

The Queen and Gozo: Elizabeth II on the Island of Calypso

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Introduction

The romantic story that evolved between the then Princess Elizabeth and her young and dashing husband Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh on the island of Malta with Villa Guardamangia as their headquarters is no unknown fact. Tens of biographies of Her Majesty The Queen refer to this reality and all lovers of the British Royal Family are aware of the strong connection between the Queen and the George Cross Island. It is in this context that the Queen's short trips to Gozo are to be taken into consideration.

Princess Elizabeth on Gozo

The future Queen Elizabeth II visited Gozo for the first time as Duchess of Edinburgh on the 2nd of April 1951. On this occasion the Princess unveiled a marble plaque at the hospital which was to be known as the Craig Hospital and which is now referred to as the Gozo General Hospital (Gauci, 1993: 153). Also on this very day, Prince Philip and Princess Elizabeth, who were then Duke

and Duchess of Edinburgh, visited the village of Ta' Sannat. They stopped in front of the house of Ġużeppa Debrincat, the archpriest's mother known as tax-Xelina, and admired some young women working lace. Ġużeppa offered a piece of lace work to the Princess; later on they went to Ta' Ċenċ where the large water reservoir was being built. When the Princess became Queen, a marble plaque commemorating this visit was attached to the wall of the house of Ġużeppa Debrincat (Bezzina, 1989: 498).

Visiting Gozo as Queen

Princess Elizabeth visited Gozo as Queen of Great Britain and N. Ireland as well as Queen of Malta on the 7th of May 1954 (Gauci, 1993: 154). This was the first visit of Elizabeth II to Gozo as monarch in her own right. She had succeeded her father King George VI who had bestowed the George Cross Award to the island nation on the 15th of April 1942. This is a very important day in the history of Gozo because it was on this day that Her Majesty The Queen unveiled the monument of Christ the King



The Queen's visit to Gozo in 1954 (Photo courtesy of the Times of Malta).

at it-Tokk, now known as Independence Square, in Victoria (Gozo). The occasion was immortalised through various photos featuring this historical event.

Strangely enough, the Queen's visit to Gozo in 1967 was described by *The Times of Malta* as the first visit to Gozo by a reigning British monarch (Pace, 2010: 18).¹ The Queen and Prince Philip crossed over from Malta on the minesweeper Walkerton to lay the foundation stone of a new hospital and place a wreath on the war memorial in the main Rabat square.

The 1992 Visit to Gozo

Queen Elizabeth II visited the Maltese Islands again at the end of May 1992 in order to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the George Cross Award. Saturday the 30th of May 1992 was a day dedicated to the Queen's visit to Gozo. Among other places,



The commemorative inscription next to the north entrance to the Cathedral commemorating HM's visit to the Cathedral and the Citadel (Courtesy-Cathedral Archives-Gozo).

the Queen visited the Gozo Cathedral. She was welcomed at the door by the Bishop of Gozo Mgr. Nikol G. Cauchi, the Archdeacon Mgr. Giovanni B. Gauci and the Archpriest Mgr. Carmelo Scicluna.



HM Queen Elizabeth II accompanied by HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, admiring the statue of Santa Marija at the Cathedral while attentively listening to Joseph Bezzina, HM's official guide during the Gozo visit. HL Mgr Nicholas J. Cauchi, bishop of Gozo, looks on (Courtesy-Cathedral Archives-Gozo).

¹ The subtitle for the paragraph referring to the Queen's visit was 'The First Royal Visit?' - the question mark is to be noticed.
² <http://thecommonwealth.org/history-of-the-commonwealth/18th-chogm> .
³ <http://royalcentral.co.uk/thequeen/the-queen-to-attend-commonwealth-heads-of-government-meeting-in-malta-45954> accessed on Thursday the 16th of July 2015.

Rev. Dr. Joseph Bezzina acted as official guide (Attard, 1992:29-32).

The President of the Republic Dr Ċensu Tabone and the Minister for Gozo the Hon. Anton Tabone were also present. At the end of the visit, before signing the visitors' book, Archdeacon Mgr. Gauci presented Her Majesty with a photo of the interior of the dome of the Cathedral Church painted by Antonio Manuele da Messina; it is a classic example of a *trompe l'oeil* (a painting giving the illusion of a three-dimensional object).

More CHOGM Meetings in Malta

The Queen visited Malta again in November 2005 on the occasion of the 18th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and was expected to visit the Ġgantija Temples in Xagħra; however this visit did not take place. The Queen was expected to visit Gozo again ten years later during her visit to preside the CHOGM in November 2015. The visit was however cancelled due to inclement weather.

On Wednesday 9th September 2015, about two months before visiting Malta, HM Queen Elizabeth became the longest reigning monarch in 1,000 years of British history.



Queen Elizabeth inspects the guard of honour at Malta International Airport at the end of a three-day state visit on November 28. Photo: Matthew Mirabelli. Reproduced from The Times of Malta.

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