

*November 2014*

*NUMBER 46*

*€3.00*

*NEWSPAPER POST*

*DIN L-ART HELWA*

*National Trust of Malta*

# VIGILO



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*open*

Monday - Friday

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

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*web* - www.dinlarthelwa.org

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

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

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



## ***Din l-Art Helwa***

*Din l-Art Helwa* has reciprocal membership with:

*The National Trust of England, Wales & Northern Ireland*

*The National Trust for Scotland*

*The Barbados National Trust*

*The National Trust of Australia*

*The Gelderland Trust for Historic Houses*

*The Gelderland 'Nature Trust'*

*Din l-Art Helwa* is a member of:

*ICOMOS - Malta*

*Europa Nostra*

*The International National Trusts Organisation (INTO)*

*The National Federation of NGOs of Malta*

*The Heritage Parks Federation*

*Qantara*

*Future of Religious Heritage Association*

The views expressed in  
**VIGILO**  
are not necessarily  
those of  
***Din l-Art Helwa***

**VIGILO**  
is published in  
May and November

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***Din l-Art Helwa***

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

# VIGILO

ISSN - 1026-132X

NUMBER 46

NOVEMBER 2014

# VIGILO



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*Detail of the restored painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel*



## FRONT & BACK COVER

View from Żebbuġ over Marsalforn/Xaghra

Photo: *Anika Psaila Savona*





## Din l-Art Helwa

The Hon Dr Joseph Muscat, MP  
Prime Minister,  
Auberge de Castille,  
Valletta.

31st October 2014

### AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Dear Prime Minister,

In the fifty years of Din l-Art Helwa's work to protect Malta's environmental and cultural heritage, this is the first time that all six serving and former Presidents of the association since its foundation have felt impelled to write a joint letter to express their deep concern at the current state of the environment and the government's plans for the future.

Land-use is Malta's most pressing environmental problem. Good planning is vital. But effective environmental safeguards put in place between 1992 and 2012 are now being dismantled without regard to the long-term effects on Malta's besieged landscape. Our environment is in peril.

The national Structure Plan – the country's template for the built and rural environment – is long overdue for review. A set of objectives, constituting the "Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development", were drawn up well over two years ago as the necessary precursor to the completion of a fully-fledged Plan incorporating all the detailed land-use policies which would flow logically from them.

A solidly constructed Strategic Plan is a crucial safeguard for the future of land-use development of this country. But, instead, the government has merely reissued the former objectives without any of the essential detailed policies which must under-pin a Plan of this nature for it to succeed. Malta has been left without a proper strategy for the future governance and good administration of its built and rural environment, thus inviting continued bad management and abuse to fester.

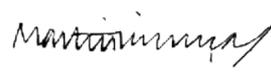
A Strategic Plan of this nature and importance should be debated and approved by Parliament. But the government intends to amend the legislation to enable it to be approved by the Minister alone, without proper Parliamentary scrutiny. Given that the Plan involves a change of such social, economic and environmental importance, the attempt to by-pass Parliament is a retrograde step which runs directly counter to the commitment to transparency and accountability which your government made on taking office.

Moreover, a number of other unilateral decisions affecting the environment are also cause for concern. The Rural Policy, constituting a new direction for the countryside that is likely to lead inevitably to land speculation outside the development zone (ODZ), has been approved by the government without any reference to an overarching Strategic Plan and without conducting any Strategic Environmental Assessments of its impact, as required by the European Union. A new policy for high-rise buildings in an area of Mriehel, which had not been included in the public consultation phase, has been approved. Calls for expressions of interest in land reclamation projects have been published without a Marine Spatial Plan being presented, debated or approved.

Din l-Art Helwa has fought to safeguard Malta's environment for fifty years.

We make this plea to you as Prime Minister to ensure that your legacy to Malta is remembered for the improvements which have been made to this country, not for the further and rapid degradation of the built and rural environment which the lack of a comprehensive Strategic Plan is in danger of inflicting.

Yours sincerely,

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran

Prof. Anthony Bonanno

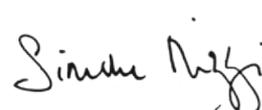
Martin Scicluna



Martin Galea



Dr. Petra Caruana Dingli



Simone Mizzi

## *Din l-Art Helwa's* Open Letter to the Prime Minister on the State of the Environment

For the first time in the 50 years of *Din l-Art Helwa's* work to protect Malta's environmental and cultural heritage, all six presidents of the association since its foundation have written a joint open letter to the Prime Minister in which they express a deep concern with the current state of the environment and the government's plans for the future.

The six presidents appealed to the Prime Minister to ensure that his legacy to Malta will not be the further and rapid degradation of the built and rural environment.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is concerned that the government has not drafted a solidly constructed new Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development and has only issued a list of objectives without the essential detailed policies that must underpin a plan of this nature for it to succeed.

Malta has been left without a proper strategy for the future governance and good administration of its built and rural environment, thus inviting continued bad management and abuse to fester.

The government also intends to amend the legislation to enable the Strategic Plan to be approved by the Minister of Planning alone, without proper Parliamentary scrutiny. Given that the plan involves a change of such social, economic and environmental importance, the attempt to bypass Parliament is a retrograde step which runs directly counter to the commitment to transparency and accountability which this government made on taking office.

Moreover, a number of other decisions affecting the environment are also cause for concern. The new Rural Policy, constituting a new direction for the countryside that is likely to lead to land speculation outside the development zone (ODZ), has been approved by the government without any reference to an overarching Strategic Plan and without conducting a Strategic Environmental Assessment of its impact.

A new policy for high-rise buildings in an area of Mriehel has been approved without being included in the public consultation phase as is required by law. Calls for expressions of interest in land reclamation projects have been published without a Marine Spatial Plan being presented, debated or approved.

These numerous development plans coming together collectively without good governance of the use of land threaten Malta's last unspoilt open spaces. The island's countryside and its coast, its built heritage and with it the quality of life of its citizens and visitors, will lose to economic interests. With this open letter, *Din l-Art Helwa's* six presidents together appeal to the Prime Minister to uphold his government's electoral promise to protect the environment for future generations.

*Executive Presidents of Din l-Art Helwa*

*Martin Galea, Profs Anthony Bonanno, Simone Mizzi, Martin Scicluna, Dr Petra Caruana Dingli sign the open letter to the Prime Minister below the portrait of Founder President, Judge Maurice Caruana Curran*



# SAVE THE COUNTRYSIDE

a *Din l-Art Helwa* Campaign



**Do we want roundabouts to be the only green spaces left?**

*Rubble walls*

*All photographs by:  
Guido Bonett*

*Din l-Art Helwa* has recently launched a campaign that aims to show the relevance of biodiversity and the countryside in our daily lives and for future generations. It aims to build public awareness of the importance of conserving the countryside and avoiding its loss, especially as a result of over-development.

The countryside is the lifeblood of biodiversity – the variety of species on earth – and ecosystems provide the habitats in which they live. These ecosystems are being degraded, and often lost, due to various man-made pressures, including pollution and land speculation. Construction on virgin land is one of the main threats to biodiversity in Malta.

*opposite:  
A Stonechat*

*Buskett*







*The caper plant  
flower*

Malta's biodiversity is threatened by the conversion of natural areas for other uses, such as housing, roads, industry and the expansion of urban areas and there is a need for more political will to seriously tackle the issue. Biodiversity loss is a growing problem and it is necessary to improve information and education on biodiversity within the community.

Our natural heritage includes many plants and animals and their diverse habitats: they depend upon the countryside to survive. Agriculture is an important sector of the economy and forms part of our cultural traditions. More action is needed against threats to biodiversity, such as illegal building in the countryside, illegal dumping and illegal hunting or trapping.

The countryside provides scenic beauty and educational benefits to Maltese society. What is left of it is beautiful and precious: we have to protect it for future generations.

Help us protect the countryside by supporting our campaign. The project consists mainly of an internet-based campaign, engaging with audiences through social media such as Facebook. It is funded by a grant awarded to *Din l-Art Helwa* by the EEA Grants NGO Programme Malta 2009-2014.

*All photographs by:  
Guido Bonett*

### **Our campaign logo**

The logo of our new *Save the Countryside* campaign is based on Malta's national plant, the Maltese Rock Centaury or *Widnet il-Baħar*. Its scientific name is *Palaeocyanus crassifolius* and it is endemic to the Maltese Islands, which means that it is not naturally found anywhere else in the world. It grows mainly along the cliffs in the south-west of Malta and Gozo. The campaign's logo reflects both a child's drawing of Malta's national plant as well as a 'smiley'. It was designed by Pierre Ellul.



*The campaign logo*

*A hedgehog*

# In Search of Quality

*Executive President of Din l-Art Ħelwa*  
**Simone Mizzi**

In 2015, *Din l-Art Ħelwa* will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> year. Founded in 1965 to safeguard Malta's built and natural heritage, the organisation has been at the forefront of the struggle to find a balance between environmental preservation and construction and development – still mistakenly perceived by many to be the prime motors of Malta's economy. This antiquated mode of thinking went out decades ago but is once again being promoted as an easy way of finding quick wealth.

The struggle is even more critical now, as the administration elected in March 2013 seems hell-bent on relaxing building restrictions and expanding construction into “no-go” areas, even before a new Structure Plan – that should guide us for the next 20 years – comes into effect. With the approval of numerous building schemes within our dwindling countryside, the promotion of cementing our limited foreshore and the demolition of graceful streetscapes ever on the increase, the government seems determined to make its mark by changing the face of Malta in the name of progress.

Well, it is easy to do that by using undeveloped space, permitting towers and high-rise buildings in privileged areas that command good views. Land speculation – which is rife as I write – and using it for investment through construction and development does not need much intelligence or imagination. Using it wisely and only when strictly necessary, on the other hand, does. It requires maturity and strength of will to observe four measures most rigidly:

- 1) Stave off pressure from the speculator.
- 2) Enact firm and fair planning laws that are not determined to accommodate the individual voter.
- 3) Lay down finely-tuned design guidelines to bring about the much-needed quality we have lacked for the last 40 years and the return of a Style Guidance Committee.
- 4) Rigidly enforce corrective and educational measures in respect of those who abuse the law and steal public land.

I question whether this administration has either the maturity or the will, but then none of its predecessors had much of either. Taking the reins of power and holding on to them is indeed a seductive motivation, but at what price for Malta?

*The dark image of our urban future.  
High-rise buildings breaking the skyline and  
throwing long shadows on all the surrounding  
streets. Fort Cambridge development, Sliema*





With the exception of a few rare examples of enforcement by Mepa that we are pleased to have noted, these are four maxims of which the government, its Sustainable Development and Environment Ministry and its Planning and Environmental Authority seem blissfully unaware of. Or maybe they are oblivious of their responsibilities to the needs of future generations of Maltese who will come after us. Are they blissfully unaware or amorally irresponsible? Take a vote.

The challenge for Malta is to create employment, generate wealth and upgrade its visual environment without allowing development to take up the few undeveloped spaces we have left, or the scarce remaining views of the sea, and without demolishing the urban and rural heritage that has made Malta the unique island it is. Steeped in centuries of wise human use, Malta has been marked by gracious buildings right up to the time when humble post-war residences were fast being erected in villages and the dock areas. Even these had their purpose and their style, sadly not recognised even today.

Yet there are people of quality who understand that Malta's main assets are its architectural and historic legacy and its natural Mediterranean topography, low-lying within its deep blue sea. They recognise the jewel it was – and still is, to a great extent. So, do we want quality, or do we want to be ordinary, mundane and the same as everybody else or worse? The turning point has now arrived, and Malta may no longer retain its charm if the government of today has its way. Hell-bent on making the island banal and the same as everywhere else, aspiring to be another Dubai or Shanghai, we will have nothing to offer that makes us unique. We cannot simply rely on keeping some of Valletta, St John's Cathedral, the Temples and Mdina. As views to the sea are sacrificed to more building, with tall buildings losing us the beautiful light we own, with not a tree in sight within the ever-growing urban sprawl, it is a dismal prospect for those who will come after us.

There is nothing wrong with building beautiful new buildings and even towers in designated areas, or upgrading disturbed land, if proper studies have indicated that such action is necessary and if the plentiful shabbiness that continues to abound is eliminated. Sadly, our eyes are accustomed to less than mediocrity. Sadly, too, the forthcoming Structure Plan – still in draft form – would not appear particularly based on study, as is required by law. It is a hollow document that runs contrary to the national legislation by which it is governed and does not even pay lip service to the vital planning job it is supposed to do.

So the struggle for conservation lives on and with it so will *Din l-Art Helwa*. The race is now to save what we can, and that is what this organisation has done successfully for 50 years – working by example to save rare pockets of heritage for the world.

*Valletta and the Sliema peninsula face each other across Marsamxett Harbour. One as a glory of our past, the other as the shame of our present.*

*A sample of our ever-diminishing countryside and development abutting the coastline.*



I was privileged to be around as a teenager in the mid-sixties when *Din l-Art Helwa* was born and I clearly remember two events at the time that were to be catalysts for the birth of the European conservation movement. As we come up to our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is worth recalling them again in this edition of *Vigilo*.

Two mega monuments were in peril and the challenge of saving them embedded the value of heritage firmly in the minds of leading intellectuals, historians, scientists, artists and architects – many of whom visited Malta. First came the two extraordinary cities of Venice and Florence: these were subsiding due to the great floods and the British-Italian Society for Venice in Peril was founded by forward-thinkers such as Sir Ashley Clarke and Giorgio Bassani, who had founded Italia Nostra in 1963.

National movements were inspired to raise funds and an awareness of the risks faced by these two cities which, in turn, made them turn their minds to their own. Another important influence on the development of conservation was Pietro Gazzola, a leading Italian architect who was the founder of Icomos in 1965 and helped map out Unesco's Venice Charter in 1966. Gazzola was achieving the extraordinary feat of saving the Temples of Abu Simbel and Philae from the rising waters of the Aswan Dam in Egypt. This achievement inflamed the hearts and minds of those who were to establish Europe's conservation movement, including the founders of *Din l-Art Helwa*, and ensured it was more than a passing passion, but a science whose time had come.

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran and a group of visionary people, soon to become heritage activists, founded *Din l-Art Helwa* guided by Article 9 of the new Maltese Constitution which holds

that the "State shall be responsible for the conservation of the country's cultural heritage, its art, and its natural environment". Its name was taken from the opening line of Malta's national anthem, which inspired Maurice Caruana Curran while he was working in his study late one night. This was the background behind the birth of *Din l-Art Helwa*. Just after Malta acquired its independence in 1964, I do remember him saying: "If we don't look after our heritage, well – nobody is going to do it for us".

*Din l-Art Helwa* joined the European movement through Europa Nostra as early as 1967 and has been a sterling example of a voluntary heritage movement for the last 50 years. It has not been easy, nor will it be. However, it has saved 39 national monuments and landmarks through restoration in those 50 years, while lobbying to establish and change laws governing heritage and the environment. It has done all this armed with nothing but the sheer determination of its volunteers – a loud but rational and respectful voice – and the help of like-minded benefactors and the local business community, who remain staunch allies even today.

Today, the preservation of both our built and natural heritage is an enterprise requiring technical skills, knowledge of the science of conservation and the ability and passion to recognise what truly makes up Malta's heritage and communicate its needs to those who are responsible. Until those who are responsible have reached sufficient awareness and maturity to fulfil their duties to our cultural identity, there will always be work for *Din l-Art Helwa* and others like it who want to preserve what is solely our own. We thank all those who listen to its voice and come to help as volunteers, or with funds or ideas or just with plain encouragement.



