MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As the year is coming to a close it is perhaps fitting to have a look at our activities during 2013. We have been actively engaged in promoting the sites for which we are responsible. We can report that most of these have managed to attract an increasing number of visitors who have shown their appreciation at the way we maintain them. We feel that we are helping to preserve heritage sites for future generations which Gozo is proud of. It is not easy to carry out our work as we are increasingly dependent on volunteers to help with our sites. We have in this respect managed to attract the attention of students and young people.

We have had two fruitful meetings with the Hon Dr Anton Refalo, Minister for Gozo. It is our intention to maintain the relationship with the Ministry started some years back. We discussed with the Minister various projects we have in mind which of course require the collaboration of the Ministry. I am very pleased to record the spirit of cooperation which the Minister has shown towards the plans we have for the forthcoming year. The Minister has suggested a few initiatives which Wirt Għawdex should take on and has promised the Ministry’s cooperation and assistance. One of these is the restoration of the many niches that are found in most corners of our villages. At the Minister’s behest we looked at the niches all over Gozo and we have drawn up a report which is fully costed. This programme will take several years to complete but we are anxious to start off with a couple of niches which badly need restoration. We hope to start this programme early next year. In the near future we hope to announce the start of a restoration plan for a prominent hilltop statue. This restoration offers serious logistic challenges but which we are prepared to face. Once completed, this landmark will enhance Gozo’s attractiveness.

One of the items which we discussed with the Minister was the taking on of another site in the Cittadella. The Minister expressed his approval. When this project is finalised we would have made a contribution towards the attractiveness of the Cittadella for tourists, Maltese and Gozitans alike. It would also mean that another important historic site would have been saved from neglect.

Unfortunately we have not succeeded this year in completing work on the Dar il-Gvernatur project even though we are now using it for our monthly meetings. However it is not yet fit to fulfil its potential as our headquarters and an important tourist information point. We hope that by the first half of 2014 works will be completed to our satisfaction.

I take this opportunity to extend Christmas Greetings to our members, volunteers and all those who in one way or another have contributed to the activities of our organisation. A special word of thanks to our hard working Committee, particularly our Secretary for his tireless work to ensure that Wirt Għawdex keeps to the fore its role as the senior cultural NGO in Gozo.

Franco Masini
The fortification that never became a city

One of the most beautiful and definitely the largest engraving of Gozo is the one which shows Fort Chambray and the port of L-Imgarr made by A.F. Gervais Depalmeus in 1754.

Construction works on the new city of Chambray commenced in 1749 following the acceptance of the petition made by Baliff Jacques Francoise de Chambray to the Congregation of War and Grand Master Pinto. Chambray offered to build out of his own pocket a new city on the place known as Ras-et-tafal overlooking the port of L-Imgarr. The plans for this fort had been drawn up some thirty years earlier by Louis Franas d'Aubigne de Tigne’. The fortification took a considerably long time to complete both because of the structural problems encountered during construction as well as because of the shortage of manpower. Chambray himself, who was overseeing the construction informed the Congregation of War that the project could not proceed because of disobedient workers and soldiers had to be sent to control the situation. The situation was so bad that a decree was published whereby workers on site were prohibited of carrying out any other work and Chambray himself asked the Grand Master’s permission to close down all the quarries in Gozo so that all the workers could work only on the construction of the fortification. Chambray did not succeed. The Baliff of Chambray died in 1756 at the age of seventy without seeing his city completed.

The engraving shows a plan of the fort on the left side with the planned buildings and streets. It was supposed to follow the grid layout like the City of Valletta. Apart from buildings for residents, a number of important buildings were planed including the palace of the governor with a spacious garden and the parish church. Each residential block had to have a central courtyard which could accommodat more people and animals in case of a siege. On the right hand side of the engraving one may notice the plan of Garzes Tower with the proposed outworks which were never carried out whilst nestled between the two fortifications is the port of L-Imgarr with the regularly laid gardens of the Grand Master. This engraving was printed on a loose sheet and does not form part of a book. It accompanies another large engraving of the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino made also by Depalmeus. A second state of this engraving was published and it has a description of the fortification in a cartouche on the upper right hand corner.

