off because they were amputating very heavily to stop gangrene and anyway they put a piece of something in and I think my mother said gold and the bones knitted over it. They put in something that wouldn’t corrode and the bones knitted but he had a metal thing in his arm and he learnt to write with his left hand. All the letters between the two of them written on his left-hand and she said you could see the writing getting better and better and then he did his exams with his left hand. It just goes to show when you have to.

Where did they meet because they were actually cousins weren’t they?

They were second cousins, once removed I think is what they call it and so they knew they were family and with all the grandparents being chefs I think it came naturally (laugh).

His side was the Hotel Bristol was it? Like her side was the Boeuf a la Mode or.....

It’s very complicated now, wait till I tell you now.

Well his brother worked in the (inaudible).

David’s uncles was Francois Jammet but he was my mothers grandfather. See it’s very complicated.

But I do know that the Jammet name was the Hotel Bristol, there was definitely the Jammet name.

But there’s still, I don’t know but....

In New York La Caravelle. They just closed two years ago. Two years ago I think they closed.

Well you know that was very funny. Gareth my son who is in the States went up to see them and it’s André Jammet.

André Jammet yeah and Rita is his wife.

And they gave them a lovely time. Gareth went up with his wife Kerry and he had a lovely meal and everything like that and then luckily about a year later Gareth took his father-in-law, brother-in-law, mother-in-law, Kerry and the two boys, Gareth’s two boys up to La Caravelle and they all had dinner there and they paid for it and it was very funny because Pat, Gareth’s brother-in-law said ‘I should have paid for that’ and when he took the bill he said ‘no Gareth I won’t’ (laugh), handed it back but they had a lovely, lovely meal. You might say they were very, very lucky. Then there was 9/11. I remember the French were deadly unpopular and when he went to renew his lease it wasn’t renewed. He couldn’t believe it.

Sure the Americans were calling, you know, French fried, were being called Freedom fries and they were boycotting French wine and all that was going on at the time. That’s right. You forget and so quickly that they hop.

Gareth was in touch in André and he said to me, he’s still in the States as far as I know so that was just an interesting bit on side there. It’s funny isn’t it.
104.MM: But the Hotel Bristol itself is very old as well?

105.RH: Pierre Jammet inherited the Hotel Bristol and Pierre married into a big German, I think they were from Frankfurt restaurant and hotel business. Now I know now that they eventually they divorced.

106.MM: Now Pierre would he be a cousin of yours now or would…..

107.RH: He would be a cousin yeah. Pierre would have been older than me.

108.MM: So you’re grandfather owned the Hotel Bristol, Louis father?

109.RH: No, Michel Jammet stayed with Jammet’s over here. And it was Francois went back and Francois owned The Bristol, and Francois’s daughter married…..

110.MM: Yeah I see that but go back one more generation as in Michel and Francois father. Was he in the restaurant?

111.RH: No he was a farmer in Quillan. Those boys left home at thirteen and fourteen and went off to become chefs.

112.MM: So they were the beginning of the catering line?

113.RH: Oh absolutely, yeah.

114.MM: What they did then was they inherited or not they inherited but they actually bought into the businesses that ran from 1792. If somebody’s business ran like…..

115.RH: The Boeuf à la Mode.

116.MM: The Boeuf à la Mode was 1792.

117.RH: And the Bristol, I don’t know. And I don’t know who owns it now.

118.MM: The Bristol was a little bit older but it was early 1800. I have that information because I tracked it back on the internet and stuff. It’s still in action yeah.

119.RH: It’s lovely. Hypollite which would have been Francois’ son and my grandmother’s half brother. And my grandmother on that side was on the wrong side of the blanket. Francois had been a naughty boy and he had a little daughter who he reared, so he gave her his name and looked after her, I mean totally and utterly and she was accepted by his wife. That also complicates things, if you get me. When she married Felix Auger and they ran the Boeuf à la Mode, so you have Francois and then you’ve Francois’s son Hypollite who (inaudible) half brother. Hypollite, he ran the Bristol and it was lovely because we stayed there in 1947. We’d been over for holidays with my aunt and we came back through Paris naturally enough to get the boat back and we stayed in the Bristol Hotel and I remember meeting Hypollite and Hypollite was very small and dark and very dapper, absolutely a lovely twinkling, very grand twinkling eyes and that and he was very funny and he had the thickest Dublin accent you could imagine, because he’d learnt his trade in Jammet’s in Dublin. So there you are. I think he was a chef and he’d worked in Dublin. Under Michel.

120.MM: Which would be the tradition as well because often you never sort of trained your own quite often, you moved them out.
121. RH:  You moved them out. But it was just so lovely. A real Dublin accent it was lovely and he had a big family, I think there were eleven and I think Pierre was the eldest and he inherited the Bristol.

122. MM:  You’ve no idea now who was chef when your father took over because your father was never a chef.

123. RH:  Oh, no, no, he was an engineer. Oh my father was very happy. He used to love things like corn beef. My mother had a very good palate and she had a very good palate for wines so they, Mr. Demaizieres who ran the wine cellar, if they got new wine in, you know, he’d ask her and she’d a very good palate and that. She was a good cook when she did, she never had to cook for years but when she had to she took to it like a duck to water because as she said she was reared around kitchens and you think you know what you’re doing. I always do the parallel when people say well, and my brother-in-law Albert used to say ‘well how come they can run restaurants so cheaply in France?’ and he said ‘of course if anybody has a restaurant over here they want to be driving a Mercedes and having this, that and the other’. And I suggest that it’s a little bit like say we produce horses in Ireland or rather we did, I don’t know about now, very cheaply because it was a foreign thing and the farmer had a mare, a good mare and he put her in foal and he’d bring them and he didn’t charge for his time. Food in France was the same. You got the whole family involved. Mother was behind the cash register, daughters are helping out, son-in-laws, the whole family is involved. It was different, it was in their blood and they didn’t think oh I’d worked eight hours a day or whatever. They just did it was their life. And my mother said for any, I always remember her saying that to marry into the restaurant business and expect somebody home at six in the evening, forget it, you’re going to be waiting until one in the morning or you’re going to be in there with them, and that was the way it was. And the only thing I could likened to Albert was to say ‘well we rear horses in Ireland the same way, we don’t charge for the time or the feed or whatever’. Now that I’d say has gone as well (laugh). People get sense or whatever, you know, that would have been the same and I don’t know if the food has gone the same way in France, whether it’s getting more expensive.

124. MM:  Well, yeah, plus you have the situation now, what they call the thirty-five hour week or whatever they have in France now and they’re finding that quite difficult, you know. Particularly in the restaurant business you know what I mean.

125. RH:  Absolutely.

126. MM:  Well at least if it’s still a family affair you don’t have that problem.

127. RH:  So maybe get round that one (laugh). But you see with everybody helping to, you know, I suppose, I don’t know if you could get round that way. Interesting to see, you know. I’m surprised the two boys left Quillan and I think it was mentioned in an article by Pierre Jammet, who got all the other things incorrect but he got this correct that when they left the farm because with Napoleonic Law you can’t disinherit a child, so you have a farm, six hundred acres and it tapers down to four sons and the farm would be broken down and end up with very small farms, and that became quite a problem and I think that’s what happened to the farm there. There were too many living off it and likely to inherit it, so if one had to buy the others out, if you had a big family you were in trouble trying to buy them out, you know. So that was one of the things, so they at that stage decided, and they were very young, I think they were like, I think my mother said thirteen and fifteen.

128. MM:  Well that wouldn’t be surprising. That would be the ages that people went into to start their apprenticeship.

129. RH:  And they did that themselves and they came home apparently to their mother and they gave her ‘Louis D’Or’ or whatever it was, a little few guineas whatever, and they gave her that and
she said ‘what have you been up to’. She thought they’d robbed a bank but they had saved and saved and saved when they were working so they had that money put by.

130.MM: Where in France is Quillan?

131.RM: It’s down near Perpignan. If the dog hadn’t eaten my atlas I had it marked. The dog ate the atlas, the last puppy we had (laugh).

132.MM: It’s south-west France, near the Spanish border. Did they head straight to Paris or did they train locally first?

133.RH: I think they headed straight to Paris, but they were very energetic the Jammets. My grandmother lived in (inaudible) now, a huge amount of energy and when her husband died she ran a hotel I think it was in (inaudible) outside Paris during the war on her own. They had huge energy and they were business people. Now I think the Augers were a mixture. My mother’s father was to have gone into the French navy. He was to have done that and he got it into his head he wanted to be a chef and like that quite deterrent and went off and became a chef and then he used it to see the world because he worked, he took a job as a very young man on board a ship as a chef and he went all over, to the Far East, and French Indochine and all round there.

134.MM: And Vietnam and Laos, yeah.

135.RH: And he was a very good photographer too so he came back and then he married and blah, blah, blah.

136.MM: Now’s that Francois.

137.RH: No that’s Auger, and then he married a Jammet. Interesting and they had a lot of go (in them) and of course they were doing the right thing at the right time. It helps. They’re the breaks that you get in life. I was always saying to David (Róisín’s husband) we were very lucky we got in to Aer Lingus. He always kept his licences up and he kept applying and he kept applying and he got into Aer Lingus in January 1957 which was great so we were able to stay in Ireland and all that and I used to say ‘it’s no good being a pilot without flying’. It’s the same, it’s no good being a chef if people can’t afford to eat out. So you hit it and I suppose the Belle Époque in France would have been the time to open a restaurant. Big time. They had the energy and they had the right career at the right time and I do wonder even if the restaurant had been refurbished and everything whether it could have kept, I think it would have had to change.

138.MM: Well if you notice see at the beginning of the ‘70s you had the troubles breaking out in the North, you had the oil crisis, you had the whole, even the Russell went to the wall. An awful lot of places went to the wall, you know what I mean.

139.RH: So that’s what I’m say, I think in a way it was a blessing in disguise. He could have put a lot of money in and the whole thing could have gone up…..

140.MM: When he sold it, it was a Berni Inn that opened.

141.RH: Yeah there was a Berni Inn there. Yeah, there was good licences there. There was a full wine and spirit licence in the restaurant and in the grill room and in the back bar.

142.MM: And did the Berni Inn refurbish the whole place?

143.RH: Do you know I was never in it. The whole idea of the Berni Inn was these sort of…. (note: The Berni Inn did not immediately replace Jammet’s. It was first purchased by Clayton Love and run as a seafood restaurant)
They say in England an awful lot of people learnt how to eat out (in a Berni Inn) because the normal ‘Joe soap’ would not have eaten out and would be nervous going into a restaurant because they wouldn’t be sure of all the stuff.

Yeah cutlery and all that sort of thing and the waiters could be so right off-putting, you know. If you didn’t get it right, oh gosh yeah and the big thing now is that Elizabeth David…..

Oh that was last night on the telly. I missed it.

Because apparently she started to bring in all the garlic and the herbs…..

The Mediterranean food yeah. Olive oil and all that because prior to that in England and in Ireland as well I suppose you had to go to a chemist to get olive oil when you think about it (laugh) and it’s not that long ago.

No it’s not and it’s just funny to see it all change and then I remember when I went to London with Michel, the Chinese restaurants had all started opening there but then there were really good ones who were run by proper Chinese, cooking proper Chinese food and then there were the ones that were like takeaway Chinese, and all that was starting to come in and ah yes it’s just amazing.

But when did you see the changes to start here. So you were born in ’35 so really it would be really be in the mid ’50s that you would have started to be independent.

We went to, I remember being the Bailey.

Now that’s not John Ryan who wrote that article. So that’s John Ryan, the 1987 article. That’s John Ryan who bought the Bailey, he owned the Bailey.

It is yeah. He’s dead. He was a friend of my brother Michel. Ah he was bit into all the literary crowd. I think he ran or part-ran The Bell magazine in Dublin and they were Monument Creameries, you knew that, and one of the guys, Kathleen was the film star and she was in the Odd Man Out. That was Kathleen and then there was Paddy. Paddy married a Polish girl and he worked in the business for the while. I think John, I have an idea John was the eldest, and John was very literary and painted and didn’t paint too bad. I mean it wouldn’t be my type of painting but he was quite good but very correct, very pictorial, and one of them married the then Labour Party Leader. (note: Brendan Corish) But they were an extraordinary family. They all did quite odd things.

Now the Monument Creamery, you have the whole thing about milk bars and that would have been big around that time as well wouldn’t it?

I mean a lot of cafes, you know, Bewley’s and you had what was the other one? Robert Roberts, and then you had the little café downstairs in Switzers, so for coffee and biscuits and tea and toast or sausage and toast. My husband Dave lived on sausages and toast (laugh). You had the Green Rooster during the war. I remember going there with Raymonde and Dom.

That was on O’Connell Street, and owned by an Australian fellow?

That’s right and I got the impression it was an adventure to go the Green Rooster, you know. I just remember a lot..... It was a bit like a diner I think.
And I think they had a thing for roasting chicken or something, a window or a spit. I think they used to sell roast chickens out the hatch or something like that (laugh). Do you remember across the road from that there would have been sort of the Broadway Soda Fountain or any of these places?

I don’t remember that. I remember Cafolla’s in O’Connell Street, wasn’t it? And there you went for ice-cream. It was very good and they were a bit frowned on (laugh).

Why was it a bit lower class or a bit more common?

Yeah. It is funny, families. I remember saying to my mother once when I knew David first and he said we’ll meet up in Davy Byrnes, blah, blah, blah and she said ‘what’. And I said ‘well I’m going to meet him in Davy Byrnes’ and she said ‘you’re not going to Davy Byrnes on your own’. Can you image?

But Davy Byrne’s did food as well didn’t it.

They did, and quite nice food. Well I suppose you’d call it bar food, they did food.

I think Davy Byrnes, in Ulysses I think doesn’t…..

And they did oysters. I remember oysters in the Bailey and then you had the poet, Kavanagh. I mean there was a great atmosphere and of course it was very small and everybody knew everybody and poor old Seán O’Sullivan getting slung out of everywhere. Oh gosh, he used to. He was, as a young girl, he was intimidating when he came in, because he was big and he was loud and he as likely to sit on top of your, you know, so he was a bit frightening. But I think really looking back on it quite harmless, do you know what I mean. He wasn’t a vicious sort of person.

How about places, would you have gone into the Wicklow Hotel or any place like that?

Where I’m now, David’s brother who was in the wine trade, he went into the Wicklow a lot and that was very good. I didn’t, but not for any reason, I mean I did go and have drinks there once before going somewhere else, I can’t remember, very early on but David and I didn’t have much money so for a long time we didn’t eat out too much because even when he got into Aer Lingus, there was a pilot strike and I think they were out of work for about a month, and that really hit us. And then my father didn’t really agree with my marriage so we didn’t get too many goodies. We didn’t have a big wedding, registry office wedding, and a reception which my mother helped out on in my apartment, in her apartment, David’s and mines little flat, we say apartment.

How come he didn’t agree or?

Well I’ll tell you a very funny thing now and it won’t shock you because you’re young. David was reared as a Christian Scientist and as he said at the age of nine realised this was a lot of boloney so I was reared as a Catholic. I did my communion at seven. I then went to Church of Ireland school, a Protestant school, which I loved because my godmother taught in that school. She taught Gaeltacht. Her name was Eileen Williams. She was lovely, a very interesting person. So I went to that school. Now I got no religious instruction other than I was allowed sit in on the first testament because it was the same for both religions but when we got to the second testament they said ‘no you can’t sit in because there are differences and we don’t want to influence you’. So anyway I went along and I mean I still went to mass and communion and confession and that sort of thing but yeah wasn’t too fussed about the whole thing. So I met David, and he was still in the air force at that stage and he said ‘he would try and convert’. He asked my father for my hand because you had to do it that way and David tried to convert but I mean, you know, in all honesty he wasn’t a believer in anything. I mean he wasn’t and didn’t disagree now but he wouldn’t be against people who did believe.
172. **MM:** He’d be an agnostic really I suppose.

173. **RH:** Absolutely and he did try, and he did try and he said I just really can’t go through this. It’s not going to work so we went to see the parish priest and he started to talk about Henry VIII and marrying for lust and I said ‘well wait a minute, first of all I think Henry VIII married for political reasons a lot of the time’ and I said ‘if we were marrying for lust and if it was for lust only we wouldn’t bother getting married’, you know, come on. Well it didn’t go down too well but we didn’t get any dispensation to get married so I said ‘okay we’ll wait until we’re twenty-one’ and then I had a friend who worked in the registry office and through her I happened to hear that you can get married in a registry office and it’s legally recognised, the fact if you don’t sign it on the back to church you’re not married. So I thought okay. So I went to my father and said ‘I know it’s very difficult for you’ because he clearly did, but what we’ll do I’ll wait till I’m twenty-one and I will get married with David in a registry office, and then it’s not your decision. You are not having to go against your conscious but I can go with my conscious. So that was why he wasn’t too happy about it. Now he did see us and everything but he wasn’t too happy about it. Now my mother was very different but then my father being to school over here (Belvedere College) and I think more Jesuitical in his outlook on life and my mother was really laid back about those things. I took she took the attitude that we all go to God in our own ways as best we can. I don’t think she was hard line.

174. **MM:** And just thinking about that, you mother was part of the white stag movement and the whole artistic crowd with friends like Hilton Edwards and that. So there would have been flamboyant and more

175. **RH:** More bohemian in her outlook. And she was very involved in the artistic crowd. And you know she’s interesting. You know she did some very good carvings. She did the carvings of the…(Stations of the Cross for Churches)

176. **MM:** In Dun Laoghaire yeah and also in the place in Limerick as well isn’t it?

177. **RH:** Yeah she worked very hard at it and she did do very well and she painted quite well. Her paintings now are beginning to come on market as people who had them are beginning to die, I suppose. Their children are my age so maybe they’re beginning to die, stuff is being sold off. But one of her paintings in America, I don’t know how it got there but it sold for €1,500 which isn’t a lot but a beginning of a trend that people actually bought it and knew about it, you know.

178. **MM:** It’s funny because like Harry Kernoff and that, and all these guys who would have been regular in Jammet’s would have been fairly penniless, you know, and now their pictures are making good money.

179. **RH:** Oh absolutely. Did I show you, there was a thing there from Yeats…(looking for a picture on Yeats among the collected scrap book)

180. **MM:** It’s funny actually because there was a programme on last week on the TV about art in Ireland and they were saying actually that the first Irish art auction or the whole thing actually started with a Jack B. Yeats (painting) that had been in Jammet’s that came to the market around 1973/1974, it came to the market in Whytes or one of those and that that was sort of the beginning of the boom in the Irish art sales. So do you remember what was in…..

181. **RH:** There was Norah McGuinness…..

182. **MM:** Because the Yeats room or sorry there was the Yeats table.

183. **RH:** There was a Yeats table, there was a Yeats Room down in Ballymaloe.
There was a Yeats table and I’ll tell you why I know the Yeats table is because that picture that I have with Hilton Edwards and Micheal Mac Liammóir and Padraig Colum, and Lady Longford, they are sitting at the Yeats table in Jammet’s, and it was in Queen Magazine in 1964 or something like that and it was to do with the thing about Yeats’ Ireland and how it got in there. You don’t know why it was called the Yeats’ table, because Yeats used to eat there.

I presume Yeats used to eat there I would think and maybe it was reserved for him. My father really liked his paintings.

But it would have been WB Yeats as opposed to Jack B Yeats or maybe both.

No Jack was the painter and W.B., I mean the poet would come in too but it was Jack Yeats as the painter that my father really liked, his paintings and Victor Waddington was the person who had the gallery. He would have eaten in the restaurant.

And he represented your mother then?

Waddington’s Gallery and he also had a gallery in London and I think his sons certainly up to a few years ago ran that gallery still in London, but Victor Waddington and his wife Mable, they ate in the restaurant as well so you got that overlap with the artistic side as well as the theatrical side. I’m trying to think of the guy, Lennox Robinson. And I even remember Lennox Robinson and I’ll tell you a very funny thing. Lennox Robinson always had little Yorkshire terriers and he used to come in and the Yorkshire terrier used to sit on his lap in the restaurant. But you know, dogs weren’t put out then, my mother always went in with her dog.

But particularly in French restaurants, they have more respect for the dog sometimes than they have for the individual. (laugh)

Today, the dogs in Paris are all in the restaurants, it’s so funny. (laugh) But my grandfather Felix Auger, my mother’s father who was a chef he loved dogs and they apparently they lived over the Boeuf à la Mode in an apartment, when he arrived back with three French bulldog puppies to my grandfather in an apartment, one for himself, and one each for the two girls. I think they were all for him actually and I think she put her foot because he only ended up with one of them, and I think he had to home the other two. He was big into dogs as well. But my mother was and my father, they were big into dogs.

Oh they would have been great bones for the stock pot (laugh).

Oh absolutely my father used to bring them back every night, he’d come in and he’d have bones for the dogs and we had one little poodle who was very finicky, he was just shy and then my collie would take the hand off you for food, and a cocker spaniel chow type thing belonged to my sister who’d also take the hand off you and another poodle. So my father would give the bones out and poor little ‘Frinzie’ would be going em, my father would say ‘you’d think I was going to hit him with it’ (laugh). But he was a great man for doing something like that every single night, and he was very much into routine. Now he always got up very early and that and if he was a great, if he said to you he’d do something for you, come hell or high water he’d do it, you know. He was very good like that, he would go by his word so if he said he was going to do something it would get done. So that was one of his characteristics. So when he did hit on not doing something he was equally as adamant which is a pity.

But you would have had Sundays together as a family because the restaurant would have been closed on a Sunday?

Yeah it was closed on Sunday and he used to come back half day on Saturday and he’d usually have afternoon tea or whatever and have a nap and a rest and then he’d go back in at about 6pm you know. So he did work hard, I mean he.....
196.MM: But the split shift system would have worked. He’d work in the morning, he’d come back for a rest and…..?

197.RH: No that was just Saturday and Sunday time. No he was always on tap and he’d nap. He’d a nice office upstairs and he’d go for a little nap after lunch. He always did that but which is probably very good. I think he used to cough hugely in the morning and I was telling my doctor, she was asking at one stage cause I’ve asthma if anybody in the family had and I said I don’t know but my father used to cough a lot and she said yeah but he was in the Great War and it could be gas. He really would be wrenching in the morning and then he’d be grand for the rest of the day, but he always up very early and he’d come in about 11pm. I did worry about him towards the end. I used to go in. David and I’d go in and collect him because his eye sight was very bad. That was before we were married and I was living away from home. We’d go in sometimes and collect him because he had cataracts but there wasn’t much traffic at 11.30pm You’d be lucky if you saw another car on the way out.

198.MM: But they lived in Monkstown until he died?

199.RH: They lived in Queen’s Park. No then they moved up to Kill Abbey when I was 12.

200.MM: But they were in Kill Abbey till he died.

201.RH: Yeah. That was a lovely house, a very historic house.

202.MM: That’s not a nursing home now?

203.RH: No it’s not, it’s across from the nursing home. It’s in flats now.

204.MM: We’re talking about Kill of the Grange, we’re talking about near Baker’s Corner or….?

205.RH: Baker’s Corner is here, and the other corner is there, there’s a crossroads and you used to come down the road and it curved and Kill Abbey was in there, there was a laneway into it. There’s a 6th Century church there you can still see.

206.MM: That’s right. There’s Rory O’Connor Park there I think, it’s sort of a corporation estate and then you’ve Abbey View I think it’s called. So it’s there.

207.RH: So that’s where it is. But it was a nice, it was an interesting house, it built in 1595 so that was just before Queen Elizabeth I. She died in 1603 and so it was Elizabethan and it had a lovely walk at the back of the house, it had a Yew walk. It had enormous trees, I mean I couldn’t get my arms around it as it was so big. And there was a lovely write up in Balls History of Ireland. He describes them, Yews of extreme old age so they must be 400 years old anyway and it had been a monastery. Peter the gardener told me that the original abbey was obviously made from wood and had burnt down and then they built the stone abbey. It had a well down in the cellar, it had a moat around most of it, it had the 6th Century Church just across the way, it had what they called a big stone with two hollows and they don’t know whether they were grinding corn or whether they were for sacrificial purposes, pre-Christian. They could have been for catching (inaudible). Anyway it was a lovely stone. They had that inside the gate and it had a holy well which is about 5” deep and clear, clear water. Now that’s been covered over. It’s still there but it’s been covered over, you know, people falling into it and one thing and the other cause that’s all open ground now and the yew trees have all gone. Lovely walled in garden. It was a lovely, lovely house. It was just magic. We grew a lot of stuff for the restaurant.

208.MM: And clearly you had a few bob to run that house?

209.RH: It was terribly run down when they bought it.
210. MM: The thing at the time anyway people wanted new houses not old houses back then.

211. RH: And they bought it in say 1947, or even say in 1946 but the people who’d been living in it had been two single County type ladies and they bred dogs, breeding dash hounds and German shepherds and there were fifty dogs in the house.

212. MM: So I can imagine the smell.

213. RH: I think only a few in the house, they had them in kennels in the garden and that and the house was reputed to be haunted. Now we always thought it was haunted. We never actually saw anything but we heard things so we had a ghost and everything, it was lovely. It was just absolute magic and we had a full-time gardener and we had Peter Rooney as a part time handyman.

214. MM: So you grew vegetables for the restaurant in the garden?

215. RH: Mr. McGee grew vegetables, I don’t know if he grew enough, he certainly grew quite a bit and my father used to take them in every day and I remember there was lime trees on the avenue going up to the house and they were lovely leaves. They used to pull those and you would have them on a plate and you would set the first strawberries of the year out and that was all the thing in the restaurant. It was a nice touch and I suppose they grew all their own herbs and stuff like that, I would think.

216. MM: And had there been a garden in Monkstown?

217. RH: Ah there was but it was a fifth of an acre I think and…..

218. MM: Oh right okay, it wasn’t a vegetable garden?

219. RH: Oh during the war we had a vegetable garden which we were very proud of. My father was very proud of it, where the tennis court had been and people…..

220. MM: It was plant for freedom sort of thing.

221. RH: So that was that. I can’t think of anything else about food or how food changed. There is something in the back of my mind. Because maybe when you had that affluent bit, when things picked up in the 60s and early 70s and that’s when I think Snaffles and places like that, cause we did eat there and the Soup Bowl and a few of the others the sort of bistro type restaurants. Snaffles was always very good.

222. MM: Did you ever go into the Tandoori Rooms?

223. RH: The Tandoori Rooms yeah. I think I went there once on Leeson Street.

224. MM: Did ever eat down in, it’s still there actually on Merrion Row, the Unicorn?

225. RH: Oh I remember that, and I remember my parents went to. I think there was a literary club or something in the Unicorn wasn’t there? Because I remember them talking about it. I think David and I went once with Jack and Kay Young, because Jack was in advertising, I think they were Young and Wilson or they were Young, I’m not sure or maybe they became Young and Wilson but we went there I think one New Years Eve. And then places started like Ballymaloe obviously took off and it was lovely, the Yeats room down there and then you’d Armstrong’s Barn in Wicklow. You had all that sort of thing. That was coming on. There wasn’t too much of that before and that started off but then the 70s.

226. MM: And how about the Coq Hardi or any of these, John Howard?
RH: We’d gone into horses, once again we didn’t have the money for eating out too much. Money was going on gentlemen horses who weren’t making money but were eating loads of food so that’s what we were doing then.

MM: There was a place Ostinelli’s, it was in the 50s. I’ll tell you where it was, it was in Hawk Street, it was across from the Theatre Royal. It was a sort of Italian place. Alfredo’s now you mentioned. Did you ever go to Alfredos? Alfredo’s I believe was a bit of a club, you had to do a special knock to get in?

RH: Yeah, yeah, I don’t know how we got in. But Bernardo’s we went to more.

MM: Alfredo’s was it more of a shebeen or what was it?

RH: I don’t know. I didn’t go to Alfredo’s. I think Dave and Albert went to Alfredo’s but Bernardo on Lincoln Place, that was nice.

MM: How about Dublin airport? What was that like because you must have gone there?

RH: Yeah, it had a good name. That was the Oppermans wasn’t it? And I’ll tell you a funny thing in the early days when David was in Aer Lingus, the crew ate in the restaurant, they didn’t eat in the canteen. He’d say ‘I ate in the restaurant, proper linen, table cloths and napkins and everything’ (laugh).

MM: They were like film stars though weren’t they.

RH: Yeah. Unbelievable, and all the dances on Saturday night, David would say, come back say if you were on the, what was it called, paper flight – The mail flight, you’d come in early in the morning and you’d see all the ladies arriving or going home in their ball gowns and stuff. I mean totally different times, you know, just so amazing. People used to drive out just to look at the airplanes back then.

MM: I’d have talked to lads who worked there and they used to stop working in the kitchen when the plane was taking off and go out and have a look, because you know you probably only had six planes a day or something like you know what I mean.

RH: I think there were only eighty pilots when David joined, so when you think there were two on every flight, three I think, well because they weren’t doing the Atlantic then but two in every flight so that was forty crew. When you think about it was only a handful. But it was lovely, it was very, very special, that whole era I think from the flying point of view, and they were good pilots because a lot of them, the senior ones had been in the war too so they were very well trained and they knew their business. I wonder now about some of the guys, because they do a course but they’re out there flying. They’re flying without all that much experience. In those days the guys flying captain, really had a lot of experience you know. Mind you that whole area has changed too.

MM: The computer systems and all. There’s probably not all that much flying on them anymore to be honest.

RH: I think the thing that’s frightening when the computers are down you have no instruments. Can you imagine? I mean even in the car I hate it. I have an old Toyota out there but it’s all electronic and the electronics failed once coming out of a garden centre, totally, so not just no indicator, no lights, no instruments (laugh) and gosh imagine if you’re flying. It must be awful, you know, because at least with the instruments you’d magnet or something. If you had a magnet, I don’t know. Very different world out there now, but probably a better world for most people.
240-MM: Talking about dinner dances and stuff like that did you go to say places like maybe the Gresham or the Shelbourne or anywhere like this.

241-RH: No I got married when I was 21 and I wasn’t into the social side at all. As I say I was different from the rest of the family in that and it never really grabbed me that much, do you know what I mean. My sister did now. She’d a coming out ball and all that sort of stuff. Things had moved on. Raymonde and I always say that, Raymonde is in her 80s now and she’s lovely and she loves me and I love her but we are very different, it’s as if we’d come from….. She was before the war and I was after the way and I think there was an attitude change that happens in a generation regardless. It’s not genetic but do you know what I mean.

242-MM: My youngest brother is ten years below me and I see that…..

243-RH: And come at things from a different angle and it’s not that he doesn’t love you or respect or anything but he’d be saying ‘oh come on’.

244-MM: Instead of before and after the war it’s sort of, he comes from the generation that never had to emigrate, you know what I mean. He never had to go to England to work or he never knew unemployment of 20% or whatever.

245-RH: That’s now in his case. It’s amazing because Gareth had to go to America because he couldn’t get any work here at all and he left. And you know looking at my generation Michel and everything left, Raymond and Don left because again he was adopted. There wasn’t any work here. So he went and worked in the Mayo clinic and various places. There was two gone. Patrick stayed and I stayed but David and I very nearly didn’t. We were getting on the boat to Liverpool when we got because David had done two interviews with Aer Lingus and we were booked to go back, we had the tickets to go back to Liverpool that night and one of the guys, the head pilot then rang up and said ‘for God sake don’t go because you’re in, and you’ll get word whenever, two days time by post so don’t go’. So we didn’t go we stayed put and the rest is history. We were very lucky. We really were because the 50s were like that, you had it again in the 80s and you had it in the 70s at one stage. You had a good period in the 60s.

246-MM: They say the mid 50s and the mid 80s were like the two worse period of emigration.

247-RH: Well that’s when Gareth went ‘86.

248-MM: ‘86 was a bleak one. I came out of school in 1986.

249-RH: And it breaks your heart, you know when you look at reeling in the years and there’s a shot of them waiting outside the American Embassy for their visas and there’s a shot of a couple of young guys standing. It could have been David O’Doherty and Gareth but it isn’t but they have the same sleeping bag (laugh) that my daughter-in-law Laura had when she used to come and lie down and it takes me back that thing and it would break your heart to see them going. I mean it really is sad.

250-MM: I remember Brian Lenihan coming back after getting something like 3,000 visas and celebrating this and celebrating the fact that he was after getting 3,000 visas for our best and brightest to immigrate instead of doing something to try and keep them here (laugh). Ah it was the attitude you know.

251-RH: It was heartbreaking. Yeah it was. It was taken for granted.

252-MM: Have you eaten in Guibaud’s? In a way Guibaud’s is the restaurant that has sort of taken over the mantle of Jammets as such?
253.RH: No I haven’t but my friends have eaten in Guibaud’s. Yvonne my friend, she’s Dickson now but her daughter is the chef/manager for Avoca and she trained in Ballymaloe and Yvonne also worked in Avoca in the restaurant in Kilmacanogue. She’s a very good friend of mine. Yvonne knows a lot about food and she knows Mediterranean food and that so and she goes to a few more exotic places than I’d go to because it’s part and parcel of her life, you know, and she’s a good cook herself too and she didn’t have a training but she picked it up. It’s funny it is flair with people and she was trying and I remember Yvonne now going back when we were living in South Park and the time Gareth was born, Yvonne at that stage was cooking a lot of Spanish food so you could see that coming in. That was the early 60s. A lot of us were starting to do spaghetti Bolognese.

254.MM: My mother did a course I think just before she got married but I remember one of the things that she learnt was moussaka and that was a dish we had maybe once a fortnight when we were growing up. And it was quite adventurous when you think about it. It was lovely. Very good.

255.RH: So you could see all those influences starting to come in and Ballymaloe in Ireland was a big thing because what they did and what was really superb is they took ordinary food and made it extraordinary. Local (Irish) food and made it extraordinary. I remember Dave and I went down after my mother died, so that was August 1967. We had a French au pair staying with who was a great help because all French relations were here for the funeral in Deansgrange, so they’d all come over and that and to thank Laurence who had handled all the children and everything and really had been great, we went down to Ballymaloe for four or five days, the whole lot of us. They had a lovely thing, they had what they called a family suite and you could get three children and Papa came with us and Laurence and Dave and myself and the children and it was like an apartment. It was absolutely great. But the food down there was just superb, absolutely beautiful and all local. I remember going up the avenue there, and they had chillies growing in pots, it was August and they had them outside. The mushrooms they had grown themselves. The mushroom soup was absolutely lovely. That was Myrtle.

256.MM: I’ve interviewed Myrtle and she’s brilliant. Absolutely an amazing women, she’s eighty-one or something.

257.RH: And she’s still as clear as a bell?

258.MM: She’s still working for God sake. She’s an amazing woman.

259.RH: It’s lovely and they’re so hands on. You know fish and everything like that.

260.MM: From Ballycotton. The other place because they took Irish and the other place that took sort of French at that time was Arbutus Lodge.

261.RH: Yes, yes and I ate their once when David was ‘eventing’ with the horses we went down with Hilda Keenan and Hilda had done the booking, and we went for ordinary bed and breakfast and she said ‘no I booked you up in the Arbus tus’, and David says to me ‘I hope we have enough money to pay for this’. But, gosh, the food was gorgeous. I can’t remember what I had but I remember thinking, it was heavenly, oh it was lovely.

262.MM: He had trained in the Russell and then he’d gone over and trained in the Roanne with the Troisgros Brothers which are the top in France at the time and so he brought stuff home. He started doing salmon with the sorrel sauce which was their signature dish and again he was doing the starters. I think Egon Ronay had them at three star at one stage, definitely two at a regular basis.

263.RH: They were very, very good but I remember we had, Dave always liked ice-cream. So we had pudding and they did one of the homemade ice-creams and I’d never tasted anything like it. A
mixture of an ice-cream and a sorbet, you know, absolutely lovely. I mean it was superb Arbutus. And there were a few out in Bantry, wait till I think now. Ballylickey, yeah, and they closed in winter. Are they still running it?

264.MM: The Graves. No they just finished a year ago. I think they’ve just sold it around a year or two ago.

265.RH: Great. Now I remember being on holidays down in Bantry with the kids and went there with Den Fitzgerals wife, was my friends mother, Catherine Howlin’s mother and she was staying there and Catherine in a bungalow I think and my kids and myself and friends we had a mobile home. So she very kindly Mrs. Fitzgerald asked us to come and have dinner there and it was lovely.

266.MM: So I’m just trying to think at that stage, like at that stage there was only, Michelin had come to Ireland at that stage. Michelin came in 1974 and The Russell got a Michelin the year it closed. It was the first year of Michelin and that was the only Dublin Michelin star. But then you have Arbutus, you had Ballylickey, you have had the Cashel Palace at one stage but that was only because, it was only because the Ryans had taken over from Arbutus. They were running it. You had places in Mayo.

267.RH: What about the Great Southern Hotel the big one in Kerry there?

268.MM: Parknasilla. But I don’t think they had a Michelin star. I think the food was good enough, it I think was the same thing as like the Gresham and the Shelbourne. The food was good but it was never on the par of Jammet’s or these other, it wasn’t that step up. It was very good hotel food but it was still hotel food as opposed to restaurant food. Even though I must say, it was Egon Ronay now had given the stars to the Gresham and the Shelbourne, but they lost them after a year or two.

269.RH: They get very fussy and you know the thing with restaurants I suppose it’s like everything you can hit it on a bad day, you know, and that’s it.

270.MM: But I think they said any place they had been too they’d been at least four times or something like that so they were seen to be fair enough.

271.RH: Because it can happen, inspect a place on a bad day. You know it’s awful I’d often wished now that I’d paid more attention but you don’t when you’re young.


273.RH: Happily. And there was something else…..

274.MM: There’s one thing here I’ve noticed is that they’ve shot all the football.
275. RH: We won them. We won the restaurant league one year and that’s the year that the thing now..... But there are no names you see. (pointing to a photo of the Jammet football team)

276. MM: I can get names to some of these because there’s a guy at work who would know them. Where’s you father, is this your father.

277. RH: Yeah, that’s my godmother and that’s Patrick.

278. MM: So that’s Eileen Williams. Tell me about Eileen Williams. Her name is very familiar to me for some reason or other.

279. RH: She’s very interesting. She obviously went to college and she graduated. She was very much into the Gaelic rival because she was older than my parents, my mother by quite a few years, it could be something like twelve years. Anyway she taught my mother English when my mother came over here cause my mother was twenty-eight when she came over and so she taught her English and she became my godmother. She had qualified in Gaelic and then had gone off and worked in Egypt in Cairo which was unusual enough at that period and that was when Egypt was under British (rule) and then they were kicked out and she was given a gratuity because they were putting an Egyptian person in to teach English so she came back to Ireland and at that stage all the schools had to, if they wanted to be serious and get Irish degrees, they had to start teaching Irish and she became the Gaelic teacher in Alexandra College.
Figure RH.5: Staff Celebrations after winning Hotels Cup

Figure RH.6: Jammet’s Football Team 1944

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Frank Corr in Cathal Brugha Street (2/7/2007)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Frank Corr (FC)

1. MM: So tell us what year were you born?

2. FC: Okay I was born in Limerick City on 16th May, 1940. My father was a printer, and his father was a printer before him and I grew up there in the 1940s. My father died when I was seventeen and I was still at secondary school. I finished secondary school in St Munchin’s College in Limerick and at the age of eighteen I did the leaving certificate and spent about nine months working with the Limerick Steam Ship Company but I always wanted to be journalist so I started writing for the local paper on a sort of a contributor basis, largely about sport and in 1959 I got a call from Tommy Morris who owned the newspaper and he offered me a job. And it was a dream come true for me (laugh). So I went to work for the Limerick Weekly Echo.

3. MM: Just before that the steam ship company was that clerical work?

4. FC: I was an office boy and then I was promoted to Assistant Manifest Clerk and this involved returning empty crates to various railway stations in England. I managed to send them I’m sure quite all to the wrong railway stations (laugh). I managed also to get my work done in about two days every week and that left the other three days for writing (laugh), for Limerick Weekly Echo.

5. MM: But your dream came through anyway!

6. FC: It did yeah and I was thrilled about it and I went to work for the Limerick Echo, got a wonderful training. Tom Morris was a marvellous editor, terrific journalist and taught me I suppose everything I ever needed to know about journalism. I as a young reporter covered everything, courts, local authorities, wakes and weddings, sport, the show band era I had my own entertainment column and I met a lot of the stars of the day. People like Roy Orbison and Jim Reeves and Everly Brothers and of these came through and I just about, there was only two reporters on the paper and a sub editor and a one of the reporters didn’t turn up very much (laugh). He was more often in the pub I think than at work (laugh). So I got a huge amount of experience and it was terrific. So after about, I suppose four or five years, an opportunity came up to be also a stringer, our local correspondent for the Irish Press Group. So effectively they had a staff reporter in Limerick and I was effectively his assistant for maybe, four or five years and that widened my experience because I got to write for national papers. I got to do a lot of features for them and I kind of got a taste of the national scene rather than the local scene.

7. MM: And you were doing both simultaneously, were you?

8. FC: I was yeah. I was doing both simultaneously. I also did some freelance for other publications and I wrote some film scripts and various bits and pieces. I remember writing a tour guide of Limerick which was like this on a tape recorder and you went into the local tourist office, it was the very foundation of the regional tourism organisations and the they’d one in Limerick, the Shannon side and they came up with this bright idea that you could hire a tape recorded which was about the size of a radio (laugh), a fairly substantial thing, in the tourist office and there would be a commentary on it which would lead you on a walking tour around Limerick. So I wrote the script for this and worked out carefully where you’d go so that you’d be able to start in the present day and work you way back to foundations of Limerick, and on a loop could back into modern times again. Everything was terrific. It was done on the basis that you went outside the tourist office and you were told switch on the tape recorder and the tape recorder said ‘please turn right’ and walk five hundred yards and switch off now, switch on again which was terrific. So they sent it up to Dublin to processed and in between the time it went to Dublin and the time it came out for
publication the tourist office had moved across the road so that every turn became a left turn (laugh). So if you were to actually follow my instructions you would have ended up in the middle of the river Shannon I think (laugh).

a. So that was good fun. So I was there during an exciting period you know. 1959 to 1969 in Limerick, a lot was happening. The first programme for economic expansion had come out. Shannon was developing, the Bunratty Banquets were starting and the airport was developing. There was new industries coming in, there was new houses being built in Limerick and emigration which was rife in the 1950s had kind of tailed so by the time ‘60s came around it was a kind of a mini boom really towards the end of that period, the end of that ten years that I spent there. I saw big change from the time I went to work for the Echo in 1959 until I left it in 1969. Yeah, yeah, another big event was the 50th anniversary of the 1916 rising. 1966 yeah but there was also an exciting time in the show bands, the Royal show band and all this sort of thing. There was a great sort of buzz about it. Limerick was terrific because Donnagh O’Malley was the Minister for Education and then Minister for Health and he being a good local politician anything that was going came to Limerick. We got new hospitals and schools and things like that so it was a pretty exciting time yeah. So I was there working flat out really. I got married in 1965 I think but I was working pretty much twenty-four hours a day (laugh) between one thing and the other. There always seemed to be something going on and then around 1968, ‘67/’68 there was an award, first of these award schemes for journalists introduced by Gallagher’s the cigarette company yeah and I won the award for the best provincial journalist that year. It was either the young journalist or regional journalist and I remember Michael Viney won the award for the national reporter and Paul McSweeney another great guy in the Irish Times won the award for the best sports reports. So there was two guys in the Irish Times and they…

9. MM: He’s nothing to Myles McWeeney, is he?

10. FC: Em, I think he’d be an uncle, yeah.

11. MM: Yeah, yeah.

12. FC: And so (laugh) there was these two famous journalists from the Irish Times and me from the Limerick Echo (laugh) and we were all brought up to the Royal Hibernian in Dawson Street and of course it was a very big deal for me, very grand and all the rest of it and George Colley presented us with the awards. I think it was maybe my first time inside a place like the Hibernian you know which was very lavish and very formal and very, very grand. But at that particular, that particular night I met a man called Nicholas Leonard and he was the editor of Business and Finance Magazine and it was a very innovative magazine. The first time that there was ever a publications devoted to business and he asked me if I would write for Business and Finance from Limerick and so I added that to my bow and now I was writing about business (laugh) as well as everything else. And about a year later em, Joe O’Malley who retired recently, he would be a first cousin to Des O’Malley. He retired recently as Political Correspondent for the Sunday Independent. He’d been there for years. He was the editor or deputy editor of Business and Finance and he was moving to a new publication within the Creation Group so Nicholas Leonard invited me to come up to Dublin and after a lot of heart searching (laugh) I did because I had turned down three or four invitations to come and work for the Press in Dublin but I didn’t want to leave Limerick but this guy was very charming, and he bought me lunch in the Old Wicklow Hotel I remember. Very impressed. I came up to see him on a Saturday and em, with my wife at the time and we came down… He was very much a kind of man about town, down Grafton Street and into the Old Wicklow and sat up at the Oyster Bar and there was a guy there opening oysters and pouring pints of Guinness or glasses of Chablis and of course I think, I don’t think I’d ever had an oyster and didn’t even know what to do with the bloody thing. But this was all very impressive. He took us into lunch, I remember, a large, do you remember those the food of the day, large prawn cocktails and they would come up in a kind of a chalice with ice underneath to
keep the prawns cold and em sort of a little ball of prawns on top of the thing and then you would get a great big dollop mari rose sauce and then this was the ultimate in sophistication (laugh). I remember that being (a) the oyster bar being very impressive and the other things that really impressed me or I was amazed by it was that Nicholas Leonard didn’t pay in cash for the meal. He took a single cheque out his shirt pocket and signed it and to me signing a cheque without a cheque book was sort of, you know, decadence (laugh). But anyway I was if you like seduced into that and I came to Dublin. But maybe, to go back to Limerick for a little bit and to talk about Shannon airport. Shannon airport originally of course emerged from the flying boats coming into Foynes in the late 1940s I suppose. They came in around then and there was no place to go when they arrived. There was no place to eat in Foynes at all and there was these Americans coming in and they began to develop Rineanna which was on the Clare side of the river as an airport and some landing planes started to come in there as well and there was a guy in the Department of Industry and Commerce as it was then, a man called Leyden and he was quite far seeing and he saw the possibility of providing some food for the passengers who arrived because very often what would happen would be the planes would over-night at Shannon if there was rough weather over the Atlantic or anything like that. They wouldn’t bother, the BOAC would fly into Shannon and they’d say it’s too rough over the Atlantic tonight and we’re not going to fly and they’d put all the passengers up on a hotel and give them dinner. So Leyden got this idea if we had a good restaurant manager it would be a good idea. And he used go, as did a lot of civil servants of the day, to the Stephens Green Club and there was a brash young man as restaurant manager who used to look after them in the Stephens Green Club, Brendan O’Regan and they suggested to Brendan O’Regan that maybe he might think of going down and taking over as restaurant manager in Shannon. And he jumped at it because his family were from Ennis.

13. MM: Right.

14. FC: Yeah around Ennis there. So he went down and he did a brilliant deal. He got himself of comptroller of sales, Shannon and Catering, sales and catering and he actually got a commission as far I remember initially from all sales through the retail sales to the airport including the food. He set up this restaurant and as I was saying to you just earlier they devised a menu that kind of got away from the haute cuisine which would have been the norm in upmarket restaurants and introduced elements of Irish traditional food. And one of the, he hired Billy Ryan then as his chef and Bill Ryan, was from Limerick originally and had trained abroad. Had trained in Lausanne and had a good track record. And he came in as a young chef and they began to work away together and…

15. MM: I think he came from the Royal Hibernian I think?

16. FC: I think he may have, he may have that’s right. And I think Brendan O’Regan may have been with the Hibernian before he went to Stephens Green Club.

17. MM: Right, okay that would make sense yeah.

18. FC: So they got this thing going and they hired two waiters, Micky and Creed, the Creeds, was it Jimmy or Micky Creed, two of them anyway who were amazing characters. That’s all you could say about them. Fantastic showmen the two of them and they used to dress to the nines in the white tie and tails and everything like that and they would look after all the passengers as they came. So they began to devise menus, the day Pan-Am or TWA or BOAC flew people into Shannon and they would be giving them a meal late, if they were even refuelling they would, all the passengers would get dinner you know. So it was very grand, kind of posh, kind of travel in those days. So they did a deal with the airlines to charge a set fee for the meal. Now in those it might have been seventeen and six pence or something like that but it was substantial.

19. MM: Yeah, yeah.
20. FC: And they offered them a meal of soup and maybe Irish, smoked salmon and they did stuff like Irish stew or they did Irish steak and they did this sort of way and apple tart and this sort of a thing. Irish kind of food that they would remember but the great trick was that Ryan used make up an Irish broth with pearl barley, potatoes, carrots, you name it, this great big thick soup and lashings of cream in it. Serve all this up steaming and they're all dashing to it with lots of slices of brown bread (laugh) and they wouldn’t be able for a main course. You see they were getting seventeen and six pence for a meal that was only costing them a shilling. You know these great big bowls of soup. Fantastic and there was great, great stories about… Literally they would come off, there was also first class travel then and second class travel on the airplanes. The passengers would come in and Jimmy or Mick Creed would say ‘second class passengers line up there by the wall, first class passengers this way.’ (Laugh).

21. MM: Yeah (laugh).

22. FC: And they would get the better seats. So it developed but the interesting thing was it became one of the best restaurants in Ireland because they were serving good Irish food and it was very creative and there was another. O’Regan was a bit like Teddy O’Sullivan, he had a terrific eye for detail and another story that’s told, it concerns a guy that later invented Irish coffee, whose name escapes me now, and he was buried out in America. You’d be familiar with that story. I might think of his name in a minute. Yeah. No well I’ll tell you about Irish coffee in the minute. I have to think of the fellas name. This same chef anyway who was doing a dish with duck and he had duck and piped potatoes and that sort of a thing and O’Regan came in and he looked at it and he said ‘chef it doesn’t seem to have much eye appeal.’ The chef looked at it anyway and he says ‘I’ll fix that for you Mr. O’Regan’ and he goes out the back and got a fistful of red currants and he threw them over the duck (laugh) and says ‘how’s that.’ Regan (inaudible) duck a la Shannon or whatever.

23. MM: Yeah, yeah.

24. FC: It just had a few red currants put on. But this stuck in this chef’s mind and sometime later he was the guy now that invented Irish coffee. Sometime later he was messing around in the kitchen and he made a coffee in a glass and he whipped cream or poured cream into the top of it and it looked really very nice. And he brought it in to O’Regan into the office. He said ‘Mr. O’Regan how’s that eye appeal?’ A new way of doing the coffees. And the story is that Brendan Reagan looked at it and he ‘well now that’s great, that looks very good but I’ve got a better idea now why don’t you put some whiskey in it?’ And he went out and he did it with the sugar and the whiskey and they put it on the menu. I mean that’s how Irish coffee did begin and they put it on the menu in Shannon initially in the airport and then of course in the bars in the VIP lounges. I have to get you the guys name though because its an interesting thing that he, that guy worked in Shannon and then eventually em, emigrated and he went to work in San Francisco and he was in a bar I think it was San Francisco and he was working there for years and there was a big sign on the window, and it was whatever his name was, inventor of Irish coffee works here. Something like that and he died and Brendan O’Regan went out to his funeral in America and had a headstone erected to him as the inventor of Irish coffee.

25. MM: Oh yeah.

26. FC: Joe something was his name, isn’t it awful that I can’t think.

27. MM: Ah the name will come back now, we’ll get it later.

28. FC: We’ll get the name. But that was it. Now the interesting thing then was the restaurant was very successful and it became successful not only then with the passenger but with people from around Limerick. I used go out to dinner there, dating young girls. Very nice idea. Drive out the sixteen miles and of course there was no drink driving problems then (laugh) and you’d dinner out there and you know it was always very nice and the service was impeccable and there
was a kind of a cosmopolitan crowd. You know this kind of international looking place. So they then got the idea that if people were coming and stopping over and having a meal why not sell them something as well. So they opened a shop and then I think it was Sean Lemass came up with the idea of well if we’re selling to international passengers they’re not residence so they shouldn’t necessarily have to pay excise duty and we could do a very nice little number by selling them stuff duty free.

29. **MM:** Yeah.

30. **FC:** And that Shannon was the pioneer shopping in the whole world as you know. So the thing developed in there and the Irish coffees developed in there and Brendan O’Regan did remarkably well. And then the next issue that happened was the jet aircrafts arrived and it was now possible not to land in Shannon. You didn’t need your fuel and you could fly from London or Paris, some to Shannon. So they had to come up with ways of trying to encourage the flights to stop off at Shannon. And it wasn’t easy and there was a whole angst that Shannon would close down and James Dillon who was the Fine Gael…

31. **MM:** TD?

32. **FC:** Yeah Minister at the time once said in the Dáil you know that this thing that was started by Fianna Fáil you see (laugh), that you’ll see the rabbits running around the runway in Shannon (laugh). That’s always quoted now. You know they haven’t started running around yet and it’s still there. But they had to come up with an idea and again Brendan O’Regan and some of the other people who were involved down there with him came up with a terrific idea. They said why don’t we, they were working with people from Bord Fáilte, why don’t we offer anyone who stops off at Shannon a free tour of the Shannon area. And you stop off, we’d put you up free overnight and we’ll take you on a tour and you can do your duty free shopping and fly onto America the next day. So it was an offer people wouldn’t refuse. I mean they sold it to the travel trade and the travel trade, oh a great idea, free stopover in Shannon and that. The problem was when they did it, there wasn’t a lot to do so (inaudible) a man called Hunt, Englishman, had bought Bunratty Castle and interestingly from my point of view he restored it and he brought in a lot of really historical furniture, antique furniture. Now interestingly when I was working for the Limerick Steam Ship Company we were handling all this stuff coming in. I could see the dockets going through or whatever (laugh). And so he restored Bunratty Castle when was an O’Brien castle down in Bunratty and Brendan O’Regan said okay can we rent or borrow it and we will put on a medieval banquet in it every night and then we’ll have something for the tourists to do and that’s how the Shannon Bunratty stared. And from a catering point of view then he used the kitchens in Shannon to provide the food for Bunratty and again it was very, they served the broth…

33. **MM:** You were saying yeah (laugh).

34. **FC:** The broth and smoked salmon and apple tart and a similar kind of thing. And of course they had the spare ribs you could eat with your hands and then they trained the singers and the whole entertainment thing and it all grew and then they built on the folk park on behind it and they had the, you know its all developed now. It’s been one of the best tourist attractions and it’s also high quality, it’s really genuine kind of thing. So I mean there was a huge amount of innovation you know when on down there between one thing and the other. They started the renting Irish cottage scheme later. That was kind of later where they reconstructed modern versions of thatched cottages and rented them out and what they did was the did them with local communities and small villages around Limerick and that and Clare and Limerick and that sort of thing. They’re still there you know. I think they’ve changed hands and that sort of a thing but the level of innovation and creativity and that was all there when I there with, we took it all for granted. Oh yeah and of course the other thing that O’Regan did was, he was very much a professional hotelier like himself and he recognised that there was a need, there was no where to train professional managers so he started of the Shannon College of Hotel Management which had a double benefit. First of all it trained hotel managers and some of the most famous successful hotel managers ever
in the Irish industry, all trained down there. And he modelled it on the Lausanne Swiss form of education and there was initially, I think it was a German Director, but the guy I remember Jorgan Bloom.

35. MM: He was Hungarian I think.

36. FC: He was a Hungarian you’re right. Yeah but Jorgan Bloom is the guy I remember who was Swiss and I mean he ran the place very, very well and set exceptionally high standards and he had great contacts and they were able to place their students you know abroad when that kind of thing never happened. And he used to bring in, okay a limited number of foreign students to be there as well so there was a marvellous you cosmopolitan thing and then another thing that happened they operated out of a place called the sheds, we used call it. The huts and it was very basic but Brendan O’Regan then one day met a man called Bernard McDonnagh who was a steel millionaire from Pittsburgh I think and (laugh) he interested him, took him around, this guy had Irish connections and loads of money and he showed him around and Bernard McDonnagh saw Dromoland Castle and he said ‘wouldn’t that make a very nice hotel’ and O’Regan said ‘it certainly would and why don’t you do it’ and he did and he started up Dromoland but he then persuaded him to build a few other hotels as well including one at Shannon airport and not only that but when they built the hotel in Shannon airport Bernard McDonnagh agreed to allow them to use part of it as the hotel school. So it was absolutely brilliant. McDonagh is a very interesting guy. Now I don’t know (laugh) don’t want to bore you with these things. He was a bit eccentric and after he had bought, he used to live in (inaudible) and used to come to Dromoland quite a bit. And a nice story, he came down one morning and his breakfast was cold and he called in the manager. ‘Who cooked that breakfast?’ He said ‘oh chef Murphy is on this morning’ he said. ‘Fire him immediately’ you see (laugh). But the poor chef got fired anyway and Bernard McDonnagh went up, dressed himself got into his gear for the day and was driving in his merc towards Limerick and this fella was hitch hiking along the road and he pulled in and gave him a life and he was chatting to him and says ‘by the way young man what do you do for a living?’ He says ‘I’m a chef’. And he says ‘have you job?’ ‘No’ says he ‘not at the moment’, says he ‘you do now’ and he turned around and he delivered the same chef back. He says ‘I’ve just hired this guy.’ (Laugh).

37. MM: (Laugh).

38. FC: Oh very, very good. But I mean the Shannon college. Do you know the background of it or not, it operates you know kind of outside of the education system here but it’s highly successful. It’s private. It has links now with GMIT and (inaudible) University and that sort of a thing but it’s a superb college and I mean I’m just saying that because when I was in Limerick I was involved in all of that.

39. MM: If you calibre of managers that came out of it.

40. FC: Yeah, yeah, everybody. Peter Maloney, Lee Kidney, Bobby Carr, you could go on you know yeah.

41. MM: What’s her name down in thing, down in Gorey, Marlfield House, Mary Bowe.

42. FC: Mary Bowe, she was yeah. Rory Murphy in Ashford. But you could go on for ever, yeah, yeah, yeah.

43. MM: So tell us so you moved to Dublin?

44. FC: Yeah I moved to Dublin then.

45. MM: What year was this now?
46. **FC:** 1969 and I joined *Business and Finance Magazine* and to some extent I was pitched out of my debt really (laugh). I was in with all these economists and bankers and I would be sent out to cover stories, to interview the Governor of the Bank of Ireland or Ken Whittaker or something about the economy and I hadn’t a clue about it all. What they needed was a feature writer and I was a good feature writer so I did a lot of features. I used to write the cover stories nearly every week and then I got to write the editorials and then I got to do lots of stuff with it and again it was part of the Creation Group owned by Hugh McLaughlin and they owned at that stage *Woman’s Way* and *Creation Magazine, This Week* magazine which was a kind of, you know in the Village, that’s there now, a bit like that. *Business and Finance* and they had trade magazines and that but they were very creative and they were signed… They did a deal then with an English guy called Carr, Clive Carr whose family used own the *News for the World* and had sold the *News of the World* on (inaudible), not to Murdoch I think but whoever owned before Maxwell or something who owned it before Murdock. So these people were pumping in and Hugh McLaughlin was spending it as fast as it was arriving (laugh). But they got loads of contracts and they put in a very modern printing works (laugh). They were, had a contract to print a magazine called *Men Only* which was essentially a soft porn magazine owned by the *News of the World* you see (laugh) and they were printing that but it was for export and they were also printing *Woman’s Way* and there’s a system called a muller system that folds the magazines together.

47. **MM:** That’s right yeah, yeah.

48. **FC:** So one lovely Tuesday or Wednesday sixteen pages of *Men Only* got stitched into the middle of *Woman’s Way* and *Woman’s Way* was read by people who did knitting patterns and mothers and Angela McNamara used to write for it and the devil knows lot and all hell broke loose (laugh).

49. **MM:** (Laugh).

50. **FC:** I remember it was all hands on deck. We were all sent around Dublin to retrieve them off the shop. But it was a very exciting time but while I was there they launched the first, the *Dublin Post* which was first (inaudible) and then they launched the *Sunday World*.

51. **MM:** Oh right, okay yeah.

52. **FC:** Or were they in the process of it which was again very, very innovative. I worked there and I worked for a lot, I wrote across a lot of magazines when I was there and I did a lot for *Business and Finance*. So I met a guy then, I met Frank Grennan one day at a reception or something and he was a good guy and he had been in England and he was over here setting up a little business and he was, had a bought a magazine called licensing world. So he asked me would I write for it so I started doing some articles for that on a freelance basis and then he started to develop a bit more, then he gave up his own job and moved full-time into this and then he was looking for a journalist. I wasn’t anxious really but I had got into a culture in Business and Finance where if you could get equity, shares in company (laugh). So Frank Grennan said if I left B&F and joined him that he’d give me shares in Jemma Publications. And so I did, off I went and I never looked back really. I stayed with Frank for thirty years or more and we had a little office out in Blackrock and we had *Licensing World Magazine* and then we bought a magazine called *Irish Catering Review* from Michael O’Linigh. He had set it up, Frank Grennan was working for him and Frank left and then Frank bought this magazine and it was a competitor for the Irish Hotelier which was the official magazine. So em that continued for a few years and I was editor of it and I was editor of Licensing World and we set up a magazine for the bakery trade. I was editor of them all. There was one for the furnishing industry and producing (laugh) all these little magazines you see and it was great fun. Looking back on them now they were really crappy but you know we were doing it as, it was good for the day that was in it and what happened was the Irish Hotelier came up for sale so we bought it and we merged it with *Irish Catering Review* and we called it *Hotel and Catering Review*. So that was in 1974. I left Business and Finance in 1972 and joined Jemma Publications that year and in 1974 we founded *Hotel and Catering Review*. So
that was it. I was editor of that then, we developed and we did loads of other projects and magazines over the years you know.

53. MM: When you started off, when you were in Business and Finance clearly you’d learnt about economics quite fast and the ideas of like shares in a business and that, how about business lunches or anything like that. Would you have been brought out?

54. FC: Absolutely from almost the day I arrived, heads of advertising agencies would ring up, the PR business was beginning to get going. PR companies or it was kind of the norm if you wanted to interview somebody the fella would say ‘oh well we’ll have lunch’. Now there was two principle places you went to. One was the Saddle Room in the Shelbourne and the other was in the Gresham and Eoin Dillon had moved from I think, had he moved to the Shelbourne.

55. MM: From the Gresham to the Shelbourne I think.

56. FC: The Gresham to the Shelbourne and the Toddy O’Sullivan was down in the Gresham and they were both kind of rivals if you like with each other but they were dining clubs really and lunches tended to be long, alcoholic, and heavy. And the norm would be you’d meet this guy. I used meet, a number of the advertising agencies for instance had places like Arks and McConnells, over around Harcourt Street and you’d go over there and do whatever the five minute courtesy interview or whatever you had to do and walk across the Green and your host would have booked a table in the Saddle Room. You sat into one of these booths and (laugh) as I said to you there was two possible starters, prawn cocktails and smoked salmon. That was more or less it and they didn’t vary a lot and looking back now it was the height of good eating at that stage and then they would bring along the trolley with a great big side of beef on it now. I did know occasionally somebody might have say a sole or something like that but largely you’d eat beef and em they would ask you how you wanted it and they’d sliced these great big chunks of meat and em, they would have it rare or whatever and then they’d bring along. Looking back on it now, pretty awful vegetables which were generally ignored I think. Largely left on the table and you would get a baked potato in tinfoil. Yeah, silver paper and a little boy would come out then in a long apron with the tray and he would have various sauces and things like on the tray and the waiter would say would you like pepper sauce with your beef or something. Or horseradish and then sour cream would go onto the top of the potato and em that was it. Always then, I don’t think I ever drank anything except wine, you know. There was Bordeaux Burgundy. Italian wine was kind of avant-garde and Spanish wine was regarded as plonk. I mean it was a very narrow style and then occasionally you might have a something like steak Diane and they would do it again you know.

57. MM: Would they flambé at the table would they?

58. FC: Flambé it at the table. Yeah they would or steak tartare and they would, you know, cut it all up and that sort of thing, or crepe suzettes, were again a kind of big cheese deal really and they’d come to the table and they’d have the pancakes made of course and they’d have the brandy and they’d make the sauce and flame it and I think pyrotechnics were big. (Laugh).Yeah, I mean the Gresham, both of them had very similar menus really. The Gresham and the Shelbourne.

59. MM: Had the Red Bank shut down by this stage or did you get the tail end of the Red Bank?

60. FC: Up in Westmorland Street.

61. MM: D’Olier Street yeah.

62. FC: Or D’Olier Street. I did and now that was different and very, very good. I mean looking back on it the food was very different in it. They would do a lot of game, duck and pheasant and that sort of thing and they would, I remember they did eel now there. Smoked eel but I don’t know whether it was Irish or where it came from. And they would also do nice desserts and that sort of thing but I suppose the place with the most, spectacularly was the word for it was the
Russell and now the Russell peculiar pen chant with aspic. They’d do everything in aspic and you’d get prawns in aspic or scallops in aspic or everything seemed to (inaudible) but it looked terrific on the table and there was different kind of colours and they also a little bit, you know they weren’t *nouvelle cuisine* but they anticipated in the, they tended to do smaller dishes. Slightly smaller portions. Now they did a lot of game as well. They would do a lot. The game was very mallard and pheasant and duck a la press.

63. **MM:** Oh right like the *Tour d’Argent*?

64. **FC:** Yeah they that in Jammets and they did it in the Russell. Now I was never in Jammets. Jammets had actually closed by the time I got there but the Russell did it and they still have the duck breasts I think from Jammets down in the Berkley Court. It’s a great big silver contraption and essentially what they did was you carved the duck and you served the breast, duck meat and then you put what was left into this press and you squashed it down but it was very spectacular. There was a wheel on top of it and the thing crushed down. It was gorey and all the juices flowed out into a little bowl and then they put brandy and cream and that and you’d make your sauce and that sort of thing you know. But again it was all done at the table. All done at the table, yeah, yeah and…

65. **MM:** Now when you arrived now, like you say you never got to eat in Jammets were these people talking about Jammets or would they be comparing?

66. **FC:** Jammets had just gone.

67. **MM:** ’67 I think Jammets shut.

68. **FC:** Yeah.

69. **MM:** So it wouldn’t be long closed before you came.

70. **FC:** It was just before I arrived and they used to talk, I heard it talked about but I only came you seen in ’69 so I just missed it and so as I said the Russell, the Hibernian, the Shelbourne and the Gresham, four hotels now when you think of it were and the Red Bank would have been a very popular.

71. **MM:** What about the Unicorn at this stage? Was the Unicorn up to anything at that time?

72. **FC:** I think it came a little bit later.

73. **MM:** Right, yeah. I went through different ownerships and I haven’t fully figured it out yet myself.

74. **FC:** And I’ll tell you another place that started to come on stream, and we used to go there because it was great for seafood, the Lord Edward. And that became very popular and that was, a slightly younger crowd would frequent it and the guys who wanted some dinner, they specialised in you know crab legs and scallops and prawns and that sort of thing. Also sole and plaice and that but it had a very good name as a fish restaurant.

75. **MM:** That came, the minute the Red Bank shut down, the chef and waiters (inaudible) that opened up something like four or five months after the Red Bank with the same crew nearly.

76. **FC:** Very, very (inaudible) too, yeah. I mean it would have been later than Snaffles.

77. **MM:** Yeah Snaffles yeah, I’m looking at that time as is from where I see it you know. Again I wasn’t there to remember it as such but from what I see it is that Snaffles was up in Leeson Street. Well you had Mike Butt started in the later ‘50s or something like that.
Mike Butt was there when I arrived and he was exceptionally unusual in that his was an Indian restaurant, the Golden Orient was upstairs and the Tandoori Rooms was below. Now there were two Indian restaurants and one was cheaper and one was dearer than the other and they were desperately unusual in so far as they were acceptable to kind of people who would go to other fine dining restaurant if you know what I mean. It was Indian food and nobody knew anything about Indian food. And only was it not Indian food, Indian food with a South African twist as Mike was South African, he was Indian. He came here via South Africa. So a lot of the cooking, there was marinade dishes and that sort of a thing you know and again it had a kind of a Indian décor and atmosphere and that sort of way but interestingly though all his staff were Irish. It was just himself that was Indian and his wife was as Dublin as Dublin could be.

Kenya (inaudible) yeah.

Yeah that was a nice place to go yeah.

And so around that time from what I understand say Snaffles opened in Leeson Street and they had another place called the Soup Bowl I think. Peter Powrie or something like that.

Peter Powerie that’s right. Now they were of a later, they were ’74.

Late ’70s ah right yeah.

’74 or ’75 onwards. I would say I was in the Hotel and Catering Review when they came on the scene and taste had become a lot more sophisticated. All of it, within that period, maybe five years the carved beef at the table had fallen into kind of disfavour and you know new French type of cooking, you know had become popular.

Now would this be the effect of Gault & Milau and Nouvelle Cuisine. I think it was 1974 when they wrote the famous piece.

A little bit later.

In France it was ’74 I think, they wrote a famous article but you would take a little time then to trickle to Ireland I’d say but…

But the first guy was Declan Ryan in Cork in the Arbutus Lodge. Em, he was the first guy I came across that had studied Michel Guérard, you know the French guy and had looked very much at the visual aspect of food and started…

He actually worked with Troisgros Brothers.

He did, Declan?

He trained in the Russell and then he said where’s the best thing happening in France and he went and he worked with the Troisgros Brothers in Roanne.

And the Arbutus Lodge was the pioneer of that kind of cooking, ever before Patrick Guilbaud or anybody came and it, ones like Snaffles now were in a transition period, do you know what I mean. They were pre nouvelle cuisine but what they started to do was to introduce you know wet dishes to the menu and I mean doing casseroles and that sort of a thing. They would have been kind of unheard of you know in the more traditional kind of places. Em, and they also they began to do, you know they were also into game and into, duck became very fashionable but they were inclined to do it in different ways and sell duck breasts rather than half ducks and they’d
lots of things like that and they made quite a name for themselves and I mean the food was very, very good.

93. **MM:** Nicholas Tinne is it?

94. **FC:** Nicholas Tinny that’s right. Lovely fella and…

95. **MM:** As far as I know there’s a link there as well with the Red Bank that some of the guys from the Red Bank went there.

96. **FC:** Did they?

97. **MM:** The original owner, the Tinne were inherited it from the, I think Fitzgeralds or something were the original owner. They were wine people or something.

98. **FC:** That’s right. They became Fitzgerald Finlater and then… Do you know who worked for them? Richard Burrows whose now the chief executive of Pernod Ricard. He worked for Fitzgeralds yeah. Had a little place over, I think that you can still see the name over in D’Olier Street where there’s little offices over there. Gilbeys were over there too in those days yeah.

99. **MM:** How about I was just thinking now, roughly around that time what you had is you had some chef proprietors open up. You had you know Mervyn Stewart, you had…

100. **FC:** Lets try and look at that. I suppose Sean Kinsella was the first guy who was a chef proprietor really to make an impact out in the Mirabeau and it was a con job. It was dreadful.

101. **MM:** I believe the food wasn’t anything special but the whole thing was that it became a club or something like that. It was so expensive that it kept the wealthy in and anyone else out sort of thing. That was it?

102. **FC:** He started out with a real exclusivity sort of thing and he never gave you a itemised bill, you got a piece of paper with a figure written on it and it was usually enough to shock you but you know you paid it. He put out the story that if you queried a bill he tore it up but he didn’t tear it up very often. He had been on the ships, he was a chef on a cruise liner and essentially he was a very good marketing man and he was able to suss exactly what people wanted and what people wanted was largely unadulterated good food so he would buy the best Dublin bay prawns and you could buy them then. He used pay good money for them and literally peel them and boil them and serve them with a little bit sauce on the side but beautiful Dublin bay prawns and nothing wrong with a bit of salad. He’s main courses were only steak and duck, that was really it. You could put in an oven full of ducks at the start of the night and he’d sell most of them I’m sure before the end of the night. There was nothing special about them, there was (inaudible), they weren’t particularly good but they were nice duck and he bought in all his desserts, apple tarts and this. As a matter of fact when he went bust, Cavistons were his biggest creditors you know. You know he used buy in everything. So he, but what he did then was (laugh) he then decorated this place in what was probably the worse possible kitch you could imagine and I mean it was marketry and china dolls and gaudy pictures. I mean it was awful and banquets around the sign and low lighting but he was a charming, wonderful host. He had a beard, a big fat guy and he looked like a chef and bring people in and you know look after them sort of thing and what happened was that he was really the only one doing anything like that in Dublin and people beat a path to his door. I mean he happened to come at a time when mohair suits and Fianna Fáil and builders, you know it was the beginning of all that and there was people with loads of money and they didn’t care and they went out and he treated them like royalty and he bought a Rolls Royce which he used keep parked outside the door and he’d drive you home in it and he’d give the ladies a bottle of cheap plonk, a bottle of wine going home. But I mean lashing it on the bill. The interesting thing was everything was in such bad taste but yet it worked a dream you know.
MM: And is it because people just didn’t know any better?

FC: They didn’t know any better.

MM: Was this sort of new money sort of thing it was?

FC: Absolutely, they didn’t know any better and also they wouldn’t dream of eating the kind of food like certainly not nouvelle cuisine but even the stuff that was becoming popular in the more avant garde restaurants you know like the Soup Bowl and that sort of thing would be much too complicated, they wanted a fine beef steak, a big bowl of prawns and they looked after them and some heavy red wine and brandies afterwards and you know maybe be driven home or something like that. It was costing them in those days a £100 a meal you know. I mean he was just amazing but you know he was typical of the time I suppose but I always, we had an office just around the corner. I always felt that he was a con man. Never had an awful time but he used to generate a huge amount of publicity you know. Meanwhile like you had these chefs coming on, Mervyn was among the first, he’s been there for quite a long time.

MM: I think Mervyn and Aidan McManus I think opened up around the same time.

FC: Interesting two different sides of the bay and Mervyn would be more influenced by Sean Kinsella now (laugh) and Aidan you know as was influenced by… Well Aidan was just a guy who cooked good fish fairly simply really. Again built himself a nice kind of business. The other guy was John Howard and John Howard started the Le Coq Hardi inside in the…

MM: Pembroke Street.

FC: No that pub yeah.

MM: Was it the Lansdowne Hotel or something?

FC: It was the Lansdowne Hotel then yeah and he was in a kind of a little back room in there and he had come up, he was a chef I think in the Shelbourne was he or the Gresham but anyway he had won a few prizes.

MM: Was he down in Wexford for a while, I think in Whites or something like that?

FC: Originally he was in Whites that’s right and then he was up here and then he won prizes in Hotelympia and then he started out in the Coq Hardi you know. Just up the road from where he ended up but he started doing interesting things then. I mean he started doing things like kidneys and brains and you get all strange food in there and he was very good for his day particularly when he was young and he was making a real kind of effort and the cooking was very quite advanced for the Dublin of the day. He tended to go towards heavier type of thing and he tended to have a fair amount of kind traditional dishes and that sort of thing as well but I remember him doing really good lamb and very good as I said offal. He was very, very good with offal and he picked up quite a lot of knowledge about French cooking. I mean he wouldn’t have been at all avant garde, he wouldn’t have been at all in the nouvelle cuisine school. He followed the Escofier yeah very much so. But you know that’s where the market was too and he had a huge following right up to the time he moved and he had a huge following largely of people who enjoyed good old fashioned eating you know. He never moved a lot from when he set-up first. You know I don’t think he developed an awful lot but he was very successful, very successful.

MM: Was he always considered to be expensive?

FC: He was yeah. Well in the first couple of years maybe not quite as expensive as he was in the past later on. When he was trying to make a name for himself you know you could go there without being a banker (laugh) you know yeah. But gradually you of course he developed a more
upmarket client and he moved clientele and moved down and became more expensive then yeah. Not quite as expensive I think at the start but he was always kind of slightly upmarket I suppose.

117.MM: When does Ernie Evans come into the picture?

118.FC: Well Ernie Evans made his name down in Waterville as you know and he’s from around there and he had a guesthouse initially and then started to cook and very talented cook and made his name by cooking fresh seafood that he was able to get in plentiful supply and Charlie Chaplin used spend his holidays down there and he was a great customer of Ernies’ and then you remember they made Ryan’s Daughter and a lot of celebrities started to hang out and he had a good flair for publicity and so he became a kind of national figure. And the place down in Waterville was a huge success there’s no doubt about it and he had various problems, you know he had drink problems, he had personal problems, family problems, the devil knows what and eventually he fell on hard times down there. One of the recessions or other and there wasn’t as many celebrities around and there wasn’t as much money down in Kerry so he moved up to Dublin and he opened a place in Donnybrook and he had acquired a lot of the art that’s in there when he was down in Kerry and he brought all that up to Dublin and you know continued on. He was a kind of if you like a continuation of that kind of old school tradition as well.

119.MM: So that was more the Escoffier thing as well.

120.FC: It was yeah.

121.MM: Traditional food?

122.FC: Style of cooking would have very influenced by haute cuisine. Very, very, lots of creamy sauces and lots of big meals, big heavy kind of meals and that sort of thing, yeah. Pates and stuffing and you know all sort of cholesterol loaded food yeah, yeah but meanwhile I mean Declan Ryan became the pioneer and then you see the other pivotal change was Myrtle Allen and I mean she had a farm and developed, started to take guests and decided well maybe she should feed them and never strayed outside her own farm in her feeding of them she went and picked the blackberries off the hedgerows and made apple tarts and she went out and collected the hens eggs and her husband was a farmer and they had their own cattle which they got slaughtered. They used their own meat. They used smoke their own bacon. She then, she started getting neighbours to help out. They used to have mackerel up chimneys and things like. They had their own smoked mackerel and seafood and she had, she’d a great flair for just the traditional Irish wholesome peasant cooking if you like although her own I mean it was far from peasant she was reared. She was kind of a west Brit, west Cork type of woman.

123.MM: And she was educated in a private school in England.

124.FC: Well to do come gentlemen farmers kind of thing. But she hit on a good thing and she messianic about it and I mean she really did revolutionise the whole approach to cooking, professional cooking and eating largely by using the best of Irish raw materials and she gave inspired a whole generation and the next whole generation of chefs as well as organic you know artists and food producers and the lot so her influence is immense.

125.MM: There is no doubt about it yeah.

126.FC: Absolutely yeah and I mean she was articulate too and could talk about it and then of course Darina came along and she developed it further with the school and the cookery books and the television programmes. But it was really Myrtle that made that particular breakthrough and I mean an awful lot of what she did what some of the famous signature chefs of today are doing that she went back to her own roots and started cooking the food that her mother and grandmother used to cook you know.
There was a growth at that period now in the mid, early to mid '70s of the country house hotel then.

There was yeah.

Ballylickey was doing really good food.

It was in West Cork. Longueville in Mallow would have been one of the first as well. I suppose it was nearly into the '80s when they really began to emerge. There was one period in the '70s when there wasn't much happening but there was I suppose some of them did get going in the '70s largely because they couldn't pay the upkeep of their houses and they started to take in guests. And you know a lot of it grew from there and eventually... Longueville was probably the O'Callaghan's down in Mallow were probably the pioneers I suppose in lots of ways. They had a beautiful house and they started welcoming guests in there and they started growing their own vegetables and that sort of thing.

The other one down next to them, Assola's yeah.

Another lovely one yeah. A lot of them were kind of gathered the kind of Cork and Kerry kind of area initially.

But you mentioned earlier on about the Dromolands, this fella buying Dromoland, now what was the food like? When did Drumoland and then later on then Ashford Castle, when did they become sort of associate with sort haute cuisine?

Well from the very beginning Bernard McDonagh has set a very high quality restaurant in Dromoland and used chefs either that had gone through Shannon School or that he had brought in you know from America and the food initially in Dromoland again was haute cuisine influenced, there's no doubt in that kind of tradition. Although, it was also influenced by the type of food that was served in the Shannon airport and that. They began to put a spin on it yeah and the food was always very, very good. Ashford was owned then by then that other guy, was the fella that owned Ashford before, Mulcahy, John Mulcahy. He was a Irish American as well and he set up a golf course down in Kerry and again you know he again the food was kind of old fashioned, there’s no doubt about it, it still is, still is. Dromoland is more modern now I think alright but they hired some very good chefs over the years.

I remember Rolland, (inaudible) Roland, Henri worked in Dromoland or Ashford at one stage.

I think he was in Dromoland.

Do you remember his restaurant in Killarney. Henri, it was called Rolland?

Rolland yeah, yeah. Well originally that’s the son, the father worked in Sh

No the father worked in the Russell.

In the Russell and when the Russell closed went I think to work in Shannon.

I thought he went to France.

Did he unless I’m mixing him up with somebody else now. I’m not too sure about that. Maybe I am. There’s another French guy I’m trying to think of now.

I tell you who you might be thinking of there was a fella, I tell you who you might be thinking about. The son has a place in Limerick at the moment and Michel Treyvaud.
Treyvaud that’s right, yeah, yeah.

Actually just talking about Treyvaud, because there’s two things there that we sort of skipped over and that was there was a change when the Intercontinental Hotel opened up that was ’70…

No that was before I left Limerick. 1965/1966.

Oh right okay. So by the time you came to Dublin Jury’s had taken over there.

No it was it was Intercontinental. What happened was Sean Lemass was, actually it wasn’t just Sean Lemass, it was Tim O’Driscoll who was in Bord Fáilte was anxious to try and attract an American brand, hotel brand to Ireland because Americans would be more familiar. The Intercontinental was just getting going and it was owned by Pan -Am so there was strong connections between Pan-Am and Ireland and Sean Lemass persuaded to come to Ireland and it was interesting. The site, the gardens there is Blackrock owned by I think veterinary college or something like that. They were offered that site and there was a tender I think put out for it but Teddy O’Sullivan found out about it in the Gresham and he bid for it and actually I think bought it and then about a week or something before and then it was sold on to Intercontinental. So he did a good deal, a fairly good deal on it but it was a key site but Lemass was very anxious to attract Americans into Limerick and the south so he offered the site to Intercontinental on the condition that they build a hotel in Limerick and a hotel in Cork which were the two Jury’s. But they did but somewhat reluctantly and the two hotels they put up were only thrown up really but they were still kind of, you know they were the first branded hotels. They were Americans. They were run by American originally and then the Irish staff came in and that sort of a thing. Now in Dublin they didn’t introduce anything particularly great in the food or anything like that but they did include the first real late night restaurant in the coffee dock.

Okay, yeah.

Where you could have burgers and snack meal.

Like an American diner sort of thing?

An American diner kind of thing. And the other thing they introduced was a supper room in the Martello room in Ballsbridge and they put Jim Doherty who played the band and they had this little trio sort of playing jazzy music every night. Lovely restaurant looking out over Ballsbridge, real romantic and that was the first of its kind and it was the nearest thing there was to a nightclub even though it wasn’t a nightclub in the current…

Would there have been dancing as well?

Yeah nice little waltzing and fox trots and that sort of thing and people out to dinner and that sort of thing and it wasn’t exuberantly priced, you would go there for your birthday or wedding anniversary that sort of a thing you know. I think it might have been five guineas or something like but I mean I know that it wasn’t outrageously priced yeah. As a matter of fact if you look at that particular era apart from Sean Kinsella dining out was reasonably priced you know. Now I think when ones like the Soup Bowl and that came along maybe they pushed up prices a little bit and the Hibernian and the Russell would have been expensive really. Ah it would really I suppose, yeah.

There was one there, The Celtic Mews?

Yeah. Joe Gray. Yes that’s where L’Ecrivain is. He was a hotel manager and he set up around 1978 or 1980 and he got a reputation, he wasn’t a chef himself but he got a reputation for
serving good food, there’s no doubt about it yeah. And it was a very successful restaurant but he died very young and his sons are still involved now I think with Lemongrass.

157.MM: Oh is that the sons. Oh right okay. That makes sense yeah.

158.FC: And the son was involved in something else as well.

159.MM: He’d nothing do with the Grey Door?

160.FC: No the Grey Door was Barry Wise and PJ Daly and that opened in the 1980s and it was a Russian restaurant and the reason it was a Russian restaurant they brought over a chef called Eamon Walsh, an Irish fella but he had been a chef in Finland. He had a Finnish wife. He came over and he started doing the Finnish version of Russian food (laugh). But they couldn’t be very, real (inaudible) so effectively it was kind of steaks with vodka and that sort of thing.

161.MM: Chicken kiev (laugh)?

162.FC: Yeah, yeah that sort of thing and they had a room called the Natasha Cabinet and which was just a room, type of room with all sort flock wallpaper and this sort of thing and they had (inaudible) bars and they had special vodka. They used to serve borsch, the beetroot soup and this sort of a thing and yeah they did a lot of interesting, he started doing a lot of stuff like herrings and things like that which were more Scandinavian than Russian if you know what I mean. Yeah they made quite a success. They bought the Old Dublin in Francis Street.

163.MM: Now did they buy it or did he buy it?

164.FC: They bought it and he went in as their manager there and then he bought it.

165.MM: And what been in the Old Dublin prior to that. Had it been a restaurant?

166.FC: No, I think it was just shop.

167.MM: Probably antiques or something.

168.FC: As far as I know. I don’t think it was a pub either. It wasn’t a restaurant anyway. And then he opened up effectively Chapter One before the current guys took it over. Yeah, yeah and now he’s up in Cavan I think.

169.MM: Swift Foods isn’t it.

170.FC: Swift Foods that’s right yeah. Good guy, very, very good guy. And he’s a guy that pushed the boundaries quite a bit I think you know both in terms of how food is prepared and that and also I suppose in terms of introducing Scandinavian cooking and that kind of a thing and that kind of Russian cooking.

171.MM: And these boys who owned the Grey Door, they went on to do something else didn’t they?

172.FC: They converted the Hibernian and then they bought a hotel in Clare somewhere. Now I don’t know exactly what they do now. I don’t know. They were in and out of a lot of things put it that way.

173.MM: Where did Guilbaud’s then came in mid, early sort of ‘80s?

174.FC: 1987 was it? (note: Guilbaud opened in 1981)
I think it was even earlier than that. I think they were here slightly earlier than that '85 maybe I think or something like that.

And there’s a couple of interesting things about that. One, it was the first purpose built restaurant to be built in Dublin for ages. Like it was built as a restaurant and of course he had good backers and he (laugh) created, no doubt he created a sensation and he introduced nouvelle cuisine and stuck to his guns and created a huge controversy over the small portions and the style and what was all this food, you’d need to go and have your dinner after it. He was expensive but a new generation was growing up that was interested in food and was interested in nutrition and he initially he know he wasn’t a kind of a corporate place. The foodies went to him very much. He wasn’t, I mean he was expensive without being ordinary mush even in real terms I think he was cheaper than he is now you know. But he created a sensation there’s no doubt about it and (inaudible) I think eventually he had to increase portion sizes. He was excessive of (inaudible) about cuisine style. But everything but what he brought to Ireland because in that kind of intervening period between you know the height of haute cuisine and when he arrived standards had fallen and there was gradual erosion of skill in the dining room and waiters became plate carriers and the whole sommelier’s were out of job, there were no sommelier’s very much and you know cooking was different and was plated and that sort of a thing and what he did I suppose was he certainly brought back craftsmanship and very high standard, meticulous preparation of every dish that ever went out and consistency and he raised the bar there’s no doubt about it. What Myrtle Allen did for kind of Irish cuisine he did for professional restaurant operation in Ireland because he introduced a standard. It was way higher than anybody else at the time and persevered with it. There’s no doubt about it.

It would have been, he would have come in at a higher level say than Arbutus or were Arbutus doing it at the time.

Well you see they were in two different markets. What Arbutus more went down you know, went down more the, they began to blend, as his cooking began to blend the nouvelle cuisine with Irish dishes so they began to introduce things like crubeens and black puddings and things like that down there but he never did is a French restaurant out and out and so I suppose he was on a different level. He was also a different market. It was a affluent market in Dublin and that sort of thing. But you know he wasn’t all that popular for a long time there’s no doubt about it you know but he gradually did get there and won Michelin stars.

That just reminds me actually because you’re talking about the black pudding which reminds me of Michael Clifford.

Michael Clifford.

Michael Clifford was in Whites on the Green?

Which was again another pioneering restaurant. It was White, he was an auctioneer and he had a lot of property and he liked eating in France and that and decided that Dublin needed a good French restaurant and I think he was impressed by Guilbaud and he got Michael Clifford started producing some amazing food there, there’s no doubt about it.

Do you remember where Michael Clifford had been prior to that?

He was educated in Rockwell. He was in Rockwell school. Where was he now? I think he was in Galway somewhere.

But he hadn’t trained abroad or anything like do you know?

He did spend some time abroad. He was in London. I think he might have been with something like the Ritz or the Savoy or something like that in London. He did some training, he
also worked a bit in France and I think then he was over in the west of Ireland but he came on the scene here and for the short time that he was there he was fantastic. But he had problems as well and the restaurant had problems. He’d produce black pudding with stewed apples.

187.MM: He opened up his own place down in Cork?

188.FC: He did. He moved on down to Cork which was disaster.

189.MM: It was brilliant first?

190.FC: It was a disaster business.

191.MM: But himself and Colin O’Daly were quite similar in that they both seemed to have a good restaurant and they moved in search of something bigger and then the business never followed or whatever?

192.FC: Both of them made the fatal mistake of borrowing much too much money. Colin was conned into putting in a kitchen that would have fed five hundred people and bring his own specially imported cooking equipment in and being largely ripped off by his suppliers but the overall cost was astronomical and Michael was the same. But his expense was in the building, he leased an entire building and he just couldn’t fill it. And it was a pity. And he was a bit ahead of his time in Cork too and Cork wasn’t Dublin you know it was as simple as that.

193.MM: That’s the building that now houses Café Paradiso isn’t it.

194.FC: Yeah that’s right. So I don’t know if any of that is any help.

195.MM: No it’s great. I’m trying to think if we’ve missed anyone along the way there, you know what I mean?

196.FC: Well Colin you’ve mentioned. They were kind of pioneers.

197.MM: So sort of after this then when Colin comes in and?

198.FC: Conrad Gallagher of course.

199.MM: Oh that’s later. Colin comes in at the time then that sort of Alan O’Reilly is in Clarets and Kevin Thornton up in the…

200.FC: They were a bit after.

201.MM: They’re sort of the late ‘80s. Gallagher comes in then the late ‘90s?

202.FC: I’m just trying to think now. Well there was a number of very good restaurants opened around West Cork. I mean one place that’s well worth mentioned was the place Ahakista, Shiro.

203.MM: That was Japanese?

204.FC: Owned by the a German (inaudible) pilot and his Japanese wife and it’s a fabulous story which I wrote into Hotel and Catering Review. The name of the guy escapes me now but he was a Japanese, or say he was German and he was put out of business twice by wars and he had two different professions. I think he was a tailor or something first, I’m not too sure and then the Russians invaded and he was, I don’t know captured and then he became a (inaudible) pilot and then he ended up, I think he was in the jewellery business. He ended up on the wrong side of the wall and then escaped into West Berlin and set-up in business again. She was a Japanese photography student and she was hitch hiking her was around Europe and she met him and he was
twenty years, thirty years, twenty-five years older than her I think and anyway they hit it off and he decided he wanted to get out of Germany. And they started living around Europe, anywhere and he arrived one day in Shannon on a wet kind of day and hired a car and drove down around Kerry, West Cork and found this Georgian house for sale and called her up and said look this is I think the ideal place and she loved it. And they came over and they set-up house and they had to make a living, and she said well I can cook (laugh). And he said okay and I can wait on tables and they started a Japanese restaurant and there were only two tables. They could only have eight people at some stage and then they got a third table and they were cooking incredible beautiful Japanese food and then most unusually they got a visit from a Michelin inspector. They didn’t even know who he was, another French man as far as they were concerned and low and behold they were other people came. They got a Michelin star. Now to get a Michelin star for a Japanese restaurant with eight places or twelve places in the back of County Cork was so unusual as to be unbelievable wasn’t it? When you think of the amount of money that a lot of restaurants and the effort they put in.

205.MM: And they couldn’t get it?

206.FC: And he was telling me. I went down to interview him shortly after he got the Michelin star and he was telling the story. He said I didn’t know, we never go into town or anything like that he said. Suddenly he said the phone ringing (laugh) a lot and we were getting all these bookings and I said to my wife this is very strange. He said they can’t take all these bookings anyway and we sort of said well could you ring us back next week or next month or something like that. They were like that. They would open the restaurant and once they had enough money made to keep them going for the following week they’d close. So they were closing weekends. They were very eccentric. But anyway they wanted to find out what all this fuss was about (laugh).

207.MM: Why they were getting so much business yeah?

208.FC: And someone told them that they were in the Michelin Guide and he said what’ that? And they said it was a famous French restaurant guide. Is that right? says he. And he said where could we get it? Oh I said you’d probably get it in Eason’s so the following week I think he went in to either Tralee or Cork to buy something for the house. He went to Eason’s and he got this book (laugh) and he couldn’t find himself in it (laugh).

209.MM: Yeah I know the way it’s done out.

210.FC: And they were looking up and down these pages (laugh) and it meant nothing to them, nothing at all. They’re a good story. If you have the files of Hotel and Catering Review. They’re in it yeah. Wait till I see is there anybody that’s outstanding. Blairs Cove.

211.MM: Oh Blairs Cove in Durrus?


213.MM: Ah Gaby’s yeah.

214.FC: But he’s an interesting guy in that he kind of broke the mould in Killarney which at kind of very bad food. Irene Maes, Pearse father that started the business and he the first real upmarket restaurant in Killarney and they served very, very good seafood and that sort of thing and he was also very much a pioneer of introducing you know good value wines and that sort of a thing and that you wouldn’t that wasn’t available. I mean was he a pioneer in that sense. To some extent I suppose she was but not on the same level now as Myrtle Allen or any of the others really you’ve been talking about.

215.MM: I’m just thinking maybe see Dublin. Kelly’s in Rosslare?
FC: I mean definitely broke the mould I mean in terms of a complete package but also in terms of the quality of the food and the quality of everything that they did and way ahead of their time.

MM: Bill married a French woman didn’t he?

FC: He did yeah. I know they definitely maintained the standard but I’m just thinking for hotel food outside of Ireland they raised the bar. They definitely did.

MM: Now hotel food, you still had the Moira and Jury’s Dame Street. Were they still there when you were around?

FC: Well the Moira, the top league was the Gresham, the Shelbourne, the Hibernian and the Russell. And the next league was Jury’s, the Moira, the Wicklow I suppose and the Central too had a reasonably good name for food then.

MM: How about the Dolphin?

FC: And another interesting thing that nearly all the good restaurants then were in hotels. Yeah, you’d be hard put to find a good restaurant in a hotel now.

MM: Do you remember the Dolphin?

FC: I do just about. But that was on its last legs when I came to Dublin. It was pretty run down.

MM: And was the other place there, maybe that had shut down, there was a place the Palace steak house, the Palace restaurant actually not far from here at the side of Cathedral Street near the Grand…

FC: No.

MM: Ah that was probably closed by that stage as well.

FC: There was a place called the, what was the name of it, it was kind of a popular steak house, it wasn’t the Grass Hopper, something like that or the Green Rooster.

MM: The Green Rooster yeah on O’Connell Street. And there was the Green Tureen, which was the Shang Mahangi up in Harcourt Street.

FC: That’s right yeah. The Green Rooster was kind of down. ….You know there was another very interesting place that opened up in the mid ’70s I suppose and it was up in Grafton Street and…

MM: Captain Americas now is it?

FC: No, no. Captain Americas was also a pioneer in a kind of, this place did incredibly unusual food like Hawaiian salads and all of this. I can’t remember the name it. It was a very kind trendy kind of place to go on Saturdays. They used to kind of cater for families and that sort of thing but everything was desperately colourful I seem to remember and it was all light kind of stuff. It was salads and lots of as I said kind of Hawaiian kind of food and kind of colourful cocktails and this sort of thing. It was this guys name.

MM: Solomon Grundy’s was it?
234. FC: No that was in Wicklow Street. That came along after the Wicklow Hotel.

235. MM: That’s Casper and Gambini’s wasn’t it straight after the Wicklow.

236. FC: If it comes to me I’ll...

237. MM: John O’Byrne they opened up Dobbins. Was that more of a club?

238. FC: It started out as it ended when he died I suppose. It was a (inaudible) but it was an alternative, it did attract a lot of journalists and the PR people liked it and the food was always...

239. MM: A lot of the political, or the political party headquarters were close in Mount Street and stuff?

240. FC: Yeah I mean it was very popular. I think the menu didn’t change very much from the time John took it over to the time he died really. And they had their own specialties and they had very good wines always. And that was, the other interesting thing though is you know the growth of kind, when self service I don’t know if you’re getting into that kind of area.

241. MM: No they reckoned a lot of people I’ve spoken to and it would be interesting your opinions on it.

242. FC: Buffets.

243. MM: They spoke about PV Doyle and put in that he sort of changed everything from their perspective to the worse because he got rid of service and he got rid of that trained...

244. FC: He started introducing buffets and that sort of a thing. But the thing about that were the buffets were seen as being very trendy and fashionable when they came in first and PV Doyle and Jury’s as well were doing them and you paid.

End of Tape, End of Interview
Edited Interview with Tommy Smith in the Lord Edward Restaurant (20/7/2007)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Tommy Smith (TS)

1. MM: Where and when were you born Tommy?
2. TS: 30th May 1946 in Ship Street, Dublin. Just down the road (laugh).
3. MM: And how many in the family?
4. TS: Five, three brothers and a sister?
5. MM: And what did your father do?
6. TS: He was a coach painter in Archers in Sandwich Street.
7. MM: And your mother was probably a mother was she (laugh).
8. TS: She was mother yeah. She died when I was nine.
9. MM: Right and where did you come in the family?
10. TS: I was the first, I was the eldest.
11. MM: Oh you were the eldest so that put a lot of pressure on you then?
12. TS: Kind of, at the time, but my grandmother reared me then you see. She took half of us on and my other grandmother took the other half on so that’s how we were reared.
13. MM: And did you stay in Ship Street?
14. TS: No we were moved down to Ushers Island before my mam died. She had my brother Patrick in the house in Ushers Island, 24 Ushers Island and two years later she died. She never recovered from having Patrick. It was a bad birth. So that’s how she died.
15. MM: How did you get started in the catering then?
16. TS: I used to always work from the time I was ten as a messenger boy in Hayes Cunningham Robinsons in Rathmines.
17. MM: The chemists, is it?
18. TS: And there was a big purser there and he used to let me come in every summer and Christmas so this Christmas he had a lad that was after staying for the summer and stayed with him, so I had no job. So I was going down to O’Connell Street on 28th December 1960. I was down town and I saw this job in Burgh Quay in the Old Boat Club, and the job was gone, and this messenger boy out of Dunn’s the fish messenger said do you want a job. I said yes. He said go down to the Red Bank and I said the bank and he said yeah. So I walked into the Red Bank and I met Joe Duggan who was the second head waiter in the front bar and I asked could I have a job and I was due to go back to work on the 17th January…
19. MM: Back to school you mean?
20. **TS:** Back to school, and I went home to the granny and I said ‘listen granny, I’m going to get my food and all here, I’m going to get paid, this is great’ and she wrote to my father who was in England at the time and he said I could stay. So I stayed in the Red Bank.

21. **MM:** You were twelve years old.

22. **TS:** I was thirteen-and-a-half at the time.

23. **MM:** Wow. You were meant to stay in school until you fourteen wasn’t it.

24. **TS:** But it was only six months. I didn’t go to school; I was ‘mitching’ so they didn’t care whether I went back or not. I was in *Ard Scoil Éinne* up in Crumlin road, an Irish speaking school yeah.

25. **MM:** Very good. So did it begin. You came in…

26. **TS:** I walked straight in and he started me right away in the front bar with Jimmy and Joe. Jimmy was the head waiter. Jimmy Ellard. He’s still gone. Joe is still with us. He (Jimmy) was the head waiter in the front bar and then you had the lovely restaurant in the back, then you had the oyster bar down in the back in the lounge down there.

27. **MM:** And who else was there at the time when you started?

28. **TS:** In the restaurant Tommy Dorney was the head waiter. They had just let Eddie Kavanagh go, he went off out to the airport.

29. **TS:** His brother Bobby went to the Montrose.

30. **MM:** And Eddie went to the airport. Were both of them in the Red Bank originally?

31. **TS:** Only Eddie, Tommy replaced Eddie as head waiter. Bobbie was in the Hibernian at that time, he was one of the head waiters in the Hibernian.

32. **MM:** Bobbie as far as I know is the only waiter in Dublin who had a room named after him.

33. **TS:** That’s right the Robert Room in the Montrose.

34. **MM:** And who else.

35. **TS:** Tommy Dorney, the head waiter in the restaurant. Willie Downey was his second head waiter. Then you had Paul Cooke, Hughie Kavanagh and Jimmy Grimes. They were all their senior staff. Jimmy Grimes, he was the oldest of the people there at that time. And then in back bar, in the oyster bar you had Dannie O’Connor and John Nolan.

36. **MM:** Do you want the bar staff?

37. **TS:** Yes, if you have them.

38. **TS:** The bar staff, Dannie Higgins was the head barman, Tony O’Grady was next and then you had a few *commis* and such like and then you had Charlie O’Leary up in the cocktail bar.

39. **MM:** And tell me about the cocktail bar because at that time cocktails were very, you had the famous cocktail now in Hibernian and Jimmy and George… Earlier than that time there were two famous sort of cocktail waiters there, and then the cocktail competitions and all this stuff.
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40. **TS:** That’s right, I don’t remember now their names exactly. The cocktail bar was very private. You know you went straight in off the street, off D’Olier Street and went straight up the stairs into this very exclusive almost barely lit room and lovely lights behind the bar and Charlie was in charge of that. That was open every night of the week except Monday. So that was the staff now of the Red Bank at that time. Gerry Ferns was the head chef.

41. **MM:** So Gerry was the head chef.

42. **TS:** Brian Kavanagh was the second head chef. They were the two main people and then you had the plethora of Paddy’s and Joe’s that you didn’t know their names like, you know.

43. **MM:** How many would there have been in the kitchen at the time.

44. **TS:** There was six in the kitchen plus May, a cook, and then you had about three or four commis.

45. **MM:** So you had the bar when you came in?

46. **TS:** When you walked in you had the front bar when you walked in off D’Olier Street and then the dining room was immediately after that. The dining room would have seated about maybe eighty. Eighty people because there was all lovely booths and everything in it. Lovely booths and…

47. **MM:** Then there was the oyster bar.

48. **TS:** The Oyster Bar in the back that held about maybe twenty people. That was a very exclusive place and the lounge held about fifty, you know, that kind of…

49. **MM:** And would there have been any food served in the bar itself?

50. **TS:** No, nothing, you had the front bar and the oyster bar and the restaurant. There was no such thing as bar food like that.

51. **MM:** And then the cocktail bar upstairs.

52. **TS:** Yeah nothing served up there only cocktails. That only opened in my time.

53. **MM:** And they did lunch and dinner.

54. **TS:** Lunch, dinner and the front bar was open all day.

55. **MM:** And was it busy for lunch?

56. **TS:** Oh very, very busy.

57. **MM:** Busier for lunch or dinner?

58. **TS:** Busier for lunch. Business people, Independent Newspapers were great clients, the Irish Times were great clients. This was all over the house. The high executives in the restaurant. We had the ‘hacks’ coming in and out to the front bar. It was a great place for the ordinary guy to come into the front bar. You could have your oysters, you could have a mixed grill, you could have anything. A light lunch as I say was eight in six I think it was at the time. That what is was seven in nine and the service charge made it eight in six. That’s when they finished up in ’69. I went to the Montrose then immediately afterwards I couldn’t believe the price of lunch. It was over a pound or something and I couldn’t believe it. I rang the Montgomery’s and said they were giving the food away!
MM: Tell us more. What was your first job, you started off as a...

TS: As a commis waiter under Joe Duggan.

MM: And so what were you doing there, you were polishing glasses and cutlery and...

TS: For the first week or two and then you were thrown in immediately because it was so busy all day the customers only get up off a chair and another fellow, you had to learn very fast how to run the place with them. I think I was three weeks when I serving coquille saint Jacques in the shell. It was the first thing I served I’ll never forget it and I was dying to serve the potatoes cause Joe used to be able to like slide the mash off the spoon with his fork and I was dying to do that. So you learn very fast in there. You got a different training in there than you did in the restaurant. In the restaurant you stood by the wall and if the waiter called you and all that sort of stuff. I had training in both of them now but I was always put back in the front bar.

MM: But the food was in the front bar.

TS: You got the same kitchen; everything was the same only it was different menu. That was the restaurant menu (pointing to a copy of the old Red Bank menu) as it turned out after the fire, I’ll tell you about that in a minute. But you had a big à la carte menu for you could have mixed grill, omelettes, anything you liked in the afternoon. You had high teas from 5 pm to 7 pm and...

MM: When you’re talking about the front now are we… Was there a bar that just served drink?

TS: You just came in off the street. Full bar, no, no that was front bar. Your lounge was at the back of the house in Hawkins Street, off Hawkins Street. You came in off the back from Hawkins Street, Leinster Market. You came in off the… The Royal and the Regal were facing us. And you came in that street there, in that laneway. And the lounge was on your left and the Oyster bar was just across from you. You turned up to walk the hallway and you walked into the restaurant or you walked into the front bar.

You could come in either side.

MM: And tell me something was Ostinelli’s gone at that stage?

TS: No Ostinelli’s was very much there. They were there until about 1964. Yeah Ostinelli’s. That was on Hawkin Street yeah. And then you had Reilly’s beside us the pub next door, Reilly’s. That was the Graces (Brendan Grace’s family), Graces uncle owned that place.

MM: Oh that’s right because Graces owned.

TS: That’s right that was Graces but they didn’t call it Graces, it was O’Reilly’s, they kept the name. They had a place down in Pearse Street.

MM: One of them had trained in the Regal Rooms originally.

TS: That’s right, that’s right in the Regal Rooms (laugh) that’s right, Phil.

MM: So basically you got in and you were sort of hands on straight away in there. You learnt the ropes.

TS: Exactly you learnt the ropes immediately, there was no such thing as mollycoddling, you just got stuck in and then when you were on with Jimmy, like Joe had a half day on a Wednesday and you on with Jimmy. So Jimmy was the head and he didn’t want any passengers. You had to get stuck in and that’s how you learnt, no messing. There was only another fellow there and myself. We were there for three years, another young commis, Peter Brady and he and I were
there for three years on and off going back and forward between the restaurant because they insisted that you learnt how to be in the restaurant and how to hold yourself in the restaurant and Montgomery then as I told you, because you were in the front bar you didn’t get the training of normal commis. So I was farmed out to the Gresham first, then the Shelbourne.

76. **MM:** So how soon in your training did that happen?

77. **TS:** That happened in 1961 in the summer of ’61. Yes it was the summer of ’61 because I remember the first place I went to was Jury’s hotel around the corner and they asked me to give a hand out in the Copper Room and that was downstairs in Jury’s and I went to give a hand but they were very pleased with me and they rang back and said I was very pleased with me and said could I come again if they were short. So Montgomery asked me would I be interested in doing breakfast and I said ‘no problem’, I didn’t know anything about breakfast. But I didn’t know you a dt os t a r ta t6a m . (Laugh).

78. And the first place I ended up was with Ken Besson over in the Hibernian and he was a hard task master. You had to be in and ready with your apron, shiny shoes and your hands out like that for inspection at 6 am. If you were there at 6.05 am you were sent back home no matter whether it was raining or otherwise, you had to learn timekeeping in the Hibernian.

79. **MM:** And who was head waiter in the Hibernian at the time?

80. **TS:** No you were only on the breakfasts you see. You could have anybody. You could have a junior manager, you could have anybody helping you and I was never under a head waiter. The only head waiter I ever worked under was Sean O’Neill in the Gresham and he gave me my station. I was with Mick Dowling there for a good while as well. He was there at that time, the boxer. He was there in the Gresham for a good while and Paddy Roberts was one of the chefs. I think he was a breakfast chef because I got to know him very well because he played with Shells. You walked in and you probably had a fourth year commis directing you for the morning cause you wouldn’t have the waiters in that hour of the morning. Off you go, get stuck in, up to the breakfast rooms, go into the little pantry. You get a room number, knock at the door and you left it outside the door. You didn’t go into the rooms those times. You never, ever went into a room! Not when I went there anyway. And I went to the Shelbourne and it was Claude Spillane. I did a few functions with Claude down in the ballroom and then he got me into the breakfast rooms upstairs. There was a Phil O’Reilly was the head waiter of the breakfast. He was in the Shelbourne. He was a permanent head waiter in the Shelbourne. They had a permanent head waiter, Phil O’Reilly was his name and he was a very strict man. Very, very strict! You had to be on time. Everything was all punctual that time, no such thing as late, no sloppiness, shoes polished; pants shined oh the whole works. It was great training.

81. **MM:** I suppose if you didn’t turn up there was plenty of other people to take your place.

82. **TS:** There was loads of people, and the same thing again with waiters if they got fed up of the job, they could leave and go somewhere else. They could be working in the Hibernian tonight, they’d be working in Jammet’s and there was plenty of casual work at that time. Like the Dolphin Hotel I worked plenty of times in the Dolphin and…

83. **MM:** It was Nugent owned that was it?

84. **TS:** That’s right.

85. **MM:** Did he still have it when you were there? Didn’t Eamon Andrews buy it off him or something?
That was bought in about 1964/65 Eamon Andrews time coming real well. He brought the Television Club, it was the Four Province at that time and he changed the name after that to The Television Club. Dublin was a great place that time, fabulous place.

So you were there, how long did you stay in the Red Bank altogether?

There was a fire in 1961, Easter ’61 and it changed the whole complex of the whole place. The kitchen went downstairs, they halved the restaurant and they amalgamated the front bar into the restaurant. The restaurant was ruined then because all you had was bar running through the restaurant and you had the kitchen behind and a little hatch that you opened, Gerry Ferns was mortified having to go in there and all, his kitchen was in there and the cocktail bar was lost. That became the function room and everything else stayed down stairs then. The lounge was okay, the Oyster Bar was alright but the front bar went too, we only had half the restaurant; we lost all the private booths so we lost lots and lots of customers, lots of special customers at that time.

And where would they have gone now? Would they have moved up to the Russell?

Well you could have gone to the Russell, Jammet’s was still there now at that time and I’ll never forget a couple of people coming in. They’d walk in and they’d look around and say ‘I will never come back here again, you have cheapened the place’. He put a mural on the wall around things like this. You’d no booths and you became number six, seven and eight and no privacy. The restaurant was ruined. So I stayed till ’62. I left there in ’62. I went to work in the University Club then and that was a different kind of training again, gentleman’s club, different training again. Then I left there and went to Madigan’s and then I came back to the Red Bank.

Now the University Club was on its own still, It hadn’t amalgamated?

Seventeen Stephens Green. No it hadn’t, no. It was very much on its own. They were all the bishops and the clergy out of the protestant faith. They all frequented there and all doctors and surgeons and all the rest. That’s the kind of people you’re dealing with.

And tell me what was the food like there?

Gorgeous, gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous.

Who was the chef do you remember?

They weren’t chefs. I still see the lady, Nora was her name. I never knew her second name. She goes to Whitefriars Street church every morning. Nora. She’s a very old lady now but she’s not working or anything like that but I still see her and Jean Kelly was the second cook. There was no chefs. John McGettigan was the head waiter in the dining room and then you had girls as well and us commis and what have you. But as I said to you it was a different type of training again. All different. Then I worked in the Airport for nine months.

So you said you went from the university club then to…

To Madigan’s to become a bar man.

Which Madigan’s now?

That was in North Earl Street with Mick Madigan. Mick Madigan was a friend of my uncles and he said to me you should become a bar man, you want to learn the bar trade so I stayed there for about fifteen or sixteen months and then the Red Bank called me again and I went back down there.
And how long were you in the University Club?

I was fifteen months there yeah.

And the University Club, most of those clubs were renowned for having good wine cellars and stuff like that.

Oh the best of stuff. I mean I learnt my wines off Joe Duggan in the Red Bank and when I went to the club, I would ring Joe and say I’m after coming across a bottle and I’d give him the name and all the rest and he’d say ‘that’s such and such a thing, such and such vintage, be careful when you’re opening it’. He was a knowledge unbelievable but he helped me many, many (ways), he trained me all the way. I always say he trained me, always, because I got trained in b and c, all round the place, but when I went back, he had patience for you. He taught you everything the way it should be done, you know, that kind of way. So yeah I went to Madigan’s and then I went back to the Red Bank.

So the Red Bank called you back and this is around 1964.

That was ’65.

Now at this stage I have gone Egon Ronay, I think he came first around ’64 or so or the Red Bank had a one star from him. The food seemingly was very good.

It was very good, top class, top class yeah. Kennedy coming here changed everything.

Okay yeah.

President Kennedy when he came here he changed everything. I mean he changed the type of people, the summers became, when Kennedy died in ’63 the following summer from Patrick’s Day onwards everything changed. We had tourists all the year nearly, up to August/September. When the oysters came back we went back to our normal winter customers. But John Kennedy coming here in ’63 changed the tourism of this country. Unbelievable yeah.

Never thought of that now.

If you do your homework now you’ll find that particular era was an awful time. Sure you might get one or two yanks coming but when he came they couldn’t get planes over quick enough. He was the best ad for Ireland that we ever did. We had them all doing their Irish coffees down in Shannon but no, this changed everything. I remember it well because I remember Mr Montgomery saying that this is going to change, well in ’64 he said ‘this is going to change tourism altogether’ he said and everything changed. Then Grace Kelly changed everything as well. She had a big huge impact as well. She came in ’61, she stayed in the Hibernian. I had the pleasure of holding a door for her (laugh). In 1961 was with Bean DeValera and they went off in the princess car. That was the name of car, the princess car. They were like the old rolls but they didn’t have the quality of the rolls and I’ll never forget seeing the big P and how appropriate for her and she stayed in the Hibernian but she was a lovely person. Then you had all the stars used to come to the Red Bank.

From Ardmore studios these ones is it?

Like Audrey Hepburn’s father was the sacristan in Whitefriar Street for ten years and she used to meet her dad down in the Red Bank. I met her a few times and I’d go up and I’d say to her can I get you anything and her father used to come in via Hawkins Street, the bus used to leave him off and all he did was walk in and meet Audrey and off he’d go. He didn’t ever have anything. But she’d be sitting there and Deborah Kerr was the loveliest person I ever met. Ah
Robert Mitchum, all the big stars came there, James Mason when the film became big here in ’63/’64…

115.MM: They were all here.

