

A THEMATIC HISTORY OF ITALIANS IN LEICHHARDT

by Anne Reynolds

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Article 1

St. Fiacre's, the San Francesco Catholic Italian Association and the Italian Capuchins in Leichhardt, New South Wales

The individuals mentioned in this article made a significant contribution to Australian society in the first decades of the period after the Second World War, a time of mass emigration from Italy to Australia, much of it directed towards Sydney. One centre for their activities in Sydney, that focused on the spiritual and material welfare of Italian migrants, was the church of St Fiacre's in Leichhardt.

The history of St. Fiacre's is indissolubly linked in the postwar period with the history of the Order of Capuchin Franciscan Friars in Australia and, in particular, with Capuchin friars of Italian origin or descent. As Pino Bosi has noted, there is a long history of a Capuchin presence in Australia 'either singly or in groups, about 25 Capuchin Friars [came] to Australia' after 1837 (Bosi 117). Irish and Scottish Capuchins were active in Australia around the mid-nineteenth century, and the Italian-born Capuchin, Elzear Torreggiani, served as Bishop of Armidale from 1879-1904. In the period between the First and the Second World Wars, the Capuchins responded to the invitation of the Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, to carry out missionary work in Queensland. They intended to minister to communities in rural Queensland where there were significant concentrations of Italians, many of whom had settled in the 1890s, working and establishing communities in the cane-fields agricultural belt. While the outbreak of war interrupted these plans, at the cessation of hostilities the lost momentum was quickly regained.

Fr Anastasio Paoletti was among a group of four Capuchin Friars who arrived in Brisbane in 1945. Their point of embarkation was America, where they had all lived for many years. An Italian-American background or their length of service in the United States ensured that the friars were bilingual and possibly also, as Bosi notes, 'more acceptable to the Australian clergy than the mistrusted Italians' (Bosi 121). On 3 November 1946, the Capuchins were formally granted the parish of St Fiacre's in Sydney by Cardinal Gilroy, in recognition of their missionary work from 1945 among the Italian immigrants, first at Wynnum, near Brisbane, and later in Halifax, North Queensland. In 1946 the Capuchins were granted not only the parish of St Fiacre's but the role of chaplaincy for Italian immigrants in Sydney. While the spiritual welfare of Italians was possibly uppermost in Gilroy's thoughts, the question of their material welfare had been brought into focus over a prolonged period by the combined effects of economic depression, racism and discrimination during the 1930s and the internment of many Italians during the Second World War.

St Fiacre's was initially staffed principally by Capuchins who, like Fr Anastasio, had strong links with Italian immigrant communities in the United States. Fr Anastasio was born in Philadelphia of Italian immigrant parents. Capuchin Friars began to arrive in Australia directly from Italy soon after 1948. The first Capuchin Friars at St Fiacre's included Henry Kusnerick (a German American), Adalberto Salerno, Silvio Spighi, who arrived in Australia from India, Samuel Rodomonti, and Anastasio Paoletti, who was first parish priest at St Fiacre's and later, from 1948, Superior of the

Australian Province at the new Capuchin House in Sydney. Among the Capuchins who followed were Frs Alfonso Panciroli, Atanasio Gonelli and Romano Franchini, as well as Frs Paolo, Filippo, Claudio and Carlo (Bosi 125).



Parish of St. Fiacre's in Leichhardt, c.1960.

In the late 1940s, Italians in Australia carried a triple burden, first as recent national enemies, secondly for what was seen by many as their racial and cultural deviation from Anglo-Celtic norms, and thirdly as Roman Catholics in the climate of parochialism, bigotry and mutual distrust between Catholics and non-Catholics that characterised Australian society until well into the postwar period. The Reverend Dr Ryan observed in Sydney in April 1947, at a reception offered by the Italian community to honour the arrival of the Capuchin Friars, with reference to the missionary work during the war of Fr Giuseppe La Rosa:

You Italians are here in a land where there are people whose attitude towards you is determined in large part by racial and religious prejudices which are based simply on ignorance, ignorance of history and ignorance about Catholicism. There is no need for you to be ashamed of being Italian, just as there is no need for you to be ashamed of being Catholics.¹

In 1950 Fr Anastasio reflected on the Australia he discovered in 1945:

After one week in Brisbane in 1945 I was shocked and hurt to realise the amount of dislike towards all foreigners, in general and to Italians in particular. I told myself that it was the war. But then, on second thoughts, we had a war in America and there were no such ugly feelings. As I talked to the hundreds of Italians who returned from internment camps, I was bewildered at the resentment expressed by them. Internment had made

them bitter... All this is the result of hostile public opinion and that alone. That is my conviction. Public opinion is a mighty weapon... The basis for this antagonism I do not know fully. I believe that it is partly due to Australia's long isolation in the Pacific, to what the Hon. A. Calwell calls xenophobia; and partly due to a racial pride that seems to have deep roots in countries with non-Catholic majorities.²

These words went on to call on Catholics to come to the moral and material help of 'New Australians'. The article concludes: 'It is well to mention that of the 33,000 Italians in Australia in 1947, only 7,000 were not naturalised³. In this very early postwar period a clear majority of Italian immigrants had demonstrated that they were keen not to be considered as outsiders or foreigners but citizens in a new country.

St Fiacre's was (and still is) a reference point for many of Sydney's Italy-born. Italy-born residents and non-residents of Leichhardt, made contact with the parish in increasing numbers over the 1950s. The clergy ministered also to Australian parishioners since it was not Church policy to create exclusively 'ethnic' parishes. Australian-born members of the congregation at St. Fiacre's traditionally sent their children to the parish school, adjacent to the church, which was run by the Sisters of St Joseph. From the 1950s, the school was frequented by increasing numbers of Italian-born and Australian-born children of Italian parents. Father Henry was instrumental in the building of a second school in the Lilyfield parish, which Cardinal Gilroy blessed in 1951 (Bosi 125).

One Australian-born resident of Leichhardt for twenty-two years until 1957, Mrs Patricia Fin, who attended the St. Fiacre's parish school during the war years, reports learning Italian from the small number of Italian-speaking children who attended classes at that time. However, Italian was not part of the school curriculum. After-school Italian classes were instituted in the early 1960s on Saturday mornings, taught by volunteers. In the early 1960s the Sisters of St Joseph sponsored twice-weekly evening English classes for immigrants, taught by lay volunteers.

The services and assistance offered in Italian at St Fiacre's would have been a significant factor for some new immigrants in their choice of an area for settlement. By the mid-1950s all the

clergy at St. Fiacre's were reportedly Italian speakers. In the mid-1950s the interior of St Fiacre's was re-modelled: the marble used to replace the timber floor and furnishings of the sacristy would have created for many Italian-born parishioners a memory of churches in Italy.