When Depalmeus was working on the production of these plans, in 1752 he wrote at least two letters to the nephew of Chambray who was the Marquis de Chambray and whilst informing him of his proposed project to publish these plans asks for his support and patronage. He does not seem to have received a favourable reply since the plans were dedicated to the Grand Prior of France, the Prince Du Sang.

A.F. Gervais Depalmeus was an engineer, designer and geographer of King Louis XVI of France, a very prestigious position. He left many quality plans and engravings which are avidly collected and appreciated by collectors.

The engraving is entitled Plan de la cite neuve de Chambray dans l’Isle du Goze. It was engraved by J. Lattre’ and measures 575mm x 875mm. Fort Chambray never managed to become the city dreamed by its founder and benefactor possibly because the fear of pirate attacks diminished significantly during the late eighteenth century and people started moving towards the countryside. Ironically it was only attacked by the Gozitans when the French sought refuge in this fort in 1798.

Gradually Fort Chambray is being re-populated. Perhaps Chambray today would be happy.......
During our year as "Wirt Għawdex" volunteers for our sixth form systems of knowledge project, we have come to greatly appreciate the value of our heritage. It has been a great experience to be part of this organisation which was both educational and fun. We hope that you enjoy this newsletter that we have assembled with the help of Ms. Jackson and would like to wish you a Merry Christmas with laughter, health and happiness! 

The Arrival Of The Three Wise Men

Every year the feast of the arrival of the Three Wise Men is celebrated in Xaghra, Gozo. The event is hosted by the ‘Għaqda il-Milled fix-Xagħra’ which was formed in 2004. The group’s aim is to organise better the Christmas activities taking place in Xaghra. It promotes and preserves cultural, religious and folkloristic Christmas traditions such as the art of the crib and the making of nativity statuettes. The organisation was founded by Maltese artist Mr. Victor Agius. He studied Art in Perugia, Italy and London.

A couple representing Mary and Joseph carrying baby Jesus with them make their way to Victoria Square in front of Xaghra Basilica along with the shepherds and a lamb. During last year’s edition the Three Wise Men, carried their biblical presents gold, incense and myrrh from three separate streets: 8th September Avenue, Triq 28 t’April 1688 and Triq il-Knisja. Then the three of them met in Victory Square. The moving star then arrives in front of the ‘Holy Family’, where the Three Wise Men give their presents and pay homage to Baby Jesus. Afterwards the Celebration of the Eucharist takes place in the Basilica with the full collaboration of the Xaghra Archpriest Mgr. Carmelo Refalo. The event usually takes place on the Sunday nearest to 6th January and is held at around half past ten in the morning.

The inspiration of this event came from Florence, where Mr. Agius wished to do a similar activity in his village in Gozo. In fact such an event was the first one to be organised on the Maltese Islands. Mr. Agius’ role in the activity was to co-ordinate and with the help of the committee organise the costumes, music, horse riders and last but not least the programme.

Some minor changes and improvements occur annually like new costumes, new routes for the kings, attractions such as the star crossing the square before it reaches baby Jesus. Usually all the people taking part are volunteers including the horse riders who give their service for free. However this year the organisation is moving to another company and therefore a fee is included. The event involves people depicting the three wise men, four shepherds, Mary and Joseph, a two year old baby representing baby Jesus, three attendants, two other people on the roof of the basilica in order to set the star in motion and people on the sound system.

The following is a funny little anecdote about the very first edition of the event provided by Mr. Victor Agius. One youngster who was playing the role of one Magi opted out during the rehearsal after he saw that the costume was too huge for him. The organisers spent the eve of the event worried about their missing king. Luckily the next morning a friend of one of the men providing the horses decided to join in and the costume turned out to be perfect fit. Also this particular man was the manager of a well known jewellery business across the islands and so it was as if this guy was giving Christ real gold.

This year’s edition is taking place on Sunday, 5th January, 2014. The event is free to the public and everyone is welcome to join and celebrate the feast of the arrival of the Three Wise Men and also to experience and re-live the true spirit of the Epiphany to complete the Christmas celebrations.
The students choosing to volunteer with us also keep increasing and this year we had 13 students working with us. We try to give them as varied an experience as possible and expose them to real-life situations where they learn how to work in a team, how to communicate effectively, how to be dependable and responsible, how to solve problems etc. So in the end, we hope that it turns out to be a win-win situation and all of us gain something out of the collaboration.