Judge Maurice Caruana Curran

# Din l-Art Helwa 1965 - 2015

**Albert P Mamo**

*Chairman, 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee*

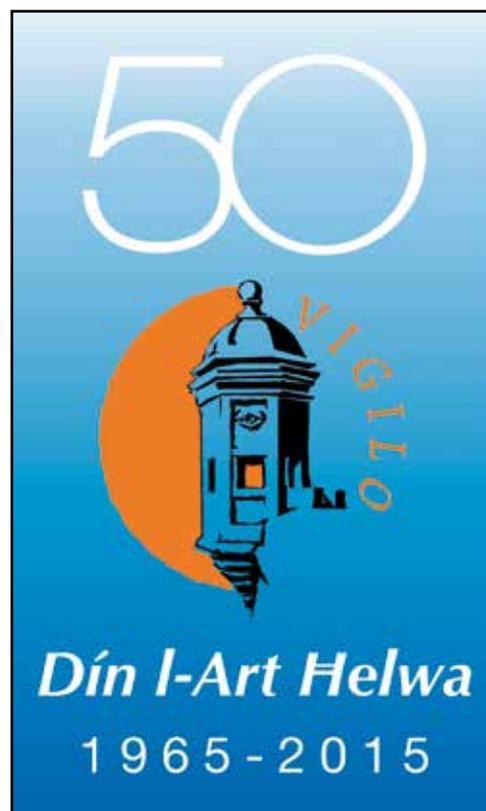
*Din l-Art Helwa*, Malta's National Trust, was founded in July 1965 – a few months after Malta achieved independence – with the purpose of safeguarding and protecting Malta's unique cultural legacy and natural environment.

The founder members of the organisation, led by Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, were encouraged by the new Constitution, which lay down that “the State shall safeguard the landscape and the historic and artistic patrimony of the Nation”. The foresight of this enlightened group of people, all volunteers and lovers of Malta, was soon to be put to the test. The need to find economic independence sparked the first rush to develop property for tourism and residential purposes and the subsequent upsurge in economic activity led to speculative pressures on Malta's spatial resources.

The island's ancient landscapes, its fortifications and traditional architecture, its baroque dome skyline, limited coastline and ridges and valleys are today still under threat. Since its foundation, *Din l-Art Helwa* has made its voice heard whenever proposals were being put forward which, in its opinion, went against principles and, furthermore, it has directly saved 39 national heritage sites and landmarks through restoration with funds raised entirely from donations, sponsorship and other fund-raising activities. Many of these sites are still under its care by virtue of a Deed of Guardianship entered into with the government or in trust from the Ecclesiastical Authorities, as the case may be.

A 50-year milestone is a remarkable event for any organisation and more so for one run by volunteers such as *Din l-Art Helwa*. To mark this special occasion, the Council has appointed a committee to oversee the usual calendar of events and try to upgrade it. In addition, a number of other events, commemorations and launches will also be organised from this autumn through to December next year, culminating with a thanksgiving Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Victories in Valletta which by then will have seen the completion of the major part of its restoration programme.

We trust that these events will be attractive and of interest to the public – who will be encouraged to participate in as many of them as possible – and will draw those who have Malta's patrimony at heart to help by giving some of their time as volunteers or by sponsoring, either in total or in part, one of the many projects that are currently ‘work in progress’ or the maintenance of existing ones. I thank you all for your support of these activities to mark the important occasion of *Din l-Art Helwa*'s Golden Jubilee in 2015 and thank all the volunteers and members of the Anniversary Committee who are working so hard to make it all happen and Graphic Designer Reno Psaila who designed the 50th Anniversary logo.



## DIARY OF EVENTS 2015 - GOLDEN JUBILEE YEAR

### FEBRUARY

*Friday, 21 February*

Launch of 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations with a concert at The Manoel Theatre featuring Carmine Lauri and the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra by courtesy of the Manoel Theatre

*Saturday, 28 February, 11a.m.*

Annual General Meeting

### MAY / JUNE

The Bir Miftuh International Music Festival

### JULY

*Thursday, 9 July*

Launch of the DLH Commemorative Stamp by MaltaPost

*Friday, 10 July*

Golden Jubilee Summer Evening Reunion and Dinner at San Anton under the patronage of HE the President of Malta

### SEPTEMBER

*Week commencing Monday, 14 September (date to be confirmed)*

Keynote lecture entitled *The Environment – Meeting the Challenges* by Professor Simon Richard Molesworth AO, QC,

BA, LLB, LFEIANZ, FAICD, FAIM, FVPELA, PIA (Hon.F), founding chairman of the Executive Board of the International National Trusts Organisation, at the Aula Magna Old University of Malta, St Pauls Street, Valletta

### OCTOBER

*Thursday, 8 October (date to be confirmed)*

Celebration event to unveil the restored Alessio Erardi ceiling paintings at Our Lady of Victory Church

### NOVEMBER

*(Date to be confirmed)*

Golden Jubilee Concert and Dinner at the Palace, Valletta

*Friday, 27 November (date to be confirmed)*

10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Architectural Heritage Awards, Launch and Exhibition

### DECEMBER

*Thursday, 3 December, 6p.m.*

A Thanksgiving Mass celebrated by His Grace the Archbishop of Malta at Our Lady of Victory Church, followed by a reception

# Thank you to all Double Golds

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

**Simone Mizzi**

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Din l-Art Helwa* is just around the corner and many precursor events are taking place in the run-up to its launch in February. With this in mind, we have been encouraged to launch the Double Gold Life Membership Scheme by many life members who felt they wished to do more for the organisation.

**So – a big, heartfelt THANK YOU** to all those Life Members who have responded so swiftly to my letter of appeal and have taken up the Double Gold Life Membership Scheme. And as a small reminder to those who may still be thinking about it, please do know that Gold Life Membership entitles you to a number of perks: a free commemorative stamp printed on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of DLH by MaltaPost; discounted rates for accommodation at Delimara Lighthouse, its two apartments now furnished and equipped and awaiting a tourism licence for use as heritage holiday premises, and a pair of the *Heritage Saved* watercolour prints signed by renowned artist Kenneth Zammit Tabona. I would also remind all members that normal standard membership entitles free admission to all National Trust heritage sites in the UK through our reciprocal agreement with this prestigious body.

I promised I would keep you all up to date with progress. We have raised just under €14,000 already, thanks to the generosity of all those of you who have responded to the Double Gold Scheme. Most who did, do not wish their names to be publicised and so, on behalf of *Din l-Art Helwa*, may I just say that this money is going to be put to excellent use in the realisation of the Treasures of the Sacristy Museum at Victory Church, which is taking shape rapidly as I write.

If you are Life Members and still wish to take this Scheme up at the current rate of Life Membership, you will find the Double Gold Life Membership Form in print in this edition of *Vigilo*, or you can just email [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org). If you can bring in new members to DLH, these are the life blood of the volunteer organization, bringing as they do new ideas and new energy.

With my warmest personal regards to you all and, again, thank you.

## DOUBLE GOLD

LIFE MEMBERSHIP FORM

### Renew Your Guardianship of Malta's Heritage

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_

I/We wish to apply for

## Double Gold Life Membership

Single Double Gold Life Membership	€200
Joint Couple Double Gold Life Memberships*	€300

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

*Cheques to be made payable to The Treasurer, Din l-Art Helwa, 133, Melita Street, Valletta.*

*Bank Payments can be made by crediting our HSBC Account 033 181181 001*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If your personal details have changed, kindly advise [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org)

I wish/do not wish my name to be published in Vigilo and the Benefactor Listings in the Heritage Corner at 133 Melita St., Valletta

tel: +35621220358 email: [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org) web: <http://dinlarthelwa.org>



## Corporate Support for *Din l-Art Helwa* **Martin Scicluna** *Honorary Treasurer of Din l-Art Helwa*



I am delighted to be able to share a few thoughts with the readers of our flagship communication – the friends and supporters of *Din l-Art Helwa*. Since I was elected to the Hon Treasurer position in February last year, I have had the pleasure and honour of working very closely with the like-minded individuals within the formal structures of DLH and with the many other people who are the mainstay of the corporate world in Maltese business and commerce.

I am grateful to the several hundred individual members who pay their annual subscription to DLH to support the significant work in the restoration and protection of the



*APS Bank Ltd*

*After a long career in banking, spanning 36 years with HSBC, Martin now holds board appointments as a non-executive director in banking, insurance and financial services companies registered in Malta. He has been active in volunteering for most of his life in the Scout Movement, the Institute Of Financial Services, the Ian Tomlin Napier School of Music Trust and as a member of the HSBC Malta Foundation Board. In February 2013, Martin was elected to position of Hon. Treasurer with DLH to further his involvement in worthy causes.*



*Mediterranean Bank plc*



*MSV Life plc*

*The photographs on these pages are of the tables pertaining to companies who supported the 49th Anniversary Celebration Dinner held at San Anton under the patronage of H.E. the President of Malta, Dr Mary Louise Coleiro Preca.*

**Photographs by Joe Chetcuti**

environmental and built heritage that is the *raison d'être* of this organisation. The value of the volunteer hours given to DLH is also worthy of note. I must express my heartfelt gratitude to the 150 or so volunteers in Malta, Gozo and Comino, many of whom are very young at heart! Without the sterling contribution of our office staff and volunteers, DLH would not be able to run the 17 sites that we manage, as well as the other landmark monuments that have been or are being restored.

Together with my colleagues, Vice President Lucio Mulè-Stagno and Council member Philip Mercieca, we have established fruitful relationships with both past corporate members of DLH and, more importantly with new corporate members that have been very supportive of our work. Seeking financial support, apart from being an essential part of our lifeblood, requires a clear transmission of DLH's aims and objectives to enable corporate entities to link their corporate responsibility programmes to our work. I am pleased to say that the brand value of *Din l-Art Helwa* is very strong and we are frequently complimented on the work we do for this country and for the generations of Maltese that will follow us. We have had many excellent meetings with



*Bank of Valletta plc*



*HSBC Bank Malta plc*



*AX Holdings*

our corporate sponsors and the feedback we receive from them provides invaluable energy and direction to us volunteers, who may need to balance priorities.

It is important to note the significant work that has been achieved by past Councils and our present Councils, led by Executive President Simone Mizzi, particularly but not solely in the pursuit of sponsorship for the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta. As you undoubtedly know, the amount of restoration work required in this church was unprecedented for DLH, so the level of funding required was also very considerable!

This particular project is now approaching completion, although there are many more projects that could be undertaken – should we find the right level of support.

With this aim, we have just launched an appeal for new 'Museum Partners'. The restoration work we have carried out at Our Lady of Victory Church will be greatly complemented by the opening of a museum in the small building, historically known as 'The Rector's House', adjacent to the church. We are looking ahead to the celebrations of our 50<sup>th</sup> – Golden – Anniversary and the national celebrations/festivities in the run-up to 2018 – when Valletta will be EU Capital of Culture – which will be the climax of the significant amount of work done not only by DLH but also by other heritage NGOs and government organisations.

Finding funding is never easy, but when the objective is compelling, the message is clear and captures the imagination, and the track record is very strong, worthwhile results can be achieved: always with a great deal of hard work.

Perseverance and patience is something that my colleagues and I understand very well, and we are committed to continuing our efforts to finance the work to protect and save our heritage and environment for future generations.

I must, however, also point out that, unfortunately, there is no shortage of restoration work in Malta that requires attention and, consequently, we have many more projects to plan and execute – with the generous support of our individual and corporate sponsors.

On behalf of the Council, the executive management team, the volunteers and the office staff, I would like to thank all supporters – both private and corporate – who have shown such faith in the work we do for Malta. Please accept our sincere appreciation.

## 49th Annual Reunion Speech

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

**Simone Mizzi**

Your Excellency, President of Malta, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends of *Din l-Art Helwa*: it is such an honour welcoming you all here tonight at the 49th annual reunion of *Din l-Art Helwa* – an event which opens the way to our 50th Golden Jubilee year next year. So much achieved since last year – so much to celebrate with you tonight.

First of all, I would welcome Her Excellency The President of Malta, Mrs Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, not only as President but also as patron of our society, and Mr Coleiro Preca, for the first time attending this annual reunion, and thank her for allowing us to use these beautiful grounds. Her Excellency brings a verve of energy with her wherever she goes and imparts it to whoever she meets, and her encouragement of *Din l-Art Helwa* has already been a source of motivation to us all. A few weeks ago, DLH officials had a courtesy call with HE, very much the epitome of volunteering herself, and within a few minutes we had already determined a common ground of activity: culture and conservation can be instrumental in the development of jobs and the retention of traditional skills so crucial for Malta. We are looking forward to continuing our discussion with you on this subject, Your Excellency. Then, just two weeks ago, DLH had the honour of being presented with an award, the *Gieħ iż-Żurrieq*, which I received from Her Excellency for DLH's 50 years of activity in the Żurrieq region. Your words on that occasion were most moving and personally gave me new resolve to spur *Din l-Art Helwa* forward on its mission.

I welcome the flower of our European diplomatic missions present with us tonight. Firstly I must mention the Ambassador for Ireland, Mr Jim Hennessy and Mrs Hennessy, and the Ambassador for Spain, Senor Felipe da la Morena and Senora Patricia



*Executive Presidents  
Simone Mizzi  
delivering her speech*

**Photographs by  
Joe Chetcuti**

*Guests enjoying  
the evening in the  
splendid grounds of  
San Anton Palace*



Bernard. Sadly, these great friends of ours – and of Malta – will not be with us this time next year, since their term of office is coming to an end. Jim, Monica, Felipe, Patricia – I thank you for illuminating our lives with your friendship, which we know we will have wherever you are in this world, and you will have ours. We thank you for having supported DLH and wish you every success. You do your countries proud.

I welcome the Ambassador of France, HE Mons. Michel Vandepoorter and Mrs Vandepoorter, HE The British High Commissioner Robert Luke and Mrs Luke, and the Ambassador of Italy Dr Giovanni de Vito and Mrs de Vito. Again, thank you for the work you do to further the cultural heritage sector in your countries and in ours.

This year has seen *Din l-Art Helwa* move ahead in its work at a most accelerated speed. We are grateful to the government for having renewed nine guardianship deeds for the historic properties we have looked after for decades now, and for granting us the privilege of yet another one, that of Wied Iż-Żurrieq Tower, which will be a most amazing asset for Malta's southern region. Then, we have finally finished the Delimara Lighthouse and it is being kitted out with furniture just this week. After seven years of challenges, we will now be making this available for heritage holidays and members will, of course, be given first preference to stay in this fabulous site.

We have won a regional tourism grant for Victory Church. These funds are being dedicated to establishing a small museum. Our Youth in Action group was also found worthy of yet another award this year, and our youths will be networking yet again with *Union Rempart* and this year with an Israeli cultural heritage group on a restoration project here in Malta. We spent €400000 this year on restoration and our volunteers contributed some 22,500 hours to society. There is much more, but dinner is waiting.



*Mr Martin Scicluna, Hon Treasurer of DLH,  
Mrs M Scicluna, Mrs Cettina Caruana Curran  
Mr Coleiro Preca, HE The President of Malta  
Mary Louise Coleiro Preca,  
Mrs Simone Mizzi, Executive President DLH,  
Profs Lucio Mule Stagno, Vice President DLH,  
Mr George Camilleri, Hon Secretary of DLH,  
Mrs G Camilleri*

*Artist John Borg Manduca with the winner  
of his painting and Simone Mizzi*



All this would not be possible without the generosity of many people and the sponsorships of many loyal business institutions who share the *Din l-Art Helwa* dream. I must mention those corporate members who are present here tonight: representatives of APS Bank, AX Holdings, Bank of Valletta, HSBC Malta, the Mediterranean Bank and MSV Life. Thank you for turning up in full colour.

Events such as these show the loyalty of our members who support them year in, year out. Well, we are going to stretch your loyalty further when, as we enter our 50th year, we ask those life members of many years to renew their vows and take another life: a suggestion that has been made by many of you and through which, if we are fortunate, we can raise some €20,000.

Events such as these do not happen without the work of so many people and I must thank them before we start our dinner. First of all, Minister for Transport Joe Mizzi and the Environment and Landscapes Consortium for making use of these grounds possible; our event sponsors, Osborne Caterers, for the special terms accorded to us for the delicious fare you will soon be sampling; FCIB for the pre-dinner drinks, The Fabulous Quacks for their entertaining music and Studio 7 for the lights.

The donors of the raffle prizes, Major John Borg Manduca for his beautiful painting, Kenneth – my husband – for donating the bumper limited edition Mattia Preti book, the Hilton, Kempinski hotels, AX hotels for dinners at the Palace Hotel and the Victoria Hotel, Charles Grech and Co. for the Presentation Box of wine, The Body Shop Malta for its perfumed gift and last, but certainly not least, Mrs Romina Farrugia Randon for producing yet another work of art. The prizes are exceptional – do buy in.

Definitely, I cannot fail to mention the organising team led to perfection by Cettina Caruana Curran and Charles and Maureen Gatt, Martin Scicluna, George Camilleri, Pat Salomone, Joe Chetcuti, all our youths helping with the raffle tickets and our office staff, Rosemarie Stagno Navarra and Anne Marie Navarro.

