

Hal Tarxien

FOUR WALKS IN A VILLAGE OF CULTURE

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Tarxien Local Council

Il-Kastell
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Introduction | Brief History of Tarxien

by Joseph A. Farrugia

One may wonder what the word “Tarxien” (pronounced *tar-shin*) means. Other towns or villages in Malta have taken their title from names or surnames of some person who was the first one to build a habitation in that place, like Hal Kirkop, Hal Ghaxaq and Hal Balzan. The prefix *Hal* is short for *rahal* which means “the village of”. Many scholars have given their version of the derivation of the word “Tarxien”. Two scholars who have offered an explanation are E.B. Vella and Erin Serracino Inglott. E.B. Vella wrote that “Tarxien” is the plural of the word *tirxa*, “a big stone” while Erin Serracino Inglott gave the meaning of “Tarxien” as “a plateau that rises slowly from the sea”.

From excavations carried out during the last two centuries, we know that this locality has been inhabited for more than five thousand years. This is proved by the presence of the Megalithic Temples, the Hypogeum and the Kordin Temples found within the area that used to pertain to the Tarxien boundaries. Tombs dating back to Phoenician and Roman times have also been found in the area. This place was on



Painting of Tarxien Landscape by Girolamo Gianni, 1837 - 1895 (National Museum of Fine Arts)



Bir Miftuh Chapel

the way between Marsaxlokk (*Porto Melkart*) and Birgu, and on the way to Mdina.

In the Militia List of 1419 we find the names of 18 male persons between the ages of 16 and 65 from Mitarxen (that is Tarxien), four of whom were rich enough to own a horse, and to have it prepared in case of invasion by corsairs at the time.

When in 1436 Bishop De Mello divided Malta into 10 parishes, Tarxien was put under the matrix church of Birmiftuh.

We know from a protest that was sent to the Viceroy in Sicily in 1436, that at that time there was also a Council, which represented the people of Tarxien in their grievance against the Lord of Castello a Mare (Birgu).

Later on, in 1541 we find recorded that there was a tavern (*Dar iż-Żinzillin*) which was not only frequented by the locals but also patronised by people going through Tarxien as they travelled between Żejtun and Mdina or to Birgu.

Before the start of the Great Siege of 1565 the old people, women and children of Tarxien were ordered to leave their homes and to seek shelter behind the bastions of Senglea while the men between the ages of 16 and 65, who were enlisted in the militia, were sent to Mdina to join the garrison of that city. Later on, during the Great Siege, however, they were given orders to proceed to Senglea to strengthen the defending forces there. The Turks used the deserted houses of Tarxien to billet and provision their soldiers.

In a census compiled in 1575 by the Apostolic Delegate Mons. Pietro Dusina it was stated that in Tarxien there were 100 houses. At that time, Tarxien was also called “The Village of St John” (*casalis San Giovanni*) because of a small chapel (*San Ġwann t’Għuxa*) found within its boundaries. Also, at that time in this locality, there were 10 rural chapels, three of which were dedicated to St Nicholas, one to St Andrew, one to the Assumption of Mary, one to St Luke, one to St Paul, one to St John the Almoner, one to St Leonard and one to the Annunciation of Our Lady. The chapels dedicated to St Luke, St Paul and St Nicholas were grouped together in the market place or *misraħ*.

On the 29th May 1592, Bishop Thomas Gargallo declared Tarxien as a parish in its own right. Between 1610 and 1636, the new parish church was completely built in the centre of the village, called the Market Place, where the previously mentioned group of three small chapels stood. Later, in 1709, the church was enlarged and in 1782 it was consecrated. The parish church is dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady, in whose honour the people of Tarxien still celebrate a feast every year in late May.



Part of Tarxien Temples

When Tarxien was made a parish in 1592, its boundaries extended to those of Żejtun (Tal-Barrani and Bulebel estates), those of Birgu up to Santa Margerita Bastions and up to the Marsa Cross (with Valletta and Qormi).

When in 1626 Grand Master de Paule built the small church of Santa Ubaldesca, he proclaimed that the land called *tal-Gherien*, part of Corradino Heights and the surrounding lands were to be called “Casale Paola” after him. All these lands were within the boundaries of Tarxien. Because of the stagnant water in parts of Marsa, this new town (called by the Maltese, *Raħal Ġdid*) took a long time to grow. In fact it was only after the British government drained that part of Marsa where there was stagnant water, built new docks at the Cottonera and opened the tunnel at Ghajn Dwieli that the country town of Paola attracted a large population so that by 1910 it was made a parish on its own.

During the French Blockade (1798 - 1800), Tarxien had two batteries facing the French locked within the Cottonera Lines. One of these was on the heights of Corradino Hill and the other on Tal-Borġ Hill, the latter being under the command of the Tarxien patriot Ġuzeppi Montebello. The people of Tarxien had to provide food and to pay the wages of all the soldiers in those two batteries. At one time the more prosperous villagers of Tarxien had to mortgage their land and the cotton crop to be able to import food from Sicily for the soldiers and the people of Tarxien. Fr Joseph Grech, vice parish priest of Tarxien, was sent over to Palermo to see the deal through. The Tarxien people repeatedly faced starvation during those two years.

By 1859 a school was opened for the boys and girls of Tarxien. In 1889 an elementary school was opened at Tarxien in which the English language was taught for the first time. Besides this school, the boys and girls of Tarxien were educated in two or three large buildings found in the village. In 1902 the Sisters of Charity also opened a school for young girls, while Fr John Mamo opened the first technical school for boys at Tarxien after 1912. In 1961 a new school, large enough to take all the boys and girls of Tarxien of primary and secondary age, was built. It still functions as such today.

During World War II many houses in Tarxien were destroyed through enemy action. During those years soldiers were billeted in large houses in Tarxien and Palazzo Abela was used as the headquarters of the regiments in the surrounding area. The records show that 63 residents of Tarxien were killed by enemy action during the war. In 1992, the then Civic Council, set up in 1964 on the initiative of Joseph Scicluna and the Rev. (later Mgr) Carmelo Sant erected a Monument to the War Dead in front of Villa Lefevre.

In 1966 the St Mary Street Playing Field was opened on the initiative of the Civic Council. The Local Council has recently refurbished it.

In 1974 the Joanne Gardens were laid and inaugurated. Some years ago the Local Council upgraded this public garden.

There are also two football grounds that are both surfaced with synthetic turf. The Local Council, on the initiative of the Mayor of Tarxien, Mr P. Farrugia, constructed one of these and inaugurated it on the 25th April 2004. The other was built on the initiative of the Tarxien Rainbows, which is the local football team. Originally it was called 'Little Rainbows Football Club' and was set up over fifty years ago.

