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Irish Cuisine: Irish Diplomatic Dining

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ABSTRACT

The study of food and power has primarily focused on absolutist courts with powerful monarchs and a wealthy court life, yet contemporary research into the emergent power structures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shows that dining remains an important feature in political and state life. Using new archival material, in particular that of the Irish Department of External Affairs, this paper will examine the emergence of Irish diplomatic dining since the foundation of the Irish Free State and explore how the Irish government established state policy for receiving important visitors. The paper will focus on the principal cultural, political and, social trends which have emerged as part of a larger study on Irish diplomatic dining and present them within the context of three state banquets which took place in Dublin between 1922 and 2011.

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Irish Cuisine: Irish Diplomatic Dining

Introduction

Food does not feature in Irish diplomatic history. When one examines the seminal survey texts establishing the history of Irish diplomacy, it is apparent that food, dining, and protocol have not been given any form of considered analysis.¹ This article addresses this lacuna by examining the emergence of Irish diplomatic dining since the foundation of the Irish Free State. The aim is to add to the existing research on food in Ireland by exploring how the Irish government established state policy for receiving important visitors. The article also looks at existing research into national cuisines and the use of dining within structures of power to see how it might be applied to Ireland. The methodological challenges of covering a period of one hundred years in a single article are considerable; the article will therefore focus on the principal cultural, political, and social trends which have emerged as part of a larger study on Irish diplomatic dining.² Using new archival material, in particular that of the Irish Department of External Affairs, the paper will present these trends with reference to three state banquets which took place in Dublin between 1922 and 2011, and chart the appearance of Irish cuisine in the food served by the Irish state within the context of its international relations.

National Cuisine

In February 2008 when French President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that France would apply to UNESCO to have the gastronomic meal of the French inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of

Humanity, he was accused of trying to flatter the national ego in a bid for re-election. Gastronomy had always been considered an “unidentified political object” by French political analysts despite research showing that food could reveal strong political and societal trends.³ The “Gastronomic Meal of the French” was nevertheless added to the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in 2010.⁴

Sidney Mintz defined cuisine as the “interconnected foods of the people who live inside a political system such as France or Spain” and considered national cuisine a contradiction in terms, stating “there can be regional cuisines, but not national cuisines.”⁵ Tom Jaine, the food historian and publisher, criticized those who would deny the existence of English cookery, who claim “that by dint of its derivative and imitative character it has lost all claim to discreet identity. This is of course absurd. If English people cook, the product must be English cookery.”⁶ Jaine’s statement is not far removed from Mintz’s definition of cuisine. Though some would consider the term “Irish cuisine” to be an oxymoron,⁷ this writer agrees with Dorothy Cashman’s assertion that “if Irish people cook, the product must be Irish cookery.”⁸ National styles of eating reflect a nation’s cultural traditions and beliefs and are as much a badge of identity as coins and anthems.⁹ The national dishes served by a state might fall under what Michael Billig refers to as “banal nationalism,” “the daily inculcation of nationhood by means of an array of barely-noticed signs,” a thesis which has been successfully applied to the study of Irish cottage imagery.¹⁰ This article proposes that Irish nationalism could be “flagged” in the consumption of national dishes within Irish diplomatic dining and subsequently be considered Irish cuisine. Hunger and famine has understandably been a concern of Irish food and culinary historians. Irish state dining as a result has gone unnoticed, has not received scholarly attention, and has been considered heretofore, as in France, an “unidentified political object.”

The multidisciplinary of existing research into national cuisines is evident. Placed under the term “food studies,” these approaches fall within the bowerbird methodology as outlined by Webb and Brien, Levi-Strauss’s term *le bricoleur*, and the research methods recommended by Mintz.¹¹ Research projects using cookbooks, national meal archetypes, newspaper content, and the targeted use of particular foods as primary sources have been carried out by anthropologists, historians, social scientists, and architects, using qualitative and/or quantitative methods to draw out the narrative on the question of a national cuisine from within their respective disciplines.¹²

Food in Power

Much of the theory and empirical research on the history of food and power from the medieval period to the eighteenth century has focused on absolutist courts with powerful monarchs and a wealthy court life.¹³ With the transformation of monarchies in the wake of the revolutionary eighteenth century, the historian's interest in stately banquets waned, despite the emergence of new loci of power such as the White House, the Elysée Palace, and international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations.¹⁴ That is not to say that academic commentary does not exist; there is a growing body of food research concerning the emergent power structures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which can be seen in the study of European courts after 1789, the analysis of the foodways of Belgian royalty, the Nobel banquets in Sweden, state dining in Italy, Britain, France, Turkey and the United States.¹⁵ The construction of a national food identity has also been examined within political food culture, culinary diplomacy, and gastrodiplomacy.¹⁶

Research into the role of dining in international relations is the contemporary equivalent of studying food in the courts of European monarchies before the French Revolution. The lack of research into the period after 1800 might be explained in part by the fact that dining in public no longer had the same role of ostentatious display and performance in the nascent democratic power structures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Research into the topic is recent, just as the acceptance of food studies by academia is recent. Rather than presenting an obstacle, lacunae might be considered an opportunity to encourage scholars to take up food at modern sites of power as a subject of research.¹⁷

Irish Diplomatic Dining 1922–1940

Arising from the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, the twenty-six counties of southern Ireland were recreated as the Irish Free State in December 1922. The Irish Free State was a self-governing dominion of the British Commonwealth. Despite membership of the Commonwealth and from 1923 the League of Nations, the newly formed state had no international existence. With no precursor department from the former British administration, the Department of External Affairs (DEA) was created. Its primary focus was securing official international recognition for the Irish Free State, the development of an Irish foreign policy, and the creation of its diplomatic service.

