



GWL

The word for *Ghawdex* in Punic inscription

Wirt Ghawdex NEWSLETTER No1/11



A Word From
The Editor

Welcome to all for the first edition of Wirt Ghawdex newsletter of the year 2011. As you may have noticed we have changed our logo which we hope looks much better now, thanks to your comments and the technical correctness of Giovanni Zammit and John Cremona. In this issue you can read about the Carnival of the past, Knights of St. John's style on page 3. You'll be surprised what they got up to! Page 2 gives a glimpse of Jay Jones in the Star Profile. Back page we find the competition and insight to the Annual General Meeting. Throughout the newsletter we've put in some snippets of information, to keep you updated of what's going on around us. Below a reminder of the events coming up in the next quarter. We look forward to seeing you there to help us support Wirt Ghawdex.

So read on and enjoy. . .

Calling All Members:

Wirt Ghawdex is organising special events to coincide with the 30th anniversary of when our society was first launched. We will be contacting you to find out more about your preferences as regards entertainment through a questionnaire. We try our best to please, therefore you will be helping us greatly if you respond to our questionnaire.

Thank You



Wirt Ghawdex sites are proving to be very popular all year round, even the cold spell has not deterred people from visiting them. According to statistics as kindly supplied by Alan Jones, Wirt Ghawdex has had 224 visitors in January and 239 in February, this year. One has to take into account that the sites are not open every day and the time spent showing people around is limited. Therefore a pat on the back for our volunteering members.

Well Done!

You may have seen articles in the press recently referring to the 'United Nations Year of the Volunteer', UNV for short. This is the 10th anniversary of this global initiative and the message is the same, bringing people of different backgrounds, experiences and abilities to work together for a common good. Wirt Ghawdex depends entirely upon volunteers who wish to help safeguard the natural, archaeological, and historical heritage of Gozo and Comino. If you love this Island then come and work with us to fight to protect it. If you are willing to give some time or expertise contact us on :

activities@wirtghawdex.org



Friday, March 18th, 2011 - **'Malta's Link with Atlantis'** – Lecturer: Francis Aloisio

Friday, April 15th, 2011 - **'Comino: Its Archaeological and Historical Heritage'** - Lecturer: Keith Buhagiar

Saturday, May 7th, 2011 A walk on Comino to visit the **Archaeological and Historical Heritage sites** (this is a follow up to the last lecture) – Guide: Keith Buhagiar

Friday, May 27th, 2011 – **'Comino's Place in Maltese Politics'** - Lecturer: Dr Edward Warrington

Details of time and place will be on our website: www.wirtghawdex.org



Wirt Ghawdex wishes to thank all the sitters that give up a lot of their precious time manning our sites. They are:

Gwen and Roger Cockram ♦ Ken and Nina Moffat ♦ Marian O'Riordan ♦ Norman Grey ♦ Derek Johnson ♦ Bob Onions
Erika Menestret ♦ Jay and Alan Jones . . . And of course our SOK students—*THANK YOU*

Star Profile ★
Jay Jones

She's the Secretary. She's Activities Coordinator. She's a site sitter. She looks after the SOK students. She looks after all members. She's a great cook. Jay Jones is all that and more. Her endless energy is reflected in her work with Wirt Għawdex which she gives willingly and with much love. Let's get to know Jay better, read on. . . .

Born in India, in a small hillside station near Missouri, just before partition. With the changes, my parents opted to return to the UK. We spent time with relatives initially but my father couldn't cope with the cold in Lancashire and we moved south to Middlesex.

My early childhood was spent helping my father on his allotment, where I first grew to appreciate fresh produce and how to grow it. We visited historical sights, museums and I was introduced to the wonders of the ancient world. Each school holiday saw me being taken to some museum or other, to Kew Gardens for the plants or to a historic home. My mother was particularly interested in china and porcelain but from the age of five my interest was centred on fans (no not the football variety but the ones used to keep the temperature down). My half crown pocket money was spent each month on a new one. Not now though, with the increasing interest over the years in their collection, prices have risen several fold. I attended an all girls' grammar school and then opted for what had been an all male teaching college for the next three years. Quite daunting for me. I started my teaching career in the local secondary modern school teaching Geography and Scripture(Divinity) to 11-18 year olds and in the time of mini skirts!!

