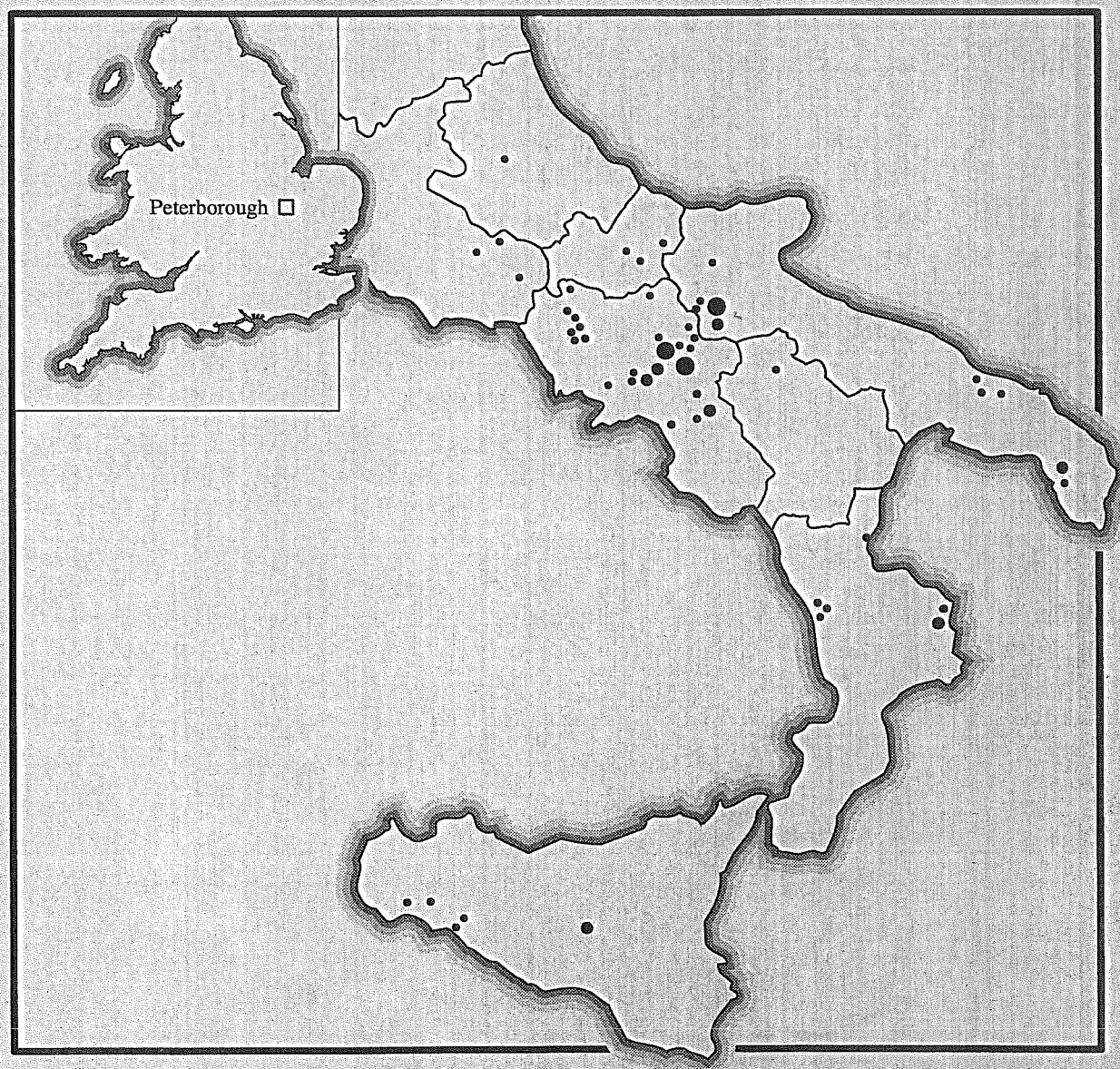


# **Research Papers in Geography**

## **ITALIANS IN PETERBOROUGH: between integration, encapsulation and return**

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**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

Research Paper 27

**Italians in Peterborough:  
between integration, encapsulation and return**

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# Italians in Peterborough: between integration, encapsulation and return

## Introduction

This paper presents the first study of the Italian immigrant community in Peterborough. Italians in Peterborough would perhaps not come high on most people's agenda for studying immigrants in Britain. In fact the 'Peterborough Italians', a community of some 7,000 persons, are the major immigrant group in the town, and they constitute the third largest Italian community in Britain after London and Bedford. Despite an impressive amount of historical and geographical research on Italians in Britain (to be highlighted presently), the Peterborough Italians have never been studied before.

The paper analyses the identity, characteristics and organisation of the community. We present data on the origins of the migrants from Italy, and some insights into the process of return migration. In Peterborough, the community appears in general to be tightly structured and economically integrated, whereas the social aspect of integration is more problematical, even for the 'second generation'. Poor social integration, as we shall see, is a function of a number of factors: the recency of the establishment of the community, since the 1950s; its strong national identity - or more particularly its conservation of rural southern Italian values; and the powerful presence of the Italian Catholic Church in Peterborough. From the social point of view, we may characterise the community as an 'encapsulated' one. However, limited social integration is not necessarily a problem for the primary or first-generation immigrants who, coming from a background of poverty in southern Italy, generally show respect for English people and institutions. Those who return to Italy are disproportionately made up of the still rurally-orientated, conservative, elderly Italians who go back to their villages to retire and reunite with kin. Their encapsulation in Peterborough prepares them, to a certain extent, for this return.

The field research on which this paper is based was carried out in Peterborough and southern Italy in spring and summer 1995.<sup>1</sup> Interviews were made with 16 immigrant households in Peterborough, as well as with various community leaders. Visits were made, and data compiled, at the local Consular Agency in Peterborough, the Vice-Consulate in Bedford, and Peterborough Town Hall. The local newspaper, the *Evening Argus*, was also consulted as a primary source, as were the records of the London Brick Company, initially the major employer of male Italians in the town. A further 16 interviews were administered to returned migrants from Peterborough in selected south Italian villages in summer 1995.

## Italian immigration to Britain: an overview

This is not the place for a complete review of all the literature published on Italians in Britain. This literature is now quite extensive and a long review would take us away from our primary focus on Peterborough. What we shall do here is to discuss the main historical phases of Italian migration to Britain in order to contextualise the Italian settlement in Peterborough. We shall make comparative reference to other Italian communities in Britain, notably that in the

nearby town of Bedford, and we shall refer, in passing, to some of the main studies carried out on Italians in Britain or, as Palmer (1982) calls them, the 'Britalians'.