Catherine Street, where the church is situated, gradually grew into a recognisably Italian community. By 1960 an estimated ninety Italian families lived there. It is estimated that around three-quarters of the houses in the street were owned by Italians at that time. Gradually the Church itself also bought up houses near the old presbytery in Catherine Street. In accord with the Christian mission of the Friars, St. Fiacre's played a significant role in services and assistance for Italian immigrants and the presbytery was at its heart. Peak years for the church's direct involvement in material assistance were 1949-1955 when Italian immigrants in increasing numbers attended the Missionary Centre at the church that offered varying types of support, such as help in finding accommodation and work.



The wedding of Guido Zuliani and Gianna Bacchiella at St. Fiacre's, Leichhardt, 22 February 1959. Courtesy G. Zuliani.

One important role played by the Capuchins was meeting immigrant ships on arrival in Sydney. Fr Romano Franchini reported that Customs officers were at first suspicious of the help the Friars offered. However, a degree of trust did develop between the two groups. The Capuchins regularly accompanied Customs officials to board the ships at the entrance to the Harbour. They provided a service that few Australians were capable of at that time. As Italian speakers, they shared cultural experience and memory. They were themselves immigrants. The Friars also

ministered to Italians in hospitals and sanatoriums, and occasionally made visits to prisons as well as to rural work sites, such as the Kandos cement works and Warragamba Dam. When Co.As.It was founded in 1968, it took over much of the welfare role that the Friary had borne.

In 1962 *La Fiamma* described St Fiacre's as the 'Italian church', near where Italians preferred to live. At that time, Fr Adalberto Salerno, an Italian American, was parish priest, and chaplains to the Italian community were Frs Silvio Spighi and Bonifazio Zurli, both of Tuscan origin. Social contacts, housing, employment, legal and translation assistance continued to be among the services offered by St. Fiacre's. Fr Atanasio Gonelli reported the involvement in the early 1950s of Callagher's Real Estate agency in nearby Annandale that assisted with rental accommodation for new arrivals at a time when the housing market was tight and rent control the norm. Another pattern of accommodation was sub-letting of rooms in houses by small-time landlords in the area, many of whom were Italian.

In the early years, single Italian males were the primary group to benefit from the assistance offered through and at St. Fiacre's. Proxy weddings were later common. In a majority of cases, the couple were already known to each other. According to a Capuchin publication of 1972, *Almanacco Cappuccino*, over the period 1947-1972, St. Fiacre's services were used by an estimated 60,000 Italy-born, and its registers included 10,000 baptisms and 5,000 weddings for that period. Given the ageing of the Italy-born community, today funerals are a more common service.

Relatively soon after being granted the parish, the Capuchins began to hold Italian-style saints' feast days (*feste*), with processions in the streets surrounding the church. When there were complaints about noise, the processions were transferred to the church grounds. These celebrations were followed by social activities such as picnics, often to the accompaniment of a traditional band, with singing. St Fiacre's initially held about three *feste* per year. Soon the number rose to about five or six annually. Fr Romano Franchini reported crowds of 1,000 people at *feste*: people came from all over Sydney. Celebration of regional saints' feast days was an important part of church celebrations. *Feste* were celebrated in honour of the Saints Bartholomew, Anthony, Catherine, Sebastian, Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of the Martyrs.

To enhance the *fiesta*, a rudimentary, portable stage was sometimes erected, where the *fiesta* band, singers and speakers performed. Traditional and sentimental songs were sung. These occasions celebrated patron saints of different regions and villages. Regional groups provided the saint's statue and music for the procession. These celebrations were one of the ways in which diverse Italian regional groups achieved a sense of solidarity and common purpose. These occasions possibly helped to create cohesion links between the regionally diverse Italian congregation. In the mid-1950s an Italian choir was formed by Fr Silvio Spighi, which sang at one service each Sunday and also for social evenings. Many of its members were from the Veneto region.

Other aspects of parish activity, such as social events including dances and picnics held at parks around Sydney, often near the Harbour, were co-ordinated by the San Francesco Catholic Italian Association (S.F.C.I.A.). In 1945 Fr Giuseppe La Rosa, in addition to his roles in the groundwork for establishing *La Fiamma* and in directing the newspaper in its first year, established the San Francesco Catholic Italian Association in 1945 for Sydney's Italian-born laity. In 1946 when the parish of St. Fiacre's was handed over by Cardinal Gilroy, the Capuchins took over the Association's spiritual and other directions. In the early years of its existence, S.F.C.I.A. temporarily used for meetings and functions two premises in the city, Cusa House and the Australia Hall. As a result of the post-1946 involvement in the organisation of the Capuchin Friars, S.F.C.I.A. became closely linked to St Fiacre's. S.F.C.I.A. was linked in the early years to the Italo-Australian Welfare association (I.A.W.) through common membership of their respective committees. I.A.W. and S.F.C.I.A. worked in tandem until 1951 when S.F.C.I.A. officially made its base at St Fiacre's.

Fr Anastasio Paoletti (1946-1951) and Fr Alessandro Merighi (1951-1958) were the first two directors of S.F.C.I.A. In the early years of the 1950s, S.F.C.I.A. operated a *mensa* and social centre, designed mainly for single, male immigrants, many of whom who lived at that time in the local area, on the upper level of 444 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, on the site of what was later to become the *Chianti* restaurant. S.F.C.I.A. aimed not only to respond to the material needs of Italians but to encourage a Christian

lifestyle through a program of religious, cultural, social and sporting activities. The Association organised fundraising for charitable institutions and causes. It supported the Villa Fatima in Hurstville, a hostel for the needy which the Capuchins purchased in 1951 to provide accommodation for sixty single male immigrants. A drama group was formed, and a soccer team was fielded in the Canterbury Metropolitan League in 1950, the C-grade Annandale Franciscan soccer team. This team had a large following among pre- and postwar Italian immigrants and, although it did not prosper in the competition, it is considered by many to be a forerunner of the A.P.I.A. team. S.F.C.I.A. also sponsored the inaugural *Festa dei Pescatori* (Fishermen's Festival), held at Iron Cove in the Leichhardt Municipality in 1952.

In 1968 Bishop James Freeman opened a hall for S.F.C.I.A. in the grounds of St Fiacre's, known as the Sala San Francesco, built mostly by voluntary effort and eventually demolished when the parish



Preparations for a religious festa at St. Fiacre's. [Photograph Zuliani Satudio]

school was extended. Dances and other social functions were held in the hall. In 1972-1973 S.F.C.I.A. constructed a pre-school kindergarten in Styles Street, Leichhardt, with funds raised from the Italian community, donations, and Government assistance. The kindergarten was designed primarily to cater for working immigrant women whose children's linguistic and other needs were not being met by mainstream kindergartens. The Mayor of Leichhardt at the time of the official opening was Alderman Nick Origlass, born Nicola Origliasso in Queensland of a Piemontese father and Australian mother. Alderman Origlass was probably the first Mayor of Leichhardt of Italian descent. The Styles Street kindergarten was subsequently sold to Leichhardt Council.

