

## Spag Bol: The making of and Aussie icon

For generations, Australian families have dined at home, with varying frequency, on some version of spaghetti with a sauce of tomato and minced beef. Indeed, spaghetti bolognese, or spag bol to give it its typically Australian abbreviated name, is so entrenched a part of Australian food culture that it regularly secures a place in polls of Australian national dishes. It can evoke memories both fond and fraught, usually depending on your mother's cooking skills, adventurousness, and resourcefulness. (And it is always your mother's, never your father's: food memories evoked for him are about the success or otherwise of family barbecues, mostly otherwise).



*Spaghetti bolognese on the cover of 200 dishes for Sunday Night Supper, 1973.*

Its appearance at the dinner table is popularly ascribed to either the United States serviceman who were stationed or on R & R in Sydney and Brisbane during World War Two or Italians who migrated to Australia after World War Two as Australia sort to rapidly address its post population needs.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest recipe I have found for spaghetti with a sauce designated as Bolognese is from Sarah Dunne on 18 April 1949 in the Newcastle Morning Herald and Mining Advocate in an article on "Tin-Openers Handy Over Holidays", published then perhaps because of the four-day Easter long weekend public holidays that year.

ANOTHER good way to stretch a small quantity of minced or finely diced, meat is to use a sauce of the Bolognese type, with diced onion, chopped 'peeled tomatoes, stock, and seasoning.

The meat is added to the cooked ingredients, the sauce thickened to a nice coating consistency (which will "flow" but not "run") and poured straight over cooked macaroni or spaghetti. Diced green pepper or parsley makes a' colour contrast against the reddish sauce.

For four people, allow one cup of macaroni. Cook 25 minutes in lightly salted boiling water. Drain very well. For the sauce slice two medium-sized onions. Saute (sic) till almost transparent in two tablespoons margarine. Add four chopped tomatoes and a teacup water with two teaspoons meat extract. Simmer 20 minutes, Add a teaspoon (or more) of caper vinegar, or one teaspoon of plain vinegar and a few drops of Worcester sauce.

---

<sup>1</sup> Van Reyk, Paul, *True to the Land. A History of Food in Australia*, Reaktion, London, 2021, pp 158 - 165

Now add one breakfastcup or more of minced, cooked meat, seasoned with salt and pepper. Thicken sauce to desired consistency with plain flour- mixed with cold water to a thin cream. Stir and cook for a few moments. Test thickness. Adjust with more liquid or more flour Use very hot.<sup>2</sup>

While the year of its publication, 1949, does seem to give credence to either of the post-World War 2 scenarios, this was not the case. In this article I want to trace the development of spaghetti-based dishes in Australia which were precursors to spaghetti Bolognese and push back the entry of spaghetti Bolognese in Australia to at least 1924.

### **A short history of the early years of pasta in Australia**

Eminent food historian Alan Davidson gives the first reference to pasta in mainland Europe as coming in a 'list of the estate of a dead man, Ponzio Bastone, including a "bariscella piene de macaronis"'. However, Davidson continues, the term was a general term for pasta at the time with the tubular form we now call macaroni being a southern Italian speciality called *macaroni siciliani*. Pasta appears as 'makerouns' in the 14<sup>th</sup> century English cookbook *The Form of Cury* in an early version of pasta and cheese though the description of the pasta suggests it was a strip form and not tubular.

Take and make a thynne foyle of dowh. and kerve it on peces, and cast hem on boillyng water & seep it wele. take chese and grate it and butter cast bynethen and above as losyns and serue forth.