It is well-known that Italy has a long history as a country of mass emigration (King, 1992). Between 1876, when official records of emigration began, and 1976 when Italy had started to become a country of net immigration, more than 26 million Italians emigrated (Rosoli, 1978). Of course, many of the emigrants subsequently returned, some after only a few months, but many more emigrated for good and they, and their descendents, became Americans, Argentinians, French, and so on, losing their nationality if not their ethnicity in the process. According to figures published by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were 5.1 million Italians (i.e. nationals and/or passport-holders) living abroad in 1987, of whom 187,400 were in Britain (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1988, pp. 286, 294). The number of Italians living in Britain has been falling during the 1980s (cf. 220,000 in 1982 according to the same source). The British census figures (based on birthplace and therefore excluding British-born second or third generations) show that this decline dates from the 1970s, if not before. The postwar censuses record 38,427 Italian-born in 1951, 87,250 in 1961, 108,930 in 1971 and 97,848 in 1981. Clearly the major growth in the postwar Italian community in Britain took place in the 1950s. Italian data on annual flows of *espatriati* (emigrants) and *rimpatriati* (returning migrants) to and from Britain show the highest rates of emigration during the 1950s and early 1960s, with net return setting in as early as 1969 (King, 1988, pp. 45, 47, 49). We shall return to the question of numbers later in the paper.

Looking at Italian migration to Britain historically, four waves of movement can be recognised: a small-scale arrival of elite migrants, lasting from the Middle Ages until the 19th century; the first mass migration of much poorer Italians during the late 19th and early 20th centuries; a second, and more concentrated, mass arrival during the 1950s and 1960s; and finally a return to the elite class with the to-and-fro movement of professionals, business migrants and students in the 1980s and 1990s. We should, however, emphasise the relativity of the term 'mass': compared to the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Italians who migrated to North and South America in the decades around the turn of the last century or to France and Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, the 'mass migration' of Italians to Britain must be considered rather small in scale.

Leaving aside the Roman conquest of Britain, the first significant migratory linkages began in the Middle Ages and concerned a number of different fields and activities such as trade, banking, artists, musicians etc. (Marin, 1975). Most were concentrated in London where, for example, the name Lombard Street derives from the concentration of Lombard bankers there in the past. Italian artists and musicians became famous at the English court in the 16th and 17th centuries. Agents of the Holy See monopolised the medieval British wool trade; whilst Italian monks, bishops and papal legates, in addition to making an important cultural and juridical contribution to Britain, also built abbeys which became significant centres of population before the Industrial Revolution. This first, long-running elite migration came to an end with the arrival in London in the early and mid 19th century of around 1000 political refugees like Ugo Foscolo (poet and writer), Antonio Panizzi (who became director of the British Museum), Gabriele Rossetti (poet and painter) and, above all, Giuseppe Mazzini (political exile and eventual champion of Italian unification).

Already by the 1830s a new, more humble, peasant migration had started. Coming from mountain regions in the Alps and northern Apennines where agricultural conditions were harsh and unable to support an expanding population, migrants walked to England where, initially in London but later in other big cities like Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow, they found work as street entertainers, chimney-sweeps, artisans and domestic servants. Chain migration was an important mechanism driving these movements, so that specific villages or small districts became linked to British destinations and, often, to specific trades like knife-grinding, barrel organ-playing or the making and selling of ice-cream. This is a fascinating era in the historiographies both of the emigration of Italians worldwide (where emigration to Britain can be regarded as a rather unique case<sup>2</sup>), and of immigration to Britain where the Italians stand alongside but clearly differentiated from the more thoroughly researched Irish and Jewish immigrations (cf. Holmes, 1988). The best treatise on this migration epoch is Sponza's (1988) book on Italians in Victorian London.

From an early involvement in peddling chestnuts (in winter) and ice-cream (in summer), 19th-century Italian immigrants developed their well-known specialisation in the catering and food trades, moving into ice-cream parlours, fish-and-chip shops and, ultimately, restaurants and hotels: areas of the British economy where, at least initially, they had few or no competitors (King, 1978). It was this involvement in the fast-expanding catering sector which accounted for the rapid growth in the number of Italian-born in Britain in the late 19th century - from 6,800 in 1881 to 24,400 in 1901 according to the British censuses. This growth was disproportionately concentrated in London which was, of course, the colonial and commercial heart of the world and therefore had a significant demand for tertiary-sector personal services. But the Italian immigrants of this period, growing ever more entrepreneurial, were not slow to seize opportunities elsewhere, moving to other cities in Britain (and Ireland) and also to seaside resorts where their near-monopoly of the trade in ice-cream parlours and cafés ensured them a successful livelihood.

The British census data indicate that the Italian community stagnated in the early 20th century: 24,383 in 1901, 25,365 in 1911, 26,055 in 1921 and 24,008 in 1931. But these data, it should be remembered, are based on the birthplace criterion: they mean that over the 30-year period the number of deaths and returns to Italy was more or less balanced by new Italian-born arrivals. What these figures do not reveal is the growth of the Italian community through their British-born children (Italian consulates estimated the Italian community at 29,880 in 1927) nor the economic consolidation of the immigrants through their business progress in the catering and allied trades. According to Colpi (1991, p. 71), the 1920s and 1930s were the 'golden era' of the Italian presence in Britain, a time when the migrants from *la vecchia emigrazione*, the 'old migration', settled down, progressed economically and became an integral part of the fabric of British society.

This prosperity and integration was brutally interrupted by the Second World War when most of the Italian community in Britain disbanded: many returned to Italy, others were interned, and Italian businesses closed down or sequestered. This traumatic period in the history of the Italian presence in Britain is reviewed by Colpi (1991, pp. 99-129). Although there were of course many exceptions, recovery of the Italian business community in Britain was fairly rapid after the war, aided above all by the buoyant economic conditions of the postwar period.

From the end of the war, however, a new wave of Italians flooded into the British Isles, preceded by a few European voluntary workers, and ex-prisoners of war who decided to stay on rather than return to Italy. This 'new immigration', the third wave of our historical sequence, had many characteristics which were different from the pre-war settlers who, despite their extremely humble origins, had achieved a broadly bourgeois status. First was their geographical origin; for the first time, the majority of immigrants to Britain came from the south of Italy, from the regions of Campania, Sicily and Calabria. The second new characteristic was their mode of recruitment, by means of an official agreement between the British and Italian governments by which unemployed Italians could be assigned to jobs in British industries where there was a domestic labour shortage, such as bricks, steel and textiles. This leads to their third characteristic: their geographical distribution within Britain which naturally reflects the location of the industries they were recruited into (King, 1977a). The key role of the brick industry in Italian employment in the 1950s led to completely 'new' Italian communities being established in towns like Bedford, Peterborough, Loughborough and Bletchley. In fact 15,000 Italians settled in these 'brick towns' in the 1950s and 1960s, many of them recruited by the London Brick Company. According to Sarre (1986, pp. 79-80), the decision of the LBC to recruit in Southern Italy rather than in the West Indies (where London Transport was recruiting workers at the same time) may have been influenced by the fact that Italian prisoners of war had been used in the brickyards in the early 1940s. Smaller communities of southern Italians took root in other industrial towns such as Nottingham, Coventry, Sheffield and the South Wales steel towns. Along the Lea Valley north of London there was a conspicuous concentration of Sicilians who worked in the glasshouse industry (King, 1979). Another characteristic of the 'bulk recruitment' immigration of the postwar years was the participation of women. Whilst males were recruited for work in the brick and steel industries, cohorts of women were brought over to work in hospitals and in light industries (textiles, ceramics, food) where there were also local labour shortages. In fact females were the first migrants to arrive in the late 1940s, the male bulk recruitments not starting until 1951. Hence, as the first arrivals, women were often the sponsors of migration chains which developed in subsequent years from their villages and kinship groups. This pioneering role of women in postwar Italian migration to Britain has scarcely been acknowledged.<sup>3</sup>

