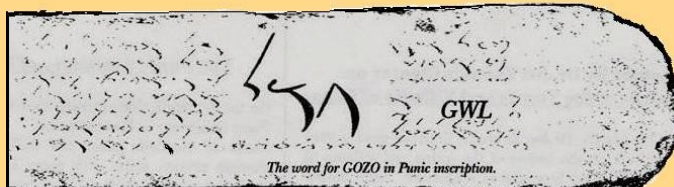




# GWL



## Wirt Ghawdex

## NEWSLETTER

No 04/10 Dec. 2010



*We Wish You All A Happy Christmas And A  
Prosperous New Year With Wirt Ghawdex*



### Inside this issue:

Front page important notices to our members  
Star Profile is on page 2  
Blast from the past is all about Christmas and Cribs turn to page 3  
The Year's Review is given by Giovanni which you can find on back page  
Also on page 4 is the competition for this quarterly issue  
So read on and enjoy . . . . .

### ENROL A FRIEND

If you know someone who would be interested in joining Wirt Ghawdex, an application form can be obtained from :

The Membership Secretary  
Wirt Ghawdex  
Dar il-Lunzjata,  
Lunzjata Valley,  
Rabat Ghawdex VCT1680  
[membership@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:membership@wirtghawdex.org)

### NOTE TO ALL MEMBERS

Any member who is receiving notices of lectures etc. by regular mail and has since acquired an e-mail address, please advise so that we can stop sending out a hard copy by mail. Also, if there is anyone who

prefers to receive this Newsletter via e-mail only (soft copy), please send me a note on my e-mail address below.

***This would help us to reduce our costs and also save some trees.***



Thank you for your assistance.  
**Betty** - Membership Secretary  
[membership@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:membership@wirtghawdex.org)

Watch out for these important dates in the Wirt Ghawdex calendar

18 March 2011 Francis Aloisio presents  
MALTA THE LINK TO ATLANTIS

Coming up Keith Buhajar will be talking about Comino and will lead a walk on the island and we will join Alfred Baldacchino for a walk and talk on Flora and Fauna

You will receive more information about these and other events from Betty



**Mr. Richard Zammit (Rikardu)** for donating the barrels in our Gunpowder Magazine. **Mr. Joe Scicluna** and **Jay & Alan Jones** for donating the furnishings of the WWII shelter at the Cittadella

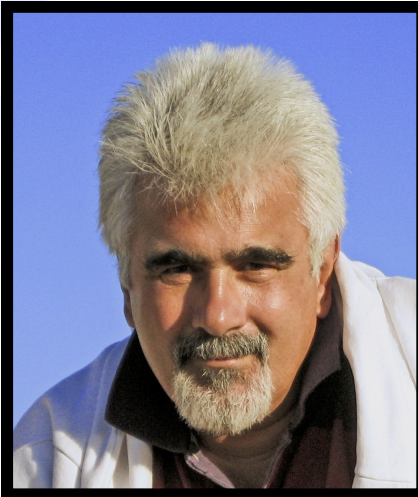
★ **Star Profile**  
**Giovanni Zammit**

In this edition we meet our very own Executive Secretary Giovanni Zammit. A Gozitan through and through whose love for his precious island steers him into an endless frenzy of sheer hard work. Giovanni is not one to enjoy his retirement quietly in his farmhouse in Gharb, not when he can save Gozo from the ravishes of the modern world. Read on to find out more about Giovanni . . . . .

I was named Giovanni at birth and that is how most people in Gozo know me. However my name was anglicised to 'John' when I started school as was the standard practice at the time and throughout the years I have answered to many variations of my name such as John, Johnny, Giovan, and back to Giovanni as I'm known now.

I was born in Victoria, Gozo – the youngest of six children. I served time with the British Air Force (Malta) and was stationed in Cyprus for two years. It was during this tour of duty that I married my high-school sweetheart Betty and we have just celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. You probably know Betty since she is the membership secretary of **Wirt Ghawdex**. I am also the proud father of two boys who have given us 4 beautiful grandchildren. The whole family moved to Canada where we stayed for nearly 25 years before Betty and I returned to Gozo. We still visit yearly in order to see our children and grandchildren who still reside there.

A visit to the Thousand Islands in Ontario Canada impressed on me the importance the Canadians give to their heritage even if Canada is still a young country. At these islands, they were giving tours of a castle ruin and it was treated as if it was a world heritage site. Another thing that impressed me was that houses that had belonged to people associated with Canadian history were considered to be heritage buildings and were preserved. This meant that sometimes thousands and thousands of dollars were spent to move them out of the way of planned roads or highways and placing them nearby. My thoughts would then return to my homeland and I would compare our own lack of appreciation of the rich and varied historical heritage of our islands. This triggered in me a wish to help with the preservation of Maltese and Gozitan heritage should I ever get the chance. When we decided to settle back in Gozo, I immediately looked to get involved in such volunteer work. Both Betty and I were introduced to **Wirt Ghawdex** by Mag. Paul Coppini who was President of the society at that time and we eagerly joined the society.



