

DIN L-ART HELWA

National Trust of Malta

VIGILO

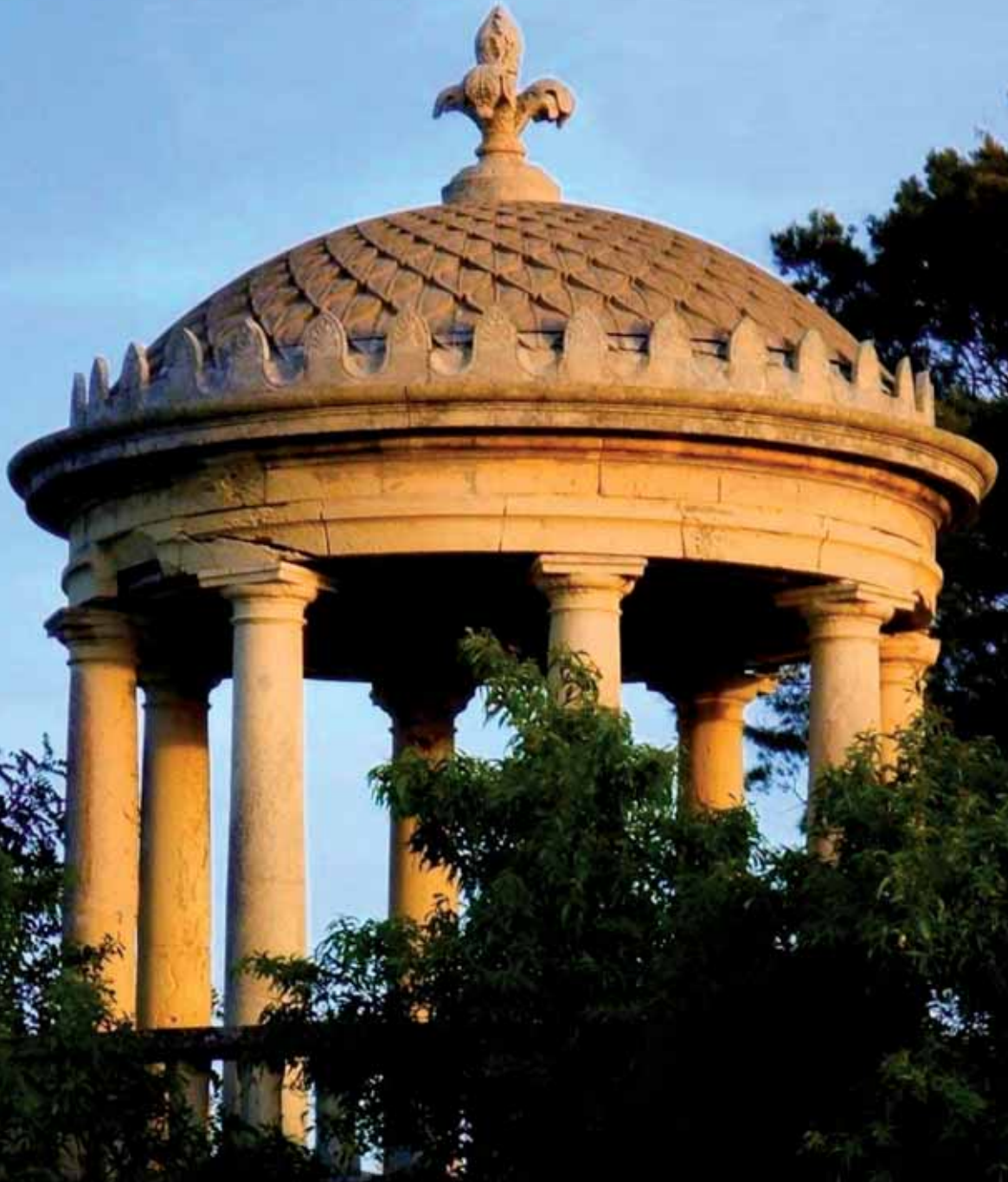


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Din l-Art Helwa is a non-governmental organisation whose objective is to safeguard the cultural heritage and natural environment of the nation.

Din l-Art Helwa functions as the National Trust of Malta, restoring cultural heritage sites on behalf of the State, the Church, and private owners and managing and maintaining those sites for the benefit of the general public.

Din l-Art Helwa strives to awaken awareness of cultural heritage and environmental matters by a policy of public education and by highlighting development issues to ensure that the highest possible standards are maintained and that local legislation is strictly enforced.



Din l-Art Helwa



The views expressed in
VIGILO
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NUMBER 35

APRIL 2009

SPECIAL ARTICLES

12

Slow Reactions
by *Petra Bianchi*

20

Din I-Art Helwa AGM

22

**Aghraf Wirt
ir-Rahal Tieghek**
by *Victor J Rizzo*

24

Burials at Ta' Braxia
by *Andy Welsh*



Detail of the Bir Miftuh altarpiece

26

Interview with Perit

Marie Louise Musumeci

32

Restoration of Villa Francia
by *Perit Claude Borg*



Detail of the Green Room, Villa Francia

02 Executive President

04 **Analysis, Hysteria and
Political Expediency**
by *Martin Scicluna*

08 **Restoration of the
Bir Miftuh
Altarpiece**
by *Maria Grazia Cassar*

14 *Din I-Art Helwa* Members

15 *Din I-Art Helwa* Sponsors

16 *Din I-Art Helwa* News

40 Photoshots

42 Publications Reviews

50 Letters to *VIGILO*



Supporting structures for Haġar Qim cover



FRONT COVER

The Belvedere of
Villa Francia



BACK COVER

Tent Structures over
Haġar Qim



Din I-Art Helwa Soldiering On *Martin Galea*

Executive President of Din I-Art Helwa

Regular readers of *The Times* may have been surprised to read that *Din L-Art Helwa* was in dire financial straights. So they should have been, as this was really a case of getting the wrong end of the stick. *Din L-Art Helwa* ended the year with a €50,000 excess of expenditure over income. However this is against a “profit” of €189,000 last year, which came about mainly through the Mikallef Buhagiar legacy. This has allowed us to spend more on restoration work this year, especially at our Valletta offices which are themselves a historic property. Quite clearly, however, this rate of expenditure cannot be sustained unless we find new sources of income.

With this edition of *Vigilo* you should receive the Secretary-General’s report and the extract from the audited accounts. The Secretary-General’s report by our very hard-working Edward Xuereb gives an insight on everything we have achieved during the year. For an organisation run almost entirely by volunteers, this is no mean achievement. The restoration of three properties and the maintenance of about 15 others is something even larger organisations would find difficult



to achieve. On top of this there are the tours for schools, lectures, articles in the press, lobbying of the authorities and preparing planning objections that are all a regular feature of our work.

This page:

The creative force of nature



“I think there is a lot of consciousness about heritage within towns and villages and, indeed, residents are now more aware of their rights and object to large development projects in their neighbourhoods.”



The Jerma Palace Hotel set between St Thomas Tower and the sea it was meant to guard.

Photo Ryan Shane Barbara

Much of the work is, however, very much behind the scenes and often frustratingly slow. A case in point is the Majjistral Park. It took about three years of lobbying to turn this dream into a reality. Since it was launched a year ago, progress has again been slow, as thorny issues such as vehicular access (which we want strictly controlled) and hunting (which we would like to see banned) are debated and discussed by the Board of Management. It seems that the new chairman, Ian Castaldi Paris is ready to take these decisions, with of course the full support and encouragement of the NGOs sitting on the board. It really is a no-brainer but it has taken time to get to this stage. We welcome the new chairman on board and hope that we will turn this beautiful part of our countryside into our first real national park.

However, our work does not stop here. The main issues we are facing are not in towns and village cores. I think there is a lot of consciousness about heritage within towns and villages and, indeed, residents are now more aware of their rights and object to large development projects in their neighbourhoods. Local councils also have taken up the mantle here. This does not mean that there are no problems – far from it – but there is now much more awareness. The countryside, however, remains abandoned and we are often seeing illegal projects or applications popping up in areas where there should be no development at all. It is important, therefore, that the Park area is increased in order to protect what little countryside we have left.

As an organisation, *Din L-Art Helwa* spent years at loggerheads with the leaders of the tourism industry. This was because the emphasis was always on building new hotels, generally in inappropriate places. To my mind, this has now come home to roost and we are now speaking very much in one voice with those involved in the tourism sector. We need to improve the product. National parks can be a very important part of our tourism

“Few countries would have surrounded historic buildings with high density tourist blocks of little architectural merit.”

product and this needs to be recognised. In the past, some of the worst examples of hotels, such as the Selmun Palace Hotel, and the Jerma Palace Hotel – both built around historic properties – have been found to be unsustainable and are now up for sale. Few countries would have surrounded historic buildings with high density tourist blocks of little architectural merit. Only in Malta, as they say. Other hotels have followed suit and are now being turned into blocks of flats or homes for the elderly.

But this headlong rush into development at all costs is not a thing of the past, unfortunately; it is still going on. We have that horrendous decision to allow 11-storey development at Mistra. It is projects such as these that keep us very busy with the few volunteers who spend their time trying to protect our heritage.

We remain very grateful to our corporate sponsors and volunteers, without whose help we would not have been able to achieve all that we have over the years. We continue to rely on their support. However, we need more support and more funds to maintain our current level of operations. This is the challenge the Council must address and, indeed, overcome if the organisation is to continue to flourish and grow.

View of Majjistral Park



Analysis, Hysteria and Political Expediency

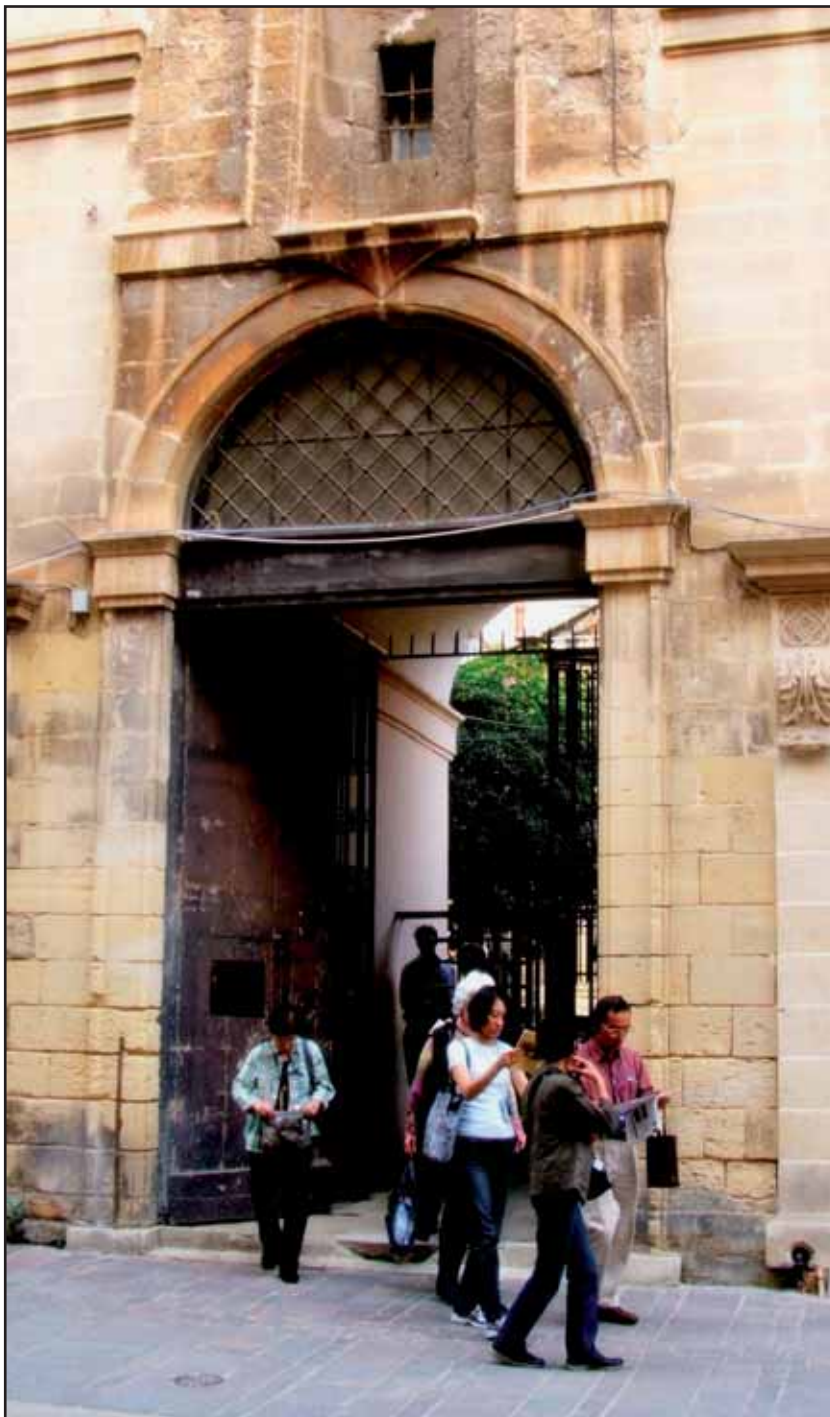
Martin Scicluna

Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa

Let us be clear at the outset that the decision to scrap the project to extend the underground museum of St John's Co-Cathedral was the result of sheer political expediency. It owed nothing to either environmental or cultural heritage concerns.

The Prime Minister was faced with a dilemma. He could either, as the minister responsible for Mepa, allow the planning process to take its proper course or, in the face of an opportunistic Motion by the Leader of the Opposition, which the government was almost certain to lose, he could order that the project be dropped.

Visitors exit on
Merchants Street



Haunted by the spectre of what happened to then Prime Minister Alfred Sant in 1998, when he allowed an essentially simple planning issue at Cottonera to become a matter of confidence in his government, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi opted not to put the Motion to the test. Although he had, wisely, not made the issue one of confidence, he knew that even the loss of a straightforward vote on a matter of such prominence would lead to a weakening of his Administration's authority.

He calculated – probably correctly – that the vote of one discredited and disaffected Nationalist Member of Parliament, together with the votes or abstentions of two or three other alienated Members in his own Party, would have repercussions on the authority and standing of his own government, which would probably dog his Administration for the rest of this legislature. He was not prepared to take that risk, even going so far as to drag in the Archbishop in support.

The result is that a project that may have allowed St John's Co-Cathedral to extend its currently wholly inadequate museum will never see the light of day. We shall never know whether or not the project was technically or realistically feasible. Worse, a planning process that depends for its credibility and public confidence on adherence to procedures and systems – due process under the law – was short-circuited. The long-term consequences for our already battered planning law in Malta – which the Prime Minister personally promised to repair only a year ago – have yet to be assessed.

Much hysteria was generated by a well coordinated, but not entirely honest, campaign about the impact of this project on the Co-Cathedral's structure and future viability. Some of it reflected genuine concern by people such as the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee of Mepa who had an intuitive feel – no more, since they had neither the time nor the range of expertise to conduct a full study – for the possible risks of what was being proposed. Much of the rest, however, consisted of an emotional, knee-jerk reaction to a project, the scale and imagination of which went beyond the comfort zone to which they were accustomed. Their attitude was: "My mind is made up. Please don't confuse me with the facts". The way in which attacks on upstanding members of the Foundation were directed was a particularly odious feature of the campaign, letting some people's desire to punish the members of the Foundation get in the way of clear thinking.

In the political sphere, which came ultimately to dominate the argument, it was motivated by personal pique, an antipathy for one member of the Foundation who has made many political enemies within his own Party, and the opportunism and manoeuvring for political advantage that is part and parcel of a vibrant two-party democracy.



Visitors entry on
Republic Street

The public debate was not helped by an inept presentation of the case by the Foundation of St John's Co-Cathedral, which failed to foresee until too late the concerns which the project might elicit and was slow to react. To carry the public along with them on the purposes and merits of this ambitious project, the Foundation should have, at the very start, presented its case publicly and made it clear that it would be guided in its decision by the outcome of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Although it did eventually say this, it was too late to reverse the momentum of what had become a highly emotionally charged and unstoppable campaign.

For a proper analysis of a project of this magnitude and technical complexity, a comprehensive, independent, technical assessment, which can only be provided under planning law by an Environmental Impact Assessment, is absolutely vital. The EIA process is a planning tool that is now regarded as an integral component of sound decision-making in planning development. It provides an assessment of the effects a project is likely to have on the environment and examines every aspect of its technical feasibility. It is the process of identifying, predicting, evaluating and mitigating – yes, mitigating – the environmental or other relevant influences of development proposals before major decisions are made. How are we ever to know whether appropriate safeguards to the structural or archaeological features of St John Co-Cathedral would have been either necessary or possible?

EIAs are a natural and fundamental ally of all NGOs who care about the environment or the cultural heritage. When, as Lead Author of the think-tank report on "The Environmental Deficit: The Reform of Mepa" a year ago, I invited all NGOs to give me their submissions for proposals to make improvements to the

way Mepa conducts itself, I received one very strong submission from *Flimkien għall-Ambjent Ahjar* (FAA) focusing solely on the importance of having in place a strong EIA process. I included this in its entirety in the think-tank's report.

For all NGOs, the proper conduct of EIAs is crucial to the outcome of any major development project. Unless such projects are subjected to full technical analysis by experts, it becomes impossible to reach a considered verdict of the merits or shortcomings of any project. Balanced analysis, which by its nature should be disciplined, objective, professional and impartial, should guide the final decisions reached by those charged with making them.

For *Din l-Art Helwa* this has invariably been a fundamental precept when considering any major project. Even though our instincts may occasionally have been against a particular project, we would always – as a matter of principle – seek discussions with the project developer to learn more about it to enable us to weigh up the issues carefully. But ultimately our decision would be guided by the outcome of the technical evidence presented in the EIA.

When I was Executive President, we were faced in 2003/04 by the controversial Mnajdra landfill project. The public reaction was as voluble, verging on the hysterical, as the recent St John's saga. The line we took then – as this time – was principled and ultimately justified by the outcome. It is an object lesson in what should happen in such cases – what should have happened in the case of the St John's Co-Cathedral project.

When the government announced its intention to place an interim engineered landfill site at Mnajdra, we took the view that, until the results of a professionally conducted EIA were to hand, it



Recently restored balcony forming part of St John's complex

would be premature to reach a judgement on the wisdom or otherwise of the decision. An objective and impartial decision could only be reached, we felt, when the technical, environmental and, above all, the cultural heritage implications had been properly assessed and analysed, not before.