Tarxien also has its local band club, which was founded way back in 1862. It is called 'Ghaqda Muzikali Marija Annunzjata, Tarxien 1862'. This band club takes part not only in the local annual feast but also in festivities held in other villages. There is also a Boċċi Club with its pitch.

In Tarxien one can also find Catholic organisations such as the Catholic Action, Legion of Mary, the Charismatic Group, youth groups and M.U.S.E.U.M. centre which are mainly responsible for the teaching of Christian doctrine in the village. There is also the parish choir, which is called 'Magnificat' and a local Pageant Group. The *Kumitat tal-Festa* organises the local feast and is in charge of the street decorations. The *Ghaqda tan-Nar San Gabriel* organises all the fireworks displays that are held during the days of the local feast. The *Ghaqda tal-Armar Marija Annunzjata* organises street pageants during Christmas and Easter time. It also takes part in the Carnival activities and is very active in setting up the decorations in some of the streets during the village feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady.



Tarxien has its Local Council elected every three years. It consists of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, together with five Councillors. One finds also a Community Centre that, amongst others, houses a public lending library and adult education facilities. Another organisation under the responsibility of the Local Council is the Tarxien Youth Forum.

After the last war all the surrounding fields were built up and two new parishes, that of Fgura and that of Santa Lucija, were erected as parishes on their own and cut off from the boundaries of Tarxien.

Nowadays the population of Tarxien stands at approximately 8000 persons. These last fifty years have seen great changes in the way the Tarxien population lived: from a rural and agricultural population, it has changed to a semi-industrial and clerical one due mainly to the Dockyard at the Cottonera and the setting up of the adjacent Bulebel and Marsa Industrial Estates.

Going to Tarxien

Bus numbers 8, 11, 13, 27 and 29 pass through Tarxien.

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Walk No. 1 (Approx. duration 1 hr)

To Tarxien Temples

by Alfred Massa

Starting our walk from *Triq Lampuka* (Lampuka Street), we see the large building of the priory of the Augustinian Friars, who came to Tarxien in 1948. Attached to the priory is the church dedicated to St Nicholas of Tolentino run by the Augustinians themselves. The foundation stone of this church was laid in 1967.

Round the corner there is St Rita's Home for orphans and children in care. This Home is run by the Ursuline Sisters.

Next to the Home stands the Augustinian Oratory, a place where youths and elderly meet to enjoy some peace, rest and recreation. In

*St Rita Home and
Oratory*



the past the whole block served as a trade school for youngsters under the supervision of Fr (*Dun*) Ġwann Mamo (1878–1935). However, Fr Mamo left it to the Augustinian Friars. During World War II it served as the headquarters of the local civil defence corps, then known as the A.R.P. (Air Raid Precaution). Between 1956 and 1962, Fr Hilary Tagliaferro OSA changed the place into a Youth Centre. Later on the same building served also as a College for secondary school students.

In *Triq l-Iskola* (School Street) still stands what was originally a Government Primary School built by the British administration in 1889 expressly for the teaching of the English language. During the war it was converted into a First Aid Post for treating casualties. Nowadays, this school is a kindergarten.

Walking further down we come to *Triq Hal Tarxien* (Tarxien Road). Opposite School Street, there is the convent of the Sisters of Charity, an order founded by the French nun Sr. Giovanna Antida Thouret in 1799. This congregation came to Malta in 1868 and in 1902 opened a House at Tarxien. It was called *Casa dell'Immacolata*. In 1949 the congregation opened a school for young girls and in the fifties both convent and school were renovated. Thus 'The Immaculate Conception High School' came into being as a Primary and Secondary school for girls.

Coat of Arms on school façade





Chapel dedicated to St Joseph

Next to the convent there is the chaplain's house and a chapel dedicated to St Joseph built by Mons. Francis Caruana in 1874.

Further up on the other side of the same street there is *Id-Dar ta' Aspinall* (Aspinall's House) with two columns flanking the main door. Mr. James Aspinall, an English entrepreneur, was co-founder of the

Society for the Arts, Manufacture and Commerce. He died in 1874 and is buried in Tarxien parish church.

Between *Triq Santa Marija* (St Mary Street) and *Triq Pawla* (Paola Road) stands a monument in remembrance of those Tarxien victims who died during the Second World War. The Tarxien Civic Council President, Mr. Joe Scicluna, inaugurated this monument on the 15th March 1992. The monument, in bronze and marble, is a work of art by Chev. Alfred Camilleri Cauchi, O.R.C.B.



Dar Aspinall

Behind this monument lies Villa le Fevrè, an 18th century house built in the baroque style. In the past, this building housed primary school children with historian and educator E.B. Vella being one of its head teachers.

In *Triq Santa Marija* (St Mary Street) still stands the house (number 31) where Mgr. Professor Carmel Sant (1921–1992) once lived. He was a Biblical scholar and well versed in oriental languages. For some years, Mgr. Sant also occupied the Chair of Maltese at the University of Malta.

Before entering *Triq it-Tempji Neolitici* (Neolithic Temples Street) we see a replica of the Dejma Cross erected here in 1992. Walking through Neolithic Temples Street we come to the megalithic temples from which the street's name is obviously derived. At the beginning of the twentieth century a local farmer by the name of Wenzu Despott



War Victims' Memorial



Villa le Fevrè



Part of Tarxien Temples

uncovered what he thought were boulders of rock while working in his field. He told Ninu Cremona, the well known Maltese grammarian and poet, who at that time was working here at Tarxien as a sanitary inspector, of the difficulties he was finding when ploughing his field. Ninu Cremona in turn invited Dr (later Sir) Temi Zammit who was an archeologist and Head of the Museums Department to go over to see for himself what Wenzu was complaining about. After digging a trench Dr Zammit immediately realized that the site was one of great archeological importance. That was in 1912 but it was not until 1915 that excavations were taken in hand under the supervision of Dr Zammit himself. The excavations soon showed that in that field lay the remains of a megalithic temple like those at Ġgantija and Haġar Qim that date back some 5000 years (Stone Age).

