With this 40th Edition of Vigilo, Din l-Art Helwa would like to thank editor Joe Azzopardi and proof reader Judy Falzon for their work in producing Vigilo and Din l-Art Helwa’s Newsletter year after year. We are indebted to them for their voluntary work to record for posterity the work of our organisation in words and in pictures making Vigilo an important collectible item of Melitensia. We would also like to thank all those who contribute to its contents and to the many DLH volunteers who make our story possible.

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A Victory for the Nation
Simone Mizzi
Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa

On 8 September in Malta each year we remember and recreate in our minds many significant moments in the history of Malta, all connected with victorious episodes against invading forces. For all of us at Din l-Art Helwa and indeed for all lovers of Malta, the 8th September this year has marked no less a significant moment in the history of our organisation. The day records yet another victory, this time over those two principle enemies of the extraordinary artistic and architectural heritage left to us by our history: ignorance and neglect. Founded in 1965 to protect the built and natural heritage of the Maltese Islands, Din l-Art Helwa has faced numerous challenges, and I am not talking here of lack of funds or of hands to help from those generous volunteers who have taken the organisation from strength to strength over the years. These fundamentals have miraculously been forthcoming most of the time thanks to the hard work of all those previous executive presidents that have led the organisation, the wisdom of its council and our hard working executive teams who continue to drive it with vision and commitment. All have been bound by one uniting force, that of safeguarding our heritage.

I am talking here about the lack of vision on the part of our island’s leaders through several successive governments, a lack of awareness of the importance of our national treasures, laissez faire policies, and some totally wrong priorities as to where national funding should be spent. So it is not a coincidence that the date 8 September has been chosen to launch another milestone in the history of Din l-Art Helwa as we remember those two important victories for Malta over enemy forces in 1565 and in 1943. For the organisation, this date will have a new significance. We will forever remember that it was on 8 September that the State, now with its growing sensitivity towards our national treasures, has finally deliberated that the restoration and care for the church of Our Lady of Victory in Valletta be entrusted to this organisation – a project that is a victory not for Din l-Art Helwa but for the whole nation and indeed for Europe.

To many this may seem like a massive and onerous obligation because to restore this first church and first building in Valletta to its dignity and former glory is indeed a complex and costly exercise. From where I stand, it is an almost impossible challenge and its path to success is strewn with difficulty. However, for those of us in our organisation who have campaigned for 12 long years to save this historic and artistic gem, the undertaking is a supreme privilege. We see it as a reward for 46 years of hard work, a recognition of the organisation’s steadfast dedication to our cultural patrimony.

Din l-Art Helwa has campaigned and lobbied at length, with successive ministers of culture, in order that Our Lady of Victory, this important place of worship and the first conventual church of the Knights of Malta when they left Birgu for Valletta, be granted recognition. Its cultural and religious dignity must be enhanced through restoration and improved accessibility with longer hours of opening to the public. Its attraction for lovers of art and of history, and now even for the discipline of conservation as this develops into an ever evolving scientific and technical profession, rides in tandem with its status as a place of worship. We are sensitive to all those many members of the public who wish to see it open so they can pay a respectful visit whilst going about their daily routine in our capital city. I was born a stone’s throw away from this corner, for me it remains “No. One, Valletta”, as desirable a location for visitors as it can ever be, perched as it is on the highest point of our capital city.
It is not news that the church has suffered from centuries of neglect from both its principle stake holders, the State and the Church. Its precious vault badly shaken with the bomb blast that destroyed the neighbouring theatre, subsequent water infiltration from the roof and rising damp over the years caused its building envelope to fail. Considering all this, together with some early ill-advised restoration attempts which did more harm than good to its ceiling paintings, it is going to take long years of dedication, commitment and professional expertise to bring it back to its former glory.

The restoration of the church has many priorities. Above all, there is the work on its monumental vault paintings depicting the main episodes in the life of the Virgin Mary by Alessio Erardi, that must be concluded. Professor Mario Buhagiar has defined Erardi as the second most important artist of the baroque period in Malta after Mattia Preti, and Erardi was Maltese which makes him the most important Maltese artist commissioned by the Order to carry out many important works of art. The professional conservation of two sections of the Erardi vault was made possible by work started by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, which commissioned the Courtauld Institute of Art, world experts in the conservation of wall paintings, to investigate the damage, consolidate the vault’s fabric and secure the paintings. DLH organised an educational symposium, in collaboration with the Courtauld, which was a unique opportunity for everyone interested in the history of art and its conservation. However, the work on the church cannot just stop with the treasures on its vaulted ceiling. There is the restoration of its internal perimeter walls and their architectural murals, the altars and many decorative structural elements. The choir and sacristy are in urgent need of de-infestation from termites, as they are quite literally falling apart – its arched confessional having fallen to the ground only two years ago. Then there is the church organ that needs to be reassembled and restored, and the historic crypt, where Grand Master de Valette was first buried, must be wholly integrated as it has been divided over the years. The church also holds many historic artefacts, vestments and documents, many of which date back to the time of the Order of St John, which need proper archiving and treatment. All this will be done in a phased programme of work which will ensure at all times that the status of the church as a place of worship is fully respected.

We must here mention and commend the Rector of the Church, Monsignor Anton Galea, who has looked after the church for many long years, and Dr Ray Bondin who, with the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, championed for this difficult project to get underway. The Valletta Rehabilitation Project’s efforts will continue to be invaluable to the success of the project.

Funding, of course, remains a huge challenge, but we have huge faith that the people of Malta and the business community will rally to our support as they have always done over the years when the time comes to issue a national appeal. It has been assistance such as this that has permitted Din l-Art Helwa to carry out difficult challenges such as the restorations of the mediaeval frescos at Hal Millieri and Bir Miftuh, the mammoth tasks of saving Comino’s Tower and the Red Tower at Mellieha, and now the almost impossible challenge of rebuilding from scratch St Anthony’s Battery at Qala Point in Gozo, which is nearing completion. We did not shirk these responsibilities but indeed rose to the challenge. Stone by stone, day by day, these national treasures are now saved for Malta.

Din l-Art Helwa’s earlier involvement on the Church of Our Lady of Victory began with assisting the VRP with much needed funds for research and photogrammetry and between 2000 and 2004 restoration work on the external walls was carried out with an important sponsorship from PricewaterhouseCoopers and work on the belfry and stone finials with the assistance of Computime Ltd, while the VRP sealed the roof with waterproofing systems. This work was essential to protect the precious vault paintings of Alessia Erardi.

We are heartened by the knowledge that there are many who wish to be involved in supporting this most prestigious and worthy project. From the day the news of the DLH restoration project for Our Lady of Victory was announced by Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture, Dr Mario de Marco, letters of support have flooded in from as far away as Australia and several donations have been received. On behalf of Din l-Art Helwa and indeed on behalf of Malta, I thank all of you who have risen to the occasion and offered moral and financial help.

Our Lady of Victory Church represents the last space within this important corner of Valletta that is still in need of restoration. If we look round us, from the Stock Exchange – the former Garrison Church, the Barakka Saluting Battery, the
Auberge de Castille, the precious church of St Catherine of Italy, St James Cavalier, the Opera House ruins and Valletta’s entrance, all have been restored or are undergoing treatment and conservation. During the last two years we have seen an influx of European money that has speeded up the much needed restoration and rehabilitation of the island’s treasures that are fundamental to our sustainability as a tourist destination and indeed for the very quality of our lives.

Putting our house in order not only improves our visual environment, but has a feel-good factor that we are indeed addressing some of the islands’ long outstanding issues.

Din l-Art Helwa will endeavour to complete the project on Our Lady of Victory church so that it can be ready to participate in its full glory by 2018 when Valletta is European Capital of Culture. This church, lying close to the place where Grand Master de Valette and his Knights laid the foundation stone of Valletta, is symbolic for Malta and for Europe. History records that coins, specially struck by the Order with the words ‘Melita Rinascens’, were placed within the foundations, invoking the nation to rise again after long months of war. On this year’s 8 September, we must believe that yet again another victory for Malta has been delivered.

On behalf of Din l-Art Helwa, I thank most sincerely all the organisation’s previous presidents and the teams whose work precedes me, as they too have all championed this cause. It is indeed a privilege for me to bring it to the point where it can now really and truly begin. I thank those many members of our team who have brought us to the point of departure of today, Ian Camilleri who wrote up the first business presentations, Maria Grazia Cassar who worked two long years to record the historic inventory of movables present in the church.

I thank most wholeheartedly the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Dr Anthony Pace and Dr Nathaniel Cutajar for their support and help, and the Valletta Rehabilitation Project for its invaluable assistance and advice. I particularly wish to thank the Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, Dr Mario de Marco, for having the faith in Din l-Art Helwa so as to entrust it with the care of this most important symbol of religious cultural heritage, Our Lady of Victory Church, Valletta. It was Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette, the creator and builder of Valletta, who willed that this church be built, and he financed it personally with his own funds. It was de Valette who dedicated it to the Virgin Mary in thanks for his victory over the enemy fleet of Suleiman the Magnificent. He was known to have spent many hours praying to the Virgin Mary each day as he went through his daily routine inspecting the building work that left us our beautiful Valletta.

It is an honour and a privilege to live in his space, and to stand on the same spot where this valiant defender of the faith once reflected and prayed. I am confident that his spirit will guide us through this restoration so that his church can rise again and find its full glory.

If you wish to volunteer in any way for the Our Lady of Victory project, whether to attend to church opening hours, or by lending other skills, please send an email to info@dinlarthelwa.org indicating your field of interest.

If you wish to send a donation, please send a cheque to Din l-Art Helwa, Our Lady of Victory Account, 133 Melita Street, Valletta or by direct credit to the DLH Euro Bank Account, HSBC Bank, Malta, Account No. 033 181181 001.

"Din l-Art Helwa will endeavour to complete the project on Our Lady of Victory church so that it can be ready to participate in its full glory by 2018 when Valletta is European Capital of Culture."
Din l-Art Helwa’s collaboration with Union Rempart was renewed again this year at the 2011 Restoration Camp held between 9 and 19 September at the church of Tal-Hniena in Qrendi.

DLH hosted eight volunteers and their leader from France, who were joined by 12 volunteers – 10 Maltese, one British and one German – to work on the restoration of the church. This year, the camp also welcomed “day volunteers”, which resulted in more participants who came to give a hand whenever they could.

On the first day of the camp, an introduction to stone and the causes and results of its deterioration was made by Heritage Malta senior conservators James Licari and Frank Chetcuti, using examples in the church to explain the various cases. Frank then demonstrated the correct way to make a lime-based mortar, using hydraulic lime, “ramel” and “xahx”, and how to apply it with the sponging technique. The volunteers were assigned tasks, and throughout the camp everyone had a go at removing the old cement repairs and mixing and then applying the mortar.

Rempart’s leader Dan Gutman tirelessly oversaw the work, instructed new arrivals and was instrumental in keeping up the morale of the group. There was an excellent pooling of expertise between him, Frank and James, who also supervised the work during the whole duration of the camp. Two of their conservation students participated in the camp and carefully carried out scrape tests on the sculptured reredos of the main altar. This was particularly interesting, as traces of the original polychrome scheme under the layers of white paint were gradually exposed. Din l-Art Helwa intends to bring this magnificent reredos back to its opulent baroque colours and to restore the marbling, gilding and polychrome effects for which it was once renowned. Luckily, the original flagstones around the altar are still in place, quaintly painted to resemble black and white marble tiles!

By the end of the week, the entire flagstone floor of the portico had been re-pointed, after the removal of the old cement grouting, which was not only damaging the stone but was also very unsightly. Work on the sculptured balustrade and steps, begun during last year’s camp, continued and was completed. Pointing of the façade of the small annexe, as well as the removal of most of the cement from the walls of the sacristy, was also carried out to everybody’s satisfaction. James even found time to demonstrate the cleaning technique used to remove stains on marble and Frank gave a presentation of defluar, the traditional waterproofing technique that involves the use of crushed pottery. The repairs carried out to the roof last year were also given a coat of lime wash as part of the maintenance programme.

The camp was not all work and no play. The volunteers were treated to a variety of cultural outings and fun activities, including swimming, visits to Palazzo Falson, St John’s co-Cathedral, St Agatha’s Tower, Fort Manoel, Ħagar Qim and Mnajdra, the Xarolla Windmill and a barbecue on the roof of Torri Mamo, with a talk by council member Stanley Farrugia Randon. They also joined in the celebrations of the Feast of Tal-Hniena by enjoying a splendid meal organised by the Santa Maria Musical Society of Qrendi, in the piazza in front of the church.

Thanks must go to the mayor of Qrendi Carmel Falzon, who kindly provided amenities for the duration of the camp, and who visited in person. The site was also visited by Qrendi parish priest Fr Mario Mifsud and French cultural attaché Dominique Freslon, who was very enthusiastic about this collaboration between Maltese and French volunteers. Dan explained the ethos behind Rempart’s “mission patrimoine”, which focuses on running such camps worldwide, throughout the year.

The organisation and day-to-day running of the camp was, as last year, in the hands of council members Maria Grazia Cassar and Cathy Farrugia, who also roped in the much-appreciated help of Silvia Mule-Stagno, Josie Ellul-Mercer and executive president Simone Mizzi, who provided all the beverages for the camp and a number of much-appreciated home-cooked meals for the volunteers. Simone also visited the camp and expressed her whole-hearted thanks to everyone involved for all their work. Thanks are also due to Josette Azzopardi, who made her St Julian’s home available to accommodate the French volunteers.

The restoration of the church of Tal-Hniena has been made possible through the generous sponsorship of Bank of Valletta.
Once threatened by the ever-increasing demand for development, the area covering Ix-Xagħra l-Ħamra, along with other parcels of land in the vicinity, is now known as il-Majjistral Nature and History Park. The idea to turn this area into Malta’s first natural national park came in 2007 after the government had rejected a proposal to convert the area into a golf course – following persistent lobbying from environmental groups. *Din l-Art Helwa*, with its continuous efforts to safeguard the countryside as well as Malta’s cultural heritage, was at the forefront of this issue. Teaming up with two other well known NGOs, Nature Trust Malta and the Gaia Foundation, *Din l-Art Helwa* has embarked on another experience in its curriculum, the aim of which is to manage natural parks on the Maltese Islands.

Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park is set on approximately nine square kilometres of land that stretches from Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay) to Il-Prajjet (Anchor Bay) and includes the areas known as Ix-Xagħra il-Ħamra, Ix-Xagħra tal-Majjiesa, Għajn Żnuber and Il-Qasam Barrani (next to Popeye Village). Although the area is not that extensive, it still caters for those who appreciate our natural as well as cultural heritage and offers an insight into some of the most interesting land and seascape features in the northwest of Malta. It also sheds light on the different uses to which the area has been put in the past.

The park sustains numerous types of habitat, ranging from garigue to salt steppe along the limestone plateaux to a coastal environment made up of boulder scree and clay slopes. The most evident type of habitat is garigue, which consists of shallow soil and low-lying shrubs. The fact that the area endures several months of strong north-westerly winds means that trees are not that abundant, yet nevertheless there is an interesting covering of vegetation. Of the approximately 400 recorded plant species in the area, 12 are endemic to the Maltese Islands. The list also includes nine different varieties of orchids, among them the Maltese pyramidal orchid (*anacamptis urvilleana*) and the Maltese spider orchid (*ophrys melitensis*), the Maltese spurge (*euphorbia melitensis*), Maltese sea camomile (*anthemis urvilleana*), Maltese sea lavender (*limonju melitensis*) and thyme (*thymus capitata*). The change in vegetation cover can be observed when looking at the boulder scree along the coast. In this area, a stratum of impregnable blue clay formation results in a denser vegetation cover that still flourishes during the dry summer months. This picturesque area of clay slopes and boulder fields holds a significant population of *fagonia cretica*, a species that can only be found here and Il-Karraba in Għajn Tuffieha. The change in vegetation is also apparent when considering the species that are found in this part of the Park. Salt-tolerant plant species, such as the golden samphire (*inula crithmoides*) and esparto grass prevail in this rather harsh environment.

There are also various features of cultural interest within the boundaries of the Park. These include small farmhouses, old beehives made out of limestone, dry stone rubble walls, cart-ruts, tombs dating to the Classical period, stone stairways, numerous corbelled stone huts and the remains of
British Military buildings. These, together with past anthropogenic influences on the landscape, are part of the Park’s rich cultural heritage. Of interest is the way in which farming was carried out along the coastal area between Rdum Majjiesa and Rdum id-Delli, where there are small parcels of land surrounded by rubble walls where farmers used to grow their produce. Even more interesting is the fact that in earlier days farmers working the area used to plant their produce in each and every spot where there was soil. These practices have long been forgotten as nowadays most of the cultivated land within the boundaries of the Park has changed, due to the deposition of soil to increase production levels.

The Park’s management team is aware of all the aspects of the Park and is doing its utmost to develop and implement sound and specific management practices to safeguard them. Since the Park has been managed by the three NGOs, a management framework has been compiled and submitted to the competent authorities and the Maltese government for approval. This framework contains proposals for the sustainable use of the area as a natural park as well as a recreational area. Another achievement of which the management is proud is the clearing of parts of Ix-Xagħra l-Hamra, an area that had been used as a makeshift landfill, and the planting of a 1,000 trees and shrubs as part of the Park’s rehabilitation. Work in this area has been extensive and upkeep of all the species planted in the area is needed for most of the year, yet the efforts by the staff are already bearing fruit.

Obviously, problems do arise – with the most discouraging being vandalism. Information boards have been set up in various locations, but have been destroyed. Last year, three wonderful examples of corbelled stone huts were vandalised during the night, leaving the management baffled for the reason behind such behaviour. Problems related to the loss of habitat have also been tackled. Unmonitored vehicular access to the area has created a disturbance in the form of soil loss and the degradation of garigue and natural areas. As a result, the management decided that the answer was to control vehicular access to the area. Planning this move has taken nearly two years, public consultations have been launched and the interested parties have been consulted on the matter. Vehicular access control

is now in its final stages of implementation and the management is confident that this task will help in the protection of the natural habitat.

But managing a site like the Majjistral Park also provides a form of satisfactions that is difficult to put in words. When volunteers offer their time to help with the various clean-ups organised by the management it really raises morale. Were it not for those offering their free time, most of the work carried out in the Park would have proved to be either too costly or too difficult to achieve.

