



# MerHbA

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

No.5/2013

SEPTEMBER Newsletter

## This Month's Program:

### The Great History Debate

“Which is the most important period of Maltese History?”

Our next meeting will be different from our usual presentation by one speaker. In fact we are going to have a panel of speakers who will debate this question “Which is the most important period of Maltese History?” Three speakers,

- Professor Maurice Cauchi;
- Mr Joe Borg
- Mr Albert Aguis,

These speakers are all well known among MHA members for their knowledge on Maltese History. They will discuss this question. Each speaker has chosen a different era and will highlight the important aspect of that period.

At the end of the debate, the audience will have the chance to agree or disagree with the speakers and make a contribution to the debate. So come along and we encourage you to bring along friends and family to be informed, entertained and share in a social atmosphere. Light refreshments will be served after the session.

Venue: **Maltese Community Centre**  
477 Royal Parade, Parkville

Time: 7.30pm

Date: Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

## Previous Months Events

May 21<sup>st</sup> 2013

By Mr Joseph Borg  
**The Plagues In Malta**

By Agnes Cauchi



Mr Joseph Borg gave an interesting presentation on the plagues in Malta. Plagues have been with us since time immemorial. They were first described around 80-100 AD, being found in Libya, Egypt and Syria.

### There are three kinds of plagues:

- bubonic , characterised by swollen lymph nodes,
- Septicaemia, involving the blood
- Pneumonic, which affects the lungs.

### What caused the plague?

The bubonic plague in most cases is contracted through the bites of an infected rodent, fleas, lice, cats, dogs, squirrels etc. The bacteria enter through a cut in the skin, either from a piece of contaminated clothing used by an



infected person, or it was spread through coughing and shared living quarters.

As a consequence to this, the marriage rate rose sharply, the birth rate rose, there was a notable increase in violence and debauchery, and upward mobility took place on a small scale.

Malta had a plague almost every century. Sometimes ever four in one century, as in the sixth and seventh century. The first possible contact with the plague was in the late 13th century. An ancient cemetery in Rabat Gozo is said to contain the corpse of King Louis IX of France. At the start of the 16th century there was a great risk of the introduction of contagious diseases due to ships coming from shores where epidemics were rampant. Hence, ships coming from the north African coast were moored in Marsamxett harbour for a certain period of time (quarantine). Bishop's island (aka Manoel Island) was used for the segregation of contaminated cargo, passengers and crew. Later on the island was developed into a Lazaretto by the Knights. Soon after their arrival the Knights took steps for the protection of the Islands against the introduction of contagious diseases. Valletta was founded in 1566 and the Knights built a large hospital and established a quarantine station. Passengers and goods were required to stay in quarantine and those afflicted were sent to Lazaretto or to the hospital.

How did the Maltese react to the plague of 1676? Many terrified people left their homes and headed for the open fields in spite of wintry conditions. Towns were emptied and the fields became towns. This plague took 11,600 lives. Among the dead were many medical personnel as well as many priests. When the plague was over, all houses were fumigated, the streets were cleaned and accumulated garbage collected. Infected mattresses, bedding and clothing were burned. All those who were in contact with the sick and the dead were quarantined

#### **Aftermath of the plague**

The Knights had to put Malta back on its feet, and measures were taken, namely: duty was raised on wine, cheese, meat, bird-seed, firewood and coal, even though the people were starving. The Knights had to try to get the embargo between Sicily and Malta lifted, and industry had to find its feet again.

The plague of 1813 was introduced by a British brigantine the San Nicola which was coming from Egypt. A series of health regulation were set in motion. Among them were public gatherings were prohibited, people were to stay indoors, shops remained closed, Mass on Sundays and feastdays were suspended, persons showing symptoms of the disease were to report to Fort Manoel for diagnosis, dead corpses were buried in lime to accelerate their decaying process.

The risk of another outbreak remained for years but thankfully they finally ended due to preventive measures.

As a result of the last plague, commerce and agricultural produce nose-dived. However, Sicily opened its harbours to Malta ships in 1815.

Many villages built cemeteries for plague victims. Below is the cemetery at Lija village



**June 18<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**By Mrs Maria Catania**

## **Education Reforms and Schooling in Malta between 1800 and 1974**

By Maria Catania

After a brief introduction, Mrs Catania developed the topic around three areas of the history of education in Malta:

- Education reforms and the personalities involved in these reforms.
- Some of the schools in towns and villages which were restored, extended or newly built.
- Our school years' experiences.