For *Din l-Art Helwa*, the key concern was the need to receive copper-bottomed assurances that the impact of the interim landfill on the World Heritage sites at Mnajdra and Haġar Qim would not adversely affect them or endanger them, then or in the future. We considered that the bottom line should be a conclusive assessment in the EIA that these outstanding World Heritage sites would not be harmed by what was proposed.

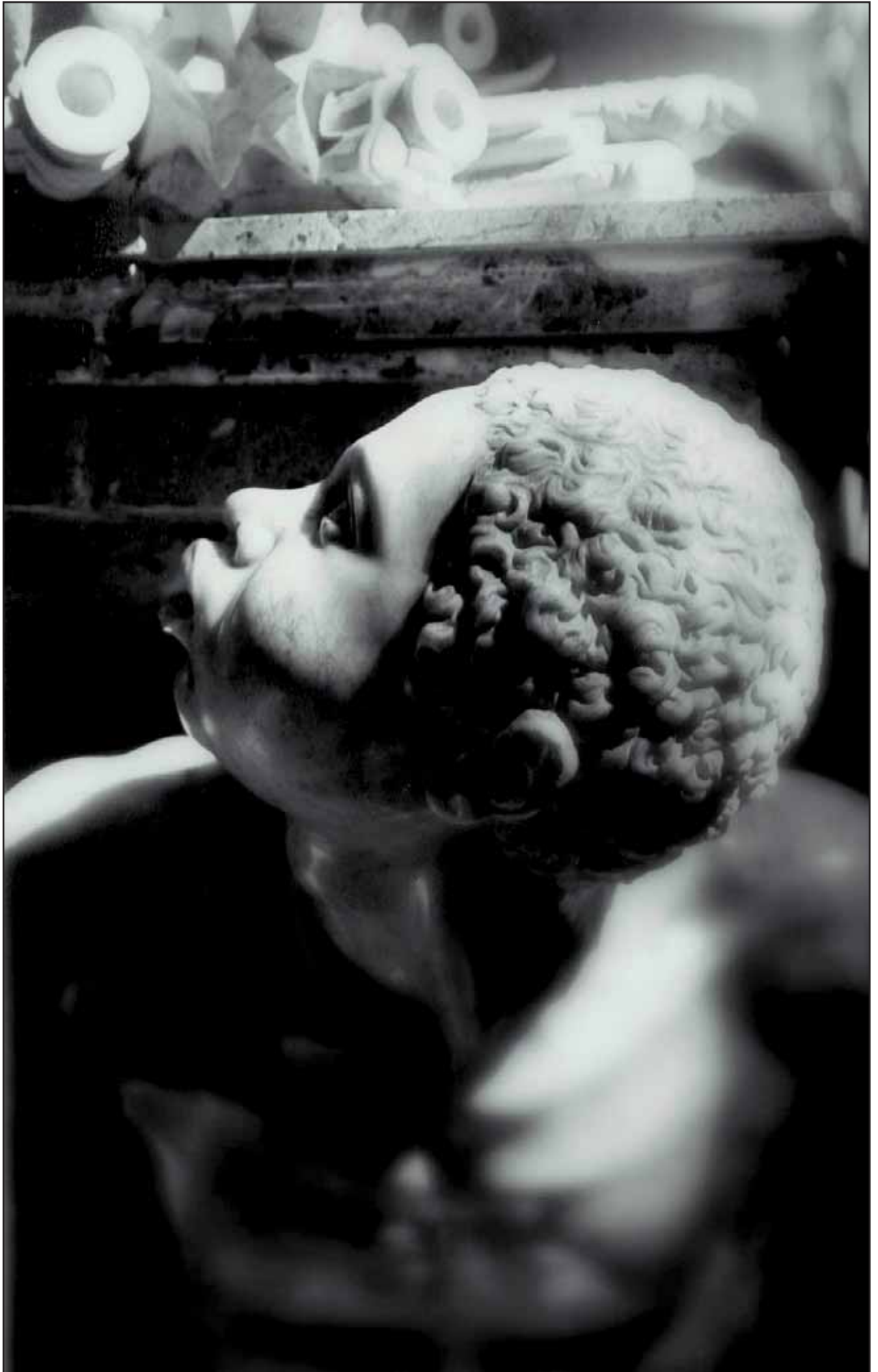
When the EIA was published, *Din l-Art Helwa's* conclusion was unequivocal. Based on the evidence adduced by the EIA, it was clear that the siting of an engineered landfill so close to Mnajdra and Haġar Qim would involve an unacceptable risk. To rely merely upon "appropriate thresholds" being applied, when the

stakes for world heritage were so high, would be to risk the possibility of imperilling our World Heritage sites. Such a risk should not be contemplated, we said, and it would be irresponsible of government to proceed with the proposal. We communicated those views to Cabinet and within a fortnight the government had abandoned the project.

Those who, during the recent St John's Co-Cathedral project, sought to cast doubt on the efficacy of EIAs to change the policy outcome failed to appreciate not only that it had successfully been done before but, more importantly, that the only way to uphold our confidence in the integrity of the planning process is to follow it carefully and precisely. If we opt to pick and choose only those parts of the planning law that suit our agendas or purposes – no matter how well-intentioned or genuine our concerns – we risk pulling down the whole planning edifice and bringing it into disrepute. Cool analysis and adherence to systems laid down under planning law, not hysteria and emotion – or party-politics – should be the guiding light.

Opposite:

Seeing the light in St John's. Detail of the Funerary Monument of Nicola Cotoner



Din I-Art Helwa Restorations

Restoration of the Bir Miftuh Altarpiece

Maria Grazia Cassar

Right:

Detail of scenery

The Altarpiece before restoration



Through the generous sponsorship of Malta International Airport plc, *Din L-Art Helwa* has recently restored the large tempera and oil-on-wood panel painting that is the altarpiece of the much-loved mediaeval church of The Assumption at Bir Miftuh, Gudja.

The altarpiece is a depiction of Our Lady seated on a cloud, holding the Child Jesus on her knee. She is surrounded by angels and flanked by St Peter and St Paul, who stand in the foreground of a hilly landscape. The segmental arched upper panel is dominated by the figure of God the Father holding the Crucified Christ. The Holy Spirit, in the shape of a dove, hovers above the cross and beautiful angels in attitudes of adoration appear on either side of the scene.



The painting has hung quietly in its stone frame above the main altar for many years, not receiving much attention during the restoration programme of the church, which concentrated on the fresco of the Last Judgement on the opposite wall. Its turn has thankfully now come and, as always in the course of a restoration project, some of its secrets have been revealed.

A workshop was set up inside the Arrivals Lounge at Malta International Airport and the restoration work was carried out there, in full view of all visitors to the country. This unique venture by the sponsors, MIA plc, was also made possible by the kind permission of the Curia's Sacred Art Commission and the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage.

The project was entrusted to the well-known Italian firm *Sante Guido e Giuseppe Mantella Restauro Opere d'Arte*, under the direction of Tuccio Sante Guido and Giuseppe Mantella.

One of the main problems with this project was the unstable nature of the wooden material, which had caused cracking along the joints. These were identified as being of the *lap joint* type, which is not usually used in the structure of panel paintings¹. The horizontal batons that were fixed to secure the jointed panels together created further problems, as they did not allow for sufficient movement and created stress on the wood, resulting in more cracks. The restorer, Giuliano Sinisi, started by carefully removing all the nails from these horizontal batons and after sanding the wood, he filled in the deteriorated parts with new pieces of a similar material. He then devised a new system of sliding steel batons that permitted the correct expansion and contraction stresses on the panel.

Anna Borzonati and Serena Sechi, in the meantime, set to work on the painted surface. The fact that the altarpiece was in two sections helped in this respect, and no time was wasted as different procedures

could be carried out simultaneously. These included the consolidation of the preparatory base, as well as that of the painted surface, after the removal of the previous emergency interventions. The altarpiece was then disinfested by a non-intrusive procedure in which it was sealed in a plastic covering for about two weeks and starved of oxygen, killing all the living organisms inside the wood and on the surface of the painting.

By the end of the cleaning process, the splendour of the original painting had started to shine through, free of the yellowed varnish, the dirt and grime deposits and, most of all, from the over-painting to which it had been subjected. In its unadulterated state, the hand of the master could be admired once more – in the exquisite faces of the angels, the fine detailing in God the Father's copious beard and the sensitive fingers of the Madonna holding her precious Son. After the cleaning, one was able to appreciate what Professor Mario Buhagiar had previously noted regarding the



Giuliano Sinisi working on the new flexible cross-bar system



Giuseppe Mantella adjusting the restored painting in situ



The restorers working on the top panel



Fabio Billi and Daniela D'Angelo working on the stone altar



Anna Borzonati and Serena Sechi during the cleaning process



Angel detail



artist's technique of outlining the figures in black paint². In some places, the top paint layers had been completely lost, revealing, as on the Madonna's face and figure, the black underlying contours. At this stage, it was also sad to see the extent of the lacunae in the painting, such as that on one side of God the Father's face, and the hair and wings of one of the angels to His right. The edges of the painting had also been badly damaged, and previously patched up in part with straw mixed into the *gesso*³.



Top and left:
The Altarpiece after
restoration

The restorers set to work, unfazed by their task, and after applying a protective coating to the original painted surface, filled in the gaps with stucco in preparation for the visual integration of the painting. They used a special *tratteggio* technique, which involves the application of fine lines of various base colours from the painting to fill in the lacunae. This method is taught at the *Istituto Centrale di Restauro* of Rome, and allows for the proper appreciation and reading of the painting and, at the same time, the easy identification of the restoration intervention.

The final varnishing of the fully restored painting ensured its protection and also gave the right finish to its aesthetic appreciation. The end result is truly spectacular.

Not much is known about the provenance or authorship of this painting. In the long and chequered history of the Church of Bir Miftuħ there are references to numerous altars and side-chapels that were erected, deconsecrated and sometimes reinstated⁴. The present stone frame, presumably from the 1693-1699 alterations to the church, was certainly not built to house this painting. We can tell this from the way it has been cut from its sides and top and also in the formation of the segmental arched shape of the top panel, lopping off angel's faces and wings in the process.

Achille Ferres praises it as *di grande merito* in his *Descrizione Storica Delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo* of 1866⁵. Buhagiar has described the iconography of the Holy Trinity as unique and of great interest⁶ and links it to another painting of The Assumption of the Virgin, which is the central panel of the Gozo Castello Church retable, due to its stylistic and technical similarities.

This attribution to the painter of the Gozo retable is important in dating the painting to a post 1551 period⁷. The entire restoration team has suggested another painting that is possibly by the same artist – that of the St Paul Polyptych, found in the Collegiate Church of St Paul, Rabat, also by an unknown artist but carrying the date of 1588⁸. This attribution allows us to date the Bir Miftuħ altarpiece to the last quarter of the 16th century.

The restoration project does not stop here. In fact, the restoration of the painted stone altar is in hand by two other members of the team: Daniela D'Angelo and Fabio Billi. The Fresco Cycle will also receive attention later on in the year, thanks to MIA plc and the expertise of the restorers.



Detail of the figure of St Paul

References

- ¹ Information obtained from the restorer, Giuliano Sinisi
- ² BUHAGIAR 1988, 38 and 2005, 205
- ³ Technical observations by the restorers
- ⁴ DOMINIC CUTAJAR, unpublished study titled "Birmiftuħ: The Medieval Church and its Frescoes"
- ⁵ FERRES 1866, 356
- ⁶ BUHAGIAR opera citata, supra
- ⁷ BUHAGIAR 2004
- ⁸ Visual and photographic examination of the St Paul Polyptych by Giuseppe Mantella, Anna Borzonati, Serena Sechi and the writer on 14 February 2009, accompanied by, and with the kind permission of, Dun Gwann Cauchi.

Note on Bir Miftuħ Chapel

The Chapel of Santa Marija ta' Bir Miftuħ was entrusted to the care of Din L-Art Helwa in 1971, and many restoration projects have been carried out under its guardianship. MIA plc have been sponsors of the chapel since 1992 and are to be thanked for the current restoration work.



Slow Reactions

Petra Bianchi
Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa



The 1960s brought a rapidly expanding tourism industry to Malta, with many large hotels built in pristine locations. Tourism is a main pillar of our economy, but times have undoubtedly changed radically with respect to the land still available for new tourism developments.

Site of the former Mistra Village

Below and opposite:

Building projects currently under way

Many of the hotels built in the 1960s and 70s have already been either demolished or extensively remodelled. A recent trend is the changing of established tourism developments built on prime sites into residential accommodation or commercial complexes. Does this trend mean that we are likely to need fewer hotels in the future? Surely not. Tourism is one of the bastions of our economy and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

However, once tourism sites are changed into accommodation with multiple ownership, it will be practically impossible to reverse their use back to tourism.

So where will any new hotels of the future be built? Nobody knows. One thing that we do know for certain is that precious little unspoiled land is left. Is anyone planning for the future land use of the tourism industry? Probably not, and unfortunately this is likely to result in planning decisions and policies drawn up to fit into applications, instead of vice versa.

What is the current thinking on change of use for developments which were originally granted permits due to the needs of the tourism industry? The Malta Environment and Planning Authority is not being clear enough on this point.

To ensure sustainable planning, a policy must be drawn up to address this issue. We would like to see faster reactions from our planners.



A similar case is planning for high-rise buildings, which is another recent trend. Once again, we have no policy considering where high rise buildings might be constructed. A large number of tall buildings would have huge consequences on this small and densely populated island.

They have a big visual impact and wide-ranging effect on the surrounding community. They are also practically impossible to reverse when they involve multiple ownership. Just think of the familiar difficulties in taking decisions about the selling or redevelopment of apartment blocks or properties when only five or perhaps 10 owners are involved, and transfer those difficulties to a building with hundreds of owners.

Clearly, once a high rise block is constructed, it will be around for a very long time. Sustainable planning can only be achieved if economic, social and environmental goals are linked.

Unambiguous and informed decisions must therefore be taken about whether high rise is suitable for Malta and, if so, then where? The details are crucial and make all the difference. As things stand, it is possible to construct tall buildings in locations all over Malta, including the most unsuitable places.

It is essential that a national policy is drawn up to address this issue before it becomes even more complicated than it already is. *Din l-Art Helwa* has been saying this for some time, yet we have heard no word from Mepa, whose duty it is to ensure that adequate planning policies are in place to address current building trends. Again, the reactions from our planners are too slow.

“...unfortunately this is likely to result in planning decisions and policies drawn up to fit into applications, instead of vice versa.”



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Din I-Art Helwa

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(* husband and wife or partners at the same address)

Cheques to be made payable to Hon. Treasurer Din I-Art Helwa,
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Signature: _____

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Din I-Art Helwa

TWO OF OUR PROPERTIES



15th century Chapel of Santa Marija ta' Bir Miftuh, Gudja
 - Restored in 1973.



St Agatha's Tower commonly known as the Red Tower, Mellieha,
 built in 1647/48 by Grand Master Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar
 - Restored in 2001.

Din l-Art Helwa Sponsors



Malta's heritage cared for by HSBC

HSBC is a world bank but is committed, in a parallel way, to contributing towards the conservation and improvement of the meaningful treasures that enhance the communities in which it operates.

As part of this corporate social responsibility, in 2005 the bank established the HSBC Cares for Malta's Heritage Fund and since then has supported the restoration of important sites that make up Malta's heritage. To mention a few, Mdina Cathedral's set of *L'Apostolato* statues, Palazzo Falson, the library at the National Museum of Fine Arts and the Notarial Archives in Valletta have all benefited from HSBC's fund for Malta's heritage.

As a result of an HSBC initiative, a number of hotels also run a Hotel-Heritage Scheme, whereby hotel guests are encouraged to make a small donation towards the restoration of selected heritage sites such as the Hypogeum, the Mnajdra Temples, St Paul's Catacombs, Haġar Qim and Vilhena Palace.

In HSBC's own words, corporate responsibility means managing business dutifully and sensitively for sustainable long-term success. Ultimately, success gains competitiveness and the confidence of investors, customers and employees.

All HSBC's corporate social activities take place within the context of the Group's wide strategy worldwide. In Malta this is fulfilled primarily through three charitable funds which, apart from the heritage fund, are the HSBC Cares for Children Fund (HCCF), which was established in 2000, and the HSBC Cares for the Environment Fund (HCEF), created in 2004.

HSBC fully sponsored the book entitled *Aġraf Wirt ir-Raġal Tiegħek*, which contains the series of lectures given by John Saré in 12 localities – a review of which appears elsewhere in this issue.

The bank has also generously sponsored the restoration of the *Abbatija Tad-Dejra* Catacombs in Rabat. This underground church will be restored in partnership with Heritage Malta with the strategic objective of safeguarding the catacombs and providing future physical access.

Din l-Art Helwa greatly appreciates the support of HSBC.



Fresco – Palazzo Falson



Mdina Cathedral

Din l-Art Helwa News

The Body Shop assists *Din l-Art Helwa*

Proceeds from a year's sales of the "Green Bag for Life" carrier-bag bearing the slogan *Green is not a colour, it's a state of mind* have been donated by The Body Shop Malta to *Din l-Art Helwa* to assist it with the regeneration of green areas around its historic sites.

In the run up to the new eco tax on plastic bags, The Body Shop in Malta introduced its popular organic cotton Green Bag and made it available to its customers for their purchases as an alternative to the standard biodegradable plastic bags used by the company. Each Body Shop outlet makes a donation of € 1 to local charities from the sale of each Green Bag to help them with furthering environmental projects and the creation of more green areas.

"Customers have responded quickly to more environmentally friendly ways of carrying their purchases" says Simone Mizzi, Director of The Body Shop in Malta. "In Malta we had prepared for this, so customers had no problems when the new eco tax was introduced. Our Bags for Life are the most popular, made of organic and Fair Trade cotton which is now understood and has become trendy. Their availability provides a good income not just for the cotton growers in India, who provide us with the bags, but also for *Din l-Art Helwa*, who will use the € 1,500 collected to further reinstate green areas around Delimara Lighthouse and Mellieha's Red Tower, both important historic sites that *Din l-Art Helwa* holds in trust. And Malta's landfills benefit too.

"Paper bags are not the answer, either", continued Ms Mizzi. "Paper still requires trees to be cut down and they are expensive and require energy to be produced. The government should ensure that any paper used locally is sourced from responsibly grown fast forests that are managed for the purpose."

The Body Shop Malta has succeeded in reducing the number of plastic bags used by some 300 a week since the introduction of its Green Bag for Life and it is hoped that this number will increase with the introduction of the eco tax.



