



GWL

The word for Ghawdex in Punic inscription

Wirt Ghawdex **NEWSLETTER** No 3/15



The summer months have not just been very hot but also very busy! No summer holidays for some of us as work on projects went on uninterrupted but of course, seeing the results is very satisfying.



Our biggest project so far is, without doubt, the façade of the old hospital at St. Francis Square. This is a project that will take us well into 2016 as we move from one phase to another. The work was split into phases because of the complexity and size of the building and splitting the project in this way gives us better control and focus as each phase is tackled. This has been a huge learning experience for all those involved in the project as the instructions and methodology for the work, as directed by the assigned architects and other relevant departments (MEPA, Superintendence of Culture, Health

& Safety etc.) are carefully followed throughout.

In our continued efforts to have knowledgeable and trained restorers in Gozo, we were also instrumental in getting the University of Malta to bring a restoration course to the Gozo campus. This is starting in October and has attracted an unexpectedly large number of students. The successful students will become a much-needed pool of well-trained restoration workers, based here in Gozo, who could be utilized for future Gozo projects. There will also be an option to continue to study towards a higher level for those interested in acquiring further qualifications.

During the summer we also provided an opportunity for several students to work in a heritage environment. Besides the group of Sixth formers from Gozo working on their Systems of Knowledge school project, we also attracted a sixth former from a school in Malta. Shawn chose to do his volunteer work with us after getting to know about us through his grandfather, Reg, who lives in Gozo and is a Wirt Ghawdex member. We also had a French student who was seeking volunteer work as part of her studies towards her Masters degree. Megan worked with us for about 6 weeks and was involved in both office work and work with visitors at our Citadel site which helped her to practice and improve her English speaking skills.



Ryan, Megan and Anna

In August, we were assigned two other students on the annual Government Scheme which aims to give students some real-life work experience. Ryan and Anna were in charge of opening our HQ office and also of working and coordinating activities with our SOK students. We hope they enjoyed their experiences as much as we enjoyed having them work with us.

The Editor

Celebrating Santa Cecilia Feast

The Santa Ċeċilja Foundation of Gozo (A.D 2013) in collaboration with Wirt Ghawdex presents a cultural activity entitled

'CONCERTINO ON SANTA CECILIA'S EVE'

on Friday & Saturday, 20-21 November 2015 at 7pm.

The venue will be the medieval chapel of Santa Cecilia, Ghajnsielem (Once the programme is available we will forward all details to you via email)



My Wirt Għawdex Experience - by Claire Farrugia, Sixth Form Student



My experience with *Wirt Għawdex*, in my opinion is one from which I will surely benefit. Nowadays, teens like me do not always appreciate the historical heritage of Gozo let alone our natural environment and our surroundings.

Personally, I only came to know of this NGO just a few years ago and when my friend suggested to choose *Wirt Għawdex* as the organisation on which to base our System of Knowledge project, I did not hesitate to agree with her suggestion.

Firstly, I felt that *Wirt Għawdex* was an organisation which was not acknowledged by many youths like me, as unfortunately many of us do not value the environment around us. Secondly, I felt that a great opportunity to get to know more about our history was an opportunity not to be missed. Moreover, when we met with our overseer Betty Zammit, I got even more excited as she told us the variety of tasks we would be involved in during our project.

We were first asked to attend their Annual General Meeting. I had never been to one and attending this showed me the purpose of these meetings and also gave me a good idea of what the NGO is involved with. We were also given the opportunity to attend some of their public lectures. At first I thought that it would be quite boring to go to these lectures however I was proven wrong. The lectures ended up being very interesting and I left the chapel pretty satisfied after learning something new about our history. I realised that there are many untold parts of our history and these lectures give us details and information that we don't learn at school. Despite the fact that lectures are not normally a hands-on activity, we were still assigned some work such as setting up the venue with chairs and putting them back at the end of the lecture.



