

ANTHONY BONELLO

MQABBA

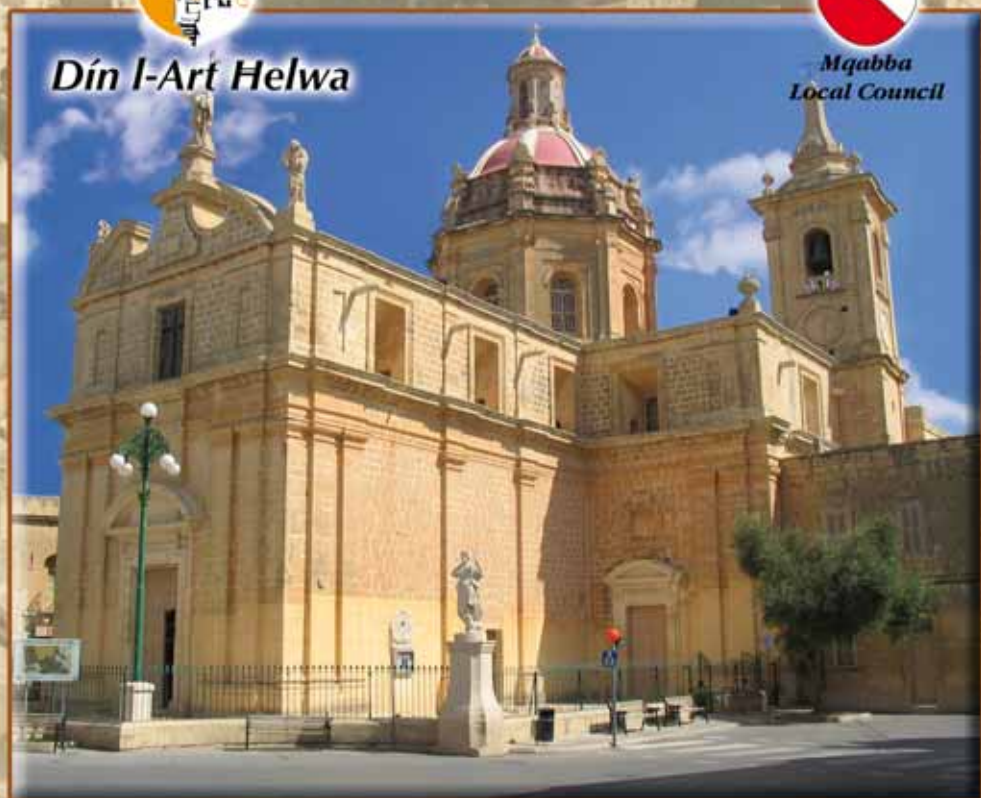
Four Walks in a Charming Village



Dín l-Art Helwa



*Mqabba
Local Council*



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Introduction

The Village of Mqabba

Mqabba is situated on the South Eastern part of the Island of Malta with some 3200 inhabitants (in 2006) in an area renowned for its Globigerina limestone. This national resource makes the village special as this is the only natural resource found on our islands, besides the sun and beaches, the other two assets that contribute mostly towards our tourist industry and the economy. It is surrounded by the villages of Kirkop, Luqa, Qrendi, Żurrieq and Siġġiewi, and this geographical feature conditioned the socio-economic lives not only of the Mqabba residents, but also that of the neighbouring villages. The name “Mqabba” is either derived from the semitic verb ‘*qabb*’ which means cutting or quarrying stone, or from the word ‘*qubba*’ referring to a dome. This may be due to the 10th or the 11th century domed tower known as *Wilga* Tower, the remains of which, are at the very edge of the Malta International Airport. Later on, the latin language transformed the semitic word into *Casal micabiba*. The word *Casal* means village and obviously *Micabiba* refers to Mqabba.

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Qrendi Local Council
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Siġġiewi Local Council
Żurrieq Local Council
Qrendi Parish Church
Qrendi Scouts
St. Mary Band Club (Mqabba)
Our Lady of Lily Band Club

Hal Millieri

The first walk, as with the other three heritage walks, starts from Church Square. Bus no. 35 or 138 from Valletta via Qrendi stops just in front of the Parish Church with its dome rising above the surrounding buildings, serving as a landmark. This is the largest church in the village and has been the fulcrum of activity in Mqabba since its construction.



Mqabba Parish Church

The Mqabba parish church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, is built over the site where two small churches used to stand, one dedicated to St. Mary, and the other dedicated to the Visitation of Our Lady to St. Elizabeth. The building of the church started soon after the visit of Bishop Balaguer in the year 1663. It was the Bishop who had asked the clergy and the people to embark on this project. On the 10th May 1693, Bishop Cocco Palmieri visited the village and noted that



the choir, side chapel and the dome already had been completed. The main part was completed on the 28th June, 1699. The church is in the form of a latin cross and is made up of the choir part, two side chapels and the main part better known as the *korsija*. Besides the major altar, it has nine other altars.

The Parish of Imqabba has a curious and original beginning. In 1575, when Mons Pietro Duzina visited the village, the people pleaded with him to declare their village, a Parish. In 1592, Bishop Tumas Gargallo decided to join the villages of Hal Kirkop, Hal Safi and Mqabba into one Parish. The people of the three villages did not accept this decision, and staged a protest in front of the Archbishop's Curia. On the 15th



*Statue of St Mary
in Church Square*

September, 1598, Bishop Tumas Gargallo declared the Mqabba Church a Parish, with Dun Ġwann Mizzi taking the office of Archpriest.

Opposite the Parish Priest's Office and the bell tower, almost in the centre of the largest part of the square, stands a prominent statue of Our Lady of the Assumption. In fact, our ancestors recall the days when one of the leading roads in this village was constructed in such a way so as to create considerable space in the village core. In fact, this road, *Triq Karmenu Ciantar*, formed an extension to the side of this irregular Church Square.

However, we start off our first walk by taking another leading road, *Triq Santa Katerina*, which takes its name from the Chapel of St. Catherine. This beautiful chapel is just opposite the Parish Church. The origins of this church take us back to the year 1575, when Mons. Duzina visited this village. He found out that one of the churches was dedicated to this saint. It was a small church with a stone framed door but no wooden door that could be locked and with only one picture painted



Chapel of St Catherine

Dun Ġwann Battista Tortella on the occasion of the feast of Lapsi in the year 1774. On the inside, this church is built upon a number of pillars of Ionic style, beautifully surrounded with ornamental sculptures in limestone. The major frame dominating this small but beautiful church represents the mystic marriage of St. Catherine in the presence of St. Anne and St. John the Evangelist. On the left hand side of this frame one can see the coat of arms of the Aquilina Family who were the benefactors of this frame, after receiving a Divine favour. The words VFGA, (*Voto fatto per gratia accettata*) also featured in the picture, are a witness of this.

