

*DIN L-ART HELWA*

*National Trust of Malta*

# VIGILIO



APRIL 2008

NUMBER 33

€3.00 (Lm1.29)

NEWSPAPER POST



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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.



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**VIGILO**  
is published in  
April and October

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***Din l-Art Helwa***

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**  
If not indicated otherwise  
photographs are by  
**JOE AZZOPARDI**

PRINTED BY  
Best Print Co. Ltd.  
Zurriq Road  
Qrendi QRD 1814

# VIGILO

ISSN - 1026-132X

NUMBER 33

APRIL 2008

# VIGILO

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Sculptural detail from the chapel of  
St Anthony of Padova, Fort Manoel



### FRONT COVER

Woven coat-of-arms  
of Grand Master Perellos



### BACK COVER

Sculptural detail from the  
chapel of St Anthony of  
Padova, Fort Manoel



## Bad Planning Decisions

*Martin Galea*

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

The interesting thing about the last election was that the environment, specifically the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa), topped the political agenda. Bird hunting was also a big issue, with the hunters trying to use the narrow margin between the parties to bulldoze through their demand for spring hunting.

The results are what they are and the new administration, and Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi in particular, has pledged to tackle the issues that have been causing so much damage to our environment. The fact that he has kept his promise to keep Mepa under his own Ministry is good news. We look forward to working with the Prime Minister to bring about a real balance between the environment and development and reduce the so-called environmental deficit.

*Din l-Art Helwa* has always supported Mepa as an institution but, as we have consistently said, certain high profile decisions have considerably tarnished its reputation and brought the whole planning process into disrepute. I will give three examples that show just how badly some planning decisions are taken.

The first is of course the case for a development permit issued at Mistra – a *cause celebre* in the recent election campaign, as the owner of the land was Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando. In this case, Mepa acted correctly. The case officer very rightly recommended refusal, the reasons for this being that it would necessitate the sanctioning of illegal building (which cannot be done), it was outside the development zone (ODZ), it was in a buffer zone of a Natura 2000 site, it is an area of international ecological importance and an area scheduled as being of high scenic value.

A more categorical recommendation for refusal, with such weighty reasons, could not be given. Yet the Development Control Commission, which is the board that reviewed the permit, over-ruled the Case Officer's objections and granted a permit (conditional, in the circumstances). This was a scandalous decision in every respect.

The second case is as bad. In 2006, the areas allowed for development were extended in what was a very dubious consultation process. All the environmental NGOs were up in arms at this sudden revision of the local plans in a six-week consultation process that saw

*" We now look to the Prime Minister to bring some semblance of justice and equity to the planning system "*

*" We look forward to working with the Prime Minister to bring about a real balance between the environment and development and reduce the so-called environmental deficit. "*





The proposed development site at Mistra

the land available for development increased and Urban Conservation Areas considerably reduced. At the time, we were promised by the Rural Affairs and the Environment Minister that the extension was necessary and that there would be no further development allowed outside these areas.

It was therefore a tragic joke that we heard that a major developer (who has been the subject of a scathing report by the Mepa auditor for a major illegal development in St Paul's Bay and who appeared to the auditor to be a law unto himself, as far as planning was concerned) was given a permit to develop a supermarket in an ODZ area in Safi. Again, in this case, the recommendation by the Case Officer was to reject the application, but the same DCC board as in the Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando case decided, on extremely flimsy grounds that go totally against all planning considerations, to grant the permit. The Board, in fact, resigned after heavy criticism by the auditor who investigated this case.

The third case concerns the Board of Appeal. This time, a developer's application to build an old people's home in Naxxar was, quite properly, rejected by a DCC board because it was situated in an ODZ area. The developer took his case to the Appeals Board, which took it upon itself to go against the Local Plan and decided that the area shown as ODZ should not be designated as such, and promptly issued the permit – a decision which, in my opinion, was clearly *ultra vires* or outside the powers of the board.

How can an Appeals Board decide that an area designated as ODZ, should be considered an area for development? The mind boggles. These three scandalous decisions show that often it is not Mepa itself but, in fact, the planning boards or DCCs who have taken these decisions.

Throughout all this, the Mepa auditor has always acted with courage and honesty. In the face of rogue DCC and planning boards and, to my mind, illegal decisions, he has investigated cases and come out with clear reports exposing the (at best) incompetence of these decisions. Mention should also be made of the role of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, which is the appointed official guardian of Malta's built and natural heritage. There have been disconcerting occasions where Mepa has ignored its firm recommendations.

We now come to the Mistra case – another scandal in the making. Mistra Village was a tourist development sympathetically built on the promontory overlooking St Paul's Bay and Mistra Bay. It is on a high point but was restricted in height. The new owner has now applied for a massive complex of apartment buildings up to 16 storeys high. Under the flimsiest justification of floor area ratio (the latest planning wheeze) the case officer, ie the Mepa directorate in this case, has recommended granting of the permit. The case is now before the Planning Board. It is difficult to think of a more visually intrusive project in an area so close to our countryside. To say that it will stick out like a sore thumb is an understatement. *Din l-Art Helwa* will, of course, be fighting this case.

We now look to the Prime Minister to bring some semblance of justice and equity to the planning system. We understand that there will be some controversies, but hopefully not of the scandalous nature of these and other similar cases. The Prime Minister has a difficult task but he can rely on our support and, indeed, the goodwill of all Maltese and foreign residents who want Malta to retain its beauty and diversity for this and future generations.

Opposite:

Mistra Valley and Bay

The cleared Mistra Village site



# Report from the Secretary General

**Edward Xuereb**

*Hon. Secretary General of Din l-Art Helwa*

On 31 January, Martin Scicluna went to Gozo to address *Din l-Art Helwa* members residing in Gozo, and their guests, on *Climate Change and Malta's Future Sustainability*. The lecture was well attended and generated a great deal of interest among those present. Because a large number of students had expressed an interest in attending the lecture, in early February Martin went over to Gozo again to talk on the same subject to over 100 students.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to the sponsors of these events: Abraham Supplies, HSBC Bank and Arcadia Supermarket and Palazzo Margherita, who served light refreshments after the talks.

The Annual General Meeting was held on 23 February at Melita Street, Valletta. Just over 60 members attended the meeting, following which refreshments were served. During the meeting, the membership approved two resolutions presented by Council: "Mepa's Composition, Structure and Processes" and "The Urban Challenge".

The Management Agreement between Government and three NGOs – *Din l-Art Helwa*, Nature Trust and the Gaia Foundation – for the management of Majjistral Park was signed on 3 February. The Government has also presented the management team with the sum of €116,468 (Lm50,000) as part of its contribution towards the project. HSBC has signified its intention to sponsor this project to the tune of €46,587 (Lm20,000) per annum for a period of three years. *Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to HSBC for their most generous sponsorship.

The management team has engaged a part-time Ranger, and is organising walks around the park that are proving to be very popular with the public. On 6 February, *Din l-Art Helwa*, the Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust signed a deed establishing the "Heritage Parks Federation", which will be governed by the rules set out in the Federation's statute.

Restoration and maintenance work at various properties held by *Din l-Art Helwa* under Deed of Guardianship is ongoing. The first phase of the restoration of Delimara Lighthouse has been completed; the second phase, which includes furnishing, tiling and the installation of water and electricity, has commenced and hopefully will be completed by the end of June.

The refurbishment of St Agatha's Tower (the Red Tower) is at an advanced stage and the refurbishment of our Melita Street premises is underway and should be finished by the end of June. The new meeting room is to be named after our benefactress, Karmen Mikalleg Buhagiar.

The Tanner Trust has kindly donated £6,000 towards the purchase of a land rover for use at the Foresta 2000 site in Mellieha. *Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to the Trust for its generosity, which is greatly appreciated.

The Rural Affairs Ministry and the Buskett Management Committee have invited *Din l-Art Helwa* to collaborate in a project to restore and conserve the architectural and natural heritage of Buskett Park. Initially, *Din l-Art Helwa* has proposed the restoration of four main features – the principal watercourse and three farmhouses.

Over the past four months, The Heritage & Environment Protection Committee has kept a vigilant eye on the various applications submitted to Mepa, paying special attention to applications that are Outside the Development Zone or within Urban Conservation Areas.

To conclude, I appeal to all members who have not yet renewed their subscriptions to please do so, and to encourage others to join our organisation.

## ***Din l-Art Helwa* Annual General Meeting 2008 Resolutions**

### **MEPA'S COMPOSITION, STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on Saturday, 23 February 2008 that, recognising the crucial importance of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) in the planning and environmental fields, the intense political, economic and development pressures under which it operates and the central role it plays in the well-being and quality of life of ordinary people, an independent study should be conducted into Mepa's composition, structure and processes to ensure that:

\* the composition of those selected to serve on the Boards and Commissions should reflect more closely the different components of civil society whose concerns they are there to represent; avoid to the greatest extent possible the conflicts of interest which currently exist; comprise people selected for their personal qualities and probity as well as technical competence; and whose selection as individuals is made subject to independent and objective scrutiny before acceptance for service on the Boards and Commissions;

\* Mepa's procedures and systems are stringently tightened up and amended as necessary so that Outside Development Zone applications are rejected outright, illegal developments are never sanctioned, written guidelines and procedures are scrupulously followed and enforcement procedures are rigorously implemented.

### **'THE URBAN CHALLENGE'**

It is hereby resolved by the Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* held in Valletta on Saturday 23 February 2008 that, applauding the work done by the *Kamra tal-Periti* in highlighting the damage done to Malta's natural and cultural heritage in its report *The Urban Challenge*, this report deserves the fullest support of the authorities, including the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, so that the document can be properly studied and implemented.

This report details the low level of importance given to aesthetics in building, bad quality in construction, poor and inappropriate land use with the resultant impact on our towns, villages and countryside. The report details some very valid solutions to the problem of planning in Malta, including the setting up of a design review commission, a national policy on architecture, the importance of aesthetics and architectural style in school curricula and the concept of public spaces which is so often overlooked. Malta has reached the stage where the architects themselves, who earn a living from construction, have had to speak out at the gross excesses in development we have witnessed since the early 1960s.

## Ebba von Fersen Balzan (1957-2008)

Baronin Ebba von Fersen, was born to Hans-Heinrich Fersen and Helga von Freytag-Loringhaven in Darmstadt, Germany. Her father's Baltic origins and mother's roots in Pomerania, now Estonia and Poland respectively, had an influence on her political views of how modern day Germany should be.

Ebba grew up in Darmstadt and started painting at an early age. She studied German literature at Frankfurt University, and later studied at the Westend Academy of Art in Frankfurt. She moved to Malta in 1987, after marrying Saviour Balzan, and fell in love with Malta at once. She remained attached to Germany and her friends, but she chose Malta as her home. The light, stones, rocks, colours and people inspired her to experiment with her art and to use "her" choice of colours.

Ebba was, above all, an experimental artist. She gained a reputation for the use of mixed media and lino cuts and her studios in Naxxar and Brittany are living examples of these works. Over the years, she organised several exhibitions in Germany, France, Italy and the US and, of course, in Malta.

In 1997, together with Saviour, she set up her art studio in Brittany and in 2004 she opened a gallery there called "Galerie 22320". This gallery will open again this summer with many of her works.

Ebba was a spiritual person, with a strong belief that behind the beauty and strength of nature there is some inexplicable force. Her other big love was her pets, especially the Maltese *kelb tal-fenek*, and her next project was to be portraits of animals. She was also involved in running the left-wing foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, where she worked with social partners by sponsoring studies and projects, especially promoting studies on women's issues and the integration of migrants in Malta.

Ebba was a *bon vivant* and loved life, good cuisine and wine, and books. She stood by the Maltese way of life while at the same time retaining many of her liberal German views.

Saviour, her husband of 22 years, as well as her family and friends, will miss her dearly, but she leaves behind a rich heritage of work and happy memories.

***Din l-Art Helwa is grateful to all the friends and colleagues of Ebba and Saviour who have made donations to Din l-Art Helwa in memory of Ebba. Din l-Art Helwa will be organising an exhibition of some of Ebba's paintings later this year.***



### The Tanner Trust Land-Rover

*Din l-Art Helwa* has taken delivery of its first Land-Rover for use by Ray Vella, the Ranger at Foresta 2000. Painted in "*Din l-Art Helwa* blue", the Land-Rover promises to be the first of what may become a fleet of similar vehicles as our involvement in Il-Majjistral Park and other nature and heritage parks develops.

The Land-Rover has been purchased with funds generously donated to *Din l-Art Helwa* by Mrs Lucie Nottingham and Mrs Alice Williams on behalf of the Tanner Trust, of which they are the trustees. Lucie Nottingham is an English lady who loves Malta. She has been a member of *Din l-Art Helwa* for several years and has previously donated funds for projects at the Msida Bastion Historic Garden of Rest and Argotti Gardens.

The Tanner Trust is the charitable legacy of the father of Lucie Nottingham and Alice Williams, Basil Tanner. Beneficiaries of the Trust are chosen at the discretion of the trustees and the Trust neither advertises nor solicits applications. The trustees continue to reflect the aims of the Tanner Trust by helping the young, the old and the disadvantaged, and by promoting initiatives wherever possible in keeping with the philosophy of their father, a successful entrepreneur and a man of great rectitude. The list of beneficiaries includes support for conservation and environmental causes and medical charities – causes as diverse as blind people, scouts, hospices, heritage trusts and many others.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is fortunate to have received such generous support. Ray Vella is delighted with the Land-Rover and his energetic overseeing of the afforestation project at Marfa Ridge, near the Red Tower, should benefit enormously from the Tanner Trust's donation.



photo: Victor Falzon

# Restoration Notes

## St Anthony's Battery, Qala, Gozo

St Anthony's Battery was built in 1732 and has been in a state of abandonment for very many years, if not centuries. The result is that the ravages of time, plus the work of vandals, have taken their toll and the restoration required is intensive and will take years.

Before restoration could commence, a temporary road had to be built leading to the approach to the battery. This road stopped some 100 yards short of the battery, after which access was through a private field – kindly permitted by the farmer who owns it. This enabled the crane to be driven down to the battery.

The first snag to the restoration process was the weather. Whenever it rained, the temporary road became treacherous, and the field impassable. A second snag occurred when the farmer, without warning, cultivated his entire field – denying us access. This problem required lengthy negotiations between the Mayor of Qala and the farmer, but was finally resolved and we were again given access.

The restoration proper started in June 2007 and consisted primarily in recovering the many stone blocks that were lying in the ditch outside the battery. It was also necessary to dismantle part of the entrance to the battery to allow the crane to pass through, without which restoration inside the battery would have been impossible.

The restoration process has started from the western wall, most of which is being dismantled and rebuilt, and will move clockwise to repair the entire wall of the battery. Once this has been done, the blockhouse, which is in total ruins, will be rebuilt and finally, the crane will be moved out of the battery and the main entrance and adjoining wall will be rebuilt.

The restoration is a very slow process, since the walls are very thick indeed and some of the stone blocks are very large and heavy. It is difficult to predict when the restoration will be completed, but a good guess would be some time in 2009.



Works in progress at  
St Anthony's Battery

photo Eric Parnis

## Lt. Col. Eric Parnis

## The Delimara Lighthouse

Restoration of the Delimara Lighthouse has just been completed. The objective of this project was to restore the lighthouse in order to preserve this historical monument and to make it accessible to the public, and possibly house visitors. The restoration work was sponsored by the Malta Maritime Authority.

The Delimara Lighthouse was built in 1854, a few years after the building of the Ta' Giordan Lighthouse in Gozo. Although the architectural fabric was in a relatively good state of repair, it was in need of general maintenance. Every effort was made to conserve the existing historic fabric of the lighthouse, which included the existing stone blocks, timber apertures, floor finishes and other materials.

The project was carried out in three phases. In Phase I the restoration of the exterior fabric of the lighthouse was carried out. This included repairing the damage to the walls, the roof and the tower. All cement accretions added in previous years were removed and the mortar joints were plastered with a hydraulic lime-based mix. All the exterior doors and windows underwent restoration and missing timber apertures were replaced.

In Phase II, the interior of the lighthouse was restored. This included electricity and plumbing work, as well as finishes and interior apertures. Phase III concentrated on the installation of a kitchen and bathroom.

The lantern will be restored after an extensive study of the lantern itself and its machinery has been carried out. The restoration of the mechanism will be carried out with the greatest care, owing to its delicate nature.



Delimara Lighthouse

photo David Mallia

*Cynthia de Giorgio*

# The Lunzjata Fountain and Valley

**Victor Rizzo**

*Hon Treasurer of Din l-Art Helwa*



The Chapel of Lunzjata Valley

The large, artistic and historic fountain in Lunzjata Valley, Gozo, has recently been restored by *Din l-Art Helwa*, in collaboration with Kercem local council. The work was sponsored by the Alfred Mizzi Foundation.

In 1698, Hercules Martin Testaferrata, who was appointed rector of this benefice by Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful, erected a large fountain in Lunzjata Valley. The fountain was built with love for the many Gozitans who needed this precious water.

Known as *Ghajn il-Kbir*, the fountain bears an inscription in Latin to commemorate this event, crowned by the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos. The coat-of-arms was completely eroded and had to be replaced.

Water still flowed out of the spring into the fountain, even in summer, but some of the stones around the sides and rear required replacing and pointing for their preservation. The stone basins along the side and front of the fountain also required conservation work.

## Lunzjata Valley

The Lunzjata valley is one of most evergreen and picturesque valleys in Gozo. As you are about to enter Kercem from Rabat, at the top end of the valley, instead of turning right towards the residential area, turn left and then sharp right.



Arched entrance to Valley

As soon as you approach the entrance to this valley you are struck by the beautiful view of well-managed fields and luscious greenery. With all this beauty around you, a stroll down the lane leads you to the natural spring that supplies part of this greenery with the vital resource of water. No wonder this area, which was once known as “*Il-Gardin tar-Rabat*”, was a game reserve for many Grand Masters.

Entrance is through a thick, walled limestone archway, known as “*Bieb is-Sultan*”, that faces north and slopes downwards. A statue of St Joseph adorns the end of the wall. It is unfortunate that the old arch was vandalised and eventually widened. The left and back of the arch also houses a lodge that is currently used by *Wirt Ghawdex*.

Further on lies a small but striking chapel dedicated to The Annunciation of Our Lady – hence the name “Lunzjata”. This chapel is very well kept and its preservation is very important, because it is one of only two remaining chapels in these islands that are partially built in a natural cave. The chapel dates back to at least the 14th century.

In 1370, it was dedicated to the Annunciation and became part of a royal benefice administered by the Aragonese King of Sicily and later by the Grand Master of the Order of St. John in Malta. It was often rebuilt, as it was in 1500 by its rector Fra Pawl Tabone. In the year 1700 a small sacristy was added that was later enlarged.

As you approach the fountain further down the narrow lane, do admire the carob and olive trees that adorn the slopes and the terraced fields supported by rubble walls. Fig trees are numerous along the valley and cane is abundant and the old windmill is still standing.

Water flows down the valley all year round due to the presence of a number of natural springs. Because of this abundance of water, Lunzjata Valley has always been an important agricultural area. It is one of the few places in Gozo supporting the rare Fresh Water Crab (P.F. Lanfranco, *il-Qabru*), which is becoming very rare and its habitat difficult to find. If it is found, it should not be disturbed. Near the fountain, enjoy the surrounding green area and the sweet, relaxing sound of fresh, clear water flowing through the rocks – an inspiration to many local poets.



The Lunzjata fountain after restoration

All photos are by the author

## Din l-Art Helwa Events

### Guided nature walks at il-Majjistral Nature & History Park

Winter is the season when many of the indigenous plants of the Maltese islands come to life – patient bulbous plants flourish after the long summer drought and life sprouts in every crack and corner of our landscape. If you would like to learn more about our flora and enjoy spectacular countryside walks, then *il-Majjistral* Nature & History Park is the perfect place to visit.

Guided nature walks are now taking place regularly at the Park on Sundays (or other days on request). The walk is 6km long and takes approximately two-and-a-half hours. Initially, this walk is being offered free of charge as part of the management's commitment to increasing awareness and enjoyment of our heritage, while also promoting some healthy exercise in the fresh air.

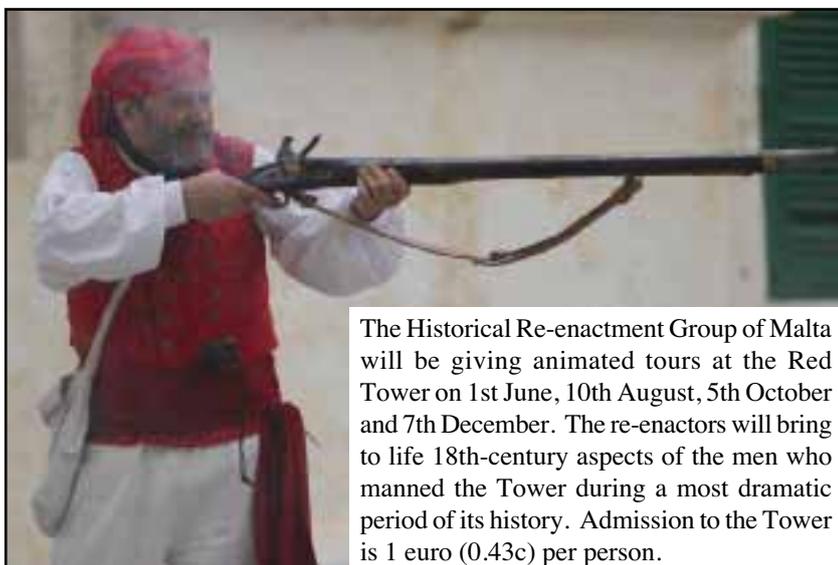
The north-west of Malta offers unique seascapes and landscapes, a sense of wilderness and some truly inspiring walks. The Park extends from ir-Ramla tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay) to Il-Prajjet (Anchor Bay), and is jointly managed by three non-governmental organizations – *Din l-Art Helwa*, the Gaia Foundation and Nature Trust.