From around the mid-1950s another important and far-reaching link between St Fiacre's and the wider Italian community was established through the medium of radio. The work of a number of Italian-born women who made this possible has never been fully acknowledged. Radio transmissions in Italian were apparently first organised under the auspices of the Capuchin publication, *La Croce del Sud*, via Sydney radio station 2SM. Fr Anastasio Paoletti was the first manager of *La Croce del Sud*. The editorial and administrative offices were located in Catherine Street, next to the church. 2SM, owned by the Catholic Church, broadcast the first Italian language program in July 1954.

The idea for the Italian program was reportedly devised by Fr Anastasio Paoletti and Evasio Costanzo. However, women were the radio voice of the Italian community. The inaugural presenter and writer of what became formally known as *L'Ora Italiana* was Ines Raffaelli (later Mrs Ines Ianitto), followed three years later in 1957 by Mrs Rosa Lauriola. The early program format included a religious reading, Italian news, sport, music, local news and listeners' requests. Lena Gustin and Franca Arena were later members of this important group of Italian-born women who contributed as announcers on Radio 2SM and other Sydney radio stations from the 1950s.

Mrs Gustin was editor of the Catholic monthly, *La Croce del Sud* (1957-1958) and a columnist for *La Fiamma* (1957-1964), under the pseudonym Grazia. In 1959, when Radio 2KY initiated a half-hour Italian program, *Melodie Italiane*, Lena Gustin and Franca Arena were heard regularly on the airwaves through 2SM. Mrs Gustin's

broadcasting career began with *L'Ora Italiana*, an hour subsequently extended to well over two hours as more material became available. Mamma Lena, as Mrs Gustin became affectionately known to listeners, within two years moved to Radio 2CH where her program 'Arriverderci Roma' (and related programs) flourished for ten years from 1959-1969. Mrs Arena remained as an announcer with Radio 2SM from 1959 for more than six years.



Mrs Ines Ianitto in the office of the presbytery of St. Fiacre's. Courtesy I. Ianitto.

The person with the longest association with *L'Ora Italiana* was Mrs Ianitto. In October 1966 she returned to the microphone at 2SM and continued with the program until December 1981 when it finally folded. On 14 December 1981, Mrs Ianitto wrote to the editor of *La Fiamma*:

Desidero portare a conoscenza dei nostri connazionali che la Direzione della Stazione Radio 2SM di Sydney ci ha comunicato che... ha deciso di sospendere con la fine di novembre il programma italiano che andava in onda ogni domenica sera, dicendo inoltre che, gli italiani, avendo ora quattordici programmi sulla stazione etnica 2EA, non necessitano più di mantenere l'Ora Italiana sulla 2SM.⁴

I would like to bring to the attention of our fellow Italians that the Management of Radio Station 2SM of Sydney has informed us that... it has decided to terminate our regular Sunday evening Italian program at the end of November, stating that since Italians now have fourteen programs on Ethnic Radio 2EA, there is no need to maintain the Italian Hour on 2SM.

November 1981 marked the twenty-seventh year of the first wholly Italian language program on

Sydney radio, that had been supported by its many listeners and Italian and Australian companies, including the Commonwealth Bank, Cantarella Bros, Melosi, and Transfield. In his response to the letter, the editor of *La Fiamma* noted that Ines Ianitto was 'una delle primissime [se non la prima] annunciatrici di programmi radio italiani in Australia' (one of the first, if not the first, radio announcers on Italian programs in Australia), as well as 'una delle più brave anche se, per innata modestia, forse una delle meno note' (one of the best although, because of her innate modesty, possibly one of the least well known).⁵

Not only was Fr Anastasio Paoletti responsible for the early organisation of Italian radio programs but he was also the instigator of other significant religious and lay structures that supported the Italian-born community of Sydney. His role in *La Fiamma* and the formation of the A.P.I.A. association are two lasting elements of his work in Sydney. Pino Bosi reports that Fr Anastasio was instrumental in the formation of I.A.W., the Italian Association of Assistance. Whatever the details, which remain to be fully documented, Fr Anastasio's role on behalf of Italian immigrants in its breadth, depth and diversity can best be described as legendary. It must be underlined that a detailed history of the Italian Capuchins at St Fiacre's remains to be written.



Election of the Queen of 'Miss Saint Francis Association' in St. Francis Hall, at St. Fiacre's Parish Church, Leichhardt, 1960.

The year 2000 marked a special anniversary for the Capuchin friar Fr Atanasio Gonelli. Born Luigi Gonelli near Massa Carrara in Tuscany on 11 February 1923, Fr Atanasio arrived in Australia in 1950, beginning missionary work in Sydney in Surry Hills and Woolloomooloo where the Capuchins preceded the Scalabrinian Fathers. Fr Atanasio's contacts with the parish of St Fiacre's have lasted over forty of the more than fifty years spent in Australia. Fr Atanasio was instrumental in 1950 in organising the youth group, Catholic Action, and in writing from the early years for the religious page of *La Fiamma*, with which he always maintained close links, eventually becoming director of the newspaper in 1963 for a number of years. Fr Atanasio was also involved with the religious elements of Capuchin-sponsored radio broadcasts on 2SM.

Another initiative promoted by Fr Atanasio was the establishment around Sydney from 1963 of a network of Italian language classes for the children of immigrants, a forerunner of the Sydney-wide after-school and language insertion program now administered by Co.As.It. Fr Atanasio has been at St Fiacre's continuously since 1964. In a commemorative article in *La Fiamma*, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his mission in Australia, he recalled celebrating 4,000 weddings, 8,000 baptisms (up to 23 in one day) and many funerals.⁶ Like other Capuchins, Fr Atanasio also carried out missionary work in other Australian locations.

Over 55 years, Capuchin achievements and support for Italians in Australia have a rich and varied history. Through the Italian Capuchins, St Fiacre's at Leichhardt has played a central role in the history of Italians in Sydney and throughout Australia.

Notes

¹ Translated from the Italian, in *La Fiamma*, 15 April 1947, p.7.

² *La Fiamma*, 13 October 1950, p.8, an article written by Fr Anastasio Paoletti titled 'Italian Immigration in USA and Australia'.

³ Art. cit., p.8.

⁴ *La Fiamma*, 14 December 1981, p.36.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *La Fiamma*, 5 April 2000, p.42.

Article 2

Italian Language Print Media in Sydney: A Short History of *La Fiamma* Newspaper

The Italian language newspaper, *La Fiamma* ('The Flame' or 'Beacon'), has been an institution in Sydney and beyond for over fifty years, and it has maintained a constant association with the suburb of Leichhardt. *La Fiamma*'s sub-title from 1951, *Il Giornale degli Italiani di Australia*, 'The Newspaper of Italians in Australia', makes clear its primary function and rationale. When it was first published in 1947, *La Fiamma* met a need that Italians would otherwise have been denied, news from Italy and international and local news in Italian (and English) as well as articles designed to assist directly with the problems of settlement.

