

## ***Wirt Ghawdex's* role in the preservation of Ghajnsielem's heritage.**

***Ghajnsielem***, like most other villages, has its share of sites that are of great importance to our history and heritage.

***Wirt Ghawdex***, the Gozitan heritage society, has worked for many years to preserve and restore some of these gems for future generations.

***Mgarr ix-Xini Tower*** is one of the 14 coastal towers built during the reign of Grandmaster de



Redin. This tower was built in 1661 on the left hand side of the mouth of Mgarr ix-Xini creek which puts it within the Ghajnsielem boundaries. Its position has particular historical importance since this location was chosen to protect the mouth of the creek after the attack which Dragut had led against the island of Gozo more than a century before in 1551. It is said that it was from this area that the Turks transferred all the Gozitans which were captured onto the galleys – an area known as Ras in-Newwiela.

By 1995, the tower was in a state of deterioration and the stability itself of this tower was threatened. A few years later, ***Wirt Ghawdex*** started a campaign in the media to highlight the plight of this tower and the need for restoration. Various fund-raising campaigns were also initiated to start collecting funds to assist with the restoration costs. Finally, in 1999, the extensive restoration work could get started. Once the works required were identified, the Ministry for Gozo offered to provide the labour to carry out the necessary works. All restoration was carried out under the direction and consultation of the Architect Ivana Farrugia and fortification expert Stephen C. Spiteri in order to ensure that the restoration respected the original design. Unfortunately, as the works were progressing, the tower suffered a setback as a result of vandalism. This unfortunate act not only cost the society an additional cost of 8,000 euro to repair but also set back the completion of the works by several months. In July 2009, the totally restored tower was officially inaugurated by the Minister for Gozo, the Hon. Giovanna Debono and included other guests, patrons, sponsors and ***Wirt Ghawdex*** members. This tower is now open to the public and manned by ***Wirt Ghawdex*** volunteers.



The *Dghajsa tal-latini* forms an important part of the history of transportation between Malta and



Gozo. The Sacra Famiglia was the only remaining dghajsa tal-latini and was left lying abandoned at Mgarr for almost three decades. It was then embroiled in a legal tussle since it was taking up valuable space at the harbour. Realising the historical importance of this last specimen of the dghajsa tal-latini, **Wirt Ghawdex** intervened in order to have it protected from destruction. Discussions started with the then Gozo Channel chairman, John Sullivan, who was very keen on the preservation of this part of our nautical history. It was thanks to him that the boat was purchased by Gozo Channel and handed over to **Wirt Ghawdex** for restoration in 2001. The Gozo Channel also agreed to sponsor the costs involved in the restoration. The project was entrusted to the Caruana brothers, sons of the original builder. The daunting task of restoring the boat to its original glory included scraping the entire boat, rebuilding missing parts, changing some of the frames

and planking and re-painting amongst other works. The work was completed earlier this year and the last Dghajsa tal-Latini, G32, is waiting for its official inauguration. It is planned to be included in the Zewwieqa restoration project which is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011.

Another historical site within Ghajnsielem is the **Santa Cecilia Medieval Chapel**. The origins of this chapel are lost in antiquity and its layout is similar to other late medieval chapels found in Malta. It is one of the few surviving examples of the many unaisled churches built entirely out of stone. The chapel is still in its original form and this style dates it back to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was most recently utilized as part of a small farmstead. **Wirt Ghawdex** appealed to the Government to take over the chapel so that it could be restored and preserved as part of our heritage. In the meantime, the chapel had been vandalized by being set on fire which caused the collapse of the roof. Further damage was caused to the west side wall which collapsed following heavy rain. The chapel was finally entrusted to **Wirt Ghawdex** for restoration in 2008. After some emergency work done with the support of the Ministry for Gozo to rebuild the collapsed wall, a sponsor approached the society with the offer to help. The Baron Group is now a full sponsor of the project and is carrying out all the necessary restoration

work including structural work, surrounding rubble walls, pointing and the delicate work of cleaning up the inside of the soot caused by the fire while preserving existing graffiti. Funding for the refurbishment of the inside has also been provided by the Rotary Club, Gozo through their fund raising activities in 2009. Once all the work is finished, there are plans to make it the main location for **Wirt Ghawdex's** various activities such as public lectures, exhibitions etc.



**Wirt Ghawdex** also sponsored the replica of an Ex-Voto located behind the water pumping station at Mgarr Harbour. The original was stolen and the society felt that this part of Ghajnsielem's heritage was also worth restoring.

More negotiations are ongoing for other important historical sites in Ghajnsielem and **Wirt Ghawdex** is also working hard to ensure that any plans for the management of Comino will include Ghajnsielem representation.

Ghajsielem residents should be proud of their rich heritage and **Wirt Ghawdex** would welcome any individual or groups that are interested in helping in any way with the preservation of our island's patrimony.

For more information on the society or any of the above sites, please refer to our website at [www.wirtghawdex.org](http://www.wirtghawdex.org)



Giovanni N. Zammit, Executive Secretary,

**Wirt Ghawdex** (founded 1981)