

FOLKLORE NEWS

MALTA FOLKLORE SOCIETY

In 1964 a group of folklore enthusiasts formed a Malta Folklore Society and at a general meeting held on December 21, 1964 at the Anglo-Maltese League Headquarters in Valletta, the following Committee for 1965 was elected:

Hon. Presidents:	Ant. Cremona, D.Lit. J. Cassar Pullicino, A.L.A. Charles G. Cassar, M.D.
President:	C.A. Micallef
Secretary:	J. Sammut
Treasurer:	Mro. J. Magri
Members:	Chev. J. Galea, K.M., F.S.A. M. Abela L. Azzopardi G. Cardona.

The Society's Statute spells out the objects for which the Society is established, i.e.

- (a) to preserve Maltese Folklore, to make it known and to encourage the practice of it in its traditional forms;
- (b) to promote Maltese folklore by means of lectures, broadcasts, demonstrations, publications, festivals and other like methods;
- (c) to promote and encourage research into and study of customs and traditions, and other manifestations of Maltese folk-life, the origins, development and practice of Maltese folk dances, songs, music and costume and their relationship with those of other countries.

Membership of the Society is open to all who are interested in the above, subject to approval by the Committee consisting of a Chairman, a Treasurer, a Secretary and five other members.

The Statute contains a provision whereby, in the event of the Society ceasing to function, all its effects, including money, shall be deposited with the Director of Museum to be utilized as he deems fit for the promotion of Maltese Folklore Studies.

The following were elected to form the Committee for 1971:

Hon. Presidents:	A. Cremona, D.Lit. J. Cassar Pullicino, A.L.A. Charles G. Cassar, M.D.
President:	Joe Dalli
Hon. Secretary:	Publius Borg, Dip. Educ.
Hon. Treasurer:	Paul Ascjak
Organiser of Activities:	Carmel Bonavia
Members:	M. Rose Gatt, B.A. (Hons.), B.A. (Gen.) Chev. Raffaele Bonnici Cali Charles A. Micallef Joseph Sammut.

Folk-Music Activities

Since 1965 the Society has been responsible for the organisation of the Innarja Folk-song Competition held at Buskett on the night of the 28th June. At the request of the Society the well-known Maltese composer Charles Camilleri composed **Three Popular Maltese Dances** (I — Dance of Youth, II — Carnival Dance, III — The Dance and the Kiss) which were published by J. Curwen & Sons Ltd, London, in 1967 and since then recorded on Maltadisk by Audiovision Productions, 43/15 Zachary Street, Valletta. These dances, which were composed in order to foster folk-dancing in the Maltese Islands, have been performed on various occasions. Their musical style is derived from the Maltese National dance tune known as **Il-Maltija**. The Society has also encouraged local dance groups to include the **Maltija** in their repertoire and to wear the national costume when participating in dancing competitions abroad.

Lectures

Public lectures were also held under the auspices of the Society, viz.:—

16th June, 1965	Mr Charles Camilleri	Folk-music motifs in modern composition
14th December, 1967	Mr Thomas Foster	Aspects of Maltese Folk-Art
1st February, 1967	Mr J. Cassar Pullicino	Four Centuries of Maltese Carnival
15th March, 1967	Mr John Bezzina	Good Friday Traditions, with illustrations from Malta, Sicily, and Spain
28th March, 1968	Mr J. Cassar Pullicino	Ninu Cremona Folklorist, followed by the first public showing of a film, in colour, on Ninu Cremona produced by the film unit of the Department of Information.
15th February, 1971	Mr I. Zeto	Folk-Art in America

Exhibitions

In 1971 the Society staged an exhibition of Maltese Customs at the National Museum, Valletta. Originally billed only for the period April 15—30, 1971, the exhibition proved to be so popular with Maltese and foreign visitors alike that it was extended up to and including Sunday, May 9, 1971. A report on this exhibition appears elsewhere in this issue.

An exhibition of Maltese Ex-Voto was also planned during the year. Arrangements are being made for this exhibition to be staged at the National Museum during 1974.

The Society was also invited to cooperate in organising an Ethnographic Exhibition in the University Library on the occasion of the First Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence which was held on April 4—7, 1972.