It seems that those people adored the goddess of fertility. Later on Dr T. Zammit came to the conclusion that there was more than one temple to be excavated at that site. This discovery became known throughout the world and put Tarxien on the world's archeological map. Famous archeologists were deeply interested by Dr T. Zammit's find which

proved to be a key site in distinguishing various prehistoric phases in the archeology of the Maltese islands and even gave its name to the final phase of the Copper Age when the temple culture in Malta entered its most flourishing period. As such, these temples can be considered as one of the main archeological monuments on the island of Malta. Prominent archeologists like Luigi Maria Ugolini, J.D. Evans and D.H. Trump studied and continued to excavate these temples. The Tarxien complex consists of three connecting temples with a fourth near the eastern temple. The three temples are interconnected by passages and are enclosed by the same surrounding wall. There are also the scattered remains of an older fourth temple; in fact, they are the last vestiges of its existence. Apart from a colossal statue, of which there remains only the lower portion, the complex has produced valuable stone slabs decorated with reliefs of geometric motifs or series of animals. Most of the items retrieved from these temples are now housed in the Museum of Archeology in Valletta. A visit to that museum is highly recommended.

Next to the Temples, there is the village cemetery. Its origins go back to the times when Malta was struck by the deadly plague (1675). In the past a small chapel within the precincts was dedicated to Our Lady and the Souls in Purgatory, from which the local name *Tal-Erwieħ* (Souls) is derived. Some years ago, the chapel was rebuilt on a larger scale and in a modern architectural style on a plan by Italian architect Mgr. Valerio Vigorelli and is dedicated to the Risen Christ. The cemetery was also extended.

The building facing the Tarxien Temples is the M.U.S.E.U.M. centre, the place where boys and youngsters attend to receive instruction in the Catholic faith. St Ġorġ Preca laid the foundation stone of this building in 1949. At one time the premises housed St John's School for students intending to sit for the entrance examination as apprentices to what used to be the Malta Dockyard.

Through the Village Core (1)

by Joseph A. Farrugia

Starting from *Triq Santa Marija* (St Mary Street), on our left we come across the Tarxien Playing Field that was inaugurated by the Civic Council in 1966. Recently a stone statue of the Annunciation of Our Lady was inaugurated in a part of this Playing Field to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the titular statue. During these last four years most of the Playing Field has been renovated. The Tarxien Local Council, under the Mayor Paul Farrugia, constructed a new five-a-side synthetic football ground and refurbished part of it.

After a walk of a hundred metres or so, we come to a large villa, which is now called 'Villa Tarxien', formerly known as Villa Dunalistair. This villa is built on the highest spot of Tarxien. In its grounds there are the remains of a tower, built

Playing Field and Football ground

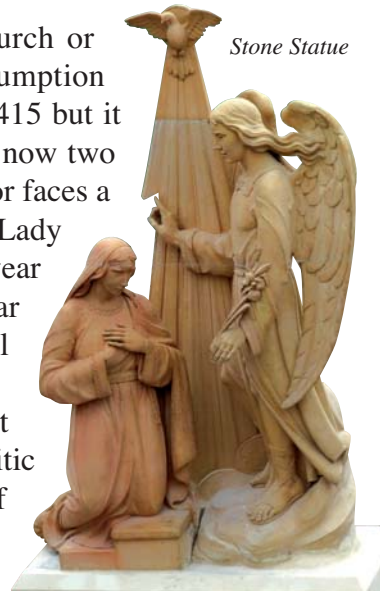


before 1691, from where the local Militia (then known as *id-Dejma*) used to mount watches against any landing by the Barbary corsairs or an invasion by the Ottoman forces, especially from Marsaxlokk, as from that tower in those days one could see as far as Gudja and the Cottonera bastions. After having different owners, this villa is now the property of the Stubbs family and is used as their residence. It is a large villa with different rooms and halls. In the garden there is even a swimming pool. It is very well kept.

Further on we come to a small church or chapel which is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady. Its origin dates back to 1415 but it was completely rebuilt in 1909. It has now two belfries, a larger dome and the main door faces a small square. A feast in honour of Our Lady of the Assumption is celebrated every year in mid-August. The artist Rocco Buhagiar executed the titular painting of this chapel in 1771.

From this chapel onwards, this part of Tarxien is called *Wara l-Bjut* (Semitic for 'Behind the Houses'). It is one of

Villa Tarxien



Stone Statue



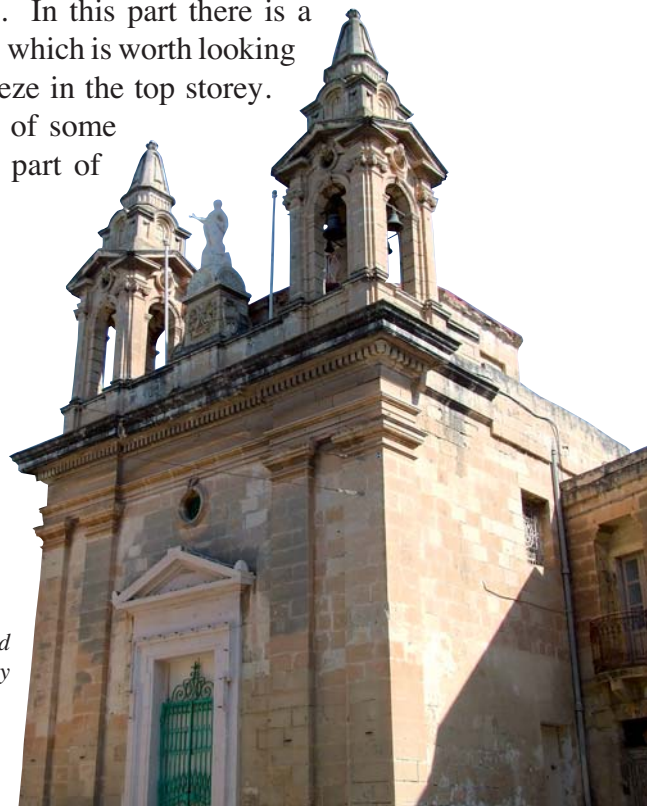
Part of the area called 'Wara l-Bjut'.

the oldest parts of Tarxien. In this part there is a house called 'Ta' Manduca' which is worth looking at. It has a fleurs-de-lys frieze in the top storey. Its architecture reminds us of some buildings found in the old part of

