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36 IRISH TOWN GIBRALTAR
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The architecture of Irish Town brings together the various influences that impacted on Gibraltar's architects in the 19th century.

At street level, there was a rhythm of arches: doors and shop windows. On upper floors, there were windows with Italianate shutters, reflecting Genoese influence. Windows were traditionally British timber sash windows, reflecting Portuguese influence. The Cooperage was in this area. It was where barrels were made and repaired. They were critical for storage in the 18th century.

No 11 and No 17
The winches are a reminder of the commercial character of the old street. Parliament Lane got its name from the original meeting house of the freemasons, where they would "parley".

The short western section of Parliament Lane shows the original street level, which is well below the height of the new street that was built immediately behind the parapet of the old city wall.

No 33
Inside the shop can be seen a large fan light of coloured glass, and an ornate ceiling. This was once a music hall, the **Salon Ideal**. It was also Gibraltar's first cinema, prior to World War I.

No 57
19th century Merchant House. The first floor shows the large doors through which merchandise was winched into the upper store room. The original winch can be seen in the patio of Sacarello's and also the original water tank for fresh water, **La Cisterna**.

No 79
Inside Corks Wine Bar & Restaurant, on the north wall, are two columns of the original Spanish Cloister. The two 16th century columns are in their original position and indicate the width of the convent's cloister.

No 81 Cloister Building
At the corner of Market Lane is a reminder of the church of the Whitefriars Convent that stood on the site. The present building dates from 1899. Note the iron drain pipes.

No 83
This was the house of Jerome Saccone who was the co-founder of the international wine and spirits merchant Saccone & Speed. Saccone also owned a private bank on this site which was subsequently taken over in 1888 by the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, a fore runner of Barclays Bank.

No 91
Behind the unassuming door lies one of Gibraltar's four synagogues. This is the Ets Hayim synagogue, known colloquially as the Small Synagogue. It was founded in 1759 and rebuilt after the destruction of the Great Siege of 1779-83.

No 95
The Spanish language newspaper 'El Anunciador' was printed here from 1885 to 1940. Today it is the Home of the 'Panorama' newspaper.

No 97
Up to the middle of the 18th century, the house at the corner of Irish Town jutted out into the square. By order of the Governor, it was rebuilt and aligned with the adjoining house to create a regular square.

No 10
Of note are the two Regency-style balconies, one above the other. When a house was built, the initials of the owners were sometimes sculpted on the keystone above the front door, in this case AL (Angel Lavarello).

Nos 27 & 32
These two properties echo one another, with their combination of tiles and fluted cement pilasters. No 32, the more decorative, was built in 1925 and has fine Art Nouveau ceramic tiles lining the corridor from the front door to the spacious patio. The rhythm of arches at street level, which was a feature of Gibraltar architecture, is best exemplified by the stretch from No 22 to No 66.

No 46
Behind the first floor winch is a metal gate leading into the original store of the property.

No 78
When the property was redeveloped, the owner of No 65 opposite bought the space above the first floor so that he could continue to enjoy a view from his upper windows.

No 92
The house is dated 1859. An ornate metal grille opens into the patio. It was a typical town house. The front door had a latch which was opened during the day with a latch key in the shape of an inverted T. At night the door would have been bolted shut. The fan light above the street door could be opened to provide ventilation.

No 122
This was the site of the public baths. There were separate entrances for men and women and a choice of fresh and salt water. The site was later taken over by the Police Department and saw several uses, including the Immigration Department. In the 18th century, No 120 was the site of the meat market, known locally as "The Zoco" - hence the name Market Lane. All the butcher's waste was thrown over the nearby city walls into the sea. The unhygienic practices resulted in the market being resited.

No 4
The casemates of Orange Bastion are on the north side of the open space. They were built in 1799 by General O'Hara, who was nicknamed *The Cock of the Rock*. The battery was redesigned in the 1870s to take large Victorian guns, which can be viewed by going up the steps behind No 2, and crossing Line Wall Road.

The archway leading from Irish Town to Fish Market Place bears the letters SCG, Sanitary Commissioners of Gibraltar, the forerunner of the City Council. It was built in 1903, when the road was built through the middle of Orange Bastion.

The image above the shop door is of a woman with a halo. It may be intended to represent Saint Anne, after whom the street was first named.

IRISH TOWN

CaseMates Square, Cooperage Lane, Parliament Lane, Tuckey's Lane, Market Lane, Irish Place, Cloister Ramp, John Mackintosh Square, The Gibraltar Parliament, The Main Guard, The Gibraltar Heritage Trust, Tourist Information Office, The City Hall.

