DIGITAL ARCHIVES WEBSITE NEWSLETTER

Archdiocese of Malta

Issue 2 - Tuesday 5th March, 2013

Dear Registered Website User

Three months have passed from our first Newsletter and it's time for another one. Once again we thank you for your continuous support to our website.

In this issue you will find notes on:

- *How to make a search for a manuscript in our website.*

- *Guidelines for Reading Old Documents*

- *Guidelines to Handwriting Variations and Transcribing*

- *The Parish Archives*

- *Zooming the Manuscript Flipper*

Before searching for a particular manuscript we suggest that you check whether that manuscript might be online or not by browsing through the About Us page on our website. It is important that you know what you are searching for. Please bear in mind that the manuscript pages are photographic shots of each page. As such you cannot perform a random search of the manuscript contents itself. When doing a general search you will be searching through the Manuscript Catalogue Cards.
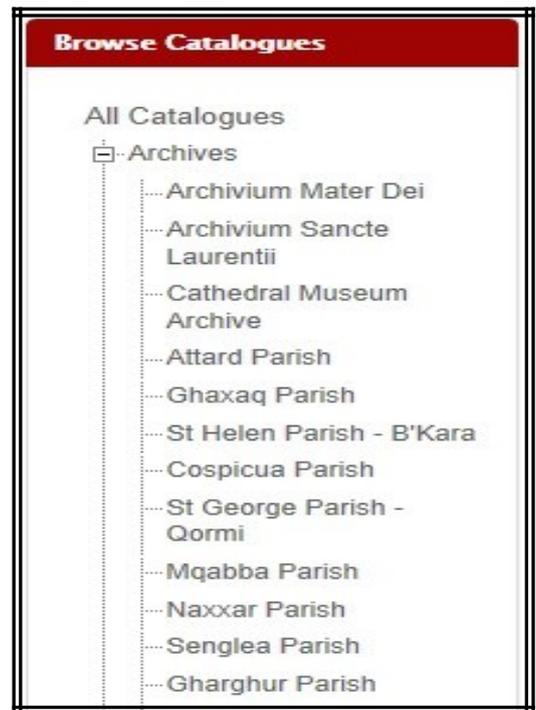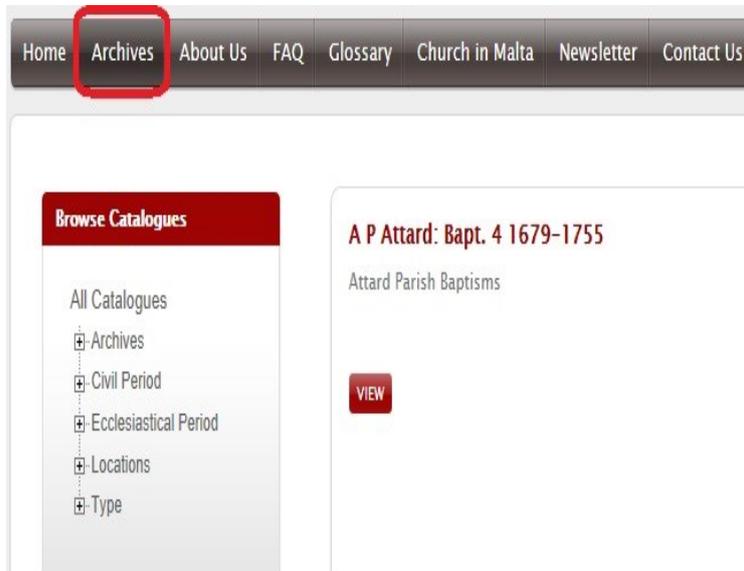
I trust that you keep finding our website useful.