This is the above recipe in modern English:

Make a thin foil of dough and cut it in pieces. Put them in boiling water and seethe them well. Grate cheese and add it with butter beneath and above as with losyns [a dish similar to lasagne] and serve.<sup>3</sup>

Pasta has had a long history in Australia. The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser of 14 August 1823, carries an advertisement to the effect that goods expected on the ship the Woodlark had arrived and were for sale, among which were 'vermicelli (sic) and macaroni'.<sup>4</sup> By 1855, Pietro Lucini was producing and selling macaroni in Melbourne, Victoria, and by the 1860s others were also, including Sebastian Danelli who was said to produce pasta using flour from Adelaide.<sup>5</sup>

The first Australian recipe for pasta I have come across is in Edward Abbott 's 1864 tome *The English and Australian Cookery Book*. Cookery for the many as well as for the "Upper Ten Thousand".

#### Macaroni and Vermicelli

Macaroni is a dough of wheat flour made into a tubular or pipe form, of the thickness of goose quills, which was first prepared in Italy, and introduced into commerce in the name of Italian or Genoese paste...

---

<sup>2</sup> Dunne, Sarah, Tin-Openers Handy Over Holidays, Newcastle Morning Herald and Mining Advocate, April 18, 1949, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> 'Macaroni and Cheese', [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macaroni\\_and\\_cheese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macaroni_and_cheese) accessed 12 April 2020

<sup>4</sup> 'Advertisements', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 14 August 1823, p. 2 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) on 14 April, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Tina. Cammarano, 'Ideas of Italy and the Nature of Ethnicity: A History of Italian Food in Australia with Case Studies.' (2018) PhD Dissertation, University of Adelaide, Chapter Four: Sweet and Savoury: Pasta in Popular Australian Cookbooks, 1860-1975 from a pdf provided to Paul van Reyk by T.Cammarano, 14 April 2020

To Dress Macaroni. – Put the quantity required on the fire to boil, either in milk or water, with a little salt; when done, take the macaroni out of the liquid, and put it into a tin dish that will fit into a toaster or salamander. Have ready cheese grated, or cut up into suitable small pieces sufficient cheese, which place on the macaroni, with a small quantity of butter and a few breadcrumbs. Put a little salt in, with grated cheese on the top. Brown before the fire and serve hot. Let the consumer use either pepper or cayenne, according to fancy; put none in the dish.

Excellent Food. - The above is a simple recipe for macaroni; but it is good in any way, whether in stews or in soups, or plain boiled, with melted butter. Vermicelli is the same in every respect, only smaller in the pipe, and is used in puddings and soups in a like manner, and its name implies that it is tortuous in shape, like worms. There is nothing more nutritious to adults or children than macaroni or vermicelli, as they are both made from the gluten of the best Southern wheat.<sup>6</sup>

This is a more elaborate version of the ‘makerouns’ recipe in *The Form of Cury*. It would reappear over the next decades as Macaroni au Gratin (and later as any kind of past au gratin). Other, simpler recipes for macaroni and cheese were circulating in Australia in the late 1870s.

Macaroni Cheese - Parboil for ten minutes in fast boiling and salted water  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb, of any kind of macaroni. Drain it well, and put it into a saucepan with a little fresh butter, some milk, and plenty of grated cheese and black pepper. Simmer until the macaroni is cooked to your taste, turn it out on a hot dish, sprinkle grated cheese over, brown well, and serve.—Boil 2 oz of macaroni in water, drain it well; put into a saucepan 1 oz of butter, mix it well with one tablespoonful of flour, moisten with four tablespoonfuls of veal stock and a gill of cream, add 2 oz. of grated cheese, one tablespoonful of mustard, salt, and cayenne to taste; put in the macaroni and serve as soon as it is well mixed with the sauce and quite hot.<sup>7</sup>

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pasta had become popular enough that Mrs. Lance Rawson included a recipe for making vermicelli in her 1895 *The Antipodean Cookery Book and Kitchen Companion*.