The walks are led by a qualified and experienced guide, and begin at 10am near the Golden Bay bus stop, ending at the



same place at around 12.30pm. Places on the walk must be pre-booked and walks are dependent upon a minimum number of participants. The terrain consists mostly of rocky paths alongside the cliffs, and dirt tracks, and suitable walking shoes are essential. Bookings can be made by email on [walks@majjistral.org](mailto:walks@majjistral.org). For further information about the Park visit [www.majjistral.org](http://www.majjistral.org)

### Historical Re-enactment Group at the Red Tower



The Historical Re-enactment Group of Malta will be giving animated tours at the Red Tower on 1st June, 10th August, 5th October and 7th December. The re-enactors will bring to life 18th-century aspects of the men who manned the Tower during a most dramatic period of its history. Admission to the Tower is 1 euro (0.43c) per person.

### Bir Miftuh Festival

The Bir Miftuh festival will this year again host 3 concerts at this historic chapel on the outskirts of Gudja. The concerts will take place on Friday 23rd May, Saturday 31st May, Friday 6th June and Saturday 14th June 2008. Tickets are available from *Din l-Art Helwa* in Melita Street (9.00 - 12.00 hrs), or by contacting us on [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org) or 21225952.

### Garden of Rest Spring Fete

This year's Garden of Rest Spring Fete will take place on Sunday 4th May 2008, from 10 am to 3 pm. Come and bring family and friends to enjoy this historic garden at it best in Spring. Refreshments will be available, as well as stands selling plants, cakes, and other items. We look forward to seeing you there. The restoration of the Garden of Rest was awarded the Europa Nostra Silver Medal. To reach the Garden, follow the road near the Excelsior Hotel and down past the Belt-is Sebh National Library in Floriana.

# The Reform of Mepa

*Martin Scicluna*

*Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa*

By virtue of its wide responsibilities for almost every aspect of the environment, Mepa probably exercises the greatest influence on the quality of the environment in Malta. If it does not function efficiently, the baleful effects are felt by everybody. Mepa has suffered a number of set-backs. Morale among its embattled staff is low, its public standing has been dented and its credibility undermined. The Authority's leadership needs bolstering and the organisation has to win back public respect for the way it operates through a fundamental process of reform.

In the last 16 years, Mepa has been manned in the main by dedicated professional staff, although it has suffered from high turn-over and the standard of Case Officers has been very variable. Those who have been appointed to the difficult task of running the boards and commissions have been mostly conscientious, public-spirited and, with one or two notable exceptions, largely effective and beyond reproach.

When the Planning Authority was established in 1992, one of its key purposes was to create a clear separation between the issuing of development permits on a ministerial whim and the national imperative for a well-ordered planning process that had at its core equity and transparency of treatment and the implementation of objective standards within a clearly laid down Structure Plan that aimed at sustainable development. Nepotism and corruption were to move out of the planning process.

However, the extension of the building development zones in 2006 and a number of other high profile incidents have led to a perception of political interference in the planning process which has, among other issues, undermined Mepa's credibility. If its crucial position as Malta's only bulwark against land abuse is to be strengthened, not weakened, there is now an urgent need to ensure that a clear fire-wall is built between the government of the day and the Authority. Perception is all-important.

While the government must be in a position to lay down the broad environmental and development strategy to be followed, it must adopt a hands-off approach where specific development decisions are concerned and, wherever possible, in the final selection of members of the key planning boards and commissions.

This has now become a pressing issue if confidence in the planning process is to be restored. While on the whole the majority of decisions made by Mepa has been unexceptionable, there have been a number of high-profile cases where doubt has been cast on both the judgment of those responsible for taking them and their overall impact on the environment. Mepa is meant to protect, but a number of the procedures it has adopted give the impression – rightly or wrongly – of the application of two weights and two measures: “strong with the weak and weak with the strong”.

## The composition of its boards and commissions

In a small country like Malta, where everybody knows, or is acquainted with, everybody else, it is inevitable that the pressure from politicians, developers, NGOs or other clients on those making planning or environmental judgments is intense. In some cases, individual members of boards or commissions are able to withstand such pressure, in others they are not. There is a clear need for improvement in this field to remove – or at least reduce – the possibility of, or potential for, conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest occurs when there is a clash between the public and private interests of somebody in an official position. The key reason for averting conflicts of interest in Mepa is to avoid the use of public office for private gain, to ensure that corruption – whether though blatant financial bribery or of the more insidious kind – does not contaminate the planning process. One distinguished leading member of Malta's judiciary – speaking in a private capacity – has referred to a “web of intrigue” involving a confraternity of inter-connected architects, each looking after his own interests. “An architect who is a board member of Development Control Commission ‘A’ will find himself processing the application of another architect who is a member of DCC ‘B’”. It's a case of ‘you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours: I'll pass your application on condition you pass mine when the time comes’”.

One does not have to subscribe entirely to the senior judge's description of Mepa's boards or commissions as “a kangaroo court” to conclude that the current decision-making processes are undermined, and potentially flawed, as a result of the seemingly unbalanced, sometimes incestuous, composition of the Mepa boards and commissions. In a situation where private architects are appointed in their majority to positions of decision affecting the built and natural environment, in which massive financial investments are at stake, (sometimes affecting their own or their firm's income), while at the same time being free to pursue their private practices, is a recipe for contamination – and possible corruption – of the process.

It is not sufficient in such cases for the architect concerned to declare an interest and to abstain formally from the decision-making adjudication, while at the same time acting as the advocate in his client's case. The potential for mutual back-scratching and the looming pressure of a professional colleague (even if he or she has withdrawn from the room) are bound to affect the outcome. Human nature alone will see to this, let alone the financial prizes at stake. There will still be the lingering suspicion that the system favours those with an inside track to the levers of power.

Although we have referred throughout to architects, since in this context they are the more obvious examples of potential conflicts of interest, the presence of other so-called “independent members”

of the board should also be questioned. For example, the required nomination of five public officers and two Members of Parliament cannot be healthy, given that many major planning decisions are driven by the government's own political imperatives, sometimes regardless of the wider environmental or development consequences, and that, under the Development Planning Act of 1992, Parliament should already be playing a scrutiny role in the development process without the need for individual members of the legislature to be involved in largely routine planning decisions.

Ways must be found of reducing conflicts of interest as much as possible, while ensuring that technical expertise informs the decisions made without removing the objectivity, autonomy and ethical basis on which decisions of such wide impact and importance are made. It is not simply about the personal integrity of those making decisions, most of whom are – and have been – above reproach. It is also, most importantly, about the potential for conflicts of interest as well as the public perception of what might or might not be happening, and public confidence in the system. This confidence now needs to be restored if credibility in the equity and objectivity of the planning process is to be achieved. A process of independent scrutiny and selection of individuals to serve on Mepa's boards and commissions should be introduced that ensures that those making these decisions are seen openly and transparently to be beyond reproach. Most importantly, the composition of those selected to serve on these boards and commissions should reflect more fully the different components of civil society, whose concerns they are meant to represent. Until a proper selection process is in place, we will continue to have decisions handed down by Mepa that many will continue to believe, rightly or wrongly, are influenced by the vested interests of those nominated to the boards or commissions.

This is not to infer that the current system is flawed because of the assumption that wherever there is the opportunity for wrongdoing, then wrong-doing occurs. No system can be perfect, but it should be possible to remove the opportunity for error, misjudgement or deliberate mischief to a much greater degree than now. We have looked at ways of reducing systemic conflicts of interest without negating the need for technical competence, while making decisions that are completely above board. The aim should be that, under the law, those responsible for reaching decisions are able to do so as objectively and impartially as possible and are guided to the right conclusion not only by good professional advice, but also by a legal

framework that allows as little room for interpretation as possible.

Clearly, the quality and integrity of those tasked with making such decisions must be of the highest calibre, probity and judgment. The need for the introduction of a Code of Ethics has been put forward by the Auditor and we support such an initiative. Those selected to serve on the boards or commissions must also be as representative of civil society as a whole as possible, so that the public can be assured that special interest groups – whether politicians or the construction industry and architectural profession, or any others – do not predominate in the decision-making process.

This does not mean that the civil society representatives have to be “experts” in the fields of architecture, design, planning, ecology, mineralogy or any of the many other technical fields that impinge on the environment and planning. What are needed are people of diverse backgrounds who are capable of weighing up the merits of a case – advised and guided on the technicalities by professionals – and can reach a considered judgment on its overall impact on the environment and the quality of life of ordinary people within the limitations set by the planning and environmental law. They must be capable of taking the long view – a view that has at its core the long-term sustainability of Malta's environment for generations to come. Expert, technical advice is available from the permanent officials of Mepa, as well as some eight or nine advisory committees. What is needed above all is that common sense and good judgment should prevail. These should be the criteria on which the selection process for sitting on the boards and commissions is based.

We have also carefully considered the size of the boards and commissions. While the latter, at seven members each, are about right, there seems to be no need for the current 13-15-man board. We have examined other comparable boards and have concluded that a board consisting of a chairman, deputy chairman and seven members would constitute the right size for the efficient and cost-effective conduct of business.

The men and women who are nominated to serve on the key planning boards and commissions – the Mepa Board, the three Development Control Commissions and the Planning Appeals Board panels – a total of some 40 or 50 people – should be selected on the basis of the following personal qualities. They should be men and women of acumen and good judgment. They should be of wide, generalist experience and “living in the real world”. They should be



independent-minded and non-political (that is, they should not be prominent members or officials of any political party or movement). They should be broadly representative of civil society and reflect different key components within it.

As to their professional backgrounds, the present composition of the boards and commissions is overwhelmingly weighted in favour of architects, “planners” and public officials or Members of Parliament. While not in any way impugning the integrity or personal qualities of those involved, their background and experience cannot be said to meet the over-riding need for decisions in this sensitive field to be seen to be taken by those who are more widely representative of civil society as a whole. Nor, as we said earlier, are they in many cases free of real or perceived vested interests.

To this end, it is proposed that the chairmen of the Mepa Board and the commissions should be appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. There is already a precedent for this. According to the Constitution, the chairmen of the Public Broadcasting Authority and the Public Service Commission, the Ombudsmen and the Chief Electoral Commissioner are already appointed in this way. When there is no agreement to a candidate being proposed, the public should be given the reasons for objections to an appointment. The President of Malta will then be invited to resolve the issue.

The remaining eight members of the Board should be nominated from among the following bodies for consideration by the Prime Minister: Cultural Heritage NGOs, Environmental NGOs, the Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise, the trade unions (GWU, GRTU, MUT and UHM in rotation), BICC; the Federation of Industry, the Employers Federation, the Church Commission on the Environment, the Chamber of Architects, the Chamber of Planning, the Women’s Council, the Local Councils’ Association, the Chamber of Lawyers, the MHRA and the academic staff of the University of Malta. A Public Officer to represent the government will always be appointed to a tied post on the Board by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister should have the power to vet and, if necessary, reject any nominee from these bodies. He will then submit the names of those nominated from among this wide range of bodies, representing a broad cross-section of civil society, to Parliament for scrutiny and approval. Thus, the final selection of the board and commissions’ members should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny by the already existing Parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Planning, whose current terms of reference should be broadened to include the selection, scrutiny and composition of the members of the Mepa boards and commissions, as well as “to ensuring the safeguarding of Malta’s environment through the implementation of good planning procedures and sustainable development”.

The selection and scrutiny process should address three key questions. First, can the individual put the public interest above his or her private interests? Secondly, can he or she put the national interest above



Urban planning gone drastically wrong

his or her purely sectoral interest? Thirdly, given the criteria above, is the individual of the right calibre?

As to the three Development Control Commissions and the Planning Appeals Board panels, the chairman and six members of each should be drawn from nominees in the same pool as the Mepa boards, subject only to the proviso that two seats on each commission should be specifically allocated respectively to one nominee from the Chamber of Architects and one from cultural heritage or environmental NGOs. The nominations to the Planning Appeals Board panels should additionally specifically include one nominee by the Chamber of Lawyers, though it would be inadvisable for a lawyer to be the chairman, given that planning appeals should be decided on more than a legalistic interpretation. Environmental justice is not always best served by a legalistic approach. Nomination to these panels should also be subject to the same vetting process by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Planning as the board and commissions.

Since the majority of members of the boards and commissions will inevitably be made up of laymen, not architects or planners, it will be important to ensure that technical expertise is made available both through the professionals in Mepa and also through the allocation of professional planners employed on a full-time contract with the Authority for providing advice to the specific boards and commissions. They should be barred from undertaking private practice during their period of full-time employment by the boards or commissions. On appointment, it is important that board and commission members should also be thoroughly briefed on their roles and the basic procedures they will have to follow as members of boards or commissions.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Development Planning should also, in future, receive regular reports from Mepa on major development or environmental issues and should formally be the recipient of the Mepa Auditor’s reports. The Standing Committee should exercise its prerogative by regularly taking evidence from the chairman of the board on major planning or environmental issues. In this way, Parliamentary scrutiny of the development planning process will be improved and public confidence in the roles and operation of Mepa will be greatly enhanced.

Opposite:  
Aerial view of Sliema  
photo:  
Marko Lujic

# The Limits of Limestone

*Petra Bianchi*

*Director of Din I-Art Helwa*

Limestone is one of Malta's few natural resources. From our magnificent Stone Age temples, to the building of the impressive fortifications of Valletta and Mdina, it has always been a vital element in the architectural heritage of our nation. The colour, texture and patina of the local stone are integral features of our urban and rural landscapes.

Maltese limestone has shaped the architecture of the islands. In the words of the architect Quentin Hughes, the "abundant good building stone... has produced a type of building which seems very different from neighbouring Sicily only sixty miles to the north... I feel that Maltese masonry and Maltese architecture are synonymous."

Unfortunately, the demolition of countless buildings still in perfectly good condition, built of local stone, has become the order of the day. The construction industry has gone into overdrive. Everywhere you look, cranes and other huge pieces of machinery are being brought in to smash tonnes of solid limestone blocks to the ground, and then cart them off, some still whole but many broken or crushed, to tip them on a dumping site.

In recent years, our waste sites have swelled to hideous proportions due to the large quantity of stone waste. Around



80 per cent of the total waste generated in Malta consists of excavation, construction and demolition waste, with the bulk of this arising from excavation.

This would be the squandering of natural resources even if the supply of stone was unlimited. In truth, limestone is a limited resource, and it is sheer madness to be throwing it away so carelessly. It is predicted that at current rates of use, and with quarrying restricted to specific areas for reasons of environmental or social impact and conflicts of land use, there is only enough permitted limestone available to last around 30 years.

Today, developers are often choosing to construct their buildings, particularly in large-scale developments, using alternative materials such as concrete rather than traditional stone blocks. Tomorrow, at this rate, there will be little choice.

It is the duty of the government to try to ensure that non-renewable natural resources are used in a sustainable manner. Measures to promote the re-use of stone have been under discussion for some years, but nothing has been done about it.

The Minerals Subject Plan of 2003 clearly supports the need to recycle construction, demolition and quarry waste. It highlights the scarcity of stone – our primary



mineral resource – and one of its stated objectives is to “introduce the principle of sustainability in all stages of minerals-related development”. In the case of limestone, this objective has not been transformed from words into reality.

In 2006, the National Commission for Sustainable Development stated that, “Incentives to recycle stone and disincentives associated with the use of new stone should be explored”, and that, “Incentives should be provided so that good stone that is quarried on site and excavated material from construction, especially on large projects, can be used instead of being dumped. Moreover, recycling of materials from demolished buildings should also be encouraged through the application of the polluter pays principle.”

In the past, houses were often built using the stone excavated from the site itself, using the space as a cellar, such as in Valletta, and many of the fortifications of the city were built using stone excavated from the surrounding ditches. Clearly, not every site yields stone suitable for building, but some sites do and this potential will not be realised until plots are excavated using methods that encourage the resulting stone to be re-used, rather than dumped.

Last November, the Chamber of Architects published a position paper entitled *The Urban Challenge: Our Quality of Life and the Built Environment*, which states that: “The nation needs to take stock of its main construction resource: stone. Our stone is to this day widely used, misused and way too often abused. Inexplicably still the cheapest building material available to us, its worth is not yet appreciated.”

The government, together with Mepa and the Malta Resources Authority, has a duty to ensure that the non-renewable resources of the country are conserved and managed. Measures to promote and assist the recycling and re-use of stone must be put in place without further delay. It is quite pointless for people to spend time preparing strategies, plans and reports if the results of their efforts are not taken into account.

*" It is predicted that at current rates of use, and with quarrying restricted to specific areas for reasons of environmental or social impact and conflicts of land use, there is only enough permitted limestone available to last around 30 years. "*



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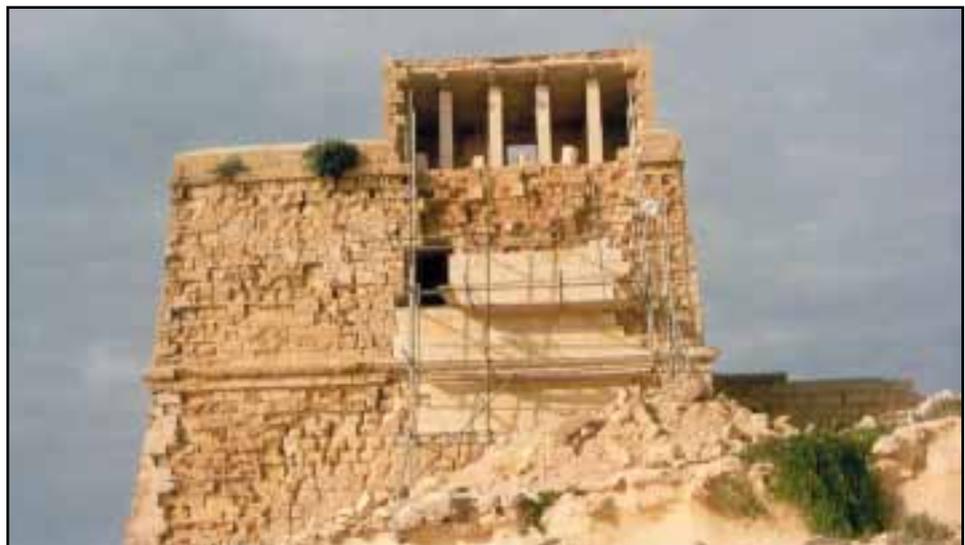
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Restoring Malta's heritage

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Opposite:

St Paul's Island

# The Eynaud Monument at Ta' Braxia

Andy Welsh

One of the most impressive tombs in Ta Braxia Cemetery is to be found just inside and to the left of the first gate, close to the old caretaker's house. The tomb, that of William Stephen Eynaud, was much damaged by WWII bombing, but was restored as far as possible during the *Din l-Art Helwa* restoration project. It consists of a massive marble plinth, with a solid block in the centre, flanked by two open urns. On the block was a tall fluted column, with the monogram "WSE" in a wreath that was surmounted by a substantial swagged urn. The material throughout was white marble of high quality and, most unusually, the monument was fashioned by Draddy and Co. of New York, whose name appears on the bottom right of the plinth. The inscription reads "William Stephen Eynaud (born) May 1813 Died December 24 (1871). Erected as a token of affection by his widow Amelia".

The history of the Eynaud family in Malta is of great interest, and I am indebted to Major Maurice Micallef Eynaud, a direct descendant, for the following details. The family came from Brest in France and were Huguenots – the family name was Agnau – and the son of a Hyancinthe Etienne Agnau emigrated to Malta in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He changed his name to be more compatible with the local usage, and appears as Giacinto Stefano Eynaud when, on 2 February 1777, he married Paola Saveria Gonzi at St Dominic's Church in Valletta. Paola was the daughter of Notary Pietro Paolo and Anna Gonzi. She was born in 1756 and died in 1833.

Stefano set up as a ships' chandler and was moderately successful, living and conducting his business from a mezzanine at 34 New Street in Valletta, a narrow street of steps (that still exists) leading down to the marina from Victoria Gate. He had 10 children, seven boys and three girls, six of whom had issue. The girls married as follows: Maria to Carlazzo Micallef, from whom the Micallef and

Micallef Eynaud families descend, Rosaria to Guiseppe Pulis and Camilla to the Hon. Guiseppe Montanaro, from whom the Montanaro family descends. Two of the boys married a pair of Sicilian sisters, and the seventh boy, Pietro Paolo, married an English lady.

