

The Scottish-Gozitan Connection

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Introduction

One of the countries with which Gozo has some connections is Scotland, the country north of England known among the peoples of the past as Alba or Caledonia, and called Scotia by the Romans. Although the bonds between our island and the Scottish country cannot be considered strong, there is definitely room for focus on this theme which may bring to light some valuable historical hints that might be of interest to the local reader.

A Common Motto

One of the first things that come to mind regarding any ties between Scotland and Gozo is certainly the Scottish motto which is identical with that flaunted on the coat-of-arms of the village of Xewkija. *Nemo me impune lascesit* translated into English as ‘No one shall attack me with impunity’ (Bezzina, 1988: 39) is the motto for both the country north of Hadrian’s wall and the oldest village on the island of Gozo. The thistle features in the coat-of-arms of both places however different is their surface area. The thistle is actually the main feature of Xewkija’s crest. At the same time, it not only features prominently in Scotland’s coat-of-arms but it is also the name of the Most Noble Order of the Thistle, the highest order

of chivalry in Scotland and which has its seat in St Giles’ Cathedral on the ‘Royal Mile’ in Edinburgh, Scotland’s capital city. The first thing that the visitor to Edinburgh Castle is told is most probably the very motto referred to above, notwithstanding the fact that its Latin pronunciation would be very much influenced by English phonetics thus not making it easy for a Latin beginner to understand at all.

Gozitan Priests in Scotland

Two of Gozo’s priests have been working in Scotland now for more than three decades. Father Loreto Tabone and Fr. Joe Portelli, both of Nadur, were both ordained on the 22nd of June 1974. Within a short time from their ordination, both priests found themselves in Scotland, the former accompanying the latter for a period of convalescence due to health reasons. Little did they know at that time that their short sojourn in Scotland would bring them to stay in the country for the greater part of their priestly life. Both priests have since become part of the archdiocese of Edinburgh and St Andrews. Both have served in various parishes, thus strengthening the bond between the Catholic Church in Scotland and the Catholic community in Gozo.

It is worth mentioning that Cardinal Keith Patrick O’Brien, archbishop of Edinburgh and St Andrews presided over the festivities of St Peter and St Paul in Nadur in 2004, and led the procession around the streets of the village.¹ Fr. Anthony George Caruana of Xaghra was actually ordained for the archdiocese of Edinburgh and St Andrews on the 29th of June 2010, Solemnity of St Peter and Paul, at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Edinburgh in the presence of various priests from the archdiocese of Edinburgh and the diocese of Gozo.² The late Cardinal Thomas Winning of Glasgow had twice visited the island of Gozo.



Emblem of the Most Noble Order of the Thistle.
[Source: http://www.european_heraldry.org]



Xewkija coat-of-arms.
[Source: <http://www.xewkija.gov.mt>]

¹ Times of Malta, (2004). “Scottish cardinal in Gozo for Nadur feast”, June 27th, available at <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20040627/gozo/scottish-cardinal-in-gozo-for-nadur-feast.119234>, accessed on Friday 13th of January 2012.

² Gozo News.Com, (2010). “Gozitan priest ordained in Scotland”, July 6th, available at <http://gozonews.com/13993/gozitan-priest-ordained-for-scottish-diocese-readers-letter/>, accessed on Saturday 14th January 2012.



Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien, archbishop of Edinburgh and St Andrews presided over the festivities of St Peter and St Paul in Nadur in 2004. [Source: <http://www.zimbio.com>]

A Scottish Name for the Gozo Hospital

Up to a few years ago, Gozo's General Hospital was known as the Craig General Hospital. It must have been called so after radiologist Edwin Craig (1912-1996) of Vittoriosa who was a member of the legislative assembly in the interests of the MLP between 1947 and 1951 (Schiavone, 2009: 607); the foundation stone of the hospital at tal-Ibraġġ was laid by Queen Elizabeth II on the 16th November 1967 (Gauci, 1969: 44). Though hailing from Birgu, 'Craig' is actually an ancient Scottish surname meaning 'crag' in the English language.³ The family must surely have had Scottish origins.

Scotland: A Place for Further Studies

Throughout the ages, Scotland has, slowly but firmly, become a popular place with students from various areas of study. It is in fact frequently chosen by many students from around the world as the ideal country for further studies. This has become possible due to the good reputation enjoyed mainly by the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and St Andrews. Maltese students of medicine, music and law have also chosen Scotland to specialise in their particular area of study. A case in point is that

of Jean Noël Attard from Victoria, who has been selected as a member of the EUYO for the fourth year running. He is now reading for a music degree at the Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland as an Ian Tomlin scholar, majoring in violin under the tuition of Francis Cummings.⁴

Gozo: Home to a Renowned Scottish Actor

A few years ago, well known Scottish comedian and actor Billy Connolly decided to choose Gozo as his second home.⁵ After having lived in Los Angeles for some time, he opted for a place in Gozo, presumably after falling in love with its quiet and laid-back environment. Billy Connolly is famous for his role in various movies among them the famous Mrs. Brown, in which he appears as Queen Victoria's Scottish servant John Brown.

For the last couple of years it has also become a tradition in the Parish of the Sacred Heart, Fontana for the parish priest to invite the Scottish community in Gozo to participate in one of the activities leading to the feast of St Andrew at the end of November, since St Andrew is both the co-patron saint of the village as well as the patron saint of Scotland.

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³ Wikipedia, (2012). "Craig (surname)", available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_surname accessed on Friday 13th of January 2012.

⁴ Malta Council for Culture & the Arts, (undated). "Jean Noël Attard", available at <http://www.maltaculture.com/content.aspx?id=269115> accessed on Sunday 15th January 2012.

⁵ Gozo News.Com, (2006). "Billy Connolly to make Gozo his home", October 3rd, available at <http://gozonews.com/402/billy-connolly-to-make-gozo-his-home/>, accessed on Saturday 14th January 2012.