

*October 2012*

*NUMBER 42*

*€3.00*

*NEWSPAPER POST*

*DIN L-ART HELWA*

*National Trust of Malta*

# VIGILO



# The Council

*Founder President*  
*Judge Maurice Caruana Curran*

## **THE COUNCIL 2011-13**

### **Executive President**

Simone Mizzi

### **Vice-Presidents**

Martin Scicluna

Professor Luciano Mulé Stagno

### **Hon. Secretary General**

George Camilleri

### **Hon. Treasurer**

Victor Rizzo

### **Members**

Professor Anthony Bonanno

Albert Calleja

Ian Camilleri

Judge Maurice Caruana Curran

Cettina Caruana Curran

Maria Grazia Cassar

Joseph F Chetcuti

Carolyn Clements

Josie Ellul Mercer

Judge Joe Galea Debono

Martin Galea

Cathy Farrugia

Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon

Dame Blanche Martin

Dane Munro

Patricia Salomone

Joanna Spiteri Staines

Edward Xuereb

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

National Trust of Malta

133 Melita Street

Valletta VLT 1123

Tel - 21 225952

Fax - 21 220358

### *open*

Monday - Friday

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

### *e-mail*

info@dinlartelwa.org

### *web*

www.dinlartelwa.org

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

*The National Trust for Scotland*

*The Barbados National Trust*

*The National Trust of Australia*

*The Gelderland Trust for  
Historic Houses*

*The Gelderland 'Nature Trust'*

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

**ICOMOS - Malta**

***Europa Nostra***

***The International National Trusts  
Organisation (INTO)***

***The National Federation of  
NGOs of Malta***

***The Heritage Parks  
Federation***

***Qantara***

**VIGILO**  
is published in  
April and October

**VIGILO e-mail:**  
joe.mnajdra@gmail.com

COPYRIGHT by the PUBLISHER  
***Din l-Art Helwa***

EDITOR  
DESIGN & LAYOUT  
**JOE AZZOPARDI**

PROOF READER  
**JUDITH FALZON**

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

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

# VIGILO

ISSN - 1026-132X

NUMBER 42

OCTOBER 2012

# VIGILO



# C O N T E N T S

**02**

Half a Century of  
Planning Abuse  
by *Martin Scicluna*

**05**

Replicas or Replacements for  
Barriera Wharf?  
by *Simone Mizzi*

**06**

How to Build Heritage  
by *Prof. Alex Torpiano*

**08**

On the Building of Heritage  
by *Simone Mizzi*

**10**

Trees Cannot Talk  
by *George Camilleri*

**11**

HRH the Duke of Gloucester Visit

**14**

Celebrating Our Victory  
Team Sponsors

**16**

*Din I-Art Helwa News*

**19**

*Din I-Art Helwa Diary of Events*

**20**

Youth Exchange Programme  
at Tal-Hniena Church  
by *Maria Grazia Cassar*

**21**

Faux Tuna  
by *George Camilleri*

**22**

Draft National Strategy for  
Cultural Heritage Comments

**24**

DLH and Our Lady of Victory  
Church 1st Anniversary  
by *Simone Mizzi*

**26**

Art Treasure at Our Lady of  
Victory Church Saved  
by *Joe Azzopardi*

**28**

Restoration and Conservation  
of Nine Monuments in the  
Maglio Gardens  
by *James Licari*

**31**

Hal Millieri Restoration  
by *Stanley Farrugia Randon*

**32**

Restoration of Mattia Preti's  
St Sebastian  
by *Maria Grazia Cassar*

**34**

Delimara Lighthouse  
Restoration  
by *Stanley Farrugia Randon*

**35**

Draft Aquaculture Policy  
by *Emma Warrington*

**36**

Mattia Preti Architect  
by *Dott. Giuseppe Mantella*

**40**

The Tritons' Fountain  
by *Kenneth Cauchi*

**44**

A Survey of the Maltese  
Muxrabijiet (2nd part)  
by *Joe Azzopardi*

**50**

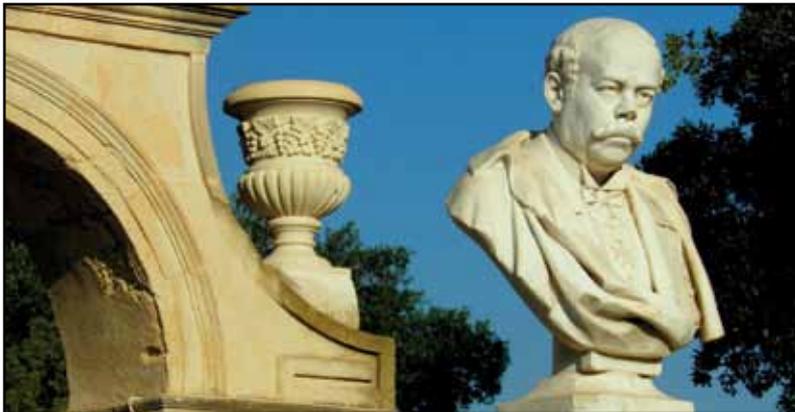
Majjistral Nature and History  
Park Update  
by *Annalise Falzon*

**51**

Publications Reviews

**53**

Corporate Members



*Bust of Marquis Joseph Scicluna in the Mall Garden*



## FRONT COVER

The restored bust of  
Sir Adrian Dingli  
By Antonio Sciortino.  
Photo James Licari



## BACK COVER

Detail of the  
Tritons' Fountain



# Half a Century of Planning Abuse

**Martin Scicluna**

*Vice-President of Din l-Art Helwa and Director General of the Today Public Policy Institute*

There can be no environmental or cultural heritage conservation without adequate planning legislation and a proper Structure Plan. Until 50 years ago, Malta's heritage had survived through some rather arcane legislation, consisting of the old Antiquities Protection Ordinance of 1925 and the Aesthetics Building Ordinance, which had as its main purpose "the safeguarding of the symmetry of surrounding buildings". These laws were essentially framed for the protection of monuments, rather than for the conservation of natural beauty, and they had very few teeth.

In 1961, an old and primitive code of police law, which curiously had provisions in it covering buildings, was amended by declaring the whole of Malta a "Planning Area". Through this fortuitous amendment, the Planning Area Permits Board was formed and, in 1970, the Town and Country Planning Act was passed by the Nationalist government. But although enacted it was never put into force and it was revoked by a Labour government some eight years later without it ever having had the force of law.

The Labour government then introduced the Building Development Areas Act with the power to grant building permits all over Malta. This Act actually revoked all planning schemes and set out policies on building permits that were not site-specific. Importantly, there was no structure plan and no development zones. Its major shortcoming was that it did not recognise the particular geographic limitations of Malta – treating Malta as though its size was infinite! Everything was effectively up for grabs.

This led to the period of greatest abuse in our planning system. The fate of planning permits and the environment were largely in the hands of the relevant Minister for Public Works, who tended, in most cases, to wield that power as though Maltese land was his personal fiefdom, there to serve not the country's needs but the political agenda of his party, or even his own personal whims.

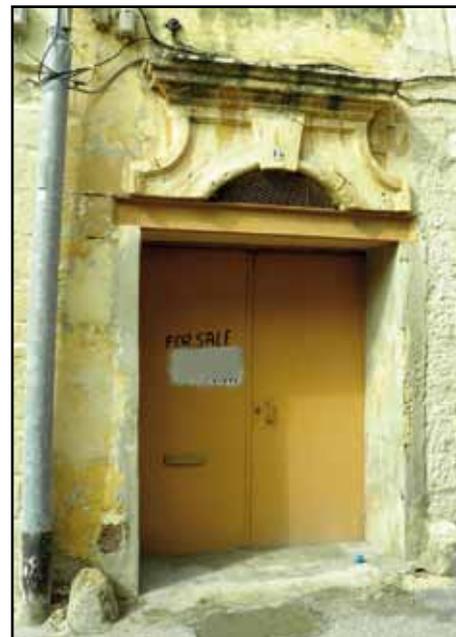
On the arrival of a new Nationalist government determined to sort out the tangled planning development mess which they had inherited, a Building Permits (Temporary Provisions) Act was put in place in 1988 to bring some order to the situation while Malta's Structure Plan was drawn up.

The Structure Plan – the first ever – was completed in 1990 and the Building Permits (Temporary Provisions) law continued to hold sway until 1992, when the Planning Development Act was passed and Malta's first National Structure Plan and a proper regulatory authority, the Planning Authority, were fully established.

For three decades up to 1992, therefore, through successive building booms – as speculators and anybody with money to invest in Malta bought land and buildings – the construction developments of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, were allowed to let rip with no proper control being exercised, massive political abuse by the individual ministers of governments then in power who used land as a means of boosting political support – as well as, in some cases, lining their own pockets – with consequent irreparable damage to the countryside and the built environment.

1992, when Malta's Planning Authority was formed, was the turning point when, for the first time in three decades, some sort of order was to be imposed on Malta's built and natural environment. The perils of non-planning were behind us, we must naively have thought.

But of course life is never as neat and simple as that. Within 10 years of its establishment, the Planning Authority became the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, as the realisation grew



*Innovative urban regeneration in Żejtun*

*opposite:  
The old and the new  
i.e. the grand and the sad.  
The Citadella, Gozo*

*Marsascalea – a non-planning  
masterpiece*



that planning for building development on its own made little sense unless full account was taken of the impact on the environment and also because Malta was gearing up to join the European Union, where it was known that the emphasis on conformity to environmental regulation would be high. In a small country like Malta, where every construction development invariably had a direct impact on the environment, this made eminent good sense.

But the essential need to establish a clear firewall between political intrusion (through the Minister for the Environment) into planning decisions and into the day to day processes of MEPA eluded us. The construction development juggernaut rolled on unabated. For a start, politicians of both parties appeared to be in the pockets of the construction industry. Furthermore, the people put in to the key Planning Board and Planning Commission posts were often carefully picked as not likely to rock the political boat. Sometimes they had clear conflicts of interest.

Moreover, planning case-law had been built up in such a way as to allow very wide interpretation of the planning regulations. One of the most abused aspects was the so-called Outside Development Zone (ODZ) applications where, under certain circumstances, the Board was allowed to sanction development in an area where the law said it could not. This was interpreted so liberally that any clever architect could make a case for such sanctioning, thus making a complete mockery of the development zone concept, with agricultural land and scenic areas increasingly built upon.

To cap it all, flouting of the law was endemic. Illegal structures were built and then sanctioned, instead of being removed. Enforcement of the law was honoured more in the breach than the observance and, for the most part, there was simply not the political will to enforce it.

The situation was exacerbated by a relentless surge in property construction caused by lax building controls and weak ministerial leadership. The repatriation under a tax amnesty of Maltese money invested in banks abroad helped stoke the building frenzy. All this reached a head just before the last general election four years ago, when a number of notorious cases of abuse and corruption – and a general public dissatisfaction with the progressive loss of Malta's natural environment – led to the 'environmental deficit', as I called it, becoming the key election issue in 2008.

The environmental deficit had been given particular prominence when the government pushed through a vote in Parliament extending, rather than reducing, the building development zones to placate some voters and the construction industry in an act of institutionalised vandalism carried out in the face of overwhelming public concern. Under pressure, Prime Minister Gonzi, fighting for his political life, gave an undertaking that if he were voted back to government he would make tackling the environmental deficit his top priority under his own personal control.

He was indeed returned to power in 2008 and a root and branch review of the Environment and Planning Authority and the other regulatory authorities was put in train. The upshot is that the Environment and Planning Authority has been greatly improved. It is now much better led. A new Development and Planning Act has been passed. Political interference has, on the whole, been notable by its absence. Confidence in the planning process has improved. A National Environmental Policy has been put in place with clear targets and bench-marks for improvement.

While the last four years have seen improvements, the danger of renewed political chicanery in the run-up to the next election remains. The reality is that the last 50 years of planning and environmental history have been a battle about greed (a lot of people have made huge amounts of money out of poorly regulated building development), exploitation, abuse, mis-governance and political ineptitude, which the current improvements can never erase.

As Malta looks back on the last half century, it can be seen that in building planning development terms it has been a story, until just recently, akin to the Wild West. It started with the taking of several large tracts of open countryside for development and was followed by an onslaught on some of our most attractive towns and villages, valleys and the coastline. Distinct and once integral villages have spread outwards to present a virtually amorphous mass.

Despite the welcome and over-due creation of the Planning Authority in 1992, the tide of uglification, personified by over-development – combined in many cases with poor architecture – has persisted. The impact of excessive and inefficient land use has exacerbated all of Malta's other environmental problems. It has created collateral damage in a number of related areas – from the coastal environment to cultural heritage sites, from air pollution to



water and energy use and the natural habitats of the island. The knock-on effects of over-development have caused distortions to our economy and to our quality of life.

What lessons should Malta draw from the mistakes of the last half century? There are five and many of them are interlocking.

The first lesson is the paramount need for a firm and comprehensive legislative frame-work to safeguard, guide and regulate the impacts of humans on the natural environment and quality of life.

In Malta's case, there was no proper planning authority or structure plan until 1992 – more than 30 years after the first of a series of building booms began the transformation of the island into a sprawling building site. It has taken 50 years to get anywhere near a workable legal and environmental planning structure – with the consequent losses in our architectural heritage and the effects on our environment that we suffer today. Look around you and weep.

The second lesson is the need for enforcement and education – the two Es – as one of the keys to improvement in this area. There must be regular, sustained, focused and concerted public education campaigns about the need to safeguard the heritage and the environment. Major changes in public attitudes happen only slowly. A greater sense of civic responsibility towards heritage and the environment can only be inculcated through education over time. The effects of the lobbying and advocacy roles which *Din l-Art Helwa* and other organisations have undertaken have constituted a drip, drip process. The road to success is only achieved if one keeps chipping away.

But, together with education, the application of the rule of law and its enforcement must also play a major part in the education process. Enforcement reflects the hard way of learning. In Malta, the inability, and lack of political will exercised

by successive governments to enforce the law on the environment and the protection of heritage sites has been appalling. It has been characterised by a lack of enforcement resources and too great a willingness to turn a blind eye to powerful lobby groups, such as bird hunters and trappers and the construction industry, for fear of losing their votes. The application of political backbone on enforcement has been sadly lacking. Belatedly, it is hoped there is now to be a re-direction of resources, together with the application of political will to enforce the law.

The third lesson, which is intrinsic to the first two lessons, is the need to ensure that the machinery of government – which means joined-up government – works efficiently. In the environmental and heritage fields, Malta has suffered from endemic organisational and systemic deficiencies in the way the machinery of government was established and operated to deal with them – sometimes raising obfuscation and delay, dysfunctional or comatose government, lack of decision or avoidance of implementation into an art form.

Poor governance, poor organisation, a lack of proper prioritisation and coordination have all taken their toll. There is a need for an over-arching plan to bring all the elements of government – economic, social and environmental – together. There are signs that this is now being done.

The fourth lesson concerns the need for government to embrace wholeheartedly the concept of sustainability and the creation of a National Plan for Sustainable Development. Sustainable development is concerned with achieving economic growth in the form of higher living standards, while protecting and enhancing the environment. This is not just for the sake of having a better environment, but because a damaged environment will sooner or later hold back economic growth and lower the quality of life of our people. This indeed has been the

story of Malta's development over the last 50 years or so. The social and environmental penalties paid by Malta for economic growth have been heavy. Again, look around you and weep.

More important than formal definitions, however, are the key objectives which should underpin sustainable development. There should be three interlocking objectives. The first objective should be to maintain high and stable levels of economic growth and employment, remembering always, however, that economic growth on its own is not progress. The second is affordable social progress that recognises the needs of everyone and third is the effective protection of the environment. This means acting to protect human health and safety from hazards such as air or water pollution, and being prudent about the use of meagre natural resources like water, limestone and land. The centre-piece of any sustainable environmental plan in Malta must be to tackle how we use and share our tiny land.

The fifth lesson concerns political will. Government is not about good or evil, it is about order or chaos. In the environmental and heritage fields, Malta has experienced more of the latter than the former. Glow-worm politicians with their self-importance and specious slogans come and go. But they are ultimately accountable to the people they are meant to serve. The constant dilemma for politicians is that what is right is more often than not unpopular. And what is popular is not always right.

Proper planning involves hard choices and sometimes very hard decisions. The longer tough decisions are postponed, the more difficult they become. We who are in the business of safeguarding our heritage and environment are concerned about its survival into the next century and beyond, while politics is about surviving till next Friday afternoon, or at most until the next election. The exercise of political will is absolutely vital to the success of any venture in government. But when it comes to the environment and heritage, it becomes absolutely crucial.

As we look around us at what successive governments have done to Malta's architectural heritage and the environment over the last 50 years, we can – on the whole – only stand and weep. Unless the stark lessons that we have learnt the hard way are taken to heart and acted upon, the prognosis for the kind of country we bequeath to our children and grandchildren is grim indeed. Although there have been improvements in the last few years, it will only take another poor Minister for the Environment to set back the progress recently so painstakingly achieved.



*The urbanisation of Sliema continues undeterred*

# Replicas or Replacements for Barriera Wharf?

*Simone Mizzi*

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

*Din l-Art Helwa* recently made representations to Mepa with regard to the proposed development of the *Pixkerija* (fish market) site at Barriera Wharf in Valletta, which is planned to offer facilities for a boutique hotel, conference centre and boating wharf. The development was being proposed by the Grand Harbour Rehabilitation Committee and the design brief was entrusted to TBA Periti. The author attended a presentation by architect Marc Bonello that was held at Valletta Local Council's offices in June. The proposal is to reutilise some of the existing structures at Barriera Wharf, whilst demolishing others to make way for more modern facilities.

*Din l-Art Helwa* welcomed the restoration and rehabilitation of the buildings within this most historic part of Valletta, as they are in a very shabby and neglected state. However, their adaptation to modern use as proposed was only acceptable providing their integrity as part of a World Heritage City is not compromised by modern and inappropriate intrusions and unnecessary demolition.

The fish market and ex-ministry buildings, backed by the historic Caraffa Stores, are a harmonious introduction to the city of Valletta, whether viewed from the sea, from the Three Cities or approached by land from Lascaris and Liesse. We believe a modern replacement of the buildings planned for demolition (if, indeed, demolition is proved necessary) could, if not planned sensitively and with appropriate materials, disrupt this visual integrity and devalue the historic context in which they are set.

In our representation to Mepa, we requested the planners to seriously debate the necessity of pulling down the ex-ministry building and the annexe of the Quarantine Hospital and not to discard the possibility of their adaptation to modern use. DLH does not find acceptable the justification for demolition given during the project presentation which was that these buildings could be demolished as they were accretions and replicas of the British period and were of no value. We find this too facile and dangerous a justification, and one that shows superficial understanding of the historic value of the area. Buildings built to the same style as others are not necessarily of no value. On the contrary, they were planned as replicas in order to fit in with their surroundings and respect previous, historic construction.

Furthermore, any buildings that have acquired the patina of time and that have their own history of human use require respectful treatment, especially if, together, they are part of a greater complex. This is exactly the case of the buildings in front of the Caraffa Stores. We asked Mepa to note that demolition goes very much against the new policies being promoted by government as a result of which structures of age are to be retained and reused through sensitive adaptation. We believe the adaptation of the ex-ministry building to be possible and this should be further explored, while any new building to replace the Quarantine Hospital annexe would be too sharp a contrast as it would be directly attached to this historic building.

We had another bone of contention which we put forward in our representation to Mepa. It was communicated that in order to carry out this project, the fish market building, currently Scheduled as a Grade 1 building, was to be re-scheduled to Grade 2, which means that future developers would be allowed to make internal alterations. The ex-ministry building, currently not scheduled, was to be listed and scheduled as a Grade 3 monument. This means that developers could obtain a permit to demolish it. The same applies to the annexe to the Quarantine Hospital, which is planned for demolition to allow a modern passage-way to be constructed. DLH believes this practice of changing the level of protection afforded to buildings in order to suit development is unethical and makes a mockery of the regulatory system that Mepa itself is bound to uphold.

*Din l-Art Helwa* requests that this most sensitive area of Valletta, that boasts the last untouched piece of coastline within

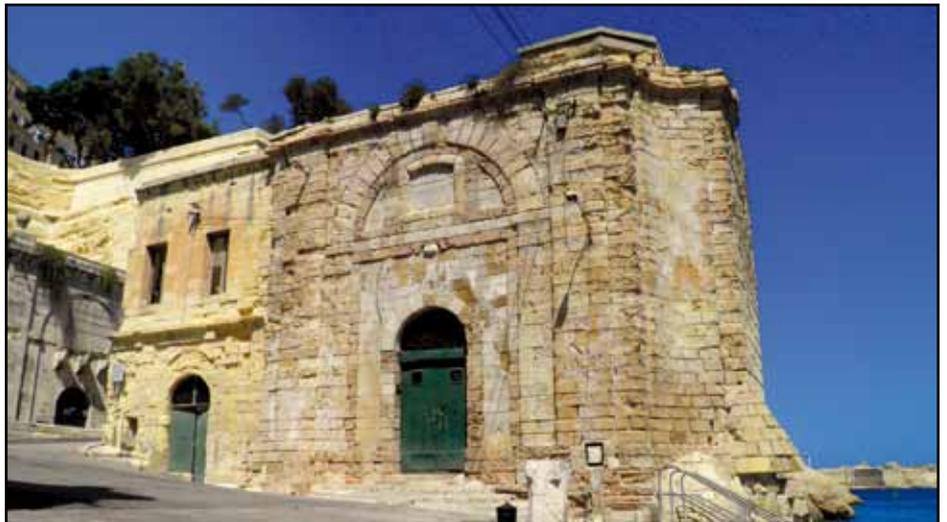
the Grand Harbour, be treated with the most stringent respect. *Ad hoc* introductions to Valletta are not advisable without a suitable debate by experts to define the style that should be adopted.

The brief given to developers needs to regulate a) the use of appropriate materials for construction and for the apertures, b) the ratio of glazing within any new façade and c) the proportions in relation to the adjacent buildings, in order not to disrupt the beautiful harmony that this historic complex has achieved over time.

On the other hand, we were very pleased to learn that both the Quarantine Hospital itself and four of the Caraffa Stores are to be totally restored and that the last Barriera hardstone column still standing is to be preserved and scheduled as a Grade 1 monument. These hardstone columns supported the wooden 'Barriera' beyond which no persons or materials could progress without proper examination. We also recommended that a lively interpretation of the history of the area be established within the Quarantine Hospital area itself.

Lastly, it was proposed within the development brief that a floating swimming pool be built in the harbour for the use of boutique hotel guests. We found this unacceptable as it would greatly devalue the integrity of this last untouched piece of coastline and be an inappropriate and insensitive addition to Grand Harbour. It was also one that set a dangerous precedent for other tourist developments that may arise in our magnificent and unique Grand Harbour.

*Din l-Art Helwa* looks forward to learning Mepa's decisions on this development brief.



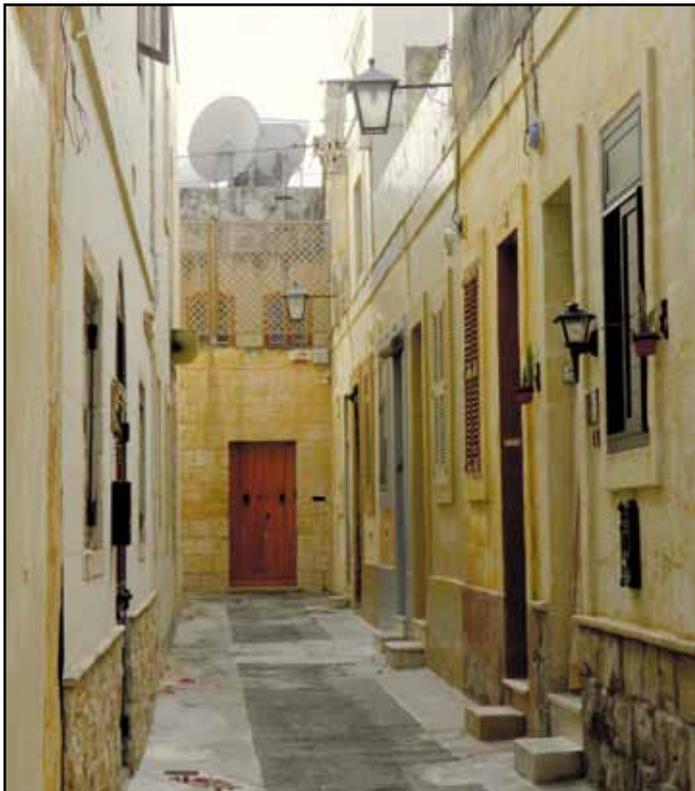
*The old Quarantine Hospital and annexe*

# How to Build Heritage

*The following is  
a letter from  
Prof. Alex Torpiano,  
Dean of the Faculty for  
the Built Environment at  
the University  
of Malta,  
that appeared in  
The Times of Malta  
of 18 July 2012.*

*opposite top:  
“New built heritage”  
in Qawra,  
ugly and getting uglier*

*Innovative urban  
focal points in Siggiewi*



In a recent address, the chairman [sic] of *Din l-Art Helwa* made an extraordinary statement. She declared that, of the many buildings erected in Malta in the last 40 years, there was no single building, not one, that she felt that she would wish to keep, to pass on to posterity.

This was a very strong statement, one that requires careful evaluation, even if one may not fully agree with it.

The comments were made in the context of an address that looked back at a year of activities by *Din l-Art Helwa* but which, in particular, made reference to the “new built heritage”, by which she presumably was referring to what was being built today, which would be the heritage of the future.

One may argue that, by using the 40-year marker, she deftly excluded a number of over 50-year-old buildings from Malta’s own Modern Architecture period, which have recently been added to the list of scheduled buildings – what we could, then, officially consider as additions to our “new built heritage”.

Time is a great filter; it does need time for a particular building, or group of buildings, to be recognised as part of a country’s heritage. Sometimes, the passage of time allows buildings to be elevated to the status of monuments, even if, when erected, the critics may have been rather negative.