The Irish state table, in the context outlined above, was yet to be established. State cooking in Dublin prior to 1922 was that of the Viceroy, the representative of the British monarch in Ireland.¹⁸ Moreover, the Department of External Affairs was yet to achieve formal reciprocal diplomatic relations with most states, a standard feature of international diplomacy which comprises a series of well-established protocols, including head-of-state-level visits and official banquets in honour of visiting heads of states and their representatives. In the early 1920s Ireland's leaders were dealing with the aftermath of a civil war (1922–23) and the fact that a sizeable proportion of the population still contested the state's legitimacy. Accordingly, entertaining foreign dignitaries did not, perhaps understandably, always appear at the forefront of state matters.

The highest ranking foreign representative to visit the Irish Free State during the 1920s was Frank B. Kellogg, the American Secretary of State, who arrived in Dublin for a three-day visit on August 30, 1928. His visit was considered an indication of the strong ties of sentiment linking the Free State and the United States and generated considerable preparation.¹⁹ A state dinner was held in his honour at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin.²⁰ Conveniently located in the centre of the city and close to government buildings, the Shelbourne was by far the most popular hotel for international visitors to the city during the 1920s and 1930s. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris and London, dining in public was an important ritual that enabled people to be seen together in exclusive settings. The mere ability to pay was not enough; perceived status depended on being invited or on political and professional affiliation.²¹ Dublin mirrored London in terms of the development of restaurants and luxury hotels, although due to the popularity of gentlemen's clubs in both cities this took place a little later than in Paris.²²

In the absence of state reception rooms, distinguished visitors to the Irish Free State were hosted at dinner at hotels in Dublin city. An extract from a DEA memorandum in 1929 sets out state policy on receiving distinguished guests:

Generally, policy is to keep State hospitality as exclusive as possible, and up to this only persons and bodies of a certain type have been looked after. These would include Ministers of foreign Governments, distinguished publicists of international repute and, to a certain extent, industrial magnates. An unpretentious dinner or a luncheon given by the President or a Minister is all that has been done hereto.²³

An examination of the “unpretentious” state dinner menu served to Kellogg reveals a distinct French influence that was very much in keeping with the fine dining trends of London and Paris of that time. The influence of French haute cuisine in Dublin during the 1920s, including the presence of foreign-born chefs in the city trained in the classic French tradition, has been firmly established by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire.²⁴ The Head Chef at the Shelbourne Hotel was a Swiss national named Otto Wuest. His ten-course menu for Kellogg began with *Cantaloup Rafrachi* and *Caviar sur Canapé* as the hors d’oeuvre. This was followed by *Tortue Claire des Indes*, *Délices de Sole aux Laitances*, *Grenadin de Veau au Risotto*, *Carré d’Agneau à la Clamart*, and *Grouse Rôtie*, *Salade Waldorf*. The meal ended with *Pêches Lucullus* and *Mignardises* followed by *Champignons sur Croûte*, dessert, and coffee (fig. 1).

According to Jean Louis Flandrin, the higher the number of dishes, the more significant the meal.²⁵ Although a ten-course menu may seem extravagant from a twenty-first-century perspective, it should be remembered that a century earlier, a typical banquet for sixty guests might have seen upwards of 120 different dishes being served. The number of dishes had been decreasing, albeit slowly, since the beginning of the nineteenth century and would continue to do so throughout the twentieth century. Banquet menus served during the early twentieth century were typically ten courses long yet still retained the prestige attributed to the lengthy banquet menus of the previous century.²⁶ Consequently, the number of dishes on Kellogg’s menu is a reflection of fine dining trends of the period while at the same time demonstrating the importance attributed to the meal, and by inference, to his visit, by the Irish government.

In 1932 a change in government brought about a new era in Irish diplomatic relations. Under Eamon de Valera, the newly elected President of the Executive Council and Minister for External Affairs, it was decided that Dublin Castle was to be used as state reception rooms. The Castle was given the “greatest spring clean in its history”²⁷ and began to be used for state events, starting with the state reception during the international Eucharistic Congress of 1932, a defining event in the staunchly Catholic Ireland of the mid-twentieth century.²⁸

Under de Valera, new procedures were also put in place for the accreditation of foreign diplomats to Ireland. Whereas new envoys to the Irish Free State had, up to that point, presented their credentials to the Governor General, by March 1934 de Valera had instigated a change in protocol in which the representative of the imperial monarch was no longer present.²⁹ With the ceremonial presentation of credentials came the official banquet to be offered by the

Wines.

