

# Giuseppe Rinvoluceri

*The Architect of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church, Amlwch*

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**D**riving through Amlwch on the A5025, a distinctive sight rises before you. Anglesey is rich in churches of all sizes, styles, and eras, but this is one of the most unusual. Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic church is a modernist reinforced concrete building opened in 1937. Designed by Giuseppe Rinvoluceri, an immigrant to Britain from Piedmont, Italy, it has been called ‘a piece of Italian architectural daring’ by the Pevsner guide<sup>1</sup> and ‘a rare and unique church’ by the Twentieth Century Society.<sup>2</sup> In a nod to the maritime history of Amlwch, Rinvoluceri created a structure that resembled the upturned hull of a ship.

At the start of the twentieth century the small population of Catholics in Amlwch had to travel many miles to Beaumaris, Holyhead, or Bangor to worship. In 1922 they began meeting in a converted stable behind the Dinorben Arms Hotel in Amlwch,<sup>3</sup> then later in a shooting lodge owned by the Marquess of Anglesey.<sup>4</sup> In 1932 work began on a new purpose-built church on the Bull Bay Road. The ground was levelled and the stone walls of the foundation, which would form the basement church hall, was built, complete with round porthole-like windows to add to the maritime theme. Then in 1935 construction commenced on the remarkable reinforced concrete parabolic arch that forms the main body of the church itself. It was built to Rinvoluceri’s design by John Mayers, Sons and Company of Chester. The foreman, Percy Iball of Rhyl, hired a team of around ten local joiners, stonemasons, and labourers. They erected the timber frame on which the reinforced concrete was poured, built up the stone gable walls and brick vestry to the rear and installed the glazing, which was all completed in five months.<sup>5</sup>

The church was consecrated in 1937 by Bishop McGrath of Menevia, dedicated to Our Lady St Mary as well as to the Welsh saint St Winefride.<sup>6</sup> In 1941 the church was handed over to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a missionary congregation that had established a base in Holyhead in 1895.<sup>7</sup> After two years of commuting from Holyhead for services, Fr Denis Maher was appointed resident priest, later joined by Frs Patrick O’Dwyer and Michael Slatterly. They also served congregations in Llangefni, Cemaes and Gwalchmai.<sup>8</sup>

The soaring roof of the church is augmented by exterior ribs interspersed with bands of geometric lights with embossed Art Deco designs. The rounded alcove at the eastern end behind the altar contains an arch of five small six-pointed star lights, and another larger star-shaped window decorates the western end

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Haslam, Julian Orbach, Adam Voelcker, *Gwynedd (Pevsner Architectural Guides: Buildings of Wales)*. (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 93

<sup>2</sup> Eva Branscome, ‘The Italian Touch’ *Twentieth Century Society* 3 September 2005, <https://c20society.org.uk/casework/the-italian-touch> (accessed February 2024)

<sup>3</sup> *Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, 21 September 1923, 6

<sup>4</sup> ‘Anglesey (Amlwch) — Our Lady Star of the Sea and St Winefride’, Taking Stock website, <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/amlwch-our-lady-star-of-the-sea-and-st-winefride/> (accessed February 2024)

<sup>5</sup> John Langley, *A History of Our Church — Our Lady, Star of the Sea and Saint Winefride*. A leaflet produced by the church in 2011, which includes construction foreman Percy Iball’s account of his time working on the building.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> <http://oblates.ie/ministries/parishes/>

<sup>8</sup> Langley, *A History of Our Church*

above the main entrance. This was surrounded by a smooth concrete face on the outside into which was set the inscription *NODDA NI SEREN Y MÔR* (Protect us, Star of the Sea).<sup>9</sup> Sometime in the late 1940s the exterior stonework of the west end was covered with cement, decorated to resemble dressed stone, obscuring the Welsh inscription.<sup>10</sup> The star-shaped light was surrounded by a blue glass circle, reputedly made from crushed Milk of Magnesia bottles donated by the local people. In 1963 refurbishment of the interior saw marble panels installed along the walls and a mural depicting Christ Crucified against a backdrop of hills was painted in the apse by Gordon Wallace of Colwyn Bay.<sup>11</sup>

