

# The Verdala Story



**By**  
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**Guzeppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum**  
**Verdala, Cospicua, MALTA**  
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Special Edition for the Re-Union  
of Staff and Students of the  
Royal Naval Verdala School  
on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2005 at  
Guzeppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum  
Verdala, Cospicua, Malta

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Powerpoint Presentation can be obtained  
by sending email to [ritadeb@melita.net](mailto:ritadeb@melita.net)*

# Let the stones of Verdala speak.....

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- Reach by walking uphill
- Top part of hill levelled off
- Military style of buildings
- Dates indicate that the oldest buildings were constructed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Open corridors link style to British Military Architecture
- Well and caption indicates reservoir underneath
- Dome on top of hall quite particular for Malta
- Very tall palm tree
- Dome and palm tree represent landmarks that can be seen from afar

# Research work links Verdala to

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- Great Siege of Malta
- The French in Malta
- The British Rule
- Malta as a Democratic Republic
- Developments in the Maltese Educational System
- To our own life history



**Oil Painting on Canvas by Artist Matteo Perez d'Aleccio**  
**Date late 16th century**  
**National Maritime Museum, London**

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# Details of the Painting

- This is the fourth of eight pictures commemorating the Siege of Malta in 1565.
- It documents the siege of St Michael on 28 June and shows the Christian Knights cut off from the sea and surrounded in their remaining fortresses.
- After St Elmo was taken, the Turks turned their guns to the forts of St Angelo and St Michael.
- The Turkish batteries are shown mounted on the landward side across the harbour from St Elmo.
- In the foreground gunners fire from the batteries, with three cannons on the left and **at St Margherita**, showing five cannons on the right. The Turkish cannons on the far right can be seen pointing at the fort.
- Inside, the fort is lined with the Christian soldiers preparing to defend it.

# The Defensive Walls

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- **Dec. 30th 1638**
- The first stone of the Firenzuola Lines was laid by Grand Master Lascaris. These later became known as the Margherita Lines. The oldest part of these walls is the Verdala Gate opposite the school entrance.
- **1670**
- Grand Master Cotoner contributed generously out of his own personal resources for the building of the Cottonera Lines. The project was started on 28th August 1670. In Zabbar Gate there is a statue of Grand Master Cotoner.

## More details about the Margherita Lines

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- 1697 - Margherita Lines continued by Grand Master Perellos.
- 1720 - Grand Master Zondadari had to continue the walls when Perellos died.
- 1736 - The Margherita Lines were finished by Grand Master Vilhena.

*It took 98 years to build the  
Margherita Lines.*

# The French in Malta

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- June 9<sup>th</sup> 1798
- June 11th 1798
- Sept. 2nd 1798
- Napoleon arrived in Malta with 472 ships and the army landed the next day.
- Grand Master Hompesch surrendered
- The Maltese revolted against the French.

# What happened next??

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- **Sept.25th 1798**
  - Nelson arrived and put Alexander Ball in charge of the campaign to overcome the French, who were still inside Valletta and the Cottonera Lines.
  - The French had their guns on the Cottonera Lines that is at the bottom of the football field.
  - The French surrendered.
- **Sept. 5th 1800**