Dar ta' Manduca



Chapel dedicated to St Mary



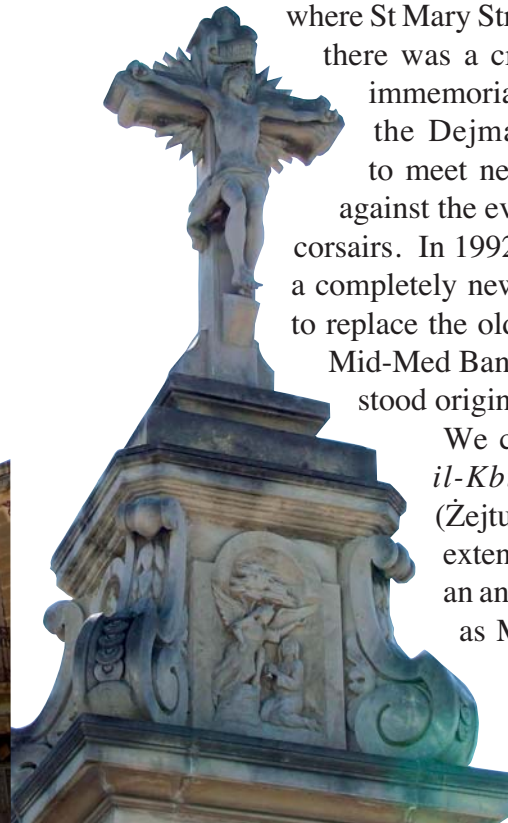
Birgu. On the windowsills of the top storey there is a fine example of what in architecture is called Melitan or triple roll moulding. Although it has been scheduled as an important house in 1994, it is still used to store animal fodder and urgently needs a thorough restoration.



Villa Barbaro

We leave St Mary Street and enter *Triq Dejma* (Dejma Road). It is so called because up to 1976 in the middle of the crossroad where St Mary Street, Żejtun Road and Dejma Road meet, there was a crucifix on a column which since time immemorial was called the Dejma Cross, because the Dejma soldiers (the Maltese militia) used to meet near it before going on patrol every day against the eventuality of an invasion by the Barbary corsairs. In 1992, on the initiative of the Civic Council, a completely new stone Crucifix on a column was built to replace the old one, with money donated by the then Mid-Med Bank, some 100 metres away from where it stood originally.

We come back and on the junction of *Triq il-Kbira* (Main Street) with *Triq Żejtun* (Żejtun Road) we find another large villa with extensive gardens built by the Barbaro family, an ancestor of whom was raised to the nobility as Marquis of St George by Grand Master



The Dejma Cross

De Rohan. One can notice its very large balcony and the coat of arms of the Barbaro family on the main door. For some two years during World War II, the Maltese Home Guard used its grounds for the training of the local Auxiliary soldiers. Today it is the residence of Prof. J. J. Cremona, formerly Chief Justice. Opposite the villa are the premises of the HSBC Tarxien branch, built in 1992.

Now we enter *Triq il-Kbira* (Main Street), known as *Strada Reale* before the last war. The first building on our left is Villa Cecy which is being refurbished. It was built in the art nouveau style in the 1930's by Dr Daniel Cecy, a popular medical doctor and for many years the president of the village band club. Dr Daniel Cecy was decorated three times by the French Government for his work with French citizens both civilian and military, during two World Wars and in times of peace. Behind the entrance hall there is a wide imposing staircase. There are several large rooms. Half of its extensive back garden was taken to build a bungalow and part of *Triq il-Knisja* (Church Street). It is a pity that it was abandoned for these last thirty years.

Next to Villa Cecy stands Palazzo Spadafora. This is an imposing house built by Monsignor Salvatore Lanzon in 1854. It used to have a large orange orchard at the back, but as happened with Villa Cecy, mentioned earlier, half of it was taken to make way for a bungalow



Villa Cecy



Palazzo Spadafora

and to open up Church Street. Its architectural style is eclectic. It has always been inhabited up to this day.

Further down this street we find Palazzo Abela, which was built as a country villa by Bishop Leonardo Abela in 1562. Leonardo Abela was appointed Bishop of Sidonia in 1582. He travelled extensively in the Middle East and was extremely familiar with a number of oriental languages such as Aramaic, Syriac, Chaldean and Coptic. He was sent there by Pope Gregory XIII mostly in an effort to bring back into the Catholic fold those Patriarchs who had formed a schism in the Catholic Church in the Middle East. Over the years the palazzo has been called by various names like 'Bowyer House' and 'Health Farm' but its proper name is



Palazzo Abela



Il-Kastell Wine Bar

Palazzo Abela. It was used as a school for many years and during the last war it served for a time as the British military headquarters of the South. It has spacious rooms and halls and it also includes a small chapel. Its once extensive grounds have now shrunk to a fraction of their original area; the fields surrounding the palazzo have had to make way for various buildings like a gymnasium and a conference room at the back and a guest house at the front. When Church Street was constructed it cut through the villa grounds for more than 100 metres in length. During the last few years the original part of the villa has been renovated with part of it, the coachhouse, being converted into a wine bar (named 'Il-Kastell Wine Bar').

In front of the palazzo stands the residence of the parish priest of Tarxien and a small church dedicated to Saint Bartholomew. The residence and the small church were built out of the money bequeathed by the Rev Bert Mangion. The small church was designed by the chief architect of the Order, Giuseppe Bonnici (1707-79). It was completed in 1776 and consecrated in 1797. One can consider this small church as an architectural gem in the baroque style. Its benefactor, the Rev Bert Mangion, is buried in the middle of this small church. The famous painter Rocco Buhagiar (1723 - 1805) executed the titular painting.

In one of the houses of this street the Sicilian exile of the Risorgimento, Francesco Crispi (1819-1901) might have lived for some time. Crispi



Marble Slab commemorating Francesco Crispi

re-entered Sicily as one of Garibaldi's Thousand and after the unification of Italy, occupied high posts in the government including that of Prime Minister (1887-90 and in 1894) of the unified kingdom of Italy.

Further on, there is a house called *Tal-Palma* because it had a conspicuous palm tree in its garden. When, in 1906, a new street was opened it was called *Triq Palma* (Palm Street) as a reminder of the palm tree that unfortunately had to be destroyed. In this house, back in 1765, the Tarxien parish priest of the time, the Rev Thomas Cyril Formosa, gathered the parish priests of Malta to submit a petition to the Bishop of that time, asking to be given the privilege to wear a cape. After some years of hard work by Father Formosa, the parish priests were granted this privilege.



Chapel dedicated to St Bartholomew

Brief Introduction to the Building of the present church

by Joseph A. Farrugia

For many years the people of Tarxien wanted to have a parish of their own as Birmiftuh, where their parish church was situated, lay some six kilometres away. It was only on the 29th May 1592 that Tarxien was made a parish in its own right by Bishop Gargallo. The people of Tarxien chose the patron saint of the largest and the best-kept chapel, that is, the Annunciation of Our Lady, to be the patron saint of the new parish. We do not know where this chapel was situated. The first parish priest was the Rev Sebastian Cuscusu. It was some time after 1610 that the building of the parish church commenced at the time of parish priest Ġann Paul Agius. It was built in the village central square (*Misraħ*) where the three chapels of St Luke, St Paul and St Nicholas stood and which had to be dismantled.