You will all soon be invited to follow a most ambitious programme of work for 2015 that will see activities ranging from seminars on environmental issues to a DLH exhibition in Washington of the Towers of Malta. If you are not yet members, please find our membership cards on the table; if you are life members, consider taking another life. You may not know, but by becoming members of DLH you have reciprocal membership of associations such as the National Trust of Great Britain, so there are loads of advantages – even overseas.

I thank you all for coming, for sharing our mission.

# Heritage and Environment Protection Report

Over the last few months, *Din l-Art Helwa's* Heritage and Environment Protection team has actively followed a number of issues, as summarised here.

## Save the Countryside campaign

DLH has been awarded funds through the EEA Grants NGO Programme Malta 2009-2014 to organise a campaign on biodiversity entitled *Save the Countryside*. The campaign aims to raise awareness, among young people in particular, of the importance of biodiversity and the need to conserve natural habitats. The project will run for a year and will mainly use social media such as Facebook and other internet-based platforms to engage with people and raise awareness of environmental issues and threats specific to Malta, mainly concerned with the protection of the countryside.

## The gas storage tanker at Delimara – Nautical Risk Assessment still not published

On 9 October, *Din l-Art Helwa* issued a public statement requesting the government to publish the Nautical Risk Assessment (NRA) and the Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) related to the new gas-fired power plant at Marsaxlokk.

In December 2013, Transport Malta had confirmed that a full NRA would be carried out on the proposed gas storage tanker to be berthed at Delimara. This assessment would study the possible impacts that the gas storage tanker and its supply ships could have on nautical traffic within this bay, including both recreational and fishing boats.

DLH had requested that the NRA be completed before the planning permit was granted. The quantitative risk assessment

included in Enemalta's Environmental Impact Assessment had also recommended that a nautical risk assessment be carried out.

Notwithstanding these commitments and recommendations, however, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority went ahead with its decision-making and issued the permits in March, before the NRA had been concluded. Furthermore, although Mepa had confirmed last year that a CBA on the new gas-fired power station and the gas storage tanker was being carried out – as part of the environmental IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) permit application. However, by early October this CBA had still not been published.

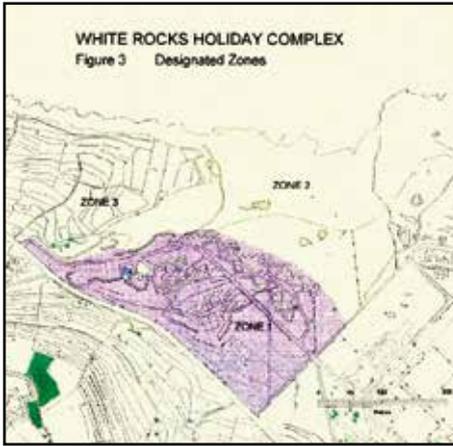
## White Rocks and Pembroke Natura 2000 site

In late July, *Din l-Art Helwa* and Nature Trust Malta wrote to the Environment and Sustainable Development Minister Leo Brincat, requesting him to initiate and promote any ecological studies that might be required of the area indicated as Zone 2 in the 1995 White Rocks Development Brief (see map) for its potential scheduling as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or as an Area of Ecological Importance (AEI).

The NGOs noted that this area is directly adjacent to the existing Pembroke Natura 2000 site and that its scheduling would enable it to be managed as an extension of this protected site. The area is characterised by a large variety of endemic and rare plants.

DLH and Nature Trust said that any redevelopment of the White Rocks complex should not extend beyond Zone 1 of the existing White Rocks Development Brief (1995) boundaries. Tourism developments can be sensitively developed in the vicinity of protected areas in order to enhance and promote the concept of eco-tourism.





*Zoning map taken from the  
White Rocks Development Brief*

*opposite:  
The site of the new  
gas-fired power plant at Marsaxlokk*

*The countryside around Mġarr popular  
with hunters and families alike*

The White Rocks Development Brief of 1995 notes that Zone 2 is to be designated an Area of Ecological Importance, and that this area will be extended to include land to the north-east of Zone 2 (outside the site boundaries), once survey work in this area has been completed. It notes that Zone 3 will be designated as an Area of Agricultural Value.

The NGOs stated that preserving this site of high ecological value would add value to the site itself as it would attract visitors interested in eco-tourism, and would also demonstrate that Malta is indeed promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, leaving the garigue habitat intact would help keep the natural corridor open for various species today found in the Pembroke Natura 2000 site, thereby not ending in a closed pocket.

#### **The Data Protection Act cannot be used to hinder freedom of expression**

In a public statement on 26 August, Din l-Art Helwa expressed its concern about the recent decision by the office of the Data Protection Commissioner, as reported in the press, to charge Birdlife Malta with an alleged breach of the Data Protection Act in connection with a series of films by a British journalist during the 2014 Spring hunting season.

The Data Protection Act cannot be used to inhibit freedom of expression. In this case, the journalist who uploaded his films on the internet was exercising his right of freedom of expression as well as his journalistic freedom, and the Data Protection Act cannot be used to restrict such rights.

The decision to charge Birdlife Malta with the abuse of personal data because the filming was carried out “with the support of Birdlife Malta” appears to go completely against the spirit of the Data Protection Act.

This decision reflects badly on the right to freedom of expression for civil society in Malta, and *Din l-Art Helwa* maintains that the government should look into the matter and, if necessary, update the existing legislation to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is adequately safeguarded.

Instead of wasting time on pursuing this ill-advised case, the government should dedicate its resources to the real issue in this matter, which is to clamp down on the illegal hunting of birds.

#### **Extending hunting hours limits enjoyment of countryside and nature for families**

On 15 August, *Din l-Art Helwa* had expressed its concern about the government’s decision to again allow hunting until 7 pm in September, removing the 3 pm hunting curfew which was intended to protect migrating birds of prey during this period. Apart from the increased threat to migrating birds, extending the hunting hours limits the enjoyment of the countryside and nature for families and the general public, and only serves the interests of hunters.

Instead of proposing new ideas and measures to improve the protection of the environment and to prevent potential abuse, the government took a step backwards by easing up existing environmental regulations in order to appease the hunting lobby.



In late September, the government then temporarily closed the hunting season following repeated instances of the illegal hunting of protected birds, a decision that was publicly commended by DLH.

These persistent illegalities confirmed that it is a mistake to relax hunting regulations, such as the removal of the 3 pm hunting curfew, which was intended to protect migrating birds of prey during this period. The relaxing of environmental regulations has only served to encourage further abuse.

***Din l-Art Helwa* opposes new building in countryside – says ‘ODZ is no more’**

Din l-Art Helwa continues to be extremely concerned that the Rural Policy and Design Guidelines, as recently adopted, have not been appropriately assessed in terms of the potential negative environmental effects on our countryside.

DLH favours the reuse and rehabilitation of existing legally-built buildings for farming and agricultural purposes, including associated uses such as wineries, and the production of olive oil and honey. However, while rural areas were previously strictly a no-go area as far as construction was concerned, the newly adopted policy goes totally in the other direction and actually promotes development.

Of great concern is the fact that Special Areas of Conservation and of High Landscape Value are also endangered, as the policy leaves room for building to occur in previously scheduled areas. The term ‘Out of Development Zone’ no longer exists.

DLH is particularly concerned by the extent of concreting of fields and country paths that will automatically stem from construction. Inevitably, the implementation of accessibility and infrastructural services will follow in the wake of all new building activity.



*Urban sprawl changing the profile of our coastline*

*opposite:  
A stretch of inaccessible rocky foreshore in Sliema*

*Ever-expanding Manikata*



The most serious threat to rural areas and the widest departure from previous policies arise from the Agritourism Policy 4.4, which allows for the possibility of new builds up to a total area of 400 square metres without specifying a maximum building height. Many of these decisions will be left to the discretion of the new Planning Authority Board, which will be responsible for determining impact on the landscape. Whilst in some cases maximum floor space is regulated, maximum building height is not. This not only gives rise to potential abuse, but may result in our natural topography being peppered with new buildings of two or three storey.

The new policy ridicules the very concept of Out of Development Zones and indicates that this government is facilitating the wishes of development lobby groups at the expense of Malta's natural landscape. Its guidelines make a mockery of Mepa's own introductory statement, which asserts that they have been drawn up "to ensure proper conservation and management of the countryside for both present and future generations".

*Din l-Art Helwa* called on the Environment Minister to answer to the country as to how this can possibly be called good environmental governance and to commit himself publicly to guaranteeing environmental protection when the new Planning and Environment agencies will sit within different ministries.

#### **EU Commissioner Designate Karmenu Vella**

On 10 September, *Din l-Art Helwa* noted that European Commissioner-designate Karmenu Vella had been assigned a portfolio that includes the Environment. While congratulating Mr Vella on his new portfolio, *Din l-Art Helwa* said it trusted he would devote his energy to championing environmental causes across the EU, including in Malta where, ironically, environmental concerns rank very low on the government's agenda.

Mr Vella's proposed portfolio includes the key policy objectives of the EU to ensure the sustainability of the environment, and the preservation of natural resources both on land and at sea. DLH said it recognised the formidable challenge presented to Mr Vella and said it would be closely following the progress of this sector.

#### ***Din l-Art Helwa* proposes Red Site Notices for those seeking to sanction illegal development**

News continues to be published daily in the media regarding the increasing number of illegal developments taking place on public land and in other areas, in particular in the countryside and on the coast. *Din l-Art Helwa* is concerned about the lack of enforcement action taken by the authorities in proportion to the illegalities committed and urges the government to step up its resources to curb the rise in abuse.



DLH calls on Mepa to publish statistics on reported abuse, the enforcement action taken and how many sites, if any, are returned to their natural state. Mepa site notices of planning applications awaiting approval of sanctioning, currently affixed to sites printed in the standard green, should be printed in red, it says. In this way the public can be made aware that there has been a breach of development/building regulations in respect of this site and that its owner, by applying for sanction, has admitted this.

Furthermore, DLH suggests that Mepa should publish all development applications requesting the sanctioning of building illegalities on a separate public listing, both on its website and in the national media. This is one way by which there can be more transparency and differentiation between requests for legal applications and those that are seeking to sanction abuse.

The new planning regulations that have been proposed, in particular those eliminating Schedule 6 of the current Environment and Development Act, are only being promoted by the authorities to curry favour with the development lobby and to fulfil election promises. Schedule 6, a critical clause in the current Act of 2010, strictly forbids the sanctioning of illegalities in Out of Development Zones but this government, through Mepa, has stated that it intends to do away with it in a clear demonstration of its intention to support those guilty of illegalities, even in protected areas.

This free-for-all mentality only incites further lawlessness and encourages more people to abuse the system whilst making a mockery of those law-abiding citizens who do not. DLH calls on the government to promote good civic behaviour by taking both preventive and corrective measures immediately.

The eradication of crime in New York in the 1980s only came about when Mayor Rudy Giuliani imposed a zero tolerance approach to all crime, petty or organised. DLH believes that, unless we want to live in a country where the line between legal and illegal building activity is blurred, as happens in lawless states, a zero tolerance approach is the way forward. This can only happen with a powerful enforcement policy and direct action where all illegal buildings are removed. Of course, this must be coupled with clear legislation that is applied equally to all. As things stand, Mepa is strong with the weak, and weak with the strong. Clearly, as was stated by DLH before the 2009 Mepa reform, it is of fundamental importance that there is one justice system that is applied without favour: consistency and enforcement, two of the four pillars of the Mepa reform of 2009, are still sorely needed.

#### **Protection of foreshore must continue in new Structure Plan**

In September, *Din l-Art Helwa* commended the unanimous decisions by the Mepa board that refused applications from two Sliema hotels to develop stretches of rocky foreshore into beach concessions and lidos. Referring to the applications by the Preluna and Bayview Hotels, DLH said it welcomed Mepa's adherence to the current Structure Plan policies, which protect the coast and secure public access, saying it hopes that these legal restrictions will continue to exist in the forthcoming Strategic Plan, set to replace the Structure Plan.

DLH said it also hoped that this decision would serve as a deterrent to those who are planning to requisition public areas of coast for private use and, indeed, to those who are already doing so illegally. The further cementing over of those rare pockets of coastline that still exist needs to be prevented at all costs. Malta's shores are fast becoming one private ring road of concrete, affording little or no public enjoyment of free spaces, no visual relief from clutter and scarce protection of the Mediterranean biodiversity that we hold. DLH looks to Mepa and to the Environment Ministry to continue to uphold such environmental considerations when handling future applications that imply loss of natural spaces and habitats.

# 18<sup>th</sup> Bir Miftuħ International Music Festival

*Patricia Salomone*

*Din l-Art Helwa* has again hosted the Bir Miftuħ International Music Festival in the mediaeval chapel of Santa Marija in Bir Miftuħ. This year, Cettina Caruana Curran obtained the assistance of the embassies of Spain, France and Italy to present quality music in the chapel's spiritual atmosphere. As has been the custom for the past 17 years, the concerts are held on three successive weekends in late spring and are followed by a reception in the cool gardens surrounding the chapel.

On Friday, 23 May, the concert featured world-class classical Spanish guitarist Francisco Bernier. It was the first time that a concert at Bir Miftuħ had been organised and sponsored by an individual family and DLH is indebted to the Chalmers family who, coming together as the ADRC Trust with the Embassy of Spain, gave untiring support and meticulous attention to detail that was undoubtedly behind the evening's huge success. The Farsons Group, Catermax and Westin Dragonara also contributed to the evening by providing the catering, refreshments and accommodation for Francisco Bernier and his father, Antonio, who both loved Malta and would love to return.

The ADRC Trust was established in 2013 by the Chalmers family in memory of their son and brother Alistair David Robert Chalmers, who died in 2012, aged just 31. Alistair wrote both poetry and prose, and his book *The Dust on the Path* was published in 2011. He was also an accomplished musician, photographer and artist and an exhibition of his photography and artwork was staged in 2013.

The Trust seeks to support causes that were important to Alistair – encouraging talent in the young, Hispanic studies, the visual and performing arts and the heritage and environment of Malta and Scotland. The Trust has already been active in providing meaningful support to a number of initiatives that its trustees believe fall within its scope, including the Manoel Theatre *Toi Toi* programme, the Spanish Maltese Cultural Centre, the International Spring Festival, the Hispanic Studies faculty at the University of Malta, Book Aid and the National Trust of Scotland.

*Francisco Bernier performing at Bir Miftuħ*



Alistair was a keen and passionate volunteer with *Din l-Art Helwa*, and a strong believer in its work of protecting and promoting Malta's cultural heritage. He was proud of this role and every week was at the Red Tower, welcoming visitors and showing them around the tower.

With the proceeds from this concert, *Din l-Art Helwa* has ensured the conservation of part of the exterior walls of the Bir Miftuħ chapel, as well as its roof and belfry. Many new friendships were made, and new members welcomed, following the concert, ensuring that the organisation continues to benefit long after the beautiful music of Francisco Bernier has come to an end.

The second concert was held on Saturday, 31 May, sponsored by the Embassy of France and the Alliance Française de Malte – Méditerranée. This violin and violoncello recital, with Agnès Pyka on violin and Sébastien Hurtaud on cello, delighted the audience with works by Beethoven, Ravel, Glière and Handel.



*Agnès Pyka (violin) and Sébastien Hurtaud (violoncello) performed works by Ravel and Zoltay*

Greatly applauded in France and many other countries, Agnès Pyka currently lectures at the *Conservatoire de Toulon* in France and is the founder and first violin of the renowned *Ensemble Des Equilibres*. DLH patrons will recall how she captivated the audience with her exceptional performance of Ravel at Bir Miftuħ, a few years ago. This year she was joined by Sébastien Hurtaud on 'cello. Since the age of 15, Mr Hurtard has been regularly participating in concerts as a soloist and chamber musician with world famous performers. He has won several prestigious national and international competitions, including the Adam International Cello Competition in New Zealand and the New York Naumburg Foundation International Cello Competition. His performances express strong feelings of rhythm and amazing concentration and are likened to 'a breath of euphoria'.