AMONTILLADO (Manuel Misa).

RUDESHEIM (Deinhard).

MUMM'S CORDON ROUGE, 1920.

TAYLOR'S PORT VINTAGE 1908.

LIQUEURS.

Diner.

Cantaloup Rafraichi

ou

Caviar sur Canapé

Tortue Claire des Indes

Delices de Sole aux Laitances

Grenadin de Veau au Risotto

Carré d'Agneau à la Clamart

Grouse Rôtie

Salade Waldorf

Pêches Lucullus.

Mignardises.

Champignons sur Croûte.

Dessert.

Café

FIGURE 1. State Banquet Menu for US Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg, 1928.
National Archives of Ireland, Department of the Taoiseach, TSCH/3/S5731.

new host government in honour of the new arrival. With state reception rooms now available, between 1934 and 1940 incoming ministers to Ireland presented their credentials at Dublin Castle to de Valera as the President of the Executive Council who then held the customary state banquet in their honour.

A series of Department of External Affairs archival materials covering state entertainment in the 1930s has made it possible to firmly establish the emergence of Irish diplomatic dining at Dublin Castle in 1934. The banquets were hosted by de Valera as President of the Executive Council and the corresponding menus are indicative of his position as head of government of the Irish Free State. Each one is printed with a gold harp and a gilt edge. The word *Saorstát* (Free State) appears beneath the harp on several of the menus. A gilt edge and gold crest can likewise be seen on the menus and invitations used by the Swedish royal family as hosts of the Nobel banquets.³⁰ The status of the host is indicated by the use of a symbol, a harp in the case of Ireland, and serves as a marker of the host's leading rank within society.

The menus were created by the Dublin catering company J. E. Mills Ltd., the firm selected to cater the state reception at Dublin Castle during the Eucharistic Congress.³¹ The names of the dishes were written in English, French, and français, as was customary at the time, and, in keeping with formal dining in honour of heads of state or their representatives, the menus were ten courses long, a reflection of state dining in France and Sweden of the same period.³² William Derham's assertion that de Valera appropriated the Throne Room where the banquets were held "as a stage for his own brand of 'majesty'"³³ could be said to have extended to the menus served, given their resonance in international state banquets of the period. Those of the Dublin Castle series contain no trace of the "meagre repasts" and frugality for which de Valera was known.³⁴ On the contrary, haute cuisine and the influence of the French culinary tradition on public dining in Dublin continued to be very much in evidence throughout.

For example, at the first banquet under the new protocol, in honour of incoming American Minister McDowell on April 9, 1934, guests were served a ten-course menu which featured dishes such as *Clear Turtle*, *Casseroles of Lobster*, *Dariole of Foies Gras*, *Asparagus Mousseline*, *Champagne Sauce*, *Biscuit Glace*, and *Angels on Horseback*.³⁵ Several months later, for German Minister von Kuhlmann, diners were served, among other dishes, *Bisque*, *Braised Sole*, *Cardinal Sauce*, and *Vol-au-vent Financière* from a ten-course menu.³⁶ Equally, guests at the banquet for the American Minister Owsley in July 1935 were served dishes such as *Brunoise*, *Trout Meunière*, *Foies Gras*, *Asparagus Mousseline*, and

Devils on Horseback.³⁷ Each of these dishes, like those served at the state banquet for Kellogg in 1928, can be found in *Le Répertoire de la Cuisine* and *Larousse Gastronomique* by name and/or preparation, clearly indicating their origin in the French culinary register.³⁸

The trend of entertaining foreign envoys at Dublin Castle continued throughout the 1930s and was also extended to include important visitors such as the Prime Minister of Australia (1935), the Prime Minister of Tasmania (1935), the Postmaster General of the United States (1936) and the American Ambassador to Britain, J. P. Kennedy (1938). The series culminated in a six-course state banquet in honour of the newly appointed American Minister Gray on April 15, 1940.³⁹ The number of courses offered at state banquets in other countries had continued to decrease in the 1930s and this downward trend was slowly reflected at Dublin Castle where by 1938 guests were offered nine courses.⁴⁰ Although unconfirmed, Gray's shorter menu may have been due to the outbreak of World War II also, given that once state banquets resumed after the conflict, dinner guests were offered seven courses.⁴¹

By the end of the period of state dining at Dublin Castle, the Irish Free State of 1922 had been transformed. Under the Constitution of Ireland of 1937 the state was renamed Ireland, or in the Irish language Éire. As the head of government, de Valera's title changed to *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister), but he remained Minister for External Affairs. In 1939 Ireland's first President, Douglas Hyde, took up official residence as head of state in *Áras an Uachtaráin*, formerly the British Vice-Regal Lodge, in Dublin's Phoenix Park. The State Apartments at Dublin Castle were renovated once more, and by May 1941 the DEA had taken up permanent residence at Iveagh House, a former Georgian townhouse of the Guinness dynasty on Dublin's St. Stephen's Green, where it remains located to this day. From its new address, External Affairs had a venue that would become a window to the world of Irish foreign policy and diplomatic relations. With *Áras an Uachtaráin*, Dublin Castle, and Iveagh House, Dublin now had a suite of state reception rooms which would form the core of state hospitality for the next half century.