Body Shop Director Simone Mizzi presenting a bag to Executive President Martin Galea

Din l-Art Helwa public lectures

Din l-Art Helwa has once again organised a series of monthly public lectures to run from October to June. The lectures, which will be held in the lecture hall at 133 Melita Street, Valletta, will start at 6pm and those wishing to attend are requested to be seated by 5.45pm. The first lecture, by Claude Borg on *The Conservation and Restoration of Villa Francia in Lija* was held on 9 October. Subsequent lectures are as follows:

Thursday, 16 April

'The Main Guard in Valletta' *Adrian Strickland*

Thursday, 14 May

'Maltese Antique Jewellery' *Francesca Balzan*

Thursday, 11 June

'Malta's Natural Heritage' *Annalise Falzon*



Restoration Unit wins top *Din l-Art Helwa* Architecture Award

In a ceremony held at *Din l-Art Helwa's* premises in November, presided over by President Emeritus Professor Guido de Marco, Architect Norbert Gatt of the Restoration Unit of the Works Division of the Resources and Rural Affairs Ministry was presented with the prestigious, top Architectural Heritage Award for 2008 for the conservation and restoration of the old parish church at Sigġiewi.

The citation for the Silver Medal Trophy award to the Restoration Unit read as follows: "The conservation of this old parish church, dating back to the late mediaeval period, constituted not only restoration and conservation of the finest order, but also an archaeological one as well, since the project gives great insight into the original architecture and layout of the building. What was so striking about this building – and what so attracted the judges' attention – was the notion of restoring a ruin and then going on to showcase the ruin itself. One is instantly reminded here of the Forum in Rome.

A grossly neglected – it had been planned to drive a road through it! – and overgrown ruin has been



Left:
Early 20th century photo

expertly restored to reveal the story of this important and architecturally beautiful historic site. The conservation has brought to light vividly once again all the outline and key features of the old church and now preserves them for present and future generations".

A *Prix d'Honneur* was also given to Joanna Spiteri Staines of Architecture Project for the rehabilitation and re-use of the 400-year-old baroque country house Villa Cagliares in Żejtun, described by the judging panel as "an outstanding contribution to architectural heritage where the search for authenticity was painstaking and unsparing".

During the presentation ceremony, *Din l-Art Helwa* Vice President Martin Scicluna said that the award scheme was *Din l-Art Helwa's* way of participating positively and constructively in the debate on the standards of Malta's architectural design and the urgent need to improve quality in development. He said: "The Architectural Heritage Award was created primarily to encourage better architecture. We wanted to reward any building project, whether old or contemporary, which made an outstanding contribution to architectural excellence in a Maltese context".

In his closing remarks, President Emeritus Professor Guido de Marco praised *Din l-Art Helwa* for its initiative and urged the good architects in Malta to produce work that was of good design and respected the outstanding tradition of built heritage stretching back thousands of years.



The site prior to the initiation of work

Below:

left:
Winners of the DLH Architecture Awards with President Emeritus Professor Guido de Marco and Vice President Martin Scicluna

right:
The site after restoration



Bir Miftuh Music Festival Dates



Saturday 9th May
 Concert sponsored by Belgian Embassy

Friday 22nd May
 Viennese Quartet sponsored by
 Malta International Airport

Saturday 6th June
 Concert sponsored by Istituto Culturale Italiano
 and Italian Embassy

Friday 19th June
 Concert sponsored by German Embassy

Friday 26th June
 Concert sponsored by French Embassy



For more information and bookings please contact the office.

Guests will also have the opportunity to admire the newly restored altar painting two details of which are shown here. (see pp. 8 – 11).

Modernist Malta: the Architectural Legacy presented to the President of Malta

Modernist Malta: the Architectural Legacy, a publication that captures the meaning and beauty of the 20th-century Modernist movement in architecture in Malta, has been presented to President Edward Fenech Adami by the Chamber of Architects (*Kamra tal-Periti*) and *Din l-Art Helwa*.

The book is edited by Alberto Miceli Farrugia and Petra Bianchi, with an essay by Conrad Thake and photographs by Patrick Fenech, Matthew Mirabelli, Sergio Muscat, Alexandra Pace and Darrin Zammit Lupi.

The presentation to the President was made by Vincent Cassar, Simone Vella Lenicker and Alberto Miceli Farrugia on behalf of the Chamber of Architects and Simone Mizzi and Maria Grazia Cassar on behalf of *Din l-Art Helwa*. The book is on sale in all leading bookshops, as well as through the Chamber of Architects and *Din l-Art Helwa*.



Clunaird House
 by Darrin Zammit Lupi



Presentation of
Modernist Malta: the Architectural Legacy

Members invited to join a free guided walk in Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park

Din l-Art Helwa, the Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust (Malta) – who together form the management of the Majjistral Nature and History Park – invite their members to join a free guided walk in the Park. The two-and-a-half hour walk will be along a trail of six kilometres, starting and ending at Golden Bay bus stop. An informative leaflet, including a map of the area, will be given to all participants and the detailed illustrated book about the park (launched recently by Nature Trust (Malta) and the Malta National Commission for UNESCO) will be available for sale during the walk.

Please choose the most suitable date from those shown below and book a place by emailing Annalise on walks@majjistral.org. Each walk is limited to 30 participants, so please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

Sunday, 3 May (am)

Saturday, 30 May (pm)



Photo: Annalise Falzon

For information about Il-Majjistral Park, please visit www.majjistral.org

NB All participants will be responsible for their own safety during their visit and are to abide by the Green Country Code in respect of the park.

Din l-Art Helwa, Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust call for a ban on hunting in Majjistral Park

An online petition has been set up by three NGOs – *Din l-Art Helwa*, Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust – calling for support for a ban on hunting in Majjistral Park. This nature and heritage conservation area in the northwest of Malta was established in 2007 and is managed by the three NGOs. The site, which forms part of an EU network of protected areas known as Natura 2000, is home to a myriad of plants and animals, including endemic species, seven breeding birds and numerous other migratory ones. Some rare visiting birds have also recently been recorded in the area.

In the past few months, over 500 visitors have joined guided walks in the Park to learn more about nature, while countless others have visited the Park on their own. The clearing of illegal dumps and the reinstatement of rubble walls and soil by the park's management continues in earnest and it is imperative that the park is free of hunters and their hides if it is to be enjoyed and developed as a true nature park for the benefit of everyone. The petition can be found on <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Majjistral/index.html>, while more information on the park is available on www.majjistral.org

Obituaries by Martin Galea

Liana Caruana Curran

Liana was a fiery, passionate woman. Her jet black hair and dark eyes reflected her personality, and when she lost it she invariably turned to Italian to find the adjectives for which she was searching. She joined the Council of *Din l-Art Helwa* when our finances were at a particularly low ebb, and set about organising our first art sales – bringing in what at the time was a significant portion of our total income. In those days we also used to organise clean-up camps and Liana was always on hand with the best eats – much appreciated by the rest of us. On the Council, she always had firm views and argued her case with gusto, which sometimes made tedious subjects more interesting. Struck down by a cruel illness in her prime, she will be missed.



Derek Aldred

Derek was a good-humoured man with a sharp wit. What struck me most about him was his get-on-with-it attitude, quietly and always with a good word. He undertook the heavy work at Msida Bastion Cemetery for some years, once almost lopping off his leg with a chainsaw, until ill-health forced him to let up. His chronic emphysema made him stop all but the lightest tasks, but he never burdened others with this – he just took on another job. In fact, my last memory of Derek is of him sitting under a tree manning the wine table, glass in hand, where we passed an hour chatting in the shade, interrupted only by the passing trade.

Mary organised a wonderful memorial service, fittingly at Msida Bastion. Many tributes were paid by his friends, all heartfelt. There was only one thought there: there goes a good man – perhaps an accolade we all would wish to have. To Mary and her daughter, our sincere condolences.

Din l-Art Helwa AGM 2009

At the Annual General Meeting of the association held on 28 February, Secretary-General Edward Xuereb gave an account of the numerous projects that have been ongoing during the previous year, many of which will be completed this year, especially when additional funding becomes available.

Din l-Art Helwa stepped up expenditure on restoration projects for built heritage to a total of €131,395 in 2008, an increase of 21 per cent over the previous year – no easy task for our organisation, as all funds are raised entirely through volunteer activities, memberships, corporate sponsorships and the generosity of individual donations.

Through the generosity of direct sponsorships from companies such as Playmobil, M. Demajo Group and Toly Products, the upgrading, ongoing maintenance and refurbishment of the interior of the Red Tower continues. Work on the Delimara Lighthouse is almost complete, thanks to a previous donation from the Malta Maritime Authority, but the landscaping of its difficult surrounding area remains a challenge. Despite the physical difficulties caused by its isolated location, the complex task of restoring St Anthony's Battery in Qala has progressed steadily, with funds being made available to the organisation by Mepa in a joint venture with the local council. This project is now 40 per cent complete.

Despite income from properties and fund-raising activities falling by a modest five per cent in 2008, significant funding has been dedicated during the year to the restoration of *Din l-Art Helwa's* headquarters in Melita Street, Valletta, where the corner premises in Old Bakery street adjoining the current offices have been acquired. This corner had suffered extensive war damage and dilapidation over many decades. With dedicated funding from the generous legacy of one of *Din l-Art Helwa's* members, Karmen Micallef Buhagiar, this extension will provide a much-needed reception area, extra office space and meeting rooms, as well as restoring dignity to an important corner of our capital city.

Din l-Art Helwa's work also consists in setting up partnerships with corporations, banks, businesses and local councils to oversee projects that otherwise would not be possible. Such projects include the restoration of Tal-Hniena Church in Qrendi, for which the Bank of Valletta has pledged funding to carry out the first phase, while the Russian Embassy has provided the association with funds for the restoration of the imposing 19th century Von Sclippenbach Memorial in the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest.

Travellers returning from overseas will have been pleased to see restorers at work on the 16th century altar painting belonging to the Santa Maria Church of Bir Miftuh. This restoration work was being carried out in a dedicated area of the Arrivals Lounge at Malta International Airport by Sante Guido and Giuseppe Mantella from the firm *Restauro Opere d'Arte*, with the financial assistance of MIA. Furthermore, the Central Bank of Malta is underwriting the restoration of a group of niche statues in Valletta that are in dire need of salvaging, and work is expected to commence soon.



“The momentum gained in environmental awareness should not be slowed down, even in the face of the current economic situation”



This page and opposite:

Frescos of the vault
Our Lady of Victories Church

Another important project where significant developments are taking place through *Din l-Art Helwa*'s involvement is the restoration of the all important and unique Church of Our Lady of Victories in Valletta, where work to secure the frescoes provides a huge challenge due to the vast investment necessary. The project to restore the external masonry, and numerous studies of what is Valletta's earliest church, was made possible by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. Another project being spearheaded by *Din l-Art Helwa* is the conservation, in conjunction with Heritage Malta, of the archaeological site and catacombs at Abbatija tad Dejra in Rabat.

Apart from this dedication to the built heritage, much time and energy has been devoted by *Din l-Art Helwa* this year to the establishment of the Majjistral Park, together with Nature Trust and the Gaia Foundation. Landscaping, the reinstatement of rubble walls and the clearing of numerous rubbish dumps continues, and guided educational walks are already taking place regularly. Two thousand trees are due to be planted within the coming weeks and Government has presented the three NGOs with a sum of €116,468 as part of its contribution, while other commercial entities such as HSBC and The Body Shop Foundation have pledged sponsorships over the next three years. Thanks to funds from the Tanner Trust, a Land Rover was purchased by *Din l-Art Helwa* for a ranger to patrol the Foresta 2000 site at Mellieha and prevent vandalism.

Din l-Art Helwa Executive President Martin Galea thanked all the numerous individuals and corporate sponsors who have made all this work possible, but said that funds continue to be necessary if the volunteer organisation is to continue its important work, not just in the restoration of the built heritage, but in the field of the environment and education. DLH therefore called on the generosity of its members and the public at large to enable it to continue with its mission and to remember that this is entirely self-funded. The momentum gained in environmental awareness should not be slowed down, even in the face of the current economic situation; the spirit of volunteering remains the keystone that makes *Din l-Art Helwa*'s mission possible. He thanked all the numerous individual volunteers for their continued dedication to the organisation and who remain motivated by the numerous tasks that are always at hand in the field of heritage and nature conservation.



Resolutions 2009

The Reform of Mepa

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on Saturday, 28 February 2009 that, in view of the fact that the reform of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority was one of the most pressing issues at the last election due to the inconsistent urban planning and the frequent ignoring of good practice that has damaged our islands for so many years, and that the Prime Minister promised to take this issue in hand and introduce reforms that will ensure Mepa lives up to its promise to protect the urban and natural environment while allowing sustainable development, the Prime Minister is hereby urged to take up the good advice contained in the *Kamra tal-Periti*'s "The Urban Challenge" as well as the Today Public Policy Institute's "The Environmental Deficit" and implement the necessary reforms without delay.

High-rise Policy

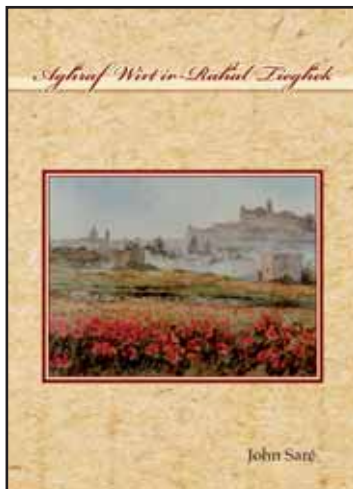
It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on Saturday, 28 February 2009 that, in view of the fact that new permits have been granted for high-rise buildings, including the controversial development on the site of the former Mistra Village in St Paul's Bay, without any national policy having been formulated to determine where high-rise buildings should be built, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority is hereby urged to introduce such a policy without further delay, before further irreversible damage is inflicted on our urban and natural landscape.



Publication of John Sare's Book *Agħraf Wirt ir-Raħal Tiegħek*

Victor Rizzo
Hon Treasurer of Din l-Art Helwa

The book sells for €10 from leading booksellers. Members can obtain a copy from *Din l-Art Helwa* at €7



Top right:

A baroque niche in Dingli

Bellow:

Ta' Marmara Windmill, Żurrieq
Photo Joe Chetcuti



Since 1965, *Din l-Art Helwa* has been on a crusade to instil sensitivity to the magnificence of our countryside, the diversity of the flora and fauna and the beauty of our villages, as well as the importance of our built heritage.

In 2004, a presentation team was set up to deliver, jointly with local councils, power-point lectures in their locality. Primarily, the aim was to create awareness of the cultural and historical heritage found in the residents' own area. The opportunity was also taken to inform residents of the mission statement of *Din l-Art Helwa*, and to illustrate the extent of all our restoration projects.

The team members were Philip Zammit Briffa, Victor Rizzo and Cynthia De Giorgio, who spoke on the achievements of *Din l-Art Helwa*. John Sare lectured on the vernacular heritage particular to the locality.

This book is a collection of the first 12 lectures delivered by John Sare 112111. The title can be translated as: "Be Aware of the Heritage in your Own Village".



The first talk, held in **Żurrieq**, was an immediate success. It focused on the architectural and artistic heritage of the village, the parish church and other chapels. The Xarolla Windmill, the catacombs found below, and the adjacent chapel of St Andrew made up the Triangle of History.

In **Żebbuġ**, the lecture concentrated on pre-history. The connection of the village with the Żebbuġ Phase from 4100BC to 3800BC, and the Punic Phase from 1000BC to 50AD, was amply demonstrated.

Rabat is rich in history. Rather than appealing to the much publicised heritage of the town, the talk focused on the impact of the Punic Phase and the Roman Phase, both of which left their mark on Rabat. The Punic Phase concentrated on the lesser known *Hypogea* known as *Taċ-Ċaġħqi*, which are still not open to the public.

In **Mġarr**, it was not difficult to talk about the 7000-year-old history of community activity in the area and the structures of *Skorba* and *Ta' Haġrat*, which are still free-standing.

The **Dingli** lecture focused on *Is-Simblija*, a mediaeval settlement within the boundaries of the village. This settlement has a church with an arched roof with mediaeval architectural features, a room previously used as a flour mill and other cave dwellings around a small square. The conservation of *is-Simblija* was fully funded by the EU.

Detail of the Portico of the Rotunda, Mosta

Mosta was tackled through the presence of early settlements in prehistoric times. The building of the Rotunda during the difficult period of the spread of cholera added more interest to the lecture. The folklore of Mosta was also touched upon.

In **Żejtun**, John Saré spoke about the contributions by Maltese nationals who made the village very rich in the arts and architecture. The art treasures in the church were fully described during his lecture, in which he mentioned no fewer than nine famous artists.