The third and final of this year's concerts was given by the Arianna Art Ensemble on Friday, 6 June. This '*Concerto all' Italiana*' featuring stimulating works by Antonio Vivaldi, was

supported by the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* under the patronage of the Embassy of Italy. The Arianna Art Ensemble, comprised of Francesco Colletti – violin, Federico Rigantino – violin, Paolo Rigano – lute, Andrea Rigano – violoncello and Cinzia Guarino – harpsichord, promotes the vocal and instrumental repertoire of 17th and 18th century music played with period instruments. Its members previously formed part of different ensembles such as the *Studio di Musica Antica Antonio Il Verso*, the Baroque Orchestra *Les Elements* and the *Ensemble Strumenti Antichi* of the Conservatory of Palermo. The ensemble has won numerous prizes in prestigious competitions including first prize in 2010, in the section for ‘Early Instruments’ in the 7th edition of the National Prize of the Arts organised by the Italian Ministry of Higher Arts. *Din l-Art Helwa* is extremely grateful to the Manoel Theatre management for the loan of the harpsichord for this occasion.



**Photographs by  
Joe Chetcuti**

*Kenneth Mizzi, Mrs Evarist Bartolo,  
The Honourable Minister of Education  
Mr Evarist Bartolo, Simone Mizzi,  
HE the Ambassador of France to Malta  
Mr Michel Vandepoorter and  
Mrs Cettina Caruana Curran*



*H.E. Dott Giovanni Umberto de Vito  
Ambassador for Italy,  
Cettina Caruana Curran,  
Mr Gaby M Doublesin,  
H.E. Dr. Magda Safwat Abdel-Hamid  
Baraka Egyptian Ambassador to Malta,  
Simone Mizzi, Chev Charles Gatt and  
Mrs Hadar de Vito*



*Cardinal Prospero Grech honoured  
Bir Miftuħ with his presence at the concert  
sponsored by the Italian Embassy and the  
Italian Cultural Institute.*

*From left to right:  
Cettina Caruana Curran,  
Cardinal Prospero Grech,  
Egyptian Ambassador to Malta  
Dr Magda Barak, Simone Mizzi,  
Italian Ambassador Dr de Vito,  
Signora Hadar de Vito and  
Mr Gaby M Doublesin*

# Our Lady of Victory Church Update

## The Rector's house

The timber fixtures of the building adjoining Victory Church, known as 'The Rector's House', have undergone a facelift.

The premises will shortly house the Treasures of the Sacristy Museum, with interactive information points illustrating datelines and ecclesiastical artifacts, as well as an audiovisual room in its cellar. The project is being carried out by DLH through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Grant for Sustainable Tourism, and with special assistance from major museums partners – the Vodafone Malta Foundation, the Farsons Foundation, Medserv and PwC Malta. The restoration of the balcony and other timber fixtures pertaining to the church proper has been made possible through the Urban Improvements Fund of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

Council Member Maria Grazia Cassar selected the beautiful new green shade for the timber fixtures that gives the premises a modern slant while retaining traditional appeal.



## Silver gilt wooden statues of the apostles

Used on the high altar during special celebrations in Our Lady of Victory Church, this set of six 19<sup>th</sup> century silver gilt wooden statues of the apostles are being restored by Silvia Orsi of the firm *Giuseppe Mantella Restauri*.

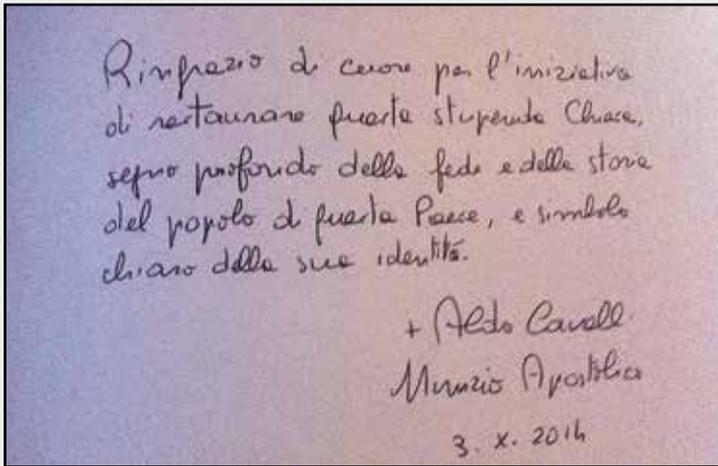
They will eventually be displayed in the new Treasures of the Sacristy Museum which is being set up with funds obtained through the ERDF Grant for Sustainable Tourism and from various sponsors. The restoration of artworks and other treasures in Victory Church is being made possible by PwC Malta's sponsorship.



## Errata corrigere

With reference to the review of the booklet 'Our Lady of Victory Church', in Vigilo No. 45, pg. 31, the first line on the second column should read: The important paintings by the Maltese artist Alessio Erardi are examined in depth...





**Apostolic Nuncio visits Our Lady of Victory Church**  
 Monsignor Aldo Cavalli, who was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Malta in February 2013, visited Our Lady of Victory Church. In signing the visitor's book Monsignor Cavalli expressed his gratitude and admiration for the restoration work being carried out within the church which he defined as a profound sign of the faith and history of the country.

Monsignor Aldo Cavalli was born at Maggiano di Lecco, Italy in 1946. He received his priestly formation in the Diocesan Seminary of Bergamo and, after his ordination, he graduated in Political Sciences. As the Apostolic Nuncio to Malta, Monsignor Cavalli is the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Malta.

### Altars at Victory Church benefit further from company's centenary

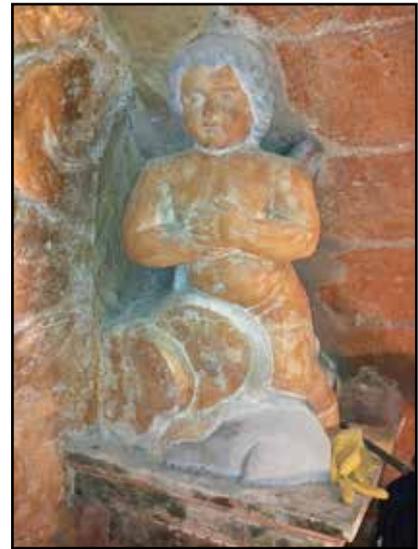
To celebrate a hundred years in business, Alf. Mizzi and Sons Ltd – through The Alfred Mizzi Foundation – will be extending its sponsorship to *Din l-Art Helwa's* project for the restoration of the altars at Our Lady of Victory Church and their elaborate carved stone niches. Next year will see the centenary of this established and respected firm and its dynamic presence within the business community which, of course, coincides with the 50th Anniversary of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Conservation work by the Giuseppe Mantella team is revealing the original gilding and polychrome marbled effect on the altar dedicated to St John of God, as patient cleaning of several layers of inappropriate paint and centuries of grime is slowly yielding results. The Alfred Mizzi Foundation has been contributing to this project for the last four years and is now contributing another generous sum towards the completion of the project.

The altar of St John of God was the last altar to be constructed in Victory Church. The altar piece was brought to the church in 1745 by its owner, the Chaplain of Obedience, Fra Domenico Xerri, at the request of Grand Master Manoel Pinto de Fonseca (1741-1773). The chaplain had popularised the cult for the saint and in 1797 St John of God was chosen as the patron of the *Donats* of the Order of St John – people who are associated with the Order without being full members in any of its grades. The Order's eight-pointed cross, without the upper arm, symbolises the Donat's status, and some are buried in the church – as can be seen from the marble tombstones that adorn the aisle.

Recent cleaning has revealed the original inscription over the altar in its gilt cartouche and shows the dedication to St John of God in 1746 and the decorative scheme that is being uncovered is believed to be the first one – dating back to the early 18th century. While over-painting and rising damp have caused deterioration, especially to the lower layers, the scheme that is being revealed, with its gilding and marbled effect, is one of the very few that have survived, providing further understanding of the original decoration in a baroque church.

DLH Executive President Simone Mizzi expressed her gratitude to the Alfred Mizzi Foundation on behalf of the organisation, saying that their gesture was one in a long series of generous sponsorships that have made the mission of *Din l-Art Helwa* possible over the years.



*Various images of the restoration work being carried out on the St John of God altar and niche*



### Clavichord recital by John Irving at Our Lady of Victory Church

John Irving is a unique musician: a distinguished fortepianist, harpsichordist and clavichordist and an internationally-recognised Mozart scholar. Mr Irving's clavichord recital on 22 August was quite possibly the first ever in Malta because the clavichord, which was a popular instrument in northern Europe between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, is an instrument that remained fairly unknown in the south of the continent and it is unlikely that there were ever any of them in Malta. For many of those in the audience, this was their first experience of the awesomely peaceful sound of these instruments which is so sweet that it "searches out one's weak places" (E.J. Dent).



John Irving and George Debono

The clavichords used at this performance are exact replicas of original surviving examples which are to be found in St Cecilia's Hall Museum of Instruments in Edinburgh. One is a double-fretted clavichord made by Christian Gottlob Hubert in 1784 and the other a small, portable "gemein" triple-fretted clavichord, the work of an unknown Flemish maker almost two centuries earlier – sometime around 1600. Mr Irving's recital was a combination of lecture and performance which, given the unusual nature of the clavichord, was an ideal approach.

By way of introduction, Mr Irving played J.S. Bach's *C major Prelude* from his *Well Tempered Clavier*. It was played sequentially on both clavichords to demonstrate their contrasting tuning and tonal characteristics.

This was followed by a selection (*Courante, Gigue*) from J.S. Bach's *French Suite No. 4 in E flat*, *Fantasia in D minor, K.397*, by W.A. Mozart, excerpts from *Sonata in A Flat* by J. Haydn and *Sonata in C, K.330*, by W.A. Mozart. All three composers, Bach, Haydn and Mozart, had an affinity with clavichords as a result of having lived during the period of transition when the clavichord was being displaced by the newly-invented pianoforte. They all owned clavichords and often composed on them.

The recital was concluded with compositions by earlier composers: *The Ghost Variations* by William Byrd and *The Frog Galliard* (after John Wilbye) by John Dowland which, appropriately, were played on the small Flemish instrument that gave them the authentic sound of a bygone age.

John Irving's performance on these rare clavichords in the congenial surroundings of Valletta's oldest church, Our Lady of Victory, was so inspirational that the listener was totally carried away by his delicate touch and magical interpretation. There was poetry in every phrase and his *rubato* timing in certain movements was of great poignancy – and especially characteristic of his individual approach to tempo when interpreting Mozart!

*Din l-Art Helwa* is intent on presenting more and more inspirational music at Our Lady of Victory Church when the current restoration work reaches an acceptable stage, much depending on the generosity of our sponsors and friends.



## THE VICTORY TEAM

*Din l-Art Helwa* is grateful to the following sponsors, benefactors, supporters and associates whose generosity has made the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church possible.

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Valletta Local Council

One of the most captivating artifacts in the church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta is a small canvas painting representing Our Lady of Good Counsel, the work of Antoine Favray (1706-1798),<sup>1</sup> executed in oils and measuring only 33x24 cm.

### Historical information

The painting has an interesting history that involves various transitions. In 1759, it was hung in a corner of the *Sacra Infermeria* by a chaplain of the Order of St John, Giovanni Ignazio Fenech, who was serving at the Infirmary at the time. It replaced a paper image of Our Lady of Good Counsel that had been hung a year earlier.

Favray's painting, in a suitable niche, remained at the Sacra Infermeria for eight years, during which it was continuously worshipped by the hospital's visitors and patients. In 1767, it was the chaplain himself who removed the painting and took it to Rome in order to forward a petition with the urgent intention "to secure on behalf of the said painting a number of plenary indulgences by way of a pontifical brief".<sup>2</sup> This request was granted by the Pontiff, Pope Clement XIII, and the painting was placed over a pontifical altar with the aim of celebrating a *messa papale* and, in the end, conveying upon it his papal blessing.

The painting was subsequently relocated again. It was taken to the Augustinian's church at Genazzano to be close to another image of Our Lady of Good Counsel. It was believed that this latter image is the original counterpart that was miraculously transferred to Genazzano from Albania.

Upon his return to Malta later in 1767, Giovanni Ignazio Fenech presented the holy image and its complementary decrees – confirming its conveyed privileges and honours – to the Grand Master. To confirm its authenticity, the painting still carries 11 wax seals stamped over its wooden strainer, despite at some point having endured inappropriate handling – evidenced by the cut threads that once held the central seal.

Although Fenech asked the Grand Master to have this much venerated painting returned to hang in the Holy Infirmary, it was decided otherwise – due to the fact that the Grand Hospitaller Bailiff Jean Charles de Rupierre, in league with the Prior of the hospital, Lambert Watour, argued that the painting (which was previously exhibited at the far end of the great ward next to the altar of the Blessed Trinity) had been the cause of several disturbances. As a result, through a magisterial order issued on 27 April 1770, the painting was moved to Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta, which was the parish church of the Order at the time, dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot.

## The Painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel

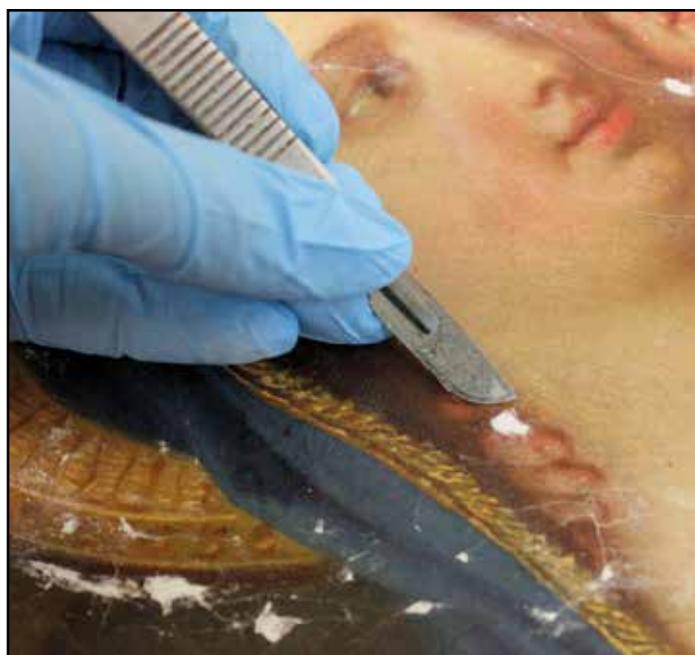
Amy So



*The painting before restoration*

*Bottom left:  
Varnish cleaning*

*Levelling infills*



# of Good Counsel Restored

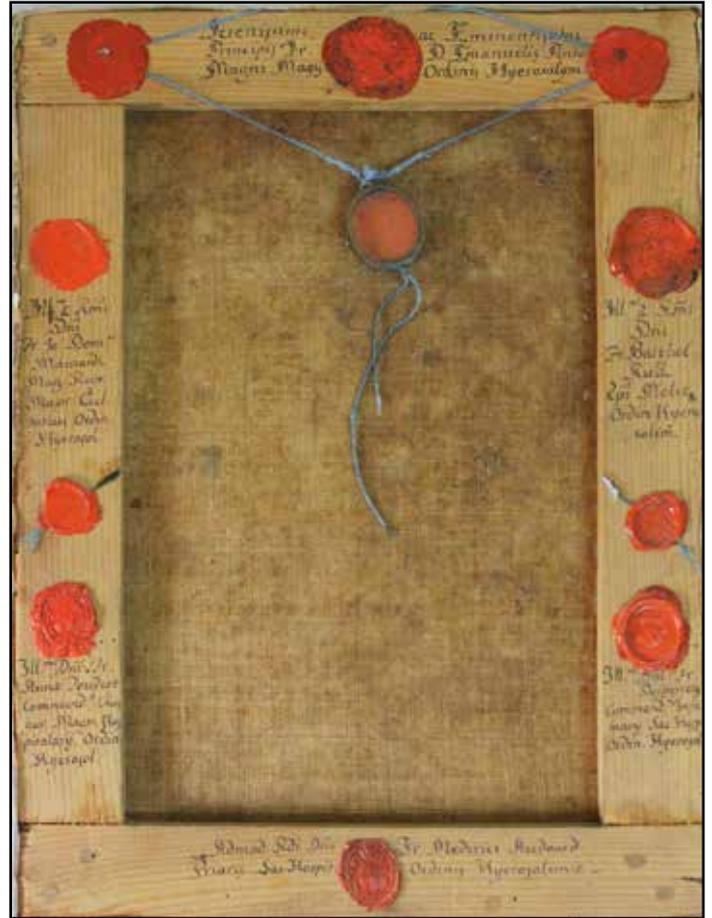
iberras

## Preliminary Analysis

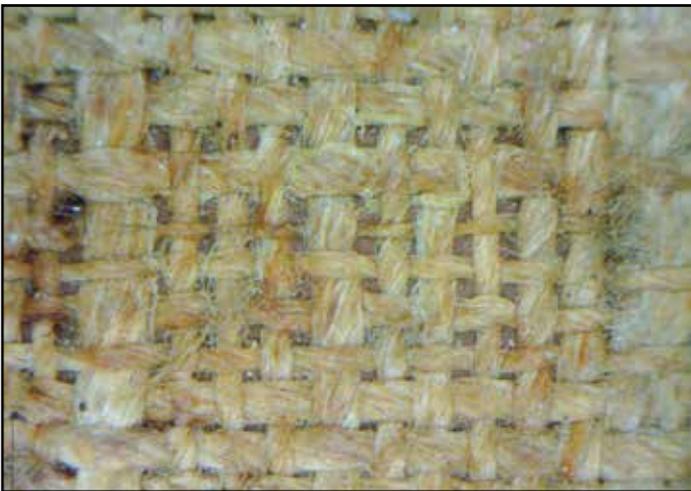
On examination of the painting in 2012, it was found to be in a poor condition, exhibiting lifting of the paint layer along with cupping, indicating a lack of adhesion between the painting's *strata* – possibly the result of fluctuating or unfavourable environmental conditions, such as high humidity.<sup>3</sup>

Unlevelled infills (*stuccature*) and gesso residues on the paint layer implied that the painting had been subjected to unprofessional restoration in the past, probably aimed at stabilising the paint layer. However, this had been unsuccessful due to the fact that, prior to the infilling of losses, any unstable areas should have first been treated and consolidated.

