

The Lace Programme at the Gozo Campus

CONSIGLIA AZZOPARDI

Introduction

During the past fifty years, while observing the decline of the Gozo lace industry, nobody seemed to notice that the weak point lay in the absence of lace education. Lace making was regarded as a means of using up free time during the day in the role of unemployed females from which a little subsistence was gained to help the family income. When the industrial estate in Xewkija opened in the 1970s providing jobs mainly for females, the lace industry took its fatal blow after having already suffered from the surge of mass emigration in the 1960s. After these hard times lace making was implanted as an art taught in special schools and from there its evolution started to create awareness.

During the 1990s, the then Minister of Gozo, Mr Anton Tabone was of the opinion that lace making should be taught on an academic level as a subject

at the Gozo Campus because of its particular roots on this island. Mr Tabone also took the initiative to discuss the matter with the University authorities.

As a result, in 1998 the present author collaborated with the Director of the University Gozo Centre to set up a Lacemaking Programme. The aim of the Programme, which has the present author as its coordinator, is to provide lace education to all strata of society, be they workers or merchants, male or female, young or old, to teach the craft, as well as lace design and ancillary studies including lace history. Traditional techniques are taught, as these are associated with Gozo's identity, but modern approaches and design also form part of the teaching programme.

The Diploma in Lace Studies

A University course leading to the Certificate Course in Lace Studies was offered in 2002 at the



Exhibits on display in the Lace Room at the Gozo Campus on Lace Day 2010.



Professor Lino Briguglio delivering the introductory speech at this year's Lace Day held on Sunday 25th April along with (from left) Consiglia Azzopardi, Coordinator of the Lacemaking Programme, the Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo and Mr. Anton Tabone, former speaker of the House of Representatives.

University Gozo Centre, and this was eventually raised to diploma level, spread over two years. The course consists of a number of study units on subjects relating to lace, including the craft itself, cultural aspects of lace making (including its history, its use in vestments, and its various techniques in different islands) as well as business aspects of lace making.

The courses were attended by Gozitans as well as by Malta residents, the latter having to cross over to Gozo on Saturdays to attend their lace classes.

In future sessions of the Diploma course this drawback could be overcome by having the theoretical section of the course delivered by video-conference.

The Gozo Lace day

An annual event, which is organized by the Lace Programme in collaboration with the Lace

Guild, takes place in spring and shows the results achieved during these lace courses. On this day, besides the projects made by students, one can see many lacemakers sitting at their pillows at the same time in one place. There are also stands which supply information about local and international lace organisations.

This year the Gozo Lace Day was organized on 25 April. The event was introduced by Prof Briguglio and followed by an address by Consiglia Azzopardi who gave an overview of the works and courses offered by the Lace-Making Programme at the Gozo Campus. Ms Azzopardi stressed on the needs of lace education on an academic level in order to keep abreast with the style of the lace market of present times.

Mr Anton Tabone delivered a very interesting speech about Lace Studies in Gozo, arguing that the Lace Programme at the University Gozo Campus has been instrumental in revising an



Hon. Giovanna Debono, Minister for Gozo, presenting certificates to the participants of the Lacemaking Programme held at the Gozo Campus.

interest in Lace, not just as a craft or a pastime, but more importantly as an aspect of culture and an area of study.

The Minister for Gozo, who also attended the event and addressed the audience during the inauguration session, praised the various initiatives taken at the University Gozo Campus and remarked that the collective effort of all those concerned are resulting in more educational services on the island. This includes the Lace Making Programme that has added an academic level to the traditional and artisan value through the inclusion of other related subjects in the course programme. The Minister explained how lace making is considered as one of the unique characteristics of the Gozitan touristic product and how it forms an intrinsic part of the island's traditions. Thus it still retains an economic as well as a heritage value as one of the authentic products of the island of Gozo. The Minister then presented certificates to five students attending the first year of the Certificate course in Lace Making.

On this occasion, a commemorative ten-year book of lace patterns was launched. The book, which contains lace patterns exhibited during past Lace Days, is printed in such a way as to permit photocopying of the patterns. In addition the patterns are indexed for ease of reference.

Consiglia Azzopardi is the Coordinator of the Lace Making Programme at the University Gozo Campus.