Other Society News

(i) In February, 1968 the Society was authorized by the Ministry of Education to hold its meetings at the National Museum and to show the same Museum as its address on letterheads.

(ii) The Malta Folklore Society is entitled to appoint a member to the Council of Din l-Art Helwa, an Association established for the purpose of preserving the historic, artistic and natural heritage of the nation.

(iii) The Society is making arrangements for the printing of a booklet containing various Maltese Legends broadcast over a number of years in the monthly folklore programme edited by Mr J. Cassar Pullicino. J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE MOVEMENT

The years 1968-70 marked an active but short-lived interest in folklore among Maltese students. This enthusiasm took concrete shape late in 1968, with the formation of the Moviment Folkloristiku Malti. The circumstances leading to the founding of the Movement were clearly explained by its founder, Mr Henry Frendo — at that time a Law student and until recently Editor of the influential Maltese daily *Il-Hajja* — in a Press Release handed out to the Press on the 4th December, 1968: "The idea of setting up a folklore movement originated on Wednesday, 13th November, following a lecture by Mr Guzé Cassar Pullicino at the Catholic Institute in the series organised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism as part of the Festival of the Arts. This lecture was illustrated with slides and films showing characteristic Maltese crafts and customs which are slowly dying out. Recordings of Maltese folk-music had also been played — folk-tunes that were really beautiful but which most of the Maltese present at the lecture had not even

heard of. Since that time I have brought together a number of students and others interested in folklore with a view to setting up this Movement. The aim of the Movement, according to its statute, is to kindle the Maltese national spirit and not to let anything destroy the traditions, the customs and other elements of our characteristic way of life."

Mr Frendo went on to explain the activities proposed to be carried out by the Movement. "To this end the Movement will . . . arouse public interest, especially among young students and awaken the national conscience so that the traditional customs of the Maltese people will not only be retained but also enhanced."

"The activities of the Movement, including the collection of folkloristic material, will range over all aspects of Maltese tradition, especially in the following fields:

- (a) Popular feasts and seasonal customs
- (b) Maltese Folk-Song and Dance
- (c) Traditional Costume, local food and folk-crafts
- (d) Folk-Tales and Popular Legends
- (e) Children's Games, Festivals and popular sayings
- (f) Beliefs and other customs of the Maltese people."

The sudden awareness of a national identity which has come to the fore since Independence in 1964 animated these youths in their activities. Mr Philip Bianchi, Secretary of the Movement, explained in a letter to the *Times of Malta* on December 19, 1968: "It has been realized that in international meetings abroad the Maltese group is usually the only one that is incapable of saying or doing anything to characterize its nationality. The Movement does not plan to limit itself to research work. Its main aim is to be dynamic, as far as possible, and to attempt to preserve and, in certain cases, promote or revive Maltese characteristics which could give the Maltese a national identity to be proud of."

Following the formation of the Movement, the writer of these notes gave a series of lectures to members of the Society and helped the Committee in formulating its programme of activities. Mr Bianchi reported in the *Times of Malta* of December 29, 1969: "With the full cooperation of its members . . . the Movement wishes to undertake field research — sending people into the villages to dig up material, take photographs, tape-record quotes and songs and look up everything in connection with our folklore . . . We intend to have permanently organized folk-singing and folk-dancing groups. Various outings were organized by the Movement last year, one of which was a conducted tour to Il-Mithna tax-Xarolla, the only restored Maltese wind-mill in existence, at Zurrieq, but which has hardly ever been visited by anyone . . ."

Very successful was the Movement's Christmas Carol group, dressed up in traditional Maltese costume, which for two years in succession, with the help and encouragement of the Government Tourist Board, toured hotels, restaurants and night clubs in Sliema and St Julian's singing typical Christmas Maltese carols. The Movement's secretary records that "it was not only the tourists who joined in humming and clapping to the beat but also the Maltese audiences themselves, people who at that moment undoubtedly remembered what their ancestors may have taught them as children, and realized that some use could be made of such intrinsic folk material."