116.TS: All came to the Red Bank. I was known as the show business waiter (laugh).

117.MM: What was the other competition at the time?

118.TS: You had the Red Bank, you had Jammet’s, you had the Dolphin. The Dolphin was a huge place.

119.MM: What about the Unicorn?

120.TS: That hadn’t really taken off at that time. That became a night owl place. People would be leaving the Red Bank and they’d say we’ll go up to the Unicorn or we’re going to here. There was another place up there. I can’t remember that place now. Up around Leeson Street, The Golden Orient, Mike Butt. His son was involved in the Hibernian hotel.

121.MM: David?

122.TS: The new Hibernian. So you had all the, what they did in those times they send one of the waiters out to see who was busy and who wasn’t busy. A spying job we used to call it and send him out on a walk for an hour or two.

123.MM: But at this stage now in the ’60s what was the, some of the hotels were going down at this stage.

124.TS: Ah yeah they were all starting to go down.

125.MM: The Gresham and the Shelbourne.

126.TS: They were all starting to move down because things were changing. You see you had the opening of the Montrose, no it wasn’t the Montrose it was the South County. That was a huge, huge slap in the face to everybody because it gave ordinary people an outlet to get out and eat cheaply and it changed everything in the hotel business. You got ordinary silver. The good cutlery was gone and you went out there and you might get napkins, you might get paper napkins but it brought down the business. You can say what you like about it, it was economic and all this but it brought the standard down. The standard dropped immediately when that came on. Fellows didn’t care. They could go out when the Montrose came on. That didn’t help at all. They always say that the Burlington and Berkley brought up the standard. It never brought up the standard because they have the standard do you know what I mean. You didn’t have the likes of Toddy O’Sullivan, you didn’t have the likes of Besson, you didn’t have Nugent, Nugent was a very hard man in the Dolphin. Very, very hard man. I mean you could walk in there and he’d look at you and he’d say you didn’t polish your shoes today sonny, go home. Imagine meeting a man like that and you after sweating your guts out for the lunch or something and you wouldn’t even be working there, I was working in the Red Bank. I was just saying to man here the other night I used to do all these breakfasts and I’d be lucky if I’d get a breakfast. I had to turn up in the Red Bank for 10.30 a.m. and start all over again. Ah I tell you, it was crazy but that’s how I learnt my trade.

127.MM: What about the Clarence Hotel?

128.TS: That was wedding hotel. That was the place where everybody really went for a wedding. There was a good standard there now in the Clarence. It was nice for weddings, it was good you know.
The Four Courts Hotel.

That wasn’t much no, the real chicken and ham, mash and veg and all that sort of stuff. I was in there a couple times, I brought my grandmother in because you could get ordinary food you know what I mean and you’d know she’d eat it.

The type the normal person would want to eat sort of thing and be happy.

It was not competition to anybody. No haute cuisine. I mean you think the Four Courts is beside it and they all come to the Red Bank do you know what I mean and then the big Hawkins house, when that went up that changed everything in the Red Bank as well, as regards the type of clientele we got because we got all the clientele from RTE. They became our main customers then.

So RTE was in Hawkins House originally.

Hawkins House yeah, the office people and they changed the type of customers. They moved out the people from the Irish Time, they moved out the people from the Irish Independent. We’d the like of Ben Kiely, Sean White, John Burns, all reporters, all people that was connected with the press. We had the press around the corner. You had all these people the Times and the Independent, they all came to the Red Bank and these are all the high executives and when RTE came in they started coming in at 12.30 pm and they’d be no tables and that meant the Irish Times and all these people were ‘hoisted’ out somewhere. So where they went we never knew but RTE over an awful lot. You had the likes for Frankie Burn coming there. Then you had McConnell’s (Advertising Agency) coming in because they were associated with RTE.

And then you had all the McConnell’s taking over and they used to take over the lounge of an evening and all the noses were put out then from the people out of the Irish Times and the Press and all these sort fellows. I mean all those people mingled out the Times, the Press, and the Independent. There was none of this snob, there was none of that because we all met them and we had to serve them and it was a great club like you know what I mean. And Dublin didn’t become snobby until the late ‘60s.

They would have all drank in the Palace and Pearl and…?

They would have drank everywhere and they’d always start off in the Red Bank because it was the nearest and the fellows in the Irish Press, we had all the reporters, we had everybody coming but as I say then RTE came in, changed the whole, we used to have a lunch menu in the Red Bank and they dismissed it and they all went à la carte because it was all on expense accounts. You were getting, in 1964 I was getting £33 wages with tips.

So RTE had the expense accounts so they were going à la carte?

Whereas the lads in the Irish Times put their hands in their pockets or they might have a small accounts and O’Conells of course then had to go the whole hog. They went big time with their expenses as well. So it became madness. It was madness. I’m not telling you a word of a lie. The wines that walked off the shelves, they were there for years. Then all of a sudden we had to get new wines. Everything changed because these were all on expense accounts.

Yeah because I remember John Howard saying that when they put an end to the expense accounts I think around 1984/1985 or something like that.

Charlie Haughey changed that, he took it off fifty per cent first and then the next budget the next year he eliminated it completely.

And that was the death now of a number of restaurants sort of thing.
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143. **TS:** It was, we lost Guinness here, we lost RTE, we lost Irish Distillers. We lost a lot of people over night we lost them. You wouldn’t believe it but we always depended on the law courts and they came back.

144. **TS:** That’s another thing when I came first it was all judges and lawyers and barristers and then all of a sudden we started getting the business people coming in and they started taking over their tables. And that was the only table you couldn’t give away because that was Colm Condon’s table, the Attorney General. That was his table, nobody else but all the other tables you could give away and you gave them away to the likes of Irish Distillers, Guinness, RTE, the religious crowd in RTE, Seán Mac Réamain, that was his table there every single day. But that all changed overnight then these all started coming back slowly became their restaurant again.

145. **MM:** Seán died himself.

146. **TS:** He was a lovely man, a lovely fella.

147. **MM:** No I interviewed him, he was a very nice fellow.

148. **TS:** Lovely man and he’d always say to the people, I mean he’d only be a guest himself and he’d always say ‘look after the lads’. ‘We must look after the lads’. He always said that. When he’d be paying himself he’d look after you. But he’d always say ‘look after the lads’. Now those times are gone.

149. **MM:** So you’re saying the big change there happened. How long did you stay in the Red Bank? When did you go to the Montrose or what was that?

150. **TS:** That was when the Red Bank closed in ’69.

151. **MM:** So you stayed, and you went back to the Red Bank in ’65 and you stayed there until it closed?

152. **TS:** ’67 went off to sea then (laugh).

153. **MM:** Oh you went off to sea?

154. **TS:** It was an ambition of mine to go to sea and I went up to him one day and said Mr Montgomery I said ‘I got to get this out of my system’ and he said ‘off you go’. So I went off in March 1967 and in October 1967 my grandmother got very ill and I was on the ships at this time, the SS Himalaya and my grandmother got very ill and I got a letter to come home and when I saw how ill she was I decided to stay. So I went down to see Joe (Duggan) and said listen Joe I’m back in town. Gran is not very well and just as I was talking to Joe when Montgomery walked in and he said ‘I had a row with Willie (that was the second head waiter) last night and I sacked him, do you want his job?’ I said, the only time I hesitated, and I knew Willie had six kids, you see, and I said ‘are you not going to take him back?’ ‘Oh he threw a lamp at me’ he said. I said ‘okay’, and he said ‘start in the morning’. Now I was only going to stay a couple of weeks but as it happened I left the ships in ’67, October ’67 and granny lived until eighty-one and died in ’81.

155. **MM:** Tell me which company was it you went in?

156. **TS:** The P&O SS Himalaya yeah.

157. **MM:** And where was that sailing from?

158. **TS:** Oh it went all around Europe. All the cruises. I missed the world trip by opening the door for another fellow and let him go in. He was from Newcastle and he was given his tickets to come back in three weeks to go on the world cruise and they said to me you come back on Friday, go down to Tilbury, there’s your fare for Tilbury and off you go on Friday. So I was two weeks
on a ship, then you’d run around to another ship and that’s how you did it for the six months. I enjoyed it, it really was good.

159.MM: And what was the level of food like?

160.TS: Very, very good. Absolutely gorgeous.

161.MM: Big buffets.

162.TS: Buffets, everything. The people went on a fortnight’s holiday that time. There was no such thing as a week. It was a fortnight and you had a family for a fortnight. Very, very good, very nice, the standard of food was absolutely brilliant.

163.MM: Where were the chefs from?

164.TS: All over, all over. The head chef was from, the head waiter was a Mr Shaw and he worked in a place called Top of the Town in London.

165.MM: Right, okay, yes, yes I remember that.

166.TS: Yeah remember that Top of the Town, Talk of the Town and his second head waiter was Peter Gold and he used to lower it (drinking gesture) but it never affected him working. I’d have to admire it but Shaw was a very regimental man. He was an army man and he got a job through a friend of his in the Talk of the Town and he got bored with all the pussy footing around the like of Tom Jones and all this. He couldn’t stand that so he gave up his job, getting £2,000 at that time a week, a week, yeah. But he was very regimental but he took me under his wing when I went on the ship, and he trained me, and imagine I never knew his first name in all the time I was dealing with him and he said to me ‘when we come back now in October you’re going to be my second in command’ and I said ‘thank you Mr Shaw’ and then he brought me the news about my grandmother and we pulled into a little place called Roses in Spain.

167.MM: I know it yeah, I was there recently.

168.TS: Are you serious. Isn’t it a gorgeous place?

169.MM: Yeah its up in the north, just near the French coast. Ferran Adria has a restaurant called El Bulli and its known as the best restaurant in the world and there’s this two year waiting list to get there and I got to eat there a month ago, just in Roses.

170.TS: Are you serious. Isn’t it a gorgeous place?

171.MM: Beautiful place.

172.TS: I said if I ever got money I’d go back there but I’ve never gone back. But anyway Mr Shaw and myself anyway we pulled into Roses and on the trip in Tilbury we were going off in the Friday and this lady boarded the ship and she was on her own and she was gorgeous, absolutely the business — plenty of money and everything — and you never knew anything about Shaw. Didn’t know if he was married or anything and in Rosses he did a bunk and you know Rosses the ship used be off out and the little boat and her luggage was taken off the ship because she was making some excuse and Shaw’s stuff was in with her stuff and he was gone. She’d plenty of money now. He was a lovely, lovely man. I was with him for six months but you don’t know people, but talk about regimental!! Of course he was gong to make me his second command when we came back but he gave me the news about my grandmother and he knew I wasn’t coming back for that particular next trip so that’s how my career ended on the ships anyway so I went back to the Red Bank and I stayed there till it finished in ’69.

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173. **MM:** It’s just funny you’re talking about the second in command there who was fond of the jar and stuff. Was there much of that now say in the Red Bank or?

174. **TS:** No, no it was in the hotels in the old days. I saw fellows coming down from room services, the back stairs and wine buckets and they’d be drinking bottles of gin and vodka. They couldn’t be detected and I didn’t know it. I thought it was water, didn’t know what they were drinking. But the lads weren’t long telling me where to look for the bottles and everything else or it was a terrible craze at that time. A terrible, terrible thing and lots of them and the different ways they were able to manoeuvre to get drink and everything you know. It was different times but they all managed to keep their jobs though (laugh).

175. **MM:** It was a different ethos or whatever.

176. **TS:** It was a different time.

177. **MM:** Yeah, yeah. It’s funny. But there was no problem with that in the Red Bank?

178. **TS:** Funny enough the Red Bank was super clean. They was no scandal, there was nothing about anybody. It was a super place, it was a lovely place, a real family place and everybody was there, was there real long.

179. **MM:** Is it Barry Montgomery who was running it?

180. **TS:** Barry Montgomery was running it and his wife Joan. They did the office work and they came down every evening and he did ‘mine host’ in the restaurant every evening and he had Geraldine, his daughter took over the ‘mine host’ for a while, Eithne went into the kitchen, his eldest daughter and you had Paul he became a solicitor, he was in here sometimes and Deirdre went off to London. There was five in the family and Mary went off to Canada that’s right.

181. **MM:** But the fact that you’re saying that one of his daughters went into the kitchen, that would have been quite unusual at the time of girls going in?

182. **TS:** Well you see…We had cooks all the time. You always had a lady cook but May just happened to be, May lived down in George’s Street. She was the cook for the time and then May got very sick and Eithne stood in for a while and she was under Brian Kavanagh’s wing because Brian was the second head chef and Gerry wasn’t, didn’t like Eithne coming in at all to be honest with you because he felt she was a plant. But Eithne was only coming in to help and Brian took her under the wing and he trained but he didn’t train her for our situation, he trained her for the lunches.

183. **MM:** When you talk about the cooks, what sort of work did the cooks do as such?

184. **TS:** The vegetables for the next day and all the cabbage, the bacon, the joints, all the main joints for the day on the table d’hote menu in the restaurant and the front bar.

185. **MM:** So they do basic, ordinary cooking.

186. **TS:** Ordinary cooking, Gerry dealt with all that menu there, yeah, and the one in the Oyster Bar. You didn’t ask, you didn’t ask Gerry to cook roast beef or anything like that at all. No that was Brian’s job and May’s job.

187. **MM:** So basically the carvery or any of that sort of stuff was done by the cook? And then as you say this sort of à la carte, the French trained stuff, that was…

188. **TS:** That was his (Gerry Ferns).
189. **MM:** You were saying Jean Retty (Previous head chef and manager) left?

190. **TS:** Jean was gone when I got there.

191. **MM:** Right okay. You mentioned there that Jean Reddy moved back to France. Was he from France?

192. **TS:** He went to work in the south of France. He was from France. But he bought a restaurant. He was in a place called Lyon and then he moved down to where all the rich people are, Monte Carlo, not Monte Carlo. Just outside of Monte Carlo, this side of Monte Carlo because the visitors were all going by and he bought the place there and Jimmy (Duggan) used to visit him and Jimmy spent three weeks holidays every year with him and worked with him in the restaurant. Whether he was a help or not or a hindrance, but Jimmy didn’t drink and that was a big thing. I never drank. Jimmy never drank, that stood to him because when he went to France, he was able to stay for three weeks on his feet and nobody was going to worry that he was going to fall down half drunk from drinking the wines. So that’s how Jimmy was there.

193. **MM:** And Jean Retty was married to an Irish girl was he?

194. **TS:** I think he was yeah. I didn’t know much about him, all I knew that Jimmy went down to him. I think she was Irish alright because Jimmy used to get on very well with her. Jimmy wasn’t married, he was one of these carefree fellows. He was up in his motor bike and his three weeks in France and that was it. You had to take your holidays that time when you were told to them. He was the head waiter, he could take his holidays but you could get your holidays anytime and you took them all at the one time. No such thing as spacing them out.

195. **MM:** And the busy time now, like you were busy a lot of the time?

196. **TS:** All the time, you were never slack. The front bar was always busy because it had a turn around from 12.30 p.m. when it opened until 10.15 pm to 10.30 pm when it closed.

197. **MM:** But did you guys get extra busy then spring show week, horse show week, all that stuff?

198. **TS:** Oh you had Patrick’s Day was the busiest day in the place after Christmas. That was the start of it Patrick’s Day, the dog show, the horse racing, then you used to have the Phoenix Park and you had Wednesdays night up there in the summer, they’d be packed.

199. **MM:** That was horse racing?

200. **TS:** Oh yeah, then you had the horse show, the spring show, you got no time off in those times. You got no time off in Christmas week. You had to work. We used to go into the Scotch House for a sandwich. They used to do lovely sandwiches there in Scotch House and had a cup of tea and a sandwich.

201. **MM:** Where was the Scotch House?

202. **TS:** Just at the corner there, around the corner from the Irish Press at the end of Hawkins Street, at the very end of Hawkins Street, down at the end. Yeah Scotch House was there.

203. **MM:** So what happened that the Red Bank close or why did it close?

204. **TS:** John Byrne came on the scene and he built a bit sky scraper on top of the street where you see the big Guinness sign and that became a restaurant on the top floor. Bobby Kavanagh opened that and...
205.MM: Now who was this John Byrne fellow?

206.TS: John Byrne was the builder, Kerry and he was buying the block, he was buying up the block of D’Olier Street and that was his main stay from the start you see. And he went along the people in the street to buy up their property and he came to the Red Bank and Montgomery wouldn’t sell to him, just out and out wouldn’t sell and he said he wasn’t going to give to something like that and that was all going to be kind of offices I suppose so he sold it to the Blessed Sacrament Fathers for £96,000 or something at the time.

207.MM: So Byrne managed to buy all the way up to him.

208.TS: No it stopped. When the Red Bank refused that put an end to it. He only came looking, knocking at doors and when Montgomery and the little kiosk in the Hawkins buildings that was D’Olier Buildings that was right beside the Tedcastle Coal Company. It was a gorgeous building, the stuff inside and there were solicitors all in those offices and that little kiosk wouldn’t sell either. It was a goldmine and she had a lease in that place for a long, long time and they didn’t go and so herself and the Red Bank were the ones that kind of scoop of the whole block moving along.

209.MM: Tell me about that restaurant that Byrne…?

210.TS: He opened a restaurant on the top and the lift went from the bottom up to the top and it opened in November and we had the worse storm in the history of Dublin. The Liffey overflowed, and they had a big brand new lounge downstairs in the basement. It’s still there now but the Liffey overflowed and went down into the thing and it stopped the people going up, the lift couldn’t go up stairs either. So the smell and everything, the place was closed. They opened and closed the same day.

211.MM: Right and there was another, there was a restaurant on the ground floor as well was there later on or…?

212.TS: They had more or less, it was gone then. It was no threat to anybody after that. That was the lounge. There was a lounge upstairs just as you walked in off the street. A kind of an ordinary lounge.

213.MM: But this was going to be all and…

214.TS: You’d the view. You had the view over Dublin. I was up there because I went up to look for a job up there.

215.MM: What was the name of it do you remember?

216.TS: That now I couldn’t tell you. If I lived to be a hundred more years I could not tell you that.

217.MM: And Bobby Kavanagh. You don’t know who the chef was?

218.TS: I couldn’t tell you anything like that because it was my first time meeting Bobby Kavanagh and I went up to put my name forward for a job because I didn’t know I was going to be made a waiter in the Red Bank you see. Well he said leave your name with the girl outside and we’ll see from there. And little did I know. I left him and I went to a fellow called Robert he ended up being the head barman in Montrose. I can’t think of his second name now. He was real smart as well, leave your name and number there and we’ll get in touch with you. Little did they all know they’d be out of a job the next day! The very next day!

219.MM: It did open. It was open for a while but it didn’t last long.
When they got everything fixed up it opened but nobody went up then. Everything was gone. The momentum was gone. They opened a restaurant then out in a, half way up to the airport there in the …

The Regency?

Yeah where the Regency was. It was called, I can’t remember what it was called and they put a restaurant up in the very top in that place in that time.

This was the Crofton Airport?

The very place and they had a lovely (view) that took over from that. They got the idea and they jumped in and they did very well.

Because there would have been a good view there of the top of the hill?

And you went up in a lift again. And Bobby Kavanagh went up there (laugh). So Bobby was up there for a little while and then as I say the South County and then he went to his brother out to the airport. I was out in the airport for nine months on a Sunday. I only worked on a Sunday in the airport under Jack Doyle. Fine head waiter.

Now Opperman was the head man out there. Johnny Opperman would have been out at the airport and Jimmy Flahive would have been executive chef and was Jimmy Kilbride there?

Opperman was the chef in down here in Jury’s.

There was a few. Johnny Opperman his brothers…

He had three or four brothers but Johnny was the main man in the airport at that time. I don’t know how he was doing that because he used to be in Jury’s as well.

No he started off in the Moira.

That’s the other place I worked as well. I did morning work there, Trinity Street.

His brother (Willy) took over from him when he went to airport his brother took over from him in the Moira.

The Oppermans were always involved in Jury’s, always involved down there. Always involved there.

He’s ninety years old now, Johnny Opperman.

Is he still alive?

He lives out in Blainroe. A lovely man, I talked to him recently.

He was a great friend of Bobby Howick. Bobby Howick was a Guinness man. He was the PR for Guinness’s and he used to do the oyster festival and they did all kind of festivals. Bobby Howick was the main man. You had everybody else but Bobby Howick was mister personality of this town at that time. And if Bobby Howick said Jury’s was a good hotel, that’s all he had to say. The Red Bank, he used to love the Red Bank. But that was the main man. Opperman and himself were great pals and he very suddenly died in 1968, Bobby Howick, no, no, it was… Bobby died in the early ’80s.
So tell us between it shut down…

It shut down in 1969. April ’69.

Why did they shut down?

They got old.

None of the family wanted to take it over?

None of the family. They all had their own lives then you see. Geraldine was after marrying an architect. Mary was gone off to Canada. Mary was finishing school and she was doing something in London and then Eithne got married and her husband lived in Waterville. He was a fisherman. He was connected to the fishing fleet stuff down there and Paul was doing the law so there was nobody to take over from them so that’s why they really sold because they were after getting old now, they really did get old, and they were there everyday, all day except Sunday.

It takes its toll.

It did take its toll and we were open every day of the week for lunch and every day for dinner and I said to you the front bar went all day, all the time and then after the fire in ’61 the restaurant became open all day with the bar so we became the restaurant bar.

But there was still quite a good business up until to the end, was there?

Absolutely fantastic, because the night times change. The lunches were great. The night life had changed completely and you had a disco next door to us called Sloopy’s and that didn’t help the night business and then of course Jammet’s was gone and Jammet’s went because they saw the signs were coming as well. All the signs were coming and then Montrose opened.

What I understand from talking to Jammet’s is that they realised that a lot of people who lived in the city centre were moving out to the suburbs. And they couldn’t get parking and all of these things.

That’s the next thing I was going to say to you. You could park across over the Irish Times, you couldn’t park there anymore then. The put the meters and they all went down Townsend Street. I mean they killed, that the night trade but lunchtime, very, very good. I mean McConnell’s were still there, RTE were still there and we were still doing that kind of business but all of a sudden the wages dropped from big wages to kind of ordinary wages because we were getting no night trade which was always busy on a Saturday night no matter happened. If a bomb fell you still were busy on a Saturday. It was just a tradition that people came to the Red Bank on a Saturday. Absolutely flying and then you had, as I said to you, all the show business people used to come and you be busy one night. These all started coming at night time then the middle of the week, the law library. The likes of Colm Condon he came quite often, Seamus McKenna, all the big noises in the law firm at that time. They all started coming at night time to the Red Bank.

And where did you go to the from ’69 onwards?

Oh I went to the Montrose and then I was there and then I went to the County Club in Churchtown.

How long were you in the Montrose for?

Six months there. I applied for a job in the County.

And what was it like to work for PV Doyle?
256. TS: It was different.

257. MM: I believed he paid quite well but expected, he paid you quarter more than anyone else but expected you to do twice the work or something?

258. TS: My wages dropped from the time the Red Bank I never got paid as well, ever, ever again, never. Even coming here I never got paid as well because at that time you had to equalise everything. Like the wages were fantastic, like £33 without your tips in 1964 when the average wage was £8 a week for the average worker. My father had to work two jobs to get £10 and…

259. MM: You’re on £33.

260. TS: In 1964…

261. MM: And tips.

262. TS: And tips.

263. MM: Which would have been half that again if not more?

264. TS: Well you see the tips are divided, the three on the night or the four was on they were all divided and if you didn’t come out with £20 a week there was something wrong.

265. MM: So it was a great job?

266. TS: It was a fantastic job, money wise and happiness, you know.

267. MM: Now was that just the waiters, the chefs wouldn’t be paid anything like that.

268. TS: No the chefs got their wages. There was no such thing as back room service. That all came in about ’75 when that big fellow in the…Jury’s, the start of that. The big chef there was big medallion and he changed everything. He wanted two-and-a-half service back room staff and that came on into Jury’s and the service charge became 15% instead of 12.5%.

269. MM: Not Willie Marshall now?

270. TS: No, no, I can’t think of his name, he’s a big, big tall and he ended up leaving Jury’s and he went out on his own. He got the medal for the best chef in Ireland. Mc Sweeney, was it Mc Sweeney?

271. MM: Ah Eugene Mc Sweeney, right Eugene Mc Sweeney.

272. TS: He started this 2.5% back room service in the Jury’s and that changed in everything, in the Berkley, in the bar at the Berkley Court they all got that as well.

273. MM: And was that in the old Jury’s?

274. TS: The New Jury’s – The Intercontinental, Jury’s was gone then, yeah Jury’s was gone. The Moira was gone. They were all gone.

275. MM: So you moved from the Montrose…?

276. TS: To the Country Club in Churchtown.

277. MM: Now that was big at the time?
401

278. 

TS: Oh it was a huge. No, this was only a restaurant.

279. 

MM: No it wasn’t the cabaret place?

280. 

TS: No it wasn’t the cabaret, I wasn’t there for that. I left before it came that.

281. 

MM: Did that become the Braemor Rooms?

282. 

TS: That became the Braemor Room. Ned Finnegan owned it and when Ned sold it to the Quinn’s and the Fitzgerald’s they bought it, the meat people up in the North somewhere, Hanley Foods. They bought it, they all worked there and the Quinn’s, Pat Quinn’s uncle they bought the County Club and they changed it then…

283. 

MM: Now the County Club what was it like?

284. 

TS: It was a restaurant, a pub and a restaurant.

285. 

MM: Who was the chef there do you remember?

286. 

TS: The chef was Joe, he’s long dead. The second head chef is now the head chef over in the Lobster Pot, Don Mc Guinness; he’s the head chef there now. He was the second head chef with Joe. I can’t think of his second name. Joe Reilly. He left the county and went to work in the hotel down there in Rathgar, at the corner. Orwell Lodge he went there. He left the County, then we had a fellow called Kelly he took over and Don stayed as his second head and then Don kind of took over.

287. 

MM: How long were you there?

288. 

TS: I was fifteen months there and then I went back to the Montrose. I met Bobby Kavanagh in town one day and he said ‘come back to me and I’ll make you one of my head waiters’ and after a couple of weeks I said ‘okay’ and Tommy McEvoy got in there before and brought me up to the second head waiter down to the Tara Towers so I was there for another fifteen months. I didn’t like it at all. I was restaurant trained not hotel trained. I mean I went to the hotels to do my breakfast training and all that, I did nothing else in hotels. Huge difference.

289. 

MM: Explain the difference like.

290. 

TS: Standards were terrible, the standards of waiting was bad, the standards of head waiters was bad. The food was completely different. I would never equate anything like with the Red Bank or Jammet’s. I worked in Jammet’s for a while now helping that lady, I can’t remember her name for the minute. She used to call Mr Montgomery and ask was Tommy busy and I’d go up and help them out if we weren’t busy and the standard of food you couldn’t equate. There’s no comparison nowadays. You read these magazines, you read all these things, there’s no comparison. Gerry Ferns in the Red Bank and the man in Jammet’s, they know how to cook.

291. 

MM: Vincent Dowling wasn’t it.

292. 

TS: Oh. Vincent, the very man, very good, very good. They knew their business and the people in charge knew their business, you know. They didn’t stand looking. You were meant to do a job, you do the job and you were trusted to do that and that’s the way it was. Nobody stood over you. I couldn’t believe when I went back to the Red Bank, there was no one hanging over me compared to breakfasts all the head waiters would be all over you and you’re coming down, where were you? and all this and you’d meet Ken Besson and he’d stand, and Toddy would stop you and all this sort of stuff.

401
From there you came to here then?

No I went to work on a ship. I went to work in a factory in Dun Laoghaire because I got so disillusioned. I got so disillusioned in the Tara Towers I wasn’t allowed service. I was meant to stand at the door. PV Doyle came in one night and said ‘why aren’t you at the door?’ and I said ‘there’s people need to be served’. ‘No, you stand at the door’ but I said ‘the people need to be served’. ‘You stand by the door and greet the customers’. I couldn’t understand that. That was a waste of talent. I was a working head waiter and McEvoy came in one day and said ‘Mr. Doyle is at the door, he’s giving out stink because you’re not standing at the door’. I said ‘Mr McEvoy’, I said, ‘the place in packed, they need hands in their helping’ and he said ‘you stand by the door’. I wasn’t able to do that so I left a little while after.

I went to work, a customer gave me a job in Upright’s in Dun Laoghaire as a van driver. I did that for fifteen months and then I was sweeping up the yard one day, put my van away and there was all leaves around and I said ‘Jesus if any of the lads come out on that they’d slip’ and I started picking them up and I said to myself ‘do you know what? I’ve had enough of this now. I’ll see what’s going on’, and I went home to my grandmother for my dinner and she said ‘Joe Duggan was looking for you’. And I said ‘Joe’ and she said ‘yeah’ and I rang Joe and he said ‘will you go down and see Tom Cunniam in the Lord Edward?’ and I knew Mr Cunniam from the Red Bank, and I was here the night this place opened with Joe in 1969 when they got all their family and friends and Tom Cunniam offered me the job here, late ’75 yeah and I came here then.

This place (The Lord Edward) opened in ’69.

September ’69 / October ’69.

So this place nearly opened nearly straight away after the Red Bank closed?

The Red Bank closed in April and this fellow got wind that it was closing and he was in like a flash. They’d seven tables and if you came in that door there, and this was the opening part and these were the tables. (pointing to tables in the restaurant) A table there, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven tables is all they had and this was all closed and they had a long trolley there and a table and if you were stuck you pushed the table. But that was only the first, I was only here a couple of nights and Joe and he offered me the head waiters job, I said ‘Joe £20 is not good enough’. And I said ‘no Joe I’ll leave it’ and that’s when I went Montrose. I was a bit young to take over a head waiters’ job because head waiters…

But Gerry Ferns was here?

Gerry came as chef.

How many were in the kitchen?

There was only three at that time. Rory Barry and Mick Fletcher. They were two commis of his in the Red Bank, and he brought those rather than brining in a head chef. The other head chef was (inaudible).

And who came here with..?

Joe Duggan.

Joe Duggan came in as head waiter.

No Joe came, yeah he just came in and there was Tony Hayden, he brought Tony Hayden out of the lounge, he became a waiter here. He brought Joe, you see they weren’t doing much at the time and then a fellow, then another lad came in, I don’t know what his name was and they
were only helping. Joe used to come in at night to do the nights, to do four nights and then they got a lad called Tony Burtonshaw and he was the head waiter.

308.MM: Was he one of the Burtonshaw’s to do with Paddy Burtonshaw and all of them. There was a Burtonshaw he was the head chef or manager in the Savoy restaurants.

309.TS: I wouldn’t know now. Tony’s dad now ended up buying a guesthouse up in Gardiner Street, the top end facing the church. But he took over as head waiter here and did he brought Frank Carney and did he got Noel Ryan and then he got Philip Conway and they were the four that was here running the place when it got busy then.

310.MM: So Eamon Ingram came here then after Gerry died?

311.TS: No, no used to do casual. Gerry used to get a bit sick, he was getting old and they…

312.MM: Was Eamon still in the Russell at the time?

313.TS: Eamon was still in the Russell and he’d do the casual here and when I came in 1975 Eamon came permanently in 1976 or 1977. He was here for all the years after that.

314.MM: And who was with him here?

315.TS: Mick Fletcher.

316.MM: Ah right, the same lad.

317.TS: Another fellow. Mick Fletcher was here and then he left, he bought a restaurant round in the corner down in Meath Street. Breakfast and café kind of thing. He left here for that. His wife and himself. They didn’t have any family. He wanted something for her to do so he bought the place around the corner so it got kind of busy and they stayed and then he went around there so then Eamon became head chef. Then he brought Gary and then they’ve only another of couple of lads up there now and that’s it.

318.MM: And Gary’s surname again.

319.TS: Gary Dunne; to remember all the names (laugh).

320.MM: Sorry you mentioned Dunne, what was the link between the Dunn’s and you know the Dunn’s Seafood.

321.TS: Oh the Dunn’s, Peter Dunn. They delivered all the fish to the Red Bank and…

322.MM: But did they have an interest in it?

323.TS: No, no they were just the fish merchants. They supplied all the restaurants in Dublin at the time. They were the best fish merchants at the time. The big abattoir kind of place in Manor Street where all the fishing was done.

324.MM: They did the smoked salmon?

325.TS: Ah everything, that’s right and they had the little shop then in the top of D’Olier Street.

326.MM: They’re up in Finglas now. They moved up to Finglas.

327.TS: They don’t own it at all now, they sold it.
MM: Did they yeah.

TS: Oh they sold it about three years ago. I had his daughter in here last Christmas and she told me oh no daddy’s not there anymore now.

MM: What he was telling me the stained glass windows that were in the front doors of the Red Bank was up in the factory.

TS: He actually told me that. They were lovely people as well the Dunn’s. They were lovely, lovely, Peter Dunn. He was a lovely man. His family now are all grown up again and nobody wanted it, so good luck, God bless.

MM: So this place hasn’t really changed since…

TS: It hasn’t changed one iota, except his brother-in-law came from America and told him how to make this the entrance and put three more tables in there. That’s the only change. That became the entrance then and he put the extra tables in there.

MM: Did someone else own it before him though?

TS: No this was built in 1875 by his dad. There was a pub always here for four of five hundred years, a tavern, not a pub and when they used to come from town there was a horses trough up there and they used to stop here for a little libation in here and then the next stop was Dolphins Barn, and that was it, the country. So this was built then in 1875 by the old Tom Cunniam and these were the bedrooms. This was the bedroom, overhead was the bedrooms and the two offices were bedrooms. There was eleven in family and down stairs where the lounge is was their living quarters and the pub was where they made the living.

MM: The brains or the…?

TS: The personality. She was the personality. They all came. She was a lovely, lovely lady. I met her many, many times over the years, many times apart from here, at the Red Bank and that, you know. So they were lovely people the Cunniams, they were lovely, lovely people and he married in 1961 or 1962 to Blanche Kelly, the model. All the models, Grace O’Shaughnesy, all those girls. Nuala Donnelly, she was in RTE, and they were all a gang of girls at that time, they were all the famous models at that time and he married her. His brother worked in Guinness’s and he got the Guinness’s coach and brought her down.

MM: The only decent restaurant really left in Dublin?
This was it.

What was the likes of Snaffles and all that sort of stuff. What where they like?

Snaffles was very good. John and Danny and Hughie out of the Red Bank opened Snaffles under Mrs Fitzgerald. They were the tea people down in West (inaudible) Street. Fitzgerald’s teas and wines, the wine merchants.

So there was a link between the Red Bank then and Snaffles as in staff wise?

Exactly, three lads went up there and they took one of the chefs, one of the chefs, I’m not sure whether it was… Brian didn’t go there, Brian went out to somewhere out in Howth. There was a new place up in Howth came…no, this was out in Sutton - Sutton House. That became a place for the likes of Haughey and all that, but died very quickly afterwards and then you had the King Sitric opened then in about 1970.

And then you had John Howard in the Coq Hardi?

John Howard then in the Coq Hardi and then that type of restaurant started coming along. That was all the late, the middle ‘70s.

Yeah and what was the other fellow now that opened there on, it was on School House Lane you know where the Passport Office is on Molesworth Street, off Molesworth Street. There was a place there called the Soup Bowl. Peter…

Oh the Soup Bowl I’d forgotten about that place.

Peter Powrie or something like that.

I can’t remember that now, that kind of went by me that kind of time alright yeah.

So you had the Soup Bowl, you had Snaffles, Snaffles was on Leeson Street.

Snaffles lasted for twenty-five years.

The next one I see now around that time was the Celtic Mews.

The Celtic Mews, that Joe Gray out of Jury’s. He was the head waiter in Jury’s in the Copper Room. Another very hard task master but a gentleman. He always reminds me of Mr Shaw and Mr Shaw reminds me of him but he opened the Celtic Mews and that became a big, big hit with the people.

Because I have a book from I think it was 1981, TWA Guide to European Cities and there’s only two listing in it for Dublin, that’s here (The Lord Edward) and the Celtic Mews.

That was about right at that time alright yeah. We didn’t get people, we couldn’t take them we used to send them over there and they used to do visa versa with us. That’s how it worked with the two families believe it or not.
363. MM: Was there anyone else until the next one I see after that like from what I see now I see okay Guilbaud’s opens up around ’85 and then you had then the likes, you had Mervyn Stuart out in the Guinea Pig and you had the Mirabeau. Did you ever do anything out there?

364. TS: No when I came here that was it and Mervyn Stuart, they were a kind of a click here and the Grays, they were all a click with Mr Cunniam and they started off the golfing society and Henry O’Neill. Do you remember O’Neill he had a place out in Lucan. He had a lovely place out there actually and they all became a click and they started the golfing society and then a lot of other fellows joined on then, John O’Byrne and all that. That’s another place, Dobbins, that was a new place that came on the scene as well.

365. MM: Did O’Byrne now train in Jammets?

366. TS: That’s right yeah, John O’Byrne.

367. MM: He opened Dobbins, so that opened up around that time.

368. TS: His brother owned that place. He was in South Africa and John was the front man, you know that’s how that worked.

369. MM: And then because I’m trying to think after than then really, nothing happened to them the mid ’80s and you’ve the likes of Colin O’Daly opening up ‘The Park’ out in Blackrock and you’ve then sort of Kevin Thornton opens up ‘The Wine Epergne’ and then and Alan O’Reilly opened up ‘Clarets’ just a few places like that and then l’Ecrivain opened up.

370. TS: And Chapter One. The Old Dublin was around here for a while.

371. MM: What was the Old Dublin like? Was it sort of Russian?

372. TS: And Bavarian and all that sort of stuff but that died after a while. It just died because they ended serving ordinary food because they ended up putting coddle on it and stews and all that sort of stuff.

373. MM: What’s his name again?

374. TS: Eamon Walsh. He’s gone. That’s gone, because they closed the Old Dubliner.

375. MM: But it was him. He’s got a company now Swift Foods. They produce vac packed or sous-vide food.

**Discussion on the background of the closure of the Old Dublin**

376. MM: From your experience the thing that killed fine dining, what killed fine dining in Dublin?

377. TS: Standards, just standards.

378. MM: You said that PV Doyle opening up had a big effect?

379. TS: A huge effect. And people’s accounts there, the expense accounts that stopped it.

380. MM: How about the troubles?

381. TS: No, I was going to tell you a quick story there. The night the bombs were in Dublin here in ’74. The British Ambassador was sitting here (laugh), believe it or not, were sitting there, a party of six. Mr Cunniam told us, and I was here one night and he was telling me and he said ‘Jesus
Tommy, the night the bombs went off in Dublin, we had your man here and Jesus, I was watching the door and I watching this. Gunmen were everywhere.

382.I had Turkish people her last night. I didn’t know they were, I thought they were Italians. They were very demanding and there was ten of them and next thing this fella came in and he said ‘is everything alright?’’, he said ‘we’re the bodyguards’ and I said ‘who are these’. He says ‘the Turkish embassy’. I nearly got sick. You would want to see the gun he had. He shows me the gun and I said ‘ah Jesus, I want me out of here’ (laugh).

383.Peter Mandelson is going by here one day, he’s in Newman House, the place is after being cased three days beforehand under the manhole, John O’Donoghue was telling us this, and Mandelson is going by in the taxi, Mandelson going by and he said ‘stop, I want to go in there, I used to eat my oysters in there when I was a student, I want to go in here’. Next minute they all stop and they come in here and he’s sitting down and he’s eating, having oysters and talking to fellows, there’s an awful panic, Jaysus wept, they’re all over Newman House. Next minute (sirens) and he’s sitting there as happy as Larry, had a dozen oysters and a pint of Guinness and then he goes off to Newman House and I swear to God you wouldn’t believe it but all the guys were there, all of a sudden there’s loads of, he just sat there grinning.

384.MM: But you were saying before that all the film stars used to come here as well?

385.TS: Lots of film stars, Paul Newman came, Peter O’Toole, Cyril Cusack, all the guys, anybody that was anybody used to come here and in the Red Bank. The Red Bank was a great place for them. I’ll tell you a quick story Robert Mitchum came into the Red Bank. He had his meal in the restaurant, a real gentleman. He walked down into the bar and he’s having a few drinks and then all of a sudden Luke Kelly walks in, Ronny Drew walked in, here was here yesterday. Ronny Drew walks in and a few more comes in and then Jimmy Campbell comes in from the Royal right, he was a band leader, and they were making, what were they making. It wasn’t Ryan's Daughter, it was weird, a good long, long time ago now but Robert Mitchum was very young in the part, very young at the time. I think it was ‘A Terrible Beauty’ he was making with Richard Harris, anyway that’s what it was. And they were here and Luke Kelly came in and a few more of them came in and Luke was very, very young now. But this woman came in, for the life of me I can never think of her name but anyway a sing song started and of course they’re all there and the lounge in packed and they’re all having a great time and all the lads from McConnell’s were all there, everybody was coming in. The Royal and Regal were still there now at the time right, and what’s his name comes in and he says, Ronnie Drew, not Ronnie Drew, Luke Kelly, very, very young now, a fabulous voice. They (Dubliners) hadn’t started. They used to come into the Red Bank and the lounge all the time when they started first. They used to come into us and go across to O’Flynn’s across the road and Mooneys and the next thing Robert Mitchum was on the floor, out of his tree, you’d want to see this big actor, and do you know who is was, Con Houlihan.

386.MM: Right he’s a big man, Kerry man?

387.TS: He was very young at that time and he came in and he says ‘where’s Robert Mitchum? I’ve to meet him for an interview’. And he says ‘well he won’t fall any further from there’. Luke Kelly says to him (laugh). ‘Leave him there he said, he can’t fall any further’ (laugh). I’ll never forget that. Luke was a fabulous bloke, but they were all the times and people were starting off. You had everybody coming in there, all the radio gangs, all the Abbey people came there, everybody came to the Red Bank, everybody. It was a great time. Vincent Dowling, Hennessy he was another great actor. You know the fella that used be on the Riordans, Sean O’Casey, he’s not Sean O’Casey. He was an old man, I can’t think of his name now it’s gone but all those people from the Abbey, they were all out of the Regal, anybody that was involved all came into the Red Bank before or after the show. I met all the greats there. Eamon Andrews, Jack Cruise, Maureen (Potter), Jimmy O’Dea and his wife used to come into the Red Bank, all the time at the counter, all the time. He wouldn’t sit at a table, he always sat up at the counter.
MM: You say Eamon Andrews there, it just reminds me that he bought the Dolphin (hotel) then?

TS: Made a cowboy shop out of it. Steaks and the girls in their American outfits – Tex-Mex and all that.

MM: One of the Oppermans was with him in that I think. Was that just Nugent got older or what?

TS: I don’t know what happened there, it was just a big buy out. Montgomery was very surprised at the time when it went because like it was the start of the end, the beginning of the end. Because like, as I was saying to you, standards dropped. I mean, you think of the Dolphin, everybody went to the Dolphin, the place was packed from the racers and all this. It was a place to go and like they’re all talking about the Berkley Court now and the Burlington, like what are they going to do with rugby internationals now? Before the Berkley Court, the Gresham was the place to go, the Shelbourne was the place to go. The Dolphin was the place to go. They were all the places to go for after matches and after football and after race (meetings) and everything, that’s where they went. Nowhere else, but now they’re gone. And that was the beginning of the end because it became a cowboy shop. You had girls going round dressed as cow girls, honest to God, little skirts and the hats and all.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with David Edwards in DIT, Cathal Brugha Street (10/12/2007)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) David Edwards (DE)

(note: The first part is a summary from memory and research notes. Side one of tape one was blank; the play button was pressed rather than the record button, dialogue begins with side two, tape one)

1. David was born on 7 May 1939 in the North Strand. His father worked for CIE in Broadstone and after the family lost their home in the Dublin bombing of the North Strand the family moved to Cabra West. He did his schooling in Cabra Convent, St Peters National School in Phibsboro, and then in O’Connell’s School. He didn’t like O’Connell’s, he felt the brothers and some lay teachers looked down on students from Cabra West. There was always great variety of food in the Edward’s home, with plenty of home baking and offal was frequently eaten. David would have cooked at home for the family. He saw an advertisement in the paper for a chef course in Cathal Brugha Street and applied. He sat an exam and did an interview and was awarded a scholarship.

2. He started Cathal Brugha Street in 1955 with eleven other students: Andy Whelan, Nicky Cluskey, John Degan, Oscar Gantly, Ted Leopold, Frank Stapleton, Brian Duffy, Aidan Murphy, Albert O’Callaghan and a boy named Donnelly. There were two male teachers, Beaucaire Murphy who taught pastry and a Swiss chef called Johnny Annler. P.J. Dunne started teaching larder that year, coming from Jammet’s, and Michael Ganly started the following year. Mo Murnaghan was in charge in the college but seldom taught the chefs. Lee Kidney was in the hotel management class while David was in Cathal Brugha Street and they got to know one another. In those days you did two years in college before beginning working in the industry. David had relations in London and spent the first summer working in the Lyons factory in Cadby Hall where they made eight miles of swiss roll a day for the various London restaurants and cafés. He saved some money as he had to buy his own knives and uniforms. While in college they were paid 10-12 shillings a week.

3. Following his time in college, David was sent to the Royal Hibernian Hotel in 1957 to begin his apprenticeship. The manager at the time was Mr. Gladwell who later became the head of the Blackpool Hotel School. Hector Fabron then took over. Louis Deschamps was head chef and two other Frenchmen, Belmont and Belan were sous chef and sauce chef respectively. There was a German chef there also, Heinz Marquardt, who, the story goes, came off a German submarine in Waterford during the war looking for supplies, was captured, interned and remained in Ireland after the war. (note: By 1958, Good Cooking lists Marquardt as chef de cuisine in Michael’s Restaurant in Wicklow Street.) David remembers that a Mrs Casey was the baker in the Royal Hibernian and used to make the breads for the Russell and the Bailey as well. He notes that she like many others worked for a pittance along with board and lodgings. Mary Murphy was the larder chef. Roger Noblet who later became head chef worked in the Russell at the time according to Edwards but he is present in some of the photographs that David has from the Hibernian at that time.

4. DE: (pointing to a photograph taken in the Royal Hibernian) That’s Louis Corrigan, he worked in the Russell, that’s me, that’s John Cleary, he was head chef down in the Limerick Inn, that’s Eddie Hayes, his brother was head chef in the Moira (Vincent), that was a long time ago. They had a scheme, we went on monthly trips to Guinness’s, of Gilbey’s or the Dublin Fruit and Vegetable Market, It was before its time.

5. MM: It seems to have been before its time, I heard that Besson used to match a chef with a waiter and save money weekly between them so they could open a business when they were qualified?

6. DE: He started a saving scheme, he got them to save. He had a lady looking after that, his personal assistant who would administer it. He was very close to Michael Mullen for what reasons
I don’t know. They had a hotel and catering festival that was held in Busaras, they had waterskiing on the Liffey, a Pancake race from Clery’s to Liberty Hall, the waiters ran with a tray and a glass of wine, and the hall porters did a race with a wheelbarrow and suitcases or a fellow in the wheelbarrow, and there was a football match between the north-side hotels and the south-side hotels, we go special jerseys and all.

7. MM: Your first hotel or catering experience really was going into the Royal Hibernian Hotel and I believe the standard was quite high there?

8. DE: Well looking back on it, the standard was quite high, but looking back, it was archaic, it was all silver service, a lot of food was taken to the restaurant and finished on lamps. The banqueting service was very, in my opinion anyway, I have done banqueting in Jury’s for five and six hundred people and I worked banquets in the States for three thousand, I thought they were behind the times.

9. MM: Is that looking back, or did you think it at the time?

10. DE: No, at the time, I didn’t know any better, in retrospect.

11. MM: I think the Russell and the Royal Hibernian were the last vestiges of that old style service in the French Classical way.

12. DE: That was there, but it was archaic, we were shovelling coal on the fire, we had a coal bunker under our table, you know.

13. MM: How about refrigeration and all that?

14. DE: Well the fish was all kept in fish boxes, we had blocks of ice came in and you had to break them, you’d go down and crush the ice and wash the fish and fresh ice, you kept them well chilled, the meat was hung, refrigeration it was very clean.

15. MM: How many people would have worked in the (Hibernian) kitchen?

16. DE: In the Hibernian, there were the typical, there were too many for the amount we were doing, about sixteen. Let’s say there are five sections, you had sauces, roast, veg, breakfast, staff, pastry, head chef, second chef, kitchen porters (3), vegetable woman – around eighteen in all.

17. MM: You mentioned that you had Mrs Casey doing the baking, and a vegetable woman, were there any female chefs?

18. DE: Mary Murphy was the larder chef in the Hibernian; I thought I had a photo of her (looking at photos of the time in the Hibernian). That would be a Christmas new years buffet we were doing, and that is stuff we made for Busáras cookery exhibition, that is a suckling pig and that’s a spiny lobster or crawfish.

19. MM: How many years did you spend in the Royal Hibernian?

20. DE: Around four, I left in 1961 and went to the Metropole.

21. MM: Before we leave the Royal Hibernian, you mentioned Roger Noblet was in the Russell, do you know anything about him?

22. DE: Seán Kelly who was head waiter in the Rotisserie, would be able to tell you Noblet’s history, he’s still in touch with him. I’ll tell you one thing though, a lot of them came over after the war because they had obviously worked for the Germans, so they had to get out. I don’t think they were collaborators just they had to work to survive. Pierre Rolland was exceptional as a chef. I
didn’t work with him on a daily basis, he was up in the Russell, but I did a thing in the RDS for the Skal for six hundred people and he was in charge of that. Ah no, I knew him very well, I knew his son as well, Henri.

23. **MM:** When you say exceptional, have you come across the like of Rolland since then?

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![Dave Edwards in Hibernian Kitchen with Roger Noblet and Catering Competition Pieces](image)

**Figure DE.1: Dave Edwards in Hibernian Kitchen with Roger Noblet and Catering Competition Pieces**

24. **DE:** Well there was a few of them, now, Noblet was quite good, Lucian Gerrard was the sauce cook there in the Hibernian, and he taught me, I was his head commis, he didn’t last long, and he was exceptional. See, one of the reasons they came and went to Ireland was that they only worked six months so they didn’t pay any taxes. You see it wasn’t pay as you earn back then. You see this fellow here (pointing to a photograph) Pierre St. Ettier, and the fellow beside him wasn’t a chef at all, you see you would get two of them coming over, one was a chef and the other was his pal. I got sacked from the Hibernian, for hitting a fellow, a little French Spanish guy who kicked me one day for no reason bar that we didn’t get on, so I caught a hold of him and gave him a hiding, and I got sacked, well they couldn’t sack me because the union, they weren’t for the foreigners anyway, but he wasn’t a chef, he was horrible little individual. He wasn’t that small (laugh).

25. **MM:** You had mentioned this to me on the phone that some of them used to come over with a pal who wasn’t a chef at all, just playing at being a chef?

26. **DE:** Yeah, its like the Polish guys today, one carpenter comes along with two guys and they go on a building site and the guy is covering up for the one who isn’t a carpenter, who’s carrying
nails for him, that is true, they weren’t chef, there is no doubt about that. No you had Andre Fernon down in Shannon, he was a good chef, he was Bill Ryan’s accomplice. Bill Ryan had left the Hibernian before I started. There was a big bust up, Willie Ryan was a very good chef and had been running the kitchen in the Hibernian, he was head chef and all of a sudden he wasn’t, they had brought in about ten French chefs. It was before my time but Matt Byrne would have been a commis there then and Besson brought these guys in thinking that they were going to change the hotel. This was after the war and of course chefs were running out of France. The first one was Lucian Adrian, Nicky Clusky will tell you more, if you check with him. I got Nicky into the Hibernian, he was in my class and was working in the Central Hotel.

27. But to make a long story short, they all disappeared, Willy Ryan left and went to the Metropole, and when he went to the Metropole and Michael Marley came down from the Grand Central in Belfast as head chef to the Metropole, and Willy Ryan then went to Shannon (note: with Brendan O’Regan).

28. MM: I believe he was a great character and a very good chef?

29. DE: He was a very good showman, he was full of confidence, very good looking, very striking appearance, a very nice man, but then André Fernon was his double down there in Shannon.

30. MM: When you were in the Hibernian, you went to Paris as a prizewinner of the Besson scheme, tell me about that?

31. DE: I went to Paris, to the big catering exhibition, we went to Versailles, we had a meal at Moet et Chandon in Eperney and saw the vineyards, how they made champagne, we stayed in a hotel in Montmartre. The head waiter in the Russell came with us, Nolan was his name; no I have it wrong; the waiter in the Royal Hibernian who ran the competition for Besson came with us. The first year I won it we went to Paris, the second year I won it we went to London to Hotelympia for a week, and the third year I won it we went to Austria for two weeks and went skiing.

32. MM: Was this a great carrot, did it inspire you to work hard try and learn as much as you can?

33. DE: When I look back I don’t think I was that brilliant a student, my training in Cathal Brugha Street helped me win the prize. If you look at the photograph, my uniform was spotless, I had my own knives, the only thing that was different was that I had a chef’s hat whereas here I had a small hat. I knew my theory, I knew hygiene from a to z from my two years in college, and any questions I was asked the answers were simple, and then we did an essay, and the first one I did was on Louis Pasteur, and the second year my essay was on Madam Currie, which I had done in college, and I could write it ad nausea. There was an interview and the head chef would continuously assess you as well.

34. MM: But it was a very generous prize, wasn’t it? Going to Paris, or going skiing; It would be a good prize nowadays without mentioning then?

35. DE: It was fantastic, and I made it better, because I stayed on in London for an extra week with the people I had lived with in London when working in Lyons. It was very good.

36. MM: Where did you go then? Were you out of your time at this stage?

37. DE: I was out of my time in the Hibernian, and I went to the Metropole as sauce cook but within three weeks I was thrown in as pastry cook in the Metropole and I trained a fellow called Tony MacShane.

38. MM: Was that because Fred Gygax had left?
DE: No, Gygax was in the Savoy, we had a fellow in the Metropole they didn’t want, because he was too dirty. Marley was the head chef and Matt Byrne was second chef. He had left the Hibernian and asked me to come to the Metropole, he was around fourteen years older than me but I got on very well with him. (note: Matt Byrne worked later for John O’Sullivan in Gallaghers in Middle Abbey Street, Blakes in Stillorgan and in Roly’s Bistro in Ballsbridge).

40. MM: What was Michael Marley like?

DE: Marley was extremely good in the larder, more than good, excellent. He was a wonderful disciplinarian, and extremely good at buffet work and marvellous at organisation. The reason I left the Hibernian was I didn’t want to become a pastry chef, Deschamps left me and to be pastry chef in the Hibernian at eighteen or nineteen was very good, but I saw my future elsewhere, I enjoy cooking, and when I went to the Metropole and they put me in the pastry again I said I didn’t want that so I trained Tommy MacShane in and then I moved to the sauce and I became second chef. In the Hibernian we learned the finer art of cookery, we had the finer art of cookery in the Georgian Room in the Metropole, you had the everyday cooking in the cafes on the first and second floors, doing thousands a day, and in the ballroom you had the function style of catering for six hundred at a time. So in a way you had three or four different systems of cookery, because you had afternoon tea, the first floor went all day long from 10am, the second floor would break in the afternoon, and the Georgian Room opened for lunch and dinner, and it was very high class, it would be on equal footing with the Hibernian but without the aura. That said, it had a head waiter in Noel Mc Devitt who was on equal footing with any head waiter anywhere, he was excellent, he had a wonderful charisma, appearance, and we did things in the Metropole that I had never done before or since.

42. MM: Like what?

DE: Well we would get a four pound sea trout and bake it and grill it whole to be filleted out in the room. And an awful lot of Jews used to go there, so you would be called down to cook at that table, make omelettes at the table, break the eggs in front of them. I often did Lobster Americaine with raw lobster, the only other place I did that was in Switzerland. I often opened two dozen oysters in front of customers at the table. You had a modern high class restaurant, rather than the Lafayette room, or the room in the Hibernian ‘Maxim’s’ which tried to be old style. The Hibernian had an aura of Englishness about it but didn’t have customers. The Russell was probably the same. People were intimidated to go into them. It is the same with the Shelbourne. Not like today, people have money and are used to eating out, now you don’t have the standards, but you have the standard of hotel, and the money but not the standards of expertise (in the food and service).

44. MM: How many years did you stay in the Metropole?

DE: I stayed four year in the Metropole, I did pastry for six months, then sauce cook, larder cook, then second chef, then Matt Byrne was out sick for a long time and I effectively was running the place, without getting the kudos. Marley had moved on with Margy to open up all the Motorway cafés in England for Ranks. He was still affiliated with the business, it was a complex thing because we were working for Irish Cinemas and they were taken over by Rank’s. Louis Elinmann owned the (Theatre) Royal, the Regal, the Savoy, the Savoy in Limerick. The Elinmanns were involved in all that. Now J. Arthur Rank took them over and they were the umbrella, and they bought the South County Hotel in Stillorgan from P.V. Doyle, and then they bought the Silver Springs Hotel in Cork and that is how it all fell. There was a guy in the Metropole with me, a French fellow, called Guy Retty, who went on the Silver Springs in Cork. So then I moved from the Metropole to the Clarence, but in the meantime there was a cinema strike and I was kept on during the strike – on a retainer because the place was closed – so I opened a restaurant for an English couple in Abbey Street called the Golden Nugget, I got a chef, Luke O’Reilly for them, then I went out to Ross’s Hotel in Dun Laoghaire as head chef for a few weeks, that’s gone now,
Ross’s. I left the Metropole because a job came up in the Clarence, which then out that it was touch and go whether it would stay open or not.

46. MM: Did you take over from Arthur Carmody?

47. DE: He was still there with me, he stepped down, he was about fifty six or so, there was Arthur Carmody, Michael Finnegan, Charlie Nolan, they were the three main chefs in it, but they were doing no business.

48. MM: How come the Clarence wasn’t doing the business?

49. DE: A lot of the problems that the Clarence and Wynne’s had was due to the 12½% service charge, because Richard Murphy who owned it was not in favour of the service charge and he opposed the strike in 1951 and from that everything went haywire, they lost a huge amount of their custom during the strike. A lot of the police charges during the strike happened on Abbey Street across from Wynne’s. But the Clarence wasn’t doing the business, because they weren’t particularly good at what they were doing in the kitchen. Now Arthur Carmody was a wonderful person, he actually lived around the corner from me in Cabra West, and Michael Finnegan was an amazing individual in lots of ways as a cook, he was a kitchen porter and made his way up to become a chef, his son became head chef in Wynne’s afterwards. But Arthur Carmody, they had a style of cooking which was totally alien to what I would be used to. They would be doing roast
beef, three veg and potatoes, soup and maybe apple pie and custard. And that was fine, they were the most wonderful carvers, they were the most wonderful guys at carving meat you have ever seen in your life, but the business dropped to nothing, and the customers who were there when I went there were the religious scenario: the priests and nuns, the stock exchange people, and a nucleus of people who didn’t want to be disturbed, like a club. And they didn’t move with the times, and they were dictating what was on the menu. For instance, when I went there as head chef, the first thing that met me was the head waiter Willy James, who was an extremely nice man, I must say, an excellent person with marvellous standards about him, a gentlemen in more ways than one, but his father was manager in Wynne’s before there, you see the Royal Exchange, Wynne’s and the Clarence were all the same. But for instance I was told that you must have boiled potatoes in their jackets every day for the boys. Now the boys were five stock exchange people, and literally they were the only five people in the restaurant, and on a Thursday you had tripe and cow heel. So we had to change, it was a question of who would close down first, I didn’t know this at the time, I though I would be without a job, I didn’t know which would close down first, the Clarence or the Dolphin.

Figure DE.3: Buffet Presentation in Clarence Hotel (Fish) c.1965

50. MM: The Dolphin was just across the road from the Clarence on Essex Street?

51. DE: The Clarence has a right of way going from the front door to the side door, that right of way exists today, I don’t know if Bono knows it or not, but that door is not meant to be closed until a certain time. And if you stand at the side door on Essex Street and you look across, there is
a thing called Dolphin Lane or Essex Lane and it goes up to the Olympia, and that is a right of way from the Quays, and the side door should not be closed before 7pm, that was on the deeds.

52. But anyway, we started off, we opened up the grill bar in the Clarence, and step by step, instead of doing ten a day we were doing two and three hundred lunches a day and two or three hundred dinners at night, and we were doing weddings, it was incredible.

53. **MM:** Did the Dolphin shut down then?

54. **DE:** The Dolphin closed and sold, Eamon Andrews and Opperman bought it and turned it into a cowboy bar but it didn’t work. All the clients from the Dolphin came to the Clarence, with the result that the Clarence started moving upwards, so I stayed there ten years. I was there from 1963 to 1973 to go to the Pat Quinn Club.

55. **MM:** The Pat Quinn club had been the Opperman club up in Kiltiernan?

56. **DE:** The Pat Quinn club was a family club, anyone could join it. He went from Opperman’s being an exclusive club, Pat Quinn opened it to anybody, and that lasted for less than a year. It was a great idea, but the petrol crises in the Middle East at the time closed it down, they were queuing to get petrol, they couldn’t get to the club.

57. **MM:** What was the standard there, was it aimed at being higher than the Clarence?

58. **DE:** Well there was a two tier system, you had a high class restaurant which had no business unless on a Friday or Saturday night, and you had a cafeteria which would be like the Metropole, which would be food all day but had no business accept at the weekends, and then we had a ballroom which had a hot and cold buffet every night for three or four hundred people. They had a show on and that is where they did their business, but unfortunately the thing didn’t last, so that was that.

59. **MM:** So where did you go from there?

60. **DE:** I was out of work (laugh) for two weeks, there wasn’t many jobs, it wasn’t a particularly happy stage of my life. I had a family, a boy and a girl at home, I had two choices, I was on my second house, I wasn’t a fool. I moved from Santry to Glasnevin to be close to the Clarence, then I moved from the Clarence to Kiltiernan (laugh) which is a contradiction in terms. I had a choice of a few jobs, Campbell Catering head hunted me and I turned it down because they were doing mostly sandwiches at the time and a bit of outdoor catering but it didn’t suit me, now I’m on great terms with Patrick Campbell since. So I went to work in the St. Laurence Hotel in Howth which was owned by a guy from Longford called McGee who was an English builder. He had bought it for £80,000 at the time. He had an English guy in there as general manager called Costello, who didn’t want customers at all, he wanted his yacht in the bay and the easy life. He used to say Dave ‘we don’t want the Saturday night, Sunday evening thing with people everywhere, the prices are too cheap’ …and ‘we don’t want high teas’. But high teas were the only tea you were going to do in Howth on a Sunday, but he didn’t want a hundred people queuing up at his restaurant, so we were doing no business at all.

61. So I was going to Canada, I had answered a job in the Canadian National, they had advertised, a guy came over and interviewed me and offered me a job as head chef opening a new hotel in St Johns in Falmouth there, and they wanted me to sign a contract with this guy in the St. Laurence but I wouldn’t, I knew I was going, anyway how could you work for a guy like that, I was on my own in the kitchen, working seven days a week with just one commis. It was very difficult.

62. **MM:** Was it from there you went into Jury’s?
63. **DE:** Yes, I was going to Canada and Lee Kidney got word of it, you see I had been interviewed for Willy Widmer’s job in old Jury’s in 1970 or so when Willy left to go up to the Boyne Valley, but for some reason I didn’t get it, I think the wanted me but something happened. The union had objected strongly to a foreigner, now I had nothing to do with the union, don’t get me wrong, I was in the Panel of Chefs, and I applied for the job, and I had the job, but I didn’t get the job because Opperman wanted a foreigner and they brought in a guy called (Christian) Childs and he only lasted six months, he was a disaster. So anyhow, I wasn’t going to stay in the Clarence, and I went to the Pat Quinn Club, but then I was eight weeks away from going to Canada when Jury’ heard I was going and they asked me to go there for an interview. They interviewed me not for head chef but for food and beverage manager. And for some reason, I didn’t get that, Peter Malone, who had worked with me in the Pat Quinn Club was now front office manager in Jury’s, and he got it but they made me executive chef.

64. You see Jury’s was having problems, the staff were running Jury’s not the management, and they needed somebody there, and they got me for their sins (laugh). Michel Treyvaud was head chef, he had worked with Willy Widmer in Jury’s and then the Moira, he knew Willy Widmer and they were friendly, but Willy Widmer was Swiss German and Michel was Swiss French. They didn’t come over together, Michel had worked up in St. Andrews in Gleneagles. He was a very good chef, an excellent chef, nobody can take that away from him.

65. **MM:** So Treyvaud was head chef, who else was there at the time? Who was sous chef?

66. **DE:** There was a few of them (laugh), There was a fellow called Brendan O’Neill who ended up in Vincent’s Hospital, then there was Seamus Kirwan, they were the main protagonists, then there was a butcher called Johnny Martin, that was the whole crew of them (pointing to a photograph of Jury’s chefs) John Linnane should have one of them, he was in it, so was John Clancy.

67. **MM:** Was Jim Bowe still there at this stage?

68. **DE:** No Jim Bowe was gone by this stage, that (photo) was taken when Peter Malone was leaving as Food and Beverage manager and going to Cork, I took over his job.

69. **MM:** So you were brought in to knock the kitchen into shape?

70. **DE:** They wouldn’t admit to that (laugh) I was brought in because…. Turn that machine off (discussion off tape about real reason Dave was brought in)

71. **MM:** So what happened really is that the place needed cleaning up?

72. **DE:** What happened really was when Jury’s bought the place over they inherited Intercontinental staff, and they tried to bring their own staff over from Jury’s. Joe Coyne only lasted a few days in Jury’s and strangely enough took over my old position as head chef in the Clarence, its amazing. It was a year later when I went to Jury’s, and all this silliness was going on. I set up a training scheme, much like the one that was in the Hibernian, similar not the same, I tried to do things for the commis chefs, I gave them a certificate when they finished their time. I’m sure lots of them are still around, lots of the lads would have one, Tony Campbell, and Jimmy Rock, they were all commis of mine, and I would give them something when they finished their time at least they got something to say they had spent five years training in Jury’s signed by the executive chef and the manager, nicely done, we tried to elevate the standards and give them some self confidence. So that is all I did, plus the fact that I improved the wage structure; the first thing I did when we got going and got some semblance of order into the place and got some people on my side, everyone was on a different wage structure which led to more problems, I instigated a three tier wage structure which would last for two years and then go onto a two tier structure. You had the A chef and the B chef, but the senior chefs would have been John Linnane, Johnny Martin, Aidan Martin, Joe Erraught if he was still there; they would be the top men in the top positions.
and the next ones would be the grill chefs and the chef de partie’s. The thing was that some of them were getting a pretty big rise and some were getting a small rise, the problem man was getting a small rise. It caused a lot of problems for him but the mainstay of the staff were happy, and within two years the three structures became two, what happened after I left, I don’t know. But then I formulated agreements in every aspect of the employment, with barmen, with waiters etc.

73. MM: But how long were you executive chef before you became food and beverage manager?

74. DE: Six years as executive chef and then I did four years as food and beverage manager.

75. MM: So you had sorted the kitchen out and set things in place, so when you became food and beverage manager you were able to look at the bars then and try and make similar structures there?

76. DE: Well, I did, and I think I was highly respected, but one never knows (laugh). Everything was going very well until they instigated the (redundancies) in the Burlington. You see the killing of Mountbatten caused a big problem, because it destroyed the tourist industry for two years, it collapsed. With the result that P.V. Doyle instigated a redundancy programme in the Burlington. And Jury’s hadn’t have a need for a redundancy programme, but of course they jumped on the band wagon. The senior management in Jury’s hadn’t got the intelligence, they rode the crest but couldn’t look after the troughs. Peter Malone was excellent with his public relations and marketing and he wasn’t a marketing manager. But the problem was that the redundancy scheme they brought in destroyed the morale of the staff that were there; it broke the good will that was built up for the previous years. And I got blamed for it because I had to instigate it, and that’s putting it in a nutshell.

77. MM: Tell me about the standard of food when you were there? You had the Embassy Room and the Kish?

78. DE: You had a huge dimension across the board, which was not a problem for me because I had come from the Metropole and the Hibernian. The College first had given me the ground work, I must never forget that, the grounding I got here stood by me, there is no doubt about that, they had a very good standard of teaching at the time, they were wonderful. I went into the Hibernian and that was a big part of my life, the experience I got in England helped me, but the eye opener was the Metropole, was the vast array of cooking facilities and cooking styles, numbers from a to z and back down again, and going down to the St. Laurence and there I was again now washing pots again when I had been in charge of a big kitchen, but I had to do it and I did it. I came to Jury’s and I got through Jury’s and got over it, and that is a part of my life I think was very successful apart from the redundancy. Like John Linnane left, got his redundancy packet, John Linnane was wonderful, a marvellous pastry chef, he probably never realised how good he was until he came here (note: John started teaching in the College of Catering) but the rest is history. But the standard of food, it had everything, the coffee dock was twenty four hours a day, you had fine dining in the Embassy and in the Kish, the reason we opened the Kish was we went to Paris with Bord Fáilte to look at restaurants. They were going to get a French guy to come over and put his name to the Kish, much like they did recently with Gordon Ramsay, which annoyed me immensely, because we ate in his restaurant in Paris. But when I started in Jury’s I kept a diary and from doing maybe thirty lunches a day, we went up to around two hundred lunches a day, so we kept a note of our sales, like how many roast beef we sold, I would do it one day and Michel would do it the next day. We saw from this that there was an increase coming in the sale of fish with the prawns, lobster, sole, turbot, brill whatever. I was able to prove to them that this was where the future lay so we opened up the Kish seafood restaurant. I was head man and they thought I was god, if you like, because things had gone so well, but I said that I wouldn’t work here if the French fellow put his name to it.

79. MM: Do you remember the name of the French chef that was going to come?
80. **DE:** I can’t remember his name, three of us went over and ate in his restaurant in Paris. It was nothing exceptional, we had done it all in the Hibernian, now it was very good, but in my opinion you cannot draw a comparison between dining out in Ireland and dining out in France. You cannot draw a comparison between the people because the French people eat differently than Irish people. We, the Irish people, go out for a meal and we want a meal as soon as possible. In France you go out for a meal, you get the menu, you sit down, they have a chat, open a bottle of wine, then mince the bread. It could be an hour and a half before the main course arrives but they wouldn’t be worried because they are in conversation, their evening is dining, their meal will come and they will enjoy the meal, they are not going to turn the table twice. Our mentality is different, while we may have the money, we may have the places, we certainly don’t have the staff regardless of what you read in the paper, we will never have the dining out idiom, the dining out history that they have in France and Belgium.

81. **MM:** It is a different culture?

82. **DE:** Yes, and if you understand that, which you do obviously, it is very hard to get that across to newspapers or anybody else, it is that simple. The two don’t mix and it is not that we are not good, it is not that we don’t know, because I know as much as anybody in this country about food. It is because of our culture, our history, our way of living doesn’t allay itself to that style.

83. **MM:** How did you become involved in the Panel of Chefs?

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**Figure DE.4:** Dave with Female commis after winning Award
84. **DE:** It came about from the first catering exhibition in *Busáras*. That came across because Kevin Barry and I were... Ken Besson was very much involved in that whole catering exhibition, and he was perturbed that the Hibernian and the Russell were not getting fair representation in this whole exhibition, because he had put a lot of work into it with Michael Mullen. Remember Michael Mullen had a tremendous impact on the history of catering in the city, he has not had the accolades he deserves because he did an awful lot for the hotel workers. No the whole thing is changed around because the union is not the force it was then, but that is not his fault, at the time he did a lot for the workers.

85. **MM:** But you are too young to remember the hotel strike, some people feel Michael Mullen used the strike to make a point? Places like the Gresham and Jammet’s settled quickly and the other places could have settled?

86. **DE:** I remember it but was not involved in it. Whatever their motives were or weren’t, I don’t know. Some people may not a great regard for Michael Mullen, and I am not of the persuasion that I would be 100% unionistic, but I recognise that the union played a part not only in the hotel industry but in the history of Dublin, which is intertwined with the Transport Union since the time of Jim Larkin, people have died, James Connolly died.

**Discussion on Irish history.**

87. **MM:** We started off talking about the catering exhibition in *Busáras*.

88. **DE:** The programme of the 1958 exhibition is in the Panel of Chefs Jubilee Stockpot booklet. There were two reasons I got involved in the Panel of Chefs; firstly Matt Byrne was involved with it, and number two, the Hibernian wasn’t represented in the demonstrations in Busáras, and Kevin Barry and myself were given a slot and that is how we became involved in it. During the demonstrations, all the teachers came down to see me, their star pupil (laugh), in Áras Mhic Diarmada, which is the true name of Busáras.
Discussion on the architecture of Busáras

89. MM: So what was your involvement after the exhibition?

90. DE: Well after that I was co-opted onto it and I became a member, attended all the meetings etc. but then it collapsed, then a catering exhibition came along and Michael Mullen called me up and asked me to get involved but I couldn’t at that time, I was in the Clarence and I was too busy, but he kept in touch and when I was in Jury’s he asked me to go to a dinner with Knorr Caterplan, Angus (inaudible) who was in charge of Knorr, in the Burlington.

91. MM: Was Noel Cullen involved in the re-forming of the Panel of Chefs?

92. DE: He was, and he may even have been behind it because he came through the union. (pointing to a photograph) That’s Jury’s, that’s myself with Michel Treyvaud, the head chef in Jury’s Cork, and a German fellow who opened a guesthouse down in Cork. So they asked me to take over the Panel and I re-organised it with my organisational skills (laugh) and I was elected for two years unopposed and then Noel Cullen took over, and then Eugene McGovern took over. Michael Ganly was president.

93. MM: When you left Jury’s, what was your next step, was it Killakee?

94. DE: I left Jury’s after the redundancy fiasco, and I went to work for John O’Sullivan for a few months in Blakes, I knew John for a while, he had wanted me to run Gallagher’s on O’Connell Street for him, and Matt Byrne was working in Dinty Moore’s for him. There was another fellow
was with John O’Sullivan at the time, Louis McCarthy, they had Flanagan’s, Gallagher’s, McArthur’s, and Dinty Moore’s. John Mulcahy got involved later. I came up here teaching (in Cathal Brugha Street) and then I got a job to open up the Mater Private Hospital. I got the job, and that was a huge problem because that was transferring the staff from the old Mater to the new staff. But what they did wrong is that they not only transferred the staff, they transferred the baggage to the new place, they created the old problems in a new environment instead of making a clean break. This was around 1984 or so and I had bought Killakee House and I wanted to run the two of them but that didn’t work out, so I left

95. **MM:** Was it a Swiss fellow had Killakee before you?

96. **DE:** Yes, a fellow called Joseph Frei, he was there for eight or then years, it had been derelict before that. I became ill, and I bought it, but I could have bought other places, one could say it was a mistake, but the only mistake was that it was too difficult, it was very successful, but it took too much out of me. I’ve put on four stone since I gave it up, not because I was eating too much but because I had been running around and doing everything. Retrospect is a wonderful thing, if I was to do it again, I would open for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday and Sunday Lunch and I would concentrate on outdoor catering and I would build it up from that. But it is easy in retrospect.

97. **MM:** How many would you do there?
98. DE: Say a hundred and seventy would be the average Friday or Saturday night, but we did weddings as well, a hundred and twenty Sunday lunch. Some nights you couldn’t cope, nights you had no staff and were inundated with customers.

99. MM: And probably nights you were inundated with staff and no customers? (laugh)

100. DE: (laugh) Yes, it is many the night I actually took the order, cooked the meal and then served it, but that was it, that was history.

101. MM: Was there any exceptional chefs who worked with you up there?

102. DE: No, I was the exceptional chef (laugh). I trained a few people myself who are still knocking around. I had a few people work with me up there all right, Matt Dowling from CERT worked with me, and I worked with CERT for a while. When the interest rates went haywire in 1987, I got a fright, business had gone down, I thought I might go bankrupt, so I went to work in CERT for six months. I was leaving Killakee at seven in the morning and returning at seven in the evening having gotten through traffic and picked up some food for the evening and then I would run the restaurant until two in the morning. Crazy stuff, I did that for six months, crazy stuff. I could have gone into CERT full time, because I had the teaching ability, but it was very enjoyable teaching and training commis chefs, not enjoyable teaching people going into industrial catering who did not seem to have the interest in the learning or the passion for it, no I couldn’t do it.

103. MM: So you saw a difference between the people coming to Cathal Brugha Street who wanted to be chefs, and those going to CERT who had been unemployed?

104. DE: It was very different, I was in Amiens Street, I was offered a position but I had a business to run. Then it became very difficult to get staff, it changed and the Chinese came in, the Poles and that, and that stage I was run off my feet. I finished up in 2001, mainly because my wife was unwell. My son was there with us, but he said to me that you might want to work all the hours god gave you but I don’t, he was probably right (laugh).

105. Prologue: Vincent Dowling went to work in the Savoy in London as sauce cook, when he left Jammet’s, he was very highly regarded. I met him over there when I was doing a tour of London hotels during another time in my life. I have a photograph of Vincent Dowling, Matt Byrne, Michael Marley, Bill Marshall, Michael Ganly, Jimmy Flahive, Myself, and Franky Farren.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Willy Widmer in Clontarf (14/12/2007)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Willy Widmer (WW)

1. MM: Where and when were you born?

2. WW: I was born in Switzerland on the 14 November 1930 and grew up on a farm half-way up the mountain and had four brothers and three sisters and in those days, the eldest son takes over the farm and the others are pushed out (laugh). So I did an apprenticeship as a confisseur for two and half years and when I finished that.

3. MM: Where did you do that? Did you do it in one of the cities?

4. WW: In Switzerland, in a town about ten or fifteen miles away from our home, and when I finished that, I had always wanted to become a chef, so I did an apprenticeship as a chef in the French speaking part, and when I finished that I always wanted to work in the big hotels. Money was no objective, I only wanted to have a certificate that I have worked in the big hotels, you know. So I went from Lausanne to St. Moritz, and Lucerne and everywhere in Switzerland.

5. MM: How long was your apprenticeship?

6. WW: The first one was three year, and the second one was two years. I started when I was sixteen in 1946 when the war was just over and I worked around in Switzerland and I met in the Grand Hotel National in Lucerne where they have a connection with the Ritz. Ritz, he was a Swiss boy you know (laugh), who became famous in the hotel business, you know, and the head chef of the Ritz Hotel in Paris, he was on holidays in Switzerland in the National, and I was talking with him and he said ‘would you like to go to Paris?’, and I said ‘I would love to go to Paris’ (laughing). So I went to Paris for a year and then back into Switzerland, then in 1954, I went to London, to the Kensington Palace Hotel, they had a Swiss chef there, during those times they mostly had a French or a Swiss head chef, there was no such thing as a English head chef in a London hotel (laugh) it doesn’t matter if it was from the Dorchester to the Kensington Palace, they all had Swiss head chefs. Then I went back into Switzerland, and in 1958 I was employed by the Swiss government for the World Exhibition in Brussels in the Swiss Pavilion.

7. MM: I’m just going to bring you back to Paris for a minute, how long did you stay in Paris, and did you see a different standard of food in Paris to what you had seen in Switzerland?

8. WW: I stayed a year in Paris and no, it was the French haute cuisine, in any big hotel on the continent it was the French cuisine, so naturally maybe they had different kind of product which you wouldn’t have in another country but the standards and the cooking methods were the same.

9. MM: It was still silver service, the influence of Fernand Point hadn’t come yet?

10. WW: Oh yes, there was no such thing as a meal served on a plate and brought to the customer (laugh), it was all silver service, or at lunchtime then, quite a lot at the voiture the carvery, and that kind of thing. So then I went to the world Exhibition in Brussels in 1958 and then…

11. MM: So tell us about the World Exhibition, how did that work, did each country have their own Pavilion? What was your role in that, was there a Swiss restaurant showcasing Swiss food?

12. WW: Yes, that’s right. The whole Pavilion was laid out, we had a little lake in between or a pool, and then we had two different kinds of restaurants, one and international kind of cuisine, and the other a typical Swiss cuisine where they would have served cheese fondue and the Exhibition was running from April to October, you know. That was a busy time, (laugh) unbelievable, but
very interesting. On our days off we would have gone off into another country’s restaurant and we would introduce ourselves and the head chef would come out and would look after us (laugh). And then I was employed by Hilton Hotels to open up the Berlin Hilton Hotel, and I stayed there for two years and I met my wife in Berlin.

Figure WW.1: Willy Widmer, Catering Consultant Brochure

13. MM: Where is your wife from?

14. WW: From Berlin, so after Berlin, I did my masters degree in Switzerland and I was the youngest in Switzerland at that time, you know (laugh).

15. MM: Just the education system in Switzerland at that time, when you did your first apprenticeship, you did a three year apprenticeship in patisserie or confectionary, and that was in a small town, was it?

16. WW: Yes, in a town with at population of 25,000.

17. MM: And did you do college as well?

18. WW: Oh, yeah, there was a contract, in Switzerland, I presume it is still the same, there was a contract made between the place you do your apprenticeship, your parents and the state. Those three parties make a contract and then you start, and every week you have to go to school one afternoon where you get theoretical teaching, I think it is the same here, and in between, every year, an expert who would come along to your place to see how you are doing, and if they feel that the place you were in was not doing enough for you, they would be reprimanded. And if you were to fail the final exam, they would go back again to see what went wrong. And if they feel that place is not good enough, they would not be allowed to have apprentices any more. It is the same here in Ireland, when you think that, you take a fellow who works in Jury’s Hotel and does his
apprenticeship, and beside him you have another guy who works in McDonald’s, after two and a half or three years they are both called chefs (laughter).

Figure WW.2: Willy Widmer, Catering Consultant Brochure Inside

19. MM: But there was a difference then after the pâtisserie apprenticeship, the second apprenticeship as a chef was two years, is that because you had done a previous one?

20. WW: It was two and half years, I got a half year off because I had done the first one. That training I did in the French speaking part in (Inaudible) not too far from the lake of Geneva, up in the mountain, it was a holiday resort, you know.

21. MM: And it was a five star hotel? Who was your chef?

22. WW: Yes, five star, the chef was Kunslig, he was Swiss but a lot of French came over too, and during that time I had to go to school in Montreux, and when I finished up I worked in the Beau Rivage Palace in Lausanne, that is some place, you know (laugh). We had customers like the Aga Khan, and they would come along with twenty or thirty Rolls Royce, you know (laugh), and take up a whole floor. That was only in summer time. Then in the winter time I was in St. Moritz in the Suvretta House, that is a five star hotel, and they had a French chef, you know, Gaylord, and he was in Yalta as head chef during the conference between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, you know, during the war. (note: the Yalta Conference took place in the Black Sea resort on the 4th February 1945)

23. MM: He was following a tradition the Carême had followed before.

24. WW: He was serious French chef, you know. From there I went to places all around, every year, maybe sometimes two seasons in one place, one in another place if you felt you didn’t like it you went somewhere else, so I did that for about six or eight years. Obviously, you have to be

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single to do that, you know (laughter). And in St. Moritz in the Suvretta House we would have had a holiday maker like Gregory Peck, the film star, King Farouk of Egypt, and he would be sitting there at a table with four or five women and his wife would be sitting at another table (laugh), and I was working up there during in lunchtime, always on the voiture, I was first commis rotisseur, so I was sent out with my roast trolley, carving the meat for King Farouk (laugh), and he never came for lunch before 2.30pm and that was the time we should have been up on the ski slope (laugh), so we didn’t like the guy, you know, but those type of hotels are interesting, you know, and the brigade we would have had at that time would have been twenty five or thirty chefs for a hotel with two hundred and fifty bedrooms. If you were to go back to that sort of hotel today they would have a dozen chefs, maximum (laugh). Everything was done by hand at that time, there was no such thing as pre-prepared, everything had to be done from scratch, but it was interesting.

25. **MM:** So when you went later on to do your masters, what did that involve?

26. **WW:** Well, first of all, you need certain qualifications, and you have to submit that to the board and then they decide yes we let him do the masters degree or not. You could not just go there (laugh). Then you have to do a three week course previous to that and then they would call you back, and then for a week, you literally had exams for a whole week, technical, all sort of things, practical, history of cooking, lots of things, it was quite tough going. And I, for example, when it came to certain areas, where a guy who would have worked in Switzerland, it would have been easier on him, you know, but I was abroad a lot, but I managed, it was no problem.

27. **MM:** And how was it easier on a guy who had worked in Switzerland, was it very focused on Swiss food?

28. **WW:** No, I mean a lot of people say there is no such thing as Swiss food. We are bordered by Italy, France, Germany, so we have an influence of all those things and through our tourism we would have more an international type of cuisine. OK, there are certain Swiss dishes like cheese fondue and these kind of things but that is why going back to the last World War or the first one for that matter, Switzerland was never involved in any war, we were only surrounded by the war, so more or less Switzerland was intact following the war where other countries hadn’t even enough food to feed their people. We were intact and after the war, a Swiss head chef, if he wanted to go anywhere in the world, there were places available, you know. You could go to the Far East or America if you wished.

29. **MM:** There was so many Swiss chefs, tourism must have been the main industries in Switzerland having sun in summer and snow in winter and being so picturesque. The Swiss government must have been very focused on creating culinary staff?

30. **WW:** Yes, it is a big industry, you know, you take for example the big hotel chains, Hilton Hotels or the Intercontinental Hotels, their managers would have been mostly Swiss trained individuals. Maybe they went to the hotel school in Lucerne which was the hotel school. And then naturally if they became hotel manager of a Hilton Hotel they would naturally want a Swiss head chef. There was a time in Hilton Hotels when seventy percent of the head chefs were Swiss. You could go to Istanbul, Amsterdam or Berlin and it would all be Swiss. I went to Berlin Hilton Hotel and they offered me jobs in Cairo, they offered me jobs in Montreal, and I could have gone anywhere, and I probably would have gone had I not met my wife there (laugh).

31. **MM:** You met your wife in Berlin, so how did you end up coming to Dublin? Was Dublin your next step after Berlin?

32. **WW:** No, after Berlin I went to the south of Germany on the lake of Constance, I was employed as a head chef in a beautiful lakeside hotel, only in the summer. And then in winter I went back to Switzerland, in and out, you know.
33. **MM:** Now, did that work well for you from a tax purpose, since in some places if you work only six months one place you don’t pay tax? There was a tradition of French chefs coming to Dublin for half the year and working in the Bahamas for the other half.

34. **WW:** Sometimes it worked, but not always. In Germany during that period, they would have told you that you earn so much into your hand and the hotel then would have to look after your taxes. They probably didn’t care about your social welfare (laugh). But you got so much into your hand. In Switzerland, it was different, as soon as you got a place in Switzerland, you got to register yourself in the town hall. Even a Swiss moving from one canton into another, you had to tell them you were leaving, and in the new place, even if it is only ten miles away, you need to register again because they have local taxes and you have to pay the taxes. Then the time came and we had two children, and I said ‘what am I going to do now when they want to go to school, I can’t just keep moving around’, you know, and I always wanted to go back to Hilton Hotels, they always were coming back to me and offering me jobs (laugh) but if you work in a Hilton Hotel, it doesn’t matter if it is in Egypt or in Berlin or in Canada, you have to speak English. OK, when I was in London I didn’t pick up all that much, but I felt that I should have better English for when it comes to meetings, you know all this sort of things in a hotel, if you don’t speak English, you can’t follow. So I saw in a Swiss chefs paper and add from Jury’s Hotel and they were looking for an executive chef, and I said to my wife ‘maybe it is something we could try’, so I applied for the job, and because at that time the managing director, his name was Willy Opperman, and his brother was Johnny Opperman who had the restaurant in Malahide (Johnny’s), and before that he was catering manger in Aer Lingus.

35. **MM:** That’s right, I have interviewed Johnny.

36. **WW:** He comes here quite often, we stayed friends but they were originally Swiss and came as head chef to the Gresham Hotel years ago. Maybe Willy thought that a Swiss head chef would be good for the image of the hotel (laugh), so I applied for it and he came out to Munich and met me for an interview. And I took the barman of the hotel out with me as an interpreter (laugh), and I wanted to know what type of hotel it was and what kind of salary and that, but he didn’t make a decision there and then, he had another interview to do in Geneva, so he flew to Geneva. But a few weeks later they contacted me and offered us two air tickets to come over to Dublin to stay with them for a few days and have a look around, and I thought that was something (laugh). You would have paid easily four or five hundred pounds at the time for a return flight (laugh).

37. **MM:** That was before Ryanair (laugh).

38. **WW:** (laugh) Serious money, you know, so we came over, they collected us at the airport, they put us up in the hotel, and they showed us around, and the manager of Jury’s Hotel at that time was Bobby Kerr. This was October 1964, and we went around Dublin and the weather was not great, a bit drab, and I said to my wife, you know, ‘I don’t think that is the place for me’. You see Jury’s Hotel at that time was just extended and they had changed from a small hotel to a big hotel and they had a big ballroom and they had no head chef really, they were messing around and there were managers in the kitchen constantly, black suits moving around in the kitchen, completely disorganised. I said ‘I don’t think that’s the place for me’, and then Bobby Kerr invited us for dinner in the Copper Grill and we were sitting there and we were having some wine and he had a pint of milk (laugh), I couldn’t believe it, you know he was a pioneer, I didn’t know what a pioneer was but I thought ‘jesus, I can’t believe this’ (laugh). And I think after two or three days they felt that I wasn’t that interested so they organised a party in the Moira Hotel which was part of the Jury’s. They invited all the Swiss who they could gather for a party, about forty or fifty people at this party and drinks flying, you know. And I met the head chef from the Intercontinental Hotel, which is the Jury’s Hotel now.

39. **MM:** Was that Freddy Goldinger?
40. **WW:** Yes Freddy, and I was introduced to him and Freddy came from only four or five miles from my home in Switzerland (laugh). He came through the Intercontinental Hotel in Puerto Rico, (note: Freddy went to the Intercontinental in Jakarta after Dublin) he was some guy, you know, and he says 'ah jesus, it is great here', you know. Would you believe it, he had race horses here in Dublin, he went to every race and he asked me to come along with him. Now I didn’t know much about race horses, but he was a mad guy, you know.

41. **MM:** Who else did you meet at that party, do you remember, did you meet the Guigax’s, what other Swiss did you meet? There had been a guy Hesse in the Red Bank but he may have been gone by that stage.

42. **WW:** Guigax, yes, but there weren’t that many around. So he said ‘jesus, it is great here, come over’, so that helped me make my decision to come over so I said to my wife to stay back home and I go over myself for six months or so to see how it works out, and that is what we did, so we moved our furniture and all that.

43. **MM:** So when you came to Jury’s first it was fairly disorganised and that, who did have working with you, you were executive chef, did you have a head chef or did you bring people in?

44. **WW:** Well, Joe Collins, I made him assistant chef, and our chef de partie, one was Bill Kavanagh, and I had a fellow from Le Coq Hardi, John Howard, he was sauce chef, and there was some older guys there, but at that stage we had about twenty five or thirty chefs there because we did an awful lot of functions there. I started organising the whole thing, ok, my first couple of weeks I just looked around to see how it ran, and my English wasn’t too good anyway. My first order for the chefs was put up on a blackboard to explain to them what I expect from everybody. Before that all the managers they used to just walk into the kitchen, into the larder, into the pastry shop looking around in black suits, so I said that will have to stop. So I told Willie Opperman, that from that day on, I don’t want to see any manager coming into the kitchen unless they come to me first. They were a bit shocked, but the chefs they respected me for that, you know. I was here around two months or three and my son was born in Germany, would you believe it I left my pregnant wife back (laugh), so I went over for a few days, and during that time the unions were very strong, you know, and when I came back, I felt something wasn’t right. I find out that they had meetings in the union and they wanted to squeeze me out. There was particularly one, I don’t want to mention his name, but he was the representatives of the chefs in the union so we just carried on. Then 1965 came along, I had been there since November 1964, and in 1965 there was a catering exhibition in the Mansion House organised by the union. I decided that we are going into that exhibition months and months before and I picked out the chefs that I felt would be capable of doing something and one of them was a very young, he was only sixteen or seventeen at that stage, that was Eugene Mc Govern, he was a young chef in the larder. We had about half a dozen of them or six or eight and I said ‘now I want you to do that, and you to do that’ and we started practicing, and it went on for weeks and weeks until I was satisfied that it was right, and we entered the exhibition and took about forty percent of al the medals (laughter). That was the turning point, when suddenly Micky Mullen from the union, naturally he was in the newspapers all the time, and Micky Mullen came along, the hotel organised a reception and that was the first time I met Micky Mullen, and he was really proud, he thought this was great (laugh) and the chefs thought this was great, that was the turning point. After that there was absolutely no problem. The chefs, they would have done anything for me, they would have worked day and night, you know, they were so bloody proud (laugh).

45. **MM:** Do you remember any of the other people doing the competition for you?

46. **WW:** Freddy Goldinger did it but I beat him (laugh).

47. **MM:** That must have been about the first year of the Intercontinental because I think Freddy stayed only around a year or so?
48. **WW:** He was there a year or two, I think it opened in 1963 or thereabouts.

49. **MM:** Was Bill Kavanagh with you after he had been in the Intercontinental?

50. **WW:** Yes that is right, he had been with Freddy before me. He then went out to the Royal Marine and later was out in the airport hotel. And before that he was in Trinity College before Eugene because the first year I was in Drogheda (1971), I had some contacts with the people in Trinity catering and they were looking for a head chef and they came to me in Jury’s Hotel to see if I would help them interview for a head chef. I had Bill Kavanagh in mind, that he would be the man, so I officially interviewed him and he got the job. I don’t know what happened, he was a very good chef but the large organisation with thousands of students might not have suited him.

51. **MM:** So after the Mansion House Exhibition in 1965, you had won the chef hearts, and you had also won the union around because Mullen thought you were great now. What did you think of Micky Mullen? Did you have many dealings with him really?

52. **WW:** I met him quite often after that, even when I was in Drogheda, he was a TD then, and I met him on a few occasions and I got on just great. I could have done anything in Jury’s at the time and he would have agreed (laugh).

53. **MM:** How long did you stay in Jury’s?
54. **WW:** Four years, I left Jury’s in 1969. I met a lot of people who came to dine at the Copper Grill, and I met the guy in the building industry, Dermot Moore, and he said to me ‘Willy, if you ever want to buy a restaurant or a hotel, let me know, I will come in with you’, and that is what happened
Edited Interview with Gerry Connell in Glasnevin (15/1/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Gerry Connell (GC)

1. MM: So Gerry what I’m going to do is just to start off with basically where you were born, when you were born and you know who was in the family, etc. etc. So what’s your date of birth?

2. GC: 16th November 1946. So I was the youngest of a family of six. So there was Edward my eldest brother, James would be next and I had a brother Vincent who died when he was very young, a year-and-a-half. Then there was Anne my sister, Richard, Raymond and myself.

3. MM: And your father was Edward as well, and he was a publican is it?

4. GC: Yeah a publican. He owned the pub in James’s Street, his brother actually owned it before him. Richard was the uncle and James was his brother, was my father’s brother. They were brothers James and Edward. James owned the pub before my father did so my father got married, he took over the pub then. James moved over to Iona Road and he continued with a different career altogether.

5. MM: So tell us, you’re the youngest, you went to school, you grew up in James Street, you lived above the pub is it?

6. GC: We lived above the pub yeah, 131 James Street. They were fairly big houses. You had a cellar, you had a ground floor, you had one, two, three stories then up after that.

7. MM: Where did you go to school?

8. GC: In Saint Vincents in Glasnevin, that was just up the road here.

9. MM: That was interesting to come from James’s Street to Glasnevin.

10. GC: I went to Basin Lane of course for infants. Junior and senior infants I went to the Christian Brothers. My eldest brother went to James’s Street; the second eldest went to James’s Street and three of us then went down to Vincent’s in Glasnevin.

11. MM: And do you think there might have been a link with the Vincent’s in Glasnevin since it was so close to Iona Road where your uncle was?

12. GC: Possibly, possibly, it is a good school, good name, good sporting facilities, etc. etc.

13. MM: And you stayed in primary school till you were what age?

14. GC: I would say about thirteen and then moved onto secondary. Left (St. Vincents) after second year.

15. MM: And when you say you left after second year so you were around fifteen or so was it? Had you done any exams?

16. GC: I’d done primary.

17. MM: Just your primary like there wasn’t a group certificate or an intermediate certificate?

18. GC: No you’d do you inter in fourth year in those days.
19. MM: And why did you leave?

20. GC: Well I just had an idea I’d like to go off and find out what the world was like outside. That was it basically. And against all advice I went off and took up a job, my first job being in ’61 in Jammets.

21. MM: So you went straight from Vincent’s to Jammets?

22. GC: Yeah straight from Vincent’s and if I remember correctly it was January of ’61 so I have been just fifteen the previous November.

Figure GC.1: Picture of Jammet’s taken from Jammet Menu

23. MM: Wow, okay yeah wow you were quite young then.

24. GC: Yeah but it wouldn’t be uncommon.

25. MM: Ah no, yeah and tell us something had anyone else in your family been involved in the catering industry.

26. GC: My second eldest brother, that’s the only one, James. He was at least ten years older.

27. MM: He was known as sort of Jimmy is it? Where did Jimmy start his training?
28. GC: Jammets.

29. MM: He started in Jammets as well. Okay so he started in Jammets probably around the early ‘50s or something like that if he’s ten years older.

30. GC: I can’t be certain whether it was. I can’t be certain but roughly around that period, when he left Jammets then he went over to...

31. MM: How many years would he have done in Jammets?

32. GC: He would have served all his time there practically, well at that time it was seven years. I don’t know exactly how many years but I’d say most of his time or if not all of it. If I remember correctly its difficult to pinpoint because it was a long time ago and I was young, quite young at the time but from Jammets he went over to London then to Cumberland Hotel. He returned to Dublin and went to the Gresham with the famous, I’m sure you heard a lot about him now, McManus.

33. MM: I think maybe what’ll I do maybe I’ll go through your thing first and then I’ll come back to him.

34. GC: That’s fine.

35. MM: But Jimmy went to Cumberland in London and then back into the Gresham and was he in the Gresham for a while then.

36. GC: I think about two years. I can’t quite recall.

37. MM: Where did he go after that?

38. GC: Back to Jammets.

39. MM: He went back to Jammets. So did he work with you in Jammets or had you left Jammets?

40. GC: Briefly, briefly, briefly. Just for a few months if I remember correctly.

41. MM: Oh right so tell us then, you’d heard about Jammets, your second eldest brother had worked in Jammets so you went there, January 1961, fifteen years old. What do you remember, your first thoughts are? Who was there to start off with? Who was working there?

42. GC: Well go back to the original question my first thoughts were this is the most unusual smell like from the food in the kitchen to walk into the environment of the kitchen he was like very, very different to anything I’d experienced before. Probably just a mixture of different foods being cooked, etc., etc. I remember that struck me. Straight away, but day two I didn’t get that experience again and probably never ever again after that. Those were my first experience but who was there at the time, at that particular time there was Vincent Dowling who’d have been executive chef or head chef. Dessie Cahill would have been his second head chef. Louis Jammet was alive of course at the time being the boss and then down the line I suppose Mick Moore, a man called Mick Moore or Michael Moore I don’t if you ever heard of him, he was saucier. There was Frank McManus who was the head chef of the (inaudible) and then there was Paddy Ryan who was (inaudible) and it worked a very strict but great system. There’s no question about that like everything was prim and proper in that line and all the sauces were made in the sauce corner, and all the vegetables and omelettes were done in the vegetable corner. That type of thing. All the roasting was done in the roast corner, game included, deep fat frying and so on. And upstairs then was the still room where the hors d’oeuvres came from and any desserts. So we had Jackie Byrne who was top man upstairs who came from Churchtown if I remember correctly or lived in Churchtown.
43. MM: And Jackie Byrne was he a chef or a waiter?

44. GC: He was a chef. His responsibility was looking after the hors d’oeuvres, the cold section, the cold hors d’oeuvres I should have said and all desserts that were required. His side kick then was a man who worked alongside him was a man called Gerry Kelly who kind of assisted Jackie Byrne and then also upstairs was the grill, the grill room and the charcoal grill of the old kind.

45. MM: And yeah sure that was the one that was designed by Moffit, it was sort of the glass, the glass, there was the glass bricks as such as part of it, the design was there. Upstairs.

46. GC: I can recall it very well because I was actually up there for a while, maybe one of the reasons why I finished in Jammets because I couldn’t get out of the grill. It was a kind of a very messy job in its own way and very hot. You had to get all your charcoal in the morning, clear out your grill from the evening before but actually they were quite basic. There was an oven grill with a charcoal base on it and it had support from the bars and just metal bar going right across. So what you had to do in the morning was to take the, when the fire got hot, you got it cleaned out so fresh coal, you had to put your bars into the grill to get them red hot like a blacksmith would in the forge. You had a wire brush to clean down the bars so maybe you can see where I’m coming from. So if you coughed or even blew your nose all this ash would appear.

47. MM: Right, it was a dirty job.

48. GC: You know it was a kind of a messy job but there was, but that was the charcoal grill at the time. Things changed as time went on but that was it in those days.

49. MM: In the charcoal grill, had you a fridge up there for the meat or did it come up from the kitchen when ordered?

50. GC: It would have been brought up from the larder. The orders would come in and there was a dumb waiter, sort of lift that went up and down and it brought the cold starters down to the restaurant downstairs as I mentioned earlier, Jackie Byrne and Gerry Kelly would look after those and the desserts and so on were sent down and vice verse the grill food would be sent up from the larder as per order.

51. MM: The steaks and stuff would come up and then you’d cook it, is that it? And how about the likes of say the garnish or the sauce?

52. GC: Yeah well that would be all on your counter but in reality what you could have put there would be bowls of ice which had beurre maître d’hôtel with watercress. Your (inaudible) would come up from the (inaudible) the roast chef, or your straw chips or whatever, that type of thing. All the different garnishes that you need. Your béarnaise would come from the sauce chef downstairs. Now it would be kept, the grill was a very, very warm place to work in. There’s no problem keeping that warm.

53. MM: I suppose we should start off with your first memory. What was your first or just see if there’s anyone else who was working there. How many people were working there at the time before we start off with your first job? You had Vincent Dowling, Dessie Cahill, Mick Moore, Frank McManus, Paddy Ryan. Now you talked about Jackie Byrne being upstairs.

54. GC: That’s right and Gerry Kelly.

55. MM: Had you a pastry chef or was he a pastry chef.

56. GC: He was pastry chef.
57. **MM:** He was the pastry chef. So he looked after the pastries and he also looked after the cold *hors d’oeuvres* as such? And then did each of these sections then have a *commis*?

58. **GC:** Oh yeah, lots of *commis* chefs.

59. **MM:** Who were the *commis* chefs there when you where there do you remember?

60. **GC:** There was a guy on the roast corner called Tony Breffnie who is since dead, Lord have mercy on him. He died young. There was a guy called Joe Whelan but I know that he didn’t continue in the business. There was another man Michael Keogh who was actually a past student of Cathal Brugha Street. Not only was he a past student but he was student of the year of the two year course that he did at the time. He would have been probably about third year when I started as a first year. I’m sure there were a few more now but I can’t quite recall all the names of different *commis*. There would have been a *commis* in the larder naturally enough so lets just say like for every corner you had at least two *commis*, for every section.

61. **MM:** Okay so there was at least eleven or twelve at least chefs working there, like between *commis* and chefs as such?

62. **GC:** Oh easily yeah.

63. **MM:** Okay and you know when you arrived in there you were probably known from your brother even though your brother wasn’t there.

64. **GC:** I would have been known, yeah. Not in all cases, but for the head chef because they would have worked together.

65. **MM:** What was your first job do you remember?

66. **GC:** In the sauce corner with Michael Moore and if I remember correctly what became my job on a regular daily basis was to make the *béchamel* and that would be quite a large pot of *béchamel* with the onion *clouté* etc., etc. We all know about that but like that was just one of the basic sauces so while I was doing that he was making the provencale, the fish *velouté*, the chicken *velouté* the demi-glaze or the *sauce Espagnole* and therefore he had all his equipment, sauces ready for whatever he needed to do. So *béchamel* would have been the first job I can recall doing.

67. **MM:** And what you call it with the sauces would you make enough sauces say to last you around three days or something or is that how it worked or.

68. **GC:** They would do, the Espanole would probably last about two days, tomato sauce two day, provencale onion, *béchamel* every day was made fresh because some of that was passed on down to the vegetable corner for their gratins and so on. So I would say the average would be two days. The *hollandaise* and then you’d *béarnaise* from that naturally enough would be made every day, left in an earthen ware jar up on a rack over the cooker.

69. **MM:** And is that how they made it like, they didn’t use a separate tarragon reduction for the *béarnaise*.

70. **GC:** No it was made as *hollandaise* and then turned into a *béarnaise*, or whatever other one you needed to use like a *maltaise*.

71. **MM:** Like I believe their *béarnaise*, you know, in a way was a *foyot*, because they used to use a bit of a meat glaze or something. Yeah, yeah I think they were renowned for that with I think was it the steak Jammets was it or one…
72. GC: No there was actually a big, big seller in Jammets particularly in the bar was a minute steak béarnaise served on a flat, a silver flat, a minute steak (inaudible) and a nice generous helping of béarnaise sauce.

73. MM: Remind me about the (inaudible) again.

74. GC: You had diced potato.

75. MM: Diced and sautéed is it. Sautéed diced potato is it.

76. GC: I can’t quite recall but I’d say possibly deep fried. Like that would have been deep fried and rendered down fat, pure hundred per cent suet, beef fat.

77. MM: Yeah, okay. Now that sort of brings me nicely to the idea of the range or was it gas or was it…

78. GC: Unfortunately because I’m sure you probably heard it was coal.

79. MM: It was coal still at that stage.

80. GC: Absolutely, yeah, one big long range that had four sections to it. Well in actual fact it had three working sections, as you came in the door of the kitchen the roast corner was in front of you. Across from that, across from the roast corner was the sauce corner and the left of the sauce corner as you worked at the range was the vegetable corner and for some extraordinary reason the end corner opposite the vegetable corner was, I never really quite understood it, but there seemed to be a vacant space. I can’t quite recall but like the soups were made by the vegetable corner too and you’d have all the basic tomato soup, (inaudible) made on a daily basis, every day fresh and then you’d have your **soup de jour**, your consommé and your (inaudible). They were always there. Its not that the **soup de jour** changed obviously.

81. MM: How, so how about electricity. I take it there was electric lighting in the kitchen?

82. GC: There would have been electric lighting in the kitchen but there would be no daylight. It was em, I don’t know how you’d describe it really, like a basement kitchen almost. Although it was not on the basement it was on the same level as Adam’s Lane.

83. MM: Right but it was internal walls as such.

84. GC: An internal kitchen, there were no windows.

85. MM: No windows okay, and how about ventilation?

86. GC: There was a canopy overhead but you’d have to say it was a working environment. It was very, very hot. Extremely hot in comparison to modern standards or even ten years later or even three years later when I went to the Intercontinental. We don’t want to jump too far ahead at this stage.

87. MM: The refrigeration, they would have had a cold room?

88. GC: All the refrigeration, there was a cold room for vegetables and fruit and salads, a walk-in cold room. It wouldn’t be very large. In the larder then you had your very old fridges with large doors and the first door you’d open in the bottom was the fish fridge which would have deep drawers with lots of ice in it. All the fish would be stored there and then probably the shellfish above that again and then on the left of that separated by a divider in the centre would be the meat fridge where the smaller cuts of meat would be. Larger cuts of meat would be up in another little
walk-in fridge. So you had this area of small, two small little walk-in fridges for large cuts of meat, large joints of meat rather.

89. **MM:** And they would have been electrical fridges?

90. **GC:** They would have been, to my knowledge yeah. Oh they would yeah.

91. **MM:** Did they mature their own meat there, you know, did they hang their own beef for any period of time or would they have bought it, you know, bought it fairly well hung and then maybe hold on to it for another bit.

92. **GC:** I would have thought that they’d get it fairly fresh and they’d hang it on recollection and it was always sort of an expertise with the (inaudible) if you want to call it that. (inaudible) that meat, don’t bring me down the one in the back, pick the ones in the front because they’d be the, they used in ten to fourteen days, was the average hanging time for particularly sirloin, that type of meat. The point steak was very popular then, extremely popular. You don’t hear of that now.

93. **MM:** You don’t hear that now, no the point steak yeah and the point steak was part of the rump wasn’t it?

94. **GC:** It was yeah, it was the pointed part of the pointed part of the rump. Actually three different types of steak came off it, off the rump.

95. **MM:** So yeah was the rump, the point, and what was the other one?

96. **GC:** I can’t quite recall what the other one was because they’re not used much nowadays. It either sirloin or fillet now and that’s it.

97. **MM:** And they were favoured over the sirloin probably were they?

98. **GC:** Not necessarily, no, no but it was a firmly held belief that like fillet had very little flavour. Sirloin had a reasonably good flavour but the point steak though it was not as tender definitely had a superior edge in regards taste.

99. **MM:** Taste, alright, okay. Its funny how trends change isn’t it. So how many, how busy a restaurant was it say in 1961 when you went there? You had, from what I understand of it now and please correctly, you had the downstairs which was quite upmarket and then you had the upstairs which was the grill room and then was there was a blue room or something upstairs as well.

100. **GC:** Yeah there was a blue room for private functions. Yeah, which is probably better known today as Lillies Bordello!

101. **MM:** Okay, yeah, yeah. And then how about the Oyster Bar, the Oyster Bar was in Adams Court then was it?

102. **GC:** That was the first door on the left in Adams Court. You went in there into the Oyster Bar, the Burlington Bar was the cocktail bar.

103. **MM:** So there was a cocktail bar, the Burlington Bar was the cocktail bar? And then there was also an Oyster Bar where you could come and have food at a bar, sit at a bar eating your food as such.

104. **GC:** Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

105. **MM:** And then would there have been other tables there or was it just a bar?
Actually I can’t recall exactly. The people would sit at a counter. I remember seeing people sitting at a counter but I don’t think it was set out like a bistro if I remember correctly. Now it could have been just that I can’t quite remember. I think just the bar more or less. But there was a man there Eamon Preston, I don’t know if you’re aware of his name. But he was very well known in Dublin as a person who was very fast at opening oysters.

Okay, like an oyster shucker?

Quiet personality, strong personality, very popular person. He wasn’t a head barman but nonetheless particularly after Jammet’s closed he went to Wicklow (Hotel). Invariably his photograph would come up every year with the oysters when they were in season.

In Clarinbridge?

You’d know who to get your oysters from if you were in a hurry. So it was Eamon Preston.

And he was from Dublin?

Yeah, yeah I think he actually lived in Santry but I’m not too sure now but Eamon was a good age then.

And where was most of the business done? Was lunch or dinner the busiest time?

Dinner time. On recollection I would imagine dinner time but it wouldn’t be very different to most establishments even today in relation to business. It always came like weekend was a time of very, very busy. Fridays and Saturdays were the prime times. They didn’t open on a Sunday so I suppose the best way to answer that question is that you could say well how long did you work or what was your roster like? It might actually quantify or even answer the question. Like Monday everybody had a day-and-a-half off.
CARTE DU JOUR.
Service Charge 10%.

Hors d’Oeuvre Variés 3/6
Saucisson Fumé 10/- Sardines Françaises 5/6 Terrine Maison 5/- Salami 3/6 Poêl Gras 12/6
Huitres de Galway 14/6 da. Escargots Fines Herbes 8/4 da. Caviar 39/6/1
Dressed Crab 2/3 Crab Cocktail 3/3 Poêlé Shrimps 5/- Téone à l’Huile 31/-
Homard Mayonnaise 16/6 Homard Cocktail 10/6 Prawns Mayonnaise 7/6 Prawns Cocktail 3/6
Melon 5/7 Melon Cocktail 2/3 Grapefruit 2/3 Grapefruit Cocktail 3/6

PETIT PLAT CHAUD
Petite Râtie Maison 3/6 Câteaux Platly 3/6 Gratines Lyonnaise 3/6
St Germain aux Croutés 2/6 Concombre 6/6 Turbot Soup (2) 6/6

PETIT POISSON
Coeur Coquett à la Râtie 3/6 - Turbot 4/6 - Diplomate 5/6
Farolette Omere 4/6 - Bœuf Poêlé 5/6 - Tomate 5/6
Coeur Poêlé Framboise 4/6 - Escallions aux Farcis de Velouté 5/6

FILET SOLE JESSE 15/6 - Otters 12/6 - Faubourg 12/6
Suprême de Turbotin Grand Duo 10/6 Bœuf Grillé - Cibiche 15/6 SCAMPO Frites 9/6
Turbot Poêlé Soe Hollandaise 12/6 - Gâteau Sou Pommard 12/6
Homard à l’Americaine - Noix de - Burlington - Thermidor 10/6

Tournedos Poêle Moderne 15/6 Suprême de Velouté Alexandrine 13/6 Filet Fines Chic Aube 17/6
Bœuf à la Râtie 16/6 - Poêlée 9/6 Eclats de Velouté 11/6 Plaques au Marsala 11/6
Entrées Poêlée Bouillabaisse 15/6 Coquilles St-Jacques 6/6 Minute Steak Bernaise 10/6
Poêlée Poêle Bergere 15/6 Jamon Frais aux Farcis 11/6 Velouté Vert à la Râtie 9/6
Nothoot d’Agneau Opéra 16/- Côte d’Agneau Marseillaise 12/6 Steak au Poivre 10/6
Poularde en Couronne Mousette 27/6 (30 mins.)

HOPPET - POUL
Jambon - Agneau 7/6 Langue 3/6 Asiettes à l’Anglaise 11/6 Poulet à la Gélye 11/6

GRIILLADES ST. PÉL.
Entrées - Minute Steak 9/6 Poitrines 10/6 Frites 10/6 Côte de Veau 9/6 Frites 10/6 Poulet Dinde à la Poêlée 27/6 - (30 mins.)
Poulet Rôti 15/6 Carre de Pêche-Sole (325.) Poêlée Grillée Américaine 37/6

Desserts
Pommes Frappées 2/6 Pommes Faconnées 3/6 Pommes Faconnées à l’Indienne 2/6
Entremets 3/6 - Fraises 6/6 Oeufs Plats Marseillais 3/6 - au Gratin 4/6 - Pâté de Pois 4/6
Charlottes Rôties 3/6 Carottes Nouvelles 3/6 - Asperges Blancs Poêlée 9/6

ENTREMÉS
Assiette Chantilly - Glace 2/6 Glace Vanille - Chocolat - Fraises 2/6 - Magdeleine de Fruits 5/6
Gâteau au Rhum 1/6 - Crêpes Jacques 4/6 Amarena Fraise au Marasquin 8/6 - Nature - Moka 6/6

FRUITS
Canapé Blanc 3/6 Croûte Crème 3/6 Crouûte Ecrasée 2/6 Canapé 3/6
FRUITS AU GRUYER 3/6

Other dishes may be obtained on request subject to availability and delay.

