

Understanding Genealogical Research in Italy

This paper was initially created to accompany a Podcast I was invited to by Emma Cox from [Journey's into Genealogy](https://anglersrest.net/category/european-ancestors/italy/understanding-italy-series/). It will now be developed as part of the **Understanding Italy Series** <https://anglersrest.net/category/european-ancestors/italy/understanding-italy-series/> and is an additional paper for the **Researching Ancestors from Continental Europe Pharos Course (750)** <https://www.pharostutors.com/details.php?coursernumber=750>

The Story of Italy began back in 1815 when Italy looked like this:

Whilst it may seem strange to go back in time and to be looking at the general Italian history, it is important to understand how Italy functioned, how it impacted the lives our ancestors and what rule of law those ancestors adhered.

In 1848, across Europe there was a tension building. There was a restlessness, a demand for change. Frustration and anger, of the majority was building and was being felt across the individual countries of Europe.

It was this revolution. The move for political and social change that precipitated the Unification, or as it is known, the Risorgimento in Italy.

Italy at this point had been a country filled with a variety of Kingdoms, Dutchies and City States. It was wished that these individual territories would unite and become the single country, to be known and recognised as the Kingdom of Italy. Rome would be designated as the capital. The completion of the unification of Kingdom of Italy took place in 1871.

The Map shown here illustrates how fragmented the country was and it is important to understand just where your ancestors came from and did that place move or change from where it was originally as part of the Unification? The reason it is important is that it can alter



where you look for records. More than that, it can provide context as you try to understand how your ancestors lived and what impact those events had on the lives your ancestors live.

Research Tip 1



Research Tip 2

Ethnology is a social science, incorporating things that define us as Italians:

- Customs
- Clothes
- Religion
- Cuisine
- Music
- Language

These factors also distinguish different Italian groups from each other:

- Sicilians from Tuscans
- Calabrians from Lombards
- Apulians from Sardinians

Most towns have a social composition of its people. These are things that identify individuals as being

- **Peasants** – Borgese, Metayer or Hired Servant
- **Artisan** – Carpenter, Mason, Shoemaker, Baker
- **Professional** – Doctor, Pharmacist, Lawyer, Maestro.

By understanding the occupations, it is easy to see how your ancestors were seen in their own communities and the challenges they faced in their undertakings of their employment. These things enable us to draw conclusions, as we establish whether they experienced different attitudes or positions, by movement across the occupational groups.

Having Unified Italy there were two things that were vital, the first, to create Italiansⁱ and the second was to structure the regions, provinces, communities, and hamlets.

Italy is divided into:

- 20 Regions
 - 107 Provinces
 - 7926 Comuni (Cities and Towns)
 - Frazioni (Hamlets and Villages)

Records in Italy are divided into three distinct time periods:

1. **1805-1814** – The Napoleonic Era - Stato Civile Napoleonico
2. **1816-1860** – The Restoration Period, spans the end of the Napoleonic war until the Unification period – Stato Civile Della Restaurazione
3. **1861 +** - Unification period – Stato Civile Italiano

It is this last period that introduces us to several records:

- **Diversi** – Various records that include information about Italians that are not replicated in other records, for example Illegitimacy records.
- **Matromoni Publicazioni** – these are involving couples who want to marry, sharing their intention prior to getting permissions
- **Marriage Licenses**
- **Matrimoni Processetti**, each generating or introducing us to several documents.
 - Details of the births of the Bride and Groom
 - Deaths of deceased parents
 - Permissions to marry
 - Date of the wedding and the church

Languages

Records are in a mixture of Latin and Italian:

- Church records are in Latin
- Civil records are in Italian

However, there are likely to be a few tweaks to that which will impact your research.

- Regional dialects are useful, but most Italian records are written in Tuscan Italian and Latin.
- Some records for the Piedmontese region will be written in French
- Some records for the Tirolean region will be written in German

Italians coming to the United Kingdom

There have been Italians within the confines of the United Kingdom since Roman times, however modern immigration began with churchman, academics, artists, merchants, and aristocrats from around the 13th Century. This gave way to an influx in the 19th Century with the vast majority coming from villages in the North of Italy, usually as seasonal workers who had walked across France to the French ports.

