

A taster from the photographic archive of the Irish Tourist Board 1940 – 1990: was there a food & beverage revolution?

Introduction

Aside from substantial work done in relation to the Irish dependence on the potato and the Great Famine (1845–1852), there appears to be a gap in the literature on what actually constituted ‘Irish cuisine’, historically. This is likely due to the lack of appropriate source material, and an element of ideological resistance to such topics in Ireland (Flavin, 2013 Pg 2). Perceptions of Irish cuisine, therefore, possibly depend on other factors.

Ireland is one of a small number of countries (the others being China, Mexico, Italy, Australia, perhaps) whose cultural background has been commoditised, particularly in North America. This commoditisation of ‘Irishness’ is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, the use of clichéd, romanticised images and dishes has increased interest in the Irish culture, driving tourism and cultural products. This idea of ‘Irishness’ in relation to gastronomy is important, as its commoditisation can result in a less authentic tourist experience both gastronomically and more generally in Irish tourism.

Having outlined these perspectives and context, this paper will highlight a hitherto unexplored resource – the photographic archive of the Irish Tourist Board, previously known as Bórd Fáilte, and now known as Fáilte Ireland. The paper will attempt to explore the extent food, if at all, contributed to this commoditisation, as featured in contemporaneous photographs intended for promotional use, between 1940 and 1990.

Irish Cuisine or national diet?

Ireland has moved from being a subsistence economy at the time of the 1845 Great Famine to be an open market economy today. Yet, throughout that period Ireland was, and is, a major European exporter of food and people – first to the UK, the US and later Europe. The key commodities have changed during this period from being grain and plant based to livestock and dairy products, but in spite of the needs at home, exports remained a priority – either as a part of the British Empire, or as a new, independent, republic. Unfortunately, the Irish diaspora caused by the Irish famine created the association that food, or the lack of it, was unreliable, unless it was merely a commodity to be sold to others according to John McKenna (McKenna, 2001).

In this context, some commentators have suggested that what constitutes a national diet is defined by the “collective imaginings” of a nation’s people, even if the individuals who constitute that collective rarely (or never) actually consume the components of that diet (Ashley et al., 2004). Alan Davidson, for example, takes the view that few people eat cooked breakfasts at home, but do expect them to be available in any hotel or restaurant (Davidson and Jaine, 2006 Pg 104). Ashley et al develop this insight further in their exploration of the “imagined community” concept, particularly in relation to the role of food culture in the construction of a nation (Ashley et al., 2004 Pg 81). They draw on and discuss Benedict Anderson’s concept: that nations are imagined in so far as they are the focus of a sense of belonging by people who cannot hope to know each other at first hand. Globalised communications facilitate the formation of endemic nationalism, and typical dishes have real significance as an element in the common culture, even if not normally consumed by those in the actual community. The Irish Breakfast is a good example in that it acquired significance in the imagined community that is part of Irish culture, part of a relatively new nation. A contributory factor is the complexity of flavours (which depend on the senses) that Fritz Blank refers to as “producing the most vivid memories” (Blank, 2006 Pg 65). In the case of the Irish breakfast, that is exemplified by the *smell* of rashers (thin slices of loin bacon) cooking in the pan; the *sound* of the sizzle of sausages bursting; the crumbly *feel* of soda bread (a round loaf made with soda and buttermilk); the *sight* of a perfectly cooked egg with a deep coloured yellow yolk; the *taste* of the combinations of those elements in the mouth (for more on bacon and breakfast, see Mac Con Iomaire, 2003, Morris, 2003). The consequent state of mind, full of emotionally powerful memories of a world left behind, a world both hard and impoverished yet one of home if an emigrant; a world of the urban Irish in Ireland that still harbours the folk memory of the close links with the land just one generation ago (Morris, 2003).

The complexity of national dishes can be illustrated further when Douglas’s views on ethnic food (i.e. the food habits of immigrants in a host country) are considered in the context of the Irish diaspora. She argues that the survival of an ethnic food system depends on some degree of social segregation of the ethnic minority, where ethnic distinctiveness is valued. Furthermore, she believes that, where ethnic identity is a vital issue, ethnic foods are revived, new items are recruited to the old tradition and a distinct cuisine is established, although she seems to be referring to the American experience (Douglas, 2003 Pg 28 - 30). Rachelle Saltzman also looked at food as a marker of ethnic identity, again in the USA, this time in the Catskills Mountains on the east coast. She found that a few well known dishes tend to