### **Education Reforms**

The British rule in Malta started in 1800. During the period 1800-1836, very little was done towards Primary Education because the Government did not want to embark on a costly program of educating the people. The Royal Commission of Inquiry of 1836 reported the low level of education of the Maltese people. The Commissioners criticised the widespread illiteracy, which was due to poverty and the poor school attendance, and recommended the opening of more schools, better pay for teachers and doubling the annual expenditure on education.

In 1840, Mons. Panzavecchia was appointed Inspector of Primary Schools and he started the hard work towards better education in Malta. Many other personalities, including Chief Inspector of Schools, Canon Paolo Pullicino, Minister for Education Mons. Dandria and Directors of Education Albert Laferla, John Brennan and Joseph Vassallo worked hard towards this aim.

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After the Second World War, people became more eager to learn and the Government introduced the Compulsion Attendance Ordinance of 1946. Parents became obliged to send their children to school at the age of five.

During the 1950s and 1960s, more primary and secondary schools were built throughout the Island. St Michael's Teacher Training College for males and Mater Admirabilis Teacher Training College for females were opened in the early fifties. The University at Tal-Qroqq was inaugurated in 1964.

In 1970, the *Secondary Schools for All Act* made secondary education compulsory from 11 to 14 years and with the *Education Act 1974*, the school leaving age was extended to 16.

By the end of the Seventies, all schools in Malta had reached the level of some of the most advanced countries in Europe.

#### Schools

During the second part of the presentation, pictures of various schools in Malta were shown. These schools were either newly built, extended or restored. Some were large houses or auberges which were used as schools. The government primary school in Tarxien (pictured right), to the best of the speaker's knowledge built in 1889, was the first purpose-built primary school in the Maltese islands. Before this children were taught in large houses rented by the authorities from private owners.

The audience showed great interest, especially when pictures of the schools which they had attended were shown. Some discussions occurred.

### School Experiences

The final part of the session created great enthusiasm among many of members and guests who attended the presentation. Many were keen to relate an experience of their school years.

The evening ended with light refreshments for all.

### About the speaker



Education formed a great part of Maria Catania's life. Just before her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, she was employed as a prospective teacher at Paola Infants' School, where Miss Rita Chetcuti, one of the finest Educationists in Malta was the Principal. Under Miss Chetcuti's

wing and through seminars and in-services, she learnt teaching skills which she passed on to students from Mater Admirabilis Training College in Malta and from Catholic University in Melbourne. Together with her husband and first child, as well as her parents, Maria migrated to Melbourne in 1964.

In the late sixties, Maria did a two year Training course towards her Certificate of Teaching and Primary Teacher Registration in Australia. Maria continued to update her qualifications through numerous courses and in-service programs.

### 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

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204 Warrandyte Road,  
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Manager

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**August 18<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**By Mr Joseph Borg**

## **Guided Walk around Melbourne**

By Agnes Cauchi

On a cold and wet Sunday 18 August a keen group of MHA members and others met Mr Joseph Borg, a sculpture engineer, led our guided walk around the city of Melbourne. The idea behind it was to appreciate some sculptures dotted around the City's landscape in which Joe had been involved in their engineering aspects.



We started from the new stand of the MCG and there Joe explained the structure and why it had to be so. The engineers had to keep in mind the safety of the public and how the wind plays around these structures.

From there we walked towards the Birrarung Marr. We stopped to admire the huge colourful sculpture called "The Angel" (right). This used to be outside the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and it was thought that it needed a better place it could be viewed from all angles. Joe explained how it was transported, keeping in line the overhead tramlines! While we were there, we were fortunate enough to listen to the Federation Bells.

We proceeded to the outdoor area of the NGV. There we looked at the waterfall shaped like the inside of a seashell and why it was so – a practical idea. There was also a sculpture called 'The Wave' (left). Again Joe gave us a detailed account of how it was structured.

Then on towards Southbank. We stopped for lunch and then resumed our walk. We looked at three other sculptures. My favourite one was a number of gold bees on the face of a building. Again Joe Borg explained the difficulties the engineers had with this sculpture, namely the effect of the wind and possible danger to the public.

It was a very informative walk and, as a result, one can now better appreciate the sculptures.