Five more rural chapels in other parts of Tarxien were also dismantled and their benefices were transferred to the new church. This church is one of the first churches to have two bell towers in the façade with two elongated stone pyramids on top and a flat dome. It is presumed that Vittorio Cassar was the architect. By 1636 it was completed, including the two front bell towers. At that time the population of Tarxien stood at 600 persons.

Façade of Parish Church

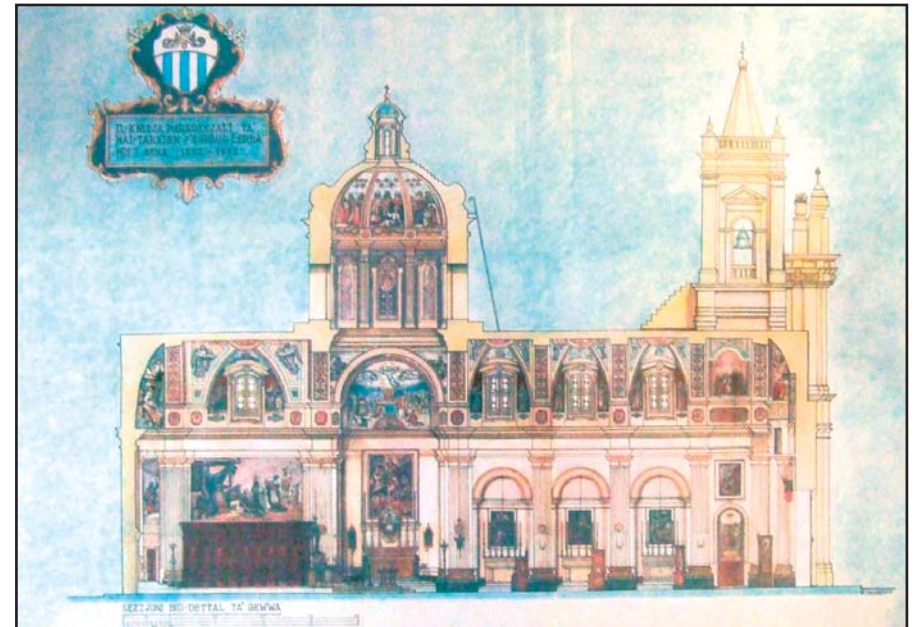


After 1693 the people of Tarxien wanted to enlarge their parish church. In 1709 the works to enlarge the parish church began and by 1756 it was completed. By that year the three chapels on each side had been enlarged, the two large chapels apsed, and the choir extended and apsed. A new sacristy was built, the ceiling changed from barrel vaulting to cross vaulting and the dome (probably under the direction of Lorenzo Gafà) was built in the present state, that is, cylindrical from inside and octagonal from outside with a height of 28 metres. The facade and the organ apse were moved outward by some ten feet. The church was consecrated in 1782 with the population of the village by now having risen to some 900 persons.

Different people contributed to the building of this church with Fr John Barbara contributing the most in money and in kind, such as offering stones free of charge from his stone-quarry in Tarxien.

Throughout the years, and up to present times, the people of Tarxien have willingly contributed to the building, refurbishing and restoration of their parish church and its artistic treasures.

Plan of Church by W. Hannaford



Visit to the Parish Church

by Joseph A. Farrugia



Statue of Our Lady of Sorrows

On entering the parish church through the side door on our right we find the niche with the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, which was bought and brought from Bolzano in 1950. The door opposite leads to the spiral staircase that takes one to the organ gallery, the clock mechanism and the belfry.

The first chapel is dedicated to the Holy Family although it is commonly referred to as 'The Chapel of St Joseph'. The altar painting, dated 1760, is by Gian Nicola Buhagiar, a Maltese artist.

In front of this chapel there is the holy picture of Our Lady of Health, which was painted by the Italian artist Sassoferrato (1609-1685), and donated to the church by Mark Anton Said, a parishioner.

The next painting, the Face of Christ (artist unknown), was donated by Chev. Rafael Bonnici Calì, a parishioner and popular local artist, from his personal art collection.

Painting of the Sacred Family



Our Lady of Sorrows by G. Calì

Between 1592 and 1890 the next altar was dedicated to two saints, St Roche and St Sebastian who are the patron saints of people infected by the plague. After 1890 the parish priest, Fr Francis Attard, commissioned the famous Maltese artist Giuseppe Calì to execute the altar painting of Our Lady of Sorrows with Mrs Calì posing for this picture.

We pass on to the chapel dedicated to Saint Leonard who is the patron saint of slaves. Francesco Zahra executed the



painting in the 1760's. One of the eight chapels that were dismantled to build the parish church was dedicated to this saint.

The painting opposite, depicting St Vincent Ferreri, was executed by Giuseppe Calì in 1924.

The large chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The titular painting was executed by Enrico Arnaud in 1760. The painting in the apse, dated 1971, is the work of Chev.

Oval Painting by Gagliardi

R. Bonnici Calì. It depicts the Council of Ephesus proclaiming Mary as Mother of God. The Italian artist Pietro Gagliardi executed the oval painting in 1874. It represents Our Lady of Christian Doctrine.

The next chapel is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. It was already built by 1624. Rocco Buhagiar carried out the present painting in 1770. In the recently decorated niche there is the statue of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine made by the sculptor Ġormu Darmanin in 1877. The paintings in this chapel were carried out by Paul Camilleri Cauchi in 1983 and donated by the parishioner Kellin Cachia. The marble tombstones used to be on the floor of this church up to 1935. The one on the floor shows were the sole benefactor Dionysius In the Sacristy we find:

A plan of the church by William Hannaford.

Portrait of Fr Michael Vella, procurator and benefactor of this church, painted by Fr C. Cauchi.

Copy of titular painting executed by Francesco Borg in 1935.

Portrait of Mgr Karm Sant who was Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Studies, painted by William Hannaford in 1993.



Painting by Pietro Novelli brought to Malta in 1799 by Fr Jos Grech.

Portrait of Fr John Barbara executed by Francesco Zahra (1760).

Painting of St Lucian brought here from Fort St Lucian, Marsaxlokk, in 1799.

Painting of Our Lady of the Apple executed by Francesco Zahra.

Painting of a Guardian Angel by Francesco Zahra.

Statue of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine



Painting of Saint Lucian



The Immaculate Conception by R. Buhagiar



Painting of Our Lady of the Apple



Guardian Angel by Francesco Zahra



The Adoration of the Magi

Copy of Guido Reni's painting of Jesus with the Cross.