Nevertheless, the chairman of *Din l-Art Helwa* does have a point. Our built environment is, generally speaking, ugly and getting uglier. However, I do not necessarily agree with the analysis that is often touted, namely that the ugliness or beauty of our built environment is simply a question of low or high-rise development, or of building in stone instead of in concrete, or of using traditional timber balconies and round arches instead of aluminium or steel apertures and flat soffits.

I do believe that some well-intentioned policies of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority have not helped and this includes both micro-scale design guidelines and macro-scale policies.

I have had occasion to insist that the quality of our urban open spaces (or lack of quality) is a more serious issue, with regard to the creation of a quality environment, than the design of the “façades” of buildings.

I would also insist that the quality of the “furniture” in the public realm, visually speaking – the ubiquitous electricity cables, the air-conditioning units, the telephone boxes, the traffic signs and, increasingly, the photo-voltaic panels and solar water heaters, the broken pavements, the lighting poles – are an even more important ingredient in the creation of urban ugliness.

Technology support systems are becoming too dominant in our built environment, without any effort to mitigate or control.

However, this argument does not diminish the seriousness of the statement made by the chairman of *Din l-Art Helwa*.

It is necessary, first of all, to look back at history to understand how, and which, buildings eventually become architectural heritage.

It must be acknowledged that, throughout the ages, the number of buildings that aspired to the descriptor of “Architecture”, with a capital A, were very few among the many structures that were erected.

Residential apartments, among many other ubiquitous contemporary typologies, (including showrooms, factories, farms and multi-storey car-parks, for example), were only relatively recently (in the time units of history) elevated to a status worthy of architectural consideration.

The one characteristic that is generally common to those buildings, which are today recognised as “heritage”, is the existence of an enlightened “patron” who seeks to create something different and of quality, more often than not reflecting status, and who commissions a designer who has the ability to match, and interpret, his aspirations.

It is no coincidence that the monuments of the past are the cathedrals, palaces and public buildings commissioned by kings and princes, the Church and noblemen. Many landmark office buildings were commissioned by important corporations and many residences of note were commissioned by the rich and important – in a time when the centres of real power changed.

Monuments of more recent pedigree include public buildings, such as museums, sports stadia, schools, colleges and Parliament buildings commissioned on behalf of “society” by presidents, ministers and parliaments – and even by enlightened entrepreneurs or corporations.



I believe that this is one prerequisite of architectural “heritage” – that there is the patron, with the desire not only to build something, which is possibly useful (and possibly valuable) but also with the aspiration that the built ensemble has a particular quality of presence and a particular cultural relevance true to its time and, in addition, that the patron finds the architect who can work with “his hands, his head and his heart” to fulfil this aspiration.

In today’s world, civilised countries which take pride in their cultural development seek to perpetuate this tradition of patronage by ensuring that their investment in key buildings, especially public buildings, or buildings built with public funds, is not only secured by the appropriate functionality but also adds to the cultural richness of the urban environment. In these countries, considerable effort is expended in finding the right interpreter of these aspirations, more often than not by holding design competitions.

Design competitions are held at various levels to select the designers of public gardens, of civic centres, of schools, of museums, of public administration buildings, of hospitals, of sports buildings and of colleges and universities.

On the other hand, what do we do in Malta to select the architects of our public buildings? Well, the current preferred route is by competitive tendering. In other words, whoever is cheapest will get the chance to design tomorrow’s heritage! The stock excuse for selecting this procurement route (which, luckily, was not followed in the case of the design of the new Parliament building) is that it is in society’s interest to get the best value for money and best value can only be obtained by competitive tendering.

It is also glibly stated these are the procurement rules prescribed by the European Union. Wrong. This statement is simply not true. Directive 2004/18/EC, which prescribes the procedures for the award of public works, supply and service contracts, clearly includes provisions for the procurement of design-related services via the organisation of design contests.

The directive even acknowledges that, where there are national provisions on the remuneration of certain services, for example the services of architects and engineers, (that is, where there is a national tariff of fees), contract award criteria should not affect such national provisions. In other words, the directive acknowledges that the procurement of design services, even for public projects, should not ignore the criterion of design quality and need not be simply tied to the “cheapest”.

Of course, it is at the discretion of the contracting public authority to decide when to adopt architectural design competitions as a procurement route rather than crude “who is the cheapest architect available”.

In other words, it is at the discretion of all those public institutions, ministries, educational establishments, public entities etc., that are (or should be) interested in procuring the architectural heritage of the future.

This is a very important discretionary power. It should be used by these authorities mindful of their responsibility not only to use public money efficiently but to make sure that good quality architectural design ensures longevity and, hence, value for whatever is built.

This patronage is vitally important for the creation of the heritage of tomorrow.

Competitions are also important to give opportunities for talented young designers to pitch their skills and showcase their abilities. Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers were young, practically unknown, architects, when they had the chance to offer their ideas via the design competition for the *Centre Pompidou* in Paris. Winning this competition not only launched the architectural careers of these now-famous architects but allowed Paris to add to its contemporary architectural heritage.

This is the story of many and, probably, all contemporary leading architects and engineers. In Malta, we have many, very talented, young people who deserve to have similar opportunities, even if for smaller things.

For 2018, Valletta is aspiring, on behalf of all of Malta, for the title of Cultural Capital of Europe. For this title not to be merely a badge or a slogan, it is necessary for Malta to create structures and processes that promote cultural development in its widest meaning and which will last beyond 2018.

The title should serve to generate a culture of design and creativity, which permeates every aspect of our life. This should include also the design of the built environment.

The creation of the built heritage of the future cannot be based on a fee-competitive tender. The young designers of the heritage of the future cannot be selected on the basis of who is cheapest.

The only built heritage that we will acquire in this way is the cheapest possible.

# On the Building of Heritage

## *The Bad and the Sad*

*The following is  
a letter from  
Simone Mizzi,  
Executive President of  
Din l-Art Helwa,  
that appeared in  
The Times of Malta  
of 1 August 2012.*

*opposite top:  
How smart is  
Smart City going to be?  
The sightline from the  
Upper Barakka over Bighi  
has been ruined forever!*

*The bad and the sad:  
The former  
Jerma Palace Hotel.  
Bad because it insensibly  
cut off  
St Thomas Tower from the sea,  
sad because now it stands  
abandoned and ruined.*

To be quoted as having said something extraordinary is indeed an accolade I would never have thought I could earn, but as a conservationist working to save cultural and built heritage for the last 40 years, to be so quoted by the Dean of the Faculty of Built Architecture at Malta's University, is surely a great tribute. It is in his hands, after all, that the teaching of quality to Malta's future heritage builders lies and his article of July 18<sup>th</sup>, 'How to Build Heritage,' articulates professionally the definition of the making of built heritage and the issues facing it. He was rightly quoting from my address to the February Annual General Meeting of *Din l-Art Helwa* as reported in the April *Vigilo*. To say the least, even if quoting out of context is very risky, my words were noticed and by somebody who can perhaps bring about change effectively, not only because he can influence both planners and developers, but because he can speak certainly to a finer level than the head of an NGO.

Sadly Professor Torpiano was not present at our AGM, when I made that impassioned speech asking for quality to return to our built environment. This followed the glimmer of hope that presented itself when the new National Environmental Policy was published where it was firmly underlined that a 'Step Change Mentality' was urgently needed to prioritise improvements in urban quality and design. On the wing of this, I was urging planners, architects, designers, architecture historians, and conservationists to foster healthy debate about the future of architecture in Malta, ending with a plea to save Manoel Island from development.

Stating there may be not one building resulting from the building jamboree of the last forty years that is worth preserving, is a broad sweeping statement, and is dangerous taken out of context and I am keen to enlarge on it, although to my mind it still stands. However broad the statement, that may disqualify such buildings as the Portomaso Tower from being considered new built heritage, I am thrilled that the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture actually ends up agreeing that the new built heritage is 'ugly and getting uglier'. I thank him for conceding that point and repay him the compliment by saying that his words perfectly articulate what good development has always needed, visionary aspirations from patrons, i.e. clients, or government schemes for key buildings, the end choice of which is dictated by recognition of artistic and technical skill, not by savings in cost or maximisation of profit. I would add that today, sadly, architecture is dictated by a very restricted vision which does not extend beyond the short term financial gain offered by speculation.

As such, I stand by my statement about the last 40 years of building and continue to challenge the worth of the utilitarian, ghastly, nameless blocks of 'disposable' architecture that these last decades have provided. Today you cannot escape the visual discord we have created and our quality of life is sorely stressed. Surely the future must bring us a gentler and more gracious visual environment, buildings that are stepped away from the roads, leaving some quality urban space, with planned water catchments, noise protection, light, good quality materials and hopefully yes, some trees?

If Professor Torpiano had attended that AGM he would have surely taken up the challenge thrown to members there, many of whom are practicing architects, to start the healthy discussions that are urgently awaited if those two small words 'Step Change' are to pervade our new built heritage





to respect the excellent building traditions Malta always enjoyed. Our island's privileged location poised between Europe and North Africa, a geographical act of fate, gave us our unique characteristics that make us different. We should indeed build on these to find our future identity without throwing away what is already ours. I, too, look forward to Valletta 2018 where we do have an extraordinary opportunity of creating beautiful spaces that serve a purpose and will last and *Din l-Art Helwa* has put forward many ideas for this exciting event.

Indeed, my marker of 40 years of unworthy building, as quoted by Professor Torpiano is a timeline that intentionally skirts the good architecture that was immortalised in the publication and exhibition 'Modernist Malta – The Architectural Legacy', the seventies being probably the end date when much good building was still being created, and some of which was sadly demolished before it could ever have been saved through scheduling, such as many fine examples by Richard England. Indeed his late sixties iconic Manikata church was only recently saved from inappropriate intervention by timely public outcry, and it is a great pity that its adjacent monastery was never allowed to be built. This would have been a memorable building in the new Maltese vernacular then being explored.

*Din l-Art Helwa* was greatly influential in this publication, working with the Kamra tal-Periti and organising interviews with leading architects to sow the seeds of debate for the future of architecture for the Maltese Islands. *Din l-Art Helwa* has never been against new building. We will remain against new building that is purely speculative, that cannot rehabilitate what already exists through reuse and restoration, that demolishes our unique character, that is disrespectful to our cultural landscape, and that leaves us with a new visual environment that is grating on the eye. Yet, we are not afraid to recognise that in some spaces we need to move forward. We were, perhaps, the only organization to not shoot down the Renzo Piano project for Valletta, and we staunchly continue to brave much unpopularity because of this position.

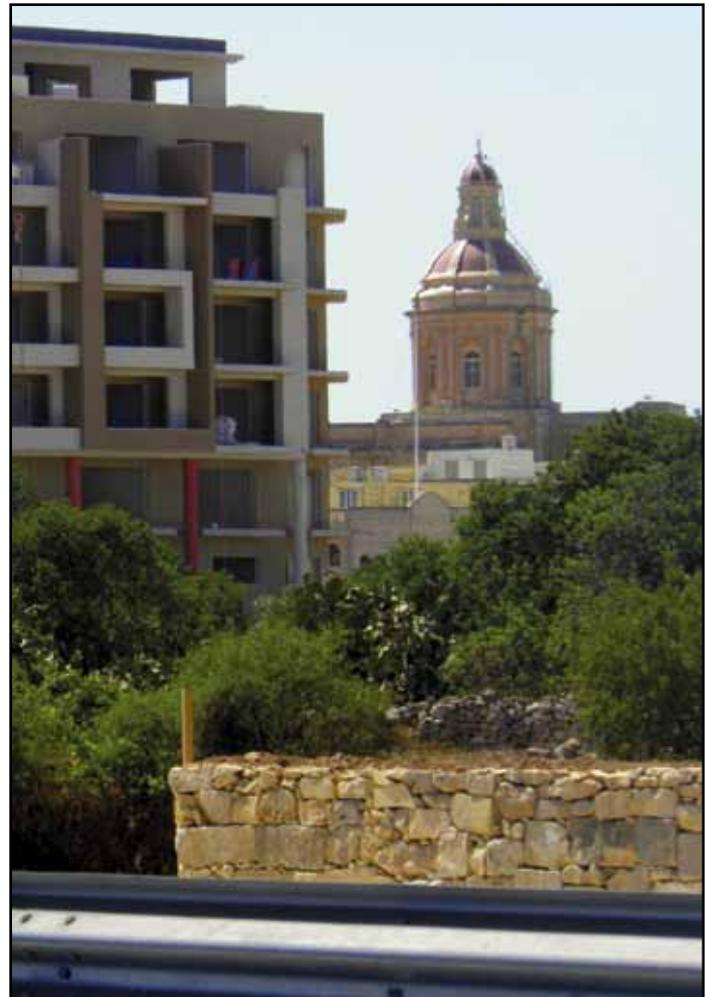
I wish to add a thought to those put forward in Professor Torpiano's considerations. It is not just key buildings, the palaces, churches born of past patronage that make heritage. It is surely also the context in which they stand, namely the old urban cores that are graced with the patina of age, the traditional streetscape, the contours of our hills and valleys, and that magical place, the coastline. If we lose all that, no matter how many national monuments we save, these will remain like beautiful diamonds in a cheap tin crown, demeaned, devalued and highly compromised. I beg to the planners to look at what our everyday heritage is becoming today. Rabbit warrens of mostly unsold flats separated by the statutory bare 10ft, built directly over noisy roads, leaving no light, no courtyards, no gardens, indeed no circulation of air, no view even of the sky, a

horrific prospect to inherit. It is these habitations now that are not fit for modern dwelling, not the perfectly respectable houses such as those at Swieqi that are being demolished. So if we have to look at what we can save from the last 40 years, well then, we could start with these.

I do so totally agree about the layers of suddenly improvised visual clutter that now crowds our eyes daily, with the need for it all to fit within well planned guidelines. While on the other hand, we have good public funding uselessly spent in the name of urban embellishment where century old trees are decimated and replaced by scrawny olive trees in square planters, kitsch statues, hundreds of energy saving lights, uncomfortable stone benches and many a fountain. Is this the heritage of which we are proud and the great architectural talent Malta always enjoyed? Well it certainly has got lost somewhere in those famous 40 years.

I will further one more urgent thought. Even if the best solutions are found, unless political leaders are sensitive to the environment, and have the will to enforce regulations, all will fail. The wild cards now being pulled from political hats indicate that the use of land risks becoming a pawn in the oncoming electoral fever. We call on influential bodies such as the Kamra tal-Periti and opinion leaders such as Professor Torpiano to ask for reason to prevail on matters that involve new construction schemes. *Din l-Art Helwa* will certainly do what it can to ensure that political manifestos give the highest level of protection to Malta's environment and to heritage. We ask for a firm hand to protect our built heritage, both past and future, and this needs to be one that is not afraid of losing votes.

I thank Professor Torpiano for giving me the opportunity of reiterating my thoughts, most of which are in agreement with his. The definition of whether new heritage is good or bad will be up to the inheritors of the last 40 years' building jamboree to define. Its legacy will certainly be up to them to improve.



*The changing skyline of Luqa*

# Trees Cannot Talk, But We Can

George Camilleri

Secretary General of Din l-Art Helwa

TEN-T is the European Commission acronym for Trans European Network – Transport, a plan for integrating transport across the EU that has been deemed fundamental for the smooth operation of the common market. The plan defines a number of access corridors of which the so-called Helsinki-Malta corridor forms an integral part. Its purpose is to increase maritime and terrestrial links between Malta and Sicily by providing better infrastructure connecting the ports of Valletta, Marsaxlokk and Palermo.

The Malta portion of the TEN-T road network connects the most northern part of the Maltese Islands (Dwejra, Gozo) and continues to the southernmost town in Malta (Birżebbuġa). Various projects have been completed or are in the pipeline to upgrade the roads that form part of it: the reconstruction and upgrading of the Council of Europe Avenue and Garibaldi Avenue in Luqa, Marfa Road in Mellieħa, the Kappara junction and the Coast Road. The EU provides various instruments for funding projects aimed at achieving this policy and healthy funding has been allocated for them, funding that Malta has been most proficient in tapping. All this indeed should prove to be very good news, except for Malta's trees.

We might ask what have trees to do with the Ten-T project and the significant European funding that ironically should be improving our natural environment. It transpires that the plans for the Coast Road include, amongst others, Kennedy Drive – a beautiful kilometre-long avenue and its grove, lined with hundreds of magnificent two and three storey-high trees that are the result of many years of fund-raising work and many a ministerial tree-planting event. We all remember the Tree4You scheme.

This access road provides a most pleasurable drive through a shady green tunnel with a wide view of open agricultural land and is nature's sitting room to the many families who picnic there. The Ten-T plan involves the uprooting of an unspecified number of trees here (some hundred in total) with vaguely phrased intentions of replanting, relocating and/or replacing them.

Kennedy Drive and Kennedy Grove are not the only places where trees are suffering on account of infrastructural work. Hundreds of citrus trees in the moat surrounding Mdina are making way for a recreation park, complete with the ubiquitous thirsty non-indigenous turf, and the neighbouring shaded and popular children's playground is making way so that parking for visitors to Mdina can be extended. Mature trees at Villa Rundle in Victoria, Gozo have been inexplicably uprooted, while the 50-year-old trees lining the road leading to Victoria have been lost to the new access road. At the same time, the ancient trees of *il-Tokk* have been heavily pruned because apparently we cannot cope with bird droppings.

In Żebbuġ, Malta, a previously green area is being "upgraded into a landscaped area with benches", and the trees have been mercilessly pruned down to bare stumps, some of them almost to ground level. Again in Żebbuġ, the main road into the town used to be lined with lovely orange trees which have all been removed.

There is a growing awareness and frustration among the public about this widespread destruction of mature trees, as many of us find we are unable to prevent this devastation – coming as it does hard in the wake of the ravages to green areas brought by over-development. Campaigns are appearing in the media aimed at protecting what is left of these magnificent mature trees in various places all over the islands.

Of grave concern is that these trees are actually well protected by existing laws and regulations. The 1990 Structure

Plan for the Maltese Islands, which is still binding, provides for "specified trees or groups of trees of aesthetic, historical, cultural, arboriculture and/or scientific interest to be protected such that uprooting, destruction or damage to trees growing in the wild or in public parks, gardens is prohibited". The wording is specific and unequivocal – damage to these trees in any way constitutes an infringement of the Structure Plan. The next paragraph of the same Structure Plan also provides that, particularly within rural conservation area, areas of scenic value will be protected and enhanced. Resorting to transplanting these trees, as seems to be the remedy applied by developers and road contractors, is not adequate as they are usually transplanted at the wrong time of the year, in the wrong place, remain without water and are left to wither and die.

Even more legal protection for our trees comes from the more recent Legal Notice 200 of 2011, which says that any trees aged 50 years or older qualify as "Protected Trees", provided that they are not causing any damage or adverse effect to the environment or to structures or features of natural or cultural heritage value.

Then there is also the Conifer Trees Preservation Regulation of 1949, still applicable to this day, which says it shall not be lawful to destroy, cut down or uproot any conifer tree wherever situated.

As has proved generally to be the case, these wise and well planned regulations are totally ignored. Malta is losing its beautiful mature trees because the funding coming in from Europe has to be spent fast, even if unwisely. We are losing them because there is inadequate planning and no overall central vision on the part of those responsible for coordinating road building, infrastructural works and local councils' development projects. We are losing them because the same people are totally insensitive and do not really care about anything green. Before more trees are lost, can some urgent planning not be done so that the provision of new roads, such as Malta's Ten-T superhighway from Marsaxlokk to Dwejra, is carried out without such sacrifice and so our village squares and streetscapes are graced by green? Trees cannot think, neither can they talk – but we can.

**Send photos of any decimated or threatened trees to the *Din l-Art Helwa* 'Trees Cannot Talk' Facebook page with locations, species and numbers for the organisation to take action with the appropriate authorities.**



*Old trees replaced by new lamp poles in Mellieħa*

## HRH the Duke of Gloucester Honours VC Recipient at Msida Bastion Garden of Rest

On 16 April, honoured by a visit by HRH the Duke of Gloucester, *Din l-Art Helwa* unveiled a commemorative monument to Pte Charles McCorrie, VC, who died in Malta in 1857 and is buried in the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest. This was a singular moment in the history of the Garden, which is the final resting place for non-Roman Catholics who died in Malta between 1803 and 1857. The Duke was in Malta to mark the 70th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to the Maltese Islands and as the representative of HM Queen Elizabeth II to mark the celebrations of her Diamond Jubilee.

In the presence of her father, Founder President of *Din l-Art Helwa* Judge Maurice Caruana Curran, Executive President Simone Mizzi welcomed His Royal Highness to the Msida Bastion Garden of Rest, where the elegant neoclassical monuments commemorate a number of remarkable people: a Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, a President of her Majesty's Judges, a Governor of Hong Kong, father of the Maltese language Mikiel Anton Vassalli, and the many ordinary people who wove our Anglo-Maltese heritage. Among the unsung heroes is Pte Charles McCorrie, the third recipient of the Victoria Cross to have died in Malta.

Addressing the gathering, Mrs Mizzi said: "To have HRH the Duke of Gloucester – notwithstanding his crowded timetable – honouring us with his presence, and unveiling this monument, is a singular honour none of us could ever have hoped for. Least of all was it expected by Pte Charles McCorrie from County Antrim, Ireland, who lies today, not under a British heaven, but beneath this splendid Maltese sky, in a corner of a foreign field that is, and will be, forever England". Dr Alexander Welsh, who has been instrumental in the restoration of the garden, then gave a brief history of some of the people buried in the garden, referring particularly to the bravery of Pte Charles McCorrie, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for heroic action during the Crimean War where it is recorded that he caught and threw back a live shell from his post, thereby saving the lives of many of his comrades.

The Duke of Gloucester had words of appreciation for Malta's rich architectural heritage, pointing out, however: "It is to be remembered that heritage is not just about buildings but mainly about the people who built and used them". He had words of praise for the bravery of the Maltese people and for this young soldier whose courage was being commemorated. A lone piper played *The Lament* while Commander Richard Brooksbank recited the *Ode to Remembrance*, after which a minute's silence was observed.

Simone Mizzi thanked British High Commissioner HE Louise Stanton, who saw the importance of the recognition of this unsung hero. She also expressed gratitude to the HSBC Malta Foundation for their generosity in making the memorial possible, to the George Cross Island Association for honouring the event with their presence and to Julian Alexander Gatt of the Victoria Cross Society for the donation of the replica Victoria Cross. Mrs Mizzi also thanked the Landscape Consortium for their timely offer of collaboration, *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna* for the kind loan of the vintage Union Flag, and DLH Council, staff and garden volunteers, ably led by Mary Aldred and Albert Calleja, for their continued commitment.



*Founder President Judge Maurice Caruana Curran meets HRH The Duke of Gloucester*



*HRH The Duke meets Garden volunteers and Council Members, from left to right: Jenny Welsh, Mary Aldred, Charles Gatt, Joe Galea Debono*

*HRH The Duke unveils the monument to Pte Mc Corrie*



## Events at Our Lady of Victory Church

HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, paid a visit to Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta to view the ongoing restoration work as part of the Royal tour to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the 70th anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta. The visit to the church was organised by the British High Commission. HSBC Malta Foundation's contribution towards the restoration of the church's vaulted ceiling has distinguished the Foundation as a "Principal Valued Partner" in what has become known as "The Victory Team" of supporting partners.

"Through this initiative, Malta's national trust *Din l-Art Helwa* aims to restore, conserve and enhance Our Lady of Victory Church which, as the first church of the capital, is intricately linked to the city's foundation and history", said HSBC Malta CEO Mark Watkinson. "The conservation of Malta's heritage is a large-scale responsibility that requires the greatest care and attention. In recognition of this, the safeguarding of Malta's historic and cultural heritage is one of the HSBC Malta Foundation's three main pillars, standing alongside its commitments towards supporting disadvantaged children and the environment."

The HSBC Malta Foundation's contribution is a very significant help towards financing the restoration of the paintings on the vaulted ceiling – the work of Maltese artist Alessio Erardi (1669-1727). "One can already see a marked improvement in Erardi's masterpiece as *Din l-Art Helwa*'s assigned team of expert bring the vault's invaluable artwork back to life", remarked Mr Watkinson.



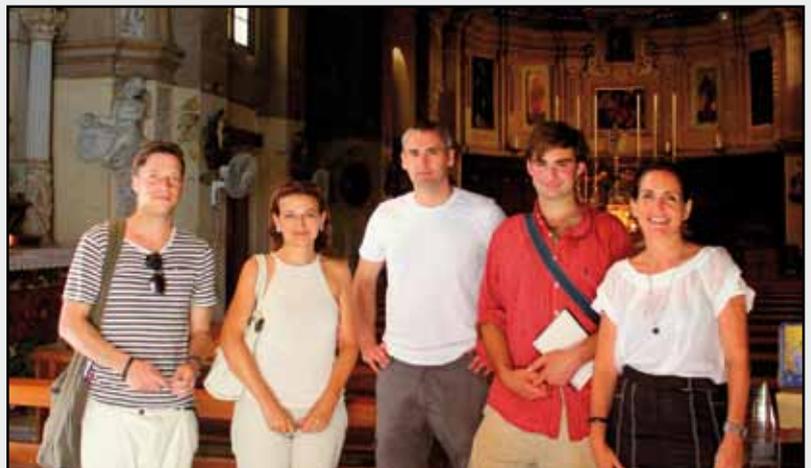
*Letter from Kensington Palace*



*HRH the Duke of Gloucester viewing the restoration work during his visit to Our Lady of Victory Church, with (from left) Mons. Anton Galea, HSBC Malta CEO Mark Watkinson, Maria Grazia Cassar and Din l-Art Helwa's Executive President Simone Mizzi.*

### Scholars from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (UK) visit Our Lady of Victory Church

Three scholars from the UK's Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) took the time during their Malta study tour to visit the restoration work in progress at Our Lady of Victory Church, on 11 July. The architects were particularly impressed by the quality of the Alessio Erardi vaulted ceiling paintings, and said that the general approach to the conservation of both the church and the wall paintings was exemplary, and espoused the principles advocated by their organisation. The visitors were shown around by Council members Joanna Spiteri Staines and Maria Grazia Cassar and the custodian and conservator Amy Sciberras.



