

THE ARCHIVED POST

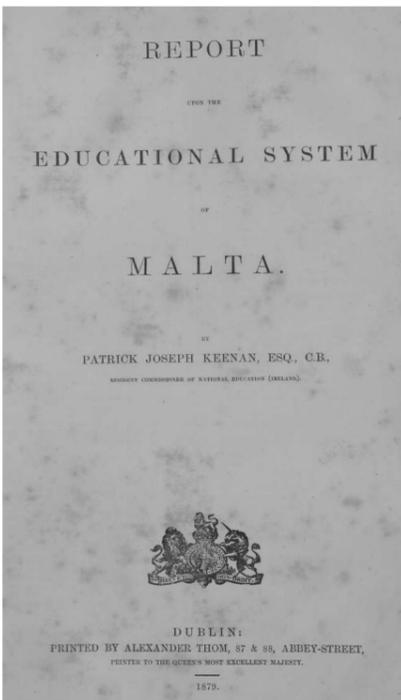
NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF MALTA

This paper is aimed to aid students in discovering the rich collective memory of the Maltese Nation through the holdings of the National Archives of Malta

12 November 2013 - Issue no. 1

The Language Question - historical background

Between the 1880s and the 1930s the Language Question dominated Maltese politics. The British Government in 1878, (see NAM facebook reference NAM GOV 2/1/75 3 Jul 1878), appointed education expert Patrick Keenan to publish a report on the Maltese educational system (NAM GMR 281 below, and extract in next



column). Keenan pointed out that it would have been better for the Maltese to learn English (rather than Italian). Sigismondo Savona, leader of the pro-English Reform Party, was appointed Director of Education to carry out Keenan's suggested reforms and set the teaching of English and Italian in primary schools on a *pari passu* (simultaneous) basis. (see NAM facebook NAM GOV 1/3/18 23 Feb 1884). In response to Keenan's suggestions and the British Government measures, the educated classes set up the Anti-Reform Party with Fortunato Mizzi as the leader. Thus The Language Question was a key contributor to the development of political parties in Malta.

In 1898 Gerald Strickland (photo in 3rd column NAM MFA01 505/1921) the Chief Secretary wanted to implement Keenan's language reforms and instead of the *pari passu* he wanted to introduce choice in schools based on *free choice*. Governor's reports indicate that most parents chose English (see NAM facebook GOV 1/3/32 23May1902). Eventually Strickland took the opportunity to declare Italian as a dying language. The Hewson case provided another opportunity for Strickland to convince the Governor to remove Italian from the law-courts and university. The pro-Italian movement

protested and below you can see a photo taken near Porte des Bombes during a protest held on Sunday 5May 1901 where circa 20,000 people attended. Amongst others, Dr Fortunato Mizzi addressed the meeting. (Photo extracted from CSG01 14683/1901). To calm down the situation the Governor decided to postpone these reforms. This brought forward the reply from the Secretary of State Joseph Chamberlain who in 1903 had the 1887 Constitution suspended.

The language question was to remain a central issue in Maltese political life up till the 1930s. The Maltese and English languages together became the official languages of the Island in 1936. The Second World War Italian air raids brought to a definite end the much debated **Language Question**.



Extract from Keenan Report NAM GMR 281 p. 98 (see pgs. 98, 99 on NAM facebook)

XLVII. Not counting Sunday Schools, Evening schools, or Secondary schools, I find that on the rolls of the ordinary Primary schools are 7, 746 pupils, of whom 5,162 -or 66.6 per cent - are in the first class (non-readers). With rare exceptions these children know nothing of either English or Italian; and in the exceptional cases their knowledge is confined to a mere jumble of the names of a few familiar objects. It is quite competent, therefore, to deal with two-thirds of the present children without any disruption of their school lessons, or violence to their school habits, as to the language -English or Italian- to be taught to them in their future school career.

XLVIII. For the reasons already given, I do not hesitate to say that **English, and English only** through the medium of the Maltese-should be that language until the pupils reach the third or fourth class; when, if their intellects are equal to the acquisition of another language, which I very much doubt, they might, if it be deemed desirable, take up, AS AN EXTRA FRENCH, taught before or after the ordinary school hours, the study of the Italian Language.



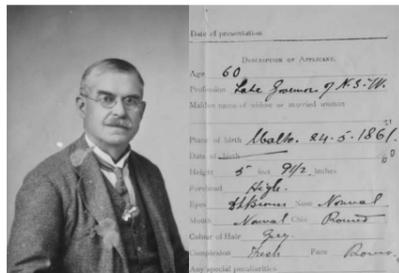
Detail from photo of protest at Porte des Bombes - NAM CSG01 14683/1901



Registered trademark extracted from the Malta Government Gazette NAM MGG 1915 p. 384

Understanding Archival References:
Ex : NAM CSG01 25/1895
Archives Name, Section Name, Section Number, File number, Year

What do these mean?
NAM - National Archives of Malta
CSG - Section Name in Archival terminology known as Fonds—this is usually the abbreviated term of the fonds (Chief Secretary to Government)
If within the fonds there are several sections a number is given this is known as Series. In this case 01 represents the Departmental files of the CSG.
The item number is usually written before the year.



Gerald Strickland passport photo and details extracted from passport application NAM MFA01 505/1921

Get to know more
grab those books!!

the IMPORTANCE
of secondary sources

It is essential to read books and articles that have already been written about the topic. This will help you to grasp different points of view about its significance. Here is a list of books that you can consult in order to help you answer the above questions more thoroughly.
Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: H. Frendo
Europe and Empire - Culture, Politics and Identity in Malta and the Mediterranean: H. Frendo
The British Colonial experience 1800-1964: The Impact on Maltese Society: V. Mallia-Milanes
L-Istorja Kostituzzjonali u l-Isfond Storiku, Volume I (1800- 1942): J. M. Pirota

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The National Archives of Malta

Prepared by the National Archives of Malta in collaboration with Ms. Evelyn Pullicino (History teacher).

COMPETITIONS - questions

Category 1. Open to 13 -14 year olds, Form 3 - Form 4
Answer all the questions :

Is the report a Primary or a Secondary source? Why?

Who were the other two commissioners who arrived in Malta at around the same time as Patrick Keenan?

Keenan was to report about Education in Malta. What did the other Commissioners report on?

Category 2. Open to Sec level and Intermediate level students (more detail is expected from Intermediate level students).
Answer all the questions:

From the extract taken from Keenan's Report (NAM GMR 281 p 98, 99) describe how Italian was going to be taught in the Maltese schools?

How did he recommend that English be taught in the local schools?

What were the reasons brought forward by Keenan for the introduction of the teaching of 'English and English only'?

What problems did he think would be encountered in the implementation of his recommendations? What solutions did he propose?

Category 3. Open to A level students
Answer the question 400-500 words:

Outline the influence of the Keenan report on Maltese political life.



Replies to be sent to:

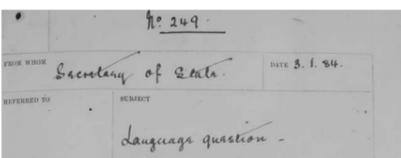
arkivjinnazzjonalimalta@gmail.com

Indicate clearly in the subject which category you are competing in ex:

Category 2. Include also your name, surname, form/level and school name.

Closing date 10 December 2013. Winners will be announced in January 2014 on our facebook page and via e-mail. A set of publications will be given to the chosen winner from each category.

Documents mentioned in this paper available in the events section on facebook of The National Archives of Malta.



Did you know?

As early as 1884 the Language Question already had its title! (NAM GOV 2/1/81 3Jan 1884 full document on NAM facebook)