Irish Diplomatic Dining 1941–1963

Of the three, Iveagh House became the strategic centre of Irish diplomatic dining in the post-war period. With a permanent venue now available for state entertaining, the DEA's Protocol Division began to establish procedures

for precedence, issuing invitations, drawing up guest lists, serving alcohol, and proposing toasts at state occasions, all to cater to the increasing number of important visitors to the state.⁴²

A project to establish the material culture of the Irish state table also began during this period. In a letter to the Office of Public Works (OPW) on behalf of the Minister for External Affairs in October 1946, a request was made for a high-quality dinner service with corresponding glassware for 120 persons bearing the official symbol of the state for official entertaining at Iveagh House. The items were to be of Irish manufacture, but the Minister was aware that the quality he required was not currently manufactured in Ireland and suggested that the order be placed in “Britain, France or Sweden,” which were known for the excellence of “products of this character.”⁴³ A request for tableware of such high quality was in stark contrast to the poverty afflicting Ireland in the 1940s. Equally, the instructions to purchase the items abroad were strikingly different from the protectionist economic policies of the Fianna Fáil government.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the request launched a project by which all government buildings, Irish representations abroad, and *Áras an Uachtaráin* were supplied with standardized tableware by the early 1960s. The items ultimately selected were Waterford Crystal glassware, Newbridge cutlery, Arklow Pottery chinaware, and Irish linen, all of which continue to be used on the state table today.⁴⁵

Prior to de Valera’s request in 1946, the state had not acquired official tableware for its suite of reception rooms. The hotel venues of the 1920s and the catering firms of the 1930s and 1940s had provided the tableware necessary. The Irish Free State legations established between 1922 and 1940 had been supplied with tableware by the OPW, but only the individual placemats of Carrickmacross Lace which they received were made in Ireland. Some, but not all, of the linen at the legations was Irish made. Most, but not all, of the items of glassware, china, and silverware were purchased by the OPW and none of them had been made in Ireland. Although the wish had been expressed in July 1929 by the Minister for External Affairs, Patrick McGilligan, that the legations be furnished with items of *Saorstát* manufacture, for logistical, financial, and practical reasons, this directive was only applied to a portion of the furniture.⁴⁶

As noted earlier, the downward trend in the number of courses offered in international fine dining was also apparent at Irish state banquets, where seven courses, rather than ten, were offered by 1946.⁴⁷ A change in the language used on Irish state menus is also evident by that time. In a letter to the Department of Education in September 1947, External Affairs wrote, “we find it necessary to

provide menus in Irish,” and requested the department’s assistance in translating a sample list of menu dishes from English to Irish in what was clearly a shift from the English- and French-language menus of previous decades.⁴⁸ Mac Con Iomaire also points to a new culinary aesthetic emerging during the same period, inspired by the move to the helm of fine dining restaurants by Irish chefs trained in the French culinary tradition and which may have resulted in the change in listings of certain restaurants in the 1965 *Egon-Ronay Guide* from French cuisine to Franco-Irish cuisine.⁴⁹ The trend appears to have begun with *An Tóstal*, a cultural festival designed to boost tourism launched in April 1953.⁵⁰ Part of this movement was the promotion of local Irish ingredients and this is particularly evident on a gala dinner menu by Irish head chef, Maurice O’Looney, at the Shelbourne Hotel in 1955.⁵¹ His menu featured *Perles de Galway Givrées*, *Le Suprême de Sole Dun Laoghaire Shelbourne*, *Le Coeur de Filet de Kildare Wellington*, *Le Perdreau des Plaines d’Emeraude*, and *Poire Praline Belle Colleen*,⁵² clear evidence of showcasing Irish gourmet ingredients within the French classical repertoire, the cornerstone of what was to become Franco-Irish cuisine.

In 1963, the White House and *Áras an Uachtaráin* simultaneously announced that the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, had accepted President de Valera’s invitation to visit Ireland. President Kennedy was not the first head of state who made an official visit to Ireland. That honour went to Prince Rainier and Princess Grace of Monaco in 1961, but there had been nothing of such national and international significance since the 1932 Eucharistic Congress.⁵³ A state dinner in President Kennedy’s honour was to be hosted by de Valera’s successor, Taoiseach Lemass at Iveagh House on June 27, 1963.⁵⁴ There was a flurry of activity in preparation for the evening. Lists of the required tableware and inventories of the cutlery in Iveagh House were drawn up and calculations were made as to how many of each item would be required on the night depending on the number of diners and the menu served. Requests for extra table linen and cutlery were sent to the OPW. Sixty gilt chairs and twelve extra coffee tables were required. Housekeeping decided to keep the hand-tufted carpets but noted that the curtains in the main hall might need to be replaced.

