

If you believed everything you read about Maltasingh, you would have to believe that he lived for one hundred and ninety three years and that he had the extraordinary ability to be in more than one place at any one time....

What we know about Maltasingh, as a matter of fact is that he was the proprietor of Brick Lanes first ever Curry House, Maltasinghs Indian Kitchen.

Although most published research recognises the emergence of the "Brick Lane Curry House" dating from around 1956, following the influx of the large Bangladeshi community in the East End of London, it has more recently been acknowledged that in fact the first public premises to actually cook and sell curry, was The Maltasinghs Indian kitchen. This can be referenced as early as 1874 and was situated in a Victorian factory where Brick Lane and Fournier Street meet.

The Curry House was named after its founder, Maltasingh Buttigieg.

Whilst in appearance he may have seemed Sikh and perhaps Indian, Maltasingh was actually Maltese. Born Fonzu Buttigieg, he grew up in Bugibba, Malta and was raised by his grandmother who was a Pastizzi maker. As a boy Fonzu helped his Grandmother prepare the pastry, cheese and peas as well as serving Pastizzi through a small window in her kitchen that opened towards the street. Later after his Grandmothers passing, he ran the kitchen for a while, quickly expanding to a chain of three kitchens. The Pastizzi were selling like Pastizzi, but Fonzu found the Pastizzi extremely bland, particularly the pea, he longed to travel in search of better flavours and to learn more about Monkeys.

He worked for a while as a Doctor at the Port of Valletta. Later he had various jobs whilst at sea with a number of different trading companies until he was banished to shore in India. This was a form of punishment for continuously touching the captain's monkey whilst serving as a porter on the East Indian shipping company's ship, The Charabanc, which at the time was docked at the Port of Kolkata.

Given his experience baking Pastizzi, Fonzu was a natural Samosa maker. He worked as a cook and vender, amongst other jobs and in his spare time he bodged what is now thought to be the worlds first Monkey powered Quadri cycle or '*Jugaad* ', from tea crates, planks and cartwheels as a means of transportation. He was soon heading north towards the Monkey Palace of Jaipur and the Northern Indian cuisine he had learnt so much about and longed to taste. After missing a left turn at Agra, he traveled along the GT Road from New Dehli to Punjab, where it is thought he traded novel ideas for ad hoc cooking appliances with other vendors and the proprietors of the many Tabbas (road side kitchens) in exchange for recipes, marinades and spice blends. It was here that Fonzu honed and finely tuned his skills as quite a formidable cooker of curry.

He continued his journey North to end up and settle in Ludhiana, where after working as a Tarkhan (carpenter) he trained up a team of Macaque Monkeys and set up a business making manjaa (day bed) frames and other furniture. It was around this time that Fonzu became known as Maltasingh, some say the name was

given to him by his customers on account of the quality and speed of his mortise joint making, however other sources suggest that the name was given in jest by local women after he began wearing a Turban in order to conceal his rapid hair loss.

In 1854 Maltasingh was summoned to accompany Maharaja Duleep Singh on his journey to London. The young Maharaja was an enthusiastic trampolinist and as a result his manjaa would require constant repair.

After settling in the East End of London, Maltasingh took on many jobs, including that of a weavers apprentice, a potato peeler in a chip shop and a polisher and leatherer at Wornock's Furniture Factory. He also worked in the Brick Lane Beigel shop where he famously came up with the idea to put a hole in the middle of the Beigel - indeed he fashioned a brilliant machine that simply punched their centers out. This genius innovation was most pleasing for the shop owners as it offered a thirty five percent better return in terms of dough to Beigel ratio. They offered to set Maltasingh up in the business of his choice in exchange for his invention.

He rented the disused warehouse of a string and twine shop on Brick lane, where he set to work engineering the most brilliant press that printed wallpaper by dusting Turmeric and other spices onto patterned glued paper, the press was constructed using found materials or reject furniture components from Wornock's Factory.

The wallpaper business was a complete failure as the British public were apparently just not ready for flocked wallpaper and his "Essence of India" range.

As he was not so busy he began cooking Indian lunches for the men from the factories and his friends from the textiles workshops using the spices left over from his wallpaper. With their help, over time they bodged together, (again being super resourceful with materials), what would soon to become known as 'Maltasingh's Indian Kitchen' and then later as 'The Famous Maltasingh's Indian Kitchen'. Quickly establishing itself as a local hotspot, Maltasingh's Kitchen served good cheap food of Indian origin, with beer until late into the evening. It was also known as the only place to hear the best of classical raags being sung.

Unfortunately Maltasingh's was forced to shut down after a local spotted a monkey working in the kitchen.

Maltasingh decided to move back to his native Malta, where he used his profits from the canteen to build a fleet of quadricycles, which would sell pastizzi along the beaches and seafronts. It was at this time that Maltasingh made perhaps his most significant intervention, it is thought that one evening after making his wife a curry he decided to add some excess curry paste into his pea pastizzi mix, although it took some time to win the locals over, it was soon known as his signature recipe and became Maltasingh's biggest seller.

So if you've ever been eating a Pastizzi whilst holiday in Malta and you've wondered where that curry twang is coming from, you now know, it's all down to the amazing Maltasingh.