

**Interview with Giancarlo Gonizzi (G.G.) – Person-in-charge of Barilla Historical Archives
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Reconstructing an archives

G.G.: Barilla's business started in the 1800's with a bakery in Via Repubblica, in the very centre of Parma. In 1910 the business grew and moved outside the city walls (that no longer exist) to where we are now conducting this interview in Viale Barilla (Barilla Boulevard). In this place the **first Barilla industrial plant** was established, made up of a pasta factory and a bake house, in two different buildings. During the 1900's, the complex gradually enlarged until the end of the thirties. In 1940 the Barilla family took over and built up the whole area, which now belongs to them. During the post-war years, the old buildings were pulled down; during the fifties a new factory was built and finally in 1999 almost all the existing buildings were demolished to make room for famous architect Renzo Piano's project, a structure which is open to the town, while retaining its distinct original character. The project includes a hotel, a Conference Centre, a big shopping mall with an 8 cinema multiplex and also the seat of the Barilla Academy, with the classrooms for courses, and the gastronomic library.

M.C.C.: When did the business start to show interest into the company history and subsequently, its archives ?

G.G.: Barilla began to think about **its own history** in the very moment that the company was about to be taken over. In 1970, due to a series of social and financial causes, **Gianni and Pietro Barilla** sold off their firm to the American multinational **W R Grace & Co.**. The new factory (the old one was on Viale Barilla) of **Pedrignano**, located next to the Milan-Salerno Sole motorway had been opened only two years before (1968). The debts for that new and ultramodern construction were heavy, and since Gianni Barilla intended to give up his part of the business, Pietro didn't have sufficient resources to buy out his brother's capital share. At that point, the firm was handed over, but Pietro kept 1% of the shares and the right of pre-emption, which allowed him to **buy back** the firm in **1979**. When he came back, he promptly applied himself to investments, product enhancement and the brand-new Mulino Bianco line.

At some point, following requests from both inside and outside the company, we realized that a firm that had begun operating over a hundred years ago, didn't have any formally written history. Journalists were asking for information but the records about the firm's history no longer existed, because when Grace took over the business, **the main core** of the former **business archives** had been **destroyed or lost**. Of course this wasn't the first priority for Grace who was more concerned with building for the future. Anyway, in the mid-80's, the need arose for recovering a part of

Barilla's historical patrimony. In **1987** then, on the initiative of the chairman office, the **Historical Archives Project** started. The project aimed to recover this patrimony through the documents inside the firm, scattered among the offices, but also through the copying of those materials in third party archives such as suppliers, advertising agencies and public or private archives.

So, that's how the archives came into being; in **1987** with about sixty photographs recovered accidentally. Now the Barilla Archives have over forty two thousand inventoried documents. In 1997 they were declared **archives of remarkable historical interest** by the *Soprintendenza* (bureau of cultural assets). Through careful and detailed research and recovery (still ongoing), some basic series have been reconstructed like advertising, for example: press advertisements on daily newspapers, magazines or billposting, but also broadcast advertising on radio and television. Other series too have been restored as well; for instance the launching of new products. These particular characteristics of the Barilla Archives, which I would call an «**archives of reconstruction**», constitute their configuration, but, at the same time, their limit.

In our case, we had to recover single documents, strips and other bits and pieces. Then it was a matter of coming up with a **classifying configuration** and **logic** for reasons of order, convenience and, of course, preservation. So we can find the archives structured in an extremely handy and practical way, even for those who enter for the first time, simply because it resembles more the classification of a library rather than of a traditional archives. This implies certain **limits**, but also **convenience**. Of course, where single record groups with their inner arrangement were found, we chose to keep them as they were, obviously using the normal standards of arrangement and shelving, while trying to respect their former internal configuration.

The archives today

Since 1987, the **perspective** and the **philosophy** of the Historical Archives have also partly **changed**. Originally they were created to reconstruct the history of the business – the aim being to supply all the elements necessary to write the firm's history, which was in fact redacted in 1994. Then, they gradually evolved into **group archives**, because with the passing of time other firms, now brands, were added to *Barilla's* original brand. The first one was *Mulino Bianco*, which has always been part of Barilla; then *Voiello* followed – a historical and very appreciated southern pasta factory – then *Panem*, specialized in the production of fresh bread, afterwards *Tre Marie* – for specialty holiday products like the Christmas spiced cake and the dove-shaped Easter cake – *Pavesi* – a historical leading brand of cookies of the fifties and the sixties – and lately *Wasa*, the well-known crisp bread from Northern Europe.