In December 2000 Cadw recognised the importance of the church with a Grade II\* listing. But by this time the elements had caused a great deal of deterioration of the reinforced concrete, and in 2004 the church was closed. It was threatened with demolition, but a campaign was begun to raise £1.4 million to restore the building.<sup>12</sup> An initial application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund failed, but funding was found from many other sources, including Cadw, the Pilgrim's Trust, the National Churches Trust, the All Churches Trust and the Oblates Trustees. The roof was repaired and new roof covering installed, and external and interior walls redecorated. The previous mural in the apse and the marble panels were removed to meet the aim of simplifying the interior. New fittings, including altar, lectern and tabernacle-plinth were commissioned of Welsh slate and granite, an oak crucifix was installed in the apse, and a limewood-carved statue of Our Lady Star of the Sea, holding a boat, placed on the southern wall. The church was reopened on 1 May 2011 with a mass by Bishop Edwin Regan of Wrexham.<sup>13</sup>

In the decade since reopening further problems with the building have arisen. Water has begun leaking around the glass lights in the roof and there was danger of falling debris from them. The nave is currently off limits and services are being held in the basement hall. A survey by Chambers Conservation Ltd in March 2025 found much cracking and discolouration of the glass, particularly on the western side facing the prevailing winds. They suggested first steps for dealing with the problem and a fundraising effort is currently underway.<sup>14</sup>

## Guiseppe Rinvoluceri

The architect Guiseppe Rinvoluceri is best known for this remarkable building, but he also designed a number of other innovative Catholic churches in North Wales and England in the 1930s. His first was the Church of The Most Holy Redeemer, Porthmadog, opened in 1933. It has a simplified Romanesque style, with Arts-and-Crafts influences, constructed of rubble stone walls and a rounded concrete roof.<sup>15</sup> Next was St Therese of Lisieux in Abergele. It is a neo-Byzantine cruciform building with semi-circular and domed apses, constructed of reinforced concrete faced with stone on the outside.<sup>16</sup> In 1936 he designed St Peter's in Ludlow, Shropshire, which fused Byzantine and Romanesque influences. It, too, was built of stone-faced reinforced concrete.<sup>17</sup> After the Amlwch church he embarked on his last one, The Church of St Teresa of the Child Jesus, in Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire. Stepping back from the modernist design at Amlwch, Rinvoluceri created this building with ecclesiastical Baroque and Byzantine influences.

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<sup>9</sup> Cadw Listed Building Report 24455; Langley, *A History of Our Church*

<sup>10</sup> 'Anglesey (Amlwch)', Taking Stock; Chambers Conservation Ltd, *Our Lady, Star Of The Sea, Amlwch, Inspection Report, Nave Glazing and Water Ingress*, 2025, available at <https://www.catholicchurchesanglesey.org.uk/amlwch.html>

<sup>11</sup> Anglesey Archives, GB 221 WM/1865/242

<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 May 2008, 14

<sup>13</sup> Langley, *A History of Our Church*

<sup>14</sup> Chambers Conservation Ltd., *Inspection Report*, see n. 10.

<sup>15</sup> National Monuments Record of Wales, RCAHMW (NMRW), NPRN 11912, <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/11912/>

<sup>16</sup> Cadw 18664; 'Abergele — St Therese of Lisieux', Taking Stock, <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/abergele-st-therese-of-lisieux/>

<sup>17</sup> 'Ludlow — St Peter', Taking Stock, <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/ludlow-st-peter/>

Unlike his other works this is brick-built and is on a triangular footprint with three apses and a central dome rather than cruciform or rectangular.<sup>18</sup>

Most accounts of these churches, including the Cadw listing of Amlwch,<sup>19</sup> describe Rinvoluceri as an Italian immigrant who was brought to Britain as a prisoner of war in the First World War. That never rang true, as Italy was initially neutral, then fought on the Allies' side in that conflict.<sup>20</sup> Further investigation of his life reveals an interesting story of an immigrant to Britain, with a kernel of truth in the 'prisoner of war' tag.<sup>21</sup>

Rinvoluceri was born on 8 September 1890 in Savigliano, Piedmont, Italy, the son of an engineer, Guglielmo Rinvoluceri, and his wife Maria Anna Ferrero. He was an only child and his father died in a train crash when Giuseppe was just a few months old. His mother died when he was at university. He was sent to a Christian Brothers boarding school in Mondovì, Piedmont from the age of eight, learning classics and mathematics, then went to Turin University to study civil engineering.<sup>22</sup>