# The Victorian Fortress of Verdala

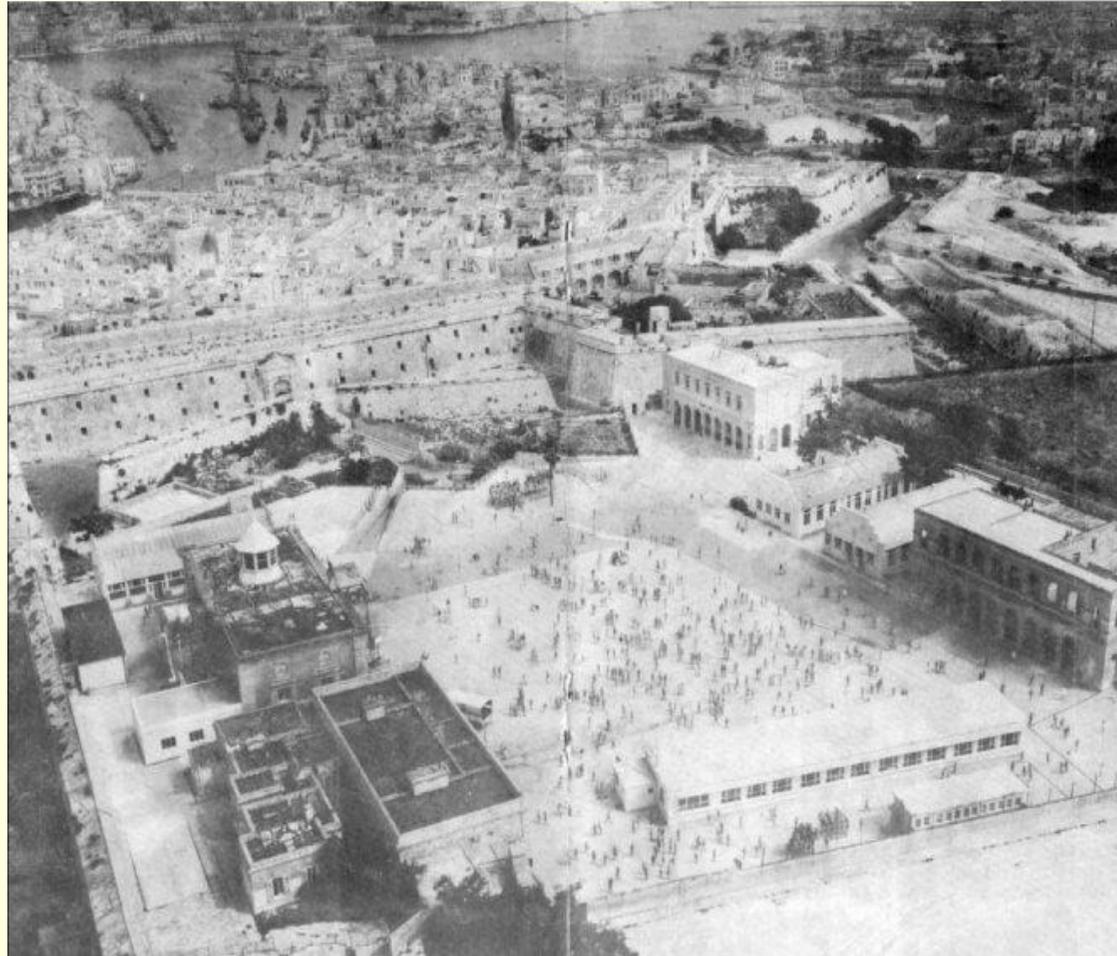
- **1814** ■ With the Treaty of Paris Malta became officially part of the British Empire.
- **1853** ■ The British decided to build the Verdala Barracks behind the old Verdala Gate and they also made a new gate leading into Cospicua. Above this gate there is the Royal Coat of Arms and the date.
- **1844** ■ The British decided to build a big fortress in front of the barracks.
  - Evidence suggests that the fortress was designed by Major General Sir George Judd Harding K.C.B., R.E.
  - Captain A.D. Craigle R.E. arrived with the 4<sup>th</sup> Company Royal Sappers and Miners to start the building.
- **1851**

# The Construction Site

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- **1854**
  - This is the whole area on which school now stands.
  - Two sets of high walls were built from Verdala Barracks to St. Clement's Bastion on the Cottonera Lines.
  - The area between the walls was levelled off for the erection of new buildings.
  - This was not finished until 1860.

# Aerial view of Verdala Fortress



# The work finally finished!

- circa 1876
- 1896
- 1906
- **The first building was the hall.**
- Block E is built
- Block B was built.
- Verdala walls have 384 rifle slits and there are casemates for cannons on each side.
- The guns were kept in the tunnels which run along the inside of the bastion walls.
- The tunnels were also used for storing gunpowder and ammunition.
- Verdala became the main powder store for the Mediterranean Fleet of Britain.
- Water tanks were built to flood the ammunition stores in case of fire.
- The main tank under the playground holds more than a million gallons of water.

***The tunnels are no longer used for storing  
gunpowder.***

# Regiments stationed at Verdala

- 1876
- 1880-84
- 1887-89
- 1890-91
- 1892
- 1893-95
- 1896-98
- 1907-08
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion North Staffordshire
- 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. South Staffs
- 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. Bedfordshire Signallers
- 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. Bedfordshire Signallers
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt. Connaught Rangers
- 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. North Staffs
- Duke of Wellington's
- 1st Bat. Connaught Rangers Signallers

*Evidence – Badges carved on roof top*

# 1<sup>st</sup> World War

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Some German prisoners-of-war were also at Verdala barracks prison camp.