All this has led to setting up (inside the historical archives) spaces and archives for every single trademark of the group, trying to recover as much as possible in the various headquarters of the different companies that are now part of the Barilla group, arranging, re-arranging and sometimes acquiring materials that were lost. For instance, in the summer of 2000, we acquired an important **photographic record group** from a photographer's in Novara. This collection consists of over five hundred glass plates and hundreds of modern pictures, taken for **Pavesi** over a period of forty years. These actions - sometimes of great importance and sometimes as small as the purchase of a catalogue on the antique market, the purchase of a poster etc. – are now carried out on a regular basis, precisely because they come out of the **awareness of the initial loss** of the archives. In fact, we have established a mechanism that will prevent future losses; we call it **automatic input** of the historical archives regarding all new and current products.

It works like this: upon agreement with a supplier, all the press and public relations material is sent in triplicate to the historical archives. Therefore, agencies, publishers and printing offices are required by contract to send a copy of what is produced to the historical archives. The archives may receive some duplication; however, there is far less risk of an information gap about current daily production. In the past, we have held courses at a secretarial level to **increase awareness** of those

who handle document administration in the various offices, so that files, materials and dossiers are sent to the archives after processing.

Nowadays Barilla has a **centralized fiscal archives** for records that must be kept for ten years as required by Italian law. This is automatized and functions rather differently from the historical archives. It includes a **centre of documentation** that closely studies problems that require more immediate solutions on a daily operating level. Lastly, it has historical archives with the task of receiving, ordering and keeping all the records produced inside the firm – in some cases, the entire document, as with the archives of the chairmanship and of the managing director. Otherwise, records undergo a selection before being ordered and filed. All the material coming to the historical archives, with the exception of the archives of the chairmanship and of the managing director, is generally **accessible to the public** depending on its time of arrival. The time gap between the realization of a project and the arrival of the documents to the archives takes from **three to five years**.

M.C.C.: Could you explain the connection between semi-current and current archives?

G.G.: There are **current archives** dealing with active records in the different offices that created them. The **semi-current archives**, once existing physically, has been transformed into the group's **fiscal archives**. Therefore, semi-active documents become part of the historical archives, which selects the material for preservation or destruction according to specific standards.

The only office operating on its own is the personnel department, which is obliged to keep all the documents concerning the personnel for at least sixty or seventy years. This kind of material comes here only after fifty years; so at the moment we have a complete series regarding personnel from the post-war period up to the fifties.

Classifying a wide variety of records

M.C.C.: We've already talked about the acquisition of documents from other businesses. Would you describe some of the series that are in the archives?

G.G.: Let's have a look at the **classification of the historical archives**. We have a **photographic library**, with photographic material – original pictures, negatives, slides, plates and so on – documenting and recording the life of the company. The library is divided into sections: a «**historical**» photographic library, where the unorganised material produced until the end of World War Two is kept; and a «**modern**» photographic library for the material produced from 1948 on. We were able to organise the modern library more chronologically by identifying various company events that were filmed or photographed.

There is a service or a safety copy of all photographed material to as to use the originals as little as possible. There are also other copies, in negatives, slides or large-size plates, as well as a virtual copy inside the computerized system, again to save wear and tear on the original items.

We also have several **attached photographic fonds** of great interest. For instance, the fonds of the Milanese photographer Ballo, who worked for Erberto Carboni; or the fonds of Vaghi, a photographer from Parma who worked in the fifties and who photographed the building of Pedrignano building. Another example is the fonds of Montacchini, a photographer working in the pre-war period; we bought this in 2000.

These fonds have their own **specific arrangement**, precisely because they were acquired as fonds. We then have what we call the **press review**; a collection of all the articles from newspapers and periodicals where Barilla or any of its trademarks are mentioned. Even the slightest reference means that the article must be kept. If instead there is no mention of Barilla, the article is not kept, with

rare exceptions such as a dossier on pasta where the trademarks are not mentioned, but the topic obviously concerns us.

Each press review is made up of several linear metres of binders with about eight thousand newspaper articles. We have put them together with the original documents covering the period up to the beginning of the eighties. The electronic press review covers the period from the end of the eighties on. We are now thinking about **digitising** everything and giving up the paper copies, given the sheer volume of material. All these documents are **filed** and **indexed** so that they can be retrieved easily, thanks to the *thesaurus* of key words.