The rehabilitation of the area’s cultural heritage is also of importance. Together with the government, the management has restored a collapsed corbelled stone hut and are now completing the restoration of the Ghajn Żnuber Tower, a landmark that is visible from most parts of the Park. Lately, the management has also been entrusted with the management and restoration of the Ghajn Tuffieħa ex-military barracks complex that is situated next to the Scout campsite. Plans for this area are ambitious with the management planning to turn this area into an administration complex that will include an information and interpretation centre, multi-purpose and display areas, dormitories for overnight stays and other accommodation. Other areas will be dedicated for sport and adventure, with facilities offering equipment such as bicycles for hire and indoor gym facilities. Two condition reports for the restoration of two buildings within the barracks compound have already been compiled, together with a third report for a World War II pillbox near the il-Minzel area. Next year, the management plans to prepare the last condition report for the remaining building within the complex, after which restoration work will commence.

There is still a lot of work to be done in the area, yet slowly but surely the Majjistral Park will become a showcase of our country’s natural environment. This will require a lot of effort, both from the management and also from those who come to help, but doing something for future generations is well worth the effort.
A very irate email arrived in Din l-Art Helwa’s inbox recently. The sender expressed in no uncertain terms his disappointment with the content of a recent Din l-Art Helwa article published in the media in which the public was urged not to buy or consume unsustainable fish such as baby swordfish.

I promptly replied to his email, explaining that there was some misunderstanding since Din l-Art Helwa stands firmly behind the traditional fisherman and sustainable fishing. I suggested a meeting to exchange ideas. Toni – which is not the fisherman’s real name, for reasons that will become clear later on – immediately agreed to meet me at his garage in Marsaxlokk a few days later and enable me to get to know the rest of his family.

In his garage, Toni introduced me to his family: Salvu his father, his mother Carmena, brother Joseph and uncle Binu. Salvu showed me his lovingly maintained 13-metre luzzu, which has been in the family for three generations. The family has always fished exclusively for tuna and swordfish and all the expertise and know-how has been handed down from father to son for almost a century. There is also a considerable financial investment in tackle that can only be used to catch tuna and swordfish.

Salvu explains the difference between the traditional and the industrial fisherman. A traditional fisherman is a small-scale operator with a boat usually less than 20m long who fishes using sustainable methods such as the long line. This method does not threaten species other than those targeted. The industrial tuna fisherman uses much bigger vessels, spotter planes and nets that are hundreds of kilometres long and that catch all the other species in their target area. The “unwanted” catch is discarded – dead – while even juvenile tuna are rounded up into pens for fattening and sale to the lucrative Japanese market. The traditional fisherman can hope to land a few hundred kilos of tuna in a season. The industrial fisherman can net hundreds of tonnes of tuna in one trip.

Toni explains that tuna in the Mediterranean is in danger of extinction because of over-fishing by the industry. This has resulted in internationally imposed quotas intended to control the total landed weight permitted for each country. Each nation then allocates its quota to locally-registered fisherman. Malta’s total quota is less than 200 tons per year to be allocated to the 90 traditional fishermen and Toni’s allocated share of this quota is less than 100 kg – compared to previous years when catches used to be 10 times greater. To put things in perspective, Malta’s tuna ranching capacity is in the region of 12,000 tonnes. This year, Toni’s family had already caught their full quota by mid-May but there was still another two months of the tuna open fishing season to go. During this time, they are not allowed to land any more tuna on pain of fines and confiscation, since they had already caught their full quota.

A possible solution would be for Toni to buy additional quotas from other fishermen, which would then enable him to carry on fishing, but he has discovered that international industrialists with access to the lucrative Japanese market can, and do, buy all the available quotas – even from other countries – because they can afford to pay more than Toni can.

The family needs to be fed and the luzzu’s running costs must be paid but the income from tuna fishing does not stretch that far. The only other solution is to fish for swordfish. However, here arises another serious abuse because all the big swordfish have been caught in illegal industrial drift nets many kilometres long – the notorious “walls of death”. Consequently, no big swordfish are caught by Toni and only the small swordfish that get through are captured. This is Toni’s only way of earning enough to survive and the main reason we are seeing so many baby swordfish for sale. And this is only delaying the inevitable, as swordfish will be the next species to be internationally controlled because of the dwindling population – unless it disappears first.

There are two cooperatives that would be expected to support fishermen, but we learn from Uncle Binu that people in high places in both cooperatives are also heavily involved with the tuna ranching and fish farming industries. Binu and others like him keep a low profile because they depend on the cooperatives for jobs and for purchasing bait, so there is no significant support from there.

The end game is being played out as we read. Many fishermen are being forced by circumstances beyond their control to sell their quotas to the industry and avail themselves of EU subsidies to scrap their fishing boats. The days of the traditional wooden luzzu are numbered and no sane young man will choose to become a fisherman under these conditions.

As a Din l-Art Helwa volunteer working to save our marine environment, the day spent with Toni’s family was most informative, and I am grateful to them for the time they took to explain to me the plight of the traditional local fisherman. What I have learnt motivates me to continue working to save not just the great species of fish that provide us with precious food stock, but especially the marvellous people and their ancient skills whose livelihoods are threatened because politicians do not act to protect those whose votes they need to stay in power where they can continue to carry out some of the good work they promise in their political manifestos.

Politicians can do much to save Toni, his family, his luzzu and the fish they need to continue to sustain traditional ways of Maltese life. Din l-Art Helwa wants everybody to know the difference between the traditional fisherman and the industrial one. Finding the balance between both can be easily sorted if those in power work for the long-term. Din l-Art Helwa, following its successful Fished Out conference this spring, has already suggested – and suggests again – that Malta can lead Europe as it has done in marine policies before, particularly now when the fate of the traditional fisherman is under threat. We look to our Minister for Resources and Rural Affairs to take this opportunity to come up with measures that will indeed ensure the correct balance is struck. Currently, short-term gain still tips the scales.
46th Annual Reunion Dinner at San Anton Palace Gardens

The 46th annual dinner was held on 28 July in the splendid gardens of San Anton Palace under the patronage of President George Abela. It was attended by Speaker of the House Michael Frendo and Mrs Frendo, the Austrian Ambassador Caroline Gudenus, the French Ambassador Daniel Rondeau and Mme Rondeau, and Spanish Ambassador Felipe de la Morena, as well as many distinguished guests and members of Din l-Art Helwa. DLH Executive President Simone Mizzi commended all the volunteers who have made the organisation’s work possible over the last 46 years, reminding everyone present that this year is the European Year of the Volunteer. In particular, she said, the country should be grateful to all the volunteers who often go about their work unseen, giving freely of their time to help preserve our cultural and natural heritage. Dancing continued into the early hours, as the formidable quartet, the Quacks, entertained everyone with their lively music.

Arts and Arias Soirée in aid of Xlendi Tower

The Arts and Arias Evening on the Kempinsky Hotel Terrace, organised by Carolyn Clements and the Gozo Committee of Din l-Art Helwa, was a resounding success, with over 80 people attending. This musical soirée and heritage arts exhibition on 31 July, perfectly organised by our Gozo volunteers, raised precious funds for the restoration of Xlendi Tower, which is a joint project with Munxar Local Council.

The concert programme consisted of well-loved arias and songs from the shows, with international sopranos Sharon Wilson and Gozo’s own Georgina Gauci, accompanied by Sue De’Ath on the piano. There was a colourful exhibition of paintings with a heritage theme by well-known local artists, and Din l-Art Helwa is especially grateful to Henry Alamango for his generous donation of a new painting of Xlendi Tower that was auctioned during the evening. Thanks go to everybody who attended and especially Carolyn Clements and the Gozo team.

Buy the ‘HERITAGE SAVED’ Limited Edition Prints for Christmas

The Heritage Saved limited edition watercolour prints by Kenneth Zammit Tabona launched two years ago to raise funds for the restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church by Din l-Art Helwa are now more relevant than ever, as DLH embarks on this challenging project to save what was the first church of Valletta and its Alessio Erardi ceiling paintings. The prints, signed by Kenneth Zammit Tabona, come in two sets of six and cost €120 per set, and a reduced price of €100 to DLH members. Please see the complete details on the flier enclosed or call 2122 5952 for information.

This limited edition makes a great Christmas present and will help us raise the much-needed funds for the restoration of the church. Do please spread the word.

Henry Alamango’s painting in the proud hands of the successful bidder, Steve Wilson.
**International Bir Miftuh Festival 2011**

Three outstanding concerts marked this year’s successful International Bir Miftuh Festival. Featuring high profile performers, both from Malta and abroad, the festival again helped us raise important funds to continue with the ongoing maintenance of the mediaeval church of Santa Marija ta’ Bir Miftuh (1435). *Din l-Art Helwa* extends its heartfelt thanks to the German Embassy, the French Embassy and the *Alliance Francaise* and the Italian Embassy and the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* for their great support, without which this festival would not have been possible.

This year we also concluded the conservation work on the remaining fragments of the Last Judgement fresco and the integration of the Donatrix fresco and adjoining niches. This project was carried out with the generous support of the Malta International Airport Plc whose commitment continues to make the upkeep of this medieval church possible. The restoration work was carried out by the Giuseppe Mantella restoration team and coordinated by Council Member, Maria Grazia Cassar.

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**Photographs: Joseph Chetcuti**

The Cosmos Wind Ensemble gave an unusual and entertaining programme in a concert made possible by the German Embassy

The Duo Marco Mischiagna and Vito Vilardi in a virtuoso violin and guitar performance, sponsored by the Italian Embassy and the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura*.

Sophie Charpentier played the harpsichord and Jean Christophe Samson the flute in an exquisite recital of Johann Sebastian Bach’s music sponsored by the French Embassy and the *Alliance Française*.

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**Din l-Art Helwa Public Lectures 2011 / 12**

*Din l-Art Helwa* will be once again holding a series of monthly public lectures. DLH is grateful to the lecturers who have agreed to share their experience and knowledge, and to John Sare for organising the programme. The lectures will be held at 133 Melita Street, Valletta and commence at 6pm. Admission is free of charge, but donations will be greatly appreciated.

- **Dr Martina Caruana**  
  Malta’s earliest known illuminated manuscript  
  **Thursday, 13 October**

- **Dr Alan Deidun**  
  The impact of climate change on our seas – a frequently overlooked aspect  
  **Thursday, 10 November**

- **John Saré**  
  The Great Siege as seen by Matteo Perez d’Aleccio  
  **Thursday, 15 December**

- **Annalise Falzon**  
  The Majjistral Park  
  **Thursday, 12 January**

- **Professor Denis De Lucca**  
  Baroque Valletta: A 17th-century Jesuit course in military architecture at the Collegium Melitense  
  **Thursday, 16 February**

- **Andre Zammit**  
  Our architects – A private archive unveiled  
  **Thursday, 8 March**

- **Dr Theresa Zammit Lupi**  
  My life with books – a book conservator’s perspective  
  **Thursday, 12 April**

- **Michelle Padovani**  
  Reading for a Master’s degree in archaeology: determining whether an individual was right or left handed from studies of skeletal remains  
  **Thursday, 17 May**

- **Nicoline Sagona**  
  Early 19th-century souvenir illustrations of *Ġgantija Temples*  
  **Thursday, 14 June**
Autumn fund-raising concert

This autumn’s fund-raising concert and dinner is to be held on Saturday, 12 November in the grand hall of St John’s Cavalier, which is being made available to Din l-Art Helwa by the kind permission of the Embassy to Malta of the Sovereign Military and Hospitalier Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta, and of HE Ambassador Umberto di Capua.

A string and vocal recital will be given by the String Quartet Anon, comprised of Marcelline Agius and Nadia Debono on violin, Stephen Galea on viola and Angelica Galea on violincello, with the special participation of Soprano Miriam Cauchi.

Bookings through the DLHI office on info@dinlarthelwa.org

The Friends of Ta’ Braxia Association celebrates its 10th Anniversary

In search of heroes

The Friends of Ta’ Braxia Association celebrated its 10th Anniversary this year and a new guide book has been published by Dr Alexander Welsh outlining the history of the Ta’ Braxia cemetery, its chapel and fountain, and of the prominent people buried there. The association was established in 2001 as an independent arm of Din l-Art Helwa to research the cemetery and care for its historic monuments in collaboration with the Department of Health, which is responsible for burials.

Volunteers Dr Welsh, Charles Gatt and Major Anthony Camilleri, who look after the multi-denominational cemetery at Ta’ Braxia, report that there is an increasing number of both local and foreign visitors to both Ta’ Braxia and the Msida Bastion Historic Garden in search of the final resting place of relatives or of prominent personages who died in Malta. Earlier this year, a group of 300 Russians from a visiting cruise liner came to Ta’ Braxia and laid a wreath on the grave of General Constantin Voyensky de Brèzè.

A Memorial to Charles McCorrie

Members of the International Victoria Cross Society also visited the Msida Bastion Historic Garden in search of the resting place of Charles McCorrie (also McCurrie), one of the three holders of the award who died in Malta. Din l-Art Helwa, with the support of the Victoria Cross Society, is planned to establish a memorial to Charles McCorrie in the Garden. The Victoria Cross is the most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. According to records held by the Victoria Cross Society, Private Charles McCorrie of the 57th West Middlesex Regiment, who was born in Co. Antrim, Ireland, is believed to be buried at the Msida Bastion, although his grave has not been formally identified. Private McCorrie was approximately 25 years old when, on 23 June 1855 during the siege of Sebastopol in the Crimea, he caught and threw back from his post a live shell that had been fired by the enemy, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Private McCorrie died in Malta in 1857.

The other recipients of the Victoria Cross who died and are buried in Malta are General Walter Norris Congreve VC, KCB, MVO, of the Rifle Brigade, and Captain Andrew Moynihan. General Congreve, Governor of Malta between 1924 and 1927 was buried at sea between Malta and Filfla in 1927. His memorial stands on the cliff edge close to Hel Gaġġ. He was awarded the Victoria Cross during the 2nd Boer War in 1899. Captain Andrew Moynihan of the 90th Regiment Scottish Rifles (The Cameronians) was, like Private McCorrie, awarded the Victoria Cross during the Crimean War in 1855, on 8 September. He subsequently served as musketry instructor in Malta and died here at the age of 36 after drinking unsterilised goat’s milk. He is buried at Ta’ Braxia Cemetery.

Din l-Art Helwa and The Friends Association are asking anybody who has any records relating to the death and burial of Charles McCorrie/McCurrie to contact Dr Alexander Welsh on info@dinlarthelwa.org

Both Din l-Art Helwa and The Friends of Ta’ Braxia continue searching for funds for the restoration of Ta’ Braxia’s chapel and the main fountain. The chapel was designed by John Loughborough Pearson and completed in 1894 with funds provided by Sir Arthur Hamilton Gordon KCMG, (Lord Stanmore), in memory of his wife Lady Rachel Emily Hamilton, whose grave is incorporated in the exterior rear wall of the chapel. The fountain was designed by Emmanuele Luigi Galizia, the architect of the cemetery and later of the Addolorata Cemetery. Charles Gatt, Executive Director of the Friends of Ta’ Braxia, states that both monuments are in a dire state of repair and require urgent work, especially the chapel due to fractures in its masonry and the deterioration of its roof tiles, its unique timber eaves and consoles. The Galizia fountain is badly eroded, two-thirds submerged and on the point of collapse, being held together with wires.

The Association has asked the government to increase the number of graves at Ta’ Braxia, as there is a long waiting list of applicants, and to allocate funds from their sale to the restoration and upkeep of these national monuments.

To become a Friend of Ta’ Braxia through an annual subscription of €50, or to purchase its guidebook, please contact Din l-Art Helwa.

A Memorial to Charles McCorrie, VC

Din l-Art Helwa is looking to raise funds to erect a memorial to the memory of Charles McCorrie, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantry and is recorded to have been buried in the Msida Bastion Historic Garden. A Victoria Cross replica has already been generously donated by the Victoria Cross Society. Please send any donations to Din l-Art Helwa, Charles McCorrie account, 133 Melita St., Valletta, Malta.
Art and Conservation Symposium on Alessio Erardi and his paintings at Our Lady of Victory Church

A most successful art and conservation symposium was held on 28 September at our premises in Melita Street and our lecture hall was packed. The excitement in the audience could be felt to mount as the day progressed. Seven presentations of first class calibre by our high-level speakers focused attention on the Alessio Erardi ceiling paintings in the Church of Our Lady of Victory and their conservation, and we were given insights into the historic and artistic ceiling paintings in the Church of Our Lady of Victory and their conservation, and we were given insights into the historic and artistic importance of this early first church of Valletta built by Grand Master de Valette and dedicated by him to the Blessed Virgin in gratitude for his victory during the Great Siege. The symposium was the first in a series of initiatives that Din l-Art Helwa intends to organise to raise awareness of the importance of the church and its art.

Experts from the Courtauld Institute of Art, all in Malta at the same time, gave the audience a rare glimpse into the highly specialised programmes of conservation they undertake around the world, and into the conservation work at Our Lady of Victory Church commissioned by the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee between 2004 and 2008 then under the direction of Dr Ray Bondin. Judge Giovanni Bonello shared his knowledge of the historic value of the church, saying that it boasted many ‘firsts’ in the history of Valletta when, as the first building of our capital city, it later also served both as a court of justice for errant Knights of the Order and as the Order’s parish church. Professor Mario Buhagiar, head of the Department of History of Art at the University of Malta, gave us a most learned treatise on the significance of the artistic scheme painted by Alessio Erardi.

Putting this artist’s work in context within the history of baroque art in Malta, which came so soon after the first ceiling paintings executed by Mattia Preti in St John’s Cathedral, he underlined the importance of the commission to Erardi by Grand Master Perellos in 1714. The Grand Master personally underwrote the cost of the decoration of the ceiling for a monumental scheme celebrating the Marian Cycle, illustrating scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin.

The Courtauld Institute of Art is one of the world’s pre-eminent centres in the teaching of the history of art and its conservation at the University of London. Two of its conservators, Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede, have been involved with the Erardi conservation programme since the Valletta Rehabilitation Project undertook the detailed studies necessary before the work could start. The ceiling of Victory Church was badly shaken by the bomb that destroyed the nearby Opera House, and water infiltration, salts efflorescence, old restoration interventions and simply neglect by its primary stake holders, both the State and the Church, have continued to cause deterioration to the ceiling paintings and to the integrity of the church as a whole.