He received his degree in 1914, just as the First World War was breaking out, and was then enrolled in the Italian army as a second lieutenant in the 2° *Reggimento Genio Guastatori* (2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Regiment). He served throughout the war and afterwards continued as a reserve officer, promoted to captain.<sup>23</sup> After the war he began his career as a consultant civil engineer, building roads and bridges for local government in Turin. He also became involved in politics, joining *Il Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI, the Italian People's Party), a centrist Christian Democratic party. He was the section secretary for the Cuneo province branch, founded a short-lived weekly newspaper *La Difesa del Popolo* (The Defence of the People), and was preparing to run for parliament.<sup>24</sup> But at that time Mussolini's *Partito Nazionale Fascista* was dominating Italian politics, and the PPI was eventually dissolved in 1926 (although Rinvoluceri appeared to support merger with the Fascists).<sup>25</sup>

Rinvoluceri is thought to have married shortly after the war ended, but his wife (name unknown) sadly died from the Spanish flu six months later.<sup>26</sup> A few years later he met an Englishwoman, Anna Gwen More Sopwith, who was on holiday at a nearby mountain resort. She was the daughter of Arthur Sopwith, the general manager of Cannock Chase Colliery in Chasetown, Staffordshire. Born in 1879, she was in her mid-40s and 11 years his senior. She was unmarried and had spent much of her life involved with community and charity projects in her town. Rinvoluceri later wrote that as they got to know each other he admired her spirit and resourcefulness, and she was interested in his 'Latin outlook' on life.<sup>27</sup> Their intellectual

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<sup>18</sup> 'Princes Risborough — St Teresa of the Child Jesus', Taking Stock, <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/princes-risborough-st-teresa-of-the-child-jesus/>

<sup>19</sup> Cadw, 24455

<sup>20</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'Italy and the Italian front, 1915–16', <https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I/Italy-and-the-Italian-front-1915-16>

<sup>21</sup> Warren Kovach, 'Rinvoluceri, Giuseppe (1890–1962), engineer and architect', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (2025), <https://biography.wales/article/s15-RINV-GIU-1890>.

<sup>22</sup> The National Archives (TNA), HO 405/44122-R4655-9. The HO 405/44122 set of documents about Rinvoluceri were closed until the year 2052, but were released, with redactions, in 2024 after a Freedom of Information application by the author.; TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-11; Kovach, 'Rinvoluceri, Giuseppe', 2025; Information from the Rinvoluceri family.

<sup>23</sup> *Bollettino ufficiale delle nomine, promozioni e destinazioni negli ufficiali dell'esercito italiano e nel personale dell'amministrazione militare*, (Italia: Ministero della Guerra, 1915), 1228; *Annuario Ufficiale Delle Forze Armate Del Regno D'Italia, Anno 1938 – XVI*, 616

<sup>24</sup> TNA, R4655-9

<sup>25</sup> Giorgio Aimetti, Ernesto Billò, Giovanni Cornaglia, Gianfranco Maggi, Giampaolo Testa, 'Il Partito Popolare in provincia di Cuneo'. In: *Un partito di popolo – Il Partito Popolare in Piemonte e la sua classe dirigente*, Bartolo Gariglio (ed.), (Torino: Celid, 2020), 157

<sup>26</sup> Rinvoluceri family

<sup>27</sup> TNA, R4655-9

connection turned to romance, and they were married at the Church of Gran Madre di Dio in Turin on 26 October 1925.<sup>28</sup>

## Immigration to Britain

They lived in Italy and France for a few years but then returned to her hometown of Chasetown in 1928. She became ill soon after and the doctor recommended moving to the seaside. They initially went to Llandudno but eventually settled in the quieter surrounds of Conwy.<sup>29</sup> She died of cancer in 1931. After her death he was heartbroken and turned to religion. He felt called to the priesthood and arranged with the Archbishop of Birmingham to be sent on a theological course in his hometown of Mondovì in Piedmont, with the aim of eventually taking orders in Birmingham. But after a few months he decided the priestly lifestyle did not suit him, so he sought other ways to serve the church.<sup>30</sup>

Rinvoluceri returned to Conwy and became involved in projects with the local Catholic church. Before his wife's death he had refurbished a former military drill hall just outside the town walls for use as a parish hall for St Michael and All Angels Catholic Church.<sup>31</sup> After coming back from Italy he designed a Lourdes-inspired Grotto behind the church, which was opened in 1931.<sup>32</sup> It was dismantled in the 1970s when a new parish hall was built. In 1934 he added a set of the Stations of the Cross, mostly marble plaques set into the nearby town walls, plus a life-size Calvary sculpture. They were carved in Italy from Carrara marble.<sup>33</sup> In association with this Rinvoluceri worked with the parish priest, Fr McCullagh, to script a Passion Play that would proceed through the streets of Conwy to the Grotto on Good Friday, 1934. Rinvoluceri said of the play that 'hardly any town in Europe could give a better architectural image of Jerusalem or to form a more ideal setting of the tragic processional way to Calvary.' But the police did not see it that way and they banned the procession because of possible traffic disruption.<sup>34</sup>