Our summer as volunteers was also quite busy. For starters, after learning the history of the sites, we were entrusted with leading visitors around the restored sites. We were also assigned some office work along with some cleaning chores. We were also given the freedom to organise any other activities such as fund raisers, thus making us more responsible while learning important skills such as organization, teamwork and problem solving.

I think it is important that all students are taught about the value and how to appreciate the history of our island and to respect our heritage. One way of learning this is to do some volunteer work at this NGO. From the first time I met the *Wirt Għawdex* volunteers and got a first look at the activities we were to do in the coming months, I knew that it would be an unforgettable experience, especially on a personal level. Even as a child I had always been interested in the history of Gozo. The fact that I know so little about it makes this experience much more exciting as I keep learning new facts about our heritage which I can now confidently pass on to others.

I feel that it is important that more youths are made to feel this way because this is what makes us truly active citizens. I have been learning new things about Gozo's heritage since my first 'visit' and I am sure I will have learnt much more by the end of my volunteering.

So to sum up everything I personally advise all teens and even adults out there to get more interested and maybe get to know more about *Wirt Għawdex* and, if possible, even give some of their spare time as a contribution towards helping this NGO to fulfill its targets of making people more aware of their heritage and surroundings. What *Wirt Għawdex* and anyone who helps them are doing is ensuring that future generations will still be able to enjoy the heritage that we are saving for them today.

Every September for the past few years, the Xaghra Historical Re-enactment Organization has been organizing dramatic re-enactments in commemoration of the 8th of September, otherwise known as Victory Day. This year's event also saw the participation of *Wirt Għawdex* through the efforts of our youth coordinator and committee member Ryan Bajada.



Ryan assisted a group of seven students from Sir M.A Re-falo post-secondary school who wanted to organize a fund-raising stand and information booth at this event as part of their Systems of Knowledge school project. The stand was decorated with a number of official *Wirt Għawdex* books, in-

formative flyers, bookmarks and of course, the welcoming faces of youthful *Wirt Għawdex* Volunteers. Their friendly presentation techniques and the informative quality of the products went down well with the general public in the area and they managed to sell a number of books, collect a few generous donations and most importantly pass on our organization's aims. Good work all!

Gozo in Print (15)

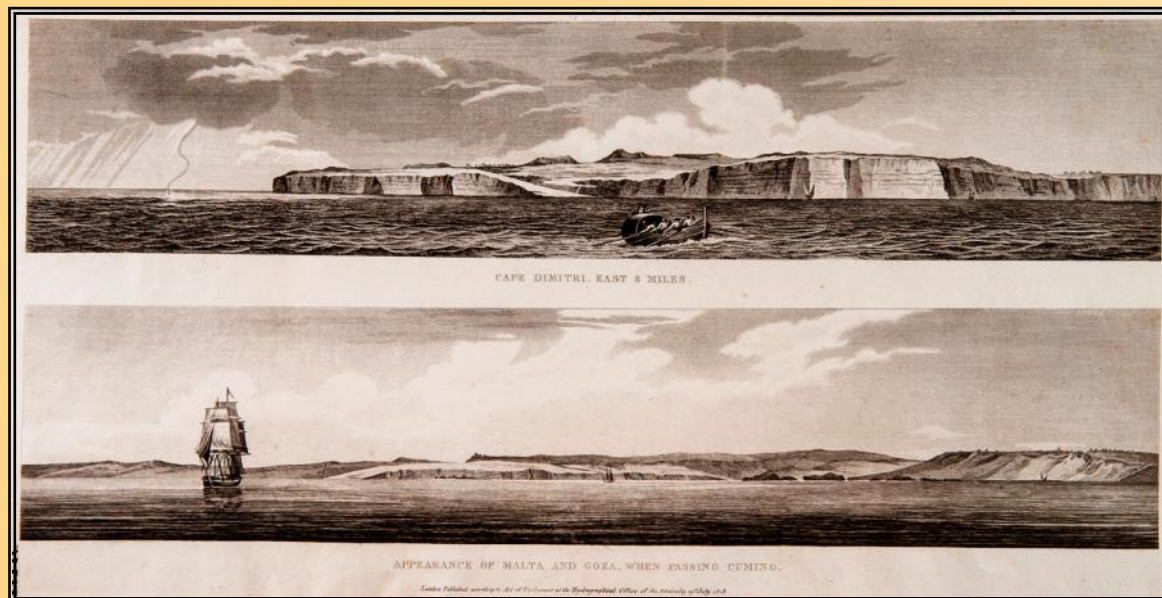
by John Cremona Executive Committee Member of Wirt Għawdex