Wirt Għawdex has continued to participate in cultural activities organized by third parties including monthly visits to our sites by 6th form students. Every year the number of students who choose to visit a Wirt Għawdex site as their extracurricular activity keeps increasing. This year about 70 students have been accommodated and for many, this was their first introduction to our society and our work. We have also given 12 presentations about Wirt Għawdex and its work to this year’s new 6th form students. This was to give them one possible option for the Volunteering part of the Systems of Knowledge project.

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What’s Been Happening…
...an update of our society’s activities from the Secretary.

Events

In October, we had our first lecture of the season with Dr. Michael Refalo delivering an excellent lecture that kept everyone interested till the end. We had the usual great response and the lecture was very well attended.

The Ghajnsielem Band Club also celebrated Santa Cecilia Day by holding Mass at the chapel on the night before. This was also very well attended (over 70 people) and they also hope to make it a yearly activity.

Wirt Għawdex also participated at the Festubru festival at Lunzjata when SOK students set up a stall to sell our publications and give out information about Wirt Għawdex. Thanks to their efforts, we now have a new volunteer sitter at our Citadel site. We also had a stall at the 3-day book fair organized by Gozo Live. This could only be accomplished thanks to the teamwork by several of the SOK students and committee members who volunteered many hours to man the stall throughout the three days.
Vandalism reared up its ugly head again when the Qbajjar Battery was spray painted with graffiti. We immediately offered our services to the Ministry for Gozo and carried out some emergency work to remove the worst of the paint. It will still require professional intervention to remove all the graffiti and this will hopefully be done when the battery is finally given the extensive restoration work that it sorely needs.

On our way to our Citadel site, we noticed that the cannon at the top of the stairs had been damaged during the restoration work on the citadel bastions. As it turned out, so was the cannon in our site (front of the Gunpowder Magazine). We informed the Ministry for Gozo and workers were dispatched to carry out the required work. This included a crane to lift up the cannons so that the wooden carriages and wheels could be fixed. Thanks to the Ministry’s prompt action, tourists are no longer faced with this issue.

Case of the missing VR

When the road works on the main road were being undertaken, Wirt Għawdex had ensured that all the VR’s being taken down would be documented and kept in safekeeping. Once the work was completed, we noticed that one VR was never returned to its place. Our investigations led nowhere and the only answer we could get was that it was lost. Eventually, a new one was (replica) was put in its place (across from the Vinyard restaurant). Recently, a public works worker discovered it in one of their stores and informed us. We have gone to check it out and, indeed, it is the missing VR! We are now in the process of having it returned to its rightful place. Here, thanks go to Johnny Walsh who started this project by taking pictures and recording the many VR stones found all over Gozo. This picture of the original stone is his work.

Earlier this year, an anonymous donor has again generously given us the nice sum of €2,000 which are to be used for one of our upcoming projects. This is the second such donation from this couple and we assure them of our gratitude in making it possible for us to keep improving our sites and giving all our visitors a more enriching experience.
Special event

Although no lectures were planned for December, an opportunity presented itself to have Dr. David Trump give us lecture while he was in Gozo as a guest of Heritage Malta. Considering the professional stature of Dr. Trump, this was definitely an offer that could not be refused. Since we had a very short time in which to organize the lecture, we set to work immediately on notifying members, friends, newspapers and website administrators of this upcoming event. As expected, interest to attend was immediate and within a few days, the lecture was fully booked.

The lecture was highly informative and also entertaining since Dr. Trump recalled many anecdotes from his many years of working in Gozo and Malta. The audience was kept interested till the end listening to Dr. Trump talk about his early work digging at Ggantia in the 1950’s, his recording of the archaeological finds beneath It-Tokk in the 1960’s and his work as Museum curator. Throughout the lecture, those present could also enjoy a beautiful photographic presentation by Daniel Cilia making the evening truly special.

We wanted to share this picture with you of the Cittadella looking nice and clean following the recent bastion restoration works.

