



# MerHbA

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

**MHA Newsletter No. 8/2014**

[www.mha.org.au](http://www.mha.org.au)

**October 2014**

MerHbA! Welcome to all the members and friends of the Maltese Historical Association.

September seems to have been the month for anniversaries. The Festa ta' Marija Bambina, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Maltese Australian Social Club, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malta's Independence all occurred this month, as well as a number of celebrations. This Newsletter contains articles and photos about these and other events.

This month, on Tuesday 21 October, George Portelli will give the second part of his lecture on the historical and social aspects of Malta between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. A summary of the first part is contained in this newsletter.

Next month on the third Tuesday, 18 November, we will be having our Annual General Meeting. All members will shortly receive a notice of the AGM by post. Remember that only financial members are entitled to stand for election or to vote, so if you are not up to date with your payments, please see our treasurer, Mario Bonnici, at the meeting or send a cheque to:

Mario Bonnici  
59 Binnak Drive  
Watsonia  
VIC 3087

Membership fees are \$10 single or \$15 for a family. If you are unsure of your financial status, you can phone Mario on 9432 1335 or myself on 0425 708 830

We welcome two new young members, Robert Blythe and Jay De Graaff, to the MHA. I am sure they will be made to feel very welcome, in traditional Maltese style. There is a possibility that the MHA will work with the Generation Australian Maltese (GAM) group to help run a workshop on the traditional Maltese crib, the presepiju. I have already been impressed by the enthusiasm and organisation of this group.

Warmest Regards,

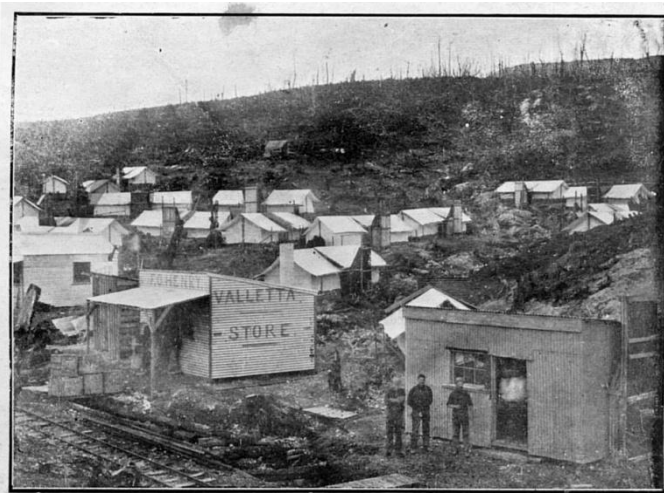
Charles Gatt  
(MHA Secretary)

## MCCV AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria Inc will be held at the Maltese Community Centre on Wednesday 5th November 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm. Nominations for election for positions on the MCCV Executive Committee close on Wednesday 22nd October 2014.

## Gozo in Tasmania!

The MHA was able to assist Mark Metrikas, the Heritage Coordinator Queenstown Heritage & Arts Festival 2014, with the contacts he requested in the last newsletter, and he has sent us the following information and photo.



Another View of the Camp, showing some of the hastily-erected stores where the Maltese obtain their provisions.

**Maltese camp at Howard's Plains near Queenstown for miners working at Mount Lyell, 1912.**

"The only photo I have (is) of this Maltese construction camp. The Maltese lived in this tented-camp, isolated from Queenstown, for about a year, before moving to the camp known as Gozo. For a few years, Gozo was the official name of the Lake Margaret hydro village and appeared as a listed polling booth in the 1917 commonwealth referendum. Not sure which book or newspaper this photo is from as it's circulating on facebook. It is said (in 1912) they preferred short macaroni, and called bread 'hops' (sic)".

Maltese workers were employed by the Mount Lyell Mining company from 1912 onwards in the construction of the Lake Margaret hydro power station in Western Tasmania.

## MHA October Event:

*Malta between the 15th and 18th centuries;  
an overview from a historical and social  
perspective (Part 2)*

by

**George Portelli**

7.30 p.m. Tuesday 21 October  
Maltese Community Centre  
Ilevers St Parkville



## The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was introduced by Pope Sergius I (687-701), following Eastern tradition. Falling on 8 September, it is a national holiday in Malta, known as Festa ta' Marija Bambina, and also il-Vitorja (the Victory), as it commemorates the turning points of two great events in Maltese and World History.