Home-made Vermicelli – *Ingredients*: Yolks of 4 eggs, whites of 1, pinch of salt, a little water, and as much sifted flour as will make a very stiff paste. *Mode*: Make a paste of dough with the eggs, salt, flour, and about a tablespoon of water. Work it slowly, adding the flour by degrees, and be sure it is quite smooth. The roll out in sheets as thinly as possible without breaking, hang these sheets over a dry cloth in the sun for a few minutes; do not let them dry. Then take a sharp knife and cut into strips, or stamp in lozenges, if liked. In an hour’s time the vermicelli is ready to use, either in soup or dressed with cheese.<sup>8</sup>

## Spaghetti in Australia

Spaghetti was a latecomer to the pasta family. Davidson writes:

The earliest record of the word spaghetti (in an Italian dialect dictionary for the region of Piacenza) has been dated by Piccinardi (1993) at 1836. And the term was not recorded in

---

<sup>6</sup> Edward Abbott, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the many as well as for the “Upper Ten Thousand”* (1864), Sampson, Low, Son and Marston, London, pp. 63 - 64

<sup>7</sup> ‘Recipes from the “Queen”’. *The Housekeeper, The Queenslander* 23 November 1878, p. 234 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) on 15 January 2022

<sup>8</sup> Mrs. Lance Rawson, *The Antipodean Cookery Book and Kitchen Companion* (1896), George Robertson and Company. Facsimile edition 1962 by Kangaroo Press Pty. Ltd, p. 75

mainstream Italian until 1846; this by the author of a domestic dictionary, who more or less equated spaghetti with vermicelli. Piccinardi explains that this dual nomenclature persisted, reflecting the practices of certain manufacturers, and exists even now; in some parts of Italy vermicelli is the preferred name for either or both.<sup>9</sup>

The new product had entered England by at least 1845 when Elizabeth Acton mentions it in her *Modern Cookery in all its Branches* spelling it 'spaghetti' and describing it as Naples vermicelli, which perhaps reflects the Italian practice at the time.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest advertisement in Australia for spaghetti I have found is from 1868:

TO SELL – Macaroni at 7d per lb  
Spaghetti 7d per lb  
Vermicelli, ditto  
Lasagne, ditto  
Dried white French beans, ditto  
Swiss Hotel, 163 George-street North.  
The proprietor, C.L., begs respectfully to inform his friends, and the public in general, that he is well supplied, in addition to the above, with every kind of foreign liqueurs  
- From France and Switzerland especially – at wholesale and retail prices.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest Australian recipe I have found in which spaghetti is specifically mentioned is from 1880. The author's use of 'macaroni' in the title and then 'macaroni(spaghetti)' in the body of the recipe is typical of the times and later decades where the two types of pasta are used interchangeably.

MACCARONI AU JUS.—This is an Italian recipe, and is one of the most delicious preparations of macaroni. Boil the macaroni (spaghetti) in water with a very small onion, or piece of one, stuck with cloves. When done drain it and put it into a saucepan with a piece of butter, plenty of grated Parmesan cheese, and as much of the strong gravy of stewed veal as it will absorb. Add pepper and nutmeg to taste. The gravy must be good, free from fat, and strained. This is a dish fit for a prince.<sup>12</sup>

In 1898, writes food historian Charmaine O'Brien, 'Swiss-Italian Vincent Fasoli opened Melbourne's first trattoria. ... the meal began with antipasto of salami, potato salad, beans, beetroot, and carafes of olive oil, which diners passed among themselves. A plate of soup followed, or perhaps spaghetti, gnocchi or risotto garnished with parmesan cheese, garlic, and olive oil. Next came the meat course; a rich Milanese ragout, osso bucco or dishes of sweetbreads, liver, kidneys, or brains. Fish was served on Fridays in deference to Catholic sensibilities...everything - the salami, the pasta and even the anchovies – were made in house...it was very attractive to the city's elite bohemian crowd'.<sup>13</sup>

By the early 1900s spaghetti had become synonymous in Australia with Italians more than any other pasta, often used in what we would now call out as racist, but which was of course passed off as

---

<sup>9</sup> Alan Davidson, *The Oxford Companion to Food* (1999), Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 740

<sup>10</sup> Eliza Acton, *Modern Cookery in all its Branches*, (1845) Longman, London, p. 513

<sup>11</sup> Advertisement, the Sydney Morning Herald, 14 November 1863 p. 9 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>12</sup> Household Recipes, Australian Town and Country Journal, 25 September 1880 p. 28

<sup>13</sup> Charmaine O'Brien, *Flavours of Melbourne*, p 144

'humorous' at the time. At the same time it became contradictorily associated with artists and opera performers.