The origins of *La Fiamma* date to 1946 and are closely linked with the Catholic Church and the Capuchin Order. *La Fiamma* evolved from an idea for an Italian language newspaper that Fr Giuseppe La Rosa expressed in 1945 to the Sydney Archdiocese. Fr La Rosa was attached to the Apostolic Delegation in Sydney for the duration of the war, having been prevented from returning to Italy by the outbreak of hostilities. In 1942 La Rosa was appointed chaplain of the Italian-born community — many of whom were at that time in internment camps — by the then Archbishop, Cardinal Norman Gilroy.

One motive for the founding of a newspaper with a strong religious and spiritual content was the perceived need to combat the 'radical, anti-clerical' newspaper *Il Risveglio* (The Awakening) that began operation in 1944.¹ *Il Risveglio* was the first Italian language newspaper in Australia after the end of the Second World War. As Gaetano Rando reports, it was published by the Australian-based anti-Fascist movement Italia Libera, after permission was granted in 1944 by the Attorney-General, H.V. Evatt. Claudio Alcorso was an early editor. *Il Risveglio* ceased publication in 1956.

In April 1946, the Australian Government responded positively to a request from Fr La Rosa to publish an Italian language newspaper. However, the restrictions and limitations imposed meant that permission, for a newspaper that was to be called *L'Apostolo*, was not acted

on. Cardinal Gilroy was in favour of a newspaper directly under the control of the Archdiocese and run by an association, consisting of a representative of the Diocesan Office, the Provincial of the Capuchin Friars, and Mr Ulisse Pellegrini (of *Pellegrini's*, the shop of religious books and articles situated in Roma House in George Street in the city) who had expressed an interest in financing the venture.

La Fiamma Pty. Ltd. was formed in April 1947, and the newspaper *La Fiamma* had its first issue on 15 April 1947. At the end of 1947, Fr La Rosa gave up direction of the newspaper, and the American-born Capuchin friar of Italian descent Fr Anastasio Paoletti took over as director and editor-in-chief. Gilson and Zubrycki record an interview of 25 July 1961 with Fr Paoletti, in which he is reported to have said that he realised two years after beginning the newspaper that 'by devoting it entirely to religious affairs we would not attract a wide readership' (Gilson 35). Once a decision to broaden its scope was made, 'from then on it was all plain sailing...when [Evasio] Costanzo took over [in 1951] he easily implemented the policy of devoting the newspaper largely to news but news presented objectively in a true Christian spirit' (Paoletti, as reported in Gilson 36).

The first monthly issue of *La Fiamma* consisted of four pages in magazine format. For a number of years the newspaper was sold exclusively through subscription. A newspaper published in Italian in the immediate postwar years was of course not readily saleable on the open market. First of all, it was a small-scale operation in the early years and circulation was limited by available resources; and secondly, Italians themselves were reticent about subscribing to an Italian language publication. As Davino Zadro recalled of the days in May-June 1947, when he delivered newspapers by hand, subscribers were afraid to receive it:

Il nome stesso del giornale era una sfida: a quell'epoca era pericoloso parlare in italiano, figuriamoci stampare un giornale in lingua straniera e per giunta, in una lingua di ex nemici.

The name of the newspaper itself was a challenge; in those days it was dangerous to speak Italian, let alone publish a newspaper in a foreign language that was, moreover, in the language of an ex-enemy.²

including his own son Ivo. By 1957 the office of *La Fiamma* had moved to 499 Parramatta Road. In that year, Costanzo started a special Sunday edition, *La Fiamma della Domenica*, which did not prosper (Gilson 36). By 1967, *La Fiamma* had a weekly circulation of 44,000 and it continued to be issued twice a week (Wednesdays and Saturdays). In the period 1963-1971, Fr Atanasio Gonelli, who assisted Fr Anastasio with the newspaper from the time of his arrival in Sydney in January 1950, also as editor of the religious page, was director of the newspaper.

From the late 1960s, under Costanzo's editorship, the newspaper began to identify with the Australian Labor Party and continued to be vocal in issues affecting immigrants. As Rando observes, the 1972 petition of 72,000 signatures, sponsored by *La Fiamma* to urge the transferability of Australian pensions to Italy, was part of a history of involvement of the newspaper in social issues. In fact, *La Fiamma* also had a long tradition of fund-raising among its readers to support disaster relief in Italy, reportedly collecting over \$300,000 over the years 1947-1967. On the Australian scene, for example, the newspaper responded to the 1953-1954 crisis of the assisted immigrants at Bonegilla migrant camp. Its journalists, especially in the early years, were frequently approached by members of the Italian community in need of help: 'journalists often found themselves acting in a referral role, sometimes as interpreters' (Rando 207).

Advice and support for readers was an integral part of the newspaper's brief. Mrs Lena Gustin was a columnist for *La Fiamma* (1957-1964), using the pseudonym Grazia, dealing with daily issues of settlement. Mrs Enoe Di Stefano, as Gianna, was involved in writing 'L'angolo di Gianna', a section dedicated to a different theme each week, which also answered letters from both male and female readers. Mrs Di Stefano has reported that women commonly expressed a desire to return to Italy, since they found their new life isolating and difficult and they missed family in Italy. Those who lived on farms sometimes took to drink to relieve their loneliness. Single men experienced similar feelings. Cultural and language differences were a source of tension in the wider society. The view that Italians commonly carried knives was well entrenched in the community. Fights often occurred between Italians and non-Italians at work sites where the

language barrier caused communication problems. Workplace accidents were also the result of language and communication problems.



Vito Nigro, from Melbourne, was the winner of a return trip to Italy, awarded jointly by the shipping company Flotta Lauro and La Fiamma newspaper, c1959.

In November 1969, *La Fiamma* was sold by the Capuchins, and it eventually passed into the control of Costanzo. Costanzo remained director and proprietor for around five years until 1974. A crisis befell the newspaper in the period 1975-1977 when it appeared that it would fold. This was averted by the sale in May 1978 to the company connected with the Italian language newspaper *Il Globo*, in its 1959 origins associated with Melbourne and Victoria. In 1994, the proprietors of *Il Globo* and *La Fiamma* added to their holdings the Italian language radio network, Rete Italia. In 1997 *La Fiamma* moved to new premises at 92-94 Norton Street, Leichhardt where Rete Italia also has its Sydney offices.