On 8 September 1565 the Ottoman Turks lifted The Great Siege of Malta, abandoning their plans to quickly conquer Malta and sweep through Italy into Europe. 378 years later, on 8 September 1943, during World War II, Fascist Italy surrendered, ending the bombardment of Malta by the Regia Aeronautica, and the Italian Navy fleet was moored in St Paul's Bay for the rest of the war. The Allied forces were then able to use Malta more effectively as a base to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany. The Maltese attribute both these reversals of fortune to the intercession of Our Lady.

In Malta a famous regatta is held on Victory Day in the Grand Harbour, while the Feast of the Nativity of Mary is celebrated in Xagħra (Gozo), Naxxar, Senglea, and Mellieħa with processions of statues, street decorations and amazing fireworks.

A number of more sedate celebrations were held in Melbourne:

A Mass to Commemorate Our Lady of Victories was held at 7.00pm on Monday 8th September 2014 at St Paul's Chapel, Parkville.

On Sunday 14 September, the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta commemorated the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of, "The Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Phileremos", with a Mass and veneration of her image. The original ancient image of Our Lady had



been brought from Jerusalem to the Church of Mount Phileremos, Rhodes, then to Malta. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the icon entered into the possession of the imperial House of Russia and is now in the National Museum of Montenegro. An early 10<sup>th</sup> century copy can be found at the basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, at Assisi, Italy.



Every year on the second Sunday in September, so as not to clash with Fathers' Day, Reskeon Maltese Association and the Reskeon Seniors Group, on behalf of The Missionary Society of St Paul, organise a celebration of The Feast of Our Lady of Victories at the beautiful St Mary Star of the Sea Church in West Melbourne. A Rosary, Mass, Procession and

Benediction were held on Sunday 14 September. It was well attended and many organisations were represented.



**September event: George Portelli:  
Malta between the 15th and 18th centuries;  
an overview from a historical and social  
perspective**

In his engaging, interactive style, George introduced the topic by highlighting particular historical milestones prior to 1436, such as the sacking of the Maltese Islands by the Arabs in A.D 870, which was followed by a period of total depopulation; the liberation of Malta by Count Roger in 1091, and again by his son Roger II in 1127. Roger II established a Latin Christian administration, as well as the role of Malta as a penal colony for European undesirables, such as in 1224 when the entire population of the City of Celano in the Abruzzi was banished to the Maltese Islands.



George Portelli speaking at the MHA Photo: Lewis Zammit

This was followed by an outline of progressive and at times regressive conurbation of the Maltese Islands, from a simple ecclesiastical organization dividing Malta into two parishes, Mdina and Birgu, in 1436, to 38 separate hamlets and villages by 1798. Due to unsettled times, during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries a number of villages and hamlets were abandoned, whilst others such as Qormi, Birkirkara, Zebbug and Zejtun flourished. Gozo had scattered settlements and population but after the Turkish raid of 1551 they were abandoned and settlement did not resume till much later in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries. During the Middle Ages, the fear of Corsair attacks was a major factor apart from socio-economic reasons.

George recounted observations of how contemporary historians and foreign visitors perceived Maltese men and women of the period in terms of their physiognomy, dress, manners, virtues and vices including a staple diet of "a clove of garlic or onion, anchovies dipped in oil and saltfish, aside from vegetables, bread, milk and water". Observers also commented on customs and rituals surrounding births, deaths and marriages.

In the next presentation, on 21st October, 2014, the concluding part will cover Maltese Language/Dialect, the proliferation of prostitution – which nearly claimed the downfall of Grand Master La Cassière; the high incidence of illegitimacy; the Nobility and Organized Religion.

**Maltese Night at Mill Park Library**

Mario Bonnici and I attended this function, organised by Jack Chan at the Mill Park library, on Wednesday 16 September. The evening started off with a singer, Gustav, who sang bawdy Maltese songs. Mario followed with a PowerPoint presentation on Malta, which was very well received. We were then treated to a performance by Mark Andrew (Tabone), who did an excellent Elvis impersonation, with a friendly style, mingling with the audience. He was followed by a dancer, after which we socialised and enjoyed nibbles. The event was well attended and most enjoyable.

We also received flyers from the Lalor United Bocci and Social Club, who run Line Dancing, Bingo, Maltese classes for children and adults, Bocci competitions and Social events. They are based at 479 High St., Epping. For more information, contact David on 0418 308 659.