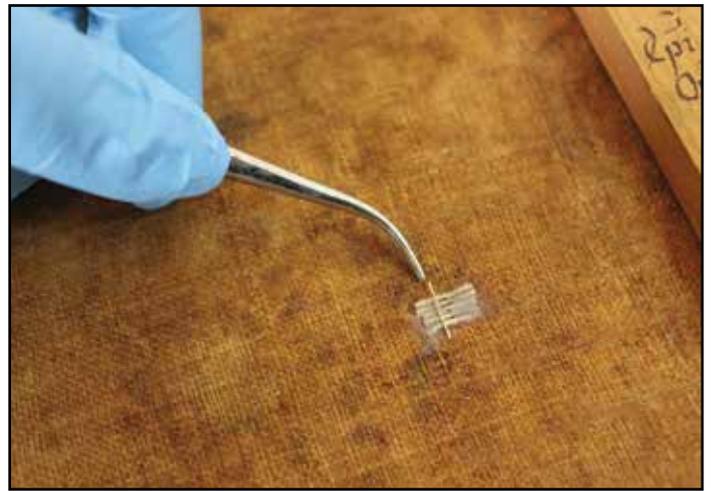
A preliminary, non-invasive, investigation was carried out to obtain pertinent information about the artist's technique, the materials used and the current condition of the painting. This included visual analysis using diffused light, raking light,<sup>4</sup> ultraviolet fluorescence (UV)<sup>5</sup> and infra-red reflectography.<sup>6</sup> Microscopy, using various magnifications, was carried out in order to better understand the technique and stratigraphy, ie the various layers (*strata*) that constituted the painting. These initial but crucial studies were essential for planning the subsequent conservation-restoration treatment and was in strict adherence to the principle of minimal intervention, in accordance with conservation ethics.



The wax seals and inscriptions on the back of the strainer



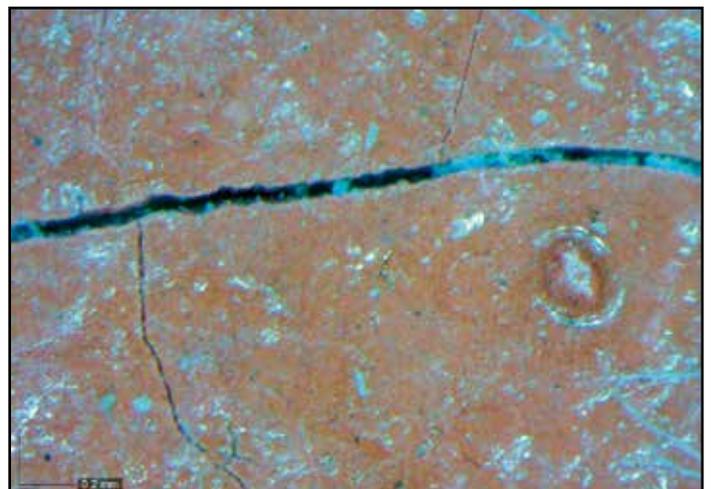
Microscopic analysis of the canvas



Repairing a canvas lacuna



Softening old repairs using solvents



Microscopic analysis of paint cracks



#### Conservation-restoration treatments

The canvas painting was removed from its decorative frame, the reverse of which contained a piece of broken glass, which would seem to indicate that, at one time, the painting was enclosed in glass – presumably to protect the wax seals and inscriptions of dignitaries and prelates on the back of the strainer.

Once unmounted, the paint layer was stabilised using a compatible and stable adhesive. The consolidant was applied by brush, at a low concentration, in order to enable greater penetration into the cracks and lifting of the paint layer. The lifted and cupped paint was also improved by the application of moisture, heat and moderate pressure. This procedure reinstated stability and adhesion

between the paint/preparatory layers and the canvas support, whilst deformations were also improved. It should be noted that, due to the introduction of moisture, the sensitivity of the painting to moisture was tested beforehand.

Although the painting exhibited severe lifting and cupping of the paint layer – and therefore detachment between the paint/preparatory layers and the canvas support – relining was avoided for two major reasons.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, this procedure should only be carried out as a last resort, due to the fact that it is a somewhat invasive method of reinstating adhesion. In this case, however, relining was also avoided because the attachment of a canvas support to the original canvas would not allow an appreciation of the original canvas of



above:

*Detail of the painting before and after restoration*

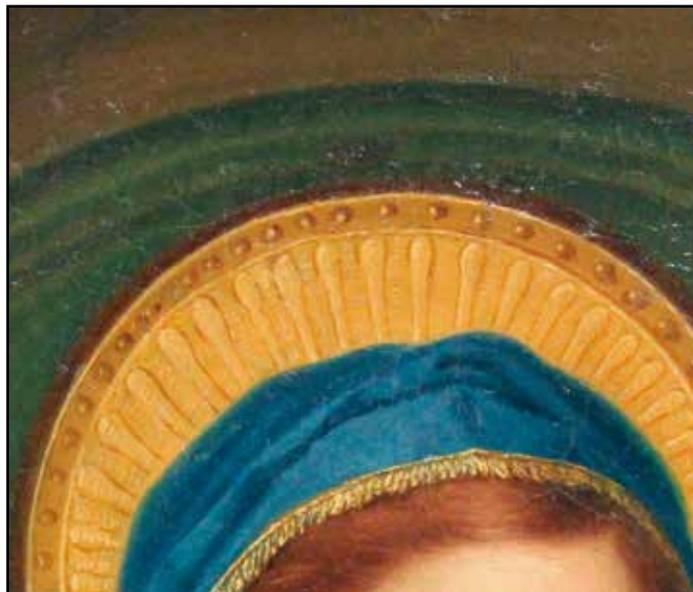
opposite:

*Detail of the painting after restoration*

**Restoration of the art treasures in Victory Church is made possible with the support of PwC Malta.**

right:

*Restorer Amy Sciberras carrying out pictorial integration*



this important painting. Secondly, the margins of the relining canvas might also a cover of part of the wax seals and inscriptions found on the strainer, since the relined painting would need to be re-stretched. Adhesion of the various strata was therefore successfully reinstated, avoiding such invasive procedures.

Unprofessional repairs (*stuccature*), which were covering paint losses as well as some areas of the original paint layer, were removed, in the process uncovering more of the original paint. Mechanical methods were used in conjunction with solvents to help soften the old repairs, thus facilitating the procedure.

Minor losses identified in the canvas support were closed by the application of linen threads of a similar thickness and texture to those of the original. Such losses should always be addressed by using a compatible material with similar properties in order to avoid introducing stresses within the painting's strata.

Cleaning trials were then conducted along the periphery of the painting to determine the most effective cleaning agent. Cleaning of the old varnish was carried out using organic solvents and the degree of cleaning was monitored under ultraviolet light.

Subsequently, lacunae in the paint layer were infilled using *gesso di Bologna* mixed with an organic binder, as this mixture is compatible with the original preparation and is also reversible. Infills were levelled and textured, according to the painting's texture, and an intermediate layer of varnish was then applied to the its surface. The infills were reintegrated, using reversible varnish colours, and a thin, synthetic and, finally, a reversible protective coating was applied. This final layer of varnish will protect the paint layer from mechanical damage such as abrasions and from deteriorating agents including dust and pollutants.

**References:**

Degiorgio, S., Fiorentino, E., 2004, *Antoine Favray (1706-1798): a French artist in Rome, Malta and Constantinople*, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti.

**Footnotes:**

- 1 Degiorgio, Fiorentino 2004: 69.
- 2 Degiorgio, Fiorentino 2004: 69.
- 3 High humidity levels cause the canvas to shrink which results in a lifting of the paint layer due to the reduction in the surface area of the canvas support.
- 4 The use of raking light reveals any deformation in the canvas support and detachment problems in paint/preparatory layers which require treatment to restore the structural stability of the painting.
- 5 Ultraviolet fluorescence is a non-invasive method for investigating paintings. The original paint and/or varnish layers fluoresce U.V. radiation relatively more than later applied materials such as past restoration interventions. Thus with U.V. light, the fluorescence of old varnishes as well as the presence of over painting can be identified.
- 6 Infra-red reflectography is another non-invasive technique which provides the possibility to reveal various information including underdrawings and *pentimenti* in paintings.
- 7 Relining involves the attachment of a canvas support to the original deteriorated canvas, thus strengthening the latter.

# Restoration & Maintenance Update

*Stanley Farrugia Randon*

Since the last issue of *Vigilo*, the Restoration and Maintenance Sub-committee has been extremely busy preparing for restoration projects all over the islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino. Our considerable achievements are due to two main factors: a committed team of individuals on the restoration side and the generous support of our sponsors and members who continue to believe in our work and therefore make the protection of our heritage a reality. This excludes the Church of Our Lady of Victory, which is being managed by a sub-committee of its own and is covered elsewhere in *Vigilo*. None of this work would have been possible without the team composed of Josie Ellul Mercer, Maria Grazia Cassar, Carolyn Clements (Gozo Branch), coordinated by me.

## **Delimara Lighthouse**

Hopefully, the final challenge that delayed the completion of this project has now been overcome. When the kitchens and bathrooms were fitted it was found that the lighthouse had no drainage system at all – not even a cesspit – leaving us to imagine where and how effluence went before eventually reaching the sea! As there are no drainage systems in this area of Delimara, the DLH restoration team decided that a cesspit had to be constructed.

This was done, but not without long deliberations on its location and size – all of which was subject to regulatory applications and approval. Minor work on the exterior and interior of the lighthouse was carried out, light fittings were installed and it was furnished, as we are all totally committed to the project.

So, Malta's Delimara Lighthouse is now finally ready to be enjoyed as holiday accommodation. With its splendid location facing the southern straits towards North Africa and close to so many popular bathing areas, we hope it will be enjoyed by many generations to come.

Our last challenge is to restore the clockwork mechanism that was originally used to turn round the red glass panes.

*opposite:*

*above - Albert Calleja, Romina and Stanley Farrugia Randon and their son Robert, Qrendi mayor David Schembri, Ian Camilleri, Kurt Zammit, Ryan Magro, Julia Camilleri and the pooch.*

*below - The Red Tower awaiting restoration*

*Delimara Lighthouse seen from the sea. Its restoration has been made possible with the support of GasanMamo Insurance Ltd.*





### Wied iż-Żurrieq Tower

The Mepa permit to commence restoration of this historic tower was received in October and we are now in a position to start the work.

A week was spent giving this coastal watch tower at Wied iż-Żurrieq, known as *it-Torri ta Xutu*, a good clean out by a group of *Din l-Art Helwa* volunteers led by the author and Qrendi mayor David Schembri. Together with Qrendi Scouts, and with the support of the Cleansing Department, decades of debris that had accumulated within this heritage site was removed. Old bedsteads, mattresses, rusty pipes, and broken windows found their way into a skip and the area round the tower was also given a clean up.

The Tower was the last to be built during the reign of Grand Master Lascaris de Castellard and it was important as a prototype for the ones to be built by his successor, Grand Master de Redin. Under British rule, the Xutu tower was manned by the Royal Malta Fencible Regiment which changed its name in 1861 to the Royal Malta Fencible Artillery. In 1873, the latter gave up its coastal guard commitments and so it was probably abandoned. During World War II, the tower was used as a Coast Observation Post and was manned by the Coast Police.

With the advent of the aeroplane and modern warfare, the coastal fortifications around the islands became redundant. The Wied iż-Żurrieq tower also lost its military role but was used a Police station till the year 2002 after which it was abandoned and fell into decay.

*Din l-Art Helwa* had appealed to government about the state of the tower which occupies a dominant position within a highly popular visitors area and is in a Natura 2000 site. The heritage NGO was last year awarded the Wied iż-Żurrieq tower in guardianship for its management and restoration. The project has met with Mepa approval and is soon to commence and will be carried out with the support of the newly set up MIA Foundation, the corporate sustainability programmes arm of MIA Plc. Wied iż-Żurrieq Tower commands spectacular views over the cliffs to Filfla and when its restoration is complete it will be part of a heritage trail in the southern area of Malta and serve as an information point to visitors.

### Red Tower

It will soon be necessary to carry out re-pointing work on the external walls of the Red Tower, but this will be a major expense, as a large area is involved and scaffolding will be required. We have already commissioned a contractor to begin work on one of the walls, thanks to funding from the Malta Financial Services Authority. It was

decided to prepare a sample of plaster to ascertain how the colour and material withstand the winter weather. If this sample proves to be successful, the restoration should be able to start by the spring.

### Dwejra Tower

It is now some seven years since the external walls of this tower were last restored and further restoration is now urgently required. We would like to start this work by next summer and currently we are discussing the methodology, the extent of the work required and the anticipated cost. We are looking for a sponsor to help us with this project.

### 133, Melita Street, Valletta

It is easy to forget that we care for another property in Valletta – our own headquarters in Melita Street. Maintenance work has been carried out on the roof membrane as well as some internal painting. However, the façade also requires attention and we are now discussing this with potential sponsors and contractors.

### St Paul's Statue

For the third time, *Din l-Art Helwa* is to restore the statue of St Paul on St Paul's island. Previous restorations were carried out in 1994 and 2006 and urgent work is now required on both the pedestal and the statue itself, both of which sustained storm damage late last year. The Malta Tourism Authority is prepared to sponsor the entire project. The impressive statue is the work of two sculptors: Sigismondo Dimech (1780-1853) of Valletta and Salvatore Dimech (1805-1887) of Lija, an apprentice of Sigismondo. Both Salvatore and Sigismondo Dimech produced many more work of art.