Alan and I married in 1968 and in 1970 we had our son Barry and in 1973 Emma. They are both now married. Barry lives in the UK with his wife and daughter. Emma is in Melbourne with hubby, daughter and son. It is only when we look at the children and grandchildren that I realise how fast time is going – me I still feel 35!! Much of our married life was spent in East Anglia living in the country miles from anywhere where we renovated three houses. In one of the houses we restored we discovered three letters written in the late 1800's and which had been hidden under the stair tread detailing a love story.

When the children were young I stayed at home but later returned to teaching first with the educationally and physically challenged. Then with primary children mainly 4-7 year olds. As



the teaching profession changed I was pleased not to be involved in state education. National Curriculum and the right of the child to answer back, not to be put in detention or the inability of the teacher to discipline really put me off.

Alan often had to travel abroad leaving me to run the home and garden but we also had the opportunity to live abroad. First in Abu Dhabi and later on in Malaysia. On all our postings we took the opportunity to travel and learn about the country. Our last stay was in Scotland and we again took the chance to see the natural beauty of the land and visit historic buildings.

Coming to the Maltese Islands in 2000 we first lived in Mellieha. We joined DLH and were the first wardens of the Red Tower. Alan was also involved in the restoration of Santa Maria Tower on Comino. When we came to Gozo we joined Wirt Għawdex and became involved in the society. We soon realised how much there is to do and the disappointment we have in lack of support. So few to help and so much to do.

I try to organise lecture/talks of interest for the Gozitan population and in an attempt to encourage an interest in their own history. We open the Gunpowder Magazine and associated areas and I really enjoy telling people of all nationalities about the history of the site. Folk come from around the world and are amazed at the age of it all. Their faces as they come out of the tunnel leading to the first silo. They stand up to see the whole silo and usually say 'wow', that's really worthwhile.

This year we have eight students carrying out their SOK project with us and this is most encouraging as hopefully more younger people are showing an interest in their own heritage. After all they are the ones who will be around to take care of things for the future. We also have the MCAST Students coming to spend a day with us at our sites so they too are being exposed to heritage. It is these younger people who hold the future of the island in their hands and although I expect it will take a couple of generations there is a light at the end of the tunnel – however far away or distant.

In appreciation of their work with Wirt Għawdex we asked one of our students to write about herself

I'm Miriam, 17 years old and I was born and live in Gozo with my parents, older sister, a dog and a cat. My parents seem to have had quite a hard time to come up with a name and after a long search they agreed on the name Miriam which I am happy about, even though most of the time people call me Mir.

My dad was born in Australia and even though he moved here when he was twenty-six years old he is not inclined to

move back there, for him Gozo is heaven on earth. I love both the cat and the dog but I have to say that the cat is my favourite. She is always there by my side, even while studying she sits on my lap keeping me company.

This year I ended my two year Matsec course at Sir Michelangelo Refalo School hoping to move on to University to follow a degree in Nursing. A compulsory subject at school is the Systems of Knowledge and this entails doing a project. To be honest when I came to choose an organization I

was totally confused.

We had several lectures at school from different people coming from the various organisations on the island. Although I had heard about Wirt Għawdex I never quite knew what it was all about. However once I learned about it in one of the lectures it sounded interesting and after giving it some thought I decided that it would be the best choice for me. So I joined Wirt Għawdex and am really looking forward to be part of this organisation. Although it is early days I already feel I made the right choice.

Continued on page 4

CARNIVAL in Gozo, MALTA & the Knights' *dis-Order*

Carnival has always been a big event in Gozo even more so in the old days when life was generally monotonous. For the rest of the year exciting events were non-existent and working in the fields was tough with long hours and not much glamour was involved. Also one must not forget the *Randan* (like the Muslim Ramadan), 40 days before Easter Sunday, of abstinence from lavish food, drink and sex. But Carnival during the Knights' stay on the islands was one huge party with scandals big enough to be noted and recorded in our history

In fact the word Carnival is derived from two latin words—*carne* and *levarium*, which means the removal of meat. It is commonly believed that the Order of the Knights of St. John started the tradition of celebrating Carnival. However, we know that in 1535 Carnival, Italian style, was celebrated in Birgu (Malta), only five years after the Knights landed on our shores. Gozitan John J. Cremona writes: *It would have been a relatively very short time to introduce Carnival to the islands, considering that in the 200 year stretch of occupying Rhodes, it was never celebrated on that island.* Cremona also says that we have to consider the strong connections and influence the islands had from Scicily. Stanley Fiorini enforces this belief when he wrote that in 1494 records indicate that the staple diet at the Santo Spirito hospital in Rabat Malta consisted of bread, pig's fat and beans garnished with salt. The monotony of fare was broken only four times a year on fixed days of celebration: Christmas, Pentecost, Easter and very surprisingly Carnival. Carnival 1495 was celebrated by a meal of 'two pieces of cheese, veal and wine'.