Our **small nucleus of books**, specialized in cereals, bread, pasta and other foods; but also advertising, considering the important role Barilla has always played in Italian advertising. Afterwards, there is the **company accounts series**, and the **honours series** – awards or certificates that Barilla has received during its lifetime.

The **press catalogue** series allows us to follow the evolution of a product. While the situation is pretty static and well-established in the world of pasta – in all, we are talking about a hundred products more or less– in the world of bakery goods, products change rapidly in a year's time, and the catalogues allow us to find products that no longer exist, the launching of new ones, the launching and the re-launching of a same product in different periods, etc. There are also other instruments like the **postcards**, which were commonly used as commercial advertisements in the pre-WWII period, while today they are only complementary elements. We also have a series dedicated to the **business brochures**; all those small publications issued by each trademark to promote specific operations, products and lines, or just to document institutional initiatives.

Our archives include a section dedicated to **cookbooks**, basic instruments to spread the culture of a product, especially in the world of pasta. Pasta is an essentially Italian product. You cannot just sell pasta abroad: you have to «**sell**» it with the **culture of that product**, because otherwise you won't communicate what we Italians mean by pasta. The cookbooks play an important role. We have some original manuscripts that were used to create printed copies that Barilla began to issue - starting in the fifties- to its customers, both in Italy and abroad, especially nowadays. I would like to recall that the **archives' structure** is defined by country. The same classes and categories of cookbooks exist for each nation: Italian cookbooks, French cookbooks, German ones and so on.

Now we come to audio and video materials. We consider interviews or tape recordings regarding the life of our company as «oral testimonials» that make up the **audio library**. Instead, the video or film recordings of facts, events or broadcast reports about our business form the **video library**. There are hundreds of units, and new ones are added in large number every year. I have already mentioned those documents connected with the world of **advertising**: press advertisements, billpostings, as well as radio, television and film commercials. Television advertising is divided into series and trademarks; arranged by year and then coded. Afterwards there is the series of advertisements for *Barilla, Mulino Bianco, Pavesi, Voiello, Tre Marie*.

The **promotional objects series** consists of all the objects that Barilla produced (from the beginning of the 20th century) and offered to its faithful customers as rewards for regular purchases, loyalty points, contests and other incentives. This series is huge, especially objects from Mulino Bianco, the well-known baked goods, directed especially to children. We are talking about over than six hundred small surprises inside the snack packaging. Other more valuable objects for the table and the kitchen offered over the years include dishes, cutlery, cups, dinner services, etc. They are interesting for their design and their message to our customers. These objects signal changes in taste over time. We also keep all documents and **forms** relevant to the distribution and communication of the promotional objects. Some of these are **prototypes** – if time has preserved them. Last in this series are **production tests**, carried out by the firm to certify the quality of its products.

From 1996, Barilla changed its commercial strategy by giving up promotions with prizes and other objects in order to focus on price cuts and giving the best quality at the lowest possible price. In the

years that followed, other types of incentives replaced the objects. For example, the printed box for a children's snack became a board game. The incentive is not something to win, but is something extra added to the product itself. In any case, these records are kept .

The archives also include the **product packaging series**, both for pasta and bakery. The packaging is kept laid out; starting from the date of their production; for pasta, the packaging series starts from the end of the fifties, while the ones for bakery date back to the middle seventies. They all are kept by typology and in chronological order. This series enables us to review **packaging changes over time**, and find the elements that help us to identify the **growth potential** for the future.

Finally, there are the **archives** dedicated to **Barilla family**, containing documents relevant to the family's history. This core archives includes the surviving documentary groups, either recovered or dating after the sale of business. These groups are arranged progressively. There we find the **archives of the chairmanship** and of the **managing director**, the **record groups of marketing** and of other offices.

M.C.C.: What about the collection of objects associated with traditional working methods?

G.G.: We have created a type of **museum**, where all the objects that are connected to the **world of pasta** are kept. Barilla became the leading trademark of pasta, not only Italian or European, but worldwide, too. And the worldwide leader of pasta needs to talk about its product. For this reason we created this small collection of objects explaining the production and the history of pasta. Barilla **aims to spread the culture of the product** and not just to sell it. The collection includes presses, historical machines from a pasta factory of the 19th century, a complete mill; but also small objects for traditional home-made pasta, like pastry cutting wheels, rolling pins and other materials. Other types of objects are associated with **our business** or **advertising history**. We have Snow White's tea-pot, Cindy Crawford's fork, White Rabbit's mask: all distinctive elements of various television commercials. These objects are now stored, but may one day be part of an exhibition.