Proceed up *Triq Santa Katerina* to *Pjazza Ġblew tad-Djamanti*, and if you are sharp enough, you would be able to spot at least two niches protruding out from façades of very old houses one on your

on wood. The person who was in charge of this church was Marjan Agius and after his death he left a piece of land, known as '*Il-bur ta' Santa Katerina*', so that the income generated from this land, would be used for the animation of the Holy Mass on the feast of St. Catherine.

During the year 1759 Archbishop Rull visited the church and when he saw its dilapidated state, ordered that the church be completely pulled down together with the nearby church dedicated to St. Peter. Another church was erected instead. This church built in baroque style, was inaugurated by Parish Priest



A house of character with a niche of Our Lady with Baby Jesus



right-hand side, and the other on your left. One cannot miss the Old Mill house further up on the right hand side. This property is private and is the regular abode of a family after converting it into a beautiful house of character. Retrace your steps until you find yourself in a square with a busy roundabout handling most of the vehicular routes to other nearby villages. Two statues attract your attention on the right hand side, corner with *Triq tas-Sejba* the road leading to the village of Siggiewi. One statue is dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, and the other to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady.

The statue of St. Francis of Assisi is a work of art by Professor Giulio Moschetti in 1899. The material of the statue is *stucco* or a composite mixture kept secret by the artist himself. The statue was built after this composition was placed over the statue base. The blessing of

the statue took place on the 13th July in 1899 by Monsignor Alfons Caruana,



Statue of St Francis in Diamond Jubilee Square



The Old Mill



Another decorated façade with a statue



Diamond Jubilee Square Roundabout

who was a prominent political person. Afterwards, the statue was placed in its present place for the public to venerate.

An interesting fact is that the land on which the statue was erected was given by the Civil Authorities. Probably this was granted on the persistence of Monsignor Alfons Caruana, who was very influent. Monsignor Caruana made other big contributions for different projects concluded satisfactorily in the village of Mqabba, such as the recreational area near the *Tal-Mentna* catacombs, with trees and park benches for people to relax on, just opposite the two statues.

On the 14th of July 1899, Monsignor Alfons Caruana asked the Archbishop's Curia, to grant 40 days of indulgence to each person reciting the prayer "*San Francesco stimitizzato ottenateco l'amore a Gesù Cristo*" meaning St. Francis consider my love towards Jesus Christ. The permission for the indulgence was issued after only three days. Along the years, the statue dedicated to St. Francis, felt into such a bad state that parts of it like hands and fingers went missing. These were reconstructed during restoration works commissioned by the Mqabba Local Council.

This road junction is extremely busy, and you would be well advised to cross carefully over to the far side of the road to the village of Qrendi. On your way, to your left you can see the largest village in the neighbourhood, Żurrieq, which has now developed into a small business town. When you come to a second roundabout, look to your right, and you will see what used to be a Quarry, which has now been backfilled with construction and demolition waste. The considerable amount of rubble required to fill up the quarry came from the newly constructed Mater Dei Hospital at Tal-Qroqq. In future, the Mqabba Local Council intends to convert this used-up quarry into an educational park. Several years ago, the central government released



An exhausted franka quarry, at tal-Mitfina that had been backfilled.





*The poor soul on pedestal
in Tat-Torba area*

the Mill Quarry in favour of the Council, to be developed mostly for afforestation purposes.

From here cross to the other side of the road where the poor soul on pedestal is and take the left road towards the village of Żurrieq through the place known as *tat-Torba*. Enjoy the lure of the countryside along a secondary road until your next stop at *Ta' l-Ars* cemetery.

The cemetery known as '*Ta' l-Ars*' is a very interesting site and a few years ago was scheduled by the authorities for its importance. Situated in a very narrow road stretching from Mqabba to Żurrieq it is believed to have housed only tombs of children that died during the pestilence. A farmhouse of interesting features adjoins this cemetery and also bears the name '*Ta' l-Ars*'. It has a series of particular roundel carvings of geometrical interest, five in all, and a pillar-like window decoration. The symbols engraved in building stone blocks take us back in time to the Arab era. These stone decorations of particular beauty may have been dismantled from other ancient dilapidated buildings and re-used in relatively more recent structures erected several years ago on private grounds. Similar roundel decorations are also present in other rural secluded buildings in the vicinity.



Ars Cemetery



*Farmhouse with roundel
carvings near ta' l-Ars*

As you continue walking along the road you can now see clearly the outskirts of Żurrieq. A narrow countryside road on your left, flanked by rows of fields lead you to a chapel dedicated to the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is under the guardianship of the National Trust of Malta *Din l-Art Helwa*, a non-governmental organisation. This area used to form part of the medieval village of Hal Millieri. Though the village is first documented in 1419, its origins are lost in antiquity seeping to Roman and perhaps even to pre-historic times.



*Chapel of the Annunciation
in Hal Millieri*

This medieval Siculo Norman chapel, dating prior to 1500 and built on a site which was then already used as a sacred land, has an arched vault and is decorated with remarkable medieval frescoes. The frescoes, depicting a number of saints, cover all the interior walls of the chapel except the apse. The inscriptions in very angular gothic letters help us to identify the saints, from the left, as St. Vincent, St. John and St. Lawrence, St. James, St. Andrew, St. Nicholas, St. Leonard, St.



*Chapel of St John the
Evangelist in Hal Millieri*

Agatha and St. Blaise, St Augustine and St. Paul. Surprisingly, the image of St. George appears twice on each side of the entrance. In one fresco he appears riding a horse and in the other slaying a dragon. *Din l-Art Helwa* commissioned restoration works on the chapel in 1968. The chapel is open for the public on the first Sunday of every month.

As you keep on walking along this narrow country road, lined with finely built rubble walls, you will come across another elegant chapel dedicated to





Chapel dedicated to Jesus the Nazarene in the Mqabba cemetery

you back to Mqabba through *Triq Hal Kirkop*. During spring, and even in winter, one can observe the large variety of wild flowers. The wild alyssum, the prolific yellow oxalis, the white and yellow marguerite, long bamboo and the scarlet corn poppy, edge the paths and brighten fields. This narrow panoramic road leads you to Mqabba cemetery. Amidst the tombstones, stands the beautifully constructed chapel, dating back to 1910, dedicated to Jesus of Nazareth with an elevated parvis.