Figure GC.3: Jammet’s Menu 4th November 1961

115.MM: Right.

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GC: So Sunday everybody was off, no problems there, they didn’t open on a Sunday. Monday you went in at nine and you worked a split shift, you were off at three, you’d be back at six and I mean back at six, ready at work and you were finished then maybe at half ten, eleven. So if you multiplied that by five days, it would give you an idea and I think you’ve got something like fifty-five maybe, over fifty-five hours there alone. Now we haven’t gone into the half day yet. The half day was, my half day was Tuesday. I do remember that. I went in at nine and you should have been off at three but that was at the chef’s discretion. You could get off at five but in fairness, you generally got off at three but not necessarily always so you had quite a hefty work schedule, long hours in comparison to now, I think its about thirty-eight hours a week, now the average and that would nearly, if we add it up, how and ever anyway, we can do that later on if you wish but just to get an idea and that probably answers the question. That applied to everybody. So it was kind of all hands on deck.

MM: But I heard the thing, I suppose the one thing that was good about working in a restaurant as opposed to a hotel is that you had every Sunday off.

GC: Yeah, yeah. Well I’m presuming that most I’m not really certain about the other restaurants but Jammets certainly did not open on a Sunday. I couldn’t vouch for the rest. That’s probably true.

MM: Now and was it open for lunch on a Saturday as well?

GC: It would be open every day for lunch except Sunday.

MM: Every day for lunch and dinner. And how many people could it seat do you remember, like downstairs.

GC: I would imagine possibly no more than fifty.

MM: Down stairs?

GC: Forty, you know it’s a question I never thought about and counting (inaudible) its been like first, second year commis, it wasn’t really, it didn’t come into my mind that the actual amount of seatings in the restaurant. But in hindsight I’d image between maybe forty and fifty.

MM: Was there a difference between the food that was offered downstairs and the food that was offered upstairs in the grill?

GC: Well upstairs was the grill and the grill bar and you ordered accordingly from the grill.

MM: Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah. You have a menu here say from 1961 and it’s probably one of the earliest because I think its an earlier, oh no it’s November ‘61 but what we have here, I’m just looking at the menu here. Okay there’s a set menu as in on the right hand side here. There’s the carte de jour, you know which is the à la carte. There’s a whole selection of starters, you know be it hors d’oeuvres variés and dressed crab and melon and grapefruit.

GC: They’d all be available in the grill room.

MM: They were all available in the grill room. Then you have your soups which as I say you’d one, two, three, four, five, six soups available at all times. You’ve egg dishes. They would have been done again by the entremetier yeah.

GC: By the entremetier, yeah.
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<td>Bourgogne, Rouge et Blanc</td>
<td>11/-</td>
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<td>Loire, Muscatel, Domaine de la Roche</td>
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- Truite Luneau Ice Raffort 8/-
- Shrimp Cocktail 5/-
- Salade de Tomate 3/-
- Creme Marie Louise 2/-
- Suprême de Turbot en Aida 10/-
- Filet Plu Yvoit les Bernardes 7/-
- Saumon St. Jacques Thermidor 10/-
- Haddock Colbert 6/-

- Vol au Vent de Riz d'Argent Financiers 9/-
- Bœuf de Beaujolais 13/-
- Emince de Volaille Duchesse 9/-

- Blanquette Poêle aux leclairs 10/-
- Saumon Rôti sur banane 20/-
- Fleurier Rôti 8/-
- Sardelle Rôti 8/-
- L'Orange Général Rôti 12/-
- L'Orange 12/-
- Fumé de Souriage Rôti 20/-
- J'ai Orange 30/-
- à la Provençale 30/-
- champignons des champignons Provençales 4/-
- belinis frisés 4/-
- Lattes de Bœuf à la Provençale 3/-
- Bœuf à la Provençale 6/-
- Bœuf à la Provençale 8/-
- Plum Pudding Vanille 6/-
- au Rhum 12/-

**Figure GC.4: Jammet Menu Specials 4\textsuperscript{th} November 1961**
MM: You’ve got your fish section. Now was there a fish chef or was that done by the sauce chef?

GC: No let’s just say that the poached chef and the pan fried fish, shallow frying would be done by the sauce chef and if you looked across then you had the roast chef, he’d look after the sole Colbert and the scampi and so on. He deep fried and grilled and maybe baked or whatever.

MM: Then you had your entrées, so that was all the sauce chefs looked after the entrées as such. You had the cold buffet. Now was that looked after from upstairs, was it.

GC: That would have been done in the larder in the (inaudible). That would be downstairs.

MM: Now I don’t think you’ve mentioned a larder chef here.

GC: Oh we mentioned Dessie Cahill. He was the chef garde manger. It’s a little bit confusing because upstairs starters were done but downstairs the meat done in I suppose the larder.

MM: The larder chef as such yeah?

GC: As such whereas in other establishments they’d probably call that the butchery. And then you’d have an orderves corner where the starters were looked after.

MM: So again you had your grills and roasts which the roast chef would look after that?

GC: Well the grills would be done upstairs in the Grill Bar.

MM: And say if someone asked for a grill downstairs it would be grilled upstairs and brought down?

GC: It would be grilled upstairs.

MM: Okay and then you had the vegetable section and the sweet section.

GC: The sweet section was upstairs.

MM: And actually when I look at the sweet section there wasn’t really that, like today, it was quite straight forward, like you know what I mean, there were ice creams and there was sort of fruit and stuff so it wasn’t…

GC: They did things like peach melba and (inaudible). Like at that time it would be fairly acceptable, like crêpes suzettes were a great favourite and omelette norvège (baked Alaska) was a fairly regular one but you’d have no machines to whip meringue for omelette norvège. You’d do it by hand in a copper basin.

MM: And I’m just looking here as well, the savouries were there, you know…

GC: The Welsh Rarebit and Canape Diane, they were looked after by the entremetier.

MM: I’m looking at this menu and it’s quite, there’s a lot of choice on it. Would people have gone through all of these courses, you know, would they have taken something from each section or would they have maybe picked and chosen?

GC: Well I’d say in a lot of cases if they went to the bother of going to Jammets they’d probably, certainly money would be no object, so they’d be well used to having choice. Large choices and I suggest that most of them start with a starter possibly if the starter was anyway heavy they’d go into a consommé of some kind or any of the cream soups which were a little bit
heavier. If they didn’t have a starter they might just have a soup and an egg dish. They might have a fish course but I would say on average that most of the customers would have a *hors d’oeuvres*, maybe a light soup, a main course and on down the line they’d have to select their vegetables, possibly dessert, there’s a quite substantial amount of food in that. Some would go right through the whole menu with the exception I would image of leaving one course out, possibly the egg course. You know that makes sense. It would vary for different groups but people who went into Jammets had no problem. They were there for the night and they were quite willing to spend maybe three hours over a meal and more. They weren’t in any hurry.

151.MM: Yeah and how often, you were saying the menu changed every day, the *table d’hôte*?

152.GC: This menu here on your left the *table d’hôte* would be written every day. This one would probably be written on a weekly basis if I remember correctly.

153.MM: Okay so the *à la carte* would change. Okay but sure I can compare because I have one or two of them so I can compare them and contrast them with that which is good. So how long, you started off with the sauce chef and how long did you stay with him. A few months, six months or something like that?

154.GC: I stayed there for almost two years and then I was asked would I like to go up to the Grill Bar and I said not particularly. So they said ‘we’d like you to go up for three months, just for three months only’. So that’s fine so to be perfectly honest with you I went up and I was there three months. I came down. I spoke to Vincent the chef and I said my three months are up and he said ‘I’m a little bit stuck at the moment you wouldn’t mind staying another three months’. So as time went on it went to seven months and I thought no I don’t really need this anymore. It was quite a good experience being there but it had a lot of disadvantages working in the grill in terms of the ergonomics of the place and atmosphere and the temperature and heat. Small confined area, I mean small confined area. Not to mention you were on your own.

155.MM: Yeah, yeah which would be sort of lonely enough?

156.GC: You were detached from the main body which never actually occurred to me before but I’m just thinking of it now, and low and behold an advertisement came along in the newspaper, interviews for the Intercontinental Hotel in Ballsbridge due to open in 1963.

157.MM: Right.

158.GC: Or maybe if we want to move on or do you want to stay with Jammets for another while.

159.MM: I’ll just come. So that’s what brought you to the Intercontinental.

160.GC: That’s what brought me to the Intercontinental.

161.MM: That’s brought you in 1963 because it was only opening as such and there was an advertisement in paper. Do you remember what paper it was by any chance?

162.GC: The Press or The Independent. I’m not sure if it was in all the papers, more than likely because it was a big hotel requiring lots of staff, lots of expertise.

163.MM: Now tell me about Vincent Dowling, because like we’re looking here at actually everyone in the kitchen was Irish.

164.GC: They were, before Vincent there was another man who was head chef, he was French, before my time, Mark Faure. So moving on from that like Vincent was the next head chef.
Would I be right in saying or do you know that I believe that Vincent actually was sent to France by the Jammets to train. Is that right?

Correct yeah. He served his time in Jammets, all of his time. And then he was sent to France.

To the Bristol was it?

The Jammet family. I can’t be certain of the name but the hotel had a Jammet connection, relatives of Jammet and he stayed there for a number of years. I can’t recall quite how many, before my time anyway but he’d been there for a number of years and he came back to Jammets then.

Yeah because it’s funny because Vincent Dowling was in the same primary class as Jimmy Kilbride, and actually the other person in that same primary was Sean Kinsella.

Oh yeah you were saying that to me recently yeah. I didn’t know that before.

So it’s quite amazing actually when you think of three people who went to become quite well known chefs as such were in the same primary school, you know?

Yeah when you think about, yeah it is amazing. It’s unusual to say the least.

The other lads, had any of the other lads been to France do you know?

No, no. It wasn’t unusual for some of the senior chefs to have been in England not necessarily for too long. They used to pop over, maybe stay a year, two years, maybe six months and come back again and after they’d come back after six months they say things like ‘how’s it going mate, are you well’. (Laugh). We used always find that very amusing but all joking aside looking back on it now there was very few that actually travel anywhere but moving on, I’m just kind of moving on a bit like, others guys that I’ve met, an awful lot of them had worked in England but for a short period. Not too long a period. Just get the experience I suppose.

Do you remember, in the early ‘60s, do you remember what the competition for Jammets was?

Absolutely, there would have been the Hibernian hotel which was just around the corner and then I suppose the Russell would be next or thereabouts, certainly the Hibernian and the Russell come to mind and the Red Bank in D’Olier Street. There was a great favourite place in town but it wouldn’t be in the same category called the Parradisio.

Or right, that was in Westmorland Street.

Westmorland Street but it would be very much middle of the range, different. The Gresham had a very good reputation at that time for fine food, maybe not quite to same standard but it wouldn’t be too far off either.

Yeah. Was there anywhere else?

Well I’m just thinking about the centre of Dublin really.

How about the, was the Dolphin still there or was the Dolphin on its way out?

No it was still there. It was very much still there but there it was always considered to be, the Dolphin and Wynn’s were much a hotel that clergy went to, to my knowledge. The distinct recollection I have about it. Now the food would have been, I don’t think you could make a
comparison in terms of classic food, like Jammets, the Russell, the Hibernian, the Redbank. Maybe they were in a different link, maybe slightly down from that. There’s no question about that.

183.MM: How about the Wicklow Hotel?

184.GC: The Wicklow. I would put it on par, it might be a little bit above the Dolphin and Wynns, a little bit above but still not reaching the same heights in cuisine.

185.MM: Yeah so sort of the Hibernian, the Russell, Jammets, the Redbank and the Gresham sort of stood, and the one that’s missing there now and maybe for a reason is the Shelbourne. Was the standard of food not as good in the Shelbourne?

186.GC: Well it must have been but we never really heard much, strange, it was never spoken in terms, in later years I do recall the Shelbourne having a good name in later years. I mean much later but it must have had but it just never came up or it never was mentioned on par.

187.MM: Well I have evidence from a little bit later in the mid ‘60s now of it sort of sliding you know from Egon Ronay visiting.

188.GC: Yeah well it just wasn’t mentioned much in our day so I’m assuming, you know certain amount about a certain amount of things, that’s as far as I can recollect anyway. There was no great buzz about the Shelbourne at that time.

189.MM: Do you remember any of the people who were working in the other establishments, like say you know the Gresham, the Redbank, the Russell, the Hibernian at the time.

190.GC: Yeah I do, I do but I wouldn’t have know them personally. I mean I just remember the names.I think there was Pierre Rolland in the Russell. There was Roger Noblet in the Hibernian. The Dolphin I can’t quite put my finger on the Dolphin now. There was the Central hotel as well but that would be kind of quite good for food but more down market again. There was a man called Billy Marshall. He was supposed to be, very tall.

191.MM: Billy Marshall had worked in, I think he might have worked in Jammets but he definitely work in the, he trained in the Shelbourne originally. Billy Marshall he did. He trained in the Shelbourne actually with Johnny Opperman and with PJ Dunne.

192.GC: Ah right, and P.J. Dunne. I think P.J. was in Jammets.

193.MM: P.J. was in Jammets before going to the college.

194.GC: And his brother too I might add. Yeah but his brother wasn’t a chef. He was in another line of work. He was actually the, I’m trying to remember the French terms for it now. He was actually the silver man.

195.MM: Okay yeah. So PJ’s brother was the silver man.

196.GC: I just can’t think of his Christian name now at the moment but it will come back to me.

197.MM: Actually just on that before we move away from Jammets and move on then to the Intercontinental. Waiters, so was the head man front of house when you were there.

198.GC: Well the head man front of house was probably the best description you could use, Willie O’Regan was the Maître D’ and very much as Maître D’. His next in line was a man called Jimmy Beggan. He was downstairs in the main restaurant. The head waiter in the grill bar was man called Paddy Flynn. There was Tom Foley, worked in the restaurant along with Willie O’Regan
and there was Paddy Wilson and there was a man called Pop Baker who I’m told much later years
was actually the father of Don Baker. He was a lovely man and I remember him retiring, he retired
at the princely sum of £10 from Monsieur Louis Jammet, thank you very much, au revoir. That
was Pop Baker. (note. Don Baker’s grandfather) So the other name then was Brendan Lorton,
we’re talking waiters now, Stephen Kirwin, Seamus Harper the sommelier.

199.MM: Shay Harper?

200.GC: He went on to, oh one of the wine merchants now, at the time they were big. Was it
Gilbeys or somebody like that. Seamus Harper left anyway and he took up a job of marketing of
wines in some large company. It will come back to me and to mention the army of commis waiters
that would have been assisting them and I haven’t named all the waiters.

201.MM: Do you remember anymore of them?

202.GC: There’s one guy, I’m trying to remember his name and it just won’t come to me. There
was Jackie Mulhall, Jackie Mulhall who went on to America.

203.MM: That’s the fella who got in contact with me.

204.GC: Is it?

205.MM: He went to Mosney with you on holidays or something like that. He got in contact with
me. He sent me a… He did very well. He went on working with the airlines. Yeah he became a
chef and became a airline chef then and the whole lot. No was it an airline. I have the
information.

206.GC: I think he worked for a family when he went to American.

207.MM: Yeah he went to Chicago or somewhere like that and he did very well for himself.

208.GC: I lost contact with him. He was from Cabra actually. A nice guy. So we didn’t mention
Ms Riordan the manageress. Ms. Riordan would appear every Friday with your pay, which was a
pound note in my case, two shillings and six pence, better known as a half crown wrapped up in
the pound note. That was your pay for your first year.

209.MM: So you’re pay was one pound?

210.GC: One pound, two shillings and six pence and a huge increase going into second year. It
was one pound and five shillings which was two half crowns. So it was one shilling, ten bob I
suppose for the want of a better mind. But the mind boggles when you think of it.

211.MM: And was that very poor money or was it relatively okay when you were there.

212.GC: That was the average. I’d say it was relative to what was being paid at the time. I know
it sounds but things moved on then. The chefs who were married men with families the senior
chefs would probably have been on anything from eight to ten pounds. You know just to put it into
perspective, the head chef had a car, Vincent Dowling, a small little Fiat but I don’t believe
anybody else in Jammetts had a car except maybe (End of side A tape 1).

213.MM: Louis was getting a bit older now, Louis died in ’64, I think, in ’63 or ’64 he died. (note:
Louis died October 1964)

214.GC: Yeah it could be. I was away at the time because I wrote to Ms. Riordan and she told me
that he had died. That would be about right. I went away in ’66, she wrote to me in ’66/’67 to say
that he had died.
215. MM: The son Patrick, was Patrick involved in the business?

216. GC: You’d see him occasionally, but only occasionally. The answer is really no, not really.

217. MM: So Ms. Riordan was really sort of managing the day-to-day finances and sort of stuff?

218. GC: Yeah she would have been. Her title was kind of manageress and I believe she was a Cork woman.

219. MM: What age would she have been?

220. GC: When you’re so young it’s hard to tell but I reckon she was in her forties, mid forties or thereabouts. But after Jammets closed she went to live with Jammets, with Patrick out near where the Top Hat is Dunlaoghaire is, around that area.

221. MM: Kill of the Grange is where, Bakers Corner around there is where they had their original house, that’s right. So basically you got fed up, was there many other people coming and going while you were there.

222. GC: Not particularly, no, because it was unusual at the time to say that you were leaving.

223. MM: Yeah, yeah. When you had a job, you stayed in it really?

224. GC: Well yes and no and the fact that it was Jammets. But it wasn’t taken very kindly when you gave in your notice because it was probably deemed as some kind of a, do you not like it here or is something wrong. It’s almost an honour to be here, you know. To me looking back that was the way, the feeling at the time so I don’t think the chef spoke to me when I gave in my notice for a couple of days (laugh). But anyway there’s another side to that story as well.

225. MM: And just sort of a question on that, because you know Vincent had his own problems, you know what I mean?

226. GC: Yeah he had his own problems.

227. MM: He had his own personal difficulties. But when you were there did you notice much of that sort of drink culture?

228. GC: Oh absolutely.

229. MM: And how widespread was it?

230. GC: Very widespread. Well it wasn’t uncommon. Well not to the extent now that some people had severe difficulties but it was not uncommon, certainly now. There was a drink culture, a very strong drink culture.

231. MM: But there was a drink system anyway, wasn’t there.

232. GC: There was. You got beer at work.

233. MM: There was a beer allowance or something like that.

234. GC: There was, yeah but commis chefs would get orange. The chefs had a beer allowance. There was a daily basis. I think that’s the same in some other hotels anyway but how and ever, yeah there would have been a strong culture of drink.
Would you have seen it affecting the work, or would it be a sort of a wind down exercise, you know, wind down from the stress and the heat that they’d sort of have.

I would say it was a wind down exercise maybe after work.

As opposed to drinking during work.

There wasn’t really that much during work. Not really. Well I mean not to my knowledge at the time but let’s say just that a small percentage of people had difficulties and it was obvious.

Yeah so this advertisement appeared in the…

Oh the advertisement for the Intercontinental Hotel and I really had no idea what Intercontinental Hotel was about. Did a little bit of research on it, asked a few questions, discovered they had hotels all over the world and they were predominatly owned by Pan American Airways which was the greatest things since fried bread. So the interviews took place in an office in Ballsbridge. To this day, across road from Roly’s on the corner. You know the opposite corner?

Near Gunnes?

Yeah that corner there, it was upstairs. The interviews took place there and I went for an interview with a lot of other people and I received a letter saying that ‘thank you for your interview; we look forward to being in touch with you sometime in the near future’. So I waited for a while and the next thing I was called back for another interview so I thought maybe this looks promising.

But had you left Jammets?

No, no. So went for the second interview and I got the job and I was to start there if I remember correctly on the first, I think it was 1st May, I think. The hotel wasn’t even open. We were just going to move in and start making preparations. The building was not even totally finished. The kitchen was almost there, almost there but to say that walking into the Intercontinental was an absolutely, it was like a paradise in terms of working conditions and I mean that. I mean Jammets was a great place to work in for learning but we have to look at the realities like too. When you went to work in the Intercontinental, you walked up, you had a clean uniform everyday, it did its own laundry. You had a beautiful canteen which Jammets did not provide. There was a place to eat alright but that was a locker room. We won’t go in too much about that but you had your personnel office, you had your personnel manager, a human resource, chef de partie with all of them, every one of them were foreign. Not one was Irish with the exception of Bill Kavanagh. He was the most senior Irish person at the time.

In the Intercontinental they hadn’t opened up, how many of these foreign chefs were there.

There was one for every section that you can think of.

The top fella was Freddie Goldinger.

Freddie Goldinger yeah, the executive chef yeah and Roland Fuchs was sous chef.

He was the sous chef, okay. And then you had all of the different sections.
250.GC: All the departments. Marcel was the sauce chef. Marcel was French, I don’t know what his surname was. He didn’t speak any English, none whatsoever. Guido, I don’t know what Guido’s second name was.

251.MM: Was he Italian?

252.GC: He was Swiss and he was the (inaudible). Josef was the butcher. He was from Germany and Hans Schneider, John Taylor if you want to translate it was (inaudible), he was the pastry chef. He was from Germany. And Yoachin, his name was actually Joachin Yessen, you can have a guess now at spelling his surname, and he was German and he was the (inaudible). And then we had the Martello room, the Roof Top restaurant. There was a George (inaudible) who was the chef in charge of the Martello room.

253.MM: Where was he from do you know? Was he French?

254.GC: Yeah he was French.

255.MM: And then where did Bill Kavanagh fit in here. He was sous chef wasn’t he.

256.GC: Actually at the very beginning now I think Bill was sort of sous chef assistant. He’d be next in line after Roland.

257.MM: Yeah. Okay. So did you do some training first then before because you say that the hotel itself wasn’t open or something like that. How long before it opened as such?

258.GC: I reckon it was probably about two or three weeks.

259.MM: So who was with you? Who do you remember? Who were the Irish people with you say starting off? There must have been a gang of you.

260.GC: There was. I was on the larder. The garde manger with Guido as chef de partie. There was Jimmy Kennedy who was probably the most senior Irish guy and then there was Shay Kirwan, I won’t say too much about that. There was Johnny Haynes and that was all that was in the larder. Guido, Jimmy Kennedy, and those three lads. So it’s difficult to trace them all back now. Jim Bowe would have been on the sauce with Marcel. He’d be kind of assistant.

261.MM: And Jim Bowe would have started at the beginning.

262.GC: Yeah, definitely, definitely, yeah. I’m trying to remember now, the roast chef was a guy called, he worked in Dublin Castle, he was Church of Ireland, Eric Bryant. A very nice guy, I think you might have met him, did you. Somebody met him a year or two ago purely out of the blue. He was English, sorry he married an English girl, I beg your pardon and I think he went off to England. Somebody met him. I can’t remember who it was, recently. It doesn’t matter. So we had Eric Bryant on the roast and then there was Bill Kavanagh, not Bill Kavanagh, Bill Kennedy was the staff chef, mind you there was quite a big staff in the Intercontinental. Him and a guy called Cox, Michael Cox they both worked as staff chefs, so they had a couple of hundred meals to do each day and so on. Moving on then I suppose there was Val Dodd who worked on the sauce. (Interrupted by phone).

263.MM: What I’ll do I’ll take it from the bottom row and we’ll work from left to right and that way I can just transcribe it later on.
264.GC: So we’re going bottom row, left to right. We have Guido, Garde Manger, then we Marcel saucier, then we have Josef who was the butcher, then we have Hands Schneider who was the patissier, Roland Fuchs seven foot two or three I think, he was sous chef. Freddie Goldinger, Swiss, executive chef, our own Bill Kavanagh who was next in line after Roland Fuchs. Then we have Joschin Yessen, then we’ve Johnny Martin who was next in line after Josef in the butchery, Pierce Hingston was chef tournant, then we have Eric Bryant, he’s the last on the front row. Okay so we’ll go up, the next row. There’s two women there now and I can’t recall who those ladies are. They worked in the still room anyway. So we’ve Bill Kennedy who as personal chef and Michael Cox, Personal Chef. We had Jimmy Kenney (inaudible) assisting Guido, then we had Jim Bowe sauce corner with Marcel, Val Dodd, sauce corner, Kevin Duffy, Lord have mercy on him, he was in the pastry. There’s three ladies then from the still room. I can’t quite recall all their names. I’ll move up to the third row on the left hand side again and its myself, Gerry Connell, Peter Lawlor, entremetier, like he was helping in the vegetables. We were commis. There’s one guy there now, oh yeah, Michael Finnegan would have been on the vegetables. Brady, Jimmy Brady, I think Jimmy was on the roast corner with Eric Bryant. Johnny Haynes would have been on functions. Another lad there I’m not quite sure who he is. I’ll just have to pass him. We’ve another lad here called, I think his name is Michael L’estrange and I think he worked in the pastry as a commis. We’ve Joe Frayne. Now I’m after skipping one after Michael La Strange. The next one after that is Joe Frayne who worked in Aer Lingus with me. Joe, I think Joe was over in the larder as well actually. He was. Then there’s little Tommy Sommers at the end of that third row and he was a brother of Willie Sommers. He died in a car crash. And he was also a brother of Jimmy Sommers, a very big executive is SIPTU. I don’t know if Jimmy Sommers is still with SIPTU. Up at the very top then, I’m not sure who that lad is there. Did I mention a Michael Finnegan.

265.MM: You did.
266.GC: That is actually Michael Finnegan. The next lad is Christy Clarke who worked in the (inaudible) and the next lad is Shay Kirwan who was on the garde manger with me. Now that’s the whole crew.

267.MM: So its just that Michael Finnegan then. The guy down here.

268.GC: So that kind of tells the story about the Intercontinental.

269.MM: So the Intercontinental started off, you had basically as you said the Martello Room was upstairs?

270.GC: The Martello Room was upstairs. It was the roof top restaurant.

271.MM: That was roof top restaurant and that was like fine dining.

272.GC: It would have been fine dining. It was an expensive place to eat in, probably the most expensive, possibly the most expensive around at the time. A small kitchen, good menu. A lot of flambé work done and so on done in the restaurant.

273.MM: Who were the waiters up there do you remember?

274.GC: There was a head waiter, Dessie Quinn. There was a man called Jack Ryan from Limerick was a waiter there and there was Dessie Quinn. There was another Quinn but it’s difficult to remember their names. Gerry Gallagher would have been there at that time and there’s not really a whole lot of waiting staff. It’s easy to remember the chefs, it’s a lot more difficult to remember the waiters.

275.MM: Sure you weren’t working with them as closely as such.

276.GC: The only thing I can remember is they earned a hell of a lot more money than we did but that’s neither here or there.

277.MM: Well come to that (laugh). So upstairs at the Martello Room, that was the most expensive as such.

278.GC: Then you had the main kitchen. There was the Embassy Room then. That was big restaurant. That would sit a hundred plus.

279.MM: Right okay and the Martello might have…

280.GC: And there was also a roast trolley in the Embassy Room. A charcoal grill in there.

281.MM: But it wasn’t a separate grill room. It was part of the Embassy Room as such.

282.GC: It was part of the embassy room yeah so the commis would stand with a trolley with a raw sirloin and a chopping board and scales and if anybody wanted steak he’d go to the table ‘I believe you’d like a sirloin steak’.

283.MM: With the trolley.

284.GC: And he’d cut, you’d be terrified you’d cut it an ounce too many or too little but he’d put the steak on the scales and they were charged two shillings and six pence an ounce. I remember that clearly and you put a flag on the steak for whatever way they wanted done. Pink, and there was blue for well done. I can’t remember. There was different colours.
MM: Colour coded then.

GC: You brought it over to the grill chef with the flag on it.

GC: That’s gas isn’t it?

MM: There was roast beef trolley of course always. Peter Farrell was the head waiter, the Maître D’ where they called him captain and the higher the grade you had, they were done in a kind of American style, so captain was a Maître D’ and he’d have the highest percentage of the takings or whatever. I think it was a percentage of the savings I think. You had a huge amount of waiters down there, quite a large number but…

MM: Now Tony Conlon hadn’t arrived at the beginning. He came later on as such, right, okay.

GC: I can’t help with the names of the waiters. (Inaudible).

MM: That’s fine, I’ll leave that to someone else as they say. We’ll leave that to someone else. So it was a busy place. You’re talking about the ideas that there was a roast beef trolley, there was like a grill that you could do.

GC: There was everything.

MM: And there was all that. Would there have been a hors d’oeuvres trolley?

GC: There would have been a hors d’oeuvre trolley. They would indeed. There was pandemonium one over the trolley, because one of the commis in the garde manger decided to the egg mayonnaise, you know the six half eggs in the ravier dish and he thought I’ll get some red peppers in it, put a swastika on each egg after putting the mayonnaise on the half egg.

MM: To garnish them yeah (laugh).

GC: So the trolley went out the restaurant and the food and beverage manager was a German man, (inaudible) was his name but he wasn’t impressed at all. He came flying in with the trolley. ‘Who done this terrible thing?’ but sure the guy was only sixteen he hadn’t a clue, he was offending everybody.

MM: Brilliant plus around the corner there was the swastika laundry when you think about it.

GC: Hors d’oeuvres trolleys, there was a course a hors d’oeuvres trolley.

MM: And how about would there have been a sweet trolley?

GC: There would have been a sweet trolley exactly.

MM: So it was very much in that sort of tradition of the big restaurant with the sweet trolley and with the hors d’oeuvres.

GC: The American style, show them what you got, so the big night was Sunday night, was the buffet, the grand buffet.

MM: Why was Sunday night the big night? Was it because other restaurants were closed?

GC: I’m really not sure. Maybe they’re trying to pull in clients that maybe didn’t have a niche or somewhere to go on a Sunday. I’m not really certain about that. It was hugely successful. So there was a big buffet. Absolutely huge. The main attraction was one whole leg of beef was
always standard and that would take like forever to cook. You know the big, big leg. A huge big leg of beef.

305.MM: And that would be carved then.

306.GC: That would be carved on the buffet, but then the usual suspects to stroganoffs, the escallops of veal and the cold and they had side (inaudible) that type of thing.

307.MM: You had a picture in here of Jim Bowe would that have been at that sort of a buffet.

308.GC: No, no. That was a special function. I can actually tell you when that was. That was called a Caroline ball and President Kennedy was, became President and his daughter was Caroline, there was young John, and then Caroline and for some reason people here in Ireland got together and had a Caroline ball. I’m sure it was a charity event of some kind but I’m sure that photograph represents part of the Caroline ball function. It’s in there somewhere.

![Figure GC.6: Buffet at Caroline Ball, Intercontinental Hotel, Dublin](image)

309.GC: So if you look at the centre pieces they had beautiful black mirrors that nobody had ever seen before.

310.MM: Wow.

311.GC: Someone with an American idea. This was really something special.

312.MM: And then you had, I can see here a sort of pastillage or something like that.

313.GC: The Hans (Schneider) would have done (inaudible).
314. **MM:** Model of the hotel as such.

315. **GC:** Freddy Gygax wasn’t there at the time but he would have appeared fairly soon after the opening. See that’s where they go, that’s Jim Bowe, that’s Shay Kirwan, that’s Guido and (inaudible) was a genius at the butter work. He won a lot of gold medals for butter work and yeah this would be representative of the Caroline ball. I don’t know what this is, I can’t make it out.

316. **MM:** It looks like lobster sauce and stuff.

317. **GC:** But these men brought great skilled to the country and an awful lot of people gained a lot of experience working with these foreign chefs. I wouldn’t imagine they stayed any longer than two years, in most cases a year and a half, that was their contract.

318. **MM:** And would they have all been gone by then?

319. **GC:** Well I know Roland was there for about three years, second head chef. Freddie was there for about three years. But the chef de parties bit by bit moved out and the Irish lads moved in then and took over. But they were just laying down, what should be done.

320. **MM:** Setting the standard?

321. **GC:** Don’t forget there were functions, a huge ballroom and Freddie Goldinger had a great love for chicken Maryland. This was a great favourite at the time. Nobody wanted to know about it but the larder was boiling all the chickens. The chickens would come in whole (inaudible) Martin and Josef and whoever else was there at the time in the larder, in the butcher rather would prepare all these chickens. There would be a thousand for a function. No such thing as buying in a breast of chickens. It didn’t happen that way.

322. **MM:** And the chicken would have been panéed?

323. **GC:** They panéed the banana. Tomato with the bacon around it, and all that would be prepared.

324. **MM:** Put sweetcorn in pancakes?

325. **GC:** Yeah put on a dinner plate, a ring on the dinner plate and they’d be stacked, maybe four or five pudding to a hot plate, a large.

326. **MM:** The chicken would have been cooked? Everything was cooked and they were put into these sort of holding ovens?

327. **GC:** No actually it was a hot plate. It wasn’t an oven as such, it was a hot plate like a hot plate you’d put plates in to get hot and stay hot. And that’s how they were done. So when the main course was going out the plates were whipped out, the rings were thrown into a basket.

328. **MM:** The plates would have been fairly hot?

329. **GC:** Oh now that’s just particular, in the particular case of chicken Maryland which was very, very popular. It seemed to go out all the time. Beef would be next I suppose and that would be carved if I remember in the room.

330. **MM:** I remember Bill Kavanagh telling me about the fact that he says they used to do the turkey and ham, he said like the turkey that was the first place in Ireland to do the parcel.

331. **GC:** Yeah I’d often him saying that but I think he said he brought that with him. He’d come from America. He did actually. He came straight from America into the Intercontinental.
He was five years in New York before coming here.

He was and he worked on the ships as well.

Oh yeah prior to that. He’d had an amazing life, actually an amazing career. So you’ve mentioned there the foreign chefs had done wonderful work in the few years they were there and they had trained in the Irish lads.

Well yes to a wider degree but not trained in completely because a lot of them had great experience, some of them had been away on the continent, not too many, but some had.

Who had been away, do you know?

Jim Bowe had been away. He’d be in Switzerland, in Zurich I think it was if I remember correctly and Jimmy Kennedy had been abroad in Germany. Johnny Martin had worked all over the world. He was the butcher now.

Well you mentioned Fred Gygax, he had worked away and he came back later on, he came in after a little bit.

Freddie was later. Slightly later but he did come in not long after it opened.

And Pierce Hingston he had worked away, had he?

He had worked in England. And probably a lot more of them that I…

So there was sort of like a second wave of people came in then, was there. The likes of you know John Linnane, did they come in…

They came in later.

Later. Not while you were there.

Oh yeah I was there when John came so that was ’63. John would have come possibly ’64 or ’65 and then Ben Smith would have come later. John Clancy would have come much later. By and large the brigade was there when it opened in ’63. Stayed on, most of them, not all of them course stayed on for some considerable time because it certainly was a great place to work in. It was a new hotel and everybody was starting at the beginning from the beginning and you know.

What were wages like because you’ve said you’ve come from earning sort of one and five or something like that, do you know what I mean. Did it go up a fair bit?

It would have gone up. Actually its funny you should ask me that because I’ve actually no recollection of what it was but I’m sure it was more. I have no doubt in my mind that it was because things started to move fairly quickly as the years went by, in terms of wages, not very quickly but a lot quicker than they had in the past I’d imagine, but I really don’t recall exactly what it was that I earned when I went in first. It was more than what I earned.

Uniforms were an issue for you though as in that it was a novelty?

It was very much a novelty, yeah, but not just that beautiful staff canteen. Brand new, remember the building is new, the locker rooms are new, the showers and the toilets and everything was spik and span.
350. MM: And there were showers like in the changing room.

351. GC: Yeah even though people were more senior in position in a lot of cases when everybody was starting out in a new venture and a new hotel and there was pecking, there was pecking order in terms of seniority but it wasn’t like there was a clique here and there, you know. I don’t know if you’ve experienced that, did you, working in a brand new establishment? It’s quite something different. It really is. So there was a very good atmosphere all around.

352. MM: Just on that because it brings up the question I was trying to ask earlier, when you were in Jammets the staff meals, like did you get to sample any of the good food that was served there or was there a lesser sort of food for staff?

353. GC: There would be absolutely lesser food for staff. No question about it. Like the, for the staff in general there would be a coddle, generally speaking, not necessarily every day but I just seem to remember coddle. This pot with a couple of sausages in it, onions, a few potatoes, maybe a few carrots in some cases and that was standard. Evening time you know that lap end of the sirloin, that’s like the soul of your shoe a bit of that would be fried off. Now if you could chew it, fair play to you, because I don’t think it was possible. (Laugh). You’d get a few chips. They’d cut the chips by hand so it was the little trimmings would be fried off. The trimmings of the chips so really like it wasn’t.

354. MM: It was ‘waste nothing’.

355. GC: You know, okay so I might make it sound very negative, but that’s the way it was.

356. MM: Oh no, I’ve worked in a few of those places myself you know and they were good places for food like but not for the staff as such. Yeah, yeah. So how long did you stay in the Intercontinental in Ballsbridge.

357. GC: I stayed there till ’66.

358. MM: And in those three years, so that’s 1963 to 1966, in those three years, you started off in the garde manger, did you move on then to different sections or…

359. GC: I actually made an error. I didn’t start in the garde manger at all. I started in the bakery.

360. MM: In the bakery, okay.

361. GC: With a man called Eamon Cunningham who hasn’t been mentioned. He’s not in the photograph, funny enough. He must have been on his day or something which makes one wonder how many chefs were there that I’m not even thinking about but started there for about a year in the bakery and when I say the bakery I mean we did the croissants, the Danish pastries, the brown bread which the Americans went mad for, scones, the hamburger baps. Continental breakfast generally speaking and that was our lot you might say but when Eamon left after about four to five months, he went off I think to some other hotel.

362. MM: I think he worked with PV Doyle if I remember. I know he was in the Skylon I think at one stage and the Montrose.

363. GC: So like there was a lot of them coming in.

364. MM: Yeah there was a whole family worked…

365. GC: But the point is that when Eamon left I became the baker or the boulanger whatever you want to call it but the interesting question you asked me a few minutes ago, what kind of money did you get? I actually didn’t get a penny extra but I didn’t mind because I quite enjoyed doing it
but looking back it wasn’t very clever because I was a third year commis I think doing chef de partie work and I was on my own which previous to that I had a chef de partie. Now I was the chef de partie with no partie (laugh). But how and ever, anyway, that’s that so then I went to the garde manger. I’d forgotten about that bit actually yeah and I did get on very well with Freddie Goldinger but at the end of the day I suppose it just goes to show, you were done, if you want more and there and knock on the door and let it be known.

366.MM: And did you finish your time there in the garde manger or did you move on to sauce or anything like that.

367.GC: No when I was in the garde manger for the first year which I’d forgotten to clarify earlier had been the bakery or boulanger and then went to the larder like from ’63 to ’66. From ’66 I asked a transfer to Frankfurt. That moved me onto Frankfurt Intercontinental.

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368.MM: Now ’66 you’re twenty years old at this stage. So you’d been working for five years so you felt you were sort of trying to see a bit of the world probably yeah.

369.GC: Yeah, still not qualified because they had this little word in Frankfurt called demi chef meaning probably half chef or you’re nearly there. So that was my title job description in Frankfurt. So I thought the idea would be nice. Move over and see a little bit of the world.

370.MM: And the Intercontinental facilitated that and they set it up?

371.GC: Absolutely no problem. They set all that up. If I remember correctly they paid for the fare over, they did actually, yeah and that was how I started in Frankfurt. I applied through
personnel and I think they did most of the paperwork transferred etc. etc. So it was a great experience being in Frankfurt.

372.MM: And how long did you go to Frankfurt for?

373.GC: For a year.

374.MM: And what section did you work on in Frankfurt?

375.GC: Well we mentioned the Martello Room in the Intercontinental in Dublin but I actually ended up working in the Silhouette Room which is the roof top restaurant in Frankfurt and that’s where I stayed for the whole year. It was quite exclusive, small kitchen with a bar. I mean a service bar in the kitchen, small and all as it was and enjoyed that experience immensely.

376.MM: Where were the chefs you were working with there? Were they from all over the world or were they mostly from Germany?

377.GC: Well when I was working in the Silhouette they were German, all German.

378.MM: All German yeah.

379.GC: Peter Diegal would have been my chef in the Silhouette Room. He went on to own his own restaurant. There was Rolf (inaudible). The barman I got to know very well. (Laugh). His name was Jacques, a Frenchman Jacques (inaudible) funny enough name for a barman. Jacques (inaudible). Yes he was a very nice guy and I might add Peter Diegal was a gentleman as a chef. So that was sort of, if I remember correctly I think we went in at 3 pm and we’d one day off a week and we worked until I am so that’s nine or ten hours is it, six days a week. We had one day off and I think that day was possibly Monday if I remember correctly. But it was a nice little team. We got on very well together.

380.MM: And how did you find learning the German. I take it was all German they spoke.

381.GC: Well of course the German lads wanted to learn English. But when you had to survive, that was the biggest mistake made was not to gone, not brought somebody else along and I would always say to young people now if you’re going anywhere, get someone else or get one or two others. I had gone on my own. Now I did meet an Irish guy very quickly in that hotel. He was a gas character. His name Kit McSwiney. He was doing hotel management but he was working as a waiter, commis waiter up on the, doing his work experience in the Silhouette.

382.MM: Where was he from?

383.GC: Dublin.

384.MM: Dublin yeah. And did you hear from him since?

385.GC: No, like everything you know. But I’ve a lot of regrets in that regard because looking back you should really keep in touch you know. Hindsight is a great thing.

386.MM: And so you were there for a year. What did you do then?

387.GC: I went on to Switzerland through personnel.

388.MM: Through the Intercontinental. I presume you came home for a holiday or anything like that?

389.GC: No straight through.
MM: And did you come home at all?

GC: In that period, no, because I was in Geneva for about nine months.

MM: And how was that, was it any different?

GC: Well it was French number one.

MM: But was the food different?

GC: The food very French. The food in Frankfurt was a mixture of French and German or German/French, maybe that order would be better. Very much a French kitchen. The head chef, executive chef was a guy called Sauget who had worked in America for many years.

MM: Yeah, yeah. He’d worked in America.

GC: In the (inaudible) and places like that. He showed me menus. He used to love to bring me into the office at night time if it was a little bit quiet. His wife would come over and sit in his office because they lived in an apartment across the road and having worked in America they liked to talk through English and talk about their experience. It was interesting to listen to them but he had menus with his name on it, the village he was born and the year he was born and where he was born.
worked and where he didn’t work but a nice man. But it had its disadvantages getting to know
the head chef very well because the second head chef wasn’t very pleased. So we had a conflict.
His name was Constance, surname, I can’t remember his first name but I’ve a good other name for
him too. (Laugh) He was very young actually.

398.MM: So did you witness more of a French style of thing there?

399.GC: The (inaudible) was predominantly French. There was oddly enough there was a guy
who worked in the pastry end of thing Jesus De Valera. Because their names used to be on a board
as you come into the kitchen. I remember the slips of paper I can’t quite remember. It must be to
do with clocking in or something but the names were written quite large. A very big brigade of
chefs but Jesus De Valera I was highly amused at that. He was from Spain. He hadn’t got much
English anyway but a nice guy. My chef de partie I worked in the garde manger in Geneva and
he was Michel Curell from Lyon, an absolute gentleman. Unfortunately I can’t say the same for
the rest of them, because they were very clannish. I found the Germans not very unlike the Irish.
They liked oddly enough and believe it or not they liked the bit of crack and a bit of laugh. Maybe
have a few beers and a sing song. They took their work serious no question about that but when
they want to let their hair down they were good fun. They were nice people.

400.MM: They worked hard so they played hard?

401.GC: Yeah the French were always together in their own little groups but I was lucky with my
chef de partie. He was excellent.

402.MM: So when you came back from, you were gone for a year-and-a-half, a year and nine
months you came back to Dublin and what did you, did you come back to the Intercontinental.

403.GC: The Intercontinental and Gygax was the pastry chef at the time.

404.MM: So this was say around 1968 or so.

405.GC: We’re talking ’68/’69. Yeah ’68 I’d say yeah.

406.MM: And Pierce Hingston

407.GC: So what happened then I work in the Martello Room. If you remember I spoke about a
man called George (inaudible) and George was a nice man to work with, he was a gas character.
Blow the head big time but a very quiet, shy man in actual fact. Him and I and a guy from
Limerick called (inaudible) end tape 1.

Gerry went to work in Aer Lingus and studied for the City & Guilds 706/3 with Jimmy Kilbride and
went on to teach in Cathal Brugha Street. The Figures below include the menus for meals he worked
on for President Reagan and Pope John Paul II.
Figure GC.9: Menu for Pope John Paul II on Rome to Dublin Flight 29/9/1979

Figure GC.10: Menu for Pope from Shannon to Boston (1/10/1979)
Figure GC.11: Menu for Ronald Reagan, Dublin Castle (3/6/1984)

Figure GC.12: City & Guilds 706/3 Class with Jimmy Kilbride and Bob Lawlor on front steps of Dublin College of Catering, Cathal Brugha Street, 1986
Figure GC.13: The Aer Lingus Kitchen Brigade 1993
with Executive Chef Paddy Keys
Edited Interview with John Clancy in Cathal Brugha Street (22/1 & 11/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) John Clancy (JC) Jimmy Rock (JR)

1. MM:  Where and when were you born?

2. JC:  I was born in Dublin on the 3rd December 1952, in the Navan Road and I was adopted aged three by a family called the Bannons. The extraordinary thing about the Bannons, was that George was Church of Ireland and Connie his wife, Catherine, was Roman Catholic and when they got married it caused terrible consternation in the family, in fact her family wouldn’t talk to them, it caused terrible friction in the family. Now I have to say he was an absolute gentleman. His career, he was a sergeant major in the British Army and he fought in the Second World War. He came back from the war and went to work in Maguire and Pattersons. He was a maintenance fitter by trade, very highly skilled.

3. MM:  The match people, they were Quakers, weren’t they?

4. JC:  That’s right, and when I went up to live in Barr na Coiile, I was fostered with another chap called Charlie Warner, no Charlie, nobody knows where Charlie is now. The Bannons had one son Kenneth who would have been about seven years older than I; he would have been around ten at the time. There are several things I remember about the experience, it was my first time ever in a car, and it was my first time ever seeing dogs, they had greyhounds and collies. It was a bit of a frightening experience, you know.

5. I went to school in St. Mary’s in Sandyford, I was there up until around ten or eleven. I was moved from there down to Dundrum National School, because Charlie was classed as a difficult child. I suppose today he had what they would class as an attention deficit disorder (ADHD), but you can imagine how they dealt with it in those days, it was heavy handed, anyway.

6. MM:  Were you both around the same age?

7. JC:  Charlie’s birthday is in July and mine in December, we were born the same year; I actually don’t know if he is dead or alive, which is a pity because he was a lovely guy.

8. MM:  At what stage did the Bannons stop looking after Charlie?

9. JC:  When he ran away at fifteen years of age. I was there up until the time that George died. George got me my first job. My first job was down in the Salthill Hotel, it was called the Crofton Hotel in Dun Laoghaire.

10. MM:  Did the Salthill Hotel become the Crofton Hotel, because the Salthill Hotel had a great name for nearly a century, was it still good as the Crofton?

11. JC:  It was superb, I remember walking into it on my first day, you can imagine what it was like going in at fifteen years of age, I met this chef, I’ll never forget his name, it was extraordinary, Joe Stefanazzi, and Joe had a brother called Charlie who was a waiter, I don’t know his whereabouts now, they would be the old timers, we’re going back forty years, it’s forty years this year actually.

12. MM:  Where were the Stefanazzi’ from?

13. JC:  He was from Italy; he had Italian parents but lived here in Ireland. He was the head chef there. I did a whole summer there and then I moved from there on to …
14. MM: I’ll just hold you there for a moment John, did you stay in primary to fourteen or did you move on to secondary school?

15. JC: I went on to technical school, what we called the ‘Tech’ in Dundrum, I did two or three years there, out of school I thought I’d never get. But I worked from about fifteen and a half, but at sixteen I started work, so I had left Technical School by then.

16. MM: Was it pure coincidence that got you into catering, or did you have a leaning towards it?

17. JC: I think I had because Connie, she was a great cook, there is certain things that I can remember, Sundays were a big day at home because it was a roast. We lived in a house that had a massive big range in the kitchen, and the kitchen was the centre of everything, the television was in the kitchen, and this massive big table, I can still see it today, and we all sat around this big table and the cooking was done there. And you were involved in the cooking. I used to do the apple tarts. And she used to do this thing called apple dumpling, I don’t know if you ever ate an apple dumpling. What they used to do is get suet pastry and line a bowl with it, butter the bowl, flour it and line it with suet pastry, fill it with apples, cloves and sugar, pour the pastry over it again, put it in a pot and steam it. Turn it out and cut it up and have it with custard, it was absolutely, you’d die for it!

18. MM: It was very English really, but she wasn’t English?

19. JC: Oh, it was beautiful. No she wasn’t English, George was English, she was actually from Drumcondra, her name was Duff from Philipsburg Avenue, the family home is still there, I think. We would have been the only two in any part of the family that were adopted, you know. But getting back to the school thing, I went to Dundrum, did my primary, and then went on to the Tech, and then I started work.

20. MM: And in the Tech was there any home economics or anything like that?

21. JC: No there wasn’t, there was woodwork or metalwork but I didn’t really like any of those, I had no time for them, I would have been good with my hands and if I was going to pick any it would have been woodwork. There was one teacher there, Michael Birmingham and he really would have encouraged you.

Discussion on treatment of the adopted children in Barr na Coille National School

22. MM: Moving on, your first job was in the Salthill Hotel, your father had set it up, what was your duties there, and how many were in the kitchen?

23. JC: I was there as a commis chef, I was doing everything, I was doing vegetables, I was piping cream on trifles, I was doing all sorts of jobs. There wasn’t that many in the kitchen, maybe three chefs in it, they did an awful lot of weddings, it overlooked Dublin Bay, it was a beautiful place. What are there now are apartments, the building is completely gone. I cycled from Barr na Coille to Dun Laoghaire and back, but it was straight shifts, you worked from 9am or so, not split shifts. I didn’t start the splits until later on in other hotels. From there I went to the Four Courts Hotel on Inns Quay.

24. MM: What brought you there?

25. JC: Well again it was George, he had a contact there, he knew the maintenance man there, John Burgess, they used to drink together on McGettigans on Queen Street, I think it is still there. So that’s how the whole thing started, he got me a job there. The head chef there was a fellow called Ned Hickey, and the second chef was fellow called Eamon Ingram, a brother of Colm’s, and it was Eamon who got me into the next job.

26. MM: Who was the manager there?
27. JC: Albert Tennant, he had come from the Gresham Hotel, he was the general manager and his daughter was manager. He was there a long time, very English.

28. MM: He was English, but both Ned and Eamon, were they from Dublin, and where had they trained?

29. JC: Tennant was English and both the boys were from Dublin. Ned Hickey had trained in the Gresham, I think, and he had also trained in the Shelbourne. He had a brother Larry who was a kitchen porter in the Shelbourne. Eamon Ingram had trained in the Russell, he had done a lot of time in the Russell.

30. MM: We are talking here about 1968/69?

31. JC: That’s right; I stayed there for around a year and a half. Again my duties would be more the same as the Salthill. I worked in the pastry section or on the larder. I worked with the larder chef there, Peter Byrne, the kitchen was downstairs in the basement and you had veg cooks and all the rest, but the larder was very small, and you did split shifts every day. It was the first place I was introduced to split shifts. So I was introduced to the chef’s sodality which was across the road on Merchants Quay. Do you know about the chef’s sodality?

32. MM: No, tell me about it?

33. JC: (laugh) Father Henry, God be good to him, he’s gone since, he would have been the hotel chaplain, and he used to have these afternoon sodalities, sort of prayers and meetings, I think it was to stop the chefs going into pubs, you know. It was across the road in the Francis Xavier Hall. There wasn’t a lot to do, when you think about it, when you were on your split shift, because there was nothing really around there.

34. MM: Would you have gone to the cinema?

35. JC: No, not really, it wasn’t until I went to the Russell that I started going to the cinema, I’d never been to the cinema, well maybe as a younger child.

36. MM: Was the Four Courts Hotel busy at this stage?

37. JC: God it was, yea. The Four Courts Hotel was like a four star hotel, it was very busy, and remember it was around the times of the Arms Trial as well. I was working there around the time of the Arms Trial. The place was swinging; it was constantly booked out around that time. It was a lovely hotel, a family run hotel, you know.

38. MM: Was the clientele mostly country or lawyers or both?

39. JC: Both, a mixture of both and a lot of politicians, Fianna Fáil, you know. You had that, and the Ormond Hotel and the Clarence Hotel. They were the three hotels that were competing on around that side of the Liffey. And they all did well, in fairness, you know. So I moved from there then into the Russell Hotel around 1969/70 and it was Ned Ingram who got me in there.

40. MM: Who was in the Russell, tell me about the Russell?

41. JC: The head chef was Pierre Rolland, I started in late spring, the beginning of summer, and Rolland would have spent six months there, I think he had just arrived; my initial interview was with Jackie Needham. In effect Jackie really employed me. My first job was working on the roast corner with a fellow called Emmet Byron, who’s now passed on since. Then I moved from there into the larder with Colm Ingram. Now, the set up was that when Pierre Rolland came over from the Bahamas, he brought Henri with him as well, the son, and Henri went into the larder. It was
weird really because, Colm was larder chef but when Henri came back Colm ended up as second in command. It was the same with Jackie, Jackie was head chef but Rolland really was the supreme, if you like. It was extraordinary, it was the first time I’d ever seen food prepared to such a standard, it was absolutely incredible. The attention to detail was just unbelievable. It was the first time, no it wasn’t, it was the second time I’d seen it, the first time was in the Four Courts Hotel, where they had duty managers or trainee managers working in the kitchen, working as chefs in the kitchen, and I thought that was brilliant, now, mind you they weren’t treated very well, they were taken advantage of, I think anyway. But in the Russell they were treated as chefs, they got the same treatment as the rest of us, you know.

42. I think a big thing as well was sitting at the chef’s table. Every commis was given their turn of preparing the food for the chef’s table. It was brilliant, everybody sat around the table, the head chef sat there, the sous chef, all the chefs, and the commis never sat with the chefs. The commis chiefs always sat below the salt, that was the term we used, (laugh) but it was tough, by Jaysus, it was tough.

43. MM: But you had the full brigade as such?

44. JC: It was unbelievable, every corner, you had the saucier, you had the garde manger, every corner was there, I suppose really my most terrifying experience, I have to say Máirtín, was when the orders were called in, they were all called in French. I hadn’t a clue what they were saying, not a fucking clue. I remember Colm Ingram saying to me, ‘now son, you are going to have to learn fast’, and by Jaysus, fear is a great motivator, I’ll tell you, you know. But what they did, is they had little cards, they’d get you to write things on cards. When they would be calling in an order, all you would hear was ‘chez command, quatre covert, blah blah blah’ all this stuff, and then ‘oui chef, oui chef, oui chef’ all coming from everywhere, and it all came together. Rolland sat on a stool at the hotplate. The hotplate was dressed with white linen, and all the cloche’s were there, all spotless, spotless! Michael Cullen was the silver man, the head kitchen porter, and Micheal had his assistant. Now, Rolland was treated as a God, he was a God in that kitchen. Hector Fabron was the manager at the time, Fabron would come down and they’d have coffee every morning and that was it, and Fabron would leave him then and maybe come back in the afternoon and have a discussion. But I remember one time there was a dispute about some dish that came back, and to this day I can still see the sauce boat getting flung across the kitchen over to Jackie Needham, I don’t know if the sauce was not right or something, and he just got it and fucked it across the hotplate, Rolland did, and said ‘this is fucking shit’. The whole kitchen stopped, it was incredible. To think about it, to think he would talk to Jackie like that, Jackie Needham, the respect he had was incredible. Even though Jackie had his problems himself with the drink and that, Jackie couldn’t get through a day without knocking back a half bottle of sherry in the morning. Jackie would be in the morning before everybody.

45. MM: What age was Jackie?

46. JC: At the time, when I knew him first, he certainly would have been in his late thirties to early forties but by God, bless us, he looked like he’d had a hard life. I’m not sure where he was from but Matt Dowling would know more about him than I would. Matt was there as well.

47. MM: Was Matt and Jackie on a parallel level or what was the story?

48. JC: No, what happened is that Matt Dowling was a young chef there on the sauce, but he wasn’t the sauce chef. Eamon Ingram was the sauce chef, when Eamon left a chap called Lorcan O’Rafferty. Jimmy Tyrell was there, there was Lorcan O’Rafferty, Tony Butler – in the pastry – he’s passed on since, and there was a chap there called John Kearney who later went on to work in the Intercontinental (Hotel), he was a fantastic pastry chef, and there was Emmet (Byron), ah yes, I’ll tell you who was on the sauce, Willy Woods, and Willy went on to work in the Celtic Mews with Joe Gray. He was a fantastic sauce chef, that fellow. And there was Colm Ingram, and there
were loads of commis, I couldn’t remember half of them and you had loads of trainee managers as well.

49. MM: Were there any women working there?

50. JC: No, no women in the kitchen, the commis did the veg. The veg house was under, you went through the kitchen, which was in the basement, to what I called the Stephen’s Green side of it and outside there were two sheds and that was the veg house. Bags of spinach the height of the lamp there, and you’d be picking this stuff forever. The regime was good, because in the morning when you came in, before work started all the commis were lined up and you had to put your hands out like that (in front of your body) to make sure everything was clean, your uniform had to be clean, white hat, white neck tie and everything. If you didn’t have it you’d be sent back to the locker room and that was it.

51. MM: And who was the drill master?

52. JC: That would have been Jackie Needham, very much so, and Rolland would look out and if he saw something, he wouldn’t call you, he’d call Jackie, and Jackie would give that poor unfortunate whore a bollocking or whatever. That was it. Everyday you got clean uniforms and they were supplied by the hotel. That was the first time I had experienced this, in the Four Courts we had to wash our own. Another thing I experience in the Russell for the first time was cooking with gas cookers. In the Four Courts and the Salthill it was coal and you’d be black as soot! Filthy, you know, you used to have to wear the black aprons to stoke the fire or whatever. The gas cookers had been there for years but they were like new, everything was spotless. The chefs were responsible for cleaning down their own area, and I’ll tell you something, if there was any dirt on the floor, you got an awful bollocking from the chefs, it was unbelievable. The place was just spotless, absolutely unbelievable, and then you had the commis de garde in the afternoon. So the w a y i t w o k e d y o u c a m e i n a t 8. 3 0 i n t h e m o r n i n g a n d y o u s t a r t e d w o r k a t 8. 4 5 a m a n d y o u w o r k e d u p u n t i l 11. 3 0 . Y o u h a d n o b r e a k , y o u w o r k e d s t r a i g h t t h r o u g h , a n d t h e n y o u s a t d o w n a t t h e c h e f s t a b l e a n d h a d y o u r l u n c h f r o m 11. 3 0 a m t o 12p m . Y o u w e n t b a c k t o s e r v i c e t h e n . S e r v i c e s t a r t e d a t 12. 3 0 . F a b r o n a n d R o l l a n d w o u l d e a t , t h e y ’ d s i t d o w n t o l u n c h i n t h e r e s t a u r a n t a t s a y 12p m o r s o . N o w , o n l y w h e n R o l l a n d w a s o v e r , J a c k i e n e v e r a t e o u t i n t h e r e s t a u r a n t , h e a l w a y s a t e d o w n s t a i r s , R o l l a n d w o u l d e a t u p s t a i r s .

53. Then service started at 12.30pm and service went on until 2.30pm, and from 2.30 the chefs would finish up. Everyone would clear out of the kitchen but there was an afternoon shift and we used to have what is called a commis de garde. There would be a commis de garde, there would be a commis de garde for the larder and a commis de garde for the pastry because there were trolleys involved. So they had to take the hors d’oeuvres trolley back and the same for the pastry, and if stuff had to be replenished then they did that. They also replenished the sweet trolley and the hors d’oeuvres trolley for that evening so that it would all be ready.

54. MM: So it was all silver service and the hors d’oeuvres trolley and the sweet trolley?

55. JC: Everything, we never plated a hors d’oeuvres in the kitchen, never; it was all done in the restaurant. Classic, classic cooking and service and it was great, like sauces went out in sauce boats, no dish was dressed with a sauce, with the exception of Sole Bonne Femme or the glazed dishes. It was put on a salver and glazed, with sliced potatoes around it, not mash potato, everything was classic. Brilliant, even in the pastry it was the same, the likes of the iced bombes, if it was crepes suzettes or soufflé grand marinier, everything was done to order. There was none of this having a panada done in the fridge and you took it out and put your egg with it, no. Everything was done fresh, you see. You could be there until 11.30 or 12 at night doing desserts, no problem, that’s the way it was.

56. MM: It was considered to be a very expensive place to eat?
It was a very expensive place to eat; I have menus that I must bring in to you. That was another thing, the carte de jour, a different menu was written every day, it was never the same menu, and different from lunch to dinner. That was Jackie's job, and the menu was put up on the wall and you knew what you had to do and you just got on with it. It was the first time also that I'd actually seen live fish come into a place.

Was this for Trout au bleu?

Yes, all the live fish came in, perfect, and you also had these fridges, small units, and the whole place was so compact it was unbelievable. All the fish were put on separate trays, sole on one tray, salmon on another tray, it was so neat, nothing came in prepared; everything came in fresh, so you filleted all the fish and the butchery was the same. The butchery came in, and we had a special area for doing the butchery. They hung their own beef. It would come in as a half body and was broken down. Oh, yeah, it was all broken down, oxtails, tongues, you name it, everything, it was incredible actually.

I take it there was an à la carte (menu) as well?

There was yeah, oh Jesus, when service started, by Jaysus, I'll tell you, you would sweat; boy did you sweat. And you just kept going, if you wanted a drink of water, you asked the chef, 'chef, can I go and get a drink of water?', that's the way it was, it was fine, you know, but at the same time, it was very organised, because the chefs knew what they were doing, they were professionals, you know, and they knew exactly. The sauce corner would be a very heavy corner, because there was an awful lot of mis en place there, the veg would be as well, you know. All the potato dishes were all made, you know, hand cut chips, all that kind of stuff. Any of the deep fried potato dishes were done by the roast corner. All the other ones, like Pommes Anna, were done by the veg corner. And all the other veg dishes, the soups were done by the veg corner, stocks were done by the veg corner. Anything to do with pastry work that needed savoury work was partly prepared in the pastry and finished by the sauce corner. You don't see that now, it's gone. Take for example Beef Wellington, the beef would have been prepared by the sauce with the soubise set on top and left to the pastry, wrapped either in pancakes or pigs caul, and then wrapped in brioche, probably brioche if truth be known because everything, absolutely everything was top class. At one stage then, butter, hollandaise, they would probably make about 8lbs of Hollandaise a day, 4lbs for lunch and another 4lbs for dinner, and used every bit of it. And all the extensions of all the sauces, everything was just bang on. Demi-Glaze was made from scratch, you started off with your brown stock, your estoufade, and your brown sauce, the espagnole and that was it. That was the way it was. They had a double boiler for that, and they had a specific area for the stocks and those heavy sauces, where they were made. The kitchen porter Michael Cullen would have played an important role in that, in making sure the stocks were on every morning. It was a twenty four hour thing, it kept going, it never stopped. Consommés were made fresh, there was none of this mince being bought in, it was minced there. The only food processor we had was this massive big ‘buffalo’ that we used to use, if you were making game terrines or patés or that. That is where I learnt a lot of my recipes for game patés etc. The stuff they used was absolutely superb, fantastic.

Game was quite big there as well?

It was, and smoked salmon as well. They used to smoke their own salmon as well in a little smoke house out the back. There was an awful lot in it, it was a fantastic place, it was a shame that it closed, but that's the way I suppose. I was there at the time that Ireland hosted the Eurovision Song Contest and it was held in the Gaiety Theatre, the year after Dana had won it; it was 1971 because I left it after that. We did a function in Iveagh House, and I'll tell you, Frank Aiken was the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the connection there was that when we finished school in Sandyford, we used to Aiken's fields to pick potatoes and strawberries. All that land is all gone now.

He held a function in Iveagh House for the Eurovision in 1971?
JC: The Russell Hotel did all the catering for Iveagh House and it was top class, all our waiters went in there as well, it was like they were doing the function in the Russell Hotel because the standard didn’t drop. You had all the taoisigh of the day whoever the taoiseach was they all came to lunch and to dinner. The Russell was the place at the time, itself and the Hibernian, they were sister hotels. What we used to have was a training exchange programme going on. Let’s say on a Wednesday afternoon you’d go from the Russell Hotel down to the Hibernian and we’d meet the lads half way, and sometimes we wouldn’t go at all, we’d go to the Green Cinema, but it was good craic. I went down there a couple of times and Roger Noblet was the head chef there, and he’d give you different lessons. Basically what it was, one of the reasons they did it was to stop them going off drinking in the afternoon, keep them busy, give them something to do. You might get a job to do during the afternoon; they might say ‘I want you to turn some mushrooms’. That’s how you learnt to turn mushrooms, they’d put five or six chips put in front of you and you would be there turning away there. And that was it, only the best ones were kept and the rest were sliced for soup or for a Bonne Femme or a Chasseur or something. Personally, I think the Russell is why I’m as disciplined as I am now. You never took shortcuts, you weren’t allowed to take shortcuts, you wouldn’t even dream of taking shortcuts, and you’d know there would be a price to pay for it. I saw people taking shortcuts and they got an awful bollocking over it, in the end of the day it did them no good. There was a standard there and you didn’t drop below that standard.

MM: Was there a formal apprenticeship there that you signed up to?

JC: There was, now I didn’t finish it because I moved on. The problem with me was that I found it very difficult, I was cycling in from Barr na Cole to Stephen’s Green and you were doing split shifts. It was very, very hard, you know.

MM: And were you going home in the afternoon?

JC: No, you were either staying in town or doing the training, or sometimes you would stay on in the afternoon, most times you would stay on in the afternoon, not in the kitchen, but in the locker room or the canteen, and they’d give you exercises to do. They might get you to look up some of the classical sauces, and again it was a kind of education really, it really was. And you would get together and they would give you little tests to do, little hand written tests.

MM: Who was organising that?

JC: That would have been organised through Hector Fabron or Ollie McMahon, who was Fabron’s assistant. Ollie went on to run the catering in AIB but served his apprenticeship under Fabron. Then what they did was they opened up the Robert Emmet Grill beside the Russell, part of the Russell, they opened this, because there was one down in the Hibernian they had the Bianconi Grill. It was really popular, but looking at a different market. It was quicker but a lot of the preparation was done in the kitchen and sent across. My last stint was over in the Robert Emmet Grill, I absolutely loved it. It was brilliant. I worked with Emmet Byron, and with Willy Woods there, and I have to say they were fantastic chefs, great chefs, absolutely fantastic. They were so organised, everything was done, you started, your shift was from 3pm to 11pm and I’ll tell you Máirtín, you worked every minute of it! But it was great, you enjoyed it.

MM: Was there an open charcoal grill in the room?

JC: Oh, yes there was, the chef was cooking the steaks in the room, but we had a kitchen attached to the room, and it was the first time that they brought waitresses into the Russell Hotel. They were all male waiters in the Russell Room, but now in the Emmet Grill it was male and female, but mostly female.

MM: I take it they were all Irish?
75. JC: Oh, yeah, all Irish, by this stage it was all Irish waiters and chefs, apart from Rolland and Henri, although Henri was born here - all Irish. So I went from there then and went to work in Opperman’s in Kiltiernan.

76. MM: Was that because it was closer to home?

77. JC: Yes, it was closer to home, absolutely; I was still living in Barr na Coille at the time.

78. MM: How did that come about?

79. JC: I heard they were opening a hotel in it and I went up, and I met this chap with a moustache, and I said I was wondering if there were any jobs going, and it turned out to be Michel Treyvaud, and he took me on.

80. MM: Where had Michel Treyvaud come from, where had he worked before Oppermans?

81. JC: Michel had come from Sligo, he had worked before that in the Moira Hotel with Eugene Mc Sweeney and the Swiss guy Willy Widmer. So Johnny was running Opperman’s but Michel was the head chef. The pastry chef there was a guy called Johnny Steininger (Irish but probably a German father), who had come from the Gresham, and the sous chef there was fellow called Joe Kennedy, who went off to Canada. I can’t think of the guy who was on the veg corner and there was another fellow on the larder. You see, Michel would have been a real working head chef, he took control ‘big time’, he would be in there at 7am and it was a busy hotel. At the time Cassius Clay was boxing in Ireland and he stayed there, he was always in and out of the kitchen, he was always having the craic with Michel. Opperman himself was a very good cook, you know, very good, both himself and Willy had the hospitality thing in their blood, Carl was an accountant. Johnny had been catering commissioner in Dublin Airport – an absolutely lovely man.

82. MM: Yes, I’ve interviewed Johnny, he’s great. That place didn’t last too long, however?

83. JC: No, it lasted nearly two years. I went there in 1971 and went to the Intercontinental in 1973. What happened is that Opperman sold the hotel and Pat Quinn took it over and then I left, we were let go, and Michel had offered me a job in the new Jury’s in Ballsbridge, he had gone there and I was there from 1973 to 1990.

84. MM: Had the Intercontinental actually left?

85. JC: The Intercontinental had actually closed their hotels and Jury’s had bought over the group of hotels.

86. MM: So you never actually worked for the Intercontinental Hotels?

87. JC: No, but it still very much operated in the Intercontinental style, it took about a year to get that get that operation system out of it. Michel had gone in as head chef, Pierce Hingston had been there before that but the Burlington had just opened and when the Intercontinental closed, Pierce went to the Burlington as head chef. Now what happened first of all is when Jury’s took over the Intercon, Joe Collins who was head chef in the old Jury’s in Dame Street went and took over as head chef in the new Jury’s in Ballsbridge, but it didn’t work out, he was gone within six months, it was a different system and that is how Michel moved in. The connection with Michel was Lee Kidney, who had worked with Michel in Westport I think. Lee Kidney was the general manager, Michael McCarthy, who had worked for Wavin, the piping crowd, came in as managing director and he turned it around. I went on from strength to strength.

88. MM: So you went into New Jury’s which was much bigger than Oppermans?
89. **JC:** I’ll never forget it, when I walked into that kitchen, the amount of hats, the amount of chefs working in the kitchen, you see at that time they were still negotiating the redundancy packages, the Intercontinental staff were still there.

90. **MM:** Were there any foreigners still there?

91. **JC:** No, they were all gone; I’ll tell you who was there. Joe Quirke was in the pastry; John Linnane was the assistant pastry chef, Johnny Martin, Shay Kirwan; Paddy Reilly, John Culhane who went to the Burlington after six months, Brendan P. O’Neill, Aidan Martin, Gerry Byrne, Matty Hoare, Tom Keaveney were all there, and the baker was a fellow called Liam Rock, and there must have been around twenty five commis (chefs) in the place.

92. And at that time in the Embassy Room Restaurant, it was huge, a massive restaurant, you had your head waiter and you had captains, this was the first time I saw captains – station captains. They would have been looking after a certain amount of tables, it was like the same as a chef de rang, but the American version, brought in by the Intercontinental group. You then had the Copper Grill, and all the steaks, all the grilling was all done in the Copper room, so there was a commis and a chef out there. Then you had the Beef Trolley as well. It was not unlike the service style of
the Russell, because everything came through the tannoy, it was a huge kitchen, you had the
butchery in one end of it and the pastry kitchen in another end and the middle of the kitchen was
where the stillroom was and you had the larder, the larder service area, the sauce corner which was
fairly tight, but you had the sauce corner, the veg corner, and the roast corner all along the one line
so everything was served from there but out over the hotplates onto table cloths and cloche’s
which was always done by Michel or Brendan.

93. **MM:** Who was the sous chef?

94. **JC:** Brendan O’ Neill was sous chef but you also had Shay Kirwan who moved from the
larder to become the sous chef. Then later Davy Edwards appeared around 1975, a year or so later,
and he came in as executive chef, so Michel held on to his position as head chef. Prior to that Peter
Malone had joined the company as front office manager, and Malone had come from Pat Quinn’s
Club, where he was manager and that was the connection between Malone and Edwards. Prior to
Malone working in Pat Quinn’s club he worked in the Shelbourne Hotel. David Lester was food
and beverage manger and he left to pursue his own place up near Christchurch there – the Lord
Edward.

95. **MM:** So he took over from Cuniam?

96. **JC:** Getting back to Malone, he took over as food and beverage manager and he brought Dave
Edwards in as executive chef, looking after the administration of the kitchen while Michel was
very much a working ‘hands on’ head chef. He was an excellent head chef, actually. When the
redundancies happened, before Davy came, but there was a later bout of redundancies later as
well.

97. **MM:** Was that following the Mountbatten murder?

98. **JC:** That’s right, but I’ll tell you who was there as well, Tony Byrne. Tony was the staff chef.
Tony went back to the Shelbourne and then set up his own place, Trotters of Fairview, his son
Paul runs it now.

99. **MM:** When you started in Jury’s, what was your role?

100. **JC:** My first job there was as a commis on the sauce corner. I worked with a fellow called
Mick Moore, a very good sauce cook who had come from the Moira. Basically I did all the
corners, and I did a lot of time on pastry with John Linnane, ended up being his assistant. He was
the head pastry chef and I was the assistant pastry chef, and then John left and I was offered the
job as pastry chef and I took it.

101. **MM:** When John left, did he leave to come here (DIT) to teach?

102. **JC:** Yes, that was the time of the redundancies, 1983 or 1984, there was a good clear out that
time, himself, Johnny Martin, Aidan Martin – maybe Aidan had left before the redundancies, I’m
not sure. About four of the top guys left at that time.

103. **MM:** How did you get into teaching? Did you do the City and Guilds 706/3?

104. **JC:** (laugh) I applied to do the 706/3 Kitchen and Larder at the age of 27 or 28, I had just
married, and I got a letter back saying I was too young, at 27 or 28, so that will tell you, they were
very mature, the likes of Paddy Keys, Eugene Mc Govern, these kinds of fellows, they were all
doing it. So I left it and about three years later, Bobby Maxwell who worked in Jury’s was
accepted and said why don’t you think of doing the pastry. John Linnane contacted me and said he
was running the 706/3 pastry and would I think of doing it so I did. That first group, my 706/3
pastry class, there was John Dowd, Tony Campbell, Derek O’Brien, Brendan P. O’Neill, I can’t
remember the rest, but were mostly practicing pastry chefs at the time and what happened is we
were offered the City & Guilds 7/11 but we knew more than we were being taught so they offered us the 706/3 and we did it over two years. So after doing that, I said I’d do the kitchen and larder 706/3, and in the meantime Joe Erraught contacted me and asked me to do some part-time teaching. Joe Hegarty was away in Nepal that year on secondment so Joe Erraught was in charge. My first class was a Friday afternoon class teaching pastry work to diet cooks. The first person I encountered was Michael Ganly, who was acting head of apprenticeship at the time, because Joe was acting head of school. That’s when it all started and then in 1990 after all them years, I’ll tell you what happened is I went for a position in Jury’s as sous chef when Jimmy Connell left, and a couple of us went for it and I didn’t get it. It was probably the best thing that happened to me because it made me think where was I going with my life. So I decided to leave. Alan O’Reilly was running a restaurant over in Rathgar called ‘Clarets’ and I took over that restaurant and ran it for over a year.

105. MM: Did you keep the name ‘Clarets’ or did you re-name it?

106. JC: No, I re-named it ‘Garvey’s’, I was there for a year, and I leased the restaurant from a chap called Tom Kenny, and interestingly enough, that hotel prior to Tom Kenny owning it was owned by Henry Ivory, who is James Carberry’s father in law now, Niamh Ivory’s father, and Niamh had been a student here in the college. Tom Kenny originally owned the Inn at the Park near Mount Jerome.

107. MM: What year was that 1989, and is that when Alan O’Reilly moved Clarets to Blackrock?

108. JC: Yeah, 1989, but I was just paying rent on the restaurant and Mark Farrell who had been working with me in Jury’s took over the restaurant from me. I’m not sure how long he kept it.

109. MM: How did the restaurant go for you and why did you leave it?

110. JC: It went very well, but I had still kept my hand in teaching in the college and what happened was that a position came up for more hours in the college and I decided to focus on the teaching job because the restaurant was tough, I have to say.

111. MM: When were you made full-time here in the college, John?

112. JC: In 1994, what happened is that in 1991 I signed up to what they call an EPT contract and that was the road to full-time as it were.

113. MM: When was the first time you ate out?

114. JC: The first time I ate out, I remember one place in particular I ate in. It was a cake shop, of all things, and it was called the Penny Farthing, on the bottom of Wicklow Street. They used to do these lovely cakes in it, and we were brought there, not regularly, but occasionally. Where else, probably Bewleys was the first place I ate out in.

115. MM: What would be the first restaurant kind of place you ate in?

116. JC: God, I would have to think of that one. When Bernie and I were married first we used to go to a place called the Georgian Restaurant on Richmond Street and it was a beautiful restaurant. We’d go there maybe once a fortnight, on a Friday and you would have a lovely meal for two with wine for forty pounds, great value for money. I never really ventured into ethnic restaurants at all, I don’t know why, they never really appealed to me, you know.

117. MM: While you worked in the Russell in the early 1970s were you familiar with the likes of Snaffles, or the Soup Bowl or these sort of places?
Figure JC.4: Japanese Festival Menu, Jury’s Hotel, Ballsbridge (1977)

118. JC: No, not really. I would have known of the Coq Hardi and Seán Kinsella’s place, The Mirabeau, but I never ate in them. There was a place in Ballsbridge called Wednesdays, I ate there.
a couple of times and it was a big deal to eat there. I ate there a couple of times, there was the Lobster Pot and then Paul Kelly’s place there beside Paddy Cullen’s, it was called Broph’s. James Carberry worked there. Then there was Paul Groves who worked in The Grey Door, off Leeson Street there run by the two brothers. It was a Scandanavian restaurant.

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119. MM: John, you might tell me how you got involved with the Panel of Chefs?
120. JC: When Dave Edwards was in Jury’s in 1976, the Panel of Chefs was reconstituted or reformed as such, because there was a while there where there had been no activity or organisation. It began to move on, to gather momentum and I joined it in 1981. Noel Cullen was chairman of the Branch at the time and Paddy Brady was secretary. I joined in 1981 and in 1987 I became chairman of the Leinster Branch.

121. MM: When you joined, was it because you were starting to do competitions?
122. JC: Yes, I was starting to do competitions, which were held either in the Burlington Hotel or in the RDS.

123. MM: Were the competitions always held side by side with the Catering Exhibition?
124. JC: A couple of times they were but there was one year that the Catering Exhibition was taking place in the RDS and what happened was that the Catering Equipment Association (CEA) sponsored the Panel of Chefs and whatever agreement they had over sponsorship, they couldn’t reach an agreement this year, and the Panel of Chefs held the competition that year on their own in the Green Isle Hotel.

125. MM: That was the year Frank Farren was President of the Panel, wasn’t it?
126. JC: That’s correct, and there was a lot of controversy about it at the time, it created a bit of a division between the Panel and the CEA. It strengthened our hand, because the show wasn’t as successful because we were not in it. It prove the point to us that we were very much an integral part of it, and it took that event to happen for them to realise that they needed the chefs, and we were very much a big part of it, and subsequently to that when I was president, when we ran the Catex in 1999, we did an exit survey which showed that 85% of people who came to see the show came to see cooking. It’s obvious, and the shows went from strength to strength from there on. The Green Isle gave us the confidence that we don’t need the CEA, that we could run our own events, and the Panel in the past did run its own events in the Mansion House and in Busáras and all these places.

127. MM: When was the first time you were made aware of the competitions?
128. JC: I suppose it was in Jury’s with John Linnane, we would have entered competitions together. I would have done either the pastillage or pastry section or cold larder. There was a great competition team in Jury’s at the time. Davy was very much to the fore as was Michel Treyvaud and in the end of the day it was extra training and we would stay back in the afternoon or in the evening and do the extra training and basically what we were doing was like little qualifying heats among ourselves. There was a great competitiveness going on. They were very interesting competitions because they are not like they are now, the last competition in which I won gold in was for petit fours. We would have to present sixty four petit fours along with a gateau on a mirror with a centrepiece, now there is a huge amount of work in that. The mirror would have been about two foot squared so a lot of work. There was a lot of cold work at that time, interestingly enough not that much interest in hot cooking as there is now. It’s a battle now to try and encourage them into the cold salon. We used to stay up all night preparing for competitions, I can’t remember the year I was on the Irish Team for Hotelympia but Jaysus, we were up for around three nights in a row. How we functioned, I don’t know, but yet, we came away with the Nation’s Cup that year.
Who was on the team with you the year you represented Ireland at Hotelympia?

John Coughlan was team captain, Eugene McGovern was team manager, John Morin was cold larder, Eddie Sherridan, Dave Murray who used to work here in the Cafeteria (DIT), John Dowd, Joe Erraught, and a chap from the Airport called Joe Frayne. I got to know these people from competitions.

John Morin was in the Imperial in Cork, where did he train?

He was a student in DIT and I’m not sure where he trained after that. A few other older guys would have been with us at Hotelympia, like Michael Marley and Kevin O’Meara who both worked for CERT. Marley would have been a senior judge over there.

I was on the board of the Panel of Chefs from the early 1990s and in 1994 I went for vice-president but was defeated. But the following year in 1995 I was elected vice-president and then I became president from 1997 to 1999.

How many members had the Panel of Chefs at that stage?

There were easily four hundred members at the time, it was huge. The two biggest branches, the most active branches were the Leinster Branch and the Western Branch. Branches then started to develop separately and ran their own competitions and the new branch in the South East grew to about eighty members in four years, it was incredible. It was something that the other branches looked at.

Who was the driving force behind it?

A fellow called Norbert Toole, a German chap, he was the head chef down in Jury’s and another chap called J.J. Healy and a few others. I sense that some members of the executive felt threatened by this growth, they felt they might take over, but this was never going to happen.

What in your opinion was the remit of the Panel of Chefs, what was the Panel there to do?

When I was a young chef you heard of the Panel of Chefs, and when I was accepted, it was a big deal, for me. It was a big deal for anyone who was accepted. You must remember it was originally set up as a head chef grouping and was originally set in Dublin. It grew from there to become Branches. I suppose for someone like me, it was a chance to meet chefs from other hotels, because back then you worked in your hotel and you didn’t have opportunities to meet other chefs apart from the competitions. There was a lot of social events in the Panel of Chefs calendar which was great, the AGM weekends were great. You might only meet people on that weekend but it was great. Quite a lot of college lecturers, actually a huge amount, were members of the Panel of Chefs. I suppose the biggest amount was from Dublin, at one stage there would have been about fifteen or sixteen members here in the college (DIT) who were members of the Panel of Chefs, then you had Galway and Cork, some in Tralee, Tallaght wasn’t around at the time. During 1985 in Noel’s time, he was responsible for getting the Panel of Chefs into WACS (World Association of Cooks Societies). In 1994, Brendan O’Neill was president, and Ray Shanks was taken on as a public relations man who had limited success. Some sponsors felt it was impersonal dealing through a representative when they were used to dealing directly with the president or the secretary.

One thing I always found was the reputation of the Panel of Chefs was based solely on competitions and I tried to change that by putting a bid in to hold the WACS conference in 2004. We sowed the seed in 2000 and people thought we were mad but the reaction was so positive it was incredible and we surged from there. We had a very successful conference in 2004.
Was there an educational focus, a legislation focus, or a welfare focus to the Panel of Chefs? Were there any of these things within the Panel or was it merely a mechanism to organise competitions?

Well if you go back to its origins, the Panel was founded under the auspices of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (IT&GWU), and Micky Mullen I think was around at the time. For a long time we were tagged with the union sort of thing, and it might have been a deterrent for some people, thinking ‘I’m not joining the union’, or ‘I’m already in the union’, or something. There was that sort of aspect to it and they carried that for a while. But as regards legislation, there really wasn’t, you know, I often wonder why they never went down the road to professionalising our craft. I made moves when I was president, but when you are president you have two years and unless you are followed by somebody that has the same commitment and drive for your policies it is hard to keep things going. It’s a pity really because, I was reading recently that the American Culinary Federation lobbied the government for ten years to get the trade of cooking recognised as an actual profession. The end result is the American Culinary Federation is the only body in America that can certify professional cooks in America. I don’t see why the Panel of Chefs can’t go down that road and it makes sense to me. We have the knowledge, we have the people in there willing to do it. As regards to training, I think a lot of training and learning took place, to be honest, because you know there were very close links with CERT at the time, when we were training National Teams, it took place in CERT up in Roebuck or in Amiens Street. As regards other training, no, but we would have done a lot of demonstrations for charity; we did a lot of work with the Irish Cancer Society and so forth.

Was there a Journal?

There was what was called the Stockpot. It was a quarterly magazine which was very interesting but it hasn’t been produced since god knows when. I think the last one that was produced was when I produced it, the year Noel Cullen died, I did a tribute to him in it. They have talked about it, and talked about doing an E-zine but it is something that WACS encourage Chefs Associations to get involved in, because it is certainly a way of informing people and also a way of generating some money, because a company like say CPC could sponsor the printing of it or whatever. But that hasn’t happened in a long time and I don’t know if they are going to produce something for the fiftieth anniversary this year or not. I know Johnny Carroll is working on something at the moment to be launched next year. A lot of training took place and a lot of junior members did well out of it, got good jobs out of it.

The idea was that you had to be vetted before you became a member, was it?

Well that system is very interesting because when I became a member I had to provide my CV and a history of my work from when I started to the present and I had to be proposed by two members of good standing and then every member had to be discussed. That doesn’t happen anymore. Now they are just taking in members when they can get them, you know. There was a very strict process there, Michael Ganly was the membership officer and I remember if they didn’t fulfil a certain criteria, they were just written back to and if they wanted to apply again they were welcome. They might have been refused on the basis of lack of experience, one criteria was you had to have so many years experience as a chef outside of your training. I think you needed a minimum of five years experience after training before you could be a member.

Is this information available, do you have an archive of minutes of meetings etc.

There would be some work done by Paddy Brady who was secretary for quiet a while.

Has the Panel of Chefs broken with the number four branch of the IT&GWU or SIPTU as it now is?
JC: When you say broken, I think it goes back to the time of the Shelbourne dispute when one of the members of the Panel of Chefs, Brendan O’Neill, was appointed head chef, and he was only appointed three weeks when the strike took place and he was caught. There was even a motion of censure put against him because he was not in the union and he passed the picket and number four branch got very involved in that.

MM: What year was that?

JC: I’m not exactly sure, it was around the mid 1980s, but it was a very turbulent time within the panel. The other point about it is that in Leinster, the Panel would have always held their meetings in Liberty Hall. I think relations got very strained there after the Shelbourne dispute. Some people supported Brendan and others felt it is not right, but in the end of the day people have to make their living, it got messy, and for some reason the Panel started to move away, but I remember meeting the representative from the union, I think it was Martin King at the time, during my time as either vice president or president, because there was suggestions that we remove the IT&GWU from the logo. But that was the old logo, when they became SIPTU there was talks of removing the logo, so it was removed but we kept the wording ‘founded in 1958 under the auspices of the Irish Transport & General Workers Union’. But I see now it is not used any more. I was always conscious that it should be maintained because it is part of the history, but people move on and different mindsets think differently.

MM: Were you in the union from day one? Have you seen a diminishing of the union over the years?

JC: I was in the Union since the age of seventeen. The union was very strong at one stage, when I say strong, they were there if you needed them. Unions are an evil necessity I suppose in many ways, if we didn’t need them, I have to say anytime I needed them, well I ended up on the national chefs’ committee as a representative for the union on the NCCCB (National Craft Curriculum Certification Board).

MM: What was the chefs’ committee?

JC: The chefs’ committee was chaired in my time by Michael Ganly and if people were in breach of say disciplinary rules in the union, when I was training, as an example, young commis chefs under eighteens years of age were not allowed to work after 10pm. You had to let them go at 10pm or earlier, so if you didn’t follow these rules the chefs’ committee was there to rap you over the knuckles for that sort of thing. But also there too, there was a slight cross over too, where people were using the Panel to report a transgression, working people to long, not paying them for their time etc. but the net result of that was that some employers took a grudge against the Panel and there are a lot of people out there, maybe not now, but back then, that wouldn’t have had much time for the Panel of Chefs precisely for that reason, what were they? Were they a chefs association or were they a union? Remember the objective of the Panel of Chefs was to promote professional cookery in Ireland, that’s the remit.

MM: Most professional bodies starting off with the original chefs societies around the 1870s normally approached that remit with three strands: firstly a professional journal, then a school, then the running of culinary competitions?

JC: We might have fulfilled two of those criteria but certainly not three. The school end of it is something they lacked on, they certainly did the demonstrations, it wasn’t a school but would have been seen as educational, in a way what you are doing is giving something back to the community.

MM: Well both the French and English models failed anyway, well the English managed to open the Westminister Technical School but the French school only lasted about six months and the employers couldn’t agree on wages or sending the students.
160. **JC:** The Panel would have had a strong voice in the past and would certainly have had a strong representation on likes of CERT, we would have had a voice there and also in the union. So anything like training programmes that were being developed, we would have been consulted on them but I don’t think that happens anymore.

161. **MM:** Do you think the Panel was depending on certain strong individuals to keep it going?

162. **JC:** Very much so, there were a lot of strong individuals and they drove it. Noel Cullen was one of them, he had a very strong vision of where the Panel was and where it should go.

163. **MM:** Now Noel went to America, so when he left, there was a gap.

164. **JC:** What happened was there were certain people like Willie Somers and Eugene McGovern who were working in CERT and then they moved on to different jobs, Matt Dowling was down in CERT also, there was good people there at the time. Noel was the real shining light during my time. And the great achievement of my time was bringing the WACS congress to Ireland in 2004, but I was surprised at the amount of negativity we faced when we returned to say we had won the bid. But you just rise above it.

165. **MM:** John, when I was a student here in the early 1990s nearly all the lecturers were members of the Panel of Chefs, when did that come to an end?

166. **JC:** That’s a good question, I’m the only full time member of staff who is now still a member of the Panel, and I’m often asked why. I think a younger group of people came in there and also that the Panel itself changed around 2002 with directorships and becoming a limited company etc. They did away with the role of the president, had instead an honorary president and formed a new position of CEO which in a way were two conflicting roles. Chefs associations around the world need new blood to keep vibrant and I know the Panel of Chefs even today is not what it was twenty years ago. The attraction twenty years ago was that you had people there who were recognisable within the industry, it was more prestigious, and if they wanted to be part of the organisation then you wanted to be part of it also. It is not as prestigious to be a member of the Panel now as it was then. You also have people joining to have it on their CV but they may not attend a meeting from one end of the year to the next. It’s a good question, because if you were to say to me ‘if I join the Panel of Chefs today, what’s in it for me?’, the answer is nothing really. I think they need to sit down and re-focus, and re-think the whole rationale as to what they are all about, you know. They were using this word to ‘protect’ professional cookery, what do they mean protect it, protect what? Protect the status? If you want to protect the status of professional cookery, one of the first things you do is, as you said yourself, is to establish yourself as a profession. As Hegarty used to say ‘where is the body of knowledge?’, but for a long time too there was this resentment among the industry section of the Panel that the college lecturers were getting too strong, and there was huge resentment there towards us and a lot of the college guys became disinterested and fell away. Remember people are moving on, we have all educated ourselves, and remember it was all done on a voluntary basis. I drove the length and breadth of this country for fifteen years and you get to know the people who hold it all together. There was also talk when Eurotoques were formed that they were seen as a threat to the Panel, but they were never a threat, Eurotoques were a different agenda altogether, they do what they do and good luck to them. That was another thing that I attempted to do, I was the first to bring Derry Clarke, when he was Governor General of Eurotoques, I brought him to the Panel Dinner and the criticism I got for that was ridiculous, why, we are all speaking the one language, we are all cooks. Whether we are training them or whatever, it is all the one language. Some people are myopic.

167. **MM:** Talk to me about gender in the kitchen, who was the first female chef you encountered?

168. **JC:** Let me go back, there was a girl in the Hibernian who was one of the first female chefs and she was there for years. But later on in the late 1970s early 1980s in Jury’s we took in our first
female _commis chef_ and her name was Caroline Griffin, and then we had a girl called Delores Fulham. They would have been the first and the chefs at the time didn’t want to treat them any different than the lads. I remember Matty Hoare saying to this girl ‘if you want to be a chef, I expect you to be able to lift the same size pot as I can’, I think he was just acting the maggot, but that was an older generation, so it was a challenge for chefs. I was a senior _chef de partie_ and I found it a challenge. I found you had to be watching your Ps and Qs, you wouldn’t curse in front of girls and our game is notorious for bad language. I think it is a great move. Just look at how many women head chefs there are now.

169.MM: Who were the first women to make a name for them selves, how about Maura Smith? Was she the first woman to do the 706/3 in Ireland?

170.JC: Maura was the first in Ireland to do the City & Guilds 706/3 and rose to the position of vice-president of the Panel of Chefs, the first female and only female vice-president of the Panel. At the time the female numbers were very low, I would say there was about ten female members of the Panel, about five percent of the membership.

171.MM: You could probably name them then? Tina Walsh who was a _protégé_ of Eugene Mc Sweeney down in Lacken House, Audrey Crone who was with Derek McLoughlin in Citywest, Rosemary Lynch, Liz and Brianán Erraught, Maura Smith

**Jimmy Rock (JR) enters that room and we begin a discussion on union activity in catering in Dublin**

172.JR: I’m 51 years old now so I came here to Cathal Brugha Street first as a student aged eighteen so that was around 1973 and the females here were called cooks and the males were called chefs and we were kept totally separate.

173.MM: And had you separate lecturers?

174.JR: Yes, but that was coincidental, they would have had Michael Ganly and so did we but not at the same time.

175.MM: And was it the same syllabus?

176.JR: Well at that time the syllabus was not a Fáilte Ireland syllabus, it was drafted up by the college itself, I would say the syllabus was very similar. They were being specifically trained not for hotels and restaurants but for hospitals and nursing homes, that’s where they were earmarked for. When we went into hotels they didn’t come, they went to their own places. And then industry tried to adapt the word cook to pay people less money, because when I started in Aer Lingus I was employed as a cook, specifically because the saw it as a way of paying less money for someone doing the same work as a chef. Subsequently the union got that abolished because there were a few cooks there who were female, now I had passed on there because I had come out of my time there, there was a job as a cook there, I took that so as not to be gone, but a year later I got a job as a chef. But the cooks there brought them to court and won and they got parity with the chefs. Anyone who worked in the staff canteen in Aer Lingus were considered cooks.

177.JC: You see that year when you were a cook, was that considered as an improver? When I was out of my time in Jury’s I did a year as an improver. Do you know what they improver meant, it meant that you spent the year as _chef tournant_, going around all the corners filling in when the other chefs were gone.

178.JR: No the improver system was gone in Aer Lingus when I was there.

179.MM: Jimmy, you had mentioned before that there was a movement towards making professional cookery a recognised trade?
180. JR: Yes, us in Aer Lingus, because when the chefs in Aer Lingus started they were being paid as professionals, more than the tradesmen. I don’t know whether it was done specifically to keep us from joining a trade union or not. But they were paid specifically as tradesmen, and as years went on I became union representative there, and we came upon a situation where we felt that it would be safer for us to be associated with the tradesmen than to be out on our own as we were. So I delved into it, I looked into it, firstly why we weren’t recognised as tradesmen, and how did you define at tradesman, and the basic definition is – anyone who serves a five year apprenticeship is a tradesman. So we served a recognised apprenticeship so we could become tradesmen. So I approached a number of unions on it, and it meant that we would have to leave the catering union which was number four branch. I approached number four branch first to see if they could change our status to tradesmen rather than catering workers but they said that they couldn’t because they were not a trades union, number four represented hotel and catering operatives. That was at the time, and for us to have been recognised as a recognised trade, we would have had to leave the number four branch and joined another union that did represent trades. I looked into it and we would have been accepted into a union and recognised as trades but we decided on mass, now I’m talking airport chefs not all chefs, we decided not to go that route, I wasn’t too happy, but I don’t know why, I think they were afraid to make that leap and move away from number four branch because they had been in it all their lives. The reason I discovered that the chefs in Dublin did not want to leave the number four branch and join a trades union was that they felt there was safety in numbers, they would be in the same branch as the waiters and the porters and to be in with the majority and that was that. But the option is still there, that is still the definition of a tradesman, and maybe now in this day and age with what is happening in the industry it may be worth looking at.

181. One very worrying movement that is happening at the moment is that number four branch has a representative on the board of Fáilte Ireland and Fáilte Ireland are promoting a nine month course and they are seeking recognition for that nine month course with our two year course, which brings them up to a phase six, now that doesn’t just wash, because if you compare us to carpenters or plumbers or electricians that do the phase six, they do up to four years of part time on a block release system. I would be worried that in the past the union would have put a block on it and would have at least contacted us here in the college, the professionals, and asked our advice on it, but that seems to be done away with and they don’t seem to care, it is all a cost saving exercise. I see the union been dwindled away, we are going to end up with line cooks, and the skills are dwindling away. If they see them as chef de partie after nine months, it is a joke.

182. We trained in a section for six months, then you were moved to another section for another six months and so on, and then back again as the second in charge of that section. Like as you said with the improver system, there was structure, you got provided with uniforms, you got paid reasonably good money.

183. Where is a good job now, Aer Lingus is gone, Guinness’s is gone, Jury’s is gone, most hotels only provide food because they have to, they are only interested in functions. End of Interview
Edited Interview with Mervyn Stewart in The Guinea Pig, Dalkey (23/1/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Mervyn Stewart (MS)

1. MM: So basically what I do here is I bring you through sort of an oral history or a life history approach. So I just bring you sort of briefly through where you were born, when you born, etc. Just through your sort of childhood, how your influence of food, you know schooling and your first sort of job, if that’s alright.

2. MS: Okay you work away, you ask the questions?

3. MM: When were you born and where were you born?

4. MS: I was born on the 10th September 1944 in a place called Millicent, a townland near Clane, Co. Kildare.

5. MM: And how many were in the family?

6. MS: There were seven children.

7. MM: And what did your father work at?

8. MS: My father worked as a foreman in Odlums Flour Mills in Naas.

9. MM: And your mother was a mother I suppose?

10. MS: A full-time cook and mother (laugh).

11. MM: You did your schooling locally I take it?

12. MS: Well the house I was born in we had no running water, we had no electricity, you might as well live a hundred miles from Dublin in the middle of the country than live twenty-five miles from Dublin. But I went to a school in a place called Hewtson School in Clane. It was attached to the local Church of Ireland Church, community.

13. MM: Or was it a specific method of teaching it.

14. MS: Unfortunately it was rather English in its outlook and the slants on history and teaching was very Anglo rather than Irish so our slant on history was more Anglicised than it was. I mean the games that were played were hockey and cricket (laugh). That all changed but that was what was there at the time. We lived in a very sort of cloistered community in that there were no, or very few, other young boys or girls around the area but they weren’t allowed play with Catholic children at that time. We were very much closeted.

15. MM: So what religion were the family?

16. MS: Church of Ireland.

17. MM: It was Church of Ireland and you sort of stayed within that sort of circle as such?

18. MS: Certainly in that circle, very much so.

19. MM: So there mustn’t have been many in the school itself?
20. **MS:** Oh there would have been forty or fifty students in that school at that time. It was a boarding school as well. It was set-up originally for the local community and for children of widows or orphans who would have a school to go to in a boarding school environment.

21. **MM:** Okay yeah. And your father, was he born in Ireland?

22. **MS:** Oh yeah he was born Dunadig which is not too far away and my mother was born, she was actually reared in what’s now know as the K Club. Her father was the Chief Stewart in the Old Barton Estate.

23. **MM:** And what was her maiden name?

24. **MS:** Fossett. They actually came very from very large families themselves. It’s unusual in a Protestant family to have, my father had, there was thirteen children in his family and there was eleven in mother’s family. It’s an unusual number of children to have in those families.

25. **MM:** You moved onto secondary school?

26. **MS:** No, no I left school at twelve-and-a-half. I’d done my primary at twelve-and-a-half and they were teaching me Latin and algebra at twelve-and-a-half because there was nothing else they could teach me and I couldn’t leave school and so at thirteen-and-a-half I went to a stud farm in Co. Meath to work as a house boy until I was fourteen and then I moved from there to the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dawson Street.
27. **MM:** Now what was the influence as such, what was the influence to moving into a kitchen or becoming a chef?

28. **MS:** Well there were two women had a huge influence in my life, one was my mother who was a brilliant teacher in her own right and very ambitious for me and secondly there was a lady called Mrs. Handy who was the wife of the Archdeacon of Kildare and took a great interest in my career. I was boy soprano and sang solo in the cathedrals and churches. I even sang on radio and it was planned that I would go to, I had a scholarship from the Royal School of Church Music in London. I had also a scholarship into St Patrick’s Cathedral School in Dublin and I was meant to go on for the ministry to become a Minister but because (laugh) of family circumstances it wasn’t going to work out. But Mrs. Handy knew I was very fond of cooking and she got it into her head that I should be a chef and travel the world and work on the liners. That was her vision. So she knew Ken Besson who was the owner of the Hibernian and I was indentured into the Hibernian for five years.

29. **MM:** What year was this? You were born in ’44 so we’re looking at ’59, around ’59 or so. Was Davy Edwards there at the time?

30. **MS:** ’58. Davy Edwards was there yeah. He was there, he was a junior chef there and I was a little fourteen year old (laugh) and I work under Roger Noblet.

31. **MM:** But Roger Noblet wasn’t the head chef at that time was he?

32. **MS:** He was, he’d come over from the Russell. He was the second head chef in the Russell. Do you know his history?

33. **MM:** No, I knew he was Breton, that’s all I know about him.

34. **MS:** He worked as a personal chef to a German general in Paris during the war. He was advised to get out of Paris after the war or he could have been targeted as a collaborator so he took a small boat over like a lot of people from France to the south of Ireland and married an Irish girl.

35. **MM:** Right, where was she from do you remember?

36. **MS:** She was Irish, that’s all I know. I never met her. And he came over from Rolland, Rolland was the head chef in the Russell and that would be Pierre Rolland. And I worked under Hector Fabron as well in the Hibernian. He was the manager. He came from the Russell as well.

37. **MM:** And then he was away for a while. He went to the Scottish hotel school for a while and then he came back again, Hector Fabron did. Who do you remember now? You arrive now, you’re fourteen years old or so, you arrive in indentured into the Royal Hibernian. Who was in the kitchen? Do you remember any of the other chefs there or?

38. **MS:** Well there was Nicky Cluskey, who eventually ended up as head chef. There was Johnny Hobbs he was the vegetable chef. I worked under him. There was Kevin Barry who was the sous chef and sauce chef all in one. He was second head chef and sauce chef and there was Mary Murphy she was the larder chef. That’s all the ones I remember off hand. But in those days the conditions were pretty Victorian. If you read George Orwell’s book.

39. **MM:** ‘Down and Out in Paris and London’?

40. **MS:** The conditions in the kitchens were very similar in reality, for instance La Plonge was exactly as he described La Plonge in the Hotel Lottie which is where he worked by the way. That was discovered by an Irish girl. She discovered that. The copper pots were washed obviously with the silver sand and the flour and the vinegar and it was amazing because they brought in the late ‘50s they brought in the first aluminium pots I remember distinctly Hobbs said to me ‘sonny you
wash those pots over there’ and I said ‘I didn’t come here to be a kitchen porter, I came here to be a chef’ and Noblet comes and says ‘if you don’t wash the pots you’ll you go back down the country’. So I washed the pots (laugh) because you can’t wash aluminium obviously in the same sinks as La Plonge. But they were vicious guys. I remember on one occasion I handed out a silver platter and what’s his name, the sous chef Kevin Barry put his hand on it and said ‘sonny this isn’t very hot, I’ll show you what is’ and he walked away. A wide ladle sitting in the plains and he put the back of the ladle on the back of my hand and said ‘sonny that’s hot’. That’s the kind of thing they’d do you in those days. I was stripped once down in La Plonge and a woman painted my Netherlands with black boot polish as an initiation. That is the sort of thing that went on in those days, but you just took it on the chin and said nothing. Just got on with it (laugh). There were quite a lot of guys who were drinking heavily. I wouldn’t say they were on drugs but there were quite a lot of vicious guys out there. Quite a few of them are dead now, I mean drink and knives and whatever.

41. MM: Some very talented chefs are dead now actually.

42. MS: Oh quite a few. Just over consumption of alcohol and just didn’t look after themselves. But one of the things I discovered when I was seventeen, sixteen, seventeen was that a lot of these guys were illiterate and they weren’t going anywhere, so what I did was I contacted the International Correspondence Schools and I took it upon myself to GECE course by correspondents and sat the exams and got A’s and B’s all the way through and I then took up a course which took me three years until I was twenty-one in hotel and catering management by correspondence but told nobody. And I got my diploma after three years again with high grades but it was never on a CV because I told nobody because I reckoned if I wasn’t careful I’d be over qualified to be a chef. So I just told nobody. Kept it at the back of my head but when I became a head chef I knew how the system worked because a lot of chefs didn’t. Because one of the things that used to happen is Fabron would come down and he’d say something to the head chef. The head chef would explode. The margins are down, the margins are down, the gross margins are down. Nobody knew what this margin was. The percentage is down, the percentage is down and the chef would beat up the commis and the commis would beat up the porters nearly so it all went down the line but nobody knew what it meant. But the head chef had no control over purchasing and pricing but he still had to try to make these margins which were fictitious margins that nobody knew how to achieve. I learnt that which stood me in great stead when I got older because when I got older, then I knew how that worked and I really was able to use the knowledge against the management if they tried to push me around in relation to, you know, ‘the percentages are down’. So that gave me a great help.

43. MM: Tell me something Ken Besson at the time and Fabron they sort of had a scheme a sort of a training scheme you know. Were you a part of that?

44. MS: It was there in theory and when they tried to teach you French and tried to teach to various things but it never really came enough (inaudible). We’d even put in showers in the staff area, and nobody used them, there were just dirty chef’s clothes thrown in them and the people at the time including myself we weren’t trained to hygiene. But nobody died (laugh).

45. MM: Yeah just that I’ve seen in the newspapers, I’ve gone through some of the archives of newspapers and there were photographs of sort of award winners that they used to run this sort of annual competition sort of thing and they used to send people away to France and things like that.

46. MS: But I never actually, the Hibernian wasn’t as good as that as the Russell was. I know that for a fact but I never really got into that scheme for some reason. It seemed to disappearing into the late, into the early ’60s because the Hibernian was in trouble at that stage. There didn’t seem to be the same incentive to go ahead with because nobody from the Hibernian in my time went to France that I know of. Certainly the Russell did.
47. **MM:** Yeah I’ll check the dates because at one stage it was when the Bailey was involved, I think around, I can’t remember the exact that Besson sold the Bailey then to John Ryan so it maybe before your time you know.

48. **MS:** Probably afterwards. The Bailey was part of my time in the late ‘50s. The ‘60s I think they sold it. I’d say so. You see one of the problems of the Hibernian is when they started building the modern hotels with en-suite bathrooms and that you still had to walk down the corridor in the Hibernian with your towel and your dressing gown to get a bath in a common area and obviously with the structure of the building it was impossible to do that. But they were the days when you had a gas jet in the chicken where you had to singe all your chickens and the ducks before you pluck them into pheasants and you know it was really an amazing experience and you would have never traded it for anything else because you learnt the old fashioned way when, you know, butchery was butchery in a kitchen and sauces were mounted and glazed. A lot of duchesse potato and all that sort of original old style French cuisine was there.

49. **MM:** Tell me about the technology because I know I have it from around 1905 or so I have a reference that the kitchen was fully modernised. Right so that’s 1905.

50. **MS:** In the Hibernian. Now in my day you had three ranges each side, in the centre of the kitchen.

51. **MM:** Were they gas or coal?

52. **MS:** They were neither, they started them off with wood and they finished with coal and my first job and my first nick name was ‘coal in the hole’. And my job was to get the coal scuttle, ‘coal in the hole’ and get the scuttle under the big sort of open area where they all came down. It filled the kitchen with dust when they all came down and it was the top of the ranges. It was one of my first jobs. But one of the biggest problems they had in the Hibernian like every other hotel in Ireland was between the months of say May into September there were no fresh vegetables and they used tin peas, tin carrots, tinned celery, \textit{la cour de solaire}, tinned everything. They’d no fresh vegetables around that time and then suddenly all the cauliflowers arrived in and all the broccolis arrived in but one of the most beautiful vegetable was sea kale and you don’t see it anymore. They did a beautiful sea kale, cooked it like asparagus.

53. **MM:** Lovely yeah.

54. **MS:** And potatoes were crap. They were never graded, they were dirty, they were full of God knows whatever. Potatoes were terrible.

55. **MM:** And would they have had different types of potatoes depending on what they were doing with them whether they were mashing them or whether they were frying or whatever.

56. **MS:** No, no whatever vegetables came in is what you got. Again when you got into the middle of the summer you’re using last years…

57. **MM:** Old crop.

58. **MS:** And they were soft and they were rotten and they were just terrible. But there’s a great story in the Hibernian in the late ‘50s where they had a dinner party for a hundred people lets say and the \textit{chef de garde} in the afternoon put in fifty \textit{pousain} in the oven and they went on fire in the oven and he just packed his gear and walked out of the kitchen and was never seen again (laugh).

59. **MM:** Tell me when you were there, you did five years there did you?

60. **MS:** No I did four years there (1958-1962). I got fed up because what happened was I was stuck on the vegetable corner for a long time because the chef wouldn’t let me off the vegetable
corner. I couldn’t, I wasn’t getting on at all with sauce chef so they wouldn’t let me near the sauce
corners. Mary Murphy had her pals in the larder so I couldn’t get into the larder so I ended up in
the pastry house for a while and learnt an awful lot there.

61. MM: Who was the pastry chef?

62. MS: I can’t remember his name. He was a big awe-inspiring guy. Edwards was there for a
while. He took over from him.

63. MM: Yeah he was pastry for a while that’s right yeah.

64. MS: That’s right I worked under Edwards there for a while. He was a bit of a lunatic but at the
same time he was an extremely good chef. He had a vicious streak like a lot of them (laugh).

65. MM: Yeah, were there many foreign chefs there while you were there.

66. MS: None, not one.

67. MM: So just Noblet was the only one as such. Did some come and go at all?

68. MS: No there wasn’t that much of a movement. Most of the guys who started there were still
there when I left.

69. MM: Very steady. The waiters as such was there any foreign waiters as such there do you
remember?

70. MS: No not that I remember. No there weren’t no. But they were like, you were never
couraged to even be friendly with them. They were on the other side of the fence.

71. MM: Right okay so there was a…

72. MS: There was always that tension between waiters and chefs and it stills goes on. It still goes
on today.

73. MM: And was Michael Governey was he there at this stage?

74. MS: Not in my time, he came later.

75. MM: There was the main business there, you had the restaurant and then you had…

76. MS: You had the Lafayette.

77. MM: Had you the Bianconi grill at that stage.

78. MS: The Bianconi grill was there but before that you had the Rotisserie. It was absolutely
amazing. Beautiful rotisserie and of course you had the Charles down in the Buttery as well.

79. MM: Okay that was the Buttery bar as such. That was a famous sort of cocktail bar the two
Jack and George was it?

80. MS: I can’t remember their names and again I never got to see those guys because we didn’t
even change in the areas. The kitchen was quite isolated from that point of view although because
of my background I never socialised with one person, so I was very much a loner, so that probably
didn’t help my cause because like I said the background I had was very much cloistered and I was
probably only apart from the owners I was probably the only Protestant guy in there but that was
never brought up by anybody ever. It was never an issue but I always regarded as being a little bit
different because the word was out that I came through Besson. Not through the normal channels like college. I never went to college.

81. **MM:** I remember David Edwards had gone to college, he’d done the Cathal Brugha Street route or whatever yeah.

82. **MS:** You see I was very young because most of the guys were probably sixteen when they started, I was fourteen so I had a two year jump. By the time I was twenty I had five years experience.

83. **MM:** It was quite a culture shock coming in at fourteen?

84. **MS:** Well it was because you know coming up from the country and suddenly you’re in this incredibly swanky hotel.

85. **MM:** Where were you staying?

86. **MS:** I stayed in a place called the Harding Boy’s Home. It was up in Christchurch Place and it was a home set-up by a man called Harding in nineteenth century for Protestant boys coming up to Dublin where they would have a safe environment to live in. It was very much based on dormitory and prefects. In by a certain time and the wording that was used to me was to keep you away from the ladies of the night (laugh) and any other temptations of the day (laugh). We had to go to church every Sunday in St. Werburgh’s Church which is just beside the Lord Edward there (laugh). It was an amazing experience but it was a great place to stay because my problem was socially was that I was working five nights a week, every second Sunday and you had no opportunity to play games at weekends like my brothers did. My uncles all stayed there before me and my brothers all stayed there as well so got into the social activity but I couldn’t get the social activities going because, it’s probably my only regret is that I lost out on all that social…. 

87. **MM:** Whereas they would have played maybe cricket or hockey or whatever?

88. **MS:** And soccer and whatever else they were playing at the time. The Harding Boys Home had a very good group of teams there.

89. **MM:** You didn’t get involved in the soccer league in the Hibernian, that was in the hotels at this stage?

90. **MS:** No, I was referee a few times but I never really got involved in any of those sports.

91. **MM:** At that time or around that time I think ’58 or so there was an exhibition in Busáras, the Panel of Chefs was sort of set up and there was an exhibition. Do you remember any of that?

92. **MS:** I remember going to it but I mean the standard seemed to be incredibly high to me to my untutored eye but I eventually became President of the Panel of Chefs, eventually, and I was on the first ever official Irish team to Hotelympia where I came home with a silver medal and I remember distinctly what happened. I was doing an omelette, Dublin Bay prawn omelette flambée and I wasn’t use to the, it was probably North Sea gas they had at that stage and I set fire to the canopy overhead the gas was so strong. The flambée hit it so all the judges rushed over and I just very calmly put it out and kept going and they obviously said this guy can work under pressure so they gave me the medal. Probably the dish didn’t deserve it but obviously the reactions to it deserved.

93. **MM:** Your professionalism yeah?