Fr VicGeorge Vassallo
Webmaster

How to Search for a Manuscript

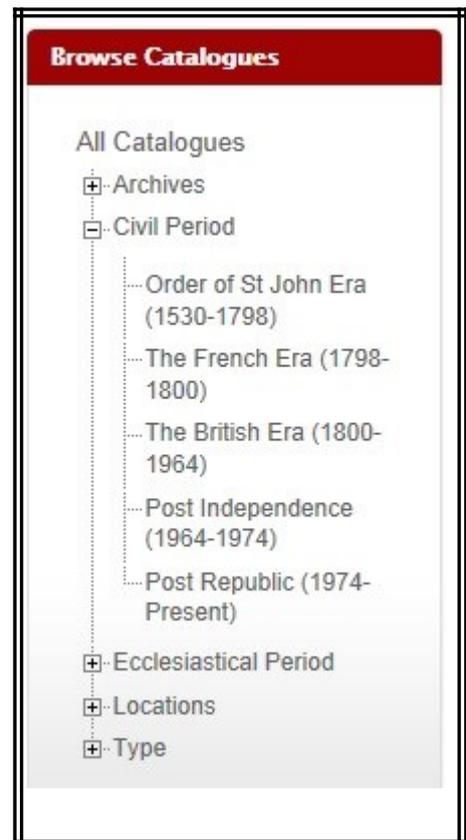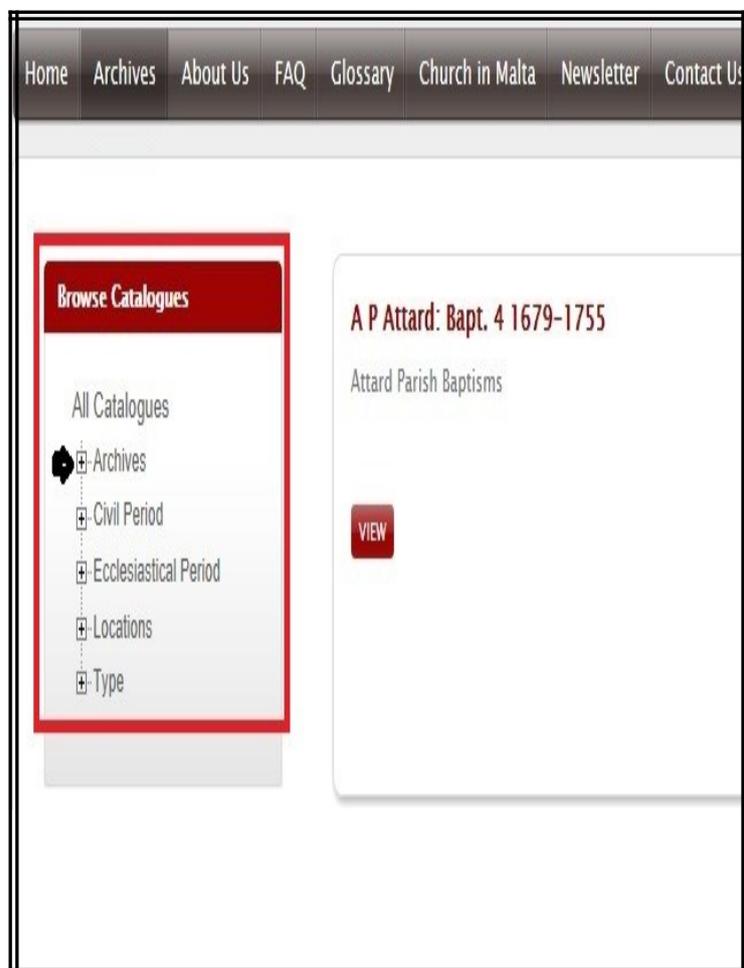*You search for manuscripts either through the Catalogues Section or else through a General Search.*

- Sign in
- Click on the **ARCHIVES** Page

If you are searching by **Catalogue**, choose the Catalogue you need. There are five Catalogues - Archives, Civil Period, Ecclesiastical Period, Localities, Type.

- Click on **+** to expand the particular catalogue

Civil Period Catalogue:

Archives Catalogue:

Browse Catalogues

All Catalogues
⊞ Archives
⊞ Civil Period
⊞ Ecclesiastical Period
⊟ Locations
    Floriana
    Valletta
    Mdina
    Attard
    Ghaxaq
    B'Kara
    Cospicua
    Qormi
    Mqabba
    Naxxar
    Senglea
    Gharghur
    Zebbug
    Zabbar
    Zejtun
    Zurrieq
⊞ Type

Browse Catalogues

All Catalogues
⊞ Archives
⊞ Civil Period
⊟ Ecclesiastical Period
    Senatore de Mello de Noto (02/13/1432)
    Jacobus (12/21/1445)
    Antonio de Alagona (06/21/1447)
    Giovanni Paternione (01/08/1479)
    Petrus de Fuxo (07/6/1489)
    Paolo della Cavalleria (02/18/1491)
    Giacomo Vualguerra (03/30/1495)
    Antonio Corsetus (12/20/1501)
    Giovanni de Castro (02/20/1506)

• Click on the Item you wish to search for according to the Catalogue you have chosen.

