

ROCK TALK

Issue No2

July 2009



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Editorial

In this second issue of *Rock Talk* we have started running what we plan as a couple of regular features from now on. The first, a Heritage page, needs no explanation. Knowledge of Gibraltar's heritage is the first and undiminished interest of our Society, and the object to which we contribute our modest funds. This month's Heritage page is contributed by Claire Valarino, a young archaeologist who is the new chief executive of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust.

Our Garrison page is contributed by Colonel Stuart Green, Media Ops Officer at the Tower, and by the talented Command photographer Corporal Ralph Merry. The editors of *Rock Talk* are as it happens civilians. But we plan a regular page of Garrison news because so many of the Society's members owe their connection with Gibraltar to their service in the Armed Forces.

In our next issue, due out in October, we may launch one or two other regular feature pages. We've already had some interesting offers of contributions but will always be glad to hear other suggestions – space permitting!

Rock Talk has now to thank not only our contributors but also our advertisers. Their support is giving us much encouragement. We are grateful to them.

In our first issue we announced a competition for a new Logo for our Society. Two members have sent entries, and though both are attractive the judges have asked for a wider field to choose from. We are looking for a simple design, possibly including lettering, symbolic both of Gibraltar and of its link with Britain. Friends should please send in small but clear sketches to Logo Search, *Rock Talk*, The Friends of Gibraltar, 150 Strand, London, WC2R 1JA, by 31 August. Our Hon. Secretary Janet Whiteley has most kindly offered a £30 book token for the winner.

In our next issue we plan to include an outline diary of 2010 events. But there are still some Society events in 2009 which you can still join – please see the Diary on page 5 and book without delay. And we are enclosing a loose-leaf membership and banker's order form. This we hope you will give to a friend who might become a Friend.

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The front cover photograph shows HRH The Princess Royal arriving in Gibraltar on 4 March 2009

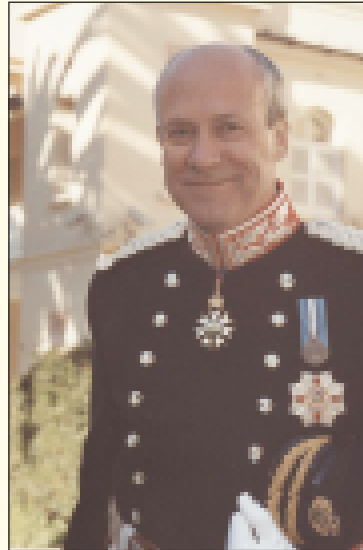
Chairman's Letter

Dear Friends of Gibraltar,

With your last *Rock Talk* you received notice of our Extraordinary General Meeting – made necessary by the experts having told us that we needed one to endorse the small changes to the Society's constitution which give effect to the widening of its remit. Since we hoped – rightly, I am glad to say – that these changes would not give rise to more than a very brief discussion, we were reluctant to put members to the trouble of coming for nothing more than that. So we scheduled the meeting to coincide with the first of our special evening meetings in Gibraltar House, at which the speaker was the Chief Minister, Peter Caruana.

He spoke to a packed room, very frankly and without notes. He gave a warm welcome to the changes we have been carrying through in the Society, and spoke of the value that the Society's support in this country can give to Gibraltar. He also gave a remarkable account of the principles which he has followed in his thirteen years at the helm, of what he feels he has achieved in Gibraltar itself, in its constitutional relationship with Britain and in relations with the Spanish government and with Gibraltar's immediate Spanish neighbours. There is an account of his talk – suitably discreet, as he spoke in confidence among friends – on page 6. There was also a welcome opportunity for members to talk to him, as well as to each other, over a drink after the meeting. We are all most grateful to him for a very rewarding evening, and for his support.

The next special meeting will be in September, when Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fulton, my successor in the Convent, will be the speaker. He will by then be about to leave Gibraltar after three very successful years as Governor. I shall certainly be there to hear him, and I hope that as many as possible of you will want to be there too. You have perhaps heard the



news that his successor will be Vice Admiral Sir Adrian Johns, who has recently been Second Sea Lord.

Meanwhile your new Executive Committee has been very busy working to get the

Society's housekeeping into a rather better state. A number of you – including me – have been the victims of some confusion in the membership list, and in records of subscriptions. I do apologise for this on behalf of the Board. Now that we have a rather larger team involved in the day to day running of the Society, and meeting much more frequently, we should soon have things much straighter than they have been for some while, and I hope that from here on we shall be able to give you a prompt and efficient service. I am most grateful to all those who have been putting a great deal of effort into this, and at the same time to producing some more visible evidence of our spring clean – for example the imminent redesign of our website and of our logo.

Meanwhile perhaps the highest priority of all for us is to get new members into the Society. The best recruiters of all are you, its existing members. So please do spread the word among your friends, family and anyone else you know who might take the same committed interest in the Rock's past, present and future as you and I do.

With best wishes to you all,

Francis Richards



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Diary of Events for 2009

Thursday 16 July

(11.45 a.m. for 12.00 noon)

FULLY BOOKED

The Friends' **Annual Luncheon** is being held in the Attlee Room at the House of Lords. Our President, the Baroness Hooper CMG, is presiding.