The Russell Hotel was to cater the state dinner and, as procedure required, forwarded sample menus to External Affairs for consideration. As might be expected, they reflected the cuisine that would see the hotel win Ireland’s first Michelin star a decade later.⁵⁵ Suggestions included *Foie Gras de Strasbourg Truffe*, *Crème d’Avocado Florida*, *Consommé Double aux Profiterolles*, *Le Timbale de Homard à l’Irlandaise*, *Saumon d’Irlande Froid Sauce Tartare*,

menu

Saumon Fumé d'Irlande

Tortue Claire au Jerez

Paillettes au Parmesan

Tournedos aux Champignons

Dommes Nouvelles Persillées

Petits Pois Frais au Beurre

Fraises Rafraîchies

Crème Fraîche

Petits Fours

Café

menu

Βρασόν Δεσταιτέ να ηέιρεανν

Δηραιτ Σμυόαν αρ Σειριτ

Calόγα Παρημέιρεάα

Στείγιní Ιε Μυιριυάμ

Πράταί Νυα Πειρπilleαά

Πίρεαννα Ύρα αρ Ιm

Σύ Τάλν Κυιρνίτε

Υάαταρ Ύρ

Σίρσίní Ιολοαάαα

Caίρε

FIGURE 2. State Banquet Menu for United States President, John F. Kennedy, 1963. National Archives of Ireland, Department of External Affairs, DFA/434/682/20.

*Le Carré d'Agneau de Lait Roti, Tournedos Sauté Escoffier, Biscuit Glace, and Ananas Voile Présidence.*⁵⁶

If a menu is a public declaration by a host towards their guests,⁵⁷ then the dishes suggested by the Russell Hotel reflected the honour which the Irish government wished to bestow upon an important guest such as President Kennedy. They also demonstrated the continuing downward trend by offering six courses, and although the final menu does not contain an Irish-themed dish in each course, Irish gourmet ingredients were present.

Ultimately, on the advice given by President Kennedy's aides that he would prefer lighter fare given the busy schedule of the day in question, a different menu was served. The food appears considerably lighter than that in the sample menus yet retains the same number of courses. In keeping with the language shift noted earlier, the menus were printed in Irish and French.⁵⁸ The meal opened with Irish smoked salmon followed by clear turtle soup, filet mignon with mushroom sauce, new potatoes, and fresh garden peas and closed with fresh strawberries and cream, petits fours, and finally, coffee (**fig. 2**). The meal was accompanied by two French wines: a *Château Tuquet* 1959 white and a *Le Cortin* 1959 red, both grand crus and considered to be of excellent vintage.⁵⁹

Irish Diplomatic Dining, 2011

If President Kennedy's visit was considered the most significant since the foundation of the state, the state banquet in honour of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain during her official visit to Ireland in 2011 was described by Dublin Castle staff as "history in the making" and "the most state managed state event" they had ever witnessed.⁶⁰ The organization of the banquet menu was overseen by the Protocol Service of External Affairs (by now Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Bord Bia, the Irish Food Board. Created in 1994, the role of Bord Bia "is to act as a link between Irish food, drink, and horticulture suppliers and ... customers throughout the world."⁶¹ Quite apart from the symbolic meaning attributed to Queen Elizabeth's visit, the arrival of the monarch was considered a vital opportunity to generate "positive media coverage" and boost "the ailing British market," whose visitor numbers had been falling in recent years.⁶²

The main primary sources consulted on the earlier Irish diplomatic meals were the archives of the Irish government; however, those pertaining to the state banquet for Queen Elizabeth are unavailable.⁶³ Instead, its recentness has

permitted access to primary sources of a different nature: interviews with the chef responsible for creating the menu and digital images of the food served, both of which are unavailable for the state banquets of 1928 and 1963. Ross Lewis, one of Ireland's leading Michelin-starred chefs and Chef Patron of Restaurant Chapter One in Dublin was asked to create the banquet menu.⁶⁴ He was not informed of the name of the guest of honour until vetting by the security divisions of the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had been completed. He then attended a series of meetings with the heads of the two departments and Bord Bia where he was given the following brief: the menu was to be Irish, the main course had to showcase beef, and the entire meal was to feature the very best of Irish ingredients, all of which were to be sourced on the island of Ireland. The brief did not pose any particular difficulty. Lewis had been using nationally sourced ingredients in his restaurant for many years. Since beef was one of Ireland's largest exports, it made sense to feature that meat as the pillar-stone of an Irish banquet.⁶⁵ There were no dietary requirements or specific requests made on behalf of the monarch or her representatives although Lewis's initial plans to feature lobster in the starter and rhubarb in the dessert had to be abandoned. Shellfish is excluded de facto from Irish state banquets as a precautionary measure and rhubarb was being served on the Queen's lunch menu on the day of the banquet.

