

Regia Me Ornat Avis

The doors of the Geblin house, in St Julian's (58 then 84 Main Street), opened wide and the Calleja Gera insignia greeted visitors. "*Regia Me Ornat Avis*" the family motto, was clutched in the crowned eagle's talons. *Regia Me Ornat Avis*, Royalty Has Honoured Me, or more literally, "I was crowned, but not here". While the exact origins of the family insignia are questionable, it is known that family roots emanate from Spain (Andalusia) and Germany (Bavaria). It is also known that the Calleja Gera's descended from nobility; originated during an era where honour and prestige characterized the aristocracy.

It was at Geblin house that two noble families united; the family of Calleja, whose genealogy extends beyond the 15th century, and the family of Gera. The families united through the marriage of Annetta Gera and Salvatore Calleja, in 1883.

The surname Calleja was, and remains, quite common in Malta. So, to distinguish her family from other Calleja's, Annetta Gera, whose family was far nobler than that of her husband, insisted on the family name of Calleja-Gera.

Annetta was a woman ahead of her time. She was a kind and sometimes eccentric woman. Annetta was known to refurbish her home frequently, and would donate furniture to a needy family in the village, so the story goes.

One day, Annetta went to see a fortune teller. The fortune teller predicted that she would have a very large family, but one child would suffer from a condition known as sweet blood. All children born after the child with sweet blood would not survive. The fortune teller also predicted that Annetta would receive a great table which would be surrounded by family for years to follow.

Annetta and Salvatore had eight children. The eighth child George, had diabetes. Children born after George did not survive. The children were born and raised, in Port Said, Egypt, including Paul (Senior).

Paul Calleja-Gera married Violet Lanzon and had 5 children, Ena, Laura, Juliette, Margaret and Paul.

George Calleja Gera married Mary Gambin, a descendant of a noble family, whose ancestry was deeply rooted in Padua, Italy. Mary was always full of life, love, mischief, culture and religion. Mary was well ahead of her time; a woman whose independence and candour was frowned upon by many. A woman, who at times challenged the aristocracy of the Roman Catholic Church, albeit a deep devotion to her faith.

Mary was so loved by the village folk that at times it took her an hour to get to church as she would stop and say hello to all who greeted her; normally a five minute walk. She wore dresses with large pockets. In those pockets were sweets that she would share with children as they greeted her on her way to church.

Mary and George surrounded the great table with their children: Antoinette, Joyce, France, John and Rita. The great table saved the family during WWII, when they were unable to escape to the shelter due to the air raids, and barrage of bombs. The table and the young family survived. The great table hosted baptisms, communions, engagements, weddings presided by George's brother, Monsignor Frances. The family grew, memories and traditions of the past carried on, and new memories evolved.

The death of George Calleja Gera, in December 1962, shattered the family. In 1966, Joyce and husband Joe, John and his lovely wife Lina, and their young families, set new roots in Canada. Mary decided to sell the family home as haunting memories became unbearable. Mary kept the family united over the miles with frequent visits to Canada. Surprisingly, she loved Canada, but Malta was her home.

In spite of the distance, the Calleja Gera's retained their unity, and the introduction of the World Wide Web facilitated immediate communication amongst various descendants of Salvatore and Annetta. The coat of arms now greets new visitors in Malta and in new lands, England, Germany and Canada. "*Regia Me Ornat Avis*" and the family history can be seen on www.shurdington.org which is run by Paul Calleja-Gera, son of Paul (Senior) and Violet Lanzon, who emigrated to England in 1974. Family tree is also available.