The significance of this performance by the students is well expressed in the following letter addressed to the President of the Movement on the 26th December, 1969:

"Dear Mr Frendo,

I am delighted to have the opportunity of expressing to you, as representative of the Maltese Folklore Society, the tremendous pleasure which my husband (the Chief Justice of Bermuda) and I had from your most pleasant entertainment last evening (25 Dec.). It was particularly refreshing to us, as parents of both "ex" and current university students, that your society had taken the trouble and effort on Christmas night to entertain guests staying at the Malta Hilton — gave us a perfectly superb and well studied programme. My husband and I warmly congratulate you and your colleagues upon your sincerity and dedication. The performance which your society gave last evening must indeed be most exemplary to students throughout the world who, in many cases, are

far too concerned with demonstrations of various kinds, to appreciate the advantages of university education . . .

Yours faithfully,
(Lady) Anne Abbott."

Most of the student members of the Movement have since left the University, and with them the enthusiasm marking the activities seems to have fizzled out. We hope that future generations of students will take up where they have left off and fulfil the noble ideals of the founding members of the Movement Folkloristiku Malti.

J.C.P.

FOLK-LIFE EXHIBITS IN GOZO MUSEUM

The Gozo Museum housed at the Casa Bondi within the Citadel contains various exhibits reflecting ancient folk-life. The annual reports on the work of the Gozo Civic Council, under whose immediate jurisdiction the Gozo Museum falls, do not record the work that has gone into the formation of this modest collection of tools and household objects between 1962 and 1966, which is in large measure due to the good will shown by the Gozo Civic Council and its then President Dr A. Tabone, and to the drive and enthusiasm of the late Henry J. Fiteni, at that time Commissioner for Gozo.

Shortly before his death in May, 1969, Mr Fiteni gave me details of various items acquired by or donated to the Museum that are of interest to the student of local folk-life. On the 15th July, 1963 the following exhibits were passed to the Custodian: 1 large jar, 1 distaff (reed), 1 distaff (metal), 1 brewing bowl, 5 cotton gins, 1 old flint gun, 1 old terracotta pan (tigan), 1 cotton separator (čikk ta' l-imdaq), 1 old brass mortar and pestle (mehrież u lida). To these, on the 18th July, 1963 were added a set of 6 red copper measures from Gurdan Lighthouse, 1 red copper funnel, 1 antique wine press, 1 mule saddle, 1 hardstone base of an old wine press and 2 tapestry combs of an antique cloth loom.

On the 23rd July, 1963 the following articles collected from a Mr Portelli, of 10 Trux Street, Gharb, were placed in store in the Citadel pending transfer elsewhere: 1 loom (with accessories), 1 cotton gin, 1 plough, 1 pottery beehive, 1 antique sofa known as kanapé, 1 lace roller (mkebbba), bobbins charged with thread, 2 sacks full of cotton, and 1 cotton spinning roller.

On August 19, 1963 other items followed, including 3 antique hay forks and an old wine or olive press.

Two baked clay water storage pitchers (żir tal-fuhhar) were added on April 2, 1964 while on the 5th March, 1965 Mr Fiteni passed on the following articles which had been collected from sundry persons for exhibition in the Gozo Museum: 1 antique stone cooker (kenur), 1 large bicycle wheel (penny farthing), 1 lace pillow (trajbu) complete with lace and bobbins, 1 lace pin cushion, 1 large lace pillow (trajbu kbir) complete with collapsible stand, 1 lace mattress, 1 wooden bobbin winder, and 1 wooden linen winder (incomplete).

Other donations to the Gozo Museum, Mr Fiteni added, included a mithna tat-gham, and a mithna tal-miexi

It is well to place on record also that one of the pioneers in this field was Mr L. Zammit Haber, of Xewkija, who, encouraged by the folklorist Father Manuel Magri, collected considerable material linked with local crafts and implements. A small part of his private collection was passed to the Museum Authorities, including two giant wooden cart wheels which he had bought from Kemmuna, 1 double plough, 1 sheep's shear (gężzież), very large and made of iron (not exhibited), a "Y"-shaped wooden instrument very rarely used for trussing straw, as well as a cotton balance (miżien) with pebb'e weights and scales made of rush work (gummar), and a wooden sieve for grain (delu) with leather chute.