My first involvement with the society was as the PRO and I enjoyed going with Paul and the then executive secretary Godwin Vella around the two ongoing projects of the time, i.e. the Mgarr ix-Xini Tower and the Dghajsa. When Godwin decided to move on due to his new position as Manager of Heritage Malta, Gozo Office, I replaced him as Executive Secretary.

My first project involvement was to continue putting pressure on local government to expropriate Santa Cecilja Chapel so that it could be restored. In the meantime, Godwin and I also discussed at length the possibility of getting the Gunpowder Magazine site to be passed on to **Wirt Ghawdex** under a Management Agreement. Since then, we have obtained both sites and also added the silos.

Besides my general duties as overall coordinator of the society's activities, I also consider that one of my prime objectives is to promote the society, both locally and overseas, and to make every effort to move it forward.

I am lucky enough to be working with a wonderful group of people who selflessly give their time and efforts to help protect this island's heritage. The whole committee works tirelessly to maintain our existing sites and is always on the lookout for other heritage sites that need protection. On the other hand, one of the least pleasant things to deal with is the inevitable bureaucracy we have to deal with while pursuing our restoration efforts.

It is my personal goal to keep on working to ensure that the authorities will always give **Wirt Ghawdex** the recognition it deserves and to see it as a solid stakeholder in future projects in Gozo and Comino. My ultimate objective is to see **Wirt Ghawdex** become a household name within the islands and to see many more locals, especially the younger generation, get actively involved in the preservation of our heritage.

# TALKS OF CHRISTMAS PAST

BLAST FROM THE PAST

It seems that Pope Saint Julius I started the tradition of celebrating Christmas on the 25th December in Roman Catholic Churches in 400 AD. During their stay in Malta, the Knights of Saint John, being a religious order, were having several disputes with the then Archbishop of Malta and Gozo. When news of these squabbles travelled to Pope Paul IV in 1555, he immediately sent Monsignor Pietro Dusina, (the first Inquisitor to Malta) to investigate. While in Malta, Dusina introduced the devotion to the birth of Christ. It was four years later that the Knights of St. John celebrated Christmas at St. John's Cathedral in Mdina. At midnight, the knights celebrated Mass in full regalia and with much pomp. This grand ceremony soon caught on in various other places. The most well known was in Valletta by the Dominican priests who held Mass everyday as a run-up to the Christmas midnight Mass. It was much later that the Diocese clergy allowed Christmas Mass to be celebrated in every Parish in Malta and Gozo. Once this 'feast' caught on, between the 16th and 17th century other rituals were added on during the midnight Mass such as the procession with the *Bambin* (statue of baby Jesus) accompanied by the parishioners who usually carried paper lanterns.

It is not known precisely when the first Crib was made in our islands, but some say that it was all down to the Dominican priests in Valletta in 1617, while others say it was the Benedictine Nuns of Rabat in 1826. During this century, the Crib and the figurines depicting the birth of baby Jesus were made with *Kartapesta* using the same technique as when we do crafts with papier maché. *Kartapesta* is a type of rough, thick paper that was used as a sack where animal feed was stored. This brown or stone coloured paper was the ideal recycling material especially for making Cribs because craft paint was rare and expensive. Although newspapers (the material for papier maché) were already in circulation, it was the educated and the well off that bought and read them.

In the 18th century the Crib entered the homes of Maltese and Gozitan families. This was all down to a certain priest, Dun Gorg Preca (nowadays known as Saint Ġorg Preca), who worked closely with the M.U.S.E.U.M. (it is the organisation that teaches the official text of the Roman Catholic Church) to familiarise children with the Crib. The Crib or Grotta as it was known then, could be found in almost every household where in the evenings for the duration of the Novena, the family used to gather around the Crib reciting the Rosary. The traditional Crib started to change its appearance when the islands were under the British Rule. Apart from the papier maché, other materials were introduced, such as slag-wool and coal ashes as well as other materials that were available at the time. Apart from the usual figures that represented Baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, slowly but surely, figures representing the Maltese way of life started to appear. Most prominent were characters from the village life like for example *għannej* (a folk singer), *nissieg* (weaver), *bidwi* (farmer), *sajjed* (fisherman), *tal-forn* (baker), and people playing old musical instruments. The most popular perhaps to this very day were the *l-imghaggeb* (a peasant looking on with a surprise on his face), *ix-xabbatur* (a man looking inside from the top of the cave) and *ir-rieqed* (the sleeping man: the 'siesta' is also traditional on the islands). As time went by, the figures (*pasturi*) were made from clay, candle and of course plastic. With the introduction of electricity, the Crib lost its place as centre stage to the Christmas Tree, although in the more traditional houses especially in Gozo, we still see the Bambin displayed in a prominent window surrounded by lights and *ġulbiena*, a mixture of wheat, grain and canary seed on cotton buds in flat pans.