You too can take an active part in Wirt Għawdex, whether it is in the committee or as the occasional sitter, contact us on: info@wirtghawdex.com
For the second year, we planned an event to celebrate the feast day of Santa Cecilia. This year’s musical-literary evening, proved to be a great success and attendance was higher than expected with a full house and others standing throughout the performance!

Soprano Rosabelle Pavia, who also happens to be a committee member has been in the musical scene for many years, ever since she was 9 years old. She started taking lessons at 18 at Sop Antoinette Miggiani. Rosabelle has taken part in concerts, operettas and operas in all the leading theatres of Malta and Gozo alongside international artists of great calibre. She has also been a guest singer in Italy and China. Rosabelle teaches voice production and technique and loves to organize and present concerts whereby young artists are given a chance to exhibit their talents in public.

Rosabelle shall be singing on the 29 December with the newly formed Santa Cecilia Choir at St. Francis Conventual Church and on the 4 January 2014 in the Epiphany Concert accompanied by the Classique Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Musical Dir. Joseph Debrincat together with Sop Claudia Tabone. Ms. Pavia can be contacted on 79965481; email: rosabellepavia@yahoo.co.uk

From left to right: Kathryn Mizzi; Andrew Gatt; Christian Saliba; Terry Shaw; George Pavia; Rosabelle Pavia; Antonella Portelli; Chantelle Mercieca; Josephine M. Grima; Joseph Pace

Some comments we received after the performance: “A very big Thank You to all for making last night so memorable; compliments for amazing programme; thoroughly enjoyed the whole performance; congratulations to all for a great evening; looking forward to next year’s”
On the Feast of Santa Cecilia apart from the singing we had two young followers of Wirt Għawdex who wrote poems which they recited at the event. Here they are in their original language—Maltese.

This is Katryn Mizzi from Victoria with her poem called Change.

Kont sigra fil-foresta mogħniija b’sahha u gmiel Kenn naqghi ‘l bosta bilejjaq li jejrabru ‘l widien Bit-żej kont nara l-kwiekeb jidħkuli mis-swe-wvet Binhar nihon bit-ragg tax-xemx tiżrej fis-skiet
Jum wiebed gjet tempesta hakuwarmi riefien kbar Qaqtuli frieghi weraq harbuntu f’nofstanhar
Inthaqt, waqajt bia sahha Daqabekk xroxt lina ġlorja Tpaaxxej bi’ ġhasfar jahannu Ghid ġajit ntemmei kmiemi
Stenbalt hafna snin wara Raġel xikxien qed jirgini B’formatur f’dlu Jnaqqax Biex b’egha ġahamel mimm
Tani forma femminili Qaddi b’litri ‘se immejla Daxxejn kola u dlika lostru Erba’ msiellet bhal cavetti
‘mmha bix-xifer indurati Kullinkien sa fuq ġenbejja U minn rasi sa taht zaqqi żejjinni b’haż tat-deheb sturati
Dlonk sibb ruhi għo teatru f’idejn tafja fitt mistiħja Il serrhiti fiq spallihha U ħargtet minn melodiż
Hekk mad-daqq tal-pjanu u l-arpa Tennejt l-ġhana helwa tiegħi Ġhanja ssabrek bhal dak ‘l ġhana tal-ġhasfar qalb il-frieghi
U tkatkar fi xmien fl- inghoddi meta kien qaqtatni r-rīħ Jien kont sigra fil-foresta W’issa sirt violin sabih

It’s great to see the restored Santa Cecilia chapel being so much in demand and being enjoyed by so many people for so many different purposes. We constantly get requests to use it and we’re happy to accommodate every request if possible.

Busy Chapel

A special thank you goes out to all the volunteers who man our sites throughout the year, many of them for years on end, for their contribution in achieving the society’s goals. On behalf of the whole committee, I send best wishes for a Happy Christmas and a New Year that brings you good health, good friends and good times.
All the way from New York
We received an email from a Gozitan gentleman living in New York who read all about the restoration of the Dgħajsa tal-Latini on our website. He wrote:

“... My name is Larry Scicluna, I’m a 44 year old New Yorker and I was just telling my two young sons about what my father did when he was growing up in Gozo. He(4,3),(995,989) worked with his father on the G32. On a whim, I googled G32 Gozo boats and was amazed at what has happened with my grandfather’s boat. That boat was my father’s passion in his youth. All he used to talk about growing up was working on the boat and working with his father and how he loved the sea. I wanted to say thank you for all the hard work you have undertaken over the past 10 years restoring the G32. My father passed away in 2004 and I’m sure he would also be very proud and very humbled by your hard work. I was in Gozo with my dad in 1979 and he showed me the G32 in its dilapidated state and I could see the sadness in his face. I wish he was alive today to see how the boat has been restored .........