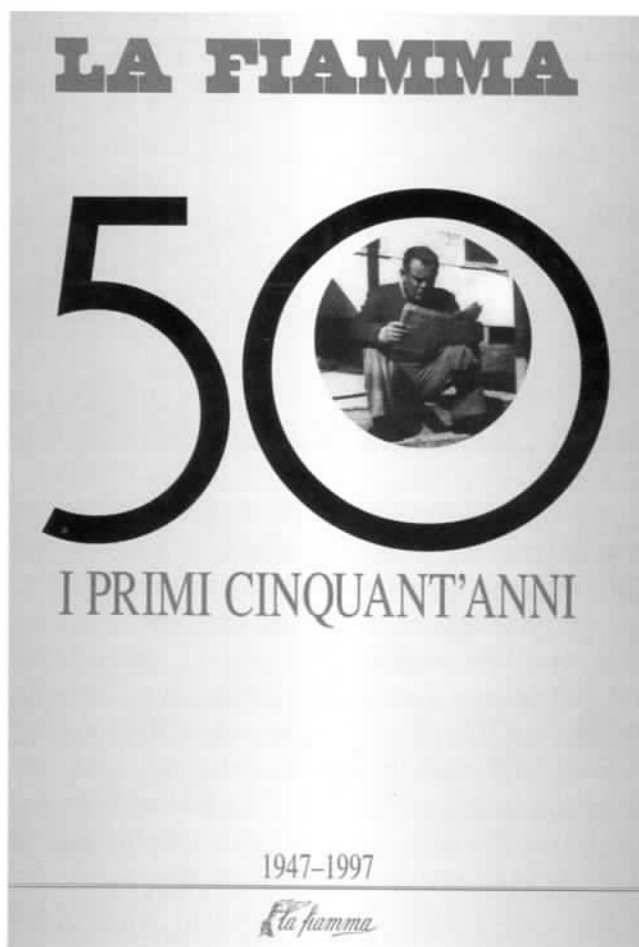
La Fiamma has had over many years an authentic and important connection with the Italian-born community of Sydney and beyond. For more than

fifty years, *La Fiamma* has played important roles in Italian language and culture maintenance, transmission of news from Italy and the provision of information in areas which mainstream print media did not address. Davino Zadro, Evasio Costanzo, Pino Bosi, Giuliano Montagna, Rosa Rossi, and Armando Tornari are just some of the journalistic and editorial staff who have over time made a major contribution to *La Fiamma*.

In content, the newspaper has undergone many changes of focus. The front page of the first issue of *La Fiamma* in 1947 had a strong religious flavour, with a message about the Resurrection and news of papal politics in Italy, relating to the renewal of the Lateran Pacts, as well as two short columns in English. The use of English in the newspaper from its inception was directed at overcoming the language barrier for newly arrived immigrants. The newspaper in fact carried sections devoted to the learning of English. The purpose of using English shifted when, from the early 1980s, a distinct section directed at the second generation was introduced into the newspaper.

Front pages of the first decade of *La Fiamma* cover such topics as the Australian Government policy on immigration, the 1951 accord between Italy and Australia over assisted immigration, problems of emigration and settlement, problems and inconsistencies of the assisted migration scheme, and institutional racism and discrimination. Gilson records some interesting data on a range of broad categories (and their relative proportions) covered in *La Fiamma* over the period 1956-1959. Australian affairs ranked almost equal in column space with news from Italy and news related to migrant group activity in Australia (Gilson 56-57). In the 1960s, topics and events covered on front pages included the riots at the Bonegilla migrant hostel, the Italian Prime Minister Leone's campaign about the economic revitalisation of Southern Italy, urging Italians to return to Italy, the need for the children of immigrants to maintain or learn their mother tongue, and the widening of sponsorship rules to facilitate emigration of extended family members and friends.

At the time of writing, *La Fiamma* is published in three issues per week, and it covers both Australian and Italian news, including a regular section in English aimed at the second and third generations. *La Fiamma* is an essential part of a thriving Italian language media in Australia. It must be remembered that in 1996 Italian was



La Fiamma newspaper: cover of the anniversary issue celebrating the first fifty years of its publication. This issue included a selection of many important front pages of the newspaper.

reportedly the most widely spoken language in the domestic sphere in Australia after English. More than fifty years on *La Fiamma*, with formalised transnational links, is a significant part the national media structure.

Notes

- ¹ Gaetano Rando provides a very interesting account of this newspaper which ceased publication in 1956 in his article 'Aspects of the History of the Italian Language Press in Australia 1885 – 1985 in *Italians in Australia. Historical and Social Perspectives*. Wollongong: Department of Modern Languages, University of Wollongong, 1993.
- ² *La Fiamma*, special supplement, *La Fiamma 1947-1967*, 29 July 1967, p. 10.
- ³ 'I miei vent'anni a 'La Fiamma'', special supplement, *La Fiamma 1947-1967*, 29 July 1967, pp. 10-11.

Article 3

The A.P.I.A. Association and the A.P.I.A. Club in Leichhardt, Sydney: A Brief History of Their Origins

The creation in 1954 of the A.P.I.A. (*Associazione Polisportiva Italo-Australiana*, or *Italian-Australian All Sports Association*) proved wrong those who claimed that Italians were not capable of transcending regional loyalties and uniting in order to work towards a collective goal. An editorial in *La Fiamma* (19 March 1962) around the time of the official opening of Stage 1 of the new Club premises at 38 Frazer Street, Lilyfield/ Leichhardt noted that the A.P.I.A. reflected 'a transition from the amorphous community to social life, from agglomeration to organisation, from the indistinct and voiceless group to a society representing traditions and legitimate rights and interests' (Di Nicola 166). The 26 September 1967 special issue of *La Fiamma* which commemorated the visit to Australia of the President of the Italian Republic, Giuseppe Saragat, recorded the significance of A.P.I.A. in the following terms (p. 87):

Per la prima volta nella storia di Sydney... gli italiani emigrati erano riusciti a darsi una comunità, cioè un ordine, una sede. Per la prima volta nella storia di Sydney gli italiani avevano dato generosamente senza interesse, senza sospetto, senza timore. Per la prima volta nella storia di Sydney gli italiani erano diventati maggiorenni, avevano dato prova di virtù civiche e democratiche.

For the first time in the history of Sydney... Italian emigrants have succeeded in creating a community for themselves, an order, an association. For the first time in the history of Sydney... Italians have given generously, without self-interest, suspicion or fear. For the first time in the history of Sydney... Italians have come of age, and provided proof of civic and democratic virtues.