Wednesday 23 September (6.30 p.m.)

BOOKING NOW OPENING – PLEASE NOTE CHANGED DATE

Meeting with the **Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Gibraltar**, Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fulton KBE. At Gibraltar House, 150 Strand, London. Sir Robert will speak and answer questions. Members are very welcome to bring family and friends.

Price £5 for members and under-25s, £10 for non-members. Includes refreshments after the meeting. Bookings and cheques (payable to The Friends of Gibraltar) not later than 21 August please to William Gomez, Gibraltar House, 150 Strand, London, WC2R 1JA.

Saturday 26 September

(11.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.)

A FEW PLACES STILL AVAILABLE

The Friends have arranged a private guided group visit to the **National Codes Centre at Bletchley Park**, close to Milton Keynes. This is the wartime home of the Government Code and Cypher School, famous for breaking the Enigma and for Colossus, the world's first programmable computer. The Director of the Centre will speak to us about Operation Goldeneye, a real-life story of Ian Fleming and the Rock of Gibraltar.

Price £22 for members and under-25s, £25 for non-members. Includes coffee, hot cottage pie, tea and biscuits. Profiteroles and wine are extra. A few places are still available. Please write to Richard Wells at rhswells@yahoo.co.uk or 7 Tollgate Drive, London, SE21 7LS not later than 7 August. Send no money yet.

Saturday 17 October

(from 1.00 - 5.00 p.m. and 7.30 to 10.00 p.m.)

PLACES STILL AVAILABLE

The Friends' **Heritage Seminar and Dinner** will this year be held at the Winchester Royal Hotel, St. Peter Street, Winchester. This annual event, previously held at Warwick, is a fine opportunity to meet others with a genuine enthusiasm and interest in Gibraltar. Speakers come from Gibraltar as well as the UK, and this year will include leading members of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. Both members and their family and friends are welcome. City sightseeing in Winchester may be arranged on Sunday 18 October.

The cost of the seminar is £18 per person. The hotel price, for a three-course dinner including wine, accommodation on the Saturday night and full English breakfast, is £70 per person (single supplement £15).

Please contact Janet Whiteley as soon as possible on 012 6481 1101 or 078 0194 8036.

A letter from Gibraltar

Brenda Soiza, who for over 15 years was the popular Secretary of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, has retired, with the best wishes of all who know her. She has sent us this letter.

I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to the Friends of Gibraltar Heritage Society (as it was known then) for the beautiful painting of King's Bastion by Vin Mifsud which was presented to me in June 2008, in conjunction with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust. I was overwhelmed by this generosity and I wish to apologise for the delay in expressing my gratitude. After retiring at the end of September 2008 I requested that my note of thanks be published in the regular FOGHS Newsletter and I only recently found out that it has been discontinued and has been replaced by Rock Talk.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish the new Friends of Gibraltar every success for the future.

Chief Minister Caruana meets The Friends of Gibraltar in London

On 12 May the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, the Hon. Peter Caruana QC, visited London to meet members of the Friends, and their guests, and address their meeting at the new Gibraltar Government building in the Strand. This meeting was the first of a series in which Gibraltar VIPs will be invited to speak to the Friends at Gibraltar House and spread the word about the Rock.

Mr Caruana spoke immediately after the General Meeting of the Society had decided to widen our scope and shorten our everyday name to The Friends of Gibraltar. The Chief Minister welcomed the change, and congratulated the Society on expanding its interests and activities. After welcoming our long-standing and undiminished interest in Gibraltar's heritage, he went on:

“I am glad that our Friends have now decided to take a wider brief and appeal to a wider membership. Gibraltar enjoys a huge store of interest and support in Britain. We want it to be active interest. The Rock needs to be kept well in the minds of as many people here as possible. Now the Friends will help us make the news, views and aspirations of our own people heard in Britain. Your work will strengthen in both directions the links between Gibraltar and Great Britain.”

Mr Caruana went on to give the Friends an outline of the Gibraltar Government's policies. He stressed the importance of political stability and economic prosperity, which had made possible great improvements in the standard of living and social services. Since 1996 the size of the economy

had more than doubled. Employment had grown from 12,400 to 21,500. A new general hospital and a new leisure centre had been opened. The support given to young Gibraltarians at university was the envy of English students. Expenditure per resident at Gibraltar's home for the elderly was more than twice the UK figure.

Attention had also been paid to Gibraltar's environment, and to its heritage. Considerable investment had been made, and was continuing, in major infrastructure projects important for attracting tourism and inward investment. Work had begun on the new air terminal, to be reached by new roads and a tunnel under the runway. After the present worldwide difficulties were over, he looked forward to new opportunities for the finance centre.

Economic success was important politically also. “If we did not pay our way, we should not be masters of our destiny.” Within the framework of British sovereignty, which was of overriding importance, Gibraltar had naturally sought the maximum of self-government. In the 2006 Constitution, that had been attained. At the same time, moreover, Gibraltar had now gained international respect for its political rights and aspirations.