It was at this time that he undertook his best-known ecclesiastical works described above, designing five major churches in as many years. He also converted an outbuilding to a domestic chapel on the grounds of the Garthewin estate near Llanfair Talhaiarn, Denbighshire, home of his friend Robert O F Wynne,<sup>35</sup> and assisted in the conversion of a building for use as a Catholic Church in Trefriw.<sup>36</sup> In addition he worked on a personal project; he had bought two acres of land in Glan Conwy overlooking the Estuary where in 1937 he designed and built an Art Deco home, St Francis Grange, where he lived for the rest of his life.<sup>37</sup>

He was engaged to be married to Lucy Cecilia Shaw, an elocution teacher from Rhos-on-Sea, but the marriage never took place.<sup>38</sup> In 1939 he married Dr Mina Josephine Moore in St Peter's Church, Cardiff. She was a lecturer in the Teacher Training Department of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire (the original name of Cardiff University). Born in Liverpool in 1902, her parents were Frederick Moore, a police sergeant, and his wife Elsie Flecken. She received a first-class degree in French and an MA from Liverpool University, a D. Litt. from Strasbourg University in France and taught languages

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<sup>28</sup> Kovach, 'Rinvoluceri, Giuseppe', 2025

<sup>29</sup> TNA, R4655-11

<sup>30</sup> TNA, R4655-9

<sup>31</sup> *Catholic News*, 8 November 1930, 11

<sup>32</sup> *Derry Journal*, 24 July 1931, 9

<sup>33</sup> *Liverpool Post and Mercury*, 31 March 1934, 1

<sup>34</sup> *Western Mail*, 31 January 1934, 10

<sup>35</sup> *The Tablet*, 5 May 1934, 576-577; Edward Hubbard, *Clwyd (Pevsner Architectural Guides: Buildings of Wales)* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 210.

<sup>36</sup> *The Tablet*, 28 November 1931, 702

<sup>37</sup> Kovach, 'Rinvoluceri, Giuseppe', 2025

<sup>38</sup> *Tatler*, 26 August 1936, vi

in secondary schools for 15 years.<sup>39</sup> They may have met through her admiration of his architectural work; the previous year she had published an article about his churches in the *Art Notes* magazine.<sup>40</sup>

After their marriage she continued teaching in Cardiff while he remained at St Francis Grange. Unlike many employers at the time, the college had nothing in their employment contract that required married women to resign, even after having children. However, in June 1940 when their first child, Mario, was born she came under pressure from the department head, Olive Wheeler, to reconsider her position and focus on raising her child. Mina left her job but consulted a solicitor and filed a complaint with the college Senate. She was supported in this by the British Federation of University Women. After an investigation into the matter, the Senate formally declared that women should not have to leave the College when they married or had a child, so long as they could continue carrying out their job.<sup>41</sup>

## Internment

By this time other problems had arisen in Conwy. Italy declared war on the UK on 10 June 1940 and all Italian citizens, Rinvoluceri included, were classed as enemy aliens. He was detained the next day, just two days after the birth of his son (whom he had yet to see, as Mina gave birth in Cardiff). Initially held at the Huyton Internment Camp near Liverpool, he was soon transferred to the Palace Internment Camp on the Isle of Man. It was one of several that were based on the seafront promenade in Douglas, where hotels were emptied of their usual residents and surrounded by barbed wire.<sup>42</sup> Both he and his wife immediately began a spirited letter writing campaign to convince the authorities of his loyalty to Britain and offering a list of people who could vouch for him, including the Catholic Archbishop of Wales and a judge on the North Wales circuit. Ultimately, he was released two months later on medical grounds; he had chronic gastritis and enterocolitis and the medical facilities and diet were inadequate to manage his condition.<sup>43</sup>

His freedom did not last long. On his release MI5, the UK Security Service, was notified and asked for their recommendations. A memo from them dated 27 November 1940 said that Rinvoluceri should be reinterned. The grounds were that he had previously been a member of the Italian Fascist Party, had undesirable associates among Welsh nationalists and disloyal Irish, and had been refused British nationality in 1938.<sup>44</sup>