During the period of 1820 – 1850 there were approximately 4,000 Italians living in England with around half of them living in London and hailing from the Como and Lucca regions. By the 1870s this had grown to include the regions around Parma and Liri.

Many of these migrants who came for seasonal work remained beyond the season, often marrying local women, or bringing their families with them.

The London epicentre of the Italian community was known then, as now as Little Italy and is in Clerkenwell. Across many Victorian writings there are descriptions of the cramped and poor conditions which the Italians shared with the Irish population and the English poor. The hope always being that families saved enough money to improve their living conditions, often the reality was very different.

Some of the Italian population spread across the North of England into Scotland and to Wales, although not in huge numbers. The majority remaining in London. By 1891 the Census indicates that the majority of those in London worked as street sellers and organ grinders. The Italian population in Manchester indicates that many were involved with modelling, plastering and tile makers. In Yorkshire many were involved in the cutlery industry especially around the Sheffield area. In contrast, those in Wales were involved with shipping, either working in industries that serviced shipping or as seaman on board British ships. Others worked in the coal industry, for which Wales is famous.

From the 1861 Census in Scotland, we can determine that there was only 118 Italians in the region, by 1901 this had grown to a substantial 4,050. These Italian communities were becoming economically stronger often running food or ice cream venues and, in some cases, moving from the Cities to smaller towns.

The First World War reduced the Italian migration substantially and it remained low until after the Second World War when we see a rise in Italians coming to the United Kingdom.

Some Italians came to the United Kingdom as Prisoners of War and after the war ended remained here, taking an English wife, and building a new life. This then lends the way to the post war boom of immigration which often joined the earlier established Italian communities.

Furthermore, from the 1950s there was an influx from the Southern towns of Italy and Sicily. Those regions were often poor with limited work; therefore, they travelled to the United

Kingdom and became part of a workforce to rebuild Britain after the war. The most noticed communities are in Woking, Bedford, Nottingham and in Cambridgeshire.

Regardless of when those Italian migrants arrived, they came bringing with them mementos from home, recipes, traditions, language and of course their religion. They say that the Church is often at the heart of the community, and that is especially the case with the Italian population.

Researching in the United Kingdom

Researching Italians in the United Kingdom is the same as searching for any ancestral links, however you do in my experience need to think a little outside the box!

Surnames over time change, all surnames can, but imagine an accent to the English ear and what is said can be recorded as something quite different. In the main the names were unfamiliar and therefore spelt with a degree of guess work. There was also a need felt by some of the Italians to anglicise their names, including forenames – Guiseppe becoming Joseph and Jo.

Civil Registration began in 1837 and in the early years the Italians were slow to record the births of their children. In the early days of my own research the only way was to go in person and see the material for yourself. The scanning of material by the Church of the Latter-Day Saints was met with some resistance, and instead the Roman Catholic records were held by the Parish Priest. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the records being available in digital format and that has provided many, many genealogists to have some success researching their families. Accessing these records can provide copious amounts of information in addition to the entry you are seeking. Witnesses at weddings, as well as sponsors at Baptisms and this is particularly useful if the name has been misspelt.

Occupations recorded on the Census can often give a clue as to the place of origin in Italy. For example, those who arrived in Woking Surrey post the Second World War were mainly from the Mussomeli and Caltanissetta regions of Sicily and it is the same for earlier groups of migrants. The Italians, as many immigrants do, remained within a proximity of others from their own commune, town, or Country. If you cannot trace your ancestor, look at others in the location, it may provide a steppingstone to your ancestry.

Other records for researching your Italian ancestry within the United Kingdom are the Census records. The first Census took place in 1801 however it is not until the 1841 that contains useful information to researchers. There are instances of earlier census records surviving, but they are few and far between. The 1841 Census records the ages rounded up or down to the nearest 5 years. 42 years of age probably becomes 40 and 48 years probably becomes 50, so you do need to be a bit flexible with the ages. In 1841 the place of birth is merely a yes or no to whether born in the County. The 1851 Census does give more information, but the amount of data varies. Some are specific with the commune and Italy others simply reflect Italy.

