



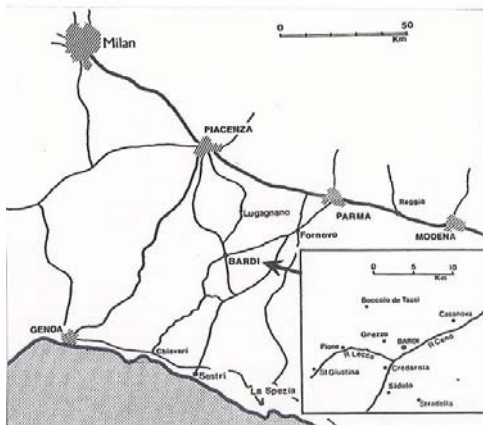
Bardi - The Italian Connection



Bardi Castle

BACKGROUND

In the north west of Italy, in the Ceno Valley, there is situated a small hill town by the name of Bardi, dominated by its ninth century castle on a rocky outcrop. It is from this small area of Italy that most of the Italian emigrants to South Wales originated - and where their descendents still have close ties.



Bardi in the Ceno Valley

AGRICULTURE

In the 1870s, in Italy, 60 per cent of the population earned their living by working on the land. They generally did not own the small plots of land on which they farmed. The tenants did not pay rent but they did all the work. The landowner paid

the taxes and bought the stock and seeds. In return the profits were split evenly between landlord and tenant. This was known as the *mezzadaria* system. In the 1870s the Italian government also introduced more taxation - profits fell even further. In addition, as Catholics, the Italians tended to have large families. The Italian government also introduced new laws of inheritance. When the head of the family died at least half of the estate had to be divided equally amongst all of the children. The result was increasing poverty as farms grew smaller and smaller.

At this time around two-thirds of Italians were also illiterate. There was no industrial growth at this time, due to a depression.

The only sensible solution for many was emigration.

ITALIAN EMIGRATION

Emigration from Italy was not new. In the 1670s there were Italian cafés in Paris, but by 1870 there were half a million Italians living abroad. By 1891 there were 1.4 million Italians living in the United States alone and by the end of the nineteenth century there was an estimated 10 per

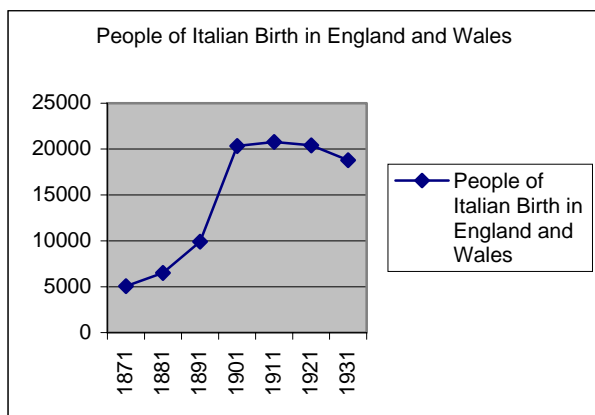


cent of the Italian population living abroad.

EMIGRATION TO ENGLAND AND WALES

Between 1871 and 1901 more than 80 per cent of Italians who emigrated to England and Wales were from northern Italy. Initially most of them came to London, particularly to Clerkenwell and Holborn, which became known as 'Little Italy', where they set up their own schools, church and hospital. In 1900 nearly a thousand of them were selling ice-cream from carts.

Over 1,200 Italians in England and Wales were employed as musicians in 1881 (most of them as itinerant organ-grinders). Of the 6,504 Italians in England and Wales at this time it is remarkable, considering their background, none appear to have been employed in agriculture.

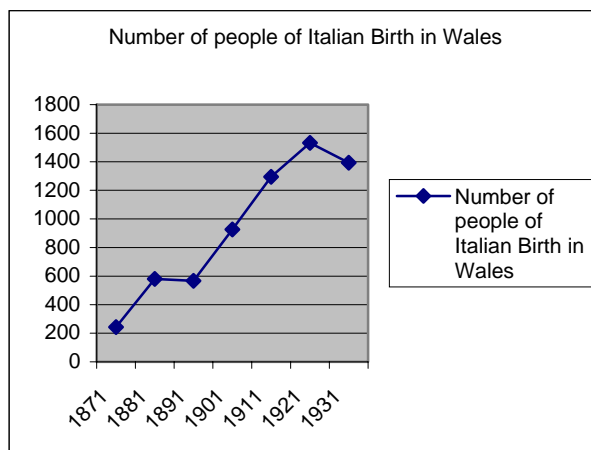


The above graph shows that the numbers of Italians coming to England and Wales levelled off after 1901. This was partly the result of the Aliens Act of 1905, which placed restrictions on the number of foreign workers entering Britain.

MIGRATION TO WALES

The statistics for Wales follow the same trend as that of the whole of England and Wales, although the Aliens Act seemed to have little effect on the numbers entering

Monmouthshire, which rose from 89 in 1901 to 303 in 1911 and 335 in 1921.



The figures for 1911 show that, of all the counties in England and Wales (including London), Glamorgan had the third highest number of Italians. Another important feature was that the ratio of males to females was close to ten to one, whilst it was only about three to one for England and Wales as a whole.

THE BARDI CONNECTION

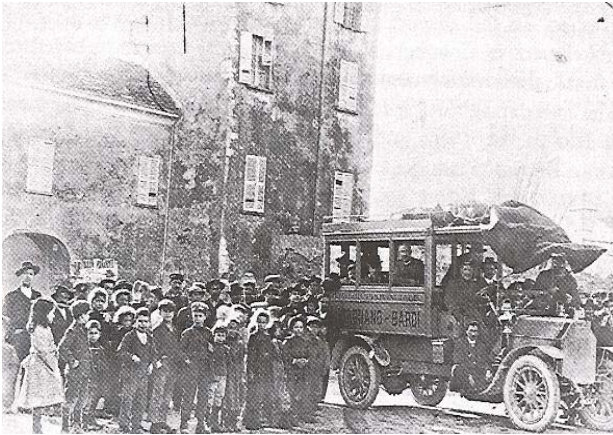


The town of Bardi in 1896, taken from the Castle

There is no firm evidence to suggest why the people of Bardi chose South Wales as an emigration destination, other than it seems that different towns and villages in Italy tended to migrate to 'twin' with certain areas. No doubt they heard of the industrial and commercial boom in South Wales and decided to take their chance.



Initially London was their preferred destination. Twenty-eight organ grinders left for London in 1843-44.



The market place in Bardi in 1906, with the bus that took them to the railway that marked the first stage of their journey to Wales

In recent interviews some of the people of Bardi were asked who were the first Italians to come to South Wales. They named the Bracchis, the Bernis and the Rabaiottis of Grezzo (a village a few kilometres from Bardi). In a BBC radio interview in 1980 John Massari (whose father came to Wales to work for the Bracchis in Aberdare) was even more precise in naming Giacomo Bracchi. Careful research has deduced that he arrived sometime between 1881 and 1893.

One thing is certain, he was soon to be followed by many other *Bardigiani*.



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