

**Chev. Agostino Camilleri PEP Knight Cdr. S.O.S.J**

Agostino (Wistin) Camilleri, the Gozitan statuary was born at Victoria Gozo on the 2nd May 1885. He pursued his studies at the Government Primary School and started his lessons in sculpture at the Gozo Seminary under the tuition of Italian Jesuit, Brother Cosimo. As a young student he made clay models to help his widowed mother. He furthered his studies at the school of Art in Valletta under the direction of the Maltese artist and designer Giuseppe Cali'. A promising student he later proceeded to Rome, where he continued his studies at the Accademia di San Luca under professors Canonica and Pizzardi.

On his return from Rome he took up residence at Gozo, and established his studio at Ghajn Qatet Street in Victoria. There he produced his first papier mache statue, that of St Calogerus which is venerated in the church of St Francis, Victoria, a few paces away from his studio and home. From then onwards Wistin produced a multitude of papier mache statues not only for the Maltese Islands, but also for churches of the Maltese communities in Australia, USA, Canada, Abyssinia, Marseilles and Tunis. Amongst his works one finds the most devoted statue of the Sacred Heart at Fontana made in 1923, Our Lady of Graces at Capuchins Church, Victoria, St Paul at Munxar parish church, St Joseph at Kalkara, St Michael at Zejtun and the statue of the deposed Christ in the Holy Sepulchre at the Mosta Rotunda in 1924. The last statue which he finished at the age of 90, represents the betrayal of Christ and is found at Naxxar Parish Church.

Apart from his statues, Wistin was also responsible for the sculpture in stone at Ta' Pinu Church, which involved 1800 original designs. He also carved out 12 stone statues depicting the 12 apostles for the same Basilica. He was mostly known as *Wistin tal-Kurcifissi* for the numerous Crucifixes found in nearly every church or MUSEUM branches throughout the islands.

Agostino Camilleri was knight commander of the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem and was also awarded the Pro Ecclesiae et Pontefice.

He married Francesca Cauchi in 1936 and they had six children: Josephine, Paul, Alfred, Catherine, Mario and Michael. Eventually the brothers became the well-known Camilleri Cauchi artists; Paul (artist painter), Alfred and Michael (sculptors) and Mario (gilder).

He died at his residence at Ghajn Qatet Street, Victoria on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1979 at the age of 94.