In 1936 Rinvoluceri had applied for British citizenship after having been in Britain for eight years. The Home Office requested reports from the constabulary in the areas where he had lived. The police in Staffordshire, where he and his wife Anna Sopworth resided for a few months on their return to the UK, had little to report, other than saying that his only friend seemed to be the local Catholic priest, and that their marriage was not popular with her family. The Denbighshire Constabulary gave a much fuller report, detailing his life and three overseas visits to Italy. They concluded he was of good character, spoke English well, was financially solvent, was not a member of a foreign political organization and was loyal to the country.<sup>45</sup>

The report from the Caernarvonshire Constabulary was equally thorough, also including his various residences in Conwy. However, they added that he was believed to have been a member of the Fascist movement. He had attended meetings of the movement in Liverpool and during a visit to Italy in summer 1935 had undergone military training as a reserve captain. It also notes that he regularly wore 'Fascist

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<sup>39</sup> J E Vaughan, 'Dr Mina Josephine Moore-Rinvoluceri 1902-1991: an appreciation', *Compare* 22(1), 1992, 103-105

<sup>40</sup> Mina J Moore, 'The Churches of Guiseppe Rinvoluceri', *Art Notes*, September–October 1938: 9–11

<sup>41</sup> Sian Collins, 'Dr Mina Moore: marriage and motherhood at Cardiff University in the 1940s', Cardiff University Institutional Archives blog 28 November 2016, <https://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/cuarm/dr-mina-moore-marriage-and-motherhood-at-cardiff-university-in-the-1940s/>; TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-5

<sup>42</sup> Yvonne M Cresswell, *Living with the Wire – Civilian Internment in the Isle of Man during the two World Wars* (Douglas: Manx National Heritage, 1994), 64

<sup>43</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-3

<sup>44</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-6

<sup>45</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-2

black-shirt' but had stopped this and severed connections with the Fascists at the time of the Abyssinian war in 1935 (when Italy under Mussolini invaded and occupied what is now Ethiopia). These police reports are accompanied in the National Archives file by other documents that have been redacted and probably came from the secret services. The cumulative effect is that he was refused British citizenship.<sup>46</sup>

After MI5 recommended that Rinvoluceri be returned to the internment camps further inquiries were carried out. A police surgeon examined him and concluded he was in good health and fit to be reinterned. A letter from an acquaintance in Nefyn said that after the Abyssinian war Rinvoluceri had expressed a desire to be employed by the British Government against Italy (his motive being more love of adventure than political), as well as his admiration of the Welsh Nationalist Party. Another report, quoting second-hand an acquaintance of Rinvoluceri, said that while 'in his cups' (i.e. drunk) he had said he was one of several engineers that Mussolini had sent to Britain and provided with an 'entertainment allowance'.<sup>47</sup> The reports also noted that he was great friends with a leading member of the Welsh Nationalist party, Robert Oliver Francis Wynne, the young owner of the Garthewin estate in Llanfair Talhaiarn. Rinvoluceri met him through the church, as Wynne had recently converted to Catholicism<sup>48</sup> and was one of the few Catholics in the area. Wynne had stood for local elections,<sup>49</sup> held garden fetes at his estate for *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* party members,<sup>50</sup> and posted bail for Saunders Lewis when he was being tried for his part in an arson attack on the RAF Penrhos Aerodrome at Penyberth, near Pwllheli.<sup>51</sup>

These reports led to the conclusion that Rinvoluceri was 'regarded as a first grade suspect' and should be reinterned. He was detained on 11 March 1941, initially again at Huyton, then on the Isle of Man. He and his wife again pursued a letter writing campaign to proclaim his loyalty and request that his case be considered by the Italian Advisory Committee, who advised the British government on how to handle Italian nationals living in the UK.<sup>52</sup>

One of the main concerns they expressed was the fate of his market garden. By 1939 Rinvoluceri had retired from active architectural work and was instead cultivating the two acres of land around his house.<sup>53</sup> He was growing strawberries, potatoes, and other vegetables, as well as raising hens and goats. Much of this was destined for the guest houses and hotels of Llandudno. He worked this mainly on his own, due to shortage of labour, so he lost all his crops during his first detention and had just replanted when he was arrested again. Given the urgent need for Britain to grow as much food as possible in wartime, they argued he should be released to continue in food production, either on his own patch or by becoming manager of a farm owned by a Liverpool University professor who was acquainted with his wife.<sup>54</sup>