What were the origins of this long-lived Sydney institution? In 1954, Tullio Bearzotti, Fernando Spessot and Ivo Clagnan met informally to discuss the question of soccer in Sydney. Their discussion was in part prompted by problems that the Julia soccer team was experiencing in the Canterbury District, when it was suspended from the Soccer Association because of over-enthusiastic fans invading the field. At that time, there were other Italian soccer teams, including the Pro Patria

and the San Francesco soccer teams. A group of interested parties, including those mentioned, as well as Giuliano Hreglich, son of the manager of Lloyd Triestino, the two Celoria brothers, Aldo and Angelo (who looked after publicity and administration in the office of *La Fiamma*), Mr Laginestra of EPT, the Capuchin friar Fr Anastasio Paoletti, Evasio Costanzo, Jim (Giacomo) Bayutti, and Mr Arquilla met at Cusa House in the city on 4 November 1954 and formed a committee to spearhead the establishment of an Italian sporting club.

Besides their interest in soccer and other sports, many of the group were concerned to provide a point of reference for the large numbers of single Italian immigrants. As the first A.P.I.A. constitution of 1957 stated: 'The prime object is to promote and encourage the sporting activities of Italian migrants, thus assisting their assimilation into the Australian society'. Ivo Clagnan and Ignazio Stillone wrote the first constitution for the Association. Evasio Costanzo promoted A.P.I.A. through the pages of *La Fiamma*. And in 1954 Jim Bayutti held a meeting at the Caltex refinery at Kurnell on Botany Bay, where 185 members joined, swelling the initial membership of thirty-five.

The name A.P.I.A. was decided upon and a committee was formed, consisting of Bayutti (President), Arquilla and Laginestra (Vice-Presidents), Bearzotti (Treasurer), and Clagnan (Secretary), together with ten committee members. As the 1957 Constitution stated: 'The activities of the Association are of a purely sporting and social nature and are strictly non-political and non-sectarian. The Association is open to all who seek to advance themselves in the amateur sporting fields'. The first sport promoted was basketball which, however, did not prosper. In 1955, A.P.I.A. promoted a boxing match at Redfern Oval. Boxing was much followed at that time, with visits from many famous Italian boxers, including Coluzzi, Visintin and Falcinelli. The frustrations of newly arrived immigrants were occasionally vented at boxing matches where tensions were often high and scuffles broke out among spectators.

The question of where A.P.I.A. meetings could be held in the early days was solved when Callagher's real estate agency in Annandale offered use of an office and telephone in their Parramatta Road premises. For bigger gatherings in the early years, the first floor of the Chianti restaurant in Elizabeth Street was used. Funds

were raised through social events such as gala dances. There were three such events in 1955, at the Maccabean Hall in Darlinghurst, the Dungowan Restaurant in Martin Place (where guests paid ten shillings per head for a 'cena fredda all'italiana' and heard the Orchestra Arquilla), and on the Showboat, *Kalang*, where 400 people paid 1 pound to attend. In 1956 the A.P.I.A. ball at the Trocadero in George Street had 700 guests. These events brought the older-established Italians who had arrived in the 1920s and 1930s to mix with newer arrivals. Raffles were held to raise money, and established Italian businesses such as Cantarella, Lucchitti, Fiorelli and others donated prizes.

True to its name, the A.P.I.A. Association sponsored a number of sports, including swimming, tennis (first played at the Italian Legation in Ocean Street, Woollahra), Italian *bocce*, boxing, indoor bowls, and cycling. Mr Val Gasparini of De Martin and Gasparini, an early benefactor and later President of A.P.I.A. from 1961-1971, offered transportation for the soccer team. The A.P.I.A. soccer team played its first matches in early 1956. The team colours, maroon shirts, white shorts and maroon and blue socks, were chosen to commemorate the untimely death of the Italian national team in May 1954 in a plane crash in Torino. The A.P.I.A. team played in the Canterbury District, against teams such as Hurlstone Park, and its home ground was Blick Park in Canterbury and, later, Lambert Park in Leichhardt. As *Soccer World*, the weekly publication of the N.S.W. Federation of Soccer Clubs, reported on 11 May 1957: 'It is the policy of the A.P.I.A. club to create better understanding with their fellow men through sport' (p. 11). In May 1956 the monthly accounts of the Association read as follows: 'Debit 31 pounds, Credit 41 pounds'. As surviving petty cash records reveal, the monthly laundry bill for the soccer team was a constant and ongoing expense. In September 1956 a new soccer ball was purchased for 7 pounds and six shillings. In April 1957 the A.P.I.A. team had six Italian names and five non-Italian names in its line-up. In 1971 not one Italian name was represented.

A.P.I.A. mushroomed from these modest beginnings, based on a collective male effort. In June 1957, rented premises for A.P.I.A. were opened above Mr Cesare Lucchitti's grocery store and the original Zuliani photographic studio, at 276 Norton Street,



A.P.I.A. Soccer team, 1955.

where Villa Rosa now stands. Mr Lucchitti had started in business in Parramatta Road, Stanmore and he opened a second shop at the Norton Street premises in 1956. In 1957, the A.P.I.A. Club was registered. It was incorporated in the early 1960s. 1957 was a turbulent year for soccer in Sydney. New post-war immigrants were major soccer supporters and players, and new 'ethnic' teams were scattered all over Sydney. Penalties and suspensions meted out to 'New Australian' players were a trigger to a revolt which led in 1957 to the formation of a new Soccer Federation in which Jim Bayutti played a leading role.

Meetings of the Association at 276 Norton Street investigated the possibilities for a permanent location. Leichhardt Council offered a 49-year lease on wasteland at the end of Frazer Street, Lilyfield. With donations from members to purchase adjoining land, permission from the N.S.W. Government to resume a metre of parkland and payment to Council for the lease, a design for a clubhouse by the architect Arena was chosen. Work began on the site, under Keith Bates, an Australian builder from Sutherland who offered a loan without interest, on condition that he built the club. Bayutti provided heavy drilling machinery, Sergio Asquini, together with Antonio Fantuz, was involved with the project, and others such as Carlo Zaccariotto, Peter De Martin and Val Gasparini agreed to payment for their work when the financial position of the club improved. A loan of 25,000 pounds was secured from the Commonwealth Trading Bank. Foundation members were also asked to provide financial support, to the suggested amount of 25 pounds per head. As the Annual Report of 15 November 1960 noted, 'it has been decided that the

[Management] Committee itself will undertake the building of the club, drawing on the resources of all those members at its disposal'.

After the first annual general meeting of the Club on 11 November 1959, a liquor licence was obtained. The Licensing Magistrate, Mr E. J. Forrest S.M., remarked at the hearing: 'The idea of a Club of this kind is excellent for the assimilation of migrants. In its ideals and objectives it is to be commended and encouraged'. There was great enthusiasm for the building of the clubhouse, and construction of Stage 1 took very little time. Mr F. M. Bianchi was chief co-ordinator of the project. Construction companies including Asquini's Modern Cement, Romeo Bros., and De Martin and Gasparini provided services on credit, and others, including Melocco Bros. and G. Bayutti Contractors, took out debentures for materials and services involved in the construction. The new Club premises in Frazer Street began operating on 17 March 1962. Val Gasparini was then President of the Club and Filippo Maria Bianchi was Secretary-Manager.

