MALTESE E-NEWSLETTER

Journal for Maltese Living Abroad

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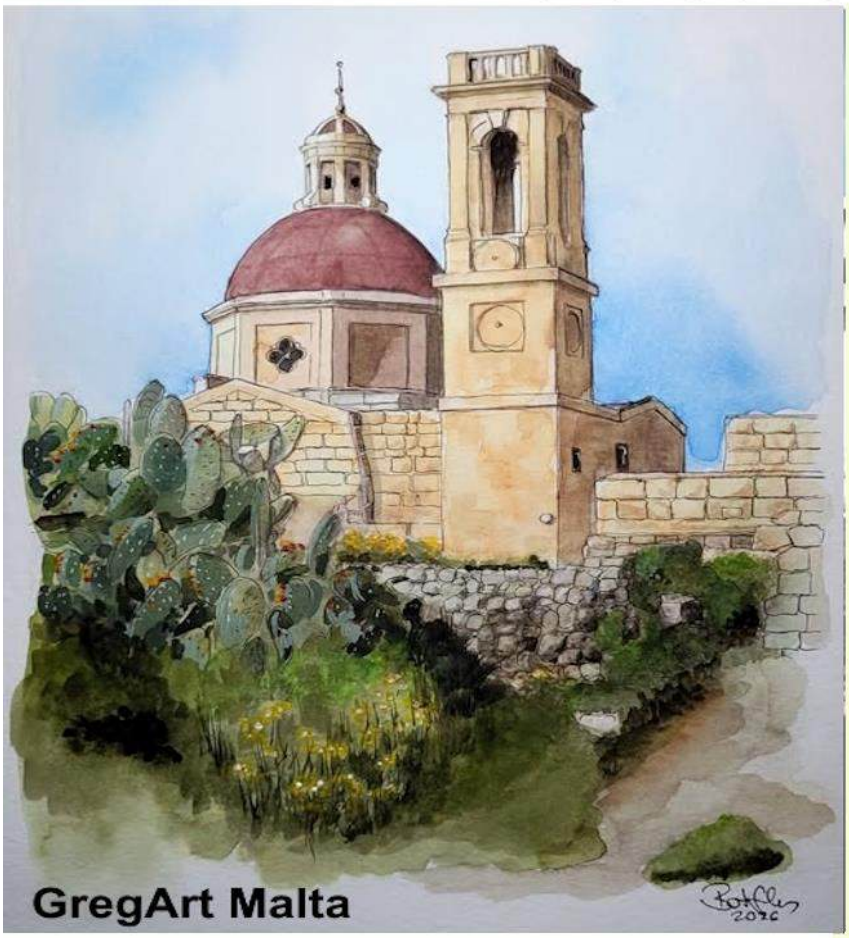
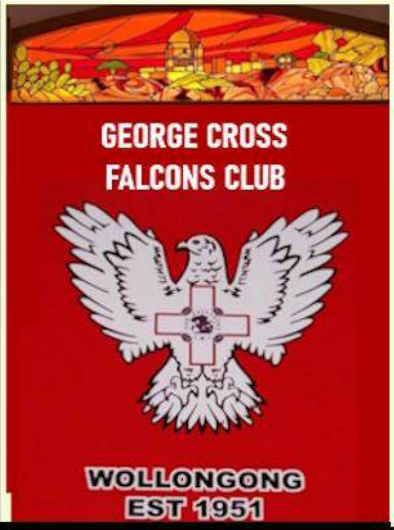
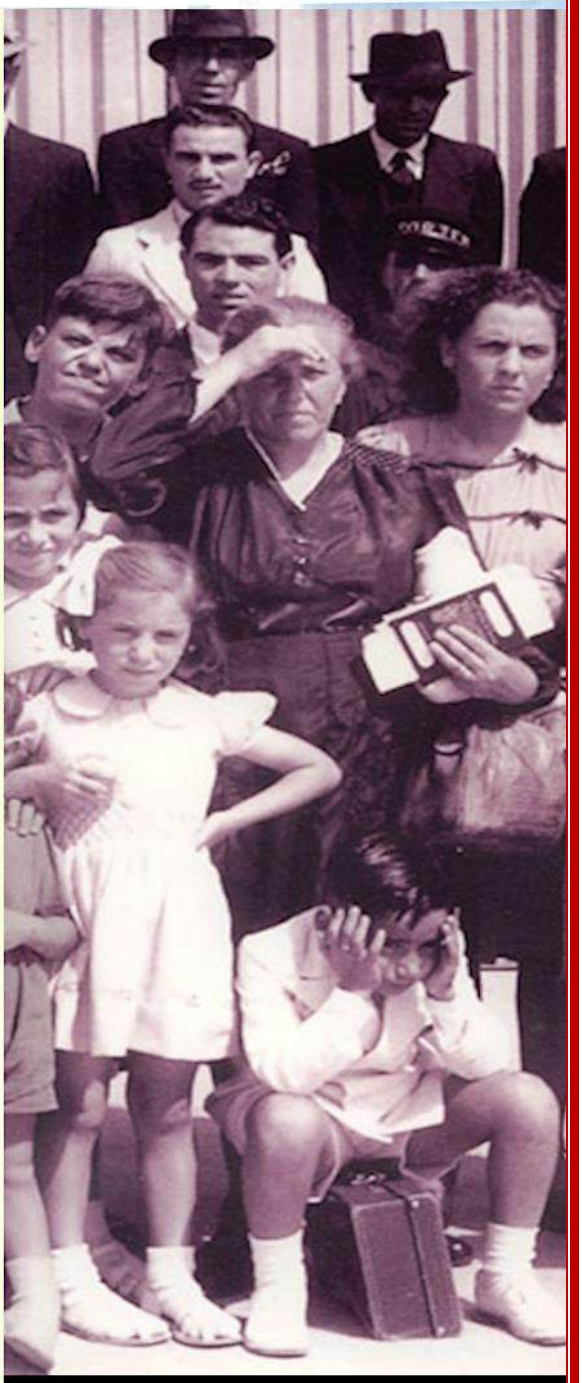


'TAL-LIRA' CLOCK AT CRINGILA NSW





REMEMBER THE DAY YOU LEFT MALTA

WE INFORM, EDUCATE, ENTERTAIN AND CONNECT MALTESE LIVING IN MALTA AND AROUND THE WORLD

COUNCIL FOR MALTESE LIVING ABROAD

ANOTHER TOOTHLESS TIGER

Victor V. Vella, Baulkham Hills, NSW Australia

CMLA

Thanks and 'Prosit' Frank for keeping us informed and up to date about the personal history and current affairs of our Island home. I was especially attracted to and follow what is happening re the Maltese Abroad council as I attended one of the conventions some years ago. The aims of the council are well set out and often repeated especially the first sentence in the list of aims of the constitution, the one ending increasing interest in Maltese culture. and identity.

In my talk to the convention I suggested two practical solutions to solve important dilemmas regarding the writing mostly in Maltese by Maltese migrants in the form of books of broadcasts talks on c.d's and how the Council can help by providing some shelter or haven for this type of writing and audial resources. We are familiar with the plight of these: these resources will all end up on the rubbish heap as the children or first generation or grand grand children will not bother to keep them, as they in many cases will not be able to understand or appreciate their content The other proposal was about some form of subsidy or financial assistance when the 'exiled' Maltese writers publish some of their writings mostly in Malta.

I have not heard of any concrete outcome re the first proposal. even though it would be of interest if these resources are archived somewhere as I would not think they would require a huge library. I am not saying that everything published or broadcast is worthy of archiving. However there is some material which could be of general historical and cultural interest. e.g interviews and some series which could be beneficial to preserve, especially with all the 'intended' and trumpeted assistance. A case in point re the second proposal : at the moment . I am editing another book of essays in Maltese to be published in Malta . I have been waiting for a while for some decision from the Council after I have contacted the new secretary. He explained to me that making a decision takes time re. my request of some sort of assistance financial or otherwise. I keep wondering how much time is needed as months have passed without any decision being made.