More enquiries were made into Rinvoluceri and new allegations arose. In particular, information was received that he had been associating with a rebellious Irishman, Cornelius O'Leary, who had been introduced to him by a local Irishwoman Kathleen Walsh. O'Leary was said to have been a close friend of the Irish revolutionary Michael Collins. It was reported that Rinvoluceri was with him in a Llandudno café when O'Leary began shouting 'Down with the King' when the National Anthem was played, and that Rinvoluceri said of the local parish priest that 'he is as big a rebel as I am'. When informed of these allegations both Giuseppe and Mina pointed out that Walsh had just been a casual acquaintance until shortly after Rinvoluceri's release from his first internment, when she took a much greater interest in the couple, inviting them to a concert and inviting herself to their house for tea several times. On one occasion she was accompanied by O'Leary, who was apparently drunk and said he had just been released from

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, R4655-6

<sup>48</sup> *Nottingham and Midland Catholic News*, 7 March 1931, 7

<sup>49</sup> *North Wales Weekly News*, 14 March 1946, 5

<sup>50</sup> *North Wales Weekly News*, 2 July 1942, 4

<sup>51</sup> *Caernarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 11 September 1936, 7

<sup>52</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-8

<sup>53</sup> TNA, 1939 Register; RG 101/7587J, District 623/2/Zkbc, Schedule 107, line 3

<sup>54</sup> TNA, R4655-8

Brixton Prison. After some unpleasant and argumentative conversations, they were hurried out of the house, the Rinvolucris distanced themselves from Walsh and had no more contact with O’Leary. Later Home Office assessments of this incident suggest that Walsh was an unreliable witness, who was probably responsible for the original reports, and may have been an agent provocateur. There are numerous redactions, including several whole pages, in these National Archive documents near where the Walsh–O’Leary allegations are presented. These were removed under FoI exemption 23, allowing the withholding of information supplied by the security services, suggesting there may be more to the story than can be released.<sup>55</sup>

Enquiries were also made into his finances. There were suspicions that he had secret income, since his market garden earnings seemed insufficient to support the household. A police report as well as statements from the Rinvolucris outlined their situation. He had inherited a sizeable amount on the death of his wife Anna Sopwith and had earned architect’s fees when building churches, which allowed him to purchase land and build St Francis Grange. He also had income from Government and overseas investments but returns on these had dropped during wartime. Mina previously had a salary from the university in Cardiff, but this stopped when she left, and she was earning as an occasional university examiner. They also had rental income from a house in Liverpool. It was a meagre income, but they lived frugal lives, rarely entertaining. Police estimated that their weekly expenses were around £8 a week, which was consistent with their income, so concerns about a secret source of revenue from a foreign source were dismissed.<sup>56</sup>

Rinvolucris was closely interrogated by the Italian Advisory Committee twice during his reinternment, transcripts of which provide great insights into his life and predicament. Several times he denied supporting or ever being a member of the Fascist party. He pointed out that the meetings he attended in Liverpool (mentioned above) were annual ones for Italian officers in Britain, although he stopped going when they began to be Fascist-leaning. He admitted regularly wearing black clothing, interpreted as Fascist black-shirt, but said this started when he was briefly studying for the priesthood as a way of signalling his piety without adopting priestly dress. This continued for a couple more years until his spiritual crisis had passed. His trip back to Italy in 1935 for reserve officer training led him to decide to distance himself from his former country and apply for British citizenship.<sup>57</sup>

Foreign citizens who were interned during the war could be approved for release if they committed to doing work for the war cause. Soon after his reinternment Rinvolucris was pleading to be released to return to working his market garden or to manage a 180-acre farm at Camaes, Llangernyw, near Abergele, which was owned by Mina’s academic colleague at Liverpool University, Dr Martin. However, both of these were refused in October 1941.<sup>58</sup> He also offered to enrol with the Pioneer Corps, a British Army unit formed during WWII to take on light engineering and logistical tasks. In August 1941 he invoked his past experience as a newspaper editor in Italy to recommend that he be employed to produce a weekly Italian newspaper to propagandise against Mussolini’s totalitarian government. At the end of 1941 he suggested that, as an Italian Army Reserve Officer, he could assist in organising Italian Volunteers to fight against the Fascist forces. He also offered to take employment as a driver or an office or factory worker.<sup>59</sup> None of these gained traction and he remained on the Isle of Man for the next year.