Just in front of Mqabba's burial place, a road called *Triq il-Hajt tal-Matla*, brings you to your next important stop. At the end of this road, a thick wall, still visible in places, used to serve as a leading pathway for our ancestors in order to avoid the flooding of the fields at this lowest part of Mqabba. It connects the no longer existing village of Hal Millieri to the oldest church in the village, St. Basil Chapel. Cross carefully the busy By-Pass, *Triq il-Konvoj ta' Sta. Marija* to *Triq Karmenu Ciantar* thus completing this first circuitry walk back to Church Square.



Matla Wall

St. John the Evangelist situated in a large rural square dominated with a stone cross. This chapel is also under the guardianship of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Follow the narrow winding road on your left towards Żurrieq until you reach *Triq Hal Kirkop* where you have to take a sharp left bend leading

Hal Xluq and Ta' Kandja

The walk starts at the very core of Mqabba, exactly at the bus stop, in Church Square. You will be enjoying the country side and the remote areas within the village. Therefore, this walk is highly recommended in winter or spring when the wild vegetation is blooming.

Our first stop is at the Our Lady of Lily Band Club with its interesting façade. This two-storey building is situated opposite the Parish Church, besides the Nationalist Party political club, and also houses a lotto office.

In 1944, members of the Lily Club, formerly known as the Circolo Number X, who were responsible for the organisation of the feast in honour of Our Lady of the Lilies, decided to establish a band. The club then changed its name to Lily Band Club and Mro Joseph Darmanin



Our Lady of Lily Musical Society Club

started to give music lessons to whoever was interested. The band's first performance was conducted on the occasion of the feast of the Immaculate Conception on the 9th December, 1945. Soon after that, other band clubs invited the Lily Band Club to perform during the feast in honour of their respective patron saint. The present conductor is Mro



Andrew Calleja. A new band-stand carved in mahogany and walnut used only during the week of the feast was inaugurated on the 14th June 1995, under the patronage of the acting President of Malta, Dr. Jimmy Farrugia. Amongst the works of art to be found within this band-stand, and manufactured by Mr Julio Sacco and his brother Charles, are the bronze busts of Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Schubert and Strauss.



St Mary Musical Society Club

Proceed to the other end of Church Square to take a closer look at the other Band Club, on the right hand side. This is King George V Band Club, and the name of the society is St. Mary, taking its name from the Parish itself.

Back in 1896, a Social Club was formed named Victory, under the honorary presidency of a Monsignor Alfons Caruana. However, in 1897, only a year later, another club under the name of St. Joseph was founded in Church Square, with Mr. Paul Caruana being its first president. In 1905, another

social club under the name of St. Mary was registered in Carmel Street, a few metres away from the Church Square. It was this club that took in hand the organization of the two major feasts in Mqabba, St. Mary and Our Lady of Lilies. However in 1910, it transpired that not everyone was happy with the administration of this club, probably because of some controversy over the street decorations and fireworks. During a general meeting, it was decided that the club be renamed in honour of King George V, to commemorate the start of his reign. In the then influent “*Malta Tagħna*” newspaper, of the 24 August 1912, one can find that the feast of St. Mary was organised in a beautiful way by the Cirkolu

Giorgio V of Mqabba. The conclusion of the procurement of the present club building was recorded on the 22nd January 1934.

Retrace your steps towards the short and narrow *Triq il-Karmnu* on your left, and in a minute you will find



Mqabba Primary School

yourself in another leading road in the village, *Triq Valletta*. In front of you, you can see the rich architecture of the Mqabba Primary School, which has a student population of around 400. In 2008 the Ministry of Education invested in a large community hall to form part of this school.

The first school plans were revealed by the Archpriest on the 25th April 1901, during the Governor's visit to Mqabba. The Public Works Department's intention was to build a new school in the garden formerly housing the Lieutenant's garden (*Ġnien tal-Kmand*). At that time, this appeared to be a very suitable place as it was located at the end of the village and therefore in a very quiet area. Nowadays, this area is no longer "the end of the village". One of the contractors offered to lower his bid should he be allowed to use the *franka* stone extracted from



One of Tax-Xantin Quarries

the site. The authorities acceded to his request. Subsequently, a basement was excavated; and the stone cut from it was used for the building of the school. The land was owned by Mr Ġużeppi Grech known as "Ix-Xugar", who also erected the first floor and gave





*Façade town house
in Parish Street*



*A particular house
in Parish Street*



*Statue of St Michael
in Buħar Alley*

the emphyteusis to the Government in 1902. The school was officially inaugurated during a school Prize Day on the 4th January, 1903. The ceremony was presided over by the then Archpriest of Mqabba Mons Pietru Pace. During the event, not only the Mqabba students were rewarded, but also other students from the nearby villages of Żurrieq, Qrendi and Hal Kirkop. Construction of the school was successfully completed in 1910.

Proceed to your left into a very narrow winding road, called *Triq il-Fjuri*, to admire the beauty of the Mqabba stone that found its place



Tarmac plant in an exhausted quarry

in nicely converted houses of characters. One must notice that globigerina stone gets very hard when weathered and its colour is transformed into a reddish white colour. Before actually emerging into *Triq il-Parroċca*, a quick look at *Tax-Xantin Quarries* would be appropriate, even if you

have to walk back a few metres into *Sqaq Numru l fi Triq il-Fjuri*. This is a very short alley, the end of which emerges on top of a deep globigerina quarry, enclosed by clusters of old houses. Back in *Triq il-Fjuri*, take a right turn into the old narrow winding



Main entrance of Ta' Kandja pumping station

Triq il-Parroċċa to admire the façade of a very old house that unfortunately seems to be neglected. Approaching a cross road, before taking the left



Department of Civil Protection

road, do not miss taking a look at a niche with a statue dedicated to St. Michael. This, as many others in Mqabba, is incorporated into the façade of a corner farm-house on your right. Our ancestors were very religious and

superstitious and believed in St. Michael as the leader of the Forces of Heaven in their triumph over the powers of all evil.

Now proceed towards a row of garages into *Triq tas-Sejba*, forming a small industrial zone. Take care of fast approaching vehicles, as *Triq tas-Sejba* is very busy especially on working days with numerous lorries journeying to and fro carrying construction and



Special Assignment Group within the Malta Police Corps.