On Sunday, 10 June 1798, a terrible event took place that was well recorded and also commemorated in a plaque affixed to the mezzanine where they lived that was destroyed with the house by Axis bombing in April 1942. The Eynaud family had just finished lunch when a group of Maltese soldiers forced their way into the house, incensed because the Eynaud children, playing on the balcony, had been chatting in French – it must be remembered that at that time the ordinary Maltese hated the French and their language, and for good reason! In the mezzanine was Stefano's great friend, Francois Damas, a French hatter from Marseilles, and he and Stefano immediately drew their swords. The soldiers ran Damas through, killing him instantly, then dragged his body to the foreshore, decapitated it and threw his corpse into Grand Harbour. Stefano was mortally wounded and died the following morning in the Sacra Infermeria. The rest of the family was saved by other soldiers who ran to their aid.

Stefano's widow Paola lived on for another 35 years, looked after by her son Pietro Paolo. She left the mezzanine, eventually obtaining 952 scudi in respect of the improvements undertaken by Stefano, and lived on in a house at Strada San Marco in Valletta.

Rosaria and Guiseppe Pulis had a son John, who was granted a commission as a cavalry officer by Grand Master de Rohan. Pulis became Commissioner for the Regency of Tripoli and then, in 1801, Consul for the USA, following William England, who had been appointed Director of Customs. He continued in this important appointment for most of his life, while continuing the family business of ship chandlery. In 1826 he also became Danish Consul, but in



1828 he resigned as Consul for the USA in favour of his son John. However, the Consulship was passed to his nephew by marriage Pietro Paolo, in the following year. He died in 1852 and is buried in Balzan parish church.

The seventh son of Stefano, Pietro Paolo, born in 1783, was a protestant like his Huguenot father and died in 1840. Upon his marriage to Anne Jeffrey, an English lady from Sidmouth in Devon, he adopted the English version of his name, Peter Paul, and he and his wife are the subject of the earlier memorial in Ta Braxia. He was also a merchant and ships' chandler, trading as P.Eynaud & Co., and was appointed Vice Consul for the USA in 1809, during the consulship of his uncle Pulis, taking over the consulship in 1829, as mentioned before. He was the first Consul to fly the American flag, which flew from his office from 1832. In 1834 he handed over the duties of Consul to an American career diplomat, but continued as Vice Consul for some years.

Ta' Braxia Cemetery was not opened until 1857, but the Eynauds were one of the first families to have a vault there. (A26). It is inscribed as having been a memorial:

*To the memory of Peter Paul Eynaud who died 12th August 1840 aged 54 years and also to Ann (sic) Eynaud his widow who departed this life on the 2nd May 1865 aged 74 years; Erected by their affectionate children.*

*In memory of Peter Eynaud of the U.S. Navy who came to an untimely end and watery grave on 30th November 1836 at the age of 21 on the coast of Liberia whilst serving in the U.S. frigate Potomac Deeply regretted by his relatives and fellow officers.*

*To the memory of Matilda Frances eldest daughter of the late Peter Paul and Anne Eynaud who died 6th February 1893 aged 77 years.*

*'Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King'*

*Also Sophia Susan second daughter of Paul and Anne Eynaud Born 3 November 1818 Died 14 September 1895.*

*To the memory of Francis Edward Eyn(aud) Who died 8 March (1880) aged 46 (years) Leaving a widow and (children) to deplore his (loss).*

The memorial itself is of coralline limestone with marble inserts and has survived the years in pretty good shape. It is of a splendid gothic design with four "wings" topped with a carved column with a sphere and cross.

The eldest son of Peter Paul and Anne Eynaud, William Stephen Eynaud, was born in 1813, and it was he who carried on and expanded the family business of Giuseppe Pulis, founding and managing a branch in Greece and in due course becoming very wealthy. In 1860 he married Amelia Luisa, daughter of Alexander Lawrence of New York, a leading and very well-to-do ship owner, with whom he lived at 93 Strada Ponente in Valletta. They had no children, but William took the young Guisepppe Cali under his wing and paid for him to study art at the Academy in Naples.

As a leading member of society he was *Impresa* at the Royal Opera House (The Manoel) for several years with Frederick Sedley, Lorenzo de Caro, Hector Zimelli and Baron P. Sciberras Trigona. He died in 1871, aged 59, and is buried in Ta' Braxia Cemetery under the impressive memorial tomb described at the beginning of this article, which was commissioned in New York by his widow. The second son of Peter Paul, Philip, a tall and very good-looking man, became a successful professional soldier, whose greatest distinction was to become ADC to General Garibaldi of the Italian *Risorgimento* during his stay in Malta. On Garibaldi's recommendation he was promoted Brevet Major, but died of a heart attack while still serving in 1870. He was one of the founder members of the Casino Maltese. Philip became a Catholic.

The third son of Peter Paul was Peter, born in 1815, who joined the United States Navy. He died young and his parents commissioned the memorial tablet in Ta' Braxia that records his untimely death.

The fourth son of Peter Paul was Charles Breed Eynaud. Like his brothers he was a successful merchant, and was a member of the *Borsa*. He was educated in the USA where he met Isabella Emery Breed of Massachusetts, a widow, who he married in St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral in Valletta, adopting the name of Breed Eynaud, although she signed the marriage register in her maiden name of Staples. He was appointed Vice Consul for the USA in Malta in 1878, and held this position until his death in 1891. Both he and his wife were buried in Ta' Braxia. (T17). Their tomb, which is near the chapel, is a simple but imposing horizontal slab, with a cross on a plinth at one end. It is in excellent condition.

The fifth son and last child, Francis Edward, was born in 1834. Another successful merchant, he married his first cousin Camilla Eynaud, and their family continues to this day. As mentioned above, he is buried in Ta' Braxia, as are his two unmarried daughters, Matilda Francis and Sophia Susan. (A26).

The Eynaud family, in its various branches, continues down to the present day, and includes many who have achieved considerable success in both public and private life, but this article has chronicled those who chose to be buried in Ta' Braxia Cemetery and who are forever remembered due to the remarkable marble memorial they commissioned and brought over from the USA – a country with which they had so many connections.



Urn detail from the Eynaud monument

Opposite:  
the Eynaud monument

# What Would Happen if it was Gone?

Matthew Vella

It is sometimes difficult to appreciate something until the moment you realise it's gone. There are the usual benefits of protecting our heritage – with the most commonly mentioned being that it brings tourism money to the country. This is very true; however, there is another perspective. Ask yourself: "What would happen to me, personally, if it was all gone?" Think about it.

During a lecture I attended as a student on *The transformation of cultural environments*, I listened to a story by one of the students about the cultural devastation of her homeland. I will never forget what she said, and of all the training and education I have had in this area, it is what I remember most. She said: "...when I returned home it was a completely different place, I couldn't recognise it! All of a sudden a part of me was missing...". Is this an over-reaction, or is it a justified feeling that most people would experience? If so, it brings a whole new meaning to the concept of heritage conservation and its importance.

The process for the protection of culturally significant items begins with appropriate legislation, followed by a compilation of those items through appropriate assessment criteria to draw up a list to ensure their long-term protection. In theory, this list is produced in order to assist in decisions in the event of potential development.

In April 2007, I began a review of the system by which culturally significant items are protected in Malta. My research included a series of interviews and surveys. I interviewed prominent and experienced heritage professionals on a technical level and prepared a survey for the general public on a more personal level. Below is a sample of the results of this study.

What would happen if it was gone?



## Surveys and Interviews Directed Towards the General Public

### *Are you aware of any lists compiled for the protection of heritage items in Malta?*

Responses to this question were relatively evenly spread: 54 per cent of those asked were aware of some form of list and of the remaining 46 per cent who were not, most said that although they were not aware of a particular list, they were sure there was one that is being compiled or has been compiled. A sample of some interesting responses includes:

*"Not really, but it makes sense to compile such lists";*

*"Directly aware no, but I would assume there would be a sort of list for the protection of heritage sites";*

*"I believe Valletta is on the World Heritage List, as are the prehistoric temples, the hypogeum, Mdina (not quite sure about Mdina though)".*

### *What does "listing" a heritage item mean?*

Some 26 per cent of respondents had a very good understanding of what "listing" a heritage item means. Of the remaining responses, 66 per cent had a vague idea and mentioned at least one element relating to the concept of formulating a list of protected items. Eight per cent of respondents simply did not know and did not expand their response.

I was pleasantly surprised and impressed with the overall response to this question. With limited education in this area, through no fault of their own, it appears that the majority of Maltese people have definitely grasped the concept, although only a small sample was tested.

### *Have you had any personal experience with the system of listing heritage items?*

One person had had experience of the system of listing heritage items in Malta. Of the remaining respondents, 83 per cent had had no personal experience with the system and 16 per cent had had experience through employment.

### *Do you know generally what type of items may be included in a heritage list?*

All the respondents decided to take an educated guess as to what they thought might be included in a heritage list, apart from six per cent, who did not know. Some sample ideas from respondents included: paintings, furniture, jewellery, elements of buildings and clothing. These are over and above the usual expected answers. It was encouraging that nearly 40 per cent of

respondents also mentioned the natural environment. The respondents were not restricting their answers to buildings or structures: the concept of heritage is much broader and people understand this.

**Have you had any other experience with heritage in general?**

At first glance this question appears ridiculous, as it is open to interpretation, and I was very interested to see the responses. The percentage of responses in this case is not as crucial as in other questions. Some 68 per cent claimed personal experience with heritage and 32 per cent stated otherwise. Most respondents also took the time to expand on their answers.

Here is a sample of the replies: travelling, work (journalism, planning, tourism), developing websites, restoration of paintings, as a painter, involvement with an NGO, course assignments, photography of models. One respondent said simply but effectively: "I think that all people in Malta are in constant contact with heritage". I believe this response is entirely correct – would people change if it was gone?

**Is the protection of heritage important to Malta? If so, why?**

All the respondents agreed, as expected, that the protection of heritage is important to Malta. When asked why, their responses were very interesting. A sample includes:

- "It should be a priority for the country because once it is gone, it is gone";*
- "The country is small, population dense and increasingly materialistic and hedonistic. We could end up destroying our past. However, the past must not be 'museumed' and unutilised";*
- "Heritage is significant in Malta, especially for setting the sense of belonging to a particular place, or defining the local identity. Its sense of past is a crucial element. Malta just wouldn't be the same if anyone were to take it away";*
- "It is what makes us unique";*
- "We are protecting and respecting what our forefathers did, being proud of what and where we came from";*
- "It gives Malta its character and soul";*
- "Heritage makes a society what it is";*
- "It is the heart and soul of this island";*
- "We are the result of what came before us – preserve it, study it, learn from it and improve on it";*
- "It is what makes us who we are".*

Once again it was pleasing to see that 20 per cent of the respondents mentioned the natural environment in their replies.

**Do you have any interest in heritage? If so, in what capacity?**

The following responses to this question are self explanatory:

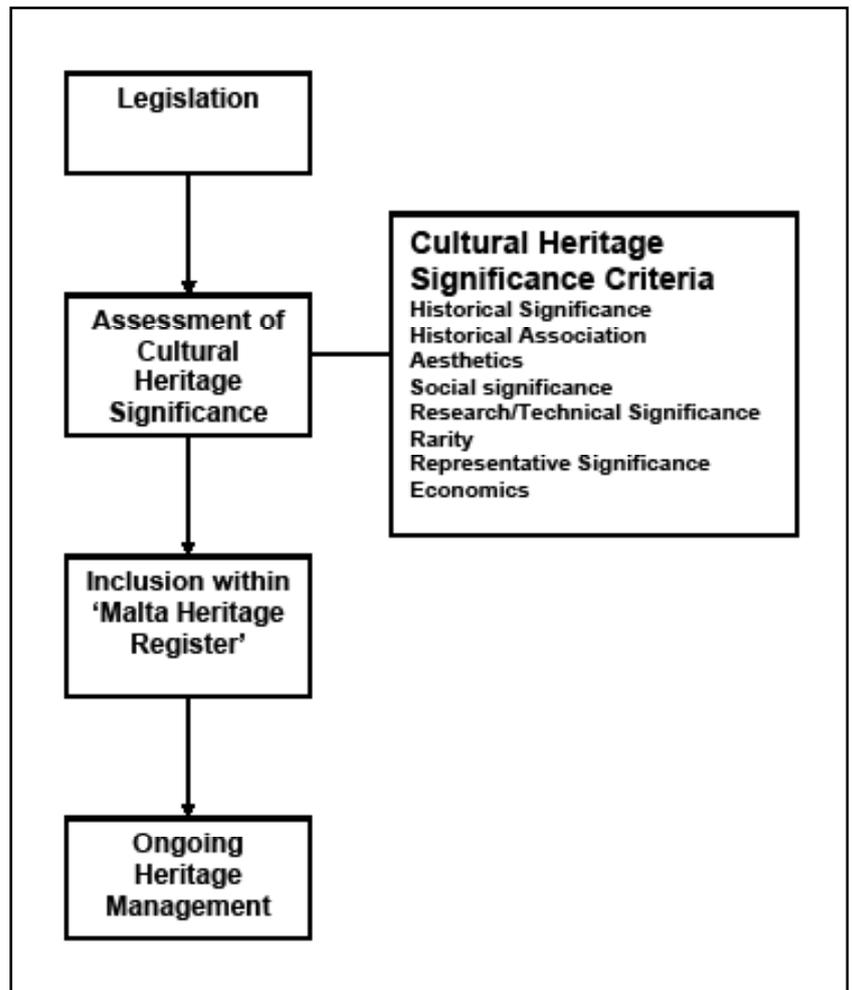
- No – seven per cent; not specifically (just general appreciation) – 39 per cent; personal interest or appreciation – 31 per cent; no, but that doesn't mean*

*it shouldn't be protected – two per cent; professional and personal appreciation – 13 per cent, professional appreciation – eight per cent Some interesting responses include:*

- "I have an interest but I feel I am not informed adequately about Malta's heritage";*
- "The only interest I have at the moment in heritage is that I appreciate it and value it, but I wish I could be more involved";*
- "I have a personal interest in heritage, particularly military architecture and building techniques – this is however purely personal and not related in anyway to my work";*
- "Living out of Malta for the past nine months led me to explore more of Malta's culture and heritage, due to the curiosity manifested by my colleagues who know nothing of my country. I had to search and explain a lot of things. Furthermore, distance makes you appreciate home more".*

The above survey is by no means conclusive but it gave me a good idea of what people with limited education on the subject understood about the protection of heritage. I was impressed and, without realising it at the time, this survey confirmed one thing: heritage, in one way or another, forms a part of every single person's life, either as part of the natural or built environment, whether it is little things such as reading, photography, appreciating one's surroundings walking down the street, a place to relax or the larger aspect as part of one's job. I continue to ask this question and I will do so again: What would happen if it was gone?

Figure 1 – Initial phase to establish a process for successful 'ongoing heritage management' in Malta



**Interviews with Heritage Professionals**

**Is there a statutory list of heritage items for Malta?**

All respondents quite correctly answered “yes”, with a number adding to their responses, “*but it is not updated*” or “*but there is not enough on the list*”.

I agree. Whether a conclusive register or list would have “enough” on it should be established by appropriate assessment techniques – you can not define the number of items. However, it must be as conclusive as possible. This is a crucial factor for successful heritage management in this country and it requires resources that so far have not been directed towards the heritage sector. Unfortunately, the resources to undertake such a task are minimal, which creates even more frustration.

**If so, what is it called?**

These responses varied, but it indicated that no real name defines it:

- “Scheduling”;
- “The list of Scheduled Property in Malta and Gozo”;
- “It was the Antiquities List but the Malta Environment and Planning Authority now calls them ‘Scheduled Sites’”;
- “Are you kidding? The list of Scheduled Buildings”.

I was concerned with these responses. I would give it a name, define it and give it identity that everyone will know and understand – perhaps call it the “Malta Heritage Register”.

**Is it accessible? Where can it be found?**

All the respondents replied correctly that it can be found on the Mepa website under “scheduling”. My main concern here is the fact that it is very difficult for the general public to locate.

**Who is responsible for listing and maintaining the list of heritage items?**

- Below is a sample of the responses:
- “Malta Environment and Planning Authority”;
  - “By law it is the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. Due to the lack of involvement by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority has taken up the role”;
  - “Malta Environment and Planning Authority but the responsibility for heritage lies with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. It is the regulatory body but does not do any scheduling. It makes recommendations or the Malta Environment and Planning Authority schedules on its own accord”.

**What criteria does an item have to meet in order for it to be included on the list?**

The responses to this question varied immensely. Some said that an item over 50 years old is automatically considered to contain cultural heritage significance.

Others mentioned age, architectural quality or rarity, among other ideas. They all said that there was no formal set of criteria an item must meet in order for it to be protected.

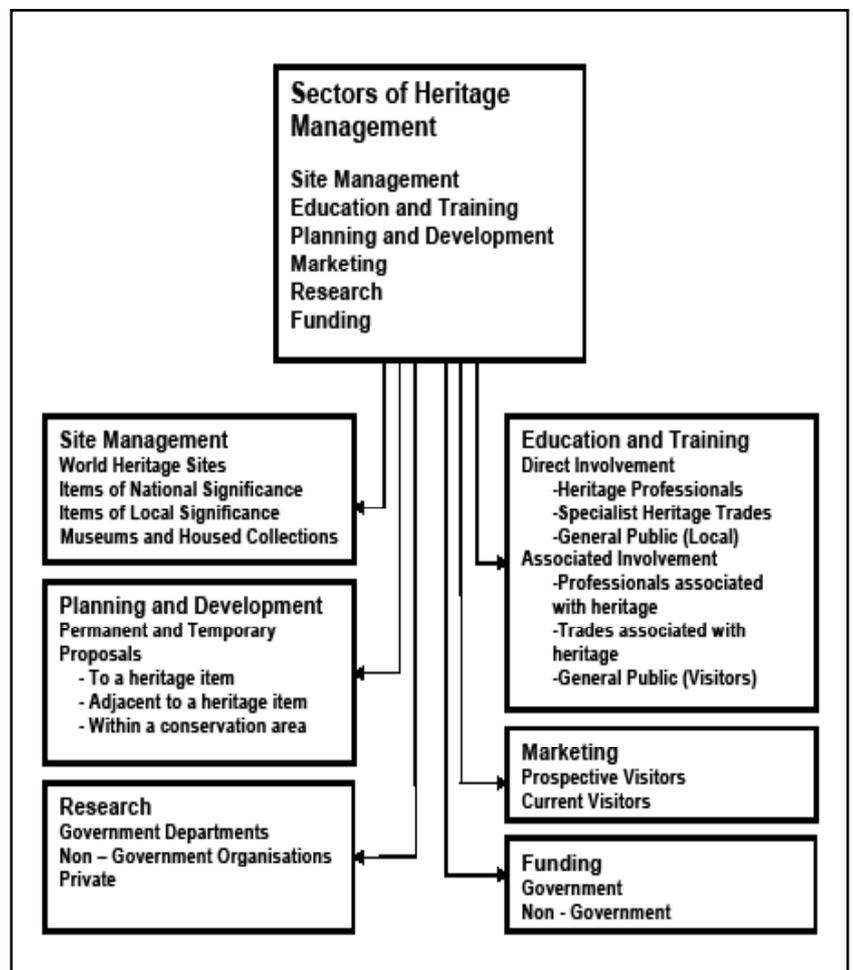
This was, in fact, a leading question, as I was quite aware that there is no formal set of criteria for establishing cultural heritage significance. If there is no formal assessment of criteria, then it is very difficult to justify its protection. It is simply not acceptable to protect an item without putting it through a set of criteria, otherwise items are incorrectly protected or graded and a precedent for removal is set.

An item with the potential for containing cultural heritage significance can quite easily be assessed through criteria such as: historical, historical association, aesthetic (architectural), social, research value, rarity, representative value and economics. These are not all necessarily applicable to every item but before an item is included on a list, it should meet at least one of these criteria. An item does not have to be beautiful in order to be significant – it should not be excluded purely because it is ugly. Heritage conservation is a great deal more than that.

**What is the difference between a local and national listing?**

Once again, this was a leading question in order to establish if heritage professionals thought it might be a good idea to differentiate between local importance and national importance, mostly for the purpose of future development. They all agreed that there is no set

Figure 2 – Second phase of Heritage Management which is ongoing in order to substantiate a successful system



of guidelines or policies to differentiate between the two. All of them expanded on whether it is required or not, due to the size of Malta. The responses were divided. Some agreed there should be, others said there should not. After personally debating this topic myself I put it in to context. Churches are a good example. Some churches are obviously of great significance to Malta. Others may not be of national importance but are very important to the local community, especially parish churches. Malta needs this differentiation and it might be a good idea to include it in an appropriate grading system.

