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The Irish Yeast Company: a Short History of the Early Years

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The Irish Yeast Company

John Moreland was born in 1924 and managed the Irish Yeast Company on College Street in Dublin, the main purveyor of yeast and bakery products in Ireland for the early 20th century in Ireland. The main function of the Irish Yeast Company (established in 1890) was to supply and promote yeast to bakeries all over the country. Employees travelled throughout the country acting as salesmen gathering orders. During the 1950s and 1960s the company had a work force of seven. The yeast they supplied was a new product coming from England and was attempting to replace the use of barley. At the time the Irish Yeast Company was the only wholesaler of yeast in Ireland, their only competitors were Findlaters, Leveret and Frye and Williams all of whom sold bakery products. The company supplied yeast to a variety of business including Kennedys Bakery Parnell Street and Gardiner Street, Bolands Bakery Capel Street, Johnston Mooney, Downs Earl Street, Rourkes, Dempseys Gloucester Place, Corr's Camden Street and Broderick's Gardiners Lane. They also supplied to all the known restaurants at the time including the Great Southern Hotel, Aras an Uachtaran (the residence of the Irish President), Convents and Bakeries in all the large educational institutions.

The product range was based on what was available: turnovers, pains, loose bread, double loaf and the single loaf. The smaller the bakery, the more precise and intricate the products. Larger bakeries tended to keep it simple. Any surplus bread in small bakeries was sold off at reduced cost. Bread making at this time was cheap but distribution was expensive. This was a problem for larger bakeries, smaller bakeries hired delivery men. In the 1960s battery operated cars started to be used for deliveries. Other bakeries retained the horse and cart as their means of delivery.

Bread was at the height of its popularity during and after the war given the limited range of foods that were available. This was referred to as the bread boom of the 1940s. The Irish government urged Irish farmers to increase their output of strong flour in order to keep the bakeries going. At the same time bakeries were urged to retain the bran in their bread to supply a more nutritious loaf during the war.

While there was an abundance of confectionary shops in the city at this time the sugar shortage during the war caused many to shut down. According to Mr Moreland Bewleys supplied the best wedding cakes in Dublin. Dessie Moles was the chief cake crafter in Bewleys Production Bakery in Long Lane, Dublin. He made and iced wedding cakes in all sizes but asked his customers to purchase any decorations they wanted from the Yeast Company. The icing and finishing of these cakes was done by hand and using handmade piping bags. The Kylemore cake business on Henry Street also crafted wedding cakes and displayed them in their grand windows. Wedding cakes were always fruit based, round or square with 2-3 tiers depending on circumstances.

The arrival of supermarkets selling bread at a low price damaged the market base of the traditional bakeries. As kitchen appliances developed baking techniques became more sophisticated and increasingly used technology in production. Over the years the yeast produced by the Irish Yeast Company declined in popularity being replaced by the use of dried yeast that first came on the market in the form of crystals. However the shop has remained in business selling all kinds of equipment and paraphernalia associated with baking.