*From left to right; Charlie de Bono, Joanna Spiteri Staines, Justin McAteer, Henry Sanders and Maria Grazia Cassar*

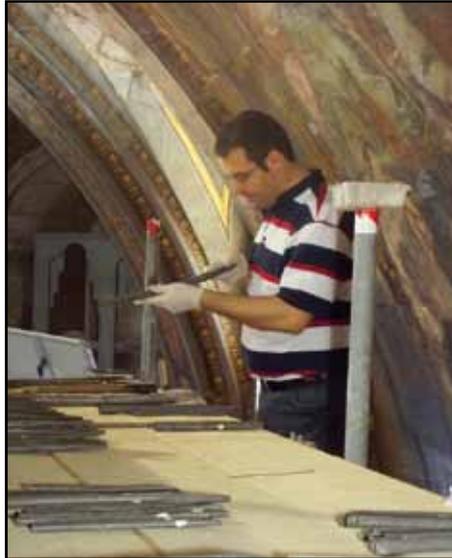


*Executive President, Simone Mizzi, discussing the restoration project of the Erardi vault paintings with Dr Owen Bonnici, Labour Party Spokesman for Higher Education, University, Research and Culture, together with HE the British High Commissioner, Ms Louise Stanton*

*Dr Owen Bonnici, Labour Party Spokesman for Higher Education, University, Research and Culture signs the 'Victory Book' during his visit*

**Restoration of 18<sup>th</sup> century organ in Our Lady of Victory Church**

Work has begun on restoring the 18<sup>th</sup> century organ in Our Lady of Victory Church. The first task was to sort out the components of the organ itself, identify, photograph and label all the parts and produce an inventory. Organ conservator Robert Buhagiar was entrusted with this delicate task. The organ had been stored in Fort St Elmo for several years and was brought back to the church last year. Several of its original components still need to be located before work to reassemble the organ can proceed.

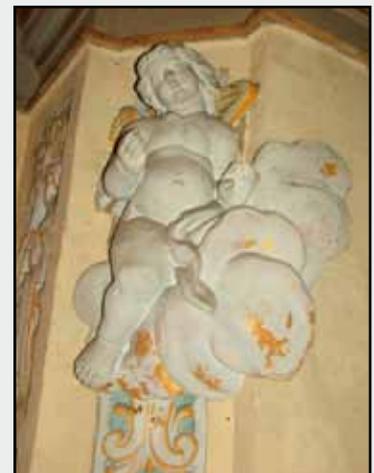


*Robert Buhagiar examining the various elements of the organ*

*The 'Finto' organ case*

**Forthcoming restoration**

Conservator Roberta de Angelis is currently undertaking research work on the perimeter murals and ground floor altar reredoses and niches at Our Lady of Victory Church in order to establish the correct methodology for treatment of these areas in forthcoming restoration.



*Conservator Roberta de Angelis at work*

*Sculptural decoration at Our Lady of Victory Church*

# Celebrating Our Victory Team Sponsors

In the last few months there have been several important additions to our Victory Team and the funding pledged in sponsorship is consolidated so as to enable DLH several years of work on the restoration project of Our Lady of Victory Church. On these pages we dedicate space to some of them.

## *HSBC Malta Foundation will save the 18<sup>th</sup> century Erardi vault paintings*

The sponsorship from the HSBC Malta Foundation will enable DLH to continue the conservation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings of the Life of the Virgin that cover the vaulted ceiling of Our Lady of Victory Church, the greater part of which were painted by Maltese baroque artist Alessio Erardi between 1716 and 1718. This complex work is being carried out by the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and will also lead to the Master of Science Course established with the University of Malta's Department of Built Heritage Conservation for the research and practical hands-on work on the last segments of the vault that wait to be uncovered. A team of conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art, will be resuming work when the weather is cooler in November.

HSBC   
Malta Foundation

  
pwc



*Mark Watkinson presenting the HSBC sponsorship to Simone Mizzi*

## *PwC's long-term commitment to the restoration project*

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has long been associated with the project to save Our Lady of Victory Church. In 2002 the company supported *Din l-Art Helwa* in a project to restore the external masonry and façade of the church, together with the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee. PwC is now supporting the work to uncover the murals on the walls of the church, currently being studied by professional conservators, as well as the restoration of several of the precious works of art within the church.

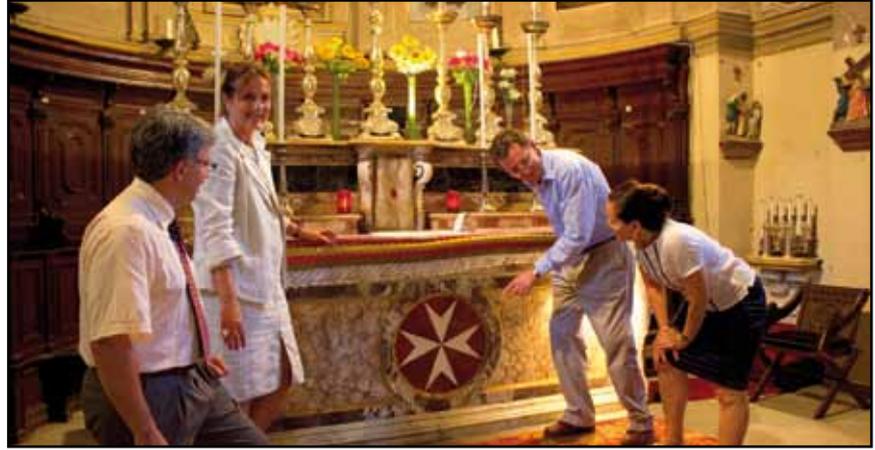
Kevin Valenzia, Senior Territory Partner at PwC said: "We at PwC are very proud to be associated with the Our Lady of Victory restoration project and, of course, with *Din l-Art Helwa*. We believe that it is vital for Malta's heritage to be protected and maintained and, within our limited resources, we do what we can to assist. We believe that we have a responsibility to help create a sustainable future and to play our part in making Malta a better place. These issues are high on the agenda for our people and the communities in which we work, and therefore our corporate social responsibility programme is an important part of our values."



*Mons Dun Anton Galea, Rector of Our Lady of Victory Church, Simone Mizzi, Kevin Valenzia, and Simon Flynn*

***Alfred Mizzi Foundation  
to fund the restoration of the  
church altars and their niches***

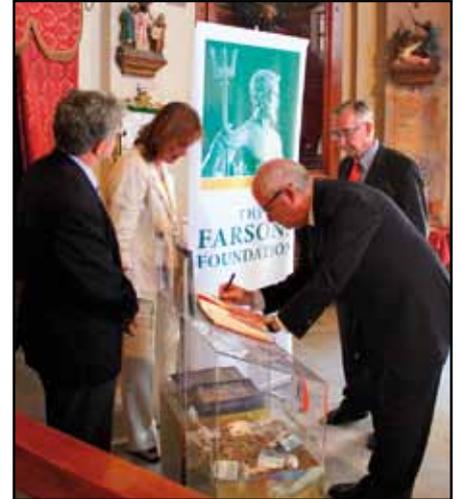
Julian Sammut, trustee of The Alfred Mizzi Foundation, said: “The Alfred Mizzi Foundation is a long-standing supporter of the *Din l-Art Helwa* project for the restoration of Valletta’s first church. We are glad to see work is solidly underway and are privileged to be associated with the project and proud to be part of its Victory Team”. The church’s high altar, which dates back to 1752, will be the first to be restored followed by each of the other four in turn.



*Lucio Mule Stagno, Vice President of Din l-Art Helwa, Simone Mizzi Executive President, Julian Sammut, Trustee of The Alfred Mizzi Foundation and Maria Grazia Cassar, Council Member and Restorations Coordinator*



*Left to right: Louis Farrugia, Chairman of the Farsons Group, Lucio Mule Stagno, Vice President DLH, Simone Mizzi, Executive President DLH, Bryan Gera, President of the Farsons Group*



*Mr Louis Farrugia, Chairman of the Farsons Group signs the Victory Book at Our Lady of Victory Church as Farsons becomes the latest member to join the Victory Team with a handsome donation towards the restoration project.*

***An important contribution from MEPA***

Malta Environment and Planning Authority (Mepa) chairman Austin Walker, together with Mepa board members, recently paid a visit to Our Lady of Victory Church and used the occasion to announce the making of a substantial and most welcome donation by Mepa towards the conservation project.

Mr Walker said: “In order to protect this church, some years back Mepa scheduled it as a Grade 1 national monument. Today, we feel it is our responsibility to further protect this church by financially supporting *Din l-Art Helwa*’s restoration project through the Authority’s EIPP fund. A grant of €85,000 will allow DLH to carry out the installation of a modern, intelligent and environmentally-friendly lighting system that will respect and enhance the art in the church, CCTV and security systems and also secure the many wooden apertures on the roof and annexe that are in a really bad shape.”

Thanking Mr Walker, DLH executive president Simone Mizzi said: “Without this essential work, the conservation of the art treasures such as the Erardi vault paintings cannot be considered complete. The funding from Mepa’s EIPP fund is providential and timely and we are most grateful to the authority for making this part of the project possible.”



*Mepa Chairman Austin Walker with Rector Monsignor Anton Galea and Simone Mizzi during the visit of the Mepa Board to Our Lady of Victory Church*

# Din l-Art Helwa News

## News from Europa Nostra

At the Europa Nostra Council Meeting held in Lisbon in June, Martin Scicluna, who has represented *Din l-Art Helwa* on the Council since 2003, relinquished his post on the Council and on the main board of the organisation. Executive President Denis de Kiergolay thanked Martin most wholeheartedly for his great contribution to the European organisation and said his work had been invaluable to its development over the last few years. Council members gave Martin a very warm standing ovation.

During his time on the main board of Europa Nostra, Martin was instrumental in establishing new ways of working and restructuring the organisation's main functions. He also established a memorandum of understanding with the International National Trusts Organisation, of which *Din l-Art Helwa* forms part, and recently drafted another memorandum of understanding with Unesco, with whom Europa Nostra has close links. Simone Mizzi was elected to the Council to represent *Din l-Art Helwa*.

Europa Nostra is the pan-European Federation that represents some 172 European Heritage organisations. *Din l-Art Helwa* was its 7th Founder Member in 1967 and the Europa Nostra annual conference and Assembly held in Malta in 2005 is remembered as one of the most successful ever. Today, its president is Maestro Placido Domingo. For further information about Europa Nostra, visit [www.europanostra.org](http://www.europanostra.org)



## Msida Bastion Garden Spring Fete 2012

This year, Sunday, 29 April began with rather dull grey weather, which did not augur well for our Spring Fête. But as the hours went by, a warm spring breeze blew away the clouds and the sun shone over the splendid Msida Bastion Garden. The hard work put in by Mary Aldred, Albert Calleja and their team of volunteer gardeners, and the generosity of the Environmental Landscape Consortium who donated the multi-coloured petunias, mowed the grass and watered the garden that had recently attained royal recognition, due to the visit of HRH the Duke of Gloucester, shone through.

Enthusiastic volunteers prepared stands selling cakes, books and bric-a-brac. Author Joe Azzopardi held an impromptu book-signing session, autographing copies of his popular publication *Heritage Fragments*, while artists Doranne Alden, Stephanie Borg, Rossella Dalmás, Amadeo Galea and Daniel Scerri painted scenes of the fête. These works of art were sold, as all the other wares at the fete, for the benefit of the maintenance of this superb garden.



*Simone Mizzi and some of the artists near the DLH Book stand run by Professor Margrit Waas and Sophie Woltz*

## Sliema scout leaders team-building weekend at Comino Tower

During the weekend of 20-22 July, *Din l-Art Helwa* was delighted to welcome the Sliema Scout Group leaders, 15 in all, to Comino for a team-building activity weekend. Some of the participants arrived by kayak from Ċirkewwa, whilst others travelled by ferry.



*Arriving by kayak from Ċirkewwa*

Amazing views greeted them as they awoke on the Saturday morning, then embarking – after breakfast of course! – on their programme that included discussions on the tower steps, scouting refresher sessions, skills training and exploring the coastline with kayaks – not forgetting, of course, the traditional true scouting-style barbecue and hikes.

Gozo and Comino volunteers are particularly grateful to the group for undertaking the rebuilding of the collapsed sections of the dry stone rubble walls of the outer part of the moat that surrounds the tower. Many thanks to you all.

The Group's adventures continued through to their departure, with the increasing sea swell adding further challenges to the kayakers – but everyone arrived home safely!

***Qormi Literary Prize***

Jeffrey Twitchell Wass was awarded the Qormi Literary Prize 2012 *Għarfien il-Hila* for his publication *Qormi, 4 Walks through a Historical City*, another walkers' guide in the *Din l-Art Helwa* series of booklets. Jeffrey was a Professor of Literature teaching in Asia before retiring to Malta, and is married to DLH volunteer Professor Margrit Wass, who assists with the management of the DLH Heritage Corner in Valletta and with the translation of our pamphlets.

*Jeffrey Twitchell Wass receiving his award from Qormi mayor Rosianne Cutajar*



***Annual Dinner 2012***

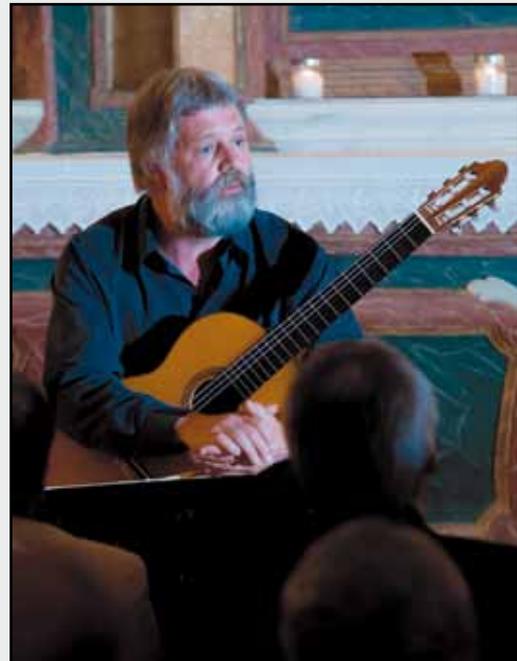
A most successful fund-raising dinner was held again in June in the beautiful grounds of San Anton Palace under the patronage of HE President George Abela.

*From left to right, Mrs. Sylvia Mule' Stagno, Head of the Social Events Committee, Mrs Cettina Caruana Curran, HE The outgoing Ambassador for Belgium Jean François Delahaut, Executive President Simone Mizzi, HE the Ambassador of France M.Michel Vandepoorter, Dame Blanche Martin  
Photo - Joseph Chetcuti*

***Bir Miftuh International Music Festival 2012***



*At the first concert, The Kalypso Ensemble gave a delightful string recital sponsored by the Italian Embassy and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura*



*The second concert was given by classical guitar player Ulrich Rasche and was sponsored by the German Embassy*



*The third concert, sponsored by the French Embassy and the Alliance Française de Malte – Méditerranée, consisted of a violin and violoncello recital by Agnès Pyka (violin) and Edouard Sapey-Triomphe (violoncello)*

***All photographs are by J.J. Chircop***

**Heritage Honour for Outgoing UK High Commissioner**

*Din l-Art Helwa* organised a farewell luncheon at Torri Mamo to honour UK High Commissioner HE Louise Stanton, whose term of office in Malta will be coming to an end shortly.

During the event, Simone Mizzi – on behalf of *Din l-Art Helwa* and its Council – thanked Ms Stanton for the inspiration and energy she had given to the heritage organisation while serving on the boards of both the HSBC Malta Foundation and the Vodafone Malta Foundation. Ms Mizzi referred in particular to the support given by the two foundations to the restoration project for Our Lady of Victory Church, saying that these two foundations continued to do so much for Malta and it was only with support such as theirs that the mission and work of *Din l-Art Helwa* could be made possible.

Prior to the lunch, Ms Stanton, together with board members of the HSBC Malta Foundation and the Vodafone Malta Foundation, visited the Chapel of the Annunciation at Hal Millieri. Tony Mangion, its long-standing custodian, gave a guided tour of the chapel and its medieval frescos. Ms Stanton was made an Honorary Life Member of *Din l-Art Helwa*.



*From Left to Right: Dane Munro, John Gafa, Maurice de Giorgio, George Camilleri, Sarah Watkinson, Vince Attard, HE Ms Louise Stanton, Simone Mizzi and Mark Watkinson outside Torri Mamo*



*UK High Commissioner, HE Louise Stanton, at Hal Millieri. From left to right: Simone Mizzi, Tony Mangion, HE Louise Stanton, Vodafone director Jason Pavia, Sarah Watkinson, HSBC Malta CEO Mark Watkinson and Maurice de Giorgio.*



**Comino Tour**

The 9 September Comino Tour organised by *Din l-Art Helwa* was a resounding success. Led by Dr Stanley Farrugia Randon, with help from Romina Farrugia Randon, participants are seen in front of the historic Santa Marija Chapel. Comino volunteers were on site tending to the historic tower, from which the flag of the Order was proudly flying.

Photo - Anthony Lance

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**  
**October 2012 to June 2013**

**October**

Thursday 11, 6pm: public lecture by public lecture by Valentina Lupo – *A study of the polychrome wooden statue of St John the Baptist in Dingli parish church, thought to have been brought to Malta by the Knights of St John.*

Friday 19 to 9 Nov: Exhibition of paintings by Maria Rossella Dalmás in aid of Our Lady of Victory Church.

**November**

Thursday 15, 6pm: Prof Alan Deidun – *Documenting in video the stunning underwater biodiversity of the Maltese Islands. (to be confirmed)*

**December**

Presentation of Architectural Heritage Awards 2012 at 133 Melita Street, Valletta.

Saturday 1, 9.30am - 13:00pm: Msida Bastion Garden Xmas Bazaar.\*

Thursday 6, 6pm: public lecture by Gabrielle Zammit – *Phototrophic biofilms growing in Maltese hypogea.*

Wednesday 12, 7.30pm: Volunteers' Party at 133 Melita Street, Valletta.

Saturday 29: After the Saturday evening mass, choral recital at Our Lady of Victory Church, by the Enkor Choir.

**January**

Thursday 10, 6pm: public lecture by Denis Darmanin – *Graffiti and more at Lower St Elmo.*

**February**

Thursday 14, 6pm: public lecture by Joan Abela – *Silent voices from the archives – the notarial archives and their contribution to Maltese historiography.*

Saturday 23, 11am: *Din l-Art Helwa* Annual General Meeting, 133 Melita Street, Valletta.

**March**

Thursday 14, 6pm: public lecture by Sarah Grech – *The original technique employed and condition of the wall paintings in the entrance hall of Verdala Palace, Buskett.*

**April**

Thursday 11, 6pm: public lecture by Amy Sciberras – *Marouflage paintings in Maltese and Gozitan churches – a study.*

**May**

Thursday 9, 6pm: public lecture by Martin Scicluna – *Fifty Years of Planning Abuse: look around you and weep.*

**June**

Thursday 13, 6pm: public lecture by Architect Edward Said - *Villa Frere, Pietà - Formerly one of the Mediterranean's most celebrated historic gardens.*

**NOTE: All the lectures will take place at Din l-Art Helwa's offices at 133 Melita Street, Valletta.**

**\* Items on sale will include: Quality Christmas decorations, cakes and tinned food, books, bric-a-brac, and plants. We would like to invite you to contribute to any of these stalls. Any donations may be delivered to Msida Bastion Garden - Tue, Thur and Sat mornings till noon.**

**Autumn Fund Raising Concert and Dinner**

The Autumn Fund Raising Concert and Dinner is due to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> November in the Grand Hall of St John's Cavalier, by courtesy and kind permission of the Embassy to Malta of the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta, and of his HE Ambassador Umberto di Capua. This year's Annual Autumn Dinner and Concert is being made possible with the support of the Embassy of Ireland and through the particular efforts of HE Jim Hennessey, Ambassador of Ireland.

# Youth Exchange Programme in aid of Tal-Hniena Church

*Maria Grazia Cassar*

*Din l-Art Helwa Restorations Coordinator*

“Maltese and French Youths for the Restoration of Maltese Heritage” is the title given to a youth exchange that has been partly funded by the European Union under the *Youth in Action* programme. It is the result of the collaboration between *Din l-Art Helwa*, through the dedicated work of Maria Grazia Cassar, and the French NGO *Union Rempart*. The 18 young people participating in the exchange lived together in two houses in Qrendi, learning about and working on the restoration of the Church of Tal-Hniena from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of September. This church, which is a jewel of Maltese baroque architecture dating from the 1650s, has suffered much deterioration, not only due to rising damp and water infiltration but particularly to former bad restoration practices.

This youth exchange was the perfect opportunity for young Maltese people to come together and share experiences with young people from France and acquire knowledge and skills through a hands-on approach, under the guidance of professionals. The workshops varied from Health and Safety on Site, to the theory and practise of conservation.

The exchange also fostered a greater understanding of both the differences and the similarities between the youngsters and their respective cultures. They have met senior citizens who have delighted them with their personal stories, or showed them practical skills. The group from France was also encouraged to mix with different people and get to know Malta not only from a visitor’s point of view, but also with a sense of belonging, in the true spirit of the European Union. The enrichment they experienced from this experience, as well as the tangible results left on Tal-Hniena, will be felt for a long time to come.

*Din l-Art Helwa* would like to thank Dr And Mrs Richard Camilleri for lending their house in Qrendi to the participants, and to MEUSAC, in particular to Ms Alison Camilleri, for its help – which went way beyond the normal call of duty – in preparing the application for the EU grant.

*Visiting Fort St Angelo  
with Architect Ruben Abela*



*The group of young people with the Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Environment, the Hon Dr Mario de Marco, Simone Mizzi and Maria Grazia Cassar*



*James Licari demonstrates how mortar is mixed and applied*

*The group of young people being shown around Our Lady of Victory Church by custodian Amy Sciberras*



# fish4tomorrow Campaign - Faux Tuna

George Camilleri

Secretary General of Din I-Art Helwa

This is not a joke, so please read this simple recipe carefully. More importantly, reflect on the implications of this recipe for Faux Tuna, a concoction of ingredients masquerading as real tuna.

***First peel, clean and slice a watermelon (yes, a watermelon) into 30cm strips, place in bowl, season with salt, pepper and dried, ground seaweed, cover with a towel and leave to rest overnight.***

***Next morning, roll the watermelon strips in sesame seeds and ground chili pepper and place in the freezer for 10 minutes. Remove from freezer, slice thinly, season with sesame oil, soy sauce and rice wine vinegar and serve with pickled ginger and wasabi.***

Why would ingenious Chicago chef Homaro Cantu venture to these extremes of creativity to produce a dish that is supposed to resemble tuna? Why are celebrity chefs all over the world promoting sustainable seafood in their restaurants and TV programmes? The answer is simple: people are querying whether it is right to eat tuna. They are becoming aware that tuna is an endangered species and that if we carry on fishing and eating it at the rate we are, it will change from being an endangered species to a collapsed aspect of the fishery industry, and nobody will ever eat tuna again. This smart chef is cashing in on the current trend which is all about sustainable fishing and eating. He is not alone. All over the world, people are realising that there is simply not enough fish in the sea to feed all the mouths that want to eat it.

By now, everybody knows that blue fin tuna is not the only endangered species, of course. We catch three times the sustainable amount of swordfish and twice that of red shrimp and hake. We have just about eradicated red mullet and we know nothing about lampuki because nobody has bothered to find out. The Mediterranean is dying because we are not managing our resources.

The North Atlantic once teemed with cod and only a few years ago nations even went to war over it. So much cod was caught that now there is no more cod for catching and 40,000 jobs were lost in Canada.

Similarly, the Pacific Ocean is – at this very moment – losing the jack mackerel, stocks of which have declined from 30 million tons to three million tons in 10 years. Not only is Jack mackerel, rich in Omega 3, a staple food in Africa, it is used to feed “farmed” tuna and salmon. Five kilos of mackerel are needed to raise a single kilo of salmon.

Reports say that by 2050 the ocean’s major commercial fish species will have been wiped out by over-fishing. The industry will run out of jack mackerel to fish and just move on to over exploit the next species so that in the end all the larger species will have been eradicated. At that stage, the oceans’ ecological balance will have been upset and it’s anybody’s guess what will happen next. Many say we will be eating only jellyfish, small fish and farmed mussels and clams because there will be nothing else in the sea.

After the Mediterranean, the South Pacific is the new fishing playground. Chinese, Russian and EU-flagged factory ships haul in millions of tons of mackerel a year and the annual catch is falling at an alarming rate, indicating an incipient collapse of the species. Economic and social reasons effectively block all efforts to control the trend and the united political will to take effective long-term measures simply does not exist because “long term” does not make political sense.

The fish are not the only ones to suffer, because the traditional fisherman is also going through hard times. Fishing quotas have been imposed across the board by the EU to try to curb the incipient demise of the tuna. These quotas are aimed at the commercial fish industry that lands hundreds of tons of tuna in gigantic purse seine nets in one afternoon. The small traditional fisherman would consider himself extremely lucky if he landed a few hundred kilos in a whole year – a mere drop in the ocean. It’s a matter of scale, but unfortunately quotas have been applied to all fishing enterprises, irrespective of size. The injustice of this is that the small fisherman is under very strict scrutiny by the authorities, while the international scale of the commercial operations makes it much more difficult to control effectively. The result is that the traditional, family-owned *luzzu* fishing boat cannot make ends meet with increasing costs and falling income.

It is evident that fishing enterprises below a certain size should not be constrained by such draconian measures and that fishing quotas for small vessels should be abolished outright. Furthermore, aid must be extended to these families for upgrading their equipment to fish for other species, for educational and training programmes and possibly also to diversify into other markets such as tourism.