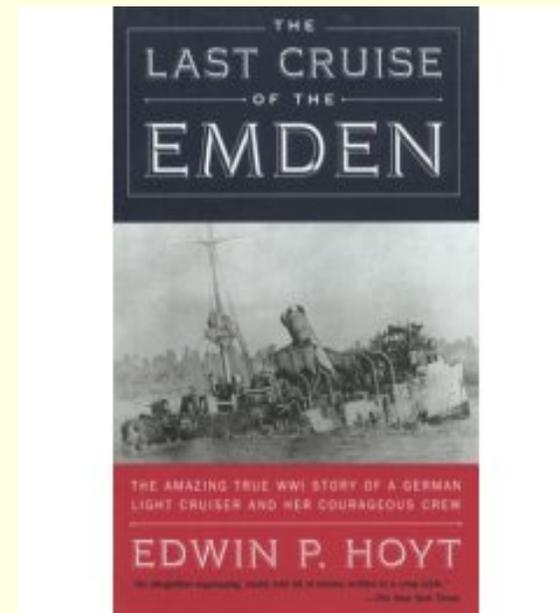
- One of these was Karl Doenitz, who was to become the Commander in Chief of the German Navy during the Second World War, and was to succeed Hitler as the head of Germany.
- Others were officials of the German war ship 'Emden'.

# Prisoners of war at Verdala

Karl Doenitz succeeded Hitler as Chancellor for a very limited span of time



Prince Franz Josef Hohenzollern & Captain Karl Friedrich Max von Muller



# A school at last!

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- Verdala appears on the scene in 1929.
- By then there were too many children for the Senglea building to hold and an old Royal Marine barracks and ex-prisoner-of-war camp at Cottonera in St Clements Bastion were taken over.
- This we now know as Verdala School.
- Here were buildings which would hold 350 children, but the records for 1932 show only 150 boys and 70 girls attending.
- This number increased steadily to 530 in 1938.
- The school also catered for the education of the Dockyard apprentices in the evenings. Top storeys were built on the main Verdala Blocks, in 1938.

# 1920 –

## Verdala home to White Russian Officers

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- The **White movement**, whose military arm is known as the **White Army** or **White Guard** and whose members are known as **Whites** or **White Russians** comprised some of the Russian forces, both political and military, which opposed the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution and fought against the Red Army during the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1921.
- It stood in contradistinction to the *Reds*—the revolutionary Red Army who supported the soviets and Communism.
- Second, the word "white" had monarchist associations: historically each Russian Tsar was solemnly called the *white tsar*, and the monarchist ideal during the civil war was known as the *white idea*.

# School Closes due to 2<sup>nd</sup> World War

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- This story of growth and development was sadly interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1939, and eventually all English wives and children were evacuated from Malta.
- The school struggled on in yet another home at St George's Barracks, but eventually shut down completely in September 1942.
- During the war the Verdala buildings were badly damaged.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> World War at Verdala

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- 1940
  - Verdala called His Majesty's Ship Euralydon
- 1940-1944
  - Transit camp
- 1943
  - Prisoner of war camp
  - Naval Detention Centre
- 1945
  - Demob. Centre
  - Servicemen enroute for ship or flight to UK

# A school again !

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- The Headmaster's report for 1948 said that no more children could be crammed into Tal Handaq.
- In 1949 the old School at Verdala was repaired and restored as a school.
- The rebuilding of the hall was not completed until 1951.
- The School's record year for growth was 1952, when 300 additional children were absorbed, the total number reaching 1947 by the end of the year.
- During this year the school was given a new name **'Royal Naval School'**.

# Royal Naval School Verdala

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# Political decisions -

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- In 1971 Malta 's Prime Minister Dom Mintoff was asking for more money for the British base in Malta.
- During the Christmas holiday 1971, a few days before term was due to start, it was announced that all Service dependants were to leave Malta within two weeks and the schools would not reopen.
- A agreement was reached by the Maltese and British political leaders.
- Two terms later, in September 1972, the school reopened, somewhat reduced in size and with about 50% new staff and 75% new pupils.