If you are doing a General Search type your search in the Search Box as indicated below and click **GO**

Browse Catalogues

All Catalogues
⊞ Archives
⊞ Civil Period
⊞ Ecclesiastical Period
⊞ Locations
⊞ Type

Search

[   ] **GO**
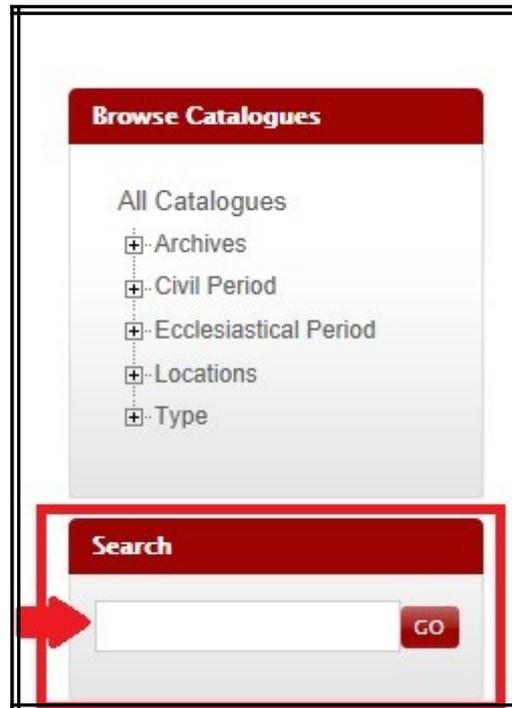
When you find the required manuscript click on **VIEW**. The Manuscript Catalogue Card appears. If you wish to browse through the manuscript click on **PREVIEW**. To preview a manuscript you have to be signed in with your user account. To buy specific manuscript pages click on **DOWNLOAD**.

Guidelines for Reading Old Documents

Reading older documents takes patience and practice, as well as a bit of know-how.

It is important to realize that scribes, clerks, and church clergy did not write with the intent that researchers would be able to read their handwriting several years later. In some cases the writer's objective may have been to create an impressive look-ing document. Regardless of the motives for writing, the scribe obviously had some latitude in using his own abbreviations, punctuation, and writing style.

Fundamental Principles

One of the most important fundamental principles in reading old handwriting is that it is always necessary to compare: compare and match unknown letters, characters, or doubtful words in the same document to determine if they are the same. Compare with words on the same page, and then look on the pages be-fore and after the one in question. Compare with letters and words that are familiar to you. For example, if you think a letter looks like an i, see how the scribe makes the letter i in other words on the same page and surrounding pages. Look through the record to determine how the writer forms the letter(s) in question in words you can read. Continue comparisons until you

recognize the letter(s) you are studying. Look backwards and forwards in the record for similar words and letters. An unusual looking letter, word, personal name, or place may occur in the record more than once.

Compare any letters in question with letters in the months of the year or other familiar words in the record. Most of the records used by genealogists and historians contain dates and months of the year. For example, if you find an unusual looking letter that may be a capital A, look for the months of April or August. Months are usually easy to read and contain many of the letters of the alphabet.

For those just beginning to read old handwriting, start your research in the more recent nineteenth-century handwriting and work backwards in time toward the Knights of St John period. This way, you will gradually become familiar with the older handwriting and abbreviations. With some practice, you will eventually be able to read seventeenth-century records with some ease. For records that have been microfilmed, this usually means beginning your research at the end of the roll if it contains more recent and easier to read handwriting.

Read the document through at a fast pace, identifying the letters and words you recognize. Note any unusual letters, words, or unique abbreviations, then read it again slowly, word for word. Look for familiar words and phrases. If necessary, read the document through a third and fourth time. You will eventually become familiar with the scribe's handwriting style and abbreviations. Do not spend too much time on one word. Rather, leave the word blank and transcribe the rest of the document, then go back and read the record for common sense. You should now be able to fill in the missing letters, word, or words.