In the office:

Copy of portrait of Fr Joseph Calleja, Professor of Oriental Languages, found in the rural chapel of Wardija and brought here by Mgr Karm Sant.

We now proceed to the Choir of the church where there are three large paintings by the famous artist Giuseppe Calì (1894). In the apse there is the Promise of the Messiah, on one side the Adoration of the

The Flight to Egypt



Magi and on the other the Flight to Egypt. Calì used common people from Tarxien and his relatives as models for these paintings. Pietro Gagliardi executed the titular painting in 1874 for the sum of 200 pounds sterling. Coats of arms show the surnames of the persons who donated the money for that particular painting. Ġanni Vella painted the vault in 1950. The master carpenter Antonio Farrugia, on the design of Francesco Zahra, made the choir stalls in 1752. One marble tombstone shows where the priests of the parish were buried (up to 1948) and the other tombstone carries a tribute to and is the burial place of Fr John Barbara, the greatest benefactor of this church.

The High Altar was made in 1783 by Antonio Nicholas from the money bequeathed by Fr John Barbara. It is made of the finest marble imported from Italy. It has a fixed marble girandola or monstrance. One may observe here the coat of arms of Fr John Barbara.

In the old sacristy one finds the statue of St Aloysius Gonzaga, executed by Carlo Darmanin in the 1870's.

The dome was painted by Ġanni Vella in 1950



Choir stalls



Titular painting by Pietro Gagliardi, 1874



*High Altar
and Choir*

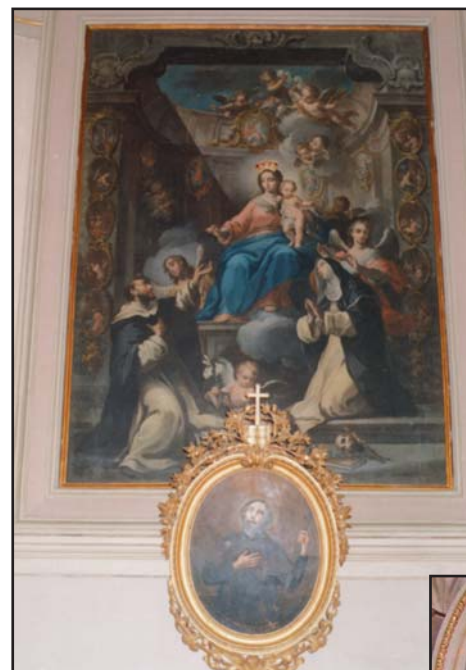
depicting Our Lady as Queen of all the Saints. The four lunettes depicting the four Evangelists were painted by Giuseppe Calì in the 1890's (see the coats of arms).

The side chapel was taken over by the confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament after 1723 when the present large chapel of the Holy Rosary was apsed and enlarged. Before it was used by the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, as it was instituted in 1597, the same year as that of the Blessed Sacrament. The Crucifix is probably of Italian origin; unfortunately its provenance is still not known. The reliefs in the

arches depict the “Triumph of the Cross” and were executed in 1912 by Benjamin Galea. Paul Camilleri Cauchi executed the paintings in the cupola and the four lunettes in 1981. The expenses were paid by Emmle Mizzi. The marble tombstone shows the place where the Parish Priest Fr Antonio Fenech is buried.

The painting in the apse of the big chapel of the Holy Rosary was carried out by the Tarxien artist Chev. R. Bonnici Calì in 1971. It depicts the Vatican Council II that declared that Our Lady is the Mother of the Catholic Church. Francesco Zahra painted the altarpiece of this chapel in 1770. The oval painting is attributed to Antoine Favray, a French painter.

View of Cupola



Painting of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

executed by the Tarxien artist Chev. R. Bonnici Calì.

The next chapel is dedicated to Our Lady of the Girdle (with St Augustine, St Monica, St Agatha and St Catherine). Francesco Zahra executed the altarpiece in 1770.

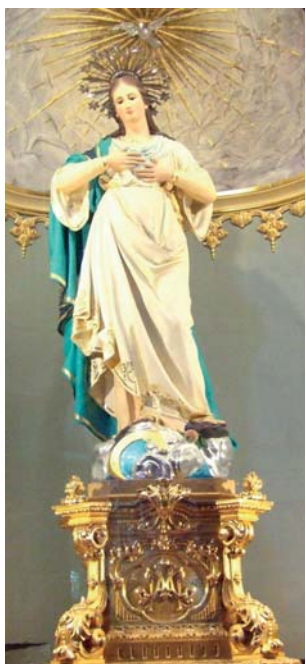
The next altarpiece was also executed by Francesco Zahra in the 1760's and dedicated to the Blessed Sacred Heart of Jesus with St Francis of Assisi and St Theresa of Avila.

Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament

The altarpiece of the next chapel depicts St Francis de Paola and St Michael, the work of Giuseppe Calì in 1894. The expenses were paid by the parish priest of that time Fr. Francis Attard and the architect Michael Busuttil. Before 1894, this chapel was dedicated to St Andrew and St Nicholas, who were the patron saints of two of the demolished rural chapels.

The painting opposite, depicting St Andrew, was





Statue of the Immaculate Conception

The painting in front depicting St Therese of Lisieux was executed by Chev. R. Bonnici Calì and donated to this Church by the artist.

The baptismal font was made in 1752 by Antonio Farrugia on the design of Francesco Zahra.

The statue of the Immaculate Conception was made by Carlo Darmanin in 1870.

Giuseppe Cilia, a student of Carlo Darmanin, executed the papier-mâché statue of Jesus the Nazarene in 1905.

The fonts for blessed water were designed by Francesco Zahra and sculpted by Antonio Nicholas.

The painting in the apse of the organ was carried out by the Tarxien artist Chev. R. Bonnici Calì in 1971. It is called the 'Magnificat' and depicts various persons who sang praises to Our Lady through different times.

The wind organ was made in Messina, Sicily and installed in 1747. The organ gallery was made by V. Cardona in 1912.

The ornamental panel over the main door was designed and executed by the Maltese artist Emmanuele Buhagiar in 1925.

The main door curtain made of damask was hung in 1952.

Above the two niches there are two canvases, which are copies of paintings by French artists,

Baptismal Font



depicting the Baptism of Christ and the Visit of Our Lady to St Elisabeth.

Wistin Camilleri, the Gozitan artist, made the papier-mâché statue of St Francis of Assisi in 1960.