During the convention I attended there was another interesting and practical proposal: to organise an exchange system of business and professional personnel between Malta and the Maltese abroad. The proposed plan was that say teachers, Lecturers doctors, successful business people etc from migrant countries would spend say a month in Malta giving talks , fora etc... and Maltese speakers would repeat the process in migrant countries to help us keep in touch regarding their field of action or expertise. and especially keeping in touch. Nothing was done as far as I know on these practical proposals. Most probably , a convention is organised this year with flights partly subsidised by the Maltese Government. More talks and proposals are heard and photos are taken. Those present are frequently reminded of the aims and objectives. of the Council for Maltese Living Abroad. All that must in some way goes to fulfil the objective of 'creating effective communications and collaborations between Malta and its citizens living abroad."! It would follow the usual pattern of a talkfest; the only change will be the year.

This Maltese journal has undertaken the work of CMLA and, regrettably, it is neither acknowledged, rewarded nor thanked for its significant role in keeping the Maltese living abroad informed and connected. JV Camilleri - Victoria

IN MALTA, EVEN GETTING FROM A TO B COMES WITH CENTURIES OF BAGGAGE AND POSSIBLY A TRAFFIC JAM

Sean Richardson - Australia

For an island just 27 kilometres long and 14 kilometres wide, Malta has always had a surprisingly complicated relationship with transport. Moving people across a small patch of limestone in the middle of the Mediterranean should be simple. Yet the story of transport here is one of ambition, endless debate and improvisation with the latest chapter being the launch of the Gozo fast ferry services.

Perhaps Malta's earliest *transport network* was carved directly into the limestone: the mysterious Punic cart ruts, the parallel grooves etched across the countryside. They are still visible in places like Misraħ Għar il-Kbir. Nobody knows exactly how they were used, but they are often linked to ancient carts hauling goods across the island. In a tongue-in-cheek way, they may represent Malta's first attempt at organised transport infrastructure. Two prehistoric traffic lanes without the traffic lights and roundabouts.

Fast forward to the nineteenth century and Malta embraced rail travel. The Malta Railway opened in 1883, connecting Valletta to Mdina via a line stretching just over 11 kilometres. It was built to reduce difficult overland travel and speed up movement between the harbour and inland towns. A parallel tram system was introduced in 1905 and both provided an alternative to the traditional horse-drawn *karozzini*.

The tramway lasted twenty-four years, closing in 1929 and the railway lasted fifty years closing by 1931. Competition from buses and private vehicles, made both mass transit systems increasingly uneconomical. Today, fragments of railway tunnels and stations remain scattered across the island while there is nothing left of the tramways.

Since 1905, Malta's bus network has been the backbone of public transport, becoming as iconic as the island's architecture. The brightly coloured traditional buses, often individually decorated by their owners, became symbols of Maltese identity, before being replaced by a controversial new bus system in 2011.

Malta's transport challenge has never gone away. Despite its small size, the islands have one of the highest vehicle densities in Europe. For an island of roughly 316 square kilometres, the sheer number of cars creates a remarkable concentration of traffic congestion and parking pressures leading to daily frustration for the population. An initiative called the Driving Licence Surrender Scheme, was introduced to 'reward' young people for not driving but it has failed to slow the proliferation of vehicles on the road, which has now reached 438, 567 vehicles for a population of approximately 530,000.

Perhaps because of this, Malta has spent decades discussing what comes next, with many reports and proposals announced for Metro systems, underground railways, monorails and tunnels, all grand visions that never see the light of day. Few topics generate more conversation than the long-discussed Malta–Gozo tunnel, an undersea link that has alternated between political enthusiasm and environmental hesitation. This is not unlike the proposed fast train system in Australia intended to link Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, which is periodically announced with great fanfare.

Now the sea has quietly become part of the solution, to circumvent the traffic. Fast ferry services were launched linking Valletta and Gozo, and have been recently expanded to link Sliema and

Bugibba. They are beginning to reshape travel habits so commuters can avoid sitting on the roads behind a long line of red tail-lights.

Malta's transport story has always balanced practicality and possibility. From Punic cart ruts to Victorian railways, from iconic buses to modern ferries, it is a continual searching for the perfect way to move people around a small place.

MULIMS IN MALTA

Have we ever considered the argument asserting that Catholic schools have the capacity and obligation to reject Islamophobia by embracing Muslim students through comprehensive acceptance. It examines research that may aid Catholic schools in responding to Pope Francis's 'Fratelli Tutti' Encyclical Letter, which calls for 'fraternity and social friendship' with both familiar and unfamiliar 'strangers. This can be achieved by fostering inclusive community practices with Muslim students and actively opposing Islamophobia.

As of 2021, Muslims make up approximately 3.9% of Malta's population, growing from 6,000 in 2010 to over 17,454, largely consisting of non-citizens. While Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion (95-98%), Islam has a historical presence, and the community is centred around the Mariam Al-Batool Mosque in Paola, which serves a diverse population primarily from Libya, Somalia, and Syria.

Demographics: The majority are foreign residents, with roughly 2,500 holding Maltese citizenship.

Community Life: Mariam Al-Batool Mosque Paola Mosque is located in Paola, Malta.[17] The first stone of the mosque was laid by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 1978 and its doors were open to the public in 1982, and officiated in 1984. The initial scope of the building was to serve the Muslims in Malta, at the time mainly economic migrants from Libya, and to promote Sunni Islam among the Maltese society.

Even though there are a number of other Muslim places of worship in Malta, the Mariam Al-Batool Mosque is the only officially recognized and mosque-designed structure in the country. The building of others has been proposed. It also hosts a Muslim primary school. The growing community faces space constraints, as the single, main mosque is often inadequate to hold the number of worshippers during Ramadan or Eid.

History: Islam had a significant impact on Malta, particularly in the 9th to 11th centuries (870–1091), influencing the Maltese language and agricultural practices.

Integration: While earlier immigrant communities are well-integrated, more recent arrivals have faced challenges, sometimes leading to social isolation.

MALTA IS LUCKY
IT HAS TWO FATHERS
CHRISTMAS

Christmas has arrived early in Malta. It has coincided with an election campaign, during which both leading political parties are acting like competitors in a bidding contest to see who can make the most extravagant promises. Daily, grants, super bonuses, pensions, children's allowances, university stipends, transport subsidies, housing initiatives, energy assistance, arts passes, tax reductions, and flexible working arrangements are being promised and are in their presents' bag..

CRINGILA MALTESE CENTRE - THE PLACE TO BE

Louis Parnis, President

If you ever have the opportunity to visit the Maltese Club – THE GEORGE CROSS FALCONS COMMUNITY CENTRE – located in Cringila NSW, you will undoubtedly feel a strong sense of identity, particularly if you have Maltese heritage.

This club resembles a museum, housing numerous artifacts, paintings, stained glass, monuments, and photographs, among other items. The most recent addition to this collection is a replica of the traditional Maltese clock, commonly referred to as 'Tal-Lira.' We are recognized as part of Museums and Galleries NSW. This year, following the Anzac Memorial in April, we unveiled a new piece created by Mr. Anthony Borg from Lake Heights. During his last trip to Malta, Anthony acquired a special clock and a designed painting to create what is known as the Lira Clock**.** ***In the accompanying photo, from left to right, are Alison Byrnes, Federal Member; President Louis Parnis; Anthony Borg; Tania Brown, Mayor of Wollongong and Paul Scully, State Minister*****.** It is evident that these clocks are now highly sought after, and Anthony is pleased to donate one to the Centre. On behalf of the broader community, we extend our gratitude to Anthony for his exquisite work in creating this clock and for donating it to the Community Centre for everyone to appreciate.