94. **MS:** But in those days Michael Marley would have told me that you prepared all your stuff in your bedroom. There was no facilities in those days and then you got your stuff and you prepared
it in your room but there was no real official, we had use of a kitchen eventually in the hotel you were staying in, the Cumberland probably but it was all inspiring.

Figure MS.2: Coronation Menu from Grosvenor House 1953, was Michael Marley’s

95. MM: What year would that have been?
493

96. **MS:** Oh God, in the ‘70s.

97. **MM:** Just go back briefly to the Hibernian. So you spent four years in the Hibernian and again you left a bit early because you felt you weren’t moving on as fast as you would like. So where did you move on to then?

98. **MS:** The Metropole.

99. **MM:** How did that happen?

100. **MS:** I rang Dave Edwards and I said I’m looking for a job, and he said come on in and I got a job right away.

101. **MM:** That’s right because Dave had worked with you in the Royal Hibernian and he’d gone to the Metropole. He was effectively sous chef. He wasn’t quite sous at the time but he was…

102. **MS:** He became sous in the end. Matt Byrne was the *sous chef* and then he became head chef. Michael Marley moved on.

103. **MM:** Tell us about the Metropole. What was the Metropole like?

104. **MS:** Chaotic, chaotic. It was huge. The kitchen was up on the top floor and in the Metropole it was volume, volume, volume and tight, tight, tight margins, absolutely, Marley was a lunatic on margins. He was an extremely good chef in his own right. He worked, obviously, in the top places in London.

105. **MM:** Yeah what did you know of him. Did you know any of his history?

106. **MS:** Well the background well I was told number one that he didn’t like Protestants. That his family were burnt out in the North of Ireland and they came down south and I told keep my mouth shut and get on with the job I’d have no problem from him. He never spoke to me once in the period of time I was there. Not once.

107. **MM:** It was Belfast he’d been in yeah.

108. **MS:** Belfast yeah. He never gave me any hard time, if there was instructions it was passed on to somebody else to pass on to me but I mean if there was overtime available I always got it so obviously he was happy enough with my work.

109. **MM:** Were you aware of where he had worked previously to being there or anything like that or.

110. **MS:** The Dorchester, as far as I know. But where else I don’t know. He worked somewhere in Belfast I think as well. I’m not really sure. But again the chefs there were even more lunatic than the Hibernian.

111. **MM:** Who was there like Matt Byrne there, Davy Edwards was there?

112. **MS:** I can not remember the names. Eamon Cunningham was the pastry chef.

113. **MM:** That’s Eamon Cunningham of the Cunningham family that went on, they worked with PV Doyle a lot.

114. **MS:** That’s correct but Eamon has his own restaurant in Bray for a while.

115. **MM:** Oh Eamon’s restaurant, was it called Eamon’s restaurant?
Figure MS.3: Panel of Chefs Photo (l-r) Eugene McGovern, Noel Cullen, Dave Edwards, Joe Erraught, A.N. Other, Michael Marley

116. MS: That’s right. I mean I was stabbed in the arse by a chef one day. He took a knife to me and I ran away from him and he caught me at the end of the kitchen and stuck a knife up my arse, ripped my arse open. I had to get it stitched but I couldn’t report because I would have got sacked for messing.

117. MM: Now are we talking about the anus or are we talking about the cheeks?

118. MS: The cheeks (laugh).

119. MM: I don’t mean to get technical here now (laugh).

120. MS: And I went down to the hospital and got it stitched and I said I fell in the fridge and I cut my bum on a sharp box, because I couldn’t report that but you learnt in those days you didn’t report anything. You just got on with it. You just took it on the chin.

121. MM: You mentioned earlier on that sort of, you mentioned knives earlier on, had you seen much of that?

122. MS: Yeah I’d seen quite a bit of viciousness but I think it was alcohol related more than anything else. You see the split shift system, I mean everybody headed to the bar at 3.30 pm and got back at 5.30 pm and they were drinking all afternoon. A lot of them were, not all of them but a lot of them were and they were coming back. I mean Barry drank all afternoon, he was a big, big heavy guy and his face was completely dripping red with sweat and the fact I remember I used to see him going into the pastry house and getting a handful of corn flour and rub it between the
cheeks of his arse because of the sweat and the heat. That was a common thing. Heat was a big problem. Physical heat but I remember just a couple of stories in the Metropole. I remember one story where they had a party for lunch/dinner for I think it was three hundred portions of crab, just crabs and they were put down in the fridge and the fridge broke down over night and they came in the next day and you could smell the crab all gone rotten overnight and some smart arse said sure we’ll put on the roof to get rid of the smell. And to put them on the roof which was only one floor up and every seagull in the country must have arrived in the roof and they were picking them up in their beaks and they were dropping them in O’Connell Street (laugh). I remember an other occasion Charlie who was the grill chef down in the Silver Grill was screaming for a rib of beef and Matt in an unusual burst of annoyance roared at the chef ‘get that rib out of here quick, they’re waiting on it’ so your man puts his hand into the oven and picks out the rib and hits your man in the chest and knocked him to the ground with the rib. ‘Is that quick enough for you’ and they ended up on the roof having a fight. That’s the only time I saw a real fight but on another occasion I remember Marley saw this chef leaving the kitchen and he said ‘where do you think you’re going’. He had a real hard voice. ‘I’m going for a piss chef’, ‘go for a piss on your own time’, ‘right chef’ and he went back down and gathered up his knives, came up the kitchen again, ‘where are you going now?’ ‘I’m going for a piss and I won’t be back’ and walked out the kitchen (laugh). Marley’s favourite expression you’d hear him all over the kitchen and his voice really barked ‘say right, shite, kiss me arse but say something’ if you didn’t answer him (laugh). But there were many things happened, a lot of them quite vicious. There was an incredible story which I only heard the answer to about a year ago. There was a Jewish wedding, there was quite a lot of Jewish functions there and the Rabi found a ham bone in the stock pot the day of the party and of course the mystery how could this ham bone get into the stock pot when it was actually sealed by the rabbi’s seal. So I was having dinner with Aidan McManus recently and the story came out that Eamon Cunningham took the hinges off, the big brass hinges off the back of the stock pot, lit it up with the seal still on it, popped in the ham bone…

123.**MM:** Out of devilment is it?

124.**MS:** Devilment yeah. But they had to cancel the soup course obviously but that sort of thing happened. There’s one of the things that amazed me actually was the conversations about anti British and anti Jews which amazed me. It made me realise that we lived in a racist country at that time and we still do probably in many ways. That I kept to myself but personally I never had a problem. Never had a problem. Anecdotes, anecdotes, anecdotes, there’s loads of them out there (laugh).

125.**MM:** The Metropole had sort of different levels of food as such?

126.**MS:** They had a restaurant, they had self service and they had the ballroom obviously and they had the Silver Grill downstairs as well so there was three levels.

127.**MM:** So the restaurant was very good like was top class was it?

128.**MS:** The Silver Grill.

129.**MM:** So the Silver Grill was the top class that was like sort of on par with the Royal Hibernian sort of thing?

130.**MS:** It would have been yeah, super yeah.

131.**MM:** And then the restaurant was fairly normal?

132.**MS:** Just a standard restaurant yeah.

133.**MM:** And then you had the self service which was a bit lower?
134. **MS:** It was known by rank at the time, I think it was known by Rank.

135. **MM:** I think so, yeah, and then you had the ballroom and they used to do an awful lot of dinner dances and all that sort of stuff?

136. **MS:** Absolutely.

137. **MM:** That would be sit down, that would be like we do weddings now, that’s sort of thing as such?

138. **MS:** Yeah and there’s ballroom dancing obviously as well. You had the big orchestra there, I can’t remember the name of it but June something or other. I can’t remember the name. One of the desserts…

139. **MM:** Had they the cinema, the cinema here as well?

140. **MS:** Oh the cinema was there as well oh yes.

141. **MM:** So they had the cinema, ballroom, restaurant, grill and self service so it was huge yeah.

142. **MS:** Unbelievable.

143. **MM:** And was there a separate entrance in from say Princess Street or something like that for that for the grill.

144. **MS:** The Silver Grill was just at the side and everything else was in the front. But I never, I mean I never actually got to see those restaurant because again the chefs were cloistered in the kitchen, you never really got in. The only time I was ever in the Hibernian hotel itself, was say if I was coming back on a Sunday afternoon. The back gate would be closed so you walked in through the hotel but for a young fella from the country this was just Nirvana, this was something out of this world. But it also gave me inspiration for my own restaurant eventually in that and for my lifestyle in that I could see what the wealthy people did and how they lived and I wanted a piece of the action (laugh).

145. **MM:** Yeah, yeah, I’ll have some of that.

146. **MS:** That gave me the inspiration I’ll have some of that. That’s what gave me the inspiration to go ahead and do a course in hotel and catering management and be a head chef and move on from there which happened eventually, but that’s another day.

147. **MM:** Was Jim Bowe in the Metropole when you were there?

148. **MS:** He would have been. Jim was a lovely guy. Jim Bowe he worked here for a while.

149. **MM:** Did he?

150. **MS:** In the early days. A very good chef.

151. **MM:** A very good chef. An excellent chef.

152. **MS:** But in the old days the Guinea Pig was more volume than quality.

153. **MM:** How long did you stay in the Metropole?

154. **MS:** Well I worked for a little while before that actually in the Central Hotel.
Okay. Was Willie Marshall there?

Willie Marshall was there yeah.

And was Frank Farren there?

I can’t remember. You see you’re going back forty-four years now. Yeah Willie Marshall was there. He was a good man. Again, it was volume, volume. We did a lot of coaches in those days, coach tours so every evening you had maybe a hundred and twenty up to hundred and fifty high teas. I’ll always remember the fish course on it was plaice, (inaudible) banana.

Caprice is it?

Caprice yeah and we used to make them up that morning and grease and flour and grill them off for the hundreds. Again the kitchens were quite basic in those days. Quite basic and the hygiene just wasn’t there. I think one of the reasons why food didn’t go off it seemed to be prepared the night before and served the next day.

Yeah it wasn’t held for long periods of time.

The fish came in on the day and whatever fish during the day was gone the day so you didn’t seem to have storage of anything and they didn’t have the deep freezers that we have today. The only deep freeze they had was for ice cream, nothing else. I mean everything was in tins or packets and yeah the meat now. Well the meat now was hung very well. In the Hibernian the sirloins, there would be up to forty sirloins hanging in rotation in the cold room. You started on the right, you used on the right and you pushed in from the left all the time and it was always the most beautiful well hung dry.

Really well aged yeah.

Well aged yeah. But you only used them when there was a skin on the bit flesh, hair growing on it almost but inside the meat was beautiful.

So you were in the Central was for what a year or six months?

Nine months. Well it was Hibernian to Central to the Metropole and then…

The Metropole for how long?

I can’t remember now.

Would it be over a year or two years?

You jump up from there to the Gresham in ’62. Oh hold on I was married in ’65 so you’d jump up to, the time line is wrong here. I was married in ’65 and I went to the Gresham in ’64 so I’m going back.

’65 so you were only twenty-one.

So it was ’64 then. Yeah ’64 so I was in the Gresham from ’64.

Ah right so you were probably two years or so, you’re probably around a year-and-a-half or so in the Metropole?

Around that time yeah.
175. MM: So you went into the Gresham then say roughly around 1963 or ’64. Who was there?

176. MS: (Michael) McManus.

177. MM: Macker, and Uhleman was gone and McManus was there.

178. MS: That was because of the unions. The unions got him in there as head chef. He was mad man. He was a lunatic.

179. MM: Yeah there was pressure at that time to get Irish head chefs wasn’t there from the union as such.

180. MS: From Michael Mullins, very strong union leader. Very, very strong.

181. MM: And who else was there in the kitchen. Andy Whelan would have been there yeah.

182. MS: Andy would have been there yeah.

183. MM: And Paddy Reilly I suppose.

184. MS: Paddy Reilly yeah. I can’t remember the names now but having me there was because I came from the Hibernian they were very much anti French style kitchens and the Russell as far as they were concerned they were just off the wall stuff. You see the kitchen in Gresham was a German style kitchen and the Hibernian was a very French style kitchen so the systems were totally different. There seemed to be, it seemed to run on a ‘click, lick arse basis’ basically. So if you weren’t in, you were out. They actually made me redundant in January of ’65 and I fought against that but. I’ll tell you what happened me there. On Fridays I was the trancher in the restaurant because obviously very little beef was sold on a Friday so I was sent out on a Friday to be trancher and McManus was on holiday. This is November ’64 and I went in and changed into a clean uniform, clean apron to go out into the restaurant as trancher and Toddy O’Sullivan came down to do an inspection of the kitchen and he’d lined all the chefs up but of course they were filthy dirty, they hadn’t shaved and they were always dirty and the only one who was clean was the second chef in charge, that was a big tall guy, I can’t remember his name.

185. MM: This is the guy who used to be what you call it he used to do the trancher regularly did he?

186. MS: I’m not sure.

187. MM: One guy was I believe was immaculate, always immaculate. Barney Neelan yeah.

188. MS: Yeah Barney. So he lined all the chefs up anyway and I stood at the end in my spotless clean uniform and he gave them a bollocking and he said to me ‘sonny what’s your name?’ and I said ‘Mervyn Stewart sir’, ‘step out here beside me’ and he said ‘look at Barney, look at this young man, Mr. Stewart they’re an example to you all, you’re a disgrace to your profession’ and the moment he left the kitchen they threw a pot of soup over me, tomato soup over me, destroyed me and stole my carving knife. Right sonny, now Mr Stewart, join the club and then in January I was let go.

189. MM: You weren’t part of the click.

190. MS: I wasn’t part of the click. I could not be part of the click. I was just ostracised everywhere. I worked mostly in the larder but I did my job. I was never late.

191. MM: Was Frankie Plummer in the larder was he?
192. MS: I can’t remember.

193. MM: You don’t remember no.

194. MS: I can’t remember.

195. MM: The quality as you said in the Gresham clearly wasn’t as high you’d experience in the Royal Hibernian?

196. MS: No but the discipline in the Hibernian was very good, but it wasn’t very good in the Gresham. They seemed to spend a lot of time arising about you know. Standing around the master himself, listening to his stories and you know just generally. But I mean they were eating cornflakes and cream for breakfast and drinking fresh orange juice. There was no discipline. Nobody seemed to have any discipline and they ate what they want and I know at the time because I became very friendly with Toddy O’Sullivan afterwards, many, many, years later in the Guinea Pig and he told me that it was incredibly difficult to have any control over the food margins, the food quality because of the union problem. He despaired, absolutely despaired of the whole situation.

197. MM: What was your experience with the union? Had you been in the union?

198. MS: From day one, yeah.

199. MM: And had you noticed it being a positive thing or a negative thing or mediocre or…?

200. MS: Well the only thing I would say is that they did protect our workers but if you were at a meeting say down in Liberty Hall and you raised a problem nobody wanted to know, a personal problem, they didn’t want to know. Just get on with it, lucky to have a job that sort of attitude. They dealt with the shop steward but the shop stewards were kitchen porters sometimes they weren’t educated men who could articulate an argument or whatever and it just was them against us. Management against staff so there was never any real co-operation or any kind of interaction between them. It there was a problem shop steward went up and sorted it, tried to sort it out but you know like I say I stayed away from all that. I just got on with my job. My father always told son positive work ethic, go in on time and do your job and keep your mouth shut and go home. Don’t get involved and I stayed with that and it stood me in good stead although again because it was my background I think, I’m not sure but I was always a bit of a loner. Again I never socialised in any place I ever worked, I never had a friend apart from Dave Edvards he was the only one I was friendly with.

201. MM: But do think a lot of that could have come from the fact the school you went to sort of thing or even the fact you didn’t really socialise that much as a child or that you felt you were always slightly different as well maybe even.

202. MS: Well I always felt different but you see my interests were religion would you believe. I was very much involved with the Society of Friends which are Quakers. They had their hall, their meeting rooms as they called them down in Eustace Street.

203. MM: That’s right in Temple Bar yeah.

204. MS: And I was very much involved with the YMCA in Lower Abbey Street and I actually was a Sunday School Teacher so my off time leanings were very much different from the guys I worked with and that would explain it.

205. MM: Did you drink?

206. MS: Never drank until I was twenty-something.
So you wouldn’t be part of that sort of…

Going to the bars in the afternoon, no, no. I do a lot of cycling and don’t forget I went home to my parents as well when I could but I met my wife when I was fourteen-in-a-half in the YMCA and I married her when I was twenty.

Where was she from?

Inchicore.

This is Florence isn’t it?

Florence, yeah.

And what’s Florence’s maiden name?

Whittle. And what we used to do we used to meet on a Sunday night at 7.45 pm. There was a Gospel service in the YMCA every Sunday night. There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds there. Young people sat in the balcony, older people sat downstairs and you had all the Gospel singers in from America, people like Billy Graham and black singers which was amazing at that time and there was absolutely an amazing atmosphere and afterwards because I only had ten shillings a week pocket money the most we could do is go to Burdocks for a fish and chips and I’d walk her home to Inchicore and walk back again or we’d go down to what do you call the place, the Rainbow Café and have a Knickerbocker Glory each and that was about as far as we
could go financially. But again the whole city centre on a Sunday night was just dead. You wouldn’t meet anybody on the streets at that hour of the night.

215.MM: Was she Church of Ireland as well?

216.MS: Yeah.

217.MM: And what did her parents do?

218.MS: Her father was a foreman in Guinness but he died when she was fourteen. No, no, he was foreman in CIE, sorry a mistake.

219.MM: Up at the works was it?

220.MS: Up at the works yeah.

221.MM: That would explain the Inchicore connection alright. So you were in the Gresham now when you got married?

222.MS: No I was let go and I ended up trying to find a job in a hurry so I ended up in the Ormond.

223.MM: And who was in the Ormond at the time?

224.MS: I haven’t a clue. I can’t remember. He’s long dead now anyway. My first memory of the chef there was that we started to work at 8 am and we did straight shifts and at 8 am every morning the waitress would arrive down in the kitchen with her arms folded a serviette and under the serviette was a large whiskey for the chef. Eight in the morning! That was my first real introduction to chefs drinking on dusty, in a big way, although Eamon Cunningham I remember in the Metropole one of the greatest strokes was you’d be making a couple of hundred rum babas so I was sent off down to the stores to get a bottle of rum essence and another guy was sent up to the cellar to get a bottle of rum and they drank the rum and used the essence (laugh). But I mean I wasn’t involved in that, I just looked at these guys doing this sort of thing. Again drinking, there was never any drink in my home. My father didn’t drink so alcohol wasn’t something I was exposed to. I don’t think I was in a bar ever until I was married, ever. That’s the kind of background so it does tell you something different about me alright.

225.MM: And when you got married did you move in together then. Like this would be a big change. A change of lifestyle.

226.MS: I’ll tell you when we got married and we moved to an apartment, a little flat on the Coast Road, in Clontarf. I’ll tell where it was exactly you know the causeway going across where the Royal Golf Club is.

227.MM: That’s the road down to Dollymount Strand.

228.MS: Sorry yeah we lived opposite that. In a little attic, a one roomed little flat with a kitchen.

229.MM: And where did you have your wedding? Like was it a small affair or a large affair or…

230.MS: We had ninety-five people which I had to pay for myself in the Central Hotel.

231.MM: And which church did you go to?

232.MS: We were married in St Jude’s in Kilmainham.
233. **MM:** And at that time was a wedding held in the morning or in the afternoon or how long did it go on for?

234. **MS:** An afternoon wedding. We even had a horse and carriage (laugh). And we started saving immediately then to buy a house. Immediately.

235. **MM:** What did Florence do, was she working at the time.

236. **MS:** She worked as a seamstress in Pollycops in Kilmainham.

237. **MM:** Were they a factory?

238. **MS:** They were a huge clothing factory, a Jewish owned clothing factory.

239. **MM:** There was an awful lot of Jewish people involved in the clothing business at the time.

240. **MS:** Even the Whites are still around today.

241. **MM:** So you’re saving to buy a house?

242. **MS:** I was in the Central Hotel, no sorry I was in the Ormond.

243. **MM:** You were out of your time at this stage?

244. **MS:** I was a qualified chef at that stage yeah so I rang Dave Edwards again, who was now the head chef in the Clarence Hotel so I got a job immediately. I was very fortunate because it was Easter ’65, I took on the job as the new grill chef and then I became second head at the age of twenty-one, under Edwards.

245. **MM:** So really Edwards was quite pivotal character in your early training?

246. **MS:** He was and I got on well with the guy and he knew my work ethic and (inaudible) the new manager there at the same time. He was quite happy to have me on board and I spent two years there.

247. **MM:** What was that like because Dave told me that the original crowd were sort of clergy, and high tea stuff and he set about to change it.

248. **MS:** Well he didn’t really. That’s not quite through because when he took the job on they had just designed the Grill Bar and the Grill Bar go away from the high tea. It was a Grill Bar, a good menu but they closed, they sort of closed down the restaurant which is now the Clarence Tea Rooms and the Grill Bar became the focus. You had lunch in the restaurant. At night time the restaurant was only used for functions and the Grill Bar became the focus. So the Grill Bar ran from twelve to three and then from six to ten and it was packed, packed, packed. The lunch was in there, three and four sittings sometimes.

249. **MM:** And the idea of the Grill Bar was the food cooked on an open grill in the room.

250. **MS:** My job would be to cook omelettes and all the grilled stuff and the deep fried fish and chips and that. I had deep fryers, I had open grill, a plain grill and things like chicken curry came from the back, salads and all that. But I cooked in front of the customers. It was a great experience, you learnt how to work in front of people without any fear and two years later I was head hunted by a guy in Skerries. There’s a restaurant in Skerries called the Windmill and I went out to work there for two years as head chef.

251. **MM:** So this is around ’67 or so.
This is '65, Easter '65. Yeah two years. It was Easter again, it would be two years later '67.

That's the Windmill in Skerries. Do you remember his name?

Oh the people who owned was Nora O'Driscoll. They served on a Saturday night they had a dinner dance on a Saturday night and we'd serve three hundred and fifty meals, like dancing afterwards or during or whatever. And I worked with two army chefs from Gormanstown (laugh). It was rough going but my God did we go through some food because Skerries in the summer was choc blocked.

It was a resort kind of thing?

Ah very much so, oh yeah, absolutely. It was great experience and then after two years, when I was twenty-four, when I was twenty-three we had our first house bought.

Raheny and it cost me £1,800 (laugh) and I was earning, my basic wage was £25 a week in those weeks. I started off in the Hibernian by the way £2, 15 shillings a week in the Hibernian. £2, 15 shillings a week. Not big money in those days but I negotiated with the owner. I said to her you know I'll be doing seven nights a week here sometimes. You've got big parties, and functions and weddings so I organised a shilling for every person that sat down in the function room. I was earning £50 a week because we had so many functions. It was unreal money and I saved and saved but before I went to work in the Skerries I had a second job to save money to buy a house. I worked as a chef in a discothèque called La Disc in Molesworth Street. It was Ireland's first discotheque. I didn't cook very much but I had to be there and they paid me quite well to be there. You couldn't get a late license without a chef there so if the inspectors came in or the police came there was a chef there with a uniform on. So I took my scooter up to 11 pm and I worked there till three in the mornings or two in the morning or whatever it was it was owned by a man called Malcolm Glass, another Jewish guy who had also a clothing business by the way. He was a customer at the Clarence at the time. We had the really wealthy young Irish people night after night in those days.

And did they actually serve food or only if people asked for it?

There was a menu available on request. And the chef was able to cook. We did chicken curry and we did steak and that was it.

The idea was there for the license?

But he was smart enough to realise that it was worth his while to pay the chef to do doing and have a late night drinks licence. Disco music was very much '60s music, very much. Fascinating.

Oh it's a real milestone in social history sort of thing.

Well it was, you see one of the pivotal things in my mind we went to a dinner when I was nineteen years of age, eighteen or nineteen years of age in the Gresham, before I went to work there. It was some kind of fund raising in the church. You know we went along and there was a big spiel and we paid to go along and I remember sitting in the ballroom, the old ballroom in the Gresham, we had the balcony and the table and chairs underneath the balcony on the lower level and I sort of looking around and I was saying to my girlfriend, my future wife, beautiful rich red, lights and the whole and I said 'this is the future for us, this is our future, this is going to be our future'. I'm going to be a head chef and we're going to open our own restaurant and this is where
our future is. We’ve got all these wasters around us. This is our future. I wanted to climb to the mountain top to see the light (laugh). That was our thinking. I was very lucky to have a woman with me who shared that vision but she caught up on the idea of coming from a poor background her mother reared five children with no husband, and she was working to support her mother and so were her sisters and to come from that level. I know we’re not the only ones who have done this, many, many people done this but the vision was there at an early age. Eighteen or nineteen years of age to move on head chef. Eventually get married. Become a head chef first, get married and then move on to better things which became very difficult because money just wasn’t out there at the time.

265.MM: So where was the next step for you then from the Windmill?

266.MS: From the Windmill I went to work in the International Hotel in Bray for a short while. No, no, I went to Wynn’s Hotel sorry, Wynn’s Hotel. The manager there was Mr O’Loughlin, sorry Wynn’s Hotel. Again I was head hunted I didn’t look for the job. I was asked would I take the job. Obviously, through the Clarence connection because they owned both hotels.

267.MM: Was there a fella there called Gerry Vogelsang.

268.MS: Maybe. I went in as head chef and I just found that it was the most disgusting, revolting, disorganised kitchen I have ever been in my life. They’d high tea and the whole high tea liked the mixed grills and the rashers and the sausages, livers, kidneys, lamb chops were thrown into a big fat fryer and taken out and drained again dressed up on plaits. So I changed the whole structure in there and I eventually got every chef that was in the place and got my own staff in bit by bit.

269.MM: And who did you bring in? Did you bring in people who had worked with or…

270.MS: Chefs that knew other chefs, a younger crew. But it was very difficult. There was a lot of trouble over it, a lot of resentment by the waiting staff, by other staff. But they were just old men who hadn’t caught up. Having worked in the grill in the Clarence and worked in Skerries with more modern equipment this was still very old fashion. Not only was the equipment old fashioned but the set-up system was almost Victorian. It was just nobody cared. The standard was not there. So what I did was I designed the kitchen on the first floor where the restaurant was, rather than send food up on lifts. I got rid of silver service because I discovered that the waiters were sliding the silver service food onto plates before they served it and I brought it to the attention of the management. Serious rows with the waiters and the head waiter but I got my way because I showed the management that there was a better way of doing. People were going to get a properly presented meal on a plate rather than a waiter supposedly bringing a silver service and Gueridon, putting the food onto the plate for high tea and they weren’t actually doing it in reality and nobody had noticed except the waiters. Well the manager got his on a silver tray alright, even the chicken curry on a silver dish was being just slid onto a plate and when I show to the management they realised, so we set up a system sort of kitchen on the first floor just for service and it made a hell of a difference. I was there for about three or four years and can’t remember how long now.

271.MM: And in everywhere else you’d been apart from probably Skerries it had been silver service till then. Was it?

272.MS: Yeah, oh yeah.

273.MM: Had you done plate service in Skerries?

274.MS: Everything was plated, oh God yeah. It was volume, volume, volume, I mean scampi and steaks and chickens and ducks. It was just volume, volume, volume.

275.MM: Do you remember any of the guys you brought in there, the young guy? There was no one sort of outstanding, no one made an impression sort of thing?
In the Clarence Hotel, the only outstanding commis I had was Colin O'Daly, but he was only there for a very short time. I barely remember him being there. But I wouldn't want to make a big issue of that.

Ah well I’m talking to Colin now on Thursday morning.

Don’t mention that to him please. He may not want to be reminded of that.

If it comes out it will come you know what I mean. He’ll tell me his own story as such.

Let him tell his story. He may not mention the Clarence. We all leave out things that we don’t want to mention. I’m sure there are things that I haven’t said that I should have said.

He was in the airport first?

All I know he was either a young commis or a young chef. It was a long time ago but again, like I say I don’t think that would even appear in his radar because we all worked in various jobs here or there that you forget.
283. MM: That’s it that’s the nature of the business.

284. MS: I wouldn’t want him to think that I was making a point of that. He is lovely, lovely guy.

285. MM: How long did you stay in, its clear you weren’t too happy with Wynn’s even though you made some changes.

286. MS: No I there again probably for two to three years, maybe three years, I can’t remember. If I back track let me think, I bought the Guinea Pig in ’78, Christmas ’77, I left the Hibernian, the Clarence I was there for maybe three years so ’77 yeah it would be back towards… Then I went to work with the International Hotel in Bray which again it burnt down after I left it.

287. MM: Was that on the seafront?

288. MS: No it was up besides the railway station. It’s now a Bowling Alley. I was there maybe nine months to a year. Again, just one of these old, old places.

289. MM: And again it seaside resort, it was families?

290. MS: At the weekends they did discotheques. A lot of Northern Ireland people used to come down in their hundreds so in the winter in the quiet but in the summer it was crazy. But again they had a beautiful copper grill there, lovely food in it. A Hibernian style copper grill.

291. MM: I think that’s interesting what you’re saying that an awful lot came down from Northern Ireland for the weekends and whatever.

292. MS: Bray was jammed with Northern people at weekends, absolutely.

293. MM: And was that like winter and summer or mostly summer?

294. MS: Ah no, no, mostly summer.

295. MM: Ah mostly summer, yeah, yeah summer. Its something we tend to forget about, you know, what I mean the mass. There’s still to a certain extent around marching season.

296. MS: But you also had them in Skerries. They stayed in the Red, what was that place in Skerries.

297. MM: A camp or something.

298. MS: The Red something. Not Butlins now that was the coast. It was a downmarket Butlins. Butlins was downmarket itself. Butlins, I’ve seen his story on television and he made it possible for people to go on holidays in a clean environment. Clean chalets with toilets and then you had the fun of the fair to keep the kids happy and the parents happy and it was a God send after the war for a lot of poor people who could suddenly afford to go somewhere and be entertained instead going to Brighton or these other places. But Skerries was like ‘honky tonky’ but it had its own sort of charm and then Bray of course. The problem with Bray has always been there’s two cities there, two towns there, there’s the seafront completely isolated from the main street. The main street is just a drag. You can’t even park there anymore. The two completely autonomous, because you can never really marry the two, there’s such a gap. And the main street was a main road to Greystones. That’s all it was. It was the main road to Greystones and Delgany, no Greystones. That’s all it was just a drag and it just had the shops lined up but I never liked Bray very much. So now you’re up to…

299. MM: You’re in Bray do you go back from Bray, did you go back to the Clarence?
300. **MS:** I was asked would I take the job on as head chef in the Clarence. Edwards had left to work with Peter Malone.

301. **MM:** In the Pat Quinn Club?

302. **MS:** Because I knew the Clarence and they knew my form, they invited me back as head chef.

303. **MM:** And how did you find that suddenly being head chef in a place where you had previously sort of worked?

304. **MS:** There’s a sad story here. Loftus met in the Clarence and offered me the job but I said would you mind confirming that in writing.

305. **MM:** You asked for confirmation.

306. **MS:** I asked for confirmation from Loftus of the position that was offered to me and he wrote me a letter confirming.

307. **MM:** You’d just bought new house in Killiney. Had you sold the house in Raheny and moved out?

308. **MS:** Yeah, yeah so he confirmed the letter and I wrote it back to him confirming my appointment and then he wrote back a letter confirming the dates to start and all that. And the morning I walked in I was met at the door by the shop steward and he said to me ‘what are you doing here?’ and I said ‘I’m taking up the job as head chef today’. ‘Oh no you’re not, we have a head chef’.

309. **MM:** That wasn’t Carmody was it?

310. **MS:** No, I’ll think in the minute. It’s a father and son situation. And they were there in my early days and they were there during Edwards time and I was told to sit and wait for the manager and came in and I eventually came down and said ‘I need to talk to you’ and I said ‘okay and I said what’s the problem’ and he says ‘well I was told you weren’t taking the job’ and I said ‘well I wasn’t told’ and he said ‘you can’t start because if you start there will be a strike because so and so has taken the job over’. And I said ‘I left a job in Bray, I’ve come here’ and he said ‘well I’ll tell you what you do leave it and we’ll sort it out in a couple of days’. So for three days I wasn’t allowed go into the kitchen and on the fourth day I called over the catering manager and the shop steward said ‘look I’m going down to the office now and I’m changing into my uniform, this is the job I’ve been offered, this is the job I’m taking and I’m not leaving unless somebody else has taken the job in the meantime’. So I said ‘if there’s going to be a strike, there’s going to be a strike’ so I went down to the stairs to the lads, and called the lads together, listen what’s going on here. This was my first contact with them. So we were told you weren’t taking the job and so and so is taking it over. I said ‘I know nothing about that’ and the other said ‘I don’t really want the job anyway’ and for four months they refused to let me run the kitchen as a head chef. In every morning, I worked and worked and did my job but there was just this tension and the manager refused to talk to me so eventually one day I was standing in the kitchen and the manager shouts down ‘get that fucker Stewart up here’ and I called the shop steward and I told him ‘I’m going to sue this guys arse off, this is disgraceful carry on, I have the letters, the offer of the job, my confirmation taking the job, what’s going on here I don’t know but whatever’s going here its got nothing to do with me.’ So I was brought upstairs and told sorry about all the messing around but you start work today after four months. It subsequently transpired that Edwards had lost his job in the Pat Quinn Club, and Loftus wanted him back and tried to run me out of the place so he could have the job back. And I wouldn’t blame Edwards on this because Edwards said he wouldn’t take the job unless I was gone which gave Loftus the idea in his head to run me out and to get Edwards back because they were friends. They were much more friendly than I’d ever been. So after that I got on very well with Loftus. I did my job for about two-and-a-half years until I bought the Guinea.
Pig. But I was being sacrificed for somebody else’s idea. But it certainly wasn’t Edward’s fault it was just what transpired.

311.MM: You always wanted your own place. You know you set that out from the thing. How did it come about now? Give me a little bit of history of the Guinea Pig. Who ran the Guinea Pig before you bought it. It has been running for quite a number of years.

312.MS: Yeah the Guinea Pig was opened in ’57 by a woman called Sheila Hyland who used to be the caterer down in Busáras. Sheila Hyland. She married a man called Dick Monaghan so her name was Monaghan as well. Hyland/Monaghan and she sold it in ’74 to her head waiter a man called Brendan Murphy. Now we had been looking to lease or rent a restaurant, we tried the Silver Tassie. We tried one of the hotels in Bray. We tried that place way up the mountains there.

313.MM: Johnnie Fox’s or one of those or the Blue Light or Lamb Doyles.

314.MS: Lamb Doyles and we tried a few other places to try and rent and nothing was coming of that and then we heard there was a restaurant in a place called Dalkey for sale and we came down and looked at it and we got the price and we had a meal. We found out about the history it. It had had a great name but the owners were supposed to be alcoholics and they wanted out of it. The place was falling apart. Literally, you couldn’t even cook, there was an old Aga range in the kitchen and that sort of thing. No proper facilities. The place was only fit for closing down and the grease on the carpet you could slide on the carpet. Anyway we negotiated a price, sold our house to the Murphy’s which was great because there were several other houses on the estate for sale and they weren’t selling. So they took our house over. We bought the Guinea Pig and the rest is history.

315.MM: So it’s nearly a sort of a swop with an extra few bob?

316.MS: A good few extra bob, so that’s how it happened.

317.MM: Did you have to keep it closed for a while you revamped?

318.MS: No, no we moved in here on the 2nd January.

319.MM: This is 1978.

320.MS: This is 1978 yeah, January 1978. And what we did was all our friends from Killiney, about six couples came down or eight couples came down and we started at the front and we finished at the back. We scrubbed, all our friends scrubbed the place out and we couldn’t use table cloths that were there or the cutlery and delft so I went to Hugh Jordans and go cutlery, delft and glassware, as much as I could possibly be able to get. We rented table cloths from a linen crowd, and the kitchen was just unreal. So we started off using a bakery down the road to cook our ducks because we’d no ovens, proper ovens and I borrowed a couple of New World gas cookers and I was cooking under a tarpaulin in the back garden almost. It was just unreal. In the meantime I got a phone call from Norbert Kellett from Caters Equipment. The famous Norbert Kellett.

321.Good story this is, because it tells you what different people are like. He said ‘I believe you bought the Guinea Pig.’ I said ‘yeah’. He said ‘how are you fixed for kitchen equipment?’ I said ‘I’m not, I’m in big, big trouble, I opened last night, I don’t know how I’m going to cope. I’ve no money’. He said ‘I’ll come out and see you, are you there now?’ I said ‘yeah’. ‘I’ll be out in an hour’. He came out and he said ‘what kind of kitchen is this.’ We’d no kitchen. He said ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do’ he says ‘I have a warehouse full of repossessed equipment and stuff traded in over the years and we’ll do some measurements.’ He had a fella called Tony with him. And he measured up and he said ‘what kind of kitchen is this.’ ‘We’d no kitchen. He said ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do’ he says ‘I have a warehouse full of repossessed equipment and stuff traded in over the years and we’ll do some measurements.’ He had a fella called Tony with him. And he measured up and he said ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do’ he says ‘I have a warehouse full of repossessed equipment and stuff traders in over the years and we’ll do some measurements.’ He had a fella called Tony with him. And he measured up and he said ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do’ he says ‘I have a warehouse full of repossessed equipment and stuff traded in over the years and we’ll do some measurements.’
the meantime you want to buy new equipment or change the equipment I’ll take this back and replace with equipment. After nine months if you still have the equipment you play me for it but all the stainless steel is free and I won’t charge you for the stainless steel tables and shelves.’ And he had loads of pots and pans, and ladles. ‘That’s all yours for nothing as well, as many as you want, take what you want.’ So the guy literally set me up. And I never bought another piece of equipment off anybody else for twenty years.

322. MM: Yeah.

323. MS: And the strange things about that story is that I met another leading catering supplier when I was leaving the Clarence and I said ‘by the way I’m opening my own restaurant in Dalkey called the Guinea Pig’ and he said ‘you’re opening a restaurant, I’ll give you six months’. So there’s the attitude to one compared to the ‘what can I do for you’ in the other guy. I met him at trade fair a year later and he complained I never bought anything off him. Says I, ‘sure why would I, I wasn’t supposed to be there after six months’. I said ‘I’d never buy one item off you’. I said ‘you could have helped me and you were in a position to help me but no, you knocked me down so forget it’. It’s an interesting story but it’s a good story, it shows that nice people are nice and there are Christian people out there still.

324. MM: And what goes around comes around.

325. MS: And it went around and came around. Anything I ever bought off anybody was off him over the years, until he closed down Catering Equipment eventually.

326. MM: When you started off first were you one your own in the kitchen? Did you have a commis?

327. MS: No, I had Jim Bowe.

328. MM: Oh, Jim Bowe used to help you out yeah. Jim was teaching at this stage in the college was he?

329. MS: He was teaching in the college at that stage yeah. I worked with Jim before in the Metropole. There was another guy came in as well, I can’t remember his name off hand. A young chef that worked with me as well but I had other casual chefs come in and worked with me but from a marketing point of view my idol at that time was Sean Kinsella.

330. I admired Sean Kinsella because he was the only chef or the first chef to put chefs on the map and I’d done a course in marketing with one of the local councils and I realised that advertising is not answer to getting business. Marketing, networking was going to be the answer so I tried to create an image for myself and the image I created was a big green jaguar outside the door, a big cigar, silk bow tie and a big moustache and the apron. And it worked, and I had got to know before I bought the Guinea Pig through Seanad Chef na h-Éireann when I was President, through my work with the Lions Clubs particularly the Liffey Valley Lions Club as PR. I got to know all the journalists of the day. John Feeney, Terry O’Sullivan, Trevor Danker, all those people, Myles McWeeney and I invited them all out one by one for dinner and they gave me fantastic write ups. Hugh Leonard I invited him out for dinner, he became a regular. Theodora Fitzgibbon became a regular, then Maeve Binchy, so then I had a group of people I could call on and I used to dream up ideas, lies, lies, lies, you know paper never refuses ink. I used to dream up these mad cap ideas and I would put, they’d write it in the papers and we were constantly getting fantastic coverage. It was all based on Kinsella, on his system, his way of doing it. And I still know, most of them are dead now, those guys but we don’t publicise like we used to at all. Not for at least ten years. I don’t bother anymore. I don’t need to. Just keep a low profile.

331. MM: Tell me something, Sean, did you know Sean?
Not well, no, only from image. I met him a couple of times but nothing, we weren’t friends.

Had you eaten in his restaurant?

Only once after I’d bought the Guinea Pig.

Oh afterwards okay, yeah.

No I didn’t feel I could afford to eat in his restaurant. I just figured that chefs were never getting the recognition that they deserved. Chefs were always kept in the background. And my experience was if you publicise yourself as the chef/owner, people would be more attracted to your restaurant because there’s a focus and I made myself the focus.

And you saw that he had the fancy car outside so you got yourself a green jag.

Oh yeah, the whole thing. One of the things I learnt about marketing was that if you’re in a position of dealing with the public especially in this line of business they don’t want to deal with a guy wearing a cardigan with holes in it. They want to deal with a guy that looks, they want to be associated with successful people so you if exude the image of success which in reality is not there at all but if you give that impression of success.

That was long before I learnt that lesson but to be successful you have to look successful so again the image I created wasn’t a real me. It was an image but then again if you’re not careful you end up living the image which I did for a while. I had been to the mountain top and saw the light (laugh). The trick is to walk up, you see I think maybe what I’m saying here is that if you come very poor background and you’re suddenly getting all this money in the till and you have all these famous people coming in, film stars, famous writers, local business people and you want to live like them but you’re only a restaurateur and you go over the top a little bit for a while and eventually you realise you’re on the top of this mountain. This mythical mountain but there’s nothing up there and the trick is to walk back down that mountain, not fall off the mountain. That’s what I did.

Now was there any, you know when you were up say on top of that mountain was there a time where you had maybe run away with yourself a bit and how did that manifest itself?

Well I had a very sensible wife who obviously kept me in control to an extent. She would always keep my feet on the ground where possible but I think you have to live that lie or live that style and stay I’ve been there. I mean by the age of thirty-eight, I was driving an XJ 64.2 Jaguar.
had a holiday home down in Ballymoney. We were Reeds Hotel in Madera. We were staying in the Savoy Hotel in Madera. We were staying in the Bahamas. We were living the lifestyle of the customer without realising this is not your lifestyle.

342. MM: Did it financially affect you as such?

343. MS: Yes of course it did, you thought you were doing great and you were doing great but you were always in overdrafts and you were always causing yourself problems but eventually you come to the conclusion this can’t go on. This can not go on so in 1989 the government halved the tax allowance for corporate dining, no ’87 and in 1989 as far as I remember they eliminated the tax allowance for corporate spending. That’s when Kinsella went belly up (note: Kinsella closed in 1984) and a lot of other restaurants and I remember having a conversation with John Howard and saying ‘what are we going to do John, this is looking very serious. He said ‘well, if the Guinea Pig is going to survive they’re going to put on a table d’hote dinner there menu.’ This is when reality hit me about my lifestyle. I sold the Jaguar, sold the holiday home, bought a van. My wife and I sat down and we worked out the average dropped from £50 a head to £23.50 overnight. Okay, overnight and at the same time we were trying to get ourselves a full license which we did eventually get which cost more money. So what we did was we sat down in the restaurant one very late and we took a sheet of paper out and it said ways to save money. And the first thing we did was like I said the Jag, the holiday home. I sacked a manager, one chef, one cleaning and one kitchen porter and an immediate saving of an awful lot of money and other savings like that. And then on the other side of the page we took another sheet of paper out and said ways to make money. So my wife said ‘why don’t we open for Sunday lunch?’ and she said ‘we turned people away last three nights at least at 6 pm, we don’t open till 7 pm why don’t we do an early bird menu?’ So we put on an early bird menu and the very first week of that menu we took in £1,500 on that menu still part of the restaurant. So, ways to make money, so we started opening at 6 pm instead of 7 pm, we put an early bird menu and I had three hundred wines in the wine list and over that Christmas I had brought it down to fifty wines by just putting on smaller, smaller, smaller wine list and it climbed up above eighty or ninety since because we were away overstocked you know cash flow, cash flow so suddenly we realised that cash flow was king and we made serious changes in that. So the success that came out of the dire problems was caused by my wife with ideas like the early bird menu, and opening Sunday lunch and Sunday dinner.

344. The biggest problem I had was not getting money in the till, the biggest problem was staff, waiting staff who refused to come in one hour earlier or even a half an hour earlier to facilitate the early bird menu and eventually it ended up that they all walked out and took me to court for constructive dismissal and subsequently lost their case, big time because they’d no case. They were being offered extra money to come in early, they wouldn’t come in early. It was a case of survival and they didn’t understand this that survival was necessary. They couldn’t conceive of the drop in tips because the way the business went. They couldn’t understand I was trying to keep the Guinea Pig together and keep their jobs together.

345. MM: Go back to this. Clearly this is a pivotal in Dublin and Irish restaurants, fine dining particularly is around this ’87 and ’89.

346. MS: Then ’91 you had a serious recession don’t forget, a serious recession in ’91. So ‘87/’89, around that time that’s went Restaurant na Mara went into a loss situation, but it was owned by CIE so they didn’t care. The Mirabeau closed down, at least that was part of the reason it closed down, but all the corporate businesses.

347. MM: Because I remember John Howard talking about this in interviews and stuff like that, that it was a big…

348. MS: Well John was a great help to me. John Howard put me in the right direction. I’d like that on the record. He put me in the right direction and so did John O’Sullivan in Roly’s. We had chats about this. But we discussed it and the same with old Joe Gray, and again we discussed this,
although, I’ll tell you a thing about Old Joe Gray from The Celtic Mews. Old Joe Gray came out here with his Maura in the beginning and we became very good friends and he gave my wife and myself some very, very good advice as to the running of the restaurant from the front of the house side because we knew nothing about the front of the house side. I’ll tell you what’s fascinating, we were open two nights and somebody wanted a glass of vintage port and we didn’t have vintage port, we had it the next day. Couple of nights later there was a guy in looking for lobsters, we had lobsters in the next day. Someone looking for Cuban cigars we had Cuban cigars the next day, so we were actually chasing the customer standard rather than setting the standard for the customer. We didn’t realise that there was that kind of customer out there demanding that kind of food and that kind of drink so within two or three weeks the restaurant had transformed itself from what I thought was just an ordinary restaurant into a very high quality clientele, demanding Chateau Palmer and Lynch Bages and Mouton Rothschild. They were drinking vintage port by the bottle, they were drinking 1952 Brandy or Armagnac by the glass and we were just staggered. I mean that was the standard that was out there looking to get in here and then we realised that these were customers that used to come before way back and had great memories of the restaurant and were delighted to come back to the Guinea Pig with better food, better ambience, but we weren’t offering them what they were expecting.

But we jumped on the band wagon very quickly and I can tell you I was into Foxes and buying my cigars the next day. This is when the cigar came out. I started smoking cigars. There was a very nice feeling for the old Cuban cigars after that but like I say if you come from a poor background I think its inevitable that you’ll want to live like the people you’re serving or at least you think they have money. They look like they’ve money, they’re spending big money and I think you have to do that and get it out of your system because I will never grow old and say I wish I’d done this or I’d done that. The first menu I had…

I’m just looking at the first menu.

It was not very practical. I tried to model it on the Hibernian Hotel a little bit. That wasn’t my very first menu; that was my second menu.

I’m looking the steak tartare. Would that have been done at the table?

At the table, beautifully done. The Entrecote Poivrade was flambéed at the table. The duck was flambéed at the table. Cherry (Inaudible) were flambéed at the table. Even the Crepe Suzettes were flambéed at the table. Flambéed

Right, the rest of it would have been plate service though.

It would have been plate service, plate service oh yeah.

Except the Dover Sole was probably done at the table.

In the beginning we did it at the table but as years went on waiting staff were not as well trained into but we’d present it so bring it back and then take off the bone.

Perfect. The other thing I’m looking at here as well you have fresh Colimore lobster and that’s lovely because you’re giving the localness to it.

I still do and the Dalkey crab.

Yeah and the other thing I’m noticing there as well you had Escargot Chabilisienne.

They sold very well in those days.

What type of snails, were they fresh snails or were they tinned snails?
363. **MS:** Oh they were always tinned snails. There were never any fresh snails in those days.

364. **MM:** And basically it was tinned snails and then you made up sort of the butter with it and then melted it on the…

365. **MS:** Baked in the oven yeah. Oh they were big sellers in those days yeah. And the *Tortue Clair*.

366. **MM:** Yeah turtle soup like this was now turtle herbs and actually this was consommé.

367. **MS:** What you did, you did both. You made a consommé, you put in the herbs but you also got some tinned turtle soup.

368. **MM:** Oh, tinned turtle soup?

369. **MS:** Even in the Hibernian they used tinned turtle soup and the herbs and the consommé but the experience from working in the Hibernian where they made everything like that you know from scratch even the lobster bisque was made with raw lobsters baked in the oven and flambéed and then passed through a sieve. Well first of all you crushed with a mortar and then you passed then through. I mean it was just incredible quality, the standard was so high it was amazing, and the old *Chateaubriand* as well, yeah.

370. **MM:** Well changes clearly came in that you stopped doing as much table work, was it because, as you said, the quality of waiters weren’t there to do it?

371. **MS:** Yeah, that was one of the problems and then I think what happened was around the 1990s time that sort of period when there was a huge problem, I think we tightened up menus and we tightened up a lot of things and made a lot of things much more simple, and having eaten out in England and eaten in France and eaten in Italy and Spain and like we say Madeira we were behind in many ways in what they were doing. Some of the old French style restaurants in the hotels were still doing you 1950 style cooking and service, but the more modern restaurants were just getting rid of all the Lobster Newberg and that sort of stuff, Prawns Thermidor, or whatever, they were all disappearing off menus and the names you always put behind dishes were also beginning to disappear. So we simplified things and we have never changed back to that kind of menu again. People don’t remember that menu and you wouldn’t sell turtle soup today and you wouldn’t sell Windsor soup today and you wouldn’t sell snails today, like you did. I mean the shells were as expensive as the snails. You wouldn’t sell just crab like you would years ago so…

372. **MM:** So you bought the shells. You bought the snails in the tins. You put the tin into the shell, put the butter on it and baked it.

373. **MS:** Right and you had the fork and the tongs to go with it (laugh). So what else was there that was very popular let me think. Escallops, we ended up putting just scallops and garlic and a lemon butter. Prawn curry. I mean that was a pain in the ass, because you had papadoms and chutney and coconut and sultanas and pilaff rice. We tried to do it right and the big problem with chateaubriand was people looking for, they were looking for one pink, and one well done and how do you do that. That’s impossible. The other thing that was a problem was when we bought the second house and doubled it to capacity, the same kitchen was there so we ended up.

374. **MM:** When did that happen?

375. **MS:** 1980. Sorry I didn’t explain that you early on. In 1980 the private house next door came up for sale. We bought it for £23,000 and within two months we’d broken in, put a new floor in, painted the walls, got the tables and chairs in and opened up.
What was your original seating capacity, around twenty-five or thirty?

Twenty-six which economically wasn’t viable.

So you moved from that then to around forty-five or something?

Ah no sixty-six, sixty odd. But that happened in 1980. We took it over, we bought it in November. I didn’t start paying for it, I didn’t put a deposit down until January but I knew the guy that owned it and he didn’t seem to care so we broke through the window in the front and poured cement in to put a floor in within a week and the deposit still hadn’t been paid and the loan hadn’t been achieved and we opened up on about the 10th December but we were already in capacity here. We were just over capacity. I mean this restaurant was full seven nights, six nights a week at that stage. That’s back in 1980 now. Its full, full, full. So this gave us the extra space. In the old days that bar wasn’t there, that bar was in a little back room so we eventually bought it up to the front then, opened up the back room.

But let me something about the financing of this which I found amazing. We unsuccessfully tried to get money to buy this place and I went to my wife’s sister’s husband who was an accountant and he lived in Virginia (Cavan) and we sat down for three nights in Virginia and we worked out an eighteen page document full of the biggest amount of rubbish, projections, projections and budgets and progress and you know the financing of it. We actually called it a proposal by Mervyn and Florence Stewart for the acquisition, operation and financing of the Guinea Pig Restaurant, and I brought it to a broker and I had the money inside three days, and I realised then that all the banks want to know is your ability to project figures. Your ability to work out budgeting concepts, and plan ahead, so all they’re interested at the end of the day is how you are going to pay the money back and you showed an ability to do that.

But later within two weeks of getting it opened a friend of mine who lived in Killiney also worked in a bank and he’d just done a credit course. And he said ‘who is doing your books?’ And I said ‘what books’ because I didn’t have a clue at that stage what books. So he sat me down and explained to me that a lot of restaurants, businesses forget restaurants go out of business within two years because they haven’t set up financial controls. They haven’t realised that the money in the till is not there’s. You’ve got to project money forward into taxes and you got to budget a little bit and you’ve got to keep your books up to date and your PAYE and PRSI was different in those days. I think the turnover tax was 2.5% in those days so he sat me down and we worked it out and he said ‘look I’ll do your books for you for a minimum amount of money’ he said ‘because if you don’t have to worry about doing your books you can stay with entrepreneurial skills, do your thing and I’ll look after this because I’m isolated from the day to day running’ and people who try to do their books invariably get in trouble and go out of business and I wasn’t trained. So we’ve done that ever since. We’ve never, I’ve never, all my invoices and statements come in. I check them over, just look at them and they go into a bag and they go to my bookkeeper who runs them up as far as trial balance and then they go once a year to the auditors. And another thing we’ve been doing for many, many years on his instigation is that we have the VAT on direct debit. For years and years and years and we’ve always got enough if not more in the till as it were to cover the annual bill. Sometimes we could be five or six thousand over. You might be a thousand under but it’s always in balance. So you’re not going to borrow the money to pay last year’s tax and that way we’ve kept financially very sound, very sound. And that’s a serious lesson that I learnt, I learnt that thirty years ago.

Tell me you spent some time, you mentioned briefly earlier on you spent some time as President of the Panel of Chefs. How did you get involved with the Panel of Chefs?

Well I was a member of the Panel of Chefs from about the age of twenty and...

Right from say the Metropole, is this probably because of Marley would it be?
385.**MS:** Around that time but it had fallen into disuse and I got a phone call from the organisers of the Hotel and Catering Exhibition wanting to know would I take on the mantle of doing the *Salon Culinare* for that year so I rang a few guys around and they said okay you’re the President, you do it (laugh). That’s how it happened.

386.**MM:** So that was really the reforming.

387.**MS:** Yeah I wasn’t happy with what I did now. What happened basically was in the Burlington they had it that year and I didn’t have any political clout with the management in the Burlington so they were meant to get all these tables set up in the room and all the clogs on ready to go and the kitchen porters didn’t want to know me. They were always looking for ‘back handers’, I was the chef. I was in the Clarence Hotel at that stage, no I was in the Clarence Hotel when I became the President and I just couldn’t get the clout to get to get any management to co-operate with me to get this done. They didn’t want to deal with me. Who are you are? And it was a problem and when the chefs started to bring stuff in there was a guy called Darsonval was one of the judges that year and another guy I can’t remember his name and they were going mental because the stuff was being brought in and the tables weren’t ready. But they got it set up eventually and got it going. Now it wasn’t a great exhibition. It was fairly limited but it was the start again of it and I was President then until 1978. They had twenty-five members paid up at that stage so it was coming back again.

388.**MM:** And who was involved at that stage?

389.**MS:** I think Noel Cullen or someone like that.

390.**MM:** I think Noel did. Was Noel Cullen in the Gresham at that stage or something like that?

391.**MS:** He was in the Gresham.

392.**MM:** I think at that stage you had Noel, so you had yourself, you had Michael Marley was still, was he a member there. Was Marley in the Metropole a lot or was he over in England as well working for ranks or what was the story?

393.**MS:** I think he was in head office. In Dublin head office of Rank’s as far as I know. But Matt Byrne was still involved and Noel Cullen and a lot of other guys.

394.**MM:** Eugene McSweeney.

395.**MS:** Eugene McSweeney would have been involved and Eugene McGovern then as well.

396.**MM:** Where did Eugene McSweeney work? Was he in the Moira or?

397.**MS:** He ended up as head chef in a restaurant up in Rathmines belonging to John O’Sullivan. Of course you know he opened his own restaurant, Lacken House, down in Kilkenny, he was always known as Golden Hands, you know that, that was his nick name.

398.**MM:** Yeah how did that come about?

399.**MS:** Because he won the awards. He was the first guy to win gold medals in Hotelympia you know. He was the first gold medal winner. Yeah that’s what he was.

400.**MM:** I think Marley had won gold a long time ago.

401.**MS:** When he was in England.

402.**MM:** Oh maybe yeah, but this was of the new breed as such.
But anyway to cut a long story short he was just known as golden hands and again he was a guy like myself that put himself forward in the firing line as an entrepreneurial guy but its very sad cause I said to him ‘what happened all the awards, you’ve got more awards than I’ve ever seen’. ‘Well they’re in a box now’ he says. And that’s sad because his awards we’d seen them all around the place. They’re worth nothing to you on the day, on the day they’re worth something if you get publicity but they’re just dead wood after that. I’ve an attic full of them going back thirty years and they’re worth nothing to me so what’s the point?

At that time as well we had the likes of you know you opened up, clearly you were influenced by Sean Kinsella down in the Mirabeau. At the same time or a little bit earlier than this, you had Aidan McManus open out in the King Sitric.

He opened thirty-six years ago, a long time ago.

John would have influenced me from a different way. John’s entrepreneurial skills influenced me from a different way. John’s entrepreneurial skills were there. John was doing great. His location was incredible. He was there a couple of years before me and he was, you see John worked more from an angle of I’m a gold medal winner chef and I was never a gold medal winner chef. So how do I explain that? He would have, and so would golden hands, he would have been in the same situation – ‘Gold medal winner, Hotelympia London. Winner of the Irish team’, and he would got publicity on television from that and on radio and in the magazines which I wouldn’t have got.

So you created a persona for yourself really. You were very clever from a marketing perspective because you created this sort of persona; you know the moustache, the dickey bow, the cigar, the car outside and the whole lot. You know, you projected success.

But people didn’t know me, people didn’t know my background and one of the mistakes I made was that as a member of the Irish Hotel and Catering Institute I was a fellow, I still am a fellow, a member of this, President of Liffey Valley’s Lions Club, I had a whole page of crap about myself in the menu and it became a stick to beat me with because all the cookery writers coming in, you know one of them said ‘this gentleman has excelled in areas of marketing and this, and this, and this but I’m afraid the cooking doesn’t match up to the bidding’. So that’s a problem. That’s a problem. So I dumped all that stuff then. I said ‘let the food speak for itself’. Forget it. That’s when I really easing off the marketing because even the tax inspectors coming in were saying ‘is that your car outside the door’, ‘yeah’, ‘where did you buy it, how much did you pay for it, how do you finance it, where does the money come from the petrol, do you insure it with and you know your Louis Copeland suit and you silk ties now where is the money coming from with all this lifestyle.’ And I got annoyed with this and I said ‘look you’re looking at too much television’ I said. ‘I’m not a mafia’ I said. ‘I’m just an ordinary guy here running a restaurant’ I said, ‘I cook in the kitchen, I wash floors, I was pots, I peel potatoes, I said this is a public persona, this is an image that I project to the public because the wealthy public like to be associated with people who look successful.’ So I said ‘it’s a marketing thing, don’t ever confuse the public representation of my image to the reality of cooking in a kitchen’.

Sean Kinsella had that problem as in he had a big tax bill because actually it was nearly the Revenue started to believe the hype, do you know what I mean and they started to say no this guy must have more than he does and sure he didn’t.

Well you see Sean was too generous. But Sean was not a businessman, he was an entrepreneur. He did not look after his business point of view. He was just too generous to customers, ducks and bottles of port and that.
MM: Ah sure half the people weren’t paying.

MS: Yeah but he’d also be robbed by his staff. You see if you’re going to be an entrepreneur just like Conrad Gallagher, he’s been in my restaurant many times, we’ve had great discussions about this. I said to Conrad you know, you’ve got to let somebody else take over the running of the restaurant and do your entrepreneurial bit. Ah no, no, he could do it all. He couldn’t but you know the story there. He believed his own hype. But I believed my own hype for a while as well but you know you do loosen the run of yourself a little bit and I mean a great leveller was what happened with Alex Ferguson the manager of the United football team, a wealthy man in his own right who got involved with the Magniers and these people who prepare the horses and he owned the leg of a horse or at least he thought he did and they put him down in his little box saying to him ‘you’re not one of us’, you know, you are, ‘you are who you are, we are the Magniers’, we are the whatever and he was just a runner in and they let him know he was only a runner in. He was new money but he hadn’t got their kind of money and you know one of the things I’ve never done here in thirty years was got personally involved with one customer. Never go to a customer’s home, never socialise with customers. I might play golf with the odd one here and there but I just don’t want to know who they are, I don’t want to know anything about their lifestyle. I have my lifestyle and keep our cards close to our chest and you can’t go to people’s homes as a restaurateur. You’re still in their eyes only a restaurateur.

MM: Yeah. Keep it professional.

MS: Keep it professional and socialising, you don’t see my name in the social columns, we don’t go to receptions, we don’t go to… You don’t see my name. I’ll tell you what it is. I’m sixty-two years of age, I value my time off. I work five nights a week on average in the kitchen. I play golf twice a week. Go for walks, I do a bit of gardening, I read a lot. I enjoy my lifestyle but I don’t want to be socialising and I don’t drink anyway so drinking isn’t a thing I would be doing but I don’t want to know my customers. I want them to come in and buy the product. Be friendly with them, be nice to them, make them feel very welcome but not become friends.

MM: Did you drink at any stage?

MS: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

MM: And have you stopped drinking altogether?

MS: Nineteen years ago. Because again it sort of, it coincided with two things. I was drinking too much back in the late ‘80s and what actually was in ‘91 when we really had a big problem. I mean after the tax allowance on the corporate dining we had to get a license and what happened there was I had to put the head down to try and get the money together to concentrate, concentrate, concentrate and I’m giving up drinking for three months. I’m going to get through the whole Christmas here, get this thing back on track. Ninety-one was follow on to ‘89 and it never really had come back up at that stage and I decided at that stage I don’t want to go back on it. I never drank since. I like my cigars though.

I decided at that stage it was getting me nowhere. You see the problem was you had a gang of guys like myself, all restaurateurs who met regular. We went to wine tasting, whiskey tasting, brandy tasting, we’d fly off to London to a show, we’d spend three days in London. We’d go off to France for a couple of days.

MM: Who was that gang, was that John Howard?

MS: There would have been John Howard, there would have been Aidan McManus, not so much Aidan, John McManus.

MM: Is that his brother?
Figure MS.7: CERT Course run for Dalkey Good Food Circle  
(Michael Marley far left, Pierce Hingston far right)

424. **MS:** His brother yeah.

425. **MM:** Oh he owned the Wishbone here in Glasthule.

426. **MS:** And there was old Joe Gray. There was your man, Power, not Power. Who was the guy that owned the Red House?

427. **MM:** In Newbridge. I can’t remember now.

428. **MS:** And Joe Gray and then James Gray sometimes as well and John O’Sullivan of course and his wife. And there were a few other hangers on, but we used to regularly fly off somewhere or go off for weekends somewhere.

429. **MM:** And was this through the Restaurant Association of Ireland or…?

430. **MS:** Unofficially. Partly golf, partly golf, we might get a private plane to the Isle of Man for golf but you couldn’t keep doing that, you know, you just couldn’t keep going and even someone would ring up and say ‘listen what are you doing next weekend’ and you’d say ‘nothing why’ ‘well we’re thinking of going over watching Cliff Richard or something, will you join us?’ ‘Yeah right, put me down’. Two days in London and you just did it but you weren’t thinking of the consequences long-term and of course all the wine tasting all over the place and you’d leave there five in the evening half ‘scattered’ and you’d say ‘ah we’ll have dinner somewhere now’ and you’d ring the restaurant and say ‘are you okay there?’ and you were beginning if you weren’t careful to lose the little touch of reality because you’re socialising too much.

431. **MM:** You nearly resent having to come back (laugh).
But that all stopped dead in 1991. I did a course in marketing. I did a course in cost control through CERT. Every course they had I went on. Oh yeah, and I was gaining knowledge all the time. I kept up to date with that and I just...

Who was your contact in CERT.

Geraghty.

There was a Geraghty in there yeah.

I can’t remember.

Were these run up in Roebuck or were they run in Amiens Street?

No down in Cathal Brugha Street. But what was interesting was Mor Murnaghan was the...

The principal or whatever.

The principal. Well let me tell you something I see here. Yeah this only comes to my mind now. I got to know Mor Murnaghan for some reason and she had me sitting on committees and councils and things and she introduced me to the manager in the Gresham, a big guy with glasses, I can’t remember his name.

This guy went on then, Eoin Dillon, was it?

Eoin Dillon and the guy that used to own the La Touche hotel in Greystones and Lee Kidney. Now I was a chef right but they figured I was different from all the chefs they knew so that'll tell you a story and why I don’t know. I never really figured it out and I was invited to join the Irish Hotel Institute, the first chef ever and I sat on council and deliberating on various aspects of things and looking at the future for cooks and chefs and training and what was needed and how things were going to go. I learnt an awful lot from those guys. Eoin Dillon and I were great friends and there was fellas looking and saying what was he doing with them even Edwards was saying ‘what are you doing with those guys?’ you know. I was thinking of my future, I wasn’t thinking like a chef. I was thinking like a manager at that stage. And I got on terribly well, I was well dressed, clean, articulate, seemed to know what I was talking about and it was just amazing. I got to know all these people and Toddy O’Sullivan as well. I used them for the Guinea Pig as well by the way. Inviting them for dinner and they sent their customers out to me. It was all marketing, marketing, networking but I was networking without even knowing I was networking. I just found it fascinating but I was going to say something there a minute ago, it crossed my mind, it’s gone out of my head. Oh yeah, there was a man came in here from early days called John Burns and John Burns owned a company called Helsings (inaudible), a big pharmaceutical company up in Sandyford and he came in here one night and he said ‘by the way I’ve got some news for you that I thought you might be interested’, I said ‘what’s that’. ‘You’ve been nominated to become a member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland.’ I said ‘why?’ He said ‘we figure that your marketing abilities here, you could teach an awful lot of the members of the marketing institute how to market their business and as President this year I can call up two members as members, and I think you’re very much deserving of a membership of the Marketing Institute of Ireland’. So, I became a member and then back in the ‘80s then I became a fellow of the Irish Hotel and Catering Institute for whatever reason I don’t know. Again they said its marketing and it’s the image you’ve created and all that so in my early days I had an incredible image. I mean Derry Clarke will tell you when he was training I was one of the guys he looked up to because I was always in the papers and magazines and doing things so I was like a Kinsella, I was like a John Howard. I mean there was a lot of publicity and stuff going on and we were always vying for publicity. In fact we were and there was murder over that sometimes. Kinsella used to go mental if
I got a big mention and he didn’t. So it’s probably in young chefs’ images in college looking to these so called chefs that were doing great things. But again doesn’t it prove what the image does.

443.MM: Oh absolutely yeah.

444.MS: The image is everything, you know. Even today now I make sure I’ve a clean uniform, a clean apron. I’ll come in to the restaurant every night, even when I’m off, if I’m back early and talk to the customers and say ‘hi, how’re you doing, good to see you’ and chat away and keep going and off you go and they love that. Especially the hosts love you to come to their table. But you have to have confidence as well.

445.MM: Around the ‘70s okay do remember anything about Jammet’s or the Red Bank or were you too young for that really.

446.MS: I was too young for that. I mean the names were there. The Jammets was there, the Red Bank was there but I wouldn’t have known them, we’d never been in them.

447.MM: There was then, after that then you had the…

448.MS: The Copper Grill in the old Jury’s was very good.

449.MM: Yeah the Copper Grill.

450.MS: That was old Joe Gray.

451.MM: Willy Widmer was the chef.

452.MS: That’s right.

453.MM: That was moment. That was real moment. Did you ever eat there?

454.MS: Would you believe, my wife reminds me, I don’t remember. On our first anniversary in 1965, ’66 we went in and had a bottle of champagne and a meal. She says she always remembers. She at that stage was getting sucked into to my vision in high class restaurants and all that kind of stuff so I saved up a few bob and I went in for a meal and she said the waiter spent his time watching us that we didn’t run out the door and not pay because we didn’t look like we could afford to pay (laugh). But, you know, when I was going on my honeymoon to London Mrs Handy, the famous Mrs Handy, she gave me two pounds and said ‘that’s specifically for yourself and your wife to have lunch in Simpsons on the Strand’.

455.MM: Right.

456.MS: And of course here we walk up two Paddys in their twenties and there’s no way we get in. We couldn’t get in. If I’d the sense to say to the guy look I’m an Irish chef from a big hotel in Dublin and I’ve been given money to come here to eat and see what its like, couldn’t get in.

457.MM: Its gas, the whole snob element of it, do you know what I mean.

458.MS: We probably thought we were well dressed with our new clothes on us but we were just innocent twenty year old and obviously to get into those kind of places then just like the Copper Grill in the old Jurys. You know the bar in Jurys is in Zurich now. I believe its still there down to the nuts and bolts.

459.MM: There were other places that opened up later, there was the Lord Edward opened up, there was…
The Lord Edward was the first fish restaurant in Dublin you know that. That was the brain child of Blanche Cunniam, the wife of Tom Cunniam. Tom Cunniam had a certain influence in my life as well because he was known as the gentleman restaurateur. He ran the bar, the lounge and the restaurant and they were exclusively fish so he had a, if you were to ask me who had positive influences on my life in the trade. Dave Edwards would be one, Matt Byrne, Joe Gray, Sean Kinsella would you believe?, John O’Sullivan from Roly’s, before it was Roly’s he was in Blakes. Those people would have had serious positive influences. I learnt from them and took the information from them and used that information for my own ends.

When did you get to know John O’Sullivan?

Wine tasting.

And that’s when he had Blakes at the time?

Yeah. And when did you get to know Tom Cunniam?

The first time I met Tom Cunniam was at a Diners Club reception in where the Russell used to be, in the new building there.

Yeah I think they call it Stokes Court or something like that because I think one of the clients, I think it Stokes, Kennedy, Crowley yeah. The Diners Club, yeah.

Tom and his wife, they opened the first fish restaurant ever in Dublin before the King Sitric as far as I know.

1968 I think it was.

I think they opened it up in ’59 or something, around that time.

As far as I know it opened directly after, as far as I know it opened in ’68 directly after, once the Red Bank shut down, they actually took the staff of the Red Bank and they put them in there. Gerry Ferns was the chef.

That’s what it was. You know more than I know. But of course Tom has retired now, you know that?

Yeah but didn’t he sell on then to someone. He was only there for the first few years.

Ah no, no, Tom was there all his life. No, no, Tom.

What about David Lester?

David Lester took it over about ten or twelve years ago. No, no, Tom was third generation there.

Okay that’s right, yeah.

There’s a hotel come pub down in Wicklow which was before Rathnew…

Ah the famous old one is it?

Yeah. That was run by Tom Cunniam’s grandfather.

Do you remember anything of Snaffles? It was on Leeson Street.
I’ve never been in it but there’s a new restaurant up there. Mike Butt.

The Tandoori rooms yeah and the…

He was a very nice guy.

I’ve spoken to his wife. He was born in Kenya of Indian parents. Yeah, yeah. Mike was yeah.

You’ve got a lot of information haven’t you over the last while.

Ah I’ve been at this for five years now so…

What are you going to do with all eventually?

Ah well there will be at least one book in it you know what I mean but I’ll get the PhD out of the way first sort of thing you know but there’s… I’m trying to think who else was at that time. There was a place called the Soup Bowl, Peter Powrie.

As soon as you mentioned that place because before we bought the Guinea Pig we had dined there and I loved the style of the place. He had avocados in a bowl inside the hallway and he had other bits and pieces and avocados weren’t know in those days. They were just something, they hadn’t even come in. I’d never even seen them in the Hibernian and that was in the ’60s, the late ’60s so he would have had, of course alcohol was his problem in the end.

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People want it.

I could tell you people come in here and they’ll eat nothing else but either crispy old fashioned duck or lamb shank or whatever it is that can not go off the menu, that’s what they want.

I’ve a few points here and I’ve probably covered most of them so I’ll just go through them so that we haven’t. The first one was looking at sort of class distinction, sort of profile of customers and staff. The idea of being indentured or sold into slavery sort of thing to suddenly the children of…

You wouldn’t have understood what adventure meant at the time. Again it’s an old fashioned terminology. I mean I left, I’m not supposed to leave but I left when I left so I was gone so no one tried to stop me. I think I’m beginning to fade into consciousness.

But the idea is you had originally signed a contract that you were going to stay for five years.

My argument was I was not getting…

You weren’t being looked after.
MS: I wasn’t getting a year here. I said it to the head chef I was supposed to be getting a year in the larder, a year in the pastry, a year in the sauces, a year in the veg and a year whatever and I wasn’t getting that so I’m out of here.

MM: Another interesting thing is that your, in a way came from a slightly different background than the average chef. I mean Church of Ireland, being from a small school, no drink, you know what I mean. You came from slightly different…

MS: A very old fashioned Christian orientated moral background basically yeah. Very different.

MM: Technological changes, because actually we’ve covered the idea about profile, the fact that you couldn’t get into ‘Simpsons on the Strand’ you know shows that there was a class distinction even from a customers perspective even who would come as a customer.

MS: Who’d be let in.

MM: Who’d be let in, yeah, yeah. Technological changes, there were coal ovens you said in the Royal Hibernian, when you came to the Metropole then it was…

MS: It was coal ovens, the Metropole was gas.

MM: But things basically, we spoke about here you updated then over the years here that sort of thing.

MS: Well we spent €223,000 three years ago here.

MM: Yeah. Social customs was another thing. Black fast days, Lent, fish on Fridays that sort of stuff, we’ve touched on that a bit.

MS: We did but it was absolutely strict. When the fasting was finished on Fridays fish sales went through the roof during the week. It became fashionable to eat fish because you didn’t have to.

MM: Right and up till then you felt that definitely the fasting on Friday had a negative affect on fish sales the rest of the week or perception of fish.

MS: No, no, no you just didn’t sell meat on a Friday. It’s as simple as that.

MM: But you mentioned the fact that you were a *trancher* on a Friday in the Gresham because there wasn’t going to be much business on the trolley with Barney Neelan was there the rest of the day, the rest of the time.

MS: Yeah.

MM: Gender, women in kitchens. Were there any? You had Mary Murphy in the Hibernian.

MS: Well she bullied her away around the place.

MM: Well she nearly had to be twice as a strong as a man.

MS: Well exactly yeah. Well there were very few, well I don’t remember working with women in any kitchen anywhere other than Mary Murphy. I had a few cooks in the Guinea Pig over the years but they didn’t last the pace because the pace was pretty hectic. Now my attitude has been, they get the same pay to do the same work and no deviation from that. If you want the same money you get it but you do the same work, very simple but its true.
518. **MM:** Who did you feel, I was looking at trying to identify who the sort of catalyst for change, like who were the people who caused change to happen and people I had sort of thought about was the likes of PV Doyle, Patrick Guilbaud, John Howard, you know, John O'Sullivan, you know these sort of people.

519. **MS:** You have them all.

520. **MM:** PV from what I see made dining or made eating out sort of affordable for the average Joe in a way by his restaurants or his hotels were more middle class.

521. **MS:** I don’t know about that. No I’ll tell you what, what changed perceptions about restaurants was people started going on holidays in the ‘60s and ‘70s and ‘80s and more in the ‘80s, in the ‘70s and ‘80s, Irish people for the first time started going abroad and they were exposed to fish and other types of dishes abroad. You always had the aficionados of Indian cuisine and a bit of Chinese. That was always there on a small scale but when the Irish started going abroad to Spain and Portugal they were introduced to fish and calamari and they wanted it when they came home.

**End of Interview**
Edited Interview with Colin O’Daly at his home (24/1/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Colin O’Daly (CD)

1. MM: So I suppose when and where you born?

2. CD: Born here in Dublin in 23rd September, 1952.

3. MM: 1952 right. That makes you now, you’re fifty-six this year, fifty-five now, and you’ll be fifty-six next September, so yes you’re just fifty-five.

4. CD: I grew up in the north side of Dublin and my father was in aviation so we lived at the airport.

5. MM: You lived actually at the airport?

6. CD: In the airport on the background, it was Colinstown in those days.

7. MM: Named after yourself, it’s as if you owned the place (laugh).

8. CD: I remember my father going out the winter in the snow to pull the aircraft out of the snow; he was in the crash team. He was one of the first people, his father didn’t speak to him, you know, when he said he was going into aviation, to an airfield out in Dublin airport and he had a good job in the civil service at the time, his father thought he was mad you know. If planes were meant to fly, you know.

9. MM: Yeah a different time wasn’t it. So your father had been in the civil service first and then took an idea for aviation in exciting times when it was only starting off?

10. CD: He was doing architecture and engineering and craftsmanship, all that kind of stuff, you know, so that’s when he went to work in the airport. And at one stage he was responsible for the cities of Dublin and Cork and Shannon airports, you know.

11. MM: Wow, and was there many in the family Colin?

12. CD: There was four of us in the family.

13. MM: Where did you come?

14. CD: Well I was the second eldest. I had an older sister who was killed in a car accident when I was very small.

15. MM: So that made you the eldest living as such?

16. CD: Yeah the oldest one living, and I’m the only one who actually went into, I suppose I ended up in the catering industry I suppose, after a long term of ill health and loss of education. That wasn’t a time where the choices were fairly dark, if you didn’t have education where did you go to?

17. MM: Tell me about your ill health?

18. CD: Well I got cortisone poisoning as a child and just in general was very, very ill and small for my age. I’l always remember later on when I went to work in the terminal kitchen in Dublin airport, it transpired I supposed, the family orientated back to the airport but I was so small I used
to stand on an orange box to see onto the top of the range. Willie Ryan would say ‘where’s your orange box, you know’ because I was only a little lad, you know.

Figure CD.1: Photo of Colin O’Daly and two female chefs in The Park

19. **MM:** Escoffier was like that too so I wouldn’t worry about it, you’re in good company (laugh). Escoffier used to wear platforms I think, as far as I know. He was quite short in stature.

20. **CD:** Yeah so through my ill health and loss of education, schooling and all that.

21. **MM:** Sorry how far did you go in school as such? Did you just finish your primary cert or did you…

22. **CD:** Pretty much self educated, all the way. I think I went two or three years in my entire life into school. But I educated myself in hospital. I was in hospital in London for a long time and I had private teaching and all that sort of stuff you know. I was also very ambitious. I worked very hard and I was very ambitious and I was always out to prove that I could do it as well as anybody else, you know, and I did, you know.

23. **MM:** When you did go to school which school did you go to? Was it a local school out near Swords?

24. **CD:** I went to the CUS (Catholic University School) in Leeson Street.

25. **MM:** Oh Leeson Street, okay yeah.

26. **CD:** I went to the CUS in Leeson Street but at the time we were living in the… My very junior education was in Griffith Avenue, junior infants type of thing in Corpus Christi.

27. **MM:** Oh yeah that’s across the road from where I live; I live on Home Farm Road.

28. **CD:** But we lived on the Rise in Glasnevin, I was raised up on the Rise.

29. **MM:** Andersons is up there now, where the butcher shop used to be.

526
30. **CD:** But we moved once the airport started to expand, we had to move, we moved nearer into town and then at that time the airport was out in the country and when our parents were thinking about education later on and where we were going to go to school and you know, and the airport was miles away you know.

31. **MM:** So what age, the airport was your first catering job was it?

32. **CD:** Yeah I went, Johnny Opperman was there at the time.

33. **MM:** He was yeah.

34. **CD:** Chef Doyle, Jimmy Doyle had just taken over.

35. **MM:** Right, okay. So he’d taken over from, had Jimmy Flahive been.

36. **CD:** Jimmy Flahive was the flight chef wasn’t he.

37. **MM:** Well I think what happened I think Jimmy was originally the Collar of Gold or the Dublin airport restaurant. He became sort of executive chef or something like that so they would have brought in a head chef.

38. **CD:** He was there for the first weeks that I was there in the Collar of Gold and then moved over, he went to the flight kitchen or…

39. **MM:** Jimmy Doyle you said, is it?

40. **CD:** Jimmy Doyle became head chef.

41. **MM:** What age were you? What year would this be?

42. **CD:** About sixteen I think.

43. **MM:** So this would be around 1968.

44. **CD:** 1968/1969 yeah. Wait until I show you this, this will spark the memory (showing a scrapbook of photos and newspaper clippings). I won my first gold medal in a Catering Exhibition. And that’s later on the Park in Kenmare.

45. **MM:** It’s fabulous.

46. **CD:** My mum keeps all these, you know.

47. **MM:** Yeah, she’s proud of you, and rightly so. So tell us, you’re sixteen years old as you said yourself, you were short, you’d be sickly for quite a while and you move in then to working in a professional kitchen, how was it?

48. **CD:** Well it was funny because at the end of day, as I said, I was quite ambitious and what would I do? What could I do? So I’d heard about a job in the airport, in the kitchen in the airport for a *commis chef*. I didn’t tell my parents, or my family, or my father and mother and my brother but I went to the interview and got the job and I always remember later, into a few weeks there Jimmy Doyle asked me to work overtime or OT as they called it, and because I didn’t know what OT was, he said ‘tell your father I want to see him in the morning’, you know. So the morning came, well I went home that night to the dad, my father didn’t know I’d taken the job in the airport, anyway I told him the head chef wanted to see him in the morning tomorrow. So my father arrived in and I always remember being in the kitchen in my whites and everybody around, There
is my father standing with his roll of plans, big cigar, brief case. Jimmy Doyle is there thinking what does he want? ‘You want to see me?’ asked my father. ‘I want to see you’ asked Jimmy Doyle, ‘yes, you know, about my son’ said my father. ‘Is that your son?’ (laugh)

49. MM: Ah, they hadn’t figured it out?
50. CD: No (laugh).
51. MM: (Laugh).
52. CD: And I remember my father saying ‘look whatever happens between the two of you is between the two of you, Colin has come here on his own’. I remember at one stage in the terminal kitchen in Dublin airport there was a spiral staircase and I fell down the spiral staircase and I was lying flat on my back and the lads said ‘compensation, stay down we’ll get an ambulance’ and I remembered it was my father who put the stairs there, I was up like a shot (laugh).
53. MM: (Laugh). So who do you remember there, you went in ’68, Jimmy Doyle you said was head chef, who else was there now?
54. CD: It was still an old style kitchen. My first impression going through the steel door, you know, all the women from the Coombe area, all the hard women, tough women but with hearts of gold. I remember the first girl I ever kissed they all held me down so one of the girls could actually kiss me.
55. MM: (Laugh).
56. CD: That was a laugh as well. But I’ll always remember the long lines of silvers, the coppers, the burnishing machine, you know, the dish washer and it was a live performance, it was a live show every day of people within behind the scenes and in front, you know. I did a year in the vegetable house with a guy called Mick Mooney and so it was very much the old school where you went through, you went through your paces. You served your time for six years, you know. So you did a year in the vegetable house, did the potatoes, chopping the parsley, all that, then you were allowed onto the veg section with Frank Reilly and then you had to clean out the fridge in the morning. But also in the vegetable house having Jimmy Doyle’s breakfast on a tray with a paper at 10 am and you dare not go into his office without being in a clean uniform. He said like ‘did you sleep in your uniform last night?’ so you knew you had to bring his breakfast and his paper in the morning so you had to be clean and that started off with the ‘morning chef’ and then you had to clean out the vegetable section then, clean out the fridges so you through and then you were allowed to do various jobs and then after a while you were chef de partie on the vegetable and then you were moved to the larder or the starters. So you went through the different sections, you know.
57. MM: Who was in the larder do you remember?
58. CD: Bill Ryan and Willie Ryan, yeah. And Willie was young then, obviously younger then, but Willie was tough enough but you know they were like father figures to me because I was only the kid. You know they were tough. The lads, they played cards down stairs and you know spent their money on the horses, you know, you had split shifts when you didn’t go home in the afternoon and they played cards.
59. MM: Now Jimmy Kilbride had left by this stage. He wasn’t there was he?
60. CD: He’d left. Paddy Keys was still there. Noel Vauls was still there. Charlie Pepper was in the Shamrock lounge. What do you call the other mad fella that was in the Shelbourne lounge, Paddy Whacker they used to call him, a real character! Davy Lord was the head waiter, and he used to wear the blue sash and the white gloves so he used to go to the hunt balls. Willie wanted to
the (inaudible) the buffet work. We used to do all the buffets, all the ice carvings and the mirrors and there was a hunt ball. Charlie Haughey used to come to them all the time. That was on Saturday night. On Saturday nights they’d all come in their splendour and... But then again I think that’s when Friday and Saturday nights were the dining out nights. They were, whereas every night is a Saturday night now.

61. **MM:** When you talk about the hunt balls were the hunt balls held in the airport in the Collar of Gold?

62. **CD:** In the Collar yeah.

63. **MM:** And the flight kitchen was totally separate from the Collar of Gold?

64. **CD:** It was.

65. **MM:** And you worked just in the Collar of Gold in the Dublin, was it called the Collar of Gold at that stage or was it called the Dublin Airport restaurant?

66. **CD:** It changed to the Collar of Gold restaurant while I was there. It wasn’t just the Dublin airport restaurant. Then all the parents used to come out for Sunday lunch, Friday night, Saturday night and Saturday, Sunday lunch so that people could watch the airplanes coming and going. Well the first escalator came in at that stage. People used to leave their kids to play on the escalator.

67. **MM:** That’s right. I remember being brought out myself and what I remember at one stage that there was this, there was a real life cock pit, a real life half part of a plane and you used to be able to go in and see it, you know what I mean.

68. **CD:** That’s right. Magic yeah. So that was...

69. **MM:** Was Eddie Kavanagh there as a waiter or had he finished?

70. **CD:** Eddie Kavanagh. I remember the name alright. There was a guy called Paddy there, an old kind of guy. He was a bit of a dipso. But in those days there used to be a lot of casual waiters in. This guy Paddy, he was a real old timers, I’ll always remember when he was there he was, we were always short of tea spoons, you know, and he’d had a few drinks at this stage of the night but I remember he had a tea spoon on a chain in his top pocket. He went to a customers table and he went (stirring the coffee with the spoon on a chain) (laugh). It was mad you know. I suppose in those days there were characters, and I think Ireland had diverse people from diverse backgrounds and diverse sort of cultural differences you know. But now cultural differences are inter European cultural difference. Now those differences were within the family almost, because there were only Irish people in Ireland, you know.

71. **MM:** But it had a very good reputation, hadn’t it? It was considered one of the best restaurants in Ireland at the time and it was actually one of the best, it was voted one of the best airport restaurants in the world I think. It got awards like that?

72. **CD:** And you know they had the carving trolley. I later on did the carving in the room. Yeah it was a big deal to go to the restaurant. Yeah it was huge you know.

73. **MM:** And Charlie Haughey, he was a regular?

74. **CD:** And Eamon Casey used to come out. One of my first experiences of Eamon Casey was he wasn’t long Bishop and I was carving and of course I was still a little lad, and I had this big rib of beef and he wanted the centre cut.(laugh) He wanted it rare and Jesus how am I going to manage this, you know. He said being gracious, take it off the end. And of course my father used
to come in to have lunch and business meetings and I’d be standing at my father’s table and carving for my father (laugh). So that was always interesting.

75. MM: And was there a *hors d’oeuvres* trolley at the time?

76. CD: There was a *hors d’oeuvres* trolley at the time and that was as you came in your different positions coming up, you know, that was I suppose that’s when you artistic flare came from. You got a knife or arranged the *hors d’oeuvres*, the trolleys and I always very precise and pernickety about doing it right and it looked good and put it on the plate and that, you know. Arrange it nicely so. So that sort of…

77. MM: Yeah, so you had contrasting colours and stuff like that as part of the plate.

78. CD: Willie Ryan and Willie Johnson later on, Willie Johnson was on the sauces. Willie was sort of second chef really but Willie should have always been the head chef I suppose but he just didn’t, but both Willie Johnson and Willie Ryan should have been head and second chef. They were very good chefs and they travelled. Jimmy Doyle hadn’t travelled; he’d grown up in the airport.

79. MM: I think with Willie Ryan, I don’t think he ever had the ambition to be a head chef as such.

80. CD: Neither of them had ambition.

81. MM: They’d great experience and they were fabulous at what they did but I don’t think they ever had that drive to want to be a head chef sort of thing.

82. CD: And I always felt that was a pity because they had the capability. It wouldn’t have been a problem for them, you know. And I’ll always remember a little woman called Lilly Keogh. She used to call in and out the orders. They controlled.

83. MM: Sort of a barker?

84. CD: Yeah she used to call in and out the orders and when it was very busy Jimmy Doyle would call in the orders, you know, and then you’d have the waiters come in and coppers and shouting and there would be tension between the restaurant and the kitchen. Then when it was over, it was over.

85. MM: But it was all silver service at that stage was it?

86. CD: All silver service, yeah, yeah. They used to put on the egg mayonnaise, the prawn cocktails and do wonders to the steak Diane, do the cordon blue out in the room and all that sort of stuff you know.

87. MM: How long did you stay out there?

88. CD: I was there for six years.

89. MM: So you did your full time out there and you got to work through all the different sections, so it was a great grounding really?

90. CD: And you did your day release to Cathal Brugha Street.

91. MM: Okay, tell us about that.

92. CD: You got one or two days a week really, and you did what was then 141, 157 or something.
93. **MM:** Do you remember who your teacher was in Cathal Brugha Street.

94. **CD:** Michael Ganly, and who was the man that came from the Intercontinental with glasses.

95. **MM:** Let me see now, Joe Erraught no.

96. **CD:** Michael Marley.

97. **MM:** Was Michael Marley teaching there, was he?

98. **CD:** No.

99. **MM:** Michael had been in the Metropole.

100. **CD:** Yeah Michael Marley is the man I’m thinking about now. I remember Michael well.

101. **MM:** I’ll tell you who was there now. PJ Dunne would have been there. You probably would have had PJ?

102. **CD:** Yeah PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly.

103. **CD:** And who became the boss of the college?

104. **MM:** Oh Joe Hegarty.

105. **CD:** Joe Hegarty was there. Has Joe retired?

106. **MM:** Joe’s retired now yeah

107. **CD:** Because he did his PhD two or three years ago.

108. **MM:** Yeah he did it in education, yeah, around three years ago.

109. **CD:** He was certainly there. There was Joe Erraught.

110. **MM:** I’ll tell you who was there now, Kilbride would have been there.

111. **CD:** That’s the very man.

112. **MM:** Yeah Jimmy Kilbride.

113. **CD:** Jimmy Kilbride, Joe Erraught. Joe Erraught was more my generation, in a way was a little bit ahead of me I suppose. And he’s still there. He’s the head man there.

114. **MM:** He’s head of department yeah whereas Joe Hegarty was head of school.

115. **CD:** They were all nice lads.

116. **MM:** And how did you find the classes when you went college.

117. **CD:** A lovely man who went to work in America.

118. **MM:** Noel Cullen.

119. **CD:** He’s dead too.
He died yeah, he is yeah. He died he was only fifty-four when he died, fifty-two or fifty-four or something like that.

And he only died in the last two or three years.

Yeah it was fairly recently yeah. Yeah it was the last few years it was.

Because he married a second time to one of his students when his wife died. I knew a lot of those lads from the exhibitions I suppose. I did Olympia and Torquay and all that sort of stuff.

Tell us about that. Were you a member of the Panel of Chefs or did you just do those competitions through the airport?

Well in those days you joined the union, Branch Four, and you joined it because you had to. I think people like Willie Ryan, Frank Ryan and Joe Robinson, they got on really well and they encouraged and I think they saw that I had the potential so they were encouraging. You were working with people of your father’s era and they were tough enough but they saw that I had had ill health and got off to a bad start so I think they were encouraging to me to go forward, you know, and I got on well with them and that sort of stuff, you know.

But you said from the outset you said you were very ambitious anyway, you know that you would push yourself sort of thing?

Yeah I was tough out like that you know and I worked hard so and then…

When was your first competition do you remember?

That was it there, this one here. How old is that now, Jesus…

1971 the Catering Exhibition, excellent and in Liberty Hall. First prize gold medal.

For beef Wellington. That’s me there.

And if I’m not mistaken now Willie Ryan had sort of coached you?

That’s right yeah.

And do you know how I know that the original way I know that is when I was a *commis*, when I was in Cathal Brugha Street Willie Ryan was taking a class. You know he was covering a class and the dish was beef Wellington and he mentioned to us because you had, I think you were out in the Park in Blackrock at the time and you were one of our idols because you’d made it, you know what I mean. You’d had the one star and the whole lot, you know and he said ‘listen lads you see this beef Wellington, I coached him’ he said. He coached Colin O’Daly as to how to make this.

(Laugh).

Do you know what I mean. And he showed us how to do it and the great thing it was those little things, you know, I suppose when teachers when they give a bit of personal information to it you remember it, like I still remember. So it was great, so 1971 first prize.

And making omelettes as well.

Fifteen seconds to make an omelette.
139. CD:  Come here make an omelette.

140. MM:  So the first prize, so when you got this gold say okay 1971 right, was there an adrenaline rush there?

Figure CD.2: Gold Medal Award in Catering Exhibition, Dublin 1971

141. CD:  Well there must have been, because that created the impetus and the platform. You know what, I can be as good as everybody else, you know, in your head, for the first time in your life probably you saw a way forward so I think that was really important, you know and then I was so enthusiastic, I obviously created an energy when everybody else saw me and they created good energy, you know, to encourage me to go forward you know. So they took an interest in me so it was kind of like a little family. You know there was internal tension and frictions and energy but
we were like a close family. I think industry was like a family because everybody knew when there was something happening anywhere in time. Everybody knew what was going on and who was leaving where and you watch and we can put you in there. I’ll give so and so a call so it was like interaction you know. Networking.

142.MM: And you’re being nurtured by the older crowd? Yeah, yeah, excellent.

143.CD: I did it so well that when I was there who was interested and I had the potential but I probably didn’t see it either but they’d always encourage you to… Because I was always on time, I was always in a clean uniform, and I’m great believer through my whole career, treat people with the respect that you want to be treated because when I was going up the ladder people helped me and were good to me. And I’ve supported people coming up because when you make a mistake and you’re coming down the ladder that’s a sign of how you’ve treated people when you’re going up. So always treat people how you want to be treated and I feel I treated people pretty well and when I ran into trouble later on, when I lost the Park in Blackrock and they lost 1.1 million and I tell you I lost everything, and people were very good, very supportive to me when I was coming down the ladder, that bumpy ride back, you know, and I came from the lofty heights with two Michelin stars and all that to working in Bewleys again you know, bacon, egg and sausage, you know and building it all back again, you know.

144.MM: We’ll move up from here. So you were six years, you were here until around ’74 or so, ’74/’75 in the airport. Where was your next move? You had done competitions, you’d been at this stage you’d been to Torque had you?

145.CD: The nice thing about that time I think was you went with the flow. Someone said you know there’s something coming up in Ashford Castle in Cong, in Mayo. So that’s where you should be. Now that’s your next obvious move as opposed to sitting down working it out what’s the next. So I’d moved away from home at that stage and I went down to work in Ashford Castle, old man Huggard.

146.MM: Who was chef there?

147.CD: I went in under Ken Wade from the Russell hotel. Ken Wade and I started the same day. He was head chef.

148.MM: He was head chef, okay.

149.CD: So Ken would put together his team and Ken lived on the Rise, he was one of my neighbours.

150.MM: Ah right, so you would have known him, yeah.

151.CD: But he was few years older. We knew each other but we didn’t hang out with each other.

152.MM: Yeah the Russell shut down in ’74. That was the end of the Russell so Ken Wade would have…

153.CD: Ken had gone to the Bahamas.

154.MM: Ah right he would have gone with Pierre Roland to the Bahamas.

155.CD: Yeah and they were going back and forth so he decided to come back and then he was offered Ashford Castle so he was putting together the team for Ashford and I was chef de partie at the time. And I was very much, you know, there was a man called Charlie Harold, you know, it was the old fashioned; they’d smoke their own salmon, they had their own garden, the girls used
to line up at 6 pm, hands out, with the hair back and be inspected. After breakfast Charlie Harold would take out the green base, put on the white gloves, and take out the silver.

156.MM: And Charlie Harold he was the head waiter was he or was he sort of restaurant manager?

157.CD: He was sort of butler, come head waiter, come a very close friend of the family. He was there forever, a very old fashioned ‘upstairs, downstairs’ kind of gentlemen.

158.MM: Do you remember who else worked with you there. Who else was in the crew there do you remember?

159.CD: There was Ken Wade, there was Bobby Briggs. You met the chef who was head chef in the Berkley Court a couple of years ago. He was the pastry chef in the Russell and he was with us in Ashford. He was big into football. He died actually relatively recently. Tony Butler. Tony passed away since as well and there was a guy called…

160.MM: Where did Bobby Briggs come from where had he been working, did you know?

161.CD: He was with Ken in the Bahamas and he was also in the Russell hotel.

162.MM: He’s was probably ex Russell as well?

163.CD: He’s ex Russell hotel as well. There was a guy called Michael Garvin, was the second chef, or the third chef then. So a kind of a team of us went there.

164.MM: And it probably wasn’t that big of a team anyway because it wasn’t…

165.CD: It seemed big at the time but it wasn’t you know. Well it was different living in the west of Ireland, living in the village.

166.MM: Yeah very quite, and it’s a beautiful place.

167.CD: A beautiful place but it was bought over by John A, Mulcahy around that time as well so there’s lots of energy. John A Mulcahy from America, so he used to bring in all the Presidents, you know, all the top names throughout the world used to come and stay there. Like the Kennedys, and it actually became very high profiled and talked about place to be. So that was a good place to have on your CV, you know. During the summer times going out on the boats and sitting in Lough Corrib and Lough Conn and it was great you know and then I was there until I was 21 or 22, two or three years, around 1973 and 1974.

168.MM: Two or three years yeah. What did you learn there that you hadn’t seen in the airport? Was there a difference in style there, was it that you’re growing your own stuff, stuff was coming out of the garden and things like that?

169.CD: The food in Ashford was never actually aspired, for its time, when you look back now Ashford never really attained, when you look at the surroundings in the castle it never aspired to its full potential. I always said if you had the food of The Park in Ashford Castle it would probably be one of the best hotels in the world, because the team at the Park were very dedicated. I’m not saying the Ashford team, it was just a different. It’s about your leader.

170.MM: I was going to say that?

171.CD: Ken had come from the Russell background.

172.MM: So he had the ability to do it?
They had the ability to do it but they still the old school, Pierre Roland and all that sort of...

So what you’re saying is that at this time things were changing. This was nouvelle cuisine sort of kicking in to a certain extent?

Even a bit later.

But was there a change coming from the old guard, because the old guard was really nearly Escoffier?

I think they were still there at some stage because I still remember the time even in my early days having The Park in Blackrock, probably before that even, Irish people, men particularly coming into lunch or dinner still looking for the well done fillet steak, peas and chips and ‘why don’t you order the wine because I know nothing about wine’. But then very suddenly when people opened their eyes and they travelled more and we joined the EU, people travelled more, now Irish people sit back and say ‘well we’re all having fish so I’ll pick a nice white’ or ‘this Chablis is good or why don’t we have the Sancerre because its nice and light’. So I saw that evolution.

And I think because of my, I always projected, not projected but saw myself to myself, its like when you look at some of the Polish people and I’ve trained a few Polish people up lately when they came into the EU. They were unspoilt, untrained, had no knowledge of what they were doing. They couldn’t look at page thirty-four of Roger Vergé or Paul Bocuse and say ‘yeah I want to make that’. You would now train them from raw and say this is how you do it. This is how I want it done. So it’s like teaching them to play the piano, they hit the right notes but you didn’t have to break down the barrier of what they’d learnt before.

Yeah it was a blank canvas as such yeah?

And like I was very much a blank canvas, you know, so you could train, you could mould them but also as well as mould them you could bring out, they had a natural like for music or for catering a natural raw flair, a feel for it that could actually flourish and grow because it wasn’t inhibited by something else. So I think that’s and I think we have that when some of the Eastern European blocks joined in Ireland and its only in recent times when you can’t get a chef you look at you kitchen porter, a Polish guy washing pots there and he has a PhD or he is well educated and already watching to see what everybody else is doing and how do you make that up. What is that? And then you come down to the guy and you’re up to there in the crap up to there and you call him up ‘come here, follow me, do this with me’ and next thing they develop a flair to… And then a couple of months later they’d go ‘any chance of a job because you know what although I’m well educated I don’t really want to wash pots all my life, I would love to learn how to cook.’ And now there are four or five lads in Roly’s on the range and actually…They have it. They are the back bones of the thing you know.

Yeah, brilliant isn’t it.

So that’s… I suppose I was that piece earlier on. I was the one who saw myself not having the… And then you’ve got to sort of modernise, you took, you modernised the old dishes and then you sort of looked at like when I’d the Park in Kenmare, you know, we used to get, go out and pick hedge row berries so you’d make hedge row sorbet. You smoked your own salmon. The Newport House in Mayo we used to get because everything came, the old lady who owned Newport House was very eccentric, a bit like Howard Hughes. She gave everything in a plastic bag and ‘yes chef, now chef, no, no, you can’t do that I want you to do this’ but everything was from the garden.

Did you go to Newport after Ashford.
CD: No I came back to Dublin, after Ashford. Where did I go after Ashford? I think my health ran into trouble because I was living in Ashford I was living down the country, working mad hours so it wasn’t really good for me so I came back to Dublin. I went to work with Mervyn Stewart for a while in the Clarence. So I docked around Dublin for a year or two. I went through a moving kind of phase you know and then I met my wife.

MM: Do you remember where else because say you were a few months in the Clarence. You were probably dodging around a few places.

CD: Crofton Airport Hotel, and Clarence hotel, and I did a year in UCD.

MM: Oh now when you say UCD you’re talking about Belfield are you? And that was almost like a purpose built canteen as such?

CD: Yes, I met my wife in UCD. She was a student there. So again I got very tired and needed a nine to five and be off the weekend type of job for a while so I kind of did that piece. Then my first job as a head chef was in Renvyle House in the West of Ireland. I got married then, you know.

MM: What age were you when you got married?

CD: Twenty-three. So we moved to Renvyle, Hugh Coyle was there.

MM: This is prior Tim O’Sullivan isn’t it?

CD: Tim worked for me sort of around the time, the year before I left.

MM: So Hugh Coyle was the owner.

CD: And Tim is still there. Hugh was the manager. John Coyle, DD Coyle, his uncle owned it and then John Coyle, but then John, but they were all kind of a family in a way but Hugh was the manager.

MM: So that was your first position as a head chef?

CD: That was quite good to sort of cut your teeth on you know. And then I had a wife and wanted a bit of responsibility, so that was interesting.

MM: And you moved down as family. Like the two of you moved down living. What was your wife doing?

CD: Well we’d two children at that time and I think we were expecting our third and then my own boys were very ill and so after two or three years, looking at the future we need to be near hospitals, we need to be near education, so it evolved again. You get tired of being an itinerant running around the country from hotel to hotel from Ashford to Renvyle to Newport House.

MM: Yeah so you went from Renvyle.

CD: No Newport came after Renvyle. When I came back to Dublin again for a while and then I went to Newport House and then after Newport House it was Ashford, it was the Park in Kenmare.

MM: Because Newport House had a Michelin star, had it?

CD: It had an Egon Ronay. It hadn’t a star when I was there.
MM: It was very highly rated anyway. What was the name of the owner there?

CD: (Francis) Mumford-Smith.

MM: And you would have gone there as head chef? I suppose a lot these places were probably fairly seasonal were they?

CD: Yeah, Renvyle and that, I did a few seasonal things around, and it was up and moving with family every year, it just became not a runner really, you know.

MM: You were back in Dublin again for a brief while, where was that, probably in some hotel or somewhere regular was it?

CD: When I came back to Dublin I can’t remember. I was in Dublin for a while and we decided we’d go…

MM: This is before you went down to the Park in Kenmare I’d say?

CD: The Park in Kenmare.

MM: Anyway it’s no place outstanding sort of thing. It was sort of marking time sort of, making your money, keeping your family going till you planned your next move sort of thing yeah.

CD: And also you came back because again because the boys were ill and that. You came back and you did other, you did all sort of jobs for a while because now you had to put your career on hold because there was something else to be sort of taken care of, and that was it, you know.

MM: So tell me how did you get down to the Park in Kenmare? How did that come about?

CD: Well the Newport, I went to Newport House and after Newport House it had come to the end of the season and I was tired moving. and we said just the Park had opened. I didn’t know very much about The Park then.

MM: Well Francis Brennan had he taken it over at this stage?

CD: They were only a few months open. They had a French chef who came and didn’t work out, on a massive ego trip and all that sort of stuff and someone said ‘there is a job going in the Park Hotel’ and I didn’t notice it here but hadn’t really raised its head above the parapet, so I went down. I went for the interview for the job and there was a sort of, they were aiming for the upper echelons and they had this French chef that didn’t work out but I had the job for six months to see it worked out until he got another famous French chef. So I had this Dutch man called Ernst Weeland, who had owned the hotel, who was telling me, in my country, that he was giving me a job. So I said ‘look I can do it, and we’ll get a Michelin star in eight months’ and I was sort of laughed at. So eight months to the day we got a Michelin star.

MM: You did it straight away?

CD: Yeah, straight away you know, but I worked all the hours. But of course I was thinking about leaving then, I couldn’t, next thing I was staying on a yacht in the south of Spain for three weeks (laugh). So you’re not going anywhere because once you go the star goes with you and this is what they wanted you know. So that was really, the Park was my big break. Absolutely you know.

MM: Who was with you in the Park? You would have built a team.
Well there was myself and a great young team. A very vibrant young team and they were very energetic. There was John Dunne, there was Fergus Moore, who is now in Sheen Falls but I don’t think he’s cooking anymore. There was who else? There was a very good guy in pastry; he was working with me then, James Mulchrone.

So you had a young team, sort of young energetic professionals. What year did that star come?

'83 I think. Actually I have the, there’s the list of awards there now.

1983, one star in 1983, yeah, brilliant. So you got this star, you were being treated now like a King then down there because they wanted to hold on to you, is it? You mentioned something about yachts (laugh).

There was a silent energy there that, you know, you’re not going anywhere you know. But also we had sort of settled in. We had settled down there. You would be part of something that was exciting. And the talk of the country and the talk of the village so Kenmare village it sort of brought so much too that and it brought a lot of employment because a lot of the girls and boys worked there and didn’t have to go to England, you know, again because of my experience in

Figure CD.3: Photo of Francis Brennan with Colin O’Daly, The Park Kenmare

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Newport House you bought local, you hired local, you know, you bought lobster and you’d come in the office and you’d look at the market price. You stuck the Independent up, you know, fish market prices so I gave you what they were paying in Dublin for your lobster and so he looked at me with surprise you know. So you treated people well so when you were down the local pub there was also a pint on the counter for you. ‘My daughter is finishing school this year, any chance of a job as a waitress for the summer?’ And as a result, I always remember one morning this old lady sitting at a table having her breakfast with her son and she was having her little bit of brown bread and when the waitress was going by ‘oh this brown bread is very thick’ and like a shot that waitress herself would come back with thinner brown bread and say to her ‘my grandmother hates thick brown bread too’. So you had a natural, they were used to doing that.

225.MM: That’s the Irish hospitality isn’t it?

226.CD: That’s the Irish hospitality that’s not there now. So the woman was thrilled and that was the old Irish hospitality. It’s like the music, it’s a natural flair that’s there and you’ve just got to bring it forward. You don’t have to pump it, you don’t have to have a PhD, you know it’s a natural, you know listening and doing what you do naturally, you know, and these people weren’t spoiled and they were thrilled to have a job working in the Park, you know. They were famous, you know, ‘well I work in the Park’, you know and they looked after their job, and the staff quarters I always made sure they had a rota there for cleaning, hovering and dusting and someone inspected and made sure they all went to mass on a Sunday. So that sort of stuff because he felt a responsibility because they were away from their mothers and fathers and if they were at home, the mother ‘come on get your ass out of bed you’re going to mass.’ You know so there’s that kind of thing.

227. That in turn created silent energy that actually created success in the Park. Its never about one person, it’s never about me, but it was about leadership. It is about the people you pull round you and I’ll always remember doing interviews with Francis in the Shelbourne and we come through this room, he and I would go out for lunch and we’d be interviewing in that room in there and we’d walk through here, Francis would say ‘the girl on the right, do you see the guy sitting by the window and the other guy over here I bet you they’re the ones we’ll take. And we always used to work it. We would know in seventy seconds to employ someone. Could you come through the door – Bling.

228.MM: It was a bit of magic or whatever yeah.

229.CD: ‘I want this job, that’s why I’m here’. But the way they came through the door, before you opened their CV, ‘that’s the girl we want’. So it’s a great learning curve because it was new. You were actually breaking, you were looking, you were boxing outside the box, the square. You were standing here looking back. You weren’t in there saying ‘well who are we going to get?’ No but you placed yourself over there. You’d see the fish in the bowl going round and you’d imagine, and there’s always one fish going this way and we’ll pluck him out you know. But also you grew and you learnt because there was a time when you had mad days where you weren’t the easiest to work for and then when I had a row with you at 9 am, I’d have a row with you at 9 am but now you’re at the stage where you can talk to you at 4 pm in my office. At 9 am I have a problem with you, at 5 pm we have a problem. I’d like to hear your side of the story. Make a pot coffee, so now you have, you wish you knew now…

230.MM: Wish you knew then what you know now sort of thing?

231.CD: And there’s a great part in that because now with all the other people you have to manage you have to work it out because if your from Bangkok or from China and someone else is from Poland and someone else is from Romania I can say something to you that’s actually funny but if I say it to someone else its not funny.

232.MM: It’s offensive maybe, yeah.
233. **CD:** You have a measure. I’ve a wicked sense of rumour, you know. In recent years you’re kind of very careful (laugh) but I still have a mad streak you know.

234. **MM:** Tell us something, for you to get the Michelin star, what sort of food, was it French classical food you went after or did you start bringing in your own slant on it or what was your aesthetic as such with your food?

235. **CD:** I think it’s a little bit what they’re trying to do now. Natural, raw ingredients, buy local, shopping local, having the old herb garden and also using material that are at your hand and also keeping, you see when you look at strawberries from Israel and this and that, you know, really we look forward to the game season because it gave a energy. The cold winter comfort food feeling. Then spring time you kind of hit the wild salmon, the spring lamb and the fresh strawberries where you brought at the best price when there’s a glut but also quality was the best. So it rolled on an axis and so we’d change our menus four times a year and you’d change your specials every week so it rolled on that kind of axis you know and then you were looking and then again you’d always say to lads that right I want two new starters today and I want four new main courses. Now from that somebody would like something and there’s something in that and you’d going to be parking the car and you would think, monkfish, apple honey baked with a curry sauce. You know something.

236. **MM:** Composing.

237. **CD:** Like I paint, all these things in my mind I’d paint and I’ve exhibitions in New York. I got up yesterday morning I had this idea in my head about, now this picture and before breakfast that’s just straight from my head so you just kind of…

238. **MM:** Go with the moment.

239. **CD:** Go with the moment. You might just go out with the kids for a walk maybe and also keeping simple. You know I was always very good at sort of, what enhances that flavour. Now you’re not going to put a cheese sauce on the sole of the bone say for example because it just kills it. So you just give some. So you want to pan fry it in parsley and squeeze a lemon juice. It’s a question of little was more and you can ask for more if you want more but you were never in (inaudible) I suppose when it came to prepare like in my early days, this is my food if you don’t like it there’s plenty of other restaurants in Dublin, you know, because I’m a specialist like Kevin Thornton.

240. Where Roly’s now you have to step outside the box and be with the customer because you do five hundred meals a day and we have the rich and famous, husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends, business men, business women, bus conductors, taxi drivers, what do they want. So you’re moving from the spotlight on you’re here through tradition have to be there and you have to, you have to put yourself with the customers is. What is it they, like mussels, I’m tired looking at mussels or crème brûlée but you know, we sold four hundred portions last, we got three hundred portions or whatever it did so the customer is telling you something, that they were mussels and the mussels are a great favourite and I think when you go to that level its about systems, its about listening and its about dishes that become household dishes, you know, customary dishes, signature dishes and so you had to work very different. So I probably find being in a partnership much more difficult because you haven’t the freedom to be who you want to be. So in recent years I probably would have found that much more difficult because there is a cost element, there is staff elements. There is, you got to pay your rent, you got to do this, you got to do that, you know, all the stuff so you have to have kitchen percent. You’ve got to run like…

241. **MM:** It’s a business, yeah, yeah, yeah.
242. CD: It's a business. I'm a chef and an artist and I'm not a whiz kid business man so people like me need…

243. MM: Good business people around you. Clearly the ambition because I think what was it '86 or so when you came to Blackrock.

244. CD: '85.

245. MM: ‘85 yeah. So this is ’83 so you really after two years in Kenmare like with your star, you know, you had the ambitions that you wanted your own or was it that Dublin lured you?

Figure CD.4: Congratulatory Letter from Ernie Evans to Colin on winning Egon Ronay Star
Again one of our kids died and that was sort of and then Eoin was very ill at that time so we needed to be back in Dublin. We needed to near hospitals, we needed to be near because we were going to have problems in the future and living in the back end of Kerry was not the place to be and so we came back. I came back to Dublin, a normal job, buy a house and we’ve tried all this other stuff, that’s fine. Now you’ll always be in a position to get a good job or whatever. So went out and saw a house in Templeogue as well and when we were coming back on the bus and I saw this sign ‘Restaurant for Sale’ (laugh). So I went back and got my deposit back and bought the restaurant. I hadn’t told me wife (laugh). She was mad when I bought this place with the deposit of the house (laugh).

This is Main Street Blackrock?

Ah there was a bit of friction for a while, as you can imagine.

As I can imagine yeah.

(Laugh) Blackrock, it was, you know, one of those situations, I went to AIB in Foster Place, never had an account there, the manager went back on the chair and he said ‘I actually like you’ so can you be open in two weeks? He had done his account also and he’d a problem with the person who was there and I think he was glad to have someone coming in. But no interior designers, no architects, no…

Who was there before you?