***Are there any problems with the process of listing heritage items that you can determine from your position in the field?***

There will always be problems with any form of process for protecting heritage items. This is mostly due to Malta's small size but very rich heritage content. Unfortunately, this is a long process, but at the very least it would be a step in the right direction. Here are some random responses:

*"It has never been more than a marginal activity to Mepa's main business concerns";*

*"The way the Structure Plan handles scheduling could be much better";*

*"The list is too short, it needs to be expanded";*

*"A lack of funding";*

*"A lack of key specialised staff within Mepa";*

*"It should be the responsibility of one entity";*

*"The system is draconian";*

*"The problem with Mepa is that it is too transparent";*

*"The effect of the process is too long winded";*

*"No will-power on the part of Mepa or the government to address these problems";*

*"Structure Plan policies related to the grading of heritage items should be revised and amended";*

*"A lack of awareness on the part of owners and their representative architects and lawyers".*

***Can you suggest any ways of improving the system of listing heritage items?***

I will refrain from commenting on this question, other than to give below some sample responses. These responses are, after all, people's thoughts on ways of improvement:

*"Mepa should carry out a thorough operation review of its performance and decide if and why it needs 'scheduling' at all, and if so how to make a key pillar of their policies";*

*"Additional human resources are required";*

*"Sources of funding must be found to complete the list";*

*"A revision of Structure Plan policies";*

*"Correct/amend mistakes in the information of existing 'scheduled' properties";*

*"It should be the responsibility of one entity who schedules only";*

*"More will-power on the part of Mepa and the government to address these problems";*

*"More awareness should be made to the general public".*

### Summary

To summarise, the above research is by no means conclusive but it provided what I believe is some valuable insight into the thoughts of the general public and the thoughts of heritage professionals working in the field. To obtain more conclusive results, the next step would be to find those who have had a bad experience with the system – perhaps developers, architects and private owners.

### The Immediate Problems

There are numerous issues surrounding the management of heritage in Malta, not only with the process for statutory protection. A disappointing aspect of heritage in this country is the fact that the system is not in complete ruins, it only requires fine-tuning and streamlining to create less complication and confusion. Some of the problems I can see with the system in Malta are:

**The 'list' of heritage items is incomplete and does not provide adequate information for each item. It does not have identity and status, such as a name or someone within an entity who is dedicated to its maintenance and function;**

**Structure Plan policies are vague, open to interpretation and outdated. A main concern is the current policies for grading. A review of the entire Structure Plan is currently being carried out, but this process is ongoing;**

**An appropriate formal set of criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance does not exist;**

**Lodging a development application with a heritage aspect should be more stringent in order to create a trend for future applications;**

**The public require education, and in the right way. They deserve to be more involved;**

**A cardinal sin in heritage is to leave an item unused and not maintained. There are many such examples in Malta, for many reasons. Is more focus on adaptive reuse solutions required?**

**There are many skilled heritage professionals in this country. However, in order for an appropriate heritage management system to exist here, it is important to work together for the benefit of heritage in this country rather than for personal acknowledgement.**

Heritage Conservation exists not only to preserve our history but also to control the rate of development and avoid dense mass development. The results of this research are not entirely conclusive, as it is a small sample from one sector of the population.

Development is important to every country; it is required in order to evolve as a nation and also, to a degree, it sustains the economy. I am not a purist and do not believe that everything should be saved or remain "untouched". There is absolutely nothing wrong with good quality development. We would hope that, in 50 to 100 years time, some of the developments we build today are included on heritage lists. It is important that we leave behind our legacy. Do we really want to be known as the generation who lowered ceiling heights and created smaller rooms in order to build extra apartments?

In other countries, it is already too late. As a country, Malta has experienced many phases of history, each leaving its own mark. Let us respect what our ancestors left for us to enjoy and appreciate, and continue by leaving our own mark on history but in the right way. Unlike the generations before us, we have a choice of what we build, how much of it we build and to what standard.

It would not require a major injection of resources to resolve these problems. I do not see this as an issue. Nor do I believe the problems are so complex that they cannot be resolved with feasible solutions. The difficulty will be in changing the perception of the public regarding the benefits of heritage conservation. So I keep asking myself why this has not been addressed.

## The National Archives A Maltese Treasure House

It is very easy to miss the old building in St Christopher Street, Valletta. No flashy signs advertise its contents and few people know of its importance. Standing just around the corner from the busy Passport Office, this large, silent building houses a veritable treasure: it is the repository for more than 15,000 registers containing an uninterrupted sequence of notarial records reaching back across the centuries to the very earliest ones dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Between the covers of the beautifully bound volumes lies a highly interesting, and mostly still undiscovered, social and economic history of Maltese private and public life. Typical contracts found here include sales and exchanges of land, animals or slaves. Others record business transactions such as contracts of loan, business ventures and investments, including bills of exchange and commissions. Agreements of a social nature include marriage contracts, wills and donations. The registers in these archives, therefore, provide a snapshot of the daily lives and activities of a diverse cross-section of the population over a period of six centuries.

### A Primary Source for Historians

Leading historians have spent years of patient research at the Notarial Archives, diligently opening up the metaphorical window on Maltese socio-economic history. To mention some examples, Professor Godfrey Wettinger studied registers that shed light on the



The illuminated manuscript binding of a Notarial Volume

topography and nomenclature of the Maltese islands and published several landmark studies, including ones on slavery and on the Jewish community in Malta. He also discovered, together with Patri Mikiel Fsadni, the *Cantilena* – the earliest known piece of Maltese literature. Patri Fsadni was a pioneer in tapping notarial sources, resulting in several ground-breaking studies, particularly about the history of the Dominicans in Malta. Another veteran researcher, Patri George Aquilina, has likewise uncovered much historic information in the notarial archives that he has published in several important studies.

Professor Stanley Fiorini transcribed the earliest existing notarial material that exists in Malta, those of Notaries Paulo Bonello and Giacomo Zabbara. He also brought to light information about the Rhodiot community who settled in Birgu with the arrival of the Knights Hospitallers in 1530, the resettlement of Gozo after the 1551 Turkish *razzia* and an important study of the Maltese language. John Debono uncovered details of activities in the harbour area in the second half of the 18th century. His latest contribution is an important work on art and artisans in Malta between 1650 and 1800. University students have also presented a handsome number of dissertations that provide in-depth studies of particular notarial registers, but otherwise the wealth and volume of the repository is still largely untapped.

A foliate initial coloured with pigments on a gold leaf background



## The History of the Notarial Archives

The Archives were originally set up in 1640 under Grand Master Lascaris (1636-1657), who was the first person to emphasise the importance of keeping proper notarial documents in the Deed of Foundation of the *Archivio Notarile*, which stated: “*essendo di tutta importanza la conservation e fedel custodia delle pubbliche scritture et atti a gl’interessi de nostri sudditi*”.<sup>1</sup>

Later on, in 1784 the *Diritto Municipale di Malta* adopted several regulations that were intended to ensure the good preservation of these manuscript volumes. One of the more important regulations stipulated that the *conservatori*, or keepers of notarial acts, had to be notaries public and that they had to bind their registers in *pergamena*,<sup>2</sup> otherwise, their licence would be suspended for a period of six months. The keepers had to ensure that all the names of the notaries and the dates of their respective registers were maintained in sequence. Furthermore, there were also to be two keys, one of which was to be held by the archivist and the other by the *conservatore*.<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays, although all archives created by the Maltese civil service are the responsibility of the National Archives, the Notarial Archives are an exception. They are governed by separate legislation and fall under the responsibility of the Chief Notary to Government.<sup>4</sup> In fact, officials from the National Archives are not accorded the right to inspect or manage these particular archives.<sup>5</sup>

Original copies of these notarial acts are presently deposited at 2-3 Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street, Valletta, which is also the office of the Chief Notary to Government. Register copies of these acts, which are true copies of the original documents, are housed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, three-storey, corner *palazzo* situated at 24 St. Christopher Street, Valletta. This elegant *palazzo* was once the property of the Grand Chancellor of the Order of St John,<sup>6</sup> Fra Anacleto Zarzana.<sup>7</sup>

According to a report drawn up for the years 1945-46 by the then Chief Notary to Government, Dr Carmelo Farrugia,<sup>8</sup> up to 1850 there were two main repositories housing these deeds, one in Notabile and the other at the Public Registry in Valletta. However, after this date it was thought more appropriate to keep these volumes under one roof, and thus all notarial acts were transferred to the upper floor of the Auberge d’Italie in Valletta.<sup>9</sup> The present set-up of the Notarial Archives and of the Notary to Government came into being on 1 April 1922, when Notary Luigi Gauci was appointed Notary to Government and Keeper of the Notarial Archives. Thus, the then Director of Public Registry ceased to be the keeper, and responsibility for the Notarial Archives passed to the Notary to Government, who is to this day also *ex officio* keeper of the Notarial Archives.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, for reasons of security, some of the original documents were transferred to the basement of the Auberge d’Italie itself, while the rest were stored in the basement of a government building in St Andrew’s Street, Valletta.<sup>10</sup>



A section of the National Archives at St. Christopher Street

Unfortunately, on 28 February 1941, a bomb hit the house over the basement in St Andrew’s Street, and the documents had to be removed and squeezed in together with the other volumes at the Auberge.

On 7 April 1942, the Auberge d’Italie was bombed and suffered considerable damage. Since all the documents were buried under a large quantity of debris, rescue operations were immediately begun the following day. Salvage work was, however, made more difficult due to the fact that just over two weeks later, on 24 April, the Auberge was bombed again, greatly increasing once more the amount of debris covering the volumes. According to a report prepared by H. Jenkinson<sup>11</sup> on the state of the archives of Malta in May 1944, the bombing on these two occasions resulted in some 2,000 volumes being either damaged or destroyed.

After the war, in December 1945, the documents were transferred to the *palazzo* in St Christopher Street. During the 1960s, alternative premises were sought in view of the fact that this building needed some structural reinforcement work. Some of the volumes were deposited in the Monte di Pietà, while the rest were stored in a house in Strait Street, Valletta. In 1968, the original documents were moved to Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street, while the Register copies were re-housed in St Christopher Street, where they have remained ever since.

## Restoration

The Archives are currently undergoing a restoration programme, with the help of the HSBC Cares for Malta’s Heritage Fund, Computime Ltd and the Farsons Foundation. The programme seeks to enhance the safety of the repository while preserving the old records.

Under this programme the building has undergone an extensive clean-up and face-lift. Several rooms in this beautiful Valletta house were emptied of piles of rubbish and debris and every volume, manuscript and scrap of paper has been saved and organised into boxes, awaiting identification and classification. A large number of documents that were stacked two volumes thick, and therefore almost inaccessible, have been re-shelved. This ongoing process is well under way, but requires a lot of manpower and can only be handled by people familiar with modern archival practices. In the process, the catalogues are being updated and this

**This article and all the images were provided by The Notarial Archives Resources Council**

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has resulted in the happy discovery of several volumes that had been misplaced. In some of the rooms, ceilings that were showing signs of imminent collapse have been reinforced and beams have been strengthened or replaced. The entire place has been made watertight and the balconies overlooking St Paul Street and St Christopher Street have been restored and can now be used safely. Several of the rooms have been whitewashed and purpose-made shelving has been installed, with a good number of the more frequently consulted volumes already in place. The research room has been equipped for the use of researchers, including facilities for connecting laptops to the main power supply.

All these improvements have been carried out under the direction of the Chief Notary. In the meantime, the Notarial Archives Resources Council (NARC) was specifically established to support, in various ways, the process of upgrading and subsequent running of these archives. The NARC is a voluntary organisation constituted of leading academics and historians as well as the Chief Notary, which enjoys the full support of the authorities.

Despite the significant process made, much remains to be done. A number of sponsors have come forward to do their bit, but more assistance will be needed if the process is to continue at its current fast pace.



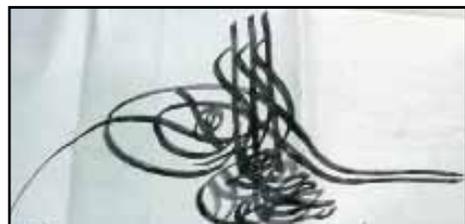
The use of the Name of God, the calling of the Holy Spirit, and various verses from the Scripture was a common practice

**Volunteers and Sponsorship**

The process of restoring the Archives is a long and arduous one. When it comes to handling the documents, they should ideally be examined by historians, archivists or seasoned researchers who can help in the cataloguing and organisation of the papers. Any such specialists who are able to spare a few hours a week to lend a hand with these Archives are encouraged to get in touch with the NARC. In order to continue with the process of restoration, and to embark on further important projects at the Archives, further sponsorship is required. The NARC, therefore, is inviting companies and other interested bodies to contact it to discuss ways in which they can contribute to this process.

**For more information write to:**  
**Mr Charles Dalli, Secretary**  
**Notarial Archives Resources Council**  
**Department of History**  
**University of Malta**  
**Tal-Qroqq**

**For further enquiries contact:**  
**9984-0026 or 9944-9909**



The tughra of the Ottoman Sultan Selim III

**References**

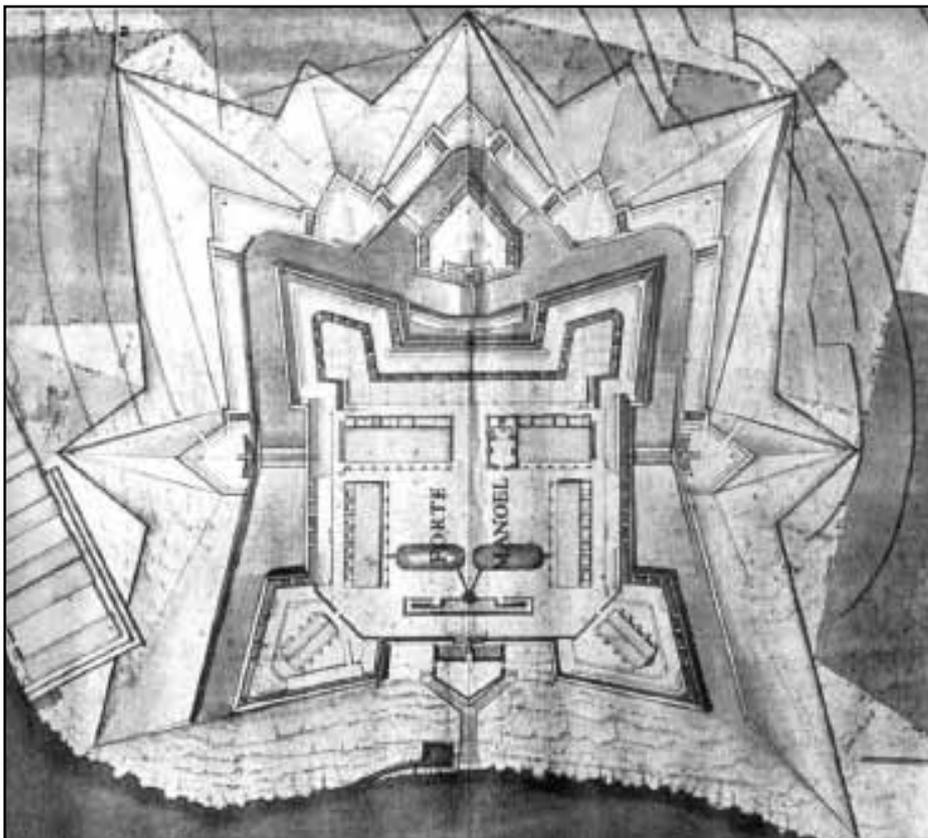
- 1 NLM, AOM, MS 469, ff.260 – 261. (Acknowledgments are due to Fr George Aquilina OFM for this information). The National Archives Advisory Committee, *Maltese Archives Exhibition*, (1944), p. 10.
- 2 Also known as *cartapecora*, pergamena parchment was ideal for bookbinding.
- 3 NLM, AOM, Diritto Municipale di Malta, (1784), pp. 78-80.
- 4 Other type of records which do not fall under the responsibility of the National Archivist are those of the civil status and other archives owned by private institutions, like the Catholic Church and political parties.
- 5 Buttigieg, Lindsay Anne. *The Notarial Archives in Malta: is Lack of Funds an Excuse?*, MA Dissertation, (Northumbria University, 2006), p. 3.
- 6 The Grand Chancellor of the Order was the Knight responsible for the preservation of archival documentation. He was always elected from amongst the Knights of Castille. Anacleto Zarzana y Serna was born on 12 July 1719 in Herez dela Frontera (ricezione 13 September 1732). (Acknowledgments are due to Dr Albert Ganado for this information).
- 7 Denaro, Victor. *The Houses of Valletta* (1967), p.96.
- 8 *Malta Government Gazette* supplement No. XCV, 17 September 1946.
- 9 Ordinance II of 1849. Refer to The Notarial Archives (Brief Historical Note), <http://mjha.gov.mt/departments/notary/archives/html>
- 10 This basement was underlying the house at 88 Britannia Street.
- 11 *Report by Mr. H. Jenkinson, C.B.E. on the Archives of Malta*, (May 1944), (acknowledgements go to Architect Michael Ellul for providing a copy of this document).

The story of Fort Manoel is intrinsically bound to that of the island on which it stands. This site, formerly known as the *Isolotto del Vescovo* (Bishop's Islet) consists of a strip of leaf-shaped land jutting out into Marsamxetto Harbour. The Cathedral Chapter of Mdina acquired the land in 1570 but the earliest record of it dates back to 1466 and says that it was leased to, and under cultivation by, a Catalan nobleman living in Malta. The Order of St John acquired the land in 1643 in exchange for an estate at tal-Fidden in Rabat in order to build a *lazarretto* (quarantine hospital). The land was incorporated in the estates of the Lascaris Foundation set up by Grand Master Jean-Paul Lascaris Castellar (1636-1657). The first *lazarretto* on the site was built during the 1592 plague and consisted of wooden huts. In 1643 this was replaced by a permanent building that was later enlarged after the plague of 1675-76.

The *isolotto* acquired strategic importance with the building of Valletta and this importance grew further following the development of yet another line of fortifications, the Floriana Lines. This strategic importance was because the *isolotto* posed a threat to both these lines of fortifications. It was assumed, at a very early stage, that the best way to mitigate this threat was to fortify the *isolotto* itself. However funds, which were being used for the incessant development of new fortifications, were at a premium.

After the Great Siege, and all through the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Knights dedicated immense resources to the creation of a formidable defence system for the Grand Harbour area. Between 1566 and 1634, Fort St Elmo, Birgu and Senglea were rebuilt and the fortifications enclosing Valletta were developed to an advanced stage. Between 1635 and 1700, the Birgu and Valletta land fronts were perfected, the Floriana Lines were built, and the Margherita Lines were started. Further 17<sup>th</sup> century defence projects included Fort Ricasoli, the addition of the Crowned-Hornwork to the Floriana land front, and the Cottonera Lines.

In the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, new projects continued to be implemented. Between 1700 and the 1720s, retrenchments were added to the Floriana Lines, the Margherita Lines were completed and Fort St Salvatore was built. However, notwithstanding the massive



## Fort M

Joe Az

investment made by the Order to render Grand Harbour an invincible fortress, a lacuna still persisted in the form of the *isolotto*, which offered a prospective enemy the opportunity to set up a battery and attack the west flank of Valletta, particularly St Michael's Bastion, and Floriana.

### *Proposed Fortification of the Isolotto*

The absolute need to prevent an enemy from obtaining this position was expressed in various reports. In 1569, an anonymous member of the Order presented a report entitled *Discoros Sopra le Fortificazioni*, which included a scheme to fortify the *isolotto*. A similar scheme was conceived by Scipione Scampi in 1577 and yet another, by Giovanni Battista, in 1582 – both suggesting the building of a fort on the site.

In around 1670, the military engineer Valperga produced a scheme for the harbour defences, including a fort on the *isolotto*. This consisted of an irregular hexagon with four bastions and demi-bastion facing Valletta with the land front protected by a small hornwork. In 1681, Don Carlos de Grunenburgh, military engineer to the king of Spain and Sicily, arrived in Malta and also insisted that a fort should be built on the *isolotto*. Grunenburgh's proposal was much larger than Valperga's but it was not carried out due to the considerable financial commitment to the Cottonera Lines and Fort Ricasoli.

### *From the Italian to the French School*

Another essential element that affected the appearance of Fort Manoel was the period during which it was built. Up to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Order orbited within the Italian cultural sphere but by the second half of that century the Order, much like the rest of Europe, was moving gradually out of the orbit of the Spanish/Italian influence into that of France. This all-encompassing cultural passage was manifest also in the design of fortifications and occurred due to a number of factors. Chief among these was the technical superiority of the French school due to the outstanding contribution of Sebastian le Prestre de Vauban, Marshal of France (1633-1707), the foremost military engineer of his age, famed for his skill in both designing fortifications and in breaking through them. The French system consisted mainly of a bastioned main *enceinte*, which had been developed by the Italians, and a system of strong outworks. After Vauban, his methods were codified and perpetuated by his followers. Chief among these was Louis de Cormontaigne who published *Architecture Militaire* in 1715. However, there were also political factors at play in this cultural shift. Between 1650 and 1750, France established itself as one of the main European political and economic powers and the Order had very strong historical, diplomatic and economic ties with the country.