*fish4tomorrow* is a campaign by five environmental NGOs: Nature Trust, *Din I-Art Helwa*, Greenhouse, Get Up Stand Up and Sharklab. It is working to highlight the numerous lesser known or under-appreciated seafood species that happen to be not only delicious but also – and more importantly – plentiful compared to their more “noble” cousins.

Oh, and don’t forget to try the *Faux Tuna* recipe.

*The ‘Faux Tuna’ recipe is from Homaro Cantu of Moto Restaurant, Chicago.*

## Din I-Art Helwa's Comments on the Draft National Strategy for Cultural Heritage

In May the Ministry of Culture published the Draft National Strategy for Cultural Heritage, which will direct the national programme for the safeguarding of Malta's cultural heritage assets between the years 2012 and 2017. This is a comprehensive document, put together by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and broken down into four sections: citizens' participation, improved governance of the sector, the care and use of resources and their sustainability. Each sector gives milestones for achievement and indicators for implementation and monitoring. The public was invited to send in suggestions and comments and DLH council members pooled their ideas which were then compiled by vice-president Lucio Mule Stagno. We were able to submit some interesting points which we hope will provoke debate and can be included in the final programme when this is published.

One of the main findings remains the overlying need to provide resources, skilled people and funding to cultural heritage entities such as the Superintendence and Heritage Malta, the latter being the state agency that is entrusted with sites and collections of national importance, and the former having overall strategic responsibility. It is also of paramount importance that funding for such a resource is requested in the forthcoming budget and, above all, that there is political consensus by all parliamentarians. We feel cross-party, or majority support, for any such bill will give recognition to a sector that can provide livelihoods to many in the field of conservation, in the management of heritage sites and in tourism – one of the main pillars of our economy.

*The following are some of the comments submitted by DLH*

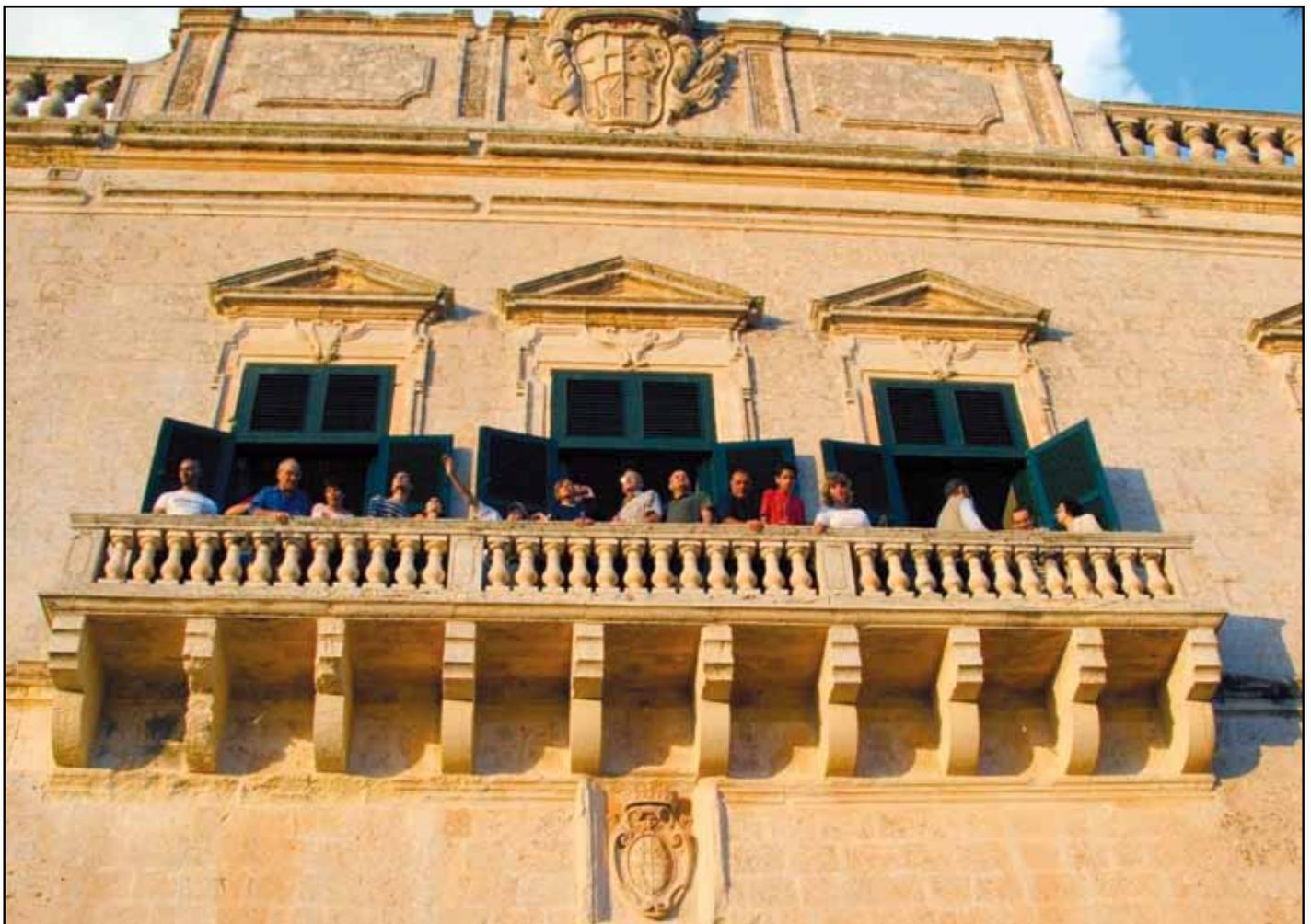
**Broadening citizen participation:** while some heritage sites are fragile, it was found that there should be alternative uses promoted in order to widen participation and citizen awareness.

National authorities should promote a sense of ownership and continue to encourage participation through volunteering.

Where possible, without harming the sites, access to people with a disability should be improved. Improvements can also be made in the interpretation of sites for those with hearing or visual impairment and resources need to be set aside for this.

**Intellectual accessibility:** more resources and funding are needed to urgently digitise material that can be placed in the public domain. Targets for this can be set, such as the number of manuscripts, number of images, etc., and announced publicly. At the current rate, it will unfortunately be decades before even critically important material we have is digitised and some is at risk of being lost.

**Bring culture to the people:** it was suggested that there are thousands of "secondary" artefacts in the national collections which, if given resources, the state agency or other entities could – by means of roaming mini exhibitions – take to schools, local councils, hotels and other public places.



*Visitors enjoying the sunset from the main balcony of Verdala Palace during an open day*

The issue of accessibility to sites (for example when surrounded by private land) needs resolving, with government investment for the purchase of such land in order to make restoration and accessibility possible.

**Broadening financial incentives:** the €2,330 minimum donation for eligibility for tax exemption should be reduced and extended to private individuals in addition to corporate entities.

**Improving Governance:** the state agency Heritage Malta needs to be strengthened and made more autonomous and more funds need to be allocated to it. It should have an incentive to generate more revenue which it can then plough back into the conservation of sites and artefacts and the general improvement of its sites. While a lot of places are currently being improved or have just been improved, there are still too many that need major restoration and museums also need upgrading.

While the operating budget of Heritage Malta is adequate to cover its day-to-day running with current staff, it does not allow room for growth and to do more. It could easily absorb twice the number of conservators and keep them busy for a lifetime. Its capital budget is pathetically low for a country of our resources, barely enough to cover incidents and emergencies. The capital budget should be enough to allow it to refurbish/restore two or three museums a year.

The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage also needs greater resources if it is to carry out the role of defining strategic direction, research and monitoring. It cannot hope to do this with its very limited number of staff.

The Committee of Guarantee, the cultural body that was established to watch over the activities of cultural heritage entities, monitor the nation's progress in the care of cultural heritage and ensure that this has the necessary legislative backing, also has insufficient resources to carry out its function.

**Ecclesiastical heritage:** while a national heritage inventory continues to be drawn up, there is no mention within the draft strategy of any recommendations for the great inventory that is held by the ecclesiastical authorities. It is good to learn that work is being carried out on the ecclesiastical inventory, and it is hoped that any conservation measures undertaken by the ecclesiastical authorities are carried out by professional and trained conservators.

**Ratification of international conventions:** DLH urges the ratification of conventions. We believe international conventions such as the Florence Landscape Convention should not take till 2014 to be signed. In the interim, precious areas of high landscape, geological or scenic value are being lost to development.

Resources given to training and education should be increased both in the field of conservation and in tourism services related to the promotion of cultural amenities.

DLH recommends that substantial resources be dedicated to the training of skilled conservators on whom the cultural heritage sector can draw in the long term. The training of skilled people in all disciplines of conservation is urgently needed and unless this pool is created, the great inventory of our artistic and architectural heritage remains at risk.

**EU funding:** the difficulty many NGOs face is the lack of resources. There are potentially many funds that are not being tapped into enough by NGOs. One way to remedy this is to second competent people (those with experience in funding) or hire companies to assist directly. These can work for an NGO on a regular – not just an as-needed – basis, in order to learn its function in depth and have first-hand knowledge about what funds can be tapped.



*Detail showing the decaying state of the chapel at Fort Ricasoli*

**More on funding:** a National Cultural Heritage Fund, administered by the Committee of Guarantee, should be established as provided for in the Cultural Heritage Act. The fund can be replenished by the 50c/€1 per hotel room per night tariff and possibly also an additional minor landing fee on cruise ship passengers. Other taxes on development and donations could also be considered.

The fund could then be made available to the National Agency, NGOs and local councils to restore, refurbish and improve sites. It could also be used to buy important items of cultural value for the national collection, or private land that has a cultural heritage value, archaeological remains, or would help protect an important heritage site by creating a buffer zone on adjoining land.

Grants should also be provided to scholars and to those wishing to become conservators in any discipline, to further study and explore our cultural heritage.

**Preparations for climate change:** DLH feels there is need for adequate studies and preparations to be made for climate change and in particular its effect on our built heritage. An appropriate provision should be made in the budget for a team of skilled conservators that can monitor and mitigate the long term effect of changing climates on our country's treasures, but also for an effective task force that is able to take immediate protective action in the event of a natural disaster such as earthquake, flooding in areas that are prone or lightning strikes.

Concluding its list of suggestions, DLH finds that this national exercise as outlined in the Draft Cultural Heritage strategic document is one of extreme importance. However, unless resources are dedicated to it so that priority areas such as enhancement, promotion and training can be established, all of which needs to be backed by political parliamentary consensus, the cultural heritage sector will be put on the back burner yet again, to the further detriment of the nation's treasures.

# DLH and Our Lady of Victory Church 1st Anniversary

**Simone Mizzi**

*Executive President of Din l-Art Helwa*

## Heritage saved, one year on!

*opposite:  
Angel holding a palm,  
detail from the vault of  
Our Lady of Victory Church*

*Detail showing one of the atlanti on the vault*



Dear Friends,

I would take the opportunity of celebrating the first Anniversary of the announcement of the DLH Guardianship Deed for Our Lady of Victory Church made exactly a year ago today by the Minister for Culture, Mario de Marco by sending you an image of the wonderfully restored portrait of Pope Innocent XII (see page 29), a most important painting which was in dire need of conservation. This is currently in Prevarti's restoration studios awaiting its gilt and ebony frame and will be returned to the church soon, where we shall greet him with due pomp and splendour. This is important heritage and well saved through the support of PwC.

Since I sent you the last bulletin in late spring, much has been done and much is happening. The news that Mepa was the latest to join the Victory Team with a handsome sponsorship coming from its EIPP fund was most welcome. These funds will go a long way towards replacing damaged apertures and installing new environmental and art-friendly illumination for the church and its treasures. A major study is being undertaken right now so we can introduce new systems while still allowing the church to continue with its function. The Farsons Foundation has also joined the Victory Team and will contribute to the general fund. Our custodian, Amy Sciberras, took up employment in early June and since then the church has been open regularly on week-days. We have received an astonishing 1,000 visitors each month, mostly just passing overseas visitors. Many too return who were married there, and many just come to worship. The local community is still present and more will be encouraged to attend services when the building work outside the church is brought to an end.

Amy is also organising guided tours for small groups of people to the vault. People leave us generous donations for this. As a professional restorer herself, she will also be conducting restoration of some of the works of art in situ to add to the visitor experience. We thank the Strickland Foundation whose contribution to the general OLV fund makes this possible.

A reception desk, computer and security monitors are all now in place, and shortly an interactive information kiosk will be located in a discreet area of the church. Audio guide texts are now ready and are being translated. Now that major sponsorships are concluded, promotional banners sporting the art within the church are being designed. Engineering these has proved a tricky task as we do not wish to touch the building fabric of the church with any insertions. These colourful festoons are planned to go up in November exactly a year after the Guardianship Deed was concluded. We are grateful to Vodafone Malta Foundation for this part of the project.

A lot of time has been taken up conducting studies on the ground floor perimeter walls and altar niches which in themselves are a great challenge. We have learnt that each area of the church is afflicted by different problems resulting from various conditions: rising damp, inappropriate over-painting of the gilding and centuries of layered decoration. Roberta de Angelis, senior conservator with the University of Malta, leads this study, and photogrammetry imaging was carried out by architect Hermann Bonnici, which will enable the conservators to trace each square metre of the ground floor perimeter when deciding on treatment methods.

Conservators James Licari and Frank Chetcuti have started work on the main altar and this will be concluded after September to allow the church to carry on with its annual services during its feast month and to keep it fully adorned for *Notte Bianca*. We thank the Alfred Mizzi Foundation for support on these activities.

The Byzantine silver icon of Our Lady of Victories is currently undergoing restoration in the Prevari Studios. A blue silk damask fabric has been ordered which will be very kindly sponsored by Camilleri Paris Mode. This will replace the very tattered blue cloth that lined the icon's wooden niche. She is very beautiful and will remain on display in the church for a while when she returns, before we place her back in her high niche.

An inventory has been made of the surviving 18<sup>th</sup> century organ elements. We are glad to say that since it was moved back to the church from St Elmo, where it had been stored for years, it has not lost any more of its pieces. However, all elements need restoration and the missing parts replacing. The work on this by organ restorer Robert Buhagiar cannot start until 2015, but that will come around soon enough! Its wooden case, in the meantime, is being inspected and stripped back to its original decorative paintwork.

Wood conservator Michael Formosa has been brought in to decide how to treat the choir, sacristy and *boiserie* for termites and other pests. We must say this is a great challenge and we await further reports from him before work can start. To eradicate the termites we have to find their queen, and she travels somewhere below the ground next to St James Cavalier – a mammoth task for anybody without help, but this may still come, maybe from above!

In October we will see the return of conservators from the Courtauld Institute of Art. They are returning in number to work on the Alessio Erardi vaulted ceiling through the generous support of the HSBC Malta Foundation. We are very excited to see them resume work. An MSc course in the Conservation of Decorated Stone Surfaces has been launched at the university and teaching at the Department of Conservation of the Built Heritage will focus on the as yet un-researched parts of the vaulted ceiling. Five students have enrolled for this course.

Maria Rossella Dalmas, the popular Maltese artist, has been quietly painting scenes from the life of the church and VIP events over the last year. An art exhibition in favour of OLV generously offered by her is being staged at the Auberge d'Italie from 19 October. More about this very soon.

With the help of private sponsorship, we are also launching a national competition for an appropriate cover to be designed for the entrance to the historic crypt where Grand Master De Valette was first buried. You will be hearing about this shortly.

Staff from the Malta Restoration Unit continue with their regular and diligent care of the roof and, as can be imagined, there was plenty to worry about after the rains. But I have been told that all is fine up on the roof.

We keep Dr Anthony Pace and Dr Nathaniel Cutajar of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage informed at each step, as well as the University Department of Conservation of Built Heritage led by Professor JoAnn Cassar. Their advice and support – for which we thank them – are invaluable to us.

These are exciting times for Our Lady of Victory Church and for all of us that are privileged to be connected with it. I would thank all of you who are in some way assisting the church, who have supported us with important funds or just with your knowledge or hands-on assistance. I also thank our hard working DLH committee who remain committed to heritage. Please do pass this news bulletin to your fellow directors, to any interested staff, family and friends. It is you who have made all this possible.

With kindest regards,  
Simone Mizzi



***Din l-Art Helwa* is looking for any pre-1950s photographs of Our Lady of Victory Church in Valletta. If you have any such photos or any information regarding how these could be obtained, we would be very grateful if you could contact the office or leave a message on our Facebook page.**



*The painting of Pope Innocent XII  
before restoration*

**Restoration of Our Lady of Victory Church  
Art Treasures sponsored by PwC**

*The painting under UV light  
during the cleaning process*



## Art Treasure at Our Lady

Joe Az...

Restoration of the art treasures in Our Lady of Victory Church, sponsored by PwC, continues with the restoration of an important painting of Pope Innocent XII (1691-1700). Born in Puglia to one of the most aristocratic families in Italy, Antonio Pignatelli del Rastrello, was Grand Inquisitor and Papal Envoy to Malta between 1646 and 1649 before being elected supreme pontiff. He campaigned strongly against nepotism during his papacy and carried out much-needed reform. He was also the last pope known to have worn a beard. A bronze bust of Innocent XII, attributed to the famous Roman Baroque sculptor Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644-1725), arrived from Rome in 1699 and embellishes the façade of the church.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century oil on canvas painting measures 50cm x 70cm, is of unknown authorship, and was found to be in a bad state. The canvas was weak and seemed to have suffered the consequences of exposure to humidity and changes in environmental conditions. At a superficial inspection, the paint layer exhibited extensive flaking and several lacunae – which exposed the white gesso layer underneath – were visible. This may have occurred due to the intrinsic quality of the materials used or to the artist's technique featuring a low percentage of binder in the gesso of the ground layer or paint layer. Deterioration of the glue in the ground layer and rapid changes in environmental conditions may have also contributed. Several instances of over-painting were observed on the brocade and minor ones on the face.

It was considered necessary to carry out stabilisation and strengthening treatment in order to remedy distortions on the canvas, while urgent consolidation treatment was necessary to prevent the complete detachment of the paint layer. Following photographic documentation in normal, raking and ultraviolet light, work on the painting began, starting with cleaning by chemicals to remove surface dust, dirt and grime.

The layer of varnish was removed, following tests to determine the most suitable cleaning agent to achieve this, revealing the texture of the paint layer. The painting was then examined under ultraviolet fluorescence – a technique used principally for the analysis of deterioration in a work and in particular to identify the existence and extent of areas that may not be part of the original work. The examination revealed the existence of a major amount of over-painting and it was decided to carry out the cleaning under the same light in order to distinguish between the original and non-original paint layers.

Once the painting was cleaned, a facing with cellulose adhesive – used for its easy reversibility – was applied to protect the painting layer from any flaking or lifting of paint during handling and during conservation treatments on the reverse.

The strainer frame was removed, as was the lining canvas that was no longer serving its original purpose. The original canvas was therefore exposed and large losses that had been in-filled with an extensive amount of stucco were discovered. The surface was found to have a non-homogenous layer of organic lining adhesive from an earlier restoration and it was deemed necessary to remove this adhesive to provide a clean surface for the new lining adhesive. The removal was carried out in small sections using fixed blades, gently scraping away the adhesive and taking care not to interfere with the canvas fibres.

The surface was then observed in raking light in order to identify any areas that were higher than the surface of the support, including any stucco in-fills during previous restoration, the

# of Victory Church Saved

zopardi

cushioning of the ground layer and small knots of threads. These areas were levelled to the surface of the canvas to obtain a homogenous support indispensable for correct re-lining, because any unevenness on the back would show on the painted surface.

Canvas inlays had to be prepared in order to fill in the lacunae with a compatible material with a weave similar to the original canvas and to support the in-fills to be carried out on the front. After this, a piece of Japanese paper larger than the lacunae was attached to provide more resistance. The painting was then placed over a vacuum table to activate the synthetic heat-seal adhesive.

Re-lining was considered necessary to give the painting a stable support, particularly in view of the numerous lacunae in the canvas support and the weakness of the original canvas itself. At this point, the canvas was again stretched over the auxiliary frame. This was cleaned from dust, a number of nails were removed from the sides, and the surface was smoothed by sanding. The frame was then treated against insect infestation through an innovative use of microwaves.

After resolving all these issues, the aesthetic problem left by the losses of paint was dealt with to obtain a homogenous surface layer. Paint losses were in-filled, and canvas inlays were in-filled with gesso di Bologna. A layer of varnish was applied prior to the reintegration of lacunae in order to saturate the colours of the painting before starting the reintegration phase, seal the in-fills in place and create an intermediate layer between the retouching carried out and the original paint layer.

The large areas of paint loss were dealt with by means of *tratteggio* to re-establish the painting's visual unity. During the whole process, reversible conservation standard colours were used. These are both colour and light-fast, so the restored areas will remain stable over time as opposed to the earlier retouching with oil-paint. In addition, these colours are soluble in mineral spirits, permitting their safe and easy removal without risking damage to the paint surface should future restoration be required.

The restoration was entrusted to Prevariti Co. Ltd, [www.prevariti.com](http://www.prevariti.com), while Salvarti Co. Ltd sponsored the disinfection work. Technical information for this article was supplied by Pierre Bugeja.



*The painting of Pope Innocent XII  
after restoration*

*All photographs are by Prevariti Ltd*

*Detail of the painting  
after restoration*



*Removal of old lining*



## Restoration and Conservation of the Nine Monuments in the Historic Maglio Garden

James Licari

An experienced team from Heritage ResCo, at the behest of *Din l-Art Helwa* and sponsored by FIMBank plc, has now completed the restoration and conservation of the nine monuments in the historical Maglio Gardens (see *Vigilo*, No. 40, published October 2011) that originally served as a recreational area for the Knights of St John and is now open for the enjoyment of everyone. The monuments commemorate people of significance from various walks of life who contributed to Malta through either their profession or their philanthropy.

Each of the nine people commemorated stood out from his peers as an individual, an individual with his own beliefs, his own political views, his own career, etc. Each had his own stature, his own appearance and his own style and, as such, each artist endeavoured to portray this individuality through the various bronze and marble busts, half or full figures. This concept is reflected in the conservation project, which is based on international conservation ethics. Clause II of the code of ethics of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works states that:

*“All actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it.”*

Conservation starts with the study of the work of art itself, its history, the materials of which it is composed, and with an assessment of the type, distribution and extent of damage visible on the object. Just like a doctor making a diagnosis of a patient, or a group of forensic investigators at a crime scene, the conservation team – generally composed of conservator-restorers, art historians, archaeologists, architects and scientists – work together to understand why an object has deteriorated or is still deteriorating.

### Technique and design

When an artist is commissioned to produce a sculpture, he/she generally first produces a clay model. Plaster models are then made to facilitate the casting of the sculpture, as the original clay model may easily disfigure, crack or shrink. The model for the sculpture is then divided into sections and a mould is made of each section so that when all the moulded pieces are joined together they form one complete figure. Plaster is often used in the construction of hollow sculptures which are later cast in bronze. Examples may be found in the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts, such as those by Vincent Apap and Antonio Sciortino.

The “lost-wax technique” seems to have been used to cast all the bronze busts in the Maglio Gardens, since these are hollow and of small dimension, and are generally in one piece, with no soldering lines. Piece casting seems to be evident only with the large bronze bust of Sir Philipo Sciberras, as the head, hands and part of the lower central clothing seem to have been attached after the first casting. On close inspection, many of the bronze busts show evidence of the location of some of the runner and riser pipes used for the casting process, as well as the mould joints. Some runners are still visible in the internal back part of the Sir Adrian Dingli bust.

Finally, the green colour of the busts is most probably the result of a chemical patination process, produced at the foundry and further enhanced by the natural weathering of the metal. Various types of patination are seen on the monuments, due to the composition of the bronze and possibly the chemical application by the artist or founder. It is therefore accepted that not all bronze monuments should be of the same colour.

Thanks to the differing production techniques, the artist’s touch can be seen through the fresh modelling finger prints cast within the metal, as is clearly seen in the fresh modelling of Antonio Sciortino’s hand on the bronze bust of Sir Adrian Dingli or through the intricate details given to certain features, such as the feathers and wings of the eagle on the monument to the Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja. Most of the monuments bear the artist’s signature, such as the ‘F.S. Sciortino’ inscribed on the pedestal of the monument to the Marquis Joseph Scicluna, the signature ‘Apap’, which is found on most of Vincent Apap’s monuments and busts and ‘Darmanin Fecervnt’ on the marble base of Sir Aloisio Pisani’s monument. The two monuments that do not bear the signature or name of the artist are those to Sir Adrian Dingli and the Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja. Some busts are also dated – such as the bust of Sir Adrian Dingli dated ‘1905’, that of Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy, which was cast in [19]’56’, the bust of Sir Filippo Sciberras is dated [19]’66’ and the bust of Sir Hannibal Scicluna [19]’79’. The monument of the Marquis Joseph Scicluna is dated ‘1904’, beneath the signature of the artist.

Bronze monuments require not only the work of the artist but also a great foundry or factory to reproduce the artist’s work without losing his “mano d’opera”. Such foundries and factories are also commemorated in these monuments, either by stamps within the bronze cast or inscriptions on the marble pedestals. There is a ‘CHIURAZZI/Napoli’ on the right side of the bust of Sir Hannibal Scicluna (as well as on the inner side of the bust), an ‘F. Abela/Malta’ on Sir Luigi Preziosi’s bronze bust and Filippo Sciberras, modelled by Vincent Apap. ‘F. BRUNO FUSE, ROMA’ is on the back of the bust of Sir Adrian Dingli and ‘FOND. ART. LAGANA, NAPOLI’ appears as a cast stamp on the back of the bust of Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy.