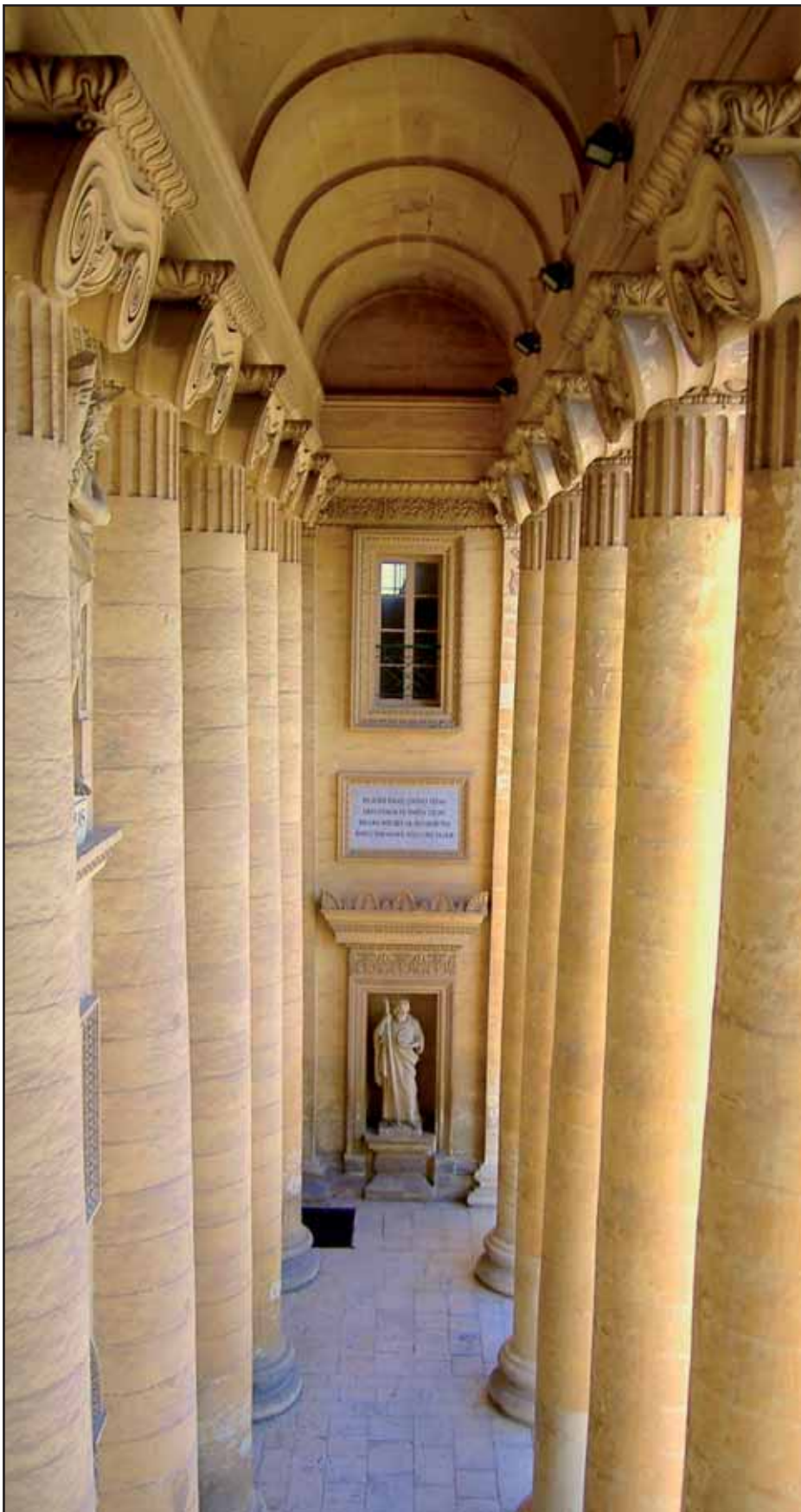
In **Mqabba**, the lecture concentrated on the beautiful underground burial tombs of *Tal-Mintna* and burial practices over the years. The artistic treasures found in the parish church were also covered in detail.

Kirkop, although small in size, is quite rich in history – which can be traced to Neolithic times. The talk also focused on the development of the parish, with a detailed explanation of the treasures found in the parish church and other churches in the village.

The **Qrendi** lecture expanded on the prehistoric religious culture of the village, with special emphasis on the *Haġar Qim* and *Mnajdra* Temples. It was extended to the numerous churches found in the village boundary and the treasures within the parish church.

In **Attard**, John Saré spoke about aspects of the prehistory, religion and history of the village. The exterior architecture and interior treasures of the parish church were well covered and the architectural contribution of Tumas Dingli was emphasised. Famous residences in Attard also featured in the talk.

The lecture in **Gharghur** covered the difficult times in the village due to invasions by the Turks. The coast of Malta was undefended and it was only in the early 17th century that the Order started building coastal defences. Grand Masters Garzes, Wignacourt, Lascaris and De Redin were instrumental in easing the pressure on the villages with the coastal towers they built. Other important features of Gharghur village were touched on during the lecture.



The Hughes Hallets and Macivers at Ta' Braxia

Andy Welsh

Continuing the series of articles about notables buried in Ta' Braxia Cemetery, we come to the Hughes Hallet and MacIver families, details of which have been researched by Major Maurice Micallef Eynaud. These two families have been linked because they were friends, both lived in the Palazzo Sliema and both have a street in Sliema named after them.

The Hughes Hallet story starts with Commander Edward Knatchbull Hughes Hallet, who was stationed in Malta while serving with the British Mediterranean Fleet. This was in the 1840s, but Hughes Hallet must have fallen in love with Malta because when his service ended in 1850 he signed a contract with the Franciscan Minor Conventuals of Valletta for the 150-year lease of a plot of land in the Tigne/ Qui si Sana district of Sliema. Sliema was becoming a sought after location – it was quieter than Valletta and had fine sea views and walks.

The Commander built a large colonnaded mansion with a well laid out garden, the Palazzo Sliema, in Qui si Sana – a showpiece – where he died on 27 May 1861 at the comparatively early age of 52. His funeral took place two days later, when his coffin was taken across Marsamxett Harbour from Sliema to the Sa Maison landing stage. From there it was borne by men from HMS *Hibernia* to Ta' Braxia. (The figurehead from the *Hibernia* is in the Maritime Museum). The family vault is to be found at A14, to the left of the palm tree near the old caretaker's house. It is covered with a horizontal memorial, with finely carved stone topped with darker marble. It is badly cracked, presumably as a result of World War II bombing, but has been repaired and the inscriptions are easily read. Other Hughes Hallet memorials from Valletta are also kept at Ta' Braxia.

The Commander's wife, Mary Wells Hughes Hallet, (who was his second wife) came from Kent and continued to reside in the Palazzo, on and off, until her death on 25 March 1890 at the age of 71. She also is buried in Ta' Braxia. In 1870, Mary and her children moved to England for a while, and leased the Palazzo to a prominent and wealthy shipping magnate, Charles MacIver of Calderstone, owner of the famous Cunard shipping company. MacIver died in the Palazzo on New Year's Eve 1885 and was buried in Ta' Braxia Cemetery, but in April 1886 his body was disinterred and transported to Liverpool, where it was reburied in Childwall Churchyard.

More is written about MacIver later, but here I return to the Hughes Hallets' children, of which they were three. (When the children were in Malta, and the Palazzo was occupied by Mary Hughes Hallet, they lived in Britannia Street in Valletta). Henry Thomas was the eldest, followed by Harry Francis and Mary Frances. Henry became a Colonel in the Middlesex Regiment of the British Army and resided with his sister Mary in the Palazzo from 1908 until his death in 1909, when he was buried with his parents. Harry had a successful career in the Royal Navy, retiring with the rank of vice-admiral, with a CVO, and lived in the Palazzo in 1910 and 1912. He died in the Naval Hospital in Plymouth on 13 July 1913, but his body was brought to Malta to be buried in the family vault in Ta' Braxia on 19 December 1913. Mary Frances lived in the house again in 1918 and from 1920 to 1926. "Miss Mary", who was well-known for her charitable work and was a great benefactress of the poor, never married, and died on 8 June 1927. She was also buried in the family vault. In 1928, the Palazzo was sold and converted into the Garden Palace Hotel, where the young society of the time spent happy hours at *thé dansants*, parties and other functions. However, it did not last long; it went out of business and was demolished in 1934 – the site now the location of Hughes Hallet Street.

Charles MacIver was born in Greenock, Scotland, into a shipping family. His father, David – together with George Burns and Samuel, later Sir Samuel, Cunard – founded the British and American Stearn Packet Company, later the Cunard Line, of which

Photos by the Author

Opposite:

Monument in memory of Eleanor Blake

The first Eynaud Monument



Charles became owner-manager in due course. At a later stage, the company branched into luxury liners, starting with the *Mauretania* and the *Lusitania* in 1906, and now famous for the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth*. The *Queen Mary II*, one of the largest passenger ships in the world, was launched in 2004.

Charles first visited Malta in the winter of 1854, for his health, and in December of that year he and his wife Mary Anne lost their infant son, James, who was buried in Ta' Braxia. The MacIvers visited Malta from time to time over the next 11 years, and became residents in 1865, living at 10 Tigné Street in Sliema (renumbered 17 in 1952). Charles became increasingly fond of Malta and the Maltese and found the climate good for his health – *Qui si Sana*, of course, roughly translates as “here one regains one’s health”. In 1870, he leased the Palazzo Sliema from the Hughes Hallets and spent most of his succeeding winters there, with his wife Mary Anne, and generally with the youngest two of his seven children, Frances and Annie. The house at Tigné Street went to a Mr and Mrs Hearn. Hearn, who was born in Malta, was the local representative of the family firm William Hearn.

Charles was included in the Malta Electoral Register of those entitled to vote for the Council of Government. He was a generous host with many friends and, like the Hughes Hallets, a great benefactor to the poor (of which there were a great many). His last visit to Malta was in November 1885, but he died in the Palazzo on the New Year’s Eve, as mentioned above.

In April 1886, Charles’ body was exhumed and taken to Liverpool, accompanied by his widow, Mary Anne, her two youngest sons, William and Edward, and the Marchioness Eleanor Cassar Dessain, who was the sister of her daughter-in-law Eliza Mary. Eliza had married the second son John, but he had predeceased his father.

Charles fifth son, William, spent holidays in the Palazzo with his wife during the 1890s and continued the family tradition of charitable giving, but in due course the Palazzo returned to the Hughes Hallets. Many years later, in 1938, the street linking Hughes Hallet Street and Dragut Street in Tigné was officially renamed MacIver Street. Two families, great benefactors and important in their time, are thus commemorated.

Americans in Ta' Braxia

On Wednesday, 17 July, we were honoured by a visit from Commander Dominic Micillo, US Navy, currently attached to the American Embassy in Malta. The Commander had come to inspect some of the graves of Americans buried in Ta' Braxia. These are still being researched, but Alan Keighley has come up with many interesting details.

The first grave one comes across, and possibly the most “important”, is that of William Winthrop. Winthrop had been a director of an insurance company in Boston before joining the US Consular Service. He was the first professional diplomat to be US Consul here, being appointed in October 1834. Previously, the Eynaud family had acted as Consuls and they continued as Vice-Consuls for some time after. Winthrop, originally Winthrop Adams, was a descendant of John Winthrop, who left England for America in 1630 and after whom the town of Winthrop is named. In 1848, Winthrop married Emma Curtis, daughter of the late Sir William Curtis, and the couple stayed in Malta until he died in 1869 and she died in 1879.

Another notable American was Colonel Asher R. Eddy of the US Army. He was born in Rhode Island in 1824 and graduated from West Point Military Academy in the Class of 1844. He served in the Mexican War and in the American Civil War. His wife was a niece of General Sam Houston of Texas, and with her and their daughter he arrived here from Egypt on 29 January 1879. He was a sick man and died the following day. His grave (A76) was destroyed in the bombing of the cemetery in World War II.

A second visiting casualty was four-year-old Harry Arthur, son of Hans Torvend of Dakota, a soldier in the US Army, who died in 1899. The Eynauds have been mentioned, and have been the subject of a previous article, but they also had a US service connection – Peter Eynaud – who died in 1835, aged 21, off the coast of Liberia while serving on board the US Navy frigate *Potomac*. Peter is obviously not interred in Ta' Braxia, but there is a memorial panel to him on one of the Eynaud monuments.

Two of the Eynauds had American wives. Stephen’s widow, Amelia, had a splendid marble monument made in New York by the firm of Braddy Brothers, and shipped over to Malta. Sadly, this monument was badly damaged during the war, but enough of it has been put back together to show what a fine piece of funerary art it was. Charles Breed Eynaud received his early education in America and married Isabella Emery Staples from Biddeford, Maine. He died in 1891, being predeceased by Isabella, who died in 1886.

Another American who left his mark in Malta was John Francis MacCartney, who died in 1913. He was the founder of MacCartney, McElroy and Co. Ltd., which was floated in New York in 1892. It was an engineering company, specialising in the design, construction and operation of electric tramway systems. The company ran tramways in many British towns, as well as Canada, South Africa, Argentina, Portugal and, of course, Malta, and also constructed the Barrakka Lift, which was opened in 1905.

Other Americans of whom we know less, but who are buried in the cemetery, include Augustus Tucker of Massachusetts, Miles Pliny of New York, Eleanor Blake and Elisabeth Sherwood Hamilton, both of Boston, Lily Blair and Dorothy Daryl. No doubt we shall find out more about these long gone Americans in the fullness of time.

Ta' Braxia Cemetery receives many American visitors, and we are always glad to show them the many interesting relics of Malta’s heritage and history there, as well as the adjoining 19th century Jewish Cemetery.



How would you describe Valletta today and what would you like to be a fitting description of it in 10 years time?

For me, Valletta is a walking experience from the present to the past. Imagine this: you start your stroll into Valletta from the bus terminus where, basically, you are exposed to different sights, smells and sounds that are all evidence of today's lifestyle. You enter Valletta through a gate that has been remodelled three times since the original gate of the knights and enter Freedom Square which is, in my opinion, the "peak" evidence of the present. Bombed during WWII, the buildings that adorned this square now gave space to a car park.

The once glamorous Opera House, which sat so proudly at Valletta's entrance, is now just a ruin, with the little shops housed on the ground floor selling an array of goods. Strolling further down Republic Street, things thankfully get better and you are whisked back into the past. The historical

buildings that line Valletta's main thoroughfare all have stories to tell that take us back into the 16th century. The stroll ends at the lower end of Republic Street with Fort St Elmo which, ironically, was the first structure to be built in the city, and a prime example of local military architecture.

The Valletta I would like to see in 10 years time is a juxtaposition of the architecture that existed in the past, with the right amount of modern cosmopolitan twist, and a bustling city life throughout the whole day. Also – one last point – I would like to see more of Valletta's centre pedestrianised.

A lot has changed at the VRC over the past year or so. Does the committee have a new vision of its role in the rehabilitation of Valletta and, if so, what is it?

Interview with Perit Ma Chairperson - Valletta R

The role of the VRC is principally the rehabilitation of Valletta. However, I must admit that over this past year the idea of rehabilitation has taken a number of different roles. For the committee, rehabilitation is not just about restoring buildings/churches and works of art, but has a wider meaning. In fact, one of the major projects we are looking at is the setting up of a database, together with the YMCA, where people will have access to an educative tour of Valletta. From the comfort of your home, you can learn and see all there is to know about this World Heritage Site. Another important role of the VRC is to maintain its World Heritage status, not just by controlling what happens within Valletta but also what happens on its periphery and anything that can threaten this standing.

What, in your opinion, are the main challenges facing Valletta in the next 10 years?

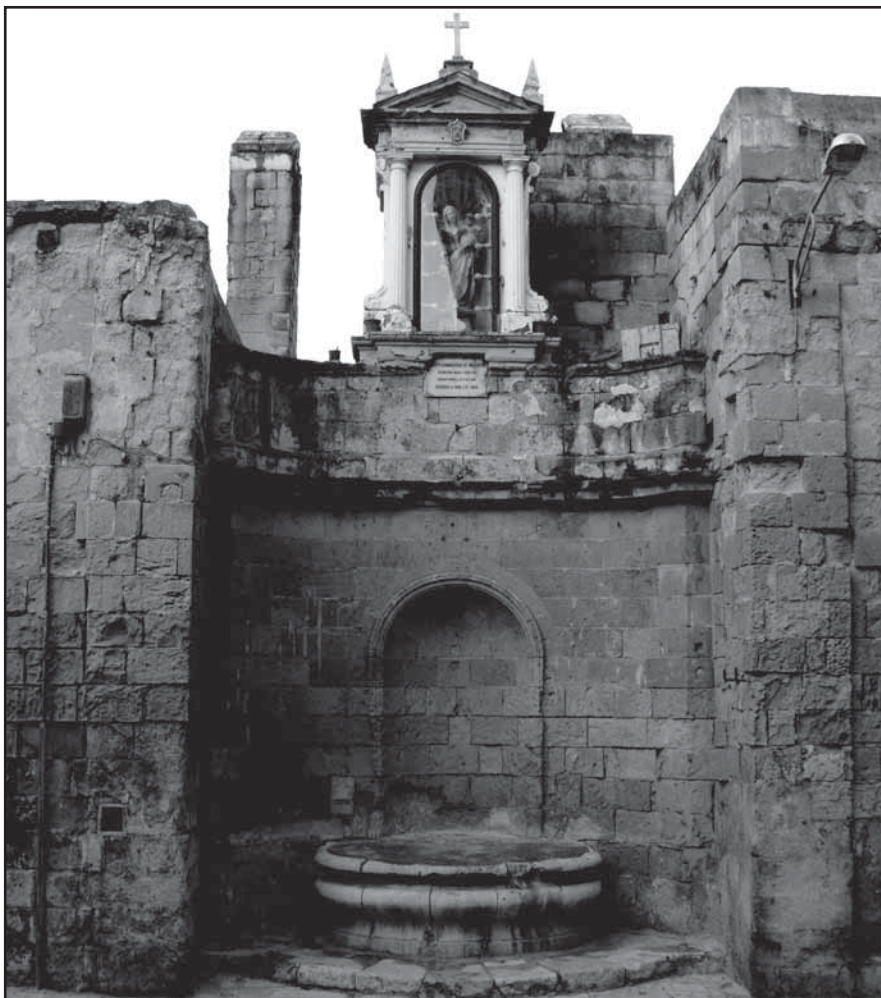
In my opinion, the greatest challenge in 10 years time is the preservation of this 16th century city at a time when high-rise buildings will be more widespread around the island. The question of these high-rise buildings, and how they can affect the skyline when looking onto Valletta from its environs, will be a very delicate issue.

What are the VRC's main projects at the moment?

The main projects are St George's Square and the link from the Cruise-liner Terminal to Victory Gate leading to Ursula Street and St John's Street.

And what will be its next most important projects?

The regeneration projects of Castille Square and Merchants Street's furniture are very high on the list of immediate next projects.



A little known fountain at the end of Old Mint Street

Marie Louise Musumeci Rehabilitation Committee

What is the VRC's position regarding the St George's Square project?

The VRP participated in the proposed project, at first in a consultancy role and more recently as an active player in the design and proposals, including the discovery of the underground passages.

The latter resulted in a twist in the way the project will be designed. As announced in the press earlier this month, the idea of an underground car park has been dismissed.

What is being planned for the underground complex discovered during the recent excavations?

The underground areas have only recently been documented and studies are still continuing

to establish the various uses to which they have been put. The possibility of conserving them and opening them to the public is being considered.

What is your position regarding the fountain that is now in St Philip's Gardens but was formerly in St George's Square? Do you feel this should be reinstated there?

A rigorous study was prepared by the VRP, during which the importance of the Square, both as one with a fountain and as a public space for important meetings and parades, was established. The proposed design takes these dual roles into consideration and proposes a slightly submerged fountain that may be covered over when a parade or public event takes place.

Will a replica of the Verdala Column be erected?

At this point in time it is not envisaged as part of the proposal.

I think you will concur that there is a great difference between the current state of the core of Valletta (the area from City Gate to the President's Palace between Merchant's Street and Straight Street) and the rest of the city. What do you think can be done to spread more the rehabilitation process and thus ensure the integrity of Valletta as a whole?