The 'new immigrants' who arrived in Britain in the postwar period now represent the most significant group in the country in terms of numbers, accounting for about 70% of the total community. Not all arrived by impersonal bulk recruitment, however. Once this scheme ended, chain migration became operational so that the districts where the original workers were recruited from continued to act as suppliers for further arrivals. In general these districts were concentrated in the hills and mountains of the southern Apennines inland from Naples (the main recruitment headquarters), and particularly from the poverty-ridden provinces of Avellino, Benevento and Salerno in the region of Campania. Secondary areas of migrant supply were in adjacent regions of Apulia, Molise and Calabria, and there was an important supply area in south-west Sicily where unemployed workers from the contracting sulphur mines were keen to move to similar work (in brickfields and coal-mining) in Britain (King, 1977a). As we shall see later, this pattern is more or less replicated by the distribution of origins of the Italians in Peterborough which is typical of the 'new' communities established quickly in the 1950s and 1960s through bulk recruitment migration.

The differences between the 'old' and the 'new' Italian immigrants in Britain are marked. Whilst in some cases the two groups are spatially separate, in different towns and cities, in other settings they are present in the same settlement. This is not the case in Peterborough, where the



community is entirely composed of postwar immigrants, but in other cities like London, Manchester and Dublin they co-exist side-by-side, with relatively little mixing or interaction. The 'old' immigrants, already present for three or four generations, are assimilated, have a high level of material well-being, and are present at all levels of British society. Mostly they preserve something of their Italian cultural identity but this in no way hinders their assimilation. The situation is more problematic for the new Italian communities which are more or less integrated economically but far from assimilated socially and culturally. Clearly, variations in integration and assimilation can be partly accounted for by the length of time spent in Britain, but other reasons are to be sought in the origins and structure of the new communities. As noted, the vast majority of postwar immigrants arrived from southern Italy and belonged to the *contadino* or poor peasant class. They had little or no land and had to live from their meagre incomes as day-labourers or insecure sharecroppers (in this respect there was some contrast with the 'old' emigrants from northern and central Italy who generally had experience of independent farming or artisan trades). The southerners came from rural areas characterised by rigid and hierarchical social structures, and many were barely literate. Once in Britain, these migrants preserved their own traditions and mentalities, spending their lives almost entirely encapsulated amongst family, kinship and village groups and under the paternal influence of the Catholic Church: a way of life defined by strong gender roles and based around life-cycle sacraments such as christenings, confirmations, marriages and funerals. At work they were mainly with Italians from the same background. Colpi, in her research on the Italians in Bedford, found that the well-known Italian phenomenon of *campanilismo* or loyalty to one's native village, found new expressions amongst the migrant subgroups in England where each major village group formed an inward-looking social microcosm constantly reinforced by ties of kinship, marriage and godparenthood (Colpi, 1993).

The new wave of postwar migration, of which the Italian community in Peterborough is a product, came to an end in the late 1960s as 'traditional' Italian emigration itself faded out. The growth of the Italian economy and welfare state removed the need to emigrate, although severe unemployment remained (and still is) a problem in southern Italy. Nowadays most Italian migration to Britain - the fourth phase in our scheme - is very different and more comparable in some respects to the elite migrations of the first historical phase. European integration, the maturing of the Italian economy to its post-industrial state, the increasing desire of Italians young and old to travel abroad, the attraction of London as a global city - these are some of the factors which have stimulated powerful Italian migratory currents to Britain in recent years. But with free movement between EU states now guaranteed, it is difficult to monitor and quantify these latest movements: indeed many of them, made up of student exchanges, business visits etc., are almost impossible to record because of their casual, to-and-fro nature. This also makes estimates of the total stock of Italian immigrants in Britain increasingly difficult to make. Colpi's preferred estimate for the total size of the Italian presence in 1991 was 250,000 (Colpi, 1991, p. 166), based on a slight grossing up of Italian consular and Foreign Affairs Ministry records. This estimate seems reasonable but has probably now been exceeded by the further growth of mobile Italian groups - especially students and other young persons concentrated in London and the south of England - in the 1990s.

### **Italians in Peterborough: migration processes and patterns**

As stated in the introduction to this paper, our interest in Peterborough derives largely from the fact that it represents a significant Italian community which has never been studied before, in

sharp contrast to the great interest which has been focussed on the Bedford Italians.<sup>4</sup> The Bedford community is the larger of the two, but not by such a degree as to concentrate attention away from Peterborough. Colpi (1991, p. 174) gives a figure of 10,000 for the Bedford Italians and 6,000 for Peterborough. The estimate of the Peterborough local planning authority is 6,500, whilst the Italian community itself estimates 7,500 as the number of first, second and third generation Italians in Peterborough. Based on the total population of Peterborough - 153,000 in 1991 - these estimates indicate that Italians make up a not insignificant 4-5% of the town's population.

Previously a medium-sized market town, Peterborough underwent a dramatic growth and transformation with the arrival of the railway in the mid-19th century. The town grew by rapid accretion of housing, stimulated in turn by the growth of industries. The brick-making industry was the most important of these, taking advantage of the suitable clays exposed in the Nene Valley, but also important were several heavy engineering companies which followed in the later 19th and early 20th centuries. Further rapid growth of population and economic activity took place after the middle of the 20th century. The town's population virtually doubled between the 1960s and the 1980s as a result of its overspill function from London and new light industries. Nowadays Peterborough has a mixed industrial and service economy. The town enjoys particularly good transport connections with the national road, motorway and rail networks.

Like nearly all British industrial cities, Peterborough has a multiracial society with a variety of immigrant and ethnic groups. With nearly 1 in 20 of the town's population, Italians are the dominant non-British ethnic group, but there are also significant numbers of Pakistanis (4,750), Indians (2,660) and Afro-Caribbeans (1,200) as well as members of a number of other ethnicities - Black Africans, Bangladeshis, Chinese etc.<sup>5</sup>

### *Push and pull factors in Italian migration to Peterborough*

Italians were the first immigrant group to arrive in any significant number at the end of the war. The overriding *raison d'être* for their migration was the need to cover a shortage of labour in the local brick industry which was in frantic expansion in order to supply a vital raw material for the reconstruction of Britain's war-damaged cities and industries. In a situation of excess labour demand, the local labour force preferred less strenuous and better-paid jobs than those available in the brickyards. We shall return to the precise mechanisms of recruitment in the next subsection of the paper.

If the shortage of labour in the postwar period in Peterborough was a major attraction for the Italian migrant workers, push factors should not be neglected either. In the early 1950s conditions in rural southern Italy were still desperately poor. Land reform had improved the situation in some of the flatter, coastal areas, but in the interior mountains - where most of the migrants came from - little was done (King, 1970). In these upland regions pressure of increasing population combined with an inefficient agricultural economy and an uncompromising physical environment to create a situation in which emigration was virtually the only hope for many people (Dickinson, 1955). Population pressure was driven up by a high rate of natural increase, compounded with the catalytic effect of many men returning home from war service who faced little prospect of employment. Through their military experience, these men had seen something of the wider world and were unwilling to accept livelihoods as peasants or farm labourers.

