

“A Business That Grew From an Idea”

The Part Played by Marble in the Development of a
Chain of English Restaurants

Through the Ages, A monthly magazine devoted to the uses
of Marble – its universal adaptability beauty,
permanency and economy

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The article begins:

“Those Americans who were fortunate enough to visit the British Empire exhibition at Wembley in England, during the spring and summer of 1924, will undoubtedly recall the dozens of restaurants and cafes scattered so thoroughly and effectively around the grounds, each one with a distinctive decoration of its own, yet each with the color red always predominant, so that a tour of the eating places made an ‘all-red- route round the miniature empire. There were all told exactly fifty-four of these restaurants and cafes ranging in scale from the Lucullus, near the Raglan Gardens...down to the small tea shops with such jolly names as The Jungle and the Toy Town Café....”

This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

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The entrance lobby of the Trocadero Restaurant, a well-known English eating place, located at Piccadilly Circus in London. The marble treatment of this portion consists of walls of Mexican Onyx with columns of Breche Sanguine. The floor, too, is marble.

(photo caption) "The entrance lobby of the Trocadero Restaurant, a well-known English eating place, located at Piccadilly Circus in London. The marble treatment of this portion consists of walls of Mexican Onyx with columns of Breche Sanguine. The floor, too, is marble."

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THOSE Americans who were fortunate enough to visit the British Empire exhibition at Wembley, in England, during the spring and summer of 1924, will undoubtedly recall the dozens of restaurants and cafes scattered so thoroughly and effectively around the grounds, each one with a distinctive decoration of its own, yet each with the color red always predominant, so that a tour of the eating places made an "all-red" route round the miniature empire. There were all told exactly fifty-four of these restaurants and cafes ranging in scale from the Lucullus, near the Raglan Gardens, where you could find a menu that compared with any in the world for delicacy and exclusiveness, down to the small tea shops with such jolly names as The Jungle and the Toy Town Cafe, and painted as gaily on the front as a child's picture book. The visitor may not have known it—and most probably wouldn't have grasped the significance of it if he had—but there was an interesting story behind this chain of all-red restaurants. In fact, there were two stories, differing from each other radically in theme and interest.

The first story had something in it of adventure, of romance—and of achievement. It controverts the notion usually held by Americans—and often by the British colonials themselves—that the people of England are a slow-moving and stick-in-the-mud sort, lacking the initiative characteristic of our own country. It begins at a point somewhere in November of 1923, when the exhibition had been in preparation for some months. Somehow the arrangements and contracts for feeding the anticipated millions of visitors were still uncompleted. The problem presented was, briefly, to feed from 175,000 to 200,000 people a day, at a site about six miles from anywhere, with no facilities provided except gas and water. But that was not all. The whole catering was to be on a definite plan, and in the hands of someone who could, as Sir Basil Clarke expressed it, "provide any possible meal from a fifty-guinea banquet to a bath bun." Each restaurant had to be built of a type of its own. There must be, for instance, one or two places capable, if need be, of supplying a meal for a monarch, a de luxe restaurant such as is found only in



Entrance lobby of Trocadero Restaurant, London, probably the best known restaurant in England.

ones or twos in the more epicurean capitals of the world. "At the other end of the scale" (and here we quote Sir Basil Clarke again) "had to be restaurants into which a shopman from Oldham or a farm laborer from Old Meldrum could take his wife and count upon getting a meal suited to his appetite and purse." Time, too, was limited, and the authorities know of only one firm in England—or anywhere else, for that matter—who could handle the undertaking. That firm was J. Lyons & Co., Ltd., and so they invited a representative of the Messrs. Lyons to discuss the matter with them.

The upshot was that the contract for the Exhibition catering was signed at 11.40 one morning in November of 1923, and by 12.27 of the same day a Lyons "pantechnicon" van was to be seen ploughing its way over the half-made roads at the fair grounds, loaded with the first installment of equip-

ment and men for the colossal venture. In a few brief months a vast organization was set up at the Empire Exhibition that represented a record in catering enterprise both in quality and extent. It is doubtful if there has even been a similar achievement at any exhibition or similar festival either in England or America that comes even near it. To install plant and equipment for supplying 200,000 meals a day for six months in a spot six miles from their base was an unique feat. It makes us wonder what manner of institution it was that was capable of such expansion on such short notice. And that brings us to the second story referred to before—the story of the firm that is one of the greatest influences in English retail trade today.