After his speech Mr Caruana answered questions about the East Side development and about relations with the various neighbouring municipalities in Spain, and joined a reception given in his honour by the Friends and the Gibraltar Government office. Sir Francis Richards, Chairman of the Friends, thanked the Government, and their UK Representative Albert Poggio, for the help which Gibraltar House is able to give to our Society. Members particularly enjoyed being able to use this fine central London venue for their meetings.



The Friends: a wider scope, a shorter name

Thirty members attended an Extraordinary General Meeting on 12 May 2009 to consider a Resolution to amend the Memorandum of Association, one of our constitutive documents. Field Marshal Sir John Chapple, Vice-President of the Society, took the chair.

The Chairman of the Friends, Sir Francis Richards, said the purpose of the Resolution was to give formal expression to the development of the Society proposed in his letter to members dated 9 October 2008. Our interest in heritage would remain undiminished, and all our traditional activities would continue. We could attract a wider membership, however, by broadening our scope to include other interests also, including aspects of Gibraltar's present and future as well as past.

In reply to a question, Sir Francis added that any financial surplus would continue to be spent on heritage. The amount available should increase if, as a result of the proposed changes, more members joined.

The Resolution was passed by a show of hands, with no dissent. Readers will find the text on page 22 of our first issue.

The Friends' Visit to Gibraltar

A week in Gibraltar in June has become a traditional highlight of the Friends' annual programme. This year's visit, from 7 to 14 June, was led by our Hon. Secretary Janet Whiteley.

We were privileged to meet both Professor Clive Finlayson MBE and Dr John Cortes MBE. Clive Finlayson showed us the new gallery at the Gibraltar Museum, where he is Director. John Cortes, Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, led us on a tour of the Alameda. These distinguished Gibraltarians have created a Gardens and a Museum of which Gibraltar is rightly proud.

In the Convent and at the Garrison Library we viewed heritage projects which the Friends have been able to help finance. The Convent project, to restore the two murals in the courtyard, which had both become damaged by damp, was shown us by Gil Podesta of the

Gibraltar Heritage Trust and by the artists who carried it out. The murals depict the failed Franco-Spanish Great Siege of Gibraltar and the successful Anglo-Portuguese Siege of Badajoz.

On 11 June we visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Europe, which this year, as described in our last issue by Bishop Caruana, celebrates its 700th anniversary. A few days later some of us saw the baroque chapel in Algeciras where the Statue from the Gibraltar shrine was taken for safe keeping from 1704 to 1864.

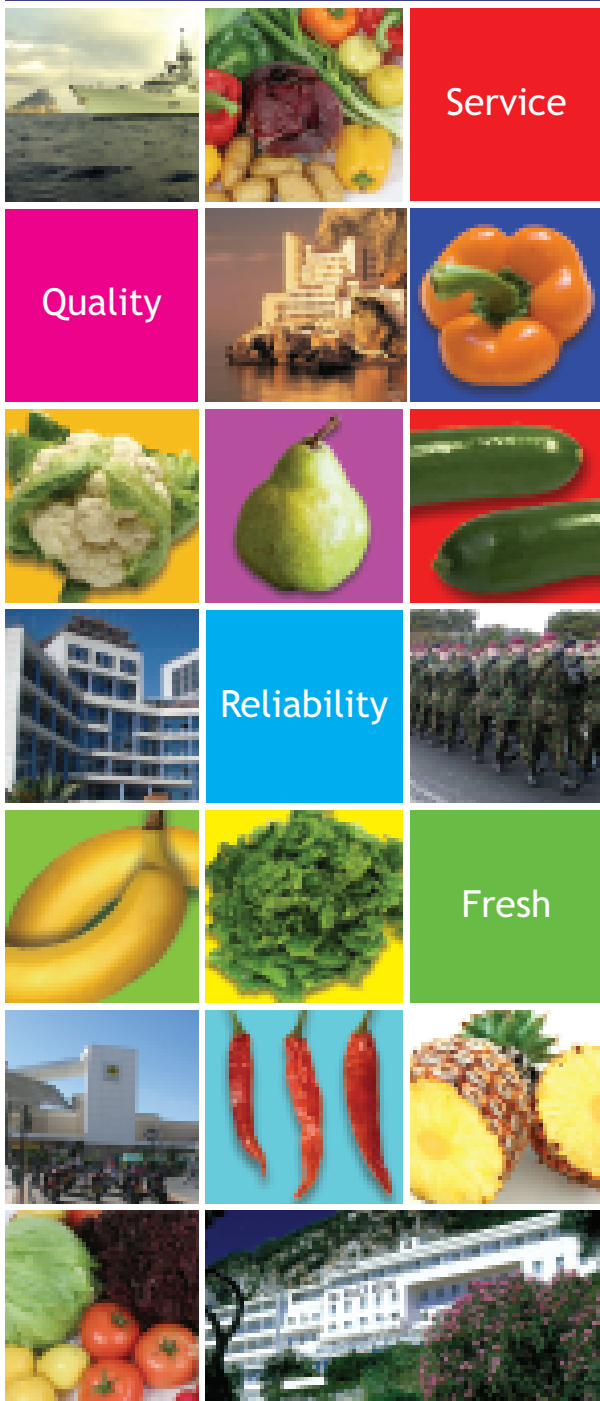
We enjoyed two fascinating excursions inside the Rock. First, the Superintendent of the Waterworks, after showing us the pumphouse opposite the Moorish Castle, led us through a long tunnel to his reservoirs of desalinated water. (The pumphouse is also Moorish in style, but actually late Victorian.) We were then fortunate to be able to visit a suite of rooms, hidden off the Admiralty Tunnel, first opened during the Hitler War and used in directing Operation Torch, and more recently housing a Nato Communications Centre (COMCEN). Now decommissioned by the military, the complex is to be used commercially, for secure data storage, and so will not normally be open to visitors.