Other exhibits at the Gozo Museum include firing petards (maskli), some of them dating from the days of the Order, and a set of 19th Century costumes donated by the late A. Cremona, D.L't.

It is hoped that more items illustrating ancient folk life and tradition will continue to be added to the Museum exhibits, especially if larger premises are provided to house the collection.

J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE EXHIBITION

An exhibition of old Maltese Customs was organised by the Malta Folklore Society at the National Museum between Thursday, 15th April and Sunday May 9, 1971.

The atmosphere of the exhibition was both elegant and relaxed; it was deliberately intended to make Maltese Folklore accessible to as many people as possible. The fact that it was clearly much liked by the public meant that Folklore, so utterly neglected in the past, has been popularised as a result of sustained publicity by scholars and others in the Press and on the air since the post-war period and recently through the wider mass appeal of T.V. in such locally originated programmes as *Wirt Artna*.

In his opening speech the President of the Society, Dr C. G. Cassar, stressed that "we should present to and teach our children the customs, the usages and traditions of our forefathers, especially now that we are an independent nation. For this to be achieved there must be co-operation and union between the Government, the Folklore Society, the Civic Committees and the Schools."

"It is important also that studious people like Mr Cassar Pullicino and others who have our Folklore at heart will keep up the study of the traditions of our country. It has to be these people who, through their studies, will continue the work begun by Father Emmanuel Magri, Vassallo, Busutil, Cremona, Preca and Badger. In our schools our children are taught who our Masters were and what was done during that time. Unfortunately few are those who learn what our forefathers did, how they lived, their daily work, their pastimes, their customs, their traditions, their crafts, their festivities, all of which is our inheritance."

The exhibition was given full coverage by the Press and generally elicited favourable comments. Our own reactions, which appeared in the *Sunday Times* of Malta of April 25, 1971, are here reproduced to show this Review's appreciation of the Society's initiative in holding this exhibition.

"The organisers have brought together an interesting selection of works and objects. R. Bonnici Cali's colourful paintings depicting scenes from ancient Maltese life is a veritable tour de force. The 95 pictures — about 50 more could not be shown for lack of space — range over a vast field of human activity broadly classified under five headings: Old Crafts and Occupations, Dress and Costume, Street Vendors, Parish Feasts and Seasonal Festivals, and Other Customs and Traditions. A wealth of detail has gone into the composition of the pictures.

"Scenes depicting ancient costumes are perhaps well known owing to the persistence of the craze for antiques. Many a traditional character — be he hawker or worker — springs to life again in Bonnici Cali's paintings. The weaver at his loom (*newl*), the cotton beater (*daqqaq tat-tajjar*), the female roof beaters (*il-ballata*), and the itinerant knife grinder (*sinnien*), all have their place here.

"Under Feasts and Festivals one immediately notes the connection between the greasy pole (*gostra*), a popular seaside sport, the May Pole, which declined in the years between the two World Wars, and the *Kukkanja*, a Carnival attraction introduced by Grand Master Zondadari in 1721. The official bonfire ceremony on St. John's eve under the Knights is shown side by side with the popular version of the custom which has survived to this day. One gets a fleeting glimpse of the joyful faces on the swing slung under a tree on Ascension Day (*Lapsi*), the blessing of animals on the feast of St. Anthony Abbot (January 15) and the enthusiasm and rivalry which characterise the traditional horse races on *Mnarja* Day and the 8th September Regatta.

"One could go on and describe the intricate labyrinth of popular ritual and practice — from the grief-stricken mother invoking St. Julian to restore her 'change-ling' son to health, to the significance of the divination rite which lies at the root of the *kućija* on baby's first birthday and on to guitar playing and folk singing, to love and romance, with a meaningful engagement party (*ir-rabta*) and a grand marriage ceremony — in fact, through the whole sequence of life ending with funeral customs that have gone out of fashion and a number of other usages which are still happily with us.

"It would be a great pity if these exhibits were to be dispersed among different owners, destroying the unity of purpose which inspired Mr. Bonnici Cali to undertake the work as a labour of love. Could not the authorities acquire the whole

collection for the Nation and place the paintings in one of the halls of the proposed Folk Museum at Mdina?