Professor David Park, Director of the Wall Painting Conservation Department at the Courtauld Institute, traced the role the Courtauld plays in the field of conservation across the globe, giving us the opportunity to see its work on wall paintings in places such as Butan, China, India and Cyprus, where the Institute has many projects. Sharon Cather discussed the approach to the conservation of the Erardi ceiling at Our Lady of Victory as an example of the ethical direction of the Institute in its teaching and execution of wall painting conservation, which determines that the methods adopted interfere with the original work of art as little as possible during all phases of conservation. Only in this way can it be passed on to future generations as the artist intended it to be.

Stephen Rickerby’s presentation discussed the dire condition of the ceiling paintings when the work was begun, illustrating the negative impact by previous interventions, the use of inappropriate materials and of external factors such as water infiltration. Charlotte Martin de Fonjaudran, currently working on the Crypt of St John’s Co-Cathedral, outlined the experience she had gained from the studies that she herself carried out on the scientific and technical analysis of the paintings.

Lisa Shekede brought the evening to an emotional close with a moving series of images of before, during and after the conservation work. These allowed us to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the areas of the Erardi ceiling treated by the Courtauld so far, in particular those of the iconic face of the Virgin of the Assumption, and of the Immaculate Conception demonstrating just how amazing the Erardi ceiling will be when the work is completed. The Symposium tripled the determination of all of us at Din l-Art Helwa to continue the conservation work as soon as possible. Malta’s Alessio Erardi, 18th-century baroque painter of the Order of St John for many years, has left us with a treasure of which we can all be proud. I for one am determined that we will do our utmost not just to find the funds necessary to make this project a success but also to find loving volunteers who will help us keep the church open for longer hours, for the better enjoyment of both worshippers and visitors.
A Tale of Two Towers

_A Tale of Two Towers_ is a DVD telling the story of the Comino and Dwejra Towers, which are held in guardianship by Din l-Art Ħelwa, produced through funding received from the Eco-Gozo Grant. The 20-minute DVD, which was filmed and produced by Alvin Scicluna of CVC Media Group, Gozo, will be shown at DLH sites. It illustrates the story behind the building of these fortifications in Gozo and Comino – which date from the time of the Order of St John – as seen by the Order’s Chief Engineer and is narrated by John Barnes who also wrote the script.

The film has been shot on location over the summer. It features, with speaking parts and in costume, Albert Gauci as Military Engineer Giovanni Rinaldini, Terry Shaw as Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt regarding Santa Marija Tower, Comino and Paul Barnes as Grand Master Juan de Lascaris-Casteller regarding Dwejra Tower, Gozo.

The Story

The arrival of Military Engineer Giovanni Rinaldini from Italy was announced by Grand Master Garzes in 1599. Rinaldini immediately carried out two careful reconnaissances of Gozo and produced two detailed reports recommending which sites he considered should be fortified and with plans of works required. The Citadel was too far inland and deemed to be ineffective when it came to rebuffing enemy incursions and Rinaldini dealt with the problem of fortifying Gozo in the light of four main problems: whether or not Gozo should be fortified; if so, which sites were to be fortified; the layout and type of defences to be erected and, above all, whether the Order was willing and able to meet the cost and to what extent this would be possible. The rest, as they say, is history!

The production of this DVD has been the dream of Carolyn Clements and the DLH Gozo team of hard-working volunteers for several years and it is hoped that it will be on sale at the DLH Heritage Corner in Melita Street, and DLH properties by Christmas.

Heritage Interpretation Panels

The Eco-Gozo Grant has also enabled Din l-Art Ħelwa to provide a number of interpretation panels and maps that will enhance the visitor experience at the heritage sites looked after by the organisation in Comino and Gozo: Comino Tower and Battery, Qala Battery, Xlendi Tower and Isopu Tower. The panels guide the visitor through the sites and on heritage trails so that they can also enjoy the built and natural heritage of the surrounding areas. Panels showing fauna, flora and marine biodiversity form part of the experience.

Qala Battery gets its roof back – and DLH appeals for the return of its coat of arms

Reduced to mere rubble, its masonry misappropriated and neglected for some 200 years, St Anthony’s Battery at Qala Point, built in 1732 by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena, is being painstakingly restored by Din l-Art Ħelwa in a project undertaken in conjunction with Qala Local Council and mostly funded by Mepa’s Environmental Improvements Fund. The battery stands on Qala Point – a spectacular location – guarding the straits to Comino. Perched on the edge of a coastal cliff, its slope permits very limited and difficult passage for workers, volunteers and the transport of materials.

St Anthony’s Battery is one of only two coastal batteries built by the Order of St John in Gozo to have survived, the other being at Il-Qbajjar, outside Marsalforn. Designed on a regular plan with five faces of embrasures for 11 guns and with ancillary accommodation inside the battery, it has a gorge wall with a projecting _tenaille_ symmetrically pierced with musketry loopholes. Carved above the main gate of the battery were two shields – one of the Cross of the Order and the other the coat of arms of de Vilhena, engraved with the date 1732.

Earlier this summer the restoration project reached a very significant stage, that of reinstating the arched roofs of the internal blockhouse inside the battery that would have been used to accommodate a small garrison and an ammunition store. With advice from fortification expert Stephen Spiteri, the triple span of the arched supports is now complete and the roof has been installed.

The next stage of the restoration will focus on the reinstatement of the water catchment system and the well in order to make this outlying heritage site as autonomous as possible. Sadly, the superb carving of Grand Master de Vilhena’s coat of arms that once adorned the battery’s doorway was stolen just days before Din l-Art Ħelwa began work on the site and we do appeal to anyone who knows of its whereabouts to get in touch with us.

Thanks go to Lt Col. Eric Parnis, who has rigorously followed the project since its inception.
In 1961, while work was underway for the construction of the new village secondary school in Żejtun, ancient remains were discovered (Fig. 1). The archaeological excavations that began at the site in 1964 revealed a large cistern and some water channels, together with an area paved in stone slabs.

Eight years later, an annual excavation project, led by the Museums Department, began and in the course of short excavation sessions that continued until 1976, the remains of a Roman villa covering an area of about 2,000 square metres were revealed (Fig. 2). Various parts of the stone apparatus used in the production of olive oil were discovered, including the large stone block used to anchor the wooden screw that pulled down the large wooden beam used to squeeze oil out of the olive pulp (Fig. 3). A vat sculpted from a single stone block intended for the settling of the processed oil was also found. These remains were clustered around one room and constituted the industrial section of the villa complex. The residential area was discovered to the south. This consisted of three adjoining rooms, with floors of lozenge-shaped terracotta tiles. Some of the walls were revealed to have been plastered and decorated with paint. A second cistern, cylindrical in shape, was uncovered to the north. Other discoveries of note included not only a large array of pottery vessels and worked stone fragments but 44 Roman coins dated from between AD 222 and 361.

In the time of the Romans, villas were country estates centred on an impressive residence. Over the years, the remains of some 25 Roman villas have been found in the Maltese Islands and the Żejtun estate is one of two surviving Roman villa sites that comprise both a residential and an industrial area – the other being at San Pawl Milqi in Burmarrad. The archaeological significance of these sites cannot be exaggerated, particularly in view of the fact that some villa remains are either wholly inaccessible (Ta’ Kaċċatura in Birżebbuġa), have been covered over (Ramla l-Ħamra on Gozo), or else have been destroyed (Tad-Dawl, on the outskirts of Kirkop, and Gharghur, and many more).

It is for this reason that the University of Malta has embarked on a multi-disciplinary research project to learn more about the Żejtun villa. In 2006, excavations were resumed by the University’s Department of Classics and Archaeology following requests from successive school heads and Żejtun local council. Four trenches were opened up, incorporating parts of the limits of the 1972-76 excavation, as well as previously unexcavated areas. The primary aim of the fieldwork was to assess, record and publish the architectural remains and cultural material revealed in past excavations and other data arising from limited excavations. It was also realised that positive action had to be taken to protect the remains that were uncovered in the 1970s from further deterioration, in particular those that are of significant archaeological importance. For this purpose, a collaborative venture was established between Din l-Art Helwa, the University of Malta and the HSBC Malta Foundation to address these concerns.

opposite:

Fig. 2
English-language students uncovering the tiled floors of the residential area of the Roman villa in 1972
(source: Heritage Malta/National Museum of Archaeology archives)

bottom

Fig. 3
Elevated view of the press room with anchor block (top right) investigated in 2006
(source: Żejtun Villa Excavation Project, University of Malta)

Fig. 1
Aerial photograph of the remains of the Roman villa in the grounds of the secondary school, St Margaret College in Żejtun
(source: Armed Forces of Malta)

The conservation and research of the Żejtun Roman Villa is a project undertaken by the University of Malta in collaboration with Din l-Art Helwa and made possible through the generous support of the HSBC Malta Foundation.
The fact that the remains of the Żejtun villa have been exposed to the elements for the last 30 years has resulted in the widespread deterioration of the site. This is particularly evident in respect of the tiled floors in the residential part of the villa and especially the remains of the plastered walls, which used to show evidence of decorated decoration that is now barely visible (Fig. 4d, e). Although some emergency restoration work was carried out during the excavations in the 1970s on one of the surfaces where tiles had been dislodged, no other measures, including preventive steps, have been taken since to safeguard the remains.

The causes of deterioration are multiple and interact one with the other. As is typical with archaeological sites, they are largely of natural origin, e.g. rain, soluble salts, wind, sun and vegetation. The action of these factors is even more harmful since it is cyclic. The annual growth of intrusive plants and trees is certainly a major cause for concern since it is damaging structures, as well as archaeological deposits. Roots grow within the gaps in the structures and slowly dislodge fragile tiles and fragments of stone and plaster (Fig. 4a, c). Rain causes the collapse of plaster fragments and the fragile parts of stone walls, while recurrent puddles have been observed to form in several areas inside the tiled rooms (Fig. 4a). Even the vat is full of water after periods of heavy rain (Fig. 4c). Although most of the deterioration observed on site is attributable to adverse climatic conditions, humans also have a role. Several stone blocks have been turned over by thoughtless individuals probably looking for snails, whilst the current fragility of the site makes the presence of visitors, even careful ones, somewhat risky.

Conservation concerns

The current project addresses the most pressing conservation needs of the villa. Special attention is being paid to the residential section, since this is clearly the most vulnerable and information-rich area of the entire complex. The project will include:

1) Recording, assessing and monitoring the site’s state of conservation;
2) Temporarily protecting the vulnerable parts of the site, while at the same time carrying out environmental monitoring;
3) Carrying out emergency conservation of the walls where there is an imminent risk of the plaster being dislodged or lost, and to the floors, where tiles are being lost;
4) Exploring ways of preventing the re-growth of vegetation;
5) Planning for the long-term protection of the site, including the erection of a permanent shelter over the residential area.

These tasks are demanding and only the constant collaboration of several entities will ensure the project’s success. The conservation plan has been coordinated by the University’s Department of the Built Heritage (Faculty for the Built Environment)
Fig. 4
(a) The residential area after the winter rains  
(b) the limestone vat filled with rainwater  
(c) vegetation growing in the space between wall face and dislodged plaster layer, scale bar 10 cm  
(d) state of painted plaster when it was discovered in September 1976, scale bar: 1 foot  
(e) trace, arrowed, of red band on plaster in winter 2010, scale bar 10 cm (sources: a-c and e Żejtun Villa excavation project; d. Anthony Bonanno)
and drawn up in collaboration with the Department of Classics and Archaeology. The recording and assessment of the site condition was carried out in collaboration with the Conservation Division of Heritage Malta (Fig. 5). Students of the Faculty for the Built Environment, supervised by Prof. Alex Torpiano, are designing the temporary shelter that will protect the residential part of the villa from the harmful effects of rainwater and solar radiation (Fig. 6). Earlier this year, a group of enthusiastic volunteers from HSBC and university students cleared the entire site from overgrown vegetation (Fig. 7). A plan to actively involve a number of schoolteachers and pupils from the local school in specific aspects of the current conservation plan is also in the pipeline, and a seminar will be held by Fondazzjoni Wirt iż-Żejtun in March next year to raise awareness of the remains of the Roman villa and cultural heritage in the area.

The way ahead
What has been described in this article is only the start of a long process that has to be maintained if the remains are to survive. There has to be continued monitoring of the environmental conditions both inside and outside the shelter, and regular maintenance of the site itself, including the periodic removal of weeds, and targeted interventions such as the reapplication of mortar and the reattachment of loose tiles. It is only with our continued commitment to the conservation of the site that these important remains will survive to act as a source of valuable information about our past and a source of enjoyment for everyone.

Acknowledgements
The Żejtun Villa Conservation Project started as the result of a conversation between a research assistant at the University of Malta, Maxine Anastasi, and a former executive president of Din l-Art Ħelwa, Martin Galea, in 2008. Since then it has developed thanks to a number of partnerships, involving students, professionals and volunteers, from the University of Malta Faculties of Arts, the Built Environment and Engineering (in particular, Dr John Betts and Ing. Maurizio Fenech); the HSBC Malta Foundation and the HSBC employees who volunteered to clear the site (coordinated by Martin Scicluna, Josef Camilleri and Doriette Camilleri); at Din l-Art Ħelwa, successive presidents and council members (especially Martin Galea, Petra Bianchi, Simone Mizzi, Martin Scicluna and Maria Grazia Cassar); at St Margaret College (formerly Carlo Diacono Secondary School), particularly the current headmistress (Anna Spiteri) and the previous one (Maria Ciappara), together with the College Principal (Josephine Mifsud) and the Foundation for Tomorrow’s Schools (Charles Farrugia).

The students from the Faculty for the Built Environment involved in designing the temporary shelter are Kane Borg, Claire Carter, Francesca Falzon, Kurt Sammut Alessi and Joeaby Vassallo. The students following the degree in conservation at the University of Malta involved in documenting the state of conservation of the remains under the supervision of architect Ruben Abela and conservators Frank Chetcuti, James Licari, Ruby Jean Cutajar and Joanne Dimech are Clayton Bonello, Chiara Galea, Claire Marie Scerri, Annetto Schembri, Francesco Sultana, Luca Tufigno and Jane Marie Vella. The project has been undertaken with the permission of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and we thank Anthony Pace and Nathaniel Cutajar for their interest and help.
GasanMamo Insurance Ltd Support for Delimara Lighthouse

Din l-Art Helwa is delighted to announce that GasanMamo Insurance Ltd has come forward with a generous sponsorship that will allow us to conclude the complex restoration of Delimara Lighthouse. The restoration is now almost completed but the challenge of the conservation of the lighthouse’s canopy comes next. The work needed to the copper and metal parts, and the housing of its beacon, requires technical and engineering skills and considerable funding. It is not the first time that this company has assisted Din l-Art Helwa and we are grateful to GasanMamo for its assistance with this restoration, which we hope to finalise this winter. Din l-Art Helwa extends its heartfelt thanks to GasanMamo Insurance Ltd, and especially to Managing Director Albert P. Mamo, and all its Board, for continuing to share our vision to help preserve Malta’s rich architectural heritage.

GasanMamo Insurance Ltd has recently announced that it will sponsor the final phase of the restoration of Delimara lighthouse. This three-year project will breathe new life into this landmark that stands as a guardian to the southernmost harbour of the Maltese Islands.

On 1 January 2003, GasanMamo Insurance Ltd was granted a licence by the Malta Financial Services Authority to operate as an underwriter for General Insurance business. However, the path to this date commenced in 1947 with the formation of Galdes & Mamo Ltd, which was appointed as attorney and agent in Malta for the London & Lancashire Insurance Co. Ltd, a company that later formed part of the Royal Insurance Group of the UK.

In 1970, Gasan Insurance Agency Ltd was established and was appointed attorney and agent in Malta for General Accident Fire & Life Assurance Corporation Ltd (GAFLAC). Gasan Insurance Agency Ltd and Galdes & Mamo Ltd both developed into leading insurance providers in Malta in their own right and in 1999 it was agreed to merge these two agency operations into GasanMamo Insurance Agency Ltd (GMI), representing CGU Insurance plc – part of the UK Financial Services giant AVIVA. In retrospect, this was the start of a series of changes that would have a profound effect on the company and the way it operated. Due to the synergy that existed between the two organisations, together with the merger, this created a significant impetus that caused GMI to surge forward in terms of size and stature in the Maltese insurance market.

Having allowed for the full integration of the two organisations, by 2002 the board and management felt that the company was in a position to evolve further. This change occurred in January 2003, when GasanMamo Insurance ceased to represent CGU Insurance plc and matured into an underwriting company. With nearly 10 years of operations under its belt, GMI has further enhanced its position and arguably ranks as a leading insurance operator in Malta with a robust product range, excellent and professional service and a high profile.

GasanMamo Insurance Ltd has a board of directors with a wealth of experience in the world of business, insurance and financial services, both locally and abroad. The board is chaired by Joseph A. Gasan, Gasan Group of Companies CEO, while Albert P. Mamo is the Managing Director. Other board members are Baudouin Deschamps, Julian J. Mamo, Paul Matthews, P. Danny Rosso and Martin Wonfor.

The company is managed by a close knit, dedicated and experienced team that is led by Albert P. Mamo with Director Sales, Marketing & Administration Julian J. Mamo, General Manager Personal & Commercial Lines Leslie Causon, and General Manager Motor Francis Valletta. All divisions are supported by some 125 well-trained, qualified personnel who have a high level of expertise in their respective areas. Training and development is a fundamental pillar of the GMI ethos, ensuring that the company provides added value to all its clients.

GasanMamo Insurance operates from a head office in Msida Road, Gzira, with strategically located branch offices and a wide network of tied insurance intermediaries (sub-agents) throughout Malta and Gozo. In addition, GMI enjoys an excellent relationship with all leading insurance brokers and also provides a user-friendly website for the convenience of customers who wish to access its products from the comfort of their own home.

The company aims to be easily accessible to customers and provide products that are easy to understand and that meet the specific needs of its policyholders. It aims to provide customers with professional assistance and support at all stages of their dealings, including before inception and in the event of a loss. Steady and constant growth is part of the GasanMamo Insurance strategy and this is achieved by consolidating its position in its established areas of operation as well as developing new product lines such as Sana Healthcare private medical insurance. GMI looks to the future primarily in the Maltese insurance market with confidence, due to its ability to perform to standards that ensure it stands out from the crowd. It currently also operates three associate companies: GM Insurance Brokers Ltd, GasanMamo Financial Services Ltd and Abacus Risk Management Services PCC Ltd, to complement its core activities and is constantly evaluating and considering other related areas of interest.