### *The London Brick Company and the recruitment of Italian workers*

Apart from the presence of a few Italians in Peterborough who had been prisoners of war, often working on farms in the surrounding area, the recruitment of Italian migrant workers started in 1951. It was in that year that representatives of London Brick's personnel department made the first of several annual recruitment journeys (the last was in 1957) to southern Italy. The procedure for recruitment was the same each time.<sup>6</sup> The Italian authorities transported men, coming mainly from villages and small towns in rural southern Italy, to a recruitment centre which at first was housed in a cavalry barracks on the outskirts of Naples but which later occupied new headquarters in the city centre. When the men had been interviewed by the London Brick Company recruitment team and provisionally accepted as employees, the contract was read aloud to them. Shortly afterwards they were transported, along with the one suitcase they were allowed to bring, to Milan where they were medically examined and then put on another train to one of the channel ports, and thence via Dover or Folkestone to London. There was a further medical examination before they were taken to their final destination, usually either Bedford or Peterborough.

The first group of Italian workers recruited to Peterborough in 1951 numbered 73. The numbers escalated to reach their peak during 1953-56, and then continued until the late 1960s, after the specific recruitment missions to Naples stopped. During the 1950s and 1960s a total of 3,000 Italians were recruited or hired by the London Brick Company at Peterborough; during the same period about 250 returned home. Those who arrived in the 1950s were initially accommodated in hostels close to the brickfields at Yaxley, Woodston and Fletton, on the southern outskirts of the town. According to a clause in the recruitment contract, wives were not allowed to come at the beginning but they could follow at a later date. It did not take long before the Italians had saved enough money to rent rooms and small houses in the town and thus moved out of the cramped hostels. At first they colonised the cheap housing in and around Gladstone Street close to Peterborough railway station, but later, in the 1960s, they mainly moved out of this area to settle in other parts of the town such as the housing estates in Fletton and Stanground, not far from the brickworks. Now the Gladstone Street area is home to many Pakistani immigrants. The Italians, meanwhile, especially those of the second generation (who have mainly married within the Italian community), are found in virtually all districts of the town.<sup>7</sup>

The Italians' conditions of service and residence were initially tightly controlled. They had to record their presence monthly at the local police station and sign an 'Alien Registration Certificate' each year for the length of their contract. The contract with the London Brick Company was for a minimum of four years and a maximum of ten. Support given to the migrant brick workers by the trade unions made sure the London Brick Company fulfilled their obligations; it guaranteed working conditions in accordance with industry's national agreements, and gave the Italians the option of returning home after one year if they did not wish to stay (Bendixon, 1988). In 1961 the original brick contract conditions were revoked; many Italians chose to stay on as non-contract workers. During the remainder of the 1960s bulk recruitment was replaced by informal chain migration, new arrivals relying on relatives and work contacts in the town for their migration from Italy. Since the early 1970s the flow of returning migrants has generally outweighed the new arrivals, with the result that the community has stopped growing by immigration; instead steady growth and the consolidation of the community have been secured by endogamous marriage and the birth of the second and, now, the third generation.

## *Geographical origins*

Apart from impressionistic information obtained from interviewees, the main data source for an analysis of the origins of the Italian community in Peterborough are the lists of current Italian passport-holders held at the Italian Consulate Agency in the town. These data, pertaining to 926 passport-holders in 1995, are however only indicative since they are a sample of the total community which, as noted above, is around 7,000-strong. Assuming that the sample is unbiased - probably a fair assumption<sup>8</sup> - the data can be portrayed at various scale levels: macro-regions, regions, provinces and communes.

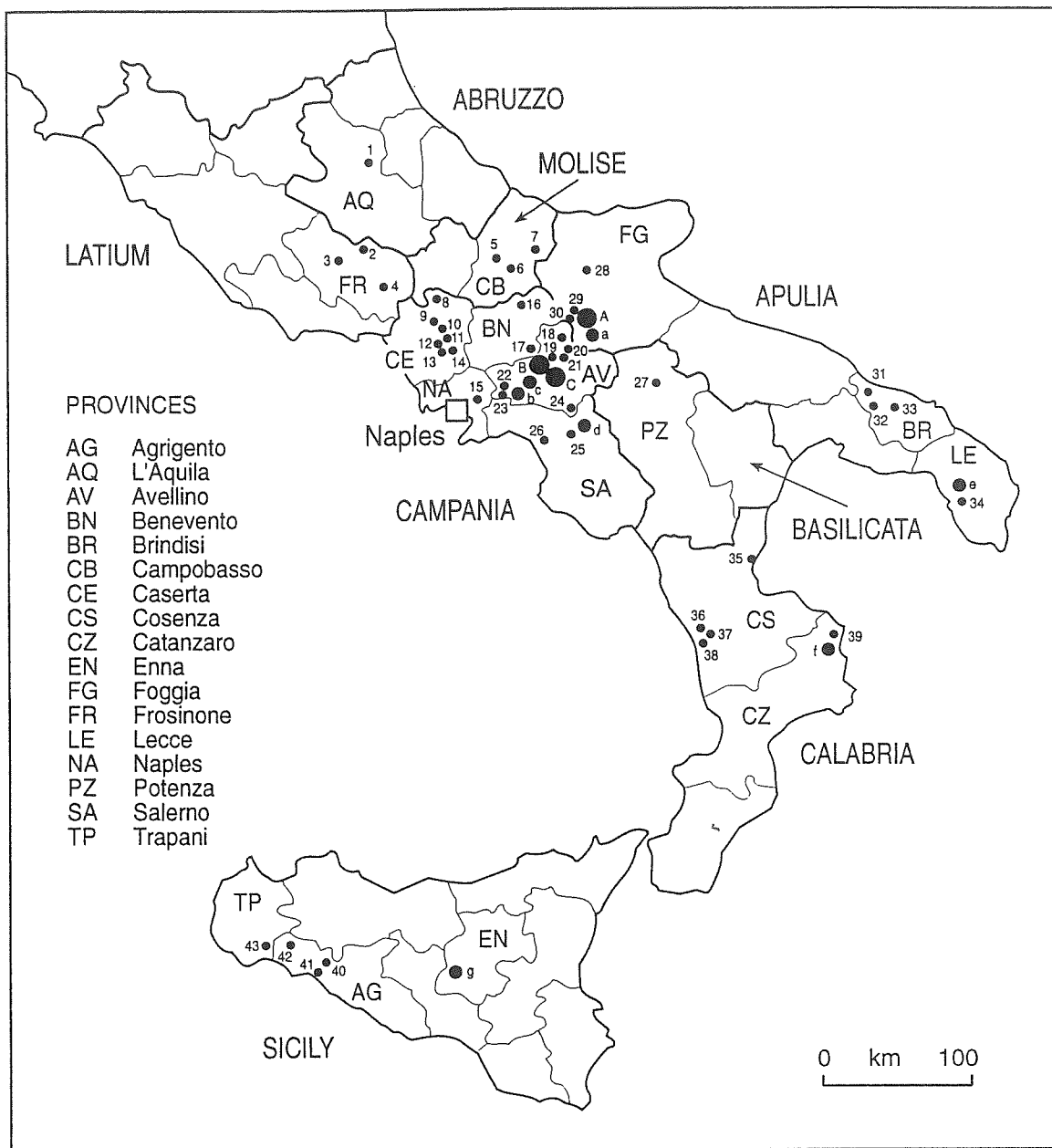
The macro-region of southern Italy accounts for the vast majority of Peterborough's Italian passport-holders - 839 out of 926 or 90.7%. The remainder are equally divided between Italy's two remaining macro-regions, the north and the centre, 44 and 43 respectively. The majority of the non-southerners are white-collar workers such as teachers and priests who have moved to Peterborough after the main influx of brick-workers.