### Deterioration and intervention

“For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19) – this refers to mankind, but scientifically may also reflect the process of deterioration in respect of various materials used in producing monuments. Bronze is a man-made material produced through an amalgamation of metal mineral ores. Yet with the passage of time and different environmental factors, this material starts to break down back into the original materials from which it was composed. Marble and other stone will, over time, also erode back to the dust particles of which they are composed.





*Detail from the restored monument of Sir Hugo Mifsud*

**All photographs provided by  
James Licari**

*opposite:  
Conservator Ingrid Ross cleaning  
the bronze bust of Sir Hannibal Scicluna  
with a micro-drill and brush*



*The restored bust of Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy*

The conservation process begins with the removal of all superficial deposits using soft brushes and mechanical tools where necessary. Once the surfaces are clearly visible, mechanical and chemical tests are carried out to determine the least invasive way of cleaning the harder deposits and old coatings, as well as to reduce corrosive elements. In this case solvents were used to remove old coatings and mechanical tools were used to reduce corrosion on the bronze elements of the monuments. For practical reasons, and to avoid damaging the decorative plants around the monuments, most of the work was carried out on ladders, with the exception of the monuments to Sir Adrian Dingli and the Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja which, due to their height, required scaffolding.

On many of the marble components, surface chemical solvents were used so as to extract and dissolved dirt. This is obtained during the evaporation of the solvent. Particular care was taken during the conservation treatment to identify and remove the corrosive elements, without removing the original and artificial patinas, which would have affected the authenticity of all the monuments. Attempts were made to reduce the various stains on the pedestals, but any persistence may have proved more detrimental than beneficial, so in some instances the team decided not to proceed further.

Once cleaned, the metal components were stabilised chemically to reduce the likelihood of further corrosion. This process is under constant scientific study and development in the international field of conservation. Once this had been done, several layers of a conservation-grade protective coating were applied.

Most of the inscriptions, which had originally been filled in with colour, were chromatically integrated, for better legibility. On some of the monuments, however, it was observed that the inscriptions had not been filled-in in the past and therefore this was respected, as can be seen on the monument dedicated to the Marquis Joseph Scicluna and the inscription on the back of the monument to Sir Hugo Mifsud. Other inscriptions were originally filled in with lead, and these were cleaned and treated individually.

A fair amount of previous restoration work was observed during the project, such as cracks that had been filled-in in the marble, coloured fills in the bronze busts, partial reconstruction of the marble, and patch fills. It was noted that the monument to Sir Adrian Dingli had probably been damaged by shrapnel during WWII and had been previously repaired, with coloured fills in the bust itself and a patch fill in the pedestal. The bust of Sir Aloisio Pisani had also been subject to extensive repair in the past, as his chin, the back of his neck and nose had been replaced with newer marble.

Most of the vandalism perpetrated on the monuments was reversed or removed, such as crayon marks on the pedestal of the monument to Giovanni Di Nicolo Pappaffy and a substance of some sort that had been thrown onto the bust of Sir Hannibal Scicluna. Whatever this substance was, it had penetrated through the patination and aesthetically disfigured the top of the bust. Once the bust had been stabilised and protected, the damaged area was chromatically integrated. The missing nose and ear of Sir Hugo Mifsud were reproduced, with the assistance of the National Museum of Fine Arts and the Office of the Prime Minister, as the original plaster bust of this monument is still in the national collection. The work was carried out with conservation-grade materials and was colour integrated so that it was not obvious from a distance but was recognisable at close inspection, as stipulated by international ethics. Article 12 of the Venice Charter (for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites, 1964), states:

*“Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.”*

Green paint splashes on the pedestals of the monuments – the result of periodical maintenance work on the railings – were removed mechanically and it is hoped that when such maintenance work is carried out in the future, more care is taken. The restoration of these railings and gates, however, must be applauded, as it was obviously done with dedication and good intent.

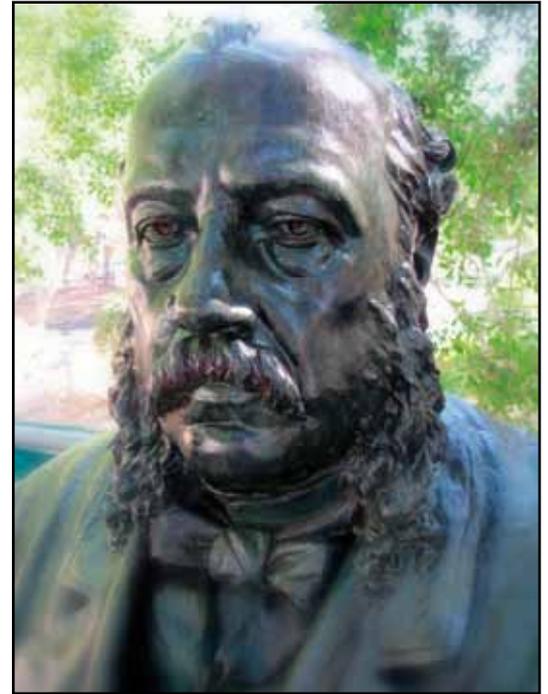
Once the conservation work was completed, the monuments were photographed and the work documented for future reference. Copies of these documents were provided to some of the various organisations who participated in the project. As always, the conservation team is willing to advise on the care and maintenance of these monuments. The team has also gone out of its way to encourage the pruning of some overhanging trees (to reduce the mess made by roosting birds, falling leaves and seeds), as a preventive measure for safeguarding the monuments, as well as for aesthetical reasons.

It is essential to the conservation of monuments that they are permanently maintained, and this is what this project – and others carried out by Heritage ResCo – aims to promote.

As can be deduced from this article, there are many sides to every story, shades to every colour and depths in every sculpture, so conservation and restoration is not a common process along the lines of simply a ‘power wash and a coating with a glossy finish’ or, as the saying goes: “restored to its former glory”. The true glory of every monument is the appreciation of all the facets briefly hinted at in this article. The ethos of the conservator-restorer profession is to follow a scientific process in observing, discussing, analysing, cleaning, stabilising and protecting the materials and concepts with which we are presented.

As every material tends to eventually return to its original state “For you were made from dust and to dust you will return”, we should remember the original intention of the monuments, which was to commemorate these nine individuals and their achievements.

Hopefully, through this project, *Din l-Art Helwa*, FIMBank and Heritage ResCo., have achieved something. May it result in more such projects and also increase awareness of the fact that maintenance (prevention) is better than cure (restoration).



*Detail of the bust from the restored monument of Marquis Vincenzo Bugeja*

## FIMBank - A Global Force in Trade Finance

FIMBank is an international trade finance specialist with an established reputation as a dynamic and customer-driven provider of trade finance solutions to corporations, banks and individuals worldwide.

Through its offices in Malta, the UK, the USA, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, Singapore, Egypt and Dubai, the bank offers a wide range of trade finance and banking services. These include letters of credit, currency accounts and term deposits, bridging finance facilities, bonds and guarantees, shipping finance, payments/wire transfers, syndication/risk participations, forfaiting, counter/barter trade facilities and factoring. The bank is the operator of *Easisave.com*, a secure online savings account that offers a leading interest rate on online savings accounts.

FIMBank actively pursues a strategy of establishing factoring joint ventures with prominent institutions in selected emerging markets. The international network of such joint ventures currently includes MENAFactors in Dubai, Egypt Factors in Egypt, FactorRus in Russia, Levant Factors in Lebanon, India Factoring in India and Brasil Factors in Brazil, as well as a strategic agreement with RomFactor in Romania. The bank's fully owned subsidiary, London Forfaiting Company, is a world leader in the forfaiting market. For further information about the FIMBank Group please visit [www.fimbank.com](http://www.fimbank.com)

FIMBank also has a corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme primarily aimed at giving something back to the Maltese people, and over the years it has supported a number of initiatives that benefit the local community. Amongst other CSR initiatives implemented in 2010, FIMBank – in collaboration with *Din l-Art Helwa* – supported the restoration of the Great Siege Monument in Valletta, a project that put the spotlight back on this Antonio Sciortino masterpiece, which also recalls one of Malta's finest moments. Again in collaboration with *Din l-Art Helwa*, last year FIMBank announced its intention to sponsor the conservation of the nine monuments that adorn the Maglio Gardens in Floriana, better known to the Maltese as “*il-Mall*”. Work on this project, which puts the focus on not only the personalities commemorated but also the artists who worked on their monuments, commenced in April.



# Restoration of Hal Millieri Chapel Gateway and Facade

*Stanley Farrugia Randon*

It is very easy for the visitor to miss the entrance to the Hal Millieri Chapel of the Annunciation as it is separated from the road by a gateway that leads to a pathway. This gateway, which is in the renaissance style, was formerly the doorway of St Michael's chapel, which stood next to the chapel of St John across the road. Before being used as the gateway to St Michael's, it was one of the portals of the new transept arms (*kappelluni*) that had been added to Żurrieq's old parish church in the 1580s. The archway consists of a semi-circular moulded arch resting on side pilasters with rare Melitan mouldings. The arch is adorned with a carved leaf keystone and the arch itself is accentuated by plain rectangular base-relief side pilasters with Doric capitals that support a cornice towering above the arched doorway with a restrained imposition.

An eastern cross is located at the centre, on the topmost level of the archway. It is raised on a circular, flat-topped coned base on a rectangular pedestal. When the old parish church of Żurrieq – with its newly added transept arms – was demolished in the 1640s to make way for the *new* parish church, the two portals were preserved and transported to Hal Millieri, where the small chapels of St John and St Michael were then being re-built.

The restoration of the gate was partly financed by Żurrieq Local Council and the balance through European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development funding. *Din l-Art Helwa* also applied for a grant from this fund but this was unfortunately not approved. A grant was required to carry out a scientific study of the frescos inside the Annunciation chapel, to purchase data loggers to monitor the internal environment of the chapel and for the publication of a book about the chapel and its surroundings. The preparation for this application had required a great deal of voluntary work which unfortunately was in vain.

Structural Plan Policy UCO7 specifies that any intervention allowed on a monument must be directed to its scientific restoration and rehabilitation. The work on the chapel, which is intended to restore its aesthetic and visual integrity, includes removing old cement repairs and other defective rendering, cleaning the stone, replacing missing elements and filling of the mortar joints.

The gate is directly fixed to the stone pilasters of the archway and the weight of the gate, perhaps together with the rusting of the metal, was causing substantial shearing of the stone. Although most of this stone was not original, it has nevertheless been retained and restored. The weight of the gate on these stones was redistributed to reduce the possibility of any further damage.

Arriva Malta is sponsoring the restoration of the chapel's façade and the replacement of the waterproof membrane. The façade of the chapel is built from globigerina ashlar blocks, which are not of uniform size, suggesting that it has undergone some changes in the distant past. This re-positioning of the stone blocks may have contributed to the deterioration, which is extensive and varied. Salt efflorescence, delamination and powdering can all be seen on the façade, but most worrying is the erosion caused by the tunnelling action of the wind on the south-west façade and especially on the corner, where the wall has suffered severe deterioration.

The restoration involves the removal of loose mortar, and re-pointing where necessary with a lime-based mortar and applying plastic repair to fill in particularly deep holes without compromising the original stone finish of the façade, and the aged stone patina. This work is being done under the supervision of Prof. JoAnn Cassar from the Department of Built Heritage of the University of Malta.

*Din l-Art Helwa* is about to install an alarm and lightning protection and is grateful to Alberta Ltd for their favourable rates which will help us complete this project.



*The restored gate*

## Restoration of Mattia Preti's St Sebastian from Sarria Church

*Maria Grazia Cassar*

*Din l-Art Helwa Restorations Coordinator*



*Giuseppe Mantella working on the painting of St Sebastian at Malta International Airport*

After the success of the restoration of the Bir Miftuh altarpiece at Malta International Airport in 2009, Malta International Airport plc (MIA) has given another generous sponsorship to *Din l-Art Helwa* under the culture section of their Corporate Social Responsibility programme. This time it was decided to restore one of Mattia Preti's masterpieces in the airport's Departure Lounge, under the curious eyes of passengers. The project served to raise awareness of Mattia Preti and his art in Malta, and about the lesser-known Sarria Church, which is not usually on a tourist's itinerary.

The story of the painting of St Sebastian is intrinsically linked to the story of the Sarria Church, and to the particular event that led to its construction. In December 1675, the first outbreaks of plague were recorded in Valletta,

spreading like wildfire around the island and taking thousands of victims (see article at pages 38). Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner (1663-1680) turned to Divine intervention, having done everything within his power to quell the terrible affliction. The Sarria Church was rebuilt in a larger and grander manner, and decorated with seven magnificent paintings by the foremost artist of the time, Mattia Preti, who also designed the church, with a centralised, circular plan and large dome. This is the only building known to have been designed by him. The building was opened in 1676, and the paintings were executed between 1677 and 1679. The set comprises a monumental titular painting of the Immaculate Conception and paintings of St Sebastian, St Roque, St Rosalia and St Nicholas of Bari – all of whom are linked to the cult of "plague saints" – and two lunettes entitled *St Michael victorious over the devil*, and an *Allegory of the Order of St John*.

**All photographs provided by the author**

*Working on the painting of St Sebastian at Sarria Church*





*below right:  
Detail of the painting of St Sebastian  
after restoration*

*The painting of St Sebastian in the  
glass room at the Departure Lounge  
at the Malta International Airport*



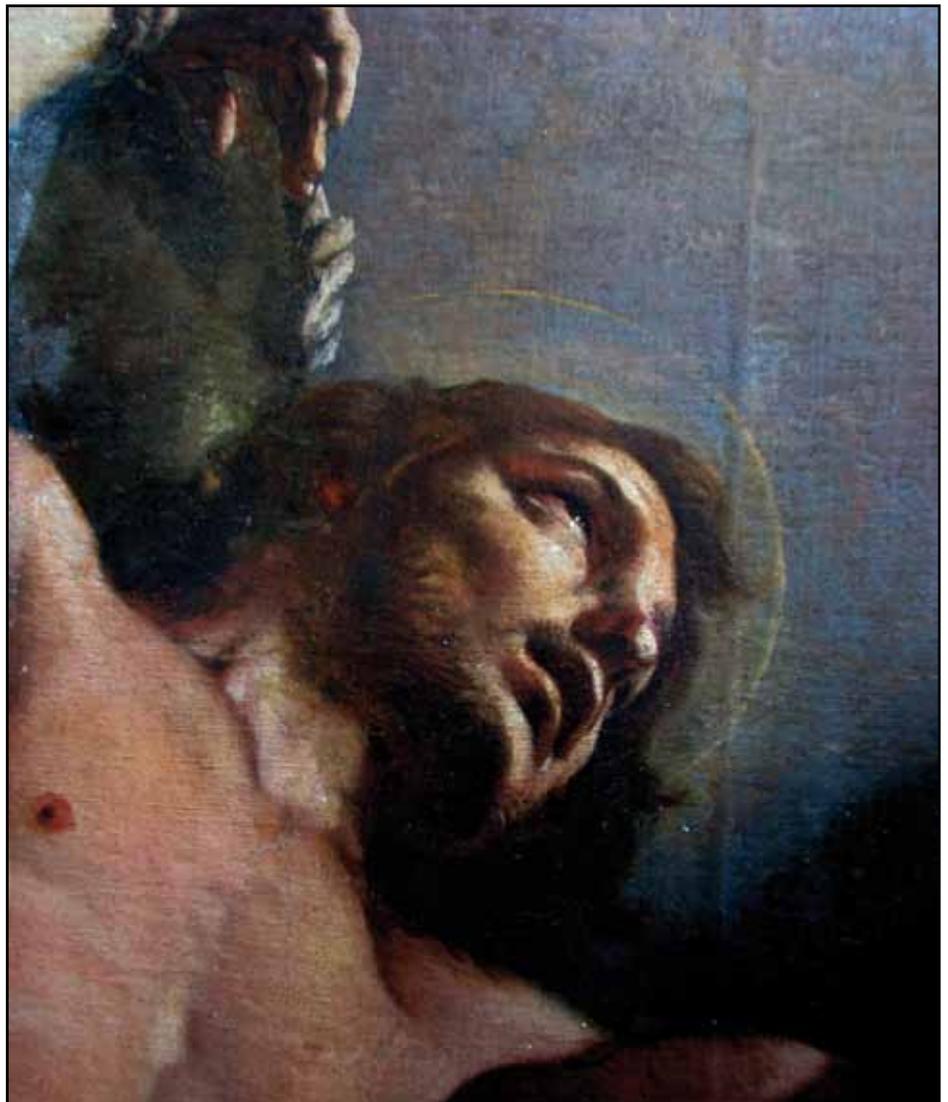
Work on the restoration of the painting of St Sebastian began in the church itself, where it was relined. This was a physically demanding process, due to the painting's size, 262cm x 160cm, and also because the work was carried out entirely by hand with heated irons, weighted and pushed across the new canvas several times to ensure proper adhesion. Cleaning tests were done on the painting at Sarria, and most of the over-painting was removed while it was there.

At the end of March, the painting was ready to be moved to the airport. MIA arranged for a police escort and *St Sebastian* was safely transferred to the glass room in which the restoration would be completed. Using the Departure Lounge of an international airport involved a lot of planning, especially in respect of security regulations. All the materials and tools had to pass through the high security gate, and had to be kept under lock and key at all times. The conservators themselves always had to be escorted in and out of the area.

Everything ran smoothly, thanks to the excellent coordination on the part of MIA managers and personnel, and the full cooperation of the restoration team. A monitor was installed close to the glass room, giving information on Mattia Preti, the Sarria Church and the restoration project. Staff at the information desk next to it were primed to answer questions from passengers and the glass room really was the centre of attraction while the work was going on. The work was completed in April 2012 and the painting was returned to Sarria Church in its original place.

This project certainly served to raise awareness about the rich artistic legacy left to us by Mattia Preti, and paved the way to future activities to celebrate the fourth centenary of his birth in 2013. This anniversary is being celebrated internationally, including in Malta, with important exhibitions, conferences, publications and restoration work. *Din l-Art Helwa*, with the help of its sponsors, is also playing its part.

Thanks go to Malta International Airport plc for their invaluable support and to the restorers *Giuseppe Mantella Restauri*, who were responsible for the restoration work.



# Delimara Lighthouse Restoration

*Stanley Farrugia Randon*

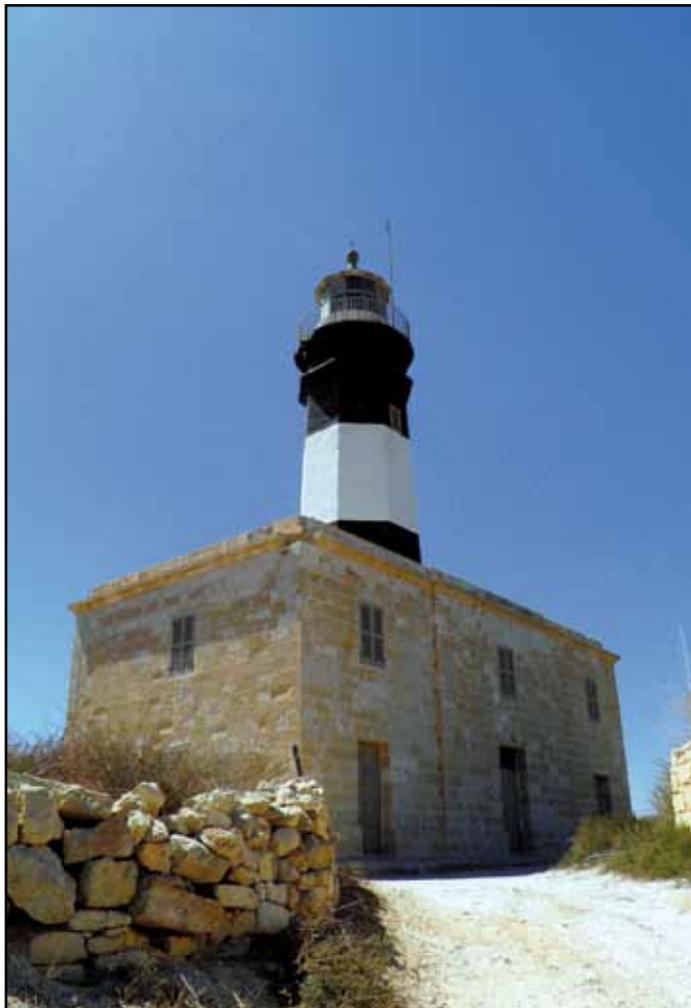
Restoration of the Delimara lighthouse has been going on for the past six years, during which time, in order to ensure that a professional job is carried out, method statements and reports have been prepared and a number of meetings have been held.

The housing of the lighthouse mechanism is made of cast iron. Its sides are protected by glass panes but overhead protection is by copper sheets that form a canopy. Rainwater is drained away by guttering that is also made of copper and both the cast iron and the copper components have corroded extensively, possibly affecting each other due to galvanic corrosion. Restoration of the cast iron part of the housing has now been completed, as reported in the previous issue of *Vigilo*. The copper components are currently being restored but, unfortunately, after cleaning it could be seen that, although the sheaths covering the canopy were in relatively good condition, the gutters were very corroded and there was also a hole in one of the canopy sheets.

New copper sheaths have been purchased to replace some of the copper alloy guttering and any that are replaced will be an exact replica of the original, with hooks and an outer border. It was observed that the outer border was originally made of copper alloy sheet ends turned over an iron rod. This had caused faster corrosion due to the two different metals coming into contact – with one acting as a sacrificial metal for the other. It was therefore recommended that where the copper alloy guttering was replaced, the iron rod would be replaced with a copper alloy rod. Based on the same premise, any iron screws attached to the copper alloy outer casings will be replaced with copper alloy screws. Wherever possible, the original elements will be retained.

Copper hooks were placed on the interior of the landward side of the housing. It is thought that these were for hanging some sort of screening to prevent the lantern's light from lighting the landward side. The badly deteriorated hooks are also being replaced.

The supporting stonework on which the housing of the lighthouse mechanism was fastened had cracked open at the points where the iron was attached and had to be replaced. The stone was hard coralline limestone and not the soft globigerina stone that is easy to find and work. The stones were obtained from Gozo and have been put in place. The housing now has a strong foundation on which it can be bolted in place. This delicate phase of the restoration is being generously sponsored by GasanMamo Insurance Ltd.



*Delimara Lighthouse*

*below left:*

*Coralline limestone blocks that will serve as a base when the housing is re-attached*

*Copper parts of the lighthouse housing undergoing restoration*



# The Draft Aquaculture Policy

Emma Warrington



The Malta Aquaculture Research Centre (MARC), which falls under the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs (MRRA), is undertaking the development of an Aquaculture Strategy for the Maltese Islands. The aim of this strategy is to lay down a path to ensure the sustainable development of aquaculture and to identify the factors necessary for a profitable and economically sustainable industry. The MRRA sums up the strategy's objectives in four key points: improved regulation, improved operation, improved environmental monitoring and better innovation.

The campaign 'fish4tomorrow' has been involved in consultations along the way and a draft strategy has been produced that attempts to set out Malta's role in the international aquaculture context. Malta's aquaculture industry does produce a number of closed cycle species (CCS) such as sea bass (*spnott*) and gilthead bream (*awrat*), but this is of a minor scale in comparison to its tuna ranching. In fact, fish4tomorrow is greatly concerned that the industry is almost wholly reliant on wild tuna stocks. In recent years, the oceans' blue fin tuna stocks have been drastically depleted through over-fishing, to the extent that they are fast approaching a state beyond recovery, and Malta has become infamous internationally as a key player in the blue fin tuna industry.

The strategy provides a detailed study of the current status of the industry – describing technical details such as aquaculture sites, cage systems, production processes for different species and export procedures. It also describes the research currently being carried out, and the personnel employed in the field. It explains that the industry is currently regulated by a number of discrete policies, clearly indicating the need for a single comprehensive policy document.

One of fish4tomorrow's requests was an improvement in enforcement and education. It stressed that illegalities, infringements and enforcements need to be publicised. Apart from enforcement, there is a need for the farm operators to show more accountability and corporate social responsibility.

The strategy describes the regulation necessary for the local industry and clearly states that many monitoring and regulating tasks should be handed over from Mepa to the MRRA, as the former is "seen by the industry to be unsympathetic to aquaculture". However fish4tomorrow has some reservations about this, since although it would be more convenient and would also promote investors, it would also result in reduced environmental monitoring and enforcement, and may leave out key stakeholders in the permit process. However, fish4tomorrow does agree that a committee should be set up to liaise between the relevant MRRA and Mepa departments to help facilitate the application process, keep the permit process balanced and encourage investment. The strategy describes current

environmental monitoring procedures as "unnecessarily complex and costly", requiring immediate revision. Also recommended are measures to control the health of fish and contingency plans for the emergency control of a disease outbreak.

Potential aquaculture sites are identified in the strategy, and the potential production of these sites estimated. The MRRA expresses its desire for tuna stocks to recover sufficiently in the coming years to allow an increase in annual quotas, preferably to above their previous largest volume of 7,000 tons. fish4tomorrow believe this is unlikely, as those quotas have already proved to be unsustainable. A number of different production scenarios are outlined, and the socio-economic impacts of each described. fish4tomorrow suggests more conservative production targets with regard to the blue fin tuna – believing that projecting such high targets will be detrimental to the conservation of the tuna and the long-term sustainability of the industry.

Currently, the industry is highly dependent upon exports to Japanese and Korean markets, which led fish4tomorrow to question the economic resilience of the industry. In fact, the strategy includes a market analysis for the different species of fish currently being produced and researched, and identifies a number of opportunities for market expansion. The MRRA will continue to encourage diversification of markets and products, but this is difficult because the revenue from current markets is so high. Key areas for research are described, together with a need for measures to improve the image of aquaculture.