The Victorian artists bohemed politely enough at the East Melbourne galleries on Thursday evening. Music and two-stepping prevailed until 9.30. when a joyous rush was made to the spaghetti banquet. Great ovals of flavoured macaroni, hot from the stove of an Italian *chef*, were carved into eatable lengths by most of the company. Sculptor Cadornin was a notable exception. He juggled deftly with the slippery yards of nourishment, and never choked once.<sup>14</sup>

The question of how to 'juggle deftly with the slippery yards of nourishment' came to be solved in many recipes by breaking the spaghetti into bite-size lengths before cooking them, much as the artists sighted did post cooking.

### Spaghetti Bolognese precursors

The earliest Australian recipe I have come across that comes closest to spaghetti bolognese is this from 1894. Intriguingly, the unnamed author claims it as 'the real Italian method given me by an *Italian housekeeper*' (my emphasis).

#### Spaghetti

The following recipe for preparing spaghetti or macaroni is the real Italian method given me by an Italian housekeeper: First, to make the gravy, which is really the principal point, make three tablespoonfuls of olive oil or two of butter very hot and throw in a pound and a half of gravy beef cut small; cover closely and cook over a slow fire for two hours, stirring occasionally. Add a little water from time to time, never letting the gravy diminish or grow less than half a pint. About half an hour before the beef is done add a sliced onion, a bouquet of soup greens, six cloves, half a dozen whole peppers, and salt to taste. Add also a handful of dried mushrooms which have been soaked half an hour in cold water, and one and a half teaspoonfuls of tomato conserve, a thick tomato paste which can be purchased of any reliable grocer. Dissolve this latter in a teaspoonful of hot water. Let all simmer half an hour longer, and meanwhile boil one and a half pounds of spaghetti in a gallon of salted boiling water. It will require twenty minutes. Drain, put a little on a large dish, sprinkle over a tablespoonful of grated parmesan cheese, strain over a little gravy, and so proceed until all are used. It requires a quarter of a pound of parmesan cheese for this proportion of spaghetti. When all are in, toss with two forks.<sup>15</sup>

Another piece of Australian myth-busting evident in this recipe is when olive oil first became available. First Fleet historian Jacqui Newling has identified that 'Florence' oil was brought to the colony in 1788, possibly in the hospital stores, and used medicinally to treat an eye injury on Norfolk Island.<sup>16</sup> The earliest advertisement for sale of olive oil I have come across is one published by the Commissary in February 1804 at which 26 gallons of olive oil was one of the items from the 'Greenwich and Britannia's Investments'.<sup>17</sup> 'The Commissary was the government stores, issuing provisions for workers' rations (military and convicts), hospital and institutions' (orphanages /asylums) etc: note that payment is made in wheat as there was no cash currency - and a valued

---

<sup>14</sup> Melbourne Chatter. The Bulletin Vol 34 No 1754 25 September 1913 p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> 'Recipes', The Housekeeper, Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser 30 March 1894 p. 3 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 20 December 2022

<sup>16</sup> Jacqui Newling, email correspondence with Paul van Reyk 31 January 2022

<sup>17</sup> The Commissary, Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 12 February 1804 p. 1 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

commodity as the government would have to supply flour or bread to its rations recipients'.<sup>18</sup> Olive oil was sometimes sold as 'salad oil' and early recipes that call for salad oil in other contexts than Italian dishes mean olive oil. John and Elizabeth Macarthur produced a trial batch in 1831.<sup>19</sup>

What about the tomato conserve?

