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Louis Jammet

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Year 2009

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School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology

Articles

Dublin Institute of Technology

Year 2009

Louis Jammet

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JAMMET, Louis (1894-1964) restaurateur, was born July 1894 in London, educated in Belvedere College Dublin and joined the French army as an ordinary soldier during the First World War. He was wounded in his right arm and was fortunate not to lose it. After the war he studied engineering in l'École Centrale in Paris where he met his wife Yvonne Auger, daughter of Felix Auger and Catherine Jammet, a second cousin once removed, from a strong restaurant family. One side of the family owned the 'Hotel Bristol' in Paris and on the other the 'Boeuf à la Mode', one of Paris's oldest restaurants founded in 1792. Louis worked as an engineer in France until 1927 when he returned to Dublin, and expanded on his father, Michel Jammet's achievement of running Ireland's best restaurant.

Michel (1858-1931) and Francois (1853-1940) Jammet were born in St. Julia de Bec, near Quillan, in the French Pyrenees to Barthelemy, farmer, and Catherine (née Bourell). The Bourell family were famous hat makers in Carcassonne. The two brothers, aged 12 and 17 respectively, were forced to leave home finding work first in Perpignan and then in Paris where they trained as chefs. Michel Jammet married Josephine Biro, and had one son Louis and one daughter Kitty. He first came to Dublin in 1887 as chef to Henry Roe, the distiller. Following four years working in London for Lord Cadogan, Michel returned to Dublin in 1895, becoming head chef at the Vice Regal Lodge, when Lord Cadogan became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. In 1888 Francois became head chef of the 'Café de Deux Mondes', rue de La Paix, and then moved to the 'Boeuf a La Mode', Rue de Valois, Palais Royal, where he married the owner widow's daughter, Eugenie. The couple legally adopted Catherine, Francois's daughter from an earlier relationship, who later married Felix Auger, a chef and ran the family restaurant.

In 1900 Michel and François Jammet bought the Burlington Restaurant and Oyster Saloons at 27 St Andrew Street, Dublin from Tom Corless. They refitted, and renamed it 'The Jammet Hotel and Restaurant' in 1901, and it became pre-eminent among the restaurants of Dublin. Clientele included leading politicians, nobility, actors, writers and artists such as William Orpen and Harry Kernoff, whose painting of the restaurant now hangs in Dublin's Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud. François Jammet returned to the 'Boeuf a la Mode', Paris, in 1908, where his two children, Hypollite and Jeanne, both followed him into the catering trade. Hippolyte married Yvonne Mollard (of the Brasserie Mollard in St. Lazarre) in 1924 and they acquired

the Hotel Bristol in 1925, had ten children who ran the Bristol until 1978. His sister Jeanne married Mr. Parizot and both managed the Buffet de la Gare in Dijon. Jammet's Restaurant traded at 26-27 Andrew Street and 6 Church Lane until the lease reverted back to the Hibernian Bank in 1926. Michel acquired Kidd's Empire Restaurant and Tea Rooms at 45-46 Nassau Street at this time and brought some of the fittings from the original premises. Michel Jammet retired in 1927. He returned to Paris where he was a director and the principal shareholder of the Hotel Bristol, where he died in 1931.

Peter Somerville-Large describes the entertainment available in Dublin pre 1916 thus: 'Bowler-hatted citizens could attend a few good restaurants like the Bailey or the one opened by the Lord Lieutenant's chef, Monsieur Jammet'. The new restaurant in Nassau Street had as a centrepiece four murals depicting the Four Seasons painted by the artist Bossini, in order to discharge his bill in the old Burlington Restaurant. The new premises was described by John Ryan, a regular customer, 'the main dining room was pure French Second Empire, with a lovely faded patina to the furniture, snow white linen, well cut crystal, monogrammed porcelain, gourmet sized silver-plated cutlery and gleaming decanters'. It became the haunt for the artists and the literary set, and the Jammet's took pride in the fact that it was Dublin's only French Restaurant. There were two entrances. The 'posh' one was in Nassau Street; the ordinary one was in an alley off Grafton Street at Adam's Court. It had a smoking room and an Oyster Bar where lunch could be taken at a wide marble counter from a high stool. The literati drank here, figures like Liam O' Flaherty and Seán O' Sullivan. Louis's wife Yvonne had a reputation of her own as an excellent painter and sculptor and as a member of the *avant garde* painters group 'The White Stag'. She also worked on stage and costume design for the Gate theatre. W.B. Yeats had his own table in Jammet's, and on the sixth of March 1933 dined with fellow writers A.E., Brinsley Macnamara, James Stephens, Lennox Robinson, F.R. Higgins, Seamus O' Sullivan, Peadar O' Donnell, Francis Stuart, Frank O' Connor, Miss Somerville, J.M. Hone and Walter Starkie in Jammet's 'Blue Room'. When Josef Reukli, the Swiss maitre d'hôtel was asked to describe the clientele, he replied 'La crème de la crème'. In 1944 the new Grill Room was opened upstairs, designed by the architect Noel Moffet in a futurist style.

