

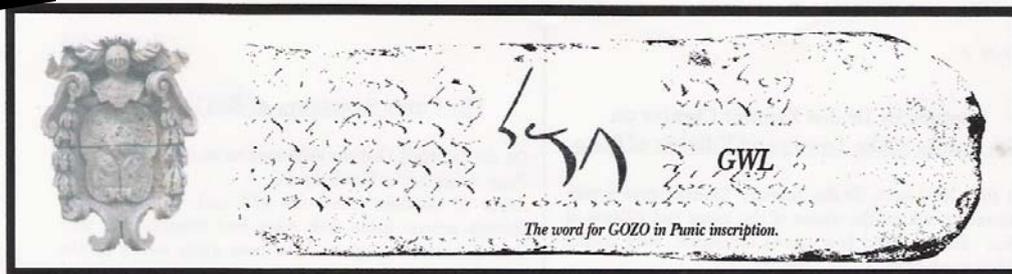


# The Newsletter of *Wirt Ghawdex*

Issue 1/09

September 2009

Edited by Steven Sultana



## Message form the President

Dear members,

A year has passed since our last Newsletter, but by no means have we been inactive. On the contrary, it has been a very busy year for us indeed, and one which has also given us much important publicity.

First, I am pleased to announce that this current Newsletter has been prepared by Steven Sultana, a Sixth Form student, who has chosen *Wirt Ghawdex* as his subject of study for his Systems of Knowledge project. Steven has been very helpful during these past months, even with respect to our projects, and while thanking him, we encourage other students to follow suit and choose the society as their subject of study.

Second, we would like to highlight that during the past year, we have mainly focused our energies on the Projects. You are all aware that the Mgarr ix-Xini Tower has been officially inaugurated, and that the silos have been opened to the public. The

World War II shelters have been refurbished, and we intend to officially inaugurate the Citadel site soon once interpretation panels are installed. We will also set up interpretation panels at the Tower. The first opening of the silos on the Notte Gozitana - Lejlet Lapsi was a massive hit with the public, and gave us much publicity on the media. My thanks go to the volunteers who are opening the Tower and the Citadel site, free of charge, to the public on established days throughout the week. The response we are receiving is so encouraging. Works on the 'dghajsa tal-latini' are reaching completion, while the restoration of the Santa Cecilia chapel is progressing at a steady rate. We now look forward to having another site to restore and maintain.

### Upcoming Events

Now that the summer is ending, *Wirt Ghawdex* is planning to start preparations for the activities mentioned in previous newsletters. More information will be supplied on the website or upcoming newsletters.

## Inauguration of Imġarr ix-Xini Tower

In Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July the Hon. Minister for Gozo, Giovanna Debono officially inaugurated Imġarr ix-Xini Tower by raising *Wirt Ghawdex's* flag on the site. After 11 years of restoring and the vandal act of 2006, thanks to the members, volunteers and government funds, Imġarr ix-Xini regained its glory. The 17th century tower was used up till the second World War. *Wirt Ghawdex* started restoring it in 1981. With the drawbridge in place, the tower is finally restored to its glory, as Grand Master De Rodin and designer Mederico Blondel envisioned it.



Photo thanks to Alan Jones

Honour Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, raising *Wirt Ghawdex's* flag on Imġarr ix-Xini Tower

## Opening of the Silos in the Citadel



Looking up one of the silos. This is the opening through which grain was lowered and retrieved.

After signing an agreement with the Water Services Corporation, *Wirt Ghawdex* opened the silos next to the Gunpowder Magazine, in the Citadel. We didn't know what to expect, since they were used as water reservoirs until a few years ago. But everything went as planned.

The silos were originally designed by the Knights of St. John to store grain, but when the British took over, they were converted into water reservoirs.

## Delving into the past

a focus on cultural and historical aspects of traditional life in Gozo in bygone times.

### The Plague of 1814

by Steven Sultana

One of the most recent plagues that affected Malta was the plague of 1813, taking over 4,500 lives. It appeared in Malta in April 1813 and died down in March of the next year, but unfortunately the illness infiltrated Gozo, that had avoided the plague so far thanks to strict measures of contact between the two islands.

It is thought that this happened when a certain Angelo Galea came to Gozo with a box of clothes that later were believed to have been infected. Galea, who lived in Hal Qormi, an area where the plague was raging, was sent to the quarantine centre Lazzarett; but he buried a box of clothes before going there. After going out of quarantine, he came to Xagħra and gave some of the clothes to a relative. Of course this story had a lot of sceptics, but since the plague started in his family, one can assume at least, that Angelo Galea was the person who brought the plague.