*Emma Warrington is project coordinator for fish4tomorrow, a campaign to promote sustainable seafood consumption by five environmental NGOs: Nature Trust Malta, Din l-Art Helwa, Sharklab Malta, Greenhouse and GetUpStandUp.*



# Mattia Preti Architect of Sarria Church

*Dott. Giuseppe Mantella (Translated by Patricia Salomone)*

On 6 March, *Din l-Art Helwa* organised a talk at Sarria Church in Floriana to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Mattia Preti. The talk was given by Dott. Giuseppe Mantella, whose work has saved many works of art in Malta. Dott. Mantella who, like Preti – *il Cavaliere Calabrese* – hails from Calabria, gave an erudite talk in which he stressed the ties that this small architectural jewel of a church had with the outbreak of bubonic plague in Malta during 1675-1676. His research also delved into the architectural production of the famous artist best known for his paintings but whose architectural skill is also worthy of attention. To an extremely attentive audience, Dott. Mantella illustrated the salient points of his talk which, translated from the Italian by Patricia Salomone, we reproduce here for the benefit of those who were unable to attend as well as those who wish to re-read this interesting study of our artistic, historical and medical history.

*“On the 24<sup>th</sup> day of last month (i.e. December 1675) we were called upon by Matteo Bonici, a citizen of this city of Valletta, to visit a daughter of his of eleven years of age who was ill with acute fever on the first day, three days later there appeared red stains and, on her right thigh, one small pustule wider than normal as well as some stains having the same colour as her flesh. These are common symptoms of malignant fever on these islands. On the fifth day the pustule burst and sent forth whitish matter, followed by death on the seventh day.”*<sup>1</sup>

With these words, the two doctors employed by the Council of the Order referred the conclusion of their investigation on ‘*the disease discovered in two homes at Valletta*’. It was the start of the horrifying plague epidemic that devastated Malta for some months during 1676, causing the death of thousands of victims<sup>2</sup>.

Sarria Church, in Floriana, its collected and serene space built with such balance and harmony of proportions, is tied to this dramatic event in the history of the island. It stands as perpetual testimony to the devotional fervour of the Knights of St John and of the inhabitants of the island, who placed their destiny in the hands of the Immaculate Conception and the Saints in the hope of being freed of the scourge that, they feared, came as Divine punishment inflicted upon the population.

Initially, the severity of the disease was underestimated by the institutions charged with caring for public health and safety. Therefore, it spread rapidly. Before long the terrible illness had crossed the confines of the city and began to spread to the surrounding areas. Soon, further cases of death were reported in Attard. As mortalities were also being registered in Bormla and Kirkop, drastic measures were taken to prevent people from congregating in popular meeting places. On 21 March, the Council of the Order established that “*as the current infirmity is spreading, and considering that one of the main causes is communication and congregation of the people, the council has unanimously voted that men should abstain from wearing cloaks when they are outside and women from wearing shawls. No Lenten sermons are to be held, no prayer meetings, no congregations in schools and similar meetings. No ordinary council meetings are to be held and no Holy Water is to be made available in churches. Nobody is to leave their households, except for one slave servant, and no exchanges are to be had with the island of Gozo.*”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, on 25 March: “*Doctors and surgeons are to assist the sick, and priests are to care for souls. Everyone is to remain within their homes and not go between one household and the other. Everyone is forbidden to walk around the city*”.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, human intervention not being deemed sufficient for fighting the terrible scourge, on 11 April 1676, the Grand Master, his Council and the Knights made a solemn vow entrusting their safety to the Immaculate Conception and the Saints: “*Considering that the disease is spreading and that the only manner to appease God’s Divine Will is to place ourselves under the protection of His Blessed Mother, The Convent and the Religion have taken a vow placing the Order and this people under the protection of the pure and saintly Immaculate Conception ordering that in perpetuity all Religious and Members of the Order are to take the Sacraments of Confession and Communion on the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December, as well as on the feast day of our patron, St John the Baptist, and that the Convent should, in solemn procession, visit the Chapel, commonly known as ‘of Sarria’, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. We order further that the images of St Sebastian and St Roque be placed in this chapel, as protectors of those suffering from this infirmity.*”<sup>5</sup>

*opposite:  
Sarria Church*

*Sarria Church as seen  
from Valletta at the turn  
of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Photo:  
private collection*



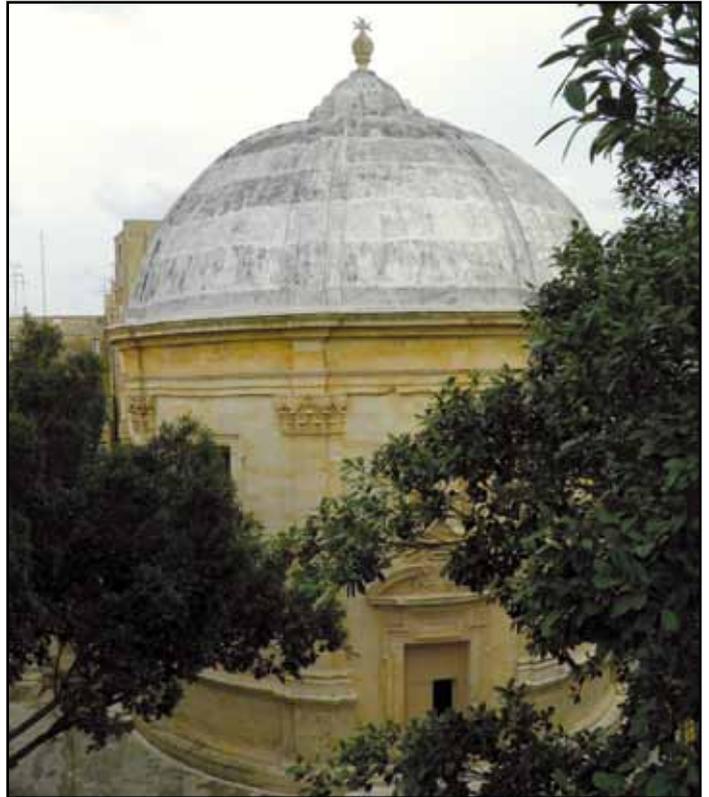
Therefore, in order to pray for the Virgin's protection, the procession was to go to the small chapel built beyond the walls of Valletta, in Floriana, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which had stood there for nearly a hundred years. The chapel, first built in 1575, was said to be "of Sarria" because it was erected by Fra Martin Sarria of the Langue of Aragon, who was remembered by Bosio as a Knight who distinguished himself with valour during the Great Siege of 1565.

It is quite possible to trace the history of this building throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to documentation relating to a controversy that arose at the beginning of the following century in relation to the ownership of a garden and house annexed to the church. The case is described in a manuscript to be found among the 'Miscellanea' of the Archives of Valletta<sup>6</sup>. The writer declares: "Around the year 1571-74, the Knight Fra Martino Sarria commissioned the building of a church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, both as a sign of his devotion and as a vow. The church was built at his expense and became commonly known as 'of Sarria' and was situated outside the city of Valletta in the vicinity of Floriana. He had purchased the site necessary for the building of the church, the sacristy, the adjacent house and garden." The manuscript also mentions the presence of a commemorative epigraph that was placed on the wall adjacent to the house as from the year 1666 and according to which "Eandem hanc, a Fra' Martino Sarria Navarro Hierosolimitano equite Conceptae Virigni dicatam, Fra' Io(ann)es Mozzini Dalmata Sebenicensis eiusdem Ordinis eques, iam vetustate collapsam in nobiliorem hanc splendidioremque formam redegit. Sexto Idus decembris 1606". ("On the sixth day from the Ides of December, 1606, Giovanni Mozzini, Knight of Jerusalem, born in Srebrenica, Dalmatia, improved the appearance of the church which had been dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin by Fra Martino Sarria Navarro, which church had been abandoned and was in poor state of repair.").

We therefore have proof that, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the ancient chapel that had been built by Martin Sarria was already in a poor state of repair to the extent that the Knight from Srebrenica, Giovanni Mozzini, took the responsibility for its reconstruction. The manuscript further relates that Fra Carlo Bellott succeeded the 'Knight from Dalmatia' as titular of the Sarria complex comprising the church, house and garden until his death, which occurred on 24 September, 1650. The chapel, with its appurtenances, belonged to the Council of the Order. It was then assigned to the Prior of St John's Church, Mons. Luca Bueno. Two years later, in 1652, the new rector obtained the Grand Master's permission to amplify and beautify the courtyard, which contained a fountain, on condition that he would make no further claim on the property and with the commitment that, in the eventuality of a siege, he would demolish both the old and new gardens at his personal expense and without claiming compensation from the Order.

In 1663, Prior Bueno was elected bishop and this is probably when the break-up of the Sarria complex took place. In fact in 1668, after the death of the Aragonese Bishop, the garden and the house that had been conceded to Juan de Galdeano, Prior of Navarre, are no longer mentioned in documents relating to the titular capacity of the Chapel of Sarria. From then until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the old group of buildings and appurtenances that had belonged to Sarria, while still the property of the Order, were ceded separately to different beneficiaries and only following a legal request by Fra Claudio de Bono, administrator of the Sarria Chapel, did the reunification of the church and its buildings occur.

However, the Sarria Chapel that was ceded to Chev. De Bono, was no longer the same chapel that had been constructed by the Dalmatian Giovanni Mozzini, as this had been demolished in 1676. This replacement chapel was also dedicated to the Immaculate



Conception, as had been decreed by Grand Master Cottoner in thanksgiving to the Virgin who had freed the island from the scourge of the plague.

While the epidemic still devastated the island, the Grand Master and the Council of the Order decreed that, as well as the solemn procession of 15 April 1676, a small church was to be constructed in honour of the Saints and the Immaculate Conception; "...have ruled that a small church, to replace the existing chapel, be erected on behalf of the Order. This church will be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and it will carry all the obligations of the previous building. It will be built to a plan and shape similar to the one built by His Eminence at the Boschetto".<sup>7</sup> Considering the restrictions on movement still imposed on the population, the building of the new church was postponed until a time when the epidemic was completely over and the inhabitants free to move about and resume normal activities.

On 25 August 1676, as there had been no reports of new cases of contagion, it was decided to relax the restrictions and, the danger having been overcome, the Knights were in a position to honour the vow taken months earlier with regard to the erection of the new building in Floriana, to the extent that: "They have finally ordered that the Venerable Commissioners of the Fortifications begin work for the Chapel dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, our Mother, in Floriana, in memory of the protection The Blessed Virgin has bestowed during the recent calamity"<sup>8</sup>.

The disease having been overcome, on 8 December 1676: "After the Vespers, the solemn procession moved from St John's Church, led by The Reverend Prior of the Church, assisted by all the Convent and followed by a multitude of people, to visit the Blessed Virgin at the Chapel known as "of Sarria", thus accomplishing the vow made to Her Divine Majesty during the calamitous period of the contagion. At the same time, on the site, the first stone was laid for the building of the new chapel, with the usual formalities and blessings and in the presence of His Eminence, the most Reverend Grand Master"<sup>9</sup>.

Until the 1960s, it was believed that the design of the church was the work of Lorenzo Gafá, as declared by Bishop Molina in his report on the Diocese of Malta at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>

century, where in respect to the Sarria Chapel, he wrote that it had been built “according to the designs of Lorenzo Gafa”<sup>10</sup>. In time, this was repeated by historians, including Achille Ferris who, in 1866, stated with regard to this church: “it was rebuilt, enlarged and improved on the design of Lorenzo Gafa”<sup>11</sup>. This statement has, however, been challenged by Vincenzo Bonello who, in his research papers, said that the project is to be attributed to Mattia Preti himself<sup>12</sup>.

The document that was found in the Order’s archives unerringly attributes the architecture to the artist from Calabria whose project for the Church of the Immaculate Conception was approved by the Order on 27 May 1676. In fact: “having seen the spherical model of the Small Church dedicated to the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, designed by Fra Mattias Preti and to be built in Floriana, His Eminence, the Reverend Grand Master and the Venerable Council have approved said outline and order that the diameter be of 40 hands and of proportional height.”<sup>13</sup>

Preti’s role as an architect is referred to, amongst others, by the researcher Bernardo De Dominicis, Mattia Preti’s best known biographer, who explicitly stated that, apart from painting, the Knight from Calabria, was also engaged in works of architecture: “For a long time he engaged in works of architecture aiming to achieve excellent mastery, so much so that he was considered as fine an architect as he was a painter”. De Dominicis further stated: “the many buildings erected in Malta are clear proof of this”<sup>14</sup>, notwithstanding that before this clear attribution, no other building was known to have been entirely attributed to the Master.

Furthermore, Preti’s intervention in the restructuring of the Conventual Church of St John is recorded and may be verified. The great painted vaulted ceilings in St John’s are a significant example of his ability to represent three-dimensional spaces including a bold use of perspective by which he creates the impression of architectural and decorative structures to frame the single scenes. De Dominicis stresses this, pointing out: “His paintings are further enriched by architectural and perspective ornaments all of which are his creation and pertain to his brush”<sup>15</sup>. Preti actually contributed his architectural skills to the Conventual Church of St John in order to give it a lighter and more luminous appearance. In fact, during the presentation of his project to the Grand Master

and the Council of the Order, on 15 September 1661,<sup>16</sup> the most intensely debated aspect was the architectural modifications to be carried out.

The artist planned to altar the profile of the windows at the base of the barrel vault by widening them. He further suggested demolishing the dividing walls between the various side chapels in order to create visual continuity and so that the church would appear lighter due to the mural paintings, the gold leaf and, above all, to the light that would have flooded into the space. With this in mind, on 18 September Preti wrote to the Sicilian nobleman, Antonio Ruffo: “The Council has established that St John’s Church be painted and that the Chapels be opened so that the church will be divided into three spaces to gain in beauty, in conformity with the designs I have made for the paintings and architecture which are much to His Eminence’s liking, and befit his enthusiasm for embellishing the church of St John”<sup>17</sup>.

However, out of concern that the stability of the church would be endangered, the alterations were only partly approved. In fact, on 30 September 1661, the Commission consented that: “the window over the main door be enlarged and moved further up so as to allow more light into the church”<sup>18</sup>, as had been suggested by the artist. The alteration to the shape of the other apertures was rejected, consequently limiting the chance of opening up the thick walls between the chapels. According to Bonello, the changes to the façade were particularly significant. The existing Guelph window was enlarged and the narrow entrance replaced by a landing with a balcony, which was inserted between the two towers.<sup>19</sup> An idea of how the earlier façade of the Conventual church appeared in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century may be gained by looking at an 18<sup>th</sup> century watercolour: the window at the centre of the façade appears to be smaller in size and is divided into compartments by the Guelph cross, surmounted by a triangular gable window.

As for the building planned by Mattia Preti at Sarria, the artist chose to adhere to the central plan: “The design of the chapel is circular, having three magnificent doors. A dome of equal diameter shall be erected, over the ledge and, as a final element on the top, there shall be the small cupola. Very spacious and of rare architecture, it will be pleasing to the eye both on the exterior and on the interior”<sup>20</sup>.



View of the main altar and surrounding architectural decoration

The original project for the church envisaged a compact structure consisting of volumes defined and separated by relief elements. On the inside, the walls of the vast circular space are divided into pairs of spines sitting on high bases and alternating with the design of great arches. Four windows, with carved frames, allow light into the church. The space is surmounted by a great semi-circular dome, which was completed by a lantern, no longer in existence, of which we have an image in the illustration of Angelo Emo's funeral service, held in the church in 1792. This image clearly shows the final element of the dome, the absence of which causes the church to appear stunted and negatively affects the proportions of the entire building which, having lost the structure of the little circular temple, has been deprived of the necessary vertical element<sup>21</sup>.

Preti's activity as an architect is proven today only by these two well known examples which, being backed by so much documentation, open the opportunity for further research into buildings planned or reconstructed by him during his long stay in the Maltese Islands.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Vincenzo Bonello, during his presentation at the congress on History and Architecture held in Malta in 1967, suggested that the wording of a document dated 15 April 1676 could indicate another possible architectural work by the master<sup>23</sup>. Once the Council of the Order had decided to rebuild the Sarria Church, it declared: "A small church is to be erected on behalf of the Order to be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary and the size is to be approximately the same as that erected by His Eminence in the Boschetto". The building referred to is Verdala Palace Chapel which was commissioned by Grand Master Cottoner a few years before the rebuilding of the Sarria Church and is indicated as a model for the proportions of the new temple to be dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, in Floriana. The reference to the chapel at Boschetto may, however, be casual as Mattia Preti participated in the Verdala project, having been commissioned to execute the paintings that decorate the small chapel: the Altarpiece showing the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist and St Anthony Abbot and the two patron saints of the Cottoner brothers, the Archangel Raphael and St Nicholas of Bari.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, just as one is aware of the artist's involvement in both the architecture of Sarria Church and of its decorative paintings, the same may have been the case with the Verdala Palace Chapel. However, this is only conjecture, as no mention is made of the artist when a comparison is made between the two buildings.

Therefore, barring the eventual discovery of other architectural works, Sarria Church remains the only example proving Mattia Preti to have been the author of an entire project. In any event, Sarria remains unique in the Cavaliere Calabrese's production, as it comprises the design for a circular temple as well as a whole cycle of decorative paintings that make up a cohesive expression of the artist's works in the years of his maturity.



Detail of the titular painting

Mattia Preti's signature

#### footnotes

<sup>1</sup> AOM 262, f.42r.

<sup>2</sup> The spreading of the plague epidemic and precautions successively taken are accurately described in the minutes of the council meetings. The account of this episode, written by the historian Bartolomeo dal Pozzo (1637-1722) in his *Historia della Sagra Religione militare di S. Giovanni Gerosolimitano detta di Malta*, edited in Venice in 1715, pg. 441-119, is based on these historical minutes.

<sup>3</sup> AOM 262, f.47v.

<sup>4</sup> AOM 262, f.48v

<sup>5</sup> AOM 262, f.49r.

<sup>6</sup> NLM Manuscripts Libr. 142/6, pg. 675-688

<sup>7</sup> AOM 262, f. 50r.

<sup>8</sup> AOM 262, f.57r

<sup>9</sup> AOM 262, f. 60r

<sup>10</sup> NLM Manuscripts Libr. 422, pg.284r-284v.

<sup>11</sup> Achille Ferris, *Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866, pg.41-42.

<sup>12</sup> Vincenzo Bonello, *Mattia Preti architetto*, in «Brutium», Reggio Calabria, year XLII, n. 2, 1963, pg. 4-7; Minutes of the Congress on History of Architecture, Malta 11-16 September, 1967, Malta – Rome, 1970, pg. 459-463.

<sup>13</sup> AOM 260, Liber Conciliorum Status, f. 52v

<sup>14</sup> Bernardo De Dominici, *Notizie della vita del Cavaliere fra' Mattia Preti*, scritte da Bernardo De Dominici e pubblicate fra le Vite dei Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Napoletani, Malta 1864 (from Bernardo. De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani*, Napoli, 1742-45) pg.131.

<sup>15</sup> Bernardo De Dominici, *Notizie della vita del Cavaliere fra' Mattia Preti*, scritte da Bernardo De Dominici e pubblicate fra le Vite dei Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Napoletani, Malta 1864 (from Bernardo. De Dominici, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti napoletani*, Napoli, 1742-45) p.131.

<sup>16</sup> AOM 260, Liber Conciliorum Status, f.106v.

<sup>17</sup> Ruffo Family Archive, Sicily, 18 September 1661 (transcribed by John T. Spike, *Mattia Preti. I documenti/The Collected Documents*, Taverna 1998, pg.145-146).

<sup>18</sup> AOM 260, Liber Conciliorum Status, ff. 108v-109r.

<sup>19</sup> Bonello 1970, op. cit., pg. 460.

<sup>20</sup> NLM, Manuscripts Lib. 2, pg. 672 (*Relazione della Chiesa della Rotonda esistente in Malta sotto titolo della Concezione Immacolata di Maria sempre Vergine detta la Sarria*).

<sup>21</sup> Bonello 1970, op. cit., pg. 461-462.

<sup>22</sup> In his detailed examination of Preti's activity in Malta as an Architect, Vincenzo Bonello also refers to the possible attribution of three homes in Valletta, amongst which the very house in which he lived and died, in St Patrick's Street and to another Palazzetto which was demolished by enemy action during WWII and which was situated behind the Auberge de France (Bonello 1970, op.cit, pg. 462).

<sup>23</sup> Idem, pg. 462.

<sup>24</sup> John T. Spike, *Mattia Preti. Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings/Catalogo ragionato dei dipinti*, Taverna 1999, pg.243-244

# The Tritons' Fountain

*Kenneth Cauchi*

One of Malta's most significant landmarks is, beyond doubt, the Tritons' Fountain at City Gate in Valletta. This is evident from its prominent place in brochures and pamphlets issued by the Malta Tourism Authority, and invariably almost every tourist brochure or guide book includes a photograph of it as a prime example of Malta's tourist attractions.

From its conception, the fountain proved to be a crowd puller, with residents adopting it as a regular meeting place.<sup>1</sup> Documentation surviving in private archives bears witness to this and, above all, emphasises that it was very well received by the public. This documentation also reveals that the fountain also caught the attention of the prominent poet Ruzar Briffa (1906-1961), who wrote a poem specifically dedicated to the Tritons' Fountain.<sup>2</sup>

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw rapid developments in transport and the post-WWII rebuilding of Valletta and further development of Floriana paved the way for the erection of the fountain. Contrary to what is believed by some, the fountain does not occupy the place where the St Mary Magdalene Ravelin once stood.<sup>3</sup> The centre of the fountain is exactly on the site of a bridge that once spanned a ditch between the ravelin and the then *Porta Reale*. The ravelin was situated on the spot between the fountain and the *Biskuttin* Gardens where Antonio Sciortino's monument to *Christ the King* now stands.<sup>4</sup>

The ravelin was demolished early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the entire area was levelled off as much as possible to create the vast esplanade that we have come to know today in front of the Valletta landward fortifications. A central pole was erected more or less in the centre of this vast area in the early 1930s to act as a fulcrum for the then limited traffic flow. This was later replaced by a shallow roundabout.

The fountain's success is due to its artistic and architectural excellence which, combined with its strategic location, have all contributed to such acclaim. Few people would realise, however, that the creation of this monumental fountain came about after no less than six long years of wearying expectation and speculation on the part of the press.<sup>5</sup>

Plans to install this monumental fountain were taken in hand in 1952 during the term of the Coalition Government between the Nationalist Party led by Gorg Borg Olivier and the Malta Workers' Party led by Sir Paul Boffa. The former was Minister of Public Works and Reconstruction. His department had organised a competition for the design of a new fountain, submissions for which were assessed by various professionals in the field. The competition was won by sculptor Vincent Apap (1909-2003), under the nom-de-plume of 'TRITON', who technically and artistically liaised with a close collaborator – Victor Anastasi (1913-1993) – an able draughtsman responsible for the design of a significant number of post-war reconstructions and also the former chief draughtsman of the Public Works Department.<sup>6</sup> TRITON's design was chosen for its "artistic simplicity and effectiveness" – the result of the excellent architectural and artistic qualities of both Apap and Anastasi.<sup>7</sup>

The official acceptance of his design was presented to Apap in July 1953, but work on site could not begin immediately, as tender documents for its construction had yet to be issued, adjudicated and awarded. Work commenced in June 1955 during the term of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff's government from 1955 till his subsequent resignation in 1958, during which period work on the fountain was almost completed apart from the bronze group that was being cast in Naples. The political turmoil of the time resulted in a situation where the fountain was conceived by a coalition government of two rival parties (the PN and the MWP), constructed by a Labour government (the MLP) and completed under direct colonial rule. This meant that all the major political parties of the time could claim ownership of this monumental construction but none could claim to be the sole executors.<sup>8</sup>

## *Lill-Funtana tat-Tritoni*

**Funtana tal-holm u tal-ghana,  
funtana sabiha, dahkana,  
li tiżfen...u tiżfen, wahdija, hemdija,  
iż-żifna tal-ferh u ż-żghorija.**

**Funtana li b'surtek sultana,  
iċċekken lill-kotra bahnana,  
li tghaġġel madwarek miġnuna,  
fil-hemm, fir-regħba midfuna.**

**Funtana, funtana ta' qalbi,  
int mera ta' hsiebi, ta' talbi.  
Hekk jien irrid nghanhi wahdieni,  
bil-holma ta' ruhi biss hieni.**

*Ruzar Briffa*

\*

## *From a poem named 'An Ode'*

**Play fountain play,  
why don't you play all day?  
...for six long years we waited here,  
for the Tritons us to delight,  
so by day and so by night...'**

*Private Archive*

*The bozzetto of the Tritons' Fountain*



The very unfortunate consequence of this is that, to this day, there has never been a formal inauguration of the fountain, which is ironic considering the sheer grandeur of this monumental construction. The water supply was simply turned on without any ceremony on the evening of Saturday, 16 May 1959 and the fountain still waits to be formally inaugurated and acknowledged as a Maltese government project.<sup>9</sup>

Apap and Anastasi had a considerable repertoire in their respective fields that enabled them to come up with a proposal that justifies the grand setting of City Gate. Both had a very strong affinity with Rome, particularly Apap, who studied in Rome with a number of other 20<sup>th</sup> century Maltese artists before the outbreak of World War II. Anastasi was obsessed with Rome and anything Roman. It is recorded that he went to Rome at every possible opportunity and it was at *L'Antico Bottaro* in Rome that he met Vincent Apap and his brother Willie.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is not clear from studying the repertoires of the two men (taking into consideration their respective professional links), it is quite possible that the claim that it was Anastasi who came up with the proposal to include the Triton theme while architecturally devising the fountain with its successive bowls – including the hydraulic and electrical engineering details – actually holds water. Certainly, elevations and other technical details in Anastasi's handwriting strongly indicate that his input in respect of the Tritons' Fountain was not insignificant.<sup>11</sup>

Primary source documentation unambiguously shows that the proposal was certainly artistically created and refined by Apap. The doodles confirm that he was certainly influenced by the work of Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) while studying various other monumental works in Rome.<sup>12</sup>

Vincent Apap worked on various designs, and changed the tritons' role significantly as he progressed. The final proposal – which won the competition – was to have three giant Tritons holding a huge bronze basin. Triton, the merman, half man, half fish, son of Poseidon and Amphitrite and the equivalent of a maritime satyr, has been used from ancient times in many fountains worldwide. The sculptor devised a modern style to establish the figure of the mythological Triton to show Malta's maritime links. Undoubtedly, the inspiration for the final design came from the *Fontana delle Naiadi* in Rome's Piazza della Repubblica. The figures' faces resemble a fish, there are scales on the back of their heads and a couple of barbs below their chins. Their genitals are covered by a nine-foiled leaf and on the sides of their hips Apap placed a lateral fin ending the legs with a five-toed webbed tail.

