



# MerHbA

Maltese Historical Association (Aust) Inc  
(Għaqda Storika Maltija (Awstralija) Inkorporata)

No 5/2012

JUNE Newsletter

## This Month's Program:

(Presentation by Prof. Maurice Cauchi)

### "Mare Nostrum: Malta and the Mediterranean"



Prof Maurice Cauchi will look at Malta as an island emphasizing the impact that being an island has had throughout its history. He starts with asking why of all the islands in the world, Malta was chosen to host the most ancient and impressive temples of antiquity. He roams over the role that the Phoenicians followed by the Carthaginians have had, followed by the period known as 'Pax Romana' where, for a few centuries, peace reigned over the Mediterranean.

Then came the period of piracy which threatened the very existence of the Maltese islands. This lasted through the period of the Knights of Malta, themselves a thorn in the side of the Turkish Empire. The way of life of Maltese in those uncertain and difficult years is described.

Finally, Malta as a bastion in the Mediterranean is highlighted, ending with the latest battle of all, the role that Malta played in the Second World War. While our information about this has been provided by reports of the victors, the point of view of the losers will also, for the first time, be aired.



## About Prof Maurice Cauchi

Professor Maurice Cauchi migrated to Australia with his family in 1969. His interest in Maltese cultural issues started in the 1980s with his involvement with the Maltese Literature Group. Later, he became the President of this association (1984-1986), during which time he was instrumental in publishing *Irjiegħ*, an anthology of poetry in Maltese written by members of the MLG. He was also chairman of the Education Committee, and President of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria (1989 -1991), and again from 2004 to 2006, after he returned from his 11-year stay in Malta. From 1989 to 1991, he was Chairperson of the Ethnic Community Council of Victoria. He also served as a member of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission, of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, of the Victoria Reference Group of the Bureau of Immigration Research as well as President of the Federated Maltese Council of Australia.

During this time he started *Il-Maltija*, a monthly paper for the Maltese community in Victoria, as well as *The Ethnic Voice*, a monthly newsletter for the ECCV. He also organised the reprinting of the classic *Malta and the Maltese – A study in Nineteenth Century Migration* by Charles A Price (1989).

Together with Victoria University, he was instrumental in setting up a Youth Forum in 1999 and published its proceedings. He has contributed to the medical education of the community, through his talks on radio, as well as his well-attended courses of lectures on topics of medical interest.

From 1992 to 2003, Professor Cauchi resided in Malta. During this time, he was Chairman for the Commission for Maltese Abroad (Ministry for Social Policy, Malta, 1992-1994), as well as Chairman, Malta Migration Museum (2001-2003). He was largely responsible for establishing a website for this virtual museum, which is the most comprehensive collection of information about Maltese migrant issues ([www.maltamigration.com](http://www.maltamigration.com)).

For his services to the community, he was made Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1991 and awarded the *Medalja għal Qadi tar-Repubblika Ta' Malta* ('Medal for Services to the Republic of Malta', MQR) in 1992.

Professor Cauchi has written extensively on various aspects of migration. Among his recently published books are *The Maltese Migrant Experience* (1999) and *Worlds Apart – Migration in Modern English Literature* (2002) and *Maltese Achievers in Australia* (2006). He has also contributed numerous articles to newspapers and journals both in Malta and Australia.

Venue: **Maltese Community Centre**

477 Royal Parade, Parkville

Time: 7.30pm

Date: Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2012.

## Retrospective

### ***"From Megaliths to Microliths"***

(Prepared By: Agnes Cauchi)

This was the title for the monthly presentation for May.

Mr Joe Borg presented his talk mainly through pictures of megaliths and microliths found in Malta.

Joe Borg identified two significant periods of cultural growth:

1. The Neolithic temple builders
2. The Knights of Malta

The builders of the megalithic temples of Ggantija, Tarxien, Hal Saflieni etc must have been an organised community. How else would such structures been erected? Not only were they master builders but also mathematicians and engineers. One has to look at the plan of these temples and their construction to marvel at these early inhabitants' skills. In the temples our early inhabitants decorated the walls with spirals and birds carved into the stone.