As a responsible organisation, GasanMamo has for many years supported initiatives that care for the historical heritage of Malta in the belief that the citizens of today are merely caretakers of this patrimony and that every endeavour should be made to hand it over to successive generations in a better condition than the one in which it was received. The company believes that this philosophy is the key to what it stands for and it is proud to once again be actively involved in a project that will secure for the future another piece in the historical jigsaw that is Malta. The Delimara lighthouse project is of particular significance to GasanMamo as the company’s logo is a lighthouse – as a beacon of security. The company wishes Din l-Art Helwa well in this project.
The restoration of the 15th-century chapel at Bir Miftuh on the outskirts of Gudja has been one of Din L-Art Ħelwa’s most notable successes, and has proved a charming venue for our yearly music festival. Restored with generous sponsorship from Malta International Airport, it speaks to us rather mysteriously of an important past. Although these days it is somewhat isolated, standing in fields some distance from modern Gudja (‘big stone’), a closer examination of the area reveals the remains of a temple, the base of a cross and the original bir miftuh, the “open well” or, as some say, the “well of sweet water”. This well is in front of the church on the other side of the lane and is identified by a large stone bath. There are other wells, one at the side of it and another in front of the chapel. The presence of the ta’ Kapella borehole, next to the cross base and another well, testifies to a plentiful aquifer which must have been an important consideration in the original location.

There are other remains, including catacombs. Bir Miftuh must have been a place of veneration long before ‘our’ chapel was built, however the houses of the parishioners it presumably served are somewhat lacking. The chapel is first mentioned in history in 1436. Bishop Senatore de Mello made a rollo of all the churches in Malta for the purpose of settling disputes over taxation (by the Holy See). Bir Miftuh was one of 12 capelle or parishes in Malta. These are thought to have been organised by Bishop Hilarius (1356-70) and comprised Siggiewi, Mellieha, Naxxar, Birkirkara, Bir Miftuh, Qormi, Bisqallin (Zejtun), Zurrieq, Żebbuġ, Hal Tartarni (Dingli), Rabat and, of course, the Cathedral. The original churches were ‘ordinary’ buildings, indeed Mellieha’s was a cave. These capelle had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over their surrounding villages and were run by clergy from the Cathedral in Mdina until local arrangements could be made. All these original churches were rebuilt or extended in the 15th century, but only Bir Miftuh and San Girgor in Żebbuġ remain in use. San Girgor, sometimes known as Santa Katerina, was rebuilt in 1492 and a low dome was added in 1606. Whether what we see now at Bir Miftuh was the original church is not known, but it must date from early on. The core of the nave is all that remains, and its dimensions are 14.5 metres in length, 9.1 metres wide and 6.7 metres high.

In 1436, more than half of these capelle were still being run by clergy from the Cathedral, but Bir Miftuh had its own priest, Baldus Carcheppo, as well as Donnus Blasio from the Cathedral. Presbyter Carceppo received a benefice income of three uncie and 15 tareni, and there were...
five *animagia* or endowments: Donna Margarita, 15 tareni, Notary Brancato, 20 tareni, S. Luca, 1 uncia, Antoni Mallia, 1 uncia and ‘Cola’ 15 tareni. Rather better off was Don Blasio (pro *Capella Birmifthum cum terris suis*) 15 unce, the *animagium* of Lu Dur (near Bir Miftuh) 2 unce, the *animagium* of La Micabibe (Mqabba) 1 uncia and the *benefitio* of Sto Antono (nothing).

The parish covered Luqa, Tarxien, Mqabba, Kirkop, Safi and Hal Farrug, a ‘lost village’ that was west of Luqa where Wied Hanzir joins Wied il-Kbir and, of course, Gudja. All in all, it was a large area that would justify a large church. Add in the *canonicati* or benefices, and Bir Miftuh was a large and wealthy operation. Subsequent kapillani (parish priests) were Nicolaus Falzon 1450, Antonius Vella 1472 and ‘Canchur’ in 1498. In 1565, the church was used as a stable and desecrated by the Turkish invading force, and it is said that one side chapel had to be rebuilt, but it seems that all was rectified very quickly.

Bishop Dusina visited Bir Miftuh in 1576 (the priest at the time being Bartholomew Mangion) and it is clear from his records that the church had prospered and expanded, being much more extensive than what we see today. The basic building was in the form of a cross, the long arm being the nave, the two wings being transepts, and the top being the chancel. The original main structure was a metre longer before the transepts or wings extended, eight metres wide and 11 metres deep. The chancel, probably with a higher floor level, continued eastwards, but the foundations disappear after three metres. On the west side the chancel, the foundations are wider and down to where has been excavated, fair faced, so that if there is a crypt, this is where its entrance would be.

There was probably a crypt under the high altar, and some burials were made under the church floor, which was paved with flag-stones. Dusina records a beautiful font, which may be the one which at present is in local hands, said to have been given to a builder in lieu of payment for repairs. The bishop also gives many other details, and it can be concluded that Bir Miftuh was a huge and magnificent complex, but it was not to last.

Writing in 1647, Malta’s first historian Commendatore Abela says that by then the parishes and their churches had developed and Bir Miftuh had been reduced to being simply the parish church of Gudja, then a village of 350 souls. It had lost many of its endowments and by then retained only Hal Farrug in its original capacity of a mother church. Abela mentions the four benefices of Rihania, Bir e Taui, Bir e Sighir, and Ta’ Vagna, which comprised 80 salmates (a salma was nearly four-and-a-half acres) and there were other lands. Rihania was near Gudja and was assigned to Don Santoro de Nasis; Bir e Taui, or Ta’ Bir it-Twil, was between Mqabba and Kirkop and was assigned to Don Antonio de Fava, and Bir e Sighir was in Kirkop and was assigned to Don Simon Bonnici.

Abela mentions the devotion of Prior d’Alvernia Morines who paid for an effigy of Our Lady by the High Altar and a loggia (was he perhaps the Prior of Crato, a wealthy Portuguese Knight, who lived from 1531 to 1595?).

Bishop Balaguer visited Bir Miftuh in 1646 and found the church in disrepair. The mural of the Last Judgment was still visible, but he describes its style as rude, i.e. fashions had changed to more sophisticated depictions of holy subjects. Two of the latter, dating from the 16th century are over the altar: a circular representation of the Madonna and above this a two-panel painting (tempera on wood) with the Trinity (God the Father holding Christ on the Cross in front of Him) in the upper panel and Mary and the Christ child flanked by St Paul and St Peter in the lower part. Both have been recently restored and are very attractive.

What little remains of the Last Judgment mural has also been restored. At the upper left corner are 18 saints and what is thought to have been the Madonna of the Lilies. This would have been the area of Paradise, to where the good souls would have been led after judgment. The centre is punctuated by a circular window which, with the bell-cote, is a later addition, as was probably the staircase access to the roof on the right, which no longer exists. On the right of the mural are devils tormenting sinners, but the lower parts are gone. They included a depiction of the Church, the Judgment (of course) and doubtless scenes of both righteous and sinful living. It is thought that it was commissioned by the Bonnici family.

In 1656, permission was granted for the building of a new church, the fine baroque building in Gudja dedicated to St Mary and in 1686 Bir Miftuh was abandoned. It is possible that it was not completely abandoned, as a fine stone escutcheon, presumably part of a fine gravestone dated 1697, has been found, but the massive church was falling into disrepair and became a ruin, deserted except for builders quarrying the stones. (It is recorded that another escutcheon, of the Dorel family, was lost in recent times.) One can imagine Bir
Miftuħ then as dark, damp and cavernous, with its decorations deteriorating, and far too big and inconvenient to continue to serve and be maintained by the parish of Gudja.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a wall at the top of the nave was built, bringing the church down to its present day dimensions, and during the War the floor was tiled (now replaced by flagstones). The restoration work carried out by Din l-Art Ħelwa followed the granting of a lease by the Curia in 1969.

Inside may be seen the altar, made of stone painted to resemble marble, and some marble pieces said to have come from Ħal Farrug, and at the side of it there is a wooden pulpit, both dating from the 18th century. Then, of course, there is the glory of Bir Miftuħ, already referred to, the fragmentary remains of a mural depicting the Last Judgment, which originally covered the entire back wall. These paintings and murals have been professionally restored and have been described in detail in previous issues.

In an age when most of the congregation was illiterate, and there were no newspapers, television or radio, the mural must have held a very powerful message. However, it obviously deteriorated at an early date, as what is thought to have been the central figure of Christ was replaced by the circular window: possibly the mural had been washed over by then.

Abela also reports that there was a cemetery, graced by an ancient and magnificent palm tree. The actual site of the cemetery has not been found – although doubtless it was in the church precincts – but two headstones have been recovered, and have been placed on either side of the altar. They commemorate the restoration of the Bonnavia grave in 1621, with the one on the right showing presumably the arms of the family, which include an interesting depiction of a two-masted ship with a lateen sail. The Bonnavias were a large and important family with interests in merchandising and ship-owning and held land at Ghaxaq, and doubtless elsewhere. Another stone refers to the building of a hospice by Presbyter Francis Mangion “post mortem”, inferring that it was completed after his death.

The chapel is open to visitors on the first Sunday of every month and to groups by arrangement. The hardworking warden for the past 10 years has been Chev. Charles Gatt and now the baton has been taken up by Lieut. Colonel George Attard Manche who lives close by. My thanks are due to both of them for their help in writing this article.

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Founded in 1950, the Malta Historical Society (MHS) is Malta’s leading non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the academic study and diffusion of Maltese history and culture. The society’s committee is composed of 11 members of whom Judge Dr Giovanni Bonello is President and Professor Mario Buhagiar, Head of the History of Art Department of the University of Malta, is Vice-President. The society’s activities throughout this past half century and more have been manifold and include the annual publication of a prestigious journal Melita Historica, as well as an uninterrupted series of lectures, conferences, studies and ‘history weeks’ with their published proceedings.

Melita Historica is the official journal of the society, and was first issued in 1952 under the editorship of Guze Cassar Pullicino – a pioneer in the field of scientific historical research. The journal’s main aim is to publish original papers, bibliographical studies and book reviews pertaining to Maltese history. It seeks to embrace all approaches to historical research covering different periods from pre-history to recent history, requiring only that work should be of the highest quality, based on original scientific research and currently not being considered for publication elsewhere. All work submitted is read by an appointed board that refers its decision to the society’s committee for final approval.

Most of the papers published in this journal are the fruit of monthly lectures which the society holds at different historical venues. The September lecture, given by Mr Keith Buhagiar, a PhD candidate in archaeology at the University of Malta, was entitled Revisiting Wied ir-Rum: Some Recent Archaeological Discoveries and was held at Palazzo Santa Sophia in Mdina in collaboration with Palazzo Falson. The October lecture was delivered at the Auberge de Castile in Valletta by Dr Frans Ciappara. Dr Ciappara has established himself as one Malta’s leading early modern historians and has published extensively both locally and in prestigious academic journals abroad. He will tackle the highly interesting subject of Conversion Narratives, 1650-1700. In order to give the audience the opportunity to socialise and get to know the speakers, refreshments are served after each lecture.

The constant eagerness of the society to place at the disposal of Maltese researchers a respectable body of interdisciplinary studies is also reflected in another significant publication known as Proceedings of History Week. In the very near future the society will be launching the 13th issue in this series, which will be edited by Ms Charlene Vella and sport a new design by Dr Stephen C. Spiteri. At the moment, preparations are also underway for the 14th annual History Week, which this year will see the participation of a healthy mix of established historians such as Prof. Dominic Fenech, Prof. Carmel Vassallo and Dr Roger Vella Bonavita.

The launch of the 60th anniversary special publication held at the Auberge de Castile
and a number of emerging assiduous historians who will be given a chance to present various aspects of their research.

This year’s lectures will be held at the newly restored Palazzo De La Salle in Republic Street, Valletta on Tuesday, 29 November, Wednesday, 30 November and Friday, 2 December from 6 to 8.30pm. It is hoped that these lectures will help encourage an awareness of the work that is currently being done in the field of Maltese studies. Members of the public are invited to attend and participate in the ensuing discussions, which promise to be extremely interesting.

As the focal point of its 60th anniversary, which was celebrated in 2010, the society introduced the biennial award known as the ‘Meritorious Historian Award’. This honour is conferred on a living historian who, by means of his or her research and publications, is deemed to have made a valuable contribution to the historiography of Malta. Nominations for the Meritorious Historian Award are submitted by members of the MHS, and the choice is made by a panel that is completely independent of the society’s committee. Rev Mgr John Azzopardi was the first historian to be awarded this honour at a ceremony held at San Anton Palace under the distinguished patronage of HE President George Abela.

Another activity commemorating the society’s diamond jubilee was the publication of an illustrated book entitled 60th Anniversary of the Malta Historical Society – A Commemoration. This publication saw the participation of a team of disciplined researchers, each working in their own specialised field, while Dr Joseph F. Grima had the difficult task of editing and coordinating the different studies.

In order to implement such challenging projects, the society is continuously seeking to obtain sponsorships and raise funds through its many social and cultural activities. The most recent of these activities was a wine evening held at Palazzo Parisio in Naxxar on 27 August, at which guests were not only entertained in the palace’s beautiful gardens but were also given the opportunity to acquire a painting by renowned artist John Martin Borg, together with other attractive prizes such as a weekend break at the five-star Fortina Spa Resort. The next activity in the pipeline is the society’s annual dinner being held on the 28th October at Palazzo Depiro in Mdina.

Recognising the mutual goals of both organisations, the Malta Historical Society and Din l’Art Helwa have recently held talks in order to establish the best ways in which they can cooperate for their common benefit. Possible areas of cooperation that have been targeted include publicising each organisation’s publications and promoting each other’s social and cultural activities.

The members of the MHS committee work enthusiastically in order to ensure the proper dissemination of Maltese history and culture, but a healthy society needs the active participation and generous contribution of its members to give it its lifeblood and enable it to function properly. Anyone interested in supporting our initiatives is invited to join the MHS by contacting the Hon. Treasurer, Chev. Alfred P. Farrugia, either by telephone on 2122 5905, by email on mhs@melita.com or by sending a written request to 27 V. Dimech Street, Floriana. Membership forms can also be downloaded from the society’s website www.maltahistory.eu. The annual membership fee is €12, which includes a copy of Melita Historica that is posted free to all members annually.

The Malta Historical Society hopes to welcome many of you soon as its members and as participants in its numerous activities.

**TEAMING UP WITH THE MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

*Din l’Art Helwa* and the Malta Historical Society have teamed up to widen their outreach by sharing communications about events, publications and activities and we also hope to increase membership. The objectives for which our two organisations were founded are very closely linked, as our built and architectural heritage is very much founded on the rich historic past of our island. We are very aware that many of you reading this will be members of both our societies, so we hope you enjoy receiving our regular communication that will bring you news of the exciting activities both organisations plan from time to time. Thanks are due also to those of you who have already come forward from both our organisations to contribute with ideas, intellectual and research support and with volunteering for the hands-on work that is sometimes requested.

Simone Mizzi
Executive President
of Din l’Art Helwa
Coastal Sentinels and their 'Clocks'

Martin Vella

Lighthouses built in the traditional 18th and 19th-century architectural style are often considered fascinating and romantic, and some people look on them as a symbol of safety or assurance but however you look at them, lighthouses have always been considered vital by seafarers.

The earliest known lighthouse was built in the port of Alexandria in Egypt in the 3rd century BC. It was called Pharos and is listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The fire on top of this lighthouse could be seen from as far as 30 miles out to sea. It was destroyed in an earthquake in the 14th century. The Romans also used to erect light towers and by 400AD many were in service from the Black Sea to the eastern coasts of the Atlantic. With the decline of the Roman Empire, the light towers were gradually neglected until the 12th century, which saw a revival in sea trading. Navigation charts were very approximate and with the increase in the frequency of voyages, the number of shipwrecks rose accordingly, resulting in a loss of life, cargo and ships. Public pressure resulted in more and more lighthouses being built.

This trend was also felt in Malta. The Knights built lighthouses in Gozo (at tal-Ġordan, but not the present one) and in Fort St Elmo, even though they were reluctant to construct them, as they would also be an aid to the pirates that infested the Mediterranean Sea. In 1850, the British built a traditional lighthouse at tal-Ġordan and in 1854, a similar one was erected at Delimara. The St Elmo lighthouse was demolished just before WW2.

While the tal-Ġordan lighthouse in Gozo is still serving its purpose, even though now it is equipped with a modern electronic beacon, the one at Delimara was decommissioned in 1988 to make way for modern technology. It was regrettably left abandoned until a restoration project was initiated by Din l-Art Ħelwa in 2006. This project was sponsored by the Malta Maritime Authority.

The Delimara Lighthouse was commissioned in 1850 by Richard Moore O’Ferrall, Governor of Malta between 1847 and 1851. The name ‘Delimara’ is probably a corruption of the Arabic dejr l-imnara, meaning ‘the house of the lantern’. When the Suez Canal stimulated maritime traffic between Asia and Europe, naval and merchant ships had to be guided safely through the Sicilian Channel or to Valletta’s harbour.

Prominently dominating Delimara point, the lighthouse stands 24 metres high and was therefore an important reference for ships coming from North Africa. It is the only one in Malta that is still equipped with a Fresnel Lens beacon. Augustin Fresnel was a French scientist who revolutionised lighthouse technology in 1823 by inventing a lens system that would reflect out to sea some 83 per cent of the light emitted by a light source (figure 1). This lens was composed of a central bulls-eye half convex lens (1), surrounded by refractive (dioptric) prisms (2). To maximise the beacon’s light emission, light rays with a narrower angle than those at the centre, were reflected out to sea by reflective/refractive (catadioptric) prisms (3). These prisms had to be accurately aligned to produce a narrow parallel beam that could reach more than 15 miles out to sea, depending on weather conditions and light source intensity.