Naturalisation records can be useful, but it was expensive and often the poor could not afford it. All aliens covered by the Aliens Act were required to register having entered the Country, but this often did not happen, and the officials often did not enforce this. Sadly, most of these records have not survived. Passenger records do exist, but often do not cover ships where the journey began outside of Europe. Directories are a useful source especially if your ancestor had a trade. Many Post Office directories or Kelly's Directories have survived.

Researching Italians in the United Kingdom does need to be approached using the accepted research methods, however in my experience it would be useful to think laterally and leave no stone unturned, no matter how unlikely that stone might be.

Look at surname mapping as an aid to your research. A rather useful mapping site is available at <https://www.cognomix.it/mappe-dei-cognomi-italiani> and another one is located at <https://gens.info> In both cases, insert your surname into the relevant box and the site produces a map of Italy and the instances in each region where that surname occurs. Click each region will provide the commune breaking the details of the data down further.

Migration

Having unified, many were happy that there was a pathway of unity, fairness, and growth. There was a feeling in Italy that growth was important. Looking across the rest of Europe countries were expanding their territories and Italy wanted to be included in that group too. Italy looked to Tunisia, which was claimed by France in 1881. Italy subsequently claimed Eritrea and South Somaliland. Italians began to settle, and commercial work and trade began to take hold. Whilst many were happy that Italy was now growing and establishing itself, some were not. At that point there were just two options, accept the situation and keep going or to migrate.

Waves of migration took shape across a variety of time periods, each one making inroads to both Italy and the country that accepted the migrants. Furthermore, the reasons and permanency of the migration impacted the time periods, added to the wider elements of the social, political, and economical spheres. The time periods are broadly outlined as:

- 1870 – 1915
- 1945 - 1985

A broad look at the bulk of the migrants went to the United States between 1870 and 1915, with others heading to Argentina. Whilst migrants post the Second world war went to other European countries, such as the UK, and Germany and for some, further afield, to Australia. That said, there had been Italian migrants in the UK earlier than 1870, so do keep an open mind.

Between 1861 and 1985 as many as 29.036,000 Italians migrated away from Italyⁱⁱ with most of those migrating from either the southern or northeast Italy. Between 1961 until 2013 it is believed that 580,000 Italians had migrated to Germany alone.

By understanding the dynamics of Italy, it is easy to identify the reasons for migration.

- North Italy was more prosperous than the south of the country.
- Naples was the most prosperous and had the most population until it was annexed into the Kingdom of Italy in 1860.
- Palermo was the second wealthiest city.
- The north of Italy had significant poverty and that greatly influenced migration prior to 1870.
- The northern region began to experience financial ingestion rather than the south leading to the migration from southern Italy by 1890 as it was less industrialised.

Research Tip 3

Broad principles of migration:

- Migration prior to 1870 was from the north
- Migration post 1890 was from the south

Italian Parish Records

Research Tip 4

- Parish records are in addition to civil registration, and these predate 1861.
- There is **NO** central registration process across Italy, and these did not begin until 1861.

The existence of Parish Records is a direct result of actions of the **Council of Trent**.

The leaders of the Catholic Church met in the Italian city of Trento in 1545, having formed a council. The topic for discussion was the Protestant Reformation. In 1563, an outcome of the Council of Trent, was that all parish priests were to maintain written records for the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriages, and Deaths for all parishioners.

At this time, 95% of Italians were Roman Catholic, therefore it is highly likely that records relating to your ancestors have survived. That said, since the instruction from the Council of Trent was given more than 400 years ago there may be challenges relating to the records surviving, poor care, earthquakes, floods, fire, war and even storage, but even so, records are likely to have been kept at the local church, or the mother church.

In the event the original church is in ruins or other similar conditions, the records couple be at the new church, or the within the local archives. Records during this period were written in Latin or an Italian dialect, plus the ink may have just faded away, as records prior to 1810 were completely handwritten.