Be aware of spelling variations. Spelling was not important. Words were often written the way they sounded, phonetically, and often in local accents. For example, an individual's name might be spelled two, three, or more different ways in the same document.

When you find you cannot decipher, place your fingers or thumbs over the word, covering all except the letter(s) in question. In this way you can study just one or two letters at a time and compare them with other letters in the same document. It may be helpful to transcribe the last letter of the word and move backward to the beginning.

Write out on a sheet of paper or note card the letters you can decipher, or use a personal computer and leave a blank space or dash for the part of the word(s) in question. Substitute letters, such as vowels, a, e, i, o, and u, for the missing letter(s). Every word has one or more vowels. Now read the sentence again for good common sense.

Guidelines for Common Phrases

It will be helpful to look for common words and phrases in old records, and then compare letters in those phrases with words you are reading.

Become familiar with set phrases and words in order to study the handwriting. A familiarity with such organization of words will be helpful in reading old records.

Guidelines to Handwriting Variations and Transcribing

Sometimes a stroke, flourish, curl, swirl, squiggle, or loop was used by the writer and may change the appearance of a letter or word. For example, a capital L may look like a capital D. This may have occurred on the same line, or for words above or below the word, the flourish making the letter look like a different letter. For example, a stroke from another word through a small l might make the letter look like a t. The small letter d frequently had a backward flourish, sometimes connected to another letter. Some strokes may indicate the omission of a letter. Sometimes the ascenders or descenders are exaggerated. Ascenders or descenders, perhaps appearing as a "curlicue" extending above or below the writing line, may run into or connect to other letters, thus changing the appearance of those letters.

It may be helpful to make a sample alphabet of the hand a particular writer used. This is especially useful for difficult to read handwriting. Trace the writing of the scribe. When you have trouble reading a word, compare each letter with the alphabet you made. In this way you will be able to become familiar with the writer's style of writing and abbreviations.

For difficult-to-read documents, it is recommended that you transcribe the entire document, writing only the words and letters you can read, then go back and fill in the missing words and letters. Read the document for common sense and compare letters and words. It may also be helpful to read your transcription out loud or to another person. In this way you may be able to hear what the scribe meant to say in his writing.

It may be helpful to make a word-for-word transcription of the document in order to study the scribe's handwriting style and abbreviations. It is essential to transcribe the record accurately and not to omit any details. Use footnotes where necessary to document sources and clarify your transcriptions and interpretation.

Guidelines for Capitalization and Punctuation

The first word in a sentence may or may not begin with a capital letter. Likewise, words in the middle of a sentence may be capitalized. Capital letters are often used to place emphasis on a word. There may be an inconsistency in the use of capital letters. Sometimes personal names and place names (localities) are capitalized, while other times they are not. In addition, it is common to find proper names that begin with a lower case letter. Do not correct capitalization as shown in the original record in your transcription.

Be on the lookout for initials that were used for given names in old records.

Punctuation may or may not be clearly seen. Some sentences clearly end in a full stop, while others do not. Punctuation was not important and was seldom used. Commas, colons, and semicolons were used haphazardly. A colon (:) was often used to denote an abbreviation. A dash (-) or equal sign (=) may frequently be seen indicating the end of a line or an abbreviation. Note that long dashes or other similar marks in a document are frequently ignored during transcription.

Be aware of symbols, wavy lines, and dots used for abbrevia-

tions or word divisions. A double hyphen similar to a modern equal sign (=) may have been used at the end of a line to divide a word carried to the next line. Sometimes a letter or word is repeated from

the ending of a line to the beginning of the next line (which may appear on the next page), or the equal sign (double hyphen) is repeated at the beginning of a line.

Practice is Important

Most of all, practice at reading old documents. It will greatly improve your paleography skills. Study the handwriting carefully and evaluate difficult words letter by letter. Practice transcribing documents for differenttime periods and localities in Malta. Patience, practice, and perseverance will pay off in bigdividends when studying these manuscripts. Read and interpret the documents carefully. Getting used to old handwriting will come with experience and will become easier to those who persevere.