TURNING BACK TIME ON A 'TAL-LIRA' CLOCK

The origins of the Maltese 'Tal-Lira' clock are shrouded in numerous tales from popular folklore, with diverse accounts as vibrant as the clocks themselves. However, it is indisputable that these clocks have become highly coveted by both local and international antique collectors. The Maltese clock has, for centuries, adorned the walls of aristocratic halls and courts, and has even appeared in various renowned representations of Antoine Favray's exquisite 18th-century interiors of noble Maltese homes. Over the years, ReCoop, a cooperative focused on restoration and conservation, has undertaken the restoration of many exemplary Maltese clocks of exceptional quality, showcasing rich craftsmanship and skill. Nevertheless, a recent project has distinguished itself from the others, as noted by ReCoop conservator director Roderick Abela. This project involved a black 'Tal-Lira' clock, embellished with shellacked, silver gilt floral designs featuring the coat of arms of Grandmaster Marc'Antonio Zondadari. A white ribbon sash, inscribed with "Presa del Sole d'Oro d'Algeri fatta nel coman.da del N.S.G. Anno 1721", elegantly wraps around Zondadari's coat of arms. But what does this inscription signify? It translates to "Capture of the Golden Sun of Algiers under the command of the N.S.G. Year 1721". On April 20, 1721, a courageous commander named Fra Adriano de Langon successfully captured an Algerian vessel known as the Sole d'Oro, just off the coast of Oran, Algeria. Chroniclers narrate an hour-long naval battle between de Langon's crew and the Algerian ship, which ultimately surrendered. A romanticized depiction of the fierce confrontation between the vessels is illustrated on the face of the clock's central dial. De Langon emerged as a prominent commander within the Order and continued to secure other significant naval victories, which became some of the Order's most celebrated achievements. It is highly likely that this specific Maltese 'Tal-Lira' clock served as a keepsake of de Langon's naval success and may have graced the walls of one of the prominent households.

NEW YOUNG GENERATION OF MALTESE WRITERS

This century, following Malta's membership of the European Union in 2004, has brought about a very interesting phenomenon: the birth of a new young generation of Maltese writers, whose literary formation has been strongly influenced by their condition of living abroad, in particular working within the institutions of the EU.

Alex Vella Gera (1973), a translator based in Brussels, is the author of various novels, amongst which *Is-Sriep Reġgħu Saru Velenużi* ['The snakes have become venomous again'] (2012) and *Trojan* (2015). The first novel is a thriller based on a failed assassination plot to kill the former controversial Prime Minister of Malta, Dom Mintoff, whilst the second, winner of the 2016 Malta Book Prize, explores the relationship between the tangible present and the intangible world that transcends it. Vella Gera is probably the first exponent of this *nouvelle generation litteraire maltaise* to rock the Maltese contemporary literary scene.

Pierre J Mejlak (1982) has been Chief of Media Relations at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington DC since 2022, following three years at the World Bank Group. Before that he spent fourteen years working in the European Institutions in Brussels. This prolific writer of short stories and novels started writing at a very young age in the second island of the Maltese archipelago, Gozo, where he was born. In the short space of over forty years since his birth, Mejlak has moved from peripheral Gozo to mainland Malta, followed by the centre of Europe, Brussels, and now to the centre of world politics, Washington, D.C. Such life experience has proved of inspiration for his many books for children, a novel and two collections of short stories, including *Qed Nistennik Nieżla max-Xita* ['Waiting for you to fall with the rain'] (2009) and *Dak li l-lejl Iħallik Tgħid* [available in English as 'Having Said Goodnight'] (2015), which have won him the European Union Prize for Literature, five Malta National Book awards and the *Sea of Words European Short Story Award*. His works have been translated into over fifteen languages.

Karl Schembri (1978-) started off as a journalist in his native country Malta. He has authored various short stories and poems. After having published in 2002 his collection of short stories entitled *Taħt il-Kappa tax-Xemx* ['Under the Sun'), he asserted himself as an innovative 'anarchic' voice, which really stood out in the contemporary literary panorama, with his novel entitled *Il-Manifest tal-Killer* ['The Killer's manifest'], published in 2006. This novel was strongly influenced by Schembri's journalistic activity, which had brought him into contact with the wheeling and dealing, hypocrisy and sleaze revolving around the Maltese political world.

Since 2009, Schembri has been working, as a journalist first and a media officer later, in conflict areas around the world, which include Palestine, Jordan, Kenya. His hands-on, close experience with suffering refugees has certainly brought about a re-focusing of Schembri's interests onto the macro-issues of this world, which have inspired his most recent works *It- tifel li salva d-dinja* ['The boy who saved the world'] (2020), *The Lulu Diaries* (2020), *The Journey of Miskit, The Brave Stoat* (2023), a book meant for child refugees and *Eħlisna mid-deni* ['Deliver usfrom Evil'] (2025).

Antoine Cassar (1978) defines himself as a «London-born Maltese poet, translator, and editor, with roots in activism for universal freedom of movement and other causes. I write in Maltese and English, mostly about maps and borders, cities and language, walking and mental health». A nomad himself, always travelling between Britain, Malta, Luxembourg and Greece, Cassar specialises in long poems which highlight the many woes of life.

Passaport ['Passport'] (2009) is a long poem written in protest against all the red tape, bureaucracy, harassment, intolerance and prejudices that travellers, nomads and, in particular, suffering refugees have to face and endure when trying to cross borders and frontiers, useless barriers between human beings, artificially created by humankind. On the other hand, *Erbgħin Jum* ['Forty Days'] (2017) is an autobiographic long poem that reflects on childhood trauma, and domestic violence. Cassar finds an antidote to all this in walking. Cassar won the National Book Prize in 2018.

Nadia Mifsud (1976) has been living since 1998 in France, where she works as a teacher and translator, and from where she derives the inspiration for her poetry and prose writings. She published her first collection of poems, *Żugraga* ['Spinning Top'] in 2009, followed by *Kantuniera 'l Bogħod* ['Around the Bend'] (2015), *Varjazzjonijiet ta' Skiet* ['Variations of Silence'] (2021) and *Meta Tinfetaq il-Folla* ['When the Crowd comes undone'] (2022). Her prose writings include *Ir-rota daret dawra (kważi) sħiħa* ['Going (almost) full circle'] (2017) and *Żifna f'xifer irdum* ['Dancing on the Cliff Edge'] (2021).

In her works she explores fundamental themes in life, such as womanhood and motherhood, the relationship between eroticism, love and the end of love, as well as the role that absence, void, silence, migration, emptiness and death play in our lives. Mifsud is involved in the Translation Workshop held yearly in Malta in conjunction with the *Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival*. She was awarded the National Book Prize for poetry in 2016 and 2022. In 2022 she also became Malta's third Poet Laureate.

Elizabeth Grech (1978) is another Maltese translator based in France since 2002. She has translated the works of many Maltese authors into French, whilst collaborating with various social scientists and a number of NGOs. She is also a consultant with CIHEAM (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies).

The title of her collection of poems, *Bejn Baħar u Baħar* ['Between two Seas'] (2019), testifies to the importance of the Mediterranean Sea in the life of a Maltese woman transplanted in Paris. As Grech herself stated, the sea is a «symbol of openness, a horizon of open possibilities, a link withother worlds [where I can] drown my pains and nourish my body and soul». More to follow.....

WE LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU.
IF YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL SHARE IT WITH OTHERS
SEND IT TO - maltesejournal@gmail.com

Lil Franġisku xtaqt nifraħlu –
Qed niktiblu dawn il-vrus;
Serraħ moħħok ħabib tiegħi
Lil mill-qalb ħerġin dal-ħsus.

Lill-Mulej fis għidlu 'grazzi'
Illi żejnek b'għomor twil
U li tak dawn s-snin kollha -
Qed iġġorr dan il-piż tqil!

Ċertament jekk tħares lura
Tiftakar fil-passat tiegħek
Illi tar, ma jerġax jiġi,
L-Imgħallem żgur illi kien miegħek!