- **Baptism – Atti di Battesimo**
 - The earliest record of an individual's life. The Catholic Church baptises infants as soon as the baby is born, perhaps within a few days of life.
- **Marriage – Atti di Matrimonio**
 - Containing the details of the actual marriage but includes the details of the Banns which are called on three consecutive Sundays before the ceremony was performed. Occasionally, if the couple were in a hurry to marry, one or two of the banns could be dispensed with, and those that are, recorded in the marriage record. The dispensation to eliminate the banns could only be granted by the bishop and not with the agreement of the Priest.
- **Death – Atti di Morte**
 - The amount of information will vary, but will be useful, especially if the individuals marry for than once, as most recent, or previous spouses maybe listed.
- **State of the Souls – Stato dello Anime or Status Animarum**
 - This can be a valuable record and was essentially a "census" taken by the priest of all parishioners and organised by family. Books are updated and maintained. The information can vary but usually includes the names and ages of each person in the household. Some include baptism and marriage records. This is often found in locations that were part of the Papal States as these were used for the purposes of tax collection. Most are not digitised and there is no central repository. Catholic Church Italy has an online directory, www.chiesacattolica.it. It is in Italian, not easy to use, but if you use the translation feature of a web browser there maybe success. Once on the page click on Diocesi e Parrocchie (Diocese and Parishes) a map will appear then you can click the region and province. Alternatively, visit www.parrocchie.it.

You will need to write to Italy to access the information, providing as much information as you possibly can. Naming patterns may have been observed and that might mean that there is one or more individual within a town with the same name.

Write in Italian and do not ask for lots of information in one go. Explain that you have used all other options available. You can either include some money with the application (10 Euro's) or ask for a cost to be provided.

Census

The first "true" census of Italy took place in 1871 following the completion of Unification. However, Census type records were compiled though as far back as 1379 in Venice, with the original purpose being taxation.

Catasto Onciario

This was created between 1742-1753 for villages in the Kingdom of Naples, following orders issued from the Bourbon King, King Charles III beginning 1742 though not all communities complied. If they exist, the document can be very helpful for completing, with a degree of caution, a family tree for those who lived prior to civil registration in 1809.

The Catasti Annotations for each household include:

- Who lived in a property
- Ages of those residing there
- Relationship of those residing there
- Ownership of property
 - Land
 - Livestock

Two copies of this were made, one for the provincial archive and one for the Archive di Stato in Naples, essentially the State archives in Naples.

The records are handwritten and can be purchased by emailing the State Archives in Naples at as.na@beniculturali.it It is worth mentioning, that an extraction of data for an entire village can be hundreds of Euros, but some might have been digitised, so it is well worth checking the Archives online, or indeed other sites.

Riveli di Beni Anime

This document was created for villages on the island of Sicily for the period of 1548-1831. The documents can be found at the Archive di Stato in Palermo and they contain:

- Names of residents, beginning with the head of the household
- Data of other family members
- List of assets
 - Houses
 - Land
 - Animals
- Debts

The Riveli for various villages may be found online at Family Search.

Censimento (Census)

The first official census for the whole of Italy, following unification began in 1871 and is repeated every 10 years, except for 1941. The records are not available to the public; however, some villages and districts conducted their own “census” for various regions, and these were done in random years.

Some may be digitised and available on the portal of Portale Atenati (Ancestors Portal). Check the website and then search for the relevant province.

Typology	
64	Citizenships
3	Citizenships, attachments
2	Citizenships, decennial indices
42	Different
98	Weddings
5	Marriages, decennial indexes
3	Marriages, memoranda, notifications and oppositions
45	Weddings, publications
31	Weddings, publications attached
116	Dead
26	Dead, attached
5	Deaths, decennial indices
89	Born
1	Born, exposed
3	Nati, decennial indices

Here is an example of the search results from www.atenati.san.beneculturali.it where I searched for Sutera.

I use Google Chrome, and this shows the results in English. As you can see there is a wide range of material available up to about 1930.

As these were undertaken at random time intervals you will need to search both:

Stato Civile Napoleonico
Stato Civile della Restaurazione.