During this time Mina kept pushing for his case to be reconsidered. She persuaded a number of prominent people to become involved. Letters were written to the authorities by: his friend Robert O F Wynne of Garthwin; the architect of Portmeirion, Clough Williams-Ellis; the history master of Ampleforth College, Thomas Charles Edwards; Conwy parish priest Revd P MacCullagh; Prof. G W Robinson of Bangor

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<sup>55</sup> TNA, R4655-11

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> TNA, R4655-9

<sup>59</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-10

University; deputy headmistress of Ely High School Dorothy G Defew; the MPs Sir Henry Morris-Jones and Megan Lloyd-George.

In August 1942 a report marked 'Secret' was sent to the Home Office from MI5. It was authored by J A Lloyd, who had interrogated Rinvoluceri. After extensively describing the case against the prisoner over the years, he summed up by saying 'my impression of Rinvoluceri was that he was an honest but somewhat eccentric individual who was probably his own worst enemy.' He said internment camp officers concluded he was genuinely friendly to Britain and was very educated but was unpopular with other Italians at the camp for supporting the Free Italy Movement that sought to overthrow Mussolini. He concluded that there was no tangible evidence to corroborate accusations against him. MI5 dropped their opposition to his release.<sup>60</sup>

His case was again considered by the Italian Advisory Committee, who interviewed him a second time in September 1942, this time in London. Following further enquiries with some of Rinvoluceri's acquaintances, the committee concluded that, although he may have had Fascist leanings in the past, he was no longer considered a threat to national security and that he could be released to undertake work of national importance, either as an engineer or farmer.<sup>61</sup>

The search then began for a suitable job to release him to and he registered with the Fulham Road Labour Exchange. The offer arranged by his wife to work at Dr Martin's farm in Llangernyw had by now expired, but Martin also had a farm in Oxfordshire and he offered Rinvoluceri an alternative position there. Released on 5 March 1943 to work on Martin's farm, he remained there until October when he was cleared to return to Conwy to tend his own market garden. He was kept under Alien Movement Restrictions, imposing a curfew and limiting travel, as well as limiting ownership of objects like binoculars and cameras, until the end of the war.<sup>62</sup>

## Mina's Citizenship

Besides fighting to get her husband released, Mina Moore-Rinvoluceri had her own problems with the authorities. The Naturalization Act of 1870 introduced a provision that a British women marrying a foreigner would lose her UK citizenship (this was revoked by the 1948 British Nationality Act).<sup>63</sup> They were married on 29 June 1939 and from that time she would be considered Italian by the UK government. But when her husband was interned in June 1940 she realised she was in a precarious position. At this point she was being forced out of her position at Cardiff University after having a child, and her not being a British citizen was another strike against her.

On 2 July 1940 she wrote to the Home Office enquiring about how to regain her citizenship. She noted that the marriage was not registered with the Italian authorities, so she had never actively taken up that citizenship. She also enlisted the help of an old friend from her university days who was now in the Foreign Office, J S Grant, who gave her advice and contacted the Home Office to support her application.<sup>64</sup> In further submissions she argued that, since permission for the marriage had not been requested from the Italian authorities (as required by a 1938 Italian law restricting marriage between Italians and foreigners), it would not be considered valid by Italy, and thus she would not have Italian citizenship. Amendments to British Nationality law in 1933 made it clear that women would no longer lose their citizenship on marriage to a foreign man unless they actually acquired the husband's nationality as a result of the marriage.<sup>65</sup> However, memos between and within the Foreign and Home Offices considered

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<sup>60</sup> TNA, R4655-11

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> 'Historical background information on nationality'

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/historical-background-information-on-nationality/historical-background-information-on-nationality-accessible> updated 22 May 2023

<sup>64</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-4

<sup>65</sup> 'Historical background'

the relevant laws and precedents and came to the conclusion that it was uncertain what position either the Italian Government or the UK courts would take on the question. Mina had hoped she could have been considered not to have lost her citizenship at all, but the only course available now was the lengthy process of applying to have it reinstated.<sup>66</sup>

However, further problems arose. She was in the shadow of the accusations against her husband. Also, Cardiff police reported that there were rumours that she had Fascist leanings, had made comments disloyal to Britain to acquaintances, and had tried to enlist female friends to Fascism. This put the brakes on her application for many months, then in November 1941 she was informed that her application could not proceed while her husband was interned or under any other restrictions. She was also, probably unbeknownst to her, placed on the Invasion List of foreign nationals to be detained in the event of an invasion of Britain.<sup>67</sup>