Trid trodd ħajr jien m'għandix dubju
Lill-familjari, qraba w ħbieb;
Bosta drabi lil dawn sibthom
U qatt m'għalqulek il-bieb.

Żgur li l-mard xi darba daħal
Ta' darek mill-għatba 'l ġewwa
Tlabt lill Alla u irbaħtlu -
Sew bid-dnewwa jew bis-sewwa!

Issa qiegħed tħares lura
U min jaf minn xiex għaddejt,
Tista' tikteb ktieb dwar ħajtek -
Meta fraħt, meta batejt!

Imma dan issa għadda kollu
U qed tfakkar dlonk il-mija;
Tassew għandek għaliex tifraħ,
F'dan il-jum u f'din is-siegħa.

Jien minn qalbi nawguralek
Li tgħaddi jiemek kuntent
Sa ma l-Mulej isejjaħlek –
Żommu qrib; oqgħod attent!

Wara kollox aħna nafu,
Min twieled irid imut
Tgħix kemm tgħix trid tħalli kollox
Sa l-iċken sold ġewwa l-but!

Fuq il-baħar għaddejt ħajtek
Fuq il-Fliegu ġġorr in-nies
Biex jaqilgħu x'jieklu, x'jonfqu
Għamilt vjaġġi żgur bla qies.

Sadattant rabbejt familja
U ġarrabt kruha l-gwerra -
Kien żmien iebes u diffiċli
Din is-siegħa kulħadd stmerrha!

B'wiċċ il-ġid dan kollu għadda
Żmien sabiħ qattajt id-dar,
Tnajjar, tixwi, biċċa laħam
Ittektek dlonk fuq in-nar.

U ma' martek kemm il-darba
L-ajru qbadtu biex iżżuru
Xi pajjiż sabiħ, imbiegħed
U ħallikom, tagħqdu, dduru.

U biex trabbi lill-familja
Fl-Amerka qattajt is-snin
Biex il-ħobża bl-għaraq taqla'
Bil-barka t'Alla l-ħanin.

Bqajt sal-aħħar bl-uniformi
Ta' Kaptan b'ħila bla qies -
Serju, bieżel u kapaċi
Jiftakru żgur ħafna nies!

Mistrieħ żgur issa jistħoqqlok
Lill-Mulej ħalli f'idejh,
Biex ikun it-tmun ta' ħajtek
Sa ma jsejjaħlek għal ħdejh!

Mill-korrispondent taghna mir-Rabat - Ghawdex
il-Kav Joe M Attard

GIFT OF LEGACY FOR CHILDREN

Joe Axiak, a Maltese Australian will forever be remembered as a hard-working cattle farmer from Dunedoo, NSW, and for making an enormous difference to children's lives across the country.

Image: Joe Axiak, middle, with brother Andy, left.

After a lifetime on the land, when Joe died at the age of 78, he left his entire estate to help sick children. His significant gift is helping our researchers find new preventions, treatments and cures for many childhood conditions.

Joe and his brother Andy spent their lives working on the family property and were well known throughout the district for their farming expertise. They kept to themselves and led a frugal life, only needing each other, trusted friends, and their beloved animals.

After Andy died suddenly in 2017, life was never the same for Joe. His health began to deteriorate, and it was during this time he decided to write his Will and include a bequest for MCRI. While Joe did not have a family of his own, he always had empathy for children and wanted to give them the opportunity of a better, healthier and happier life.

Joe will never be forgotten at MURDOCH CHILDREN RESEARCH INSTITUTE. His story will continue through our life-changing research projects and the children who have their whole lives ahead of them thanks to his kindness. We receive all types of bequests from generous, everyday Australians and are grateful for every single one.

Postal voting is a system that allows eligible voters to cast their ballot by mail instead of attending a polling station in person.

It's commonly used in many countries to increase accessibility, especially for people living abroad, those with mobility challenges, shift workers, or individuals unable to vote on election day for personal or professional reasons.

As conversations around electoral reform continue, an important question comes up: should Malta introduce postal voting for its general elections?

Each election season brings with it a familiar frustration for Maltese citizens who have built lives abroad. Unless they can interrupt work, reorganise family life, reach an airport served by KM Malta Airlines, and secure a seat through the subsidised election fare system, they are effectively unable to exercise their democratic right.

For the 2026 general election, the Electoral Commission has confirmed that voters who will be abroad on polling day may vote early in Malta on Saturday 23rd May, ahead of polling day on Saturday 30th May. KM Malta Airlines has also announced €90 return fares and additional flights for eligible voters travelling back to Malta. Yet for those living outside the airline's direct network, the offer remains limited.

Malta remains among the few EU countries where citizens abroad cannot vote remotely in national elections. While other countries have introduced postal voting, proxy voting, embassy voting, consular voting, or electronic voting for at least some external voters, Malta continues to rely on physical return.

A European Commission study defines remote voting as mechanisms that allow voters to cast their ballot by means other than attending their assigned polling station in person, including postal and electronic options.

MALTESE WOMEN WRITERS IN AUSTRALIA

One might find it surprising to know that there have been so many women writers of Maltese background appearing on the Australian scene, publishing novels and poetry as well as being involved in several related literary activities.

It would be safe to say that the majority of these authors are largely unknown to Maltese readers in Malta. The aim of this article is to introduce the Maltese reading public to this veritable efflorescence of literature within the Maltese Diaspora.

Lou Drofenik

Lou Drofenik (born **Lou Zammit**, 1941) is a Maltese-Australian novelist and academic. She lives in Victoria, Australia.

Drofenik was born in Birkirkara, Malta. Her father was a stonemason. She completed her primary and secondary education in Malta, and taught at the Siġġiewi primary school before migrating to Australia in 1962 under the Single Women's Migrant Scheme. She followed undergraduate and graduate degrees in education at La Trobe University, and pursued her doctoral studies at the same university, focusing on the effects of migration on the moral identity of Maltese migrant women in Australia.[3] Since then, she has worked as an educator in the Australian Catholic primary school system.

She is the recipient of three Malta National Book Council Awards - in 2008 for *In Search of Carmen Caruana* in the category of Novel or Short Story in English, in 2010 for *Cast the Long Shadow* in the category of Novel in Another Language, and in 2017 for *The Confectioner's Daughter* in the category of Novel in Maltese or English.[5][6] Two of her novels - *Of Cloves and Bitter Almonds* and *Beloved Convict* - were also awarded the Australian North Central Literary Award.

Drofenik has published eight novels. Her fiction is founded on extensive historical research, and focuses on the migrant experience, specifically in a Maltese-Australian context. Her work is notable for its engagement with questions of Maltese and migrant identity, and has been praised for its engagement with female perspectives and experiences in distinction to the "predominantly patriarchal outlook" of much of the Maltese literary tradition.

List of publications

Birds of Passage (self-published, 2005: *In Search of Carmen Caruana* (self-published, 2007: *Of Cloves and Bitter Almonds* (National Biographic, 2008: *Cast the Long Shadow* (National Biographic, 2010: *Beloved Convict* (Maltese Historical Society, 2011: *Bushfire Summer* (self-published, 2013:*The Confectioner's Daughter* (Horizons, 2016: *Love in the Time of the Inquisition* (Horizons, 2017)

Georgina Scillio

Georgina Scillio (née Zammit) migrated from Malta (Birkirkara) in 1962, and after completing her B.Sc., B.Ed. and M.Ed, at Melbourne University she spent the next thirty years teaching Science and Mathematics in various schools and colleges.

Although she was always interested in writing, it was only since she retired from full-time teaching that her work started to be published.

Scillio's articles, or 'pieces', have been published in *Quadrant, Arena, The Weekend Australian,* as well as in several literary magazines, namely: *Readers' Paradise, Expectations, The NSW Writers'*

Centre, The Sunshine Coast Writers' Group, The Multicultural Journal of Australia, Page Seventeen and *Culture is.*.