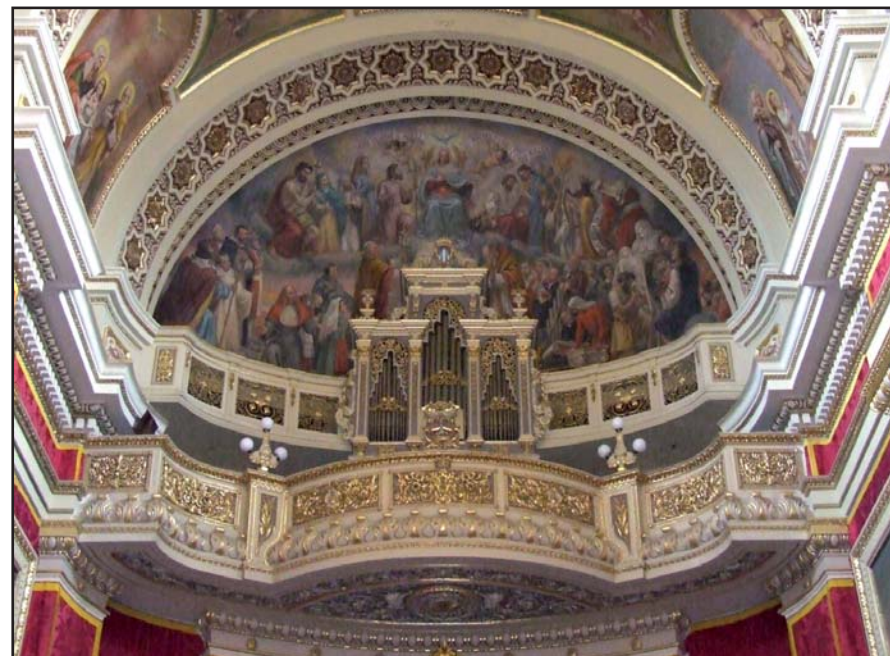
The wooden statue of St Joseph was brought over from Bolzano in 1961. It was paid for and donated by several persons from Tarxien, all having Joseph as their first name.

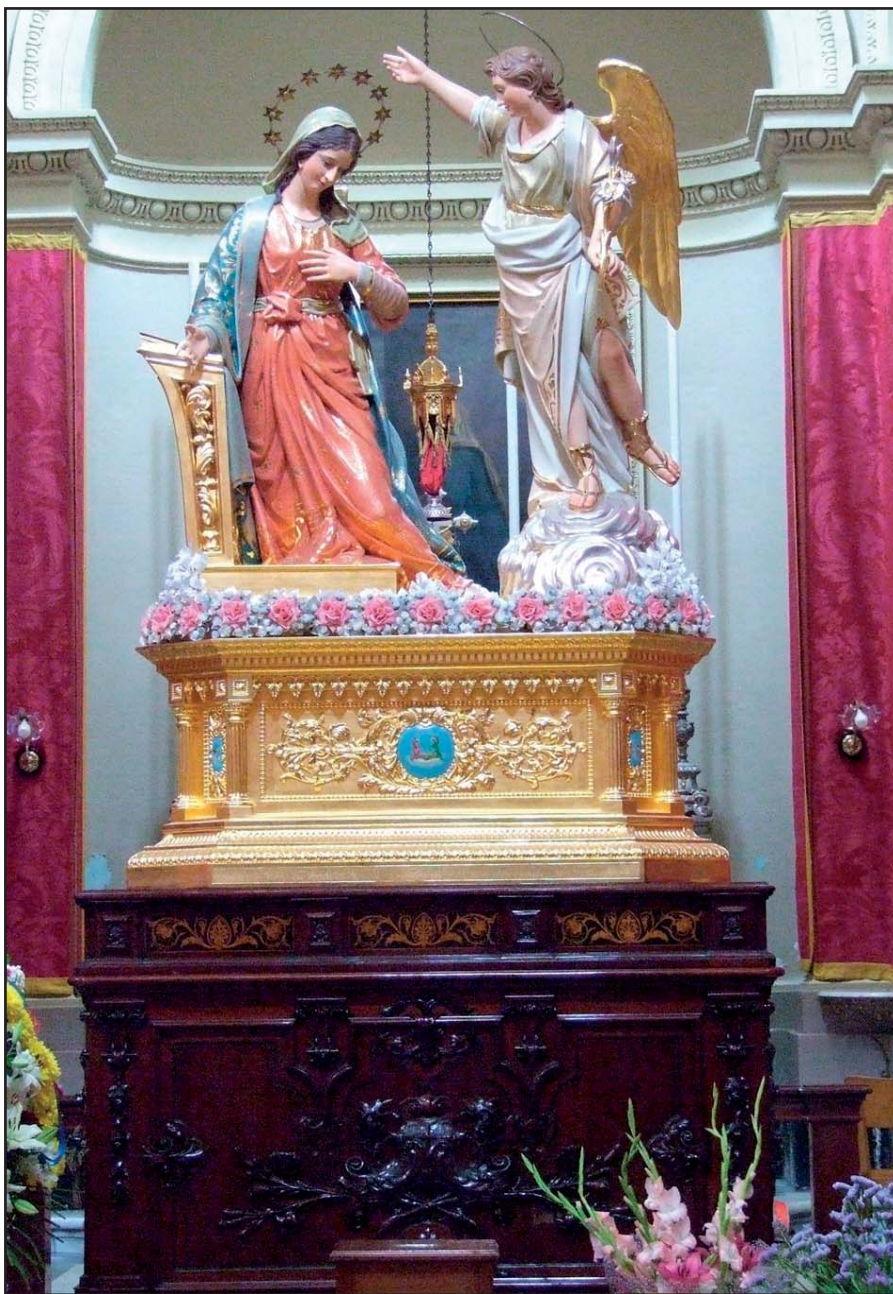
The marble tablet on the floor near the main door, records that the marble pavement of the parish church was paid for with the contributions made by the people and clergy of Tarxien in 1936.

In one of the niches there is the wooden statue of Our Lady of the Rosary, which was sculpted by Gio Maria Saliba in 1698. Up to 1976 instead of this niche there was the baptismal font.

In the other niche is the wooden statue of the Annunciation of Our Lady executed by Alexander Farrugia in 1829. This niche was enlarged in 1912 and redecorated in 2004.

View of Organ Balcony





Titular Statue of the Annunciation of Our Lady



Second largest bell of the Parish Church

were made by Ġulju Cauchi and another two, manufactured by Barigozzi Firm (Italy), were bought in 1960. The church clock was made by Ġan Anton Tanti in 1786.