J. Lyons & Co., Ltd., have their headquarters at Cadby Hall, Kensington, where is located what is claimed to be the world's

largest bakery, with a capacity of 10,000 loaves an hour. From Cadby Hall go out the supplies for a chain of more than 200 restaurants and tea shops scattered thickly all over London and appreciably over all parts of England, not only in great cities like Manchester and Liverpool, but in smaller towns. But in addition to the eating places, Lyons sells enormous quantities of teas (they have a tea-packing factory at Greensford that is capable of packing and wrapping no fewer than 1,000,000 packets of tea a day), pastries, chocolates and ices. They employ a staff of approximately 25,000 people, a truly staggering figure for a retail organization. It is claimed that for the provision of music alone for their restaurants

the sum of \$750,000 is spent each year. So important a place does Lyons & Co. hold in the daily life of the British people that Sir Leo Chiozza Money, the economist, was moved to write that "I imagine that the £5,000,000 capital employed by J. Lyons & Co. has made more impression upon the national economy and the national habits than any other sum put up for industrial purposes."

All of this stupendous business developed from a single shop and a single idea. This shop was the first "Corner House" which they built in London about thirty years ago; the idea is explained by Sir Basil Clarke as follows: "It soon became clear to the founders of this organization that the provision



Grill room in the Trocadero Restaurant, in Piccadilly Circus, London. The columns are Breche Sanguine, the walls Skyros, the skirting Verde Antico marbles.



Grill room in the Trocadero Restaurant, one of the J. Lyons & Co.'s chain of popular-priced establishments throughout England.



Basement dining hall of the Popular Café, another Lyons restaurant in Piccadilly, London. Note the elaborate marble treatment.

(photo captions) (top photo) "Grill room in the Trocadero Restaurant, one of the J. Lyons & Co.'s chain of popular-priced establishments throughout England." (bottom photo) "Basement dining hall of the Popular Café, another Lyons restaurant in Piccadilly, London. Note the elaborate marble treatment."



The State Café, Liverpool, England. The pilasters here are Pavanazzo, the wall panels Brazilian Onyx, and overwalling Onyx Doré. The dado is Bleu Belge.



One of the feature panels in a corner of the State Café, Liverpool, England.

of mere comfort was only at the beginning of a long chain of potential service to the public on lines such as had not been attempted. Comfort, after all, is only the beginning and outskirts of the field of luxury, which is merely comfort raised in degree. As the first Lyons tea shops initiated the public into appreciating, and later, expecting conditions of comfort, Messrs. Lyons began gradually to extend the comfort of their places, and enhance its degree until it overlapped into the field of luxury. They began to equip and open cafes and restaurants in which far greater attention was paid to such things as the setting and elegance of surrounding, the pattern and lustre of crockery and cutlery, the whiteness and fineness of table linen, the provision of music, and so on."

People made the astonishing discovery

that beauty and luxury were not the prerogative solely of the very rich. They found that they could share in pleasures hitherto regarded as beyond their purse; and Lyons & Co. proved to their own mental and material satisfaction that the great middle class was universally appreciative of fine food, fine music and fine surroundings—that the cultural instinct was flamingly alive in every normal human being, irrespective of his social strata or his degree of education.

The first shop was augmented by a second, then a third, and soon the white and gold shop front, the vari-colored window display of chocolates and cakes, and the trimly clad waitresses of Lyons & Co. were familiar and ever-recurring spectacles. The firm very early in its career began to use marble for the interiors of its restaurants, and some of these treatments were so elaborate in the



Detail of marble treatment in the State Café, Liverpool.



Ground floor room in the Coventry Street "Corner House," London, England.

diversity of the marbles used and the extent to which the material was employed, that Elsdon and Howe, in their well-known book "The Stones of London," list in detail the various types of marble that appear in eight of the Lyons establishments.

