



# City of Westminster **Cabinet Member Report**

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Cllr Tim Roca, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Young People Culture and Learning
<b>Date:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> July 2023
<b>Classification:</b>	For General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Commemorative Green Plaque for Café Monico at 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8AD
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	West End
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Financial Summary:</b>	The Green Plaque Scheme is funded by sponsorship, which has been secured for this plaque
<b>Report of:</b>	Richie Gibson, Head of City Promotions, Events and Filming

## **1. Executive summary**

Café Monico was founded in 1877 by brothers Giacomo and Battista Monico who emigrated from the Swiss canton of Ticino. The Café soon became an institution within central London, famous for its fashionable interior and French style dining.

The magnificent Shaftesbury Avenue façade formed an important part of the wider Piccadilly Circus setting and the corner of Piccadilly Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue and became known as ‘Monico’s Corner’.

Giacomo and Battista Monico were two of many immigrants from Ticino who established themselves as restaurateurs, chefs, waiters and entrepreneurs in London, thereby promoting the cultural and gastronomic scene of the city. In this context, Café Monico can be regarded as representative of the distinct contributions that immigrants from Ticino made to cultural life in Westminster from the 19th century onwards.

The proposed wording is:

### **Café Monico**

**Once stood adjacent to this site**

**Founded in 1877 by Giacomo & Battista Monico from Ticino, Switzerland**

**Famous for its fashionable interior & fine cuisine**

## **2. Recommendations**

That the nomination for a Westminster Commemorative Green Plaque to Café Monico at 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue is approved.

## **3. Reasons for decision**

The nomination is supported by the independent Green Plaque panel who believe the contribution of the Ticinese community to the gastronomic life of London is an important one that deserves to be marked.

## **4. Policy context**

The Green Plaque scheme aims to highlight and improve awareness of Westminster’s diverse cultural heritage and social history, provide information for visitors and to create a sense of pride in neighbourhoods.

## **5. Background**

Café Monico was founded by brothers Giacomo and Battista Monico in 1877, who had emigrated from the Swiss canton of Ticino. It was originally located at 15 Tichborne Street, at the time a small side street just off Piccadilly Circus.

An advertisement in a programme for the Argyll Rooms in 1878 describes it as: 'Grand Café Saloon. Grill Room. Best Ventilated Billiard Saloons in London. Supper after the Theatres. Restaurant Open till Half-past 12'.

In 1885-6 the fortune of Café Monico was secured when the Metropolitan Board of Works demolished numbers 1-11 and the houses opposite number 15 Tichborne Street to create Shaftesbury Avenue. The brothers found themselves in a prominent position overlooking an enlarged Piccadilly Circus renumbered as 46 Regent Street.

Making the most of their good fortune, Giacomo and Battista purchased a lease on land that adjoined the back of their premises on Shaftesbury Avenue. The building they erected in 1888-9 was designed by architects Christopher and White and more than doubled their space. It was located at 19 Shaftesbury Avenue alongside Piccadilly Mansions designed by Martin and Purchase and Piccadilly House.

The Shaftesbury Avenue front of Café Monico, was faced with Burmantofts terracotta and a plinth of polished grey granite. The most prominent feature of the design was a large central gable, dressed with volutes, urns and a pediment. A balcony featured on the first floor and the interior was lavishly decorated with a marble staircase, columns and arches. Passenger lifts served the dining-room on the first floor, and the Masonic suite on the second floor.

The ground floor was connected to the older premises in Piccadilly Circus which were enlarged and redecorated with marble wall linings.

The Café soon became an institution within central London, famous for its fashionable interior and French style dining. It was particularly known for its Winter Garden, the sumptuousness of its décor with marble, intricate plasterwork, mirrors and miniature palms, and its numerous suites.

The magnificent Shaftesbury Avenue façade formed an important part of the wider Piccadilly Circus setting and the corner of Piccadilly Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue used to be known as 'Monico's Corner'.

The Café's Banqueting Halls were popular for lavish dinners as well as evenings hosted by the Unione Ticinese but also international events such as the first World Weightlifting Championships in 1891 and the London Chess Tournament Banquet in 1899.

Battista Monico died in 1893 and Giacomo in 1910, and the restaurant was managed by Giacomo's two sons. It continued to be known for its style and quality beyond the Second World War. The business was acquired by Forte's and Co in the late 1950s and the buildings were demolished soon afterwards for the rebuilding of this part of Piccadilly Circus. The famous Piccadilly Lights now

occupy the space where Café Monico once stood.

### **Ticinese gastronomy in London**

Giacomo and Battista Monico were two of many immigrants from Ticino who established themselves as restaurateurs, chefs, waiters and entrepreneurs in London, promoting the cultural and gastronomic scene of the city. In this context, Café Monico can be regarded as representative of the contributions that immigrants from Ticino made to cultural life in Westminster from the 19th century onwards.