The archives collects, preserves and communicates

M.C.C.: You have certainly described a wide variety of records. How are they exploited within the company and communicated to the public? What is the role of the archives in the daily life of the company?

G.G.: In 1987, when first created, the archives' aims were **to collect, preserve and valorize** [in the sense of *mettre en valeur* or «to enhance the value»]. If you don't collect, you can't preserve; if you don't preserve, you have nothing left to valorize. However, if you don't valorize, the first two steps mean nothing. So the valorization rule is a basic one for the Barilla archives. It means to promote ideas and share knowledge inside the company and to communicate excellence to the public.

Inside the company, we often meet the product managers in charge of either a new product to be launched, or a classic one to be re-launched. We find that gaining a historical perspective on products, lines, and brands, helps our product managers do a better job of marketing, positioning, and communication. So, the archives are an important tool. For example, if a new kind of Togo biscuit is to be launched, the Togo manager comes and analyses previous advertising campaigns in order to study what we have done in the past, and uses this information to make decisions. The archives is a mine of ideas with many layers of experience.

Barilla also organizes courses for new employees. Those who aren't already familiar with our company and its targets, style, and history take a one-week full-time course on the group organization. The first day is largely dedicated to the history of our company and to pasta as a product. The lesson takes place here at the historical archives, with objects and documents all

around, so that the course participants, whether Italian or foreign, can find links to further studies knowing that there is an institution here at their disposal. Of course, we also respond to specific requests such as retrieving a document, an article, or a file. Just like any other archives.

We work quite a lot with external patrons too. First of all, schools, researchers, and universities. We welcome students writing their final dissertation as well as researchers. For the last 10 years, the archive has been always open to students on Fridays. Our website explains how to be admitted: you have to apply through a downloadable form, then the archives staff contacts you to arrange a date. Students can be sure that they will be thoroughly supported in studying the records. The one and only condition is that the student has to leave a copy of his or her work for the archives. More than 100 research projects have been completed, and currently about 60 new ones are carried out every year. This system works so well that the archive also supports people writing a dissertation on other subjects, by sending them copies of our records. Sometimes, we arrange with the teachers to have their students work on some specific fonds: In these cases, students don't look for a particular record, they just focus on a single archive, with mutual benefits for both the historical archive and the institution. Secondly, press and TV journalists often ask for information and records on various matters concerning the company and its brands. So we might film our objects, or send pictures and publications.

In the third place, we look after publications and public information. In order to spread knowledge of our company history, the archive promotes publications on objects, fonds, events, and archival materials. We have assisted the company in publishing some volumes: for example, on the history of Barilla communications and advertising; or on the single brands of Mulino Bianco, of Pavese, and a monograph dedicated to the history of pasta. We also help the editorial staff of the house organ «Gente Barilla»: every issue contains information and news from the historical archive .

Actually, there are many other opportunities: people feel that the archive supplies many important services to the company, firstly, because it is there and secondly, because it works well, thanks to its staff.

The exhibits section has been functioning for some years now and it is currently increasing its activities. At the beginning, we just lent our objects to exhibitions organized by other institutions; for example, we lent some objects(photographs?) by Carboni for an exhibit on his work as an architect and designer. Now we are starting to organize our own exhibitions.

Whatever we collect becomes a meaningful tool of communication. It makes no sense to spend time and money to preserve records, if what we preserve is of no use to anybody. The Barilla archives strives to make images, objects, and documents known according to their potential, because we strongly believe that history is not just a sort of «stabilizing ballast». On the contrary, it is more of a «launching pad». **You can't innovate if you don't know your traditions.**

Real innovation can't ignore history. Barilla understands this very well. We also know that after more than 100 years, whatever could be said about a product has been said already. So the archives aren't talking about «breaking news». as much as seizing the moment and using the archives to gather information suitable to that moment .The archives keeps practically everything, except innovative or recent products. In this case, I'm referring mostly to pasta.

M.C.C.: Strong points, weak points and problems related to an archive as big as yours.