AHOY! Whirlwind ahead!!

The print that I shall be talking about in this article forms part of a collection of maps and seascapes published by the Hydrographical Office of London and which served to guide seamen in recognizing one place from another when at sea. This print shows two views one on top of the other. One is taken eight miles off the western coast of Gozo and shows Cape San Mitri whilst the other shows a view of Malta and Gozo as they appear when one sails from behind the island of Comino.

I am going to deal only with the first one which shows Cape San Mitri. It shows the high cliffs which characterize the area as well as the topography of the island. An interesting feature is the inclusion in the foreground of a boat with eight men rowing with all their strength to avoid a water spout or whirlwind that is seen approaching menacingly from the area of Wied il-Mielaf. I am sure that this was purposely included by the artist as a warning to seafarers that they might meet with such dangers when at sea. Whirlwinds which hit our islands every now and then and cause havoc remind us of the fears of fishermen and seamen when they would suddenly spot an approaching whirlwind.



In the book *'Studies in Maltese Folklore'* published by the University of Malta in 1992 the renowned ethnographer Guze' Cassar Pullicino writes at length about the sayings and superstitions of Gozitan and Maltese fishermen concerning the whirlwind. In fact it is recorded that Gozitan fishermen knew the prayer of the *'Salve Regina'* which used to be recited at sea on

such fearful occasions. We find that this superstition was common amongst Gozitan and Maltese fishermen as well as those of Sicily. When fishermen used to spot an approaching whirlwind, the captain of the boat used to go on the bow and standing alone he would mumble some secret prayers which were considered to have special powers to "cut" the whirlwind. Nobody was supposed to hear these secret words and they were to be recited only in real emergencies since otherwise it was thought that they would lose their power and efficacy. Only at midnight on Christmas eve could a sailor teach the secret words to another sailor since such prayers were a heavily guarded secret. Pullicino, an assiduous collector of folk tales and songs for many years admits that he never managed to record such secret prayers. Pullicino further says that when L. Bonelli in 1894 tried to ask fishermen from Birgu to tell him the secret prayers he almost caused a revolt and I will quote from his book *'Saggi del Folklore dell'Isola di Malta'* published in Palermo in 1894;

".....Yesterday at Vittoriosa I almost caused a revolt amongst the fishermen in the square because I asked one of them to recite to me the prayers or secret and quasi magical words that sailors recite to calm down storms at sea or more precisely id-dagħbien (whirlwind).....there was a general uproar amongst those good people and all of them joined in the protest that they would reveal these prayers to no one in the world: only at midnight of Christmas can one who knows these prayers reveal them to his companions".

Unfortunately this secret was so heavily guarded that it has probably been lost forever and no ethnographer seems to have managed to record these secret words or prayers.

The engraving I am publishing with this article was printed in London in the Hydrographical Office of the Admiralty on 19th July 1823 and these were published according to an Act of Parliament which regulates sailing. The plate is marked as number VIII and its price was three shillings.

New Research on Prehistoric Gozo funded by the European Research Council.

Two seasons have now been completed of a project funded by the European Research Council to study the prehistoric temples of Gozo and their demise. The five year Fragsus project is made up of a consortium of Maltese, Irish and English scholars headed by Prof. Caroline Malone of Queen's University of Belfast, with the support of Heritage Malta, the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, and universities of Cambridge and Malta as well as her own.