# Manoel

## zopardi

In the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, proposals to fortify the *isolotto* were revived by Grand Master Perellos and in 1714, he asked the Order's Ambassador in Paris, De La Vieuville, to ask Monsieur Le Pelletier de Souzy, Director-General of the Fortifications of France, to supply the Order with a good military engineer. The French reaction was overwhelmingly positive, showing the great interest of the French Crown in Maltese affairs. In January 1715, Rene Jacob de Tigné and his assistant Charles Francois de Mondion arrived in Malta with a presentation letter from Le Pelletier that introduced Mondion as having been "apprenticed at a good school under the guidance of the late Marshal de Vauban". Also included in the party led by Tigné were De Tressement and the artillery engineer De Rougemont. In May, this party grew further with the arrival of a second contingent, this time of experts in coastal fortifications – Philippe Maignet, D' Artus, Delafon and Grillot de Predelys.

Tigné produced a master plane for the fortification of the harbour area entitled *Discours General sur les Fortifications de Malta et ce qui reste a faire pour les mettre en estat d'une bonne deffence* (Of the fortifications of Malta and what remains to be done to put them in a defendable state). The document, dated 25 October 1715, deferred to its Italian predecessors in that it did not propose grand new schemes but rather the improvement of existing work by the addition of defence features that had been perfected by the French school. It also included a detailed defence strategy to be adopted.

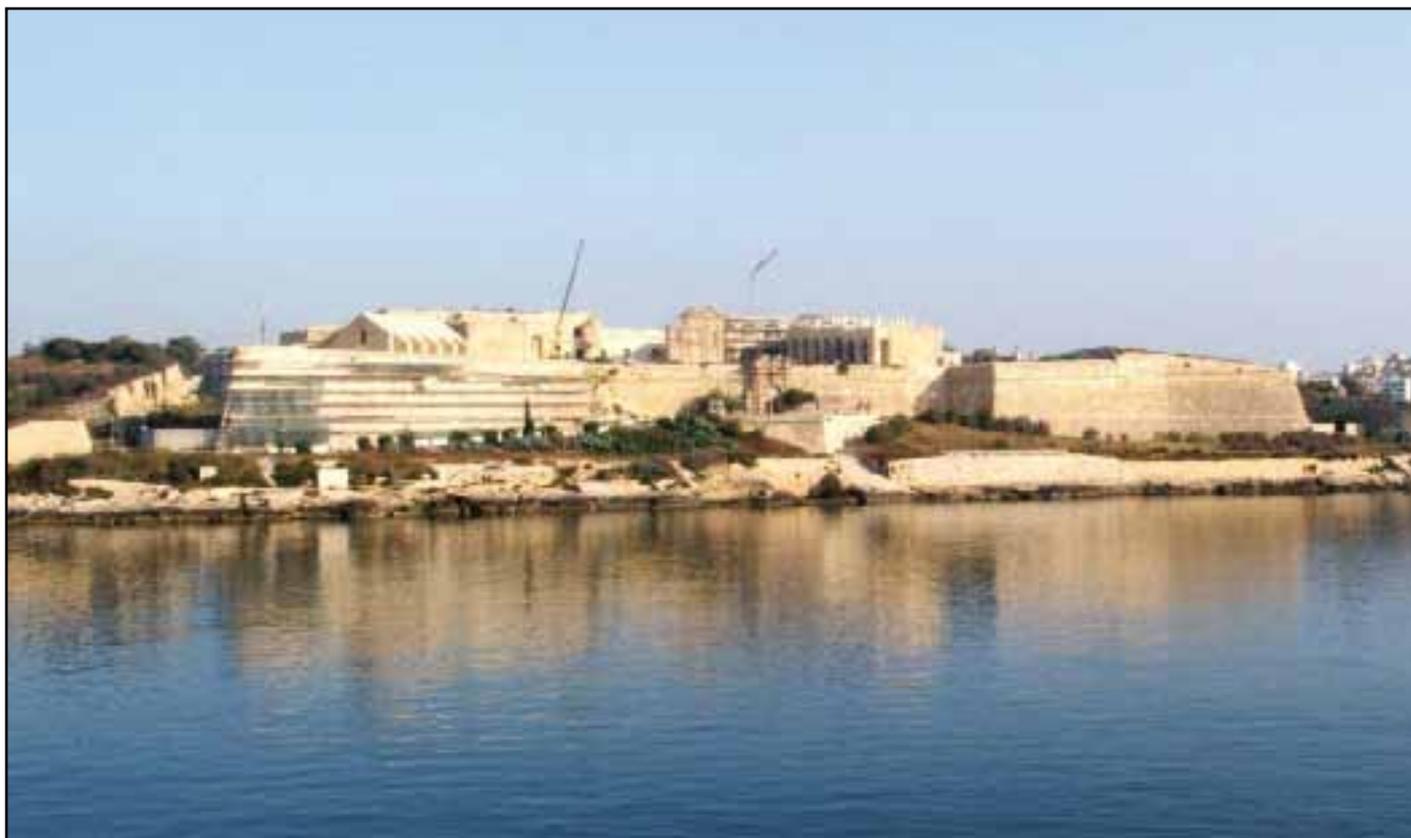
Tigné also designed a small fort to protect Valletta from the *isolotto*, as did Maignet. Later the two proposals were combined into a single design. The scheme provided for the fortification of the whole island with a square fort with four corner bastions at the extremity facing Valletta. The design included a large *ravelin* and a *tenaille* in the ditch on its land front. A battery was placed at the other (Gzira) end of the island to absorb an initial attack. Half way between these was a redoubt that could support the battery and provide a staging post for troops withdrawing from the advanced battery towards the fort. It consisted of a small casemated redoubt with a covered way and a round central *polverista*. A *caponier* connected it to the battery covering the strip of water that connected the *isolotto* to the mainland.

Below:

Fort Manoel  
seen across  
Marsamxett Harbour

Opposite:

A plan of Fort Manoel



The overall cost of this scheme was calculated at 27,600 scudi. The scheme provided an answer to one of Vauban's main strategic contentions – that the further out you push your outworks, the more the enemy's resources will be damaged before they arrive at the core of your defences. The scheme was not carried out due to the chronic lack of funds that was recognised by the designers themselves. Tigné and his men were recalled to France in October 1715 but the Order obtained leave of absence for Mondion to remain in Malta.

One of the first things Mondion did in the months following Tigné's departure was to prepare a feasibility study on the possibility of building a small fort on the *isolotto*. The document is entitled *De la Necessite de construire un Fort sur l'isle de Marsamuscetto, communement nomme Izoletto*. (Of the need to construct a fort on the Island of Marsamxett commonly known as Isolotto), and also included some detailed plans.

But it would take eight years, and the election of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena, for Mondion's project to take physical shape. In 1722, the year Vilhena was elected, Mondion was admitted into the Order as a Knight of Grace. With the election of the new Grand Master, the biggest obstacle to the construction of the much-envisioned fort on the *isolotto* was removed. In 1723, Manoel de Vilhena expressed his intention to personally fund the project and the land was transferred to the Manoel Foundation. This would be but one of the many building projects that would characterise the magistracy of Vilhena.

Tigné had left behind a simplified design, which included only the fort and its outer works and it was the building of these that Mondion was appointed to supervise. The *enceinte* (fortified area) was laid out according to the contours previously determined in Tigné's design. These were outlined on site either through ropes or chains, or through dry walling, to create the actual trace. Then the site was excavated, creating the ditch and leaving an outcrop of solid rock. From this the lower part of the bastions, curtains and the *ravelin*, and the whole of the *tenaille*, were formed. *Terraplein* was then deposited on top of the resulting rock outcrop and faced with ashlar blocks to form the upper part of the bastions. Thus the lower part of the fort was excavated from solid rock rather than being built, which rendered it particularly resistant to artillery attack.

The first stone was ceremoniously laid on 14 September 1723 and without the financial difficulties that characterised most of the Order's building projects, work progressed smoothly. By 1726, the date carried in the inscription over the main gate, the fort was almost complete. The chapel was finished in 1728 and by 1732 the ditch had been completely excavated. Another distinctive feature of the fort, compared to other fortifications of the Order, is that it was almost universally praised – its reputation largely based on the fact that it was considered bombproof because most of its bastions were carved out of solid rock.

Once it was built, Fort Manoel fulfilled two fundamental roles. It transformed the *isolotto* from a menace into yet another defence element for the

Valletta and Floriana fortifications and it also rendered Marsamxetto harbour, and what would later become the Sliema shoreline, more secure. Before Fort Manoel was built, the only defence for Marsamxetto harbour had been the guns of St Elmo.

Opposite:

The Main Entrance to Fort Manoel

### *The Design of Fort Manoel*

Fort Manoel consists of a square fort with a bastion at each corner. The land front bastions are dedicated to St John and Notre Dame and those on the Marsamxetto front to St Anthony and St Helen. St Helen's bastion is dedicated to the patron saint of Birkirkara because the *isolotto* formed part of this parish between 1436 and 1728. In 1728, the Fort's chapel, dedicated to St Anthony of Padova, was raised to the status of parish by Pope Benedict XIII (Pietro Francesco Orsini 1724-1730).

There is a considerable difference between the land front and the Marsamxetto front, which houses the main entrance, with the former being much stronger. There are many reasons for this, the main one being that an enemy attack was most likely to come from this direction. On the other hand, the Marsamxetto front could delay a threat to Valletta, were the fort to fall. This was probably one of the reasons for its exposed nature. Each bastion on this front accommodated a large *polverista* (gunpowder magazine) measuring

The *porta reale*



60 x 40ft with a gabled roof and counter-forts on the flanks. These were separated from the main piazza by means of high walls. In front of each *polverista* stood an *echaugette* (*gardiola*).

### *The Main Entrance*

The most outstanding feature of this front is the *porta reale* (main gate) consisting of a baroque gateway placed in the centre of the east curtain wall connecting St Anthony's and St Helen's bastions. Internally, the gate is flanked by two guard rooms, each fitted with two musket loopholes facing the approaches to the gate. In front of the gate is a small ditch that was defended by a wooden palisade and access was by a drawbridge. The whole is defended by a small triangular outwork known as a *couvre porte*.

The actual *porta reale* consists of a monumental arch flanked by two banded columns in the French style, with elaborate Corinthian capitals. On each side are sculptured elements representing Vilhena's armorial bearings – the rampant lion and the winged hand holding a sword. These were damaged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A bronze bust of Vilhena rested on a bracket over the arch. On each side of this, in line with the columns' capitals and forming part of the entablature, is the monogram of Vilhena. The arched opening is reduced by an inner wall at the top of which is a marble plaque with a Latin inscription that translates as "For the protection of Valletta and for the security of the State Don Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, a very illustrious Grandmaster, erected this Fort out of his own money, furnished it with arms and guards and endowed it with an annual grant in the year of health 1726". The gate was approached from the seashore by a staircase cut into the rock that rose from the water line to meet the *couvre port* where it separated into two arms, following the contours of the same.

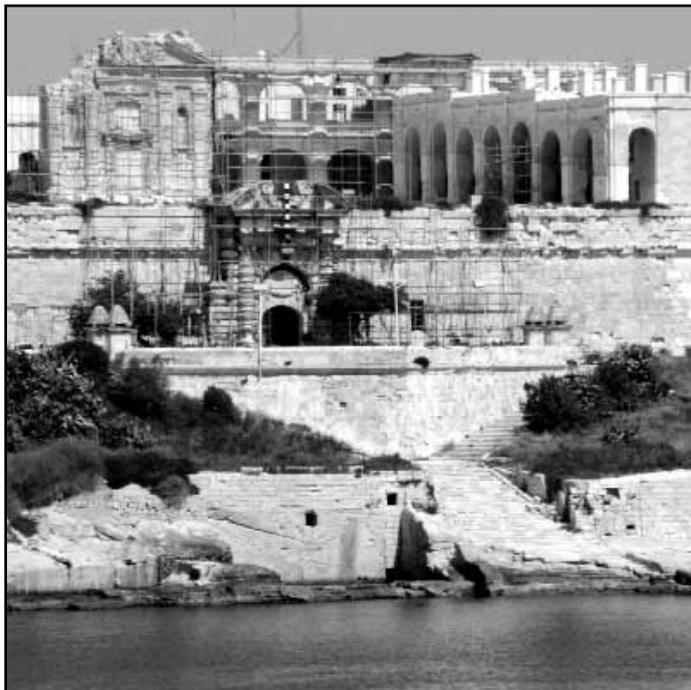
Inside the gate, a double flight of steps led to the piazza located on a higher level. There were also ramps for hauling heavy equipment such as cannon. According to Wismayer, there was a fountain in the small yard just behind the main entrance, the main feature of which was a statue of Moses holding a water-bearing rod.

### *The Land Front and its Out-works*

The most imposing features of the land front are the two low cavaliers joined together by a curtain wall. Both cavaliers and the curtain wall are fitted with embrasures, giving this part of the fort a devastating firing power. The curtain wall uniting the cavaliers also contained bomb-proof accommodation for troops. More bomb-proof accommodation was supplied by the casemates (vaulted chambers built in the thickness of the ramparts) below them, which could house up to 500 soldiers. These were built against the inner face of the curtain. Parts of these casemates were used for storage and to house a flourmill, bakery and detention rooms. Each of these cavaliers takes the name of the bastions on which they stand.

A deep ditch flanked the fort on three of its sides. Far from being a barren vacuum, as it is normally perceived, the ditch provided strategic areas of defence and an indispensable connection between the fort and the outer defences. Here troops could be assembled and led to a counter attack via the stairs that connected the ditch to the covered way. Troops could also out-manoeuvre the enemy by using the road at the back of the fort close to the seashore.

On top of the counterscarp (the face of the ditch facing the fort) runs a wide *strada coperta* (covered way) protected by parapets. This was fitted with six traverses built at 90 degrees to its base. These divided it into sections in case an enemy gained access, in which eventuality only the part between two traverses was lost. Without them, the enemy could have surrounded the fort with great ease.



Below:

top - A section of the ditch and the ravelin

bottom - The tenaille protecting the base of the curtain wall





Set in triangular depressions in the covered way are places of arms where soldiers could be assembled. The lateral ones offered protection to the curtain walls opposite across the ditch. They were connected to these via *caponiers* (protected sunken passages), sally ports and stairs carved out of the side of the counterscarp.

The dilapidated crypt

### *The Ravelin and Tenaille*

The two strongest defensive elements within the ditch are the *ravelin* and the *tenaille*. The *ravelin* is a triangular strong-point placed in front of the curtain wall to protect it. Curtain walls, in fact, were considered the weakest element of the bastioned system as they offered long stretches of plain walls that could easily be bombarded and subsequently breached.

The *ravelin* contains a large excavated vaulted chamber measuring some 95 x 35ft that was intended to serve as an assembly point for a company of some 100 troops about to launch a counter-attack on enemy

The surviving polverista



positions within the ditch. On each side there is a half *caponier* protecting the passage towards the stairs leading up to the covered way.

Between the curtain wall and *ravelin* lies a solid rock-hewn *tenaille* (a low strong-point providing protection for the base of the curtain wall), about 300ft long. It also provided protection for soldiers with muskets intent in covering the back of the *ravelin*, the counterscarp, and the ditch on each side. A *caponier* connects this to the entrance of the chamber in the *ravelin*. On the other side, an underground tunnel, protected by two guardrooms, led through a staircase into the fort.

The outermost section of the land front was the *glacis*, consisting of empty ground in the immediate vicinity of the fort. This was cleared of all cover and sloped, so the guns on the ramparts could rake it with fire. The *glacis* was elaborately mined with powder chambers lying deep beneath its surface. Access to these mines was through galleries dug in the ditch at regular intervals, each provided with an overhead air vent. There were single and multiple type galleries. The multiple ones were provided with a kind of ante-room and a main gallery, wide enough for two men to walk side by side, through which other narrow galleries, some of which were only four feet high, connected to the powder chambers. The multiple galleries were about 150ft in length while the single galleries were about 50ft long. The firing chambers were packed with a demolition charge that could be set off by means of a *nicca* (slow-burning fuse).

### *Internal Layout*

Internally the space was occupied by large square, the Piazza d'Armi, flanked on three sides by barrack blocks and on the fourth by a chapel. The piazza unfolds at a raised level to the main monumental entrance. This was a peculiar, but very clever, layout that afforded a number of advantages, the main one being its exposure to view from the higher Valletta fortifications across the harbour. This permitted the command in Valletta to have a clear view of what was happening inside the fort. Furthermore, it contributed to the psychological element of the fort's defensive role in that the exposure of its sheer size reiterated the fort's strength and its role as a defender of the city.

The piazza also had a specific theatrical role. In practice it amounted to a stage where elaborate military drills and grand parades could be held that could also be viewed from Valletta, from an advantageous elevated viewpoint. Underneath the piazza, two large water cisterns, holding some 100,000 gallons of rainwater, provided the water supply for the fort. A life-size bronze statue of Vilhena, commissioned by Chevalier De Savasse, was erected in the piazza, further reinforcing its role as a display area.

The whole fort, in fact, was conceived as a very refined exercise in concealment and exposure. On the land front, the emphasis was on concealing, and thus protecting, the troops, particularly through the covered way, and on exposing the enemy through the outworks and the *glacis*. On the Marsamxetto front,



this was reversed, rendering the fort completely open to observation from Valletta. What would seem like a lack of security was, in fact, the contrary. This exposure towards Valletta was intended to render the fort vulnerable from this side in case the enemy managed to take it and use it against the city.

The Piazza d'Armi, Chapel and one of the barrack blocks

### *The Chapel*

The most outstanding and lavishly decorated feature of the piazza was the façade of the chapel, the decorative features of which were further enhanced by the austerity of the surrounding military architecture. The chapel is dedicated to St Anthony of Padova and the design is ascribed to the Italian architect Romano Carapechia.

The chapel had five altars and was roofed by a closed vault topped by a lantern. The main altar was dedicated to the titular saint, while the others (clockwise) were dedicated to St Anne, The Assumption, St Joseph and The Immaculate Conception. Below the chapel is a partially rock-hewn crypt in which Mondion, who died of tuberculosis on Christmas Day 1733 aged 50, was once buried. The tombstone marking his grave was commissioned by the French naval architect Joseph Coulomb. The crypt altar was dedicated to Our Lady of Graces.

### *The Barracks*

The four blocks of barracks were arranged on three sides of the Piazza d'Armi, with two blocks at right angles to each other on each side of the chapel. They were all two-storeys high and were enclosed by an arched veranda.

The block on the right-hand-side of the chapel housed the chaplain's quarters and the fort's second-in-command. Here, the accommodation consisted of four ground-floor rooms, a yard, kitchen and a toilet at the back. A staircase led upstairs to a sitting room and two bedrooms.

The other block, to the left of the chapel, housed the commander of the fort. His quarters consisted of six rooms on each floor, together with a large armoury. The whole block had three such units – the others being for the assistant chaplain and a subaltern. The blocks facing each other across the piazza were reserved for the garrison. Each consisted of seven units with two rooms on each floor plus a kitchen, yard and toilets. During the period of the Knights, the garrison included 19 officers and two boatmen. In emergency situations, the fort was designed to accommodate 500 troops. In 1785, Chevalier de Saint Felix Laine reported that Fort Manoel was armed with 50 assorted iron and bronze guns of various calibre, two 12-inch shell-firing mortars and six 12-inch *petrieroes* (stone-firing mortars). The ammunition store included 1,125 round shot, 247 grapeshot (of various calibre) and 60 12-inch mortar shells. The powder included 1,000 *pergamena* gun-cartridges.

Grand Master Vilhena also created a special fund for the upkeep of the fort, The Manoel Foundation, which was richly endowed out of his *quint* (the fifth of his property that he was permitted to dispose of in his will). This had an annual income of about 10,000 scudi enabling, among other things, the purchase of a new cannon every three years.

next page:

top - A British period structure within the Fort

bottom - British gun emplacement on St Anthony's bastion

### *The French Period*

When Napoleon invaded Malta on 10 June 1798, Fort Manoel was garrisoned by 200 men. The fact that the garrison was short by 300 illustrates a long-standing problem of the Knights to man the extensive network of fortifications they had created. These 200 men were from the regiment of the *Cacciatori* (1777-1798), raised by Grand Master de Rohan, under the command of the Knights Gourgeau and La Tour de Saint Quentin. The garrison was later joined by the Birkirkara militia. Shortly afterwards the French, under Marmont, surrounded the fort and three times attempted to take it, each time in vain. The garrison surrendered after the capitulation was signed on board the French Flagship *L' Orient*.

During the Maltese uprising on 2 September 1798, Fort Manoel featured in several skirmishes with the Birkirkara battalion led by Vincenzo Borg, known as Braret. After the French capitulation on 5 September 1800, Fort Manoel was used to hold prisoners of war, with the last French prisoner leaving on 1 October 1800.

The British received the fort in perfect condition and used it throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This continued use entailed some modifications in response to evolving warfare. The first was the demolition of the two *echauguettes* to enable the mounting of cannon on the salience of the bastions.

In August 1858, the bronze statue of Grand Master Vilhena was removed to Piazza Tesoreria in Valletta, on the orders of Governor Sir John Gaspard le Marchant. In 1872, the powder magazine on St Anthony's bastion was demolished and a new gun emplacement was constructed to take a heavy 9-inch Rifled Muzzle Loading (RML) gun. By 1906, this had been replaced by a battery of three 12-pdr Quick-Firing (QF) guns supplied with an underground magazine and ammunition hoist.