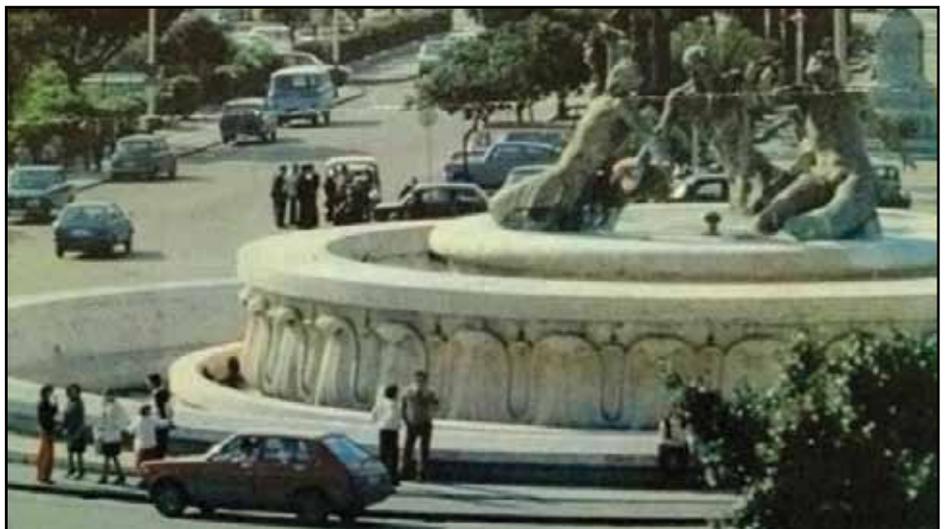
All three figures are balanced on a seaweed base: two in a sitting position and the third kneeling. The modelling is treated by Vincent Apap in a very classical manner, and is a demonstration of his work at its peak. He covered the Tritons' bodies almost entirely in seaweed strands, probably intended to relieve the monotony of the rather austere body surfaces and give further 'life' to the group. The three Tritons are strategically placed to face City Gate so that when viewed from this position the face of each figure can be seen.



*The Tritons' Fountain in the 1970s*

**All photographs  
provided by the author**

*The Tritons' Fountain without the basin  
following the damage sustained in 1978*





The actual fountain was planned both centrally and circularly and it was not intended to be seen switched off at any moment. Thus the concept of conserving the layout of the nozzle design and projected water pressure is part of the monument's intangible cultural heritage and is equally worthy of conservation.

The fountain is constructed entirely of reinforced concrete, skilfully covered with a staggering 730 tons of Roman travertine slabs, parts of which were originally intended to be executed in *marmo bianco di Carrara*. This proposal fell through because of the cost, but the tonnage used remained more or less the same. The base of the bronze group was executed precisely according to the original design in huge slabs of Roman travertine. Each slab was cut and numbered on plan, the mortar joints placed directly in line with each other following a radial design commencing from the centre of the structure out to the surrounding pavement.<sup>13</sup>

These travertine slabs are placed over a number of reinforced concentric rings which are also covered in reinforced concrete. These rings are designed to form a series of crests and troughs. The crests are hollow to accommodate an inspection tunnel while the troughs (and therefore the reservoirs) are constructed entirely in reinforced concrete, designed to contain the cascading water from the bronze basin held by the bronze group down to the main water reservoir that acts as a ditch around the monument.<sup>14</sup>

The very thick (up to three-quarters of a metre in places) reinforced concrete skeleton was constructed specifically to prevent any cracking of the concrete and catastrophic water ingress that could wreak havoc on the structure. The concrete matrix is in the form of concentric circular rings, each of which is regularly spaced between the succeeding rings. The spaces in between are designed to contain water and form a series of five reservoirs, cascading water successively into each other.

A functioning fountain such as this required a number of subterranean tunnels and chambers for inspection and maintenance purposes and with this

### *The Tritons' Fountain*

#### *Views of the spaces underneath the fountain*

in mind, Anastasi devised a complex underground system accessible from a manhole cover leading to the pump room that was designed for this reason from conception. The system comprises an area of over 140 square metres of complex underground tunnels feeding all parts of the structure that contain pipe work and electrical fittings. Each tunnel was designed with ventilation shafts and drains to combat condensation and the eventuality of catastrophic flooding.

The tunnels contain ferrous and brass piping, the water supply mains and pumps, accompanying valves that control the drains and the necessary overflows. The main part of the subterranean complex, situated precisely underneath the bronze figures, consists of a large circular central chamber. The pipe work ended here after starting in the pump room and previously diverging into the three Tritons and straight into the basin and its nozzles, manufactured precisely to create a droplet effect.<sup>15</sup>

Due to its prime location, the fountain caught the attention of various people who used it for purposes other than its hydrological and decorative role. It was used as the stage for a fashion show way back in October 1962, a role that it played increasingly between 1974 and 1977, when even the bronze basin was unfortunately used for this purpose.<sup>16</sup>



Being rather weak in structural design, the Tritons collapsed under the additional weight exerted on their carrying arms on 1 March 1978. The bronze basin was subsequently removed and remedial work was carried out in 1986 by Malta Drydocks. It was decided to carry out minimal restoration of the Triton figures on site, while bypassing the water through an alternative route that would also act as a structural support for the basin.<sup>17</sup>

Several documents confirm that this supporting element was vehemently opposed by both Apap and Anastasi, but they were told that this was not an option and had to be considered as the only way forward.<sup>18</sup> In this instance, Apap was commissioned to patch up the support by covering it with a sculpture, which was originally designed as two non-load-bearing dolphins. This proposal was, however, not accepted and again the yet unconvinced Apap was obliged to undertake the present artwork, which has effectively ruined the bronze group's original graceful proportions. The clumsy sculptural addition has unfortunately reduced and altered the Tritons' original role of exhibiting impressive strength and has given them the appearance of being apparently part of a children's roundabout, rather than the mythological role for which they were designed.

Since then, various problems have plagued this grand monument. The problems are various – ranging from bronze corrosion to structural failures within the bronze and the structure itself. These failures are all due to many complex matters that need to be addressed professionally. It is hoped that the fountain will be well and truly restored, after understanding the details of its significant and colourful history. Once completed, this construction, singular in its logistical statistics of an underground hydraulic plant complex, will retain its premier position as one of Malta's main tourist landmarks and meeting points.

Regardless of its deterioration, the fountain's prestigious status is still zealously guarded, to the extent that it is now legally protected in its entirety due to scheduling by Mepa as Grade 1 – the highest degree of protection – according to Government Notice 522/12 in the Government Gazette of 8 May 2012.



*One of the Tritons*

#### *footnotes*

<sup>1</sup> This is highlighted in a 1971 Eurovision song performed by Joe Grech 'Marija l-Maltija' *M'hemmx li jdur l-iżveljarin, nistenna li jgħaddi l-hin, Putirjal mimli bit-tama hdejn il-Funtana nkun nistenniek.....*

<sup>2</sup> Ruzar Briffa; Lill-Funtana tat-Tritoni, Il-Poeżiji Migbura, (Friggieri O. ed), 1983, Klabb Kotba Maltin, p.124.

<sup>3</sup> Times of Malta 11th May 2011 – Let's re-expose St Magdalen Ravelin.

<sup>4</sup> Private Archive – technical reports compiled in 2011 by various specialists regarding miscellaneous works in the terminus area.

<sup>5</sup> Private Archive 1953-59.

<sup>6</sup> Although no primary source documentation exists which confirms the official input of Victor Anastasi one particular public document written by Anastasi himself in 1992 contests the assertion that the fountain was architecturally devised by Apap alone, to which there was no other public appeal. Also supported by verbal communication with relatives of Victor Anastasi on the 5th May 2011; Private Archive – various documents dated 1952-53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> This is probably the only public monument that has unfortunately been through this saga.

<sup>9</sup> Verbal communication with Chev Vincent Apap on the 22nd May 1987.

<sup>10</sup> Verbal communication with relatives of Victor Anastasi on the 5th May 2011; Anastasi was known within the artistic inner circles as 'Il Duce' due to his marked resemblance to Benito Mussolini and also because of his intensive Roman affinities which without being offensive they may also be described as being obsessive.

<sup>11</sup> Private Archive: 24 Luglio 1953 Rif: Fontana Kingsgate Roundabout.

<sup>12</sup> Private Archive 1953.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 1953-1955.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. f. 1, *gli zampilli saranno in parte a forma unita e in parte del tipo a suddivisione d'acqua in goccioline in modo da riempire la zona alta e la zona intermedia della cupola d'acqua del bacino centrale superiore portando delle statue di bronzo.*

<sup>16</sup> Private archive 1974 - 78.

<sup>17</sup> Private archive 1978 - 1986 and verbal communication with Malta Drydocks engineers on the 23rd January 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Verbal communication with Chev Vincent Apap on the 22nd May 1987 and with relatives of Victor Anastasi on the 5th May 2011 and with Rev. Marius Zerafa OP. on the 15th April 2011.

# A Survey of the Maltese Muxrabijiet (Part 2)

Joe Azzopardi

The enduring popularity of the *muxrabija* among certain sectors of the Maltese population can be inferred from the number of timber ones which were constructed once this material became widely available in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By this time, the security issues that originally motivated the creation of the earlier *muxrabijiet*, mainly crafted in stone, had largely receded and yet, rather than fading into oblivion, the *muxrabija* was the subject of a revival reaching a distribution that far exceeded that of the stone variety. At first, such a trend may appear somewhat incongruous but if one looks at the social context in which timber *muxrabijiet* flourished, they soon emerge as an architectural manifestation of some fundamental characteristic pertaining to that society.

These timber *muxrabijiet* are symptomatic of a closed, insular society that was experiencing the inevitable adjustment trauma that the change from the familiar, even if detested, rule of the Knights to that of the British brought with it. Instead of looking out for external threats, some sectors of Maltese society began looking inwards towards their immediate neighbours. It is during this period that the *muxrabija* acquired the connotations of eavesdropping that are still attached to it. It is also at this point that appellatives such as *seksieka* and *nemmiesa* (derived from the verbs *isseksek* and *tnemmes* – both meaning to pry) were used in connection with *muxrabijiet*.

These observations are further corroborated by studying the distribution of timber *muxrabijiet*, many of which are located in the larger villages such as Siggiewi and Żejtun. On the one hand, these villages did not possess the cosmopolitan and forward-looking attitudes of the harbour-area cities, while on the other, they were too large for the type of community in which everybody knew and trusted everybody else to persist.

Although most timber *muxrabijiet* in Malta are from a later date than the stone ones, they share the same material as the original Arab prototype. However, because they are also generally the product of unsophisticated village society, they have none of the grandeur and decorative details of many Arab examples. On the contrary, their design tends to be frugal and inconspicuous. This in turn fostered the perception of them being little more than modified apertures.

Local *muxrabijiet*, and in particular the later timber ones, have largely been neglected by researchers and scholars, who have often described them simply – and erroneously – as a legacy of the Arab rule, thus implying that *muxrabijiet* were in use since that period. However, it is to be noted that the Arab rule of Malta lasted from 870 to 1090 while the *muxrabija* as we know it did not develop, even in the Arab regions, before the late Middle Ages (1300-1500). This implies that although the *muxrabija* did originate in the Arab regions, it reached Malta, probably through commercial contacts with Egypt, centuries after the Arabs had been expelled and Malta returned to the western cultural milieu. Noticeable exceptions to this scholarly neglect are Carol J Jaccarini<sup>1</sup> and, more recently, Robert Galea,<sup>2</sup> who compiled an extensive gazetteer of most Maltese *muxrabijiet*.

## Design details

The use of timber brought with it a certain standardisation in the design of the *muxrabija*. Whereas stone *muxrabijiet* were more often than not an individual artefact specifically created to fit a particular building, most timber ones conformed to a universal design which only changed in its detail. This consisted of a rectangular frame, the thickness of which could vary considerably, protruding from the wall and sometimes resting on a masonry edge. They are mostly crafted out of red deal timber and are often vertically aligned. The upper extremity usually consists of a simple slanting timber cover, slightly protruding in all directions from the frame, and meant to deflect rain water. A cornice which is defined as *kuruna*, is also commonly found. In most cases the various elements are joined through dovetail joints and spy holes are generally included at the sides and bottom to allow as wide a range of view as possible. Some timber *muxrabijiet* also include *kontraporti* (solid wooden panels) installed behind them. However, the most characterising element of timber *muxrabijiet* is the type of screen used for the front and it is by this that they are classified in this article.

There exist four types of front screens, namely latticework, louvred, glass and nylon mesh. When these are viewed as a hole there emerges a link between the geographic distribution and the types of front screens. Of the 35 timber *muxrabijiet* still in existence, 14 have a louvred front. Of these, seven are in Siggiewi and five are in Żejtun. All the ones in Mdina are glass-fronted, while all six nylon mesh-fronted timber *muxrabijiet* are in Gozo. A simple explanation for this might be the availability of craftsmen in a particular area who produced *muxrabijiet* to a standard template.



Louvre-fronted *muxrabija*, Triq il-Brija, Siggiewi

### Latticework front

Of all the surviving *muxrabijiet*, the four with the latticework front are the closest to the original Arab model. Incidentally, three of these are found in Capuchin convents and might be the work of one of the friars. A pair with a square format and narrow profile is found on the friary founded by the Capuchins in the 1730s in Rabat, Gozo. The complex rises in an area known as Tax-Xambek, fronting Triq il-Kapuċċini. The *muxrabijiet* are at first-floor level, fronting two windows with plain square masonry surroundings. They are over two square-headed doorways leading to the parvis in front of the friary church and are located at a height of 18 courses. The base rests on the window-sill but the *muxrabijiet* do not reach as high as the top of the windows. Both sides are furnished with small slits that serve as spy holes. Additional viewing slits can be seen at the base.



Latticework-fronted *muxrabija*,  
Triq il-Kbira, Qrendi

A third latticework front *muxrabija* is found on the Capuchins' friary in Kalkara. This friary was founded in 1736 and its church is dedicated to St Barbara. It is in an area called Ta' Santa Liberata and the front of the friary is on Triq San Rokku. The *muxrabija* has a horizontal rectangular format and is triangular in section. Like the two in Gozo, the base rests on the window-sill and, again, the *muxrabija* is not the full height of the window.

One of the oldest timber *muxrabijiet* is the latticework fronted one on the ground floor of an 18<sup>th</sup> century palazzo in Triq il-Kbira, Qrendi. The palazzo, built in high baroque style, was known formerly as the Monsignor's Palazzo after the monsignor who commissioned it<sup>3</sup>. This *muxrabija* is a noticeable departure from the simple and functional approach generally seen. It has a slightly rectangular format and is horizontally aligned. The front elevation consists of a pair of latticework panes hinged at the sides and both sides include small spy holes. The bottom section is adorned with three large round perforations screened by decorative motives in latticework, similar to those found on roundel carvings. These are set within a shutter hinged to the lower edge of the front elevation. The *muxrabija* is located at the far end of the elevation, overlooking various doorways, at a height of approximately 12 courses.

overleaf top:

Glass-fronted *muxrabija*,  
Mesquita Square, Mdina

overleaf bottom:

Nylon netting-fronted *muxrabija*,  
Sqaq Papa Klement XIV, Għarb

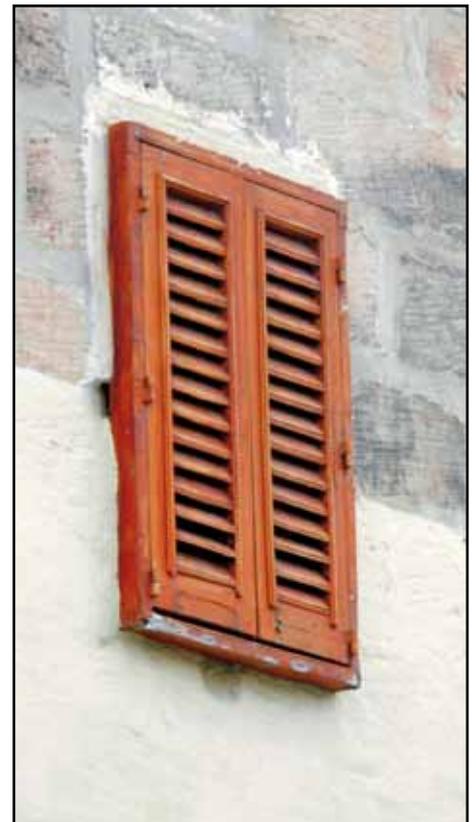
Louvre-fronted *muxrabija*,  
Misraħ Santa Marija, Żejtun

### Louvre front

Many people consider the louvre-fronted *muxrabijiet* the standard Maltese timber *muxrabija*, due to the fact that they are the most common type. In terms of design, they are also probably the most recent type. This is inferred from the fact that, just like timber *muxrabijiet*, louvres became widely known and used in Malta during the British period. Louvres, in fact, belong to the northern European architectural tradition where they originated in the Middle Ages as part of lantern-like timber constructions that were fitted on top of roof holes over kitchens to allow ventilation while keeping out rain and snow<sup>4</sup>. In Malta, this northern European architectural tradition met and fused with the Middle-Eastern and North-African *muxrabija*, giving rise to a cultural contamination resulting in a new architectural element that is quintessentially Maltese.

Louvre-fronted *muxrabijiet* were predominantly referred to as *rewwieħa* (derived from the verb *trewaħ* – to air or ventilate), indicating their adaptability for ventilation purposes – and sometimes included an independent top-hinged louvred pane defined as a *glusija* (from the French *jalousie* meaning envy). The only surviving louvre-fronted *muxrabija* with a *gelusija* is the one in Triq id-Dejqa, Siġġiewi. It has a rectangular format and vertical alignment. The front elevation is sub-divided into four louvred sections set within a moulded frame and includes the *gelusija* at the base. Both sides feature a star-shaped motif incorporating the spy holes. The upper section consists of a moulded cornice with a slanting cover. The *muxrabija* is on the façade of a vernacular building, overlooking a square-headed doorway, at a height of approximately 12 courses. It was restored and modified at the beginning of this century<sup>5</sup>.

A particular concentration of louvre-fronted *muxrabijiet* can be seen in and adjacent to Misraħ Santa Marija in Żejtun, where four such *muxrabijiet* can be seen. One of these is located on the façade of a typical vernacular building overlooking the square. This louvre-fronted timber *muxrabija* has a narrow profile, rectangular format and vertical alignment



and is located at first-floor level. This particular *muxrabija* blends so well with the façade that although it is in a prominent position, it is hardly noticeable. An unusual feature of this *muxrabija* consists of deeply-cut grooves in the masonry of the façade in correspondence to the spy holes in order to obtain a larger observation hole.

An unusual louvre-fronted *muxrabija* can be seen in Triq Santa Marija, off the same square in Żejtun. This is actually a door screen at street level and has four louvred sections. Although it was unlikely conceived as such, this was converted into a *muxrabija* by the addition of two spy holes, set at eye level, on each side. Here again, the spy holes coincide with grooves in the masonry.

### Glass front

Glass fronted *muxrabijiet* represent something of an anomaly, considering their intended use. They defy the basic concept of the *muxrabija* and the glass-paned fronts are probably modern replacements of the original screen. The use of timber also signified a less permanent nature to the appearance of *muxrabijiet* which, as opposed to stone ones, were more liable to deterioration, and to alterations, both as a whole or in their component parts.

Of the five existing examples of glass-fronted *muxrabijiet*, three are in Mdina. One fine specimen is on the first floor of a large property, probably dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, overlooking Mesquita Square. It is inserted into a masonry moulding, corresponding to a window on the other side of the façade, at a height of approximately 16 courses. The frame is very simple and the front consists of a two-shutter aperture with six clear glass panes. Both sides include a sizable ornate spy hole with an internal sliding glass cover.

The bottom section houses a rectangular spy hole that was originally covered by a wooden slat. The cover is a plain timber sheet resting on a simple moulded cornice. Behind the *muxrabija* are louvred window shutters similar to those on the other apertures on the façade. The current *muxrabija* is a 1980s' replica of the original but retains the original locks and hinges<sup>6</sup>.

Another interesting *muxrabija* in Mdina is on the façade of the Cathedral Chapter building which was built, abutting Mdina Cathedral in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, when most of the cathedral was



rebuilt following the 1693 earthquake. The *muxrabija* in question is located in a first-floor moulded masonry window surround overlooking an arched doorway at a height of approximately 21 courses. It is fitted in the only window of the cathedral's sexton room<sup>7</sup>. The front elevation consists of double side-hinged shutters with six clear glass panes and is set within a larger window aperture that extends to form a fanlight over the *muxrabija*. Behind it is an iron grill. The *muxrabija* has one spy hole, which is currently blocked, set in its base. It also features a moulded upper cornice, over which is a timber cover.

### Nylon netting front

Nylon mesh-fronted *muxrabijiet* are a peculiarity of Gozo where six of the seven existing ones have this type of screen, while the one in Malta appears to be a replacement for an earlier, probably louvred, front. This *muxrabija* is located at one end of the façade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century *Palazz ta' l-Ghasajjar*<sup>8</sup> in Triq il-Kbira, Siggiewi. A *ganġetta* (peg-stay) is attached to one side of the front while a dent at the same level on the other side seems to indicate that there was another matching peg-stay here as well. This implies that the *muxrabija* once included a front, top hinged screen. Both sides include a decorative, eight-pointed cross motive, within which are set spy hole perforations. A second *muxrabija*, with a louvred front, is located at the other end of the façade.

An interesting mesh-fronted *muxrabija* can be seen on the façade of a free-standing building in Triq il-Knisja, Ghasri, in an area known as tat-Torri. The section of the façade on which the *muxrabija* is located extends over the roof level, indicated that internally it might correspond to a staircase. It has a triangular format and vertical alignment. The crudely constructed *muxrabija* has a protruding base and an inwardly-tilting front, the top of which rests

against the façade. Both the front elevation and the sides of the *muxrabija* consist of a fine nylon mesh nailed to its frame. The base consists of a solid piece of wood containing an observation slit. The *muxrabija* is at a height of approximately 16 courses.

One peculiar exception to the mesh-fronted *muxrabijiet* in Gozo is in Triq Wied Merill, San Lawrenz. This rectangular, vertically aligned, narrow-profile *muxrabija* includes five *hsajjar* (cane curtains). It is set in a moulded masonry window frame and is attached to the façade of a typical late 19<sup>th</sup> century building. The front elevation consists of an upper fixed section and a lower, top-hinged section, all fronted by fixed *hsajjar* with PVC edgings. Rectangular spy holes are on both sides and at the base, with the lateral ones also covered by small *hsajjar*, and the timber frame is joined at the corners by dovetail joints. The façade of the building includes a niche with an inscription dated 1928.

#### Missing front *muxrabijiet*

Although *muxrabijiet* are still relatively misunderstood compared to other elements of our architectural heritage, interest in these fascinating objects is gaining momentum. A number of wooden ones have now been restored, even if often altered and in particular made narrower than they were originally<sup>9</sup>. A number of new timber *muxrabijiet* have also been installed in places that might once have been occupied by older ones.

As is the case with the *muxrabija* on the *Palazz ta' l-Ghasajjar* referred to above, a further four still in existence have lost some of their component parts – in most cases the front section. These include the only *muxrabija* in the Valletta area – which is also the only one that was installed specifically for surveillance purposes. This is on the northwest elevation of the historic stables (possibly originally used by the Royal Navy) in St John's Ditch, which were built around 1881. The *muxrabija*, missing its front, is rectangular and vertically aligned. The rusty remains of hinges on the upper part of the frame suggest that the original front was top hinged. There are round spy holes on both sides and at the base. Traces of rusting nails around the spy holes suggest that there was originally some form of round cover. This *muxrabija* is at first floor level, over a square-headed doorway at a height of approximately 18 courses.

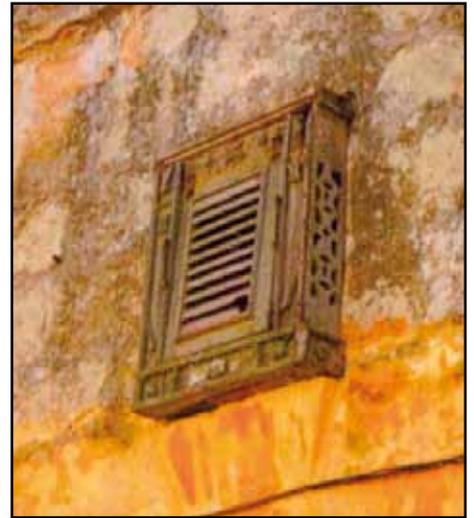
A particularly well-crafted *muxrabija* with a missing front, but which was, until quite recently, complete, can be seen in Triq San Duminku, Żejtun. Photographs published in 2007 by Ruben Abela show that at that time it had a top-hinged louvered front<sup>10</sup>. This square-shaped *muxrabija* has a fairly elaborate frame, the lateral sections of which consisted of an oriental-style decorative latticework motive. The lower section was sub-divided into frames decorated with embossed floral motifs. A similar motive extended horizontally to the sides and vertically on the front. The *muxrabija* is at a height of approximately 12 courses, resting on a V-shaped stone ledge.

#### Lost *muxrabijiet*

The author was able to identify records referring to 21 *muxrabijiet*<sup>11</sup> which have been lost, some even recently, apart from the eight on the Gourgion Tower referred to in the first part of this article.