She received 'Commended' or 'Highly Commended' certificates for her short stories in the Alan Marshall National competition, the Judah Waten National competition, the Boroondara National competition, and the Eastern Regional Libraries competition.

In 2007, her short story 'The Vase' was runner up in the Darebin Leader Newspaper competition and was published in the Anthology *Around the Clock*.

Scillio belonged to the writers' group 'The Cartridge Family' which won first prize in the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Anthology Competition in 2007, with their Anthology *A Curiously Reduced Universe*.

In 2008 her collection of short stories *A Dandelion on the Roof* won first prize in the Northern Notes Writers' Festival competition and the book was published by the sponsors of the competition, Clouds of Magellan and Trojan Press. In 2009 one of her stories was included in the anthology *Stamping Ground*.

In the February 2010 issue of the *Australian Book Review,* J.D. Thompson wrote: "The strongest aspect of *A Dandelion on the Roof* is Scillio's ability to convey the unique viewpoints of her characters....(for example) a university student living in a dingy inner city Melbourne apartment describing the powerful impact that catching a glimpse of her neighbour's backyard has on her. The character remarks, 'I had discovered an island of precious peace in a sea of clamour.'"

Scillio has several more short stories which she hopes to publish either in an anthology or as a collection, as well as manuscripts for three novels which she is re-writing and hopes to submit them to a publisher in due course. Some of her stories are now appearing in eBooks.

Her inspiration for writing comes from all sources: listening to people talking, watching people when travelling by public transport, and of course, lots of life experiences. *A Dandelion on the Roof* was inspired by her own childhood, growing up in the ruins of World War 2. Scillio is also moved by contrasts, for example the mother who was so skilled in sewing (like her own mother was) yet she got such a small recompense for her efforts, or the contrast between the grinding poverty of a war-torn village and the grandeur of the Basilica nearby. In the story *Folds of Fat*, the anorexic girl who shared her flat was from a wealthy family and could afford any food she fancied, whereas Scillio who was living on the breadline longed to be able to cook nice and rich meals! Some aspects of these stories are autobiographical, but Scillio insists that overall her work should be read as fiction or 'faction'.

There are other things which intrigue her, for example the intense reaction to President Kennedy's assassination, and the personal obsessions some people develop when they live a solitary life (in *The Plate*) or the lack of perception by others of their own neighbours (in *Through a fence darkly*).

The story about a psychiatrist in *The Dream* was a mixture of a true story and a fictitious set up: a dream which, in the end influenced the woman's decision to accept or reject a marriage proposal.

She hopes that those who read her stories will find in them some enjoyment and perhaps a reflection of persons they have met, lived with or heard about.

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THE GRAND MASTER MEETS CHIVALRIC ORDER OF SAINT JOHN OF THE HOSPITAL AT JERUSALEM.

ORDER OF MALTA NEWS

The Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Fra' John Dunlap, welcomed at the Magistral Palace Oskar Prinz von Preussen, Herrenmeister of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg of the Chivalric Order of Saint John of the Hospital at Jerusalem. The meeting reaffirmed the longstanding ties between the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Bailiwick of Brandenburg, both institutions sharing the same Hospitaller origins and a common tradition of service to the sick, the poor, and the most vulnerable. During the meeting, the Grand Master was admitted as an Honorary Knight of the Bailiwick of Brandenburg and, in turn, conferred upon His Royal Highness Dr Oskar Prinz von Preussen the Grand Cross, Special Class, of the Pro Merito Melitensi. The exchange of honours reflected the spirit of friendship and close collaboration that has long characterised relations between the two Orders.

Though distinct in their historical development, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Bailiwick of Brandenburg trace their origins to the same Hospitaller mission born in Jerusalem centuries ago. The meeting also reaffirmed the importance of strengthening cooperation in the service of the poor, the sick, and the most vulnerable.

THE GRAND MASTER MEETS LEBANESE FIRST LADY

03/05/2026

The Lebanese First Lady Nehmat Aoun met with the Grand Master of the Sovereign Order of Malta, Fra' John T. Dunlap, on the 68th International Pilgrimage of the Order of Malta to Lourdes. Also present at the meeting were the Grand Chancellor, Riccardo Paternò di Montecupo, and the President of the Order of Malta in Lebanon, Marwan Sehnaoui.

As already stated in a recent letter addressed to Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, the Grand Master reiterated the Order of Malta's deep solidarity and support for the institutions and people of Lebanon in the face of the current tragic circumstances and their extremely grave humanitarian consequences, assuring the continuation of every effort to support the country. The First Lady emphasized how the presence of the Order in Lebanon is "unique and irreplaceable," as it represents service, cohesion, and neutrality.

The Lebanese Association of the Order of Malta (also known as the Order of Malta in Lebanon) has been committed for decades to serving the country's most vulnerable communities, regardless of ethnic or religious background, to the highest standards of quality. Through a network of 60 projects and programs—comprising 12 health centres, 12 mobile medical units, 7 Agro-humanitarian centres, 3 mobile community kitchens, 2 care centres for people with disabilities, and numerous other programs—the Order of Malta in Lebanon provides essential medical, social, and agricultural support to those in need. Apolitical, neutral, and impartial, it is rooted in the principles of dignity, solidarity, and service, and its mission goes beyond relief to promote long-term resilience and inclusion.

Maltese writer John Edward DeMicoli has been named Regional Winner for Canada and Europe in the 2026 Commonwealth Short Story Prize, becoming the first writer from Malta to win at regional level.

DeMicoli received the award for his short story The Bastion's Shadow, a work set against the fortifications of Valletta that explores themes of memory, migration, identity, and survival through the encounter between a humanitarian worker and a young survivor arriving by sea.

In April 2026, DeMicoli had become the first writer from Malta to be shortlisted in the competition. Reacting to the news, DeMicoli said the achievement represented another important milestone for Maltese literature on the international stage.

DeMicoli described the recognition as "deeply meaningful not only personally, but as a reflection of our island's heritage and storytelling tradition finding its place on a global stage."

The author also confirmed that his forthcoming two-volume novel, The Sacred Redemption, to be published by Midsea Books Ltd, expands on themes explored in the award-winning story. Drawing from historical fragments of Malta's past, the work reconstructs a narrative shaped by silence, faith, and identity across centuries.

"From the heart of the Mediterranean, the story continues — louder, prouder, and unmistakably Maltese," DeMicoli said.

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize is regarded as one of the world's most significant international awards for unpublished short fiction, recognising writers from across the Commonwealth. Laura Calleja is assistant print editor at MaltaToday

Mużika Mużika 2026 winner Jasmine Abela has officially unveiled the music video for **Nistaqsi**, the track that secured her victory in this year's edition.

Announcing the news online, the singer called the experience emotional and "unreal," particularly because it signifies her debut official music video.

"Right now, my inner child is filled with joy," Jasmine wrote. "My very first music video is for a song in Maltese, my native language, which won Mużika Mużika 2026."

The vocalist expressed gratitude to her fans for the encouragement she garnered during her Mużika Mużika experience and after her triumph earlier this year.

Nistaqsi captivated both audiences and judges at this year's festival, enabling Jasmine to achieve first place in one of Malta's largest music contests dedicated to original Maltese music.

The official music video has now been released on Jasmine's social channels.

A WONDERFUL MOTHER'S DAY CELEBRATION AT THE MALTESE CULTURAL CENTRE ALBION

By Emmanuel Brincat - Victoria

On Thursday 7 May, Mary Anne and I had the pleasure of attending the Mother's Day celebration held at the Maltese Cultural Centre Albion, at the kind invitation of President Joseph Spiteri and his committee.

I was also honoured to act as MC for the evening.

By the time we arrived, the hall was already filled with members and guests, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for what proved to be a most enjoyable and memorable occasion.