Status Animarium or Stato dell Anime (State of the Souls)

An additional census like record beginning in the 1600s. Catholic priests were instructed to create books to record the family sacraments. These books are probably in the local parish although some may have been deposited in the State Archives, or another church if the originating one is no longer functioning.

Italian Surnames

The idea of individuals being given a second name began in the 11th Century in northern Italy. It was to take about 800 years before the practice was widespread and incorporating the rest of the country, especially in the south of the country.

Research Tip 5

A few pointers to think about when you are looking at Italian surnames:

- Prefixes or Suffixes may have been either added or removed from a name
- Long surnames may well have been shortened
- Surnames may have been anglicised
- Despite popular belief, names were not changed by officials at Ellis Island or other immigration centres

- Names were recorded as they were heard, which means that names may well have been recorded differently to how they were spelt. This was not intentional, but a result of accents and surnames that were not familiar to the officials.
- Local dialect can influence the spelling or pronunciation of a surname.
- Many men have the middle name of Maria

Italy has over one million surnames and most of these fit into one of these surname groups:

1. **Patronymic Names** – these are surnames that take their formation from a male, the surname of ORLANDO is an example of this.
 - a. **Metronymic Names** - these are surnames that take their formation from a female
2. **Nicknames** –
 - a. Based on a description of an individual, someone who was always sick may have taken the name MALASSO
 - b. Physical attribute
 - c. Circumstance
 - d. Personality trait
 - e. The name might also be ironic, so someone who is rotund, might have taken the name meaning thin - MAGRO
3. **Names linked to a place**
 - a. Based on an actual place, such as LICATA
 - b. Based upon a description of a place, or a feature.
4. **Occupational Names**
 - a. A literal occupation, such as MACELLAIO (masculine) meaning BUTCHER
 - b. Something linked to an occupation, such as MANNAIA meaning Cleaver as would be used by an occupational Butcher
5. **Foundlings** – This can be tricky, a name may well have given honouring the person who found the child, but also the name of the place where the child was raised was given, an example could be LICATA. Children found in Licata could be given that as a name and to some degree that stigmatised the child. In awareness of that, an attempt was made to alter the naming structure, and what developed was the usage of a name, perhaps a place name that was not typically found in the town where the child was found.

Research Tip 6

A useful book is *Our Italian Surnames* by Joseph G. Fucilla. This was originally published in 1949 and is freely available on the internet, and can be downloaded [HERE](#) at Haiti Trust.

My copy dates from 2003 and published by Genealogical Publishing Company, Incⁱⁱⁱ



There are chapters on Given names, the Evolution of Italian surnames, Pet names (nicknames), Kinship names, Compound names, Desirable and Undesirable qualities (this aligns with the naming that might be ironic), Botanical names, Topographical names, Geographical names, Bird names, Animal names, Fish names, Insect names, Arachnid, Worm, Reptile etc names, Occupational names, Object names, Anatomical names and then a chapter on Miscellaneous names. The final chapters relate to the Anglicization of Italian names in the United States, Dictionaries, vocabularies etc, and other books and articles cited. There is an index at the back.

Italian Military

All males born after 1850 were required to register for the draft, also known as conscription or national service. These records are fascinating and hold some very valuable genealogical information.

Some military records may be available for individuals before 1865, and some as early as the mid-1700s, especially those in the northern provinces. Military service was compulsory and lasted from between 2-3 years.

From 1865 all males were required to report to the local draft board and to register. This also applied to those who were disabled. Annually, a list of all males would be created, with this list being known as **Liste di Leva** or **Registro di Leva**, or Conscription lists. This list would include:

- All males that would turn 18 during the year
- Individuals name
- Date and place of birth
- Place of residence
- Literacy - ability to read and write
- Hair, eye colour, and there might be a photo
- The record would also show if the individual had died or migrated.