The Italian speaking canton of Ticino is located in the most southern part of Switzerland along with the Valais, bordering Italy. The first Ticino arrivals in Britain and Ireland in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century were mainly plaster workers followed by many confectioners, cooks, waiters and craftsmen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By 1900 there were hundreds of Ticinesi restaurants throughout Britain, particularly in London including cafes, sandwich bars and high-end restaurants. The West End became a cultural melting pot and the restaurant trade was led by expatriate communities who worked as talented chefs, owners and waiting staff. This resulted in exciting regional dishes and hybrid menus based on French and Italian cuisine. Many of London's top West End restaurants were owned and run by migrants including Café Monico, Café Royal, Romano's and Gatti's, founded by Italian Swiss Carlo Gatti.

In 1874 the Unione Ticinese was founded as a Benevolent Society for Ticinese waiters by Stefano Gatti, a restaurant-owner and entrepreneur whose family had arrived in London from Marogno in the Val di Blenio. It was a mutual aid society intended to provide care in sickness and company in health for the increasing number of Ticinesi in London and South-East England.

For the first 70 years it was dominated and financially supported by wealthy Ticinese restaurateurs, and notably by the Gatti and later the Meschini families. Its activities became centred on the district between Leicester Square and the Euston Road in London where the largest single concentration of Ticinesi was to be found.

For many decades members usually met at the Schweizerbund in Charlotte Street, near Fitzroy Square and their bosses regularly organised glamorous banquets in the grander Ticinese-run restaurants, such as Café Monico, the Gattis' Royal Adelaide Gallery on the Strand and Pagani's on Great Portland Street, which was owned by the Meschini family. As well as giving the participants the chance to network and enjoy good food and superb wine, banquets raised large sums for the social fund. This paid for sickness benefit, medical care and funerals of the poorer members.

The tide of immigration began to decline after the enactment of the Aliens Act in 1905 and the last Ticinese café-restaurant closed in 1987.

### **Plaque location**

The original Café Monico restaurant was located within the Lucent Development in the 1890s and had fronts on 46 Regent Street and Shaftesbury Avenue. Both existing buildings are no longer standing and have been replaced by the Piccadilly Lights and new buildings. Landsec and Fletcher Priest Architects have identified an alternative location for the commemorative plaque at 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue.

Image: Original location of Café Monico at 19 Shaftesbury Avenue, 1914



**6. Financial implications**

The cost of production and installation will be covered by the Embassy of Switzerland in the UK and Landsec as sponsors of the plaque.

**7. Legal implications**

Listed Building Consent is not required. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

**8. Consultation**

Building owners Landsec are supportive of the Green Plaque.

The nomination is supported by members of the independent Green Plaque panel.

Ward Councillors have been informed and no objections have been raised.

If you have any queries about this report, please contact Claire Appleby - [cappleby@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:cappleby@westminster.gov.uk).

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1**

The proposed placement of the plaque at 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue, WC2H 8AD.

### **Appendix 2**

Wording and layout of proposed plaque.

For completion by the Cabinet Member for Young People Culture and Learning

**Declaration of Interest**

I have no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed:  Date: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023

NAME: Councillor Tim Roca

State nature of interest if any .....

.....  
*(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)*

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled Commemorative Green Plaque to Café Monico, 11-17 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, WC2H 8AD .

Signed: 

Cabinet Member for Young People, Culture and Learning

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment: .....  
.....  
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should



take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

## **Appendix A**

### **Other Implications**

#### **1. Resources Implications**

1.1 There are no resources implications arising from this report.

#### **2. Business Plan Implications**

2.1 There are no Business Plan implications arising from this report.

#### **3. Risk Management Implications**

3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

#### **4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications**

4.1 There are no health and safety and wellbeing issues arising from this report.

#### **5. Crime and Disorder Implications**

5.1 There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report.

#### **6. Impact on the Environment**

6.1 Plaques are manufactured by Leander Architectural from 100% recycled metal to reduce the environmental impact of the castings. Plaques are made to last indefinitely and can be refurbished rather than replaced. They are installed by our contractor FM Conway who are aligned with the council's Climate Emergency plan to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

#### **7. Equalities Implications**

7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report. Green Plaques aim to highlight and improve awareness of Westminster's diverse cultural heritage and social history, provide information for visitors and to create a sense of pride in neighbourhoods. All Green Plaque submissions are reviewed by an independent panel and a decision is made against the criteria listed on the corporate website:

7.1.1 Our green plaques commemorate people who:

- are regarded as eminent by most members of their profession;
- deserve recognition for their genuine contribution to society or for improving lives;
- are reasonably well known;

- and where sufficient time has elapsed since their life to show their lasting contribution to society.

The scheme also marks buildings of historical interest, that form a significant part of the heritage of the city.

- a historical or cultural event of great significance must have taken place in any building that is nominated;
- nominations will not be considered on the basis of anniversaries or short stays from public figures alone.
- shops, restaurants and organisations must have existed for at least 100 years to be considered for a green plaque.

## **8. Staffing Implications**

8.1 There are no staffing issues arising from this report.

## **9. Human Rights Implications**

9.1 There are no issues relating to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report.

## **10. Energy Measure Implications**

10.1 There are no energy measure issues arising from this report.

## **11. Communications Implications**

11.1 The council's communications team will be made aware of the Green Plaque and unveiling ceremony.