Mark Andrew performs at Skyways on the second and last Wednesdays of the month and will be performing at The Palms at Crown on 7 & 8 November. He does a number of different impersonations and I can thoroughly recommend him.

Charles Gatt

**Keith Stodden "My Passion for our Trams"**

One of our members, Francesca Folk-Scolaro, informs me that the Brunswick Community History Group Inc is holding a presentation on the history of trams at Bridie O'Reilly's Irish Pub on the corner of Sydney and Brunswick Roads from 1.30 to 3.30 pm on Saturday October 25.

Admission is free and food and drinks are available at pub prices. The pub also has discounted lunches from 12.00 on Saturdays. It promises to be a most pleasant, interesting and informative afternoon.

Contact: Phone Francesca on 93871194

Email: [brunswickhistoryinc@yahoo.com](mailto:brunswickhistoryinc@yahoo.com)



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## Maltese Independence 21 September 1964

The path to Malta's Independence from England was complicated, and is well described in an interview with Professor Frendo in Kevin Schembri Orland's article in *The Malta Independent*, "50th anniversary: The rocky road to independence". It can be found at <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2014-09-15/news/50th-anniversary-the-rocky-road-to-independence-658322273/>

It can also be read on the MCCV website: <http://www.mccv.org.au/50th-anniversary-the-rocky-road-to-maltas-independence/>

The following is part of an article by an eyewitness, Ted Delia, who was a boy at the time: <http://shanedelia.com.au/maltese-independence-day-50th-anniversary/>

"It's approaching midnight on the 20th September 1964, the Independence arena at Floriana is bathed in light. The British armed forces Army, Navy and Air force, together with Maltese Army units (Royal Malta Artillery & King's Own Malta Regiment) and Police units have just finished parading in the arena in the best of British tradition.



The arena is full to the brim with happy Maltese and at the front entrance barrier is an 11 year old boy who has been there since 6.00pm watching his father participating in this spectacle as a member of the Malta Police Band. At 11.55pm the arena lights are turned off except for a single spotlight shining over a flagpole in front of the official dais. A member from each of the British Armed Forces march into the arena and approach the flag pole, formally salute the British and Maltese dignitaries on the dais then marched to the flag pole. The parade ground shook when the officer in charge bellowed, 'Attention – Present Arms' and the entire contingent of personnel on parade came to attention. The band master of the massed bands totaling about 350 musicians raised his baton and starting playing "God SAVE the Queen" as the 3 members of the British forces



solemnly started lowering the British Union Jack. When finished they removed the Union Jack and folded it neatly. They approached the dais and presented it to HRH Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh. On the stroke of midnight, 21st September 1964, as the arena became silent once more, members of the Maltese Regiments and Police approached the official dais. The Prime Minister of Malta DR. George Borg Olivier presented them with the Maltese Flag which they took and marched to the flagpole.

Again the officer in charge of the parade shouted 'Attention – Present Arms' and the massed bands started playing for the 1st time the haunting sound of the Maltese National Anthem while the Maltese Flag was tethered and hoisted up the flag pole declaring that centuries of dominion by other nations were at an end and that Malta was now free to choose and carve its own path in history.

At this point the Prime Minister raised the INDEPENDENCE DOCUMENTS above his head, doffed his hat to the British dignitaries and waved them towards the gathered crowd. Pandemonium broke out, people waving Maltese flags, clapping madly, shouting VIVA MALTA TAL MALTIN together with a few tears of joy at the realisation that Malta as from that moment, was a free and sovereign nation. What a

wonderful night that was and how befitting were the lyrics of the Maltese National Anthem:

Lil din l-art ħelwa, l-Omm li tatna isimha,  
Ħares, Mulej, kif dejjem Int ħarist:  
Ftakar li lilha bil-oĥla dawl libbist.  
Agħti, kbir Alla, id-dehen lil min jaħkimha,  
Rodd il-ħniena lis-sid, saħħa 'l-ħaddiem:  
Seddaq il-għaqda fil-Maltin u s-sliem.



This was the beginning of a NEW and MODERN era for Malta. It was this humble beginning that lead to Malta being declared a REPUBLIC in 1974 followed by full membership of the European Union in May 2004".