Fresnel categorised these lenses by size, better known as “orders”. The largest, order 1, would have an approximate focal length of 92cm and would be 240cm high. The smallest, order 6, would have a focal length of around 15cm and would be 43cm high. Order 1 lenses were mostly used in major lighthouses, while the 6th order lenses were used on breakwaters and signal beacons. Delimara Lighthouse is equipped with a 3rd order lens with a focal length of 53cm and a height of 160cm.

For several decades after this invention, France was the leading supplier of lighthouse lenses until a British glass factory, Chance Brothers Ltd, took the lead after adopting a revolutionary lighthouse beacon design. James Timmins Chance came up with the idea of fitting Fresnel lenses on a rotating table, at the centre of which he placed the light source. Depending on the number of lenses fitted, usually three or six, and the speed of rotation of the table, each lighthouse could then have its own ‘signature’, recognised by the frequency, number and colour of light flashes observed from out at sea. The
Delimara Lighthouse signature used to be one flash every 30 seconds, alternating red and white. The beacon table rotated by means of a weight-driven “clock”, very similar in principle to the clock mechanisms found decorating many Maltese church façades. This “clock” is not a clock in the accepted sense, as it does not show the time, but it does keep accurate time. The driving weight hangs from the very top of the lighthouse tower and when released, it unwinds the “clock” drum that turns the gear train of the “clock”. A friction governor in the gear train controls the rate of descent of the weights and, when correctly adjusted, it produces a fairly accurate number of revolutions per minute on its output shaft that drives the lens rotating beacon. Chance Brothers “clocks” were equipped with a minute dial (figure 2) so that the Lighthouse Keeper could compare the number of turns per minute (rpm) of the “clock” output shaft against a pocket watch. By adjusting the governor, he would be able to produce the required lighthouse flash frequency.

A most interesting detail of the Delimara beacon is its light source. This is made up of a pear-shaped paraffin tank with three lion paws serving as points of support. Brass half-rounded rods, which also serve to reinforce the tank itself, extend from these paws to the very top of the tank, where three lion heads complete the design (figure 3). This is typical Victorian period adornment, indicating that the tank could well be the original tank that lit the first stationary beacon in 1854. This theory is also supported by the rather rough and unusual method by which the tank is installed in the beacon. It is equipped with a hand pump to pressurise the fuel supplying the three co-centric wicks that were located just above the tank.

Unfortunately, years of neglect and vandalism have left their mark on the Delimara Lighthouse Chance Brothers beacon installation. Several Fresnel prisms were smashed as the result of gunshots (figure 4), while the clock was vandalised by the removal of most of the gear train, shafts, winding handle and weights (figure 5).

The World Lighthouse Society was contacted in an effort to obtain technical information that could be used in the restoration of the clock mechanism. These clocks were made for each specific lighthouse and were never mass produced – which to all intents and purposes dashed all hopes of obtaining any technical drawings. The Chance Brothers Archives in Birmingham were also contacted and they advised that when Pilkington Glass, which was once in direct competition with Chance Brothers Glass Works, took over the company in the 1950s, they appear to have microfilmed some selected engineering drawings and then destroyed the originals. The hopes of finding micro-filmed drawings dating back to 1896 are very slim and the research involved is very expensive.

This basically leaves only one option, that of re-designing the gear train according to the shaft spacing, weight and vertical drop height. This alternative is not an inexpensive option either, especially when it comes to the actual manufacturing of the gear train that would need to be made in gun metal to avoid damage to the remaining original gearing.

Being the only Fresnel Lens beacon in Malta, it would be a matter of national pride to have all the missing lenses and prisms replaced. This is simply a question of cost and raising the necessary funds. Acrylic prisms would be ordered in place of the original glass ones to contain costs.

Until the lighthouse is fully restored, Din l-Art Helwa is planning to have a functional lighthouse model made to scale, which would be kept at Delimara Lighthouse for visitor information. It is planned to open this heritage site for holiday accommodation next summer. In its earlier days, the lighthouse was the permanent home of two lighthouse keepers and their families. This feature will still be respected and when the restoration has been completed, the lighthouse will be an excellent holiday location with swimming beaches, fishing villages and other local attractions all close by.
The Church of Our Lady of Victory – the first church to be constructed after the lifting of the Great Siege, and the first resting place of the body of Grand Master de Valette – has a hugely important place in the history of Malta and the Order of St John, reflected in the magnificent ceiling paintings. Undertaken under the patronage of Grand Master Perellos by Maltese artist Alessio Erardi in 1716, the scheme is surpassed in scale and accomplishment only by that of Mattia Preti for the ceiling of St John’s co-Cathedral.

Towards the end of the 20th century, the church and its paintings had been neglected for years. Rainwater poured through cracks in the roof, causing the globigerina ashlar blocks to erupt with salts and spall, and the paintings applied to their surface to crack and flake. Additionally obscured by grime, darkened non-original layers of varnish and veils of white salts, by 1979 the paintings were considered to be so worthless and unsightly as to have been threatened with being whitewashed over. Although spared this indignity, subsequent misguided and piecemeal restoration interventions in the 1980s and 90s resolved none of the problems and only added new ones.
Emergency stabilisation, analysis, and research

Following the application of a temporary membrane to prevent further rainwater infiltration, conservation work was initiated in 2004 by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. The first and most urgent job was to secure falling stonework and mortar across the entire ceiling, first with temporary facings, then by the application of appropriate lime-based grouting and repairs. The next and more laborious task – underpinning all subsequent interventions – was to unravel the numerous interconnected problems and understand how they affected the paintings. This was a mammoth undertaking that involved the examination, documentation and state-of-the-art scientific analysis of salts, paint materials and altering varnishes, that was carried out in laboratories in the UK, the USA and the Netherlands.

The results were daunting: salts and moisture had caused the brittle oil-based paint layer to break up and flake, and in some places it could be brushed off the wall by the lightest touch. Salts were found not only to cover the surface of the painting, but were also trapped in crystal form inside and under the paint and the layers of varnish – which were not only darkening, but were also becoming acidic and increasingly insoluble. Furthermore the varnish was oil-based, so that the solvents suitable for removing it could also damage the layers of paint underneath. Although the problems were formidable, understanding them was the first step in learning how to resolve them. Previous restorers had simply removed damaged paint and disguised the subsequent loss by repainting and revarnishing, but the real challenge was to develop and test treatments that would allow the safe removal of the dirt, salts, varnish, while preserving Erardi’s original painting.

The treatment programme

Painstaking research and testing resulted in a complex but effective treatment tailored to the specific problems of the Erardi paintings. This consists of three phases: the pre-consolidation and fixing of powdering and flaking paint, the solubilisation, extraction and clearance of salts and varnish swelling and reduction.

In pre-consolidation and fixing, the flaking and powdering paint is secured through the application of a conservation-grade acrylic resin in a solvent mixture selected to maximise penetration and minimise surface film-formation. This is applied by brush through a tissue intervention layer, which helps keep the flakes in position during application. Degraded and flaking paint surfaces are then relayed manually through a cushioned intervention layer using a metal spatula heated to a constant optimum temperature.

The solubilisation and extraction of salts is achieved using a water-based polyacrylic gel sorbent applied over a tissue intervention layer. Water from the gel solubilises and absorbs the salts and, following removal of the sorbent, the residual solubilised salts and surface dirt are removed by sponge.

The swelling of the varnish layer is achieved by a further application of the polyacrylic gel to which has been added a small amount of solvent, selected for its effective and controlled action on the varnish. This increases the efficiency of the solvent while limiting its action to the surface. After the removal of the sorbent, the swollen varnish is reduced by swab.
The final, presentation stage, consists of the light toning of losses and repairs using earth colours only. Deceptive reintegration is unnecessary and thus avoided, and there is no over-painting, which means that all the painting now visible in bays 4 and 5 is original and uncompromised.

Areas already treated under the current programme
The ceiling is divided into eight bays of uneven width and the Erardi scheme covers the central four bays (bays 3 to 6), which comprise the greater part of the ceiling. The narrow bays at the extremities of the ceiling (bays 1 and 2 and 7 and 8) were painted at a later date. Approximately 50 per cent of the Erardi scheme (over 30 per cent of the entire ceiling) has already been successfully treated under the current programme, including:

• Bay 5, which contains the large scenes of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Virgin.

• Most of bay 4, which contains the smaller allegorical figures of Victory/Abundance and Victory/Hope.

• Large parts of the painted and gilded ribs bordering these areas.

Areas that remain untreated under the current programme
The outer bays, which date to a later period, remain untreated. These are generally in better condition than the Erardi paintings and will respond well to the treatment methods described above. Of the remaining areas of Erardi’s painting, bay 3, which depicts The Presentation of the Virgin and The Presentation of Christ, and bay 6, which depicts The Visitation and The Annunciation, remain untreated.

Bay 3 was greatly compromised in the 1990s by the unsystematic efforts of a previous restorer. The problem of salts and darkened varnish layers were not addressed, but large areas of painting were badly and inefficiently over-cleaned, resulting in blanching and damage. These failures were subsequently disguised with thick, opaque repainting and an application of glossy, tinted modern coatings. Trials carried out in this area during the current programme revealed that, despite this, much of the original painting can be recovered.

Bay 6 was treated in the 1980s by another restorer. Here, salts and darkened varnish layers were totally removed, but all the flaking paint and much of the original upper paint layer were also stripped during this extremely aggressive intervention. The appearance of what is now a highly compromised bay can nevertheless be improved.

Conclusion
The paintings have begun to emerge once more as some of Malta’s most important and accomplished baroque ceiling paintings. This has been a slow and torturous process, and the work is still far from completed. Din L-Art Helwa, in collaboration with the Courtauld Institute, intends to see the completion of this important work so that the paintings can once again be seen and fully appreciated.
Fimbank plc has once again kindly agreed to sponsor a *Din L-Art Helwa* restoration project, in collaboration with DLH and Heritage ResCo. Following its sponsorship last year of the conservation of the Great Siege Monument, it is now funding the restoration and conservation of the nine monuments in the Maglio Gardens in Floriana.

The work has once again been entrusted to the conservation team of Heritage ResCo, and will be undertaken by Ingrid Ross together with James Licari and Frank Chetcuti (both of whom are also employed with Heritage Malta). Kevin Fsadni will be the architect in charge of the project and architect Norbert Gatt has agreed to provide the scaffolding required in sponsorship of this project through the Valletta/Mdina/Cottonera rehabilitation projects within the Resources and Rural Affairs Ministry.

### The historical background of the Maglio Gardens and its monuments

The Maglio Gardens in Floriana, bordered by the old British military parade ground on one side and the Granaries (Fosos) on the other, start from the two arched entrances, which bear the coat of arms of Grand Master Lascaris (1636-1657) reflecting the fact that the gardens were created at his behest. It is recorded that the gardens were intended to be a recreational area in which the Knights could take a walk, play cards or play the then popular game of pall mall or ‘palamaglio’ (a game similar to croquet). This is reflected in the name of the gardens, which were in a very convenient location, being very close to the busy Pietà Creek.

The gardens consist of two broad parallel walks – separated by ornamental plants – that stretch over almost 400 metres. This length made it ideal for gymnastics and other sports, which Grand Master Lascaris used to his advantage, encouraging the Knights to keep fit through exercise and avoid various vices. Originally, the gardens – which were enclosed by high walls – were for the exclusive use of the Knights. In time, pergolas erected on pillars became overgrown with creepers, providing shade for the paths, and various species of trees were planted, although the gardens are dominated by palms.

During the British period, the gardens were enhanced with more trees and shrubs and were finally opened to the public, although they were closed at night. The peace of the gardens was shattered during World War II, as the surrounding area suffered several direct hits from bombs – one example being Floriana parish church. The surrounding wall of the gardens was destroyed and although the building of a new wall was started in 1966, it was 1988 before it was finished.

In the centre of the gardens is an old fountain, consisting of a large arch over a large shell-shaped basin. On top of the arch is a proud eagle with open wings. The centrepiece of the fountain is in the shape of two intertwined dolphins, holding between them a sea shell. This fountain originally stood in the orange orchard in Republic Square (previously known as Queen’s Square) near the palace. It was moved to the Maglio Gardens in 1887.

Beneath the tall building at the end of the garden, that replaced the original gardener’s tool store and watermill in the middle of the last century, is a large – and old – reservoir that runs to the nearby Wignacourt aqueduct. Also at the end of the garden is an iron-grill set into the ground that was a ventilation shaft for the now defunct railway tunnel.

In the gardens are a number of monuments commemorating renowned (predominantly) Maltese figures who each made a worthy contribution to Malta either in their respective professions or by their philanthropic work. Other commemorative plaques are also found close to trees planted to mark noteworthy events. It has been said that the development of a civil society is measured by the social appreciation of people who have dedicated their life to the common good, and monuments dedicated to such people are intended to reflect this appreciation.

The monuments in the gardens commemorate diplomat Aloisio Pisani, Sir Luigi Preziosi (1888-1965) an ophthalmologist who was president of the Senate of Malta in 1932, president of the National Congress in 1944 and president of the National Assembly in 1947); Marquis Joseph Scicluna (1855-1907) a banking pioneer who founded the National Bank of Malta); Sir Hannibal Scicluna ([1880-1981) a solicitor, librarian of the Maltese library and historian specialising in the history of the Knights of Malta); Filippo Sciberras (1850-1928) president of the *Comitato Nazionale* in 1918 and convenor of the country’s first National Assembly on 25 February 1919, leading to the 1921 Constitution; Sir Hugo Mifsud (1889-1942), Prime Minister of Malta between 1924 and 1933; the Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja (1820-1890) a businessman and philanthropist who opened a conservatoire for orphan girls, bequeathed funds for the poor and built a trade school for boys; Sir Adrian Dingli (1817-1900) Chief Justice of Malta and Crown Advocate in 1854. He promoted the enlargement of Grand Harbour and the building of the market and the Royal Opera House in Valletta and the mental asylum in Attard; Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappafy (1792-1886), a Greek businessman importer of wheat and a philanthropist who funded young Maltese emigrants.

Ganni Darmanin (1817-1908) produced the Aloisio Pisani Monument. Gulio Moschetti (1847-1909) is considered to have designed and sculpted the monument dedicated to Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja. Antonio Sciortino (1872-1947) was responsible for the monument to Sir Adrian Dingli. Vincent Apap (1909-2003)
is the most represented artist in the gardens, producing the monuments commemorating Sir Luigi Preziosi, Sir Ugo Mifsud, the Marquis Joseph Scicluna, Sir Hannibal Scicluna, Dr Filippo Sciberras and Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy.

The manufacturing technique used for the monuments

The bronze busts were cast in the cera persa (lost wax) method, where the model of the sculpture was first produced in wax and surrounded by an outer mould. It is clearly evident that, before the wax model, the sculpture was modelled in clay in various parts. Joining marks within the clay model are evident in the final product, by the sides of the central figure. When submitted to heat, the wax melts leaving a void that is filled by the viscous metal. The sculpture is attached to the stone with bolts, covered with cement. The sculpture is finely modelled and detailed. Following the casting, the bronze is further refined with files, evidence of which can be seen on its surfaces. Generally with such bronzes, a chemical patination was applied, under the artist’s supervision, as a final foundry procedure. It is possible that this had been removed during previous restoration but had re-formed with the passage of time and natural weathering.

Marble busts and statues are usually carved out of a single block of marble. The marble block is first quarried and transported to the sculptor’s workshop, where it is hewn into a rough shape. This latter sculpture is further refined with tools and files. The final surface is then polished with fine abrasive powders.

The pedestals are either carved out of a different marble or local hard stone. Some pedestals would probably have a globigerina limestone interior and which was then clad with marble or travertine.

State of preservation

Most of the stonework seems generally stable. It has been observed that some mortar joints are cracked and that there is some biological growth on the upper surfaces. Light green copper corrosion has stained the stone underneath, having dissolved the metal through acidic rain. There are also some areas of the stonework that have been stained with deposits from the trees above the monuments. There is also evidence of what may be damage caused by shrapnel during WWII that has probably been repaired in the past. A fairly stable patina has built up on the bronze parts – a normal result of being exposed to the elements.

It is normal for such bronzes to be subject to wax treatments, but the existence of such coating/s has yet to be ascertained. Dribble-like marks are observed on some the bronzes – the result of water path marks caused by rain and possibly irregular coatings. It was also noticed that on the back of some of the monuments, the bronze parts are separate from the stone part, leaving a wide area from where deteriorating agents such as bird droppings and rain water may penetrate.

It was observed that the main cause of deterioration was natural weathering, mostly salt deposits due to the monument’s close proximity to the sea. The factor of most concern regarding the bronze is the sporadic areas of active corrosion seen as light-green pin-point areas from which a light coloured powder is efflorescing. If not treated, these may eventually continue to expand and penetrate into the metal thickness, causing pitting of the surface. In turn, this type of corrosion may progress to a worse state of preservation in larger areas. These areas are mainly found in the undercuts and the lower edge of the bronze areas.
A black crust was also observed on some of the undercuts and on the stonework. This crust may be due to various factors, the main one being pollution. It could also be due to the deposit of carbonaceous dust which amalgamates to the copper corrosion products into a hard thick crust. Past treatments may also have contributed to the deposition of crusts on the surfaces.

Despite the similar deterioration factors discussed above, each monument poses its own individual problems and deterioration phenomena, and these must be tackled individually, just as a doctor tackles his patients individually. Some of the problems worth mentioning are: the loss of the nose of Sir Hugo Mifsud the result of vandalism; crayon graffiti on the pedestal of the monument commemorating Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy; the running corrosion stains along the pedestal of the monument dedicated to Fillipo Scibberas; and the extensive corrosion developments on the monuments dedicated to Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja and Sir Adrian Dingli.

It should be pointed out that the depiction of spectacles on the bronze bust of Sir Luigi Preziosi seems to be incomplete. Research carried out by the conservation team has produced no documentary evidence that the rest of the spectacles ever existed. The team got in touch with the local foundry that used to produce the bronze casts for Vincent Apap to ask about this particular bust and they said that Vincent Apap used to avoid doing full spectacles due to the difficulty in casting them, or adding them during the refining stage. He apparently used to convey the impression of spectacles through the hint of a central rest over the nose and the sides of the frame. As with all monuments, the team will continue its research and any documentary evidence on the subject would be very welcome.

The conservation intervention
The intervention begins with ascertaining the condition of the monuments. Graphical mapping was done to document this visually, along with photographs and written notes. These were submitted to the Malta Environmental Planning Authority and to the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, for approval and record.