"A selection of unbaked clay figures representing typical early 20th Century Maltese characters is another attraction. They form part of a larger collection and are the work of one Scicluna, known as Ta' Rużarja, whose relative Mgr. Giorgio Scicluna bequeathed them to the Museum in March, 1939.

"Various other objects, some of them in glass cases, figure in this exhibition. A few pictures showing 18th century costume and lent by the Royal Malta Library supplement those by R. Bonnici Cali. There are specimens of oil lamps (fjakkli) used on feast-days, old Maltese jewel boxes, models of Maltese dghajsa and of a Gozo boat with lateen sails spread out, lace bobbins and others, much bigger and pear shaped, for making tassels, a cowrie shell (bahbuha) and other amulets against the evil eye, scissors formerly employed for trimming lampwicks. A few silver ex votos and some copper plates used for printing scapulars are of special interest for the study of devotional lore in Malta. Also on view are masons' and other work tools belonging to the Antiquities Section of the Public Works Department, a saddle cover of local manufacture lent from a private collection, some agricultural implements, spinning wheels and other items associated with the old cotton weaving industry.

"A set of old Maltese measures, primitive musical instruments, such as the drum (tanbur) and the friction drum (rabbaba), together with a life-sized mannequin dressed in genuine 18th century costume and another one showing a typical Maltese woman wearing the ghonnella or faldetta are among the National Museum's contributions to the exhibition. A miniature loom from a private collection, and previously used for making baby's swaddling bands, rounds off this survey of ancient Maltese folk-life.

"Those who attended the opening ceremony welcomed the statement by Mr. V. Castillo, Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism, who deputised for his Minister, that preparations for the setting up of a Folklore Museum at Vilhena Palace, Mdina, are in an advanced stage. Mr. Castillo appealed to those present, and through them to the public at large, to come forward with donations of suitable material. May we hope that at least some of the objects kindly lent for this exhibition will be transformed into gifts and donations or permanent loans to the Folklore Museum?

"The life of our people has often been confused with that of its rulers in which it has been completely lost. Past dominations have left deep traces in the people's dress, food and play no less than in the faces and surnames of each Maltese. Hence the need of discovering the life of the humble folk and reconstructing their history through the evidence of popular literature, traditional customs and beliefs."

J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE IN FILM DOCUMENTARIES

Over the past 12 years or so there has been a welcome interest in amateur filming of Maltese documentaries with a decided folklore content or bias.

Members of the Malta Amateur Cine Circle blazed the trail with a series of 16 mm films covering (I) the bread-making process "From Corn to Bread" (II) Tunny Fishing (III) Il-Maltija — Malta's National Dance.

Since 1962 the Department of Information's Film Unit has been able to produce some excellent documentaries in which the spirit and content of Maltese seasonal customs are re-captured and presented with great gusto. Among these one may mention (i) The Blessing of Animals on the Feast of St Anthony Abbot (ii) Maltese Carnival (iii) The Good Friday Procession (iv) The Easter Sunday Procession (L-Irxox) at Cospicua and Vosa (v) L-Imnarja Festival and (vi) The 8th September National Festivities. Two other valuable productions are those dealing with (a) Maltese Festa and (b) Crafts of an Island.

The Malta Broadcasting Authority produced nine programmes on M.T.V. between October 1964 and July 1965 devoted to the dying crafts of Malta. Details of these documentaries, which included live interviews by Lawrence Mizzi with various artisans and craftsmen, are given elsewhere in this issue (p. 277). Between December

1965 and May 1966 the undersigned presented six illustrated talks on M.T.V., produced by Mr M. Spiteri on behalf of the Authority, under the general title *Drawwiet ta' Dari* (Customs of the Past). The subjects treated were: (i) Maltese Christmas (ii) Birth and Early Childhood (iii) Children's Rhymes and Games (iv) Funeral Customs and the Good Friday Tradition (v) Courting and Betrothal and (vi) Maltese Wedding.