At the regional level (Italy has 20 *regioni* or official administrative regions), Campania heads the list with almost exactly half the total - 461 or 49.8%. Campania is the region of which Naples, the recruitment centre for the brick-workers, is the capital. Yet no passport-holders could be found who originated from this city: they mainly came from the mountainous interior, as we shall see presently. Other significant regions of origin are Apulia 172 (18.6%), Sicily 78 (8.4%), Calabria 75 (8.1%), Molise 36 (3.9%) and Latium, a central Italian region, with 32 (3.5%). The remaining southern regions - Abruzzo (7, 0.8%) and Basilicata (12, 1.3%) - are unimportant as sources. Figure 1 shows the location of the regions named, plus the provinces and communes discussed below.

At the provincial level (each region being made up of two or more provinces), the main provinces are Avellino (240, 25.9%), Caserta (90, 9.7%) and Salerno (50, 5.4%), all in Campania, plus the Apulian province of Foggia (105, 11.3%). When we examine the position of these provinces on the map (Figure 1), we see that they form a contiguous cluster in the southern Apennines in the hinterland of Naples. However this map also shows that the provincial and regional totals are made up of a relatively limited number of sending communes (villages and small towns), reflecting the geographically selective nature of the emigration process at the micro level and the operation of chain migration after the initial bulk recruitment drive. The Peterborough consular records indicate 248 source *comuni* in Italy; those sending more than 5 passport-holders are marked on Figure 1. The three most significant *comuni* are, in order of importance, Montefalcione (province of Avellino), Bovino (province of Foggia) and Pratola Serra (province of Avellino), all with at least 40 members in Peterborough. The map also shows that nearly all of the Italians from the central Italian region of Latium originate from the southern corner of the region (province of Frosinone) which has a long tradition of emigration to Britain (King, 1977a) and is part of the highly emigration-prone core of the central-southern Apennines.

Comparison of the Peterborough origins with those of the much-studied Bedford Italian community reveals a broad similarity of distribution. As the map in King (1977b, p. 446) shows, in Bedford too the main concentration is from the southern Apennines, with subsidiary yet important sources in Calabria, Apulia and Sicily. Taking the top few supply communes in each case, one is common to both towns - Montefalcione. But whereas Montefalcione is top of the list for Peterborough, it is the third in the Bedford list after Sant' Angelo Muxaro in Agrigento province,

Figure 1 Places of origin of Italians in Peterborough



- |                 |                      |                           |                          |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● 20+           | ● 5-10               |                           |                          |
| A Bovino        | 1 Capestrano         | 16 Colle Sannita          | 31 Cisternino            |
| B Pratola Serra | 2 Sora               | 17 San Giorgio del Sannio | 32 Ceglie Messapico      |
| C Montefalcione | 3 Veroli             | 18 Ariano Irpino          | 33 San Vito dei Normanni |
|                 | 4 Cassino            | 19 Taurasi                | 34 Sannicola             |
|                 | 5 Oratino            | 20 Zungoli                | 35 Trebisacce            |
|                 | 6 Ferrazzano         | 21 Sturno                 | 36 Malvito               |
| ● 10-20         | 7 Colletorto         | 22 Moschiano              | 37 Santa Caterina        |
| a Deliceto      | 8 Ciorlano           | 23 Quindici               | Albanese                 |
| b Ospidaletto   | 9 Calvi Risorta      | 24 Senerchia              | 38 Fagnano Castello      |
| c Forino        | 10 Bellona           | 25 Campagna               | 39 Ciro                  |
| d Oliveto Citra | 11 San Prisco        | 26 Pontecagnano           | 40 Calamonaci            |
| e Galatone      | 12 Marcianise        | 27 Forenza                | 41 Ribera                |
| f Melissa       | 13 Casal di Principe | 28 Lucera                 | 42 Santa Margherita      |
| g Pietraperzia  | 14 Maddaloni         | 29 Orsara di Puglia       | di Belice                |
|                 | 15 San Guiseppe      | 30 Ansano di Puglia       | 43 Castelvetro           |
|                 | Vesuviano            |                           |                          |



Sicily, and Busso in Campobasso province, Molise (Colpi, 1993; King, 1977b). Bedford also appears to have greater numbers from its 'lead' communes, both absolutely and relatively, than does Peterborough, where the Italians are more evenly scattered across a wider number of supply villages.

### **Social and community life of the Peterborough Italians**

The structure of the Italian community in Peterborough is well-developed if self-contained, and these features have allowed the community and its members to retain contact with Italy and with basic Italian cultural values. Various institutions - the Italian Consulate Agency, two Italian churches and a number of recreational associations - have played a key role in the maintenance of ethnic identity. In the following subsections we consider first the functioning of these institutions, then the employment structure of the Italian community, and finally the Italians' social life and identities.

#### ***Italian community institutions***

The consular structure is the institution which represents Italian authority in Britain and which regulates civil and penal matters under British and Italian law. Peterborough is the seat of an Italian Consulate Agency, one of 14 now present in Britain. It is directly subordinate to the Vice-Consulate in Bedford and indirectly to the General Consulate in London.<sup>9</sup> The Consulate Agency is housed at 275 Gladstone Street, in the area of original Italian settlement in the town.

The Agency deals with a wide variety of matters, including residency, property, land ownership and transfers within the family, registration of births, deaths and marriages, military service exemption papers, and return migration. Most Italians in Peterborough have therefore had many contacts with the Agency. Comments in the interviews frequently referred to disappointment about the complicated bureaucratic procedures and long delays in the resolution of various matters. Such criticisms naturally reflect the fact that the Consulate Agency is merely a remote arm of the heavily bureaucratic and centralised Italian state and has to mediate both Italian and British law.

Long before the Italian Consular Agency was set up (in 1985), the Italian Catholic Church was active in Peterborough. The mission run by the Scalabrini fathers<sup>10</sup> has been working in Peterborough since 1956. At the beginning the priests' task was essentially a practical one; none of the immigrants had much command of English and hence they needed help in virtually every sphere of life, especially in their relationships with authorities. Today the improved knowledge of English, the maturing of the bilingual second generation and the intervention of the consulate structure allows the missionaries to devote most of their time to pastoral activities, although they remain available for help in practical affairs.