One of the major challenges facing the genealogist in any language is learning to use and understand older language forms and handwriting styles.... The ability to read early records develops slowly and can only be obtained through actual experience. Do not try to absorb, in a single reading, all of the material written in the old script or unfamiliar [language, i.e., Latin]. It is necessary, instead, to have available one or two of the reference works described while attempting to read an early record until an instinctive knowledge of the techniques develops.

You can compensate for any deficiency in formal Latin instruction by study, patience, and a determination to understand the records. Consulting a good beginning grammar book (and possibly one of the quick introductory Latin courses) and always having a dictionary at hand will also help to compensate for any deficiency. Do not be discouraged from performing research by a lack of formal training in the Latin language.

The Parish Archives

We know that The Parish archives are the most popular section with our Website Users. It is our wish that all Parish Archives will be online someday.

This has to be done within the parameters of the Malts Data Protection Act.

At the moment we have the following manuscripts from the Parish Archives which are online:

- *A.P. Asciack (15 mss, 1626-1908)*

- *A.P. Attard (11 mss, 1581-1917)*

- *A.P. Birkirkara (51 mss, 1557-1869)*

- *A.P. Cospicua (205 mss, 1587-19th century)*

- *A.P. Casalis Gargur (11 mss, 1599-1914)*

- *A.P. Mqabba (2 mss, 1599-1675)*

- *A.P. Naxxar (22 mss, 1545-1895)*

- *A.P. Qormi (Curmi) (3 mss, 1563-1634)*

- *A.P. Senglea (23 mss, 1585-1912)*

- *A.P. Valletta (Ecclesia Collegialis S. Pauli Civitatis Vallettae) (105 mss, 1595-1873)*

- *A.P. Zabbar (5 mss, 1616-1811)*

- *A.P. Zebbug (Rohan) (6 mss, 1550-1720)*

- *A.P. Zejtun (Sanctae Catharinae) (43 mss, 1580-1866)*

- *A.P. Zurrieq (22 mss, 1567-1904)*

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Zooming the Manuscript Flipper

In order to make download time faster to flip through the manuscript pages we had to opt for a lower resolution.

To zoom into manuscript page click on the magnifying glass image as shown below.

If this is not enough you can always increase the zoom level of your browser. To do this this depends on the browser you are using.

Here are intructions how to zoom on the most popularly used internet browsers.

Internet Explorer 9:

How to zoom in or out on a webpage:
1. To zoom in and out on a web page that you are currently displaying, select the **Tools** button and scroll down to **Zoom**.
2.
3. You may now select how much to zoom in or out by. **NOTE:** To quickly zoom in on a web page that you are currently viewing, press and hold the **Ctrl** key and press the **+** key. To quickly zoom out on a web page, press and hold the **Ctrl** key and press the **-** key.

Google Chrome:

Use the zoom options in the Chrome menu to make everything on a webpage larger or smaller.

1. Click the Chrome menu on the browser toolbar.

2. Find the "Zoom" section in the menu and choose one of the following options:

- Click + to make everything on the page larger. You can also use the keyboard shortcuts **Ctrl** and **+**

- Click - to make everything smaller. You can also use the keyboard shortcuts **Ctrl** and **-**

Mozzilla Firefox:

Using Mouse
If your mouse has a scroll wheel, press and hold Ctrl while scrolling up to zoom in and down to zoom out.

Using Menu
1. Press the Alt key to temporarily bring up the traditional Firefox menus. At the top of the Firefox window on the menu bar, click the View menu, then go to Zoom.

2.

3. Select either Zoom In, Zoom Out, or Reset for their corresponding action.

Using Toolbar
1.Right-click on an empty section of the Tab Strip, select Customize... and the Customize Toolbar window will open.

2.In the Customize Toolbar window, click and drag the "Zoom Controls" toolbar item to the desired place on one of your toolbars.

3.Click Done to save the changes to your toolbars. Two new magnifying glass icons will be added to your toolbar, one with a plus (+) and one with a minus (-)

4.You can now use the + magnifying glass icon on the customized toolbar to zoom in, and the - magnifying glass icon on the customized toolbar to zoom out.

5.Please keep in mind that when you download the requested pages your download will automatically opt for the optimal resolution available.