I fully agree with the drastic change in social fabric you have delineated. Unfortunately, the lower part of Republic Street – better known as the *Bicċerija* area and the *Mandraggio* area – have never been given much attention in the past. The further down you travel, the shabbier and off-putting the historic fabric and road surface becomes. The regeneration scheme for this area, if there ever is one, will involve a large financial investment



Map of Valletta. Galleria delle Mappe, Vatican Museums



Paving in Merchants Street

that will probably have to lean towards a public-private partnership. No public-private partnership, however, comes without its concessions: on the one hand it injects money and thereby energy into the area, but it also inevitably must bring with it an element of commercialisation in order for the venture to be worthwhile for the investor. The greatest value the *Bicċerija* area has to offer is what it possesses already – its unique history, its maze of streets, its rich architecture and its proximity to the sea, as well as its connection to the main road of access.

Are there plans to extend the current paved pedestrian areas and, if so, in which areas?

Yes. As a first phase, paving and pedestrianisation will be extended to all the streets between St Paul's Street, Old Bakery Street, City Gate and Archbishop Street.

The VRC initiated a project that aimed to graphically record all the façades in Valletta? Is this project still active?

Yes. In the last few years the YMCA has collected a large amount of information on the buildings, tunnels, gates, etc., in Valletta. Some of this has also been captured using laser scanning, undertaken by Italian professionals. In collaboration with the YMCA, the VRC has embarked on this project with the ultimate aim that this data, covering all Valletta, will be available online. This is a very ambitious project, as the end-product we envisage will consist of chronological data depicted in 3D of all the important buildings in Valletta, as well as historical information on each and every building.

What is the main issue to be addressed in order to preserve the urban fabric of Valletta?

The number of vacant dwellings currently stands at more than 20 per cent of the total in the capital. When these are privately owned, the problem is that the property is jointly owned by siblings, each concerned with their own interests when it comes to maintaining the property or not. Most of the time, the property is allowed to fall into a derelict state and, worse, then poses a danger to passers-by. Then there is the issue of the old rent laws, whereby you have palazzos rented out for a pittance and the landlord therefore having no interest whatsoever in keeping them in a good state of repair.

In my opinion, where vacant private owned buildings are concerned, the government should introduce legislation that will give the owners of vacant property some kind of responsibility and an incentive to develop their property, and when the property is government-owned, it should be developed and maintained in good condition. On the subject of the old rent laws, much has been said regarding their revision, and it is high time that this revision was implemented.

What are your views about the creation of a museum of the urban history of Valletta?

Very positive. However, I would like to see such a museum as an interactive one, not the same as the traditional museums to which we are accustomed.

Derelict buildings in the Bicċerija area



Other long-standing issues regarding Valletta are its ageing population and general lack of evening/nocturnal vitality? What are your views on these issues?

It is important to make the capital more attractive, even as a place of residence. Valletta was booming until the late 19th century, but the population started declining in the early 20th century, and fell drastically towards the end of the century. The number of registered voters in Valletta is currently just over 5,800, but there was a time, in the mid-19th century, for instance, when the population was as high as 24,400.

Over the last few years we have seen a string of restaurants and wine bars opening up, as well as a fully-fledged cinema, not to mention St James Cavalier. Lately, the City Theatre has recently opened its doors to the public, providing another space for cultural expression in the city.

So in reality, a lot has already been done. We must exercise great care over the type of nocturnal activity that is allowed; my personal opinion is that no justice will be done to this World Heritage Site if we succumb to the run-of-the-mill type of entertainment that is sought by the younger generation. I also believe in the designation of various areas for different activities and, hopefully, this will be the case in the eventual Master Plan for Valletta.

Do you think more could be done to attract people to live in Valletta?



Enduring habits in Valletta

Derelict buildings in lower Republic Street



Yes. I strongly believe that if we regenerate areas such as the *Bičċerija* area, then it can become a desirable place in which to own property at an affordable price. More residents will require more services in the form of shops and so on, and so a mixed use area is created. The Grand Harbour Regeneration project should also help in the regeneration of this end of Valletta, as will the eventual restoration and rehabilitation of Fort St Elmo.

Has Valletta become a better place in which to live?

I do not live in Valletta myself so I cannot speak from a personal point of view. However, I have friends who were born and bred in Valletta and they seem to speak of their childhood days as somehow offering a better lifestyle than that which the city offers today. Who knows – could it be today's bustling lifestyle or the great influx of vehicles that has brought about this negative change? Whatever it is, demographic studies show that since the beginning of the 20th century the population of Valletta has dramatically declined.



View of Grand Harbor

How important is the presence of the Beltin for the life of the city?

In my opinion, it is very important. The character of a place is partly the result of the way of life/culture/traditions/hobbies of its inhabitants. To me, the first thing that comes to mind when one mentions the *Beltin* is the feasts of the city's patron saints, as well as carnival. The *Beltin* have this great zest for these major events because they are part of their lifestyle and it gives them a sense of affiliation with the place. I think it would be very hard to find a true *Belti* who does not celebrate these events.

Some say that there is a risk of turning Valletta into an up-market real-estate area and that this will drive out the real Beltin? Do you agree?

No. I think that with a good regeneration plan for the remaining areas of Valletta, the property market will be spread from medium to high-end. In this case, there will be no reason for the people of Valletta to move out.

Do you agree that Valletta should have more entertainment spots?

I believe that being a World Heritage Site calls for a certain type of entertainment. In my opinion, the development of the Viset project has been a great success, mainly because of the type of entertainment it provides. A balance has been created in the various types of entertainment which, although attracting a large sector of society, respect the area for what it is. The same approach has to be adopted for the centre of Valletta. Also, when considering the type of entertainment to be adopted in Valletta, the wishes of the residents themselves as to what they would like to have should not be overlooked. I strongly believe that any form of entertainment provided should also appeal to the residents.

Do you agree that Valletta should have a livelier nightlife?

As stated above, I feel that a World Heritage Site should be respected for what it is and hence certain kinds of entertainment are more suitable for other areas rather than Valletta.

Do you feel Valletta is adequately connected to its immediate surroundings and to the rest of the Island?

No. I feel that whereas the land-front connection is quite developed, the seafront connection has not been utilised to its full potential. At present, the only seaward connection is the ferry service from Marsamxett to the Sliema promenade. This is very ironic, seeing that Malta is an island and we can easily provide links to other areas such as the Three Cities. Another never-ending debate is the one over the re-installation of the lift from the waterfront to the Upper Barrakka.

In your opinion, has the Park-and-Ride scheme reached its objectives?

Partly, perhaps. The number of cars requiring parking far exceeds the capacity of the park and ride system. Furthermore, the park and ride car park is located far too close to the bottle neck of the peninsula. Ideally, we should have three park and ride sites located for residents from the centre, the south and the north of the island.

Do you think that Valletta today is worthy of her designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and, if so, why?

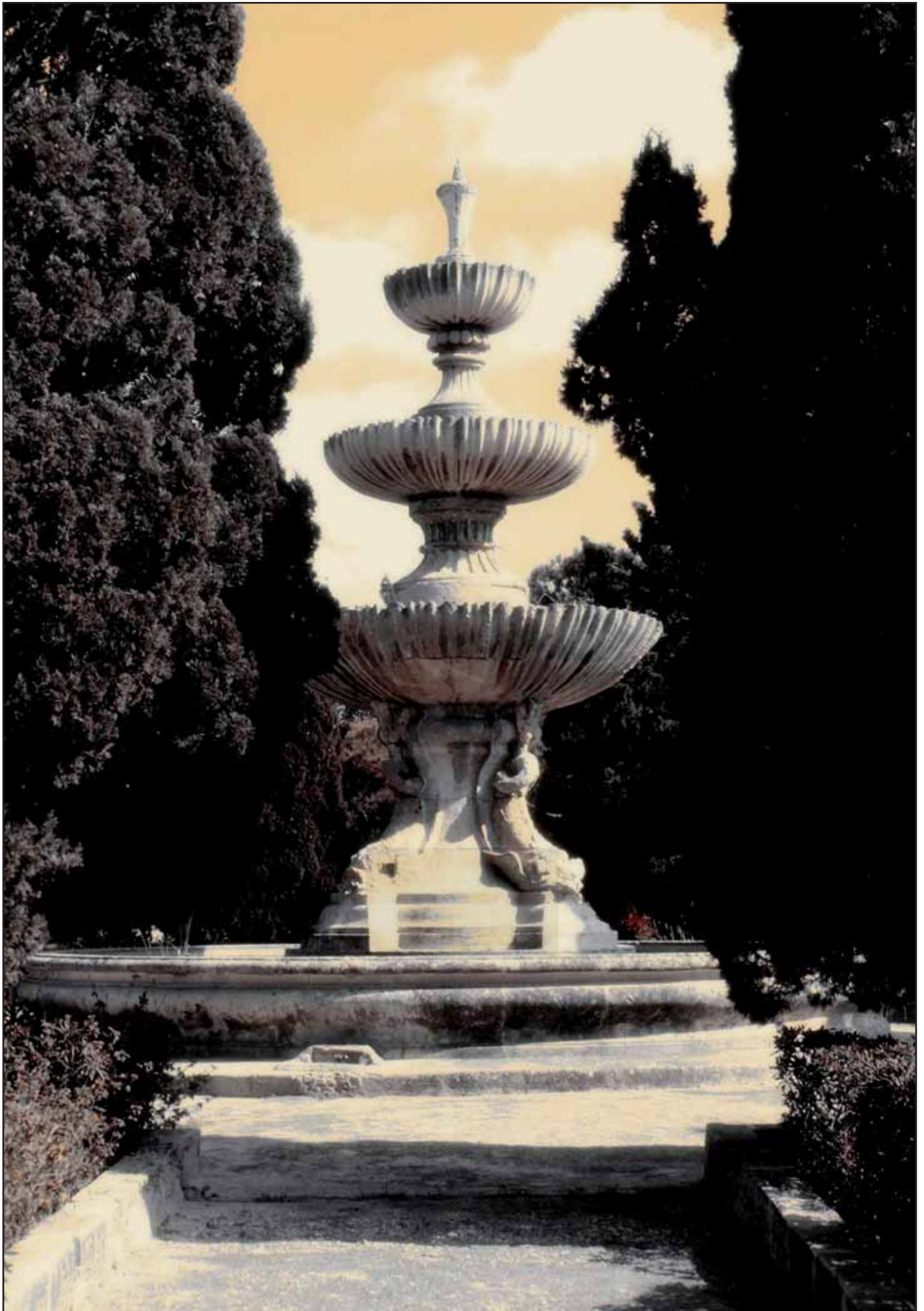
Yes Valletta is worthy of UNESCO World Heritage Site status because it is a city that has undergone little change since it was originally planned and thus serves as a fine example of 16th century Renaissance town-planning.

Opposite:

Fountain formerly in St George's Square, St Philip's Garden, Floriana

The fading skin of Valletta





Villa Francia - Restoration, Conservation, and Rehabilitation

Architect Claude Borg

Villa Francia, formerly known as Villa Preziosi, is situated in the northern part of Lija. It is surrounded by fields to the north-west and south-east, while the southern and eastern sides are surrounded by old houses that form part of the outer band of the organic urban development of the village. Leonard Mahoney has dated the villa to the mid-18th century (prior to 1757), when the baroque style permeated down from the ruling class to the pretentious and wealthy Maltese families. Mahoney also says that some of these residences cost so much that their ambitious owners, including those of Villa Preziosi, ended up bankrupt.

There is sufficient intrinsic evidence to demonstrate that the villa was not built in its present complete state in one go, but developed over time, with the original building probably serving as a hunting lodge. It can be demonstrated that additions to the building were made up to the second half of the 20th century.

Today, the villa comprises a two-storey building with formal front and back gardens. At the end of the back garden there is a large nymphaeum building that houses a water mill (*sienja*) and a large reservoir. On the southern side there is a small garden and a building consisting of some rooms attached to the main two-storey building.

A coach room and stable are attached to the southern boundary wall of the back garden. The coach room, stable and the small room with continuous corbels could be contemporary to the hunting lodge. During one of the surveys of Villa Francia, it was established that the courses laid within the double walls of the coach room are not aligned with the back wall that forms part of the perimeter wall of the back garden. This indicates that the back garden was constructed when the hunting lodge was converted into a villa, with the consequence that the rear part of the coach room and the stables were demolished.

On the northern side there is a row of rooms overlooking a large stretch of terraced agricultural land, measuring approximately two hectares, in which is a circular *belvedere* overlooking Mosta Road. The whole is surrounded by a substantial boundary wall.

The façade

The main façade, like the whole complex, has grown through various interventions carried out over time to arrive at its present appearance. The central section consisting of a finely decorated flat centrepiece and is punctuated, at ground floor level, with a regular repetition of finely moulded windows that lie three on each side of the central doorway. The centre of the façade is emphasised further by an arched doorway at first floor level. The tall proportions of the first-floor windows, with their wooden louvres, are further heightened by the rusticated pilasters between them. There is also a projecting cornice, high above the lintels of the windows and door.

The central section was at some point flanked on either side by wings projecting outwards at 90 degrees to it, each with a window of similar proportions to the central doorway. Two windows on the wings are



The façade

presently closed, although they have wooden louvered apertures on the outside. The façades of the two lateral wings each contain an arched “entrance” in-between two rusticated pilasters. The façade is divided into two parts and the two floors appear to be different, with small but important differences in the detailing of the windows indicating that the two floors were not constructed at the same time.

On entering the front garden, the visitor is immediately impressed by the sumptuous front elevation of the villa. What immediately catches the eye is the elaborate external staircase that leads to the first floor. This finely decorated balustraded open staircase, with urns at every landing, interrupts the flatness of the central section. This appears to be the most recent element to have been added to the façade. It spans both sides of the building in a fan-like manner, curving around the façade towards an arched entrance at first floor level. It includes porthole windows on each side, covered with simple iron grillwork and decorated with a surrounding frame made of sculptured foliage. The entrance to the ground floor is set in the centre of the façade within the external staircase. The main door is made up of four leaves consisting of narrow wooden panels and transparent glass panes.

The first floor elevation consists of six rectangular windows enclosed with wooden louvres – three on each side of the arched entrance leading off the open staircase. On each façade of the lateral wings is an arched window and all the windows are separated by rusticated pilasters and decorated with an architrave, topped with a frieze and a cornice. A string cornice separates the ground floor from the first floor. The latter is also topped with a string cornice and a parapet of balustrades, separated at intervals by short stretches of panelled walls and pilasters over which are decorative stone urns.

Although the façade lacks sumptuous carving, it was nonetheless carefully thought out by its architect so that rusticated pilasters are virtually transformed into an order of supports, giving the impression that they are the sole load-bearing elements, while the balustrades and decorative stone urns enliven the skyline. The two lateral wings are like embracing arms welcoming all those who enter.

The interior

The main entrance at ground floor level leads into a central room that in turn opens onto the back garden. This room is decorated in neo-classical style, with a coffered ceiling and panelled walls in pastel green with white trimmings. The long corridor that intersects



Detail of external staircase

the building leads to various rooms which, apart from the one that occupies the southern lateral wing, are of moderate size and in some cases could be considered small.

The internal layout of the villa has probably undergone several changes, especially when the property was transferred from the Preziosi family to the Francia family. After the transition occurred, the maids' quarters were probably relocated to the extension on the southern side of the villa, and also to the row of rooms overlooking the fields, whereas originally all the ground floor used to serve such a purpose. Most of the

Central section of the Green Room ceiling



The garden façade



sculptured motifs probably form part of the original 18th century building but the majority of the doors, windows and apertures, including the fitted cupboards, date to the Victorian period or later.

The oven and hearth in the kitchen abutting the coach room are probably 19th century additions. Originally, instead of the hearth, there was an opening that led into the coach room. The coloured and patterned tiles on the wall of the corridor near the kitchen were

The kitchen



originally fitted around the hearth and oven. The kitchen also has a blocked door that originally led to more rooms. It is evident that these rooms, now the property of a third party, once formed part of Villa Preziosi. The ceiling of the small kitchen is made up of stone slabs (*tal-qasba*) supported with continuous corbels (*kileb*) and a wooden beam that is further supported with another beam at right angles (*pastaz*).

The back elevation of the main building consists of a central doorway surrounded by a plain architrave that opens onto the back garden and is flanked on both sides by a number of doors and windows. A pair of Tuscan columns on either side of the main entrance are set on a rectangular base with their entablature acting as a support to an open balcony at the centre of which is a sundial. The doors and windows on the ground floor are flanked with rusticated pilasters and topped with a cornice. The open balcony at first floor level is accessible via two doors. On each side of the balcony are three rectangular windows. All the apertures on the first floor are decorated with entablatures and topped with friezes and cornices. A thick string cornice separates the first floor from the parapet wall. The latter is plain but curves upwards from the centre on both sides, becoming slightly higher – probably to hold a date or inscription.

Internally, the villa is striking on account of its grand scale, with the width and gentle rise of the external staircase being perhaps one of its most predominant aspects. The first floor is almost identical to the ground floor. All the paving of the first floor is in stone slabs (*ciangatura*) of the standard 0.5m width. The *soffits* in the sitting room, kitchen, dining room and green room are constructed with a bamboo netting structure and/or wooden planks with stucco appliqué. The green room, located at the centre of the first floor, is the most extensively decorated of the villa's rooms, with painted panels illustrating trophies of arms and musical instruments, *putti* and scenes of musicians and pastoral love.



The nympheum

The Gardens

The villa was erected with large gardens on all four sides, each of which has its own particular atmosphere. The villa is orientated along a northeast/southwest axis and the predominance of the gardens over the residence is strongly emphasised. Such play on light and proportions is an element that was very much in vogue in late baroque country houses and villas. Owing to its orientation, the light cast on the villa follows the rising and setting of the sun. During the morning, the main façade and front garden are full of light, while the back garden is partly in shadow. The play on light continues as the day passes, with the villa acting as a large sundial casting shadows on the front and back gardens. At the end of the day, the sun sets behind the large nympheum amidst a symphony of natural sounds: the gurgling of the water spouting from the fountains, the gushing water running along the irrigation channels and the cheerful singing of the birds.

Both the front and back gardens are laid out in the formal baroque style and develop along a central axis towards an architectural focal point. Pathways form a cross along the axis of the front garden, dividing it into four equal squares, and also running around all four sides. Different coloured pebbles, encased to form geometrical patterns, cover all the paths in the front and back gardens. This method of decorating with coloured pebbles was common in Italy during the late baroque period. The paving appears to be contemporary to the period in which the gardens were laid out, with the grid-pattern layout and mosaic decoration both intrinsically baroque. The paving is composed of variously coloured pebbles that have been arranged in specific floral or geometric patterns. In other areas, such as the paths on the sides of the garden, the pebbles are monochromatic.