At the beginning the Scalabrini fathers said mass in hired halls and private rooms. In 1962 an old Victorian school in the Gladstone Street area was converted into a church and named after the patron saint of workers, San Giuseppe. A second Italian church, Saint Anthony's, was founded in 1966 in the Fletton area where many Italians were (and still are) resident. In addition to the Scalabrini priests, working nuns (of the order of the Holy Ghost of Nazareth) have been present in Peterborough since 1962 when they founded a day nursery taking mainly Italian children. The nursery, together with rooms for social activities, occupies space donated by the town to the

Italian mission to promote integration. Attached to the church of San Giuseppe, the entire complex constitutes a focus of Italian religious and social life in Peterborough.

The most important religious event for the Italians in Peterborough is the festival of Saint Anthony (*festa di Sant'Antonio*), held on 19 June. It replicates the tradition of Italian villages where a big annual festival celebrates the 'saint's day' of the local patron saint. St Anthony is the patron saint of the Italian community in Peterborough. The festival consists of a procession through the streets of Fletton in which four statues are paraded - St Anthony, San Giuseppe, San Gerardo and a madonna - followed by several hundred people. The day is concluded by parties and general merry-making - fireworks, music, a lottery etc. The event is always widely reported in the local press, suggesting interest and consideration from the English and other populations.

Whereas originally the priests acted as a socio-religious reference-point for virtually all members of the Italian community, now their role has changed. The church survives as an institution which regulates the main phases of life on special occasions such as christenings, funerals and marriages, but the rates of religious observance and church attendance, especially amongst Peterborough-born second-generation Italians, have fallen off, and the new generations seem increasingly to live outside the influence of the church.

After the Consular Agency and the Catholic Church, the third pillar of institutional and associative life amongst Italians in Peterborough is made up of societies and welfare agencies. Work-related welfare agencies such as ACLI, INCA and INAS<sup>11</sup> developed during the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the growth of the 'third wave' of southern Italian immigration into provincial industrial cities such as Peterborough, Bedford, Coventry, Nottingham, Bristol etc. As Bottignolo's account of the postwar Italian communities in Bristol and Swindon shows, these associations attempted to guarantee social assistance to Italian workers and their families and operated through local agents in each town with a significant community of working Italians (Bottignolo, 1985, pp. 122-123). Reflecting their Italian trade union origins, such associations also had a political character, linked to one or other of the main political factions in Italy - Christian Democrats, Communists etc. In addition to their welfare role, they also organised social and recreational events.

As the employment pattern of Italians in Peterborough has changed (see next subsection), the relevance of these welfare agencies has diminished. Today the main instance of community associationism is ICA (Italian Community Association), founded in 1985 and now counting 2,000 members. Its premises are a building known as the 'Fleet', located in Fletton. By most accounts, it is a well-organised association, with an overall management committee and several subcommittees which promote different activities. Recreation is the main element in the day-to-day functioning of ICA; special care is taken to involve older members of the community. For younger members, sport is the main focus - football, basketball, volleyball and fencing. Football is a passion amongst Italians everywhere and the first Italian team in Peterborough was organised as far back as 1965. The current team, 'ICA Juventus', was put together in 1987.

### *Employment*

Analysis of the Italian community's employment patterns was made through two sources: occupations recorded in data on residence permits held for Peterborough in the Vice-Consulate in Bedford; and interviews carried out with migrants and other key informants.

Table 1

## Employment categories of Italians in Peterborough, 1995

Category	no.	Category	no.
Unskilled workers	282	Hotel, restaurant workers	15
Skilled workers	149	University professors	1
Office workers	66	Teachers	1
Artisans, shopkeepers	15	Artists, journalists	1
Farmers	1	Clergy	3
Agents, representatives	7	Unemployed	21
Managers	19	Pensioners	190
Officials	1	Housewives	90
Professionals	10	Students, schoolchildren	101
Health workers	3	Pre-school children	69

Source: Italian Vice-Consulate, Bedford: residence permit files for Peterborough

The consulate data identify 20 employment categories for the 1045 permit-holders. As Table 1 shows, unskilled and skilled manual workers account for 41.2% of the total residents; however, if we consider only employed persons, omitting pensioners, housewives, students, schoolchildren and unemployed, the percentage rises to 75.1%. Hence the manual, working-class nature of the Italian community in Peterborough is confirmed beyond doubt. The manual workers are mainly concentrated in the town's various industries, and in construction trades. Also worthy of note in the data on Table 1 are the high percentages of pensioners (190, 18.2%) and of children/students (170, 16.3%), indicating a balanced age and family structure after 45 years presence in the town; and the low incidence of unemployment - 2%.

While Table 1 gives a reasonably clear picture of the occupational categories of Italians in Peterborough, it is nevertheless the case that the categories are too broad to provide a specific idea of the actual jobs done. Interview data help to shed light on the more precise job types and also patterns of occupational mobility. What emerges from this analysis is the high percentage of Italians now employed in the main manufacturing industries of the town (Hotpoint, Perkins, Red Ring etc.) as well as in building trades like bricklayer, electrician, plumber etc. There has been a wholesale move out of working in the brickyards into manual jobs which are both better-paid and less strenuous. Also, many of the original recruits to the brickyards are now retired (Table 1). London Brick, the major employer of Italians in Peterborough for twenty years after 1951, now employs no more than 50 Italians. Mechanisation has reduced labour needs in the brickyards, and Pakistanis have taken over from Italians as the main immigrant workforce.

Interview data reveal that Italians in Peterborough have had few problems finding work. Many have enjoyed job stability, even if they have changed jobs now and then. Nevertheless, real occupational advancement amongst the first-generation immigrants has been limited due to low educational attainment and still fractured English. It is also worth noting that two-thirds of interviewees had emigrated and worked abroad (mostly in Switzerland and Germany) before

coming to England. Perhaps the most significant statistic which sums up the character of the community is that 94% of its households are owner-occupiers. This indicates, above all, its stability and achievement of at least a modest economic success.

### *Social, cultural and family life*

With very few exceptions, the Italians in Peterborough lead stable, family-centred lives in which most social interaction is reserved for family members, and people from their own village, known as *paesani*. Within *paesano* groups, special importance attaches to those who are *compari* or 'special friends' linked by bonds of godparenthood or having officiated as best man or witness at a wedding. Membership of community associations such as the ICA and other trade-union-affiliated welfare groups is widespread: in fact more than four-fifth of our contacts and interviewees in Peterborough belonged to one or more Italian societies. These Italian associations, together with the still-important role of the Catholic Church, help to preserve traditional cultural values and mean that very few Italians play an active part in any British organisations, either formal or informal (such as pub life).

The nature of social relationships both within the community but especially with others outside is very much bound up with educational background and language skills, and with whether we are talking about first-generation or second-generation Italians. First-generation Italians come, as we have seen, from peasant backgrounds and have few if any formal educational qualifications; most have but a few years of primary schooling. Even after 40 years in Peterborough their English is often far from good, for they have spent most of their long years in England socialising and working within an Italian-speaking environment of *paesani* and Italian workmates in the brickyards. Even their knowledge of standard Italian is generally limited for they speak the thick dialects of their home regions in southern Italy.<sup>12</sup> After half a lifetime in Peterborough they remain estranged from British society by barriers of language and culture. Curiously they have also become estranged from mainstream Italian society, which has changed so much in their absence that they can scarcely relate to it anymore. In some respects, therefore, the south Italian immigrant communities in British cities like Peterborough exist in a kind of time-warp, preserving cultural values which have diminishing meaning in Italy itself. In other words, they are encapsulated in time as well as in space and in society.