assume greater importance than the overall ethnic character of the cuisine (Saltzman, 2003). In the so-called Irish Alps of East Durham, the Full Irish Breakfast (as part of a wider, more American menu) is offered to visitors, reflecting the typical offering of B&B's and hotels in Ireland. She concluded that the ethnic Irish were representing the wider perception (the imagined community mentioned earlier) of what a tourist might experience in Ireland rather than a re-creation of home.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Kneafsey and Cox have showed how Irish women in Coventry used food to demonstrate or create a sense of Irishness, but in a more overt manner than the American example above, and out of necessity (Kneafsey and Cox, 2002). Foods perceived as traditional, such as specific brands of tea (Barry's) and butter (Kerrygold), bacon, sausages and traditional items such as soda bread (the constituents of the Irish breakfast), were sought out to denote Irishness in their adopted community while also symbolising an idealised memory of Ireland rather than the modern commercial Ireland of the time (1960's). This was despite similar British foods being available locally. Kneafsey and Cox concluded that food consumption practices can help to reflect and constitute Irishness.

The Irish women of Coventry looked for the food brands that they knew from Ireland and this highlights the cultural dimensions of advertising. The Coventry example supports Goddard's suggestion that advertising messages can both reflect and construct cultural values (Goddard, 1998). Food, cuisine and gastronomy are tied to place. *À la France* (the archetypical culinary nationalist), culinary distinction is utilized as a marker of identity in places such as Norway and Singapore, New Zealand and Scotland in order to promote both tourism and exports (Mulcahy, 2014). Freda Mishan develops this idea further by explicitly pointing out that advertisers in Ireland have regularly exploited the context of the Irish diaspora by using images of Irish emigrants in distant locations wistfully indulging in Irish products (Mishan, 2005). Typically, the products and geographies included Barry's Tea in the United States, Galtee Rashers in Russia, or Harp Lager in Dubai (the advertising for which featured a fried egg – are they using a key component of the Irish breakfast to create the connection?). These are vivid examples of the semiotics of food that have been used to create a link to the mother country (Ireland) in the minds of emigrants, cooks and consumers (who are potential tourists and visitors, of course), no matter where they actually reside.

Irishness and its relationship to gastronomy and tourism

Some exploration of the idea of 'Irishness' in relation to gastronomy is important, given the implicit interpretations in some of the images selected later on. Ireland is arguably a victim

of its own success (or misfortune, depending on your perspective) as it is such a global ethnic and cultural brand, its meanings seem quite diverse, and this influences the Irish experience for each visitor. Consequently, authenticity and forms of economic, social, cultural and culinary capital (Naccarato and LeBesco, 2012, Buscemi, 2014) are also germane to this discussion about Irish gastronomic tourism. While these concepts are not specific to gastronomic tourism, they inform and deepen an understanding of the dynamics of contemporary gastronomic tourism. For one German tourist to County Mayo (Ireland's most western county), Ireland is authentic because "it is at the edge" (Kneafsey, 1998 Pg 117) What was meant by the 'edge' from the German's perspective? That author believed that possibly 'the edge' could have been the cultural periphery, the romantic Western seaboard, or a place apart.

Essentially, visiting Ireland or being Irish is complex – 'Irish' is difficult to define, so what (or who) is Irish, and from what perspective? One commentator observed that Irish culture, "at once Western and colonised, white and racially other, imperial and subjugated, became marginal in the sense of existing at the edge of two experiences" (Graham, 2001). Is a person Irish if; one is born in Ireland; born 'there' and raised 'here' (depending, of course, on location); has become a naturalised citizen; is a child of naturalised parents? Current events and past history are not that concerned with nationality and its discontents *per se*: as another commentator describes it, "great swathes of contemporary popular culture, multinational capitalism, migrants and refugee seekers, all participate in and are moved by global forces that traverse this island of Ireland, blind to the intricate complexities of its past" (Connolly, 2003 Pg 2-3). Yet, every part of Europe has been influenced in some way by similar industrial forces and economic trends, so maybe Irishness is not unique (Kneafsey, 1994). Others argue that, influenced by a colonial past and dependant on imported Anglo American intellectual models, Irishness is "besieged by globalisation, and seen to have bought in fully to membership of the EU, yielding yet again to an external authority" (Balzano et al., 2007, xviii).

Alternatively, are you Irish if you are a member or descendant of the diaspora to Argentina, England, America, Australia, or to any country although you have never visited Ireland? The Irish diaspora can be the Other, but also part of Us. In relation to food, for example, the diaspora can determine if something is authentic because of their ethnicity, but are considered Other in their adopted land if they talk about it. Yet, more than likely, they are unable to make or cook it. Diasporic identities reconstitute and complicate representations and conceptions of 'Irishness', particularly "the interrelations of 'home' and diaspora in the

context of a largely Anglo-American global media industry and the images of 'Irishness' and 'Ireland' that this produces" (Balzano et al., 2007, xiii). In more generic terms, Massimo Montanari arrives at a similar point of view: "Identity does not exist without exchange. Identity is defined and constructed *as a function* (author's emphasis) of an exchange that is simultaneously economic and cultural, the market and the skill, the merchandise and the experience" (Montanari, 2012, Pg 163 -164).