The evening commenced with the General Acknowledgement of Country, followed by a brief bilingual introduction in Maltese and English. President Joseph Spiteri then officially welcomed the special guests, members and friends present for the celebration.

Among the special guests was the Consul General for Malta in Victoria, Dr Gioconda Schembri, together with members of her staff. An apology was received from Dr Victoria Borg who was unable to attend. President Spiteri also took the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the dedicated ladies working in the kitchen whose efforts contributed greatly to the success of the evening.

Guests enjoyed a delicious dinner with a variety of meats and salads, followed by dessert, while tea and coffee were available throughout the night.

A celebration honouring mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers would not have been complete without the much-loved Maltese traditional *Ghana*. Adding further cultural significance to the evening, the Maltese Bizzilla Ladies Group was also present, proudly displaying their beautiful lacework for everyone to admire.

Music for the evening was provided by DJ Dominic, who once again ensured the atmosphere remained lively and enjoyable throughout the function.

A particularly memorable highlight of the evening came from long-time friend of the Centre and active member of the Ghana Group, Anglu "In Nice" Buttigieg. In his own unique and entertaining style, he dedicated the traditional *Spirtu Pront* to all mothers. His performance immediately captured the audience's attention, with guests listening closely to every word.

As if that was not enough, I then introduced the well-known and much-loved Ghana singer, Mrs Polly Mamo. During the evening, many learned that Polly had only recently undergone surgery, making this her first performance since her recovery.

Already warmly known to audiences at the Centre for her outstanding talent in *Spirtu Pront*, Polly joined Anglu "In Nice" for a delightful duet centred on the theme of mothers, with Polly taking the role of the mother and Anglu portraying the son through song.

Their performance was received with tremendous appreciation from the audience and proved to be one of the highlights of the night.

The last item on the night was the usual raffle.

In closing, the members and supporters of the Centre continue to greatly appreciate the dedication and commitment shown by President Joseph Spiteri and his committee, whose ongoing efforts ensure that our Maltese traditions, culture and community spirit continue to thrive.

PIONEERING WORK IN MALTESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE BY DR CHARLES DANIEL SALIBA FEATURED ON NATIONAL TV

Gozitan author Dr Charles Daniel Saliba was recently interviewed by presenter John Demanuele on the programme *'Ħajjitna Ktieb'*, aired on Malta's national television station. The programme focused on Dr Saliba's academic research and his distinguished career, spanning over 25 years of teaching Maltese as both a native and foreign language, as well as linguistics and literature, across secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary institutions.

During the interview, Dr Saliba and Mr Demanuele discussed the current landscape of Maltese as a Foreign Language (MFL) teaching in Malta, highlighting Dr Saliba's pioneering work and professional practice in the field. They explored the significant changes he has observed in the sector throughout his career. The discussion also centred on his latest textbook series, *Maltese as a Foreign Language for Juniors*, specifically detailing its methodology and pedagogical structure.

Reflecting on the experience, Dr Saliba commented: "Such programmes provide a healthy forum for authors to discuss their work and specific fields of study. In my case, alongside my academic career, we were able to discuss the vital MFL sector and analyse the *Learning Maltese / Nitgħallem il-Malti* series. This programme serves as a valuable information tool for those teaching or learning MFL both locally and abroad, particularly within the Maltese diaspora."

The programme can be accessed online via the following link: https://tvmi.mt/episode/159327 or scan this QR code.

THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF THE MALTESE RAZZETT

Ernest Ferrante

The evolution of the Maltese farmhouse, or ir-razzett, offers a fascinating glimpse into the archipelago's rural past, where the architecture was forged by the dual pressures of a harsh climate and the constant threat of maritime invasion. These honey-hued limestone structures are not merely dwellings; they are enduring monuments to a way of life that balanced agricultural necessity with a defensive mindset.

Centuries of Defence and Stone

The foundations of the traditional farmhouse were laid primarily between the 16th and 18th centuries. During this period, the Mediterranean was a volatile region, and the Maltese countryside was frequently subjected to raids by corsairs. Consequently, the earliest farmhouses were designed with

a fortress-like mentality. Ground floors were often entirely windowless, featuring thick walls built from local Globigerina limestone.

The primary entrance was typically a grand, arched doorway known as the remissa. This was wide enough to allow horse-drawn carts and livestock to be ushered quickly into the safety of an internal courtyard. Once the heavy timber doors were bolted from the inside with massive stone bars, the farmhouse became a self-contained stronghold, protecting the family and their vital assets from external threats.

Architectural Ingenuity in a Treeless Landscape

Malta's lack of large timber forests forced master builders to innovate using the one resource that was available in abundance: stone. This led to the development of distinct structural features that define the razzett aesthetic.

Because long wooden beams were unavailable to span wide rooms, builders utilised the kileb—a system of stone corbels or arches that supported heavy stone slabs known as xriek. This created the iconic vaulted ceilings found in many traditional Maltese homes. The walls themselves were often double-skinned, with the gap between the inner and outer stone faces filled with rubble and earth. This provided exceptional thermal mass, ensuring that the interiors remained remarkably cool during the blistering Mediterranean summers and retained warmth during the damp winters.

The Functional Layout of Rural Life

The internal organisation of the farmhouse was strictly divided by function. The ground floor was the domain of the animals and the harvest. Mangers (maxtura) were carved directly into the stone walls, and small rooms were dedicated to the storage of carob, grain, and tools.

The family lived on the upper floor, which was reached via an external stone staircase located in the central courtyard. This separation kept the living quarters away from the heat and smells of the stables. The courtyard, or bitħa, served as the lung of the house, providing light and a private outdoor space for domestic tasks like weaving, lacemaking, and food preparation.

HARVESTING SALT IN XWEJNI AND WIED IL-GĦASRI, GOZO SINCE 1860

By Ernest Ferrante

The salt pans along the coastline are filled with sea water to be evaporated by the hot sun leaving behind the crystalline salt to be collected and eventually sold. The weather controls salt production, for example, the northerly winds dries up the seawater faster.

Harvesting salt has been part of Josephine Xuereb family tradition for generations since 1860.

Josephine, alongside with her husband and mother continue to this work, but, sadly this tradition that dates back to the Phoenician times is somewhat dying out.

"It's very labour-intensive, and it still being done the traditional way," said 50-year-old Josephine. "The only machinery we use is the motor pump for irrigation. Salt harvesting has been running in my family for many years... I'm the fifth generation. There might be a sixth generation... I hope it will continue".

After sweeping up the salt with wooden brooms, the family carry it in buckets and heap it into a mound, and then cover it to dry out.

Forming a checkerboard pattern, the Xwejni Salt Pans stretch for some distance on Gozo's rugged rocky northern coast, but most of the old pans are no longer in use.

"We have got about 350 small pans from where we extract the salt and we have 12 big pools from where we get the water," she said. "First we pump the sea water directly into the big pools and then we let the water concentrate there. In the days when people bought large quantities of salt to preserve food, the practice was a key source of income but nowadays there are few farmers and less demand", Josephine said.

The weather has a big impact on the harvest of course. In a good season, the family business harvests about 20 tonnes of salt but during some summers they managed less than half of that amount.

"Sometimes it's very challenging due to bad weather, high winds and the big waves that wash away the salt," Josephine continued. "High humidity means the rock remains cold so it's very difficult to dry."

Josephine's father Leli Cini sells the salt to tourists from a small street stall. "The market has changed quite a lot. Nowadays we have a good demand from tourists….which is the main source of our income. Everyone is opting for natural and organic food these days," she said.

Sea salt is still prized for its flavour and texture, which is considered by some serious food lovers to be superior to the more common mined table salt.

Salt harvesting is part of Malta and Gozo national heritage and historically important. We hope that this tradition continues to generations to come.