On the Wednesday, 10 June, we were most grateful for invitations to two events which celebrated the 83rd Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen. The first invitation, from the Commander British Forces, was to Grand Casemates, where the Royal Gibraltar Regiment paraded, and the Ceremonial White Ensign of the Royal Navy and the Standard of 202 Squadron RAF were also on parade. This was followed by a Garden Party in the beautiful garden of the Convent, to which His Excellency The Governor and Lady Fulton were so good as to invite us.

We were also most kindly entertained by the GHT at their Office, by Joseph Gaggero CBE (President of the Bland Group) at the Rock Hotel, and at the Garrison Library by the Librarian Lorna Swift. Our thanks go to them and especially also to George Russo and Claire Valarino of the Trust, to Tito Benady who arranged the tour in Spain, and to everyone else who gave us their time. Our Gibraltarian friends were very good to us.

The photographs of the visit are on page 19.

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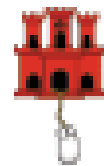
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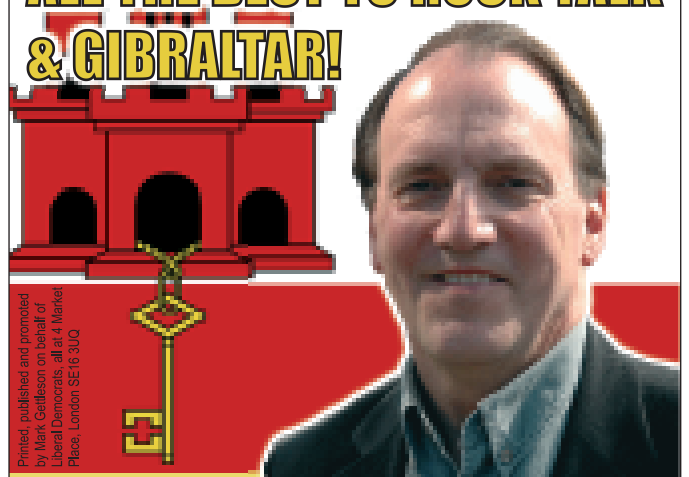
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I'd like to congratulate *Rock Talk* on your launch and wish you every success. I hugely value our links with Gibraltar. I'm always grateful for the warm welcome I receive when I visit - most recently during my visit in May.

SIMON HUGHES MP

Immediate Past Party President, Liberal Democrats
MP for North Southwark & Bermondsey

The Princess Royal visits Gibraltar again

On the afternoon of Wednesday 4 March Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, accompanied by her husband Vice Admiral Timothy Laurence, arrived at Royal Air Force Gibraltar in a BAE 146 of No 32 (The Royal) Squadron. Dressed strikingly in yellow and blue, the Princess was received by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Robert Fulton, and inspected a tri-Service Guard of Honour.

It was her second visit within five years, for during the Tercentenary celebrations year of 2004 she visited the Rock from 28 to 30 June. On that occasion, when Sir Francis Richards, now Chairman of the Friends, was Governor, the Princess inaugurated the Tercentenary Sports Hall and also opened the Tercentenary Garden at the Convent.

The weather this time was not good. There had been heavy rain, and winds still gusted to Force 7. In 2004 it had been much better. And the Spanish Foreign Ministry, though their reaction was milder than it had been in 2004, still described the second visit as “inopportune”. In every other way, it was an enormous success.

The Princess Royal and her husband of course stayed at the Convent, where the Governor gave a Reception on the Wednesday evening and a Dinner on the following day. There was time also for a visit to the Upper Rock, where the Mediterranean Steps, described in the last issue of *Rock Talk*, have recently been restored. The *Gibraltar Chronicle* showed the Princess, with representatives of the Trust which financed the restoration, preparing to climb the Steps.

Thursday's programme began with a visit to the Windmill Hill Signal Station. From there, Her Royal Highness continued to Headquarters British Forces at the Tower. Here she presented medals and met many Service people, including the crew of the patrol boat HMS Scimitar, one of the patrol launches of the Gibraltar Squadron of the Royal Navy. She also met civilian staff and representatives of the welfare associations. The Princess was able to watch a display by the Command Diving Element, but a planned trip on Scimitar had unfortunately to be cancelled because of the bad weather.