It was a coffee shop, a dingy old place. So we were in and opened in two or three weeks and we started lovely. Then again it was old fashioned, the bank manager liked me and he was ringing every day and saying ‘the lodgings not great today Colin, what is the problem’ and he would ring around, as well as giving me the money, he would ring around the different banks and tell them if you’re entertaining tonight, go to The Park Blackrock.

And then I went through weeks wondering would it ever going to take off and then Helen Lucy Burke came one day and gave me a write up. I hate telling you about this, this place is great and blah, blah, blah, she gave me a great article and next thing we moved into about forty people a night, fifty people and sixty. We were booked out six weeks in advance, you know.

And did John Dunne come with you from the Park? Who came with you when you opened up?

John Dunne came yeah. Well John, well there was Sandra Earl who’d worked with me. Some of the old reliables joined me and they sort of, they came and went a bit but James Mulchrone, Sandra, Fergus and John Dunne, Mark Phelan. We never really, none of them never really took major positions afterwards and some of them were very good creative guys. Some of them were good kitchen managers. It was a bit like a partnership in Roly’s. I have one, my partners don’t have and they never have but they have what I don’t have and never have. I think I’ve always employed people who I think were better than me because they always kept you on your toes and got the best out of the business. I was never afraid to find good people. And it really worked you know and it gave a vibrancy to the business, you know.

There was a fellow Wall there I believe at some stage was there.

That’s right.

Because I remember there was a young guy, there was a guy who was in class with me now, Jason Wall and he worked with you but his brother I think had worked with you before or something like that.
259.CD: Jason was a gas man. I remember saying to Jason, ‘hey mister any chance of a job’, and I liked him, I said ‘Jason how did you ever get interested in cooking?’ He said ‘well my mother used to put the bacon and cabbage on at the same time.’ (laugh) He was a gas man. But he was the character in the kitchen. He was the wild buck. There was guy Giles O’Reilly, Giles is now a head chef in *Dáil Éireann*.

260.MM: That’s right, yeah. He was in Whites in the Green or something prior to that yeah. So Giles worked with you as well?

261.CD: Yeah Giles worked with me for a long time. Giles, he’s not eccentric at all but Giles is a handful to manage. He had creativity, he’s a good ideas man, you know. Giles is gas and I was talking to Giles only last week and Giles was a maverick you know.

262.MM: He’d worked in Arbutus as well I think?

263.CD: And Michael Clifford and I were good friend Lord have mercy on him. So we all came up together, Michael Clifford, myself.

264.MM: Yourself and Michael Clifford were really, in a way arrived at the same time. Do you know much about Michael’s background or where he started or where he trained?

265.CD: No I don’t.

266.MM: Like I know he was in Whites on the Green, but you don’t know where he was before Whites or whether…

267.CD: He was in Arbutus for a long.

268.MM: Ah, he was okay, alright. Oh so he would have trained with the Ryan’s then?

269.CD: He was with Ryan’s a long time. Then he was in France. Did he come from France to work with…

270.MM: Well they would have had contacts in France anyway. They probably set him up. I can check that with Declan anyway because I spoke to Declan.

271.CD: Michael was with them for a long time and then Michael went to Dublin. I got him the job actually with Whites. And then he went back to Cork then.

272.MM: But Whites was a moment. Whites on the Green was quite good wasn’t it?

273.CD: Peter and Alicia, they weren’t restaurateurs but they were stylish people and that and they invested a lot of money in that. Oh yes it did very well, you know.

274.MM: How long did Whites stay over do you remember?

275.CD: A couple of years.

276.MM: It was sort of a moment there, which was around 1984 or so or around that time, ’84 or ’85 around that time. Around the same time you were open up in the Park.

277.CD: We were open in the Park at the time.

278.MM: It was probably ’86 or so yeah?
It was the late 80s, the middle to late ‘80s yeah.

And then Michael went off and opened up Clifford’s down in Cork. And similar to yourself actually he was extremely successful in this one building and then he sort of moved to another building?

A restaurant and bistro type of thing.

And it didn’t happen you know?

Absolutely yeah and cause when I moved to the Park up the road the place needed to be refurbished, the spirit and licensing law was changing, there was a rent review coming up and the banks sort of said look it the premises was on the corner for sale why didn’t you do it. So I borrowed a lot of money and it was spectacular restaurant.

Yeah I ate in it.

And I got the olive tree in from Israel, Jesus madness you know.

I think part of your problem was, you see, I grew up in Blackrock and I couldn’t find the restaurant. I was looking for the restaurant and I couldn’t find it, do you know what I mean, because it was up here and if you didn’t know exactly where it was you would have walked by, do you know what I mean. You literally like had to sort of ask someone where it was. I think that was…

And also the road system changed the week we opened, because the road used to come straight up past, up straight.

It was one way.

So you had to go back up the garage and back down and around you know.

You were saying Helen Lucy gave you this great review. Suddenly that changed things overnight really. That was the Tribune she was in at the time yeah so that turned things around so suddenly…

And she was feared at that time.

Ah yeah she was, by Christ was she feared.

Seriously feared.

So that turned things around and you had what, you had around three or four years of good, probably three years of really good business and as you said the rent was rising.

And also the Gulf War happened and interest rates rose and if you have a business and you have clients, don’t go to The Park in Blackrock or Patrick Guilbaud’s or Thorntons, because it’s a bad image for our companies to see that we’re wasting money so now you’re expected to kind of cut, so now you have to go through and say Roly’s, and I’m your client and I’m happy to do business with you because you’re being careful with my money as well yeah, and you’re responding to it. And that’s what happened because we were mainly expense account.

Well actually there’s something else there now as well because it was ‘87 there was a change happened in expense accounts and I think ‘89 it got knocked on the head altogether?

That’s right.
MM: I think fifty per cent in ’87 and I think ’89 I think it was taken away altogether. So that had an effect on you clearly?

CD: Clearly, yeah well especially when you’re in the early days of borrowing and when you’ve borrowed over half a million, well the guts of a million, eight hundred thousand and yeah a huge responsibility on your own and then the bank decided you know we’re going to close. Somebody said to me the banks are going to close in on you, you know. That was sort of, Jesus, that was a horrendous time, you know.

MM: Do you think what you borrowed when you look back at now from what you know now from business and from projections and cash projections and sales and that sort of stuff do you think you had bite off too much in your borrowings as such. Could you, you know, had you filled that room for lunch and dinner were you ever going to make enough to clear what you borrowed?

CD: I think if everybody had held their nerve a little bit longer you might have made it. It was thin as it was but you needed someone with courage to say look it you’ll close this guy down we’ll get nothing, we’ll work with him we’ve some chance of getting something back. This is a long run, lets try and make it happen you and again it’s a question if you knew then what you know now you would do it very differently. Because say I’ll put you as the financial guy and I have to listen what you’re telling ‘Colin the lodgement is down, you’ve got to get more turnover. You’re charging too much for that or you vegetable bill today is up through the roof’. But I’m creative and I would say ‘oh lets do it, come on’. But I needed someone the art needed to managed also and I think that’s true with a lot of business, you know, and I don’t think its there at the moment. There’s nobody with that eccentricity or madness to take that risk at the moment, you know. I took risks, they were there to take, and I was sort of, you can say fool hardly you know, well I’m not arrogant and I’m not fool hardly, but I have lived on the edge. That’s for sure, I’ve seriously lived on the edge (laugh).

MM: You had your star in Kenmare, did you get your star back in Blackrock?

CD: We got the Egon Ronay and we got the Red M. We were probably on the verge, looked like we were on the verge of getting the Michelin star for the Park because that year we had
inspectors in three and four, oh six and eight time and they were looking very closely and I kind felt okay.

Figure CD.6: Congratulatory Letter from Gerry Galvin to Colin (3/12/88)

304.MM: This is about to happen sort of thing?

305.CD: And it was certainly on the cards that it was going to happen. Whether it was that year or the next yeah we would have got something because we would have got it for what we were doing as opposed to we weren’t chasing this Michelin star and I always said lads whatever we get, so when we do get it we don’t have to change course. Now getting is great craic.

306.MM: Holding on to it is another story yeah?

307.CD: Holding on to it is another story.

308.MM: Yeah I was just saying because Dylan McGrath now and Oliver Dunne both got theirs yesterday for the first which was brilliant you know what I mean but…

309.CD: But now the work is to be done.

310.MM: Now they have to worry because they have to hold onto it (laugh).

311.CD: And no matter what if you loose it next year which they won’t loose it if and when they should ever loose it doesn’t mean that, people’s perception is that the restaurant has gone down but a point of fact, it will still be a very good restaurant do you know.
MM: Absolutely. You hit a real low here. The banks effectively sort of foreclosed on you or whatever and you hit a low then in your personal life as well. You split is it with your wife at that time. Was it at that stage that you split was it?

CD: Before Rose, that’s sixteen years ago and the Park had gone wallop.

MM: At that time the funny thing about this is because I remember some of this, you know, I was like an observer at this time because I went to get a job with you and then I actually took a job in Claret’s and then you rang me back but I was working across the road so I stayed there at the time but you having lost the Park I remember that you went to represent Ireland in the Bocuse D’Or. Tell us about that because that would have been in a way, you know, people were gathering around and trying to support you but probably it was the last thing you needed?

CD: Well it’s a great time to know who you’re friends are and people in the industry were really good to me. I’ll always remember, John Howard and Patrick Guilbaud were sort of coaching me at the time and they were sort of saying well, I was living in the West of Ireland. I was driving a hearse, then bringing sheep in off the mountain, keeping out of town and then John Howard one day rang me.

MM: Just bringing you back to that little piece of information. When you were saying you were in the West of Ireland were you back around Renvyle was it?

CD: I’d friends up there.

MM: That’s what I’m saying, you went back to your friends and off the radar sort of thing?

CD: And there was two people in particular I remember that I was very close to he. He was a head master, Leo Hallicy he was the head master in the school down there. Leo himself is an artistic kind of person. A bohemian very free kind of spirited person, so I spent some time with him but then John Howard rang me one day and say look I was going to France and they had been coaching me in Patrick had coached me to get my head straight and so they said well, will you come to Dublin tomorrow? So I arrived up and this hearse going chuck, chuck, bang you know. I said ‘let’s meet in Jury’s’ and I was unshaven and I’d an Aran sweater on me and I walked into the bar and I looked up and said Jesus Christ, the people in both the hotel and restaurant industry had got together to have a lunch for me and they gave me £9,500 to keep me going for the coming year (laugh). So that was really special, and I was going off the France the following day so they wanted to give me a bit of a boost, you know. Even going back to the days of the Park, you know, when the Park went wallop a friend of mine rang me and said look, because we used to do all the Anglo Irish (diplomatic) meetings and all that sort of stuff, and said to me Colin, I think the bank are going to foreclose on you, I’ll come around on Sunday with the horse box and we’ll take whatever is value out so that’ll keep you going for the coming year, you know. So I said fine. He said ‘trust me I know what I’m talking about, the boys are going to close you down’. So he came round Sunday morning with the horsebox. I arrived in to work Monday morning. The place was like a supermarket closing down and the phone rang. The Department of Foreign Affairs told me there was an Anglo Irish meeting on today. The Special Branch were on the way out to seal off the road (laugh). On the phone, ‘get back here with the equipment and the horsebox quick’ (laugh). So he was standing there on the road, two Special Branch on the front door, two on the back with Uzi’s, watching stuff coming off a horsebox (laugh). ‘What’s going on here’ you know, ‘just putting the restaurant back together’. Oh my nerves. I remember at 5 pm he rang me and said ‘I’m on the way back’. I said ‘don’t, I don’t care what they get. I really don’t care but I’m not going through that again, not going through that’.

MM: Now who would have been at that meeting? Would Margaret Thatcher have been at that meeting or would it be before?
321. CD: All of them.

322. MM: Would it have been senior civil servants or would it have been the top guys?

323. CD: And then just to go back to what we were saying before that, what was that we were saying.

324. MM: We were talking about your friends sticking by you and the idea of going to the Bocuse D’Or.

325. CD: I remember arriving in France, off the plane and the Italian team had arrived before with a big fan fair and there was a press conference at the airport and the French team arrived and it was like a Michael’s Jackson’s concert you know, pots and pans and all flipping and here was Colin O’Daly coming down the steps of the plane with his Dunnes Stores bag under his arm (laugh).

326. MM: Who went over with it because you’d normally you’d bring…

327. CD: John Howard and Patrick.

328. MM: No but normally don’t you bring a commis with you or was that the situation at the time?

329. CD: No I’d a French commis with me and the French commis had no English so we got… I did well from the point I had nothing to loose whatever my head space was I just went for it you know. I got fourth out of the team nations but I remember the wall and television sets and the audience and oh my God and I must have went to hesitate to go on and Guilbaud says to me ‘you survived the liquidation get your ass on there’ (laugh).

330. MM: Tell us, when had you started eating out do you know what I mean. You know you’re in the airport now, you know, from ’68 to ’72 or so. Did you start eating out in restaurants then or did you wait till later on?

331. CD: No I’d say it was later one because, you know, again back in those days you didn’t have the money, you had family, so it was more about cooking at home and I’m a coeliac as well so I used to cook my own bread and I used to, you know, you never did anything. Even when I’m here on my own cooking, I cooked the dinner last night. I was here I think but you still put the same care. I still go to the supermarket and do my week’s shopping. I still buy fresh vegetables and I’ll always put it up very carefully, I’ll never just dump then like in a hurry now, you know, I have to go. I’ll always no matter what I do cause eating is a sense of occasion and the best times you’ve had is with people sitting and even lately I suppose I don’t eat out as much as I used to. Have people in sitting on this table and cooking here and having a bottle or two of wine. So it’s that sense of, it’s not always just about food but it’s about a sense of occasion.

332. MM: Yeah and it’s the people. I suppose what I’m getting at there is I’m trying to figure out about, I’m looking at say the ’70s, I’m looking at from my I see that ’67 Jammet’s shut down, ’68 the Red Bank shut down, ’74 the Russell shut down. I’m looking at, you know, who came on. I was looking at the likes of maybe Snaffles in Leeson Street, the Lord Edward up in, you know...

333. CD: I suppose I saw a window. I suppose you saw yourself, looking at John, that breed of people you’ve just talked about and they’re maybe a little bit where I might be now the way it’s different a bit. You saw yourself coming onto to the crest of the wave, you’re young, you’re energetic. It’s a young single man and woman’s game. There’s a window of opportunity here that you make it. Don’t look back and, a very good person said ‘don’t look back in ten years time and say I should have and I didn’t’.
Whatever we have to do, the window is now, it’s today and that window and its just like a marathon, I’ve won many international races, your national and international races but there’s a time you pass the baton but you do your best, don’t give out and say ‘I should have done and I didn’t do it. Look at what John Howard, or Colin O’Daly did or so’, you know, and have a chip on your shoulder, you know. I’ve a great sense of humour, I’m not bitter; I don’t have a chip on my shoulder. I did what I did and that’s great. Is there someone there that’s better than that? Of course there is and it’s the next wave coming on and I’m in transition at the moment or something and I look at the Ollie Dunnes and the people coming on after me. Do you want to get into competition with these? Are you mad because they are a different era. They are what you were twenty years ago. Now what you have and they don’t have still you have maturity. You have, you’re values are different, you’re understanding is different, your ego, you’re not on an ego trip.

It’s about something else, you know, and sometimes now I can put paint on the canvas. I can do something for an exhibition somewhere and that’s your expression. That’s what’s going on in my life, I can paint it and so it’s kind of interesting. It’s like the seasons flowing. Everything moves and flows and I think that’s really and if you can sort of… I’d be quite a spiritual person I think I realise that, you know, pass open and sometimes you try to, I’ll always travel the road less travelled. But there’s a time in your life you’ve got to see around the corner a little bit as well. Look what’s happening here, you know, and its got to be yeah, trying to go this way when you actually, you know, your body really wants to go this way.

You were talking about John Howard and Patrick Guilbaud earlier, when would you have eaten in the Coq Hardi or would you have eaten in Guilbaud’s? Do you remember when you first ate in these places?

I suppose the first place I remember eating was like with them. You could, Dobbins Bistro, the Old Hob.

What was the Old Hob?

Leeson Street.

The Old Hob on Leeson Street.

I was head chef, yeah I knew what I was missing. I was the head chef in the Tandoori Rooms and the Golden Orient.

With Mike Butt. Wow.

With Mike Butt yeah. That’s the bit of the link I was missing. I was with Mike for about two years and I knew there was a link there missing. So Mike used to get all the spices in from London and all that and so you learnt the chemistry more so of herbs and spices so that was a really interesting time too working with Mike. Mike is a tough guy to work for.

Yeah he had the Golden Orient upstairs and the Tandoori Rooms downstairs yeah?

So that was interesting you know.

So we’re looking here now, that’s the ‘70s okay and that was Leeson Street. So Snaffle’s was on Leeson Street at the same time was it not?

I would have been there a bit later but Snaffle’s was that’s right.

Do you remember anything about Snaffles’s?
CD: I knew it but I didn’t… We used to dine out a bit and it was I think we didn’t have a great, you know again, we still didn’t have great dining out culture and you didn’t have the money to be honest so you know my wife was a student at the time. We probably used to have people in more on a Friday night or we’d cook something at home and then as kids were growing up and that, you know, there was other things that were more important. So I think you more experimented. I think you more looked at books. I think you more looked at, you looked at the Darina Allen. Well I know Darina pretty well. You had to watch what was going on really. And then also there was like how could change that if I was doing something. I always had creativity that you could take an ingredient out of something or put something in so the innovation was really.

MM: Do you remember when you first ate in either the Coq Hardi or Guilbaud’s or whatever?

CD: Yeah I think it was a sense of occasion because you looked forward to it and you got dressed up sort of, you know. You knew it was special because you didn’t and I think from being in the business especially when you became a head chef for the first time you came up to Dublin to go the exhibitions or wine tastings or you started moving in a circle of people who again, who were on that crest. We were moving, Michael Clifford, John Howard and we all knew each other and they would judge the competition and you were asked to judge competitions so you were in the bowl and then we’d all go down later on for a bite to eat and they’d say will you come? Ah yeah sure I’ll come yeah. So you were exposed to that more then and then because you started, you needed to look and see what everybody else was doing and put your own edge on it or you slant. I never had the herd instinct, I suppose. I always wanted to be a little bit different, you know, fillet of sole with sea urchins, salmon soufflé stuffing I remember the judges having a problem because they’d never see sea urchins. So I won the gold medal because it had a subtle taste and it was very interesting but what do you mark it against, you know.

MM: Yeah because they’d no reference point as such. They’d never had it?

CD: And so you kind of and again that came from my time in Kerry and different things that you use really that were local, you know, so it was about being different not for the sake of being different and not mixing like doing rhubarb with filled of pork, stuffed fillet of pork with rhubarb but things that complemented each other as opposed to, there was a stage there too that people were being different for the sake of being different.

MM: For the sake of being different, yeah, yeah.

CD: Some of the combinations were daft, you know, ‘what are you doing?’

MM: So tell me something, you’d a quiet period there for a while as you said yourself, you know what I mean and it was really, you’d a quiet probably two years before Roly’s kicked off wasn’t it. It was probably two or three years before Roly’s kicked off?

CD: Roly’s.

MM: I think the Park went around ’92 was it?

CD: Yeah Roly’s took off straight away. Roly’s was booked out the month before it opened.

MM: No I don’t mean that, what I mean is that Roly’s didn’t open in ’92, what I’m saying is you had a few years that…


MM: Oh did it. So you were picked up fairly straight away.
<table>
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<th>Figure CD.7: Menu from The Park, Blackrock</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roast Rib of Beef with Roast Shallots</td>
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<td>(Serves two)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seafood Specialty of the Evening</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saddle of Ham (Parmesan, Sauce-Broadiais)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baked Stuffed Lake, with a rich tomato &amp; Basil Sauce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magret of Duckling with Citrus fruit</td>
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<td>Selection of Fresh Vegetables or Salad</td>
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<td>Oyster Souffle with Star Anise Sauce</td>
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<td>Avocado Mousse</td>
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<td>with a warm 'cocktail' of vegetables</td>
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<td>Ribbons of Calf's tongue, salad Nigose</td>
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<td>Confit of wild Wood Pigeon, port sauce</td>
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<td>Cream of Fruitsilk</td>
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<td>Chicken Consommé with Quenelle</td>
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<td>Sorbet</td>
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363. CD: I was there hanging about for about a year I suppose. Yeah.

364. MM: You’d probably six or seven months of quiet period.

365. CD: Well I got a involved with Roly’s before that because again I was going in as head chef but also I had to negotiate with the bank that if you don’t take handcuffs off because they’d taken everything but unless we came to a settlement figure, if you don’t take the handcuffs off you’ll get nothing and if you do a deal with me well I get a chance to start my life again and you get a chance to get your money back, so the first seven years, I pretty much worked to pay the bank back, but they took off the handcuffs and we did a deal.

366. MM: Tell us how did Roly’s come about? You were in there with John O’Sullivan?

367. CD: John O’Sullivan, Roly Saul, John Mulcahy and myself.

368. MM: Okay how did you know, did you know John O’Sullivan? John was up in Blakes previously to that.

369. CD: And John would have been a customer in The Park and he used to come in and out so we kind of knew each other.

370. MM: And then John and Mulcahy had already in partners in… I think Mulcahy has been a partner in Blakes with John, had he not?

371. CD: No he wasn’t a partner there. John Mulcahy was Mulcahy Associates.
553

372.MM: The equipment people, the catering equipment?

373.CD: To my knowledge he wasn’t.

374.MM: I always felt he was. Maybe he wasn’t?

375.CD: And maybe he was I don’t think he was.

376.MM: And how about Roly Saul, he had Trudi’s in Dun Laoghaire, had that been on the go for quiet a while or had that a name?

377.CD: I think they were all on the golf because they got before Mick. John and I had spoke about Roly’s in Ballsbridge before they were ever involved John and I. But look he wanted to give up what I was at, and I didn’t. I decided no I want to do this, I’m a purist and I just want to do my gourmet bit and John advised me against it but I went my own way. And again they’re not really people I want to be in business with because they were a different breed of animal than I was and different energy where, you know, realistically going into business with them when I did if I was ever going to make back I had to get into to bed with them because they were tough business people and if you’re going to survive. And if you want to survive you want to get into bed with them. Like it or lump it you know. So that’s the choice I had to make, you know, but I definitely felt that Roly’s was a, yeah John and I were involved in that originally and then I pulled out and I think John and Roly and John Mulcahy. They were on a golfing trip, over a few pints and said let’s go ahead and do it and then I ran into trouble later on, so they approached with ‘the one element that we need in this is you, so we can get your handcuffs on, get you sorted’. So that’s how that evolved. And with John’s business acumen, John Mulcahy was sort of outsider in a way, really John and I, we complemented each other and I let him do his bit and he let me do my bit, you know.

378.MM: And you had Roly then as sort of a presence front of house and you had your name, you know what I mean. I remember when it opened up the idea like seemingly it was like this magic combination, you know, you had this Roly character outside and you had Colin O’Daly in the kitchen.

379.CD: It was a great combination. And again we all worked together. It was great and that lasted, you know.

380.MM: Who was with you at the beginning? Was Warren Massey with you at the beginning or did he come later?

381.CD: Warren didn’t come till a bit later. A guy called Rodney Doyle. He opened a place in Stillorgan Road there. James Mulchrone. James was working with me in Newport House as a kitchen porter after school and he was a good guy so I trained him up as he went along. He followed me and he’s doing very well now. Do you remember Jean Michel Poulet? He wasn’t at the very, well it was early enough days. Then there was Dave Walsh. You might remember Dave, he did the advanced pastry course in the college. Geraldine Doyle she was with Derry Clarke. Some of the lads came from London, Pat Quigley I think he was in the Green House in London or one of those. Hughy Highland but Hughy Highland was only a young commis. There were twenty-six chefs in the kitchen.

(looking at a picture of the crew of Roly’s)

382.MM: Now Paul Cartwright was there.

383.CD: Do you remember old Matt?
384.MM: Matt had worked up in Blakes with John, and he’s dead now. Matt is a legend because 
Matt had started off in the Royal Hibernian Hotel and then he was in the Metropole.

385.CD: Matt was the father figure in the kitchen.

386.MM: I worked with Matt up in Blakes years ago. He used to make the soups.

387.CD: You’d shake hands with Matt every morning. He had a good rapport with the youngsters.

388.MM: Matt Byrne isn’t it?

389.CD: And Paul Cartwright is the head chef now.

390.MM: You know the funny thing about because this Matt carries the story through because Matt 
let me see, ’48 Matt probably started his training around 1940 in the Royal Hibernian and then 
going from there to the Metropole. Now he was in the Metropole for a long time with Michael 
Marley, he was sous chef there, you know and I’m not sure where, I’m not sure of the connection. 
I’d tell who’d know now is John O’Sullivan would know I’m sure. He probably went to work with 
John maybe in Flanagans or maybe in somewhere like that prior to going to Blakes or whatever so 
I must check that out. Matt Byrne, yeah a lovely man.

391.CD: Matt and I got on really well. It was great for him to keep a link with the industry and the 
people and if Matt was sick one of the lads went to check he was okay and they’d get a doctor and 
get food in so we looked after him for his last years and he looked after us too. He was great, you 
know. And he gave a nice sense, I always liked the sense of, he created the sense of family as well 
because they had respect for Matt so that made it nice.

392.MM: He’d a good sense of humour too you know what I mean.

393.CD: A gas man Matt. I was very fond of Matty. Myself, John, Pat, anybody else there now. 
(looking at the photo)

394.MM: You work with so many people in the industry that it’s you know, you remember faces 
straight away but its names that are always difficult you know.

395.CD: Unbelievable what they go to you know.

396.MM: So really Roly’s was a success straight away really wasn’t it.

397.CD: From day one because I think the country was ready for it.

398.MM: Just on the brink of the Celtic Tiger?

399.CD: And then frontiers were opening, people were eating out. People had disposable income, 
people could eat out six or seven nights a week and yeah we moved up a gear very quickly and if 
you did a feasibility study to try and do it you couldn’t do it. It was just the right people the right 
place. It was one of those things.

400.MM: At what stage then did you take over, or did you buy John out at some stage?

401.CD: No John is still there.

402.MM: Oh John O’Sullivan is still there is it?

403.CD: I bought Roly out. Roly left after, well for seven years we were all there and then we 
opened the Palm Beach in Florida and I moved out to Florida, and was back and forth and then my
second son died then so I came back and then it was difficulties around Roly and business things going on, so Roly decided it was time to go, so I bought Roly’s shares so it was John and I and then we gave Paul some shares so the dynamic of the business moved and…

404.MM: After a while Warren Massey sort of became head chef and Paul Cartwright really took, did Paul take over from Warren. Was that how it worked or was there someone else in between.

405.CD: Paul and Warren were good mates.

406.MM: But Paul had been over in London hadn’t he? Had he worked in Roly’s prior to going to London?

407.CD: No he hadn’t worked in Roly’s. He worked in the Savoy in London.

408.MM: He came straight back.

409.CD: Warren was actually there and I was their head chef. Warren was there, Warren’s brother, he’s in Venu now.

410.MM: That’s right yeah, yeah, yeah.

411.CD: So then Warren decided he’d move on then.

412.MM: Yeah he opened up his own place out in Rathgar or somewhere wasn’t it?

413.CD: And he got married and stuff like that so he moved on from that, you know.

414.I suppose I became the sweetheart if you want of the industry there for a while cause I was a young lad who wasn’t shooting his mouth off or being a big shot and think that kind of helps you along the way and you know you sort, if you want to take a loan of these (handing me the photo album of press cuttings, photo, and menus).

Figure CD.8: Photo of Nicholas and Catherine Healy from Dunderry Lodge
I would love to and I will go through them and bring them straight back to you. I’ll do that.

Because there’s lots of interesting articles in them you know of different places and different times and they’re a bit more accurate about dates and times than I’d be. There is Patrick Guilbaud and Alicia White, and do you remember Dunderry Lodge?

Ah Dunderry Lodge yes, Nicholas and Catherine Healy. That was a moment; they had a Michelin star at the time.

Yeah they were wonderful and we were there at the same time.

What was I going to say, I don’t have the list here but I know what the questions are. Number one was looking at the idea of technological changes, do you know what I mean, when you worked out in the airport, it wouldn’t affect you as much because I think when you were out in the airport it was a fairly modern kitchen wasn’t it like it was gas and it wasn’t coal or anything like that?

No but in Newport House in Mayo it was an anthracite range. It was like Concorde, you had to go to work early in the morning, or you’d go back early in the afternoon to pull out the damper and prime it because if a clicker got into it at 7pm you could go home but it was great for cooking joints, for roast lamb, you know for joints of meat and for baking for bread it was fantastic but it was oh man. It was like working in a three hundred seat restaurant because you’re watching it like a hawk because the minute it got jammed the temperature dropped.

A nightmare, so like electricity and the gas and refrigeration and all that sort of stuff, later on I suppose blast chillers would have come in, but you know that might have come maybe in the ‘80s or so. Think technological changes, how about computerisation, you know, did you see that sort of change the restaurant industry?

I think it certainly, you know, because I suppose to a degree like most things in that period throughout Europe or throughout the world, it was seat of the pants stuff, and technology has moved forward. Education is hugely important in the industry now. People with special needs. Not a day goes by that you don’t have someone whose diabetic, coeliac, allergies to shellfish and you know I know from our own kitchen you have the cake tins to make the coeliac breads on the top shelf and nobody would use them for anything else but that. So there is a greater awareness and if someone says I’ve an allergy to peanuts because that means they get very seriously ill, so yeah there’s no sort of ‘ah don’t mind you’ll be grand you know’ or ‘there’s only a little bit of flower in it, you’d be grand’. No it’s not the point because again especially I suppose more so I feel with Roly’s because it’s such a high profile business, its such a live performance and there’s a live show everyday of a vast wide range of people that you do have to be very responsible.

You do have to watch because there’s always somebody, with hygiene, you know, like having the HACCP system in, using the right boards, using, people used to wash their hands after the toilet, you know, you’ve got so, we have one person employed for purchasing and for taking the temperature readings of food coming on and off the trucks. Keeping food in the kitchen, keeping samples of twenty-one days, having an independent food analyst who’d come in, you ring him tonight and say Colin I was in last night and I’m dying sick to the morning. I’ve got to be able to go to the reservation book and see where you were and what table you were sitting on, go pull out your docket, go to the fridge, pull out what you had, called the analyst come in, take away, you can get results within ten days so its not a, I suppose there was a great time, you know, where it was cool to have a restaurant.

It was sort of thought, well I suppose it’s like anybody’s job everybody thinks from far off that everybody else’s job is easy. You know ‘it’s a fast buck’ but its not it’s a tough, tough game. Like fashion, like food, wine, fashion, everything has its upside and its downside but I think as it said
already it's a single man and woman's game and it's a vocation I think for family life and for married life and you're working as you know when everybody else is off, you're working and that's the way it is. So it is difficult.

425.MM: That brings me on nicely to it's a single man or a single woman's game. Women when did you start noticing women coming into kitchens because I doubt there was many women chefs out maybe at the airport or whatever?

426.CD: No there wasn't any really you know. I suppose I was more aware of women, I suppose it was at the Park in Blackrock because I got a couple of girls along the way from the Killybegs School of Catering, Sandra Earl in particular, and she was I just had a… I think whether it is male or female they have flair. I think with the technology we have its easier for women now and for men and I think with respect for people and for discriminations, be it class, creed or colour that boundary to a large extent has gone but there's still elements of there and bullying in the workplace, all that kind of stuff.

427.MM: Would you have seen much of that?

428.CD: Ah yeah, you know you do. You know and there’s part of it, you know, yeah you do and how necessary it is? I don’t think it is necessary. I think if you can do, I think you can bring the best out of somebody without doing it. I know how pressurised getting into the cockpit. I know there was time I used to come to the top of the stairs every morning before lunch would start, or dinner would start and I'd flick mentally, switch, flash on all the lights in my head and I would go down the stairs and feel the weight of my body in every step, turn around come back up, feel my weight of my body in every step of the stairs and then the show was on. Now I’m right even if I’m wrong. Yes chef, no chef, yes chef, everybody stop everything can we start again. Tick, tick, tick, go so you can walk through the front door and you can say this place is going too fast, its going to slow, its just in your blood and at the end of service you’d be like a stack of wet potatoes, you’d go to the top of the stairs and you’d flash off all the lights. You walk down the stairs again and come back up and say ‘phew it’s over’.

429.But then when you go home there’s nothing left for anybody else. There’s nothing and even I’ve lived on my own for the last eighteen years and I’ve noticed that I’ve gone through Christmases and busy times, with notes on the back of bedroom door, things to do tomorrow, and I’ve got to stop this, this is crazy, you know. Like any job that you’re dedicated to but I think it is, is it better, and is the training better and is the attitude of trainers. I think probably the biggest thing that needs to be done is retrain the trainers and I think that’s in a lot of industries now also. People like Colin O’Daly we’ve run our marathon, we’ve run our race. Now for me to now open another restaurant I’d need to take on a young guy in his 20s who is actually going to be my head chef and I have to listen to him because he’s bringing something to the table that I don’t have. I can actually become his second chef by supporting him and you know, so the dynamic, I can see the dynamic, I’m very lucky like that. If I was ever to do another restaurant, that’s what I would be doing, I would put the team together.

430.MM: The final question because I actually have to go up to talk to Anita Thoma shortly. If you were to do it all again, would you change anything or what would you change?

431.CD: Would I do it all again. Yeah, I’ve no regrets, I certainly have no regrets and the industry has been very good to me and I’ve been very successful, I’ve worked very hard. Like everything to be successful or dedicated or devoted and vocated to something, something has to suffer, there’s no doubt about that. So I think life’s very much been a balance. I look at my private life, my kids, my working life and where I am now, there are swings and roundabouts. I have absolutely no complaints at all. There are always things that you would like to change but in the bad times they were the biggest learning times. You can’t have it all one way. Probably, I think education probably is something I will look back at and say you know and the same time to be self educated I think you go in there blind without fear and you get on with it and you produce great things from
that too. But certainly this generation, if I was now this generation education is hugely important, hugely important because I think time on the chef, the Colin O’Daly type of chefs in the future is going to managing teams of Asian workers or Chinese workers or Indian workers or so we’ll become the team leaders and will we be in there doing what I did when I spoke today, washing the pots to start. Chopping the parsley, peeling the potatoes, know something about the potato and learn something. Even now once a week I’ll go into the wash up. I’ll hang my coat on the door and I will give the guy a hand to stack the dishes and talk to him. I learn more about my business in that hour so I think that’s gone. So I think we will be leaders but I also think we need people’s skills and people’s skills and education and know how you can treat people. There will always be the Marco Pierre Whites and we see the programmes on the television and is that all show? No its not. It is like that. Its clearly like that and I think the notoriety of the chef as well is something we have to be really careful of, because there’s so many cookery programmes and people moving into the business and I think that’s going to be the future. Cookery books and television programmes and the Kevin Thornton’s set of crockery or delf or pots.

432. It will be interesting to see where people like Colin O’Daly will move to next because I’m clearly probably in a place now where there’s a transition coming and you say where do want to position yourself but its about enjoying the next piece of your life but having a connection with the industry. But certainly you’ve got to move over and people give out about the young generation coming up. There are some good people coming up, there’s some seriously talented people but the dynamic is so different, so, so different because they don’t want to do what we did. And are they right? Yeah they are right but it was right for us when we did it. That doesn’t make them better than us or worse than us, you know.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Anita Thoma at Il Primo Restaurant (24/1/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Anita Thoma (AT)

1. AT: So you see there is his photograph (pointing at her father’s Swiss work passport) Florian Alfred Thoma, this is a work history, with his date of birth and in a way it was his passport

2. MM: So he was born in 1923?

3. AT: So he started off here as a pastry chef in Davos (looking through the book) goes through the different places and is signed off by the manager of the place or whatever, this is where he worked here in Ireland.

4. MM: Wow, Rockwell College, he taught there in the cookery school, I must check that with Jim Bowe because he worked there.

5. AT: Jim Bowe knew him well, because when I was in Cathal Brugha Street, Jim Bowe was teaching there at the time and he knew my father well. So there is some notes of medals he won at Hotelympia and stuff (pointing to awards page). He was pastry chef and baker in some places.

6. MM: These years are just after the war and some years during the war, of course Switzerland was neutral.

7. AT: He used to tell the grandchildren stories of being asked to make a cake for Hitler and that he told them the fuck off (laugh) Anyway, it goes through it there and it is very interesting. He spends from 1948 to 1954 in the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dublin, so six years and then goes to the Grand Hotel in Birmingham, and then on to the S.S. Oransay out of London, then to Chadwick House in Knowle (Solihull, West Midlands) before returning to the Royal Hibernian Hotel again as entermetier (vegetable chef). He then spent two years as chef in the Royal Marine Hotel in Dun Laoghaire before going over to London to work in the Oxford and Cambridge University Club in Pall Mall from 1957 to 1961. From 1961 to 1968 he was executive chef over six hotels for the Ulster Transport Authority, and from 1968 to 1972 he was head chef in Dromoland Castle and the Clare Inn in Newmarket on Fergus (Co. Clare). I think they were owned by the same people. And then he went to the Burlington Hotel when it opened in 1972, where he retired out of there.
8. **MM:** Oh, yeah, so he must have been the first head chef of the Burlington, because Pierce Hingston came then from the Intercontinental when Jury’s took over around ’73 or so.

9. **AT:** He was and then he left. I didn’t find a huge amount of photos for you, they are all in the attic, this is a picture of him in Davos before he came to Ireland, that’s him doing a butter sculpture.

10. **MM:** Do you know if there was any catering in his family?

11. **AT:** There wasn’t really, his father was a gardener in a kind of estate and he died when my father was very young, he was only a small boy, it was after the First World War, the influenza (outbreak), my father was only about five or six because he was at school and they came to get him out of school, the father and some other guy were pushing a cart through the village in rural Switzerland, and the fellow in the front was shouting back at him ‘why aren’t you pushing?’ and he’d collapsed and died, you know. They are just those kind of medals from Olympia, that’s all I could find in a hurry, I hope they are of some use for you.

12. **MM:** Just about yourself, when were you born?

13. **AT:** I was born on the 14th June 1967 so I’m forty now, I was born in Clondalkin. My parents had moved from Clontarf to Clondalkin in 1961, I think. My mother was Irish, Maureen McGlinn, she was working in the Royal Hibernian as a waitress and that is how they met.

14. **MM:** Was she from Dublin?
15. AT: Well, originally born in Achill but grew up in Sligo, but moved to Dublin when she was around seven or eight because her father died and her and her mother came to Dublin, looking for work, the granny worked in service and my mother went to work in hotels. I remember her saying the year she died, she got diagnosed with lung cancer and died eight weeks later, but asking her that year about meeting my father and she remembers her and her friend the day the Swiss arrived, because they came down into the kitchen, you know, that morning and they all looked very glamorous in their whites, and her friend said to her ‘well what do you think?’, and she said ‘the little one at the end’, because they were both like 5’3 or 5’4, I’m the tallest in my family.

16. MM: Your father was short in stature, but well rounded, or well built?
17. **AT:** Well, you know what they say, being a pastry chef, never trust a skinny chef! But it was a different thing in those days, his attitude to food was completely different from my experience of anyone else I ever met in Ireland, you know the disposable nature of food here and the real lack of respect for it, it was just a different thing, in those days if you were a chef, you were a professional, you know. I think that certainly dipped, when I did my leaving certificate, I went straight to Cathal Brugha Street and did the full time course there in 1984 and JoeErraught was head of School at that time.

18. **MM:** I think Joe Hegarty had taken a year out and gone off somewhere; who taught you there?

19. **AT:** Jimmy Kilbride was there, Jim Bowe was there, Joe Erraught was teaching at the time as well. Every Monday morning we had P.J. Dunne in the larder kitchen, I suppose he is dead now? He was fantastic, I remember he said to me one day, because he was in his 70s when I was there, around 71 or so but they kept getting him to come back, but one Monday I remember standing in the kitchen and I had my hands in my pockets, and he said ‘Thoma, take your hands off your brains!’ (laugh) but he was a fantastic man, everything he did. I remember cutting my finger once and he just took the membrane off a kidney and put it on my finger, and it worked, and I tell guys that now and they are horrified, and my business partners say ‘don’t put it on any of our lot there, like they’re fingers will fall off’.

20. **MM:** He is really what part inspired me to start this project, He’d told me tales of Jammet’s and I thought if somebody doesn’t tap into these peoples stories, they will be gone.

21. **AT:** Really, he was a fantastic man, and Michael Ganly was one of our lecturers as well, a very stern sort of man, a great lesson he thought me, I don’t know if he had any army background because he was very regimental, but we used to have him for practical classes and it came to taste the food, and the guy beside me got him to taste the sauce and he says to him to taste it again, and he put the spoon back in again and that was the end of that.
22. MM: Always wash the spoon because it’s been in your mouth?

23. AT: He humiliated him with ‘and you expect me to eat that now?’, I’ll never forget that, I’ve never in my life put a spoon into anything twice (laugh), and for pastry we had John Linnane, a gentle soul, he had been just a year or so there at that stage, a very nice man.

24. MM: Where did you go after that?

25. AT: I went to a few different places, what happened is that when I was finishing up in Cathal Brugha Street, Dave Edwards had come from Jury’s to teach and he was setting up the Mater Private Hospital and there were some of us who were finishing up that year and he asked us if we’d go, so I did. It was supposed to be something different setting up a new place with new systems etc. So I stayed for two years there. I worked in a few various places, went over to Zermat in Switzerland for a while and then went over to live in Paris for a year and then came back.

26. MM: Had you worked in kitchens in any of these places?

27. AT: Yeah, I did, when I was over in Zermat, I worked a six month season in for Siler Hotels, they are a big hotel group in Switzerland. My sister was in Switzerland at the time but not there. I just went to work there for the experience and lived in the hotel, it is at the base of the Matterhorn mountains and you just went there to work. Six doubles a week and all the chefs, it was the first time in a kitchen that anyone had called me by my second name only, Thoma or Frauline Thoma, you know, it was my first taste of that really, and it was my first taste of working in really old buildings that had been maintained to a very high standard, some of these kitchens were a hundred years old and some of the pots were nearly as old but in fantastic condition. I sometimes say to the guys, you know, ‘the outside of the pot needs to be cleaned too’. The respect for equipment was
just something I never experienced anywhere here, people just throw things out and buy another one.

Figure AT.7: Thoma’s Work History

28. MM: In Paris, where did you work?

29. AT: I was just moving around doing different types of things, you know, I was trying to improve my French, I had done French at school, and obviously we had done kitchen French in college. So that is it, I came back to Dublin and did the first year when La Stampa opened, I think it was 1991. I did the first year there.

30. MM: Was that with Michael Martin?

31. AT: No, he came after, it was a guy called Terry Sheen. May Frizby owned it with Louis Murray in the first year and that was mad, but in between I had done a six months around the world. But that was mad because I had come from this very professional situation in Switzerland to that Dublin restaurant scene which was mad. People like being in work after having a few pints, all kinds of mad things, and music been played in the kitchen and that, it was crazy, it was like another world, I was lost.

32. MM: Where was Terry Sheen from, was he Irish?

33. AT: Yes, he’s still around, I think he had worked for May Frizby in Café Fresca before. Michael Martin must have taken over from him, I left after a year.

34. MM: It had been Café Klara before that, but what was the standard in La Stampa like?

35. AT: It was the first one of those big rooms that Dublin are full of now doing rack of lamb, seabass, salmon, chicken and steak for big numbers, and it is a huge room, I always thought that the best thing about that place was the room. I think they tried initially, because they had a pastry chef, but they weren’t making bread or that, you know.
36. **MM:** Where did you go then?

37. **AT:** I went with this guy that owned this place here, a German guy Dieter Bergman, who took over the building where Shay Beano was on Stephen Street, it was called Alfresco, so I worked there for about six or eight months. You need restaurateurs to be putting something back into it, not just running a business. He owned this place (Il Primo) until two years ago and then somebody else bought the building and we bought the business. After that he opened a place in Ballsbridge called 162 on the block there but I don’t know. So many people open restaurants and have problems with tax, when I was opening this place I said one thing I would employ was an accountant, a solicitor, let the business people do the business and I’ll do the other stuff. So I worked here for ten years, so it’s a dream come true now.

38. **MM:** A huge change happened from 1986 to 2000, were you aware of Johnny Cooke and Patrick Guilbaud, Kevin Thornton and these people?

39. **AT:** In a way I was, but not really at the time. My take on things is that some chefs work in the restaurant business and that’s what they do, then there are other people who are involved in the social scene of the restaurant business as well and they socialise with the other restaurant people around town, and certainly I wasn’t into that at the time, and whereas I wonder now over the last number of years how you could be removed from that and work in a restaurant in Dublin because everyone talks about everybody all of the time, and everybody knows what’s going on, they can tell you how many people you had in last night, and who’s doing what.

Figure AT.8: Work History Continued 1946-1947
40. I remember going to a restaurant, I think it was run by a French man, called the Dauphin, and it was over the shops in Phibsborough, and it was the first time outside of being in college or being in Switzerland that I actually tasted food that I was trained to do. He was probably before his time in the late ‘80s or in the wrong location. Certainly over the last ten years I have been aware of what was going on in Dublin, I thought it was fantastic Dylan McGrath getting his star and Ollie Dunne as well, it is great for Dublin to have two more stars, it’s great.

41. MM: Were you aware of Kevin Thornton having the Wine Epergne, or Alan O’Reilly out in Clarets or Colin O’Daly in The Park?

42. AT: A little bit, I was aware of Colin O’Daly because he had a bit of a profile when I was in college. And then Johnny Cooke came and it was everywhere, it was rock and roll.
End of Interview
Edited Interview with Michel Treyvaud in DIT, Cathal Brugha Street on (4/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Michel Treyvaud (MT)

1. **MM:** Where and when were you born?

2. **MT:** Many years ago (laugh), 3rd June 1937 in near Avenches, in the French speaking part of Switzerland, twenty minutes from Bern, two and half hours from Zurich.

3. **MM:** Was there catering in your family?

4. **MT:** My mother, she worked before her marriage in a restaurant that was about two hundred yards from the house where I was living. She as a cook in this small restaurant, but when I was big enough, eight or nine years old, I used to go into the kitchen, and that is where, see the owner was the chef herself, preparing vegetables, peeling potatoes, the usual that kids will do in that kitchen, so that is where I started. I got to like it so then when I finished school, just the last couple of years from sixteen to eighteen, every weekend I was working in the kitchen to make a few bob.

5. **MM:** So how many was in the family?

6. **MT:** I have only one brother.

7. **MM:** Did you go to catering school or do an apprenticeship?

8. **MT:** No, at that time in Switzerland, you had the hotel school; ok, but it was mostly for management, the training for a chef was done in a hotel or in a restaurant, and you had one day, that was your day off, you had to go to the college, to the school. The day release, here (Ireland) in the hotel you have the day release and you can go, in Switzerland at that time, that was your day off and you had to go. That was for two and half years the training as a *commis chef*, you know.

9. **MM:** Did you do that in your local village?

10. **MT:** No, in Neuchâtel, in the *Hotel de Soleil*, about forty five minutes in a car but I used to take the train because the car was not always available, so that is it. From there on, I was there for about two and a half years and I pass the exams in the school with top marks. And from there on I went to work for the winter season in *Arosa*, which is a ski resort. During the summer I went to Italy, because the head chef of the hotel had a small restaurant in Italy, between the winter season and the summer season there was about six weeks to kill, so I went to his place because he was coming back for the summer season not in *Arosa*, but in (inaudible).

11. **MM:** Where in Italy did he have his place?

12. **MT:** Oh, in the north, at the winter station, in *Cortina d’Amprezzo*. There was still work to be done there, I could have gone home, but then I wouldn’t have got a salary, so you follow the work. Then I was in the summer season in (inaudible) in the Friesan part of Switzerland, then from there on I went to Zurich to the *Hotel Limmat*, on the river Limmat, and I was there for about seven months and I had to go to the army. After the army I went to *St. Moritz*, the Palace Hotel. Again that was for a summer season.

13. **MM:** That was quite a good hotel, wasn’t it?

14. **MT:** Oh yeah, a five star, It’s still there, so from there on, where did I go after that? Oh, they were calling me back to the army as a corporal, to go up the ladder, but I did not like it, so what did I do? I did a runner! I went to work in Germany in the *Frankfurter Hof*.
That’s the train station in Frankfurt?

Yes, that was a Steigenberger hotel at the time. I was there for about three months, I did not like Frankfurt, at about forty or fifty years ago, you can imagine at the station, it was not great, the Hotel was very nice, you know, but I changed. I went to the Ritters Park Hotel in Bad Homburg, that was again a Steigenberger Hotel, and I was there for about two years, that was five star overlooking the park where you go and take the water, a spa, and from there on I was on my way, believe it or not, to Texas, Fort Worth, (laugh) and I never made it. If you speak English; I had French, German and Italian, but if you speak English you would be earning extra dollars. So a friend of mine, from Germany said ‘well feck it, we will go four months in England and see if you have two or three words of English’ and that is what I applied for and I was supposed to go to Leeds and I ended up in Edinburgh in the Caledonian Hotel. The larder chef there broke his wrist or something like that, so two days before leaving Germany, they contacted me by telegram saying go to Edinburgh instead of going to Leeds, so I was in Scotland for about four and half years, but I was working as sous chef in the Gleneagles Hotel for summer, well from Easter until the last Sunday in October. I don’t know if you know Gleneagles?

I do indeed, it is an amazing place.

Well, when I was there, it was only the hotel, we had a French restaurants which was open only eight weeks and they used to bring all the chefs in from Manchester, that was owned by British Railway at the time, Manchester was closed during the summer, you know, and during those eight weeks they used to bring all the waiter and some of the chefs to work with us. And on a Sunday we had a buffet, and it was only the head chef and myself that were allowed on the back of the buffet on a Sunday. Nobody else, because it was (Harold) McMillan and all those people, so they were not going to bring any youngsters, that was always the way, that was a very good place.

All the movers and shakers were there?

Yes, I spent four summers up there as sous chef and then in the larder as well.

Do you remember where the head chef was from, or his name?

He as Swiss, but I can’t remember his name.

Did you come to England through an agency?

No, on my own, I just wrote to the British Railway, the head office was in London in St. Pancreas, we wrote them there. My friend went to Leeds, but I had been working in the larder in Germany and when the guy broke his wrist they say ‘hey, you go over there’. So I did two winters in the Caledonian (Hotel) in Edinburgh and two winters in the Central (Hotel) in Glasgow.

This is roughly around 1957 or so?

Yes, it would be because I left Glasgow on the Clyde to come over to Ireland on the night of Guy Fawkes (5th November) in 1964, I know it was Guy Fawkes because of the fireworks and all that. So that is when I took the boat from Glasgow.

What was the link that made you come to Ireland?

Woman (laugh), now we were married and she was expecting, and I had been there before, I had bought the house I live in now while I was working in Scotland. So, I had bought that house, and she was expecting, and I said Scotland is not my country, so what am I doing here, it is not yours either so do we go back to Switzerland or do we try Ireland?
29. **MM:** What’s your wife’s name and where was she from?

30. **MT:** Breda London, and she was from Passage East, Waterford. She was working in the Caledonian Hotel but she did not come to Gleneagles. When I moved to Glasgow, she came while I was in, not the Central but the North British Hotel, they were all owned by the railway, she was a book keeper / receptionist. I could speak a bit of English and she had no French, and her mother was here, so we thought it would be better, so that is what happened, I took a chance to come over here in November 1964.

31. 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, ‘I’m not going to work in there, no way’, my pride would not let me do it.

32. **MM:** So the places you could get work without the union were not worth working in?

33. **MT:** It wasn’t a place worth working in, but the way it came is that The Montrose Hotel was opening, you know P.V. Doyle, he was moving from the South County or Parkes Hotel there, and opening the Montrose, in fact he caught the South County well because he said that he would not open a hotel within three miles of the South County, so he started out as apartments and ended up with a hotel, you know, but anyway. He had a chef there, a German fellow, who was there at the time, you see it was just opening so that union hadn’t worked into it, they had a manager there, Lawlor was his name, and he said ‘you can start there’ so I started there and I was doing the job as the chef and P.V. Doyle saw that, because the German chef, (note: Heinz Marquardt) to tell you the truth he had jumped submarine in Waterford (laugh), he was there – he worked somewhere in Glasnevin.

34. **MM:** Can you remember his name?

35. **MT:** I can’t remember his name but anyhow, he’d say ‘Michel, what do you think we should put on the menu?’, so in the end I was doing chef saucier for him and in fact I was running the kitchen. From there on there were still problems with the union, the breakfast chef that was there was supposed to be the representative of the union, and the guy was a thief, so he had to stop. The day he was stopped, he had sole on the bone, cutlery and everything, he was getting married, that was all in the boot of the car, you know. Still the guy that was causing the most trouble from the union was an Englishman, that money from the union was stopped from the salary. For six months they had stopped my money every week and the English fellow was causing problems again saying ‘all the fecking foreigners coming here’ – an English man, so I say ‘fair enough, yeah ok, so I am a foreigner, but so I work here and you work there’. And something happened, he was not a member of the union, he never paid his union dues, so I went to Micky Mullen and I said ‘I pay, where is my (union) card? You stopped money from me for the last six months, so I am entitled to my card’. So I got my card anyway, I got an interview up in Liberty Hall. Where did I do my apprenticeship? What’s that? Are you a chef? Whatever, well at the end I got my card, and when I got my card I went down to the manager Pat Lawlor and I say ‘thank you very much but Jury’s in Dame Street want me’, so that is the way I went into the Jury’s company. I had my union card, they had a job, and that is where it started and I was there in Dame Street for about four months.

36. **MM:** Was Willy Widmer there?

37. **MT:** Willy Widmer, yes, I was his second chef. Second chef in work, but the second chef really was Joe Collins, Joe was a good chef, a nice fellow, you know. What exactly happened? I went to the Moira. Lee Kidney went from Dame Street to the Moira, and there was a chef there who left, and Lee said to me ‘are you interested to come there?’ and I said ‘why not’, so I went to
the Moira and Eugene McGovern came with me as second chef in the Moira, he had been working as larder chef in Jury’s Dame Street. I was there for two years and after that I went to Jury’s Hotel opened…

38. **MM:** Now this was around 1966 or so?

39. **MT:** Around that, no before ’66, ’64 or so.

40. **MM:** Well, I think Willy Widmer arrived in 1964.

41. **MT:** Willy Widmer arrived around three months before me, so he would have been there in 1964 so I would be in the Moira around 1965. And I was around two years in the Moira and Lee Kidney, Jury’s opened in Westport and I was in Westport only for about, they opened the hotel for about three months, and then Jury’s opened the Park Hotel in Sligo. So Lee Kidney went from the Moira to Sligo and asked me if I would go down there, so I went down to open the Sligo Park with him and I was there for about two and a half years. My wife didn’t like Sligo because it was one of those border towns, now I had no problems with Sligo people, like with the Protestant Catholic thing because I was a complete outsider, I had come out from Switzerland not from … so I had no problems, but she did not like it, it was difficult to make friends, so we came back here (Dublin). Johnny Opperman was opening in Kiltiernan and that is where I came back to.

42. **MM:** That was in 1970 or so?

43. **MT:** That would have been in 1970/71, because I was up there for about eight months, and it was starting not to go well at all. Did you talk to him?

44. **MM:** Oh, yes, he is a great guy, he is ninety one years old and still looking as fit as anything.

45. **MT:** A fantastic guy, the whole family, it was Willy, and Carl, Carl worked for Gilbeys, a wine exporters. Willy was in Jury’s and the Moira which is where he met his wife, and then he went to the place at the back of the Clarence (Hotel), … The Dolphin (Hotel). He was manager of the Dolphin for a while, you know. But nice fellows, they are all dead now except Johnny, Johnny still survives with Eileen in their little cottage down in Blainroe.

46. **MM:** Yes, I was down with them. Now, the Opperman’s place, you went in there as head chef. How many people did you have there with you in the kitchen at the time?

47. **MT:** John Clancy was there, Freddy Steinberg who was the pastry fellow there, then there was a small fellow who was the *sous chef*, I can’t remember his name, I think there was around six or seven to start with, but it never took off. It never took off.

48. **MM:** It was very busy in the weekend, I believe?

49. **MT:** Johnny was not a manager, he was a good chef, he had his place in Malahide and it was a very good restaurant, and the manager was Eileen more than him. But the problem with that place is that it was ahead of its time. The wrong people joined the golf club. I don’t play golf but nobody likes to go uphill then downhill, kick the ball up and it rolls down. So people were not playing golf, they joined the club, the likes of Charlie Haughey and that kind joined the club just because it was Opperman’s Country Club, they joined for that, and you’d see them maybe once a year in the restaurant. Those guys were not interested in coming up here for a meal and that is the reason that the place did not do well. The rooms were sold, Breda worked there for a while, but they were fifty years to early.

50. **MM:** Well the troubles had broken out in Northern Ireland as well and I think that had some bearing on it as well?
51. **MT:** I don’t think that was the main thing, the wrong people joined the club to make money. In the K Club, the restaurant is not that busy, because people go there to play golf and go into the club house for food. When Michel Flamme was there (as head chef), the food was excellent, I went there one weekend on a Saturday night and there were about three other couples with us in the restaurant. The owner there had the money to absorb it, the rooms were full, they were making money on the rooms.

52. **MM:** Yes, the restaurant was a loss leader?

53. **MT:** They were playing golf and meeting in the club house, and the food in the club house was excellent, I was at a wedding there in the golf club and it was a beautiful meal we had there. So that is why Opperman’s place never really took off.

54. **MM:** I’d say it was an exciting time; there were a lot of stars and celebrities staying?

55. **MT:** It was, I ran uphill (jogging), believe it or not, with Cassius Clay, and my wife has a photo that was taken with him at the reception. But again, for Cassius Clay, you had a table over there and everybody was pushed away, and what do you cook for a man like that? Double T-Bone steak and salad. That is what he was eating. But we were doing good cooking in the restaurant and the celebrities were all (interrupted by a phone call).

56. **MM:** You were up in Opperman’s club at this stage, where were you living?

57. **MT:** Still in the same place in Cornelscourt, in the first house I bought.

58. **MM:** Would you have eaten out in restaurants in Dublin at this time?

59. **MT:** Yes, quite a lot. You could say that nearly every restaurant or hotel, that I would have gone there, to see what they were doing. Food was somewhere good, somewhere not so good, somewhere appalling, but I never complained.

60. **MM:** Where were the really good places?

61. **MT:** Well believe it or not, I had a meal in the Russell. That was a really good one, the Hibernian, the Shelbourne, those places were good, you know.

62. **MM:** Did you eat in the Red Bank?

63. **MT:** Yes I did, and in Jammet’s, and the one in Dun Laoghaire – The Mirabeau, Seán Kinsella’s place. Have you spoken to him yet? That was a very good restaurant.

**Directions on how to find Seán Kinsella’s house in Shankhill**

64. **MM:** So what were the places that were ok, and what were the places that were really bad?

65. **MT:** Well I won’t mention that bad ones. Most of the hotel restaurants weren’t that bad, as I said the Russell, the Hibernian, the Gresham, those were good, you know, as forty years ago standard.

66. **MM:** And the Moira? Jury’s Copper Grill was supposed to have been very good?

67. **MT:** You could compare The Copper Grill with what you have today, the restaurant in the Four Seasons, that kind of place. Jury’s had a restaurant and they had The Copper Grill which was special.

68. **MM:** The Dolphin was more of a steak house than haute cuisine?
69. **MT:** Yes, big steaks, mixed grill and things like that. The Moira was good, the Moira was a small restaurant that was very good, and it had a bar on the side there that they used to get food there, a bar with seventeen or eighteen seats. We used to serve fresh prawns and chicken, if you served twenty lunch or dinner, you would serve eighteen scampi (laugh).

70. **MM:** What about places like Snaffles on Leeson Street or the Soup Bowl?

71. **MT:** The Soup Bowl was not bad, the soup bowl restaurant was not bad, places like that, so many restaurants, the memory is bad, you know.

72. **MM:** Do you remember a place called Alfredo’s?

73. **MT:** Alfredo’s was the restaurant that I was supposed to start in but I walked out of. The food was Italian, it was a good Italian restaurant but the conditions were appalling, and he was going to open another restaurant in Dun Laoghaire, and he was supposed to open on Monday and I went there on Friday and there was absolutely nothing, cobwebs from here to there etc. ‘Oh, I’ll have my woman clean it’. I was coming into Alfredo to work for a week or two in that restaurant and then to open the other one, but I said ‘ah, forget about it’. But the food was (ok).

74. **MM:** I believe it was more about the ambience than the food, that people liked to be seen to be slumming it in Alfredo’s, there was a kind of a buzz to it?

75. **MT:** Yes, do you know the Italian restaurant in Dame Street, Nico’s, Alfredo’s was a bit of the Nico’s of that time. Nico’s again, now I had a meal in Nico’s last year with Mervyn Stewart and it was just ok, not great, but it used to be very good, typical Italian food and the food was good.

76. **MM:** And Bernardo’s was there on Lincoln Place, and La Caprice, Quo Vadis, all these places. Did you ever eat in Mike Butt’s place on Leeson Street, The Tandoori Rooms, the Indian place?

77. **MT:** No, the only Indian one was on the other side of the Westbury Hotel, The Rajdoot, but I like Chinese and Indian food but my stomach doesn’t like it. I don’t mind doing the cooking myself at home and using very little of curry, you know everything nowadays in chilli, chilli, chilli. You know the chilli kills the taste of everything anyway.

78. **MM:** Opperman’s went bankrupt, didn’t it? Where did you go then?

79. **MT:** Well, Pat Quinn took over Opperman’s place and Dave Edwards went there from The Clarence. I went straight into Jury’s Ballsbridge as head chef. Joe Collins had been head chef, he came from Jury’s Dame Street when Jury’s took over the Intercontinental Hotel. Pierce Hingston had been there but went to the Burlington Hotel.

80. **MM:** There was a Swiss chef in the Burlington too, Alfred Thoma?

81. **MT:** Thoma was the chef in Annabelle’s, the night club in the Burlington. Jury’s had the Martello, there was a kitchen in the Martello. Annabelle’s had the same, they had a restaurant and Thoma was the chef there. He was the chef working Annabelle’s. You see in Jury’s we had the Kish and there was a chef there, so Enda Dunne was the chef in the Kish, he is now in Parkes, the other chef there was Derek Dunne, no relation, he went up to the Glenview Hotel and then started his own business.

82. **MM:** So you arrived into Jury’s in Ballsbridge, and Joe Collins had been there briefly, since it was a big change moving from Dame Street to Ballsbridge, so you sort of took over. Do you remember who you had working with you?

83. **MT:** Well Jimmy Connell was one of them, and Brendan O’Neill who went to Vincent’s (Hospital), not the man who went to The Red Cow (Hotel). Paddy Reilly was the third sous chefs. Jimmy, Brendan and Paddy were the three sous chefs.
84. **MM:** So at this stage there weren’t really that many foreign chefs left in Dublin or in Ireland at the time? And from your experience with the union it was clear that they were anti-foreign chefs at the time?

85. **MT:** No, it was anti-foreign chef, even the Irish chefs were anti-foreign chef because I know for a fact that one of them was really against any continental chef coming because, that guy, he was not happy with his job, he wanted the next job, wherever a continental chef was going he wanted that job. So it made life difficult. Do you remember Bernard Gaume? He was a French guy in the Intercontinental; I think he went back to France. Another one who is still here but probably retired is Jacques Mansion. He was in the Hotel Europe in Killarney and then he was in the Clontarf Castle Hotel.

86. **MM:** You had Jimmy, Brendan, and Paddy there as sous chefs, but you had a really large crew there, didn’t you?

87. **MT:** There was forty eight, including Joe Erraught, John Clancy, Jimmy Rock, Gerry Byrne and a lot more that are teaching here (Cathal Brugha Street).

88. **MM:** So how long were you in Jury’s Ballsbridge?

89. **MT:** From 2nd January 1972 to around 1990, about twenty years in Jury’s – a lifetime – too long!!!

90. **MM:** The fact that you stayed so long, means you must have liked it?

91. **MT:** Ah yeah, I loved it, the work was hard, the work was not so hard, but the problem with Jury’s was that when Jury’s Dame Street took over Ballsbridge, there was a lot of redundancy. And where you get redundancy, most good chefs, twenty years ago will always find work, so the good ones took the money and started work the following week in another place. So what have you left? I’m not talking of the guys here because they came in after, and John Clancy came in with me. You have left with the worst, you were left with a lot of wasters who would not ever find another job, so they were dictating, the union were their strength not their cooking ability; and that is what it was.

92. **MM:** And Dave Edwards was brought in to try and sort things out?

93. **MT:** Dave Edwards came in, the reason they brought Dave Edwards in was to have an Irish chef there and he was brought in to control the union and the chef. And then after a short while he was made Food and Beverage manager. But I enjoyed Jury’s because at that time chefs were working in the kitchen, they were not in front of the television. I was doing most of the service. You used to serve 120 people a night, at the time the food was reasonably good, and you served that with five chefs. John Clancy was on the larder and the starter, and most of the time we had a sauce cook, and during the service I was doing the pass and the cooking. And I enjoyed that, I used even to go up cooking in the Kish, if there was a sous chef on at night, very often I will take a function or do the Cabaret. At the time I used to enjoy cooking, to me it was nothing more enjoyable than to take a young guy, at the time it would be John Clancy or Enda or Derek Dunne or Delores what is her name is, to take them and do a function, one hundred people just me and the commis chef. And it was nothing to see those youngsters do it, because they were working hard, because I would cook nothing (beforehand), because most of those functions, very often I would go in to the Martello and give out to the banquet chef because everything was already cooked. When I was doing it, we did it à la minute or as close as possible to the guest eating it. The timing was the most important part, but I used to enjoy it.

94. **MM:** That brings me nicely on to a good question, you spoke about Delores. Before that time had there been many women working in any the kitchens you had worked in?
95. **MT:** No, in Jury’s Dame Street there had been one woman, she was the breakfast cook, and you would find that most of the hotels, in that department, it would be a woman. And the reason I would say is that they would come in at 6am and they would do the breakfast and they would be finished at 11am and they would be home. In Jury’s you had Delores, and you had Connie Murray, who married Enda Dunne, and there was another one who was working in the Lansdowne Hotel, but I can’t remember her name. But now you have a lot of women, and a lot of foreign women, Lithuanian and Polish women coming in. It is changing. In the last ten years, the Irish hotels to me are like Switzerland fifty years ago. In Switzerland, the Swiss were head chef, were sous chef, manager, owner, the rest was all Italian, and then after the Italian there came the Portuguese and lately it’s been the Polish, and it is the same here. Swiss people were above working in the kitchen, and the last ten years that’s what has been happening in the catering here in Ireland. Who wants to be working at 10pm or 11pm when they can finish at 6 or 7pm? They must really love the kitchen!

96. **MM:** Would you have seen much technological changes in your time in kitchens?

97. **MT:** The Montrose was a brand new kitchen, Jury’s Dame Street wasn’t bad, old equipment but strong good equipment, and it was still the standard that you had with the pass and you prepare your food and it all comes out together. The Moira was bad, down below in the basement. Ballsbridge wasn’t bad, but when Jury’ took over it was still old style, everything came out of the one kitchen. When we re did the kitchens they were near the restaurants, each area had there own kitchens, Coffee Dock, Martello, Kish, Banquets. With the Kish restaurant they built the kitchen into one of the bedrooms. They were good kitchens.

98. **MM:** You had the Embassy room which was the main restaurant, then the Martello which was exclusive because it had the great view over Dublin?

99. **MT:** Jury’s never used it, the Intercontinental used it as a restaurant, but Jury’s just used it as a function room for maximum one hundred people, which was nice for weddings because there was a balcony and you could use it for taking pictures.

100. **MM:** So Jury’s never used it as a restaurant, because it was quite a good restaurant when the Intercontinental was there?

101. **MT:** It was the top restaurant in Dublin, and not only that, it had the top view, you had the glass all around, and if you were lucky enough to know the head waiter or tip the head waiter well, you had a good table where you could see all the lights of Dublin (laugh).

102. **MM:** Was it silver service when you started off in Jury’s?

103. **MT:** Yes, in Dame Street, most of it was silver service, but in the Copper Grill it was mostly copper pans rather than silver. To tell you the truth, it is the only menu that I have still left at home, the menu of the Copper Grill. Joe Gray was the head waiter and Tony Conlon worked there too. Joe Gray took over the Celtic Mews when Jury’s took over the Intercontinental and Tony went with him. When Joe Gray died the son took over but something happened, I don’t know what, ask Tony.

104. **MM:** Yes, Willy Woods had been there as chef in Celtic Mews, he had come from the Russell. You may not have known him. Did you know any of the other Swiss chefs in Dublin at the time? You knew Willy Widmer, did you know the Fred Guigax?

105. **MT:** Willy Widmer, I knew and I met Guigax but didn’t know him. The only one I would know well was Thoma. (Alfred) Thoma used to come to the Swiss Club at the Swiss Embassy where we always organised something for our national day. The club used to organise something but now the Embassy has been directed to have the Swiss National Day in the Embassy on the first of August where the other embassies come in at 6pm and the Swiss come in at 7pm. But we used
to also have a day for the Fondue where it was Thoma or myself would always end in the kitchen with Willy.

Discussion on barbeque organised by the Swiss in Wicklow where Michel spit roasted a leg of beef (end of tape 1)

106.MM: You handed in your notice in Jury’s, because you said if you didn’t you would either be an alcoholic or kill someone (laugh). Explain that, because there was a sweat pint system in place in Jury’s at the time, wasn’t there?

107.MT: Yeah, it was, the sweat pint came with the Intercontinental, it was not Jury’s who instigated it, it came in there and you could not cut it off. So each chef on duty got two bottles of beer at 10pm or a lemonade if you wanted, one every so often (laugh), but it was not that, the pressure was getting too much. Its fine in a small kitchen when you have eight or ten chefs and they all pull together, but when you have one chef over there on fish, and one chef in charge of the banquets and three sous chefs and they are not pulling their weight, I tell you I don’t think those guys were pulling there weight. If somebody was off or sick, never would a sous chef say ‘I will work tonight and get tomorrow off’. I was the one left behind, it was not worth it. So that’s why I decided, I never even told my wife, I went home one day and said ‘listen, I am not working tomorrow’, and she said ‘why not’, and I said ‘I quit’. She said ‘what are you going to do?’ and I said ‘you go to work now for a change’ (laughter) So I had looked at the papers and I had already the plan made that I would open something myself, I was not going in to an empty home and we bought that place and it was a vegetable shop. Paddy Shovelin, do you know him?

108.MM: Yes, Paddy used to own Blakes in Stillorgan.

109.MT: When I came out of Jury’s, I opened Shiels in the top of the Stephen’s Green Centre. He had his place Shiels in Moore Street, the butchers, and he opened up over there and I opened it for him with Tony Campbell, who gave a hand there as well.

110.MM: That was around 1988 or so because I had worked in Blakes in Stillorgan for a while and the manageress went from Blakes to Shiels.

111.MM: How long did you work with Paddy Shovelin?

112.MT: Only six weeks or so, I just opened it up for him and then I opened Simply Delicious, the delicatessen on Foxrock Avenue.

Discussion on the future plans for his business in Foxrock Avenue with his daughter.

113.MM: How many children have you?

114.MT: Four, and the four of them are involved in catering. The eldest one Francis, is in Waterford, in the Bodega restaurant; Lucienne is in Simply Delicious; and Mark and Paul opened Treyaud’s restaurant in Killarney around five years ago.

115.MM: So these business’s have kept you busy since you left Jury’s?

116.MT: Oh, yes, more than enough!

117.MM: Tell me about P.V. Doyle, did he make going to hotels more accessible to the average man?

118.MT: I worked for him for six months or so in the Montrose, but P.V. Doyle was a builder, but he was more into rooms in the hotels than the restaurants. The man was very good to all his staff, it
would not be one weekend without coming into the kitchen and say ‘good evening or good morning’ and he was always very good staff wise, I found anyway.

119-MM: Did you know Robert Kavavagh who was head waiter in the Montrose, and who they named ‘The Robert Room’ after, when he died?

120-MT: No, it was a Belgian head waiter when I was there, Louis Ghandi. He left the Montrose, in fact just after me, and opened a little pastry shop in Stillorgan Shopping Centre, and again he was ahead of his time, especially where expensive (pastries), so after that he started doughnuts from a little kitchen near the Graduate (Pub) on Rochestown Avenue. He taught pastry in Shannon in the Hotel School before the Montrose.

121-MM: Alfred Thoma had taught for a while in Rockwell College. We have discussed women in kitchens, and the trade union issue was important for you because they were anti-foreign chefs as such?

122-MT: I think every union, the hotel union was anti-chef coming in, but the building union would be anti-foreign workers too. To me, the Irish people, even now, have forgot their past. Of old, there was no work for them and they had to go away, you can say that every family in Ireland has somebody that at sometime of their life who went away to another country. Where did they go, it doesn’t matter, because they left home. How they were welcome at the other end, most of the time yes, because the Irish worker, to me, was always a good worker except he was mislead by somebody above, but otherwise I never had a problem with the Irish worker. If I told them to do work, they did it, I never had to swear or shout at them, once you showed them, they did it, I always found them very good at that. But they forgot that their children went away and it would be nice to find somebody to teach them in the other country as well. But there is absolutely no problems, I go down there to Killarney and I love every minute that I am here in Ireland, you know, sunshine or not (laugh), I know it is because I do a lot of fishing, it doesn’t really bother me (laugh). I like it here.

123-MM: Why do you think so many people leave the business?

124-MT: I think for most of them it could be a dead end, or they see it as a dead end, or not enough interest. Don’t make the mistake, chef or waiter is a hard job, maybe the work is not hard, but the hours, you know. Remember if you were leaving the house, as I did many a time at 7am and not returning until 11pm because you cannot go back home if you have only two hours split, what do you do with those hours? Most of them used to go to the pub or the bookies. It is not that the work is that hard, but at the time the splits and that.

125-MM: Alcohol and drinking clearly was a problem in the industry, did you see much of that?

126-MT: Well, I saw some of it, I would not say much of it. I would blame the culture of the splits because there was nowhere else to go. And remember because you were a chef or waiter or working in the business, even your car insurance was loaded, you were penalised because you were working in the hotel industry even if you only drank a little bit. When I was in the Moira, often in the afternoon I would to up to Grafton Street to the picture house to see the Pathé news, pass an hour seeing the news or sleeping, particularly if it was raining. But a lot of people used to pass the time in the pub or in the bookies.

127-MM: When did the silver service stop and plate service take over?

128-MT: Around the 1980s and I’ll tell you the reason, the chefs were doing a nice job with preparing all (food) thing on the dish. When the first person sees it, it looks good with the garnish etc. but when the last person is getting it, it looks a mess. So the chef started to do it on a plate, they’d put the main course on the plate with a little piece of veg and that was going out, and the waiter was going into the restaurant after that just with a follow of veg. And on your plate you’d
have your steak or whatever, or fish, a little spinach, maybe a few carrots and the waiter would come back with some mash potatoes. But each customer would get a nice plate in front of them, as we say, you eat about 40% with your eyes and what looks nice tastes better.

129. MM: When did menu start to differ between restaurants? At one stage most menus were classical and looked similar?

130. MT: I would say about the same time as the television programmes started to arrive, around twelve or fifteen years ago, around the mid ‘80s or so. You know with the influence of the nouvelle cuisine.

131. MM: Were you aware of the nouvelle cuisine? Who were your main influences?

132. MT: The customers would influence the restaurant, to me, that is what they wanted, so we had to change.

133. MM: And who were they copying? Was it Robert Carrier or was it more the French chefs like Bocuse or Troisgros?

134. MT: Bocuse was one of them and Michel Guérard was another, they came in with these books and every chef would jump into the pot and copy them. Nowadays it is lamb shanks, everyone is doing it whereas it was only one a while ago, it is very hard to find a chef who is going to do something themselves, something that is not too expensive but something good and simple. They all follow each other, if the restaurant sells, the waiter will go over with the chef and say we sell a lot of this and a lot of that, and what ever sells well that’s what they put on. I started with the shanks, now it’s the belly of pork, every restaurant has belly of pork on the menu, slow cooked and it is very nice.

135. MM: I have three very short questions for you now at the end. What would you liked to be remembered for?

136. MD: Being a decent chef.

137. MM: A good answer. What part of your professional life are you most proud of?

138. MD: Well I’m proud to have achieved that my children are in the business and doing well with a little help from the father.

139. MM: If you were to start your professional career again, would you do anything differently?

140. MD: I don’t think I would do something differently, but I do not think I would come to work in Dublin. Any part of Ireland but not in Dublin, the life is too fast compared with the lifestyle in Kenmare or Killarney with the houses and the lake etc. I would have preferred to have lived in the country. When I came here, Dublin was the place with the good hotels and the good restaurants, there was only a few down the country. When I moved into Jury’s in 1972 there was no better job in Ireland. Jury’s was an example to everybody of how a hotel should be run, so it is difficult to find a better job.

141. MM: It is interesting that most of the people teaching here in Cathal Brugha Street trained either in the Intercontinental Hotel or Jury’s around that time. That was the Four Seasons of the day.

142. MD: I believe that those guys who are teaching here today learned a lot from me that they would not have the chance to learn today in a big hotel.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Jean-Jacques Caillabet in Les Frères Jacques (7/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Jean-Jacques Caillabet (JJ)

1. MM: So where and when were you born?

2. JJ: I was born on the 9th August 1946 in a small well-known seaside resort in Brittany called La Baule, which was a quite up-market resort, which is busy from Easter to late August.

3. MM: How many were in the family?

4. JJ: There were six in the family, I was the last, the baby, four sisters and one brother.

5. MM: Was there any catering in your family?

6. JJ: There was no catering in the family as such, but although it sounds a bit of a cliché, my mother was the biggest influence on me in cuisine, She was a very good cuisinière rather than a chef, very knowledgeable and very creative, I remember shopping in the market with her from a very young age, it sounds clichéd but it is true, she had a pile of recipes that she tore out of magazines and she loved to entertain at weekends, so there was strong mother influence in what happened in my later stage of life.

7. MM: What did your father do?

8. JJ: My father had a small factory manufacturing yoghurt in that region.

9. MM: So there was some food in your family (laugh).

10. JJ: Oh, yes there was food, but that region was severely hit by the war in 1944 because very near La Baule was St. Nazaire, right on the estuary of the Loire, that was a U-boat station, and there is still a massive submarine base there. After the liberation of Normandy, the Germans retreated into pockets and they were that region and so the Americans came and bombed everything and St. Nazaire was erased completely. My parents had been living there and before he manufactured yoghurt he was managing a cheese wholesale and retail shop, but it was bombed completely and they had to leave, restructure their lives and became farmers during the occupation and from there they had a herd of cows and they made the yoghurt from the milk. So that was the link with the food.

11. MM: When did you get started with the food business? I take it you went to the local primary school, how about the secondary school?

12. JJ: I was meant to be in the industrie de bouche, I wanted to be a vet. But circumstance, money, various factors, probably intellect as well meant that I went into catering but at quite a late age really, I was twenty and I went to Paris to start at the very bottom.

13. MM: Plongeur! (laugh)

14. JJ: Plongeur, yes, commis de bas: what they call in England a ‘busboy’, and that is how I started in catering.

15. MM: Where in Paris did you start as a busboy?

16. JJ: In a restaurant on the Champs Elysée called the ‘Drugstore’, It was a big company and they had five units, three on the Champs Elysée and another one in St.Germain, and one at La
Defence. It was owned and operated by an advertising company called Publicis. The reason I got there was because my brother who was older than me was the director of one of the units there. He was running a unit in the middle of the Champs Elysée called the Pub Renault because it was a Renault showroom and he was managing that unit, and the décor was all into cars, it is disappeared now. So that was very valuable experience as a young apprentice, and my advantage was I had further education so I possessed English quite well at that time and languages were my strong point, English and Spanish, so I kind of moved on and after that I went to the Eiffel Tower.

17. MM: Just before we go the Eiffel Tower, can I bring you back to education. You said you had third level education, did you study languages in University?

18. JJ: I did the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate, the Baccalaureate, so obviously you have languages as the curriculum and I had Spanish and English and I had a strong tie with English speaking people and I went a couple of times to England, I found I had a facility for languages but I didn’t study languages as such.

19. MM: So you moved on the Tour Eiffel?

20. JJ: At the time at the Tour Eiffel you had on the first floor was a gastronomic restaurant which was a very old institution with the chef there for years and years, I don’t remember his name, but a very classic gastronomic restaurant and they had an absolutely extraordinary cellars that was on the other side of the Seine in a kind of a cave or basement, and it was an absolute Aladdin’s Cave, so I stayed there in the gastronomic restaurant for a while. There was different types of restaurant in the Tour Eiffel, on the second floor, there was a kind of a Brasserie, and another restaurant which was a bit more up-market, and now I think they have moved the gastronomic restaurant to the second floor and they had nothing on the third floor because it was too small, so they had obviously different markets under the same roof.

21. MM: So you were working there, were you always front of house?

22. JJ: I was always front of house, I started as a commis, and ended up as a kind of commis de suite, a sort of waiter, but in these old brigades you had such structure and hierarchy that you could be a commis or commis de suite and then you might verge to become an assistant waiter, and it is very interesting now because it hardly exists now. In those days staff were not as expensive as now, it was very interesting from the cover on the table to the maitre d’hotel, to the sommelier. I got a very good experience there and then I went to the army.

23. MM: When you were there, I take it was all silver service at the time?

24. JJ: Absolutely, all silver service, a lot of Gueridon work, then even the salad, something as simple as a salad, the vinaigrette was made at the table to the request of the client. All the carving was done at the table, you know, the duck, all the meats, the Côte de Boeuf, the canard à la (inaudible) and all the flambé as well.

25. MM: Would there have been an hors d’oeuvres trolley and a sweet trolley as well?

26. JJ: Oh, there was a sweet trolley, but there was an à la carte as well, because you had full choice because of the flambé dishes in the dessert and you obviously had a guy who would do the carving at the table, they were carving the parma ham and the salmon at the table meaning the team there was at the time and as I was saying the commis de suite, there was a huge kitchen underneath the restaurant, and as a commis de suite you collected the dishes, and if there was a sauce with it, you were going to the saucier, the entremetier, the garde manger, to the various. I don’t think now there are many places where young people can experience that kind of work, it is much more simplified, even in the Michelin star places, there is still a bit of that but not as much.

27. MM: So this is around 1967 or so?
28. **JJ:** Yes, I went to the army in 1968 so I had about four year before that.

29. **MM:** 1968 was a very big year in France?

30. **JJ:** ’68 was a very big year because we had our mini revolution, and again because I was in catering, you did eighteen months in those days, but there was three months they called ‘the class’ which really was three months of initiation to be a soldier, to have your vaccination and to have your blood taken for the good of the nation, very good source of blood donors – you were an automatic volunteer (laugh), and then after three months you would be dispatched to your final stay of your army time, but because I was in catering, a lot of the young catering lads were sent in Paris itself preferably as waiter or chefs for the mess of the generals or whatever, but I ended up being a driver for the mess of the army ministry which was right in the centre of Paris. And my function as a driver was to go the market in *Les Halles* in the centre of Paris and I was driving a kind of van, Citroen van, and I was going with the officer that was in charge of the mess, kind of canteen for officers, and I would go with him to the market and collect everything and bring it back to the kitchens. So that was very lucky for me because I had a kind of civilian regime as such, because I was not sleeping in the barracks, I just had to be in at 7am and at 5pm I had a civil servant regime, meaning I could work in the evening.

31. In the evening I was working in a restaurant in *L’Ille de la Cité* to kind of get a bit more money than the army were providing. That was an interesting experience because in *Les Halles* at the time the market was still there before moving out to *Rungis* sometime in the ’70s. So that was a very good experience, obviously they were trying to exploit guys who were chefs or guys who were waiters and I was lucky to end up as a driver of vegetables not a driver of an officer which means picking up the kids from school (laugh) and doing the shopping, and that I could work a night in the restaurant.

32. **MM:** This restaurant you worked in, what kind was it?

33. **JJ:** It was a kind of themed restaurant; it was called the *Sargent Recruteur*.

34. **MM:** Very good, the recruiting sergeant and you in the army at the time! (laugh)

35. **JJ:** It was a kind of theme restaurant, when you came in you sat at a table and two baskets came to the table, one containing cruditees and the other one containing saucison of all kinds, brought to the table would be bread and cornichons and that was how you were welcomed. It was a kind of a meat restaurant, nothing gastronomic but good and honest, so that was what I did to make more money, and obviously ’68 happened and that was a turbulent time, particularly if you were in the army, all the leave was stopped, because they wanted to see as little soldiers in the street as possible, but as you know, when you are in the army you belong to the army, you don’t belong to any political, you are not allowed to voice an opinion, perhaps that has changed? But as it were, I had *couchage exterior* which meant I could sleep outside. But I remember living outside of Paris and driving after work and you had constant control of the road with checkpoints with machine guns and it was quite hot. So that was interesting, so that was finished and I decided to start my solo career, and become a restaurateur in my own right. In retrospect, it was too early, still so I was twenty five when I took my first business which was a *Gérance Libre* which is a free letting of a fully equipped restaurant and it was a small hotel, a *pension famille*, in a ski resort just above *Megève*, in a small village of about 380 inhabitants which would grow to much more than that during the ski season, but basically it was called *Crest Volant* just beside *Notre Dame de Bellecombe* about 10km from *Megève* which is one of the oldest ski resorts in the Alps. That hotel was a twenty five bedroom hotel with a restaurant and a bar, and I took it over with my wife to be, we got married actually in that resort.

36. **MM:** And your wife’s name?
37. **JJ:** My wife’s name is Susan, she is an English lady, but we are divorced now.

38. **MM:** How did you hook up with an English lady? Of course you had been to England?

39. **JJ:** I had been to England but I didn’t meet her there, she came to France as a babysitter for my brother with whom I was living in Paris and she was eighteen years of age. So we took that business for the winter, it went quite well, I had a chef in the kitchen, obviously to answer your earlier question I was always in the front of house but I have a very tight relationship with my kitchen, always got my kitchen to work with me, not the other way around, but just as respect for a trained chef, I always say I am a cook but I understand very well what is going on. I had a few occasions to go in there, not by choice, but I had to, so I am very close to the food side of a restaurant. So anyway we took that business and we did the summer season as well and we did the next winter season as well. After that, during the second winter season we met an English couple from Manchester, and he was in the fish wholesale business and the connection came from the fact that my wife to be, her parents had a fish and poultry retail shop in Moss Side, Manchester, and they came to stay with us the second winter we had the business and enjoyed themselves very much and became friendly. We finished that second season and then we went back to La Baule, my birthplace where I opened a restaurant in partnership just between La Baule and Guérande. Guérande is a very well-known because it is a fortified city, a bit like Carcassonne. We opened a restaurant which was called Le Triangle, and that was with a friend of mine and he was quite older than me and he wanted to open a restaurant and it was between seasons and I didn’t know what to do, so we opened that restaurant from scratch, he had a premises there and we named it after the triangle that is used in the west to call people to eat. So we created a restaurant which was quite nice, the idea was we built a big chimney in the room where we were doing a lot of grillade, there was a big chimney with a grill, a small kitchen with the work top and refrigeration underneath. Obviously it was a restricted menu but we were doing grilled fish and grilled meat, some small starters, but again it was a seasonal business, a summer business, and like all seasonal businesses whether they are in the mountains or the seaside, if the weather is bad the people moan and groan and leave. Seasonal business are no good.

40. At that point and time, the couple from Manchester approached us to open a restaurant in partnership and that is how we moved to Manchester where we spent eleven years.

41. **MM:** What was the name of the restaurant in Manchester?

42. **JJ:** Well I had two restaurants in Manchester. The first restaurant was called La Marmite, named after the soup cauldron, and that was a basement restaurant, quite a nice restaurant in its day, I had a French chef, always a French team. I was doing a lot of fish, I always had a lot of fish on my menu, and we stayed there for five years and the reason for that, I discovered later, at the time my English was good but not technical, my partner had taken a five year lease that was not renewable. La Marmite was on Faulkner Street just off Princess Street in the city centre. The building above us was unoccupied and belonged to the Post Office and after five years they kicked us out. Interestingly enough, Patrick Guilbaud was my head waiter for nearly four years down there. He won’t say that (laugh). Don’t tell him I said that.

43. **MM:** I’m talking to him next week. I’ll let him mention it.

44. **JJ:** He actually got married in my restaurant; we know each other quite well. La Marmite actually closed and Patrick opened his own restaurant in Alderley-Edge in Cheshire. So after that I took over a restaurant / casino which was just around the corner from us and I called L’Elysée and that restaurant was at street level with the casino underneath and it was a strong casino which was owned by a French gentleman who was in the gaming business and he owned another casino in Blackpool and in the South of France. He decided at the time to compliment his casino by running a very up-market restaurant, which was very up-market but he was not a restaurateur and he used to come to La Marmite and he as very fanatical about eating fish at the time, Lobster, his name was Mr. Emil Simplici. His favourite dish was Homard à la Nage and I got to know him quite
well. At the time his restaurant was the top of the top, but his restaurant did not go well because many of the gambling clients were eating for free etc.

45. Anyway, he was unhappy, and my lease was running out and I arranged to take over the lease on his restaurant and re-named it L’Elysée. It was about 5,000 square feet, with a grill nearly in the room, a big kitchen, it was a dream but sort of outside of my means. There was a dance floor with a DJ so it went quite good for the first two years and then England came into a recession and we had a lot of business accounts which just died.

46. MM: What year is this now?

47. JJ: That would be, let’s see, 1975 or so.

48. MM: So the recession came around 1977, the casino was still running downstairs but you were not giving free meals to the customers? It wasn’t like Vegas? (laugh)

49. JJ: Yes, (laugh), no (free meals), and then this is when the Irish times came about. When we were in Manchester we bought a labourer’s thatched cottage near Ballycotton (Co, Cork). Just to situate you the time, you had here a major strike, no transport, no petrol – the end of the ‘70s, and the reason why I recall very well, my wife saw an add in the paper for a cottage for sale at auction and the auction was in a hotel on the mall (the Imperial), so I rang the agent and we flew to see it and visitors had coupons to get petrol and we arrived, met the agent, loved the cottage and I flew back the following week for the auction. There were brochures on every chair but nobody else there on the day of the auction, so the auctioneer arrived and said the wrong day was advertised in the paper, so I bought the cottage anyway. That was my first foot hold in Ireland.

50. MM: Had you been to Ireland before?

51. JJ: I had been to Ireland once on my motorcycle; I’m a biker, so I had been here once for a weekend. In the meantime my business in L’Elysée was falling and we had met again connected to my wife’s family one of the directors of a development company in Cork called Power Securities and he was the director of a really up coming company which was mainly in Cork. We were invited to come and visit their latest development which was in the Queens Old Castle in Cork and what they were doing mostly was developing shopping centers. So we made a deal to take a unit there on the first floor to open a restaurant which was named the Café de Paris. My brother helped me financially to open that. That went quite well as well as that beginning, but never reached any great…, I think we were ahead of our time in Cork. At the time it was the Oyster Tavern, there were a few restaurant but not in the same market, what we were doing was a typical French Brasserie, again doing a lot of fish, we had a big mobile blackboard that we bought in a convent that was closing, we had two or three blackboards with the specialties written on them. It was a very nice place, anyway, I still have customers coming here today that started in Cork. So that started not to go to well at all and in the meantime Power Securities took over the Galleria in Stephen’s Green in Dublin, just at the corner of Grafton Street, do you know it there?

52. MM: I know it, and the Café de Paris was there, so that was you?

53. JJ: So what happened is they approached me to open another Café de Paris is Dublin, now they knew my situation, the reason we were not doing the business in Cork was not my mismanagement or mis-knowledge or that, it was just the market wasn’t ready and the shopping center overheads was quite serious in those days. So I said, ‘ok, I’ll open in Dublin, but I have no money, and not only that I have no money but what I had is going down the tube in Cork’ so I said ‘I will need a loan and I will open’. So they got me a £20,000 unsecured loan from Bank of Ireland and we opened the Café de Paris here.

54. MM: Do you remember what year Café de Paris opened?
Café de Paris opened in late 1982, I opened here (Les Frères Jacques) in 1986 and I sold Café de Paris, sold the lease. So we ran that for about three or four years.

So how big was Café de Paris, how many seats?

120 seats.

Wow, I recall there was a guy, Gerry Reddigan who worked there?

Yeah, Gerry worked with us, my chef was Spanish at the time, he had been the chef in Lovett’s in Cork and he had worked in Arbutus Lodge as well and he came to Café de Paris in Cork from Lovett’s and then he came to Dublin with me.

Do you remember his name by any chance?

Yes, Manuel Las Heras. I know his name quite well because he divorced and his wife is now my partner (laugh).

You have good reason then to know his name (laugh). So this was a big undertaking with 120 seats?

Café de Paris in Cork was the same size, it was the Brasserie type table so you could pack them in, because you had to meet the overheads. The overheads here in Dublin was quite high at the time, I think I was paying £40,000 a year plus service charge and that was back in 1983, I think we were a bit ahead of our time in Dublin as well, when you see what has happened since, you know. So a guy bought it and I think he ran it for nine months or so.

So you ran it for three and a half years or so, what was happening in Dublin at that time, in the early ‘80s, was Whites on the Green there yet?

No, not quite, that came a little later, I knew Michael Clifford quite well, who was the chef there, he’s dead now. It was just about to open when we closed.

What was your main competition at the time?

The main competition was the likes of these big restaurants in Dawson Street at the time, Café Klara was not open yet nor was the Fitz’s Café, no there wasn’t an awful lot at the time.

I’m just thinking what was there in the early ‘80s, the Soup Bowl was there, Snaffles, Celtic Mews was there, The Lord Edward, was the Grey Door opened?

Yes the Celtic Mews and the Grey Door, and the Lord Edward had been open for a long time, and Dobbin’s had been open for a while as well. There was a few, but not in our style, there was not a lot in our style.

That’s right because at that time you had places like Captain America’s opening and I think Casper and Gambini’s was open in Wicklow Street where the old Wicklow Hotel had been. And you had the Berni Inn where Jammet’s had been. Solomon Grundy’s was there as well wasn’t it?

Yes indeed, that’s right the Berni Inn was there, but interestingly enough it was all on this side of the city (around Grafton Street), there was nothing on the other side of the river, you know.

Yes, that’s right; they were all on the south side of the city. The Bad Ass Café had opened as well in Temple Bar but you were aiming higher than that, but lower than the Coq Hardi or that.
73. **JJ:** Yes we the kind of little up-market brasserie with the fresh, the same formula as Cork, we had the big blackboard that would be wheeled to your table and I was doing a lot of fish. I was buying my fish in Union Hall in Cork, I was driving every week with my fish from Cork and that again was an interesting time. So we sold again in 1986.

74. **MM:** Again you feel that the market wasn’t there; you were ahead of your time. When you think about it, it is that kind of restaurant that is doing very well at the moment when you think of the likes of l’Guelleton or Venu.

75. **JJ:** Yes, Brasserie Sixty-Six and Fallon & Byrne and that.

76. **MM:** Do you remember your staff there, you had Manuel and Gerry Rettigan, who was your managers?

77. **JJ:** Yes, Gerry was my second chef. I had actually three managers in the room because we were open obviously all God’s hours to meet the overheads before we could meet any profit. I had a Spanish guy, Francisco, who worked for a long time after that in the Westbury Hotel. There was
a young German guy, Horst, I can’t remember either of their surnames, and I had a French guy
called Phillipe Missichi.

78. **MM:** Ah, yeah, he went on to open a restaurant?

79. **JJ:** He opened a restaurant in Harcourt Street called *La Mistral*. He came and worked here
 (*Les Frères Jacques*) after and went on to have a colourfial career.

80. **MM:** Gerry Reddigan opened a restaurant in Harcourt Street as well called Stokers, didn’t he?

81. **JJ:** In my head chefs I didn’t have a lot of movement in my head chefs in the Galleria. 
Manuel was my head chef and Mano was more a classical chef. He was an excellent chef trained 
in Spain from a father who was a chef as well, I never met the father but on all accounts, he was an 
excellent chef as well. Mano was very talented, but obviously his personality was very introverted, 
he stayed in his kitchen. So he came here when we opened up in 1986.

82. **MM:** Those years you are talking about from 1983 to 1986 must have been some of the worst 
years of the Irish economy, because I remember leaving school in 1986 and it was just depressing. 
Everyone was emigrating and the taxes were so high, it must have been tough, yeah, how did you 
finish there and come here, was there a break?

83. **JJ:** It was tough, I knew I was selling, I knew I had a buyer so I started looking for premises, 
and really the idea was away from big place, big rent, big overheads, and to go back to my original 
training which was a bit more up-market. So I looked for suitable premises where the overheads 
would not be too big and the location was not that important because I had in mind to created 
something where people would want to come irrespectively of the location where, within certain 
limits, obviously. So I started prospecting and that is how I came to Dame Street. I think I saw the 
place being advertised and we came here.

84. **MM:** What was here before you?

85. **JJ:** It was a restaurant, it was a small restaurant, and it had a mezzanine situation like this but 
structurally completely different.

86. **MM:** Do you know what it was called?

87. **JJ:** It was two partners and one of them was Greek or something, Cypriot or something, and 
an Irish guy I still see sometimes, but it is too vague. It was restaurant though. So I found that and 
the rent was £10,000 compared to £40,000 plus expenses in the other place, so obviously the 
budget was tight because I sold *Café de Paris*.

88. **MM:** Who bought *Café de Paris* from you?

89. **JJ:** Danny Fox, a guy called Danny Fox, he was a haulier, in the haulage business. His chef 
was his brother, James Fox, who started to work in the big place on Dawson Street later, *La 
Stampa*.

90. So that is how I bought this place, obviously we were on a shoestring budget, Cork had gone 
down, I still had debt to repay, I sold *Café de Paris* here, I did not sell, I was bought. I realised it 
was too difficult to run, anyway with a small budget we had and we found here and we opened in 
Easter of 1986.

91. **MM:** I’m just thinking of the name of the restaurant, was your brother still financially involved 
here?
92. **JJ:** No, not at all. It was actually my ex-wife that came up with the name. When at first we were searching for a name for it we had three criteria to follow: first it had to be very French, it could not be mistaken for another nationality; the second one was that it had to be catchy, easy to remember; and thirdly, easy to pronounce, so that is where we chose *Les Frère Jacques*. So obviously the identity was clear, we all learn the song at school even in English speaking countries.

![Menu Cover from Les Fréres Jacques](image)

**Figure JJ.2: Menu Cover from Les Fréres Jacques**

93. **MM:** So when you opened up, Manuel came as your head chef, and Phillipe Misisichi came as your manager, how did things go?

94. **JJ:** Well things went very slow, there were two chefs in the kitchen, Mano had an apprentice, he was a French guy, a young commis, I don’t remember his name. I remember his face very well, an obviously it went quite slow because as you know Dame Street in 1986 was not particularly up-market, it is still not up-market despite the Temple Bar *Quartier Latin, Rive Gauche*. It was mostly Chinese restaurants, Kingsland and Fan’s, and Italian restaurants like Nico’s that has been there for years and has not changed at all, it is amazing. And obviously we had no working capital, so it was really shoestring and progressively it started. I’ll always remember we were not able to buy cigars for the customers, not loan from the bank or whatever.

95. **MM:** And where were you living at this stage?

96. **JJ:** I was living in rented accommodation in Scholarstown Road – very posh. What happened is that we developed a bit and the landlord at the time approached me to see if I would buy the building so that was in 1986 and the building at the time was £110,000. An obviously with my string of misadventures I was quite slow, but eventually I took the plunge, and then he had the
building next door and he offered it to me but I said that it would be too much for me, but little do you know – unless you have a speculative mind, which I didn’t. And then we grew the business and our team in the kitchen grew, I had three Irish head chefs here.

97. MM: Do you remember who they are?

98. JJ: Yes of course, the last one was Darragh Kavanagh, then John Dunne and Michael Rath.

99. MM: Maybe if we take it chronologically, you started with Manuel and a French commis, how long did he stay with you?

100. JJ: About four years, and then came John Dunne who had worked with Burton Race in *L’Ortolon*. Michael Rath had worked here with John Dunne, but John only stayed a year here, I think he was very stressed after Burton Race. We stayed friends but he left a bit strange.

101. MM: Did he go out to Morel’s then?

102. JJ: I think so. (note: John Dunne went from *Les Frères Jacques* to Colin O’Daly in the Park, Blackrock, and then out to Morel’s, when Colin went bankrupt) So, next came Eric Tydgad (who is Belgian) who spent about three years here. (note: Eric left to open *La Mère Zou* in Stephen’s Green in 1994). (note: I think Michael Rath must have come after Eric for a few years as head chef) Then after him came a French guy called Nicolas Boutin who spent with me I think another four years, we will have to add up the years, and he left to open the *Maison de Gourmet* in partnership with Olivier, I think they are out of it now, Guilbaud was involved, but I think they have their own bakery now. Nicolas stayed with me for four years and opened that and then he went off to the St. James near Bordeaux as a *sous chef*, they had a Michelin star there. After that he went to some Caribbean hotel and two years ago, actually, I went to meet him for a holiday in Hong Kong, where he was with the Mandarin Group. He is still with the Mandarin Group, but he took a position of executive chef in Boston. Then I had another Irish guy called Darragh Kavanagh.

103. MM: Where did he train?

104. JJ: Darragh trained in France, fluent French speaking, Spanish mother, Irish father, very talented chef, he started well but not a very good finish – a difficult character, but very talented chef. He took a position in Jacobs Ladder but then went back to Valencia in Spain. For the last four years we have had Richard Reau, whose French from the Paris region, married to an Irish lady who prospected the position for him here, she wanted to move home, obviously when Kavanagh left, Richard took over.

105. Otherwise in the kitchen, I have the head chef, second chef, *chef de partie*, commis and *patissier*. At the moment they are all French, I’ve had Irish lads as well.

106. MM: I suppose you have never had problems employing French chefs because of the European Union, in terms of work permits. Since I am writing about a hundred years, there was a time when work permits were an issue, but not since the EU. Tell me about your managers here?

107. JJ: Well my managers, when Phillipe left, Sylvain Vallier, my actual manager now has been eighteen years with me now, he worked in Guilbaud’s and came here then. Yvan Benezech has been with me for five years, and my sommelier Michael Riedel has been with me for ten years. A very steady team.

108. MM: That is a great name for a sommelier, Riedel, like the wine glasses. How has your food changed in the last twenty years?
I don’t it has changed that much, because I have set style of cuisine that I have stayed very faithful too, because I think we are very French and I wanted to stay that way so that when people come here they found what they were looking for, we are very French, fairly classical and conservative type of cuisine. I like very distinctive cuisine. I don’t like too much the modern style of, you know, building up presentation, I’m not too keen either on the mixing of different ingredients from various countries, but we would be quite modern as well, as much as we can, but really we are classical, really sauces, but what have we changed, the sauces are a bit lighter. But otherwise I don’t think we have changed that much, we always did a fair bit of seafood and fish, which is in a matter of fact about 70% of our sales, I think we are known for that as well: shellfish, lobsters, we always have a very good selection of fish so we kept that very much alive. I love to see the guys work with fish, and I love to sell fish, and obviously the product we have here (in Ireland) is so fantastic so why not use it? I think I always looked at my chefs, even with the Irish lads, they were really within that line of cuisine.

The French classical training as such?

Yes, and that was very interesting because they obviously loved the type of cuisine and I like my chefs to express themselves at every level, when we do menus I say well what did you learn where you come from, and anything interesting I like to pick out, even one thing in six months, and so I think we have stayed pretty faithful to what we set to be and to do.

From the time you opened up, has it always been plate service or did you do sole on the bone with the Gueridon?

No not at all, the only thing we do is Sole is served off the bone all the time but it is done in the kitchen. The other thing we do is Crepes Flambé but is very restricted, we don’t have the space even for a trolley of cheese, because we have a very good selection of cheese which is again
within our identity and it is a loss making venture. We don’t have the space to do any Gueridon work, if we do a Côte de Boeuf, for example, we present it to the table but carve it in the kitchen.

114.MM: Have you had any women working for you in the kitchen?

115.JJ: Yes, I have one at the moment, a French girl, yes, I have had a French pastry girl who worked with us for a while, who was actually a friend of Eric Tydgad, that’s how she came here. She opened a Patisserie in Marseille or some city in the South of France. A very good girl, I’ve had a few, not many, but I’ve had a few. And again because they were not available when I was looking rather than anything else.

116.MM: It wasn’t a sexist thing?

117.JJ: No, absolutely not, I’m very open as well as with my chef, I also say that talent has no nationality, if you are talented in what you do, what is important is where you learn and how you developed. If you have the talent, you are a talented person and that is it. Obviously the Irish guys that were here responsible for the kitchen had a very strong French training, I’m not saying it is the best, but for what I’m doing it is important. If an Irish guy comes here for the position of head chef, I want to know precisely where he trained before, now it could be here or in England but with people that I would recognise as talented chefs, you know.

118.MM: You are here twenty one years, have you noticed changes in your customers or in their eating habits or things like that?

119.JJ: Oh, yes, for sure, to take something that comes quick to my mind, take foie gras. Now, foie gras is well accepted and well known and well tasted by Irish people, but go back ten or fifteen years ago and it was different. Obviously people travel much more, because they have the means to begin with, and they have experienced more cuisines, and they are more knowledgeable and that is it. They can afford to eat in good restaurants, and can afford to travel and eat in good restaurants abroad, and I think that it has broadened up a lot, but there are still barriers that you will not pass, if you start dealing with strange offal, you know strange things that are absolutely delicious but would have to give almost free for people to try it, but definitely there is very big change which explains the diversity of ethnic restaurants we have in Dublin. For a small capital city, it’s extraordinary the amount there are and since they are open and trade, there must be a demand. Definitely people have become much more knowledgeable, when you look at the food programmes and the wine programmes, you know and everybody wants to become a food critic (laugh) so it has become part now of the culture and the social way to behave. Someone told me the other day to illustrate that, years back if you were having a date with a new girlfriend, you would meet her in a pub with a pint and a bag of crisps. Now you take her out to a restaurant, according to your means, but it is interesting how things have changed.

120.MM: It’s true. Would you consider yourself to be an haute cuisine restaurant?

121.JJ: No, (pause), No, (pause), I’m searching for the right description, maybe we are a bit gourmet classic, maybe I’m a bit modest, I don’t like to blow my own trumpet, I let people decide for themselves, we are on the edge of gastronomy, but in a simple and very truthful way, a very genuine way, you know. What you have is there, it is fresh and authentic, it is well prepared, there is no fancy footprint in creating the type of cuisine that we do. I believe that simplicity in what a chef is going to produce is very important. That is the way I like it. I dine here and eat here quite often with friends.

122.Once a month we do a lunch with my wine merchant Paddy Kehoe from Wines Direct, and he will bring wines, particularly if he’s been abroad and he has brought back wines, he will do a lecture. It is no big headache, but interesting and relaxed, and I devise a menu with my chefs around the wine or vice versa, Paddy may say ‘what are you putting on?’ , so we do that once a month and I watch my chefs, because if I give them carte blanche, I don’t want them to be too fancy.
123. **MM:** Who do you see as the leaders of *haute cuisine* in Dublin over the last twenty years?

124. **JJ:** Well definitely Guilbaud has a very strong responsibility for bringing a new dimension of dining, whether it is in the cosmetic side of the restaurant, the décor and that, as well as in the cuisine. Definitely he has been a beacon for a lot of restaurants who try and imitate him, and try to do what he was doing. He is in a very special up-market niche and there is a lot of special etiquette attached to dining in Guilbaud’s. You don’t say ‘I was dining in Guilbaud’s last Saturday’ without being labeled as what, what, what. That’s part of what food has become, part of the social status, I suppose.

125. I think John Howard, I would regard him as an initiator of good rich gourmet cuisine, Ernies’s in his time as well, a very good restaurant. But now it has diversified so much and there is so many people trying to get a share of the eating out market, that the punters expect variety and they get it. We are obviously in the upper end of the market. We have customers who come here and they go everywhere, Guilbaud’s, Thornton’s and people here comment on that. I think people go to restaurants for specific reasons and specific occasions, so they move around, when they have the
means and money to gravitate among the gastronomic restaurants, they go around and pick their
venue according to who and what occasion and according to their mood.

Discussion on newspaper clippings, menus, photos that he gave me to look at and his policy of
not serving well known food critics, because he says he has been here twenty years and his
regular customers are his best critics.

126.MM: Thanks very much Jean-Jacques for your time.

127.JJ: Not at all, it is good fun, you know.

Figure JJ.5: Brochure for Les Frères Jacques

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Patrick Guilbaud in Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud (20/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Patrick Guilbaud (PG)

1. MM: So Patrick, When and where were you born?

2. PG: I was born in Suresnes on the outskirts of Paris but my family comes from Brittany, Brest my mother, Cognac, my father. I consider myself more a mixture of Breton and Cognac, but I only lived in Paris for ten years of so. I was born in 1952 (22 March) but my family moved then to Normandy, to Brest and then to Cognac, we moved around.

3. MM: How many was in the family?

4. PG: Chantalle, Issobel, Brigitte, four sisters and I, five in all and I was the second eldest

5. MM: What did your parents do?

6. PG: My father was an engineer in a company called Ferodo working with bricks or construction. My mother’s family were in the restaurant business in Brest. She had always been involved, indirectly speaking, in the business.

7. MM: Did you do your schooling in Paris?

8. PG: I did my schooling in a place called Le Vallois in 1967 to 1969 when I was around fifteen, it was an aviation school. The story is that my mother and father divorced and since I was the only boy I had to stay with my dad and my sisters went to my mum. So when I finished school at fourteen I wanted to go to catering school but my father said absolutely not, you’ll go and follow my footsteps and go to engineering school. That was not very successful (laugh).

9. MM: But you did want to go to catering school?

10. PG: Oh yes, of course, I wanted to stay in the trade, you know.

11. MM: Had you experience of it during the summers in your mother’s

12. PG: We worked part time in families business, we used to help with the potatoes, clean the glasses, whatever had to be done, each summer. I never managed to go to catering school in the end because I was too old, so I decided to go to an apprenticeship in a restaurant in Paris called Ledoyen (2 or 3 star Michelin) in the kitchen around 1969-70. Then I went to the British Embassy in Paris, and I worked with Christopher Soames.

13. MM: How long did you stay in Ledoyen?

14. PG: I think I stayed the best part of eighteen months, the name of the proprietor was Lejeune, the chef I can’t recall his name although I met him about two years ago in Paris. In that job the ‘piano’(the solid top range) was operated by coal, but things changed very quickly after that.

15. MM: How did you get the job in the British Embassy?

16. PG: When I was doing my military service, they realised I was a chef and the Elysee Paris all the chefs go there to serve, and the guy said I can find you a place in the British Embassy if you like, and I said ‘fine, I’ll do that, no problem at all’.

17. MM: Was this part of your military service?
18. **PG:** No it wasn’t. I only did a week of military service because I was sick and the military said that I was exempt so I did a week or three months, some very short period anyway, and then I started in the British Embassy as a helper. There is no grade in the Embassy, you do everything, the front of house, the kitchen, the washing up, everything.

19. **MM:** Were you on your own?

20. **PG:** No there was a big staff there, about ten, to do breakfast, dinner, parties when they had parties, do the floor – actually it is a very good thing to learn how to do, to dress, it is a completely different thing to do than the restaurant business. You receive the president of the French Republic, the Minister of England, it is like Buckingham Palace with a lot of protocol – how to serve them, it is very interesting. You are a ‘valet de pied’ and you do everything from the cooking to the floor. You did not do the bed, that is the only thing we didn’t do.

21. **MM:** ‘Valet de pied’, that would be a footman? How long did you stay there?

22. **PG:** Yes a footman, I stayed there about a year or so and from there I went to Munich, Germany, in the Hotel Morzet. I wanted to learn German, which I didn’t do (laugh), I went there to do open a new restaurant. I stayed in Germany for about a year, around six months in Munich and then six months in Berlin, where I did all kinds of stuff, I was wild (laugh) I can’t remember half of it – I came back with no money (laugh).

23. **MM:** We all need those experiences (laugh), so what was your next step?

24. **PG:** Going back to Paris, I went to work in a restaurant called La Maree with Mr. Trompier, it was a very famous fish restaurant in Paris and I worked there for another year or eighteen months. I worked in the kitchen there and then I moved to the Midland Hotel in Manchester. I think that is what I did, did I work anywhere else?

25. **MM:** Well that would have you coming to Manchester in 1974 or so. What was the link with Manchester?

26. **PG:** Yes that is right, the British Embassy was the link with Manchester, they had asked me if I wanted to go to England to learn English that they would make arrangements. I can’t remember the name of the fellow who was head of the ‘valets de pied’.

27. **MM:** Was the Midland Hotel part of the railways?

28. **PG:** Yes, absolutely right, it was. ‘You know your things’. I stayed in the Midland Hotel where I worked in the kitchen of the French Room which was the quality restaurant there, and there was so many people in the kitchens and the problem they had, which I discover with most hotels is really you cannot mix a good restaurant with a hotel, you just can’t do it. Impossible to do, you have to do breakfast, parties and things, different *mis en place*, you can’t monitor the quality. You can monitor some of it but not all of it. There was so many people, I only met the chef once there.

29. **MM:** Were you a *chef de partie* there?

30. **PG:** Yes, a *chef de partie*.

31. **MM:** It must be hard to be motivated in a place like that?

32. **PG:** Yes, so I moved from there after about eighteen months and moved to a restaurant called La Marmite in Manchester which I became the manager. It was a small French restaurant in Manchester.
33. **MM:** I was talking to Jean-Jacques (Caillabet), was that his restaurant at the time?

34. **PG:** Yes I worked for him there, I was his manager.

35. **MM:** This was your first front of house position in a restaurant, did you prefer being outside over the kitchen?

36. **PG:** It was very difficult for me to start with, because obviously I did not say to Jean-Jacques that I was a chef to start with, because I just wanted to try the front of house to see how it was, but it was a different world. It is difficult to move to the front when you work at the back of the kitchen. It is actually easier in the kitchen sometimes than the front of the house, I tell you, because some of the customers don’t have a clue, but it was a great experience for me. I learn an awful lot how to deal with difficult situations and then when you go back into the kitchen you realize sometime you have to (hold your tongue). I could understand the frustration of the chef, but it was a very interesting situation for me.

