

Wirt Ghawdex

Godwin Vella Secretary

Wirt Ghawdex, Gozo's non-governmental heritage organisation, was originally founded in the late 1970's with the primary aim of fostering the knowledge and to safeguard the natural, archaeological, historical and anthropological patrimony of the island. Eventually, it was re-founded on 12 July 1996, by Magistrate Paul Coppini, who is the President of the Society.

Initiatives for the protection of Gozo's heritage include active participation in the management, restoration and rehabilitation of cultural monuments and natural sites, and an increasing public awareness of the island's patrimony. Currently, the Society is working on three restoration projects, being: the Imgarr ix-Xini 17th century coast watch tower, the Santa Cecilja medieval chapel, and the Xlendi mid 20th century emergency flour mill.

Built in 1661, Mgarr ix-Xini coast watch tower is one of fourteen constructed during the reign of Grand Master de Redin. Its position was particularly ideal for controlling traffic in and out of the Mgarr ix-Xini creek. Set on a square plan, its interior is divided in two floors. The roof is flat. Although its design is similar to that of the other towers constructed during 1658 and 1659, it is slightly larger in size and varies from the other de Redin towers in that it has only one entrance. It was reached via a flight of steps and a drawbridge which now no longer exists. Wirt Ghawdex is expected to fork out Lm 5,000 (for technical advice and all materials needed), as the scaffolding and labour is to be supplied by the Ministry for Gozo.

The second restoration project which Wirt Ghawdex intends to complete in the coming couple of years is the unique medieval chapel of Santa Cecilja. Apart from its

gabled roof, the most interesting feature of this chapel is the fact that it is partially sunk in the ground and partially built above-ground. When restored, this country chapel and its adjacent room will host the premises of the Society, comprising a well-equipped office and a state-of-the-art multipurpose hall.

Xlendi bay treasures one of the eight emergency flour mills built during the early 1950's in the Maltese islands. Although barely visible, it constitutes the major and best preserved monument belonging to the industrial archaeology period in Gozo. The mill consists of a long 3 metre wide tunnel leading to a spacious chamber housing a series of cleaning, grounding and sifting machines, all powered by an 80hp diesel engine. Wirt Ghawdex, with the collaboration of the Munxar Local Council, intends to turn the site into a cultural attraction. The concept of minimum intervention, the principle of preserving the original fabric and the philosophy of allowing any interventions to be clearly identifiable from the rest will be meticulously observed in the restoration projects described.