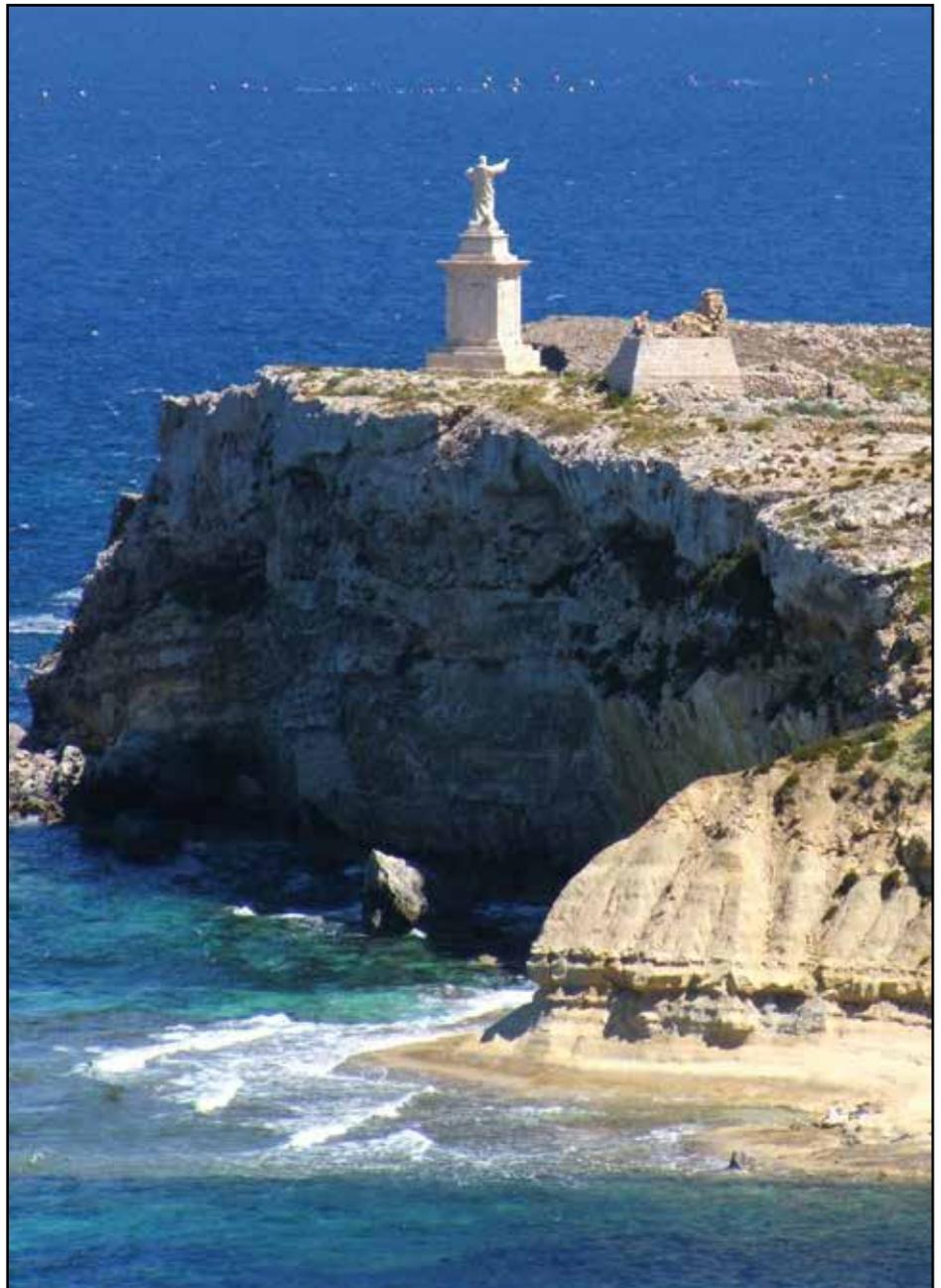
Unfortunately, in the damage caused last year, part of the statue's right arm fell to the ground and the wrist and hand (which were not the original as they were replaced in 1960) were shattered. The conservation-restoration team will consider whether it is possible these re-adhere these.

The proposed work on the statue will mainly involve cleaning, treatment and presentation within the conservation ethics of minimal intervention. The cleaning of the statue will start with the superficial cleaning of surface deposits: the dust and dirt on the surfaces are a substrate on which micro-organisms feed.

This will be followed by the removal of the old, powdery, previously applied sacrificial layers, as these require regular re-application. The iron pin may also need to be removed and/or treated.

Work will be carried out to reduce the staining on the statue. Most of it is removable but where stains have seeped deep into the stone, there will be some residual marking. A lime-based mortar will be used to reconstruct the eroded surfaces and lost parts of the statue including, hopefully, also the missing snake. Work on the pedestal will include the removal of vegetation, the re-pointing of the mortar joints and possible in-filling of some of the eroded stone with an inert mortar.

*The statue of St Paul  
on St Paul's island*





**Comino Tower stairs**

*Comino Tower*

For a long time, the Comino Tower volunteers have been concerned about the possible danger to both themselves and visitors due to the fact that the flight of steps to the door of the tower are totally open and do not have any type of handrail. After long discussions on site, it was decided to install a wooden railing attached to the present coping stone with iron brackets. When we applied to Mepa for permission, we received a letter saying that we should follow a sketch by Giuseppe Bonomi dated 1824 which shows that the sides of the steps were at least three courses of stone higher. Fresh plans were submitted to Mepa but this time the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage objected and preferred our originally proposed timber and metal railing. We have therefore left it up to Mepa and the Superintendence to sort this matter out between them and let us know what they decide.

### **Wignacourt Tower**

Wignacourt Tower – the oldest existing coastal defence tower built by the Knights of St John, dating back to 1610 – was the first historic site entrusted to *Din l-Art Helwa* when it was leased to us in 1970.

DLH first carried out a restoration project – spending most of its cash reserves in the process – in the 1970s, and further conservation work took place in the 1990s.

Following recent work on the St Paul's Bay promenade, the Malta Tourism Authority signed an agreement with *Din l-Art Helwa* to use part of the EU funds granted to them to restore the external walls. We are now removing the items on display in the tower before this work begins. The work is expected to take around four months, during which, unfortunately, the tower will be closed to the public.

*Wignacourt tower being enclosed by scaffolding*



# Din l-Art Helwa News

Patricia Salomone

## DLH Council pays courtesy visit to President

On her appointment as President, HE Marie Louise Coleiro Preca kindly agreed to extend her patronage to *Din l-Art Helwa*.

During a courtesy visit to HE by members of the Council, Mrs Coleiro Preca was presented with a copy of the Europa Nostra publication entitled *The Power of Example*, a compendium of some of the finest examples of award-winning restoration projects in Europe.

In her remarks, the President praised DLH for its “splendid work” over the last 49 years.



Executive President Simone Mizzi, together with Albert P Mamo and Vice President Prof. Lucio Mule Stagno, presents the President with the publication *The Power of Example*.



From left: Council members Josie Ellul Mercer, Albert P. Mamo, Simone Mizzi, Prof. Lucio Mule Stagno, Martin Scicluna and Joseph Chetcuti with the President

Photographs by Joe Chetcuti

## DLH awarded the Ġieħ iż-Żurrieq Award

In May this year, *Din l-Art Helwa* was awarded the *Ġieħ iż-Żurrieq* for its dedicated service to Żurrieq and the southern area of Malta. DLH has been involved with this area since 1968 when, the mediaeval chapel of Hal Millieri was discovered and saved for the nation through restoration. Executive President Simone Mizzi collected the award on behalf of DLH.

Anthony Mangion, a DLH volunteer of many years standing, was also presented with the *Ġieħ iż-Żurrieq* for his life-time dedication to the chapel of Hal Millieri, which is held in trust from the Church by DLH.



Simone Mizzi and Anthony Mangion being presented with the *Ġieħ iż-Żurrieq* award by the President of Malta

Photographs by Joe Chetcuti

### Al Fresco dinner at Ras Rihana, Bidnija

It took the energy and enthusiasm of Council member Philip Mercieca to carry off the mammoth task of organising and running an informal *al fresco* dinner – a new event for DLH, this summer.

On 16 September, in the beautiful garden of Ras Rihana, Maurice Mizzi's country home in Bidnija, almost 200 friends and members of DLH enjoyed a splendid dinner prepared by volunteers. DLH president Simone Mizzi thanked Mr Mizzi for his kindness in allowing DLH the use of his garden. She told those present that she was always mindful of the fact that the Mizzi Organisation had been DLH's first corporate sponsor, back in 1995, for the restoration of a heritage site – in this instance, Ghallis Tower.



*top left:  
Simone Mizzi and  
Maurice Mizzi*



*top right:  
The band 'Silver  
Lining' entertaining  
the guests*

Next year DLH celebrates its golden anniversary, so Simone declared that this function was the first event in the run-up to a very busy calendar of events. Nearly 50 years of guarding Malta's heritage, and saving 39 monuments and landmarks for the nation, was a great achievement that would not have been possible without events such as these and all those who organised and supported them. She continued: "I also wish to say that the fruits of the voluntary work and the funds we raise tonight will be dedicated to the new Museum in Victory Church which, we intend opening next year. We have to raise €70,000 to complete this and the funds raised today will help complete one of its spaces".

Apart from thanking Council members Albert P. Mamo, Philip Mercieca and Cathy Farrugia for taking care of the promotional material, together with Patricia Salomone and Maria Grazia Cassar, Simone said she was touched by the generosity of so many people – many of whom are not directly involved with DLH but are mostly personal friends of Philip's – who have agreed to help him because they are convinced that DLH deserves support for the good work it does.

The talented ladies responsible for the wonderful food were Matty Cremona, Karen Miller and Tina Castillo, while Marian Galea and Erika Falzon were tireless behind the scenes. Others who helped with food preparation were Felicity Bianchi, Nadya

*Guests enjoying the  
evening at Ras Rihana*

Aquilina, Ninna Pace, Jackie Mercieca, Brigida Arrigo, Mariella Zarb, Astrid Xuereb, Mary Camilleri, Diana Toledo, Carol Zammit Briffa, Joan De Jong, Veronique Mizzi, Angela La Rosa, Clarissa Mercieca, Clara Testaferrata, Tina Agius, Joanna Meli, Pat Sacco Dyckhoff, Margaret Zammit and Simone Brincat.

Thanks were also expressed to the Waterfront Hotel and Seasons Catering, to Jean Cali for the subsidy on the San Patrigniano Wines and to Forestals, and DLH is grateful to the following for donations of some exciting raffle prizes:

Anton Mercieca, Charles Palmier and Joe Spiteri Staines for paintings of Maltese countryside scenes, Winston Zahra of Radisson Group for a weekend at The Radisson Blu Golden Sands |Hotel, Sandro, Louise La Rosa for an Ecco voucher, Maurice Mizzi for his new book: *The Pleasures of Gardening in the Maltese Islands*, Albert Mamo for the book *Sails around Malta*, The Body Shop for a perfumed Gift Pack and Romina Farrugia Random for her beautiful marzipan and almond cake.

DLH office staff Anne Marie Navarro and Rosanne Zerafa were acknowledged, and the young musicians, Silver Lining, who entertained the guests with quality music, were given an enthusiastic round of applause. They were literally 'instrumental' in making the evening such a great success!



### *Din l-Art Helwa* Youth win Erasmus+ funding for Restoration Youth Exchange



*Participants at work in the Garden of Rest*



**Photographs by  
Tara Cassar**

*right:  
The group made up  
of the Maltese, Israeli  
and French contingents  
sitting on the steps of the  
Auberge de Castille*

Throughout the project, the participants were taken on various visits aimed at showing them the traditional building techniques used in the construction of the country's forts, as well as the historical significance of these structures in themselves. The project was also aimed at increasing an understanding of the merits of joint effort and an appreciation of the creation of positive change. Through a hands-on learning approach, the young people were encouraged to take an active role in the development of their communities by contributing to the preservation of their shared cultural heritage. This also created opportunities for the volunteers to exchange information about their respective cultures and forge links with each other. The Erasmus+ programme is organised with the assistance of the European Union Programmes Agency.

A group of *Din l-Art Helwa* youth volunteers, in collaboration with partner NGOs *Rempart* and SPIHS (the Society for the Preservation of Israeli Heritage Sites) enjoyed a two-week youth exchange in September at the Garden of Rest in Floriana. The project, organised by young architect Tara Cassar and led by History-of-Art student Alexandra Camilleri, was awarded a grant through the Erasmus+ Programme. Entitled *Crossing Borders for the Preservation of our Shared Heritage*, the project brought together six young volunteers from each participating country – Malta, France and Israel – who, for the duration of the exchange, carried out restoration work in this prestigious garden that overlooks Pieta Creek.

The neo-classical Garden of Rest was established in 1806 during the British Period as a cemetery for Protestant and other non-Roman Catholics. By 1856 it was closed because it was full and in later years suffered not only from the bombing of Malta during WWII but also – in later years – was subjected to several acts of vandalism. In 1988, by which time it was in a ruinous state, it was taken under the guardianship of *Din l-Art Helwa*. In a restoration project that took around 10 years, more than 20,000 fragments of tomb stones had to be put together before the cemetery was finally restored to the unique place that it is today.

Work carried out by the young volunteers focused on the restoration of parts of the bastions on the top of which the garden rests. The main slope was cleaned of all the vegetation that was wedged between the stones and damaged or open gaps were then re-pointed with lime-based mortar. The volunteers were instructed by professional restorers Tony Mifsud and Josef Dali from the Restoration Directorate and James Licari, a conservator who, for the past four years, has supervised projects for similar exchanges with *Din l-Art Helwa*.



### Exchange organised with Erasmus+, *Din L-Art Helwa* and Rempart in France

Seven young Maltese volunteers have recently taken part in a two-week youth exchange work camp in France organised by Erasmus+, *Din l-Art Helwa* and *Union Rempart* that focused on the conservation work being carried out on the remains of Chateau de Coucy, a 13<sup>th</sup> century castle just north of Paris. The castle's keep and four towers were blown up by German troops during WWI and what was left has been continuously conserved ever since.

Each year, *Rempart* create a number of work camps where volunteers go to a particular site and learn old trades, such as the mediaeval way of dressing stones before using them and how a fortified wall would have been constructed, as well as taking part in various excursions to areas close to the site where they have the opportunity to learn more about the history of the region as well as participate in local cultural events.

The Maltese group formed part of a work camp that was held between 1 and 16 September. This year, the area designated for repair at Chateau de Coucy was one of the oldest parts of the wall. The vegetation that had taken root on the wall had to be removed – by both manual labour as well as by the use of special chemicals that are designed to prevent new vegetation growing through the cracks in the wall. Additional stones that were needed to restore the wall were taken from other parts of the chateau. These old stones required cleaning and dressing and were then measured by the master mason, who was continuously overseeing the work and giving guidance and support. Once the stones were “dry-fitted” – that is, put in place without mortar – then the mortar can be mixed and the stones fitted into their final position. With winter is fast approaching – and bearing in mind that it can get very cold in Coucy – particular care was taken to ensure that the mortar was watertight and that no damage could occur during the winter.

This year the group of volunteers consisted of six French, eight Croatian and seven Maltese – one of whom, Bobby Pace, talked about his experience. The great thing about being part of a diverse group of people, he said, is that everyone learned about the others' cultures. It is customary for each country to give a brief presentation to the rest of the group on the important aspects of their country's heritage. They also organise theme nights for each specific country, where each one tries to provide some local items that can either be cooked or at least tasted.

“All the volunteers live under the one roof, which helps build a sense of community that is vital when living and working with people for two weeks,” said Bobby. “Every person is expected to cook at least one meal and clean the house at least once during their stay. The house in which we stayed was spacious, with three floors. The kitchen and dining area were on the ground floor and rooms and bathroom facilities on both the first and second floors. Food and accommodation is all paid for by the work camp and lunch is usually prepared by a local chef, so it was always good.

“Another great part of the experience was the fact that we were able to visit many places close by, such as Soissons, Amiens, Chemin des Dames (a very important position during WWI) and even Paris. These were all great experiences that were not only incredibly interesting but also continued to build a great relationship among our group of volunteers – with everyone laughing and enjoying their time together.

“I think these youth exchanges are vital, as they offer such an easy and enjoyable way for volunteers to experience a new country and culture as well as for the host country to be able to get some help in any work that needs doing. Obviously, this project is not something that can be accomplished quickly, but by slowly making it an annual event, it will eventually be completely funded.

“A point that was made by the French – and mirrored by the Maltese at the work camp – is that it is always difficult to get locals interested in participating in such work camps. People are always more interested in getting this type of work experience abroad, because it's not just about the work but about the whole experience. I think this is a very important point, as it might be easier to propose a work camp like this one to people from outside Malta, rather than to locals.”

Bobby said he had built a strong relationship with some of the people from *Rempart* – both the leaders and the volunteers – and he felt it was of the utmost importance that these ties remain strong, not only because of the current series of work camps but also because of any future opportunities that might arise either here in Malta or in France.



*Maltese, French and Croatian volunteers working side by side on the part of the wall being restored*

**Photographs by Bobby Pace**

*The area surrounding the Chateau de Coucy*



### The Gran Soccorso, today's Artists to the Rescue

As the first event to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, *Din l-Art Helwa* held a reception in the President's Room of the Casino Maltese in Valletta for the launch of the art exhibition entitled *The Gran Soccorso, today's Artists to the Rescue*.