In Gozitan Churches, the *zaqq* (an ancient Maltese bagpipes powered by a goatskin bellows) was played during the midnight Mass. Today we can all be part of this ancient era when we visit the Live Crib in Ġhajnsielem during the festive season, having a sharp contrast on the other side of the hill as one can see the Gozo ferry leave our beloved island.

## THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our next **Annual General Meeting** is scheduled for **Friday, February 4, 2011 at the conference hall, The Ministry for Gozo, St. Francis Square, Rabat**

**Our AGM follows an agenda that includes:**

- Approval of minutes of previous AGM
- Reading of Administration and Financial reports
- Amendments to the Statute (if any)
- Election of additional committee members (if available)

**Major requirements of an AGM:**

Notification of the meeting date has to be announced a minimum of 10 days prior to the meeting.

All paid-up members will be invited to attend and those present are entitled to take part in any vote taken.

Amendments can only be carried out during the Annual General Meeting and these can be amended with a two thirds majority of those members present. Additions to the Statute may be proposed and require a simple majority.

Proposals for amendments to the statute are to be notified to the Executive Secretary, in writing, at least three (3) working days before the date of the Annual General Meetings.

**If you would like a copy of the Statute please write to Betty - Membership Secretary**  
[membership@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:membership@wirtghawdex.org)

# The year's review

By our Executive Secretary, Giovanni N. Zammit

The past year has been a busy and challenging year for our society. Besides the work on our own projects, we have been promoting the society's values and aims through various activities in Malta and Gozo. We are now a recognized stakeholder and attend regular information/consultation meetings that MEPA holds with all NGOs. We have taken part in the Malta Tourist Authority's celebration of Biodiversity Day by holding a lecture/walk at Ta' Cenc and also participated at an associated Open Day fair at Mdina. We also took part in the G.I.V.E. (Gozo International Volunteer Event) organized by the Gozo NGO's Organization. We supported the Victoria Local Council public event of "12 Steps" by making the Gunpowder Room and the Silos available as part of this interactive game. We also opened up our headquarters at Lunzjata for the general public during "World Environment Day" and also during the Festubru festival organized by Kercem Band Club.

Thanks to our Activities Co-ordinator, Jay Jones, we managed to hold six successful lectures about a variety of subjects related to Gozo and its history and heritage. In June we had the opportunity to organize the launching of the book "**The Earliest Church Register in Gozo - 1554 – 1628**" by **Prof. Horatio C.R. Vella** who chose to have this latest publication launched only in Gozo – a real first! We also organized two walk/talk activities - at Ta' Cenc and of the 3 Friaries in Victoria. Here we must acknowledge the many professional lecturers who donate their time and expertise, free of charge, to our society and without whom the lectures wouldn't be possible.

We have increased the awareness about our society and its work through articles in publications such as "**Guide Me**" and The Ghajnsielem 2010 Feast Programme. We have also had details of our sites included in the latest "**Malta & Gozo**"- Brand Travel Guide and also in "**The Malta Baby & Kids Directory**

## 2010/2011"

The 4<sup>th</sup> Wirt Ghawdex publication, "Mgarr ix-Xini Tower", was launched at the "In Search of the Fougasses of Gozo" lecture by Dr. Stephen C. Spiteri in November. This was appropriate since the content of this publication was all contributed to us by this lecturer. This free contribution of expertise is another example of Dr. Spiteri's constant support of our society.

This year we have also had several students get involved with our society's work. We have had two Sixth formers doing their Systems of Knowledge project with us. We also had two Fifth formers who volunteered throughout the summer by sitting the Gunpowder Magazine site. The MCAST Gozo also held a volunteering activity with a group of about 15 students spending a day at the Mgarr ix-Xini Tower doing maintenance work. This interest in students was raised mostly through various presentations about our society that are done on a regular basis in public and Church schools.

At the beginning of the year we welcomed a new Editor, Sandra Jackson, who has worked hard to produce the new look of this Newsletter. This quarterly publication's printing is being sponsored by Synergie Financial Planning, of Dorset, England which is the private enterprise of our Treasurer Steve Andrews. This generous sponsorship is providing us with a superior quality newsletter.

Throughout all this we also gave our input to MEPA regarding major projects in Gozo and Comino such as Hondoq, Dwejra and the Comino Management Plan.

The whole committee looks forward to 2011 which will mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this Society and which we hope to celebrate in more ways than one. More details will be revealed as they become available.

## COMPETITION

Our competition in this issue is:-

Name three figures or characters that are traditionally displayed in a Crib.

The first correct entry pulled out of a bag will win a set of three of our current publications which includes The Gozo Boat, The Voyage of Jean Houel and our latest booklet, The Mgarr ix—Xini Tower.

Send your entries by not later than 1st February 2011 to:

**Wirt Ghawdex**

The Editor,  
Dar il-Lunzjata,  
Wied il-Lunzjata,  
Rabat VCT 1680  
Għawdex

Or email: [gwl\\_editor@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:gwl_editor@wirtghawdex.org)

Congratulations to our winner in the last issue - Robert Borg from Pieta Malta.