Also is a picture of the crew. The gentleman second from the right is Paul Scicluna, my grandfather, one of the original owners of the boat. The teenager standing in front is my father, Michael Scicluna. My mother says he was around 13/14 years old in the picture. He had worked on the boat for most of his teenage years when he quit school to work with his father. I hope you can put these pictures to good use, and thank you again for the hard work of restoring the boat and keeping Gozo’s and my father’s heritage alive.

Thank you,
Larry Scicluna.

Before modern ferries started plying between Malta and Gozo, the Dgħajsa was an important lifeline and connection between Gozo and Malta. It carried merchandise, livestock and passengers and facilitated commerce in Gozo. It is therefore an important part of our maritime and social history.

When the last Dgħajsa was left abandoned at Mgarr Harbour, our ex-president, Mag. Paul Coppini intervened to save it. Eventually, agreement was reached between Wirt Għawdex and Gozo Channel Ltd. wherein Gozo Channel would purchase the boat and fund its restoration which was to be entrusted to Wirt Għawdex. Restoration work was left in the hands of the sons of the original builders and took several years. In February of 2013, the fully restored boat was put in its permanent exhibition place at Żewwieqa, Mgarr, and Gozo.

If you want to know more about the history of the Dghajsa follow this link http://www.wirtghawdex.org/docs/publications/A_passage_through_time.pdf
We would like to thank all those who wrote in to take part in the competition. If you haven’t won yet keep trying it might be your turn next. Our lucky winner in the last issue was Margaret Psaila who answered correctly Rabat and Cittadella as two places depicted in the print of John Cremona’s article. On your left Margaret is being presented with her Hamper by our committee member, Betty Zammit. This time round our competition is as follows: In John Cremona’s article the author talks about the magnificent fortifications perching high on the hill

We want to know the full name of the person who petitioned Grand Master Pinto for the fort to be built, even funding the project out of his own pocket. The first correct answer that reaches the editor (please see the address on page 3) wins you a Hamper with wines and other goodies. Good Luck

January 24, 2014 - 2013
A.G.M. — All members will receive notification of exact time and venue closer to the date.
January 31, 2014
Lecture — “Nature Sites in Gozo” by renowned Gozitan ornithologist and environmentalist Joe Sultana. As usual, venue will be the Santa Cecilia chapel and lecture will start at 6:30pm. Because of limited space reservations are recommended via membership@wirtghawdex.org

We were so sad to hear of the sudden passing of Dr. Joseph Grech, a long-time life member and proud supporter of Wirt Għawdex. He will be remembered as a true gentleman with a ready smile and will be sorely missed by family and friends. Our condolences to his wife Monique and May He Rest In Peace.

The public lectures and other activities we organize are an important way of carrying out one of our society’s main goals – namely, spreading knowledge and awareness of our heritage. These lectures and events have become very popular and are eagerly awaited and very well attended. This is indeed what we like to see and it encourages us to keep organizing them. However, since we have to rent out chairs each time, the more popular they become, the higher the cost to us. Each year, chair rental alone costs us several hundreds of euro. If we buy the chairs, the saved funds could then be put towards other areas such as maintenance of our sites, additional resources for our visitors etc. We are therefore asking for your help with this project by sponsoring a chair with a one-time donation of €20 per chair. Each sponsored chair will have a small plaque on the back identifying the sponsor. Shared sponsorships can also be accommodated. If you would like to contribute towards this campaign, please send your cheque, payable to Wirt Għawdex, Wirt Għawdex Chair Campaign, Dar il-Gvernatur, Triq l-Imgarr, Rabat VCT 9010, Għawdex. Please include your full name/s. Receipts will be sent to all sponsors.

We thank you beforehand for your generosity.