

**LIFE & WELLBEING HISTORY**



Photo taken before the commemorative luncheon held in honour of Prof. Michelangelo Refalo and Prof. Arturo Mercieca. Seen seated in the front row are (from fourth from left) Mgr Francesco Camenzuli, not identified, Prof. Refalo, Col. Leo Amery, Prof. Mercieca, Judge Giuseppe Cremona, not identified, Mgr Luigi Vella, not identified.

# Flashback to a commemorative luncheon 100 years ago 'Gozo and its dependencies'



FRANCO MASINI

1919 was an eventful year for Malta. After the end of World War I, the island went through troubled times, culminating in the iconic Sette Giugno events that eventually led to the granting of a measure of self-government.

The aftermath of the June riots and the arrival soon afterwards of Field Marshal Herbert Plumer as a Governor seem to have set in motion, action on the part of the British government leading to the granting of the first representative government for Malta.

In the summer of 1919, Leo Amery, the Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, visited Malta to enquire among other things about the island's financial situation. He would eventually play a part in the granting of self-government to Malta, and indeed the first Constitution is referred to by the name of Amery-Milner.

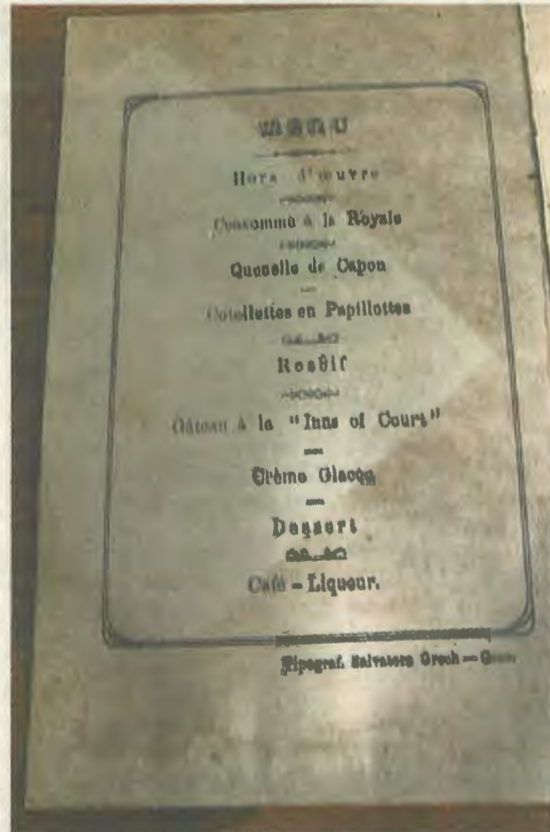
Though Gozo had not been very much involved in the Sette Giugno events, it followed closely what the National Assembly was discussing. In fact, when the new Governor visited Gozo for the feast of Santa Marija he was received rather coldly by the population.

That same summer, two prominent Gozitan lawyers were promoted to two important posts in Malta. Professor (later Sir) Michelangelo Refalo was appointed Chief Justice on August 26, and Professor (later Sir) Arturo Mercieca was appointed Crown Advocate on September 7, 1919.

Refalo's appointment as Chief Justice was in line with a long tradition of Gozitans occupying that



The poster announcing the luncheon to commemorate the appointment of Prof. Michelangelo Refalo as Chief Justice on August 26, and Prof. Arturo Mercieca as Crown Advocate on September 7, 1919. Right: The menu listing the dishes served on the occasion.



position, starting with Sir Paolo Dingli in 1854. Refalo was destined to be succeeded four short years later by the same Mercieca.

The citizens of Gozo decided to commemorate this event with a luncheon in honour of these two important personalities. This luncheon was presided over by Amery, who was on a visit to Gozo as the guest of Judge Giuseppe Cremona.

A commemorative menu lists the dishes served on the occasion. Besides members of the Refalo and Mercieca families the list of people attending the luncheon included about 80 citizens of Gozo. They were drawn from a wide cross-section of the ecclesiastical, professional and business classes of Gozo.

Bishop of Gozo Giovanni Camilleri was invited but could not be present and he was represented by Vicar General Mgr Francesco Camenzuli. Other prominent ecclesiastics present included Mgr Giuseppe Pace, a future Bishop of Gozo, and distinguished monsignori of the Gozo Cathedral and parish priests of Gozo parishes. Also present were a future Chief Justice, Dr Luigi Camilleri, and prominent lawyers, architects and distinguished citizens.

The guests were addressed by Amery, who spoke lightheartedly in good Italian. He started by saying that when he arrived in Malta he noted that the official title of

the island was 'Malta and its Dependencies'. Little did he know, he confessed, that the best products claimed by Malta, such as wine, cheese, fruit, lace, the Chief Justice and Crown Advocate, are all imported from Gozo. "Why therefore not change the formula to 'Gozo and its Dependencies'?" he concluded, to the applause of the appreciative audience.

### Acknowledgement

For details of the event I relied on Sir Arturo Mercieca's eyewitness account as described in his autobiography *Le Mie Vicende* (1947).