Then, with her husband, Her Royal Highness opened the Princess Royal Medical Centre, next to the Royal Gibraltar Regiment at Devil's Tower

Camp. This replaces the Royal Naval Hospital building, in which the Armed Forces had received medical care for 104 years. The new Medical Centre offers a wide range of primary care services, such as physiotherapy, pharmacy, occupational health, a school nurse and mental health support. The site also offers such secondary care facilities as radiography, general surgery, paediatrics and obstetrics, as well as Accident and Emergency. A dental centre is included. The Princess toured the Centre with the Surgeon Commander.

Later, dressed now in a plain white coat, she walked, with Vice Admiral Laurence and the Chief Minister and Mrs Caruana, from Casemates, up Main Street, past what is now Parliament House, towards the Convent. To cheers and applause and cries of “God Bless British Gibraltar” she repeatedly stopped to speak to people lining the street, collecting flowers and good wishes. One of the youngest Gibraltarians she spoke to was

Bethany Chichon, aged two, who was herself dressed up as a princess.

From there the Princess Royal visited King's Bastion Leisure Centre in Queensway. This outstanding project, completed a year earlier, demonstrates how successfully a building of great historical importance can be transformed for completely up-to-date use. Here, besides touring the Centre, she met local schoolchildren, and Scouts and Guides. The Chief Minister hosted a Reception.

On Friday 6 March the Princess visited a project in Waterport Terraces, touring part of the estate, and from there she continued to St. Martin's Special School and Nursery, where she spoke to staff and pupils. Finally, on her departure for RAF Lyneham, the Governor, the Chief Minister, the Mayor and Commander British Forces all made their farewells at RAF Gibraltar. And happily the visit ended in bright sunshine.

An earlier Princess Anne who also was Princess Royal, the eldest daughter of King George II, is commemorated in the Princess Anne's Battery on Willis's Plateau, where the 5.25 inch anti-aircraft guns have recently been restored. Three days in March 2009 added another chapter to the long story of Gibraltar's connections with the British Royal Family.



The Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club

The Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club (RGYC), founded in 1829, was probably the first yacht club to be established anywhere in the world outside the British Isles, other than the Singapore Yacht Club three years earlier. Indeed, very few yacht clubs are older than Gibraltar's. In continental Europe, the RGYC predates the Royal Swedish Yacht Club, of 1830. It is several years older than the oldest in America, Detroit Boat Club and the New York Yacht Club.

Clubs which do claim existence prior to 1829 are the Royal Cork Yacht Club, founded in 1720 as the Water Club of the Harbour of Cork; three more from the 1700s – Lough Ree Yacht Club, Starcross Yacht Club and the Royal Thames Yacht Club (originally called the Cumberland Fleet); and the Royal Dee Yacht Club, the Royal Yacht Squadron (originally called simply The Yacht Club), Loch Long Sailing Club, the Royal Northern and Western Yacht Clubs, and Singapore Yacht Club.

In some correspondence dated 1860 connected with the Club there appears a minute in the handwriting of the Governor of Gibraltar: "I am told by an old inhabitant that the Gibraltar Yacht Club is the 2nd oldest Yacht Club in existence". Give or take a very few, he was right.

The Club was founded by officers of the regiments then stationed in the Garrison. The *Gibraltar Chronicle* of 15 July 1829 contains a notice



as follows:

"The members of the Gibraltar Yacht Club will hold a meeting at Griffiths Hotel on Friday 17th instant at 1 o'clock p.m. when any officers of the Garrison wishing to join the Club are requested to attend."

The Club first met at the Griffiths Hotel in Commercial Square – now the Piazza – and subsequently at the Gibraltar Garrison Library. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that it acquired permanent premises and a Club House on the waterfront, outside the historic walls of the City of Gibraltar, nestling under the protection of the mighty King's Bastion.

The early minute books and records of the Club have unfortunately been lost. The records commence with a despatch dated 27 October 1837 from the Admiralty to the Governor of Gibraltar transmitting a Warrant authorising the vessels belonging to the Club to wear a "St. George's or White Ensign and a cornet or burgee". In 1842, by a letter dated 22 July from the Admiralty to the Secretary of the Club, permission to wear the White Ensign was recalled and use of the Blue Ensign was granted. The warrants of 1837 and 1842 are both in the custody of the Club and carefully guarded.

The oldest regatta on record is the one staged on Saturday 22 July 1893. Sailing took pride of place – of course – but the Regatta programme also included rowing, swimming, water-polo and the greasy pole!

The title "Royal" was granted to the Gibraltar Yacht Club on 13 October 1933 by H.M. King George V. His association with the Club dated back to 1910 when, as Prince of Wales, he presented a handsome challenge cup, now known as the King's Cup, to be sailed for annually. The following year he consented to become the Club's Patron, and the RGYC has enjoyed Royal Patronage ever since.

The first visit to the Club by a reigning monarch was in May 1954, when H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, accompanied by H.R.H. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, visited the RGYC.

Today the main objective of the RGYC is to promote Yacht and Boat Sailing in the waters of Gibraltar and its environment. At present the Club's main sailing programme is carried out in Victory Class yachts and 420s. There are currently seventeen Victory Class yachts in Gibraltar; they are 20'9" long, and have a 5'10" beam and a draught of 2'6". These yachts have a sail area of 195 square feet.