By the second half of the 19th century, Fort Manoel had found a new role as an inner harbour defensive position against the increasingly dangerous motor torpedo boats designed to slip into a



harbour and attack ships at anchor. In 1898, a new landward entrance into the fort was introduced through a palisaded gateway cut through a section of St John's Bastions, with a metal bridge installed to span the ditch.

Shortly before WWII, a battery of 3.7-inch heavy anti-aircraft guns was built on the *glacis* and covert way outside the fort. These guns, mounted in concrete gun emplacements and deployed in a semi-circle around the fort, were manned by the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> HAA Royal Artillery. During WWII, Fort Manoel received some direct hits that demolished a large part of the curtain wall joining the two cavaliers. The chapel was also badly damaged.

These events ushered in a long period of abandonment and neglect, which accelerated the cycle of decay. Now, finally, Fort Manoel is the subject of an extensive restoration project, through which the architectural elements should be fully restored and all the accretions that currently render difficult the reading of the fort in its entirety should be removed. It is hoped that this will be able to recapture, at least in part, some of Fort Manoel's former glory.





Interior of one of the  
barrack blocks

# Dwejra - A Coastal Nature Park

Vince Attard



Fungus Rock

photo  
MTA

***Vince Attard is the  
President of  
Nature Trust (Malta)***

Opposite Right:

top - Azure Window  
bottom - Inland Sea

Opposite left:

Quarry impacts that  
are being addressed

photo  
Nature Trust (Malta)

Dwejra, an important and very popular site in the Maltese islands, is located on the north-west coast of Gozo and is famous for its natural and dramatic beauty.

The popularity of the area is partly the reason for its deterioration as a result of human activity. These activities include quarrying, because the only stone in Gozo that is good for building is found around Dwejra; tourism, with about 750,000 tourists visiting the area every year together with another 100,000 local residents; and diving, which adds another 60,000 visitors every year, as Dwejra is considered to be the third most popular dive site in the Mediterranean.

Apart from this, Dwejra has been harmed by many illegal activities such as dumping, parking on fossilised remains, the degradation of the beach by the operators of boat-trips and diving clubs, the introduction of alien species such as the toad, which has started competing with the local

frog, and alien plants. All this has contributed to irreparable damage. Over the years, the local authorities have acknowledged the importance of Dwejra by means of various policies covering the area, one example of which is in respect of the coastal cliffs rising along the entire western coast of Gozo. However, despite all this, there are no specific regulations for Dwejra to cover its status as a Natura 2000 site – which means it is considered to be of European Community importance. Dwejra has also been a prospective UNESCO world heritage site for several years, and the same damaging activities have prevented it from achieving this status.

## The Situation Before the LIFE Project

Before the LIFE project, Dwejra was open to the public without any control or management of visitors. Thousands of tourists arrived in coaches, brought over to enjoy the site by tour operators and just left on their own for an hour with no explanation about the ecological importance of the site. There was no management or supervision.

Furthermore, people running businesses in the area simply parked their vehicles on fossil beds and endemic plants, and constructed jetties without permits. This resulted in heavy trampling over the fossil beds and the flora and fauna of the area, and the damage was exacerbated by the commonplace picking of what are often rare plants.

Many of the visitors also used to climb on top of the “Azure Window”, known locally as *it-Tieqa* (the window). This is a geological formation created by wind and wave erosion where a section of land still holds onto a column rising from the sea. Human activity was accelerating the erosion of this well-loved feature, and drastic action was essential in order to save it.

With no surveillance in force, illegal dumping of waste was also on the increase. A few years ago, the national environment agency had to take action to stop illegal dumping from slowly finding its way from the cliffs down to the Inland Sea area. Quarries have also been spilling rubble into the valley bed.

The concept of marine protected areas (MPAs) is still something relatively new for the Maltese Islands. Here, once again, human activity and erosion were the main issues, together with damage to the marine ecology and the fossil beds.

The quarries found near the site, some of which were operating outside the permit limits, emitted fine dust particles that often caused ecological harm to the area. These quarries were and still are an eyesore, and in general have had a very negative effect on the intrinsic value of the area.

The authorities are aware of these problems and have promised to take remedial action. However, this had to be a holistic approach, if it was to achieve long-term results. Proper site management, law enforcement, visitor-flow management and environmental education were essential, and it was these issues that triggered the LIFE project.

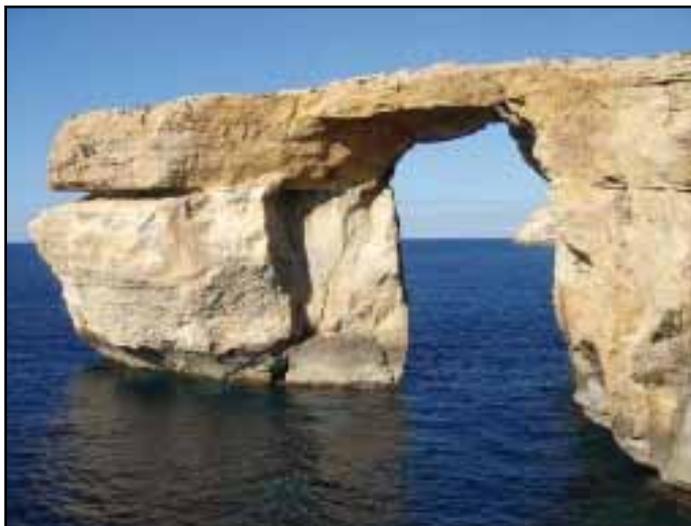
### **The LIFE Project**

In April 2002, the council of Nature Trust Malta (NTM) decided to take this project further and try to create a full conservation plan. Of course, the main problem was financial resources. It was for this reason that NTM decided to dedicate all its efforts and resources into making a good proposal for the European Union to consider under the LIFE Third Countries. Months of hard work and long hours of compilation of a proposal followed, until in October 2002 the proposal was submitted to EU LIFE. In May 2003, the LIFE evaluation team announced that the Dwejra project had been accepted.

The Dwejra LIFE project started in April 2004. The main aims were to reverse the degradation process, to conserve the site for the benefit of the environment, to provide a better tourist product and to aid the economy of the local community, to create environmental awareness among visitors and locals and, most importantly, to have effective legislation put into force. Apart from this, NTM aimed at having a sustainability plan to take the project beyond its three-year period.

The main partners in the LIFE project were NTM as the beneficiary, together with Mepa as the national environment and planning agency, and WWF Italy as an experienced partner in Natura 2000 site management and LIFE projects. Two major stakeholders were also involved from the very start – the Gozo Ministry and San Lawrenz local council.

In order to ensure that all the stakeholders felt part of the project, and to address the main conflicts of the stakeholders, continuous meetings and talks were held throughout the entire project. These meetings included the Gozo Ministry, San Lawrenz local council, the Tourism Authorities of Gozo and Malta, diving associations, boat owners, fishermen, *Din l-Art Helwa*, tour operators, boat house owners, the church, and other neighbouring local councils. This helped create awareness among all those using the site of the importance of conserving and managing the site, resulting in long-term economic benefits for everyone.



#### ***The main objectives of the project were to:***

- Develop a management plan of the area;
- Restore the area, which is of significant ecological, geological and historical importance;
- Establish a framework for environmental management, enabling integration between governmental agencies, institutions, local communities and stakeholders;
- Strengthen the current administrative and law enforcement capabilities, plus providing additional training resources;
- Create environmental education and eco tourism;
- Use the project as an example for other local and Mediterranean future projects;
- Create a coastal nature reserve in line with objectives of the Coastal Zone Management Structure Plan as well as the Structure Plan for Gozo.

#### ***The project actions included:***

- Carrying out a detailed study of the wildlife, flora, geology and marine ecology as well as the pressures currently affecting the area;

Identifying the negative pressures having most impact on the area and minimising such pressures;

Bringing together all stakeholders involved in the area to set up a closer framework of collaboration, leading to better administration of the area through meetings, seminars and workshops;

Involvement of all the stakeholders in the drawing up of the conservation and management plan. (NTM, MEPA and WWF provided the basis through the Steering Committee for the compilation of such data);

Identifying the short-term and long-term priorities necessary for the restoration of the area;

Providing training sessions for those involved in the maintenance of the site (capacity building);

Restoration of the historical heritage and creation of a visitor centre to provide added value to the Dwejra experience for the visitor, through educational material, exhibitions and guided educational walks;

Setting up a marine protected area (MPA) to protect the ecology and provide value for foreign and local divers as well as help the fisheries close to the MPA;

Introduction of signage and information panels to provide further information for visitors, and encourage more visitors for the benefit of the local community;

Drawing up a sustainability plan to take the project beyond the three-year phase of the LIFE grant;

Studying environmentally friendly energy ways for the use of resources in the area.

This was an ambitious project, because of the size of the area: 5.5 sq km of land and coastal park and 2.5 sq km of MPA. With such a concentration of activity in one area, including recreation, tourism and business, the problems that arose were bound to be significant.

Training MEPA staff  
on site management  
by WWF experts

photo  
Nature Trust (Malta)



## Project Stages

The total cost of the project was €321,000 with €211,000 funded by the EU, €72,000 by Mepa and €38,000 by Nature Trust (Malta).

The project was carried out in four main stages. Stage one commenced with consultation. All the stakeholders were brought together for meetings on the way forward. NTM wanted to make all the stakeholders feel that it was their project and be part of its success, while at the same time appreciating that such a project would be of economic benefit to those who earn a living from the site. Mepa also played an important role at this stage.

This was not an easy stage, for two main reasons. Firstly, the Gozitans, like all those who live on minor islands that depend on the mainland or a bigger island, saw the Maltese as interfering with their more easygoing way of life. It was not easy, and it took the project coordinator over a year to obtain the trust of the Gozitans. However, once this trust was obtained, communication was smooth. Secondly, Mepa, being a government agency, was not trusted by most, as many citizens have more trust in NGOs. The friction between the stakeholders and Mepa was sometimes rather high and NTM often had to act as the mediator in such issues.

The discussions helped in many ways. For example, they helped the diving clubs to realise that, as the site is a nature reserve and an MPA, more quality diving tourists would visit it to enjoy its marine ecology. The fishermen realised that outside the MPA, the fish population would increase as has happened in other MPAs run by WWF in Italy.

The tour operators felt that the site would offer value for money with guided tours and information panels, etc, and would encourage more eco-tourists. The boat-ride operators would have a higher quality of tourist, which would improve their economic situation. The locals realised that the long-term sustainability of the project would enable them to continue enjoying the beauty of the site for many years to come and would also have positive commercial spill-over effects, as it would continue to be a prime attraction for quality tourism.

With this site as the first nature reserve on the island of Gozo, schools would also be able to make use of the area for environmental education events. Nature Trust is now the FEE co-Green Flag coordinator, and Dwejra will be used as an example of nature conservation for Gozitan schoolchildren as part of the EkoSkola project. Furthermore, it was hoped that the quarry owners would appreciate how they could make alternative use of their existing quarries by turning them into tourist attractions, as has been done in Malta with The Limestone Heritage at Siggiewi.

The consultations took longer than expected due to all the stakeholders' problems that emerged. The two most difficult groups were the hunters and trappers and the boat house owners. Unfortunately, no objections were registered against trapping and hunting and the illegal boat houses during the consultation process. This put Nature Trust at

a disadvantage with the management board, as it was on its own in trying to stop these two activities and did not have the fact that there had been other objections to back up its arguments.

So as the project would not stall and EU funding be lost if there were any further delays, NTM had to reach a compromise and agree with suggestions on areas for hunting and trapping and the regularisation of boat houses on site. Had this compromise not been reached there would have been the risk of losing the conservation plan for Dwejra and there would not be a second chance from the EU.

The conservation plans covered many other areas of equal importance. The compromise had to be reached to gain the following measures for the site: the restoration of rubble walls and habitats, the creation of a marine protected area, the setting up of visitor information material, traffic management for the area, visitor flow management on sensitive sites, the carrying out of studies to reduce the erosion of the Azure Window and a halt to the stealing of fossils by tourists and locals.

The measures also included arranging for Dwejra Tower to run on solar energy, increasing the bird protected area, dealing with the nine quarries inside the park and restoring disused areas.

**Stage Two** involved the compilation of data and the evaluation of existing data. This stage was very interesting as much more information about the area was gathered. It also gave the project team an excellent idea of the whole site. This process facilitated the compilation of a five- year management plan. The plan also focused on taking the project beyond the three years of the LIFE contract.

The management plan was drawn up with all those directly involved in the area. In this way all the stakeholders felt they were part of the project and proud that they were doing something for the area. The hunters and trappers were also approached during this process. It was not easy, but in the end a balance was found and the hunters finally accepted that the bird protected area within the reserve was being increased.

**Stage Three** focused on the actual work on site covering the conservation of the area, clearing of rubble, restoration of rubble walls and the creation of a fully-fledged visitor centre to offer the Dwejra Experience to all who visit the area. The zoning of the marine protected area was identified.

It was at this stage that the project encountered the first stumbling block, as Mepa decided to prolong the consultation process and the actual finalisation and approval of the management plan. This sent the project targets off by 12 months and created some friction between NTM and one of the partners. As Mepa is the national agency responsible for such permits, NTM could do nothing more than try to push on with the project and reduce the impact of the delay.

In fact once the approval was granted and the go ahead given, all work focused on trying to gain as much of the time lost and keep to the project's targeted end date. All the effort and extra hours that were put in on a voluntary basis by NTM had a positive result, as the project was finished on time.

NTM also proposed that Dwejra Tower, which is managed by *Din l-Art Helwa*, be used as the main visitor centre until the issue of the other visitor centre had been resolved by Mepa, especially since, due to the delay, NTM had reached an agreement with the landowner that the visitor centre expenses would be carried by third parties. This allowed NTM to use the LIFE funds for getting Dwejra Tower fully set up as a visitor centre until all the issues had been resolved.



top - Educational visits

bottom - Rubble wall restoration

photos  
Nature Trust (Malta)



Today, Dwejra Tower offers information to visitors, two DVD projections on the park, a booklet and exhibition panels. To keep in line with EU considerations on climate change, the energy to run the centre is today 100 per cent solar-generated. This added to the educational element in demonstrating that renewable sources were possible for the Maltese islands.

**The fourth and final stage** was the creation of signage, information panels, the organisation of visitor flow, exhibitions for the centre, a video, education leaflets, the training of wardens and on-site guides. During this stage a sustainability plan was compiled to take the project beyond the March 2007 date and into the future. As the project was still developing due to the delays in the implementation stage, the report kept changing, especially with regard to car parking facilities, since these were still being set up in parallel with the plan.

### Lessons Learned

The entire project has been considered as a major learning curve for all the team, especially NTM which already manages five other sites in the Maltese islands. The project has given us all an extensive overview of project management with regard to environmental management. One of the main issues considered as fundamental was that one should not take all partners for granted, and that when a constraint is identified, contingency plans should be drawn up.

The main benefits of the project as far as the learning curve was concerned were the consultations and dealings with the various stakeholders, dealing with the authorities – especially with tight time frames, getting to know more about EU directives such as the birds and habitats directives, dealing with eco tourism issues and conservation in a large area and marine protected areas.

The main frustrations were the delays outside the coordinator's control, stakeholder conflicts, pressing for enforcement, not having enough time (due to initial delays) to monitor the success of the project and having to compromise in order not to lose the project altogether.

The positive moments of the project were obtaining the trust of the stakeholders, seeing birds fly into the park and remain there without being shot or trapped, getting positive feedback from visitors and having the LIFE flag flying at Dwejra, which indicates that EU support was given.

Dwejra Lizard

photo  
Arnold Sciberras

### Conclusion

Nature Trust (Malta) now looks forward to continuing with this challenge to conserve one of Malta's richest ecological sites and hopes that now, thanks to the EU LIFE instrument, the conservation of Dwejra has been completed and it will be classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. NTM feels that, with the support of Mepa, WWF Italy and all the stakeholders involved, all the targets were finally reached.

This project has not only fully protected and conserved the area, but will also provide value for money for the tourism sector and enjoyment to all who visit it. The project has also provided capacity building for NTM which, as an NGO, is heavily involved in site management in Malta. This project has helped NTM improve its work procedures, become more professional and to mature in its work. This project can now be used as a case study for other NGOs to follow.

Unfortunately, NTM had to make compromises and go against some of its principles to save the site, and there are still some who accuse NTM of giving in to the boathouses in the area. Had we not done so, this project may have never started and today Dwejra would still be deteriorating. At times one wonders if these accusations come from those who prefer to do nothing and be simple purists. Through experience, and by dealing with bigger international environmental NGOs, NTM has learned that if you simply stand your ground, the natural environment can lose more, instead of acting and compromising to save a percentage for the years to come.

A big thank you goes to *Din l-Art Helwa*, who have supported this project. We now hope that with the funds being generated from this park we will be able to help DLH maintain the Tower and other historic sites in the park area.

Dwejra Tower and  
rock cut cave

photo  
Nature Trust (Malta)



# Irriċikla t-Tlieta

*Christopher Gantar*

This month, April, the Resources and Rural Affairs Ministry is launching 'Recycle Tuesdays', a scheme aimed at facilitating waste separation at source.

Waste packaging material, including packaging made of glass, plastic, metal and paper or cardboard, falls under Legal Notice 277/06 whereby the producers and importers of packaging are obliged to organise themselves, either individually or jointly – the latter in the form of an authorised packaging waste recovery scheme. Such efforts are aimed at contributing to the national recycling targets stipulated in the Legal Notice.

The Federation of Industry, the Chamber of Commerce, the General Retailers and Traders Union (GRTU) and the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA) have cooperated in the setting up of a national scheme and other privately-organised schemes are already licensed and operational. Irrespective of which authorised scheme a producer joins, she or he will be compliant with LN277/06. Any scheme set up to recover this material needs the cooperation of the general public as well as all retail outlets, so that all packaging waste will be recovered for recycling.

Discussions regarding the organisation of the waste collection system at domestic, commercial and industrial levels have long been ongoing between Government, the Local Councils Association, the four constituted bodies mentioned above and the privately organised schemes. Reorganising our national waste collection system will not only ensure that packaging waste is recovered for recycling, but will also result in a healthier waste collection service from our towns and villages, as well as a cleaner island.

## Households

Grey bags will be made available free of charge to every household and can be collected from local council offices. Additional bags may be bought from all leading retail shops. Alternatively, families are encouraged to use bring-in sites, if the grey bag is not sufficient.

These grey bags, into which all packaging, except glass, should be placed, will be collected every Monday (in Gozo) and every Tuesday (in Malta). On these days, householders will be asked to take out the extra grey bag that will contain the packaging waste in addition to any other type of bag containing mixed waste.

No other waste should be placed in the grey bag, as collectors will be obliged to refuse contaminated bags. All cans, bottles and containers should be rinsed before they are placed in the grey bag and all containers should be free from liquids such as used oil, chemicals, paints, etc. The existing daily waste collection service will remain unchanged.

## Commercial Outlets

Bars and restaurants, as well as shops, generate packaging waste and although every locality has some shops, there are areas where there is a large number of shops, such as St Julian's, Bugibba, Marsascala and Valletta.

While acknowledging that it is hard to identify the ideal set-up, the arrangement so far is that all retail outlets are required to register their operation with their local council. In areas where the number of retail outlets is low, the collection of all packaging waste (paper/cardboard, metal and plastic, but excluding glass), will be made on Tuesdays in Malta and Mondays in Gozo, the day domestic packaging will be collected from homes. Additional collections, for these outlets only, will also be made on Thursdays and Saturdays each week.

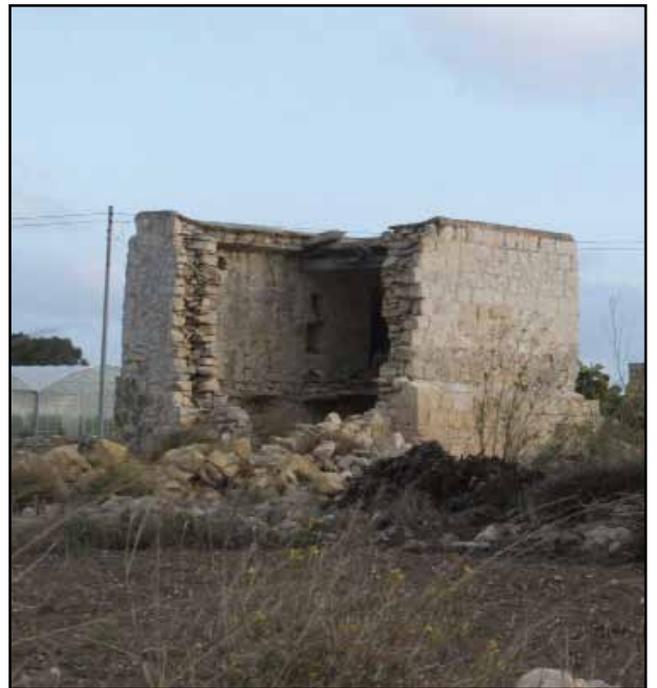
There will be no additional charge for the collection of this packaging waste, as the Government will shoulder the additional cost in the interim period. Financial assistance from the Government will cease after a period of three months and at this point, a scheme will endeavour to make arrangements with local councils so that this packaging is managed by the scheme directly.