When the individual turned 21 years of age, he would be eligible for service and consequently report to the draft board for a physical examination which would determine his fitness for service. This list, recording this information is known as **A'Liste d' Estrazione**

The next document is known as the **Registro dei Foglie Matricolari**, which is the military service record with the information included as:

- Enlistments
- Promotions
- Assignments
- Discharge

If someone migrated before the military serving in the military, or the First World War then the record would be annotated as "deserter". As the punishment for desertion could range

from imprisonment to death, many men feared returning to Italy, but eventually the Government granted pardons to those labelled this way. Many men returned to Italy and served their country in World War One.

The discharge document is known as **Foglio di Concedo Illimitato** (Unlimited Discharge) and was issued on the completion of military service, with the soldier receiving a copy of the document. This contained personal and biographical information and is a useful starting point if the document has survived and remains with the family.

Military records are usually indexed and arranged by year of birth and organised by the military district (distretti) and correspond to the province where the registrant or draftee resided. Over the years boundaries have changed, so having access to a map will help you identify an area as you start your search.

Two copies of the records were made:

1. This was kept at the archives for the military district
2. This was sent to the local court, Procura della Repubblica

Local court records after 75 years are sent to the State Archives. Some records have been digitised and might be found in the Family Search catalogue, but otherwise you will need to write and request them. You can do this by visiting www.atenati.san.beneculturali.it and then head to the Land and Sources page.

Italian First World War Dead

Italy's involvement in the First World war was nothing short of disastrous. In 1915, knowing that Italy was keen to expand its geographical area Britain promised Italy that upon defeat of the Austro-Hungarian empire there would receive territorial rewards if they supported the cause. Italy broke with The Triple Alliance on 3rd May 1915 and just three weeks later declared war on Austria-Hungary, although not on Germany, 5.8 million Italians were immobilised from a population of 38 million. Italy was both militarily and economically unprepared for war.

The war for Italy lasted just three years, but in that time more than 650,000 Italian soldiers were killed and more than a million seriously wounded. 600,000 Italians were captured by the Austrians and deported of which a 100,000 died. From the 5.8 million immobilised soldiers, 4.2 million were deployed to the front and 56% were former farmers.

At the end of the War, Italy was virtually bankrupted. National debt in 1914 had been more than 15.5 lire by 1919 that number had risen to 85 billion lire. Inflation rose to 400%. More than 500,000 civilians died mostly from food shortages and the poor harvest in 1918.

The promises made in 1915 did not come to fruition, many Italians felt that they had paid a hard price and received almost nothing in return, and it was this sentiment that led to Benito Mussolini to rise to power.

For those of us researching Italian ancestors one thing to be mindful of is that if your ancestor retained their Italian Citizenship but lived elsewhere, the UK or US for example they were required to serve in the Italian military.



In the 1930's Italy's Ministry of War published what are known as the Golden Books. There were 28 books published plus an additional three appendices commemorating those who perished during the First World War and fought in the Italian Military.

The website can be located at <http://www.cadutigrandeguerra.it/CercaNome.aspx>

The image shown here is of the Golden Books and showing the page for the surname of VIRCIGLIO and two members of my Great Grandmother's family, from Sutera who perished during the war.

The website is not the greatest design, and the main page and the initial results can be translated using your internet browser, when your surname yields a response it shows the surname, first name and the father's first name, which is very helpful, the second field shows which volume the record is in followed by the province, the page and sub-page, the commune or town of birth, date of birth and the last two fields have links, first to the actual page of information (in Italian) and the last field is the personal data and this can be translated in your browser.

The image shown below shows the search box, the transcription and then the excerpt for the surname of VIRCIGLIO, although there were two individuals that perished.

[Home page](#)
[Search Nominative](#)
[Conti](#)

FALLEN NOMINATIVE RESEARCH

Set the surname and name to be searched, even partially, and press the SEARCH button

Ferrarini, Ferrarelle etc. ... "Mowacini" A" finds Bonacini Andrea, Bonacini Alfonso etc.