Soccer was an exotic, 'Continental' sport and the new premises, with marble and other expensive decorative elements, were a fitting venue. Flotta Lauro donated mirrors that created a feature wall at the entrance to the main dining room, Lloyd Triestino provided the mural on the lower floor, and Alitalia was responsible for the painted wall panel in the main foyer, depicting Italian cities. Cantarella and Stock furnished bars. The bronze statue of the discus thrower, emblem of the club, which stood at the foot of the stairs leading to the foyer, was a gift of the Italian Government. Since the demise of the Club, the statue has been located in the Co.As.It. premises in Norton Street, Leichhardt. The Frazer Street clubhouse was by the time of its official opening in 1965 a prestigious symbol of the Italian community in Sydney.

The building's Stage 1 foundation stone, for the original ground floor construction, was laid on 9 July 1960 by the Minister for Immigration, Sir Alexander Downer. The official opening of Stage 2 (including the first floor and a re-modelled ground floor) was performed on 14 April 1965 by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies. A loan to part-finance Stage 2 was secured from the Commonwealth Bank which later opened a small branch in the lobby. In 1966, the estimated cost of building and fitting Stage 2 was 230,526



Dame Joan Sutherland with Secretary-Manager Filippo Maria Bianchi [right] at the A.P.I.A. Club, c.1963.

pounds. In the A.P.I.A. Club Annual Report of 1965, President Gasparini reminded members that guarantees of 30,000 pounds for the project loan from the Commonwealth Trading Bank were provided by four members of the management committee, himself, Bianchi, Bates and Asquini.

The A.P.I.A. Club opening was widely reported in the Sydney press of 1965, with an 8-page spread in the *Daily Telegraph*. In a newspaper supplement of 26 September 1967, celebrating the State visit by the Italian President Saragat, the official speech of the Prime Minister at the opening of Stage 2 in 1965 is reported verbatim. In part, Menzies observed:

You know, if I might make a quiet, confidential admission to you, we native-born Australians are occasionally a little narrow-minded about our own ideas and our own way of living. We say, 'Well, who are these fellows to tell us?' This is the best proof that we have a lot to learn... you have shown us new ways in which to walk, new ways to understand, and I venture to say that in one hundred years' time somebody writing what I will call — to use that abominable word — the cultural history of Australia, will be able to trace in it the influence of your people who have come here and settled here and contributed to the country a lot of faculties, a lot of ideas, a lot of standards that come in almost as new things... Don't be exclusive. Don't get off, but get in, get into the community, get mixed up with the community.

Let everyone have the benefit of what you can contribute and you get the benefit of what they can contribute, an integrated Australian society' (as reported in *Il Globo*, 26 September 1967, pp. 34-35).



The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, on the balcony of the A.P.I.A. Club, overlooking Iron Cove bay, on the day of the official opening of the Clubhouse. (Photograph Zuliani Studio)

The A.P.I.A. Club's restaurant soon achieved fame, and its variety shows and dances were among the well-patronised activities. Poker machines were also a feature. In 1966 the Club's members numbered 4,000; by 1968 membership stood at 8,000. In 1970 there were reportedly more than 13,000 members, 49% of whom were of non-Italian background. This was a considerable increase on the 630 members of 1956.

Other Italian clubs throughout Australia looked to the A.P.I.A. Club for inspiration and advice. There is no readily available record of membership figures over time. However Vartuli reports that of 9,450 members in January 1975, 82% were male and 18% female, and almost 50% were of Italian background. On the basis of a limited survey of members, Vartuli concluded that a majority was from Central or Southern Italy, even though the founding members of the Association were of Northern Italian origin (Vartuli 19). Almost 29%

of members were at that time of Anglo-Celtic background. Vartuli's survey suggested that one of the primary motivations for Italians to join the club was the opportunity that it provided for 'friendship and brotherhood within the Italian community'. (Vartuli 21). Certainly A.P.I.A. was a male-dominated organisation and it responded primarily to male interests. There were even those who felt that by the 1970s the club itself was not 'Italian enough' (Vartuli 21).



ANFE Ladies' luncheon at the APIA Club, Leichhardt, 27 October 1967. Pictured are: Mrs Sini, Enoe Di Stefano, Lena Gustin, Sally Basaglia, Rina Guido and Ester Penna. (Courtesy Mrs Enoe Di Stefano — Photograph Zuliani Studio)

One of the primary motivations of the founding members of A.P.I.A. was a desire to help Italian immigrants. They were themselves immigrants and knew first-hand of the difficulties of settling in a new society. The *Daily Telegraph* reported in 1957 that the constitution of A.P.I.A. mandated a representation of Australian-born athletes in all sports that the Association sponsored: 'This helps Italian migrants to meet Australians and speeds assimilation' (*Daily Telegraph*, 26 February 1957, p. 30). For example, in the eight A.P.I.A. Sporting Committees of 1968 there was a good mix of Italian and non-Italian names among the office-holders.

The glory and the cause of early financial burden for the A.P.I.A. was the soccer team. In 1960 the A.P.I.A. team reportedly had costs of 14,438 pounds. In 1960, over fifty players participated in the three grades, and all three teams reached the semi-finals. Junior soccer was also sponsored. The teams' honorary doctor was Dr Farinelli. In 1970, A.P.I.A. subsidised the team to the amount of \$18,000. As Solling notes: 'in the 1962 and

1963 seasons, peak years for Australian soccer, the Apia Soccer Club... attracted crowds of 30,000 at semi-finals at the Sydney Sports Ground' (Solling 228). In April 1968 a business consortium was formed to help finance the team, including Alitalia, Cinzano, Fiat, Lloyd Triestino and the Australian-Italian companies of Fiorelli, Lucchitti and Transfield, as well as the newspaper *Settegiorni* and Sutton's Motors at Petersham. In October 1987, *La Fiamma* reported a gathering of some of the legendary names from the earliest team line-ups, including Bertoz, Comandini, Cosatto, Molinaroli, De Francesco and Cortese who was the first coach (*La Fiamma*, 29 October 1987).

Di Nicola has observed that the role of A.P.I.A. 'went far beyond that of a social and sporting club. It soon came to be seen as the Italian club both by Italians and Australians: this made it politically relevant' (Di Nicola 167). The size and potential voting preferences of the Italy-born community in Sydney were of great interest to political parties throughout the 1960s and beyond. With visits by the politicians already mentioned, and later many others, A.P.I.A. provided a forum where mutual concerns could be explored. As Solling reports, citing Valente, 'it [A.P.I.A.] became a powerful vehicle for the expression of Italo-Australian opinions and attitudes' (Solling 228). The February 1974 twentieth-anniversary souvenir edition of the A.P.I.A. Club publication, *The Apian*, highlights in its photographic illustrations the presence in the Club premises of a range of State and Federal politicians from the two major political parties, as well as visiting Church and diplomatic dignitaries, together with sporting, cultural and show business notables. Guests of honour at the twentieth-anniversary dinner were the Prime Minister E.G. Whitlam and Mrs Whitlam.