Artists Andrew Borg, Anna Galea, Anna Grima, Arnold Sultana, Carol Jaccarini, Claude Gaffiero, Daniel Cilia, David Carrington, David G. Curmi, Debbie Caruana Dingli, Ethelbert Perini, Godwin Cassar, Henry Alamango, Janet Grech, Jenni Caruana, Joe Pace Ross, John Borg Manduca, Kenneth Zammit Tabona, Kevin Casha, Lawrence Pavia, Maria Rossella Dalmas, Mark G. Muscat, Martin L. A. Scicluna, Maurice Calleja, Noel Attard, Peter Vella de Fremaux, R.H. De Renzy Channer, Rachel Galea, Tonio Mallia, Vince Caruana generously donated their work to raise funds in aid of DLH's forthcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Michelle Muscat inaugurated the exhibition and dedicated much time to viewing and discussing the various exhibits. After being shown at Casino Maltese, the works will be transferred to DLH's office at 133 Melita Street, Valletta, where they will shortly be available for viewing and purchase.



*Michelle Muscat being entertained by Simone Mizzi, and Patricia Salomone, curator of the exhibition*



*Cettina Caruana Curran, Council members and guests at the opening of the Gran Soccorso Exhibition*

### Italian art – Maltese heritage Maltese art – Italian heritage A lecture by Dott Sante Guido

On 16 October – in the hall at Casino Maltese, surrounded by the exhibition of paintings – art historian Dott Sante Guido spoke about the exchange in art between Italy and Malta: *Arte Italiana – Patrimonio Maltese/Arte Maltese – Patrimonio Italia; Italian Art – Maltese Heritage/Maltese Art – Italian Heritage*.

This was a fascinating and erudite presentation of the exchanges between Italian artists in Malta and Maltese artists in Italy. Examples covered Sicilian paintings of the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Antonio Sciortino, who was director of the British School of Art in Rome until its closure in 1936. Particular emphasis was placed on Melchiorre Cafè, especially in the light of a newly-discovered work by this artist in Rome.

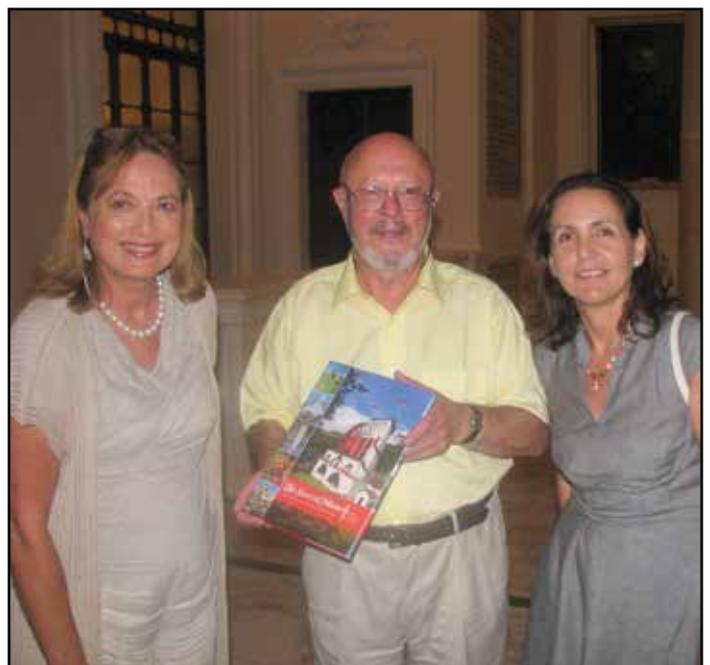


*Dott Sante Guido being introduced to the audience by Patricia Salomone*

### Book presentation by David Elyan

A wonderful book on The Isle of Man has been presented to *Din l-Art Helwa* by David Elyan, a trustee of Manx National Heritage and the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Mr Elyan has been a passionate supporter of DLH for a quarter of a century and joins in activities and events when he is in Malta. He is one of the first to take up the Double Gold Life Membership Scheme recently launched by DLH and we are grateful for his encouragement.



*From left to right: Simone Mizzi, David Elyan, and council member Maria Grazia Cassar*

**BULWARKS OF FORTITUDE**  
**An exhibition of paintings by Janet Grech at Wignacourt Tower**



*Din l-Art Helwa* has held an exhibition of paintings by artist Janet Grech entitled *Bulwarks of Fortitude*. All the paintings were of Malta's historic fortresses as seen through the eyes of an artist who is enamoured of our built heritage and fortifications.

"I am fascinated by Malta's fortifications", said Ms Grech, "and wanted to contribute to *Din l-Art Helwa's* precious work towards their maintenance by offering part of the takings from my work."

Simone Mizzi said that *Din l-Art Helwa* is always astounded at the generosity of people like Janet Grech, who support us through the gift of their art. "Here we have a young woman", said Simone, "who is fascinated by our built heritage and who has spent many hours conveying her feelings on to canvas as, awestruck, she observed the might that is in these buildings – Malta's towers.

Her artistic eye catches unusual, almost quirky, angles of these antique structures – the proud expression of the Order's might and the fruit of the sweat of our forbearers, the fortress builders."

The paintings were exhibited in historic Wignacourt Tower in St Paul's Bay. The exhibition was opened by St Paul's Bay mayor Raymond Tabone on 30 May.

Guests and visitors were then entertained to a reception, sponsored by Banif Bank (Malta) plc and Sistina Wine & Co. on the terrace at the side of the Tower with St Paul's Islands providing a magical background. Janet Grech can be contacted on [letsplanjan@gmail.com](mailto:letsplanjan@gmail.com).



above:  
 some of the paintings on exhibition

right:  
 Simone Mizzi opening the exhibition



**Visit by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings**

On 30 September, three SPAB scholars, led by architect Charlie de Bono, met Petra Caruana Dingli and Maria Grazia Cassar at *Din l-Art Helwa* to discuss the present planning situation, in particular the new Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development, which is still in draft form. They were shown around Our Lady of Victory Church and were extremely interested in the work being carried out there. Council Member Josie Ellul Mercer also met them at Torri Mamo and Delimara Lighthouse, and told them about the recent restoration work at both places. Mr de Bono has since expressed his wish to develop collaboration between the SPAB and DLH and arrange a further visit in the near future.



**DIARY OF EVENTS 2014****NOVEMBER**

*Saturday, 15 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday, 16 November from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

Restoration workshop weekend organised by the DLH Youth Committee at Msida Bastion Garden with conservators Amy Sciberras and Sara Yeomans Gafa

*Friday, 21 November*

Annual Autumn Dinner with a harp and piano concert at Villa Arrigo, San Pawl Tat-Targa, featuring international harpist Silke Aikmens and Sofia Narmania on the piano

**DECEMBER**

*Saturday, 6 December; 9 a.m. to Noon*

Christmas Fair at Garden of Rest

*Friday, 12 December; 2 p.m.*

Architectural Heritage Awards 2014 Ceremony presented by Minister of Justice, Culture and Local Government, Dr Owen Bonnici

*Thursday, 18 December; 7 p.m.*

Volunteers Christmas Party at 133 Melita Street, Valletta

*Saturday, 20 December; 7.30 p.m.*

Christmas Concert at Our Lady of Victory Church by the EnKor Choir

**AN APPEAL FOR VOLUNTEERS**

Dear Members and Friends of *Din l-Art Helwa*. We now look after 19 historic sites in guardianship or trust and we very much need more hands to work. We also have our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary coming up next year and a full calendar of activities is planned.

We are looking for volunteers to help us in several areas:

- 1) Although the summer season for Gozo and Comino activities is now over, we need to bolster our Gozo and Comino team with new recruits. For logistical reasons, this would be particularly practical for those living in Gozo or in the north of Malta. Maltese speakers are needed and anybody interested in helping is requested to talk to Carolyn Clements on 9905 1866.
- 2) In our offices in Valletta the programme of activities to mark our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is growing and we really need some volunteers to help Rosanne Zerafa and Anne Marie Navarro with clerical work, answering the telephone, various odd jobs and errands. Please email [info@dinlarthelwa.org](mailto:info@dinlarthelwa.org) or telephone 2122 0358 or 2122 5952 and speak to Rosanne.
- 3) Other volunteers are needed everywhere, so do please get in touch if you are willing to help.

***Din l-Art Helwa Lectures 2014/2015***

Please note that the lectures will start at 6.30 pm and will be given in English at the Judge Caruana Curran Hall at 133 Melita Street, Valletta.

**Thursday, 9 October**

*Lost & Found: the re-discovery of Malta's underwater cultural heritage*  
By Dr Timothy Gambin

**Thursday, 13 November**

*Aspects of Ta' Braxia Cemetery*  
by Janica Buhagiar

**Thursday, 11 December**

*Mdina and Rabat before the Knights: the cradle of Malta's Renaissance*  
by Dr Charlene Vella

**Thursday, 15 January**

*Hidden Aspects of Gozo*  
By Fr Joe Bezzina

**Thursday, 12 February**

*Malta's Magna Carta*  
Dr Michael Frendo

**Thursday, 12 March**

*Hal Millieri Revisted*  
By Professor Anthony Bonanno

**Thursday, 09 April**

*WW11 Radar and Military History at Dingli*  
By Tony Abela

**Thursday, 14 May**

*Focus on Climate Change*  
By Michael Zammit Cutajar

**Thursday, 11 June**

(date to be confirmed)  
*The Sketches of Julian Trevalyan*  
By Lawrence Pavia

### Harp and piano concert for Autumn Dinner

This year's autumn fund-raising dinner and concert held on 21 November featured international harpist Silke Aichhorn who, with pianist Sofia Narmania, entertained us to a select repertoire at the elegant Villa Arrigo, which provided a more spacious venue for this always well-supported event. The concert has been arranged through the generosity of Heribert Grunert, a life member of *Din l-Art Helwa*, who wished to make a special gesture on the occasion of the forthcoming 50th Anniversary of the organisation.

### American Malta Foundation - text Luciano Mulè Stagno

Around about Christmas-time in 2012, Stefanie Joy Muscat and *Din l-Art Helwa* Vice-President Luciano Mulè Stagno began talking about the idea of setting up a foundation in the USA and Canada to support DLH's work. Ms Muscat, who is American, is married to a second generation Maltese descendent and, due to her work in cultural heritage ([www.bevaraweb.com](http://www.bevaraweb.com)) has always been keenly interested in Malta and Maltese heritage.

It has taken over a year, but The American Malta Foundation is finally a reality ([www.americanmaltafoundation.org](http://www.americanmaltafoundation.org)) It is a US-registered non-profit organisation "whose mission is to inspire Americans to learn about, experience and support places of great historic and natural significance in Malta, in alliance with Din l-Art Helwa, National Trust of Malta." The initial board of trustees has just been formed and will incorporate representatives of the major Maltese communities in the USA and Canada and a representative of *Din l-Art Helwa*. The foundation plans to begin organising fund-raisers, cultural exchanges and other events that will promote Maltese culture in North America.

Two cultural tours to Malta are already planned. The first – *From Avifauna to Temples* – will combine bird-watching at various locations around the Maltese Islands with cultural tours in Spring 2015. The Foundation has also begun accepting members, with promising results. All the proceeds from these events will benefit *Din l-Art Helwa* and all the work of the Foundation will be carried out by volunteers.



### Mattia Preti guide book

Produced by Din l-Art Helwa Council member Maria Grazia Cassar

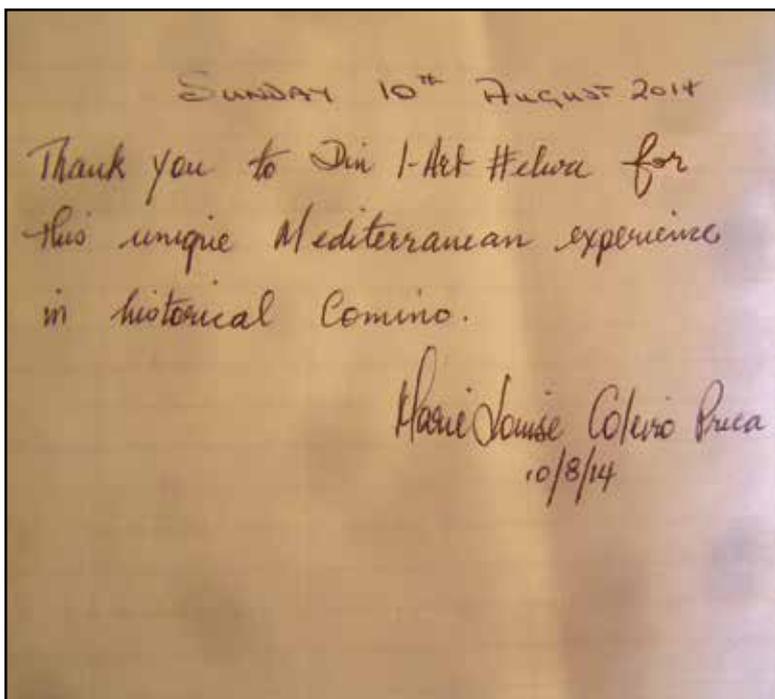
What was originally intended as a commemorative and educational guide in conjunction with the fourth centenary of Mattia Preti's birth in 2013, developed into a celebration of his artistic output and vast legacy in the churches of Malta and Gozo. *Din L-Art Helwa* decided to publish this guide-book, whilst undertaking the restoration of some of Preti's masterpieces in St John's co-Cathedral and the Sarria Church, thanks to the collaboration and authorship of conservators Sante Guido and Giuseppe Mantella, to whom we are extremely grateful.

This pocket guide is intended as a locator of his major works in the churches of Malta and Gozo and provides concise information on the paintings, as well as the churches in which they are to be found. The sequence has been designed as an itinerary that will facilitate a tour of these churches according to their location. A thumbnail image of each painting is provided, together with its position on the plan of the church for ease of identification.

This project was made possible through generous funding from the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, in conjunction with the Small Initiatives Scheme, to whom we are indebted. It has been produced entirely on a voluntary basis under the editorial direction of Council member Maria Grazia Cassar. Photography is by Caroline Miggiani, Giuseppe Mantella, Sante Guido and Maria Grazia Cassar and the drawing of the plans is the work of Joanna Vella.

The guide book is not for sale, but will be distributed free of charge to all DLH members, as well as the Orders and institutions involved.

**Visit by President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca to Comino Tower**



*The President's entry in the visitors' book*

On 10 August, President Marie Louise Coleiro Preca visited Comino Tower during her visit to the island to meet its inhabitants and those who work there.

The President was greeted by executive president Simone Mizzi and members of the Gozo and Comino team of volunteers and was then escorted around the tower by Joe Attard, who told her about the history of the tower and pointed out its main features. Mrs Coleiro Preca made a point of visiting the tower's main attraction – its roof – where she signed the visitors' book and enjoyed the commanding 360° views of the straits between Gozo and Malta, a breathtaking sight of which the tower alone can boast.

She spoke highly of the work of the volunteers, expressing her appreciation of the service they give to visitors and was impressed that the information leaflets are available in 23 different languages. The difficulties of access to the tower, and the problems surrounding Comino and its management – especially during the August peak season at the Blue Lagoon – were discussed. HE was presented with a copy of the DLH Video *A Tale of Two Towers* and a book on the marine life around Comino by Stanley Farrugia Randon.

**Photographs by  
Joe Attard**



*The President signs the visitors' book*



*From left to right;  
Sheila Dunbar Smythe,  
Neville Rainier, Brian Pearce,  
Executive President Simone Mizzi,  
Jane Bower, Pauline Camilleri  
& Lorraine Orlandi*

**Wedding at Comino Tower**

Christine (Moy) & Martin Walton chose Comino Tower as the venue where to exchange their wedding vows in front of registrar Frans Cauchi - Mayor of Ghajnsielem. The enthusiastic bride stated "having our wedding ceremony at the Santa Marija Tower made our dream come true!".



*The bride arriving at the tower*



*The bride and groom Christine(Moy) & Martin Walton and their witnesses Ashlee Cakebread and Pat Falzon*



*The bride and groom with registrar Frans Cauchi - Mayor of Ghajnsielem*

**The 34th Paola Girl Guides visit Comino**

The 34th Paola Girl Guides has recently marked the end of summer in an unusual way: an outing to Comino for all the guides and their families, with the aim of having fun in an educational way.