Imported tomato sauce was advertised for sale as early as 1867.<sup>20</sup> By 1889 the Victoria Preserving Company under its "Red Cross" brand was advertising its locally made tomato sauce, one the company's sauces that 'are well-known to be BETTER THAN ANY IMPORTED'.<sup>21</sup>

There was interest also in making tomato sauce at home. This 1871 recipe was published in the Australian Town and Country Journal, one of a handful of recipes for ways to prepare tomatoes.

TOMATO SAUCE, TO KEEP – Take six pounds of ripe tomatoes, crush them, and sprinkle with salt; let them remain a day or two, then boil and pass through a coarse sieve or colander. Put into the liquor half a teaspoonful of Cayenne, and a dessertspoonful each of cloves, pepper, ginger, and cinnamon; boil it one-third away and bottle it tight. It should be shaken before being used.<sup>22</sup>

The tomato conserve the recipe asks for may well have been what earlier recipes call French tomato sauce (*conservé de tomates*).<sup>23</sup> Tomato conserve, so named, was being imported into Australia by 1872 when Ponçon's Tomato Conserve was advertised by Peate and Harcourt, who would be a major stockist of tomato conserve over the next years.<sup>24</sup> Other non-French inflected brands of Tomato Conserve soon entered the market.

The first spaghetti dish in Australia I have found named after a specific local in Italy was Neapolitan Spaghetti.

#### Neapolitan Spaghetti

Cook ¼ lb of spaghetti in boiling salted water until tender. Drain, rinse with cold water and cut into two-inch lengths. Cut the breast of a cold boiled or roasted chicken into even slices, about an eighth of an inch thick, then cut likewise into strips as wide as they are thick and about two inches long. Cut in the same way an equal amount of lean cold boiled ham or smoked tongue. Mix the chicken, ham, and spaghetti lightly in a saucepan and set the dish over boiling water to heat. Cook one teaspoonful of chopped onion, a bit of bay leaf and a sprig of parsley in one tablespoonful of hot butter about five minutes. Stir in one teaspoonful of corn starch and gradually add one cup of strained tomato. Stir until it has thickened and is smooth, then strain it quickly over the spaghetti. Toss it up lightly until the meat is all moistened, then turn it into a dish for serving and pass (illegible) cheese with it. The attractiveness of this dish depends upon the

---

<sup>18</sup> Jacqui Newling, email correspondence with Paul van Reyk 22 January 2022

<sup>19</sup> 'The 'good oil' on olive oil in early Sydney', The Cook and the Curator. Eat Your History, 17 January 2019, . <https://blogs.sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/cook/the-good-oil-on-olive-in-oil-in-early-sydney/>,

<sup>20</sup> Newell and Co, The Argus, 8 March, 1867, p.8 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>21</sup> The Naracoorte Herald 3 May 1889, p. 3 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>22</sup> Australian Town and Country Journal 21 January 1871, p, 21

<sup>23</sup> 'Savoury Rice'. The House, South Australian Chronical and Weekly Mail, 24 July 1875 p. 19; 'Vegetable Stock'. The Household, The Albury Banner and Wodonga Express 19 August 1876 p. 21 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>24</sup> Peate and Harcourt, The Sydney Morning Heals, 18 July 1882, p. 7

care in cutting the chicken and ham into uniform pieces and the careful mixing of all the ingredients.<sup>25</sup>

By 1910, Spaghetti a la Napolitaine was one of the drawcard daily meals being offered to 'Gourmets and Connoisseurs' by the Savoy restaurant and Hotel in Sydney for 1/6- (one shilling and six pence). The other dish as London Silver Grill.<sup>26</sup>

Then in 1920 this recipe appeared in the Chronicle

Liver, Italian Fashion.