Once her husband was released in March 1943 she enquired about her status and was informed that her application for reinstatement of citizenship was again under consideration. She began more regular letter writing, enlisting the help of Irene Hilton of the Women's Employment Federation and Eleanor Rathbone, the women's rights campaigner and Member of Parliament for the Combined English Universities. Their interventions, as well as that of Mina's friend J S Grant of the Foreign Office, led Home Office officials to approve her application for regaining her citizenship in August 1943, despite the misgivings of some within the government.<sup>68</sup>

## Post War

After losing her position at Cardiff and having her husband interned Mina managed to make ends meet by marking examinations for Cambridge, Oxford, Bristol and the Northern Universities, as well as lecturing to naval cadets and other organisations. After the war she embarked on a renewed academic career, becoming a lecturer at Liverpool University, leading a team doing modern language lecturing for Postgraduate Certificate in Education courses. She also taught and researched in comparative education, writing two books, *Oral work in Modern Languages* and *Education in East Germany*, as well as numerous journal publications and translations of others' works.<sup>69</sup> She was awarded the *Médaille de Vermeil* and the *Officier d'Académie* by the French government for her services to French culture in Britain.<sup>70</sup>

After the war the Rinvolucris settled in to a quiet life at St Francis Grange. He was working in his market garden, as well as teaching Italian and leading cultural trips to Italy, while she pursued her academic career. They also by now had two sons, whom they were home schooling. Mario followed in his mother's footsteps and became well known in the comparative education world, while Bernardo was a property landlord in Llandudno.

In 1950 Rinvolucris again applied for British citizenship. The National Archives files show that all the previous allegations against him were re-examined. One internal memo noted that 'It is a curious case which has caused much perplexity to the Home Office in the past.' It also says that there was 'a large number of factors arousing suspicion concerning him, particularly in a country district of North Wales where anything odd is a matter of common knowledge and suspicion.' But on balance the author accepted Rinvolucris's version of events rather than his critics', and recommended he be granted citizenship. This was approved by the Under Secretary of State Geoffrey de Freitas and he became a British citizen on 11 January 1951.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-5

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Vaughan, 'Dr Mina Josephine Moore-Rinvolucris...'

<sup>70</sup> *North Wales Weekly News*, 22 July 1948, 6

<sup>71</sup> TNA, HO 405/44122-R4655-14

Giuseppe died of a heart attack at St Francis Grange in 1962, aged 71. Mina established the Giuseppe Rinvoluceri Prize in his memory, awarded to the best student in the beginners Italian course at the University of Liverpool. She lived to the age of 89, dying in 1991.<sup>72</sup> They are buried together in St Agnes Cemetery in Conwy.

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*Note: this is the manuscript of a paper published in the Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society. There are some minor differences between this and the final published text. Also, this manuscript does not include the images.*

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<sup>72</sup> Kovach, 'Rinvoluceri, Giuseppe', 2025

**Dr Warren Kovach** was born and raised in Ohio, USA. After receiving his PhD degree at Indiana University for research in palaeobotany and palaeoecology he moved to the UK, working at the universities of Aberdeen and Aberystwyth. He later moved to Anglesey where he develops and sells scientific data analysis software alongside exploring the history of the island. He is the author of the Anglesey-History.co.uk website, which highlights aspects of the island's history, and has written four books for Amberley Publishing, *Anglesey Through Time*, *Anglesey in 50 Buildings*, *A-Z of the Isle of Anglesey* and *Lighthouses of Wales*. He is currently working on a new one, *Churches of Anglesey*.

Ganwyd a magwyd **Dr Warren Kovach** yn Ohio, UDA. Ar ôl derbyn ei radd PhD ym Mhrifysgol Indiana am ymchwil mewn paleobotaneg a paleoecoleg symudodd i'r DU, gan weithio ym mhrifysgolion Aberdeen ac Aberystwyth. Yn ddiweddarach symudodd i Ynys Môn lle mae'n datblygu ac yn gwerthu meddalwedd dadansoddi data gwyddonol ochr yn ochr ag archwilio hanes yr ynys. Ef yw awdur gwefan Anglesey-History.co.uk, sy'n tynnu sylw at agweddau ar hanes yr ynys, ac mae wedi ysgrifennu pedwar llyfr i Amberley Publishing, sef *Anglesey Through Time*, *Anglesey in 50 Buildings*, *A-Z of the Isle of Anglesey* a *Lighthouses of Wales*. Ar hyn o bryd mae'n gweithio ar un newydd, sef *Churches of Anglesey*.