Over the decades of its existence, A.P.I.A. was run by numbers of Italian-born businessmen, many of whom were highly successful and high-profile. Giacomo (Jim) Bayutti was among those from the business community who had a life-long association with A.P.I.A. Valente's sample survey indicates, however, that among the Italian-born community of Leichhardt there was a view that the A.P.I.A. was an 'elitist organisation', with an over-representation of businessmen. Whatever the truth of this, the soccer team regularly drew crowds of 7,000 to home games at Lambert Park. The sporting aims of A.P.I.A. clearly had wide popular support.

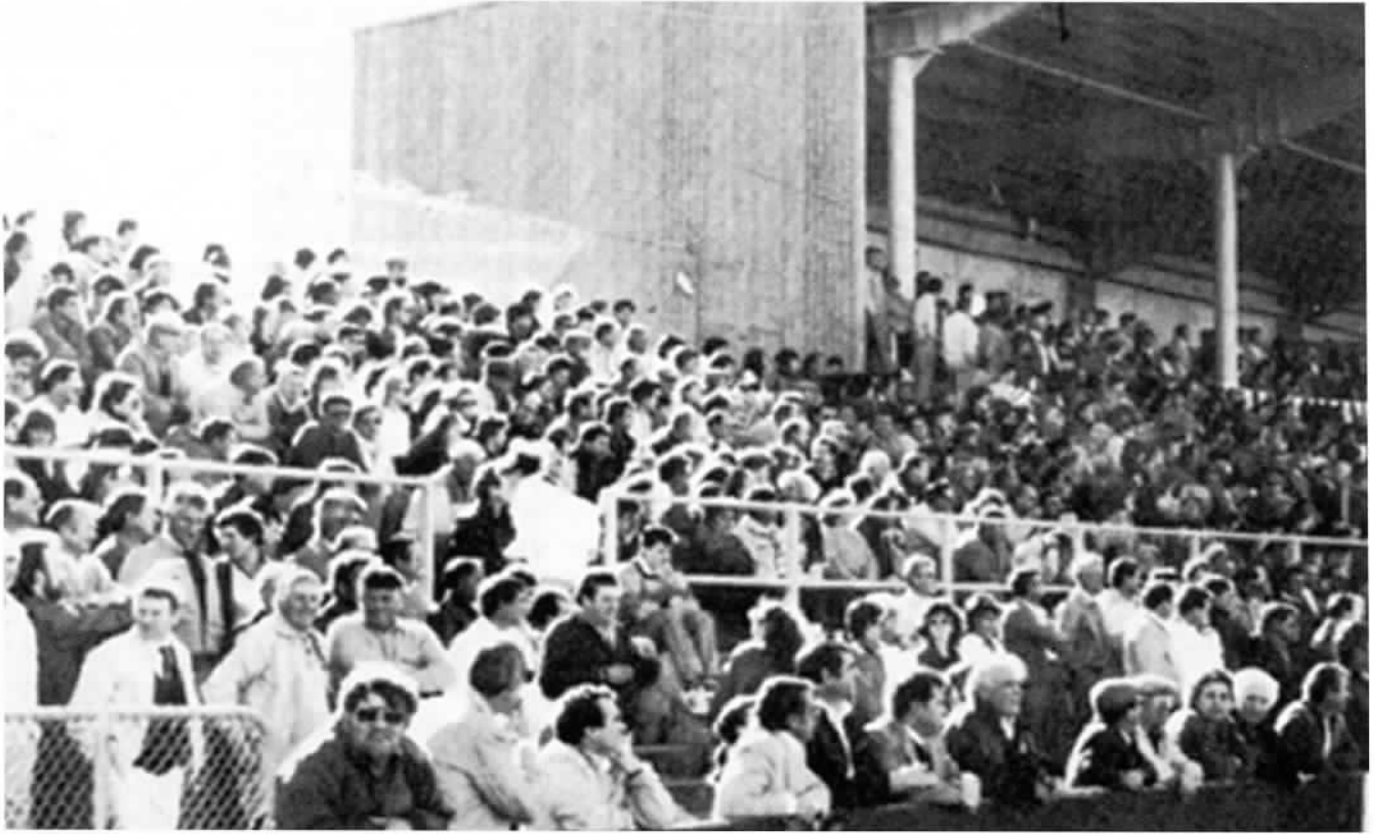
In the late 1970s, a decline in Club membership began. By the 1980s, although it was still a drawcard for both Italy-born and the wider community, there were other outlets that offered the facilities for which A.P.I.A. was initially well known, such as Italian-style eating. A.P.I.A. began to run into financial difficulties. The local newspaper, *The Courier*, of 19 June 1991, reported that the club had debts of \$5 million, membership had dwindled to 3,000, and there were difficulties in raising the money needed to maintain the soccer team (p. 2). When the A.P.I.A. was threatened with closure by liquidators in early 1996 (and did in fact close in May 1996), there was a campaign to rescue it through a public share float, with vigorous support from many prominent members of the Italian community. A *Save the APIA Club* committee was formed, with members including Franca Arena and Louise Bayutti, daughter of Giacomo. Although by July 1996 it seemed that the club would be bought and resurrected by a syndicate of businessmen, this plan did not come to fruition, and the building was re-sold towards the end of 1996.

The demise of the A.P.I.A. club in Frazer Street was seen by many as the end of an era in the history of Italians in Sydney. A reaction from Franca Arena was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 2 March 1996 (p. 27), in the following words: 'The Apia Club is part of our history. Back in the 1950s when Italians first came here in large numbers, it was the only meeting place where they could enjoy their own food and language and culture. Menzies came here, and Whitlam, and this was symbolic — for the first time we were not just a bunch of wogs, we were part of the community'. The blue-painted clubhouse near the Sydney Harbour foreshore was an important landmark to many Sydneysiders.

Acknowledgments

Thanks for the invaluable assistance and advice are due to Guido Zuliani, Ivo Clagnan, Enoe Di Stefano, Ines Ianitto, Gio and Patricia Fin, Bob Giezekamp, Fr Atanasio Gonelli, Fr Romano Franchini, Francesca Merenda, Armando Tornari and Louise Bayutti.

The research on which these articles are based is still in progress. Feedback and comments are actively sought by the author, Anne Reynolds (Telephone 02 9351 3500 – email anne.reynolds@italian.usyd.edu.au)



A glimpse of the crowd of soccer supporters present at a match between A.P.I.A. and Marconi soccer clubs in 1988. The A.P.I.A. soccer team regularly drew crowds of 7,000 to the home games.

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