Amongst the second-generation Italians the cultural situation is more open and fluid, and their linguistic skills are more advanced. Such persons speak excellent and colloquial English, for this will have been the language of their schooling and, if they have left school, of their workplace; and they will probably have at least some command of dialect (the language of their home upbringing) and perhaps too of standard Italian, especially if they attended one of the courses in Peterborough organised since the 1960s by the Italian government and run by Italian teachers.<sup>13</sup> Use of dialect, however, is probably destined to die away as the first generation dies off or retires back to Italy; although the younger generation understands it, there is no move to preserve it long-term (Tosi, 1991).

These generational contrasts are also reflected in citizenship patterns. Most of the older Italians retain their Italian nationality (about three-quarters of the entire ethnic community has Italian nationality). Dual nationality is held by about 12% but is becoming more widespread amongst the second generation. The remainder, nearly all British-born, have opted for British nationality. Identity is also bound up with friendship patterns: nearly all members of the community

have other Italians as their closest friends, with whom they socialise and visit each other's homes. Regarding self-perception of national identity, 69% of those contacted and interviewed considered themselves Italian compared to 31%, mainly second generation, of mixed identity; there was also a strong local identity as citizens of Peterborough.

When feelings of identity and positive/negative feelings were further probed in the interviews, it emerged that the vast majority of interviewees viewed migration to, and life in, Peterborough in positive terms. There was praise for many British institutions like the National Health Service, and the efficiency of the British educational and welfare services was frequently contrasted with the situation in Italy or the experiences interviewees had had in their dealings with the Italian consular authorities. When asked to describe the main characteristics of the British people, words like 'fair', 'reasonable' and 'kind' were commonly used, but a significant minority of about a quarter expressed a negative tone, using terms such as 'cold' and 'racist' to portray the British. Despite their long stay in Britain, many first-generation migrants expressed a certain degree of homesickness for Italian weather, food and ways of life. But two-thirds think they will probably stay in Britain since this is where their work and families are.<sup>14</sup> This links to the final section of the paper which is on return migration.

### **Return from Peterborough to Italy**

Italian data on return migration are partial and deficient (King, 1988, pp. 3-9); hence there was no way of accessing accurate information on returns from Peterborough. Some information on return is held by the Consulate Agency in Peterborough, and this was used to locate returnees in Italy. However it should be recognised that this source is far from complete, firstly because many Italians do not bother to inform the consular authorities when they return home, and secondly because the authorities themselves do not try very hard to keep the records up-to-date.

Nevertheless, some national-level data indicate that substantial return migration from Britain back to Italy has taken place. Between 1946 and 1987 Italy received nearly 82,000 returned migrants from the UK. This was 1.6% of the total return flow from all countries to Italy over the same period. The fact that the UK accounted for 2.3% of the total emigration flow over the years 1946-87 indicates a lower than average propensity to return. In fact the European countries of destination for Italy's postwar emigrants divide into two subgroups as far as return ratios are concerned: France, Belgium and the UK where return rates are rather low, indicating the development of settled communities; and Switzerland and Germany where return rates are higher, reflecting the difficulties of permanent settlement in these countries (King, 1992, p. 15).

As Gentileschi and Simoncelli (1983) have amply demonstrated, most returns to Italy are directed to the original places of outmigration. For Peterborough, too, nearly all departures back home were to villages of origin. A sample of addresses was obtained from the partial records of the Consulate Agency, and these were used to locate and interview 16 returned migrant households in various villages in southern Italy.<sup>15</sup> In addition to basic biographical data, interviewees were asked three main groups of questions: why they emigrated and why they returned; their economic status since return, especially work and employment; and their social experiences of reintegration.

The returnees can be crudely divided into two types: those who returned, often with their children, in the 1970s, when return migration first began to deplete the size of the Italian-born



community in Peterborough; and those who returned upon retirement, and hence at a more advanced age, in the 1980s and 1990s. The former group had been in Peterborough for around 10-15 years, the latter group had been emigrants for 25-40 years (the maximum absence was 48 years). Most had left from a background of poverty and unemployment and had started work in Peterborough in the brick industry.

Whilst the explanation for the original emigration to England was relatively clear-cut, motives for return were generally more complex and involved a mixture of factors - health problems, nostalgia, children's education and retirement. Of course, we must realise that the reasons given in an interview may not be the real reasons behind the decision to return. Elsewhere it has been noted that 'poor health' may be a cover for a range of other more delicate circumstances or may reflect a strong psychosomatic element (King, 1988, p. 82). Nevertheless in the Peterborough case the high frequency of health reasons, cited as the main factor by almost half (7 out of 16) interviews, is probably fairly genuine given the hard nature of work in the brickyards, the likelihood of industrial injury and the fact that several of the interviewees were receiving disability pensions for damage to their health through work. Health problems were often combined, in the returnees' explanations of their decision to return, with nostalgia (a rather difficult concept to define) and (early) retirement. These three elements - health, nostalgia, retirement - generally act to reinforce each other and to lead to a kind of return whereby the migrant comes back to enjoy the last phase of his/her life in the native village. Cerase (1974) simply calls it the 'return of retirement'. Such a return is probably more likely where migrants have retained contact with their home villages through frequent letters, telephone calls and visits. In the early years of migration, before the age of mass air travel and the widespread ownership of telephones, contact was more difficult; in recent decades however the availability of cheap charter flights from Luton to Naples has facilitated frequent return visits.

For those who return at pre-retirement age, the reintegration is much more problematic, especially as regards employment. Indeed the severe difficulties of obtaining any kind of work in rural southern Italy were the main reason why many migrants in Peterborough chose not to return. More than one third of the returnees interviewed were experiencing problems of finding satisfactory work back home. For most, the only options were a return to semi-subsistence farming or precarious employment as a building worker, road-mender etc. Rejecting these unattractive opportunities, some try to establish themselves as small self-employed business owners, running a shop or bar, usually without conspicuous economic success (cf. King 1977c). The demand for such services in stagnant villages is far from buoyant, and there may be an over-supply of such services, to the detriment of those with little experience of running such enterprises. The basic problem here is that the employment situation - at least for those without education or training - in the marginal upland districts of southern Italy has not significantly changed since the migrants departed (Reyneri and Mughini, 1984).

Accumulated remittances and savings (including proceeds from the sale of a house in Peterborough) are usually spent on a new house in the village and on the consumer goods which are the accessories of a 'modern' way of life. The prestige value of a new house as a clearly visible symbol of the 'success' of the migration project is a recurrent and dominant theme in the history of return migration to southern Italy since the end of the last century (King, 1988); and in this the returnees from Peterborough compete for social recognition with village migrants returning from France, Germany, Switzerland etc. The emphasis on the prestige of consumerism means

that only rarely does migrant capital find its way into economically more productive initiatives which yield a good return on investment and generate more employment - such as agricultural improvements or small industries.<sup>16</sup>

The final part of the interview dealt with problems of reintegration. Interestingly, half of the persons interviewed expressed feelings of nostalgia for Peterborough! This sentiment, however, is consonant with the fact that the majority of the Italians in Peterborough, including those who have returned to Italy, view their experience of emigration in broadly positive terms. This makes us appreciate the fundamentally ambiguous nature of international migration: it leads people to identify with two places - 'home' and 'abroad', Italy and England, Peterborough and their home village - and to experience nostalgia for whichever place they are not in. At its most positive, this dual identity enables people to draw the best from both places; on the negative side it can result in a state of permanent dissatisfaction and disorientation.