Required. — 1 lb. of liver, & oz. of chopped fat bacon, 8 oz. of cooked spaghetti, 8 oz. of chopped onions 1 lb. of tomatoes, fat, and seasoning.

Method.— Wash, dry, and slice the liver. Cut off the rind from the bacon and chop it into neat squares. Put the macaroni (sic) on to boil. Wash, dry, and slice the tomatoes. Put 2 oz. of butter in a clean stewpan. Melt it. Add the bacon and onions and tomatoes and cook for six minutes. Then add the liver, and saute it gently in the fat and tomato juice for eight or ten minutes. Draw the pan to the side of the fire and continue to cook, basting every now and then, for forty-five minutes. Add the spaghetti. Toss the whole well together till the spaghetti is well coated with the gravy. Season highly to taste with coarse black pepper and salt and a very little grated nutmeg. Serve with finely-grated cheese, handed separately, and a dish of floury potatoes.<sup>27</sup>

Chicken livers are often given as ingredient in 'classic' spaghetti bolognese. However, Ada Boni in her 1969 Italian Regional Cooking lists them as optional.<sup>28</sup>

So now we have all the elements that go to make what Australians would recognise as spaghetti bolognese (liver notwithstanding). But when does it make its first appearance?

### **At last ... Spaghetti Bolognese**

In the early 1930s from an apparent bolognese desert in Australia, three reports on it appeared in newspapers.

In 1931 Mark Foys, one of the major department stores in Sydney placed an advertisement in the Italo-Australia for speciality items in stock for Lent (non-meat) which read in part:

The variety is so great that it even includes spaghetti - but not the delicious Neapolitan specialty nor even with a juicy bolognese sauce accompaniment. No, this is from the well-known Aunty Mary brand.

While it doesn't offer the freshness and aroma of home-cooked fare, this is something quite new! And no doubt with a spicy twist. We're talking about Aunty Mary's "curried spaghetti" which brings together both Italian and Indian cuisines.

---

<sup>25</sup> The Housekeeper. Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser 29 March 1895, p. 4 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 10 January 2022

<sup>26</sup> Ad. Savoy Restaurant and Hotel, the Sydney Morning Herald 27 May 1910 p. 8 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 10 January 2022

<sup>27</sup> 'Dishes you can make with a pound of liver', Chronicle (Adelaide) 1 May 1920 p. 45

<sup>28</sup> See for example [bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/classic-spaghetti-bolognese](http://bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/classic-spaghetti-bolognese)  
Ada Boni, 'Ragù. Bolognese Meat Sauce'. Italian Regional Cooking, Thomas Nelson & Sons (1969), p.105

Mark Foy's looks forward to welcoming Italian customers, and for those of our compatriots who wish to visit their premises, a pleasant and affordable experience awaits.<sup>29</sup>

This is the first reference I have found in any Australian newspaper or magazine to spaghetti with 'a bolognese sauce'. Aunt Mary's was the brand name of a line of products from the Australian grocery products company James Tillock and Co established in the 1890s. Their baking powder was a standard item in many Australian kitchens well into the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The product specifically being referred to in the Mark Foys advertisement was canned spaghetti with tomato sauce. But clearly Mark Foys thought the term bolognese in relation to spaghetti would be familiar enough with the Australian public. (I draw a veil across 'curried spaghetti' and the bringing together of Italian and Indian cuisines.)

The March 1931 edition of *The Home*, a high-quality magazine targeted at the style and art conscious wealthy, Jo Fallon, a well-known society photographer and social columnist, reproduced a recipe from *The Gun Club Cook Book*, published by Scribners in New York, for Spaghetti a la Caruso in which the sauce has all the hallmarks of bolognese, except chicken livers.<sup>30</sup> The recipe is in an article headed *Some Rare Dishes* which is curious given that Mark Foys must have thought the name bolognese commonly enough known to refer to in their advertisement. Perhaps it was because the spices for the dish included 'grated nutmeg, a little lorber leaf (bay), and spice of marguery, which Fallon guesses may be thyme. (A search for spice of marguery only brought up recipes for dishes with Marguery sauce which is made white wine, fish stock, egg yolks and butter ascribed to French chef Nicolas Marguery in the late 1800's.)<sup>31</sup> It's unlikely that the recipe would have found its way into the average Australian kitchen of the time, however, and can be discounted as the origin of spaghetti bolognaise in Australia.