37. **MM:** You were there for about a year and a half or so?

38. **PG:** Yes, that was ’74, maybe around two years, I think I did well for him.

39. **MM:** I think he moved into a bigger restaurant after that, with a casino attached?

40. **PG:** Yes, you are correct, it was called *L’Elysée*, which I didn’t want to move into so after that I opened my own restaurant called Le Rabelais in Alderley Edge and I stayed there from 1977 to 1980. Alderley Edge was in Cheshire near Nantwich and Winslow, it is where all the big stars from Manchester United lived – the Martin Edwards and those people. ICI was there. I went back into the kitchen, back cooking, and my wife Sally took over the front of the house, and we did well, we kept it for three or so years.

41. **MM:** And where is Sally from? Where did you meet her?

42. **PG:** She’s Welsh, I met her when I was in the Midland Hotel, she worked for a company called Mary Quant (clothing and make up company). When we opened Le Rabelais, it was a very small operation; it was me in the kitchen, Sally in the front of house and with two waiters and a barman. I was on my own with a *commis* in the kitchen to start with and then we grow as business got better.

43. **MM:** How many seats?

44. **PG:** Funny enough I was thinking about that a couple of weeks ago, if I recall we had about fourteen tables of four, so fifty two seats, and at the weekend we used to do about one hundred and twenty so we turned the tables over a few times.

45. **MM:** So it was more like a Brasserie than trying to do *haute cuisin*?

46. **PG:** Yes, absolutely, I never tried to do anything to (fancy). It was a starting restaurant for us.

47. **MM:** Your next step after that was to come to Ireland, how did that happen? Why did you pick Ireland? What was the influence?

48. **PG:** It is very interesting, we had a customer called Barton Kilcoyne, who used to come to my restaurant in Alderley Edge, and Barton for some reason had a building business in Cheshire and when he came to the restaurant, he used to sign the bill. Because my restaurant was a small and we never had customers signing the bill, I asked my wife why the hell is this person signing the bill for? He would send a cheque at the end of the month and pay, you know. Anyway, one month,
then two months went by and no money came in and one day I went to see him and said ‘excuse me Mr. Kilcoyne, but if you want to come to my restaurant you will have to pay the bill’, and Barton said ‘I’m terribly sorry, I thought my secretary did that for me, so next time I go to Dublin I will send the cheque straight away’, which he did. So we became friends after that, and he said ‘why don’t you come to Dublin and see what is going on’, and we went to Ireland on vacation in 1979 or 1980 and I said to Sally ‘I think this would be a very nice place to live’. Anyhow, it is very funny because the 1970s and early 1980s in England, it was booming because Margaret Thatcher, and I didn’t realise that Ireland would not be following things, and I was very confident. Barton sold me the site on Baggot Street and we built on it. Also, Barton had introduced me to a fantastic man called Arthur Gibney who was an architect and I spoke to Arthur and said that if I come to Ireland I want you to design a restaurant for me and I do not want a restaurant which is going to be stuffy, I want space, I want you to create me a space where people are going to be comfortable. At the time I never thought it was going to be a Michelin star restaurant. My aim was to open a restaurant which I would like to go and eat in. That was my aim, I always felt that goal in a restaurant was to buy the best ingredients you can and then cook them as simple as possible, to make them interesting for the customer to eat. And everything evolved around that, we built up a reputation around the things. No people to start with said that we were nouvelle cuisine, but we were never nouvelle cuisine. They thought we were nouvelle cuisine because the portions were smaller because if you went to a restaurant in Ireland in the 1980s of 1970s there was an immense amount of food on the plates. (laugh)

49. MM: I call it the PHD of food, the Pile High and Deep (laugh), you wouldn’t know whether to eat it or climb it (laugh)!!!

50. PG: Pile High and Deep (laugh) exactly, so when I say, I was never trained like that, so I only did what I used to do.

51. MM: But this was effectively the first purpose built restaurant in Dublin and probably in a lot of other places too?

52. PG: I would say it was the first purpose built restaurant in any European capital city because you could not do it in Paris or London, there is no room, Brussels, Madrid, Rome, they are all city so you can’t find a place like that, I’m sure somebody did it, but you know, that was my dream. To open a restaurant, to design it with the help of Arthur, and build it in a capital city, that was a great carrot for me.

53. MM: And you were still very young, you were twenty nine or so?

54. PG: Yes, I was twenty nine, I was young. I sold my restaurant in England very well, I made good money on that, so I was quite well off if you like, in some ways for someone who was twenty nine years old. But that went very quickly, all my money, I kept some aside but most of it went into the business.

55. MM: Was Guillaume (Lebrun) with you from the very start in Dublin?

56. PG: He was a commis at the time, I had a chef working for me who was my number two in England, when Le Rabelais grew into a bigger restaurant the staff also grew, so the number two came with me, his name was Mark… I’m going senile with the names, he was French and only lasted for eighteen months and then he went to America. My idea was that I would go back into the kitchen, but I was speaking with my wife about it and she said ‘Patrick, for you to go back’, because Sally was not working in the restaurant at the time, she had my little daughter, we had my son already and she was minding them, and she said ‘for you to go back to kitchen is to go backwards, you need to project yourself forward’. She was clever in that, so I needed to find a chef and I had a look around in my kitchen and I saw Guillaume, which to me was the man who had the most potential to become a great chef. He was very good at sauces.
Where did Guillaume come from?

Lenôtre (Gaston Lenôtre’s famous Paris restaurant) in Paris, and I made a deal with Guillaume, I said if you want to be the chef here you need to involve yourself in the business. He was very young at the time, and he said ‘sure, we’ll do that’ and he changed his feelings and became the chef and he has been the chef ever since, and a partner as well, both himself and Stefan (Robin) are partners.

Was Stefan with you also from the beginning?

No, Stefan came around five years later.

Your first few years here were hard enough, weren’t they?

The first ten years here were really difficult, because it was a difficult time, we had huge interest rates, up to 24% interest rates, forget about that, you know.

You had bought the site from Barton Kilcoyne, did Barton have a share in the business? Did you need a strong cash flow to operate?

And the building was mine as well, Barton had 25% in the business. Barton didn’t contribute any cash flow whatsoever, none, not a penny. I put in all the money, so that was a fact, but then I think it was in 1984 or maybe 1986 we were in trouble because we couldn’t pay our VAT and things and the tax was very high at the time, we used to be spending nearly 80% in tax, it was crazy stuff. It was a very difficult time, and we had tough time, so I had to bring another partner in, and that’s where Loughlin Quinn and Martin Naughton from Glen Dimplex got in and they bought Barton out.

So they bought Barton’s shares out?

Practically, but not all of it, they bought some of my shares and some of Barton’s out and they reduced the borrowings. They cleared the bank out basically and that was a huge help to us as we don’t have the bank on your back. It helped get me over the tax problem, because when you pay 24% interest in the bank on borrowings, it is a lot of money every month, but because it took that out, that was a great help to the business. Now I want to be serious about that, they only put the money in at the start, but I never touched a penny, we cleared the most of the bank debt, that was a great help to us, but since then they didn’t put a penny in. Just to make sure because some people think they were like a fairy godmother to us (laugh). I think it is very unfair on them people thinking that, it is a very solvent business, we do it ourselves here. But, I must say, it was psychological to believe that people of the caliber of Loughlin and Martin Naughton trust you. They were good customers at the time and I remember them saying will with come in with you, we own 25% or what ever it was at the time of the business, we are there, you can come and speak to us if you want at any time, but the only thing we ask you to do is not to drop the quality. We want your restaurant to always try to be the best you can. So that was a great help, (great for confidence).

Well someone of that standing to show faith in you and to demand you keep the quality must have been reassuring?

(pointing to the brain) Up there it was great.

Your first Egon Ronay star came in 1983, the first Good Food Guide award came in 1983, you opened up a business in Baggot Street next door to Doheny & Nesbitts pub, you opened up a traiteur (delicatessen) in 1985, was that only for a year or so?
PG: We had a great idea, we had bought the building there and changed it completely and put a *traiteur* in, but it is all about management, and that was a big lesson to me, we had the wrong person in there.

MM: Around that time too, you started doing ready meals for Quinnsworth when they opened in Merrion Centre. Did you need a factory for that?

PG: No, we did it from the back of the shop, it was very good that, a very good product, today it would be working great, people do it now on a big scale. That closed when the *traiteur* closed. At the same time my mother came over and got involved in Matt the Thrasher’s. She had remarried with my father in law, Jacques, and she retired from the business in France and she was bored to death and wanted to come and do something. Then Tony Ryan came to see me and said we want to do something with Matt the Thrasher’s in Limerick and will I come in with him to do it? It was doing badly at the time and I put things together with my mum and they stayed for about eighteen months or so.

MM: Your sister also had a place in Powerscourt Town House Centre for a while?

PG: Isabel came with me when we opened the restaurant and she worked for about five years and we split company, she was too impatient, and she opened a restaurant, I can’t remember what it was called, and she discovered that running a business is not the same as working for someone else. She admitted that herself.

MM: Had you a loyal staff or did people move quite a bit? Marc Amand stayed with you for about five years?

PG: I have staff that stayed with me for long period of time, Marc Amand was my number two, he was a good lad, he worked his way up to number two. You would have to talk to Guillaume about the kitchen staff.

MM: I remember hearing you talk before about difficulty in getting ingredients when you moved here first?

PG: There was nothing there, in 1981 I used to go to the market every morning and carrots, cabbage, onions, potatoes, and even the potatoes were more soil in the bag than potatoes (laugh). It was very lacking in fruit, in the early 80s the vegetable market was nothing.

MM: How did you get over that? Did you have to start importing stuff?

PG: We asked the guys, some of the guys were very receptive in the market, the Giles and that. I used to say will you bring some fucking new stuff in, we need to have shallots at least and we need to have herbs, and they did. To be fair to them they did, I think they made a lot of money out of it which is great.

MM: Ireland is renowned for its fish, were you using the French man, Raymond, who used to bring the fish up from Cork for all the top restaurants?

PG: We used to go to the fish market at first but Guillaume used to say it was useless because you needed to buy a 100kg of fish or a mixture of fish. I think Raymond is still around but we don’t work with him any more. We work with Wrights of Howth now and we used to buy whole turbot and sea bream in the market but now things are much better, you can buy nearly anything you want, to a limit. We used to bring our *foie gras* from France and our cheese from France which is funny when you think about it today. It’s incredible, my supplier used to phone me from France to say our cheese was on the way, they would put a lump of *foie gras* in the middle, the airport people didn’t have a clue what it was, and we go to customs and you get your invoice and you would have to go back to Nassau Street to have it stamped and then back to the airport to
collect it (laugh), I mean crazy stuff, this was all the time, the bureaucracy, the amount of time it took, so you can imagine it was just as well I didn’t go back into the kitchen.

83. When we first started doing the cheeseboard, every restaurant in Ireland that did a cheeseboard had wrapped cheese (laugh) portions of wrapped cheese (MM: calvita and easy singles - laugh) and I spoke to the fellow from the Mirabeau, Séan Kinsella, and he said ‘Patrick, forget the cheeseboard, you will loose your shirt on the cheese’, but I said that I was going to do a proper cheeseboard.

84. MM: On that subject, when you arrived first, who was the main competition?

85. PG: The Coq Hardi was the big name at time, John Howard and that was it I suppose, The Mirabeau was finishing. I would say we changed the attitude of a few people when we opened.

86. MM: Then Colin O’Daly opened around 1984 or so?

87. PG: Yes and then Whites on the Green opened around 1986 with Michael Clifford who had worked in Arbutus Lodge. Whites on the Green opened because the property market was going slow and they had the property so they opened a restaurant. They were never restaurateurs.

88. MM: On a smaller scale, Jean Jacques Caillabet had come to Cork and opened up the Café de Paris, a type of Brasserie type of place. When you think about it, he was too far ahead of his time because that is exactly what Fallon & Byrne, and Venu and all these places are doing now, but the market wasn’t there for it then.

89. PG: You know for Brasseries you need to have young people, older people and younger people, a mixture of people coming in to eat. In Ireland in the ‘80s going out to eat was very expensive, so the concept of going out to eat cheap food in a restaurant, people didn’t know. Either you had a bit of money and you went anywhere, or you had no money and didn’t go anywhere. It was either McDonalds or Guilbaud’s (laugh). It is why restaurants opened like Jean Jacques (Les Frères Jacques) which is a very good restaurant, a very local restaurant.

90. MM: Your customers when you opened must have been the elite, the business men, did the business entertainment tax relief change affect you much?

91. PG: I think it happened fairly soon after I arrived in 1983 or 1987 so did it make a difference to the business? It must have done, I can’t remember but it must have done. To me the biggest concern was that the VAT was far too high, the taxation on the restaurant on staff, on profit, was so high that it was practically impossible, how we managed to do it, I do not know.

92. MM: VAT on food changed from around 24% down to 10% and that was a big change but still on the wine it was around 27% or so, it was ridiculous.

93. PG: But there was also a duty on wine, and I just think that people here binge drink because they might not be able to afford it tomorrow. The taxation on wine here is too high anyway.

94. MM: When the first Michelin star came in 1989, was it a big moment for you?

95. PG: Oh, yeah, it was a huge moment for us because it did bring us back. We had a very tough time in the ‘80s and the restaurant was very steady doing business, but very tough, the margins very small and the taxation very high, and interest rates were high, so for us when the Michelin star arrived it was very important, not for me, but for my staff and partners because ‘yes, we are doing something right’. I think we were the only one in Ireland at the time, defiantly the only one in Dublin. (note: In 1989 the Park Hotel and the Sheen Falls, both in Kenmare also won a Michelin star. But in 1991 and 1992 Guilbaud’s was the only Michelin star in the Republic of Ireland; Roscoff in Belfast also had a star those years). It was something that was very important
for the restaurant; it was like a consecration or something, if you like. The staff had been working
very hard to try and achieve things, my partners were very delighted to be partners with us with a
Michelin star, which said we’d arrived and that was good. And also for the customer, for the Irish
customer to realise that maybe they were supporting a restaurant that was worth supporting.

96. MM: Success breeds success, if you are perceived to be successful, people like to be associated
with you. Stefan was with you by this stage?

97. PG: Stefan arrived around in 1985-86.

98. MM: So from then on you have had a very solid back bone of staff in all key departments? Is
there anyone who has worked with you that you who you considered to be outstanding and went
on to be successful elsewhere?

99. PG: Marc Amand, he was a very determined man with a great knowledge of product. In front
of house I had a fellow called Charles Derain who left us around a year ago having been our
sommelier for ten years, he has his own business now in wine, but if he had stayed he could have
become one of the best sommeliers in the world. An outstanding guy. That was in the past, I can’t
speak about the present, but Laurant Steraud who has gone to America now was a very
outstanding manager in the front of house.

100. MM: What percentage of your staff would have been French and what percentage would have
been Irish? Was it always a mix?

101. PG: I think on average since we started here in the restaurant we’d have about forty staff.
We’d have about fifteen Irish, twenty French, and five of different nationalities.

102. MM: Did you feel there was a good enough quality of Irish people coming through or was
there a difficulty in getting Irish people of the right attitude?

103. PG: I think the Irish people do not want to serve, we tried but we can’t find a good Irish front
of house manager, good Irish waiters, they don’t want to do it, it is not their thing, they don’t feel
it is the job for them. Otherwise, it is difficult to find good Irish people (for the dining room).
Back in the kitchen, a lot more Irish people, which is great.

104. MM: Penny (Plunkett) stayed with you for a long time. Was she one of the first women to work
in your kitchen?

105. PG: Penny stayed a long time, she is in Venu now. She is great, she is fantastic. Penny was
outstanding as well. Penny was one of the first women to work in the kitchen, she was
outstanding, she was tough, and she is still working for us in Venu.

106. MM: Did you notice more women coming into the kitchens in the last ten years or so?

107. PG: Yes, it did, my feeling in the catering industry is we all know it’s a very tough business,
because the unsociable hours, the pressure of the work, so I always say to my chef, Guillaume,
you must try to treat your staff as well as possible, do not be rude to them, be hard and tough but
fair. That is the thing we must always be, and it drives me absolutely demented when I see a
television programme like The F Word because, ok, he promotes the business, I agree with you
there, I have no problem with that, but he really does nothing to attract young people, which is
terribly sad. I think I have always worked all my life to try and bring respectability to the kitchen
and the restaurant business, to try and make sure that when you go to the bank, if you are a
restaurant people, they will say ‘oh yes, we know your restaurant, we will loan you money’. All
these guys, what they are doing is they are taking everything away, the credibility of the business
is going rapidly, it is fine for five minutes but after a while it is absolutely crazy. It drives me
absolutely mad, it is a disaster for the restaurant business, you know.
108. I had a customer in the restaurant who asked me ‘can I go into your kitchen, is it chef swearing?’;
and I say ‘what do you mean?’ In the kitchen we have seventeen staff, nobody speaks, they are all
working, the chef is the only person who speaks and there is shouting at thing, you know.

109. **MM:** What prompted you to move from Baggot Street to the premises in which we are now in
the Merrion Hotel?

110. **PG:** Well, space, the address. First thing is we had a beautiful building where we were there
off Baggot Street in the purpose built restaurant, which was fantastic. This is a purpose restaurant
by the way except for the front two rooms, but the kitchen and the restaurant are purpose built. I
think why we moved here is that Loughlin Quinn and Martin Naughton were involved in the hotel
next door, in The Merrion, but I said to Loughlin and Martin at the time if they wanted us to move
here we would do it on three conditions: (a) we are completely independent from the hotel (b) we
have our own front door, and (c) we have our own kitchen, because what I said to you before
about hotels. And we are all not involved at all with what is happening in your hotel, but at the
same time you can use our name to promote your hotel if like, because in the early days that was
important to them, you can use our name with your PR and that there is an established restaurant
in your hotel, so that was the deal.

111. So what happened then is that it made Guillaume and Stefan bigger partners in the restaurant, it
was better for them in the long run. They could buy a more shareholding in the business,
Guillaume and Stefan, Loughlin and Martin reduced their shareholding, I stayed as I was and
Barton was gone.

112. **MM:** So the deal was, the carrot was that for a reduction in their shareholding you did them a
favour by bringing the business and the prestige associated with it here to their new hotel? Did the
second star come here or before?

113. **PG:** No that came before (we moved).

114. **MM:** You were building up, like Mary Swanzy, a collection of art. Was that your interest or
was it Loughlin and Martin’s?

115. **PG:** That was Loughlin, Martin and I. The three of us worked together very hard on that. Most
of the art in the restaurant is owned by the two boys, I have a few, the business has a few, but art
today is very expensive to buy.

116. **MM:** What I’m saying is that two things, first the building in Baggot Street and second the art
on the wall was rising in value all the time even if business wasn’t that great, so it was a good
investment. Because there is a great Harry Kernoff picture of Jammet’s hanging in the bar.

117. **PG:** I bought that for a thousand punts in 1982 or 83, which was a lot of money at the time
and I had to pay for it out of my money because the business could not afford to buy it.

118. **MM:** Well it was a good investment because he is starting to be appreciated now, Harry
Kernoff, but it is the type of thing you would not want to sell anyway because of the historic link
with Jammet’s, it’s great.

119. You saw a change happening in the 1990s with Kevin Thornton, Alan O’Reilly, Colin O’Daly
made a name for himself first, and later the Commons opened up and later then Conrad Gallagher
starts opening up?

120. **PG:** Well that was fantastic, Ireland is moving in the right direction, it is fabulous to see the
number of new chefs coming through, this guy from Mint – McGrath, and Thornton as well, and
Derry Clarke in l’Ecrivain and Chapter One and Ross Lewis. A capital city of the caliber of
Dublin should have more good restaurants. I know it’s tough but two things, the product are good and the cheffing is even better, which is great. I mean this is a great asset, it is fantastic.

121. MM: You opened up a bakery at one stage, when did that happen?

122. PG: That was in the mid 1990s. It burnt down but we rebuilt in Finglas, it is still going but I sold out, I own the property but I don’t own the business any more. Olivier owns the business now.

123. MM: Was it the same with Maison de Gourmet, did you sell out of that as well when you invested in Venu?

124. PG: That’s right. I would say that the biggest challenge to the catering industry is going to face today is the EU law on hygiene, the HACCP, because it is something we need to learn about, but it is also something we need to control a bit better, I think it has gone over the top. We don’t want to loose product, I think the product for us, we must get very good product, and the more these guys interfere with the product, the less quality we are going to get, we are going to all the same kind of bland stupid product which have no taste.

125. MM: So you are talking really about the idea of un-pasteurised cheese and this kind of stuff?

126. PG: I don’t understand why we can’t have un-pasteurised cheese, just tell me why, it is crazy stuff. Is it because somebody gets sick some time? We have to build up our immune system. My mother is eighty three and she never gets sick, and she explains it by saying ‘I don’t wash five times a day like you’ (laugh), it is stupid but true, she has a shower maybe three times a week and that is it, she washes her face and that but we have to develop our immune system a bit better than we are doing. On the one hand, we obviously have to control the product without destroying the product, on the other hand we have to build up our immune system to cope with these things otherwise we are going to have product on the market that are all the same and which taste all the same. That is why I say when I go to America I say the food tastes rubbish because the it tastes of nothing, just generic food.

127. MM: Would you describe the food in the restaurant as French food or modern Irish food?

128. PG: It is Guillaume’s and my food, people say we are French, of course we are French, I am born in France so is Guillaume and Stefan, 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 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. When we can’t find it, we find it in France or wherever we can find it, but what we are trying to do is what we think is alright for the food, not stupid things, today the big fad is foam, foam everywhere. The most important thing about a restaurant business, that is my opinion, is that the customer comes to you, they eat your food and when they leave they say ‘I’m going to go back’. The rest is completely irrelevant, you could have five star or three star, if nobody comes to you it is of no relevance. At the same time you must do what you feel is right when you are a chef. You must create your own personality in the kitchen and in your restaurant. So you need to balance the two, you can’t be open to all, criticism is very good, I always welcome criticism in the restaurant, I will always listen, ok maybe he has a point, let’s try and work on this one, or sometime I say ‘no this is very stupid’, so you have to balance what is a successful restaurant. What I would judge Guilbaud’s at is that we have been here twenty seven years and we are still one of the top restaurants in Ireland and we try to be as good as we can be all of the time and we renew ourselves all of the time. Why do we renew ourselves all of the time? 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, it is very tough on the
top guys, Guillaume and Stefan because they have to keep training the new guys, but it is so good for them because it keeps them fresh. He will speak to the new guys and get new ideas and that is why I think we are always fresh with new ideas. I know sometimes that customers complain because we have new staff and they don’t know me, I think it is the best thing.

Discussion about the waiters in Snaffles years ago who were there for twenty years.

129.MM: What is your ambition now? I know this is outside my research area (the year 2000)

130.PG: I would always like to go for my third star, I know I would be disappointed if I did not achieve it in my life, but I might not achieve it. I would love to get three stars. I would love to bring Ireland, to bring Dublin a three star Michelin. That would be great. My big problem is now that I am not getting younger, and the problem of getting three stars is you have to keep it. I would hate to see three stars for one year and then to become two stars again, so sometimes I do not worry about it too much.

131.MM: It would be the cherry on the cake!

132.PG: Correct yes, but also for Guillaume and Stefan, it would be fantastic to see them awarded three stars because they deserve it, the guys are working so hard in the business and all my staff are great, and through the years all the staff who have worked here, the Penny’s and the Marc Amand’s, all those guys that have contributed to the restaurant, all the guys who have worked here over the last twenty five years, some of them were bad, 90% of them were good, and I can say with my hand on my heart that most of my staff who have been working here will have good memories of Guilhaud. Very few will have bad memory of Guilhaud and that to me is something.

133.MM: That is a good thing to be proud of and on that note I’ll thank you very much for your time.

134.PG: My pleasure.

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Pierce Hingston in DIT, Cathal Brugha Street (21/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Pierce Hingston (PH)

1. MM: So we’ll start off with where and when you born?

2. PH: I was born in Rotunda and reared in Crumlin, Kildare Road, Crumlin for the first fifteen years.

3. MM: What year were you born?

4. PH: I was born in 14th August, 1938 in Crumlin, I’m 69 years old.

5. MM: How many was in the family?

6. PH: There was five of use, one brother, one sister.

7. MM: Ah right. And where did you come?

8. PH: I was the last.

9. MM: One brother and one sister and you’re the baby as such. And what did your father do?

10. PH: He was away during the war in Britain, one of these guys that…

11. MM: Was he in the army or was he working in the factories.

12. PH: He worked in, how do I put this? These are the stories he would tell us. He worked for a company, it was a cover like, say Musgraves or something delivering stuff. He’d been bringing munitions all over the country and he used to tell me a few stories but we won’t go into that and when he came home he worked for a card box company, he ended up there as a manager in charge of the cardboard and he was up in Mary Street and that and in those days you know everything had to be done by hand. My mother worked in the sweep stakes for many years but then all married women had to leave after the war.

13. MM: That was a very glamorous position in a way.

14. PH: Well I don’t know what she did there but the point was that I think she was in there for about four or five years but she had to give it up. All married women had to leave because the men had to get work when they came back. As you know most men, a lot of me went away to fight in the wars. Then we moved to Terenure when I was fifteen.

15. MM: Did you do your primary school in Crumlin?

16. PH: I went to the Christian Brothers School in Crumlin.

17. MM: And was that both primary and secondary.

18. PH: No, no primary, you didn’t have secondary schools then. It was only just starting on Clogher Road there in Kimmage.

19. MM: Now primary would be up to the age of fourteen or so would it?
20. PH:   Because of the war we went to school very early so I was thirteen when I was sixth class
and we created what they called seventh year or another year and then I left and I went down and I
applied for the entry exam for high school of commerce in Rathmines and I was successful there
and I was there for nearly two years.

21. MM:   And what did you do there?

22. PH:   I learnt more in two years than I did in the Christian Brothers for five years, because there
was only fifteen in the class where there was sixty-five in the other one which you could
understand, the Brothers had nerves of steel. Father Finnegan and he was very good to us. Quite
strict but not as strict of the others and I always remember the head master coming in to us with
the mortar board down the college and he said, okay we’re all here to learn and those of you who
don’t want to know just be quiet and let the others get on with it. I never looked back and even my
Gaelic I learnt a lot of more in that two years because you weren’t beaten senseless.

23. MM:   You weren’t getting beaten senseless.

24. PH:   But anyway having said that I work with a lot of younger people I’m always ‘slagging’
them off, I do it in purpose. Like I’d slag them over the fact that Gaelic is taught in English. We
don’t have the Gaelic writing.

25. MM:   Ah the Gaelic script, yeah, yeah, yeah.

26. PH:   But anyway forget that. So from there I won a scholarship.

27. MM:   But when you were there were you learning typing and were you learning anything like
that. What sort of stuff were you doing?

28. PH:   I was doing English, Irish, everything.

29. MM:   English, Irish, maths, history, that sort of stuff.

30. PH:   Everything exactly but in that two years, because you’d no pressure because you wanted
to learn and then I entered, there was a thing came around if you wanted to apply for a scholarship
and you had another exam then for here. They’d only just opened, this was Saint Mary’s Domestic
School of Science and there was one hundred and fifty girls here in Cathal Brugha and they had
twenty-four, we were twelve boys and we were the first years, there was twelve before us so there
was twenty-four chefs altogether, first and second years. Now I think they may have training
managers. Now they had beautiful kitchens here and foreign chefs were fantastic. Our chef his
name was Beaucaire Murphy.

31. MM:   Where was he from?

32. PH:   He was French but his mother I gather somewhere along the line had an Irish link but he
was French. Brilliant he was and he told me I should have always gone on to be a pastry chef what
I was good at you know.

33. MM:   And who were the other foreign chefs here at the time?

34. PH:   I can see them in front of me, don’t ask me their names. They were from Switzerland.
One was from Switzerland. There was three of them altogether. These men were all in their late
fifties, early sixties. They’d come to the college on a special request and they were great. The
kitchens in those days were on the top floors and everything was copper and it had to be polished
and scrubbed and polished and cleaned before you left the area, I loved it here, I did.

35. MM:   Do you remember who was in your class?
36. **PH:** My closest friend was a chef called Bernard Ballantine. He lived in Sundrive Road in Kimmage, a great friend of mine. He actually died there a few years back. It turns out there’s another friend of mine a guy called Eamon Doyle a close personal friend of mine, the closest friend of mine next to Eugene (McGovern), he’s the owner of the Park House Hotel in Galway and he happened to know. He called me one day and I used to go up and help out Bernard Ballantine’s wife. He knew Bernard for years and either of us didn’t know this but when he asked me to go up and help see they had a restaurant.

37. **MM:** How many was in the class?

38. **PH:** Oh there was only twelve.

39. **MM:** Twelve in the class, so there was twelve first years and twelve second years. But you had cooks here as well? You had the girls in here at the same time as you or…

40. **PH:** Yeah there were one hundred and fifty girls. It was a girls schools. They hadn’t changed it.

41. **MM:** But when you came in it was just changing to the college again. I think it changed to College of Catering in 1951. I think it opened in 1941 I think. It turned into the College of Catering in ’51.

42. **PH:** But then maybe there was more the before. We got the impression there was only one lot before us because I know, it could have been done because I went to London in 1958, there was I’m mixing them up so yeah. Now whether they had the training managers in then, I know they had it the second year I think but I’m not sure if they had it the first year. I think the scholarship I think I got twelve shillings the first year, and I gave it to my mother which a lot of money then and fourteen shillings the second year.

43. **MM:** Now that was a week, was it?

44. **PH:** A week yeah, that’s your scholarship money and I cycled up and down. I had to make my own bike (laugh). It was a beautiful bike. So I built my own bits and pieces. I’m brilliant with my hands so I can do anything, I can build a house, I have done, but so having said that yeah, so I had no gears (laugh).

45. **MM:** What sort of subjects were you doing here now.

46. **PH:** We had the theory of cooking, of course you had all that. We didn’t have, you’d know a few of the names.

47. **MM:** Mona Hearn, Mor Murnaghan, Kathleen O’Sullivan, no?

48. **PH:** Oh God, and I remember she got, she was a lovely lady. I can see her. It will come to me. *(Note: Pearse contacted me later that evening by phone to inform that Miss McCauly was the instructor in theory of catering, and that Miss Foley taught some of the practical cookery classes)* If I heard I’ll know it but anyway we were taught, we had to do Gaelic which we never learnt because we used to get around Andréas (Ó Muíneacháin) we’d say ‘were you watching the match last night’, we’d get him going. So I can see two or three guys that I went to college with but I can’t, God, can’t think of their names. A lot of them left and they didn’t bother continuing.

49. **MM:** So the theory of cooking you did Gaelic, you did...

50. **PH:** And we did the English of course and we did maths and you had to do your maths you know. It was related to the business and that. Then of course we had to do our physical training
and that was another thing. The guys that were teaching us these were SAS instructors from Scotland and they get a job in Canada they had to leave a job, so they were here for the year. We tormented them to show us how to defend ourselves. And the first guy did that eventually gave in, and we were told never to use unless you had to. I never had to use it but I know if I had to get out of the situation even at my age, but anyway and his mate came the following year and he did the same thing. It was great, they were red-haired guys, they are probably dead and buried now.

51. **MM:** Or were they Irish or English?

52. **PH:** Oh they were Scottish, they came from Scotland.

53. **MM:** And where did you do, was there a gym?

54. **PH:** There was a gym on the top floor. So I used to love that. That was very good because it was boring doing the usual.

55. **MM:** Especially young lads, give them something like that and they’ll pay attention.

56. **PH:** Yeah I always pride myself as being good at it.

57. **MM:** How about menu French and stuff like that, did you do that sort of thing?

58. **PH:** Oh yes we were taught French. First year we had this French, an English/French teacher. When I say that, it was an Irish teacher which was a major mistake, I’ll explain to you in the minute, and we were doing great as I thought, and the following year we had another teacher that came in and rattled away, and she was livid and walked out. Never saw her again. She didn’t last five minutes. Now that’s true because my daughter went to, one of my daughters she’s living in France, I’ve two daughters living there, and married a Frenchman and my second eldest girl she went there, she was the training manager in Galway Institute and she failed her French and she went away.

59. **MM:** She is fluent now, yeah?

60. **PH:** She came back and went through her instructor for a shortcut and her instructor didn’t know what she was talking about. The sad thing about it you need to go and live in France for a long time for a few years to get the pronunciation correct. Like when I go over there and I say to my granddaughter, and she’s nineteen now, and I used to say to her when she was fourteen you teach your pappy now how to speak French. No I only want to speak English. But get the accent right, you must get the accent right.

61. **MM:** What else did you do, you used to do pastry, you did larder?

62. **PH:** We did pastry and larder and butchering yeah and then we did the restaurant on the top floor. We’d have to take it over and we’d serve food like this here now and then serve.

63. **MM:** And would you serve as well would the chefs be trained to serve?

64. **PH:** No, those days the chef didn’t serve.

65. **MM:** The chef was the chef and you had the waiters then who’d do the service work?

66. **PH:** I don’t remember waiters being here when I was here, somebody was serving it. I just probably just sent it down but I don’t ever remember a waitress. I’d remember it. It was only the chefs. They may have got the young managers.
There were waiters part-time here at that time. I don’t think they were full-time but they were definitely part-time here alright yeah. And you know as part of your first year, as part of your holidays did they send you on work experience or anything like that?

Ah no. We weren’t sent to. No you were just off. When I finished they sent me to the Bailey Restaurant in South Anne Street.

So that was your first job then in a kitchen was it?

I stayed there nine months and ran out.

And who was the chef there at the time?

Bracken, Tommy Bracken, a lovely man, a very nice man.

Ken Besson owned it at this stage?

He owned the Bailey and he owned a hotel, The Royal Hibernian and the Russell.

Yeah he owned all three of them actually at that stage yeah. There were three rooms, you had a candle room and you had the long room and you had the bar in the Bailey?

Yeah but when you went into Bailey and you went down the kitchen and I wasn’t very tall, my head hit the ceiling. Mind you in fairness it wasn’t as bad as the one up the road, Jammets. (laugh) you are taping this so I won’t tell you what I thought or it.

The kitchen was in the basement yeah, and a very low ceiling.

But it was terrible, the hygiene and forget it, God it was frightening. Anyway I went back to the college and complained and they told me ‘you’ve got to stay there for a year otherwise you won’t get your diploma’. I ran out after nine months out of there and I still got my diploma.

At my time, was Besson running a training scheme. Were you aware of that?

Not for us. He was great for all that I believe. He did it for his own hotel, but not for the Bailey at the time. He didn’t do it when I was there, mind you, I said I was only there nine months.

The Bailey was definitely included at some stage in that scheme. Do you remember would there have been many in the kitchen?

There was three. There was Tommy, I could see them and oh what’s his name. You mentioned him earlier on Kavanagh.

Liam Kavanagh.

Yeah it could have been Liam because he went to the Red Bank.

It could have been his brother Eamon Kavanagh, Eddie or Robert Kavanagh.

One of them. He was a chef and there was another very old guy there, he did the grill, but anyway so when I was there…

He wasn’t an Italian, was he, the old guy? I have a picture in a photograph of quite an old guy.
He could have been I wouldn’t know. I’m trying to think of his name. Yeah, it could have been foreign, I don’t know. He didn’t speak much actually (laugh) and that was it. You would buy all the oysters and that down through the grid and you would be bargaining and swapping money. There’s only four dozen, no there isn’t, there’s ten (laugh), no there isn’t. It was someone from Galway selling the oysters.

They were renowned for their oysters weren’t they and their seafood particularly as well?

In fairness now the quality of the food was great. The working areas weren’t great.

You don’t remember any of the waiters or anything like that.

There’s a guy there he’s a personal friend of mine, Wally Flood, he, Wally started there the same as me as a young barman. That’s all I remember Wally where he started there as a young commis barman. He stayed there for a few years. I don’t know what he did after that. He worked with CERT for many years, brilliant at his job.

Where was your next port of call then?

I went to the Moira Hotel on Trinity Street.

The Moira. And who was there at the time?

There was a fellow called, Willie Ryan was there.

That’s Willie Ryan that moved down to Shannon?

No, Bill Ryan (who went to Dublin Airport). And oh God the head chef, he was only two years older than me and Willie Opperman was the manager. Willie was a hard man to work with but we became the best of friends years later. I used to go down to his house and have a glass of wine when I came back years and years later just before he died. Oh God there was a guy called John Higgins, he went on to be a bus driver. He was a commis there and there was another lad there, I can see him, the three of us went to London afterwards. I can’t remember the head chefs name. God I can see him clearly. Willie was a hard man, Willie Opperman very hard man to work for but a perfectionist, and his family background, this is Willie Opperman and the manager.

I’ve interviewed Johnny Opperman.

Is Johnny still alive?

Johnny is ninety-two now, or ninety-one or something like that he is.

Anyway but Willie was a very hard man but Willie went away, the family background is that they were Swiss, but he went away anyway and he’d bring back great ideas. He was fantastic for Jury’s and Bill Ryan and myself used to do all the butter work and sugar work. He loved the butter work and he’d bring him across to Jury’s and get the credit for it. We had put a lot of time into them and I said to Bill, ’Bill, we don’t get paid for this?’ Bill had a great sense of humour. The sugar pieces were on a trestle table and Bill kicked the leg of the table and the whole thing collapsed on the ground. ’Oh God love’, he said, ‘that’s a terrible accident’, so when they came to collect them from Jury’s across the road, he said ’I’m very sorry but they got damaged’ (laugh). I ended the best friends with Willie Opperman but to get out at night time you’d be sneaking out under the reception and dragging your bike with you so he didn’t see you (laugh). He was a character.
It was famous. But I have to give credit to Willie, he was a perfectionist, if it wasn’t right he’d throw it back at you, literally, but you can’t blame him. It had to be, I always believed he was the man that put Jury’s on the map.

Well he brought Willie Widmer over you know what I mean and I think Willie put the standards in.

Willie went and opened his own place there. He is semi-retired.

Yeah I talked to him there a few weeks ago. Nice fellow. So you were in the Moira for what around a year or so?

I stayed I think, around a year and a half and I’ll always remember, he saw me making pastry and that he couldn’t get over it, the fantastic work and I used to do the grill and the pastry. Vincent Hayes was the head chef.

Vinnie Hayes, Vincent Hayes right yeah.

I’d say Vincent is probably still around. He lives over in the north side somewhere. Lovely wife.

So he was the head chef and he was from Dublin?

Oh yeah. He was a very excellent lad. He’d never been to college but he was good at learning and perfected his skills. I always thought in fairness to Vincent he was made head chef too early which affected him later on. The money I suppose, when he tried to settle down. In those days you took what you got. So yeah we were good mates. I think I was there a year and nine months. And I decided I wanted to go abroad to learn, I couldn’t have been more than eighteen and a half and calculate it yourself afterwards but I wrote to three hotels, I wrote to the Park Lane hotel in London, I wrote to the Dorchester and I wrote to the Mayfair hotel and I got a reply from the three of them so Sean Diggan who was a chef there with me, we were all third year commis there and there was another lad there, but I can’t think of his name. Anyway the three of us went but they had no applications so when we got there, and we were standing in Green Park and I said ‘look, I’ll got down to Mayfair, so you go to Dorchester and see James or you go up to the Park Lane’ and the three of us got a job and I stayed there. Myself, Sean Diggan and I can’t remember the other.

Did Sean work for Fitzpatricks hotels later on?

He might have, but he left and went to be a bus driver. How I knew that I met him once getting on the bloody bus one day, and I said ‘what the hell are you doing?’ I was the head chef and I think he didn’t believe me in the Intercontinental and whether he went back in the trade or not, I don’t know.

I might have mixed him up with someone else, another Sean.

A very handsome guy. The women flocked up.

And the other fellow you went over with.

He lived in Kimmage, I see him in front of me but can’t remember his name.

So you went to the Mayfair anyway.

Yeah I went to the Mayfair and it was like, you had the fish corner and then you had the soup corner and then you had the vegetable corner, then you had the meat corner and then you had
the roast corner and Polynesian fruit corner and then you had the glacier, then you had the pastry, I
can still see it, and then you had the larder and then you had another area where you did all the
salads and starters and hors d’oeuvres. Now they were eighty in a brigade so I when I went in first
they put me on the vegetable corner. There was ten on that corner and the head chef, the chef de
partie’s name was Adolf Schafer and I was in the Kaderoni was the name of the head chef of the
hotel. Don’t ask me to spell it for you.

121.MM: Was it Caldaroni? Because I think I’ve come across a Caldaroni. (note: Calderoni from
the Mayfair hotel and Jean Nico from Quagliano’s were the first to set up the Salon Culinaire in
the 1950s)

122.PH: It could have been Caldaroni. Yeah but now he was very old, he would have been well
into sixties, sixty-five or something. They’re all, chefs in those days (worked on into old age), so
he brought me along to introduce me to chef and he was standing there with all the crew and they
were all preparing fresh (inaudible) and that and one guy doing the service, I can’t remember his
name. He was a pain in the ass. He was the chief porter. Anyway lets say the chef was standing
where that chair is there, and he picked up this wooden crate and he fired it at me, that’s how I met
the chef.

123.MM: That’s how you met your chef de partie.

124.PH: But seemingly there was another Irishman there before me who seemingly, he was given
a bad name, he was always drunk, always late, created rows. So I informed him, ‘I’m not the same
as that’. So things worked out okay. So I got on to that corner so within three months I was
assistant chef de partie, the youngest chef assistant otherwise known as a first commis. Back in
those days there were chef de partie’s and there were commis, you could be a hundred years in the
business but you’re still a commis. Now the Greek fellow, there he wasn’t very clean, as far as I
was concerned, and everybody else was down there working away, it was a very busy hotel. So I
used to force my way up onto the service and how I perfected was, and you had two chefs serving
in French but my kitchen French wasn’t anything good. They had these one, two, threes and fours
size dishes and we used to prepare all our vegetble and what you had to do is have your clarified
butter and your heating water for the veg and you’d heat them into a copper pot and heat okay. But
when I became on the line, that’s how I knew how many veg was required – it was common sense
and the chef was fascinated.

125.MM: You’re over in the Mayfair and you were saying that you figured out the system about
how to get three portions, four portions, six portions or whatever.

126.PH: You see you put them beside the like three ones, and a two and a thing of peas but you
put the relevant dishes beside it and the carrots and asparagus or whatever and you went down the
line and so pretty quickly and I was flying, there were two chefs, there was two different sections
and this was before they built the Beachcomber. Anyway the chef offered me that job as first
commis, I thought this was fantastic so I stayed there then for nine months and a job came up as
first commis poissonier. This guy James Fritzassler didn’t like to be called Fritz and he used a
brain-washing technique and you were guaranteed to only stay three months with him. He’d make
bets on it, how long Paddy would last and they were all making bets. Paddy stayed with him for
nearly nine months, no two years and nine months.

127.MM: On the fish.

128.PH: Now each section had five ranges okay and behind that there was a long marble table and
above the range were all the copper pots. At the end was a sink and at the other end was a big grill
and everybody had all their sections. We’ll say an order came in for Lobster Thermidor and he
was teaching you. He brought you through it stage by stage with that Lobster Thermidor and if
somebody spoke to him, he’d shout at them that he was teaching somebody, and when you’d make
it you were terrified it was perfect so as he had made it out to be. And then he took your book, and
you had to write very clearly, you had to move the bloody book, not the shagging pen and if you went to write it bad he’d kill you, and tell you it was brutal, he said you treat it like a television. When you could write it correctly you will see, when that order comes in you will see it like a television in front of you, exactly as your wrote it, and you will never have to use that book again. I used to love it, there were over three hundred recipes, the ones for sole alone!! Now we didn’t have to clean the fish.

129.MM: The larder chef would do that?

130.PH: The order would come in like on a ship and you’d blow through the whistle and you’d shout for it and they’d bring it down to you and it would be even breaded if it had to be breaded you know. And we just cooked it, prepared the garnish and made all the sauces but he was very hard. I’ll give you an example now. He would keep at you, nag, nag, nag, and either you stayed or you went and it got to a stage one time and we were on at night and he was at it and up yours I’m going, and I walked out, there were two doors and as I went through the first I heard him say ‘I knew that Irish fellow wouldn’t last’, so I walked back in the other door and I stood behind and I was drinking my tea and they were all laughing at him, the sous chefs, and I said ‘never mind Fritz, sure I’ll stay another while’, and he hated the Irish but after about six months he thought…

131.MM: Where was he from?

132.PH: He was English but the family background was Swiss, but a brilliant chef and a genius and he could teach you anything. You know even his personal life I could tell you about later. He used to save cigar boxes up and we went to his house one day, and he showed me this dolls house he had made for his daughter, it was an Inn, actually, she had married an oriental guy, and they had bought an Inn down the country, and when you opened it there was one thousand, I’m not joking you, one thousand little drawers, and when you opened them there would be a hairpin for a watch and it was fantastic, he was a bit eccentric but a genius. But he taught me and he clears the shit out of your brain. Now I’ll explain to you how he does now. I’m there now quite a while say and a new lad will come in the door and he’d say ‘what do you think, will we take him? Ah sure why not? This is how it works. You had to barter for everything, tea and coffee, you got your butter, and now there’s six or eight of us in that corner and the young fellows name is John. ‘John you want to be a chef, fine that’s grand’, he’s coming at fourteen. ‘Do you smoke John?’ ‘Go down there for fifteen minutes and have a smoke before you even start’. The young fellow would go off and come back, and ‘I told you to away for fifteen minutes’. ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’ ‘Go and get yourself a cup of tea’. Would you like to chop some parsley? ‘Tomorrow now don’t come in till ten tomorrow that’s okay’. Nobody at all and he’d keep this up for two weeks solid. Now he used to come in twenty minutes late every morning, I’ll explain to you how it worked, and anyway on the third morning, and we’re trying to tell the young fellow ‘be careful he’s going to turn on you’. This is how he takes the shit out of the brain and he moulds him into his way. So the young lad saunters in late, Jimmy’s in already, he’s standing and he’s small now with a tall hat, he’d be there twenty minutes waiting tapping his fingers impatiently and when the young lad appeared he’d say ‘where were you?’ and the young lad would say ‘but you told me…’ and he’d say ‘go and get the stocks’, and the minute the young fellow was gone he’s say ‘where is that young fellow gone?’ ‘I told you not to go to the stores’ and he’d give him an unmerciful clatter and send him to chop parsley, then give him a clatter for doing that wrong. And he’d keep at it and at it and at it and this would go on for three or four, it could take up to a week and the young fellow would crack. He’d be in bits. Jimmy would say ‘right, go home now and be back here sharp at ten tomorrow or at nine tomorrow’. The young fellow would be in the next day and if Jimmy said ‘jump on that shovel’ the young fellow did it, but he’d learnt, that’s how he cleaned the brains out. Lucky he didn’t get me that far because I was older you know so I clicked onto it.

133.MM: So it was a bit like the army, break them and build them up.

134.PH: But did I learn, when I came along it didn’t bother me. That’s why I was so successful. When I was in the Intercontinental I practically ran it.
613. **MM:** Did you finish in the Mayfair like after your fish or did you move onto another corner?

614. **PH:** I moved on up to the sauce corner and I worked with a Swiss guy there. I can’t remember his name. A very nice lad and he taught me the sauces, a brilliant sauce cook, but Jimmy was great at doing the sauces, the fish sauces, unbelievable. There was a skill on how you did it and you had to learn the skill. I’ll tell you a story about John Morin later on. The bottom line was so I moved there and I left it in the end and stayed there whatever it was the last nine or ten months can’t remember. I was there four and a half years and overnight I decided to go home. I had a motorbike.

615. **MM:** What made you want to come home?

616. **PH:** I just got fed up with it, that’s the way I was. When I was going away I said to my mother on a Monday, I’m going to London on Friday and then she looked at me, and in those days you didn’t do that and I needed her to say it was okay. So she let me go and it broke her heart. She aged overnight, and of course I never rang home, you’d think of it at three in the morning, the next day is gone, typical. I went the same way, just decided. I gave everything away, we threw a big party, one of the trainee managers had a room down in Marble Arch and we went down and we wrecked it and I’ve photographs of me sailing through the air with a guitar in my hand and I’m in mid air (laugh). So anyway that was it. They followed me out to the airport and I gave everything away, I even gave away my motorbike.

617. **MM:** When you were in London for those years how often did you back to Ireland? Once a year, twice a year?

618. **PH:** The great thing about it, you know the way have this pay as you earn because we worked in a hotel with five hundred staff and we’re all foreign you had a special house so I didn’t have to tax at that time. I went home on holidays, the first year I went home and I was in bits, you know, the shock hit me and I had a bit of a nightmare actually and my mother came looking at me and asking me if I was okay. I had woken in the middle of this nightmare; this was the middle of Christmas. I was only away four months and I came home for the New Year but when I went back I had nearly an extra week’s wages. So they used to come to me, it was a five-and-a-half day week but I often worked six or seven and they’d come to me and say ‘Pat, I need you to work tomorrow’ so I used to save the days up and we used to Swansea in Dorset and another trainee manager, his parents had a private hotel on the coast and they’d give us a room, there would be five or six of us and you’d stay there but we’d do all the cooking on the Sunday. They would say ‘the chefs are all here from the Mayfair’. We’d stay overnight and that was it. So that’s how we used to save our days off but I was also saving up my holidays so I used to take a couple of weeks holidays every six months. I’d come back and the money was there for you.

619. **MM:** Brilliant. And when you came back you probably came back with a few bob in your pocket as well?

620. **PH:** No, I gave everything away, I have to borrow £5.

621. **MM:** No, I mean when you came back on you holidays like if you came back for a few… Would you go out, like would you go to the Green Rooster or anything like that?

622. **PH:** Well in those days you didn’t, no. We went to the local dance hall and like there was one up there in South Anne Street I think, I’ve forgotten the name of it. It was up on the right hand side. It was a famous place, and the usual, the girls on one side and the lads on the other but then you see we weren’t taught anything like that as kids, It’s not like what you see now. So like you needed to build up your courage and I met my first wife there and I was married to her in a few years.
And that’s when you came home from good? So you were over there basically roughly from around 1956 to around 1960 or 1961.

No ’61 it would have been. ’57 to ’61. And I went back to the Moira Hotel and I stayed there I think it was nine months and then I moved on to the…And Willie was thrilled to see me.

Willie was still there but was the head chef Vincent was still there and Bill Ryan was still there. So you slotted back in sort of chef de partie at this stage.

I think Bill Ryan came then. Bill was a character. Now there were other lads that were around. There was another fellow yes, there was a fellow Cowen was his name, and he was the soup cook but could never get it right I don’t think but anyway and Maurice Blythe.

And Maurice was there was he. Okay so was Maurice a commis then?

No, no, Maurice was a chef. We were all chefs.

Do you know where had Maurice trained?

Oh I haven’t a clue. Maurice is in the Hibernian now. I think he was in the Russell as well. You need to ask Maurice. Have you spoken to Maurice? He lives over in what they call the Ranch.

Ballyfermot, Inchicore around there? How long did you stay in the Moira?

Stayed nine months.

Now did you stay just until the Intercontinental opened is it?

I remember going for an interview and my first wife at the time she was eight months pregnant, and Charlie Lawlor was the manager in the Gresham and he was supposed to be interviewing and another guy, an American called Mr Blue, don’t ask me how to spell it, he was one of the directors of the company. It was an international company.

It was part of the Pan-Am Group or something like that?

The appointment was set for a certain time and my wife May she was downstairs waiting, standing there, an hour later getting to me, they were making on effort. Charlie was sitting there. So I couldn’t understand why they weren’t doing it so I got up and said ‘what’s the story’. Oh they said we won’t be long and ‘it was the typical ignorance I was getting from the management at that time, treat you like a piece of shit, leave you standing there, so I got up and walked out and I said ‘I have a job, I thought you needed people, people with skill and experience, you can go to hell’. And I walked out and then half way down the street this Director flies out and says ‘I’m terribly sorry, I apologise, I’m sorry, will you come back?’ I went back. A very nice man he was. He asked me how to make a hollandaise and a few other things and that’s fine and he says ‘when can you start?’ Now the money wasn’t great, they were never greater payers, but the opportunities were great and I learnt that if you had an Austrian guy working there when I advanced to head chef afterwards, I went in there as a chef tournant.

We’ll bring it up to that. You arrive in there now…

As chef tournant

So you have like, Freddie Goldinger is head chef is he and then you have Roland Fuchs is there is he?
PH: He put the sign on and this guy was about six foot six and he had to lie down for an hour every six hours because he was tiring his body and I got on okay.

MM: But all the senior chefs as far as I know at that stage, all the senior chefs were foreign except for Bill Kavanagh I think, was it?

PH: Bill came in and there was Jim Bowe came in as well and there was myself and there was another guy, he was doing the roast. We had a Joaquin Jesen he was the vegetable chef and I can’t remember, Ledergerber, he was Swiss he was the larder chef, oh he was German sorry cause he used to call you by your surname Hingston, Brown or whatever, and I ripped through him one day and I said ‘don’t do that’ but he said ‘in my country you must wait six months before I decide to call you by your first name. ‘Well’, said I ‘you are in Ireland now, and you’ve got no manners you ignorant so and so’. That goes to the hilt.

MM: What was his name again?

PH: Ledergerber. I can’t pronounce it. And I remember making a butter piece once and he picked it up and brought it into the fridge and never used it, that was his way. That’s the way he was. But he did some great work. He was great at canapés, great presentation and you learnt from him.

MM: And he was a larder chef and Joaquin Jessen he was entremetier?

PH: And there was a guy on the sauces, a French guy. God he had a heart of gold. Jim Bowe was his assistant. Jim might remember him and then you had Freddie Goldinger and you what’s his name Rolland Fuchs. He put up this notice one day ‘Silence is Golden’ so I wrote under it ‘So lets be rich’. He went berserk (laugh). So I loved that hotel, I loved working for the company yeah. They eventually left because the union was very strict because they were arguing that there was Irishmen out of work and all that, and we were trying to say look we brought back our skills a lot of my peers came back and hence the reason I told you earlier on about Boucher Hayes. We went away to study, to bring back knowledge. That was our bit instead of blowing up the country so anyway I still have that attitude you could be my worse enemy but if you ask me I would show you something, I’d gladly show you, and that’s the way it should be. But anyway to get back to the point eventually they drifted out and they weren’t replaced, they just kept the first and second chef and when Fuchs left, Bill Kavanagh, I think he moved up. I’m not sure.

MM: Bill dirtied his bib at some stage because.

PH: They brought in a fellow, a French guy. He came as head chef after that. Freddie Goldinger I don’t know what happened. In those days the waiters didn’t talk to the chef. I remember a few years back just before I came back from London which was only a year before there was a six month strike and it was pretty bitter and I remember asking a guy before I went to London, show me something and he was bitter, this is the Moira and I made a vow as a young boy it doesn’t matter if you don’t like me I’ll always pass on my knowledge anyway. But anyway Freddie, I think he threw flour at a waiter or threw something at a waiter and the union they were out to get him out and this is my first time to meet the famous Michael Mullen, you know, we ended up best of friends and we wouldn’t have it. He was nearly finished his term and I said ‘no way’, I wasn’t having that. I was there as a representative on the Panel of Chefs so I went in, stormed into the meeting, forced my way in and (inaudible). I said your man, (Freddie), you are not getting rid of him, he came here to help us. We invited him in, and if you have any sense at all you will let him pass his knowledge on so that we can carry on where he left off. Now I knew Michael the way he was giving out to me he knew I wasn’t talking through my backside, but he had to go by the book. He was the secretary of the union I think. He went on to be secretary. I think he was a head of the branch at the time. Anyway I brought before, down the old Liberty Hall, you thought you were in Russia.
171. When I came back from London I got a letter ‘please report’, Michael Ganly was head of the Panel of Chefs. Now he was something to do with, we were all there. I was sitting with all these chairs and he says ‘you have been away for four years, you never paid your union bills’, and I said ‘I didn’t live here’, they said ‘you should have paid your bills’, and they charged me, finally I had to pay out a weeks wages. ‘Have you anything to say?’ ‘Yes, how do I join this grouping?’, next thing I was on the panel, I couldn’t go wrong (laugh). The one thing I have learnt over the years just leading back to this point here was learn all the rules, as I said to some of the guys ‘I made most of those rules myself, so don’t come to me bullshitting’, so they could understand it, and that is how Michael Mullen and I got on great afterwards. If I had a problem I’d call him and he’d help me with it. And if he had a problem that he knew it was going down the road, he’d call me so he didn’t have any fights anywhere. That was it, and that’s the way it should be. So I think about five or six years later, I was twenty-six or twenty-seven, I got the opportunity, I made sous chef and what’s his name…

172. MM: Bill Kavanagh.

173. PH: He had a row with the chef which was the French guy, a very nice chap. He went to the Carlton Towers in London, I’ll think of it in the minute and he’s still there, I think, and a very nice chap but anyway (inaudible). But he came there, he was the head chef.

174. MM: He took over from Freddie?

175. PH: Freddie yes and they moved what’s his name, Bill Kavanagh, to sous chef and I was on holidays and I got a phone call would I mind coming in and I came in and I was told Bill was leaving, would you like a job as sous chef and I of course said ‘what happened?’. He said ‘well either you want it or you don’t’ he says, ‘look Bills going anyway’ so I took it. It was magical afterwards. So anyway that was that. Eventually the rate of exchange changed from the head chef at the time was being paid in dollars and there was problems with the wage structure, his wage structure would have been wrong and he went demanding extra which you couldn’t blame the man. Anyway the general manager at the time was Monsieur Lambert, he was French and anyway they decided then that was, not to give it to him. There was another reason for this; I think he was waiting for his chance. I had a lad working for me, a fellow called Brendan O’Neill.

176. MM: Yeah Brendan, the guy who is in Vincents (hospital) yeah.

177. PH: And I was off we’ll say on a Wednesday and Missus Lambert was a perfectionist and she had bad oyster and the head chef was supposed to do it himself but he was somewhere. I can’t think of his name. Anyway in fairness anyway, I got nailed for it and I told him I wasn’t here and he said ‘it must have happened on a night you were on’. Pierce being Pierce went to accounts and went through every available receipt and found that it was the night that I was off and I think Brendan had looked after it but Brendan had relied on somebody else, the usual and I went up to his office and you walk into the office and you sink in the carpet, its like the grass, and he had his head down and he said ‘do you want something?’ and I said ‘well if your busy, it doesn’t matter’. So I did it again and I said ‘here’s the receipt I wasn’t here, I didn’t give your wife a bad oyster, because I know what you want and I will personally do everything to perfection for you and your wife’. This was a guy, he used to seat at a laced table with candelabras, he was a Gaullist, the famous Lambert. So anyway that was that so I gather he was sore with the chef about what happened so that might have been part of why you know when you went arguing about his money because it wasn’t long afterwards. Anyway they brought in this lad Viel, chef Viel. I don’t know, I think he was Italian and to me, he was a sauce cook but I don’t think he ever was used to running a big place like that. I was actually running the place and one day…

178. MM: So he took over from the other chef.

179. PH: And I was supposed to take over and anyway I didn’t argue, I couldn’t be bothered arguing and I was the sous chef then you see and I controlled and ran the place because knew the
crew and one day we were doing a function when a fellow called Sammy he was from the Lebanon and he was a great friend of mine and he was assistant general manager, a lovely man and he says Monsieur Lambert wants to see you. So I went down to the office and he started the same thing as before and I turned around and says ‘how would you like to be the head chef?’ Well I knew I could do it and he said ‘yes’. Well he said, and you can quote me, ‘The King and Queen of Belgium are coming here’ and he says ‘I want you to run it but I don’t want anybody to know you’re running it and at the end of it you will be the head chef’. So this man Viel, a lovely man but he hadn’t got the skills for running a big place and we used to share, at lunch hour he used to add water to the wine and this is what we do and anyway the King of Belgium came over and everything had and we were doing langouste to start and then we had asparagus as the next course and then we had guinea fowl, we had another chef in by the way then brought over especially. Flew in especially, a kind of a pilau rice and all different things and they stuffed the guinea fowl and after that they had three different sorbets made in tuile paste on a sponge. Now I had to be there for each and I had to move your man to the right, which I did and when we finally got to the, he says ‘you keep moving me, why are moving me?’ and I’d say ‘chef because I want you to check it all, make sure it’s correct’ and Lambert was standing there like a policeman, it was like the army but it went to perfection. But you see we had all the canapés ready and I had to fly over with my crew over to the embassy to serve the whole thing and came back into the office. The chef said ‘look I got my gold medal from the King of Belgium’. I said ‘that’s fantastic’ and to myself I said ‘and I have your job’. So he stayed there for a few months and they were having problems down in Limerick sister hotel, I’m not putting it on tape.

180.MM: So basically what happened that Viel got swapped down, he got moved down to Limerick and you took over as head chef.

181.PH: Brendan O’Neill replaced me and Jim Bowe was my sauce chef

182.MM: Brendan was your sous chef. This is what two years, three years into you being there is it?

183.PH: No, no, four or five.

184.MM: Okay this is around ’68 or so then or something like that?

185.PH: I was about twenty-six or seven at the time.

186.MM: You were born in...

187.PH: ’38.

188.MM: This around ’66 or so.

189.PH: Now Jim Bowe was the sauce chef.

190.MM: So you were a young head chef.

191.PH: I was the youngest head chef in Ireland responsible for three or four hotels in that sense, and of course you weren’t allowed to go unless you were sent to the other hotels, which I was.

192.MM: And Jim Bowe was your sauce chef. Jim Bowe was around twenty-four was he?

193.PH: He’s the same age of myself give or take a few months. John Morin then, I have to tell you about. John will always tell you he taught Jim Bowe sauces, remember we worked with these nut cases in London for four or five years.

194.MM: Did you know Jim over in London?
PH: No but he worked with the uncle of the person that I worked with and had the same system and Jim had gone through the same thing and that’s what we always talked about. He was a brilliant sauce chef, genius, anyway, John comes out of college and you can quote me, and he came out of college whatever he was sixteen and one of the best students in the college. In fairness he was excellent but he learnt his sauces from me and Jim Bowe and he tried to tell people that he taught us, how could he teach us sauces, and he coming out of college? I mean you had to have experience but I met him there a few years back, he does it for a sick joke.

PH: John is the person you’d bring with you everywhere. The life and soul of the party and when everyone is down he’ll get them back up again. He was fantastic at Hotelympia, brilliant, guaranteed gold medals, loved that guy but you know a cheeky chap. Anyway I believe he has his own restaurant, I haven’t even been in it yet but that’s it.

MM: But he came in then as a commis then and Jim Bowe and he became a commis sauce chef under Jim Bowe as such.

PH: And that’s where he learnt most of his stuff. And he’d great skills and that, actually he beat me the first time we had a cold exhibition and he’d never let me forget it. I got the silver, he got the gold but I didn’t mind. But I always remember when he had the catering exhibition, the first one, when the foreign chefs were there and I had made the three wise men.

MM: The first catering exhibition was ’58 in Busáras, that one is it?

PH: No there’s one here in the Mansion…

MM: The Mansion House that was the sixties though?

PH: It had to be the Mansion House. I was working in the Intercontinental at the time and I had made the three wise men and in fairness to Michael Ganly he was one of the judges, I got the gold medal for it. I had a few others. I won I think a couple of medals that day. I can’t remember the other ones.

MM: Was that your first exhibition?

PH: The first Irish exhibition.

MM: The first Irish exhibition okay. Now when you say you’re first Irish did you do some in London when you were in London?

PH: No, no, no I didn’t even know about them. I hadn’t a clue. We only started, it’s when you got involved in the Panel of Chefs, then eventually over time, we ran the whole thing. So that was busy.

MM: You say you were very good friend with Eugene McGovern at the time. From talking to Willie Widner, Willie trained Eugene for that competition in the Mansion House and I think Eugene.

PH: Eugene worked in the Moira as well but after me or before me I can’t remember.

MM: Probably after you I’d say.
Figure PH.1: Panel of Chefs Team c. 1980 (l-r) Noel Cullen, Kevin O’Meara, Ruairí Quinn, Brendan Leahy (CERT), Eugene McGovern, Pierce Hingston

211. **PH:** Eugene is younger than me about four or five years younger than me. He’s supposed to be retiring. I’m waiting for the retirement party. He was supposed to arrange a weekend down in John Morrin’s place but I haven’t heard. We only meet at funerals, say no more.

212. **MM:** The sad thing I’m afraid at the moment yeah. So basically you remained head chef in Jury’s, sorry in Intercontinental until Jury’s, until it closed and Jury’s took over.

213. **PH:** Jury’s were taken over and they were bringing their own head chef.

214. **MM:** What year was that?

215. **PH:** Now I could have stayed.

216. **MM:** ’71 or something?

217. **PH:** They had a ten year remission of tax for the government and they decided to up and go and they were selling it to, now remember I was as the head chef, executive for the main company is God and he sits on the right hand side of God, and when we went to executive meetings, I sat beside the general manager and you sat beside him and the secretary sat on the other side but anyway that’s the way the executive chef was treated but it wasn’t Lambert then, it was a German guy. He gave me, he was very good, he looked after me, I can’t think of his name. It’s come back to me. Anyway he was German man and he was very nice and oh God you couldn’t meet a nicer
bloke. So when Lambert left he came and we got on great. I’ll think of it in a minute. Anyway to get back to the point, so when we were closing down PV had been, a fellow called Michael Brennan he was front office manager in the Hotel Intercontinental and he went up to the Burlington as the general manager and with Michael’s background he needed good people behind them which is understandable, you know and he asked me to go but I couldn’t get final decisions from him, you know. I felt uneasy about moving and like the amount of crew, I kept getting conservative (inaudible) and like I know PV had put everything into this hotel and I decided not to go, and he wasn’t too happy with me.

218.MM: Now when the Burlington opened right, who was the first head chef there? It wasn’t Thoma was it?

219.PH: Freddie Thoma. There was quite a few of them. They weren’t really top chefs and…

220.MM: Did Thoma open up the Burlington?

221.PH: I don’t know. Anyway when he decided a short time later it was decided to sell to Jury’s and I decided I would go with Michael, but I told the general manager and he didn’t want me to go because there was a clash between the two companies. He was a character but anyway but the bottom line was I went.

222.MM: But you didn’t work for Jury’s at any stage did you?

223.PH: Only when I was a young lad.

224.MM: Did you get a packet or anything.

225.PH: but I went up at night time and I always remember the Burlington it was only six months open and looked like six years, it was in a terrible state, and we had a function in the bar something like seven hundred hot buffet with hot food on it and the full ballroom holds a thousand, and it was for an Australian company, Silver Mines it was, something Silver Mines, their head office was over in Fairview, anyway beyond Fairway there and they were having this but anyway the bottom line was we got the place all cleaned up. Now I had brought a crew with me.

226.MM: Who came with you?

227.PH: Maurice didn’t come, Billy Higgins came with me. My roast cook, he died a few years later and he was a lot younger than me. I can see him but I can’t remember his name and my larder chef John Cullhane, both of them came. My sauce cook, Willie was the sauce cook, my roast cook, my larder chef and myself. John Cullinane, Willie Higgins, myself and another lad. I can see him in front of me. Anyway that was that. The roast cook fellow was Derek, when we were working in the Continental we (inaudible), you know him very well. Anyway I’ll get his name afterwards.

228.MM: Not Jimmy Connell or Gerry Connell.

229.PH: Jimmy Connell came afterwards. Jimmy was a sauce cook for a while as well. Anyway the bottom line was we decided we put up the buffet, my lads had the skills. The way it was in those days they used to bring in outsiders to prepare the thing and what’s his name Doyle, he used to run the (inaudible). Aidan Doyle was senior manager there and he came in, Aidan didn’t love me at all. I’ll give you a reason after this. Aidan didn’t like me on bit. ‘I hope you’re going to do all this correct’. I said ‘yeah, just trust me, trust me, it will be done’. I had seven hundred and when we put the buffet up, you wouldn’t see it, and he said ‘how are you going to serve it?’ Don’t worry about it at all, so we put up the buffet tables, and we used the old function crew, told them any over-time, you get it so we had to teach them. We left gaps, the hot plates, the famous hot
plates that we had to have the hot stuff in it and just before the guest we wheeled it all out, no where to plug them in. They stayed hot and within twenty minutes we had served seven hundred people. So that was grand.

Discussion about a charity event in the Green Isle where Pierce and Aidan Doyle first met but the ended up good friends later

230.MM:  So when you were in the Burlington was there a fine dining room there. The Sussex room was that the fine dining room?

231.PH:  You had the Sussex room and then you had the food bar and that. The food bar gave, you know, they switched them around eventually because there was more money in the quick food bar. So the head waiter, Noel Cullen the head waiter there and then Maurice rang me up, he was finished up in the thing and he asked me could I find a place for him so I brought him in and I had him up stairs in the restaurant. We had a carvery upstairs in our own, in the Burlington, carvery, so he came but he eventually moved on and became my sous chef and that, when Willie Higgins went over to Rathfarnham and he’s still there.

232.MM:  Ah he went to the golf club or something.

233.PH:  He’s still there. This girl that’s in France, my daughter is in France she went to Loreto college but they wanted to teach music and she wanted to learn to play the clarinet and it was Willie that taught her

234.MM:  Tell us about PV Doyle, because PV opened up, okay his opened up out was the Parks Hotel and then sold that to I think it was the Ranks Organisation and then went to. He opened the Montrose and then he had the Green Isle, the Montrose and then the Burlington was his first big hotel.

235.PH:  I got on very well with PV. The Burlington was the start-up and we had to get it right and when I went there now and in fairness to Michael Brennan, he was burning out and I couldn’t blame the man but I could say things but I’m not going to say things about other people in fairness to Michael but anyway he went on a vacation and PV had a meeting with everyone and he asked my opinion and I realised then he was interested but I put an analysis forward about how to control costs, paying staff, records and all the rest. In a way that I’d always know how much money in my department (inaudible) I worked with a guy in the Intercontinental, and Austrian guy, Kwowsky was his name and don’t ask me to spell it but he was a genius but he taught me cost control, I reshaped it to suit CERT years later and when I went to the Burlington. I put in a control system, put everything into it and nothing could go astray down to the last T. Eventually I became the food and beverage manager there, but I still had control of the kitchens, I’d put Maurice Blythe in as head chef. I had to convince PV because he’d pay me whatever I want. He said this to me, if I want he’d pay me to stay where I was because that was the backbone of the company. We centralised the kitchen and the grand functions everywhere. No I was pleased. Eventually he let me have my own way and I took over then as food and beverage manager so I had control of the bars as well. That was an education. So anyway yeah, turn that tape off.

Pearse tells off record about pilferage and the systems he put in to stamp it out

236.MM:  You had quite a good system there, you know what I mean?

237.PH:  If you want to talk about the system you can.

238.MM:  Yeah I don’t know how it fits in, I don’t want any names. But basically when you became food and beverage manager you put systems in place because there had been some sort pilferage going on.
239. **PH:** We were never happy with the results so I put in control systems and that. For me they were standard practice, common sense really.

240. **MM:** How long did you stay as food and beverage manager?

241. **PH:** And I controlled everything. They had a central office for purchasing but I controlled the quality coming in. If it wasn’t right it was sent back, and if they couldn’t manage it, then I’d get it somewhere else. I got on very well with the guy there.

242. **MM:** When did you start working with CERT then?

243. **PH:** Well it came to a stage that I decided I’m going to go. I wasn’t happy in it any longer. It was a guy between myself and Michael Brennan and he’d be a great pal today and cut your throat the next day, and he was a younger man than me. I trained him actually yeah in costing but a nice guy. You couldn’t meet a nicer guy but maybe the pressure of it, I don’t know. But anyway I decided I had enough and that but CERT were after me for quite a long time and I had, I had interviews in CERT prior to that and myself and probably people like yourself, other head chefs and other people, apply for certain positions and then I saw a write up in the magazine owned by the companies put it together about an interview. They had no intentions of employing you, they just wanted your knowledge, so I told them if you want information come and ask me I’ll tell you, no problem, none of that crap. Anyway the bottom line was then was I was interviewed by Michael Mullen and a couple of others. Anyway the next day I got a phone call to say that I’d been accepted.

Pearse started off working with career guidance teachers for CERT but soon developed a cost control course that he ran successfully for hospitality managers and workers both in CERT and in situ around the country. Eugene McGovern joined him in this venture. They both opened up Roebuck but handed the training aspect over to Matt Dowling and Willie Sommers.

244. **PH:** I loved it I was like telling my life story and they wouldn’t go home. 5 p.m. we need the room, yeah, and they didn’t want to go and can you come to my hotel tomorrow. I was doing great business. So it took off and then Eugene came in you see and I trained Eugene in my cost control skills, I’d sit in with him. I’d be in with the crowd and I’d say now, I was very diplomatic, you don’t mind me asking this Eugene because they probably don’t want to ask, so I’ll ask the questions but I was only putting the words into his mouth and he would do that. I’d get him to do (inaudible) so that’s it. So it took off and he was great and we put systems in the hotel so that basically that’s what I did. That was my forte and then we went into in company training where you’d go do in and you’d pass your skills on. Then I went to a particular area of the country to a hospital situation. Now Eugene was the hospital guy but it ended up that I went, but anyway great money, I made great expenses.

245. **MM:** But so were you involved at all in the sort of training up the likes of Roebuck or anything like that.

246. **PH:** When they opened it first Eugene and I went up and opened it, and Matt Dowling and your man in Knorr, what’s his name?

247. **MM:** Ah Willie Sommers.

248. **PH:** And they did great work there.

249. **MM:** The idea behind Roebuck…

250. **PH:** We used it a lot for our lecturers.

251. **MM:** The idea behind Roebuck was to actually train people who were on the dole wasn’t it?
Well if you weren’t successful in your leaving certificate or you were on the dole, either way, there were the odd few that may have been in a wee bit of trouble and they’re out on remand but nobody would know it. Our temporary offices were out the back that’s how I came to get the Saturday thing, to teach the students, but yeah, that was that and when they moved in to Amiens Street I used to do a lot more of that.

When did you start getting involved with the team, you know as in the Panel of Chefs?

It was when I worked for CERT you see so you might say when I started with CERT.
255.MM: Because you had the time then?

256.PH: I had the time. Well they give you the time. Well you did your own time at the meetings but when it came to doing the competitions. Now I always remember in fairness now Noel was captain, Noel Cullen was the chairman of the Panel of Chefs and he decided then and we all agreed we were going to have our own Panel of Chefs jackets, I think of the name McCaughey

257.MM: David McCaughey

258.PH: When we were first going to Hotelympia, the question was who was going to have the guts to be the first team captain? I went to the meeting and it wasn’t run by the chefs then, it was run by a committee, hoteliers and people, CERT people and Bord Fáilte and some representative from the Minister’s office and so on. I’ll always remember the guy from Bord Fáilte, we ended up great pals we were. He says to me ‘what are you politics’ I said ‘you know me, I’m liberal all round, whatever you have to say, I’ll consider it’. I did a lot of work for him afterwards for charity things. We ended up good mates. I think it was Aidan Leonard, he was the PR and anyway I sat down I said what we’re doing, we’re going to get these new jackets and explained the whole thing. Now they had the money and Dave (McCaughey), he says ‘we’ll give them a green tie’. Now he didn’t know me at that time and they all agreed. I said ‘I’ll tell you what, it is obvious that you have a financial problem here, what we are going to do is we’ll buy our own green jackets and our own green ties and our own shirts and we’ll approach suppliers for sponsorship, is that ok, that’s what we are doing’, and your man from Bord Fáilte said quick as a flash, I think Pearse has a point here, I think maybe we should be paying for this, and we got the uniforms. Ten minutes later he asked for something that I didn’t believe in, heart and sole I didn’t agree with but I had to say yes (laugh). What’s your politics? He had a heart of gold, he looked after the battered wives shelter and it was burnt down and he came into me in the Burlington and I gave him sixty meals, I put PV’s name to it, he was great that way, PV.

Discussion on doing competitions and competing in Hotelympia
259. **MM:** At what stage did you go to CERT?

260. **PH:** I was basically nine years with Intercontinental Hotels, nine years with PV Doyle, nine years with CERT and now nine years out on my own, give or take a few months. One of the reasons I left CERT was that I wanted to go out on my own, I had separated from my first wife after twenty one years, the children had all grown up and I met my present wife two years later and we’re together twenty three years. We leased a place in Wexford – Horetown House and I worked as assistant catering manager for B&I for five and half years and I loved that. Oliver O’Shaughnessy took over then. So basically I went out doing my cost control courses and did some work for CERT.

261. **MM:** You mentioned that there was one girl who was your protégé as such with the competition work?

262. **PH:** Mary Dorian, she came from the Killybegs College, she came from Ballyshannon. In those days the girls in the colleges they wore a white coat and a flat hat and I felt they were been badly treated, they were sent out to work weird hours in the day for crap money. Mary came down for my team, and I thought she was so good I offered her a job in the Burlington, now there were thirty five male chefs in the Burlington and anyway, I actually had a row with Killybegs but they let me have her, and I put her in a chefs uniform and she was the first recognised female chef given equal wages, and remember Joe Coyne my pastry chef, and I had to ask him to take her in, he was reluctant but took her in. He was in his 50s, but she had all the lads on their toes because she was determined to prove herself. And low and behold when I went after six months to move her on to the larder I had to fight with Joe to take her out. So she moved around and when I left Maurice looked after her, and when I was doing lectures, I’d bring her along and taught her all I knew about the costings etc. I really thought the world of her. She was a lovely girl, and she ended up in the ESB in their catering department.
263. MM: You mentioned that you had eaten out in the PV Doyle hotels regularly when you worked there, did you eat out in the Gresham or in other hotels before that?

264. PH: No, when you went into the Gresham years ago, you had to be in your wedding suit. The Intercontinental Hotel was the first place, the Americans are very clever, the Dubliners bar had a separate entrance, if you walked into the Dubliners bar and had never been in a hotel in your life, I’ll explain to you in a minute, so you are in the Dubliners and from there a guy would get nosy and move around and before you knew it you were in the food bar or the other restaurant. So PV clicked on to this and he did the same with his hotels. In the Gresham or the Shelbourne, you put on your wedding suit and walked in the door and a guy would come straight over to meet you and say ‘can I help you?’ and the bar was down the other end of the hotel, and that was the problem. Now it’s the other kettle of fish, the barman is meeting you at the door. You had to educate people, you had to teach people, Irish people in those days, it didn’t happen, you had to teach people. Now the people who went out were business people who took it for granted, but the ordinary Joe Soap, like you or me, it only caught on after television came in and we saw it was done elsewhere.

265. MM: When did silver service die out?

266. PH: We had silver service at night in the Intercontinental

267. MM: When did you start doing your butter sculptures?

268. PH: Bill Ryan introduced me to it in the Moira Hotel.

Figure PH.5: Butter Sculpture of Slane Castle by Pierce Hingston

End of Interview
Edited Interview with Seán Kinsella in Shankhill (12/3/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Seán Kinsella (SK)

1. MM: Where and when were you born?

2. SK: I was born in Curraclare on the 24th June 1931, I’m a Clare man, I came to Dublin when I was two, I’ll be seventy seven this year. My dad was from Wexford, and my mam was from Curraclare, her name was Mac Mahon, and they came to Dublin very young, I suppose my dad got a job, he worked in the Richmond Hospital all his life. I just have one sister; she’s still alive and lives out in Finglas.

3. MM: Where did you live?

4. SK: I lived on 66 Clonliffe Road, and Croke Park was my back garden! We used to climb up the embankment for the matches, there was no Hill 16 back then, you just climbed up, and that is how I got involved in feeding the Dublin team and all sporting people.

5. I remember watching my dad, god rest him, cooking his lunch on a the shovel that he used to put the coal into the furnace, because that shovel was made of stainless steel, and there was now chance of you getting any bacteria, and the engine drivers and the firemen on the trains used to do the same thing which goes to prove that you don’t have to have the best of everything, you can cook on anything. But when my mum and dad were sick in bed, I got up on a butter box and made their breakfast for them. And this gift that God gave me came from my Aunty Betty, my mother’s sister from County Clare, and she worked in 12 Bushy Park Road, which was the mansion of the Childers. Mr Childers was shot as you know during the Howth gunrunning and they had two sons, one (Erskine) became president, and Bobby became the head of the Irish Press. But my aunt was in charge of running the house and cooking. And she was one of the greatest of all times. She could make a cake today and you could have it a month afterwards. Today you make a cake and it’s all this high ratio flour and all that false stuff, but she is the one where I got the gift. Because cooking is an art, it is, the only difference between an artist and a chef is that an artist will do a painting and it will hang on the wall, a chef will make a fabulous meal and the next day it is gone.

6. MM: It is an ephemeral art.

7. SK: And chefs are born, they are not made, I don’t care, I’ve had fellows from Cathal Brugha Street and we’d have this beautiful asparagus from California and I said will you, you know what he did, he threw the spears out, another fellow was doing lobster and threw the meat out and kept the shells. It comes from the heart.

8. MM: Did you have experience with your aunty Betty, did you work with her or see her in action?

9. SK: No, in those days in the 1940s, she was the one who looked after us, she brought us on holidays, she was never married. I mean my mother bought me a bicycle on the never never in Hannah’s on the Green, because I had to be in at five in the morning for breakfasts, and I used to come in behind the horse drawn carriages coming in from North County Dublin with the pyramids of cabbages and cauliflowers, and I’d get in behind them for shelter. I hired that bicycle out in the afternoon for sixpence to try and pay it back. Tony O’Reilly used to sell the butt of his apple when he was up in Belvedere, that is true. I mean the pyramids of cabbage and cauliflower, they could sell every one of them, they weren’t there for decorative purposes, the air, they were all as fresh as when they were taken out of the ground. Nowadays everything is in a plastic bag.

Discussion on quality of food and meat today.
10. Food is a language, you can go to anywhere in the world and you may not speak the language but you can eat the food. And it is great to see now, when I was made executive chef of the P&O Lines, I had to be French, I had to be Swiss, but I was an Irishman, ‘Jesus, where did you come from’. I always believed to lead people rather than driving them. If you want a job done, you start doing it and they warm to you, but this business nowadays (of shouting and roaring) it’s all from Ramsay, I don’t know. In those days, ok, but you had a job, Toddy (O’Sullivan) used to come around at Christmas and he’d though you ten cigarettes, no I never smoked. Those were the times, 7 (shillings) and 6 (pence) a week. When I was in Frascatti’s which was the place at the time on Suffolk Street, I had a friend who told me they were looking for a commis in the Gresham, and I got dressed up and went down, and I met Toddy in the hall and he looked down at me and he said ‘yes’, and I said ‘I believe you are looking for a commis in the kitchen’, and he said ‘why do you want to come working in this hotel?’, and I said ‘because it’s the best hotel in the world’, and he said ‘can you start tomorrow?’ (laughter). Had I said anything else he probably would have shown me the door (laugh). So Toddy was Toddy.

11. MM: So let me bring you back a bit, you did your primary education in Canice’s and O’Connell’s. Did you get a scholarship to O’Connell’s?

Figure SK.1: Sean Kinsella Reference from St.Canice’s School (1946)
12. **SK:** No, at those days if you showed any good signs, and I was an alter boy at that time and god gave me a great voice and I used to compete at the time with Austin Gaffney, he used to live in Clonliffe Gardens and I lived on Clonliffe Road and we were great friends, it was just things were so bad, the first Christmas present I gave my parents was a sod of turf, and I wanted to get a job to help, see you’re too young to remember, in those days to get a job, to see my dad get up at four or five in the morning, because the Richmond Hospital, it is now a court, at the time there were three hospitals, the Richmond, the Hardwick and the Auxillary, and he had to be on duty in case they needed to put the full heating on for the operation theatres or whatever the case may be. They later moved to 3 North Brunswick Street, on the grounds of the Richmond, so he would be nearer, because he had to walk from Clonliffe Road.

13. **MM:** At what stage did the family move?

14. **SK:** Oh, that was later, I was at sea, but I went to live with them when I came home.

15. **MM:** What I find fascinating about your schooling is that there were three guys in the same class in Canice’s who went on to become the leading chefs of Dublin, yourself, Jimmy Kilbride, and Vincent Dowling.

16. **MM:** That poor chap, it broke my heart to see him, he was working in the Star and Garter in Richmond, he was working in England, one of the nicest parts, and Vinnie had a motorbike, and we used to play football up the back lane in Jammet’s and Marc Faure was the head chef when I went there, and Josef the head waiter and Marcel was the manager, and there was a chap called Sheridan there as the roast cook and poor Mr Dunne was there in the gardemanger, the larder, and after being in the Gresham, and of course I could hear Marcel ask ‘how is he getting on?’ and Sherridan said ‘oh, he’s very interested in getting on very well’, and he made the remark ‘a new broom brushes clean’. And I proved my point, and moved around and Vinny became attached to me, and I used to go on the motorbike, I never told my parents. But I couldn’t believe when I met him over in the Star and Garter, he had dissipated so much. But he was the first Irish chef to get a job in Jammet’s. Now Jammets was the place in the world. You had to make a booking weeks in advance. There was a waiter there called McLaughlin, he was a great footballer, Johnny Kinsella was in the bar there. They had a great football team.

17. **MM:** Did Vincent go straight to Jammet’s after finishing school, do you know? I think they sent him to the Hotel Bristol in Paris which the Jammet family owned, and that he later became head chef or Jammets. I think they understood that after Marc Faure was leaving that the unions wouldn’t agree with employing another foreigner.

18. **SK:** That’s right, but when you think about Rolland, and his son Henri took after him, he had a restaurant also.

**Discussion on sport and his two sons**

19. I never had a drink in my life, because poor Ernie Evans, now he died too young too, Eddie Callaghan, the cooking wine.

20. **MM:** But there was a lot of that, that is what killed Vincent in the end, wasn’t it, the drink? He must have been very young, in his 30s or so?

21. **SK:** Yes, indeed, and Mr. Dunne, I mean he was one of the senior men, and he always had the hat on the side of the head, and he was always so immaculately dressed.

22. **MM:** So you did your primary education in Canice’s?

23. **SK:** That’s right, the reason I went to O’Connell’s was that Biddy Boylan was the choir mistress and Eamon Ó Gallaghóir was in Canice’s, I was head hunted, it was not to do with
scholarship (laugh), it is like rugby or football now, that is how I ended up singing in the various things and the big hall, but it is funny when we used to go to Croke Park, we’d park the car in the back of O’Connell’s school. One thing, apart from God giving me talent, I have a wonderful memory. I can meet people who dined at the restaurant twenty or thirty years ago and tell them what they had to eat. I could go in and take an order for twelve people for twelve starters and twelve main courses, and you would always get one person who would say, can I change my mind? Now I wouldn’t write anything down, I used to say to the waiters ‘the lady in the blue dress is having this, the gentleman in the red tie is having that’. What really upsets me is when you go out and they come in and say ‘who’s having what?’, Jesus!!! and they always serve the men first.

24. MM: Where is the professionalism gone?

25. SK: Well, it’s coming back with these Polish people but it looks like they will probably be leaving, there will be an exodus out of the place, but they were the things. Yo see business people, when they go abroad, they are entertained to the highest, and when they get the chance to reciprocate they come and they’d phone me up, and a man would book a table for ten or twelve. We had a thing that the door was always locked because we lived upstairs, and either Audrey or myself would greet them at the door and they would come into the bar and they wouldn’t ask what they wanted, there was a glass of wine put in their hand. And then the waiters would take the food in, in its natural state, and then I’d come in, and I’d say ‘Mr. Smith you are having your usual wine’, and he’d say ‘oh, yes Seán’, the bloke wouldn’t know what I was talking about, but around the table they would be saying ‘oh, yer man is a regular here’. It was psychological, now I am not going to give him a bottle of plonk and he’s not going to worry if he pays fifty or a hundred pounds for it, he is able to reciprocate the treatment that he got abroad. And then you get the other side of the coin, a chap phones me up and says to me ‘I hope to get engaged tonight’, and I say no problem, come around eight, and he says ‘there is only one problem, my fiancé and I only eat burgers’, and I say no problem, so they arrived and I told the waiter ‘don’t give them the menu, give them a bit of melon, then the main course, then give them a bit of dessert’. And in the visitors book, he wrote ‘she said yes’, and she wrote ‘I’ll always remember this burger’ (laugh), you see most places would have said to them ‘get lost’, but in one corner there was Garrett Fitzgerald with a crowd, and I’d say, but the reputation that was built up and people writing about the bills, the idea of having a menu with no prices, that was required by our customers who were entertaining.

26. MM: You still have that in the upmarket places on the continent; the only person who gets a price on the menu is the host.

27. SK: That’s right, I remember one day some lunatic rang me saying that he was sitting in a pub and there were six people in your restaurant last night and they paid two thousand pounds for their food. And I said, if you can get the receipt off them you come here and dine for free as long as I am here! Opening a restaurant at that time was in a difficult period in the 1970s.

28. MM: Can I bring you back to how you got started? We’ll try and keep it in sequence if possible. What age were you when you finished in O’Connell’s?

29. SK: I must have been fourteen, I probably only did a year. I’ll tell you who was there, Ollie Freeney was there, Dennis O’Mahony was there, the head brother was known as the beak and you didn’t cross him. I used to serve 10am mass and I’d arrive up to class around 11am but there was never any problem because I was the one winning all the certificates in the Round Hall in the Mansion House (for singing), that was very important to Brother O’Driscoll who wrote me a beautiful reference when I was leaving. O’Connell’s wasn’t the same as Canice’s. There was a PE trainer who was an ex sergeant major in the army and you knew how to march, that was the break in the school. It was incredible, it is amazing how you see people coming towards you and you know even before talking to them, an old captain taught me if you have an appointment with somebody always arrive at least fifteen minutes before you are due. It was the same with school, I was a stickler for time and I still am. I played football for them.
30. But the history, in the restaurants, the Green Rooster in O’Connell’s Street, the chicken there, you couldn’t beat it. And the Paradiso in Westmoreland Street, you had that lovely man up on top and if he gave you rubbish you couldn’t complain, he was so gracious. He made you feel as if you were the only one in the place, but that doesn’t happen nowadays.

31. MM: What was your first entry into a kitchen or the restaurant world, and how did it come about?

32. SK: When I got my school holidays, a friend of my father got me a job in Millers on Thomas Street, they were a family in the business of making whiskey and wine, and Ivor had been in India and he came back and he had this old Rolls Royce and it wasn’t working, but there was a man called Mr Bell who was in charge of getting it going, and he got me to lend a hand with the monkey work as they used to call it. Johnny Kinsella’s father worked there and he said the Johnny was going to work in a new restaurant which was Frascatti’s, so that was my entrance, and there was a chap called Arthur Madden and another chap called Jimmy Ryan in Frascatti’s and the fridge was the back lane, everything you cooked at night was put out there to cool off. That was my first introduction, I got the reference from a guy called O’Brien who was about six feet tall, he was the manager. He came from the Red Bank, I think. It was owned by a Jewish family, Frascatti’s and his wife worked in the office, she was a lovely lady. Kevin O’Meara worked there because I used to walk home with him, he lived in Seville Place.

33. MM: Frascatti’s was quite an upmarket restaurant?

34. SK: Oh it was, it was unbelievable, it was the place at the time on Suffolk Street. (looking at reference from Frascatti’s) It was 1947, I was employed as an Improver chef, I was there for about seven months, but it was the late nights that my parents didn’t suit since I was so young, so I went down to the Gresham.

Discussion about the ‘Would you believe’ television programme. Audrey arrives in to the room and prepared coffee. Tape recorder turned off for a while.

35. MM: So you went from O’Connell’s to the Technical School in Marino, they did a year there a bit like the transition year now, is that right?

36. SK: That’s it, and I played football there with Snitchy Ferguson who played for Vincents. Of course Snitchy went to jail for leaning towards the IRA, and sure Jimmy Kilbride was arrested for selling the Poblacht. Poor fellow, when we heard that we were in the Gresham, and we used to go out hail, rain or snow to play football on our break up in the Phoenix Park. His son is running the business for him now, but Jimmy was a character.

37. MM: Jimmy would have done all his training in the Gresham, and even though you were in primary school with him, you would have come to Gresham later than Jimmy?

38. SK: Oh indeed, he was number one guy in the Gresham, he as the one carrying McManus, but he was unbelievable, Jimmy.

39. The chef in the Moira when Willy Opperman was there was Daly, he lives in Galway now.

40. MM: Going back to Frascatti’s, it was on par with Jammet’s but it only lasted around two years?

41. SK: Well you know why that was?

Discussion off tape which confirmed previous stories I had heard that some of the staff had been stealing and forced the business to close
42. **MM:** So you went to Toddy in the Gresham, tell me about that?

43. **SK:** That was Toddy. I remember at that period everything was so scarce, and he would travel the country and go into old bars and buy all the old whiskey, the ports and etc. Cooking oil was very scarce and we used to make our own mayonnaise and that, but one day this guy came and said he had so many gallons of oil and Toddy said ‘meet me at twelve o’clock tonight in the garage’ and paid him, and a couple of days went by and then the head waiter John O’Callaghan, in the grill room, went up to Toddy and said ‘there is something terrible going on, all the housekeeping staff are complaining about tummy problems, I think it is something to do with the
mayonaise’. It had turned out that your man had sold him cod liver oil for cooking oil (laugh). Paddy Fitzpatrick, God rest him, trained under Toddy and his first job in the kitchen was a big chopping board, two knives and a load of flour to chop up.

44. **MM:** They were winding him up.

45. **SK:** He was the only person to have a sports car, his people were publicans up in Dalkey, and he used to take us all up and down the lane and all around. And with that time the things they used to do with the managers at that time, like look them in their rooms. One manager who was there Bentley nearly did away with himself.

46. **MM:** Tell me about Bentley, didn’t he have a restaurant later on Baggot Street? *(note: The assistant manager was called Bennett)*

47. **SK:** No he became a butler in private service, it was Mac Sweeney who went in there (Bentley’s). He was known as ‘Medals’, he was an extraordinary individual. People ask you what was the most difficult thing to do? When the Pope came to Ireland I was asked to make Irish stew for him and I said no. They asked ‘are you an atheist?’ and I said no, I was an alter boy, I sang with the choir, so they said ‘what’s your problem?’, I said there are two ladies up in the papal nuncio’s home all their life, and I’m going to go up there and go in, and take away the only bit of pride that they will get in their lives to cook Irish stew (for the Pope). He took a step back and said ‘that’s incredible’. So Bishop Casey got on the phone to ‘Medals’ to come down and cook the Irish stew, and the ladies up in the palace got a word of this and got on the phone to the women in Bishop Casey’s house in Galway. They went to the bishop and said ‘if that man comes in here, were walking out’. So someone was sent to the station to meet ‘Medals’ and send him back home. But you can get carried away with your own importance and you forget.

48. It is like the thing that was on the programme ‘Would you believe’, when we cooked at Christmas in the Mansion House for the homeless, and the man said to me ‘hey Mr. Mirabeau, I’ve a complaint’, my heart dropped, the two of us had cooked the meal for 700 and I said ‘did you not enjoy your meal?’ and he said ‘oh the dinner was beautiful’, so I said ‘what is your complaint?’, and he said ‘there was no cheese board!!!’. You know the Dublin wit (laugh), and did you see the fellow with his arms around poor Charlie (Haughey) and the pint glass in his pocket. I mean we raised one million for charity and never took one sausage, because you read about how the proceeds of a charity can go, there may be a hundred grand and the charity might only get a grand out of it by the time everybody has got their bits and pieces.

49. **MM:** You came in to the Gresham, Toddy met you, you started in the kitchen, Uhlemann must have been there, what age was Uhlemann at this stage, in his late 60s or even more?

50. **SK:** Oh yeah, he was ninety odd when they retired him, and he died a week afterwards, he would have lived a lot longer if they had left him. It has been written that Karl Uhlemann is responsible for getting Irish chefs to be world renowned.

51. **MM:** I think at that stage there were two main academies, the kitchen of Jammet’s and that of the Gresham under Uhlemann. Uhlemann trained so many. Later on when Rolland came along the Russell was another academy.

**Story of Seán’s nephew working with Rolland and his career after that in Cork.**

52. **MM:** How many years did you do in the Gresham?

53. **SK:** I think it stipulates it there on my reference, I did four years.

54. **MM:** So Uhlemann was there, and MacManus was second in command, and I suppose Paddy Roberts was there?
55. **SK:** He was, he was in the pastry house and Willy Johnston was in the larder, before going out to the airport, and apart from his brilliance, he was a lovely man, a real quiet unassuming guy, and there was a fellow called Tommy Monaghan who was on the grills and a fellow called Jimmy Maguire, he ended up working up in the Green Tureen in Harcourt Street, where the woman was put into the fire. (tape turned off for story). Jimmy Flahive used to come in, he was the non army man in Portobello barracks. In the larder you had Willy Johnston, Franky Plummer, and Garret Maguire who was a *commis*, that was three, in the bake house you had the lady who used to make the cakes, Pauline, and you had Dessie Cunningham who used to be out on the grill before Paddy Roberts; you had Macker and Jimmy Kilbride, Tommy Monaghan and Tommy Dunne on the grill, and you had a little lady called Annie who was Karl Uhlemann’s girlfriend on the vegetables, and she had two assistants; you had two people in the pot house and you had Jimmy French who was the silver king who used to polish all the silver, and that was it. That was the brigade, Pauline was the woman in the pastry.

56. **MM:** Well fair play to your memory (laugh) well done. I heard women used to come in and look after the vegetables and the potatoes in particular?

57. **SK:** Well Annie was the number one vegetable lady, there were three others who did the potatoes, the terminology they used was spud barbers, peeling the potatoes. There were no female chefs as such but it was great to see them coming in later. I used always say that to say the men are far better cooks than women is a fallacy because there are far more women in the world cooking than men.

58. **MM:** So you were in the Gresham from 1946 to 1950 and Karl Uhlemann gave you this reference, where did you go then?

59. **SK:** Kevin O’Rourke head hunted me down to the Commodore in Cobh

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**Figures SK.3:** References (a) Hotel Commodore 1951  (b) Gresham Hotel 1950
Stories of a job in the Hammond Lane Foundry and the Miller’s in Thomas Street, Johnny Giles and Shamrock Rovers, the six burglaries and the kidnap attempt on the sons.

60. Louis Kilcoyne (of Shamrock Rovers and Barton Kilcoyne’s brother) was a waiter in the Gresham.

61. MM: We’ll come to that, but you leave the Gresham and go to the Commodore in Cobh where Kevin O’Rourke is manager. Tell me about that?

62. SK: Kevin had been head waiter in the Gresham and the owner of the Commodore Mr Sheer was a Jewish man, and had been a customer in the Gresham. I started there as a commis and ended up as head chef (laugh), Jaysus, when you think of it, and that’s where I got the grá for it. I was there for a year from July 1950 to June 1951, I was head chef but I was the only chef there, speed promotion, breakfast, lunch and dinner!!!

(Showing me Johnny Giles’ cap and also a medal from the Tokyo Olympics where Seán’s ship was used as a floating hotel in Yokahama, and they prepared lunch and evening meals for the passengers who were there for the games)

63. Jack Doyle (the boxer) came in one day in the Gresham and lifted me up on the table and put a ten bob note in my pocket, then you had Victor Mc Lagan was a famous actor, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, Grace Kelly used to go up and stay in Toddy’s house in Killiney. Toddy and his wife and two sisters came one evening and knocked on the door and I opened and he said ‘how long are you working here?’ (laugh), I said ‘I’m working here but I also own the place (laugh). I have a photo of him there, every visitors book we have, and the people, it was something that we never visualised.

64. In the old days you came home and you went to a restaurant and you’d get the Swiss paté and you’d say to the waiter ‘have you nothing better?’, and he’d say ‘ah, sure we’ve been serving that for years’. And you would have a steak well done, some French fried onions and chips and a bottle of blue nun. But we are a nation of travellers and that is where we got the experience of eating the food of other countries.

Audrey arrives with Seán’s seaman’s logbook

65. MM: You were fifteen years on the one ship the Oronsay, then on to the Arcadia up to Alaska, then on the Canberra. Your last voyage was in 1972.

66. SK: That’s right, we were thirty five years married in the 7th July.

67. MM: Were you getting fed up at sea or is Audrey the reason you settled down?

68. SK: Well, my parents were getting older and the voyages were getting longer and they started flying you home and you had to give up your cabin with all your personal stuff in it, and then they brought in pro-forma menus for the whole voyage written by some ‘headbanger’ in London, which was like television dinners, whereas before that you were in charge of your own menus, ordering the produce, and you had an input into (things) not television dinners, so that was not for me. So I came home and a friend of mine met me and said there is a house out in Sandy Cove, you should look at it. And that was it, it went for £30,000. Our bedroom was sold for €1.5million recently before the downturn started, it’s the most fabulous location. You had Howth and Bray.

69. MM: Its 1972, you have been nineteen years at sea, you have a few bob in your pocket, did you have enough to buy out the building or did you have to get a mortgage?

70. SK: No, there was a passenger on the ship who lived in a mansion in Howth, his name was Len Fox and his lovely wife, and he used to work for builders and I told him about my plan, and
he said he’d come out and check out the building for me, and everything was fine, so I went to the bank and I told him. Now he told me that he’d like to have an interest and we got on like a house on fire, but one day he had to leave Ireland and we bought him out. So that is what happened. So we lived upstairs, because it was ideal, there is no way that I could have been with the customers until four or five in the morning if Audrey was up there with the two little boys, but when we went to the courts.

Figure SK.4: Sean Kinsella’s Seaman’s Record Book 1953

Figure SK.5: Seaman’s Logbook 1953 – 1955
Figure SK.6: Sean Kinsella’s Seaman’s Logbook 1957 – 1972
71. MM: I’ll stop you there Seán (laugh), and just bring you back, you opened up, how quick did things develop, how was business at first?

72. SK: It was word of mouth, that here was something different happening, there was no you are in at seven and out at nine, fifty seats is all you did, we never double booked tables, you were in at eight and you could be there until eight the next morning if you wanted to be.

73. MM: What was your unique selling point or vision when you opened up, did you set out deliberately to create something new?

74. SK: We made people feel that they were coming into somebody’s home, either Audrey would meet them or I’d meet them. And when they were going, either Audrey would say goodnight or I’d say good night, and this had never happened before. If you were there at two or three in the morning, the chairs were not being put up on the tables around you and would you mind paying your bill at reception, and this had never happened before, plus the fact that we were buying the best produce and if it wasn’t as we wanted it, we didn’t serve it. And then all the big food people around the world got to hear about it, and all the awards we all got, we never dreamed or wanted to be known as ‘you can’t afford to go in there’. It’s twenty four years since we closed and people still talk about the restaurant.

75. You are not in the business to make the quick kill, we put more in than we were taking out but we were happy, we had two lovely sons, but when the crunch came, we were not forced to close, we went into voluntary liquidation. It was not that we hadn’t paid our tax, we got an assessment, the law is you pay the assessment and then fight to get it back which we were not willing to do.

76. MM: You opened up, gradually developed an international reputation, how many people had you working with you?

77. SK: We had two ladies doing the washing up, but if we were not there the place was closed, because nobody would have the same interest as us, and people used to say ‘are you not afraid that you would loose custom?’, but when we opened up again people couldn’t come back quick enough to let us know where they had been. We build up a relationship with the customers, and if we knew a man’s wife was having a baby, Audrey would go down to Michaels (Maternity Hospital) with a bunch of flowers and a bottle of champagne. If people had a birthday, we’d organise a cake, the personal touch, and people would be able to tell visitors, ‘when you go out here, the door will be locked, the wife or the husband will come out and greet you, and if that didn’t happen, how would that person feel? As one would say, ‘you are only as good as your last meal’.

78. MM: You inspired a generation of chefs because they saw you as the first celebrity Irish chef with an image of success, did you market yourself and the restaurant specifically to get the press coverage you got?

79. SK: We never once advertised. Mr Owen who was the government PR. He came into the kitchen and asked me one evening who does your PR. And I said what is PR? He said public relations. I said I don’t have a PR, this is all just word of mouth. Well, he said ‘if I was your PR I would charge you a hundred thousand a year’. Barry Manilow came with all his entourage one night, and Jim Aiken, who was a lovely man and started bringing all the big stars here, his sons run it now, but the phone went and ‘Jim here Seán, Barry Manilow is coming to town and I’ll try and get him to come out to you tomorrow night’. I said to him ‘Jim, Barry and all his entourage are in the restaurant tonight’, and he said ‘Feck off’ (laugh). And I would always ask people and I’d say ‘how did you know to come here’ and he’d say ‘I met Larry in LA and I told him I was coming to Dublin and he said ‘you must go to the Mirabeau’. And Larry was Lord Laurence Olivier. He came over to make Inchon in Ardmore Studios (1981), I was asked to do the cooking for Laurence Olivier, and it took so many hours to make him up like McArthur, that everything I had to make for him had to be made up like baby food so that he could eat it through a straw,
because if he was to use a knife and fork, and he cracked any of the make up, it would have taken hours to re-do it. He used to come to the restaurant at night time and he was one of the most gracious gentlemen. Like that it was word of mouth, when Burt Lancaster came with his lovely wife and there was a bit of a kafuffle in the bar and he stood up and said ‘Seán, you better get that man out of here or there will be a murder here’. And your man Michael Winner had pulled a stroke on him and he had been with Judy Agatha and he had to go, he had pulled some stroke on Burt Lancaster.

80. MM: Michael Winner was a famous Western director at that stage wasn’t he?

81. SK: That’s right, your man left, and a few weeks later the phone rang and said ‘Seán’ and it was Burt and he said ‘I’m sitting here in LA with some AH’s who think they know about restaurants, and one has a private jet, so we will be with you tomorrow’, so I went out to the airport with the Rolls and went on to the tarmac to pick them up. And I asked him ‘how do you judge a restaurant?’ and he said ‘that’s easy, by the bread, if your hungry the first thing you do is pick up the bread, and if it is stale, your taste buds are destroyed, and then by the coffee, if you get a bum cup of coffee after a beautiful meal you wake up the next morning and your mouth feels like a kipper box that a cat has slept in and peed in’ and it is so true. Audrey or I, it didn’t matter how many cups of coffee you had you always got a new cup because you can’t pour coffee in where you had coffee, it is not the same. It is the same with butter, you go into places and you have to unravel them, we had a square of butter and piece of parsley, if it wasn’t used, it would be used for cooking. These are the little things, ashtrays; we always put one on top of it and took it away. And the waiters were dressed in riding waistcoats and stock, because bows will fall, and Audrey used to iron them, and they copied that in a movie called ‘The Hotel’, they had the same idea. People used to come and take photographs. When we painted the place black, they all thought we were mad, but all if you paint on the seafront any light colour, the sea destroys it. We even had the kitchen black and when the man who was minister of health came in one night, he said ‘all my dreams are answered, those hospital kitchens are driving me nuts!’.

82. What has hurt me most, about all these television chefs, they drive me mad, they may be good, but where is the nice white uniform?

83. MM: There was a restaurant previous to you here run by an English man, did you buy from him?

84. SK: Oh yes, we did, his name was West Waffington, he was an ex-RAF pilot, and had a wooden leg and was fully convinced that the IRA were going to come and blow the place up. He started in the Wagon Wheel, in Molesworth Street way, he was a lovely man, he started that, it was run for those type of people.

85. MM: So did the Mirabeau, when he was here, cater for a gay clientele?

86. SK: Oh yes, we did, his name was West Waffington, he was an ex-RAF pilot, and had a wooden leg and was fully convinced that the IRA were going to come and blow the place up. He started in the Wagon Wheel, in Molesworth Street way, he was a lovely man, he started that, it was run for those type of people.

87. MM: Was it a Rolls or a Bentley that you had? Jimmy Kilbride told me that during the bank strike you had a lot of money and were afraid the IRA was going to come in and take it and that some customer was down on her luck and that you bought her Rolls because there was less chance of them stealing the car (laugh). Is there any truth in that or is it just urban legend?

88. SK: During the first bank strike, everybody lived like millionaires, the second bank strike nobody would take a cheque. Ninety percent of our business was not cash, it was credit cards, which you cannot manipulate, and the rest were company cheques that you cannot manipulate. That car was bought for £2500, I had a Bentley before that and I did it up and sold it to an American. I bought the Bentley from Kavey’s the Rolls Royce people in Lad Lane had the Bentley, we got it for practically for nothing, and had it done up and Mr Hogan, the man who
started the restaurant in Dun Laoghaire, Restaurant na Mara, he said to me ‘if I leave this car with my family it will be wrecked, and my wife wants to go to an auction to buy a painting’, so I went down to the bank manager and borrowed £2,500. It had belonged to Lady Granard.

89. MM: So you followed the seasons with your food?

90. SK: Indeed like Toddy, I liked to have things that nobody else had. I bought game off John Howard when he was in Wexford. One day Frank Delaney from the BBC turned up with his ‘hurdy gurdy’ and asked ‘are you serving strawberries tonight?’ I am, said I, so he came in and I used to serve them in half a pineapple and marinate them in cointreau, and it was on the BBC the next morning. I got an irate phone call from Frank Mahony who was the head chef in the Glenview Hotel in Wicklow, who had paid one thousand pounds for two punnets of strawberries in the Dublin market. He said ‘you are the biggest liar, you were on the BBC saying you had the first Irish strawberries’, and I said ‘wait a minute, did I say they were Irish strawberries, I wasn’t asked and didn’t say they were Irish, we get strawberries all year round from Japan, California etc. ‘If I were asked if they were Irish, I would have said no’. The Glenview was owned by the Staffords who owned the Gresham.

91. MM: That was the big thing for publicity at the time, to buy the first salmon, or the first pheasant or the first strawberries, and the money normally went to charity?

Discussion on restaurateurs divulging secrets of their customers to the press

92. MM: Tell me about the front of house staff? Audrey ran front of house, and you had a few waiters?

93. SK: We had two waiters, and then we had the lads from the airport, Sammy who was there for years, and used to do the Christmas dinner for Charlie every year, and Noel was great too, all casuals, and they at night time would sit down and have whatever they wanted and a glass of wine and then we’d get them home. We had a few French lads as well that were very nice, and we had a great relationship with our waiters, they got some great tips and if it was left on the credit cards, they got it all, we didn’t stop them the interest we’d be charged by the American Express or the Diners Card crowd.

94. MM: You had a policy of driving customers home?

95. SK: Oh, yes, because I could not let a man get into a car that was after drinking extra port or wine who could kill himself or somebody else. One night the head of the Insurance Corporation of Ireland was in and he had a Russian Prince with him and I told this story to his son later, I always took the keys of the cars and when he was leaving I said ‘I’m taking you home’ and he said ‘Seán, if I go home without the car my wife will think that I was down in Leeson Street or Dolly Faucettes or somewhere’. I said let me take you home, so I flashed a taxi to follow me in his car and to take me back, which he did, and next morning at 7am and the customer phoned me and said ‘Am I in the horrors, didn’t you leave me home last night?’ And I told him I did, and explained how his car was outside his driveway.

96. I remember one night we used to get a lot of Arabs, and Sheiks coming, and this two came with a whole entourage with them and I would never say a thing, just the waiter would say your taxi is outside, and the two of them got into the back and the conversation was ’we thought that man was a very nice man when we came in, but he never said good bye to us’, so I turned around and I said ‘I know, that’s because I’m driving you back to your hotel’ (laughter). Back at the hotel they put £200 in my hand (laugh).

Other various stories and discussion on feedback from the ‘Would you believe’ programme.
97. SK: We had the great film star Cary Grant came on board with his wife, she stayed up in the State Room, and he came down on his own, and no matter what was put in front of him, he used to say ‘take it away’. So this night he came down and he said to the head waiter ‘I want a Caesar Salad, and a Fillet Mignon, and Gratin Potatoes and Champignons’, so the head waiter came into me and I got it all ready and brought it out, the next minute he’s back in ‘he doesn’t like it’. So I went in and I had the menu and I said ‘excuse me sir, I’m the executive chef and I prepared that meal especially for you, and I am very disappointed, I have to put this down in writing’. He said ‘you do that, guy’, so I am letting on to write and I said ‘excuse me sir, could I have your name please?’ and he said ‘you bastard’. I could have given him muck after that!!! But he was living on pills at that time, and that appeared in every newspaper ‘Cary Grant, Cary Who?’(laugh). There was always ways of bringing people down, you don’t let them royal you, I was the first head chef to grace a ships dining room, because most of the chefs before that were ‘langers’ (drunk).

98. SK: One Christmas the pastry chef was trying to flame the Christmas pudding and there was a problem. He said to me ‘this is bum brandy, it’s not flaming’. I tasted it and it was cold tea that had been swapped by whoever had drunk the brandy (laugh).

99. MM: So the Christmas Pudding became a tea brack! (laugh)

100. MM: You had mentioned on the phone about where Toddy had me his wife?

101. SK: Yes, he met her in Gibraltar giving dancing lessons. She was Niamh from Kerry and she fell in love with him when he was giving dancing lessons to her, and she came home and told the family, much to their disapproval, and she said I don’t care, I’m getting married to him anyway. So they gave her what she was due from the family business and she came to Dublin and he was working in the Four Courts Hotel at the time. There was an old head hall porter who was a shareholder in the Gresham and she bought his shares and Toddy went as manager from the Four Courts to the Gresham. He gradually bought up more shares and eventually took the whole place over. It was his domain.

102. He had a great thing with weddings, Paddy Kingsbury was the head waiter, he was like a father to me, and when Macker nearly killed me and I was taken over to Jervis Street (Hospital) in an ambulance, he went for Macker. (note: Macker had locked Seán in a fridge as a gag) You see, I used to stay over after a dance to cook a meal for Paddy Kingsbury. He used to take us out to Red Island, in Skerries that was owned by Fergal Quinn where Peggy Dell used to play, in his car.

103. MM: How did Macker nearly kill you?

104. SK: Yes, I was in the fridge and he came in behind me and closed the door, and it was only someone else came in and found me or I wouldn’t be here now. I was afraid to go in and tell my mother or father to upset them, so he got away with it.

105. MM: I believe Macker was a terrible man for letting oranges fly across the kitchen at people? And you said that one waitress stuck a fork in his backside when he groped her?