Several draft menus were drawn up and a number of tastings took place. Myriad dishes were prepared and various wines were tasted with the different courses; the final choice being a *Château Lynch-Bages* 1998 red and a *Château de Fieuzal* 2005 white, both from French Bordeaux estates with an Irish connection. Two months and two sittings later, the four-course menu was signed off by officials from the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The menu, discussed in detail below, opened with cured salmon followed by rib of beef, ox cheek and tongue with smoked champ and fried spring cabbage, and closed with a Carrageen cream served with strawberries, yoghurt mousse, and brown bread sugar biscuits, followed by a cheese course of Knockdrinna, Milleens, Cashel Blue, and Glebe Brethan.

The very distinctive Irish nature of the menu requested by the brief is evident in the sourcing of the ingredients and the dishes from the Irish culinary repertoire such as salmon, champ, ox cheek, tongue, and brown soda bread.⁶⁶ It is this part of the brief—the evolution towards an Irish menu and the existence of an Irish cuisine—that has been the focus of this article. How did Irish state dining, let alone an Irish menu, come about?

The State Dinner Menus

As well as announcing the names of the dishes to be served, a menu may be considered to be an indicator of the cultural, social, and political life of any given period.⁶⁷ Kellogg's 1928 ten-course menu was very much in keeping with fine dining in Paris and London. Ten courses were standard for a banquet of this type, as was the language used: French, English, and *franglais*. The menu sequence (the order in which the dishes were served) was also typical for a banquet of this kind. Beginning with a sweet, then savoury hors d'oeuvre (melon, then caviar) and followed by soup (consommé) and the fish course (sole). Rather than an entrée of sweetbreads, poultry, or game that would typically follow, Kellogg was served three meat courses featuring veal, lamb, and grouse as their main components. The final three courses were a sweet entremets (peaches), a savoury (mushrooms), and dessert (unspecified).

The French culinary repertoire is evident throughout Kellogg's menu and it dominated Irish state banquet menus from the 1920s. According to Stephen Mennell, La Varenne is considered to have been the first to codify a recognizable French cuisine in *Le Cuisinier François*, published in 1651.⁶⁸ Culinary fundamentals and techniques were continuously refined from this point. They evolved and developed through the ages of *Nouvelle Cuisine* (c.1740s), Carême (1783–1833), *La Belle Époque* of Auguste Escoffier (1846–1935), Fernand Point (1897–1955), and chefs such as Les Frères Troisgros and Paul Bocuse who emerged as leaders of *Nouvelle Cuisine* in the 1970s, thus confirming that the French not only invented a national cuisine but also the cuisine of the culinary profession.⁶⁹

By the time of President Kennedy's visit in 1963, the French culinary tradition was still very much present within Irish state dining although Franco-Irish cuisine had begun to emerge. Noteworthy is the reduction to six courses compared to the ten offered to Kellogg. President Kennedy's menu was written solely in Irish and French and reflects the changes in sequence and content taking place in Irish state dining at that time. The banquet opened with an hors d'oeuvre (Irish smoked salmon) and soup (clear turtle) and was followed by a meat course (beef), one dessert (strawberries), and finished with petits fours. Even though the time constraints of the day dictated the need for a modified menu, the dishes offered to President Kennedy remain an indicator of the importance accorded to his visit by the Irish government. The menu was also a precursor to the starter, main course, and dessert menu style, which we

recognize more commonly today, and is similar in content to the menu created for the 2011 banquet for Queen Elizabeth.

The key element in the creation of the menu for Queen Elizabeth was the intention to highlight Irish cuisine and this was a distinctly new development compared to the previous two state banquets. Although Irish gourmet ingredients appeared on President Kennedy's menu, French haute cuisine remained a feature of Irish state banquets up until the 1980s.⁷⁰ An official directive to use Irish dishes in state banquets from a specific date prior to 2011 has not been identified but is likely to have emerged in the 1990s in light of the changing dynamics of public dining as explored by Mac Con Iomaire.⁷¹ The menu for Queen Elizabeth was created by an Irish chef trained in the French culinary tradition. The presence of Irish head chefs in fine dining establishments had been noted in the 1950s, but by 2011 this had evolved substantially to where Irish Chef Patrons were at the helm of fine dining restaurants.⁷² The menu for Queen Elizabeth was four courses long and although the title page of the menu was written in Irish and English, the menu itself was printed in English. The dishes were made exclusively from ingredients sourced in Ireland; the only exceptions were sugar and vanilla, as Ireland does not produce either of these items.

Starter

As with President Kennedy's June visit, Queen Elizabeth's visit took place during the summer, albeit a little earlier, in mid-May. Both menus reflect the seasonality of that time of year and the ingredients most readily available. The first course for both banquets was Irish salmon. In the case of Queen Elizabeth, this was specifically wild salmon, an ingredient associated with summer (**fig. 3**).⁷³ The banquet began with a starter of organic Clare Island salmon cured in a sweet brine which was laid on top of a salmon cream combining wild smoked salmon from the Burren and Glenilen Farm crème fraîche from Cork set over a lemon balm jelly from the Tannery Cookery School Gardens in County Waterford. Garnished with horseradish cream, wild watercress, and chive flowers from Wicklow, the dish was finished with rapeseed oil from Kilkenny and a little West Cork sea salt.



