



Back in time: Tracing the journey of Fuwairit

At the QNHG Talk, Prof Robert Carter will elaborate on the history and archaeology of Fuwairit, a leading town in the 19th century. **By Anand Holla**



UNEARTHING THE PAST: The Origins of Doha and Qatar project has made great progress in Fuwairit.



Prof Robert Carter

Before Doha would emerge as the capital, Fuwairit was the leading town of Qatar. That was a long time ago, in the mid-19th century. Unravelling finer details of Qatar's fascinating history and development in the decades bygone, Dr Robert Carter, Professor of Arabian and Middle Eastern Archaeology, University College London Qatar (UCL-Q), will elaborate on 'Fuwairit and the Former Capitals of Qatar' in a talk organised by the Qatar Natural History Group (QNHG).

On Wednesday at 7pm, Carter's talk at Doha English Speaking School, Madinat Khalifa South, will provide precious insights into the eventful journey of Fuwairit. Thierry Lesales of the QNHG told *Community*, "The QNHG's opening meeting for the 2016-2017 season will feature an interesting presentation by professor Robert Carter about the history and archaeology of the site of Fuwairit."

"Better known as a picturesque beach and a turtle sanctuary, Fuwairit also hosts a lesser known extensive archaeological site. As for QNHG meetings, they take place between October and June, usually on the first Wednesday of the month, followed by a field trip at a later date. The talks are open to the public, but field trips are reserved for members."

Interestingly, the archaeological site in Fuwairit used to be a coastal pearl-fishing town. The historical records indicate that there were repeated occupations, abandonments and re-occupations of



Turtle lovers get set to release turtle hatchlings into the sea.

the town during the 19th century, and this is backed up by UCL-Q's preliminary archaeological work.

Lesales explained, "Along with Huwaila, Zubarah and Doha, Fuwairit can lay claim to having been one of Qatar's major historical urban centres. In the mid-19th century, Fuwairit was the peninsula's leading town before Doha (then Bida') became the country's capital city. Preliminary archaeological work conducted by UCL-Q early in 2016 provides a glimpse into the sequence and nature of occupation, while early aerial imagery from the mid-20th century reveals the final stages of the abandoned town as it collapsed into the archaeological record."

Professor Carter, who also co-ordinates and teaches the Archaeology of the Arab and

Islamic World MA at UCL-Q, is passionate about demystifying the origins of the Gulf towns; his chief research project is the Origins of Doha and Qatar, a multidisciplinary project that combines archaeology, historical research, GIS, architectural studies and oral histories to explore the development of Doha and Qatar, the foundation and historic growth of Doha, and its transformation to a modern city. He holds a PhD in Bronze Age Eastern Arabia and an MA from the UCL Institute of Archaeology, London.

The Fuwairit excavation is an extension to the Origins of Doha and Qatar, which is funded by a QR3mn grant from Qatar Foundation's Qatar National Research Fund for three years. According to Professor Carter, earlier this April, the Fuwairit dig indicated

that the village of Fuwairit was inhabited at least four times between the 18th century and the mid-20th century.

Detailing more about the historic landscape of Qatar, the archaeological surveys at the site of Zarqa, inland from Fuwairit, have been yielding interesting findings. In a video from the location, made earlier this June, Daniel Eddisford, the Field Director of the Origins of Doha and Qatar project, says, "As well as undertaking archaeological excavation, we have been recording a number of standing buildings such as the traditional structure. These buildings are constructed using traditional methods. They are often built with stone, limestone, bonded with mud, with roofs made of mangrove beams. We have been recording these buildings both here in Fuwairit and in Doha because these represent an important aspect of life in the country prior to the introduction of oil in the mid-20th century"

For most people though, Fuwairit is synonymous with its popular beach. Home to Hawksbill turtles, the only species that nest on Qatar's beaches and are listed as 'critically endangered' worldwide, the beach was recently closed down for four months from April to August so as to protect the turtle nesting grounds on the coastline. Located in northern Qatar near Ras Laffan, the beach witnessed a big increase in the number of turtle nests this season due to the measures taken by the Ministry of Municipality and Environment.