G.G.: If we had two more people working with us, they would be busy all the time, but the company mission is to produce pasta, not to file records, so I guess it's already remarkable that a historical archives does exist and that **the company believes enough to invest in it**. The basic problem concerns the lack of financial and human resources. On the other hand, I feel that Barilla supports the notion of an extensive archives. I mean the task of each of us is to make others grow and mature in a specific field. Obviously, the company top managers have developed their idea of what constitutes an historical archives, and I'm quite satisfied with it. I think the situation is far

worse in other companies. Actually, Barilla also promoted, together with other companies, the creation of Museimpresa, the association of Italian company archives and museums.

Business culture organizations

M.C.C.: What do you think of business archives or, more precisely, of historical business archives?

G.G.: I'll tell you what I think, rather than the company opinion on this matter. It is important to say so. Barilla is a lucky company: it operates in the field of basic consumer products that are already widely recognized by the public. So it has more opportunities than other companies to utilize its archives for a number of initiatives: publications, events and so on.. The archives of a contract-supplier engineering company, for instance, may not be so well known to the public and therefore, has fewer opportunities than a company like Barilla, which is also a market leader. The typology of a company is a key issue as far as the potential for the historical archives is concerned.

I'd also like to stress that, in Italy, the concept of entrepreneurial culture and history are not only lacking, but practically inexistent. I'm not speaking of culture in terms of economics (and I fully respect those who deal with these subjects, some with great authority), but of a **culture of work**. By working, human beings change their world, making it better or worse. If you ignore work in the sense of a reality-transforming activity, you are practically ignoring the **memory** of what humans do for most of their lives. When archaeologists dig a hole and discover buildings and walls, we can't forget that those buildings and walls were built by people, whether architects, engineers, common labourers or contractors. So, valorizing the culture of work means enhancing the human being. Work is nothing in itself: without the person, there is no work. You see, in Italy, an **ideological culture** – regardless of party allegiance - has dominated for years, in the total absence of a culture of work to promote this primary human activity.

I believe that establishing a **culture of work** is the most important role of **business culture organizations** - museums, collections, exhibits and archives which, perhaps, should be re-defined. Society in general should recognize the value of these organizations too and provide companies that invest in this type of activity with fiscal incentives (such as tax breaks). But this is not my main point.

There is also another important matter I discussed recently with Prof. Paletta: archives and museums classification is currently managed by the Government. That is how it should be - State offices, by the very nature of their activity, produce papers which become archives, and the archival rules are set by the Government. In contrast, industry, in order to produce goods, also generates structures, procedures, machineries, and papers. All these elements are kept by what we call business archive/museum. I don't mean to split hairs, it's just a matter of space organization, you can call it neither archive nor museum. We call it something like «archimuseum», for lack of a better word. A business archives is different from other similar institutions.

I was kindly invited to the National Meeting of Italian Archivists, and I spoke about business archives and of how we work in them. Italian archivists themselves are realizing that their association was created to protect the interests of a category made up of 99% State employees. This situation is gradually changing as a new category of professional archivists is coming into being: they work within companies and focus on archiving matters (how do I order these records? How do I preserve them?), but they haven't the proper cultural tools, not because of lack of training, but because of the lack of referential literature.

When considering how to process and preserve films, magnetic tapes or latest generation DVDs, a business archives must face brand new questions and situations that usually happen only in specialized film libraries, because we must keep audiotapes, LPs, original lacquer matrices, and all the recording mediums you can think of. Then we have printing materials, films and newspaper sheets: a lot of different kinds of mediums kept together in the same structure, with completely different preservation problems.

So, to sum up my answer to your question, we are facing a lot of problems starting from the basic philosophy underlying the culture of work and the definition of «preservation»(i.e. business archive is not like a public or State archive because it keeps what remains of the work process). On the other hand, there are exciting opportunities for studying innovative technical solutions for preservation. I think that people who manage or work in business archives have great potential, but hardly all the skills they need.

And finally, the business cultural organizations also face an even greater challenge; and that is to work collectively in increasing perception that enterprise in a broader sense is a full member of the community. In other words, if business cultural organizations can showcase cultural values on behalf of **business as a whole**, not only of a single entrepreneur, then these organizations will have justified their existence. If that doesn't happen when times grow lean, such efforts are dismissed, because the main tasks of a company, its mission, is to produce goods or services, not culture. Nevertheless, **business cultural institutions are precious means of motivating the employees and spreading a positive attitude towards work.**