A 'hidden' façade of a farm house behind a creeper



Dry stone wall in the narrow winding rural road from Ta' Kandja to Hal Xluq

demolition waste. Down to your right walk close to the airfield, and if you are lucky, you may experience a low flying aircraft passing overhead gradually losing altitude to land at the Malta International Airport. At the far end of *Triq tas-Sejba*, one cannot miss a relatively low chimney emerging from a quarry enclosed by boundary walls. This used up quarry was converted into one of the most established tarmac plants on our islands, thus successfully making alternative use of a disused quarry. This one ceased to operate after reaching depths close to the underground fresh water galleries at *Ta' Kandja*. Proceed to the left road and take



An old farmhouse with corner niche dedicated to Our Lady in Hal Xluq

a quick look at the main entrance of *Ta' Kandja* Bore Hole which is a major source of fresh water in Malta. As you proceed up the road you go past the premises of the Civil Protection Department and the Special Assignment Group of the Malta Police and again turn left into the second narrow rural road heading towards a remote part of *Sigġiewi*. This

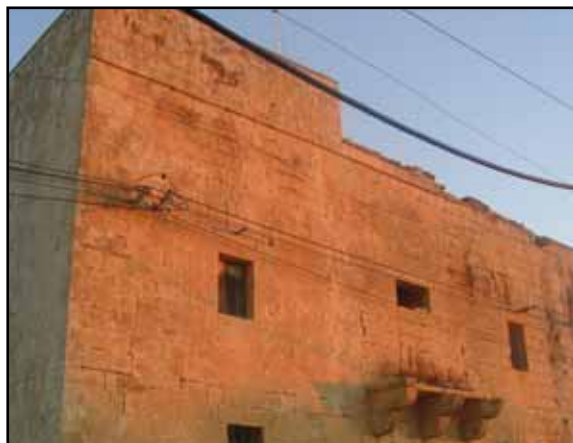
take you into a quieter part of the countryside to enjoy the beauty of wild flowers and admire the finely built rubble walls.

This narrow, winding pathway will eventually lead you to the wayside chapel of St Mary known as *Ta' Hal Xluq*. This is the only surviving church that was considerably altered along the years. In the now no longer existing village of *Hal Xluq*, there used to be no less than six churches not connected to each other.



Hal Xluq chapel dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady

This particular church was built in the 15th or the 16th century. Probably its original roof is now concealed behind a parapet wall. The west façade consists of a bell cot and a rectangular window, both added later on, and a square-cut doorway, which was originally arched. The semi-circular hood-mould above the doorway does not have end culls and is rather



Farmhouse in Hal Xluq

uncharacteristic. The north wall is pierced by a low arched doorway which is still the original one. Another alteration took place inside the church. The apse on the east end was destroyed and an altar from the seventeenth century now rests against a blank wall. The wall piers have a plain moulding





Statue of the Assumption in a rural cross road in Hal Xluq



Herza (an opening of a well) in Hal Xluq fields

which mark the line from where the pointed arches spring. Bank of Valletta (BOV) supported the restoration of an 18th century organ located at the church. The restoration was undertaken in 2005 by the *Kunsill Patrimonju Kulturali – Siġġiewi* which was set up specifically to advise the local church authorities on the condition of historical and cultural properties and artifacts within the parochial limits of the Parish of Siġġiewi. This organ in itself is a rare piece of Malta's rich cultural heritage and its restoration was entrusted to expert organ restorer Mr Robert Buhagiar, who eventually restored it to its former glory.

Keep going until the very end of the pathway, where a statue of St Mary is clearly visible on a high stone pedestal. Turn left and soon you will find yourself into a kind of a valley lined with bamboo, revealing the rich underground water resources in these parts. As you approach a gentle hairpin bend, stop at the batching plant entrance to have a look

at the fields below. From this spot you should be able to see a small stone hut erected on one single huge stone called *Misraħ is-Sinjura* Dolmen.

This is one of the largest stone blocks, if not the largest, found on our islands. The Dolmen is sited at *Misraħ is-Sinjura* between Mqabba and Qrendi, measuring about four and a half metres, by almost four metres. This is a typical Neolithic dolmen in the form of a horizontal flat slab stone of globigerina type. This slab stone dates back to the first Bronze Age culture, 2500-1500BC, popularly known as the Tarxien funerary culture. Later, someone erected a hut all over this structure with a flight of stairs leading to the top of it, possibly to avoid floods. However, this would also have served as a shelter for workers in the surrounding fields and quarries – there is a small quarry close by – and also a storage space for tools or fodder. A groove on the surface running round the edges of this dolmen, popularly known as “*il-Haġra l-Imsaqqa*”, meaning a roofed rock, makes this a typical capstone for funerary purposes.



Misraħ is-Sinjura Dolmen



Newly converted field now sustaining rows of vines in Misraħ tas-Sinjura and ta' Mudurbu



Back on track you find yourself once more on a busy traffic route dominated by lorries. One cannot miss the hub of activity involving the reclamation of used-up quarries at *Ta' Mudurbu*, *Misraħ is-Sinjura* and *Xaghri Mqalleb*. The Government, in partnership with private contractors, has embarked on a major project to fill up these disused quarries with construction and demolition waste. Eventually, these used quarries will be transformed into sheltered fields fit for viticulture, a number of which are already in their early year produce. It



Chapel of St Catherine in Tat-Torba



Statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in tat-Torba between rows of trees

is expected that the dumping works in this area cease by 2010. From this hill one can appreciate the beautiful scenery of the villages of Qrendi and Mqabba.

Keep walking straight until the cross road and proceed to your left, through *Triq l-Imqabba* which separates the two villages. Here on your left, stands another wayside chapel dedicated to St. Catherine (*tat-Torba*). This chapel is in an area known as *Tat-Torba*, and is one of the oldest churches on the islands dedicated to St Catherine. In fact, the first

traces of this church are documented in Mons Pietro Duzina's 1575 report. He was an apostolic visitor who eventually visited the chapel, formerly known as *ta' Bieb iż-Żejtunija*. In 1624 this chapel was profanated and a stone cross was erected.

Two years later, a certain



Old mill in Tal-Mithna



Benedict Camilleri commissioned the re-building of this church, according to a contract by Notary Gio Domenico Gatt dated 14th June 1625, and Mr Camilleri began celebrating the feast of St Catherine in this church. A cemetery was also excavated and built in the vicinity of the church. In 2000 as part of the millenium celebrations to further conserve our heritage, the Qrendi Archpriest, commissioned the restoration of this church, which presently houses a beautiful statue of Christ the Redeemer. Every year on Maundy Thursday, (*Hamis ix-Xirka*), enthusiasts turn this chapel into a creative Altar of Repose.