The nympheum, which provides a backdrop to the view across the back garden, was built before the later wings were added to the main body of the

villa. It has a large central arch leading to a niche decorated with a scallop shell motif and supported with Tuscan columns. In the centre is a fountain representing a cherub on a dolphin blowing into shell from which water spouted. The building has a parapet wall decorated with balustrades and a central archway with the bust of a faun at the top. The nympheum building houses a large water mill, which is still in very good condition although it lacks the buckets that used to collect water from the artesian well. This is the heart of a complex water system that feeds a number of fountains located across the gardens.

Historical aspect

As can be seen from a plaque on the boundary wall close to the entrance of the villa, in 1942 Villa Preziosi was the residence of Sir Ugo Mifsud, Prime Minister of Malta from September 1924 to August 1927 and from June 1932 to November 1933. Sir Ugo was married to the former Miss Francia, whose brother owned Villa Francia during the Second World War. After the

Two details of a garden fountain





war, his wife's brother adopted a child and from then onwards the villa was owned by adopted heirs until it became the property of the Government of Malta.

Although we have no documentary records, it is obvious that the villa evolved from a hunting lodge to the sumptuous building we know today. For this reason it is of the utmost importance that all the features of the villa, including the gardens and even the fields, are respected and preserved in their authentic presentation, as distortions of any sort would definitely diminish the value of such a fine complex.

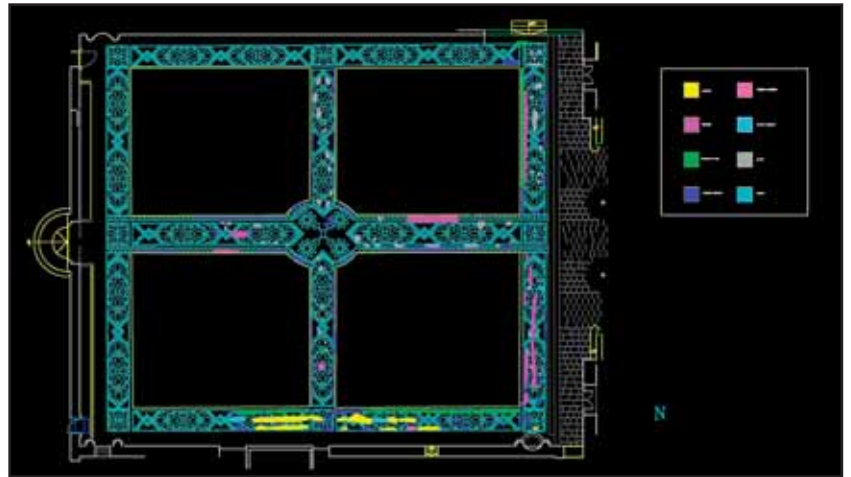
Restoration, conservation and rehabilitation

Although the extent of the property includes the villa, its extensive gardens and some fields, the current intervention was mainly concerned with the buildings and the formal gardens in their immediate vicinity. The complexity of the intervention can be appreciated by the extent of the multi-disciplinary team brought in to work on the project. Various professionals were involved, including a conservation specialist, a project manager, an electrical engineer, a mechanical engineer and a landscape architect.

Such buildings do not require restoration back to the original, but a need to understand, analyse and respect all the various changes that the building has undergone to reach its present form. This does not imply that each and every change to the building requires equal respect. Authentic features have been retained, while most of the additions considered to have no intrinsic value (post mid -20th century) have been removed.

Documentation

In order to achieve a comprehensive knowledge of the villa, its contents and the state of its preservation, an extensive documentation exercise was undertaken. Archival research did not yield a great deal of information, but much could be deduced by the study of the structure itself. A series of surveys were carried out and detailed records were created using various techniques. Some of the surveys used a system of scaled rectified photos. In the case of masonry surfaces, the scaled rectified photos were traced and each stone indicated for the treatment required. All the joinery items were catalogued and a detailed inventory of all the items pertaining to the villa was undertaken. A photographic record was compiled and deposited with the Department Of Information.



Top:

Schematic drawing of the pebble paving with colour identification of state of preservation

Above:

Rectified photograph of a section of pebble paving

Opposite:

Detail of the nymphaeum fountain



Detail of corridor ceiling



Consolidation and restoration of masonry surface

The cleaning aspect of the project involved the removal of damaging elements. This meant that the cleaning carried out was very light – removing all the immediate damaging elements on the surface without attempting to renovate the surfaces intervened upon. Except where cement rendering or oil-based paints were applied, only nylon or bristle brushes or surgical blades were used and small hand-held chipping hammers were employed where the damaging elements were more stubborn.

Plastic repairs were carried out in order to reduce or eliminate the disturbance caused by missing parts of masonry surfaces, in such a way that the intervention can be unmistakably identified as such. The replacement of the original stone fabric with similar stone was only carried out when it was structurally, and not aesthetically, necessary or when the original was completely missing.

Colour schemes

All the interiors were covered with a coloured lime wash. Apart from presenting the villa in the way it was intended to look, this solution was necessary in order to protect the surfaces from further deterioration. In one of the rooms, badly damaged gold gilding was discovered on the painted cornice.

Colour schemes were chosen following a visual paint analysis, which indicated that the appearance of the villa had undergone various stages. It was evident that the earlier colour schemes presented a much richer aesthetic unity and these colour schemes were reintegrated using



This page:

Various stages of the restoration of a fountain



lime washes. For this purpose, lime was slaked in a methodological way, with all the barrels dated to allow the lime to slake for a minimum of three months.

On the front façade of the Villa, colour rendering on the coat of arms and on various other elements, such as the original lime green of one of the urns, was discovered, and although not reinstated this was documented.

The chromatic richness that once characterised the environs of the villa was recovered during the restoration of the nymphaeum and the various fountains. In most cases the rehabilitation of the fountains included the removal of cement rendering, algae and lichens, dirt and loose lime layers. The cleaning process was carried out using surgical blades, brushes and chipping hammers. During this intervention the original colours were analysed and, once the masonry had been rehabilitated, were reapplied.

Paving

The rehabilitation of the garden paving, composed of variously coloured pebbles, presented a considerable challenge. Work began in the back garden for logistical reasons. The retaining culverts were restored prior to restoring the pebble paving itself. This work involved the cleaning and treatment of the mosaic according to the conservation ethic of minimal intervention. The loose pebbles were cleaned and re-applied, with the meticulous insertion of one pebble at a time, following the original decorative pattern. Where the mosaic had completely disappeared, slightly different pebbles were used to reintegrate the missing area.

Restoration of bamboo soffits

Another considerable challenge was presented by the *soffits* of the first floor rooms, all of which required immediate restoration. One had missing stucco pieces due to the collapse of the bamboo substructure that originally held it in place. As a result of this, the bamboo netting had become exposed and very specialised restoration was required to repair it and strengthen the underlying structure. In the Green Room the *soffit* showed separation seams running along the ceiling painting causing detachment, deformation and stress damage to the paint layer. Over-painting during past intervention was also visible.

The repair of the bamboo *soffit* substructure had to be carried out from above. This was achieved by removing the stone slabs of the overlying roof one by one and

reattaching the bamboo framework first to the secondary beams sub-structure and then reattaching the whole to the primary beams with copper bonding. Once the soffit structure had been stabilised, the painted surface was restored from below.

Services

The most drastic intervention to the fabric of the villa was the demolition of a set of modern rooms and their reconstruction using traditional methods. These rooms were formerly servants' quarters and they have now been used to house various services.

All the water, electrical, telephone and drain supplies had to be refitted and new ones added. Whenever possible, services were passed beneath the paved floor, and elsewhere the old service chases were re-used to avoid the need for new ones. The restoration of the terrazzo tiles of the ground floor corridor, which were removed, restored and re-laid, provided the opportunity to excavate a trench from which many services were directed.

Training

An interesting aspect of the project was the involvement of various MCAST students in the work, thus providing them with the opportunity to obtain on-the-job experience. One particularly emotional moment was when one of these students uncovered a small carving on the ground floor corridor wall. Further investigation revealed two intricate carvings running the whole height of the wall.

Conclusion

The restoration of Villa Francia has been a complex project, requiring a multi-disciplinary approach. Thanks to the efforts of all those involved, this unique architectural gem has been saved for posterity.



Discovery of the ornate carving by an MCAST student



Exposed bamboo soffit



Before and after restoration of the Green Room ceiling

Acknowledgements

Architect Mario Bonello, Project Manager.

Louis Attard, Works Manager.

Engineers Brian Cauchi and Paul Mejlaq.

Architect Shirley Buttigieg for assisting in the landscaping design.

Paul Saliba, for assisting in the compilation of some of the information on the history of the building.

Ugo Callus representing the client from the Office of the Prime Minister.

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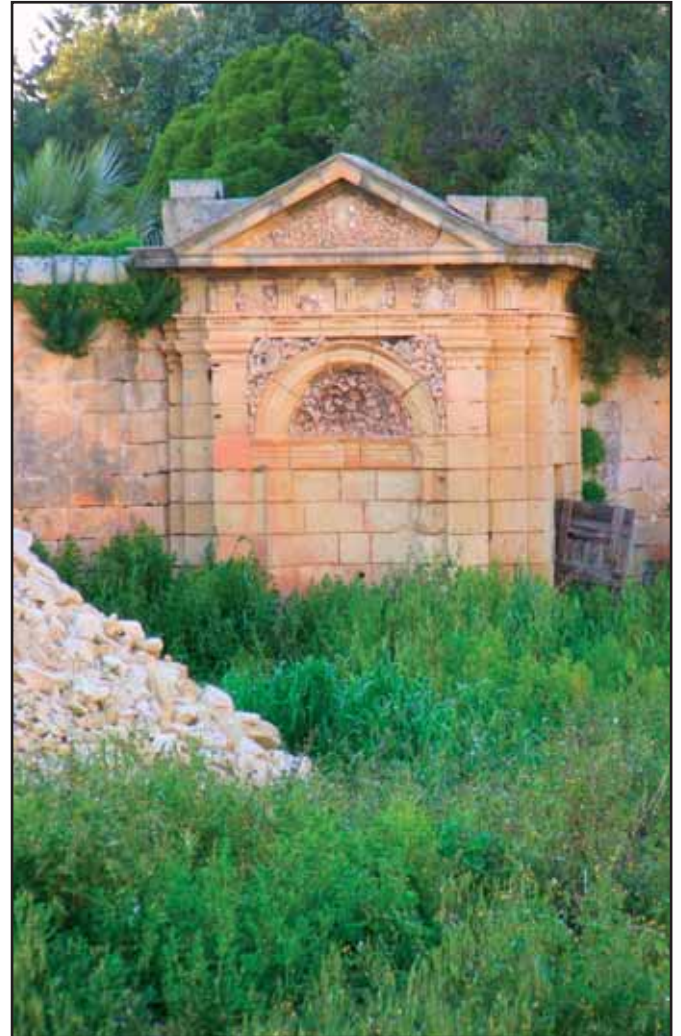
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Site plans currently available were obtained from the Chief Draughtsman Office.



One of Malta's oldest post-boxes. It was spared defacement but has now been abandoned near the customs house.



Forgotten garden. Monumental element abutting the boundary wall of Romeo Romano Gardens.



Urban development. "Saving" a fragment while obliterating its context.



Incredible neighbours.
Derelict building next door
to the Malta Centre for
Restoration.



The abandoned chapel on
the hill. (Il-Kappella tas-
Salib ta' l-Gholja, Siġġiewi)



We are saving the temples
from the elements. But
who will save them from
institutional insensitivity?

Heritage Publications Review

Publications for consideration within this section are to be forwarded to the Editor :

Din l-Art Helwa
133 Melita Street
Valletta

An Introduction to Cultural Heritage Law

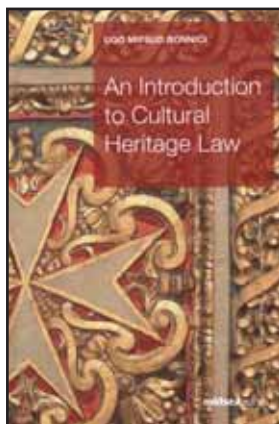
Author - Ugo Mifsud Bonnici

Published by - Midsea Books

ISBN - 978-99932-7-183-3 hardback

ISBN - 978-99932-7-184-0 paperback

Reviewed by *Petra Bianchi*



Piazza del Duomo, Florence



The author of this informative book is President Emeritus Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, who was Minister for Education from 1987-94, when he was also responsible for culture and heritage. At the time, he had attempted to change the outdated law on Maltese heritage, which had been enacted in 1925 and which did not take into account significant developments in attitudes towards heritage, as well as international law. However, this draft was still incomplete when he was appointed President of Malta.

Once he left the Presidency, in 1999, he again took up this task, together with Dr Louis Galea, then Minister for Education, and a new law regulating and protecting our cultural heritage was finally enacted in 2002.

This instructive volume outlines not only the development of Malta's national legislation on cultural heritage, but also explores the related international context that exists in the form of treaties, charters and conventions. It explains the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002, which is the main focus of the text, and documents Maltese legislation in relation to libraries and archives, language, copyright, tax, religious heritage and land acquisition.

Definitions of cultural heritage in legislation tend to be extremely broad and can be stretched to encompass almost everything. One of the unresolved issues that emerges from this book is the complex relationship and potential conflicts that appear when ideas about the conservation of cultural heritage clash with planning or other social or political considerations: "The difficulties encountered when proper planning is hindered by myopic land speculation interests, are still to be resolved by good legislation in both planning and cultural property legislation" (48).

Anyone involved in planning issues will be familiar with the re-emergence of these conflicting arguments on both sides of the debate very frequently in the discussion of development applications.

The book frames the question in broader terms, noting that this problem exists in other countries too: "The bridging in the law concerning Land Use and Planning with those protecting Cultural Heritage has been seen to be inadequate in many other jurisdictions" (10). In Malta the relevant legislation is the Development and Planning Act of 1992, which was intended to entrust the planning process to one authority and lead to greater efficiency.

However, heritage concerns are not given enough importance in the planning process, and after the Antiquities Committee was abolished no adequate replacement was introduced: "Incidentally, though unintentionally, if inevitably, some subordination of Heritage concerns to those of development ensued" (107).

The author points out that the claims of heritage are, however, not ignored in planning legislation, as it includes the instrument of "scheduling", which is essentially the "listing" of objects and properties of cultural importance, although the process is slow: "Extensive scheduling has been done, though it must be admitted that a large number of areas, buildings, structures and remains still await their scheduling" (107).

Items of natural heritage, including landscapes, also merit protection. The author points out that there are three distinct ways of valuing the importance of natural heritage: Nature as "environment" (a habitat), as considered by the Environment Protection Act; Nature as "beauty" (an aesthetic value), as considered by the Development Planning Act and Nature as "culture" (historical/social landscapes), as considered by the Cultural Heritage Act. The legal structure governing this area is fragmented.

The importance of the "setting" of sites and monuments within a cultural landscape was formally recognised by the Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments in 1931, in which it was stated that buildings and monuments should be considered within their physical and cultural context, and not in isolation.

This concept was repeated in the Venice Charter of 1964, which states that: "The concept of an historic monument embraces not only the single architectural work but also the urban or rural setting in which is found the evidence of a particular civilisation, a significant development or an historic event. This applies not only to great works of art but also to more modest works of the past which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time" (230).

Laws concerning cultural heritage are becoming increasingly international in their approach. Today's policy makers, while

respecting the national heritage of individual states, also embrace the concept of “world heritage”, as established by the UNESCO listing of World Heritage sites. In Malta we have our own sites that are recognised as world heritage in this list: Valletta, Mdina and the Neolithic temples. This listing is prestigious, but it also implies obligations towards the international community and the requirement of high standards of conservation.

Malta also played its part in the establishment of world heritage in 1967, when Ambassador Arvid Pardo, on behalf of the Maltese Government, proposed that the common resources of the sea should be administered by the United Nations, recognising that the sea belongs to mankind as a whole.

On another note, the book discusses the way that policy makers through the ages have understood the importance of the role of culture in raising the prestige and attractions of the country to visitors. There are many examples in history that illustrate this point. The Renaissance rulers of Florence paid great attention to the cultivation of the arts in their city, and this is what has ultimately led to the beauty and fame of Florence today.

The relationship between culture and tourism is important, but in reality it is extremely delicate. On the one hand, it is positive that cultural sites should derive financial gain from their assets and that they should be marketed and presented to a high standard. On the other hand, there is the ever-present danger of over-commercialisation, as well as the threat to conservation if visitor numbers to any particular site are too high, and visitor flows become unmanageable: “There is however a risk in excessive commercialisation of cultural property. Though also an economic good, their primary mission lies in spiritual and social enrichment. The preservation of the cultural goods themselves must always prevail over exploitation” (57).

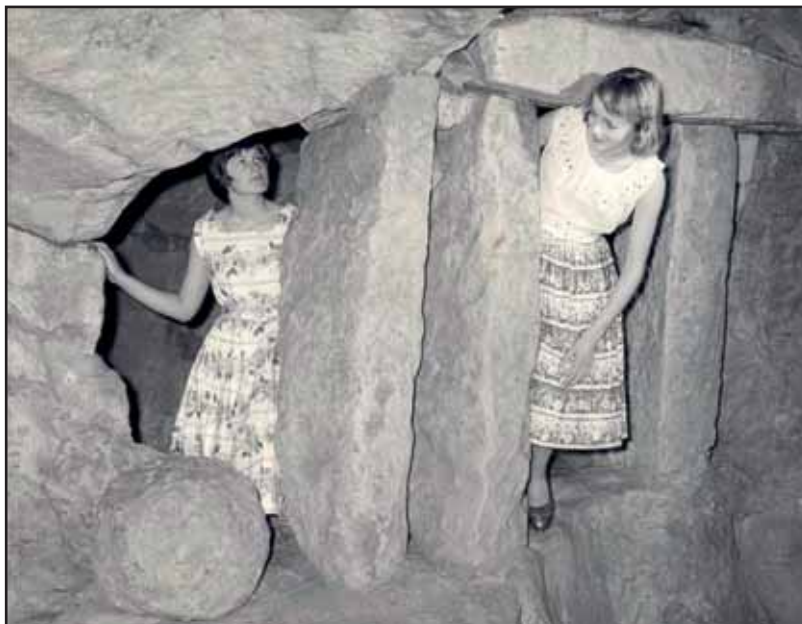
One of the most important innovations in the Cultural Heritage Act of 2002 was the separation of the regulation and the management of cultural heritage, both of which were formerly incorporated in the Department of Museums. The “regulator” is now the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage, and the “manager” is the government agency Heritage Malta.