Since January, 1970 public interest in the subject has been maintained through the fortnightly presentation of an extremely popular M.T.V. programme *Wirt Artna* (Our Heritage) co-ordinated by Charles Coleiro and Tony Parnis. Although not exclusively devoted to local folklore, one or more contributions with a folklore content is included in practically every edition. The following details are given for record purposes:—

19.1.70 The Horn (Against the Evil Eye), *Ganutell* (tinsel) with gold and silver thread, and Maltese Farmhouse — 22.7.70 Street Niches and Statues in Rabat (Gozo), Maltese Cooking Utensils — 16.2.70 The Cheese Basket — 2.3.70 The Friars' Medicine, The Washerwomen's Spring, The Faldetta, The Maltese Wall-Clock — 16.3.70 The Windmill (Part I), Holy Week Customs, The Altar of Repose at the Imdina Cathedral, The Purkan, (Woollen blanket or shawl), Explanation of the *Passju* (Passion) Game. — 30.3.70 Easter Sunday Procession — 13.4.70 The Sale of Farm Produce in the Past, Maltese Chests of Drawers, The Windmill (Part II) — 27.4.70 Fruit Baskets, Maltese Landscape (photographic study), The *Vedette*, Popular Cures of the Past, Edward Caruana Dingli (Characters and Sketches from Maltese Life) — 11.5.70 Songs by Mikiel Abela (il-Bambinu) — 8.6.70 Old Method of Roof Construction, The Making of Nougat, Boats with Lateen Sails — 22.6.70 Field Irrigation, The Game of Bowls, The *Imnarja* Horse-races — 5.10.70 The Regatta, Balconies in Valletta, Angling from the Cliffs — 19.10.70 Maltese Ex-Votos — 2.11.70 Old Maltese Funeral Carriage — 16.11.70 St Martin's Day, The Monti (Jewish) Fair, Lampuki Fishing — 30.11.70 Bird Trapping, The Hunter's Bag — 14.12.70 The Midnight Sermon on Christmas Eve — 28.12.71 Maltese Christmas Folklore, New Year Customs, The Crib — 11.1.71 Bell Ringing — 22.2.71 Carnival in Bygone Days, Maltese Women's Fashion, The Maltese Country-dance, Maltese Folksongs (with songs on villages, festas, rivalry and love) — 8.3.71 The Maltese Cab (including interview with Censu Friggieri), People's Sunday — 22.3.71 Street Niches, Good Friday Statuary Groups — 5.4.71 Funeral Customs of the Past, Good Friday Customs — 19.4.71 Cane Work, The Blessing of Homes at Easter Time — 3.5.71 The Wheelwright — 17.5.71 Making Merry (on traditional seasonal feasts: Assumption Day etc.) — 30.5.71 Maltese Door-Knocker — 14.6.71 Kite Flying, Customs on St John's Day — 28.6.71 The *Imnarja* Festival, Street Vendors — 11.10.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part I), The Threshing Floor — 25.10.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part II), Songs of Love — 8.11.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part III), Drying of Fruit and Vegetables on the Roof — 22.11.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part IV), Gozo Lace.

For four years in succession M.T.V. has participated in the Golden Harp Folk-Film Festival held annually in Dublin, Ireland. The entries dealt with (i) Maltese Festa (6 days of a Maltese Festa) (ii) The Windmill (iii) An Eye to Reckon With (The Evil eye in Malta) (iv) *Pizzi Pizzi Kanna* (Maltese children's games). The research for (i), (iii) and (iv) was carried out by John Bezzina, that for (ii) by Charles Abela Mizzi. In 1970 Malta succeeded in tying with Russia for Third prize, while in 1971 she was awarded the Third prize and the Bronze Harp.

In 1968 Australian Television produced a 1-hour programme on Maltese rural life entitled *Two Trumpets for St. Andrew*. The documentary, which was shot on location at Luqa, presented a cross-section of village life, with its variegated under-currents — centring on band club rivalry, social classes, festa-partiti, family events such as marriage, funerals, etc., and party political allegiance — held together by a unity of purpose that inspires communal effort in organising the yearly festivities in honour of the patron saint of the village. Although the film has not been released in Malta it has been shown on Intertel in Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.