The Knights of Malta period:

Before the Knights arrived Malta was a barren island. And look at it now. They built the city of Valletta with its magnificent monuments/auberges/churches etc.

The word 'microlith' is a small stone that can be as fine as talcum powder. In fact any artefact made of pottery is a microlith. We have many examples of pottery, eg, bowls and figurines found in the temples and necropolis of the Neolithic period.

One can marvel at the wealth of megaliths and microliths accumulated through the centuries found around the islands.

### **Prospective members:**

**All Welcome**

You are always welcome to attend any of our lectures and obtain a hard copy of the membership form from Mario Bonnici. Or go to our website [www.mha.org.au](http://www.mha.org.au) & download application form.

## **NATIVITY OF OUR LADY : BIRKIRKARA**

(Photos & Article by: Nino Xerri)



This Marian Sanctuary is commonly known and referred to as "tal-Herba" and is dedicated to The Nativity of Our Lady in Birkirkara. It is very popular all over the Maltese Islands and many Maltese in different parts of the world still keep at heart the childhood dedication & devotion to the "Madonna tal-Herba"

In 1402 the large area of Birkirkara was already considered by the ecclesiastic authorities as a parish and the strange name given to this Marian Chapel "tal\_herba" might have the connection with the site where it was built. The translation of Herba is Ruins, because it might have been due to the fact that the reconstructed Chapel at one time was in ruins. This Chapel became widely known on account of a miraculous cure of a paralytic, who happened to be in the vicinity and heard a bell from the belfry of the Chapel to inform the locals that a Mass is being celebrated. After entering the Chapel and praying to the Blessed Virgin to be healed walked out of the Chapel unaided. This miracle became known all over the island. People from all walks of life visited this Chapel to venerate this special effigy.

Eventually the Chapel became too small to accommodate the numerous visitors and so in 1640 the Chapel was enlarged and decorated. The facade, portico and present belfry are dated 1797.



The Knights of St. John made special donations to this Chapel. The original altarpiece, which is nowadays kept on a white marble altar in the original was donated by Chev. De Pierre. Romualdo Doz was the benefactor of the silver font, covering the mensa of the main altar. His Coat of Arms can be seen embossed on the silver adorned with red velvet. De Rohan donated an artistic silver chalice and a complete aspersionarium for holy water.

Wignacourt donated a hanging silver altar lamp. La Vallette offered a precious ganutill bouquet. In the middle there are two small statuettes : a Maltese with a flag in his hand, holding a Turk captive under his foot.



The crowned altarpiece gives us a picture of the Blessed Virgin on a cloud, holding baby Jesus with her left hand. With her other hand, Our Lady is pointing to the Holy Souls imploring further prayers to be freed from Purgatory. The figure of a Guardian Angel accompanying a child and that of St. John the Baptist, Patron of the Order are on either side of the altarpiece.

The Birkirkara born artist Joseph Briffa developed the theme of the role Mary played in the mystery of salvation, so in the cupola, he chose to paint Mary's prototypes in the old testament as Judith, Esther, Abigail, Anna and Ruth. He chose the Annunciation , The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple in the

presence of Simon, Jesus remaining in the Temple in a discussion with the wise doctors, The Pentecost and the glorification of Mary in heaven.



Devotion to Our Lady venerated in this Chapel is rooted in the hearts of many people, who make it a point to come and visit every Wednesday and Saturday, besides other special occasions throughout the year. Several couples have chosen this Chapel to celebrate their canonical marriage and this Chapel was also used to hold catechism classes as well as monthly meeting of the "Congregazione Mariana" the members of the Carmelite Third Order and the members of the "Fergha Ewkaristika"

In 2010 the Chapel celebrated its first centenary of the Crowning of the Madonna and Child in the altarpiece.