Once on the island, the group met their guide – Joe Attard – who took them to the cemetery, the old hospital, the chapel and – obviously – Santa Maria Tower. Here, the hard work put in by *Din l-Art Helwa* is very evident. In their own words: "We were particularly thrilled by the outstanding views and the meticulous finish on all the floors. We will definitely return – quite simply, the campsite had us inspired!"





**‘Operation Capers’ on Comino Tower**  
 text by Carolyn Clements



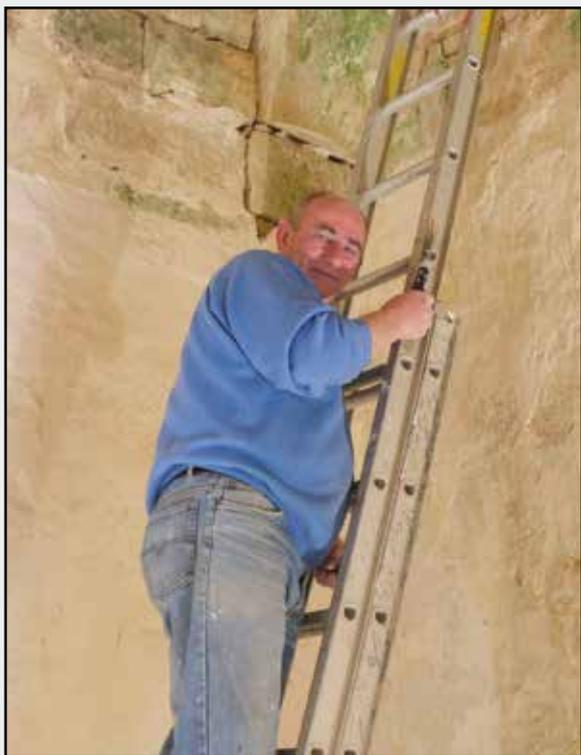
Spectacular’ is the best way of describing ‘Operation Capers’ on Comino Tower – but the mission was serious: to save the tower from invasive destruction as a result of the stunning caper plant, which looks beautiful but the roots of which, in this location, are deadly. DLH wishes to thank David Borg Saydon and Mark Camilleri, and their team, for so professionally treating the plants by using their abseiling skills – and as volunteers! Although the work was carried out on a hot day in mid-July, it was windless so the herbicide spray could be directed to the specific targets. Thank you, guys!



*Photographs by  
 Peter Llewelyn*



Volunteers on duty at Comino Tower



*Members of Mater Dei's CCU team who spent a relaxing time – including a "sleep-over" – at Comino Tower in October and enjoyed the special experience of the island itself.*



# New life for Preti's St Roque

*Patricia Salomone*

Following the restoration of Mattia Preti's splendid paintings *The Immaculate Conception* and *St Sebastian*, the painting of St Roque is the third painting by this renowned baroque artist to be given a new lease of life, thanks to *Din l-Art Helwa*'s ambitious project to save the seven Preti paintings in the Sarrja Church in Floriana. The painting was found to be in a perilous state of decay and its restoration is being made possible through the generous sponsorship of MSV Life and part of the proceeds of an exhibition of abstract paintings by David G. Curmi, entitled *Pictures at an Exhibition* that was held in March at l'Auberge d'Italie in Valletta.

Timed to coincide with the 400th Anniversary of Mattia Preti's birth, last year saw the restoration of the larger-than-life titular painting of the Immaculate Conception completed, while the painting of St Sebastian was completed the year before. The restoration project has been entrusted to Giuseppe Mantella Restauri and is being carried out with the support of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage.

Mattia Preti was born at Taverna, Calabria in 1613 and became the official artist of the Order of St John. Having lived in Malta most of his life, he became known as *'Il Cavaliere Calabrese'* and he left the island a great artistic legacy. Sarrja Church was built in 1676 on the site of an earlier church constructed in 1574 that was also dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

In December 1675 there was an outbreak of plague in Marsamxetto that quickly spread to Valletta, then to Senglea and which, by April 1676, had spread to Żurriq. Malta lost a third of its population as a result. Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner felt that only the divine intercession of the Immaculate Conception, with her renowned power over evil, could stop the plague and he ordered that Sarrja's small church be rebuilt in a grander style as a gesture of thanksgiving for her intercession. He commissioned Mattia Preti to design it and, in fact, the artist also took charge of its building, making it the only known church in the world to have been designed and built by Preti. All seven of the paintings by Preti, including the monumental titular painting, were designed to fit architecturally into the stone housings he created for them and all the saints depicted are in some way connected to the deadly disease. In May 1676, Mattia Preti presented Grand Master Cottoner with a model of the church and the spread of the plague was halted.

St Roque is known primarily as a pilgrim saint of the late-13th century who gave up his noble family's wealth to tend the sick and needy in Europe, curing victims of the Black Death by marking them with a cross. He is said to have survived the plague and his iconography usually depicts him with the dog that saved his life by licking his sores and bringing him a daily loaf of bread. The painting of St Roque in the church is a typical example of Preti's flourish and energy and its russet tones still impress today.

*bottom:  
Preti's St Roque  
undergoing restoration*



# Restoration Workshop at Our Lady of Victory

The *Din l-Art Helwa* Youth Committee organised a very successful Restoration Workshop at Our Lady of Victory Church, Valletta on 15 and 16 November. Conducting Conservators were Amy Sciberras and Sarah Yeomans Gafa and the event was co-ordinated by Council members Mariagrazia Cassar and Ian Camilleri, with the collaboration of the Our Lady of Victory custodian, Mario Sciberras.

This event was held as part of the run up to DLH's 50th anniversary and demonstrated the Youth Committee's main purpose and objectives of involving young people in *Din l-Art Helwa's* mission. The workshop shed light on the general care and conservation of collections and cultural heritage in order to raise awareness among the general public – especially the younger generation – of the importance of preserving our national heritage. The conducting conservators demonstrated the many stages involved in the conservation of paintings, including the preliminary scientific analysis to ascertain the treatment required. Through the use of posters, the in-situ and the non-invasive analysis and practical work on a number of old paintings, visitors were introduced to the scientific research involved in the field of restoration.



*Minister Evarist Bartolo using the optivisor*



*above:*

*Conservator Amy Sciberras demonstrating how old paintings are treated in conservation work*

Education Minister Evarist Bartolo officially declared the workshop open during his visit, together with his wife Gillian, on the Saturday morning. Dr Bartolo displayed considerable interest in the work, encouraging the young conservators and expressing the hope that their example would encourage other young people to choose this profession.

DLH Executive President Simone Mizzi showed Dr and Mrs Bartolo around the church and the small museum which is being established. She then accompanied them above the scaffolding to show them the progress that has been made on the restoration of the Alessio Erardi vaulted ceiling. Dr Bartolo expressed his thanks to the *Din l-Art Helwa* volunteers "for working so hard to save this church", exhorting them to keep up the good work and to count on him for tangible support.



*Minister Evarist Bartolo signs the Our Lady of Victory visitors' book*



### National Geographic magazine's accolade for Msida Bastion Cemetery

National Geographic magazine has recently named Msida Bastion Cemetery as one of Europe's five loveliest cemeteries, along with Hólavallagarður Cemetery: Reykjavik, Iceland, Hietaniemi Cemetery: Helsinki, Finland, Mirogoj Cemetery: Zagreb, Croatia, and Prazeres Cemetery: Lisbon, Portugal.

The magazine notes:

"A crenellated fortification seems like an unlikely setting for a cemetery. And, yet, the former Msida Bastion Cemetery is sunk into a scenic parapet overlooking Marsamxett Harbor on the fringe of Malta's capital city. Built centuries ago as part of Valletta's defenses (it played a vital role in efforts to resist Napoleon's forces) the property was converted to a burial site, Malta's first Protestant cemetery, in the early 1800s. After operating as a final resting place for a half century, withstanding bombing in World War II, the cemetery closed, falling into disrepair. It wasn't until the late 1980s that a campaign to restore the grounds coalesced.

Reconceived as a garden, the cemetery has enjoyed new life since 1993, becoming a popular destination for tourists and locals alike. Scattered-about benches offer the opportunity for reflection and a tranquil spot to take in the view of sailboats anchored at the marina below, verdant expanses of grass dotted with olive trees, palms, oleanders, and ancient pines. Other botanical delights include colorful flower blooms—some visible year-round—such as hibiscus, oleander, and blue Mexican petunias".



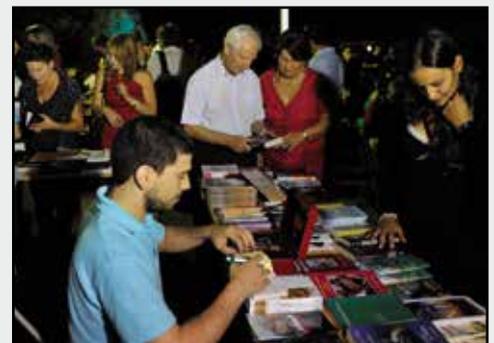
Photograph by Albert Cassar Farrugia

### Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival at Msida Bastion Historic Garden

For the fourth consecutive year the Msida Bastion Historic Garden hosted the Inizjamed Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival. The 2014 Festival and the Malta Literature Across Frontiers (LAF) translation workshop celebrated the European Day of Languages.

LAF is a European platform for literary exchange, translation and policy debate. The festival and workshop were organised by Inizjamed and LAF with the support of the Malta Arts Fund, Valletta 2018, *Din l-Art Helwa*, Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, Reel Festivals, the European Commission Representation in Malta and the Small Initiatives Scheme under the Voluntary Organisations Fund, *Għaqda tal-Malti* (University of Malta) and the Institute Ramon Llull.

The event, which was held from 4 to 6 September, saw the participation of authors from Algeria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Palestine, Slovenia, Spain and the UK, as well as Malta. This year's stage was designed by Keith and Roseanne Schembri and the music was provided by Plato's Dream Machine and Kantilena.



Photographs by  
Gilbert Calleja

## In Some Obscure Corner The 1676 Plague Cemetery at Cospicua

*Denis A Darmanin*

During the reign of the Order of the Knights of St John a number of outbreaks of deadly epidemics decimated the population of Malta, and at times even of Gozo. A number of such epidemics were recorded as occurring in 1592, 1623, 1655 and from 1675 to 1676.

The cause of the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1676 was attributed to disease-carrying fleas that lived on rats that made their way to Malta on one of the many cargo ships that arrived in the island from North African or Eastern Mediterranean ports. The symptoms included severe headaches, fever, swelling in the neck, groin and armpits – better known as ‘*buboes*’ – and in most cases led to death. The sick were first conveyed to *lazarettos* – places of quarantine – but in Valletta and Cottonera they were taken to the ditches below the fortifications where makeshift shacks and crude awnings were erected to afford some protection from the elements.

The first case of plague occurred in Valletta on Christmas Eve in 1675 in the house of a merchant, Matteo Bonnici. The epidemic lasted for some nine months and at the time was estimated to have caused the death of over 11,000 people from a population of around 60,000. Just as at other times of need, the populace sought divine intervention from, in particular, Our Lady of Sorrows and Saint Roque.

Many priests, physicians and hospital attendants who attended the sick also perished. In 1677, the medical historian Laurentius Haseiah – or Hasciac – published his studies on this deadly disease.

*opposite:  
The gate of the plague cemetery  
at Cospicua*

*Detail of the carving over the gate of the plague cemetery.  
The lilies are both a symbol of the Virgin Mary  
and an allegory of purity as opposed  
to the decay caused by the plague*





### The Cemetery

Entering Cospicua from the direction of the Ghajn Dwieli tunnels and turning down to the area of St Paul's church, there is a little alley appropriately named *Sqaq l-Erwieħ* (Souls' Alley), that is seldom noticed. Apart from a few dwellings, the alley leads to an ornate, pointed archway and an iron gate. Above the arch is a sculpture that resembles a lily, the symbol of purity. This is the entrance to what was once the *Ċimiterju tal-Infetti* (Cemetery for Infectious Diseases), where many of those who died in Cospicua during the outbreak in 1676 were buried. Over time, the cemetery fell into disuse and was encroached upon by buildings, but the space was retained and a number of trees and shrubs were planted on what was once consecrated ground.

Of particular interest is the statue standing in a niche on the wall facing the gate. Although obscured from sight by trees, it is a representation of Our Lady of Sorrows, and possibly dates back to the middle of the 18th century. An earlier statue of Our Lady of Sorrows that stood in the cemetery was removed and placed on the side of the Oratory at Cospicua in 1750, as indicated on a marble plaque.

*The statue of Our Lady of Sorrows formerly in the cemetery*



# The Dubaification of Malta

Petra Caruana Dingli

The name ‘Dubai’ is associated with more than just another city state. It is linked in the collective imagination with shopping malls, ostentatious wealth and the large-scale consumption of luxury goods and entertainment, including extravaganzas like ski slopes of snow in the hot desert.

People associate Dubai’s landscape with high-rise ‘iconic’ buildings, ambitious land-reclamation projects, gated luxury residential areas and a massive building boom of concrete and glass. The aerial image of Dubai’s artificial Palm Island almost functions as an international corporate logo for the city.

So many other places have tried to emulate Dubai’s success in some form or other that the word ‘Dubaification’ has been coined to describe this trend. And now the fever has evidently reached our shores too.

Over the last year, the government has given sufficient reason to believe that it is holding up Dubai as one of its models for urban development in Malta, but without explaining what this will involve. We already had a nod towards Dubai some years ago with the Smart City business and ICT park, but this was a single project that is only just beginning to see the light and which has yet to prove its added value to Malta.

Over the last year, the government’s dream of Dubai seems to have grown into something more widespread and substantial. It is currently pushing for major land reclamation projects by the private sector. It is promoting ‘iconic’ high-rise buildings. It is promoting the development of an exclusive luxury residential project at White Rocks – to include “upmarket homes, luxury hotels (not less than 5-star), luxury units” and a “high-quality lifestyle community village”.

The new high-rise policy has set the sky as the limit in Qawra, Tigné, Gzira, Marsa and Paceville, and states that the government is “looking for buildings that are icons of architectural quality”.

If further confirmation were needed, in a recent speech the Prime Minister was reported as stating that Malta could become a regional Dubai or Singapore.

Fine, but what will the Dubaification of Malta mean in practice? Icons and logos apart, high-rise buildings and land reclamation are large construction projects but are not an economic strategy in themselves and will not turn Malta into a regional Dubai on their own. It is not enough to cherry-pick a few aspects of Dubai’s economic model, in particular those linked to an outdated theory that construction can be the motor of growth in Malta. This will not work in Malta today and will not provide the jobs that the thousands of graduates from all strata of society expect and will need over the years to come.

Those holding the reins of government should explain clearly what they think this model is and what it really means for the future of Malta, including the long-term environmental, social and economic effects of their version of the ‘Dubai model’ transplanted to our shores.

One obvious place where this vision should be explained is in the ‘Strategic Plan for Environment and Development’ which was issued by this government in draft form in March. This document should lead the way for the sustainable management of land and sea resources until 2020, taking into account economic, social and cultural factors. Yet it only says this about high-rise: “While tall buildings may increase the efficiency of land use if they are actually occupied, and may contribute marginally to the provision of open space, their impact on the Maltese landscape is becoming a matter of concern.”

On land reclamation, the Strategic Plan only says that a framework will be provided “for the spatial planning of the Coastal Zone and the Marine Area which supports land reclamation to further socio-economic development.” It does not, however, say when this general framework will be provided while, in the meantime, a call for individual land reclamation projects has already been issued.

White Rocks is mentioned in the Strategic Plan as an opportunity for an employment hub and market services and not as a “high-quality lifestyle community village” – whatever that might be.

This is extremely confusing. Are we following the left hand or the right hand of the government? On the one hand it is actively targeting a Dubai-style development model for Malta, yet on the other there is no hint of this in the Strategic Plan to 2020 issued for public consultation. The draft Strategic Plan has been widely criticised already as not fit for purpose, and here is another example of it falling short.

These changes over the next few years will obviously affect all those who live in or care about Malta. It is not acceptable to present one strategic direction to the public for consultation, while deliberately following another. People deserve better than this muddled and opaque approach to urban development.

*Smart City  
business and ICT park*



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