Twenty-one trophies are sailed for on Wednesdays and Saturdays over the sailing season, which runs from May to October, and there are six spoon races. The most coveted of the trophies is the King's Cup, won by the best overall performance during the season in the Victory Class series.

An annual event which is always looked forward to is the visit of the R.A.F. Sailing Association team from the United Kingdom. This was first organised by Air Marshal Sir Edward Chilton, when he was Air Officer Commanding Gibraltar.

The Club remains at the centre of social life in Gibraltar, encouraging many family-orientated activities.

The RGYC sailing school was launched in May 2001, and in 2004 it became a recognised teaching centre for the Royal Yachting Association (RYA). The aim of the centre is to encourage the development of sailing in Gibraltar. It is run by volunteers and is heavily subsidised by the club. You do not



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necessarily need to be a member of the club to learn how to sail, and sailing lessons take place from February to December. Beginners are introduced to the sport during a one-week course in the summer.

Club racing for members culminates at the end of the summer, with the Tango Laser Open.

The Club offers reciprocal arrangements with a number of sailing clubs around the world. Enquiries should be addressed to the Club's membership secretary at:

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The Heritage Painting Competition

by Claire Valarino, Chief Executive, Gibraltar Heritage Trust



Saturday 9 May 2009 saw the Gibraltar Heritage Trust's painting/sketching competition get underway. Now in its twentieth year, the competition has been a Trust annual event since 1991 and enjoys participation from a wide spectrum of the Gibraltar community from locally established artists, to amateurs, to schoolchildren and families alike.

The aim of the competition has always been to encourage participants to take a closer look at the heritage that surrounds them on a daily basis and reproduce it through artistic media. Past themes (all historic buildings, monuments and sites that have featured in Gibraltar's history) have included Parson's Lodge, the Moorish Castle, Trafalgar Cemetery and the Mount. There are few rules, the crucial one being that the painting has to be carried out between 9am and 5pm on the day of the competition – a challenge for any artist! However, despite the short timescales, the competition compels the participant to take the time to stop, look at a site or monument, and create a study of it through art, in the process affording them a greater understanding and a deeper appreciation of the history and importance of the site.

This year's subject, the Dockyard, industrial by its very nature, was not a particularly picturesque site to paint. However the Dockyard and Dry Docks have played a major role in shaping the Gibraltar of today, both physically and more complexly in the makeup of Gibraltarian society. The construction of the Dockyards had a hugely significant effect on Gibraltar. As well as altering the western coast of the Rock through the construction of the docks and moles, the influx and subsequent settling of workers, stonemasons and their families from places such as Malta also



contributed to making the Gibraltarian community the melting pot it is today.

A dull and dreary morning did not bode well for the competition; however artists did turn up and at the end of the event there were 71 entries, comprising 43 in the children's section, 16 in the juniors and 12 adults. Two schools participated this year, with St. Mary's First School entering the Children's Section and Loreto Convent pupils entering in the Junior Section.

The Friends of Gibraltar have been contributing the prizes for the competition for a number of years now and the Gibraltar Heritage Trust is most grateful for this support.

The adjudicator this year was Mr John Langdon, architect and long-time supporter of the Trust. The results were as follows:

Children's Section

1st Prize – Francis Devincenzi (£75 art voucher)

2nd Prize – Katie Norton (£50 art voucher)

3rd Prize – Katherine Stone (£25 art voucher)

Junior Section

1st Prize – Kayleigh Buttigieg (£125 art voucher)

2nd Prize – Timothy Canessa (£100 art voucher)

3rd Prize – Amy Mesilio (£75 art voucher)

Commended – Anna Garcia

Senior Section

1st Prize – Peter Parody (£300 cash)

2nd Prize – Christian Hook (£200 cash)

3rd Prize – Michelle Stagnetto (£100 cash)

Commended – Vin Mifsud, Karen Sisson.

All entries were subsequently exhibited at the Trust's new exhibition room at the Main Guard, with members of the public taking the opportunity to come along and take a look.

The Synagogues of Gibraltar

by Tito Benady

In the eighteenth century the main part of the ration of both the army and navy consisted of beef or pork. Supplies were sent out from Ireland and England of barrels of salted beef and pork, but in order to avoid scurvy fresh beef had to be issued after a few months on salted provision. The most convenient place for the garrison of Gibraltar to procure fresh beef was nearby Tetuan in Morocco; pork was of course not obtainable from that Moslem country. So as from 1705 a number of Jewish merchants from Leghorn, Amsterdam and London who had connections with Morocco came to Gibraltar, as well as their correspondents from Morocco. The agent of Moses Ben Hatar, the Sultan's man of business, settled in Gibraltar. By the time the Treaty of Utrecht was negotiated there was a thriving Jewish community, and the Spaniards were aware of this and insisted on a clause that excluded Jews and Moslems from settling on the Rock. Lord Lexington, the British ambassador, tried to get this clause deleted but was unsuccessful.