# Third closure of school

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- Numbers reached 600 by September 1973 and stayed about this level until early 1977 when the final rundown began to bite, causing numbers to decline steadily to the final total of just over 300.
- School closed July 1977 for the third time.

# ***R.S. Stubbings***

## ***Headmaster 1976***

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***I hope that we have been able to close Verdala in such a way that a cheerful, business as usual atmosphere has prevailed thereby minimising any sadness or insecurity which might have been felt by the children.***

***I am sure that a large number of you will associate Verdala with laughter and happiness. I hope the children will. I certainly will. I will never forget the Pantomines, the Class Assemblies, the Sports Days, the Music Festivals and of course the Staff versus School netball matches.***

# The International School of Malta

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- Jan 1977
  - **The International School of Malta** opened at Verdala for those students whose parents were in the oil exploration field.
  - This school closed in June.
- 1977 -1978
  - The School resumed under a new name that is **The Verdala School of Malta.**
- October 1987
  - The School was also open for Maltese students. Eventually the name of the school was changed to **Verdala International School.** This school moved to St. Andrews.

# Verdala as a State School

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- Sept. 1984 ■ The **Verdala Boys Secondary** opened for ex-private school students whose parents had opted for a Government School. The head of school was Mr. Charles Chetcuti.
- Sept. 1985 ■ The **Verdala Junior Lyceum** was opened for those students who passed from the national exams set at the end of primary level.
  - Mr. Charles Chetcuti remained as headmaster of Verdala Junior Lyceum which eventually became known as '**Guzeppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum.**'
  - A new block was built behind Block F to provide rooms for special lectures, and the teaching of Information Technology.

# Headmaster's Post

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- July 1998
  - The long term of Mr. Charles Chetcuti's headship ended after a span of 14 years during which the identity of the G. Despott Junior Lyceum was established.
  - Mr. Raymond Zammit was appointed headmaster of G. Despott Junior Lyceum. He remained in this position till March when he received another posting in a different school.
- Sept.'98 - March'99

# The 4<sup>th</sup> Head for Verdala Junior Lyceum

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- Last term 1999
  - Mr. Emmanuel Chetcuti became the new headmaster of G. Despott Junior Lyceum. Mr. Emmanuel Chetcuti continued to give his full commitment to the school up to the very last days of his appointment.
- Sept. 2002
  - Mr. Joe Huber became the new headmaster of Guzeppi Despott Boys' Junior Lyceum at Verdala Cospicua.
- Sch. Year 2004-2005
  - Special activities organised to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> year since the school opened in Sept. 1984.