## STOP PRESS/ STOP PRESS STOP PRESS



### Our Official Launch

Date: **Sunday 17th June**

Location: **Williamstown RSL, 128 Ferguson Street, Williamstown**

Time: **From 12pm... entertainment commences at 2pm**

What better way to officially celebrate the launch of nisga, than with people, food, drinks and music.

Join us from 12 noon on Sunday June 17th, enjoy lunch at the bistro (and secure a good seat in the process) and [Nicky Bomba's Bustamento](#) will be kicking off the entertainment from 2pm.

Entrance Fee: **Mention 'nisga launch' to receive a special discounted rate of just \$15.00** (Usually \$20.00)

If you haven't joined us for lunch, upon arrival just search for the nisga banners (or follow the Maltese Chatter) to celebrate this momentous occasion. Here you will also receive a stamp giving you access to discounted drinks for the afternoon.

**You can only purchase tickets on the day so first in, first served! We don't want anyone to miss out so get in early and we look forward to seeing you on Sunday June 17.**

All questions for the event please text/call Sandra 0499077920 or e-mail [enquiry@yba.net.au](mailto:enquiry@yba.net.au)

## GENERAL NOTICE

1. The Home Visits Group of Volunteers of the MCCV require both male and female volunteers to visit elderly Maltese. This group is also making up a list of those people who would wish to be visited at home by members of this group. Please ring the centre on 9387 8922 for more information.
2. John Gordon Kirby painted a picture of the Grand Harbour while he was in Malta in the 1950's. Please visit the MCCV website to have a look.
3. Maurice Blackburn Solicitors encourage all those members of the Maltese community who had contact with asbestos in the past to contact them. These solicitors are keeping a register of people who have come in contact with asbestos.
4. The MCCV Executive Committee are organising a luncheon on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> July at the Parkville Centre as a fundraiser for the Bishop Joe Grech Fund. Joan Drago will be the guest singer. For more details please ring the centre.

## WANTED

The Maltese Historical Association is looking for sponsors from within and outside the Maltese Community. The role of a sponsor is to offer some financial assistance in support of our activities. In return the Sponsor will be given an advertising space in our Newsletter and given mention at all our events throughout the year. It is a worthwhile cause in helping the MHA to continue the good work within the Maltese Community. For more details about the MHA please e-mail Frances Bonnici (President) at [mfbonnici@bigpond.com](mailto:mfbonnici@bigpond.com)

*Thanking you in advance.*



**Please welcome our new sponsor**



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### **Interesting Websites**

#### ***Check these out:***

- 1] [www.malteseabroad.org](http://www.malteseabroad.org) - the website of the Federation of Maltese Living Abroad, formed following the Convention of Maltese Living Abroad held in Malta in 2010.
- 2] <http://www.maltain360.com/#110001632> - this Heritage Malta website takes you on a virtual tour of a number of historically significant sites (courtesy of Joe Borg).
- 3] [www.maltagc.net.au](http://www.maltagc.net.au) - This website dedicated to the people of the Maltese Islands to whom the British monarch, King George VI, awarded the George Cross seventy years ago on 15 April 1942.
- 4] <http://www.maltain360.com/#110001632> - this Heritage Malta website takes you on a virtual tour of a number of historically significant sites (courtesy of Joe Borg).
- 5] <http://www.maltamigration.com> - The aim of the Malta Migration Museum website is to collect information relating to issues of interest to migrants and migration. It will continue to grow to provide the most comprehensive collection of such information.
- 6] [www.mha.org.au](http://www.mha.org.au). The official Maltese Historical Association website to be launched this month
- 7] <http://www.maltahistory.info> – This site is dedicated to the fascinating history of the islands of **Malta, Gozo and Comino**. It provides a lawyer's perspective of the history of Malta describing the conditions of the Maltese people