In 1716 relations with Spain improved and supplies started arriving over the border. The newly appointed Spanish consul reported that there were not only a considerable number of Jews resident in Gibraltar in contravention of the terms agreed at Utrecht, but they also had a public synagogue in the street leading from the main street to the square outside the property of Juan de Sierra, now the Museum. The British government ordered the lieutenant governor to apply the terms agreed at Utrecht and the Jews were expelled in 1717.

But their expulsion did not last long. In that same year Spain sent an expedition to recover Sardinia and Sicily which she had lost under the terms set at Utrecht. The nations of Europe, including France, were horrified that the hard-won peace established after the War of Spanish Succession was being broken and declared war on Spain. Supplies no longer arrived across the frontier, and as the Sultan had closed his ports to exports to Gibraltar as retaliation for the expulsion of his agents and other subjects, the Jews had to be readmitted in order for supplies to be resumed. Commodore Stewart was sent on embassy to Morocco and a treaty was negotiated by Ben Hatar on behalf of the Sultan under which Moslems and Jews were allowed to settle in Gibraltar. The British government had to balance this with its commitment under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht and subsequent treaties



*The Great Synagogue
(by courtesy of Mesod Belilo)*

limited their stay to three months, but this was tacitly ignored by successive governors, and by 1777 the Jewish community was 863 strong, of whom three-quarters had been born in Gibraltar.

The Great Synagogue (Engineer Lane)

When the Jews returned to Gibraltar they must have made some makeshift arrangements for a place to say their prayers. The first synagogue was built when in 1724 Colonel Hargrave gave Isaac Netto the grant of a piece of waste land in Engineer Lane where he built a shed building for use as a synagogue.

Netto was a merchant who also acted as the governor's secretary in all matters relating to Morocco. He had been born in Leghorn in 1687 and was taken to London at a young age when his father became Chief Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese (Sephardi) Jews' congregation in Bevis Marks in the City of London. This synagogue was an offshoot of the Sephardi synagogue in Amsterdam which had been formed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by descendants of Jews whose ancestors had been forcibly baptized but reverted to their ancestral faith as soon as they were out of reach of the Inquisition. He had been trained as rabbi by his father. During the 1727 siege, Netto was given the monopoly of importing food from Morocco, but the following year his father died and he returned to London to become rabbi of the Bevis Marks synagogue and the monopoly was passed to his partner James Argatt.

Netto was not only the founder but also the first

religious leader of the Jewish community of Gibraltar, and he organized the community on the same lines as the London synagogue and gave it the same Hebrew name of *Shaar Hashamayim*, which means gate of heaven. It is however normally referred to in Gibraltar as the Great Synagogue – *Esnoga Grande*. The original building had its entrance in what is now Serfaty's Passage and was destroyed by the great rainstorm of 30 December 1766 during which some eighty people were drowned in the town. It was rebuilt on a larger plan with a new entrance in Engineer Lane. The building was destroyed by Spanish gunfire on 17 May 1781 and was rebuilt after the Great Siege. It had to be partially reconstructed again in 1812 after a fire; the present vaulted ceiling dates from then.



*The Flemish Synagogue
(by courtesy of Stephen Gross)*

The Little Synagogue (Irish Town)

There were two synagogue traditions in Gibraltar. The Moroccan Jews were prohibited from erecting places of worship in their own country by *shariah* law and therefore normally met in rooms in their own homes. In the circumstances their synagogue services tended to be somewhat informal whilst the northern Sephardim, having been Christians for several generations, were used to the greater formality of church services and conducted their synagogue services accordingly. The service in *Shaar Hashamayim* (referred to in official documents as the Dutch synagogue) was not therefore to the liking of all, so in 1759, another of Netto's foundations, the *Yeshivah* (Talmudic Academy) in the market place (where the police station now stands) was turned into a synagogue. It retained its original name of *Es Hayim* (Tree of Life) but is generally referred to as the Little Synagogue – *Esnoga Chica*.

The Flemish Synagogue (Line Wall Road)

In time the Moroccan influence began to prevail in the Great Synagogue and a number of the congregants decided to build a new synagogue which would revert to the old Dutch customs and order of service. The years from 1793 onwards were ones of great prosperity in Gibraltar as a result of the French Revolutionary Wars and Gibraltar merchants became very rich through the ownership of privateers, dealing in the rich

captures that were brought into the port and providing supplies for the army and navy; so a grand new building was constructed for a sum of \$26,300 (almost £3,000) on a garden bought by Semtob Sequerra from John Crusoe. The building was opened for worship in March 1799. The old palm tree in the courtyard is all that remains of the original garden.

The synagogue copied the Amsterdam synagogue closely but could not have the same name of *Talmud Torah* (The Study of the Law), as Netto had already used it for another of his institutions, the boys'

school. So instead it was named *Nefusot Yehudah* (The Dwelling of Judah) presumably as a tribute to Rabbi Judah Levy who had recently died, but it is generally known as the Flemish Synagogue – *Esnoga Flamenca*.

The Dutch gable can still be seen. The interior was however gutted by fire in 1913 and was rebuilt in marble by an Italian architect more conversant with church architecture. The building is therefore a mixture of styles, Dutch outside and Italian inside, with the reading desk built into the ark instead of being in the centre of the synagogue as is usual. The Moroccan tiles in the interior were added after 1945.