Angelo Galea was the first to die on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. Some of his friend suspected plague, but the death was covered up to keep the community calm. Ten days later, his daughter, who was taking care of him, died too; and so did the gravedigger. After investigating these deaths, it was confirmed that the plague has entered Gozo. The island was completely cut off from Malta and anyone trying to cross was punished by death. Reports about the situation were to be sent to Sir Thomas Maitland, the Governor of Malta of that

time, daily. With the turmoil the plague had brought with it still fresh in Maitland's memory, he immediately ordered troops to be sent to Gozo to form a cordon around Xagħra to try to contain the plague. However, people inside the cordon still communicated with each other, so the plague continued to grow. For this reason, a farm on the south of Xagħra was turned into a temporary hospital and a field nearby was chosen to bury the dead in it, to remove the need for transport that could spread the illness further.

The plague lasted 100 days, the last case being registered on the 28<sup>th</sup> May. It took 104 lives. Those who were infected but were cured, were ordered to "swim three times a day" in Ramla bay for 40 days. On the 26<sup>th</sup> July, the cordon was removed, and people could move anywhere freely (except for Ramla bay). The official proclamation that the plague had ended came on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, the day Xagħra celebrates its village "festa".

Reference: 'Ix-Xagħra l-bieraħ u llum' in *L-Egħjun - Lehen il-Moviment Civiku Xagħra* (October - December 1989 (pg. 3), April - June 1990 (pg. 4), July - September 1990 (pgs. 6 - 7), January - March 1991 (pgs. 6 - 7))



The following sites will be open free of charge to the general public as follows:

–>Gunpowder Magazine, Battery, Silos (at the Citadel, Victoria): 11.00 – 13.00 on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

–>Mġarr ix-Xini Tower (Għajnsielem, limits of Xewkija): 10.30 – 13.30 on Tuesday and Saturday.

The number of people that are visiting these sites is very encouraging, so should anyone be interested in volunteering to help open these sites at these times or others, please contact us on [info@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:info@wirtghawdex.org)



### Obituary

It is with sadness that we note the loss of Mr. Dennis Vella, the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Museum of Fine Arts, in Valletta, Malta. Mr. Vella was very helpful to us on various occasions, and also delivered a lecture about Antonio Sciortino in September 2007. He will be missed, and we send our condolences to his family.

*Wirt Ghawdex* has featured prominently in three separate dissertations submitted as partial fulfilment of three different degrees conferred by the University of Malta in November/December 2008.

1. The Cultural Heritage Act: An Evaluation (LL.D.) by Stephanie Jean Coppini, *Wirt Ghawdex's* P.R.O.
2. Recent Policy Developments in the Field of Malta's Cultural Heritage (Diploma in Public Administration) by Gordon Fitz.
3. The third was written by a foreign student Stefanie Schempp for the degree in B.A. (Hons.) Tourism Studies. Its aim was to research heritage management practices in Malta with particular focus on the role of NGOs, including a look at the problems and challenges NGOs (including *Wirt Ghawdex*) face in managing heritage, and the degree of collaboration between public and private entities in the heritage management sector.

*Wirt Ghawdex* participated in these research projects on a voluntary basis. For the last two dissertations, the P.R.O. of *Wirt Ghawdex* had met the students for an interview and discussion at the Main Library of the University of Malta.

## Wirt Ghawdex Website

Always check our website [www.wirtghawdex.org](http://www.wirtghawdex.org) for updates about opening times, lectures and upcoming events.

Following discussions during a committee meeting, it was decided to issue all press releases in both Maltese and English for the benefit of the press.

If you wish to obtain some information you may contact:

Executive Secretary: [info@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:info@wirtghawdex.org)

Membership Secretary: [membership@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:membership@wirtghawdex.org)

P.R.O.: [pro@wirtghawdex.org](mailto:pro@wirtghawdex.org)

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It is with pleasure that we announce that *Wirt Ghawdex* has meanwhile also enrolled in the Voluntary Organisations Association. So also, the society has now its own flag, showing our logo, which you can see flying at our sites when open.

During this past year, we have had several changes on the Committee, with two new members Alan and Jay Jones. My thanks and appreciation go to all the Committee members for their constant hard work and support.

Whilst thanking all the members of *Wirt Ghawdex*, I take this opportunity to remind you to kindly renew your membership, and encourage your friends to join the society. May I remind you that at the end of this year, we would once again hold our Annual General Meeting. Further details will be announced later on.

Paul Coppini

### 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.

## News In Brief

- May 8th: The Silos next to the Gunpowder Magazine were opened.
- May 22nd-24th: the Silos, Gunpowder Magazine, Shelters and Battery were opened to the public free of charge for the Lejlet Lapsi – Notte Gozitana event.
- June 20th: a tour of the sites *Wirt Ghawdex* is taking care of was held for all the members free of charge.
- July 3rd: Imġarr ix-Xini Tower was officially inaugurated by the Minister for Gozo.