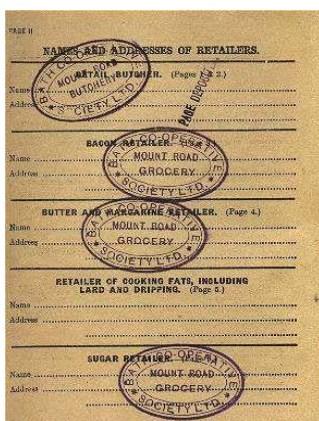


# Decline of the Italian Café and the New Generation

## POST-WAR PROSPERITY

After the Second World War the South Wales economy recovered from the hard times of the 1920s and 1930s, and brought with it an era of great prosperity for the Italian cafés in the valleys.

Rationing of meat and bacon in Britain continued until July 1954, so people turned to the Italian cafés and fish and chip shops in even greater numbers than before and takings boomed.



Page of a ration book

## DECLINE OF THE ITALIAN CAFÉ

The decline of the Italian café came in the 1960s as habits changed. With working class people being able to afford cars people travelled away from their local village to eat. Other forms of entertainment also had their impact. Televisions in every home meant that fewer working class people went out for entertainment. Those that did found alternative entertainment such as the Bingo Hall, and live entertainment in the public houses saw their numbers swell. Hence the evening trade of the cafés was the first to be hit. Soon there were alternative sources for meals. In the

1970s the immigrants from Hong Kong discovered a lucrative market for Chinese takeaway meals. As well as hitting the café trade, it also took trade away from the Italian fish and chip shops.

As well as takeaway meals, from the 1970s, the Bangladesh community in South Wales began to exploit the market for cheap Indian curries. Beginning in the towns and cities, they eventually spread into the valleys.

Next came the multi-national franchised food chains. Kentucky Fried Chicken (now KFC) started its franchised operation in the USA in 1956, and opened its first outlet in Britain in Preston in 1965. The McDonald franchise began in Illinois in the mid-



1950s, and opened its first UK outlet in Woolwich in London. Even Pizza Hut owed its origins to the USA, rather than Italy. It set up its first outlet in Wichita, Kansas in 1958 and its first Pizza Hut in the UK in Islington in London in 1977. Of the 4.2 billion purchases of pizza each year few come from the Italian community in Wales.



Perhaps the death knell of the Italian café in South Wales came when public houses began to sell cheap meals in order to boost the lunchtime trade.

Today there are still some Italian cafés that survive in South Wales, most notably in the Aberdare area, whilst others (many long-established), like the Express Café in Taff Street, Pontypridd closed its doors for



the final time in 1986.

Examples of Italian cafés that survive to-day in Aberdare

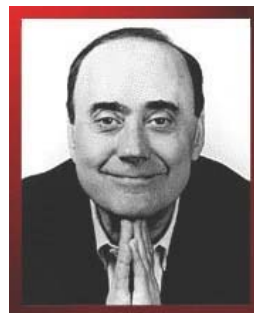


## THE NEXT GENERATION

So what has happened to the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the Italians in South Wales? With the familiar surnames it is not difficult to trace them.

Some have made their name in entertainment. **Victor Spinetti**, who was born in Abergavenny in 1933 (his grandfather walked from Italy to Wales) attended the Welsh College of Music and Drama (where he is now a Fellow) and sprang to international prominence in three Beatles' films in the 1960s, '*A Hard Day's Night*',

*'Help!'* and *'Magical Mystery Tour'*.



Victor Spinetti

*'Victor Spinetti Up Front... His Strictly Confidential Autobiography'* was published in September 2006.

**Marco Marengi**, whose grandparents emigrated from Italy to Wales, has become a top Hollywood animator. In London he worked on films such as *'Lost in Space'* and *'Walking with Dinosaurs'* before emigrating to California, where he has worked on films such as *'Minority Report'*.

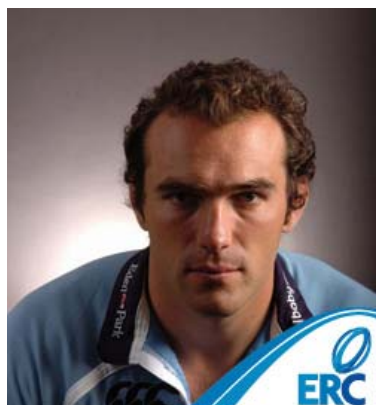


Marco Marengi

Others have made their mark in the international sports arena.

**Robert Sidoli** was born in Merthyr Tydfil in 1979, a member of the famous Sidoli family. Although he gained a BSc degree in Computer Science it was as a rugby union player that he found fame. Standing at 6 feet 6 inches tall (2 metres) and weighing 18 stone 2 pounds (116 kg), he plays professional rugby for Cardiff Blues and won the first of over thirty Welsh caps (to date) when he made his debut against

South Africa in 2002. He was an ever-present in Wales' Grand Slam team of 2005, including a cap against his 'Land of My Fathers', Italy.



Robert Sidoli



Robert Sidoli in action for Wales

Robert's brother, **Peter Sidoli**, is a year younger and approximately the same weight and height. He is also a professional rugby player for the Newport Gwent Dragons.



Peter Sidoli

Wales has also been fortunate with its Italian connections in the world of boxing.

**Joe Calzaghe** was born in London in 1972, the son of a Sardinian father and Welsh mother. He moved to Newbridge in South Wales at the age of eighteen months. Joe took up boxing in school with his father Enzo as his trainer. As an amateur he lost only one out of 117 fights (where his opponent's father was the referee). He turned professional in 1993 and to date (February 2007) he has won every one of his 42 professional fights, with 31 knock-outs and is currently a world champion. He won the WBO super middle-weight title in October 1997 by defeating Chris Eubank and has held it ever since. In March 2006 he defeated the American Jeff Lacy, in one of the best fights ever seen, to add the IBF and IBO super middleweight titles.



Joe Calzaghe - the Italian Dragon

His ties with Italy can be seen in his nickname '*The Italian Dragon*'. He was named the BBC Wales Sports Personality of the Year for 2006 and is rated as one of the top five pound-for-pound boxers in the world.

Joe Calzaghe defeats Jeff Lacy in 2006



Joe Calzaghe defeats Jeff Lacy in 2006 to add to his world titles



Enzo Maccarinelli knocks out Mark Hobson in 2006 to become World Champion

Another Welsh boxer with Italian connections is **Enzo Maccarinelli**, who is from Swansea with an Italian father. Born in 1980 he has won 25 of his 26 professional fights, with 19 knock-outs (up to February 2007). He is trained by Joe Calzaghe's father, Enzo, and he became the WBO cruiserweight champion in October 2006 when he knocked out Mark Hobson after only 71 seconds.



Enzo Maccarinelli

### THE PRESENT

It is clear that the Welsh-Italians continue to leave their mark today. Do this generation think of themselves as Welsh or Italian? The answer varies. Some of the younger generation, because of their upbringing, still consider themselves as mainly Italian. Others consider their homes to be in Wales and view themselves as mainly Welsh.

Of the older generation some, like Robert Servini, still own second homes in Bardi, and spend much of their summer holidays there.

One thing is for certain, the *Bardigiani* made a contribution to South Wales out of all proportion to their numbers. Their chosen trade in the café business provided much enjoyment and happy memories for the people of South Wales whilst posing no threat to the employment of others.

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