From its foundation until 1882, the minister of the synagogue was a member of the Conquy family. In John Masters's book *The Rock*, the story revolves round the Conquy family who were supposed to be descended from the original inhabitants. In fact, the Conquy family came from Amsterdam and had originated in the Spanish city of Cuenca.

The Abudarham Synagogue (Parliament Lane)

In 1820 there was another break-away movement in the Great Synagogue; this time the move was to something small and less formal. This led to the conversion of the Academy of Rabbi Solomon Abudarham (who had died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1804) into a synagogue. The building had previously been the Freemasons' Hall, which is why Parliament Lane is still known as *Callejon de los Mases*. It is possible that that it had been the seat of the municipal council in Spanish times. (See "The Roman Catholic Abudarham Family" by A. J. Lombard in *Gibtel Gibraltar Heritage Journal* 4.) The Abudarham, a small prayer house with dark wooden pews, was the last of Gibraltar's synagogues to be founded.

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The Royal Gibraltar Regiment Celebrates its 70th Anniversary



The Royal Gibraltar Regiment has celebrated its seventieth anniversary with a faultless parade in Grand Casemates Square and a Freedom March along Main Street.

Having originally been raised under the Governorship of General Sir Edmund Ironside on 28 April 1939, the then Gibraltar Defence Force (GDF) served side by side with the regular units of the Garrison from the outbreak of war in the September of that year. In those days the GDF consisted of anti-aircraft and coastal artillery, motor transport, signals, medical, fire-fighting and special constabulary sub-units.

Following the war the GDF was demobilised, with just a small cadre being retained to train conscripts whose only duty was to be placed on the reserve, but in 1958 the Gibraltar Regiment was formed as an infantry battalion of four rifle companies and a gunner troop, the gunners being tasked to man the 9.2 inch coastal guns.

In April 1991, with the withdrawal of the last regular infantry battalion from Gibraltar, the Regiment was reorganised into an all-infantry unit and it assumed the role of the major army unit on the Rock.

On 25 April 2009, thousands of Gibraltarians lined the streets as the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, now an infantry battalion, celebrated its seventieth anniversary with a parade on Grand Casemates Square and the Regiment exercised its Freedom of the City with a march along Main Street. The occasion was also marked by the rededication of the Regiment's Colours, which have returned to Gibraltar after being re-embroidered to include the word "Royal" in the Regiment's title.

Watched by many VIPs including Field Marshal



Sir John Chapple (a former Governor, and a former Chairman of the Friends), Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach (Chief of Joint Operations) and the Chaplain General, the Venerable Archdeacon Stephen Robbins, the salute was taken by His Excellency The Governor of Gibraltar, Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fulton.

In addressing the parade, His Excellency The Governor reminded everyone that "loyalty and courage, strength and resolution brought the honour to the Regiment that we mark today". He exhorted the Regiment to "guard these Colours well and ensure that those same virtues inspire and guide all who serve under them".

In his reply, the Regiment's Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Perez, stressed that his soldiers of today "continue to step into the line of fire in loyal service of the Crown. Theirs is a noble profession which drives our men and women to the extremes of hardship and danger so that others may be spared the same." The CO went on: "It is this loyalty and this sacrifice that our Colours represent. And so we shall guard these Colours with the dignity and commitment that they deserve. And we shall honour the trust which Her Majesty has bestowed on the Royal Gibraltar Regiment."

The 160 officers and soldiers on parade were joined by two guards made up of 100 former members of the Regiment and, of course, the 40 members of the Regimental Band and Drums.

Following the parade, the Regiment was joined by many of its former members for the march along Main Street, where the salute was taken by His Worship the Mayor, Mr Momy Levy. For members of the Regiment, the day ended with an enormous and well-deserved party back in Devil's Tower Camp.



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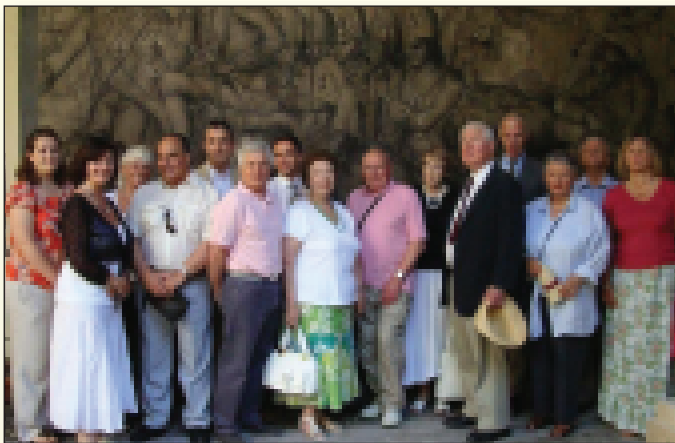
The Friends' visit to Gibraltar_____



The Chairman of the GHT receives the Friends' cheque for the painting competition prizes.



At the Alameda



At the Convent



At the Museum



Outside the Shrine



Inside the Shrine

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