The group who walked on the day

**August 31<sup>st</sup> 2013**

## **Language Immersion Morning (LIM)**

By Frances Bonnici, MHA President



On Saturday 31 August the committee of the Maltese Historical Association hosted the annual Language Immersion Morning (LIM) for the students who are currently studying the Maltese language at the Maltese Community Centre in Parkville. The morning was filled with activities targeted towards the students who were multi-aged, ranging from primary to VCE level.

The theme for the youngest group was 'F'holm u Fantazija'. The students were encouraged to come dressed as their favourite 'fantasy' character. It was such a delight to see so many of the girls wearing 'fairy' costumes and the boys turning up as Ninja Turtles, skeletons or the Tortoise from the fable 'The Hare and the Tortoise'.

During the first two hours, the very young students (Levels 1-3) listened to an imaginative story about fairies, coloured in and assembled a fairy or an elf and then were assisted by the adults in writing a few sentences in Maltese about their fantasy characters.

A different activity which required a higher skill in the language was organised for a group of students (Level 4-6). Working in groups, they completed a Board Game. After the introduction and discussion as to what words and phrases were to be used, the students sat down to finish the given task. All groups are to be commended on the ideas they came up with and the finished games were just great.

The senior students had a PowerPoint presentation run by Mr Paul Lia about the 'FESTI MALTIN'. Paul touched on

**August 31<sup>th</sup> 2013**

aspects of the festi as celebrated in Malta and here in Victoria. He also spoke about the festivals such as *Festa tal-Hobż*; *Festa tal-Frawli*, etc. that villages in Malta have been hosting lately to attract both the Maltese and the tourists who visit the islands. This presentation was followed by a quiz and more discussion on this topic.



After a morning tea of *pastizzi*, party pies, cakes, chocolates and drinks, the students got ready for their final activity. The primary age students sang and danced to Maltese songs like "Onġi, onġi onġella"; 'Jien Tifla tal-Kampanja' and ABC. They learnt the words, sang the songs and did the actions. Words and YouTube snippets of these children's songs were shown on the big screen and the children participated to the fullest.

The senior students participated in a cooking demonstration; they were shown how to make the 'Prinjolata'- a popular Maltese sweet eaten mainly around Carnival time. Historical information and the recipe were handed out to the students.

I would like to thank the committee of the MHA who together with Rosemary Attard, Edwidge Borg, Rosette Xerri and Dr Susan Zammit worked very hard to make this event one filled with fun and learning for the benefit of the younger generation of Maltese descent. I would also like to thank the teachers and teacher aides who participated in the morning's activities.

My final thanks go to the MCCV Executive who provided us with the venue and the 'pastizzi'.

Frances Bonnici  
President MHA



## **2013 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The MHA's Annual General Meeting will take place on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013 (2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in October).

As per usual all committee positions will be declared vacant after the President's and Treasurer's reports are read. This year there are committee members who will be retiring from positions on the committee. I, for one, will not be nominating for the position of president again; nor for any other position on the committee.

### **NEW BLOOD**

The MHA needs new blood. Please consider giving some of your time and expertise and nominate for a committee position. With much regret, unless vacant committee positions are filled, it is proposed to move for the dissolution of the MHA. **YOUR PARTICIPATION ON THE COMMITTEE CAN STOP THIS.**

So please come along and give your support if you feel that the MHA is worth keeping in its role of maintaining alive and sharing the history and culture of the Maltese in Malta and abroad. Your support is crucial for the future of the MHA.

Frances Bonnici



The President and Executive Committee

*Of the*

Maltese Community Council of Victoria Inc

Request your company

*At the*

PRESENTATION OF  
"ISLAND OF DREAMS"  
BY ALINE P'NINA TAYAR

**Date:** 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013  
**Time:** 6 pm  
**Venue:** Maltese Community Centre  
477 Royal Parade, Parkville, 3052

**Donation:** \$10.00 Redeemable upon the purchase  
of the novel (price \$17)

**RSVP** Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2013

**(Please detach and complete the form below and return it together with your payment.)**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Suburb:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Post code:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Number of people:** \_\_\_\_\_

Money order/cheque to be made payable to the Maltese Community Council of Victoria Inc.  
477 Royal Pde Parkville 3052 Tel: 9387 8922  
Email: [admin@mccv.org.au](mailto:admin@mccv.org.au)

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