In 2014 research was focused on the settlement of Tac Cawla , when a four month season uncovered the



temple period settlement focused on a water hole and later cultivated by vines in the Late Punic period. Research in 2015 concentrated on the study of the Xaghra and In Nuffara plateaux. At Santa Verna, clear evidence was found of the development of a five apse temple, that was first occupied as a probable settlement in the Ghar Dalam early Neolithic. At Ggantija, invaluable evidence was uncovered of rich soils dating to the Neolithic that can no longer be found on Gozo in the modern landscape. At In Nuffara, two grain silos produced rich evidence of Borg in Nadur Bronze Age pottery and food remains. In combination, this fresh fieldwork can be pieced together to give a new understanding of the changing lifestyle of the island of Gozo in prehistory.



Members of the team plan to report in more detail in the next issue of the newsletter.

Projects update

Restoration of Sant Indrija statue at Xlendi Bay

The statue of Saint Andrew, patron saint of fishermen, was erected in that area of Xlendi Bay where boats are kept on land during the winter months. Inauguration and blessing of this stone statue took place on June 18, 1882 by the then Bishop of Gozo Fra Giovanni Maria Camilleri. A marble plaque fixed onto the statue's pedestal in 1901 indicates that the same Bishop bestowed 40 days indulgence to whomever recited prayers in front of the statue. Devotion towards Saint Andrew still remains today and the statue is adorned with lights and flowers every November 30 in his honour.



This votive statue is constructed of local limestone and rests on a high pedestal. While the pedestal was also originally made of the same limestone as the statue, it was, at some point, plastered over with a thick cement based mortar which had adhered to the stone underneath.

While several maintenance interventions took place over the years, it was not done on a regular basis. As a result most of the protective paint layer covering the statue had flaked off and the underlying stone was showing obvious deterioration. This was made worse by the fact that the cement based plaster on the pedestal was causing the transfer of all water evaporation and related salt crystallization to the statue's stone above it.

A professional Method Statement was sought and once this was in hand, restoration work could start. The statue was cleaned and damaged paint layers removed. Since the removal of the cement based plaster on the pedestal was not considered viable (since it would cause further damage to the stone underneath it), a damp-proof layer needed to be inserted between the pedestal and the statue. This necessitated the hoisting up of the statue for the laying of the damp-proof material. Once this was accomplished, the statue itself started to be prepared for restoration and repainting. The statue and pedestal were finished in a stone coloured render while the cross was finished in a reddish brown colour in order to stay as faithful as possible to the original colours.

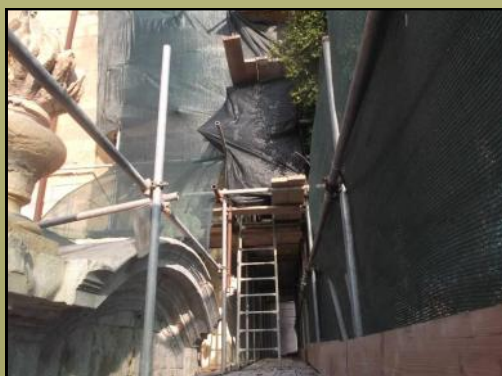
Finishing works also included the cleaning and restoration of the marble plaque on the pedestal, the construction of a shallow kerb around the statue (to protect it from vehicular damage) and the lighting up of the statue.

All works were completed in August 2015.

Restoration works on the Old Hospital Façade, Victoria

A holistic approach is being undertaken in the carrying out of this restoration project and works will include the restoration of the masonry, the removal of all external wiring and the assessment and restoration of all wooden apertures. Deterioration of the façade includes powdering of the globigerina stone, discolouration as a result of biological growths, black crust formation, mechanical damage and earlier application of renders wrongly prepared with ordinary Portland cement.