The Act also recognised that it is impossible for central government to finance and manage the entire wealth of heritage in the public domain, and introduced the legal instrument of Guardianship, which entrusts the management and conservation of heritage sites to non-governmental cultural heritage organisations or local councils. *Din l-Art Helwa* was the first organisation to benefit from this legal instrument, and signed a Deed of Guardianship with the government in 2002 for several properties. Further properties should soon be entrusted to *Din l-Art Helwa* in this manner.

And what about the future? The author notes that the legal protection of archival and documentary material is not adequate, and that great losses to this aspect of our cultural heritage have occurred. He also points out that Malta’s ancient heritage is often sacrificed to development “with some nonchalance” (262), and that abuse and negligence in this area might be accorded greater weight in the legislation.

The author concludes that there are a number of areas within cultural heritage that call for further study, public discussion and perhaps legislation, the most important of which is that of “policy, and the support, to be given by general consensus, to the priority accorded to cultural conservation as to environmental protection over economic development” (259).

The right balance between safeguarding our heritage without impeding development is still elusive and the discussion must be continued. This book provides a fine introduction and scholarly exposition of the subject, and should be read by all students and professionals, as well as politicians and others interested in the protection of our heritage.



Promotional images used
in the mid-20th Century

“Though also an economic good, their [cultural goods] primary mission lies in spiritual and social enrichment. The preservation of the cultural goods themselves must always prevail over exploitation”

A lovely image of the Madonna and Child once again graces the cover of an issue (Christmas 2008) of *Treasures of Malta*. The image of Our Lady tenderly holding her infant child must be close to the heart of the publishers. Such a representation featured on the cover of that long ago first issue that went to press in 1994, and keeps reappearing every now and then. This latest one is the work of a 17th century anonymous painter that forms part of the Edward Caruana Dingli bequest, kept at the Museum of Fine Arts.

The cover image is not the only thing that relates back to *Treasures* No.1 across the 42 issues that have followed. *Treasures of Malta* has remained more or less faithful to the concept, format, character and prerogatives set in 1994. In a world that is so often characterised by fast-changing trends, where nothing lasts more than a few seasons, the rhythmic return of *Treasures* in the windows of booksellers is a comforting certainty. Like all its predecessors, this issue is once again full of interesting material.

Giovanni Bonello delves into the world of *castrati*, one of the most fascinating products of the baroque era for which, in a cinematographic way, they provided a *colonna sonora* (sound track). This Italian term, which translates literally into “sound column”, renders perfectly the status of these singers, with their angelic voices, in the musical world of their time. Far from being simple performers, they were indeed a unique musical instrument, by the use of which a particular type of music was conceived. Even the Catholic Church, at the time busy disciplining its adepts through the persuasive exertions of the Holy Office, could not fail to yield to the temptation of this, in the words of the author, “forbidden fruit”. The Church, in fact, condemned castration perpetrated on pre-pubescent boys, and yet was all too happy to use these in its splendid functions.

Another extremely interesting topic, which has lately become a regular feature of *Treasures*, is fortifications. Fortifications are probably the most perfect incarnation of the architectural expression: “Form Follows Function”. They are its perfect synthesis in that it is the outline of a fortification that in great part determines its effectiveness and validity. Stephen Spiteri continues to spread his encyclopaedic knowledge of the fortifications of Malta both through his writing and, even more, through his precise, erudite and immensely evocative graphic illustrations. Indeed, it has become difficult to escape these images when mentally trying to conceive the outline of a particular fortification.

The arts in general, and painting in particular, are also a recurring theme in *Treasures of Malta*. I find it fascinating how, within a thickness of a few millimetres and sometimes very restricted surface areas, painters manage to capture and express so much. Paintings become like sieves passed through time which, although letting many things pass, still manage to capture on the surface of the canvas, together with the pigments, aspects of both the culture of the society in which they were created and, at a more personal level, the emotional status of the painter while creating his work. In this issue, pictorial art is represented by three very different articles. One is the interesting study by Charlotte Bellizzi of the materials used by the 17th century Maltese painter Stefano Erardi. Another is the joyous and lyrical rendering of everyday life in early 20th century Malta as captured by the able brush of Edward Caruana Dingli. And finally, there is the somewhat naïve but intense representation of St Alphonse Maria De Liguori from the parish church of St Lawrence, Birgu.

The publishing team at *Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti* have produced another edition of great quality and aesthetic validity that is able to stand in line with the ever-growing body of printed matter it has published in recent years.

Treasures of Malta

No. 43 Vol. XV No.1 Christmas 2008

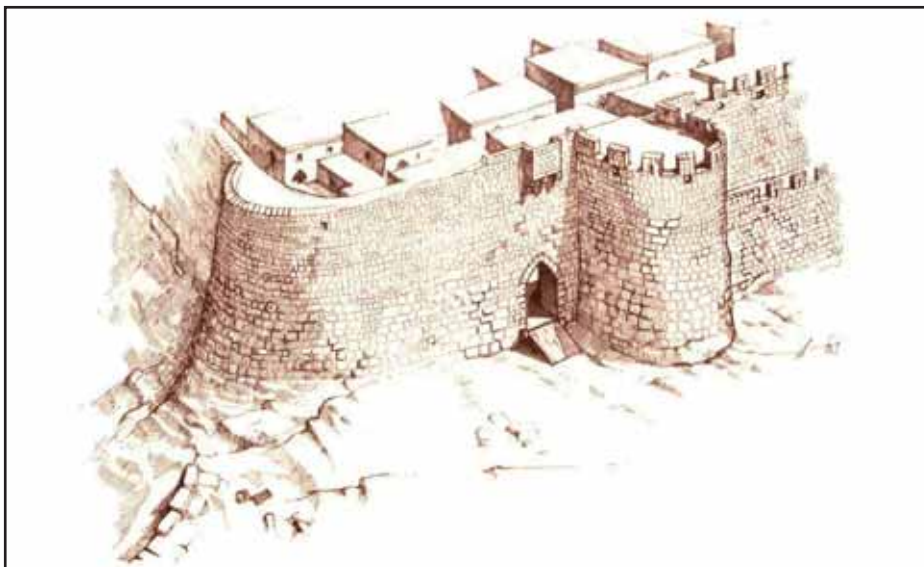
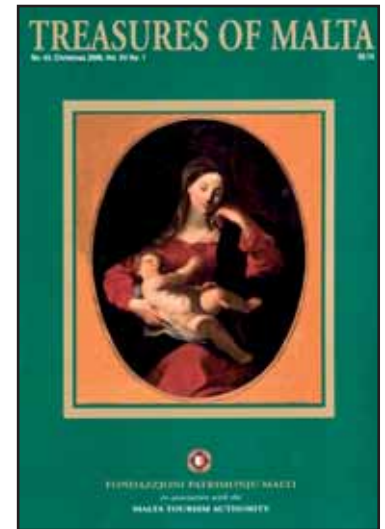
Editor - Paul Xuereb

Published by - Fondazzjoni

Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 1028-3013

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



Graphic reconstruction of Greek's Gate
Stephen C. Spiteri

Histories of Malta - Confessions and Transgressions

Volume IX

Author - Giovanni Bonello

Published by - Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti

ISBN – 978-99932-7-224-3

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



A book can say as much about its author as it does about its subject. The subject of *Histories of Malta Vol. 9* is expressed in its sub-title *Confessions and Transgressions*, but where are the characteristics of the author to be found? Late last year, Giovanni Bonello was awarded the accolade “Man of The Year” by a local publication. This was a rare opportunity for some to get to know him better, thanks to a follow-up interview – an opportunity to assess how much of an author’s character and life-story can be found in his writing.

Bonello relates his difficult upbringing, especially during WWII, which sharpened his resistance to injustice and his determination to succeed, while making him aware of the ease with which injustice and discrimination might become the order of the day, even in a modern democratic culture.

In his *Histories of Malta* series, and particularly so in this particular volume, Bonello strives to fight historical injustice and discrimination by bringing out of oblivion facts and personages generally ignored by other researchers. This is a recurring theme in the series, which delves in what might at time seem trivial and inconsequential topics. But the brilliant intuition behind this is that, while history might be enacted by the great, their performance would be quite dull without the colourful background against which it is enacted. It is this background that Bonello brings to life, be it in the shape of the linguistic legacy of the Order of St John, the consumption of tobacco under the same Order, the paintings of Gerolamo Gianni, or the photographs of Salvatore Lorenzo Cassar. These *tessere* all go to form a common historical mosaic.

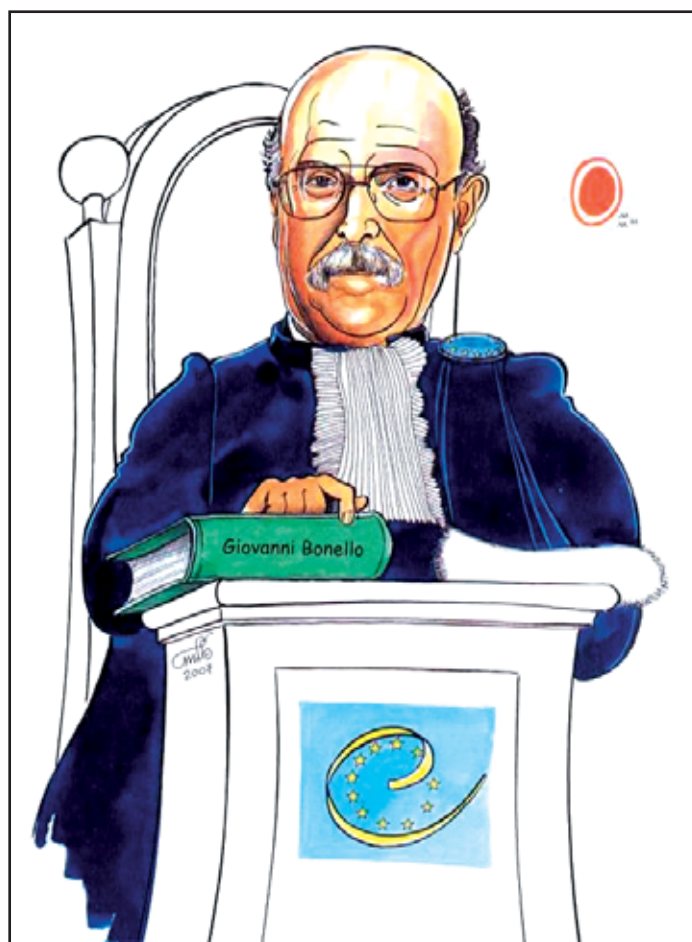
Bonello also betrays a passion for freedom “freedom of expression, conscience, assembly, belief and movement. These are some of the basic legal and political freedoms enshrined in constitutions and international conventions, but Bonello has also a practical side that is uncommon for people in his position who often deal with intangible issues. He realises, in fact, that: “these freedoms would be worth little without other, more ‘physiological’, but less guaranteed rights, like freedom from hunger, illiteracy, war,

disease, persecution”. In his writings, the author often recounts cases in which such basic liberties were at risk, so that the hindsight offered by the past might be an admonition for the present and the future. In this volume, these issues emerge poignantly in the interesting article dealing with the planned but never held Malta Trials of those suspected of participation in the massacre of the Armenians in WW1.

When Bonello declares that he did not want to study law but wanted to either study art history or live the life of a “vague and blissful vagabond”, he reveals a definitely romantic streak – in this sense an awareness of his deeper emotions. Without this romantic side, he could never have decoded the hidden meaning behind what he himself refers to as “margin doodles”, those enigmatic graphical scribbles found in many old documents. Previously brushed aside by many as the manifestation of bored clerks, these are re-assessed and re-evaluated by Bonello, who offers meanings for them and their seemingly chaotic distribution.

While looking at the past, Bonello is deeply grounded in the present. The book is full of instances where different cultures confronted each other with at times positive outcomes but mostly with harsh consequences. He is aware that, although the stage might have changed, much of the weaknesses in human nature are still at work. In a final comment in his interview Bonello states: “...yet we too also suffer from our own problems in the sphere of human rights. I would point fingers at environmental protection, together with a widespread resistance to cultural diversification”. These are undoubtedly the priorities on his agenda – the things against which he is determined to fight, be it as a judge or as an author.

There can be no doubt that much of the author is reflected in his writing. Giovanni Bonello carries his 72 years very well. He declares that he intends to keep writing and now that his work at the European Court of Human Rights is concluded, it is hoped he will find more time to dedicate to his writing.



Welcome is indeed a welcome addition to the local press catalogue. The name of the publication manifests the driving concept of the Institute for Tourism Studies (of which it is the journal) – that of training individuals who will welcome visitors to our shores and give them as good and comprehensive an experience of Malta as possible. ITS pays particular attention to presenting Malta as a unique destination, with a fascinating history and good standard of service.

By extension, this need to present a product of good standard has also extended to the publication. Its large format, full colour, and graphic richness give it immediate appeal. However, the reader should not be misled by the glitzy appearance. This is no relaxing magazine meant to be read lazily in one's spare time; it is meant to inform and provoke.

Issue No. 2 has Malta's mythical and magical aspects as its general theme and presents a series of articles that expound these themes from different angles. Extremely interesting is the article by David Pace entitled *Malta Island of Mystery*. The author gives an objective and critical overview of the numerous, and often extravagant, theories about the origin of our prehistoric culture. He neglects no aspect, citing as well the myths of UFOs and Atlantis, and uses as his base a wide variety of sources. Together with these myths and speculation (which he acknowledges as such) he refers to the few concrete pieces of evidence available, such as pottery shards, personal ornaments, clay figures and built structures. The celestial alignment of some of the temples is discussed at some length, emerging as a certainty in concept but as a baffling mystery in reality.

What is sure is that, judging from the still-existing remains, the Maltese have always been a prolific people when it comes to building places of worship. Is it possible that there is link between the large proportion of prehistoric temple sites on our small land area and the huge number of churches and chapels built in more recent times? The author also delves superficially, but intelligently, into the psychology of the temple builders. He emphasises how traces of those "primitive people" we see as being so far back in the past might still be present among us, citing as examples certain behaviour during national elections and village *festas*.

To conclude, the author asks why the University of Malta does not have a faculty for Neolithic Studies and, considering our archaeological heritage, one asks why more is not done to turn Malta into a centre for Mediterranean archaeological studies.

Yet another interesting article, this time by Carmel Cassar, deals with superstition in general and witchcraft in particular. The author gives a very clear definition of what was meant by superstition in the 16th and 17th centuries: "... this did not refer to the modern notion of uncritical belief in non-existent supernatural forces, but to attempts to reach supernatural beings through unofficial channels".

Cassar gives a good analysis of the role of witchcraft and magic practises in the daily lives of our ancestors during this period. He expounds how, at the heart of the matter, were marked cultural differences. These differences were most evident between the better educated and cosmopolitan urban population of the harbour areas and the superstitious, and generally introvert, country folk of rural areas. Parallel to this was the struggle of the sexes, with the socially inferior "weaker sex" often resorting to magic as an alternative means of achieving its ends.

On this subject, one cannot fail to mention the Inquisition and all the efforts it made to suppress witchcraft, or any other form of behaviour deviating from the social canons devised by the post-Trentine Catholic Church. Here emerges an immense effort towards the justification of social conformity, helped by the paranoia of insular and continental periphery living. This paranoia resulted in arrogance and a distrust of the different and unknown, and found as its perfect scapegoat the weaker members of society. No wonder that women of independent nature, often unmarried, were the favourite victims of this all-male set-up.

Ironically, the records of the Inquisition are often the best available source for forming a detailed picture of the magical practices most commonly employed. They are also useful in identifying the extent to which the cult of the supernatural imbued life in all strata of society. Cassar uses these records, and other sources, to weave his tale into a colourful historic tapestry.

This issue of *Welcome* contains other interesting articles by Francesca Farrugia, Joshua G. Giordmaina, and Stanley Farrugia Randon. Throughout the publication, subjects that might perhaps be considered a trifle highbrow are presented in an approachable and entertaining manner without however being simplistic. Overall it is a calculate effort meant to maximise interest and stimulate curiosity.

Welcome - Journal of the ITS

Issue 2

Editor - Raymond J Vassallo

Published by - Institute of Tourism Studies

ISBN – 1998-9954

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



Lost souls. Fresco, Campo Santo, Pisa





Michael Refalo's *magnum opus* – the translation into English of Herbert Ganado's epic story, *Rajt Malta Tinbidel* – marches on. We have now reached Volume 5, covering the years 1943 to 1955.

In this volume, Herbert Ganado gives an account of the war, "its impact and effect on the world and on our country", and its aftermath. In-so-far as the war is concerned, it is inevitably a second-hand account, since the author spent those years incarcerated in internment camps in Uganda, well away from the privations of war visited on Malta by Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany and Mussolini's Fascists in Italy. Nevertheless, Ganado has pieced together a lively and evocative account of what life in Malta was like and the huge social and political changes which the Second World War wrought on this Island – and the world.

Volume 5 of *My Century* is dominated by Ganado's experience

of internment, of the pain of being parted from his beloved family and the sense of injustice at what he sees as the "politically motivated and exceptional circumstances of internment". The personal difficulties that internment created are not difficult to appreciate or to empathise with whole-heartedly.

Nobody who has seen what a very crude and blunt instrument internment is for dealing with those in civil society during the emergency conditions created by war who appear – rightly or wrongly – to be working, or likely to work, against the legitimate instruments of the state can doubt this. This reviewer has experienced at first hand the inefficiency – and, indeed, the counter-productive ineffectiveness – of internment when it was tried in 1971 in Northern Ireland. He was also instrumental at a later stage, when he was in a position to directly influence policy on the issue, in advising strongly against its re-introduction – advice that was wisely taken.

But the fact remains that in the context of the Second World War, and specifically in the context of Malta at the start of the war in 1939/40 – a Malta just emerging from the bruising political battles of Italian versus English, pro-Italian or pro-Great Britain – a significant body of important and vocal supporters of Italy and Italian culture would be seen – justifiably or unjustifiably – as inimical to the best interests of the state. In this case, in colonial Malta, the state was Britain and the best interests of Malta were to be found, rightly, in fighting fascism and Nazism by all the means at the state's disposal.