Results found: 2 names

FALL OF THE FALL

Nominative (and paternity): VIRCIGLIO PAOLINO DI CARMELO
 Register of Gold: Sicily III - (Vol XXII) (22)
 Province: AG - CL - SR
 Page: 494
 Sub in Page: 24
 Common birth: Sutera
 Common birth Current: Sutera
 Date of birth: May 1, 1894
 Grade: Soldier
 Department: 9 Infantry Regiment
 District: Military District Of Caltanissetta
 Dead or Missing: Dead
 Death Date: August 9th 1916
 Place Death: Karst
 Cause Death: Wounds Reported In Combat
 Decorations:
 Burial: None

Insert Surname

Virciglio Paolino di Carmelo or Virciglio Paul son of Charles!

Nominative (and paternity)	Register of Gold	Provinces	Page	Sub in Page	Common birth	Date of birth	Register of Gold	Personal data
VIRCIGLIO CALOGERO DI GEROLAMO	Sicily III - (Vol XXII)	AG - CL - SR	494	23	Sutera	January 30, 1893	Show Page	View
VIRCIGLIO PAOLINO DI CARMELO	Sicily III - (Vol XXII)	AG - CL - SR	494	24	Sutera	May 1, 1894	Show Page	View

VIRCIGLIO PAOLINO DI CARMELO

Soldato 9° reggimento fanteria, nato il 1° maggio 1894 a Sutera, distretto militare di Caltanissetta, morto il 9 agosto 1916 sul Carso per ferite riportate in combattimento.

For those of us researching Italian ancestors it is a vital record of our ancestors, because even if they resided elsewhere, they may well have returned home to Italy to serve their country.

Fraternal Organisations in the United States

The formation of Benevolent Societies in the United States was an important way to receive support. The mission of the Societies was to:

1. Help members who were from:
 - a. The same village or province
 - b. Practicing Roman Catholics

Some of the Societies were more inclusive and welcome all Italians regardless of regions and how committed they were to their faith.

2. Members were able to receive
 - a. Assistance from the Benevolent Society in times of need.
 - b. Receive assistance to navigate things they needed in the United States

Some of the Benevolent Societies have histories of their organisations, membership records and perhaps even photographs. Most of the organisations will have a **Formal Charter** that is filed with the State that it was formed in. This charter lists officers and early organisers of the Society and this might help with the surnames of the founding members before they were "Americanised".

Some of these societies offered life insurance to members and this often includes details of:

- Beneficiaries, including the maiden names of females
- Date of birth
- Date of death
- Ancestral hometown of the deceased
- Occupations
 - Migrants often worked in the more dangerous occupations, such as mines, mills, quarries, and railroads.

If records do not exist, photographs might. Special events were often photographed and if the Society exists and has a physical building the photographs of the early days may be on display.

The most notable Fraternal organisation is the **Figli d' Italia – Order of the Sons and Daughters of Italy in America**. The organisation was established in New York City in 1905 and had, and still does chapters across the United States. This organisation had some very important resources that members could access, and these were:

- Free Schools to help immigrants learn English
- Assisted in applications to become Citizens of the United States
- Provide Life Assistance and Monetary funds

Some materials have been digitised and are online, currently with Ancestry.

In Cleveland, the **Western Reserve Historical Society** (<https://wrhs.org>) was established in 1905 and has a collection of Italian American cultural records, including diaries and Journals, photographs, and various other information, including some fraternal organisation records.

There are many, many of these societies across the United States and Canada. Some have websites, others have a presence on social media, such as Facebook. You can also check **La Gazzetta Italiana** for local based societies.

Another well established organisation is in Lowellville Ohio, **Fraterna Societa Della Madonna Del Carmel** (Mount Carmel Society), which formed in 1895

Organisations in the UK

There are similar organisations within the United Kingdom, some of which started from a political viewpoint and have since morphed into progressive and non-political organisations. Other organisations are much more cultural in their reach, the likely reason for the difference between the groups within the United States and those in the United Kingdom is probably the number of migrants.

Migration from Italy to the United Kingdom had been undertaken since Roman times, with later migration numbers rising steadily, with the majority appearing to arrive after the Second World War, though where the migrants settled affects the numbers, whereas in the United States the migrational peaks were much more defined.

There were significant Italian communities in London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and elsewhere. The community at Woking, in Surrey for example is around 4,000 but the group of Italians arrived post the second world war and from two areas in Italy.