Statue of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady in Diamond Jubilee Square



Return to the hustle and bustle of *Triq il-Qrendi*, by taking a left turn and proceed down the Mqabba By-Pass (*Triq il-Konvoj ta' Santa Marija*). One needs to be careful and keep to the side of the road especially when approaching Diamond Jubilee Square roundabout. It is also recommended to use the service road (the side road parallel to the carriage way) as much as possible for safety, thereby avoiding the carriage-way traffic. To the left, you should be able to spot a very small garden in which a bust was erected by the Mqabba Local Council to commemorate Mikiel Anġ Sapiano's mechanical genius. Most people associate M'Anġ Sapiano with the nearby village of Luqa. However, he was born in Mqabba and lived there until he met Mikelina Mifsud from Luqa, whom he married in 1847. He lived in Luqa even after his first wife passed away and he married her sister Marjanna. When M'Anġ was young, his father proposed that he accompanies a certain Mr Ġużeppi Bajada in his workshop where a lot of agricultural tools were made. However, Mikelaṅ used to go to the shop of a clock maker/repairer of a certain Kalcedon Pisani and he soon began attending lessons under the professional teaching of a certain Ġan Anton Tanti. At the age of fourteen, he inaugurated his personal business. One of the most difficult tasks he performed successfully was the difficult repair of the Mqabba



Garden inaugurated by the Mqabba Local Council to mark the mechanical genius Mikelaṅ Sapiano



Old Hospital restored by the Mqabba Local Council

Parish Church Clock. Then he began making church clocks, starting with that of Gudja. He managed to build not less than twenty-one large mechanized clocks for different churches and other places, such as that at Marsa wharf that used to guide workers when to start and stop from work. Mikelang Sapiiano deserved the gold medal with which he was honored by the Society of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce on the 26th February, 1908. He died on the 2nd December, 1912.

Take the first road on the left, *Triq Mikelang Sapiiano* towards *Triq San Innoċenzju* concluding your walk by admiring the architectural beauty of the recently restored building of the Old Hospital.

One of the earliest inscriptions found in Mqabba is that attached to the old entrance of the Old Hospital (*Dahlet l-Isptar il-Qadim*) dated 1st July 1725, when the Cottoner Foundation sublet the premises to a certain Mariuzzo Zahra for 150 years at a rental value of 62 skudi per annum. The Old Hospital probably dates back to the sixteenth century when pestilence epidemic took the lives of 11.2% of the Maltese population. The premises was recognized by the authorities as of great historical





*A house of character
in St Catherine Street*

importance and were scheduled in 1997 to grade 1 at the insistence of the Mqabba Local Council. Within these premises, one can find some interesting features such as the sculptured designs in stone known as roundel carvings. Similar carvings were found in 1960 in catacombs at Ta' Kandja, underneath the runway at the Malta International Airport. In 1999, Government devolved this property to the Mqabba Local Council. Soon after the Council commissioned Architect Dieter Falzon for a restoration programme, the renovation works were awarded to Mr Joe Farrugia. The Mqabba

Mayor Mr Emmanuel Buttigieg inaugurated the premises as a centre of Culture and Arts on the 21st October, 2003 in the presence of the Prime Minister, Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami to mark one of the activities on the occasion of Mqabba Day.

Take a right turn to *Triq Santa Katerina* and proceed to the bus stop situated near the MLP club in *Pjazza tal-Knisja*.

Quarries at *Ta' L-Isqof* and *Tal-Froxx*

The third walk also starts from Church Square and take you to the neighbouring villages of Hal Kirkop and Żurrieq. Throughout your walk you shall be enjoying airport views and the spectacular golden depths of franka stone quarries. A number of exhausted quarries have now been converted into construction and demolition storage sites.

Your first stop is the stone cross standing at the centre of Church Square opposite the church main door. This square has an irregular shape and gets wider as one approaches St. Mary Band Club, the place nearest to the cross.

The fulcrum of activity here is the magnificent church building and the cross itself commemorating the death of the former parish priest Dun Angelo Mallia. He was in office between 1676 and 1690, a very difficult period during which the building of the Parish Church was completed (1689) by Mario and John Mary Briffa (father and son respectively).

Facing St. Mary Band Club take the narrow street to the left, that is *Triq il-Karmnu* to *Triq Valletta* where we get into the hustle and bustle of school life, if you happen by at the time school starts. From there take a right turn and by following your sense of smell and taking a left turn you should make it towards the village bakery, in *Triq*



Stone Cross in Church Square





Mqabba Primary School (Main Hall Entrance)

it-Torri Vincenti. This street takes you towards the fence of the runway of the Malta International Airport.

The amazing Vincenti Tower, for which the street is named, is located in *Ta' l-Isqof* (of the Archbishop) between



Vincenti Tower (present state)



Statue in niche dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel

the area popularly known as *Tax-Xantin* and *Hal Farruġ*. According to hearsay, when the weather was fine and visibility was good, our ancestors used to see the island of Sicily from the very top of the original tower. Near this tower, separated by a large beautiful garden, there is an elegant palace that used to serve as a club. These two examples of franka stone

architecture were erected in 1726 by a certain Prior Orfeo de Vincenzo during the reign of Grand Master Vilhena, according to an engraved scripture beneath the coat of arms of the founder. The original tower stood four stories high with a flat roof and was built on a square shaped room. An external staircase was the only means of access to the first floor and an interior spiral staircase led to the basement. It appears that the other levels were accessible by means of an iron or wooden ladder. The tower had a beautiful balcony running all around it at the second level and a small one overlooking the beautiful private garden. During the Second World War, on the 2nd June 1941, the tower was requisitioned for “defence” purposes by the English army for a sum of Lm18. The requisition order was served on a certain Mr William John England, who at that time was the owner, and the payment was eventually effected by the War Department. The tower served as an Observation



Vincenti Tower (original building)



Niche of St Paul in the Tower Residence

Post by the section of the 59th Light Ack-Ack Battery forming part of the 7th Light Ack-Ack Regiment. A bomb hit the Mqabba Parish Church on the 9th April, 1942, however the tower went through the same fate three days later. In this unfortunate incident the lower parts suffered extensive damage, though



the tower courageously stood ground. However the Royal Air Force decided that the tower had to be dismantled, as its height probably hindered airport operations during war. Dismantling works were carried out over a few days and now only the lowest parts of the building exist.

The tower residence is as interesting as the tower itself featuring a niche of St Paul.

