

# From corner shop to a €2.17billion turnover

by Eric Villiers

Fyffes plc, one of the world's largest fruit importers has confirmed that the company originated in a corner shop at Railway Street, Armagh at the end of the nineteenth-century.

The confirmation came after enquiries by Armagh and District History Group into the origins of a photograph taken outside the shop in 1918. A caption below the photograph has details of the business and also states that from 1911 to 1916 Charles was chairman of Armagh County GAA Board.

It seems that it was on the corner of Railway Street and Albert Place that Charles Vincent McCann (1859-1927) first set up as a fruiterer, fishmonger and greengrocer. By 1904 he had opened a second shop in Thomas Street and as his family grew his son Charles Jun., (1882-1954) moved to Dundalk to open a third establishment. Charles jnr, like his father, was very interested in the G.A.A., both as a player and as an administrator. He was Ulster representative on the General Council when the decision was made to buy the site at Jones's road for Croke Park from Frank Dineen of the Freeman's Journal.

The global fruit giant with a turnover of €2.17billion has confirmed that the charming photograph of the original shop

is now pride of place in their archives.

The company history states: "The family lived at Railway St., where their business was situated, but Charles McCann also had a shop on Thomas St., which was taken over by his son, Michael, around 1915. The youngest son, Patrick, looked after the fish department but died young. Neil, another son, went to work in Cork and Charles Jun., to Dundalk. After his father's death, Michael took over the Armagh business and it was sold to Patrick Magee in the 1930s.

## Leadership

By the middle of the twentieth century Neil Vincent McCann, a son of Charles Jun., was working in the Dundalk-based company and it was under his inspirational leadership that the business grew hugely from the 1960s until the 1990s.

At first it was Charles McCann Ltd., but after the first big expansion in Ireland the main company became Fruit Importers of Ireland Ltd., and then in 1986 with the take over of Fyffes UK it became FII-Fyffes plc in 1987 and finally Fyffes plc in 1990.

Fyffes is probably the largest in this trade in Europe and in the

top five worldwide. Last year's turnover was €2.17 billion and including staff working for joint-venture concerns employs about 4,800 people. There are depots around Ireland in Belfast, Dundalk, Swords, Dublin, Piltown, Cork, Tralee, Galway, Sligo, amongst others and there are also large operations in the UK, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Italy, and the Czech Republic. Fyffes bananas alone can come from as many as 11 different countries.

Neil V. McCann has now retired both as Chairman and as a Director of Fyffes plc but continues to work hard as ever for the company. His sons Carl and David are respectively Chairman and CEO of Fyffes plc so the lineage of successful involvement with the fruit trade continues. ❖