Various artists painted the pictures representing the Stations of the Cross (*Via Crucis*).

There are five confraternities in Tarxien: that of the Blessed Sacrament (1597); of the Holy Rosary (1597); of the Immaculate Conception (1668); of Our Lady of the Girdle (1777); and of Our Lady of Doctrine (1874). They all participate in the procession on the day of the feast.

There are seven bells in all: three were purchased before 1753, two



Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in procession

Through the Village Core (2)

by Alfred Massa

From *Triq il-Palma* we proceed to *Triq tal-Barrani* (Tal-Barrani Road). As we go through the streets of Tarxien, we observe various niches, but the most important of all is the one found in Tal-Barrani Road on the outskirts of the village. The shrine is dedicated to the Annunciation of Our Lady and goes back to the year 1762. Salvu Muscat, who hailed from the locality, sculptured it in stone, on the initiative of some cotton merchants from Tarxien. This niche in the baroque style is situated near the boundaries of Tarxien with Żejtun and Gudja. In 1998 a crane accidentally damaged the niche and the Local Council took immediate steps to restore it back to its original state, as it is today.

Niche of the Annunciation at tal-Barrani

In the core of the village around the parish church one finds narrow streets with some large houses. One can mention here *Triq Brittanika* (Britannia Street), *Misraħ ir-Repubblika* (Republic Square), *Triq Xintill* (Xintill Street), *Triq Birbixkilla* (Birbixkilla Street) and *Misraħ is-Suq* (Market Place).

We now come to *Triq Sqajjaq* (Sqajjaq Street) part of which is the oldest street in Tarxien. In this street just at the back of the Parish Church stands

Dar tal-Logutenent Montebello

Ġużeppi Montebello's house. It is called *Id-Dar tal-Logutenent* (the Lieutenant's House) because it was once the residence of Ġużeppi Montebello who was one of the leaders during the uprising of the Maltese against the French in 1798. This is a typical Maltese house of the 18th century with a large garden at the back. Two houses worth noting are *Id-Dar ta' Franku* (Franku's House) and *Id-Dar ta' Ganà* (Ganà's House) in Republic Square, build in the 19th and 18th centuries, respectively.

Our Lady of Christian Doctrine Social Club



Old Lane in
Village Core

From Republic Square we come to one of the most picturesque streets in Tarxien, a small winding narrow street called *Birbixkilla*. This name might mean either that it is called after someone nicknamed *bixkilla* or that it is a corruption of the word *Paxkwalino*. In front of the parish church there is the new Our Lady of Doctrine Social Club, which has been built recently. From this street we find ourselves in front of the parish church of Tarxien or Market Place.

Milestone



On the right hand side of the Market Place there is an upright stone which was once a milestone. Before the last war, it used to show the distance in miles from this spot to Valletta. The writing on every milestone on the island, including this one, was removed as a precaution by the military authorities so that in the event of an invasion the enemy would not know the distance to Valletta.

After leaving Market Place, one comes to *Triq Xintill* (Xintill Street) which dates back to the Middle Ages.

Going through *Triq Pawla* (Paola Road) we come to the Annunciation Band Club. This association was founded in 1862



Niche of San Spiridione



by Odilone Caruana (1839–1899). At first it was called The Tarxien Band; later the name was changed to *Banda San Giovanni* and *Circolo Musicale l'Annunziata – Casal Tarxien*. Now it has been named *Għaqda Mużikali Marija Annunzjata*, Tarxien AD 1862. Plans are in hand to renovate the façade of the Band Club in the near future.

Marija Annunzjata Band Club

A few metres away in house No. 17 Chev. Rafael Bonnici Calì (1907–2002) once lived. He was a well-known Maltese artist who followed in the footsteps of his mother’s uncle, the famous Prof. Giuseppe Calì. Chev. Rafael studied art in Italy. He accepted commissions for vault paintings and restorations in various local churches.

Just opposite Bonnici Calì’s residence one can see a niche with a small stone statue representing St Spiridione. The niche style is pure gothic, designed by architect Mikiel Busuttil; the statue was carved by Franku Faurè, the same artist who sculptured the statue of the Annunciation that stands in a niche on the right hand side of the parish church. During the 19th century there was a special devotion in Tarxien to this Greek saint as a painting representing the same saint is also found in St Mary’s chapel in *Triq Santa Marija* (St Mary Street).

Further down *Triq Pawla* (Paola Road), corner with *Triq Lanzon* (Lanzon Street) there is a replica of the so-called *Arkata Normanna* (Norman Arch). This name is connected with an old house that once stood in this very place, having a ‘Norman arch’ as its main door; however there is no evidence that the arch was built by the Normans

Joann Garden



who ruled the Maltese Islands from 1091. It is believed that the original stones of the arch were taken to the National Museum in Valletta and stored with other artifacts.

Finally in the same street there is Villa Lanzon built in 1877. It is named after its first owners, the Lanzon family. During the Second World War the villa served as an Air Intelligence Unit by the British troops. Between 1945 and 1961 this building served as a Girls’ Government Primary School; now it is the residence of former Foreign Minister, Dr Alex Sciberras Trigona

We pass through part of *Triq l-Annunzjata* (Annunciation Street) and turn left to part of *Triq is-Sorijiet* (Sisters Street) and find ourselves in Joann Gardens, named after the two daughters of ex-Prime Minister, Dom Mintoff, who resides in Villa Olives in *Triq Xintill* (Xintill Street). These gardens were inaugurated in the seventies and serve as a recreation place for young and old. They have been upgraded by the Local Council during the last four years.

Residence of Mr. Dom Mintoff (ex. Prime Minister of Malta)





Villa Lanzon



Dar tal-Kejka



Villa Annunzjata

When one enters *Triq Xintill* (Xintill Street), one surely cannot miss, on the right side of the road, a recently restored and well-kept old building called *Id-Dar tal-Kejka* (Tal-Kejka House) or, as it is sometimes known, ‘The Hermit’s Monastery’. This building dates back to the 18th century. The exact date of its construction and its original purpose are still not known. Some years ago it was refurbished. It is now used for cultural purposes by the Local Council and as an official meeting place for the Tarxien Boy Scouts.

Further up there is Villa Annunzjata which was the residence of the late Chev. Dr James Farrugia (1922–2006), a prominent family doctor, antiquarian, writer and a man of great culture. He was a Member of Parliament between 1976 and 1986. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives between 1987 and 1988 and was Acting President of the Republic and Ambassador to the Holy See for several years.



Tarxien
"Tyrri Genuerunt Me"



European Voluntary Service



P. S. for Public Dialogue
and Information