The restoration is to be tackled in three phases in order to make the large area of the façade more manageable. Works on the first part (the side closest to the church) started in earnest in April 2015 and is now nearing completion. All work is being carried out as per a very exacting Method Statement and under the supervision of two architects.



Works are sometimes slowed down due to the need to coordinate with other entities with regards to electrical wiring, communication and security systems wiring etc. but this was to be expected and resolution of these issues at this stage will save time during the restoration of the rest of the façade.

This restoration of the façade is part of the much larger project of the complete rehabilitation of St. Francis square which is planned to be completed by 2017.



One of the architects supervising the work

In support of *Breast Cancer Month*

As many of you know, October is designated as Breast Cancer Month and 'Pink October' has become a yearly event. This year we have been invited by Europa Donna Malta to support this initiative by lighting up one of our sites in Pink. In this regard, we intend to light up in Pink both our HQ (Dar il-Gvernatur) and the Santa Cecilia Chapel for the month of October. We hope that many others will support this worthwhile cause in their own way.



We regret to say that we have lost a long-time supporter of our society.

Bob Onions 9 April 1946 – 28 August 2015

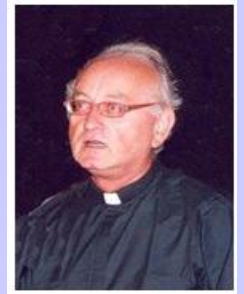


Bob was, for many years, a very active member of Wirt Għawdex and he spent innumerable hours volunteering at our Citadel site. He so enjoyed giving historical tours of the site, in his inimitable way, to the many visitors there. The enjoyment he got out of passing on snippets of our history was very obvious and this was a reflection of his love of Gozo and its history. Bob was instrumental in training new volunteers and managed to pass on to them his enthusiasm for sharing our history with visitors to our island.

Bob was a true gentleman – a gentle and courteous man with a ready smile for all. He will be missed but not forgotten.

Our condolences to his beloved Joanna.

Earlier this year another long-time member and supporter of Wirt Għawdex, Fr. George Mercieca, passed away after a short illness. He loved his home island of Gozo and was vocal and active when it came to anything that concerned our heritage and our environment. In fact, one of his last 'battles' was to save the trees at the Tokk (main square) after he learnt that the plan was to have them removed. He resorted to the media and tried to garner support for his cause. He sought our help as well and we will do our best to win this one for him. Fr. Mercieca was also a respected poet and while his first tentative writings were in prose, he soon discovered that poetry was the right medium and published his first poems in 1968. He was also involved in various literary and cultural circles and also in philanthropic organisations.



Competition

GWL 2/15 winner:

Maureen Spiteri was the winner of our Q2 competition. She visited our HQ with her cute daughter to collect her prize. Maureen thanked us not just for the hamper but especially for the worthwhile work carried out by our society.



This issue's question:

From the article 'Ahoy! Whirlwind Ahead', when was the only time a sailor could learn the secret/magical prayers used to calm down whirlwinds?

Send your answer to *The Editor*, at info@wirtghawdex.org

Our recently formed Maintenance Group had a busy summer keeping main sites in Victoria clean and tidy. They regularly maintained the areas around the 1881 Fountain, the Three Hills Fountain, the Ninu Cremona monument, St. Cecilia Chapel, silos site at the Citadel etc. The plan for the coming months is to start cleaning the several bronze monuments in roundabouts etc. In Victoria. Cleaning of bronze needs to be done in cooler temperatures and therefore was postponed from the summer months. There is a long waiting list for maintenance work which pretty much guarantees that there will always be work for this group!



Wirt Għawdex (founded 1981)

Member of:
- Voluntary Organizations VO0227
- Gozo NGOs Association

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Mission Statement

"To Foster the Knowledge of and Safeguard the Natural, Archaeological, Historical and Anthropological Heritage of the Islands of Gozo and Comino."