Proceed by taking a rural road to the right and again the rugged road on the right as to make way towards the quarries at *Ta' l-Isqof*. The area, indeed used to be owned by the Archbishop's Curia, and thus the name *Ta' l-Isqof* (of the Archbishop). From this spot enjoy views of the Malta International Airport runway



Globigerina Limestone active quarry at Ta' l-Isqof

and also the quarrying and stone cutting activities several metres below, in the still operating quarries at *Ta' l-Isqof* and further on at *Tar-Robba*. This footpath should lead you towards the Government district office owned by the Works Division at *Tar-Robba*. Along the way take time to absorb and assess the two different and separate activities: the Malta International Airport on your left directly contributing towards the tourism

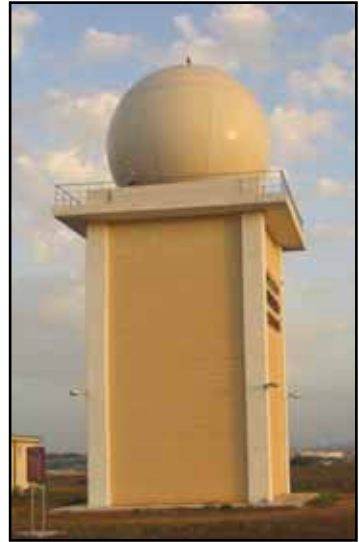


Exhausted quarry with building at the background

industry, and the quarrying operations on your right contributing towards the industry of construction, a leading industry on our islands. Tourism and the construction industry are two major economy contributors in Malta and Gozo. One may therefore attempt to compare and



*Airport Radar flanked
by an aircraft*



The Weather Tower

contrast the two hubs of activities standing so close to each other. The airport provides essential services to all tourists arriving in Malta. On the other hand most of the best quality globigerina stone used in the construction industry across the island comes from quarries found in this village. The quarries operating hours are normally from 5:00 am to 1:00 pm in winter, while in summer the circular saws start whizzing at the limestone even earlier until 11:00 am when the sizzling heat makes working conditions at the bottom of the quarries unbearable. The Malta International Airport is a company employing hundreds of workers, whereas the quarries are manned by three or four hard working



Airport Control Tower





Dry Stone Walls in the making

pair of hands. Another major difference is the altitude in which workers operate. Those in the Control Room or the Radar building, work in buildings high above the ground, while quarry workers are only a few metres above sea level.

As you approach the end of the footpath, you can appreciate better the change of use of exhausted quarries, as some of them are turned into screed producing sites, batching plants, brick-making factories and storage sites for stockpiling their aggregate such as sand.

These sites are now the quarters for a factory producing large blocks of rubble stone embedded in concrete used to build walls, marble factory, and also a factory where stone turners specialise in balustrades, stone



Control, check point at dawn

carving, etc. A few paces ahead you will again find yourself on a tarmac road and at the roundabout in the vicinity of the water reservoir of the village of Hal Kirkop. Take the road to Żurrieq, taking good care to



Government's Works Division Offices at Tar-Robba



An active quarry in Valletta Road



cross safely to the other side of the roundabout at this busy junction.

This arterial road leading to Żurrieq enables you to look onto another operating quarry within the Mqabba boundaries, known as *Tal-Froxx*. On the right hand side, rows of mature aleppo pine trees separate Valletta



Rows of newly planted peach trees in a reclaimed field at tal-Froxx

Road (Żurrieq) from the quarries below. If you walk underneath these trees, you should enjoy views of the voids below and observe



Exhausted quarries being transformed into fertile agricultural land

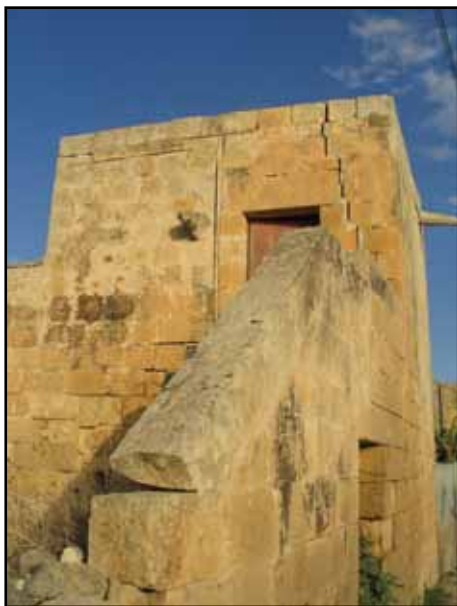
the busy movements of lorries going up and down the quarries transporting tons of globigerina limestone blocks, the only natural resource the island possesses.

Following the road towards Żurrieq note the newly reclaimed fields enclosed by rubble walls. These fields are the result of used-up quarries, now filled with construction waste and converted into fertile agriculture land, yielding produce, such as potatoes, onions, and fruit. The first building you spot at Żurrieq is the petrol station on your



Fountain at Żurrieq entrance

right. Walk right up to the water display roundabout and take the second road to the right leading towards Mqabba, through a narrow country lane. Route signs showing the way to the now extinct village of Hal Millieri should be of assistance. Keep walking and enjoy the flora until you draw closer to the village of Mqabba. One may note the roundel carvings of a farmhouse wall, perched over the narrow winding rural road. From now on make your way towards Mqabba Parish Church by taking the right turn as we arrive at the Qrendi roundabout which normally flies the Qrendi flag. This route takes



Roundel Carvings within the construction of the old farmhouse which may have been saved from a previous dilapidated building



A beautifully converted farmhouse at the quiet area in Tat-Torba



us straight on along *Triq il-Qrendi* with our last stop at the Catacombs of *Tal-Mentna* in Diamond Jubilee Sqaure.

To your right, three separate entrances lead to the Tombs, which were found by Dr Annetto Caruana and Capt Strickland in 1860, in the southern part of



A rare sight of the intact Agape Table (altar of celebration) in one of the tombs at Tal-Mentna

Mqabba. Archaeologist David Trump speaks highly of these fine works. Similar tombs were found in 1960 at *Ta' Kandja* when works were being carried out on the extension of the airport runway. On these findings, David Trump wrote the following: *“Across the lane towards Mqabba an early Christian catacomb was found when the main airport runway was extended in 1960. It could not be preserved – there were obvious difficulties to diverting the runway round it. Visitors will be amazed to learn that they have been within a few feet of a site even before they step out of their plane”*. *D.H. Trump Malta: An Archeological Guide, 1989.*

The most important archaeological elements in *Tal-Mentna* Catacombs are the designs engraved in rock with the round ones in the form of a compass. The entrance consisted of six steps with a Greek cross engraved on the ceiling. In an analysis that was conducted on this site, these designs were found out to be unique in Paleo-Christian era. It is interesting to note the vicinity of this site to the Wilga Tower and the roundel carvings that are scattered all over the island especially in the Żurrieq and Hal Millieri area. In this place, another tomb was found containing punic artefacts and the skeleton of a human baby.