It was a tragedy for those who were directly affected by internment, and in many cases an injustice. But internment lay at the lower end of the scale of human suffering, death and destruction wrought by the Second World War on other Maltese citizens. This is not in any way to diminish what Herbert Ganado and some others must have felt and experienced, only to place it in its proper *realpolitik* perspective.

Ganado writes of these times with great perception, with a wonderful human touch, with humour, with, it must be said, a certain amount of naivety and innocence, but also with generosity and forgiveness. For him, sincerity and truth are paramount. Revenge is disdained. His religious faith was of great comfort and strength to him and his utter loyalty to his family and the Malta he so clearly loved the compass which guided his every action.

Michael Refalo has captured all this accurately in his translation of this seminal work. My one quibble is that there are a number of editorial slips which better proof-reading should seek to avoid. Michael is a great supporter of *Din l-Art Helwa* and generously continues to donate a proportion of the sale of each book to the Association.

Please buy this volume, not only to support a good cause but also to enjoy the wonderful story-telling about Malta in what was probably one of the finest and most tumultuous periods of its history.

My Century Volume 5

Author - Herbert Ganado

Translated and adapted by

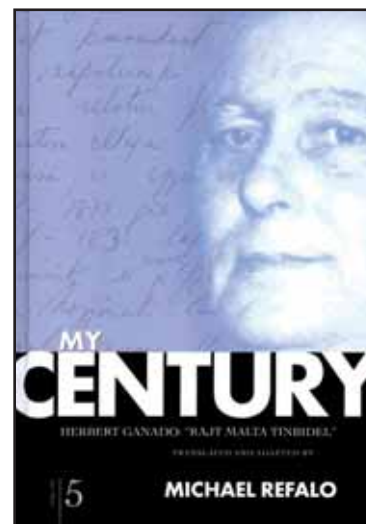
Michael Refalo

Published by

Be Communications Ltd

ISBN – 99932-690-1-4

Reviewed by *Martin Scicluna*



Top left:

Herbert Ganado

Modernist Malta:**The Architectural Legacy**

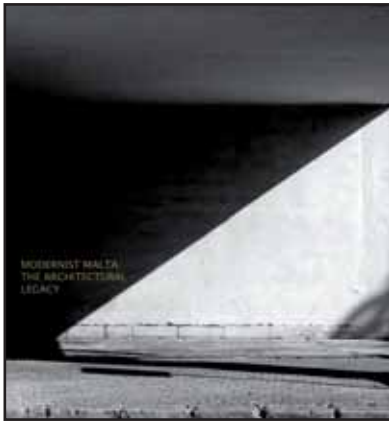
Edited by - Alberto Miceli-Farrugia & Petra Bianchi

Published by

Chamber of Architects, Malta: 2009

ISBN 978-99932-0-692-7

Reviewed by Dennis Sharp



Top right:

Qala Primary School
Architect: Joseph Huntingford
Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

St Therese de Lisieux Sanctuary
Architect: Giorgio Pacini



This excellent and well-written publication was produced to accompany the exhibition of the same name held at the St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta earlier this year. It stands on its own as an informative book, conveying in some detail the course of modern movement architecture in Malta – stressing the original contributions to modernism in the 1930s but concentrating on the confident and often controversial modernist buildings of post-war times.

Like the UK, Malta was a little behind with the introduction of an international and “functional” architecture during the inter-war years. At that time, Modernism and the “machine aesthetic” ideas that accompanied it were in full flow in Europe. In the mid-1930s in Britain an active pressure group known as MARS (Modern Architecture Research) emerged and was accompanied by a few examples of this new and contemporary way of designing, largely the work of émigré or colonial architects.

It would be remiss of any critic to confuse the probative examples of the inter-war years with the much richer vein of modernism that occurred after 1950. As this book suggests, there was an attempt to create a local regional type of architecture that took up the cubic character of Mediterranean modernism but that also echoed the local vernacular building forms, despite the fact that many of the examples were in reinforced concrete. Such a material gave an impetus to plastic creativity in a country largely built of porous stone, but it was still an uphill journey in terms of expression and appreciation.

Alberto Miceli-Farrugia’s foreword suggests that Malta had not seen the contemporary works of architecture as works of art but rather saw them more in terms of functional concerns. He argues that Malta treated these new manifestations of modernism “with far less respect than we would normally grant to neo-classical 19th century or baroque examples”.

There is a sense of disappointment in making such a statement which I know is related to the inexplicable proposal to demolish in part, if not as a whole, Qala Primary School in Gozo, built in 1950 by the then young architect Joseph Huntingford. The campaign for its recognition as a pioneering example of modernist architecture by the Chamber of Architects failed. However, there was a markedly different outcome in respect of Rediffusion House in Guardamangia, which suggests a change in attitudes.

The exhibition sought to build on the spirit of such campaigns in order to raise public awareness of modern design. From what I have seen there is much need of such awareness as, although the players have changed, art is still in many cases pushed to the sidelines. Mediocrity, in the hands of developers, helpless planners and accountants, seems to reign over everything else in Malta, as in the UK.

This book therefore is a kind of gazetteer of modernism, a *vade-mecum* and an attempt

to communicate to the public at large – through a series of black and white photographs by acclaimed photographers such as Fenech, Mirabelli, Muscat, Pace and Zammit Lupi – the interesting and characteristic nature of the work shown. A summary itinerary by Alberto Miceli-Farrugia reflects this coverage, which is helped by postage stamp illustrations and a numbered map at the end of the book.

It is to be hoped that the local working party of DOCOMOMO Malta will see the importance of this educational move and help stimulate local initiatives. In England we offer tours and lectures, seminars and exhibitions to underscore DOCOMOMO International’s message, which has now achieved enormous international success in its documentation (and its good advice on conservation of local examples).





So what do we have in this publication, besides this survey of examples? We have the simple bare bones of the achievement thus far, which takes in the extremely important contribution made by architecture firm England and England, and particularly Richard England, in putting Maltese modern architecture on the world map. His ground-breaking early concrete hotels, many of them now disfigured by insensitive additions, his Manikata Church, now hemmed in by ill-sited developments and his most sensitive rendition of the St James Cavalier into a major art venue – even leaving aside his many houses, his sculptures and his artworks – have been widely featured in international journals and publications .

But there is more in this book in respect of local and foreign architects. For me, the buildings of Spiteri, Ellul and Borg Grech appear to be promising examples of the new architecture, although of the locals', England's buildings do stand out in a separate category of design innovation and a mature integrity. The book also highlights the modern conversions of farmhouses "done-up" by practising architects and artists, including those by my own tutor at Liverpool University Dr Quentin Hughes, Basil Spence, Victor Pasmore and my good friend Nigel Dennis. However, two projects stand out in particular for me – the fine apartment blocks by Patrick Gwynne at Xemxija in the 1960s and the superbly handled Mellieħa Holiday Centre by Hans Munk Hansen – the name of which belies its importance as a model holiday estate that sits well and comfortably in its surroundings. Additionally, the works of the distinguished British architectural practices Austin-Smith Salmon Lord Partnership (army quarters) and Norman and Dawbarn's (university campus) stand out as mileposts in the post-war modernist landscape.

I have for many years argued that Malta possibly has more architecture per square kilometre than many other nearby historic places, and particularly its great City of Valletta should never be missed off any visit. In this publication, some of the other fine examples from another tradition from all over the islands are recorded for posterity.

Get it; read it, and use it. It can add the icing of modern art and architecture to the historic cake mix of the Baroque and 19th century and eventually it should broaden Malta's appeal to the cultural tourist and thereby enhance the local contemporary architectural culture.

Prof Dennis Sharp is senior partner in Dennis Sharp Architects; executive board member of DOCOMOMO International and co-chair of DOCOMOMO UK; Vice President of The Architectural Association and chair of CICA. He has lectured widely in the UK, USA and Australia and was guest lecturer at the Royal University of Malta in the 1960s. His latest book is Connell Ward and Lucas: Modern Architects in England 1929-39 London 2008.

Below:

Villa in San Pawl tat-Targa
Architect: Richard England

Bottom:

Commercial premises in Marfa

These two images source – Private Collection



Letters to Vigilo

These pages are your voice for heritage. Please mark your letters for the attention of The Editor, Vigilo, and send them to:

Din l-Art Helwa
133 Melita Street
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Many have been the occasions in which MEPA was the object of deserved criticism. This authority has a difficult job to carry out and often its record has been far from satisfactory. But credit should be given where credit is due and this time MEPA has done it right. The Authority is the prime driving force behind the recently commenced colossal undertaking of clearing Malta's countryside from illegally dumped items.

"Colossal undertaking" might sound as bombastic and out of proportion but if one looks at the figures it is more than justified. In a pressrelease issued by MEPA the public was informed that "MEPA has so far identified 220 sites around Malta and Gozo" and that "to date 240 tons of scrap has been removed" (the pressrelease is dated 27.01.09). When one considers the size of Malta, and the far smaller size of the national area that can still be termed as countryside, these are indeed huge numbers. Of course the real shame is that we had to arrive at such a catastrophic juncture before someone could be shaken from his slumber and do something about it.

Congratulations to MEPA for its initiative. Naturally one hopes that the vigour of the initial phase will be maintained and even amplified.

Simon Tonna
San Pawl



Dear Joe,

It is beyond any doubt that the Co-Cathedral of St John, together with its museum, houses a considerable, if not the greater, share of our national heritage. Caravaggio's Beheading of St John and St Jerome, together with the Perellos Flemish Tapestries, are enough to make it a museum of European, if not world, standard.

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation has done a huge job in re-organising the collections and improving the display. One only has to think of the moving of the painting collection from the sacristy to the Carapечchia corridor. Besides this, many more improvements in the management of the Co-Cathedral have been manifest in recent years.

That the museum needs more space is also undeniable. This becomes obvious when one is confronted by the present system of sliding frames on which the Flemish tapestries are displayed. This is far from satisfactory and although not being an expert, I assume that in the long run these movements do cause damage to the tapestries. In any case, I am under the impression that a great number of the items, particularly sacred objects in precious materials, which form part of the collection are not on permanent display.

These are the issues that should be kept at the centre of any discussion regarding the proposed extension to the museum. It is a sad fact that such an important issue has been turned into yet another bone of contention between the two major political parties. This, together with other factors, tends to shift attention from what is really needed to solve the problem.

Considering the difficulties involved in the issue, one must also keep an open mind and thoroughly consider every option. This might be slightly difficult for time-honoured institutions such as those responsible for the Co-Cathedral. That in this day and age someone would insist on the idea that a museum should be housed under one roof is absolutely myopic, retrograde and limiting. Valletta has a great stock of buildings that are empty and decaying. If at least part of the EU funds for this project – now that it has been given the thumbs down by parliament, or rather by the Prime Minister – could go towards rehabilitating some of these buildings in order to house part of the Co-Cathedral collection, we would be gaining a double benefit.

Malta has been lucky enough to give to the world a revolutionary thinker who has given humanity a new way of looking at things. Let's follow the teachings of our compatriot Edward DeBono and engage in some lateral thinking.

Simon Cremona
Floriana

Dear Joe,

I recently took my family for a Sunday walk along the magnificent coastline around Wied iz-Żurrieq. It was a glorious early spring day and while taking in the sheer natural beauty that surrounded me I felt a connection with the ancestors that chose this spot to built their temples. This is indeed a magical place where the true spirit of men in its primordial form is stimulated. As we walked along towards Haġar Qim and Mnajdra I fully expected these feelings of belonging to reach a zenith. Mentally I was already resenting the modern intrusion of the fences which I knew surrounded the temples, somehow intruding on their full assimilation within the landscape from which they were born.

I want to point out that it has always been my conviction that fencing off the temples was a mistake. This action simply killed the spirit of these monuments severing them in relation to the landscape and to each other. Some form of remedial action was sought when the old masonry fences were replaced by the current wire structure (deemed less intrusive), implicitly admitting that the fencing was a mistake, but the result was far from satisfactory. As I had occasion to state in other fora the landscape forms an integral component of the temples set-up and therefore its full integrity needs to be preserved.

I do realise, however, that it was necessary to regulate public access, particularly following the barbarous attacks of 13 April, 2001. But it should be pointed out that although the fences had defaced the area for decades they were inefficient against the savage determination of those vandals. The correct thing to do would have been to fence off the whole area from the road to the cliff's edge.

The fences might have been a necessary evil but what I never accepted was that a commercial interest was allowed to operate so close to the temples site. For many years in fact the infamous restaurant was the first thing that caught the eye from the road. In recent years the incongruous prominence of the restaurant has been shared and magnified by the equally invasive splash of tarmac that some insensible bureaucrat deemed necessary so as to allow vehicles to park only a few metres from the temples thus destroying yet more square metres of their millennial landscape.

But now both these intolerable intrusions have been upstaged in their deformation of the landscape by the new Visitors Centre being developed by Heritage Malta. This inordinately huge and ill-sited building rises out of the previously untouched surroundings and, by comparison, both the restaurant and the car-park pale into insignificance. The role of the Visitors Centre is to shape the experience of the temple visit. In this it already succeeds, as on approaching and leaving the site it sticks out a like sore thumb, quickly bringing visitors that had managed to immerse their soul in the spiritual aura of the temples to the harsh reality of the concrete structures that have invaded the whole of Malta. If the aim was to provide a genuine experience of the real Malta of today, then this has been fully achieved – even before the centre has been opened to the public.

And where were Mepa and the NGOs while all this was being planned? What has distracted those voices that expressed their indignation at the proposed extension of St John's with such assurance, at a stage when not even an Environment Impact Assessment had been carried out? How unlucky that no political kudos could be obtained by opposing, or arbitrarily stopping, this project!

It is of little merit that the Visitors Centre is not visible from the temples themselves. It is far too close and the impression it makes is still fresh in the mind of visitors during the odd 100 metre-walk from it to the temples. The fact that we are content simply that it does not show over the hill demonstrates what little sensibility we have.

What would it have cost to have built the Visitors Centre just off the road and to have given it as small a footprint as possible? The protective tents may be yet another necessary evil to be imposed on the site, but the Visitors Centre is simply an unfortunate ego trip. To someone who was convinced that the restaurant was an eyesore inspired by personal greed, the new centre can only be defined as institutionalised vandalism. The saddest thing is that, not having spoken out decisively, as in the case of St John's, we have got what we deserved.

Mario Aquilina
Floriana



Dear Sir,

I want to put my best foot forward by first stating that I love trees and am of the opinion that these can be a much needed embellishment to many urban landscapes. Having said this, trees that are planted in such contexts should be complimentary to their urban setting accentuating, rather than obliterating, urban architectural features.

By now many will have understood that in writing this letter my mind goes to the removal of trees in front of the Auberge de Castile. Although these provided a vivid green canopy to the area many will concur that their removal has landed majesty and an imposing aura to this truly magnificent façade. The vertical trust of the original architectural concept has been re-established and now Castile gives the impression of a solidly placed block emerging from its base towards the sky, and I tend to think that this was the vision that its designer had of his creation.

At a superficial level this act of urban regeneration might seem to stop at just that but in fact many other threads can be spun from this simple collection of facts. To start with this is a rare case in which much has been achieved with relatively little effort. Secondly a very positive result has been achieved for Valletta by removing, rather the adding, to its urban landscape. Last, but certainly not least, is the fact that it was will, rather than cash, was the currency used to purchase this result.

When the issue of rehabilitating Valletta is discussed mega projects with relative mega costs and mega delays keep surfacing. The powers that may seem to be oblivious to the fact that much has been achieved for Valletta by the small projects implemented over time by the VRP and VRC. A case in point is the never-ending saga of the Valletta Entrance / Opera House project. The fact that the bus terminus, City Gate, Freedom Square and Opera House sites have all been concatenated into one plan simply meant that the resulting project was unattainable. I am all in favor of the fact that there should be an over-all strategy for the whole area, but this dose not necessarily mean that all four projects must be implemented contemporarily.

Neither should the options for all four sites be viewed in a homogeneous manner. While the bus terminus, City Gate, and Freedom Square certainly need considerable development and a drastic injection of funds much could be attained with the Opera House site at a relatively low cost in terms of time and funds.

Over time only two options, rebuilding or replacement, have been mooted for this site. But unlike the other three sites this is not a blank, or grotesquely encumbered, canvas. The Opera House site already possesses a character of its own embodied by the ruins it houses. And this is the way in which a great portion of the population has come to know it. Then why not simply capitalize on these ruins? What about turning the ruins into a veritable war memorial. What more than these ruins can evoke the foolishness of war? Imagine what a sight they would be if rehabilitated and floodlit, maybe with a small interpretation area at their centre including an olive tree grove of peace. Or, if the site is to form part of the St James Centre for Creativity a free-standing Greek theatre could be created.

This site has waited for decades to be ransomed from the devastation of WWII. In this case time, as much as money, is of the essence.

Paul Farrugia
G'Mangia





Dear Joe,

Rendering all public places, and especially museums and other cultural related sites, accessible to people who are diversely-able is certainly a very positive thing. I use the term “diversely-able” because I have an aversion for the term “disabled”. The latter term I find discriminatory and degrading as it is after all a result of the view held by the majority, who think they are able, to indicate those who through a physical impediment might not be able to do things the way they do them. But this does not make people with physical impediments “disabled” but simply diversely-able. A woman with a pushchair can't go up a flight of steps on her own but none of us would dream of defining her disabled.

Since the setting-up of KNPD (Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilità – an unfortunate official sanctioning of the term (may I suggest to Mr Joseph Camilleri, the tireless chairman of this worthy institution to alter the name) in 1987 much has been achieved in terms of accessibility. In 2000 this association published their Access for All Guidelines which were reviewed in 2005. KNPD is also consulted by MEPA when new projects or major changes to existing buildings are carried out.

Of course ensuring access to all becomes much more complicated when old buildings are involved. In such cases the issue of assuring access needs to be equated with the need of preserving the aesthetic qualities of the building and compromises must be found. But the fact that the solution must be a valid compromise does not mean it has to be hideous or mediocre one. In the specific I am referring to the ramp placed at the main entrance of the archaeology museum. This hideous structure is made up of cheap looking, obtrusive, and frankly ugly, plastic pipes. Could not a sleek design in stainless steel and other natural materials be devised for such a prominent building? When I first saw this structure I was sure that it was a temporarily solution but time has passed and it is still there defacing the magnificent façade. To add insult to injury advertising material in the form of colorful posters are placed on this railing accentuating its presence and making look even cheaper.



Claire Apap
Mriehel