Credit must be given to the Knights of the Order of St. John for turning Carnival into another rowdy, merrymaking activity in the town of Birgu (Malta) which was

the Knights' *relaxation hub*. The second Grand Master to rule the islands Piero de Ponte felt that his Knights were getting out of control during the Carnival period with exaggerated banquets, masquerades, numerous abuses and brawls. He approved only activities that promoted tournaments and other military exercises associated with Christian Knights' battles against the Turks. Gran Master Jean Parisot de la Vallette (1560) too was aware of the Knights' unvirtuous behaviour, but he allowed the wearing of masks in public, a custom which up till then was prohibited. The Knights made the most of these festivities and brightly decorated the Order's fleet, sheltering in the Grand Harbour, while song, dance and revelry the likes of which never seen in Malta before, carried on for days leading up to Lent. Carnival took a nosedive under Grand Master Lascaris when he banned women from wearing masks and their participation in the Carnival Banquets which took place at the Auberges. Costumes representing the Devil were also forbidden and soon blame quickly shifted to Lascaris' Jesuit Confessor Fr. Cassia who was thought to have great influence over the Grand Master. This did not deter the Knights and the public from making fun of the Jesuit. For one Knight in particular Girolamo Selvatico the joke of

dressing up as the Jesuit Confessor went too far and got him arrested. This brought unrest when some young Knights retaliated by attacking and ransacking the Jesuits' College. They used force to help Selvatico escape from prison and demanded that Lascaris expel the Jesuits from the islands which he did until things calmed down. And so Lascaris goes down in history as being a spoil sport, stick-in-the mud, a grouch. To this very day we describe someone who is sad looking and unhappy individual as 'wiċċ l-askri' (face like Lascaris). Other 'incidents' were happening right until the end of the Knights' stay in Malta and Gozo, with Knights insulting dignitaries through their satirical Carnival dances and overindulgence of visits to certain *ladies of ill repute*. Young Knight De Livry's cry of 'I didn't know what was happening in Malta' when he was caught organising dinners with the women did not quite excuse him from punishment. He and seven others were expelled from the islands. It seemed that the only acceptable Carnival-*esque* satire was the re-enactment of the victory of the Order over the Turks at the Great Siege of Malta which is also celebrated to this very day.

Sources: John J Cremona, Stanley Fiorini, Newspapers Illum and Kullhadd.

The Annual General Meeting

Among the amendments discussed at Wirt Għawdex AGM, our member Roger Cockram suggested that the word *Patrimony* is replaced by Heritage, as stated in the society's aims and depicted under the coat of arms.



Jay Jones suggested that:

Anybody wishing to stand on the Wirt Għawdex Committee cannot do so if they hold a position on the committee of another association of similar interests thus avoiding any possible conflict'



*Continued
from page 2*

Thanks to Wirt Għawdex I will now be more aware of what we have here in Gozo. During Lejliet Lapsi many people were fascinated by the silos at the Cittadella. Many people including myself didn't know they even existed. It is a shame for most of us Gozitans that we do not take pride in our heritage. When we go abroad we are fascinated by things inferior to what we have here in Gozo. We have so much to be proud of but we just ignore it. I feel sad when I read about vandalism and for me people committing these acts are purely selfish and ignorant. We have to preserve what we have to pass it on to those who come after us. Maybe there should be more information to the people with emphasis on how everyone can contribute. I really admire all the volunteers of this organization. Something that quite impressed me is that there are a lot of foreign members. These people reside in Gozo and they feel so welcome here, that now they are willing to spend their spare time helping in preserving our heritage. So personally I want to thank all members and hope that other people follow their example.

Miriam

COMPETITION

Competition in this issue is:

Which Grand Master from the Order of the Knights of St. John introduced the wearing of masks in public during the Carnival period?

A tradition that has continued to this very day.

Send in your right answers not later than May 4th 2011, to :

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

Alternatively email me the editor at:
gwl_editor@wirtghawdex.org

The first correct entry will win our 3 Wirt Għawdex publications on your right. Good Luck



Natura 2000

Did you know Gozo has eight terrestrial Natura 2000 sites which form part of the €3.4 million project which MEPA has recently secured through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Fund? The project will develop management plans and legal provisions for the protection of a wide range of habitats and species inhabiting these sites and aims to increase public awareness of both the owners and general public of the importance of these sites to our Islands' rural environment.