Another successful and enjoyable social evening was hosted on Saturday 9 May by the St Helena Maltese Australian Social Club & Seniors Group, with this year's Mother's Day celebration once again bringing together members, families, friends and supporters in a warm atmosphere of Maltese community spirit.

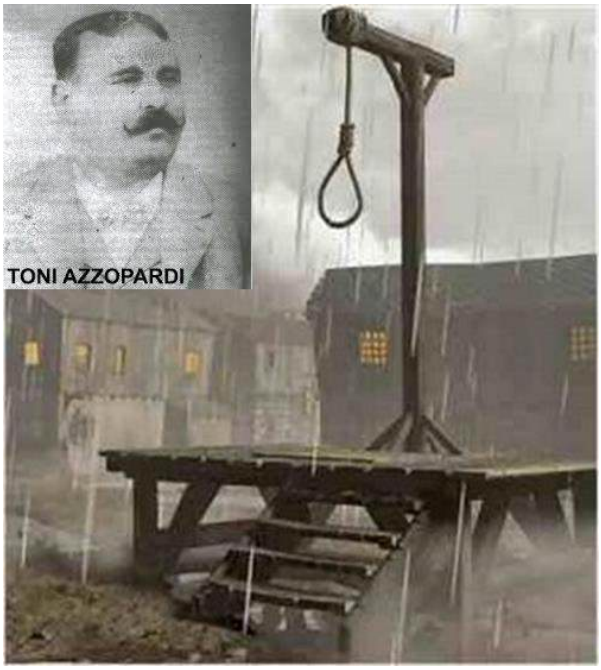
The hall was beautifully decorated for the occasion, setting the scene for an evening filled with friendship, entertainment and appreciation for all mothers present. Proceedings commenced with the Maltese and Australian National Anthems, followed by a welcome address from President Victor, who acknowledged Association founder Mr Reno Grima, major sponsors Alfred and Rose Xerri of the Roxburgh Hotel & Bistro, visiting association representatives, committee members and supporters.

Guests enjoyed traditional "Ħobż biż-Żejt" entrée, followed by dinner, refreshments and cassata dessert, while DJ Dominic kept the dance floor alive throughout the evening with music suited to all ages and tastes. One of the highlights of the night came when all ladies were invited onto the dance floor during the playing of "Simply The Best", followed by the Association Anthem performed by Maltese singer Renato, creating a wonderful atmosphere of celebration and togetherness.

As part of the annual Mother's Day tradition, all ladies attending received a special gift from the Association President and Committee, a gesture warmly appreciated by everyone present.

The evening also featured the ever-popular raffle draw, with all tickets sold on the night. In keeping with tradition, Association founder Mr Reno Grima drew the first winning ticket, with many excellent prizes enjoyed by the lucky winners, including the door prize recipient.

Congratulations and sincere thanks are extended to President Victor, the Committee, volunteers and supporters for once again organising an event that continues to strengthen Maltese culture, friendship and community spirit within the Australian Maltese diaspora. E. Brincat



THE CASE OF NINU "XKORA" TONI AZZOPARDI

Ninu Xkora, Toni Azzopardi, has become a legend and part of our Maltese folklore. This man was hanged as he had killed his daughter's lover, a thirty-year-old man who was seducing Xkora's fifteen-year-old daughter. Did this father have no right to defend his daughter from this paedophile? Was he given a fair trial, when the whole courtroom spoke Italian, as was customary in those days, and he did not understand what was being said against him? Was he given a decent burial?

All these questions arise when we speak about this man who was unjustly treated by eighteenth century society.

The story starts when Ninu, grieved by his wife's death and the death of 4 of his offspring, used to drink and play cards only to end up in considerable debt with Joseph Camenzuli – who eventually became his daughter's lover. He used to refuse to go home and eat with his 2 remaining daughters and found refuge in Camenzuli's inn, drinking and spending money uncontrollably.

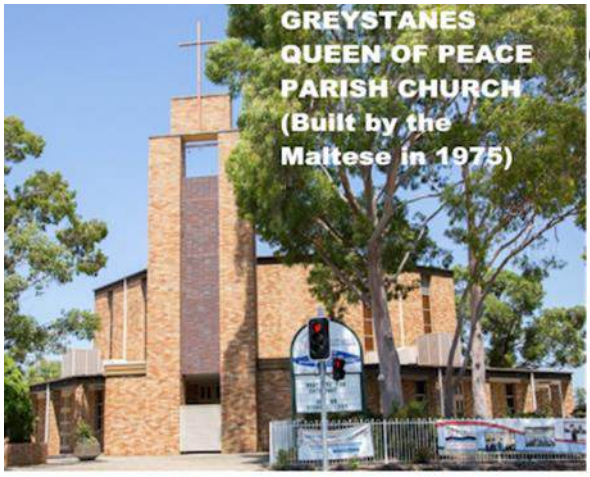
One night, Stella his daughter, came to tell her father that their maid had supper laid on the table, and that everyone was waiting for his arrival. He shouted at Stella to go home and that he was not returning home, before he finished playing cards with his mates.

Before leaving, Joseph,Camenzuli 25 years of age, Toni's friend, told Stella if she would like to come and see him in the coming days at his inn, so that they could chat and get to know each other better. Stella immediately fell in love with Joseph and a love story between the two soon ensued. Ninu was not at all happy when he learnt about this and forbade the two from speaking to each other again. Unfortunately, they did not pay attention to his words, and this brought a catastrophe…

One morning, exactly on the 6th December 1907, as Joseph was opening his inn, preparing for a day's work, Ninu rushed towards him and struck him 14 times with a dagger in his chest. When the magistrate heard the case, Ninu's verdict was that he was to be hanged. His burial took place a few hours after his death and many are of the belief that he was buried alive.

Legend has it that Ninu's spirit still haunts the Prison Cemetery as a lady relates the story when she went to place some oil so as to light a lantern on his tomb and found the cemetery to be closed. No sooner had she turned around to start walking home, a man called her and asked if she needed anything. The lady told the man that she wanted to place some oil in a lantern to light Ninu's tomb. The man offered that he would do this himself and took the oil from the lady's hands and thanked her heartily.

When the lady related the story to two guards who were there in the following days, she was shown a photo and asked if she recognized the man in the picture. She did not hesitate to utter that the man in the photo was the same man who had taken the oil and offered to place it on Ninu's grave. The guards then gave her the shocking news, that the man was no-one else except Ninu Xkora himself



Greystanes NSW known as Little Malta

Degiorgio's Deli opposite the Maltese Church 1960

The Greystanes area was used for poultry farming throughout the twentieth century. Frank Cefai, a Maltese migrant, was a well-known developer who built hundreds of residential homes and infrastructure throughout Greystanes and its surrounding suburbs.[9] In 1973, Frank was the main contribution to the record year of development applications at Holroyd Council for Greystanes and its surrounding suburbs.

In the early 1950s, the Maltese community raised donations to help Wentworthville parish purchase the land from a poultry farmer, upon the highest hill of Greystanes to build a new Catholic church, school and parish.[F] Frank Cefai began the construction of St Simon Stock Catholic Church. Dams were filled in and poultry sheds were knocked down. The original St Simon Stock Catholic Church is located where the current science block of St Paul's Catholic High School is. This church was also used as the classrooms for the St Simon Stock Primary and High School.

The St. Simon Stock primary school was completed in 1958 and its all boys high school in 1962. As well as parish buildings and a nuns convent. Frank Cefai built and helped fund the Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church and these surrounding primary and secondary schools and parish buildings. In 1975, Frank Cefai completed the construction of Our Lady Queen of Peace church.

From 1957 to 1965, the Parish was cared for by the Maltese Carmelite Fathers and Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School was run by the Sisters of Mercy. From 1965 to 1988, The Dominican Sisters of Malta ran OLQP Primary School. Their Dominican Order coat of arms forms the OLQP logo.[15] The Blessed Imelda Convent at OLQP Primary School was closed in 1988 and moved to St. Dominic Hostel, in Blacktown, Sydney (which was built by Frank Cefai); leaving OLQP a fully staffed lay school.