106. SK: He sent Paddy Fitzpatrick into the larder one day for the garnish for a steak Rossini and he came out with a pousain with a sausage up its neck. And then with the melees, and fathers of girls would be waiting outside for him. You had an Italian chap in there who used to fill the garbage with bags of flour and butter, and one night he was stopped going out with two pints of cream in his case, and he was sued. When it came to court, the judge said that it was serious and the Italian said ‘with respect, your honour, I paid for that cream in the Kylemore, and I have a receipt for it’, so you can imagine the compensation he got, even though… And we were always running low on chickens and Toddy said next time the chicken guy comes in let me know. There was a big scales in the kitchen, and Toddy watched your man weigh the box of chickens, and then

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said ‘now, excuse me, please take the chickens out of the box and weigh the box’, the box weighed twice as much as the chickens! And they used to sell the waste fat for making black soap out of it, Macker used to put stones down the bottom of it to bring up the weight (laugh). One night, Toddy caught somebody trying to break into a room and chased him down into the kitchen and held him in the pastry house with a copper pan in his hand until someone came to help (laugh), and another day he was walking down O’Connell Street with his dog and he spots two guys waling towards him with two chairs from the Winter Gardens (laugh) so he stops them and they said they were having them repaired, there was nothing wrong with them, they were nicking them (laugh).

**Story about dinners in Barry’s Hotel on All Ireland Sunday when a row broke out between the two teams**

107.MM: You mentioned that you used to cook for the Dublin team in the 1970s.

108.SK: I was up in Santry Avenue one night, and I said to Heffo ‘these lads are just come from work, do they get something to eat?’ and he said ‘you must be joking, we can’t afford that, they go to the pub for a pint’. So me and Audrey used to go out with sandwiches. And they were always being slagged for going to pubs, so we invited them out to dinner whether they won or lost. We wrote a menu and named the dishes after all the footballers, and said that there would be a reception in the Father Mathew Hall for the team which would be for teetotallers. We have a photo of my son Andrew sitting in the Sam Maguire Cup.

**Discussion about sports teams and charity work**

109.MM: You had a list there earlier with Ostinelli’s on it. Did you eat in Ostinelli’s?

110.SK: Oh, yeah, I used to go to the Theatre Royal with my mum and dad, you could go and have a movie and a picture. Ostinelli’s the minestrone was a meal in itself, You see minestrone now and its only ‘bog wash’, they had the bacon and the spinach and the everything in it. And then you had then you had the Paradiso, you went upstairs and you could have a little dance, George I believe was the head waiter, and he was so gracious, that if he gave you muck and you couldn’t complain. There were two floors, the top one was where you went up and had a little dance, and the Regal Rooms of course was where the great man Uhlemann came to the Gresham from.

111.MM: What was the food like in the Regal Rooms? Was it fancy or just a Grill Room?

112.SK: It was very good, it was the place to be seen, for Toddy (O’Sullivan) to go after him (Uhlemann), he wouldn’t have picked somebody just from a Grill Room.(end of tape one)

113.MM: So we were talking about the Regal Rooms and Ostinelli’s and you mentioned the Green Rooster earlier on, did they specialise in rotisserie chicken?

114.SK: That’s right, there was a hatch in the window and it was open late, if you were down in the Cosmo snooker hall beside it, where all the great snooker players used to play and the gambling, you could come up to it or to the Kylemore place was the restaurant beside it, they had a little place there where you could have sardines on toast or a sandwich. As you know, you don’t eat when you work in a kitchen, and you get out then and you play a game of snooker, the lads could never get over how I’d have an orange when we were dancing in the National or the Four Ps. They often tried to slip me a Mickey Finn, but I knew having worked in Millers with the whiskey.

115.Another place that was very good was where Noel Mc Devitt was head waiter, Dessie Cunningham’s brother in law, the Metropole, Peggy Dell played the piano, that was very good. And when you think of the Capitol on Princess Street, that had a restaurant as well, there are no places now, they all went into disco land.
Audrey arrives with photos of Seán pouring milk into the Sam Maguire, and photos with Mick Holden Denise Roussous, the English Show Jumping team, Luke Kelly, Noel Purcell, Joseph Locke, Frank Hall, Phil Coulter, the Shah of Persia, Richard Keil (aka. Jaws),

Figure SK.7: (a) Kinsella with Richard Keil a.k.a. ‘Jaws’ (b) with Dennis Roussos

117.MM: So you had the bar and two dining rooms?

118.SK: We had two dining rooms, one at the front and one at the back, each would seat about twenty people. And we sometimes opened upstairs for private parties in our sitting room. Ben Dunne phoned us one Saturday night, Ireland was after playing Wales and he brought Gareth Edwards and all the great Welsh players upstairs and they were singing.

119.MM: Did you get an honorary degree in this photo?

120.SK: That was in Boston University, I was the first Irish man ever.

Discussion on Noel Cullen and his passing away

121.MM: You seem to have always been quite dapper, even from your teenage years, did you develop a style?

122.SK: Anyone in the hotel business, waiters, chefs are not, but they are always well dressed. I remember my mother, God rest her, bought me my first set of long trousers when I was in the Tech in Marino, a rust coloured one, and I always remember people admiring it, you know. This suit I’m wearing was made for me in 1981 by Louis Copeland. We couldn’t afford to buy them now.

Discussions about clothing
You were open from 1972 to 1984, you sort of filled a gap in the market because the Russell had shut down in 1974 and Jammet’s was closed before that. Do you remember Snaffles on Leeson Street at all?

I do indeed, the chef there, his brother worked in the Gresham and later in Woolworths, it was run by Hugh and Rosie Tinne, and their son is now the great pianist. They went in for the game there big time and they were there on Leeson Street. That was a place for much of the barristers and the judges and many of them lived in Killiney and it was handy for them to come to me because I was just down the road. Of course Jammet’s, when Marc Faure and Vinnie (Dowling) left, it was bought over by Clayton Love and then it was taken over by the Berni Inn and they changed it all to fast food.

Was the Berni Inn like a steak house where you could get fast service?

Yes and they had fish as well, different foods on different floors, like they have done now on Bewleys (Grafton Street). McInerney’s daughter bought the Mirabeau when we sold it. (note: Michel Flamme was the chef)

Discussion on various topics

You started horse riding early, I remember Jimmy Kilbride mentioning seeing you with the cropped trousers and all?

Yes very young, I used to do two six month world cruises back to back and then had one whole year off on full pay and anywhere there was a horse to be ridden I was there.

Story about American Millionaire and the Leprechaun outfit
When you finished up I 1984 you went to Waterville Lake in Kerry for a year?

We would have stayed there for ever but it was the year the President Reagan told Americans not to leave America to go on holidays. The Waterville Lake was booked out and it was like a locusts, cancelled, cancelled, cancelled. And Mr. Mulcahy (the owner) who was great friends of the presidents of the United States, Mulcahy knew us, you see, we used to go to Ashford on holidays and Waterville had been closed and he wanted somebody to give it a new lease of life. It was unbelievable, we had a beautiful bungalow there on the lake, and the first night Andrew and Stephen said to us ‘isn’t it great to be able to go to sleep, daddy’, living in fear, we had six burglaries, we had wine stolen from us – a bottle of Mouton Rothschild 1961 which would be £10,000 in English money – and the fellows who stole it probably threw it against the wall saying ‘that’s too old to drink’. When you went away and we found your house (turned upside down), it was built like a fortress.

Various stories about childhood

We had an accountant who used to come twice a week and Audrey would get a cheque because we used to stamp the card. One evening I went down to the back of the little office and this thing that had all the cards fell on the floor and not one of them was stamped. And it so happened that one of the customers had said to us ‘you must be paying your accountant some money, because he’s down in Elizabeth’s every night with Dom Perignon and cigars’. And it was an awful lot of money that he was pocketing, and we knew a man who was in the flying squad (detective), and we told him and he went after your man and he said you have until this evening to give the money back, and he had a girlfriend who was working in the bank and she gave him the money. He had done this to a few people. He left and went to Canada. So we had to get a new accountant. When the revenue came to check the books, he asked us why we had two sets of books. The fellow that was doing us, he left the books, naturally, and the new fellow coming in had brought in a new set of books. They thought we were keeping two sets of accounts.
132.MM: If you were, you were hardly going to have left them for him to see! (laugh)

133.SK: When we went in to the Revenue they had fabricated a story the boys were in private school, that I had a yacht in the bay, we had a house in Killiney, that we had racehorses, that I left the country every six months with bags of money to Switzerland. This was what was built up, and every one was untrue. You see, when you want to go into voluntary liquidation, you have to get permission from the Director of Public Prosecution and he will not give that permission if there is any inkling or fraudulence, if because if he does and there was, he’d be gone. And I could not tell the boys or Audrey when I got the call that we had got the thing. And the first thing that Farrell of Touch Ross wanted me to do was to stay on, and I said ‘thank you very much, but what I’ve gone through here, and what this has done, that we are supposed to owe this that and the other and you owe nothing’, and all the newspapers saying that we owed hundreds of thousands, because anyone in business knows that if you owe tax, the first thing they will do is come, take your car, close you down and sell the place for themselves. We got one apology and a photograph that it was totally wrong that we owed anything and an apology that we caused you, the usual, but the thing was that, when these people build up a dossier, and it was a coalition government of Labour and the other and they wanted us to put menus on the wall outside, and I wouldn’t, and I said ‘when John Bruton puts a list outside his farm for what he gets for his cattle, I might consider, but I’m not putting any menus, this is my home as well as my business’. It was just bureaucracy, and we waited nine years to get to where we are living now, and what we went through with a means test, even the two sons were up, ‘do you have any land, any money?’, you know, and they’d go in and they’d smirk at you ‘oh, I couldn’t deal with you, you had the Mirabeau’, I mean, what’s that got to do with it, but nine years. And the day we came out here, eight years ago, the place was all boarded up and the gate was hanging off, and we didn’t know what to do, because if we hadn’t accepted this, we’d end up in a B&B.

134.MM: You were fifty three years old when the restaurant shut down in 1984, you went to Waterville, and there was bits and pieces, and you went to America for a while, how did that come about?

135.SK: A customer said ‘I want to open a Mirabeau in New York, and I want you and Audrey to come over’, and I went over before Audrey who stayed with the boys, and got it going and the publicity was unbelievable. I did Good Morning America even before that with Robert Redford and I did Irish Stew and he said ‘what that man can do with meat and potatoes’ (laugh), so they made me a partner. In America, paying bills doesn’t come in to it. There was a beautiful big shop right around the corner from Saks and every morning their windows would be smashed because they wouldn’t take the mafia garbage collectors. This man used to come in and he would grab the cash and go off to Atlantic City or whatever, and all the people who used to come in to us from New York or Boston used to come down to the restaurant. Teddy Gleeson who was chairman of the Longshoreman’s Union was a customer in the restaurant and his son was an attorney and he tipped me off. ‘All I’ll say is you don’t stay there because the IRS are closing in on him, what he’s doing there, so I would advise you to get out, since you are down as half owner’. So we discovered then that it is no place to rear children, you’d be walking down fifth avenue and the next thing they’d be gone, the photos were everywhere (of lost children), you know, you’ve been there yourself. We lived on Fifth Avenue, you could see Central Park from where we were staying, it was an experience.

Yarn about promoting Wedgewood pans on American television. Looking at clippings of newspaper clippings of the New York Times when Craig Claibourne wrote about him which came from a promotion Seán did in the Tavern on the Green in New York.

136.MM: You ran the Mirabowl in Tallaght for a while, I remember reading somewhere that you made more money there than in the Mirabeau? Is there any truth in that?
Well it was Paschal Taggart that owned it, we were there a year or so but then it was sold. We used to feed the old age pensioners up there every morning for nothing. I was up there at 6am and I’d leave at 11pm. And we would help out with the local boxing club up there. Another thing that we did that is happening more now is that my wife was involved in the business. I’ve always said that Audrey was not my right hand, she was both my hands.
Edited Interview with Seán Hogan in Cathal Brugha Street (29/4/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Seán Hogan (SH)

1. **MM:** Where and when were you born?

2. **SH:** I was born on the 10th June 1953 in Ballyfermot, I’m actually one of three, triplets, two girls and myself, and blessed art thou among women (laugh). We were actually big news when we were born, front page headlines in the Irish Press (laugh). There are actually twins in the family too; I am one of nine siblings. My father was a shoe maker / shoe repairer, he used to make all our shoes so that is how the shoes always looked well, he saved the good leather. My mother was a seamstress. Her name is Eugena Conlon and she used to live in Inchicore, her grandfather was German, there was German blood in the family, so we reckon that is where she got the firm hand (laugh), to raise nine siblings like us.

3. **MM:** So the grandfather was German, do you remember his surname?

4. **SH:** Melhorn.

5. **MM:** You were one of nine children, where did you come in the family?

6. **SH:** The twins came first, then Margaret, then the triplets came, and at one stage my mother had six of us under five years of age. When you look back on those days, Francis came along, Geraldine and Declan. They had difficult periods raising us but we all stayed at home thank god. In fairness to my mother’s sisters an that, they all came and gave a hand, naturally, and as my father said when you had so many children and no public transport, just a pram and my mother trying to figure out how the blazes we’d all get on it, but we all survived, thank god. So then I went to Clarendon Street School, believe it or not.

7. **MM:** That wouldn’t have been your local school?

8. **SH:** No, what happened is that we started off in Ballyfermot in the Dominican, and then we went to Clarendon Street School because my sister was going there so she took me by the hand, and then I went back to Ballyfermot to the De La Salle.

9. **MM:** That was for secondary school, was it? How many years did you do there?

10. **SH:** Three years, at that time, and how I started in the hotel and catering business was that first of all I got a job as a pageboy in Jury’s in Dame Street in 1968/9.

11. **MM:** How did that come about?

12. **SH:** My father knew Eddie Corcoran, you know, and he said they were looking for just summer work.

13. **MM:** Is this Eddie Corcoran who is involved in the FAI?

14. **SH:** Yes, Eddie was a head waiter – banqueting style – and I tried to get into the waiting but I was too young. Then what happened is that I used to be the pageboy that would drive the lift, and at that time it was a manual lift, and Willy Opperman was the general manager and when he used to come in at 8.20am you would be assigned to the lift to bring him to the fourth floor and to make sure you landed on the fourth floor (laugh), so there was a knack in doing it, you know (laugh). You would be assigned to do the brass first and after that the rest of the pageboy’s duties entailed, I used to love going around with the telegrams, you know, telegrams would arrive in and you
would have to go around paging someone, and there was certain clients at that time who would say there was a telegram for me, there wouldn’t be but they’d give you a telegram and you had to go through the restaurant calling their name for sheer attention seeking (laugh), and in my best Dublin accent I’d call out ‘Mr. Jones’ or ‘Mr. Burke’ only so they could call out ‘over here, young lad’ (laugh), and as a young lad I would go over with the silver tray with the telegram and as my father used to say ‘that fellow is coming home, how is he getting these silver crowns and all?’, and he was trying to figure out what was going on (laugh). He met Colm Wise who was the general manager and said ‘what’s my son doing in there?’, and Colm said ‘oh, no, Sean has the gift of the gab and will do well’. Lee Kidney used to work in the Moira Hotel, and in my Jury’s time I encountered John O’Hara, the famous man from Athlone (IT), he was a waiter there, head waiter in room service. Then from there I went to the Dolphin with Eddie Corcoran, if you remember he opened it up.

15. MM: What happened there? Was this with Eamon Andrews?

16. SH: Eamon Andrews, yes and Colm O’Connell who was the banqueting manager of Jury’s went with Eddie Corcoran and that is how I got the job there as a commis waiter. We did functions also in the Portmarnock Club which Eamon Andrews has only just taken over, so you were shifted at the weekends out there for the banqueting and they started bringing in Cabaret’s and acts into the Dolphin Hotel. Now the Dolphin they did up and had it as a wild saloon.

17. MM: What is the story, had the Dolphin been shut down for a number of years?

18. SH: It had been shut down a couple of years because the old Dolphin had been a prestige hotel at the time and when Eamon Andrews took over they didn’t have bedrooms as such, they put it into entertainment, they had wild saloon, you had a boat restaurant like the Mississippi one, it was more like what we do today with the Event Management course.

19. MM: Was Paddy Keys there as chef?

20. SH: Paddy Keys was there as chef, but I didn’t stay too long there because I went to the Hibernian to serve my apprenticeship as a commis waiter, you know. How that came about is that Eddie had said ‘you can only get so much here, if you are pursuing this field you have got to go to a decent hotel’. So John McGann and Johnny Bacon took me on there and we were then sent to Cathal Brugha Street two days a week, which was St Mary’s College.

21. MM: So both John McGann and Johnny Bacon were the two head waiters in the Royal Hibernian Hotel at that time?

22. SH: Yes, they were the two head waiters, and I was taken under both their wings and you were supposed to serve a full four years apprenticeship but from my recollection I was taken out after two years, I must have been good (laugh). I know I came first in the college in the exams.

23. MM: Who were your teachers in college in Cathal Brugha Street?

24. SH: I had Kevin O’Rourke, John Byrne who had been in the Gresham, there was a female who I can’t think of her name, and I know at the time we were to get the certificates of them, there was a fierce disaster in Dublin and they postponed our graduation day.

25. MM: That must have been the Dublin bombings of either 1972 or 1973?

26. SH: Yes the bombings, so the whole thing was knocked on the head. I have a copy of the certificate if you would like to see it.

27. MM: That would be great, what subjects did you cover in college?
28. **SH:** It was in the afternoons, you had to go twice a week from 3-5pm. We did the kitchen and larder, believe it or not, you did that side before you came to this side with the Gueridon work. We had a bit of housekeeping and all thrown in, so a bit of everything. You had someone for home economics because at that time this was the place for that, and in languages we did the culinary French, then you had somebody for accountancy, but at that time it was just known as maths (laugh). The culinary French was very important because the menu languages in the Hibernian at that time, our menus were done out in French, you know. You have some copies of them.

29. During my apprenticeship then, as I said you were given the menial tasks to do, the first thing you did when you came in, in the morning, was to clean all the silver, the cutlery and the cruets and then the copper pans. To this day I think that you still had to use sand flour and lemon and as they say, elbow grease (laugh). They would come in to inspect them and it is just like when you came in for duty at 12.00 they would check your shoes. Of course with my father being a shoe maker, I had the best shoes and the best shine (laugh), and then they’d check your sock to see if they were black (laughter), and myself and Johnny Brown who came from a big family too, I remember one day he had no black socks, and if you didn’t have black socks you’d be sent off duty, so I said I wear the left one and I’ll wear the right one and we’ll just show them one sock each (laugh). But during the apprenticeship in those days we worked in the Lafayette Restaurant which was prestige there, you know, where you had John McGann and Johnny Bacon as the restaurant managers, and then you had eight station head waiters, twelve waiters, a sommelier and twelve commis. Then you had the different sections of commis.

30. **MM:** You had twelve commis waiters?

31. **SH:** The reason why you had so many was that at the weekends in the wintertime we would do the gastronomic events, which you would bring a chef over from France, certain parts, mostly France, and if say we are doing this region and doing his dishes, we would match the wines with them. It used to be a twelve course meal and the commis starting in the ballroom of the Hibernian it would be all set up and we used to parade around with our big trays, you know. Now those dinners, they say at that time that they were very dear and that only the five percent bracket could afford it. Now at that time you had your cigarette breaks, your sorbet and then your cigars and liqueurs at the end.

32. **MM:** Between which courses was the cigarette break?

33. **SH:** It was usually after the fish course, then the entrée and you would give them a sorbet and then they would be going for their smoke break and you would be going around changing ashtrays. Now at that time they only did it at those dinners, because at normal dinners they would be smoking at any time, but for these dinners they would only smoke at that time because the ladies had these big cigarette holders and they used to love it, and believe it or not, the gents used to open up snuff boxes and take a bit of snuff. And when the cigars came it was the gents turn then when they produced the cigars, and we used to go around with our selection of cigars and our cutters and I used to love nipping the cigars, and at that time you would be trying to sell the big Havana cigars. Believe it or not, yes you’d have the small half coronas for the ladies, and yes, they did partake. They’d say ‘don’t mind these male chauvinists, I’ll have one’, and then you came out with your brandies and liqueurs and at that time you had the liqueur trolleys in each section of the room, and then believe it or not we had fine crystal glasses to sell the brandy, the whole emphasis was marketing all the time, the wines were purposely brought over and you had to sell them, and the liqueurs that went with it. Of course these dinners often went on until 2am. They didn’t have music, at the latter stage they decided to putting it on but they realised you don’t need a band. At that stage, believe it or not, in the ballroom, they would move them out to the Donegal Lounge which was a big area and they would have their teas and coffees and they would be selling their liqueurs.

34. I may be jumping the gun here, but when we moved up to Iveagh House, when I was appointed as a banqueting head waiter or a station head. I was appointed to Iveagh House: (a) because I had a...
car and didn’t drink, and (b) because on a minutes notice you would be brought up. The Hibernian Hotel was the first hotel to take over when the Russell closed in 1974. We got it then and I was the youngest head waiter in town to take over this so called prestige job. At that time you had small and big functions. Now the small ones I’d be sent up for but the big ones, it was Johnny Bacon. Again we had an entourage of head waiters and sommeliers and again what we used to do was after the meal, coffee and all that would be served in one of the lounges, and all that and again with the crystal glasses. On one occasion we had commis that used to come over from France and we used to send commis over there, but this particular commis unfortunately fell down the stairs and broke crystal glass. Well, to this day, I think I’m still writing letters about it. They had to weigh the crystal glass to make sure all the splinters added up to it (laugh), and unfortunately the poor chap was rushed off to Steven’s Hospital, but she (housekeeper) didn’t care about the individual, ‘the glassware is gone, where is it? What happened?’ You know, this day in age, you wouldn’t be allowed with health and safety and that, because it was a spiral staircase and the poor chap did fall and twelve glasses were shattered. But to hell with him, she was more concerned about the glasses, the next day I remember when I went up ‘Sean, you were the Maitre d’, give me a full report’, and no matter what I wrote was not good enough – the glass again. Every week I’d be still writing reports for it, the incident, the time factor, they were only short of taking me down to Pearse Street (Police) Station and asking what happened to the Waterford Crystal, nothing about the poor individual that was lying in hospital (laugh).

35. MM: But the controls were there, weighing the glass fragments to make sure no one had actually taken one?

36. SH: Exactly, and again the controls were there.

37. MM: I remember talking to Garret Fitzgerald who recalled a Salmon falling on the ground and them having to wait an hour and a half till another one came up from the Royal Hibernian. Do you remember that event?

38. SH: (note: Sean phoned after the interview to say it was Eddie Murray who was the head waiter when the Salmon fell on the ground) Well, one particular incident I remember was that someone wanted cheese and we hadn’t got enough, and we said it to the policeman ‘listen, we need the cheese’, so straight into the police car immediately, sirens down to the Hibernian, down one way streets and all, straight in, the cheeseboard was ready for us, and back up to Iveagh House and no one noticed, the cheese was served within ten minutes and everyone thought that was great. But they didn’t realise that we had the police there, yes, incidents like that or someone would say ‘can I have something different’, but we had the police standing by to go down to the Hibernian and bring it back. It was easier with the Russell being closer, but when we took over there was a shock for the Government Department at the time because we did things slightly differently. They felt an honour and all that, and it was an honour for us but at the same time there was money to be made (laugh), and at that time we also did Dublin Castle and Malahide Castle we actually did, we were the first to do it. At that time Ireland had been handed the EEC and we had to put on a show and prove we could do it. At that time you had the chef Noblet and Nicky Cluskey who also worked up in Iveagh House, but you had Johnny Bacon who really looked after Iveagh House and John Rigby and that, you know. And as I said for small lunches I was given it to look after but at that time you always had plenty of staff, where even for a party of eight you would have a head waiter, a station head waiter, a sommelier and a commis (laugh) you would be scratching your hands standing around, but at that time everything was done precise and it was the same when we did the big State Banquets. We had so many waiters and station heads on the top tables, the amount of waiting personnel you had.

39. MM: What age were you when you got into Jury’s?

40. SH: I was fourteen going into Jury’s, about sixteen going into the Dolphin, and about seventeen going into the Hibernian.
61. MM: So by the time you were nineteen you were a full waiter, thanks to the accelerated learning? (laugh)

62. SH: Thanks to the certificate I had from (laugh) St. Mary’s College, you know.

63. MM: So nineteen brings up to 1972 and then in 1974 you start to do Iveagh House?

64. SH: And in 1979, I left and went to the Berkley Court Hotel, because Michael Governey who was general manager of the Royal Hibernian Hotel had moved and nine months later I joined him over there.

65. MM: Just to go back to the Royal Hibernian Hotel for a few moments, you started there in 1970, who was there at that time?

66. SH: Roger Noblet was the chef there, Ken Besson was still there, and he had a French manger called Manesero. At that time the Hibernian and the Russell were sister hotels, they hadn’t been sold out yet, but I think that year they were sold to Lyons group who didn’t hold on to it for long before it was purchased to Kingsley Windsor group. Manesero was the contact for all these French gastronomic events as they were called. Noblet also had his roots in France although he had been in Ireland for years. They tried it and it was very successful and they ran that in winter time on a Saturday evening and as soon as they saw the menus the people booked immediately and we found that this was very good but we also found a way then to sell the wines too, and then the liqueurs and then the found it as a money racket after that.

67. MM: So the idea is that you up-sold everything, you sold the wines from the region that you were covering, and the liqueurs likewise? How many seasons did that go on for?

68. SH: It went on for about five or six years, it was a great success and then what happened is that the changeover came and they didn’t run it. It was purposely run around January and February and maybe into March depending on if rugby internationals were scheduled. At that stage, one year they ran it in October and November. In the Hibernian they tried to sell rooms with it, but in such a small hotel the rooms went anyhow. It was to fill the ballroom on Saturday nights and those particular nights.

69. MM: How many people would have been at these gastronomic events?

70. SH: Around three hundred people, they had moved it into the ballroom and that is how they fit more in, so it was a real big event. The higher echelons of society loved being there, at that time you had all the horsy people of course. And to do that number of people with twelve courses, the delft alone, god forgive me, you would start serving at 7pm and by the time you would be serving the dessert, the poor commis at that time would be absolutely exhausted, more so then with the smoking break, but what happened then is that they trimmed the courses. The portions got smaller and then the courses were reduced and before they finished up they realised to just put it down to a six courses. At that time you had savouries and all, cheese and savouries, if you have a look at the old menus, but at that time they didn’t mind because you were selling the wines with it, you know.

71. MM: So the gastronomic events went on for five or six years and whittled down from twelve courses at first to six courses at the end. Who else worked in the kitchen and front of house in the Hibernian at that time?

72. SH: Well there was Roger Noblet and Nicky Cluskey, in the kitchen with Ray Carroll in the pastry, who was an excellent pastry chef and eventually opened up his own place, there was Mary Murphy there on larder. At that time, the demarcation thing was in and the only reason that I got into the kitchen was like everything. I was putting plates into the hotplate and it was an old gas oven and the bloody thing blew out and it blew me from one side of the kitchen to the other. That was it, just get up, wipe yourself down and get on with it (laugh), but then I got to know the chefs.
Johnny Hobbs was on the vegetable side of it, Nicky Cluskey was on the sauce, there was an in-house training started by John Rigby and that and eventually they allowed the waiting personnel in around the kitchen to see what was going on.

53. **MM:** John Rigby was one of the head waiters?

54. **SH:** That’s right, he went on to the Lobster Pot. When you were a station head waiter, if you have a look at the menus we had a lot of Gueridon work, you know, Steak Diane, Kidneys Flambé and all that, and Steak Tartare, and that is where the station head waiter would do it rather than the waiter. The station head waiter would take the order and then he would perform, you know. The Lafayette Restaurant was broke up into three rooms: the top room was the Dawson Room, the middle room was known as Maxim’s since it had the same décor as Maxim’s in Paris and the banquettes, and then you had the Waterford Room because we were the first restaurant ever to have the Waterford chandelier which was purposely designed for that restaurant.

55. **MM:** So the whole restaurant was called the Lafayette but you had three separate rooms.

56. **SH:** Yes, and the lounge area then was the Donegal Lounge because we had the Donegal tweed carpet and that was famous for the afternoon teas and cocktail bars. They used to have the famous cocktail bar down below, with Jack and George, they ran it and to get there alone (you had arrived in society). The Hibernian was famous for its afternoon teas. Now the afternoon teas came on a big brass tray which was around twenty two inches round and again the poor commis had to lift it to the table and again the weight of those, you know you had your hot toast, your croissants, you had pastry, sandwiches and your silver teapot and you could feel the weight of it.

57. **MM:** You probably had a spare teapot filled with boiling water to fill up or water down the tea?

58. **SH:** That’s right and you had a slop basin where they poured out and then you would go around and refresh the tea, and the afternoon tea was always served from 3-5.30pm but people used to come in, the higher echelons of society, and spend the afternoon there.

59. **MM:** Was the Rotisserie there at this stage?

60. **SH:** No, that came later. Sean Kelly opened up the Rotisserie, he looked after that but the Bianconi Grill was still there and stayed till the end. The Bianconi Grill looked after the people who would come in from the cocktail bar into the Bianconi Grill.

61. **MM:** But was the Bianconi Grill less formal than the Lafayette?

62. **SH:** That’s right, the Lafayette still remained the formal restaurant where you had to wear a shirt and tie for the gents and the ladies usually dressed up, you know. Big business men for lunch, and if you saw the lunches with the à la carte and even the choices you got on the table d’hote, whereas lunches often went into tea time with the long business lunches that used to go on.

63. **MM:** What sort of customers did you have in there?

64. **SH:** A lot of business people, tourists, believe it or not, a lot of people who stayed in the restaurant used to eat there and they had to book ahead of time before they got into the restaurant. Again the type of service we gave was very formal, you could come in at 8pm and the staff would still be there at 2am serving teas and coffees. They had a far breakfast room, purposely on the far side because of the late dining. Many a night people slept on the banquettes (laugh). You had a lot of theatre people too, even though last orders were at 10.30pm but (laugh) when you look at our order it didn’t matter, everything was cooked to order. So it was often late nights.

65. **MM:** Are you talking about the likes of MacLiamóir and that?
66. **SH:** Oh, yes they were always in, the two of them, Hilton Edwards loved it. They would come over after the shows, let us know they were coming, or on a night off they would come, and they loved the Maxim’s room. It reminded them of Paris, they didn’t like the Dawson. People had particular areas or rooms that they liked.

67. **MM:** How many people could the Lafayette seat?

68. **SH:** Well, because of the three rooms, you could actually do up to eighty six covers. The Dawson Room itself could hold twenty five or thirty. Naturally for a rugby weekend the posh chairs went out and you took more. The Waterford Room was always known as the tour bus room where you could fit as many coaches in because trestle tables were used. But as I said you had the *chef de partie* system in the kitchen and everything was prepared fresh on the day.

69. **MM:** What was the kitchen like? Was it old-fashioned?

70. **SH:** It was very old fashioned, it had its different corners, as you went in on your right hand side, they had the larder area and that is where you would have collected your cold starters and all where you would go from one side of the kitchen to the other if you collected your hot starter. Get your cold starter first and then up to the hot plate and pick up the hot starters and then get in to the room. That is why you needed the *commis* waiters to act as runners for you because you also had a dispense bar. It is like the afternoon teas where the still room was kept further a field and you had the runners, you know.

71. **MM:** By this time, Sean, had you started to go out to eat yourself?

72. **SH:** Yes, well believe it or not, they encouraged it, what happened was that as a *commis*, John Brown and I used to go to Anne Street, you know, the Tropicadero was still there and across the way was *Quo Vadis* which we found cheaper so we ate there. And in South Anne Street there used to be an Italian place and they had the best Spaghetti Bolognaise there, I can’t remember its name but it was across from the night club. Of course we also ended up in the Green Rooster on O’Connell Street which was a real haunt for the waiters (laugh) because it stayed open late at night. When you came off work, and you wanted something, you would go there or the place in Cabra. At that time this wasn’t gourmet cooking (laugh) but that was that end of things. In fairness it was the gastronomic seasons that set it off for us, because then you had a whole turbot, and if you were a station waiter, you cut the turbot and divided it and portioned it and that. In fairness Noblet used to get us to taste the food and I thought that was very important, so you could see it and taste it and then we were aware of what the customer was having and you’d have to sell it. Again everything was done fresh, can you imagine doing a whole turbot today?

73. **MM:** And they were probably big turbot?

74. **SH:** Oh, they were actually huge, and you would take them on the bone and cut them first and if the clients wanted it off the bone, some of the gents insisted on doing it particularly for the ladies and you had to do it fast to keep it warm. And the sweets then, the great *crepes suzettes* and believe it or not there was always some *Gueridon* work involved on those gastronomic nights and you’d be doing your nut waiting on pans and stuff, saying ‘who put this on?’ There would be different pancakes flamed with different liqueurs. It could be *crepes Normande* or *Breton* or whatever.

75. When I moved to the Berkley Court, I must say in fairness to Michael Governey he was one of the best hoteliers around, because he trained under Hector Fabron, and Michael Governey gave everyone a chance, it is something that he introduced in the Hibernian that chefs, particularly the young *commis* chefs, come the other side of the hotplate and see what else is happening and be aware of what was happening, and later on when he was in the Berkley Court he called it the day training session where you could go upstairs and one day you’d learn how to make a bed. Believe it or not, it brought great teamwork and camaraderie because you appreciated what there work was...
like, the same in reception and in fairness when you started in the Berkley Court when Michael Governey was there, you were brought on a tour and everywhere you were shown, you just weren’t thrown in the area. First of all the Berkley, the prestige of it, you know.

76. **MM:** What was the official name of the fine dining room in the Berkley Court?

77. **SH:** It was just the Berkley Room or the Berkley Restaurant. We always insisted that you had a jacket and a tie, and if you hadn’t got a tie you couldn’t get into the Berkley Court, and then we used to have ties that were purposely given to you but the gents used to take them as souvenirs and later what happened was that a jacket was required and in fairness Louis Copeland gave us a few jackets which we could give to our clients and some of those jackets mysteriously vanished, the waiters never got any of them (laugh) it was the clients. But at that stage, as I said, the restaurant was done fine dining but with less staff. There were only two restaurant managers (laugh) and your waiters, and at that stage there were no sommeliers, you had to do that yourself.

78. **MM:** So you joined the Berkley Court nine months after it opened, was this PV Doyle’s first ‘five star’ hotel?

79. **SH:** PV Doyle poached Michael Governey and put a proposition to Michael Governey that he was going top of the market, fine dining, and really picked Michael Governey’s brains and in fairness they did see that if you spend money you will make money. And PV in his wildest dreams never thought it could be done, but after Michael Governey went there, within a year we were dealing with the higher echelons of society, the Michael Smurfits, the Denis Desmonds, the JP Mc Manus and when PV realised that yes, I could get them, we never had to worry about budget accounts or that when PV ran the hotel because we were known, well the accountants called us the white elephants because they were pouring so much into the establishment, it was always the best of everything, but PV always looked on it as his hotel. On a Saturday night we had to tell Vincent Doyle to sit down and stop doing *Maitre D’hotel* in the restaurant because he was jeopardising our future (laughter), he was buying everybody drinks but at the same time he was approachable and in fairness, if we wanted anything, like if the carpet was fraying, he’d replace it immediately. With Jury’s, three years later you would still be looking at the same carpet. With PV you got it immediately or you got your answer within three days.

80. **MM:** Who was in the kitchen when you went there first?

81. **SH:** Eugene Mc Sweeney, he stayed about two or three years. He brought in a great menu, he was renowned. He had a full *chef de partie* system there. When the hotel opened first we had the biggest brigade of chefs and again it was the old tradition, Michael Governey brought that with him, the same with the restaurant. But then after a few years they trimmed it down and that’s when Eugene felt, ‘I’ve done my time here’.

82. **MM:** Do you remember who was with Eugene there?

83. **SH:** He brought a young brigade with him. There was a fellow McDermot, they were all young chefs at the time, he trained them.

84. **MM:** Did any of them go on to become famous?

85. **SH:** No, well Tony Butler was there in his day and he was a great pastry chef. Tony came from the Russell. Lee McAvey went on to the bank. In fairness anyone who was there Brian McDonald went on the AIB bank centre, and they did become chefs under Eugene’s training. After Eugene, Noel Cullen came for a while but didn’t stay too long because he was going to America and I think Tony Butler took over for a while. Michael O’Neill came from the Westbury and stayed about eighteen months before Volker and he was followed by Dermot Whelan.

86. **MM:** What position did you go to the Berkley Court as? Did you go as assistant head waiter?
87. **SH:** No, I just went in there as a waiter, John Cartland, Paddy McNamara and David Marks were the head waiters. Dave Marks left, Joe in Irish Life was a head waiter, there was four head waiters but it went down to three – Dave Marks left and I was appointed, and after Paddy left there was only myself and John. At that stage they trimmed us down, it was kind of like the semi-Hibernian Hotel with the numbers but the responsibility became more. Then eventually myself and John took over and we more or less did everything (laugh) sommelier, head waiter, you just got stuck in. At that stage we trimmed from twelve waiters to nine waiters or eight waiters so that you had four each shift. We used to have four **commis** waiters but that eventually went, in the latter years we had no **commis** at all.

88. **MM:** When did that come to an end?

89. **SH:** It started to fall off in the sense that management and the accountants more so looking at the rates of pay and realising that you had to pay them and give them more time off and they decided that it was ridiculous. In fairness, at first when we trained them, we didn’t mind that they had served three or four years, now they never served that long, when we had an outlet for them in the Palm Court, the restaurant next door. We used to train them and send them in there so they were still trained for fine dining but could revert to normal table service, either that or they went to banqueting. But then when the radical changes came where we lost waiting personnel, just before the Jury’s came, the Doyle Group trimmed it down and let some chef go and waiting staff, you know.

90. **MM:** Did they do much banqueting in the Berkley Court?

91. **SH:** They did, for such a small hall, the prestige of it, we did the big function for the chancellor of Germany, Helmut Kohl, when he came over. The other one we did was the king and queen of Spain. You see that time we had a small ballroom because we were the first hotels to have a swimming pool and massage area, but then they realised that it wasn’t doing so well, so they extended the ballroom and again they would do functions for the higher echelons of society, the Smurfit Group and that.

92. **MM:** Where had the likes of JP Mc Manus and Smurfit and these boys been eating prior to the Berkley Court opening?

93. **SH:** They had been eating in the Hibernian but as Michael Smurfit would say, he knew us and if he rang to say ‘Hi Sean, I want a roast pheasant’, we knew exactly how he liked it cooked and we would carve it at the table and the legs he wouldn’t take. It is like the wild duck, the duck press, in all the years I used it only three times and that was for him, and Michael Smurfit found when he opened up the K Club, that it was easier for him to take a helicopter down from the airport than to drive across the city to the Berkley Court. We always knew when Dr. Smurfit was coming in and we had his wines and his cigars and of course the famous person that ate at our restaurant too was Charlie Haughey. We held his table until 1.15pm, table six, and after that we could give it away. You held it just in case, he could come five days out of six or he could come three or four days, but that table was sacrosanct until 1.15pm.

94. **MM:** So he was that regular there?

95. **SH:** He was, Charlie was, he was that regular and you held on to his table, at that stage he could arrive on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday when the Dáil was in session but on a Monday too, and he could bring the family in on the weekend. Now in fairness you’d get a call to say if he was out of the country. And at that time he’d be sending the Lynch-Bages to tables and they’d be coming back, you know. At that the restaurant was small, you must remember, and we had the five percent bracket eating all around, and that is where most of the deals were done.

96. **MM:** So it was the place for all the movers and shakers?
97. **SH:** Oh, yes, everyone used to eat in that restaurant, and as I said, we could get the lobster and the sole and the freshest stuff in the market, Sean Kinsella was the only competition at the time, you know. Sean and ourselves would be rating the amount of times they came in (laugh).

98. **MM:** How about the likes of John Howard?

99. **SH:** John in fairness used to eat in our restaurant on Sundays too, but Charlie may have a dinner in John’s establishment but he’d have lunch with us. We used to have the same clientele but he’d have them for dinners and we’d have them for lunches, and vice versa.

100. **MM:** At that time, were you aware of the competition, were you eating out yourself?

101. **SH:** At that time, when I was appointed, you had to go out. And at that time you used to eat in hotels, to see what competition we were up against. And at that time the Gresham here, believe it or not, you’d start out here and we purposely didn’t eat in the other Jury / Doyle hotels, but we ate in the Central which had been re-done, to check it out. You also checked with your clientele where they were eating out and how it was. That is how I ended up going out to Sean Kinsella one night, he got stuck one night and Michael Governey asked me to go out, and I thought it was to eat, but it was to work, you know, and I met some of our clients out there, like Margaret Heffernan from Dunnes Stores. So you would see what they were eating, and again Sean would put on a great show, he’d bring your food out and say ‘this is the duck you will have’ and all that, they thoroughly enjoyed all that in the restaurant. Now, the likes of John Howard and that we ate in it to see what they were doing and had and all that but we noticed that we had the best wine list and that stood to us. But we could because Michael Governey had brought a system in that we had in the Hibernian that they would go over to France and buy the best crop of the year and bed them down, and then when Berkley opened we had good wines, *Chateau de Pez* and that and lay them down for ten years and then we would make a good profit on them. But then as times changed, when the accountants took over, they didn’t allow that. They didn’t see it as an investment, but in fairness Michael did.

102. **MM:** He probably got that from Hector Fabron?

103. **SH:** Yes, and we used to love in the Hibernian the odd time when the Liffey would overflow, the cellar would damage and then we could get bottles of wine. I have a nice *Chateau Margaux* 1962 which I bought for £2 10shillings and 6pence. I have it at home still (laugh).

104. **MM:** But you never drank Sean, did you?

105. **SH:** No, it made me aware in the earlier days in the Hibernian, what happened is that I got a car, and Anglia Estate of my father and one particular night we had gone out disco dancing, Sloopy’s and all that, and I had brought colleagues home who lived in the far side, Crumlin and all that. This one particular night I brought a colleague home, and he destroyed my car getting sick, and at that time I had an old sheepskin rug in the car so I had to take it out and clean it, and I spent the next day cleaning out my car and when I arrived into work this colleague went for me saying ‘thanks to you I never got home’. I said ‘what are you talking about, I left you home’, ’you didn’t, he said, ‘I had to get a taxi’, and to this day I couldn’t realise that I did, and the slagging I got off my friends because they thought ‘how dare you leave him’, and I said ‘no, I brought him home’. And he was after throwing up in my car and I said if that is what drink does to you, no way. And believe it or not, when I saw that, I said ‘I don’t need this’, so to this day I’ve never touched it. I’m bad enough without it, and looking back I’m very fortunate because then also in the Hibernian I would see things going on in the Locker Room on a Friday, they’d be playing cards and wives outside waiting, while you realise the pay packet is being gambled upstairs, and at that time they would be playing for big money. You know yourself, waiters at the time would gamble on two flies going up a wall, so I said ‘this is it’.

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106. A very funny incident was when the *commis* waiters were out, you’d get a break from 12.00 – 12.30 and if you finished you *mis en place* you could go off to Stephen’s Green around 11.45am for your break. Myself and John Brown (laugh) used to go up to Stephen’s Green, get bread and feed the ducks, this particular day people were saying to us ‘would you like to buy some grass?’ and we were saying ‘grass, why would we want to but grass, there is loads of it in my garden’ (laugh), so we went back and told the waiters and they said ‘we’ll go up and sort them out’, that’s how innocent we were (laugh). At that time the hours were unsocial. In the Hibernian when I first started you would do a shift from 8am till 10.30am and then back at 12.30 – 2.30pm and then back at 5.00 – 10.00pm and that was your early night. You would think great, you were going at 10pm knowing they would still be there at 2am. There were days that you would finish at 3pm on Wednesday and you wouldn’t be back till 3pm on Thursday, and they tell you that was your day off because you had twenty-four hours free (laughter). When you look back you say ‘how did we survive?’ but in fairness later on then we got used to getting weekends off. When myself and John took over in the Berkley Court, our incentive to the staff was that you would have every second weekend off – Saturday and Sunday – and that way we knew we would have no problems with absenteeism. In fairness we ran a tight ship eventually with Michael Governey and he didn’t mind the flexibility on the roster. One thing that stood to us is that because we gave the waiting staff the weekends off, which was unheard of in the Doyle group, because the rest of the waiters in the group were wondering what was happening, so Tom O’Dwyer who was shop steward in the Brulington said ‘let’s look at it’ and he was branch secretary and once we got it in through the union, it was ok. At that time the union was pretty strong, even though we exceeded our quota of hours in the one week as opposed to the second week, but one we had achieved that we never had a problem with absenteeism because we knew we were going to have a busy weekend and in fairness Michael Governey said ‘when you are off enjoy it, but when you are on, be on’. Our saying was ‘you are only as good as your last meal’ and we put on a little show, the whole secret is to relax the guests, entertain them, sell as much as you can, and assure them that we provide a service but weren’t servile.

107. Yes, there were times when a guest would get a bit ‘strappy’, some of them would chance their arms and open a dear bottle of wine and try and say they weren’t paying for it, but when I checked that there was nothing wrong with it, they did pay for it. One particular occasion Michel Smurfit ordered a *Chateau Talbot* 1966 and I said to him ‘I’m a bit concerned’ because we had the odd bin list and anything on that was questionable. He said ‘Sean, it will be fine’, and I said ‘I don’t think so’, and he said ‘it doesn’t matter, just open it up’. I poured it out and he tasted it and for that second he said ‘that’s fine’, so I got that one wrong, but again by the time his main course was ready he tasted it again and by that time the tannins had set and it was gone off. So he said ‘what am I going to do now?’ so I said ‘I’ll put a cork in it and it will do you for your chips, the vinegar’ and he said ‘ah, yea’. But Vincent Doyle was at the table and he said ‘oh, no, put that down to my account and I’ll pay for it’. Michael Smurfit said ‘no, Sean is saving you money, he is right, he did warn me’, it ended up he did pay for it because I said ‘it’s going on the bill, that’s it’ (laugh).

108. Now despite the odd bin list, we had the best of wines. That came from Michael Governey where you could purchase the best of wine, spin them down and by the time you came to sell them the mark up was good. At that time they were in the hotel business to stay. Then David and Michael they built the penthouse and it was like half the hotel and one designed one section and the other designed the other. They brought in fine dining to the suites and all that, and that is when we realised what was happening with the bank centre, we realised that there was competition with the private dining rooms in the bank centres. They didn’t mind paying the extra for the lobsters and that.

109. **MM:** You are talking now of the private dining that was with in AIB, Bank of Ireland or Ulster Bank. They all had their own private dining rooms near their boardrooms, so they were siphoning off customers who would have come to you.

110. **SH:** Not just customers, they were siphoning off the staff as well. In fairness we didn’t mind but our staff was usually found in these establishments because they were trained well and knew
their stuff. In fairness to PV, he came back one day and he said ‘Sean, I was down the bank centre and your staff were there’. And I said ‘no my staff was here, the ones that are here tonight, but were you well looked after, and if so what are you worried about?’ Now Michael Brennan took it another way, he came up and said ‘I want to see what staff you have, I was down the bank centre’ and I said ‘what are you worried about?’ but he was concerned. They were trained but sometimes when the clients came in they would know them and feel embarrassed but they would say don’t worry I’m just down here for a while, and they were able to tell the bank centre ‘listen, make sure he has this or has that’, the little attributes, we were always aware of what the clients liked or not.

111.MM: So there was really a little club of top waiters who knew the clients and could be found working at a lot of different occasions?

112.SH: Exactly, and some of our clients may insist on doing something private at home, the likes of Ken Besson. That was my first experience of outdoor catering when he said to me ‘Sean, I need you tonight’. Now I was only a young garsún, as I said to you and I went down to Sallins (Co. Kildare), myself and John Brown and a chef. And Besson tried to convince the people he was trying to sell his house to that we were the butlers, he’d ring the bell and we’d come in, and they were very interested at the time these German people in buying the house and wanted to know if the staff came with the deal. Besson was telling the ‘yes, the footmen will be here’ (laugh). So then the highlight of the Berkley Court was getting in to the leading hotels of the world group.

113.MM: So the highlight of your time in the Berkley Hotel was getting into the leading hotels in the world?

114.SH: Yes, we were the first in Ireland to get into this, before the Shelbourne or that, and it took over two years to get into it, you had to be aware of the standards and at that time the staff had to be retrained and remember you were dealing with well mature staff that had served apprenticeships and all, so it was difficult, but we got over that hurdle and we did very well. We found that we were bringing in to the top – higher echelons of society in and then also the Americans and then they realised that for every client we’d get, leading hotels of the world would get around 400 dollars, so they decided that was a bit too much.

115.MM: Was that every new client?

116.SH: Yes, every new client, but also if they booked through leading hotels (a percentage was taken), at that time we used to have a chauffeur who if need be would meet you at the airport and if you had the penthouse there would be a butler, now it was a waiter but he was called a butler, but these clients they had the money to pay, they just felt sure put it on the bill, kind of thing. If they wanted to do in-house dining they’d go through the restaurant and we’d check the market and get the best lobster and all that. When Jury’s took over they decided no. But in fairness we had a renaissance, because Joe Russell, in fairness got us back into the leading hotels, but after two years Jury’s decided no again. By that stage leading hotels were gone to the Shelbourne, the Marriott Hotel, the Westbury and all that, but we were the first to get it.

117.MM: Was there ever any women serving up with you?

118.SH: Yes, believe it or not, it was remarked because we had a young girl who served an apprenticeship with us in the restaurant and was to be appointed but for a male-dominated world, and because we used to do a lot of Gueridon work, but she did pass her apprenticeship but then decided she would rather work inside with her colleagues (in the Palm Court), but it was a male dominated profession at that time.

119.MM: Why do you think that was?

120.SH: I don’t know, when I look at the Hibernian, there used to be a female in the lounge who used to do the afternoon teas, but for the Hibernian the big room I think it was because they had to
serve an apprenticeship and at that time you had the Gueridon work and you had to carry those trays. The trays in that time were very heavy; today I don’t think you’d get away with the health and safety aspect. I remember lads saying to me ‘weight this tray’ and it was a half stone before putting any breakfast on it, and they were expected to carry this in your hand and knock on the door. At that time we didn’t use trolleys but then we had to use trolleys, but they were some weight. You were using a cloche and in those days, it was solid silver.

121. And in the restaurant what we were renowned for was the beef, and we would do our own carving, it was again the head waiter, which was usually myself or John that would do the carving, or the waiters would and we used to have to flambe dishes, so smaller but we kept the old tradition of Gueridon work.

122. MM: So the changes, you felt, came in the Berkley Court when Jury’s took over about 2002?

123. SH: Definitely they did, the accountants took over and they were cost cutting. Then we found that we were dealing with different clientele. In fairness, when Michael Governey was there we had the business man, and the weekends were quiet because the business man was away so you had the higher echelons of society. But then a new culture shock came with Jury’s because they realised on the computer system that the Berkley had room and the tour bus would arrive. Now we didn’t think that was prudent, I’m not trying to be smart or snobby, but the clients who were paying the top market prices did not like to see the tour buses arriving. And when some of these new clients were staying, some of them would bring home souvenirs with them. Breakfast trays weighed significantly less coming down in the morning, silver tea pots, cruet sets would be missing. You couldn’t say anything.

124. MM: Now Michael Governey moved to the Conrad after the Berkley Court, didn’t he?

125. SH: After PV died, Michael left and did some consultancy work and then went to the Conrad Hotel. Michael Brennan took over after PV died and he was entirely different, and in fairness when Michael Brennan passed, young David Doyle got a chance and we felt a resurgence was coming back to the Berkley, he was spending money and I think that may have caused him trouble because he may not have passed it with the board or that. Then unfortunately like many families the Doyles fell out with each other, as you know, and we felt that we were caught in the middle. In fairness when Bernie bought back over and she came back in, she wiped Jury’s and Pat McCann out and as time moved on, never in our wildest dreams did we think that she’d sell.

126. MM: Do you think that Michael brought some of his clients with him to the Conrad?

127. SH: I think he did, but I think we held on to most of them because we were the prestige, where he was still trying to build up that but we were one step ahead of him. We knew then that we had a fight on our hands but remained one step ahead of him, because the staff were so well trained and when I said to you ‘Jack or Gary is looking after you today’, you knew that they knew the little attributes, like ‘he likes the Melba toast with his cheese’. And we used to have two Americans, Ethel and Arty, who came from California and they’d ring the week before hand and we’d be out getting the stuff for them. We used to do ‘Oeuf Ethel and Arty’ for them which was a scrambled egg put back into the shell with some caviar and that was named after that. And they would book out the restaurant and put on a big banqueting diner and they would invite Vincent Doyle and all the high society people to dine with them, and they loved that. We purposefully made a signature dish for them and put it on the menu and they loved it – the personal touch. At one stage when Dr. Smurfit was home you’d bring his cigars up and it got to the stage when Dr. Smurfit came in that he may drink a bottle of certain bottle of wine and his client would have another one (laugh). We were all used to their certain attributes and that, but it stood to the good training we gave to the waiting personnel.

128. MM: Did you know Hector Fabron at all?
129. **SH:** Yes, I met him in the Hibernian when I was a young *commis*, Hector used to walk around with the keys jangling and you’d hear him coming. Molly was his wife and they had dogs. When Molly would come down for breakfast I’d look after her. This was part of the training for the *commis*. But Hector, in fairness, he trained Michael Governey and you could see the type of hotelier he was, he dressed to impress. He’d stop you in the morning and he’d check your hands, ‘let me see those nails, turn them over’, and at that time the shirts were starched and they’d have to be white and the shoes, naturally, polished and that stood to you. If not, ‘home young man, home’. That’s it, you’d be just sent out the door.

130. **MM:** Did anyone else in your family work in catering?

131. **SH:** No they didn’t. They often wondered how I did the unsocial hours, I didn’t mind, the breakfast shift was early and I remember coming home at five in the morning when I was courting, to collect a white shirt for work, and coming down the stairs and my father grabbing me saying ‘come here you, you never came home, and I saying ‘of course I did, ask, mum, I’m on my way to work’. (laugh) After a disco you’d realise you had no shirt and you were on the breakfast shift. You had to have your white crisp shirt because otherwise you would be hung (laugh). They often wondered how I did it. I often offered to help my mother in the kitchen, but my father would tell me to stop my messing that he preferred the bacon and cabbage to the fancy stuff I’d be suggesting. My brother Tony loved his food and wine and later on he’d eat out in the best places and tell me about them, he’s a bit of a wine buff.

132. **MM:** Were you aware of Guilbaud’s opening up or did it take a while to build its clientele?

133. **SH:** When Guilbaud’s opened up first, one or two or our clients went and came back telling us it was gorgeous but that they weren’t getting enough food. We used to have the beef trolley and if they wanted it we’d give them the extra slice. The chef used to go mad saying he’d never make money on it, but I’d say ‘but look at the bottle of wine they are drinking’. We allowed for some loss makers once you were making it on the wine. When Guilbaud’s opened up they tried it, loved the presentation, but the gents used to come out saying it wasn’t substantial. They weren’t aware of the Irish appetite, and of course the Irish people and their potatoes and no matter what you had to have potatoes and he disagreed with that, he nearly died. When the nouvelle thing started of course our clients would go, they had to be seen there, but we used to say ‘try out the rest, and then come back to the best’. We knew they would come back, we didn’t mind them going, the likes of Margaret Heffernan, they would come back and tell us how it was, and when they travelled abroad to places like Dubai they would come back and tell us. Eventually I got out there and saw the seven stars and that but I think where we kept ahead of them is that we were aware of their attributes, we knew what they liked and didn’t like. When Albert Reynolds used to come in I used to call him the ‘Ayatollah’ and people would look and he’d say ‘that’s Sean for you’, and I tell him this is what your having today, one particular incident I particularly remember is the Japanese Ambassador came in on day looking for Albert’s table. It wasn’t booked but I said ‘sit down’, and I tried to get Albert on the phone. I eventually got his daughter and found out he was in London. I told her to tell him I had the Japanese Ambassador waiting for him at his table. So I looked after the Ambassador with sole and prawns and that and then got Albert on the phone to talk to him and they agreed to meet the following day in the Savoy in London. But when he went to the Savoy the next day he told Albert the *Maitre D’hotel* had looked after him very well and Albert told him how I had tracked him down through his daughter. As a *Maitre D’hotel* I used to tell them not to worry about the menu that I would get them whatever they wanted, the chefs didn’t like me for that, I used to check the ingredient in the kitchen. And if the sole wasn’t fresh, I’d say that’s not going on the menu, I won’t serve it. That was it. I was always aware of the fact that you are only as good as your last meal, and that you don’t get a second chance to impress. If it is not good, it’s not coming out.

134. **MM:** So you were really quality control in the place?
Yes, I’d walk around the kitchen and taste the sauces and that, I had to know what was going out, they didn’t like you for it, but they respected the fact that I knew how to peel prawns, skin sole, all these things I learnt in the Hibernian kitchen and in Cathal Brugha Street.

Was the training you got in Cathal Brugha Street valuable to you?

That was very valuable, the two days a week I did here back then, very valuable because you were brought inside to the other area which at that time was a revolution in itself, to think that a waiting person was being brought the other side of the hotplate. Eventually we had that in the Hibernian, but that only happened because I was blown into the kitchen with the gas thing (laugh). My first experience of that was as a pageboy in Jury’s, Dame Street, I remember seeing a chef chopping onions and saying I’d love to do that. They showed me in the larder how to chop an onion and I’d do the post quickly and come down and say can I chop a few onions? He’d say ‘yes Sean, but wash your hands afterwards’.

Was Willy Widmer still there, and Joe Collins?

Yes, and Joe Gray, but the only reason I got in there was that I had to go through the kitchen to collect dockets and bring them up to accounts. So I’d chop a few onions between jobs. But in the college, the training stood to you, and eventually when I came back here to do the advanced course with Christy Sands and Michael Ganly, we were brought into the kitchen also.

When did you do that course?

Late 70s, I was still in the Hibernian, at that stage they brought in the 706/3 Advanced courses and decided to put on an advanced waiters course as well. It was set up for head waiters at the time. I was one of the first to do it. Jimmy Kilbride had started the 706/3 and Christy Sands started this course at the same time. We got involved inside with Michael Ganly and he’d show us in the kitchen how to make a stock for a minestrone soup and that, we learnt all that and did more Gueridon work and that. It stood to us at that time and was very much a refresher course and I in turn could bring it back and say ‘lads, Gueridon work is not gone, but we’ve got to do it quicker’. At that time when you were doing a crepes suzette, you were peeling the orange and slicing the lemon – 35 minutes to do one – you don’t have time anymore, caster sugar instead of grating the sugar, we now had fifteen minutes to do it rather than thirty five. Eventually that is what we did, but we kept the Gueridon work going. It was like the Steak Diane.

So when did you start to teach in Cathal Brugha Street?

In 1982 / 1983, after I did the advanced course, I came here and I started doing two or three hours a week. Eventually the NCCCB courses came in and I started doing the bar course with the bar that was downstairs, I also did the Dips and H. Dips and that is when I started going crazy. We were coming up to the anniversary of the college (1941-1991) and Bob Lawlor wanted to do something and I got the students involved, and got props from RTE and transformed the place.

Sean used reverse psychology to get agreement from RTE props and art departments for help, saying he would just fail the student if they didn’t manage to put on a good show. He used tiles that had been used for Strumpet City to line the corridors of the college and got tram ticket from the Tram Museum in Howth. They transformed the college back to the 40s and had recordings of Noel Pearson talking about the rare old times. Another year they did themed lunches on food through the ages and Bobby Maxwell who was a chef in the college got a whole lamb roasted in the Gresham Hotel. The year Bob Lawlor was leaving for head office, the theme was Al Capone and the gangsters and they got a girl to jump out of a cake with a Tommy gun in her hand. His finest event was in 1990 when he managed to get three members of the Irish Soccer Team into the college, through his contacts with Eddie Corcoran and have a whole Italia 90 theme to the event, the foyter was done out like a Subway.
with rubbish on the ground, and a football pitch was laid out in the canteen using undertakers fake
grass.

144.MM: Do you remember Snaffles restaurant on Leeson Street?

145.SH: Now Snaffles was also a nightclub if you remember, and some of our younger clientele
used to go there. The Burlington also had a rooftop restaurant called Annabelle’s that started out
and turned into a disco later. Another one like that while I was in the Hibernian was the Paradiso
in Westmoreland Street, and believe it or not, that was competition and we had to check that out,
and they had a Maitre d’Hotel there who dressed immaculately and who was so gracious, he’d say
‘welcome Sir or Madam, we are so fortunate to have you this evening, we really are, and your
name young lady’, and they absolutely loved it. As I said ‘you put on a show’, it’s like I say the
bounce in the Berkley Room, you built a rapport with the clientele, you knew not to mess with the
business lunches but keep them happy.

146. Even in the State Banquets, back then not all of the politicians would be familiar with the layout
of the table and you’d tell them ‘right to left, see how many forks and knives there are and always
start from the outside and work in’, but as I said that did well. It was the same with the glasses,
you explained to them. Now, at the gastronomic dinners, that’s were I learnt, where I got my
formal training on these matters. But at the gastronomic events we took the glasses off the table
after each course and the clients knew to drink their wine or loose it when we cleared between
courses. See you couldn’t have six glasses on the table at the same time, and it was the same with
the port and brandy. No wonder we didn’t get out till 2am at those events (laugh). Times have
changed now.

147.MM: What is the biggest change you have seen in the restaurant business in Dublin during
your career?

148.SH: The biggest change I have seen is the degrading of the waiting side of things, I think the
nouvelle cuisine thing made it happen, but I see now a resurgence particularly among those who
have the money, they want something different. That’s what we did in the Berkley, ‘I will cook
you your dish, let it be prawns whatever style you would like, flamed with Pernod or Cointreau or
whatever’. That then became a signature dish for that client when they came in. If a business client
came in, I’d say ‘tonight we are glad to see you in, what would you like us to do for you?’ You
felt ‘I own this waiter, he is going to look after us and look what he can do, the way he serves and
he is dressed immaculately’. Not what’s happening now where you are looking at the waiter and
he doesn’t even know the dish. We were quick, we were sharp, and if you wanted a dessert we’d
do it to order at the table with some fruits flamed in Contreau or Tia Maria, the way the customer
wanted it. More so the younger people thought ‘this is great, he is cooking at the table’. In
America, I saw the chef actually cook omelettes or eggs at the table, not at a buffet table. They
used to call it ‘seen service’.

149.MM: They used to do that in the Metropole in O’ Connell Street years ago, back in the 50s and
60s.

150.SH: The clients loved that, more so the Americans when they came over and they thought the
‘seen service’ was super, they didn’t see it often at home. They would bring in clients to try the
flambé work, because they were fascinated by it. They felt they owned the waiter for the night,
because they might have prawns cooked on the Gueridon for starter, a Chateaubriand carved at the
table for mains and then finish off with a sweet.

151.MM: At what stage did that come to an end in most places?

152.SH: When the nouvelle cuisine came in around the late 1970s, and then as I said it was slowly
coming back, because although the waiting apprenticeships were coming to an end and they were
not as aware of what wine goes with what food, people who were going abroad were coming back
and saying ‘hang on a minute, we are paying top dollar in this place, why can’t we get the same service as we get abroad? What’s wrong here? Where is the professionalism gone?’ I always kept emphasising that you provided a service, you were not servile, and yes there will always be a demand if you know what wine will go with what food, and if you can do some Gueridon work, they will pay for it. A waiter can make a meal or ruin it. There is nothing worse than a waiter just placing the food down on the table, or going into an empty restaurant and the waiter asking if you have an reservation and pretending to check a busy reservations book, just show the client to a nice table. Names, they love, if you can get a client’s name and even better remember what it is they like, even better. They like to see the salesperson in you, I could assure my guests that the prawns were going to be fresh and that, because I would cook them at that table, and I would recommend the wines and of course I would know if it was going on the company account to go for a more expensive wine, or if a client came in on their own account, often a client would say ‘I’m coming in with the missus tonight’, in other words, I’m paying so go easy on the bill.

153. It is like the great judge Martin, when he retired, there was no such thing as a free meal, he’d say ‘Sean, I have a few barristers coming to check me out today, I think we’ll try a little Chateau Lynch-Bages’, or if there were cigars he’d take a few extra, and of course at the end of the meal he would say ‘well gentlemen, of course there will be no fee for this today, but of course you will take the bill’ (laugh). As he used to say ‘there is no such thing as a free lunch’, mind you if he came in on his own expense he’d say ‘we’re going on the house wine today’ and there would be no cigars served (laugh). People will always pay for good service, and if you look at the places that are spending money, I think they should spend a bit more front of house, with training in the restaurant. Ireland has got slagged a bit recently saying the chefs and ingredients are great but unfortunately the front of house is letting us down. But I think it is great to see we are producing great chefs now but you got to be aware how it goes on the table and what the customer wants because it is he who is paying for it. Even Gordon Ramsay has said the importance of meeting and greeting the client and that has got to be made clear to the waiters today. We have been criticised that staff look under pressure, as I say ‘you are putting on a show, guys, I don’t want to know your problems, smile, you are putting on a show tonight, and at the end of the day, if you do you will be rewarded. Remember you are only as good as your last meal’.

154. MM: But there was good money in it?

155. SH: Oh, yes, you standard of living was very good, the taxman needn’t know about the ‘dropsy’ (tips) but that’s what motivated us. I decided where people sat, and if people wanted the top tables, they were willing to reimburse me to sit there. They may not always get the table but when they did they appreciated it. That was the name of the game. I make no apologies for that. That is how we had such a high standard of living, but we looked after them. Clients loved it, it will eventually come back that service will be king again. You can see from Irish people travelling the world, their palates have changed; they are no longer looking for bacon and cabbage.

End of interview
Edited Interview with Jim Bowe in Mount Merrion Ave (30/4/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Jim Bowe (JB)

1. **MM:** Where and when were you born Jim?

2. **JB:** I was born on the North Strand in Dublin on the 31st January 1942.

3. **MM:** How many was in the family?

4. **JB:** I have one brother and one sister and I come in the middle.

5. **MM:** Did you move from the North Strand out to Clontarf?

6. **JB:** Yes, they were demolishing the houses, they were railway cottages as they call them and we got a house in Clontarf out in Conquer Hill Road behind the bus garage.

7. **MM:** What did your father do?

8. **JB:** My father was a shunter in the railway, which was kind of a dangerous job. There were a lot of his colleagues killed. You have two wagons with fifty or a hundred tons each in them and you have to uncouple one and you have to push them so as they come together and the buffers have to hit and they spring back and at the right time you have to hook off the chain and this was one hell of a dangerous job.

9. **MM:** Did your mother work at all, apart from being a mother?

10. **JB:** No, my mother was a great cook, and you had to be a good cook in those days. I’m not sure if you are familiar with the history of the early 40s, but things were really bad. There were queues in St. Agnes’s, North William Street, across the road, people queuing for the stew kitchen. They had these gallon cans and if there were four in the family you got four ladles of stew. But my father going all over the country (on the trains), he used to have one of those wicker baskets with the rails on it to hold his lamp and his stuff in there, but he’d bring home a rabbit, a chicken, a turnip, things that you couldn’t get in Dublin at that time for love nor money. And my mother would make a pot of stew, and from an early age we were accustomed to all kinds of food. People used to say ‘I wouldn’t eat tripe’, we got tripe one day a week, ‘I wouldn’t eat rabbit’, we used to stuff the rabbit, boil the rabbit, we’d have cups of soup with bread in it, it was a real kind of farmhouse cookery except it was in Dublin (laugh), a pot with a chicken in it with onions and carrots floating around in it, and more than likely it was boiling fowl, a hen that had given up the ghost. It was unbelievable, full of flavour; I remember getting a mug of the broth with bread in it, absolutely fabulous food. I remember kids in our class who had rickets and scurvy. People would say ‘rickets and scurvy, they had that on Mutiny on the Bounty’, no, they had it in schools in Ireland and what was it but malnutrition.

11. **MM:** Where did you do your primary schooling?

12. **JB:** We went first of all to St. Agatha’s, North William Street, but then we went to Belgrove when we went to Clontarf. Belgrove was a fairly famous school. From Belgrove I went to the Tech in Killester, and every year, every couple of months there would be these scholarships for the ESB, or this or that, a mechanic or a printer, but once one came and I brought home the brochure that there were interviews in Cathal Brugha Street. So my mother scrubbed me up and I went for the interview in Cathal Brugha Street and Miss Boucher-Hayes was there, Miss Murnaghan, Miss Armstrong, Aidréas Ó Muineachán and all those people, and I remember saying that I was in the scouts and I loved cooking. Of course when I was in the scouts, that was my detail, put Jim Bowe
in the kitchen. So it kind of started from that, my love of food, there wasn’t that much food around at the time but my mother was very good at making the best of it. My father also had a plot in St. Anne’s and we were having turnips and parsnips and radishes and beetroot when nobody knew what they were because he was a country man, he was from Kilkenny, and he had this plot of vegetables. I remember actually my first banana, because remember there were no bananas or oranges between 1942 and 1947 or 1948. There was a banana boat came into the North Wall and they were on the train and a fellow threw my father down a bunch of bananas. He brought them home and we didn’t know what to do with them. I was trying to eat it when someone said; no I think you take the skin off it (laugh). If you say that to somebody today, they’d say ‘was he born in the Dark Ages?’ No, there wasn’t, and oranges were exactly the same. All of a sudden we had to become accustomed to oranges and bananas but they weren’t going to sail boats from North Africa with the U-Boats in the water. When you say that to a younger person they’d say ‘that must be a hundred years ago’, but it’s not, it’s within peoples’ lifetimes.

13. MM: What age were you when you went for that scholarship?

14. JB: I was 15 / 16; my first two years in the college were 1957-1959.

15. MM: Who was teaching in the college at this stage?

16. JB: You had PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly, Kitty Doyle, Miss Connolly, Paula Daly, Aindreas Ó Muineacháin, Miss Armstrong, Miss Boucher-Hayes, Miss Murnaghan, all of those were there. There wouldn’t have been the structures there that came later, as a student these people are who were there.

17. MM: Were Beaucaire Murphy or Johnny Annler gone by this stage?

18. JB: Yes, they were both, there were no foreign lecturers, and both PJ Dunne and Michael Ganly got their positions when they left. They were the two replacements.

19. MM: And both PJ and Michael had worked in Jammet’s restaurant. Did Miss Armstrong teach practical classes as well?

20. JB: Oh, yes, she did and Miss Murnaghan as well, and Paula Daly who was there as well. She later did the cooking programmes for Stork margarine or Odlums flour. She was very talented; she went to work for Odlums later in Drogheda and was a huge success. At that time there were only one hundred and fifty students in the college, so if we are looking for structures, they weren’t there. Room 13 was the common room and we had a radio and we all met and listened to the radio, Fergus Gantly was one of the students there. Now, remember Fergus Gantly wore shop coats, I think the institutional management wore a blue shop coat, the other one wore a khaki shop coat, which was very funny and the cooks wore a white coat, it was very, very small.

21. MM: How many were in your class, and do you remember any of their names?

22. JB: There would have been twelve in my class, twelve in first year and twelve in second years. I remember in my class there was a fellow called Phelim McGuiness, and Norton, and a neighbour of mine, a fellow called Tony O’ Shea, actually they will come into the story later on. Myles Flood’s brother was there also, and in the second years was Ciarán Feeley who worked for Irish Base Metals in Clontarf later on, he worked in the Intercontinental and had a beard, a nice kind of a guy. I think Myles Flood was in second year at the time, and I think the year before that was Dave Edwards. I think Andy (Whelan) was in the same year as Dave.

23. MM: What do you remember of it, you did practical subjects and then French, maths, English and that?
24. JB: Mostly, we had Aindréas Ó Muineachán who tried to put manners on us, Aindréas had us for like maths / English / manners / everything, are you with me? He was the number one guy. Then you had a few of the women for theory of catering, and all of this. The book they used was All in the Cooking, that Armstrong and Murnaghan wrote, and it was a very simple but a quite a good book. (note: the main author was Josephine Marnell)

25. I remember then in second year, where the library is now, the room next to the library was the restaurant kitchen. I remember Mick Ganly doing liver and bacon to order with us and sautéed potatoes and that was up-market cuisine compared to what we were doing in first year. You had PJ Dunne for the larder, and the larder was just where the corridor around the corner from the stores is, there was no back stairs, the college stopped there. We used to batten out the veal escallops, it was purely butchery, there were no pates or terrines or that, but I remember the things we did. We made the stockpots, two big ones, skimming the stockpots and roasting the bones, all of that was very important, and every class got buckets of fresh stock which was absolutely great. I remember on a Friday, you had to clean out the stockpots, strain them off, cool them down and refrigerate them. When you came in on Monday, they were jelly, it was really good stuff in that respect. The training was very simple but very good. Paula Daly used to do demonstrations, it was simple stuff. The college has made strides in latter years but I think it was suited to where it was in the 60s, remember we had no peppers back then. Aubergines and courgettes would have been an absolute treat, but they weren’t there. The most exotic thing we had was apples, oranges and bananas, they simply weren’t there. So any dishes that came with them, was in latter years. So when I finished there I went over to the Metropole.

26. MM: Was this after first or second year, where did you spend your first summer?

27. JB: No, after second year, I spent my first summer over in Wales with the scouts in a field somewhere in Wales for three weeks. I don’t think we has any money, but we were very happy, sleeping in a tent, and if it rained you dug a trench around the tent (laugh). How we didn’t all die of pneumonia (laugh), but this is the thing. I came back on the September and went through the year and got my placement the following May or June. It was a big culture shock going into the Metropole.

28. MM: This would have been May / June 1959?

29. JB: Yes, and remember it was a big culture shock going into the Metropole. The Metropole was a big catering establishment at the time. Downstairs they had the grill room which was top class for what it was, with fellows doing chateaubriands carved at the table, do you know what I mean? Then there was the first floor which had the self service which would do around 200-300 meals, and the second floor which had a Buttery / coffee shop / snackery.

30. MM: So the grill room was the fine dining restaurant there at the time, I believe the standard was very high?

31. JB: The standard was very high. They actually had a charcoal grill with a bellows, so you had to give it a blow to get the steaks cooked, and send the vegetables down and they'd be heated down there in a pan with butter, obviously there were no microwaves back then, and the likes of chateaubriand would be carved at the table and flamed beautifully, it was a very good standard. And also, we had a ballroom, the biggest ballroom in Dublin at the time, it could hold a thousand people. And at the time there was the Vauxhall ball which was black tie, and I remember that once you were 16 or 17 and the chef knew, you could work after 10pm. I remember him telling me ’you are on tonight, aren’t you 16?’, so obviously my mother had no phone and I couldn’t contact her, even the neighbours didn’t have phones, so I borrowed a bike from a fellow and I had to give him my bus fare home. So I cycled home and I was stopped on the Clontarf road by a guard for having no light on my bike (laugh) at one o’clock in the morning, probably the only traffic on the Clontarf road at the time. I had to be back the next morning at about 9am.

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What is your first memory when you went in to the Metrople, you had Marley as chef, wasn’t it?

Michael Marley was the head chef, and Matt Byrne was the second chef. We all know Michael Marley, he was the most cantankerous man, but by god did he run a good kitchen, Matt Byrne was an outstanding chef. Davy Edwards was in the pastry, there was a fellow called Charlie Biddell on the roast and Charlie was eighty years of age and Charlie served on a submarine during the First World War.

Where was Charlie from?

He was from Wales, and actually many moons after, I met this young lady after at some sort of social occasion by the name of Biddell. I asked her was she anything to Charlie Biddell and she said he was her grandfather. Of course he was dead many years by then, he lived in Clontarf, but to think that he was the roast cook there at the age of eighty, a lovely guy, you know.

Funny you say that because Matt Byrne stayed on working in Roly’s until he was well into his seventies, he used to do the prep. I worked with him in Blakes in the early 1990s and he used to do the soups, he was brilliant, he’d come in the morning and do all the soups and finish early and go home to look after the wife.

Matt wore his apron long; he had the moustache and the bald head. Matt was a lovely man, a real gentleman.

How many would have been in the kitchen in the Metropole back then?

I’d say 25-30 at the time, and the great thing about the Metropole was that it closed on a Sunday, so we got one and half days off a week. I think we had one early evening; you were on till 6pm. Remember we were off between 3-6pm, it’s a long day from 9am till 10pm. We got passes for the pictures because Ranks owned the Metropole, and we went to the pictures every afternoon. I remember going to the pictures, all you’d get in the pictures in the afternoon was hotel workers. I remember one fellow jumping up in the middle of the pictures, saying ‘Jesus, I forgot the chickens in the oven’, and he just tore off (laugh). Of course we played football; I played in the cinema league and in the hotel league. We played football for about two hours in the afternoon, say twice a week, and then go back and work till 10pm, it was unbelievable.
40. **MM:** When you went in there to the Metropole, was it French classical system of cooking you were learning, with the stocks and *mis en place*, the Escoffier system of the different corners and that?

41. **JB:** Absolutely, you see Matt Byrne would have been trained in the Hibernian. He was with Pierre Rolland and Roger Noblet. Matt would have been very much a traditional French trained cook.

42. **MM:** Where did Michael Marley train or work, he was originally from Belfast but had worked in England, hadn‘t he?

43. **JB:** He worked for the Grand Central Hotels, they are not there anymore. I’ll tell you something, Michael Marley was a master of his craft. They didn’t come much better than him. Talk about how he ran his kitchen, and his profits and that, but the Rank organisation weren’t good to work for. He ran the most profitable organisation for them. I remember when I used to jump off the bus and he had a blue Ford Prefect and I still remember the registration number ‘WII 120’, and if it was there you had to look at your watch and rush to get into the kitchen. I’ll tell you something, to remember WII 120 after fifty years (laugh), you put on a spurt and you rushed up to change because if you were a minute late, because his office looked right down the kitchen.

44. **MM:** The kitchen was upstairs, wasn’t it?

45. **JB:** Yes the kitchen was on the roof, but it’s amazing, the day I left the Metropole I was delighted to see the end of that man, but guess what, I worked in three jobs in which he was my boss after that. I’ll skip a whole load of things but I became head chef in the Silver Springs and he was the catering controller, I left Silver Springs and I went to work in CERT and guess who my boss was in CERT, it was Michael Marley.

46. **MM:** We’ll just take it from there first. How long did you stay in the Metropole?

47. **JB:** Just twelve months, and from there I went to the Wicklow (Hotel).

48. **MM:** Who was in the Wicklow, because it was a fairly good restaurant at that time?

49. **JB:** The Wicklow was regarded as one of the best hotels in Dublin. Tommy Markey was the head chef, he was from Dublin. Lord and Lady Brocket owned it at the time, this would be Carton House people. It was regarded as one of the best steak houses, grill houses, roast houses, you know this kind of stuff. We made big pots of brown Windsor soup which you don’t see today, again, I remember making the brown Windsor soup, pure roasted beef bones. Brown Windsor is thin demi-glaze with sherry in it, are you with me? Just beef soup, it was hearty food, no waste.

50. **MM:** Would there have been many in that kitchen. Do you remember any of the names?

51. **JB:** It was very small, about eight people. Tommy Markey was head chef and the *sous chef* was Frankie Plummer. There was Tommy de Lacy, I remember one of the lads played in goals for Sligo, and whenever he had a match I’d work for him on Sunday and get ten shillings for it (laugh). His name will come to me in a moment. It was a very happy place, a very happy place. I stayed in the Wicklow for a year. The manageress, Miss McCrossen, then asked me if I would be interested in going to Switzerland, she wrote the letters of recommendation for me and sent them off to the *Banhof Buffet* in Zurich.

52. **MM:** This would be the restaurant at the railway station in Zurich?

53. **JB:** Yes and at that time, it was the biggest restaurant in Europe, and guess how many is working in it today? Four. I flew over, aged nineteen. We had a kitchen with a hundred and fifty cooks in it, it was unbelievable. What a culture shock, we started work at 6.30am and you got your
lunch at 10am. You worked till 2pm and you’d be off from 2-5pm and then work till 9pm. You would get one day off a week and every sixth Sunday. Monday this week, Tuesday next week and so on until you got Saturday and Sunday off together and you thought you were in heaven (laugh). We were down stairs in the butchery with whole hens and you’d take off the feet and give them a manicure and put them and the chicken necks in for the stock. We cut off the cockscomb and that and you know the little piece of meat at the craw, we kept that for paté. Basically there was nothing wasted, it was unbelievable.

54. MM: Who was working there at the time? Were they from all over the world?

55. JB: Yes, all over the world. Most of the cooks were Swiss or Swiss – German, the Swiss ones could have been from the French speaking part. Remember everyone spoke three languages. When I went back there last September all the signs in the shops were in English, you might as well be in a high street in London. Then no-one spoke English. I remember meeting an old man and telling him I was from Ireland and he knew Greenland, and Iceland and Scotland but never heard of Ireland.

56. MM: Did you pick up German fairly quick?

57. JB: German was the thing, it was a kind of dialect of German. It came after about six weeks, because you had no other options. One or two of the other young Swiss lads spoke English. I remember one lad, Freddie Rossi was his name and the head chef used to say ‘Freddie, come here, tell him to do this or that’ Freddie would translate, but it was very strict. I remember we would collect our wages once a month, which was about five pounds a week, they might give you three hundred Swiss francs at one table and take fifty back at another table and then maybe if you broke the bed or a pane of glass they would take it off you, and if you came out with fifty in the end you would be lucky (laugh).

58. MM: Where were you staying?

59. JB: Oh, there was a staff house; this is where I came across Joe Hegarty. Joe Hegarty had to do his two or three months from the Shannon students (Shannon School of Hotel Management), and he was on the veg. The pots were so big, you had to put them up dry and there was this big tap and I used to call Joe over and I’d have the tap dripping and I’d swing the tap over and the water would hit the range and a big cloud of steam, and I thought this was very funny, trying to roast Joe Hegarty (laugh). Needless to say I got a few thumps for it.

60. It was grand, but Jimmy Rock told me that the law changed afterwards, because he was a few years behind me and he worked across the road in the Movenpick and he said that although he worked hard, when he came back to Ireland he had a thousand pounds in his bank balance, which was unheard of. You’d never save that much money in Ireland. So we were denied that because we were in training. I remember working as a potager and you had to do sixteen big butchers trays called ‘meskerplex’, four of those of pasta, four of those of spätzle, four of those of rice and four of those you know, before you started, and there was big vats of soup. The soups were calves feet boiled and skimmed and strained, they used to do very Germanic type of cooking, you’d break an egg into a bowl and pour the broth into it, we used to call it ‘bouillon mit eir’. I’ll tell you one thing, I never worked as hard in my life, the attitude towards work was unbelievable, event he fellows you worked with, you know, would say ‘no, we cannot talk about tonight or what we will do because now we must work’. It was a kind of a culture shock, but I stayed there for about fourteen months and then I went home and got a job in Dublin Airport on the sauce corner with Jimmy Kilbride.

61. MM: At this time you were probably out of your time (finished the apprenticeship)?

62. JB: They had this category that was called an improver chef. I was on the sauce corner with Jimmy Kilbride and one or two days I did the flambé in the restaurant.
63. MM: Who was out there with Jimmy at this time, was Jimmy Flahive the head chef?

64. JB: Flahive was the head chef, Bill Ryan was over in the flight kitchens, Micky Mullen’s son Michael Junior was chef there at the time, I don’t know what happened to him, he had a sister out in Argentina and he may have gone out to her. He was the greatest mimic ever; he would walk up behind you and mimic Jimmy Flahive. I’d have great fun with him. Johnny Opperman was the boss, and I remember when they opened up the Green Lounge and I was brought over to do the Green Lounge and on a Sunday all the people used to come out to see the airplanes and the Green Lounge was packed, and I was flipping hamburgers and chips, which was new, and scampi and chips.

65. I remember working with Brendan O’Carroll, the comedian, and I’m trying to figure out was it in the airport or maybe it was in the Intercontinental. People used to ask me if I ever saw him in the Olympia, but I’d say that I listened to it from 9am till 12am (laugh), I worked with him for donkeys years.

66. MM: He was a waiter, I think in the Shelbourne before going into comedy full time, but how long did you stay in the airport?

67. JB: Again just about a year, and come September they were getting rid of people and things got very quiet and I remember serving a portion of French fried onions and they were stuck together so I got a week’s notice. The union went bananas, because this seemingly was what they did every year. It was nothing to do with the onions.

68. MM: What influence did Jimmy Kilbride have on you there?

69. JB: Jimmy was one of the finest cooks I have ever met in my whole life, and I think that is saying an awful lot. I think I got to know Jimmy better than most people because we became great buddies, great drinking buddies. Jimmy taught at every level, he introduced the City & Guilds 706/3 into the college. He was a total master at the content of the 706/3, and then he went on teach pastry at the highest level, it would be 706/3/4. We were doing things like Bombes Glacé and Sally Lunns and all these stuff that you don’t see today, but by God, Jimmy was a master of his art, you couldn’t say more than that, a fabulous, fabulous cook, and again they wouldn’t promote him in the college. Where other people got senior lectureships they wouldn’t promote him.

70. MM: But out at the airport, I believe he was quite inspirational, getting people motivated and out playing football on their breaks and that?

71. JB: Oh, yes, remember Jimmy was a young man at this stage and whatever you did for Jimmy, you did it with one hundred percent. I played football, and then whether you were doing the sauce; I remember being on the sauce corner with Jimmy and I couldn’t keep up with him, he was that good. Remember the Collar of Gold which was what they called the restaurant at the time, was the finest restaurant in Dublin. It is hard to believe that today. The title was the Collar of Gold, and it was a big restaurant, it stretched from here to across the road. You would do hundreds of people, remember, you could have three delayed flights and they got a cold meat salad with tea and bread or a fry up, along with the regulars. You could be busy and then you’d get three delayed flights. That type of thing is unheard of today, now they wouldn’t even give you a sandwich (laugh). And then on Saturday night there was music and dancing. The restaurant was top class.

72. MM: I believe Charlie Haughey was a regular out there, because in many ways there was very little else on the northside of the city at that time?

73. JB: Yes, indeed, and I remember one time the fridges breaking down and who was fixing them but the puppet guy from the television, Eugene Lambert, he was the refrigeration engineer re-gassing the fridges.
So you were in the airport for a year, where did you go next?

I went to the Hyde Park Hotel in London.

What brought you to London?

You see, Tony O’Shea, my neighbour and friend, who I was in Cathal Brugha Street with had a bed-sit in London, are you with me? I said ‘sure it would be grand to go to London’. So the first place I went to was actually the St. Ermins Hotel, a bit of a dump, a Victorian Hotel near Caxton Hall. I remember the morning that one of the Beatles was getting married, we had a champagne reception, and they came in and we were doing hors d’oeuvres, I was in charge of the hors d’oeuvres and I had never done them before in my life but wasn’t long learning. I was in charge of putting up three or four trolleys of hors d’oeuvres a day, and then do canapés. I remember drinking bottles of champagne in the kitchen, your man Teazy Weazy Reynolds who had a hairdressing salon across the road, his horse won the Grand National and he was sending bottles of champagne into the kitchen (laugh). It was a fun time, but it was a bit of a dump. I stayed there six months and then went on to Hyde Park Hotel.

Now the Hyde Park was wow. First of all there was three hot plates, all French. The head chef was Toullamon, the famous man, the man was eighty years of age and his office was the size of the front room there, and I remember being brought in to meet him; he had three sous chefs, all Swiss and French. I thought the funniest thing as being given this enamel mug and told not to lose it. I thought it was a joke, but no delft was allowed around the kitchen; think about it, how often have you seen chefs with pints of milk and that in kitchens, it made perfectly good sense.

I went for the grand job of first commis tournant at £12 and 10 shillings a week. On Monday I was on the sauce, Tuesday I was on the fish, Wednesday I was on the roast, Thursday I was on the potager; let me tell you something, you couldn’t buy this experience. It was unreal, I remember I had to be in first, I had to make the veloutés, and we had this bain marie of fish stock and we poached the fish in it and topped it up, poached the fish and topped it up, but by the end of the night you would drain it off and you’d jump on top of it, it was that gelatinous – jelly. Everything was made to absolute perfection. Everything was done on this beautiful earthenware on silver gondolas, you know. You wouldn’t put your hand on the hotplate, it was the old steel hotplate, you’d put the stuff on it and it would stay warm. We did Regimental Dinners, now security at the time was no problem, no hassle with security, but I knew guys after who had to be vetted and told to stay out of work.

You were there pre the Troubles?

Exactly, but it was absolutely fabulous food, beautiful food. And I remember every corner would put up for the chefs table, and all the chef de parties had their meeting over lunch and all the dishes would go in.

It was a form of quality control?

Absolutely, and the old man sat at the top and he was the loveliest man, I had a catering magazine, I must have lost it, The Caterer, and he was on the front cover of it when he was eighty five years of age, testing the Christmas pudding. This man was a legend, he was a kind of an inspiration to cooks, he’d walk through the kitchen once a day and tap you on the back and say hello, and he was fabulous. The roast corner was amazing, there were frittures on the range, there were no thermostats, the blue smoke indicated to pull it aside, you know. There were two vats of fat on the range, and in the kitchen was the last coal range over on the veg corner, now they didn’t use it often, but when they did, your legs would roast off you. In the larder they had, I thought it was a holy water font. They had no robo-coupés, this was a big pestle and mortar and they pounded the livers for the paté, and then rubbed them through big sieves like you’d see on a
building site. It was that kind of stuff, everything was made kind of perfect. One day a week, I got to do the little grill that was upstairs, which wasn’t very busy. I remember carving a rib of beef for Sir Roy Wollensky, the Governor of Canada one day, and going to the other end of the scale, Barbara Windsor, you turn on Eastenders and there she is today, but she gave me ten shillings, do you know what I mean, ten shillings.

84. I remember coming up to Christmas, asking the chef if I could go home for Christmas, and he said ok, so going home on the boat – train type of thing. And on the boat, I met Phelim McGuinness and Ray Norton, and the lads were saying ‘you’re what? You’re working in the Hyde Park Hotel?!’, now remember that the factories in London were booming at the time. They said ‘listen, we are working in a car factory in Lewisham and we’re earning twenty pounds a week, give us a ring and we’ll get you in’. I remember thinking ‘will I or won’t I?’, I was feeling hard done by with my twelve pounds ten shillings, but I stuck it out, I was glad I did. At the end of the day you could be frying eggs and chips and getting £20 a week in Lewisham, you know it was great money, where I was getting £12, but…

85. MM: You wouldn’t be moving any further in a place like that, though. How long did you stay in the London?

86. JB: Between the two of them, probably a year and a half. A year or so in the Hyde Park which was good, it was excellent.

87. MM: Did you come straight back and into the Intercontinental when it opened up in 1963?

88. JB: That’s exactly what happened, I used to speak to my mother once a week and she told me there were interviews for the Intercontinental Hotel, so I came home and went for it. Now, the Intercontinental certainly was different, first of all, it was no problem, a lot of people around me were struggling, but I’d seen it all before. A fellow called Freddie Goldinger was the head chef and he was a great man, he was a fabulous guy. All the chefs de parties were French or Swiss, and I was on the sauce corner with Marcel Pezinnini or something, who was French, and poor Marcel hadn’t a clue. I was showing Marcel, but that didn’t matter, now he was a lovely fellow, a grand fellow. Now Marcel didn’t have a clue but it didn’t really matter, because Willy Somers little brother was on the sauce with us, who is dead now, but the sauce corner was hard work because we had a lot of functions, a lot of buffets and all that. I stayed there for six or seven years.

89. MM: Now the foreign chef de parties only stayed for a year or so, did you take over as sauce chef from Marcel?

90. JB: No, Bill Kavanagh took over from Marcel, so Bill was the sauce chef. Bill was a lovely man, but we made his life hell, because we were younger and playing tricks on him and that (laugh). Bill was a lovely man, but there was a struggle when they made Bill sauce chef and then sous chef because still the head chef and sous chef were trying to keep out the Irish fellows. We ate out the back and the chefs ate out front but there were only two chairs, so Bill got another chair and sat out with them, which was the right thing to do. I got on great with Bill; he is one of my best friends today, but it was hard on Bill.

91. Discussion off tape that a certain individual was very ambitious and the mood in the kitchen changed.

92. Freddie Goldinger went and the man from Carlton Towers, the French man came, I remember visiting him a few years ago in London in the Carlton Towers before he retired and he was very gracious, he ordered a bottle of champagne and an ounce of caviar up to the chef’s office, I can’t think of his name now. He was very good, he was very good. But poor old Bill got himself in a spot of bother, he hit a waiter or something and he was let go. There was a lot of disharmony there at this time so I got sort of pissed off with it at this time and there was a job going in the Silver Springs as sous chef so I went there and I worked with Günter Oxx.
93. **MM:** So this was around 1969 that you went to the Silver Springs in Cork, but before we move down there, did you see the quality of food drop over your period in the Intercontinental, and what would be the reason for that?

94. **JB:** Yes, very much so, the reasons for it was profits, number one, a change in management affected things, on a Sunday evening, it was the place to go for the Sunday evening buffet, all the Jewish community who know where value is would be there, and the stuff was second to none, and then for whatever reason the whole thing changed. Now, I’m not knocking our own, but when the foreign chef 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.

95. **MM:** So you feel that they made their name and were now resting on their reputation?

96. **JB:** Yes, that was the thinking at the time, there was a lot of that.

97. **MM:** Did you notice that there was a push from the union to get Irish guys into the senior positions in these kitchens?

98. **JB:** There was a lot of that alright, ok, maybe some of them didn’t deserve, or didn’t have the background needed for promotion. I’d say you have come across that before.

99. **MM:** Yes I have, even in the Gresham, I think McManus was promoted and probably should have never have been promoted; although he was a great cook, he didn’t make a good head chef when Uhleman left. Some people were promoted who didn’t have the background necessary to bring an establishment forward.

100. **JB:** You said it yourself; the standard went from being very high to being only moderate. The standards dropped.

101. **MM:** So you went down to The Silver Springs in Cork as sous chef working with a German head chef called Günter Oxx?

102. **JB:** Günter was one of the loveliest men you’d come across, one of nature’s gentlemen, a fabulous guy. Günter fought in the Second World War and he was in combat, and on one of the last days of Berlin he was on the stockades. All his arms and shoulders were ripped and somebody sewed it up with copper wire, it was all they could get. Poor old Günter, his nerves weren’t the best, he had a kind of a briefcase and he’d go down to the market pubs early in the morning. He suffered from all kinds of stomach ailments, he was a youngish man, and in the briefcase there was always (wrapped in newspapers) two or three bottles of stout. There were days when he would be in the office and his head would be on the desk, so I’d just pull the office door over and get on with it. ‘Where is the chef?’; ‘He’s on the phone, he’s busy’. No one ever said ‘will you look at your man’, he was such a lovely man. Eventually the management copped on, and Günter was stood down for a better word, and they sent someone down from the Metropole to take over for a couple of weeks and then I was made head chef. It was very difficult, because the people you had with you didn’t want to work. They didn’t want to work, ‘what’s your problem? What’s wrong with the steak?’ They just wanted to get it out, whereas I wanted them to do it nice, put a nice garnish with it, again it was very difficult but I survived for a year and a half.

103. **MM:** Was it owned by Ranks at the time?

104. **JB:** It was owned by Ranks and Michael Marley was my boss. It was very enjoyable, a nice time in my life, working away, and of course you had a grill room downstairs, a fabulous little grill room, and a nice restaurant and we did weddings, but it was easy.
There wasn’t much in Cork at that time, was there? The Oyster Tavern was there, and Arbutus and Ballymaloe were only really starting.

There was very little, the Oyster Tavern and the Metropole was about it. Norma and I used to go up to Arbutus for lunch on a Sunday but they were only starting off really. You’d get a nice little bit of roast chicken and a few vegetables for twelve and sixpence, you know. Ballymaloe would have been very much in their infancy. But the Oyster Tavern was actually the best of the whole lot, because on their menu you had rump steak, and I always got a rump steak, which meant the meat was hung, beautiful meat, grilled and you’d have a nice jus. The Oyster Tavern was a fabulous place.

How long did you stay down there?


How did that come about, had Rockwell been long open or was it just opening?

Rockwell had opened as a catering school a couple of years previous, there was an advertisement in the paper and I went for an interview and got it. It was a little bit rough around the edges at the time, it was run by the priests, you see they had about a thousand students in Rockwell at the time, about 500 juniors and 500 seniors, and they all needed to be fed. There was a big kitchen and over there were the classrooms, and you did your stint in the kitchen and then a stint in the classroom, the roster moved around. Now it was rough, and a lot of criticism was made of it, but I’ll tell you something, it got a lot of fellows a start that they wouldn’t have normally got. There were a lot of people who graduated through it and made a good living out of it.

What sort of students went there, were they the same type of student who would come into Cathal Brugha Street, or a slightly different student?

Again, it was mixed, you could have got a lot of orphans, Michael Clifford started with me and Michael was a great cook, but Michael came from a foster home. So it was mixed, there would have been a lot of orphans for want of a better word, and there would have been a lot of fairly well heeled people who couldn’t get into Cathal Brugha Street at the time, they were only taking ten or twelve people at the time.

So they had a choice of going to Maynooth, Rockwell or Athenry?

That was it exactly. It was mixed. It would be wrong to say that they were underprivileged or anything.

It wasn’t like Roebuck? Roebuck was originally set up for people who were either unemployed or out of jail or that and needed training?

No, these were kids who were out of school, and they couldn’t get into Cathal Brugha Street, but see there was a couple of people in Killarney, there was one woman, I think she fostered twelve young fellows, and she had a guest house. Now I’m not going into why she fostered them (laugh) but they came to Rockwell and they became excellent waiters and excellent chefs who went off to England and were very successful. I met them donkeys years after that at a reunion and they were all doing exceptionally well for themselves, so that is exactly what I’m saying, it made a good living for a lot of young people that wouldn’t have got a chance.

How long did they stay there?

Two years, based on the Cathal Brugha Street model, you had first and second years.

Freddie Thoma was teaching with you there, I believe, who else was there?
120. JB: Freddie was there, when I went there first, Jim Ahearn was there. Jim is a superb cook, I mean super. Sure look at the job he is doing now in Kelly’s Hotel in Rosslare, he is a fine guy, an excellent cook. One of the students who was there when I was there went with Jim to Rosslare, Michael, he finished up in Rockwell and he went with Jim and is now the sous chef in Rosslare today, so that tells you a whole lot.

121. MM: You had Jim Ahearn, and Freddie Thoma, who must have been teaching pastry, probably?

122. JB: You see, I worked with Freddie in Dromoland, now remember we had June, July and August off in Rockwell and guess what they didn’t pay you. So I was head chef in Dromoland for one year and head chef in Ashford Castle another year. You see Ashford and Dromoland opened from Easter till September every year. They didn’t want me back in the college until September because they’d have to pay me, so I would go to Dromoland and open it in Easter and close it in September so it was the best of both worlds.

123. MM: When you were in Rockwell, you were working for CERT? How many more were teaching in it?

124. JB: You see, they brought me in as the teacher. Jim did the kitchen and was excellent, are you with me, Jim didn’t want to know about teaching, excellent cook and that, so I was brought in for that side of things. Again we did service in the main restaurant and then we had class from 2-5pm in the kitchen, whatever the lesson was, so that was my kind of thing.

125. MM: Did you like that; did you find you had an affinity for teaching?

126. JB: I absolutely loved it. And guess who my boss was? Michael Marley. I remember Michael Marley came down and introduced me to Practical Professional Cookery, saying this is the new book we will be using; I’ll get you a copy and send it on to you. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Again the conditions, we could have done with better equipment and that, but I used to do the pastry with the lads and we’d make the finer things you wouldn’t normally see, and anything special would go on the menu for the fathers’ supper that evening. And then there were the dinners, and you’d use them as class prep.

127. MM: Would you be feeding the fathers (priests) or the boys, or both? Was the fathers the fine dining and the students the canteen, so that the trainees experienced both kinds of catering?

128. JB: Oh, both, exactly, as well as that on six tables in the seniors at night, on rotation, they would get a mixed grill. So one week table one would get it, the second week table two, and so on, while the others got whatever normal food was on the menu, shepherds pie or something. There was always something happening, it could be a little dinner on for the rugby crowd, or soup and sandwiches or that. Now what we did in the other building is that we opened a little restaurant where people came in, there was big community of teachers and that, we could do fifty lunches. This was an extra little bit of training, so say ‘Johnny, you are on the main courses, you are on the veg, etc.’, and we’d call out the orders ‘one soup, one Florida cocktail, one roast beef etc.’, it was something extra, all part of the progress.

129. MM: I’m thinking that it must have been opened a few years before you were there because Eugene McSweeney trained there.

130. JB: Eugene was there a year or two before I was there and Eugene was in the Cashel Palace because I remember meeting Eugene there.

131. MM: How long did you stay in Rockwell? Were you married at this stage?
JB: Around eight years, so that brought me up until 1978 or so. Yes I was married, I met Norma in the Intercontinental and we had a little cottage in Rockwell, Ruth was born while we were there.

MM: Did you go from there to Cathal Brugha Street?

JB: No, what I did was, we went to go back to the city to buy a house and set up, and I met Joe Hegarty somewhere and told him I was coming back to the city, and he gave me part-time hours in the college. But I came back and I worked for six months in Leopardstown Racecourse, I was head chef there, and another six months in the Rochestown Lodge. While doing part time in the college, three jobs came up; Andy (Whelan) got one, Joe Erraught got one, and I got the other. And that would bring us up to 1979/1980. Jury’s took over the franchise for Leopardstown Racecourse and actually made money at it, but for some unknown reason decided not to continue with the franchise, they actually made a lot of money, so it didn’t make sense. Fellows like John Linnane were supplying me with gateaux from Jury’s and some of the lads would come out and work at meetings, and we did some big functions there as well. One of the big orchestras came and we did a buffet for a thousand people. So I moved into a house on a Wednesday and was made redundant on a Friday, it was one of those nightmares, so that is how I got the job in the Rochestown Lodge. I called up, someone said they were looking for chef, so I went up, a nice little place but again you could be banging your head off the wall (there was no passion for food among the staff).

MM: Going back to Michael Clifford, did you clearly see that he had talent straight away?

JB: The first kitchen Michael Clifford worked in was Ashford Castle and I brought him with me, and I hand-picked him, for very obvious reasons, because he had a flair. Even giving out sausages and mash, he could do it a bit different, it is amazing. So Michael came the Easter we were there. I’ll tell you the story of Ashford, the Huggard family had just sold it that year to a fellow called Jack Mulcahy, who was an American multi-millionaire steel magnate. The Huggards were the staff in the castle, and Chris Andrews, who was a brother of David Andrews, had a hotel in Limerick. He recruited me to be head chef in Ashford, he was a very clever man, we set it up, started at Easter and closed it down in September. That September we did a wedding for the guy who was manager for decades after that, I forget his name. Chris was the advisor, because Chris was married to Jack Mulcahy’s niece, so Chris recruited me to set up the kitchen and after the first season he said in September ‘this is perfect, we’re closing now, you go back to Rockwell, I’ll be in touch with you and we’ll set up a contract, we’ll build you a house, this is big stuff’. He was killed in a car crash coming from the funerals or Bloody Sunday, that man was a maniac in a car, he aquaplaned somewhere on the Naas Road, and was killed outright, and I had a verbal contract with him. Peter Huggard was then the manager and I didn’t actually see eye to eye with Peter, so that was that, I was never going back. So, the summer after, I went down The Devon Inn in Templeglantine, on the border between Limerick and Kerry, and we did thirty six weddings in twenty nine days, with hundreds à la carte, but again it paid the bills. I was so near to the big time, but then it didn’t happen, the man was killed. Isn’t fate an amazing thing?

MM: Indeed it is, and it is all about personalities, meeting somebody you get on with, and often you stay working with that person.

JB: I was always lucky with regards the summers, you had June, July and August and they had you for extra because Rockwell didn’t pay you. I spent two summers in Dromoland working for another eccentric millionaire, and you could use anything you wanted, Ashford was the same, use anything you want, but every summer was different. I went up to work for Mrs. Britton up in Rossanowlagh for two summers, and she gave us a mobile home on the beach, so the girls had a month on the beach in Rossanowlagh, most kids would kill for it. There were no foreign holidays at the time, but I still had to put in the work. Rossanowlagh was fantastic, you had a hundred and twenty dinners every night, you had fifty or sixty high teas, and you had students in the kitchen.
from Killybegs or the Northern Ireland colleges. I must say lovely kids, and a wonderful set-up, but hard work. I worked for her for two summers.

139. MM: How about the City & Guilds 706/3, did you do that before or after you were made full time in the college?

140. JB: I went in year one, and the 706/3 had just finished the year previous and Jimmy (Kilbride) was saying that ‘if we get the numbers, we’ll do it again’, so I was told to do it by Joe Hegarty, so that was my introduction to the 706/3.

141. MM: So you were in the second or third year of it being run?

142. JB: I would say the second, yeah, in 1980. Again it was a wonderful course, Willy Somers was in my class, and Paddy Brady, I can’t remember some of the others because I never saw them again.

143. MM: Was Noel Cullen in your class?

144. JB: No, Noel, and Eugene McSweeney, and Joe Erraught were in the year before me, and Andy (Whelan) was two years after me.

145. MM: How was it, was there anything new in it, or was it just going over stuff you had covered in England and along the way?

146. JB: The point about it, and I’m not just blowing my own trumpet, I was light years ahead of most of them for the reasons I have already given.

147. MM: Well, I spoke to Jimmy Kilbride, and he said that the two star pupils he had on the 706/3 over the years were yourself and Noel Cullen. He said you were absolutely gifted with your hands.

148. JB: Well, I didn’t want to say that myself (laugh), it’s good to crosscheck (laugh), but it was a wonderful course, really wonderful, and I went on to do the pastry with Jimmy and he was equally as gifted at pastry. Things like _croutes_, like savoury _croutes_, we used to make these Sally Lunns, and carve them and toast them, serve things on top of them. I don’t think I ever met a man who was as well read as Jimmy, you know. He was tremendous to that particular respect; he had everything on his fingertips, ice cream gateaux and bombes. He’d blow them out, things you wouldn’t be allowed to do today.

149. MM: Did he instil a passion for reading in you?

150. JB: Absolutely, that is where I got it from, I came into the Oriental cookery, I’d get a book, and then one of the summers I went to New York and I was working for Marriott in the flight kitchen in Kennedy Airport. Air India was on one side of me and Air Taiwan or Air China was on the other. South African Airways was there, Air France was there, and I’d be looking around, I’d watch the guys doing a hundred weight of rice in a tilting braising pan with the stock and turning it on barely and off again, then putting a cross of yellow colouring on it and the lid down, and that was saffron rice (laugh). And I remember reading up about all of this, and when I came home I remember getting a phone call one day, an Oriental voice saying ‘Mr. Bowe, we believe you are an expert in Oriental Cookery’. I thought it was one of the lads winding me up, so I said ‘give me your phone number and I’ll call you back’, which I did, and it was one of the Japanese car companies, they were launching the Nissan Bluebird car. Well there was a big poster of Mount Fuji there and we did all _Teriyaki_, and _Sukiyaki_, and we had an audience of a hundred and fifty people. Tony Campbell was on the _Sukiyaki_ and we cooked up a storm and served on the bonnet of the Bluebird, and fed about a hundred people (laugh), we probably got a hundred quid each (laugh). I knew nothing about Japanese cookery but it took me about a fortnight to find out, you know.
Noel Cullen came to me and said ‘we are doing a Conquer Cancer thing in the Royal Marine Hotel, will you do a Chinese cookery demonstration?’ Well nobody was doing Chinese cookery at the time, so Michael Martin was my commis at the time, and I said ‘come on, let’s get set up’, so we had our woks and our pans and our bit of history and that and then Michael Martin said ‘chef, look, the game is up’, and I said ‘what do you mean the game is up?’ I lifted my head and there was the Chinese delegation from the Chinese Embassy walking down the aisle, and I was giving a history of each dish and rice and paddy fields and they were absolutely thrilled. They didn’t think any Irish people knew the history of Chinese food. So I was invited to a dinner in the Chinese Embassy and it was incredible to be entertained in the Chinese Embassy. Now I think there were duck feet in broth and Norma nearly threw up, because you see western duck feet are like crackling, no problem, Chinese duck feet are boiled or poached, it was like a big bit of bubble gum. The food was great and washed down with Chrysanthemum wine etc. I didn’t notice too much, but Norma said that they had no central heating on (laugh), I don’t think they were too interested, you just left your coat on (laugh), but that was a fun thing.

Just going back to Cathal Brugha Street, there were not that many of you teaching there at first. There was yourself, Jimmy Kilbride, Joe Erraught, PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly, Andy Whelan, and that was it. Were you teaching the chefs programme?

You see we were brought in for what was really the start of the day release programme; that was the reason that we were brought in. Michael and Jimmy and PJ could handle the chef’s programme, but the day release programme had just begun. We obviously had other classes but we were brought specifically in for the day release.

I know you would have had Alan O’Reilly as a day release, was Michael Martin full-time?

Yes Alan was in my class, and Michael was full-time. Michael was so talented, three or four gold medals in Hotelympia. Michael went off to London to work with the Greek guy, Nico Ladenis, a guy who has never got the praise he deserves. I regard Nico as one of the best. Paul Flynn worked with Nico.

Paul Flynn actually cooked one of Elizabeth David’s last meals, which was a consommé that Nico brought into her in a flask in hospital, because Nico was a great friend of hers when she was dying.

I had a copy of Nico’s book which is more a life story than a cookbook; I think it is called My Gastronomy.

Did you eat out much in Ireland or Dublin when you came back from London? Did you ever eat out in Jammet’s or the Russell or that?

No, we couldn’t afford it at the time.

How about later on, with restaurants like Snaffles or the Golden Orient, or the Soup Bowl?

Well, I would have gone to eat in the Oriental ones, but it was very dear compared to the money you were earning; it was a big deal, a big treat to get out to one.

So you only went out if it was an occasion? I suppose you were eating the food for free at work anyway?

Absolutely, you see Ireland was at a transition stage, it was only coming into a better style of cuisine. Now I don’t know what you know about Jammet’s, but Jammet’s wouldn’t have
been terribly, what would I say, ‘gourmet food’. Jammet’s had one thing, it was a French restaurant and it cooked to order, and they would serve a nice dish under a dome (cloche) with a nice waiter, I think that was more of its benefit rather this wonderful cuisine. Now, don’t get me wrong, there was nothing wrong with the food.

164.MM: I think that Jammet’s in a way was in a bit of a time warp. Jammet’s was serving Edwardian style food for sixty seven years, and it didn’t really change. I think that when the Russell opened, it was producing much more exciting food and stole the top position in Dublin from Jammet’s.

165.JB: Exactly, that’s how it was, because I used to go into Jammet’s kitchen, waiting for one of the lads to come play football or something, and there would be a few orders going out, the chef had gone, there was liver and bacon with some jus and beurre noissette over it, but it wasn’t like Derry Clarke or that, it was very much Elizabeth David type of food.

166.MM: It was perfectly prepared French Classical cooking, not Nouvelle cuisine?

167.JB: Exactly, in fact a lot of people if they saw it today wouldn’t go near it. So they’d roast a chicken and carve it at you table, are you with me?

168.MM: Interestingly enough, we seem to be going back to that. A lot of people are doing these Rotisseries in their restaurants because people are going back to the flavour of food.

169.JB: Well that is no harm at all.

170.MM: So, with the day release programme kicking off in Cathal Brugha Street, it shows that at least more chefs are being trained. Where were they coming to you from, Hotels, Restaurants?

171.JB: Yes, Pat Zaidan was one of them. Pat was in Celtic Mews at the time.

172.MM: That’s right, and then Guilbaud’s opened around 1981. When is the first time you took note of Guilbaud’s?

173.JB: Well first of all, when it opened first there was write ups in the paper about it, the cost of the food and that, and you become very much aware that it was the first in Dublin, something new or something different.

174.MM: Would you be aware at the time of the Coq Hardi and John Howard?

175.JB: Well I worked in the Coq Hardi, first of all, when I was in Rockwell he’d phone me. He was head chef in White’s in Wexford at the time, and he’d say ‘Jim, are you doing anything this weekend? Come on down.’ What I saw there, I hadn’t seen anywhere else in Dublin or anywhere because John was a French trained classical cook, and is superb. He had some party in for the weekend, and we’d cook away for the weekend, have a few pints at night, get paid on a Sunday and drive back to Rockwell with a few bob in my pocket. When I came back to Dublin, I met him someplace and he said he was thinking of opening up a place. It was the old Pirate’s Den I worked in. Where John’s restaurant was, well, next door was the old Lansdowne Bar. That was the old Pirate’s Den. John was in at the back of the bar, he had a curtain (separating them) and he had six or eight tables. That’s where John started and I worked in there with John. John would give me the list of what is on tonight, I’d do the French onion soup with the croutons, and have everything ready, and he’d say ‘oh I have a private party upstairs’, he wouldn’t tell me who it was (laugh), but I found out later (Haughey), but I had everything ready for him. I’d get a tenner, John was a great friend of mine.

176.MM: Didn’t you do a bit in the Guinea Pig as well with Mervyn Stewart?
177. **JB:** I opened up the Guinea Pig for Mervyn (laugh). I was just in the college or that, I had just come back to Dublin, I knew Mervyn from the 706/3 class, and I worked with him for a year or two, around 1978. When I went to the Guinea Pig first, it was certainly different, but Mervyn did a good job there.

178. **MM:** At that time, from the late 70s, early 80s was really the birth of these chef / proprietors. I know the King Sitric had been open for quite a while, but you had the Coq Hardi, the Guinea Pig, the Mirabeau, did you know Sean Kinsella?

179. **JB:** I know Sean very well. I know Sean going back donkeys’ years, because Sean would be around the same vintage as myself. I hadn’t seen Sean for donkeys’ years. I won a number of prestigious competitions around Dublin. I won the Chef of the Year competition in Dublin that was sponsored by the flake meal association – Odlums. The final was in the Mirabeau, and I said to Sean, messing, ‘where is the can opener? I want to open up a few cans of beans’. I was only pulling his leg, but Sean, because there were other people around, said ‘we don’t have a can opener in the Mirabeau’, but later on I had a bit of craic with him. I won that competition, a prize of £500, and the following year there was one sponsored by Irish Mist and I beat a John Clancy, Pat Zaidan etc. and in the paper there was a headline ‘Veteran chef wins major competition’ (laugh). Another £500, so the next one came, and I applied, and I got a letter back saying ‘Dear Sir, we regret to inform you…’ they didn’t want me in it, which was fair enough and a compliment in itself. But I know Sean for donkeys’ years and as the man says, he’s a character. I met himself and Audrey a while ago and he is still as flamboyant as ever.