The walk comes to an end by proceeding along *Triq Santa Katerina* towards the Church Square, where one may rest a while in the bus shelter awaiting the No 35 or 38 bus, to Valletta.

Operating and Exhausted Quarries at *Sejba* and *Sqaq Buħar*

The fourth and last walk also starts at Church Square. Walk in the direction of the buildings of the two main political party clubs. In fact, there is a large bus shelter just outside the Malta Labour Party Club in Church Square corner with *Triq Karmenu Ciantar*. Karmenu Ciantar was a leading politician and, to the Mqabba people, synonymous with the Malta Labour Party (MLP). The newly built MLP Club is two storeys high, featuring marvellous works in *franka* stone. As you walk in the direction of *Triq Santa Katerina*,



The Malta Labour Party Club



The Nationalist Party Club

the street opposite the clock tower of the Parish Church, you come across another political party club. The Nationalist Party Club occupies the space in *Pjazza tal-Knisja* corner with *Triq Santa Katerina*. Adjacent to this club is Our Lady of Lily Band Club, with a highly decorated façade.

Keep walking along *Triq Santa Katerina* for about 250 metres turn to the right along *Triq il-Mithna* and keep walking towards a small squarish garden surrounded by four residential roads, in *Il-Missjoni ż-Żghira* Square. This garden was re-constructed by the



Missjoni ż-Żgħira Garden

government in February 2005, as part of it had subsided. It is located in an exhausted quarry which was eventually back-filled with construction and demolition waste. Unfortunately, in time, the debris settled down to more than one metre below the original road level.

Opposite this garden, one can enjoy a view of the Mqabba Football Club with the village of Siġġiewi and the *Tas-Salib ta' l-Għolja* hill, Laferla Cross in the background. The Mqabba Football Nursery attracts boys and teenagers like a magnet. Young people from Mqabba as well as from nearby villages now proudly play football on the synthetic turf pitch laid down in February 2005.

Follow the tarmac road on your right along *Triq il-Madonna tal-Ġilju* towards the Bank of Valletta and return to the Mqabba Parish Church in the Church square. As you approach the square, turn left into a short and very narrow stretch of road, named *Triq id-Duluri* towards a small chapel.

The origins of the small chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows, take us back in time to the 16th century. At first it was dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, but for some reason, in 1680 it had to be rebuilt. The patronage (Gus Patronat) of this chapel passed on to Dr Giovanni Schembri who at that time was an assessor of the church authorities.

He invested his interest in this building by means of a number of initiatives, such as the building of a parvis, an embellishment scheme consisting of the planting of trees and the erection of a belfry. Subsequently, this patronage passed on to Mons Paolo Pullicino. At that time Mons Pullicino was a great personality



Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel

in Malta and very much renowned for developments in the primary education sector. However, the quiet prayers quickly evolved into a yearly feast in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows with the ringing of bells and street decorations during the feast celebrations taking place in September. This feast was marked for the free distribution of bread to the poor of the village who were numerous at that time.

For a number of years an old corner house just outside the parvis of Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel has been let by private parties to Central



Mqabba Local Council Building

Government. This building now houses the Mqabba Local Council, the Public Library, the Police Station and the Mqabba Government Clinic, a sort of one-stop shop premises. In the past, the rooms on each side of the courtyard used to serve an array of purposes providing services very different from those we know today. The upper floor, which is now used by the Mqabba Local Council, was a dormitory for those policemen who preferred to have a night's rest there to avoid walking back to work early the following morning.



However, this building served other purposes from time to time. It is said that it was used temporarily by the Central Government whenever it embarked on large infrastructural projects in the area, such as the introduction of electricity for Maltese residents. At that time the two rooms now serving as the Government Clinic were used as temporary offices for personnel carrying out duties connected to the installation of electricity lines and house service. The Police Station offices were also used by different auxiliary corps set up by the Government from time to time.

Continue walking towards St. Basil Chapel the oldest chapel of Mqabba, using the pedestrian part of the road in *Triq il-Parroċċa* that leads you back to the main door of Mqabba Parish Church with the statue of St Roque facing you as soon as you emerge into the square. At the point where the stone cross is visible, take the left hand road towards



Main entrance of the Parish Church

Triq San Bażilju. While walking along this street, one can enjoy the stone structure of the Parish Church from a different angle until one comes to a small square with the interesting building that pertains to the Church authorities – the Youth Centre.



The Youth Centre

You can admire the statue of St Joseph in a niche at the very corner of a beautiful



An Ivy covered façade of an old remissa

house situated in front of another house of character, the façade of which is hidden by a large creeper plant.

Keep going towards the parvis of the Chapels of St Basil and St Michael, fenced with iron railings.

The Chapel of St Basil is older than the Parish Church itself. In fact it is one of the oldest on the islands. It was first built in the fifteenth century and was smaller that it is now. However in 1515 according



Chapels of St Basil and St Michael



St Joseph Niche at the corner of an old house

to the year marked on the main (titular) painting, the chapel was enlarged. From the beginning, the chapel was of great importance to Mqabba. In fact when it was visited by Mons Duzina in 1575, he declared that it was the biggest chapel in Mqabba. It had everything, including wooden doors and an altar



with an overhanging main picture. It was taken care of by a priest. When Archbishop Molina visited it in 1680, he referred to it as the main church of Mqabba and said that it was in the heart of the Mqabba people.

The chapel is constructed on a series of pointed arches that reveal older structures. The main picture, although of no artistic value, is very old. It features God, St Joseph, Our Lady with Jesus, and the poor souls together with St Basil and St Roque, the patron saint associated with the pestilence. Quite a good number of victims of this epidemic were buried in the vicinity when the Black Death struck Malta long ago. The year 1515 inscribed on this picture, marks the blessing of St Basil's Church.

The interesting lateral altar also found in St Basil's Church together with the bench found just outside the chapel, within the parvis, shed light on the historical importance of this church. The parvis served for burial purposes and in 1778 a monument was erected in memory of the poor souls.



*Our Lady of Sorrows
statue in niche*

Adjacent to St Basil's, another chapel was built. This is dedicated to St Michael the Archangel and its origins date back to the sixteenth century. The details of the façade of this chapel are very intriguing as they reveal the antiquity of the building. The window just above the front door is in the shape of a flower and is in itself a major work of art. The style of this church is totally different from that of the chapel dedicated to St Basil. The year 1669 shown on the main picture represents the year in which the chapel was built. St. Basil and St. Michael chapels were restored by the Government in 2007 and now show their original beauty.