A beautifully crafted stone *muxrabija* is known to have existed in Triq San' Andrija, Luqa. Photographs taken in 1938 by C.G. Zammit and held at the National Museum of Archaeology show that it was one of the most highly decorated stone *muxrabijiet* in Malta. It had a rectangular format and the later sections comprised a narrow base that curved out and then curved in again to meet the façade. In these lateral sections, which were covered by an intricately carved decorative motive, was a large ornate four-petal spy hole located over the curving out section, which also contained a round hole at its widest part.

The central front section was characterised by a latticework screen, below which were a series of decorative motives with round finials. The upper part was carved to resemble a curtain, with a ribbon edging and a central bow decoration. The *muxrabija* ended in a simple stone cornice.



*Muxrabija, Triq San Duminku, Żejtun.*  
Photo published in 2007 by Ruben Abela



*Muxrabija, Triq San Duminku, Żejtun, 2012*

*1938 photograph by C.G. Zammit of the muxrabija in Triq San' Andrija, Luqa.*  
Photo: National Museum of Archaeology



Another noticeably elaborate *muxrabija* is recorded as being in Triq il-Kbira, Balzan. The only photograph that could be traced shows this *muxrabija* in an incomplete state. It extended for a height of almost eight courses and the surviving elements were crafted from a single stone block to an elaborate design. The lower part consisted of a screen subdivided in three rectangular sections, having a vertical orientation, with latticework decoration with a section of similar design on the lateral elevations. Below these was a polygonal base with latticework roundels that corresponded with the overlying screen sections and was divided by diamond-shaped carvings. Resting on this lower section were two lateral triangular elements that sloped inwards towards the façade and seem to have included spy holes. The top of these lateral elements joined the façade two courses short of the full extent of the aperture behind and probably accommodated a screen. Behind the *muxrabija* was a timber screen with a smaller insertion. Unfortunately this *muxrabija* was destroyed by an explosion on the night of 16 May 1969<sup>12</sup>.

Carol J. Jaccarini published a photograph in 1998 showing a stone *muxrabija* attached to a corner property in Triq Santu r-Rokku, Birkirkara. It was in the form of an elongated hood over which was a rectangular feature apparently issuing from the string course that marks the internal sub-division of two different floors. Just below the *muxrabija* is a vertical spy hole some 25 cm in height. The lower part of the *muxrabija* consisted of a rounded feature composed of three stone blocks and included four square spy holes. Over this was the vertical body of the hood, the

external part of which was made up of sheets of masonry measuring some 55x20cm and approximately 1cm thick. The lower two also included a pair of square spy holes. The house to which the *muxrabija* was attached is purported to have been the residence of Vincenzo Borg (known as Barrette) (1777-1837)<sup>13</sup>.

A stone *muxrabija* that was unfortunately lost towards the end of the last century was attached to a property in Triq Ta' Brija c/w Sqaq No 1, Siġġiewi. The *muxrabija* was attached to a garden wall, over an arched doorway at a height of approximately 13 courses. Photographs taken in around 1994 show that it consisted of a polygonal hood with a flat upper part and rested on a pair of corbels. The polygonal hood appears to have been cut out a single stone block and had round perforations, functioning as spy holes, on each side and at the front.

In what is probably yet another indication of the lack of consideration shown to timber *muxrabijiet*, photographs of those which have been lost are hard to come by. An exception to this lack of photographic evidence comes in the form of an illustration published in 1958. In the background can be seen a large *muxrabija* extending from the façade of a building on Triq San Pietru, Mdina. The *muxrabija* included at least two large lateral ornate spy holes shaped as keyholes<sup>14</sup>. The scant remains of this *muxrabija* can still be seen at first-floor level of the building, at a height of approximately 16 courses. Only a pair of hinges, and the frame inserted in the window aperture, survive. The hinges inserted in the upper section suggest that at one time there was a top-hinged front.

On only two occasions, thankfully, wooden *muxrabijiet* have suffered the same humiliation suffered by wooden windows and balconies in the second half of the last century, being replaced with aluminium equivalents. A silver aluminium *muxrabija* can be seen in Triq Santa Margerita, Siġġiewi, while a bronze aluminium example can be seen in Triq Doni, Rabat (Malta). Carol J. Jaccarini published a photograph in 1998 showing the original wooden *muxrabija* in Rabat, saying that it had only recently been replaced by the bronze aluminium one<sup>15</sup>.

From this photograph, it appears that the original wooden *muxrabija* had different proportions to the current aluminium one, being shorter and wider. It had a two-paned aperture with darkened glass panes on the front. There was a large round spy hole on each side, while the base accommodated a slit. The lower solid section, under the two-paned aperture, was decorated with three embossed, evenly spaced, floral carvings reminiscent of roundel carvings. Similar decorations were on either side. The top section shows a moulded cornice.

### Spy holes

*Muxrabijiet* are but one manifestation of the concern for surveillance that has characterised Maltese society over the centuries. When a *muxrabija* was not included in a building, various spy holes were discreetly added to buildings to serve a similar purpose. In many instances these are referred to as *sindikajri* (from the verb *tissindijka*: to pry), a term that at times has also been used to refer to *muxrabijiet*. A favoured location for such *sindikajri* was the base of balconies that overlooked the main entrance to a building.

One noticeable instance is the spy hole on the façade of a town house, probably dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Triq il-Kbira, Żejtun. The spy hole is discreetly located behind the moulding around a ground-floor window to correspond with an inverted funnel-shaped groove looking towards the main door of the dwelling.

In contrast to most *muxrabijiet*, a *sindikajra* offers a single view and several of them were required to expand the range of vision, and so increase the size of the area under surveillance. A particular type consisting of a square hole set in a funnel recession in a stone block became widespread. Two such spy holes are located on a small vernacular corner building opposite Ta' l-Abbati Cemetery, Lija. They are set within rectangular panelled sections on the two street elevations of the building at a height of approximately 16 courses.

In many cases these spy holes served a double purpose – combining



Illustration published in 1958



security and defence by providing both a view of anyone approaching and, if the need arose, also as a hole through which a firearm could be fired in relative safety. An unusually extensive set comprising six such spy holes can be seen on a fortified farmhouse in Triq San Ġwakkin, Mrieħel. They are set on the corner of a tower-like structure, two on each floor, and afford full coverage of the main approaching roads.

The continued popularity of such means of surveillance until relatively recent times is manifest in the rectangular spy hole in the ceiling of the portico fronting the Capuchin's friary and church in Floriana. The present building is a reconstruction carried out between 1947 and 1955 following a direct hit sustained by the original late 16<sup>th</sup> century building in February 1942 during WWII<sup>16</sup>. From the inside, the spy hole – which was included in the reconstruction – is set in the floor of the first-floor corridor<sup>17</sup>.

### Bon Pastur *muxrabijiet*

Although evident through the whole spectrum of society, the use of both *sindikajri* and especially *muxrabijiet* within a monastic context is particularly interesting. In the case of nunneries in particular, their use constitutes a link with the middle-eastern tradition that fostered the spread of the *muxrabija*: female segregation motivated by religious beliefs. Although the reasons behind this segregation are completely different in the local context, the link is certainly there.

An interesting example of a series of *sindikajri* can be seen in the Benedictine nunnery of St Peter, known as the *Abatia Vecchia*, in Mdina. These are a set of five obliquely oriented viewing slits on the upper section of the façade overlooking Villegaignon Street. The nunnery was founded in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century in an already old mediaeval building that was repaired, altered and enlarged during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The oldest part, on the corner of Villegaignon Street, formerly known as Harit il-Mwieli (Feudal Lords Street) and Mesquita Street, was repaired in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the *sindikajri* probably belong to this phase of the building's history.

Certainly the most spectacular arrangement of *muxrabijiet* attached to a nunnery can be seen on the convent of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Balzan. This building, designed in an eclectic style by the architect V. Busuttill and built between 1898 and 1901<sup>18</sup>, includes 14 stone *muxrabijiet* at first floor level.

The great number and the way they are spread out along the façade indicates that their purpose was more ornamental than functional. However, they still convey very effectively the spirit of seclusion that characterises the building in an effective example of the architectural principle of a building expressing by its design the purpose for which it was built.

The *muxrabijiet* overlook the road in front of the building and are located at a height of 22 courses. They are set in an ornate frame and are made out of stone and metal. The front consists of a

metal screen having a latticework pattern at its lower bulging end. A spy hole, consisting of a large round perforation with a metal latticework screen, is set at each side within a masonry element.

The *muxrabijiet* were also probably meant to serve as a reminder of the North African and Middle-Eastern origin of this community of nuns, the first of which arrived in Malta from Tripoli in 1858 soon to be followed by others arriving from Smirna (Izmir) in Anatolia, Turkey<sup>19</sup>.

Although long ignored and neglected, *muxrabijiet* are an important element of Malta's architectural heritage. They speak to us through the centuries of the fears and insecurities that permeated the lives of our forefathers, living as they did between Europe, Africa and the Near-Eastern regions. But they also demonstrate the ingenuity and talent of those people, who were able to adapt the *muxrabija*, with its eastern origins, and fuse it with more northerly elements to make it better suited to their intended use. It is through such cultural interactions that new cultures are formed.

### footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Carol J Jaccarini / Il-Muxrabija Wirt l-Islam fil-Gzejjer Maltin in Folklore: Ġabra ta' Kitba minn Membri ta' l-Għaqda Maltija tal-Folklor / 2001 / Għaqda Maltija tal-Folklor.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Galea / A Descriptive Gazetteer of Muxrabija-Windows and Roundel Carvings in the Maltese Islands / 2008 / Unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Andy Welsh / Qrendi – Essays on the History of a Maltese Village / 2009 / Din l-Art Helwa

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre>

<sup>5</sup> Robert Galea / A Descriptive Gazetteer of Muxrabija-Windows and Roundel Carvings in the Maltese Islands / 2008 / Unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Galea / A Descriptive Gazetteer of Muxrabija-Windows and Roundel Carvings in the Maltese Islands / 2008 / Unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Carmel Vella / Siggiewi Citta Ferdinand - A profile of History, Social Life and Traditions / 2002 / Siggiewi Local Council

<sup>9</sup> Robert Galea / A Descriptive Gazetteer of Muxrabija-Windows and Roundel Carvings in the Maltese Islands / 2008 / Unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis.

<sup>10</sup> Ruben Abela in G Wettinger, C Dalli and R Abela / Iz-Żejtun fiz-Zminijiet tan-Nofs / 2002

<sup>11</sup> 12 stone / 6 Timber / 3 unknown material

<sup>12</sup> Carmel Bezzina / Programm tal-Festa / 2009 / Kazin tal-Banda San Gabriel Hal Balzan

<sup>13</sup> Carol J Jaccarini / Ir-Razzett – The Maltese Farmhouse / 1998 / Published by the Author

<sup>14</sup> S Sitwell and T Armstrong Jones / 'Malta' / 1958 / BT Bratsford Ltd.

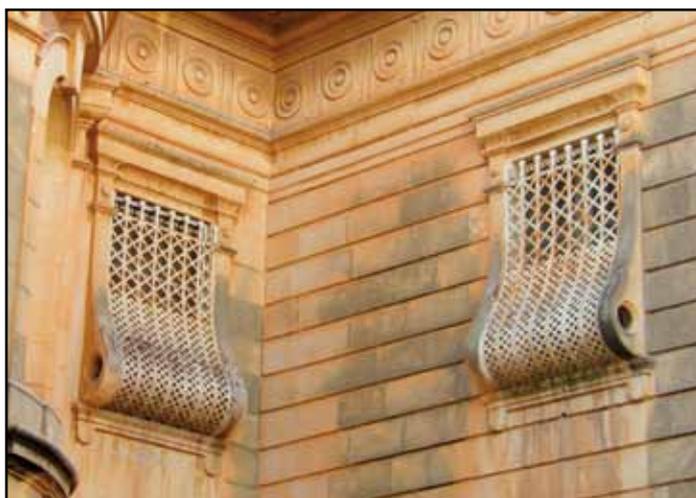
<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Alfie Guillaumier / Bliet u Rhula Maltin Vol II / 2005 / Klabb Kotba Maltin

<sup>17</sup> Carol J Jaccarini / Il-Muxrabija Wirt l-Islam fil-Gzejjer Maltin in Folklore: Ġabra ta' Kitba minn Membri ta' l-Għaqda Maltija tal-Folklor / 2001 / Għaqda Maltija tal-Folklor

<sup>18</sup> Alfie Guillaumier / Bliet u Rhula Maltin Vol II / 2005 / Klabb Kotba Maltin

<sup>19</sup> Ibid



Two *muxrabijiet* from the Bon Pastur Nunnery

# Majjistral Nature and History Park Update

*Annalise Falzon*

The Majjistral Nature and History Park celebrated its fifth anniversary in September. It has been a busy year, with many activities, but unfortunately also one with various instances of vandalism as well as threats.

The park was recently extended to include Ghajn Tuffieha Barracks – a group of British Colonial buildings in an area that was used for military training purposes until the 1970s. Massive clean-ups, about a dozen of them, have taken place over the past few months to remove the incredible amount of rubbish that was found all over the place. For this we must thank all the volunteers – including students, staff from private companies, NGOs, the Cleansing Department and members of the public – for their invaluable help in producing a cleaner site that is now in the initial stages of restoration. It is hoped that Majjistral Park will soon have its own interpretation centre and offices in the former barracks, whilst the rest of the complex is being proposed as dormitories, accommodation and facilities for visitors. Further north, the restoration of Ghajn Żnuber Tower has now been completed, with the help of the Resources Ministry, and new windows and doors are now being installed.

## Enjoying the park

In the past nine months, over 2,000 people have taken part in activities organised by the park, which ranged from guided school visits to guided snorkelling and kayaking, health promotion events, Tai Chi, raising Blue Flag coastal awareness, night walks and nocturnal wildlife observation, nature photography, astronomy, botany/entomology/malacology/mammalogy site visits, organic farming and more. Join us to learn more about the park and enjoy different-themed activities that aim to bring you closer to nature. Check the Majjistral Park Facebook page and website [www.majjistral.org](http://www.majjistral.org) or email [walks@majjistral.org](mailto:walks@majjistral.org) for more information about future activities.

Whilst a fee is charged for some of the activities (which goes to cover the activity itself and to contribute towards the management of the site), the park is freely accessible to everyone on foot as long as they keep to the paths and avoid trampling on and respect the wildlife. Please report any illegal activities or grass fires on 112 to help us safeguard what is a common heritage of all of us.

Annalise Falzon is Communications Officer and Nature Walks Guide at Il-Majjistral Nature and History Park.

Our thanks must go to the following for their collaboration on various activities in the park, including clean-ups and public awareness events:

- Malta Tourism Authority
- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Department
- Manikata Farmers Cooperative
- Private Sector: hotels, companies and tour operators
- Valletta Gateway Terminal
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Vodafone
- Caritas
- Junior Chamber International Malta
- Salesian Brigade
- Ramblers Association of Malta
- Staff from the Island Hotels Group and Radisson Golden Sands Hotel
- MCAST and Sixth form students
- MRRA Cleansing Services Department
- Sharklab Malta and H2O Divers
- Maltese Tai Chi Society
- Mental Health Association
- Members of the public, Scout groups and NGOs



*Nature photography in the field with Wildlife photographer Guido Bonett*



*A minuscule part of the massive rubbish at Ghajn Tuffieha barracks*

## Heritage Publications Review

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

*Din l-Art Helwa*  
133 Melita Street  
Valletta

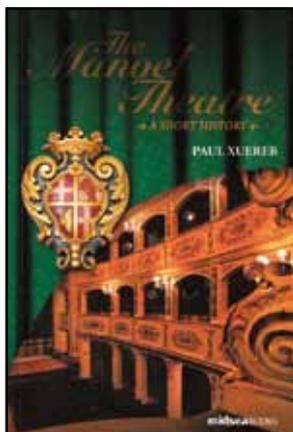
### ***The Manoel Theatre – A Short History (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)***

Author – Paul Xuereb

Published by – Midsea Books Ltd

ISBN 978-99932-7-377-6

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



### ***Bejn Kliem u Storja***

Author – Martin Morana

Published by – The author

ISBN – 978-99957-0-137-6

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi

That what is by the definition of the author himself “A Short History”, thus far from exhaustive, takes up 142 pages is in itself a sign of the long, multifaceted and intriguing history of both the Manoel Theatre as an institution and of the buildings that house it.

As pointed out by the author, research into the theatre’s history is greatly hampered by the lack of archives covering its first 225 years – from its inauguration in 1732 up to 1957 when, thankfully, it returned to state ownership after almost a century in private hands and such archives were finally established. In such a scenario, the author is also quick to point out the significance of research carried out by others before him and also research published since the first edition of this book in 1994.

A few fundamental aspects of this history can certainly be discerned from the building itself and its urban context. One could, in fact, very easily pass by the Manoel without even noticing that it is, in fact, a theatre. The building lacks the grand setting that is normally associated with theatres – that testifies to the Manoel’s antiquity, dating back to a time when theatres were often little more than adapted buildings. It is also intrinsic to its location in a city where grand settings were reserved for buildings of a military or religious nature, as one would expect in a city ruled by Knights who took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Yet this theatre found its way into the city of the Knights of St John and since then a great historical web has spun itself around it.

It is this history that the author, a former chairman of the *Friends of the Manoel Theatre*, aims to capture in his pages. Aware that the Manoel’s story is made up of much more than the building itself, he brings into focus the ephemeral world of the performing arts and their protagonists, which are the soul of the building’s history. He brings us into contact with the many who – ever since the first performance of *La Merope* in January 1732 – have walked the stage of this theatre, each and every one of them becoming a fragment of this history.

Like many good stories, the story of the Manoel goes from riches to rags and back again. The physical comeback from the doldrums has gained considerable momentum in the last few decades, during which it has been and continues to be, the subject of various restorations, the most recent of which should see work on the façade itself.

This publication is a reminder of the significance of the Manoel Theatre to Maltese culture over the years. It is hoped that this institution – and the building that houses it – will retain and reinforce this significance in the long overdue change that Valletta’s urban landscape is experiencing.

---

It only takes a few seconds to realise what power and cultural wealth are behind each word that makes up any language. This is even more so when that language is spoken by fewer than 500,000 people born on a rock in the middle of the Mediterranean. Our language is what binds us to each other and to our past; it is what makes us stand out, and apart, from any multi-national group. In short, our language is what defines us as Maltese.

Unfortunately, this language of ours is becoming increasingly misused, often abused, and largely ignored in favour of more widely used languages. One of the accusations that is often levelled at the Maltese language is its restricted vocabulary. But is it really so? One would beg to differ after reading through the more than 600 words collected by Martin Morana in this exquisite book. *Bejn Kliem u Storja* (Between Words and History) is an encyclopaedic glossary of words related to Maltese traditions, place names and historical terms. This little gem of a book explains in concise form many words which, at some point, most of us will have used out of embedded knowledge without ever wondering where they came from.

Looking for the origin of such words is equivalent to a cultural journey that leads the reader through all the historical periods that form the past of our island. Although we might not be aware of it, these words are often the only information and the only tangible legacy we have of such periods. The book is obviously as diverse as are the origins of the words we use, and the different derivations of these words are as diverse as the people who have come into contact with Malta over the ages. We find ‘kwarezimal’, having a Latin origin, ‘babaw’ of Venetian origin, ‘Dellimara’ from Arabic, ‘fliegu’ of Italian origin and ‘morra’ from the Spanish.

Reproduced on the cover of the book is an inscribed Phoenician *stèle* dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC that refers to the “molk”, the sacrifice of the first-born male child to the god Ba’al. Thankfully, this is a word that has lost its function but it is possibly the only one in the entire book. Many others are words we have neglected for want of a context in which we can use them and it is very good of the author to bring them back to our attention, rekindling their fading memory in our consciousness and giving us the context from which they were derived.

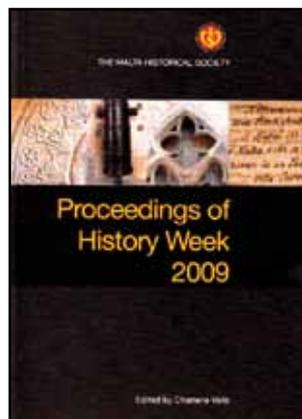
### ***The Proceedings of History Week 2009***

Editor – Charlene Vella

Published by – The Malta Historical Society and Midsea Books Ltd

ISBN – 978-99932-7-400-1

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



A breath of fresh air wound its way through the publishing office of The Proceedings of the History Week, leaving behind a new look for this time-honoured publication. This will definitely go a long way to stimulating readers who are unfamiliar with it and who, up until now, might have been put off by its academic appearance, to venture into its pages and hopefully fall under the spell of its fascinating contents. As pointed out by Charlene Vella in her editorial, this rejuvenation process has not merely stopped at appearance. This edition brings together well-known authors, who are responsible for the excellent reputation of The Malta Historical Society, with some up-and-coming researchers – thus broadening the range of subjects that are traditionally addressed by this publication.

Perhaps as a result of this, a look at the contents page reveals titles that are particularly relevant to today, such as Noel Buttigieg's *Is Bread Male or Female? Gender and Power Relations* or David Mallia's *Cross Currents in Emigration: Corporal A. M. Benscher and the proposed Maltese settlement in the Holy Land*. The core issues at the heart of such essays are as relevant today as they were during the historical periods discussed by the respective authors. Furthermore, they present the possibility of looking at such issues from a privileged position and maybe allow for a detached analysis that could, in turn, offer suitable solutions.

Along with the essays referred to above are others of a more traditional nature, but nonetheless of considerable interest. This is particularly true of the ones by the same Charlene Vella dealing with *A Late Medieval and an Early Modern Window in the Reserve Collection of the National Museum of Archaeology* (although unfortunately many illustrations referred to in the text have not been reproduced), and Robert Galea's *Roundel Carvings on Late Medieval and an Early Modern Buildings in Malta: An Art Historical Context*. Of course, interest in a particular essay depends on the interests of any particular reader and other essays will certainly be of interest to other readers. What is beyond doubt is that, while endeavouring to give this publication a new look, all those involved were conscious of the excellent reputation it has built over the years and strived to meet, with considerable success, the standards set by their predecessors.

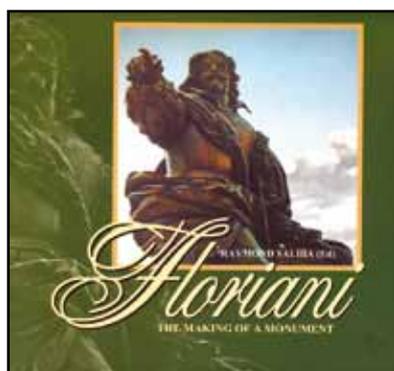
### ***Floriani – the Making of a Monument***

Editor – Raymond Saliba

Published by – Raymond Saliba and Christopher Ebejer

ISBN – 978-99932-0-941-6

Reviewed by Joe Azzopardi



This small volume may well be considered the birth certificate of one of the most recent commemorative monuments to be erected in Malta, the one dedicated to Pietro Paolo Floriani. The monument to this military architect and engineer, the work of sculptor Christopher Ebejer, is most fittingly located on the bastions of the Floriana Lines which he designed and which – in a rare occurrence, were named after him.

The book begins by discussing the two basic elements that resulted in this sculptural work itself, i.e., the very concept of a commemorative monument and the genesis of Floriana as a fortress city. This is followed by an essay that discusses the Floriani Monument, the factors behind its final form, and the issues regarding its commissioning.

The last part, written by the sculptor himself, is dedicated to the actual realisation of this work of art and illustrates all the stages, from an embryonic idea consigned to paper in the form of a *bozzetto* design to the casting of the impressive bronze figure that stands at 2.4 metres. This section of the book reveals the efforts, and considerable research, made by the artist to embellish his work with as many historically accurate details as possible.

Already known for his figurative style, often including citations for classical and baroque sculpture, Ebejer has sought to create a purely baroque work of art with all the hallmarks of this style – including the impression of movement captured in time, the emotional tension expressed through voluptuous drapery and the almost decadent flamboyance of rich detail.

What might at first appear as a obvious choice of style must have, in fact, been a very deliberate one by the artist, who was without doubt aware that, without fail, a criticism that would eventually be levelled against him would be that of a lack of awareness of developments in the art world over the past 250 years. This notwithstanding, Ebejer marched on stubbornly, as any artist should do, to create an exquisitely baroque monument to a quintessentially baroque personage and going even further by publishing this volume, which gives a tangible aspect to the creative process that would otherwise have been lost, once the work was accomplished.



## *Din I-Art Helwa* Corporate Members

Air Malta plc	Malta International Airport plc
Alfred Mizzi Foundation	Malta Tourism Authority
APS Bank Ltd	Marsovin Ltd
Arriva Malta Ltd	Medserv
Atlas Insurance PCC Ltd	Megabyte Ltd
Auto Sales Ltd	M Demajo Group
Avantech	Middlesea Insurance Company Ltd
AX Holdings Ltd	P Cutajar & Company Ltd
Bank of Valletta plc	Pisciculture Marine de Malte
Best Print Co. Ltd	Playmobil (Malta) Ltd
Central Bank of Malta	PwC
Charles Darmanin & Company Ltd	Rotary Club (Malta)
Computime Ltd	Round Table Malta (One)
Corinthia Group of Companies	Salvo Grima Group Ltd
Curmi & Partners Ltd	Shireburn Software Ltd
Cyberspace Ltd	The Body Shop Malta
De La Rue Currency & Security Print Ltd	The Body Shop Foundation
Dingli and Dingli	The Strickland Foundation
Eden Leisure Group Ltd	Toly Products Ltd
Enemalta Corporation	Transport Malta
Environmental Landscape Consortium	Tug Malta Ltd
Exalta Ltd	Union Haddiema Magħqudin
Farsons Foundation	Vassallo Builders Ltd
Gasamamo Insurance Ltd	Vodafone Malta Foundation
General Workers' Union	
GO plc	
HSBC Malta Foundation	
Ignazio Anastasi Ltd	
Island Hotels Group Ltd	
Joinwell Ltd	