These questions have implications for tourism and gastronomy in Ireland. Ireland is one of a small number of countries (the others being China, Mexico, Italy, Australia) whose cultural background has been commodified, particularly in America, where the media on one hand, and businesses with cultural themes on the other, underline stereotypical imagery resulting in "Hollywoodisation" of a culture through consumption (Wood and Munoz, 2007, 252). For example, Diane Negra examines how Ireland plays a specific role in the USA wedding market where "Ireland is conceptualized as a national site which one can remake or fortify one's 'family values' and access a consoling 'authentic' white ethnicity" (Negra, 2007). One wonders how this affects non-white ethnic Americans when they consider Ireland as a tourist destination.

This commodification of Irishness is a double edged sword. On one hand, the use of clichéd, romanticised images and dishes could increase interest in a culture, driving tourism and cultural products. On the other, a visit to Ireland may disappoint if the experience does not live up to expectations, and local business may react accordingly. For example, there is evidence traditional pubs in Dublin have changed interior design and gastronomic offerings so that they are more consistent with themed pubs outside of Ireland (Wood and Munoz, 2007). In effect, the local 'authentic' Irish cultural and gastronomic experience upon which the commodification was originally based is evolving, raising obvious authenticity and loss of cultural identity issues and is likely to affect not only the livelihood and lifestyle of the local Dublin population, but Irish tourism generally.

Ireland's imagery highlights how image is not just that communicated by a tourism promotion, but through a wide variety of other activity such as literature, media, commercial advertising, the sectoral promotional work of state agencies, and personal experience (Henchion and McIntyre, 2000). Examples of commercial advertising that impact the Irish image internationally are easily found; Guinness, Jameson whiskey, and Kerrygold butter are obvious candidates. Specifically in the USA, Lucky Charms Cereals and Irish Spring soap have specifically utilised themes of Irishness to sanitise or romanticise their commodities, and some of the advertising for Irish tourism in the past were perceived to translate the

traditional American consumption of Ireland into a touristic concept (Negra, 2001). Perhaps they still are, but updated for a new generation.

Aside from the fact that Irish images and their meanings may differ between individuals across context, time, and geography, the image that is being created for Ireland's gastronomic tourism may be a fusion of disparate elements rather than consisting of a holistic entity (Mulcahy, forthcoming). Destinations are constructed through images that are either engineered by those tasked with promoting tourist destinations, or evolve organically from a variety of sources outside the control of destination marketers. The image of Ireland portrayed in the past by tourism agencies has existed in direct opposition to the modern, technology driven, knowledge economy image portrayed by other sectors of economic, political and cultural activity, and continues to do so (Quinn, 1994). However, given the onset and rapid development of the digital economy, social media, and the use of imagery, there are different challenges emerging for all concerned with promotion and marketing. Images from organic sources are perceived to be more credible, as opposed to those which Quinn (1994) describes as manufactured images. For example, recent empirical research shows that US tourists still prefer to imagine Ireland as a pre-modern nation. The US participants in that research shared images of their experiences in Ireland, and those images aligned with that imagined view of Ireland. Consequently, the research concluded that, irrespective of how a destination is promoted, tourists will capture images during their visit that reflect their own imagined view of that destination (Ruane, 2014). This, of course, is likely to reinforce the imagined Ireland when they return home and share their images with family and friends. Even within the food industry itself, there is evidence of polarisation between the agro-food sector and what Sage (2003) calls alternative good food networks. There is also an imbalance between the natural food images intended to attract tourists, and the patterns of consumption of the majority of the Irish population (i.e. strong growth in the convenience and fast food sectors) (Sage, 2003). Ultimately, in whatever medium, contradictory messages imply a degree of pretence resulting in a consequent lack of belief and trust in those images in the consumer mind.

From an external perspective, some commentators have regarded Ireland (along with New Zealand) as being to the forefront of using regional images to market Irish food and tourism products and to reinforce the national brand (Hall et al., 2003). They see as significant the use of place in the cross promotion of food and tourism with the development of Brand Ireland, giving the 2002 campaign by Bórd Bia (the Irish government food board) in western

USA as an example.¹ It is not clear if Hall et al assumed a collaborative state agency approach, but the example does highlight the idea of a national brand, which is of advantage to all. New Zealand is a case in point, where there are reciprocal effects created between a country's food and drink industry and its tourism industry (Mulcahy, 2015). When the products do well overseas, it has an effect on tourism, and when visitors enjoy products on their home ground, this creates a market for those products elsewhere (Canavan et al., 2007).