The conservators will carry out various mechanical and chemical cleaning tests to ascertain the most efficient and appropriate method to use. The cleaning of the monuments will include the removal of external deposits, dirt and grime as well as any previously applied waxes and oils (which may have aged through the passage of time, like varnish on an old painting. The various areas of active corrosion areas observed on the bronze busts (usually as bright green powder) will be cleaned and chemically treated to reduce further development that would cause irreparable damage to the bronze. It will be then given several layers of a conservation-grade protective coat.

The stone pedestals will also be cleaned, and attempts will be made to reduce the staining to the point where it is considered ethically permissible. No drastic corrosive treatment will be carried out, as this could possibly cause further damage to the monuments. Unfortunately, when bronze corrodes, the residues that run down the stonework penetrates the pores of the stone and cannot be completely removed, resulting in staining. Black crust might require both mechanical and chemical cleaning but in some cases it may have to be left in place as attempting to remove it may cause further damage to the stonework.

Any losses will be considered lacunae and will not be recreated. Efforts to find documentation that may reveal the missing elements will be made and should the missing parts be identified, discussions will be held as to how this information should be presented to the public.

The team would like to emphasise the fact that a conservation project never really stops. In some ways, a conservation project is pointless, if the item in question is not maintained. The team is more than happy to recommend the type of maintenance of monuments required, which can be done easily if carried out on an annual basis.

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Following the Towards Frugality in Architecture Symposium held earlier this year, Alberto Miceli-Farrugia, partner at Architecture Project, outlines the need for a more sustainable use of resources and a more responsible approach to designing the urban and non-urban environment.

“People only often realise how important good architecture and urban planning are for their lives, and how their daily comfort is determined by spatial design, when their positive perceptions change. It is only when the environment becomes a burden that people pose questions about its genesis.” (Architecture and Quality of Life, Architects’ Council of Europe, 2004)

Reacting to the growing dissatisfaction with our current condition, the Kamra tal-Periti’s published its position paper on the urban environment in 2007. Entitled The Urban Challenge, it referred to how the rapid change and economic development of the country over the past few decades had led to a growing awareness of the need to review the way we intervene in our built environment, and that only through a quality built environment will we succeed in further improving our quality of life.

Fortunately, the recently published draft National Environment Policy appears to acknowledge this. “The improvement in the appearance, pleasantness, amenity and attractiveness of Malta’s places is central to our quality of life…” (National Environment Policy Draft for Consultation, 2011).

Environmental quality, sustainability and a judicious use of resources are now recognised as essential parameters for a better quality of life and future economic progress. It is this growing realisation about the way we see, value and treat the world around us that led to the organisation of the Towards Frugality in Architecture symposium.

Din l-Art Ħelwa offered its support to the exciting initiative designed to familiarise the local design, heritage and environment communities with the concept of frugality. The symposium was organised by the local firm Architecture Project, together with Abate e Vigevano Architetti from Rome. A one-day conference at the Mediterranean Conference Centre was followed by a two-day design workshop. Reputable international speakers from Europe and beyond were invited to participate, including Sarah Wigglesworth from the UK, Luca Stasi of Ctrl+Z in Mexico, Nina Maritz from Namibia, Elena Barthet of Rural Studio – a design office within the Architecture Faculty of Auburn University, Alabama, USA, and Franco La Cecla, an anthropologist from the University of Palermo, who collaborates with architects to develop more socially responsive urban strategies.
In the introduction to the book *Una Guida all’architettura Frugale*, published in 2010 by the Fondazione Bruno Zevi, Cinzia Abate writes: “Contemporary Architecture offers a two-fold approach: …anonymous constructions characterised by their low technological content and scarce spatial qualities and… monuments… indifferent to specific geographical context in the choice of materials, selection of building systems and architectural idiom. The idea of a ‘frugal’ architecture is proposed as a counter trend, a residual architecture capable of making the best use possible of natural and local materials, or re-using those that would otherwise become waste”.

The concept of frugality in architecture is certainly not new. There are several prominent well-known examples, including the traditional dwellings of Japan and Africa or, closer to home, the *sassi* in Matera or the *trulli* of Apulia. Prominent architects have won international acclaim for the frugal nature of their work. While Hasan Fathy in Egypt reproduced materials and techniques of the local vernacular, at the same time integrating traditional responses to climatic conditions, Buckminster Fuller, believing that architecture represented man’s ability to survive and overcome his destructive antagonism towards nature, researched and created self-sufficient dwellings. Later, Paolo Soleri searched for an alternative mode of habitation in harmony with nature, conceiving Arcosanti in the 1970s as an ever-developing experimental ecosystem based on his research. Several others followed in their footsteps. Even today, frugality in architecture retains a healthy freshness and subtlety. As in the examples from the past, it remains a concerned, responsible alternative approach to space making, an architecture firmly rooted in the societies it is intended to serve, in their needs and culture. It is the search for equilibrium between man’s needs, the built environment, technology and nature, between aesthetics and the environment.

Seen in this light, frugality may be considered the antithesis of the flamboyant, iconic architecture that today’s media portrays as the acceptable and desirable face of contemporary design.

Neither is frugality new to Malta. We are all familiar with our temple remains, constructed of large hewn blocks of stone, or the former cave dwellings used until the beginning of the last century, and even the typical farmhouse structures prior to their conversion into luxury residences in recent years. As a result of progress and economic development, however, we have, as a whole, neglected our frugal nature or at best ignored the concept.

You will of course be forgiven nowadays for believing that, in our haste to develop our economy and keep up with our growing affluence, our architecture may have lost many of its qualities as an art, with development regarded merely as another economic activity, once extremely lucrative though now no longer a sure thing. You will probably also be excused if you felt that ‘architecture’ is only merely tolerated, the architect useful only to guide a development proposal through the planning process. Rightly or wrongly, let’s say sometimes rightly too, architects are not seen to add much value to the project itself.
Of late, however, we appear to be realising that matters can no longer carry on the way we have let them proceed to date, and that we collectively need to become more responsible in the way we deal with our cities and towns. Greater attention is being paid to the delicate state of our environment, to the precarious condition of our own limited resources: our stone, which is fast running out, our scarce water supply and the depletion of the water table, the huge amounts of energy we consume, not only to power our buildings but also to produce water to make up for what we do not collect. And let us not forget our heavily developed terrain as well as the volumes of waste we produce daily. Our environmental shortcomings have become very topical, and the situation is fast becoming critical.

The interest generated by the symposium is, therefore, as encouraging as the topic is fascinating. *Frugality in Architecture* brought to the fore how architecture has no other choice than to once again assume a strong social responsibility. But it also revealed how a fresh look at things can lead to surprisingly satisfactory – even if unexpected – results, how creativity and invention lead to new ways of appreciating even the most common aspects of our surroundings, their value and potential.

And what really ignited the imagination of the participants is the understanding that sustainability is not just an inconvenient chore to be tolerated, but that it can be something desirable and welcome.

During the design workshop, 35 individuals – including architects, journalists, artists, engineers and students – worked in small groups to develop concepts, based on the ideas expressed during the conference, for temporary emergency shelters for the Hal Far open centre for refugees. The results were later exhibited at the Halmann Vella Ltd showroom in Lija. The challenge now remains to promote the concept of sustainability and to present it as a desirable lifestyle in which all are invited to participate.

Opening the conference, Dr Mario de Marco, Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism, the Environment and Culture, said he hoped that, in time, Malta would become the model for an urban development that truly reflects a new era of environmental and cultural re-evaluation. He called for concerted action to achieve the ambitious objectives set for the quality of the urban and rural environment, in order to enrich the socio-economic condition of the nation. The National Environment Policy Draft may just be a small first step towards achieving these goals.

Further developments of the *Towards Frugality* project are envisaged for the future, including more talks and other events. Additional information will be posted on the *Towards Frugality* page on Facebook.
Turghut Reis was born in Karabag (near Bodrum, Turkey) in the last quarter of the 15th century. It is said that he went to sea at an early age, and soon made a name for himself due to his skill in artillery. He learned his navigational skills from Hayrettin Barbarossa and in 1538 achieved a notable success at the naval battle of Prevesa, in which the Ottoman navy defeated the fleet of the Holy League. Later, captured and enslaved by Giannetino Doria, he was subsequently ransomed by Barbarossa, whom he succeeded after the latter’s death in 1546, and soon becoming the most renowned corsair in the Mediterranean of his time.

**The Restoration of Dragut's Tomb**

Dr David Mallia

The conquest of Tripoli of the West

The conquest of Tripoli in August 1551 had been determined by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the orders given to his Admiral Sinan Pasha (lord) early that year. Dragut had also been ordered to join this expedition and so mobilised a fleet of some 120 galleys in Istanbul. These orders also included the attack on the city of Augusta on the east coast of Sicily. These attacks appear to have been a reprisal for the destruction of Dragut’s headquarters in Mahdia, which had been razed to the ground by the Knights of St John earlier that year – an action that was considered to constitute a break in the truce between the Sublime Porte and the Holy Roman Empire.

During the voyage, Dragut engineered a short but profitable detour from the principal objective in the form of a raid on Gozo. It is quite likely that he saw this as an opportunity to exact vengeance on the people who had killed his brother during a previous raid in 1544. Following the rapid capitulation of Gozo, and the large number of slaves captured from the island, the fleet sailed on to Tripoli. The siege of that city began in alliance with the local tribesmen under the command of Murad Agha (military leader), who had been sent by Sultan Suleiman to coordinate resistance to the Knights.

During the siege of Tripoli, Dragut eagerly championed the proposal of an agreed capitulation by the Knights in order to shorten the duration of the siege, thereby preserving as much of the existing fortifications of the city as possible. It was clear that Dragut had determined that Tripoli was to be his new capital. However, at the successful conclusion of the siege, command of the city of Tripoli and the neighbouring region was given to the eunuch Murad Agha as a result of intrigue in Istanbul between the chief eunuch and the Sultan. Admiral Sinan Pasha’s brother, the grand vizier Rustem Pasha, who was also the sultan’s son-in-law, did his utmost to stall Dragut’s rise to power. As a result, nepotism ensured that it was not until 1554 that Dragut was appointed as Beghlerbey (Governor General) of Tripoli and, after several notable victories in the Mediterranean, he was subsequently promoted to Pasha of Tripoli in 1556.

This victory deprived the Knights of an important base, which Grand Master de Valette had even proposed as the headquarters of the Order of St John instead of the Maltese Islands, which he proposed to abandon. Emperor Charles V’s subsequent attempts to retake the city proved futile. Establishing control in Tripoli enabled the Ottoman Empire to substantially reduce the continuous threat to its bases in Algeria and Tunisia.

On Dragut’s appointment to the post of Beghlerbey, economic growth reached its maximum, with the successful contacts established with the hinterland playing an important part in this growth. With the incorporation of Sfax, Monastir, Sousse and even Kairouan in Tunisia into its territories, Tripoli increased its
wealth. A group of inhabitants of Sfax, mainly tradesmen, artisans and farmers were encouraged to settle in Tripoli and helped enrich the social structure. Another important contribution came from the Sahara. The transfer of rule from Christians to Muslims encouraged the ruler of Bornou, Mai Muhammad, to conclude an agreement with Dragut for the development of commercial exchange; this agreement was renewed in 1598. Eventually, the area under Dragut’s control included most of Libya and southern Tunisia. According to Braudel:

“With Tripoli, the Turks possessed a valuable military position and a link with the Barbary States. The traditional port of the African interior, the town was restored to its former glory. When the Christians occupied the town, the Sahara trade had been diverted to Tadjura, near Tripoli. With the Turkish occupation, once more, gold dust and slaves travelled to the city rich in gold.”

Dragut’s improvements to the fortifications of Tripoli also ensured the successful defence of his capital city against the united attacks of Europeans. His most notable victory at this time was the defeat of the fleet of the Holy League, which was composed of Spanish, Papal, Genovese, Florentine, Maltese, Sicilian and Neapolitan ships. This was destroyed near the coast of Djerba in May 1560: 47 ships were captured and their commanders taken prisoner.

In 1565, Dragut was ordered by Sultan Suleiman to join the Malta campaign and although he arrived more than a week after the siege had begun, he gave advice for the better deployment of the besieging forces. On 17 June, during the bombardment of Fort St Elmo, a cannon shot from Fort St Angelo across Grand Harbour struck the ground close to the Turkish battery. Debris from the impact mortally injured Dragut, who lived until 23 June – just long enough to hear the welcome news of the capture of Fort St Elmo. Thus died Dragut, ‘the drawn sword of Islam’. On his death, Piyale Pasha appointed Uluj Ali, Dragut’s son-in-law, as his successor as Beghlerbey of Tripoli. Uluj Ali took Dragut’s body to Tripoli for burial, on a galley accompanied by four escort ships. His death brought sorrow and grief to his subjects, since they considered that he had died as a martyr fighting unbelievers on the island of Malta. It is quite possible that, had he lived, the Malta campaign would have had a rather different outcome.
Dragut’s tomb in the old city of Tripoli

As behoved the ruler of a Pashalik (territory governed be a pasha), on his appointment as Beghlerbey of the city of Tripoli, Dragut had begun to display his munificence to his subjects by endowing his capital with public buildings, the most famous of which still bear his name. This complex of buildings consists of a mosque and a hammam (public steam bath). It is situated on the street, known as Zangat (narrow street) Dorght, which leads directly to the Bab al-Bahr (sea gate), also known as Bab Dorght. In the shadow of the mosque, on the qibla (direction facing Mecca) side, he erected a türbe (tomb) as the final resting place for himself and his family.

Qubba is a common Arabic name for a tomb surmounted by a dome, since the word means ‘dome’. However, another word for a tomb is turba, which means ‘soil’, and which is considered to be the prescribed covering for a qabr (grave) following interment. The Turkish word türbe is derived from the Arabic turba. The popularity of the traditional Islamic domed tombs seems to stem from the green dome built by the Ottomans over the Prophet Muhammed’s (P.B.U.H.) tomb in Medina which, in accordance with the Wahhabi tradition, is neither embellished nor decorated.

The Türbe

Dragut’s death in Malta as a martyr for his faith further enhanced his reputation. He had expressed his desire to be buried in the mausoleum he had built in order to remain near to the sea that he loved so dearly during his lifetime. His tomb was considered sacred by the people and it was a custom for a new beghlerbey of Tripoli to visit the tomb and offer prayers before assuming office.

Unusually, although this building is located within the old city of Tripoli, the türbe of Dragut is actually a waqf (religious endowment) that is still paid for and maintained by the Turkish state. This is because all religious establishments in Turkey came under the direct control of the state following the abolition of the caliphate and the ministry of sharia and waqf early in 1924, and the responsibility of this mausoleum devolved on to the new Turkish state. This is why the restoration of the türbe was carried out by Turkish workers and paid for by the Republic of Turkey.

The complex is one of the most majestic to be found in Tripoli. The tomb is located on the qibla side of the mosque and consists of three chambers. The one adjacent to the qibla wall and the one behind it both have large domes, while the third room is covered by a canopy-like dome (or domical vault). The rooms themselves lack decoration but the cenotaphs of the graves with their funeral plaques are simply decorated in marble relief and gilded engraved script.

The three main burial rooms are almost square, each covering an area between 40 to 50 square metres. In the centre of the one just behind the mosque’s mihrab (niche set in a wall indicating qibla) lies Dragut in his final resting place, with his wife resting beside him in the tomb to his right. Buried around them in the same chamber are their descendants and in the adjacent rooms, other high dignitaries who served in his time. Outside there are other tombs in which other wali (governors) are buried, such as the one that has its entrance on the street overlooking the harbour in which there is the grave of Pasha Muhammad Saqazli, the governor of Tripoli from 1633 to 1649.

Decay and Restoration

Turkey’s responsibility for the türbe was acknowledged by the official visits made during the course of Turkish state visits to Tripoli such as the one made by Turkish Prime Minister Celal Bayar in 1958. The end of the UN embargo on Libya in 2004 signalled a resumption of Turkish investment in the country. Not surprisingly, this coincided with an increase of Turkish visitors to Dragut’s türbe, who noted the decay that was slowly eroding it. Although the tomb itself was still covered by a Turkish flag, the flag was covered by fallen plaster and paint fragments. The bad condition of this monument of historic Turkish naval power deeply affected the visitors, who reported that the tomb of their famous hero was in need of restoration. Their efforts were championed by the Imam (leader of prayers) of the mosque, Mohammad Omar Abu Haqar, who has been responsible for the mosque and the türbe for over 50 years. Support in Turkey came from foreign affairs specialist and actor, who hails from the city in which Dragut was born. This led to the formulation of a project led by the Turkish Minister of Tourism and Culture, who directed the Istanbul Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection Committee to coordinate the work under the direction of architect Cem Eri. The restoration was entrusted to two Turkish companies, Yuksel Construction Co. and Nurol Construction and Trading Co Inc., both of which were involved in Turkish projects in Libya. The project was launched in 2005.
Site investigation continued through 2006 and was completed by the end of the year. The causes of deterioration may generally be summarised as follows:

1) water (rising damp, leaking pipes, rainwater infiltration, direct sea spray attack)

2) salt contamination (soil infill, cement, extreme proximity to sea, pollution)

3) biological factors (lichens, fungi and higher plants)

4) human intervention (faulty repairs and neglect)

5) other factors (WWII bomb blast from the direct hit on the adjoining mosque)

Water is generally seen as a key factor in the deterioration of various building materials and it can originate from precipitation (infiltration), capillary action (ground – fresh and sea – water), surface water and condensation. The proximity of the türbe to the sea, and the fact that it is almost at sea level, had resulted in copious quantities of salts permeating the porous building materials and efflorescing at the surface. Salt crystallisation is the most important mechanism of decay, as it potentially causes the most damage to porous materials such as stone and plaster. Rainwater penetration through the decayed waterproofing system on the roof further contributed to moisture permeating the building. Crypto-efflorescence – the formation of salt crystals within the pores of the material – is dangerous because it leads to the material’s destruction. Salt crystals grow in the ‘larger’ pores, while liquid solution is fed from the small pores to the growing crystals. The salt-laden surfaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of the domed chamber &amp; dome diameter</th>
<th>Type of dome</th>
<th>Transition Zone</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 6m x 6m</td>
<td>Hemispherical</td>
<td>Pendentive</td>
<td>The dome on the northeast side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 6.5m x 6.5m</td>
<td>Hemispherical</td>
<td>Pendentive</td>
<td>The dome on the southeast side adjacent to the sanctuary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 6.5m x 6.5m</td>
<td>Hemispherical</td>
<td>Squinch</td>
<td>This domed tomb is located on the southeast side of the preceding one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: details of the türbe domes

Dragut’s tomb after restoration

Another section of the restored türbe
had decayed and had subsequently been rendered with impervious Portland cement. This exacerbated the situation, resulting in the peeling off of paint and the decay of the rendering, which came off in some places, revealing the decayed fabric underneath. Portland cement itself contributes salts to the decaying process described. Moreover, it is an incompatible material since its low porosity, high density and high thermal conductivity create a barrier to moisture movement while favouring the condensation of water vapour. It is also generally stronger than the material to which it is applied and therefore, far from protecting it, it causes the underlying fabric to break by repeated cyclical expansion and contraction.