FIGURE 3. State Banquet for Queen Elizabeth II at Dublin Castle, 2011 – Starter
© Ross Lewis, Restaurant Chapter One, Dublin.

Main Course

Both President Kennedy and Queen Elizabeth were served one meat course, while Kellogg was served three. The main course for both the President and the Queen was beef. In the case of President Kennedy, the cut served was tournedos (filet mignon); for Queen Elizabeth it was rib (fig. 4). Although beef was considered the pillar-stone of Irish state menus by 2011 according to Lewis, what stands out is the evolution in the number of meat courses and the type of meat served since the 1920s. In 1928 three main courses were served; by 1963 only one main course was served and this remains the trend to this day. In 1928, veal, lamb, and grouse were served. In 1963, the choice was between lamb and beef and by 2011 beef had become the centrepiece of an Irish state menu. As Kellogg's banquet took place in late August, it could be said that the meat dishes correspond with the beginning of game season. While that may be the case, it should be noted that lamb was the principal meat served for main courses in Irish state banquets between 1922 and 1940.⁷⁴ There is therefore a clear transition from lamb to beef as the focal point of Irish state dining menus between 1922 and 2011.

Potatoes did not feature on Kellogg's menu, although that is not to say that they were not served. According to the menu, the veal was accompanied by risotto, the lamb with peas, and a salad was served with the grouse. Potato appears in various guises from the French culinary repertoire on state banquet menus between 1922 and 1940, so it is possible that a potato dish was served but was simply not indicated on the menu. The same potato dish, *Prátaí Nua Peirsilleacha/Pommes Nouvelles Persillées*, appears on all three of the menus for President Kennedy, the two proposed by the Russell Hotel and the final menu served on the night. Champ, a traditional Irish dish made with mashed potatoes and scallions softened in butter and milk⁷⁵ was served at Queen Elizabeth's banquet. Lewis's version was smoked and served wrapped in a fried cabbage leaf. Queen Elizabeth was later reported to have particularly enjoyed this element of the main course.⁷⁶

For Queen Elizabeth, the main course of rib of Slaney Valley beef was served with ox cheek and tongue from Rathcoole, County Dublin. The ingredients for the smoked champ came from the eastern coastline: Wicklow cabbage with potatoes and spring onions from Dublin. The new season's broad beans and carrots were served with a garnish of wild garlic leaf.



FIGURE 4. State Banquet for Queen Elizabeth II at Dublin Castle, 2011 – Main Course
© Ross Lewis, Restaurant Chapter One, Dublin.



FIGURE 5. State Banquet for Queen Elizabeth II at Dublin Castle, 2011 – Dessert
© Ross Lewis, Restaurant Chapter One, Dublin.

Dessert

Kellogg's 1928 menu is the outlier in terms of dessert when compared to the menus for President Kennedy and Queen Elizabeth. Following his main course, Kellogg was served a sweet entremets, a savoury dish, and then an unspecified dessert. This was the typical finale of a banquet of this stature during the period. Although sweet flavours had been served early in the sequence for centuries, by the eighteenth century sweet dishes had started to migrate to the end of the meal where they appeared alongside savoury ones in the penultimate course and were always simply designated "Dessert."⁷⁷ Irish state banquets followed the same sequence between 1922 and 1940.

By 1963 this sequence had disappeared from Irish state menus and a single dessert course had become standard. This remains the case today. President Kennedy was offered one dessert course followed by petits fours and coffee. Lewis's main challenge for the dessert dish in 2011 was the fact that the state banquet for Queen Elizabeth was taking place in mid-May, a difficult spot in the Irish fruit- and vegetable-growing calendar, between the end of one season and the beginning of another. As his initial plan for rhubarb had to be discarded, he decided to serve strawberries (fig. 5). Strawberries had also been served as the dessert course for President Kennedy, although the desserts originally proposed by the Russell Hotel were rather more elaborate sounding (*Ananas Voile Présidence, Fraises Rafraichies au Grand Marnier*) than the image the final menu might conjure up (*Sú Talún Cuisnithe, Uachtar Úr/Fraises Rafraichies, Crème Fraiche*). Seasonality was most likely taken into account in 1963 as well, but for an event at the end of June, it was unlikely to have presented as significant an obstacle for Pierre Rolland, head chef at the Russell Hotel, as it did for Ross Lewis in the middle of May. Lewis had to be sure of a supplier's ability to deliver perfectly ripe, freshly picked strawberries on the day of the banquet. Once he had located the supplier and guaranteed the delivery he set about creating the dish. Westmeath strawberries were served with a cream and yoghurt from Glenilen Farm in Cork. The cream was set with Irish Carrageen moss, overlaid with strawberry jelly and sauce, and garnished with meringues made with Irish apple balsamic vinegar from Lusk in North Dublin, yoghurt mousse, and Irish soda bread tuiles made with wholemeal flour from the Mosse family mill in Kilkenny.