In the Trocadero, situated in Piccadilly Circus, and probably the leading restaurant in London, the front entrance hall and stairway is carried out in Mexican Onyx with Breche Sanguine columns and Ashburton handrail. In the stairs leading to the grill room may be seen steps of Bardilla and side walls of Cippolino and Irish Green. The grill itself on the new side has a skirting of Verde Antico, wall decorations in Skyros and Breche Sanguine, the dado bands in Escalette (Pyrenees) and dado panels of Jaspé Tebe with dado rail of Italian Griotte. On the old side are panels of yellow Verona inlaid in Statuary, pilasters of Rouge Antique and Bardillo skirting. The buffet bar is Algerian Onyx, while in

the extension to the foyer is a striking display of Siena Pavanazzo.

The Popular Cafe, which is actually not a cafe but a popular restaurant for luncheons, teas and dinners, and is known throughout the United Kingdom for its excellent meals at moderate prices, is in Piccadilly, London. The entrance hall is carried out in Blanc P marble entirely, whereas the ground and first floor dining halls have their walls of Skyros Alpha and the skirting of Siena. More colorful and interesting, however, from the architect's viewpoint, is the basement dining hall, for here the columns are Siena, the pilasters Verde Antico, and the skirting and dado rail of Ashburton. Fleur de Peche is seen in the dado filling, and the walls are Skyros. Bleu Belge, Second Statuary and Irish Green, in conjunction with the Verde Antico of the architraves, render the Jermyn Street entrance attractive.

Similar in character to the Popular Cafe

is the most famous eating place in Liverpool, the State Cafe, where many thousands of meals are served daily. Here the marble scheme is carried out with Bleu Belge dado, Genoa Green rail and an overwalling of Onyx Doré. Pavanazzo pilasters and panels in Brazilian Onyx feature the treatment. The mere listing of the names of the materials cannot begin to convey an accurate picture of the actual appearance of the rooms, and even the accompanying illustrations can furnish but a faint conception of the splendid coloring and intriguing veining of these striking surfaces.

In the Throgmorton Restaurant are examples of Pink Pettitor and "Devonshire Spar," and in the Corner House, Strand, is a staircase of Piastraccia. The numerous tea shops of Lyons & Co. contain a great variety of treatment, and one is likely to

find in any one of them the use of some marble that is not frequently employed in England. For example, in the shop at 133 Rye Lane, Peckham, is a dado filling of Lunel Rubane, and wall panels of Jaune St. Baume while in number 15, Charing Cross, the dado rail is Languedoc, and in numbers 10 and 12 Ludgate Hill the rail is Bavarian Rouge Royal and the wall panels are of Red Skyros. Just recently the firm extended their Coventry Street "Corner House," installing a large amount of marble in the premises, as shown by the illustrations herewith. The ground floor room was carried out in Breche Capraia with Genoa Green skirting and bands of Cippolino, and the first floor room was sheathed to within 3 feet of the ceiling in Skyros Alpha. In the columns and wall pilasters the marble, however, was continued to the capitals. The



The marbles in the bar of Lyons "Corner House," in Coventry Street, London, are Breche Capraia, Genoa Green and Cippolino.



The basement room in the Coventry Street "Corner House" of J. Lyons & Co., London.
The pilasters are Breche Ivory, with bases of Convent Siena.

basement room of this building is the most distinctive portion, with rather interesting square columns formed by double pilasters on each face surmounted with Ionic capitals. The bases of these columns, as well as the wall bases, are of Convent Siena; the pilasters are of Breche Ivory. The room skirting is in Green Genoa, the dado panels in Breche Medeci, and the dado rail is Red Levanto—surely an interesting combination of lively surfaces, admirably selected and pleasingly arranged.

Lyons & Co. have under course of erection at the present time another large "Corner House" in Oxford Street, London, where they are adopting a special marble treatment consisting of inlaid panels of striking design, but the work is not sufficiently forward at the moment to make an accurate description possible.

This brief account of J. Lyons & Co.,

Ltd., would not be complete without calling attention to the social effect of that great organization's work on the habits of the country—the addition it has made to the pleasure, comfort and outlook of thousands of people. As Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., wrote when reviewing the history of the Lyons Co.: "It didn't take Londoners long to realize the great new thing that had come into their midst. . . . There was a rush, then a cataract of custom, until the business grew with the miraculous growth of the legendary beanstalk." And it is almost impossible to ignore the important part played by marble in this modern-day epic of business in the development of the idea upon which the firm was founded—that "luxury is merely comfort raised in degree"—and that beauty and big business may travel hand in hand to their mutual profit.