Italian Procession for the Feast of the Lady of Mount Carmel, Clerkenwell, London 18 July 2004

Individuals from the Commune of Sutera in Sicily identified by the banner.

© Julie Goucher, 18 July 2004

As the detail on the image shows, the banner represents those who have attended the event in London from Sutera. This is dated from 18 July 2004 and copyrighted to me.

What appears to be the fundamental element for keeping the communities in the UK aligned with the originating one in Italy is the religious events that take place. An example of this is the Feast of Mount Carmel which takes place in London in mid-July. The streets around what was Little Italy are filled with the loud Italian banter, music, and friendship. Groups attend and follow the religious edifices through the streets. It is at events like this, that I feel very lucky to have such a rich culture & heritage, representing both my Sicilian and English nationalities.

The British Italian Society (<https://www.british-italian.org>) was formed in 1941 in London and I find that quite interesting. In 1941, Italy was an Axis power, effectively an enemy of the allied forces. We know from other sources that Italians were interned, and their status reviewed, but given that and the feeling at the time, I cannot help but to want to find out the driving force for the formation of the Society. Whatever the reason though, as an organisation it has survived and thrives.

Beyond the Second World War

In concluding this paper, it would be remiss of me to not include something about the structure of the Italian Government and its position with its Monarchy. On 2nd and 3rd June 1946 and institutional referendum was held across Italy, bringing together both men and women to have an equal say in the Governmental structure of the country.

There were two options:

1. Maintaining the Monarchy
2. Choosing to become a Republic

The vote was tight, as the results show:

1. 10,718,502 votes (45.7%) were cast in favour of maintaining a Monarchy
2. 12,718,641 votes (54.3%) were cast in favour of becoming a republic.

King Umberto II of Savoy had only been in office since 9 May 1946 and was exiled and thus ended the domination of the House of Savoy on the Kingdom of Italy, which had begun on 17 March 1861, with the Unification of Italy.

The Constitution was approved in 1947 and became the foundation and symbol of the democracy of the country, guiding and inspiring the people of the Country to move forward with the reconstruction of Italy following the Second World War.

In 1949 Italy applied to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation)^{iv}. In 1961 the celebration of the Republic took place in Turin, the first capital in a unified Italy. The financial and economic crash of the 1970s moved the celebrations of Republic Day to the first Sunday in June to save money and drive the economy. In 2001 the President of the time restored the celebrations to the 2 June as a full public holiday.

Italian Republic Day, 2 June is a time when Italians across the country and elsewhere can come together to celebrate the values, ideals and traditions that unites them. Italians can remember with a civil sense and responsibility the history, success, mistakes, conquests, and defeats. It is a reflective time, to remember and recognise the importance and value of democracy and what it means to be Italian.

ⁱ This is in reference to a quote from the Prime Minister of Sardinia on the eve of the Unification “*We have made Italy, now we need to make Italians*”.

ⁱⁱ Hunt, Peter and Tosi, Laura, *A Fit as a Fish: The English and Italians Revealed*, published 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Our Italian Surnames, Fucilla, Joseph G. ISBN0-8063-1187-8, published 2003, Genealogical Publishing Co Inc – Free download available [HERE](#) at Haiti Trust.

^{iv} NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, <https://www.nato.int/>

About the author

Julie Goucher is of mixed heritage, Sicilian on her paternal side, with her family coming from Sutera on the Mediterranean Island of Sicily, with migration to both the United Kingdom and the United States. Julie’s maternal heritage is from England, primarily from what is defined as the “Home Counties” – Surrey, Sussex, and Hampshire, where her ancestors did not really move more than 30 miles for 300 years.

Julie began researching her ancestors in the late 1980s and is undertaking two One-Name Studies, for surnames representing her parents – BUTCHER and ORLANDO. Julie is a Trustee for the Guild of One-Name Studies (<https://one-name.org>), and a Tutor for Pharos Tutors (<https://pharostutors.com>), where she tutors three surname courses and a further course on Researching Ancestors from Continental Europe.

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All sites accessed March 2023