Cheese Course

A cheese course does not figure on Kellogg's 1928 menu, where, in keeping with custom, the final dish on the menu was simply designated "Dessert." This designation can be seen throughout Irish state menus between 1922 and 1940. Cheese, like sweet flavours, had been served across courses in the Middle Ages and, like dessert, had come to be reassigned to the end of the meal by the turn of the nineteenth century, although "no longer served at dessert but before it."⁷⁸ In light of Flandrin's assertion that by this time sweet flavours now occurred at the entremets *and* the dessert, it is safe to assume that the "Dessert" on Kellogg's menu was a sweet course.⁷⁹ A cheese course was neither proposed nor served for President Kennedy in 1963, having disappeared from state menus by then. This had evolved once more by the time Queen Elizabeth's state dinner took place in 2011. A cheese course is now very much part of an Irish fine dining menu, although in contrast to our French neighbours who serve it between the salad and dessert, in Ireland it follows dessert. Lewis chose four cheeses: Knockdrinna, a *Tomme*-style goat's milk cheese from Kilkenny; Milleens, a Munster-style cow's milk cheese produced in Cork; Cashel Blue, a cow's milk blue cheese from Tipperary; and Glebe Brethan, a *Comté*-style cheese from raw cow's milk from Louth; all served with Ditty's Oatmeal Biscuits from Castledermot in Londonderry. The meal ended with tea and coffee. The following day, President McAleese called Ross Lewis to thank him and said that the menu was not only delicious but that it was amazingly articulate in terms of the story that it told about Ireland and Irish food. She summed it up saying to him "*Ní hé go raibh sé go maith, ach go raibh sé míle uair níos fearr ná sin*" ("It's not that it was good but that it was a thousand times better").

Conclusion

This article has focused on the principal trends which have emerged in Irish diplomatic dining within the context of three state banquets which took place in Dublin between 1922 and 2011. Far from being a culinary wilderness, Irish diplomatic dining began in the 1920s and evolved in a recognizable, formalized manner at Dublin Castle from 1934 onwards. By 1941, the state had three official

venues available and established protocol for receiving distinguished guests. Differences are evident in the social, cultural, and political periods of each of the state banquets; these events mirror the international trends of their *époque* and reflect some of the changes taking place in the realm of national identity, fine dining, and the culinary profession within Ireland. The government's intention to assert its sovereign identity at the state table is evident, in particular in the emergence of state dining at Dublin Castle in 1934, the project for material culture in 1946, and the use of the Irish language in 1947. The 1950s and the early 1960s is a pivotal moment within Irish diplomatic dining. It balances the old with the new, featuring remnants of nineteenth-century French haute cuisine in elaborate French dishes while at the same time new Irish gourmet ingredients begin to feature and a new menu format starts to emerge. The changes most evident are in the number of courses offered and the food served, in particular the main course dishes. Lamb was the meat of choice in the early decades of Irish diplomatic dining, but by 2011 beef had become the main feature of an Irish state menu. The French culinary repertoire dominated the early decades. By the 1950s a move towards a Franco-Irish cuisine was evident. By 2011 there was an express intention to showcase Irish cuisine, thus highlighting the existence of a new era in Irish diplomatic dining, one resembling the approach seen in Sweden to create political meals. Early Irish diplomatic dining was markedly outward-looking, requiring an external framework and repertoire upon which to establish protocol for receiving state guests. By 2011, this was neither necessary nor a feature of Irish state dining. Irish diplomatic dining had evolved and developed to such a point that the international confidence it had achieved was now reflected in and on its state table, something which would have been inconceivable less than a century earlier. ♣

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- 68 Mennell, *All Manners*, 71.
- 69 Mac Con Iomaire, “Emergence, Development, and Influence,” 1:83, 2:402; Trubek, *Haute Cuisine*.
- 70 For example, at the state dinner in honour of the President of India at Dublin Castle in May 1982 guests were served *Hors d’oeuvres variés, Consommé de tomates, Suprême de volaille princesse, Tomates farcies, Carottes Vichy, Haricots verts, Pommes duchesse*, and *Fraises à la crème*. NAI, DFA 2014/106/44 State Visit of President of India, May 1982.
- 71 Mac Con Iomaire, “Haute Cuisine Restaurants.”
- 72 Mac Con Iomaire, “Haute Cuisine Restaurants.”
- 73 Mac Con Iomaire, “Ireland.”
- 74 See Mahon, “Irish Diplomatic Dining.”
- 75 Mac Con Iomaire and Gallagher, “Potato in Irish Cuisine,” 164.
- 76 Lewis, interview.
- 77 Flandrin, *Arranging the Meal*, 87–88, 105.
- 78 Flandrin, *Arranging the Meal*, 108.
- 79 Flandrin, *Arranging the Meal*, 105.