83, 91, 95, 97, 120, 122

11, 15, 17, 22, 28, 32, 36, 40, 46, 54, 60, 66, 68, 78, 92, 94, 102, 111, 113, 115, 117, 119, 121, 123, 125, 127, 129, 131, 133, 135, 137, 139, 141, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151, 153, 155, 157, 159, 161, 163, 165, 167, 169, 171, 173, 175, 177, 179, 181, 183, 185, 187, 189, 191, 193, 195, 197, 199, 201, 203, 205, 207, 209, 211, 213, 215, 217, 219, 221, 223, 225, 227, 229, 231, 233, 235, 237, 239, 241, 243, 245, 247, 249, 251, 253, 255, 257, 259, 261, 263, 265, 267, 269, 271, 273, 275, 277, 279, 281, 283, 285, 287, 289, 291, 293, 295, 297, 299, 301, 303, 305, 307, 309, 311, 313, 315, 317, 319, 321, 323, 325, 327, 329, 331, 333, 335, 337, 339, 341, 343, 345, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357, 359, 361, 363, 365, 367, 369, 371, 373, 375, 377, 379, 381, 383, 385, 387, 389, 391, 393, 395, 397, 399, 401, 403, 405, 407, 409, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 421, 423, 425, 427, 429, 431, 433, 435, 437, 439, 441, 443, 445, 447, 449, 451, 453, 455, 457, 459, 461, 463, 465, 467, 469, 471, 473, 475, 477, 479, 481, 483, 485, 487, 489, 491, 493, 495, 497, 499, 501, 503, 505, 507, 509, 511, 513, 515, 517, 519, 521, 523, 525, 527, 529, 531, 533, 535, 537, 539, 541, 543, 545, 547, 549, 551, 553, 555, 557, 559, 561, 563, 565, 567, 569, 571, 573, 575, 577, 579, 581, 583, 585, 587, 589, 591, 593, 595, 597, 599, 601, 603, 605, 607, 609, 611, 613, 615, 617, 619, 621, 623, 625, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, 637, 639, 641, 643, 645, 647, 649, 651, 653, 655, 657, 659, 661, 663, 665, 667, 669, 671, 673, 675, 677, 679, 681, 683, 685, 687, 689, 691, 693, 695, 697, 699, 701, 703, 705, 707, 709, 711, 713, 715, 717, 719, 721, 723, 725, 727, 729, 731, 733, 735, 737, 739, 741, 743, 745, 747, 749, 751, 753, 755, 757, 759, 761, 763, 765, 767, 769, 771, 773, 775, 777, 779, 781, 783, 785, 787, 789, 791, 793, 795, 797, 799, 801, 803, 805, 807, 809, 811, 813, 815, 817, 819, 821, 823, 825, 827, 829, 831, 833, 835, 837, 839, 841, 843, 845, 847, 849, 851, 853, 855, 857, 859, 861, 863, 865, 867, 869, 871, 873, 875, 877, 879, 881, 883, 885, 887, 889, 891, 893, 895, 897, 899, 901, 903, 905, 907, 909, 911, 913, 915, 917, 919, 921, 923, 925, 927, 929, 931, 933, 935, 937, 939, 941, 943, 945, 947, 949, 951, 953, 955, 957, 959, 961, 963, 965, 967, 969, 971, 973, 975, 977, 979, 981, 983, 985, 987, 989, 991, 993, 995, 997, 999

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The street prior to Gibraltar becoming British in 1704

In the period when Gibraltar was Spanish, from 1462 to 1704, the street was known as the *Calle de Santa Ana*. St Anne was the mother of the Virgin Mary. An image of St Anne was venerated in a chapel at the southern end of the street, which was enlarged as from 1581 and became a Convent. The religious house was known as the *Convento de la Merced* as the friars belonged to the Mercederian Order, the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy which was founded in 1218. They ransomed Christians from the Moors in Barbary, modern-day Morocco. The Convent church and its belfry stood at the corner of Irish Town and Market Lane. Indeed, the building that stands there today is known as Cloister Building.

The cloister of this Convent was alongside the church, and two of its original 16th century columns can still be seen on the north wall of Corks wine bar and restaurant. They indicate the width of the original patio in the cloister.



The Convento de La Merced in the 18th Century.

There was a second convent on the *Calle de Santa Ana*. It was for nuns of the Order of Poor Clares, and was founded in 1587. This was the *Convento de Santa Clara*. The convent church and building faced a small square off Main Street, which was built upon in later years. Today, the Sacarello Coffee Shop, winery and restaurant is located in what was once a large part of the nuns' garden.

The street in the 18th century

Gibraltar was taken from Spain by an Anglo-Dutch force on 4 August 1704. Under the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, Spain ceded Gibraltar to the British crown in perpetuity. Most of the Spanish residents of Gibraltar left in the days after it was taken. The old name of the street was then forgotten.

The Convent of *Santa Clara* was abandoned by the nuns in 1704, and was converted by the British into Bedlam Barracks. When the last of the Mercederians left Gibraltar, the Spanish convent of *La Merced* was taken over



Public Baths and Police Station 1870.

by the Royal Navy in 1720 as a storehouse and apartments for the victualling clerks.

In the early years of British Gibraltar there was little need for streets to have names. The barracks and officers' quarters were all numbered, because they were important. Properties in civilian hands were of little consequence at first.