In those localities where the number of outlets is high each local council will make its own packaging waste collection arrangement depending on the peak season. Once the outlets register their existence with the local council, the local council will organize a collection system for the recovery of glass and the recovery of packaging waste (paper/cardboard, metal and plastic). Each locality in this category will make its own arrangements depending on the demand. The local council is obliged to alert each commercial establishment accordingly.



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*Encounters  
in the Maltese  
Countryside*



# The Flemish Tapestries at St John's Co-Cathedral

*Cynthia de Giorgio*



depicting the life of Christ and allegories and 14 panels representing the Virgin Mary, Christ the Saviour and the Apostles. The position that each subject was given indicates careful consideration, so that their beauty would be enhanced and the munificence of this magisterial gift would be appreciated.

The tapestries depicting the 12 apostles, the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ were carefully set in their proper place in the order in which they are mentioned in the Canon of the Mass. These colossal figures, woven in shades of grey, are beautifully rendered in a chiaroscuro effect as they were intended to resemble sculptures. The subjects for the 14 larger tapestries, each measuring approximately 6 metres by 6.5 metres and intended to be suspended over the arches leading to the side chapels, were also specifically selected. Seven of them relate the life of Christ, while the other seven depict allegories intended to convey the principal and fundamental divine truths of the Catholic faith and the supremacy of the Catholic Church, and express the fame and grandeur of the Grand Master and the Order.

The selection of both the subject and the style is often attributed to Mattia Preti, who had already decorated the vault with his glorious rendition of the life of St John the Baptist. Preti is said to have been the sole authority for judging all the decoration in the church, to ensure uniformity of style and, perhaps, as the only person who could satisfy the ambitions of the opulent Bali Perellos in his ardent desire to offer a gift to the church that would astonish both the Order and the public, in the event that he was selected as the next Grand Master. Perellos was elected to supreme power on 7 February 1697 and the tapestries were delivered to His Most Serene Highness in 1701.



The series of Flemish tapestries at St John's Co-Cathedral is the largest set of its kind in the world and one of the most valuable of the cathedral's collections. The set, consisting of 29 pieces, was ordered from the Brussels *atelier* of Judecos de Vos for the sum of 40,000 scudi and was based on cartoons of the same subjects by Peter Paul Rubens, with the exception of the Last Supper, which was woven from a cartoon prepared by Nicolas Poussin, and the portrait of the Grand Master Perellos, which was produced by Mattia Preti. The Co-Cathedral of Valletta was, of course, originally the conventual church of the Order of the Knights of St John.

Tradition required that, on his appointment, a new Grand Master would present the church with a gift or *gioia*, as the Knights referred to it. This collection of tapestries was the gift of the Aragonese Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful, who was elected in 1697. The tapestries were originally suspended from the main cornice along the nave of the church and draped over the arches of the side chapels. Their large scale and brilliant colours harmonise perfectly with the paintings on the vaulted ceiling of the church, producing an impressive visual effect that was a unique expression of the flamboyant high baroque style prevailing at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The entire set of tapestries was intended to hang from and cover the large green marble pilasters that seemingly hold up the vault consists of 14 large scenes

The Flemish tapestries hanging in the nave of St John's Co-Cathedral

Opposite:

top - The woven signature of Judecos de Vos

centre - One of the tapestries being restored

bottom - The triumph of the Catholic Church

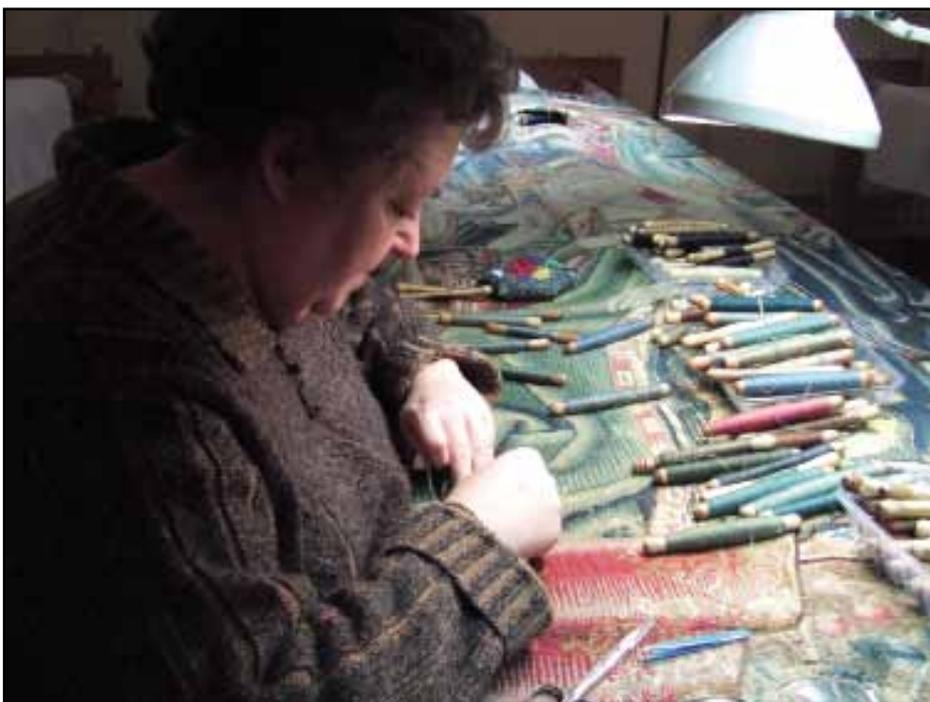
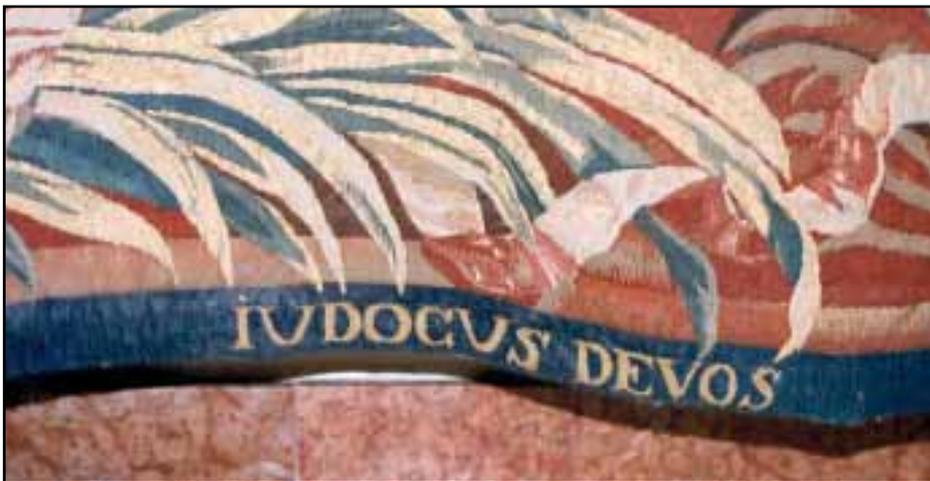
Woven coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos

It is understandable that the series includes a tapestry portraying its donor, Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful. This originally hung over the main entrance to the church – and was based on drawings that were prepared by Mattia Preti. Portrayed in the tapestry is a full-length figure of the Grand Master, accompanied by the apostles Thaddeus and Simon. Minerva, as the allegory of the Order *Melita*, with sword in hand, intently crushes a Moorish slave prostrate in chains at her feet, while the allegorical figure of charity distributes alms to the poor. On the podium, but receding a little to the left, is a page who carries the Magisterial hat in a silver salver, while in the background are seen the masts and pennants of the fleet of the Order, in the efficiency and strength of which the Grand Master took so great an interest.

The historical series of the life of Christ commence with His birth in Bethlehem and end with a tapestry depicting the glory of His resurrection. From the series of allegories, one of the most impressive pieces from an artistic point of view is the one that depicts the triumph of the Catholic Church.

The tumultuous composition focuses on “Ecclesia”, personified by a woman, representing the church triumphant as she rides a golden chariot drawn by four horses led on by personifications of the Cardinal virtues: Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice who holds a sword, her attribute, in her hand. An angel descends from the skies and is about to place the papal tiara on Ecclesia’s head. In the front, another angel carries the keys under a canopy – the emblem of her divine power and absolute supremacy. She is also accompanied by the allegory of fame, represented by angels blowing their trumpets. Victory holds a laurel wreath in her hand, while Peace holds an olive branch. The chariot is followed by a blindfolded man in rags – the symbol of moral and spiritual blindness, hence ignorance and sin. Ecclesia is strengthened by the possession of the Holy Eucharist as her chariot tramples upon evil and opens the way to righteousness and eternal glory. The fine draughtsmanship of this composition, together with the rich use of opulent colours, renders this piece a true masterpiece of Baroque art.

With the passage of time it is understandable that the collection, woven entirely from pure wool and silk, has suffered extensive deterioration. For this reason the Foundation of St John’s Co-Cathedral, which is in charge of the cathedral’s preservation, has taken the initiative of having the entire set restored. Two pieces had already undergone restoration in 1997 and the process of restoring the remaining pieces will take at least eight years and cost €1 million to complete.



# The International National Trusts Organisation

*Din l-Art Helwa* was represented by its Vice President Martin Scicluna at the formal launch of the new International National Trusts Organisation (known as INTO for short) by the Vice President of India in New Delhi on 4 December 2007.

As a member of the INTO Board since its inception, Martin Scicluna was among the first to sign the new Charter, which he had helped to draw up, establishing the organisation. Other members of the Board, known as the “Transitional Steering Committee” since the first Executive Committee has yet to be elected by the membership, consists of the Australian Council of National Trusts, the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the National Trust of Scotland, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, the National Trust of Slovakia, the National Trust of Bermuda, the National Trust of Fiji, the Gelderland Trust of the Netherlands and the Land Conservancy of British Columbia, Canada.

The over-arching mission of INTO is to promote the conservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage of all nations. As such, it is a global network that will be organised into five regional groupings: the Americas – including the Caribbean, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Asia and Oceania and Australasia. All member organisations now joining will be allocated to regional groups which, in due course, will be responsible for electing their representatives to the Executive Committee.

In furthering the implementation of this mission, INTO has five objectives:

- \* **To foster international cooperation and coordination between National Trusts and similar heritage organisations.**
- \* **To formulate and promote conservation best practice.**
- \* **To increase and enhance the capacity of individual National Trusts.**
- \* **To encourage the establishment and development of National Trusts and other heritage bodies where they do not presently exist (such as Africa, the Middle East and South America).**
- \* **To pursue advocacy in the interests of conservation and cultural and natural heritage.**

The signing of INTO’s charter and the launch of the new membership organisation was the culmination of an excellent conference attended by over 300 delegates from all over the world, which had been organised by INTACH, the Indian National Trust, and opened by the Prime Minister of India, Mr Manmohan Singh.

What now for INTO? The headquarters of the organisation has now been established in London, at a prestigious address belonging to the National Trust not a mile from the Houses of Parliament. A small staff – the nascent secretariat – is already at work. Two part-time volunteer directors have been appointed and in due course a full-time director, or “secretary-general”, will be employed. The first task is to expand the membership of INTO so it becomes a truly representative world-wide organisation. In parallel, funding needs to be increased in order to enable the organisation to function efficiently and effectively. A strategic plan is being drawn up that will plot the way ahead, with the aim of being in a position to elect the first executive committee and president at the next congress, to be held in Dublin in the autumn of 2009.

*Din l-Art Helwa* has always believed in the importance of the international dimension of cultural heritage, which is a unifying force for good across the world. Virtually from its beginnings in the 1960s, *Din l-Art Helwa* belonged to international organisations, starting with Europa Nostra, the pan-European umbrella organisation for heritage across Europe, and going on to build affiliations with National Trusts world-wide. Its close involvement in the setting up of INTO, and now in its development, is yet another example of this and should enhance *Din l-Art Helwa*’s, and Malta’s, profile with like-minded bodies and foster the causes of conservation and the importance of safeguarding world cultural heritage.

# Buskett - A National Heritage Site

*Petra Bianchi*

The woodland park at Buskett is a national heritage site that enjoys the highest level of historical, natural and cultural importance, and a management plan is currently being drawn up for the area by the Rural Affairs Ministry, in collaboration with several environmental NGOs including *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Unfortunately, some of the architectural features of the area are in a state of extreme neglect. *Din l-Art Helwa* has made a proposal to the Ministry, and has offered to help restore and conserve the rich architectural heritage of this park.

## History

After the building of a summer palace at Buskett by Grand Master Verdalle (1581-95) and the planting of trees on the slopes of the valley in the vicinity of the palace, the extensive woodland park of Buskett was later enlarged by Grand Master Lascaris (1636-57). The park is linked to Verdala palace by a wide path that leads down the hill.

Verdala palace was designed in 1586 by Girolamo Cassar as a fortified villa, a summer retreat in which to escape the heat. In the words of the historian Elizabeth Schermerhorn:

*“Everything in Verdalle’s palace speaks of the luxury of a cool, spacious, tranquil retreat, a refuge from the palpitating, pitiless heat of a southern summer; thick walls [...]; deep-set windows, arched and opening generously to all the breezes that blow; wide stone balconies giving on shady gardens and the cool green hollow of the Boschetto.”*



Entrance to the Razzett tal-Baghal

In the park below, Grand Master Lascaris built the stone watercourse as well as fountains, water pools, and various buildings, including three farmhouses. He also planted citrus groves, vineyards and terraces of oaks and cedars. Extensive tree-planting continued during the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the British. The water pools were later converted into citrus groves.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, water shafts were dug and wind-driven pumps were used to supplement the original watercourse.

## The Stone Watercourse

During the time of the Knights, the park was irrigated by the use of natural springs and channelling the water by gravity through an extensive water system flowing from the principal stone watercourse that leads right through the park and down into the valley.

The principal stone watercourse leads down to an open stream, along which the water flow was once regulated by a series of small dams which are still visible but which are in a bad state of repair. The stream continues alongside a pathway down to a stone arch that marks the lower end of the park.

During a very heavy rainstorm in the 1980s, the Buskett valley was flooded and several of the stone arches that strengthen the high walls supporting planted terraces above the right-hand side of the watercourse were damaged and collapsed. Some of the high walls also collapsed, with large stones being washed down the watercourse and partly blocking the channels. These arches have not yet been rebuilt.

Further storms have continued to worsen the damage over the years, and subsequent repairs to the supporting walls of the upper terraces have since collapsed again (some quite recently) and are in urgent need of rebuilding. The paving of the watercourse has been damaged by the roots of large trees growing in the centre of the watercourse.

## Three Farmhouses

Towards the end of the first section of the stone watercourse, a ramp on the right-hand side leads up to a stone archway embellished with the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Lascaris. This archway leads to a dilapidated farmhouse with the same coat-of-arms over one window that is known as *ir-Razzett tal-Baghal* (Mule Farmhouse) and once contained stables.

Verdala palace lies on a hill on one side of the Buskett valley. An area on the hill on the opposite side of the valley is known as *il-bosk* and has a grove of mature pine trees. This hillside contains a second farmhouse built by Grand Master Lascaris, known as *ir-Razzett tal-Bosk* (Woodland Farmhouse), which appears to have been designed as a hunting lodge with several rooms. This farmhouse is in a very dilapidated state.

The *tal-bosk* farmhouse lies at the side of a long stone wall that marks the upper boundary of the park. An open area of garigue landscape lies behind the wall.

Beneath the *il-Bosk* area there are some abandoned fields that were once cultivated as vineyards and which form part of the Buskett park. A third small farmhouse built by Lascaris lies close to these fields.

This farmhouse is known as *ir-Razzett ta' l-Ispirtu* (Spirit Farmhouse) and appears to have been used to store agricultural products and tools required for the maintenance of the surrounding fields and groves. This building is also in a very dilapidated state.

## References

*Joseph Borg,*  
The Public Gardens and Groves  
of the Maltese Islands (2005)

*Elizabeth Schermerhorn,*  
Malta of the Knights (1929)

# Saving the Environment and Cultural Heritage

## Mistra Village

*Din l-Art Helwa* has recently been concerned with the application for the redevelopment of the now derelict Mistra Village in Xemxija, St Paul's Bay. This application, PA 05538/04, proposes the building of four massive apartment blocks of stepped heights in "boomerang" shapes, reaching a height of between 6 and 16 storeys at a maximum of 55m, and comprising a total of 1,000 new apartments.

On 2 April, *Din l-Art Helwa* requested Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) auditor Joseph Falzon to review the contents of the DPA Report drawn up by the Mepa Planning Directorate for this planning application. In particular, Mr Falzon was requested to review how Mepa reached the conclusion that this application should be recommended for approval, as the proposed building heights go against existing policies in the Local Plan.

The North West Local Plan, policy NWSP 25, clearly states that the maximum building height that can be considered on this site, through the application of the Floor Area Ratio, is 8 storeys, or at most only "slight departures" from this height. In no way can 16 storeys be viewed as a "slight departure" from 8 storeys.

The Environmental Impact Assessment conducted for the Mistra Village application clearly shows that the proposed building heights will have a major negative visual impact on the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, the draft Floor Area Ratio policy of 2006 states that elevated ground and ridges are deemed inappropriate for tall buildings as they would dominate the whole landscape when viewed from low-lying ground, and would have a deleterious impact on the skyline on a national scale.

## Fort St Elmo and Marsamxett Harbour

In January 2008, *Din l-Art Helwa* attended a consultation meeting on the proposed development projects and regeneration of Fort St Elmo in Valletta and Marsamxett Harbour. We are in favour of a holistic approach to the regeneration of the harbours around Valletta, and have noted many of the proposals with approval. The restoration and rehabilitation of Fort St Elmo is of utmost importance, and *Din l-Art Helwa* has long lobbied with this aim in view.

However, we have serious reservations about the building of two cruise liner terminals in Marsamxett harbour. Furthermore, the position of these terminals cannot be properly assessed without a scaled study in plan as well as in elevation, to view the relationship of the ships to the backdrop of the historic fortifications – a view that will surely be obscured in no small measure. We have requested that a photomontage showing cruise liners simultaneously at both terminals is to be provided for public viewing before any decision is taken or commitment entered into.

The benefits brought about by the building of a new breakwater at the mouth of Marsamxett Harbour must be thoroughly weighed against the negative results such a project might have, namely the narrowing of the already tight opening to the harbour, where a bottleneck may be created, affecting the traffic of local pleasure craft. This congestion would be further compounded by the presence of large cruise liners as proposed.

The footprint of the proposed 5-star hotel on the site of the existing Evans Laboratory should not extend beyond the footprint of the present building. By going out as far as the existing boundary wall line, and even beyond it as proposed, the new hotel would block the flank of the *Sacra Infermeria* and obstruct it from view. There has never been any building, except for the Nibbia chapel, extending out in this area since the time of the very conception of this important landmark building. The removal of unnecessary structures that have cropped up over the years on the shoreline along

Marsamxett Harbour





Historic Valletta

Marsamxett Harbour and the tidying up of the area as a whole, as well as the restoration of the fortifications is, of course, a very good idea. However the existing rock-faced shoreline should not be covered with concrete or other material that would alter the natural relationship between the shore and the sea.

The landscaping proposed in certain areas appears to be too intrusive, covering existing rock-cut slipways and paths and obliterating other areas of natural landscape. We are not in favour of strong interventions on the landscaping of the outcrops of land that are still in their natural state surrounding the fortifications. Care must be taken not to introduce foreign elements to these historic landscapes, which might change their state of authenticity or obliterate their character.

### Scheduling

Mepa has recently scheduled a number of buildings in Valletta. This is a commendable initiative that will hopefully ensure that alterations or changes to these historic buildings will be strictly monitored and carried out sensitively.

However, it is essential that more resources are directed into this department at Mepa – the Integrated Heritage Management Team – as the scheduling process is still far too slow and many important buildings are in danger. Old buildings that do not lie in Urban Conservation Areas and that have not yet been listed can be altered, or demolished altogether, far too easily, with practically no safeguards at all in place to protect their historic value. Mepa should focus on endangered buildings that lie outside Conservation Areas as an immediate priority.

Fort St Elmo from the sea



## Heritage Publications Review

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

*Din l-Art Helwa*  
133 Melita Street  
Valletta

### **Nostalgias of Gozo Images from the 1880s to the 1930s**

Author - Giovanni Bonello  
Published by - Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti  
ISBN – 978-99932-7-160-4  
Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



Collecting is a seductive art. A collection often starts by chance, a casual encounter with an item, familiar or not, which one begins to see from an unexpected perspective. A second glance, a further thought, and one is hopelessly hooked. Items that, to most people may seem ordinary, or even trivial, suddenly become the object of one's desire. Curiosity turns to passion and passion to obsession.

These were my first thoughts as I started leafing through the collection of images presented by Giovanni Bonello in *Nostalgias of Gozo*. It would be easy to define this volume simply as a sequel to *Nostalgias of Malta*, but I feel that this would be a misinterpretation of the author's intentions. At a conceptual level, the statement could certainly be true, but the resulting volumes are profoundly different. This difference results mostly from the fact that while the Malta volume presented many images that are now lost, the Gozo one portrays images that we are accustomed to seeing. These Gozo images are enhanced, and rendered more fascinating, by the veil of time, but one just needs to remove in one's mind's eye the unfortunately ubiquitous car and the occasional soulless building and the world captured in these images becomes the contemporary one.