A year later, in 1932, the Dungowan Café in Martin Place, Sydney, advertised its Piatti Della Giornata, Italian dishes for each day of the week, one of which was tagliatelle bolognaise.<sup>32</sup> The advertisement was published in *Il Giornale Italiano*, and as accompanied by an advertorial for the café. The Dungowan had for some years been a popular restaurant because of its central location. The Society of Women Writers in New South Wales lunched there.<sup>33</sup> Society pages of Sydney newspapers often carried reports of wedding breakfasts, office staff lunches and other social events big and small were held there. It had a dance floor and charities held fundraising dances there. It was also near the newly built Cenotaph (1927 – 1929), the memorial to Australians who had died in World War 1, which may account for it being a popular venue for armed forced reunion dinners like those of the Australian Flying Corps Association, the April 1930 menu for which shows a mix of French named dishes (a long-standing practice in Australian restaurants whether the dishes were in fact classically French or not) and staunchly English fare: Creme of Tomato, Fried Fillet, Marlin (Marlin?), Tartare Sauce. Roast Chicken. – seasoning. Vegetables in Season, Cope Jacque, Café Noir.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> 'L'Emporio Mark Foys', *Italo-Australian* 13 March 1931, p. 2 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 25 January 2022

<sup>30</sup> 'Spaghetti a la Caruso' *Some Rare Dishes*, *The Home: an Australian quarterly* Vol 12 No 3. 2 March 1931, p. 51

<sup>31</sup> 'Marguery Sauce', [foodnetwork.com/terms/marguery-sauce](https://foodnetwork.com/terms/marguery-sauce)

<sup>32</sup> Advertisement. *Il Giornale Italiano* 16 July 1932 p.1

<sup>33</sup> Notes from the Capitals. Sydney., *Here and There, The Australasian* 15 February 1930 p.13 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 23 January 2022

<sup>34</sup> D215. 'A menu for the annual re-union dinner held at Dungowan Cafe Martin Place on 24th April 1930. Australian Flying Corps Association', *Cheals Museum of RAAF Memorabilia* [www.chealsmuseum.com/448555156](https://www.chealsmuseum.com/448555156) accessed 216 January 2022



The café, the advertorial said, had passed into the hands of Aldo, Mario Pasquale, and Aurelio Giovanni (John) Bottero. They did not change its name nor its main menu no doubt because it already had a regular clientele who may well have taken the business elsewhere a name change. However, the brothers clearly saw an opportunity for branching out to a new clientele. The advertorial said the brothers hoped to serve the Italian community with specialty dishes from Italian cuisine and hoped the community would use the café for weddings, baptisms, and other special events.<sup>35</sup> In February the following year, the newspaper carried a story in its 'English Section (Italian topics and tit bits of general interest to our English readers)' 'Gastronomic Italy. What Italy Eats and Drinks' in which it noted, 'Bologna is celebrated for its tagliatelle, ribbon shaped macaroni, served with a sauce made of meat'.<sup>36</sup> Tagliatelle bolognese would continue to appear on restaurant menus like 'Un nuovo, moderno, elegantissimo ritrovo gastronomico il "Luigi's Spaghetti and Grill Bar"', though spaghetti bolognese did not.<sup>37</sup>