As the civilian population grew, and as commerce in Gibraltar began to develop, this began to change. A nucleus of Portuguese people lived in what is today Crutchett's Ramp, but was previously called Portuguese Town. Similarly, a number of Irish people took up residence in the street close to the sea wall. As a result, it became known as Irish Town. But who were these Irish?

The most likely contenders were two large shiploads of Irish women immigrants who arrived in Gibraltar in late 1727/early 1728. They were sent out to provide female company for the troops in Gibraltar, who were bored and resorted to drink, which was



The original facade of Cloister Building.

THE HISTORY OF IRISH TOWN

Irish Town is at the commercial heart of the city of Gibraltar. It has always enjoyed a privileged location and is today a bustling pedestrianised zone and home to a number of interesting shops, restaurants, bars and a coffee shop. But the street has not always been known by this name.

bad for discipline. Irish Town then became a street of ill repute.

The location of the street, close to the port, made it particularly attractive for commerce, and so the street was soon taken over by the merchant class. The Irish women became a distant memory, but the name 'Irish Town' stuck.

A synagogue was founded at 91 Irish Town in 1759. It became known colloquially as the *Esnoga Chica*, the small synagogue. Its formal name is *Es Hayim*, the Tree of Life. It was discreetly screened from the street as the Treaty of Utrecht, signed 46 years earlier, specifically set out that neither Jews nor Moors could live in Gibraltar.

Gibraltar's growing commercial prosperity received a major blow when the Great



The Police Station colonnade.

Siege broke out in June 1779. It lasted until February 1783. Trade practically came to a standstill. Even more devastating was the intensive bombardment of the city during the siege, which resulted in the destruction of every building on Irish Town.

The heyday of Irish Town in the early 19th century

The final years of the 18th century and the first two decades of the 19th century saw the commencement of Gibraltar's commercial heyday. The policy of Napoleon of trying to strangle the British economy by closing off ports in Western Europe to British exports placed Gibraltar in the commercial limelight.

Gibraltar was a major port that was open to receive British goods for re-export into Europe and North Africa. The value of British goods that flowed through the warehouses in Irish Town was immense.

It was time to rebuild and repave the street after the ravages of the Great Siege. Its location next to the cooperage and with easy access to the port made it a key commercial street.

Many fine houses on the street date from the 19th century. The design of the Gibraltar merchant house with its Georgian sash



HRH the Duke of Gloucester in Irish Town.

windows and Genoese-style louvered wooden shutters and underground tank for storing rainwater is generally attributed to Milanese-born architect John Maria Boschetti, who lived and worked in Gibraltar for most of his life. Indeed, the Sacarello merchant house at No 57 was built and owned by Boschetti.

Irish Town became the home in the 19th century for a number of ship owners and managers, shipping agents and ship chandlers. The oldest of these were M.H.Bland, at the corner of Market Lane, established in 1810; and Turner's, established in 1831, and with offices at No 65/67.

Irish Town in the later 19th century

The most significant public building on Irish Town is the former Victorian police station. It was designed by Walter Elliott, the official Civil Engineer of Gibraltar at the time,



Wining and dining al fresco.

in the then-fashionable neo-Gothic style. Red brick was combined with Maltese limestone. The station incorporated a senior police officer's residence, which faced onto Cloister Ramp. The Police Station was inaugurated on 7 July 1864. It was the headquarters of the police, now the Royal Gibraltar Police, until 1984.

Opposite the Police Station, at the corner of Irish Town and Market Lane, Jerome Saccone established a flourishing private bank in the 1850s. Eventually, in 1888, it became the Gibraltar branch of the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, a forerunner of Barclays Bank. Saccone was also a prominent wine and spirit merchant. His heirs and those of James Andrews-Speed teamed up in 1908 to form Saccone & Speed, a prominent wine and spirit merchant in many countries across the globe. The company, whose origins date back to 1839, still has a presence in Irish Town: it is The Cellar, which specialises in fine wines.



Looking down on Irish Town from a roof terrace.

The street in the 20th century

The bustling commercial Irish Town, in the early 20th century, included tobacco factories, coffee roasting works, a music hall which incorporated Gibraltar's first cinema, and many shipping offices. The street was paved with wooden cobbles. It was a noisy and dusty place. The printing works of a Spanish-language daily newspaper, *El Anunciador*, were at No 95. The newspaper was printed from 1885 to 1940. Today, another newspaper, *Panorama*, is produced from the same premises.



The entrance to No 92 Irish Town.

The commercial character of Irish Town took a decided change in the latter part of the 20th century when the street was pedestrianised. In addition to its traditional activities and its many shops, the street embraced a new leisure and gastronomic character. The bars that had catered to a primarily naval and military clientele, at a time when Gibraltar was a key military facility, now catered for a new type of more discerning customer. New bars and restaurants were established. Irish Town became a focus of visitor and tourist interest.

Today it has become a gastronomic centre with its cafes, pubs and restaurants offering a variety of cuisine, complemented by fine shops. It is a hub for wining and dining including al fresco. Echoes nevertheless remain, for those who look closely, of the history of the street that spans over 500 years.

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