180. **MM:** Was the development of Oriental restaurants the big change you saw in your time in the college?

181. **JB:** When it happened first, there was a few Chinese restaurants with the one wallpaper, it must have been a job lot, this red wallpaper. I remember getting two chicken currys and a bottle of wine and you would have change out of £20 and all of a sudden even that became a bit refined, it went way up market. I remember the first Oriental shop in Dublin, I used to go up once a week to get my stuff every Tuesday for my Oriental demonstration, carry two plastic bags down Grafton Street which would cut the hands off you. Helen would be counting the beansprouts then, today she is a multi-millionairess, are you with me? I met her one day; they were shopping for a top of the range Mercedes down in Deansgrange. I had the same old rusty car (laugh). But it is amazing, now they have this Emporium.

182. **MM:** When did you start the advanced courses? Was it when Jimmy Kilbride retired?

183. **JB:** Yes, Jimmy retired and I did the 706/3 for two years and the man that we had as our examiner was Harry Cracknell, and he was eighty years of age and I couldn’t keep up with him. He was opening up the noisettes of lamb looking for scraps. You would want to see this man, you would want to see his marking sheet – noisettes 10/10 and then he started deducting marks, trimming bad, minus one mark – I was very impressed with him. Eamon O’Reilly was in that class, James Carberry was in that class, three guys who are lecturers in Ireland were in that class – Frank is in Galway, and then another one is in Waterford. People may laugh at the 706/3 but you can actually look at all these people who did it, they all did very well. I think the 706/3 had something special about it.

184. Then they decided, I think the Maastricht Agreement had something to do with it, that every country would recognise other countries qualifications. Then CERT said ‘let’s do away with this two year thing and put on twelve week modules, then trimmed it down to ten weeks etc. I wrote the Ethnic module. It was, believe it or not, the most popular of them all, sure you did it yourself. It is a shame to see it die. I think that was the instigator of lowering the standards. Maggie Thatcher brought in the NVQ, which means you don’t bother coming to school at all, just send in your book and we tick the boxes, you know. 
That was proven to be a disaster, but it is interesting to note that Maastricht was the beginning of the change in standards of education. Another thing I’m interested in is the role of gender in kitchens. When did women start working as chefs in kitchens in Ireland?

I’ll tell you, there were women eyeing the spuds in the Metropole, but Mary Murphy in the Royal Hibernian Hotel was ahead of her time, she was the larder chef and as good a larder chef as you would meet anywhere. What? A woman chef in the kitchen? It was unheard of, it was only kind of latter years, in my lifestyle in the mid 80s with the opening of the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) that they started coming in.

There were no girls in Rockwell?

No, all boys, but I remember when I was in Ashford there was a girl on the sweets and she was excellent. There was another girl, I started her off in the kitchen and she did breakfasts, I trained her into breakfasts and she was great, so I trained her as a cook and she did veg. Her father was the gardener and he was so grateful it was nearly embarrassing, she was a grand girl. I think kitchens were so rough pre that, you weren’t going to get them. A lot of fellows barely survived, you know (laugh).

Talking about that, there was a lot of alcoholism in the trade, a lot of fellows with great talent died young from drink? You probably saw a lot of that?

Absolutely, it was unbelievable; I remember trying to flame that lobster with a brandy bottle on some sauce corner and it was only cold tea that had been replaced in the bottle. It was a big, big problem. You see the anti-social hours, a lot of the people went to the pub for the afternoon. We played football and went to the pictures, but it would be terribly easy to go over and have four or five pints, it would be sad but you know.

But there was the whole sweat pint system in the Intercontinental when you were there, wasn’t there?

We got a beer ration every night, a couple of bottles of ale or smithwicks or whatever, but poor old Günter that we spoke about earlier, he went to open a hotel in Africa somewhere and died and is buried in Africa. God love him, he was one of natures’ gentlemen, but circumstances and whatever he saw during the war and that, you know.

Did you know many of the other foreign chefs that worked here? You had Willy Widmer in Jury’s, Dame Street, and then Michel Treyvaud, and Josef Frei was up in Killakee House?

I knew them all very well, Willy opened up in Drogheda in the Boyne Valley Hotel.

How about the Irish chefs who did well for themselves, Michael Clifford, do you know where else Michael worked, I know he was in Whites on the Green, but do you know did he train anywhere foreign?

Michael’s training was London, the places I don’t know. When Michael came back to open Whites on the Green, he sent me an invitation to have dinner there. Now this was one of my first experiences of nouvelle cuisine. We had chicken breast that was fanned out on a plate with stuffed cherry tomato and a mange tout, and I thought everything was lovely but everything was cold (laugh), because by the time somebody is finished fiddling around with it for twenty minutes, you know. Now I would certainly be impressed with Michael, he was a lovely cook and that, but I had my doubts about the nouvelle cuisine. Compare that to a Coq au Vin, they wouldn’t even equate.

Of that movement, who impressed you? I remember you being impressed by Anton Mossiman, the Swiss chef in the Dorchester?
Yes, Anton Mossiman was the first to impress me, Rory (Ó Morachain) was his sous chef for years, and I used to get phone calls from Rory ‘Jim, I’m here in Anton’s office, Irish hors d’oeuvres?’ I’d say ‘smoked trout and smoked salmon, and do them up nicely...’ So Anton Mossiman came to the college and he was down giving a lecture down in the lecture theatre, and I was giving a night class up in Kitchen 18, when one of the attendants came up saying the Mr. Mossiman wanted to talk to me. I thought it was just another wind-up, Aidan Martin again, so ignored it. Next thing I get Joe Hegarty on the phone saying that Mossiman could not wait all night for me, he had a plane to catch. Fame at last says I (laugh), but he shook my hand and said ‘Rory sends his regards’. Rory was his right hand man for eight years, I’d say he was there from dawn to dusk for years, probably caused him his marriage. He was a lovely man, Mossiman would have been one of the first to really impress me, he used black plates with red pepper sauces, tournedos seared medium rare, put in a bowl and then covered with consommé. He had a fish consommé with little fish swimming around in it; there were little crabs and that, so I was wondering how was that done? I went to Hotelympia the next year and bought the cutters, I thought it was the greatest thing since fried bread, it was too of its time, but he was delivering the goods as well. He was one of the first components of that style.

I think I recall you being impressed also by Shaun Hill?

I had the most fantastic experience with Shaun Hill. He came to Dublin for a workshop in CERT Amiens Street. He was in Gildleigh Park, and he showed me his menu. His sauces were stock reductions and he used the foamer to lighten them up. Pat Zaidan worked with him there, when this workshop was over I was to bring him down to meet Michael Martin in the Clarence at 8pm. We started off at 4pm in a pub in the North Strand drinking pints of Guinness, he was a madman, he couldn’t pass a pub. Michael Martin was doing his nut, we arrived late. We went into the bar and Michael was saying ‘I’ve got dinner for a big crowd’, ‘shut up, get over here you little bollix, Barman, a bottle of Dom Perignon and three pints of Guinness’. I swear to Jaysus, it was one of the best nights I ever had, a lovely guy, a madman, a total madman, the guy is a genius. He interprets ancient Greek manuscripts when he is not busy, you know, a pure academic turned cook, which is amazing, but a lovely guy. I was really impressed with him, you know. Michael (Martin) had worked in La Stampa when he was in college and La Stampa was in its infancy then.

So Michael was in La Stampa before going to London and then he would have returned there as head chef before opening up the Clarence. That makes sense.

The missing pieces of the jigsaw! I hope that has been of some use to you.

It’s been great, thank you so much for your time.

End of Interview
Notes from Interview with Giles O'Reilly in Rialto (19/5/2008)

Giles was born in London c. 1960 and moved to Ireland as a teenager. His mother was second generation Irish with family in Kells. The family moved from London to Rosscarberry in West Cork where Giles did his secondary schooling. Giles took a summer job in a local hotel and got a taste for cooking and the excitement of catering. He went to the College of Marketing and Design, Mountjoy Square, for a year where he studied marketing but decided it was not for him. He did a three month CERT course in a Hotel in Killarney that was closed during the winter season. He recalls there being around 90 students there between chefs, waiters and barmen, and housekeeping. He enjoyed the course, thought it was quite progressive, since it was applied in nature, set in a real hotel. He went to work in a guesthouse in Crosshaven, realised he knew very little and went to Kinsale which at the time had a certain caché as the centre of gourmet food in Ireland. He worked in the Monastery Hotel with an English chef, Leon Edge, where he recalls getting his first standing ovation in a restaurant for serving turtle steak. A lot of the food was flown in from Harrods in London. This was the summer of the Pope’s visit (1979). From there he did a three week stage in Ballymaloe where he recalls it had a rustic vibe, with a predominately female kitchen. Myrtle Allen used to call anywhere outside of Ballymaloe ‘margarine country’. He enjoyed the fact that they picked their own herbs and vegetables and that but didn’t stay long.

Giles then did a second year refresher course for chefs in Roebuck, in Clonskeagh with CERT where his teachers were Matt Dowling, Pierce Hingston, and Eugene McGovern. In 1980 he was employed in Ashford Castle as a third year commis chef. The head chef was Ken Wade, who had trained in the Russell Hotel and been to the Bahamas with Pierre Rolland, and this was Giles first experience of a true first class kitchen. He recalls the standard of food was good but quite old fashioned. They were doing a lot of terrines, a carving trolley in the dining room, and the customers were mostly rich Americans. Many of the chefs were just journeymen chefs, no real passion for the food. It was a similar story in his next position in Dromoland Castle. He recalls that the American owner dictated the style of food, lots of Baked Cod with paprika crust etc. Giles was moved in to the sister hotel The Clare Inn, and he effectively was second in command there which was a great experience.

He then moved to the Park Hotel in Kenmare, where the Dutch chef had just left and Colin O’Daly had just arrived. This was his first experience of nouvelle cuisine. The whole team in the kitchen were under 21 and he was about 22. They were young, lean, and efficient and there was a great energy in the kitchen. He was
in the Park when they won there Michelin star, and he left about the same time as Colin after about two
years. Giles went to Arbutus Lodge in Cork, which also had a Michelin star. Arbutus at that time had a
rustic feel to the food, drisheen with tansy sauce, crubeens etc., but he recalls the atmosphere in the small
kitchen was slightly charged because Michel Flamme was chef, but Michael Clifford was also there having
returned from the Cashel Palace which had been run by Ryan’s of Arbutus. Rory O’Connell was also in the
kitchen along with Giles and an American commis chef doing desserts. Declan Ryan was front of house and
Michael was in the kitchen, so Giles effectively had three bosses, Michael Ryan, Michel Flamme and
Michael Clifford. He only spent four months in Arbutus but he points out that they were a very big
influence on his culinary education. He suggests that Arbutus had perfected the art of sauce cookery.

Figure GR.2: Menu from The Park Kenmare (3/1/1983)

In 1984 he spent the summer working in Baltimore and the winter and following two years running a
Country House Restaurant in Tullamore. In 1985 he bumped into Colin at a trade show, who told him about
the new restaurant he was opening in Blackrock. He opened The Park with Colin and recalls that at the
beginning there was only himself, Colin, a pastry chef who later became a priest, and Sandra Earl who

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arrived shortly afterwards. There was only one menu in The Park, with five courses, including a sorbet course which was innovative at that time. He also recognises the limitations of the restaurant; they plated up the vegetables before service and reheated them in a microwave, which was common practice at the time. The restaurant was soon full for lunch and dinner. He spent two and half years in The Park.

From The Park he moved to Whites on the Green, where Peter and Alicia White had given Michael Clifford free reign in the kitchen. There were about eight or nine chefs in the kitchen, Michael, Giles, Paul Kelly and a number of commis chefs. The food was influenced by *nouvelle cuisine* and the restaurant itself was very busy and fashionable. When Michael Clifford moved to Cork to open Cliffords, Giles spent two years working for John O’ Sullivan doing *sous-vide* cookery. They were producing sauces for their own restaurants such as Shannon’s and Blakes and also selling *sous-vide* products to *Iarnród Éireann* for the Citygold trains. He recalls feeling a sense of irony selling his *sous-vide* sauces into Sachs Hotel whose chef at that time was Sean Kinsella, who had been the famous chef / proprietor of The Mirabeau. O’Sullivan’s *sous-vide* company eventually closed down, but Giles returned to Whites on the Green for a year and half as head chef under the new owners Paddy Shovelin and Paddy Gallagher. He recalls that he simplified the menu but that it was a bad time for fine dining restaurants. The next few years were spent working casually in various restaurants including Polo One, The Left Bank, No 10 at Longfields, and a while as head chef in The Terrace Restaurant in Leeson Street which was then taken over by Alan O’Reilly as Morels at Leeson Hall. He now had a young family and decided it was time to get a job that would be more family friendly, so when a position came up in *Dáil Éireann*, he took it and remains head chef there today.

The restaurants of note at that time in Dublin he suggests were Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, and that the chef’s restaurant was Shay Beano’s where Eamon Ó Caitháin cooked French provincial food. When Whites closed down, he recalls Ó Catháin running a restaurant there called The Green Room, but the building was then sold and has since been Shanahan’s on the Green.
Figure GR.4: Menu from Shay Beano (15/1/90)
STARTERS
MUSHROOM & TARRAGON SOUP £1.95
COLIN’S PRAWN BISQUE £2.75
BEIGNETS OF FRIED BRIE SOUFFLE WITH APPLE SAUCE £3.65
CASK ALE MUSSEL PASTY £2.95
PIGEON BREAST WITH HERB SALAD £3.55
WARM TERRINE OF SEAFOOD WITH CHIVE SAUCE £3.95
AVOCADO & PEAR SALAD £2.75
TIAN OF CRAB WITH PINK GRAPEFRUIT £3.75

MAIN COURSE
PORK FILLET APRICOT & WALNUT STUFFED IN A HONEY & THYME SAUCE £7.05
FILLET STEAK ON BOXTY WITH GREEN PEPPERCORN SAUCE £11.50
BREAST OF CHICKEN WITH A LEEK & HAZELNUT SAUCE £7.75
GAME PIE TRADITIONAL STYLE £7.95
ROAST DUCK WITH PORT & ORANGE SAUCE £8.95
FILLETS OF SALMON IN FILLO WITH A LIGHT VEGETABLE SAUCE £8.50
SEA TROUT & PLACCA WITH A WATERCRESS SAUCE £8.95
BLACK SOLE COLBERT £8.50
VEGETARIAN STIR FRY £6.50

VEGETABLES
PUREE OF CELERIAC & SWede £1.25
COURGETTES PROVENÇAL £1.95
CARROTS WITH ORANGE & CUMIN £1.75
TRADITIONAL COLCANNON (POTATO WITH RAISIN, UNION & HERBS) £1.25
Sauté POTATO £1.25
MIXED GREEN SALAD £1.75
SELECTION OF VEGETABLES & POTATO £1.95

DESSERTS £2.50
CREME BRULÉE WITH PRALINE ICE CREAM
STRAWBERRIES LAYERED WITH GINGER SHORTBREAD & CREAM
PAUVOLA WITH MARSHMALLOW BREAD & BUTTER PUDDING
CHOCOLATE & ALMOND SOUFFLÉ

CHEESE £3.25
LONG CLAWSON STILTON
GUBBEEK FARMHOUSE CHEESE
LA CAFETIÈRE £1.25

Figure GR.5: Menu from Roly’s Bistro c. 1993
Notes from Interview with Kevin Thornton in Thornton's Restaurant (12/8/08)

Kevin Thornton was born on the 26/4/1958 in Cashel, County Tipperary. He was one of nine children, his father was a farmer / truck driver and his mother was a dressmaker. He was educated by the Christian Brothers in CBS Cashel to leaving certificate and went on to do a three year chefs programme in the newly opened Regional Technical College (RTC) in Galway. He recalls two of his teachers as being quite good, Tom Keavney and Pat Kivlehan, who had worked in London and Europe.

Kevin had worked in an abattoir in his teens and also worked in the gardens of Cashel Palace Hotel which had been transformed into a hotel from private dwelling by Vincent O’ Brien, the racehorse training, in 1959. This early experience gave Kevin an understanding about the origins of ingredients he would be using in the kitchen. He spent the summers of his RTC years working in the Great Southern Hotels of Corrib, Parknasilla and Killarney. He went to London following college and worked in a one Michelin star restaurant called Waltons under a Scottish chef c.1978. (note: Waltons had a Michelin star from 1979-1989) In c.1979 he went to Europe with friends and worked in the vineyards and then in Paris selling bracelets on the street. He then went to Switzerland where he spent two years working in 5 star hotels first in a Ski resort and then in Lausanne. He recalls immersing himself in the language and becoming quite proficient in French. He returned to Ireland c.1980 but there were no jobs available so he went to Canada where he worked in the Four Seasons in Toronto for two years and then spent a year and a half working in a Patisserie. He returned to Dublin and did some industrial catering work for John D. Carroll group. It is uncertain whether he then went to work in Bentleys in Baggot Street with Tom Egan or to the Shelbourne Hotel. While in Bentleys’s he met Alan O’Reilly who later on, opened Clarets Restaurant in Rathgar. Kevin worked for a while with Brendan O’Neill in the Shelbourne Hotel as saucier, becoming his sous chef; in charge of the Shelbourne Hotel Restaurant, where the standard of food was very good.

A contact in the Shelbourne got him a place in Paul Bocuse’s Restaurant in Lyon where he spent nine months. He recalls that Bocuse was run on a military style and that the chefs were sent to the barber for a haircut every fortnight. Kevin hid his long hair under his jacket and when discovered, he tried to convince the chef that he kept it long for religious reasons. He was told cut it or leave. He encountered physical violence in Bocuse and a lot of psychological bullying. He recalls there was a lot of Japanese in the kitchen and they would be sent back into the fridge to clean it directly after they had thought it was cleaned. When he was in Bocuse he spent a day working in Troisgros which he thought was amazing.

On his return, he took up the position of head chef in Adare Manor in Limerick and it was here that he first felt he could win a Michelin star. He had a young hungry team of chefs working with him in Adare Manor, but he felt that the management were not as focused on the star as he was. It was during his time in Adare that Kevin went to The Dublin College of Catering to do the City & Guilds 706/3 Advanced cookery course which was run by Jimmy Kilbride. He describes Jimmy as a legend and names him as the person who inspired him most in his life. Jimmy opened Kevin’s mind to the history of food and instilled him with confidence in his own ability. Some part time teaching followed the completion of the course and Kevin went on to take the teachers certificate. Following Adare Manor, he received a call from Alan O’Reilly that there was a restaurant lease available in Rathmines. The Wine Epergne had been run for a while by Alex Findlater’s wife and Kevin took it over in 1990 and ran it for two years with his wife Muriel. Kevin recalls that the only person he was ever nervous cooking for was Jimmy Kilbride, when he came for a meal at the Wine Epergne. ‘It was like cooking for the master’. They wanted to buy the lease in 1992, but he recalls that interest rates were very high and that the restaurant was bought by a Chinese businessman.

In 1993-1995 Kevin spent teaching full-time in the Dublin Institute of Technology, Cathal Brugha Street, having secured a permanent position. He didn’t feel the college was fulfilling his ambition, and didn’t like the politics of academia. While he was in the college, he represented Ireland in the Bocuse d’Or competition in Lyon with Eoin Sherry as his commis chef. He felt there was little support for him in Lyon, his equipment went astray and nobody seemed to care.
In September 1995, Kevin and Muriel open Thornton’s Restaurant in Portobello and won their first Michelin star the following year in 1996. Thornton’s won its second Michelin star in 2001, making Kevin the first Irish winner of two Michelin stars.
Notes from Interview with John Howard in Foxrock (12/8/2008)

John Howard was born in County Clare on the 4th December 1945, one of three children with no catering in his family. His first catering experience was working in the Shannon Airport Restaurant which had been set up by Brendan O’Regan. He came to Dublin in 1962 and worked for a while in Daly’s Waldorf Hotel in Eden Quay with Roly Saul (who later went to the Bailey and then the Goat Grill) and Liam Riddler (who went to Limerick). In 1964 he took a position in Jury’s Dame Street as a junior chef de partie and worked for three years in Jury’s under Willy Widmer, a Swiss chef who was extremely influential on young John. He recalls Liam Kavanagh, Noel Cullen, Eugene McGovern, Ronnie May, Tony Kelly, and George Haynes also worked in Jury’s kitchen at this time. In 1967 John went to London and worked in l’Ecu de France in Jermyn Street under a French chef for about a year. He then went to the Café Royal where he worked alongside Noel Cullen for a while. He also worked in the Kensington Palace where he met Phil Duggan from Portlaoise (who had trained in L’Ecu de France, Le Caprice or the Mirabelle) and later became his restaurant manager when he opened Le Coq Hardi in 1977. He also met Conor Breen who became head chef in Jury’s Limerick, and Patrick Martin who went on to work in Lassere in Paris and eventually became the Irish council in Bermuda.

In 1968 he went to Switzerland and spent a year working in the five-star Lausanne Palace Hotel. He found the Swiss were very clinical. He returned to Dublin in 1969 and took up the position of sous chef in the Sutton House Hotel with Cyril Clohessy and Freddy Thoma. He notes that a lot of the meetings about the gun-running to the north took place here during this time. In 1972 he became executive chef of Whites Hotel in Wexford. His wife Catherine, who he met in Jury’s, was from Wexford. John’s profile as a chef grew in Wexford receiving favourable press, particularly during the Opera Festival. He also won three gold medals in Hotelympia during this period, and catered for a number of high profile dinners for the European Union. Most of the staff in Whites came from Rockwell College, he particularly recalls Tony Rogers. Jim Bowe used to help him out on busy weekends also, while he was working in Rockwell.

John recalls that Jack Williams was the chef in Snaffles in Leeson Street, Nicholas Tinney was the owner and his wife was a journalist. Snaffles specialised in small game such as snipe and woodcock. He also remembers the Peter Powerie’s Soup Bowl and recalls that the Smurffits were great clients. Norma Smurfit ran the Soup Bowl for a period after Powrie disappeared. One of Powrie staff was Evelyn who now works in the K Club, also owned by the Smurffits. He also notes that Aidan McManus had opened the King Sitric while he was in Sutton and that Aidan had previously worked in the House of Commons in London.

Figure JH.1: Gearóid Lynch, John Howard, Glen Clifford, Jimmy O’Sullivan
In 1977 John opened the *Coq Hardi* in the basement of the Lansdowne Hotel with Phillip Duggan as head waiter, and Jackie Bermingham as his assistant head waiter. Two chefs who worked for a short while there were Brendan O’Neill and Emmet Byron but John notes that Jim Bowe and Aidan Martin also worked part-time with him. Jimmy Sullivan, who had spent time on the Queen Mary, became his head chef of over twenty years. His most outstanding commis was Derry Clarke, but notes that in later years, Gearóid Lynch, Warren Massey and Brian Beatty were also very good. When John opened first, he was producing classical French haute cuisine rich in butter, cream and alcohol. Over the years his style of food lightened, avoiding flour in sauces etc. In 1980 he moved the restaurant to a new building down the road, and Patsy McGuirk opened *Bon Appetite* in the Lansdowne Hotel. *Le Coq Hardi* became the most exclusive restaurant in Dublin. Its customers were mainly from the corporate sector and business remained buoyant even through the harsh economic years of the mid 1980s. John built up an impressive wine cellar after a review of *Le Coq Hardi* and *La Provence*, both French restaurants on Pembroke Street by Jim Dunne in the Irish Times or Business and Finance, which noted that the food in *Le Coq Hardi* was by far superior but that the wine list was terrible. John had been getting his wines for a merchant in Wexford. John said ‘that will never happen again’, he changed suppliers and soon built a cellar that was voted ‘the best cellar in England and Ireland’ by Egon Ronay, and also won awards from the Wine Spectator magazine. The other Irish cellar noted by Wine Spectator, he recalls was Arbutus Lodge.

John recalls that service in *Le Coq Hardi* was plate service from the beginning with a fair bit of Gueridon service such as carving game or chateaubriands in the room. The restaurant could seat 45 with an additional 20 in a private room. They regularly did 100 covers a night. He notes that business expenses were often abused; customers who came for lunch would still be there at dinner time and would want to keep their table, which had only been booked for lunch. John was always a pragmatic businessman and noted that he kept a simple dessert list because he couldn’t justify keeping a great pastry chef. At one stage when he did employ a good pastry chef, he made a business out of it, supplying delicatessens and other restaurants. The pastry chef would start work at midnight and finish at eight when the rest of the chefs began work.

John noted that for years there was no middle market in Dublin restaurants. You either ate fast food or café food or else went to an upmarket restaurant. He names John O’Sullivan as the man who identified and exploited the middle market with his various restaurants, Flanagans, Gallaghers, Raffers, Blakes, and Roly’s. Using computer technology, O’Sullivan would analyse sales every few days and if a dish was not selling it would be removed from the menu. New technology that John noticed during his time included Sous Vide, but he suggests it was not properly utilised. He recalls hygiene and health and safety legislation coming in towards the end of his time (late 90s). In many ways he felt it was overdone.

John used to close the restaurant for the month of August and spent time in the south of France where he ate in Roger Vergé’s restaurant and also ate in Bocuse and *La Gavroche*. When asked what the biggest influences on his professional career were, he mentions Willy Widmer, his time in London, and the fact that he employed a solicitor and accountant from the first day he opened his business. *Le Coq Hardi* closed in 2001 and the building was sold for a handsome profit.
Notes from Interviews with David Butt (12/1/2005), Terry Foy (22/5/2005)

David Butt is the son of Mike Butt (The Golden Orient and The Tandoori Rooms)
Terry Foy is Mike Butt’s Widow
David Interview was by telephone and Terry’s informal interview was in Sandymount.

1. Mahmood (Mike) Butt was born in Nairobi, Kenya on the 7th May 1926. His parents were Indian coming from Lahore and Amritsar. He moved to London and came to Ireland for the first time in the late 1940s with the civil service cricket team. He was also interested in trial biking and Mondello Park was then in Santry. He had a friend in Dublin, came over for six weeks and never left. He met and later in 1955 married Terry Foy from Dublin who was a graduate of The College of Catering, Cathal Brugha Street and was manager in The Green Rooster Restaurant in O’Connell Street. The Green Rooster was owned by and Australian, Billy Willis, and Terry recalled throwing Stilton cheese (procured on the black market during the war years) in the bin because she thought it was gone off!!! Mike’s first business called ‘Fruity Frost’ involved the production of iced fruit lollys. They had a factory near Mespil Road but he was refused funding when he tried to expand. An Irish company took the concept, received the funding and prospered.

2. He had two options, to return to Kenya or to set up a new business. His wife did not want to leave Ireland and they decided to use her catering experience and his Indian cooking knowledge and open Ireland’s first Indian Restaurant. They searched for premises and took a long lease on premises in 27 lower Leeson Street, which was a residential area. They opened the Golden Orient Restaurant, one of Ireland’s first Indian restaurants, in February 1956. The restaurant had six tables and a curtain separating the kitchen from the dining room. They were blessed in that Terry Sullivan from the Irish Press came in on the opening night and wrote a great review of the restaurant that helped secure a loyal following from early on. The restaurant became like a club and was opened late up until 3am. Students from University College Dublin in nearby Earlsfort Terrace would often work waiting tables just to get their dinner for free. Evans, Gray and Hood in England specifically blended their curry powder for them. He had to import all the spices; rice poppadoms and even tomato puree from London and stored them in their garage at home. It was not until the early 1980s that these ingredients became more widely available. In the April 1956 issue of Good Cooking (Ireland’s first Food and Wine Publication) Mahmood Butt is featured under the Chef’s Choice section and he gives recipes and advice on producing a good curry and accompaniments.

3. Mike was quite the visionary and he noticed the winter time business was not as healthy as summer time when the tourists were more plentiful and to keep busy and also to educate the Irish public on Indian food, hence increasing future custom, he travelled around the provinces running Indian food festivals in hotel restaurants from Donegal to Clare. In the 1960s he set up Golden Orient Foods producing frozen TV Indian dinners but was ahead of his time as very few people had deep freezers. He worked in conjunction with Irish Meat Packers to produce a range of canned Golden Orient Curry Products that held pride of place in many of the gourmet shops window displays.

4. In the early 1970s he noticed the trend in England of gourmet or ‘fine dining’ style Indian restaurants evolving from the Curry Houses. He decided to move first to avoid competition and he opened the Tandoori Rooms in the basement of the Leeson Street premises. He drew up the plans for a tandoor (special Indian oven) and had it made by a friend who worked in a foundry. His style of food was eclectic and he would often take crayfish and monkfish from Hanlons fishmongers that would have been in their window display but would otherwise have been thrown out, and create Indian dishes with them. Recipes from the Tandoori Rooms appeared in many publication including Gourmet magazine and Guilt and Millau. He appeared in Egon Ronay’s first guidebook and in every subsequent edition until the restaurant closed in 1986.
5. Mike Butt was the founding president in 1970 of the Irish Restaurant-Owners Association (IRA), which soon changed its name to the Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI) for obvious reasons. John D. Carroll, Mark Kavanagh, Peter Robinson, Maurice Cohen, Heather Gay and Rachael Bewley were the other founding members. The main motivation behind this organisation was to lobby for reduced taxation and the special restaurant licence to enable restaurants to serve spirits and beer and not simply wine. He was also director of Dublin Tourism for a period as well as being Honorary counsel for Pakistan in Ireland. In 1975 Golden Orient Ltd. started a service called ‘Dine Around’ where visitors to Ireland could book meals in top Irish restaurants before leaving home and pay for them with special vouchers purchased from their local tour operators. The 1980 Good Food Guide published some of Mike’s maxims ‘strength through joy’ and ‘variety through spice’ and the inspector found the tastes and the bonhomie of the restaurant unchanged. Mike at this stage shared the cooking with Mohamad Yusuf and Kevin Pigot.

6. Mike Butt enjoyed shooting pheasant and was an avid fly fisherman, favouring particularly the Connemara lakes. He loved to drive fast cars and was the proud owner of a Bristol 404, Austin Martin DB4 and the first MGBGT in Ireland. In his latter years he took up painting and became an Irish citizen. He died on the 15th January 1988.

Kathleen Montgomery (KM) Interview with her grandfather William B. Montgomery (WM) using questions supplied by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire

William B. Montgomery was after being in a car accident and elderly and was not strong enough to be interviewed by a stranger. His grand-daughter who was a culinary arts student at the time supplied this information from a shortened questionnaire supplied by the researcher.

KM: Where and when were you born?
WM: Born on 17th July 1911, Shrewsbury Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4

KM: How many in the family?
WM: 4 children

KM: What did your mother and father work at?
WM: Thomas Montgomery was a solicitor in his own firm and inherited the Red Bank restaurant. Kitty Montgomery was a housewife.

KM: Was there catering in the family?
WM: William B. Montgomery’s maternal grandparents, Bill and Kitty Whelan owned the Star and Garter pub and The Red Bank restaurant and left the restaurant to Thomas Montgomery.

KM: Where were you educated and to what age?
WM: William B. Montgomery went to Clongowes Wood College from 1918 to 1930 where he obtained his Leaving Certificate. He then went to Trinity College where he did a law degree from 1930 to 1934. He then went to Blackhall Place and qualified as a solicitor.

KM: Did you have any specific catering education or apprenticeship?
WM: After the end of World War Two there was no work for solicitors in Dublin, William Montgomery went to the Gresham Hotel and did a one year apprenticeship under Toddy O’Sullivan in Hotel and Catering Management.

KM: Outline the Chronology of places in which you worked?
WM: After qualifying, William B. Montgomery became a solicitor in Thomas Montgomery and Son Solicitors where he worked for four year. He then got married and moved to Stroketown Co. Roscommon where he set up his own firm, William Montgomery Solicitors, where he stayed for five years. In 1946 he did his apprenticeship in the Gresham and then became manager of the Red Bank Restaurant for the next five years before returning to Thomas Montgomery Solicitors where he worked until 1993.
Edited Telephone Interview with Jimmy Flahive (23/5/2005)

Jimmy Flahive was reluctant to talk when first approached by telephone but when phoned again later, having talked to some of his colleagues, he agreed to a telephone interview but was reluctant to do a face to face interview since he had gone blind. Jimmy passed away in Christmas 2006.

1. Jimmy Flahive was born in 1916 in Harolds Cross, Dublin. His father was an army man. His grand Aunt worked in the Kildare Street Club. He became a chef and didn’t know what a chef was. He got a job at Christmas as messenger boy in Clery’s. After Christmas the staff manager said come and see me and introduced him to the chef Paul Hitz and manager, Paddy W. Fields.

2. Jimmy trained under Swiss chef Paul Hitz in Clery’s when they had a grill room and a lounge downstairs, ballroom and everything, with an entrance in Sackville Place. It was all silver service in Clery’s at the time. The general manager of Clery’s got a salary and commission, but not on the restaurant so he shut down the restaurant. When Denis Guiney took over Clery’s, in 1941 it opened as a concession bases. Haffners staff dances were held in Clery’s, and at the dress dances, you had to wear dress suit.

3. From Clery’s he went to the Old Wicklow Hotel, where he recalls a big long hall into the bar, an Italian head chef, an English man in the Bar. He came into the kitchen as chef, there was a husband and wife team running the hotel. It was all silver service.

4. He worked for a while in the Grand Hotel, Malahide, they closed it because they thought the war would mean an end to business. They were so wrong, Americans coming down from the North ordering a Porterhouse steak with two fried eggs on top (unbelievable). They sacked the chef – he went to the Grand Hotel in Greystones briefly. Todd O’ Sullivan went to the Four Courts Hotel from Malta when the war broke out. Todd O’ Sullivan was looking for a chef – he engaged him in the Four Courts and the day he was to start, Todd announced he was going to the Gresham Hotel. Worked in the Gresham with Charley Opperman and used to do the carving at the table. He worked for a short while as chef in the Central Hotel with Miss Mullins who had been manager of the Gresham Hotel before Todd took over. Miss Mullins had women chefs and brought two of them with her to Central. One took over as head chef when Jimmy left to go to the Officers mess in Portobello.

5. He left the Central Hotel during the war years to go to Portobello Barracks where he recalled the money being great. He finished in the Barracks at 4pm and would work part time in the Gresham for Todd. He met Todd O’ Sullivan through the union and was earning 3’ 6 pence and hour in the Gresham for Todd. Toddy, he recalls ‘he was a great manager’.

6. Jimmy left the Gresham and went to the airport because there was a pension. He was earning two pounds a week less in Air Lingus in 1954 than he was earning in the Gresham but he soon was promoted and ended up as outdoor catering manager.

7. Toddy’s words on hearing Jimmy was leaving were ‘I hear you are taking wings’, his answer was there’s no pension in the Gresham to which Toddy just nodded his head.

8. Johnny Opperman, who was in charge of the catering in the airport, was related somehow to Jimmy Flahive. Jimmy used to be a customer in Jammet’s, John O’ Farrell who worked in Jammet’s cocktail bar was his brother in law. He recalls that there were silver tankards (half pint) and all the regulars had their own tankard for the beer. His cousin Frank Purcell worked in the food bar in Jammet’s and went on to be high in the Union, he was Number 4 branch secretary and then Mickey Mullen came.

9. In 1963 Jimmy did two years of television, providing cookery slots on a programme called ‘Home Truths’. Jimmy recalls that Charlie Haughey would eat at the Collar of Gold restaurant in the
airport twice a week (minimum), and that he said to Jimmy ‘if this was England you would be
known as James Flahive’. Charles Haughey often had forty for lunch, ‘horsy people not
politicians’; and nobody could do catering for him but Jimmy Flahive and Aer Lingus. Jimmy
spent thirty years working in the airport.

10. Jimmy recalled the Paddy Burtonshaw was in the Regal Room with Uhlemann, then in the
Gresham and went on to be head chef of the Savoy. He also recalls that Michael Mac Manus, who
was sous chef in the Gresham when Uhlemann was head chef, married twice in the same week and
was jailed for bigamy. Macker was in Mountjoy at the same time as Mamie Cadden.
Telephone Interview with Eugene McSweeney (9/5/2008)

Birth and Family
Eugene was born on the 31st July 1947 in Dublin, but reared in Portlaoise, the eldest in a family of three. His father worked in the Worsted Clothing Mills and both his mother and grand mother, who lived with them, were good cooks. When Eugene was young, his mother was ill, which meant that he did a lot of cooking at home. His interest in cooking built from that, and from making jams and baking at home.

Education and Training
Eugene did his secondary education till 5th year in CBS in Portlaoise, when he dropped out. He went to Rockwell College on, 8th Sept 1964 aged 17. He did three years in Rockwell, completing his leaving certificate in his final year. His first year, for some unknown reason, was spent in the dining room with the trainee waiters under the guidance of Jim Maguire. Eugene always wanted to be a chef but is now happy he had that years training as it stood to him in his future career. He spent the summer of 1965 in Ashford Castle as a commis waiter, which he says was fantastic. Noel Huggard was cooking in the kitchen and John Roche was the restaurant manager.

The following two years were spent training as a chef in the Rockwell kitchens. The sole chef / instructor there at the time was a German in his mid 40s called Frans Knoblaugh, who ran a guest house, Linden House, in Killarney. He spent the summer of 1966 in the Royal Marine Hotel in Kilkee which was a busy seaside resort hotel. The chef was Paul Deegan who had come to Rockwell as a lecturer and brought Eugene there with him for the summer.

He thinks Rockwell Catering College opened in the late 1950s and recalls that Hugh Bennett from Warren Point was school manager. There were about 80 catering students there at the time, roughly 20 a year in both the chef and waiters courses. They attended separate classes to the normal Rockwell students for their usual academic subjects but were taught by the teachers from Rockwell. He feels that Rockwell gave him fantastic training, everyday there was a new treasure to be learnt, and it gave him a great grounding in the business.

Work Experience
In 1967, Eugene finished in Rockwell having done the Leaving Certificate and goes to the Butler Arms in Waterville, Co. Kerry, owned by Billy Huggard. The chef in the Butler Arms was Raymond Hunt who went on to open the Huntsman in Waterville. This was an up-market hotel similar to Ashford Castle but in Kerry, where he worked the season from May – October. He then went to work in a French restaurant in Munich called La Bonne Auberge, a placement that was organised through Rockwell. Eugene stayed there for two years working mostly with Eastern Europeans, but also with two Irish lads, John Tuthill and Sean Donaghue who both worked front of house. John would later become restaurant manager in the Bailey in Dublin and bring Eugene in as head chef. Sean later worked in the Imperial Hotel in Cork. The La Bonne Auberge was German owned but run in the French style, still following the Escoffier school of classical French cooking. Eugene learned to speak German, and loved his time there.

From Munich, Eugene moved to Morcote in Switzerland to a five star hotel called Olibella au lac, which overlooked Lake Morcote. He had a Swiss head chef but was still working within the French culinary canon. He spent the summer season there and moved on to London for the winter season in the Hotel Excelsior in Heathrow, which was a four star airport hotel. The head chef here was German, with mostly English and continental chefs in the kitchen. It was a bad time to be Irish in London, with the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Because Eugene spoke German and he had come from Switzerland, he was mistaken for a German by some of the English chefs. He spent the following summer season back in Morcote in Switzerland again and then retuned to Ireland in 1971.

Back in Ireland, his first job was as sous chef in the Ashling Hotel in Parkgate Street, Dublin, where he spent about a year. Pat Moore who had also trained in Rockwell was the head chef there. From there Eugene moved to the Killiney Heights Hotel in Dalkey as head chef about a year. The Bailey Restaurant
was purchased by Galen Weston from its previous owner John Ryan, and totally remodelled. John Tuthill was restaurant manager so Eugene became head chef there. There was a fish bar downstairs where oysters and other cold fish salads and dishes were prepared and served in the bar. The main restaurant was on the first floor and could sit thirty six people. They were regularly full for both lunch and dinner but they only had one sitting. There was lots of fresh fish and flambé work, carving pheasant and chateaubriand, and cooking prawns at the table. Noel Cronin was the sous chef and about three commis. At this time Eugene recalls eating out occasionally around Dublin. He particularly recalls the Russell as being excellent, ‘really special’, as was the Royal Hibernian under Roger Noblet. He remained in the Bailey from 1973-1976 and recalls that the main competition was the Russell and Royal Hibernian, but The Bailey was a small restaurant that had displays of game in season as you came in, similar to what Sean Kinsella did in the Mirabeau. Eugene remembers the Soup Bowl and Peter Powerie, and suggests it may have been in competition with the Bailey, but that he wasn’t aware of it at the time. From around 1974-77, Eugene attended the advanced cookery courses (City and Guilds 706/3) that were run by Jimmy Kilbride in the Dublin College of Catering, Cathal Brugha Street. He recalls that his class was the first to do the 706/3 and that Jimmy was an absolutely fantastic teacher. He focused their attention onto Irish food and gave them great confidence. That was where he first met Noel Cullen and also in his class was Joe Erraught who was teaching in the college also. Eugene joined the Panel of Chef around this time.

Eugene left The Bailey to become head chef in Rafters in Rathmines, which was owned by John O’Sullivan. Rafters was a 100 plus seat Steak House, and Dave O Connor was his sous chef. It was successful from day one. John O’Sullivan, a butcher by trade, sourced good meat, and had the food costing and porting control down to a fine art. Paddy O’Neill (who was ex Gresham) was restaurant manager. John O’Sullivan also owned Gallaghers Restaurant in Middle Abbey Street where Matt Byrne was his head chef. Eugene stayed in Rafters a year before going to Berkley Court.

When PV Doyle was opening The Berkley Court Hotel, Eugene was employed as executive chef by the general manager, Michael Governey, six months before the opening and they picked staff, set up their menus and catering systems. He employed Paddy Brady as his head chef and his sous chef was Peter Brady. Paddy Brady later became executive chef of the Westbury Hotel in Dublin and Peter Brady went on to become head chef in Jury’s Ballsbridge. They set a very high standard in the Berkley Court. There was a Grill Room which later became The Palm Grove. The Berkley Room was the fine dining restaurant and wasn’t big enough for all the business. It was run like a separate outside restaurant instead of a hotel restaurant and attracted all the wealthiest people of the day, including politicians, businessmen, kings and queens. Robert Dagger, who later became a lecture in the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, was one of his chef de parties in the Berkley Court. He recalls that Michael Governey was an excellent manager, they never had a food and beverage manager, the just agreed things between them, he had free reign, and he recalls that the late 1970s was a good time in Ireland with lots of people spending money. Eugene stayed in the Berkley Court from 1978-1982 and was succeeded by Noel Cullen.

In 1982, he decided to try opening up a place of his own. An opportunity arose and he opened Bentleys on Baggot Street in partnership with Joe Malcolmson. At that time there were very few individual restaurants in Dublin, he remembers Le Coq Hardi, The King Sitric, The Mirabeau, Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud, and The Guinea Pig. He recalls that John Howard in Le Coq Hardi was the quality of service and décor. Patrick Guilbaud began nouvelle cuisine in Dublin, and Eugene recalls that ‘this was completely different; it raised the bar, which he has continued to do’. Because of differences within the partnership, Eugene only stayed there for three months. Different chef(s) took over and Bentley’s stayed open for about two years. The restaurant then became a Malaysian / Oriental restaurant called Langkawi.

On the first of September 1983, Eugene and his wife bought Lacken House in Kilkenny and ran it successfully as a restaurant up until July 2000. They were not in the blue book since they were within the city limits of Kilkenny but they produced a similar high standard of food found in many of the country house hotels that were in the blue book.

When asked what the biggest influences on his professional career were, he mentioned Rockwell College, and then Jimmy Kilbride and the 706/3 course in Cathal Brugha Street. ‘Jimmy Kilbride was a huge influence on me, he’s an incredible man’. Eugene did the 706/3 pastry as well as the 706/3 kitchen and larder with Jimmy. Michael Governey was also a great influence, an excellent manager, from what he learnt from them, he was able to go on and develop his own style.
Maureen contacted me through the Marion Finucane Show, and informed me that her father Günter Heinzfinger was a chef who worked in Dublin from 1948 till he died in 1974. He was born in Germany and was in the German Army during World War Two. She thinks he was captured either in Italy or Spain and was brought to Maryland for interrogation where she recalls he picked cotton. He was then sent to England to the Talavera Prisoner of War Camp in Northampton. He was well treated in the camp and the regime after the war was fairly relaxed. He met a Roscomon girl and they were married in a registry office, before he came to Ireland with her on a passport borrowed from a man from Cork. A photo shows him and other German cooks mixing a Christmas cake with English Army cooks in the Camp. He had to register as an alien in the newspaper and was soon employed in the International Hotel in Greystones before moving to the Woodlands Hotel in Greystones where the family lived in situ. From there it seems he spent some time in 1950 in the International Hotel in Bray before going to work in Jury’s, perhaps working occasionally in the Moira also. Photo’s show him in Jury’s Dame Street for a few years with chefs Bill Everard and Clifford Steere. The next photographs show him working in the Unicorn for the Sidoli family in 1960. An earlier photo shows him on picket duty outside the Royal Marine Hotel during the 1951 Strike. It is unclear whether he worked there or was simply showing solidarity with fellow union workers.
It is unclear the exact dates or sequence of his work after that but based on menus he had he may have worked in the Royal Hotel in Bray in 1961 and Maureen recalls him working in the Trocadero in Andrew Street, The Charcoal Grill in Ranelagh, and notes that he was chef in the Braemor Rooms in Chuchtown when he died in 1974 of lung cancer.
Telephone Interview with Carmel Byrne, daughter of Gerry Ferns (22/1/08)

Gerry Ferns was born in 1911 in Liverpool, went to college in the Channel Islands with notions of becoming a priest. He trained in the Adelphi Hotel London. He came to Ireland for a weekend and never went back. He worked in the Savoy Restaurant in Dublin where he met his wife, then the Royal Hibernian Hotel, Jammet’s, The Red Bank until it closed in 1968 and he then opened up the Lord Edward as a favour to Tom Cunningham where he remained until around 1972-4. He died in 1981 aged 70 years old. Carmel describes her father as very low key; he would be invited out to meet film stars in the Red Bank but would remain in the kitchen. He was offered a position setting up restaurants in Denmark but never pursued it. There was no known catering in his family. Carmel’s maternal grandfather was a chef called Patrick Tozer that she believed came from Switzerland but is awaiting a relative who is doing up the family tree.
Notes from Telephone Interviews

Michael Martin (29/8/2008)

Michael Martin was born in Dublin in the 1960s. He left school at fourteen years of age without his intermediate certificate. His mother’s cousin was Kevin O’Meara, who got him into Cathal Brugha Street through the back. He got involved in cookery competitions while in college and was successful. He used to do a little work in AIB Bankcentre and got to know Ollie McMahon who set him up with the position at Gildeigh Park. On finishing the two-year full-time course in college in 1983, he spent two years in Gildeigh Park with Shaun Hill. After that he moved to London and following a year working in La Tante Claire with Pierre Koffman, which didn’t like his style too rustic, if you last with him you last anywhere, after a year went to Chez Nico in Great Portland Street – Paul Flynn was the head chef. Twelve or fourteen in the kitchen in Nico’s, five splits a week. Went to La Gavroche for two years to see three stars and did two seasons for them in France also. He went to Japan for nine months, had met Louis Murray in London and was enticed back, brought back three lads from La Gavroche, a Scot, Italian and ? He opened La Stampa in June 1993, it had been Café Klara, but had been taken over by May Frizby and Louis Murray. He did the Late Late Show with Gay Byrne and packed the place after that publicity. He stayed a year but had a falling out with Louis Murray and left.

Kevin O’ Driscoll was the manager of the Clarence, after U2 took it over, designed by the same man who designed Quaglino’s, Bluebird and other Terence Conran restaurants. He stayed in the Clarence for seven years, and left because he was after getting cancer. He later got involved in a number of projects, The Vaults in Connelly Station, The Village in Lyons with Tony Ryan. Paul Carroll was fifteen came down to the Clarence and, after The Clarence he got Paul into Nico and then Petrus and then Ramsay main restaurant in Royal Hospital Road. Carroll came back to the Village in Lyons. Cathal Kavanagh left the Clarence and went to the Westbury and now the Carlton, Thomas Houghton, Philip Brazil were both good Irish chefs who worked under him. Jacques Mention in the Abbey Tavern was French.

Biddy White Lennon (28/8/2008)

Father had the Abbey Bar where the Peacock Theatre is now, mother taught in the Royal Academy of Music. Father died when she was young. Got their turkey cooked in the Gresham each Christmas. Restaurant opened in that lane as a daytime place. Biddy started there as a waitress in The Soup Bowl in 1968 and the waitresses and it was well known for a late opening place, good simple food and the owner Peter Powrie courted theatrical and film stars. He loved theatre people and he gave cut prices to Irish theatre people. He bought the best of produce, fish from Sawyers Chatham, meat form Byrnes of Chatham Street. He also bought smoked river trout from Dunns with the head and tail on. ‘Smiths on the Green’ was the upmarket grocery store and he bought there. His basic menu was a very good steak, smoked trout, crispy half ducking, simple sauce with the duckling, orange rind and juice with arrowroot. He used to buy in a rough chicken liver pate and it was doctored by garlic, brandy and served up brown bread. Kitchen was very small, on the ground with an old fashioned six ring gas cooker and a Belfast sink where of lady washed dishes, and a cosy reception area downstairs. The upstairs was the restaurant furnished in Mahogany, no table cloth, linen napkins and good wine glasses, silver cutlery, Very dark, tables were close together. There were a lot of regulars and a convivial atmosphere. He plied people with drink before letting them go upstairs to their tables.

Actors went to the Golden Orient, and got half price on meals, it had pretensions to fine dining but it was good food. Served a platter of vegetables, huge baked potatoes served with sour cream and chives, good vegetables. Peter Powrie was South African, drank a lot. Biddy worked at the Soup Bowl on and off for two years. He was the only chef. It was a mad place; he was aggressive and abusive when he was drinking. There were three waitresses, Mary Cassidy was the senior waitress, who used to work in the Golden Orient and she trained the new waitresses. She met an actor and had a baby by a half Indian actor who disappeared and she eventually went to America. She was and unofficial manageress. They would sit down, and they
walked out on horse show week. It was always actresses who worked there, £1 a night plus tips on a good night you could make £25, waitress did salads, vegetables, and the deserts. Exotic trifles, rum baba, cheese *pont levéque*, Danish blue, *camembert*, stilton. He would have put a menu together each night, the waitress learnt it off, there were two prices, one for the rich, and another for the acting fraternity. No one ever asked the price. He could be generous.

The Golden Orient was the great Tandoori Rooms opened which was more upmarket and authentic Indian food. Twice the price of upstairs, The Paradiso, The Castle Hotel was a place for great feeds. A trend started among the actors to hold dinner parties after work, Patrick Bedford was the king of home cooking and became competitive. The Soup Bowl started at 6pm and would not close until the last person left. You could only work three days a week. The Trocadero was another great place

**Martin Dwyer (28/8/2008)**

In 1972 he started in Snaffles Nicholas and Rossie Tinne, Suzy Mandrake was cooking in the kitchen, the public didn’t really know what they were eating, a lot of healthy amateurism going on, juggled hare, teal, snipe, widgeon, cooked for the gentry, Jack Williams came in because Nicholas in 1972 he had come from Elephants, via the *Belle Epoque* which was a brief French restaurant next door the Snaffles. Guy Bentinck from London in partnership with Pat Hickey in Elephants was the owner of Elephants (Jack Williams 23 Foxes Grove, Shankhill. 2820249). Jack did everything in Elephants, Jack trained in the Airport. Nicholas Tinne has a B&B in Ballycineely, mentioned in Georgina Cambpell’s Guide. One of Snaffles famous desserts was grapes, whipped cream, brown sugar and scorched it with a hot iron. The famous Snaffles mousse was jellied consommé, garlic, cream cheese and pinch of curry powder.

**Jack Williams (1/9/2008)**

Donycarney born in 1945 started in the Airport in 1961 with Jimmy Flahive and great place the main restaurant, dinner dances in the winter, worked in all departments and outdoor catering. Flahive was head chef, Jimmy Kilbride *sous chef*, Willy Johnson, Jimmy Doyle, Johnny Kilbride, Dessie Maher, Willie Ryan, Frank Reilly, were all chefs. The *commis chefs* were Paddy Keys, Gerry Dawson, Eugene Mc Govern, John Wedick, Liam Mazzetti, Jimmy Dunne, Steven Howell (Moira afterwards) Michael Mullen – went on to be a singer Mike Munro – and Jim Bowe.

Grandfather chef Jack Williams worked in the Central Hotel and took over in the Sweepstakes when it opened in Ballsbridge c.1949. His son Eamon Williams had worked in Jammets and the Grehsam and in Woolworths and took over from grandfather in Sweepstakes. His father, Tom Williams, spent 38 year in Woolworths but had trained in the Central Hotel. Another uncle, Jack, worked in Four Courts Hotel and took over in the Sweepstakes, industrial catering 3,000 meals a day in a huge kitchen. Sweeps opened around 1949. Another uncle, Bobby Williams, worked in Woolworths in Grafton Street. The Henry Street branch would do up to 1,000 people and would open for matches on Sunday for all Ireland.

Married in 1968 and moved to Shankhill, and went to Goat Grill, head chef was a German called Günter Ox, who actually had a heart attack when he was there in the kitchen. The Goat Grill was owned by a Mr Traynor, whose brother Seamus was the restaurant manager. There were three second chefs there, John a driver in Guinesses, a German called Hugo, who went back to Germany. The waiters were Tommy Crean, Eddie Corcoran. Stayed a year in the Goat Grill, did a busy lunch trade and weekends and rugby internationals up to 300 people. The waiters would cook the steaks in the room but sauces came from the kitchen.

Went to John D. Carroll catering group, Carroll had been a director of Bateman’s Catering who became National Catering in Anglesea Road. He took over the unit in Smurfits in Ballymount. Jack Williams had three kids in quick succession after getting married and that is what drove him into industrial catering but he eventually missed the night buzz.

Jan Kaminski had a restaurant before Elephants Guy Bentinck from London in partnership with Pat Hickey in Elephants, did it up, furnished it and started well, with a few good write up, one joint write up about
Elephants and Snaffles from James Beard for a Philadelphia newspaper, and it was syndicated so a lot of business came out of it. Mary Kenny also gave a good write up. It started out great, but the partnership between Bentink and Hickey. Hickey opened a nightclub called Dandelion Green on Stephen’s Green, the original Dandelion market was in Leeson Street. He was making more money in the night club and lost interest in Elephants. He saw the writing on the wall and went to the Belle Époque which was owned by Counihan, her husband was very wealthy, in Irish Meat Packers and she fronted the business for him. Similar type restaurant to Snaffles, You went to Snaffles for dinner and Birds for a dance later. Birds was originally called the Penguin Club but became La Belle Époque which was opened around a year and closed in April 1973. He knew Nicholas Tinne from Elephants. There was a great social scene around Leeson Street at the time. Tinne heard that La Belle Époque wasn’t going well and he took him on and was there for twelve years. The menu didn’t change that much, it had been going well, game in season was a speciality, fish during summer, oysters in season, lobsters, crawfish, fresh scallops, crabs, Scotland and back with a suitcase full of grouse. Wine auctions in Christie’s buy wine for £20 and sold for £100. He had been to school in Eton so had his contacts. Martin Dwyer was his commis and Suzy had been a waitress in Elephants and then to Club Elizabeth and then Snaffles. She was from London and was living with a film producer. Elephants was a small restaurant that sat 20 or so, with a parlour and Guy was the manager, Freddie Grohne, a German lady became manager after Guy and would wear the national Bavarian costume. The private rooms in Snaffles constantly occupied by Charles Haughey and Terry Keane. Hughie Kavanagh left and went to the Burlington. Snaffles was very informal in ways, small compact kitchen. One girl worked there Fiona Gartland who now writes for the Irish Times. Paddy Kue, friend of the Tinnes and lived in Fitzwilliam also helped out in the kitchen occasionally.

The expense accounts taxation change halved the business overnight, and Nicholas suggested if you could get another job, he got redundancy and took a job in the Motor yacht club in Dun Laoghaire, business picked up however and he went back, to Snaffles, and it finally closed in Jan 31 1985. The Irish Times advertisement 26th May 1986 Ouzel galley chef Jack Williams formerly of Snaffles, also an advertisement for Bentleys with menu printed. The Ouzel galley was a gay nightclub and Jack left after a short while. After Snaffles, three months in the Abbot Monkstown, chef Dermot Baker, Alexis Fitzgerald was the owner but it closed around 1986/7. Williams worked in The Mews in Emmiskerry for a while, Anne Whelan was the owner, opportunity to take a restaurant in Dalkey called Sirloins and took it over and called it Just Williams from 1986-89.

Johnny Cooke (29/8/2008)

Johnny Cooke was born in Dublin in 1960, started in The Grey Door in 1977, which was owned by PJ Daly and Barry Wise both of whom had been to Shannon School of Hotel Management. It opened as a Russian / Scandinavian restaurant, Eamon Walsh was chef in the famous restaurant in Helsinki Bellevue and The Grey Door evolved.

Cooke was familiar with the Old Dublin Restaurant because his brother had an antique business in Francis Street and in 1981 they purchased the restaurant with Eamon Walsh and both Daly and Wise, originally opened by Jammets chefs and then Maurice Cohen was a hideaway for legal crowd. Cooke stayed there till 1984 and sold his interest.

In 1984 he went to America, started working in the Water Club in New York City and later with Gustav Anders in California who worked with a market gardens, the style of Californian cuisine influenced by Alice Waters and Jeremiah Towers of Chez Panisse.

He returned to Dublin in 1990 when Oliver Caffrey opened Polo One and timing was good. He replaced melon au porto, and paté maison, with Caesar Salads and lighter style of food. Louise Pickering was the manageress and Polo One attracted U2 and an international clientele, and was making money. Oliver Caffrey was a property man, and the restaurant was a pet hobby of his.

Johnny opened Cooke’s Restaurant in 1992, allowing him a bit more freedom in his style of cooking, the restaurant only had 40 seats and was extremely successful from the start. In 1993, he opened Cooke’s
Bakery and introduced foccacia and tomato and fennel bread to the Dublin market. Another innovation of his was the serving of bread and dips in his restaurant which was widely copied. Got involved in the cafes in the Museums, but they didn’t work.

Charlie Smith was maître D’Hôtel and his wife Josephine, both of whom are working out in Howth in Aqua now. Some of his staff went on to open their own businesses: Harry McKeon opened The Cherry Tree restaurant on the Shannon, Rosmary Lynch became a lecturer in Dundalk Institute of Technology, Avril runs the Bodega in Cork. Many of the chefs who worked in Cooke’s went on to become entrepreneurs either with restaurants, bakeries or catering companies, the most famous of which was Eleanor Walsh who opened Eden, Café Bar Deli and Bellinter House.

The most influential thing was having a background in French classical cookery, knowing the basics, you could adapt to other styles, he had read Escoffier and other books and he notes that despite being a Russian / Scandinavian restaurant, the Grey Door was run along French lines.

Nicholas Tinne (29/8/2008)

Four people were partners in the opening of Snaffles Restaurant on Leeson Street: Jim Fitzgerald of the wine merchant family, Cobby Knight interior designer, Rossie and Nicholas Tinne. Fitzgerald only lasted a short while and when Cobby Knight broke his neck in car crash, he sold his share. Nicholas was brought up in Connemara and had experience of cooking fish and game, and Rossie had done a Cordon Blue course in Paris. There was a shortage of good restaurants in Dublin in the late 1960s, they felt there was clearly an opportunity for a decent restaurant. They invested £2000 between the four of them and took over premises on Leeson Street that had been Charlie’s Diner, and did it up. Tinne opened a night club called Birds for few years in Leeson Street. He suggests that Elizabeth’s and The Pheasantry were really nightclubs that sold food rather than restaurants. Snaffles closed c. 1984. Two things changed trading conditions, they used to be full for lunch and dinner, but following the reduction and then abolition of tax relief on business expenses, a lot of business from advertising agencies disappeared.

The opening of Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud also started to attract some of their good customers. Snaffles had consistent staffing with the three boys from Red Bank and Jack Williams in the kitchen. There was a move away from people living in the city. Called Irish Country House Cuisine – rather than Irish farm house – 40 seats with some private rooms – opened at 7pm and last orders at 10.30pm. The food was that of the aristocracy rather than the bourgeoisie. Snaffles was not a late night restaurant unlike some of the other places on Leeson Street that had restaurant licences but were really late-night drinking dens.

They used the bin ends of wine from Fitzgeralds on the wine list that gave a great prestige to the place, some vintages going back to 1928. Nicholas heart wasn’t really in Dublin, escape to Connemara at weekends. He never trained as a chef, it just happened that he found himself in the business.

Sebastian Masi (28/8/2008)

Michael Andrews manager Harvey Nichols was the manager in the Commons. Masi had worked in Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud before that and then after opened Pearl Brasserie in 1999. 1995-1999 sous chef for first year and then head chef to Leslie Mallon. Aidan Byrne sous chef, Stephen mc Allister sous chef

Michael Fitzgerald owned it, his brother Tom owns the pub in Glasthule.  

Stephen Mc Allister – Aidan Byrne head chef, English sous – to Blue Bistro, Dylan replaced him, Troy Maguire was there

Jacobs Ladder – 1999 French Pastry chef David Franco still there

Michael Andrews – due in around lunchtime tomorrow 2910488

Ben Gorman – Mermaid Café
James Carberry (14/5/2008)

James Carberry started his culinary training in Crumlin College, during which time he worked in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, and at the Orwell Lodge. He met Paul O’Reilly while attending Cathal Brugha Street, who told him that Clarets was being opened by his brother Alan. James worked in Clarets while in college (1987-89). After college he went to Broph’s working with Paul Kelly, and Robert Ahern who had represented Ireland in the world skills competition. Kelly had done the City & Guilds 706/3 and won the Toque D’Or prize. Broph’s was owned by Kevin Brophy and Kelly took it over later but it didn’t work. Le Cirque was downstairs in the basement, dining club / night club – full of middle aged men with young girls. Carberry spent six months in Broph’s, but didn’t like it, because it was a very small kitchen. Went to O’Caseys restaurant on Baggot Street owned by Frank Conway who owned Joys nightclub where he cooked for Richard Harris etc. The Orwell Lodge was sold and O’Reilly came into O’Caseys as head chef. Then Carberry went down to Adare Manor with Kevin Thornton. Laurant Champert had been head chef but his friend was killed in car crash, and Gerry Sommerville was his sous chef. Kevin Thornton came form the Shelbourne, because Benjamin Jaegar had come from the Shelbourne. French guy Fredrick Benoit. Dave Ging had been in the Park Kenmare with Matt Darcy and then in the Caribbean, and came back to Adare. They didn’t have enough senior staff, Mark Ryan also worked there. He spent six months in Adare but left when Thornton was sacked. Ging, Ryan, Benoit and Carberry all left at the same time as Thornton.

He went to Dun Laoghaire 1990, Kevin was doing the 706/3, started in Restaurant na Mara with Derek Dunne. Worked there with Mark Ryan, Felt he needed to leave and learn from chefs. Muriel Thornton was working for Glendawn Herbs and gave information about how kitchens in Dublin were working. Jamie Davis was working in the Marie Rose Café in Powerscourt Townhouse Centre with John Dunne’s wife, Jane, who was a great cook. That was the link into the Park in Blackrock because John Dunne was the head chef. In 1991 Carberry did a trial and got a job as a commis, and later received four swift promotions, Colin O’Daly, John Dunne, Sandra Earl, James Carberry, Jason Wall, Denise from Donegal. Sandra left and James was acting sous chef, David Ging came up from Cliffords in Cork to become sous chef.

Stayed in The Park for a year and a half, split shifts killed him, he had one Saturday off. He left The Park and got at job cooking for executive dining in the ESB. He spent nine years working in the executive dining room. Dave Ging joined him after a year, having been working in The Wine Epergne. He did nights in The Wine Epergne and days in the ESB. The economy was very poor and Mark Ryan and Jason Lynch had been working in The Wine Epergne. James won the Roux scholarship in 1992 and David Ging replaced him as chef in the ESB while James went for three months working with Georges Blanc in Vonnas. There were 35 chefs in the brigade in Vonnas, doing 150 for lunch and dinner, the busiest 3 stars in France. When he returned from France he did the 706/3 with Jim Bowe for two years, started teaching in the college in 1994 and was part-time teaching until being made full time in Dundalk in September 1999, and in Jan 2001 started in Cathal Brugha Street.

Tom Keavney – Morgons Wines (1/9/2008)

Peter Powrie, English, quite a character, no formal training in cooking. The place in Dublin from 1968 to 1970 even though the roof was leaking, you could see anybody, he finished up in Spain died in Spain at least 10 years . Emily Keegan worked there and now works in the K Club. John Costello had owned the Wicklow and the Royal Dublin and Eamon Preston. English lady stayed in the Hibernian and Powrie fell in love with her and he got the room number, removed from the room by two henchmen by Manesero and he later set his Alsatian on him. The Red House in Newbridge opened by Tom Morgan of Morgon Wines.

Manager in Bentleys Derek Flood
Evelyn Keegan works in the K Club but had worked in The Soup Bowl 6017310 ring after 3pm.
Eamon Walsh (2/9/2008)

Head chef in The Grey Door (086) 8365300

Eamon Walsh was born in Co. Laois in 1946 no catering in the family, not a lot of work in Ireland so he went to England where he studied some catering course in the College of Art and technology on a day release basis where he did the City and Guilds examinations. He was working in the University Arms Hotel, and later in the Blue Boar Hotel as sous chef for 4-5 years where he met his future wife. Went to Finland influenced by his wife who was a student in Cambridge and was working as a receptionist in the Blue Boar. In 1973, there was a recession in England, their work was reduced to three days a week, so moved to Helsinki and worked for Intercontinental Hotel for 7-8 months. A group of people reopened a famous Russian restaurant 'Bellevue' which had been opened originally in 1914. It had two private dining rooms and restaurant seating 100 people. Walsh remained there 4 ½ years. Mostly Finnish people working in Bellevue – at that time there was only 25 Irish people in Finland.

He returned to Ireland in 1978 and met PJ Daly and Barry Wise who had trained in Shannon and had worked in England. They bought a house in Pembroke Street, and decided to do a Russian style restaurant. He notes that in the 1980s there was either fast food or high class restaurants. Vat was very high, Alan Dukes, Minister of Finance, was the saviour, the Restaurant Association of Ireland convinced him to drop the Vat rate from 25% to 10% c.1987, it later rose to 12%. This revolutionized the restaurants in Ireland.

The Grey Door influenced by Russian food, a lot of marinated herrings, gravad lax, a lot of fish. The different between the restaurants in the 1970 and 1980s was the quality of fish, fabulous fish available at the time, supplier would through in free Monkfish, there were great prawns and Turbot sometimes a meter long (120 kilos). Lots of wild salmon, Molloy’s would buy it in and freeze it in season. Billy Delaney was restaurant manager (ex-Shelbourne), when it first opened, brought 2 guys back from Finland, Dave Daughan, Greg Santos who took over when Eamon opened the Old Dublin. He stayed three years in The Grey Door and opened old Dublin in 1981 with Johnny Cooke, and PJ and Barry. Old Dublin originally opened by Paul Hughes (095 21201) in 1971 who now owns the Abbey Glen Hotel in Clifton, he sold Maurice Cohen who sold it on to Johnny, Barry and PJ. And Eamon. Future chefs (such as Paul Groves) in the Grey Door made the food more French in style.

Ross Lewis worked in America and London. Neil McFadden had experience of sous vide in Belgium and he started bringing it in to Ireland. The Old Dublin was an instant success, they did a lot of business from the Four Courts and from Guinness, IWS, and other business in the area. There were also a lot of tourists for early bird menus. They continued with the Scandinavian dishes such as coulibiac, forsmak – Austrian dish of Lamb, herring, potato, garlic cooked for eight hours, served with beetroot and sour cream.

From 1984 Martin Corbett had been his waiter, and in 1987 Ross Lewis had started having been in America. He stayed and as president of the RAI and he met up with Frank Magee had done up The Writers Museum, opened up Chapter One in 1991 with Ross, Martin and Eamon as partners. Neil McFadden had been head chef in Old Dublin before moving on to Luttrellstown Castle. In 1982 the Christmas party all the staff were from Donegal, and a staff party 2002 there were 10 different nationalities. Neil had been in Belgium in Michelin star place and changed the menu a bit. Pat O’Connor, Ray Burke, Brian Lenihan were regulars in the Old Dublin. Seamus Mallon had collapsed under the table in a private room.

Things were slow to grow in Chapter One from 1991, the brains behind the operation was Ross, he was very single minded in his pursuit and stuck to his vision. Chapter One was slow in making money, it was steady but Ross never compromised on his vision and it built up and took off. What happened in the Old Dublin was that they needed around 500,000 to upgrade the place, closed in 2003 looking for planning permission to re-vamp the building but had problems in getting that. Eamon Walsh did a lot of work with the RAI, in Ireland and at European level. Henry O’Neill became full time in RAI and closed down in Henri’s in Lucan.
Ross Lewis (3/9/2008)

In 2006 Chapter One won their first Michelin star. Ross Lewis was born in Cork and started working from 1990-1992 in Old Dublin by chance which later led to the opening of Chapter One Restaurant in Parnell Square. He did a high diploma in dairy science in UCC in 1983-85. Worked in New York, Dorian’s Red Hand Restaurant owned by an Irish American restaurant and decided he’d like to own a restaurant, and set about learning his trade. A friend had worked in Odins in London. Christian Germain was the head chef, who had trained under the Roux Brothers (Fig. 9.10). The restaurant was next door to Langan’s which was owned by Peter Langan, Richard Shephard and Michael Caine. London 1987 worked with Lorcan Cribben, for 2 years, then went to learn front of house in Dolphin Brasserie in London went to Geneva in Switzerland in Beau Rivage year and then came to Dublin.

Tony Conlon (3/9/2008)

First chef in Celtic Mews was Robert Dunne from the Clarence but then there was a German for short while and then Willie Woods was head chef for about fifteen years, Jimmy Rock, Matt Dowling, Paddy Pender, Claire Williams, - D. Williams family Tullamore who invented Irish Mist, Front of house staff with Tony (1975) and Irish Stew served in a skillet, Celtic steak, Celtic chicken with noisette potatoes, a lot of table service (Gueridon), mix of tourists and big business people, ESB, banks, Rugby Matches corporate business. The Bailey was good at the early years and John Howard opened in 1977.

Jan Kaminski (1/9/2008)

087 4129494

Born 1934 in Poland came to Ireland 1954 scholarship to trinity economics and politics. Student days in London worked in restaurants, Dorchester as waiter, Cunningham’s Oyster bar, Holborn Rooms, in Wales worked in Llandidnow in Lewis Carroll’s mansion as a restaurant. He was removed from the country because study leave was expired. Applied for an Irish passport, went to Belfast with a computer company and worked in ICT back in Dublin. Note in the paper for a restaurant on the Ellis Quay called The Last Post run by an Italian Nico who opened Nicos on Dame Street later on. Sold for £300 turned into an all-night steak house with some pasta, it ran from 10pm until 6am. The Last Post was frequented by Trinity students, and also one or two ministers. He also worked in ICT.

He leased a stable on Baggot Street in late 1960s ran a nightclub called Baggot Mews, served wine in Coke bottles. He opened a restaurant called Sherezade and later Troika, Russian restaurant but because they sold a lot of seafood, they known as a fish a chip shop, had a Greek chef and Jan cooked for a while also. Another Greek Theo Spiropolus was a partner but lost his half of the business in a poker game. Running the Last Post, chef from the Polish coal ship, gave him a lease, six months later he died, it was left to a lady of leisure and in due course it was empty, Building collapsed and the lease had elapsed and since the lease was on the building not the ground.

Viking Travel in Merrion Row became Concorde
Night Clubs were dirty words -

James Gray
Working in the Crumlin Medical Research Foundation at Crumlin Children’s Hospital.

Telephone Interview with Aidan McManus (28/8/2008)

Aidan born 31/3/47 in Clontarf, his younger brother, John, did the hotel management course in Shannon, with the thought that they might both set up a catering empire. (John opened The Wishbone restaurant in Glashule) Aidan started off in Unicorn around 1963 when Renaldo Sidoli owned it, John Walsh was chef, had trained in Jammets, Italian with French style – racks of lamb, spaghetti and lasagna homemade pasta,
bolognese on the stove all day. Lunch in the Unicorn included roasts and stews, but dinner time it was more pasta and scampi, heavy sauces with the pasta. He stayed there for one year, and then moved to the Metropole.

In the Metropole in 1964, Marley was the Executive chef, Matt Byrne was the head chef and Davy Edwards was the working chef. Mervyn Stewart and Eamon Cuningham were there as well. He recalls there were a few kosher dinners, he didn’t even know what a Jew as not to mind ‘kosher’. He stayed over a year in the Metropole, and then went to London aged 17.

Three lads went over, Ken Steins (Metropole), Declan Conroy (Gresham) both in USA now, and John to London together. They went to the Talk of the Town, spending four months there. He recalls it was a real culture shock, there were 95 in the kitchen including porters, and only five spoke English. Half the kitchen brigade were Greek, with some French, Bulgarian, Swiss, and Canadians. There were no English in the kitchen, just some in the waiting staff and the management. He recalls there were two services, one before the show, steaks, and grills etc. They used to cater for around 1,000 covers a night, with a second session in between shows. Bruno (surname unknown) might have been the head chef.

Both Declan and Aidan then moved to Quaglino’s and the Hotel St. Maurice. They had a restaurant and banqueting room, entertainer most nights, Val Doonican. He remembers it being a very good place with 50 or so in brigade, all the food was made fresh, a lot of game, and a reasonable fish selection. Quaglino’s had the full partie system and during the winter season banquets, they served breakfast at 3am after ball, so there was great overtime, if you hadn’t lost it playing cards! He stayed a year in Quaglino’s and then in 1966, he spent six months in Switzerland for the summer at the Banhoff Buffet in Aarau, between Zurich and Basle. The owner of the franchise for running a number of the Banhoff Buffets was Ernst Pauli who had a link with the catering colleges in Switzerland and used to give the catering students experience in the Banhoffs.

He noted that the Swiss were really impressed that he had come from Dublin to London and then to Switzerland, and Aidan got confidence from that, he matured and his working career began there. He started reading books and getting involved, big difference from sophisticated London to small time Switzerland. The food they cooked as brown soups, gnocchi, schnitzel, osso bucco etc.

He worked in the London Ritz for a few days then to the he went to House of Commons where he stayed 18 months. There were five food outlets in the House of Commons: staff, police, and members canteens, a member’s room and a visitor’s room. Roasts were served for lunch but dinners were more formal. Robert Maxwell was the convener of the committee and it lost lots of money each year. Aidan recalls a good standard of food and great holidays, same as the members of parliament. He ran the cold buffet for six months in the member’s room, and recalled there was no real security issue, as this was 1967-8 before the troubles in Northern Ireland.

He answered a phone in the House of Commons kitchen to a man in Guernsey who offered jobs to run the place for Easter holidays, and always got staff from the houses of commons. He did it for three weeks and was persuaded by the owner to stay on and he worked for a year just making bad food. Two weeks after his getting married, the owner got someone for ten pounds cheaper a week and let Aidan go.

He took a job in a place called La Frigate which was a small fine dining restaurant, with a French head chef, who told him he could not cook. There were six in the brigade, but this was the first time cooking with finesse. They did 24 for lunch and 60 for dinner, fresh food, from the kitchen garden. This was his Eureka moment – stayed there for about two years and learnt an awful amount about good food and cooking.

Aidan returned to Dublin in September 1970. Father was a sub-editor in the Irish Independent, a house in Howth came up for sale, and the family moved from Clontarf to open. Arrived in September but delay in the restaurant opening the restaurant, did some freelance work, got a call in 1971 from La Frigate and spent the summer of 1971 in Guernsey. The restaurant eventually opened in August 1971, with Aidan as the only
chef, and first English wife helped out. His two waiters when it first opened were both ex Hibernian. One of his brothers and his father would sometimes get involved.

There was very little around in the 1970s and the influence of the Independent helped. No real competition, and Aidan was using fresh ingredients and got peppers and courgettes imported in the market and after got people to grow for them. The first menu was one fish dish and six meat dishes and in 1973 it reversed. Fairly classic dishes Beef stroganoff, osso bucco, fillet steak with a choice of three sauces, plaice, sole, monkfish, prawn cocktail. Business was all the local people from the north side but also McCalmont from Mount Juliet came regularly and leave at 2.30am to drive home. The Abbey Tavern had put Howth on the map for tourists and many people used to come out for dinner and then on to the show in the Abbey Tavern.

Head waiter Brian Daly joined in 1973, James O’ Leary sommelier joined in 1972, people stayed very late, sometimes only arriving at 11pm. Head chef started as kitchen porter and did apprenticeship in early 1980s James McCann. Other chefs who worked there were Kevin Thornton, Colin O’Daly, Dermot Whelan in Berkley Court.

Menu was fish based and only changes subtly but remained fairly classical. Fish is sourced locally, farmer grows vegetables. Woman grew herbs locally. Modern Irish cooking before it was called that. Good food, local, fresh, seasonal, bit by bit linen appeared on the tables, proper glassware, good wine.

Changes in the old days people didn’t like bright rooms, they preferred dim lights and candles. Over time they upgraded the room and presented the food on big white plates, more attention to presentation. Food was very good in the Soup Bowl, Tom Keaveney in Morgan Wines, (Coq Hardi) with Gilbeys Wines brought him in to, Peter Powrie served on a family stove behind a curtain on the ground.

Sean Kinsella overgenerous with journalists

Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud raised the bar. Aidan ate there after a week or so of opening, and was shocked that the barrier had been raised so high,

Mosiman came over to talk to Irish chefs and talked about black plates, plates became more attractive and heated food separately, lightened up the food in a health conscious manner – calorie counting. Influenced by Michel Guérard and Anton Mosiman.

1981 or 1982 Joan became involved after a place opened in Malahide, Mollison, linked with the first pilot to fly in Dublin. The restaurant had a salad bar, lasted around three years, but those were the years of 25% Vat, cruel time the mid 1980s, three years in a row with losses. Business expenses ruined the lunch trade the change in legislation. (NB This resulted in the businesses like the banks opening their own dining rooms, employing their own chefs and waiters and entertaining in-house where the expenses were not an issue and the meal was not a benefit in kind to the directors)

Michael (Mike) Fitzgerald (28/8/2008)

The Commons restaurant opened on the 9th April 1991 and closed 12 years later. Gerry Kirwan had been head chef in Jeddah having traveled the world but returned home at the time of the first Gulf War. He got the star after a year, now in the Rochestown Park in Cork after having had his own restaurant in Athlone. Derek Bulmer said it was unusual to retain star when the chef leaves, but the Commons managed to do it on three occasions. Michael Bolster took over from Kirwan, he went to Cashel Palace afterwards. During the 1990s chefs climbed the ladder too early and missed a few rungs. This was bad for the chefs, the restaurants in which they worked and also for the people who trained under them. Leslie Malone became the head chef and he retained the star, and he committed suicide a year and a half after leaving. Sebastian Masi had been in Guilbaud’s and he took over (21) and did not retain the star but Mike feels he was hard done by, that his food was as good, but that the Michelin people probably were becoming impatient with all the chefs leaving. Masi opened his own restaurant Pearl Brasserie and Aidan Byrne was working in Peacock Alley with Conrad Gallagher. He came in and got the star back within a year. His product was the most exciting, but Gerry was the safest. Aidan and Dylan were a formidable duo. There was a brigade of 12 chefs during most of the time there, sometimes only had 12 customers for lunch.
Michael Fitzgerald was born in Temple Bar 1952. From 1952-1960 they lived over his father's Temple Bar Pub and then moved to Sandycove in 1960. He developed a love for alcohol, opened a pub with Noel Ginitty and drank it out within a year. He has been 32 years dry now. He introduced food in Sandycove pub with help from Jim Bowe. He was always interested in Joyce, being the nearest pub to the Joyce tower in Sandycove, and went to Newman House to see where Joyce had gone to college. He met up with the buildings officer who told him he wasn’t interested in his restaurant idea, but they got talking and they got on well together. It was decided that the proper type of restaurant could enhance the building and complement the image and motto of the college ‘ad astra’ (to the stars) – He invested a lot of money into it, got a three year lease originally, followed by a ten year lease. Running front of house for him was Phillip Ryan, who he recalls was young and smart.

Looking back he suggests that he probably over spent and was undercapitalized at the time. He opened The Commons Café in Concert Hall and Citron in the Fitzwilliam Hotel, but these were not successful. His drive in establishing The Commons restaurant was to open something that would complement the building. He interviewed 42 chefs, screened by Action Recruitment and Ollie McMahon, from AIB Bank, and he was looking for someone he could gel with. They weren’t looking for a star but it came. He commissioned an art collection by ten leading artists about Joyce, including Louis le Brocquy, and Robert Ballagh. He had twelve wonderful years, which were hard times in a lot of respects. He feels fortunate to have met so many talented people. Dylan McGrath probably epitomized the passion in these chefs.
Transcribed Radio Archive Interview with Brendan O’Regan (1917-2008)

Information taken from Bowman Sunday Morning RTE1 2/3/08 featuring archive interviews with Brendan O’Regan

Born in Sixmilebridge Co. Clare, in 1917, recalls what had occurred after the ambushes and how the black and tans would have taken retribution on the community. His father was chairman of Clare Co. Council. He explained to him as a child how they were making progress towards freedom. His father came from the Parnell – Redmond school of thinking that you could achieve freedom by democratic means, which influenced Brendan’s thinking in his later work in Co-operation North supportive peace movement at first with the women’s movement in the north. At ten years old, in 1927, his father purchased that Old Ground Hotel and decided to bring the whole family to France to experience how the French run a small hotel and they spent three weeks there where they observed and learnt and came back and opened the hotel with the two eldest sisters Maire and Jenny as management team. He recalls on docking in Cobh, someone coming on the launch to tell them that Kevin O’Higgins had been killed. This was the beginning of a lot of other visits with his father who had picked him out to pass on all his knowledge on hotel business. His father and mother née Ryans of Kilrush, were both strong influences, his mother got him into Blackrock College in 1930s which was a tremendous school at the time with Dr McQuaid as President and both a rugby and hurling team, Brendan played hurling.

At 19 he went to train under the famous Toddy O’ Sullivan and his wife Niamh who was running the Rock Park Hotel in Wales where he had a great indoctrination under Toddy which he was always grateful for, and then his father set up an exchange for him where he went to a hotel in southern Germany and the German boy came to Clare. This was the time that Hitler was coming to power but Brendan couldn’t see it at the time, he used to answer Heil Hitler with Gros Gott, but at one occasion when a group of hefty brown shirts Heil Hitlered him at the same time he replied Heil DeValera, and he was nearly attacked but for the proprietor saving him by explaining that he was not German.

After Germany he went to work in the Carlton Hotel in London which was one of the finest hotels in the world, and his father sent him a wire to come home, that he had leased the Falls Hotel in Ennistymon, much to Brendan’s disappointment since he had secured a position as a steward for that winter on a cruise ship the SS Narcunda to South Africa, but he did his fathers wishes. The Falls Hotel had been run by Francis McNamara, one of the great Irish aristocrats for a number of years at a personal loss but gave it a great bohemian name from the bohemian classes in London, with tales of Pyjama parties etc. He was horrified to hear that Dr McQuaid was going to visit, on his way to the Bishop of Galway, to see how he was getting on because one guest at the time a Mrs Winterbottom, who had an escort of several young men with her. DeValera cancelled at the last moment for some reason, much to Brendan’s relief. He made his salary for five years but never made any more in the Falls.

Due to his success in the catering and hotel industry, he came to the notice of Sean Lemass and John Leydon. At the time many of the professional Dublin Elite, many of them members of the Stephen’s Green Club, stayed there during the summer. During the fifth summer he was asked to come to Dublin during the winter season when the hotel was closed and to remodel the catering in the Stephen’s Green Club. During this time at the age of 25 he was offered the job to set up the restaurants in Foynes. He was one of the first Irishman to have foreign training and was asked to take over. Seemingly DeValera had eaten a meal in Foynes and noticed that it was run by English people and felt that Irish people should be doing it. BOAC had around 300 staff there, it was like a little British colony there, and both Brendan and his colleague Joe Lucy felt very patriotic and were motivated to show how well the Irish could do things. Ireland was still a very young country, hadn’t proved itself yet, operating on an import substitution experiment which wasn’t working. Aer Lingus hadn’t come at this stage, no management institutes at this time and the Irish had quite an inferiority complex towards the British at the time. The department under John Leydon had purchased the Mount Eagle Arms and that had to be remodelled (winter 1942) and Brendan got to know the Hunt family and instantly decided on seeing their house said he would model his restaurant on their fine house. From the very beginning things went well, Lord Hedford, the station manager, said ‘that was a great meal,
but you Irish are great at doing things once but you never keep things up’. Brendan reminded him later, having experienced numerous good meals, of what he had said. Brendan used to repeat Lord Headford’s words every year at the annual general meeting to motivate his staff. They kept up the standard for over fifty years. ‘Young people should know that the biggest driving force of those working in Ireland at that time was the love of Ireland’ said Brendan.

Telephone Interview with Peter Strunz (October 2007)

His Austrian father and mother ran the Unicorn Restaurant in Merrion Row. His mother was Jewish and they got out of Austria with the help of an Irishman and ended up in Dublin. William Griffith from Clontarf put money up for the restaurant which was available at a cheap rent because Irish people thought it was haunted since W.B. Yeats had held séances there. Griffith grew vegetables and supplied the restaurant and also went to the market in the morning. Peters mother was the cook and his father ran the front of house. It soon became the haunt of the artistic set with lady Longford and Hilton Edwards from the Gate as regular clients. Sheila Richards the artist produced a mural on the wall of the restaurant. Ernst Strunz played the guitar and used to sing for the customers. Peter recalls it was forbidden to serve bread during the war years and that lunch was 8 shillings and 6 pence.

Telephone conversation with Michael Ostinelli (7/2/2008)

Spoke to Michael Ostinelli on 7th February 2008 at 9.30 pm on phone and discovered that his father was an Italian chef from Lake Como who opened Ostinelli’s around 1945 having worked in Belfast managing a number of Hotels. Michael’s brother Adrian is older and had been a manager in the restaurant. Hawkins Street was ‘the social centre of Dublin at the time with the Theatre Royal and the Regal Rooms, the Cosmo Pub on the corner and Syl O’ Reilly’s pub and the Red Bank Restaurant nearby’. The restaurant only closed two days a year, Christmas day and good Friday.
Feedback from Marian Finnucane Programme

Piece aired on Tuesday 16th November 2004 (15 minutes)
Marian had a story of her husband in Jammets whilst a student in Trinity where they had agreed a set price for the meal and some of the lads with him got out of hand and ordered some expensive wines and when the bill arrived it was the original price agreed. Louis Jammet had not charged them the extra for the wine but asked them not to forget him and his restaurant when they graduated and were earning which they duly did not!!!

Maureen Mooney
Maureen rang 4527395 (evenings) living in Tallaght has menu’s from 1940s and 1950s Christmas menus International Hotel in Bray (1949) from Jury’s and Intercontinental, Father was a chef in Oyster Grill, Jurys Dame Street, Trocadero, Gunther Heinzfinger (German) Met wife in Northampton and came over on an Irishman’s passport to marry in Dublin, to Royal Hotel Bray died in 1974, Unicorn Menu – I rang her on 24th November and agreed to meet in the future

Spoke again on 16 May 2008 and arranged to pick up the menus from 3 Bawnville Park, Tallaght. 086 8919632
Tallaght M50 exit, over bridge, through first roundabout, first left, first left.

Peter Dunne rang 087 2273634 Wednesday evening Father was waiter in Gresham – has autograph book with the likes of Charlie Chaplin etc. in it – Trained as a waiter in Cathal Brughla late 1960s under Jimmy Byrne trained in Dolphin Grill for 2 years, moved to airport
Bertie Dunne (1930 page boy – 1952) played football
He rued the day that service charge came because the waiters got lazy, they didn’t have to earn the tips, or give proper service

David Lord (head waiter in the collar of Gold) still alive - Allsaa retired staff association
39 Pine grove park, swords
Paddy Keys was a chef in the Dolphin Paddy Kelly was sous chef Charlie Kerr
Saturday night do in Collar Of Gold Charlie Haughey – his father did his private do’s
Eyes and ears open and mouth shut
Alan Clarke manager in Holiday Inn in Airport trained
Eddie Corcoran FAI great guy to talk to Dolphin
Story of film star paranoid about cleanliness, fancied the waiter (father), but waiter started to cough to get rid – father was a snooker star of Ireland
Supplied sugar and butter to street
Sister worked in the Shelbourne – Eileen Keeler 8348362 older sister

Maura Aherne has handwritten school notes from 1910 – 021 4961399 Cork or 086 8255288 – Old school copybook from 1913 belonging to her mother has recipes in it. Ring her back on Tuesday 23 Nov at 2pm

Eileen (66) 8491695 Dad (Tom Noonan) and granddad were wine importers in Temple Lane Dame Street. Set up lot of cellars for a lot of the hotels. Remembers bottling wines and labeling – whitewash walls – washing bottles - wine fairs – save the Dublin Cabs wine merchants sponsored the cabs. Joe Lucy catering in CIE , supplied the Wicklow Hotel – introduced Remy Martin and Mateus Rosé to Ireland – very anti-supermarket wine. Has a wooden bong hammer – wines delivered by the railways.

Paul and Phillip Bocksberger
087 6251235 father was chef in Shelbourne – Grandfather came from Switzerland at circa 1900 Alfred Boksberger (changed to box) your maternal grandfather was head porter in Shelbourne Paddy Kelly (met by chance) and had a temper in kitchen (a bit of a loose cannon) and father in law wasn’t to happy – Boystoats and girl scouts at the Eucharistic Congress in 1932. Grandfather married Mary Lynch from Killarney (hotel background) opened a hotel / townhouse in Leeson Street Alfred did the cooking –
grandmother died when Phillip’s father was 14 and Alfred abandoned family and worked in a Hotel in
Virginia Cavan and family moved to Killarney and was raised by their aunt. (Phone conversation 19/11/04)
spoke again (14/5/08) so his grandfather was in Dolphin in 1911 then on to Shelbourne then married
and opened a small hotel / guest house in Leeson street – his wife died and he left his family and was last
known to be working in Virginia, Cavan.

Spoke to Paul Bocksberger oon 16/5/08 about his grandfather. Alfred Boksberger was Swiss, his father was
in the Military – Swiss Guards to the Pope – came to Ireland originally around 1900 to work as chef in the
Great Southern Hotel, Killarney. He married Mary Ryan from Killarney who had two sisters. On sister
married a Swiss photographer Louis Anthony, and the other married an English man Edwin Bullock and
they lived in Flesk View House on the grounds of the Gleneagles in Killarney. Paul has a photo of his
father with friends and relations visiting the Gap of Dunloe taken by Louis Anthony. He knows that he
worked in the Shelbourne because of two things. Firstly his Paul’s maternal grandfather worked in the
Shelbourne, Paddy Kelly, and secondly when Paul entered Cathal Brugha Street, he had P.J. (Mucky)
Dunne as a teacher who had stories of his grandfather in the Shelbourne. Seemingly Alfred used too send
the commis chefs away when he was doing something important, because he didn’t want them to see his
technique. He felt that knowledge was power. I know PJ started in the Shelbourne in 1932 which would
make him too young to have worked with Alfred, since Alfred was running a small hotel in Leeson Street
at this time and then left his family when their mother died. Alfred may have returned to the Shelbourne
for a brief period from 1932-1937 when PJ was there as an apprentice.

Paul had an interesting story of how Alfred was discovered in a hotel in Virginia in Co. Cavan. Seemingly
one of his wife’s relations recognised one of his signature dishes on the menu and buttonholed him in the
kitchen about betraying his family. He is reputed to have been a charming man but tough with a fierce
temper. Alfred died in Killarney in 1951. Paul recalls driving to see him with his father before he died. Paul
also mentioned that mother told him his grandfather had worked in the Royal Hibernian Hotel. Paul’s father
was in the fruit business in the Markets in Dublin and was known as Gerry Berger. Paul re-instated the use
of the Boxberger when in college and before his son was born he changed his name officially by deed poll
to the original spelling of his grandfather Boksberger. The Ryan family had private hotels in Baggot Street
and Clanwilliam Place.

Paul Boxberger repeated the story 0872548544

Caroline Besson married to Tim 064 45033 living in Sneem Co. Kerry daughter of Ken Besson – sent me
some excellent material on her father.

Seán Ó H-Éalaigh story of ex girlfriend who worked in the Green Rooster in O’ Connell Street and
remembers the Rats so frequent that they had names for them including one called ‘stripper’ because it
cleaned itself publicly that it seemed to be stripping.

Michael Mc Manus’s daughter Carmel rang 8383789 lives in 43 Fausaugh Ave. Cabra. (14/5/08) rang
and spoke to her daughter Aisling and discussed the cordon blue that she had for her grandfather – Carmel
had passed away three in 2005

Phillip Kennedy worked in Jammets as a Commis waiter at the end 1967 ph.087 2385785 Montrose-
Jammets, Dublin Airport, Royal Marine has reference from Jammets – blocks of ice, coal fire, basement
with oysters - Gorey

Aingeal Ni Bhuaclalla scéal faoi Castle Hotel and Metropole

Paul Kavanagh (6052478) has huge collection of menus from many of the restaurants including some in
London – Started in Cathal Brugha in 1961-63 and was fascinated with menus, Russell, Lafayette, Dolphin,
Jammets, Savoy Hotel (Arthur Helliwell wrote for the people ‘my table in the savoy’ paul wrote to him and
got menus – now working in Glass bottle company trained in Metropole, Matt Byrne, Davy Edwards, -
Wicklow Hotel, Shannon Airport, Gresham Paddy O’ Neill was waiter Mac Manus and Barney Neelan and
Andy Whelan, - Qualified Chef in the Wicklow form 9-16 punts a week, Chef was Tommy Maher
41 Croydon Park Ave, Marino, Down Philipsburg turn left at shops, around circle, 2 D shaped greens, right hand side, well lit up garden Tuesday nights best 8339880
Talked on Phone 18/11/04

Jackie Harpur 056 4442904 late husband Shay Harpur worked for Jammets and has a book on a day (during Horseshow week) in the life of Jammets (unpublished) shanja@eircom.net She also has pictures of Micheál Mac Liamóir in Jammets and some other memorabilia. (talked to her on 28/01/05 and agreed to ring back in a months time and meet up)

Fr. George Ennis

St Brendans Community, Mulrany, (born April 1923) Terrenure (older brother, sister, young sister and him) Father worked for Greenmount Oil Company (le Brouqy’s owned it) Co. Mayo tel. 0983 6316 before coming a priest he was the manager of the Red Bank Restaurant and other establishments in Dublin, Chef in Royal Hibernian Hotel - sister Olive Maher
Manager on Red Bank, Jury’s, Spa Hotel, Lawlors of Naas
Terry O’ Sullivan (Nuala O’ Faoláin’s father) was working with Radio Éireann and did pieces on Restaurants – John and Danny Nolan worked in the seafood Bar
Jean Retty from Macon, France was head chef became manager after George Ennis left Gerry Ferns came from Jammets to become Sous Chef. Dunn’s the seafood people had an interest in the Red bank for a while- talked to peter Dunne (8643100), spoke of beautiful stained glass entrance doors by Anne Yeates, now owned by Peter Dunne. Dunns left D’Olier Street in 1965.

Dolly Fossets was a sheebeen whiskey in teapots top of Capel Street, had a cousin Eugene across the road, in through a door into a bare room, trap door in corner. Alfredo’s Mary’s Abbey owned by an Italian, late night restaurant / drinking. Had a doorman.

Mother was ill, at 12 George looked after the house, Father got on to James O’ Regan (Brendan’s father) take him in to Falls Hotel in Ennistymon to put him off the business but it didn’t work. Brendan O’ Regan had been in Germany in Hotel Hirsch Iminstaat, rented the Falls in Ennistymon. Back in Dublin got in to Parnell Square College through Jack Thunder, lady teachers, chefs course for a year, fairly basic, learned terms like bouquet garni. Michael Ganly was in his class as was students called Grant and Brady. Went to Spa Hotel for 3 years as an apprentice, the Hotel was mostly for elderly people for treatment and golfers, owned by the Mc Grath family who owned the sweepstakes. Eddie Guidan (good all round cook) was the chef and Tommy Ryan. Rode in the first motorbike race in the Dublin 100(miles) in Phoenix Park.

Sacked and moved on to Rossapenna Hotel in Donegal as third chef with Head Chef Joseph. O.Kordina (family settled in Rathmines), a Swiss Italian brilliant chef, Graham Moore the manager.

Trainee manager in the Royal Hibernian Hotel, Willie Ryan (who went on to Shannon – Irish Coffee fame) was head chef, English sous chef, Joe O’ Neill Grill Chef, Paul Besson was owner manager and Douglas Vance was a manager and went to the Metropole in Cork. Just one dining room and snacks in the Buttery. Worked at every section.

He then became deputy assistant manager in Jury’s Dame Street. In Jury’s - Martin Mortell was manager, Tom Tighe, assistant manager, Haydon manager, Bill Everard (English) was head Chef, Charlie Le Freve Carver, (steak and Kidney pie, stuffed sheep Hearts, Steak, Wholesome food) from 6pm in those days Dame Street would be empty.

After that he became manager in Shannon Airport Restaurant.

He then spent 7 years in The Red Bank Restaurant in D’Olier Street. The Old Red Bank was glorified pub on a Sunday night, melee came in to murder stout, dirty plates on the table just in case the police came in as they were meant to be eating. Hess (Swiss) was manager before him, Jack Doyle (the boxer) hung around with a queer kind of people, during the emergency 50 gallon drum of oil sold on the black market, was really liquid paraffin – William Montgomery got sick after eating mayonnaise made from it, was a manger, rats in the upstairs Kitchen, at night a few friends mad with drink used to turn off the lights , then on again
and used to beat the hell out of the rats with sticks. Plan before the Montgomery’s to move the kitchen to the ground floor to cut out the lift. Went there as manager, Barry Montgomery was an accountant; Gertie Mc Donald was the secretary and became manager. Gerry Ferns had been in Jammets, Jean Retty was from Macon and a married a Irish girl. Brilliant chef, no business for French chefs at that time, what was wanted was eating houses like the Dolphin and the Palace. (Atmosphere like American speakeasy). Unicorn was good at that time. Trying to do high class food at reasonable cost, good one day not so good another day. Hardy’s (Hanlons) has a share in The Red Bank.

Joe Whitworth in Kilmessan, bought the Kilmessan Inn Pub but didn’t know he bought it.

Lawlors of Naas, Mrs Lawlor was the boss, sons Tom and Jim but she did everything from the bed. They did lot of catering for Races and Horse Show etc.

Worked for J.E. Mills Merrion Row, did catering for embassy, catering hire, house weddings etc, needed development, got drunk again and walked. Got a snack bar on the Naas Road, part of the showroom in the Petrol station, everything cooked to order, truck drives, religious, all types, Fox and Geese hoped to have a restaurant as well. Two places on the go at the same time, staff employed at this stage, His friend said one day we’ll have to stop this cursing business. After cutting down on the cursing he said you should give up the drink. Introduced him to a Jesuit, had his first confession in a long time and then ended up joining the Jesuits, gave up drink in 1956. (Telephone interview took place on 11th May 2005) (George Ennis passed away c.2007)

Sylvie Reilly rang about her husband Giles Reilly - Whites on the Green, Arbutus Lodge, 1980s , Kinsale, Kenmare, Ashford Castle, 01 6183399 who is head Chef in ‘Dáil Éireann’ for the last 25 years and has a collection of menus and cookbooks. Seems to have a very good insight of the Dublin Restaurant scene around the 1980s. Will make a good interviewee. (spoke on Phone 25 Nov. 04)

Anonymous feedback to Marian programme ‘A table for two, tender strips of chicken, neatly cubed roast potatoes and rich gravy. We were aged 8 or 9 and the year was 1944. We’d been told that we were going to a posh restaurant and we must be very, very good but how could we be otherwise when it was all so gorgeous and the waiters were so kind. I wish I could remember what we had after the chicken, it was probably ice-cream and a real treat. For us this was war-time and we had come from Derry to go the pantomime. My first gastronomic experience. I think we paid a second visit to Jammets but it has paled into insignificance; for one thing, I think we had to sit with grown-ups.’ Mary Towers mtowers@eircom.net

Max Berger who worked as a chef for 20 years but left the business and has mixed feelings about the business made contact with the programme and can be contacted at maxber2ie@Yahoo.co.uk

A Diner – Kevin Burke (79) from 6 Claremont Road Dublin 4 rang the programme Tel. 668 9533 Mid 40s-50s Wife Helen,

Jack Mulhall e-mailed from America – He worked in Jammets in the 1960s as a waiter and can be contacted at john.mulhall@unisys.com (he went to Butlins with Gerry Connell) – received an e-mail from him outlining his life.

Another listener sent in a scan of an old menu from Dublin Airport in Collinstown. Saved under Marian Scans in Oral History Masters File. Menu from 1955 from old book- the menu was found in between the pages of a book, Martin Walsh – glenbower@iol.ie

Frank Gaughran – 40 Dalkey Park, Dalkey, Co.Dublin sent menus from Cunard lines and other ships including Restaurant na Mara, Gresham Dinner Menu for Function 1947, Queen Mary 1964, Sent him a thank you letter 25/11/04

Angie Me Ginn – Leitrim Road, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim sent a letter talking of the ‘Country Kitchen’ on Stephens green ‘a little Mecca in the heart of Dublin’Sent a thank you letter 25/11/04
Thérèse (Terry) Murray (granddaughter of Camille Fauvin)

41 St David’s Court, Castle Avenue, Clontarf, Dublin 3 ph. 8333751 sent a letter andmenus and information on the Restaurant Continental on 1 Upper Sackville Street where her grandfather worked as Proprietor from 1909-1916 until it was destroyed in the uprising. Doing Family research 10 years ago Claire Boylans Home Rule, Camille Fauvin Continental Café, Had Five Daughters, grand son of Palmier, Elsie, Margaree had the information, story of a dead Horse in O Connell Street and women sitting on the horse using it as a seat to try on some stolen shoes. Worked in the Kildare Street Club for 10 years previously.

Scheme in London to improve the quality of Cuisine, young people brought over to London, He cooked for tsar of Russia the last time the crown heads of Europe met.

Camille Fauvin, son of Celestin and Julianne, a wine-merchant and licensed limonadier, was born in 18 August 1859 (died 5 July 1926) in Chateau Landon, Seine et Marne in the Loire Valley. He worked for the Royal Family in London based in Army barracks and came to London Married in 1885 brought to London as part of a scheme to bring French chefs to Britain to improve, married 1886 Sussannah McIntosh from Kent arrived in Dublin after securing a position as chef in the Kildare Street Club Ireland

Mr Senezio from the Pillar Restaurant taught her father how to make Ice cream the Italian way. After the rebellion he went in and brought back in a Port manteau (Bag) piece of Bacon and the Fork.

Ray Staunton 087 2892038 has wedding breakfast menu from Mon 25th April 1938 The Gresham – Aunt on fathers side – photo of menu everybody signed the names (34 people) Wedding of Arthur Healy and May Healy (worked as a receptionist) 1 hour 50min for the wedding Glasnevin at 7am to make the boat in Dun Laoghaire at 8.45. By the time they returned the food was all cleared up.

Chanelle College, Coolock Village, Dublin 5

Matt Mc Nulty 8464122 (Spoke on 25/11/04 and agreed to meet up in the near future in Kinsealy) (former director of Bord Fáilte) has function menus from 1930s and 40s and knowledge of the Restaurant scene in Dublin at the time – therese@tmservices.ie Will ring back, he was one of the founders of the Restaurant Association of Ireland in the early 1970s and Bord Fáilte 1988-1998 and former manager of Dublin Tourism 1968-9.

Has menus from different Functions from 1928

Mike Butt – son runs Hibernian Hotel in Balls bridge
RTE did a programme on Micky Mullin in the 1970s
Gourmet Festival in Royal Hibernian were the high point of the Culinary Calender and introduced the dining public to food they would otherwise have not seen.

Nicolas Tinne ran Snaffles in Leeson Street – game did they come for a meal or a piss?
Russell was the first
Baskin Lane , Kinsealy
Old Books – The Irish Traveller 1890- 1950 Journal of the Irish Tourist Board
Winston Churchill came over to a meeting once
Small book – history of the Irish Tourist Association
Minutes of meeting where at 11 where special branch came in and arrested some members and interned them in the Curragh.

Anne Byrne sent an E-Mail – Her aunt Mary Hickey was Ken Besson’s PA and on clearing out her house she found some old menu’s from the Royal Hibernian Hotel including the last menu from 1982 and some French Gourmet menus from 1973. She works in Sunway Travel Upstairs in Stillorgan Shopping Centre and will have the menus in there for me. Ph. 086 3760228 and annfb@eircom.net

Marie Brennan rang on Mobile 27/11/04 - 4513159 – 18 Tonduff Close, Green Park, Walkinstown, Dublin 12
Her Uncle Jack Bathe is 91 and in a Nursing Home in Killecullen. He was a waiter in the Kildare Street Club, Royal Hibernian Hotel and the Russell Hotel. He did banquets during his split shifts. (sent Marie a letter with sample questions on 1st February 2005) (Her Uncle Jack died and was buried the day she received my letter)
Ed Hick told Kathleen Montgomery who’s Grandfather William Montgomery is 93 and trained in the Gresham and was manager of the Red Bank Restaurant for the last five years it was open. 087 6242293

30/11/04 Got a ring from Catriona Thornbury 086 8798277 who knows a Venetia O’ Sullivan 2806406 living in Dun Laoghaire (70s) who would be good to talk to. Background British aristocracy, married an Irishman and is knowledgeable about food.

Michael Murphy

Via Anne Hennessey sent two menus from Jammets in scanned in an E Mail through Marian programme. The address is 85 Kill Lane, Foxrock, Dublin 18. Phone: 2896301 – hen@esatclear.ie sent her a thank you e-mail on 6/12/04 – Spoke to Michael Murphy (80) on the phone on 7th December 2004 . He went to Belvedere College, where he recalls Michel Jammet getting a hard time from the boys because he was dressed like a Frenchman with starched white collar. University and then was called to the bar at the age of 21. He ate in Jammets twice both times as part of the Bar Easter Dinner (25 guests) in the upstairs room where he remembers the chef and an assistant serving whole poussain to each diner. Unfortunately he didn’t start drinking until he was 30 and even when he did they called him ‘one glass Murphy’. There was good food to be had in the Kings Inns where there was a strict hierarchy from the senior judges, senior and junior barristers, students and solicitors in that order (laugh)!!! He recalls that there was a light ale on tap and that they had a cellar but that you would not drink the house wine, always a pay a little extra for better quality wine. After the wine a snuff box would be passed around.

As a barrister he travelled the Leinster circuit and in certain towns there would be a table booked for dinner and you needed to let them know if you were not going to partake. He recalls a hotel in Tipperary where for dessert he got a sweet omelette passed from the kitchen to the dining room through the hatch and turned onto a plate. He recalls eating in the Red Bank and the Dolphin and the Clarence he remembers for their carving trolley where the Beef was wheeled into the room and carved at the table. Beef was the only meat you could serve county councilors.

He joined the Civil Service and then worked later in local government. He recalls a good canteen in the Customs House where he once ate woodpigeon and it was good.

He was a law student during the war and he ate more in café’s than restaurants. He recalls a café (o’Byrne’s) in Liffey Street (now the Legal Eagle) where you ate at a communal table. He also recalls eating in Caffola’s where the forks were chained to the tables. Many of the Barristers were members of Clubs as they were not meant to officially tout for business and the Clubs gave them a network to work from.

6th December 2004 – Received a copy of Illustration of Jammets Menu from the 40s that hung on her dining room wall. Lisa Lawrence, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal – retired language lecturer in Tourism College Killybegs. (Sent her a letter of thanks on 26/1/05)

6th December 2004 - Received an E-Mail from Deirdre Scully via the Marian programme and she may have information concerning Dublin Restaurants. scullideirdre@hotmail.com She phoned in January and left her number 01 8427794

Grandfather worked as a waiter in Jammet’s restaurant until the early 1960s died in 1979 aged 87 his name was Patrick Baker. His friend Frank (O’) Reilly was pastry chef and moved to the airport.

7th December 2004 - Received a e mail from Maurice Jones with two menus from the Gresham where he trained in around 1962 – He lives in Aughrim, Co. Wicklow, Phone: 0402 36043 – rang him on 10/12/04 and agreed to talk soon he has lots of information for me.

7th December 2004 – Sheamus Smith (sheamus@iol.ie) contacted through RTE and may have information from the 1950s and 60s. Ex Film Censor living in Rathgar, worked for the Evening Press social column with Terry O’ Sullivan 1 Sept 1954 –58, Went to Canada, RTE and then Ardmore Studios 76-82, Alfredo’s Upmarket Restaurant in Mary’s Abbey door with a slit in it and if you didn’t like the look of you, you didn’t get in (1954-63). Started out as an Italian waiter in Parknasilla, own restaurant looked after medical students who were in Jervis Street, when he became ill he went to Italy but returned to Dublin and
was looked after by the medical students who were now doing well financially, they put him up in the Shelbourne until he died. (will contact in a month and go out to house and talk) (He Phoned in January and left his number 4964926 but will be away until 24th January)

Maura O’Casey Publisher of Good Cooking Magazine

16 November 2004 – Letter from Maura O’Casey (83) who published a food magazine in the 1958 in Dublin and might have relevant information for the project. 613 Cross Road, Killaloe, Co. Clare. Tel 061 376943 Married in 1950- husband was in Surgeons but took ill and got into publishing – add in Irish Times for cookery classes – 5 night a week for the whole year and they then issue a magazine ‘Good Cooking’ Dutch restaurant called ‘the clog’ near the back of the Gaiety – owner was an American and he wanted to marry the dutchgirl and she wouldn’t marry him and he killed himself in his mews. Bought a castle outside of Sixmilebridge and opened it to tourists, she did the cooking. She taught classes in the Royal Hibernian based on parties they gave and the likes of Milo O’Shea would say that her food was fabulous. She cooked blinis and pizzas when no one else did. She is sending me her magazines in the post. (Spoke to her on the phone 10/12/04). Magazines were photocopied and returnec – very valuable information in them.

19 Jan. 05 – Received an e-mail from Phil Moore concerning Karl Uhlemann. She knows his grandson Fritz and his father Hermann who is also a chef. I e-mailed back to look for some contact details of Uhlemann’s family. Phil’s contact is pmooremacmahon@oceanfree.net Fritz Uhlemann phone: 6275400 his father is deceased and he has a brother and two sisters.

28 January 2005 – Tony Sweeney 73 (racing correspondent for Irish Times) rang with information on Dublin Restaurants. He has been eating out at the top level for 60 years and has a bill from Jammets and from the Russell and some other memorabilia. He lives in Dalkey, ‘Aramore’ Cumingham Road, (Red brick and Granite House 2nd on the left) ph. 2858886 – waiter in Jammets was an apprentice jockey (willie something)

31 January 05 – Received a letter from Fred Gygax 75 who is a retired pastry chef 1949-64 in Metropole, Savoy, Dublin Airport, new Jury’s etc. His father was head Chef in the Savoy between 1929-1953. His phone is 2873935, lives in ‘Hillside’, Hillside road, Greystones, Co. Wicklow. Mr Margey worked as manager for Rank Organisation but is now dead. Rang him and arranged to meet in 6 weeks. Before Jimmy Flahive there was a chef called Flanagan Bill Ryan Chef Ryan (Irisn Coffee) and Michael Marley, Chef Senn (Swiss) patisiere, Willie Opperman in the Metropole in the larder 1949 (football cup Final in Tolka Park) trained in Switzerland did college, knows Paddy Burtonshaw in the Savoy.

Feedback from Radio na Gaeltachta piece

John Denham (tea taster and whiskey taster) manager of restaurant on Abbey Street around 1935, the country shop (tea rooms and lunches) Kathleen Farrington from Inchicore, great cook, worked there in Stephens green. Daughter Anne Denhan has silverware from The Cabin Hotel and Café, O Connell Street, cousin lived in the Kerry Arms (B&B) in Talbot Street. Sign never blew down. (rang back on 22/11/04)

Feedback from notice on the DIT Update Staff Notice board (22/11/04)

Yvonne Gilna

Yvonne contacted me with menus form the 1980s and 1990s and a menu from the Red Bank but unfortunately not the D’Olier Street Restaurant but the Skerries restaurant. Also had photocopy of menu from Friendly Brothers House 1875.
Kevin C. Kearns
Living in Maine – PO Box 267, Camden, Maine 04843
Talked to Kevin on the phone on 10th January 2005
He drifted into using oral history but finds it excellent for reconstructing society in real terms. Although folklore was quite widespread in Ireland he seems to be one of the pioneers of urban folklore in his oral history of Dublin Tenement life, slums, pub life and lore and street traders and characters. Like any archival research preparation is key in oral history where you gather as much information about the individual and context prior to the interview and that you have a sequence of questions memorised to elicit the information you require from the interviewee in a seemingly informal setting. He emphasised the importance of eliciting the information carefully and when an interviewee is drifting away from your area of interest to bring them back to the area carefully and tactfully. He stays away from using questionnaires as they are perceived as officious and can sometimes put the informant off partaking in the exercise. The key is to build trust, make it informal and make it seem spontaneous.
In discussing some perceived misgivings about the validity or reliability of oral evidence he asks why should archival sources like the diaries of memoirs of politicians, clergy or business men be considered any more valid than oral evidence since he notes that common people have nothing to gain by not telling the truth compared to some of the upper echelons of society. In his thirty years of using oral history his work has not been challenged by any academic and on the contrary most modern histories of Dublin draw on his work.
In editing the transcripts he would never alter phraseology or grammar, he values the vernacular as highly as academic speech. He sometimes changed the sequence of speech in order to bring remarks about a common theme together but never in a way that would alter the meaning. He refrains from asking people to sign official release papers as they can be intimidated by the officiousness of it but agrees that it would be good to have the tape running as you explain the process to them so that permission is recorded.
He concluded in discussing the liberating nature of oral history in that the respondents are giving the interviewer a wealth of information but that the interviewer is also giving the respondents something in return: their time and their attention. The process affirms the value of their lives and the value of their memories particularly in a time of television and video where younger people seldom take time to tap into the wealth of experience their elder relatives hold.
References