Louis and Yvonne Jammet had four children, Michel, Raymonde, Patrick and Róisín. They first lived in Queens Park, Monkstown, but moved to the sixteenth century 'Kill Abbey', in 1946. The Jammets were central to Dublin's social scene, involving themselves in theatre, aviation, and particularly the French Benevolent Society for which Yvonne acted as secretary and treasurer for many years. Vegetables were grown in Kill Abbey gardens for the restaurant and in 1934 Louis hired two planes to fly to Dundalk to secure fish delicacies. Louis worked in an advisory role with the CDVEC in setting up the first chefs and waiters courses in Parnell Square in the 1930s, and also worked with the Irish Tourist Association, the Irish Hotels and Restaurant Proprietors, and the catering branch of the ITGWU to develop apprenticeship and catering education. In September 1941 he, along with his fellow leading Dublin restaurateurs, became one of the directors of the Goodwill Restaurant, Pearse Street, Dublin.

There are many references to Jammet's in international publications as one of Europe's best restaurants. After the war, when films began to be made in Ardmore studios, the stars would converge on Jammet's. It was the place to be seen during the 1950s and early 1960s. When Egon Ronay came to Dublin in 1963 he wrote of Jammet's 'As if by magic the turn of the century has been fully preserved beyond the swing door...Space, grace, the charm of small red leather armchairs, *fin-de-siècle* murals and marble oyster counters exude a bygone age. Ritz and Escoffier would feel at home here', and awarded the restaurant two stars – indicating excellence of cooking.

Louis was a director of the Gate Theatre during the early 1960s, and when he died quite suddenly in October 1964, the running of the restaurant fell to his son Patrick, the only member of the family who had worked in the business. By 1964 conditions in Dublin had changed considerably, parking became a prime consideration in the catering trade. Many of the restaurant's customers had begun moving away from the city centre into the suburbs. In 1967, Patrick closed the restaurant and sold the business. He planned to re-launch a 'Jammet Hotel and Restaurant' on Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, but failed to secure planning permission, sparking a public debate in the Irish Times letters column. Yvonne Jammet died in America in 1967.

Louis Jammet contributed to the formation of some of the leading figures in the Irish restaurant industry over the years. These included Willie O' Regan, Jimmy Beggan,

Christy Sands, Charles Opperman, Mark Faure, Vincent Dowling, Frank Farren, Liam Kavanagh, P.J. Dunne, and Gerry Connell. Many of these chefs and waiters went on to become the future teachers, mentors and standard bearers of the Hospitality Industry both in Ireland and abroad.

Vogue (3/10/28); Ir. Independent (28/4/30); Ir. Times (7/3/33); Irish Hotel and Club Manager (April 1934); The Queen (12/8/42); Journal L'Epoque (22/6/47); The Irish Hotelier (Dec. 1949); Egon-Ronay Guides (1963-67); Sommerville-Large, Dublin (1981); Ryan, J. Ir. Times (11/4/87); Jammet family personal documents, newspaper clippings and menus; Interviews with Louis's daughter Róisín Hood, and Hypollite's youngest son André Jammet; Interviews with ex staff of Restaurant Jammet, Christopher Sands, Frank Farren, Liam Kavanagh, Gerry Connell; CDVEC Archives.

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