In September, 1932, The Argus, a Victorian newspaper, has the first, albeit brief and non-Australian locale, description of what a bolognese sauce contained, in a report on what athletes at the 10th Olympiad held in Los Angeles ate: 'The Italians, for instance, called for spaghetti Bolognese, a dish of onions, celery, carrots, butter, ground steak'.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it was some version of this that in 1934 was offered by Buckley and Nunn, a large department store in Melbourne established in 1851, at its Special Friday Tea, where shoppers could have Spaghetti Bolognese as an entree with sweets could be had for 1/3 (one shilling and threepence).<sup>39</sup>

It's unlikely that patrons of Buckley's and Nunn's tearoom would have dined on the spaghetti bolognese on which, in May 1938, the Pratten family were noted as dining as reported to Jo Fallon for her 'Society Tucker' (sic) story in the Daily Telegraph:

The Pratten family, big shots in tin, without exception take to hero soup and spaghetti Bolognese ... chicken livers, chopped onion, tomatoes/herbs, all cooked together, then finally cooked in front of the diners by a floor captain, who uses a spirit lamp and a silver stove.<sup>40</sup>

The article doesn't say where this spaghetti bolognese table-side performance takes place. But in June 1939 Mr. and Mrs. Richard Crooks were seen lunching at Romano's, the popular society restaurant and nightclub established by Azzalim Orlando Romano in 1928.: 'They were enjoying a dish which they both like: "Spaghetti Bolognese:" and it was being specially prepared by Luigi at a table close beside them.<sup>41</sup> Romano's had also previously served tagliatelle bolognese but seems to have dropped that in favour of spaghetti. The tableside idea caught on" Miss Joan Ritchie, Mrs Rex

---

<sup>35</sup> 'Il Nuovo 'Dungowan' Café', Il Giornale Italiano 16 July 1932 p.4

<sup>36</sup> 'Gastronomic Italy'. English Section. Il Giornale Italiano 4 February 1933, p. 1 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>37</sup> 'Nuovo Ristorante Italiano a Kings Cross', Il Giornale Italiano 3 May 1938 p. 2 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>38</sup> 'What Olympic athletes ate', The Argus, 24 September 1932, p. 2 21 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>39</sup> 'Buckley's Special Friday Tea', The Herald 27 September 1934, p. 21 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>40</sup> Jo Fallon, 'Society Tucker', The Daily Telegraph, Monday 23 May 1938, p. 6 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

<sup>41</sup> Gossip Bites, Women's Magazine 6, Daily Telegraph 22 June 1939 p. 16 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) 22 January 2022

Money, Miss Marcelle Bishop and Miss Audrey Wilkinson were photographed serving up their spaghetti bolognaise at Princes in July 1939.<sup>42</sup>



*'Well Known People Enjoying Themselves in Snow and City', the Sydney Morning Herald 27 July 1939, p. 17*

Astonishingly, despite its evident popularity by 1940 at least, it would be another nine years before the first recipe for it appeared in an Australian newspaper: Sarah Dunne's 1949 recipe for 'ANOTHER good way to stretch a small quantity of minced or finely diced' given at the start of this article.

Over the following years spaghetti bolognaise would go through many changes: baked with a topping of grated cheese; with Worcestershire sauce; with mushrooms; with capsicums and aubergine; spiced with cinnamon and cloves.

It was popular enough in 1961 for the Kraft company to market the *Kraft Spaghetti Dinner* in a box – 'real Italian style spaghetti in the true Italian tradition' Each box contained 'thin, thin spaghetti in the true Italian tradition', a Spaghetti Sauce mix – a foil sachet of herbs and spiced which the diner was to add to a tomato soup or sauce of their choice, and a foil sachet of grated parmesan, both in separate foil packets.

*My thanks to Jacqui Newling and Alison Vincent for their skills in researching which were of considerable help to me in finding material for this article, and to Joanna Saville for translations of material from Il Giornale Italiano and the Italo-Australian.*

---

<sup>42</sup> 'Well Known People Enjoying Themselves in Snow and City', the Sydney Morning Herald 27 July 1939, p. 17. accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) 25 January 2022