The wetting and drying of the lower courses of the buildings also contributed to the decay. Vegetation embedded in the joints of the roof was removed to prevent further damage to the underlying surfaces. The Portland cement-based rendering was removed and the building’s surfaces were cleaned. Plastic repair was carried out to reconstitute the surfaces and prevent further decay and joints were re-pointed. However, the prevention of further deterioration is more difficult to achieve, since deterioration due to moisture movements within the building fabric cannot easily be eliminated. The marble monuments were cleaned and the oil-gilding reapplied where necessary.

The restoration work began in 2007 and was completed in February 2010. The tomb soon became a popular destination for numerous visitors, both Libyan and foreign, particularly Turkish, and the Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit in November of the same year.

Apotheosis

Dragut is still regarded as a hero of the Islamic world, although it is pertinent to point out that in his time even Christian leaders respected him for his skills in navigation and artillery.28 The great seaman is revered and still held in respect, although many centuries have passed since he sailed across the Mediterranean as the virtual master.29 He is also remembered as the first early modern ruler to rule over the provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and the Fezzan, thereby paving the way for the unification of Libya under the Karamanli dynasty. Restoration of his türbe is considered as the rehabilitation and revitalisation of an important national monument and funerary complex. The accolade of martyr given to Dragut as a result of his untimely death on the field of battle against the unbelievers secured his apotheosis in the minds of his subjects and, indeed, of their descendants to this day.

References

1 Dragut is the European version of Turgut (Turkish) and Dorghut (Arabic)
2 The town of Karabağ was renamed Turgutreis in 1972 in honour of Dragut, its most famous son.
5 Tarabulosugarb or Tarabulus al-Gharb means Tripoli of the West, which helps distinguish this city in Libya from the other Tripoli in Lebanon.
6 A.P. Vella, The Order of Malta and the defence of Tripoli 1530-1551, in Melita Historica, vol. VI no. 4, Malta 1975, pp. 362-381.
7 Seyfi.
9 Seyfi
12 Feraud
17 Koloğlu
18 Vertot. However, it is suggested that Dragut was a victim of friendly fire Cf. F. Balbi di Correggio: The Siege of Malta, 1565 (Translated from the Spanish edition of 1568 by E. Bradford), London, 2005.
19 This honorific title had been bestowed on him by following the capture of Tripoli.
20 The Qibla is the direction worshipers in a mosque must face so as to point towards the Holy City of Mecca. The direction is generally indicated by a niche although sometimes – as in the Selimiye mosque in Nicosia – the pattern in the carpet gives the direction, since the gothic (former) cathedral does not have niches.
22 A.M. Ramadan, Reflections upon Islamic Architecture in Libya, Tripoli, 1975.
24 Personal communication by Mohammad Omar AbuHagar, imam of the Durghut mosque.
26 F.X. Cassar, Darghut, on visiting his grave in Gamgha Darghut at ‘Bab al Bahar’ Tripoli of the West, Libya, (unpublished study), 1995.
27 Koloğlu
28 Balbi di Correggio
29 Cassar.
The present building known as the Main Guard was originally built in 1603 by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt as the *Corpo di Guardia del Palazzo* and abuts the Order’s Chancellery or *Cancelleria*. Located in what was then known as *Piazza San Giorgio* (St George’s Square) facing the Grand Master’s Palace, now the Palace of the President of Malta, the building served as the quarters for the *Corpo di Guardia d’Onore dell Gran Maestro*, the Grand Master’s Bodyguard or – to use the name by which they are more commonly known – the *Guardia della Piazza*.

The Chancellery building is on the right, where Archbishop Street meets the Square, and is where the Order’s archives were held. Above the doorway of what is now the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* (the Italian Cultural Institute) is a plaque with a Latin inscription commemorating Grand Master Wignacourt’s transfer of the Chancellery from the Palace into this building in 1604. The main hall of the building is particularly renowned for its ornate entrance, with a bust of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena above the door and the fresco that adorns its vaulted ceiling reputed to have been painted by Niccolo’ Nasoni of Siena while he was living in Malta between 1723 and 1725. The Chancellery was subsequently used by the British Council, incorporating the Garrison Library and after Independence in 1964 it became the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Commonwealth and eventually the Italian Cultural Institute in 1974.

In 1830, the building in the left-hand corner, where Old Theatre Street meets the Square, was converted for use as a bank – ‘*Joseph Scicluna et fils*’ – which in 1926 became ‘Scicluna’s Bank’ and since 1973 a branch of the Bank of Valletta. The rear of the entire block runs along Strait Street, better known to British sailors and soldiers as ‘The Gut’. The famous ‘Egyptian Queen Music Hall’ or the ‘*Gippo*’ as they called it, also occupied part of the building on Old Theatre Street.

Until the early years of British rule, a fountain built by Grand Master Wignacourt in 1615 was located in the middle of the square, as part of the water system constructed to bring water into Valletta from the area around Rabat. At each end of the façade is a fountain, part of the legacy of Grand Master de Rohan. These fountains have defied time and war and are still functioning.

The saga of the surrender of Malta by the Order in 1798 to Napoleon Bonaparte and his Army of the Orient en route to Egypt is well known. In just a few weeks, the Maltese rebelled against the French garrison under General Belgrand de Vaubois. Seeking Britain’s help, the Maltese insurgents laid siege to the capital and other strongholds for two eventful years, until the French surrendered on 5 September 1800.

The Treaty of Amiens of 1802 stipulated that Malta be returned to the Order of St John, but under Sicilian protection. However, the British were very well aware of Malta’s value as a military and naval base and Britain had long sought to establish itself in the Mediterranean Sea and to defeat and deter Russia from expanding its influence into the region. Tsar Paul I was declared *de facto* Grand Master of the Order of St John after the capitulation and eviction of the Order from Malta and the death of the last Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch zu Bolheim. With its fine natural harbours and its location in the centre of the Mediterranean, Malta was Britain’s finest foothold.

One of the earliest buildings to be occupied by the British in Valletta was the Grand Master’s Palace, which later became the Governor’s Palace. Eventually, the Treaty of Paris of 1814 decreed Malta to be a British Crown colony and with the presence of a strong garrison, the need arose for a building to house soldiers required to guard the Governor and Palace and from where *Reveille* and *Sunset* are officially sounded. The building across the square from the Palace was strategically located and was soon occupied to become ‘The Main Guard’. During that same year, a neo-classical colonnaded portico was erected on the façade of the Main Guard, enclosing the main entrance. By 1815, a stone sculpture of the British Royal Coat of Arms with lion and unicorn supporters had been placed in the centre of the terrace, probably the design of Captain George Whitmore, RE and possibly sculptured by Vincenzo Dimech, who also executed the Royal Arms above Neptune’s
Courtyard in the Palace, above the gate of the old University in St Paul’s Street, the old Marina Gate and on Porta Reale, all installed as a result of Governor Maitland’s Proclamation No. VI of 1814.

An inscription in Latin on the plinth below the Royal Coat of Arms, attributed to a Maltese priest, records the wish of the Maltese to see their islands placed under the care of Britain and Malta declared as part of Europe by King George III.

**MAGNÆ ET INVICTÆ BRITANNIAE MELITENSUM AMOR ET EUROPAE VOX HAS INSULAS CONFIRMAT A.D. 1814**

Translation:
‘These islands are granted to the great and invincible Britain by consent of Europe and by the love of the Maltese’.

Whether “confirmat” belongs to the original text or was altered during a later restoration is still being debated.

It is interesting to note that in an engraving depicting the Burning of Letters Patents by the Nobles of Malta on Bastille Day 1798, above the main portal of the Main Guard, is a plaque with an inscription, which was then covered by the portico.

The Guard Room proper was located on the lower floor, where a Quarter Guard was always present, with sentries pacing in front of the portico at regular intervals. The Guard was mounted at Reveille and dismounted at Sunset, but was called out when the Governor was entering or leaving the Palace, when the Archbishop of Malta passed in his carriage or for visits by distinguished personages. The British converted the large upstairs hall into an Officers’ Mess next to which was also the Duty Officer’s Quarters. Until the late 19th century, a lantern hung below the Royal Coat of Arms, which was replaced by a clock that probably then controlled the exact time by which all events in the square were held.

St George’s Square, or Palace Square as many called it, was the scene of countless parades, manifestations and other military and civilian activities, including the spilling of Maltese blood during the Sette Giugno 1919 “bread’ riots”. During the 160 or so years of its occupancy by the British Army, the walls of the Officers’ Mess became a monument to many of the British regiments stationed to garrison the island, or even in transit. The soldiers soon began to paint badges, caricatures and other testimonials associated with their presence in Malta or particular to their regiment. Being so many, it is impossible to list them all in this article. One unfortunate Sergeant Major even lost his long-cherished moustache, which ended up being pasted to one of these walls. Even the Indian Expeditionary Force in Malta in 1878 left a memento of their stay here, with a mural depicting an Indian trooper.

Apart from a coloured postcard that dates to around the end of the 19th century, there is no other contemporary
photographic record. Some of the caricatures can be vaguely seen in the background of the illustration entitled *The Main Guard, Valletta, Malta 1885* that originally featured in *The Illustrated London News*, based on engravings from sketches by Lt. A.W. Crawford M’Fall of the 2nd South Yorkshire Regiment. The next and more detailed record is an unpublished book by Lt Colonel R H Melville Lee.

In 1971, the last troops to occupy the Main Guard were elements of the King’s Own Malta Regiment and when the Regiment was disbanded, the building was closed and all military activities ended. The British Council also vacated the section it had occupied. A few years later, the Main Guard was ceded to become the Libyan Cultural Centre and the Royal Coat of Arms was hidden by a box-like sign. Most of the decorated portals were removed and the walls of the Officers’ Mess were covered by panels attached to wooden scantlings fixed to its walls.

In the early 1990s, the Libyans were requested to vacate the building which was required to serve as the Office of the Attorney General. The box structure was removed from the Royal Coat of Arms, which were later restored. Panels and boards were also removed, but since the wooden strips were fixed directly to the walls and doorways had been altered, the murals had suffered much damage.

Some years ago, an unnamed sketchbook was placed on an Internet auction site. It featured a number of pages of watercolour illustrations and caricatures and loose pencil drawings. Some of the scenes were of Malta and two particular caricatures are identical to two on the Main Guard’s wall, one of which is a marching Maltese policeman wearing a ‘Bobby’s helmet’ complete with badge. It’s a pity that I could never learn to whom the sketch book had belonged.

Although when the Attorney General began using the building, the murals were covered by thick curtains to eliminate damage by light, the deterioration was quite evident, as sections of plaster had chipped, possibly when doorways were widened, and raw concrete was found to have been earlier applied to door jambs. Unfortunately, although there have been numerous restoration projects of other historical murals, those at the Main Guard have been by-passed and have been forgotten since the building was vacated by the military. It is believed that some of these murals were last ‘restored’ by the famous Maltese artist Envin Cremona in around 1942, when he was serving in the Royal Engineers, but I have yet to locate any official documentation of this.

Due to its historical and architectural importance, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority scheduled the Chancellery and the Main Guard building as Grade 1 National Monuments as per Government Notice No. 276/08 in the Government Gazette dated 28 March, 2008.

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“Progress” pushing in, and heritage context moving out! Prehistoric Menhir at Qala.

Watching over our heritage! Could a less obtrusive spot be found for this surveillance camera and tow zone sign?

Burial with a view. Is the environment being killed to serve the dead in the new cemetery at Nadur?
This Qala windmill once harnessed the wind to perform its work. In a few years it might well fall victim to the same wind.

Reinventing our heritage!
A bronze aluminium muxrabijja in Rabat (Malta).

Heritage of death or the death of heritage?
Historic tombstones in the ditch of Forth Chambray.
Anyone trying to keep a garden lush in Malta, especially during the long summer months, knows what a struggle this can be. If it is not the sun that is too hot, then it is the winds that are too strong, and such climatic vagaries can cause havoc, ruining months of care and expectations.

‘A Lost Maltese Garden’ tells the story of an improbable garden. In 1826, against considerable odds, John Hookham Frere started creating a beautiful garden at his villa, in the best British tradition, out of a hill facing Msida Creek. It was one of the earliest cultural manifestations of the newly established British rule on a monumental level, Hookham Frere being one of the first British citizens of note to make Malta their home following the island’s annexation to the territories controlled by the British Crown.

The book is written in an almost colloquial manner, as if Josephine Tyndale-Biscoe is allowing the reader a glimpse into her mind while she is recalling mental images composed from fragments of tales about the garden told to her by her grandmother. Although she is repeating what she has been told by another person, it is to the author’s credit that she manages to deliver this information with a remarkable freshness – the same freshness, one would imagine, the soul would enjoy while roaming around this delightful and, to a large extent, unfortunately lost garden.

The garden of Villa Frere was conceived as a romantic statement, but not romantic in the sentimental sense in which we now use the word. It was a landscape meant to appeal to the senses, letting them override all else in a sensorial storm of emotions caused by aesthetic beauty, overwhelming perfumes and a magnetic attraction towards the very centre of this mysterious, earthly sanctuary. This is manifest in the irregular layout which grew without an overall plan, conforming to the contours of the landscape and allowing physical manifestation to the random peregrinations of the soul. This was certainly a place were the soul could be renewed.

Behind this ethereal creation, however, was a very practical organisational machine. To start with, a garden needs water and the more arid the environment, the larger the water supply needs to be. The abundant supply of water is testified to by the 13 well heads that once existed in the grounds, all of which rested over differently sized cisterns. But gardens also need back-breaking manual labour, which is best discerned in the photograph of the three gardeners Nichola, Matthew and Philomana (names as written on the same photograph) whose stoic expressions reveal volumes about the determination required to keep the garden thriving.

Like any artistic creation, this garden is a reflection of the person who conceived it and many details betray the passion for classical scholarship manifest by Hookham Frere. Most prominent among these is the exedra. Exedras originated in classical Greece and the term was used to indicate a seat out-of-doors often ringed with curved high-backed stone benches. Exedras were considered suitable spaces for philosophical conversation, which would hardly be the case today as the exedra that fortunately survives has been completely engulfed by the structures making up St Luke’s Hospital. The author refers to it as “the temple”. This is probably the affectionate way in which this garden structure was referred to in the family circle.

In 1860, following the demise of John Hookham Frere in 1846, the villa and gardens were rented by Count Rosario Messina who, as the name suggests, was of Sicilian origin but whose wife was Maltese. The lease was then passed to their daughter, who married Edward Pierce – the great-grandfather of the author.

Edward Pierce took in hand the first restoration of the garden which by then had been established for 60 years. Just as in its first layout the garden reflected the classical inclinations of Hookham Frere, so touches added by Pierce reflected his world-wide travels. This is most evident in the Japanese Garden, which included a bamboo fence, lanterns and an alcove housing a Buddha. That the Pierce family loved the garden is obvious from the number of photographs taken of, and within, it.

The garden also had its moment of international fame when, on 5 July 1930, it was featured in Country Life, one of the most prominent publications of its genre in the UK. The author concludes by expressing the wish that the surviving parts of the garden be restored.

**A Lost Maltese Garden – John Hookham Frere’s masterpiece**  
Author – Josephine Tyndale-Biscoe  
Published by – Birchquest Ltd  
ISBN – 978-0-9563849-0-4  
Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi

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*Images: The exedra*
Having now passed the 50th issue mark – the issue under review is the 51st – *Treasures of Malta* and all the people involved in its publication can certainly look back with pride and satisfaction. Years of effort and commitment to quality have resulted in the creation of an exquisitely Maltese encyclopaedia containing much of what can, without any fear of over-valuation, be defined as a beautiful part of Malta’s heritage.

In some ways, *Treasures of Malta* can also be defined as a literary “*wunderkammer*” (cabinet of curiosities). Such cabinets originated in Renaissance Europe and consisted of eclectic collections of items which today would be categorised as falling under natural history, geology, ethnography, archaeology, religious or historical relics, *objets d’art* and antiquities but which at the time failed to fall squarely under any known category. In the same way, *Treasures of Malta* has, over the years, dedicated page on page to seemingly insignificant, or generally ignored, items which did, however make for very interesting reading.

The first article in this issue deals with a subject close to the heart of many of us, the cemetery of Ta’ Braxia which DLH has, for many years, strived to return to its former glory. In this well-written article, Conrad Thake takes his reader through the salient points in the cemetery’s history.

The creation of Ta’ Braxia and the initial opposition it faced, particularly from the local church, is symptomatic of the difficulties presented by the relatively new political scenario that was unfolding on the Island. After 267 years of total hegemony, the political power of the Roman Catholic Church – once embodied by the Grand Master, the Bishop and the Inquisitor – had to accede to that of the British. The author also reminds us that the often quoted appellation of “multi-denominational cemetery”, which in turn evokes the idea of an open-minded and progressive British administration, was in fact limited to Christians and excluded the adherents of all other faiths.

Being an architect, the author displays a marked bias towards architectural matters – giving a detailed description of the chapel commissioned by Sir Arthur Hamilton-Gordon in memory of his wife Lady Rachel Emily. The chapel, which now appears as being in the heart of the cemetery, actually stands in what was then the new part – following the extension carried out in 1879. The tombs themselves are only briefly referred to by the author, whose attention is mainly focused on those incorporating Masonic symbols. The article is superbly illustrated by the cemetery’s architect Emanuel Luigi Galizia’s own drawings, showing the original layout articulated along a central path with a fountain as its focal point. The drawings, of course, reflect the layout of the cemetery when it was opened in 1857 and do not include any of the southern section that was added at a later stage. A drawing dated 1889 shows the cemetery more or less in its present configuration.