The Greystanes area was dubbed “Little Malta” by the Sydney Sun newspaper due to the influx of Maltese migrants since the 1910s who had settled in the area and taken up poultry farming or market gardening. By 1932, 30% of the produce sold at the Sydney fruit and vegetable markets was supplied by Maltese market gardeners.[19] Gozo Road, Greystanes is named after Gozo – the second largest Island in Malta. Baiada Chickens, Cordina Farms and Pace Farm Eggs; were founded and operated by local members of the Greystanes Maltese community.

Former Maltese corner shop in front of OLQP Catholic Church, corner of Ettalong Rd & Old Prospect Rd. The Maltese Club, previously owned by the Catholic Church, was located on the current site of Genista Aged Care Facility at 185 Old Prospect Road. The former corner shop across the road from the Catholic church, was one of many Maltese stores in the area, which sold pastizzi, kinnie and ravioli. There was also The Maltese Herald newspaper, founded by Nicholas

1Frank Cefai, Master builder, laying the foundation Stone of the Greystanes Church

Bonello, Vincent Pisani and Lawrence Dimech in 1961.[21] The Maltese Herald ran for fifty-two years with its final edition in 2013. Greystanes still has a large Maltese community.

The Maltese began a strong culture of Christmas lights and nativity sets in Greystanes. There are still displays annually, every December throughout Greystanes. Our Lady of Victories on display for the Maltese Festa, in Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Greystanes

In 1965, the fourth centenary of the Great Siege of Malta, the statue of Our Lady of Victories (il-Bambina - a patron saint of Malta) arrived in Greystanes to the great joy of the Maltese; not only from the immediate area, but also from many other parts of Sydney. She is the centrepiece of the Greystanes Catholic Community and Our Lady Queen of Peace church, and is the centrepiece of the annual Maltese Festa procession.[24] She is a hand crafted statue from Bolzano, Italy; a replica of il-Bambina from Gozo, commissioned and funded by the Greystanes Maltese Community. Il-Vitorja or Victory Day, is a Maltese public holiday that commemorates the end of the great siege of Malta in 1565 and the end of World War II. It also coincides with the commemoration of the birth of the Virgin Mary (il-Bambina). Hereby giving the traditional name to this statue (Our Lady Queen of Victories) and festival (Festa tal-Vitorja).

The first procession in honour of Our Lady in the parish was held in 1962, under the title of Our Lady of Lourdes.[24] However, since the arrival of the statue, the Maltese community have celebrated an annual Festa (il-Vitorja & il-Bambina) every October since 1965, in and around the Catholic Church (as every village in Malta traditionally does).

Our Lady Queen of Peace church and parish was intended to be named and dedicated to Our Lady of Victories, in honour of the aforementioned statue.[28][29] However, despite hundreds of years of tradition surrounding this statue, the clergy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Parramatta deemed it incorrect to have the moniker Victories attached to Our Lady. The church and parish were to be known as Our Lady Queen of Peace, when Frank Cefai finished construction in 1975. The statue of Our Lady of Victories is on display inside Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church. She is carried by hand, traditionally, at the annual procession of the OLQP Maltese Festa.[30] The statue is accompanied by the Maltese Concert Band of NSW, who also perform the ongoing celebrations.[31]

A pioneer to the Maltese community in Greystanes,[30] the longest serving

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I spent several years as a teacher at St. Simon Stock College and lived in Wentworthville from 1965 to 1970. I made many Maltese friends. We used to organise functions and discos for the youths. As a social worker, I assisted numerous Maltese and participated in several committees. I used to go to Gozo Road to visit the Maltese chicken growers. Many Happy Memories Joyful Recollections = Editor Frank Scicluna

The Maltese e-Newsletter - the Journal of Maltese Living Abroad has achieved another significant milestone – the 600th edition. I cordially invite you to send a message that I will feature in the 600th SPECIAL EDITION. I would appreciate it if you could specify the country in which you reside. I have successfully connected thousands of Maltese associations and individuals living in various countries worldwide. I thank you in advance for your support in continuing publishing this only and important link for Maltese people living abroad as well as in Malta and Gozo. Send your message to maltesejournal@gmail.com

The Maltese Proxy brides? Maiden Voyages

Tonina and Ted Farrugia on their wedding day 62 YEARS AGO

Boatloads of 'proxy brides' brought a civilising balance to postwar Australia, writes Sonia Harford.

TONINA FARRUGIA remembers her wedding day as "weird" because on her big day, a man she didn't wish to marry joined her at the altar, and the real groom didn't show up at all. Ted Farrugia was far away in Australia, while Tonina got married in Malta.

Tonina was one of thousands of young women who came to be known as "proxy brides" in the 1950s and '60s. Demand for wives was so great among postwar migrants in Australia that the men sent home urgent letters of proposal to childhood friends, sisters' friends, any young women they could contact.

After World War II, the influx of men from Italy, Greece and Malta arriving to labour on major projects in Australia created an imbalance, with too few women. Public opinion at the time feared the men might become "an unruly force without the tempering influence of women", according to ***By Proxy***, a study of migrant brides by Susi Bella Wardrop.

So the search for a mate gathered strength through a formal, pragmatic scheme, organised by the Catholic Church, and accepted by the Australian government. In a defining decade for

Australia, and particularly Victoria, huge transport ships brought young women from all over southern Europe to balance the male migrants. It was unthinkable for young women like Tonina to travel alone, unwed. Respect lay in being married.

The proxy came in the form of a ceremony, in which another village man would stand in for the groom, as a priest performed the wedding in his absence. Ring on finger, the girl would then board a ship bound for Australia as a married woman, due to be collected by her husband at journey's end . Australian newspapers welcomed the exotic female fleet with colourful headlines and photographs. "Proxy grooms storm a bride ship" summarised a scene of men crowding onto a pier and actually clambering up the ship's hull to claim their bride, as shy girls looked down from an upper deck.

Now, after 57 years of marriage, Tonina considers herself lucky to have migrated as a teenage bride to a country she has loved since her first glimpse of Station Pier. Her union was a success, as were many others. Tomorrow, at a reunion organised by the Immigration Museum, many Melbourne couples like the Farrugia's, who married at a distance, will share their stories.

Tonina was just 16 when she took a huge leap of faith in accepting Ted's proposal. She'd known him as a childhood friend in her village of Floriana but hadn't seen him for two years. They'd corresponded a little, then he outlined an ambitious plan: marriage and migration. For a girl who'd never left home, she was surprisingly open to the future.

The practice of proxy marriage was common amongst many migrants from southern European countries from the 1920s through to the 1960s – particularly those of Maltese and Italian origin in Australia where the single men outnumbered women. This was mainly due to Australian immigration policy, which relied on the recruitment of able-bodied young men for employment in manufacturing or rural work. It was also common practice for men to migrate first, find employment and housing, before calling for families to join them (known as chain migration).

Proxy marriage became a solution for many men who wished to marry women from their own cultures and villages. The women would be part of a marriage ceremony in their home countries, with family members standing in—as a proxy—for the groom, before migrating to join their husbands in Australia. The women usually came from the same village or district as their prospective husbands. Sometimes they knew each other; often they did not.

For southern European families, marriage by proxy ensured that their daughters' virtue and future was secured before leaving home. For many families it was preferable to send a married woman to a foreign country, rather than a single, unescorted woman who may be vulnerable to seduction or abandonment. It was often an agreeable solution for the women and their families. There were cases of young proxy brides meeting men on their voyage whom they preferred; of disappointment on both sides upon meeting when small black and white photographs did not quite match reality; and sometimes of men even rejecting their new wives.

Photo: Queensland Cane Cutters, Proxy Husband brushes the hand of his proxy bride with a kiss when the ship Aurelia berthed at Cairns in 1956. Source: Museum Victor