Images from the Archive

The selection of images in this paper is from an initial search of the archive which identified 256 negatives that might depict a food or a food activity. Those 256 negatives were digitally scanned and then assessed again to confirm that they did depict a food or food activity. As one would expect, there are a large number of very similar images, where the photographer took several shots of the same scene, with slight variations. Twelve images, ranging in date from 1940, up to 1990, were selected for this paper.

1940 – 1960: Plates 1 - 7



Plate 1

**Archive
caption: Milk
Cart 81**

¹ Interestingly, the participating companies were all quite industrial, bar the Farmhouse Cheese Group. The others were Nestlé Ireland Ltd., McCann's Irish Oatmeal, Irish Biscuits Ltd., Jacob's Biscuits, Barry's Tea and the Irish Dairy Board. Obviously, the cost of such a promotion is prohibitive to small producers.



Plate 2

**Archive Caption: TY55_56 Dun Aengus.
Possibly 1956**

The SS Dun Aengus was a passenger and cargo boat which operated between Galway and the Aran Islands from 1912 to 1958. In this image cattle are being loaded from Galway pier on board and, below, are then transferred to one of the Aran Islands.



Plate 3 Archive Caption: TY48_56 Cattle Swim. Possibly 1956



Plate 4 Archive Caption: TY93_48 OMearas

Note the poster advertising GAA challenge match on Sunday 19 Sept 1948, thus dating this image.



Plate 5 Archive Caption: TY 239 Gorumna. Undated

Gorumna is an island on the west coast of Ireland, forming part of County Galway.



Plate 6
Archive Caption: Inisheer 116.
Undated

Inisheer is the smallest and most eastern of the Aran Islands and lies 8 kilometres off the west coast of County Clare.

The date on the calendar is 1959.

It would appear that this is staged, given the items (the model of the currach boat, the traditional woven 'crios' belt) being handled by the two men. In addition the combined pose of the customer along with his clothing suggest a stage scene.

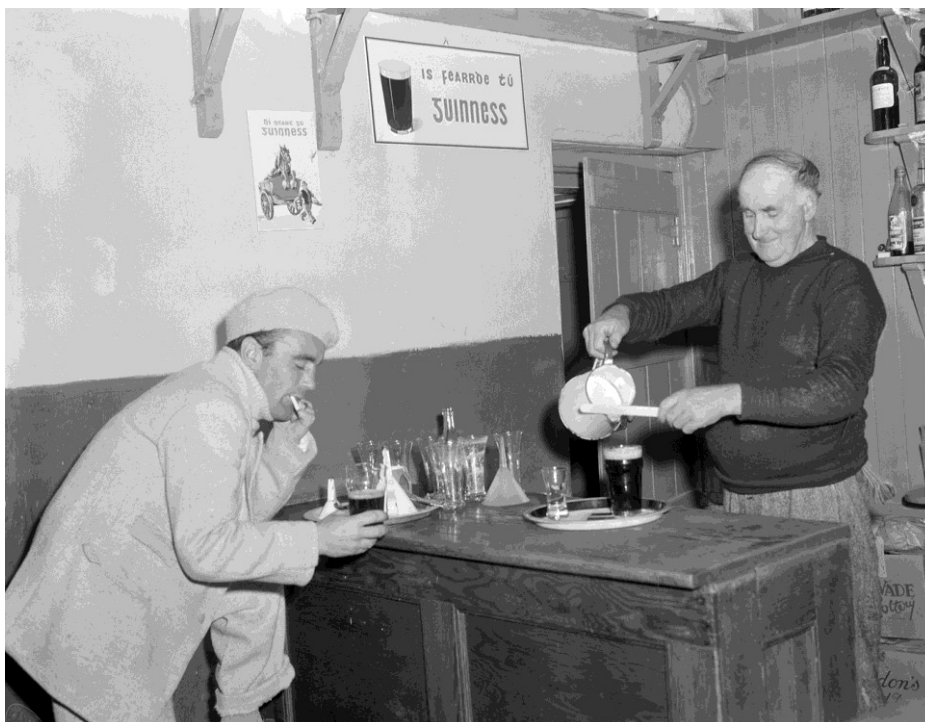


Plate 7
Archive Caption: Inisheer 115.
Undated

Possibly dated 1959, and staged, given the same customer in a similar pose and clothes as in Plate 6.