In his contribution entitled *Gozo – Three Friaries, Three Peculiarities*, author Godwin Vella takes the reader on an excursion in, around and at times under three monastic establishments located in Rabat Gozo. These belong to the Augustinians, the Franciscan Conventuals and the Capuchins. The article highlights the similarities between the three communities and their respective friary, and the impact that such a concentration of monastic establishments in such a small area had on the area and its inhabitants. It also illustrates the peculiarities of each establishment, reflecting the different interpretation each gave to monastic life, and the way in which these became physically manifest in the different buildings.
The current Augustinian Friary was established at the turn of the 15th century. As the Augustinians professed a marked contemplative isolation, this is reflected in the layout of the friary, which consists of individual isolated cells, serviced by separate amenities, albeit collected around a central common cloister. Each cell included an underlying low chamber, partially hewn in the live rock, which each member of the community used as a personal hermitage.

The Franciscan Conventuals established themselves in Gozo in the late 1480s. The site of their convent was located on the border of the Rabat urban area and occupied a strategic position facing Marsalforn. Due to the relative isolation of such a position, the convent’s architecture displays all the introspection that characterised rural buildings of the period. Such austerity and blankness persisted until the 19th-century modifications. The north-facing side even accommodates a gun platform, suggesting an escalation of perceived insecurity in which even friars belonging to an Order that professed peace as one of its core values were not content with simply passive measures to ensure their safety, but also adopted offensive strategies.

The distinctive element of the Capuchin’s Friary, built in the 1730s, is the complex of underground spaces dedicated to the mummiﬁcation, preservation and presentation of departed members of the community. These consist of a vault extending under the church and include display niches and desiccation chambers. Such facilities, although on a larger scale, also existed in the main Capuchin convent situated on the Floriana fortifications. These displays were intended as a testament to the fragility and temporal nature of earthly things, implicitly exhorting the faithful to concentrate their efforts on a saintly departure from this world.

These are but two of the many contributions that make this issue of Treasures of Malta yet another shining tessera in the golden mosaic of information that has steadily expanded over the years and that has given its readers many hours of pleasurable and stimulating reading.

As is being predicted by the editor Joseph F Grima, this publication will probably become the most enduring memento of the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the Malta Historical Society. This, one would assume, would be a desirable outcome for an organisation that has, over the years, established the publication of original historical research as one of its principle values. So important is this aspect to the society’s ethos that a commitment to this effect was incorporated in the original statute. This commitment has been embodied in the society’s publications over the years, principal of which is its journal Melita Historica.

The first section of this publication is dedicated to outlining the events leading to, and immediately following, the foundation of the society. It recounts in a very direct and vivid manner the society’s evolution from an idea originating from Monsignor Professor Arturo Bonnici into a constituted entity as sanctioned during the first general meeting held on 26 April 1950 in the University Library, then located in St Paul Street, Valletta. This section also includes a list of all the officials who, at some point, have served the society in various roles. It reads like a golden book of Maltese history – listing most of the personages who have contributed fundamental research to this field and who are responsible for our knowledge of various aspects of this multi-faceted subject.

Following this section is one dedicated to historiography and research. The editor brings to the attention of the reader the fact that the core of this section consists of the first ever published English translation of the seminal work entitled On the History of the Older Christian church of Malta, published by Albert Mayr in his native German, in 1896. This is the first known attempt to analyse Malta’s Early Christian, Byzantine and Arab periods in a systematic way and extrapolate the historic facts from the legends, written and spoken traditions, and even fabrications which, before Mayr, characterised perceptions regarding Malta’s past. Mayr’s pioneering work provided a base on which subsequent historians have added an infinity of details which together form our current understanding of Maltese history of these periods.

This section is followed by a series of original essays on various subjects, arranged in chronological order according to the subject matter and spanning the period from pre-history to British rule. The publication is brought to a conclusion by a series of six essays on art-related subjects including architecture, sculpture and painting.

Prof. Mario Buhagiar, President of the Society at the time of publication, points out that this publication brings together both established, well-published historians and up-and-coming researchers. This is indeed a positive approach, and one not often found in such a tradition-based context. It is also an implicit acknowledgment of the need for further work in the ever-evolving field of historical research.
Comfortably seated on her fur cloak, the Countess de Vergennes, or to be precise the depiction of her by Antoine Favray, entices the prospective reader with her soft skin tones, her somewhat mischievous expression and the uncompromising directness of her gaze. The sheer opulence of her costume, the seductive sparkle of her jewellery and the transparency of her bodice are pregnant with the promise of a wealth yet to be uncovered. It is certainly an image much suited to grace the cover of this volume of Histories of Malta, which lives up to the excellent reputation established by its 10 predecessors.

These volumes have cemented the author’s reputation as a historian, but have also given him the opportunity to display his ability as a literary portraitist. Giovanni Bonello has an undeniable ability to endow the personages about whom he writes with a full human presence. Writing with a mixture of sagacity, objectivity and irreverence, he conveys in many shades the complex personalities of what are sometimes outstanding, oftenfallible but always very real, human beings.

In this latest addition to the series we once again meet a multitude of such personages, one of the most interesting of whom is Fra Carlo Valdana. As described in Bonello’s unmistakable style, Valdana comes across as the equivalent of one of the villains we frequently see in television fiction these days. The cadet son of a most noble family, Fra Carlo joined the Order of St John virtually penniless. Endowed with a colossal ego and few scruples, he accumulated a considerable fortune mainly through piracy and corruption but also certainly thanks to an outstanding intelligence and an iron determination. Reaching the point where he actually became a creditor to King Philip IV of Spain, he also had the audacity to march on the two royal cities of Rometta and Santa Lucia when the King failed to honour the terms attached to the loan. His difficult character – undoubtedly coupled with his undeniable success – made him a target for many detractors, chief among which was Fabio Chigi, who for a time acted as Inquisitor in Malta and who would one day become Pope Alexander VII. As often happens in television dramas, Fra Carlo’s ascent stopped short of the most coveted prize, being appointed Grand Master of his Order. Fra Carlo’s most enduring legacy is his stately house in Valletta, Casa Valdana on Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street, which the author uses as a pretext to delve into the life of this fascinating character.

Another individual extensively featured in this volume is Sir Thomas Maitland. Bonello gives an unflattering portrayal of the man known to many as ‘King Tom’ but defined by those close to him as a “rough old despot” and reputed to be “hated by the very ground he trod on”. Maitland emerges as a judge and exploiter of human weaknesses rather than qualities, a leader by dissent rather than aggregation.

An exquisite snippet included in this volume is the article about the restoration of the Palace of the Grand Masters, of which the author is the appointed superintendent. Bonello is the first to admit that turning what are today mainly administrative offices into the envisaged national showcase will be no easy task. Even deciding what items, and from which periods, such a showcase should feature will be the subject of many debates. Some of the choices – such as the return of the armoury, currently occupied by the House of Representatives, to its original location – come naturally. But others, such as what to preserve and what to change within the chaotic built fabric of the palace, will be certainly difficult to make and even more difficult to obtain a consensus for. In this article, Bonello commits himself to the position of impartial arbiter, suppressing what might be his natural inclinations and tastes to ensure that all things Maltese that can stand the quality scrutiny find their way into this national showcase.

Fully aware that no national history can exist in isolation, Bonello also strives to contextualise his Malta-centric events in the context of their historic, political and geographical European context. Keeping Malta as his focus, he reaches out in many directions – such as Tudor England and the Sorbonne University in France – to give a European dimension to local events.

Bonello’s ability as a literary portraitist referred to earlier makes this volume a depository of acquired knowledge about the lives of many whose stories have been captured between its covers. A poignant reflection on the nature of life is given at the very beginning: in the words of the author himself “Here is life, a smile that withers”. This is aptly illustrated by a still life painting by Adriaen von Utrecht, who crowded his picture with all that is beautiful and desired in man’s life only to reserve the central position for a skull, to remind his spectator that although the things he sees might bring joy to his life, his final destination is nothing but death. It is through work such as Bonello’s that death is denied the last word and that individuals who might well have been forgotten are brought to the reader’s attention for his entertainment and reflection.
Our Lady of Victory Church Entrusted to Din l-Art Helwa

How apt that the first building to be erected in Valletta, the church of Our Lady of Victory, has been entrusted to the care of Din l-Art Helwa. This is indeed a great victory for the organisation and a much deserved recognition of the work it has carried out assiduously over many years. But even more is it a victory for our national heritage, as it brings hope that after years of obliteration the magnificent series of murals by Alessio Erardi may yet again be revealed. I remember vividly my impressions when, shortly following the laying of the suspended wooded floor, I had the opportunity to inspect the frescos at close quarters. It was like moving in a veritable feast of colour and figures. Even under the grime of accumulated dirt, the angelic faces smiled at me in what felt like resignation to their inescapable fate. Little did I know at the time that the same wooded floor would preclude the sight of these beautiful murals for many years to come. The same feelings resurfaced when I saw the illustrations of these frescos in your informative publication Heritage Fragments.

It should be borne in mind that 8 September marks the Nativity of Our Lady. What joy would it be if a future 8 September, possibly in 2018 when Valletta will rightfully and proudly bear the title of European Capital of Culture, could also mark the return to life of this cycle of frescos that represent episodes of her life? I realise that Din l-Art Helwa has been entrusted with the entire church, and that there are other areas that need attention, but I think the frescos should be a priority. For too long they have been denied to the eyes of an appreciative public.

There can be no doubt that this enterprise will constitute a substantial financial burden. In this respect, I have a suggestion to make: What if Din l-Art Helwa adopted a ‘cantiere aperto’ (open working site) policy? This is being done increasingly in Italy where, in the course of restoration work, events are organised at which members of the public can have a close look at what is being restored and are also given information on the restoration process while seeing it being carried out. I recently visited the church of Santa Croce in Florence during such an event and it proved to be a very enriching experience. Of course, precautions such as limiting the number of visitors – and the duration of such visits – need to be taken to avoid altering the micro climate surrounding the frescos too much, but I am convinced that such events could generate some of the funds needed to secure the future of these beautiful frescos.

I can only conclude by wishing Din l-Art Helwa every success in yet another challenging restoration project.

John Abela
Swieqi

Din l-Art Helwa would like to thank John Abela for his excellent suggestion regarding the cantiere aperto. Indeed this is already being considered and a roster of viewing will be established as soon as the restoration programme is underway.
Commemorating Grand Master de Valette

The debate regarding the proper rendering of the name of Grand Master Jean de Valette recently appearing in the local papers has proved to be very interesting. However, I would like to point out that it’s all well and good trying to establish whether the actual name of the grand master who was the protagonist of the Great Siege of 1565 was ‘la Valette’ or ‘de Valette’ but there are more pressing issues that surround this historic personage. In fact it is a blessing that the same grand master had the foresight to give the city he worked so hard to establish his name, because in over 445 years no public monument has ever been raised in his memory within the same city.

Now that considerable work is being carried out in Valletta, it is high time that this unpardonable lacuna be filled. De Valette deserves to be properly celebrated in the city with which his name is so intimately linked. Mine is not a new proposal: over the years many people have called for such a monument, but I feel that this is the time to transform good intentions from empty words into concrete action. Now is the time to act and call for a public competition for the design of such a monument so that all the work can be carried out in time for what will certainly be a grand unveiling of the new entrance to Valetta. It would be very fitting that a representation of the grand master be set to welcome all who enter the city that bears his name.

It is only to be hoped that if this monument ever materialises it is given a better treatment than that meted out to the bust of Pope Pius V, who also contributed so much to put the building of Valletta on a solid financial foundation. I am referring to the replica of the 19th century bust of this Pope which, a few years ago, was unceremoniously dumped at one side of Great Siege Square. A monument should be the focal point of an urban space, not an appendix to such a space that gives the impression that no more suitable place could be found.

Paul Mifsud
Valletta

Great Siege 450th Anniversary

Dr Ray Bondin recently brought attention to the fact that 2015 will mark the 450th anniversary of the Great Siege of 1665. As Dr Bondin himself states: “Without doubt, 1565 was a turning point in Malta’s history” – primarily because the events that occurred during the Great Siege cemented the relationship between the Knights of the Order of St John and what were up until then their comparatively new Maltese subjects. This in turn ushered in a new phase in Maltese history, firmly establishing the rule of the Order which transformed Malta from a European backwater to a protagonist of European history and saw the creation of a rich heritage which otherwise would not have been possible through local resources. Again as Dr Bondin points out, the Great Siege put Malta on the map of Europe, affirming its strategic position and bringing it for the first time to the attention of many Europeans who probably had never heard of Malta before 1565.

Four years might look like a long time for the planning of such a commemoration but in fact it is not. Dr Bondin believes that such a commemoration should be multifaceted. He calls for in-depth research into the neglected, but most certainly fundamental, aspect of the Maltese contribution to the siege effort and another aspect that needs thorough investigation is the Arab version of events. Arnold Cassola’s book The Great Siege of Malta (1565) and the Istanbul State Archives (published by Said International in 1995) is the only work to delve into this aspect of the Great Siege published to date and the anniversary would certainly be a good occasion to investigate these issues further.

Dr Bondin also calls for the creation of a Great Siege Museum. This is indeed a splendid idea, especially as he suggests the museum could include a permanent exhibition of Albert Ganado’s maps that are now in the custody of Heritage Malta and which would, by themselves, be the pride and joy of any museum. Although Dr Bondin did not suggest a location for such a museum, I believe that it should be in Senglea – the role of which in the defence of the island is often neglected and which lacks an important museum to support its place among the tourist attractions of Cottonera.

This anniversary has also been identified by Dr Bondin as an ideal reason for concluding restoration projects that have been left in suspense. He refers in particular to the frescos representing scenes of the Great Siege depicted by Matteo Perez D’Aleccio in what used to be the Sala del Gran Consiglio to serve as a reminder to the senior officials of the Order of the sacrifice and consecutive glory of their brethren in those momentous days. To many people these are “the” definite iconographic representation of the Great Siege, the images that come to mind when the words are heard. They are for many reasons, including their artistic relevance, an invaluable cycle of frescos that ought to be preserved for future generations through the completion of the restoration project.

Finally, Dr Bondin envisages that this should be an occasion for celebration and reflection. In a world where international politics are still so strongly characterised by religious conflict, this commemoration should indeed be an occasion for reflection in the hope that the pain and suffering of the past can serve as an admonition to the present and become the hope for a better future. With such an ambitious programme of action envisaged, four years might indeed not be sufficient.

George Mallia
Qrendi
It’s Time to Get on Board - Draconian changes that permanently affect our street names

Finally, the much-anticipated bus service is ‘up and running’ – more or less! There are many new and forward-looking innovations and appreciable aspects to the service but, unfortunately, there are many other issues that need immediate attention before, as with most things in Malta, we become so accustomed to them that they become impossible to change – a fait accompli.

I am referring to place names and typology. The Cultural Heritage Act defines cultural assets as both tangible and intangible. Place names are part of this intangible patrimony that needs to be defended and protected for posterity. Unfortunately, we find that, in one fell swoop, this asset/treasure has been arbitrarily compromised, corrupted and inexplicably altered, apparently without any prior research or reference.

Many of the names chosen for bus stops/stages are either unintentionally funny, dangerously close to having obscene connotations or quite simply incorrect, and are probably the creation of someone who is better off staying unidentified but who is most probably not Maltese. Just to give one example of incompetence, for the last 100 years or so, we have referred to the bus stop at Valley Road, Birkirkara, as ‘The Market’. This should have been re-named to read, in Maltese, ‘Is-Suq’, but no, someone decided to remove the article, leaving ‘Suq’ which, in Maltese, means ‘drive on’!

There are many other examples: ‘It-Telgha t’Alla u Ommu’ has become ‘Ommu’. In Maltese, this either means familiarity with the person or else it becomes the basis for a serious insult and argument. When the mother in question is God’s Mother (t’Alla u Ommu), it is more the latter than the former. In any case, the subject of the place name is ‘hill’ (It-telgha).

The Maltese Language National Council has just published guidelines for local councils on how to write place names and the necessity or otherwise to include articles and other words before place names. In one fell swoop, we find that, now, all place names and topological references have lost much more than their article: they have lost their meaning. How can you refer to ‘Ghar id-Dud’ as ‘Dud’?

Referring to saints by just their name is disrespectful and even offensive – for example, ‘Tereżza’ for Sta Tereżza. And referring to them by “pseudo Italian” names they never had, instead of the Maltese equivalent, is tantamount to a loss of national pride. An example of this is ‘Gejtano’ for San Gejtanu. The saint in question is San Gaetano di Thiene, not Gejtano.

I have to say that, during the many years of British “imperialism”, they never dared so much – translating place names on a whim. Place names have always remained the prerogative of the Maltese people, and even when foreign names were involved, the Maltese always imaginatively modified them to suit their needs. An example of this is the land belonging to the Order of St John at Dingli, which was originally recorded as ‘Dell’Assemblea’ and subsequently transliterated by the locals to ‘Is-Simblija’ – with the ever-present article.

Other topological anomalies are related to places local people have always known by certain names – for example, Mriehel, on the outskirts of Birkirkara. The bus stop next to Mriehel school is now named “Notabile”. How can you justify such a name in the heart of Birkirkara/Mriehel instead of using the original name? Another name treasured by any Hamrun resident worth his salt is “Strada Rjali”. Where has that gone?

Names of actual people have been changed beyond recognition: Umberto Colosso, for example, has been changed to ‘Calassa’. You cannot expect the stop to be called ‘Colosso’, since it does not refer to a colosseum, but it is the name and surname of an individual with historical local connections.

Consultation has been lacking on this and other issues. It is very unfortunate that time and money could have been saved had anyone bothered to refer to the professionals in these fields. I believe it is the responsibility of the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, the Maltese Language National Council, Heritage Malta and the Malta Tourism Authority to see that these horrendous errors are rectified immediately, before they become part of our jargon and yet another essential aspect of our heritage goes down the drain. A board or team of experts should be established to look into the matter and save this irreplaceable part of our heritage. I would expect Arriva to actively collaborate in such an endeavour.

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The bus stop in proximity of Il-Bieb ta’ Santa Lina, St Margherita Lines, Bormla
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