As you continue walking along the narrow winding *Triq San Bazilju* towards *Triq il-Langasa*, admiring the paving works

in this old part of the village and also the old houses, you will be able to spot two niches one dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows and the other to St Michael the Archangel. Take a right turn to emerge into the busier *Triq Valletta* which used to be the main road of Mqabba before the bypass (now *Triq il-Konvoj ta' Santa Marija*) was constructed.

Here we encounter an interesting one storey house with a prominent niche on top dedicated to St Joseph. A particular archway is also a major attraction in this part of *Triq Valletta*. Its massive walls have for years kept the structure standing, becoming

a stand-alone monument. Keep walking until you come to a major intersecting road. This is the junction where *Triq Valletta* meets *Triq il-Konvoj ta' Santa Marija*. However proceed along the narrow road to the left, this is *Triq Valletta l-Qadima*, leading you to



Another beautiful paved alley



*Statue of St Joseph
on a one storey building*



Arch in Valletta Road





Roudabout flying the Mqabba flag

the quarries at tar-*Robba*. Here, you should take a close look at the now spent quarries converted into sites for the making of concrete, bricks and other construction products used in this kind of industry. A stone turner in a garage is usually busy making balustrades and other decorative works made of globigerina stone. As you walk along this area dominated by quarry



One of the first cranes in Malta



Quarries in Ta' l-Isqof



Stone turner with the material used surrounding its place

activities, keep an eye on moving lorries as the road is quite narrow.

At the end of the road, you can clearly see aircrafts busily taking off and landing at the Malta International Airport. Aircraft enthusiasts would appreciate a good peep through the fence, where the Malta International Airport fuel station is.

Go round a farm, retracing your steps to *Triq Valletta*, with Aleppo pines arching over it and work your way back towards the village by taking a right turn. Soon you should find yourself in front of a factory specialising in stone turning and architecture work. Most of the artistic



Mile stone



The Government Quarry in Tar-Robba



Main entrance to Mqabba



*Stone turning factory in
Valletta Road Mqabba*



figures including those removed from old building are certain to attract your attention. Very soon you can spot a cobbled stone hut on your left and in five minutes time you will be at the same junction

encountered when accessing *Triq Valletta l-Qadima* where the Mqabba Local Council flagstaff is planted in a traffic island.

At this point turn left into *Triq Konvoj ta' Santa Marija* and make your way into this busy road.



*Cobbled hut in Valletta Road
flanked by rows of olive trees*

During the two major feasts of Mqabba, dedicated to Our Lady of Lilies and to the Assumption of St Mary, hundreds of people pack this road, to enjoy the shimmering colourful petards putting on a spectacular fireworks display in the dark skies. Mqabba is renowned for fireworks and the exquisite colour ones are designed to go off according to the accompanying music. Nowadays this is done with the aid of sophisticated computer programs connected to the numerous pipes from where the shells take off. At the time of



The fertile lowlands of Mqabba

year when the feasts are celebrated, the fields are barren and farmers allow the musical society members to drive lorries through their fields, carrying the petards that are made every year to honour Our Lady under the two different titles.

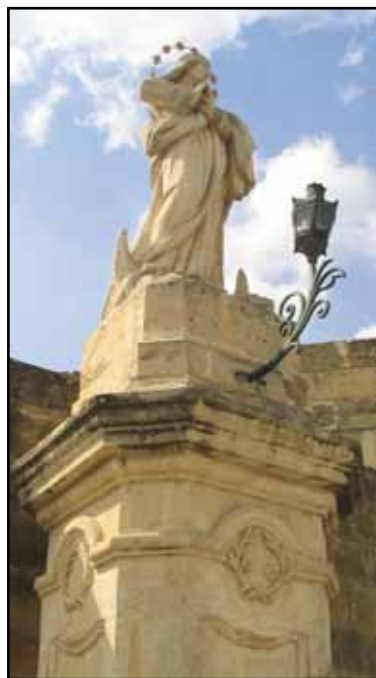
The fireworks factories

are sited near *Ta' Kandja*. Along the years, unfortunately, destiny took the lives of a number of fireworks enthusiasts. However, fireworks remain a major attraction in our feasts as can be witnessed every year



Mqabba's open reservoir (soakpit)

when hundreds of people throng the roads around the village to enjoy these activities.



Statue of the Immaculate Conception in Diamond Jubilee Square

Proceed through *Triq Konvoj ta' Santa Marija* until the roundabout in *Pjazza Ġublew tad-Djamanti*, where two statues stand on a stone pedestal. One of the statues is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, and was restored by the Musical Society of Our Lady of the Lily. From here make your way to *Triq tas-Sejba* minding the traffic that uses this road on its way to the nearby village of Siggiewi. This road is literally constructed on spent quarries; some of them are still being restored by importing top soil on top of construction and demolition waste that was deposited on the sites. The Mqabba Local Council invested a substantial sum to construct parts of the road, to render



*Citrus trees
in a sheltered
exhausted
quarry*



it fit for industrial purposes, as it takes up most of the traffic from the village core.

Further down the road a chimney emerges from behind third party walls, going down into another spent quarry now producing bitumen for road construction. At the bend, take a right turn into *Triq Hal Farruġ* from where you will be able to look on your left down upon deep sheltered citrus orchards in another spent quarry that was restored into an agricultural area. As the road widens on your left you will be able



The remains of Wilga Tower

to spot the remains of the *Wilga* Tower.

Onsite, the remains of a 3rd Century Roman Tower, were excavated by Ashby in 1908. This tower, similar to others like *Ta' Ġawhar* has a diameter of not more than eight metres and is constructed of



Tax-Xantin operating exhausted and operating quarries with the Primary School and the Mqabba Parish Church as background

massive stones of 1.5 metre thickness. It is believed that such towers were built for signalling purposes against the enemy.

Retrace your steps back in *Triq Hal Farruġ* and again in *Triq tas-Sejba*, walk up to the industrial garages and turn left to *Triq Siggiewi* until the statue of St Michael the Archangel comes into view. This niche is at a small junction protruding from a corner of a very old building. Then walk straight along what appears to be an alley called *Sqaq Buħar* winding to and fro amongst spent quarries placed at the end of the runway of the Malta International Airport.

This rural passageway leads you to the area called *tax-Xantin*, behind the Mqabba Primary School. This path would lead you back to an asphalt road towards the Vincenti Tower and into *Triq Valletta*. To complete your fourth and last walk, make your way to the right until the school comes into view and then take a left turn into *Triq il-Karmnu* which would lead you back to *Pjazza tal-Knisja*.





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MQABBA

Malta

'Non Nisi Per Ardua'