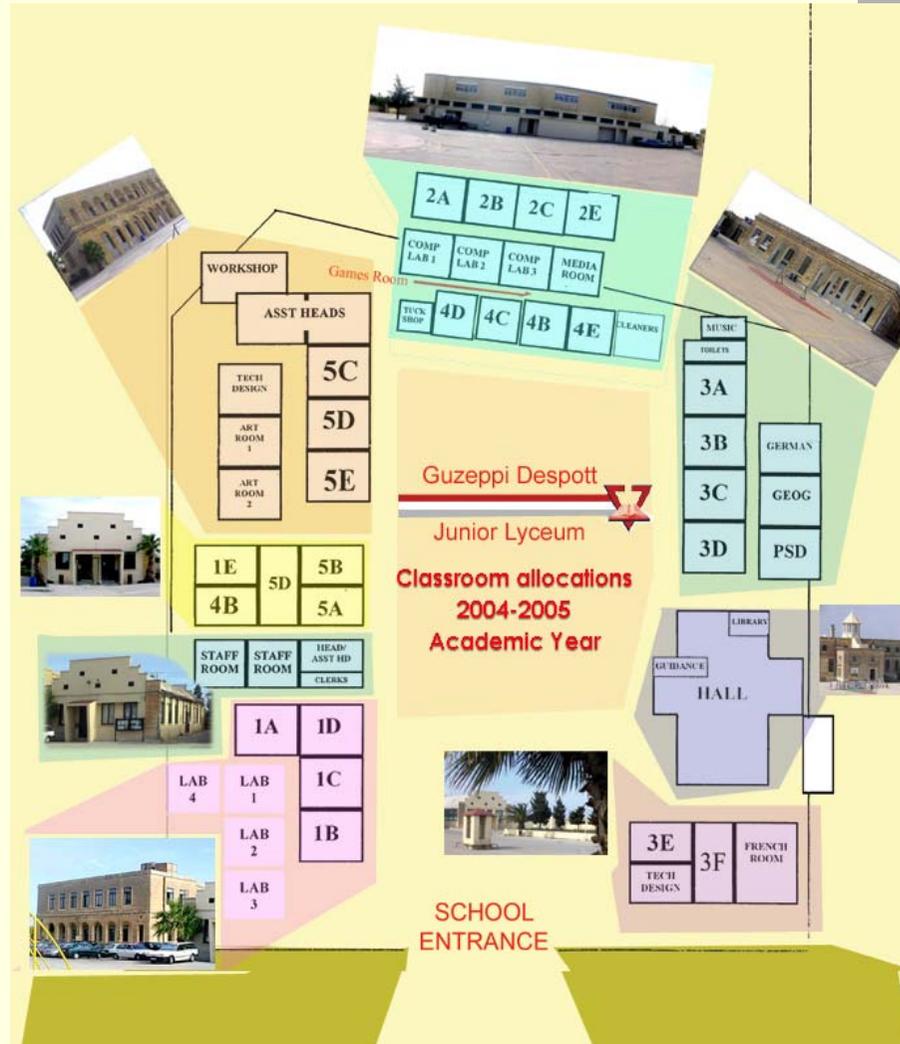
# Special mass celebrated by Archbishop Guzeppi Mercieca for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the School



# Staff 2004-2005



# Layout of classes for 2004-2005



# New developments in education

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- School Development Plan to establish the priorities that need to be accomplished for each scholastic year.
- Annual Exhibition involving students in the planning, setting up and dismantling of sections on display.
- Motivating students to participate in national and international competitions
- Utilising IT technology to involve students in their own learning strategy
- Taking an active role in regards to Environmental Issues
- Active Participation in Global Education Week in collaboration with the North South Centre of the Council of Europe

# Annual Exhibition



# National seminar organised at G. Despott JL for Global Education Week



# Looking beyond the Horizon!

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- Two Comenius Projects
- Theme of 1<sup>st</sup> project with Poland, Hungary and Germany is 'Fighting Stereotypes in European Nations'.
- First project meeting was held in Malta and the second in Poland
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Project is with partner schools in Latvia, Lithuania and Germany. This project is entitled 'My school – My Castle – myth or reality'.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Comenius Meeting in Kamieniec Poland



# Celebrating Britain !

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- To celebrate 200 years of friendship between Britain and Malta a competition was organised for Maltese school children.
- Rylan Patissier, one of our students, won a trip to London during December 2000.
- Rylan wrote about the link that our school has with Britain.

## Extract from essay written by Rylan

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**'If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field,  
That is forever England...'**

*Rupert Brooke's poem can be easily adapted to describe the strong English influence that can be found in Malta. Two hundred years of British rule have certainly left an indelible mark on Malta and the Maltese.....*

*The bond between the British and the Maltese is still alive and going strong. I deduct this from the fact that quite a number of British citizens return to our school on a trip of nostalgia. As part of our on-going geographical project, my friends and I have willingly opted to conduct interviews with these British tourists to obtain the human aspect of the Verdala story....*

# Concluding on a humorous note!!

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Pranks over the span of time -

- *Hide-outs*
- *Chase and kiss during the days of co-ed*
- *Finding how useful a newspaper can be*
- *Ways to avoid a test*
- *Real commitment so as not to be caught without homework*

# References

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- Websites – RoyalNavalSchoolVerdala  
<http://schoolnet.gov.mt/gdespottjl/>
- Newspaper cuttings
- Interviews with students and staff of Verdala
- Verdala primary school year book 1976
- Contributions to ‘Verdala Story’ also made by other members of staff - M. Zammit, L. Farrugia Gambin, O. Calleja, P. Pulis

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*Thanks for your attention.  
You have behaved extremely  
well for such a big class!!*

**Pass on message that former students and staff of the  
Royal Naval School are always welcome at  
G. Despott JL**

***Rita***