The greatest merit of this volume, and its author, is that it makes us realise how much of the time-honoured Gozo is still there to be seen. It calls our attention to the fact that the "development" that has ruined so much of Malta has not as yet spread to the sister island, although the process is certainly gathering momentum. This intention is declared by the opening words of the author himself: "Often have I toyed with the belief that Malta is the more disagreeable part of Gozo. Here is my chance to have a go at proving it". Simply divided by a small stretch of sea, how far apart have Malta and Gozo grown!

With such intentions, it is logical that the text should have been kept to a minimum. However, that small amount of text is profoundly appealing. I was particularly captured by Pawlu Mizzi's essay on Mikiel Farrugia, aka *Mastru Badiku*, one of Gozo's first photographers. Mizzi evokes beautifully the fascination generated by the secret world encapsulated in the small space occupied by the photographic equipment and rendered impenetrable by the black cloth that covered the photographer and his camera while he took his shot.

The images show in a dream-like haze, magnificent panoramas, beautiful buildings, peculiar oddities such as the Gozo Mail Bus, and captured moments like the unloading of tens of Gozitan *kenuri* from a boat. But the most captivating images are those showing a great variety of people in various situations. It is this human element that turns out to be the most ethereal component of this publication, for while most of the remainder is still there to be seen, these people, and the world they inhabited, are gone forever.

Michael Refalo, who is the translator of this volume of Herbert Ganado's seminal work *Rajt Malta Tinbidel*, is donating some of the proceeds from its sale to *Din l-Art Helwa*, an organisation to which he has had a long and loyal attachment, as he has already done with previous volumes. Even if this were not the case, I would still have no hesitation in recommending it to readers.

This, the fourth volume in the series, continues the excellent standard of translation and presentation set in the earlier ones. Michael Refalo has captured well Ganado's tone of voice and the spirit of his story in the often challenging translation from Maltese into English. It reads smoothly and unstiltedly.

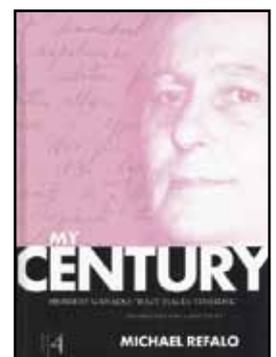
Volume 4 of what Michael Refalo has re-titled *My Century* takes us through Ganado's unhappy internment at the beginning of the Second World War, starting in Fort Salvatur in Malta and ending with his deportation, after a long and perilous journey, to Uganda. Throughout, we are regaled with descriptions of his fellow internees – a motley crew, those placed in charge of them and the places through which they travelled. This is interwoven with thoughts about the war, the plight of Malta and, overwhelmingly, the family he had been forced to leave behind.

Although Ganado was not witness to many of the events about which he writes – the attack on HMS *Illustrious*, the E-boat attack on Grand Harbour, the Santa Marija Convoy – since he was not in Malta at the time, he draws on reports of those who saw them at first hand to enable him to write about them with verve and imagination. He uses these momentous events as the main props of his story of Malta. The Battle for Mediterranean Supremacy is an excellent example of this.

As always, the most striking feature of the book is not only Ganado's ability to make the connection in the thread of his story of how he witnessed Malta change so radically in the span of his life-time, but also his own outstanding character and personality. Never one to moan about the hard knocks that life had occasionally dealt him, his innate goodness, his strong Catholic faith and his utter devotion to his wife and family shine though like a beacon.

The book is worth buying for these qualities alone in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Malta so riven by political back-biting. And worth reading for the insight it offers into a Malta in transition during its apogee as one of the world's most important strategic fortresses.

**My Century Volume 4**  
Author - Herbert Ganado  
Translated and adapted by  
Michael Refalo  
Published by  
Be Communications Ltd  
ISBN – 99932-690-0-X  
Reviewed by  
Martin Scicluna

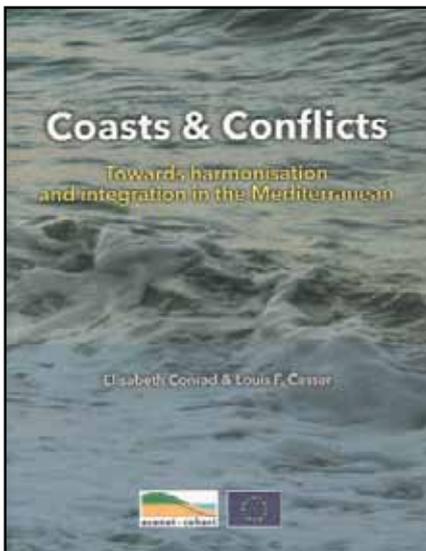


## Coasts & Conflicts Towards Harmonisation and Integration in the Mediterranean

Authors - Elisabeth Conrad  
& Louis F. Cassar

Published by - International Environment  
Institute, University of Malta  
ISBN - 978-99932-0-567-8

Reviewed by Petra Bianchi



Environmental management only began in Malta in the 1990s, when a lot of damage from development, and the related expansion in tourism, had already been done to our coastline. Tourism-related developments such as hotels, restaurants and clubs constantly strive to claim valuable stretches of the coast, as do property development and many other activities. With changing demographics and an increasing population, the battle for the coastline can only be set to intensify.

Huge pressures and threats are thus constantly placed on our coastal resources, together with their ecosystems. A study quoted in this publication points out that in some Mediterranean countries – including Malta, Libya, Greece and Cyprus – over 80 per cent of the population lives along the coast. The majority of Malta's one million tourists per year reside temporarily along the coast.

It is essential that all tourism development takes serious account of environmental concerns and not merely planning issues. This book aptly includes both "conflicts" and "towards harmonisation" in its title, which gives a good idea of its aim, which is to provide a way forward to achieve a holistic solution to coastal management, integrating the needs and competing interests of various "stakeholders" in the coastline to achieve the aim that is of interest to everyone: sustainability.

Fortunately, environmental concerns are now part of the national agenda. To prevent the further decline of our coastal systems, it is vital to secure the political will to promote and establish good coastal management practices. It is also necessary to adopt a holistic approach, integrating many different stakeholders, needs and approaches, always bearing in mind that the coastal system is dynamic and that changes in one part of the system will have an effect elsewhere in the system.

The term "holistic" implies that not only ecological or marine biological issues should be taken into account, but social, economic and cultural factors must also be included in all proposed strategies for coastal management.

The authors say: "With the collapse of fisheries, the degradation of habitats and consequent loss of species, the loss of crucial storm buffering functions and a variety of other such blows, the human race has had to wake up to the startling reality that resources are not limitless and that we may have already pushed coastal ecosystems beyond the thresholds of their survival."

This book provides an overview of coastal management issues and techniques in the Mediterranean, aiming for sustainability. In the words of the authors: "Solutions will only be found through coordination and integration". It is aimed at a wide audience and the many different players involved in managing coastal resources throughout the Mediterranean, not only the Maltese Islands, and will certainly be a valuable addition to the library of any groups or individuals interested in coastal management.

The coast is defined as the "physical interface between land and sea". The coastline is of economic importance to many communities that have settled along it throughout history – for tourism, recreation, fishing and other marine-related activities.

Coastal environments have a complex history – the coastline, together with coastal towns and cities, has played a central role in the social history of the Mediterranean, the so-called "cradle of civilisation". Fernand Braudel was the first historian to, almost 60 years ago, famously study the Mediterranean, taking into account the intimate connection between history and geographical space. He dedicated the first part of his seminal study of the history of the Mediterranean to man's relationship with the environment, and the second part to the region's social history.

Today we are faced with the challenge of a changing climate, which is predicted to have major impacts in the long term on the environment, including our

coasts, which will be affected in no small measure by changes in climatic and oceanic systems caused by global warming. In particular, the predicted rise in sea level may have a major impact on coastlines throughout the Mediterranean, particularly in low-lying areas. These geographical changes will, of course, also bring about social change.

According to this book, "the need for judicious management of coastal areas has never been more critical." This requires an understanding of three key features for effective management systems to be put into place: firstly, an understanding of the physical geography and ecosystems of the region; secondly, an understanding of the social and cultural context; and thirdly, the interaction between the natural and human dimensions.

Furthermore, "the Mediterranean increasingly exhibits symptoms of unsustainable development most of which seem to have roots that go no further back than the last two centuries of human development, and that are concentrated within the past four decades. It is the irony of human progress extending blindly and optimistically, without a realisation that there can be no human progress without a healthy environmental support system".

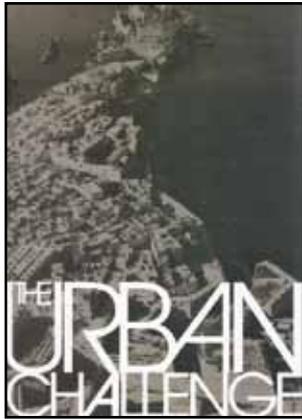
The book is divided into two parts. Part I looks at the background to coastal management issues and Part II discusses specific techniques of coastal management. It contains a good selection of illustrations and presents useful discussions on various approaches to coastal management, including ICAM, gives examples of regional, national and localised management initiatives in the Mediterranean and also focuses on the Econet-Cohast methodology of conservation of coastal habitats. It analyses different components, challenges and definitions of ecosystem management and gives case examples from different countries.

The authors also study concepts and methods of stakeholder involvement in coastal management, including identifying, engaging and interacting with stakeholders. Further chapters discuss landscape approaches to coastal management, environmental assessment, conservation strategies and geographic information systems and remote sensing.

The publication is part-financed by Interreg IIIB Archimed through the project Econet-Cohast, which seeks to address the need to establish and adopt environmental management tools and methodologies in the central and eastern Mediterranean.

## The Urban Challenge: our Quality of Life and the Built Environment

Authors - Jacques Borg Barthet  
& Alberto Miceli Farrugia  
Published by - Kamra tal-Periti  
Reviewed by Petra Bianchi



The Chamber of Architects (*KTP*) has recently published a valuable discussion document entitled *The Urban Challenge*, which aims to ignite a debate on architecture and explore ways of improving the quality of life in Malta through more sustainable development and higher standards of architectural design. It also seeks to introduce the draft National Policy for Architecture being prepared by the *KTP*.

These efforts were partly inspired by a statement made by the architect Quentin Hughes in 1969, which said: "If Malta accepts laissez-faire development, the whole island will be obliterated by buildings. And this will take very little time. It will happen unless the planners, legislators and architects take action very soon."

As the *KTP* knows well enough, environmentalists and lovers of heritage could not agree more. Today, almost 40 years after the remarks made by Quentin Hughes, countless outraged members of the public now campaign incessantly against what is described in this document as "environmental damage caused through a scarcity of quality development and well considered forward planning". The general public certainly agrees with the *KTP* in so far as environmental priorities should not be allowed to "become emergencies." *Din l-Art Helwa* is involved in this relentless debate on a daily basis, and has chosen to support *The Urban Challenge* in its AGM resolutions this year.

*The Urban Challenge* is peppered with statements that decry the sorry level to which our built environment has sunk. But where are the solutions and what does the *KTP* suggest should be the way forward?

Firstly, the *KTP* stresses the need to promote quality in design, through a

shared understanding of quality and the basic elements of design that enable high standards to be achieved. However, it points out that this commitment to quality must be shared by the client as well as the architect. For this reason, the *KTP* suggests the setting up of a National Centre for the Built Environment, committed to improving quality in the built environment. This would include a Centre for Research, an Architecture Review Commission and an Advisory Service for architects, and educational facilities.

Secondly, the document calls for the public sector to assume more responsibility in the promotion of good design. This could include design competitions on national projects of significant scale and importance. *Din l-Art Helwa* fully agrees with this point – for example, we would have liked to see a design competition in the case of SmartCity, a perfect project for a competition of this kind that could have resulted in a more exciting design than the one with which we have been presented.

The *KTP* also explores the idea of introducing schemes that could permit central government to purchase rural sites of strategic value that are at risk of being developed under private ownership. Other schemes could allow the purchase and dismantling of old tourism-related projects in sensitive areas, if these are no longer an economic necessity for Malta as a leisure destination. The document suggests that buildings of heritage importance under threat could also be purchased by central government. This could be financed, for example, through the sale of surplus government property or through contributions from inheritance tax. Fiscal incentives could be introduced to encourage the upkeep of heritage buildings and sites in

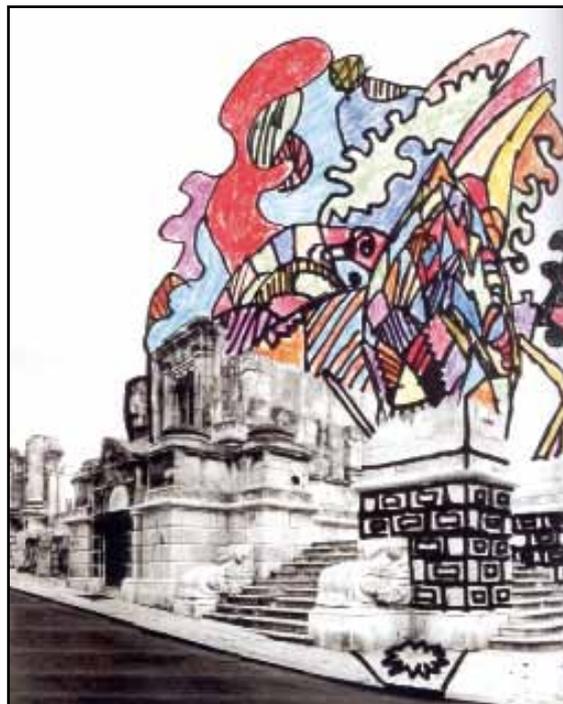
private ownership. A revision of the rent laws would also promote the upkeep of heritage buildings.

The document puts forward the idea of introducing urban redevelopment agencies empowered to "drive social and economic regeneration (eg in Gzira, Valletta or the Three Cities), initiate large-scale redevelopment (eg in Bugibba) or to manage the reuse and redevelopment of under-utilised government properties (eg Valletta)," pointing out that "the workings of the Government Property Division warrant a review to permit the creation of these agencies."

In the field of policy, the *KTP* addresses the need to properly assess the benefits of tall buildings, "other than the obvious financial benefits for the developers through the provision of properties with stunning views." Tall buildings require sound urban and planning objectives if they are to add "value to the country's social and economic offering." A policy that only seeks to endorse existing and forthcoming planning commitments is "as undesirable as it is misconceived".

It is crucial that these and so many other valid suggestions in this document are not left on the shelf to gather dust, but instead are taken up and discussed by the relevant authorities, as well as by our planners. The central proposal of this study should be taken forward, which is the setting up of a National Centre for the Built Environment, hand in hand with a National Policy for Architecture.

Yet undoubtedly it is the architects themselves who must equally take good note of the sound ideas in this document, as each of the badly designed buildings so clearly described here has the hand and mind of an architect behind it.



# Letters to Vigilo

These pages are meant to be your voice for your heritage.

Please mark your letters for the attention of The Editor, Vigilo, and send them to:

*Din l-Art Helwa*  
133 Melita Street  
Valletta

Or email us on:  
arhelwa@kemmnet.net.mt



Dear Editor,

With reference to the article entitled *Watermills and Their History* in last October's *Vigilo*, I visited Syria, including the city of Hama, in March last year and saw several of the few surviving norias along the River Orontes. These wooden undershot waterwheels are constructed with adjacent weirs and lift water, by means of half open boxes, which spill it into aqueducts. The axes of the wheels are of wood as is the axle housing and therefore, the wheels make a tremendous groaning noise when in operation.

For the interest of your readers I include two photographs; one of a triplet of norias, and a second showing a close-up of the top of a wheel where the carrier boxes can be seen spaced at intervals between the paddles and water being spilled into the aqueduct. The wheel is turning towards the observer.

Yours faithfully,  
Gordon Knox  
Balzan

Dear Sir,

*That our Malta is an island of contradictions has been said over and over again. One such contradiction is that while, due to the short distance, it would make a whole lot of sense to use public transport, all those who can prefer to use their private cars. The reasons for such an attitude are various and well known.*

*However, the irony in this situation is that while public transport should, and could, be a veritable means of drastically reducing emissions, we are turning it into a double polluter. On the one hand it is a direct polluter through the considerable, and often exacerbated, emissions it causes and on the other it is an indirect polluter by preventing the reduction in the use of private cars through the defective service it provides.*

*Thankfully, parking management schemes such as the Park and Ride system and the escalating fuel price are slowly re-instilling the bus attitude. If not our heads, at least our pockets will bring us to see reason.*

Albert Micallef  
Mriehel



*Dear Sir,*

*How sad it has been to see a city as beautiful as Naples wounded, disfigured and humiliated due to waste management issues. Seeing those marvellous piazzas stuffed with all sorts of refuse, and the proud façades of many palaces disfigured by agglomerations of garbage bags, has been a veritable tragedy.*

*I was caught in a sort of panic when I realised how terrible it would be, were such a thing to happen in our own Malta. The fact is that at times we can get frighteningly close to a similar situation. One only has to walk through Valletta at certain times to realise that we are not that far away from a similar occurrence.*

*What impressed me most about the Naples situation was that it seemed to me that the central issue was completely lost to one and all. While people were justifiably outraged by what was happening to their city, they did not seem to grasp the fact that it was their garbage: refuse they had generated that was now choking them.*

*Many of us are assiduous followers of Italian TV. Let not the lessons that can be learned by these events be missed.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Paul Gatt  
Lija*



*Dear Sir,*

*I am a fan of the buses and have been using them all my adult life. I do drive on occasion, but whenever possible I leave my car in the garage. My life as a bus user has certainly been aided by the fact that I live in a central area, but another factor is my deep belief that by using the buses I can make a significant contribution to improving the environment of our Island.*

*Unfortunately, for a number of years this last conviction has been overshadowed by my awareness that most of the buses on which I was travelling were significant vehicles of pollution themselves, but in recent years this issue seems to have been addressed. I am not saying that there are no more buses emitting noxious gases but these are few and far between. Anyway, I have always been convinced that the pollution created by one bus was always less than that caused if all the passengers had used individual vehicles.*

*However, what has not changed over the years are the chronic defects regarding the lack of effective and comprehensive service to the public that would enable so many more members of the public to use a bus, or any other form of public transport. I have heard many fellow passengers over the years lamenting the fact that they had had to give up using the buses not because of the few shortcomings, but because the service no longer responded to their needs.*

*There is a tendency to put all the blame of the ineffectiveness of the bus service on the drivers. While I am the first to say that quite a few of these need to be trained in order to interact better with the public, I can assure you that most are very decent people, doing their best to provide a service. The real problem is that there seems to be a total alienation between those who are supposed to monitor, and respond to, the changing needs of the public and those who are able to design the bus service to provide for this. The unfortunate thing about all this is that, in the meantime, the number of bus users is in constant decline, while car-related pollution problems are exacerbated as a direct result.*

*My final comment is addressed to the passengers themselves. Stopping at the Valletta terminus I am always one of a crowd to get off the bus. Invariably, a good 70 per cent of all those leaving the bus throw their tickets onto the ground, when there are rubbish bins every few yards. This is also self-inflicted pollution.*

*Simon Vella  
Hamrun*

Dear Sir,

I would like to point out that in the article about the Red Tower Restoration Project in Vigilo No. 32, a section of the history of the tower has been left out, ie the period during the 1960s, when it was leased to Lord Faringdon by the government.

Immediately after acquiring the lease, Lord Faringdon asked me as an architect to make the place habitable, complete with government water and electricity supply, cooking facilities, drainage, etc. This I did, at the same time redecorating the whole place internally and externally as well as furnishing one room (one of the turrets) on the roof for sleeping in.

Having done all this, Lord Faringdon used to come and stay in the tower for a few weeks' holiday every year. Before returning to England, he used to hand me the keys of the place asking me to open it and make use of it, to keep it inhabitable. This I used to do, especially in summer when I also used to invite some friends to come and spend a day there. These were very enjoyable parties.

As I was building Hotel Comino in those days, I also used to sleep at the tower at times to save myself the drive down to Msida from Cirkewwa every evening, only to drive up again the next morning.

After some years, (I do not remember how many), Lord Faringdon gave up the lease and returned the tower to the government.

The place was then given to the army to be used as a signal station and some poles and cables were put on the roof.

Up to the day Lord Faringdon gave up the lease, the place was in very good order with none of the steps of the spiral staircase broken or missing.

Yours faithfully

Louis A. Naudi A & CE  
Msida



## Important Notice Your Membership 2008!

Please allow us to remind you that your membership for 2008 was due on January 1<sup>st</sup>. As we are sure you are certainly aware, your membership means a lot to us. Apart from giving us your financial support, your membership is an act of confidence in our work. As you also know our work is not always easy and knowing that there are people like you who support us is always of great encouragement. So please do take a moment and forward your membership fee.



*The Hon Treasurer  
Din I-Art Helwa  
133, Melita Street  
Valletta*

*Thank you for your support!*