The identity and education of children may be particularly problematic in this regard. In Peterborough they are caught between, on the one hand, the culture of their parents involving loyalty to family, questions of honour and the chaperoning of girls, and on the other hand the more open values of British society. It was the desire of parents to reinforce Italian cultural values in their children that led some families to return to Italy so that their children could receive an Italian education. As research on the return migration of Bedford Italians has also showed (King, 1977b and 1977c), this can be acutely problematic for children who have already started their schooling in English. The lack of knowledge of standard Italian on the part of such pupils means they are put in classes several years lower than their own age group - a humiliating experience which only the brightest and most resilient of children can work to overcome and progress to their peer group year.

Returned migrants also express problems in dealing with the local bureaucracy of public administration. Resettlement in Italy invariably involves a large number of visits to the local town hall to acquire permits for residence, building a house, transfer of pension etc. After their long experience of living abroad, migrants are often ill-equipped to deal with the local administrative structures and perhaps lack the social skills and contacts to bypass frustrating bureaucratic delays.

## Conclusion

Despite a growing amount of research on the evolution of the Italian presence in Britain, Italians remain one of the least 'visible' and least-known ethnic groups in modern Britain's multicultural society. As a result of Sponza's (1988) pioneering research, more is known about the late 19th and early 20th century migrations of Italians than about the post-1945 migrations, even though the latter are both more recent and more numerically important. The mechanism of bulk recruitment, by which thousands of Italian workers were brought to industrial towns like Peterborough in the 1950s, has more in common with the hiring of *Gastarbeiter* in 1960s Germany than with earlier waves of Italian emigration to Britain.

This study of the 7,000-strong Italian community in Peterborough has attempted to explore some of the experiences of this little-known group. Given the limitations of time and the relatively small number of people interviewed, this study must be regarded as a preliminary interpretation rather than an exhaustive piece of work such as that carried out by Colpi (1987) on the Italians in

Bedford. Nevertheless, the research reported here is useful if only because it has thrown up few surprises. Generally the findings of previous research on the Italian communities created in the postwar years in Bedford, Bristol etc. (Bottignolo, 1985; Colpi, 1987) are confirmed by this work on Peterborough.

The Peterborough Italians were found to be a compact, inward-looking, family-oriented, law-abiding group; in many ways a relict of a bygone age. Their preservation of traditional Italian village values of family obedience and loyalty to *paesani* reflects a life-code which is less valid now as a reflection of Italian rural society than it was 30-40 years ago. Whilst the first-generation immigrants, with their long years of hard manual work in the brickyards and factories of Peterborough behind them, will continue to cling to their old memories and cultural values, the second and third generations are in a much more fluid and open position between the two 'worlds' of rural southern Italy, which they 'know' only from return visits and the reminiscences of their parents, and the urban society of Peterborough. For the third generation, born only in recent years, the world of their grandparents is more remote. Their *italianità* is under threat, perhaps only to be rediscovered as a cultural curiosity in later life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The field research was carried out by Mariacaterina Tubito as part of an MA dissertation (Tubito, 1995). The idea of the research on Peterborough was Russell King's: he supervised the research, helped design the research instruments and strategy, and wrote this paper based on the longer text of the above dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> In the classic English-language study on the history of Italian emigration Foerster (1924) makes frequent reference to the uniqueness of the Italian migration stream to Britain. See also King (1979).

<sup>3</sup> But see Di Blasio (1979) for a meritorious exception; also Colpi (1991, pp. 145-147).

<sup>4</sup> See Barr (1964), Brown (1970, pp. 82-97), Cavallaro (1981), Colpi (1987, 1993), King (1977b), King and King (1977), Sibley (1962), Tonna (1964), Tosi (1984, especially pp. 43-71).

<sup>5</sup> These data are based on the self-assessment ethnicity question in the 1991 census; in this classification Italians are not accorded a separate identity.

<sup>6</sup> This information is mainly drawn from an interview with Brian Jennings, London Brick Company Personnel Officer, on 6 June 1995, and has been cross-checked with other sources, including interviews with various immigrants who arrived in the early 1950s.

<sup>7</sup> As documented in more detail in Bedford (King and King, 1977).

<sup>8</sup> If there is bias, it will be in favour of the Italian-born older migrants and away from the British-born younger generations. This has little effect on the spatial representation of the origins in Italy, the key variable in this analysis.

<sup>9</sup> The Peterborough Consulate Agency's jurisdiction includes northern Cambridgeshire, south-east Lincolnshire and Norfolk. For more details on the general organisation and functions of the consulates see Colpi (1991, pp. 222-226).

<sup>10</sup> The name of these priests takes its origin from Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, Bishop of Piacenza, who became known as the 'emigrants' priest' after he founded the Congregation of Missionaries to Italian Emigrants in 1887.

<sup>11</sup> Respectively Associazione Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani, Istituto Nazionale Confederale di Assistenza, and Istituto Nazionale di Assistenza Sociale. See Colpi (1991, p. 248).

<sup>12</sup> The linguistic abilities and mixes of Italian immigrants in Britain are investigated in depth by Tosi (1984, 1991) whose two books contain much information and research data which are valid for Peterborough (Tosi carried out much of his research on the Italians in Bedford).

<sup>13</sup> These courses have taken various forms, including after-school courses and pilot schemes of second-language teaching within primary and secondary schools. Currently 150 children are following Italian-language teaching in Peterborough primary schools.

<sup>14</sup> As a perspective on the propensity to stay or return, this proportion is biased in that it excludes those who have already returned.

<sup>15</sup> The interviews were carried out by Mariacaterina Tubito in the following communes: Calvi Risorta (province of Caserta), Bovino (province of Foggia), Montefalcione (province of Avellino), Taurisano (province of Lecce), Fagnano Castello (province of Cosenza), Airola (province of Benevento) and the provincial capital town of Campobasso.

<sup>16</sup> An instructive contrast can be drawn here between return migration to southern Italy and that to Friuli, the region of northern Italy most affected by postwar emigration. Both Friuli (in 1976) and southern Italy (in 1980) were hit by destructive earthquakes which laid waste villages, rendered thousands of people homeless, and caused many fatalities. In Friuli the migrants came flooding back to help with the reconstruction process and many were able to develop efficient and successful small businesses feeding off the regeneration effort and the government aid that was available for rebuilding the regional economy (Saraceno, 1986). The south Italian earthquake, which hit most severely the south-east highlands of Campania where many Peterborough Italians came from, caused, if anything, further outmigration. Meanwhile the earthquake funds were immediately monopolised by corrupt local politicians who recycled the money for their own private and political benefit, to the obvious detriment of the local people who needed the help (see, for example, Alexander, 1984 and 1989).

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