## Maltese Independence 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 21 September 2014

### ROYAL VISIT 2014:

Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, representing Her Majesty the Queen of England, visited on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2014 to help celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malta's independence from England. On the Saturday, he visited San Anton Palace, the residence of the Maltese President, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca. As is traditional, he planted a tree within the Palace gardens. The Duke of Cambridge then travelled to the Auberge de Castille, originally built in the 16th century, to meet with the Maltese Prime Minister, The Hon. Dr Joseph Muscat, and his wife, and went on to watch the Guardia Pageant re-enactment at the Palace Square, Valetta.

William viewed a number of historical documents at the National Library, including the original citation awarding the George Cross to Malta. Greeted by large crowds



outside the Library, he apologised on behalf of his wife, who had to cancel her visit on doctors' orders, due to her severe morning sickness.

His final engagement for the day, at the Upper Barrakka Gardens, culminated in an evening celebration of Independence, including a large fireworks display over the spectacular view of the Grand Harbour. Speaking at the event, William thanked Malta for his welcome and read a message from The Queen, recounting her fond memories of her times in Malta and congratulating Malta on her development into a confident and proud nation.

On the Sunday, the Duke received the salute of a Guard of Honour by the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) outside St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, in the presence of the President and Prime Minister of Malta. He then joined the congregation for an Independence Day service and viewed paintings by the 16th Century Italian painter, Caravaggio, including 'The Beheading of St John The Baptist', displayed in the position for which it was originally commissioned.

William visited the Agenzija Żgħażaġh (Agency for Youth) in Vittoriosa then viewed the artworks in the Church of St Lawrence, which was founded in 1681. The Duke met more locals and tourists, watched Gozo folk dancing, and took a short boat trip across the Grand Harbour to Valletta, admiring the magnificent views. He travelled on the same boat, the St Angelo, which transported his grandmother, the Queen, on her visit to Malta in 1949.

His final engagement was an Independence Day celebration hosted by the British High Commissioner at his residence, where the Duke greeted guests at a Garden Party, taking the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life.

<http://royalcentral.co.uk/cambridges/prince-william-celebrates-maltas-50th-independence-anniversary-37428>




### MCCV Celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malta's Independence

On Sunday 21 September, the Maltese Community Council of Victoria hosted a formal function at the Maltese community Centre in Parkville to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Malta's Independence. Several dignitaries spoke to us and presented various awards for contribution to the community. The recipients included four MHA members who have been very active in our organisation and given us a number of talks, namely our current president, Joseph Borg, and Dr Clemente Zammit, Nick Chircop, and Albert Agius. I am looking forward to reading all about it in the next MCCV newsletter.



Independence Monument in Floriana

Photo - DOI- Omar Camilleri



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## The Maltese Australian Social Club



The Maltese Australian Association also celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, having been founded on 8 September 1964 to coincide with the Feast of the Vitorja, which was then Malta's National Day. Mr Francis Soler (1915-1975), originally started it as the Maltese Australian Social Club, an extension of the 17<sup>th</sup> Melbourne 1<sup>st</sup> Malta Scouts Group, which he had also founded, as well as cofounding the MCCV, and designing the MCCV logo. Frank, as he was known, was assisted by Mr Paul Paris, who later became the first president of the MCCV.

The Association approached the Honourable Sir Hubert Opperman, the great Australian sportsman and professional cyclist, to become the official patron of the association. Sir Hubert was also a Federal Minister for Immigration under the Menzies Government and the 1<sup>st</sup> High Commissioner for Australia in Malta.

This year, the Maltese Australian Association celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a Ball on Saturday 27 September 2014 at Ferraro Reception and Function Centre in Campbellfield. The evening started with a processional Entrance of the Flags accompanied by stirring bagpipes. A live band, the Tequila Brothers, with lead singer Michael Zammit, provided live entertainment. MAA president, Mr. Benedict Soler, welcomed us and led us in a minute's silence for departed friends.

Does anyone know where this is? Let me know at [secretary@mha.org.au](mailto:secretary@mha.org.au) if you can help.



The guest speaker, Mr. Victor Grech, Malta Consul-General for Victoria, spoke about the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Malta's Independence and the evolution of Malta's role from Nurse of the Mediterranean in the First World War to the provision of humanitarian assistance and a centre of Peace. Toasts to Australia and to Malta; a response by Dame Leonie Christopherson A.M. D.S.J.; the singing of the Maltese and Australian National Anthems interspersed with fine conversation, dining and dancing to make for a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

To finish off, I thought you might like this photograph of Valletta, our magnificent capital, by Fred Erick.