1960 – 1980: Plates 8 - 11



Plate 8
Archive Caption:
Journalists Kinsale.
Undated

Given the picture windows, this is probably The Trident Hotel, built on the water's edge of Kinsale harbour in 1966. One of the male guests is holding a sheet of paper which has the Trident logo on it.

A formal buffet, reflecting the fashion for classical (French?) cuisine.



Plate 9
Archive caption:
Kenmare. Undated

Note the title on what appears to be a butter sculpture, which has the text "Seafood Exhibition, Kenmare 1971"

A classical presentation, utilising a mirror for the base, aspic jelly, etc.



Plate 10

Archive Caption: GSR Parknasilla2. Undated

The caption refers to the Great Southern Hotel, in Parknasilla, Co Kerry, which was operated in the style of the ‘grand hotels’ of Britain and Switzerland.

This appears to be a staged scene, in a classical, formal manner featuring full table setting, linen, and a side table with the elements of the meal – a soup tureen, lobster, vegetables, breads, wines and cheeseboard.



Plate 11

Archive Caption: Armstrongs19. Undated.

Armstrong's Barn was a restaurant in Annamoe, County Wicklow, which was awarded a Michelin star in 1977. The restaurant closed in 1988.

The less formal setting contrasted with the use of ‘silver service’ is interesting in its attempt to appear progressive.

1980 – 1990: Plate 12



Plate 12 Archive Caption: Image 6. Undated

Other images in the archive show some of the same people that are in this image beside a banner which names the event as the 35th Clarenbridge Oyster Festival. The festival is held annually in Galway on the west coast of Ireland on the last weekend of September, the first month of the oyster season, and was inaugurated in 1954. This dates the image as 1989. Note the presence of Keith Floyd (second from right), a celebrity and TV chef in the late 1980's, and the sponsor being Murphy's stout rather than Guinness, who was the original sponsor.

Conclusion

The paper set out to explore the extent food, if at all, contributed to the commoditisation of Irishness, as featured in contemporaneous photographs intended for promotional use by the State tourism bodies, between 1940 and 1990. It also sought to identify whether the subject matter, as selected for promotional use, reflected Irish cuisine was evolving over the same period. The limitation, of course, is that the photographs in the archive were actually used in promotional campaigns during the periods covered by this paper, and this was not addressed. It is legitimate to assume that the images in the archive are there due to specific promotional campaign decisions by Bórd Fáilte and others, and that photographers, either in house or commissioned, sought to fulfil the briefs those promotional campaigns required. On that basis, the archive is useful for the purposes of this paper, and many others, in all probability.

Based on the limited selection of images used, it appears reasonable to conclude that, up to 1960, images which confirmed the continued existence of ‘old’ Ireland to the diaspora were very much in the brief given to the photographers, thus maintaining a version of Irishness similar to the Coventry women discussed above. It is interesting, however, that while some appear to have been staged (Plates 4, 6 and 7), others were not (Plates 1, 2, 3, and 5). What is notable, however, is that food does not feature, except as an ingredient (cattle, potatoes, grain, milk), but beverages do, particularly stout.

From 1960 onwards, though, the tone of the images changes, reflecting the changes in Ireland, particularly in tourism as both access and the economy grew. While there is still a significant element of staging in Plates 10 and 11, the tone is more confident, and denotes a desire to demonstrate that the Irish ‘have arrived’ in terms of food and its surroundings, by alluding to the French culinary hegemony of the time. This is clearly evident in Plates 8 and 9, demonstrating that the skills to produce such culinary showpieces was clearly present, and that consumers were engaging with it. From the perspective of an Irish cuisine, however, there seems to be a reliance on superb ingredients, rather than dishes – see Plates 8 and 10, which feature seafood (lobster, crab, salmon), cheese, vegetables, and bread scones. Beverages feature, but in a more refined manner and combined with food, suggesting moderation and decorum, which would appeal to some of the international tourist markets Ireland desired.

Finally, the image from 1989 in Plate 12 signifies a further development, and is probably more familiar today. Food is now shown to be more mainstream, the subject of a festival, and endorsed by the dignitaries in the picture – most notably, Keith Floyd, a TV chef personality at the time. Beverages feature, alluding to the perceived tradition of combining oysters with stout, and a well known beverage brand is the primary sponsor.

In totality, even the limited selection of images used can show a remarkable evolution of the subjects considered to be important for tourism promotional purposes by the State over fifty years. As a by-product, the selection also shows the revolution that has taken place in that time in terms of Irish food and beverages, and our confidence around it.

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